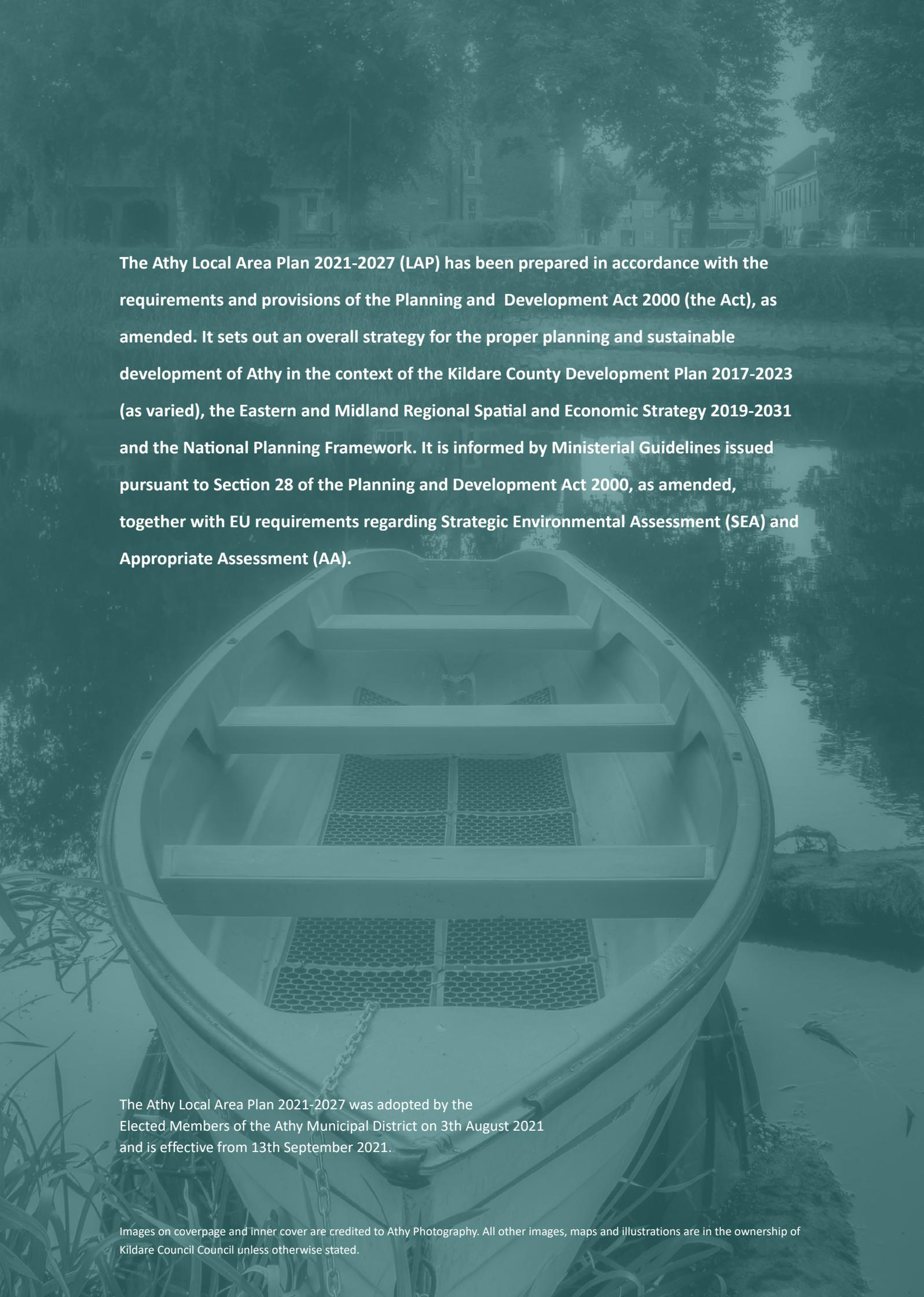




KILDARE COUNTY COUNCIL

Athy LOCAL AREA PLAN 2021-2027

PLEAN CHEANTAIR ÁITIÚIL
ÁTHA Í



The Athy Local Area Plan 2021-2027 (LAP) has been prepared in accordance with the requirements and provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (the Act), as amended. It sets out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of Athy in the context of the Kildare County Development Plan 2017-2023 (as varied), the Eastern and Midland Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031 and the National Planning Framework. It is informed by Ministerial Guidelines issued pursuant to Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, together with EU requirements regarding Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA).

The Athy Local Area Plan 2021-2027 was adopted by the Elected Members of the Athy Municipal District on 3th August 2021 and is effective from 13th September 2021.

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1. Introduction and Context

1.1 Introduction

Under the provisions of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, Athy Town Council was abolished and its functions, including those relating to planning and development were fully subsumed into Kildare County Council. Accordingly, the Athy Local Area Plan 2021 – 2027 has been prepared to replace the Athy Town Development Plan 2012 – 2018 as the key strategic planning document which will guide the overall development of the town in the period to 2027.

The Local Area Plan has been prepared in accordance with the requirements and provisions of the *Planning and Development Act 2000*, as amended (the 'Act'), in particular Sections 18-20 of the Act which provide that a local area plan shall be made in respect of an area which:

- Is designated as a town in the most recent census of population, other than a town designated as a suburb or environs in that census;
- Has a population in excess of 5,000; and
- Is situated within the functional area of a planning authority, which is a County Council.

Census 2016 recorded a population of 9,677 persons in the town of Athy¹. A Local Area Plan is therefore a mandatory requirement.

The Local Area Plan sets out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of Athy in the context of the *Kildare County Development Plan 2017-2023 (as varied)*, the *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region 2019-2031* and the *National Planning Framework (2018)*. It is also informed by Ministerial Guidelines issued under Section 28 of the Act together with EU requirements regarding Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Appropriate Assessment (AA), and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA).

The period of the Plan shall be taken as being six years from the date of its adoption or until it is reviewed, or another plan made, unless it is extended under section 19(d) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

1.2 Composition of the Plan

This Plan comprises a written statement with accompanying maps. The written statement shall take precedence over the maps should any discrepancy arise between them. In the full interpretation of all objectives for Athy, it is essential that both the County Development Plan (CDP) and the Local Area Plan be read in tandem. Where conflicting objectives arise between the CDP and the Local Area Plan, the objectives of the CDP shall take precedence. It should be noted that the general development management standards applicable to the plan area are included in the CDP. This Plan therefore provides policies and objectives that are specific to the future development of Athy.

¹ The figure provided relates to the population within the settlement boundary of Athy in 2016. The boundary of this Plan follows, as far as practicable, the 2016 settlement boundary as defined by the CSO. For an explanation of what constitutes a 'settlement boundary' and a 'built-up area' refer to Section 3.3.

1.3 Relationship with Other Plans and Guidelines

The Local Area Plan has been prepared having regard to national, regional and local policy documents, in addition to ministerial guidelines issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). The Plan also has regard (where relevant) to any Specific Planning Policy Requirements (SPPRs) contained in Section 28 ministerial guidelines as per the provisions of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018.

The Kildare Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2016-2021 has also informed this Plan. The purpose of the LECP is to promote the local and community development of each local authority area, act as a roadmap for the development of the county and ensure the effective co-ordination of publicly funded programmes.

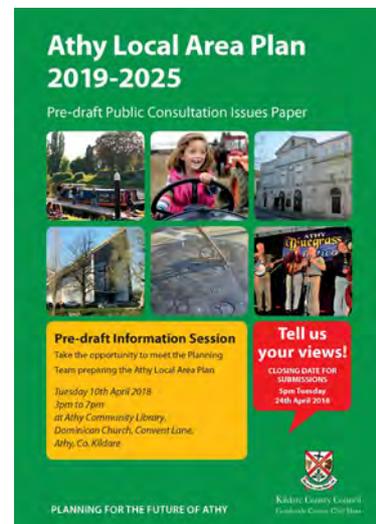
1.4 Office of the Planning Regulator

The Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018 provided for the establishment of an independent Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR). Under the provisions of the Act, the OPR have assumed the Minister’s evaluation and assessment function of all statutory land use plans including local area plans. The OPR will provide statutory observations on all draft statutory plans to ensure consistency with relevant national and regional policies. Kildare County Council undertakes that all observations received from the OPR will be taken into consideration and commits to working with the Regulator to realise the most optimal planning and development outcomes within each respective plan area.

1.5 Pre-draft Public Consultation

The preparation of the Local Area Plan included pre-draft consultation with the local community, statutory agencies and adjoining local authorities in 2018. This pre-draft public consultation extended over a five-week period (20th March-24th April) and was accompanied by the publication of an Issues Paper which identified the key planning and development matters that the Plan could address and was made available for inspection at Athy Community Library, Athy Municipal District Office, Kildare County Council and online. The pre-draft process also included an informal public consultation evening held on Tuesday 10th April 2018 in Athy Community Library. A total of 76 submissions were received from residents, service providers, local community groups, interested parties and elected representatives. These submissions have been taken into consideration during the formulation of this Local Area Plan.

Figure 1.1: Pre-draft Issues Paper



1.6 Strategic Environmental Assessment

The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process is the formal systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme before a decision is made to adopt the plan or programme. It informs the plan-making process of the likely environmental impacts of alternative actions and contributes to the integration of environmental

considerations into the Plan. Under the provisions of the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011, SEA is mandatory for plans for areas with a population of 5,000 persons or more; therefore, SEA is required for the Athy Local Area Plan.

The findings of the SEA are set out in the Environmental Report, which, while constituting part of the Plan documentation, is presented as a separate document alongside this Plan. The Environmental Report provides a clear understanding of the likely environmental consequences of decisions regarding the location of development in the Plan area. The mitigation measures needed to offset the potential adverse effects of the Plan and future monitoring proposals have been transposed from the Environmental Report into the Plan.

1.7 Habitats Directive

The requirements for Habitats Directive Assessment of plans or projects, is outlined in Article 6(3) and (4) of the European Communities (1992) Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and biodiversity ('Habitats Directive'). In any case where, following screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA), it is found that any plan or project is likely to have a significant impact on areas designated as Natura 2000 sites, a full Appropriate Assessment must be carried out.

Athy Local Area Plan was screened for AA during its preparation at draft stage. This screening concluded that likely significant effects of the Local Area Plan on the integrity of the River Barrow and River Nore Special Area of Conservation (Site Code: 002162) could not be ruled out, and therefore full Appropriate Assessment would be required. The mitigation measures identified in the Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment (i.e. Natura Impact Report [NIR]) have been incorporated into the Local Area Plan. The NIR has been published as a separate document alongside this Plan.

1.8 Approach Taken in Formulating this Plan

The Local Area Plan sets out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of Athy in the context of the *Kildare County Development Plan 2017-2023 (as varied)* as well as the various national and EU legislative requirements. In this regard an evidence-led approach has been adopted in the formulation of the Plan. Accordingly, the following data based documents have been prepared to inform the Plan and are published alongside the document:

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

SEA is the process by which environmental considerations are required to be fully integrated into the preparation of plans/programmes prior to their final adoption. The objectives of SEA are to provide for a high level of environmental protection and to promote sustainable development.

Habitats Directive Assessment (HDA)

The HDA, also known as Appropriate Assessment (AA), is a requirement under the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC. This Directive indicates the need for plans and projects to be subject to Habitats Directive Assessment if the plan or project is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a Natura 2000 site but is likely to have significant effects either individually or in combination with other plans or projects on Natura 2000 sites.

Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)

A SFRA was carried out to support the preparation of the Plan. The SFRA is required to be prepared in accordance with the requirements of *The Planning System and Flood Risk Assessment Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2009) and Circular PL02/2014 (August 2014).

Sustainable Planning and Infrastructural Assessment (SPIA)

A Sustainable Planning and Infrastructural Assessment (SPIA) was carried out to inform the appropriate zoning of land. In accordance with Appendix 3 of the National Planning Framework (2018), the Sustainable Planning and Infrastructural Assessment comprises both quantitative and qualitative research analysis of existing and proposed infrastructure and accompanies the Plan.

Social Infrastructure Audit (SIA)

The SIA examined the current context with respect to social infrastructure provision in Athy and also identified the future requirements of the town and makes recommendations on priority areas for investment within the plan area. The Audit identified relevant social infrastructure that will contribute to improving quality of life in the town, forming a key part of the fabric of an area, not just in terms of wellbeing, but also in terms of sense of place and local identity.

Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA)

The purpose of the ABTA is to place the integration of land use and transport planning at the centre of the plan-making process for Athy. The assessment examined the existing and proposed transport infrastructure and service provision across all modes of transport including sustainable means such as active modes (walking and cycling) in the town. The assessment provides an understanding of the existing constraints and modal share and also identifies the interventions required within the Plan area and in the wider context, to effectively accommodate the anticipated increase in demand and ensure the optimal transportation interventions can be planned in order to drive a shift towards sustainable movement.

Athy Urban Regeneration Framework

The Urban Regeneration Framework for the town (incorporated into the Plan as Appendix 1) is intended to assist in the realisation of the key provisions of the Plan. While applying to the town as a whole, the Framework primarily focuses on the rejuvenation of the historic centre by identifying and presenting co-ordinated actions to improve the retail and commercial attractiveness of the Core Retail Area, provide for enhanced permeability and sustainable mobility within the town centre and improve links between the core and surrounding residential and employment areas.

Athy Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) Statement of Character

The purpose of the Statement of Character was to conduct a comprehensive historical and architectural analysis in order to identify and define the special character of Athy ACA. This provided the opportunity to review the boundaries and extent of the ACA. The Statement of Character also includes a guide which provides advice to homeowners, developers, architects and planning professionals on best practice for development within the ACA and type of works that will require planning permission.

1.9 Athy in Context

The name Athy dates back to the 2nd century when Ae the son of Deargabhail 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 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 13th century near the ancient river crossing of Ath-Ae. Indeed, Athy's strategic location on the River Barrow, at the edge of the Pale, was to play a key role in the development and consolidation of the town over the intervening centuries. The river was again to play an important role in the economic development of Athy with the opening of the Barrow Line Canal in 1791. This led to a boom in the trade of corn and resulted in the construction of warehouses and other facilities in the town. The opening of the railway followed in the mid-19th century and led to the further consolidation of the town. Despite this however, the extent of Athy's urban development remained confined to the area between the canal to the west and the rail line to the east. For most of the 20th century Athy remained a rural market town, though there was some level of industrial development with the opening of the asbestos cement factory in 1937.

The post-war period saw the gradual development of low-density residential housing to the north, east and south of the town. Such expansion accelerated rapidly during the 1990s and 2000s. This was to a large extent due to the town's accessibility by both road and rail to the jobs market of the Dublin Metropolitan Area as well as larger urban centres in the rest of the county – a position that has been reinforced with the opening of the M9 Motorway and the N78 motorway link.

Today, the town of Athy, despite having many of the characteristics of a commuter town continues to provide an important local employment base for south County Kildare. Indeed, Athy retains a vital role as a centre for jobs as well as retail, health and educational services for a wide hinterland area extending into the adjoining counties of Laois and Carlow.

1.10 Overview of Core Issues and Challenges

Table 1.1 (see overleaf) provides an overview of the key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) affecting the spatial and economic development of Athy. This Local Area Plan acknowledges the current weaknesses and potential threats facing the town. However, in transitioning to a growth model of low carbon development whilst also focusing on improving quality of life issues, the aim now should be on developing the town's many inherent strengths which will be used as a basis to identify and realise opportunities and future possibilities for Athy.

Table 1.1: A SWOT Analysis of Athy

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic and accessible location within the ‘Core Region’ of the Dublin Metropolitan Area. • A young demographic profile – with a vibrant and growing population. • An intact and highly legible urban core with an inherent historic character. • Rich in historic, architectural, industrial and natural heritage. • An established economic and employment base serving a wide rural hinterland. • Town centre as an established commercial area serving the local needs of the community. • Town is served by a good level of social infrastructure, including leisure and training and education services. • The quantity of natural spaces such as the River Barrow and the Barrow Line Canal within the town.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An underperforming town centre with unsustainable high levels of vacancy. • A jobs ratio of less than 1:1 resulting in high levels of commuting to other centres of employment. • An urban form that has an extended footprint which lacks legibility and connectivity. • A lack of specific types of recreational amenities and facilities such as playing pitches. • Heritage, recreation and tourism infrastructure is under-developed and under-utilised. • High levels of socio-economic deprivation present within the town.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a compact and consolidated urban form with particular emphasis on orderly and sequential development alongside a regeneration of the town centre. • Support the continued development of Athy as a Self-Sustaining Growth Town that provides an important role in delivering economic growth and promoting sectoral interests. • To deliver integrated communities by initiating a model shift towards sustainable movement centred on a network of high quality cycling and walking routes linking all key destinations within the town as well as longer distanced routes (i.e. Barrow Blueway) • To ensure that existing historic and natural heritage should be at the heart of Athy’s recreational and amenity infrastructure. • Capitalise on the opening of the Athy Distributor Road with its second Barrow Bridge, to deliver an enhanced public realm with particular emphasis on the quality of the town’s key routes, entry points and historic core. • To make the transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society. • To become an inclusive and age friendly town with universal accessibility to infrastructure and amenities. • To develop the many regeneration proposals already being progressed for the town.
Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment growth lagging behind population growth. • Continued development of poorly integrated housing estates at edge-of-town locations. • Increased retail leakage to neighbouring towns such as Newbridge, Carlow and Portlaoise undermining the viability of the established commercial core. • Lack of targeted investment to regenerate the historic core. • Lack of co-ordinated and sustained investment in the town’s social and recreational infrastructure to accompany the planned growth in population and the aging of the town. • Continued over-reliance on private vehicular transport, particularly for local journeys. • Climate change and associated negative consequences (i.e. increased frequency of severe weather events such as flooding along the River Barrow).

2. Spatial Planning Context and Vision for Athy

Aim: To set out the statutory context of the Athy Local Area Plan in relation to its position within the hierarchy of spatial plans and outline an ambitious and achievable vision for the sustainable development of the town in the period to 2027 and beyond.

2.1 Compliance with the Hierarchy of Plans

In establishing a framework for the sustainable planning and development of Athy in the period to 2027 and beyond, it is important that the position of the Athy Local Area Plan within the overarching spatial planning hierarchy be outlined in order to provide a level of context but also to demonstrate how the plan complies with these overarching policy documents, in line with statutory requirements. The provisions of these plans and strategies, insofar as they relate to the planning and development of Athy, are also crucial and will be discussed below.

Figure 2.1: Hierarchy of Spatial Plans



2.1.1 National Planning Framework

The National Planning Framework (NPF) together with the National Development Plan (2018-2027) was published in 2018 under Project Ireland 2040. Project Ireland 2040 is the Government’s overarching long-term policy platform to guide and manage the future growth and development of the country. The primary aim of Project Ireland 2040 is to improve the quality of life in Ireland for all its citizens by creating and promoting opportunities for people and protecting and enhancing our environment. In order to achieve this goal, the NPF contains a series of National Policy Objectives (NPOs), which set out the intentions of the plan within specific areas. **Table 2.1** (see overleaf) outlines the NPOs which are most relevant to the preparation of the Athy Local Area Plan.

Table 2.1: List of National Policy Objectives which relate to the Athy Local Area 2021-2027

National Policy Objective (NPO)	Plan Response
NPO 3c: 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.	A substantial majority of the housing target will be delivered within the existing footprint of the town.
NPO 4: Ensure the creation of attractive, liveable, well-designed, high quality urban places that are home to diverse and integrated communities that enjoy a high quality of life and well-being.	Strategy focuses on creating sustainable and integrated communities.
NPO 6: Regenerate and rejuvenate cities, towns and villages of all types and scale as environmental assets, that can accommodate changing roles and functions, increased residential population and employment activity and enhanced levels of amenity and design quality, in order to sustainably influence and support their surrounding area.	Plan will adopt an ‘ <i>asset based approach</i> ’ to development which will seek to utilise the town’s existing social, economic and environmental assets to drive the sustainable growth of the town.
NPO 7: Apply a tailored approach to urban development that will be linked to the Rural/Urban Regeneration and Development Fund.	Includes an Urban regeneration Framework which will identify a series of projects that can be funded under the RRDF/URDF programme.
NPO 17: Enhance, integrate and protect the special physical, social, economic and cultural value of built heritage assets through appropriate and sensitive use now and for future generations.	Conservation and heritage-led regeneration policies included in the Plan for built heritage assets.
NPO 27: Ensure the integration of safe and convenient alternatives to the car into the design of our communities, by prioritising walking and cycling accessibility to both existing and proposed developments, and integrating physical activity facilities for all ages.	The Plan promotes an age-friendly town which seeks universal accessibility and prioritises the development of sustainable modes of travel.
NPO 35: Increase residential density in settlements, through a range of measures including reductions in vacancy, reuse of existing buildings, infill development schemes, area or site-based regeneration and increased building heights.	The Plan provides for residential development at sustainable densities in accordance with Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines.
NPO 53: Support the circular and bio economy including in particular through greater efficiency in land management, greater use of renewable resources and by reducing the rate of land use change from urban sprawl and new development.	The Plan and the Urban Regeneration Framework (Appendix 1) includes targeted active land management provisions supported by a number of specific objectives.
NPO 54: Reduce our carbon footprint by integrating climate action into the planning system in support of national targets for climate policy mitigation and adaptation objectives, as well as targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions.	Plan integrates national policies on climate action by promoting compact growth, sustainable movement and other adaption/mitigation measures.
NPO 58: Integrated planning for green infrastructure and ecosystem services will be incorporated into the preparation of statutory land use plans.	Identification of an integrated green infrastructure network to be protected and enhanced throughout the life of the Plan.

2.1.2 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region 2019-2031 sets out a framework to direct future growth of the region over the medium to long term. The Strategy is underpinned by key people-focused principles that reflect the three pillars of sustainability (Social, Environmental and Economic).

Figure 2.2: Three Key Principles of the RSES



The central purpose of the RSES is to support the implementation of the NPF and the economic policies and objectives of the Government by providing a coordinated strategic planning and economic framework for the development of Ireland's regions. In this regard both the RSES and NPF contain provisions which are particularly relevant to the development strategy being pursued in the Local Area Plan. The first is the achievement of compact growth by building at sustainable densities, infill development and urban regeneration. The second is the pursuit of an asset-based approach to development which seeks to enhance and expand upon the existing resources of Athy be they natural, cultural, or economic. Lastly, the realisation of climate resilience within the settlement will be of critical importance in underpinning the long-term sustainable development of the town.

The RSES is underpinned by a settlement strategy which identifies various settlement typologies within an overall hierarchy. Whilst the strategy locates Athy within the 'Core Region', surrounding the Dublin Metropolitan Area, it does not assign any specific typology to settlements below the level of Key Towns, which in County Kildare are identified as Maynooth and Naas. Instead, the RSES provides for County Development Plans to assign typologies to towns and settlements further down the settlement

What is a 'Self-Sustaining Growth Town'?
 Self-Sustaining Growth Towns are described in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy as towns with 'a moderate level of jobs and services. Such settlements include sub-county market towns and commuter towns with good transport links and capacity for continued commensurate growth to become more self-sustaining.'

hierarchy. Accordingly, the Kildare County Development Plan 2017-2023 (as varied) has identified Athy as a 'Self-Sustaining Growth Town', the highest possible category the Local Authority could assign. This designation was made on the basis of a comprehensive economic analysis of all settlements in the county. This demonstrated the critical role that Athy has as an employment and services centre not only for its resident population but also for its wider rural hinterland area.

Figure 2.3: Location of Athy within the Eastern and Midland Region



Source: Settlement Strategy of the Eastern and Midlands Region 2019 – 2031 (p. 45, RSES) as amended

It is noted that the RSES states that the policy response to settlements which local authorities define as 'self-sustaining growth towns' should be to promote and support the consolidation of the settlement coupled with targeted investment where required to improve local employment, services and sustainable transport options in order to become more self-sustaining (RSES, Table 4.3, Page 47).

2.2 Integrating Climate Considerations into the Athy Local Area Plan

One of the cross-cutting principles of this Plan (see Section 2.3.1) is to initiate a transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society, a necessary measure that is also a National Strategic Outcome (NSO 8) of the National Planning Framework. In tackling global warming, a comprehensive legislative and policy framework relating to climate action has been developed in Ireland over the past number of years. These provisions seek to ensure that climate considerations are fully integrated into spatial plans such as the Athy Local Area Plan.

Whilst the primary long term goal is to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 (Climate Action Plan, 2019), recent policy developments reflect a widespread acceptance that climate change is happening now, and its effects will only get more disruptive to both societies and the environment. Therefore, there is increasing emphasis on plans integrating mitigation and adaptation measures. In this regard, Kildare’s Climate Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024 has provided a critical point of reference in preparing this plan.

What is climate mitigation and adaptation?

Climate mitigation refers to measures to reduce climate change by limiting greenhouse emissions. It includes strategies to reduce activities that give rise to greenhouse gases and to enhance carbon sinks. Adaptation refers to actions which seek to better manage and reduce the risks and effects associated with existing or anticipated climate change and exploit beneficial opportunities.

The publication of the first Kildare County Council Climate Adaptation Strategy (2019), as provided for under the Low Carbon Development Act 2015, signalled the beginning of a coordinated cross-departmental approach to implementing climate mitigation and adaptation measures. Accordingly, the strategy contains an adaptation framework which incorporates objectives and actions that encompass all services, functions and operations of the Council. The strategy is centred around six complementary high level goals (see Figure 2.4) with each one containing a suite of relevant actions directed by specific objectives.

Figure 2.4: Goals of the Climate Adaptation Strategy



While some objectives apply to all areas of the Council, others such as those contained in *Goal 3: Land Use and Development* specifically apply to the preparation of this Plan. Such objectives seek to:

- Integrate climate action considerations into land use planning policy.
- Explore policies to help the transition to a climate resilient low carbon society.
- Promote and maximise the most efficient and sustainable use of land.

It is noted that other goals contain objectives and actions relevant to this plan, including *Goal 2: Infrastructure and the Built Environment* (the incorporation of green infrastructure and biodiversity provision in plans) and *Goal 4: Drainage and Flood Management* (flooding avoidance and adaptation measures).

The Athy Local Plan 2021-2027, through its various policies, objectives, and actions incorporates and provides for the following measures to both limit the amount of greenhouse gas emissions and increase the resilience of the town to the effects of existing and future climate change:

- Supporting the circular and bio-economy through achieving greater efficiency in land management by building at sustainable densities and prioritising brownfield development.
- Reducing Athy's local carbon footprint caused by transport emissions by increasing connectivity and prioritising sustainable movement routes to key destinations within the town.
- Avoiding development at inappropriate locations by changing the zoning designation of flood prone land from *Town Centre* and *New Residential* uses to conservation or agricultural uses.
- Creating an integrated green infrastructure network to support urban biodiversity, water retention and flood alleviation, allowing for natural and unhindered inundation during flood events.
- Supporting and promoting the use of biodiversity techniques, such as green roofs and walls and the integration of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) into all new development schemes.

Policy CAM 1 – Climate Adaptation and Mitigation

It is the policy of the Council to future proof Athy to ensure that it becomes a climate resilient town by promoting the economic, social and environmental benefits of low-carbon development, creating an integrated green infrastructure network, prioritising sustainable mobility within the town and building at sustainable densities in appropriate locations.

Objective

It is an objective of the Council to:

CAMO1.1 Support the full implementation of the Kildare County Council Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024, or any succeeding document, with regards to its goals, objectives and actions relating to the planning and development of Athy.

Action

- To ensure all plans and projects carried out in Athy encourage and provide for climate resilient measures.

2.3 A Vision for Athy

The Local Area Plan is underpinned by a strategic vision which is intended to guide the future growth of Athy in a sustainable manner, in a way that reflects the inherent character of the area and identifies the potential of utilising its existing assets as the basis for improving the quality of life, wellbeing and resilience of both the present and future residents of the town.

Vision Statement

To successfully fulfil Athy's role as a self-sustaining growth town by embracing the transition to a low carbon and climate resilient model of development which seeks to utilise and invest in the town's existing economic, social and environmental assets to generate sustainable economic development and job creation, thereby enhancing its status as the main economic and services centre of South Kildare.

The vision for the Local Area Plan will ensure that growth planned for the town over the life of the Plan and beyond occurs in a sustainable and sequential manner, characterised by a compact, consolidated and permeable pattern of development linked by sustainable modes of transport including a robust network of pedestrian and cycle routes, providing a high level of connectivity; facilitating and enabling the creation of a healthy, safe and age friendly community.

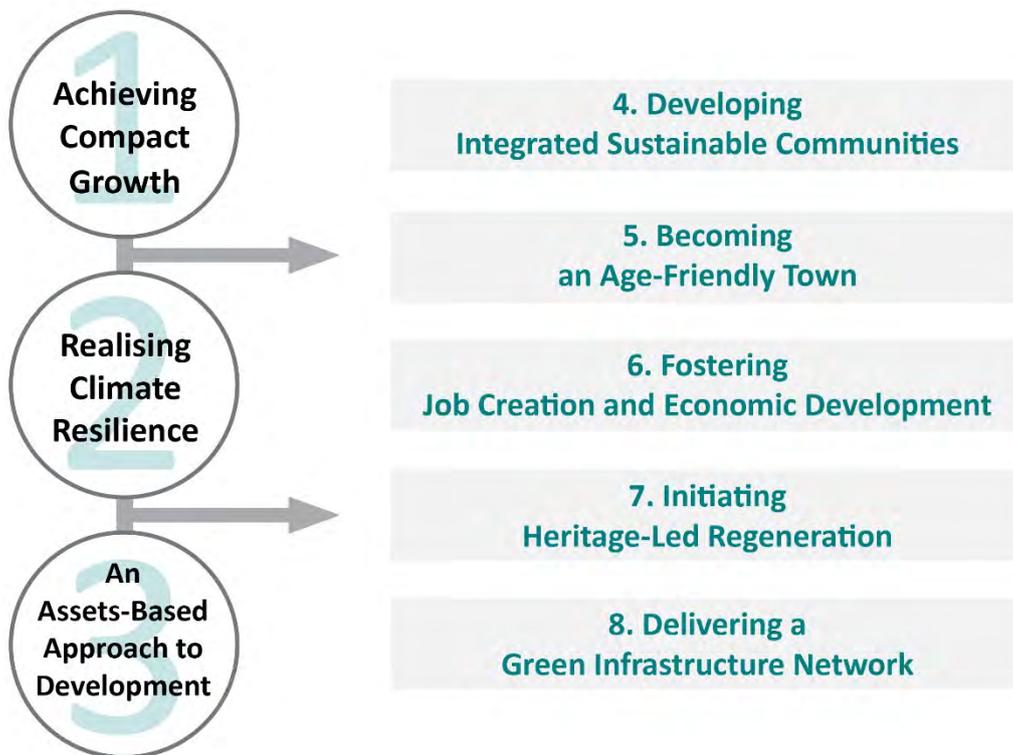
In essence, by 2027 a series of concerted steps will have been taken to 'future proof' Athy and create a more sustainable inclusive settlement centred around a regenerated and vibrant town centre providing important retail and commercial services and hosting an improved tourist offer. The town will not only be more resilient to the effects of climate change but will also have adapted to the needs of a growing and aging population, through the development of integrated communities, served by an enhanced level of social infrastructure and an expanded green infrastructure network.

2.3.1 Strategic Development Principles

The vision is underpinned by a number of strategic development principles which are designed to provide a level of focus and direction to the policies, objectives and actions within this Local Area Plan. The principles were developed on the basis of the many strengths of the town and seek to overcome the weaknesses and threats identified in order to future proof Athy and provide for its long term growth and sustainable development.

Three of the principles; Achieving Compact Growth; Realising Climate Resilience; and Pursuing an Asset-Based Approach to Development are over-arching and cross-cutting in nature, insofar as they can only be attained through the implementation of the others (see Figure 2.5, overleaf). For example, the delivery of compact growth will be dependent on developing integrated sustainable communities and a successful regeneration of the town centre. The principles can therefore be seen to be interdependent and mutually supportive i.e. the delivery of an accessible green infrastructure network both for nature conservation and recreational/tourism uses will also enable better connectivity between communities and help Athy become an age friendly and more inclusive town, delivering a better quality of life for all.

Figure 2.5: Strategic Development Principles of the Athy Plan



1. **Achieving Compact Growth:** In keeping with stated planning policy at all levels of the spatial hierarchy, a key priority of the Plan is to develop a compact and coherent urban form with particular emphasis being placed on the regeneration of the town centre, building within the existing urban footprint of the town and providing for orderly sequential development.
2. **Realising Climate Resilience:** The Local Area Plan endeavours to accelerate the transition to a low carbon model of development, which will better equip the town in managing the adverse impacts of climate change, whilst also providing for a better quality of life for residents of the town.
3. **An Asset-Based Approach to Development:** This approach involves utilising and investing in the existing social, economic and natural assets of Athy. In such a way, the town’s rich stock of built and natural heritage can be harnessed and appropriately developed to provide for sustainable locally based employment opportunities. In this regard the development of the Barrow Blueway walking and cycling route along the Barrow Line Canal will be a critical project.
4. **Developing Integrated Sustainable Communities:** Focusing on the idea of healthy placemaking, this wide-ranging principle will ensure that new residential areas are being built at sustainable densities in appropriate locations, but also seeks to create a more connected town, linking existing neighbourhoods with key destinations by sustainable and active modes of transport. This principle also involves an enhanced level of social infrastructure provision to service the needs of the residents of the town and its surrounding rural hinterland.

- 5. Becoming an Age Friendly Town:** Similar to many settlements across the country the population of Athy is aging. In order to ensure that this growing cohort of people continues to contribute and participate in the social and economic life of the town, it is necessary to put in place and where appropriate, retrofit the infrastructure needed to ensure universal accessibility.
- 6. Fostering Jobs Creation and Economic Development:** Ensure the realisation of Athy as a Self-Sustaining Growth Town by supporting existing and encouraging new enterprise and employment generating activities within the town. Such support also includes the delivery of key infrastructural projects such as the Athy Distributor Road which will improve the accessibility and the functioning of business activities in Athy.
- 7. Initiating Heritage-Led Regeneration:** Such an approach is key to ensuring the continued viability of the historic core as a centre for commercial activities. The Local Area Plan includes an Urban Regeneration Framework for Athy, which will primarily focus on how the historic centre can accommodate changing roles and functions, increase its residential population and employment activity, and provide for a transformed public realm that will enhance the user experience of shoppers, visitors and the community as a whole.
- 8. Delivering a Green Infrastructure Network:** The creation of such a network will not only protect Athy's strategic natural assets but also enhance the town's climate resilience, protect biodiversity within the town, and be the focus of public recreational and tourism activities.

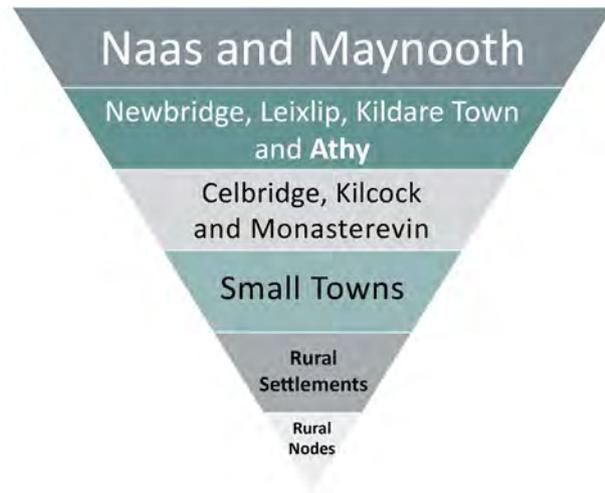
3. Compliance with the Kildare County Core Strategy

Aim: To accommodate 4.8% of County Kildare’s allocated housing growth in Athy over the period 2021-2027 in accordance with the Core Strategy of the Kildare County Development Plan.

3.1 Function, Population and Scale of Athy

The Core Strategy of the County Development Plan identifies Athy as a ‘Self-Sustaining Growth Town’. This is the second highest level within the settlement hierarchy of the county (see Figure 3.1). Census 2016 recorded Athy to have a population of 9,677 persons². The population of the town was relatively unchanged from Census 2011. However, this period of stagnation in the town’s growth followed a prolonged period of rapid population growth in the late 1990s and 2000s, which was not accompanied by a similar increase in employment. In this

Figure 3.1: Athy within the Kildare Settlement Hierarchy



regard the Plan seeks to deliver a framework for development where the projected population growth is accompanied by targeted investment to improve local services and employment opportunities, in order for Athy to function as a more self-sustaining settlement.

3.2 Future Housing and Population Targets

Under the Core Strategy of the County Development Plan Athy has been allocated 4.8% of Kildare’s overall housing growth. Applying this figure to the Athy Local Area Plan translates into a requirement for 771 additional units to be built over the life of the Plan to 2027. Using a unit occupancy rate of 2.8 persons per household, as provided for in the Development Plan, would result in an increase of 2,160 persons in Athy by the end of the Local Area Plan period (see Tables 3.1 and 3.2, below and overleaf).

Table 3.1: Projected Population Increase to 2027

Population Census 2016	Allocated Population Increase	Population target for 2027
9,677	2,160 *	11,837**

* The projected increase is based on the allocation in Table 3.3 of the County Development Plan (as varied) which provides for a population increase of 1,890 persons by 2026 and then projected forward by a further year to 2027 in order to coincide with the life of the Local Area Plan i.e. 1,890/7 years (2020-2026) = an increase of 270 persons per annum multiplied by 8 years gives a projected population increase of 2,160 to the end of 2027.

**This figure only includes projected population growth on lands zoned for town centre and new residential uses. It does not include any increases in population on existing residential/infill lands.

² The figure 9,677 comprises of the population living within the settlement boundary of Athy as defined by the CSO (see Map 6: Land Use Zoning Map) and based on the results of Census 2016 and not the population of the larger Athy Legal Town area which was abolished under the Local Government Reform Act 2014.

Table 3.2: Projected Housing Increase to 2027

Housing Units Census 2016	Allocated Unit Increase to 2027	Total units in 2027
4,281	771*	5,052

* Similar to Table 3.1 the projected increase is based on Table 3.3 of the County Development Plan which allocates an increase of 675 units by 2026. This is then projected forward by another year to 2027 in order to coincide with the life of the Local Area Plan i.e. 675 units/7 years (2020-2026) = an increase of 96 units per annum multiplied 8 years gives a figure of 771 units to the end of 2027.

3.3 Achieving Compact Growth

As required under objective 3(c) of the National Planning Framework (NPF) at least 30% of all new housing units must be delivered within the existing urban footprint of the town. 30% of the 771 units, which are allocated to Athy in the period to 2027, amounts to 231 units. Due to the nature of the settlement boundary that defines the built-up area of the town and the emphasis on delivering sequential and compact growth, this Local Area Plan aims to deliver far in excess of the 30% required. It is estimated that the Plan provides for over 99% of all new housing units to be delivered on ‘Town Centre’ and ‘New Residential’ lands inside the settlement boundary³. The plan will also provide increased densities for residential development within the town by providing for an average of 35 units per hectare (uph) on new residential zoned land.

What is the settlement boundary / built-up footprint of a town?

The existing built-up footprint of an urban settlement is defined by the CSO (in line with UN criteria) as an area with a minimum of 50 occupied dwellings, with a maximum distance between any dwelling and the building closest to it of 100 metres, and where there is evidence of an urban centre (shop, school etc.). The built-up area of Athy, as defined by its settlement boundary is based on the returns from Census 2016.

3.3.1 A Tiered Approach to Land Zoning

Appendix 3 of the National Planning Framework (NPF) requires the plan to adopt a Tiered Approach to Land Zoning. On foot of this a Sustainable Planning and Infrastructural Assessment (SPIA) was prepared to assess the suitability of lands for future development. This assessment (published alongside the Plan) provides a weighting of potential sites for future development on the basis of sustainable planning and serviceability/infrastructural grounds. The SPIA assists in the designation of lands as either Tier 1 lands (lands that are already serviced) or Tier 2 lands (lands that are serviceable within the life of the plan) and identifies the likely development services required to support new development. An indicative timeframe for delivery of critical infrastructure i.e. short, medium term or long term is also provided. The SPIA is considered to be another important tool in delivering consolidated and sequential development within Athy and has informed **Section 3.4 Estimated Residential Capacity**.

³ The CSO settlement boundary transects a site zoned C: New Residential on the Dublin Road (see Map 4: Land Use Zoning Map). All other new residential and town centre sites are located within the CSO settlement boundary.

3.3.2 Active Land Management

The dynamics of the housing and rental market in Athy have altered greatly over the past number of years. Figures from the 2016 Census recorded a residential vacancy level of 12.5% (1 in 8 properties) and recorded only 34 residential units being constructed in the town between 2011 and 2016⁴.

Whilst Athy may have been slower to recover from the early 2010's recession than other parts of the county, and consequently slower to suffer from the effects of the housing crisis, this situation has changed and due to the shortage of properties and the increase in rents, the town was designated a rent pressure zone (RPZ) in April 2020⁵.

There is a need to deliver the housing units allocated to Athy during the life of the plan. In order to ensure such development is sustainable, it is considered that an active land management approach on behalf of the local authority is critical to achieving the delivery of a continuous supply of new housing in the town in a consolidated and sequential manner.

The Plan, through its various policies, objectives and actions incorporates the following active land management provisions:

- A prioritisation of residential development within the town centre. In this regard, at least 10% of all new houses (excluding extant permissions) will be provided on town centre zoned lands.
- A detailed Urban Regeneration Framework for Athy (Appendix 1) has been prepared which identifies sites within the town centre that can accommodate multi-unit developments.
- The Urban Regeneration Framework also includes a land use survey which provides a detailed assessment of the level of vacancy on town centre lands.
- An emphasis on bringing vacant residential properties, which is particularly prevalent within the town centre, back into use through various measures including the ongoing identification of, and engagement with landowners (see Appendix 1, Section 3.4).
- Measures to support the change of use from vacant commercial units to residential using the Council's statutory powers, where appropriate, under the Derelict Sites Act 1990 (as amended) and the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 (as amended).
- Prioritising the completion of residential estates situated on existing residential/infill lands.
- Utilising the Sustainable Planning and Infrastructural Assessment (accompanying this Plan) to identify the infrastructural readiness of lands to accommodate residential development (see Section 3.4).
- Supporting the completion of the Athy Distributor Road which will provide access to lands designated as *Tier 2 – Serviceable* (by the Strategic Planning and Infrastructural Assessment) within the life of the plan.

3.3.3 Building Heights

The guidelines *Urban Development and Building Heights: Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (DHPLG, 2018) contain a number of mandatory Specific Planning Policy Requirements (SPPRs) which local authorities are obliged to provide for when making their statutory plans. Of particular relevance to this Plan is SPPR 1 which requires local authorities explicitly to identify areas where increased

⁴ Source: Central Statistics Office (CSO) and the All Ireland Research Observatory (AIRO).

⁵ It is further noted that all of County Kildare was designated a Rent Pressure Zone in September 2020.

building height will be actively pursued for both redevelopment, regeneration and infill development and that such plans shall not provide for blanket numerical limitations on building height. Also of relevance is SPPR 4 which requires that the minimum densities set out in the Guidelines for *Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (2009)* should be met and that a greater mix of building heights and typologies in planning for the future development of suburban locations, in particular in developments of 100 units or more.

Having regard to the requirements outlined, this Local Area Plan does not propose to place any height limitations on new development in Athy. Also, in keeping with the provisions set out in SPPR 1 the following locations are identified as possible locations for taller buildings:

- The town centre (with possible sites identified in the Urban Regeneration Framework)
- New Residential lands at Chanterlands (south of the train station)

Taller buildings can, in circumstances where they are well-designed and sited, make a positive contribution to an urban setting, however, particular care must be taken when making such interventions in a town with such a rich historic fabric as Athy which also includes an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA). Due regard must be had to the existing characteristics of the receiving environment. As provided for in the guidelines on building heights (p.13), each proposal will be required to ‘...successfully integrate into/enhance the character and public realm of the area, having regard to topography, its cultural context, setting of key landmarks, protection of key views’.

Increased building heights on new residential lands should be subject to site-specific and design quality appraisals which take into consideration the impact of taller developments on the existing urban fabric in order to ensure that such buildings integrate well with their surroundings.

Whilst the preferred locations of taller buildings have been identified, it should be noted that this Local Area Plan places emphasis on delivering the desired densities at appropriate locations rather than focusing on increasing building heights. Achieving the sustainable residential densities envisaged in Section 3.4 will not require the development of tall buildings in Athy.

3.4 Estimated Residential Capacity

This Plan retains areas of land with extant planning permission for residential development (261 units) previously zoned for new residential purposes under the Athy Town Development Plan 2012-2018. Circa 10% (58) of the remaining units have been allocated to town centre lands (see Section 3.3.2). The balance of 452 units required will be provided on approximately 15.6 hectares of additional New Residential zoned lands from an overall residential unit target of 771 units to 2027 (see table 3.3 and 3.4 below).

Table 3.3: Units target to 2027 (less extant permissions)

	Units
Units allocated to Athy in period to 2027	771
Less units developed on new residential lands since 2016	0
Less extant permissions on new residential lands	261
Remaining unit target	510
Town Centre allocation of c.10% of remaining unit target =	58

Table 3.4: Estimated Residential Capacity

Location of Development	Quantum of Undeveloped Residential Land (in hectares)	Estimated Residential Capacity (approx. no. of units)	Density Range* (units per hectare)
Town Centre Development			
Town centre infill	-	58	35-50 (where appropriate)
New Residential Development			
Dublin Road	0.5	11 units	N/A (extant permission)
Clonmullin and Gallowshill	8.9	250 units	N/A (extant permission)
Tomard	4.2	147	35
Chanterlands	4.3	172	35-50 (average 40)
Blackparks	3.8	133	35
Ardrew KDA*	3.3	65 (60 units and 5 halting sites)	Varying
Sub Total	25 ha	-	
TOTAL (inc. Town Centre infill)	-	771	

* There are currently 765⁶ cases on the Council Housing List for the town of Athy. Following consultation with the Housing Section during the preparation of this Local Area Plan, it was evident that a substantial number of those on the list are people who are currently resident in the town and therefore do not represent population growth in the context of the Core Strategy. Whilst it is acknowledged that the proposal does not accommodate a significant percentage of those currently awaiting social housing, the PPP (Public-Private Partnership) development at Ardrew KDA, will provide 60 housing units and 5 halting sites (and a sizable recreational facility). It should be noted therefore, that whilst identified in Table 3.4, these units do not form part of the overall new housing target to accommodate population growth in the town. This Plan will also make provision for social housing in the town, through Part V and through supporting housing developments brought forward by Approved Housing Bodies.

The densities estimated for each site in **Table 3.4** above are indicative only. It should be noted that any application for development on these lands should adhere to the Guidelines on *Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas*, DEHLG (2009). In any case, the density of development and number of units permissible will be determined at detailed design stage based on a full assessment of site characteristics, local conditions, design sensitivities and the overall quality of the scheme and having regard to the various provisions on development management within the Kildare County Development Plan along with the relevant Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines.

⁶ Note: 765 cases equate to housing units not persons. This figure has been provided by the Housing Section of Kildare County Council (July 2020).

3.5 Compliance with the Core Strategy

To ensure continued compliance with the Core Strategy and its housing allocation for Athy it will be necessary to monitor the number of residential units permitted and developed on an annual basis. The quantum of land zoned in the Local Area Plan is based on an estimated density of specific sites. If that density is significantly increased a surplus of zoned lands is generated which, if developed within the lifetime of the Plan, will result in a greater population than the Core Strategy provided for.

Monitoring the number of units permitted and constructed enables a closer alignment between the Core Strategy, the population projection, development activity and all the associated necessary physical, social and community infrastructure. If it appears that population targets are likely to be exceeded as a result of increased densities, it may be necessary to review the Plan.

3.5.1 Review of the Kildare County Development Plan

Kildare County Council will commence the statutory review of its County Development Plan (CDP) in 2021. This two year formal process will conclude with the adoption by the members of a new Kildare County Development Plan (CDP) in 2023. The new CDP may contain provisions, including revised population/housing targets for Athy, which may differ from those on which this Local Area Plan is based. The Council acknowledges this possibility and commits to amending this Plan through a statutory amendment under Section 20 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), as necessary, to ensure that it adheres to the Core Strategy and any other material changes contained in the new CDP, insofar as they relate to Athy.

It is an objective of the Council to:

CDP1.1 Align the Athy Local Area Plan 2021 – 2027, if necessary, with the Core Strategy of the Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029 once adopted, and any other material changes relevant to Athy contained in the Kildare County Development Plan 2023 – 2029, by way of a statutory amendment to the Local Area Plan pursuant to Section 20 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

3.6 Economic, Retail and Social Infrastructure Capacity

Employment

The Local Area Plan seeks to designate a sufficient amount of land for both enterprise and employment functions and for industry and warehousing uses that is commensurate with Athy's role as a Self-Sustaining Growth Town. The Plan will also seek to identify other areas for employment growth including the development of the tourist offer within the town and the revitalisation of the historic core.

Retail

The policies and objectives of this Plan seek to strengthen and protect the viability of the established retail function of Athy. This will be done through a combination of measures including an Urban Regeneration Framework (see Appendix 1) that outlines a range of opportunities for the town centre along with protecting established neighbourhood centres through appropriate land use zoning objectives.

Social Infrastructure

A key component of this Plan is the provision of adequate social infrastructure to cater for both the needs of the existing population as well as to accommodate the projected level of growth within the plan area. In this regard a Social Infrastructure Audit has been carried out to identify any existing shortfalls and ensure that adequate provision is made for such infrastructure to meet the future needs of the plan area. On foot of the findings of this Audit a number of objectives and actions have been set out in this Plan to support the delivery of such infrastructure in tandem with the development of new housing and employment lands.

3.7 Environment and Heritage Protection

The environmental sensitivities of the county identified in the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process for the Kildare County Development Plan 2017-2023 have informed the Core Strategy and the role it identifies for Athy. The Local Area Plan responds to environmental factors including proposed development within/adjacent to Special Areas of Conservation and areas at risk of flooding. It also acknowledges the importance of built and natural heritage as an environmental and economic asset (including tourism) and includes comprehensive and integrated objectives for its conservation and enhancement. The Plan has also been subject to and informed by a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA). Regarding built heritage protection, a Statement of Character has also been prepared for the Athy Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) which provides the local authority, residents and developers with best practice advice for development within the ACA.

3.8 Future Development Priorities

The vision statement outlined for Athy in Section 2.3 acknowledges that the aims and objectives for the town can only be achieved by implementing sustained and targeted measures over the long term, beyond the life of the Local Area Plan. However, this Plan presents an opportunity to initiate the necessary transition to a low carbon and sustainable model of development that will improve the quality of life for people living in the town. Accordingly, the priorities for this Plan are to achieve compact growth based on the prioritisation of the town centre sites and the development of infill

sites and to identify new residential sites at sustainable densities. Furthermore, the implementation of the Urban Regeneration Framework will provide a key area of focus for the rejuvenation and development of the town during the life of the Plan.

In the post-2027 period and following the building out of identified sites, it is considered that the lands situated to the southeast of the town, adjacent to the future Athy Distributor Road, represent the most appropriate area to cater for future strategic requirements to accommodate the orderly and sequential expansion of the town, at a location which is proximate to public transport at the train station, and with suitable access to other services such as the Primary Care Centre, as illustrated in Figure 3.2: Athy Development Strategy Map. For this reason, these lands have been zoned as ‘Strategic Reserve’, a designation that seeks to protect such lands from inappropriate forms of development which would impede the orderly and efficient expansion of the urban settlement.

Policy CS1 – Core Strategy

CS1 *It is the policy of the Council to support the sustainable long term growth of Athy in accordance with the Core Strategy of the Kildare County Development Plan 2017-2023 (or any succeeding plan), the provisions of the National Planning Framework and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031.*

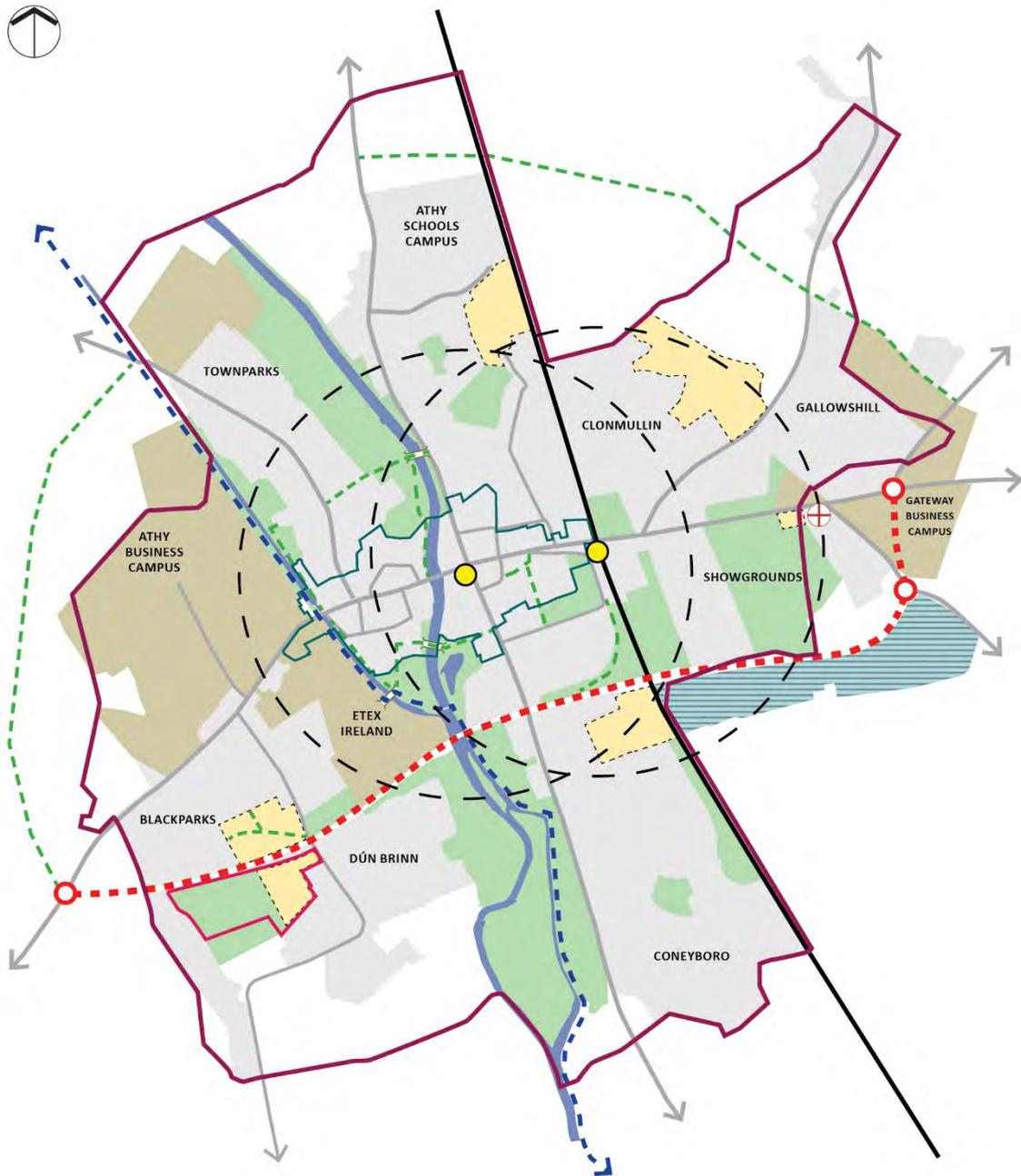
Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

- CSO1.1** Support and facilitate compact growth through the sustainable intensification and consolidation of the town centre and established residential areas.
- CSO1.2** Monitor the scale, type, tenure and location of constructed and permitted developments in Athy during the lifetime of the Plan and apply appropriate development management standards to ensure compliance with the Core Strategy to achieve the delivery of strategic plan-led and coordinated balanced development within the town.
- CSO1.3** Prioritise the development of sites zoned A: Town Centre and C: New Residential within the town as set out in **Chapters 2, 4 and 11 and Appendix 1** of this Plan.
- CSO1.4** Support and facilitate the implementation of the Urban Regeneration Framework for the town as set out in Appendix 1 of the Plan.
- CSO1.5** Focus new enterprise development into lands identified for Industry and Warehousing and Enterprise and Employment uses.
- CSO1.6** Support new residential development and infill development that occurs in tandem with the delivery of supporting physical and social infrastructure.
- CSO1.7** Preserve the lands identified as ‘Strategic Reserve’ on **Map 6: Land Use Zoning Map**, thereby controlling the level of piecemeal and haphazard development on these lands and safeguarding their strategic value in accommodating the orderly sequential expansion of the urban settlement beyond the current Plan period.
- CSO1.8** Ensure that projects giving rise to adverse effects on the integrity of European sites (cumulatively, directly, or indirectly) arising from their size or scale, land take, proximity, resource requirements, emissions (disposal to land, water or air), transportation requirements, duration of construction, operation, decommissioning or from any other effects shall not be permitted on the basis of this plan⁷.

