

## Chapter 7: Retail and Town Centre Strategy, and Regeneration

This chapter is prepared in the context of the following documents:

- National Planning Framework
- National Development Plan 2018-2027
- Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region
- Retail Planning Guidelines 2012 and accompanying Retail Design Manual
- Enterprise 2025, Ireland's National Enterprise Policy 2015-2025
- Bringing Back Homes; Manual for the reuse of existing buildings 2018 (DHPLG)
- National Vacant Housing Reuse Strategy 2018-2021
- Urban Development and Building Heights – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2018)
- A Framework for Town Centre Renewal, Retail Consultation Forum (due to be updated 2020)
- Rejuvenating Ireland's Small Town Centres a Call to Action
- Places for People, National Policy on Architecture – (*Discussion document, Nov 2019*)
- Age Friendly Strategy for Offaly 2018-2021
- Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas '09
- Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015



**Figure 7.1 Birr Town Retailing**

## 7.1 Retail and Town Centre Strategy

### 7.1.1 Aim

To provide a clear framework for retail development in County Offaly in acknowledgment of its role in employment, economic activity and vitality in towns and villages.

### 7.1.2 Context

The retail sector plays a significant role in the economy of Offaly, particularly in place-making and the vitality of town and village centres. The provisions of the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012 inform the retail and town centre strategy for this plan. The retail and town centre strategy must therefore be consistent with the approach of the guidelines.

### 7.1.3 Retail Strategy

The Retail Planning Guidelines 2012 require the following matters to be addressed in a Retail Strategy:

- Retail Hierarchy to be in line with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and the Settlement Hierarchy of the Core Strategy;
- Outline the level and form of retailing activity appropriate to the various components of the hierarchy;
- Define by way of a map the boundaries of the core shopping areas or town centres and if applicable the location of district centres;
- Set out strategic guidance on the location and scale of retail development;
- Identify sites to accommodate the needs of modern retail formats;
- Include objectives supporting action initiatives for the improvement of town centres; and
- Identify development management criteria for assessment of retail development.

Regional Policy Objective (RPO) 6.10 of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) states that EMRA will support the preparation of a Retail Strategy / Strategies for the region in accordance with the Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2012 (or any subsequent revision), to update the retail hierarchy and apply floorspace requirements for the region. Accordingly, until such time as this is undertaken the retail

development strategy for this Plan will be informed by the provisions of the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012 as they offer direction on retailing matters to be addressed by development plans.

### **Retail Hierarchy**

The Retail Planning Guidelines 2012 prescribe that to ensure proper planning and sustainable development, retail development must follow the settlement hierarchy of the state as per the hierarchy identified by the National Planning Framework, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and Core Strategies of development plans. The retail and town centre strategy will demonstrate consistency with the Core Strategy in setting out a retail hierarchy in line with the settlement hierarchy for County Offaly as set out in Chapter 2 of this plan. Offaly’s retail hierarchy comprises the following:

**Table 7.1 Retail Hierarchy County Offaly (based on RSES)**

<b>Settlement Typology</b>	<b>Settlement</b>
<b>Key Town</b>	Tullamore
<b>Self –Sustaining Growth Town</b>	Birr
<b>Self-Sustaining Towns</b>	Edenderry, Portarlington
<b>Towns</b>	Clara, Banagher
<b>Rural (Smaller Towns, Villages, Sráids and Open Countryside)</b>	Daingean, Ferbane, Kilcormac, Ballinagar, Ballycumber, Belmont, Bracknagh, Cloghan, Clonbullogue, Cloneygowan, Coolderry, Geashill, Killeigh, Kinnitty, Moneygall, Mountbolus, Mucklagh, Pollagh / Lemanaghan, Rahan, Rhode, Riverstown, Shannon Harbour, Shannonbridge, Shinrone, Walsh Island, the Sráids and open countryside.

The retail hierarchy reinforces the settlement hierarchy set out in the Core Strategy and takes the following approach which:

- Reinforces and extends the high order retail function of Tullamore as a Key Town, enabling it to effectively reduce retail expenditure exported from the county to other centres;
- Supports the roles identified for Birr, Edenderry and Portarlington by encouraging retail floor space provision commensurate with their anticipated growth; and
- Promotes balanced retail provision throughout the county of a scale appropriate to the size and function of the various settlements.

The bulk of additional retail floorspace in the future will be directed to the main existing centres in the retail hierarchy, consistent with the provisions of the Core Strategy. Tullamore as a Key Town and as the county town will be the main focus of retail development activity. The role and function of

established centres should be consolidated (at all levels in the retail hierarchy) by encouraging the improvement of retail facilities and supporting services appropriate in size and scale to each of the existing centres. This will include:

- A positive approach to planning applications which reinforce retail roles and functions, subject to satisfying relevant planning and environmental assessment criteria;
- Support ‘in principle’ for town and other centre improvement initiatives (including for example, public realm and business development initiatives); and
- Support for sustainable mobility.

### **Level and Form of Retailing Activity**

The Retail Planning Guidelines require Planning Authorities to outline the level and form of retailing activity appropriate to the various components of the retail hierarchy as set out in Table 7.2 below. The retail hierarchy encourages the provision of retail floorspace in the settlement areas of County Offaly at a level appropriate to the size and the defined function of its various settlements as outlined in the Core Strategy.

**Table 7.2 Level and Form of Retailing Activity in the context of the Retail Hierarchy**

Typology	Description
<p><b>Key Town</b> <i>(Tullamore)</i></p>	<p>Tullamore is the focus for all types of retail development. Its role, as a Key Town, can be strengthened through securing major retail development for the town, which will in turn benefit the county area and the wider region. Tullamore has the greatest capacity to accommodate a range of retail development types. Major comparison retail development should be directed to Tullamore. The application of the sequential test is fundamental to achieving appropriate retail development in the most appropriate locations within Tullamore. Major retail development proposals in Tullamore shall demonstrate that the proposal will have a positive impact in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• further reducing levels of retail expenditure exported from the county;</li> <li>• generating a significant improvement in Tullamore’s regional appeal; and</li> <li>• consolidating the town centre, in particular Opportunity Sites.</li> </ul> <p>A neighbourhood centre will be considered where it complements rather than competes with the town centre. It should provide an appropriate range of local services including commercial, retail and community uses, to support the population of the surrounding area.</p> <p>Retail Warehousing development will be carefully considered given; the level of existing provision, the levels of vacancy, pressure to entertain or accommodate inappropriate uses at existing sites and the justification for additional retail warehouses.</p>

<p><b>Self-Sustaining Growth Town</b> <i>(Birr)</i></p> <p><b>&amp;</b></p> <p><b>Self-Sustaining Towns</b> <i>(Edenderry and Portarlinton)</i></p>	<p>As the larger towns within the county, appropriate levels of convenience and comparison floor space will be encouraged in Birr, Edenderry and Portarlinton, and supported where it is required to serve the existing and projected population catchment, subject to consideration of the impact on retail core areas and existing retail developments. There will generally be a presumption against further development of retail parks accommodating retail warehousing in these larger towns. Where retail warehousing is proposed careful consideration shall be given to the level of existing provision, the levels of vacancy, pressure to entertain or accommodate inappropriate uses at existing sites and the justification for additional retail warehouses.</p>
<p><b>Towns</b> <i>(Clara and Banagher)</i></p>	<p>Additional convenience and comparison floorspace shall be encouraged where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is needed to support levels of population growth commensurate with the settlement hierarchy;</li> <li>• Gaps are identified in local provision; and</li> <li>• There would not be a material and unacceptable adverse impact on the vitality and viability of the existing town centre.</li> </ul> <p>Comparison retail development shall not be considered where it proposes to attract a larger catchment such that it would be likely to affect the integrity of the retail hierarchy.</p> <p>There shall generally be a presumption against the development of retail parks accommodating retail warehousing in these towns.</p>
<p><b>Rural</b> <i>(Smaller Towns, Villages, Sráids, and open countryside)</i></p>	<p>Smaller Towns and Villages shall maintain the role in the provision of retail services to their local population catchments. New small scale retail developments shall be supported where they meet the needs of the local population (including the rural catchments that they serve), subject to normal planning considerations including sequential approach and adherence to the retail hierarchy of the county. There shall be a clear presumption against edge-of-centre and out-of-centre locations in smaller towns and villages. The development of vacant/derelict or underutilised land or buildings is a key priority in smaller towns and villages to encourage the most efficient use of land and to promote the renewal, regeneration and consolidation of smaller towns and village centres.</p>

**Core Retail Areas**

Volume 2 of the Development Plan provides for settlement plans for all settlement areas within Offaly (except where a separate Local Area Plan exists). The core retail area of each settlement area has been delineated to identify clearly that part of a town centre which is primarily devoted to shopping as distinct from the wider town or village centre / mixed use zoning objective. Core retail areas contain the primary retail streets of a centre where the main concentration of retail activity takes

place. Identifying and delineating core retail areas allows a focused approach for retailing and town / village centre action initiatives as well as the proper application of the sequential approach to retail development.

