

County Carlow

Local Economic and Community Plan (2023-29)



Prepared by Carlow County Council in collaboration with the
Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) and
the Tourism, Enterprise and Economic Development
Strategic Policy Committee (SPC).



COMHAIRLE CONTAE
CHEATHARLACH

CARLOW COUNTY COUNCIL



Coiste um Fhorbairt Pobail Áitiúil
Cheatharlach
Carlow Local Community Development
Committee

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Message from Cathaoirleach



Cllr. Andrea Dalton
Cathaoirleach Carlow County Council

I warmly welcome the Local Economic and Community Plan for County Carlow. This plan represents an exciting opportunity for us to reinvigorate our vision and establish a comprehensive framework that will continue to support the sustainable growth of our local economy and communities.

Our approach is one of inclusivity, aiming to maximize the benefits of growth for all members of our community. We also recognize the pressing need to take action now, implementing positive measures for the environment and biodiversity. It is essential that we act swiftly to ensure the prosperity we achieve is felt by everyone within our communities, both today and in the distant future.

The High-Level Goals, Outputs, and Outcomes that we have set for ourselves will enable us to enhance the capabilities of our residents, empowering them to contribute and thrive throughout their lifetimes, regardless of the individual challenges they may encounter. This is a pivotal step as we continue our efforts to address the consequences of deprivation and fulfil our commitment to improving the health and well-being of all individuals, regardless of age, within our communities.

This approach will also, collectively work towards maintaining a resilient, productive, and sustainable business foundation within our county.

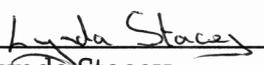
I wish to express my gratitude to the members of the Strategic Policy Committee for Culture, Libraries and Digital Development, Tourism, Enterprise and Economic Development (SPC), and the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) for their leadership in developing this plan, alongside our dedicated council officers.

The extensive engagement process, which involved capturing the insights and perspectives of communities and businesses across our county, has been instrumental in shaping the ambitious goals and priorities laid out within the LECP. I extend my heartfelt appreciation to all those who have taken part in this process, and I encourage others who share a desire to drive change to actively participate in the plan's delivery and implementation. I also want to express my appreciation of the diligent and excellent work of People and Place Limited in the preparation of this plan.

I eagerly look forward to collaborating with each of you and witnessing the positive impact of our collective actions.

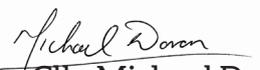
Foreword from the Chairs of the LCDC and SPC




Lynda Stacey

Chair of the Carlow Local Community
Development Committee (LCDC)




Cllr. Michael Doran

Chair of the Culture, Libraries & Digital
Development, Tourism, Enterprise and Economic
Development Strategic Policy Committee (SPC)

The vision of the Carlow Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) for 2023-2029, forged through extensive consultation, is a powerful declaration: “County Carlow is committed to a just and sustainable future.” This vision builds upon the successes of our first LECP, forming the bedrock of our second plan.

Recent years have presented us with unprecedented global challenges, from the far-reaching impacts of a devastating pandemic to the urgent need to address climate change. These challenges have reverberated from the national and regional levels to reshape the lives of every resident and business in Carlow. The development of this second plan has enabled us to pivot our focus, preparing for the next six years by embracing the opportunities presented by a rapidly evolving 21st century while fortifying ourselves for the challenges that may arise.

At the national level, strategic planning has been instrumental in preparing us for an effective response. We have a national Climate Action Plan, Roadmap for Social Inclusion, Healthy Ireland Framework, and Project Ireland 2040 etc. Our LECP represents our local response to these national strategies, aligning with the clarity provided by the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), which underscores the importance of sustainable economic growth and the “Town Centre First” Policy. Through our LECP, we aim to ensure the sustainability and justice of our communities and businesses, empowering them to confront challenges and innovate, as they continue to shape Carlow into a place we can all take pride in, both in our communities and workplaces.

The six High-Level Goals that underpin this plan provide a comprehensive framework, encompassing both community and economic aspects. They transcend traditional boundaries, acknowledging the vital synergies between these two pillars while emphasizing our overarching commitment to inclusive communities and climate action. These goals

Foreword

offer us the tools to coordinate existing public funds efficiently, maximize their impact, and attract additional funding from the public and private sectors.

The Carlow Local Community Development Committee and Carlow County Council stand firmly committed to the delivery of this plan and the accompanying Implementation Plan for 2023/2024.

We extend our deep appreciation to the members of the Carlow LCDC and the Culture, Libraries and Digital Development, Tourism, Enterprise and Economic Development Strategic Policy Committee for their steadfast support and unwavering commitment to the development of the LECP and its future delivery. We would also like to express our gratitude to all stakeholders, the council departments, the PPN, and the various statutory and non-statutory bodies, community and voluntary organizations. Your willingness to lead individual actions and your dedication to an ongoing process of monitoring for refinement and reprioritization are pivotal to driving change. The inclusive and sustainable development of County Carlow rests in your enthusiasm, dedication, hard work, and commitment.

Together, let us embark on this transformative journey with confidence and purpose.



Background and Legislative Context

The purpose of the LECP, as provided for in the Local Government (Reform) Act 2014, is to set out, for a six-year period, the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community development of the relevant local authority area, both by itself directly and in partnership with other economic and community development stakeholders.

LECPs support the sustainable development of our counties. First described in Putting People First: Action Plan for Effective Local Government and then given effect in the Local Government (Reform) Act 2014, they form the local element of the national development framework, and they seek to support collaboration to increase the quality of life in our communities. This strategic approach has never been more important as Ireland looks to support a sustainable recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

All local authorities published their first LECPs in 2016/2017, and the process to develop new LECPs provides an opportunity to reflect on the experiences of all stakeholders in the intervening period. The process to support the development of a new LECP is described in the guidelines (Local Economic and Community Plans – Guidelines 2021), jointly prepared by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), and it should be fully informed by the learning and experiences of all relevant stakeholders through both internal and public consultation - to ensure a robust LECP for the next 6-year period.

The aim of the guidelines is to provide support to local authorities and relevant local partners to help them to develop and implement comprehensive and flexible 6-year plans that will support the sustainable development of their areas over the lifetime of the plan. Consultations undertaken as part of the guideline-development process indicated the need to ensure that the LECP is agile and allows stakeholders to respond to emerging needs on an ongoing basis. As such, the guidelines point to two linked phases:

Section A supports the development of the Integrated Framework LECP, which represents the strategic part of the LECP development process. The main feature of the overall LECP framework will be a set of high-levels goals for the integrated plan, which will be supported by specific sustainable objectives under the respective economic and community streams. Each objective will, in turn, consider potential outcomes and high-level indicators for the 6-year planning period.

Section B addresses the implementation plan process, which is aimed at achieving the objectives of the framework LECP.

The Carlow Approach

Carlow County Council, in collaboration with the Carlow Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) and the Economic SPC, has commenced a process to prepare a local economic and community plan (LECP) for the period 2023-2029. This plan builds on the learnings and achievements of the previous LECP, and it will seek to provide a strategic vision and framework for integrated and sustainable economic and community development across the county over the next six years.

About this document

This document provides a significant building-block in the formulation and development of the Carlow Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP), 2023-2029. It began by outlining the national-level background and legislative context – demonstrating how the LECP enables Carlow County Council, in collaboration with the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) and the Culture, Libraries & Digital Development, Tourism, Enterprise and Economic Development Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) – referred to hereafter as the Economic SPC, to guide and coordinate development efforts at county and sub-county levels and to enable improved service delivery to communities. County Carlow has pursued an evidence-based and inclusive approach to the LECP’s formulation, and this document summarises the process that has been rolled out.

This document provides a synthesis of the EU and Irish policies that are most relevant to the formulation and delivery of the LECP. It situates this synthesis in the context of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), and it notes how the UNSDGs provide a useful framework and set of imperatives for the LECP. A clear connection is also made between the vision and goals of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy of the Southern Assembly and those of the Carlow LECP.

This document also presents an overview demographic and socio-economic profile of County Carlow. This profile, along with a review of the previous LECP, provides useful pointers for the formulation of the LECP’s mission statement and associated high-level goals. The summary socio-economic profile of County Carlow concludes with a detailed **SCOT analysis** that has been informed by a wide range of social, economic and environmental stakeholders.

To develop the shared Vision and High-Level Goals for the Carlow LECP 2023-29, Carlow County Council and the Carlow LECP Advisory team followed a bottom-up and open consultative approach.

Following a detailed public consultation process in the first months of 2023, this document sets out a shared Vision for the county with a set of High-Level Goals that will commit Carlow to a just and sustainable future.

“County Carlow is committed to a just and sustainable future”



Background to Local Economic and Community Plans (LECP)

The plan is evidence based and informed by extensive research and stakeholder consultation that took place over the period September 2022 to the end of 2023. In line with the aforementioned government guidelines, Carlow County Council is pursuing a 6-stage iterative approach, as outlined in the following diagram.

In advance of embarking on this iterative process, Carlow County Council:

- **Established an LECP advisory group;** and
- **Undertaken a review of the previous LECP (2016-2021).**

The LECP Advisory Group included representatives from the local authority and the agencies and organisations that are most directly responsible for the LECP’s formulation and implementation - all members of either the LCDC or Economic SPC. The review of the previous LECP was completed in autumn 2022, and it involved a mixed-methods approach – a questionnaire survey and focus group. The review identified how stakeholders can build on the previous LECP and how they can refine its strategic approach. It noted satisfaction with LECP-related achievements over the past six years, the merits of a collaborative framework and approach, and the need for more systemic and robust monitoring and evaluation.

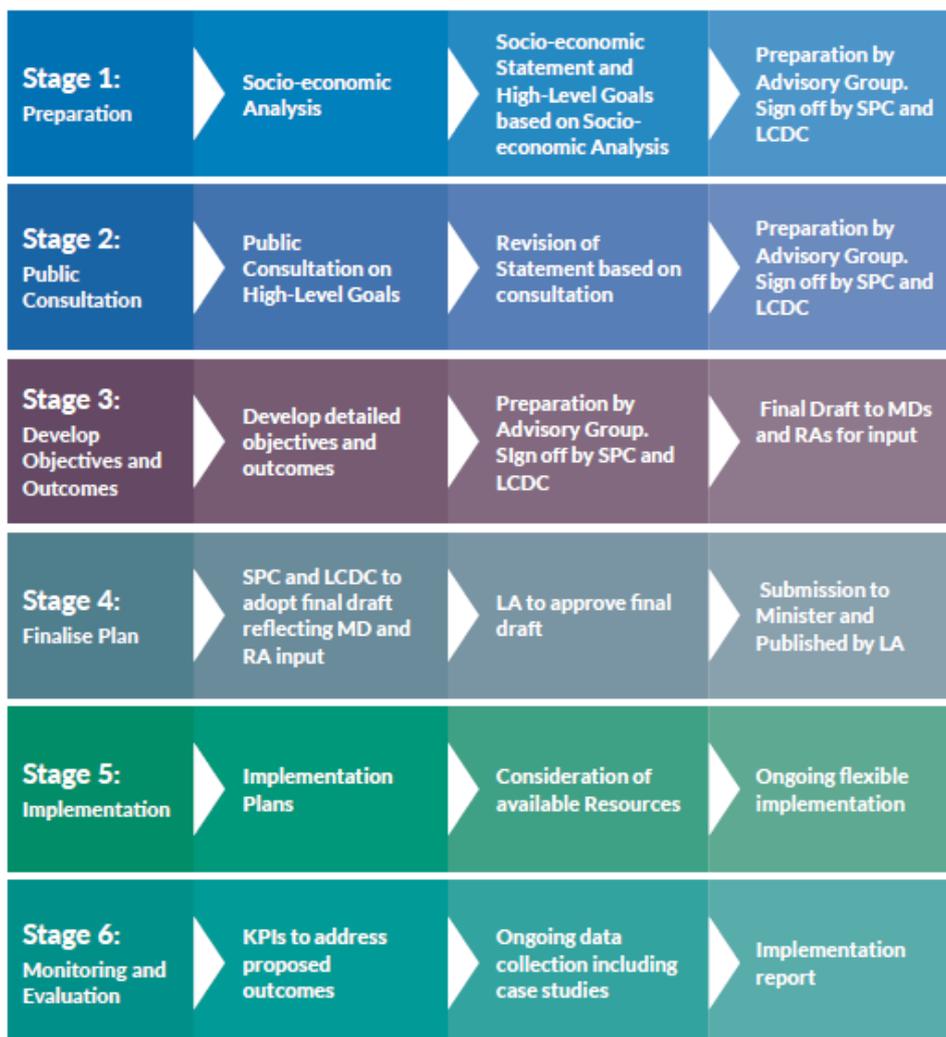


Figure 1: Government Guidelines on the LECP Formulation Process



**STAGE 1:
Preparation**

Stage 1 of the LECP-formulation process focused on preparation, evidence-building and data collation. Thus, People & Place has prepared a socio-economic profile of County Carlow that builds on the census atlas of the county that was produced in 2019. This profile included preliminary data from the 2022 Census of Population and recently published data from the 2020 Census of Agriculture. The profile also incorporated current data on relevant socio-economic features, including housing, ecology and citizen well-being. Where possible, People & Place benchmarked County Carlow values against those of the State and NUTS II and III regional tiers.

Moreover, the profile provides sub-county data, including at municipal district and settlement levels. Thus, it represents a significant body of objective data and information to enable the LECP Advisory Group to undertake a SCOT analysis, identify needs, potential and priorities and to formulate high-level goals.

During Stage 1, the LECP Advisory Group also agreed a timetable and methodology for the development of the LECP. The timetable envisaged completion by the end of 2023 with the methodology providing for a series of stakeholder engagements and consultations, with the bulk of these having taken place in January / February 2023. Stage 1 was completed in November 2022, with the Advisory Group meeting to refine the vision and high-level goals on December 2nd 2022. Following approval from the LCDC and Economic SPC, the draft Socio-Economic Statement was published in late December 2022.



**STAGE 2:
Public
Consultation**

Stage 2 involved intensive statutory and sectoral stakeholder engagements in the formulation of the LECP (see Figure 2 below). Beginning in December 2022, People & Place worked with Carlow County Council to design and distribute a survey instrument

to enable stakeholders to further refine the high-level goals and tease out relevant strategic actions and approaches. This survey was rolled out over the course of January 2023, and it paralleled the convening of stakeholder workshops. Stage 2 was completed in early March 2023 and fed into the formal adoption of the Vision, High-Level goals and broad strategic objectives on the parts of the LCDC and relevant strategic policy committees (SPCs).



STAGE 3:
Objectives &
Outcomes

Stage 3 involved working on the feedback received from the LCDC, SPCs and regional assembly in order to develop detailed objectives, outcomes and strategic actions. During this stage, Carlow County Council

worked with the LECP Advisory Group to identify beneficiaries and to formulate overarching targets and indicators as well as a system for ongoing review and monitoring. Thus, by summer 2023, the Advisory Group was in a position to structure the LECP and seek further feedback from the MDs and regional assembly. This stage was essential in ensuring alignment between the LECP and other policy objectives and fostering a supportive institutional context.



STAGE 4:
SEA &
Finalise Plan

Stage 4 involved Carlow County Council presenting the strategic environmental assessment (SEA) that had been progressing

over the preceding months, as this represented an essential component in ensuring the LECP's contribution to sustainable development. It also involved the formulation of a two-year integrated implementation plan, which sit within the overall six-year strategic framework. Both documents were submitted to Carlow County Council, for review and approval, in late 2023.



STAGE 5&6:
Implementation &
Framework

Stages 5 and 6 paralleled the later parts of Stage 4, although they will continue thereafter. They have involved (in Stage 5) the formulation of implementation plans,

in collaboration with the relevant statutory agencies and sectoral interests, so that the LECP is given effect across all relevant elements of economy and community. The following diagram, which is taken from the government guidelines, illustrates the interfaces between the LECP and the agendas and roles of statutory and sectoral interests. Stage 6 involved agreeing targets and key performance indicators (KPIs).