⁷ Except as provided for in Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, viz. There must be: (a) no alternative solution available, (b) imperative reasons of overriding public interest for the plan to proceed; and (c) adequate compensatory measures in place.

Figure 3.2: Athy Development Strategy Map



Key

	Railway line		Town Centre Regeneration Area
	Existing road network		New residential areas
	Athy Distributor Road Scheduled for completion in late 2023		Ardrev Key Development Area
	Barrow Blueway Under Construction		Employment Lands
	Existing Urban Form		Strategy Reserve
	Strategic Open Space		Strategic connectivity routes
	Key centre/transportation point		Future pedestrian/cyclist bridges (Indicative locations)
	800 metres catchment area 10 minute walk		Athy Primary Care Centre
			CSO Settlement Boundary

4. Homes and Communities

Aims:

- *To support and facilitate the development of integrated sustainable neighbourhoods that respond to the needs of changing demographics and provide community, recreational and amenity facilities in tandem with housing delivery;*
- *To require residential developments be built at sustainable densities in appropriate locations, incorporating a mix of tenures and integrating the principles of healthy and age friendly placemaking to ensure that Athy enhances its attractiveness as a place to live and work;*
- *To promote and support innovative housing models including live-work units and specific needs housing.*

4.1 Overview

The development of integrated sustainable communities is one of the key principles underpinning the Local Area Plan for Athy. In achieving such an aim the town faces many challenges; its urban form is sprawling and low density in nature, and its residential estates are self-contained and car-dependent in design. Furthermore, while the town’s social infrastructure was found to be good in some respects, for example with regards to further education and training facilities, other more basic amenities, such as the provision of playing pitches and playgrounds are noted to be deficient for the size of the population currently being served. Accordingly, the realisation of healthy placemaking in the town will require sustained measures and targeted investment over the long term. In this regard, the Plan highlights the key obstacles and the specific deficiencies in social infrastructure which hamper the development of sustainable communities and outlines a range of policies, objectives and actions to address these issues over the life of the Plan and beyond.

4.2 Socio-Economic Profile

4.2.1 Population Change

Census 2016 recorded a population of 9,847 persons in Athy (within the Legal Town boundary) which represents a small increase of 2.7% (260 persons) in population from 2011 (9,587 persons)⁸.

Table 4.1: Population Change in Athy 1986 to 2016

Census Year	1986	1991	1996	2002	2006	2011	2016
Population	5,449	5,204	5,306	6,058	7,943	9,587	9,847

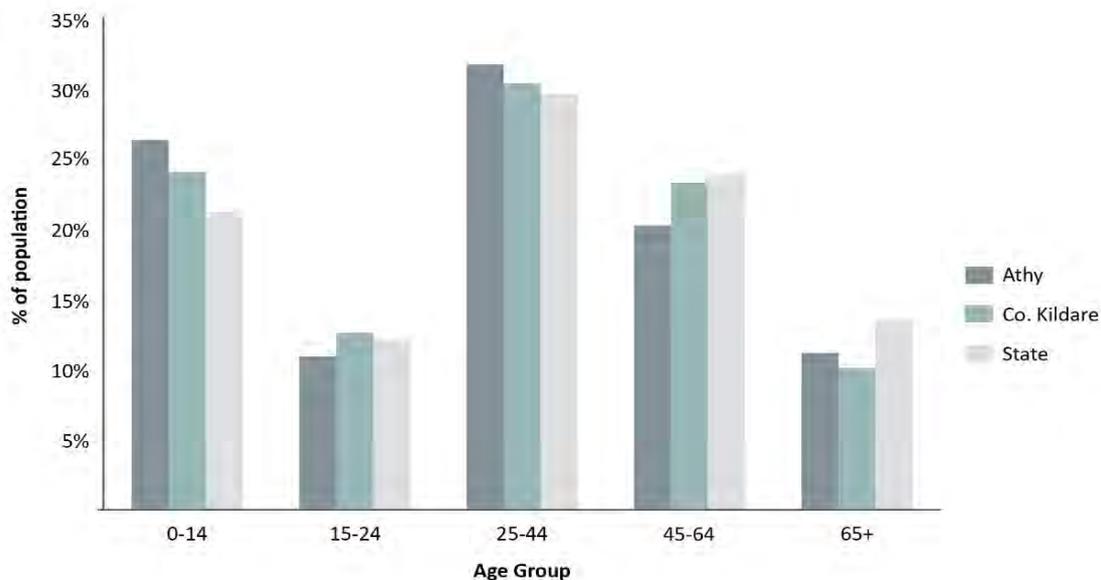
The low rate in population growth over the intercensal period between 2011 and 2016 followed a sustained period in which the town experienced rapid growth. For example, the population of Athy increased by 81% between 1996 and 2011. In comparison the population of County Kildare increased from 134,992 in 1996 to 210,312 in 2011, representing a growth of 57%. The population growth in Athy equated to three times the national population increase of 27% between 1996 and 2011.

⁸ The population figures referenced here and in Table 4.1 are based on the area comprising *Athy Legal Town* and were used in this instance to provide a like-for-like comparison. It is noted that settlement boundaries were only introduced by the CSO in Census 2016. In this regard the 2016 population of 9,677 is based on the 2016 settlement boundary of the town and is used in this Plan as the baseline figure for population projections to 2027 (see Chapter 3, Table 3.1).

4.2.2 Age Profile

According to Census 2016, Athy has a noticeably higher proportion of its population within the 0-14 age group (26.2%) than either the county as a whole (24%) or the State (21.1%) (see Figure 4.1). Indeed, it is noted that the age profile of Athy includes a high percentage of children, young people and those at work. The 0-24 age group comprises 37.1% of the population which is noticeably higher than the national average of 33.2%. Athy also has a higher percentage of population aged 65+ (11.1%) when compared to the county average of 9.9%. However, it is below the national average of 13.4%.

Figure 4.1: Population Profile by Age



Echoing national trends, the population of Athy is ageing with Census 2016 recording an increase in the average age of persons in the town, rising from an average age 33.8 years in 2011 to 34.6 years in 2016. The population of Athy is however, younger than the 2016 national average of 37.4 years.

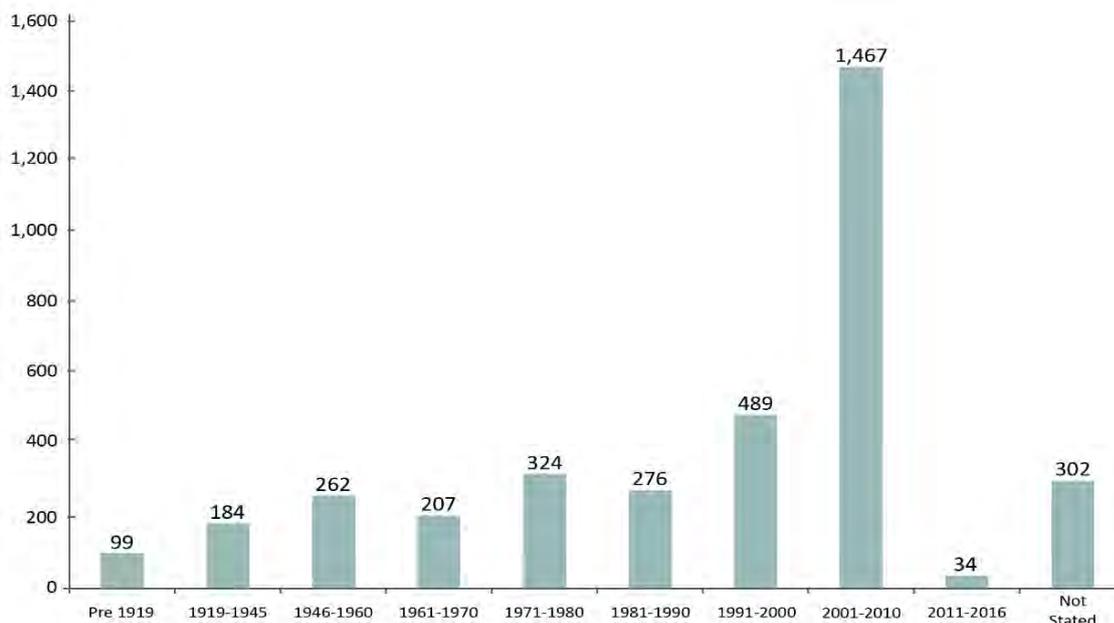
4.2.3 Housing Stock and Household Size

Census 2016 recorded a total of 3,650 households within the settlement of Athy. In the decade from 2001 to 2010 an additional 1,467 residential units were constructed in the town (see Figure 4.2). This equates to 40.3% of all housing stock in the town and coincided with a period of rapid population growth (as discussed in Section 4.2.1). By contrast only 34 residential units were constructed between 2011 and 2016.

Census 2016 also recorded that that vast majority of the population of Athy (86.4%) live in conventional housing (i.e. bungalow/house) while another 11.7% live in apartments. By contrast the figures for the county note that 89.2% live in conventional houses, while the corresponding figure for apartments is 9.5%⁹.

⁹ Source: CSO and the All Ireland Research Observatory (AIRO).

Figure 4.2: Private Households Built by Year



The results of Census 2016 indicate that the average household size was 2.63 persons per household. This figure is lower than the county average which was recorded as 2.8 persons per household. However, as noted in Section 3.3.2, the town in 2016 recorded a vacancy rate of 12.5% in 2016¹⁰ and given that Athy has been designated a Rent Pressure Zone in April 2020, it is considered that the Census 2016 figure has become outdated.

4.2.4 Housing Tenure

Census 2016 records that 57.9% of all homes in Athy as being owner occupied whilst 21.7% of the housing stock is privately rented with 15.6% being socially rented. Athy has a higher proportion of both social and privately rented housing than the county and national recorded average in 2016 (see Table 4.2 below).

Table 4.2: Housing Tenure Breakdown 2016

	Athy	Co. Kildare	National Average
Owner Occupied	57.9%	72%	67.6%
Privately Rented	21.7%	17.2%	18.2%
Socially Rented	15.6%	7.1%	9.4%

Source: Census 2016 and AIRO

4.2.5 Educational Attainment

The results of Census 2016 show that a high proportion of the population of Athy received either no formal education or primary education than the population of the county or state. This pattern is mirrored at second level. However, Census 2016 does indicate that a higher proportion of the population of the town has a Technical/Apprentice qualification than the national average or county average.

¹⁰ Note: This figure excludes holiday homes.

Table 4.3: Percentage Breakdown of Educational Attainment in 2016

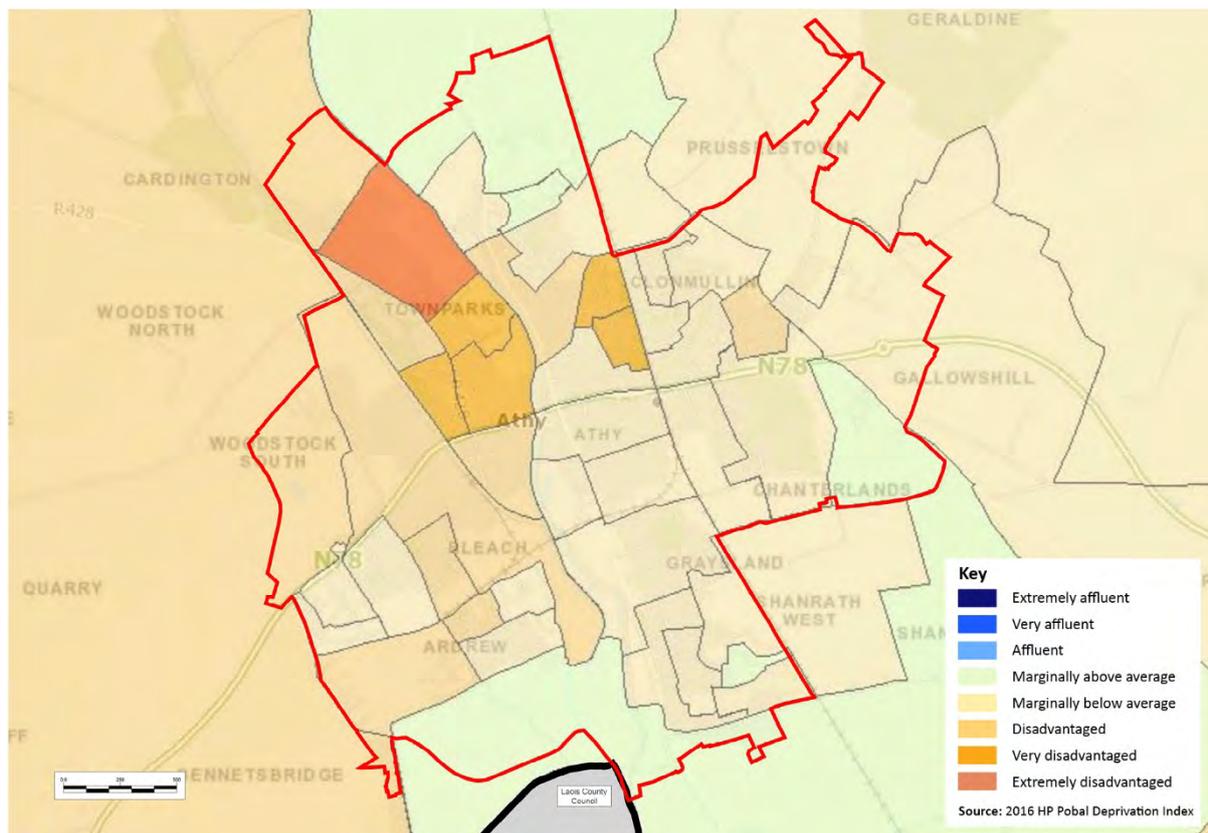
	No formal Education / Primary	Higher Secondary	Technical / Apprentice / Certificate	All Third Level
Athy	14.2%	20.7%	16.6%	22.2%
Kildare	10%	19.5%	15.6%	36.3%
State	12.5%	18.5%	14.7%	33.4%

Source: Census 2016 and AIRO

4.2.6 Social Deprivation

The Pobal Trutz Haase and Jonathan Pratschke (HP) Deprivation Index for 2016 recorded that Kildare as a whole is the 5th most affluent local authority in the country (out of 34 local authorities). However, there are variations in areas of affluence or disadvantage across the county. For example, the most disadvantaged parts of the county are in the west and south with one Small Area (Athy West Urban) being the most disadvantaged Small Area in Kildare.

Figure 4.3: 2016 Pobal HP Deprivation Map for Athy¹¹



¹¹ The Plan area is outlined in red.

4.3 Residential Development: Capacity and Delivery

This Local Area Plan seeks to develop Athy in a manner that is consistent with its status as a Self-Sustaining Growth Town within the settlement hierarchy outlined in the Kildare County Development Plan (CDP). Key to achieving this is ensuring the delivery of the residential units allocated to Athy under the Core Strategy of the CDP. The Sustainable Planning and Infrastructural Assessment (SPIA) which accompanies this Plan, notes that the lands identified for new residential uses have the ability to accommodate such development subject to the delivery of specified servicing infrastructure (see **Section 11.3 Phasing and Infrastructure Delivery Schedule**).

Residential delivery will be achieved through a combination of the following measures:

- i. Supporting intensification and consolidation within the existing residential and built-up area including redevelopment and infill opportunities, where appropriate.
- ii. Implementing the active land management measures set out in Section 3.3.2 having specific regard to prioritising residential development within the town centre as well as reducing elevated levels of residential vacancy in this area.
- iii. Developing new residential lands at sustainable densities in appropriate locations.
- iv. Delivering physical and social infrastructure in tandem with residential development to support the continued development of a healthy, active and liveable town.

Policy HC1 - Residential Development: Capacity and Delivery

HC1 *It is the policy of the Council to ensure that sufficient zoned land continues to be available at appropriate locations to satisfy the Core Strategy growth allocation for Athy and that each household has access to good quality housing that is appropriate to its circumstances.*

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

- HCO1.1** Support new residential development and infill development that occurs in tandem with the delivery of supporting physical and social infrastructure.
- HCO1.2** Encourage the appropriate redevelopment of brownfield and infill sites for residential uses within the footprint of the existing built-up area.
- HCO1.3** Utilise the provisions of the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 (as amended) with regards to the Vacant Site Levy to facilitate the appropriate development of vacant sites on Residential land and Regeneration (Town Centre) land¹².
- HCO1.4** Manage the provision of one-off housing on lands zoned as '1: Agricultural'. Limited one-off housing will be permitted in this zone subject to compliance with the rural housing policy of the Kildare County Development Plan and all other normal siting and design considerations.

4.4 Residential Density, Mix and Design

The housing allocation for Athy on New Residential zoned lands is based on an average density of 35 units per hectare (uph) which is considered appropriate given the role and character of Athy as a *Self-Sustaining Growth Town* located within the Hinterland Areas, surrounding the Dublin Metropolitan Area. It should be noted however, that the average density with respect to the

¹² Refer to Part 2 of Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 (as amended) for definition.

provision of group/special needs housing (see Section 4.4.1.) may be less than the envisaged average of 35 uph for new residential development within the town.

Government policy outlined in *Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas: Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (DECHG, 2009) and *Urban Development and Building Heights: Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (DHP&LG, 2018) state that land is a scarce resource and should be managed efficiently. The guidelines provide, inter alia, indicative appropriate residential density standards to apply to settlements depending on population size. For towns in excess of 5,000 persons, i.e. Athy, no upper limit should, in principle, apply to town centres subject to specified requirements. Similarly, on brownfield sites higher densities would also apply. On public transport corridors in proximity to bus stops or rail stations minimum net densities of 50 uph are advised while on outer suburban/greenfield sites net densities of 35-50 uph would be encouraged while discouraging densities below 30 uph.

There is a high proportion of 3-bed semi-detached type dwellings within Athy. The Plan seeks to address this monotype housing pattern in the town and will seek to ensure a greater mix and variety of housing within individual sites. Specific Planning Policy Requirement (SPPR) 4 of the Guidelines on Building Heights (2018) states that in planning for the future development of greenfield or edge of city/town locations for housing purposes, planning authorities must:

1. Ensure the minimum densities for such locations set out in the Guidelines issued by the Minister under Section 28 Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (2007) or any amending or replacement Guidelines;
2. Ensure a greater mix of building heights and typologies in planning for the future development of suburban locations; and
3. Avoid mono-type building typologies (e.g. two storey or own-door houses only), particularly, but not exclusively so in any one development of 100 units or more.

Accordingly, residential schemes in Athy should therefore provide for both a mix of dwelling size and dwelling type to cater for a diverse range of housing needs. The overall design and layout of residential development should be of high-quality and comply with the urban design principles contained in the Kildare County Development Plan along with the provisions of the relevant Section 28 Ministerial guidelines.

4.4.1 Group/Special Needs Housing

There are a number of groups with specific design and planning needs including older people, people with disabilities and members of the travelling community. This Plan places emphasis on universal design in order to provide for those with specific housing needs. The mix and design of new housing for group/special needs housing in Athy will be influenced by a range of factors including:

- Consideration of the nature of the existing housing stock and existing social mix in the area;
- Desirability of providing for mixed communities;
- Provision of a range of new housing types and tenures;
- The need to provide a choice of new housing types, suitable and adaptable for all age groups; abilities; and
- The need to cater for groups with specific needs.

4.4.2 Housing for Older People

Supported housing and longer-term residential care facilities for older people should be fully integrated into the local community. Such facilities should be within walking distance of the town centre, key services and public transportation, car parking and public spaces while integrated into a universally accessible and age friendly public realm.

4.5 Becoming an Age Friendly Town

As outlined in Section 2.3.1 one of the cross-cutting strategic development principles of this Plan is to put in place supporting measures to cater for the ageing population. In future proofing Athy to cater for an increased older population we can help make it a town that allows people to age in their community whilst also creating stronger more sustainable settlements.

Such an aspiration requires an integrated approach and targeted investment at many levels from social infrastructure, to mobility and housing. In this regard, Kildare County Council is leading the way and there are many examples where measures are actively being implemented to make Athy an age friendly town. For example, the Kildare Age Friendly Programme Manager has worked with various stakeholders to identify how new and existing infrastructure/buildings can be made age friendly by implementing the new policies and guiding documents from *Age Friendly Ireland*. This has resulted in cooperation between the Council, the HSE and the developer to make the Athy Primary Care Centre the first Age Friendly Primary Care Centre (PCC) in the country. This work will feed into guidelines being prepared to inform all other future PCCs nationally.

Another example of an age friendly public building is the new Athy Library (the former Dominican Church) which was the first in the country to receive age friendly status from Age Friendly Ireland. Since its opening in 2018 the library has become a key piece of social infrastructure and the hub of the local community, receiving over 100,000 visitors in its first year of operation.

The creation of an age friendly town also means that key destinations within the town should all be easily accessible by foot, particularly within the commercial core. The Walkability Audit Report for Athy (April 2020) conducted an in-depth survey of the town centre and recommended a number of actions be taken in order to provide a more age friendly pedestrian experience in the town.

Furthermore, in the provision of housing, Kildare County Council has appointed an age friendly housing specialist who will be involved in developing a programme to implement the age friendly housing policy at local level ("*housing options for the ageing population*"). In relation to housing provision in Athy there are plans afoot to develop independent living units for people aged 55+ on the Dominican lands in the centre of the town.

Policy HC2 - Residential Density, Mix and Design

HC2 *It is the policy of the Council to ensure that all new residential development provides for a sustainable mix of housing types, sizes and tenures and that new development complements the existing residential mix.*

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

- HCO2.1** Ensure that a good mix of housing types and sizes is provided in all new residential areas including the Ardrew Key Development Area (KDA) and appropriate infill/brownfield locations to meet the needs of the population of Athy, including housing designed for older people and people with disabilities.
- HCO2.2** Support the actions set out in Kildare Age Friendly County Strategy 2019 – 2021 and any subsequent strategy, regarding the implementation of age friendly principles in the planning, design and delivery of physical infrastructure, public realm works, business and commercial premises.
- HCO2.3** Require that residential schemes in close proximity to heavily trafficked roads within the Plan area are designed and constructed to minimise noise disturbance, follow a good acoustic design process and clearly demonstrate that significant adverse noise impacts will be avoided.
- HCO2.4** Seek to provide Traveller Specific Accommodation at appropriate locations close to key services and public transport facilities in accordance with Kildare County Council’s Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019-2024 and any subsequent traveller accommodation programme.
- HCO2.5** Comply with the Specific Planning Policy Requirements (SPPRs) for apartment standards and building heights issued under Section 28(1) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).
- HCO2.6** Apply a 10% social housing requirement, pursuant to Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) to all sites that are zoned solely for residential use or for a mixture of residential and other uses (save where the development is exempt from the provisions of Part V).

4.6 Social Infrastructure

As part of the plan-making process a Social Infrastructure Audit (published alongside this plan) was carried out to examine the availability and capacity of existing social infrastructure facilities in Athy, to determine future requirements and make recommendations based on anticipated settlement growth.

In addition to the actual activity and function, ‘social infrastructure’ facilities can provide an invisible platform of community and social interaction which many residents may rely upon for personal wellbeing. The provision of the requisite levels of social infrastructure within Athy is therefore important and vital to support the needs and quality of life of the existing and planned residential base as well as the local catchment area.

What is social infrastructure?

‘Social Infrastructure’ relates to the provision of services and facilities which are essential for health, wellbeing and the social development of a town. Social infrastructure facilities include but are not limited to schools, health services, community facilities, sports and recreational activities.

4.6.1 Assessment of the Existing Situation and Future Demand

Assessing the existing situation included:

- Establishing a social and demographic profile of the community who live in Athy.
- Identifying existing community infrastructure features (including where relevant, their capacity) under a number of predefined themes including 'Education/Training', 'Childcare', 'Health', 'Sports and Recreation', 'Open Space', 'Social and Community', 'Faith', 'Arts and Culture', and 'Other Facilities Including Neighbourhood Centres'.
- A walkability analysis based on defined walking distances from specific community facilities in order to evaluate proximity, accessibility and coverage of those facilities to target user groups.

The Audit also considered the existing infrastructure provision relative to the existing/planned population and best practice provision.

Below is a summary of the findings from the Athy Social Infrastructure Audit (September 2020) which accompanies this Plan.

Education and Training

Facilities examined under this theme included primary schools, secondary schools along with third-level, evening classes and skills development programmes. Within the Plan boundary there are four primary schools, two post-primary schools and four further education/training centres.

The primary schools in Athy were found to be nearing capacity, while secondary schools were found to be overcapacity, with Athy Community College relying on prefab classrooms. Athy is well served by further education facilities and courses. However, it is noted from Census 2016 records that attainment of third level degrees is lower than the national average. The Council will support these existing facilities and support any development that would help to address any lack of higher educational attainment.

The walkability and primary school catchment analysis indicates that there is a significant proportion of residential units falling outside a 10-minute walking distance of existing primary schools.

Childcare

Childcare facilities are well distributed spatially within Athy with 12 facilities spread throughout the Plan area, predominantly located close to or within existing residential developments. Figures obtained from these facilities show that 492 children were enrolled for the 2019/20 year but that there was capacity for 506 children. Overall, childcare facilities are operating at 95% capacity in Athy. Furthermore, it was calculated using Appendix 2 of the '*Childcare Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2001)*' that over the period of this Plan an additional 206 childcare places are required within the Plan area.

Health

Healthcare facilities included GPs, health centres, dentists, pharmacies, care and other related facilities. The Audit indicated a total of 27 health facilities including: a Primary Care Centre, one Health Centre, five General Practitioners (GPs), four Dentist Practices, four Physiotherapists, two

Nursing Homes, four Specialist Services and six Pharmacies. Healthcare facilities are dispersed throughout the town, although there is some clustering within the new primary care centre.

Using the Graduate Medical Education National Advisory Committee (GMENAC) standard of 0.25 physicians per 1,000 population the current doctor to population ratio in Athy (excluding hospital services) is 1.4 per 1,000 population, with 14 doctors practicing from 26 different facilities. Should the population grow by the anticipated 2,160 persons by the end of the Plan period in 2027 the ratio of existing doctors per population will fall to 1.2 per 1,000 population which is almost five times higher than the recommended standard. Assuming no increase or decrease in doctor numbers during that period this indicates that provision in Athy would appear to be well catered for. Coupled with this adequate provision it is noted Athy also benefits from a high level of community nurses. However, it must be noted the health services in Athy serve a large rural hinterland that extends outside of the scope of this study.

Social and Community

Social and Community facilities are a broad category and can include general civic services and services targeted at specific sections of the community. Excluding the Fire Station and Garda Station, there are 18 other social/community services. While it appears that Athy is well served by community facilities/services, it is noted there is a high level of deprivation present in Athy. Pobal's Map of Deprivation based on Census 2016 results indicate a high level of deprivation in Athy, with no areas indicated as either affluent or very affluent. This contrasts starkly with surrounding neighbouring towns in Kildare and Carlow. Taking this into consideration more community facilities/services may be required to cater for the demand in Athy on a per capita basis.

Faith

A total of ten faith facilities were identified in Athy comprising six places of worship / churches and four cemeteries within the SIA study area. Most facilities are located within the town centre. Athy is adequately served by cemeteries but has no crematorium within the Plan area.

Sports and Recreation

There are 21 sports facilities/clubs in Athy. The town provides a wide variety of sporting facilities including Athy GAA Club, Athy RFC, Athy Town FC and Athy Tennis Club. Also provided is the Arch Community Centre and a 25m swimming pool and gym at K-Leisure. It was calculated that currently Athy has an outdoor sports provision of 1.96 hectares (ha) per 1,000 population which exceeds Fields in Trust (FIT) UK standards. It is noted that a further 5 ha of Kildare County Council lands are proposed to be designated as open space with the potential future sports training hub in the south-eastern corner of Athy.

Open Space

There is one Neighbourhood Park within the study area, which is located north of the town centre on the western bank of the River Barrow. This park is mainly used for passive recreation but also includes a children's playground, a 5-a-side all-weather pitch, a soccer pitch and Woodstock Castle. The only other park in Athy is called the '*People's Park*' which is classified as a local park and contains facilities for active recreation including a playground and outdoor adult gym equipment.

In terms of amenity green space, green corridor and natural/semi-natural green spaces Athy provides a high quantum of area per capita in excess of Fields in Trust (FIT) UK standards. However, it was evident that Athy did not achieve the minimum recommended area of playground space. Furthermore, it is noted the Kildare Open Space Strategy 2011¹³ recommends an additional local park if the population is to rise over the plan period to in excess of 10,000 persons.

4.6.2 Recommendations

Recommendations for future social infrastructure provision have been taken into consideration in the preparation of the Athy Plan 2021-2027. Table 4.4 provides a breakdown of the requirements under relevant themes that are required to provide for the future needs of the projected population. Figure 4.4 also outlines an indicative location for each of the themes detailed in Table 4.4.

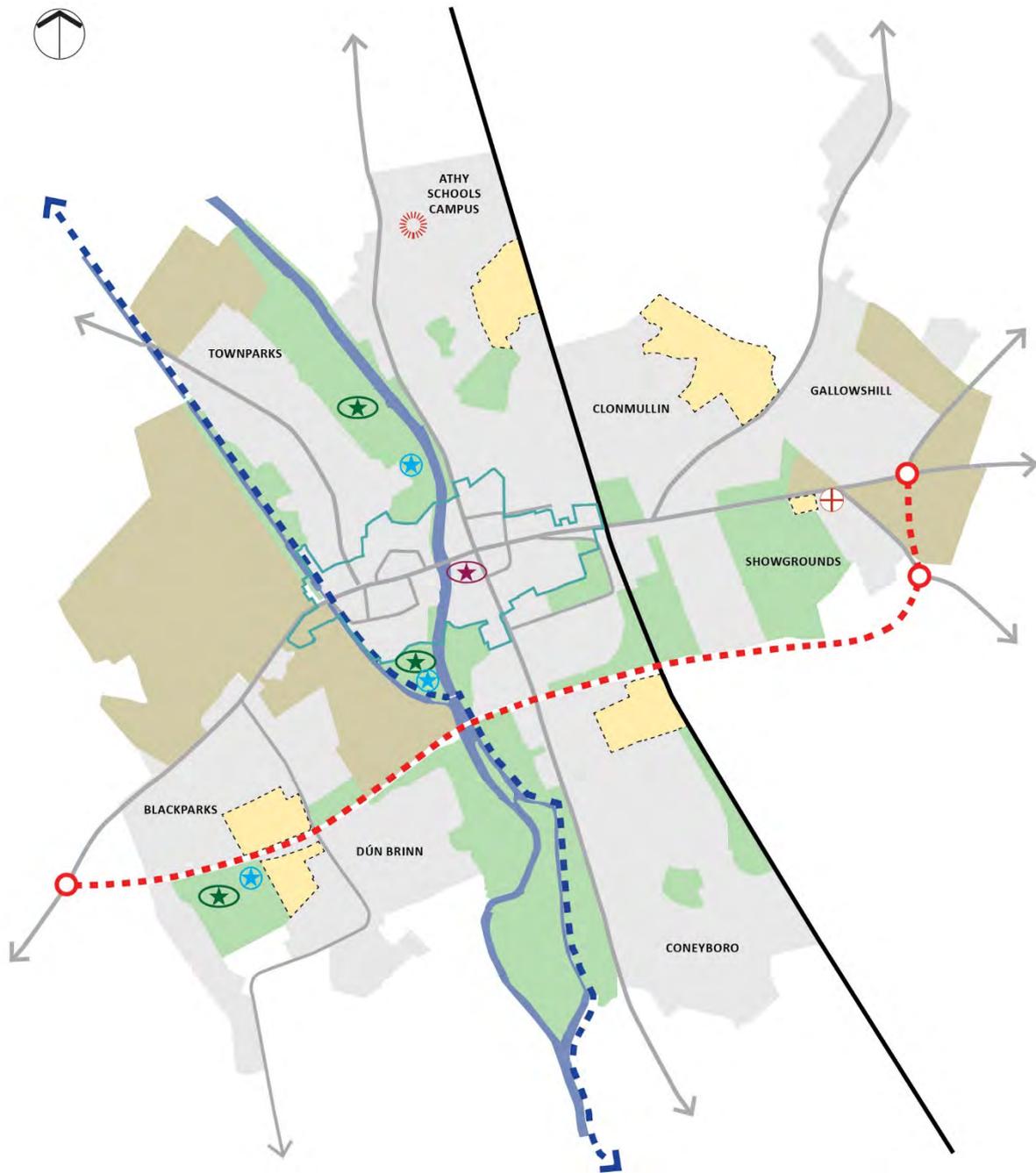
Table 4.4: Social Infrastructure Requirements

Theme	Zone	Land use	Potential Location	What is required	Delivery Mechanism
Education					
Secondary school extension	E	Educational	Adjacent to Athy Community College.	An extension to Athy Community College which would provide capacity for 560 pupils.	Dept. of Education and Skills
Childcare					
20 childcare places per 75 new residential units	Refer to zoning matrix Ch 11.	Childcare	Adjacent to / within new residential developments.	206 additional childcare places	Private developer-led alongside new development.
Health					
No critical infrastructure required.	-	-	Not applicable.	While no further health infrastructure is required over the period of the plan appropriate applications will be supported.	Developer / Kildare County Council / HSE / Other
Social/Community					
No critical infrastructure required.	-	-	Not applicable.	While no further Social/Community facilities are required over the period of the plan	Developer / Kildare County Council / Charity sector / HSE / other

¹³ The Kildare Open Space Strategy is currently being reviewed and a new strategy is anticipated to be complete at the end of 2021.

				appropriate applications will be supported.	
Arts/Culture					
No critical infrastructure required.	-	-	Not applicable.	While no further Arts/Cultural facilities are required over the period of the plan appropriate applications will be supported.	Developer / Kildare County Council / Charity Sector / Irish Arts / Other
Faith					
No critical infrastructure required.	-	-	Not applicable.	While no further cemetery spaces are required any appropriate applications will be supported.	Religious institutions / Kildare County Council / Other
Outdoor Sports					
One additional Local Park is required.	F	Open Space and amenity	To be located on the Dominican Lands in Council ownership	Local Park (greater than 2 ha) containing passive and active recreation	Kildare County Council / Other
Further outdoor training facilities	F, B, C	Open Space and Amenity, Existing Residential, New Residential	Off Fortbarrington Road, Andrew	Kildare County Council lands (5 Ha) are proposed to be converted into a future sports training hub.	Kildare County Council / Irish Sports Council / Other
Equipped/Designated Play Space					
Playground facilities	F, B, C, E, T	Open Space and amenity, Existing Residential, New Residential	Within existing open spaces and the proposed Local Park.	A further 5.7 Ha of playgrounds are required.	Council / Other

Figure 4.4: Indicative Locations of Proposed Social Infrastructure



Key

	Railway line		Athy Town Centre
	Key routes		Athy Primary Care Centre
	Athy Distributor Road Scheduled for completion in late 2023	Proposed Social Infrastructure (Indicative locations)	
	Barrow Blueway Under Construction		Education
	Existing Urban Form		New Outdoor Sports
	Strategic Open Space		New Equipped/Designated Play Spaces
	New Residential Areas		New Social and Community (Including Arts/Culture etc.)
	Employment Lands		

4.7 Education, Childcare and Health Facilities

Policy HC3 – Social Infrastructure

HC3 *It is the policy of the Council to facilitate and secure the provision of social infrastructure to support existing and new communities within the Plan area, in a manner which provides flexibility to respond to varied and changing community needs.*

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

- HCO3.1** Support and facilitate improvements to existing primary schools and secondary schools to resolve current capacity issues and facilitate forecasted future growth.
- HCO3.2** Promote initiatives with relevant agencies to expand training and education that meets the wide range of business skills located in Athy.
- HCO3.3** Require the provision of appropriately located and purpose-built early learning and childcare facilities to meet the pro-rata childcare needs of housing development during the plan period.
- HCO3.4** Support and co-operate with promoters or operators of public and private health care facilities by facilitating and encouraging the provision of improved health care facilities in appropriate locations in Athy.

4.8 Other Community, Sports and Recreational Facilities

Policy HC4 – Community Facilities

HC4 *It is the policy of the Council to facilitate and support a broad range of community, cultural and recreational facilities to serve the needs of the residents of Athy.*

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

- HCO4.1** Support and facilitate the provision of both indoor and outdoor multi-functional community facilities to meet the needs of the population of Athy.
- HCO4.2** Support, promote and facilitate the development of cultural, arts and performance spaces in Athy.
- HCO4.3** Support any appropriate development or extension of places of worship/burial in Athy.
- HCO4.4** Require, promote and facilitate the development of a new local park (2 ha or larger in area) which would contain both passive and active recreation.
- HCO4.5** Support and facilitate the provision of children’s play facilities in Athy within existing and proposed green spaces, for children of all ages while also having regard to those with special needs.
- HCO4.6** To support the provision of new postal facilities and the enhancement of existing facilities, including for operational requirements in Athy, and to facilitate the provision of postal infrastructure at suitable locations within the town, subject to planning and design considerations.

5. Urban Centre and Retailing

Aim: To protect and enhance the primacy and character of the town centre, so that it remains attractive to businesses and meets the retailing and service needs of the town and its surrounding hinterland, whilst also offering an attractive environment for shopping, business and living as well as becoming a visitor destination.

5.1 Town Centre

Athy Town Centre maintains its role as the established commercial core of the town. Offering a range of key retail, financial and leisure services, it is also a hub of employment. However, it has also witnessed sustained and ongoing challenges, which threaten the viability of many activities operating in the commercial core. This can be seen in the high levels of long term commercial vacancies where numerous buildings are in a poor state of repair (see Appendix 1, Section 2.5.2).

It is noted that the extent of the town centre closely correlates with that of the historic core (i.e. Athy Architectural Conservation Area). Accordingly, there is an opportunity to respond to the ongoing weaknesses within the town centre by adopting an asset-based approach to development within the town centre. This approach, which is central to the Plan's Economic Development Strategy (refer to Section 6.3), places particular emphasis on utilising the built and natural heritage assets within the town centre to develop its tourism and amenity infrastructure and enhance the overall visitor experience.

While it is important to acknowledge that the Plan will continue to prioritise the commercial core as the primary retail area of the town, it is considered that developing and promoting Athy as a visitor destination, along with other measures to increase unit occupancy, will play an essential role in the rejuvenation of Athy and contribute to the long-term viability of its town centre.

5.2 Athy Urban Regeneration Framework

An Urban Regeneration Framework for Athy was prepared in tandem with the Local Area Plan (published as Appendix 1 of this Plan) in order to develop a comprehensive and integrated strategy to rejuvenate the town and provide for its long-term sustainable development. The Framework seeks to advance the Vision and Key Development Principles outlined in Section 2.3 of this plan by providing a platform which guides and co-ordinates various projects which will help initiate an economic rejuvenation of Athy increasing the quality of life and health of its residents, whilst also providing for a memorable visitor experience.

Accordingly, the Athy Urban Regeneration Framework has sought to;

- Incorporate the existing policy context and research background including previous studies and proposals for the town;
- Identify and provide an analysis of existing challenges, constraints and opportunities facing the future development of the town;
- Provide a framework for the rejuvenation and development of Athy based on heritage-led regeneration and placemaking projects. Such projects seek to:
 - Enhance the tourist and amenity infrastructure of the town to develop Athy as an important visitor and tourist destination in the county.

- Promote Athy as a 'living town' by examining the potential of underutilised sites within the town centre and explore alternative functions for existing vacant and derelict buildings.
- Enhance the public realm of the town, particularly throughout its historic core, to improve the overall experience of the pedestrian shopper and visitor.
- Integrate sustainable movement routes and connections, where appropriate, into the urban structure to create a more inclusive town, providing a healthy and safe alternative to car-based journeys to identified key destinations within the town.

5.2.1 Land Uses and Activities within the Town Centre

A key aim of the Urban Regeneration Framework is to tackle the number of vacant units and rejuvenate brownfield sites within the town centre. New and alternative uses need to be found for vacant commercial units, where, in a number of instances, original uses are no longer viable. Section 3.4 of the Urban Regeneration Framework outlines specific measures that will be taken to encourage the reuse of existing buildings and the development of alternative uses in vacant commercial units.

Kildare County Council has proactively engaged with property owners of vacant and inactive sites throughout the town, whilst placing a particular emphasis on strategic locations within the town centre. In this regard, the main focus of this contact has been to get an understanding of the current status of sites/properties and to establish whether the owner has any plans for development or refurbishment. The problems that have been encountered include sites where there is a debt to be discharged or instances where the owner does not have access to funds to carry out redevelopment works. It is acknowledged that further work is needed particularly in terms of continuing to engage with property owners and their representatives to encourage redevelopment/refurbishment and the Council is committed to assist where possible in this regard.

In keeping with the Plan's active land management provisions, the entire town centre has been designated a regeneration area for the purposes of applying the Vacant Site Levy. It is intended that the vacant site mechanism will be used in the first instance to address prominent and problematic sites within the town centre, helping to achieve the target of having at least 10% of all new builds in the period to 2027 developed on town centre lands. Two opportunity sites have also been identified in the Urban Regeneration Framework, the development or redevelopment of which would provide a much-needed boost to the town's attractiveness as a vibrant and active commercial centre.

This chapter and other chapters within the Local Area Plan such as Chapter 6: Economic Development, Enterprise and Tourism contain a number of objectives which are specifically tailored to support the rejuvenation of land uses within the town centre and assist in the implementation of the Urban Regeneration Framework.

5.2.2 Public Realm Strategy

The quality of public realm is a key factor in underpinning the overall liveability and quality of life of a town. A high-quality and bespoke public realm provides the basis for a people-centred, age friendly town and greatly assists in the development of integrated communities, whilst also supporting businesses through the increased footfall in the commercial core that results in creating an attractive, safe and universally accessible urban destination.

Section 2.7 of the Urban Regeneration Framework includes an in-depth urban quality survey analysing the current state of the town’s public realm. This assessment concluded that the quality of the public realm was poor and required a coordinated programme of investment to help maximise the benefits of the Athy Distributor Road when complete, and the consequent reduction of traffic travelling through the town centre. Such works to the public realm are also needed in order to integrate with and maximise the potential socio-economic benefits of the Barrow Blueway and other key areas of investment proposed within the town.

Accordingly, the Urban Regeneration Framework proposes the preparation of a comprehensive Public Realm Strategy for the town, to be commenced within 12 months of the adoption of the Plan. Section 3.5 of the Framework provides specific guidance on the provisions of such a strategy and is supported by Objective UCRO1.10 of the Plan.

Policy UCR1 – Urban Regeneration and Development

UCR1 *It is the policy of the Council to support the implementation of the Athy Urban Regeneration Framework to maximise the potential of Athy’s unique built and natural assets in order to instigate transformative place-based change in the town, where a revitalised town centre becomes a major visitor destination and contributes to a model of low carbon development and the creation of a climate resilient, healthy, connected and more inclusive settlement.*

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

- UCRO1.1** Support the implementation of the Athy Urban Regeneration Framework (Appendix 1) and seek funding from relevant agencies and Government sources including the Rural/Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF/URDF) to secure financial support for all regeneration and urban development projects in Athy.
- UCRO1.2** Promote the town centre as the priority location for commercial, civic, social and cultural development and to promote new infill and backland development that consolidates and regenerates the existing urban core.
- UCRO1.3** Improve the quality, ambience, vitality and vibrancy of the town centre, through the following:
 - (i) Promotion of an appropriate mix of day and night time uses.
 - (ii) Facilitation of development that will attract and retain commercial and retail activities in the town centre.
 - (iii) Encouragement of alternative uses and functions as outlined in **Section 3.4** of the Urban Regeneration Framework (Appendix 1) for vacant units within the town centre.
- UCRO1.4** Continue to actively engage with the community, landowners, developers and other agencies to secure resources for the enhancement, renewal and regeneration of Athy town centre.
- UCRO1.5** Encourage the full utilisation of buildings and sites, in particular the use of upper floors and backlands where appropriate, with due regard to the quality of urban design, integration and linkages.
- UCRO1.6** Ensure that regeneration and new development enhances the character of the townscape and the quality of the public realm. Such development shall also be in keeping with the relevant provisions of the Athy Urban Regeneration Framework.
- UCRO1.7** Ensure that development in the town centre will only be permitted where it conserves or enhances the existing character of the area and where it is demonstrated that it is of

high architectural quality; providing a strong vertical emphasis along key streets and incorporating a fine urban grain, with active frontages at ground floor level where appropriate.

UCRO1.8 Require that new development facilitates a connected network of streets and spaces which prioritises pedestrians and cyclists and provides for the possibility of connections to future development on adjacent lands.

UCRO1.9 Prioritise the enhancement of the streetscape and heritage assets of the town centre, to continue environmental improvements, to sustain and improve its attraction for living, working, visiting and investment.

UCRO1.10 Commence the preparation of a Public Realm Strategy for Athy within twelve months of the adoption of this plan. The strategy should be developed in accordance with the provisions of the Athy Urban Regeneration Framework and implemented on a phased basis over the lifetime of the Plan and beyond. The Strategy should also address the following issues:

- (i) Ensure that the town centre is accessible to all members of the community, including people with disabilities, the elderly and people with young children.
- (ii) Support and facilitate the delivery of age friendly seating, bus stops and other public realm initiatives identified in the Athy Public Realm Strategy.
- (iii) Develop a comprehensive car parking plan for the town which will balance the needs of vehicular access to the town centre without compromising the overall quality and visitor experience of the public realm.
- (iv) Seek to reduce the use of line marking, signage and overhead wiring in the town centre of Athy.
- (v) Investigate the feasibility of the development/redevelopment of the backlands of the town centre area of Athy in conjunction with the formulation of the Public Realm Strategy.

Actions:

- Apply for funding for all urban regeneration and development projects identified in the Athy Urban Regeneration Framework (Appendix 1) as opportunities/funding streams arise.
- Prepare a Public Realm Strategy for Athy and implement its recommendations on a phased basis over the lifetime of the Plan and beyond.
- Work with the owners of White Castle with a view to providing public access to this historic building as a tourist and heritage destination (see Chapter 8, Objective BH1.8)
- Seek to update the Town Centre Land Use Survey on a biennial basis during the lifetime of the Plan.
- To investigate the feasibility of appointing an Athy Town Centre Coordinator.
- To explore the possibility of the Local Authority acquiring a vacant commercial unit within the town centre (or in partnership with a landowner) in order to demonstrate as a 'pilot project' the feasibility of repurposing the building for alternative uses as outlined in Section 3.4 of the Athy Urban Regeneration Framework.

5.3 Retailing

Athy is designated a *Level 3, Town and Sub-County Centre (Key Service Centre)* in the County Retail Hierarchy as outlined in the Kildare County Development Plan. The range of retailing which is deemed appropriate in the County Retail Strategy for centres at this level is large scale convenience and middle order comparison. This however does not exclude higher order comparison, particularly that relate to the tourism economy.

Figure 5.1: Athy with the Kildare County Retail Hierarchy



An important priority for the Plan is to ensure that Athy fulfils its designated role as a Key Service Centre within the County Retail Hierarchy. However, it is recognised that there are long standing deficiencies in Athy’s retail offer which is undermining the town’s potential in fulfilling its strategic role. Furthermore, changing retail trends and habits over the past decade, including the rise of online shopping and an increasing level of retail leakage to other urban centres such as Carlow and Newbridge have resulted in a high number of vacant commercial units within the town centre and an increase in lower order units (charity shops etc.).

It therefore should be acknowledged that many commercial units, which previously housed viable retail businesses in the town will never return and there is a need to put a framework in place which focuses on the adaptability of the town centre to accommodate changing roles and functions in order to ensure it retains its role as the commercial centre of the town. For such a rejuvenation and repurposing to be successful it will require the urban core to increase both its residential population and levels of employment activity, whilst also providing enhanced levels of social and community infrastructure and a high quality of design.

5.3.1 The Retail Offer

The analysis carried out on the trading retail floorspace in 2016 for the preparation of the County Development Plan 2017-2023 noted that Athy ranked 5 in the county, with a total of 5.5% of all retail floor space. While Athy’s overall ranking is in line with its status within both the Retail Hierarchy and the settlement hierarchy, it is noted that both Kildare Town¹⁴ (ranked 4) and Maynooth (ranked 3) have more than double the amount of trading space of

¹⁴ It is noted the high ranking for Kildare Town is due to the presence of the Kildare Village Retail Outlet.

Athy, with Kildare Town having 11.5% and Maynooth having 12.1% of all trading space in the county.

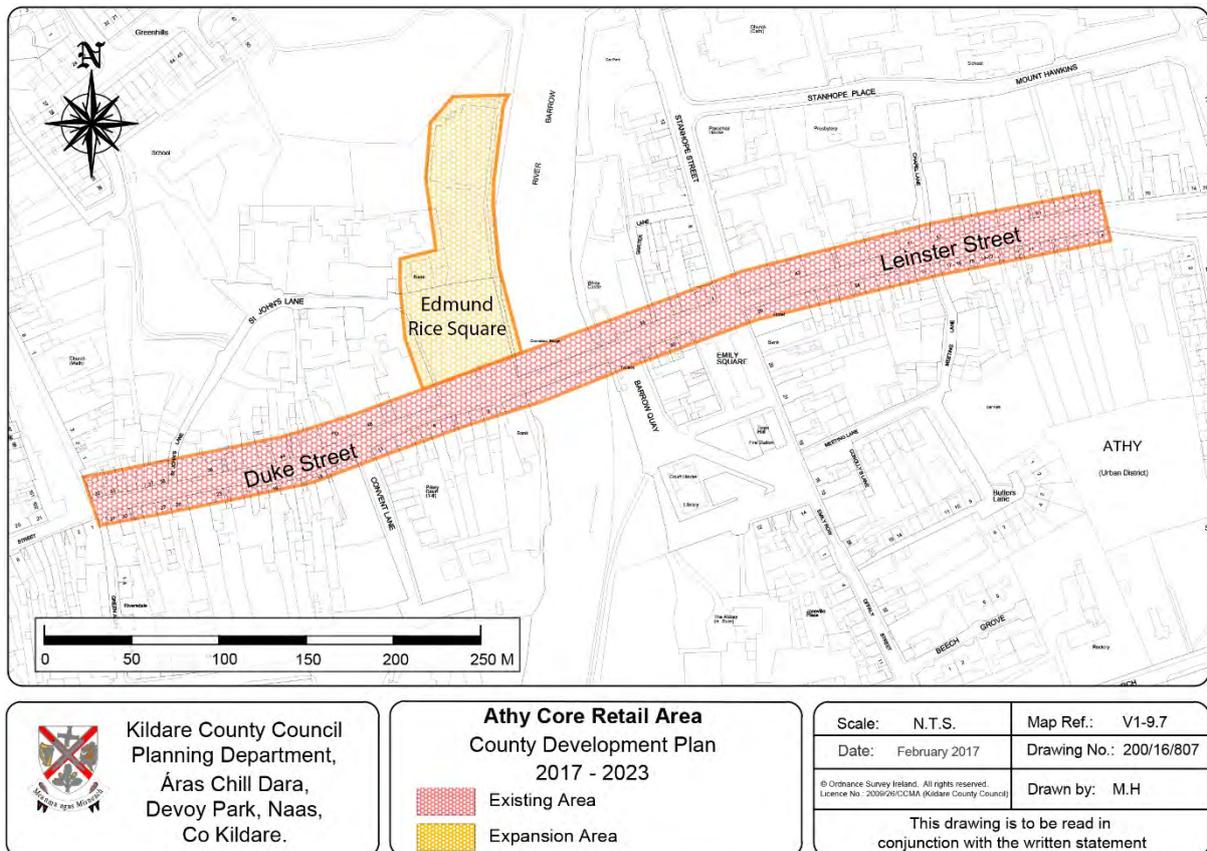
Table 5.1: Athy Net Retail Floorspace Trading in 2016 (m²)

Convenience	Comparison	Retail Warehousing	Total	Ranking in County
5,620	4,864	0	10,484	5

A further examination of the figures shows that overall, the town is well serviced in the area of convenience retail having 8.9% of the county total. Conversely, the town is home to only 5.3% of comparison retail floorspace. It is further noted that the 2016 survey showed that there is no retail warehousing in the town.

The Core Retail Area of the town is defined in the Kildare County Development Plan as focusing along an east-west axis encompassing Duke Street and Leinster Street (see Figure 5.2). This area is the preferred area for retail development. This Plan anticipates that new retail provision will be achieved through a combination of appropriate infill, regeneration and renewal of sites. A retail expansion area has also been identified which focuses on Edmund Rice Square.

Figure 5.2: Athy Core Retail Area



Source: Kildare County Development Plan 2017 – 2023, as amended

5.3.2 Edge-of-Centre

Edge-of-centre sites are identified as those that are in easy walking distance from the Core Retail Area. The *Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012)* state that the distance of such sites is generally not more than 300 – 400 metres from the core retail area. Athy has a number of potential regeneration sites located in edge-of-centre locations that could provide additional retail/commercial provision alongside other cultural, residential and amenity areas. These are outlined in Section 3.4.2 of the Athy Urban Regeneration Framework (Appendix 1).

5.3.3 Neighbourhood Centres

The Retail Guidelines (2012) define a neighbourhood centre as a small group of shops, typically comprising newsagent, small supermarket/general grocery store, sub-post office and other small shops of a local nature serving a small, localised catchment population. This Plan has zoned a number of locations to provide regular convenience and lower order comparison shopping and retail services for the needs of surrounding communities. Such retail development will have a limited retail function and will strictly be intended to serve the immediate neighbourhood in which it is located.

Policy UCR2 – Retailing

UCR2 *It is the policy of the Council to support the Level 3 Town and Sub-County Centre (Key Service Centre) retail function of Athy and to consolidate existing retail development and to develop/regenerate opportunity sites/areas within the town centre.*

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

- UCRO2.1** Ensure the type, quantum and location of future retail floorspace provision in Athy is consistent with the requirements and recommendations of the current County Development Plan, relevant regional policy frameworks and national planning guidelines.
- UCRO2.2** Protect the primacy of the Core Retail Area of Athy, through the application of a sequential approach to retail development, in accordance with the Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities, DECLG (2012).
- UCRO2.3** Support and facilitate the development of retail, retail services and niche retailing in the town centre area, including new/infill development and redevelopment of an appropriate scale.
- UCRO2.4** In the event that proposals for new retail development on the regeneration site identified in Figure 3.15 of the Urban Regeneration Framework (Appendix 1) are unsuccessful, resulting from a planning application, any proposal for large scale convenience retail development on lands adjoining the town centre shall be considered, subject to a Retail Impact Assessment. This assessment shall be prepared in accordance with the Retail Planning Guidelines, pursuant to Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). This shall include, but not be limited to, demonstrating compliance with the County Development Plan and that there will be no material and unacceptable adverse impacts on the vitality and viability of the town centre through the consideration of alternatives and after the examination of all other town centre sites are exhausted.
- UCRO2.5** Encourage and facilitate the re-use and regeneration of derelict land and buildings for retail and other town centre uses, with due cognisance of the character, heritage and

design requirements for the Architectural Conservation Area (ACA).

UCRO2.6 Align, as far as is practicable, new retail development with existing and proposed public transport infrastructure and services and encourage access by foot and bicycle to reduce the dominance of access by private car.

UCRO2.7 Support and facilitate appropriate levels of expansion within established retail neighbourhood centres.

UCRO2.8 Support and facilitate the development of retail-led tourism associated with the natural and built heritage assets of Athy.

UCRO2.9 Strongly discourage the development of undesirable uses such as fast food outlets, amusement arcades, off-licences, bookmakers, and other non-retail uses in the interest of protecting the vibrancy, residential amenity and public realm of Athy Town Centre.

UCRO2.10 Require applicants to indicate proposed hours of opening. Late opening of shops will only be permissible where it can be clearly demonstrated that there will be no negative impact on the residential amenity of neighbouring areas.

UCRO2.11 Ensure that new shop front and signage design contributes positively to and enhances the streetscape and is in accordance with the guidance set out in the County Kildare Shopfront Guidelines (July 2013) and Kildare County Council Policy on Signage (April 2013).