### **Strategic guidance on the location/scale of retail development and identification of sites to accommodate the needs of modern retail formats**

The priority for the location of retail development is in town and village centres in line with the sequential approach to retail development. The delineation of core town and village retail areas as set out in Volume 2 of the Plan (and in future Local Area Plans), establishes the framework from which the sequential approach can be applied.

Thereafter, key Opportunity Sites have been identified in the Regeneration section of this Chapter for larger settlements and in Volume 2 for other settlements. Such Opportunity Sites are considered suitable for re-development to contribute to the enhancement of the vitality and vibrancy of town and village centres and to provide for future mixed use development including retailing, commercial and residential uses.

### **Encouraging the improvement of Town and Village Centres**

The decline in town and village centres in County Offaly is recognised as a challenge that needs to be addressed where possible within the lifetime of this plan. The role of town centres has been impacted by the following factors:

- Economic situation;
- Increased competition from out of town retail parks and large supermarkets; and
- Changing trends and patterns in consumer purchasing, namely, on-line shopping.

An aim of this Plan is to support and further develop the role of town and village centres in their evolution as inclusive, diverse and attractive service centres, recreational centres and living centres for residents and visitors alike.

In order to maintain the attractive characteristics of our town and village centres, applications for new development / changes of use within the town and village centres would need to ensure proposals would not detract from the amenity, vitality and character of the area. Where the evening economy is promoted it should avoid being detrimental to the amenity of residents. Safeguards regarding the hours of permitted operation, control of litter and odour may be imposed as conditions to development. In cases where there is a proliferation of uses which threaten the vibrancy and mixed use character of the town and village centre they shall be discouraged.

To remain competitive, attractive and sustainable, town and village centres need to be responsive to local needs and to strike a balance between choice and offering environmental attributes for example, quality shopfronts, green infrastructure and attractive public realm that can be used to attract people.

Future town and village centre development should have regard to the principles outlined in section 7.2.4 of Opportunity Sites below.

### **Development Management Criteria for the Assessment of Retail Development**

The Council supports applications for retail development which:

- Are in line with the role and function of the town or village in the settlement hierarchy of the development plan, and
- Accord with the scale and type of retailing identified for that location in the development plan.

Applications for retail development shall be assessed against a range of criteria, which include the following:

- Sequential approach;
- Retail Impact Assessment;
- Traffic and Transport Assessment;
- Specific categories of retail development (for example, large convenience goods stores such as supermarkets, factory shops, retail parks and retail warehouses);
- Sustainable mobility; and
- Design and place making.

### **Sequential Approach**

Planning applications for retail development proposals must demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority that it complies with the policies and objectives of the Development Plan to support town or village centres. Proposals should demonstrate compliance with criteria on location, suitability of use, size, scale and accessibility to ensure that the site chosen is suitable, available and viable for the type of retailing proposed. For retail proposals outside the core retail areas, proposals should demonstrate by supportive evidence what alternative sites were examined and why they were discounted.

Retailers should demonstrate a degree of flexibility in appraising potential sites and provide for:

- Adaptation of standard retail format to accommodate retail development on sites which are centrally located or sensitive in the context of the sequential approach;
- Possibility of changing core business models and adopting flexible retail formats in order to complement the local character; and
- Innovation in site and store layout.

A sequential approach should be applied to material changes of use of existing development where due to their nature (for example, size, category of retailing, likelihood to cause vacant properties in

the town or village centre), could have a significant impact on the role and function of the town or village centre.

**Table 7.3 Order of Priority - Sequential Approach**

<b>Order of Priority</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Criteria</b>
<b>1</b>	Town Centre	Preference for location of retail development in town / village centre locations, and only to allow retail development in edge-of-centre or out-of-centre locations where all other options have been exhausted.
<b>2</b>	Edge of Town Centre	Only where the applicant can demonstrate and the Planning Authority is satisfied that there are no sites or potential sites including vacant units within a town / village centre that are (a) suitable (b) available and (c) viable, can an edge-of-centre site be considered.
<b>3</b>	Out of Town Centre	Only in exceptional circumstances where the applicant can demonstrate and the Planning Authority is satisfied that there are no sites or potential sites either within the centre of a town / village or on the edge of a town / village that are (a) suitable (b) available and (c) viable, can an out-of-centre site be considered.

### **Retail Impact Assessment**

A Retail Impact Assessment (RIA) will be required where:

- a new retail development is considered to be particularly large in scale compared to the existing town centre; or
- there is a particular allocation of a specific type and/or quantum of retail floorspace to a particular settlement, and a proposed development absorbs on one site the bulk of that potential retail floorspace.

An RIA must examine and demonstrate compliance with the Development Plan and that there would not be a material and unacceptable adverse impact on the vitality and viability of any existing centre. The RIA must address criteria as set out in the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012 (or any subsequent update).



### Traffic and Transport Assessment

A Traffic and Transport Assessment (TTA) must examine the traffic and transport impacts of a proposed development, incorporating any subsequent measures necessary to ensure roads and junctions and other transport infrastructure in the vicinity of the development are adequate to accommodate the proposed development without causing additional delays to existing and future road based traffic. A TTA is important in demonstrating how to encourage a shift towards sustainable travel modes by those using the retail development in question. The TTA must also address urban design impacts of the proposed public and private transport proposals. A TTA will be required for retail developments over a threshold of 1,000sq.m. gross floorspace; and, at the discretion of the Planning Authority, a TTA may be required for retail developments below this threshold.<sup>1</sup>

### Specific Categories of Retail Development

Table 7.4 provides a range of criteria for the assessment of the specific categories of retail development.

