



WESTMEATH COUNTY COUNCIL  
Comhairle Chontae na hIarmhí

*Pre-Draft  
Consultation  
Strategic  
Issues Paper*

# MULLINGAR

## Local Area Plan

### 2024-2030



What is **your VISION**  
for **Mullingar?**

A stylized map of the Mullingar region. The town of Mullingar is highlighted in a light green color. The map shows a network of roads in light grey and blue, and a railway line represented by a black dashed line. The word "Mullingar" is written in blue text within the green area. The background is a teal color with blue shapes representing water bodies.

Mullingar

# Introduction

**Westmeath County Council is commencing the preparation of a Local Area Plan (LAP) for Mullingar 2024-2030. The plan making process will review and build upon the progress achieved under the current Mullingar Local Area Plan, and in collaboration with local communities and key stakeholders, set a direction and vision for the future growth of Mullingar.**

A LAP is a functional planning policy document used to guide development and implement a vision for how an urban area should grow and evolve into a sustainable and resilient place of residence, employment, community, tourism, leisure and recreation, culture and education.

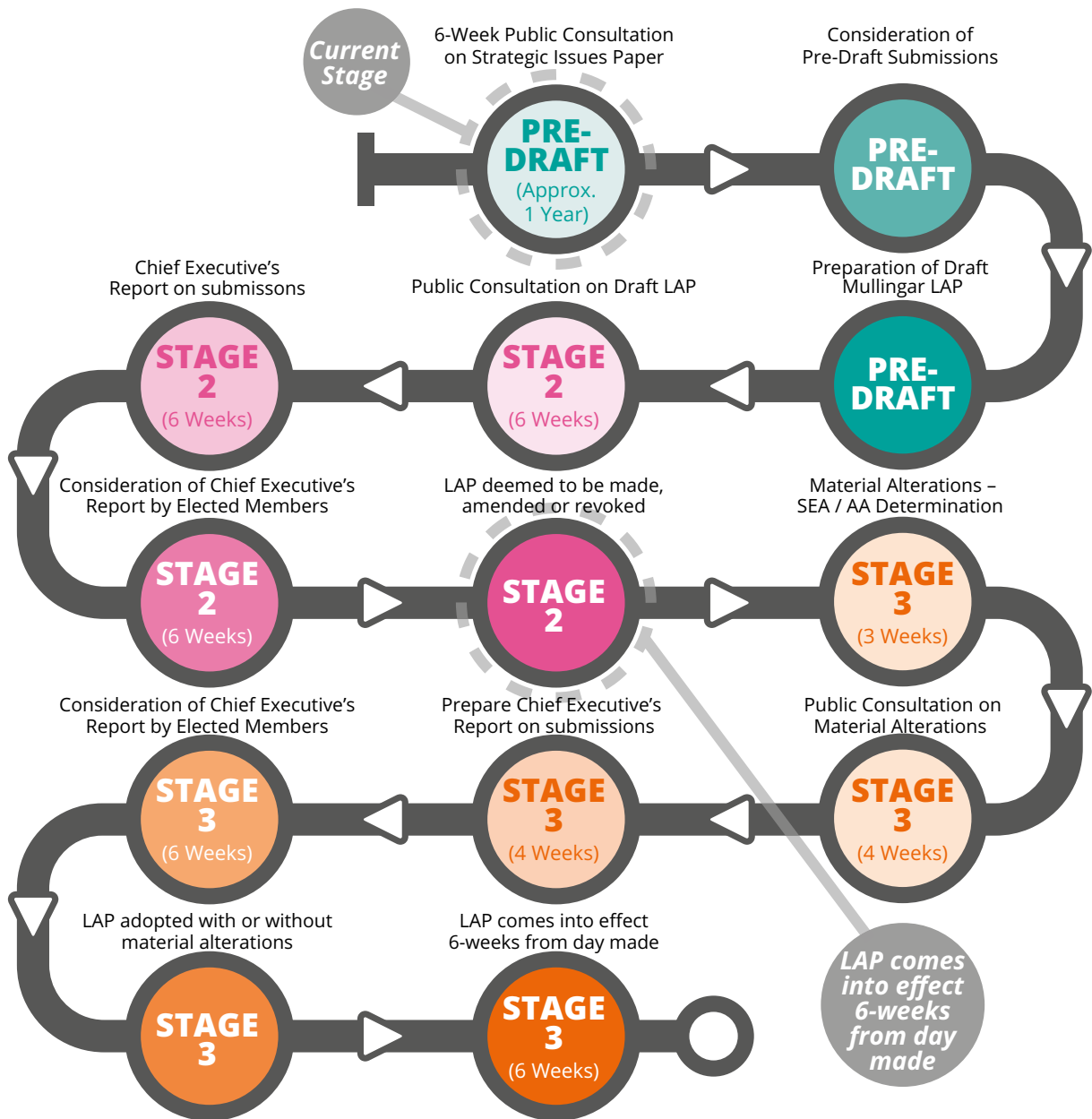
The Mullingar LAP will consist of a series of chapters that cover the broad aims of Westmeath County Council's cross-cutting themes drawn from national and regional planning frameworks and bespoke policy objectives and management measures regarding the future development of Mullingar. The plan will also set out an overarching land use framework which will form the basis for deciding the appropriate locations for different types of future development of the area. Whilst the plan will be strategic in outlook and focus on key economic, social and environmental issues affecting Mullingar, it will also include tailored and site specific objectives and actions to enable the town to fulfil its full development potential.

The Plan will be prepared in the context of the framework of national, regional and County strategies and guidelines and must be prepared in accordance with the provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).



# The plan making process

The preparation of the Mullingar LAP has now commenced and will incorporate three stages in the plan preparation process, as set out at table below, with public consultation undertaken and submissions welcomed at each stage.



## LOCAL AREA PLAN TIMEFRAME

This **Issues Paper** has been prepared to inform the **first stage of public consultation** in relation to the **Mullingar LAP**. It presents an overview of the main issues and challenges affecting Mullingar and sets out by theme, some of the key issues that may need to be addressed by the new Plan. It is envisaged that the Issues Papers will stimulate interest and debate which will provide helpful feedback, thus creating a more informed Plan. Please note that the focus at this stage is on strategic and/or high-level issues pertaining to Mullingar.

