Draft Westmeath County Development Plan 2021 - 2027



APPENDIX 4 County Westmeath Retail Strategy

Westmeath County Retail Strategy

Prepared for Westmeath County Council

Adopted April 2019



MACCABE DURNEY BARNES

Planning | Environment | Economics

20 FITZWILLIAM PLACE, DUBLIN 2, D02YV58 T: +353 1 6762594 F: +353 1 6762310 W: WWW.MDB.IE

Statement:

This report has been prepared by MacCabe Durney Barnes using due skill, care and diligence and is sufficient as a means of estimating future retail requirements of Westmeath County Council. The data and conclusions reached should not be used for other purposes.

7 The County Retail Strategy

Every retail planning strategy must be clear as to its purpose and what it is intended to achieve. In respect of the Strategy, its foundations and purpose are set within the aim for retail planning and development in the County Development Plan 2014. This aim is:

To continue to sustain and improve the retail profile and competitiveness of County Westmeath, through the consolidation and environmental enhancement of town centres and settlements and by improving the quality and choice of retail developments on offer.

To achieve the overall aim over the 2016 – 2026 period of the Strategy, a logical step-by-step framework has been adopted which is summarised in Figure 7.1.





7.1 Objectives

The objectives underpinning the Strategy have been informed by the requirements of the GRP 2012; reviews of the MRPG 2010, County Development Plan 2014, other adopted Town and Local Area Plans and the 2007 Strategy; the current baseline and retail market trends; and, responding to the retail issues and opportunities that prevail in the County's main centres and Westmeath as a whole. Founded on this, the retail planning objectives of the Strategy are:

- **Objective 1:** To sustain and improve the retail profile and competitiveness of the County and its main centres within the retail economy of the Region and beyond.
- **Objective 2:** To confirm a County Retail Hierarchy which assists in achieving the County and Regional Settlement Strategies and their objectives and provides clear guidance on where major new retail floorspace would be acceptable.
- **Objective 3:** To provide the retail land use and planning policy framework that harnesses the potential of Mullingar and Athlone's role within the national and regional economies and to ensure that the County and these two key settlements fully play their role in achieving the objectives and targets of the National Planning Framework and associated RSES'.
- **Objective 4:** To sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of the four Key Service and Service Towns within the County Retail Hierarchy and facilitate the means by which this can be achieved.

- **Objective 5:** To encourage and facilitate the preservation and enhancement of the retail and services role of Local Service Towns and Rural Centres around the County.
- **Objective 6:** To reinforce the hearts of town and village centres as the priority location for new retail development, with quality of design and integration/linkage being key underpinning principles.
- **Objective 7:** To ensure that the retail needs of the County's residents are met as fully as possible within Westmeath to enable a reduction in the requirement to travel to meet these needs and in the interests of achieving greater social inclusion and accessibility to shopping and services across all sectors of the community.
- **Objective 8:** To address leakage of retail expenditure from the County by providing the means to strengthen the range and quality of its retail offer.
- **Objective 9:** To align, as far as practicable, new retail development with existing and proposed public transport infrastructure and services and encourage access by foot and bicycle to reduce the dominance of access by private car.
- **Objective 10:** To encourage and facilitate the re-use and regeneration of derelict land and buildings for retail and other town centre uses, with due cognisance to the Sequential Approach.
- **Objective 11:** To promote and sustain the importance of retailing in the County's tourism economy.
- **Objective 12:** To encourage and facilitate innovation and diversification in the County's retail profile and offer.
- **Objective13:** To prepare and implement a Joint Retail Strategy for the counties of Westmeath, Roscommon and Offaly, in conjunction with Offaly and Roscommon County Councils following the adoption of the County Retail Strategy, as required in the GRP 2012.
- **Objective 14:** To prepare and implement with Roscommon County Council a Joint Retail Strategy for the Athlone – Monksland/Bellanamullia area (the Athlone Western Environs) in accordance with the recommendations of the Athlone Boundary Review Committee.
- **Objective 15:** To provide the criteria for the assessment of retail development proposals.

7.2 Strategic Policy Framework

The achievement of the Strategy's objectives requires due cognisance to be taken of the strategic policy framework that underpins specific policies and proposals. This framework is set by the:

- i) County Retail Hierarchy;
- ii) Core Retail Areas;
- iii) Sequential Approach;
- iv) Spatial Distribution of New Retail Development; and
- v) Consideration of Need.

7.2.1 County Retail Hierarchy

Policy SRP1: County Retail Hierarchy

It is the policy of the Council to guide major retail development in accordance with the framework provided by the County Retail Hierarchy set out in Table 7.1 to enable an efficient, equitable and sustainable distribution of floorspace throughout the County.

The County Settlement Hierarchy adopted in both the MRPG 2010 and County Development Plan 2014 generally well represents the County Retail Hierarchy which prevails. However, it has been slightly modified to incorporate specific types of retailing which characterise lower tiers of the County Retail Hierarchy, namely Neighbourhood Centres and Local Shops. These categories of retailing in the County Retail Hierarchy are referenced but no specific locations identified. Reflecting this, the County Retail Hierarchy is set out in Table 7.1. It is illustrated in Map 1 of Appendix I.

Position Hierarchy	in	the	Description	Settlement/Centre
Tier 1			Linked Gateway Town**	Athlone, Mullingar.
Tier 2			Key Service Town	Castlepollard.
Tier 3			Service Town	Moate, Kinnegad, Kilbeggan
Tier 4			Local Service Town and Neighbourhood Centres*	Rochfortbridge, Killucan/Rathwire, Clonmellon, Tyrrellspass.
Tier 5			Rural Centres and Local Shops	Including: Delvin, Coole, Multyfarnham, Ballymore, Ballynacarrigy, Raharney, Milltownpass, Collinstown, Glasson, Ballinalack, Rathowen, Finnea, Ballinagore, Ballykeeran, Castletown-Geoghegan.

Table 7.1: County Retail Hierarchy

Source: Westmeath County Development Plan 2014 and MacCabe Durney Barnes

<u>Note 1:</u> * Varies in the suburbs of Mullingar and Athlone

<u>Note 2</u>: ** Classification of 'Linked Gateway Town' was abolished under the NPF (2018). For the purposes of this Retail Strategy, it is replaced by Athlone Regional Centre and Mullingar County Town, with both of these Tier 1 settlements within the county's retail hierarchy.

7.2.2 Core Retail Areas

Policy SRP2: Core Retail Areas

It is the policy of the Council to define the Core Retail Areas of Mullingar and Athlone to provide guidance on the Sequential Approach.

Definition of the Core Retail Areas relates only to Mullingar and Athlone as it was determined that the other main centres in the County – Castlepollard, Moate, Kinnegad and Kilbeggan – did not exhibit a clustering of central retail activity but rather this was spread along their respective Main Streets or areas adjacent. The defined Core Retail Areas for Mullingar and Athlone, along with the development opportunity sites and retail hubs identified in the Sequential Approach within the 400-metre distance of the Core Retail Areas in each of the towns, are illustrated in Maps 2 and 3 in Appendix I. The Core Retail Areas of the two principle settlements comprise the following:

- Athlone: Custume Place, Church Street, Dublin Gate Street, the Athlone Town Centre and John Broderick Street.
- Mullingar: Dominic Street, Oliver Plunkett Street, Mount Street, Castle Street and Pearse Street

The Core Retail Areas have been modified from those defined in the MLAP 2014 and the ATDP 2014 and are generally smaller. The reduction in size reflects the issue that the larger the Core Retail Area is, then so too is the extent of the parameters for what would be defined as edge-of-centre sites, with consequential implications for impact on the vitality and viability of the heart of both Athlone and Mullingar.

