



Clara Town Plan 2012

Adopted as part of Variation
No.2 of the Offaly County
Development Plan 2009-2015

21st May 2012



The illustration on front cover by Rachel McKenna, Senior Executive Architect, shows how Main Street, Clara might look after some Public Realm alterations.

The Clara Town Plan was adopted as part of Variation No.2 of the Offaly County Development Plan 2009-2015 on the 21st of May 2012 and is effective from that date.

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Chapter 1 Introduction and Context

1.1 Introduction

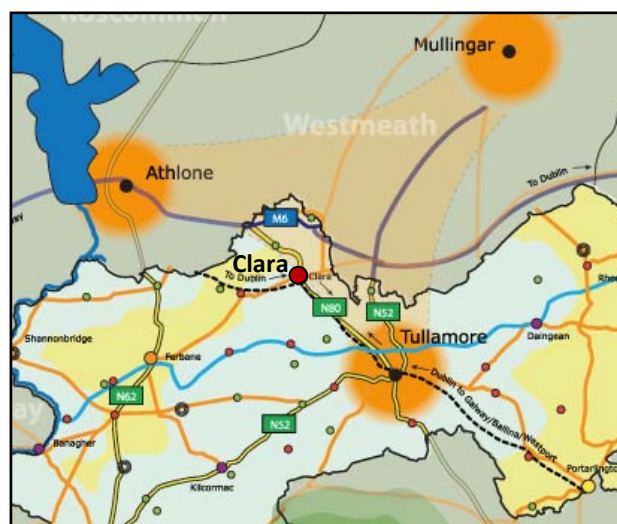
Clara is a town boasting an industrial past located 11 kilometres northwest of Tullamore in County Offaly. The town is situated on the River Brosna, which runs from east to west, south of the town centre and is a tributary of the River Shannon. The 460 hectare Clara Bog Nature Reserve, which is among the few large raised midland bogs remaining substantially intact, lies a short distance south of the town. Clara has good transport links to larger population centres. It is situated on the Dublin to Galway and Dublin to Ballina/Westport railway line and the Regional Road R420 (formerly the National Secondary Route N80) links the town to Tullamore to the southeast and the M6 Dublin/Galway motorway to the north. The results of the national census, carried out in April 2011, show that the population of Clara has grown by 8.6% in the inter-census period between 2006 and 2011 from 3,587 to 3,894 people.

1.1.1 Purpose of this plan

This plan is to be included in Volume Two of the Offaly County Development Plan 2009-

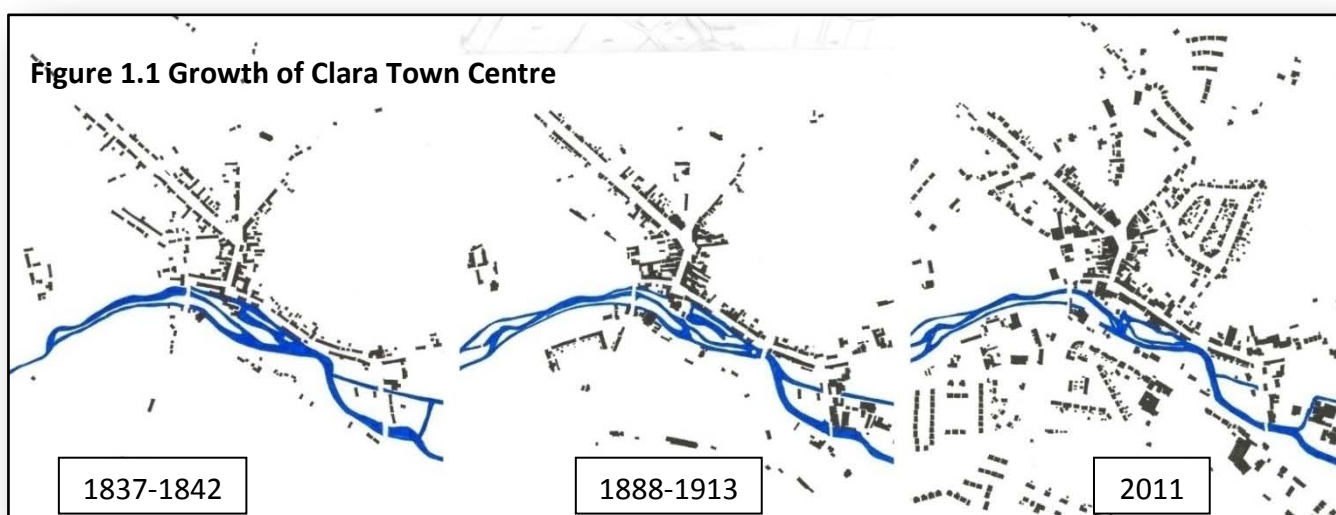
2015 as part of Variation Number 2 of this plan, following the first variation of the plan which incorporated the Core Strategy. The Clara Local Area Plan 2005-2011 expired on the 18th December 2011.

Map 1.1 Extract from Core Strategy showing Clara in the Context of the Midland Gateway



1.2 Historic Development and Settlement Pattern

Clara town lies on the plain of the River Brosna with eskers running to the northwest and to the south of the town centre. The commercial town centre itself is linear in form, developed in a compact fine grain along the R420 running from the southeast end at River Street, through Main Street and



onto Church Street where the commercial use gives way to residential and the street widens into a tree lined boulevard. The heart of the town centre is laid out in a formal arrangement with Main Street, St. Brigid's Church of Ireland, the Fair Green and St. Brigid's Roman Catholic Church all along a north south axis. The mature residential estate, "The Green" has access to both the Fair Green and River Street while other lanes such as Bridge Street, Oratory Row and Chapel Lane provide excellent permeability within and around the town centre.

From the mid-18th Century onwards the town's development was strongly influenced by the linen industry and the Goodbody family who were associated with various enterprises in the 19th century such as a gasworks and flourmills. Much of the associated industrial buildings are located along the River Brosna and while more recent industrial development has taken place on the outskirts of the town to the north and east of the town centre, there remains a legacy of industrial activity still occurring in these areas southwest of the town centre.

Much of the historic suburban residential development that remain was originally built as local authority development or dwellings built for the workers of the mills. More recent suburban residential development has taken place within the previous plan period (2005-2011), detached from the existing town centre to the south of the river and the railway line, to the north of the town centre and to the east in the Kilcoursey area. Kilcoursey is a low density suburban area detached from the town centre to the west on the Kilbeggan Road, the R436. This area saw a considerable amount of private residential development take place in the

previous plan period from 2005 to 2011. While the occupied dwellings and their immediate surroundings have been substantially completed in Kilcoursey, there is, at the time of writing, some outstanding issues relating to existing planning permissions and partially commenced construction sites in this area.

To the north and northeast of the town centre, on the difficult esker topography, very low density one-off residential development has occurred along local roads.

1.3 Population Demographics

The results from the national census carried out in April 2011 are available and Table 1.1 below shows that the population of Clara and its rural hinterland grew by 326 people or 8.6% to 3,894 people between 2006 and 2011. This is ahead of the national growth rate of 8.1% and the growth rate in Offaly of 8.4% in the same period.

Table 1.1 Population of Clara	
Population 2006 - persons	3,587
Population 2011 - persons	3,894
Population 2011 - males	1,949
Population 2011 - females	1,945
Actual change in population 2006-2011	307
Percentage change in population 2006-2011 (%)	8.6

(Source: CSO 2011 Results)

1.4 Previous Plan Period

The previous plan for Clara Town was the Clara Local Area Plan 2005-2011. Between 2005 and 2008 there was considerable pressure for residential development in Clara. From around 2007 the Clara wastewater treatment plant was approaching capacity and at the same time the level of new residential development in the town was causing concern as it was considered that the town could be competing with the linked

gateway towns of Athlone/Tullamore/Mullingar for residential development. From this point onwards, proposals for large-scale residential developments were not being permitted at planning application stage. Nevertheless the number of occupied units grew by 213 between April 2006 and January 2011. The level of residential development is considered excessive relative to its role as a support town within the linked gateway of Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar and in particular Tullamore. Due primarily to the overall downturn in the economy, in December 2011 there are two unfinished developments in the town and some instances of unoccupied houses – the Council is taking a pro-active approach to resolving issues with unfinished developments, seeking to work with developers, residents and central government.

1.5 Policy Context

1.5.1 Planning Policy Hierarchy

This Town Plan is to be included in Volume 2 of the Offaly County Development Plan. The purpose of this plan is to provide a vision for the future development of Clara Town, while doing this it will operate within the parameters and objectives outlined elsewhere in the County Development Plan and in the other plans in the hierarchy.

The National Spatial Strategy identifies Clara as a town with urban strengthening opportunity, while the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines identify Clara as a Service Town in the Central Development Area. Service towns perform important retail, residential, service and amenity functions for local rural hinterlands and support the upper tiers of the urban hierarchy including the Linked Gateway.

1.5.2 Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment

The processes of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA) were part of the process throughout the preparation of this plan. The Stage 1 SEA Screening Report and Stage 1 AA Screening Report and addendums were completed and are attached as appendices to the plan. These are outlined in more detail in Chapter 8.

Chapter 2 Vision and Development Strategy

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter gave a description of the settlement form of Clara Town. The purpose of this Chapter is to outline the overall vision for the development of Clara Town through this plan period and beyond and the strategy for how it is to be achieved.

2.2 Vision

To recognise the quality of life and strength of community spirit that exists within Clara and to ensure that new development, through the provision of employment, amenity and social facilities and quality of design, will contribute to, and enhance the positive aspects of living in the town while offering new opportunity for improvement and protecting the environment through the principles of sustainable development.

2.3 Strategic Aims

1. Maintain and Improve the Town Centre

This plan identifies the existing town centre area and recognises the importance of the town centre as an area of commerce and of social and cultural value, contributing daily to the quality of life and social interaction of the residents of the town. It is a key aim of this plan to protect, maintain and improve the vitality and vibrancy of the town centre.

2. Provide for Employment Development

The Council will seek to facilitate the provision of employment within the town of Clara where appropriate and this is a key aim of the plan. The plan recognises the

importance of consolidating the existing manufacturing sector while seeking also to ensure that the service sector can expand.

3. Facilitate the Community

There is an existing vibrant community and voluntary sector in Clara Town and this plan will seek to facilitate the provision of new and expansion of existing services and community infrastructure.