UCRO2.12 Recognise the tradition of Athy as a Market Town and to encourage the continuation and improvement of the 'Athy Town Market' and the continued development of a high quality 'Farmers Market' within the town.

Actions:

- To continue to promote the Kildare County Council Shopfront Improvement and Accessibility grant scheme.
- To explore the possibility of updating the Town Centre Land Use Survey on a biennial basis during the lifetime of the Plan.

6. Economic Development, Enterprise and Tourism

Aims:

- ***To provide for the future wellbeing of the residents of Athy by adopting an asset-based approach to economic and employment growth in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.***
- ***To achieve a reduction in the levels of commuting from the town by ensuring that lands are appropriately zoned, and a framework is in place to attract greater employment opportunities including in the sectors identified for growth by fostering competitiveness and innovation within a high quality physical environment.***
- ***To provide a greater focus on social infrastructure and the quality of life of the residents of Athy in order to increase the attractiveness of the town as a place to live, work, visit and invest in.***
- ***To provide for an improved 'tourist offer' and associated entrepreneurial spin-offs by identifying and supporting targeted areas for investment over the life of the Plan and beyond.***

6.1 Policy Context

The National Planning Framework (NPF) sets out the development of a strong economy supported by enterprise, innovation and skills as a National Strategic Outcome (NSO5) that will depend on creating places that foster enterprise and innovation and attract investment and talent and states that this can be achieved by building regional economic drivers. The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) expands on this aim by encouraging an asset-based approach to development and outlining various 'growth enablers' for the Core Region in which Athy is located. This approach, which is central to the Economic Development Strategy (see Section 6.3), places emphasis on utilising the town's existing built and natural heritage assets to develop its tourism and recreation sector.

Growth enablers include the following:

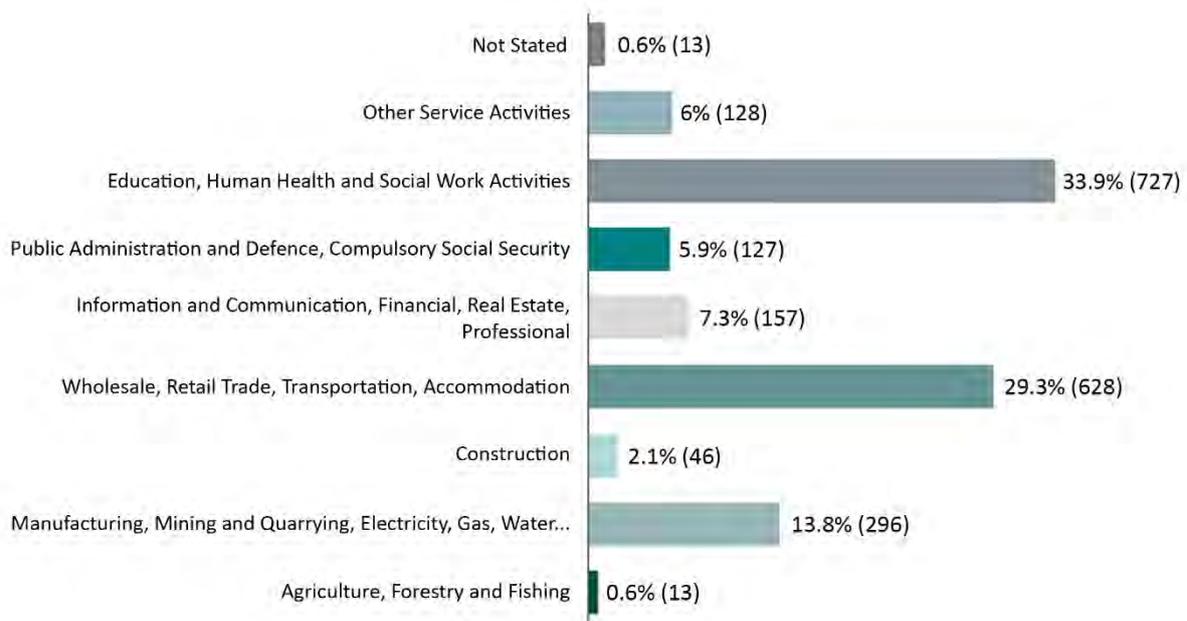
- The promotion of continued growth, while providing for increased employment and improved local economies, services and functions to allow towns to become more self-sustaining and to create the quality of life necessary to attract investment.
- 'Catch-up' investment to promote consolidation and improvement in the sustainability of those areas that have experienced significant population growth but have a weak level of services and employment for their residents.
- Diversification and specialisation of local economies with a focus on clustering, smart specialisation, placemaking and urban regeneration to create the quality of life to attract 'Foreign Direct Investment' and indigenous investment and increase high value knowledge-based employment including second site and relocation opportunities.
- The promotion of tourism, leisure and recreational activities including development of an integrated greenway network.

The Economic Development Hierarchy as outlined in the Kildare County Development Plan has described Self-Sustaining Growth Towns like Athy as having a moderate level of jobs and services. In order to promote future economic development and employment growth it has identified specific sectoral opportunities for the town in the areas of tourism, bloodstock, manufacturing, logistics and food and beverage products.

6.2 Employment Profile

Census 2016 recorded that there were 2,147 jobs based in Athy which accounted for 3.4% of all jobs in the county. Employment in Athy ranges across various sectors with the largest being recorded in the areas of Education, Human Health and Social Work Activities, providing 33.9% of all jobs in the town in 2016 (see Figure 6.1 below). This is followed by employment in the Wholesale, Retail Trade, Transportation and Accommodation Sector at 29.3%. Together these sectors reflect Athy’s status as an important retail and service centre in south Kildare. Significant manufacturing employers in the town include Etex Ireland, Minch Malt and Athy International Concentrates.

Figure 6.1: Employment by Category for the Settlement of Athy in 2016



Source: Kildare Census 2016 Profile: Commuting (KCC and LCDC)

Of the 3,157 people that Census 2016 recorded to be in employment and living in Athy, 29% work in the town, 21% work elsewhere in the county and 28% commute out of Kildare. An additional 1,242 workers commute into Athy for employment every day. Of these, 25% (542) commute from elsewhere in Kildare and the 33% (700) commute from outside the county. In this regard, it is noted that Athy is relatively proximate to several neighbouring employment centres such as Carlow, Portlaoise and Kilkenny.

What is a jobs ratio?

The term jobs ratio relates to the number of jobs based in a settlement area divided by the resident workforce; it does not factor in employees commuting in or out of the town to work. For example, a jobs ratio of 1 for a town would theoretically mean that there was one job available for every resident worker.

Census 2016 Athy recorded a net daily loss in working population of -1,010 workers indicating the town’s jobs ratio to be 0.68. This is the fourth highest for any settlement in the county after Naas, Maynooth and Leixlip¹⁵. However, represents a small decline on the level recorded by Census 2011 when the jobs ratio was found to be 0.73. Furthermore, it should be

¹⁵ Source: National Planning Framework, 2018, Appendix 2: Population and Employment in Urban Settlements in the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly Area, Census of Population 2016.

noted that this figure indicates that there are not enough jobs for every worker living in the town i.e. for every 100 workers there was only 68 jobs based in the town in 2016.

6.3 Economic Development Strategy

A key principle underpinning this Plan is the pursuit of sustainable economic development opportunities to provide for an increase in the number of jobs based in the town. For Athy to fulfil its designated role in the economic hierarchy of the county and become a more self-sustaining settlement, the town must aim to increase its jobs ratio over the longer term. Therefore, the Economic Development Strategy targets 1,330 extra jobs and a projected jobs ratio target of 0.70 for the town by 2027. The jobs ratio aligns with the 0.70 jobs ratio target for the county as outlined in the current County Development Plan.

Table 6.1: Future Employment Requirements

Athy	2016	2027	Change between 2016-2027
Population	9,677	11,837	2,160 persons
Labour Force Participation Rate	59.9%	64.1%*	4.2 percentage point increase
Total Resident Labour Force	4,284	5,607**	1,323
Unemployment Rate / Projected Unemployment Rate	26.6%	11.4%	16.6 percentage point decrease
Labour Force at Work	3,157	4,968	1,331
Jobs Ratio	0.68	0.70	0.2 percentage points increase
No. of Jobs Existing/Required in Athy	2,147	3,477	1,330
Extra jobs required by 2027	-	1,330	-

Source: Kildare Census 2016 Profile: Employment Industry and Occupation (KCC and LCDC)

* The projected labour force participation of 64.1% for 2027 was based on a targeted average participation rate recorded for County Kildare in Census 2016.

** Represents a proportional increase as a derivative of population growth whilst also incorporating a 4.2 percentage point increase in the labour force participation rate.

*** This figure is calculated by applying a targeted 11.4% unemployment rate and a 0.70 jobs ratio to the projected total resident labour force of 5,607. It is noted that the unemployment rate for Athy in 2016 was recorded in the Census as 26.6%, a figure far exceeding the county average of 11.4% in 2016. It is projected that this figure will fall to the 2016 county average by 2027.

Whilst all employment generating activities in the town will be encouraged, the key areas of focus for development opportunities will be in the sectors of tourism, bloodstock, manufacturing, logistics, and food/beverage products, as provided for in the County Development Plan.

The envisaged level of employment along with the targeted jobs ratio of the town in 2027, outlined in the Economic Development Strategy for Athy will be achieved by:

- Providing the infrastructure and zoned land necessary to attract economic development. The plan has designated **15.2 ha** of undeveloped land zoned for Q: Enterprise and Employment use and **38.8 ha** undeveloped land for H: Industry and Warehousing use.
- Supporting the intensification, renewal and modernisation of existing industrial and business floorspace where this accords with the proper planning and sustainable development of the town.

- Ensuring new industrial or business floorspace will allow for future flexibility, including future subdivision and/or amalgamation to provide for a range of accommodation, particularly for small/medium businesses.
- Capitalising on the development of new servicing infrastructure within the town such as the Athy Distributor Road.
- Rejuvenating the town centre for the provision of retail and commercial functions as well as providing for alternative functions and activities.
- Recognising and expanding the tourism offer in Athy by investing in appropriate tourism developments and supporting associated spin-off enterprises.
- Supporting the development of dedicated Incubation Units / Workshops / Business Starter Units within the town centre.
- Continuing to develop Athy as a *Level 3, Town and Sub-County Centre (Key Service Centre)* in accordance with the County Retail Hierarchy, by consolidating the retail offer and improving the urban fabric and public realm of the town centre.
- Supporting the development and enhancement of the further education and training infrastructure of the town.
- Supporting the development of research and innovation activities in the town including the development of Athy Food, Drinks and Skills Hub at the former Model School.
- Facilitating all forms of employment generation subject to environmental and other relevant planning considerations.

6.3.1 Asset-Based Approach to Development

Key to the delivery of the Economic Development Strategy for Athy is the pursuit of an asset-based approach to development, where the town's social, economic and natural/built heritage capital are viewed as existing environmental resources. These assets have the ability to accommodate changing roles and functions, which, if fully utilised and subject to targeted investment, can sustainably support an increased level of residential population and employment activity, whilst also providing an enhanced level of social infrastructure, amenity, and design quality.

What does an asset-based approach to development mean?

An asset-based approach to development identifies and builds on a combination of the social, economic and natural assets that are available within a settlement, in order to establish an overall growth strategy. This holistic circular economic approach to development recognises the change required to ensure that growth is sustainable in the long term and that such growth is accompanied by the necessary investment in infrastructure and services.

Such an approach to development is multi-faceted in nature, ranging from supporting the full utilisation of existing brownfield lands and vacant buildings to promoting the expansion of further education and training facilities, a key piece of existing social infrastructure in the town. Whilst the Plan incorporates a series of measures to support the aforementioned areas, the primary focus of this asset-based approach to development will be on the rejuvenation of the town centre and on improving Athy's tourist and amenity infrastructure.

In many ways the regeneration of the town centre and the development of the tourist offer and amenity infrastructure in the town are interlinked. For example, a transformed public realm in the

historic core will improve its attractiveness to both residents and visitors alike, whilst the development of the Barrow Blueway route will not only attract tourists but also provide an important local amenity. Such proposals are discussed in more detail in Section 6.5, Section 9.4 and in Appendix 1: Athy Urban Regeneration Framework.

6.3.2 Availability of Zoned Land

One of the key enablers in attracting potential investment and employment to Athy will be the availability of appropriately zoned lands. Under the Athy Town Development Plan (TDP) 2012 – 2018 approximately 105.2 hectares of land was zoned for employment, industry and enterprise purposes in Athy. This figure does not include such land uses as Town Centre, Retail, Leisure and Amenity which would also provide an element of employment generation. According to a survey conducted for the preparation of the Plan, 62.3 hectares of lands zoned for employment purposes in the Town Development Plan remain undeveloped. This figure solely relates to lands zoned for employment such as industrial warehousing and commercial uses.

Table 6.2: Survey of Employment Lands zoned under the Athy TDP 2012-18

Area in hectares (ha) zoned for employment uses*	105.2 ha
Area zoned for employment uses undeveloped	62.3 ha
Area zoned for employment uses undeveloped (%)	59.2%
Area zoned for employment uses which have been developed but are currently unoccupied**	1.72 ha

Source: KCC Planning Department Survey, August 2020

*The term ‘employment uses’ relates to the lands zoned Q: Enterprise and Employment, R: Retail and Commercial, H, H1, H2, H4: Industrial and Warehousing and H3: Light Industrial and Commercial in the Athy Town Development Plan 2012 – 2018.

** This figure includes the developed part of Athy Business Campus, Kilkenny Road (2.02 ha) which was determined to have a vacancy rate of circa 50% (i.e. 1.01 ha).

Having regard to;

- (a) the quantum of lands built-out;
- (b) the level of occupancy as noted in **Table 6.2**;
- (c) the projected increase in employment of 1,330 persons to the end of the plan period in 2027; and
- (d) providing that all lands are developed for low-medium density type employment (40m² per employee),

it is projected that Athy will require 54.9 hectares of undeveloped land to be zoned for employment purposes¹⁶. This figure solely relates to lands zoned for employment such as industrial warehousing and commercial and does not consider potential job creation on other lands zoned for town centre, retail or leisure and amenity uses.

Table 6.3 provides further information in relation to the location of the main employment areas in Athy and the quantity of zoned undeveloped land available for employment uses. As noted

¹⁶ Note: A substantial majority the employment lands zoned under this Local Area Plan have previously been zoned under the Athy Town Development Plan 2012-2018.

previously, in addition to the main employment zoning categories such as Enterprise, Industry and Warehousing, there are other zoning categories which allow for employment creation in relation to leisure activities and various commercial uses. Reference should be made to **Chapter 11** for further detail in relation to the individual land use zonings throughout the town.

Table 6.3: Development of Employment Lands zoned under the Athy Local Area Plan 2021 – 2027

Location of employment lands	Employment Opportunities/Sectoral Strengths
Town Centre	<p>Capacity for retail and residential development, office and small-medium sized enterprise. Also, capacity for innovative retail/tourism/mixed use/cultural development in brownfield town centre sites.</p> <p>Promotion of live/work units is encouraged as well as the repurposing of existing and vacant buildings as incubation/start-up units.</p>
Woodstock South Bleach	<p><i>Q: Enterprise and Employment</i> zoned greenfield sites in Woodstock South have been identified for medium/large scale new enterprise and employment growth and are intended to play a pivotal role in future enterprise and employment development within the town. Opportunities include development of higher quality knowledge based enterprises focusing on ICT, R&D, offices, office based industry, telemarketing and some manufacturing.</p> <p>Development comprising of both brownfield and infill sites on ‘Q’ zoned lands’, should seek to increase the density of employment in the area. There is capacity for significant infill industrial development and re-development of brownfield sites.</p> <p><i>H: Industry and Warehousing</i> zoned greenfield sites in Woodstock South have been identified as suitable for generally less employment intensive activities. There are opportunities for high value added manufacturing and small – medium enterprise (SME) development on these sites.</p> <p>The plan seeks to consolidate the employment base within the Athy Business Campus which is noted to have a c. 50% occupancy and is unfinished. Accordingly, other uses ancillary or similar to industry and warehousing including office, office based industry; professional and medical services will normally be acceptable subject to the provision of appropriate service infrastructure and car parking to support such uses.</p>
Townparks Shamrock Lodge	<p>Development in these areas will be focused on improvement/consolidation of existing permitted established uses, and/or the provision of new office, light industrial development. Development on these sites, comprising both brownfield and greenfield sites, should increase the density of employment in the area.</p>

Gallowshill	<p>The lands zoned H: Industry and Warehousing are located at the eastern entrance to the town and sited prominently on key routes such as the Kilcullen, Dublin, Castledermot and N78 (Motorway link) roads. Accordingly, a high standard of quality in terms of design, layout and finish along with hard and soft landscaping will be required in order allow such development to announce the entry to the town.</p> <p>Future development will be for lower-density employment of the light industrial and related uses.</p>
Lands zoned I: Agricultural	<p>Lands zoned 'I' in the immediate rural hinterland of the built-up areas should be reserved for agriculture, rural enterprise, horticulture and equine related activities.</p>
Lands zoned L: Leisure and Amenity	<p>These lands relate to the Clanard Court Hotel and should be reserved for leisure and amenity related activities.</p>

Note: This table is indicative of the main employment zones and their employment opportunities. For further detail in relation to zoned land, refer to **Chapter 11: Implementation** and **Map 6: Land Use Zoning Objectives**.

6.3.3 Industrial Development

There continues to be a need for a diverse range of employment opportunities in Athy including in the area of manufacturing. It is therefore important to retain existing established industrial based development and also to expand further industrial activities appropriate to the town. The industrial and warehousing zoning objective allows for industrial development and a range of related uses that could be suitably located within industrial estates and enterprise lands within the town.

6.3.4 Small and Medium Enterprise (SME)

The development of small and medium scale projects with longer-term employment potential are essential to the future development of Athy. Emphasis should be placed on recognised best practice approaches to stimulating SME activity include incubation units, clustering of similar such enterprises and networking. Small and medium enterprises may include manufacturing, food and beverage production, services, repairs, agriculturally related enterprises and logistics.

6.3.5 Home-Based Economic Activity

Working from home can make a very positive contribution towards reducing car travel and increasing the vibrancy of an area and in recent times, with the increasing availability of high-speed broadband, this has become a more viable and popular option for many people. While this Plan supports the concept of home working, it is important that such activity does not result in the disamenity of a predominantly residential area and therefore employment use in a dwelling should be restricted to the occupier(s) of the dwelling and such use should be subordinate to the main use of the dwelling as a residence.

In addition to home working, this Plan supports the concept of a live-work unit which can be defined as a single unit within a building that is both a place to live and a place of business or commerce. The

development of live-work units can lead to a more sustainable land use pattern, by providing for a mix of uses, ensuring a balance between day and night-time activity and reducing commuting.

6.3.6 Incubation Units / Workshops / Business Starter Units

The provision of appropriate infrastructure is important in creating the conditions conducive to enterprise and employment creation. Incubation units, workshops and business starter units provide small and medium businesses with a base to engage in the production, research and development and enterprise activities. Having regard to current trends and forecasts it is considered that there will be demand for smaller units c.50-80m² providing for greater letting ability and lower rents. Kildare County Council will continue to work pro-actively with national, regional and local development bodies and agencies including the Local Enterprise Office and the Kildare Local Community Development Committee to support such start-up enterprises.

6.3.7 Athy Food, Drink and Skills Innovation Hub

Athy Food, Drinks and Skills Innovation Hub is one of ten connected co-working zones in the Mid-East Region and is a flagship project of Kildare Community Network Co. Ltd, a Kildare County Council not for profit enterprise development company. The initiative was set-up as a response to the announcement in 2018 that Coca Cola would close its Athy production facility with the loss of 85 jobs. In establishing the Hub, Kildare County Council and County Kildare Community Network Co. Ltd with the support from Coca Cola will seek to fill the employment void in the town but also address the lack of food incubation space in the county. Accordingly, the project aims to develop an innovation-rich environment to accelerate job creation and enterprise development through investment in people, collaboration and clustering, thereby facilitating the development of scalable, sustainable and profitable food businesses across the region.

The initiative has selected the former Model School as the future home for hub and has recently been awarded funding by the Regional Development Enterprise Fund (RDEF) to progress to the design and planning stage. It is considered that this is a critical project for the town, not only in fostering regeneration and economic development but also finding a high quality use for what is a prominent historic building and a protected structure in Athy.

6.3.8 Equine Industry

The equine industry represents a significant employment generator in County Kildare. The Council recognises the importance of the bloodstock and sport horse industry in the county and will encourage its further development in the Athy area.

6.3.9 Improving Quality of Life in Athy

Quality of life issues are increasingly being viewed as an important consideration for both multinational and indigenous companies investing in new enterprise operations. The IDA recognises the potential of placemaking in helping to enhance Ireland's attractiveness to foreign direct investment (FDI). Indeed, the agency notes that *'the creation of urban environments that offer good quality of life is important in allowing investors to attract and retain the talent necessary to support*

their establishment and growth. Placemaking offers the opportunity to differentiate Ireland from other locations by delivering attractive urban areas in which to reside.’¹⁷

Factors that make a town attractive for both businesses and their employees are therefore considered to play a determining part in securing the delivery of inward investment to the town, consequently realising the successful implementation of the Economic Development Strategy.

Specific actions to improve quality of life for the residents of the town include:

- Providing high quality residential developments with supporting social and community facilities.
- Ensuring a vibrant town centre with a high quality public realm.
- Creating an attractive urban environment to facilitate residency of the projected labour force.
- Ensuring the appearance of development complements existing environments and is of the highest quality.
- Seeking the upgrade of transport infrastructure together with the improvement of interurban non-national roads and supporting the shift to more sustainable modes of transport.
- Increasing and improving the range and quality of recreational, amenity and cultural facilities.
- Improve access to the range of further educational, training and research and innovation facilities within the town, and support the development of Athy Food, Drinks and Skills Innovation Hub at the former Model School.

Policy EDT1 – Economic Development

EDT1 *It is the policy of the Council to support the development of Athy as the enterprise and employment hub for south County Kildare, increase employment located within the town, reduce rates of commuting and ensure new employment development contributes towards reducing carbon output.*

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

- EDTO1.1** Encourage economic development and employment growth in Athy in accordance with its designation as a ‘Self-Sustaining Growth Town’ while adhering to the overall Economic Development Strategy of this Plan.
- EDTO1.2** Ensure that an appropriate quantum of land is zoned for employment generating uses in Athy. Such lands will, notwithstanding exceptional circumstances, be protected from inappropriate development that would prejudice any long-term development for these uses.
- EDTO1.3** Ensure the provision of adequate and appropriate water, wastewater treatment and waste management facilities to accommodate future economic growth of the town.
- EDTO1.4** Acquire and develop suitable land/properties, subject to the availability of funding, to stimulate and support creative and innovative entrepreneurial initiatives.
- EDTO1.5** Encourage the development of existing manufacturing industries in the town while establishing and expanding new categories of business in Athy and support their development in a phased and sustainable manner.
- EDTO1.6** Support IDA Ireland in the attraction of high value added manufacturing sectors and internationally traded sectors to Athy.

¹⁷ Source: IDA Press Statement, 6th March 2020 [online] available from <https://www.idaireland.com/newsroom/importance-of-placemaking-highlighted-local-auth>

- EDTO1.7** Actively encourage the appropriate redevelopment of brownfield sites and re-use of disused buildings for enterprise and employment creation, when such development is compliant with the policies and objectives of this Plan.
- EDTO1.8** Promote employment in Athy in order to reduce the need to travel and the dependence on private transport.
- EDTO1.9** Support the appropriate development of a high quality built environment to attract and sustain enterprise and employment.
- EDTO1.10** Promote innovative economic sectors and encourage business clusters that exploit links with one another and with third level education facilities.
- EDTO1.11** Promote the establishment of entrepreneurial start-up businesses and small scale employment generating activities and to apply a flexible approach to zoning where it can be demonstrated that the proposed use would have minimal impact on adjoining uses, particularly residential.
- EDTO1.12** Support the development of Athy Food, Drinks and Skills Innovation Hub at the former Model School and support the initiative in its remit to accelerate job creation and create an innovation-rich environment which will facilitate the development of scalable and sustainable food businesses. To support any ancillary education and training activities taking place on the former Model School site.
- EDTO1.13** Promote the provision of incubation/start-up units suitable for small businesses and start-up companies in general, and with particular emphasis on their provision within the town centre.
- EDTO1.14** Facilitate home-working and other innovative forms of working which reduce the need to travel but are subordinate to the main residential use of the dwelling and do not result in a disamenity in an area.
- EDTO1.15** Encourage the provision of live-work units as part of mixed-use developments in appropriate locations (particularly at ground floor level within the town centre).
- EDTO1.16** Encourage the provision of remote working hubs within the town centre.
- EDTO1.17** Support and protect the development of agriculture within the agricultural zone in Athy and to protect agricultural and equine uses, from encroachment by urban development uses beyond that needed to cater for the orderly expansion of the town.
- EDTO1.18** Encourage agri-businesses appropriate to the area which are directly related to the local horticultural or agricultural sectors in areas zoned for agricultural purposes.
- EDTO1.19** Encourage the development of equine related enterprises on agricultural zoned lands within the local area plan boundary.

6.4 Non-Conforming Uses

Throughout the town there are uses that do not conform to the zoning objectives for that area.

These are uses which:

1. Were in existence on 1st October 1964,
2. Have valid permissions or,
3. Have no permission and which may or may not be the subject of enforcement proceedings.

Extensions to and improvement of existing small scale commercial/employment uses referred to in Categories 1 and 2 above may be permitted in principle where such uses contribute to the economic and social wellbeing of the area as a whole and do not inhibit the development of adjoining lands in conformance with the land use zoning objective. Where the continued expansion or operation of such uses is incompatible with the predominant land use zoning of the area, they will be encouraged by the planning authority to relocate to more suitably zoned land.

Policy EDT2 – Non-Conforming Uses

EDT2 *It is the policy of the Council, where commercial and industrial enterprises exist as non-conforming but long established uses, to support their continued operation and reasonable expansion, save where such a use would impact negatively on the economic and social wellbeing of the area and inhibits development that is in conformance with the land use zoning objective.*

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council:

- EDTO2.1** To support the continued operation and reasonable expansion of existing non-conforming uses, provided they do not:
- Result in loss of amenity to adjoining properties;
 - Cause adverse impact on the environment;
 - Cause adverse impact on the visual amenity or character of the area; or
 - Inhibit the development of adjoining land in conformance with its land use zoning objective.

6.5 Tourism

Considering the richness of Athy's built and natural heritage and its highly accessible location by road, rail and canal, the town is in an excellent position to pursue the principle of asset-based development (see section 6.3) to develop its tourism potential and provide for locally based employment opportunities. The development of tourism amenity infrastructure in Athy will also contribute to improving the quality of life of its residents by assisting in the regeneration of the historic urban core as well as the protection and enhancement of the town's green infrastructure.

Figure 6.2: Image of Late Medieval Athy in the 1500's



Credit: Mark A. Guernon (2013)

Kildare County Council will seek to leverage the economic and social opportunity which the growth of the tourism sector can bring to both Athy and the wider surrounding rural hinterland. Accordingly, the Council will look favourably on tourism development proposals and especially on supporting tourism infrastructure, which is consistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the town. For this reason, the Local Area Plan has incorporated the Clanard Court Hotel into the plan area and designated the site for Tourism purposes under the land use zoning matrix (see Chapter 11). Furthermore, the Council recognises that there are particular opportunities within the town to develop niche tourism including water sports, walking, angling, eco-tourism, heritage tourism, golfing, culinary tourism and other leisure pursuits including passive recreation.

6.5.1 Waterways Tourism – Boating, Fishing, Walking, Cycling, Canoeing and Nature

Given the location, extent and quality of both the River Barrow and the Grand Canal Barrow Line, there is enormous potential for the development of waterways tourism throughout the town and in the surrounding areas to harness the benefits of the proposed projects such as the Barrow Blueway. This route will initially run alongside the existing Barrow Line of the Grand Canal from Lowtown to Athy, a distance of 45 km with 9 locks¹⁸.

The development of the Barrow Blueway is being led by Waterways Ireland and follows the preparation of several environmental and economic studies into the development of waterways

What are Blueways?

Blueways are a network of trails running on and alongside lakes, canals and rivers which can be explored by canoe, bike or on foot. The Barrow Blueway is proposed to consist of the development of a multi-use shared leisure route on the existing navigation towpath, which is a National Waymarked Route. This will include tailored surface finishes, information, directional, and safety signage, and all other associated ancillary works.

¹⁸ The proposed Barrow Blueway extends for 115 kms to St. Mullins in Co. Carlow. As of late 2020 planning permission has been secured for the sections of the Barrow Blueway in Co. Kildare (47 km) and Co. Laois (16 km).

tourism along the River Barrow. *The Barrow Corridor Recreational, Tourism and Commercial Product Identification Study (2012)* noted the 'undeveloped potential' of the Grand Canal – Barrow Navigation as a multi-use tourism resource. The study identifies the importance of Athy as a key destination along the river and sets out recommendations for the development of activity hubs and tourism trails. Such Activity Hubs are places where visitors can access a range of activities including water contact sports and swimming. The study proposes the development of looped walks and cycle trails from the hubs along with the development of canoe guiding on the river/canal. The study notes the proximity of Athy Heritage Centre to the river and advocates the development of mooring facilities and jetty and the provision of a greater sense of welcome to Athy including information about the heritage centre.

Athy has witnessed substantial growth in boating tourism in recent years. This regularly results in over demand for berths on all town centre mooring facilities. To accommodate this demand, and the predicted future growth, a major upgrade of the current in-place facilities is needed. In addition, investment to dramatically expand the number of berths and moorings available is essential. The development of a marina, or at least the expansion of the existing mooring facilities is considered an essential requirement in order to maximise the possibilities presented by the increase of tourism activities based around Athy's waterways with the completion of the Barrow Blueway.

Kildare County Council is committed to working with Waterways Ireland and the National Parks and Wildlife Service in order to sensitively and appropriately harness the potential of the canal and river Barrow as a tourist attraction to local, national and international boat users and for fishing and walking/cycling and nature enthusiasts.

The Council will support Waterways Ireland to develop the Barrow Blueway along the full length of the Barrow Line and the Barrow Navigation system in County Kildare. However, it is noted that should any works be required in order to provide amenity infrastructure and other facilities along the river and canal banks that a full Appropriate Assessment (AA) may need to be carried out¹⁹.

Proposed Barrow Blueway Sports Hub / Education Centre

The proposed masterplan for the Dominican Lands (identified as Priority Project 4 in the Athy Urban Regeneration Strategy, see Appendix 1) also includes provision for the development of a blueway sports hub and education centre which would act as an attraction and visitor destination for many different user groups including:

- Daytrippers and tourists using the Waterways or Barrow Blueway
- Local clubs such as the Canoeing Club, Angling Club, Triathlon Club, etc.
- Locals availing of the proposed Ecopark and looped walks
- Climbing enthusiasts

It is envisaged that the hub could feature facilities such as a café, training rooms, changing facilities, a climbing wall, and boat storage, along with much need jetties and a slipway. A level of ancillary car parking would also be provided. This plan supports the development of such a facility on the lands subject to the appropriate environmental assessments.

¹⁹ The River Barrow forms part of the Barrow and Nore Special Area of Conservation. Consequently, all development proposals are required to be screened for Appropriate Assessment (AA) as per the requirements of the EU Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC.

6.5.2 Cultural and Heritage Tourism

Athy boasts a vibrant arts and culture sector with the Heritage Centre on Emily Square hosting regular exhibitions and cultural events along with the Community Arts Facility in the Methodist Church on Woodstock Street. Another key cultural event is the Bluegrass Jamboree held in the town every July. Now extending over three days this celebration of bluegrass music has been taking place since 1991. Kildare County Council through its Arts Office will continue to support the arts and cultural development within the town over the lifetime of the Plan and beyond.

Athy is located within Ireland’s Ancient East; Fáilte Ireland’s marketing platform which promotes the 15 eastern counties of Ireland as a unique destination steeped in 5,000 years of history and culture. The town’s medieval street layout and architectural character provides a solid basis for the development of heritage-based tourism, an activity which according to Fáilte Ireland, the majority of tourists coming from overseas partake.

A key destination is the Heritage Centre – Shackleton Museum, which is home to the only permanent exhibition anywhere devoted to Ernest Shackleton, the famous Antarctic explorer. Plans are being progressed to redevelop and extend the Heritage Centre to provide an enhanced visitor experience (see Figure 6.2 below). This project is very important in terms of improving the tourism offer of the town and creating synergies with the water-based activities that will increase with the development of the Barrow Blueway.

Figure 6.3: Proposed Redevelopment of Athy Heritage Centre - Shackleton Museum



6.5.3 Sports and Recreation Tourism

The annual TriAthy event has grown in popularity since its establishment in 2006 and has become an important feature in the sporting calendar of the town. Kildare County Council through Kildare Sports Partnership supports the event’s further development. Significant potential exists to develop and improve the amenities and linkages between important public open spaces in the town such as the People’s Park, the lands surrounding Woodstock Castle and the Dominican lands. Such proposals

are discussed further in Section 9.4 Strategic Open Space and in the Urban Regeneration Framework (Appendix 1).

6.5.4 Tourism Development Opportunities

This Plan has identified a number of projects and proposals which, if realised, over the life of the plan and beyond have the potential to have a transformative effect in the improvement of Athy's tourist offer in the town and the promotion of the town as a Blueway tourism destination town.

The Plan, through its various policies, objectives and actions supports and promotes the following tourism development projects/proposals:

- The development of the Barrow Blueway, subject to the appropriate environmental considerations and assessment.
- The development of new waterways amenities infrastructure including pontoons, kayak friendly jetties, triathlon/swim entry/exit points and other waterways amenities infrastructure, subject to the appropriate environmental considerations and assessment.
- The rejuvenation of Athy's public realm as part of an overall Urban Regeneration Framework (see Appendix 1).
- The delivery of the masterplan proposals for the Dominican Square and Blueway Sports Hub / Education Centre.
- The enhancement of the walking routes and trails in the town including Athy Slí Na Sláinte route and the creation of other dedicated Tourist Trail(s).
- The redevelopment and expansion of Athy Heritage Centre – Shackleton Museum

Policy EDT3 - Tourism

EDT3 *It is the policy of the Council to support and facilitate the development of the tourism infrastructure in Athy with particular emphasis on utilising and harnessing, in an appropriate and sustainable manner, the potential of the town's natural and built heritage assets.*

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

- EDTO3.1** Support the development of the Barrow Blueway route along the Barrow Line of the Grand Canal and Barrow Navigation system as a multi-use tourism and amenity resource, subject to the required environmental assessments.
- EDTO3.2** Support and facilitate the development of Athy as Blueway destination town and an 'activity hub' for water-based sports and associated recreational activities including the development of a Blueway Sports Hub / Education Centre within the Dominican lands, subject to the required environmental assessments.
- EDTO3.3** Acknowledge the importance and potential of Athy's waterways and its water sports clubs by supporting the development of the necessary infrastructure to service the expansion of water-based activities in the town, including safe and convenient mooring facilities, subject to the required environmental assessments.
- EDTO3.4** Support and facilitate the development of angling activities and supporting infrastructure, including the provision of wheelchair friendly stands in Athy, subject to appropriate environmental assessments.

- EDTO3.5** Support and facilitate the development of an integrated network of greenways, Heritage/Tourist Trails and looped walks where appropriate, within the town centre and along the River Barrow and the Barrow Blueway route.
- EDTO3.6** Support the development of the transformational public realm projects that will enhance the aesthetics of the town's built and natural character and improve the overall ambience and visitor experience of the town.
- EDTO3.7** To support the redevelopment of Athy Heritage Centre – Shackleton Museum as a key tourism and heritage resource and visitor destination in the town and to support its board of directors in progressing related programmes and proposals including, in particular, the further development of the Ernest Shackleton theme.
- EDTO3.8** Support the development of the tourism industry by the upgrading of existing amenities in co-operation with the appropriate statutory agencies, private tourism sector and community groups.
- EDTO3.9** Protect recreational areas such as the People's Park and encourage the further development of amenity areas such as the area surrounding Woodstock Castle, the Dominican Lands and Ardreich Island.
- EDTO3.10** To facilitate the erection of bespoke signage for tourism amenities throughout the town, including interpretative panels and directional signage along designated tourist trails.
- EDTO3.11** Protect the environmental amenities of Athy from insensitive or inappropriate development, particularly any development that threatens the tourism resources of the town.
- EDTO3.12** Recognise the importance of the local golf clubs and other sports clubs and sporting events to tourism in the town and encourage their continued operation.
- EDTO3.13** Facilitate the appropriate use and development of White Castle, either fully or partially, as a tourist attraction, in order to ensure its conservation and protection.
- EDTO3.14** Recognise the importance of the malting industry to the economy of Athy and to support and encourage the development of the town's association with the malting industry as a tourist attraction.
- EDTO3.15** Support tourism initiatives including Fáilte Ireland's '*Ireland's Ancient East*' tourism marketing platform which promotes Athy as a visitor destination.
- EDTO3.16** Promote festivals and sporting events to increase the tourism, cultural and lifestyle profile of the town including the use of appropriate green areas throughout the town.
- EDTO3.17** Support tourism initiatives which develop the tourism potential of the town's rural hinterland while recognising and enhancing the quality and values of the rural area.
- EDTO3.18** Encourage the sustainable development of tourism activities such as waterways activities, agri-tourism, green/eco-tourism, niche retailing, farmers' markets, local and other craft type activities so as to diversify the tourism product in Athy.
- EDTO3.19** Promote Athy's literary, social, historical, genealogical, archaeological, architectural, and natural heritage as tourism generating opportunities.

Action

- To continue to apply for funding from the relevant national sources to support the development of the projects/proposals outlined in Section 6.5.4 Tourism Development Opportunities.

7. Movement and Transport

Aims:

- ***To promote and develop a sustainable transport network for Athy that improves access to walking, cycling and public transport while also providing an appropriate level of road infrastructure and traffic management to support future development;***
- ***To facilitate the development of a universally accessible and integrated network of pedestrian and cycle routes, linking identified key destinations in Athy, thus providing for a realistic and convenient alternative to the car for short journeys within the town.***

7.1 Overview

Policy documents at all levels of the spatial hierarchy recognise that current transport and travel patterns are unsustainable and are having a negative effect on the quality of life in our urban environments. *Smarter Travel*, the Government's Transport Policy for Ireland (2009-2020) has sought to disrupt the '*business as usual*' trend in which the private vehicle predominates and initiate a shift to public transport and other sustainable forms of travel. In this regard, the National Planning Framework (2018) supports the development sustainable movement in Ireland and includes a National Planning Objective (NPO 27) which seeks to ensure the integration of safe and convenient alternatives to the car into the design of our local communities. The Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035, which includes Athy, also seeks the incorporation of sustainable land use and transport planning policies across the GDA. Such sustainable movement policy provisions are further outlined in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) and in the Kildare County Development Plan.

7.1.1 Movement and Transport in Athy

Despite the adoption of sustainable movement policies over the past two decades or more, the much-desired modal shift away from private transport has not occurred. Whilst this situation is not unique to the town, both the Area Based Transport Assessment (see Section 7.3) and the Urban Regeneration Framework (Appendix 1) note the dominance of the private vehicle within Athy. This is due to the unconnected pattern of development within the town, particularly within residential estates, the peripheral location of some key destinations, and the lack of supporting transport infrastructure to encourage the development of sustainable movement patterns.

Section 2.3 of the Urban Regeneration Framework (see Appendix 1) illustrates the extremely limited areas of the town which are reachable with a 10-minute walking distance of both the schools campus (Monasterevin Road) and the recently opened Athy Primary Care Centre (Dublin Road). It is therefore unsurprising that Census 2016 recorded only 17% of workers in the town travel to their place of work by sustainable modes (walking, cycling, public transport) and almost half (48%) of the pupils and students travel to school/college by car. Whilst the current situation appears to be entrenched, there are a number of opportunities which have the ability to provide for the realisation of a more sustainable transport model. Such initiatives include the Athy Distributor Road, which will reduce through traffic in the town by c. 40-50%, thus freeing up space for alternative modes of movement, and the Barrow Blueway which will provide for a high quality off-road pedestrian and cycling route through the heart of Athy.

7.2 Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA)

As part of the preparation of the Local Area Plan, an Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA) was also undertaken. This supporting document (published alongside the Plan) has assisted in placing sustainable transport considerations to the forefront of land use planning decisions in the formulation of the Local Area Plan. The ABTA was informed by the vision statement and the eight strategic development principles outlined in Section 2.3 of the Plan.

The ABTA examined the existing and proposed transport infrastructure and service provision across all modes of transport, including active modes (walking and cycling) in the town. The assessment provides an insight into the existing transport patterns and constraints in Athy and also identifies the interventions that are required to effectively accommodate the anticipated increase in demand due to planned population growth, ensure the optimal transportation interventions can be planned, and drive a shift towards sustainable movement.

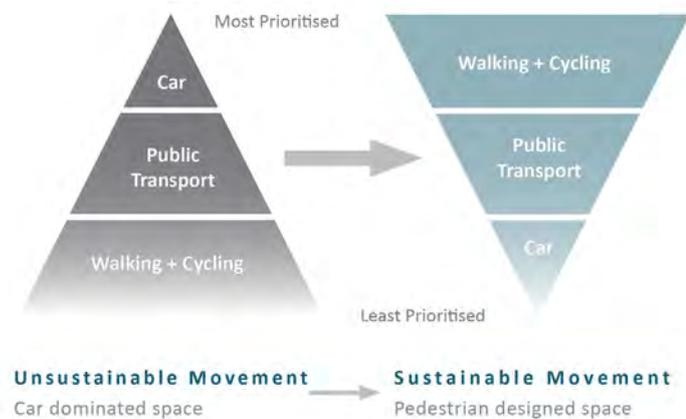
The outputs of the ABTA include a series of proposed options and measures to improve the transport network of the town and have informed the contents and policy objectives of this Chapter. These proposals also include measures designed to ensure the integration of areas designated for new residential development in the town, with particular reference to developing active and sustainable modes of travel (see Section 11.3 Phasing and Infrastructure Delivery Schedule).

7.3 Planning for Sustainable Movement in Athy

The achievement of a comprehensive and meaningful transition towards a model of sustainable movement in Athy is perhaps one of the most critical components needed to realise the future vision for the town, as outlined in Section 2.3. This is primarily because the creation of sustainable integrated communities (one of the eight strategic development principles) can only be achieved by providing residents with a realistic and convenient alternative to the private car which links all key

destinations in the town. Furthermore, without the delivery of sustainable movement within in the town, other strategic development principles such as the successful regeneration of the town centre and the development of an age friendly community cannot be achieved. Accordingly, this Plan will seek to maximise the opportunities arising from the Athy Distributor Road (currently under construction), capitalising on the additional space available in the town centre to create a transformed public realm, and expanding the high-quality pedestrian and cycling links formed by both the Distributor Road and the Barrow Blueway (currently under construction) to link all key destinations within the town.

Figure 7.1: Existing and Desired Movement Hierarchies



7.4 Active Transport Modes - Walking and Cycling

Providing the infrastructure to promote and facilitate active modes of transport within the town forms a key output of the ABTA. Sections 7.4.1 and 7.4.2 detail the specific measures proposed to develop the walking and cycling infrastructure of the town respectively. Together, these proposed measures combine to form a *Connectivity Programme for Athy*, which is listed as **Priority Project 5** of the Athy Urban Regeneration Framework (Appendix 1, Section 3.6.).

It is envisaged that the Connectivity Programme will be implemented through collaboration between Kildare County Council, local communities, and educational bodies (local schools) to enable all stakeholders to work together towards the delivery a high quality, comprehensive and safe walking infrastructure and to promote walking and cycling in the town. The various measures proposed will be subject to a separate public consultation process as part of the overall consent procedure. The Council will continue to implement improvements to its pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure through its operations programme as resources become available prioritising locations where pedestrian activities are the greatest or most vulnerable.

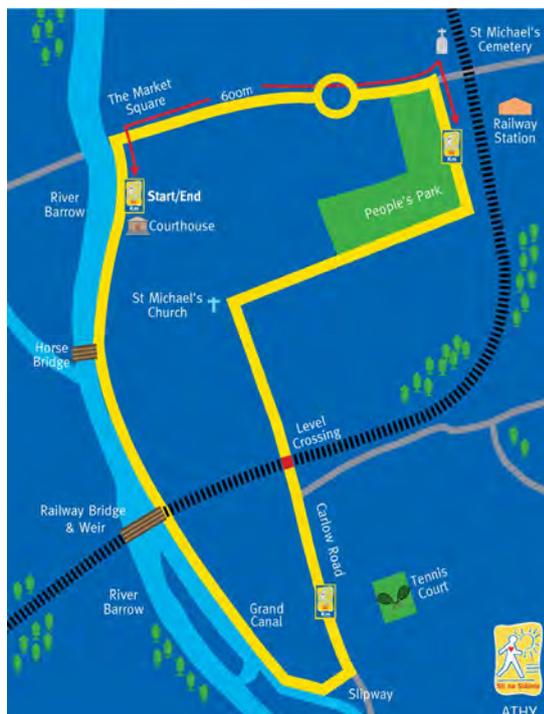
It is noted that the connectivity programme proposes the construction of two new pedestrian/cycle bridges over the River Barrow comprising of; one to the south of the town centre, linking the Dominican Lands to the Abbey site; and one to the north of the K-Leisure facility connecting with Monasterevin Road.

7.4.1 Walking

The ABTA contains a series of proposals to provide an integrated walking network for Athy, with an emphasis on improving safety and increasing the walking mode share, particularly to schools. This can be achieved by improving existing walking infrastructure and by creating new connectivity links, thereby increasing the catchment areas of key trip attractors in the town.

Another key feature of the ABTA is to integrate the Barrow Blueway into the pedestrian infrastructure of the town and provide a high-quality link between it, the town centre and the railway station. Additionally, the ABTA contains proposals to enhance and upgrade pedestrian infrastructure along other waterways within the town, thereby creating an integrated network of attractive greenways. Such routes will incorporate the Athy Slí Na Sláinte (see Figure 7.2) and also have the potential to form the basis of other signposted Heritage/Tourist Trails and looped

Figure 7.2: Athy Slí Na Sláinte Route



walks. The provision of such amenity infrastructure has also been identified in Section 6.5.4 Tourism Development Opportunities.

The ABTA proposes a list of options which have been grouped into the following categories:

- Upgrading of existing infrastructure;
- Construction of new infrastructure, and;
- Supporting measures

Collectively, the proposed measures will provide for an integrated walking network in Athy and have a positive impact. Table 7.1 (see below) details the walking and connectivity options for the town and should be read in conjunction with Map 1.1: Movement & Transport - Walking and Connectivity Measures.

The following time used to define the implementation period for each measure:

- **Short Term (ST):** Measure intended for implementation within 1-2 years
- **Medium Term (MT):** Measure intended for implementation within 3-5 years
- **Long Term (LT):** Measure intended for implementation within 6-10 years

These timescales are indicative only and will be subject to funding and resource availability.

Table 7.1: Walking and Connectivity Measures

A: Walking and Connectivity Measures – Upgrading of Existing Infrastructure		
Walking and Connectivity Measures (see Map 1.1)	Description	Timeframe
WE1	The Barrow Blueway is proposed to consist of the development of a multi-use shared leisure route on the existing navigation towpath, which is a National Waymarked Route. This will include tailored surface finishes, information, directional, and safety signage, and all other associated ancillary works. The Blueway will cater for both pedestrians and cyclists and the section to Athy is due for completion by end of Q1 2022.	ST/MT
WE2	Improve link along the eastern side of the River Barrow from Barrow Quay to link with the Barrow Blueway at Horse Bridge. This will require upgrades to the existing bridge along this route	MT/LT
WE3	Improve link along western side of River Barrow, from N78, north to new pedestrian/cyclist bridge WN6	MT
WE4	Improve link along eastern side of Grand Canal, from N78, north to St. Dominic’s Park	MT
WE5	Improve link along eastern side of Grand Canal, from N78, south to new pedestrian bridge (part of Barrow Blueway)	MT
WE6	Upgrade and improve pathway between St. John’s Lane and Greenhills	MT
Not on map	Footpath surfacing improvements as determined by the upcoming N78 upgrade project through Athy Town Centre (removal of street clutter, footpath improvements, etc.)	ST

Not on map	Conduct a survey to highlight the defective footpaths and design a priority list for repair works in conjunction with the relevant stakeholders.		ST
B: Walking / Connecting Options – New Infrastructure			
Option	Description	Type	Timeframe
Not on Map	North-western Distributor Road Note: This is not on shown on Map 1.1 as it is a long-term objective beyond the life of the Athy Local Area Plan 2021-2027.	New Road	LT
Not on Map	North-eastern Distributor Road <i>(Extended slightly south onto R417 to end of existing footpath on that road, as assume connecting footpath would be provided in conjunction with WN2 construction.)</i> Note: This is not on shown on Map 1.1 as it is a long-term objective beyond the life of the Athy Local Area Plan 2021-2027.	New Road	LT
WN3	Athy Distributor Road (plus associated links, including link to train station)	New Road	ST
WN4	New Street	New Road	LT
WN5	Bridge over the River Barrow at Athy Library	Pedestrian / Cyclist Bridge	MT
WN6	Bridge over the River Barrow at Barrack Lane / Woodstock Castle to Stanhope Street / R417	Pedestrian / Cyclist Bridge	MT
WN7	Boardwalk along Cromaboo Bridge It is an objective of this ABTA to carry out a feasibility study regarding the provision of a boardwalk along Cromaboo Bridge. The scope of this study must have regard to the design and impact of the proposed boardwalk, having regard to the protected structure status of the bridge; it's location within the ACA and the SAC status of the River Barrow and the associated requirements of the Habitats Directive. Currently this bridge is very narrow and heavily trafficked. During a recent walkability audit of the town centre, participants found the slope and narrowness of the footpaths very difficult to negotiate. The bridge was noted as one of the biggest limitations on the walkability of Athy.	Boardwalk	LT
WN18a	Link to provide for additional access point to Ardscoil na Tríonóide.	New Link	MT
WN21	Tonlegee Lawns and Branswood – Athy Distributor Road / Fortbarrington Road Junction. As part of new development	New Residential Lands Link	Timeline dependent on when lands are developed

WN22	New link as part of Dominican lands indicative framework. Links new bridge WN5 – Convent Lane	New Link	Timeline dependent on when lands are developed
WN23	Janeville to new bridge WN5	New Link	ST
WN24	Link in Dominican Lands from new bridge WN5 to Barrow Blueway		
WN25	Link to People’s Park from New Street (WN4) – As part of indicative framework for site to rear of Leinster Street	New Link	Timeline dependent on when lands are developed
WN26	R418 Dublin Road (Texaco Station) to Clanard Court Hotel (including section along Gallows Hill Ct)	New Link	ST
WN27	Barrow Blueway to Woodstock Industrial Estate	New Link	MT
C: Walking / Connecting Options – New Infrastructure			
Option	Description	Timeframe	
WS1	Increase priority for pedestrians at signalised junctions in Athy. Note: Not shown on Map.	ST	
WS2	Provide pedestrian crossings at locations as determined by the upcoming N78 upgrade project through Athy town centre. Note: Not shown on Map.	ST	

7.4.2 Cycling

The ABTA notes that there are currently no dedicated cycle lanes in Athy. In terms of other supporting infrastructure such as cycle parking facilities, there are some cycle stands provided at the train station, the schools campus and the primary care centre. However, no cycle stands in the town centre are noted.

The Greater Dublin Area Cycle Network Plan (2023) sets out the National Transport Authority’s plan for a cycle network throughout the Greater Dublin Area, comprising of an Urban Network, Inter-Urban Network and Green Route Network for the seven Local Authority areas in the GDA. The Cycle Network Plan aims to ensure that cycling as a transport mode is supported and enhanced in order to achieve strategic objectives and reach national goals for cycle usage.

The Athy cycling routes identified within the Plan are:

- A1** N78 – Dublin Road to Kilkenny Road
- A2** River Barrow Greenway – Eastbank (Alternative to R417 Kildare Road)
- A3** Barrow Canal Greenway (Alternative to R428 Stradbally Road)
- N10** Barrow Canal Greenway, West of Robertstown to Athy
- K20** Newbridge - Curragh - Suncroft – Athy
- A number of other Urban Town Network routes around Athy

The Barrow Blueway and Athy Distributor Road, which are both currently under construction, will provide for dedicated cycle tracks. Similar to the walking network, the ABTA notes that these two schemes will provide two major cycling spines east-west and north-south. However, additional cycling infrastructure will be required to link residential areas with key trip attractors around the town, particularly to schools. The objective of this ABTA regarding cycling is to provide an integrated network for Athy and improve safety for cyclists, with a focus on improving the cycling mode share, particularly to schools.

The cycling options are divided into infrastructure measures and supporting measures. The type of cycle track to be provided (cycle track, shared street, greenway, etc.) is indicated beside each option. Exact details of the cycle option, for example, if it is segregated or on-road would be examined at detailed design stage.

The following time used to define the implementation period for each measure:

- **Short Term (ST):** Measure intended for implementation within 1-2 years
 - **Medium Term (MT):** Measure intended for implementation within 3-5 years
 - **Long Term (LT):** Measure intended for implementation within 6-10 years
- These timescales are indicative only and will be subject to funding and resource availability.

Table 7.2 (see below) details the cycling measures for the town and should be read in conjunction with **Map 1.2: Movement & Transport - Cycling Measures**.

Table 7.2: Cycling Measures

A: New/Upgraded Infrastructure			
Cycling Measures (see Map 1.2)	Description	Type	Timeframe
Not on Map	North-western Distributor Road Note: This is not on shown on Map 1.2 as it is a long-term objective beyond the life of the Athy Local Area Plan 2021-2027.	New Road	LT
Not on Map	North-eastern Distributor Road Note: This is not on shown on map as it is a long-term objective beyond the life of the Athy Local Area Plan 2021-2027.	New Road	LT
CL3	Athy Distributor Road	New Road	ST
CL4	New Street	New Road	LT
CL5	Barrow Blueway	Blueway	ST/MT
CL6	Bridge over the River Barrow at Athy Library	Pedestrian / Cyclist Bridge	MT
CL7	Bridge over the River Barrow at Barrack Lane / Woodstock Castle to Stanhope Street / R417	Pedestrian/ Cyclist Bridge	MT

CL8	Improve link along the eastern side of the River Barrow from Barrow Quay to link with the Barrow Blueway at Horse Bridge. This will require upgrades to the existing bridge along this route and a suitable cycle path under or around Horse Bridge to make safe for cycling	Greenway	MT/LT
CL9	Improve link along western side of River Barrow, from N78, north to new pedestrian / cyclist bridge CL7	Greenway	MT
CL10	Improve link along eastern side of Grand Canal, from N78, north to St. Dominic's Park	Greenway	MT
CL11	Improve link along eastern side of Grand Canal, from N78, south to new pedestrian bridge (part of Barrow Blueway)	Greenway	MT
CL12	Geraldine Road	Cycle track/ lane	MT/LT
CL13	Dublin Road R418 – From N78 Roundabout to junction with Gallows Hill Ct	Cycle track/ lane	LT
CL14	N78 – From Roundabout with Dublin Road to Canal Bridge	Cycle track/ lane	ST
CL15	R417 – Junction with N78 to junction with new pedestrian bridge over River Barrow (CL7)	Cycle track/ lane	MT
CL16	R417 – From new pedestrian bridge over River Barrow (CL7) to Schools Campus	Cycle track/ lane	ST
CL17	R417 – Schools Campus to junction with new North-eastern Distributor Road	Cycle track/ lane	LT
CL18	Link between CL7 and CL10, via Barrack Lane, Green Hills, Woodstock Street and St. Dominic's Park	Cycle track/ lane	ST
CL19	Improve pathway between St. John's Lane and Greenhills	Cycle track/ lane	MT
CL20	N78 – From Canal Bridge to junction with Athy Distributor Road / North-western Distributor Road	Cycle track/ lane	LT
CL21	Fortbarrington Road – From junction with Athy Distributor Road to N78	Cycle track/ lane	MT
CL22	R417 – From junction with Athy Distributor Road to N78	Cycle track/ lane	MT
CL23	Canal Side, Green Alley and Convent Lane and around Library to new pedestrian/cyclist bridge (CL16) – As part of Dominican lands indicative framework	Cycle track/ lane	Timeline dependent on when lands are developed
CL24	New cycle link between Janeville and new pedestrian/cyclist bridge (CL16)	Cycle track/ lane	ST

CL25	Link to People’s Park from New Street (CL4) – As part of indicative framework for site to rear of Leinster Street	Cycle track/ lane	Timeline dependent on when lands are developed
CL26	Link between N78 and train station, via Church Road	Cycle track/ lane	MT
CL27	Upgrade link between Barrow Blueway and R417 between Oak Lawn and Kingsgrove	Cycle track/ lane	MT
B: Supporting Cycle Measures (not on map)			
Option	Description		
CS1	Provision of cycle parking at train station and bus interchange		
CS2	Provision of cycle parking at schools, healthcare centres and sports facilities		

Policy MT1 – Walking, Connectivity and Cycling

MT1 *It is the policy of the Council to promote enhanced connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists within Athy in order to improve access to the town centre, local schools, residential areas, recreational facilities, public transport services and other amenities.*

Objectives

It shall be an objective of the Council to:

- MTO1.1** Support and promote the use of sustainable active transport modes in Athy and seek to implement a connected network of walking and cycling infrastructure in the town as detailed in Table 7.1 and 7.2 and illustrated on Map 1.1 and 1.2, in conjunction with the National Transport Authority, other statutory agencies, and the relevant stakeholders. The final design details shall be subject to appropriate environmental assessment, where applicable, and undergo a separate public consultation process.
- MTO1.2** Support the implementation of the actions contained in the Walkability Audit Report for Athy (2020) and ensure that all footpaths in Athy are accessible to all members of the community, including people with disabilities, the elderly and people with young children.
- MTO1.3** Continue to work with Waterways Ireland to progress the completion of the Barrow Blueway route.
- MTO1.4** To work with the National Transport Authority (NTA) to implement the Greater Dublin Area Cycle Network Plan (2013) proposals for Athy, subject to detailed engineering design and any mitigation measures presented in the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Natura Impact Statement (NIS) accompanying the NTA Plan.
- MTO1.5** Support the creation of new pedestrian and cycle links across the River Barrow that enhance connectivity in the area and link residential areas, the town centre, community facilities and public spaces/amenities as proposed under the Athy Area Based Transport Assessment. In particular, WN6 (as outlined in Table 7.1 and Map 1.1), which provides for a bridge over the River Barrow at Barrack Lane/Woodstock to Stanhope Street/R417, should be prioritised for delivery. The final design details of all new links across the River Barrow shall be subject to the appropriate environmental assessment and public consultation.
- MTO1.6** Ensure that all development within Athy allows for connectivity (pedestrian, cyclist and vehicular) to adjacent lands in accordance with the National Transport Authority’s Permeability Best Practice Guide (2015), or any updated version of same.

