

Irish Independent 

County

# Carlow

YOUR SEAT IS READY

**INSIDE:**

- What makes Carlow a unique destination for hybrid working
  - Interviews with remote workers who relocated to Carlow
  - Hotels as hubs – Fantastic ‘Holiworking’ options in County Carlow
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## A BeCreative Editorial Production

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**Editor:** Clodagh Dooley

**Deputy Editor:** Shauna McCrudden

**Advertising:** PJ Banville,  
pj.banville@mediahuis.ie, (086) 027 4304

**Design:** Mediahuis Ireland Design Studio,  
Belfast

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# County Carlow – An eco-system where the remote, hybrid and resident workforce blooms

## Why County Carlow is an ideal destination for remote and hybrid workers

Carlow County is known for many things, from its magical Garden Trail to the breathtaking South Carlow vistas of the Blackstairs Mountains, and from traditional villages like Borris, Leighlinbridge and Clonegal to the River Barrow, where you can wander off the track. Then there's celebrities such as Kathryn Thomas and Saoirse Ronan who hail from Carlow.

Not to mention, many global enterprises such as MSD and Unum and an array of indigenous businesses with a global reach – from Netwatch, engineering giants such as Burnside Group, Tanco and Magma to food and drink companies such as O'Haras, Seerys and Codd Mushrooms. Over 2,700 companies are embedded in County Carlow and over 60,000 people call Carlow "home".

"Carlow provides an ideal location for companies and individuals who want to go remote or be hybrid," says Rowena Dooley, President of County Carlow Chamber. "Carlow has an array of public and private remote working facilities which are there for the working population to use and a variety of tourism establishments who offer an excellent base for the nomadic type of employee who passes through Carlow."

### Supporting the working population

Hybrid working is becoming increasingly popular in Ireland, as more businesses adopt this flexible working arrangement. According to LinkedIn, Ireland has one of the highest shares of hybrid job postings in Europe, second only to the UK.

Rowena says, "There are many benefits to hybrid working for both employers and employees. For employers, hybrid working can help to reduce office space costs, increase employee productivity, and improve employee satisfaction. For employees, hybrid working can offer increased flexibility, reduced commuting costs, and improved work-life balance."

She adds, "County Carlow is the ideal place for hybrid companies and remote employees."

Carlow County Council is at the forefront of leading and supporting the business community and resident population by facilitating the hybrid and remote working agenda. Cllr Andrea Dalton, Cathaoirleach of Carlow County Council, says, "As a Council, we want to ensure that Carlow is an ideal place to live, learn and play. Supporting our working population and business community is an essential part of that."

"Remote and hybrid working is having a positive impact on the rural economy of County Carlow. Given its proximity to the capital, remote and hybrid solutions are allowing Carlow to retain talent, create jobs, boost the local economy, reduce commuting costs, improve quality of life, reduce infrastructure costs, and improve environmental sustainability."

The Cathaoirleach comments that, "remote and hybrid working is helping to attract and retain talent in rural areas of County Carlow because people who want to work remotely can choose to live in rural communities, where the cost of living is often lower. This



Rowena Dooley President of County Carlow Chamber of Commerce and Cllr. Andrea Dalton, Cathaoirleach of Carlow County Council

has a knock-on effect of boosting the local economy by increasing spending in rural areas. Remote and hybrid working can also reduce commuting costs for employees, which improves their quality of life."

Cllr Dalton concludes, "Remote working is also providing a significant and positive environmental impact in Carlow, given that over 6,000 people from the county commuted to Dublin on a daily basis prior to the pandemic."

Speaking about the Council's ambition when it comes to the development of infrastructure to support remote and hybrid working, Kieran Comerford, Head of Economic Development and Enterprise in Carlow County Council's Local Enterprise Office, says, "As a Council, we are delighted to have supported both public and private hubs across the County. Our own economic development unit is based in the County's flagship hub in Enterprise House on O'Brien Road in Carlow Town. This hub alone is home to over 28 companies, with 146 staff located on-site and hybrid."

### Hybrid facilities

Comerford says Carlow County Council has ambitious plans for the future to develop further hubs and enterprise facilities that are designed to help businesses grow, while also providing facilities for hybrid and remote workers.

Comerford outlines five main reasons why people should consider locating their business in Carlow or working from a hub in Carlow.

"Firstly, hubs in Carlow provide a central location for people to reduce costs, increase efficiency, and attract talent. Carlow offers

a variety of hubs from private, social and educational facilities.

"Secondly, hubs are a place for people to connect, whether they are from the same organisation, the same industry, or the same geographic community. This can help to facilitate collaboration, knowledge sharing, and innovation, and this is particularly evident in Carlow through local links to the two local third-level institutions, Carlow College and South East Technological University."

Thirdly, Kieran says as a rural county, Carlow is a cheaper location than the capital. "Carlow's hubs can reduce costs for businesses and organisations by providing shared resources, such as office space, equipment, and technology. This can be especially beneficial for small businesses and startups that may not have the resources to acquire these things on their own."

"Fourthly, hubs in Carlow encourage a sense of community by bringing people together from different backgrounds and with different interests. This can help to foster community belonging and support, which can be especially important for people who are new to an area or who are working remotely."

"Fifth, and finally, hubs can attract talent by providing a stimulating and collaborative environment. This can be particularly beneficial for businesses that are looking to attract top talent in a competitive market."

Kieran adds, "Hubs in Carlow can be a valuable resource for businesses, organisations, and individuals. They can help to improve efficiency, reduce costs, create a sense of community, and attract talent."

**County Carlow – Your Seat is Ready**  
In this special supplement, we speak to business owners and employees that have made Carlow their home and base from where to work. We share the many reasons why Carlow is an attractive destination for remote/hybrid working, as well as the facilities and supports available to remote workers, and much more.

## LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS





“When I graduated with a human nutrition degree back in 2012, my intention was to study further and become a dietitian,” says Deirdre O’Shea, who is a Laois native but is now living in Carlow. “But my career took a different path. I had a farming background, and I ended up working in the agriculture department of Ulster Bank in Carlow for about a year after college.

“Then I moved to Dublin and worked in various policy-based roles within the Irish Farmers Association (IFA), before working for a not-for-profit called Agri Aware for four years. Food, farming and agriculture have always been something I was passionate about.”

Deirdre then flew to Australia in March 2020, with plans to travel. However, Covid-19 hit and Deirdre moved back to Ireland shortly afterwards.

“I moved back to Dublin and secured a job at Aon Ireland, which I started in August 2020. Aon is a global professional services firm, which operates in 120 countries around the world. There are over 50,000 colleagues globally, and approximately 800 employees within Aon Ireland. I lead the food, agribusiness and beverage (FAB) division within Aon Ireland, advising clients on all areas of risk (both insurable and uninsurable risks) within their business.

“We have a broad range of clients in various sub-sectors of the FAB industry. In my role, I get to work with people across the Aon network, from our broker colleagues to people in our risk consulting division, for example, to deliver solutions for our clients. This keeps the job both challenging and exciting.”

**Adapting**

When Deirdre began at Aon, the role was fully remote, due to the Covid pandemic.

“When Covid hit, I spoke with my manager, and decided to move back to Carlow. I was renting in Dublin at the time and couldn’t afford to buy a house, so that was one deciding factor in moving back to Carlow for me, as Carlow is more affordable. I was able to buy a house in Carlow which was close to my family home.

“I worked remotely for over a year, but as we overcame Covid, Aon developed their Smart Working model. This adopts hybrid working arrangements, with employees working remotely and in the office. So as a hybrid worker, a minimum of 50pc of my time is spent either in an Aon office or on a client site, and then the remaining time is spent in a remote location.”

Deirdre says the hybrid model works well for her because she is regularly on the road, meeting clients and companies. “But on the days that I don’t need to travel, working remotely from Carlow helps to cut my commute time, which I feel is a big benefit.

“I do love to go into the office and meet my colleagues, and Carlow is a good location for commuting to Dublin, with easy access to the



# Feeling connected in Carlow

Deirdre O’Shea, Food, Agribusiness and Beverage Industry Leader at Aon Ireland, speaks about why the company’s hybrid working model best suits her and how moving back to County Carlow has allowed her to lead a better work-life balance while staying connected

Deirdre O’Shea

motorway. But when you’re travelling from a rural area to Dublin, it can take a lot of time out of the day. So by mixing my time between the office and working remotely, I get an extra three or four hours in my day for activities that I am involved in locally, such as sports. I also get to spend more time with family and friends.

“It’s lovely to have the flexibility to be able to spend a day in Carlow and have that extra bit of time to yourself. Aon are very good at promoting personal wellbeing and making sure that their employees are looked after from that perspective.”

**Creating boundaries**

However, Deirdre says that when she works remotely from Carlow, she prefers not to work from home and instead, takes advantage of the local Carlow Community Enterprise Centre, also referred to as Enterprise House. Established in 2005, Carlow Community Enterprise Centres offer fully serviced office spaces, hot desks, co-working areas and also large and small meeting rooms, all with fibre broadband connection.

“The centre is just a short stroll from my house. I found that when I worked from home during the Covid lockdown, it really wasn’t for

me. I like that boundary between the home and your place of work, and I find that going into Enterprise House provides the feeling of a work environment. I like to get up, get my morning coffee and get dressed, as if I’m going to the office. That’s my personal preference.

