

# 3 Economic Strategy

**Aim:** To provide for the future well being of the residents of Athy by facilitating and promoting economic development and the growth of employment opportunities in all sectors in accordance with the principles of sustainable development; to achieve a reduction in the levels of commuting from the town by ensuring that lands are appropriately zoned and a framework is in place to attract greater employment opportunities and manufacturing industries by fostering competitiveness and innovation within a high quality physical environment; to provide a greater focus on community building and the quality of life of the residents of Athy.

## 3.1 Economic Policy Context

### 3.1.1 National Context

Improving Ireland's economy is a recognised priority at national level and this has been reflected in *"Building Ireland's Smart Economy: A Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal"* (2008). This framework plan sets out Government policy on the restructuring of the economy with the primary objective of returning Ireland to sustainable growth in the medium term. The framework focuses on building a smart economy with thriving enterprises, high quality business environment, secure energy supplies, an attractive environment and first class infrastructure.

### 3.1.2. Regional Context

At a regional level the Greater Dublin Area is seen as the power house of the national economy accommodating over 40% of the population of Ireland and generating just under half of Ireland's Gross Value Added. The Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area (2010-2022) set out a strategy for the continuing economic development of the region. The RPG strategy identifies key areas of enterprise

development potential in the GDA and focuses on enhancing strategically important aspects of the business environment so as to create the conditions for attracting investment by both foreign and indigenous companies, stimulating entrepreneurship and enabling companies to grow and target international markets. The RPGs state that targeted investment in physical, green and social infrastructure provides the most efficient and effective long term use of resources.

Athy is identified in the RPGs as a "Moderate Sustainable Growth Town". It is located in the Hinterland Area and provides a wide range of local services to meet local needs at district level and for the surrounding rural areas as stated in the RPGs. Moderate Sustainable Growth Towns should continue to fulfill a strong role as a commuter location within the fabric of continued consolidation of the metropolitan area. Growth in Athy needs to ensure that expansion is based on and related to the capacity of public transport connections and capacity of social infrastructure. Emphasis should be placed on encouraging good local connections to adjoining towns and employment locations within the metropolitan area through bus corridors and good cycling and walking connections within the town itself.

The town should develop in a self sufficient manner in the longer term and that continued basis for growth is that it does not remain a dormitory town. The local labour market should be capitalised on to attract a range of enterprises and employment opportunities

### 3.1.3 Local Context

The promotion and development of sustainable economic development is a priority of this town plan. It seeks to build upon the current economic strategy for the county "Competing in a Globalised World –An Economic Development

Strategy for Kildare” and the economic strategy of the Athy Town Development Plan 2006-2012.

The future economic development of Athy is linked to that of the county and the key message from the aforementioned economic strategy is that Kildare has to compete internationally in order to attract and retain investment and skills. It recognises the need to develop and attract more strategic activities in the manufacturing sectors and re-orientate the county towards high value added traded services. At a strategic level it advocates the importance of identifying locations that have the highest potential for the attraction of high-tech, high value added and R&D activities and that these sites be identified specifically for those developments. It also recognises the need to cater for a wide range of business, residential and infrastructure developments throughout the county.

The importance of attracting investment into the town is recognised and the Council aims to facilitate economic development and employment generating opportunities throughout Athy by:

- Appropriate zoning of lands at strategic locations;
- Facilitating the provision of necessary infrastructure;
- Continuing to develop a partnership approach and a coordinating role with other agencies in pursuing investment opportunities for Athy.

The Council will continue to promote economic development and will engage with the County Development Board, the Kildare Enterprise Board, the IDA and Forfás and stakeholders and interest groups to deliver sustainable economic development.

### 3.2 Economic Profile of Athy

According to the 2006 Census, 4,014 workers lived in Athy. 2,176 people were employed within the town and 3,445<sup>1</sup> residents of the town were available for employment<sup>1</sup>. Manufacturing, education, health, social work and commerce accounted for the majority of the jobs within the town in 2006, with agriculture also featuring as a source of fulltime and part time employment in the hinterland area of the town.

**Table 3.1** Principal Economic Status (Persons aged 15+)

Population Category	No. of Persons
Total population of Athy	7,943
Labour Force	4,014
Persons aged 15 and over	6,051
Number in employment	3,345
Students	463
Retired	647
Looking after home/family	717
Unable to work due to disability /sickness	307

**Source:** CSO Census 2006

<sup>1</sup> Persons who are employed, unemployed and first time job seekers.

**Table 3.2** Employment in Athy by Industry

Industry Category	No. of Jobs
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing	17
Commerce	602
Construction	103
Education, Health, Social Work	625
Manufacturing Industries	444
Public Administration & Defence	81
Transport, Storage & Communications	52
Other	252
<b>Total No. of Jobs</b>	<b>2,176</b>

*Source: CSO Census 2006*

### 3.2.1 Unemployment rates

Within the County as a whole, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of people “signing on” since the end of February 2007.