In the absence of defining Core Retail Areas for the other main centres in the County, the Sequential Approach is founded on the recognised central point of each of these centres. The application of this approach is illustrated in Maps 4 to 7 in Appendix I for Castlepollard, Moate, Kinnegad and Kilbeggan, which identify the development opportunity sites within 300 metres of each of the centres. The reason why only the 300 metres distance and not that of 300 – 400 metres has been applied to these towns is addressed below under the Sequential Approach.

7.2.3 Sequential Approach

Policy SRP3: Sequential Approach

It is the policy of the Council to provide guidance on the application of Sequential Approach in the County's main centres.

The importance of the Sequential Approach in respect of sustaining and protecting the vitality and viability of centres is a fundamental principle in the Strategy. It is, thus, reinforced in the strategic policy framework for guiding new retail development. Proposals for retail developments in the County's centres at whatever level in the County Retail Hierarchy must take full cognisance of this as follows:

- i) In the first instance, the priority should be locating retail development in town centres or village centres;
- ii) If town centre locations are not readily available within a reasonable and realistic timescale then edge-of-centre sites should be looked to. In successive GRP, these are defined as sites which are within 300 – 400 metres of the Core Retail Area, and less in smaller centres; and
- iii) Only after all the options for town centre (or village centre) and edge-of-centre sites are exhausted should out-of-centre locations and sites be considered.

The suite of GRP qualify that the precise distance to apply to prescribing what is an edge-of centre site cannot be defined precisely as different centres vary in their size. Reflecting this, the approach adopted in the Strategy has been to distinguish between what is apposite for the two principle settlements and the other main towns within the County as follows:

- Mullingar and Athlone: a distance of 400 metres has been adopted in the identification of development opportunity sites
- Other Main Towns: reflecting their smaller scale and size only the 300-metre distance has been applied and this has been derived from the identification of a central point in each of the towns.

7.2.4 Spatial Distribution of New Retail Development

The Strategy, in accordance with the GRP 2012, provides the strategic policy framework for the spatial distribution of new retail development. The emphasis is on strategic guidance on the location and scale of major retail development. The Strategy does not seek to inhibit small scale retail development in centres around the County, particularly smaller centres, but the scale should be appropriate to local needs. It should be taken to be implicit in the aims of the Strategy that such developments should be encouraged and facilitated to enhance the sustainability, vitality and viability of smaller centres in the County Retail Hierarchy. The hierarchy sets the framework for the spatial distribution of the nature and quantum of convenience and comparison floorspace. The following provides guidance on how the Strategy defines the distribution of strategic and non-strategic retail floorspace that is appropriate in Westmeath within the County Retail Hierarchy:

- Tier 1 Regional Centre and County Town: major convenience and comparison, including bulky goods floorspace;
- ii) **Tier 2 Key Service Town:** large convenience and middle order comparison, specifically tourism related/niche comparison, and small-scale bulky goods floorspace;
- iii) Tier 3 Service Town: large convenience and middle order comparison, specifically tourism related/niche comparison, and small-scale bulky goods floorspace;
- iv) **Tier 4 Local Service Town and Neighbourhood Centres**: local level convenience and comparison, but not excluding tourism related/niche comparison in the former; and
- v) **Tier 5 Rural Centres and Local/Corner Shops:** predominantly additional local level convenience, but not excluding tourism related/niche comparison in the former.

Additionally, the Strategy recognises the need to ensure that local needs, primarily convenience shopping and local services are met in an *'equitable, efficient and sustainable way'* in large

existing or new residential areas in and around the main centres through the designation of locations for Neighbourhood Centres in the County Development Plan and Local Area Plans. Comparison floorspace will be limited in such centres to lower order to ensure the primacy for higher and middle order comparison shopping remains in the retail core area/town centre. For the foreseeable future, new Neighbourhood Centres will only be appropriate in the existing, growing and new residential areas of Mullingar and Athlone.

7.2.5 Consideration of Need

In the proper and sustainable retail planning of the County over the period of the Strategy, both qualitative and quantitative needs have to be considered. In respect of the consideration of qualitative need, this is set down in the objectives of the Strategy.

The quantitative consideration of need is determined by the broad assessment of the requirement for additional retail floorspace in the County under a scenario which is the median of two scenarios: one based on the2016 Census; and, the other based on the extrapolation of the MRPG 2010 population targets. The assessment is provided in Table 7.2 below.

Devied	Convenience		Comparison	
Period	Low	High	Low	High
Adjustment	605	605	397	397
2016 – 2020	4,553	6,043	5,809	7,862
2020 - 2026	10,293	13,065	12.238	16,089
Total	15,450	19,712	18,443	24,348

Table 7.2: Strategy Scenario – Indicative Net Floorspace Potential (m²)

Source: MacCabe Durney Barnes

7.3 Specific Policies & Proposals

The specific policies and proposals of the Strategy are designed to facilitate the achievement of the aims of the Strategy. As such, they are formulated to ensure that:

- Existing or emerging issues in the County's retail profile and that of its centres have the policy framework to be addressed
- The expenditure capacity for additional floorspace is harnessed over the timescale of the Strategy.
- 7.3.1 County Town Mullingar

Policy RP1: County Town – Mullingar

It is the policy of the Council to promote and encourage major enhancement and expansion of retail floorspace and town centre functions in Mullingar to reflect its role as a major town centre and further develop its competitiveness and importance as a key centre in the County and Eastern and Midland Region.

7.3.1.1 Strategic

Mullingar is recognised to be the premier location in the County and wider Region for quality bulky goods shopping. However, if it is to not only sustain but enhance its role as a key retail location in the shopping patterns of the County and Region, and reduce expenditure leakage to centres in the GDA, then the County Town's middle and higher order comparison and convenience offer requires to be considerably improved. The priority for achieving this are within the Core Retail Area and through the strengthening of the town centre. However, the health check and MLAP 2014 identify that the scope and potential for this to be achieved at the scale required is limited in the context of the nature and character of the town centre and the fine historic grain of its streetscape. There is considerable potential for this to be delivered on a range of defined development opportunity sites, all of which are located in edge-of centre locations. These lands are identified in Map 2 of Appendix I and are:

- Blackhall
- Grove Street
- SuperValu car park
- Canal Avenue
- Cusack car park
- Heatons¹

1

Harbour Place Shopping Centre car park.

In addition, the former Columb Military Barracks, which closed in 2012, is designated in the MLAP 2014 as a Major Regeneration Opportunity Site. This major and important site is partially located within both the 300 – 400 metres edge-of-centre Sequential Approach distance. It is recognised to have the potential to accommodate a range of uses, with retail being one of the mix but is unlikely to be a major component in view of: the need to respect the architectural heritage of the complex; and, ensure it does not become an alternative retail location to the town centre or undermine the prospect for more centrally located wholly edge-of-centre development opportunity sites coming forward in the interests of consolidating the critical mass of the town centre.