**Table 7.4 Assessment of specific categories of retail development**

Category	Assessment Criteria
<p><b>Large Convenience Goods stores i.e. supermarkets, superstores and hypermarkets</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should be located in town centres or on the edge of town centres and be of a size which accords with the general floorspace requirements set out in the development plan/retail strategy to support and add variety and vitality to existing shopping areas and also to facilitate access to shoppers by public transport.</li> <li>• The sequential approach should be used to find the most preferable sites.</li> <li>• Planning application drawings should clearly delineate the floorspace to be devoted for sale of comparison and convenience goods, and should differentiate between net and gross floor area.</li> <li>• The balance between the convenience and comparison elements shall be assessed as a critical element of the suitability of the development proposal. Where a significant element of the store is indicated to be for comparison goods the potential impact of that element of the store on existing comparison goods stores within the catchment must be included in the assessment of the application.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Retail Parks and Retail Warehouses</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presumption against further development of out-of-town retail parks where they have already reached saturation point, where there are existing levels of vacancy, and where there is potential for detrimental</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> As per Traffic and Transport Assessment Guidelines, National Roads Authority, 2014

	<p>impact on town centres (including vacancy rates in town centres where retail parks exist on the periphery of the town).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Types of goods to be sold from retail parks is tightly controlled and limited to truly bulky household goods or goods which are not portable by customers travelling by foot, cycle, or bus in accordance with the provisions of the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012.</li> <li>• Minimum size of retail park units shall be no less than 700 sq.m. in out of centre locations and shall not be subdivided.</li> <li>• Cap of 6,000 sq.m (gross) on large-scale single retail warehouse units.</li> </ul>
<b>Factory Shops</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should be restricted to the sale of products produced in the respective factory only.</li> <li>• Scale of the shop should be appropriate to location and raise no issues in relation to the vitality and viability of nearby centres.</li> </ul>
<b>Outlet Centres</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applicants must demonstrate that the products sold would not be in competition with those currently on sale in typical town centre locations.</li> <li>• Most appropriate location for outlet centres is likely to be where commercial synergy can be achieved between an outlet centre and an urban centre which would lead to economic benefits for the overall area. Outlet centres should not be permitted in more remote out-of-town locations.</li> <li>• Applications for the development of outlet centres should be considered having regard to the retail hierarchy and shall be assessed in accordance with the sequential test.</li> </ul>
<b>Retailing in Small Towns and Villages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retail development should be provided for the local urban and rural populations that the town or village serves.</li> <li>• Applicants must demonstrate a need for the retail development within such locations.</li> </ul>
<b>Local Retail Units</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The importance of local retail units must be justified for their location within defined local centres.</li> </ul>
<b>Retailing in Rural Areas</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retailing in rural areas should generally be directed to existing settlements and retailing in the open countryside should generally be resisted.</li> <li>• Retail development may be considered in the open countryside in circumstances where there is a justifiable need for one of the following:</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A retail unit which is ancillary to activities arising from farm diversification.</li> <li>- A retail unit designed to serve tourist or recreational facilities, and secondary to the main tourist use.</li> <li>- A small scale retail unit attached to an existing or approved craft workshop retailing the product direct to the public.</li> <li>- A small scale retail unit attached to an existing or approved rural resource based industry / activity retailing the product direct to the public.</li> <li>- A small scale retail unit designed to serve a dispersed rural community.</li> <li>- Consolidation, extension and/or improvement of an existing retail development that is operational.</li> </ul>
<b>Casual Trading</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Casual trading i.e. craft, Christmas and farmer’s markets and car boot sales, will be promoted in the retail centres of towns where it can create an ambiance which can contribute to the vitality and viability of such centres.</li> </ul>
<b>Retailing and Motor Fuel Stations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convenience shops are part of the normal ancillary services provided within motor fuel stations and should remain on a scale appropriate to the location.</li> <li>• The floorspace of the shop should not exceed 100 sq.m net.</li> <li>• Where permission is sought for a floorspace in excess of 100 sq.m., the sequential approach to retail development shall apply.</li> </ul>

### **Design and Layout**

Retailing plays a vital role in attracting people to towns and villages and is a major component in the provision of high quality services and amenities to local populations and visitors. One of the key messages of the Retail Planning Guidelines is that a high level of design quality in retail development can make an important contribution to the visual aesthetic of an area and to the vitality and viability of town / village centres, whilst designs which are inappropriate for their contexts, or which fail to realise opportunities for improving the character and quality of their locations should not be accepted.

Offaly County Council encourages the regeneration of land / structures, such as vacant sites, derelict sites, brownfield sites, backland sites, and Opportunity Sites, located particularly in town and village centres.

Quality urban design and place making shall be promoted and encouraged at all times by Offaly County Council for retail developments. Public realm constitutes all areas of the urban fabric to which the public have access and includes, for example, streetscapes, public space around buildings, parks, green

spaces, canal /river banks, public buildings, and pedestrian and cycling facilities. The enhancement and development of these areas are the responsibility of both the public and private sectors. In this regard a Design Brief is generally required to be submitted as part of planning applications for large scale retail development or on sensitive sites or visually prominent sites, in order to assess the urban design aspects of the development.

The design brief should demonstrate how the design is guided and informed by good urban design practices as set out in the Retail Design Manual – A Good Practice Guide (companion document to the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012) and must describe and justify the rationale for the submitted design.

The scope and level of detail expected in the design brief will typically depend on the location, scale, site, nature and complexity of the development proposal. In any event the design brief should include and address the following as set out below.

- Description of the site and its context.
- Summary of Development Plan objectives and policies relevant to the site and the general area.
- Identification of planning constraints or considerations.
- Contribution to place making and quality of life.
- Regard to relevant Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines for example, Retail Planning Guidelines and Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets.
- Design considerations including:
  - Massing, scale, and density;
  - Building and architectural design;
  - Protection of existing architectural and heritage;
  - Character and form;
  - Vitality and viability;
  - Public realm enhancements;
  - Environmental responsibility and sustainability;
  - Efficient and effective use / site layout;
  - Climate adaptation and mitigation; and
  - Regeneration / reuse of vacant, derelict or brownfield sites.



**Figure 7.2 Public Realm Improvements, Millennium Square and Bridge, Tullamore**

### **Diversity of Uses**

Maintaining the health of town and village centres requires diversity in the services on offer to the catchment population. A wide variety of different functions in town and village centres is a key element in ensuring the on-going vitality of an area. This vitality is threatened by an overconcentration of one particular type of outlet, for example, amusement centres / arcades, fast food outlets, off licences and betting offices.

## 7.2 Regeneration

### 7.2.1 Aim

To encourage and assist in the regeneration of areas and structures throughout the county in order to improve both quality of place and urban resilience, considering that attractive places have a role in enhancing quality of life.

### 7.2.2 Healthy Place-Making

High quality and well-designed buildings, structures, public spaces and streets, contribute to attractive and healthy place-making and quality of life, drawing more inward investment, skills and talent, and increasing the liveability factor of a place.

We need a high quality, low carbon and more resilient built environment for existing and future generations. The adaptation of existing as well as the design of new buildings will be critical to meet the targets set by the Climate Action Plan 2019 which is addressed in Chapter 3 Climate Action and Energy.

Healthy place-making is underpinned by good urban design, which seeks to create public spaces that are attractive, vibrant, distinctive, safe and accessible and which promote and facilitate social interaction. Making a place more resilient is about a place surviving and absorbing changes and adversity both man-made and natural and recovering and revitalising to a more sustainable path.

Public realm constitutes all areas of the urban fabric to which the public have access and includes for example streetscapes, public space around buildings, parks, green spaces, canal /river banks, public buildings, and cycling and pedestrian facilities. These areas and settings, which can be on public or private lands, support or facilitate public life and social interaction.



High quality places share some common characteristics:

- A strong character and sense of place, where cultural, built and natural heritage is understood, valued and enhanced;
- A rich diversity of functions and activities which underpin viability and vitality;
- A highly adaptable urban structure and buildings to provide for future longer-term changes in society and economy;
- A well-connected network of streets and spaces of high quality for all users which promotes urban life, community coherence and a sense of shared ownership;
- Priority for walking, cycling and public transport to reduce reliance on the car, and by so doing improve health and wellbeing;
- Coherent, legible and attractive streetscapes which provide continuity and enclosure, variety of frontages, vibrancy and interest; and
- Integration of various characteristics of quality places.

In accordance with Regional Policy Objective (RPO) 9.10 of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), in planning for the creation of healthy and attractive places, there is a need to provide alternatives to the car and to prioritise and promote walking and cycling in the design of streets and public spaces.

Place-making and quality of life is identified as a key differentiator in Enterprise 2025, Ireland's National Enterprise Policy 2015-2025 in attracting enterprise and employment to an area.

RPO 6.12 of the RSES states that local authorities shall include objectives in Development Plans and Local Area Plans supporting emphasis on a Place-making Strategy for towns and implementation of Town Centre Renewal Plans.