Employment levels within the town are lower than for other large towns in the county, with a Job Ratio<sup>2</sup> of 54.2%<sup>3</sup> in Athy, in comparison to 62% for the County. Economic growth and development is primarily linked with growth in population and employment and while it is generally possible to assign population growth to a particular location, it is not possible to “assign” employment to specific areas. Employment investment is generally attracted to a particular urban location and the power of subsidies; tax breaks and grants to make locations attractive are declining. Emerging policies favour the switch from subsidies and grants to investment in infrastructure because it is considered to be more effective and offers better value for money over the longer term.

<sup>2</sup> Jobs ratio relates to the number of jobs based in the town area divided by the resident workforce; it does not factor in employees commuting in or out of the town to work.

<sup>3</sup> Source: CSO POWCAR 2006, as provided by the National Transport Authority

### 3.2.2 Levels of Commuting

The 2006 Census indicates that a substantial number of workers resident in Athy commute to employment outside the town. Approximately 1,691 workers commute from Athy between 10-50+ km to their place of work. The number of workers commuting from Athy supports the view that there is an available workforce to support many new employment projects. The projected increase in population coupled with the role of Athy as a Moderate Sustainable Growth Town as outlined in the RPGs will result in an increase in the labour force in Athy. The availability of a larger workforce could result in a comparative advantage in attracting inward employment creating enterprises and will also require the creation of additional employment opportunities.

### 3.3 Employment Requirements 2006-2018

Table 3.3 provides a broad assessment of Athy's employment requirements up to 2018. Many residents of the town are dependent on jobs located elsewhere in the region and in particular in Dublin City and Carlow Town. In order to make the town more self sufficient and improve the quality of life of residents, there is a need to bring employment closer to where people reside. The RPGs identify that the county should plan for an increased Job Ratio. While there is no empirical evidence available there is no doubt the number of jobs available in the town has reduced from the figure of 2,176 given in the 2006 census reports. It is the goal of this Plan to facilitate the creation of sufficient jobs to restore the Job Ratio to at least the 2006 figure of 55% and to increase it to match that of the County with a target Job Ratio of 62% for Athy by 2018.

**Table 3.3** Future Employment Requirements

<b>Athy</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>Increase 2006-2018</b>
Population	7943	10,676	2733
Total Labour Force <sup>4</sup>	4014	5446	1432
Percentage of population economically active	62%	62%	No Change
Labour Force Participation Rate	64%	64%	No Change
Number of Jobs existing/required in Athy <sup>5</sup>	2176	3377	1201
Job Ratio	54 %	62%	8% increase
<b>Extra jobs required by 2018</b>		<b>1201</b>	

**Source:** CSO POWCAR Data by DTO (2009)

Assuming that greenfield sites are developed at a modest plot ratio of 0.4 and all lands are developed for low-medium density type employment (40m<sup>2</sup> per employee), the provision of the required new jobs would require the provision of 12.01 hectares of zoned land. Currently it is estimated that approximately 57 hectares of undeveloped land is zoned for employment purposes in Athy.

<sup>4</sup> Estimates based on same proportion evident in 2006

<sup>5</sup> Source: Derived from CSO POWCAR data by DTO (2009)

### 3.4 Strategy for Economic Development and Employment

Athy Town Council recognises the significant economic and employment challenges facing Athy and will seek to facilitate the continuance of inward investment and the development and revitalisation of indigenous businesses in Athy. The recommendations put forward in the County Economic Strategy are relevant to the economic development of Athy and inform the content and direction of the new Town Development Plan.

The importance of quality of life is a key component to facilitate future economic development, which depends not solely on employment status and income but on factors such as infrastructural support, commuting times, availability of childcare, education, recreation opportunities and on the quality of the built and natural environment.

This Plan will also have regard to the government's framework for economic recovery entitled "Building Ireland's Smart Economy, A Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal 2008". This framework focuses on building a smart economy with a thriving enterprise sector, high quality employment, secure energy supplies, an attractive environment and first class infrastructure.

Athy must seek to develop a complementary role in economic growth and sectoral interests in tandem with the primary economic growth towns in the GDA to facilitate higher order employment uses. A new land use zoning category of "Enterprise and Employment" has been included in this Draft Plan to allow for and to promote the growth and improvement of this sector. It is a priority of the plan to encourage and make provision for increased employment activity, including ensuring that sufficient land is zoned at optimum locations, the provision of necessary infrastructure and to encourage measures in promoting critical mass to allow for the future sustainable economic development of Athy.

The Town Council will continue to work closely with the Athy Investment and Development Forum in order to bring forward a number of new initiatives relating to enterprise development. The importance of developing the town centre area is acknowledged. Key interventions in this regard include better traffic and parking management and master planning as well as a greater level of flexibility in terms of zoning matrices.