During this initial phase of public consultation on the plan, it is important that all stakeholders, including local residents, youth groups, children and those representing children, retailers, businesses as well as community and sporting groups, submit suggestions and ideas on how Mullingar should develop and evolve thus shaping the future of Mullingar Town.



# Join the **Conversation**



**A successful Local Area Plan is one that provides a robust forward-facing development framework, guides quality planning outcomes, and importantly, enjoys broad-based community support. In order to identify the issues most pertinent to those living, working and visiting Mullingar, we want to hear your ideas, opinions and suggestions on the future of Mullingar. Everyone is welcome to make a submission (including youth groups, children and those representing children).**

Please make your submission online at:

<https://consult.westmeathcoco.ie/en>

*or* in writing to:

**Pre-draft Consultation Mullingar Local Area Plan,  
Administrative Officer,  
Planning Department,  
Westmeath County Council,  
Áras An Chontae,  
Mount Street,  
Mullingar,  
N91 FH4N.**

- Submissions / observations may be made between 10 October 2023 until 23 November 2023. (both dates inclusive).
- Your name and address should be provided on a separate cover page as part of your submission / observation.
- All submissions will be posted on the Westmeath Consultation Portal within 10 days of receipt and will include the name of the individual(s) or organisation who made the submission. Any other identifying details will be removed in line with General Data Protection Regulations.



**Closing date for submissions: 23 November 2023**

# Strategic Policy Framework

The **Mullingar Local Area Plan 2024-2030** sits within, and will be informed by, a hierarchy of higher level planning guidance including the **National Planning Framework**, the **Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region** and the **Westmeath County Development Plan 2021 - 2027**.



## Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region (RSES)

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) set out the mechanisms for delivering the NPF objectives and growth / settlement strategy at the regional level. Mullingar is located within the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly Area (EMRA) and is designated as one of the region's '**Key Towns**', as defined below:

*Large **economically active** service and/or county towns that **provide employment** for their surrounding areas and with **high-quality transport links** and the capacity to act as **growth drivers** to complement the Regional Growth Centres*

This designation reflects Mullingar's strategic location and the essential role of the town as a crucial social and commercial centre for the surrounding hinterland. It is envisioned within the RSES that Mullingar will serve as a growth enabler for the region by virtue of its capacity to deliver commensurate population and employment growth whilst enabling investment in its public transportation

corridor, infrastructure and services to facilitate the achievement of compact growth. The key strategic issues facing Mullingar, as summarised below, mirror this need to continue advancing Mullingar as a Key Town and the importance of promoting the town's economic development and employment creation; built and natural heritage; arts, culture and outdoor recreational activities including walking, cycling, fishing, boating, eventing and sports; and tourist economy while also supporting the stakeholders, businesses and communities which drive this growth.

**The key strategic issues for Mullingar as identified in the RSES are as follows:**

- **Support** Mullingar's role as a tourism hub having regard to its accessibility to key tourist destinations in the Region including proximity to natural amenities and recreational opportunities including the Galway to Dublin Greenway.
- **Promote** the plan led development and regeneration of publicly owned land banks in the town for employment, education, community, cultural and recreational opportunities and to support the economic development and regeneration of the town centre.
- **Support** the development and expansion of the Midlands Regional Hospital including any necessary supporting infrastructure.
- **Support** Mullingar's role as an important employment hub by promoting economic development and clustering of related enterprises.
- **Support** the preparation of a Local Transport Plan for Mullingar.







## Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027

The Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027 (CDP) sets out the strategic policy objectives, population projections and housing targets for Mullingar which will underpin the LAP. The CDP supports the continued growth and sustainable development of Mullingar, to act as a growth driver in the region and to fulfil its role as a Key Town in accordance with the requirements of the RSES. In this regard, it is a policy objective of the CDP to prepare a Local Area Plan for Mullingar to align with the RSES and the CDP Core Strategy.

Furthermore, the LAP will be informed by an Area Based Transport Plan which shall place the integration of land use and transport planning at the centre of the plan preparation process. A key component of the Transport Plan will be to provide for, and encourage take-up of, sustainable travel modes thus reducing carbon emissions and contributing to a low carbon society.

Several other overarching objectives for Mullingar pertain to the promotion of economic development and clustering of related enterprises, the development of Mullingar's role as a tourism hub having regard to its accessibility to key tourist destinations and natural amenities and the regeneration of publicly owned land banks in Mullingar.

# Emerging Vision

Since the adoption of the Mullingar Local Area Plan 2014-2020, the policy and regulatory framework for land use planning and development has undergone significant changes in response to shifting population demographics, sustained economic growth, both locally and nationally, and our improved understanding and awareness of climate change. The National Planning Framework, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021 – 2027 have identified the strategic themes guiding the future development of Westmeath and the country and which should guide any future vision for Mullingar.

Mullingar's role as a Key Town in the Midlands Region, in addition to its recent designation as a Decarbonisation Zone, confers significant scope to position the town as a dynamic centre for new and expanding communities, business, enterprise and investment, climate action, tourism and heritage. Mullingar is also a place of innovation and opportunity, where place-making is an investment in our future wellbeing and projected population growth and economic development are catalysts for new means of active travel, sustainability and compact growth. A vision, informed by all those who live, experience and contribute to Mullingar, is required to set out a forward-facing approach to maximising our strengths, addressing constraints and identifying new cross-cutting opportunities for growth and improvement up to 2030 and beyond.

What is **your** vision for **Mullingar** in **2030** ?

What **measures** should be included in the **Mullingar Local Area Plan** to ensure this **vision** is **realised** ?

How can the **unique aspects** and **inherent strengths** of the town be enhanced to **improve** its **attractiveness** as a place to **live, work** and **visit** ?