“Plus, you meet various other business people in the centre, so it’s a good opportunity to connect with different people.”

Deirdre adds that another way business people and the community are brought together in County Carlow is through events organised by the Carlow Local Enterprise Office. “The Carlow LEO is excellent for organising networking events so that people in the hub can connect with each other. I attended a lunch for Women in Business in Carlow recently, which was interesting. For those working remotely, it’s a brilliant way to continue to feel a part of something and make new connections.”

Looking ahead, Deirdre thinks hybrid working will be the way forward for many companies. “I love hybrid working and Aon’s Smart Working model really works for me. It’s definitely something I hope will continue and I think it makes sense. There have been so many advances in technology, for example, we are now able to do meetings over Zoom or Teams, which is great. I do think in-person meetings are still so important, but there are some things that can be done online and other things in-person. And with climate change on everyone’s mind at the moment, hybrid working can help to reduce our emissions and carbon footprint.

“It’s good to have that balance and I think combining remote and office work is a win-win.”

For more information on Aon Ireland, visit [aon.com/ireland](http://aon.com/ireland)



Enterprise House, O’Brien Road, Carlow – part of the Connected Hub Network



# Embracing opportunities in Carlow

Norah Ryan, Owner and Managing Director of Barrow Consultancy and Training, talks about the evolution of the company and the potential for growth and success in County Carlow

**N**orah Ryan is making waves with her innovative approach to training and consultancy services.

Barrow Consultancy and Training was established in 2008 by Joe and Marian Manning in Bagenalstown in Carlow. It offers accredited training in various fields such as childcare, healthcare, special needs assisting, management, health and safety, and personal development. They have also started offering training courses with the Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board in areas such as floor and wall tiling, construction studies, welding, IT and textile floor coverings.

Norah had been working in the company since 2015 as the Training Manager and acquired the company in July 2021 amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. And in just over two years, she has led her team of seven, all women, to new heights, expanding the company's horizons.

"I'm so lucky to work with the team I have," says Norah, who is originally from Tipperary and who lived and worked in Dublin for 20 years before moving to and falling in love with Rathvilly in Carlow. "We have a very entrepreneurial spirit in the office, and all the ladies have their own areas of expertise, which gives me the freedom to work on growing the business as opposed to working 'in' the business.

"Networking plays a crucial role in my vision for the company to open doors for Carlow, promoting it as an excellent place to work with strong support for small businesses."

## A hybrid approach

In response to the pandemic, Norah shifted the company's training model to predominantly online, offering blended learning and virtual training courses. This move not only catered to changing demands, but also facilitated a more flexible work culture.

"More people have embraced the hybrid model given that they can do it from home as self-paced, self-directed learning, and don't have to leave the comfort of their home or office to complete it," says Norah. "We can have conversations with those unsure if the training is right for them as sometimes, going back to education can be very daunting for people. So, we like to encourage them and so far, we have enjoyed a 100pc success rate in our courses.

"This hybrid model has opened up so many new avenues for the business, as well as allowing more of a flexible workplace. I always want to support and encourage my employees. If you work in great workplaces which respect a healthy work-life balance, where staff are treated fairly, you get happier and more productive employees."

Recognising the diverse needs of her employees, she introduced flexible working hours for parents to accommodate childcare responsibilities. This approach allows employees to log in later in the evening or earlier in the morning, offering them convenience without high childcare costs.

"And of course, those without children are treated in a similar way, so we have started a four-day work week. Employees alternate when they want the long weekends, and it's been working incredibly well so far! The team has such a close-knit and supportive work atmosphere.

"Being in Carlow contributes significantly to this positive work culture. It has such a central location, as it's close to Dublin, Waterford, Wexford, Kilkenny and so many other counties. It has far less traffic and congestion. I've lived and worked in Dublin, so the difference is astounding! It is also much more affordable to live here which makes it an attractive destination for businesses and individuals alike. There is such a friendly, local community here. I haven't looked back since moving here!"

## Giving back

Norah praises the welcoming and supportive



Norah Ryan working from her offices in Enterprise House, O'Brien Road, Carlow



Tori Carroll, Florrie Leonard, Leona O'Shea, Norah Ryan, Sile Seoige (Powerhouse Awards Presenter), Donna Purcell, Josephine Havlin, Siobhan McNally

community, which has inspired her to give back through volunteer work and community involvement. "I've joined the Board of Directors of various organisations to give back because I think Carlow has offered me a lot since I moved down here. Especially as a woman on her own, it can be more

challenging, but Carlow really took me in as one of their own."

Since taking over the business, they have been honoured with a number of awards. The prestigious AIBF Business All-Star Award and both the Powerhouse Award for Excellence in Personal Services for Business and the overall

award for Carlow Female Entrepreneur of the Year 2022 at the Carlow Powerhouse Women in Business Awards were among the accolades won over the last year.

Norah is quick to credit Carlow County Council, the Carlow Chamber and the Local Enterprise Office for their unwavering support. They provide mentorship, business development programmes, and networking opportunities that have been instrumental in Barrow Consultancy and Training's success.

"They're second to none. I have plenty of experience working in other locations, but here in Carlow, they provide so many opportunities in different areas."

Norah adds, "They run the 'Powerhouse' Women in Business network, where a group of like-minded female entrepreneurs meet once a month for lunchtime sessions and run ideas by each other. The entire team is outstanding as they have been a huge support to us."

Looking towards the future, Nora has ambitious plans for her company. She is negotiating with a UK university, with the goal of providing degree-level courses in childcare training. She also aims to make her company menopause-friendly accredited, acknowledging the importance of supporting employees through different life stages.

"The town's vibrant community, along with the local supports, offer an ideal environment for aspiring entrepreneurs and employees alike. If anybody is thinking about starting a business in Carlow or thinking of moving here and working, I would wholeheartedly tell them to embrace the opportunities and go for it."

For more information, visit [barrowtraining.ie](http://barrowtraining.ie) or call (059) 972 1416





Jerry O'Driscoll pictured in Duckett's Grove, Carlow

**J**erry O'Driscoll, Account General Manager with DXC Technology, is originally from Cork. After working overseas and in Dublin for many years, his life changed when he married a Carlow woman and settled in the town in 2008.

"Carlow is a great town to raise a family in," says Jerry. "We have education facilities that are as good as anywhere in Ireland. It's a university town now, with the South East Technological University (SETU) Carlow campus, and also currently has major investment and building going on in many of the post-primary schools as well."

"We have great sports facilities and there is an ongoing investment with a new running track. I know my own kids are excited about the brand new hockey pitch that Carlow Hockey Club is getting later in the year!"

Prior to the Covid-19 lockdown, Jerry was commuting long hours on the N7 into Dublin. But as a result of the lockdown and a strategic pivot by DXC to virtual working, Jerry can now work from anywhere and most of the time, he works from home.

"Carlow town is my home now and I've no plans to move anywhere else."

**From commuter to remote worker**

DXC Technology, a Fortune 500 global IT Services leader, has a significant presence in Ireland. Headquartered in Dublin, they have Business Continuity Centres in Dublin, Cork and Belfast, and Research and Development facilities in Galway.

They provide world-class IT services at scale from their Global Innovation and Delivery Centres in North America, South America, Europe, Asia and Australia to over 6,000 clients around the world. They solve complex technology challenges and transform their customers' businesses through a workforce of more than 110,000 people. They provide services for Business Process Outsourcing, Analytics and Engineering, Applications, Security, Cloud, IT Outsourcing and Modern Workplace.

# A testament to work-life balance

*Jerry O'Driscoll used to commute long hours, but since he started remotely working from Carlow, his life has a lot more balance*

While working at DXC before the pandemic, Jerry would leave home before dawn and return late in the evening, leaving little time for personal pursuits and a work-life balance. However, as the world went into lockdown, DXC Technology recognised the need to adapt and enable its workforce to work remotely, efficiently and safely.

Jerry says, "We had to change the way we worked almost overnight and we migrated the vast majority of our staff to home working in a matter of days. We also had to support our clients and the changes they had to make in how they worked. Plus, we had to ensure that the businesses and clients were not impacted by these changes."

"As part of that, some of our staff, including myself, were classed as essential workers and were rostered to travel where required to ensure those businesses continued to operate successfully. When I look at the response of DXC to our clients during this period and the support we all got, it's something we can be very proud of."

For Jerry, the advantages of remote work

were life-changing. He suddenly wasn't bound by the daily grind of commuting, often not getting home until nearly 7pm and spending up to 15 hours a week in his car.

"Now my commute is a morning walk around town with my dog before I start work! My wife also works in Carlow and having the two of us working in the town has given us both so much flexibility. I can do the school run in the morning or nip out to collect the kids in the evening. There are times when I need to travel to meet a client or supplier, but the ability to work from there when I get on-site is now so much better."

And Carlow's unique characteristics have played a significant role in enabling remote work for Jerry and other DXC employees.

"We have some fantastic bars and restaurants, as well as the Visual Theatre and Arts Centre," says Jerry. "You can be on the motorway in 10 minutes. If I do need to go to Dublin for work, I often take the train and can work on that in the morning and be in the IFSC in 90 minutes. Location-wise, it's second to none and with property prices far more reasonable than in Dublin, it's a great place to work from with a far more relaxed lifestyle."

**Getting support**

Jerry says DXC Technology understands the importance of supporting its remote workforce to ensure a positive and efficient virtual work experience. Approximately 90pc of their staff now work from home, and the company has implemented several measures to promote well-being and productivity.