Development in Athy should concentrate on the areas of high value added export led manufacturing sectors as well as SMEs; logistics and internationally traded sectors in tandem with IDA support, around transport corridors and routes such as the railway station. Continued investment in education and skills development are also advocated.

### 3.5 Factors Influencing Future Economic Development

#### I. Availability of zoned land

One of the key enablers to attract potential investment and employment to Athy will be the availability of appropriately zoned lands.

Under the Athy Development Plan 2006-2012 approximately 101 hectares of land is zoned for employment, industry and enterprise purposes in and around Athy. It should be noted that this figure does not include such uses as Town Centre, Retail, Leisure and Amenity which would also provide an element of employment generation.

Approximately 57 hectares of lands zone for employment purposes remain undeveloped. This figure solely relates to lands zoned for employment such as industrial warehousing and commercial and does not take into account potential job creation on other lands zoned for town centre, retail or leisure and amenity uses which amount to approximately an additional 120.67 hectares.

It is considered that there is currently sufficient land zoned for employment generation to meet job creation needs for the town up to 2018 and beyond.

Table 3.4 provides further information in relation to the location and availability of undeveloped zoned employment land in Athy.

## II. Infrastructure

Adequate infrastructure is vital for the facilitation of future economic development activity in the town. This includes water services, effective road and public transport networks, energy, telecommunications, waste management, education and recreation facilities etc. There is a significant infrastructural deficit in relation to road infrastructure and to a lesser extent the public transport network in Athy. The Southern Distributor Road in Athy has been identified as a key infrastructural priority and its delivery is viewed as being essential for the future economic expansion of the town as well as the significant improvement of the accessibility and attractiveness of the town centre. The Northern Distributor Road is identified in this plan as a longer term objective in order to further improve accessibility and economic development of the town.

Improvement of the broadband and telecommunications network in Athy is also required in terms of the quality and range of broadband provision throughout Athy. The development of a comprehensive and efficient broadband and telecommunications network will bring significant economic benefits to the town. The availability of this telecommunications infrastructure in Athy enables high speed access to information for industry, public and private sector organisations.

## III. Quality of life

The significance of quality of life is a key component to facilitate future economic development. Factors that make a town attractive for both businesses and their

employees are the key to a successful economic development strategy. Specific actions to improve quality of life for the residents of the town include:

- Providing high quality residential developments with supporting social and community facilities.
- Ensuring a vibrant town centre with a high quality public realm.
- Creating an attractive urban environment to facilitate residency of the projected labour force.
- Developing the public realm and amenities of Athy so that the quality of life of employees and residents can be improved.
- Ensuring the appearance of development complements existing environments and is of the highest quality.
- Seeking the upgrade of transport infrastructure together with the improvement of inter urban non national roads and seeking opportunities for modal change.
- Expanding infrastructural capacity for water and wastewater.
- Increasing and improving the range and quality of recreational, amenity and cultural facilities.
- Improve access to the range and type of educational facilities within the town.

## Policies-General Economic Development

It is the policy of the Council:

- ED1: To facilitate and support the growth of Athy as an attractive location for employment development.
- ED2: To promote employment in Athy in order to reduce the need to travel and the dependence on private transport.
- ED3: To promote economic development on appropriately zoned land throughout the town, especially at or in close proximity to transport nodes.
- ED4: To support the development of a high quality built environment to attract and sustain enterprise and employment.
- ED5: To promote innovative economic sectors and encourage business clusters that exploit links with one another and with third level education facilities.
- ED6: To actively encourage the appropriate redevelopment of brownfield sites and re-use of disused buildings for enterprise and employment creation, when such development is in compliance with the policies and objectives of this Plan.
- ED7: To promote the establishment of entrepreneurial start up business and small scale employment generating activities and to apply a flexible approach to zoning where it can be demonstrated that the proposed use would have minimal impact on adjoining uses, particularly residential.
- ED8: To encourage and facilitate at appropriate locations, small indigenous industries in recognition of their increasing importance in providing local employment and helping to stimulate economic activity.

- ED9: To encourage and facilitate the development of 'green' industries, including those relating to renewable energy and energy-efficient technologies

## 3.6 Land-use and Economic Development

Economic development will be focused on land uses such as enterprise development, industry, retail and commercial development. Other sectoral employment opportunities for consideration include tourism, leisure and rural enterprise in the agricultural zone.

### 3.6.1 Large scale enterprise development

Enterprise development includes a broad range of economic and employment generating developments that rely on process-orientated activities to produce goods and services. It includes "office-based industry" and knowledge based industry, high value added manufacturing and services based industry.

Traditional industries are being replaced by these new categories of business which provide a range of products and services including software development, information technology, telemarketing, commercial research, science and research and development.