While the development opportunity sites provide the key strategic locations in the town centre for large scale retail development, there requires to be parallel priority in ensuring that the potential and attraction of the side streets within/adjacent to the Core Retail Area is creatively harnessed to enable expansion of the retail, commercial leisure and cultural heart of Mullingar's Town Centre. By this means, the characteristics which distinguish Mullingar from many other large towns as a thriving centre for meeting, eating, greeting and staying in can be maximised.

Beyond the town centre, the needs of existing, growing and new residential areas require to have their daily shopping and services requirements met sustainably, and in this regard, locally, to reduce the need for people having to travel to meet these needs. The suburbs of the town have a mix of Neighbourhood Centres and areas which are the subject of Framework Plans. The latter are: Robinstown to the north; Ardmore/Marlinstown to the south east; and, Mullingar

Heatons Mullingar ceased operations in the town in Spring 2019 and is now occupied by Sports Direct.

South to the south. The locations of existing and proposed Neighbourhood Centres are identified in Map 1 of Appendix I. Although consistent with guidance in the suite of GRP, each of the proposed Neighbourhood Centres was previously considered as having the potential for new District Centres. However, to ensure that Mullingar Town Centre sustains its position as the predominant retail location in the town, the needs of these areas will be met by way of a network of Neighbourhood Centres with District Centres not appropriate in the retail hierarchy of Mullingar.

While the priority is enhancing the convenience and mainstream comparison offer of Mullingar Town Centre, there is a need to ensure the town sustains its role and importance in bulky goods shopping patterns in the County and Region. However, in view of the current saturation of this retail sector, when there is market recovery, the priority should be on the consolidation of Lakepoint Business and Retail Park and the upgrading/refurbishment of provision on Lynn and Mullingar Business Parks. It is a position which requires to be monitored over the period of the Strategy.

7.3.1.2 Integration & the Public Realm

Parking remains a significant issue in the town centre and there is a need to integrate parking provision, management, pricing and traffic management arrangements in the interests of sustaining the attraction and potential of Mullingar Town Centre. The development of sites in and around the town centre present opportunities to address this. Management of parking provision also presents opportunities to improve access and the public realm, particularly on Dominic Street.

It will be important to fully integrate edge-of-centre opportunities into the retail/town centre functions of the Core Retail Area and town centre as a whole. This is consistent with the policies and objectives of the MLAP 2014.

A scheme of ongoing public realm improvements would assist in the overall vitality and health of Mullingar Town Centre. Very important in the equation is that they preserve the ambience of the historic core of the town, but also set the agenda and vision for the future. Inherent in this is the important role that local people and bodies play in shaping the future of their town. This is consistent with objective O-DU4 of the MLAP 2014-2020 which commits to the preparation and implementation of a Public Realm Strategy for the town centre area, incorporating the creation of a network of interconnected civic spaces. This remains a commitment of the Council in the proposals for the Public Realm Enhancement Strategy.

The development of edge-of-centre sites also provides the opportunity to provide additional cultural and leisure uses close to the heart of Mullingar Town Centre, although the priority location for these will be in and abutting the Core Retail Area.

To deliver the strategic, integration and public realm initiatives and potential identified, it is the policy of the Council:

RP2: To support and implement appropriate development of lands for the future major retail expansion of Mullingar Town Centre within the town centre, with the priority being the designated development opportunity sites and the linked integration of these lands with the Core Retail Area.

- **RP3** To support the incremental expansion of the Core Retail Area through the increased profile and ambience of town centre side streets by enhancing the public realm and encouraging intensification of retail, commercial leisure, tourism and cultural uses.
- **RP4** To prepare and implement a Public Realm Strategy for Mullingar Town Centre to secure the enhancement and renewal of the area and which includes an Interpretation and Signage Strategy to maximise the understanding of the heritage of the town.
- **RP5** To prepare and implement a Traffic Management Plan for Mullingar Town Centre which examines opportunities for pedestrianisation, improves movement and integration for pedestrians, cyclists and the private car and addresses parking deficiencies and issues.
- **RP6** To encourage and facilitate the development of appropriately located Neighbourhood and Local Centres to meet the needs of existing, growing and new residential areas of the town.
- **RP7** To sustain Mullingar's role and importance as a key bulky goods shopping destination in the County and Region.
- **RP8** To work in partnership with local organisations, businesses and local people in the delivery of the policies and objectives for Mullingar Town Centre and the town as a whole.

7.3.1.3 Regional Centre – Athlone

Policy RP9: Regional Centre – Athlone

It is the policy of the Council to promote and encourage major enhancement and expansion of retail floorspace and regional centre functions in the core of Athlone to reflect its role as a major centre and to further develop its competitiveness and importance as a 'Regional Centre' as designated within the National Planning Framework.

7.3.1.4 Strategic

The priority is continuing to grow and enhance convenience and mainstream comparison shopping in Athlone's core area. The Athlone Town Centre shopping centre has reinforced the strategic retail function of Athlone. This has been secured and sustained throughout the period of economic recession the country has faced. This performance and potential requires to be built on recognising that, due to the fine grain morphology of the Core Retail Area of the town, then this would be difficult to achieve in the Core Retail Area of Athlone. However, through a suite of development opportunity sites, this can be redressed and underpin further growing of Athlone's retail role, potential and profile within edge-of-centre sites in the Eastern Bank area. These sites are identified in Map 3 of Appendix I and are:

- Adjacent to Southern Station Road
- At Loughanaskin
- Former shopping centre off St Mary's Square

- Between Sean Costello Street and John Broderick Street
- The Dunnes site and car park
- On Lloyds Lane and The Strand
- Golden Island.

In addition, the Strategy has identified the designation of lands on the Western Bank as a **Cultural and Tourism Quarter**. This designation is wholly in accordance with the ATDP 2014-2020 but reinforces the assessment that the area will not become a prime retail location within the context of Athlone. Rather, its potential lies in its established recognition and development as being the as yet, untapped Cultural and Tourism Quarter within the heart of Athlone. Retailing will play an important part of this but is envisaged to be craft/speciality/niche rather than mainstream convenience or comparison floorspace. However, in parallel, there is recognition that the convenience shopping needs of local people require to be better met in the area and ensuring this is achieved is a fundamental principle of the Strategy. The potential of this area will be further assessed and responded to in the Athlone Joint Retail Strategy.

As with Mullingar, there is the need to ensure that the shopping needs of existing and growing residential areas in the suburbs of Athlone are sustainably and properly met. These should not have the scope or potential to undermine the principle *'town centre first'*. Thus, the strategic response is sustaining and encouraging a network of Neighbourhood Centres as the sustainable approach to the retail strategy for Athlone. The locations of these are identified in Map 1 of Appendix I. As with the approach to the Cultural and Tourism Quarter, this will be further assessed and responded to in the Athlone Joint Retail Strategy.

However, when market conditions improve, the objective must also be for Athlone to raise its profile and attraction in the County and Region for bulky goods shopping. This is not anticipated to emerge in the foreseeable future but when it does the priority must be consolidating and upgrading existing retail warehousing locations. It is a position which requires to be monitored over the period of the Strategy.