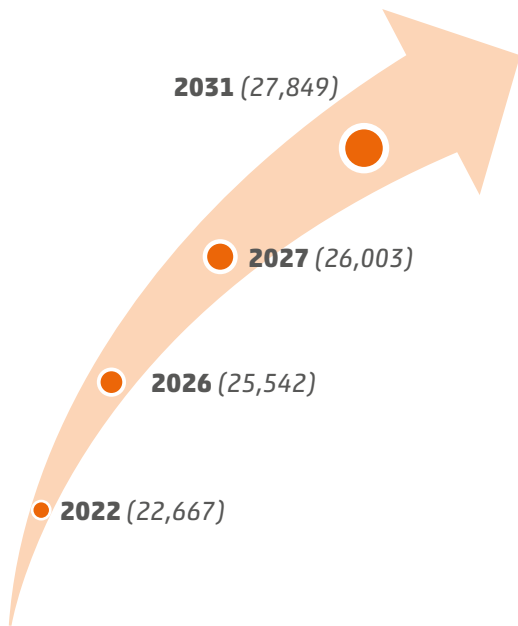
# Housing & Sustainable Communities

**Mullingar has experienced steady population growth since 2011. According to the 2022 census, there are 22,667 persons living in the town, which represents a 12.7% increase and a clear indication that Mullingar remains a sought after destination to those looking for new opportunities in the Midlands.**

Mullingar's on-going growth must remain sustainable and a key role of the LAP will be the identification of sufficient lands to accommodate the town's strategic population targets and associated housing demand. We also need to ensure that new houses and communities are delivered in tandem with vibrant urban environments and public realms, accessible social infrastructure, active travel corridors and permeability between the built and natural environments. This multi-faceted approach will assist in facilitating Compact Growth, Resilient Housing Stock and Sustainable Communities throughout Mullingar.



### Mullingar Population Forecast (CDP 2021-2031)



Compact growth seeks to consolidate the built environment in order to develop more integrated and connected settlements with improved integration between land uses, social / community infrastructure and services and sustainable modes of travel. The LAP will target Mullingar's existing brownfields and backlands, building heights / densities, transportation links and public realms when developing a framework for compact growth. For example, opportunity sites in the town core, e.g. Blackhall, St. Columb Barracks and Canal Avenue, have considerable residential capacity which can balance with other potential uses through creative place-making.

It is envisaged that future residential development will predominantly be located within the areas of Robinstown, Mullingar South, Ardmore / Marlinstown, and the western environs of the town. It is important to ensure that resilience is built into Mullingar's housing stock through an adequate range of housing types, sizes and tenures and the prioritisation of reuse, energy efficiency, lifetime adaptability, universal design, sustainable accessibility and integration.

In line with national trends, population growth and demographic change will result in increasingly diverse and vibrant communities contributing to the social fabric of Mullingar. As society changes, people's needs and preferences will also change. Accordingly, we need to consider how to best address the social and community requirements of the town's population to ensure everyone, irrespective of age, ethnicity, background or circumstance, has equal access to the services, facilities and amenities they need to prosper.





A Social Infrastructure Audit is currently underway with the aim to analyse the availability and capacity of existing social infrastructure and assist in determining future requirements within the town. Social infrastructure relates to the provision of services which are essential for health, wellbeing, social and community development. Typical facilities include education, childcare, healthcare, sports and recreational, meeting halls and community centres, churches and arts and culture.



Social Infrastructure - Mullingar Resources

Significant increases in the provision of education and childcare services and sports / recreation facilities will be required to accommodate Mullingar’s projected population growth as well as the delivery of additional healthcare and community services. The provision of, and availability of access to, a range of community services and social infrastructure are integral to societal well-being and health, to social inclusion and fostering sustainable communities.

Permeability is a key characteristic of successful communities, and in this respect, the built environment should develop in such a way that facilitates, and does not obstruct, the healthy functioning of community and cultural life. In this regard the RSES supports the “10 Minute Town” concept which seeks to have a range of social infrastructure and community facilities accessible within a 10-minute walk or cycle from homes or are accessible by public transport services within settlements such as Mullingar.



Social Infrastructure Benchmarks

Permeability through place-making and compact growth can also facilitate the provision of additional amenity areas, e.g. green spaces, for neighbourhoods and communities. The creation of healthy and inclusive communities, with a focus on sustainability and accessibility, will be a key driver in achieving a high quality of life for all residents of Mullingar.

The LAP will set out a policy framework guiding the alignment of new development, sustainable transport modes and social infrastructure in order to ensure an adequate level and distribution of community facilities and amenities in Mullingar to meet the current and future needs of local communities.

Mullingar Town Park



What **kind of housing / accommodation mix** is required to address all sectors of our community ?

What **types of new community facilities** should be provided in Mullingar and **where should these be located** ?

Are the **needs of different cultural, ethnic, youth, older people**, and persons with a **disability** being **accommodated** in Mullingar, and if not, what is needed and where ?

Are there **assets** within the town that could be **developed to support community development** ?

How can **health, well-being** and **quality of life** in Mullingar be **improved** for all communities and individuals ?

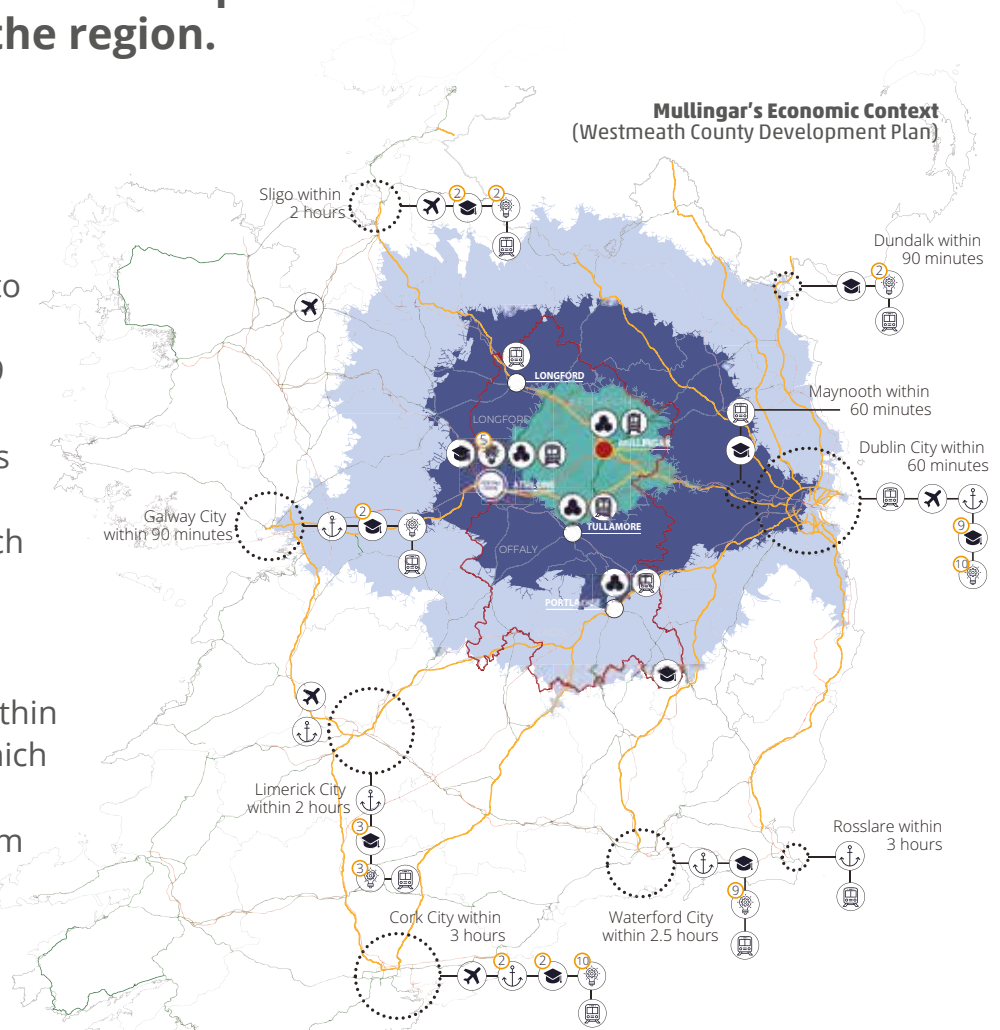
How can the **LAP assist** in promoting **social inclusion** ?