RPO 6.13 of the RSES states that local authorities shall support the preparation of Design Guidelines to provide for improvements in the appearance of streetscapes and for revitalising vacant spaces for example with cost effective, temporary uses that build on the longer-term vision for space.



**Figure 7.3 O'Connor Square, Tullamore**

### **7.2.3 Compact Growth**

Offaly County Council recognises that there needs to be a focus on the regeneration of towns and villages in order to make them more attractive. This can be greatly achieved through the sustainable growth of our settlements in the form of legibility, inclusivity, safety, resilience and also compact growth rather than sprawl which is uneconomic. 'Compact Growth' is a National Strategic Outcome of the National Planning Framework. Creating more compact development requires a focus on:

- (i) the 'liveability' / quality of life of urban places;

This includes the quality of the built environment, including the public realm, traffic and parking issues, access to amenities and public transport and a sense of personal safety and wellbeing.

- (ii) Regeneration and development of the existing built up areas, for example, infill sites and brownfield sites;

This includes making built up areas attractive and viable. It requires a steady supply of sites, land and investment in infrastructure and amenities through more active land management.

- (iii) Tackling legacies such as disadvantage in central urban areas, through social and physical regeneration and by encouraging more mixed tenure and integrated communities; and

- (iv) Linking regeneration and redevelopment initiatives to climate action.

An increase in the proportion of more compact forms of growth in the development of settlements of all sizes has the potential to make a transformational difference. It can bring new life and footfall, contribute to the viability of services, shops and public transport, increase housing supply and enable more people to be closer to employment and recreational opportunities, as well as to walk and cycle more and use the car less.

### **7.2.4 Opportunity Sites**

Opportunity Sites are identified below for Tullamore (Key Town), Birr (Self-Sustaining Growth Town), Edenderry and Portarlinton (Self-Sustaining Towns), and those within other settlements are identified in Volume 2 and Local Area Plans. These sites were chosen because of their prominence and underutilisation. In addition to promoting local economic growth, it is considered that their redevelopment would contribute greatly to the renewal, enhancement and regeneration of the towns and villages in which they are located. These sites also provide the greatest potential for development and consolidation. Regeneration lands as defined in the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 (as amended) include these Opportunity sites.

Opportunity site boundaries have not been identified definitively and can be added to, to provide for logical site boundaries or the inclusion of other potential Opportunity Sites. Some of the sites may be owned by different parties and would require an element of site assembly for a coherent development strategy to progress. This approach to re-development is encouraged over a piecemeal approach. To help realise the full potential for the development of these sites, any application put forward should



consider the Development Plan policies, objectives and standards and shall include an **Urban Design Statement and Masterplan** taking cognisance of the following **development principles**:

### **Site Assembly**

A detailed masterplan shall be prepared for each individual area that includes a phasing programme which demonstrates how the proposed development complies with the principles of sustainable compact development, good urban design and healthy place-making. This can be undertaken in consultation with the Planning Authority prior to the submission of a planning application. Developers, landowners and the Council shall be required to coordinate and work together in order to achieve an integrated coherent approach to development as opposed to a piecemeal approach.

### **Land Use**

Re-development proposals shall accord with the zoning provisions of the plan, and any Place-Making Strategies / Town Centre Renewal Plans in effect.

### **Design and Layout**

- Promote mixed use and diversity, with a substantial amount of residential use;
- Comply with the Core Strategy and Housing Strategy;
- Be of high quality design in terms of buildings form, layout, materials and public realm;
- Provide a sense of place by developing attractive, liveable, safe and vibrant places;
- Be of compact form and of high density;
- Be consistent with Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines for example Sustainable Development in Urban Area Guidelines, Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets, Sustainable Urban Housing Design Standards for New Apartments, Urban Development and Building Heights – Guidelines for Planning Authorities, Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines, Traffic and Transport Guidelines and any other future relevant Guidelines, and in particular specific planning policy requirements;
- Utilise where possible, energy efficient and eco-friendly design and building methods;
- Provide for green, pollinator friendly infrastructure, for example, green open space, trees, green roofs, green walls;
- Plant drought-resistant plants / trees in public amenity areas to provide shade;
- Provide for low carbon output, for example, sustainable integrated transportation and land use, green roofs, green walls, and use of renewable energy, where appropriate;

- Incorporate Taller Buildings (6 storeys) if the site is designated for consideration of such in this County Development Plan / future Local Area Plans<sup>2</sup>;
- Provide for adaptability and flexibility in design so that places can respond easily to changing property needs;
- Comprise a mix of residential unit sizes and types which accommodate a range of living requirements for all age groups, for example, older people and families, and for people with disabilities;
- Take cognisance of the existing urban grain and scale of adjoining structures;
- Ensure efficient and attractive design of street block and plot;
- Use maximum natural light in orientation and acknowledge prevailing wind direction;
- A focus on design-led and performance-based outcomes rather than specifying absolute requirements;
- Protect views and vistas;
- Protect adjoining amenities to an appropriate level;
- Reinforce local distinctiveness, for example, by inclusion of features in design and materials;
- Respect the integrity and setting of protected structures, recorded sites and monuments, and key scenic views and prospects;
- Provide legibility within the public realm, create a hierarchy of routes and use landmark elements;
- Incorporate hard and soft landscaping;
- Provide for natural surveillance of public areas;
- Support creative ways to adapt, retrofit and reuse existing buildings and structures to optimise the use of renewable energy and resources and incentivise adoption of low-carbon technologies, processes and techniques;

### **Movement and Access**

- Design for an alternative to the car (for example, walking, cycling, public transport) and enhance accessibility and connectivity, by prioritising cycling and walking as active sustainable transport modes;

---

<sup>2</sup> A taller building is defined as 6 stories or higher in the Urban Development and Building Heights – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2018)

- Provide an integrated, safe, convenient, direct and comfortable network of routes for walking and cycling;
- Encourage 'access for all', specifically for people with disabilities;
- Provide bicycle parking and charging point infrastructure for electric vehicles;
- Provide place-based streets;
- Movement and access should also be informed by future strategies / plans relating to transportation;

#### **Built and Cultural Heritage**

- All new development proximate to protected structures shall be sensitively designed to respect the form of the protected structures;
- Promote the retention, reuse, refurbishment and maintenance of existing built heritage with vibrant adaptable uses;

#### **Biodiversity**

- Identify biodiversity within the site and explore opportunities for biodiversity enhancement to improve ecological connectivity;

#### **Other**

- Identify flood risk and adhere to Flood Risk Management Guidelines for best practice; and
- Be accompanied by a site specific risk assessment and waste management plan for the disposal of any wastes arising including hazardous or contaminated material.

