



**Laois County Council**  
**Comhairle Chontae Laoise**

**MOUNTMELICK DRAFT LOCAL AREA PLAN**

**2018 – 2024**

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Draft Mountmellick Local Area Plan 2018 – 2024 (LAP) has been prepared in accordance with the requirements and provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (hereafter referred to as ‘the Act’). The Draft LAP sets out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of Mountmellick, in the context of the Laois County Development Plan 2017 – 2023 and the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 – 2022. The Draft LAP has also been informed by Ministerial Guidelines issued pursuant to Section 28 of the Act together with EU requirements regarding Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA).

The Draft Local Area Plan comprises a written statement with accompanying maps. The written statement shall take precedence over the map should any discrepancy arise. In the full interpretation of all objectives for Mountmellick, it is essential that both the County Development Plan (CDP) and the Draft Local Area Plan (LAP) are read together. Where conflicting objectives arise between the CDP and the Draft LAP, 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 County Development Plan, while policies and objectives that are specific to Mountmellick are included in the Draft LAP.

## 2 LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

Sections 19 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) requires that an LAP be prepared in respect of an area which –

- (i) 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,
- (ii) Has a population in excess of 5,000, and
- (iii) Is situated within the functional area of a Planning Authority which is a County Council.

In accordance with the Core Strategy of the Laois County Development Plan 2017 – 2023 Mountmellick has a projected population of 5,478 persons for 2023. A LAP is therefore statutorily required for Mountmellick.

Section 20 of the Act sets out the process for the making of a Local Area Plan as illustrated in the follow diagram:

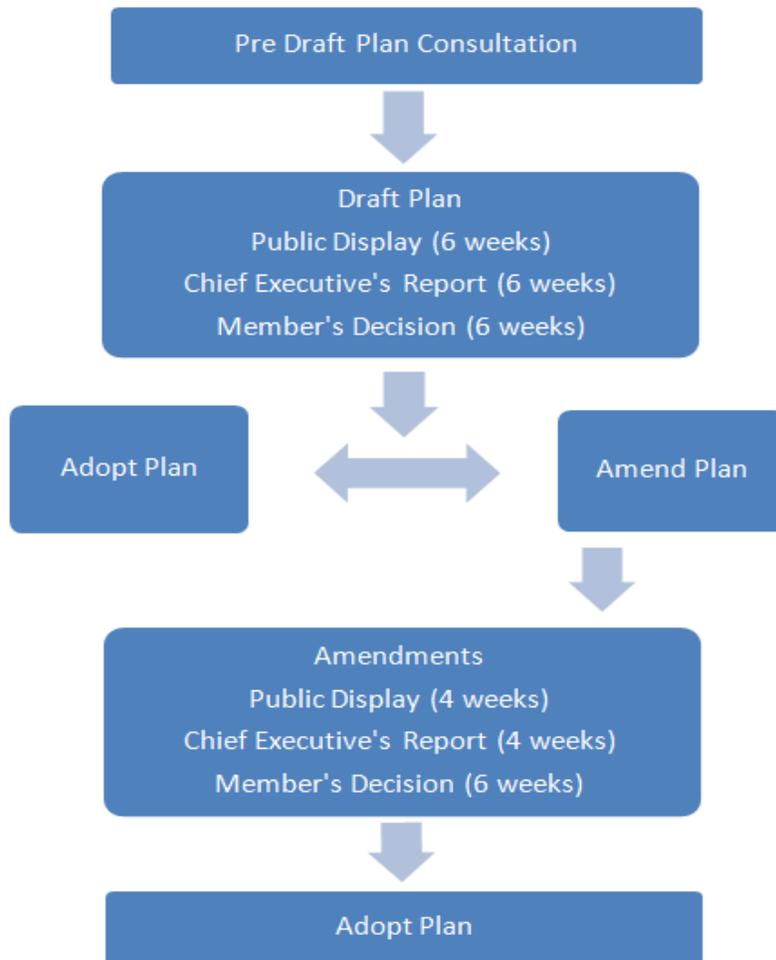


Figure 1: LAP Process

In accordance with Section 19 and 28 of the Act the Draft LAP is subject to the following environmental considerations:

## **2.1 STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is required in accordance with the SEA Directive (DIR 2001/42/EC). SEA is a formal, systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan, policy or programme. SEA is mandatory for plans for areas with a population or target population in excess of 5,000 and is therefore required for the Draft Mountmellick LAP.

Minogue and Associates, Environmental Consultants have been appointed by Laois County Council to undertake the SEA as part of the preparation of the Draft LAP. In this regard, an SEA Environmental Report has been prepared informing the likely environmental impacts of implementing the policies and objectives of the plan and integrating relevant environmental considerations into the plan. The SEA Environmental Report accompanies this Draft LAP. This report sets out the likely environmental consequences of decisions regarding the location and type of developments within the plan area, mitigation measures to offset potential adverse effects of the plan and monitoring proposals.

## **2.2 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT**

Appropriate Assessment (AA) is required in accordance with Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the EU Habitats Directive (DIR 92/43/EEC). AA is a focused and detailed impact assessment of the implications of the plan or project, alone and in combination with other plans and projects, on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site in view of its conservation objectives.

Minogue and Associates, Environmental Consultants have been appointed by Laois County Council to undertake Appropriate Assessment as part of the preparation of the Draft LAP.

Following screening for AA, it was determined that the Mountmellick Draft LAP is likely to have a significant impact on areas designated as a Natura 2000 site, therefore a Natura Impact Report must be prepared. The mitigation measures identified in the Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment (Natura Impact Report) have been incorporated into the Plan.

## **2.3 STRATEGIC FLOOD RISK ASSESSMENT**

A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) is required in accordance with *“The Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities”* as amended by Circular PL2/2014. The primary purpose of the SFRA is to determine flood risk within a particular geographical area and to support planning decisions in relation to developing the plan.

A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) was prepared for Mountmellick in 2012 by JBA Consulting. The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) carried out for Mountmellick is an

assessment of flood risk in the town to inform strategic land-use decisions with the purpose of ensuring that flood risk management is fully integrated into the Draft LAP. Arising from the results of the SFRA, a change in the zoning objectives of some sites is proposed. The SFRA recommends that development proposals for the areas identified as being at risk of flooding be subject to a site specific flood risk assessment.

The Office of Public Works commenced a national Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) programme in 2011. The CFRAM Programme is central to the medium to long term strategy for the reduction and management of flood risk in Ireland. The CFRAM maps for the South East region including County Laois have been prepared, however these are not yet in operation. The recent flood events experienced in Mountmellick in November 2017 have informed the SFRA which has been updated accordingly.

### **3 OTHER PLANS & GUIDELINES**

The Plan has been prepared having regard to national, regional and local policy documents, in addition to Guidelines issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 (as amended), including the following:

- Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework (2018)
- National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020 (NSS)
- Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 - 2022 (2010)
- Laois County Development Plan 2017 - 2023
- Laois Local Economic and Community Plan 2016 – 2021
- Local Area Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2013)
- Manual for Local Area Plans (2013)
- Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009)
- Our Sustainable Future, A Framework for Sustainable Development for Ireland (2012)
- Smarter Travel, A Sustainable Transport Future 2009 - 2020 (2009)
- Building on Recovery; Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2016 - 2021 (2014)
- Rebuilding Ireland – Action Plan for Housing the Homelessness (2016)
- National Climate Change Adaptation Framework; Building Resilience to Climate Change (2012)
- National Energy Efficiency Action Plan 2009 - 2020 (2009)
- National Renewable Energy Action Plan (2010)
- Government Policy Statement on the Strategic Importance of Transmission and Other Energy Infrastructure (2012)
- Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012)
- National Cycle Policy Framework
- Water Services Strategic Plan, A Plan for the Future of Water Services
- Water Supply project Eastern & Midlands Region
- Eastern and South Eastern River Basin Management Plan (2009 - 2015)
- National Broadband Plan 2012
- Laois Heritage Plan 2014 - 2019
- Framework and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (1999)
- Architectural Heritage Protection – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2011)
- Actions for Biodiversity – Ireland’s National Biodiversity Plan 2011-2016 (2011)

## 4 MOUNTMELICK IN CONTEXT

Mountmellick is a service town in the north of County Laois. Mountmellick has a role to play in supporting both the County Towns of Portlaoise and Tullamore. Mountmellick has a pivotal location on the N80, National Secondary route which extends through Portlaoise and provides access to Carlow, Waterford and Rosslare to the south and Tullamore, Mullingar and Athlone to the north. Portarlinton is located approximately 10km to the east on the R423. Mountmellick has easy access to the M7 and M8 Motorway interchanges at Portlaoise (approximately 12km) and New Inn (approximately 17km) which provides excellent access to the south and west of the country, the Greater Dublin Area, Dublin Port and Airport.

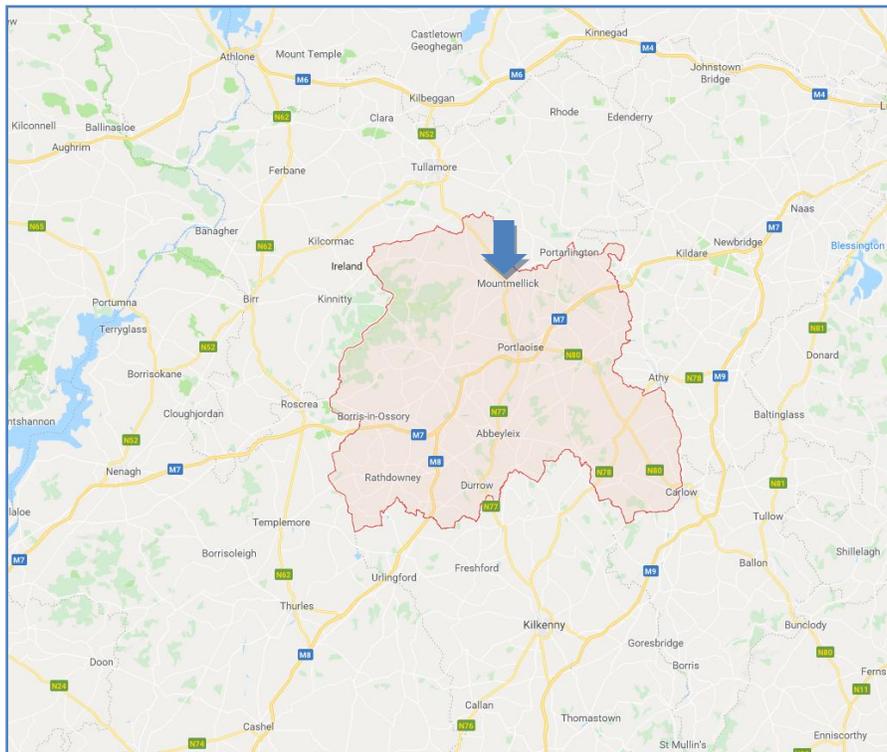


Figure 2: Mountmellick, Co. Laois

Mountmellick is the largest and most important service town in the county, performing vital retail, residential, service, amenity functions and support services to the surrounding hinterland, while supporting the upper tier of the urban hierarchy.

Mountmellick has experienced a very minor population increase in recent years. In addition, the recession has exerted major pressure on employment levels in the town. The attraction of employment is therefore important for the future prosperity and development of the town. Land is currently used for industrial purposes at Bay Road and Acragar, additional lands are zoned for employment purposes to the south of the town in Derryguile and Debbicot to facilitate the expansion of industry and promote employment.

## 5 HISTORY OF MOUNTMELICK

Mountmellick is a recent town with little historic reference predating the seventeenth century. The “Y” shaped plan of the town arises from the joining of the old roads from Tullamore and Birr with the axis of the main street following the line of traffic to a ford in the River Owenass. In 1659 a number of Quaker settlers came to found a meeting in the town. This group became important in the development of Mountmellick, which was to become the most important Quaker centre outside of Dublin. The Quakers contributed to Mountmellick becoming a centre of industry and commerce which lasted into the nineteenth century, when the town was known as the “Manchester of Ireland”. Embroidery and lace making was introduced into the town in 1825 by Quaker Johanna Carter. Mountmellick Work is a form of embroidery which is entirely Irish in origin and design and which is showcased at Mountmellick Museum.