- MTO1.7** Provide appropriate, secure and sheltered bicycle parking facilities subject to demand analysis, at appropriate locations at:
- (i) Town centre;
 - (ii) Adjacent to heritage, community and amenity destinations.
- MTO1.8** Seek to improve and promote looped walks in conjunction with Slí na Sláinte and other relevant bodies recognising them as important health and recreation infrastructure within the town.
- MTO1.9** Protect, maintain and upgrade the existing pedestrian connection between St John's Lane and Greenhills (WE6 and CL19) as identified on Map 1.1 and 1.2. Where redevelopment of the lands is proposed, priority shall be given in the overall design to the maintenance and upgrade of this route with maximum passive supervision, including lighting as appropriate, addressing its full length.

Actions

- To progress the delivery of the measures outlined in the Athy Area Based Transport Assessment on a phased basis as funding is secured.
- To progress the delivery of the Barrow Blueway.
- To identify and provide suitable sites for secure and appropriately located bicycle parking as per Objective MTO1.7.
- To commence the preparation of a Public Realm Strategy within 12 months of the adoption of the Local Area Plan (Objective UCRO 1.10) and to implement the recommendations on a phased basis over the lifetime of the Plan as funding is secured.

7.5 The Public Realm

Section 2. 7 of the Urban Regeneration Framework (see Appendix 1) investigated the public realm in Athy and found it to be generally of poor quality. There are a number of elements that combine to create a problematic and hostile public realm for pedestrians, cyclists and more vulnerable road user, such as children, older people and people with disabilities. These issues which need to be addressed, include:

- The dominance of vehicular traffic in the town and the lack of supporting walking and cycling infrastructure (including the complete absence of cycle paths) to provide a realistic alternative to the private car.
- The level of congestion arising from trips to drop-off and collect children to/from schools in the town.
- Disconnected and substandard footpaths, particularly within the town centre.
- The location and extent of public car parking within the town centre resulting in an excess of hard and uninviting landscaping in streets and public spaces.
- The general unattractive nature of public space with poor/disjointed landscaping along with the haphazard and inconsistent use and placement of materials, street furniture and signage.

It is a specific objective of this LAP to commence the preparation of a Public Realm Strategy for Athy within 12 months of the adoption of this Plan (Objective UCRO1.10, Chapter 5). This Strategy will set out a programme of works to create an attractive and vibrant urban environment that is well connected and safe, and one which encourages people to use more sustainable forms of transport, particularly for short trips to key destinations within the town (refer to Section 5.2.2). It is envisaged that the Public Realm Strategy will have a transformative effect on the urban environment of Athy

when implemented in conjunction with the recommendations of the ABTA, as outlined in Section 7.4 and Appendix 1, Section 3.3.

7.6 Car Parking

Car parking while a necessary feature of any town centre should not be allowed to dominate the public realm or compromise the experience of the pedestrian shopper. In this regard, the Urban Regeneration Framework (Appendix 1, Section 2.7.4) investigated the extent of the present public parking arrangements within the commercial core of Athy and found it to take up a considerable proportion to town centre. In several instances it was found that car parking was the dominating feature in a number of important civic spaces in the town, detracting from the historic character and setting of what is a designated Architectural Conservation Area (ACA). In view of this situation, the Urban Regeneration Framework proposes that a comprehensive car parking management plan would be undertaken as part of a Public Realm Strategy for the town (Objective UCRO1.10). The ABTA acknowledges this provision and supports the car parking management plan being prepared under the auspices of the Public Realm Strategy. The management plan will seek to take a balanced approach to effectively manage parking to support the local economy and encourage sustainable travel modes in order to reduce reliance on the private car.

It is noted that the ABTA has outlined several measures regarding the provision of car parking in the town. These proposals are supported by objective MTO2.2 of the Plan.

Policy MT2 – Car Parking

MT2 *It is the policy of the Council to manage the provision of parking to provide for the needs of residents, business and visitors to Athy Town Centre.*

Objectives

It shall be an objective of the Council to:

- MTO2.1** Apply the parking standards in the Kildare County Development Plan and relevant Section 28 Guidelines in considering applications for planning permission in Athy.
- MTO2.2** Support and facilitate the implementation of the preferred car parking management measures, as identified in the Athy Area Based Transport Assessment.
- MTO2.3** To make provisions for the use of electric vehicles through a significant increase in the provision of clearly and exclusively designated electric car charging points on public and private land in partnership with ESB and other relevant stakeholders and landowners.

Action

- To implement the preferred car parking measures outlined in the Athy Area Based Transport Assessment.

7.7 Public Transport

The Area Base Transport Assessment (ABTA) has highlighted various deficiencies in the current public transport offering in the town. For example, although there are bus connections to a number of hinterlands, major towns and cities in the province (as well as Dublin Airport), these are limited in frequency, limiting their potential as viable transport modes for commuting journeys. In addition, although train services from Athy are spread relatively evenly across the day, there is no increased frequency at peak hours in the morning and evening. There are also no early morning trains towards Carlow, Kilkenny and Waterford.

Figure 7.3: Athy Train Station



Credit: Athy Photography

The ABTA proposes a number of measures to improve the existing public transport offering to encourage a shift to sustainable transport modes. Whilst this Local Area Plan includes objectives supporting the implementation of such proposals within the town, it notes that the provision of bus and rail services is outside of the remit of this Plan.

Policy MT3 – Public Transport

MT3 *It is the policy of the Council to promote the sustainable development of Athy by supporting and guiding the relevant national agencies in their remit to deliver improvements to the public transport network and to public transport services.*

Objectives

It shall be an objective of the Council to:

- MT03.1** Focus people-intensive land uses around existing and planned public transport nodes and improve access to services.
- MT03.2** Support and facilitate the delivery of the preferred public transport (bus and rail) enhancements in the town, as identified in the Athy Area Based Transport Assessment.
- MT03.3** Engage with the National Transport Authority (NTA), Irish Rail, Local Link and other stakeholders to improve the provision of public transport in Athy including the provision of a new bus interchange, close to the train station and the extension of certain bus routes to access this interchange.
- MT03.4** Support improving the quality and extent of the bus infrastructure within the town including the provision pull-in bays, bus shelters, seating and real time passenger information.
- MT03.5** To facilitate the provision of taxi and hackney services and appropriately located taxi parking in Athy.

Action

- To continue to promote the provision of improved public transport services and facilities to serve the population of Athy, as identified in the ABTA, through ongoing consultation with statutory agencies and public transport providers.

7.8 Roads and Streets Network

The Athy Distributor Road (scheduled for completion in late 2023) will provide a new east-west link to the south of the Duke Street – Leinster Street axis, bypassing the congested N78. This new road will provide Athy with a high-quality route for active travel modes and connects directly to the train station via a pedestrian/cyclist spur from the road.

On completion of the Distributor Road Scheme, it is envisioned that the reduction in traffic along the N78, resulting from the Athy Distributor Road and the potential modal shift to active travel modes from walking and cycling measures (removing some car based internal trips) will result in a significantly less congested main street. This will result in safety improvements, particularly for vulnerable road users and allow for a general upgrade of the public realm. However, there are two regional roads converging on Athy from the north (R428 to Stradbally and R417 north to Monasterevin) which will not be able to bypass the town centre via the new distributor road. As such, there will still be a level of regional through traffic along the main street. To address this issue the ABTA proposes that two new routes be constructed, as follows:

- **North-western Distributor Road** – linking the western end of the Athy Distributor Road (N78 Ballylynan Road) to the R428 Stradbally Road.
- **North-eastern Distributor Road** – linking R417 to Monasterevin with the R418 to Kilcullen

Whilst the Plan acknowledges that the purpose of these proposed routes is in keeping with one of the key objectives of the ABTA i.e. to reduce unnecessary vehicular trips through Athy Town Centre and identify mitigation measures to improve road safety and minimise collision hotspots, it also notes that the construction of these routes is a long term proposition, beyond the life of the Plan. Consequently, the routes are not illustrated on the Transport and Movement Maps, nor are they specifically supported by any objective of the Local Area Plan.

The ABTA identifies a number of other measures to improve the roads and streets network in the town and these are supported by objectives of the Plan.

The Plan will seek to safeguard the development and carrying capacity of the national road infrastructure along the existing N78 corridor. New development along this route will be required to accord with policies of the County Development Plan and official policy, which seeks to safeguard these routes from development, which would compromise the safety, integrity or capacity of these routes.

7.8.1 New Street

The ABTA proposes the creation of a new street in Athy Town Centre. This new route will link Leinster Street to Back Square. Whilst this proposal has seen different iterations in past statutory plans for the town, it should be noted that its purpose is to function as an urban street and not as an inner relief road in the town.

The new street will contribute fundamentally to the connectivity of the town and allow for significant improvements to be made along the main street, catering for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicular traffic appropriately. This will be achieved by making the section of Leinster Street parallel

to New Street one-way from west to east, opening up road space for active travel modes and an enhanced public realm. In turn, the new street will run one-way from east to west, allowing for the integration of appropriate pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure (see Map 1.3: Movement & Transport - Roads and Streets Network Measures).

7.8.2 Employment Lands to the East of the Town

With regard to the employment lands zoned ‘H: Industry and Warehousing’ to the east of the town (identified as Gallowshill in Table 6.3), it is considered that their strategic location, adjacent to the N78 (motorway link) and straddling the Athy Distributor Road, necessitates the preparation of a Strategic Transport Assessment (STA) of the subject lands to be carried out prior to their development. This assessment should demonstrate the quantum of development that can be facilitated at the location complementary to safeguarding the strategic function and safety of the national road network, in accordance with the provisions of official policy outlined in the Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines ‘Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities’ (DoECLG, 2012). Such an assessment will also need to identify an Access Strategy and any improvements required to the local transport network to accommodate the extent of development proposed. The STA should undertake relevant stakeholder consultation including with TII, the NTA and landowners and shall be considered in the context of any development proposals for this location.

Policy MT4 – Road and Street Network

MT4 *It is the policy of the Council to maintain, improve and extend the local road network in and around Athy to ensure a high standard of connectivity and safety for all road users.*

Objectives

It shall be an objective of the Council to:

- MTO4.1** (a) Maintain and improve, as required, the local road network to ensure a high standard of road quality and safety in accordance with the requirements of the relevant legislation.
(b) Safeguard the development and carrying capacity of the national road infrastructure along the existing N78 in accordance with the Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines ‘Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities’ (DoECLG, 2012).
- MTO4.2** To support and facilitate the continued development and completion of the Athy Distributor Road.
- MTO4.3** To support and facilitate the development of ‘New Street’ as identified in the Athy Area Based Transport Assessment and illustrated on **Map 1.3: Movement & Transport - Roads and Streets Network Measures**.
- MTO4.4** Support the implementation of the recommendations of the Athy Area Based Transport Assessment regarding the road and street network of the town.
- MTO4.5** Co-operate and liaise with the Department of Transport, the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in relation to securing appropriate improvements/extensions to the transport network within Athy.
- MTO4.6** Ensure that development proposals within Athy Town Centre are subject to a Transport Impact Assessment (TIA), to be carried out in accordance with the Traffic and Transport Assessment Guidelines (2014). Transport Impact Assessments will also be required in the following cases:
(a) Development on all lands zoned C: New Residential and;

(b) All other lands for which significant development is proposed within the Local Area Plan boundary.

- MTO4.7** Ensure that any significant new development takes place in proximity to public transport routes and can be adequately served by the road network.
- MTO4.8** Provide for traffic calming and speed reduction measures throughout the town, where necessary as funding allows, and ensure that all new developments are designed to incorporate appropriate traffic calming measures as set out in the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets.
- MTO4.9** Reduce the harmful effects of traffic noise by ensuring noise mitigation measures are implemented into new developments in proximity to national routes, regional routes and significant urban streets. Developers shall engage a suitably qualified acoustic specialist to prepare an Acoustic Design Statement for all new developments with the potential to impact sensitive noise receptors from traffic noise. The Statement shall have regard to the thresholds set out in the Kildare Noise Action Plan 2019-2023 (or any subsequent plan).
- MTO4.10** To carry out a Strategic Transport Assessment (STA) and to produce an Access Strategy for lands zoned 'H: Industry and Warehousing' situated to the east of Athy in consultation with relevant stakeholders including TII and the NTA, as well as landowners. This will identify the quantum of development that can be facilitated at the location complementary to safeguarding the strategic function and safety of the national road network, in accordance with the provisions of official policy outlined in the Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines 'Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (DoECLG, 2012). The STA will also identify any improvements required to the local transport network to accommodate the extent of development proposed.

Action

- To progress the delivery of the road/street network measures proposed in the Athy Area Based Transport Assessment over the life of the Plan.

8. Built Heritage and Archaeology

Aim: To protect, conserve and manage Athy's unique built and archaeological heritage, by promoting the understanding, enhancement and appropriate development of these assets in order to instigate a heritage-led regeneration of the town.

8.1 Overview

Athy boasts a rich stock of architectural and archaeological heritage, a non-renewable resource that provides a high level of distinctiveness and character to the town. Such heritage refers to all manmade features in the environment including buildings and other structures such as bridges, monuments, archaeological sites, walls and street furniture. These structures and sites play an integral part in the life of the town and include places of work, commerce, worship, education and recreation. It is important that these heritage items are not viewed in isolation or as an impediment to development on account of their existence but rather form an inherent part of the townscape of Athy, which lends the town a unique '*sense of place*' and offers great potential in providing for a place-based regeneration of the town.

As stated in the National Planning Framework (NPF) our '*built heritage assets merit being nurtured in a manner appropriate to their significance as an aid to understanding the past, contributing to community wellbeing and quality of life as well as regional economic development.*' Accordingly, this Plan will seek to conserve and manage Athy's heritage assets for the benefit of present and future generations and to promote such assets as generators of economic development and urban regeneration while adhering to the relevant statutory obligations.

8.2 Architectural Heritage

8.2.1 Record of Protected Structures

The Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) places an obligation on local authorities to include objectives for the protection of structures, or parts of structures, which are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest. Archaeological structures may, in some situations, be considered as architectural heritage and, therefore, may appear on both the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) and the Record of Protected Structures (RPS). The RPS, which includes structures in Athy, is contained within the Kildare County Development Plan. **Map 3: Built Heritage and Archaeology and Map 3a: Built Heritage and Archaeology – Town Centre** illustrate the location of protected structures in Athy. Most of these structures are also identified in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) as being of regional importance.

Table 8.1 is an extract of the Record of Protected Structures and is reproduced in this Plan for information purposes only²⁰. There are 150 protected structures located within the area covered by the Local Area Plan. These structures merit protection and enhancement and in many cases have been identified by the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) for that reason. The NIAH for Kildare was completed in 2003 and the entire Record of Protected Structures in the county was last reviewed in 2015. It should be noted that the consideration of any additions or deletions to the

²⁰ For the full record of protected structures in the county please refer to the Kildare County Development Plan.

RPS is addressed outside of the local area plan-making process and must have regard to the relevant planning legislation and guidelines including the ‘*Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities*’ (DoAHG, 2011).

Table 8.1: Record of Protected Structures within the Athy Local Area Plan 2021-2027 Boundary

Reference (RPS No.)	NIAH Ref.	Item and Location	Description
AY001	11506014	St. Michael’s Cemetery, Boherboy	Cemetery
AY002	11503008	Moneen Lane, Tomard	Bridge
AY005	11503016	St. Michael’s Convent of Mercy Graveyard	Graveyard
AY008	11504029	Geraldine Road, Townparks	Wall
AY009	11504024	Shamrock Lodge Gates, Geraldine Road, Shamrocklodge	Gates
AY010	11500020	St. Vincent’s Hospital, Stradbally Road Townparks	Building (Formerly detached five-bay single-storey hospital gate lodge, built c.1845, as workhouse lodge with extension to rear). Now in use as sheltered housing.
AY011	11500002	Cardington Lock, Stradbally Road, Cardington	Lock
AY012	11500005	Galilee, Stradbally Road, Cardington	Building
AY013	11500015	St. Vincent’s Hospital, Stradbally Road, Townparks	Building Freestanding former workhouse, built 1843, now local hospital. Eighteen-bay two-storey front with two-and three-bay three-storey projecting wings
AY014	11500019	St. Vincent’s Hospital, Stradbally Road, Townparks	Wall
AY016	11500038	Lennon’s Bridge, Ballintubbert Road, Townparks	Bridge
AY017	11500056	The Grand Canal	Canal (Section of the Grand Canal (Barrow Line) constructed c. 1790. Links into the Barrow Navigation to south of the town at Horse Bridge.
AY018	11500034	Woodstock Lodge, Townparks	Building
AY019	11505060	Duke Street	Building
AY020	11505040	Cromaboo Bridge	Bridge
AY021	11505039	The White Castle, Leinster Street	Castle
AY022	11505358	Emily Square	Fountain

Reference (RPS No.)	NIAH Ref.	Item and Location	Description
AY023	11505336	No. 5 Emily Square	Building
AY024	11505341	W.T Duthie, No. 30 Leinster Street	Building
AY025	11505342	No. 31 Leinster Street	Building
AY026	11505331	Bank of Ireland, Emily Square	Building
AY027	11505330	O'Brien's, Emily Square	Building
AY030	11505300	Stanhope Place	Building
AY032	11505344	The Emigrant, Barrow Quay	Building
AY033	11505311	Bapty Maher's, Leinster Street	Building
AY034	11505309	No. 25 Rafter's, Leinster Street, Athy	Building
AY035	11505307	No. 27 Manleys, Leinster Street	Building
AY036	11505286	No. 46 Leinster Street Athy	Building
AY037	11505016	Athy Community Centre, Stanhope Place	Building
AY038	11505017	Carlton Hotel. (Formerly St. Michael's Convent of Mercy, Stanhope Place)	Building
AY040	11505019	Carlton Hotel. (Formerly St. Michael's Convent of Mercy, Stanhope Place)	Building
AY041	11505020	Carlton Hotel (St. Michael's Convent of Mercy - Chapel, Stanhope Place)	Church
AY042	11505021	St. Michael's Roman, Catholic Church, Stanhope Street	Church
AY043	11505022	Rathstewart Road	Bridge
AY046	11505049	St. John's Cemetery, St. John's Lane	Cemetery
AY048	11505054	St. John's Lane	Wall
AY049	11505226	Front façade only of No. 9 McLaughlin's Bar, Leinster Street	Building
AY050	11505006	No. 82 Leinster Street	Building
AY051	11505258	No. 69 Leinster Street	Building
AY053	11505318	Meeting Lane	Building
AY054	11505314	No. 20 (M.D Mullins), Leinster Street	Building
AY055	11505313	No. 21 Leinster Street	Building
AY057	11505257	Post Box, No. 69 Leinster Street	Post Box
AY058	11505260	No. 67 (Angler's Rest), Leinster Street	Building
AY059	11505229	Front façade only of No. 6 Leinster Street	Building
AY060	11505230	Front façade only of No. 5 Leinster	Building
AY061	11505224	Front façade only of No. 11 (Kane's Public House), Leinster Street	Building
AY062	11505223	No. 12 (Clancy's) Leinster Street	Building
AY063	11505163	Athy Railway Station, Church Road	Railway Station
AY064	11505164	Athy Railway Station Post Box, Church Road	Post Box
AY065	11505168	Athy Railway Station Church Road	Water Tower
AY066	11505170	Athy Railway, Church Road	Bridge
AY067	11505172	Leinster Street	Water Trough
AY068	11505001	Athy Railway Bridge, Boherboy	Bridge
AY075	11505332	Athy Town Hall, Emily Square	-
AY077	11505116	Athy Court House, Emily Square	Building

Reference (RPS No.)	NIAH Ref.	Item and Location	Description
AY079	11505074	Front façade, east and west side elevations only of No. 22 Griffin Hawe, rear, Duke Street	Building
AY080	11505076	Griffin Hawe, Duke Street	Building
AY081	11505063	Athy Post Office, Duke Street	Building
AY083	11505144	Janeville Cottage, Janeville	Building
AY084	11505143	Casa Maria, Janeville	Building
AY086	11505136	No. 8 Offaly Street	Building
AY087	11505135	No. 7 Offaly Street	Building
AY088	11505134	No. 6 Offaly Street	Building
AY089	11505133	No. 5 Offaly Street	Building
AY090	11505132	Front façade only of No. 4 Offaly Street	Building
AY091	11505127	No. 13, Rear of Emily Square	Building (outbuilding)
AY094	11505119	Front façade only of No. 13 Emily Square	Building
AY095	11505115	Barrow Quay	Quay
AY096	11505111	Irish Permanent, No. 3, Duke Street	Building
AY097	11505108	No. 5 Duke Street (H.G Donnelly and Sons)	Building
AY099	11505096	No. 1 Duke Street	Gazebo
AY100	11505081	No. 16-17 Duke Street	Building
AY101	11505083	No. 14 Duke Street (An Sean Chistin)	Building
AY102	11505073	No 23 Duke Street	Building
AY103	11505072	No. 24-25 Duke Street (Perry's Supermarket)	Building
AY104	11505067	No. 43 Duke Street	Building
AY105	11505066	No. 44 Duke Street	Building
AY107	11505177	The Rectory, Church Road	Building
AY108	11505176	The Rectory, Church Road	Church
AY109	11505175	Church Road Athy	Building
AY110	11505150	Athy Lodge, Church Road	Building
AY111	11505146	Teach Iosa, Carlow Lodge	Building
AY112	11505145	St. Michael's Church of Ireland	Church
AY113	11505179	Post Box, Offaly Street	Post Box
AY115	11505147	Prospect House, Carlow Road	Building
AY116	11505148	Prospect House, Carlow Road	Building
AY120	11505162	St. Anne's B&B, Church Road	Building
AY122	11505339	No. 3 Emily Square	Building
AY123	11505335	No. 6 Emily Square	Building
AY124	11505337	The Immigrant, Athy	Building
AY125	11506021	Athy Presbyterian Church, Dublin Road Townparks	Church
AY126	11506020	The Manse, Boherboy, Townparks	Building
AY127	11506006	The Model Farm, Dublin Road, Townparks	Building
AY128	11506007	Model Court, Geraldine Road, Townparks	Building
AY129	11506008	Model Court, Geraldine Road Townparks	Building
AY130	11506009	Model Court, Geraldine Road, Townparks	Building

Reference (RPS No.)	NIAH Ref.	Item and Location	Description
AY131	11506010	Model Court, Youth Reach, Geraldine Road, Townparks	Outbuildings
AY132	11506011	Model Court-Montessori School, Townparks	Outbuildings
AY133	11506012	The Model School, Dublin Road Townparks	Building
AY135	11506019	Cemetery, Boherboy Athy	Cemetery
AY136	11501132	No. 89 Woodstock Street Townparks	Building
AY137	11501127	Grand Canal Barrow Navigation, Townparks	Mooring Bollards6
AY138	11501126	Grand Canal Barrow Navigation, Townparks	Dry Dock
AY139	11501110	W. Doyle, Woodstock Street, Townparks	Building
AY140	11501039	Athy Methodist Church, Woodstock Street	Church
AY141	11501038	No. 7 Woodstock Street	Building
AY142	11501037	No. 8 Woodstock Street	Building
AY143	11501036	No. 9 Woodstock Street	Building
AY144	11501035	No. 10 Woodstock Street	Building
AY145	11501028	Woodstock Street	Post Box
AY146	11505071	No. 39 Park House, Duke Street	Building
AY150	11501151	Grand Canal Barrow Navigation, Woodstock South	Mooring Bollards
AY151	11501150	Minch Norton and Company, Upper William Street, Woodstock South	Building
AY152	11501148	Canal Side, Woodstock	Building
AY153	11501118	No. 15 Biadhlan, William Street, Townparks (Athy West Urban ED)	Building
AY154	11501116	Athy Lock-Crane, William Street Townparks (Athy West Urban ED)	Crane
AY155	11501115	Athy Lock, William Street Townparks (Athy West Urban ED)	Lock
AY156	11501114	Augustus Bridge, William Street Townparks (Athy West Urban ED)	Bridge
AY157	11501105	No. 97 Woodstock Street Townparks (Athy West Urban ED)	Building
AY158	11501103	No. 98 Woodstock Street Townparks (Athy West Urban ED)	Building
AY159	11501102	No. 99 Woodstock Street Townparks (Athy West Urban ED)	Building
AY160	11501101	No. 100 Eversley, Woodstock Street Townparks (Athy West Urban ED)	Building
AY165	11501079	William Street Athy	Post Box
AY167	11501055	No. 27 Duke Street Athy	Building
AY168	11501054	No. 26 Duke Street, (Parkview House)	Building
AY169	11501045	No. 1 Woodstock Street Athy	Building
AY170	11501044	No. 2 Woodstock Street Athy	Building
AY171	11507071	Barrow Lock, Grand Canal Barrow Navigation, Bleach	Lock
AY172	11507058	Convent Lane Athy	Gates
AY173	11507057	Horse Bridge, River Barrow, Athy	Bridge

Reference (RPS No.)	NIAH Ref.	Item and Location	Description
AY174	11507056	Railway Bridge, River Barrow, Bleach	Bridge
AY175	11507055	Weir, River Barrow Coneyburrow	Weir
AY176	11507054	Duke's Lodge, River Entrance, Carlow Road	Gates
AY177	11507046	Duke's Lodge, Carlow Road, Coneyburrow	Building
AY178	11507045	Duke's Lodge, Carlow Road, Coneyburrow	Gates/railings
AY179	11507003	Carlow Road, Grayland	Building
AY180	11502053	Fortbarrington Road, Blackparks	Post Box
AY182	11502002	Tegral Building Products - Chimney Stack Upper William Street, Bleach	Building
AY183	11502004	Tegral Building Products – Store Upper William Street, Bleach	Building
AY184	-	Bascule Bridge, Stradbally Road, Townparks (Athy West Rural ED)	Bridge
AY186	-	Lift Bridge at Ardreich, Ardree	Lift Bridge
AY188	-	Woodstock Castle, Woodstock	Ruins of Woodstock Castle
AY189	-	Former Maltings, Nelson Street	Stone walls of former malting house
AY190	-	Duke Street	Lamp Post at west end of Cromaboo Bridge
AY191	-	Mill Cottage, Ardreich, Ardree	House
AY192	-	No. 20 Emily Square (Royal Garden Restaurant)	Building
AY193	-	No. 18 Emily Square	House
AY195	-	No. 18 William Street (Canalside Inn), Townparks	House
AY197	-	Tonlegee House, Tonlegee	House

Policy BH1 – Protected Structures

BH1 *It is the policy of the Council to preserve and enhance the buildings identified on the Record of Protected Structures and to carefully consider any proposals for development that would affect the special value of such structures, including their historic curtilage, both directly and indirectly.*

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

- BH1.1** Ensure the protection and preservation of all protected structures (or parts of structures), including the curtilage and attendant grounds of structures contained in the Record of Protected Structures (refer to **Table 8.1, Map 3: Built Heritage and Archaeology and Map 3a: Built Heritage and Archaeology – Town Centre**).
- BH1.2** Acknowledge and promote awareness of the origins, historical development and cultural heritage of the town, to support high-quality developments that relate to local heritage and to ensure that new development respects and is responsive to the cultural heritage of Athy.

BH1.3	Support the sensitive conservation of protected structures, their curtilage and attendant grounds, and to operate flexibility with regard to the use of these buildings to facilitate their ongoing use, subject to good conservation principles.
BH1.4	Proactively address dereliction, endangerment, neglect and vacancy in the town centre through the use of the Council’s legal process and through the promotion of appropriate uses and the sensitive conservation of historic buildings, in conjunction with other relevant initiatives.
BH1.5	Encourage the protection, retention, appreciation and appropriate revitalisation of the vernacular and industrial heritage of Athy.
BH1.6	Protect and conserve important heritage items such as, gates, street furniture, post boxes and other significant historic features of interest.
BH1.7	Support the development of Athy Heritage Centre and Shackleton Museum as an important tourism and heritage resource for the town.
BH1.8	Support the public access to White Castle as a tourist and heritage destination and to support the preparation of a conservation management plan for the building to avoid loss of historic building fabric and authenticity through appropriate repair and restoration work for White Castle.
BH1.9	Explore the feasibility of restoring the dry dock in Athy, in consultation with Waterways Ireland.
Action	
•	The Council will work with and assist, where appropriate, owners of protected structures of particular significance within Athy in their maintenance and repair through advice and grant aid from relevant sources.

8.3 Athy Architectural Conservation Area (ACA)

An Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) is a place, area, group of structures or townscape that is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest or value, or contributes to the appreciation of protected structures. The Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) provides the legislative basis for the protection of such Architectural Conservation Areas (ACA). An area in the historic core of Athy has been designated as an ACA in the *Kildare County Development Plan*. While the purpose of this designation is to protect and enhance the special character of the area, this does not preclude appropriate forms of development, including the construction of new build from happening.

As part of the preparation of the Plan, a Statement of Character for Athy ACA was also commissioned by Kildare County Council. This is also an objective of the Kildare County Development Plan 2017-2023 (Objective ACAO2). The purpose of the Statement, (which has been published alongside this Plan), is to define the special character of the Athy ACA and to provide guidance to property owners, developers, architects and planning professionals on important features and characteristics of the area and the type of works that would require planning permission within the ACA.

Another piece of work undertaken, as part of the preparation of the Statement of Character, involved a review of the current boundaries of the ACA, having assessed the special character of the town. On the basis of this review, the Statement of Character has made recommendations to include

or exclude certain areas from the ACA²¹ and will, if adopted, be amended through the review process of the Kildare County Development Plan. The proposed changes are illustrated in **Figure 8.1**.

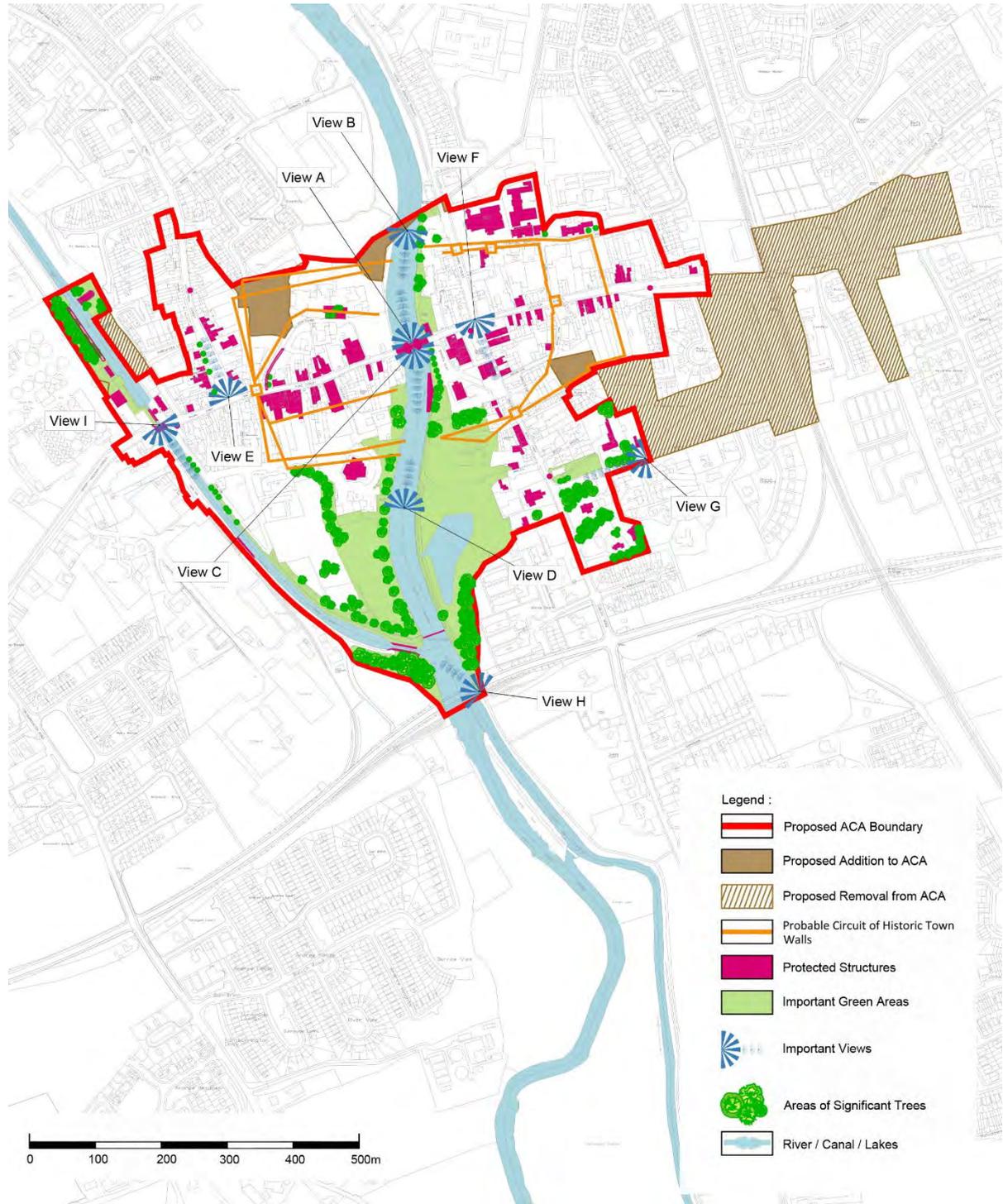
It is also the intention of the Council that an accompanying information/guidance booklet be prepared and be circulated to property owners, the general public and Kildare County Council service departments on the type of works that would require planning permission within the ACA while making specific recommendations on how to improve/restore the character of the ACA where required.

The rationale for the designation of the ACA for Athy includes *inter alia*:

- *Historical Significance*: Athy traces its history back to the Normans and it played a significant role in the consolidation of control from The Pale in this part of the country. As a medieval walled town Athy is of great archaeological interest. It contains sites of medieval structures which add depth to its historical interest and value.
- *Morphology of the Town Centre*: The historic layout is defined by the main north-south and east-west cruciform street arrangement, a river crossing and walled enclosure. The location of the walls can be traced somewhat in the present-day street layout.
- *Architectural Significance*: Athy contains significant buildings from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. These include infrastructural, defensive, administrative, religious, commercial, industrial and domestic structures of different types, both vernacular and of formal design.
- *Architectural Character*: Athy is a good example of an Irish town in which many houses conform to a simple typology of rendered street architecture with slate roofs and simple sharp detailing. The intrinsic value of the architecture lies in the mix of appealing historic formality and informality, contextual grouping and the survival of early detailing.
- *Vernacular architecture*: The informality of the town is reinforced by the survival of some vernacular buildings. These simple buildings reinforce the character and charm of Athy as a small rural market town.
- *Landscape*: Athy retains much of its impressive historic landscape setting along the river. It also retains a historic cemetery (St. John's Graveyard) and landscaped grounds associated with Georgian and Victorian houses.

²¹ It should be noted that any amendments to the boundaries of Athy ACA will only be carried out through the making of the Kildare County Development Plan 2023 – 2029. The current extent and boundaries of the ACA, as outlined in the Kildare County Development Plan 2017 – 2023, remain unchanged until such a time as agreed by the elected members as part of the making of the new County Development Plan.

Figure 8.1: Athy Architectural Conservation Area with Proposed Boundary Changes



8.3.1 Management of Development in the Architectural Conservation Area

The Athy ACA Statement of Character shall act as a guide for homeowners, developers and the Planning Authority to inform proposed development proposals in the ACA. Owners and occupiers of non-protected structures located within the ACA should note that carrying out of works to the exterior of a structure located in an ACA constitutes exempted development only if those works would not materially affect the character of the area. For example, alteration works to streetscape features such as roofs, walls, windows, doors and rainwater goods may not be exempted development. Porches and other development, which may normally be considered exempt, are consequently not exempt within the ACA.

This Plan aims to ensure that any development within or adjoining the ACA is sympathetic to the character of the area and that the design is appropriate. All planning applications within and adjoining the ACA shall be assessed having regard to *Section B: Guide to Development* within the ACA of the Statement of Character (published alongside this Plan).

Applications for infill development within and contiguous to the ACA, and also modifications to existing or new shopfronts, should also have regard to Section B of the ACA Statement of Character and include: a study of the overall façade; an analysis of how the development complements the setting; the removal of visually intrusive elements such as inappropriate signage, lighting and ancillary cables and ducts, and the use of appropriate materials.

8.3.2 Views and Prospects in the ACA

Whilst it is noted that the Kildare County Development Plan does not include views to be protected within the Plan area, the Statement of Character for the Athy ACA outlines a number of key views/prospects which are deemed to be worthy of protection (see Figure 8.1). Such views should be taken into consideration when developing sites within the ACA.

Table 8.2: List of views outlined in the Athy ACA Statement of Character

View/Prospect	Location
View A	View upstream from Cromaboo Bridge (north-side)
View B	View downstream towards Cromaboo Bridge and river (north-side)
View C	View downstream from Cromaboo Bridge (south-side)
View D	View upstream towards Cromaboo Bridge (south-side)
View E	View into Woodstock Street from junction with William Street / Duke Street
View F	Stanhope Street looking south towards Emily Square with the spire of St. Michael's Church of Ireland Church in the distance
View G	View on Church Road to St. Michael's Church of Ireland church
View H	View towards Horse Bridge and River Barrow Sluice Gate
View I	View from the Canal Lock at William Street down the Canal Side towards the Dominican Lands

Policy BH2 – Architectural Conservation Area

BH2 *It is the policy of the Council to protect the character of the Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) and to carefully consider any proposals for development that would affect the special value of the ACA, while providing guidance through the publication of a Statement of Character to support property owners located within the ACA.*

Objectives

It shall be an objective of the Council to:

- BH2.1** Ensure that new development, including infill development, extensions and renovation works within or adjacent to Athy ACA preserve or enhance the special character and visual setting of the ACA and its setting including vistas, streetscapes, building line, fenestration patterns and architectural features.
- BH2.2** Require all development proposals including new development, modifications, alterations or extensions to existing buildings within the Athy ACA boundary, in the surrounding area and adjoining the boundary of the ACA have due regard to the Athy ACA Statement of Character (2020), DoEHG’s ‘Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2004)’ and their ‘Advice Series’.
- BH2.3** Encourage the retention, repair and re-use of materials which characterise the vernacular architecture of the ACA including stone, slate, timber windows and doors, and decorative render.
- BH2.4** Ensure that any development (contemporary or traditional) within or adjoining the ACA is of high quality design and finish and is sympathetic to the character of the area. All applications within and adjoining the ACA will be assessed in the context of the following criteria and the impact of any development on the immediate surroundings of the site, the broader townscape or its landscape setting;
- The height, scale and orientation of the proposed development;
 - The bulk, massing and density of the proposed development and its layout in relation to any building line and the surrounding plan form;
 - The quality and type of materials to be used in the construction of the development; any boundary treatment and landscaping;
 - The design and detail of the proposed development;
 - The retention of the traditional plot boundaries of the town;
 - The retention and maintenance of historic street furniture, surfaces and boundary treatments.
- BH2.5** Review all applications for demolition, modifications or extensions to existing buildings with regard to their relative importance to the appreciation of the character of the ACA as identified in the Statement of Character.
- BH2.6** Strongly discourage proposals for the demolition of a structure that positively contributes to the character of the ACA, except in exceptional circumstances. Kildare County Council will require such applications to be accompanied by a photographic survey, condition report and architectural heritage assessment of the structure and an assessment of the impact of the replacement building on the character of the ACA.
- BH2.7** Require that proposals for infill development within the ACA, and proposals contiguous to the ACA should include an analysis of how the new development complements the setting, character and appearance of the ACA, making reference to the findings of the Statement of Character for the town.
- BH2.8** Encourage appropriate new infill development which is considered essential to the vibrancy and sustainability of the town, designed in accordance with the advice given in the Statement of Character for the town.
- BH2.9** Encourage removal of visually intrusive elements from existing façades, and reinstatement of historic features, and differentiation of original building plots in

accordance with the advice and case study demonstrated in the Statement of Character for the town.

BH2.10 Encourage the repair and enhancement of existing shopfronts and the replacement of inappropriate shop fronts where necessary. The design of new shop fronts is required to act in harmony with the upper floor facades to complement and enhance the character of the building and streetscape plots in accordance with the advice and case study demonstrated in the Statement of Character and the Kildare Shopfront Guidelines (2013).

BH2.11 Require that applications for modifications to existing shopfronts or new shopfronts include a study of the overall façade and to make proposals which would, where relevant, include the removal of visually intrusive elements such as inappropriate signage, lighting and ancillary cables and ducts and use of appropriate material as indicated in the shop front case study in the Statement of Character

BH2.12 Reduce, prevent and encourage the removal of visual and urban clutter within the ACA including, where appropriate:

- Traffic management structures
- Utility structures and signage
- Signage (including signs protruding from the façade) at ground and upper floor levels;
- Obsolete/unnecessary lighting, electrics, cables, ducts
- Internally affixed stickers;
- Internally illuminated signage.

BH2.13 Protect the landscape character, values, sensitivities, focal points and views identified in the Athy ACA Statement of Character. This will include, inter alia, the following:

- i. The requirement of a Visual Impact Assessment for developments with potential to impact on areas of significant landscape character, value or sensitivity, including both urban and natural features, significant townscapes and historic buildings, as appropriate.
- ii. Prohibit development that will block or interfere with a significant focal point or a view. Where it is considered that a development may impact on focal points or views, proposals must have regard to the significance of any such impact and any appropriate mitigation measures that should be incorporated.

BH2.14 Seek the preparation and implementation of heritage-led regeneration plans (including for the public realm) in Athy’s historic core, through funding sources such as the Historic Towns Initiative and the Rural/Urban Regeneration Development Fund.

Action

- The Council will prepare an information/guidance booklet to be circulated to property owners, the general public and Kildare County Council service departments on the type of works that would require planning permission within the ACA while making specific recommendations on how to improve/restore the character of the ACA where required.

8.4 Archaeological Heritage

Whilst Athy can trace its origins as a settlement back to medieval times there is a diverse range of archaeological features found throughout the town, with representative monuments and artifacts of all periods. Archaeological finds dating to the Neolithic and the Bronze Age attest to the importance of the crossing over the River Barrow from prehistoric times. Little of Athy's medieval origins remain apart from the presence of structures from this period such as White Castle located on the east bank of the River Barrow adjacent to Cromaboo Bridge; the ruins of St. Michael's Church at the edge of the town and a wall of St. John's Hospital bounding the medieval graveyard on John's Lane. The sense of the Athy's medieval origins is retained by the street pattern and distinct building line along the Main Street creating a sense of enclosure of medieval character.

For the purposes of the Local Area Plan, Archaeological Heritage includes the following:

- National Monuments
- Archaeological and Architectural monuments/sites on the Sites and Monuments Record
- Monuments in the Register of Historic Monuments
- Zones of Archaeological Potential in Historic Towns
- Underwater Archaeological Heritage, including Historic Wrecks
- Previously unknown and unrecorded archaeological sites
- Potential sites located near large complexes of sites or monuments
- Present or former wetlands, unenclosed land, rivers or lakes, or the inter-tidal zone

8.4.1 Medieval Town Walls/Defences

Athy was once a fortified town; however no above ground evidence of the town defences exists today. The County Kildare Urban Archaeological Survey (Bradley and King, 1986) suggests the line of the town defences, including any subterranean remains should be protected. In this regard the Statement of Character for the Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) proposes to alter the boundaries of the ACA so that they follow the probable circuit of the town walls (see Section 8.3). Furthermore, as per Objective AO2 of the County Development Plan a Conservation, Management and Interpretation Plan has been prepared to aid the development of planning policy and guide the conservation of the medieval heritage of Athy. It should be noted that the town walls and other subterranean other defences are categorised as 'National Monuments' (rather than 'Recorded Monuments') under the *National Walled Towns Policy (DAHG 2008)*.

8.5 Sites and Monuments Record

Map 3: Built Heritage and Archaeology Map identifies the sites within the Plan area that are included on the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). This map should be read in conjunction with Table 8.3 (see overleaf) which lists all the relevant sites, and which has been reproduced in this Plan for information purposes only. The Archaeological Survey of Ireland database www.archaeology.ie contains an interactive map/search facility that provides access to all records of the Archaeological Survey of Ireland (ASI) and should be consulted prior to the development of land within the Plan area. The SMR for Athy is continually updated as new information becomes available and new sites are uncovered.

Some archaeological structures within the town may, in some situations, also be considered as architectural heritage and may therefore appear on both the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) and the Record of Protected Structures (RPS). Such structures are therefore protected by both the National Monuments Acts and the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

Table 8.3: Sites and Monuments Record within the Athy Local Area Plan Boundary

Monument No.	Townland	Classification
KD035-021	Townparks	Castle - hall-house
KD035-021001	Townparks	Bawn
KD035-021002	Townparks	Fish-pond
KD035-021003	Townparks	House - 17 th Century
KD035-021004	Townparks	Settlement deserted - medieval
KD035-022	Townparks	Historic town
KD035-022002	Townparks	Town defences
KD035-022004	Athy	Religious house - Dominican friars
KD035-022006	Athy	Religious house - Fratres Cruciferi
KD035-022008	Athy	Bridge
KD035-022010	Athy	Castle - tower house,
KD035-022014	Athy	Church
KD035-022015	Athy	Graveyard
KD035-022016	Athy	Graveslab
KD035-022017	Athy	Cross-slab
KD035-022018	Athy	Crucifixion plaque
KD035-022019	Athy	Architectural feature
KD035-022020	Athy	Graveslab
KD035-022021	Athy	Graveslab,
KD035-022023	Athy	Memorial stone
KD035-022024	Athy	Armorial plaque
KD035-031	Ardree	Enclosure
KD035-032001	Ardree	Settlement deserted - medieval
KD035-032002	Ardree	Church
KD035-032005	Ardree	Graveyard
KD035-049	Bleach	Burial
KD035-101	Ballybought	Excavation - miscellaneous

8.6 Zone of Archaeological Potential

The County Kildare Urban Archaeological Survey (Bradley and King, 1986) identifies a Zone of Archaeological Potential in Athy. A number of medieval / early modern towns with known archaeological potential were surveyed and zones of potentially significant archaeology identified. These areas are designated under the National Monuments Acts as recorded monuments and are listed on the SMR. The historic core of Athy was identified as a Zone of Archaeological Potential (Refer to **Map 3: Built Heritage and Archaeology** and **Map 3a: Built Heritage and Archaeology – Town Centre**).

As noted in Section 8.4.1 Athy was once a walled town and is one of four towns in the county that are members of the Irish Walled Towns Network (IWTN). Within the Zone of Archaeological Potential there is a significant potential of uncovering archaeological remains, including the circuit of the town walls. Therefore, developments located within a Zone of Archaeological Potential and/or close to known archaeological monuments or sites, including site works that are extensive in terms of area (ground disturbance of 0.5 ha or more) or length (1 kilometre or more) and developments that necessitate an Environmental Impact Assessment Report, will be required as part of the planning application process, or by condition of permission, to carry out an archaeological assessment, monitoring, testing or excavation within the area either prior to the planning decision or prior to any development proceeding on site. The Council, as a condition on such developments, may consider the preservation of all, or part of the archaeological remains in the area covered by that permission.

The Council will engage with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and other statutory consultees when considering applications for planning permission for development on or in the vicinity of archaeological sites and/or monuments.

Policy BH3 – Archaeological Heritage

BH3 *It is the policy of the Council to safeguard the archaeological heritage located within the boundary of the Local Area Plan and avoid negative impacts on sites, monuments, features or objects of significant historical or archaeological interest.*

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

- BH3.1** Prioritise the protection/preservation in situ (or upon agreement preservation by record) of items of archaeological interest as listed in **Table 8.3** and shown on **Map 3: Built Heritage and Archaeology and Map 3a: Built Heritage and Archaeology - Town Centre** from inappropriate development that would adversely affect and/or detract from the interpretation and setting of these sites.
- BH3.2** Protect the historic core of Athy and retain, except in exceptional circumstances, the existing street layout, historic building lines and traditional plot widths where these derive from medieval or earlier origins.
- BH3.3** Ensure the remains of the historic walls/defences of the town are retained where these still exist (including subterranean remains) and to promote public awareness and understanding of the existence of these historic elements and their route within the public realm.
- BH3.4** Encourage, where practicable, the provision of public access to sites identified on the Sites and Monuments Record under the direct ownership or control of the Local Authority and the State.
- BH3.5** Provide for the protection of historic burial grounds within Athy, in co-operation with agencies such as the Office of Public Works and the National Monuments Section of the Department of the Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
- BH3.6** Ensure that development proposals contribute towards the protection and preservation of the archaeological value of underwater or archaeological sites associated with the River Barrow, the Grand Canal and associated features.

9. Natural Heritage, Green Infrastructure and Strategic Open Space

Aims:

- **To protect, enhance, create and connect natural heritage, high-quality amenity areas and other green spaces throughout Athy for both biodiversity and recreational use and to ensure that the future development of the town complements its natural setting;**
- **To ensure that the natural heritage and green infrastructure of Athy is allowed to play an enhanced role in strengthening the climate resilience of the town.**

9.1 Overview

The concept of biodiversity goes beyond identifying the variety of species that may occur within a given area. Rather, it recognises the inter-connectivity and interdependencies that occur between different species and their habitats. For example, a negative impact in the local environment could adversely affect a much wider ecosystem. Many ecosystem services are provided by biodiversity such as pollution control, flood mitigation, carbon sequestration and sustaining agricultural production. The conservation and enhancement of biodiversity and natural heritage is therefore an integral part of good environmental management and sustainable development.

What is Biodiversity?

Biological diversity or *biodiversity* as it is more commonly known, refers to the variety of all living things, including plants, animals and their habitats as well as the physical and geological foundation that forms the landscape. The idea of biodiversity is a well-established feature of nature; however, the term was previously more often referred to as 'flora and fauna'.

There is a great diversity of natural and semi-natural habitats in Athy, ranging from its hedgerows to groups of trees, grassland areas, and riparian habitats along its river and canal corridors. It is considered that the natural heritage of Athy, while somewhat underutilised, is a critical asset for the town which, when taken in combination with its built heritage, has huge potential, if appropriately and sensitively developed, to improving the overall wellbeing and quality of life of the town's residents whilst also providing critical economic and tourism opportunities.

The natural environment also plays a vital role in helping communities adapt to and mitigate the negative effects of climate change. Accordingly, the policies and objectives set out in the Plan seek to protect Athy's existing habitats and promote the sensitive incorporation of new green infrastructure features into the existing urban fabric of the town alongside new developments in order to foster greater biodiversity, whilst also utilising such green infrastructure for climate mitigation purposes.

9.2 Designated Sites

Athy boasts two significant designated sites which contribute greatly to its character. The River Barrow is listed as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and the Grand Canal is designated as a proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA).

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are legally protected under the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and are selected for the conservation of Annex I habitats and Annex II species. The River Barrow flows southwards through the town and forms part of the River Barrow and River Nore SAC (Site code: 002162). The site is of considerable conservation significance given the occurrence of good examples of habitats and of populations of plant and animal species that are listed in Annexes I and II of the EU Habitats Directive respectively. Furthermore, the River Barrow is of high conservation value for the populations of bird species that use it.

The Barrow Line of the Grand Canal is a man-made waterway linking the River Liffey in Dublin with the Shannon at Shannon Harbour and the Barrow at Athy. The Grand Canal system is protected under national legislation by way of its designation as a proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA) – (Site Code: 02104). It runs through the town and intersects with the River Barrow 500 metres south of Cromaboo Bridge.

The Grand Canal pNHA comprises the canal channel and the banks on either side of it. The canal supports important habitats such as hedgerows, tall herbs, calcareous grassland, reef fringe, open water, scrub and woodland. Diverse ranges of species use the site including the Annex II species such as otter and white-clawed crayfish. The ecological value of the canal lies more in the diversity of species it supports along its linear habitats than in the presence of rare species. Associated canal structures and buildings also contribute to the setting and historic character of the canal.

The River Barrow and the Grand Canal have the potential to play a key role in the regeneration of the town. This Local Area Plan aims to realise the full potential of these waterbodies as local and national amenities by providing supporting policies and objectives which seek to enhance walking/cycling route options connecting with residential areas and other public open spaces in the town and further afield (including the Barrow Blueway project) without compromising the integrity of these designated sites.

Policy NH1 – Natural Heritage

NH1 *It is the policy of the Council to support the protection of species and habitats that are designated under the Wildlife Acts 1976 and 2000, the Birds Directive 1979 and the Habitats Directive 1992 as well as areas of high local biodiversity value and to ensure that developments with potential to impact the integrity of the Natura 2000 network will be subject to Appropriate Assessment.*

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

- NH1.1** Protect, conserve and manage the River Barrow and River Nore SAC and contribute to the protection of the ecological, visual, recreational, environmental and amenity value of the Grand Canal pNHA.
- NH1.2** Ensure screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA), in accordance with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive is carried out with respect to any plan or project, including masterplans.
- NH1.3** Ensure that any proposal for development within or adjacent to the Grand Canal pNHA is located and designed to minimise its impact on the biodiversity, geological, water and landscape value of the pNHA.

NH1.4	Ensure all applications for planning permission within or adjacent to the Grand Canal pNHA are accompanied by an Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) prepared by a suitably qualified professional.
NH1.5	Identify, protect, conserve and enhance wherever possible, wildlife habitats and species of local importance, not otherwise protected by legislation. Such habitats would include woodland, river, canal, wetlands and grassland areas along with field boundaries (hedgerows, stone walls and ditches). These features form part of a network of habitats and corridors, which allow wildlife to exist and flourish and contribute to compliance with Article 10 of the Habitats Directive.
NH1.6	Protect and conserve the integrity of soils that supports the rich biodiversity and ecological networks in Athy.
NH1.7	Ensure that any proposals for the lighting/flood lighting of waterways infrastructure, buildings or pedestrian/cycling routes along waterways within the Plan area incorporate bat friendly lighting schemes as set out in 'Bats and Lighting, Guidance Notes for: Planners, engineers, architects, and developers' (Bat Conservation Ireland, December 2010).
Action	
•	To survey existing bridge structures in Athy to identify whether any such structure currently supports bat roosts

9.3 Green Infrastructure

The natural heritage features of Athy can be described as its green infrastructure network. This network supports native plant and animal species and provides corridors for their movement, maintains natural ecological processes and biodiversity, sustains air and water quality, protects from flooding and provides vital amenity and recreational spaces for communities. This Plan takes a proactive approach towards planning and managing the green infrastructure network of Athy by seeking to maximise the benefits of the multi-functionality that such natural heritage provides. In protecting and enhancing the green infrastructure network of the town important amenity and recreational spaces can be provided for communities, thereby contributing to the health and quality of life of residents and also allowing for increased climate resilience within the town in the years ahead.