Are there sufficient **play areas, open spaces, public parks, sports, amenity and recreational facilities** in Mullingar ?

# Economic Development & Employment

Mullingar has traditionally served the surrounding hinterlands as a vibrant market town. Looking forward to 2030, it is envisioned that the town will continue to serve as a focal point for economic development, employment generation and service provision and will function as a 'Key Town' in the region.

Supporting a young, highly skilled and growing population, Mullingar has a strong ratio of jobs to resident workers of approximately 1.079 (2016), one of the highest overall ratios in the region. According to research conducted by [midlandsireland.ie](http://midlandsireland.ie), there are over 1,410 active businesses within 5km of Mullingar which employ over 5,050 people each day from the town and wider region.



WHO'S WITHIN REACH*	30 MIN	60 MIN	90 MIN	LEGEND
Population	80,083	1,122,018	2,587,114	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Roads</li> <li>Motorways</li> <li>Railroad</li> <li>Railway Station</li> <li>International Airport</li> <li>International Sea Port</li> <li>Research &amp; Innovation Centre</li> <li>IDA Business &amp; Tech Park</li> <li>3rd Level Institutions</li> <li>Mullingar</li> <li>Key Town</li> <li>Midlands Region</li> <li>60 min catchment</li> <li>90 min catchment</li> </ul>
Labour Force	37,600	554,100	1,284,398	
3rd Level Qualified	11,361	189,285	514,817	
Students	6,677	95,958	231,980	

\*Based on Census 2016 Electoral Division data and assessed travel-time catchments

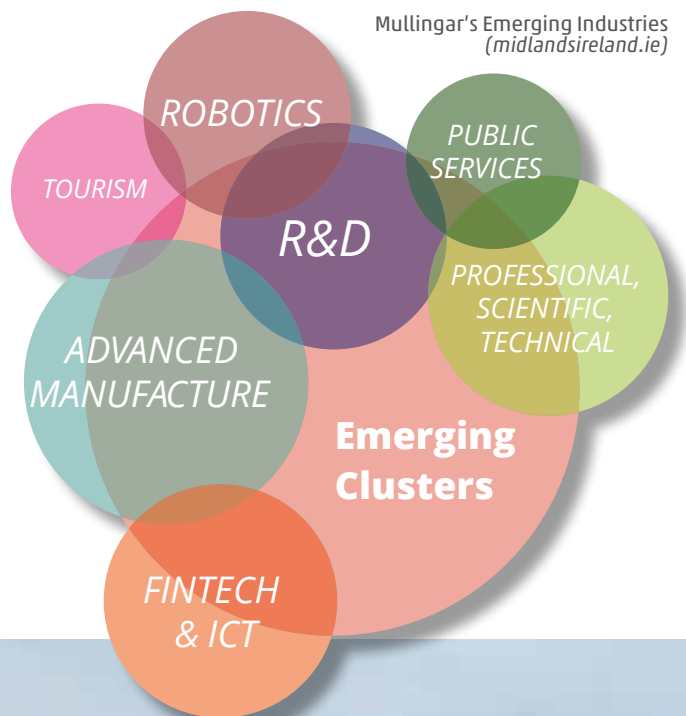
Source: [Midlandsireland.ie](http://Midlandsireland.ie) / Future Analytics Consulting



Mullingar's central location, regional transport connectivity and enabling infrastructure (i.e. fibre broadband) have contributed to the town's economic base and accessibility to other large Irish markets.

Mullingar's employment profile largely comprises professional services, manufacturing and commerce and trade sectors with construction and tourism representing the town's other key industries. Mullingar has also strategically positioned itself at the forefront of emerging knowledge economies with significant growth in sectoral specialisms such as Engineering, ICT, FinTech, Robotics, Advanced Manufacturing and R&D, together with new and emerging businesses such as the film industry.

Companies, both local and international, have located in Mullingar to avail of the available research and collaborative opportunities being developed by the IMR (Irish Manufacturing Research), Ireland's leading research centre for manufacturing. Coupled with Mullingar's proximity to Technical University of the Shannon and Maynooth University (c. 45min) and the current levels of education attainment in town, there



are significant opportunities for attracting inward investment, capitalising on emerging synergies and enabling new clustering opportunities for those seeking to capitalise upon the town's advanced specialisms and skilled workforce.

The Council recognises the importance of promoting inward investment and ensuring that the conditions for enterprise and innovation are embraced and developed. Strategic landholdings in the National Science Park, IDA Park and Forest Park Business Campus also offer opportunities to drive enterprise. The strategic and coherent development of identified lands will assist in retaining, consolidating and optimising existing services and employment uses.

It will also be important to ensure that Mullingar's retail centre remains resilient through expanded retail offerings, increased flexibility and adaptability to changing consumer patterns and diversity of employment opportunities.

As an employment hub and centre for commercial activity, it is important to ensure that Mullingar is an attractive and vibrant destination for those who live, visit, invest and work in the town. The LAP will guide economic development to ensure investment and growth opportunities are coupled with the provision of quality public realms, social infrastructure and amenities and welcoming communities to ensure quality of life is a fully realised component in Mullingar's overall commercial package.