4. Provide for Appropriate Residential Development

This plan aims to ensure that the housing requirements of the people of Clara can be accommodated within the town over its lifetime. The first priority is to ensure that issues relating to incomplete developments are resolved satisfactorily and that the amenities of residents of these estates are improved. The Council will seek to support and advise developers in order to resolve such issues.

5. Be Consistent with the Policy Hierarchy

The Clara Town Plan is part of the Offaly County Development Plan 2009-2015 and is consistent with the Core Strategy published as part of Variation No.1 of that Plan. The Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022 identify Clara as a Service Town in the Central Development Area. It is a key aim of this plan that the town fulfils its role as a service town; providing important retail, residential, service and amenity functions for local rural hinterlands and supporting the upper tiers of the urban hierarchy particularly the Linked Gateway.

6. Protection of Resources – natural and man-made

This plan will aim to protect the existing natural and man-made assets within and close to the town. The Council recognises the

international significance of the raised bog habitat of Clara Bog lying south of the town.

2.4 Development Strategy

While this plan contains actionable objectives that require the input of Offaly County Council, in many ways the land-use planning system within which this plan exists is passive in nature; providing direction to privately funded development to create and improve efficient towns and neighbourhoods. The policies and objectives in this plan have been designed so that new development proposals will contribute towards achieving the strategic aims outlined above.

2.4.1 Zoning – Quantities and Nature

This Town Plan takes a new approach to land-use zoning in Clara, particularly with regard to residential zoned lands. The Clara Local Area Plan 2005-2011 expired in December 2011 and the Core Strategy, adopted as part of Variation No. 1 of the County Development Plan, places Clara in a hierarchy of settlements and includes an allocation for undeveloped residentially zoned lands for the town. The allocation contained within the core strategy is 31ha of undeveloped residential land – this is considerably less than the undeveloped land allowed for in the previous local area plan, however it will still allow for considerable population growth and it is anticipated that it will be more than sufficient to allow for the development expected over the plan period. As is required by the Core Strategy, the land-use objectives map that accompanies this written statement includes a reduced quantity of residentially zoned lands in order to ensure consistency with the population targets.

2.4.2 Town Centre

It is a key aim of this plan to maintain and improve the vitality and vibrancy of the town

centre. The strategy for achieving this aim must be multi-faceted in its approach and may be categorised under three main headings:

1. Public Realm

The key advantage that town centres have to live, shop and do business in, over out-of-town alternatives is the town centre's attractiveness to visit and spend time. There are many contributory factors to this and Clara town centre retains this sense of place better than many towns of similar size.

2. Retail

Clara is described as a Service Town in the MRPGs and as in the Secondary Tier in the Offaly County Retail Strategy, meaning that retail development should be commensurate with a moderate level of population growth and should be focussed on serving the needs of the town and its rural hinterland. The town centre is a priority and should be the focus of new retail development.

3. Renewal

New development will be an important aspect of improving the town centre and by the nature of the established town centre this will take the form of infill development, change of use and reuse of buildings and redevelopment of brownfield sites. The Council will encourage new development within the town centre and will insist that such proposals are designed sensitively to be incorporated into the existing streetscape.

2.4.3 Employment

The Council will seek to facilitate the provision of employment within the town of

Clara where appropriate and this is a strategic aim of the plan. Some of the historic mill related sites are a continuing source of employment and the Council recognises the value of this and will seek to ensure that such uses are continued in these areas. Newer providers of employment are operating in modern industrial units to the east and to the north of the town centre – the Council will seek to ensure that sufficient lands are zoned for employment purposes to allow for possible expansion of these industries on adjoining sites.

2.4.4 Population Growth

In accordance with the population targets outlined in the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022 and the Core Strategy adopted as part of Variation No. 1 to the Offaly County Development Plan 2009-2015, this plan provides for reasonable population growth in the town of Clara. The role of Clara as outlined in the MRPGs and in the Core Strategy is as a supporting one. This plan provides for areas of new residential development but prior to permission being granted in these areas, the Council must be satisfied that this will not adversely impact on the possibility of existing small number of unfinished developments being completed.

2.4.5 Location for New Development

The maintenance and improvement of the town centre is a strategic aim of this Town Plan and new developments should, where possible contribute to the life and vibrancy of the town centre. Consequently the Council will apply a sequential approach to the approval of new development on zoned lands – meaning that developments that occur close to the town centre – already serviced by footpaths and lighting will be favourably considered. In addition, infill development, within and around the town centre, will be

positively encouraged, subject to the relevant design and development management standards.

2.4.6 Residential Development

The Council recognise that significant residential development took place over the lifetime of the Clara Local Area Plan 2005-2011. The strategy now is to prioritise unfinished development and to allow for new development where it is commensurate with the size of the town and its role in the settlement hierarchy.

The Council will seek to ensure that the completion of the small number of existing unfinished developments is a priority during this plan period.

This Town Plan also provides for new residential development areas. The largest area identified is to the north west of the town centre and it is considered that this area will be developed over the long term in a sequential manner. This area has potential for residential development for a number of reasons but primarily due to its proximity to the existing town centre, within walking distance and with good road links to the town centre and adjoining areas. It is anticipated that this new residential neighbourhood will utilise and support the services that already exist within the town centre. The topography of this area will allow for its comprehensive redevelopment and the natural features including trees and hedgerows as well as existing stone walls may be successfully incorporated into the layout of any proposed development while creating and maintaining a distinct neighbourhood character. It is anticipated that development in this area will take place on an incremental basis to allow for moderate population growth rather than the comprehensive

development of a new neighbourhood, but also that each proposal must demonstrate that it will sit coherently and provide connectivity to adjoining future development.

2.4.7 Development Management

Development Management is the process that ensures that development occurs in an orderly and planned manner in accordance with the overall vision and strategic aims agreed through the adoption of the plan.

This plan is for the period to 2015 but it is not envisaged or intended that the entire lands zoned in this plan will be developed in this time. In order to avoid piecemeal development of land isolated from the remaining built up areas in the town the sequential approach will be applied to new development proposals in Clara. The sequential approach relates to development taking place from the centre out, avoiding 'leapfrogging' of more appropriate lands and consolidating existing developed areas. This is particularly important in assessing applications for residential development or community uses.

In addition to the sequential approach to development, the Planning Authority will have regard to the following, where relevant, in determining the suitability of applications relating to residential development:

1. Population and housing unit requirements for the plan period – each application will be assessed with regard to the population targets outlined in the Core Strategy and the future population that the proposed development will accommodate.
2. Land use zoning.
3. Progression of the following:
 - The completion of developments which are ongoing.
 - Unzoned lands with planning permission.
 - New residential development proposals.
4. Existing development on adjacent lands.
5. Current no. of unoccupied units within the plan boundary, where information is available.

2.4.8 Monitoring

Monitoring of key data such as planning application figures, wastewater treatment capacity, employment figures and population throughout the plan period is essential to the delivery of the strategic aims of this plan. The data will become available throughout the lifetime of the plan and will indicate the progress of the strategic aims. This monitoring will ensure that appropriate action may be taken where the practical implementation of the plan, or the plan itself, needs to be adjusted in order to meet the strategic aims.

There are two housing developments that are ongoing in Clara, as identified by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government survey undertaken in 2010 and updated in 2011. It is a key aim of Offaly County Council that these

developments are completed satisfactorily and monitoring of their progression shall be undertaken over this plan period.

The policy context in which this plan is placed will also be continually monitored to ensure that the plan is consistent with legislation, ministerial guidelines and other plans in the hierarchy. This plan is part of the Offaly County Development Plan 2009-2015 and is consistent with the overall Core Strategy contained therein.

outstanding issues and reach a satisfactory conclusion. The Council will have regard to future DoECLG/Government guidance in relation to the satisfactory completion of unfinished developments.

CTPP2-05

It is Council Policy to ensure that development within the lifetime of this plan takes place within the zoned and serviced area of the town and in an orderly fashion, so that economic use is made of resources.

Policies	
CTPP2-01	It is Council policy that the development of Clara over the lifetime of this plan shall be primarily focused on employment generation, the consolidation of the town centre, the completion of ongoing developments and the provision of community and social services
CTPP2-02	It is Council policy to implement the development strategy for Clara in order to be consistent with, and in accordance with, policies at a national level, regional level and at a county level.
CTPP2-03	Offaly County Council supports and encourages the appropriate growth of Clara over the plan period and will facilitate such growth where it can be demonstrated that such proposals are consistent with national, regional and local level policy and in line with the sequential approach.
CTPP2-04	It is Council policy to prioritise the completion of housing development where works are incomplete in Clara. In this regard, Offaly County Council will, where necessary, engage with developers, landowners and agencies involved to resolve

Objectives	
CTPO2-01	To monitor the growth in population and associated residential development in Clara during the plan period through the development management process and also using accurate and recent statistics as and when they are published.
CTPO2-02	To adequately address the completion of residential developments that are ongoing, where Offaly County Council have the capacity to do so, particularly on foot of DoECLG/Government guidance being issued.

Chapter 3 Town Centre, Retail and Renewal

3.1 Introduction

The Council recognises the importance of the role that the Clara Town Centre plays in the daily life of the people of the town and wider hinterland. This includes the provision of employment and services to the people of the town and those within its wider catchment. It is a strategic aim of this plan to maintain and improve the vitality and vibrancy of the town centre.

The Town Centre is shown in Map 3.1. This boundary was created with regard to both the existing land use and potential development sites that will play a role in the function and vibrancy of the commercial heart of the town.

3.2 Town Centre

Clara town centre is linear in form running along the main axes of River Street, Main Street and Church Street. The Town Centre Boundary is identified in Map 3.1 at the end of this Chapter. The buildings fronting the main business areas of the town are mainly two storey with some single storey shops. The centre of town is vibrant and active and the level of services available is commensurate with Clara's role as a Service Town, primarily including businesses that fulfil the needs of the population of the town and its immediate surroundings such as convenience retail, pharmacies, banks, licensed premises and some professional services. There is a significant residential use within and close to the town centre.

3.2.1 Public Realm

The Public Realm is an umbrella term used to describe areas where all members of the public have routine access to; it includes

streets, squares, parks and green spaces, public buildings and river banks. Elements that contribute to the success of each public realm include overall layout, shopfronts, architecture, passive surveillance, street furniture, planting, signage, paving, footpath maintenance, colour schemes, traffic management, cycling and pedestrian facilities. In historic town centres, such as in Clara, the quality elements of Public Realm have developed through investment over many years and ensure that the town centre is an attractive place to spend time and do business. It will be Council policy to continually improve the public realm, identifying elements that contribute positively and maintaining them while seeking to identify and resolve issues that detract from the quality of the public realm.