What is Green Infrastructure?

'Green Infrastructure' is a term that is used to describe the interconnected network of environmental features such as nature conservation areas, parks, open space, rivers, floodplains, wetlands, woodlands and farmland and other open spaces that adjoin and are threaded through towns and villages. A green infrastructure network should be designed and managed as a multifunctional resource capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.

It is important to note that not all pieces of green infrastructure perform the same functions and not all are of equal value. For example, a grassy strip between a footpath and the road surface provides a level of water regulation by providing a pollution control and a green space for excess water to soak into and it also provides a very limited habitat for plants and insects. Conversely, a riparian wetland would have a much greater capacity to absorb water, provide pollution control and would support a much greater range of biodiversity. To be effective, any project identifying Green Infrastructure must recognise these differences in value and distinguish what are the most important components.

9.3.1 Habitat Mapping

Under Article 10 of the EU Habitats Directive, planning and development policies must endeavour to conserve and sustainably manage corridors and stepping stone habitat features. As part of the preparation of this Plan, Kildare County Council commissioned a habitat mapping and green infrastructure survey for Athy in 2018²². This report identified and mapped the various habitats and green infrastructure areas in the town. These maps are a valuable tool in the future planning of the area and also provide information for the general public and community groups.

The survey employed the Heritage Council's habitat classification system and recorded habitats by features according to their ecological value (see Table 9.1). Figure 9.1 and Map 4 Green Infrastructure Map provide detailed information of the location and distribution of the various habitat types listed below.

Table 9.1: Extent of habitats in Athy when grouped by ecological potential

Broad Habitat Group	Heritage Council Habitat Types	Percentage coverage
Built and improved Grasslands (Low ecological potential)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved agricultural grassland - Amenity Grassland - Arable land - Horticultural land - Tilled land - Stone walls and other stone work - Buildings and artificial surfaces 	90.1%
Transitional (Ecological potential)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mixed broadleaved woodland - Conifer plantation - Scattered trees and parkland - Scrub - Ornamental / non-native shrub - Canals - Other artificial lakes and ponds - Spoil and bare ground - Recolonising bare ground 	5.1%
Semi-natural (Higher ecological potential)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dry meadows and grassy verges - Wet grassland - Wet willow-alder-ash woodland - Depositing lowland rivers - Reed and large sedge swamp - Mesotrophic lakes 	4.8%

Source: Habitat Survey and Mapping of Athy, 2018

As noted in **Table 9.1** the dominant environment within Athy is categorised as being of low ecological value (i.e. built environment, improved agricultural grassland and amenity grassland). However, the habitat mapping has identified six main routes of green infrastructure (local

²² The study area comprised of the now abolished Athy Legal Town area, approximately 1,053 hectares in size.

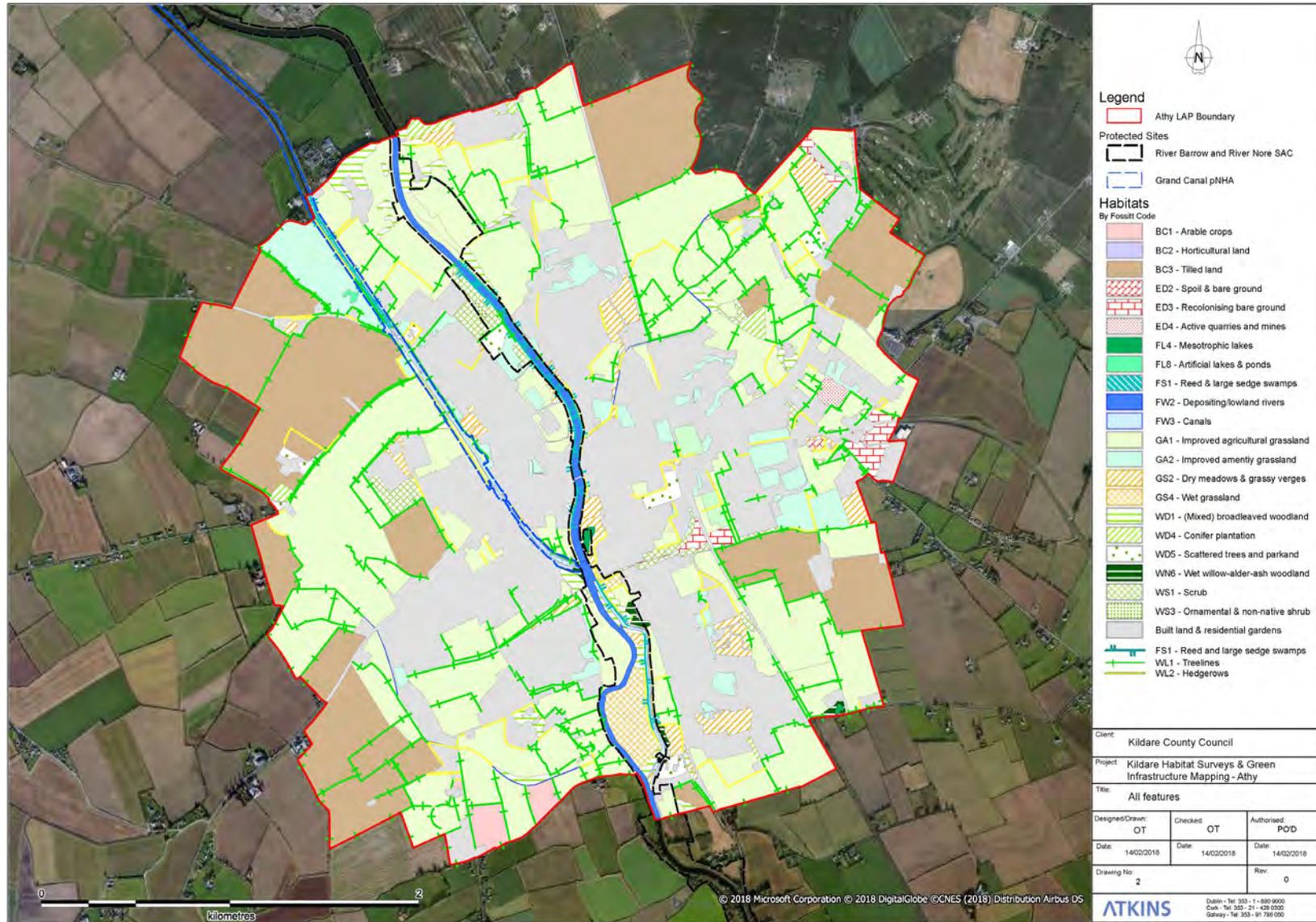
biodiversity areas) in the town. These routes are named, as outlined below, with regard to their most noticeable features and all are connected to the largest and most important piece of green infrastructure and ecological corridor – the River Barrow. These routes are also considered to constitute ‘*local biodiversity areas*’ and form a critical component of the town’s Green Infrastructure. **Map 4: Green Infrastructure Map** illustrates key aspects of these areas which should be protected.

- **River Barrow:** This local biodiversity area consists of the main river channel, bordering habitats, Ardreich Island and section of the disused rail line west of the confluence of the River Barrow and Grand Canal. Notable habitats located within this area includes many small pockets of mixed broadleaved woodland, long sections of reed swamp, the wetland/scrub mosaic north of Woodstock Castle ruins, significant amounts of dry meadows and grassy verges, “The Marina” mesotrophic lake, a number of semi-natural woodland areas within the study area, and the semi-natural wet grassland on Ardreich Island. The eastern section of the Grand Canal is also contained within this area, as is the linear woodland and semi-natural grassland bordering the disused rail line going west. Many of these habitats are also contained within the River Barrow and River Nore SAC.
- **Grand Canal:** This area consists of the western section of the Grand Canal within Athy, as well as its fringe and bankside habitats, and other habitats to the west connected by the treeline and hedgerow network. This route also connects to the wider landscape to the north of the study area. Notable habitats include the Canal itself as well as its fringe and bankside habitats. The network of linear woodland and scrub links Cardington House Golf Course and Athy Business Campus to this route. There are significant amounts of scrub and dry meadows, grassy verges, hedgerows, and treelines within this infrastructure route.
- **Bennetsbridge Stream:** The Bennetsbridge Stream has been identified within this study as a local biodiversity area. This site comprises of Bennetsbridge Stream and small areas of wooded river valley. The adjoining hedgerow and treeline system link the site to small remnants of planted woodland at Tonlegee.
- **The Rail Line:** The rail line green infrastructure route is focused to the south of Athy Railway Station. The habitats within this route are highly modified due to their proximity to an active rail line. However, the railway embankments provide a relatively contiguous corridor in the southeast of Athy which provides connectivity to the wider landscape. A key feature is a small area of semi-natural woodland and lake at Shanrath West; this is in private lands and managed by the Ballyroe Gun club as a nature reserve.
- **Athy Stream and Prusselstown:** This area is centred around the Athy Stream and adjoining habitats connected through the hedge network in the Prusselstown area. Athy Stream flows in a generally southwest direction before converging with the River Barrow within Athy town. While heavily altered in some sections, there is however a strong hedgerow network in the area of the Athy stream to the wider landscape. This route includes woodland and scrub areas in the region including that at Shamrock Lodge.

- **Barrowford:** Centred around Barrowford House and Demesne (outside the Plan boundary), this area includes many small sections of modified woodland which are interconnected through the hedge system in the area. The connectivity of this route to lands within the wider landscape is facilitated through its proximity to the River Barrow. The area has significant woodland directly adjacent to the River Barrow.

It is critical that these areas are safeguarded and given the opportunity to increase their extent and ecological function within the town by retaining links and supporting connectivity within the network. In addition, stepping stone habitats, including scattered trees and parkland as well as amenity areas within housing estates, further enhance the connectivity of habitats, and in turn, promote biodiversity across Athy.

Figure 9.1: Green Infrastructure Survey - All Habitat Features in Athy



Policy GI 1– Green Infrastructure

GI 1 *It is the policy of the Council to protect, enhance and further develop the Green Infrastructure network in Athy to provide a shared space for amenity, recreation and biodiversity to thrive and to strengthen links to the wider regional network.*

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

- GI1.1** Reduce fragmentation of the existing green infrastructure network while protecting and enhancing its biodiversity by strengthening ecological links including stepping stone habitats (according to their value).
- GI1.2** Integrate new and existing green infrastructure as an essential component of all new developments and to restrict development that would fragment, damage or prejudice the integrity of the green infrastructure network.
- GI1.3** Ensure the key green infrastructure and habitat features identified in **Map 4: Green Infrastructure Map**, and the linkages they provide to larger areas of green infrastructure and the wider countryside are retained and integrated into the design of new developments as far as practicable.
- GI1.4** Seek that development proposals also include an outline of measures to protect the retained green infrastructure of a site during the period of construction.
- GI1.5** Provide for wildlife bridges (eco links) as part of any new pedestrian and cycle links across the River Barrow, the Barrow Line Canal and railway, thereby facilitating the free movement of people and species throughout the Plan area.
- GI1.6** Promote a network of pedestrian and cycle paths to enhance accessibility to the green infrastructure network, while ensuring that the design and operation of the routes responds to the ecological protection needs of each site.
- GI1.7** **(a)** Maintain a biodiversity protection zone of 60 metres from the top bank of the River Barrow (including all areas covered by the River Barrow and River Nore SAC), 20 metres from the canal and not less than 10 metres from the top bank of smaller watercourses, with the full extent of the protection zone to be determined on a case-by-case basis by the Planning Authority, based on site specific characteristics and sensitivities. Strategic green routes and trails will be open for consideration within the biodiversity protection zone, subject to appropriate safeguards and assessments.²³
(b) Ensure that any development on the lands zoned ‘H: Industry and Warehousing’ located adjacent to the River Barrow at Townparks incorporates an appropriately landscaped riparian zone to seamlessly integrate with the lands to the south and east, which are subject to the development of a masterplan under objective OS1.8.
- GI1.8** Incorporate items of historical or heritage importance within the Green Infrastructure network as amenity features, where practical.
- GI1.9** Seek to protect trees with a particular local amenity or conservation value.
- GI1.10** Promote appropriate tree planting and pollinator friendly planting, in accordance with the recommendations of the *All Ireland Pollinator Plan* throughout Athy and in open spaces within new developments in order to enhance local biodiversity, visual amenity and surface water management.
- GI1.11** Protect and enhance the existing character and setting along the route of the Barrow Blueway.

Actions:

- All proposals for development will be required to demonstrate that the existing green infrastructure network is protected, in so far as practicable, and that the development

²³ Any such green route or trail should be designed in accordance with the guidelines and principles outlined in ‘*Planning for Watercourses in the Urban Environment*’ (Inland Fisheries Ireland, 2020).

contributes positively to the development and protection of the overall green infrastructure assets of Athy.

- Investigate opportunities for placement of bat boxes and/or bird nesting boxes along the River Barrow in conjunction with the Kildare Bat Group / Bat Conservation Ireland and BirdWatch Ireland (in partnership with the National Parks & Wildlife Service and Waterways Ireland).

9.4 Strategic Open Space

Open spaces form a vital part of the urban environment. Such amenity spaces create benefits not only for the enhancement of the quality of life of residential areas but also provide opportunities for recreational activities, education and biodiversity through the preservation and enhancement of green infrastructure as well as helping to mitigate the impacts of climate change. The existence of quality open spaces also improves the visual attractiveness of places to live and work; it helps to create a sense of place and identity and can improve the economic performance of a town by attracting visitors and inward investment.

A Social Infrastructure Audit was carried out to inform the Local Area Plan and to examine the availability and capacity of existing social infrastructure facilities in Athy and future requirements and to make recommendations based on anticipated population growth. The Audit was structured and carried out in the following manner;

1. Assessing the Existing Situation;
2. Future Demand Analysis; and
3. Social Infrastructure Recommendations.

The Existing Situation

There are 90.1 hectares of land zoned as 'F: Open Space and Amenity' within the plan area. These lands are used primarily for recreational and amenity purposes and represents 13.4% of the total area of the Plan.

Currently there is one Neighbourhood Park²⁴, within the plan area (13 ha) which comprises circa 19% of the total amenity open space provision in the study area. In addition to this neighbourhood park there is a local park (2 ha); green corridors (4.9 ha); sports areas (18.46 ha) and playgrounds (0.53 ha) with the remaining areas consisting of amenity green spaces and natural/semi-natural green spaces. The remaining spaces provide habitats for ecological purposes, a focal point for active and passive recreation, promote community interaction and help mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Future Demand Analysis

Using the UK's Fields In Trust (FIT) recommended benchmark guidelines for 'informal outdoor space' it was determined that Athy would provide an acceptable amount of open space. Currently there are 21.96 hectares of sport and recreation area per 1,000 population which complies with the FIT benchmark guidance. While this would decrease during the course of the Plan to 1.61 ha per 1000 persons taking account of the projected increase in population, this figure would still comply with FIT standards.

The *Kildare Open Space Strategy 2011*²⁵ highlights that Athy currently has the full complement of public open space types and Athy currently exceeds this strategy's recommended standard of 2 ha of open space per 1,000 persons. The population of Athy is envisaged to exceed 10,000 persons over the lifetime of this Local Area Plan. The open space *Kildare Open Space Strategy 2011* therefore recommends two local parks are required; one further local park is therefore proposed.

²⁴ Kildare County Council (September 2020) 'Athy Social Infrastructure Audit', Table 15, page 34.

²⁵ The Kildare Open Space Strategy is currently being reviewed and expected to be completed by the second quarter of 2021.

Furthermore, it was found that there is a significant shortage of play area facilities within the plan area. Play facilities, out-door gym equipment, benches and art installations should all be used to improve the quality of existing and proposed open spaces in Athy.

It was also noted there is currently a lack of sporting facilities in the western part of Athy. The proposed sports training hub (c. 5 ha) on Council owned lands at Ardrew is therefore welcomed. Whilst at an early stage of development it is envisaged the facility will be home to a range of active recreational activities and will have a number of training pitches.

Social Infrastructure Recommendations

There is an opportunity to enhance the green links between open spaces throughout Athy. These links vary in character from woodland and riverside/canalside walks to pathways within the urban context. These also have the potential to link historical points of interest. Many of the open spaces closer to the town centre and in the residential areas are also passive in nature. The introduction of amenities/facilities such as picnic tables, playgrounds or outdoor gym equipment should be considered and integrated into the existing open space network.

Amenity green space provision in Athy is over four times above FIT benchmark guidance. However, current playground provision is 0.055 per 1,000 people considerably short of the 0.25 FIT benchmark. Furthermore, it is noted the Kildare Open Space Strategy 2011 recommends that an additional 2 hectare local park in Athy with active uses is required once the population surpasses a population of 10,000 persons. These issues should be addressed within the lands identified as Natural / Semi-Natural Green Space in **Figure 9.2**.

Figure 9.2: Map of Natural / Semi-Natural Green Space



Source: Site Survey, Social Infrastructure Portal

Policy OS1 – Open Space

OS1 *It is the policy of the Council to provide for a hierarchy of high quality multi-functional public open spaces within Athy, and to preserve and protect such spaces through the appropriate zoning of lands.*

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

- OS1.1** Support the implementation of the proposed Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Strategy for County Kildare 2021 – 2031 with regards to its aims, recommendations and actions relating to the provision of open space and outdoor recreation infrastructure in Athy.
- OS1.2** Explore the feasibility of and develop and/or improve linkages and connections between the network of open spaces in Athy, without compromising the biodiversity along the banks of the River Barrow and banks of the Grand Canal.
- OS1.3** Continue to facilitate and promote community-managed gardens/allotments and green waste composting sites.
- OS1.4** Support and promote the development of a sports training hub (c. 5 ha) on Kildare County Council owned lands at Ardrew to cater for active recreation for residents.
- OS1.5** Support and facilitate the development of a new local eco-park (2 ha or larger in area) as part of the Dominican Lands Masterplan, which would provide active and passive recreation for residents, subject to appropriate environmental considerations.
- OS1.6** Cooperate with key stakeholders including landowners in the development (where appropriate) of universally accessible greenways and blueways, and other areas within Athy for recreational purposes, subject to appropriate environmental considerations.
- OS1.7** Promote and provide amenities and features such as playgrounds, outdoor gym equipment facilities and picnic tables in all open spaces to improve their quality and usability.
- OS1.8** Support the development and implementation of a masterplan for the Woodstock lands surrounding Woodstock Castle within the lifetime of the Local Area Plan.

10. Infrastructure and Environmental Services

Aim: To ensure that future residential, employment and commercial growth in Athy occurs in tandem with the delivery of supporting physical infrastructure whilst also incorporating appropriate climate change mitigation and adaptation measures.

The availability of high quality infrastructure networks and environmental services is critical to securing investment, creating sustainable and attractive places, ensuring the health and wellbeing of the community and safeguarding the environment. In this regard, a Sustainable Planning and Infrastructural Assessment (SPIA) was carried out to inform the appropriate zoning of land and has been published alongside this Local Area Plan.

10.1 Water Supply and Wastewater

Irish Water is responsible for the provision of public water services (water supply and foul drainage) on a national basis. Irish Water is mandated to provide both drinking water and wastewater capacity to facilitate future settlement growth, in line with national and regional planning policies and objectives, subject to the availability of funding, environmental and financial sustainability criteria. Kildare County Council retains its role in facilitating the provision of adequate water services, in conjunction with Irish Water, at a local level, through a Service Level Agreements (SLA).

In 2015 Irish Water published its Water Services Strategic Plan (WSSP), which sets out strategic objectives for the delivery of water services over a 25 year period and a context for investment and implementation plans. Irish Water and Kildare County Council will continue to work together to identify the water services required to support planned development in line with national and regional planning policies for inclusion in the Irish Water Capital Investment Plans.

Irish Water is currently preparing a National Water Resources Plan (NWRP). This strategic plan for water services will outline moves towards a sustainable, secure and reliable public drinking water supply over the next 25 years, whilst safeguarding the environment. The NWRP will outline how Irish Water intends to maintain the balance between the supply from water sources around the country and the demand for drinking water over the short, medium and long term. This will allow planning for the future and ensure the provision of sufficient safe, clean drinking water to facilitate the social and economic growth of Ireland. Kildare County Council will work with and support Irish Water in delivering the NWRP.

10.1.1 Water Supply

Census 2016 records that 92.5% of all households in the settlement of Athy are connected to the public mains network. The average water demand in the town is 3 million litres per day, as of Summer 2020. Since 2013, Athy has been served by the Srowland Water Treatment Plant, located to the north of the town.

While Athy is supplied from Srowland WTP, it also forms part of the overall Greater Dublin Area Water Resource Zone. Supply in this Water Resource Zone is constrained, therefore new connections will be prioritised for housing and domestic sanitation purposes. Connections for Non-Domestic supplies will be accommodated on a first come, first served basis. To protect current supplies, applicants for non-domestic demand may be asked to review their demand requirements. Irish

Water are developing the National Water Resource Plan which will identify solutions to improve supply over the life of this plan.

10.1.2 Wastewater

Census 2016 records that 91.3% of all households in the settlement of Athy are connected to the public sewerage scheme network. Wastewater is treated at the Athy Wastewater Treatment Plant at Fortbarrington Road located to the southwest of the town centre. The plant has an existing design capacity of 15,000PE with capacity for future expansion.

Following some recent modelling of the sewer network, some issues are appearing in a few areas that will require new systems to be implemented with the growth of the catchment. Where there are constraints, applications for developments would be on a first come, first served basis. If no project is associated with a constrained area, then any infrastructure improvements or upgrades will be developer led. Irish Water can work with developers to form the best solution for a particular site. This would be through the Connections and Developer Services section of Irish Water’s website: <https://www.water.ie/connections/developer-services/>

There should be sufficient headroom at Athy wastewater treatment plant to provide for the majority of the projected domestic population. However, as above, this will be on a first come, first served basis.

Policy I1 – Water Supply and Wastewater

I1 *It is the policy of the Council to work in conjunction with Irish Water to protect existing water and wastewater infrastructure in Athy, to maximise the potential of existing capacity and to facilitate the timely delivery of new water services infrastructure to facilitate future growth.*

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

- IO1.1** Work in conjunction with Irish Water to promote the ongoing upgrade and expansion of water supply and wastewater services to meet the future needs of Athy.
- IO1.2** Maximise the sustainable and efficient use of existing capacity in water services in the planning of new development.
- IO1.3** Seek to ensure that adequate water services will be available to service development prior to the granting of planning permission for development.
- IO1.4** Seek to ensure that development proposals comply with the standards and requirements of Irish Water in relation to water and wastewater infrastructure.

10.2 Surface Water and Ground Water

The management of surface water and protection of groundwater is an integral part of Kildare County Council’s sustainable water services policy. Adequate storm water drainage and retention facilities are necessary to accommodate surface water run-off resulting from current and future developments in Athy. The use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) and the provision/safeguarding green infrastructure in new developments is considered to be critical in contributing to surface water retention and consequently help to prevent and mitigate the effects of flooding, by aiding the natural drainage of a site. As noted in Section 2.2, such measures are

considered to be an essential part of mitigating the effects of climate change and creating a more climate resilient town.

The central objective of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD), to protect and restore good water quality, is carried out through the implementation of River Basin Management Plans in Ireland. Athy is located within the South Eastern River Basin District. This Water Management Unit contains the River Barrow, the Corrán Árd stream, the Moneen Stream and the Grand Canal waterbodies. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) notes the River Barrow as having a ‘Good’ quality status just north of the town, while to the south of the town, the Barrow along with the Corrán Árd stream is recorded as having ‘Poor’ water quality status²⁶.

The EPA has designated the groundwater within the area within the boundaries of the Local Area Plan as having a ‘Good’ quality status²⁷. In relation to groundwater risk, the EPA exams water quality and trends on an ongoing basis. Such data is used to highlight waterbodies that are at risk of deteriorating or being at less than ‘Good’ status in the future. In this regard, the majority of the area covered by the Local Area Plan is categorised as ‘Not at Risk’ but an area to the northwest of the town designated as in need of review.

The objective of the Plan is therefore to protect both surface waterbodies and groundwater aquifers from further deterioration and maintain or where necessary improve their quality over the period of the Local Area Plan and beyond.

Policy I2 – Surface Water and Groundwater

I2 *It is the policy of the Council to maintain and enhance the existing surface water drainage systems in Athy and to protect surface and ground water quality in accordance with the Water Framework Directive.*

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

- IO2.1** Carry out an audit of the existing surface water infrastructure to identify improvement works as required.
- IO2.2** Ensure that all new developments maintain surface water discharge at greenfield run-off rate, including an allowance for climate change.
- IO2.3** Incorporate Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) and other nature-based surface water drainage solutions as part of all plans and development proposals in Athy. Priority shall be given to SuDS that incorporate green infrastructure and promote biodiversity including green roofs, walls and rain gardens. Proposals for all new residential developments and for the development of ‘H’ and ‘Q’ zoned employment lands must consider the potential for SuDS to control surface water outfall and protect water quality, with underground retention solutions only being considered when all other options have been exhausted.
- IO2.4** Ensure that the capacity and efficiency of the national road network drainage regimes will be safeguarded for national road drainage purposes.

²⁶ Source: www.catchments.ie (the status of the waterbodies is designated in accordance with the WFD and cover the 2013-2018 period)

²⁷ Source: www.catchments.ie (the status of the groundwater is designated in accordance with the WFD and cover the 2013-2018 period)

- IO2.5** Maintain, improve and enhance the environmental and ecological quality of surface waters and groundwater in Athy in accordance with the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland and in conjunction with the Environmental Protection Agency.
- IO2.6** Require applicants, where necessary, to demonstrate that proposals will not negatively impact on any groundwater or surface water body and be compliant with the requirements of the Water Framework Directive and measures to protect and improve our water bodies set down in the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018 – 2021 and future cycles of this Plan.
- IO2.7** Protect both ground and surface water resources and to work with Irish Water to develop and implement Water Safety Plans to protect sources of public water supply and their contributing catchments.
- IO2.8** Ensure that development along urban watercourses must comply with the Inland Fisheries Ireland Guidance *'Planning for Watercourses in the Urban Environment'* (2020), including the maintenance of a minimum riparian zone of 35 metres for river channels greater than 10 metres in width, and 20 metres for rivers channels less than 10 metres in width. Development within this zone will only be considered for water compatible developments.²⁸

Action

- To encourage 'daylighting'/deculverting²⁹ and the restoration of culverted water bodies within the town as a natural method of flood management.

²⁸ Water compatible developments as defined in the OPW Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009)

²⁹ 'Daylighting' is the action of returning a culverted river to open water. At its simplest it is taking the lid off the culvert, but most designs aim to create a more natural river shape and re-introduce ecological habitats.

10.3 Flood Risk Management

While it is noted that Athy is vulnerable to flooding particularly from the River Barrow (see Figure 10.1), large areas of the floodplains within Athy are currently not built upon. In light of the increasing risk and frequency of flooding due to climate change and the need to achieve resilience within the town to mitigate its effects this Plan has taken measures to ensure these lands remain undeveloped. Floodplains and wetlands subject to flooding are therefore recognised and preserved in the Plan to the maximum extent possible, in both urban and rural areas, as essential green infrastructure that provides a natural defence against flood risk. In recognition of this and in light of their additional value as ecological corridors, the Plan seeks to develop an integrated green infrastructure network which focuses on the waterbodies within Athy, namely the River Barrow and the Grand Canal. These measures are required under the Kildare County Council Climate Adaptation Strategy 2019 - 2024 and integrated throughout the plan (see Section 2.2). Areas susceptible to flooding are identified on **Map 2: Strategy Flood Risk Map**.

Figure 10.1: Flooding Event Along the River Barrow Floodplain in Athy 2009



1D205377 Photo: © Peter Barrow Photographers 23rd November 2009. Tel: 0872 559638.

Athy

A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA), as required by the *Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2009) has informed the preparation of the Plan. This Plan avoids development in areas at risk of flooding as identified by the SFRA and has substituted vulnerable land uses with a less vulnerable use where this is not possible. Where neither is possible, mitigation and management of risks must be proposed. Justification tests³⁰ were carried out on a number of sites and are detailed in the SFRA report accompanying this Plan. The SFRA has recommended that development proposals for a number of areas within the plan boundary should be the subject of site-specific flood risk assessment appropriate to the nature and scale of the

³⁰ Justification tests are used to assess the appropriateness of developments in flood risk areas. For further detail, refer to the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment which accompanies the Local Area Plan.

development being proposed. The SFRA of the Plan is informed by the South Eastern Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) study which was undertaken by the OPW to manage river catchment flooding.

10.3.1 Athy Flood Relief Scheme

The outputs of the CFRAM studies have informed the preparation of various flood risk management plans (FRMPs) to deal with fluvial flood risk in County Kildare, which were adopted by the Council in July 2018. As part of Tranche 1 there is a flood relief scheme (FRS) proposed for Athy. This scheme has been prioritised by the Office of Public Works (OPW) and will provide protection to existing residential and commercial properties at risk from fluvial (river based) flooding to 1% Annual Exceedance Probability (AEP) event standard of protection (roughly equivalent to a 1 in 100-year storm). It is noted that this scheme has and will continue to integrate climate change considerations into its design, planning and construction.

The Council is currently developing a brief for consultancy services for the design of the Athy FRS. The first stage of this brief will include a review of the hydrology and environmental survey. It is likely that the scheme will involve construction of defences along both sides of the River Barrow in the town centre. It is envisaged that these works can be incorporated into landscaping features.

10.3.2 Site Specific Flood Risk Assessment

All development proposals taking place in areas that Kildare County Council have applied a Justification Test, where a residual flood risk remains, should be supported by an appropriately detailed Site-Specific Flood Risk Assessment (SSFRA). The level of detail within the FRA will depend on the risks identified and the land use proposed. Applications should apply the use of the sequential approach in terms of the site layout and design and, in satisfying the Justification Test (where required), the proposal must demonstrate that appropriate mitigation and management measures are put in place. The development should ensure that no encroachment onto, or loss of, the flood plain shall occur. Only water compatible development such as Open Space would be permitted for the lands which are identified as being at risk of flooding within that site. For any development in flood risk areas that meet the Development Plan Justification Test, a Development Management Justification Test must then be applied. Development must satisfy all of the criteria of the Development Management Justification Test as per **Box 5-1 of the Flood Risk Management Guidelines**. This chapter provides a broad overview of the requirements of FRAs which should accompany planning applications.

Policy I3 – Flood Risk Management

I3 *It is the policy of the Council to manage flood risk in Athy in conjunction with the Office of Public Works and in accordance with the requirements of the Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009) and circular PL02/2014 (August 2014).*

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

- IO3.1** Manage flood risk in Athy in accordance with the requirements of *The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities*, DECLG and OPW (2009) and Circular PL02/2014 (August 2014).
- IO3.2** Ensure development proposals within the areas where Kildare County Council have applied a Justification Test and where residual flood risk remains as outlined on **Map 2 Strategic Flood Risk Map** are the subject of a Site-Specific Flood Risk Assessment, appropriate to the nature and scale of the development proposed.
- IO3.3** Maintain all existing overland flow routes.
- IO3.4** Support and co-operate with the OPW in delivering the Athy Flood Relief Scheme, subject to the statutory environmental considerations.
- IO3.5** Ensure that all development proposals apply the sequential approach in terms of the site layout and design and, in satisfying the Justification Test (where required), the proposal shall demonstrate that appropriate mitigation and management measures are put in place. The development proposals should ensure that no encroachment onto, or loss of, the flood plain shall occur. Only water compatible development such as Open Space would be permitted for the lands which are identified as being at risk of flooding within that site.

10.4 Energy Supply and Communications

The electricity infrastructure of Athy comprises one 110KV Station at Woodstock South with two associated 110KV lines. There is capacity available in Athy for industries and other demand uses wishing to locate in the town. This Plan seeks to continue to encourage and facilitate the undergrounding of overhead electricity cables in built-up areas, particularly in the town centre, during the lifetime of this Plan.

Athy was linked to the national gas pipeline network in 1999 and is served via a spur from the Cork to Dublin mainline pipe. GAS Networks Ireland (GNI) operates and maintains a modern gas network in Athy. GNI note that there are currently no constraints on the network with maintenance work being regularly undertaken to ensure it continues to run optimally. Gas customers in the town benefit from a reliable network with typically zero downtime. The gas network in Athy currently serves areas of the town where it is economically viable to provide a service. GNI supports the expansion of the gas network within settlements in line with its approved Connections Policy which ensures that any further expansion of the network is completed in an economically feasible manner. As of July 2020, GNI have no plans to expand the gas network in Athy.

Broadband is readily available in Athy from a number of telecoms providers, which have developed a network of infrastructure serving the area and provide various types of connectivity from fixed line to wireless and mobile broadband.

Policy I4 – Energy and Communications

I4 *It is the policy of the Council to promote and facilitate the development and renewal of energy and communications networks in Athy, while protecting the amenities of the town.*

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

- IO4.1** Support the statutory providers of electricity and gas infrastructure by safeguarding existing infrastructure and strategic corridors from encroachment by development that might compromise the operation, maintenance and provision of energy networks.
- IO4.2** Support and facilitate the provision of telecommunications infrastructure, including broadband services in Athy, subject to safety and amenity requirements.
- IO4.3** Seek the undergrounding of all electricity, telephone and television cables within built-up areas in the town.
- IO4.4** Discourage a proliferation of above ground utility boxes in the town and to seek screening measures in conjunction with the provision of such structures.
- IO4.5** Promote and encourage the use of renewable energy technologies in existing and proposed building stock within the boundaries of the Local Area Plan subject to consideration of environmental, conservation and visual requirements.

Action

- To liaise with EirGrid, ESB Networks and telecommunications providers in relation to the rationalisation of transmission and telecommunications infrastructure and/or underground routing of overhead lines in Athy.

10.5 Pollution and Environmental Services

It is a priority of this Plan that pollution and environmental services in Athy conform with European, national and regional policy in relation to pollution control (air, noise and light) and waste management and to maintain and improve environmental services and amenities in the town.

Kildare County Council recognises the importance of maintaining Athy free from litter and protecting it from indiscriminate dumping and bill postering. Along with fulfilling its statutory obligations, the Council will endeavour to work with the Tidy Towns Committee, schools and local residents' associations, along organisations such as Waterways Ireland to increase awareness of waste recycling and litter control.

Refuse collection in Athy is currently carried out by a number of private contractors. The Civic Amenity Centre located at Gallowshill, off the Dublin Road, in Athy is operated by AES under license by Kildare County Council. This facility provides a significant service to the local community and accepts a wide range of recyclable materials including glass, paper, cardboard, hazardous household waste, material, plastic and cans. There is also a bring bank recycling facility for bottles and cans located in the car park at Edmund Rice Square in the centre of the town. The Council seeks to expand recycling opportunities in Athy by establishing another local bring bank facility at an appropriate location within the town.

The GEO portal of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) www.epa.ie/EPAMaps under the heading of Health and Wellbeing) maps the air quality levels and noise pollution of the major settlements in the country. Athy is stated as having achieving category '1 – Good' on their air quality

index. The portal does not have (as of Summer 2020) any noise pollution maps for the town. However, Objective HCO2.3 (see Chapter 4) requires that residential schemes in close proximity to heavily trafficked roads within the Plan area should incorporate comprehensive noise mitigation measures into their planning and design.

Policy I5 – Pollution and Environmental Services

I5 *It is the policy of the Council to protect environmental quality in Athy through the implementation of European, national and regional policy and legislation relating to air quality, greenhouse gases, climate change, light pollution, noise pollution and waste management.*

Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

- IO5.1** Adequately maintain recycling facilities and to secure the provision of additional facilities, as required, including in conjunction with development.
- IO5.2** Support the development of a local bring bank recycling facility at an appropriate location, proximate to either the Stradbally Road or Kilkenny Road, within the boundaries of the Local Area Plan.
- IO5.3** Avoid, prevent or reduce harmful effects on human health and the environment as a whole through promoting the preservation of best ambient air quality with sustainable development.
- IO5.4** Support the take-up and use of ultra-low emissions vehicles and encourage, through the development management process the provision of electric vehicle charging infrastructure, where appropriate.

11. Implementation

Aims:

- ***To phase new development to ensure that it occurs in an orderly and efficient manner in accordance with the principles of proper planning and sustainable development.***
- ***To ensure that all new residential development and infill development occurs in tandem with the delivery of supporting physical and social infrastructure.***

11.1 Implementation Strategy

This Local Area Plan sets out a clear and strategic vision for the development of Athy in the period to 2027 and beyond. This vision is in accordance with the role identified for Athy at both county and regional levels and seeks to make that town a more attractive place to live, work, visit and do business. In order for the vision to be realised it is critical that the projected population growth is accompanied by the delivery of the necessary site servicing and social infrastructure requirements. The identification of critical infrastructure that needs to be delivered in tandem with the planned development of the town forms the basis of the following documents:

- Sustainable Planning and Infrastructural Assessment (SPIA)
- Athy Social Infrastructure Audit (SIA)
- Athy Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA)

These audits and assessments provide a strong evidence base which has informed key policy objectives and provisions of this Plan, including the Phasing and Infrastructure Delivery Schedule for new residential development lands, as outlined in Section 11.3. This seeks to ensure that such development in a sustainable and co-ordinated manner in order to maximise integration of new residential neighbourhoods into the existing community.

This chapter also contains an urban design brief and framework map for lands at Ardrew which the Plan has designated a Key Development Area. These lands, which are under the ownership of Kildare County Council, are also designated to be the location of a proposed 'Sports Training Hub'. This new facility is considered to form an essential component of the future recreation and amenity infrastructure of the town (see Section 11.2).

Lastly, this chapter outlines the Land Use Zoning Objectives for Athy (Section 11.4) along with the Land Use Zoning Matrix (Section 11.5)

11.2 Ardrew Key Development Area

The Ardrew Key Development Area (KDA) is considered to constitute a strategic site within the town. Whilst, a portion of the lands, has the capacity to accommodate some residential development, the majority (circa 5 ha) of the KDA will be set aside for the development of a future sports training hub.

The design brief (Table 11.1) and urban design framework (Figure 11.1) illustrates an overarching design concept for the lands which has been based on an appraisal of area and its surrounding contextual environment. It is intended to set out the broad parameters for the development of the site and is designed to assist all parties involved in the planning process including the Council, design teams and residents. While the principal access points, pedestrian connections and key building frontages should generally be regarded as fixed requirements, a degree of flexibility will apply. This takes into consideration any design or on-site issues which may arise. Key building frontages and the layout of the urban blocks may also be varied where it is demonstrated that there is a strong urban design rationale and that passive supervision of public spaces will not be compromised (see Table 11.1, below).

Table 11.1: Ardrew Key Development Area Design Brief

Vision

To develop the lands for infill residential development and facilitate the creation of a '*sports training hub*' which will incorporate various passive and active recreational facilities, whilst also providing a much needed training space for clubs in western part of the town.

Connectivity/ Movement

Vehicular access to the KDA will be via a single point of entry from Fortbarrington Road which borders the east of the site. The main vehicular route through the lands will also provide access to a car parking area which will service the '*sports training hub*'. The KDA should provide for a high quality permeable form, which integrates with surrounding residential areas, allowing ease of access to what will be an important recreational and amenity space. It is crucial that options for potential connections to future development sites surrounding the KDA are not closed-off. All roads and streets in the KDA should be designed in accordance with the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS).

Built Form

Whilst only covering a portion of the site, the built form should provide for a legible development which has regard to the residential amenity of the existing neighbourhood. The built form should provide for a strong level of passive supervision both around dedicated open spaces areas and along the interface with the sports training hub lands. This site will generally accommodate a density in the order of 30 units per hectare. It is noted that the urban design framework for the KDA incorporates the proposed extension to the halting site to the southeast. As provided for by the provisions of the Local Area Plan regarding special needs housing (see Section 4.4), the extended halting site will be accommodating a reduced level of density.

Landscape and Spaces

Provide for a minimum of 15% quality open space within the residential lands. Retain as far as possible, the existing green infrastructure (i.e. trees and hedgerows and mature vegetation) in the KDA, as outlined in Map 4: Green Infrastructure Map. An indicative layout of the training hub is provided which is intended to show the possible sports facilities that could be accommodated on the site.

Figure 11.1: Ardrew KDA Urban Design Framework



Key

Access route to car parking		Extended halting site	
Pedestrian connections		Existing hedgerow/vegetation	
Residential block		Landscape reinforcement	
Key building frontage		Indicative changing facilities	
Strategic open space		Indicative location of playground	

11.3 Phasing and Infrastructure Delivery Schedule

The development of new residential areas within this Local Area Plan will be dependent on the timely delivery of a wide range of infrastructure. The Sustainable Planning and Infrastructure Assessment (SPIA) which accompanies the Plan provides an assessment of transportation, water and wastewater utilities, community and social infrastructure and services that will be required for the development of the KDA lands. **Table 11.2** sets out the key infrastructure necessary and funding sources, in a staged delivery schedule, in order to achieve the timely delivery of the objectives of the Athy Local Area Plan 2021-2027.

The outputs of the sustainable planning and infrastructural assessment have informed the overall development strategy and the policies and objectives of the Athy Local Area Plan, specifically the zoning proposals for lands zoned ‘C: *New Residential*’. The Plan seeks to ensure that the required infrastructural and site-servicing requirements for these lands, as outlined in the SPIA and the Area Based Transport Assessment, are delivered prior to or in tandem with development of these sites, where appropriate and reasonable.

Note: In relation to childcare provision all new residential development in the town including on the sites below is required to provide the pro rata childcare requirements as outlined in Objective HCO3.3 of this Plan and in the Kildare County Development Plan.

The lifetime of this Plan is six years, and the delivery schedule is divided into several phases with the delivery plan of servicing infrastructure to be carried out during the plan period and beyond:

<u>Immediate term</u>	Year 1 and Year 2
<u>Short term</u>	Year 3 to Year 4
<u>Medium term</u>	Year 5 to Year 6
<u>Long term</u>	7 years +
<u>On-going</u>	Throughout the plan lifetime and beyond

Table 11.2: KDA Phasing, Infrastructure, Delivery Schedule and Expected Funding Sources

C: New Residential – Chanterlands		
Infrastructure	Delivery Schedule	Funding Sources
Roads and Transportation		
Implement measures identified in the Athy Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA) and the Athy Local Area Plan 2021-2027.	Medium – Long Term - In tandem with new development.	Developer, State, KCC
General cycling infrastructure improvements.	On-going - In tandem with new development.	Developer, State, KCC
New junction for pedestrian/cycle traffic onto the Athy Distributor Road and access to paths along the River Barrow.	On-going - In tandem with new development.	Developer, State, KCC
Water and Wastewater		
Sewers and watermains in estate immediately to the west (10 metres) but would have to be reviewed for	On-going – Subject to IW agreement prior to development.	Developer, State (IW)

suitability. Downstream combined sewer to be checked		
Town centre drainage upgrade works planned but no project yet.	Medium – Long Term	Developer, State (IW)
Drainage, SuDs and Flooding		
No known fluvial flood risk on this site.	On-going - In tandem with new development.	Developer, State, KCC, (OPW)
Open Space Provision		
Provision of open space and recreational areas	To be carried out in tandem with new development and completed prior to the occupation of all units.	Developer
C: New Residential – Adjacent to the Primary Care Centre		
Infrastructure	Delivery Schedule	Funding Sources
Roads and Transportation		
Implement measures identified in the Athy Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA) and the Athy Local Area Plan 2021-2027.	Medium – Long Term - In tandem with new development.	Developer, State, KCC
Recent Primary Care Centre development set back boundary which allows for a 3-metre-wide combined walkway/ cycleway. This site already has linkage to New N78 section/ M9. Once Carlow Road is rerouted it will have nearby access to the Athy Distributor Road	Complete	Developer, State, KCC
Water and Wastewater		
Site is not serviced nearest sewer is 150m in adjoining estate to the west. However, this goes into a combined sewer downstream that could be constrained. There is a watermain 80m to the east of the north of the site.	On-going – Subject to IW agreement prior to development.	Developer, State (IW)
Drainage, SuDs and Flooding		
No known fluvial flood risk on this site.	On-going - In tandem with new development.	Developer, State, KCC, (OPW)
Open Space Provision		
Provision of open space and recreational areas	To be carried out in tandem with new development and completed prior to the occupation of all units.	Developer
C: New Residential – Tomard		
Infrastructure	Delivery Schedule	Funding Sources
Roads and Transportation		
Implement measures identified in Athy Area Based Transport Assessment and the Athy Local Area Plan 2021-2027.	Medium – Long Term - In tandem with new development.	Developer, State, KCC
General cycling infrastructure improvements.	On-going - In tandem with new development.	Developer, State, KCC

Water and Wastewater		
Sewer and watermains in adjacent housing estates but would have to be reviewed for suitability. Combined sewers to the south could be constrained	On-going – Subject to IW agreement prior to development.	Developer, State (IW)
Town centre drainage upgrade works planned but no project yet.	Medium – Long Term	Developer, State (IW)
Drainage, SuDs and Flooding		
Fluvial flooding ³¹ in higher return periods ³² along the line of the stream at the site boundary. It may be possible to mitigate the flood risk through the construction of a flood risk management scheme. This would require a site-specific assessment and a catchment-based approach which would demonstrate that the mitigation of any existing risk would not result in increased flood risk elsewhere. There are no plans to reduce the flood risk on these lands as the OPW will only provide funding when existing properties are at risk.	On-going - In tandem with new development.	Developer, State (IW)
Open Space and Recreation		
Provision of open space and recreational areas.	To be carried out in tandem with new development and completed prior to the occupation of all units.	Developer
C: New Residential and F: Open Space and Amenity – Ardrew Key Development Area		
Infrastructure	Delivery Schedule	Funding Sources
Roads and Transportation		
Implement measures identified in the Athy Area Based Transport Assessment and the Athy Local Area Plan 2021-2027.	Medium – Long Term - In tandem with new development.	Developer, State, KCC
General cycling infrastructure improvements.	On-going - In tandem with new development.	Developer, State, KCC
Water and Wastewater		
Dependent on-site levels, there is a 225 sewer in the road to the east of the site. Also, a watermain is present.	On-going subject to agreement with IW.	Developer, State (IW)
Drainage, SuDs and Flooding		
No known fluvial flood risk on this site.	On-going - In tandem with new development.	Developer, State, KCC, (OPW)

³¹ Fluvial flooding occurs when rivers and streams break their banks and water flows out onto the adjacent low-lying areas (the natural floodplains). This can arise where the runoff from heavy rain exceeds the natural capacity of the river channel and can be exacerbated where a channel is blocked or constrained or, in estuarine areas, where high tide levels impede the flow of the river out into the sea. https://www.floodinfo.ie/about_frm/types_and_causes/ (OPW)

³² A Return Period is the period the estimated average time between flood events (e.g. the 100-year flood), although it is noted this period may not be the length of time that will elapse between two such events occurring (e.g. two 100-year floods may occur within the period of 5 years rather than once every 100 years). https://www.floodinfo.ie/about_frm/types_and_causes/ (OPW)

Open Space Provision		
Ensure provision is in line with the design brief and urban design framework provided in Section 11.2 of the Plan.	On-going - To be carried out in tandem with new development and completed prior to the occupation of all units.	Developer, State, KCC
C: New Residential – Blackparks		
Infrastructure	Delivery Schedule	Funding Sources
Roads and Transportation		
Implement measures identified in Athy Area Based Transport Assessment and the Athy Local Area Plan 2021-2027.	Medium – Long Term - In tandem with new development.	Developer, State, KCC
<p>General cycling infrastructure improvements.</p> <p>Improvements needed to Fortbarrington Road L8990, localised where new Athy Distributor Road crosses L8990.</p> <p>Site will be accessed by car from the Fortbarrington Road only, protecting the capacity of the new distributor road</p>	On-going – In tandem with new development.	Developer, State, KCC
Water and Wastewater		
No IW Sewer, adjacent to this site (not on GIS) Could link in with site no. 5 to the south, dependent on site levels or longer route down the road. Watermain in road to the east.	On-going subject to agreement with IW.	Developer, State (IW)
Drainage, SuDs and Flooding		
No known fluvial flood risk on this site.	On-going - In tandem with new development.	Developer, State, KCC, (OPW)
Open Space Provision		
Provision of open space and recreational areas	To be carried out in tandem with new development and completed prior to the occupation of all units.	Developer

11.4 Land Use Zoning Objectives

The land use zoning objectives for Athy are illustrated on **Map 6; Land Use Zoning Map** and should be read in conjunction with Table 11.3: Land Use Zoning Objectives, Table 11.4: Definition of Terms and Table 11.5: Land Use Zoning Matrix.

Table 11.3: Land Use Zoning Objectives

Ref	Use	Land-Use Zoning Objectives
A	Town Centre	To protect, improve and provide for the future development of the town centre.
B	Existing Residential / Infill	To protect and enhance the amenity of established residential communities and promote sustainable intensification.
C	New Residential	To provide for new residential development.
E	Community and Educational	To provide for education, recreation, community and health.
F	Open Space and Amenity	To protect and provide for open space, amenity and recreation provision.
N	Neighbourhood Centre	To provide for new/existing neighbourhood centres and associated facilities.
H	Industry and Warehousing	To provide for industry, manufacturing, distribution and warehousing. <i>H lands – Athy West (Bennetsbridge Road)</i> a) Access to these lands shall be via the existing industrial lands to the immediate east. No further access shall be permitted on to the N78 national primary route. b) The development of these lands shall be subject to a site-specific transport assessment to protect the integrity and carrying capacity of the N78 at this location.
I	Agricultural	To retain and protect agricultural uses.
Q	Enterprise and Employment	To provide for and facilitate the provision of high job-generating uses. ³³
L	Leisure and Amenity	To provide for tourism and leisure facilities.
U	Transport and Utilities	To provide for the needs of transport and utility uses.
SR	Strategic Reserve	To protect strategic lands from inappropriate forms of development which would impede the orderly expansion of the strategic urban centre.

³³ Note: This zoning designation takes into consideration the development of Athy Food, Drinks and Skills Innovation Hub which will be located at the former Model School site. The proposed hub will also have ancillary training and education facilities. Such a provision is supported by Objective EDT01.12 (Chapter 6 Economic Development, Enterprise and Tourism).

Table 11.4: Zoning Matrix – Definition of Terms

Term	Definition
Permitted in Principle (Y)	Land uses designated under each zoning objective as 'Permitted in Principle' are generally acceptable, subject to compliance with those objectives as set out in other chapters of this Plan.
Open for Consideration (O)	Land uses shown as 'Open for Consideration' are uses that are not considered acceptable in principle in all parts of the relevant land use zone. However, such uses may be acceptable in circumstances where the Council is satisfied that the proposed use would not conflict with the general objectives for the zone and the permitted or existing uses as well as being in the interests of the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.
Not Permitted (N)	Land uses which are indicated as ' <i>Not Permitted</i> ' in the Land Use Zoning Matrix (see Table 11.5) will not be permitted.
Other Uses	Proposed land uses not listed in the matrix will be considered on the merits of the individual planning application, with reference to the most appropriate use of a similar nature indicated in the table and in relation to the general policies and zoning objectives for the area.
Non-Conforming Uses	Existing established uses that are inconsistent with the primary zoning objective, where legally established by continuous use for the same purpose prior to 1 st October 1964 or by a planning permission and will not be subject to legal proceedings under the Act in respect of their continued use. Where extensions or improvements of premises accommodating these uses are proposed each shall be considered on its merits in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area (see Section 6.4).
Transitional Areas	<p>While the zoning objectives indicate the different uses permitted in each zone it is important to avoid abrupt transitions in scale and use at the boundary of adjoining land use zones. In these areas it is necessary to avoid developments that would be detrimental to amenity.</p> <p>In zones abutting residential areas, particular attention will be paid to the uses, scale, density and appearance of development proposals and to landscaping and screening proposals in order to protect the amenities of residential properties.</p> <p>Development abutting amenity and open space will generally facilitate the passive supervision of that space, where possible by fronting onto it.</p>

11.5 Land Use Zoning Matrix

The land use zoning objectives for Athy are illustrated on **Map 6: Land Use Zoning Map** and should be read in conjunction with Table 11.3: Land Use Zoning Objectives, Table 11.4: Definition of Terms, and Table 11.5: Land Use Zoning Matrix, below.

Table 11.5: Land Use Zoning Matrix

<i>Land Use</i>	A – Town Centre	B - Existing Residential/Infill	C – New Residential	E – Community and Educational	F – Open Space and Amenity	N – Neighbourhood Centre	H - Industry and Warehousing	I - Agriculture	Q – Enterprise & Employment	L – Leisure and Amenity	U – Transport and Utilities
Amusement Arcade	O	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Agricultural Buildings	N	N	N	N	N	N	O	Y	N	N	N
Car Park (other than ancillary)	Y	N	N	O	N	O	O	N	O	O	O
Betting Office	O	N	N	N	N	O	N	N	N	N	N
Cemetery	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	O	N	N	N
Cinema	O	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Community / Recreational / Sports buildings	Y	O	O	Y	Y	O	N	O	N	Y	N
Crèche / Playschool	Y	O	Y	Y	N	O	N	N	O	O	N
Cultural Uses / Library	Y	O	O	Y	O	O	N	N	N	O	N
Dancehall / Disco	O	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	O	N
Dwelling	Y	Y	Y	O ³⁴	N	O	N	O ³⁵	N	N	N
Emergency Residential Accommodation	Y	O	O	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	O	N
Funeral Homes	Y	N	N	O	N	O	N	N	N	N	N
Garage / Car Repairs	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
Group/Special Needs Housing ³⁶	Y	Y	Y	O	N	O	N	O	N	N	N

³⁴ Ancillary to health/community use, and/or to meet special needs housing.

³⁵ Subject to Rural Housing Policy as outlined in the Kildare County Development Plan.

³⁶ For further information on group/special needs housing refer to Section 4.4.1 of this Plan.

Land Use	A – Town Centre	B - Existing Residential/Infill	C – New Residential	E – Community and Educational	F – Open Space and Amenity	N – Neighbourhood Centre	H - Industry and Warehousing	I - Agriculture	Q – Enterprise & Employment	L – Leisure and Amenity	U – Transport and Utilities
Guest House/Hotel/ Hostel	Y	O	O	N	N	O	N	O	N	Y	N
Heavy Commercial... ...Vehicle Park	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	O
Hot Food take away	O	N	N	N	N	O	N	N	N	N	N
Industry (Light)	O	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	O	N	N
Industry (General)	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	O
Medical Consultant / Health Centre	Y	O	O	Y	O ³⁷	Y	N	N	O	O	N
Motor Sales	O	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
Nursing Home	Y	Y	Y	O	N	N	O ³⁸	O	N	N	N
Offices	Y	O ³⁹	O ³⁹	N	N	O	O	N	O	N	N
Park/ Playground	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	O	N	O	N	Y	N
Petrol Station	N	N	O	N	N	O	Y	N	O	N	O
Place of Worship	Y	O	O	Y	N	O	N	N	N	O	N
Playing Fields	O	O	O	Y	Y	N	N	O	O	Y	N
Pub	Y	N	O	N	N	O	N	N	N	O	N
Restaurant	Y	O	O	N	N	O	N	N	O	O	N
School	Y	O	O	Y	O	N	N	N	N	N	N
Shop (Comparison)	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Shop (Convenience)	Y	O ⁴⁰	O ⁴⁰	N	N	O ⁴¹	N	N	O ⁴¹	N	N

³⁷ Only where the existing Open Space and Amenity can be offset to a suitable alternative site.

³⁸ Nursing homes will only be ‘Open for Consideration’ within the zoning designation ‘H: Industry and Warehousing’ on lands located to the south/east of the R418 at Dublin Rd. / Gallowshill and denoted by ‘H*’ on Map Ref. 6 Land Use Zoning Map.

³⁹ Proposals of this nature shall be restricted to circa 100m².

⁴⁰ No single unit shall exceed 100 m² of the net retail space.

⁴¹ No single unit shall exceed 200 m² of the net retail space to a maximum number of three units. The total net retail space shall not exceed 300 m².