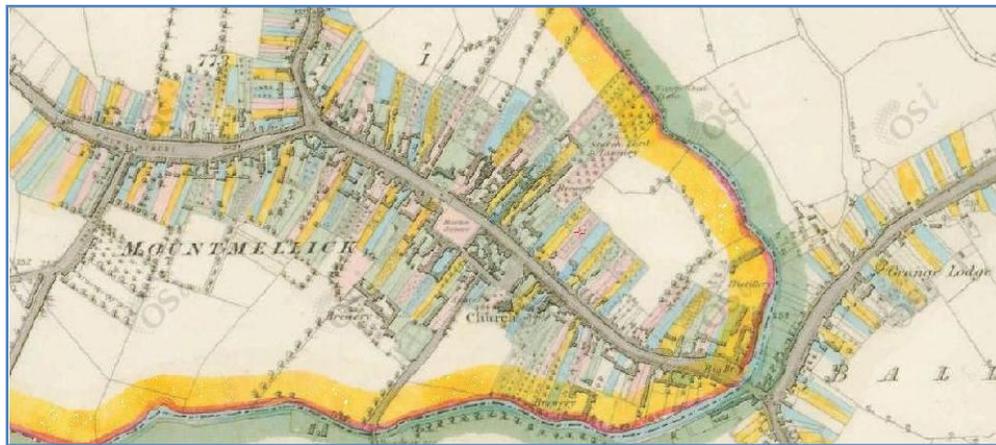


Figure 3: Extract from first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1837

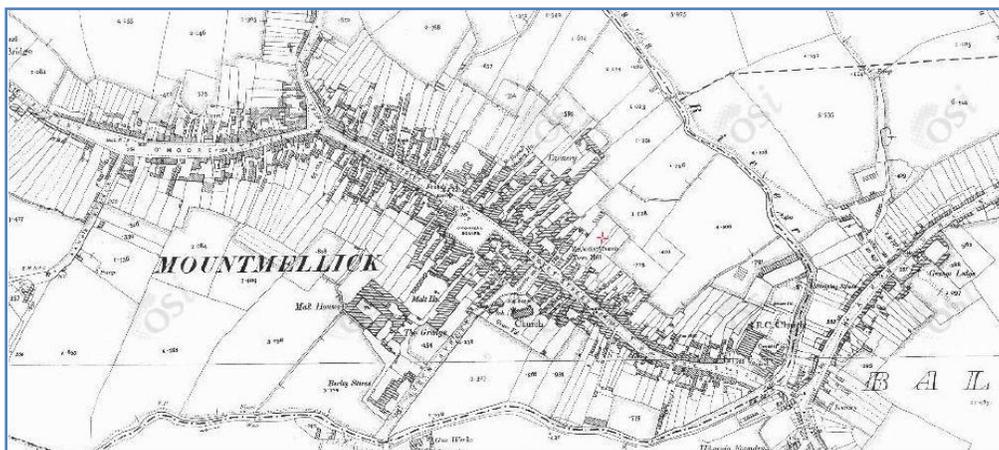


Figure 4: Extract from first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1907

## 6 URBAN FORM

Mountmellick is laid out around a relatively narrow and long linear Main Street that extends roughly southeast to northwest with O'Connell Square located in the centre. A number of approach roads gather at either end of this main street with several other roads branching in a perpendicular manner. The town developed in a ribbon like fashion along the streets with prevailing long and narrow plots reaching back from the streetscape. This layout establishes a strong structure that is one of the town's defining characteristics.



Figure 5: Google Earth Image date 31/03/16

The town centre area contains a number of Protected Structures and is proposed to be designated as an Architectural Conservation Area under the objectives of the Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023, reflecting its special architectural interest. The Built Heritage of the town is discussed in further detail in the Built Heritage chapter of this Draft LAP.

Mountmellick is constrained by the Owenass River and associated flood plain which forms a loop around the town. The issue of flooding is discussed in further detail in the Flood Management chapter of this Draft LAP.

## 7 SPATIAL PLANNING POLICY

The Irish spatial planning hierarchy is set out in the following diagram:



Figure 6: Planning Hierarchy

### 7.1 PROJECT IRELAND 2040 NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK

“Project Ireland 2040” is the Government’s overarching policy initiative to make Ireland a better country for all of us, a country that reflects the best of who we are and what we aspire to be. Project Ireland 2040 is informed by the Programme for a Partnership Government 2016 which recognizes that economic and social progress go hand in hand, and is made up of the “Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework” (NPF) and the “National Development Plan 2018-2027” (NDP).

The NPF replaces the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) 2002-2020. The NPF in conjunction with the NDP is the Government’s plan to cater for the extra one million people that will be living in

Ireland, the additional two thirds of a million people working in Ireland and the half a million extra homes needed in Ireland by 2040.

Project Ireland 2040 seeks to achieve ten strategic outcomes, building around the overarching themes of wellbeing, equality and opportunity. The ten shared National Strategic Outcomes and Priorities of the National Development Plan will ensure a consistent approach between planning objectives under the NPF and investment commitments under the NDP. The Ten Strategic Outcomes and Priorities are:



Figure 7: National Strategic Outcomes

As a strategic development framework “Project Ireland 2040” sets the long-term context for our country’s physical development and associated progress in economic, social and environmental terms and in an island, European and Global context. “Project Ireland 2040” will be followed and underpinned by supporting policies and actions at sectoral, regional and local levels. This Draft LAP has been prepared with cognizance to these National Strategic Outcomes.

## 7.2 REGIONAL PLANNING GUIDELINES FOR MIDLAND REGION 2010 - 2022

The Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 - 2022 (MRPGs) were prepared under the National Spatial Strategy and designated Mountmellick as one of eleven “Service Towns” within the Southern Development Area (SDA) of the Midlands Region. The SDA borders the South East Region and the Mid West Region and encompasses County Laois, excluding Portarlington.

Mountmellick is the largest and most important service town supporting Portlaoise, as emphasised within the Settlement Hierarchy of the Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023.

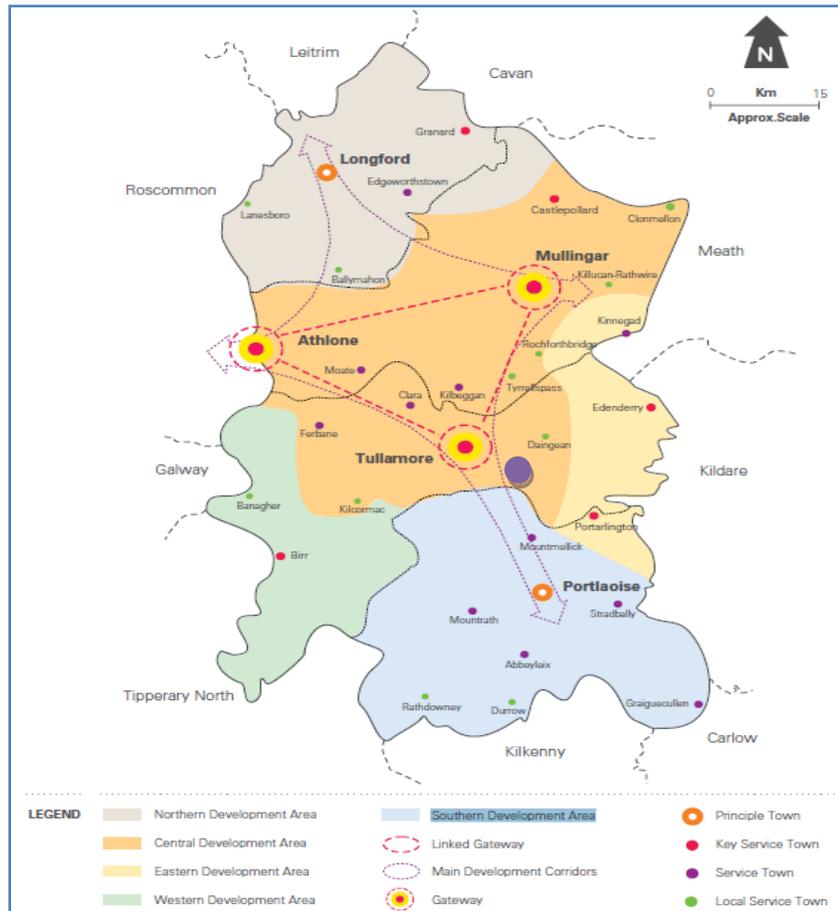


Figure 8: Mountmellick in the context of the Midlands Region

The Core Strategy in accordance with the provisions of the Act requires the correlation of the population targets of the MRPGs with housing land requirements of the settlement hierarchy. The Core Strategy is set out under the Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023.

The MRPGs envisages that the future development of the SDA will require the strengthening and consolidation of the existing infrastructure that forms an important element in the prosperity of the region. Existing strengths should be built upon, including opportunities in transport based industries such as freight and logistics. There should also be an emphasis on a sequential approach to new development, within the context of the availability of current and future social and physical infrastructure. Moreover, the guidelines acknowledge the importance of the N80 National Secondary Route for Mountmellick and the region.

### 7.3 REGIONAL SPATIAL AND ECONOMIC STRATEGY

Since the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines (MRPGs) were published in 2010, a new administrative structure at regional level has been developed as directed by the Local

Government Reform Act 2014. The Reform Act included the abolition of eight Regional Authorities and the creation of three Regional Assemblies. County Laois now forms part of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) along with eleven other counties. This area further comprises three Strategic Planning Areas with Offaly, Laois, Westmeath and Longford forming part of the Midland Strategic Planning Area. EMRA will be responsible for the preparation of a new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) which will replace the MRPGs.

The RSES will identify the Eastern and Midland region's key strategic assets, opportunities and challenges and set out policy responses to ensure that peoples' needs – such as access to housing, jobs, ease of travel and overall well-being are met, up to 2030 and beyond. In this regard, the RSES will set a new regional context to guide and control the development of County Laois.

The RSES will include:

- A **Spatial Strategy** for the future location of employment, housing and retail development along with supporting infrastructure and services, in a way that enhances the potential of our cities and towns and best protects our environment and our people from the impacts of climate change;
- An **Economic Strategy** with strategic policies to boost competitiveness and support a strong future economy and the creation of high-quality jobs for sustained prosperity;
- A **Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP)** to plan for the future sustainable growth of the capital city region as set out in the National Planning Framework.

On publication of the RSES, Laois County Council will undertake a review of the LAP, as necessary, in order to update and ensure compliance with the strategic approach adopted therein. In the interim the Draft LAP has been prepared in consistency with the existing RPGs as outlined above.

## 8 DEVELOPMENT VISION & STRATEGY

The Draft Local Area Plan for Mountmellick is underpinned by a strategic vision which is intended to guide the future growth of the town. The objectives outlined below combine to form a coherent development strategy to 2024 and beyond. These goals cover economic, social and environmental dimensions. The strategic vision recognises the potential of Mountmellick to align with the key growth objectives set out in higher order spatial plans and to take advantage of the pivotal location of the town both regionally and nationally. Delivering on these objectives will result in an enhanced quality of life for all citizens.

The strategic vision is based on the role of Mountmellick as defined in the settlement strategy of the Laois County Development Plan 2017 - 2023 and the aspirations of the people and stakeholders in Mountmellick. The vision statement reads as follows:

*“To develop Mountmellick as a sustainable low carbon settlement centred on a vibrant town centre, utilising the location strengths to attract employment and promote the unique settlement as an attractive town in which to work, live and play, while ensuring the protection of the unique built and natural heritage and managing flood risk”.*

Mountmellick will become a place for its people, where residents, workers and visitors alike will come to enjoy a place that is inclusive, accessible and sustainable from a social, economic and environmental perspective. The Draft LAP and overall vision for Mountmellick is underpinned by a number of interlinked strategic aims as illustrated in the diagram below. These interlinked strategic aims will be realised through the chapters of the plan.



Figure 9: Strategic Aims

## 8.1 KEY PLAN OBJECTIVES

This Draft Local Area Plan is based on a number of general goals which are designed to improve the quality of life of the citizens of the town and surrounding hinterland and which the council will endeavour to implement during the period of the Plan. The development of Mountmellick over the lifetime of this plan shall be focused on **employment generation**, the **consolidation of the town centre** and the provision of **community and social services**.

The following are specific objectives in relation to the delivery of the Strategy:

1. To support and facilitate sustainable intensification and consolidation of the town centre and in established residential areas;
2. To promote balanced economic development and employment ensuring a diverse range of economic sectors are developed and supported;
3. To support and facilitate development on zoned land based on the policies and objectives of the Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023;
4. To focus new residential development primarily into infill and backland sites;
5. To protect, conserve and enhance the built, natural and cultural environment, through promoting awareness, utilising relevant heritage legislation and promoting good quality urban design;
6. To develop and improve flood alleviation measures throughout the town and rural hinterland;
7. To require the preparation and assessment of all planning applications in the plan area to have regard to the information, data and requirements of the Appropriate Assessment Natura Impact Report, SEA Environmental Report and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Report that accompany this Draft LAP;
8. To require projects to be fully informed by ecological and environmental constraints at the earliest stage of project planning and any necessary assessment to be undertaken, including assessments of disturbance to habitats and species, where required.

On the basis of the above it is the key policy of the Council to:

1. Implement the development strategies for Mountmellick in order to be consistent with, and in accordance with policies of higher tier plans;

2. Support strategic enterprise and employment opportunities at appropriate locations in Mountmellick, having regard to proper planning and sustainable development and relevant development control standards;
3. Facilitate and promote Mountmellick’s role as a “Service Town” as designated in the MRPGs and Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023;
4. Monitor and manage the delivery of population and housing in Mountmellick, in line with national, regional and county level objectives, through the development strategy in this plan and also through the development management process;
5. Facilitate and support the provision of new, and expansion of existing, services, facilities and community infrastructure.