Figure 3.1 Impression of Main Street after Public Realm improvements



In order to maintain and improve the quality of the Public Realm in Clara, a collaborative approach between central government (funding), the local authority, local businesses and voluntary associations is required.

3.2.2 Access and Movement

Vehicular – The R420 acts as a distributor route through the centre of the town and the level of through traffic in the past has necessitated a significant amount of traffic management features such as lights, signage, pedestrian crossings, barriers and parking

bays. Bridge Street, the Green, Chapel Lane, Oratory Row provide permeability in and around the town centre.

Parking – Parking provision in Clara primarily consists of on-street parallel parking. While this can provide good access to some businesses it can also impede pedestrian and vehicular movement along the street.

Figure 3.2 Possible Revised Parking Layout

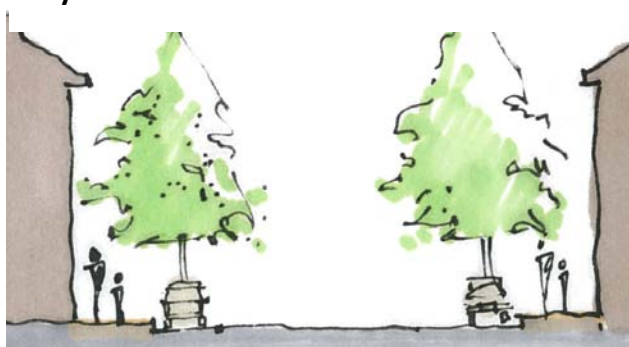


Figure 3.2 shows a possible revised layout for parallel parking on street. Pressure for parking in the town centre would be much alleviated by the provision of a surface car park, close to the town centre. Please refer to Chapter 5 for possible future locations of surface car parks.

3.2.3 Shop Fronts

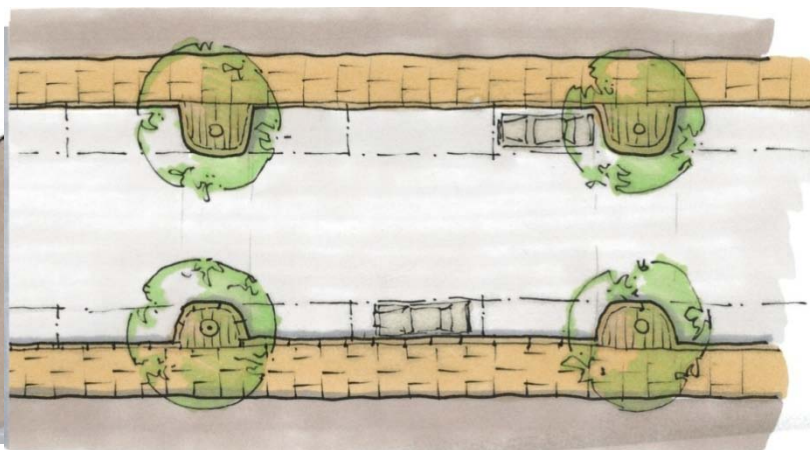
River Street, Main Street and Church Street contain a wide variety of shop fronts. Shop fronts provide colour and add variation to main streets, older shop fronts can contain clues of the history of commerce and the development of the town.

3.3 Retail

Clara is identified as being in the second tier in the retail hierarchy as outlined in the Offaly County Retail Strategy. It is important that new retail development in the town conforms to Clara's role in the retail hierarchy and its role as a Service Town as outlined in the Midland Regional Planning

Guidelines, so that it provides an appropriate level of comparison and convenient retail for its surrounding hinterland.

Retailing in Clara is primarily located within the town centre. Clara has avoided large out-of-town supermarket and discount retail developments and this is to the benefit of the town centre.



3.4 Renewal

3.4.1 Derelict Sites

The Derelict Sites Act 1990 requires that owners or occupiers of any land take all reasonable steps to ensure that the land and any structure within, does not become, or continue to be, a derelict site. There are a number of derelict sites within the town centre and it has been the policy of the planning authority to pursue these. The Council will apply levies where appropriate in order to satisfactorily resolve these issues. The Council will continue to monitor the levels of dereliction in the town centre and take action when necessary.

3.4.2 Backland and Infill Development

There are underused lands to the north and east of Main Street that may have the potential for rear vehicular accesses. These backlands may be suitable for development depending on all other relevant site specific considerations. There are possibilities for

landowners to work together in amalgamating sites to come forward as part of a larger comprehensive development proposal.

Offaly County Council supports the principle of the development of backland areas within the town centre where adequate access can be achieved and different landowners work together to secure the comprehensive redevelopment of these backland areas. The achievement of vehicular accesses to backland sites should not be to the detriment of the existing streetscape within the town.

3.5 Opportunity Sites

Map 3.1 identifies a number of sites that could play an important role in the future development of the town centre, with a number of possible uses for each site. Each proposal will be assessed on its own merits but some of these sites may be suitable for a surface car park – alleviating parking pressures in the central business area of the town, while others may be suitable for a more comprehensive redevelopment, subject to the relevant planning considerations.

- 1. Lands to the Rear of River Street/Main Street** These lands are in close proximity to the commercial heart of the town centre. It is likely that some buildings may need to be demolished in order to gain satisfactory access to these lands. Future vehicular access may be provided from the access road to The Green, to the southeast or from River Street to the southwest. There are potential pedestrian access points to Main Street to the west and these should be developed as part of any scheme. These lands could accommodate a comprehensive mixed-use scheme but also the provision of a surface car park

could enhance greatly the potential for streetscape improvements on Main Street and River Street.

- 2. Erry Mill** Erry Mill is the largest surviving Flour Mill in County Offaly and occupies a prominent site at the corner of the Ballycumber Road and Bridge Street. Also on the site of the mill is a landmark brick chimney associated with a steam engine which was used to generate electricity in the late 1800s. These structures on the site are included in the Offaly Record of Protected Structures and the redevelopment of the site should include the careful restoration and reuse of these buildings. The site has potential pedestrian links directly to the town centre across the river to the north which should be developed as part of any overall scheme. The site could be suitable for sensitive office or residential development, or a mix of such uses.
- 3. Site at Frederick Street** This site is opposite the existing school and has a direct connection to the town centre via the pedestrian bridge over the River Brosna to the south. It is envisaged that this site could potentially provide surface car parking which would provide an alternative to on-street parking in the town centre thus freeing up space for streetscape improvements.
- 4. Charlestown Mill and County Council Yard** These properties make up a large site in close proximity to the town centre. The Mill is a protected structure and is a prominent gateway feature sited beside Charlestown Bridge at the edge of the Town Centre. This site together with the adjoining yard and various buildings

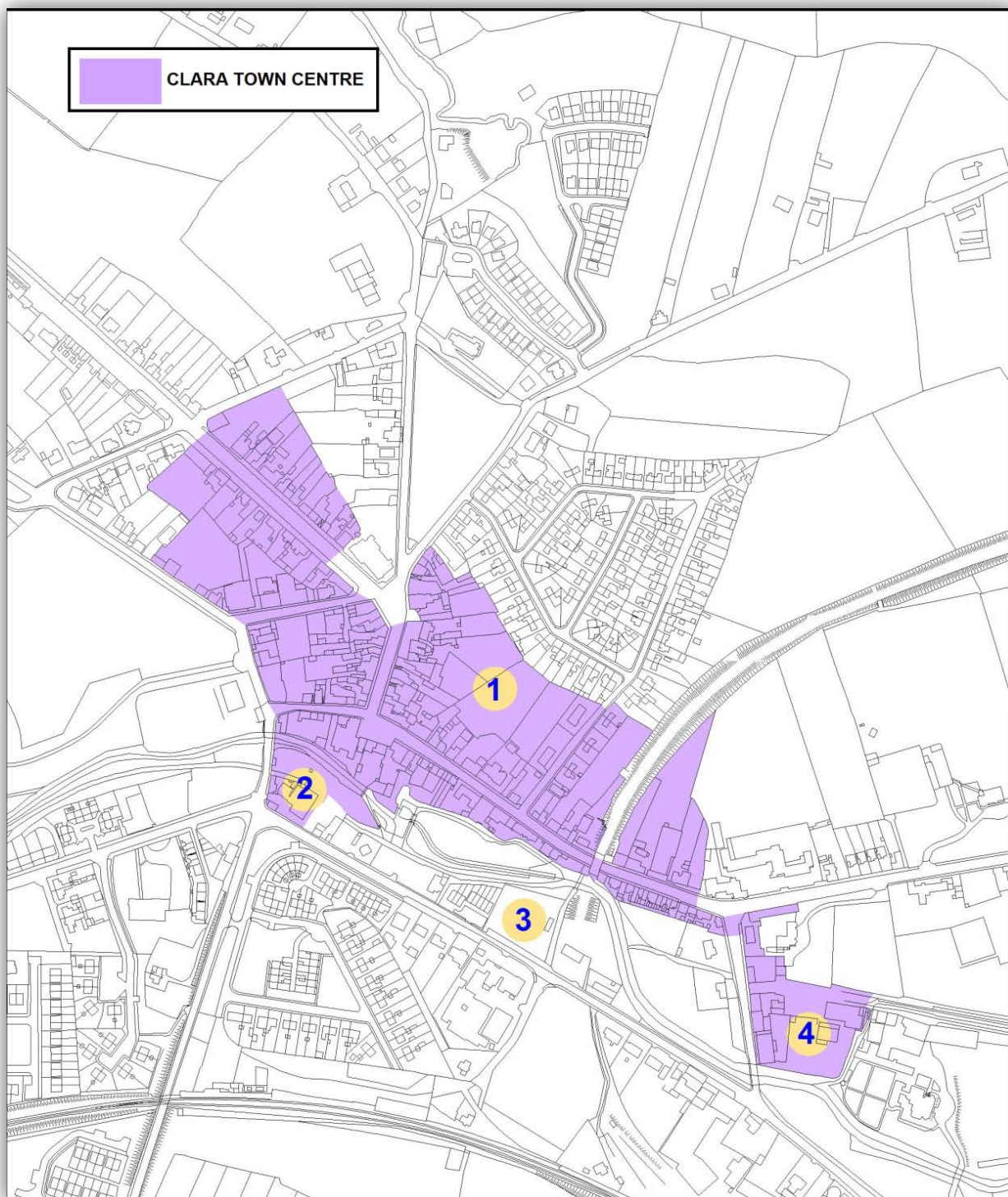
has potential for cultural or community related development, sensitively refurbishing and reusing the existing mill building.