<i>Land Use</i>	A – Town Centre	B - Existing Residential/Infill	C – New Residential	E – Community and Educational	F – Open Space and Amenity	N – Neighbourhood Centre	H - Industry and Warehousing	I - Agriculture	Q – Enterprise & Employment	L – Leisure and Amenity	U – Transport and Utilities
Stable Yard	N	N	N	N	O	N	N	Y	N	N	N
Tourist Related Facilities	Y	O	O	O	O	O	N	O	N	O	N
Utility Structures	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	Y
Warehouse (Wholesale) / Store / Depot	O	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N



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**Athy Local Area Plan
 2021 - 2027**

Legend :

- Local Area Plan Boundary
- County Boundary
- Town Centre Regeneration Area
- Paths Associated with New Roads Options
- New Connectivity Links
- Greenway
- Barrow Blueway
- Other Existing Path/Bridge Improvement
- Proposed Pedestrian / Cyclist Bridge
- Athy Distributor Road
- River / Canal / Lakes
- Distance from Town Centre (at 400m intervals)

Note: This map needs to be read in conjunction with Table 7.1 of the Plan

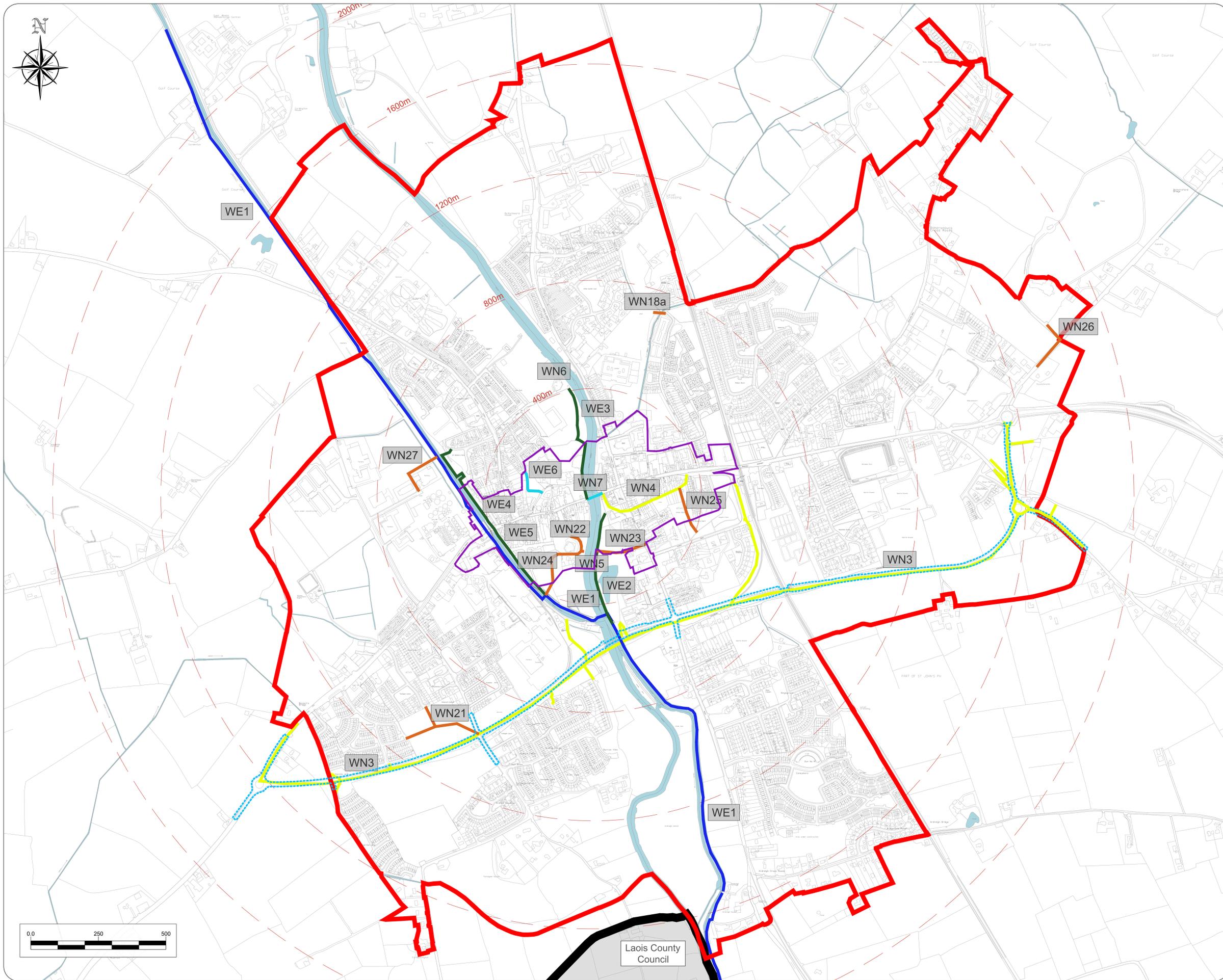
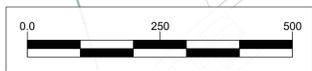
Stage	Date	Description
Plan Effective	13/09/2021	Date the plan comes into effect
Plan Adopted	03/08/2021	Plan Adopted
Draft	17/12/2020	Draft Plan

**Movement & Transport
 Walking and Connectivity Measures**

Scale: N.T.S.	Map Ref.: 1.1
Date: August 2021	Drawing No.: 200/21/1115

Drawn by: M O'Loughlin	Checked by: L Crawford	Approved by: D Jordan
Date: 04/08/2021	Date: 08/09/2021	Date: 08/09/2021

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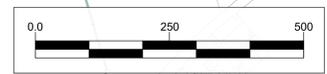
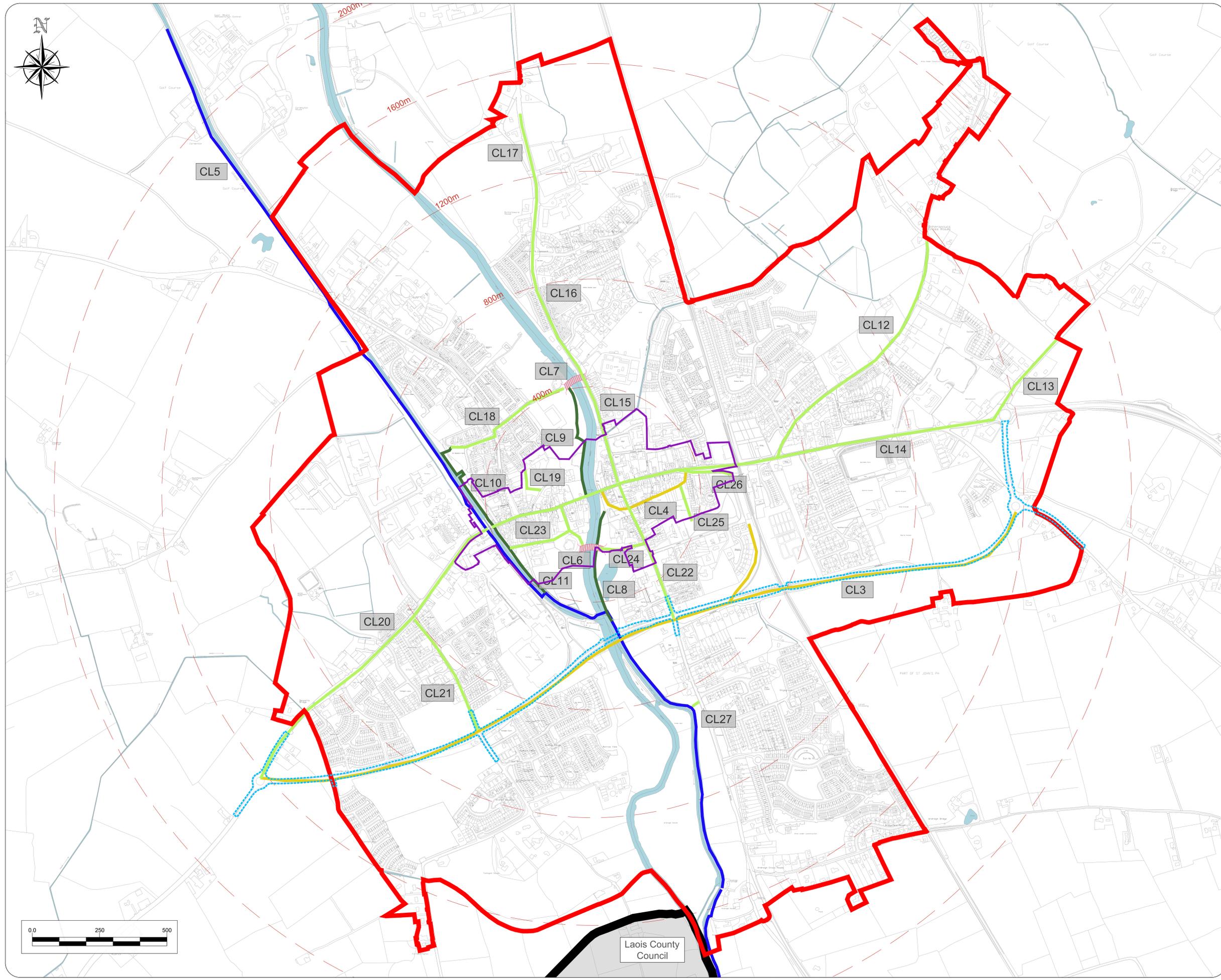
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 Áras Chill Dara,
 Devoy Park, Naas, Co Kildare.

**Athy Local Area Plan
 2021 - 2027**

Legend :

- Local Area Plan Boundary
- County Boundary
- Town Centre Regeneration Area
- New Roads / Streets Option
- Cycle Track / Lane
- Greenway
- Barrow Blueway
- Proposed Pedestrian / Cyclist Bridge
- Athy Distributor Road
- River / Canal / Lakes
- Distance from Town Centre
(at 400m intervals)

**Note: This map needs to be
 read in conjunction with Table
 7.2 of the Plan**



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Stage	Date	Description
Plan Effective	13/09/2021	Date the plan comes into effect
Plan Adopted	03/08/2021	Plan Adopted
Draft	17/12/2020	Draft Plan

**Movement & Transport
 Cycling Measures**

Scale:	N.T.S.	Map Ref.:	1.2
Date:	August 2021	Drawing No.:	200/21/1115

Checked by:	Checked by:	Approved by:
M O'Loughlin	L Crawford	D Jordan
Date: 04/08/2021	Date: 08/09/2021	Date: 08/09/2021

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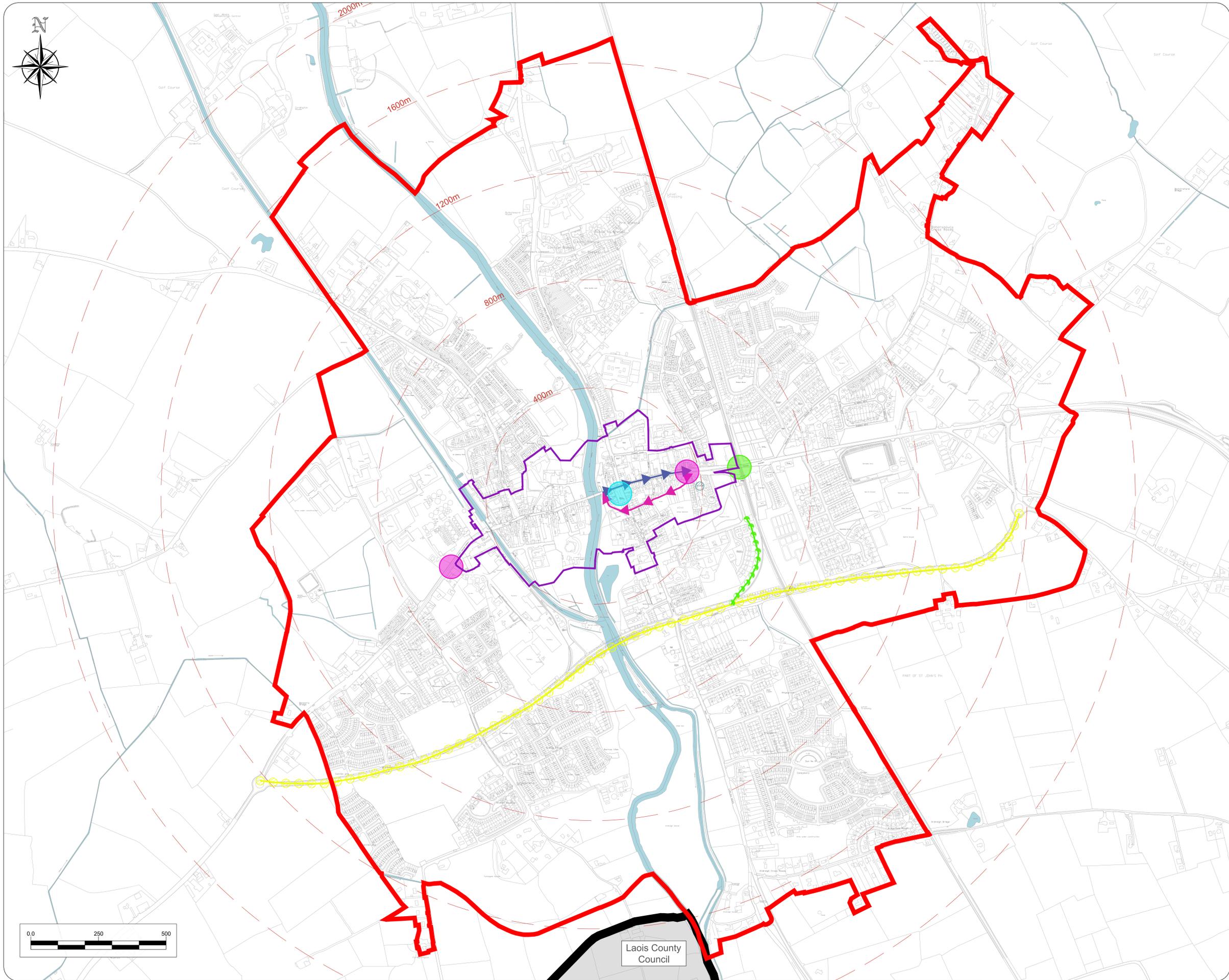


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**Athy Local Area Plan
 2021 - 2027**

Legend :

-  Local Area Plan Boundary
-  County Boundary
-  Town Centre Regeneration Area
-  Athy Distributor Road
-  Athy Distributor Road (Pedestrian / Cycle Spur to Train Station)
-  New Town Centre Street
One way system (east to west)
-  Leinster Street
One way system (west to east)
-  Reservation to allow for upgrading of railway bridge
-  Western & Eastern Gateways
-  Changes to Road Network due to Emily Square Public Realm Upgrade
-  River / Canal / Lakes
-  Distance from Town Centre (at 400m intervals)



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Stage	Date	Description
Plan Effective	13/09/2021	Date the plan comes into effect
Plan Adopted	03/08/2021	Plan Adopted
Draft	17/12/2020	Draft Plan

**Movement & Transport
 Roads and Streets Network Measures**

Scale: N.T.S.	Map Ref.: 1.3
Date: August 2021	Drawing No.: 200/21/1115

Drawn by: M O'Loughlin	Checked by: L Crawford	Approved by: D Jordan
Date: 04/08/2021	Date: 08/09/2021	Date: 08/09/2021

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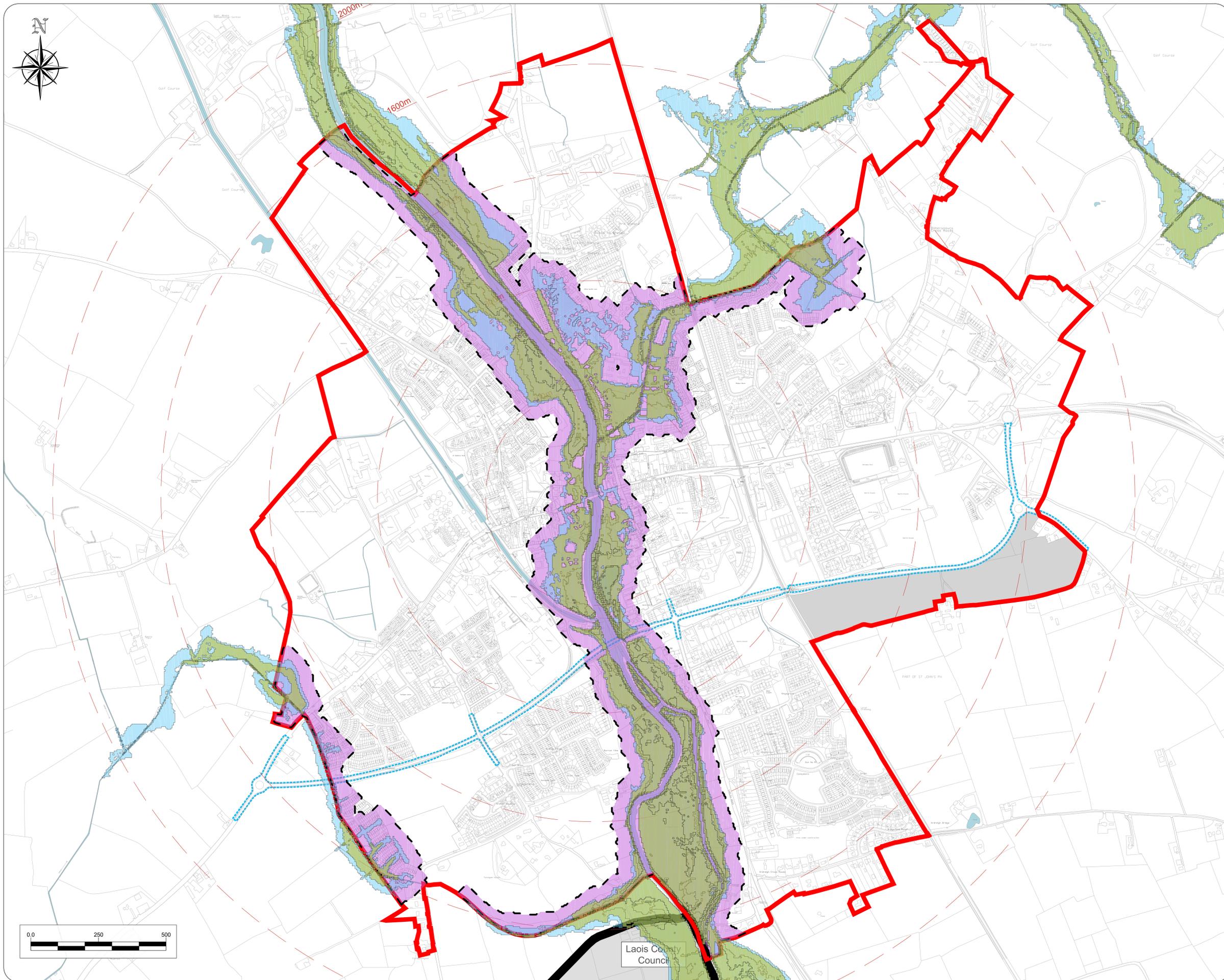


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**Athy Local Area Plan
 2021 - 2027**

Legend :

- Local Area Plan Boundary
- County Boundary
- Athy Distributor Road
- River / Canal / Lakes
- Distance from Town Centre
(at 400m intervals)
- Athy Flood Risk Assessment Zone
- Flood Risk Zone A (1% AEP)
- Flood Risk Zone B (0.1% AEP)



Stage	Date	Description
Plan Effective	13/09/2021	Date the plan comes into effect
Plan Adopted	03/08/2021	Plan Adopted
Draft	17/12/2020	Draft Plan

Strategic Flood Risk Map

Scale: N.T.S.	Map Ref.: 2
Date: August 2021	Drawing No.: 200/21/1116

Drawn by: M O'Loughlin	Checked by: L Crawford	Approved by: D Jordan
Date: 04/08/2021	Date: 08/09/2021	Date: 08/09/2021

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 Development Department
 Áras Chill Dara,
 Devoy Park, Naas, Co Kildare.

**Athy Local Area Plan
 2021 - 2027**

Legend :

- Local Area Plan Boundary
- County Boundary
- Town Centre Regeneration Area
- Athy Distributor Road
- River / Canal / Lakes
- Distance from Town Centre (at 400m intervals)
- Athy Flood Risk Assessment Zone
- Flood Risk Zone A (1% AEP)
- Flood Risk Zone B (0.1% AEP)
- A: Town Centre [M2]
- B: Existing / Infill Residential [R2.6]
- C: New Residential [R1.6]
- E: Community and Education [S1, 2, 6]
- F: Open Space and Amenity [G4, 6]
- H: Industry and Warehousing [C2.2]
- I: Agricultural [P1]
- L: Leisure & Amenity [C5]
- N: Neighbourhood Centre [M3]
- Q: Enterprise and Employment [C3]
- SR: Strategic Reserve
- U: Transport and Utilities [N]

Stage	Date	Description
Plan Effective	13/09/2021	Date the plan comes into effect
Plan Adopted	03/08/2021	Plan Adopted

**Strategic Flood Risk Map
 Zoning Underlay**

Scale: N.T.S.	Map Ref.: 2a
Date: August 2021	Drawing No.: 200/21/1116

Drawn by: M O'Loughlin	Checked by: L Crawford	Approved by: D Jordan
Date: 04/08/2021	Date: 08/09/2021	Date: 08/09/2021

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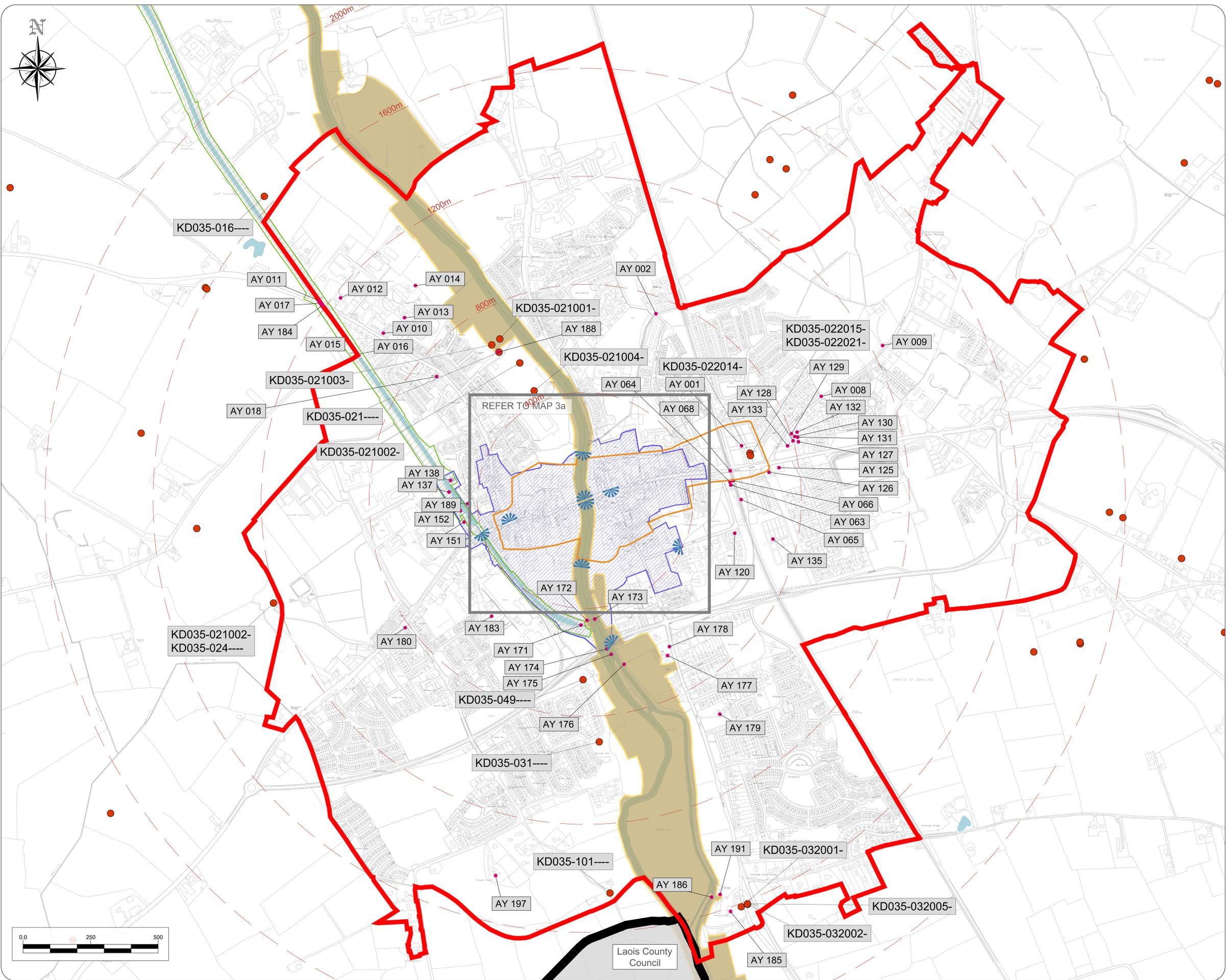


Laois Co
 Council



**Athy Local Area Plan
 2021 - 2027**

- Legend :**
- Local Area Plan Boundary
 - County Boundary
 - Zone of Archaeological Potential
 - Proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA)
002104 - Grand Canal
 - Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
002162 - River Barrow and Nore SAC
 - Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) Boundary
 - Sites & Monuments Record (SMR)
 - Record of Protected Structures (RPS)
 - Views and Prospects to be Preserved
 - River / Canal / Lakes



Stage	Date	Description
Plan Effective	13/09/2021	Date the plan comes into effect
Plan Adopted	03/08/2021	Plan Adopted
Draft	17/12/2020	Draft Plan

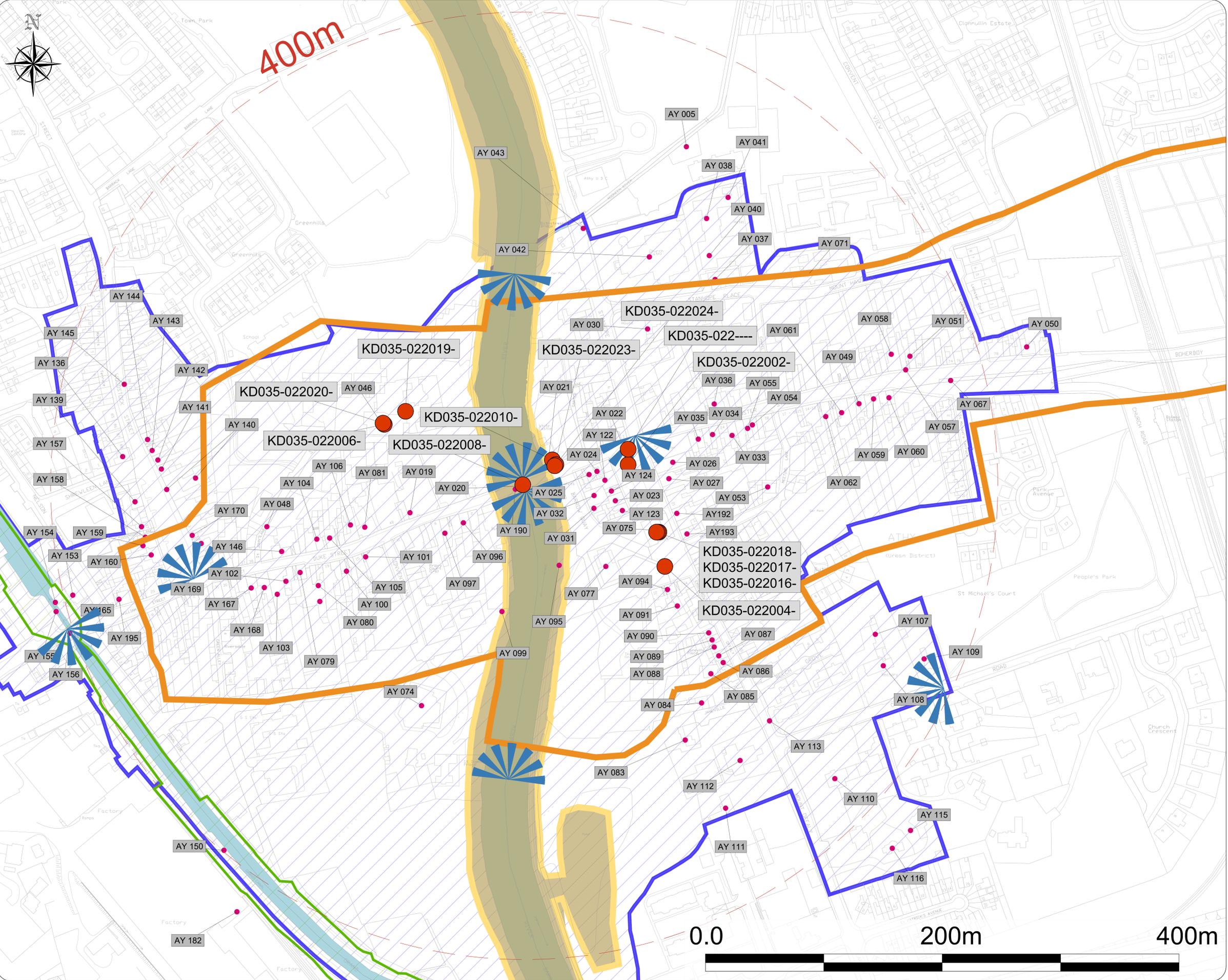
Built Heritage & Archaeology Map

Scale: N.T.S.	Map Ref.: 3
Date: August 2021	Drawing No.: 200/21/1117

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**Athy Local Area Plan
 2021 - 2027**

- Legend :**
- Zone of Archaeological Potential
 - Proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA) 002104 - Grand Canal
 - Special Area of Conservation (SAC) 002162 - River Barrow and Nore SAC
 - Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) Boundary
 - Sites & Monuments Record (SMR)
 - Record of Protected Structures (RPS)
 - Views and Prospects to be Preserved
 - River / Canal / Lakes

Stage	Date	Description
Plan Effective	13/09/2021	Date the plan comes into effect
Plan Adopted	03/08/2021	Plan Adopted
Draft	17/12/2020	Draft Plan

**Built Heritage & Archaeology
 Map - Town Centre**

Scale: N.T.S.	Map Ref.: 3a
Date: August 2021	Drawing No.: 200/21/1117

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**Athy Local Area Plan
 2021 - 2027**

Legend :

Local Area Plan Boundary

County Boundary

Notable Green Infrastructure Routes

River Barrow

Grand Canal

Bennetsbridge Stream

Rail Line

Athy Stream & Prusseltown

Barrowford

**Key Features Of Green Infrastructure
 For Retention**

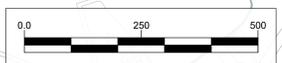
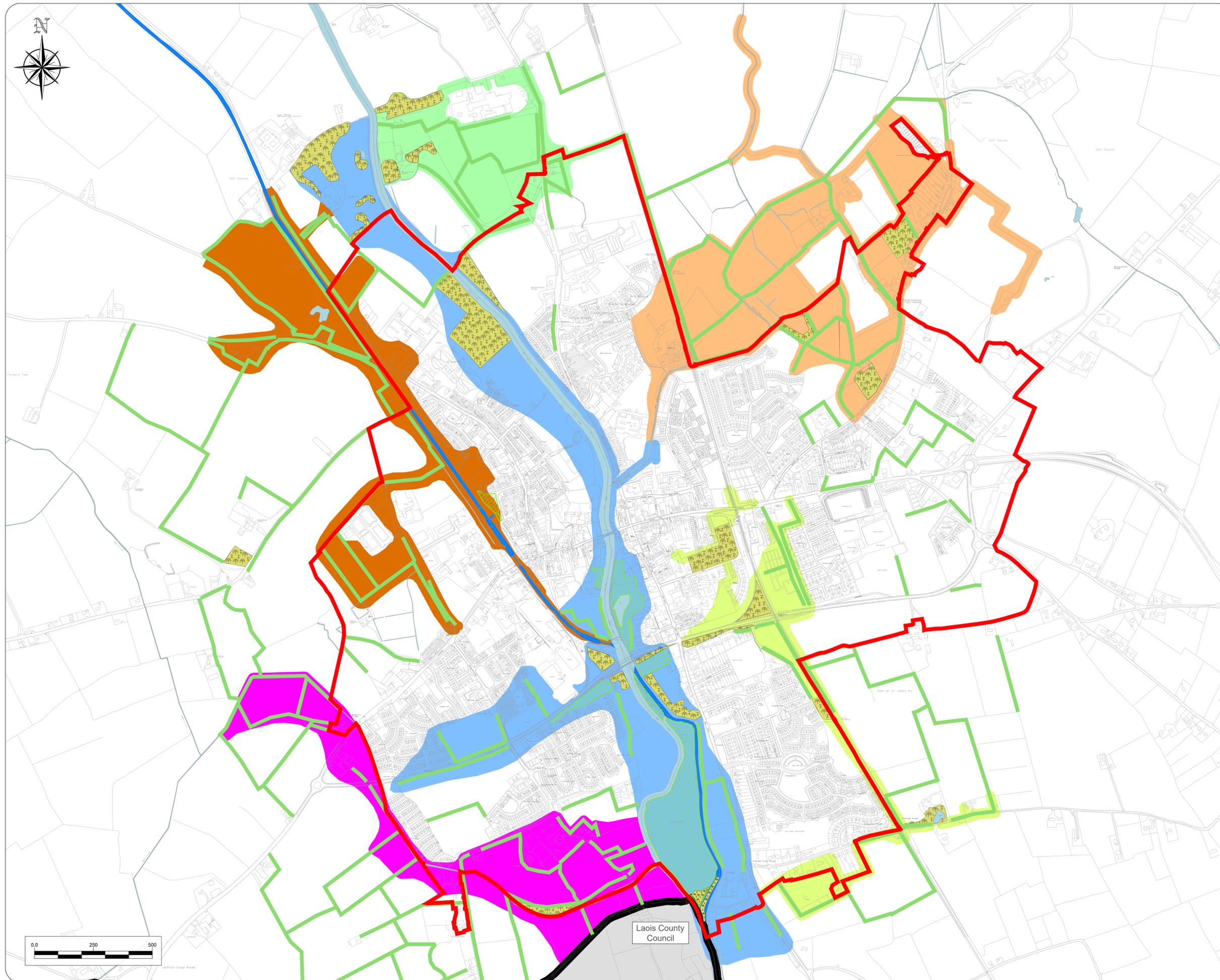
Woodland / Scrub

Wet Grassland

River Barrow

Grand Canal - Barrow Line

Hedgerow & Tree lines



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Stage	Date	Description
Plan Effective	13/09/2021	Date the plan comes into effect
Plan Adopted	03/08/2021	Plan Adopted
Draft	17/12/2020	Draft Plan

Green Infrastructure Map

Scale:	N.T.S.	Map Ref.:	4
Date:	August 2021	Drawing No.:	200/21/1119

Checked by:	Checked by:	Approved by:
M O'Loughlin	L Crawford	D Jordan
Date: 04/08/2021	Date: 08/09/2021	Date: 08/09/2021

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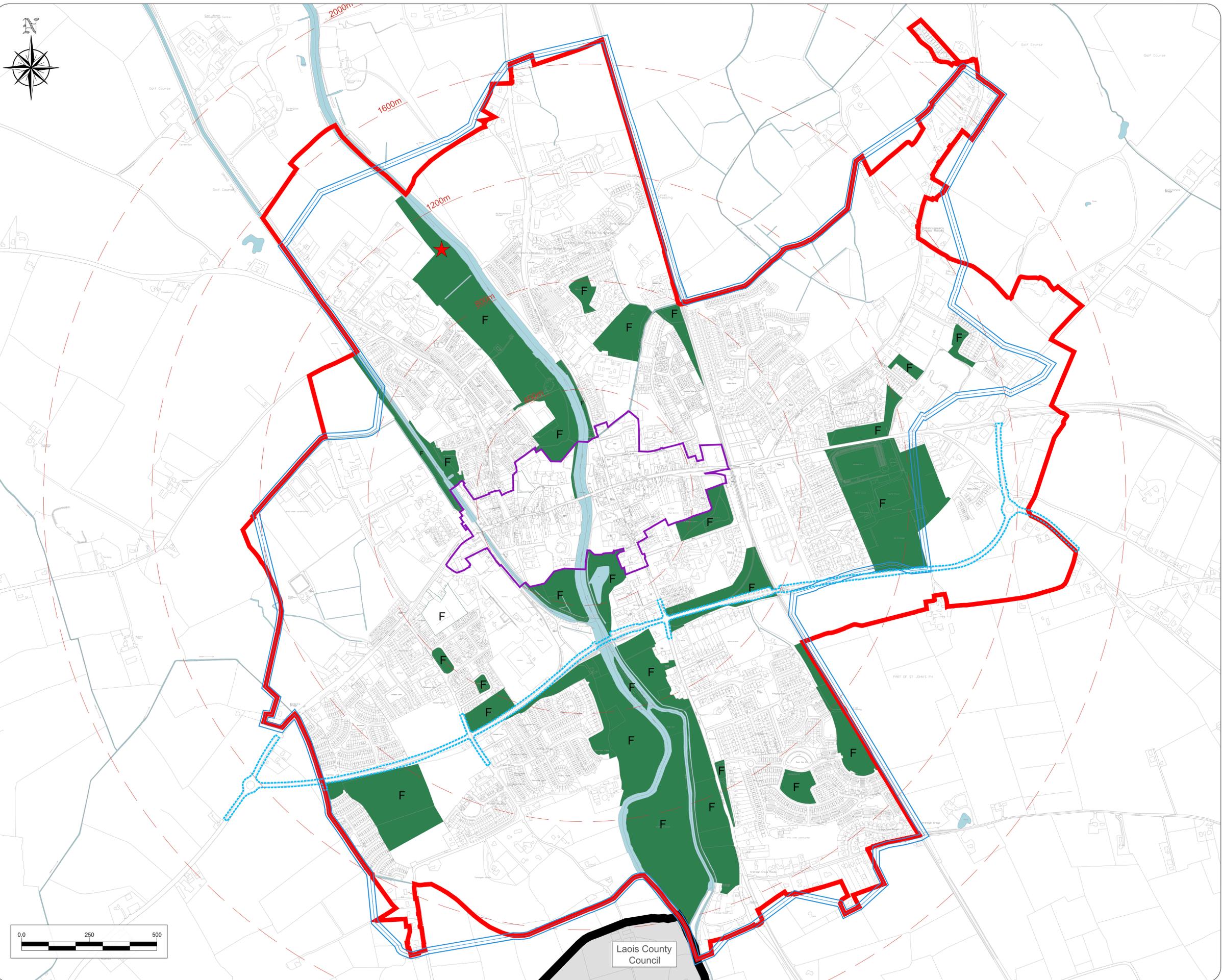
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 Áras Chill Dara,
 Devoy Park, Naas, Co Kildare.

**Athy Local Area Plan
 2021 - 2027**

Legend :

- Local Area Plan Boundary
- County Boundary
- Town Centre Regeneration Area
- CSO Settlement Boundary 2016
(centered on middle line)
- F: Open Space and Amenity [G4, 6]
- Athy Distributor Road
- River / Canal / Lakes
- Distance from Town Centre
(at 400m intervals)

Please refer to Objective
 GI.7(B) of the Written
 Statement



Laois County
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Stage	Date	Description
Plan Effective	13/09/2021	Date the plan comes into effect
Plan Adopted	03/08/2021	Plan Adopted
Draft	17/12/2020	Draft Plan

Strategic Open Space Map

Scale: N.T.S.	Map Ref.: 5
Date: August 2021	Drawing No.: 200/21/1120

Drawn by: M O'Loughlin
 Checked by: L Crawford
 Approved by: D Jordan
 Date: 04/08/2021 Date: 08/09/2021 Date: 08/09/2021

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 Planning & Strategic
 Development Department
 Áras Chill Dara,
 Devoy Park, Naas, Co Kildare.

**Athy Local Area Plan
 2021 - 2027**

Legend :

- Local Area Plan Boundary
- CSO Settlement Boundary 2016 (centered on middle line)
- County Boundary
- Town Centre Regeneration Area
- A: Town Centre [M2]
- B: Existing / Infill Residential [R2.6]
- C: New Residential [R1.6]
- E: Community and Education [S1, 2, 6]
- F: Open Space and Amenity [G4, 6]
- H: Industry and Warehousing [C2.2]
- I: Agricultural [P1]
- L: Leisure & Amenity [C5]
- N: Neighbourhood Centre [M3]
- Q: Enterprise and Employment [C3]
- SR: Strategic Reserve
- U: Transport and Utilities [N]
- Athy Distributor Road
- River / Canal / Lakes
- Distance from Town Centre (at 400m intervals)

The area of land within the 'B: Existing Residential/Infill' zone that is located within an area identified as a Flood Risk Assessment Zone, adjacent to Fortbarrington Road shall be used for open space purposes only within any permitted residential development as part of the overall landholding.

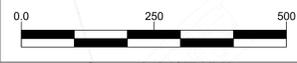
Stage	Date	Description
Plan Effective	13/09/2021	Date the plan comes into effect
Plan Adopted	03/08/2021	Plan Adopted
Material Alterations	27/04/2021	Report on Material Alterations and Motions received
Material Alterations	01/04/2021	Report on Material Alterations and Motions received
Submissions	10/03/2021	Chief Executive's Report
Draft	17/12/2020	Draft Plan

Land Use Zoning Map

Scale: N.T.S.	Map Ref.: 6
Date: August 2021	Drawing No.: 200/20/1114

Drawn by: M O'Loughlin
 Checked by: L Crawford
 Approved by: D Jordan
 Date: 04/08/2021 Date: 08/09/2021 Date: 08/09/2021

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Athy Urban Regeneration Framework
Appendix 1 of the
Athy Local Area Plan 2021-2027

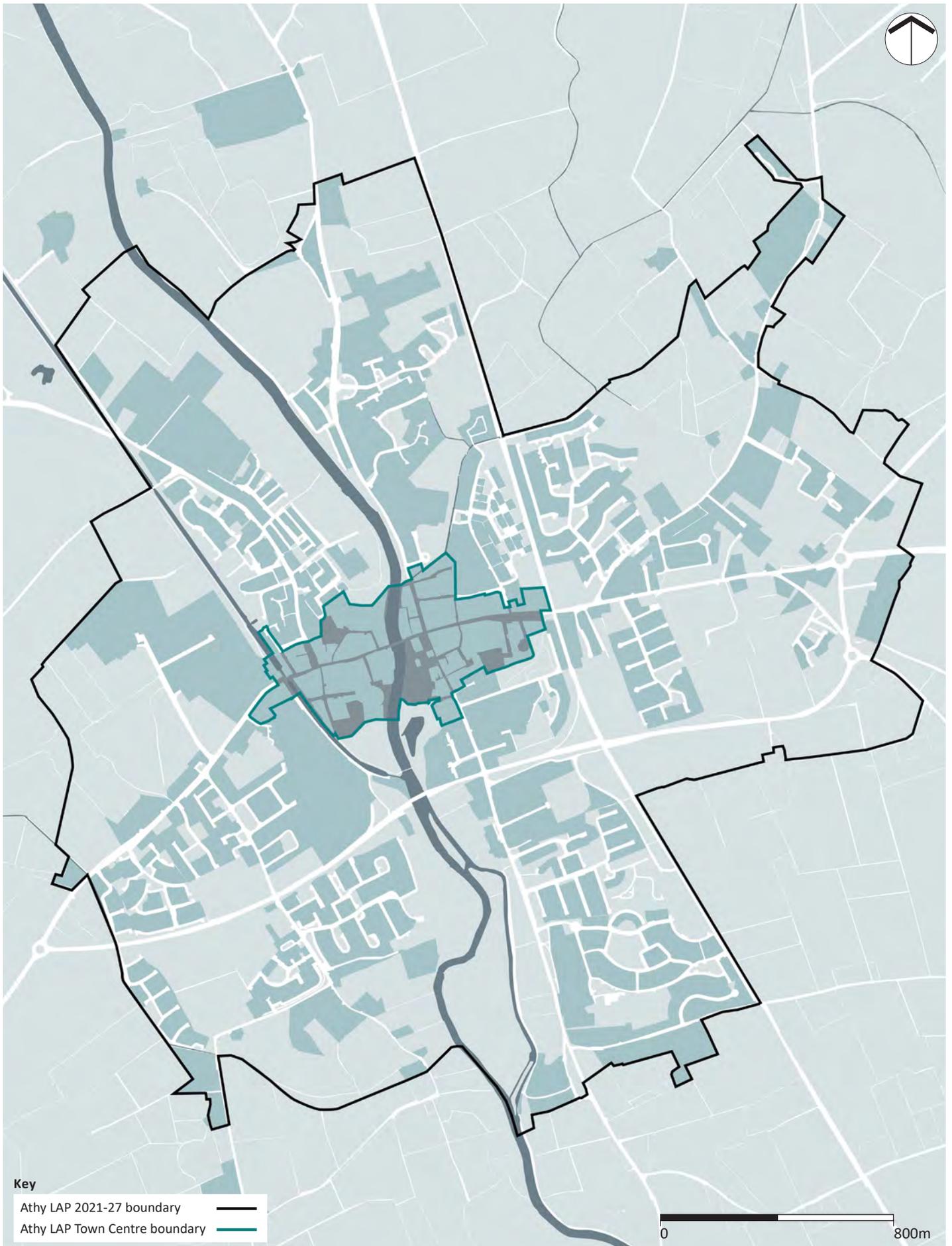


Athy Urban Regeneration Framework

Appendix 1 of the Athy Local Area Plan 2021-2027

All images and illustrations are in the ownership of Kildare County Council unless otherwise stated.

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1. Introduction and Context

1.1 Introduction

The Urban Regeneration Framework for Athy sets out a strategy to guide and co-ordinate various projects which will help to rejuvenate the town whilst also providing a platform for its future sustainable development. While applying to Athy as a whole, the framework primarily focuses on the regeneration of the historic and commercial core by identifying and presenting opportunities to improve the retail and commercial attractiveness of the town centre; creating revitalised streets and public spaces; facilitating and providing for the development and improvement of appropriate town centre activities including retail, residential, cultural, tourist and amenity uses. The framework also seeks to promote sustainable mobility within Athy by increasing connectivity and prioritising sustainable movement routes to key destinations within the town.

1.2 Purpose and Structure

The purpose of the Athy Urban Regeneration Framework is to assist in the realisation of a number of important provisions set out in the Athy Local Area Plan 2021-2027. Accordingly, this document can be considered to be a first but necessary step towards the implementation of the vision for the town as outlined in Section 2.3 of the Local Area Plan.

Designed to act as a holistic response to the weaknesses identified in the town, the Framework adopts a tailored approach in seeking to overcome the current developmental challenges affecting Athy, whilst also aiming to maximise the potential of its unique built and natural assets in order to instigate transformative place-based change in the town. In this regard, the Framework has a long term focus that extends beyond the life of the Plan, where its role is also to assist and contribute to a model of low carbon development and the creation of a climate resilient, healthy and more inclusive settlement.

The Framework has been constructed so that it can be presented as a comprehensive supporting document alongside any future application for funding for urban regeneration and development projects within the town, as identified in the document.

The Athy Urban Regeneration Framework has been structured as follows:

- Part 1:** *Introduction and Context* – Setting out the Framework’s over-arching policy context, this section will also outline its central role and purpose and detail how it incorporates elements of previous plans and strategies undertaken in the town.
- Part 2:** *Urban Quality Analysis* – This section investigates the current urban environment in Athy, highlighting its weaknesses and identifying the town’s inherent strengths to be built-on and used as a basis for rejuvenation and self-sustaining growth.
- Part 3:** *Areas of Opportunity* – Identified character areas will be the focus of examination of potential transformative place-based change with the aim of improving the liveability of Athy for its residents whilst also enhancing the overall visitor experience. On a larger scale, linkages and accessibility within the town will also be examined. The Framework will conclude with a series of identified priority projects selected on the basis of their ability to kick-start regeneration within the town.

Figure 1.1: (opposite page) Athy and its hinterland

1.3 Aligning with National and Regional Planning Policy

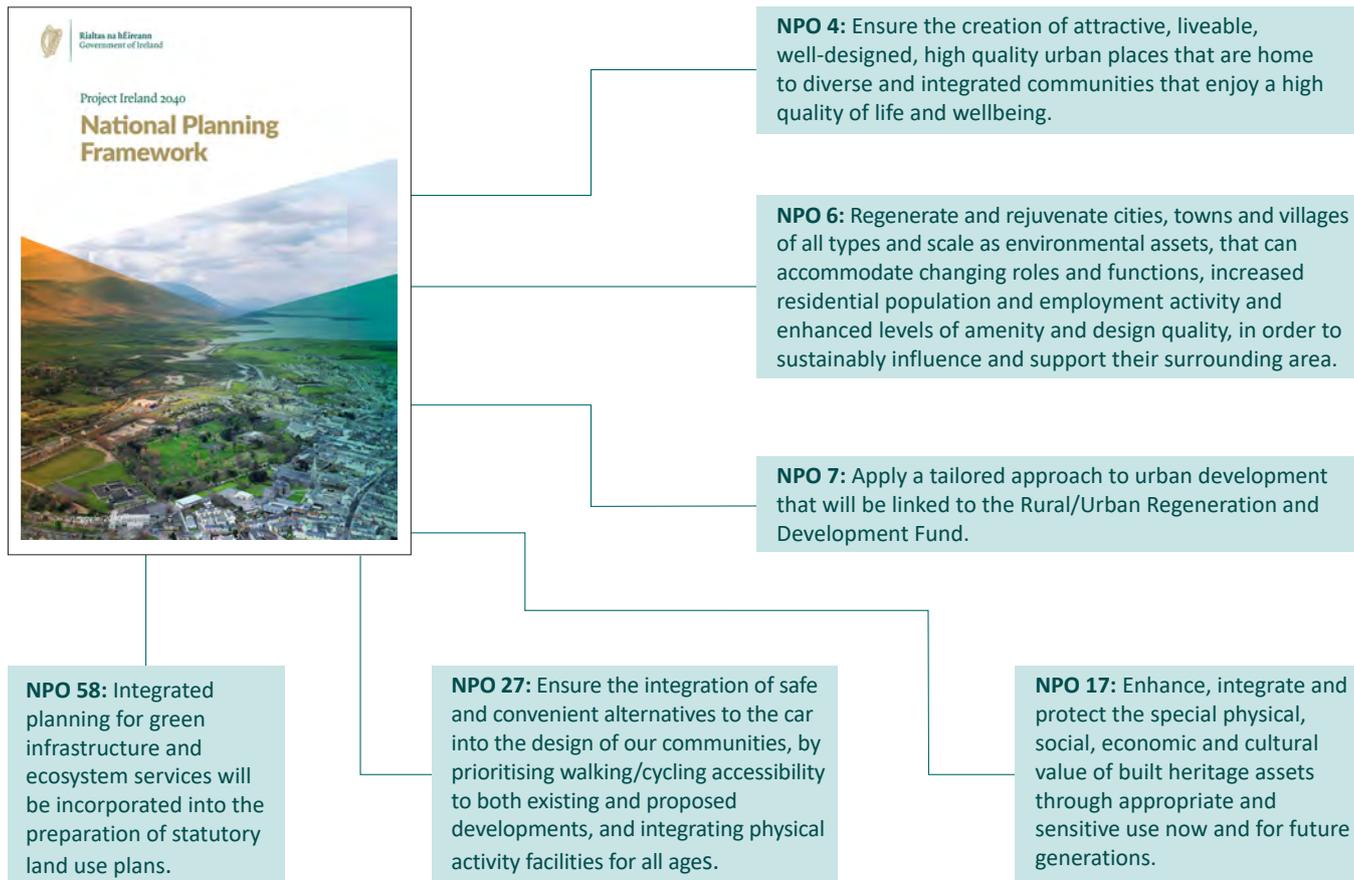


Figure 1.2: National Policy Objectives relevant to the Framework

Athy Urban Regeneration Framework consciously aligns with both national and regional planning policy objectives. This is to both acknowledge the overall hierarchy of planning policy, whilst also taking into consideration its provisions and desired outcomes regarding the regeneration and place-based development of our urban settlements.

The National Planning Framework (NPF) places particular emphasis on towns as environmental assets that can “accommodate changing roles and function, increased residential population and employment activity and enhanced levels of amenity and design quality in order to sustainably influence and support their surrounding area” (National Strategic Objective 6). This objective is central to the overall Urban Regeneration Framework for Athy. Consequently, the Plan and the Framework both acknowledge that in order for such rejuvenation and re-purposing to be successful, there will be a requirement for the urban core to increase its residential population and levels of employment activity, whilst also providing enhanced levels of amenity and design quality. It is noted that the NPF is supported by a €3 billion Rural and Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (National Planning Objective 7) covering the period to 2027¹. Accordingly, the Athy Urban Regeneration Framework is designed to act as a ‘business plan’ to attract the funds needed to realise the vision of a rejuvenated and vibrant urban core.

Certain critical aspects of the Framework resonate strongly with the key principles set out in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (2019-2031), which focuses on improving the long term quality of life of the population by promoting healthy placemaking, low carbon development and creating the right conditions for employment growth and economic opportunity.

¹ Presently, in seeking funding for regeneration projects in Athy, Kildare County Council applies to the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF). However, the next Census (scheduled for 2022) will likely record Athy’s population to exceed 10,000 persons. On foot of this, all applications for the town will need to be submitted to the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF).

1.4 Relationship with the Athy Local Area Plan 2021 - 2027

The Athy Urban Regeneration Framework shares the same research background as the Local Area Plan and was prepared in tandem with the Plan. Consequently, it can be considered to both inform and be informed by the Plan. The Framework therefore seeks to translate and ground the ideas and concepts set out in the Vision Statement of the Plan along with the Eight Strategic Development Principles (see Fig. 1.3) into clearly identifiable projects and actions. Such a focused approach requires the Framework to carefully analyse the reasons behind the many issues and challenges affecting the performance of the town, particularly its retail core. Having considered its weaknesses, the Framework will then seek to build on the strengths of the town centre by developing a responsive and co-ordinated urban design-based approach where the principles of healthy placemaking and sustainability are placed to the front and centre of the document.

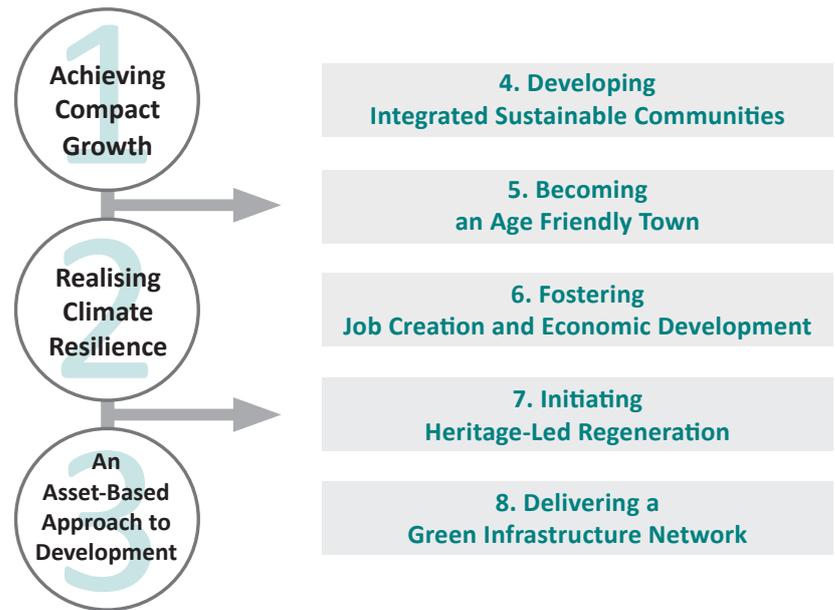


Figure 1.3: The Athy Local Area Plan’s Eight Strategic Development Principles

In seeking to achieve a sustainable model of development for the town, the focus will be centred on maximising the potential of Athy’s built and natural heritage by using these existing assets to enhance its role as a visitor destination and create new local employment opportunities. It is envisaged that a targeted and co-ordinated investment strategy, concentrated for the most part within the town centre, will lead to the creation of local synergies (the development of tourism-based enterprises, for example) which will in turn initiate a broader economic regeneration of the town over the life of the plan and beyond. The Athy Urban Regeneration Framework is underpinned by policies and objectives threaded throughout the Athy Local Area Plan 2021-2027.