In general large scale multi national companies display a preference for locations within or in close proximity to large urban areas that can provide labour force, skills, infrastructure, services, accessibility and business social networks. Athy provides a number of areas zoned to accommodate a wide range of enterprise development opportunities including Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

It is the policy of the Council:

- ED 10: To encourage the development of existing manufacturing industries in the town while establishing and expanding new categories of business in Athy and support their development.

### 3.6.2 Industrial Development

There continues to be a need for a diverse range of employment opportunities in Athy, despite the increasing move towards “knowledge-based” activities. It is essential to retain existing established industrial based development and also to expand further industrial activities appropriate to the town.

The industrial and warehousing zoning objective allows for industrial development and a range of related uses that could be suitably located on industrial estates and enterprise centres within the town.

### 3.6.3 Small – Medium Enterprise (SME)

The development of small and medium scale projects with longer term employment potential are essential to the future development of Athy and such types of development is encouraged within the town. Recognised best practice approaches to stimulating SME activity include incubation units, clustering of similar such enterprises and networking.

Small – medium enterprises may include manufacturing, processing, services, repairs, agriculturally related businesses, distributions and transport operating centres type activities.

It is the policy of the Council to:

ED11: To facilitate the development of knowledge-intensive and technology based companies in Athy and to encourage the provision of Research and Development/ Innovation facilities and SMEs to support enterprise and employment.

### 3.6.4 Retail and Office Development

The retail sector contributes to the overall vitality and attractiveness of a town and provides employment in an area. While Athy boasts an attractive historic town centre with a range of local retail services, there are challenges posed

particularly in terms of accessibility, traffic movement, vacancy rates, dereliction and adaptability of retail units. However it is important to look at opportunities for the appropriate re-use and regeneration of the town centre, along with the development of backlands and browfield sites.

Planning policy in relation to retailing is set out in Chapter 6 of this Draft Plan. The priority location for new retail floor space is within and/or at the edge of the town centre. It is an aim of this Draft Plan to revitalise and improve the existing town centre and also to deliver the key infrastructure required to ensure the retail sector in the town centre continues to grow and provide a wide range and high standard of retail development to serve the population of Athy and surrounding area.

It is policy of the Council:

RO1: To implement the retail strategy and support the creation of high quality living and shopping environments which will add to the attraction of Athy for employers as a town in which to locate.

RO2: To facilitate and encourage office based industry primarily in enterprise and employment zones and to encourage smaller scale office development in the town centre.

RO3: To locate commercial developments providing goods / services to significant numbers of visiting members of the public, within or in close proximity to the existing town centre.

### 3.6.5 Education and Health

Education, health and social work account for the majority of employment opportunities in the town. In particular the recent completion of the new education campus on the Monasterevin Road has boosted the role of education within the town as an employer. Both the education and health sectors have a vital role to play in the

further training of the workforce and also in further research. The continued support and development of education facilities in the town is of great importance. Furthermore the relationship between the adjoining third level Carlow Institute of Technology (CIT) should be built upon with economic opportunities developed which support the third level education base of CIT, including development in the areas of R&D, agri-engineering and alternative energies.

Health Services in the Athy area are administered by the Health Service Executive from a number of locations within the town. The main Health Centre is located on Woodstock Street and provides for the full range of community health and social services. Services for older persons are based at St.Vincent's Hospital Athy. Naas Hospital provides the general hospital services for the area.

It is the policy of the Council:

EH 1: To promote initiatives with relevant agencies to expand training and education that meets the wide range of business skills located in the town.

EH 2: To support and co-operate with promoters or operators of public and private health care facilities by facilitating and encouraging the provision of improved health care facilities in appropriate locations in the town.

### **3.6.6 Incubation units / workshops / business starter units**

The provision of appropriate infrastructure is important in creating the conditions conducive to enterprise and employment creation. Incubation units, workshops and business starter units provide small and medium businesses with a base to engage in the production, research and development and enterprise activities. Having regard to current trends and forecasts it is considered that there will be demand for smaller units c.50-80 sqm providing for greater letting

ability and lower rents. Athy Town Council will continue to work pro-actively with national, regional and local development agencies and to work in conjunction with the County Development Board and in particular, such educational institutions as CIT and the VEC. The economic potential arising from the location of Athy town close to Carlow town should be maximised in terms of the benefits that can be gained from good economic and educational relationships.

It is policy of the Council:

EE 1: To promote the provision of workspace units suitable for small businesses and start up companies, in general, and with particular emphasis on their provision within large schemes.

### **3.6.7 Research and Development**

Research and Development is a high value employment sector which relies on a good supply of a well educated, skilled workforce within its geographic catchment. Consequently, factors influencing the location of R&D enterprise include quality of infrastructure and physical environment, availability of a well educated workforce, connectivity levels, and community and cultural facilities.

It is the policy of the Council:

EE 2: To promote the growth of Research and Development in Athy by facilitating the conditions conducive to such development including a high quality built and natural environment, public transport infrastructure and community and cultural infrastructure.