## 8.2 CORE STRATEGY

The Core Strategy for County Laois is set out under Section 2 of the Laois County Development Plan 2017 – 2023. Section 19 (2) of the Act requires that:

*“A Local Area Plan shall be consistent with the objectives of the Development Plan, its Core Strategy, and any Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy that apply to the area of the plan...”*

## 8.3 FUNCTION, POPULATION AND SCALE OF MOUNTMELICK

The Midland Regional Planning Guidelines and the Core Strategy of the Laois County Development Plan 2017 - 2023 Mountmellick is designated as a Service Town within the settlement hierarchy. In this regard, it is anticipated that Mountmellick will play an important role in supporting the County towns of Portlaoise and Tullamore.

	Persons 2002	Persons 2006	Persons 2011	Persons 2016	%Change 06-16
<b>County Laois</b>	58,774	67,059	80,559	84,697	26.3
<b>Mountmellick</b>	3,361	4,069	4,735	4,777	17.4

**Table 1: Population statistics for County Laois and Mountmellick between 2002 and 2016 (Source: CSO)**

As can be seen in the table above County Laois has experienced significant population growth in the past decade, growing by 26.3% over the ten year period between 2006 and 2016. In the same ten year period, Mountmellick experienced a population growth rate of 17.4%. However, the proportion of the county’s population living within Mountmellick has marginally decreased over this period, falling from 6.1% in 2006 to 4.1% in 2016.

The chart below presents a breakdown of the age of the population of Mountmellick. Mountmellick benefits from a relatively young population, with 50% of the population below 35 years of age, compared to 47.1% elsewhere in the State. Mountmellick has a lower proportion of middle-aged and older residents, with just 21% of the population aged 55 or older, compared to 24% elsewhere in the State.

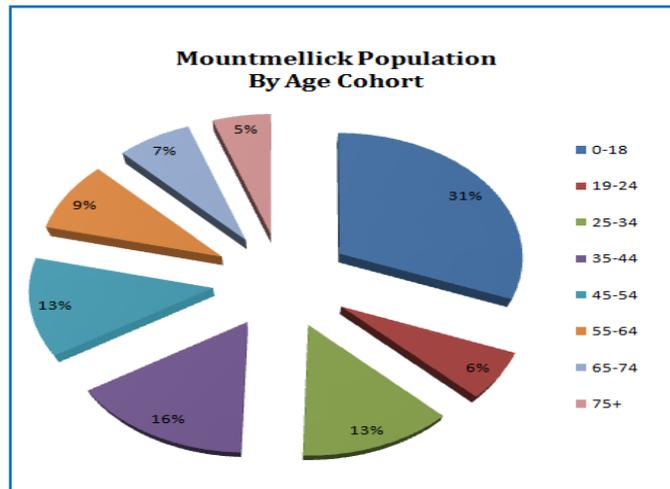


Figure 10: Population by age cohort (Source: CSO Census 2016)

Mountmellick also benefits from ethnic diversity with 7% of its population being non-Irish. Of particular note, is that almost 5% of the population is made up of EU nationals excluding the UK.

Population targets for County Laois and for Mountmellick for the period up to 2022 are set out within the MRPGs. Owing to significant and sustained population growth in County Laois, particularly in Portlaoise, these population targets have been exceeded and revised targets have been agreed as part of the CDP. These revised targets provide for growth to 89,790 persons in the County by 2023 and for growth to 5,478 persons in Mountmellick over the same plan period. For Mountmellick, this equates to a projected requirement for an additional 257 households over the six-year period up to 2023.

	County Laois	Mountmellick
<b>CSO Population 2011</b>	80,559	4,735
<b>Projected Population 2023</b>	89,790	5,478
<b>Projected Increase</b>	9,231	739
<b>Projected Increase in Households 2023</b>	3,216	257
<b>Density (Per ha.)</b>		14
<b>Housing Land Requirement to 2023 (Including 50% headroom)</b>		27
<b>Area (ha.) zoned for Residential</b>		27

Table 2: Core Strategy Table of Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023

As can be seen from the Core Strategy Table above, the CDP identifies a requirement for 27ha. of land in order to accommodate planned growth, equating to an average density of 14 units per hectare.

## **8.4 RESIDENTIAL LAND AVAILABILITY**

The Draft LAP identifies approximately 15.45ha. of undeveloped residentially zoned land, located within and adjacent to established residential areas within the town. The housing capacity of these lands excluding infill sites within the built-up area is estimated to be approximately 216 (15.45 ha. x 14 units per ha.) residential units, based on a density of 14 units per hectare. Over the lifetime of the LAP, priority for residential development should be given to the development of these lands, infill and backlands to consolidate the built up area of the town.

## **8.5 FUTURE DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES**

### **8.5.1 TOWN CENTRE CONSOLIDATION**

The Draft Local Area Plan has been prepared in the context of a longer term vision for Mountmellick. The Draft LAP identifies an opportunity site to accommodate growth during the plan period. Site specific details for the site are set out under the Town Centre Revitalisation chapter. A sequential approach will be taken to the development of the town, with lands closer to the town centre being developed prior to zoned lands on the periphery so as to avoid “leapfrogging”. Such an approach is essential to underpin the sustainable delivery of population and employment development and consolidation of the town centre over the plan period. This approach will adhere to the priority phasing outlined earlier in this chapter.

Consolidation, brownfield and infill development will also be promoted on appropriately zoned land within the plan area which accords with the policies and objectives set down in this plan.

### **8.5.2 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Economic development underpins all chapters in this Draft Local Area Plan. The aim of the plan is to capitalise on Mountmellick’s location on the national road network and proximity to the motorway interchange at Portlaoise. The zoning and servicing of land for enterprise, employment and industrial uses, represents an important opportunity to develop a cluster of complementary enterprises and more generally a larger, more robust and diverse economic basis for the town.

The location of the town in close proximity to the Slieve Bloom mountains including the amenities of the Mountain Bike Trail and hiking trails, in addition to the unique built and cultural heritage of Mountmellick, and the opportunity for the enhancement of existing green infrastructure provides the basis for the enhancement of facilities and attractions to create a strong tourism industry in the town.

### **8.5.3 KEY INFRASTRUCTURE**

Future development proposals are contingent on key infrastructure. Currently capacity exists in the Foul Sewer Network, Waste Water Treatment Plant and Public Water Supply. The delivery of an N80 relief road is considered a strategic piece of infrastructure which will help alleviate traffic congestion in the town centre. Further investigation is required in order to identify a preferred route.

### **8.5.4 ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE PROTECTION**

The environmental sensitivities of the county identified in the SEA process for the Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023 have informed the Core Strategy and the role it identifies for Mountmellick. The Draft LAP responds to environmental factors, including wastewater infrastructure constraints, areas at risk of flooding etc. It also acknowledges the importance of built and natural heritage as an environmental and economic (including tourism) resource and includes significant objectives for its conservation and enhancement.

### **8.5.5 COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

There is an existing vibrant community and voluntary sector in Mountmellick and the demand for community services, education and recreational amenities has increased with the growth in population. This plan will seek to facilitate, wherever possible, the provision of new, and expansion of existing, services, facilities and community infrastructure.

## 9 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



*Mountmellick is a vibrant service town with the potential to promote inward investment and the creation of more local jobs. Laois County Council is committed to facilitating the creation of employment within the town and this plan provides the appropriate framework for development through the provision of adequately zoned lands and policies which support economic development. The zoning objectives for each of the land-use zones provide agility to respond to the demands from those looking to invest in Mountmellick. This plan sets the right conditions to secure inward investment and interest in Mountmellick as a business location and firmly embeds an economic development agenda into all other goals making their successful delivery more achievable.*

The Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023 sets out the strategic context for economic development of the County as informed by the **Laois Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021** which should be read in tandem with this chapter.

The **Local Enterprise Office** has been fully integrated into the Local Authority. In addition to the LEOs enterprise function it delivers the economic function of the Council and has a lead role in implementing the economic dimensions of the Laois Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021 and delivering local and regional initiatives within the Midland Action Plan for Jobs. The LEO provides a range of services for persons seeking to set up or grow a business. The LEO works with a range of stakeholders at community, county and national level to support employment opportunities including the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, the IDA, Enterprise Ireland, local and regional development agencies, existing businesses and individuals.

The services provided by LEO allow for a broader and deeper approach to job creation through opportunities presented by the not so traditional sectors for example green economy, tourism, creative services /industries and cloud computing. The LEO contributes significantly to building pathways to employment and enterprise in Mountmellick by:

- Facilitating client meetings through an Outreach Office (held in the Mountmellick Development Association once a week);
- Providing high quality, integrated information and support to new and expanding businesses;
- Providing training, mentoring and support;
- Enabling access to start-up finance;

- Collation and quarterly update of a Property Database for all industrial, commercial and retail premises that are for sale or let in the town, enabling business owners to research and identify suitable property;
- Collaborating with Library Services on Library Supports for business schemes;
- Working with schools to introduce young people to the potential of working in business and promoting an enterprise culture.

**Laois Partnership Company** was formed in 2008 to offer one unified structure for the delivery of economic, social and cultural services to small businesses, community groups and individuals. This work is largely delivered through initiatives including The Rural Development Programme (previously LEADER), Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP), DSP Job Club, Community Employment Schemes, Tus Programme, Rural Social Scheme, Services to the Elderly Programme (LSTEP), National Childcare Schemes, Back to Education Initiative, the Local Community Development Programme (previously LDSIP) and other complementary programmes.



Figure 11: Mountmellick Development Association

The **Mountmellick Development Association** (MDA) is a non profit organisation working to improve the economic, social and cultural development of Mountmellick. The MDA works with the community to increase employment and job creation opportunities while reducing inequality. The MDA centre provides hot desks, office space, conference rooms, book keeping, training, commercial kitchens, childcare facilities etc. The Council recognises the pivotal role of the MDA in job creation and will engage with and facilitate the work of the association in the development of the town.

An established measure of the employment “health” of a settlement is a measure called the “**Jobs Ratio**”. This is the relationship between the number of people in the labour force and the number of jobs in any defined area. A healthy area is considered to be one where the jobs ratio is around 70%. While not all towns will be able to reach this level, it is considered reasonable that the plan should aim to increase the jobs ratio proportionately to accord with the town’s characteristics and level in the County settlement and employment hierarchy.

As indicated in Census 2016 the **total labour force** within the settlement of Mountmellick is 2,104 persons, representing approximately 5.3% of the labour force in the county (39,609 persons). The census also indicates that there are 915 **jobs** within the settlement of Mountmellick. Given an indicated resident worker population of 1,571 Mountmellick has a jobs to resident workers ratio of 0.582.

The majority of persons commute to work, school or college by car (1,628 persons) and have a commute of under 15 minutes (1,079 persons), while 329 persons have a commute of over 1/1.5 hours.

Mountmellick has the lowest proportion of employers and managers of the Laois towns and the highest proportion of lower professional and semi skilled workers. The skills trade sector, elementary occupations, caring, leisure and other service occupations are the biggest employers in Mountmellick.

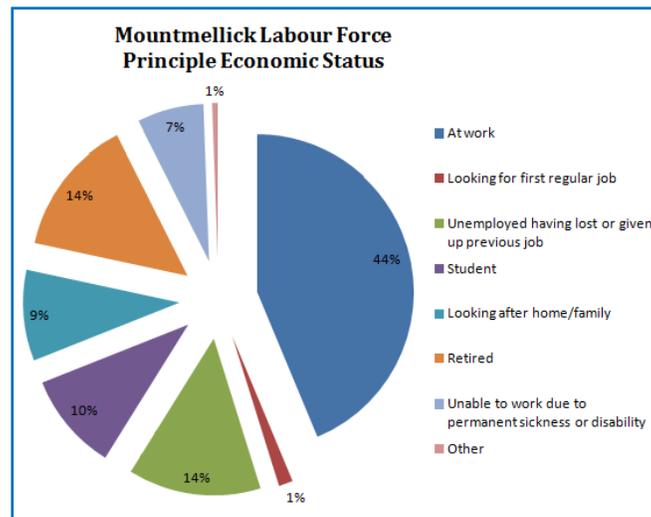


Figure 12: Labour Force by Principle Economic Status (Source: Census 2016)

Employment levels in the Mountmellick labour force are below that of the rest of the State, with 44% of residents in employment, compared to 54% nationally. However, the proportion of the labour force either unemployed or seeking their first regular job at 15% is significantly higher than the national rate of 8%.

Teagasc’s town index of economic strength is a function of in-migration (the higher the in-migration the stronger the town) and employment (the lower the unemployment level the stronger the town). Laois towns experienced high in-migration, however unemployment levels remained high over the last few years with Mountmellick performing the poorest of the Laois towns.

The creation of sufficient **employment opportunities** in Mountmellick is fundamental to build a sustainable community and reduce the rate of unemployment. Mountmellick’s location on the N80 and proximity to the Greater Dublin Area in conjunction with the zoning and servicing of

cost effective land is of major benefit to attracting economic development to the town. In this respect, the Council will support local enterprise and employment generating opportunities, facilitate up skilling and training of the labour force and the provision of hard and soft infrastructure. Such measures aim to create an attractive base for employers and more self sustaining development for the population, while providing an alternative to commuting to the GDA for employment.

