

# Meath - The place & space to thrive

## Economic Development Strategy Roadmap

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# Foreword



On taking up the role of Chief Executive of Meath County Council in 2013 I was keen to ensure that Meath's rich landscape and heritage, skilled workforce, vibrant communities and recreational assets were represented on a national and international scale.

The vision of 'Make it Meath' was used to encompass all Meath has to offer. This Roadmap continues with this vision and focus as identified in the Meath Economic Development Strategy 2014-2022 and moves Meath forward into the next phase of being 'the place and space to thrive' for entrepreneurs, potential investors, future residents, communities and visitors alike. Its purpose is to ensure that those considering establishing or expanding their business within Meath, along with their potential workforce, see Meath as an ideal place to live, work and do business. The County boasts a high standard of living with good quality housing, ease of access to airports, ports, education and healthcare facilities, as well as many recreational and cultural amenities.

The Strategy had identified a number of key focus areas and sectoral opportunities to expand the economic base of County Meath, particularly with investment in the food, knowledge and creative economies and attracting further Foreign Direct Investment, by marketing Meath to overseas and indigenous investors as a county willing to support and work in collaboration.

This roadmap aims to address the current and future approach to the implementation of the Strategy, until work commences on a new Strategy. Work on the new plan will be progressed when the full details of Census 2022 statistics are available. Emerging Census 2022 figures show Meath as the second fastest growing county with the population up 13% from the 2016 figures, where the national average is 8%. Since its inception, Meath has seen major successes in attracting significant foreign direct investment and indigenous companies, sustaining existing industry and enterprises and ensuring long term and sustainable growth.

The landscape has changed both economically and socially since the strategy was launched. Meath, along with all players in the economy, have had to weather the impacts of a global pandemic, the significant increases in the cost of living, as well as the challenges of mitigating the adverse effects of Brexit and humanitarian crises.

I would like to acknowledge the work of our Elected Members, the Strategic Policy Committee, the Planning and Economic Development teams, our Local Enterprise Office and Meath Enterprise staff on the implementation of the Economic Development Strategy to date. With their commitment to giving investors the support and services they need to conduct business in our county, we will continue the journey to being at the centre of cutting-edge innovation in the 21st Century and a great place to live, work and build a brighter future for our growing number of inhabitants.

*Jackie Maguire.*

# Vision for Meath

This Economic Development Strategy Roadmap outlines our vision and approach to drive sustainable economic growth and prosperity in our region. The purpose of this roadmap is to guide our efforts in fostering a dynamic and resilient economy that benefits all stakeholders. It builds upon the foundation set by Meath Economic Development Strategy 2014-2022 and moves Meath forward into the next phase of being 'the place and space to thrive' for all, while taking into account changing market conditions, emerging trends and new opportunities.

This roadmap focuses on seven key focus areas and has four enabling actions with priority areas, all of which are underpinned by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. By implementing this roadmap, we aim to support existing and attract new businesses, encourage innovation and provide quality job opportunities for our residents.



## OUR VISION

# Meath - the place and space to thrive!

Clear, concise, innovative and evidence based measures aimed at accelerating the economic transformation, revitalisation and sustainable development of Meath.

This Roadmap has pinpointed seven key focus areas that are vital for our county's economic success in the future. By working together with a shared vision and with support from both Local and Central government, we can achieve the ambitions outlined in this Roadmap and ensure Meath remains a thriving place for all!

**4** ENABLING ACTIONS

**7** KEY FOCUS AREAS

**24** STRATEGIC PRIORITY AREAS

## 7 KEY FOCUS AREAS

**01** Indigenous Industry / SMEs

**02** Foreign Direct Investment

**03** Tourism, Hospitality & Heritage

**04** Retail

**05** Innovation

**06** Agriculture & Food Industry

**07** Creative Economy

## MEATH - THE PLACE AND SPACE . . . .

FOR PEOPLE

THAT MAXIMISES  
ITS SPATIAL  
ADVANTAGE

AT THE  
FOREFRONT  
OF SMART  
GROWTH

THAT WORKS  
FOR YOU

# Policy Context

The Meath Economic Development Strategy Roadmap is informed by a hierarchy of international, national and regional strategies.

Internationally, the EU Regional Aid Map is a tool that provides information on the different types of aid available in different regions of the country and to promote investment and job creation in these areas. The Meath Economic Development Strategy Roadmap is informed by the EU Regional Aid Map 2022-2027, particularly in regard to the potential it has to stimulate Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the County.