EE 3: To support the development of economic opportunities which support the third level education base of CIT and NUI Maynooth, particularly in the areas of R&D, agri-engineering and alternative energies. The Council will co-operate with Carlow IT and NUI Maynooth to

promote and encourage R&D in Athy to attract industry.

### 3.6.8 Home Based Economic Activity

Working from home can make a very positive contribution towards reducing car travel and increasing the vibrancy of an area. While this Draft Plan supports the concept of home working, it is important that such activity does not result in the disamenity of a predominantly residential area and therefore employment use in a dwelling should be restricted to the occupier(s) of the dwelling and such use should be subordinate to the use of the dwelling as a residence.

In addition to home working, this Draft Plan supports the concept of a live-work unit which can be defined as a single unit within a building that is both a place to live and a place of business or commerce. The development of live-work units can lead to a more sustainable land use pattern, by providing for a mix of uses, ensuring a balance between day and night time activity and reducing commuting.

It is the policy of the Council:

- HW1: To facilitate home-working and innovative forms of working which reduce the need to travel but are subordinate to the main residential use of the dwelling and do not result in a disamenity in an area.
- HW2: To encourage the provision of live-work units as part of mixed-use developments in appropriate locations (particularly at ground floor level).

### 3.6.9 Design, Location and Availability of Employment lands in Athy

The Council's zoning strategy for the town identifies locations for particular types of employment lands uses such as large-scale enterprise development, industrial development,

retail and small to medium enterprises. The Draft Plan seeks to identify a range of optimum locations which can present opportunities for the location of specific /specialized enterprise and employment uses within the town.

The Draft Plan also encourages the re-use and re-development of brownfield lands i.e. those lands formerly used for other uses.

The location of the main employment areas in Athy and the quantity of zoned undeveloped land available for employment development are shown in Table 3.4 and Map 3.1 in this chapter. In addition to the main employment zoning categories such as Enterprise, Industry and Warehousing, there are other zoning categories which allow for leisure activities and various commercial uses. Reference should be made to Chapter 16 for further detail in relation to the individual land use zonings throughout the town.

It is the policy of the Council:

- UD1: To ensure that new employment areas are attractive areas and are of a high standard of urban design.
- UD2: To ensure the provision of adequate screening of employment developments in the form of planting, landscaping and mounding as appropriate, especially where new industrial/employment developments adjoin residential areas.
- UD3: To ensure that the layout of new employment developments will have regard to alternative sustainable modes of transport. Site layout should emphasise the necessary connections to the wider local and strategic public transport, walking and cycling networks.

**Table 3.4** Location and Availability of Employment Land in Athy

Land Use Zoning Objective	Location and availability of (undeveloped) land	Employment Opportunities/Sectoral Strengths
<p><b>Q: Enterprise and Employment</b></p> <p><i>To facilitate opportunities for employment and enterprise uses, manufacturing, research and development, light industry and employment related uses within a high quality campus/park type development.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Woodstock South</li> <li>• Bleach</li> </ul>	<p>Identified for large/medium scale new enterprise and employment growth of Athy. These areas which were previously zoned H: Industrial and Warehousing in the Athy Town Development Plan 2006-2012, will play a pivotal role in future enterprise and employment development in the town.</p> <p>Development of higher quality knowledge based enterprises focusing on ICT, R&amp;D, offices, office based industry, telemarketing and some manufacturing.</p> <p>Development at these locations, comprising both brownfield and infill sites, should increase the density of employment in the area while also allowing for some appropriate mixed-use development to increase service opportunities.</p> <p>This plan seeks to retain and develop the existing manufacturing industries in the town while establishing and expanding new categories of business in Athy and support their development.</p>
<p><b>H: Industrial &amp; Warehousing</b></p> <p><i>To provide for and improve industrial and warehousing development</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Woodstock South</li> <li>• Chanterlands</li> <li>• Townparks</li> </ul>	<p>Development in these areas will be generally less employment intensive. Opportunity for development of high value added manufacturing and small –medium enterprise (SME).</p> <p>Significant capacity for infill industrial development and re-development of brownfield sites. Opportunity for new industrial and warehousing development, and small-medium sized enterprise in undeveloped areas.</p>
<p><b>G: Light Industrial &amp; Commercial</b></p> <p><i>To provide for new office and light industrial development</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Townparks</li> <li>• Shamrock Lodge</li> <li>• Gallowshill</li> </ul>	<p>Development in these areas will be focused on the improvement/consolidation of existing permitted established uses, and/or the provision of new office, light industrial development.</p> <p>Development on these sites, comprising both brownfield and greenfield sites, should increase the density of employment in the area.</p>