With respect to **tourism** Mountmellick is the closest town to the Slieve Bloom Mountains for tourists travelling from the east and south of the country. The Slieve Bloom Mountains are the largest natural resource in the Midlands and are designated as a National Environment Park. The Rivers Owenass and Barrow have the potential to be developed for recreation and leisure amenities including angling, walking and water based activities. The Mountmellick Museum showcases Mountmellick Work embroidery and marks the start of the heritage trail incorporating the historical and Quaker cultural features of the town. In this regard, the basis for the development of a viable cultural and natural heritage tourism industry is present within the town.

**Economic Development: Strategic Aim:**

*To promote, facilitate and enable economic development and employment generating activities in appropriate locations and in a sustainable manner.*

**Objectives:** It is an Objective of the Council to:

- ED O1:** Facilitate the future sustainable development of Mountmellick so as to optimise the benefits of its location, in accordance with the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines;
- ED O2:** Promote balanced and sustainable economic development and employment, ensuring that a diverse range of economic sectors are developed and supported;
- ED O3:** Promote employment opportunities by facilitating development on appropriately zoned lands;
- ED O4:** Facilitate the provision and expansion of all services and infrastructure which would contribute positively to the attraction of the town to economic development;
- ED O5:** Facilitate and promote the up skilling and training of the labour force in conjunction with NUI Maynooth, Athlone and Carlow IT and other education providers;
- ED O6:** Facilitate the improvement and expansion of established enterprises and industries;
- ED O7:** Facilitate and promote the provision of incubator units for start up businesses and SMEs;

- ED O8:** Facilitate development of a digital hub/ creative cluster;
- ED O9:** Accommodate small employment generating activities at first floor level and vacant ground floor commercial premises in the town centre;
- ED O10:** Facilitate home based economic activities which do not adversely impact on existing amenities;
- ED O11:** Develop lands for industry at Derryguile and Debbicot to support existing industry at Bay Road and Acragar;
- ED O12:** Support the continued operation and reasonable expansion of non conforming uses subject to maintenance of existing environmental, visual and residential amenity;
- ED O13:** Promote Mountmellick as a tourist destination as a gateway to the foothills of the Slieve Bloom Mountains and on the Quaker Experience;
- ED O14:** Promote the Georgian and Quaker character of the town as a basis for tourism development;
- ED O15:** Facilitate the provision of tourist accommodation and ancillary services;
- ED O16:** Facilitate the development of the Rivers Owenass and Barrow for recreational Amenities whilst avoiding significant effects on habitats and species of the River Barrow and Nore SAC;
- ED O17:** Facilitate the provision of standardized tourism signage and interpretation facilities for tourist attractions;
- ED O18:** Facilitate the development and expansion of new and existing food-agri businesses.

**Policies:** It is the Policy of the Council to:

- ED P1:** Co-operate with Mountmellick Development Association, IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, the Local Enterprise Office and other agencies, organisation and individuals in promoting enterprise and employment in Mountmellick;
- ED P2:** Support strategic enterprise and employment opportunities at appropriate locations, having regard to proper planning and sustainable development and relevant development control standards;
- ED P3:** Facilitate the continuity of and encourage the expansion of established enterprises and to promote start-up enterprises, having regard to the protection of the amenity value

of neighbouring properties;

- ED P4:** Support the development of broadband in Mountmellick to facilitate the development of internet based businesses and home based economic activities;
- ED P5:** Encourage, in co-operation with the Local Enterprise Office and Laois Partnership, the development of small to medium scale industries and services;
- ED P6:** Create an integrated and sustainable public and private transport system to move people and goods efficiently within and through Mountmellick;
- ED P7:** Develop high quality business infrastructure;
- ED P8:** Identify opportunities to improve the tourism product in cooperation with relevant statutory agencies, private providers and community groups.

## 10 TOWN CENTRE REVITALISATION



*The town centre of Mountmellick is the focus for retail/commercial and residential development for the settlement. Market pressures have impacted on the town centre with retail and commercial leakage to Portlaoise and Tullamore. Vacancy rates in the core are an issue and require attention. The town centre has capacity to limit this leakage through the development of key sites and by improving the attractiveness of the public realm. This plan seeks to redevelop the town centre as the focus of commercial, retail and residential development within the town while having cognisance to issues relating to flooding. Consolidating the town centre will help revitalise the town and provide the framework for channelling development into brownfield sites.*

O'Connell Square, Parnell Street, Wolfe Tone Street and Sarsfield Street comprise the traditional **retail core** of Mountmellick. A diverse range of retail services mainly comprising independent operators such as Shaws and Cost Cutters are accommodated in the town. A Super Valu convenience store with several mixed use units was opened at the junction of Davitt Road and Connolly Street in 2009.

Retail Excellence Ireland's review of towns (2012) indicated that Mountmellick performed in the third quartile (1<sup>st</sup> strong – 4<sup>th</sup> weak). The town performed well with people's perception of safety and security, family friendliness, presentation and maintenance of the town centre. However, the town performed poorly in terms of things to do and see, events and promotions. Approximately 75% of people surveyed felt the town has a unique and positive image, there is an abundance of car parking and it is competitively priced. However, the retail, restaurant and pub choice was considered poor.

The traditional Town Centre presents an opportunity to create diversity and distinctiveness in Mountmellick's retail offer and evening time uses as well as to provide an attractive and pedestrian friendly public realm. The traditional retail core should be retained as the centre of commercial activity that delivers a range of services and functions. The development strategy for the town centre as set out below recognizes the potential of the traditional core as a focus for employment generation, retail use and residential development where appropriate. The creation of an attractive urban environment is critical to attract new business to the town centre.

Improvements to the **public realm**, offer opportunities to create stronger nodes that provide a better experience and diversity of retail, as well as high quality food and drink and other complementary uses.



Figure 13: Mountmellick Town Centre

The retail planning policy context for the LAP is informed by the Guidelines for Planning Authorities: Retail Planning (2012) and the retail hierarchy identified for Laois in the MRPGs. As set out in the Laois Retail Hierarchy Mountmellick is identified in the third tier as a Service Town, for which it is an action to *“Sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of the central parts of the town in conjunction with the utilization of strategic backland areas”*.

New and improved **infrastructure** plays an essential role in attracting development to the town. A connected town centre which is accessible, with a high quality public realm, good pedestrian permeability and a network of open and civic spaces can stimulate growth and attract inward investment. This will assist in growing and supporting the town centre’s residential, retail and employment base.

Infrastructural improvements will prioritise pedestrians through measures such as traffic calming, street maintenance and traffic management in the traditional town centre. Measures would also support the creation of a town centre that is more easily navigable by those with mobility impairments through the provision of wider footways and the removal of unnecessary street furniture.

**Residential development** will be encouraged in the town centre to contribute to the vitality of the core and to encourage economic development and further retail expansion. Existing brownfield sites will be prioritised to deliver dwellings in the town over more peripheral sites. Innovative design and layout and a mix of tenure will be encouraged in all residential developments.

**Town Centre Revitalisation: Strategic Aim:**

*To support the sustainable long-term growth of Mountmellick, in accordance with the Core and Retail Strategies of the Laois County Development Plan 2017 – 2023.*

**Objectives:** It is an Objective of the Council to:

- TCR O1:** Improve the quality, vitality and vibrancy of the town centre;
- TCR O2:** Encourage the opening up of the backlands to the north and south of Parnell Street and Sarsfield Street facing onto the Owenass River;
- TCR O3:** Facilitate the redevelopment of strategic sites within the town centre for a mixture of uses that will contribute to vitality of the central core area;
- TCR O4:** Renew, consolidate and develop the existing fabric of the town by achieving a high quality of design in new development and refurbishments while safeguarding the built heritage of the town;
- TCR O5:** Facilitate public realm improvement projects and landscaping integrating blue and green infrastructure measures where appropriate;
- TCR O6:** Ensure the type, quantum and location of future retail floor space is consistent with the requirements and recommendations of the Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023, relevant regional policy frameworks and national planning guidelines;
- TCR O7:** Promote an appropriate mix of day and night time uses within the town centre;
- TCR O8:** Create attractive and secure pedestrian and cycling links including green infrastructure through the town.

**Policies:** It is the Policy of the Council to:

- TCR P1:** Promote the town centre as a priority location for commercial, civic, social and cultural development and sustainable consolidation;
- TCR P2:** Promote the consolidation of the town centre through the use of brownfield, infill and backland sites without compromising streetscapes;
- TCR P3:** Promote the reuse of existing town centre buildings through appropriate design and adaptation;
- TCR P4:** Prohibit the proliferation of uses in the town centre which would detract from the amenities of the area or the vitality and viability of the town centre;
- TCR P5:** Encourage retail development within the existing town centre. Proposals which would undermine the vitality and viability of the town centre will not be permitted. The sequential approach to retail development set out in the *“Retail Planning - Guidelines*

*for Planning Authorities, 2012” will be strictly enforced;*

**TCR P6:** Encourage and facilitate the reuse and regeneration of derelict and vacant sites and disused buildings, especially upper floors;

**TCR P7:** Promote living over the shop and conversion of town centre buildings into housing units;

**TCR P8:** Encourage the maintenance of original shop fronts, or the reinstatement of traditional shop fronts where poor replacements have been installed;

**TCR P9:** Ensure new shop fronts have regard to existing shop fronts and complement the existing character;

**TCR P10:** Prohibit internally illuminated fascias or projecting box signs. Concealed strip or flood lighting of fascias and traditional hand painted signs lit by spotlight may be an acceptable alternative.

## **10.1 OPPORTUNITY SITES**

A potential opportunity site for re-development has been identified which would contribute to the renewal, enhancement and regeneration of the particular area of the town in which the site is located. This area has been identified for various reasons such as dereliction, under utilization of land and land that would be readily adaptable for new uses.

Other opportunity sites not listed can be presented for appraisal. Some of the sites may be owned by different parties and would require an element of site assembly for a coherent development strategy to progress. This approach to re-development will be encouraged over a piecemeal approach.

### 10.1.1 OPPORTUNITY SITE 1: MALTINGS, IRISHTOWN, PORTLAOISE ROAD



Figure 14: The Maltings

**Zoning:** Residential 2

#### Comments:

- Strategically located on the Portlaoise Road entrance into the town with direct access onto National Secondary Route N80;
- A 0.37ha. brownfield site formerly used as a grain mill;
- Protected Structures on site;
- Fully serviced site;
- Extant permission for residential development of 37 no. apartments;
- Outside of Flood Zones A and B;
- Ecological survey including bat surveys may be required and results inform landscaping and design;
- Opportunity to intensify development to provide a key landmark or gateway building to signify the approach and entrance to the town from Portlaoise to create a sense of arrival;
- The building should address the extensive street frontage and be designed to an exceptional standard.

## **11 KEY INFRASTRUCTURE**



*The sustainable social and economic growth of Mountmellick is dependent on the satisfactory provision of key infrastructure associated with the provision of services for new developments both residential and commercial. Key infrastructural provision will support the economic development of the town and needs to be undertaken in a plan led manner.*

Mountmellick's infrastructure must keep pace with modern demands. In this regard, the provision of high quality infrastructure networks and environmental services is fundamental to ensuring the long term physical, environmental, social and economic development of the town.

Irish Water is responsible for the provision and operation of public water and wastewater services across the country. Laois County Council delivers water services in accordance with a Service Level Agreement. The Water Services Strategic Plan (WSSP) was published in 2015 by Irish Water, 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 Laois County Council will work jointly 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.

Within the settlement of Mountmellick 1,634 households are connected to the public mains water supply and 1,565 households are connected to the public sewer system.

The Mountmellick Wastewater Treatment Plant has the capacity to cater for a population equivalent of 3,000. The River Owenass acts as the receiving waters for this plant. Currently there is capacity in the waste water treatment plant and public water supply. However, extra capacity is required to implement the policies and objectives of this plan.

Adequate storm water drainage and retention facilities are necessary to accommodate surface water run off from existing and proposed developments. Sustainable Drainage Systems can contribute to surface water retention and a reduction in the potential for flooding by acting as natural drainage.

Mountmellick is served by a high capacity electricity system. Within the settlement 1,130 households have broadband internet services.

**Key Infrastructure: Strategic Aim:**

*To enable development in line with the capacity of supporting infrastructure and to require the timely provision of infrastructure needed for the planned development of lands.*

**Objectives:** It is an Objective of the Council to:

- KI O1:** Facilitate economic and social development through the provision of infrastructure and optimise the return of infrastructure investment;
- KI O2:** Phase growth in line with the capacity of supporting infrastructure;
- KI O3:** Facilitate Irish Water in the maintenance, expansion and upgrading of wastewater disposal and water supply infrastructure;
- KI O4:** Ensure a good quality of life, through maintaining and improving waste water treatment and water supplies and to minimise the adverse impacts of development on the environment, through policies for the management of wastes and emissions;
- KI O5:** Seek compliance with the standards and requirements of Irish Water in relation to water and wastewater infrastructure;
- KI O6:** Maintain a development free buffer around the Mountmellick wastewater treatment plant of a minimum of 100 metres;
- KI O7:** 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;
- KI O8:** Require all new developments to include proposals for Sustainable Drainage Systems;
- KI O9:** Maintain, improve and enhance the environmental and ecological quality of surface waters and groundwater in accordance with the National River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021 (DHPLG) and associated Programme of Measures;
- KI O10:** Ensure developments will not adversely impact on the status of waterbodies in accordance with the Water Framework Directive and National River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021 (DHPLG);
- KI O11:** Facilitate, promote and encourage the expansion and improvement of telecommunications, broadband, electricity and gas networks infrastructure subject to proper planning and sustainable development.