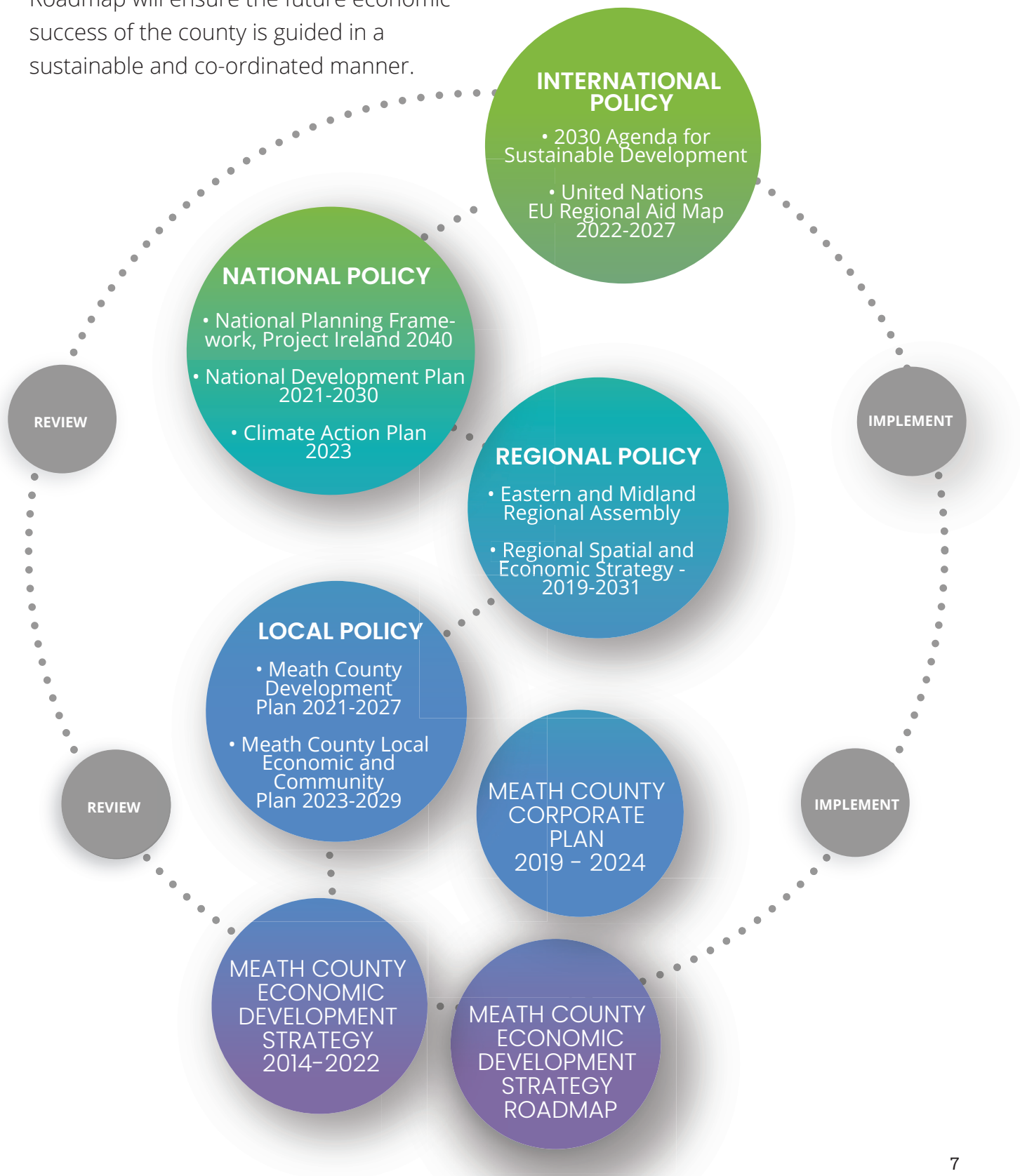
At National level, economic policy is outlined in the National Development Plan 2021-2030 (NDP), the current framework of the overarching Project Ireland 2040. This plan sets out a 10 year plan of State investments across the country. Objectives

relating to Meath include investment in the accessibility of Dublin from the outlying regions and the utilities infrastructure of Mid and East Meath. The Meath Economic Development Strategy Roadmap is in accordance with the NDP guidelines focusing on investment to generate economic growth and job creation as well as a transition towards a sustainable and innovative Green Economy.

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region 2019-2031 provides Spatial, Climate Action and Metropolitan Strategies but more relevantly it outlines an Economic Strategy and Investment Framework for the Eastern and Midland Region. The economic strategy of the RSES revolves around the concepts of Smart Specialisation, Clustering, Placemaking, Orderly Growth and Future Proofing. These regional economic focuses informed the actions employed in this Roadmap.

Economic policy is embedded in the Meath County Development Plan (CDP) 2021-2027 and the Local Economic and Community Plan 2023-2029 (LECP). The CDP focuses on the objectives, policies and proposals for the development and use of land in County Meath, while the LECP provides a six-year framework to improve Meath's quality of life and ensure the provision of joined up and accessible community services and continued economic growth.

The Economic Development Strategy aligns with these policies to ensure that the actions detailed below benefit the people and places of the county. This Roadmap will ensure the future economic success of the county is guided in a sustainable and co-ordinated manner.



# Why Meath

Meath possesses significant economic potential to prosper as a successful, diverse and vibrant social, civic, commercial and residential centre that is recognised locally, nationally and internationally as a highly attractive and distinctive location in which to live and conduct business. Meath has unparalleled and unique competitive advantage within Ireland, due to its:

## **Strategic location:**

Meath's proximity to Dublin, international airports and ports, provides easy access to a large pool of skilled workers, suppliers and customers. This makes it an attractive location for businesses looking to expand their operations in Ireland or to establish a presence in Europe.