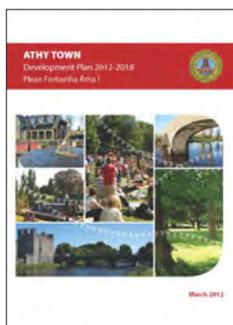
Figure 1.4: Athy Heritage Centre - Shackleton Museum on Emily Square (credit: Athy Photography)

1.5 Previous Plans and Current Proposals

This Framework acknowledges the existing extensive number of strategies and plans prepared for Athy over the past number of years, the purpose of which was to develop the town and increase its attractiveness as a place to live, visit and do business in. The Framework draws on this body of work and incorporates many previously outlined ideas and proposals which are considered to best align with the Plan's strategic development principles. In doing so, the Framework seeks to not only co-ordinate and further progress the work already carried out to date but also prioritise the projects that are considered to have the most potential in achieving the desired transformative place-based change within the town.



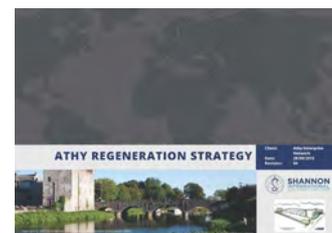
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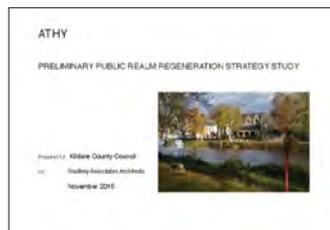
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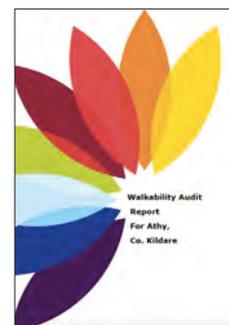
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8.



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10.

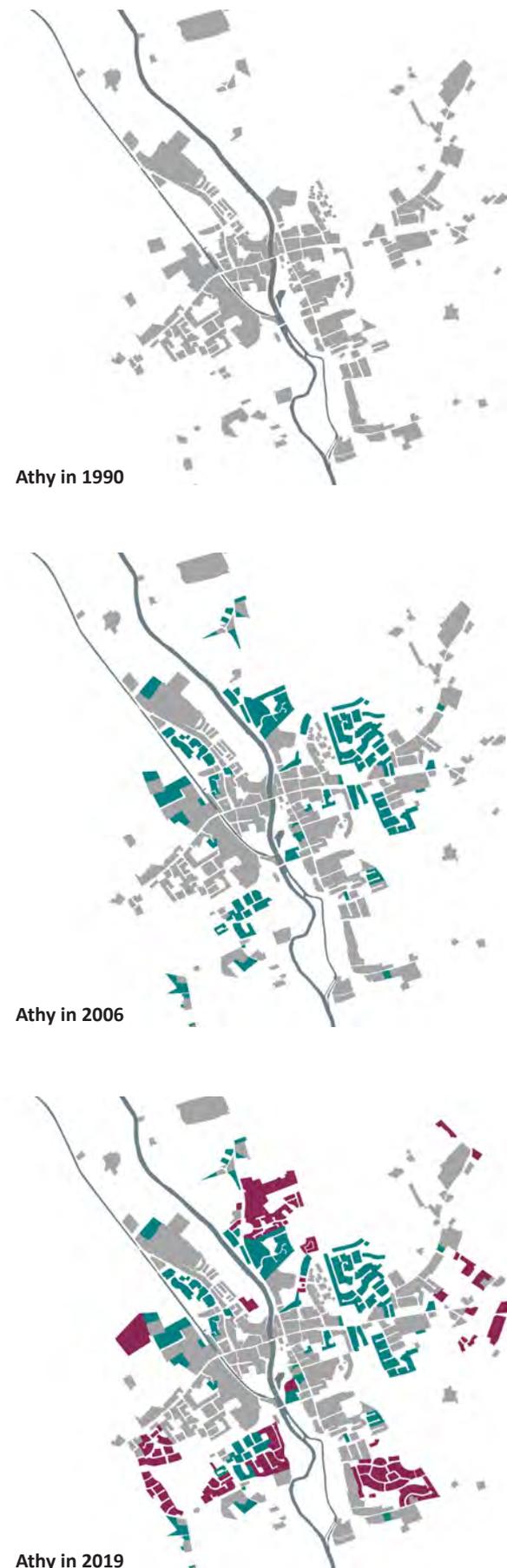


11.

1. **2020 Vision for Athy: Integrated Framework Plan (2004)** - Non-statutory long term strategy for land use and transportation
2. **Athy Town Development Plan 2012-2018** - Statutory land use plan
3. **The Barrow Corridor Recreation, Tourism, Commercial and Product Strategy Study (2012)** - Developing the Barrow Valley as a key visitor destination within the region.
4. **Athy Regeneration Strategy, Athy Enterprise Network (2015)** - Economic development and branding strategy
5. **Athy Preliminary Public Realm Strategy Study (2016)** - Sets out a provisional framework for improvements within the town centre.
6. **Barrow Blueway (2018)** - A multi-use shared leisure route along the existing Barrow Line Canal and Barrow Navigation towpath.
7. **Dominican Square and Blueway Hub Masterplan proposal** - Initial design iteration for the Dominican Lands.
8. **Walkability Audit Report for Athy (2020)** - Kildare County Council document focusing on creating an age friendly town centre.
9. **Emily Square Environmental Improvement Scheme (2018)** - Approved Kildare County Council (Part 8) proposal.
10. **Athy Heritage Centre - Shackleton Museum Refurbishment and Extension** - Approved Kildare County Council Part 8 proposal.
11. **Athy Food, Drink and Innovation Hub Feasibility Study (2020)** - Proposal to repurpose the former Model School was awarded funding for further design and planning work from the Regional Enterprise Development Fund.

2. Urban Quality Analysis

2.1 Historic Growth and Recent Development Trends



From its medieval origins Athy developed into a small but locally important market town serving a large rural hinterland. Its strategic location on a river crossing along with incremental developments in its infrastructure, such as the development of the canal system in the late 18th Century, and the railway in the mid 19th Century helped to sustain its role as a hub for business and services in the south of the county. However, limited growth resulted in the extent of the town being confined, for the most part, to the present day town centre area until the mid 20th century.

Over the past number of decades the town began to experience rapid growth in both its population and urban footprint. This development occurred in a diffused pattern characterised by low-density, car-orientated residential housing estates being accessed off the main arterial routes into the town. Such growth peaked during the 2001-2010 period where 1,467 homes were constructed, representing approximately 40% of all residential units in the town in 2016 (CSO 2016 and AIRO). This boom in residential development was accompanied by an unprecedented growth in population which increased by 58.4% between 2002 and 2011 (Census 2002 and 2011).

Whilst residential construction has virtually halted in recent years, with only 34 units being constructed between 2011 and 2016 (Census 2016), other development trends have arisen in the town over the past decade. These include elevated levels of residential and commercial vacancy within the town centre and the relocation of educational and health facilities to less accessible areas around the periphery of Athy. Such development patterns represent key long term challenges to the overall sustainability of Athy, rendering the town a more car-oriented and increasingly dispersed settlement which is becoming more dependent on other towns for retail services.

Figure 2.1: (top left) Athy's urban footprint in 1990, **Figure 2.2:** (centre left) Athy's urban footprint in 2006, **Figure 2.3:** (bottom left) Athy's urban footprint in 2019

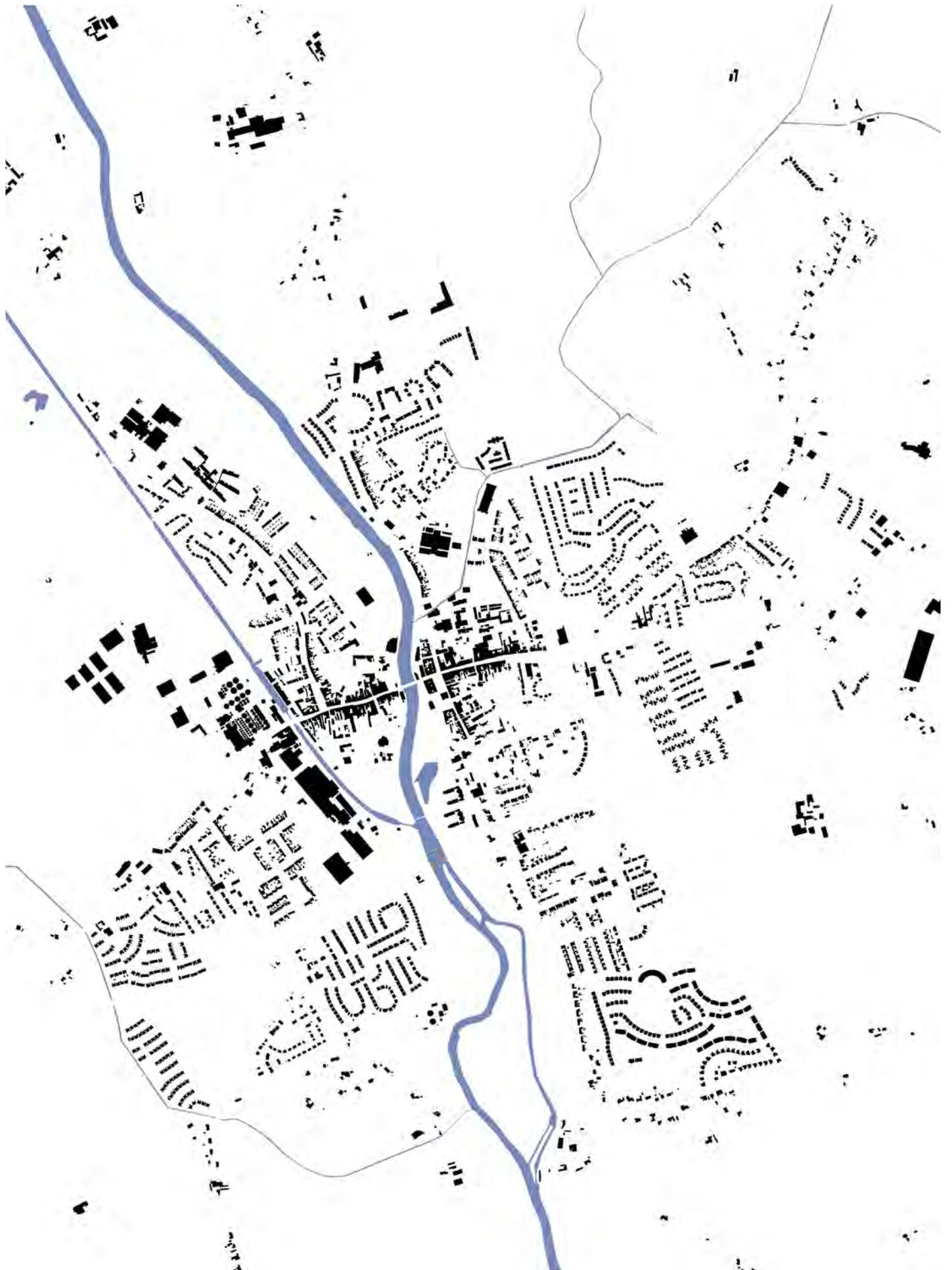


Figure 2.4: Athy figure ground and water map

2.2 Urban Structure of Athy: An Overview

The figure ground map of Athy (Figure 2.5) shows the built-up area of the town and its immediate hinterland and illustrates a number of defining characteristics, the most notable of which consists of the central unbuilt void which separates the town into east and west. However, the reason for this becomes clear when presented with the figure ground and water map (see Figure 2.4) which shows the enduring effect that waterways, particularly the River Barrow, has had on the development of the town. Figure 2.4 also shows the intensity of development within the relatively confined area of the historic core. The density of development highlights the street pattern within the town centre, where the east-west Duke Street / Leinster Street / William Street axis is clearly visible, along with its intersection with the north-south Stanhope Street / Offaly Street axis at Emily Square to the east of the river crossing (see Figure 2.19 for a more detailed map of Athy Town centre).

The inverted figure ground map (see Figure 2.6) illustrates the large floor plates of the established industrial lands immediately to the west of the town centre. This map also clearly indicates the dispersed nature of the town's development of recent years where low-density detached and semi-detached housing developments predominate. Ribbon development consisting of one-off houses along arterial routes is the most defining feature of the town's rural hinterland.

An interesting aspect of Athy's urban structure can be observed when green open spaces are also illustrated (see Figure 2.7). These show that substantial green spaces surround residential developments and thread their way through the heart of the town centre. In this regard, the potential of this space to be incorporated into a future integrated green infrastructure network, which would also include high-quality pedestrian and cycle routes, offers an interesting opportunity to develop sustainable mobility and recreational routes within the town.

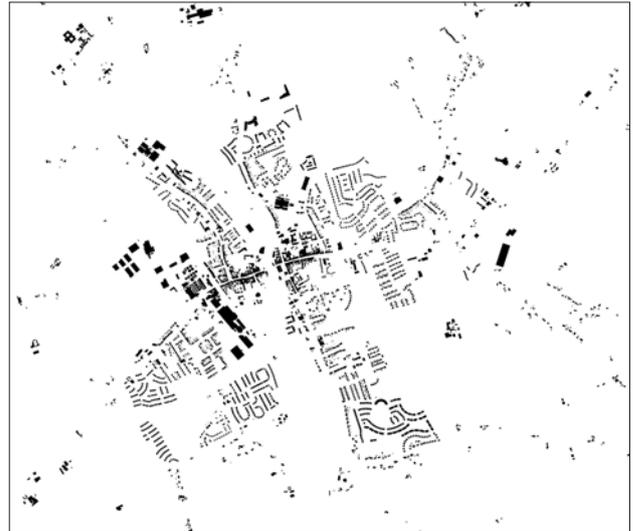


Figure 2.5: Athy figure ground map

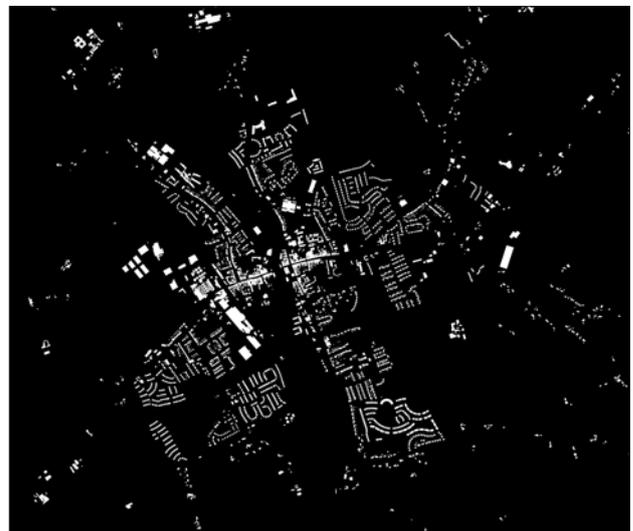


Figure 2.6: Athy inverted figure ground map



Figure 2.7: Athy green open space map

2.3 Permeability and Walkability

How the urban structure has developed in a settlement has huge impacts on permeability and consequently the walkability of a town. The more permeable and connected a town’s network of streets and paths are the easier it is to move around a settlement and the more likely that this movement will be made by sustainable means (i.e. on foot or bicycle). Figure 2.8 shows the street and urban block layout of Athy. The size of the urban blocks within the town can be compared to the 120 metre x 120 metre urban block illustrated in the legend (see Figure 2.8, below). According to the Government’s Design Manual for Urban Streets and Roads (p.44, DMURS, updated 2019), these dimensions are the maximum size which should not be exceeded in order to enable a reasonable level of permeability and encourage pedestrian movement. In contrasting this urban block with the street and block map of Athy it is clear that the vast majority of urban blocks, as defined by the street and road network in the town, exceed these dimensions. Whilst it may not be possible to provide such a level of permeability within certain land uses such as enterprise and employment, where large floor plates are required to provide for the efficient functioning of business, such a desired pattern of development should always be met when planning for new residential areas.



Figure 2.8: Athy street and block map

2.3.1 Permeability Within the Town Centre

The level of permeability in a town centre provides a good indication as to the level of activities and uses in the commercial core. Figure 2.9 illustrates a street and block map of a portion of Athy Town Centre comprising of the main commercial core along the east-west Leinster St. / Duke St. axis. In common with most traditional Irish towns there is a reasonably high level of permeability. It is seen that an opening in the urban block at both Emily Square and Edmund Rice Square has allowed for active uses to spill out from the main commercial artery into these spaces. This is also the case with Woodstock Street further to the west.

Contrasting the level of permeability of Athy Town Centre with that of other town centres in the county provides an interesting and useful comparison. Figure 2.10 shows the town centre of Naas. Unusually for a historic Irish town centre, the urban structure of Naas is relatively impermeable. This provides a major reason as to why the commercial core of Naas, for the most part, is limited to one space; its Main Street. In contrast, the highly permeable layout of Newbridge Town Centre (Figure 2.11), particularly to the northwest of Main Street and Edward Street has resulted in a greater number of streets being very active and hosting a diverse range of commercial and retail uses.



Note: All maps above have the same scale

Figure 2.9: (top) Street and block map of Athy town centre,
Figure 2.10: (bottom left) Street and block map of Naas Town Centre,
Figure 2.11: (bottom right) Street and block map of Newbridge Town Centre



2.3.2 Through Routes Versus Cul-de-sacs

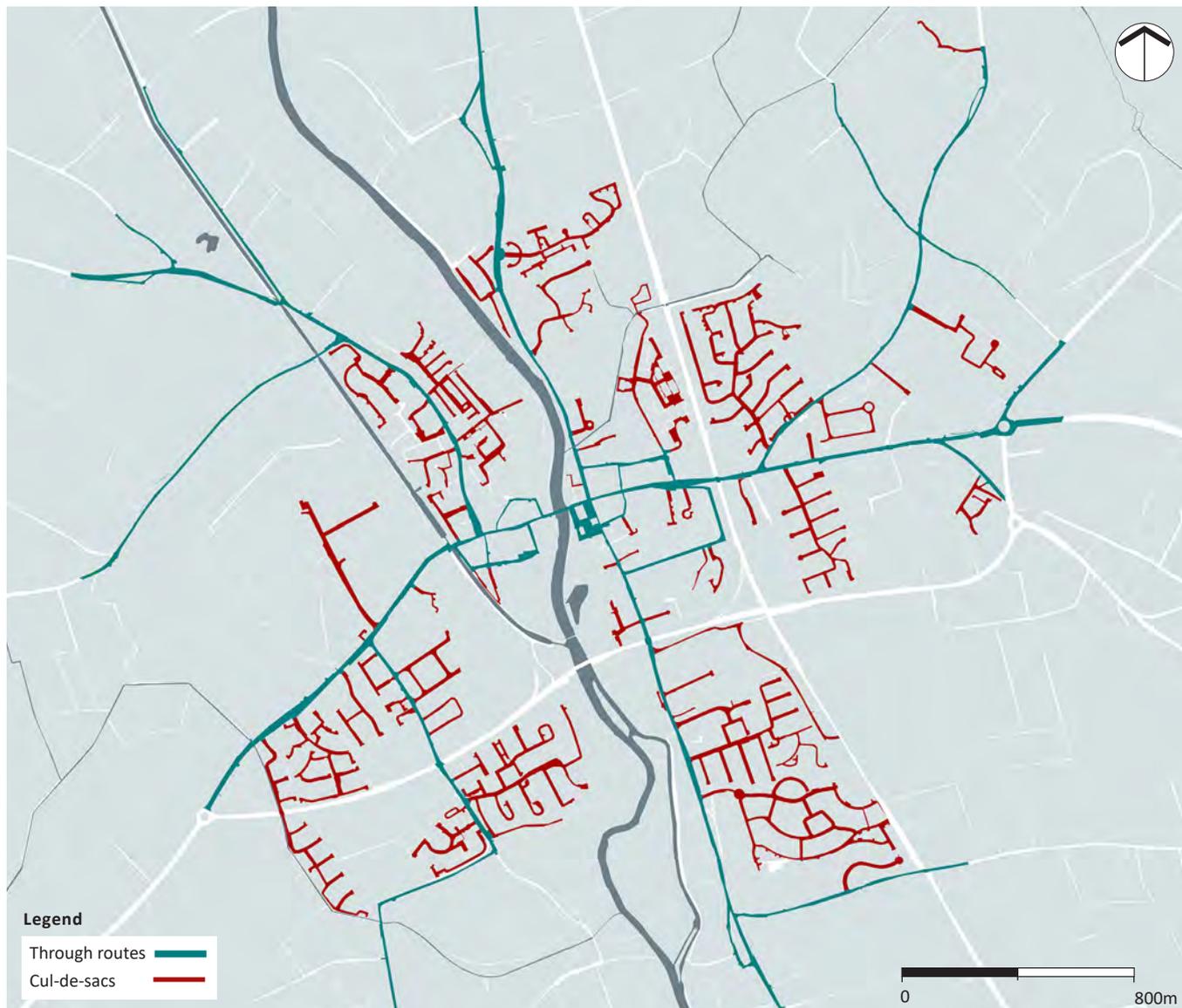


Figure 2.12: Through routes and cul-de-sacs in Athy

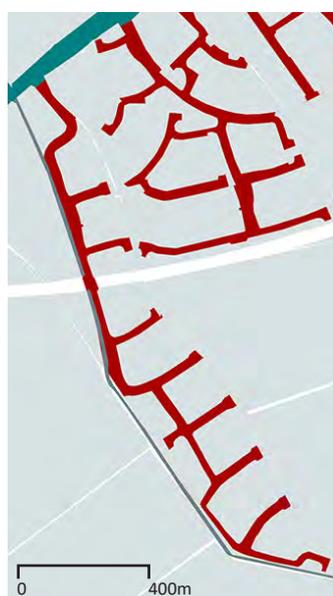


Figure 2.13: Corrán Árd Estate

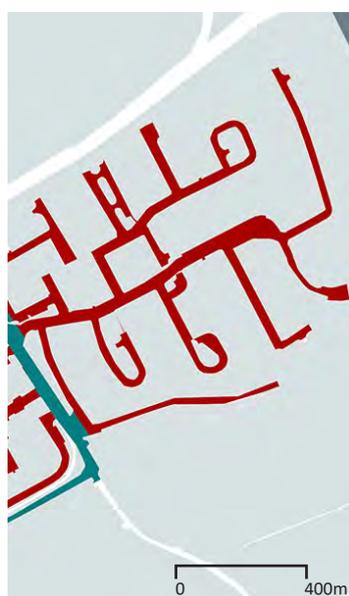


Figure 2.14: Dún Brínn Estate

The street and block maps on the previous pages do not tell the full story about permeability in Athy. Figure 2.12 provides a more revealing picture as to how the town has grown, illustrating a specific development feature which has been allowed to become predominant. This is the cul-de-sac. Aside from the key arterial routes and the historic streets within the Athy Town Centre the majority of the urban structure of the town is composed of cul-de-sacs which for the most part, serve residential estates. The examples in Figures 2.13 and 2.14 show developments where residents in some cases would have to walk for over 800 metres (10 minutes) just to reach the entrance of their estate.

2.3.3 Town Centre Versus Periphery

This section seeks to investigate and highlight the consequences that such a proliferation of cul-de-sacs has in terms of its effects on accessibility to key services by the residential population of the town. It is an accepted principle of planning that a 5-minute walk (400 metres) to a local shop or a 10-minute walk (800 metres) to a key public amenity (i.e. a public transport hub or town centre) are the maximum distances that the majority of people will make a decision to walk to rather than drive². Usually, a notional 800 metre circle radiating from a town centre or railway station is used to denote the 10-minute walking distance on plans. However, this is often misleading as it does not take into account the permeability of the street and block network. Figures 2.15 - 2.18 illustrate the notional 800 metre distance along with the true extent of the accessible area that lies within 800 metres (10 minutes walk) of four identified key destinations within the town, as follows:

1. Athy Town Centre (Emily Square)
2. Athy Train Station
3. Athy Schools Campus (Monasterevin Road)
4. Athy Primary Care Centre (Dublin Road)



Figure 2.15: True extent of area (shaded in dark green) accessible by foot within 800 metres of the town centre



Figure 2.16: True extent of area (shaded in dark green) accessible by foot within 800 metres of Athy Train Station

²Sources: Urban Design Compendium (2000) and Am Azmi et al. (2012)

Figure 2.15 and Figure 2.16 (see previous page) show that while the real area of accessibility for a 10-minute walk from Emily Square and Athy Train Station respectively is a lot more restricted than the notional 800 metres radius, the connected nature of the street network in the area has enabled a relatively sizeable portion of the town to be reached. An even greater area will be within a 10-minute walk with the opening of the Athy Distributor Road (scheduled for completion in late 2023) which will incorporate enhanced pedestrian/cycling provision along with new high-quality connections, particularly to the train station. Conversely, the area within reach of the schools campus on the Monasterevin Road and Athy Primary Care Centre is extremely limited. This is due to the peripheral location of both sites in relation to the rest of the built-up area of the town.

The location of key services in peripheral areas in conjunction with the proliferation of cul-de-sacs in the town, leaves the population of Athy particularly dependent on private vehicular use, thus increasing the likelihood of even short trips to these key destinations being made by car. This has long term consequences for the overall health of the resident population, their ability to access key services, and levels of isolation and loneliness experienced by people in what is an aging town (see Section 4.5 of the Local Area Plan).



Figure 2.17: True extent of area (shaded in dark green) accessible by foot within 800 metres of the schools campus

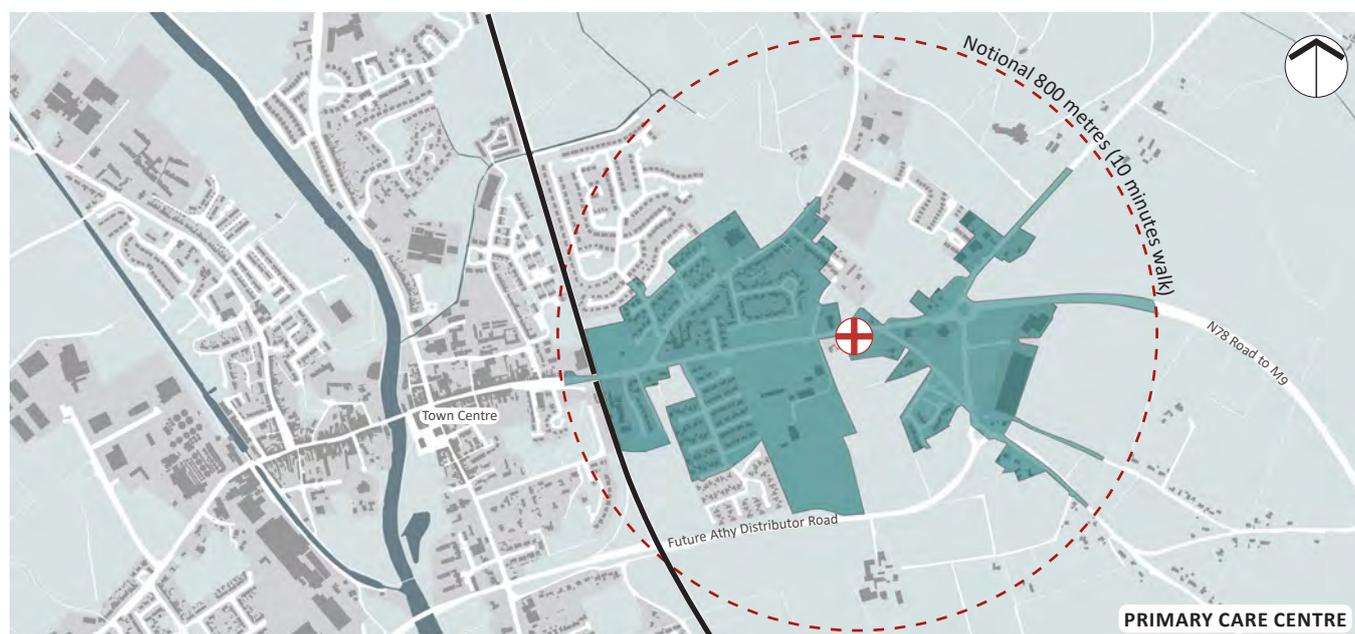


Figure 2.18: True extent of area (shaded in dark green) accessible by foot within 800 metres of the Primary Care Centre

2.4 Athy Town Centre

The centre of the town is focused around the Leinster Street / Duke Street axis and is, in comparison to the overall footprint of Athy, confined to a limited area, comprising the most historic part of the town³. This area also forms the commercial core of Athy and performs a vital retail, services and employment centre for the residents in the town and its rural hinterland. However, as noted in the Plan (see Chapter 5), the town has struggled in recent years to maintain its retail offer. This can be explained in part to external factors, such as the overall economic situation along with retail developments in larger neighbouring settlements which have increased their attractiveness vis-à-vis Athy's retail offer.

The following sections seek to examine the internal dynamics of the town centre, specifically investigating its land use patterns and public realm quality in order to provide a baseline review of the overall urban quality within the commercial core. The aim of this analysis is to address the local reasons that are playing a role in the decline of the town centre, while providing an evidence-based context to enable the identification of regeneration and development opportunities which will be expanded upon in Part 3 of this document, along with supporting policies, objectives and actions outlined within the Local Area Plan.

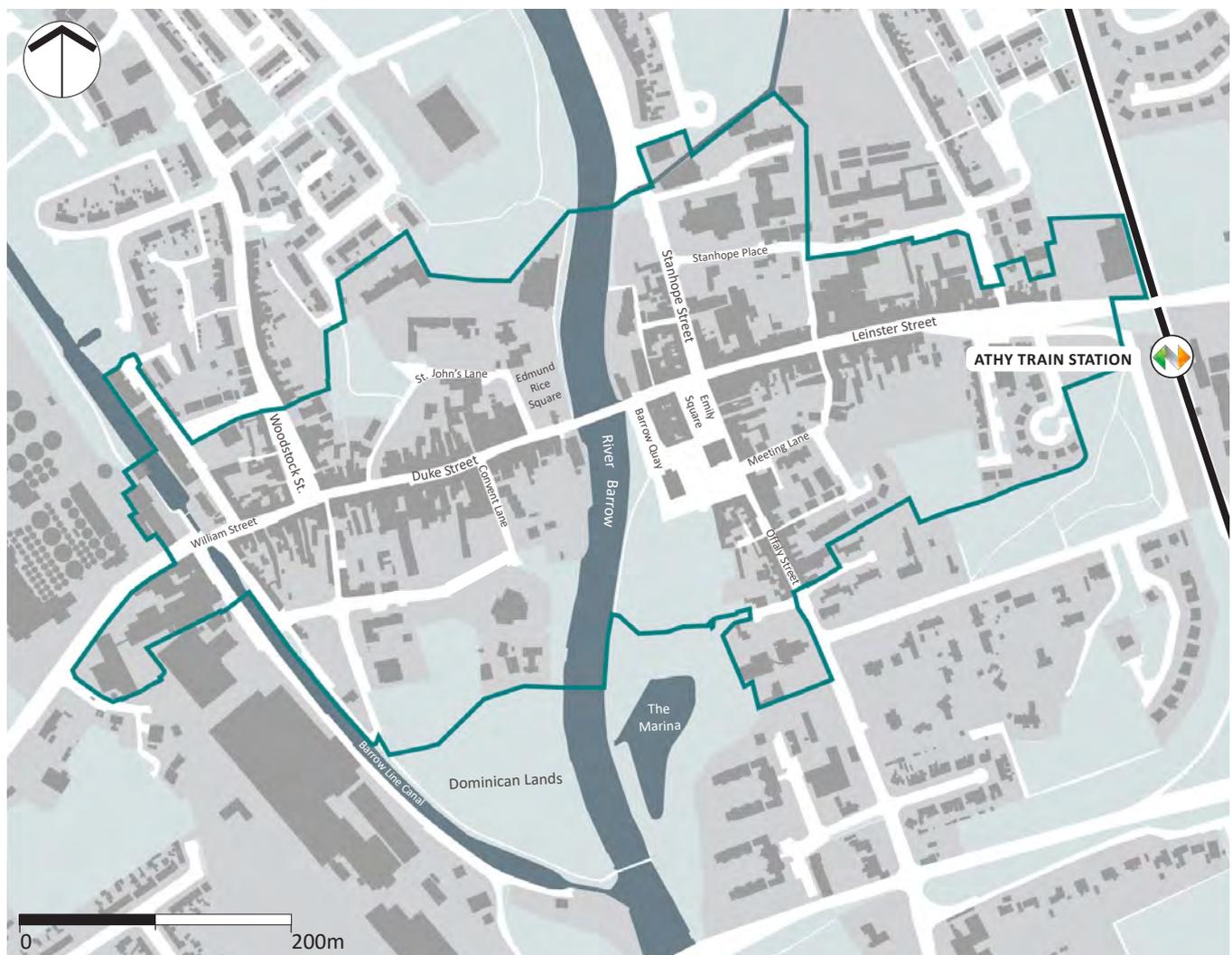


Figure 2.19: Athy Town Centre lands outlined in dark green (Athy Local Area 2021-2027)

³ For further information on Athy's historical development and the evolution of its architectural character refer to the Athy Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) Statement of Character which has been published alongside the Plan.

2.5 Land Uses in the Town Centre

The land use survey⁴ highlights that Athy town centre is seriously affected by elevated levels of vacancy. For example, the retail vacancy rate is calculated to be 24.1%⁵, which is considered to be extremely high⁶. The effect on the vitality of the town is amplified by the fact that such vacancies are concentrated within quite a confined area. The survey investigated ground floor uses only, however it was also observed that the upper floors within the majority of units (aside from residential uses) appeared to be either disused or allocated for storage/back office uses.

Whilst it is noted that this survey was conducted in late July 2020, in the period after the first Covid-19 national lockdown of Spring/early Summer 2020, the results are consistent with those of a previous survey undertaken in summer 2018. Figure 2.20 (see opposite page) illustrates that elevated levels of vacancy are prevalent throughout the town centre, even within its core retail area (Leinster Street / Duke Street axis). However, there are a number of vacancy ‘black spots’ which are particularly concentrated along William Street and Offaly Street. There are also several units which are in a dilapidated or even derelict state, indicating long term levels of vacancy and highlighting that this has been a chronic and ongoing challenge for the town centre for many years.

Land Use Key

	Convenience		Religious Services
	Comparison		Storage and Warehouses
	Retail Services		Residential
	Other retail services (none of above)		Undetermined/Inaccessible
	Leisure Services		Vacant (with previous use shown behind)
	Finance and Business Services		Vacant (if previous use is undetermined)
	Health and Medical Services		Surface Car Parking
	Public Services		Town Centre Boundary (Athy Local Area Plan 2021-2027)
	Industrial		

Land Use Classifications - Description of Use

- **Convenience:** Supermarkets, Newsagents, Groceries and Frozen Food, Butchers, Markets, Health Foods, Fishmonger, Delicatessen, Bakers and Confectioners, Tobacconists, Vape Shops, Off-Licence, Shoe Repairs etc.
- **Comparison:** Pharmacies, Clothing and Footware, Jewellers, Charity Shops, Opticians, DIY and Hardware, Garden Centre, Booksellers, Electrical Goods, Florists, Furniture shops, Stationers, Office Supplies etc.
- **Retail Services:** Clothing and Fancy Dress Hire, Dry Cleaner and Laundrette, Filling Stations and Garages, Health and Beauty (e.g. beauticians, nail bars), Hairdressers/Barbers, Other Retail Outlets, Photo Processing, Photo Studio, Post Offices, Repair, Alterations and Restoration, Travel Agents, Vehicle Repair and Services
- **Leisure Services:** Bars, Pubs and Wine Bars, Bingo and Amusement, Cafes, Casino and Betting Offices, Cinemas, Clubs, Disco and Nightclubs, Fast Food and Takeaways, Hotels and Guest Houses, Restaurants, Sports and Leisure Facilities, Theatres and Concert Halls
- **Finance and Business Services:** Property Services, Retail Banks, Building Society, Building Supplies and Services, Business Goods and Services, Employment and Careers, Financial Services, Legal Services, Other Business Services, Printing and Copying
- **Health and Medical Services:** Dental Surgery, Doctors surgery, Health Centre, Nursing Home, Osteopath, Other Health and Medical Service, Rest Home, Veterinary Surgeon
- **Public Services:** Advice Centre, Community Centre, Council Offices, Educational Establishment, Emergency Services, Information Centre, Kindergarten, Library, Museum and Art Gallery, Tourist Information
- **Religious Services:** Place of Worship
- **Storage and Warehouses:** Not including retail warehousing outlets

⁴ The survey was conducted using the land/building use classifications developed by the Heritage Council in their Collaborative Town Centre Health Check (CTCHC) Programme.

⁵ Retail vacancy is calculated on the vacancy rate of comparison, convenient and retail services units in the town centre. The survey found that 28 out of 116 retail units in the town were vacant. It should be noted that this figure is different to the figure for overall commercial unit vacancies.

⁶ The Heritage Council’s Collaborative Town Centre Health Check Programme considers town centre retail vacancy rates in excess of 10% to be ‘problematic’. It is noted that the target town centre retail vacancy rate under normal trading conditions is 5%.

2.5.1 Analysis of Selected Uses

Lower Order Uses

The land use survey enabled specific uses to be identified and mapped. This analysis highlighted that ‘lower order’ uses such as charity shops, betting shops, discount stores (including pound shops) and hairdressers have a strong presence being particularly concentrated within the designated Core Retail Area of Athy, along Leinster Street and Duke Street. For example, there are 18 hair/beauty salons, barbers and tanning shops within the town centre. Whilst such uses are a vital part of every towns’ retail offer, their over concentration at the expense of higher order uses can have a negative effect on the overall retail attractiveness of the town, discouraging inward shopping trips and creating the conditions for excessive retail leakage to neighbouring town centres.

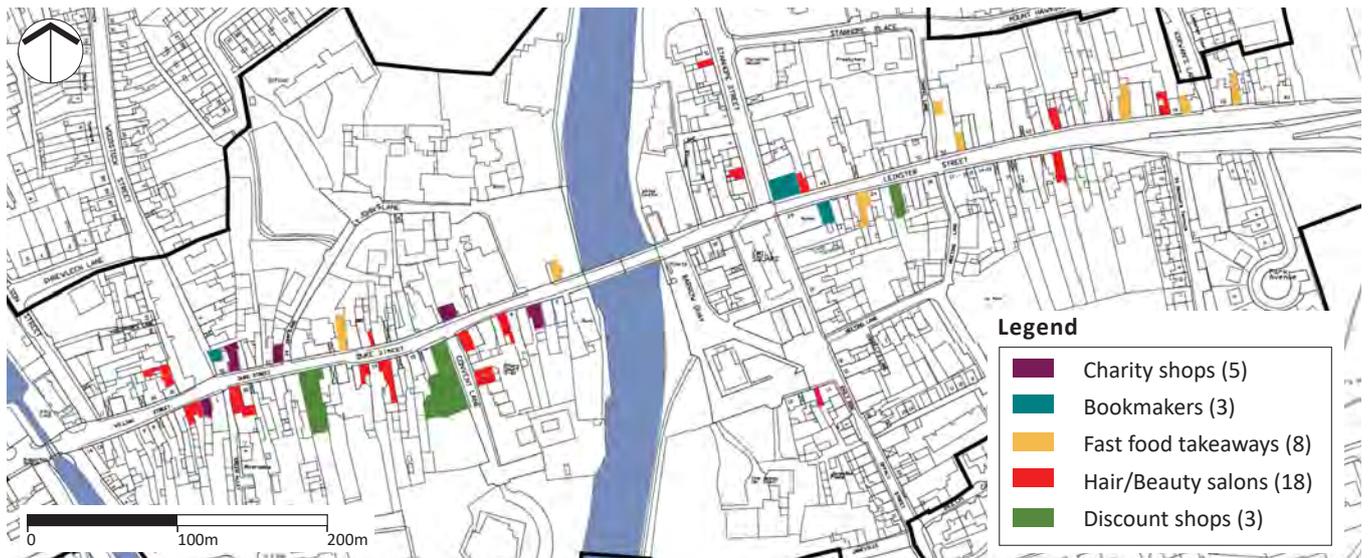


Figure 2.21: Lower order uses within the town centre

Pubs and Vacant Pubs

The land use survey recorded 15 pubs trading within the town centre and 8 vacant pubs. A comparison with the 2018 land use survey indicates that the level of vacancy has not changed. Furthermore, historic images (Google Street View) show that the majority of these vacant pubs were also vacant as far back as 2009. Such long term vacancies indicate that such uses are no longer viable and demonstrate the need for consideration of alternative functions and uses for these units in order to increase the vibrancy and vitality of Athy Town Centre.

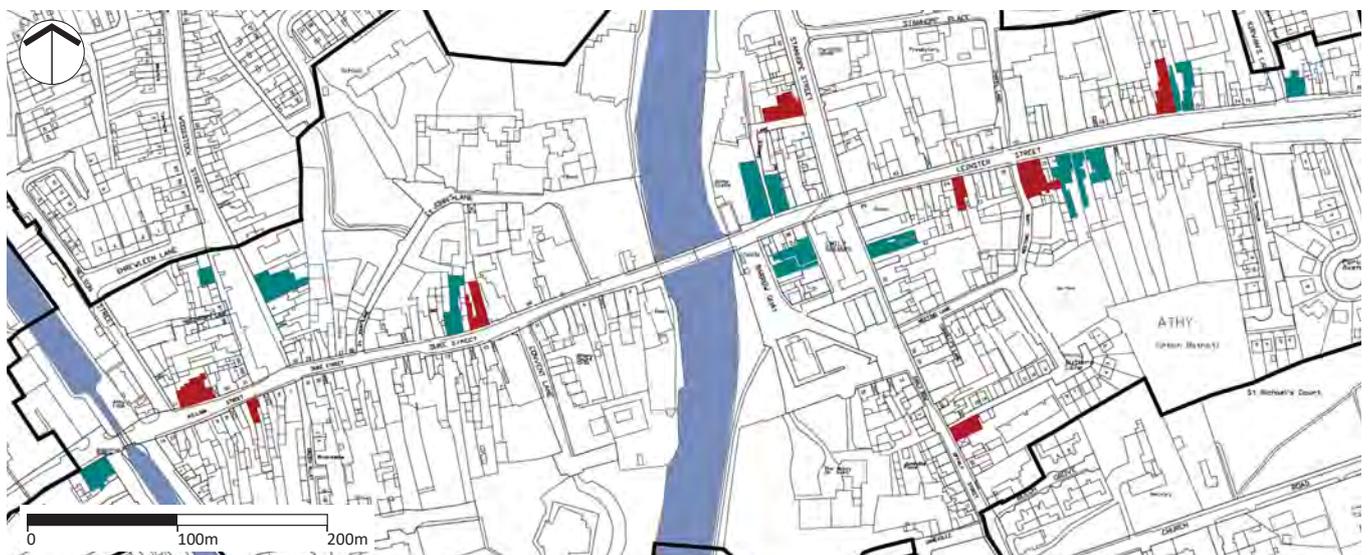


Figure 2.22: Distribution of pubs (teal) and vacant pubs (dark red) within the town centre

2.5.2 Vacancies and Dereliction

Figure 2.23 highlights the extent of vacant commercial and vacant residential units within the town. As noted in Section 2.5, they occur throughout the town, creating a deadening effect on the vibrancy of the entire town centre. The type of vacant uses is widespread ranging from retail, to pubs and restaurants, offices, a hotel and industrial activities. It is noted that the level of residential vacancies within the town centre has reduced since 2018 with several previously vacant including some derelict units having been refurbished. An example of this can be seen along Offaly Street (see Figures 2.24 and 2.25). This is perhaps the result of ongoing shortage of housing accommodation in Athy, with the town being designated a Rent Pressure Zone (RPZ) in April 2020.

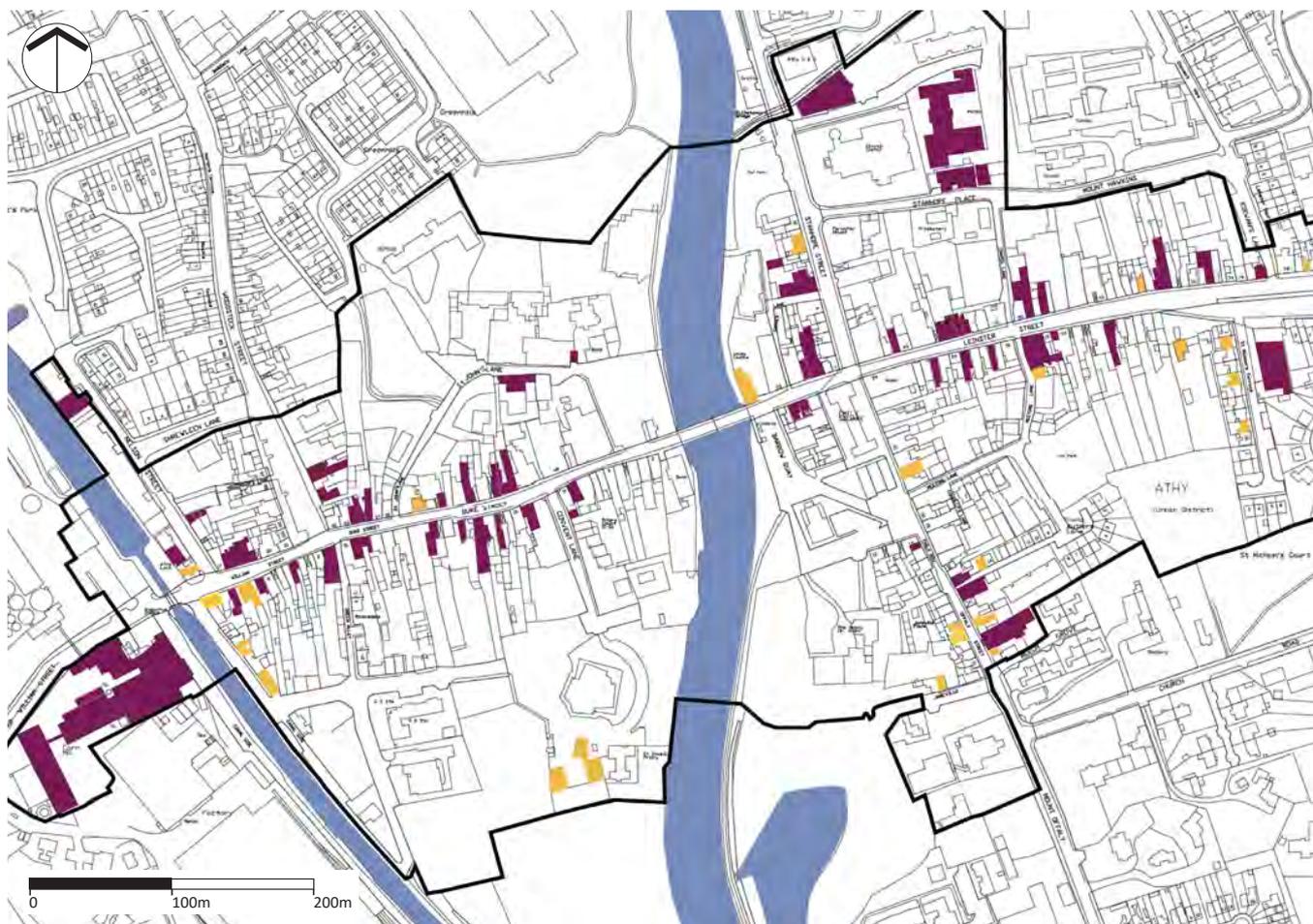


Figure 2.23: Vacant commercial units (purple) and vacant residential units (yellow) in Athy Town Centre, July 2020



Figure 2.24: Derelict houses on Offaly St. (August 2018)



Figure 2.25: Refurbished houses on Offaly St. (July 2020)



Source: Google Street View

Figure 2.26: Derelict unit on Offaly St. (August 2018)



Figure 2.27: Refurbished unit on Offaly St. (July 2020)

While residential vacancy may be declining within the town centre, the extent of vacancies across all retail services and leisure services is cause for concern. Altogether some 63 commercial units (i.e. non-residential units) were recorded as being vacant in the survey. As noted in Section 2.5.1 there are many instances of long term vacancies, which is evident by their poor condition and long standing ‘for sale’ and ‘to let’ signs’ (see below). In comparison to the 2018 survey, several commercial units within the town have been refurbished, which has helped improve the overall appearance of the town centre (see Figures 2.26 and 2.27). This is in part, due to the work of the Local Authority who have engaged heavily with property owners in the area. Whilst it is important that the appearance of individual units are maintained, the critical aspect of a building is that it must be kept in use and contribute to the vitality of the town. Accordingly, the outputs of this regeneration framework must continue to place particular emphasis on active land management measures within the town centre.

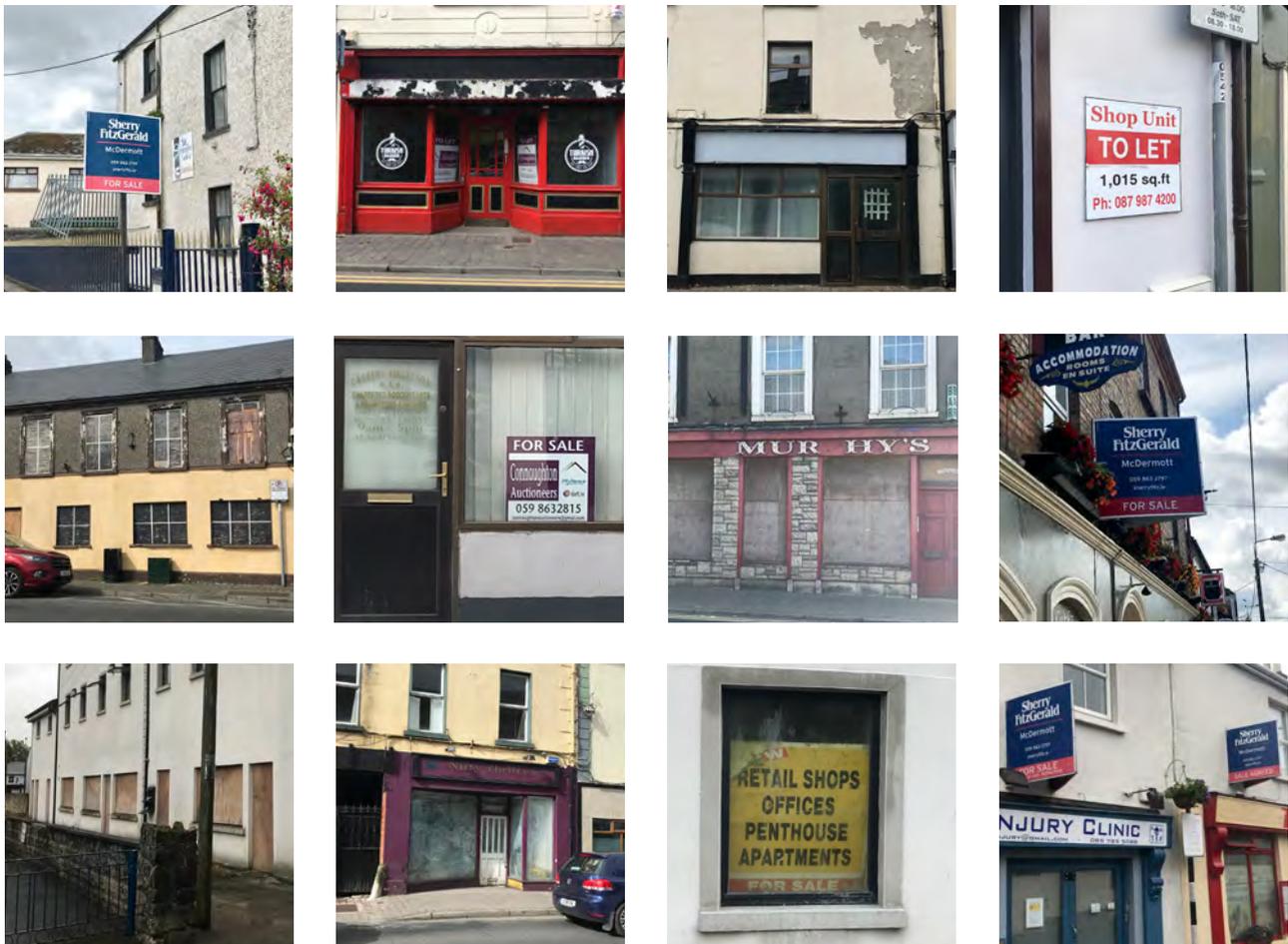


Figure 2.28: A proliferation of vacant and neglected units in Athy Town Centre

2.6 Assessment of Active Frontages

For an area to be a vibrant hub of activity there must not only be a multiplicity of different land uses sited on relatively small plot sizes but crucially, these activities need to be on display and easily identifiable to the person in the street (i.e. an active frontage). An assessment of active frontages is a useful exercise in helping to identify the streets that are likely to have a higher footfall than others, owing to the high degree of active frontages. For the purpose of the study an active frontage can best be described as a commercial frontage in which the activity within is easily identifiable and its design helps to animate the street. For example, an active frontage can take the form of an attractive pub façade, an outdoor seating area or a transparent window frontage displaying merchandise. A well-marked entrance leading to uses on the upper floors of a building can also be defined as active as the more doors opening onto a street the more active it will be. Alternatively, an inactive frontage is one that detracts from the life of the street. This can take the form of a blank façade (i.e. a wall or a fence) or it can be a unit that is vacant and shuttered. Such inactive façades create a deadening effect on a street’s vitality.

The exercise investigated frontages centred around Athy’s designated retail core. In keeping with most traditional market towns there are characteristically high levels of active frontages in Athy along its key streets. It can be seen from the study (see Figure 2.29) that the various concentrations of active and inactive frontages correlate strongly with the level of vibrancy in each street. For example, the presence of active frontages diminishes greatly on side streets (e.g. Meeting Lane and St. John’s Lane), which consequently have a distinctive backland and inactive character. It is noted that the level of active frontages has been markedly reduced by the elevated level of vacancies throughout the commercial core. One positive aspect is that such inactive frontages are temporary in nature and can quickly become active and contribute to the life of the street, through the creation of a new use.

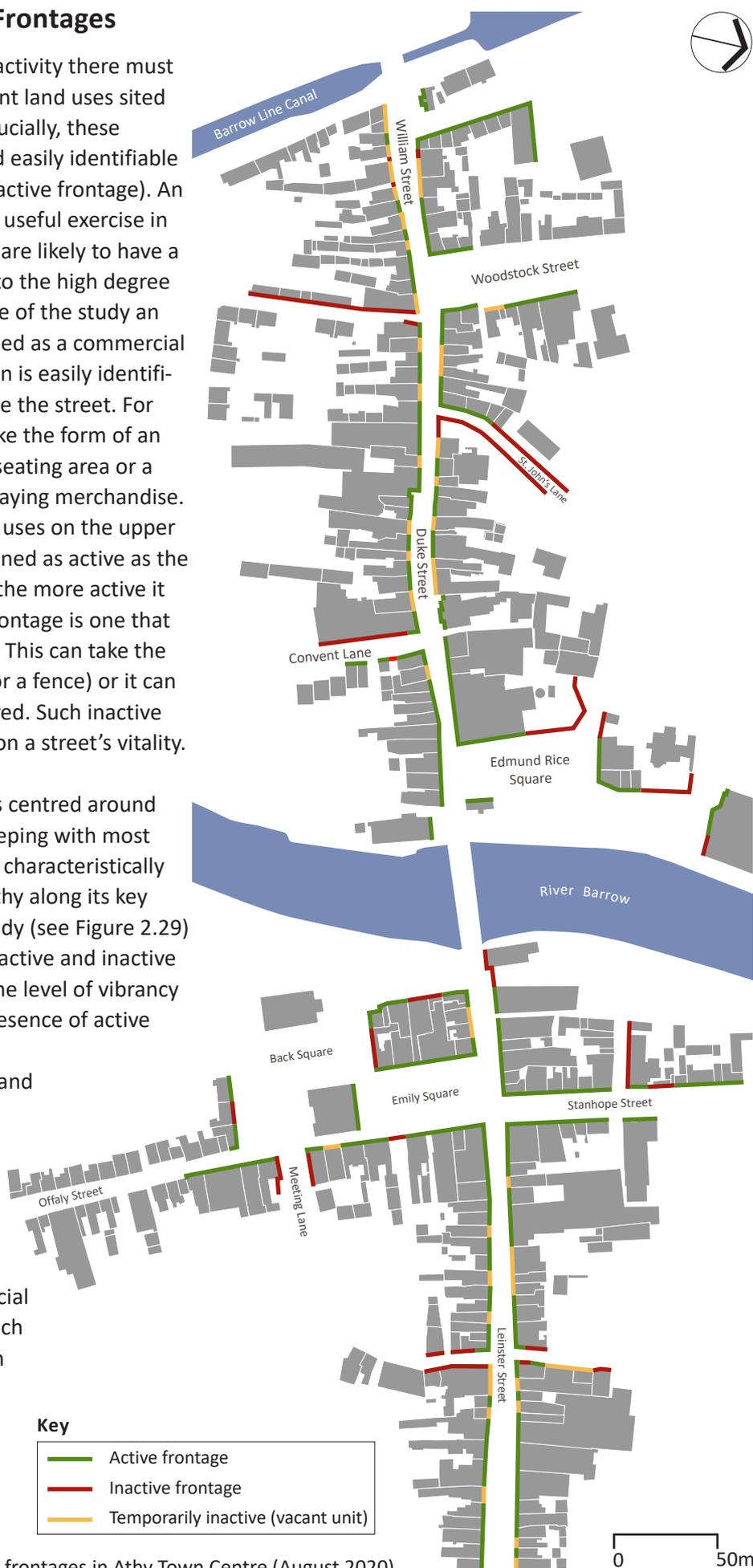


Figure 2.29: (right) Active and inactive frontages in Athy Town Centre (August 2020)

2.7 Public Realm Quality within the Town Centre

The majority of Athy Town Centre has been designated an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) due to its inherent character and value. The appreciation of such a historic built heritage asset to a great extent depends on the quality of the surrounding public realm i.e. a town's network of streets and public spaces. A high quality public realm allows a visitor (tourist, resident shopper, business investor etc.) to have a positive and memorable experience of the town, increasing their potential to linger, spending more time and contributing to the local economy. Therefore, the public realm has the potential to become an attractor and a destination in its own right, adding vibrancy and creating a more active town centre.