Policies	
CTPP3-01	It is Council policy to encourage and enhance the role of Clara Town Centre as a retail and commercial centre serving the town and its wider hinterland.
CTPP3-02	It is Council policy to facilitate the comprehensive consolidation of the town's retail core and, where appropriate, expansion to the backland areas of Main Street, River Street and Church Street.
CTPP3-03	It is Council policy to encourage retail development in Clara, including new forms of shopping, which relates to the regeneration of the existing Town Centre. Proposals which would undermine the vitality and viability of the Town Centre will not be permitted.
CTPP3-04	It is Council policy to facilitate the development of brownfield sites within Clara Town Centre and the reuse of existing buildings to provide for a broader range of services.
CTPP3-05	It is Council Policy to continually improve the public realm, identifying elements that contribute positively and maintaining them while seeking to identify and resolve issues that detract from the quality of the public realm.
CTPP3-06	It is Council policy to monitor the levels of dereliction in Clara and take action when necessary in accordance with the Derelict Sites Act 1990.
CTPP3-07	It is Council policy to monitor the type of uses occurring within Clara town centre and to not permit the proliferation of any one use which, in the opinion of the Council, will

	detract from the vitality and vibrancy of the Town Centre.
CTPP3-08	It is Council policy to seek the maintenance and improvement of shopfronts within the town centre. Proposals for new shopfronts should be sensitively designed with regard to their location within the streetscape.
CTPP3-09	It is Council policy to facilitate the appropriate redevelopment of the opportunity sites identified in this Town Plan for uses that will ensure the satisfactory use of the subject site or, in the case of surface car parking, facilitate development elsewhere in the town.

Objectives	
CTPO3-01	To maintain and improve accessibility to and within the town centre and develop a comprehensive approach to the provision of car parking and pedestrian access with particular regard to the needs and access for people with disabilities.
CTPO3-02	To further improve the streetscape and public realm including reviewing and maintaining paving and street furniture in particular.
CTPO3-03	To work with service providers with a view to undergrounding overhead cables visible within the town centre.
CTPO3-04	To provide loading bays of adequate capacity where they are needed most in order to ensure that traffic flows are not restricted.
CTPO3-05	To explore the feasibility of providing a piece of civic art within the town centre.

Map 3.1 Clara Town Centre



Chapter 4 Employment

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 gave a description of the settlement form of Clara Town. The purpose of this Chapter is to outline the overall vision for employment and industrial development of Clara Town through this plan period and beyond and the strategy for how it is to be achieved.

The policy of Offaly County Council in relation to employment in Clara is based on catering for the needs of the projected workforce, by ensuring that sufficient serviced land is available when required and also that opportunities for service employment are available. Due to the fact that Clara is one of the larger settlements in the County, the number of jobs needed in the town will be greater than those required to cater for the Clara workforce alone.

4.2 Potential for Employment Growth

Clara has a number of significant employers successfully operating within the town.

These include Steri-Pack, Europharma, Synthetic Packaging Limited, Wilker Automation Conversions Ltd., Rosderra Irish Meat Group, Clara Fields Ltd., and The Flat Bread Company.

Clara has the potential to attract other such industries and potential employers and has 4 key strategic advantages in relation to this;

- Its location on the Dublin-Galway/ Westport Railway Line.
- Its close proximity to the M6 Motorway, Dublin- Galway route.
- Its relationship to the towns of Athlone and Mullingar and in particular

Tullamore which form the **Linked Gateway** for the Midlands Region.

- Availability of an educated workforce.

It is envisaged that there should be renewed emphasis on the creation of long-term sustainable employment in industry including production and manufacturing in particular the food and pharma-med industries in Clara. It is anticipated that a vibrant production and manufacturing sector coupled with service industry will have resultant benefits in employment creation.

Clara has a rich industrial past, which is worthy of acknowledgement; in particular a linen industry, a gasworks, flour milling enterprises and jute processing. The presence of the railway, the River Brosna, local raw materials and local entrepreneurship made Clara a busy industrial town from the mid 18th century to the mid 20th century. This past had a huge influence on the town in the form of employment and prosperity. While there has been a decline in manufacturing and industrial based employment since the mid 20th century, this industrial tradition and local entrepreneurship is a definite positive towards Clara's future.



Photo 1. SteriPack & Europharma, Kilbeggan Road, Clara.

4.3 Zoned Lands

This plan will facilitate the expansion of employment generating activities through

the provision of zoned and serviced lands of adequate size at strategic locations. These locations include lands to the north of the town at Raheen Industrial Estate and to the West on the Ballycumber Road and also on the Eastern approach on the Kilbeggan Road.

Existing industrial zoned areas will be consolidated to allow for organic growth and extension of the existing industries and possible spinoffs.

4.4 Employment Levels

Table 4.1 Principal Economic Status of Population aged 15 and over for Clara - 2006

Small Area Population Statistics (SAPS) - Census 2006			
Persons aged 15 years and over by Principal Economic Status (PES) - Clara			
PES	Male	Female	Total
At Work	719	520	1239
Looking for first regular job	9	3	12
Unemployed, having lost or given up previous job	73	49	122
Student	91	114	205
Looking after home/family	15	281	296
Retired	135	121	256
Unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability	75	85	160
Other	5	1	6
Total aged 15 years and over	1,122	1,174	2,262
Source CSO (www.cso.ie)			

Table 4.1 above gives a snap shot of employment levels for Clara in 2006.

Taking the figure for those **looking for first regular job** and those **unemployed, having**

lost or given up previous job; the unemployment rate in 2006 was 5.9%.

The downturn in the Irish economy since 2008 has had an impact on the town of Clara.

It is estimated that unemployment has risen in line with national trends (circa 14%), since 2006 and this will be reflected in the 2011 census figures, when available.

4.5 Incubator Units

Offaly County Council would like to facilitate individuals in the creation of employment opportunities for themselves and others; in this regard the Council supports the development of incubator units in the town, providing work space for start up businesses, in appropriately zoned locations in the town.

4.6 Tourism

Clara has underexploited tourism potential in so far as the town could benefit from interest in the natural heritage of the surrounding peatlands in particular Clara Bog, which is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and its associated interpretive centre, 'Clara Bog Visitors Centre'.

4.7 Energy

The availability of energy is a key consideration for the location of investment particularly for manufacturing and industrial type developments.

Clara is 12kms from the 110 kV Station in Tullamore. Clara itself has a 38 kV substation on the Kilbeggan Road.

There is also a Bord Gáis connection for domestic and business users in Clara.

Policies			
CTPP4-01	It is Council policy to ensure employment maintenance, generation and expansion is a key focus of the development of Clara.	CTPP4-08	It is Council policy to encourage and facilitate the development of the tourism sector centred on Clara Bog and Eskers, as a means of employment generation.
CTPP4-02	It is Council policy to ensure that sufficient serviced land is available for employment generation, which will cater for an increase in Clara's workforce.	CTPP4-09	It is Council policy to actively encourage the implementation of government measures, focused on the creation of increased job opportunities and re-training in the town.
CTPP4-03	It is Council policy to facilitate, where appropriate, the development of employment generating enterprises within the existing employment areas in the town.	CTPP4-10	It is Council policy to consider the development of the cowpark lands to the north of Clara town should a use, appropriate to this location come forward. Any proposal to develop these lands must demonstrate that this site is best located to serve its operational needs and that the proposed use cannot be accommodated satisfactorily elsewhere on zoned and serviced lands within the county.
CTPP4-04	It is Council policy to encourage the establishment and expansion of service industries and facilities within the town.		
CTPP4-05	It is Council policy to encourage and support local start up business in the area through flexibility in the reuse of existing vacant units.		
CTPP4-06	It is Council policy to facilitate the further development of the tourism potential of the town.		
CTPP4-07	It is Council policy to ensure that industrial or commercial development integrates as much as practicable with its surroundings, and in this regard, in relation to visually sensitive sites (such as lands at Raheen), the Council will require that proposals for such development must satisfy the Council that they will not detract from the visual amenities of the town, in particular in views to and from elevated positions.		

Objectives	
CTPO4-01	To facilitate the establishment of incubator units to provide work space for start up businesses.
CTPO4-02	To engage with and co-operate with employment agencies, such as the Offaly County Enterprise Board, the Offaly Local Development Company, Enterprise Ireland and the IDA, to foster an environment of job creation and attracting inward investment.
CTPO4-03	Co-operate with government agencies and the Offaly County Enterprise Board in examining potential sites for industry and in attracting firms to any land zoned as such. Such sites may include lands at Raheen, Lahinch or on the Ballycumber Road, which are regarded as being potentially prime locations for small business park development

Chapter 5 Transport and Accessibility

5.1 Context

Clara has the advantage of having very good transport links. It has good links to the major population centres; it is close to the M6 Dublin/Galway Motorway, is linked to Tullamore via the R420 and is on the main Dublin to Galway and Westport train line. In addition, the town is connected to nearby towns and villages and its wider rural hinterland via an extensive network of regional and local roads. Within the town there is good permeability with vehicular, and pedestrian friendly routes crossing the town linking different neighbourhoods, employment areas, community facilities and the town centre.

5.2 Strategy

This plan will seek to ensure that the standard of the existing transport links, both between other population centres and within the town are maintained and that new development will provide increased permeability where appropriate.

5.3 National Routes and Travel Times

The Regional Route R420 runs through the centre of the town in a southeast to northwest direction. Clara is 11.5km from Tullamore via the R420 and the town is only 7.5 kilometres via the R420 to the M6 Dublin to Galway motorway route. Typical travelling times by road from Clara to major population centres are set out in the table below.

Population Centre	Typical Travelling Time by Road from Clara
Tullamore	15 Minutes
Athlone	23 Minutes
Mullingar	40 Minutes
Galway	1 Hour and 15 Minutes
Dublin	1 Hour and 15 Minutes

Due to infrastructural improvements elsewhere, including the Tullamore Bypass and the upgrade of the M6 to motorway status, the old N80 National Secondary route, between Tullamore and the M6 has been reclassified meaning that ongoing maintenance will be the responsibility of Offaly County Council. This reclassification has not impacted on journey times between Clara and the aforementioned major population centres.