**Policies:** It is the Policy of the Council to:

- KI P1:** 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 catchment;
- KI P2:** Work with Irish Water on developing and upgrading the water supply schemes so as to ensure an adequate, resilient, sustainable and economic supply of piped water;
- KI P3:** Work with Irish Water on upgrading the wastewater treatment plant in line with the projected future growth of the settlement of Mountmellick;
- KI P4:** Promote and support the implementation of Irish Water's Eastern and Midlands Region Water Supply Project;
- KI P5:** Assess all applications in the context of available and sufficient public infrastructural facilities, the protection of Surface Water and Groundwater Resources and their associated habitats and species;
- KI P6:** Promote public awareness and involvement in water conservation measures by households, businesses and industries and supports the implementation of Energy Efficiency solutions in Water and Waste Water Systems;
- KI P7:** Promote and encourage the harvesting of rainwater to meet non-potable water needs;
- KI P8:** Co-operate with and facilitate the work of national telecommunications, broadband, electricity and gas network providers in the improvement, expansion and provision of energy and communication infrastructure subject to proper planning and sustainable development.

## 12 TRANSPORT AND MOVEMENT



*While the overarching rationale for the making of a local area plan is to guide land-use, the integration of good land use planning with transportation is a key that can unlock significant improvements in the quality of life, in ways that are tangible to many in the town, who have long identified car dependency and commuting as being a major drawback to living in the area. Reducing the need to travel long distances by private car, and increasing the use of sustainable and healthy alternatives, can bring multiple benefits to both our environment and communities.*

Mountmellick is located on the N80 **National Secondary Route** in close proximity to Portlaoise, Tullamore and the Greater Dublin Area. Mountmellick has strategic road links to the entire country via the M7 and M8 motorways in close proximity at the Togher Interchange, Portlaoise, the N80 National Secondary Road and a network of regional (including the R423 Mountrath to Mountmellick and R422 Clonaslee to Emo) and local roads. The N80 was designated a National Transport Corridor in the National Spatial Strategy 2002. Local bus routes provide services in the town. Mountmellick is therefore easily accessible to the Greater Dublin Area, Dublin City, the M50, national airports and ports. The pivotal location of the town provides key advantages for the attraction of economic and residential development.

The Council will continue to provide for all components of the transportation system which are within its own remit and will encourage and facilitate the development of those other elements provided by external agencies, such as the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII, made up of the former NRA and RPA). In addition the strategy and objectives of this plan are required to be consistent with the transport strategy of the NTA.

The improvement of **transport infrastructure** in the town is a key element of sustainable development and achieving a low carbon economy. At present significant traffic volumes are evident on the N80 passing through the town. The secondary school Mountmellick Community College is also located on the main street and exacerbates traffic congestion at school drop off and collection times. Vehicles therefore dominate Mountmellick's main street which is detrimental to a vibrant and livable environment. This impacts negatively on the quality and type of activities that can be accommodated in the Town Centre and the attractiveness to and safety of pedestrians and cyclists. Traffic congestion is therefore an issue which needs to be addressed. In this regard, Laois County Council have engaged consultants to examine the feasibility of providing an inner relief road to the town as an upgrade of the N80. Limiting and/or removing large volumes of vehicles, in particular HGVs would benefit the public realm in

terms of air quality and noise, and make the town centre a more attractive place to work, live and visit. In addition, there is an identified need for upgrades and new vehicular, pedestrian and cycle connections to improve the accessibility to existing residential estates, the town centre and educational facilities.

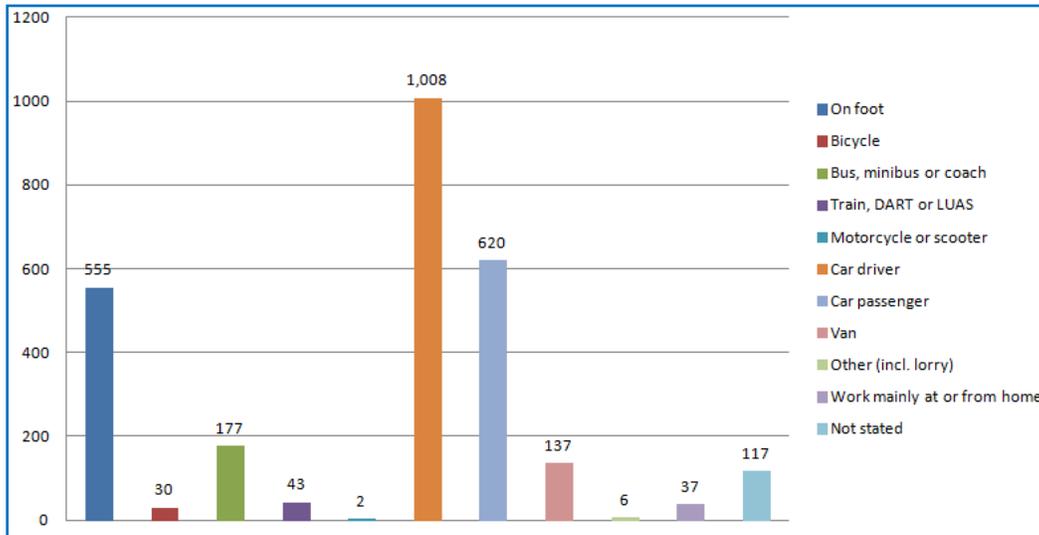


Figure 15: Commuting by means of travel to work, school or college (CSO 2016)

As indicated in Census 2016 as shown in the chart above, 1,767 persons (64.7%) use private transport as the mode of travel to work or school every day in the settlement. This compares to 220 persons (8.1%) for public transport and 585 persons (21.4%) for green modes. The key to getting people out of their cars and into public transport is to have a reliable, convenient, frequent and fast public transport service available and opportunities for pedestrian and cycle linkages, that bring people to the places they want to go.

While Laois County Council is not itself a public transport provider, and cannot force providers to deliver services in any particular area, this plan can put in place the necessary policy framework to encourage and facilitate the improvement of alternative modes of transport. Limiting and/or removing vehicles at certain locations would benefit the public realm in terms of air quality and noise, and make the town centre a more attractive place to work, live and visit. In addition, there is an identified need for upgrades and new vehicular, pedestrian and cycle connections to improve the accessibility to existing residential estates, the town centre and educational facilities.

In order to achieve more sustainable travel patterns, a significant focus on reducing car dependency and increasing the permeability of the town is required. The benefits of reducing reliance on the car and improving the permeability of towns for cyclists and walkers, can be summarised as follows:

- Reduced dependency on fossil fuels, pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions;
- Increased levels of exercise with consequent health and fitness benefits;

- Builds social capital in neighbourhoods through increased social interaction;
- Higher numbers of pedestrians and cyclists increase levels of passive supervision making places safer;
- Reduced congestion on roads makes public transport more viable and;
- Reduced expenditure leakage to larger towns benefits local businesses.

Given that the majority of Mountmellick’s population are living within a few kilometres of the town centre, there is great potential for a modal shift from the private car towards walking and cycling as more attractive modes of transport in the town.

A key aim of this Draft LAP is therefore to promote **compact, connected neighbourhoods** based on street patterns and forms of development that will make walking and cycling, especially for local trips, more attractive in line with national policy such as the “*Smarter Travel, A Sustainable Transport Future*” (2009) and “*Ireland’s First National Cycle Policy Framework*” (2009) promote sustainable travel movements and encourage people to find alternative ways to travel reducing car dependency.

In accordance with the “**Permeability** Best Practice Guide” (NTA, 2015), the key principles for maintaining and providing permeability within the plan area for the lifetime of the plan are as follows:

- Origins and destinations, such as schools and shops, should be linked in the most direct manner possible for pedestrians and cyclists;
- Greater priority should be given to pedestrians and cyclists;
- The physical design of links should be fit for purpose in terms of capacity and security;
- Junctions in urban and suburban areas should cater for pedestrians and cyclists safely and conveniently.

Opportunities have been identified for an enhanced pedestrian and cycle network and permeability in all new residential areas and in existing residential areas where possible that will provide more direct and safe access from residential areas to schools, town centre, community facilities and local amenity areas.

Parking provision in the town is relatively limited. The possibility of providing additional car parks close to the town centre will be examined during the lifetime of this plan.

**Transport and Movement: Strategic Aim:**

***To promote and facilitate a sustainable transport system that prioritises and provides for walking, cycling and public transport facilities while ensuring sufficient traffic management.***

**Objectives:** It is an Objective of the Council to:

- TM O1:** Promote and encourage the development of Mountmellick to enhance its strategic location on the National and Regional road network;
- TM O2:** To cooperate with NTA and other relevant transport planning bodies in the delivery of a high quality, integrated transport system;
- TM O3:** Facilitate the economic and social development of the town through the provision and efficient use of transport infrastructure;
- TM O4:** Cooperate and facilitate Bus Eireann and private operatives in the provision and frequency of public transport services, operation of services and facilities;
- TM O5:** Encourage, promote and facilitate a modal shift towards more sustainable forms of transport in all new developments;
- TM O6:** Promote sustainable and compact forms of development which reduce reliance of private car based transport;
- TM O7:** Significantly reduce carbon emissions through interventions on the N80;
- TM O8:** Improve the pedestrian experience by reducing vehicle dominance on the N80;
- TM O9:** Improve pedestrian links, based on desire lines, from Main Street to surrounding areas.

**Policies:** It is the Policy of the Council to:

- TM P1:** Improve and provide pedestrian linkages, cycle networks and permeability including blueways and greenways throughout the town;
- TM P2:** Examine the feasibility of introducing clear, direct pedestrian routes between the Main street and surrounding areas;
- TM P3:** Provide adequate, secure and dry bicycle parking facilities at appropriate locations;
- TM P4:** Ensure all footpaths provide access for disabled and mobility impaired persons;
- TM P5:** Facilitate and implement appropriate measures to reduce or manage traffic associated with schools to regularize vehicular movements and alleviate congestion;
- TM P6:** Reserve all lands for future relief roads free of development in conjunction with the requirements of the Roads Authority;

- TM P7:** Provide for improvements to the national road network, including reserving corridors for proposed routes, free of development, so as not to compromise future road schemes;
- TM P8:** Prevent inappropriate development on lands adjacent to the existing national road network, which would adversely affect the safety, current and future capacity and function of national roads and having regard to possible future upgrades of the national roads and junctions;
- TM P9:** Ensure that any development permitted along national roads is in accordance with the *Spatial Planning and National Roads—Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DoECLG, 2012)* or any updated version;
- TM P10:** Facilitate a limited level of new accesses or the intensified use of existing accesses to the national road network on the approaches to or exit to Mountmellick that are subject to a speed limit zone between 50 kmh and 60 kmh otherwise known as the transition zone. Such accesses will be considered where they facilitate orderly urban development and would not result in a proliferation of such entrances, leading to a diminution in the role of these transitional zones. The Council will have regard to the nature of the proposed development and the volume of traffic to be generated by it and the implications for the safety, capacity and efficient operation of the national road. A Road Safety Audit, prepared in accordance with the *Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (NRA, 2010)*, shall be submitted where appropriate.

## 13 HOUSING



*This Draft LAP aims to balance the provision of good quality housing that meets the needs of a diverse population, in a way that makes Mountmellick a good place to live now and in the future. To meet the housing needs of Mountmellick to 2024 and beyond is an important element of this plan. Adequate housing provision is essential for the creation of an environment to attract business and enterprise to the town and this plan provides the quantum of zoned lands to meet this demand. The quantum of zoned lands is in compliance with the Core Strategy of the Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023.*

The LAP aims to enhance the quality of life of residents and the ability of the town to attract occupiers and investment. There is a need to create a high quality public realm that connects to a network of open spaces, parks and squares and makes the town an attractive place to live. Suitable locations for housing must offer a critical mass of development capable of creating the capacity to provide the improvement in amenity and setting that will make urban living more attractive to young and old alike.

As a service town of the County, Mountmellick is required to cater for new housing to serve population growth and new household formation, in accordance with the population targets of the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines and the Core Strategy of the Laois County Development Plan 2017 – 2023. In accordance with the Core Strategy, the town of Mountmellick has a projected requirement for an additional 257 households over the six-year period up to 2023. The Core Strategy identifies a requirement for 27ha. of land in order to accommodate planned growth, equating to an average density of 14 units per hectare.

As set out in the tables below the Census of 2016 recorded a total of 1,721 households in Mountmellick, with the majority of households (94%) accommodated in houses built since 2001 (665). The majority of these households (59%) comprise couples with children.