7.3.1.5 Integration & the Public Realm

There has been a long-term commitment in successive ATDPs to address/remodel/significantly enhance the public realm of the core area of Athlone. Street furniture is limited, footpaths are poorly maintained and there is no coherent approach to public signage. Shops fronts and facias on Church Street and Dublin Gate Street need care and attention. These issues require to be redressed if the significant progress, profile and competitiveness of Athlone is to be sustained and developed. This should be through an ongoing programme of investment in the public realm, with appropriate street furniture, signage, tree planting and footpath improvements. The framework for this is provided in the Council's Public Realm Enhancement Strategy for Athlone and construction works in implementing this enhancement plan along Church Street were undertaken in 2018.

Although Athlone Town Centre and Golden Island Shopping Centre are the key retail locations in Athlone, there is little connectivity between them. As such, they serve as destination centres in their own right. A key strand in looking forward must be to overcome this to help strengthen the retail and commercial function and coherence of the-core area of Athlone.

In addition, as part of the above equation, Golden Island Shopping Centre is a dated centre surrounded by extensive surface car parking and adjacent to a mix of poor condition retail, commercial and industrial buildings set in a generally degraded environment. Given the area's proximity to the Core Retail Area and its profile on the major amenity and tourism asset of the Shannon, it is a priority that there is strategic environmental enhancement and upgrading of the area.

There is a clear traffic challenge within Athlone Town Centre. The Loughandonning Link Road is a key local road link that will provide strategic access into the centre of Athlone from the Creggan LAP lands to the east of Athlone. The Link Road will provide relief in terms of traffic volumes to the Dublin Road (R446) and in particular should relieve the Dublin Road of all Heavy Goods Vehicle traffic that is servicing retailers and other businesses in and around the town centre. Traffic calming measures, enhanced pedestrian priority and improved pedestrian facilities would also serve to redress the traffic challenges. Additionally, pedestrianisation of certain streets requires to be considered. Related to this is the need to manage and increase parking in the town in terms of future provision, pricing structure and car park access points. The creative development of edge-of-centre opportunity sites around the Core Retail Area provides the potential to assist in this.

For Athlone to continue to sustain and enhance its role and attraction as a key retail and tourism destination in the County, Region and beyond as well as better meeting the needs of local people, it is the policy of the Council:

- **RP10** To support and implement appropriate development of lands for the future major retail expansion of Athlone within its core area, with the priority being the designated Development Opportunity Sites and the linked integration of these lands with the Core Retail Area.
- **RP11** To develop a vision and strategy to progress the realisation of the Western Bank of Athlone's core areaas a Cultural and Tourism Quarter.
- **RP12** To support the incremental expansion of Athlone's Core Retail Area through the increased profile and ambience of town centre main streets by enhancing the public realm and encouraging intensification of retail, commercial, leisure, tourism and cultural uses.
- **RP13** To prepare and implement a Public Realm Strategy for Athlone's Regional Centre to secure the enhancement and renewal of the area and which includes an Interpretation and Signage Strategy to maximise the understanding of the heritage of the town.
- **RP14** To promote the preparation of a strategic environmental masterplan for the Golden Island Shopping Centre and its immediate environs.
- RP15 To prepare and implement a Traffic Management Plan for Athlone Regional Centre which addresses the strategic relief of congestion, examines opportunities for pedestrianisation, improves movement and integration for pedestrians, cyclists and the private car and addresses parking deficiencies and issues.

- **RP16** To encourage and facilitate the development of appropriately located Neighbourhood and Local Centres to meet the needs of existing, growing and new residential areas of Athlone and its environs as informed by the Joint Retail Strategy for Athlone.
- **RP17** To develop and enhance Athlone's role as an important bulky goods shopping destination in the County and Region.
- **RP18** To work in partnership with local organisations, businesses and local people in the delivery of the policies and objectives for Athlone as a whole.

7.3.2 Key Service Town – Castlepollard

Policy RP19: Key Service Town – Castlepollard

It is the policy of the Council to sustain and enhance the retail and services offer of Castlepollard Town Centre and harness the potential of its heritage asset and tourism profile.

As a Key Service Town, Castlepollard is an important economic driver for the surrounding rural area which is relatively remote from the main population centres in the County and the wider Region. As such, it is a key service centre for its rural hinterland. However, given its population size, it is unlikely to attract any substantial new retail floorspace although there could be potential for tourism-related retailing. The priority should be to consolidate the strength and profile of retail and commercial uses around the Square and on surrounding side streets. In the interests of looking forward, the lands between Pakenhamhall Road and Mullingar Road are identified as those which would best serve the objective of the consolidation and retail enhancement of the town centre. These lands are identified in Map 4 of Appendix I.

Additionally, as set out in the County Development Plan 2014, and in accordance with the MRPG 2010, the aim should be to develop the town closely linked with that of the County Town of Mullingar.

The town centre, the Square and the Green provide an attractive and well-maintained environment. There should continue to be investment in this, with it being enhanced by an Interpretation Strategy to encourage the tourism potential and heritage asset of the town to be further developed and maximised. The commitment to delivering this is evidenced through Castlepollard successfully securing funding from the DAHRRGA's Town and Village Renewal Scheme. Additionally, the scope and potential for a Farmers' Market in the town centre requires to be examined as part of the Markets Strategy for the County.

To harness and enhance the retail and tourism potential of the Castlepollard, it is the policy of the Council:

- **RP20** To secure and promote the consolidation of Castlepollard Town Centre through encouraging the re-use and regeneration of buildings around the Square and surrounding streets.
- **RP21** To support and implement appropriate development of lands for the future retail expansion of Castlepollard Town Centre, with the priority being the designated

development opportunity site and the linked integration of these lands with the Square.

- **RP22** To strategically review, in association with the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, the mechanisms required to develop the linkage of Castlepollard with the County Town of Mullingar to provide the catalyst for the sustainable economic development of the town.
- **RP23** To support and prepare, in association with local organisations, businesses and people, an Interpretation Strategy for Castlepollard which responds to the town's tourism potential and heritage asset.

7.3.3 Service Town – Moate

Policy RP24: Service Town – Moate

It is the policy of the Council to sustain and enhance the retail and services offer of Moate Town Centre and harness the potential of its heritage asset and tourism profile.

Reflecting the strong population growth Moate has experienced since at least 2002, there would be potential for the town to improve its convenience offer, particularly given its role and importance to its rural hinterland. Given its proximity to Athlone, it is not envisaged that Moate would attract national/international comparison multiples but rather the town centre would grow its independent comparison retail offer, with some of this having the scope to be tourism related. However, the delivery of any substantial growth in the town's convenience floorspace is constrained by the limited number and size of available development opportunity sites. With the exception of a large site on and extending on lands to the north of Main Street, there is only one other site identified. This is located on lands to the rear of St Patrick's Church and extending westwards from Moate Hill Road. Both sites are identified in Map 5 in Appendix I.

While steps have been taken to enhance the town's public realm, this has not been as ambitious as the potential for the heritage streetscape could deliver. This is recognised in the County Development Plan 2014. A key step would be to better give back Main Street/Church Street to pedestrians through strategically located road narrowing and pedestrian crossings, with priority locations being at the Tuar Ard Art Centre and Moate Community School. The scope and potential to redress these issues is provided by the DAHRRGA's Town and Village Renewal Scheme funding which Moate has been awarded.

There are additional smaller initiatives which could help develop the ambience and attraction of the town centre. These could include: the continued use of vacant shop/commercial premises windows as exhibition space for Schools/Community Art Projects – an initiative which could be rolled out in other main towns in the County; and, the provision of further cycle parking facilities.