Land Use Zoning Objective	Location and availability of (undeveloped) land in hectares	Employment Opportunities/Sectoral Strengths
<p><b>A: Town Centre</b></p> <p><i>To protect and enhance the special physical and social character of the existing town centre and to provide for new and improved town centre facilities and uses.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Town Centre</li> </ul>	<p>Capacity for retail and residential development, office and small- medium sized enterprise. Also capacity for innovative retail/tourism/mixed use/cultural development in brownfield town centre sites.</p>
<p><b>I: Agricultural</b></p> <p><i>To provide for continued agricultural development and associated uses.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agriculture</li> </ul>	<p>Agriculture, rural enterprise, horticulture, equine industry.</p>

**Note:** This table is indicative of the main employment zones and their employment opportunities. For further guidance in relation to zoned land, refer to Chapter 16 Land Use Zoning Map 16.1

### 3.7 Prevention of Major Accidents

The Seveso Directive II (96-082-EEC) is an EU Directive that seeks to prevent major industrial accidents involving dangerous substances and to limit the consequences of such accidents on people and the environment.

There are no major accident hazard sites notified under the EC (Control of Major Accident Hazards involving Dangerous Substances) Regulations 2006 (SI 74 of 2006) within Athy but any new developments of this nature shall abide by standards prescribed by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) and the relevant legislation.

It is the policy of the Council:

MA1: To have regard to the following in assessing applications for new developments (including extensions):

- a) Major Accidents Directive (Seveso II – 96/082/EEC)
- b) The potential effects on public health and safety.

- c) The need to ensure adequate distances between such developments and residential areas, areas of public use and any areas of sensitivity.
- d) The advice of the HSA.

### 3.8 Rural Development and Agricultural Development

Athy and the surrounding area boast some of the finest agricultural lands in the region. The rural economy is an important component of Athy's overall economy. There is approximately 455 hectares of agricultural land zoned within the town boundary.

Certain types of rural enterprises and agribusiness, especially those that involve natural resources may, at an appropriate scale, have a role to play in the agricultural zone. Where appropriate locations are available in Athy and subject to proper planning considerations, including adequate infrastructure, proposals may be considered favorably within the agricultural zone.

Despite a national decline in fulltime agricultural employment, Athy continues to have a higher than average number of persons in fulltime agricultural employment. SMEs are a significant element of the rural economy and include food production and manufacturing. A small component of Athy's rural economy is engaged in strategic food production and processing. This area of economic development should be encouraged and promoted. Rural based tourism which includes fishing, forestry, trekking, equine and farm based activities also provides opportunities for the diversification of the rural economy. Given the importance of the rural environment it is essential that its integrity is maintained and enhanced and that the activities which rely upon it do not degrade or detract from it.

It is recognised that the agricultural industry has an important role in employment. Horticulture, a sub sector of agriculture, offers higher value added than other traditional agricultural enterprises and its development as an enterprise activity is also recognised in this Plan. Furthermore the development of specialised agri-engineering and related R&D projects on appropriately zoned lands within the town will be supported by the Council.

It is the policy of the Council:

- AG1: To promote an environmentally sustainable agricultural/horticultural sector and a vibrant bloodstock industry, which contributes to a dynamic and successful rural economy.
- AG2 : To support the development of agriculture within the agricultural zone in Athy; to develop a sustainable agricultural sector that is compatible with the sustainable development of the town and maintains the viability of farming.
- AG3: To ensure that agricultural activities do not impinge on the visual amenity of the countryside/ agricultural zone and to ensure that watercourses, wildlife

habitats and areas of ecological importance are protected from the threat of pollution.

- AG4: To protect agricultural and equine uses, from encroachment by urban development uses beyond that needed to cater for the orderly expansion of the town.
- AG5: To protect and ensure the continuing viability of agriculture and horticulture within rural areas and to sustain the rural character of the countryside as a valuable resource.
- AG6: To promote the diversification of the rural economy and the development of rural indigenous industry while safeguarding the environment and role of the rural area as a strategic asset.
- AG7: To encourage agri-businesses appropriate to the area which are directly related to the local horticultural or agricultural sectors in areas zoned for agricultural purposes.
- AG8: To require any proposed agri-business within the rural area is supported by a comprehensive traffic impact study of vehicular traffic generated by such an enterprise.

### 3.9 Equine Industry

The equine industry represents a significant landuse in County Kildare. The Council recognises the importance of the bloodstock and sport horse industry in the County and would encourage its further development in the Athy area.

It is the policy of the Council:

- EQ1: To encourage the development of equine related enterprises on agricultural zoned lands within the town boundary.

### 3.10 General Economic Development and Employment Objectives

It is an objective of the Council:

EDO 1: To encourage economic development and employment development in the Moderate Sustainable Growth Town of Athy in accordance with national and regional policies and objectives and in accordance with the overall development strategy of this Plan.

EDO 2: To ensure that sufficient and suitable land is zoned for employment generating uses in Athy. Such land will, normally, be protected from inappropriate development that would prejudice its long term development for these uses.