Employees are provided with all necessary

IT equipment, accessories, and even furniture to set up their home offices. The focus has shifted from rigid 9-5 work hours to outcomes and results, offering employees more flexibility in managing their time.

"Remote and virtual working is now part of our core approach and culture. And we've adapted how we work to facilitate that, whilst continuing to ensure we focus on our client's needs."

"From a personal perspective, it's been a life-changing move."

To combat feelings of isolation, DXC employs various tools like Teams and Workplace to drive engagement between remote teams. Regular on-site meetings are also held to maintain a sense of connection among colleagues. And the company provides a comprehensive Employee Assistance Programme to support employees' mental and emotional well-being.

"An important value for DXC is our approach to the community we live in too. We encourage our staff to get involved in local initiatives. That's how I've been involved in supporting Carlow Local Enterprise Office for the last number of years by sitting on committees and also acting as a judge on the local finals of Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneurs (IBYE). It's been great to see all of the local start-ups and established businesses we have in Carlow and to do a little bit to help them grow and prosper."

Jerry adds, "For DXC, our focus is very much on growth - grow our business, help our clients to grow, and help our team to grow."

■ You can find out more about DXC at [dxc.com](https://dxc.com)



*From a personal perspective, it's been a life-changing move.*





Riley Mc Evoy pictured in Woodford Dolmen Hotel

# A nationwide success in Carlow!

Riley McEvoy, General Manager at CanCo Services, speaks about how being located in County Carlow has allowed the company to evolve on a countrywide basis

**R**iley McEvoy's background in the fire protection and electrical industry dates back to 1997, when he took a job servicing fire extinguishers in Canada. "My career just evolved rapidly from there," says Riley. "I had a number of roles in the industry within that time before I moved to Carlow in 2018. Today, I am General Manager of CanCo Services and have never looked back since."

CanCo Services supports fire alarm

companies and electrical contractors with specialty work regarding fire alarms, emergency lights, fire suppression, fire doors, AOV and electrical services. "Whether clients are looking for fire protection equipment installation, maintenance, repair or just advice, our primary aim is to make premises in Ireland safe and up-to-standard," says Riley.

### Necessities

Because of the nature of the work, Riley and his

team have always worked remotely. And even though remote working is a necessity for Riley, he says it suits him and his lifestyle.

"We have always worked remotely, well before the Covid-19 pandemic. The nature of the work demands you be on-site, while ensuring all the office-based activities are overseen to a high standard. Being in the fire and safety business, detail and systematic paperwork are very important.

"Remote working suits me because it

affords me the opportunity to oversee ongoing projects, while still getting my office work done in a timely manner. It was chosen out of necessity, while developing our business. Because we offer specialised services, the work can take us anywhere in the country, so we need to be mobile and capable of performing operations remotely."

While the work can take Riley and the CanCo Services team nationwide, he feels Carlow is a unique place to base himself, and to grow the business.

"Carlow is a great hub, logistically and commercially, as it has fantastic links to the motorways and Dublin, as well as the south-east. The town has everything you could want and the management at the 4-Star Woodford Dolmen Hotel provide such fantastic working, meeting and eating facilities that it makes it hard to want to work anywhere else.

"When our employees are working remotely in Carlow, we put them up at the Woodford Dolmen Hotel and treat them to fine dining and drinks in the hotel's lovely facilities! Carlow has great amenities for a work-life balance, having shops for everything you need. But it also has a small town feel that is close to nature."

### Local love

Riley adds, "Carlow has become a home for me and we have locals working with us every day, so we will always aim to stay in Carlow while we provide nationwide service."

Riley is proud of how far CanCo Services has come today and feels the company plays a part in supporting local job creation, "Setting up a specialist company in a town with a limited population and labour pool has led us to take the approach of training the right people in-house, as opposed to having a large selection of already experienced people. We pride ourselves on good quality work and our system of operations has evolved to enhance this process.

"Our goal for the future is to continue growing the business in Carlow to offer high-quality services both locally and nationwide, with the aim of bringing Ireland's fire safety infrastructure up-to-standard."

For more information, visit [cancoservices.ie](http://cancoservices.ie)

**County Carlow Chamber**  
Advancing business together

## THE VOICE OF BUSINESS IN CO. CARLOW

County Carlow Chamber is the premier business organisation in Co. Carlow.

We currently represent over 194 companies, and in turn represent over 6,800 employees in Carlow town and County.

We are a privately constituted organisation, that works for the interests of businesses, and for the economic development of the town, county and region.

- Networking
- Promoting
- Supporting
- Advice
- Training
- Lobbying

County Carlow Chamber of Commerce  
Gateway Business Centre, Athy Road, Carlow R93 C7P6  
admin@carlowchamber.com  
www.carlowchamber.com





Andrew Tobin pictured in Leighlinbridge, County Carlow

**W**ith an extensive background in the technology industry, Andrew Tobin is currently CEO of vCloud (previously T2), a leading provider of private Cloud solutions, and CEO of Stryve.

“I founded T2, a leading Irish digital agency in 2003,” says Andrew. “Having spotted a gap in the market for secure private cloud, in 2018, T2 merged with vCloud.ie to offer something unique to the market. We embarked on an acquisitions journey and quickly added several complementary companies to our portfolio, including Stryve. Today, the group boasts six companies across seven countries and over 100 people employed with a turnover upwards of €10 million.

“Stryve is an ISO 27001 accredited company that employs a global team of 100 professionals delivering cutting-edge multi-cloud solutions to clients around the world. From its head office in Carlow, Stryve provides secure and reliable cybersecurity solutions to scaling SMEs in everything from healthcare and legal to distribution and retail, plus EU Government contracts.”

**Balanced lifestyle**

Both companies are headquartered in County Carlow and follow a hybrid model of working, which works well for Andrew’s busy work schedule.

“Stryve has always had a hybrid model of working from home and in the office,” says Andrew. “But obviously during the pandemic, we had to work fully remotely. With a few tweaks during the pandemic, the company adapted well to the lockdown internally. Working in the private cloud space, we were well-placed to adapt to remote working. The transition was smooth.”

Today, Andrew says the company has set office days, but employees can choose to work both at the office and remotely, which encourages balance.

“Work-life balance is a core value at Stryve. Our employees value the flexibility to work either remotely or from the office. It is beneficial to meet in-person periodically. Once it was safe, we introduced set office days, which allows the team to connect in person. We also schedule social mixers to nurture the company culture.

“We also operate corporate wellness programmes. For example, Amella Nutrition Coaching and Consulting and Spectrum Health, which are available to all employees, offer health, financial, diet and exercise and talk therapy to our employees. We check in with each other regularly and facilitate social events to keep the team connected as we expand, and while working remotely.”

Andrew strongly feels that living and working in Carlow is an excellent way to achieve a healthy work-life balance. “The town is small enough to feel welcoming, but large enough to facilitate a range of interests and activities. There is also a strong sense of community, with plenty of local events and activities to get involved in. A good school structure for families, with the beautiful Carlow countryside on your doorstep.”

Andrew adds that while Stryve has office locations around the globe, being located in Carlow means it is extremely well-connected to the rest of the country, with easy access to

# Hybrid working in cybersecurity

Andrew Tobin, CEO of Stryve, a leading provider of tailored cybersecurity solutions, speaks about the benefits of hybrid working arrangements for him and his employees, and how County Carlow as a location provides a healthy work-life balance

the major cities. “We can attract top talent from all over Ireland. However, many of our employees are located here in Carlow. It offers a superb quality of life, sports and outdoor pursuits, shopping, heritage and dining plus one of my passions, a great GAA club.

“We can enjoy a relaxed rural location, yet we’re a stone’s throw from major cities. And whilst many multinational tech companies choose Dublin, we prefer to be a big fish in a smaller pond in one of Ireland’s tech hubs in County Carlow.”

**Global and local ambitions**

Being a cybersecurity company, Andrew says they go above-and-beyond to ensure the protection of their employee and client data while working remotely.

“It’s our day-to-day job to ensure our people and data are safe. We follow a very simple protocol of people, process, and tools. We train our people and do regular simulations to ensure they are very clued into cyber attacks. We adopt good processes such as the ISO 27001 security standards amongst many other less onerous protocols in the business and we implement an appropriate tool set to protect and prevent cyber-attacks. We also do this for our clients in turn on a daily basis to ensure they too are protected.”

While Andrew says the company’s exponential growth in a short amount of time is one of their greatest achievements, they are also proud to have been recognised as Security Company of the Year and won the InBusiness Recognition Award last year.

“Our Chief Security Officer was also named Security Leader of the Year in 2023. We are also very proud to be a Carbon Neutral Certified company,” says Andrew.

Andrew says the company credits Carlow County Council – Local Enterprise Office for being “extremely supportive with providing grants” at the beginning of their journey. “Carlow LEO also facilitates excellent networking events and incredible mentoring programmes, such as the management development programme with Blaise Brosnan. These types of events are very important for those working remotely to maintain professional connections. T2 was also propelled onto the national scene back in 2008 by the local LEO, by winning the Carlow Enterprise Award for that year and finishing runner-up at the national finals.”

Whilst Stryve has global ambitions, Andrew says it is important to stay local to Carlow. “Our goal is to become a dominant player in the global multi-cloud space. Strategically, our focus remains on organic growth and targeted acquisitions in our ambition to become a leading provider of multi-cloud solutions and cybersecurity across the globe.