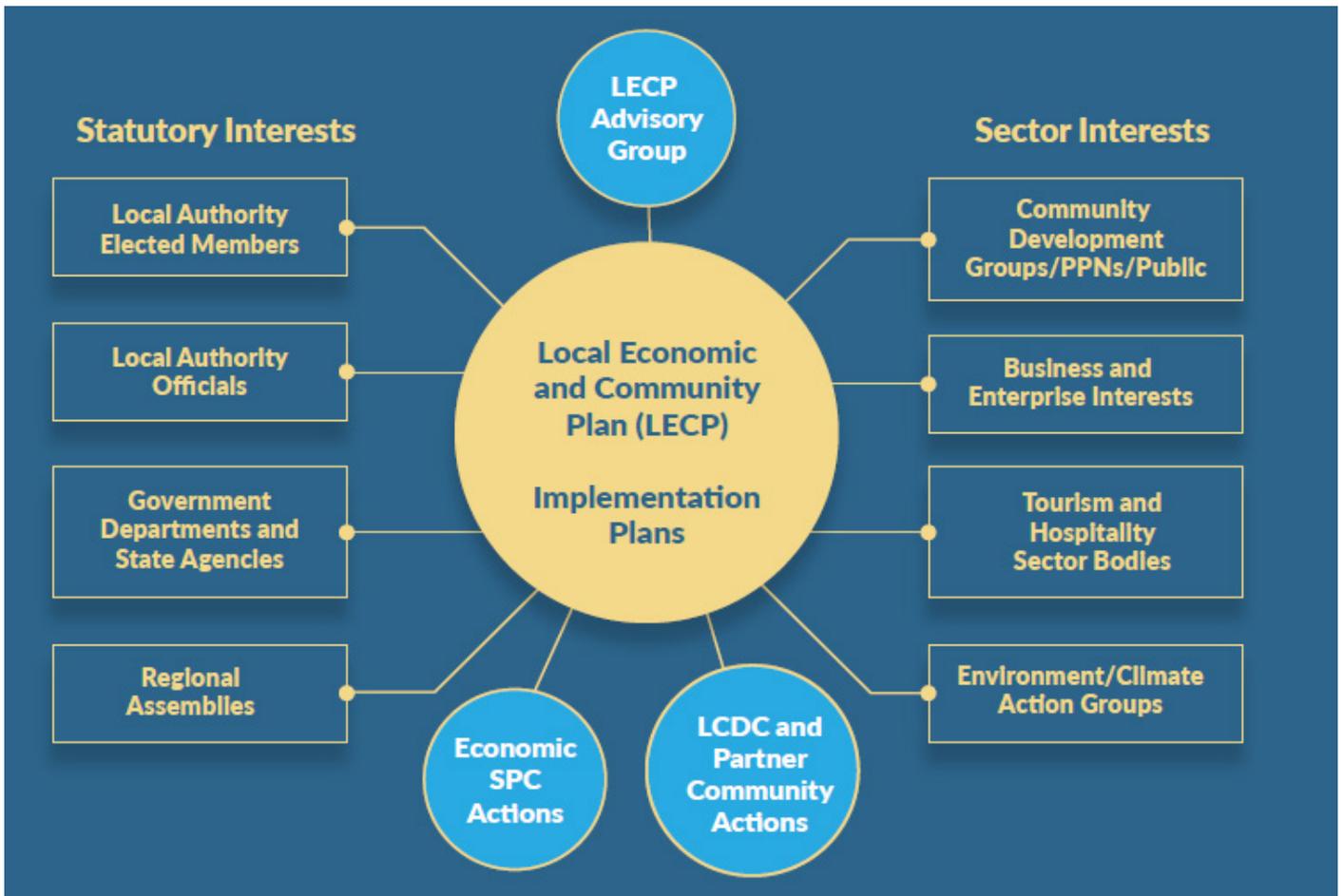


Figure 2: Statutory and Sectoral Interests in the LECP Process



Carlow LECP 2023-29:

Policy Context

Introduction

The Carlow Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP), 2023-2029 is informed by objective research and stakeholder consultations. It is tailored for County Carlow, as it articulates local needs and potential, and it responds to local challenges and opportunities. The initial research findings and preliminary stakeholder engagements confirm the significance of the wider policy milieu in enabling the LECP to attain its high-level goals. Additionally, the LECP offers a mechanism for the local-level delivery of EU and national policy objectives, while local-level experiences and feedback are integral to ensuring responsive and evidence-based policy development. Thus, stakeholders in County Carlow are cognisant of the interactions between the various policy tiers and how policy provisions and interfaces shape the development context.

Sustainable Development Imperatives - linking the global to the local

EU and Irish (national) policies are evolving in response to needs and opportunities, and

their orientation has become increasingly focused on enabling, promoting and delivering sustainable development objectives. The maxim ‘think global – act local’ is probably even more relevant today than when it was first advocated in the 1980s, following the publication of Our Common Future. As evidenced by the ongoing COP gatherings and supported by a growing volume of independent scientific data, the attainment of sustainable development objectives requires global and supranational frameworks, and this realisation underpins the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs)**.

Thus, the UNSDGs provide the overarching global framework for the entire policy milieu in which the Carlow LECP is situated (Figure 3 below). The seventeen goals articulate a vision for humanity that requires more even economic development and equality of opportunity for all peoples regardless of geography, gender or other social factors. Their attainment requires a commitment to ecological conservation and the restoration of biodiversity – at sea and on land. The UNSDGs also provide for improved social, health and educational services and better governance – at all tiers.



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The realisation of the goals requires tackling so-called ‘wicked problems’, particularly climate change and biodiversity loss, and they advocate a just transition to a post carbon society. Given the transboundary nature of the issues the UNSDGs address and considering the growing inter-connectedness between peoples and places, the UNSDGs require geographical, sectoral and institutional collaboration. Thus, the Carlow LECP is underpinned by collaborative approaches that enable the county to realise a more sustainable development trajectory, thereby improving economic, educational and socio-economic outcomes for all its citizens, while protecting natural resources and making tangible contributions to our global responsibilities.

influence and shape national-level policy in Ireland as well as policy and practice in County Carlow. As the following diagram illustrates (Figure 3), the County Carlow LECP (2023-2029) refers and relates to a nested set of interlocking policies – in a holistic sense, rather than on discrete sectoral bases.

Thus, as the diagram indicates, the UNSDGs provide the external global over-arching policy framework and vision, and these, in turn, shape and guide policy-making and outcomes at the EU and national levels. Moreover, the UNSDGs and the associated lower-tier policy frameworks provide reference points on which the LECP’s progress can be measured.

Policy Alignment and Complementarity

The principles and approaches articulated in the UNSDGs are reflected in the current iteration of EU policy frameworks, and they

Thus, the policy context is relevant, not just to the LECP’s formulation, but also to its ongoing implementation and monitoring systems.

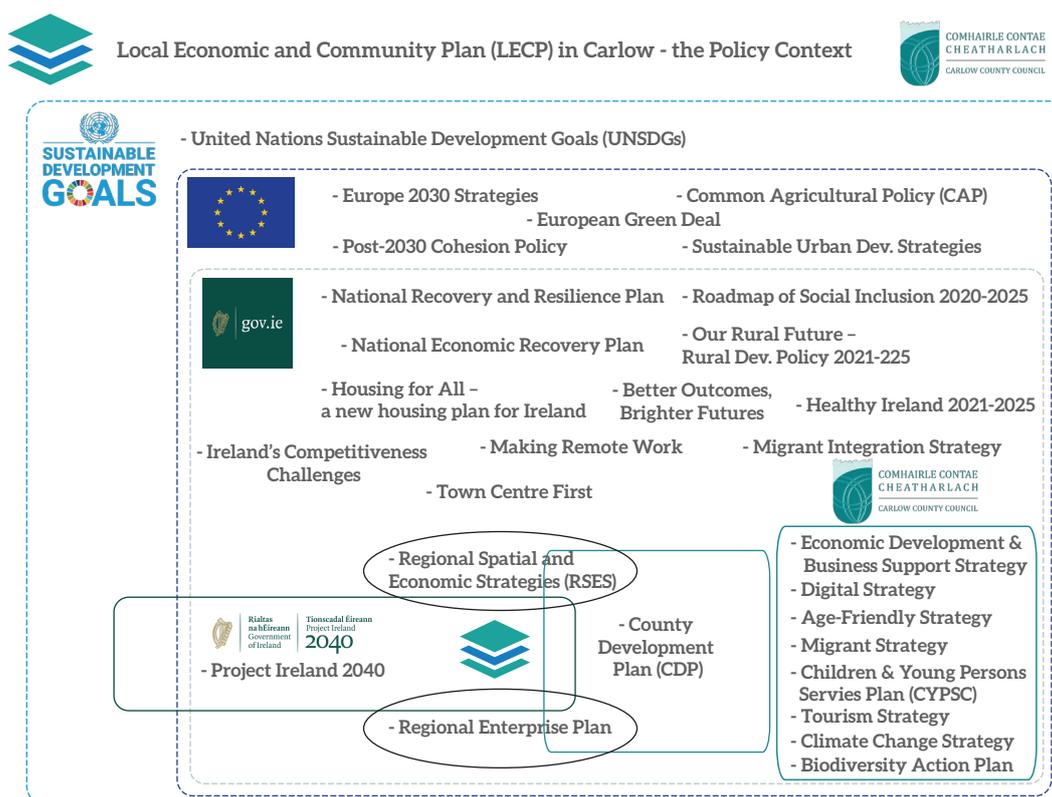


Figure 3: Carlow LECP Policy Context

The LECP Policy Context

The European Union (EU) has described itself as a 'natural partner' of the United Nations (UN) with respect to delivering the UNSDGs. The EU's statistics agency – Eurostat – monitors the EU's contributions to the realisation of the UNSDGs, and its reports help shape policymakers approaches to decision-making.

Similar approaches pertain at EU member state level; the Irish Government has committed to implementing the UNSDGs, and Ireland has a time-in-motion system in place that records and documents the country's progress in this respect. Statutory bodies and sub-national agencies, including regional and local authorities, have important roles to play in ensuring sustainable development, as they are the primary providers of social services, they are close to communities / citizens and they have both legislative and soft powers with respect to promoting partnership working, enabling economic development, fostering social progress and protecting the natural environment. Their responsibilities and capacities are manifest in the various policies that are listed in the diagram here.

It should be noted that while policies have to be listed separately, they have several overlapping elements and shared objectives, not least with respect to ameliorating and averting further climate change. The range and scope of policies listed here will evolve over the lifetime of the LECP, but the fundamental structure and alignment that are articulated in this diagram will be constant, along with policy and practice commitments to sustainable development.

EU Policies and Frameworks

As the diagram shows, EU policies are at the second tier – after the UNSDGs, and while there are several areas of EU policy that impact on County Carlow and the LECP, the diagram lists the main and most extensive policies. Europe's strategy to 2030 acknowledges the scale of challenges in respect of climate change and the need for more inclusive societies. It seeks to build on awareness-raising actions and partnership-building in order to enable European society to address climate change, biodiversity loss, resource scarcities, geopolitics, the surge in transparency and privacy expectations, labour market transitions, an ageing population, rising protectionism, income inequality and the widespread adaptation of digital technologies.

Through its policies, funding streams and inter-governmental mechanisms, the EU is enabling, encouraging and obliging member states to become more resilient – so that societies and communities are better able to withstand current and anticipated shocks such as those caused by climate change and evidenced by the recent COVID-19 pandemic. EU goals in these regards relate to stakeholders in Carlow as we strive to develop and implement the LECP, and we anticipate keeping abreast of EU research and policy trajectories. Moreover, we are committed to working with national and regional authorities to leverage opportunities arising from inter-territorial collaboration and support mechanisms.

While the EU policies listed here relate to specific sectors, in operational terms, they are bound together by a realisation that public policy needs to support firms, institutions, communities and citizens to become more ecologically responsible, innovative, adaptive and creative.

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Thus, the **EU Green Deal** seeks to incentivise all sectors of the economy to be more ambitious in reducing their ecological footprints and to embrace new technologies in maximising energy efficiency, while increasing productivity and generating new employment and training opportunities. Spatial policies, such as the sustainable urban development strategies, are oriented towards improving the attractiveness of urban spaces - enticing and sustaining investment, strengthening local economies and networks and making neighbourhoods more accessible / walkable and self-contained.

Similar approaches pertain in respect of rural communities, and the EU anticipates further rollout of smart village approaches over the next decade. Digitisation and smart specialisation feature across policy domains as enablers of innovation and as offering means through which public service delivery can be enhanced. Society's ability to avail of the associated opportunities is contingent on improving digital literacy. Thus, stakeholders in Carlow envisage investments in hard infrastructure and soft supports - training and capacity-building - as the county strives to avail of the economic, human resource and service delivery opportunities associated with smart technologies and our obligations in respect of environmental protection.

The forthcoming **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)** will have a significant impact on County Carlow, given the importance of the rural economy. The CAP endeavours to support farmers in continuing to produce high-quality food, while protecting the natural resources on which sustainable food production is contingent. This can be challenging, particularly for dairy and beef farmers, and the entire food industry

will need to be particularly innovative and adaptive over the next decade. The CAP provides funding and strategic signposts for **LEADER**, and the implementation of the next iteration of LEADER (2023-2027) will parallel the rollout of the LECP.

National Policies and Frameworks

As illustrated in the diagram (presented earlier), the national-level policies that shape and relate to the County Carlow LECP are nested within the UN and EU frameworks, and there are several complementary, shared and over-lapping principles and provisions. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and in order to enable societies to recover from its adverse effects, each EU member state has prepared a recovery and resilience plan, and their implementation is being enabled by EU and Exchequer funds.

The plans' six pillars resonate with the UNSDGs, and they provide a set of reference points for stakeholders implementing the Carlow LECP. The pillars are:

- Green transition;
- Digital transformation;
- Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth;
- Social and territorial cohesion;
- Health, economic, social and institutional resilience; and
- Policies for the next generation

Ireland's **National Recovery and Resilience Plan** has three over-arching and inter-locking priorities as follows:

- Advancing the green transition;
- Accelerating and expanding digital reforms and transformation; and
- Social and economic recovery and job creation.

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These strategic priorities embrace and give effect to the aforementioned over-arching EU policy trajectory, and the rollout of associated projects is impacting on firms, institutions and communities in Carlow.

While the National Recovery and Resilience Plan is primarily about delivering strategic actions, it also commits to structural reforms. These include adjustments to the carbon tax base, addressing the digital divide, reducing regulatory barriers to entrepreneurship, pension reform, increasing the provision of social housing and progressing the implementation of **Sláintecare**.

These policy domains have direct and indirect bearings on the implementation of the County Carlow LECP, and it will be important for stakeholders to be mindful of their consequences, particularly for vulnerable groups. Stakeholders will also need to be proactive in ensuring that firms, institutions and communities in Carlow avail of the opportunities that flow from the plan's implementation and the structural and legislative reforms that are expected to accompany it.

Key National Policies

Since June 2021, the State has been driving Ireland's **National Recovery Plan** – seeking to support the resumption of economic activity (post COVID), and this plan focuses on the following: ensuring sustainable public finances; helping people back to work; rebuilding sustainable enterprises; and a balanced and inclusive recovery. While the main imperatives relate to economic re-adjustments, the plan recognises the importance of investing in education, training and social inclusion, among other domains, in order to enable and sustain economic development.

There are several national-level sectoral and inter-sectoral policies that relate to the formulation and implementation of the Carlow LECP.

Ireland's **Climate Action Plan** and the associated legislation, which commit us to significant reductions in our carbon emissions, will have far-reaching implications for all sectors of the economy and society. Underpinned by scientific data and driven by moral imperatives, the obligation to reduce our carbon footprints will pose short- and medium-term challenges in some sectors, most notably energy, transportation and agriculture. They will also place financial burdens on low-income households and will necessitate policy and practice interventions, including actions at community level, to ensure a just transition to a zero-carbon society.

Climate change mitigation and amelioration factors underpin the principles, thrust and objectives of the Carlow County Development Plan, which will operate in parallel with and complement this LECP. The county development plan and its associated local area plans (LAPs) govern spatial planning, including land-use, transportation and place-making. While the LECP has a broader functional remit, its provisions need to comply with the planning policy objectives that are set out in the county development plan (CDP). At the same time, the CDP can provide supports and leverage to enable the delivery of the LECP's objectives, and there is potential for positive synergies between both sets of plans.

While there will be changes in EU and national-level policy, legislation and funding streams over the lifetime of this LECP, and it is not possible to list all the relevant policies let alone anticipate all changes, the framework of overarching policies presented in this

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report outlines the current landscape and milieu, and it has signalled policy patterns and trends that are likely to shape the LECP's institutional context over the next six years.

The framework (Fig. 3 - above) references two government departments specifically, namely the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the Department of Rural and Community Development, as these are the two departments that oversee the implementation of LECPs, and it was they who issued the LECP guidelines that we are following. In their guidance documentation, the departments note the relevance of their own policies and programmes, as well as those emanating from ministries and agencies, and they specifically list the following policies(i):

- Regional Enterprise Plans;
- Town Centre First;
- National Remote Working Strategy;
- County Digital Strategies;
- LEO Strategies;
- Social Enterprise Policy;
- Climate Action;
- Healthy Ireland;
- Creative Ireland; and
- Age-Friendly Ireland.

These policies are already finding local-level expression and implementation in the various strategies that have been put in place in County Carlow, and the LECP can provide a mechanism to re-enforce, tailor, sharpen and strengthen these policies and strategies and to promote further collaboration among those who are delivering them.

(i) For details, please see: <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy/d5adb8-community-supports>

Housing for All – a new housing plan for Ireland provides for significant investment in the construction of housing, and it behoves stakeholders in Carlow to avail of the associated opportunities and to work collaboratively in enabling place-making and community development. The LECP has the potential to provide tools to enable the construction of communities and social supports – that are necessary to accompany any investment in physical infrastructure.



Ireland's current rural development policy presents opportunities for sectoral interests in areas such as tourism, the social economy and digitisation, and its provisions in respect of remote working tally with, and accentuate, the provisions in other policies – thereby opening-up possibilities for transformative projects that would benefit rural economies, address rural decline and improve people's health and quality of life.

Our Rural Future - Ireland's Rural Development Policy (2021-2025) offers a supportive framework for improved physical and digital connectivity, and it commits to supporting further and accelerated rollout of broadband and the development of digital

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hubs. The policy takes stock of experiences and lessons that have been garnered from the COVID-19 pandemic, including the transformative potential – for individuals and communities - of remote / hybrid / connected working and the health and social benefits associated with access to green spaces and recreational amenities.

In a similar vein, the national policy - **Making Remote Work: National Remote Work Strategy** – seeks to mainstream best practices that came to the fore during the pandemic, and the Government has introduced a series of measures to support remote / connected working, including the right (among employees) to request remote working.

Our Rural Future’s provisions in respect of heritage-based tourism and the creative economy are particularly relevant for County Carlow. The policy also notes the need to rejuvenate town and village centres, and in this regard, it complements the objectives of other national policies, including **Town Centres First**. The policy notes the changing profile and increased diversity of rural communities, and it advocates investment in social inclusion, capacity-building and the social economy.

Thus, in these respects, Our Rural Future complements other community-oriented policies including the **National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022** and **Our Communities: Framework Policy for Local Community Development in Ireland**. Collectively, these policies note the importance of supporting volunteerism and citizen engagement in decision-making in both urban and rural contexts, and they refer to the ways in which social economy and community enterprises can engage citizens, promote economic development and provide local services, particularly for hard-to-reach cohorts.

In concert with the aforementioned overarching national and regional spatial frameworks, sectoral policies in respect of rural development, volunteerism, the social economy, agriculture and tourism, among others, note the imperatives associated with the climate emergency and the need for concerted bottom-up and top-down strategic actions to ameliorate and mitigate climate change. Such actions imply increasing investment in public transport and active travel, encouraging more sustainable modes of food production, reducing food miles, arresting biodiversity loss and safeguarding and restoring natural habitats. These and other ecological endeavours are necessary in the context of the UNSDGs, and they also afford opportunities for economic diversification and an improved quality of life for communities. At the same time, however, the EU has consistently noted the need for targeted measures to support rural communities and low-income households, so that the transition to a post-carbon society is just and fair.

