
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Plan

The aim of the Rathangan Local Area Plan 2002 is to establish a framework for the planned, co-ordinated and sustainable development of Rathangan and for the conservation and enhancement of its natural and man made environment.

The Plan sets out the objectives and policies of Kildare County Council in respect of physical planning as well as co-ordinating the activities of the Council as, *inter alia*, Housing, Sanitary and Roads Authority. This Plan has been prepared under the provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000 and provides the statutory basis for the consideration by the Council of planning applications.

There are a number of important new provisions in the Planning and Development Act 2000. Amongst the most significant new features of the Act are the following;

- There is no presumption in law that lands zoned for a particular use in this plan shall remain so zoned in subsequent reviews of the plan.
- The Planning Authority will require a specified percentage of land zoned solely for residential, or for a mixture of residential and other uses, be made available for social and/or affordable housing, in accordance with the County Housing Strategy.

The Rathangan Local Area Plan consists of this Written Statement and attached Maps. It is essential that both be referred to in considering the proper planning and sustainable development of the town. The Written Statement takes precedence over the Maps should any discrepancy arise between them. The period of this plan shall be taken as being six years from the date of its adoption or until it is reviewed or another plan made.

1.2 Planning Area

Kildare County Council considered it appropriate to draw up a distinct town development plan in the 1985 review of the Kildare County Development Plan. At this time a town development boundary was established by the Council, subsequently reviewed in the Rathangan Development Plan 1996.

Kildare County Council has decided to zone additional land and to designate a Development Boundary beyond the 1996 boundary. The area to which this plan relates is the land within the 2002 Development Boundary, as shown on the attached maps.

1.3 Review of Rathangan Plan

Rathangan has seen substantial development over the last five years, in common with many other towns in Kildare. Approximately 60% the lands zoned for residential development in the 1996 plan have been developed while there has been little investment in either industrial or commercial property. Development in Rathangan is currently being constrained by inadequate sewage treatment capacity.

Since the Rathangan Development Plan was adopted in 1996, the prospects for growth for Rathangan have changed substantially. Construction of a new sewage treatment plant is expected to be approved in the near future. The improvement in this service, together with the continued buoyancy of the economy, will greatly increase the pressure for growth and development in the town. Rathangan is well placed to benefit from this growth, and is likely to enjoy a renaissance during the period of this plan.

1.4 Regional Context

Rathangan is located within the Mid-East Region and was identified in the *Strategic Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area* as being within the hinterland area of the Dublin Metropolitan Area. It is envisaged that the town will grow to cater for local population growth only. Concentrating local growth in Rathangan is considered the most appropriate way of reducing pressure for one-off housing and other development in the surrounding countryside, while at the same time providing enough serviced land to allow the local community to grow.

Rathangan is located within the area covered by the Dublin Transportation Initiative and consequently benefits from the activities of the Dublin Transportation Office.

1.5 Sustainable Development

The principles of sustainable development, as set out in the document "*Sustainable Development – A Strategy for Ireland*" published in 1997, have been adopted by the Government. Kildare County Council, through the *Rathangan Local Area Plan 2002*, seeks to support this strategy. The Council will seek to integrate its land-use planning with strategic economic, social and transportation planning.

The Council supports Local Agenda 21 and will endeavour to implement the initiative through appropriate actions. The Council is committed to working in partnership with local communities in resource management, conservation of the environment and waste reduction.

1.6 Social Exclusion

The Council supports the national anti-poverty strategy and seeks to address the issues of poverty, social exclusion and multiple deprivation in the various policies and objectives of this plan. The Council is aware that reducing physical isolation and promoting accessibility are key factors in combating social exclusion. In particular, the Council's policies on social and affordable housing, promotion of public transport and pedestrian friendly environments, access for the disabled and provision of childcare facilities are all intended to combat social exclusion.

More generally, the Council, through the County Development Board and in partnership with other agencies and local communities, will take a leading role in tackling poverty and social deprivation.

1.7 Location

Rathangan is located on the Grand Canal and Slate River, 56km from Dublin, 8km north of Kildare, in west Kildare.

1.8 Town Function and Role

The town is primarily a service centre for north west Kildare and Offaly. The town was recognised in the 1999 County Development Plan as being a 'Town of Special Townscape/Heritage Character'. The County Plan recognises that these towns are scheduled for expansion but that their character should be retained

1.9 Population

In 1996 the town of Rathangan had a population of 1,190 persons. There were 350 households within the town in 1996¹ with an average household size of 3.4 persons, higher than the national average of 3.14 persons.

Table 1.1 Population change in Rathangan, 1971 to 1996

	Rathangan	Average Annual % rate of Change
1981	1,083	
1986	1,272	+3%
1991	1,129	-2%
1996	1,190	+1%

Source: CSO.

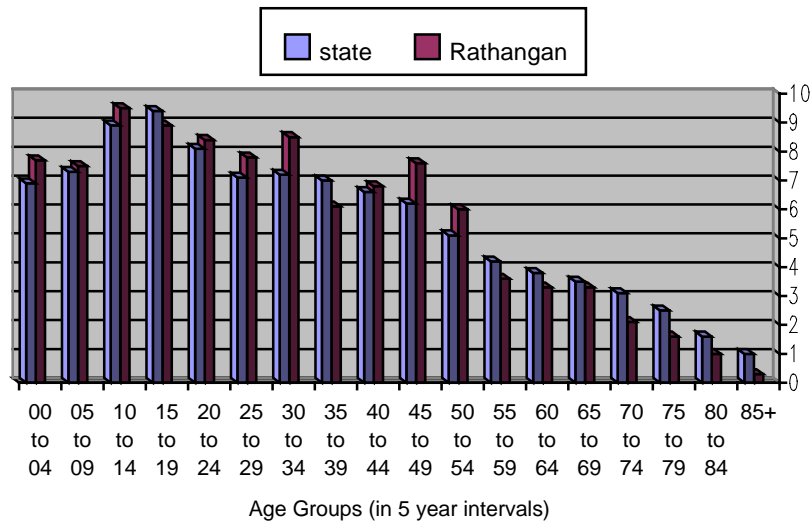


Fig 1.2 Age profile of Rathangan, 1996

A number of residential developments have been completed in the town since 1996. Estimates based on the number of new dwellings constructed and planning permissions granted since then indicate that there will be approximately 380 households by the end of 2001, suggesting a population of between 1,150² and 1,300³ persons within the existing town boundary. While this suggests the town grew in the late '90s after 20 years of stagnation, the rate of growth was significantly below that experienced by most other towns in Kildare.