“However, we will always be firmly rooted in Carlow as our headquarters. A key value of the company is a focus on relationships. We leverage this with a ‘boots-on-the-ground’ approach, whether that’s in Carlow, the US or Europe.

“We focus on growing a local team, with local connections and knowledge, and contacts within the local business community. Stryve clients have come to expect a people-focused personal approach. Maintaining deep local roots is essential to achieving this.”

■ To find out more about Stryve, visit [stryvesecure.com](http://stryvesecure.com) or join their LinkedIn community – [linkedin.com/company/stryvesecure](https://www.linkedin.com/company/stryvesecure)

## Unlock Your Business Potential

County Carlow - Your Business Hub

Contact Us to Support Your Business Development Journey

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- Networking & Training Opportunities
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[www.carlow.ie](http://www.carlow.ie)





Founders Room – Connected Hub, O'Brien Road, Carlow

# The spirit of local business

*Lynda Bolger, Founder of Flag Lane Marketing, speaks about the growth of her business, her successful integration of remote work, and the unique charm of Carlow*

Lynda Bolger's background is pretty colourful. She has plenty of experience as an international marketing executive. She has worked at major companies such as Curves fitness club, one of the world's fastest-growing fitness franchises, and at Carlow Brewing Company, also known as O'Hara's Brewery.

However, life took a turn with the arrival of her two children and the Covid-19 lockdown. She realised that she actually wanted to run her own marketing company, Flag Lane Marketing, in Carlow and use her talents for herself. But as Lynda says, this was a venture vastly different from the international enterprises she was accustomed to.

"I was used to huge marketing departments, with copywriters, graphic designers, web builders, and everything all in one area. But when I went out on my own, it was suddenly just me face-to-face with businesses in rural Ireland. It was initially daunting, but I have found a huge passion for it.

"Whenever I see a business I've worked with grow and succeed, they go on to hire more

local people, and they donate to local charities. Rural areas of Ireland are underpinned by really strong businesses. Our mission at Flag Lane Marketing is to help small businesses grow, and in doing so, we strengthen their brand, their business and their community."

## Remote work

Originally from Borris and now living in Ballinkillen in Co Carlow, Lynda has been in her business, Flag Lane Marketing (named after the lane in Ballinkillen which connects one side of the village to the other) for 18 months and has already won awards. The company gained All-Star accreditation from the All-Ireland Business Foundation and was awarded the Best SME Marketing Agency in Leinster, as part of the Irish Enterprise Awards 2022. And she manages all this by working remotely.

"I am in the car most of the time," says Lynda. "I'm driving between clients or to training or something else that needs my attention! So, I work remotely from the hub in Enterprise House, Carlow as it saves a lot of



Lynda Bolger pictured at Duckett's Grove, Carlow

time. Doing this has allowed me to grow my business as I'm using my time more efficiently. I have my laptop with me, and I can do Zoom meetings, instead of constantly having to drive back and forth just wasting time."

It's not only Lynda. Her two staff members also work in the exact same way. Lynda says working this way in Carlow has been much easier than anywhere else. "Carlow has everything right at your fingertips! It is close to so many other counties, if I need to get to Dublin, I drive onto the motorway, and I'm in Dublin in an hour.

"There's a very central train station and not to mention, everything in the town worth sticking around for. The schools are excellent, there's the Gaelcholáiste Cheatharlach which keeps our heritage alive. St Laurence O'Toole Athletic Club has top facilities. There's just so much here.

"No matter what you're looking for, it is in Carlow."

## Growing the business

But it's not just about the benefits of living in Carlow that make it a great place to base yourself. Flag Lane Marketing has also been able to grow a lot due to the business links and environment in the county.

"I have been able to grow my business a lot by connecting with South-East Technological University (SETU)," says Lynda. "We have interns coming from SETU for 12 weeks who are looking to work with a marketing company and gain experience. And then another intern

will be available for another 12 weeks. This really helps as we don't have a major budget and they get to learn so much on the job and grow their careers. One of my interns, Laura, has gone on to work full-time with Killashee Hotel on the back of having that placement with us."

The Local Enterprise Office and Carlow County Council have also been an incredible support to have in the area.

"The team at the Local Enterprise Office have been a pillar of support. I opened my business in the middle of lockdown, and I had two small babies - one being six weeks old! I was living with my parents-in-law too and if it wasn't for the Local Enterprise Office and their help, I don't know how I could have done any of this. They gave me access to grants available, helped me with a microfinance loan, helped me speak to accountants and overall, steer my business in the right direction.

"Now my main goal is to help the businesses in Carlow and the counties in the south-east to grow and be successful. I'm really passionate about this. If we shop local and have really strong businesses in our local, rural communities, then our economy is stronger. Also, our schools are stronger, and our children want to stick around when they grow up and have their own children in the area. Strong businesses really are the underlying pulse of rural communities."

.....  
 Visit [flaglanemarketing.com](http://flaglanemarketing.com) for more information



Lynda Bolger as part of a panel event with County Carlow Chamber and Local Enterprise Office – Carlow with Panel Members: Kieran Comerford, Michael Quinn, Rowena Dooley, Anton Savage (Event MC) and Colin Duggan





**Michael Rainey**

Carlow Town, strategically located in the south-east region with strong links to the midlands and greater Dublin area, stands as a prime location for companies seeking growth and prosperity. As a regional centre for third-level education, public services, healthcare, shopping, arts, culture and leisure, Carlow Town is a very attractive location for companies seeking to invest in Ireland or expand their existing presence in the country. The town is already home to leaders in technology, innovation, engineering, pharmaceuticals, internationally traded services, with MSD and UNUM serving as prime examples.

Michael Rainey, Interim Chief Executive of Carlow County Council, says Carlow Town is a very attractive location for investment. "It has many of the key economic enablers that businesses are looking for, such as skills and infrastructure. And now, with the recent establishment of the South-East Technological University, it is proud to call itself a University Town."

**Project Carlow 2040**

In 2020, Carlow County Council spearheaded the development of an innovative and ambitious Regeneration Strategy for the town, titled 'Project Carlow 2040: A Vision for Regeneration'. Project Carlow 2040 seeks to reinforce the critical role of the town centre as the heart of Carlow Town, providing attractive and accessible public spaces with new pedestrian linkages.

By cultivating a thriving, vibrant, and sustainable town centre, Carlow Town seeks to entice not only shoppers, but also tourists drawn to its unique architectural, cultural, and heritage attributes. This vision supports increased town centre living and increased building occupancy, which will, in turn, improve the wellbeing of the local economy and community life.

Michael continues by saying, "Project Carlow 2040 really captures the future potential of the town. This strategy was key to the success of an Urban Regeneration Development Fund application in 2021 which



**Vision for Potato Market, Carlow**

# Carlow Town: A thriving hub for investment and regeneration

Project Carlow 2040 is paving the way for economic growth and urban renewal

will see a total investment of €23 million in the Town Centre public realm in the near future."

**Four strands of development**

The URDF funding will be channelled into four key strands of development over the coming years, each contributing to the town's revitalisation.

The first strand of development focuses on the Barrack Street Connection Project. This crucial project aims to improve pedestrian accessibility, link key areas and support retailers in the town centre. The project will establish a direct route from Barrack Street to Potato Market, providing safer walking and cycling environments, while supporting the town centre's commercial activities.

Michael states, "The key is connecting the old with the new. The achievement of a new connection between these destinations

through the reallocation of road space will deliver a safer, healthier, and more attractive environment for walkers and cyclists."

The second strand emphasises the transformation of Potato Market. This ambitious project seeks to refocus and overhaul this vital urban location, breathing new life into the space and surrounding businesses. The visual appearance and uplift of the main business area will be measurable.

Michael says, "A reimagined and redesigned Potato Market will be a 'game changer' for Carlow Town, both visually and economically."

Renewing and improving streets is a constant feature of urban development, and the third strand focuses on Barrack Street, Tullow Street, and Kennedy Avenue. The proposal aims to create a more 'walkable' town centre, promoting pedestrian-friendly environments along Barrack Street, the

Shamrock Square area, and linking into both Tullow Street and Kennedy Avenue.

The fourth and final strand of development focuses on the Carlow Train Station Link. This aspect capitalises on Carlow Town's natural environment and the unique asset of Carlow College. Through well-designed upgrades, the train station will be linked to the town centre, creating a direct and visually appealing route that showcases the town's beauty and historical significance.

According to Michael, "The Carlow College campus is the centrepiece of the Cultural Quarter in Carlow Town, consisting of a beautiful 18th-century campus positioned just off the main shopping district. Improved permeability through this campus will be a major enhancement of the Carlow Town public realm and its connection to public transport."

**The vision for Carlow Town**

The proposed developments aim to optimise underutilised spaces and connections, while seamlessly integrating Carlow's social, educational, cultural, and historic assets. Project Carlow 2040 envisions a thriving and innovative town that embraces the future, while preserving its rich heritage.

Commenting on the overall vision for the Town, Michael states, "The enhancement of the unique attributes and attractions of Carlow Town, combined with the development of key opportunity sites, will support local business, facilitate tourism and encourage more people to live within the Town Centre. The new Advanced Technology Building developed by the IDA, and a series of other proposed projects in enterprise development, recreation, and amenity over the coming years, means its an exciting time to live, work, visit and invest in Carlow Town and County."