The County Carlow LECP (2023-2029) has the potential to add value to, and complement, the **South-East Regional Enterprise Plan (2022-2024)** as well as successor regional enterprise plans. The current iteration operationalises national enterprise policy in a regional context. It affords a framework for regional-level collaboration and the plan sets targets in respect of job creation emanating from LEO and agency investments. In practice, the plan, which has been driven by regional stakeholders, affords a mechanism to leverage national funding into the region, and its five objectives are as follows: start and grow; green growth, smart specialisation and clustering; innovate; and place - developing a region that is attractive to both domestic and international visitors and communicating the benefits of living and working in the South-East.

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At EU and national level, there are a number of policies and programmes in place to support particular population cohorts including young people, those with disabilities, migrants and older people, all of which are relevant to the Carlow LECP.

Some are already reflected in, and given effect by, local-level strategies and initiatives in County Carlow, including the age-friendly strategy, children and young people’s services committee plan and migrant integration and inter-cultural strategy.

Over the course of the LECP (2023-2029) organisations will continue to implement these strategies, and some of them will come up for review and renewal within this timeframe. Their renewal will provide opportunities for maximising complementarity and the alignment of strategic objectives with one another and with respect to the priorities outlined by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission namely economic equality; justice; respect and recognition and futureproofing.

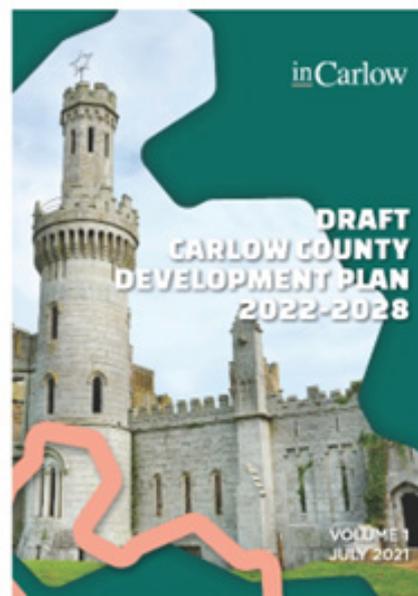
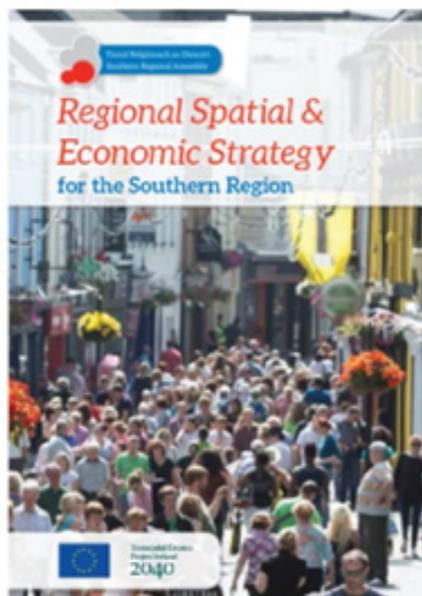
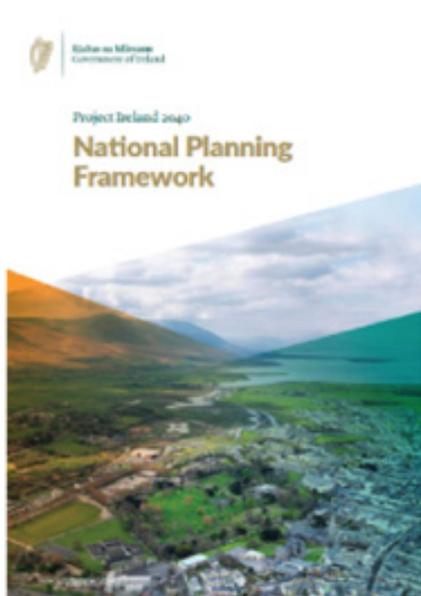
Furthering Complementarity and Sustainability

Spatial planning and place-making are integral to the policy frameworks referenced here – in terms of ensuring they have positive impacts at county and community levels. Thus, **Project Ireland 2040 – Ireland’s National Development Plan** has been aligned with Ireland’s **National Planning Framework**, and the State has clear targets and timeframes in respect of promoting balanced regional and territorial development.

These targets are operationalised through three **regional spatial and economic strategies (RSEs)** and the **RSE for the Southern Region** provides the frame of reference and parameters for the **Carlow County Development Plan (2022-2028)**.

Some of the key regional policy objectives/initiatives include;

- The designation and status of Carlow Town as a key town in the regional strategy



The LECP Policy Context

- The application of the five principles of the regional spatial and economic strategy, these include 1) smart specialisation, 2) clustering, 3) placemaking for enterprise development, 4) knowledge diffusion and 5) capacity building.
- The development of the Southern Region as a UNESCO Learning Region in which County Carlow can participate to 1) grow the Regions Human Capital base, 2) Improve Lifelong Learning, 3) develop the Region’s skills and education proposition, and 4) build resilience and capacity.
- The Smart Southern Region initiative which seeks to work with people and communities on collaborations across all sectors to harness digital and data to create vibrant, sustainable and liveable communities.

The County Development Plan governs land use, and it guides the development of infrastructure in County Carlow for the entire period of the LECP. Thus, there is a need for complementarity in respect of both strategies. The County Development Plan also includes provisions for environmental protection, the development of housing, the provision of connectivity, cultural resource development and quality of life. It impacts on all sectors of the economy, and while it

regulates activities, the plan can be a significant enabler and stimulant of initiative across all sectors.

The seventeenth of the UNSDGs is entitled ‘partnership for the goals’. On a global scale, this goal implies partnership between and across the Global North and Global South and between governments, statutory bodies, NGOs and communities. It also implies capacity-building along with knowledge and technical transfers.

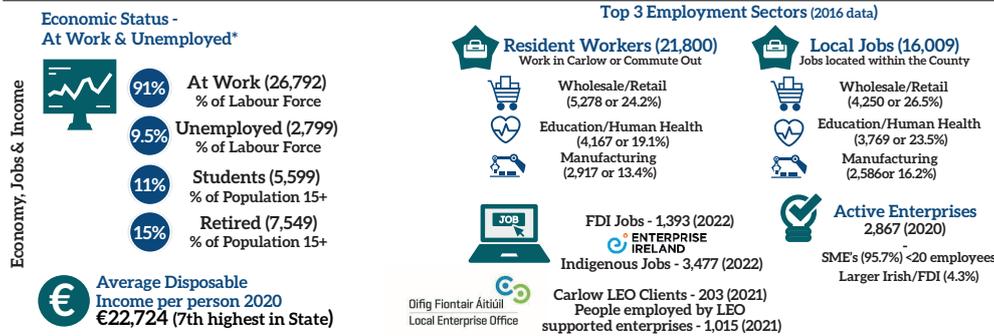
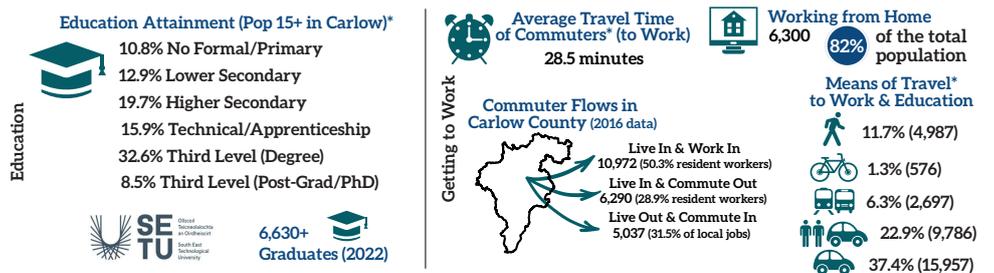
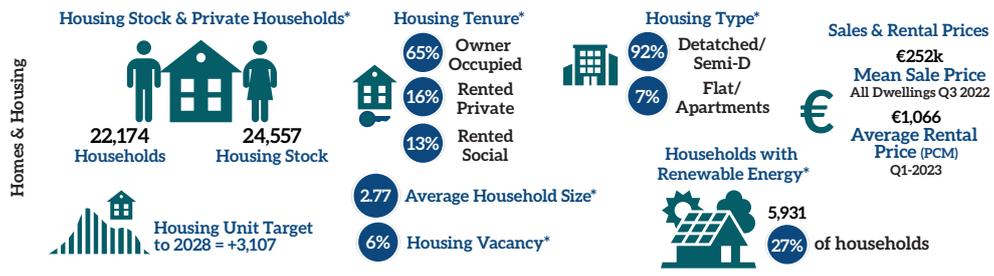
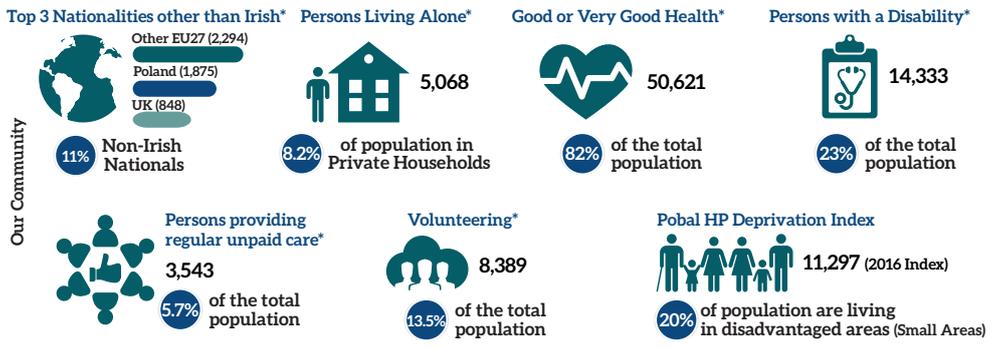
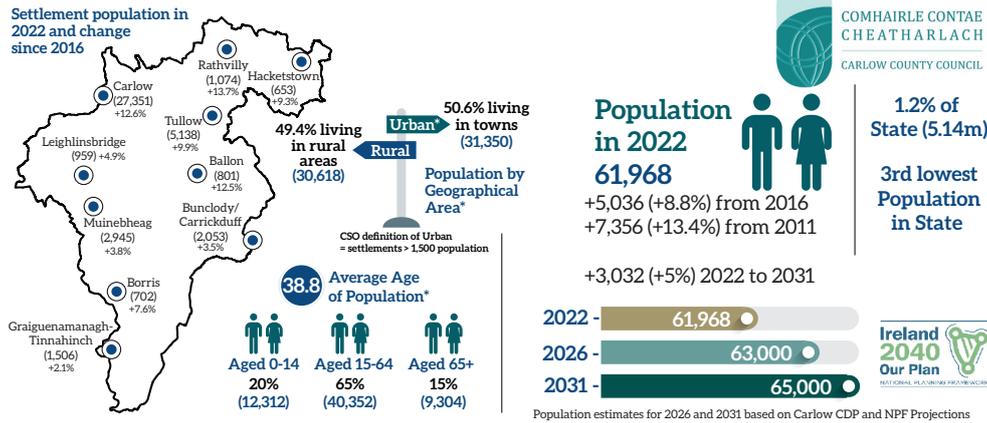
Collaborations involve supranational bodies and governments, and they also involve the private sector and civil society. Indeed, civil society has been proactive in promoting linkages and solidarity between communities and citizens in Ireland / Europe and in the Global South. There is scope for County Carlow to further play its part in promoting solidarity with communities across the globe – through, for example, the Fair-Trade towns, and the responsible sourcing of goods and services. Moreover, the partnership principles that underpin UNSDG 17 are transferable to the ways in which the LECP can be delivered – based on inter-agency and inter-sectoral collaboration, a fusion and integration of economic, socio-cultural and ecological objectives and a commitment to good governance.

The RSES seeks to achieve this vision through the following economic principles:

- Smart Specialisation
- Clustering
- Placemaking for enterprise development
- Knowledge Diffusion, and
- Capacity Building.



Carlow LECP 2023-29: Socio-Economic Profile

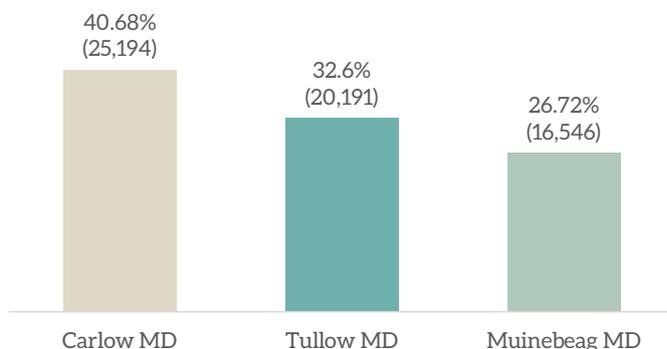
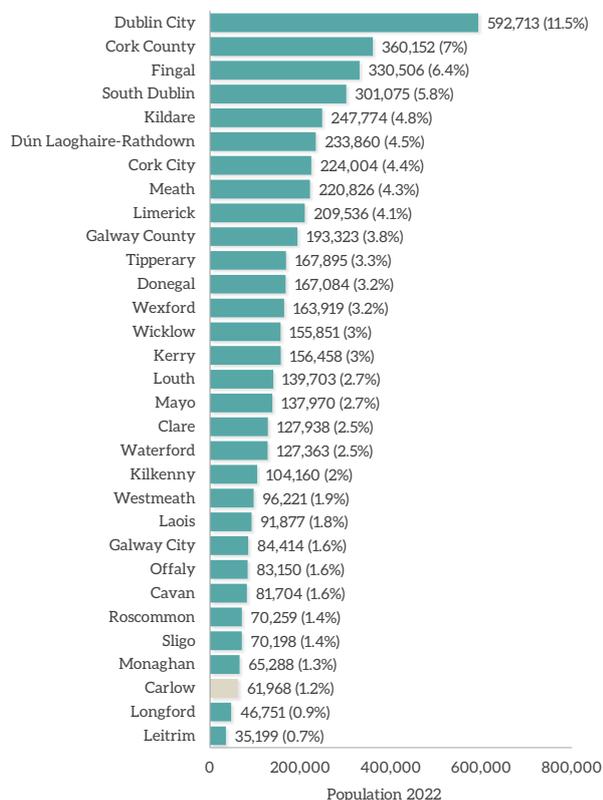


* Data sourced from CSO Census 2022

Demographic Key Facts:

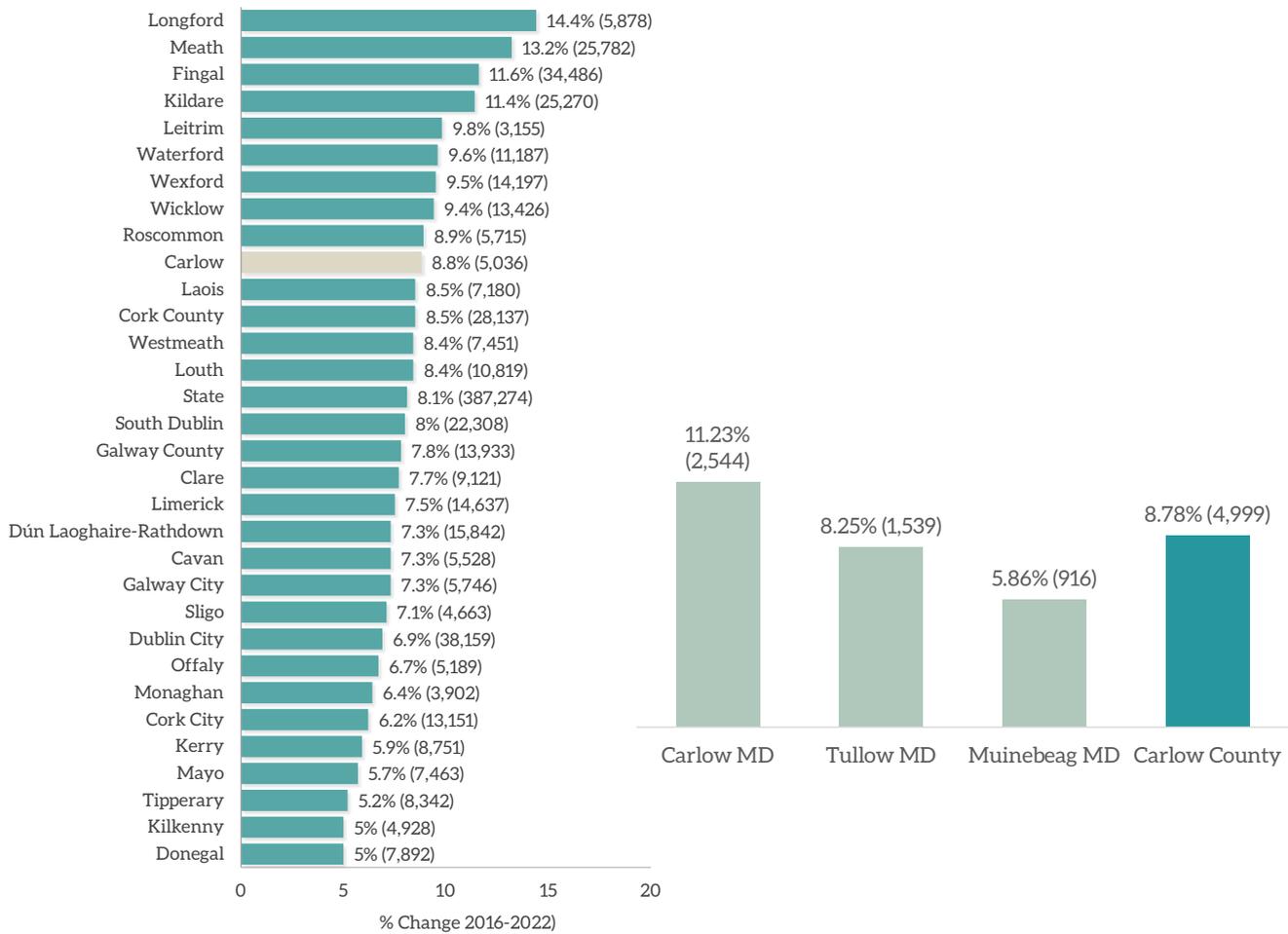
According to the most recent (2022) Census of Population returns, County Carlow:

- has a total population of 61,968; and
- experienced an increase in population of 8.8% – the ninth highest among the 31 local authority areas since 2016.
- Recent population growth has been most pronounced in and around Carlow Town and Tullow;
- Net in-migration is the primary driver of population growth;
- County Carlow’s population is projected to increase by 19% between now and 2040 – the second highest rate of increase of any county;
- The county’s population is also expected to age over the next twenty years and beyond;
- Over a third of the population is aged 0-24 years; values are 33.2% in Ireland and 34.5% in Carlow, and within the county, the highest rates of young people (among the resident population) are generally in the north of the county; and
- Nearly one in seven persons is aged 65+ (15%, compared with 15% across the State), and the highest values are generally in rural areas and in the south of the county.