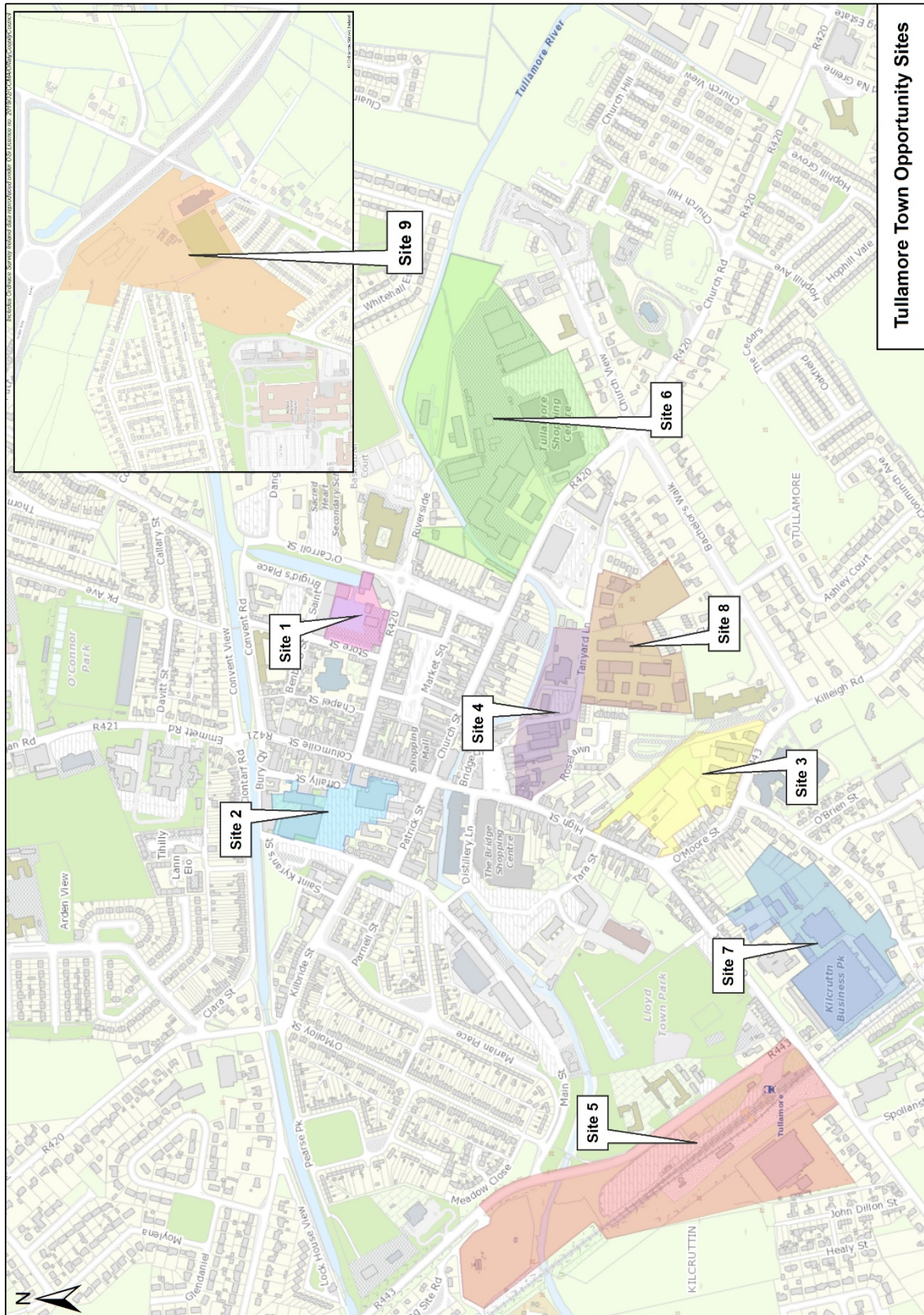


Figure 7.4 Tullamore Opportunity Sites

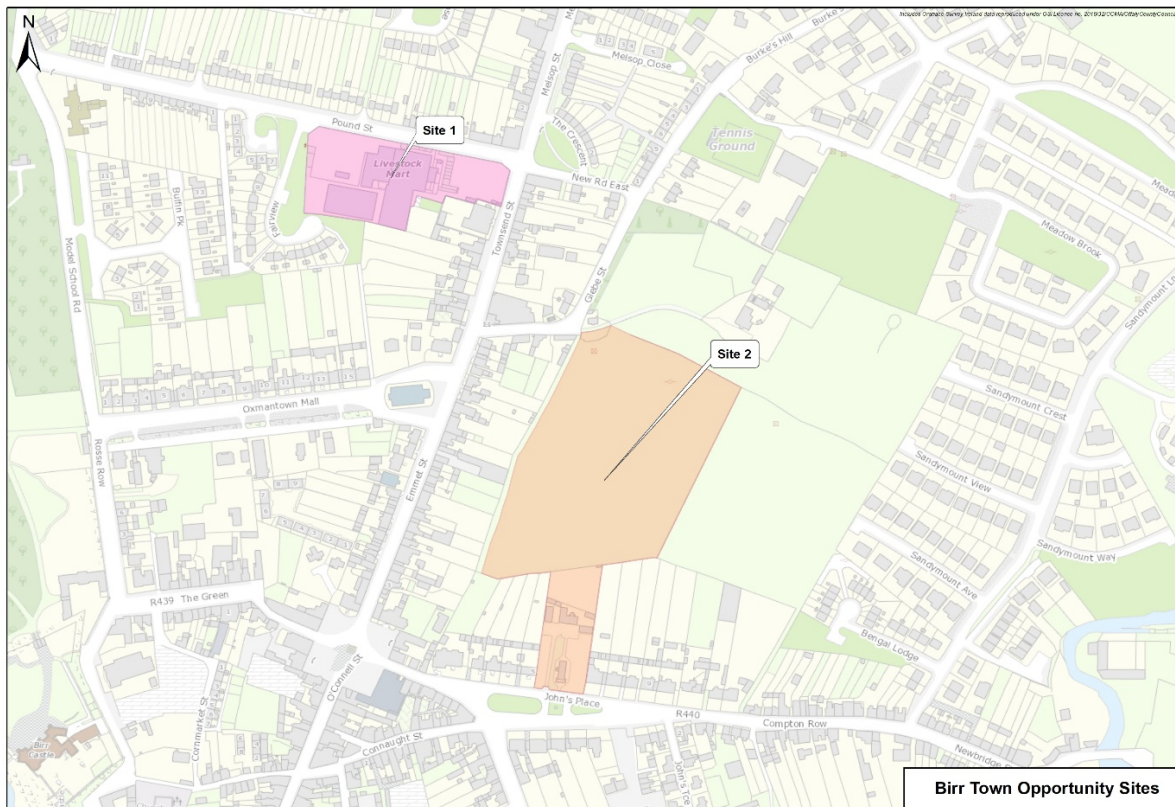


Figure 7.5 Birr Opportunity Sites

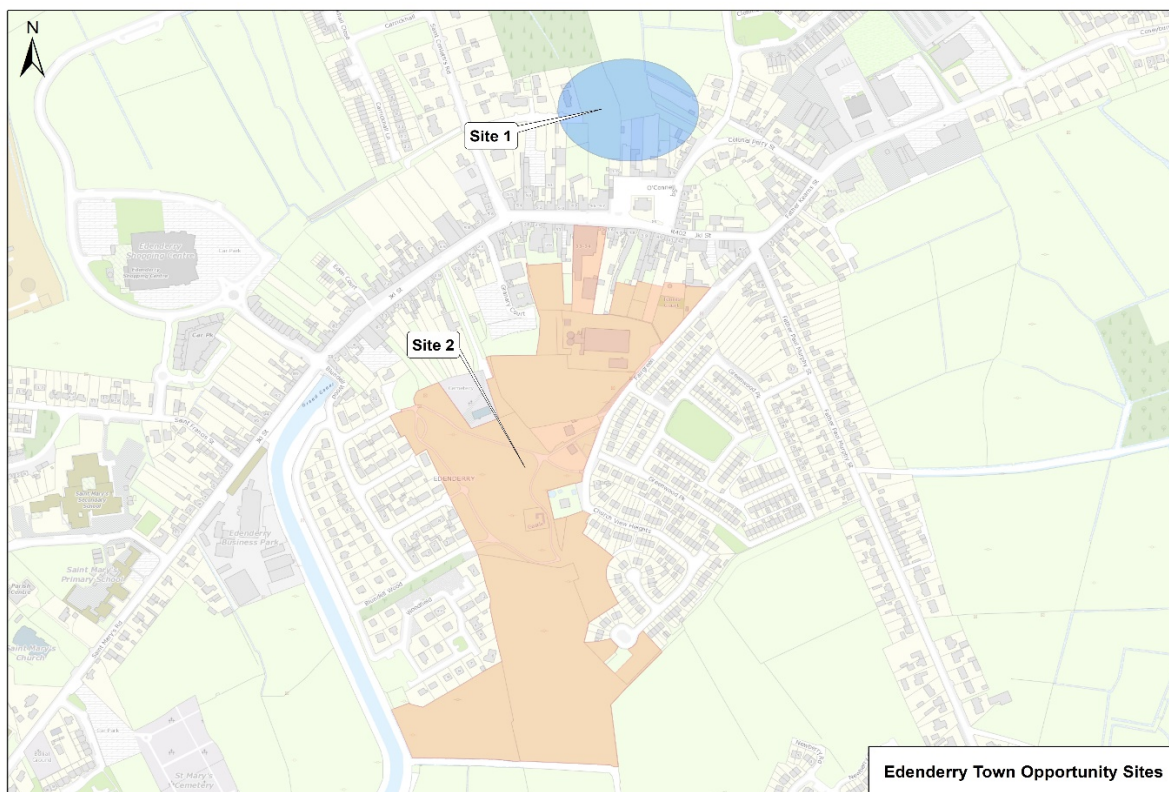


Figure 7.6 Edenderry Opportunity Sites

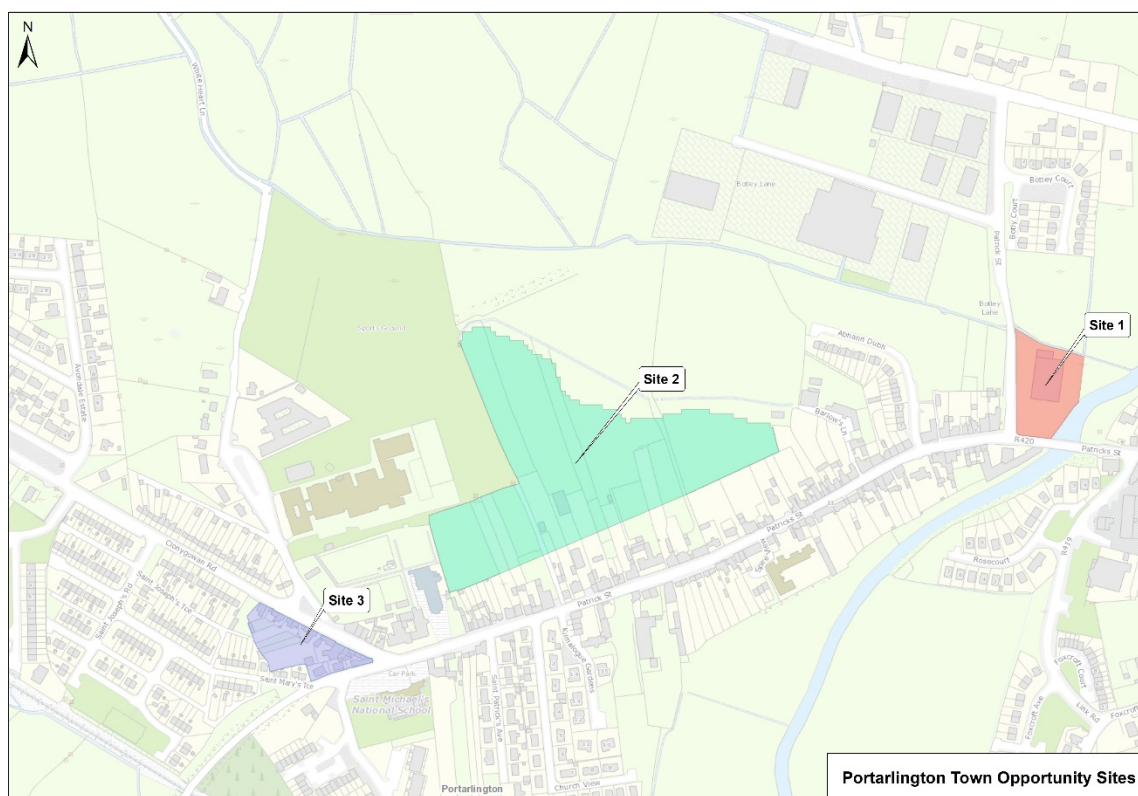


Figure 7.7 Portarlington Opportunity Sites

### 7.2.5 Taller Buildings

Growing upwards rather than outwards represents a more efficient use of land and infrastructure, is less carbon intensive, and can accommodate increased densities. Building upwards plays a critical role in consolidating and strengthening existing built up areas which is more sustainable than urban sprawl. An appropriate mix of living, working, social and recreational space is required in our urban areas. Offaly County Council promotes greatly increased levels of residential development in our urban centres and where appropriate increases in the building heights and overall density of development. While achieving higher density does not automatically imply taller buildings, increased building height is a significant component in making optimal use of the capacity of sites in urban locations where transport, employment, services or retail development can achieve a requisite level of intensity for sustainability.