As Interim Chief Executive of Carlow County Council, Michael Rainey shares his enthusiasm, "Carlow County Council is proud to be part of this transformative journey."

For further information, visit [projectcarlow2040.com](http://projectcarlow2040.com)



**Project Carlow 2040**





John Shortall

*The Carlow Library Service has developed into a hub connecting people from all walks of life in the community*

In existence since 1929, Carlow County Council Public Library Service has always been at the heart of local communities in the county. From its humble beginnings as a makeshift one-room operation in the courthouse, the service has evolved into a four-branch network, serving the three Municipal Districts of the County, and offering a wide range of services expected of a modern public library.

The original remote working hub, public libraries in Ireland now offer access to a collection of over 13 million items. These are available through a national library catalogue supported by a national stock distribution system. This allows customers to get their hands on requested items promptly.

John Shortall, County Librarian at Carlow County Library, says, "This is an extraordinary resource for the people of Carlow and, indeed, the whole country. Over the last 20 years, in particular, public libraries have responded to the ever-changing needs of an increasingly savvy public. They have been growing and adapting to meet user needs on a continuous basis, while never losing sight of our core values of universal access and inclusion and the provision of democratic, free and open spaces for everyone."

Library branches occupy town centre locations in Carlow, Tullow, Muine Bheag and Borris and are heavily used by all ages and segments of the local population. Muine Bheag has been operational as a 'My Open Library' Service (MOL) since 2019, offering extended access to approved members from 8am to 10pm, seven days a week, 365 days a year. The Borris branch will launch its MOL service in September and work commenced a few weeks ago on readying Tullow Library with a launch anticipated for November of this year.

With exciting plans for the regeneration and extension of the central branch and HQ in Carlow town, the service will provide for the growing population of the county with diverse needs.

The My Open Library Service is a positive development for the communities of Co Carlow, giving access outside of regular opening hours and empowering people to use the library when and how they need to.

John adds, "For a working person in particular, the flexibility to visit the library for study, leisure or work with full use of all facilities including Wi-Fi, Eduroam, computer access and wireless printing adds value to the lives of our citizens. We are very proud of our libraries in Carlow and the statistics reflect a population who appreciate and use the library as part of their daily lives."

Complementary to the physical offering, the library service also provides access to a collection of 110,000 eBooks and eAudiobooks, 7,000 eNewspapers and eMagazines, over 600 eLearning courses and 110 online languages courses for speakers of 30+ languages.

And best of all, everything is free!

#### Community arts

Louise Osborne, the Creative Places

## Carlow County Council Library Service – at the heart of our communities

Bagenalstown Coordinator, is a familiar face at Carlow County Library. Creative Places is a three-year programme funded by the Arts Council of Ireland and supported by the area Arts Office. Bagenalstown/Muine Bheag is one of 17 places around the country that is part of the Creative Places network. It was established to provide funding to areas that may not have previously benefited.

On whether Carlow County Library acts as a community hub, Louise is clear, "It serves as an open and welcoming space for everyone to enjoy. It can cater for a variety of needs and interests and is easily accessible. It is so much more than the outdated idea of the libraries some of us would have had in our childhoods – a place to be quiet and read.

"It still provides that quiet, learning or reflective space, but it's also a place of exciting events, community meetings and art exhibitions."

As part of Creative Places, Louise says

several events have been held at the library including a theatre production, created by local writers and actors Angela Keogh and John McKenna. They also held an exhibition of work from three local primary schools created with artist Leah Corbett of Muine Bheag Arts. Other hosted various events included an information night on arts grants and a series of support clinics.

"Creative Places will continue to connect with the library and host future events."

Louise recognises the library's potential as a remote working hub too, especially with the My Open Library service in place. "With the right resources, such as workspaces and Wi-Fi and the MOL, it is more accessible to cater for a variety of working hours outside of traditional office hours.

"You can also explore the resources of the library – learn about genealogy, local history and explore the library collection online."

Louise encourages everyone to explore



Louise Osborne



Michael Grant

the library's offerings as it is not just a centre for literature, but also a space for fostering creativity. "The library is a great space for literature and a real resource for the local community. It has been a true supporter and champion of the arts."

#### Preserving history and knowledge

Michael Grant is a Carlovian and a dedicated PhD student at DCU whose research on 'Politics in Carlow, 1760-1850' has led him to an appreciation for the Carlow County Library and its valuable resources.

With 50 years of experience using the local library service, Michael says the library is an integral part of the community. Michael primarily uses the branch in Carlow, where the Local Studies section holds a veritable treasure trove of historical information.

"Although my field of research is rather specialised, I was surprised at the range of secondary material that is available, either on-shelf or in reserve in the Carlow branch," says Michael. "The staff are always helpful in arranging inter-library loans for any material that they don't hold.

"The library is also an integral part of the community. During the day, it is used by locals to browse newspapers, explore the internet or simply chill out.

"The main library has been used as a venue in the evenings for lectures and book launches. There are often daytime activities for children too. The space is used by all sections of the community."

Michael highly recommends the library to others and commends the helpful staff. He also praises the library's 'Eduroam', a Wi-Fi service enabling students to access secure Wi-Fi when visiting other institutions. And for researchers like Michael, Carlow Library's Local Studies section holds a range of specialised collections.

Michael shares how the County Library Service went above and beyond to assist him during the pandemic. When access to vital resources, such as accessing The Carlow Morning Post on microfilm, became a challenge, County Library Service had the microfilms digitised and made them available to Michael.

"Library staff were most helpful and indeed went 'over-and-above'. They also shared the digital files with the Irish Newspaper Archive, making them available to the wider public."

While discussing the library's facilities, Michael believes its location is a real boon. Researchers like Michael have found a sanctuary of knowledge, and community engagement in the middle of the town. "It's right beside the Cathedral of the Assumption which is a peaceful haven. The grounds of Carlow College are open to the public providing a green space ideal for a contemplative stroll. I would recommend it to anyone."



# Developing skills *for remote work*

We speak to past students and tutors of County Carlow education providers who have been thriving in remote work and study environments



**Beth Boyd**

Orla Keogh is originally from Galway and has been a resident of Carlow since 2007. She had completed a degree in Economics, Politics and Social Studies and worked within the hospitality and retail sector. But when the pub she worked in closed in 2018, Orla, who is married with three children, decided to explore her options to return to education.

Seeking a new direction, she started her journey with Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board (KCETB), a leading provider of education and training in the south-east, enrolling in a QQI Level 5 Business Administration course in September 2019. The programme, initially conducted in person, transitioned to remote learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Orla then progressed to the QQI Level 6 Administration course in September 2020. Orla says her decision to join the KCETB courses was motivated by her desire to enter the administration and financial sector.

"I had heard good feedback from others who had attended courses with KCETB," says Orla, "The range of modules offered through the Level 5 and 6 courses were relevant and provided a good foundation for entering the workplace."

Orla says the Further Education and Training (FET) courses offered through KCETB offer adults opportunities for reskilling and upskilling and "the learning environment is very supportive and inclusive," says Orla.

"Learners on KCETB FET courses have support to build their knowledge, experience, skills and confidence to take on remote work in the future."

Orla's investment in her education, and the skills she gained through KCETB, played a pivotal role in her journey to employment. In July 2021, she secured a position in the finance department at Teagasc's head office in Carlow.

"I work under the hybrid system where we attend the office for three days and work remotely for two days. I enjoy this as it provides a good work/life balance. It is nice to have a slower pace without the commute two mornings a week, but you also get the social aspect on the other three days. Carlow is an excellent destination for remote work as it has great Wi-Fi and is an easy commute to Dublin if necessary."

Orla says the skills she acquired through her KCETB courses have been instrumental in her transitioning to remote work.

Orla adds, "Without the QQI qualification and the necessary training, I would not have secured the position with Teagasc."

"Attending the course with KCETB had a really positive impact on my confidence and has allowed me to thrive in an area that matched my interests and ambitions for the future."

## A seamless transition to remote work

Shaun Dowling is at the forefront of adapting to the world of remote work. A proud resident of Graiguecullen, Carlow, Shaun, now 31, pursued his education at South East Technological University's (SETU) Carlow Campus, graduating with a Bachelor's Honours Degree in Marketing in 2015. After a period in Dublin, Shaun returned to Carlow and became an Online and Social Media



Officer at SETU.

Through his role, Shaun decided to further his skills by completing a Level 9 Certificate in Digital Strategy through SETU's Faculty of Lifelong Learning. The benefits of upskilling, combined with the programme's remote format, made it a perfect fit.

Shaun says, "The course was very informative and practical and even though it was remote, I got to know my classmates really well through various breakout sessions held during our lectures. Completing the course remotely was a huge help given my busy schedule."

The programme proved to be a wonderful experience, combining informative content with practical application. And now Shaun's role as an Online and Social Media Officer at SETU allows him to explore a remote work environment too.

"Working remotely has been excellent," says Shaun. "We have remote working systems provided to us that enable me to collaborate with my colleagues in Carlow and our other campuses in Waterford and Wexford. Working remotely is just another normal work day for me!"



**Orla Keogh**



**Shaun Dowling**

to them, you will find it hard to picture your professional life without them."

## Fostering inclusivity through online learning

Beth Boyd is a dedicated tutor in Carlow County Development Partnership's (CCDP) Fáilte Isteach programme, a conversational English language initiative designed to help people from diverse backgrounds learn conversational English.