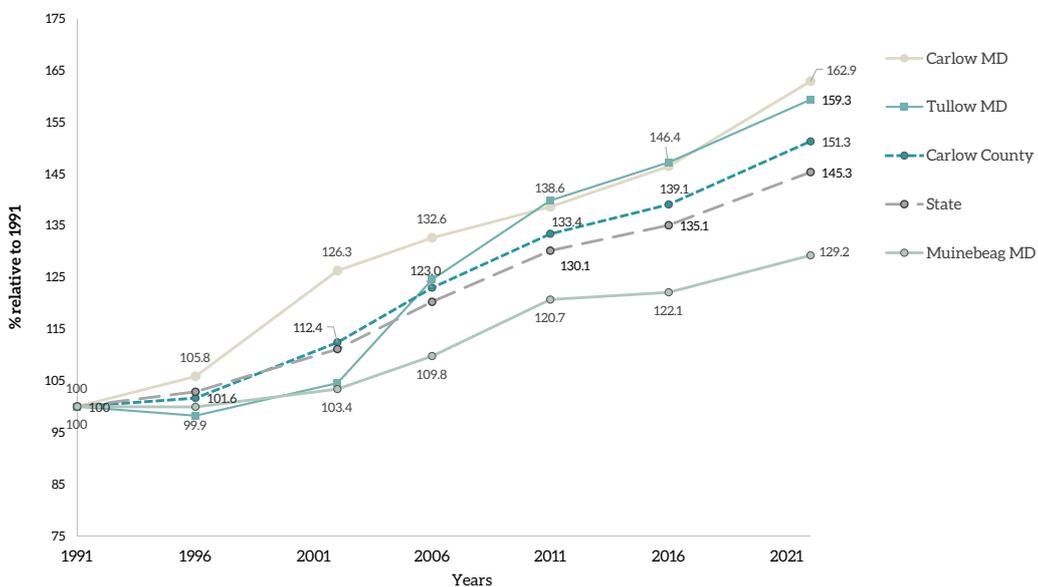


Local Authority and Municipal District Population, 2022 (CSO Census, 2022)

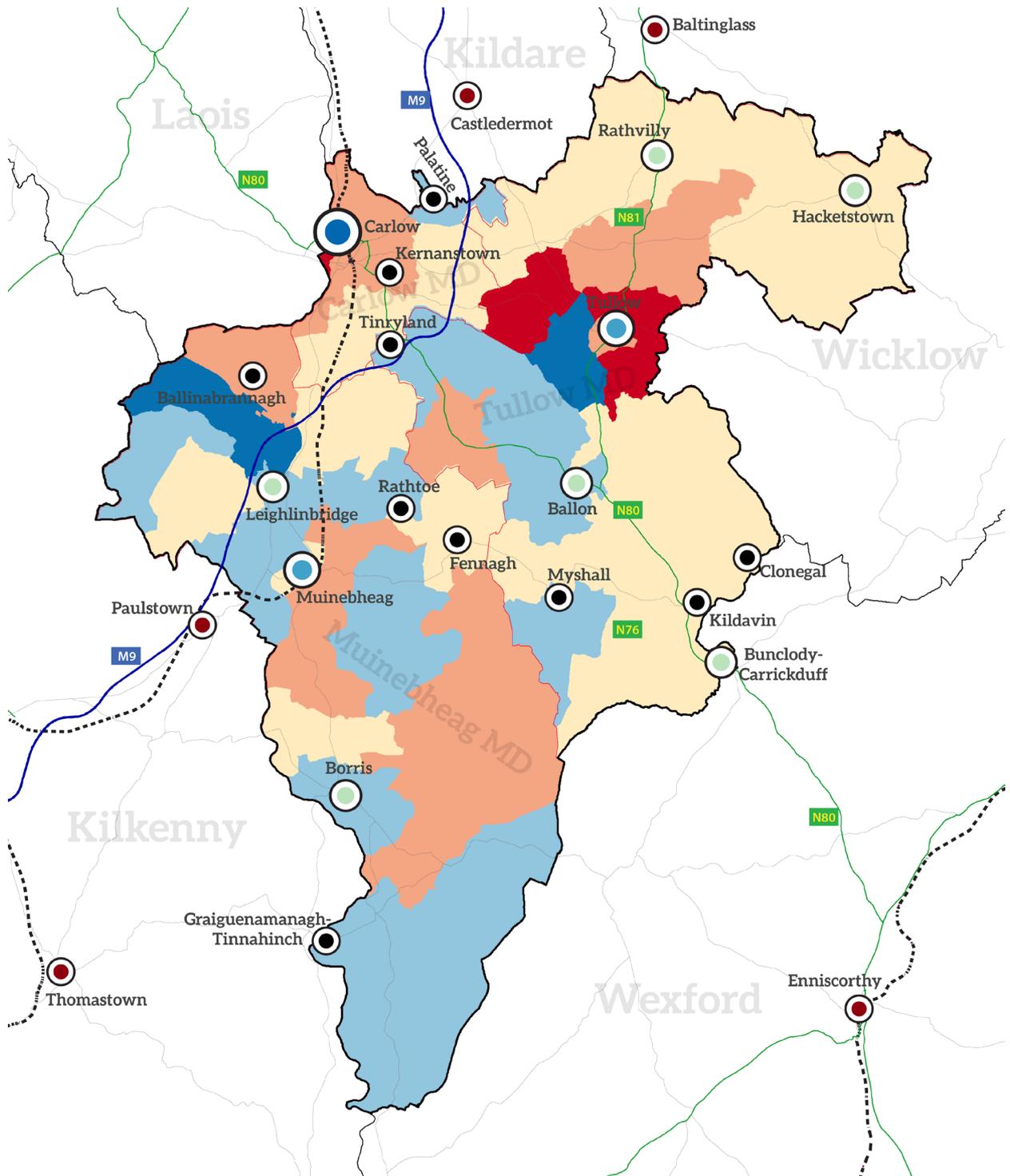
Socio-Economic Profile, 2023



Population Change 2016 to 2022 by Local Authority and Carlow MDs, 2022 (Source: CSO)



Population Change 1991 - 2022 by Carlow MD (Source: CSO)



% Population Change - 2016-2022

- Decrease
- 0% to 5%
- 5% to 10%
- 10% to 15%
- Greater than 15%

- Local Authority
- Municipal District (MD)
- Motorway
- Primary/Trunk Roads
- Other Key Roads
- Railway

- County Town
- District Town
- Smaller Town
- Villages

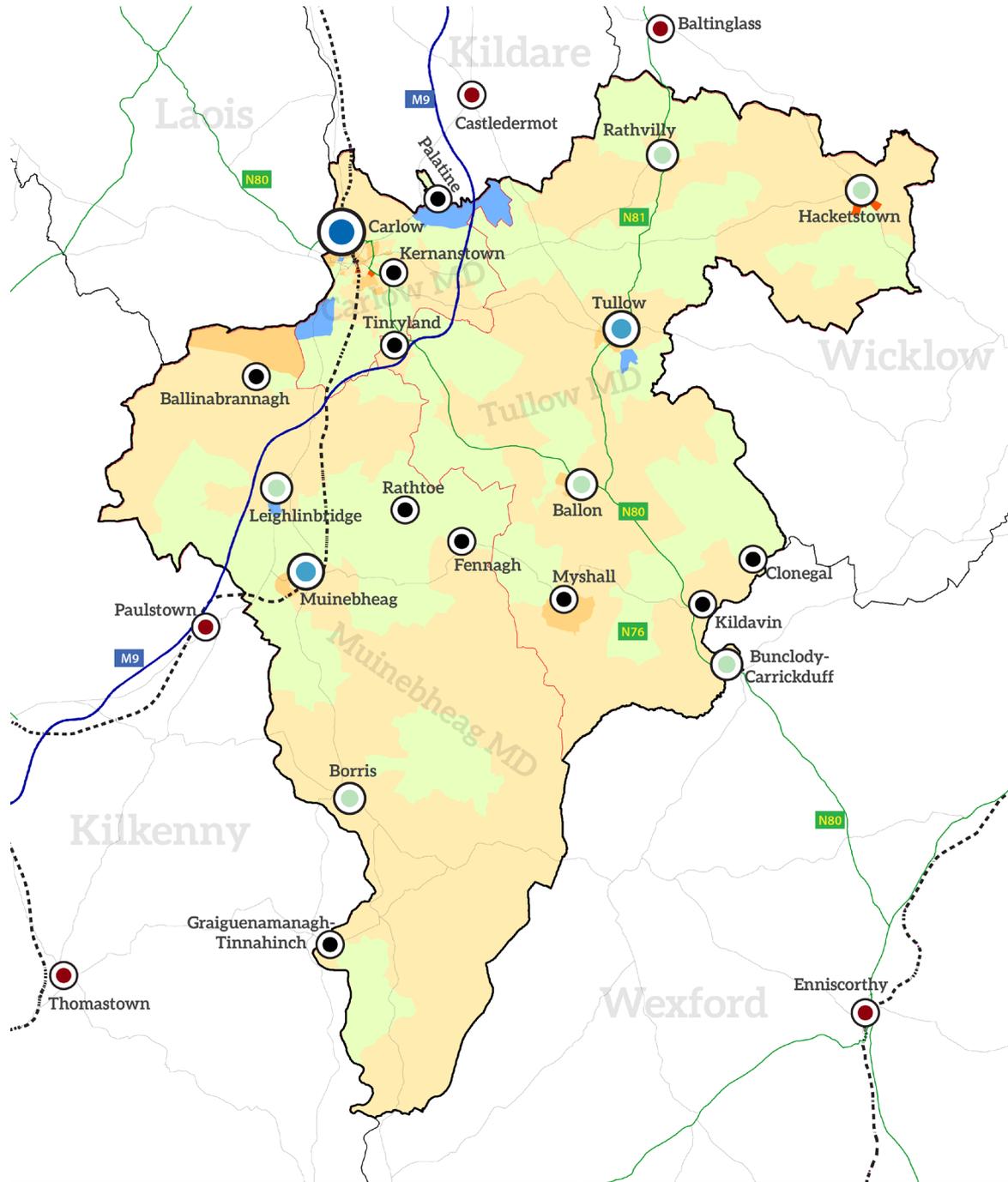


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Population Change Map, 2016 - 2022 (Source: CSO)

Social Indicators Key Facts:

- Eleven percent (11%) of County Carlow's resident population has a nationality other than Irish. The corresponding figure for Ireland is 12.4%. Within Co. Carlow, non-Irish nationals are more likely to reside in urban areas (than in rural communities);
- One in five persons who lives in Tullow Town has a nationality other than Irish;
- There are 511 persons who self-declare as an Irish Traveller. They comprise 0.9% of the county's resident population (relative to 0.7% across the State), with the highest numbers being in Bunclody-Carrickduff;
- The Pobal HP Index of Affluence and Deprivation (2022) reveals that County Carlow, as a whole, is more disadvantaged than the State. The county registers a score of -2.76 on this index.
- Within the county, the highest levels of affluence are in the suburbs of Carlow Town and some of the adjoining communities, while the highest levels of disadvantage are in Hacketstown and parts of Carlow Town;
- As of June 2023, County Carlow was home to 1,315 refugees from Ukraine of the 80,417 who have come to Ireland. Within the county, the greatest numbers are in Carlow Town; and
- Just over one in five (20.5%) families with children is headed by a lone parent (2016) – half a percentage point above the proportion across the State, and the highest proportions of lone parent families are in Hacketstown and parts of Carlow Town.



Pobal HP - Relative Deprivation '16

- Extremely Disadvantaged
- Very Disadvantaged
- Disadvantaged
- Marginally below Average
- Marginally above Average
- Affluent
- Very Affluent
- Extremely Affluent

- Local Authority
- Municipal District (MD)
- Motorway
- Primary/Trunk Roads
- Other Key Roads
- Railway
- County Town
- District Town
- Smaller Town
- Villages

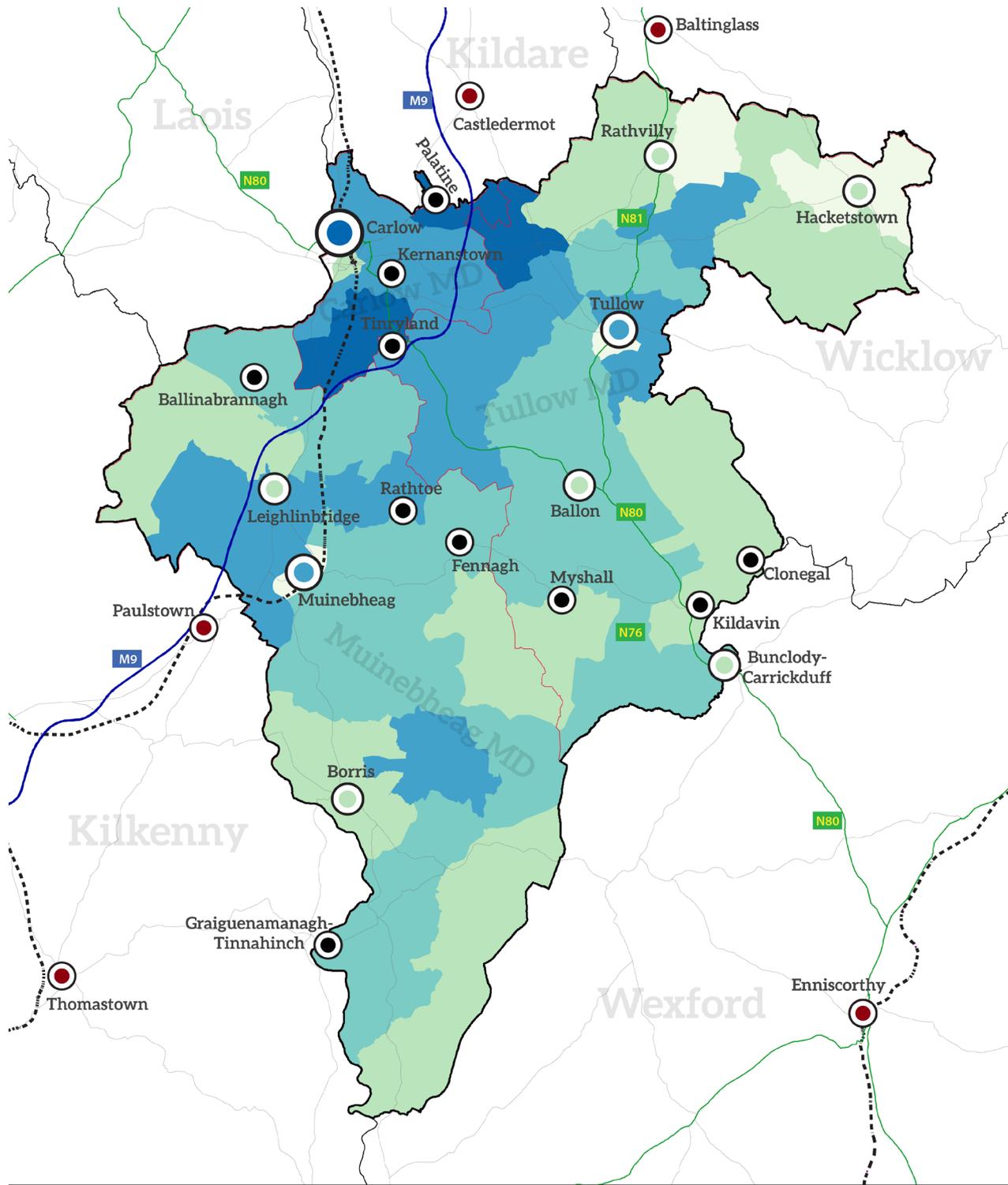


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Pobal HP Deprivation Index Map, 2016 (Pobal & CSO Census, 2016)

Education Key Facts:

- Levels of educational attainment, among County Carlow's resident population, are slightly lower than is the case across Ireland as a whole. The proportion of persons whose formal education finished prior to the leaving certificate (or international equivalent) is four percentage points higher than is the case in the State;
- In Ireland, 39% of the population has a third-level qualification, while in County Carlow, the corresponding figure is almost seven percentage points lower at 32.6%;
- Among County Carlow's 42 primary schools, 6 (14%) have DEIS status – this is lower than the proportion across the State;
- Among County Carlow's 11 post-primary schools, 2 (18%) have DEIS status – this is lower than the proportion across the State and the tenth lowest among the State's 31 local authority areas;
- The Pupil - Class ratio in County Carlow is the sixth highest among the 31 local authority areas; and
- Average weekly childcare fees are lower in County Carlow than in all other local authority areas.