To harness and enhance the retail and tourism potential of the Moate, it is the policy of the Council:

RP25 To secure and promote the consolidation of Moate Town Centre through encouraging the re-use and regeneration of lands and buildings along Main Street and Church Street, with the key priority being the development of opportunity sites and expanding the scope of the Schools/Community Art Project Initiative.

- **RP26** To prepare and implement, in association with local organisations, businesses and people, an enhanced Public Realm Strategy for Moate which addresses enhanced pedestrian movement across Main Street.
- **RP27** To support and prepare, in association with the Moate Museum and local organisations, businesses and people, an Interpretation Strategy for Moate which responds to the town's tourism potential and heritage asset.

7.3.4 Service Town – Kinnegad

Policy RP28: Service Town – Kinnegad

It is the policy of the Council to sustain and enhance the retail and services offer of Kinnegad Town Centre.

Kinnegad was the fastest growing of the main centres in the County over the period 2002 – 2011. This reflects its strategic location on the border of the GDA and at the nationally important interchange of the M4/N4 (Dublin – Sligo) and M6 (Dublin – Galway) motorways. The combination of population growth and location has attracted retail and commercial investment into the town. To date, this is wholly to locations outside the Main Street focus of Kinnegad Town Centre. This reflects the limited potential for any significant new retail floorspace in the heart of the town centre. There are, however, two significant backland development opportunity sites which, with the provision of direct physical links to Main Street, provide the potential for consolidation of the retail offer of the town centre. Both are located to the south east of the Athlone Road and north of the R446 and are identified in Map 6 of Appendix I.

There is a need to encourage investment in new retail and commercial space within the heart of the town centre. Underpinning this is the necessity to consolidate activities within the town centre as currently these are dispersed in the St Etchen's and Eastwae schemes and the Tesco store. As part of this, the scope and potential for Kinnegad to host a Farmers' Market requires to be examined as part of a wider Markets Strategy for the County.

Of key importance is the need to strategically enhance the environment and ambience of Main Street and create a better sense of place. This should be through a range of measures including; street narrowing; environmental enhancement; shop frontage improvements; and, an increased number of pedestrian crossings. An important contribution to delivering this will be through the DAHRRGA's Town and Village Renewal Scheme funding that Kinnegad has secured.

To address the issues and harness the opportunities which prevail in Kinnegad Town Centre, it is the policy of the Council:

- **RP29** To secure and promote the consolidation of Kinnegad Town Centre through encouraging the re-use and regeneration of lands and buildings along Main Street, with the key priority being the development of opportunity sites and ensuring their connectivity to the Main Street.
- **RP30** To prepare and implement, in association with local organisations, businesses and people, an enhanced Public Realm Strategy for Kinnegad which addresses street narrowing, environmental enhancement, shop frontage improvements and enhanced pedestrian movement across Main Street.

7.3.5 Service Town – Kilbeggan

Policy RP31: Service Town – Kilbeggan

It is the policy of the Council to sustain and enhance the retail and services offer of Kilbeggan Town Centre and harness the potential of its heritage asset and tourism profile.

Kilbeggan requires to see an enhancement of its retail offer, particularly but not exclusively its convenience one, if the needs of those in the town and its rural hinterland are to be better met locally. However, there is very limited development potential within the town centre on Main Street. Re-use of vacant buildings for retail purposes will be a priority, but this will not serve to meet shopping needs, particularly in respect of food shopping. The scope for this being redressed is limited close to the heart of the Main Street. The only site which has been determined to have the potential to achieve this is located on backlands to the north-east of the junction of Main Street/Dublin Road and Tullamore Road, with key to this being linkage to Main Street. This site is identified in Map 7 of Appendix I.

In parallel, there is the real opportunity for Kilbeggan to build on the profile and importance of the tourism attractions of the Kilbeggan Distillery and Racecourse. This is recognised in the County Development Plan 2014-2020 through the commitment to developing a Tourism Strategy, within which an important strand will be to enhance the linkage and synergies of Kilbeggan Racecourse to enable the town and its businesses to better benefit from its attraction and economic impact. Additionally, the town has a successful Christmas and Craft Fair held in St. James' Hall. The scope and potential for developing on this through the introduction of a Farmers' Market requires to be examined as part of the Markets Strategy for the County.

The heritage streetscape of Kilbeggan is an important asset but one which is not having its potential maximised. There is a need to build on this through a strategic programme of public realm improvements and interventions. This is recognised and it is the policy of the County Development Plan 2014-2020 to pursue this through a variety of funding mechanisms in collaboration with voluntary organisations and community groups in the town. In progressing this, a balance requires to be struck through ensuring parking needs are met but not to the detriment of wider environmental objectives for the town centre. The scope and potential for these issues to be redressed will be greatly assisted by the DAHRRGA's Town and Village Renewal Scheme funding which Kilbeggan has successfully secured.

There is a number of buildings of heritage/architectural merit within Kilbeggan Town Centre which are vacant, with some at risk. A key one is the bank building on Market Square. The vacancies are recognised to detract from the amenity and ambience of Kilbeggan Town Centre. Resolution of redressing buildings at risk and bringing them back into viable economic use cannot be achieved by the Council alone and this is well understood, thus a collaborative approach with owners, business and other local people is the required road map.

To harness and enhance the retail and tourism potential of Kilbeggan, it is the policy of the Council:

RP32 To secure and promote the consolidation of Kilbeggan Town Centre through encouraging the re-use and regeneration of lands and buildings along Main Street, with the key priority being the development of the identified opportunity site.

- **RP33** To work with owners and local businesses and people in a collaborative approach to bringing vacant and at-risk buildings of heritage and architectural merit back into viable economic use.
- **RP34** To prepare and implement, in association with the Kilbeggan Distillery and Kilbeggan Racecourse, a Tourism and Interpretation Strategy for Kilbeggan.
- **RP35** To prepare and implement, in association with local organisations, businesses and people, an enhanced Public Realm Strategy for Kilbeggan which develops a programme of improvements and interventions.

7.4 General Retail Policies

In addition to specific policies relating to the main centres of Westmeath, a number of general policies are defined to shape retailing over the period of the County Retail Strategy and beyond. These are set out in the paragraphs which follow.

7.4.1 Local Service Towns

The Tier 4 Local Service Towns in the County Retail Hierarchy are Rochfortbridge, Killucan/Rathwire, Clonmellon and Tyrrellspass. Each of these towns have: a range of retail and other local services; heritage townscapes; and, important tourism assets and infrastructure. They are important centres in their rural hinterlands. A number of these centres within the County successfully secured DAHRRGA Town and Village Renewal Scheme funding in recent years.

The key priority is for the consolidation and enhancement of the central areas of these Local Service Towns and ensuring that they continue to grow and meet the needs of local people within the town and their wider rural catchment areas. To progress and achieve this, it is the policy of the Council:

GR1 To sustain, enhance and consolidate the retail and services offer of Local Service Centres within their central areas and harness and develop the potential of their heritage and tourism assets.