Due to the upgrades elsewhere in the national road network, the town has already experienced a drop in the level of through traffic using the reclassified R420.

5.4 Train Line and Station

Clara Train Station is located to the south of the town centre and was opened in 1859 with both Midland Great Western Railway and Great Southern and Western Railway operating through it. The station, on the main Dublin to Galway and Dublin to Westport/Ballina line, Clara once also had connections to Banagher to the southwest, which opened in 1884 and closed in 1963, and Streamstown to the northeast, opened in 1863 and closed in 1965. The remains of the Streamstown line are still very prominent in Clara with a single-arch masonry bridge, a protected structure, spanning over River Street in the heart of the town.

Today the train line provides a vital connection between Clara and larger population centres. There are regular

services directly between Clara and Dublin and there are also regular services to Galway, Westport and Ballina as well as other towns such as Tullamore, Athlone, Ballinasloe and Portarlinton.

5.5 Proposed Clara Relief Road

There are plans to construct a new relief road in Clara and permission, in accordance with Part VIII of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2011, has been granted for the construction of the road. This proposed relief road runs to the west of the town centre from the Moate Road (R420) to the Ballycumber Road (R436). The proposed relief road includes a bridge over the River Brosna. The purpose of this relief road will be to take through traffic away from the town centre. The delivery of this relief road is entirely dependent on the availability of resources in the future.

5.6 Regional and Local Routes

There is an extensive network of local and regional roads in and around Clara Town. The R436 leads west to Ballycumber and then on to Ferbane and east towards Kilbeggan. The R436 is a restricted regional route – refer to Table 13.2 of Volume 1 of the County Development Plan. Just outside of town, the R391 leads north to Horseleap.

The Local Primary Route LP2015 runs south of the town over the railway line, through Clara Bog and towards Rahan. Local Secondary routes traverse the esker to the north of the town and serve one-off housing development that has occurred over a 30 year period.

5.7 Public Bus Transport

Bus Eireann operates a bus service between Athlone and Waterford twice a day in each direction which also serves Clara. A private

operator also operates a service running four times a day connecting Clara to Athlone and Tullamore.

5.8 Routes within the Town

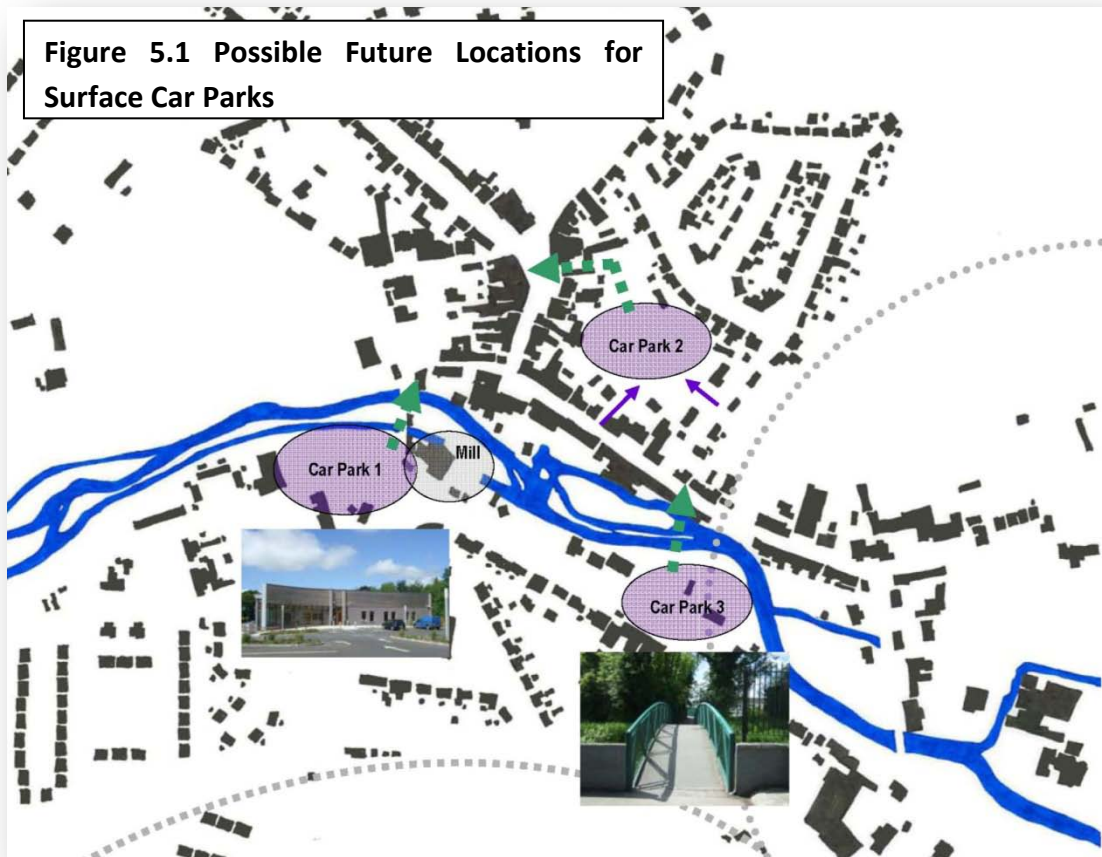
There is a dense network of roads and laneways providing permeability within and around the town centre itself. The R420 passes through the heart of the town centre and acts as an internal distributor road within the town.

The town centre is situated almost entirely north of the River Brosna. As such the number of possible routeways between the town centre and the area south of the river, which includes the train station, the public library, residential and employment areas, is limited by the fact that there are just two crossing points over the River Brosna. The two bridges over the River Brosna are Charlestown Bridge on the R420 and Clara Bridge leading from the Ballycumber Road to the town centre at Bridge Street. It is an objective of the County Development Plan (O13-45) to improve and upgrade Charlestown Bridge. In addition the Kilcoursey area is slightly separated from the town centre with the R436 the main route connecting this suburban residential area to the town centre.

5.9 Parking

The Council will monitor the parking arrangements in Clara on an on-going basis and make changes and improvement where considered necessary. The Council recognises that a new off-street surface car park would be of great benefit to the town centre as it would free up space on Main Street, River Street and in the Town Square for improvements to the public realm. Figure 5.1 below shows the possible future locations of such car parks.

Figure 5.1 Possible Future Locations for Surface Car Parks



Possible Location 1 Subject to using the existing entrance at the library or creating an acceptable alternative entrance, expanding the existing library carpark by providing car parking at this underutilised site could open up access to the river and would promote the use of the Library and Swimming Pool. There is pedestrian access available via Bridge Street to the Town Centre.

Possible Location 2 This location would provide pedestrian permeability to Main Street and River Street and would be most effective in alleviating pressure for parking on Main Street.

Possible Location 3 The existing Pedestrian Bridge across the River Brosna would provide access to River Street and the rest of the Town Centre.

5.10 Pedestrian and Cycle Routes

Pedestrian and cycle routes around the town mainly correspond to the vehicular routes, though there are some pedestrian routeways

running along and over the River Brosna, including a pedestrian Bridge and path linking River Street with Frederick Street.

There are currently no dedicated cycle lanes within the town and these may be incorporated into new development and on existing roads when the opportunity arises. Cycle routes to be considered may include along the R436, the Ballycumber Road, to the town centre and the R436, linking the Kilcoursey residential area and the primary schools and the town centre.

5.11 Approach Roads

The approach roads to Clara have avoided serious proliferation of signage that can have negative visual impacts on the approach roads to towns. However, the Council supports the ongoing maintenance and improvement of the roadsides on the approach to the town. Over the lifetime of this plan consideration may be given to the installation of gateway features on the approach roads to the town, this will remind

motorists that they are entering a built up area and will have a traffic calming effect.

5.12 Airport

It is an objective in Chapter 13 of the Offaly County Development Plan 2009-2015 (O13-48) to support the location of an airport in County Offaly and/or within the Midlands Region.

Policies	
CTPP5-01	It is Council policy to investigate and make provision where possible for alternative access and linkage routes through the town to alleviate pressure from the main thoroughfares. These will be encouraged to be provided through proposed development sites for delivery in tandem with overall site development.
CTPP5-02	It is Council policy to maintain the existing quality of the (R420) which provides a vital link to both the M4/M6 motorway to the north and Tullamore to the south.
CTPP5-03	It is Council policy to continue to liaise with Iarnród Éireann, Bus Éireann and other public transport operators to seek to ensure that the existing level of public transport provision is maintained or improved.
CTPP5-04	It is Council policy to ensure that new developments provide for increased permeability in their layouts where possible. Linkages to adjoining undeveloped lands should be provided where possible.

	road running to the west of the town centre from the Moate Road (R420) to the Ballycumber Road (R436).
CTPO5-03	To reserve lands within the town to provide for future access to undeveloped lands.
CTPO5-04	To improve and upgrade all approach roads to Clara providing 'gateway' features that may act as traffic calming measures and as a method of enhancing the entrances to the town.
CTPO5-05	To facilitate safe pedestrian movement and improved access for all by providing, improving and upgrading footpaths as required.
CTPO5-06	To improve and upgrade cycling facilities and in particular to investigate the feasibility of providing dedicated cycle lanes linking the Kilcoursey area and Ballycumber Road area to the town centre.
CTPO5-07	To improve public lighting where necessary.
CTPO5-08	To improve and upgrade junctions within the town, specifically at the locations shown on the land use zoning map.
CTPO5-09	To investigate the feasibility of providing a pedestrian bridge adjacent to Charlestown Bridge.

Objectives	
CTPO5-01	To investigate the feasibility of providing off-street car parking within easy reach of the town centre.
CTPO5-02	To reserve land for a future relief

Chapter 6 Services and Infrastructure

6.1 Introduction

The strategy in relation to services and infrastructure is to identify and inform the envisaged need for necessary services and infrastructure in the Clara area over the lifetime of the plan.