% E. Attainment: All Third Level

- Less than 18.5%
- 18.5% to <25.5%
- 25.5% to <30%
- 30% to <34%
- Greater than 34%

- Local Authority
- Municipal District (MD)
- Motorway
- Primary/Trunk Roads
- Other Key Roads
- Railway
- County Town
- District Town
- Smaller Town
- Villages



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Education Attainment Map - All Third Level, 2016 (CSO Census, 2016)

Economic Profile Key Facts:

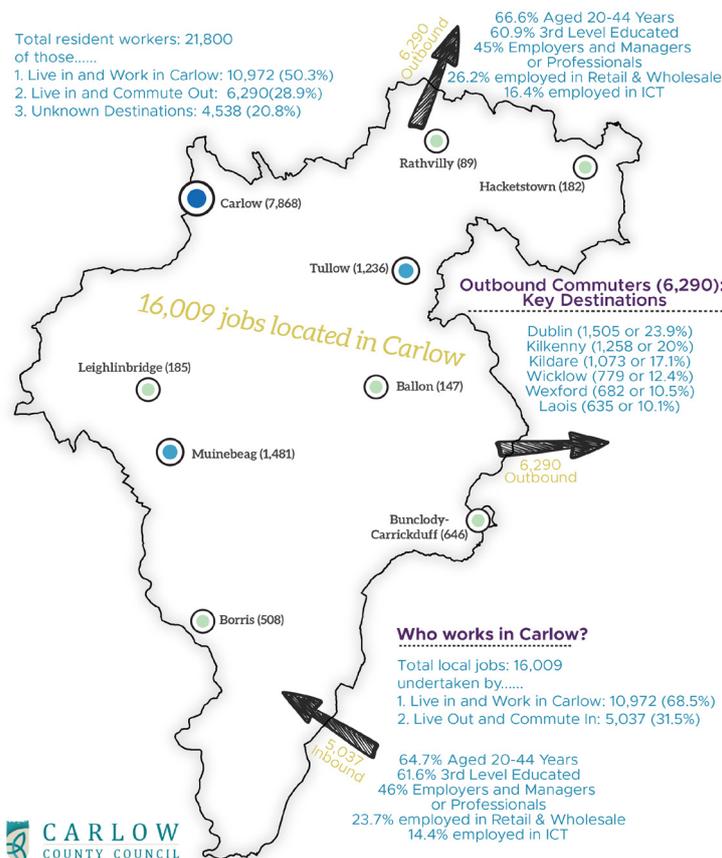
- Carlow's Core Economic Area (30 minute drivetime from Carlow Town) had a population of just under 109,000 in 2016. Both the Core Economic Area and the Functional Area (45 minute drivetime from Carlow Town) are experiencing high levels of population growth.
- Carlow's labour force participation rate has increased since 2011, but it continues to lag behind the rate for the State as a whole;
- The proportion of the labour force classified as being 'at work' is four percentage points (83%) below the corresponding value for the State;
- Labour force participation rates are highest in rural areas around Tullow;
- Over a quarter (29%) of the workforce commutes to work outside the county, with Kilkenny and Dublin being the main destinations;
- Relative to those who live and work in County Carlow, outbound commuters are more likely to have a third-level qualification, work in service industries and belong to the higher socio-economic groups;
- There are 16,009 jobs and 21,800 resident workers in County Carlow; thus the county's jobs to workers ratio stands at 73:100;
- Almost half the jobs in County Carlow are in Carlow Town (n=7,868);
- Commerce & Trade (23.0%), Professional Services (22.1%) and Manufacturing (13.4%) are the key sectors in the County Carlow economy. Combined, these sectors employ around 13,000 people.
- Commerce & trade and professional services account for almost half of the jobs held by County Carlow's resident workers, but agriculture and manufacturing are more significant in Carlow than is the case for Ireland as a whole;
- Agricultural employment is particularly significant in the south of the county;
- Employment in professional services, commerce & trade and the public sector is most prevalent in and around the main towns (most notably Carlow and Tullow) and rural communities in North Carlow that have high levels of outbound commuting;

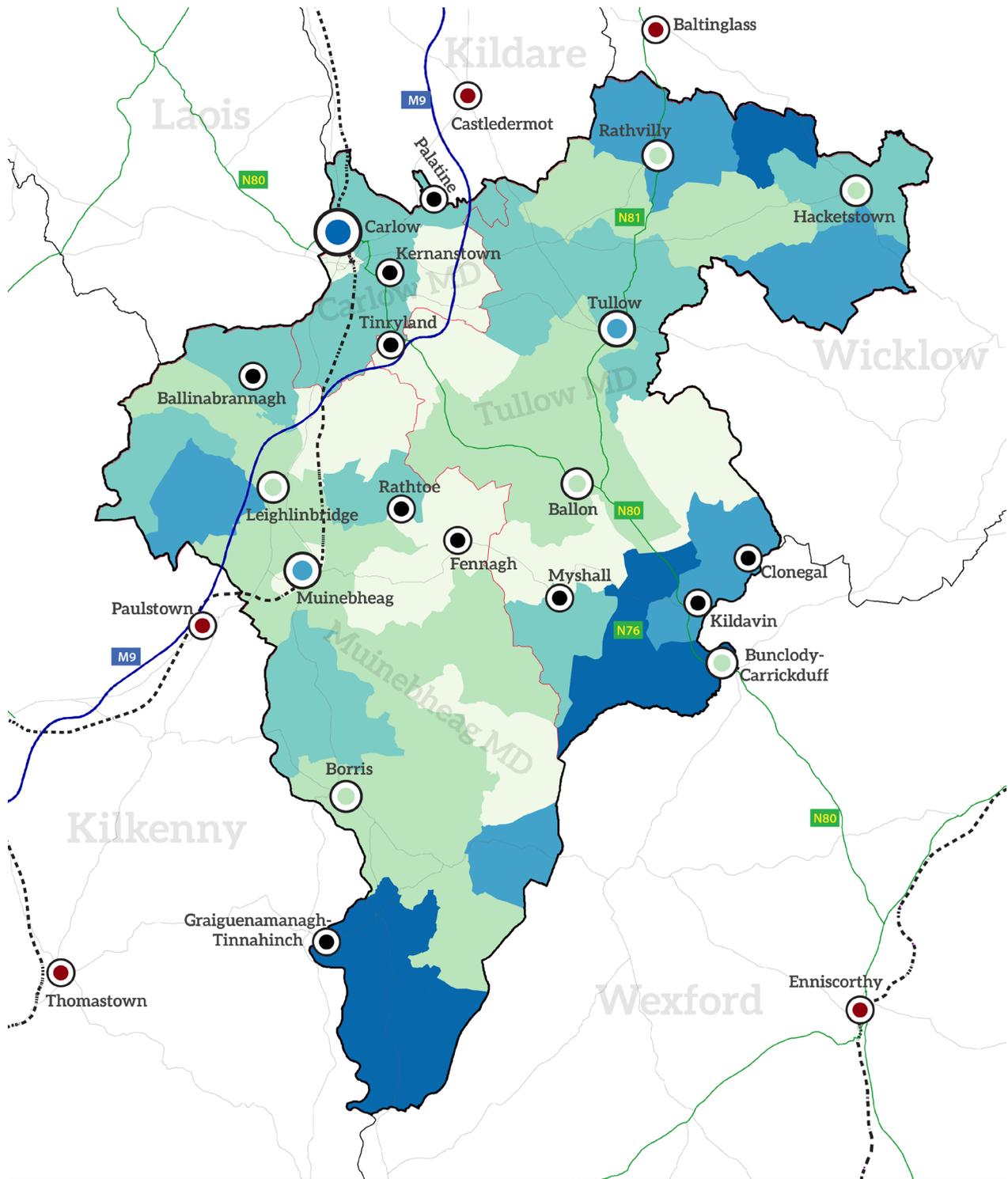
- In 2021, the Carlow Local Enterprise Office (LEO) supported 203 clients, and these provide 1,015 jobs;
- While the regional unemployment rate has been declining since 2016, the rate of decline is slower than is the case across the State as a whole;
- Within County Carlow, the highest rates of unemployment are in urban areas and in Hacketstown;
- Median gross household income in County Carlow is over €5,000 below the level for the State as a whole;
- The proportion of households who derive the majority of their income from social welfare (18.6%) is the third highest among the 31 local authority areas; and
- Among those who live in rented accommodation an average of 26.3% of household income is expended on rent.

County Carlow - Summary Jobs Profile

Key Facts:

- * 21,800 resident workers
- * 16,009 local jobs in County Carlow
- * 28.9% of resident workers are external commuters





% Workforce: External Commuters

- Less than 23%
- 23% to <28%
- 28% to <35%
- 35% to <45%
- Greater than 45%

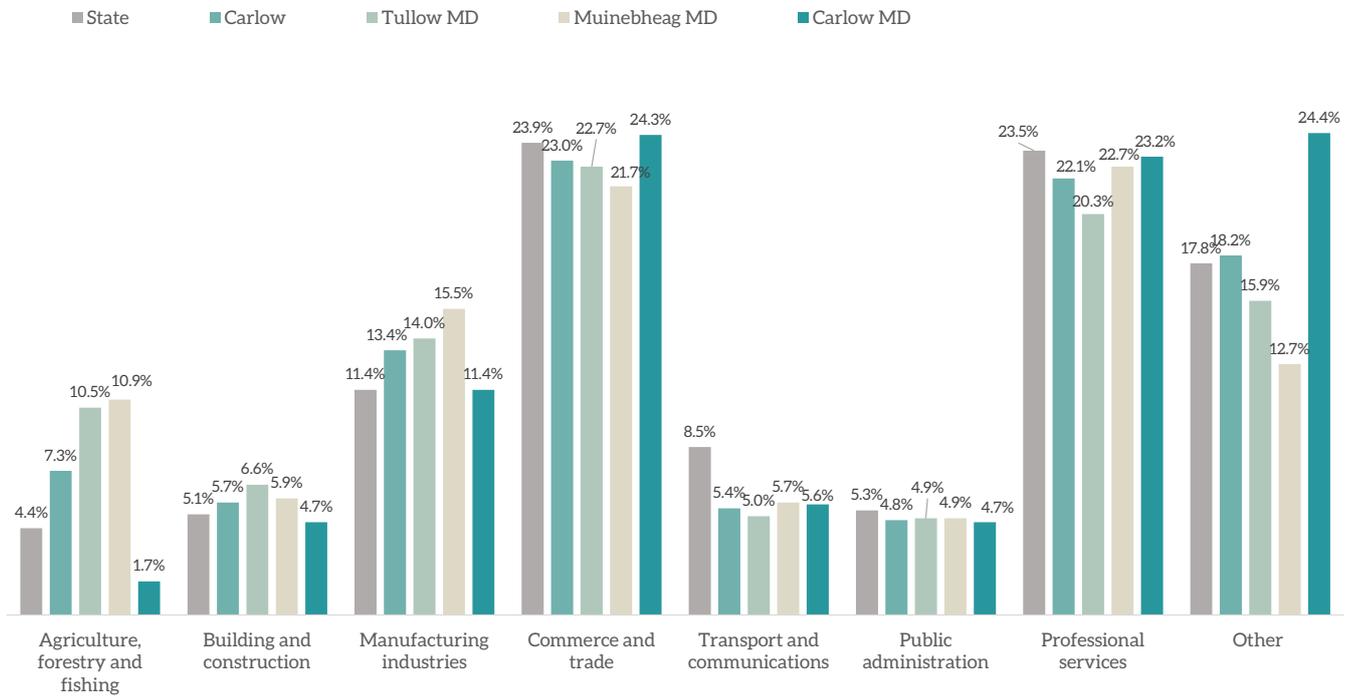
- Local Authority
- Municipal District (MD)
- Motorway
- Primary/Trunk Roads
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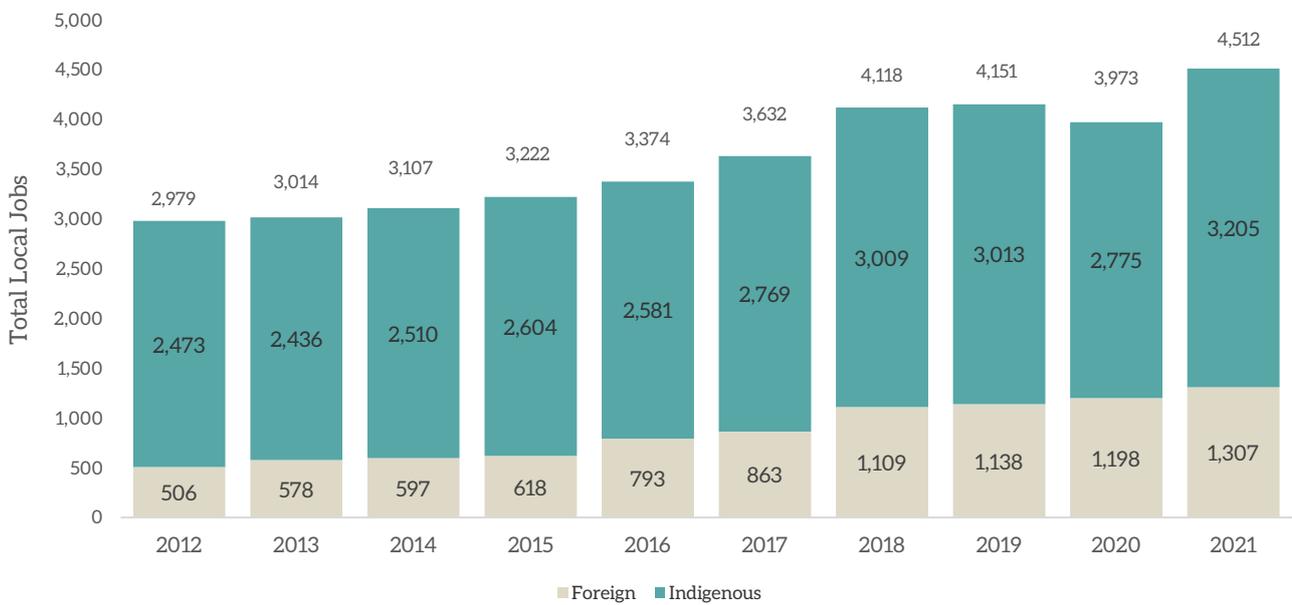
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Out of County Commuting Flows, 2016 (CSO Census, 2016)

Socio-Economic Profile, 2023



Industry of Employment, 2016 (CSO Census, 2016)



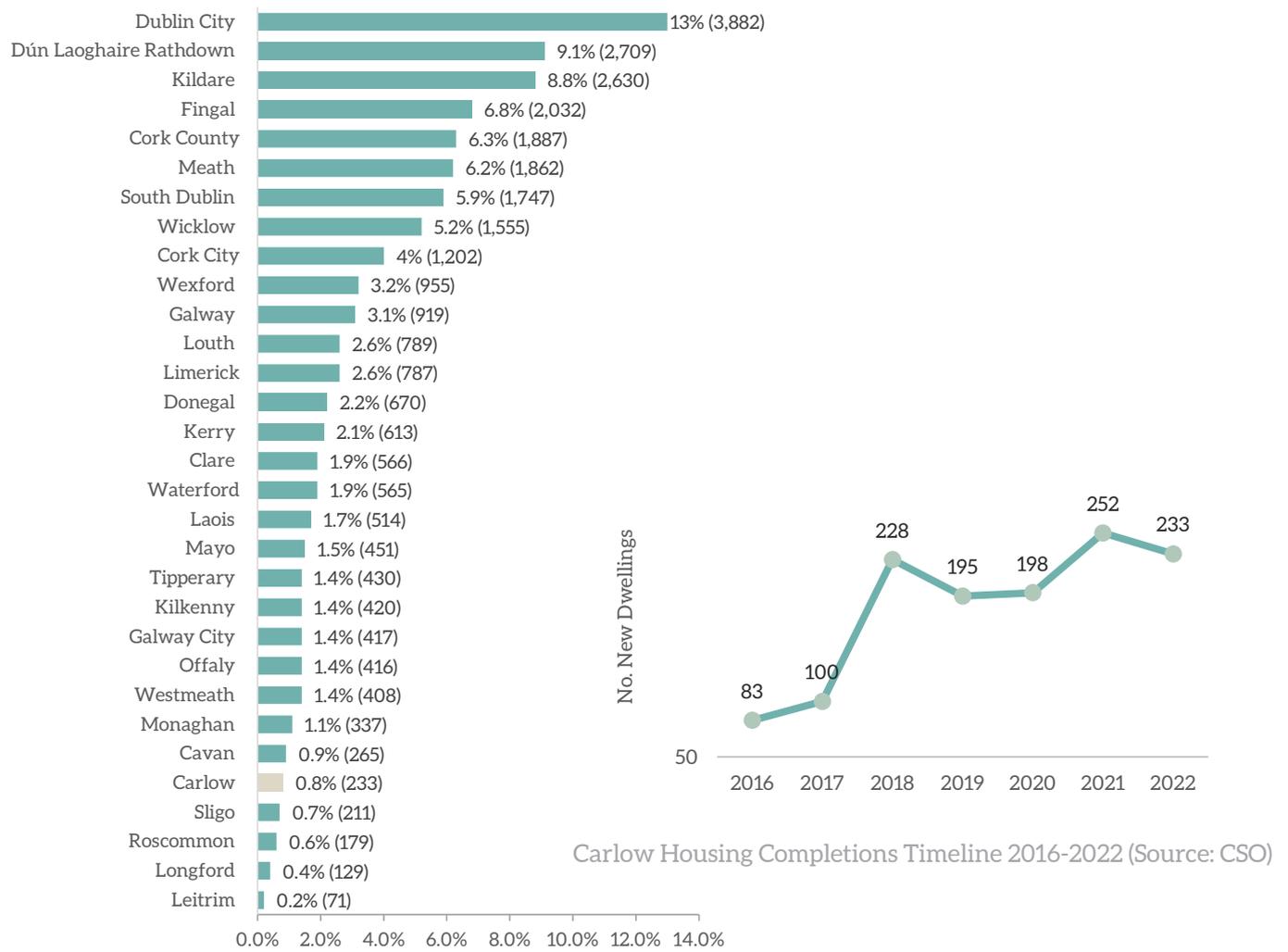
State-Assisted Employment in County Carlow, 2012-21 (CSO Census, 2016)

Housing

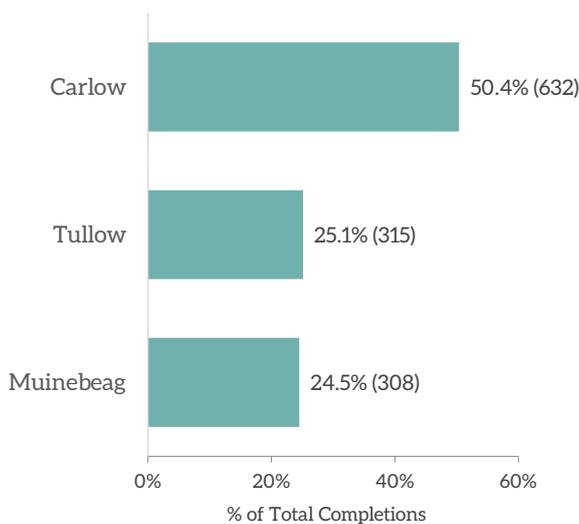
- There were 233 housing completions, in County Carlow, in 2022 – an increase on pre-pandemic levels;
- There are 1,772 vacant homes in County Carlow (2022 data);
- County Carlow’s profile, in respect of housing tenure, is similar to that of the State;
- The average sale price of a residential property in County Carlow, in September 2022, was €252k which is more than €100,000 below the State average;
- Approximately 30% of households are renting from a private landlord, while 13% renting from the local authority or an approved housing body (2022), and both these figures have increased consistently over recent years;
- One fifth of those in the private rental sector are in receipt of the housing assistance payment (HAP) – with the highest concentrations being in Carlow Town and its environs; and
- Rental costs have been increasing year-on-year and stood at €1,066/ month in Q1 2023.