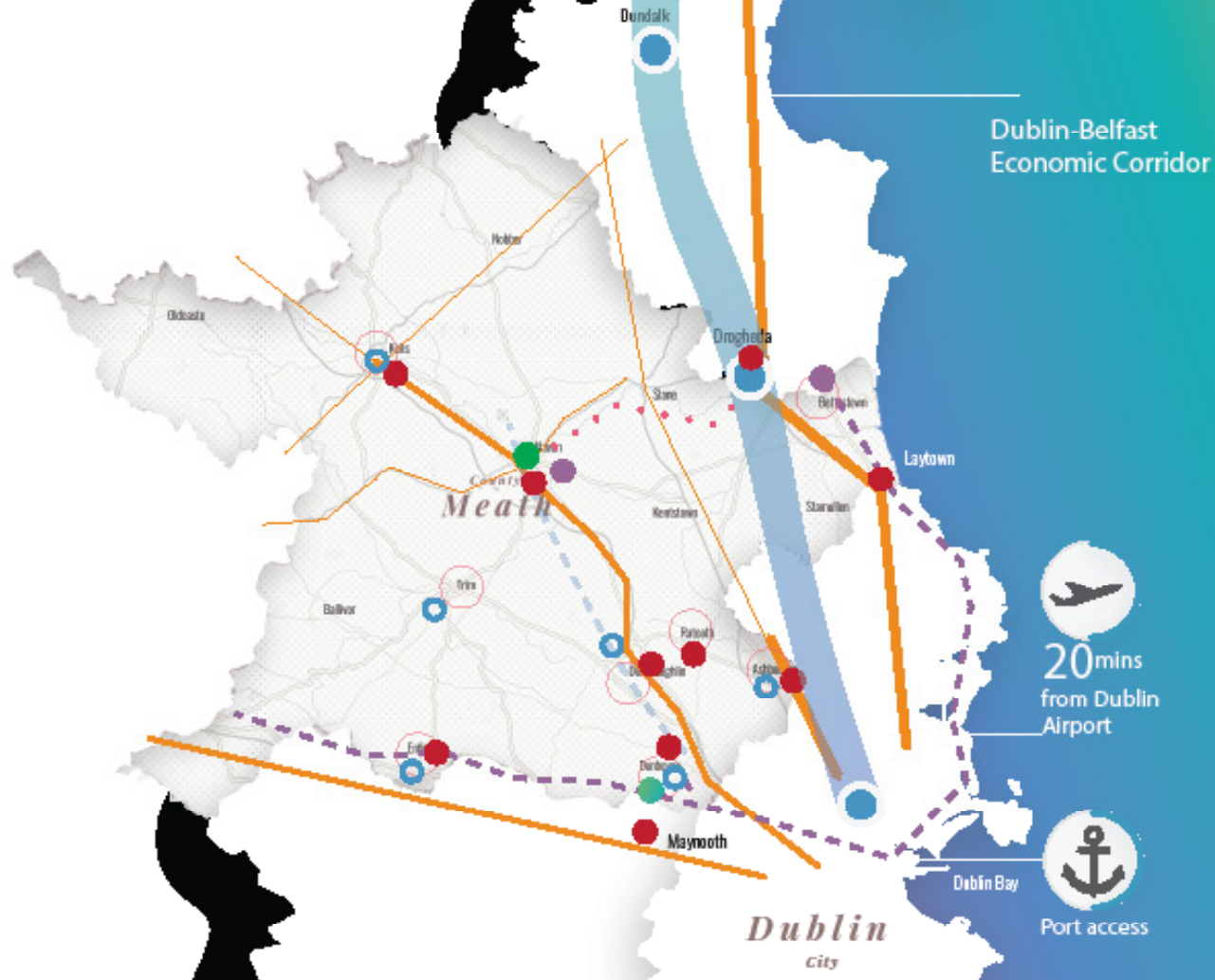
## **Infrastructure and amenities:**

Meath has modern infrastructure and amenities that support businesses and residents. The county has several business parks, access to high speed broadband and proximity to excellent healthcare facilities and high-quality schools and universities.

## **Highly skilled workforce:**

Meath has a strong education system that produces highly skilled graduates in areas such as engineering, science and technology. The county also has a young and diverse population, with many international residents, which provides a rich talent pool for businesses.





#### Rail/Roads

- - - - - Freight Rail Line
- - - - - Existing Commuter Line
- - - - - Future Commuter Line
- Motorway
- National
- Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor

#### Key Employment Centres

- Strategic Employment Sites
- IDA - Parks and Sites
- Business Parks

#### Retail Settlement Type

- Level 1: Major town and county town centres
- Level 2: Sub county towns and district centres

### Business friendly environment:

Meath has a business-friendly environment that encourages entrepreneurship and innovation. The county offers a range of incentives, grants and supports to help businesses start, grow and succeed.

### High quality of life:

Meath has a unique blend of historical and natural attractions and a thriving arts and cultural scene that makes it a desirable place to live, work and play. The County is home to the Unesco World Heritage site at Newgrange and natural attractions such as the Boyne Valley and the Hill of Tara.

### Strong economic sectors:

Meath has a diverse economy with strong sectors in industries such as food and beverage, life sciences, tourism and technology. The county is home to a number of multinational companies, such as MSD, Meta and Amazon as well as many innovative small and medium-sized enterprises.



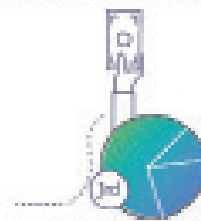
## LIVE

### A YOUNG AND GROWING POPULATION



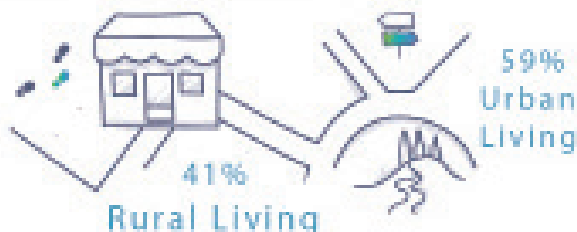
- Second lowest average age in the State
- Second highest rate of population growth in the State

### MONEY GOES FURTHER



Meath has the 6th highest disposable income and 3rd highest labour force participation rate in the State.

### URBAN AND RURAL LIVING



### HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE

A strong sense of community, access to employment, education, arts, culture, heritage and diverse recreational opportunities.



### A SAFE PLACE



### GOOD FOR YOUR HEALTH

92% of people reported being in either good or very good health, 2% higher than the Eastern and Midland Region and the State.



# WORK

## SUCCESSFUL INDIGENOUS BUSINESSES

Meath is home to **13,345 local businesses** and 36 new company formations per 10,000 population, the 4th highest in the State.



## CLUSTERING OF KEY INDUSTRIES

Major employment industries include: retail and trade/auto, health and social work, manufacturing, education and construction.



## HIGHLY DESIRABLE PLACE TO DO BUSINESS

77% of businesses were happy or very happy that their business was located in Meath.

77%

## PROXIMITY TO NATIONAL AND GLOBAL MARKETS

Dublin Airport within 30 minutes

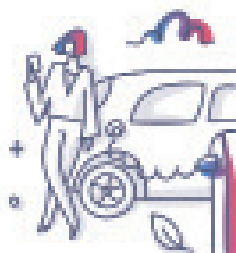


Ferry ports in Dublin, Drogheda and Belfast

Served by four motorways (M1, M2, M3 and M4)

Bus routes operate throughout the County

Rail via the Dublin-Belfast line and Dublin-Sligo line and Dunboyne line



Proposed Navan Rail line

## HIGHLY EDUCATED WORKFORCE



**43.4%** of Leaving Cert students are progressing to university, which is higher than the State average.

# PLAY

## UNIQUE SENSE OF PLACE

Meath enjoys a rich heritage with

**3,000+**



monuments and heritage sites.