Type of accommodation	Households	Percentage
House/Bungalow	1,593	94
Flat/Apartment	94	4
Bed-sit	0	0
Caravan/Mobile Home	5	0
Not stated	29	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,721</b>	

**Table 1: Households by accommodation type (CSO Census 2016)**

Type of Household	Households	Percentage
One Person	463	10
Couples without children	570	12
Couples with children	2,794	59
Single parent families	692	15
Other	232	5
Total	4,751	

Table 2: Households by composition (CSO Census 2016)

To cater for the projected population growth of the County, the **Housing Strategy** is set out under the Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023, and should be read in tandem with this chapter. It is the policy of the Council to implement the provisions of the Housing Strategy in accordance with Section 95 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

The Housing Strategy has identified a housing need in Mountmellick. Therefore, in accordance with the provisions of the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015, the Planning Authority will employ Site Activation Measures including the Vacant Site Levy to bring forward vacant and/or underutilised sites in Mountmellick for the supply of housing.

The previous LAP period (2012-2018) identified **unfinished housing developments** as a legacy issue. However, the majority of these estates are being resolved due to successful collaboration and cooperation from a number of key stakeholders.

Following economic recovery **new residential development** will become an issue for the growth of Mountmellick during this plan period. This plan places a strong emphasis on providing quality residential developments on infill and backland sites within the existing built envelope of the town. A key opportunity site has been identified adjacent to the town centre which is suitable for higher density developments. However, this area is insufficient in size to accommodate the total projected population growth. Therefore, greenfield sites have also been identified which are suitable for new high quality residential developments.

In order to ensure the delivery of high quality housing in a sustainable manner residential development will be required to:

- Be located in places that can support sustainable development, places which support growth, innovation and the efficient provision of infrastructure, are accessible to a range of local services, can encourage the use of public transport, walking and cycling, and help tackle climate change;
- Increase residential density through a range of measures including reductions in vacancy, re-use of existing buildings, infill development schemes, area or site-based regeneration and increased building heights;
- Be delivered where homes and the appropriate supporting services can be delivered more efficiently and effectively at least cost to the State in the long-run;
- Have an excellent standard of design, layout and finish;

- Provide an appropriate mix of tenure types;
- Compliment the character of Mountmellick.

Mountmellick may be suitable for **apartment development** subject to local determination, having regard to the following broad proximity and accessibility considerations:

**1) Town Centre:**

Generally suitable for small scale infill (will vary subject to location) and higher density development (will also vary), that may wholly comprise apartments, and includes:

- Sites within the town centre.

**2) Remainder of the town:**

Generally suitable for limited, small-scale (will vary subject to location) development that may wholly comprise apartments, or residential development of any scale that will include a minority of apartments at low medium densities and includes:

- Sites in suburban development areas that do not meet proximity or accessibility criteria.

These areas require local assessment that further considers these and other relevant planning factors.

Apartments can allow for greater diversity and flexibility in a housing scheme, and allow for increased overall density. Accordingly, apartments may be considered as part of a mix of housing types in a given housing development at any urban location.

The need for **Nursing Homes** and residential care homes in the town is anticipated to grow into the future and these facilities should be integrated wherever possible into the established or planned residential areas where residents can avail of reasonable access to local services. In determining planning applications for a change of use from a residential dwelling or other building to a nursing home the following will be considered:

- Whether such a use would not give rise to a traffic hazard and off-street car parking;
- The proximity to local services and facilities;
- Whether the size and scale is appropriate to the area.

**Housing: Strategy Aim:**

*To deliver new residential development, to support the existing community infrastructure, recreation and amenity facilities and provide new facilities in tandem with new housing.*

**Objectives:** It is an objective of the Council to:

- H O1:** Ensure that sufficient zoned land is available at appropriate locations to cater for the envisaged population growth of the Core Strategy;
- H O2:** Promote and encourage the development of the critical mass of Mountmellick and to enhance its strategic location on the National and Regional road network;
- H O3:** Facilitate the provision of housing in a range of locations to meet the needs of the population, with particular emphasis on facilitating access to housing to suit different household and tenure needs, in a sustainable manner;
- H O4:** To ensure compliance with the provisions of Part V of the Act (as amended) and to integrate such housing so as to prevent social segregation within residential developments;
- H O5:** To utilise the provisions of the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 (Vacant Site Levy) to facilitate the appropriate development of vacant sites (residential zoned) that are in need of renewal or regeneration;
- H O6:** To encourage the sequential development of sustainable serviced residentially zoned lands in a sustainable manner subject to compliance with relevant Department Guidelines and Development Management Standards of the Laois County Development Plan 2017 - 2023;
- H O7:** To promote a higher density at appropriate locations, particularly close to the town centre and public transport facilities;
- H O8:** To encourage appropriate housing development on infill and brownfield sites subject to preservation of existing residential amenity, the provision of a high quality design respecting the established character, density and layout, compliance with all traffic safety, quantitative and qualitative standards of the Laois County Development;
- H O9:** To promote the reoccupation of vacant residential stock within the Town Centre, including 'Living Above the Shop' units;
- H O10:** To ensure an appropriate and sustainable mix of dwelling types, sizes and tenures to cater for all members of society, including homeless persons, the elderly, disabled and travellers;
- H O11:** To ensure provision of lifetime adaptable homes that can accommodate the changing needs of a household over time;
- H O12:** To identify, acquire and provide suitable sites, accommodation and facilities for the

housing and resettlement of travelling families;

**H O13:** To secure the provision of social infrastructure, community and recreational facilities in tandem with residential development.

**Policies:** It is the Policy of the Council to:

**H P1:** Ensure that sufficient zoned land is available at appropriate locations to cater for the envisaged population growth of the Core Strategy;

**H P2:** Require all new residential developments to be consistent with the Core Strategy of the Laois County Development Plan 2107-2023 and the settlement strategy of this plan;

**H P3:** Promote and encourage the development of Mountmellick and to enhance its strategic location on the National and Regional road and rail network;

**H P4:** Facilitate the provision of housing in a range of locations to meet the needs of the population, with particular emphasis on facilitating access to housing to suit different household and tenure needs, in a sustainable manner;

**H P5:** To require the creation of sustainable communities and high quality residential areas at appropriate locations with a mix tenure and adequate amenities and facilities and to meet the standards and guidance of:

- Sustainable Residential Development In Urban Areas, Guidelines for Planning Authorities, DEHG (2009);
- Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2018);
- The Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets, DTTS and DECLG (2013);
- The development management standards of the Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023;
- Technical Guidance Document L – Conservation of Fuel and Energy – Dwellings.

## 14 COMMUNITY SERVICES & CULTURE



*Community services and facilities catering for all sectors of society and of a social, sporting, educational, and amenity value are crucially important to provide opportunities for participation, for health and to attract inward investment. This plan provides for the expansion of existing community services and facilities and development of new services. This plan also puts an emphasis on promoting and developing a stronger cultural dimension in the town. Culture plays a key role in ensuring that communities are mixed, sustainable and dynamic. Developing and promoting culture in Mountmellick will maximise the physical, social and economic benefits of the cultural offer. Promoting cultural development shapes the identity of the town and helps set it apart in terms of its distinctiveness.*

The creation of sustainable and vibrant communities requires the provision of and access to education, childcare, health and support services, recreation and leisure facilities and a good quality built environment to create a sense of place. The Council is committed to the provision, upgrade and expansion of community facilities and social infrastructure in conjunction with private, public and voluntary organisations.

The **Local Community Development Committee** (LCDC) was established in 2014 by Laois County Council and performs a role in developing, coordinating and implementing a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development through the Local Economic and Community Plan 2016 (LECP). The LECP is central to promoting economic and local community development in the county over a six year period.

The provision of good quality **childcare and educational facilities** is important to support the development of sustainable communities and to support economic development. There are approximately 6 preschool facilities in Mountmellick, including a variety of full day care and sessional services. The requirement for additional preschool facilities will be based on the capacity of existing facilities and additional requirements arising from new residential development.

There are three primary schools and one secondary school in Mountmellick. The Council has sought and will continue to work with the Department of Education and Skills to identify and develop sites for new schools as necessary. Mountmellick Further Education Centre provides a number of Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses and an outreach centre for adult literacy. The requirement for additional educational facilities will be monitored having regard to the

development of residential land during the lifetime of the LAP. The Council will facilitate and promote the development of educational facilities in the town.

Laois County Council adopted the **“Laois Age Friendly County Strategy 2016-2021”** in 2016. The strategy sets out a number of aims and actions so that the county will be where older people are supported to live independently in safe and secure homes and communities, suitable for their physical and social needs, with improved health and quality of life, where older people are enabled to participate in economic, social, political and community life and continue to grow, develop and contribute to society and build upon existing services and supports.



Figure 16: Mountmellick Library and Art Gallery

**Mountmellick Library and Art Gallery** was opened in 2010 in the refurbished Court House on Wolfe Tone Street. The library is a state of the art facility with a significant range of services available to serve the education and recreational needs of the town and surrounding hinterland.

Portlaoise is the main centre of **health care** in the county. However, Mountmellick is served by a Primary Care Centre and a Community Nursing Unit. There are a number of public, voluntary and private agencies responsible for the provision of healthcare facilities in the town, with the Health Service Executive being the primary agency.

Mountmellick is served by **emergency services** including An Garda Siochana, the Fire Service and Civil Defence etc.

**Community Services & Culture: Strategic Aim:**

*To deliver, facilitate and support the provision of a broad range of high quality community, educational and cultural facilities and infrastructure to meet the needs of the population.*

**Objectives:** It is an Objective of the Council to:

**CSC 01:** Facilitate the provision of social infrastructure and to provide access to new and

existing community and social facilities;

**CSC O2:** Facilitate the improvement and provision of community facilities, library and emergency services in appropriate locations;

**CSC O3:** Facilitate the improvement and provision of educational, childcare and healthcare facilities in appropriate and accessible locations;

**CSC O4:** Facilitate implementation of the Laois Age Friendly County Strategy 2016-2021;

**CSC O5:** Promote the amenities and ensure the accessibility of arts and cultural facilities within the ownership of Laois County Council;

**CSC O6:** Facilitate the roll out of community policing and neighbourhood watch schemes.

**Policies:** It is the Policy of the Council to:

**CSC P1:** Ensure provision of sufficient zoned lands to allow for expansion of existing and provision of community facilities;

**CSC P2:** Facilitate the development of and expansion of services, amenities and facilities to cater for all society members, ages and community groups;

**CSC P3:** Facilitate the development of primary, second-level, third-level outreach, vocational and lifelong learning facilities and digital capacity for distance learning including fourth level education, lifelong learning and up-skilling;

**CSC P4:** Ensure the provision and implementation of primary and secondary education facilities in concert with the planning and sustainable development of residential areas in order to maximise the opportunities for use of walking, cycling and use of public transport.

## 15 BUILT HERITAGE



Mountmellick’s built heritage is a key and distinctive asset which can be used to promote a positive image of the town. The built heritage is a unique resource and represents an irreplaceable expression of the richness and diversity of the town’s past. The vernacular architecture makes a strong contribution to the character of the town. This plan seeks to protect, preserve and enhance the built heritage for the benefit of future generations.

The quality of the **historic building** stock in Mountmellick reflects the historic, architectural and social heritage and gives form to its architectural character. The morphology of Mountmellick comprises a mix of regular and informal layouts, the result of its origin as a settlement at the meeting of routes leading to a ford crossing in the river Owenass. Uses associated with Mountmellick’s role as an industrial and commercial town contribute to its historic architectural character. The town centre is characterised by a close mix of shops at street level with family accommodation above or adjoining and there are many dwellings opening directly onto the street. These structures strongly contribute to the architectural character of the town. Many plots have historic warehouses and outbuildings located to the rear accessed via covered openings from the street.



Figure 17: Mountmellick Heritage Trail

Having regard to the Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023 it is an objective of the Council to designate an **Architectural Conservation Area** (ACA) in the town centre. A Character Appraisal for the proposed ACA was undertaken in 2013.

An ACA is a place, area, group of structures or townscape, taking account of building lines and heights that is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest. The designation is a driver for sustainable and sensitive development, the aim of which is not *'preservation'* but managed development that enhances the character and heritage of the town. Contemporary design should reinforce the historic character within the ACA, and should take its cues from the historic setting in terms of scale and design. High quality architectural design will add to the built heritage and complement the receiving historic environment.

The **Record of Protected Structures** (RPS) is set out under Appendix 1 of the Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023 and should be read in conjunction with this plan. The RPS includes structures of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest. There are approximately 74 no. Protected Structures within the development boundary of Mountmellick.