Beth's story began in South Africa, where she developed a passion for language and community. After immigrating to Ireland, she seized the opportunity to volunteer with the programme.

"Although English is my first language," says Beth, "I could empathise with the students trying to immerse themselves into a new country."

The Fáilte Isteach programme is supported by the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme. The classes, previously held in person for two hours, transitioned to a remote format during the Covid-19 pandemic and were a great success.

"We reduced the class length to one-hour classes and increased the number of classes a week to two per group. The classes being online worked well. Not only were they learning English, but the classes also provided them with a social outlet during lockdown."

"Language is not just about speaking, but also about how to form the words and that is more difficult remotely. But we tried to keep it interesting and fun by bringing challenges and games into the classes."

Beth believes one of the greatest outcomes of the shift to remote learning was the enhanced inclusivity of the Fáilte Isteach programme.

"Most people became very isolated during Covid," says Beth. "But by reaching out to each group, we were connecting and learning. Our classes are more than just learning a language, it's about making friends. It's about being inclusive."

"Traditionally, the classes would have been delivered in Carlow Town, however, because we were teaching remotely, we had students engaging from different towns and villages across the county as barriers such as transport and childcare issues were removed. Once a person had an internet connection and Zoom, they were able to engage."

For those looking to develop remote work skills or engage with the Fáilte Isteach programme, Beth emphasises the importance of reliable technology.

"It's important to be able to work or stay in touch remotely. Not only for business but also for everyday life."

"I would also highly recommend volunteering at Fáilte Isteach. My students have gained enough confidence to enable them to go out and find jobs. They are able to talk to teachers and doctors alike. They have made friends and contributed to their communities. And I have learned so much about other countries and cultures. It's a win-win situation."



As the legendary Greek philosopher Aristotle said, humans are social animals. We need social bonds in all aspects of our lives, particularly in the workplace. Having connections in work can have a range of benefits including increased engagement and improved well-being. Connections can foster collaboration and innovation, ultimately leading to success. And a culture of connection is essential for leaders and employees in a remote working environment.

"It's very easy to become isolated when you work remotely," says Megan Manning, who has recently been appointed president of Network Ireland Carlow, a voluntary organisation that supports the professional and personal development of women. Network Ireland Carlow is a new branch of Network Ireland, having launched in October 2022. "This is why having a network like ours locally has so many benefits, such as support from like-minded people and opportunities for collaboration, skills development, and knowledge sharing.

"Having that emotional support and connection can help maintain a positive mindset. While having an expanded professional network and access to mentors can enhance your career prospects."

#### Connecting women in business

Megan has over 12 years' experience in sales, merchandising and leadership roles across the retail industry. And being the founder of the Creative Spark Jewellery Programmes, as well as her own jewellery business, she is passionate about supporting female entrepreneurs who work remotely.

"As part of my role in Network Ireland, I organise events, talks and workshops once a month which aim to inspire and give practical help to women in business. We dedicate time to networking at each event. It's a great opportunity to meet new people and see what connections can form.

"We also hold a more relaxed monthly coffee morning, where members can meet up during the day and catch up. Our events are held centrally in Carlow, so it's accessible to people who live in the locality. We also have a WhatsApp group, where members can ask questions, advertise their businesses and get information on upcoming events."

Rowena Dooley, who has a background in the motor industry for over 20 years and runs Dooley Motors in Carlow, has also been recently elected as a president – of County Carlow Chamber. "I have been part of the Chamber Board since 2018 and was elected as Chamber president in June this year. We place the concerns of our members to the forefront of our lobbying and meet with local representatives, local authorities, government bodies and representatives. We organise various networking events and promote Carlow as a great place to do business."

For local businesses or individuals working remotely, Rowena says County Carlow Chamber organises "a range of networking opportunities to help people to connect with other professionals across a range of sectors".

"We provide regular communications and updates to our members including regulatory updates and promotion of businesses and events, helping to create a stronger brand



Megan Manning, President, Network Ireland, Carlow and Rowena Dooley, President, County Carlow Chamber

"We hosted a series of webinars/coffee mornings and discussions online throughout Covid with various local speakers," says Rowena. "Many of these events encouraged free conversation and everyone was given the opportunity to interact. The topics covered online and in-person varied widely, from finance through to well-being, and we constantly reached out to the network for ideas and also for people to lead sessions on a topic of importance to them."

#### Championing County Carlow

County Carlow Chamber continues to host networking events to support and promote individuals and businesses around the county. Rowena says the organisation is dedicated to fostering a thriving county. "The Chamber is a catalyst in the promotion and progression of the town, county and region.

"We support the economic and social development of County Carlow and continue to support the enhancement of infrastructure across the county to support businesses in operating from all locations with strong, reliable, and consistent connectivity. The Chamber is the voice of business in the County, championing the concerns of business, celebrating success, and promoting Carlow."

Megan Manning, Network Ireland Carlow, adds that there are a range of benefits to remote workers basing themselves in Carlow. "Carlow is a compact county with a lot to offer, by way of cost of living and housing costs, especially compared to big cities such as Dublin or Galway. The town has a vibrant community, with a variety of shops, restaurants, schools, and recreational facilities. It also boasts beautiful natural surroundings. We have a good broadband connection, which is essential for any remote worker!"

Megan says Network Ireland will continue to support and be the voice of female-led businesses and entrepreneurs in Carlow. "Our aim is to increase our reach to support more local women on their business journeys. We are gathering feedback, ideas and opinions on how we, as the committee, can best serve our members."

"I am passionate about empowering women to overcome barriers and obstacles and reaching their full potential in every walk of life."

Visit [networkireland.ie/page/CarlowBranch](https://networkireland.ie/page/CarlowBranch) and [carlowchamber.com](https://carlowchamber.com)

## Building your network

How Network Ireland Carlow and County Carlow Chamber are helping remote workers to build and maintain professional connections

awareness. We also met with National Broadband Ireland and arranged a members briefing with them to discuss the rollout of National Broadband in Carlow. This ensured our members had an opportunity to raise matters of importance to them and to feel supported while remote working."

#### Maintaining professional relationships

The majority of County Carlow Chamber members are based in County Carlow, with their employees working in Carlow or surrounding counties. Rowena says many of these businesses have employees who are working remotely on a full or part-time basis, and the majority of these are working remotely within the county.

"In the case where a business can support remote working, the benefits can be seen. Remote working can create an improved work-life balance for employees and their employers. This leads to increased productivity and cost savings. It provides access to a larger talent pool for employers in Carlow – allowing them to recruit from a broader geographical area.

"People working from home in Carlow who traditionally drove to the cities are now around Carlow during the day for lunch or in the evenings, and are spending their money on leisure time activities here locally."

Rowena feels, however, it is vital for businesses and individuals to maintain professional connections while remote working. "The physical, in-person meeting is always encouraged. A hybrid approach could be seen as the ideal balance. But mentorship and support from other professionals is important when working remotely, as this can offer guidance and support to the remote worker.

"Working with others on projects can lead to innovative solutions and new opportunities. Connections can also help to build trust and credibility, and offer emotional support during challenging times."

With the Covid-19 pandemic seeing a rise in remote working, County Carlow Chamber strived to support businesses in Carlow to continue to grow and make connections in a virtual world.



Brian O'Farrell, Chief Executive, speaks at County Carlow Chamber Network event



Network Ireland and Carlow County Council - Local Enterprise Office Event with Lucy Kennedy (MC)





Hidden Sky Road

# ‘Wander off the Track’ on a ‘workcation’ in County Carlow

With authentic experiences, hidden gems and a relaxed pace of life, we look at why County Carlow as a destination is perfect for a remote working trip

Being just a little over one hour from Dublin City and just over two hours from Cork, one of the aspects that attract people to County Carlow is its accessibility. For those travelling from further afield, Carlow is convenient to the major entry points into Ireland, with Dublin, Dún Laoghaire and Rosslare ferry ports, and Dublin Airport all within easy reach, as well as access to regular bus and train services.

But accessibility is just one of Carlow’s many appeals. With breathtaking scenery, outdoor adventures, fabulous food and culture, Carlow is also a place for unforgettable experiences. And with its peaceful settings and laid-back atmosphere, Carlow is ideal for remote workers.

Eileen O’Rourke, CEO of Carlow Tourism, says, “For those with a busy lifestyle, Carlow is the perfect place for a working holiday offering important downtime in a place with a more relaxed pace of life.”

Eileen says it’s a suitable location for all types of personal situations. “For example there are plenty of attractions to keep young kids entertained for families that might have one parent working part-time while on a holiday break. Carlow is also the perfect destination for individuals on a remote working holiday, hybrid workers looking to relocate to Carlow, or companies organising team meet-ups or training days. There are many hotels in Carlow that offer fantastic facilities for remote workers and families (turn the page to read more on this).

“While in Carlow, all family members, companies or individuals have a great variety of visitor experiences to choose from, which will maximise the enjoyment of the work break.”

## Great outdoors

Research shows that short breaks can boost engagement at work. And studies

have shown that being in nature can have an overall positive effect on your sense of enthusiasm, aliveness, and energy. With stunning mountains, glorious countryside and river valleys, Carlow offers an array of exceptional natural features that provide the perfect backdrop to some of the finest outdoor activities.