7.4.2 Neighbourhood Centres

Neighbourhood Centres are designated Tier 4 centres in the County Retail Hierarchy and form part of the retail hierarchy of Tier 1 Retail Settlements (ie. Mullingar and Athlone). They are located in the suburbs of both Mullingar and Athlone in existing, growing or new residential areas and serve to meet daily shopping and services needs in a sustainable way to reduce the propensity for local people having to travel to meet these needs. These existing and proposed centres are identified in Map 1 of Appendix I. Neighbourhood Centres are limited in size and function, although the GRP 2012 do not set down an indicative threshold in respect of the former. The GRP define a Neighbourhood Centre as consisting of a small group of shops, typically comprising a newsagent and anchored by a small supermarket – be that a mainstream, symbol group or discount operator – and have the potential to provide a small range of local non-retail services, civic, community and commercial leisure floorspace serving a small localised catchment population.

Consistent with the role, function and scale prescribed, it is the policy of the Council:

GR2 To encourage and facilitate the development of appropriately located Neighbourhood Centres to meet the needs of existing, growing and new residential areas of Mullingar and Athlone.

7.4.3 Rural Centres & Local/Corner Shops

Rural Centres and Local/Corner Shops are designated as Tier 5 settlements and centres in the County Retail Hierarchy. In respect of the former, they are identified in the County Retail Hierarchy as Delvin, Coole, Multyfarnham, Ballymore, Ballynacarrigy, Raharney, Milltownpass, Collinstown, Glassan, Ballinalack, Rathowen, Finnea, Ballinagore, Ballykeeran and Castletown-Geoghegan. Although there has been a continuing decline in the number of Rural Centres and Local/Corner Shops around the more rural parts of the County and country in recent years, their role and function in the life of the community is recognised as very important. They predominantly serve local level convenience shopping needs, but some will provide a limited range of non-retail services and have tourism function. A number of these centres in Westmeath were successful in the Council's bid for DAHRRGA Town and Village Renewal Scheme funding in recent years.

Reflecting their role and importance, it is the policy of the Council:

GR3 To retain, encourage and facilitate the retail and limited non-retail services role of Rural Centres and Local/Corner Shops around the County.

7.4.4 Convenience

The enhancement of the convenience/food shopping offer across all centres in the County Retail Hierarchy is a sustainable objective. Underpinning this is the need to ensure the sustained vitality, viability and attraction of centres at all levels of the County Retail Hierarchy and, as such, new foodstores should be located in the centre of towns, villages and neighbourhood centres with all other applications demonstrating they fully meet the tests of the Sequential Approach. The GRP 2012 no longer distinguish between discount stores and other convenience goods stores and the Strategy reinforces this. There is concern with the exclusion of any comparison threshold within the net floorspace cap of 3,000m² for large convenience stores in the County, as set out in the GRP 2012. This is specifically as a number of the main national and international convenience operators are potentially opening the door to in-store High Street mainstream fashion brand concessions. This has very real potential implications for the vitality, viability and attraction of main centres in the County Retail Hierarchy. Over the period of the Strategy, it is an issue which will be fully addressed in the assessment of applications for large scale convenience stores.

To ensure that these issues are addressed, it is the policy of the Council:

- **GR4** To request that the nature of the comparison component of proposed large convenience stores is provided in detail and a transparent and evidence-based RIA/RIS provided in support of the application.
- **GR5** To prohibit the development of edge of and out of centre large convenience stores which include a large component of high street fashion brands in the comparison

mix proposed in the interests of sustaining and further enhancing the vitality, viability and attraction of the Core Retail Areas and central areas of the main centres in the County Retail Hierarchy.

7.4.5 District Centres

The GRP 2012 in Annex 1 - Glossary of Terms under A.1.5 Types of Centre sets out the following description of what a District Centre comprises:

'Provides a range of retail and non-retail service functions (e.g. banks, post office, local offices, restaurants, public houses, community and cultural facilities) for the community at a level consistent with the function of that centre in the core strategy. They can be purpose built as in new or expanding suburbs or traditional district centres in large cities or town.'

The previous GRP set out thresholds of what the thresholds for District Centres were likely to comprise and, outside of the Dublin Area, in or adjacent to main towns this was 10,000m². This has not been the guidance provided in the GRP 2012 where no threshold is provided. In the context of the County and its Tier 1 Retail Settlements and the priority of the *'core area/centre first'* principle, the nature and scale of District Centres, as prescribed in the GRP 2012, are deemed not to be an appropriate centre or retail format in the County Retail Hierarchy. As such, it is the policy of the Council:

GR6 To prohibit applications for District Centres in the Tier 1 settlements to ensure and protect the vitality, viability and attraction of the Core Retail Areas of Mullingar and Athlone.

7.4.6 Retail Warehouse Parks

In view of the saturation of the retail warehouse market over the last decade, there are both many unimplemented permissions for new retail parks and vacancies in existing retail parks. Consequently, there has been increasing pressure on the Council for alternative forms of retailing to bulky goods shopping to be permissible on retail parks. To protect the vitality and viability of the County's core areas within its Tier 1 retail settlement areas (Mullingar and Athlone) and avoid retail parks emerging as out-of-town shopping centres, this pressure has been resisted by the Council. This responds to advice in the GRP 2012 which states under paragraph 4.11.2 – *Retail Parks and Retail Warehouses* that:

'To minimise potential adverse impacts on central areas, it is important that the range of goods sold in both existing and any future 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.'

Reflecting this advice, it is the policy of the Council:

- **GR7** To prohibit mainstream and discount convenience retail developments in retail parks.
- **GR8** To prohibit mainstream comparison retail development or retailers in retail parks.

7.4.7 Retail Development in Business Parks & Employment Areas

Increasingly, single use large employment areas, be they business parks or industrial parks and estates, have generally been superseded by more mixed-use sustainable development models that combine working, living, leisure, shopping and local services provision. In addition to being a more sustainable development strategy for major strategic greenfield and brownfield locations, the introduction of local shopping and services provision is an important ingredient in the attraction and competitiveness of such areas. In respect of older employment areas, retail provision will be limited unless it directly interfaces with existing and expanding residential areas and forms part of a strategic approach to provision in the suburbs of the County's Tier 1 retail areas (Mulllingar and Athlone). Any further retail floorspace in such employment areas will be restricted to meeting the convenience and non-retail services needs of employees rather than facilitating the creation of new Neighbourhood Centres or enabling retail warehousing to be introduced.

Underpinning this strategic approach, it is the policy of the Council:

- **GR9** To ensure that the level of retail and local services provision in existing and new major employment areas sustains and enhances their attraction as locations for investment and working in.
- **GR10** To provide the land-use and retail planning framework to ensure that the mixeduse strategies for new employment areas respond to the wider context of need and demand in related expanding residential areas and individual main centres, in the interests of ensuring that these locations are attractive to new residents, workers and employers.
- **GR11** To limit the level of shopping and local services provision in existing industrial estates or business parks. Stand-alone mainstream and discount convenience or comparison floorspace will not be permitted, however the introduction of wholesale retail floorspace will be open for consideration.

7.4.8 Enhancement of Towns & Villages

The enhancement of the main centres has been established as a key strand in the required approach in the specific policies for each. This general policy outlines the mechanisms needed to progress and implement these specific polices.

It is, therefore, the policy of the Council:

- **GR12** To encourage and facilitate the enhancement and environmental improvement of the County's towns and villages.
- **GR13** To pursue all avenues of funding to secure resources for the enhancement, renewal and regeneration of the public realm of the County's towns and villages.
- **GR14** To ensure the best quality of design is achieved for all new retail development and that design respects and enhances the specific characteristics of the different towns and villages in the County.