What are Mullingar's **key economic strengths** and **competitive advantages** that this Plan should **promote** and **safeguard** ?

What **supports / services** are required to **sustain** and **grow employment** and **employment potential** ?

What types of **retail / commercial services** are required to **serve** the **population** and where should this development be **located** ?

Are there **economic opportunities** in Mullingar that this Plan can **assist** in **exploiting** ?

# Regeneration & Place-making

Urban design involves examining all of the elements that contribute to a place, consisting of buildings, uses, streets, footpaths, open spaces, and ensuring that these elements blend harmoniously to create an attractive and distinct environment. It is both a process, and an outcome, of creating high quality places that benefit people of all demographics.



Key Design Principles of Quality Placemaking

Good urban design underpins what has been more recently termed as place-making. Place-making reinforces a collaborative people-centred approach to the creation of places that people want to live, work, play and learn in. The successful delivery of such places in Mullingar will require the consideration of issues such as mixes of use, accessibility and connection, attractiveness and sociability and the public realm, including open space and landscape.

The future development of Mullingar should provide shared value as well as community pride. For example, early engagement with stakeholders, businesses and members of the community as part of the Mullingar Town Centre Health Check indicates a strong desire for public realm improvements such as increased outdoor seating, meeting spaces and better quality signage on shop fronts. In this respect, effective place-making should aim to strengthen the connection between people and space, merging the social and physical fabric of the town and helping to define character and identity.



This is a place that is easily accessible, visible and permeable with strong connectivity to the built environment by a variety of sustainable mobility modes.



The layout and composition of this place promotes a safe, clean and comfortable environment.



This is a place that is actively managed to support a range of activities.



This is a place that encourages frequent visitation, healthy interactions between users.



Elements of a Great Place

A key consideration for place-making in Mullingar is how we can improve the quality of the town's environment by promoting a high standard of design for all new developments. Principles of place-making should consider accessible, safe and sustainable built and natural environments, which reflects the special character and heritage of the townscape. High-quality public realm can facilitate a positive environment and provide for an improved quality of life for everyone.



Urban Regeneration is a multi-dimensional process which aims to promote economic development, as well as quality of life improvements, through the renewal of the built environment. Regeneration projects can reinvigorate and promote town centres and the public realm, attract residents and accompanying inward investment, encourage more diverse economies and facilitate initiatives to address dereliction and poor-quality environments.

Successful regeneration requires broad partnerships between stakeholders and a combination of private and public sector measures such as **Town Centre First** and **Croí Cónaithe (Towns) Fund**, the **Urban Regeneration and Development Fund**, **European Regional Development Fund** and the **Just Transition Fund**. To date, the Council has secured substantial funding to support the delivery of such projects as the Blackhall Urban Quarter, Canal Avenue and Environs Regeneration Project and urban realm improvement works encompassing Mount Street, Pearse Street and Oliver Plunkett Street. The LAP will look to further identify potential sites in town for focused regeneration, including the utilisation and rejuvenation of existing buildings, brownfield/infill and derelict sites.

Achieving a quality built environment and public realm is essential to supporting healthy communities, sustainable mobility, climate resilience, and overall, successful urban living. The Council has a key role through the planning process in shaping the built environment and in this regard, understanding needs and aspirations will be paramount to the success of the LAP.



How would you **define** an **attractive place** to **live, work** and **visit**? Does Mullingar meet those criteria, and if not, what is required to bridge this gap?

What are the **unique features** of Mullingar's **urban environment** that should inform future policy?

What **areas** of Mullingar should be **considered** for **urban regeneration opportunities**?

Are there specific **regeneration works / projects** that could be **transformative** for Mullingar?

Is there **infill, derelict / vacant / under-utilised sites / buildings** that can be **reused** and for what uses(s)?

Where do you see **potential** to **enhance** the **public realm** in the town?

# Cultural Heritage & Tourism

**Mullingar is part of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, with unique opportunities to get 'active in nature' and to get 'off the beaten track'. Mullingar is a key Hidden Heartlands destination, with its greenways, nearby lakes and the River Brosna.**

The Royal Canal Greenway is Ireland's longest greenway, almost encircling Mullingar town on its route from Maynooth to Longford. In the first year following its official opening, from March 2021 to March 2022, there were over half a million trips taken on the greenway. The route also seamlessly connects with the Old Rail Trail Greenway from Mullingar to the River Shannon in Athlone and will form part of the Ireland's first Coast to Coast greenway from Dublin to Galway in future years.

Historically a market town, Mullingar provides a unique expression of the richness and diversity of its past. Many of the buildings in the centre of Mullingar date from the eighteenth and nineteenth century set in a typical Irish town layout which contributes significantly to the town's distinctive and appealing character by virtue of their form, layout, scale and bulk. There are several Architectural Conservation Areas (ACA) within Mullingar together with a wide variety of historical and architectural buildings. Of note are the protected complexes of Columb Barracks and St. Lomans Hospital.







Mullingar's musical heritage has been identified as a unique selling point for the town and a distinctive quality that sets it apart from other destination towns in the region. The town is the birthplace of Fleadh Cheoil na hEireann, Ireland's annual celebration of our traditional music and culture. Mullingar hosted the much accoladed Fleadh 2022, the Homecoming, welcoming in the region of 500,000 visitors to the founding town. The highly successful Fleadh 2023 was again hosted in Mullingar in August 2023.

This concentration of visitor attraction can enable Mullingar to serve as a base for multi-day visits and allowing visitors to explore the range of surrounding attractions linked to the towns historical, archaeology, landscape, built heritage, literary, musical heritage, and its festivals.





**Belvedere**  
House, Gardens & Park

welcomed  
**130,000** visitors  
during **2022**



**Five hotels**  
in Mullingar  
providing **317**  
**bedrooms** with  
approximately **793**  
**bed spaces**



**Fleadh Cheoil**  
na hÉireann  
**2023**  
**Mullingar**  
"The Homecoming"

An estimated **600,000**  
**visitors** were attracted  
to Mullingar in **2023**  
during the **week-long**  
**event**



**Greenway Old Rail Trail**  
*Athlone to Mullingar*      Distance: **43km**



Royal Canal Greenway  
**WESTMEATH**  
Distance: **130km**  
Maynooth - Enfield - Mullingar -  
Longford - Cloondara



How can we **maximise** our **tourism infrastructure** and **assets** in order to increase visitor numbers ?