Socio-Economic Profile, 2023

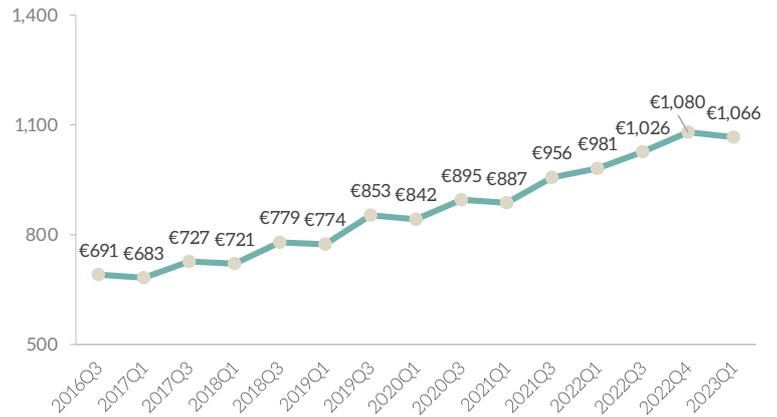
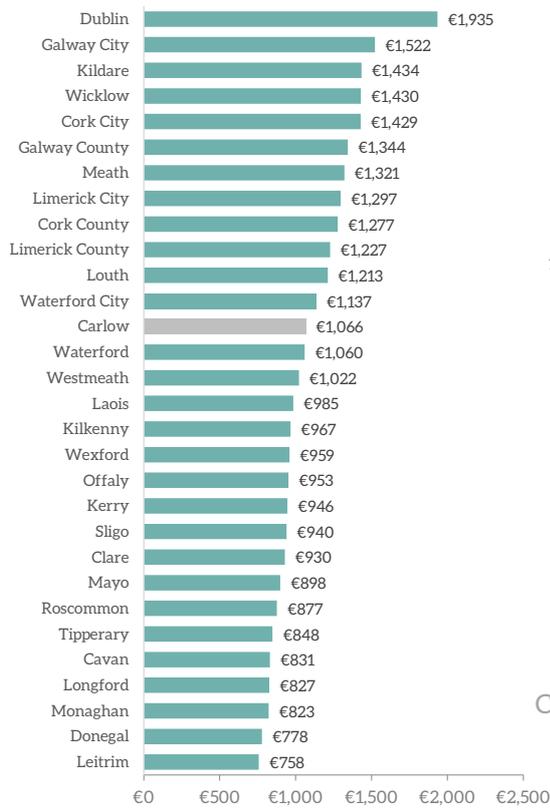


New Dwelling Completions by Local Authority, 2022 (Source: CSO)



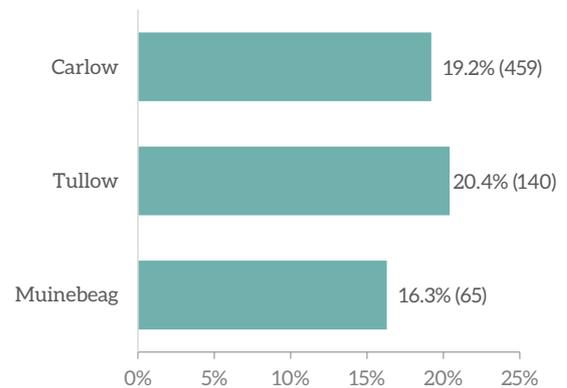
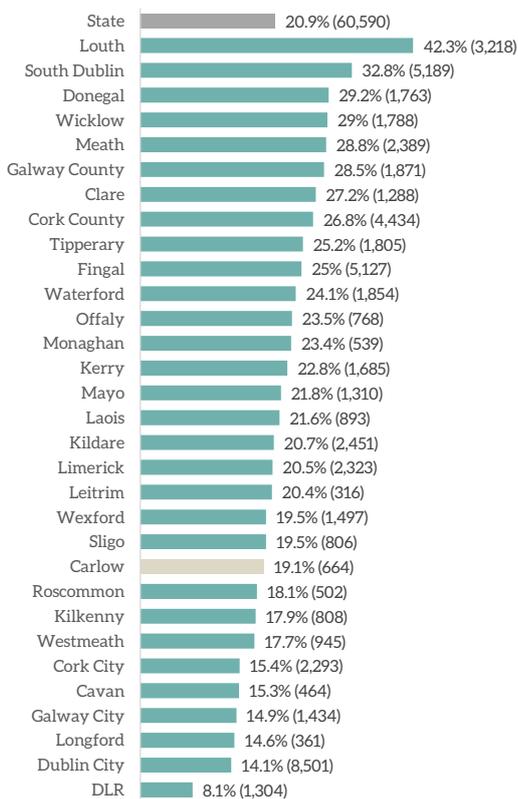
Carlow Housing Completions by MD, 2016-2022 (Source: CSO)

Socio-Economic Profile, 2023



Carlow Rental Price Time Series 2016 - 2023 (Source: CSO)

Rental Price Comparison by Local Authority, Q1 2023 (Source: CSO)

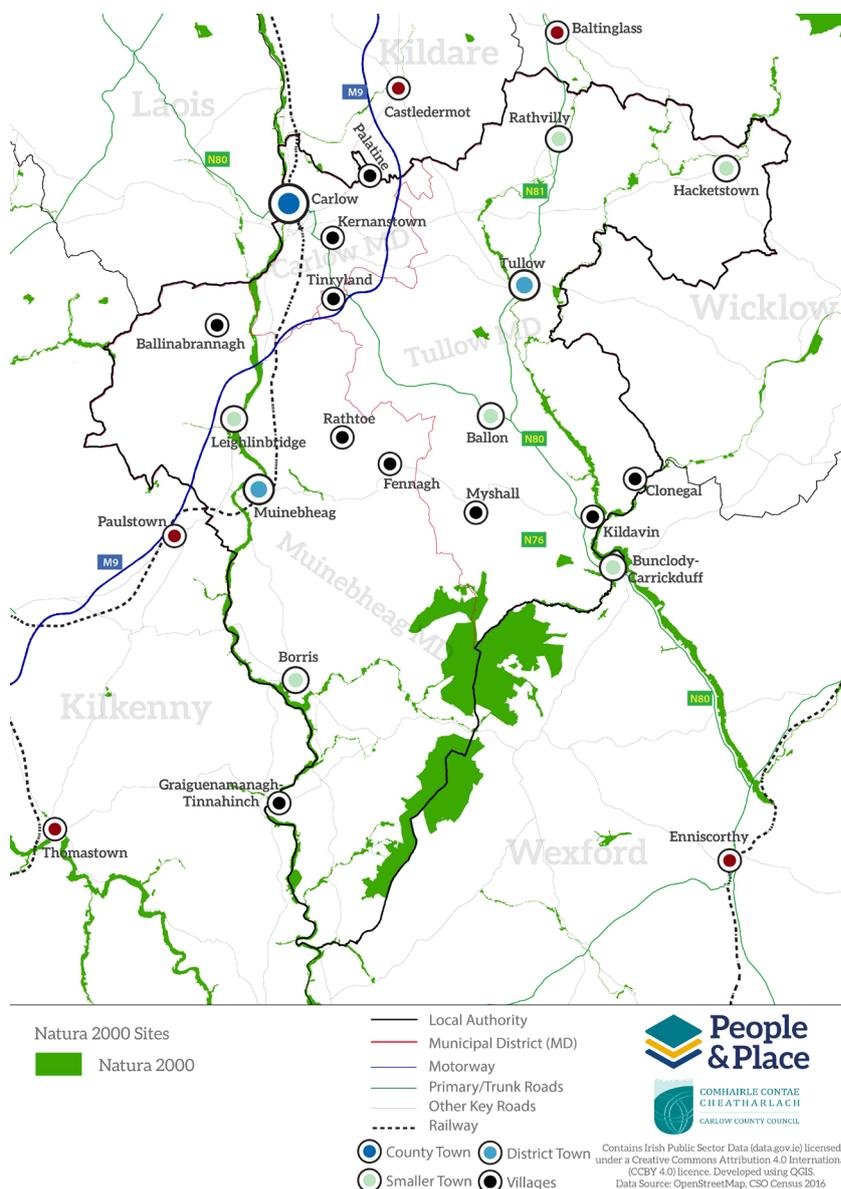


% RTB Properties supported by HAP by LEA, 2021 (Source:CSO)

% Distribution of HAP Tenancies by Local Authority, 2021 (Source: CSO)

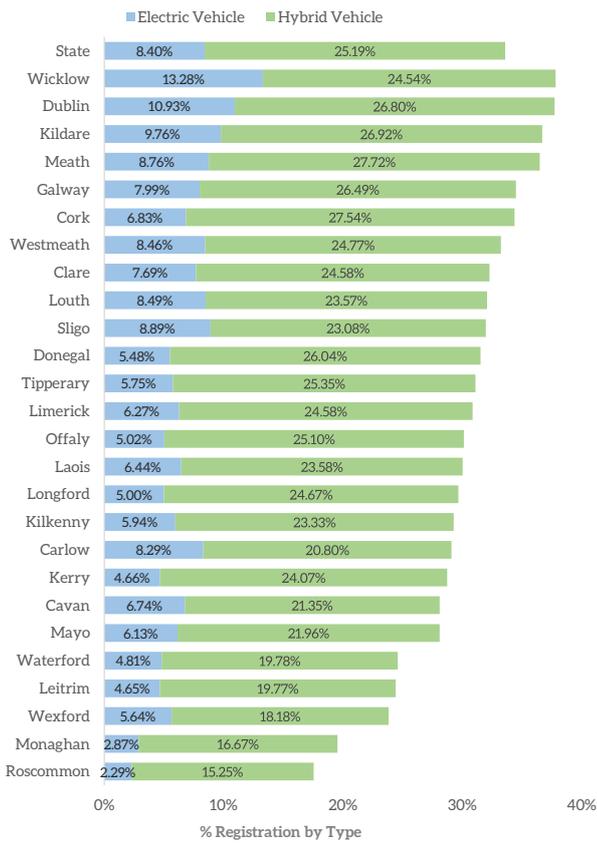
Key Environmental Facts:

- Carlow’s main river systems – the Barrow and the Slaney and several of their tributaries – and most of the Blackstairs Mountain Range are designated Natura 2000 sites;
- At present, there is one planned solar farm for the county which will produce an estimated 4 Megawatt MEC (Max Export Capacity);
- Residential heat demand per capita, in Carlow, is similar to the median level across the State’s local authority areas, while heat demand across all sectors is in line with the size of the county;
- One in seven new vehicles registered in 2021 was either an electric or hybrid model; and
- Almost half the waste collected (in 2020) from homes was residual (black bin), which is nine percentage points more than was the case across the State.

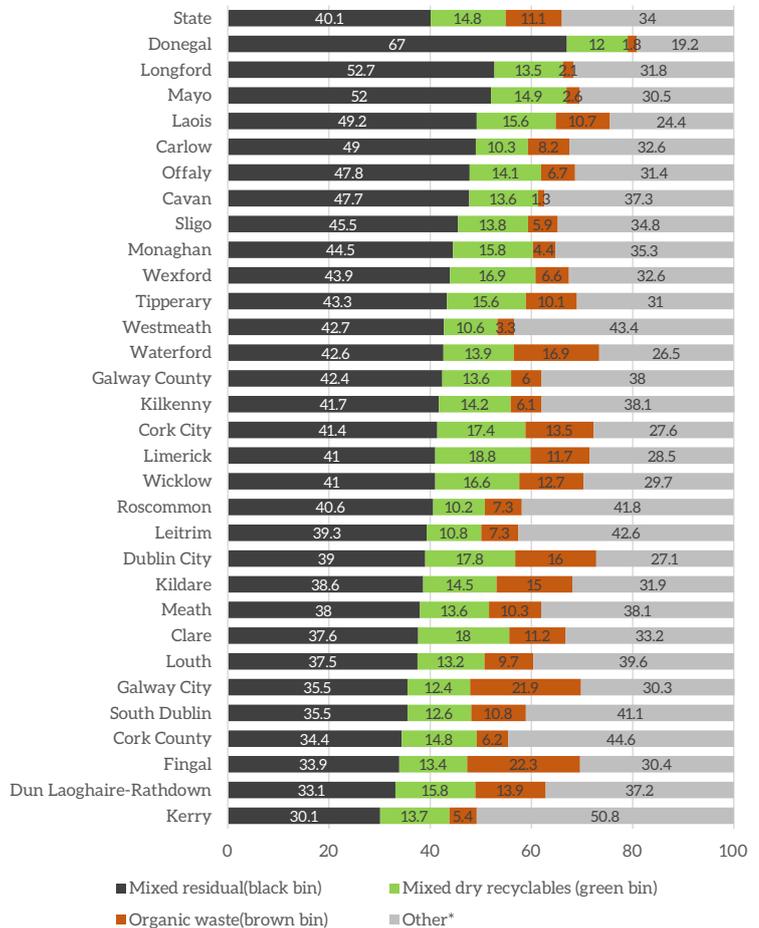


Natura 2000 Sites Map, 2022 (Source: NPWS)

Socio-Economic Profile, 2023



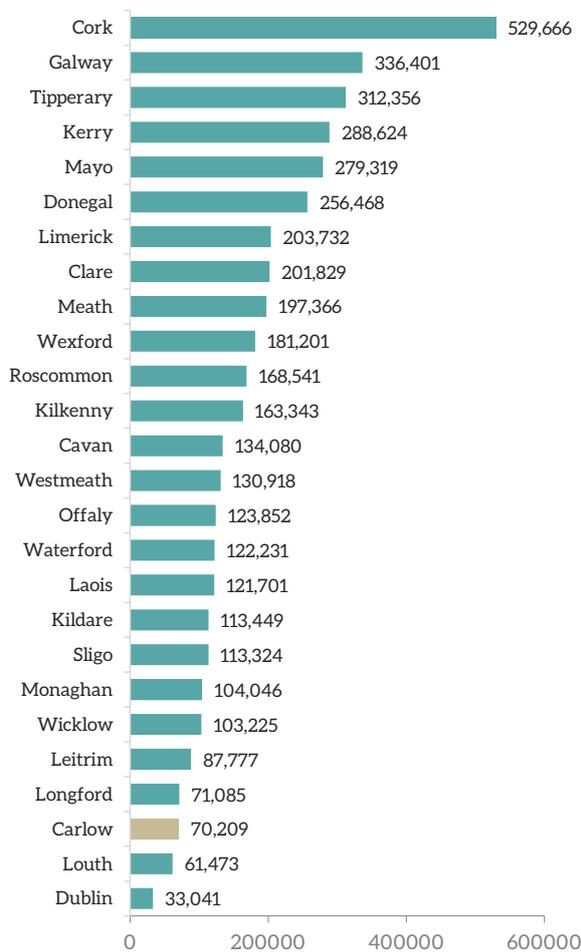
% New Car Registrations by Fuel Type, 2021 (Source: CSO)



Household Waste Collected Breakdown, 2020 (Source: CSO)

Key Agricultural Facts:

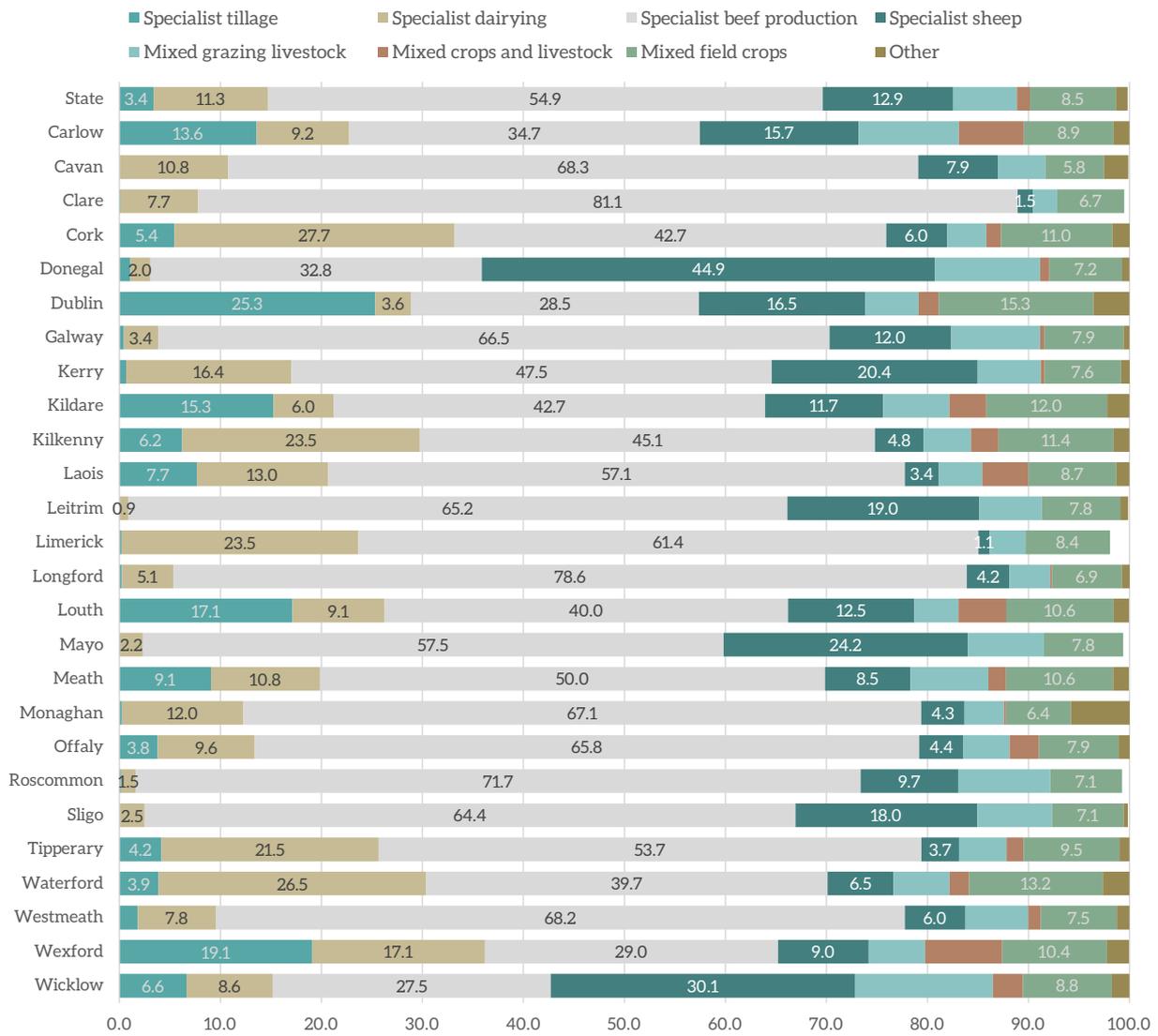
- The median standard output (in Euro) in County Carlow is almost twice that of the State, and the fifth highest of the 26 counties;
- Almost one in seven farms (mostly in the north and east), in County Carlow, is a specialist-tillage farm, while almost one in six (mostly in the south) is a specialist sheep-farm;
- One third of farms in Carlow specialise in beef production; and
- The largest farms (in terms of surface area) are predominantly in the centre and north of the county, while upland farms (in the Blackstairs) are generally the smallest.



Area Farmed (Ha), 2020 (Source: CSO)

Median Standard Output (€) per farm by county, 2020 (Source: CSO)

Socio-Economic Profile, 2023

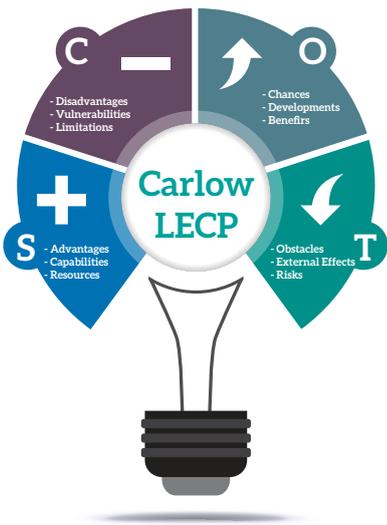


Farm Types by Local Authority, 2020 (Source: CSO)

Carlow LECP 2023-29:

SCOT Analysis

Strengths, Constraints, Opportunities and Threats (SCOT) Analysis



This section identifies key Strengths, Constraints, Opportunities and Threats (SCOT) relevant to the development of County Carlow over the next decade.

This has been prepared following the development of a detailed socio-economic analysis of the county, a review of recently published documents and strategies (County Development Plan, Economic Development & Business Support Strategy, Tourism Strategy) and an analysis of the last LECP for Carlow. It has also been supplemented through feedback and comments received from the Carlow LECP Advisory team including input from the LCDC and Economic SPC.



Strengths

- County-level strategies in place that give effect to EU and national policies e.g. climate change, migrant integration and inter-culturalism
- Geographical size of Carlow – a small county with the 3rd lowest population in the country (2022 population = 61,931)
- Strong volunteerism in communities
- A diverse and increasingly multi-cultural community
- Vibrant arts and cultural organisations and good performance spaces
- Strong industry clusters throughout county – Financial Services/Fin-Tech, ICT and Engineering
- Carlow’s geographic location, with ease of access to Dublin, the Midlands and the South-East Region (potential talent pool)
- Strong Transport Connections – through rail and road connections
- South East Technological University & Carlow College – talent availability and R&D potential
- Cost of living is relatively low (housing, childcare etc)
- A stock of natural and cultural resources, including heritage sites of national significance
- A strong agricultural sector that is the bedrock of several food-processors and service industries
- Natural beauty and its tourism potential – River Barrow and Mount Leinster (Blackstairs)

Constraints

- Large parts of the county classed as disadvantaged with the county having a more negative score on the Pobal HP Index than the region and State.
- Persistent and inter-generational unemployment and socio-economic disadvantage in certain communities
- Isolation in rural communities
- Vacant property issue within town centres
- High proportion of households dependent on social welfare payments as main source of income (18.6%)
- Relatively low levels of educational attainment
- A lack of scale-up space and landing / start up accommodation
- Relatively low level of FDI investment and supported jobs
- Brexit-related pressures on indigenous manufacturing industries
- Linkages between indigenous firms and education sector could be stronger
- The retention of students post-graduation (graduate brain drain)
- Poor connectivity outside of the main M9/N9 artery – resulting in uneven economic growth and over-reliance car-based commuting
- High levels of reliance on private transportation – causing excessive greenhouse gas emissions
- Rail line (Dublin-Waterford) is only single track, and Carlow Train Station has capacity limitations; thus public transport provision and uptake are delimited, leading to environmental degradation

- High levels of septic tanks in rural areas and some villages not fully connected to the wastewater treatment networks
- Poor access to, and interpretation of, heritage and cultural sites
- Environmental resources and their significance can be overlooked in favour of other parts of the South-East Region

Opportunities

- Increased visibility and use of the Irish language, particularly in Carlow Town
- Inter-county collaboration across the South-East Region – generation of critical mass
- Carlow’s growing population – increased by 8.8% since 2016.
- Carlow’s population growth will be one of the highest in the country and is expected to increase by +19.4% by 2041).
- Improved skill profile through the development of the Technological University
- Potential development & enhancement of enterprise hubs - building on Carlow’s Quality of Life excellence
- Improving the outward brand of Carlow to enhance Carlow’s reputation and visibility to international and domestic investors/visitors
- Increased potential for industry links with SETU and educational sector
- The development of a distribution hub, utilising the convenience of Carlow’s location to Dublin, etc.
- Improved ICT connectivity
- Post-COVID valorisation of green and open spaces and access to the countryside
- Increased/Stronger linking to Ireland’s Ancient East brand – garden, heritage and archaeological trails
- Blueway potential of the rivers; kayaking, boating, canoeing, cycling track along the Barrow
- Development of walking products; Carlow Camino and Columban Way, link with circular routes
- Harnessing young people’s awareness of the significance of natural resources and their commitment to local-level action
- Building-on and expanding the existing exemplars of good environmental practices, throughout the county e.g. high-nature value farming combined with rural tourism, farmers’ markets and gardens (e.g. An Gairdín Beo)
- The designation of Carlow as a key town in the regional policy objectives
- The development of the southern region as a UNESCO learning region
- The Smart Southern Region initiative, which seeks to work with people and communities on collaborations across all sectors

Threats

- An aging population with large increases in population aged 65+ in coming decades
- Rapidly increasing level of rental prices
- An older (less ecological) housing stock in many rural communities
- A perception among some newcomers that they are transient – aspiring to live in Dublin
- Limited availability of ‘suitably skilled’ apprenticeships across the county and beyond
- Export knowledge and key market development knowledge of SME firms
- The slow roll out of broadband provision across the county
- Retention of talent, given convenience to Dublin
- Tourism requires development of economics enablers based on sustainable experiences
- Environmental Pollution – especially groundwater
- With climate projections showing an increase in rainfall for winter, a decrease in rainfall for summer combined with an overall seasonal increase in average annual temperatures, these clearly highlight the need to reduce the impacts that climate change is having on the environment, the economy and the citizens of County Carlow
- Pressures on farmers to continue to produce large / increased volumes of food, although industrial agriculture is harming public health and the natural environment
- Exposure to the vagrancies of global patterns e.g. climate change and demands for commodities such as milk (leading to monoculture and a lack of biodiversity)
- An increase in part-time farming, such that farmers are not on site (on farms) to maintain and support ecosystems
- Decaying built heritage in some of our town and village centres
- Pressure on unlisted historical buildings / sites / monuments associated with the demand for home-building

Carlow LECP 2023-29:

Our shared Vision and High-Level Goals

LECP Vision and High-Level Goals

The Carlow LECP is centered around a shared Vision for the county and a set of High-Level Goals and associated Sustainable Community and Economic Objectives that will commit Carlow to a just and sustainable future.

To develop the shared Vision and High-Level Goals for the Carlow LECP 2023-29, Carlow County Council and the Carlow LECP Advisory team followed a bottom-up and open consultative approach. Following the prescribed logical steps as set out in the LECP Guidelines, the approach to developing the Vision and High-Level Goals was structured around a number of interlinked phases:

1. An analysis was undertaken of the latest socio-economic and environmental data for County Carlow;
2. This analysis enabled an evidence-informed SCOT analysis to be completed with specific input from both the LCDC and Economic Strategic Policy Committee SPC. It also took full account of Carlow County Council's social, economic, community and environmental policies;
3. A detailed survey was carried out on the existing Carlow LECP, and this was informed by the the LECP Advisory Team. This survey evaluated the Vision and High-Level Goals and sought recommendations for change, where applicable; and
4. A draft Socio-Economic Statement was published in December 2022 and that underwent an extensive consultation process - public survey, geographical (MD) and sectoral consultations, a specific climate action consultation, a public workshop, and a number of one-to-one detailed in-person consultations. This process allowed a two-way flow information and opinion exchange on the draft Vision and High-Level Goals.

An analysis of the findings of this public consultation process has enabled Carlow County Council and the LECP Advisory Team to prepare a final Vision, six accompanying High-Level Goals and strategic Objectives.



**The vision for the
Carlow LECP 2023-29 is:**

**County Carlow is committed to a just
and sustainable future -
*with inclusive, diverse and resilient communities,
thriving and innovative enterprises supported by
proactive organisations/agencies, working together
to support the education and well-being of all.***

LECP Vision and High-Level Goals

The realisation of the overall Vision for the Carlow LECP will be driven by the High-Level Goals. The High-Level Goals can be viewed as the setting of the general direction of travel for the LECP. The goals will remain constant throughout the plan period, and inputs and interventions supported through the lifetime of the plan will be designed to attain the High-Level Goals.

The Carlow LECP High-Level Goals are ambitious with their foundations being in the analysis of the socio-economic data as well as the consultation processes undertaken as part of the plan development. However, we believe the High-Level Goals are achievable and realistic.

The following section sets out the six High-Level Goals (including the associated objectives) for the Carlow LECP, and it identifies the cross-cutting connections between our goals and those of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and the overarching UN Sustainable Development Goals.



LECP Vision and High-Level Goals



LECP Vision and High-Level Goals

HLG 1

Carlow is a carbon-neutral and climate-resilient society - with affirmative climate and biodiversity actions and environmental sustainability at the heart of all decision-making.



- ✓ 7 - Affordable and Clean Energy
- ✓ 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities
- ✓ 12 - Responsible Consumption and Production
- ✓ 13 - Climate Action



- ✓ 1 - Compact Growth
- ✓ 4 - Sustainable Mobility
- ✓ 8 - Low Carbon, Climate Resilient and Sustainable Society
- ✓ 9 - Sustainable, Planned and Infrastructure-led Development
- ✓ Informed by the Blue Green Infrastructure and Nature-based Solutions Framework (2022) and the 10-minute City and Towns Concept



LECP Objectives

- ✓ 1. Ensure the County Carlow Business Community continues to develop in the areas of sustainability, climate and bio-diversity.
- ✓ 2. Raise awareness and provide education and training in relation to biodiversity and climate change, with a particular focus on the Just Transition
- ✓ 3. Promote more sustainable and active travel
- ✓ 4. Reduce waste

HLG 2

Our communities are safe, empowered and supported through an active community-led local development approach and participative democracy.



- ✓ 3 - Good Health and Well-Being
- ✓ 5 - Gender Equality and Empowerment
- ✓ 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities
- ✓ 16 - Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions



- ✓ 3 - Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities
- ✓ 7 - Diversity, Language, Culture and Heritage Enhancement
- ✓ 9 - Sustainable, Planned and Infrastructure-led Development



LECP Objectives

- ✓ 1. Proactively support community-led local development
- ✓ 2. Identify and address the needs of diverse communities, and develop appropriate inter-agency responses
- ✓ 3. Support and strive for meaningful engagement by children and young people
- ✓ 4. Valorise, support and celebrate cultural, heritage, creative and artistic resources, expression and endeavour

LECP Vision and High-Level Goals

HLG 3

Our communities are more welcoming, inclusive, healthy and accessible, and are enriched by culture, heritage and diversity



- ✓ 3 - Good Health and Well-Being
- ✓ 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities
- ✓ 16 - Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
- ✓ 10 - Reduced Inequalities



- ✓ 3 - Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities
- ✓ 7 - Diversity, Language, Culture and Heritage Enhancement
- ✓ Development of the UNESCO Learning Region initiative



LECP Objectives

- ✓ 1. Ensure Carlow’s communities, organisations and institutions are welcoming, inclusive and accessible
- ✓ 2. Ensure our communities are healthy and active
- ✓ 3. Work to enhance accessibility across public infrastructure

HLG 4

Life-long learning and education opportunities are available and accessible to all.



- ✓ 3 - Good Health and Well-Being
- ✓ 4 - Quality Education
- ✓ 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth
- ✓ 10 - Reduced Inequalities



- ✓ 3 - Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities
- ✓ 5 - A Strong Economy
- ✓ Development of the UNESCO Learning Region initiative



LECP Objectives

- ✓ 1. Increase the engagement of the County Carlow Business Community in education and development activities
- ✓ 2. Maximise learning opportunities that are accessible to all

LECP Vision and High-Level Goals

HLG 5

Our towns, villages and rural communities are great places in which to live, work and do business – supported by community-led local development, collaboration, enterprise and tourism development, creativity, entrepreneurship, and inward investment.



- ✓ 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth
- ✓ 9 - Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- ✓ 10 - Reduced Inequalities
- ✓ 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities



- ✓ 1 - Compact Growth
- ✓ 2 - Enhanced Regional Accessibility
- ✓ 3 - Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities
- ✓ 4 - Sustainable Mobility
- ✓ 6 - High-Quality International Connectivity
- ✓ Carlow's Key Town designation
- ✓ Opportunities arising from Ireland's Ancient East brand.



LECP Objectives

- ✓ 1. Improve the liveability, appearance and attractiveness of our towns and villages by improving services and infrastructure, harnessing heritage resources, and developing 'smart', 'accessible' and 'connected' rural towns and villages - enabling them realise their potential as attractive places to live and visit
- ✓ 2. Harness our natural, cultural and heritage resources, and put in place the infrastructure and supports necessary to ensure sustainable tourism and recreation and amenity development within the county
- ✓ 3. Enhance the capacity of communities to develop the economic potential of their areas
- ✓ 4. Ensure the continued delivery of high-quality accommodation and facilities to support the growing population

HLG 6

High-quality employment is provided across all sectors by innovative, creative, smart, adaptable and connected businesses.



- ✓ 4 - Quality Education
- ✓ 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth
- ✓ 9 - Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- ✓ 12 - Responsible Consumption and Production,



- ✓ 2 - Enhanced Regional Accessibility
- ✓ 3 - Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities
- ✓ 5 - A Strong Economy
- ✓ 6 - High-Quality International Connectivity
- ✓ 7 - Diversity, Language, Culture and Heritage Enhancement
- ✓ Carlow's Key Town designation, the value of the South East Technological University, the Smart Southern Region Initiative and the Regional Skills Form



LECP Objectives

- ✓ 1. Build a resilient, sustainable business base and support new and existing businesses to grow, be enterprising and take advantage of new opportunities
- ✓ 2. Ensure our local economy contributes proportionately to, and integrates with, the growth of the region and maximises its international reach by improving the attractiveness of County Carlow as a place to do business
- ✓ 3. Support for business development, innovation, process efficiencies and first-time exporters

Implementation Arrangements

The County Carlow Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) comprises two discrete elements that include:

- 1) An overall LECP Strategic Framework document that details the high-level goals and objectives over the six-year planning period; and
- 2) Implementation Plans that identify the priority actions to be implemented over a two-year period. These implementation plans will be reviewed and revised every two years to ensure they and the LECP remain relevant and responsive to the changing policy, economic and community conditions, challenges and opportunities.

The initial Implementation Plan (2023-2025) was developed with inputs from the Carlow LECP Advisory Team, agencies and service providers, LCDC members as well as members of the County Carlow Culture, Libraries & Digital Development, Tourism, Enterprise and Economic Development Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) – referred to throughout the document as the Economic SPC. The plan was developed through an iterative consultative process that was designed to identify clear actions that could directly contribute to the achievement of the LECP high-level goals and objectives, over the two-year period. The County Carlow LECP Advisory Team's focus was on ensuring that the actions identified were in line with what was envisaged in the LECP framework consultation.