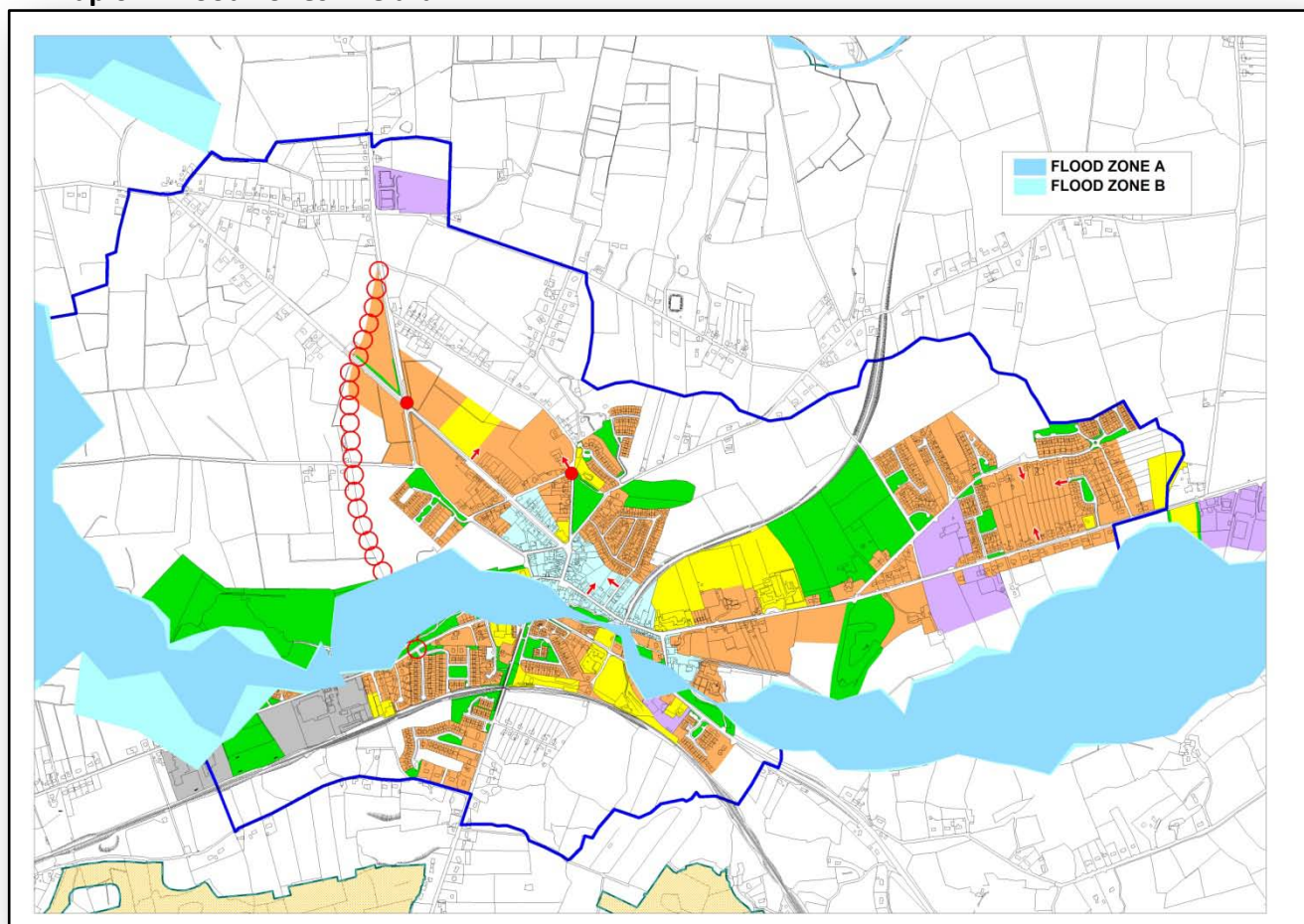
6.2 Water Supply

Clara's water supply is from the Clara and Ferbane Regional Water Supply, which was established in 1998 and serves a large area of mid and west Offaly. There is spare capacity available.

population equivalent (p.e.) and had been operating close to capacity during the previous plan period. As a result of exceptional demand relating to construction and development in the last decade, there was a corresponding demand on services. Therefore a number of proposed developments could not proceed owing to the need for an upgrade to the waste water treatment plant.

This issue is in the process of being resolved with a proposed upgrade that will increase the capacity of the wastewater treatment plant to 9,000 p.e. This upgrade is due to be complete within the third quarter of 2012.

Map 6.1: Flood Zones in Clara



6.3 Wastewater Treatment

The Clara wastewater treatment plant has a capacity to treat the waste of 4,500

The scheme is being jointly funded by Offaly County Council and DoECLG.

6.4 Flood Risk

The dynamics of flooding are ever changing depending on individual ground conditions, levels of rainfall, surface water attenuation etc. It is important to note that the Planning and Development Act of 2000 lists amongst suitable reasons for refusal of a planning application “the proposed development is in an area which is at risk of flooding”. Therefore flooding and flood risk are important issues in the zoning of land in Clara and particularly in the consideration of new developments in these areas.

Clara, located on the River Brosna is in the Shannon River Basin District. In May 2011, the Office of Public Works (OPW) issued the preliminary stage of the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management Studies (CFRAMS), which indicate *Flood Zones A* and *B* for the study area.

The flood risk zones for Clara are indicated on Map 6.1. Development proposals in these zones must adopt the ‘Sequential approach’ as outlined in the *Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities*, to ensure that new development is directed towards lands that are at least risk from flooding.

Clara has experienced flood events within the past number of years that have affected certain parts of the town to varying degrees.

It is widely anticipated that climate change (in particular rainfall patterns) may result in more frequent and severe flooding incidents in the future. The **Office of Public Works** (OPW) is the lead agency on flooding for Ireland.

Information received from **www.floodmaps.ie** and the CFRAM will continue to inform the plan making and

decision-making process on an on-going basis.

6.5 Surface Water - Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS)

To make certain the sustainable management of surface water and its proper discharge/disposal, all developments in Clara should make provision for the inclusion of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS), in accordance with best management practices of same.

Refer to Policy P07-16, included in Chapter 7 of Volume 1 of the Offaly County Development Plan 2009-2015 which relates to the inclusion and application of SuDS in development proposals. The planning authority will apply this policy, in relation to the integration of SuDS as part of new development proposals in Clara.

6.6 Energy

Enhanced development of secure and reliable electricity transmission infrastructure is recognised as being a key factor for supporting economic development and attracting investment to any area. At present there is more than adequate electricity infrastructure supplying Clara.

The Bord Gáis gas network extends to Clara town and there are gas supply connections available to domestic and business users.

6.7 Telecommunications including Broadband

The provision of improved broadband infrastructure is seen as important to the future of the town. This can consist of new fibre cables, wireless, DSL, satellite or other technologies.

There is access to broadband through normal broadband service providers in Clara. There are no immediate plans to extend the Metropolitan Area Network to Clara.

6.8 Waste and Recycling

6.8.1 Recycling

There is a “bring centre” for recyclables available for public use located in Clara.

Policies	
CTPP6-01	It is Council policy to upgrade water and wastewater infrastructure as deemed necessary to serve the needs of the population in Clara.
CTPP6-02	It is Council policy to have regard to ‘ <i>The Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities, November 2009</i> ’, and any future reports in relation to flood risk for Clara or County Offaly.
CTPP6-03	It is Council policy to ensure that applications for all development on lands identified as being at risk of flooding shall be accompanied by an appropriate flood risk assessment.
CTPP6-04	It is council policy to have regard to any mapping of flood patterns, in particular those carried out by the Office of Public Works, www.floodmaps.ie and also to the relevant CFRAM.
CTPP6-05	It is Council policy to support the infrastructural renewal and development of electricity networks in the area. The development of a

	secure and reliable electricity transmission infrastructure is recognised as a key factor for supporting economic development and attracting investment to the area.
CTPP6-06	It is Council policy to facilitate the provision of broadband telecommunications in Clara, in conjunction with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources and any other relevant bodies.

Objectives	
CTPO6-01	To upgrade the Sewage Treatment Works to cater for the treatment of wastewater in Clara.
CTPO6-02	To carry out improvements as outlined in the Water Services Investment Programme 2010-2012 and subsequent WSIPs as resources allow.
CTPO6-03	To improve leak detection and resolve leakage, where possible, in the water supply network.
CTPO6-04	To support the provision of civic amenity facilities for Clara, where necessary.

Chapter 7 Community, Education, Culture and Recreation

7.1 Strategy

Clara has a very vibrant and dynamic community with social and voluntary groups active in many aspects of life in the town. The community facilities that have been developed over time reflect this ongoing activity and include a new public library, the Clara Community and Family Resource Centre, Clara Swimming Pool and Clara GAA Pitch. A strategic aim of this plan is to facilitate the continued development of this community infrastructure and ensure it can adapt to meet the needs of the community as they evolve.

7.2 Education

7.2.1 Primary and Post Primary

There are two primary schools and one post-primary school within the town of Clara.

The two primary schools are located in Kilcoursey, on the Kilbeggan road.

The post-primary school is Ard Scoil Chiaráin Naofa run by the County Offaly VEC and is located south of the River Brosna on Frederick Street. The Department of Education and Skills enrolment figures show that the school has on average just over 210 pupils. A large extension was provided in recent years and there is capacity available for growth in student numbers.

In consultation with the Department of Education and Skills, it is considered that it is unlikely that a new school will be required to serve the population of Clara in the immediate future. However, in creating this plan Offaly County Council are cognisant that

that the existing post-primary school is on a relatively confined site and that future changes in primary school provision in the town could possibly require reorganisation and a new school site. It is not envisaged that it will be required within the lifetime of this town plan, however, it is considered prudent to ensure that a site is reserved for a future education campus in the town as part of this land-use plan. This is located central to the residentially zoned area that could be developed to the northeast of the town centre.

7.2.2 Childcare

Refer to Section 11.5, Volume 1 of Offaly County Development Plan, 2010-2015.

Childcare facilities in Clara range from private crèche and pre-school facilities, to a Montessori school, and also local home child minding services.

7.2.3 Access to Third Level Institutions

Clara has good links to Athlone Institute of Technology, which is just 25kms away and is accessible by bus and rail from Clara.

7.3 Community Facilities

7.3.1 Clara Community & Family Resource Centre

The Clara Community and Family Resource centre located on River Street provides services and facilities for the youth club, women's group, senior citizens and infant parent support groups. The Resource Centre also accommodates classes, counselling services and Citizens Information.