How can we **encourage** and **facilitate visitors** to stay in Mullingar and the surrounding area for longer ?

Are we making the **best use** of **historic buildings** in the town centre?  
How can we **enhance** our **heritage** ?

Are there **specific interventions** that are required, or **safeguards** that should be included to **protect** the **built environment** into the future ?

Are there any **additional built heritage buildings** that you considered should be afforded **conservation protection** ?

How can the **Local Area Plan** **incentivise** or **encourage cultural heritage led regeneration** of the town ?



# Transport & Mobility

Mullingar benefits from strong regional connectivity with respect to road, rail and greenway / blueway infrastructure. This infrastructure provides excellent accessibility to other key locations, international transportation hubs (e.g. airports) and public transportation services.



Served by **national and local bus routes** and is located on

the **Dublin-Sligo rail line** with up to **12 train services** per weekday



**Strategically located** on the **national road network** with **existing connectivity** to the **N4, N52** and **M6/M4**

Forms part of the emerging **270 kilometre Galway** to

**Dublin Cycleway (Old Rail Trail)**



Important **green / blue infrastructure networks** such as the **Royal Canal Blueway, National Famine Way** and the **River Brosna**



A key consideration of place-making is understanding how individuals move through the built environment, and secondly, how can we improve and optimise the public realm to facilitate efficient mobility across a full range of transport modes. Public realms, encompassing streets, laneways and open squares, have historically been designed to facilitate vehicle movement with limited consideration of the broader range of functions possible.

Innovative place-making and urban design principles are now challenging these standards with new emphasis on prioritising sustainable mobility, inclusivity and promotion of place in the public realm. The delivery of multi-functional public realms can benefit all residents by supporting liveable neighbourhoods and communities and promoting sustainable mobility with a wide range of positive economic, social and environmental outcomes.



Source: Transport & Environment (2019) Less (cars) is more: how to go from new to sustainable mobility.

Public Realms & Mobility (European Federation for Transport and Environment)

Sustainable mobility refers to low emission, energy-efficient, affordable modes of transport which can include walking, cycling, public transportation including rail and car shares. A shift towards sustainable transport modes has the potential to support the economic competitiveness of the town, reduce the cost of congestion (CO2 emissions) and improve the attractiveness of the town centre, enhancing mobility access and retail vitality.

The Mullingar Town Centre Health Check survey findings indicate that improved provision of traffic management measures, public transport services and sustainable mobility infrastructure is required to realise any future modal shift from private car. A Mullingar Area-Based Transport Assessment (ABTA) will also be prepared to guide and inform our transitions towards sustainable mobility in conjunction with delivering appropriate levels of development to support Mullingar's sustained growth as key town.

The LAP, in conjunction with the ABTA, will consider a co-ordinated approach to land use and transport planning, to improve people's travel choices and support the development of a sustainable, healthy and low carbon town.

Connectivity and the ease of movement between places of residence, employment and amenity can impact our quality of life as well as influence how we perceive the attractiveness and overall liveability of a place. To date, Westmeath has successfully secured Active Travel Investment Grants from the National Transport Authority with a total of €3.9m allocated to the county in 2023.

What are the **key transport, connectivity and movement issues** in Mullingar?

What are the **key areas** of Mullingar that would benefit from **new or improved footpaths, cycle ways, parking, roadways and links to public transport services**?

What **practical measures** could LAP incorporate to **positively encourage** increased active travel (e.g. **walking, cycling and public transport use**) and reduce car dependency?

How can we **create more** successful **public realms** that easily **facilitate** the **needs of vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians**?

Are there **particular locations** within Mullingar that are **difficult to navigate** on foot or by bike and how can we **improve the safety of pedestrians and cyclists** on these routes?

# Green Blue Infrastructure

**'Green - Blue Infrastructure', as defined by the European Commission, comprises 'strategically planned networks of natural and semi-natural areas with other environmental features designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem service'.**

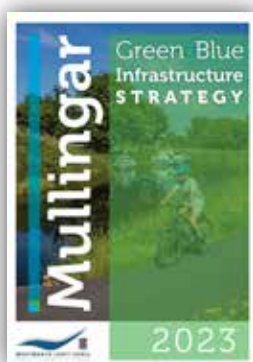
These networks include both 'green elements', such as trees, forests, fields and parks, open spaces, playing pitches, and recreational areas, and 'blue elements' like rivers, canals, ponds, wetlands and floodplains. Under the Ecosystem Services approach, it is recognised that Blue-Green Infrastructure not only enriches our lives but also supports a wide range of natural systems including but not limited to; provision of habitat, increased biodiversity, provision of ecological corridors and climate change adaptation and mitigation.