The age profile of the town, illustrated in Fig. 1.2, shows no statistically significant variation from the state at large in 1996. Average household size in Kildare is expected to decrease to 3.00 by 2006.⁴

1.10 Population Projections

The April 2000 Review and Update of the *Strategic Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area* estimates the population of the Greater Dublin Area, recorded as

¹ Rathangan town as defined by the CSO, encompasses a wider area than the Council boundary. Source: CSO

² Assuming an average household size of 3.0 persons

³ Assuming an average household size of 3.4 persons

⁴ Source: Strategic Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area

1,405,671 in 1996, will be 1,652,710 by 2011 (assuming nil net migration) an increase of 11%.

Given the current high level of in-migration into the Greater Dublin Area in general and County Kildare in particular, it is reasonable to assume that the county will experience population growth of greater than 11% between 1996 and 2006. The *1999 Kildare County Development Plan* estimates the county's population at 155,817 by 2006⁵

Population projections for towns such as Rathangan are particularly difficult because of the town's small size. Population growth will primarily depend on the availability of housing, both in Rathangan and elsewhere in the greater Dublin area, which in turn will depend on the availability of serviced, zoned lands.

Given Rathangan's accessibility to Kildare railway station and its attractive environment it is likely the town will come under new pressure for new residential development.

The *1999 Kildare County Development Plan* established a target population for Rathangan of 2,350 by 2006. This represents a population increase of approx. 100% over the '96 population in ten years.

1.11 Historical Development and Urban Form

Rathangan derives its name from Rath Imghain, the iron age rath next to the Church of Ireland. The village prospered with the opening of the Grand Canal in 1790. The village was a convenient crossing point for both the canal and the river Slate. Much of the present Main St dates from this era. As the importance of the canal declined with the coming of the railway the town stagnated with relatively little development throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

The town's street pattern reflects its historical development and the natural constraints imposed by the river Slate and Grand Canal to the south.

1.12 Development Vision

The growth Rathangan is likely to experience in the near future is both an opportunity and a threat. The danger is that Rathangan develops as a dormitory suburb of Dublin, with the town's own unique character is swamped by urban sprawl.

On the other hand, the growth in population may allow Rathangan to develop the critical mass needed to sustain a range of economic and social facilities, with its own distinct identity and vibrant economic, social and cultural life. The stagnation and slow decline the town endured over much of the 20th century may be reversed.

The development strategy of Kildare County Council, as set out in this Local Area Plan, is to consolidate Rathangan as a service centre for west Kildare. Rathangan will develop in a balanced manner with a range of employment, recreational, retail and educational facilities appropriate for a town of its size.

The Council recognises that the town must offer living and working conditions, educational, recreational and cultural opportunities of the highest standard in an attractive urban environment. The Council aims to achieve this in partnership with the people of Rathangan.

⁵ assuming in-migration rates for the '91 to '96 period continue at the same rate in the '96 to '01 inter-censal period before slowing to half this rate in the '01 to '06 period.

It is critical, if this vision is to be realised, that the town grows in a balanced fashion. Growth in population must be accompanied by the growth in the social, cultural and economic infrastructure of the town.

Kildare County Council aims to achieve this by;

- Protecting and further developing the role of the town centre as the focal point for economic, cultural and social activity,
- Protecting and enhancing the unique architectural heritage of the town,
- Making adequate provision for safe and convenient circulation around the town, by foot, bicycle, public transport and car.
- Ensuring an adequate supply of serviced, zoned land is be made available to accommodate future population and economic expansion,
- Strictly controlling ribbon development and urban sprawl,
- Ensuring that adequate recreational facilities are available to the residents of the town,
- Ensuring all new development in the town, by the Council or by the private sector, is of the highest standard.

It is envisaged that the future development of the town will aim to consolidate the existing centre. A new river/canal crossing will allow the town centre to grow in a balanced manner, while ensuring most circulation around the town is by bicycle or on foot. Within the town centre core, an emphasis will be placed on conservation and the refurbishment of existing structures.

Pedestrian/cycleway links will be focused on connecting residential areas with the town centre schools and employment zones. Employment and traffic generating activity, whether industrial, warehousing or office developments, will be concentrated on the fringes on the town with easy access to the M7 motorway at Monasterevin and Kildare.

This plan for the future development of Rathangan is guided by the policies of the *1999 Kildare County Development Plan*, the *Strategic Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area (1999)*, *Sustainable Development – A Strategy for Ireland (DoELG 1997)* and the policies of the Dublin Transportation Office.

The plan also conforms with the *Residential Density Guidelines for Local Authorities (1999)* and the *2000 Retail Planning Guidelines*, both issued by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government.

The Planning Authority is under a general obligation to secure the objectives set out in the Plan. The Council must also have regard to the provisions of the Plan when exercising its powers under the Planning and Development Act 2000. The plan should not be interpreted as committing the Council to any specific expenditure.