#### **Built Heritage: Strategic Aim:**

*To protect, conserve and manage the built heritage of the town and to encourage sensitive and sustainable development to ensure its preservation for future generations.*

#### **Objectives:** It is an Objective of the Council to:

- BH O1:** Protect, conserve and enhance the built environment, through promoting awareness, utilising relevant heritage legislation and promoting good quality urban design;
- BH O2:** Conserve, protect and enhance the built heritage of Mountmellick, including the the proposed Architectural Conservation Area, all Protected Structures and attendant grounds, Recorded Monuments and Places in accordance with best conservation practice;
- BH O3:** Positively consider proposals to improve, alter, extend or change the use of protected structures so as to render them viable for modern use, subject to consultation with suitably qualified Conservation Architects and / or other relevant experts, suitable design, materials and construction methods;
- BH O4:** Ensure all development works on or at the sites of protected structures, including any site works necessary, shall be carried out using best heritage practice for the protection and preservation of those aspects or features of the structures / site that render it worthy of protection;

- BH O5:** Support the re-introduction of traditional features on protected structures where there is evidence that such features (e.g. window styles, finishes etc.) previously existed;
- BH O6:** Strongly resist the demolition of protected structures, unless it can be demonstrated that exceptional circumstances exist;
- BH O7:** Consider the change of use of protected structures, provided that it can be shown that the structure, character, appearance and setting will not be adversely affected or where it can be shown it is necessary to have an economic use to enable its upkeep;
- BH O8:** Ensure the protection within the traditional town centre, of all those buildings, spaces, archaeological sites, trees, street furniture, views and other aspects of the environment which form an essential part of their character
- BH O9:** Ensure the design of any development in the traditional town centre, including any changes of use of an existing building, should preserve and/ or enhance the character and appearance of the traditional town centre as a whole;
- BH O10:** Promote schemes for the conservation and enhancement of the character and appearance of the traditional town centre;
- BH O11:** No development in the vicinity of a feature included in the Record of Monuments & Places (RMP) will be permitted which seriously detracts from the setting of the feature or which is seriously injurious to its cultural or educational value;
- BH O12:** Ensure archaeological assessment is carried out as required and promote 'preservation in situ' of archaeological remains and settings in developments that would impact upon archaeological sites and/or features;
- BH O13:** Protect previously unknown archaeological sites and features, including underwater sites, where they are discovered during development works;
- BH O14:** Facilitate public access to National Monuments in State or Local Authority care.

**Policies:** It is the Policy of the Council to:

- BH P1:** Ensure heritage assets that are the focus for tourism development are appropriately managed and their special interest conserved from potential adverse effects from visitors or development in general and that best practice standards in relation for the environmental management of tourism enterprises are adhered to;

- BH P2:** Support and promote, with the co-operation of landowners, public access to heritage sites and features at appropriate locations whilst ensuring heritage related development does not result in negative impacts on the fabric or setting of Laois's heritage assets;
- BH P3:** Support the implementation of Ireland's Ancient East by facilitating the provision of visitor information in line with the policies and objectives with respect to heritage sites, and integrating the objectives of Ireland's Ancient East with transport programmes in the County;
- BH P4:** Encourage and support the provision of foreign language interpretation interventions in order to ensure the appropriate interpretation and appreciation of the county's heritage asset.

## 16 NATURAL HERITAGE



*This chapter considers the natural heritage of Mountmellick which includes the Natural Environment, Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure. Similar to Built Heritage the Natural Heritage is a key and distinctive asset which can also be used to promote a positive image of the town. The natural heritage of Mountmellick is a material asset which should be protected and enhanced.*

With respect to the **Natural Environment** of Mountmellick there are no European designated (EU Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC) Special Areas of Conservation or Special Protection Areas located within the plan boundary. However, the Owenass River flows through the town which is a tributary of and forms part of the River Barrow Special Area of Conservation (Site Code: 002162). The Mountmellick SAC is located approximately 3km east of the settlement.

**Green Infrastructure** is the physical environment within and between our towns and villages, comprising a network of multi functional open spaces, including formal parks, gardens, woodlands, green corridors, waterways, trees and open space. Green Infrastructure includes all environmental resources such as air and water quality and provides vital amenity and recreational spaces for communities, thus contributing to the health and quality of life of residents and visitors to the town.

The river Owenass provides a nature corridor extending through the centre of the town. Connected green spaces provide the greatest benefit to biodiversity in an urban context. In addition to ecological benefits, the existing amenity open spaces in Mountmellick provide a focal point for active and passive recreation. A playground and outdoor gym is located at Mountmellick Playground. There are also a number of sports grounds and clubs located in the town.

The provision of recreational infrastructure has wide ranging quality of life benefits for the local community including:

- The creation of a community and a sense of place;
- Encouraging physical activity through the use of walkways and cycle paths;
- Access to nature and the environment;
- The creation of a pleasant environment to attract business and inward investment;
- Climate Change adaptation.



Figure 18: Mountmellick Playground

A wide diversity of species, habitats, ecosystems and landscapes make up the **biodiversity** of Mountmellick. The Mountmellick Local Biodiversity Action Plan was published in 2015.

Biodiversity is the diversity of life, the diversity of all the organisms that occur on Earth – everything from birds to bugs to mammals to trees to reptiles to lichens to fish to mosses to amphibians to algae and everything in between! The term biodiversity includes genetic diversity i.e. the differences within species e.g. the differences from one person to the next.

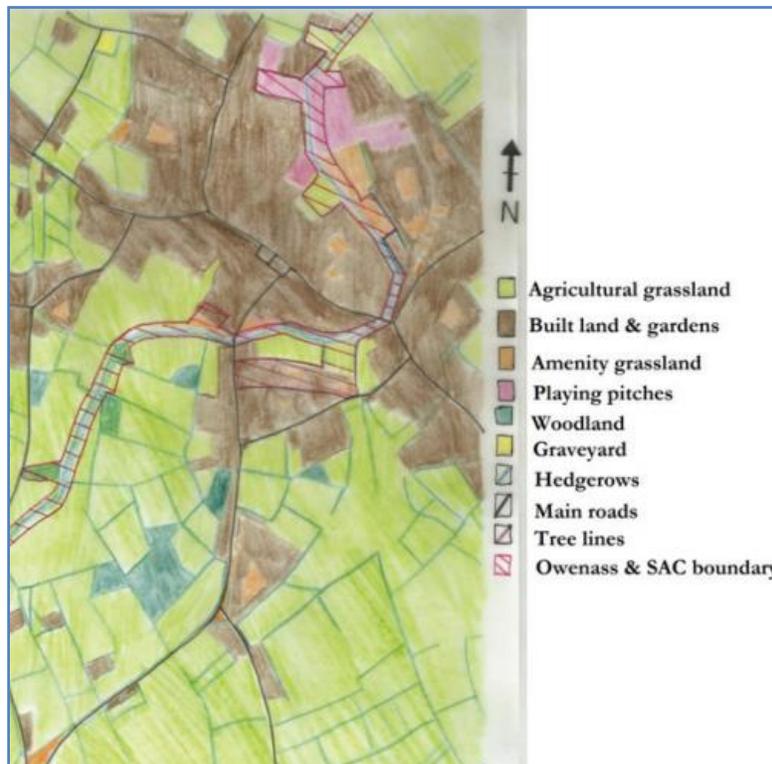


Figure 19: Heritage Map of Mountmellick, Mountmellick Biodiversity Action Plan

Humans are an integral part of the Biodiversity of Earth and our actions can affect it in both a positive and negative way. Ecology deals with the inter-relations between organisms and the places in which they live. This can refer to human beings' dealings and interactions with both

the habitats and species around them. A habitat is the type of area where an organism or a number of organisms are at home.

There is potential to conserve and enhance biodiversity in Mountmellick through the planning system. Individual planning applications can provide or retain hedgerows, landscaped areas and trees etc.

**Natural Heritage: Strategic Aim:**

*To protect, enhance, create and connect natural heritage, green spaces and high quality amenity areas throughout Portlaoise for biodiversity and recreation.*

**Objectives:** It is the Objective of the Council to:

**NH O1:** Identify, protect and conserve natural heritage sites, nationally designated conservation sites and non designated sites in co-operation and consultation with the relevant statutory authorities;

**NH O2:** Seek integration of all elements of existing green infrastructure into new developments, prevent fragmentation and mitigate potential impacts on the existing green infrastructure network;

**NH O3:** Require the preservation and maintenance of suitable mature trees, hedgerows and natural heritage features in new developments;

**NH O4:** Seek to preserve, protect and maintain trees of special amenity, conservation or landscape value;

**NH O5:** Carry out and require the planting of native trees, hedgerows and vegetation in all new developments;

**NH O6:** Open up visual and physical access via the River Owenass as a continuous pedestrian and cycle link through the town centre, having regard to ecological considerations including protected species and habitats;

**NH O7:** Identify, protect, conserve and enhance wherever possible, wildlife habitats, stepping stones, corridors and features;

**NH O8:** Provide recreational amenities such as playgrounds and outdoor gym equipment;

**NH O9:** Protect environmental quality and implement site appropriate mitigation measures with respect to air quality, greenhouse gases, climate change, light pollution, noise pollution and waste management;

**NH O10:** Maintain riverbank vegetation along watercourses and ensure protection of a 30 to 50 metres riparian buffer zone on Greenfield sites and maintain free from development;

**NH O11:** Facilitate the work of agencies redressing the issue of terrestrial and aquatic invasive species.

**Policies:** It is a Policy of the Council to:

**NH P1:** Ensure heritage assets that are the focus for tourism development are appropriately managed and their special interest conserved from potential adverse effects from visitors or development in general and that best practice standards in relation for the environmental management of tourism enterprises are adhered to;

**NH P2:** Develop a greenway/blueway walking and cycling route along the River Owenass having regard to ecological considerations including protected species and habitats;

**NH P3:** Support and promote, with the co-operation of landowners, public access to heritage sites and features at appropriate locations whilst ensuring heritage related development does not result in negative impacts on the fabric or setting of the town's heritage assets;

**NH P3:** Support the implementation of Ireland's Ancient East by facilitating the provision of visitor information in line with the policies and objectives with respect to heritage sites; and integrating the objectives of Ireland's Ancient East with transport programmes in the County.

## 17 FLOOD MANAGEMENT



*Flooding is a natural process that can happen at any time in a wide variety of locations and the severity of which is set to increase due to climate change. Flooding from rivers and prolonged, intense and localised rainfall can also cause sewer flooding, overland flow and groundwater flooding. Flooding has significant impacts on human activities as it can threaten lives, livelihoods, housing, transport, and public service infrastructure and commercial/industrial enterprises. The impacts of flooding can be significant and wide reaching and include health, social, economic and environmental effects. Developments in inappropriate locations can exacerbate the problems of flooding by accelerating and increasing surface water runoff, altering watercourses and removing floodplain storage.*

The **Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities** (2009), Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) has informed the preparation of the Draft LAP. There is a history of flooding of the Rivers Owenass and Barrow in Mountmellick. The Council recognizes that flooding or the risk of flooding constrains development potential in Mountmellick. The Council will strive to ensure that proper flood risk identification, assessment and management avoidance are integrated with the planning system to safeguard and provide for the future sustainable development of the town. Flood hazard maps for the Mountmellick area indicate that there is a considerable flood risk within the town and environs.

The Barrow Drainage Board was dissolved in 2014. The Board comprised the Local Authorities of Laois, Kildare and Offaly, which were responsible for maintaining the Barrow and its tributaries from its source in the Slieve Bloom mountains to the Horse Bridge in Athy. The responsibilities of the Board were subsumed into the County Councils.

Following the severe and unprecedented flooding in November 2017 Laois County Council has agreed in conjunction with the Office of Public Works (OPW) the urgent commencement of detailed design and engineering specifications for flood defences in Mountmellick. The detailed design will include a review of the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management mapping (CFRAM) taking into account the recorded flood depths on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2017 and the identification of any additional flood defences necessary. A Project Office will be established locally to manage the design, implementation and construction of a flood relief scheme on behalf of and in partnership with the OPW during the lifetime of this plan. The Council is considering further short term actions including an improved flood/ rainfall community alert system, further river and channel clearance works and the provision on a pilot basis, of defence equipment for flood prone and flood affected domestic properties. A

programme of river channel clearance in the Blackwater and Owenass catchments has taken place in recent months.

As the frequency, pattern and severity of flooding are expected to increase as a result of climate change, it is vitally important to take account of flood risk in the preparation of development plans such as this Draft LAP and ensure that any development does not individually or cumulatively give rise to flood risk. The Draft LAP avoids development in areas at risk of flooding and has substituted vulnerable land uses with less vulnerable uses where this is not possible. Where neither is possible, mitigation and management of risks must be proposed. Justification tests were carried out on a number of sites and are detailed in the SFRA report accompanying this Draft LAP. 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 development being proposed.

The **Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management** (CFRAM) programme is a medium to long term strategy for the reduction and management of flood risk in Ireland covering seven river basin districts in Ireland. Mountmellick and its environs lie within the South Eastern River Basin District and were identified as an “Area for Further Assessment” (AFA) through CFRAM. A Hydraulics Report and Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (PFRA) mapping has been completed as part of the CFRAM study which provides the complete assessment of flood risk in the town.

In accordance with “*The Planning System and Flood Risk Management - Guidelines for Planning Authorities*” as amended by Circular PL2/2014, a **Strategic Flood Risk Assessment** (SFRA) is required to be undertaken during the development of this Draft Local Area Plan. The SFRA is an assessment of flood risk within Mountmellick and includes mapped boundaries for indicative Flood Risk Zones, taking into account various factors including local knowledge, photography, site walkovers and published data sources indicative of flood risk. The SFRA should be read in conjunction with this Draft Local Area Plan.

The landuse zoning map for Mountmellick has been developed taking into consideration the areas identified as being at risk of flooding as per the indicative flood risk map. Largely a precautionary approach has been taken to landuse zoning and this provides for the avoidance or minimization of development in areas at risk of flooding.