Including Leinster's only two Gaeltacht regions and home to one of Ireland's two UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

## LOTS OF OPTIONS FOR ENTERTAINMENT



102

Sports facilities



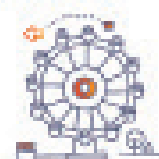
23

Arts and culture venues



13

Libraries



1

Theme Park (Emerald Park)

## ACTIVE AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

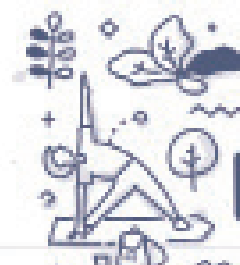
**400+**

community, social, environmental and leisure groups.



## THE PLACE TO RELAX

Countryside, award winning beaches, historical landmarks, rivers, farms, blueways and greenways.



# The Story So Far

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 established a new statutory remit for economic development in local authorities in Ireland. This Act, which was signed into law on July 27, 2014, introduced significant changes to the role of local authorities in economic development, including the establishment of Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) and the transfer of certain functions from state agencies such as Enterprise Ireland and the County and City Enterprise Boards to the local authorities. Meath County Council embraced this new remit and launched an Economic Development Strategy in mid-2015 which sought to put the Council at the forefront of best practice for economic development.

The purpose of the Meath Economic Development Strategy was to provide clear, concise, innovative and evidence based measures aimed at accelerating the

economic transformation, revitalisation and sustainable development of Meath. Since the Meath Economic Development Strategy was implemented, Meath has experienced strong economic and employment growth. The aftermath of the recession brought a focus on job creation and economic development, resulting in the Meath Economic Development Strategy target of creating 7,500 jobs by 2022. Meath has achieved significant job growth by increasing employment in both indigenous and foreign-owned, agency supported businesses in Meath.

The Strategy aimed to improve the county and region from a social and community perspective as well as economically. This was achieved through the Council proactively engaging and building relationships with businesses as well as the wide range of other stakeholders with a role in economic development to raise their awareness of the Council's new and enhanced capacity to provide support to businesses.

The outcomes of the Strategy are identified on page 18.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

### Meath Economic Development Strategy 2014-2022

- 01** Create and promote a culture that supports sustainable economic development practices within Meath County Council.
- 02** Engage and work with State Agencies, Regional Agencies, Higher Education Institutions and Local Enterprise Agencies to stimulate and grow economic development in Meath
- 03** Collaborate with wealth creators and business innovators who have the capacity to assist in job creation and entrepreneurship.
- 04** Promote our towns and strategic employment sites as the economic drivers for employment in Meath while acknowledging the role of the rural economy.
- 05** Identify and support investment in infrastructure and services that enable and deliver economic development.
- 06** Examine financial incentives designed to aid the delivery of the employment generation.
- 07** Develop a marketing plan and initiatives aimed at promoting the economic strategy.
- 08** Review and monitor progress and trends in jobs.

# Trends & Drivers

Since the launch of the Strategy, County Meath has been impacted by various economic trends and drivers of change. One significant trend has been the continued growth of the Irish economy, which has outpaced many of its European counterparts. However, this growth has been tempered by the uncertainty caused by Brexit, which has led to concerns around trade, investment and the future of the Irish border. The Brexit uncertainty created challenges for businesses in the county, particularly those in the food and farming sectors. Meath was required to identify its unique circumstances and

develop tailored strategies to mitigate the risks and take advantage of new opportunities.

County Meath, like the rest of Ireland, was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The public health crisis led to the closure of many businesses, including in the tourism and hospitality sectors which are crucial to the local economy here in Meath. This resulted in a significant increase in unemployment rates in the county, as well as a decrease in economic activity. However, the local and regional government were innovative and quick





to respond by providing various supports to help affected businesses, including wage subsidies and grants, which helped to mitigate the economic impact. In June 2021, the Government released its National Economic Recovery Plan which focused on a number of pillars, including supporting returning to work, enterprise resilience and productivity and investing in infrastructure. While the COVID-19 crisis has created new challenges, Ireland was the only EU country to post positive growth in 2020 and 2021.

Other notable trends include the rise of the digitalisation and tech industries, which have fuelled job creation and innovation in Ireland and the increasing importance

of sustainability and climate action, as Ireland seeks to transition to a low-carbon economy. Additionally, demographic changes such as an aging population and an influx of immigrants have presented both challenges and opportunities for the Irish economy.

Meath has managed to remain responsive to these economic trends, ensuring it could anticipate and mitigate any potential risks and opportunities and adjust the strategy accordingly.

# Success to date

The successful implementation of the Economic Development Strategy has resulted in a range of positive outcomes for the County. The deliberate and targeted actions set out in the strategy have resulted in an 8% increase in employment, with 2,935 new jobs created within the County and a 1.47% annual increase in employment rates, as well as approximately 3,500 construction jobs in the development of the larger multinational companies including the data centres.

Key areas that have been addressed include increasing the jobs-to-population

ratio, reducing economic leakages through outward commuting and broadening the employment base of the County by facilitating high-quality, knowledge-oriented employment.

Since the adoption of the strategy, successes such as the Meta data centre developments, MSD Pharma Group and the Avoca development at Dunboyne are key to note, as some of the new significant employers with potential to expand. The location of such businesses within Meath is indicative of the positive direction in which the County is heading.







Furthermore, the development of Emeri Nutrition in the IDA Business Park is a welcome indication of additional employment activity in Navan.

This Roadmap intends on building on the previous Economic Development Strategy and aims to address challenges in the county, such as developing the base of economic activities and attracting more FDI. However, improvements are predicted in these metrics, favouring Meath, with particular improvements to the local economic base.