7.3.2 Library

The refurbished Clara Library was opened in September 2009. The library is open 5 days a week and provides a comprehensive service to users with a stock of over 10,000 items

including books and a wide range of audio visual materials; there are computer facilities and Wi-Fi availability. The Clara Bog Visitor Centre is also accommodated at this location.

7.3.3 Youth

Young people play a huge role in the town of Clara and youth needs are an important part of this plan. The Clara Youth Club is currently facilitated in the Clara Community and Family Resource Centre. There is also an active Boy Scouts and Girl Guides organisation in Clara.

7.3.4 Playground

There is a children's playground located at the residential area of Erry Mill. The Council acknowledges the work of the Clara Playground Committee, towards the provision of a second playground area for the town of Clara. The Council will assist local groups in the provision of a future playground by zoning lands appropriately, where necessary.

7.4 Open Space

Clara has formal open space centrally located at the Fairgreen adjacent to the square.

There is also an area of existing green space located adjacent to the Charlestown Bridge. There is huge scope for additional open space provision along the Brosna River which flows through the town as depicted in figure 7.1 below. Also the 'Goodbody Reservoir' is an undeveloped resource which has previously been identified as a potential recreational area for the town.

7.5 Recreational Walks

There are numerous recreational walks around Clara which are enjoyed by the people who live in and work in Clara as well as also attracting people from outside the area. These include the Erry Way, the Kilmucklin Way and the Aughamore Way, which are in close proximity to the town. Also, the Offaly Way, the Grand Canal Way and Slí Mhór are popular recreational walks which are located in the wider area. These existing walks are an important amenity and should be maintained and promoted.

There is potential for the development of both linear and linked recreational walks within the Clara Town Plan area. In particular,

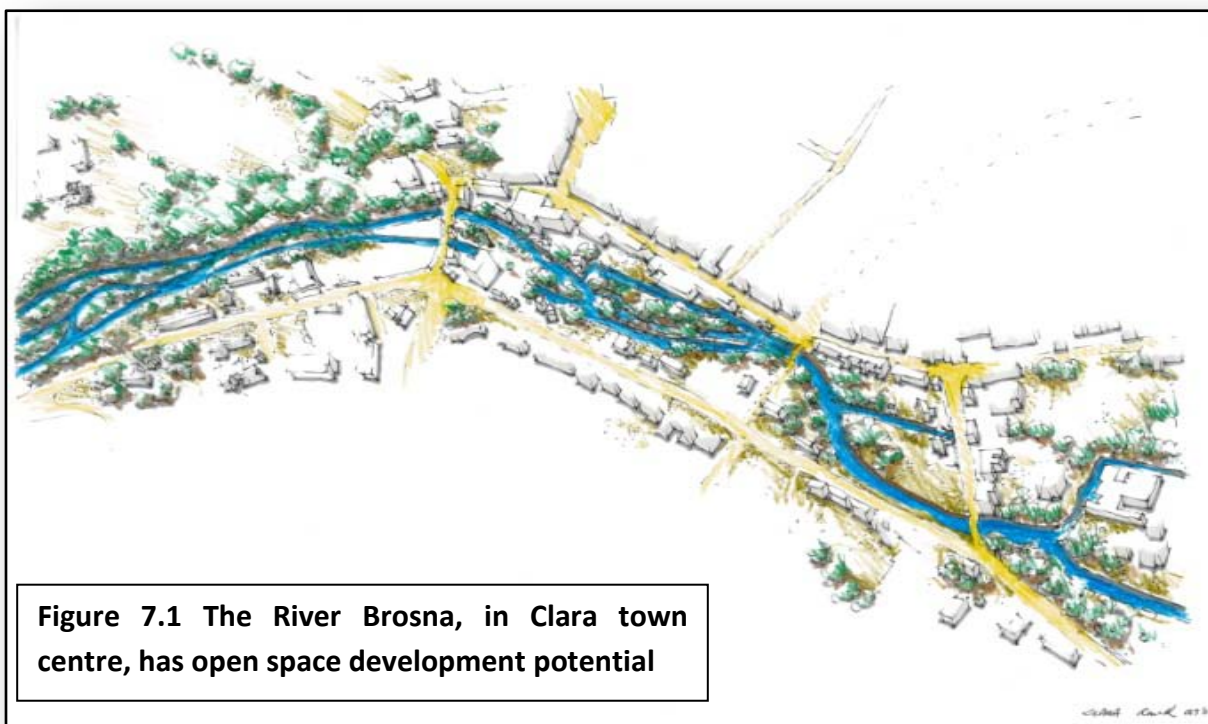


Figure 7.1 The River Brosna, in Clara town centre, has open space development potential

the banks of the River Brosna and the local eskers offer possibilities for future amenity and recreational development. Figure 7.2 outlines some potential themed walks in the areas around the town centre that could be developed should the opportunity arise.

facilities are located within the boundary of Clara Town in proximity to other services and are facilitated by footpaths, lighting and car parking.

Offaly County Council will seek to promote and encourage all ranges of sporting



7.6 Sport

There are a number of sporting clubs, activities and facilities located within Clara. The clubs and societies managing and promoting sporting activities in Clara have varied individual requirements for playing pitches, club houses, halls, ancillary structures as well as ancillary car parking. Many of the existing sporting activities and

activities in Clara that not only contribute to the town but to its wider hinterland also. Offaly County Council will encourage sporting clubs to expand or re-develop existing facilities and to maximise the usage of existing lands given over to the sporting activities associated with those clubs. Should a demonstrable need arise to re-locate clubs and their associated facilities, the Council would encourage their re-location to lands

within the town boundary of Clara, within walking distance of residential areas and along well lit roads with footpaths.

7.6.1 GAA

Clara has a strong GAA club with Gaelic Football and Hurling teams at both adult and underage levels. Currently there are GAA pitches on the Ballycumber Road, Pairc Bríde and in Kilcoursey. There is a GAA hall located in the town centre, which is used widely.

7.6.2 Soccer

Clara Town AFC (pitches and dressing rooms) is located outside the town boundary to the north east, in the townland of Lissanisky.

7.6.3 Swimming Pool

Clara Swimming Pool is a 25 metre, 4-lane heated indoor swimming pool which is open to the public and provides adult and children classes.

7.6.4 Erry Pitch & Putt

Erry Pitch and Putt course is located in close proximity to the town on the New Road.

7.7 Arts

While Clara does not have a purpose built Arts building, there is an active Arts community existing in the town. The Clara Parish Choir, Musical Society, Town Band and Drama Group are active in the town.

7.8 Healthcare

Clara provides varied healthcare facilities and services for people of the town and wider catchments.

There is an 80 bedroom nursing home facility at Killnabinnia outside the town boundary, off the (R420) Tullamore Route.

There is a Health Services Executive (HSE) health centre located in Clara which provides a number of services including Public Health Care nurses, community welfare services, chiropodist services, and older people services.

Policies	
CTPP7-01	It is Council policy to assist, encourage and facilitate the provision and extension of community facilities to serve the individual community needs of all individuals in Clara in liaison with community based groups, public bodies, government departments, state agencies and other interested parties.
CTPP7-02	It is Council policy to encourage the provision of necessary Public/Community/Educational services and facilities, within the boundary of Clara town.

Objectives	
CTPO7-01	To seek to support the provision of a new playground in the town. The playground should be in an accessible location close to residential areas.
CTPO7-02	To seek the provision of additional open space/amenity within the boundary of the town in order to improve recreational and amenity facilities in the town.
CTPO7-03	To promote and support the Arts in Clara and support the provision of a permanent civic art piece at a suitable location within the town.
CTPO7-04	To facilitate and support the provision of recreational walkways in the town.
CTPO7-05	To preserve and promote Fair Green as a recreational/amenity/open space area.

Chapter 8 Built and Natural Heritage

8.1 Introduction

Heritage is an integral consideration when planning all of our towns, as it has informed the unique development of each subject town. Clara is no different and its present built form reflects the rich narrative of its history, influenced by natural features including the Eiscir Riada, the River Brosna and Clara Bog as well as by human development and in particular its industrial past. By recognising and understanding the value and range of the town's heritage the Council we hope to optimally provide for the town's future growth.

The Offaly Heritage Plan 2012-2016 was launched in November 2011 and outlines objectives for Heritage throughout the county including Clara.

8.2 Architectural Heritage

8.2.1 Record of Protected Structures

There are 60 protected structures, as designated in the Offaly County Development Plan 2009-2015, within the Clara Town Plan boundary. There is a rich variety of buildings in Clara included on the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) including a number of large 19th Century homes, three bridges, four post boxes, a convent, two churches, industrial buildings including mills and associated structures and a terrace of 11 residential dwellings on River Street. Refer to the RPS which accompanies the County Development Plan for further details. In addition refer to Chapter 14 of Volume 1 of the Offaly County Development Plan 2009-2015.

Buildings are designated protected structures if they are of special architectural, historical,

archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest. Where a structure is protected by its inclusion within the Record of Protected Structures, planning permission is required for any alteration internally or externally, which affects its character.

8.2.2 Works to Protected Structures

Refer to Chapter 14 of Volume One of the County Development Plan for more information on works to, re-use of and change of use of protected structures.

8.2.3 Clara's Industrial Heritage

Clara has a rich industrial past and the historical buildings that remain are a legacy of this. Jute, grain and flour were among the valuable products of industry in the town from the late 18th to the early 20th Century. Many of the mill structures are protected structures and some are still in industrial use. The Mill Races along the River Brosna are also substantially intact and are an important part of this heritage. Offaly County Council commissioned a survey of Offaly Mills carried out on its behalf by industrial archaeologist Fred Hammond and published in 2009; the study is available in the heritage section of the Council's website: http://www.offaly.ie/eng/Services/Heritage/Architecture/Mills_of_Offaly/.

The study includes three industrial buildings within the plan boundary that it rates as being of 'regional importance' including Erry Mill and Clashaun Works, and it also includes Charlestown House as having industrial significance due to its association with the Goodbody family.

Offaly County Council encourages the maintenance of Clara's industrial heritage buildings and is positively disposed to proposals for the re-use and change of use of

protected structures provided that alterations are sensitively designed and appropriate conservation measures are put in place.

8.3 Natural Heritage

The conservation of the natural environment forms an important overall policy in the Offaly County Development Plan. The overall aim is to protect the natural environment through the promotion of sustainable development, achieved through development control measures.