While taller buildings will bring much needed additional housing and economic development, they can also assist in reinforcing and contributing to a sense of place within a town centre. In this manner, increased building height is a key factor in assisting modern place-making and improving the overall quality of our urban environment.

The Urban Development and Building Heights Guidelines for Planning Authorities (December 2018) states that it would be appropriate to support the consideration of building heights of at least 6 storeys at street level. Taller buildings are advocated in the major towns identified for strategic development in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy: in Offaly's case this is Tullamore only, a designated Key

Town. Sites suitable for taller buildings shall meet the highest standards of architectural quality, urban design and place-making.

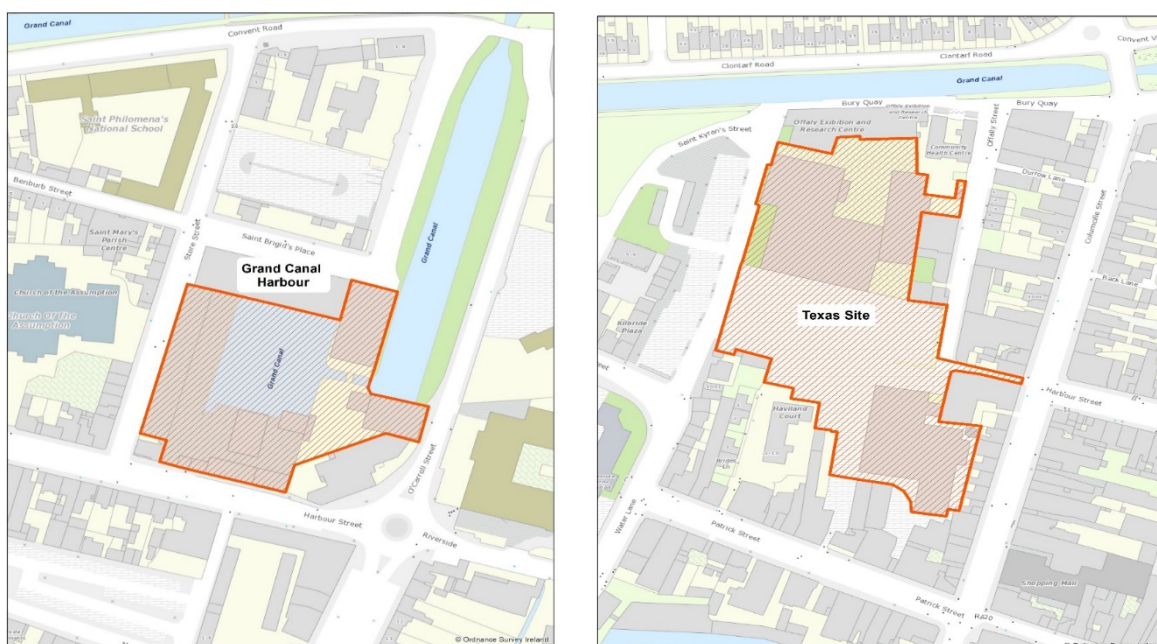
The Development Management Standards (Chapter 13) sets out the items which are to be addressed in proposals for taller buildings.