7.4.9 Re-Use & Regeneration of Derelict & Underutilised Land & Buildings

Re-use and regeneration of derelict/obsolete/underutilised land and buildings in town and village centres is a sustainable and desirable objective. In the context of the County, regeneration and renewal are particularly important in town and village centres as they will help achieve preservation and restoration of the character and quality of the centres, particularly in terms of vernacular/historical architecture, scale, height, density and massing. The potential for the re-use and regeneration of derelict buildings and brownfield or underutilised sites in town/village/smaller centre locations should be promoted in the formulation of retail and mixed-use development proposals. Only where suitable, available and viable land and buildings cannot be found should alternative options be considered by applicants.

To deliver the achievement of these principles, it is the policy of the Council:

- **GR15** To identify obsolete and potential renewal areas and to encourage and facilitate the re-use and regeneration of derelict land and buildings in the County's main towns, villages and smaller centres. The Council will use its statutory powers, where appropriate, to facilitate this and consider such buildings and lands for inclusion in the Register of Derelict Sites.
- **GR16** To work with landowners and development interests to pursue the potential of suitable, available and viable land and buildings for retail and other town centre uses across all centres in the County Retail Hierarchy.

7.4.10 Retailing & Tourism & Leisure

The specific policies for the main centres in the County serve to highlight the importance of tourism in the economies of these towns and this extends across Westmeath as a whole. To date, the full retail dimension of the County's tourism economy has not been harnessed. As this is of considerable importance to the wider Westmeath economy, retail-related tourism requires to develop a greater critical mass and profile, in the interests of the attraction and competitiveness of the County.

To develop and better harness this potential, it is the policy of the Council:

- **GR17** To encourage and facilitate the development of retailing in the tourism and leisure sectors, subject to protecting these assets and amenities from insensitive and inappropriate development.
- **GR18** To encourage and facilitate the delivery of tourism related retail developments and initiatives, subject to compliance with the Strategy's objectives and assessment criteria.

7.4.11 Non-Retail Uses in Core Retail Areas

The Terms of Reference for the review of the 2007 Strategy and the preparation of this Strategy indicated concern in regard of the overprovision of lower order services within the town centre areas of the main centres of the County and that this was impacting on the characteristics and ambience of these centres. These lower order services were identified as take-aways and betting offices. However, there is a wider range of retail and non- retail uses which also contribute to

the potential undermining of the retail heart of these centres. These include amusement/gaming arcades, budget shops, charity shops, telephone/mobile shops and business and financial services. It is recognised that in the majority of the County's main central areas the retail footprints do not meet the requirements of national and international operators and the space provides the opportunity for the introduction of alternative occupiers, often without a planning application for a change of use being required. To maintain the integrity, critical mass of quality retail activity, viability and vitality of Core Retail Areas and other main streets, the Council will seek to discourage an overconcentration of the aforementioned uses in prime retail areas.

To achieve this objective, it is the policy of the Council:

- **GR19** To prohibit the development of amusement/gaming arcades as they are considered to be an undesirable use and potentially detrimental to the business and commercial environment of centres in the County.
- **GR20** To discourage where possible within its statutory powers the introduction of nonretail and lower grade retail uses in the Core Retail Areas and central areas of the main centres in Westmeath in the interests of maintaining and sustaining the retail attraction of the County's centres.

7.4.12 Markets

The 2007 Strategy recognised that markets are a popular form of traditional retailing which meet local shopping needs, often with a range of other specialist and tourism-related shopping. It advised that it would be appropriate for the Council to develop and initiate a Market's Strategy for Mullingar and Athlone. This initiative has not been progressed at a strategic level but Farmers Markets (Mullingar, Moate and Clonmellon), a Food and Village Market (Athlone) and Christmas Markets (all the main centres with the exception of Kinnegad) operate within the County. Quality markets are key attractors to centres and greatly add to their vibrancy and ambience. The scope and potential for the County to have a sustainable and quality network of markets, not solely restricted to Mullingar and Athlone, requires to be examined and developed building on the market town heritage of Westmeath. This potential is specifically highlighted in the County Development Plan 2014 in respect of Moate and Kinnegad.

To harness this potential, it is the policy of the Council:

- **GR21** To support and develop, in association with leading organisations in the County's main towns and other centres, an integrated Markets Strategy for the County.
- **GR22** To encourage and facilitate the development and attraction of quality town markets selling indigenous products in towns and villages at all levels of the County Retail Hierarchy, in recognition of their potential to sustain and increase the attractiveness of these centres.

7.4.13 Casual Trading

In contrast to Farmers' Markets, those which would come under the banner of Casual Trading are not considered to be the image and attraction sought for the town and village centres of the County. In addition to not having the ambience of Farmers' Markets, they are viewed as creating

adverse environmental effects such as noise, litter and traffic congestion. To seek to redress this, the Council will carry out its statutory functions under the Casual Trading Act 1995, including the issuing of permits and the designation of Casual Trading Areas where the Council considers these to be necessary.

In recognition of the prevailing issues, it is the policy of the Council:

- **GR23** To prosecute in situations where the Casual Trading Act 1995 is being contravened.
- **GR24** To take cognisance of the proper and sustainable development of the County's towns and villages, including the preservation and improvement of amenities, the safety and convenience of pedestrians, the traffic likely to be generated by Casual Trading and the promotion of tourism.

7.4.14 Innovation in the County's Retail Offer

After the boom years in retail development, following the impact of the recession, there remains caution in CSO and ESRI forecasts on whether the retail sector achieves the level and profile of its expansion years in the last decade. This noted, to ensure that the County sustains and enhances its attraction and competitiveness as a retail destination, it must be proactive and responsive in respect of innovation in retailing and new retail market trends. The Council has demonstrated its commitment to looking at innovative concepts and formats through its granting of planning permission for Phase 1 of the major Europe China Trading Hub to be located just outside Athlone. Although progress on the proposal has not emerged to date, the approach adopted by the Council is the way in which the County can maximise its competitiveness and capitalise on its strategic location at the centre of the country. Therefore, encouraging and facilitating innovation, be that in trading format, location or product, will assist the County to build on the success that has been established to date and, consequently, its retail profile and attraction.

To ensure this remains a strategic component in the development of Westmeath's retail and tourism profile and competitiveness, it is the policy of the Council:

- **GR25** To encourage and facilitate innovation in the County's retail offer and attraction.
- **GR26** To review and monitor retail trends that could have an influence on the performance of the sector within Westmeath and pursue harnessing new concepts and formats in the County's retail structure.

7.4.15 Garden Centres & Agri-Business Diversification

The profile and mixed-use diversification of existing and new garden centres and agri-businesses has been an increasing trend over the last decade in the County and across the country as a whole. The Council in principle supports this, as both contribute to the economies of Westmeath's rural areas. However, through their expansion and diversification, such developments should not become alternatives to small town and village centres, as this could impact on the viable sustainability of existing retail and non-retail services, businesses and the expansion of these offers in the County's smaller rural centres. Sustaining, protecting and enhancing the vitality, viability and attraction of small towns and villages in the County is a priority of the Council and proposals that could undermine this will be resisted. To assure such proposals do not have the potential to adversely affect small rural centres, it is the policy of the Council:

GR27 To seek comprehensive details, such as RIA/RIS and other appropriate information, for all proposals for new garden centres or agri-businesses or extensions to either (which include retail and restaurant/café floorspace) to enable assessment of their potential impact on nearby small towns and villages.