8.3.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is the formal systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing the Clara Town Plan before a decision is made to adopt the plan as part of a Variation to the Offaly County Development Plan 2009-2015. The current procedures for this process are set out in the Planning and Development Acts 2000 to 2010, and the Planning and Development (SEA) Regulations, 2004.

The preparation of a full SEA is not mandatory for land-use plans for areas with a population less than 10,000 persons. The population living within the area affected by the Clara Town Plan is considerably less. This Clara Town Plan was prepared as a variation to the County Development Plan where the SEA process was mandatory and was completed at review stage. In accordance with the SEA Regulations, the planning authority must determine whether or not the implementation of the variation as part of this plan would be likely to have significant effects on the environment and therefore may require an SEA. In making this determination, the planning authority is

required to undertake the screening process to determine whether or not to carry out a strategic environmental assessment.

The Screening Report for Variation No. 2 of the Offaly County Development Plan 2009-2015 accompanies this plan and has assessed the strategic policies and objectives against 'environmental' objectives, using the criteria set out in Schedule 2A of the SEA Regulations, outlining the potential environmental impacts of the policies and objectives of the Variation, were they to be implemented. The Screening Report concluded that a full SEA was not necessary. The screening process also deals with any subsequent alterations to the town plan.

8.3.2 Appropriate Assessment

An Appropriate Assessment is an assessment carried out as a requirement under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC.

An appropriate assessment is based on best scientific knowledge, by personnel with ecological expertise, of the potential impacts of any plan or project on the conservation objectives of any Natura 2000 site. The potential impacts of policies outside Natura 2000 sites (but potentially impacting upon them) must also be included in the assessment.

This screening process has been carried out in accordance with the Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities, 2009. A separate screening report accompanies this variation as an appendix. The Screening Report concluded that a full AA was not necessary. The screening process also deals with any subsequent alterations to the town plan.

8.3.3 Clara Bog

Clara Bog is a Special Area of Conservation, site code: 000572 (refer to Chapter 15 of Volume One of this County Development Plan), lying south of the town, much of it is state owned and designated as a nature reserve.

“Clara Bog has long been regarded as one of the most important lowland raised bogs in the country, being the largest remaining example of the true Midland sub-type. It has well developed hummock and hollow complexes and one of the few remaining soak systems.” National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Site Synopsis

The history of the bog dates from around 10,000 years ago, after the last Ice Age, as retreating glaciers laid down a sand and gravel esker to the north which impeded the drainage of glacial meltwater from this low-lying area. A large shallow lake formed and over time was overgrown with plants and infilled with dead plant matter. Sphagnum mosses thrived in this low-nutrient environment and as they died they could not decompose in acidic, waterlogged, anaerobic conditions and instead accumulated as sphagnum peat. The bog supports a rich variety of plant and bird life.

Approximately one third of the bog has been lost to peat extraction and the construction of the Clara to Rahan road (LP2015) in the late 18th century caused the bog to subside by up to six metres. The bog as a habitat was under threat as recently as the 1980's when drains were dug in the eastern part in preparation for commercial peat extraction – these drains are now blocked. The bog has since been the focus of national and international study. Conservation and

management of the bog is now the responsibility of the NPWS. The NPWS also operate the Clara Bog Visitor Centre which was opened in 2010 and is co-located within the new library building in Clara. The Clara Bog Visitor Centre is staffed seasonally by education guides and offers visitors a fascinating insight into the bog.

8.3.4 River Brosna

The River Brosna flows south of the town centre. Its course through the town has been altered over time by the construction of mill races and a reservoir to the west of the town centre for industrial purposes. The river itself is not a designated site, but it is a tributary of the River Shannon, a Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area and Natural Heritage Area, which it meets at Shannon Harbour approximately 17km downstream of Clara. The natural flood plains of the river widen east and west of the town centre. The path of the River Brosna provides a corridor for biodiversity within the urban area and allows the people of Clara to experience and interact with natural heritage on existing pedestrian walkways along the river. There is potential for further expansion of a linear park along the river.

8.3.5 Eiscir Riada

The Eiscir Riada system runs in a west to east direction north and south of the town. Eskers are of geological, zoological, botanical and scientific value. An Offaly Esker Study was published in 2006 and provides detailed information about the eskers close to Clara Town. Many of the Eskers have been designated as Areas of High Amenity in Chapter 15 of the Offaly County Development Plan.

Policies	
CTPP8-01	It is Council policy to recognise and protect the ecological value of the River Brosna and to ensure that no form of inappropriate development occurs within the immediate riparian zone.
CTPP8-02	It is Council policy to recognise the importance of the industrial heritage of Clara and to positively encourage the appropriate redevelopment and reuse of the mill-related buildings, including protected structures that remain in the town.
CTPP8-03	It is Council policy to recognise Clara Bog to the south of the town as a habitat of international significance and to ensure that no development will adversely impact on the area designated as an SAC or the conservation objectives put in place by the NPWS.
CTTP8-04	It is Council policy to recognise the geological, zoological, botanical and scientific value of the Eiscir Riada esker system, running north and south of the plan area and to ensure that new development will not unduly impact on this landscape feature.

Objectives	
CTPO8-01	To improve and increase access along the banks of the River Brosna while seeking to develop a linear park.
CTPO8-02	To conserve, protect and enhance important landscape features, such as rivers, wetlands, stonewalls, hedgerows etc, which form wildlife corridors and link habitats and to promote and encourage biodiversity within all new developments in Clara.
CTPO8-03	To develop a strategy for tree-planting in public areas and along roadways within the town and on approach roads.

Chapter 9 Land Use and Zoning

9.1 Strategy

The purpose of land use zoning is to ensure that the right development takes place at the right time in the right location.

This written statement is accompanied by a zoning objectives map – this map is a visual representation of where the overall strategy, aims, policies and objectives can be achieved.

In designing this new zoning map for Clara town cognisance was given to how the future uses of development will relate to the existing town and how to ensure that the layout of new development will contribute to the quality of life of both existing and prospective residents of the town. The efficiency of locating different land uses in proximity to each other and to transport corridors was considered as was the impact of the location of land uses on the efficient movement of traffic within the town including the potential to provide new internal vehicular and pedestrian links.

The impact of development on the environment was another important consideration when designing the layout of the zoning plan. The zoning layout was designed so as to mitigate or avoid impacting on sensitive sites. As well as the consideration of the impact of development on the environment, consideration was also given to the topography of future development lands. The zoning layout avoids low lying lands at risk of flooding from the River Brosna and Esker areas where the topography makes construction and designing layouts problematic.

Finally the quantity of land to be zoned is an important consideration. This plan seeks to ensure that sufficient lands are designated for development over the lifetime of this plan and beyond. However, similar to most land-use plans throughout the country, there is a legacy of over-zoning from the previous plan and the overall quantity of lands zoned, though particularly residentially zoned lands, are reduced in this plan compared to the previous plan.

9.2 Sequential Approach

In conjunction with the consideration of the relevant zoning objective on any site, a sequential approach will be taken to the assessment of new development proposals in the town. Lands closer to the town centre should be developed before zoned lands on the periphery of the town and ‘leapfrogging’ of undeveloped lands should be avoided.

9.3 Zoning Objectives

The zoning objectives used in this Clara Town Plan are consistent with those used throughout the County Development Plan and this Chapter should be read in conjunction with the zoning objectives and the Land Use Zoning Matrix of the County Development Plan which indicates the acceptability or otherwise in principle of the specified land uses in each zone. The zoning objectives used in this plan are:

- Residential
- Town Centre
- Open Space
- Public/ Community/ Educational
- Business/ Employment
- Industrial

9.3.1 Residential

The zoning plan rationalises the amount of land for residential development when compared to the previous Clara Local Area Plan 2005-2011 and this is consistent with the approach adopted in the Core Strategy as part of Variation No. 1 of the Offaly County Development Plan 2009-2015.

This zoning plan outlines that the majority of the future residential development in Clara Town in the short to medium-term should take place in a new low to medium density neighbourhood area northwest of the town centre.

This area was chosen for residential development for a number of reasons:

- **Proximity to the town centre** – should this neighbourhood area be developed all parts of it will be within short walking distance of the town centre and all associated services.
- **Improved Connectivity** – There is an extensive network of existing roads within this area. New developments would require these roads to be upgraded where necessary and would also provide new linkages around and to the town centre.
- **Topography** – the area is level, avoiding both the steep esker topography and low lying lands close to the River Brosna.
- **Boundaries and Natural Features** – The area is dissected by the (R420) at a point where the road is wide and tree-lined. The fields within the area are bounded by stonewalls and there are mature trees and hedgerow boundaries throughout this area. These features should be incorporated into proposed layouts where possible and will be an asset to future development in this area.

The remaining residential development should be infill development, within the town centre or on other smaller zoned sites within built up areas.

All new residential development within Clara should have regard to the Chapter 19 of the Offaly County Development Plan relating to Development Standards and to the standards outlined in the planning guidelines Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas May 2009.

9.3.2 Town Centre

Uses in and around the town centre have been surveyed in order to establish a town centre boundary. Development within the town centre boundary will consist of the development of backland sites and brownfield sites and change of use applications for existing buildings. Ideally the lands zoned for this purpose will accommodate development of varied uses. The proliferation of any individual use within Clara town centre which in the opinion of the Planning Authority, does not contribute to the vitality and viability of the town centre will not be permitted. A diversity of uses for both day and evening will be encouraged and all developments should contribute to the vitality and vibrancy of the town centre. More information on the Town Centre can be found in Chapter 3 of this plan.

9.3.3 White Lands

Applications for single dwellings on white lands within the town boundary will be assessed in accordance with the Policy P04-16 of the County Development Plan.

9.4 Access and Linkages

The zoning objectives map also includes indicative arrows and circles showing the location of accesses and linkages, should the

lands in question be developed in the lifetime of the plan – these links will provide improved vehicular, cyclist and pedestrian access. These links are part of an overall approach to achieving increased permeability throughout the town. The arrows do not show the precise line of any roadway but demonstrate that a connection will be required, this approach allows for flexibility to be applied to proposed schemes. Developments within the town will be required to provide improved connectivity to adjoining developed and undeveloped lands where possible. Cul-de-sacs will be discouraged. Some of these links may be achieved through one development while others will be an incremental part of an overall objective, please also refer to Chapter 5 Transport and Accessibility.