Whilst this section highlights issues relating to the current design, layout and standard of public realm in the town, the analysis below should be viewed in the context of the future potential of its public space and how it could be re-imagined, particularly with the construction of the Athy Distributor Road which will reduce the percentage of through traffic over the long term by over 40%.

2.7.1 Visual Clutter

Visual clutter in the public realm can negatively impact on the visitor experience, detracting from the character of the urban form and impeding peoples' journeys through the urban space. A key feature of visual clutter is street clutter i.e. the over-use and poor siting of street furniture. While there are some instances of street clutter present in Athy, it is limited within the town centre (see Figures 2.30 and 2.31). However, a more prominent issue is overhead wiring and intrusive cables and ducting around shop frontages, which oftentimes is redundant. This issue is particularly noticeable along the Duke Street / Leinster Street axis which lies at the heart of the ACA. Such wiring not only reduces the visual amenities of the area but also has the potential to damage the architectural and historic fabric of the buildings themselves, many of which are protected structures.



Figure 2.30: Non-pedestrian friendly railings at Emily Square



Figure 2.31: Excessive bollards on Offaly Row



Figure 2.32: A proliferation of wiring on Leinster Street



Figure 2.33: Wires affixed to the 15th Century White Castle

2.7.2 Street Furniture

The extent and distribution of street furniture (i.e. bins, seating, signage etc.) is limited in Athy. However it is noted that there is no defined design palette present in the town. For example, there are varying types of bins, street bollards and seating distributed across the town centre. Athy needs a coordinated approach to the design and siting of street furniture, one which is based on a bespoke palette of materials and complements the town’s built character. More seating is also required along both the River and Canal.



Figure 2.34: Variety of bin types

2.7.3 Pavement Quality

The standard of footpaths varies greatly throughout the town centre with a wide variety of materials used ranging from concrete, to brick and pavement slabs. Overall, the footpaths are generally in good condition within the Core Retail Area, however there are pockets of badly maintained pavement on Duke Street and on Woodstock Street. As one moves away from the active streets to the side streets, such as John’s Lane and Meeting Lane, the quality of the footpaths reduces greatly and in some cases there is a complete absence of pavements (Figure 2.36).



Figure 2.35: Good quality pavement on Woodstock Street

The overall width of the pavements within the town is oftentimes too narrow and in some cases dangerously so (Figure 2.38). While it is acknowledged that in many instances footpaths cannot be widened due to the historic and narrow character of the town centre streets, it is noted that where there is space available on streets it is more often than not given over to on-street car parking, despite the presence of several car parks in the area.



Figure 2.36: Lack of footpath on Meeting Lane



Figure 2.37: Varying pavement standards within town centre



Figure 2.38: Substandard footpath on Augustus Bridge

2.7.4 Car Parking within the Town Centre

As noted in the previous section, where public space becomes available within Athy town centre it is generally allocated to on-street parking. In addition to this, there is a huge provision of public car parking spaces comprising of both public car parks operated by the Local Authority and privately owned ones, often sited to the rear of commercial premises. It is noted the 2009 Traffic Management Plan and car parking strategy found that there was 1,010 parking spaces in the town centre comprising of 586 public parking spaces and 424 private spaces. This huge provision has resulted car parking being a dominant feature of the public realm within the historic core and takes up a considerable footprint of the town centre area (Figure 2.39). Indeed, it can be seen that in some prominent public areas, the urban environment becomes a chaotic scene. An example of this can be seen in the Dominican lands car park where Athy Library, a striking piece of modernist architecture is surrounded in a sea of cars (see Figure 2.40).

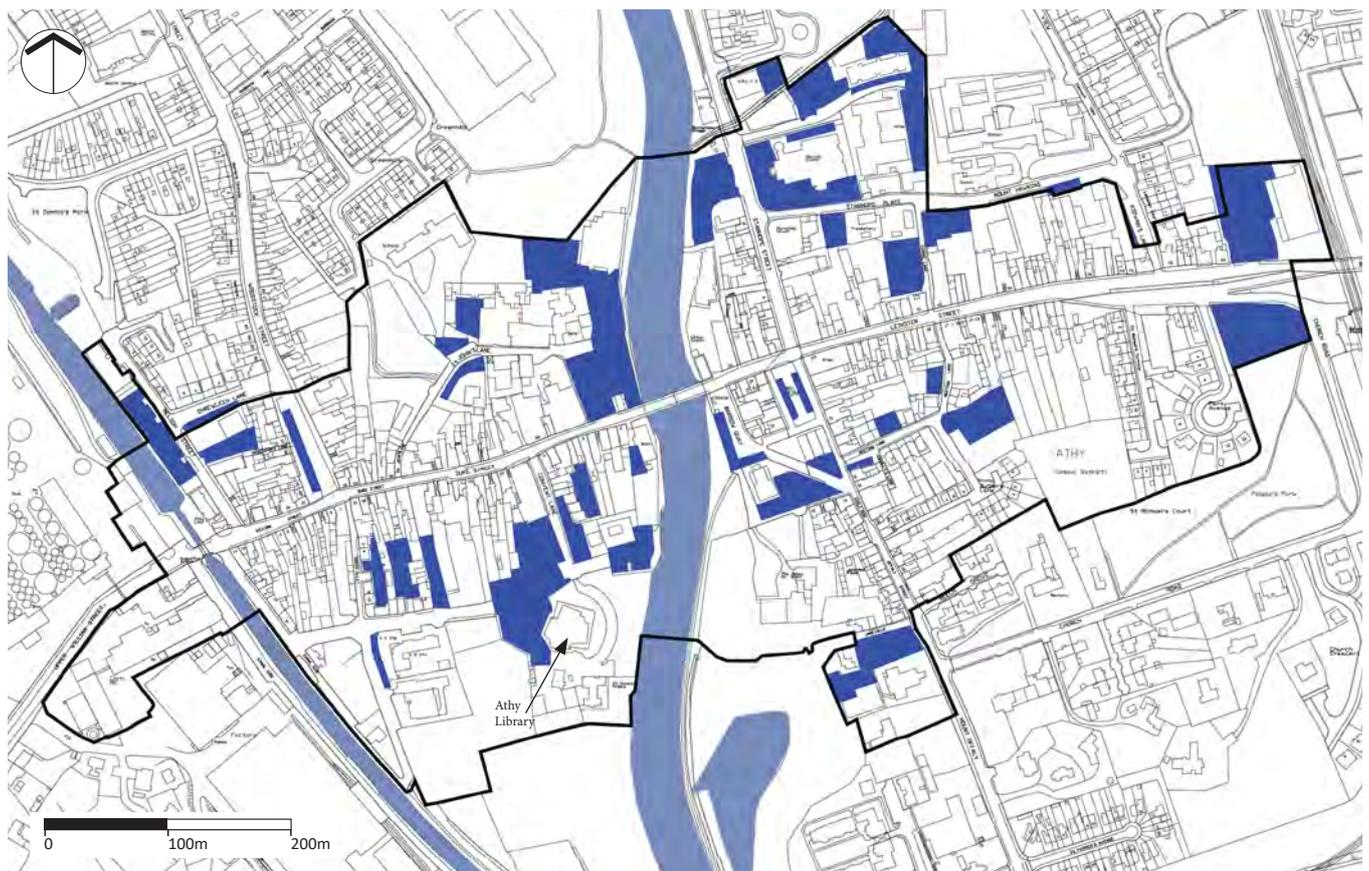


Figure 2.39: Extent of major surface car parking areas (dark blue shading) within Athy Town Centre



Figure 2.40: Car parking around Athy Library (far left)

As part of the urban quality analysis, a number of car parks were surveyed within the town centre on a weekday afternoon. This recorded that none of the car parks managed by the Council were operating at or even near capacity. Whilst it is acknowledged that the results provide only a snapshot in time and do not differentiate between short and long term parking demand, they do however demonstrate the need for further research on this topic with a view to developing a more integrated strategic plan for the public realm of Athy.

Table 2.1: Car parking survey of Six publicly managed car parks

Carpark	Capacity in Spaces	Spaces Occupied	% Occupancy
Meeting Lane	38	16	42%
Stanhope Street	52	29	56%
Emily Square	28	7	25%
Back Square and Barrow Quay	79	24	30%
Edmund Rice Square	84	32	38%
Dominican Lands	122	45	37%

Note: Survey was carried out between 3-4 pm on Thursday 17th September 2020. Weather conditions: Sunny, Temp. 21°C.

While there will always be a need for adequate car parking facilities to support the retail and service function of the town centre, an element of rationalisation is required. Parking should be provided at a proximate and convenient location to the designated core retail area but such areas should be to the interior of the urban block and not comprise a dominant feature along the key streets and public spaces. Indeed parking should be maintained in areas that would otherwise not support any street activities. An example of a well-sited car park within the town is the publicly owned car park on Meeting Lane. Parking at this location attracts people and enables passive surveillance of this backlands area, including the adjacent skate park. The distribution and quantum of car parking provision within the town needs to be a central consideration of any future public realm plan for the town.

2.7.5 Cycling Infrastructure

The flat topography and the relative proximity of key services and destinations means that cycling in Athy should be viewed as an attractive alternative to the car. Presently however, the supporting infrastructure for cycling throughout the town is weak. While certain key destinations in the town have cycle parking facilities, for example at the train station, the schools campus and the primary care centre, it is evident that there are no visible cycle stands or bays anywhere within the town centre. Furthermore, there are no dedicated cycle lanes present in Athy. It is noted that the Blueway (under construction) and the future Athy Distributor Road will provide for dedicated cycleways and have the capacity to form the spine of an integrated network. However, much remains to be done to realise a comprehensive network which would connect these high quality routes with dedicated cycleways linking residential and employment lands with key destinations across the town in order to provide for a convenient and safe alternative to the car.



Figure 2.41: Cycling facilities at Athy Primary Care Centre

2.8 Challenges and Opportunities

The previous sections analysed the quality of the urban environment across different scalar levels in Athy, ranging from a broad examination of the urban structure to a more detailed investigation of the quality of public space within the town centre. The primary conclusion from this research is that a considerable gap exists between the current situation within the town and the future development scenario of Athy, as outlined in the vision statement of the Plan, which envisages a sustainable, connected, age friendly and climate resilient town. The pattern of development over the last number of decades in Athy has resulted in a poorly connected and overly car-dependant settlement. The town centre continues to experience ongoing challenges relating to land use and activities, highlighting the need to find alternative roles for many vacant commercial buildings where the previous uses may no longer be viable. The poor quality of the public realm also detracts from the overall visitor experience and liveability of the town.

While there are a number of critical issues holding back Athy’s development potential, the analysis also found key areas of opportunity, based around the existing built and natural heritage present in the town. The development of the Barrow Blueway is of crucial importance and it is considered to be at the centre-piece of the Urban Regeneration Framework. With further carefully targeted investment in Athy’s waterways infrastructure there is an opportunity to unlock the town’s untapped tourist potential and to enable it to become a tourist destination of regional significance. Athy’s comprehensive network of green spaces also needs to be integrated with the river and canal and developed so that they can offer visitors complementary ‘spin-off’ recreational activities.

Another key area of potential for the town over the medium term is the construction of the Athy Distributor Road. This will provide a real opportunity to re-imagine the town’s public realm; its streets and public spaces. Such transformational change would complement the Blueway, entice people into the heart of the town and provide for new activities and economic synergies to develop. A re-visioned public realm would also encourage greater town centre living, create enhanced recreational spaces, thereby further increasing the town’s attractiveness as a cultural, tourism and business investment destination.



Figure 2.42: Traffic congestion in Athy Town Centre



Figure 2.43: Natural Heritage - Athy’s Waterways

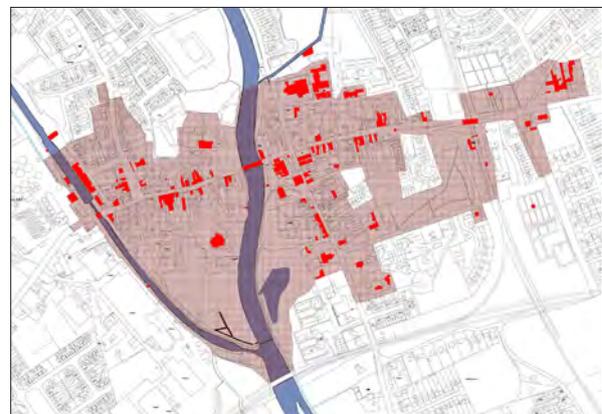


Figure 2.44: Built Heritage - Athy ACA (pink hashing)

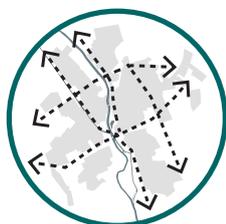


Figure 2.45: Route of Athy Distributor Road (in red)

3. Areas of Opportunity

3.1 Approach Taken

In identifying areas of opportunity to increase the economic potential of Athy, the principle of asset-based development comes to the fore. This approach which is central to the Local Area Plan’s Economic Development Strategy (outlined in Section 6.3 of the Local Area Plan) places particular emphasis on utilising the town’s rich stock of natural and built heritage resources to develop its tourism and amenity infrastructure, with the aim of enhancing the overall liveability and visitor experience of the town. It is considered that this approach will not only create and secure locally based employment opportunities, but also make the town as a whole a more attractive place for inward investment, improve the quality of life for residents in the town and lead to the creation of a more self-sustaining settlement. In pursuing such an assets-based principle to development, the findings of the urban quality analysis outlined in Section 2 have also been taken into account. These highlight that the town is experiencing challenges relating to connectivity, land use and activities, and the public realm. Accordingly, the outputs of the Framework proposes that these issues be dealt with across three broad strands, as follows:



Enhancing Connectivity: At an over-arching level, key destinations within the town need to be linked to residential and employment areas by a network of high quality pedestrian and cycle routes. Such supporting infrastructure is necessary in order to create a more integrated and age friendly settlement and provide for a realistic, safe and convenient alternative to the car, especially for short trips within the town.



Revitalising Activities: An issue that is particularly prominent within the town centre, it is considered that new and alternative uses need to be found for vacant units, many of which are protected structures. Active land management measures are also required to encourage the full utilisation of strategic brownfield and backland sites within the historic core of the town.



Transforming the Public Realm: A coordinated programme of investment is required for the town’s public realm, which includes its public spaces, parks and streets and recreational infrastructure, in order to integrate with and maximise the potential socio-economic benefits of the Barrow Blueway. Such a placemaking exercise will reinforce the inherent qualities of existing character areas within the town and improve the experience of the town for visitors and residents alike.

The final outputs of the Framework (Section 3.6) will identify a number of priority projects for the town which are specifically designed to respond to the requirements of the three strands in a meaningful and comprehensive manner. As previously outlined in Section 1.5, the proposals will also have regard to the various past and present plans and projects for the town. These projects or aspects of the projects will only be incorporated into the outputs of the Framework where they align with aspirations set out in the three strands above.

3.2 Developing Character Areas

The Urban Regeneration Framework identifies a number of character areas in and around the town centre. Whilst acknowledging various designations and boundaries in previous plans and studies, this framework seeks to define character areas around sites of activity and will focus their development as existing destinations or potential future destinations for the town.

The Framework will provide the opportunity for the character areas to be regenerated and enhanced so that they become the focus of prioritised projects within the town (see Section 3.6). To this end, the framework will briefly outline how the various character areas can each contribute to the overall regeneration of the town by:

- Identifying the main issues and challenges presently affecting the character area;
- Developing a coherent identity for the area based on its unique character and assets, and defining the role that it will play in the future development of the town and;
- Outlining the future spatial opportunities and high level urban design principles for each character area, which would contribute to the fulfilment of such an envisaged role.

Whilst the Urban Regeneration Framework sets out a series of proposals which are envisaged to be implemented over the medium to long term, the short term vision for the character areas should be to plan for the upgrading of the public realm, the identification of key connections and to set out desirable uses/activities. It is therefore considered that such a character-based focus is central to the development of any public realm strategy for the town (see Section 3.5).

The following areas have been selected as character areas (see Figure 3.1, right):

1. Town Core - East
2. Town Core - West
3. Dominican Lands
4. The Abbey and Marina Lands
5. Woodstock Lands



Figure 3.1: Athy Character Areas

3.2.1 Town Core - East

Challenges and Opportunities

This character area comprises of the eastern part of the commercial core of Athy and is centred along Leinster Street. This route, when approached from the east is quite wide, however it gradually narrows, drawing one into the centre of the town at Emily Square, the most important civic space in Athy, with its architectural ensemble of the Heritage Centre (former town hall) and Courthouse (former corn exchange). Emily Square and Back Square, to the rear of the Heritage Centre, form a single spatial entity that is bordered to the west by the River Barrow. Although presently dominated by car parking and vehicular traffic, this unique space has the potential to capitalise on its strategic riverside and town centre location. Leinster Street itself is dominated by commercial and retail activities, though an element of residential is present along its eastern section. The high level of retail vacancies along the street is noticeable, as is the overall poor quality of the public realm which worsens as one moves to the side streets such as Meeting Lane, Chapel Lane and Kirwan's Lane.

There is potential for infill development within the area, most notably within a key site to the south of Leinster Street (see Section 3.4.2) which would, if developed, contribute greatly to the vitality and vibrancy of this part of the town centre, providing for both residential and commercial uses, as well as creating an alternative high quality pedestrian and cycling link between the town centre and the train station (see Section 3.3).

Envisaged Role

It is envisaged that the character area not only strengthen its role as part of the commercial and retail core of the town but also provides for the transformational change needed to maximise the potential of its key urban spaces such as Emily Square, Back Square and Barrow Quay, re-imagining them as places which showcase the towns historic, cultural and architectural heritage, whilst also attracting both visitors and businesses, and providing an enhanced sense of civic pride to the residents of the town.



Figure 3.2: View of Barrow Quay (credit: Athy Photography)

Key Urban Design Principles

- Ensure that Leinster Street retains its key function as the most important spatial route in the town by providing for a high quality public realm which places particular emphasis on pedestrian and cyclist mobility.
- Ensure that the eastern part of the character area acts as an eastern gateway to the town, by providing for a high quality and pedestrian friendly public realm around the ramp over the railway line and the junction of Leinster and Church Road (i.e. the access point to the train station).
- Ensure that the public realm of Emily Square, Back Square and Barrow Quay is developed as a coordinated and integrated single space which provides for high levels of interaction with the river.
- Provide for the sensitive development of infill sites, particularly along side streets. All developments must provide a strong urban edge and be designed to maximise passive surveillance of public areas.
- Facilitate car parking provision within the interior of urban blocks and backland sites rather than along visually sensitive areas of the public realm, where possible.
- Ensure that the Public Realm Strategy provides for the upgrading of side streets in the area in order to provide for attractive and well-defined urban spaces.
- Provide for the 'undergrounding' of all overhead wiring particular along Leinster Street and other areas within the Athy Architectural Conservation Area (ACA).
- Ensure that the strategic infill site to the south of Leinster Street is developed in a manner which enhances the existing character of the area, revitalises activities and creates high quality pedestrian/cyclist connections through the site.

3.2.2 Town Core - West

Challenges and Opportunities

Comprising the western portion of the town core, the spine of this character area is composed of Duke Street and William Street which is a continuation of the commercial artery formed by Leinster Street across the river to the east. Other critical spaces in the area include Edmund Rice Square and Woodstock Street. While the former is dominated by car parking, it nevertheless is an area that has a noticeably high pedestrian footfall and as such has the potential to be re-imagined as an attractive and successful civic space within the town. Commercial and retail uses feature particularly prominently in the area, albeit with high levels of unit vacancy.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of this character area is the presence of good quality examples of residential living within the backlands of Duke Street. Centred around an attractive laneway, such housing offers a model for sustainable town centre living that could be emulated across the entire commercial core. Since the character area is bound by both the River Barrow and the Barrow Line Canal there is great potential to improve north-south links along these routes. Whilst the route along the canal will form part of the Barrow Blueway, the Public Realm Strategy should plan for improvements along the River Barrow. Other north-south links such as Convent Lane and St. John's Lane have the potential to enhance connections to the strategic open spaces of the Woodstock lands to the north and the Dominican lands to the south. The area around Augustus Bridge acts as an eastern gateway to the town and should be upgraded accordingly, to reflect its significant location.

Envisaged Role

Similar to the Town Core - East, it is envisaged that this character area should continue to play a central role as part of the commercial and retail core of the town. The transformation of key spaces such as Edmund Rice Square, Duke Street and Augustus Bridge are critical for attracting visitors and shoppers to Athy. The critical asset of this character area is its potential to act as a strategic connector between north and south and east and west.



Figure 3.3: Attractive residential laneway off Duke Street

Key Urban Design Principles

- Ensure that the Duke Street / William Street axis retains its key function as the most important spatial route in the town by providing for a high quality public realm which places particular emphasis on pedestrian and cyclist mobility.
- Provide for the development of an upgraded civic space in Edmund Rice Square which is fully integrated with any riverside promenade route alongside the Barrow.
- Ensure that the western part of the character area around Augustus Bridge is re-imagined as a western gateway to the town, through the provision of high quality and pedestrian friendly public realm at this important junction with the Barrow Blueway which will provide for a sense of arrival.
- Ensure that the Public Realm Strategy provides for the upgrading of side streets in the area including Monastery Lane and St. John's Lane in order to provide for attractive and welcoming spaces.
- Provide for the 'undergrounding' of all overhead wiring in particular along Duke Street, William Street and other areas within the Athy Architectural Conservation Area (ACA).
- Promote permeability within the urban block and encourage interventions to restore block permeability to Duke Street. This will be further explored as part of the Dominican lands masterplan (see Section 3.6).
- Facilitate a rationalisation and reorganisation of public car parking provision within the character area, as part of an overall traffic management plan for the town centre.
- Facilitate the development of infill sites in a sensitive manner having regard to the ACA and any adjacent established uses. All developments must provide a strong urban edge and be designed to maximise passive surveillance of the street.

3.2.3 The Dominican Lands

Challenges and Opportunities

The Dominican lands occupy a large triangular area immediately to the south of Duke Street. Water plays a key role in defining the character of the area and it is bordered to the east by the River Barrow and the west by the canal which merge at the apex of the triangle to the south. The lands are joined to the north by Duke Street and the commercial core of the town but have a very backlands character, which for the most part lacks any defined street frontage. This area is also intensively used for both publicly and privately owned car parking, which is arranged in an informal and somewhat haphazard manner. A key building of note in the area is Athy Library (former Dominican Church) which acts as an important landmark in the town (see Figure 3.4). To the south of the library the lands mostly constitute picturesque green open space comprising of some mature trees and waterside walks along the river and canal. Indeed, the Statement of Character for the Athy Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) notes that in relation to the Dominican lands, *'very few towns in Ireland can boast such a landscape setting of such high visual and heritage value'*.

Considering the inherent character and natural assets of the area, there is huge opportunity to harness the potential of the canal and river and develop the Dominican Lands as a hub for water and amenity-based activities within the town. Indeed, the Council is currently progressing such a plan as part of its masterplan for the Dominican Lands and Blueway sports hub/education centre (see Priority Project 4, Table 3.1). There is also the potential for built form to be developed along the northern fringe of the area to create a strong urban edge (along the northside of Convent Lane). Such development should provide for high levels of integration with both the town core to the north and the open space to the south. A future pedestrian and cyclist footbridge is proposed to be located to the south of Convent Lane. This crucial link will allow for the creation of an alternative high quality pedestrian and cycling link between the Barrow Blueway, the town centre and the train station (see Figure 3.8 and Section 3.3).

Envisaged Role

The Dominican Lands will become a multi-use tourism resource located at the centre of Athy's waterways infrastructure. Acting as a key activity hub, the area's upgrade facilities will attract local, national and international boat users offering a range of activities including fishing, walking, cycling, kayaking etc. whilst also being an attraction for nature enthusiasts.



Figure 3.4: View across the River towards the Dominican lands

Dominican Lands Masterplan

The area is subject to a separate masterplanning process which has already commenced. This process has taken into account all the challenges and opportunities for the character area, as outlined above. Thus, it is envisaged that the outputs of the masterplan will include a series of design measures and provisions which will maximise the potential of the lands while also taking into consideration the sensitive location of the site within an ACA and bordered by a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) to the east and a proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA) to the west. The masterplan will also provide for the appropriate facilities and infrastructure to be developed to help it realise its envisaged future role.

3.2.4 The Abbey and Marina Lands

Challenges and Opportunities

This area is located to the south of Emily Square/Back Square, adjacent to the River Barrow and is composed of the abbey lands to the north and the marina lands to the south. The abbey lands, whilst almost entirely cleared of vegetation retains a number of mature trees along its northern and western boundaries which contributes to its character. This area in particular has experienced ongoing issues relating to anti-social behaviour and illegal dumping. The marina itself, is an artificial inlet of the River Barrow constructed a number of years ago but has subsequently been designated as part of the Barrow and Nore Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The SAC also encompasses the western boundary of the character area alongside the river. The area is therefore considered to be very environmentally sensitive and this places challenges in terms of its future development. The majority of the lands also lie within flood risk areas, which places further constraints on the potential development of these lands.

The marina itself is not open to the general public, however it is currently managed for fishing activities by Athy and District Anglers' Club. Whilst there may be possibilities for some development within the northeast confines of the character area, the key opportunities should be based on harnessing its attractive riverside location and promoting an increase in recreational and amenity activities on the lands. The riverside path, which is also part of the Athy Town Centre Slí na Sláinte walking route, will play an important role in accessing the lands either from Emily Square/Back Square to the north or from the horse bridge (connecting with the Blueway) to the south. Other key links through the site also need to be developed such as connecting the River Barrow path with the lane at Janeville which would link into Offaly Street (see Figure 3.8).

Envisaged Role

It is envisaged that the character area will to a large extent play a complementary role to the Dominican Lands across the river, in that it should also be home to various water-based recreational and amenity spin-off activities arising from the development of the Barrow Blueway and Blueway Hub.



Figure 3.5: Kayaking on the River Barrow in Athy



Figure 3.6: Amenity infrastructure (credit: Athy Photography)

Key Urban Design Principles

- Enhance the connectivity of the site by upgrading the River Barrow pathway and allowing for the development of permeable routes throughout the site, including a link east from the river through the character area to Janeville.
- The development of any built form on the site must provide for a strong urban edge and enhanced passive surveillance of publicly accessible spaces.
- Any development plans for the area must incorporate, as far as possible, the mature trees bordering the area to the north and along the Barrow pathway to the west.
- Development proposals for the area must respect the sensitive environmental nature of the area, as such any landscaping and public realm works undertaken must incorporate appropriate sustainable and ecologically friendly features.

3.2.5 Woodstock Lands

Challenges and Opportunities

The majority of this large character area is composed of approximately 13 hectares of open space which extends along the River Barrow into the centre of the town. The lands which are under the ownership of the Council, are bordered by the river to the east and residential developments to the west. For the most part the lands presently comprise of under-utilised open grassland, with a playground facility and some informal playing pitches. The area is also home to the K-Leisure swimming pool and gym. This facility, while an excellent amenity for the town, does not interact very much with its immediate surroundings, being fenced off from its immediate surroundings. Overall, the lack of boundaries around the Woodstock lands have resulted in high levels of interaction with the residential estates to the west. While there is public access between the lands and the town centre to the south, there are poor levels of integration. Such a situation is exacerbated by the presence of Pettitt's supermarket which blocks visual links between the lands and the town centre. One notable feature of the lands are the remains of Woodstock Castle (see Figure 3.7), one of the oldest structures in Athy and one which played an important role in the town's early history and development. It is considered that the castle should be placed as the centre of focus in any future landscaping masterplan for lands (see Priority Project 8, Table 3.1).

Envisaged Role

The Woodstock lands have the potential to provide an array of passive and active recreational amenities for residents not just in the immediate vicinity but for the town as a whole. It is therefore envisaged that the lands should be developed to their full potential as a neighbourhood park, as identified in the Athy Social Infrastructure Audit (published alongside the Plan).



Figure 3.7: Ruins of Woodstock Castle

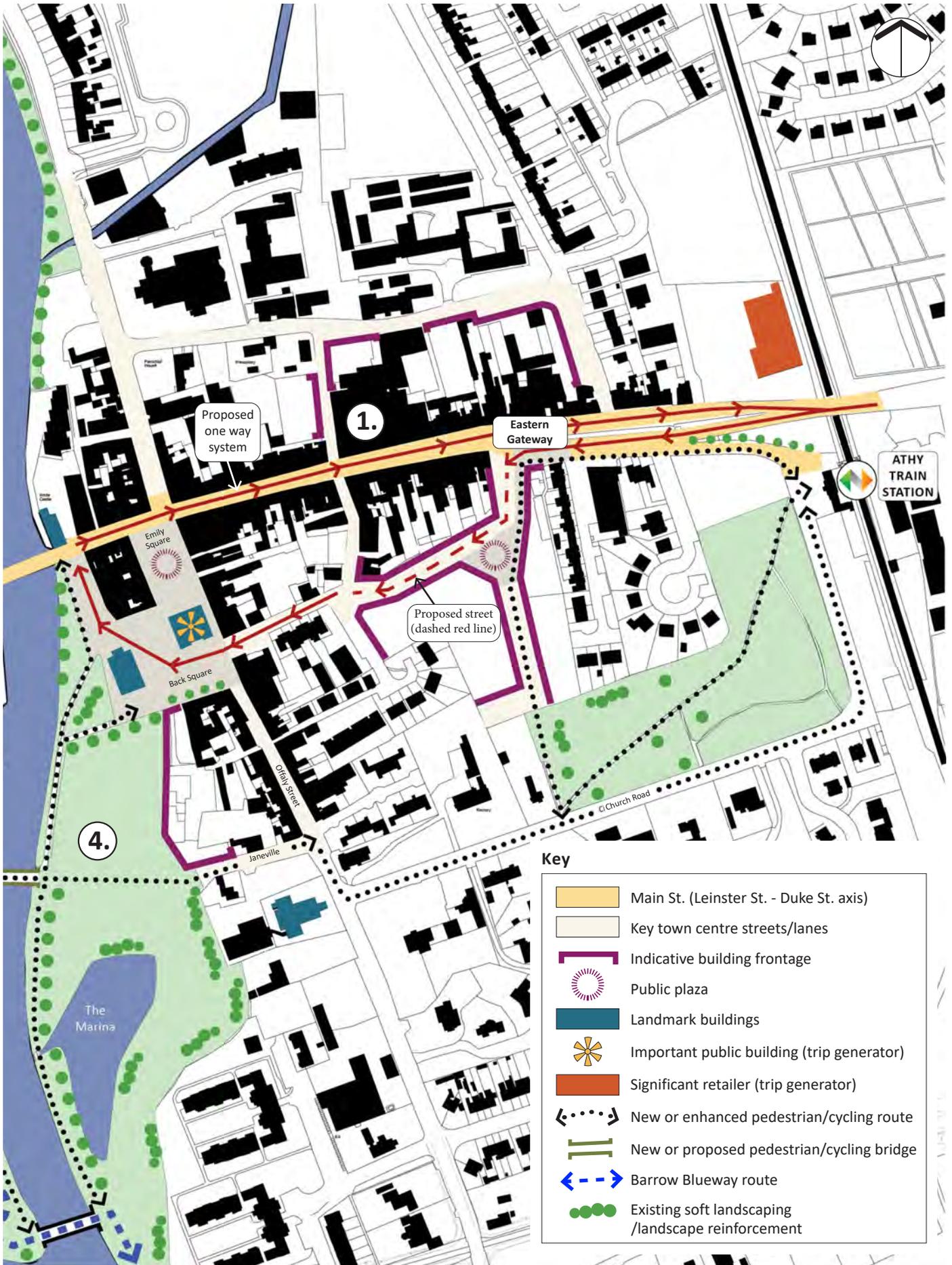
Key Urban Design Principles

- Development proposals for the character area must respect the sensitive environmental nature of the lands and the fact that they are situated within a flood plain, adjacent to a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Accordingly, any landscaping and public realm works undertaken must incorporate appropriate sustainable and ecologically friendly features.
- Ensure that the remains of Woodstock Castle are the centre focus of any future masterplan for the lands. Any such masterplanning scheme should also seek to provide a comprehensive soft landscaping scheme for the lands. The masterplan should also investigate the possibility that any future flood relief works on the lands be incorporated into the overall landscaping design.
- Provide for increased interaction between the K-Leisure facility and the surrounding Woodstock lands.
- Ensure improved access to the lands and enhanced connections with the town centre to the south which would include improved connections along the river Barrow and integration with any public realm improvements to Edmund Rice Square (see Section 3.2.2 and Figure 3.8)
- Provide for an array of passive and active recreation facilities on the lands in accordance with standards set out for a Neighbourhood Park.
- Examine the possibility of locating community managed gardens, allotments and a community compost facility on the lands.

3.2.6 Character Areas within a Regenerated Town Centre



Figure 3.8: Character areas within a regenerated town centre



3.3 Enhancing Connectivity

3.3.1 Creating an Integrated Network

The realisation of integrated sustainable communities is one of the Eight Strategic Development Principles guiding the Athy Local Area Plan. A vital component of this is the creation of a network of sustainable movement routes and connections which link neighbourhoods with key destinations throughout the town. Whilst this Framework has noted that many of these connections are currently lacking in Athy, it also illustrated the huge potential for their development. Indeed, both the Barrow Blueway (currently under construction) along with the Athy Distributor Road feature high-quality pedestrian and cycling facilities, which together, will form the core of a dedicated sustainable movement network transecting the town (see Figure 3.9, below). This opportunity has also been identified by the Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA), a supporting document published alongside the Plan. It is further noted that the north-south Barrow Blueway route will connect directly with the new east-west Athy Distributor Road once constructed.

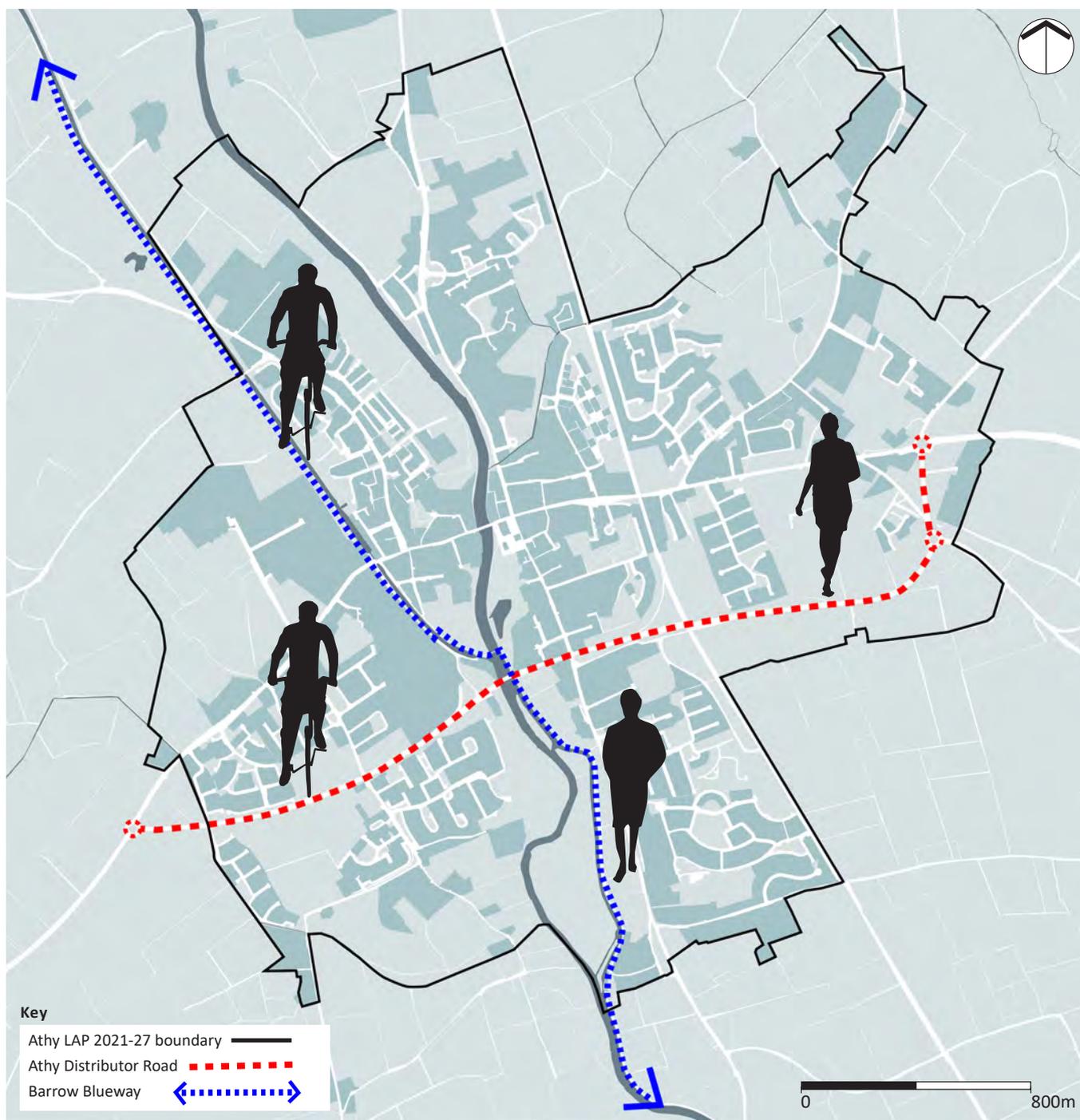


Figure 3.9: The core of the future sustainable movement network in Athy

3.3.2 Proposed Pedestrian/Cycling routes and Other Connectivity Projects

Whilst the Barrow Blueway and the Athy Distributor Road will form two major connectivity spines of the network, the ABTA also proposes a series of pedestrian/cycling routes designed to integrate with these routes and create an broader high-quality network throughout the town. The ABTA outlines a list of options ranging from upgrading existing infrastructure to the building of new infrastructure along with the provision of other supporting measures, such as for example, enhanced pedestrian and cyclist priority at traffic junctions. These options have been transposed into **Chapter 7 Movement and Transport** of the Plan and are supported by statutory objectives contained therein.

While the options for both walking and cycling in the town seek to utilise and upgrade existing routes, for example along Athy’s waterways, there are also several instances where links are badly needed to increase connectivity at a local level. Figure 3.10 (see right) illustrates such a scenario within a housing estate located off Geraldine Road, where no formal connections exist between the development and the nearest main road. In this case, people have resorted to creating an informal route. Such desire lines demonstrate the residents’ collective need for connectivity beyond their immediate surroundings. Only through the creation of universally accessible links at a local level will the town become truly integrated and the potential of the strategic links be fully realised. Accordingly, the Local Area Plan, also outlines options for enhancing local connectivity in specific areas throughout the town (see Section 7.4 and Maps 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 of the Plan).



Figure 3.10: Informal routes accessing Geraldine Road

3.3.3 Pedestrian and Cycling Routes within the Town Centre

The development of a network of upgraded and new walking and cycle routes within the town centre is crucial for both its economic and social wellbeing. The creation of looped routes focused around the Athy’s waterways including the Barrow Blueway, will help to maximise the tourist and recreational potential of this key amenity.



Figure 3.11: Proposed new/upgraded pedestrian/cycle routes in the town centre

3.4 Revitalising Activities in the Town Centre

The high level of vacancies within the town centre is perhaps the biggest obstacle needed to be overcome to achieve a successful regeneration of the historic core. Such an issue is considered entrenched in the town and requires a targeted and long term response. Tackling vacancies will have positive repercussions, not just for town centre rejuvenation but also for the settlement as a whole, where bringing existing building stock back into use will provide additional benefits in terms of strengthening environmental and climate resilience. The revitalisation of town centre land uses can only be achieved by recognising that some former uses (including retail uses) will not be returning and by identifying and encouraging credible alternative uses and functions for these units.

The current situation in the town has taken on a new dimension with the housing crisis. Athy is now a designated Rent Pressure Zone. Consequently, the need for an increased housing supply within the town is critical. Whilst it is to be welcomed that there has been a reduction in the level of residential vacancies in the town centre, more needs to be done. Serious consideration must be given to the re-purposing of vacant commercial units as homes. Such a change of use may not require permission, as outlined in *Bringing Back Homes: Manual for the Reuse of Existing Buildings*. Whilst the Core Retail Area should be respected, there is huge potential in the town centre to increase its residential population, foster compact development and revitalise its main commercial streets. Aside from housing, other ideas for their potential uses of vacant buildings should be imaginative and flexible, and respond to the rapidly changing trends and requirements of our economy. Accordingly, the Plan specifically identifies and supports the following alternative uses within Athy Town Centre:

- Live-work units
- Remote working facilities (with access to high speed broadband)
- Enterprise incubation hubs
- Tourist ‘spin-off’ enterprises
- Tourist accommodation
- Specialised services (speciality food/craft shops)

3.4.1 The Role of Kildare County Council in Reusing Buildings

Kildare County Council has taken a leading role in finding alternative uses for key buildings in Athy. For example, the Heritage Centre on Emily Square served during different periods as a Town Hall, Fire Station and a Library. The Council also successfully transformed the Dominican Church as the town’s new public Library, which was opened in 2018. At the initiative of the Council, the former Model School, a prominent protected structure within the town, is set to become the home of the Athy Food, Drinks and Skills Innovation Hub, an incubation and innovation space which will be a regional centre for food and drinks research and development .

In addition to coordinating direct interventions to finding new and adaptable uses for prominent existing buildings in Athy, the Council has over the past number of years engaged with private land owners in the town centre with the aim of reducing instances of vacancy and dereliction. As previously noted in Section 2.5.2, this has yielded very positive results. Contact has been made with owners of vacant sites and properties across the town, with specific emphasis on strategic locations within the town centre. A key area that requires attention is the improvement of the streetscape in some areas of the town. To this end, Kildare County Council’s recently introduced shopfront renewal scheme has assisted in providing grant funding that has facilitated the improvement of a number of shopfronts in the town centre. It is acknowledged that further work is needed particularly in terms of continuing to engage with property owners and their representatives to encourage redevelopment/refurbishment. In this regard, the council is committed to maintaining this positive momentum and assisting where possible.

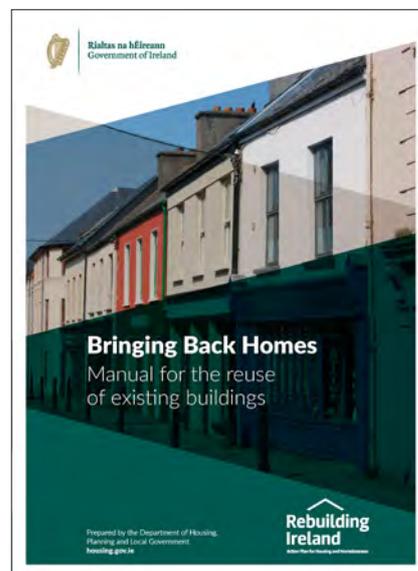


Figure 3.12: Manual for the Reuse Existing Buildings



Figure 3.13: Athy Library

An action of the Local Area Plan also includes investigating the feasibility of the Council acquiring a vacant commercial unit within the town centre (or in partnership with a landowner) in order to demonstrate as a 'pilot project' the possibility of re-purposing such a building for alternative uses (see Chapter 5 of the Local Area Plan).

3.4.2 Development Opportunity Sites in the Town Centre

There are a number of high-profile vacant sites in the town centre that offer great potential not just in terms of increasing activities and improving placemaking within the historic core but also providing the opportunity for achieving the target to have at least 10% of all new units in Athy built on town centre lands (see Section 3.3.2 of the Plan). The two sites identified below, provide indicative examples of the urban form, connections and activities that could be achieved on such sites.

Site A - Dominican Lands



Figure 3.14: Indicative design framework

The Dominican lands occupy a prominent location in the town centre which, notwithstanding environmental constraints, can accommodate a level of infill development which would contribute to improving the urban environment whilst also providing for an increased level of vitality and activities within this part of the historic core. The indicative design framework (see left, Figure 3.14) illustrates the potential for creating a well-defined east-west street along Convent Lane. A new civic square would also be created at the library. The new spaces would be defined by a strong urban edge, which would act as a bookend to this part of the town core and provide for a strong level of passive surveillance. Envisaged land uses should include a mix of residential and commercial. A strong visual and permeable connection should be maintained between the north and south of the site. Figure 3.14 also incorporates a proposed pedestrian/cycle link between the Blueway and the town centre (see Section 3.3).

Site B - Rear of Leinster Street



Figure 3.15: Indicative design framework

This strategic 1.45 hectare site to the rear of Leinster Street is key to the development of the east-west link, which will allow for a one-way traffic system to be created, to improve the public realm and provide cycleways. The site has the capacity to both create increased connectivity and permeability whilst also providing for an intensification of commercial uses (including an anchor retail tenant) which would add to the overall retail offer of the town centre. The indicative design framework (see left, Figure 3.15) illustrates the internal streets of the development as being people-centred, with car parking to be located to the interior of the urban block. This creates the possibility of developing a central civic plaza. The potential for a high-quality pedestrian/cycle link with the People's Park to the south is also illustrated. Envisaged land uses on the site should incorporate retail, commercial and residential units.

3.5 Transforming Athy's Public Realm

The Statement of Character for the Athy Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) notes that *'the town is experienced along its street spaces, river and canal.'* A number of regeneration projects such as the Barrow Blueway and the Dominican Lands Masterplan seek to enhance the public experience of Athy's natural and built heritage features. However, it is the public realm that is the critical common denominator that links these proposals to each other. Whilst it is evident that the public realm is somewhat of an unloved and overlooked feature within the town, the potential for transformational change in connecting these key visitor attractions through high quality and universally accessible public spaces is huge. It is therefore considered that such a placemaking exercise will furnish the opportunity for increased liveability and investment in the town, while also providing a responsive and design-based solution which will be unique to Athy.

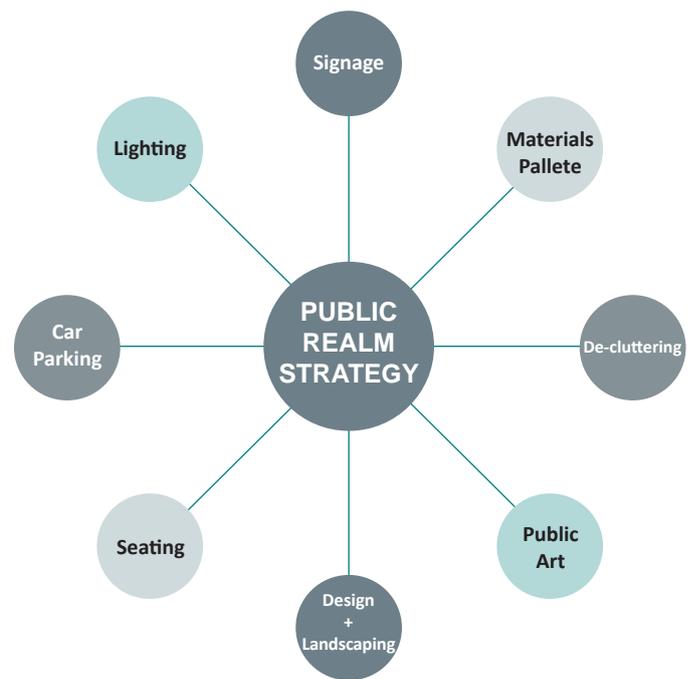


Figure 3.16: Factors to be considered in a Public Realm Strategy

Having regard to the above and noting the importance of having a comprehensive plan in place ready to be implemented in order to maximise the opportunities with the opening of the Athy Distributor Road, it is an objective to commence the preparation of a Public Realm Strategy for Athy within twelve months of the adoption of Local Area Plan (UCRO1.10). This strategy will be implemented on a phased basis during the lifetime of the plan and beyond, to support and facilitate the regeneration of the town. The Strategy will seek to develop and deliver an actions based programme for the effective presentation, development and management of the town's public realm. While the focus will primarily be on the town centre, proposals for other important areas of the town such as the approach roads and gateways, along with public transport nodes such as the train station should also be examined.

Specifically, the Public Realm Strategy will incorporate the following provisions:

- Provide guidance and propose a suite of spatial interventions that will be focused on improving the legibility of the character areas identified in Section 3.2 and developing them as key visitor destinations within the town centre.
- Undertake a car parking analysis of the town, the outputs of which will comprise of a comprehensive car parking plan for the town centre, which will balance the needs of vehicular access to the town centre without compromising the overall quality and visitor experience of the public realm.
- Devise a bespoke materials palette for the town, including for pavement, signage and street furniture which will complement and enhance the natural and built environment of Athy.
- Develop a bespoke wayfinder scheme for the town which will provide up-to-date information on activities, attractions and looped walks within the town to aid visitor orientation.
- Have regard to the provisions of the Urban Regeneration Framework, particularly to the incorporation of proposed public realm interventions with the connectivity routes outlined in Section 3.3.
- Incorporate the recommendations of the Walkability Audit Report for Athy to create an age friendly and universally accessible town centre.
- To consider the incorporation of proposals outlined in the Conservation, Management and Interpretation Plan for Athy (2016) which seeks to create a physical focus in the centre of the town that celebrates the medieval heritage, including the town walls of Athy.

'The town is experienced along its street spaces, river and canal'

p.6, Athy Architectural Conservation Area Statement of Character (2020)

3.6 Conclusion: Priority Projects for Athy

The 8 priority projects outlined below have been selected on the basis of their potential to addressing the current development challenges facing the town and their contribution to delivering the three strands (see below) thus ensuring the realisation of a sustainable, resilient and inclusive settlement which will also be a key tourist destination of regional significance.



Enhancing Connectivity



Revitalising Activities



Transforming the Public Realm

Table 3.1: List of priority projects of the Urban Regeneration Framework

Priority Project	Strand	Description	Key LAP Supporting Objectives
1. Barrow Blueway		The development of the Barrow Blueway, initially from Robertstown to Athy will realise the untapped potential of the route as a multi-use tourism resource for the town. The Blueway (currently under construction) is considered to be the centrepiece of the town’s future tourist offer and crucial in fostering the development of sustainable and locally based tourist spin-off enterprises.	EDTO3.1 to EDTO3.4 MTO1.1 MTO1.3 GI1.6 GI1.11 OS1.1
2. A Public Realm Strategy for Athy		<p>This Framework has identified the development of a Public Realm Strategy as a short term priority for the town, to be commenced within 12 months of the adoption of the Plan. Such a strategy is considered to be fundamental in producing a co-ordinated and transformational programme of works for the town’s public space.</p> <p>The Public Realm Strategy will seek to capitalise on the opening of the Athy Distributor Road and the consequent freeing up of space within the town centre. The main focus of the strategy will be the enhancement of character areas and contributing to their development as a key visitor destinations, thus improving the overall liveability and attractiveness of the town for both visitors and residents alike.</p>	HCO2.2 UCRO1.3 UCRO1.6 UCRO1.8 UCRO1.9 UCRO1.10 EDTO3.5 EDTO3.6 EDTO3.10 MTO1.1 to MTO1.9 MTO2.2 MTO3.5 BH2.9 BH2.12 BH2.14 IO4.3 IO4.4
3. Emily Square Upgrade and Athy Heritage Centre Extension and Refurbishment	 	This project combines two projects which have already secured Part 8 Planning Permission; the public realm upgrade works to Emily Square and the redevelopment of the Athy Heritage Centre - Shackleton Museum, which will provide for the development of a high-profile visitor destination at a strategic and attractive town centre and riverside location.	HCO2.2 HCO4.2 UCRO1.2 UCRO1.9 EDTO3.6 to EDTO3.8 BH1.2 to BH1.7
4. Dominican Lands and Blueway Hub Masterplan	 	<p>A masterplan will be prepared for the former Dominican Lands and its immediate surroundings which will accommodate the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new urban built edge to the north • A new civic square/public realm surrounding the Library • An eco-park • A Blueway sports hub/education centre • Pedestrian/cyclist bridge across the River Barrow, • Flood defence works • Social housing scheme (for the over 55’s) 	HCO2.2 HCO4.1 UCRO1.2 UCRO1.8 EDTO3.1 to EDTO3.8 MTO1.5 MTO1.7 MTO1.8 OS1.1 OS1.5

Table 3.1: List of priority projects of the Urban Regeneration Framework (continued...)

Priority Project	Strand	Description	Key LAP supporting objectives
5. A Connectivity Programme for Athy		This programme has been guided by the Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA) for Athy and includes options for developing an integrated network for walking and cycling. The proposals have been transposed into Section 7.4 of the Local Area Plan and collectively, they combine to form a Connectivity Programme for the town. The Programme includes options for upgrading of existing infrastructure, construction of new infrastructure and other supporting enhancements.	HCO2.2 EDTO3.1 EDTO3.5 UCRO1.8 MTO1 to MTO.1.9 MTO4.3 MTO4.4 GI1.6 OS1.2 OS1.6
6. Active Land Management Programme		This programme involves a range of actions including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applying the Vacant Site levy to prominent and problematic sites within the town centre. • Continuing to engage with property owners regarding vacant sites within the town and providing assistance where required, for example through the issuing of grants as part of the Kildare County Council Shopfront Renewal and Accessibility Scheme. • Aiming to update the Town Centre Land Use Survey on a biennial basis during the lifetime of the Plan. • Supporting the development of alternative uses and functions for vacant units within the town centre, as identified in Section 3.4. • Explore the feasibility of the Council acquiring a vacant commercial unit within the town centre (or alternatively, in partnership with a landowner) in order to demonstrate as a 'pilot project' the possibility of developing alternative uses and functions. 	CSO1.3 UCRO1.2 UCRO1.3 UCRO1.4 UCRO1.5 UCRO1.9 UCRO2.2 to UCRO2.5 EDTO1.7 EDTO1.13 EDTO1.15 EDTO3.12 MTO4.3 BH1.4 BH1.5 BH1.8 BH2.8 BH2.10
7. Athy Food, Drinks and Skills Innovation Hub		This regional facility will be located in the refurbished Model School and aims to facilitate the development new and innovative food and drinks businesses. The Council considers the hub to represent a critical component of the economic development strategy for Athy and will, through the Local Enterprise Office (LEO) and associated bodies, continue to progress the development of the hub over the short to medium term.	HCO3.2 EDTO1.4 EDTO1.7 EDTO1.12
8. Woodstock Lands Masterplan		This project seeks to maximise the potential of the Woodstock lands as a recreational space not just for the immediate area but one that can be utilised by the population of the town as a whole. The Masterplan will seek to develop the lands to their full potential as a neighbourhood park, maximise its riverside location, whilst also making Woodstock Castle a key point of focus.	EDTO3.5 EDTO3.9 MTO1.8 OS1.1 OS1.3 OS1.7 OS1.8



Figure 3.17: Priority Projects within Athy

KILDARE COUNTY COUNCIL

**ATHY
LOCAL
AREA PLAN
2021-2027**

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