EDO 3: To ensure the provision of water, wastewater treatment and waste management facilities to accommodate future economic growth of the town.

EDO 4: To co-operate with and seek to facilitate local community based development groups in developing employment clusters including incubator/start up units as appropriate.

EDO 5: To continue to forge strong partnerships and work in conjunction with national, regional and local development agencies, including Forfás, Industrial Development Agency, Kildare County Development Board, Kildare County Council, County Enterprise Board, Enterprise Ireland, Athy Industrial Forum, FAS and also the educational sector including CIT and the VEC in attracting new commercial enterprises and employment opportunities in Athy.

EDO 6: To acquire suitable land, subject to the availability of funding, to stimulate and support creative and innovative entrepreneurial initiatives.

EDO 7: To support IDA Ireland in the attraction of high value added manufacturing sectors and internationally traded sectors of Athy.

### 3. (B) Tourism Strategy

#### 3.11 Background

Tourism is an important sector of the economy offering potential for increased employment and economic activity. Athy has a rich portfolio of natural, architectural, historical and cultural assets and amenities, providing a substantial recreational and heritage resource for a large and growing population. The Council will seek to leverage the economic and social opportunity which tourism within the area represents to both Athy and the wider surrounding rural area.

Athy also has strong opportunities for business tourism because of its proximity to Dublin City and the ready availability of hotel accommodation. Opportunities to develop niche tourism including water sports, walking, angling, eco-tourism, sports, passive recreation, golfing, culinary and other leisure pursuits. The Council will look favourably on sustainable tourism developments and especially on supporting tourism infrastructure, which is consistent with the proper and sustainable planning and development of the town.

The Council is committed to supporting the development and improvement of tourism services and attractions throughout the town. The town is designated as a Heritage Town and associated heritage and information signage has been erected in the town since the adoption of the previous plan. There is now an official seasonal tourist office located in the Athy Heritage Centre along with the Shackelton Museum and the town library. Furthermore, several initiatives have been developed for Athy in recent years in order to encourage increased visitor numbers to the area and to improve the overall experience of the visitor while in the town. The town is the subject of the pilot

“Shine Town” strategy. This initiative aims to reinvigorate the traditional Irish welcome offered to overseas visitors. The initiative was developed by Tourism Ireland in conjunction with

Fáilte Ireland and in response to approaches and involvement from local tourism interests.

#### 3.12 Tourism in the context of Athy

##### I. Waterways Tourism- Boating, Angling, Walking, Cycling

Given the location, extent and quality of both the River Barrow and the Grand Canal in Athy, there is great potential for the development of waterways tourism throughout the town and the surrounding area. The River Barrow Navigation extends from Robertstown and heads south through Monasterevin and Athy and onward through Co. Carlow and onto Co. Kilkenny. The County Kildare section of the Barrow Line is 28 miles (43 km) long with nine locks including two doubles. The main line of the Grand Canal flows from Dublin to Shannon Harbour and is 82 miles (131 km) in total with 43 locks, five of which are double locks.

Waterways Ireland in conjunction with Fáilte Ireland, Kildare, Kilkenny and Carlow County Councils is currently undertaking a study of the River Barrow Corridor to recognise and mark the 220<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2011, of the Barrow as a navigation waterway. This study will contribute greatly to the potential and further development of the tourism industry associated with the Barrow. The scope of the study will include a detailed examination of a one-mile wide corridor along the Barrow Valley from the Grand Canal at Lowtown, Roberstown to the Barrow estuary south of New Ross, Co. Wexford. The report will also include a high level assessment of a fifteen mile wide corridor along the Barrow Valley route. The key outputs from the study will be:

- Audit of existing facilities and tourism products and trends in the catchments.
- Production of a map to identify potential sites for future tourism enterprise.
- Action plan for development of identified sites.

- Nominate responsibility to key actors for the delivery of the Action Plan.

The main obstacle to achieving improved utilisation of the waterways in Athy is the deficit in safe and convenient mooring facilities. Boats and barges are being restricted in their ability to moor in Athy and this is a major disincentive to considering the town as a stop over location. The development of a marina or at least a floating jetty, is an essential piece of infrastructure required in order to maximise the possibilities presented by tourism activities based around the waterways of Athy. The Council will continue to work with Waterways Ireland and the National Parks and Wildlife Service in order to unlock the potential of the Grand Canal and River Barrow as a tourist attraction to local, national and international boat users, fishing and walking enthusiasts. In addition to a marina, the provision of a boat house and/or canoe club would also be a welcome addition to the town and would further boost tourist numbers.

The Council will support initiatives to provide strategic walking and cycling routes in conjunction with angling spots along the waterways. However it should be noted that should any works be required in order to provide walking and information and facilities along the river and canal banks that an Appropriate Assessment may need to be carried out.

## II. Sports and Recreation Tourism

The annual TriAthy event has grown in popularity since its establishment in 2006. Its further development and expansion by the organisers is supported by Athy Town Council.