There’s a range of walking trails such as the scenic Barrow Way, which follows along the second-longest river in Ireland, the Barrow. The walk covers a distance of 114km, but can be divided into a series of manageable stretches and can also be used for cycling.

For an invigorating walk, follow the Kilbrannish Trails, which link Kilbrannish Forest North and Kilbrannish Forest South on the Blackstairs Mountains to make one complete circuit of 14km, along mainly flat terrain. And for a more relaxed stroll, visit Oak

Park Forest Park, which is just outside Carlow Town and is a popular destination for walkers and joggers. Extending almost 4km, the walks include Butlers Wood Loop (700m), the Lake Path, Fox Covert Trail (1,100m) and Lost Forest Trail (1,100m).

Then there’s a host of other exciting outdoor activities, such as canoeing on the River Barrow with Pure Adventure and Go With the Flow River Adventures. The county has a superb range of golf courses to choose from, all within easy distance of Carlow Town. These include Carlow Golf Club, Mount Wolseley, Borris Golf Club and Bunclody Golf and Fishing Club. Bunclody is the only golf course in Europe with an elevator taking you from the 17th hole up five floors to the 18th tee box, giving a bird’s eye view over the River Slaney.

Carlow also has mountain-biking, cycling trails, and even an outdoor heated swimming

pool in Bagenalstown, so there’s plenty for the outdoor enthusiast.

## Family-friendly attractions

For those bringing the family along on their remote working trip, there are a range of attractions to keep everyone happy.

Set against the backdrop of the picturesque village of Leighlinbridge, ‘Arboretum: Your Home & Garden Heaven’ is a haven of shopping and experience all rolled into one. With a love of plants and an ambition to create a unique customer experience, Arboretum has grown from a small backyard business to a world-class lifestyle destination in just 40 years.

The inspirational display gardens allow visitors to take a break from shopping to relax and unwind as they stroll through the exclusive display gardens to inspire imagination and creativity in their own garden dream. Finally, you can pop into Rachel’s Garden Café and enjoy a delicious treat with something on offer for everyone.

Duckett’s Grove Historic House and Walled Gardens in Kneestown is a real gem. Around the ruins of the 19th century great house and former estate are beautiful gardens to explore, brimming with historical varieties of roses, peonies, perennials and flowering shrubs. It’s one of the most romantic and photogenic attractions. There’s also a playground located within the grounds, featuring slides, poles, an obstacle course and lots more. Altamont Gardens in Tullow are an enchanting blend of formal and informal gardens with riverside walks covering over 40 acres.

History buffs can discover the history of Carlow at the Carlow County Museum. For kids, there’s a ‘Museum Detective’ game, where clues lead them and their parents on a journey around the museum. While you can get your cultural fix at the VISUAL Centre for Contemporary Art and the George Bernard Shaw Theatre.

For an outdoor adventure for all the family, enjoy an open-boat trip on the beautiful River Barrow. Kids will enjoy spotting all manner of wildlife such as kingfishers, otters, dragonflies and shoals of fish as they glide past the boat. For those seeking a little peace, it’s the perfect occasion to switch off the mobile phone and relax inches above the waterline, unwinding to a more soothing pace of life. Boat trips are available with boattrips.ie in Carlow Town and An Bád Keppel in Bagenalstown.

## Discover Carlow

In Carlow, as well as a variety of attractions and blissful scenery, there’s also an infinite list of places to eat and drink. The locals are friendly. Carlow has attractive, clean towns and villages. It’s only a short journey from Dublin, with excellent roads and less traffic. What’s not to love?

Carlow is an ideal location for a remote working office. With a treasure trove of gorgeous gardens, unique historical castles, and stunning natural sites, you’ll find it is an escape, even if you are working! Whether you’re seeking fun, adventure or quiet reflection, then charming Carlow awaits you.

Visit [carlowtourism.com](http://carlowtourism.com)



VISUAL Carlow



# Hotels as hubs: Embracing the future of remote work

How County Carlow's hotels and manor houses are top destinations for both work and family-friendly getaways

## Ballykealey House

Ian Farrell, General Manager of Ballykealey House, says there has been a massive uptick in the need for remote work.

"Ballykealey House is the perfect location for remote working, corporate retreats, and events," says Ian. "Located just outside Carlow town, in Ballon Village just off the M9 motorway, it is very accessible as it's only an hour from Dublin."

According to Ian, working from a venue like Ballykealey House provides an escape from the typical office setting. The 19th-century country house is set in a beautiful private parkland setting in Ballon Village, ensuring uninterrupted focus.

"The House offers acres of indoor and outdoor spaces, making it perfect for team building activities. The ballroom can accommodate up to 250 people for conferences, while the Cobden Suite and self-catering lodges provide private spaces for focused work.

"We have AV facilities and can tailor menus to suit the requirements of each conference. Our Executive Head Chef James Murray, and the team, will work with the company to come up with a menu using the best of local and Irish ingredients. As the client has the house privately, they can do whatever they want to do. From a homely feel with open fires to the meeting setting of the Cobden Suite – we work around the client."

For those wishing to combine work with a holiday, there are plenty of local options not only around the House, but throughout Carlow.

Ian says, "The lodges are available to book on a self-catering basis for those who wish to extend their stay beyond the event date or bring family with them. Around the locality, there are lots of things to do, from hill walking in Mount Leinster to a walk around the beautiful Altamont Gardens. There is plenty for families who want to have the best of both worlds."

Feedback from guests has been overwhelmingly positive too. They have welcomed many companies for their events from the Local Enterprise Office who hosted their Digital Awards there, as well as national and international corporate clients.

As a previous guest that used the hotel's facilities to work remotely says, "We could not have picked a better location for our leadership team corporate retreat. The hospitality and organisation of our stay was beyond compare."

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■ Visit [ballykealeyhouse.com](http://ballykealeyhouse.com)

## Sandbrook House

Sandbrook House is a period Queen Anne-style house set in 25 acres of lush parkland near the village of Ballon. Already an accomplished interior designer, Bella Bielenberg came to Sandbrook House when she married Christopher Bielenberg, who had owned the house for over 20 years. Through her talents, the estate has blossomed with an impressive collection of books, paintings, exquisite art pieces, and stylish rugs.

And since the advent of Covid-19, Sandbrook House has evolved into a remote working hub. It features spaces for B&B accommodation, allowing guests to enjoy exclusive access to the entire property. Sandbrook House offers the option of week-long or weekend rentals, and can comfortably sleep up to 29 guests. The house boasts six bathrooms, a generously stocked kitchen, and a spacious dining room.

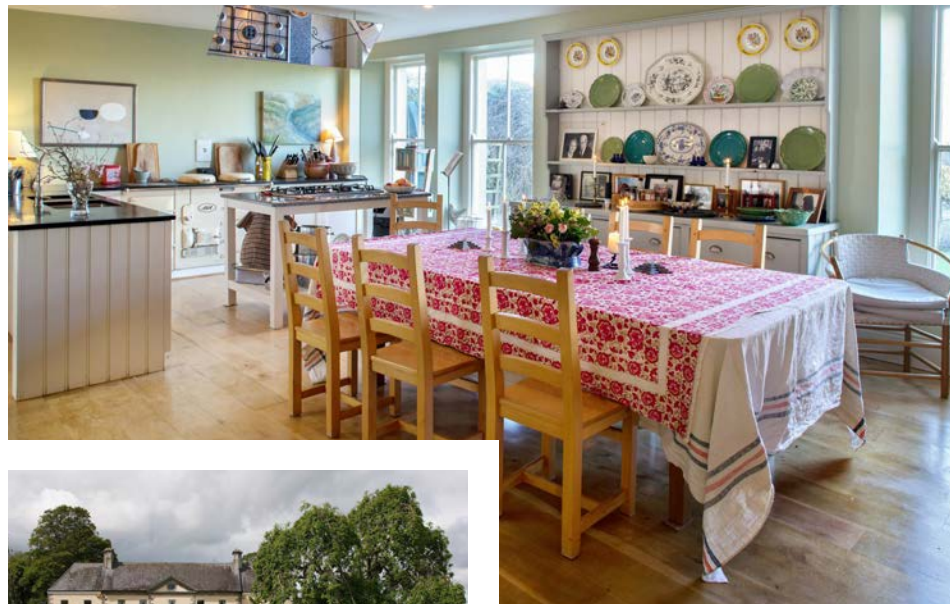
Bella says, "For example, this year, we had four generations of a family from the US stay for 10 days. Even in a large group like this, you can easily go into one of the rooms and work there quietly and then join the group for the rest of the day. We have a lot of space here."

Bella says Sandbrook House has become a favourite destination for remote workers, entrepreneurs, and corporate teams. The estate's excellent Wi-Fi connectivity ensures uninterrupted work, and the numerous rooms and cosy spaces make work even easier.

Bella says, "Sandbrook House provides a level of intimacy and privacy rarely found in traditional hotels. Guests have the option to book the entire property for total exclusivity. The housekeepers ensure that guests feel at home. And the peaceful surroundings make it the perfect retreat for one person or for groups seeking a break from city life."

"Carlow offers so many attractions, including the Saturday market, beautiful gardens, river walks, and Ballymoney Beach about 45 minutes away. There are gardens

Michael Walsh, Seven Oaks Hotel; Ian Farrell, Ballykealey House; Aisling Maher, Woodford Dolmen Hotel; Sheena McCanny, Mount Wolseley



Sandbrook House

on the estate where people can play football, or erect bouncy castles. Guests can also go fishing, clay pigeon shooting, and archery offered by friends of the House."