A number of approaches to managing flood risk in Mountmellick have and will be employed during the making of this Draft Local Area Plan and also in dealing with planning applications for particular developments. These include:

1. Areas at risk of flooding have been identified;
2. A precautionary approach has largely been employed to landuse zoning to avoid directing development towards areas at risk of flooding;
3. Areas at risk of flooding as identified which are being put forward for landuse zoning have been subject to assessment through the justification test;

4. Where particular areas were examined as being strategically important for the consolidated and coherent growth of the town and zoned accordingly, area specific flood risk assessment will be required and mitigation measures for site and building works will be required to be integrated.

**Flood Management: Strategic Aim:**

***To develop and improve flood alleviation measures throughout the town and rural hinterland so as to compliment the overall strategy for economic and population growth and to achieve improved physical and environmental protection.***

**Objectives:** It is an Objective of the Council to:

- FM O1:** Manage flood risk 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);
- FM O2:** Support and co-operate with the OPW in delivering the South Eastern CFRAM Programme;
- FM O3:** To carry out a programme of infrastructure and flood defence works in conjunction with the OPW to alleviate flooding in the town and hinterland.

**Policies:** It is the Policy of the Council to:

- FM O1:** In conjunction with OPW implement a program of flood defense works for the town;
- FM O2:** Comply with DoEHLG Guidelines *“The Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009)”* and any future Guidelines in relation to flood risk;
- FM O3:** Ensure development proposals within the areas outlined on Flood Risk Map are the subject of Site-Specific Flood Risk Assessment as outlined in *“The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines”* 2009;
- FM O4:** Ensure all development on lands identified as being at risk of flooding must demonstrate, through the carrying out of a Site Specific Flood Risk Assessment and the use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems, that any flood risk can be adequately managed and the use or development of the lands will not cause unacceptable adverse impacts elsewhere;

- FM 05:** Co-operate with the OPW in relation to the development of the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment (CFRAM) South Eastern River Basin and for the Rivers Owenass and Barrow and its tributaries in particular and to comply with any guidance and recommendations of this flood risk management plan;
- FM 06:** Incorporate the recommendations of the South Eastern CFRAM into any site specific flood risk assessment undertaken for individual sites/areas;
- FM 07:** Provide an appropriate set back from the edge of the watercourse and proposed developments to allow access for channel clearing/maintenance;
- FM 08:** Adhere to the requirements of the Inland Fisheries and National Parks and Wildlife Service in the construction of any flood alleviation measures;
- FM 09:** Comply with relevant provisions of the Arterial Drainage Act, 1945 and the Arterial Drainage (Amendment) Act 1995;
- FM 010:** Ensure protection of Natura 2000 sites supporting rivers and streams by avoiding development on flood plains and ensure flood risk assessment policies, plans or projects are compliant with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive and avoid or mitigate negative impacts on Natura 2000 sites.

## 18    IMPLEMENTATION

This Draft LAP outlines specific policies and objectives for the development of Mountmellick. The overarching policies and objectives of the Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023 also apply.

The applicable Development Management Standards are set out under Section 8 of the Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023. All proposed developments will be screened on a case by case basis for Environmental Impact Assessment, Appropriate Assessment and Flood Risk Assessment.

### 18.1    LAND USE ZONING

The purpose of zoning is to indicate to property owners and the general public the types of development which the Planning Authority considers most appropriate in each land use category. Zoning is designed to reduce conflicting uses within areas, to protect resources and, in association with phasing, to ensure that land suitable for development is used to the best advantage of the community as a whole.

The Land Use Zoning Map shows the land use zoning objectives for Mountmellick. The Land Use Zoning Map should be read in conjunction with the Land Use Zoning Objectives and Land Use Zoning Matrix set out below.

Land Use Zoning	Objective & Purpose
<b>Town Centre (Primary / Core Retail Area)</b>	<p><b>Objective:</b> <i>To protect and enhance the special physical and social character of the existing Town Centre and to provide for and improve retailing and commercial activities.</i></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> To enhance the vitality and viability of the town centre through the promotion of retail, residential, commercial, office, cultural, public facilities and other uses appropriate in the urban core.</p> <p>To prioritise the development of town centre lands in order to consolidate the development of the town.</p> <p>To encourage the use of buildings and backlands, in particular the full use of upper floors, preferably for residential purposes.</p>

<p><b>Residential 1 Existing Residential</b></p>	<p><b>Objective:</b> <i>To protect and improve the amenity of developed residential communities.</i></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> This zone is intended primarily for established housing development. It is an objective on land zoned for Residential 1 to protect established residential amenity and enhance the quality with associated open space, community uses and where an acceptable standard of amenity can be maintained, a limited range of other uses that support the overall residential function of the area, such as schools, crèches, small shops, doctor’s surgeries, playing fields etc.</p>
<p><b>Residential 2 – New Proposed Residential</b></p>	<p><b>Objective:</b> <i>To provide for new residential development, residential services and community facilities.</i></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> This zone is intended primarily for housing development but may include a range of other uses particularly those that have the potential to facilitate the development of new residential communities such as open space, schools, crèches, small shops, doctor’s surgeries, playing fields etc.</p> <p>The improved quality of residential areas and the servicing of orderly development will be priority. New housing and infill developments should be of sensitive design, which are complimentary to their surroundings and do not adversely impact on the amenity of adjoining residents. No piecemeal development can take place unless it does not conflict with the possible future development of the reserved development areas of the town.</p>
<p><b>Strategic Residential Reserve</b></p>	<p><b>Objective:</b> <i>To provide lands for future development in line with national and regional targets.</i></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> The inclusion of such lands will <b>not</b> in any way infer a prior commitment on the part of Laois County Council regarding their future zoning during the review of the subsequent development</p>

	<p>plan for the plan period 2024-2030. Such a decision will be considered within the framework of national and regional population targets applicable at that time and the proper planning and sustainable development of the County.</p>
<p><b>Community, Educational &amp; Institutional Services/Facilities</b></p>	<p><b>Objective:</b> <i>To protect and provide for local neighbourhood, community, ecclesiastical, recreational and educational facilities.</i></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> To protect and improve existing community, educational and institutional facilities and to safeguard their future provision. The land use will provide for local civic, religious, community, educational and other facilities ancillary to neighbourhood uses and services.</p>
<p><b>Open Space &amp; Amenity</b></p>	<p><b>Objective:</b> <i>To preserve, provide for and improve active and passive recreational open space.</i></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> The Council will not normally permit development that would result in a loss of open space.</p>
<p><b>Industrial &amp; Warehousing</b></p>	<p><b>Objective:</b> <i>To provide for and improve industrial and warehousing development.</i></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> To provide for industrial development, including heavy industry with environmental emissions, including noise and odour and with intensive or hazardous processing. To also provide for light industry, technology related office development and general office development that exceed 400 square metres.</p> <p>Other uses, ancillary or similar to industry and warehousing will be considered on the merits of each planning application and may be acceptable.</p> <p>Where employment is a high generator of traffic, the location of new employment at appropriate scale, density, type and location</p>

	<p>will be encouraged to reduce the demand for travel. The layout of new employment sites shall have regard to alternative sustainable modes of transport. Any proposed site layout should emphasize the necessary connections to the wider local and strategic public transport, walking and cycling networks. Residential or Retail uses (including retail warehousing) will not be acceptable in this zone.</p> <p>Where any industrial and warehousing land adjoins other land uses, a landscaped buffer zone will be required.</p>
<p><b>Neighbourhood Centres</b></p>	<p><b>Objective:</b> <i>To serve the needs of new/existing residential areas.</i></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> Neighbourhood Centres are intended to serve the immediate needs of the local working and residential population and complement, rather than compete with the established town centre. A mix of appropriate retail, community and recreational development will be permitted. Only limited residential development will be considered in new developments sufficient to ensure the satisfactory working of the neighbourhood centre.</p> <p>The retail element will be controlled so as not to negatively impact on the existing town centre. The largest size of a new convenience store shall be restricted to no more than 300 sq.m in a Neighbourhood Centre.</p>
<p><b>Enterprise &amp; Employment</b></p>	<p><b>Objective:</b> <i>To provide for enterprise and employment activities.</i></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> To accommodate commercial and enterprise uses that are incapable of being situated in a town centre location, including low input and emission manufacturing, campus style offices, storage uses, wholesaling and distribution, commercial services with high space and parking requirements. Business Park type development shall be provided in high quality landscaped campus style environments, incorporating a range of amenities.</p> <p>The uses in this zone are likely to generate a considerable amount of traffic by both employees and service traffic. Sites should therefore have good vehicular and public transport access. The</p>

	<p>implementation of mobility management plans will be required to provide important means of managing accessibility to these sites.</p>
<b>Transport &amp; Utilities</b>	<p><b>Objective:</b> <i>To provide for the needs of all transport users and other utility providers.</i></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> Car parks and commercial development associated with the provision of public transport services are considered appropriate in this zoning. This zoning also provides for and preserves land for the provision of services such as electricity, telecommunications, water, wastewater etc. to the town.</p>

## 18.2 LAND USE ZONING MATRIX

There are eleven different land use zones within the plan area of Mountmellick. The Zoning Matrix set out below provides an indication of the acceptability or otherwise of particular uses in the individual land use zones. The land use zoning matrix is intended to provide general guidance to potential developers and is not an exhaustive list. The reader is advised that an indication that a proposal is “*permitted in principle*” does not imply a grant of planning permission. In this regard, all planning applications for development will be assessed on their merits by the Planning Authority in accordance with the relevant Development Management Standards and Planning Guidelines.

<b>Acceptability</b>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Y</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Will Normally Be Acceptable</p>	<p>A use which will normally be acceptable is one which the Local Authority accepts in principle in the relevant zone. However, it is still subject to the normal planning process including policies and objectives outlined in the Plan.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>O</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Open for Consideration</p>	<p>A use which is open for consideration means that the use is generally acceptable except where indicated otherwise and where specific considerations associated with a given proposal (i.e. scale) would be unacceptable, or where the development would be contrary to the objective for a given area. Not a Material Contravention.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>N</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Will Not Normally Be Acceptable</p>	<p>Development which is classified as not normally being acceptable in a particular zone is one which will not be entertained by the Local Authority except in exceptional circumstances. This may be due to its perceived effect on existing and permitted uses, its incompatibility with the policies and objectives contained in this Plan or the fact that it may be inconsistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. The expansion of established and approved uses not conforming to land use zoning objectives will be considered on their merits.</p>

Zoning	Town Centre	Existing Residential (R2)	New/ Proposed Residential (R1)	Community Services/ Facilitates	Open Space & Amenity	General Industry & Warehousing	Neighbourhood Centres	Enterprise & Employment	Transport & Utilities
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Land Use	Acceptability of Land Use								
Apartment	Y	Y	Y	O	N	N	Y	N	N
Car Park	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N
Café	Y	O	O	N	N	O	Y	Y	N
Cemetery	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	O
Cinema	O	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Community Hall	O	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	O	N
Craft Industry	Y	O	O	O	N	Y	O	Y	N
Crèche/ Playschool	Y	Y	Y	O	N	O	Y	O	N
Cultural Uses/ Library	Y	O	O	O	N	N	Y	O	O
Dancehall/Disco	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Dwelling	O	Y	Y	O	N	N	N	N	N
Funeral Home	O	N	N	O	N	N	N	N	N
Garages, Panel Beating, Car Repairs	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	O	N
Garden Centre	O	N	N	N	N	N	N	O	N
General Public Administration	Y	N	N	O	N	N	O	Y	O
Guest House/Hostel/Hotel	Y	O	O	O	N	N	N	O	N
Halting Site	N	O	O	O	N	N	N	N	N
Health Centre	Y	O	O	O	N	N	Y	O	N
Heavy Commercial Vehicle Parks	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	O	N
Hot Food Takeaway	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
Industry	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	O	N
Industry (Light)	O	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N
Medical and Related Consultants	Y	O	O	O	N	N	O	O	N
Motor Sales	O	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
Nursing Home/ Sheltered Housing	O	O	O	O	N	O	N	N	N
Offices < 100 sq m	Y	O	O	O	N	Y	O	Y	N
Offices > 100 sq m	Y	N	N	O	N	O	O	Y	N
Park Playground	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	O	O	Y	N

Petrol Station	Y	N	N	N	N	O	N	O	N
Place of Worship	Y	O	O	Y	N	N	O	N	N
Playing Fields	N	Y	Y	O	Y	N	N	N	N
Public House	Y	N	N	N	N	N	O	N	N
Recreational Building (Commercial)	O	O	O	O	N	N	O	O	N
Recreational Building (Community)	Y	Y	Y	Y	O	N	Y	O	O
Restaurant	Y	O	O	O	N	O	Y	O	N
Retail Warehouse	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	O	N
School/Educational Facilities	Y	O	O	O	N	N	O	N	N
Scrap Yard	N	N	N	N	N	O	N	N	N
Retail < 100sqm (Comparison)	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
Retail > 100sqm (Comparison)	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
Retail < 100 sq m (Convenience)	Y	O	O	N	N	N	Y	O	N
Retail > 100 sq m (Convenience)	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
Sport/Leisure Complex	Y	O	O	O	N	N	O	Y	N
Utility structures	Y	O	O	O	N	Y	O	Y	Y
Warehouse (Wholesale)	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N
Workshops	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N