This detailed collaborative process has ensured that the initial Implementation Plan includes strategic actions, that are led by a range of relevant stakeholders and are designed to clearly contribute to the achievement of the LECP high-level goals. They include Carlow Tourism, Enterprise Ireland, the HSE, SETU, KCETB, CCDP and others. The actions include consideration of the current and projected resources (both human and financial) available to implement the strategic actions over this initial two-year period.

All actions included in the initial Implementation Plan have been designed using a SMART framework with each action being Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time Bound (within a clear time horizon). All actions consider the imperative of sustainability, and while most actions relate to either economic objectives or community objectives, some actions address and transcend both economic and community objectives (e.g. housing).

Implementation criteria have been assigned to each action. Each action is set within an overarching high-level goal (including its relevant policy link from the overall framework) and a relevant objective. Responsibility for the implementation of each action has been assigned to a lead agency. It is expected that each lead agency will allocate sufficient and appropriate resources to support action implementation and will report regularly on delivery / progress to the LCDC or the Economic SPC as appropriate. See Table 1 below for a sample of the implementation criteria used.

Implementation Arrangements

High-Level Goal:	Carlow is a carbon-neutral and climate-resilient society - with affirmative climate and biodiversity actions and environmental sustainability at the heart of all decision-making.
Planning/Policy Framework:	UNSDG (7, 11, 12 & 13) & SRA RSES (1, 4, 8 & 9)
Objective (Economic):	Ensuring the County Carlow Business Community continues to develop in the areas of sustainability, climate and bio-diversity
Action 1:	Promote a sustainable destination tourism training programme on a bi-annual basis, in order to ensure that the principles of regenerative tourism are being practised
Reporting to:	Economic SPC
Lead Agency:	Carlow Tourism
Collaborators:	Carlow County Council, Carlow Chamber, CCDP, SETU, KCETB, Fáilte Ireland
Are resources in place?	Yes
Target Group / Beneficiaries:	Local businesses/Communities
Key Performance Indicator(s):	Secure the participation of 12 tourism businesses in the programme
Timeline:	2024-2026

Table 1: Sample LECP Action Implementation Criteria

Organisational collaborators and the target group/beneficiaries, for each action, are clearly identified within the Implementation Plan. Agencies/organisations identified as collaborators are expected to support and assist those leading the action/s. The identification of key performance indicators for each action is critically important within the implementation plan. These indicators will be used to measure the extent to which a particular action has been implemented.



Monitoring and Evaluation

The LECP will be implemented over the six-year period from 2023 to 2029.

The initial Implementation Plan is for two years. Some of the actions included within this initial Implementation Plan will be completed within the two years, while others will be ongoing over the lifetime of the six-year LECP. Additional actions can, of course, be added as necessary over the life time of the Implementation Plan.

Monitoring the delivery (outputs, outcomes and impacts) of the Implementation Plan will be crucial to ensuring its success, resilience and adaptability. Monitoring will also be important in terms of ensuring those identified as lead agencies and collaborators are held to account. Therefore, action leads will be responsible for reporting on action progress, and as noted earlier, the two key reporting structures are the Economic SPC and the LCDC.

Those involved in the implementation of economic-oriented actions will report to the Economic SPC, and those responsible for community-related actions will report to the LCDC. Where actions include both economic and community objectives, one of the two reporting structures has been specifically identified as the reporting body, so that each lead agency has full clarity with respect to the body to which it will report.

- Lead agencies will be expected to report on action implementation progress twice a year, using the identified KPIs where appropriate.
- The LCDC and Economic SPC secretariats will compile six-monthly progress reports and will produce and circulate a joint annual implementation report.
- The LCDC and Economic SPC secretariat will also work with lead agencies to compile at least one case study for each high-level goal annually, thereby bringing qualitative data to bear on the evaluation and complementing the mainly quantitative KPIs that have been prescribed.
- An independent mid-term evaluation will also be conducted to determine progress and to identify learnings for all involved.
- Carlow County Council will continue to pursue an evidence-based approach to the overall monitoring of the LECP and all other policies and plans by collating and analysing the latest spatial, economic and environmental data for the county.

Appendix 1 - Glossary

ABTA – Area-based Transport Assessment
AHBs – Approved Housing Bodies
CAP – Climate Action Plan
CAP – Common Agricultural Policy
CCC – Carlow County Council
CDP – County Development Plan
CCDP – Carlow County Development Plan
CIC – Community Interest Company
CLG – Company limited by Guarantee
CK Skillnet – Carlow Kilkenny Skillnet
CORC – County Outdoor Recreational Committee
CSO – Central Statistics Office
CYSPC – Children and Young People’s Services Committee
DEIS – Delivering Equality in Schools
DHLGH – Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
DRCD – Department of Rural and Community Development
DSGBV – Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence
DSP – Department of Social Protection
EI – Enterprise Ireland
ETB – Education and Training Board
EU – European Union
EV – Electric Vehicle
FDI – Foreign Direct Investment
FI – Failte Ireland
FRCs – Family Resource Centres
GHG – Greenhouse Gas
HAP – Housing Assistance Payment
HIF – Healthy Ireland Framework
HLG – High-Level Goal
HSE – Health Service Executive
ICT – Information and Communications Technology
IDA – Industrial Development Agency
IWA – Irish Wheelchair Association
KCETB – Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board
KPIs- Key Performance Indicators
LA – Local Authority
LCDC – Local Community Development Committee
LEADER - Liaisons Entre Actions de Développement de l’Économie Rurale i.e. Links Between Actions for the Development of the Rural Economy
LECP – Local Economic and Community Plan
LEO – Local Enterprise Office
LTACC – Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee
MD – Municipal District
MEC – Maximum Export Capacity
NALA – National Adult Literacy Agency

Appendix 1 - Glossary

NPWS – National Parks and Wildlife Service
NRRP – National Recovery and Resilience Plan
NUTS – Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
NFQ – National Framework of Qualifications
OPW – Office of Public Works
PPN – Public Participation Network
RA – Rural Area
REP – Regional Enterprise Plan
RSES - Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy
SCOT – Strengths, Constraints, Opportunities and Threats
SEA – Strategic Environmental Assessment
SEAI – Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland
SEEA – System of Environmental Economic Accounting
SETU – South East Technological University
SIF – Social Inclusion Forum
SPC – Strategic Policy Committee
SME – Small Medium Enterprise
SMART - Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Realistic and Time-related
UNESCO - The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UN – United Nations
UNSDGs – United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
URDF – Urban Regeneration and Development Fund

Appendix 2 - Key Projects

Project	Relevant High-Level Goals (HLGs)	Description
Tullow Road Multi-functional Community Hub	HLG2, Objectives 1, 2 and 3	Carlow County Council proposes to construct a multi-functional community hub at Tullow Road, Carlow Town. This project will facilitate new and existing supports and services - catering for physical, social and community needs. The main constituents of the facility will include the following: (1) General Administration; (2) Social areas; and (3) Activity spaces
Duckett's Grove Tourism & Recreation Development	HLG5, Objective 2	Duckett's Grove (gothic castle) is a spectacular ruin near the village of Grange/Killerig, situated 10 km east of Carlow Town. The ruined mansion and gothic revival castle along with 11 acres were acquired by Carlow County Council (CCC) in September 2005, to develop as an amenity and tourism attraction. The purchase included outbuildings, stables, yards, barns, forge and two superb interconnecting walled gardens, along with a small area of woodland. In the 17 th , 18 th and 19 th century, the property was home of the Duckett Family, one of the most prominent families in Carlow, and it remains an important and powerful reminder of a former period, rich in history and deep in tradition. The ruins enable one to see the development of the house from a mid-18th century Palladian house, through the first gothicisation of circa 1825, by Thomas Cobden, to the later additions of circa 1845 by J. McDuff Derick.
Tullow Court House	HLG5, Objectives 1 and 2	The former courthouse building is situated on Barrack Street in the Town Centre. This two storey Georgian-style building dates from c.1825 and is a protected structure. The heritage plate attached to the façade of the building provides interesting background information regarding the history of the former Courthouse. This will complement the delivery of the Tullow Master Plan
Project Carlow 2040	HLG5, Objectives 1 and 3	Project Carlow 2040 is an ambitious regeneration strategy for Carlow Town, which contains transformational and inspiring concepts for the economic, social and environmental benefit of Carlow. The project's plans include an ambitious vision for the vitalisation of the town centre.

Appendix 2 - Key Projects

Project	Relevant High-Level Goals (HLGs)	Description
Project Bagenalstown 2040	HLG5, Objectives 1 and 3	It is proposed to develop a strategy for Bagenalstown called Project Bagenalstown 2040 that will enhance the town’s liveability, attractiveness, vibrancy and resilience.
Project Tullow 2040	HLG5, Objectives 1 and 3	The vision for Tullow is to create an attractive, prosperous, vibrant and connected Town Centre, where people will want to be, to live, to work, to socialise and to visit. Through an understanding of Tullow’s urban structure and functions, key interventions have been identified that seek to deliver long-term economic, social and environmental benefits with the aim of improving the quality of life and opportunities within the town. The purpose of this project includes undertaking the refurbishment of, and extension to, a protected structure in a central location in the town centre and to bring the building back into active use as a new library for Tullow. This project will bring forward a new modern facility for community use, while re-activating a valued historic asset. The project will also include a full upgrade of the public realm around the former courthouse building that will provide an enhancement of the visual quality of the streetscape within this locale.
Link of South Leinster Way to Wicklow Way	HLG5, Objective 2	This project is to establish a link between the Wicklow Way in Clonegal and the South Leinster Way in Kildavin. This is a key ‘missing link’ in the E8 Path, one of the European long-distance paths, 4,700 km across Europe, from Cork in Ireland to Bulgaria, and which passes through Clonegal and Kildavin.
The Columban Way	HLG5, Objective 2	The Columban Way is a cultural route through eight European countries namely Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Ireland, Switzerland and the UK, which celebrates the tangible and intangible heritage of the Irish Monastic Movement. Consultants are currently examining the feasibility of the route from Myshall in County Carlow to Bangor in County Down.

Appendix 2 - Key Projects

Project	Relevant High-Level Goals (HLGs)	Description
Water Centre Activity Hub	HLG5, Objective 2	This project will involve the development of a regional water activity centre in a central location in Carlow Town, adjacent to the Town Park, with a specific focus on regeneration and water recreational infrastructure. The Water Activity Centre will link into existing facilities of the Town Park and provide a central campus for all - offering recreational and well-being opportunities. It will bring new life to the underdeveloped riverbank, as well as supporting the active use of the River Barrow thus supporting a regenerated Carlow Riverfront.
Enterprise Campus, O'Brien Road, Carlow	HLG6, Objectives 1, 2 and 3	The development of an Enterprise Campus, in partnership with Carlow Community Enterprise Centre, will focus on enhanced business support services to assist companies to export and scale via facilities, services and clustering.
Presentation House, Bagenalstown	HLG2, Objectives 4 and 4, HLG3, Objective 3, HLG4, Objective 2	The former convent will be re-developed and brought into productive use.
Presentation Buildings, Tullow Street, Carlow	HLG2, Objectives 4 and 4, HLG3, Objective 3, HLG4, Objective 2	The Presentation Building offers a wide range of services, which are provided by the Carlow County Library Service, including access to technology, e-services, children's services, special collections, local studies, genealogy and archives, community information, lifelong learning initiatives, regular events and programmes. The Presentation Building is an excellent example of a public facility that promotes and maintains the cultural identity and history of the local area and exists to attract visitors thus encouraging activity within an existing urban centre and the proposed redevelopment of the building in line with the National Public Libraries Strategy.

Appendix 2 - Key Projects

Project	Relevant High-Level Goals (HLGs)	Description
Southern Relief Road	HLG 5, Objective 1	The Carlow Southern Relief Road is a strategic Road improvement Project for Carlow that will; reduce the volume of vehicular traffic in the Town Centre, reduce the mode share of car transport, increase cycling and bus transport as a mode share. This is a key project earmarked in the National Development Plan 2021-2030
Housing for All -Housing Capital Delivery Programme	HLG 5, Objective 1	The Council has an ambitious programme in place under its Housing Delivery Action Plan -Housing for All for the period 2022-2026 for the delivery of social and affordable housing
SEAI Pathfinder programme	HLG1, Objectives 2 and 3	<p>Public sector bodies are required to report on their annual energy use to the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). This is done through the Monitoring and Reporting system (M&R), which is used to track the local authorities progress towards 2030 targets.</p> <p>Carlow County Council buildings and facilities accounts for 40% of its GHG emissions. Many of the older buildings require retrofit works to be carried out to reduce significant energy use. Carlow County Council have partnered with Kilkenny, Wexford, Waterford, and Tipperary County Councils to participate in the SEAI pathfinder funding programme. The programme adopts a holistic approach to improving the energy performance of public bodies and sectors and supports Local Authorities to identify and remove barriers and gaps to achieving their energy saving and carbon reduction targets.</p>
Department of Transport Pathfinder Programme	HLG1, Objectives 2 and 3	<p>The Pathfinder Programme forms a key part of the implementation of the National Sustainable Mobility Policy, which sets out the government's plan to meet Ireland's requirement to achieve a 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 in the transport sector. On 17th October 2022, Minister for Transport Eamon Ryan launched the Pathfinder Programme of 35 exemplar transport projects to be delivered by local authorities and agencies around the country by the end of 2025.</p> <p>The Carlow to SETU Pedestrian & Cycle Scheme was chosen as 1 of the 35 exemplar transport projects to be delivered. The scheme will provide high quality pedestrian/cycle facilities along the R448 (Kilkenny Road) linking Carlow Town Centre and the South-East Technological University (SETU). The proposal involves the upgrading of existing sections of on-road cycle lanes and sub-standard footpaths to high quality separated cycle tracks and footpaths which will encourage commuter modal shift away from single vehicle use, thus reducing carbon emissions by enabling the shift to cleaner transport modes. The scheme is currently at Option Selection stage, with construction expected to commence in 2024 for delivery in 2025</p>

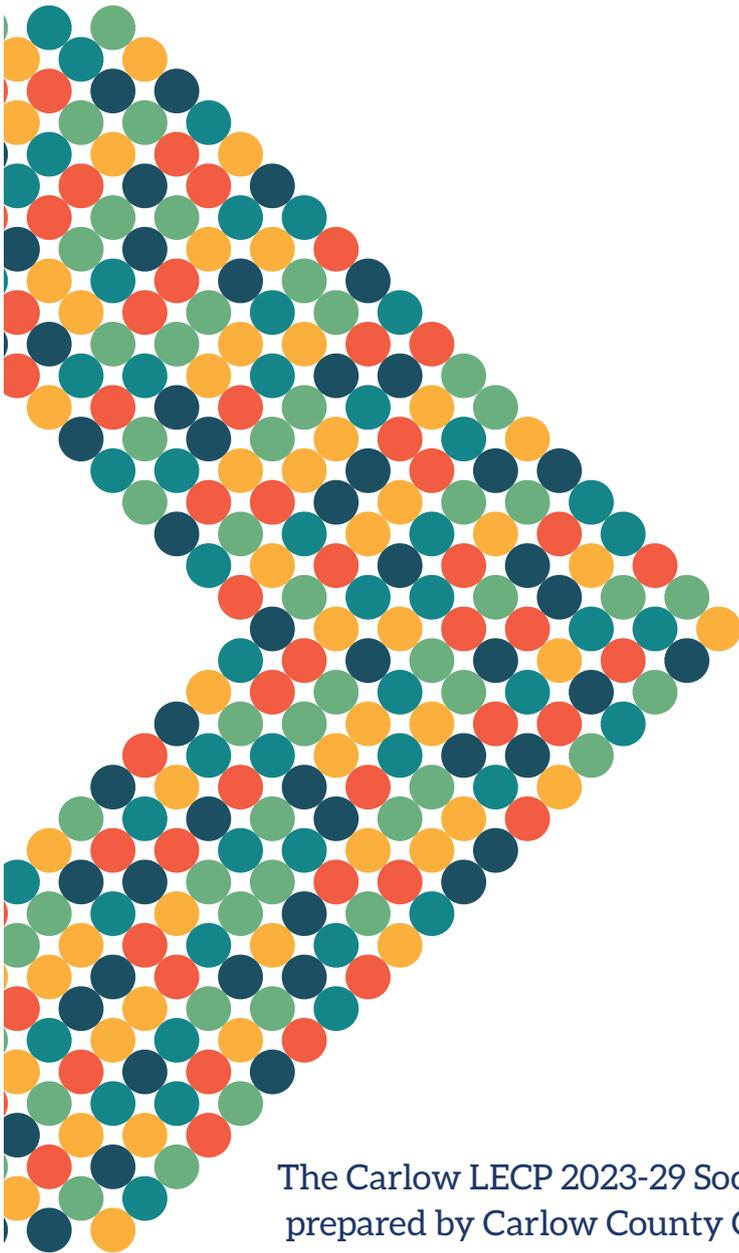
Appendix 3 - List of LECP Collaborators

LCDC Members
Carlow County Council
Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
Kilkenny and Carlow ETB
Health Service Executive (HSE)
5 PPN reps (2 Community & Voluntary Pillar, 2 Social Inclusion Pillar, and 1 Environment Pillar)
Business Sector (Chamber of Commerce) Rep
Agriculture/Farming Sector Rep
Civic Society/Arts Sector Rep

CYPSC Members
Tusla
Carlow County Council
Carlow County Childcare Committee
SETU
Primary and Post Primary School Representatives
Kilkenny-Carlow Education and Training Board (KCETB)
Carlow Regional Youth Services
Family Resources Centres (Bagenalstown and Forward Steps)
St. Catherine's Community Services Centre
Carlow County Development Partnership CLG
Gardaí
Barnardos
Carlow Youth Training
HSE



COMHAIRLE CONTAE
CHEATHARLACH
CARLOW COUNTY COUNCIL



The Carlow LECP 2023-29 Socio-Economic Statement has been prepared by Carlow County Council in collaboration with the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) and the Tourism, Enterprise and Economic Development Strategic Policy Committee (SPC).