The following two sites in Tullamore are open for consideration to accommodate taller buildings based on the mix of adjacent building heights, the desire to have higher densities at these brownfield central locations and their extensive site sizes. These two sites are also designated Opportunity Sites;

- Grand Canal Harbour site, Tullamore (Opportunity Site No. 1)
- Texas site, Tullamore (Opportunity Site No. 2)

Permitting taller buildings at these locations is dependent on assessment by the Planning Authority of the following documents prepared by a prospective applicant / applicant;

- A masterplan and local planning framework to deal with movement, public realm and design;
- An urban design statement addressing the impacts on the historic built environment;
- A specific design statement on the individual proposal from an architectural perspective;
- A visual impact assessment; and
- Daylight and shadow projection diagrams.



**Figure 7.8 Potential Taller Buildings Sites: Grand Canal Harbour Site and Texas Site, Tullamore**

### **7.2.6 Funding**

The Urban and Rural Regeneration and Development Funds introduced under Project Ireland 2040 have as their purpose the revitalisation of community, and the delivery of innovative and transformational regeneration proposals. The Town and Village Renewal Scheme provides renewal and rejuvenation to towns and villages within the county. Offaly County Council is proactive in applying for funding under these measures.



### **7.2.7 Collaboration**

A collaborative approach between central government (funding), the local authority, semi-state bodies, the community, private sector and voluntary associations is required to successfully achieve the regeneration of areas.

A joined up approach is encouraged whereby landowners work together in amalgamating sites to bring forward a comprehensive and coherent development proposal.

The Land Development Agency was established under the National Planning Framework. It works with local authorities, Government Departments, agencies and the OPW to release strategically located land banks suitable for redevelopment and designation for future public and private affordable housing provision. This effective land management of publically owned lands is a central element to achieving compact and sustainable development, and accordingly contributing to the regeneration of settlements.

### **7.2.8 Derelict Sites**

The Derelict Sites Act 1990 (as amended) requires that owners or occupiers of any land take all reasonable steps to ensure that the land and any structure within, does not become, or continue to be, a derelict site. A derelict site is any land, which detracts, or is likely to detract, to a material degree, from the amenity, character or appearance of land in the neighbourhood of the land. Offaly County Council maintains a Register of Derelict Sites and continues to be proactive in identifying and seeking the improvement of such sites, and applying a derelict sites levy where the site is located in an urban area. It is considered that the continual implementation of the provisions of the Derelict Sites Act shall assist in preventing and / or removing injury to amenity.

### **7.2.9 Vacant Sites**

The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 introduced the vacant site levy which is intended to incentivise the development of vacant or idle sites in designated residential / regeneration land in urban areas.



In summary, residential land is land that is:

- Zoned primarily for residential purposes;
- In an area where there is a need for housing;
- Suitable for the provision of housing;
- Mainly vacant or idle;
- In excess of 0.05 hectares; and
- Exclusive of a person's home.

In summary, regeneration land is land that is:

- In need of renewal and regeneration;
- Causing adverse effect on existing amenities or on the character of the area;
- Mainly vacant or idle;
- In excess of 0.05 hectares; and
- Exclusive of a person's home.

Regeneration lands include Opportunity Sites as described in this chapter, however lands other than these Opportunity Sites may be considered as regeneration lands. In accordance with the Act, a Vacant Site Register for County Offaly has been established.

#### **7.2.10 Vacant Homes**

Offaly County Council compiled a Vacant Homes Action Plan 2018 which sets out objectives in reducing the number of vacant homes in the county.

To increase the supply of new homes and to adhere to the principles of compact growth, the reuse of existing underutilised building stock for residential use, including unused or underused floors above ground floor retail premises is encouraged.

#### **7.2.11 Heritage Led Regeneration**

Offaly County Council recognises that planning for the regeneration of an historic town needs an integrated approach that balances the protection of the built heritage and the sustainable development of historic urban areas with the needs of modern living, while taking account of the concerns and aspirations of the community and key stakeholders. Bringing unused or underused spaces within our towns back into use has many advantages. In addition to reviving the economic value of an urban area, it also removes abandoned and derelict sites, and reduces the pressure to build on greenfield sites or agricultural land.

#### **7.2.12 Change of Use**

The Planning and Development Amendment Regulations 2018 outline exemptions for changing the use of an existing commercial unit to a residential unit subject to meeting specific criteria. This is a measure to assist in the speedy reuse of vacant commercial buildings and bring them into a residential

use in order to contribute towards meeting the housing shortage, while at the same time rejuvenating a vacant building. It also recognises the importance of town living and having an injection of residential occupancy on our streets<sup>3</sup>.

### **7.2.13 Purple Flag Accreditation**

‘Purple Flag’ is a town and city centre award which aims to raise the standard and broaden the appeal of town and city centres between the hours of 5pm to 5am. Areas that are awarded the Purple Flag are recognised for providing a vibrant and diverse mix of dining, entertainment and culture while promoting the safety and wellbeing of visitors and local residents. The Purple Flag can play a valuable role in raising the standard and broadening the appeal of a town’s night time economy.

---

<sup>3</sup> In accordance with Article 10(6) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended), this specific exemption has been enacted for a limited time period, requiring that any change of use proposal which avails of the exemption must be commenced and completed before 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021, unless the provision is extended by further legislation.

## 7.3 Retail Policies

### Retail Hierarchy

**RTCP-01** It is Council policy to implement the retail hierarchy. The Council shall seek to locate retail development in the designated settlements where the scale and size of retail development proposed is in accordance with the size and the defined function of the settlement as outlined in the Core Strategy.

**RTCP-02** It is Council policy to promote Tullamore, a Key Town, as the main retail centre in the county and to ensure that the retail quantity, quality and range is of a standard that contributes to the strengthening of the retail economy within Tullamore Town, the county and the region as a whole.

**RTCP-03** It is Council policy to ensure that higher order retail services and developments are located in higher order settlements, as set out in Offaly's Settlement Hierarchy. The Council shall consider the scale, type and location of retail developments within the county when determining their suitability.

### Vibrancy / Revitalisation

**RTCP-04** It is Council policy to support the vitality and viability of existing town and village centres and facilitate a competitive and healthy environment for the retailing sector into the future by ensuring that future growth in retail floorspace responds to the identified retail hierarchy, the sequential approach, and the needs of the projected population of the settlement areas.

**RTCP-05** It is Council policy to promote the reuse of vacant retail floorspace. Where no viable retail use can be sustained, alternative uses shall be assessed on their own merits against the requirements of the proper planning and sustainable development of the area within which they are located.

**RTCP-06** It is Council policy to encourage retail development, including new forms of shopping which relates to the regeneration of existing town and village centres. Proposals, which would undermine the vitality and viability of core retail areas or town centres, as a whole shall not be permitted.

**RTCP-07** It is Council policy to encourage retail development primarily in core retail areas and to apply the sequential approach in the consideration of the location of retail developments located outside of core retail areas.

**RTCP-08** It is Council policy that there will be a general presumption against large out-of-town retail centres in particular those located adjacent or close to existing, new or planned national roads/motorways.

### Use

**RTCP-09** It is Council policy to resist the loss of retail units to non-retail use at pedestrian level, particularly in the primary shopping frontages of towns.

**RTCP-10** It is Council policy that the types of goods to be sold from retail parks shall be limited to bulky household goods or goods which are not portable by customers travelling by foot, cycle, or bus as defined in the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012 and any updated versions.

**RTCP-11** It is Council policy to address leakage of retail expenditure from the county by providing the means to strengthen the range and quality of its retail offer.

### **Design**

**RTCP-12** It is Council policy to encourage high quality architectural design and high quality layout / urban design in retail development to support and promote healthy place-making and quality of life.

**RTCP-13** It is Council policy to require that a Design Brief is submitted with applications for retail development that is large-scale or complex or located on sensitive sites. The Design Brief shall show the rationale and evolution of the proposal and how the proposal complements its context and setting.

**RTCP-14** It is Council policy to require applicants to demonstrate a degree of flexibility by providing for adaptation of standard retail design and format in order to accommodate retail development which is centrally located or sensitively located in the context of the sequential approach.