While FDI has been a focus of attention, it is essential that the more traditional

economic base of the County continues to be supported, including extractive activities such as mining and quarrying, meat processing, other agri-food, engineering and furniture making. The indigenous sector has seen an increase in employment, with Enterprise Ireland client companies providing a significant boost to employment numbers. The County's advantage relative to the State in this regard has remained strong, indicating that employment prospects are likely to remain positive for larger Irish-owned companies based in the County.

# Meet the Trailblazers

Meath is already home to indigenous and international businesses making their mark that have opted to make Meath their Place and Space to Thrive. This is what they have to say:

“Meath offers a number of competitive advantages and points of differentiation for SME’s in Meath including, access to skilled staff through the various further education institutes in close proximity, access to local and international trade corridors via our road networks, sea and airport hubs and a strong cluster of innovative progressive organisations in the Meath region.”

**DROMONE**<sup>®</sup>  
intelligent:innovation



“Our family farm now employs over 350 people, 77% of whom live and work in the immediate area; our great location in County Meath enables them to enjoy a healthy work/life balance. We also really value being situated in the fertile Boyne Valley, which is such a productive area, home to many excellent food and drink producers.”

“As a native of the county, I was delighted to establish our business eCOMM Merchant Solutions in County Meath. I am proud of the potential in this thriving County and we have further expanded our investments in Meath, through our involvement with Bective Stud, Tea Rooms & Apartments. This demonstrates my belief that Meath is the ideal place to work, live and play.”



"We are delighted with our location in Duleek, Co Meath. It has easy access to the National motorway network and enables our customer base to stretch the length and breadth of the entire Island of Ireland with ease. Its proximity to Dublin airport and surrounding Industrial estates make Qualitas a viable option for R&D companies to meet their manufacturing needs locally.

With Meath's attractive heritage and local amenities on our doorstep gives us a distinct advantage when hosting existing clients while also attracting new clients. A very strong telecommunications infrastructure and development plan enables us to use the latest in technology to improve efficiencies across the business and plan with confidence for the future."



"We feel very privileged to have one of our MSD sites located in beautiful Co. Meath. At the heart of everything we do, is an unshakable commitment to making a difference – for our employees, for our communities and for the people across the world who rely on our medicines. We are so delighted with our location, accessibility and amenities as we have continued to expand our campus in Dunboyne."



"Meath is a great place and space to thrive because of its' ease of access, infrastructure and supports available."

"The culture of 'can do' is major and the availability of world class facilities and a fantastic workforce is critical."



"When we first started exploring Meath as a place for a Meta data centre nearly a decade ago, it was clear very quickly that it was a community we wanted to call home. Not just because of the access to reliable infrastructure and a great workforce but Meath also has a strong and collaborative set of local authority partners and is a wonderful place to live and do business."



# Imagining Meath 2030

Overall the local economy of County Meath is influenced by a complex set of factors, including demographic changes, tourism, agriculture, technology, infrastructure investment, Covid-19 and Brexit. Meath is affected, like all Irish counties, by local, national and international trends. International supply chain issues and weary investors affect all counties in Ireland indiscriminately. Meath remains informed and well-positioned in order to take advantage of these drivers and to reduce any negative effects. Meath will continue to place importance on understanding these trends and drivers, recognising it is important for businesses and policymakers seeking to promote economic growth and development in the area.

As we look to the year 2030, Meath County Council is focused on driving sustainable economic growth and development across a range of sectors. Seven key areas where the council is working to support and promote economic development in the county include:

- Indigenous Industry/SMEs
- Foreign Direct Investment
- Tourism/ Hospitality & Heritage
- Innovation
- Retail
- Agriculture/Food Industries
- Creative Economy

## Indigenous Industry/ SMEs

County Meath has a diverse range of indigenous industries, reflecting the area's strengths in engineering, technology, agriculture, food processing, construction, manufacturing, retail and services and the creative sector. Meath County Council will continue to develop an ecosystem that supports the growth and creation of indigenous businesses and SMEs. The close relationship developed with the Local Enterprise Office allows Meath County Council to identify local business needs providing tailored support, guidance and funding opportunities to increase entrepreneurship and growth.

The Regional Enterprise Plan for the Mid-East is one such strategy developed by the Irish government to support the growth and development of businesses in

the region, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and indigenous industries. The plan will enhance the already competitive region, boost innovation and create more sustainable employment opportunities.

The local authority will continue to play a major role providing these ongoing, significant benefits to SMEs and indigenous industries in County Meath. By providing access to funding, business supports and opportunities for innovation and exporting, the plan can help these businesses to

grow, create jobs and contribute to the economic development of the region.

The Planning and Economic Development Team strives to accommodate and support businesses by providing focused pre-planning consultations and processing applications for Economic Development projects in an expeditious way.



## Foreign Direct Investment

FDI is an important driver of economic growth in Ireland and County Meath is no exception. Meath County Council has a strong track record of attracting FDI and the area will continue to be an important destination for international investors in the years to come.

Working together, Meath has advised on and encouraged companies to invest in a range of activities in County Meath, including software development, data centres and customer support services. The presence of these, as well as new Pharma companies, has created employment opportunities and stimulated growth in the local economy. The technology sector is expected to remain a key driver of FDI in County Meath in the coming years, as more companies seek to establish operations in the area. Not only is Meath County Council fully supportive of the Tech industry and associated FDI, it also recognises that there are important opportunities in other sectors, such as healthcare, pharmaceuticals and finance among others.

Meath County Council will continue to work closely with the IDA, Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise Ireland to maintain Meath's status as an attractive foreign direct investment opportunity. This provides an opportunity for the county to further improve its offerings to and capitalise on, potential investors. Meath will continue to promote the county's strengths and unique selling points, such

as its proximity to Dublin and Dublin's educational and transport infrastructure. Meath is recognised for having all of the advantages of a capital city but with a significantly lower cost base and increased access to natural amenities. Maintaining and improving the important Council's 'one point of contact approach' will ensure that investors continue to be facilitated, given extensive pre-planning consultation and guaranteed decisions in the shortest time possible.