Rather than offering predefined packages, Sandbrook House creates tailor-made experiences for each guest. "We have conversations with potential guests to understand their preferences and needs. This allows visitors to design their stay."

And Bella and Christopher's involvement in management and hospitality even extends to their work in Ghana, where they manage a school with over 450 children, adding a deeper dimension to their hospitality. "Some proceeds from Sandbrook House are channelled to support this project, we're very passionate about this."

Sandbrook House's unique destination creates a personalised experience for every guest, whether they are seeking a remote work environment or a tranquil retreat.

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■ Visit [sandbrook.ie](http://sandbrook.ie)

**Mount Wolseley Hotel, Spa and Golf Resort**  
Set amidst an 18-hole championship golf

course in County Carlow, Mount Wolseley is a beautiful property with a stunning private garden, and a tranquil lake. This magnificent Resort provides a captivating backdrop for business, leisure, and special celebrations. And with an award-winning spa, Mount Wolseley transports guests into a world of relaxation.

Sheena McCanny, Resort Sales, Marketing and Revenue Manager, says, "Mount Wolseley is the ideal location for remote working as it provides for both the corporate and leisure guests. Our spacious bedrooms can accommodate remote working, with high-speed broadband available in all guests' bedrooms."

"Our guests can avail of all the facilities within the hotel, including bar food in our Aaron Lounge, dinner in Frederick's Restaurant, or a swim in the hotel pool. Our guests can take a break and go for a stroll on our Woodland Walking Trail."

Ideally located within an hour from Dublin, Kilkenny, and Waterford, the Resort offers 143 bedrooms including suites, executive rooms, family rooms and interconnecting rooms, as well as 16 elegant four-bedroom self-catering Resort Houses, each of which can accommodate up to seven people.

"We also have 15 professionally appointed conference and banqueting suites, with capacities of up to 800 theatre-style and 550 banquet-style. We have a self-contained exhibition area and dedicated conference



Ballykealey House





**Mount Wolseley Hotel, Spa and Golf Resort**



**Woodford Dolmen Hotel**

**Woodford Dolmen Hotel**

Woodford Dolmen is an 80-bedroom property set in a woodland setting just outside Carlow town, providing all the benefits of the tranquil countryside while still being close to the town centre. Just take it from one of the hotel's guests. Sarah Fishwick, from Warrington, England is a Risk Management Consultant and travels to Carlow every few months to visit family.

Sarah says, "I always use the Woodford Dolmen as my base. It has a very central location, great facilities, lovely food and really friendly staff. I usually work in the mornings, then plan family days out in the afternoon."

"The hotel has lots of tables and booths for working. You can always find a peaceful, private spot with a ready supply of refreshments. The Wi-Fi works perfectly and when I need a break from work, they have an expansive garden with a unique 1km walk on their 'island' across the bridge that I enjoy."

As well as quiet zones and workspaces throughout the hotel lobby and corridors, the hotel also has a variety of meeting rooms with different sizes and configurations to accommodate any group size or event type. These rooms are equipped with audio-visual facilities and sound systems.

Aisling Maher, Marketing and Strategy Manager at the Woodford Dolmen Hotel, says, "For additional features or equipment, we have a partnership with local providers and businesses. The hotel's dedicated events team is also on-hand to assist and co-ordinate all aspects."

"We offer our own unique team-building experience with our Corporate Wellness Retreat. This package provides groups with the opportunity to unwind, reconnect with nature and refocus their mental health through a restorative Forest Bathing session on our woodland island, followed by a relaxing team lunch. This retreat package can be booked as a standalone package or can be bundled with meeting room hire or overnight accommodation packages."

During the work day, guests can enjoy breakfast, lunch, evening meals and a selection of snacks at the hotel's Plum Tree Bistro. "Our corporate bedrooms are also equipped with Nespresso coffee machines and we have a room service menu," says Aisling.

Aisling says for workers bringing along

families or partners, there are plenty of activities for them to pass the time. "They can explore our 'Draiocht Glen' Fairy Garden, kids' garden trail and 1km island walk. Off-site, there are also many family-friendly attractions."

"Carlow is an ideal base for a holiday of day trips. A combination of a range of shared workspace and conference facilities, outdoor activities, historical sites and family-friendly amenities offer a blend of relaxation, education, and adventure for everyone."

■ Visit [woodforddolmenhotel.ie](http://woodforddolmenhotel.ie)

**Huntington Castle and Gardens**

Situated in the picturesque village of Clonegal, Huntington Castle and Gardens is like something from a fairytale. With a fascinating history, the Castle has been in the Durdin Robertson family since 1625.

Its idyllic location, combined with its beautiful gardens and charming interiors, makes the property a peaceful retreat, not just for regular guests but remote workers who wish to feel inspired and re-energised. Particularly those with a creative flair.

Current owner Alex Durdin Robertson says, "Huntington is set in over 160 acres of gardens, woodland and farmland. It's perfect for people who might feel fed up with looking at an office wall or their home walls and want a change of scenery. Its natural setting is certainly one that can inspire a creative person, such as someone that wants to escape to finish writing a book. Or someone that simply wants to avoid distractions."

Huntington has a number of historic guest rooms, all with original period features such as four poster beds and oak panelling, as well as a range of self-catering accommodations. The newly renovated Esmonde wing of the castle has an enchanting self-catering apartment that sleeps up to five people, and the Sentry Gate Lodge and Gate Lodge at the entrance avenue both sleep four people.

"Many guests use our three self-catering accommodation options for remote working. They offer private spaces from which to work, with desks and high-quality Wi-Fi, despite being in a rural location. And they also have space for the whole family to stay."

Alex adds, "Once the work is done, guests can visit Dunne's pub in the village for a drink or the Michelin-starred Sha-Roe Bistro for a delicious meal. Or take the opportunity to discover our beautiful gardens, French limes and Yew Tree Walk."

"I think what makes Huntington so unique and special is that you can just walk out the

door, be surrounded by nature, and away from the very pressurised urban environment. It makes a great hub for people who really want a peaceful escape."

■ Visit [huntingtoncastle.com](http://huntingtoncastle.com)

**Seven Oaks Hotel**

Located approximately a three-minute walk from Carlow Town Centre, Seven Oaks Hotel is the ideal base for a remote working holiday.

Michael Walsh, General Manager, says, "We have two bedrooms that can be converted into offices quickly, with a bed fixed into timber panelling which converts into a desk when you push the bed up into the wall. So anyone that wants to stay over can work during the day and sleep at night."

"Then there's our large lobby area, which has 50 seats and has recently been refurbished. It's like a big sitting room. It's great for people who perhaps want to get away from being stuck alone in the room and want to meet others. My wife, who works remotely, actually sometimes works from the hotel as a change of scenery from our home."

Seven Oaks Hotel also has a fully equipped corporate set-up which is suitable for meetings, conferences, seminars and team-building events. Their spacious facilities cater from two to 500 delegates. "Many local companies around Carlow visit our hotel for team meetings and training," says Michael.

Guests of the hotel also have access to its leisure club facilities, including a 20-metre swimming pool and Jacuzzi, as well as their T.D. Molloy's Restaurant, which serves modern international and Irish cuisine, using fresh local produce.

Michael, who has an extensive career within the hospitality industry and once worked at Fitzpatrick Manhattan Hotel in New York and with Jurys Hotel Group in Ireland, decided to settle back in Carlow for good with his wife and newborn child in 2001. He says he has a fond love for Carlow and would recommend the county to anybody that works remotely.

"Not only is Carlow's location very good, but our hotel rates can be a lot more reasonable than other parts of the country. And then the county itself is just fabulous in terms of tourism. We have beautiful gardens, historic manor houses, majestic mountains and, of course, the River Barrow, which provides great opportunities for canoeing and kayaking. For remote workers, Carlow offers a great balance between work and relaxation."

■ Visit [sevenoakshotel.com](http://sevenoakshotel.com)

entrance and registration area, as well as a large outdoor area for training days and corporate team-building events. Frederick's Garden provides a lovely outdoor space for BBQs too."

Sheena continues, "Our meeting rooms are used regularly for both team meetings and private Zoom meetings, with The Healy Suites, the Siddeley Suites, and the regal Siddeley Boardroom offering natural lighting, air conditioning, LCD projectors and screens, and complimentary high-speed Wi-Fi."

Sheena says the option of combining remote work with a hotel stay can have huge benefits from both a productivity and health-and-wellness point of view. "If you're a morning person, you can tailor your hours to take advantage of your most productive time of the day, while the kids (if travelling with you) go to the pool in the hotel, or the playground, or Teen Zone."

"Guests that work remotely can develop habits, routines and best practices that optimise their working day and increase their motivation to finish early and spend time with the family. The proximity to the countryside, local attractions and Dublin City makes Carlow an excellent location as a place to avail of a good work-life balance and for remote working."

■ Visit [mountwolseley.ie](http://mountwolseley.ie)



**Huntington Castle and Gardens**



**Seven Oaks Hotel**



Duckett's Grove Historic House and  
Walled Gardens, near Carlow Town



# Uncover a world of hidden gems in Carlow when you wander off the track.

Take the path less trodden, through the timeless and unspoiled Carlow landscape.

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CHEATHARLACH  
CARLOW COUNTY COUNCIL