Significant potential is recognised to develop and improve the amenity of greenfield recreational areas such as the People's Park, the area surrounding Woodstock Castle and the structure and adjoining gardens of White Castle.

## III. Heritage Tourism

Athy boasts a rich and unique architectural, archaeological and natural heritage. The town retains many buildings of significance, including White Castle, Market House (Heritage Centre and Library), The Model Farm and School (recently fire damaged), Dominican Church and Presbyterian Church. Furthermore the town has strong connections with Arctic explorer Ernest Shackleton, providing the only permanent exhibition in the world on this subject in the Heritage Centre. It is essential to protect and enhance the qualities of Athy so that the growth in tourism visitors into the town is encouraged.

## IV. Arts & Culture

Athy boasts a vibrant arts and culture sector with the Heritage Centre on Emily Square, hosting regular exhibitions and cultural events along with the recently established Community Arts Facility in the Methodist Church on Woodstock Street. Athy Town Council in conjunction with Kildare County Council's Arts Office will continue to support the arts and cultural development within the town.

### 3.12.1 Policies – Tourism

It is the policy of the Council:

- TS 1: To recognise the employment and revenue potential of tourism in the local economy.
- TS 2: To recognise and improve the existing tourism potential of Athy such as the Grand Canal and River Barrow waterside amenity activities such as walking, fishing boating will be further enhanced through specific objectives of the Plan.
- TS 3: To implement the recommendations of the River Barrow Valley Study currently being carried out by Waterways Ireland in conjunction with Fáilte Ireland and other local authorities.

- TS 4: To identify opportunities to improve the tourist product in Athy and to co-operate with the appropriate statutory agencies, private tourism sector and community groups.
- TS 5: To encourage tourism related uses along the Grand Canal and River Barrow including the investigation of the feasibility of developing a marina within the town boundary (in accordance with Policy R 9) and associated boating uses and activities in co-operation with the relevant statutory agencies, voluntary bodies and private property owners to develop the infrastructure and amenity of both water bodies.
- TS 6: To continue to work closely with key stakeholders in the tourism industry including Kildare Fáilte, Fáilte Ireland and Waterways Ireland in conjunction with local clubs and stakeholders, in order to further develop the overall tourist and economic potential in and around the town with particular emphasis on water based and waterside activities such as angling, boating, walking, canoeing etc.
- TS 7: To work with the relevant agencies and bodies in the development and improvement of tourism related infrastructure, facilities activities in Athy.
- TS 8: To ensure that the development of new tourist facilities are designed to the highest standard with particular emphasis given to quality materials and accessibility.
- TS 9: To support the development of new tourist facilities or upgrading / extension of existing tourist facilities, including hotels, guesthouses and B&B's, in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.
- TS 10: To promote the establishment of tourist destinations in Athy subject to them being of an appropriate scale, located in

sustainable locations, adequately served by public transport and would not adversely impact upon a Natura 2000 site.

- TS11: To promote festivals and sporting events to increase the tourism, cultural and lifestyle profile of the town including the use of appropriate green areas throughout the town.

### 3.12.2 Objectives-Tourism

It is the objective of the Council:

- TSO1: To support the provision and development of walking and cycling trails which give access to river and canal banks and towpaths, subject to Appropriate Assessment where appropriate and in conjunction with Waterways Ireland and the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the DoEHLG.
- TSO 2: To promote the National Trails Network, Sli na Sláinte and other defined walking trails and cycle routes.
- TSO3: To support the protection of recreational areas such as the People's Park and encourage the further development of amenity areas such as the area surrounding Woodstock Castle, Lords Island and the adjoining gardens of White Castle.
- TSO4: To support the development of the tourism industry by the upgrading of existing amenities in co-operation with the appropriate statutory agencies, private tourism sector and community groups.
- TSO5: To facilitate the erection of standardised signage for tourism facilities and tourist attractions throughout the town.



TSO6: To protect the environmental amenities of Athy from insensitive or inappropriate development, particularly any development that threatens the tourism resources of the town.

TSO7: To recognise the importance of the local golf clubs and other sports clubs and sporting events to tourism in the town.

TSO8: To promote Athys literary, social, historical, genealogical, archaeological, architectural and natural heritage as tourism generating opportunities.

TSO9: To harness the economic benefits of the tourism industry through sustainable means, including the conservation and protection of the built and natural heritage.

TSO10: To encourage the development of tourism activities such as waterways activities, agri-tourism, green/eco-tourism, niche retailing, food markets, local and other craft type activities so as to diversify the tourism product in Athy.

TSO11: To support sustainable tourism initiatives which develop the tourist potential of the rural area around the town while recognising and enhancing the quality and values of this rural area.

TSO12: To protect the economic and social benefits of licensed local farmers/ country markets and support their role as visitor attractions.