County Meath already provides an attractive and educated local labour pool. It is strategically located, has serviced employment lands and important infrastructure for potential investors. Meath County Council will ensure these important factors are developed and communicated in order to maintain its attractive position for FDI. The team in Meath will continue to build on this momentum in establishing urban centres, which are crucial in generating agglomeration benefits. These benefits are deemed essential in creating a suitable economic atmosphere for multinational corporations. The new strategy of IDA Ireland, "Driving Recovery and Sustainable Growth 2021-2024," pledges to promote Meath and the Mid-East region by leveraging existing assets, such as property solutions and placemaking. Meath's Economic Development Strategy Roadmap compliments the IDA strategy and it will further improve Meath's development plans, with job creation and investment always at its core.



The focus of this Roadmap is to ensure that potential investors are familiar with all the County has to offer, such as good quality housing and services as well as a wide variety of recreation/amenities for employees locating here.

## **Tourism/ Hospitality & Heritage**

It is worth noting that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the tourism industry in County Meath, as it has in many other regions. The closure of attractions, hotels and hospitality businesses resulted in a sharp decline in visitor numbers and revenue. Nevertheless, Meath is recovering well from the pandemic, thanks to its strong tourism infrastructure and its established reputation as a leading heritage destination in Ireland.

To continue positive growth in this sector, Meath County Council commits to the ongoing development and enhancement of key tourist attractions, support of local

businesses and promotion of Meath's unique heritage and culture.

County Meath is already home to several important heritage sites, such as the ancient burial grounds of UNESCO World Heritage Site, Brú na Bóinne, the Hill of Tara and the medieval town of Trim. In line with the Ancient Destination Experience Development Plan, the council has invested heavily and will continue to do so, in these attractions, improving infrastructure and visitor experiences in order to attract more visitors to the region. In addition to the development of existing sites, the council also plans to support local businesses to create new tourist offerings including restaurants, hotels and other hospitality businesses that cater to visitors.

Meath County Council commits to ongoing support for local entrepreneurs which will help solidify Meath's position as a vibrant and diverse tourism industry. The development of further industry cluster hub action plans will help industry



stakeholders work together to create growth for their sector within the tourism industry.

Meath is seeing continued investment in attractions such as Greenways, Blueways and various other recreational and sporting developments, both completed and in the pipeline.

## Innovation

Meath County Council recognises the importance of innovation and technology to the future of the county's economy. As part of its 2030 plans, the council aims to further promote Meath as a hub for innovation, with a thriving ecosystem that supports research, development and entrepreneurship. A focus on technology and innovation roles will provide impetus for the continued

adaptation of Meath's economy to an increasingly technological future.

The technology sector has seen significant growth within Meath, with several multinational companies establishing operations in the county, including Amazon and Meta. These companies are world leaders in technological innovation and both have large-scale data centres located in the County. As mentioned earlier, the establishment of these centres contributed by creating ca. 3,500 construction jobs in the County, as they were being developed as well as permanent employment in the operation and management of these facilities.

Meath has also seen growth in the agriculture and food sectors, with companies such as Meade Farm Ltd, Finnegan's Farm and Dawn Meats



operating in the county. These companies have invested in research and development, introducing new products and production techniques to the market. Furthermore, they have developed new sustainable farming practices in the production of food. Meath will continue to cultivate an environment in which advances towards a more sustainable and efficient future are encouraged and promoted.

Meath will continue to support and facilitate an economy that drives innovation across sectors and positively impacts the economy locally and internationally. Meath wants to work with companies and producers to assist with aligning innovation with sustainability, particularly in product development.

## **Retail**

The Retail Hierarchy for Meath, as laid out in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region 2019-2031 and the County Retail Strategy, designates Navan as a Level 2 centre (County town centre), while Ashbourne, Dunboyne and Trim are designated as Level 3 centres (district centres). Kells and Ratoath are designated as Level 4 centres (local centres), while Dunshaughlin, Bettystown/Laytown and Enfield are designated as Level 5 centres (neighbourhood centres). This hierarchy serves as a guide for the strategic development of retail in the region, with Navan and Ashbourne being the primary locations for major retail development, while the other towns are expected to support comparison and convenience retail.

The County Retail Strategy is a policy framework that guides the distribution of new retail spaces throughout the county, considering emerging trends in the retail market and future demand based on projected changes in the local population, consumer spending and turnover potential.

The retail sector is recovering after Covid-19, which has accelerated structural changes including the move to digital and online shopping. Meath is working to support the retail sector in the county, with a particular focus on creating vibrant and attractive town centres and ensuring businesses are ready for a digital transition. Although some forms of retail may have moved online, Meath remains fully committed to the maintenance, growth and support of the local high street.

The strategy aims to provide guidance on the location and size of major retail developments. Navan and Dunboyne will be encouraged to promote new retail spaces for comparison retail uses, while addressing vacancy through incentives. The strategy also aims to improve the range and quality of comparison floorspace to enhance the retail offer and attraction of the county, particularly in Navan. Convenience retail provision will be promoted in underprovided areas such as Dunboyne and Enfield to improve competition and diversity in the retail market. The county is well served in terms of retail warehouse development, with no current need for additional floor space of this type within the county.

Retailers are increasingly required to transform their business to deliver an omnichannel experience (bricks and clicks), that shoppers increasingly demand and do it profitably and sustainably. Retail business models are also changing in response to sustainability challenges moving towards circular business models, prolonging products and components' lives. Global movements to reduce packaging waste and single-use plastics present a challenge to the sector. In accordance with the recommendations of the Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities, Meath County Council will continue to actively engage with landowners to facilitate the delivery of key town centre sites, along with strategic employment generating sites.

Implementation of the Government's Town Centre First Policy, with significant investment from the Council, as well as state funding in the form of URDF and RRDF grants etc, will accelerate progress in this regard.