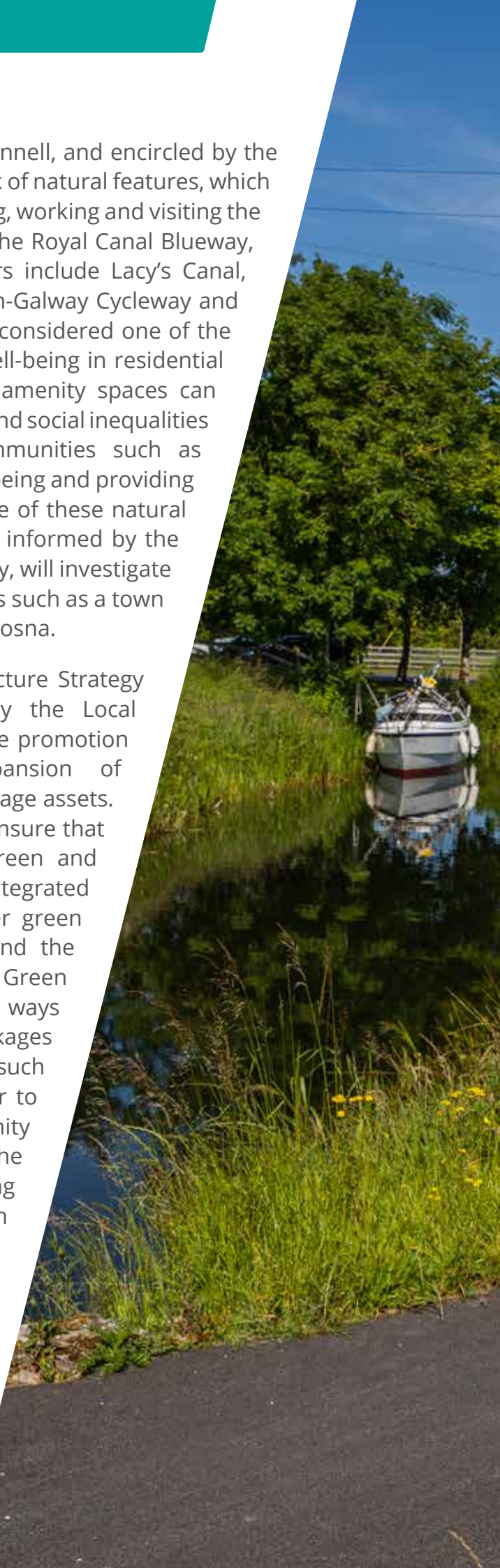
Benefits of Green - Blue Infrastructure



Located between Lough Owel and Lough Ennell, and encircled by the Royal Canal, Mullingar boasts a rich network of natural features, which represents a significant asset for those living, working and visiting the area. Together with Mullingar's lakes and the Royal Canal Blueway, other noteworthy wildlife habitat corridors include Lacy's Canal, the River Brosna, the Old Rail Trail / Dublin-Galway Cycleway and the Town Park. Green amenity spaces are considered one of the sustainability indicators for maintaining well-being in residential communities. Developing recreation and amenity spaces can address factors which contribute to health and social inequalities and can empower individuals and communities such as increasing physical activity, enhancing wellbeing and providing spaces for social interaction. Given the role of these natural features in our everyday lives, the LAP, as informed by the emerging Green Blue Infrastructure Strategy, will investigate opportunities for new green amenity spaces such as a town park and/or a linear park along the River Brosna.



A Green Blue Infrastructure Strategy will be undertaken by the Local Authority to support the promotion and sustainable expansion of Mullingar's natural heritage assets. It will be important to ensure that the development of green and blue Infrastructure is integrated with the County's wider green and blue networks thus extending beyond the extent of the Mullingar boundary. The Green Blue Infrastructure Strategy will look at ways to improve connectivity and provide linkages between the town and surrounding areas, such as Lough Owel and Lough Ennell, in order to maximise the potential of existing amenity spaces for the benefits of the residents of the town. Long-term investment in maintaining and improving access to high quality green and blue infrastructure will be central to creating an attractive, liveable Mullingar and positively influencing the well-being and health of current and future residents.







The protection and enhancement of natural heritage will need to be reflected within our land use planning policies to ensure appropriate balance with future development proposals.

How can the LAP **encourage the incorporation of green and blue infrastructure networks** into new development proposals ?

How should we **manage and enhance our green and blue infrastructural assets** ?

Are there any **barriers to accessing green and blue infrastructure networks** within Mullingar and if so how can we **improve accessibility** ?

Can you identify **potential green blue infrastructure links** within Mullingar and its environs ?

Are there **opportunities** to provide **new public green amenity spaces** in Mullingar ?

# Enabling Infrastructure

**The sustainable growth of Mullingar is dependent on the satisfactory availability of the necessary enabling infrastructure such as water and wastewater infrastructure, energy, IT and communication networks. The availability of such services plays a key role in securing economic investment and contributes towards safeguarding our health and environment. Whilst the Council is not directly responsible for providing such infrastructure, the plan will set out the context for the delivery of same.**

Mullingar is well served in terms of water and wastewater infrastructure. Uisce Éireann is responsible for public water services (potable water supply and wastewater effluent drainage), including the delivery, integration and implementation of strategic projects and infrastructural improvements. In 2022, Uisce Éireann upgraded critical infrastructure at the Portloman Water Treatment Plant to provide a safe and reliable water supply for existing homes and businesses in Mullingar. Another major local infrastructure project, as set out in the National Development Plan, is the provision of a new branch connection to Mullingar via a water supply pipeline from the River Shannon to Dublin.

Projected population and economic growth within Mullingar will give rise to increased energy demands. A safe, secure and reliable energy supply is therefore crucial to supporting Mullingar's future development. Due cognisance will be given to the Climate Action Plan 2023 and the need to transition towards decarbonised and decentralised energy sources, technologies and infrastructure. The LAP will support and encourage the delivery of low carbon and energy efficient development through appropriate land use zoning and consolidation, sustainable design, promotion of local and national refurbishment / retrofit incentives and the integration / provision of renewables where appropriate.

The availability of reliable Information and Communication Technology (ICT), such as high-speed broadband and telecommunications services, will be critical to attracting investment and sustaining businesses and enterprises. ICT infrastructure also benefits social / community development such as education, including associated knowledge-based economies (e.g. 'research and development' and sectoral clustering).

What are the **main infrastructural issues** that should be considered in the LAP ?

What **infrastructure** could be developed to **stimulate economic development** and the **sustainable growth** of the town ?

How can the plan **support the use** of **renewable energy sources** in Mullingar ?