**RTCP-15** It is Council policy to encourage the repairing and retaining of historic shop fronts or historic features in a shop front.

**RTCP-16** It is Council policy that illumination of fascia signage, shopfronts or distinctive architectural features should be discreet and limited to externally lit signs, spotlighting, uplighting or disguised minimalist strip lighting. In this regard, internally illuminated fascias, internally illuminated signs and neon type signs are generally not permitted.

**RTCP-17** It is Council policy to encourage the design of shopfront and signs in accordance with the Advice Leaflet 'Guide to Shopfronts and Signs' by Offaly County Council.

### **Climate Action**

**RTCP-18** It is Council policy to support the development of environmentally sustainable low-carbon climate resilient communities and to encourage a climate adaptation and mitigation approach to retail development, for example the provision of green infrastructure, sustainable mobility and accessibility, sustainable urban drainage systems, water harvesting and renewable energy.

## 7.4 Retail Objectives

**RTCO-01** It is an objective of the Council to encourage the continued vitality and viability of town centres by:

- Identifying and promoting key town and village centre Opportunity Sites for development;
- Promoting the revitalisation of vacant and derelict properties/shop units;
- Promoting ongoing environmental improvements to the public realm;
- Preventing overdevelopment of particular non-retail uses such as fast food outlets, amusement arcades / centres, off licences and betting shops in core retail areas;
- Promoting activities including events, festivals, street markets and farmer's/country markets in appropriate town and village centres in the county; and
- Facilitating sustainable mobility, accessibility and permeability improvements.

**RTCO-02** It is an objective of the Council to ensure that, in the interest of vitality and viability, development proposals result in a balance of services and outlets thus avoiding an over-concentration of a particular type of retail activity in a given area.

## 7.5 Regeneration Policies

### Reuse

**RP-01** It is Council policy to promote the regeneration of settlements by making better use of under-utilised land and buildings, particularly within the existing built-up areas where a transformational difference in the sustainability of a settlement can take place through compact growth.

**RP-02** It is Council policy to promote and encourage the suitable redevelopment of derelict and vacant sites as an alternative to new build on greenfield sites.

**RP-03** It is Council policy to promote and facilitate the habitation of vacant homes in accordance with the Council's Vacant Homes Action Plan.

**RP-04** It is Council policy to support initiatives that promote the reuse, refurbishment and retrofitting of existing buildings within urban centres.

**RP-05** It is Council policy to promote heritage-led regeneration in historic towns / villages through the reuse of historic buildings, the enhancement of places of special cultural / natural interest and the protection of the historic urban fabric.

**RP-06** It is Council policy to encourage a mixture of uses within built-up areas in order to promote the liveability and sustainability of our settlements.

**RP-07** It is Council policy to apply for funding under various funding streams to facilitate the enhancement, revitalisation, renewal and regeneration of communities and town / village centres, and the delivery of innovative and transformational regeneration proposals, for example, under the Urban and Rural Regeneration and Development Funds and Town and Village Renewal Schemes.

### Design

**RP-08** It is Council policy to encourage high quality and well-designed buildings, structures, public spaces and streets to support and promote healthy place-making and quality of life.

**RP-09** It is Council policy to encourage and facilitate improvements to the physical fabric and environment of the town and village centres including streetscape, street furniture, landscaping (hard and soft), signage and wirescapes, while recognising that both private and public developments can contribute to effective public realm.

**RP-10** It is Council policy to be flexible in terms of enabling brownfield / infill development within settlements, focusing on design-led and performance-based outcomes, rather than specifying absolute requirements in all cases.

### Opportunity Sites / Taller Buildings

**RP-11** It is Council policy to facilitate, promote and encourage the re-development of Opportunity Sites identified in Volume 1 and Volume 2 of the County Development Plan and Local Area Plans for appropriate development that contributes positively to the character of the settlement. Any proposal

brought forward on Opportunity Sites shall be in accordance with the Development Principles for Opportunity Sites as set out in section 7.2.4 of the County Development Plan, with the inclusion of an urban design statement and masterplan and shall demonstrate the rationale for the proposal and how it will interact within its context and the wider urban area.

**RP-12** It is Council policy to consider the development of taller buildings on the 'Harbour site' and 'Texas site' in Tullamore as identified in Figure 7.8 of the County Development Plan, subject to assessment by the Planning Authority of the following documents prepared by a prospective applicant / applicant;

- A masterplan and local planning framework to deal with movement, public realm, and design;
- An urban design statement addressing aspects of impacts on the historic built environment;
- A specific design statement on the individual proposal from an architectural perspective;
- A visual impact assessment; and
- Daylight and shadow projection diagrams.

### **Collaboration**

**RP-13** It is Council policy to promote a collaborative approach between Offaly County Council, central government, semi-state bodies, the community, the private sector and voluntary associations to successfully achieve the regeneration of areas.

**RP-14** It is Council policy to work in conjunction with the Land Development Agency in co-ordinating and developing strategic publically owned land banks suitable for housing provision in order to contribute towards achieving compact growth, sustainable development and regeneration.

**RP-15** It is Council policy to support the consolidation and aggregation of land where required in order to enable regeneration and proper planning and sustainable development.

**RP-16** It is Council policy that scheduled town and village improvement schemes shall be informed by joint walkability audits involving local older people together with relevant local authority officials in accordance with the Age Friendly Strategy for Offaly 2018-2021, and any future editions.

### **Climate Action**

**RP-17** It is Council policy to support the development of sustainable low-carbon climate resilient communities and to encourage a climate adaptation and mitigation approach to developments which enable regeneration.

## 7.6 Regeneration Objectives

### Renewal

**RO-01** It is an objective of the Council to encourage and facilitate, where appropriate, the development and renewal of areas throughout the county which are in need of regeneration and in particular to apply for funding under government urban and rural regeneration / renewal schemes.

**RO-02** It is an objective of the Council to encourage the continued vitality and viability of town and village centres by promoting ongoing environmental improvements to the public realm.

**RO-03** It is an objective of the Council to promote the development and renewal of areas identified in need of regeneration in order to prevent (i) adverse effects on existing amenities in such areas, in particular as a result of the ruinous or neglected condition of any land, (ii) urban blight and decay, (iii) anti-social behaviour, or (iv) a shortage of habitable houses or of land suitable for residential use or a mixture of residential and other use.

**RO-04** It is an objective of the Council to establish a database of strategic brownfield and infill sites so that brownfield land re-use can be managed and co-ordinated across multiple stakeholders as part of an active land management process.

**RO-05** It is an objective of the Council to support the examination of a Purple Flag status for a town(s) in County Offaly in conjunction with relevant stakeholders.

### Reuse

**RO-06** It is an objective of the Council to identify derelict sites and vacant sites which are suitable for redevelopment and to maintain the respective registers.

**RO-07** It is an objective of the Council as per the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 (as amended), to use site activation measures such as the Vacant Site Levy in specific areas to bring forward vacant or underutilised 'Residential Lands' and 'Regeneration Lands' (which includes Opportunity Sites) into beneficial use where considered necessary for renewal and regeneration. Each year of the plan period the planning authority will assess the county's settlements for the purposes of identifying vacant sites for addition to the Vacant Site's Register and accordingly implement the statutory provisions for same.

**RO-08** It is an objective of the Council to encourage and be proactive in the habitation of vacant homes in accordance with the Council's Vacant Homes Action Plan.

### Strategy / Guide

**RO-09** It is an objective of the Council to make a Place-Making Strategy for towns and implementation of Town Centre Renewal Plans<sup>4</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> In accordance with Regional Policy Objective 6.12 of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.



**RO-10** It is an objective of the Council to support the preparation of Design Guidelines to provide for improvements in the appearance of streetscapes and for revitalising vacant spaces for example with cost effective, temporary uses that build on the longer-term vision for space<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>5</sup> In accordance with RPO 6.13 of RSES