## Agriculture/Food Industries

Meath County Council strives to support all relevant stakeholders in the development of a programme of Agri-Innovation/ Agri-Tech, Agri-Green, Food Innovation and Niche Food for consumers. By 2030, the council aims to have established Meath as a centre of excellence for food production, with a thriving network of businesses and research institutions.





The continued development of innovative schemes such as the Boyne Valley Food Innovation District and the Digital Innovation and Smart Agri Hub will support the development and scalable expansion of Irish Foodtech and Agtech startups and SMEs. Not only will these hubs and their kind help develop inclusive economic growth, sustainability and social cohesion but they will also support Ireland's policy endeavours to promote innovation and entrepreneurship.

The Boyne Valley Food Hub, developed with support from EI, is a flagship project of the Boyne Valley Food Innovation District to develop an innovation rich building and stimulus project to accelerate growth and yield business impact through collaboration, innovation and clustering. This will facilitate the development of scalable, sustainable and profitable food businesses across the Mid East and North East regions.

## Creative Economy

Meath's creative sector is an important part of its economy and cultural identity and continues to grow and thrive. Since 2017, the County has invested heavily in Creative Ireland Projects. Meath County Council has helped create and support a robust and diverse industry with notable newcomers including a burgeoning TV and Film sector.

Unscripted television refers to TV content that is made without a script, for example, a reality or game show, a documentary, or a talk show. This genre of television is seeing significant growth internationally and in Ireland. Meath is ideally placed to capitalise on this sector, due to our rich history, stunning scenery, strategic location, vibrant local culture and of course the availability of suitable lands for the development of studios. This has led to a couple of multi national companies

showing a keen interest in progressing on large projects within the County in the near future.

The council will continue its work to establish Meath as a thriving hub for creativity contributing to the county's economic and cultural development. The work to date has resulted in the progression of Ashbourne Film Studios which has been granted permission and is due to commence construction shortly.

The roll out of the ambitious Meath County Culture and Creativity Strategy will be supported by the Creative Ireland Programme 2023-2027. Working closely with government agencies, Meath County Council will protect and enhance our literary legacy for future generations;

mainstreaming culture within the local authority with an ambition to deliver integrated cultural services as envisaged by the Creative Ireland model; nurturing and supporting creatives, artists and creators. This will enhance Meath's local cultural and creative infrastructure, creatively engaging with communities to record and communicate our natural, built and cultural heritage; and increasing access to, awareness of and participation in culture and creativity.

The plan will incorporate contributions from community stakeholders that will encourage people to engage, participate and enable their creative potential.



# Meath the place and space to thrive

Meath County Council is committed to enabling growth across the County that aligns with Regional and State priorities. The council has identified key enabling actions to underpin each focus area:

The place  
& space

for people

that works with you

that maximises its spatial advantage

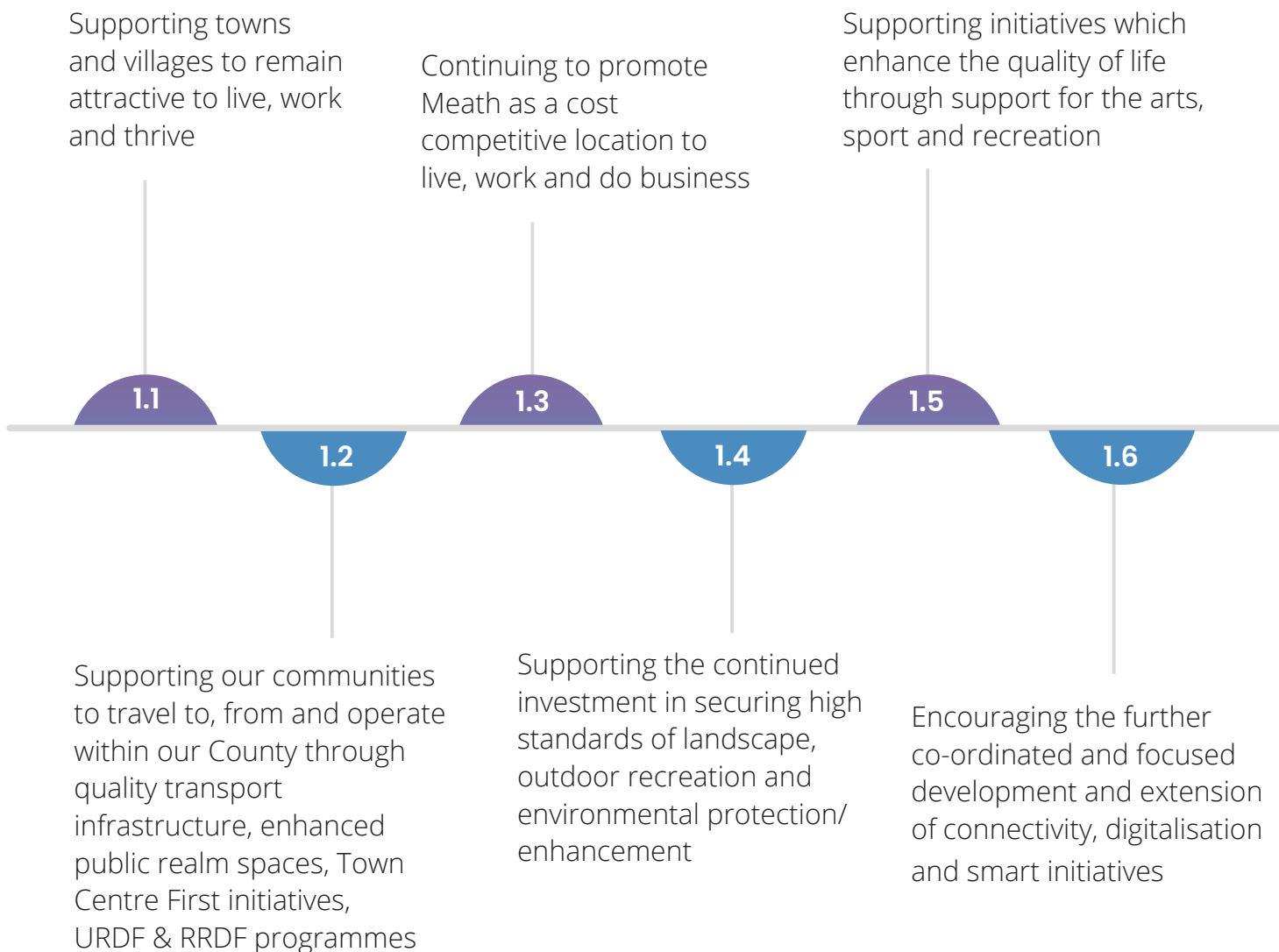
at the forefront of smart growth

# The place and space for people

We recognise the importance of creating highly desirable places where people want to live. This pull factor is currently reflected in Meath's population growth, which is the second highest population growth in the State. This population growth is being supported by high-quality placemaking principles ensuring that existing assets and unique features are protected and improved, while new well-designed places are created. This is being achieved through investment in high-quality urban design, urban and rural regeneration and social infrastructure provision.

Meath's strategic priorities will continue to promote High Quality of Life Enabling Actions that seek to create vibrant, attractive places to live, work and play, a critical catalyst in attracting and retaining its talented workforce.

## Strategic Objectives



## The place and space that works with you

Meath County Council is committed to continuing its collaborative approach with businesses and investors to retain its supportive environment for economic growth. By actively engaging with business leaders and investors, the Council can assist in identifying and meeting the specific needs and challenges of new and innovative enterprises. This collaborative approach not only benefits businesses but also creates a more attractive investment climate that has proved successful in attracting new businesses and investors to the county. Ultimately, creating a more vibrant and prosperous local economy, benefiting the entire community.

### Strategic Objectives

Forging mutually beneficial linkages and partnerships with the business and third-level institutions including research and development facilities

2.1

Business Supports including training and mentoring programs, business development initiatives and networking opportunities

2.3

Ensuring our in-house expertise is available to support businesses to navigate the planning and development process

2.5

2.2

2.4

2.6

Assisting enterprises in accessing a range of funding options so that SMEs and indigenous industries can avail of grants and loans

Aid and support the collaborative working with education and training providers with relevant stakeholders and local employers to develop and deliver targeted responses to skills and employment needs

To actively promote best practices for job creation initiatives and innovation

# The place and space that maximises its spatial advantage

Meath's strategic location offers ample opportunities for economic growth and development, which Meath County Council, along with key stakeholders, aims to leverage for the benefit of its residents. Located within the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor, Meath is within easy reach of major national and international markets. Additionally, Meath benefits from its proximity to Dublin International Airport and Drogheda and Dublin Port, providing an excellent opportunity to leverage commercial and tourism prospects. As well as maximising on these factors, Meath maintains a thriving rural economy that offers ample space and potential for new indigenous industries. The County boasts a young, educated and rapidly growing population, top-rated tourist destinations and industry-leading agri-food and technology firms all in a cost-competitive business environment.

## Strategic Objectives

Promote global connectivity and regional accessibility as part of an integrated land use and transport strategy, with a focus on protecting national assets and enhanced interregional connectivity

Develop the Metropolitan towns of Dunboyne, Maynooth and Kilcock to ensure a steady supply of serviced development lands to support Dublin's sustainable growth

Utilize existing employment zoned land in suitable locations for industry and enterprise uses

3.1

3.2

3.3

3.4

3.5

3.6

Develop the 12 key strategic employment sites outlined in the Meath CDP for employment generation in Meath for the promotion of economic growth

Facilitate collaboration to support the development of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor, to drive synergy in the Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry cross border network and strengthen economic links with the south east extending to Rosslare Europort

Offering a good quality of life encouraging and providing a sustainable "live work" development model in the County, thereby reducing unsustainable long-distance commuting patterns for employment



# The place and space at the forefront of smart growth

Meath continues to lead both regionally and nationally in economic innovation and enterprise. It recognises that to do this it has to have a strong and consistent alignment with national, provincial and economic policies and strategies, while retaining and promoting its own unique selling points and sectoral strengths. Meath County Council is committed to promoting orderly growth, digitalisation, clusters and smart specialisation to increase productivity, internationalisation and innovation.

Meath is committed to increasing its FDI proposition and supporting IDA Ireland with investment attraction while ensuring its existing industries are well-positioned to leverage new and emerging opportunities across the green economy, such as renewable energy and waste reduction, to develop environmentally conscious businesses that thrive.

## Strategic Objectives

Facilitating relevant bodies regarding the availability of high-speed telecommunications

Formalise the creation of cluster teams within the county charged with demonstrating capability in Meath in all focus sectors

4.1

4.2

4.3

4.4

4.5

4.6

Develop and implement smart growth opportunities

Continue to ambitiously pursue FDI with IDA Ireland

Working with national universities to develop innovative projects in the identified sectoral areas

Commit to the continued expansion of the Green Economy through sustainable practices, energy efficiency and climate action

# The next chapter

Economic Development in Meath will continue to be the focus of this local authority, supported by:

- The Meath Local Economic Community Plan 2023-2029
- The Meath County Development Plan 2021 - 2027
- Engagement with Government initiatives such as URDF, RRDF and the Town Centre First Schemes
- A new Economic Development Strategy for County Meath, which will be informed by all of these, as well as the full statistics and analysis available from Census 2022.

If you are considering Meath as a potential location for your business, be assured that we are ready and willing to support you in the process in any way we can. The Meath County Council Economic Development & Planning team are here to guide you on the journey to making Meath your place and space to thrive, in collaboration with the excellent resources available from:

- Meath Local Enterprise Office
- Meath Enterprise
- Meath Chamber of Commerce.

**Contact us at [economic@meathcoco.ie](mailto:economic@meathcoco.ie) and we will take it from there.**





comhairle chontae na mí  
*meath county council*

**Meath**  
The place & space  
to thrive