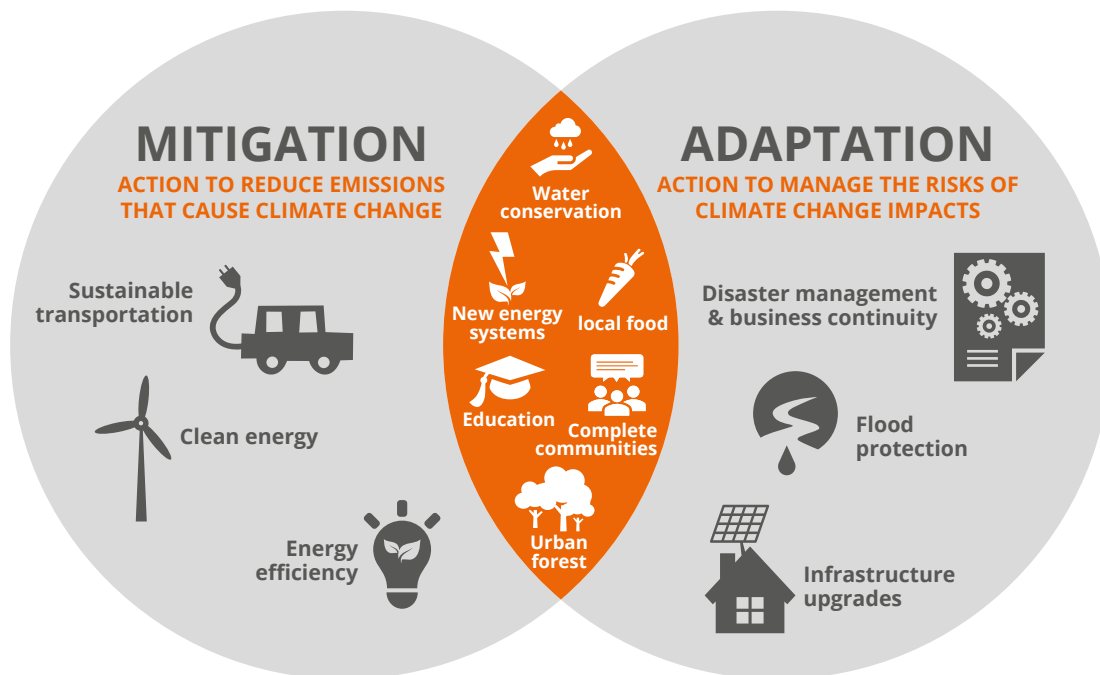
# Climate Action

**Climate change is recognised as a defining issue of our time and is now at the forefront of policy at an international, national and local level. Projections of future global and regional climate change indicate that continued emission of greenhouse gases (GHG) will cause further warming, and ultimately, will lead to increased risks to societies and the natural environment.**

The adverse consequences of climate change, such as the increased frequency and intensity of heatwaves, precipitation and storm events, have become progressively evident within Mullingar and the surrounding hinterland over the last several years. Therefore, there is an onus on all of us to assist in mitigating the magnitude of long-term climate change impacts by acting now.

Climate action is a central theme underpinning the Westmeath County Development Plans, which emphasises the key role that land use, transportation and spatial planning will play in ensuring an integrated approach to addressing climate change. The role of the Mullingar Local Area Plan is to translate high-level GHG targets and climate strategies into localised policies aimed at transitioning Mullingar towards a 'low carbon economy' and developing climate resilience. Climate resilience, the ability to prepare for, recover from, and adapt to the impacts of climate change, requires the effective implementation of both '**Mitigation**' and '**Adaptation**' measures, as illustrated in Figure overleaf.





Source: Calgary Climate Change Program

The development and implementation of climate action measures in Mullingar will be achieved through a range of mechanisms including Local Authority led initiatives and the national Community Climate Action Programme which seeks to support and empower communities and key stakeholders to build low carbon sustainable communities.

One of the key climate issues associated with urban areas relates to the relationship between settlement growth, traffic generation and the impact of traffic growth on GHG emissions. Drawing from the findings of the emerging Mullingar Area-Based Transport Assessment, the Council aims to address these linkages and support the reduction of existing levels of GHG emissions by improving sustainable mobility. On-going progress towards the decarbonisation of Mullingar’s transport sector includes advances in public transportation and active travel:

- Significant investment in the development of a 47km greenway from Mullingar to Athlone, which forms part of the broader Galway to Dublin Cycleway;
- Provision of greenway link from Mullingar to Lough Owel;
- Active travel projects including provision of walking/cycle route along Ardmore Road;
- Grants to the value of €1.6m awarded to Mullingar under the National Transport Authority (NTA) Active Travel grants for 2023.

Mullingar has also been designated as a Decarbonisation Zone. A Decarbonising Zone (DZ) is defined as a spatial area in which a range of climate mitigation, adaptation and biodiversity measures and action owners are identified to address local low carbon energy, greenhouse gas emissions and climate needs to contribute to national climate action targets. For example, 2164 LED public lights have been installed in Mullingar since 2017. The LAP will set out the policy framework for a place-based approach to Climate Action focused on the following areas of action:

- **Transport** - public transport / car dependency/Active travel
- **Buildings** - retrofit & energy efficiency upgrades
- **Green spaces and green infrastructure** - carbon sequestration
- **Complimentary infrastructure** - renewable energy generation
- **Land and Environmental value** - designations
- **Air Quality** - potential to enhance
- **Waste Management** - circular economy
- **Integrated policy** - further mainstreaming
- **Community activation** - involvement & empowerment

Policy objectives and development management standards relating to *compact and mixed-use development, urban renewal, sustainable mobility, Green & Blue Infrastructure, Flood Risk Management, Circular Economies and Renewable Energy* will assist in strengthening Mullingar's climate resilience. Systems for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of climate action policies will also be investigated to ensure Mullingar's long-term success in responding to climate change.

Mullingar is designated as a **Decarbonisation Zone (DZ)**

**2164 LED public lights** installed in Mullingar **since 2017**

**626 bike rentals** in Mullingar **May - October 2022**

The infographic consists of three overlapping orange callout boxes with white text. The top-left box contains the text 'Mullingar is designated as a Decarbonisation Zone (DZ)' and is accompanied by a photograph of green foliage. The bottom-center box contains the text '2164 LED public lights installed in Mullingar since 2017' and is accompanied by a photograph of several modern streetlights. The top-right box contains the text '626 bike rentals in Mullingar May - October 2022' and is accompanied by a photograph of a group of people standing around a bicycle.

How can the LAP best **address** the **challenges** of **climate change** ?

What issues should be considered to **support** the **transition** to a **low carbon economy** ?

How can we promote a **shift** from **car dependency** to active **travel forms of walking** and **cycling** ?

Are there **opportunities** to **introduce new carbon sinks** in the town ?

What **initiatives** should be considered to **advance Mullingar** as a **Decarbonising Zone** ?



# Environmental Assessments

**Environmental assessment of the Mullingar Local Area Plan 2024-2030 is a crucial element of the plan preparation process, assessing the potential environmental impacts of the implementation of policies and objectives. The assessments include a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA).**

## Strategic Environmental Assessment

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) assesses the likely significant environmental effects of the plan proposals and to help to ensure a high level of protection of the environment. The SEA process is aligned with the review of the proposed land use strategy prior to adoption. All proposed policies and objectives shall be assessed with regard to their potential environmental impacts.

## Appropriate Assessment

The Appropriate Assessment (AA) is required to protect flora and fauna sites within the Natura 2000 network. It is a requirement that an AA be carried out to ascertain if the plan or policies contained within same will have any impact, either individually or in combination on the protected Natura sites.

## Flood Risk Assessment

A strategic flood risk assessment is required for the purpose of integrating flood risk assessment and management and to assist in the determination of spatial planning policies, objectives and land use zoning for the Local Area Plan.