7.4.16 Petrol Filling Stations

The GRP 2012 reinforced that the size of retail units associated with petrol filling stations should not exceed 100m² net. Where permission is sought for floorspace in excess of 100m² in retail units associated with petrol filling stations, the Sequential Approach to retail development shall apply i.e. the retail element of the proposal shall be assessed by the Planning Authority in the same way as would an application for retail development (without petrol/diesel filling facilities) in the same location. In addition, there has been development pressure for non-retail food takeaways and cafes at filling stations which have the potential to adversely affect smaller town and rural centres through trade diversion. In respect of the latter, this is highlighted as a concern of the Council.

To be consistent with the guidance in the GRP 2012 and limit the range and function of petrol filling stations, it is the policy of the Council:

- **GR28** To restrict the size of any retail units associated with petrol filling stations to 100m² of net retail floor area and ensure that any proposals above this threshold will be subject to the Sequential Approach.
- **GR29** To prohibit food takeaway outlets and cafes in petrol filling stations if not located in a designated centre.

7.5 Criteria for Assessment of Retail Proposals

The development management process is fundamental to the delivery of an effective County Retail Strategy. In accordance with the requirements of the GRP 2012, the Strategy identifies the development management criteria for the assessment of retail developments. These criteria apply to the assessment of what is considered significant retail development in the context of the County's towns and villages. Development thresholds for rural counties, such as Westmeath, generally distinguish between what should be applied to major centres and what is appropriate at lower levels in the County Retail Hierarchy. This is the approach adopted with regards threshold levels, which is as follows:

- Athlone and Mullingar: developments of 1,000m² gross convenience and 2,000m² gross comparison will be tested by the assessment criteria
- All Other Centres: proposals for 500m² gross convenience and comparison developments will be assessed against the criteria.

Applications for significant retail development will be assessed in accordance with the following criteria and whether or not the proposal will:

i) Support the long-term strategy for town and village centres in the County Retail

Hierarchy, as established in the Strategy, and not materially diminish the prospect of attracting the private sector into one or more such centres;

- Have the potential to increase employment opportunities and promote site and centre sustainable economic regeneration in both urban and rural centres across all levels of the County Retail Hierarchy;
- iii) Have the potential to increase the competitiveness of the County regionally, nationally and internationally, as appropriate, and thereby attract further consumers/shoppers to the County and its towns and villages;
- iv) Respond to consumer demand for its retail offering and not diminish the range of activities that all centres across the County Retail Hierarchy can support and sustain;
- v) Cause an adverse impact on one or more centres in the County Retail Hierarchy, either singly or cumulatively with recent developments, outstanding permissions (which have a realistic prospect of implementation) or those which are at an advanced stage in the planning process, sufficient to undermine the quality of the centre or its wider function in the promotion and encouragement of the arts, culture, leisure and public realm, all of which are critical to the economic and social life of communities in the County;
- vi) Cause an increase in the number of vacant properties within the designated Core Retail Area or central area of settlements at the higher levels of the County Retail Hierarchy but also generally in respect of the smaller, more rural, centres in the County;
- vii) Ensure a high standard of access by public transport, foot, bicycle and private car so that the proposal is easily accessible by all sections of society. Specifically, details of proposed Mobility Management Measures should be provided which outline how the proposed development could both improve accessibility of retail areas while aiming to contribute to the development of pedestrian and cyclist friendly centre environments and a vibrant street/village life. These criteria are on the whole directed at applications in the County's main retail centres in recognition that communities in centres and areas in the more rural parts of Westmeath are highly reliant on the private car given both the lack of public transport and the distances involved; and
- viii) Link effectively with the town/village centre in which the development is proposed so that there is likely to be commercial synergy.

In addition, the Council will seek that applications for new retail developments address and provide evidence in respect of the following:

- The relationship of the application to any Development Plan/Local Area Plan allocations.
- Assessment of the proposal against the tests of the Sequential Approach with all other options being considered. Under the Sequential Approach, the following criteria require to be addressed:
 - If a brownfield town or village centre site is not being promoted in the application, it should be demonstrated that all town or village centre options have been fully evaluated and that flexibility has been adopted with regard to the retail format
 - In all cases, the site should offer the optimum accessibility by all transport modes, including walking and cycling, and this is generally best achieved within town or village centres.

- There is demonstrable qualitative and quantitative need for the proposal, and it is in accordance with the centre's role and level in the County Retail Hierarchy. In respect of quantitative need, this should be derived from the expenditure capacity within the relevant catchment area which should be appropriate to the nature and quantum of the retail floorspace proposed. All applications should provide details of the methodology applied and the source inputs to the capacity assessment.
- The baseline information and capacity/impact assessment is fit for purpose and transparent.
- Its contribution to town/village centre improvement through quality of design, public realm interventions and integration.
- Its contribution to site and/or area regeneration.
- Its role in sustaining rural communities.
- The extent to which it is relevant to consider the imposition of restrictions on the nature and range of goods permitted for sale.

The Council will consider hours of operation in assessing planning applications for retail development and may attach conditions restricting same.

In making applications for retail development above the Strategy defined thresholds, applicants should ensure that the proposal addresses and demonstrates compliance with above assessment criteria. This is a requirement set down in the GRP 2012.

If the retail proposal, whether significant or not, is in compliance with County Development Plan and Local Area Plan policies and proposals in all material respects, it should expect to be met with approval. In accordance with the GRP 2012, in such instances, it should not be necessary for the applicant to provide additional supporting background studies. However, the onus is on the applicant to demonstrate convincingly that the proposal does comply with these plans as appropriate. Where there is doubt on any aspect of a planning application, the Council will require a detailed justification related to the matter that is questionable. The Council will, however, seek to ensure that all potential issues in respect of the proposal are identified and understood at the pre-application stage through pre-application consultations with applicants.

GR30: All applications for large retail development will be assessed in accordance with the County Retail Strategy assessment criteria.

7.6 Monitoring & Review

This Strategy shall be reviewed in parallel with that of the overall review of the Westmeath County Development Plan 2014-2020, to be undertaken following the adoption of the Eastern and Midland RSES. This will enable monitoring of the progress made in the delivery of the Strategy, permissions granted and implemented and on envisaged changes to the population and economic assumptions applied to be made. This review of the Strategy will therefore form part of the review of the County Development Plan 2014 which will underpin the preparation of the County Development Plan 2014 which will strategies will be aligned to the timeframe of the County Development Plan, the interim update and review monitoring reports will be produced at regular intervals of no less than every second year. If the findings of

these reports indicate any significant changes in baseline information or trends, as deemed appropriate, the Council will review the Strategy or parts thereof.

Appendix

Map 1: County Westmeath Retail Hierarchy

Map 2: Mullingar (County Town) Retail Core; Existing Retail Hubs and Opportunity Sites

Map 3: Athlone (Regional Centre) Retail Core; Existing Retail Hubs; Opportunity Sites and Culture & Tourism Quarter

Map 4: Castlepollard Retail - Opportunity Site

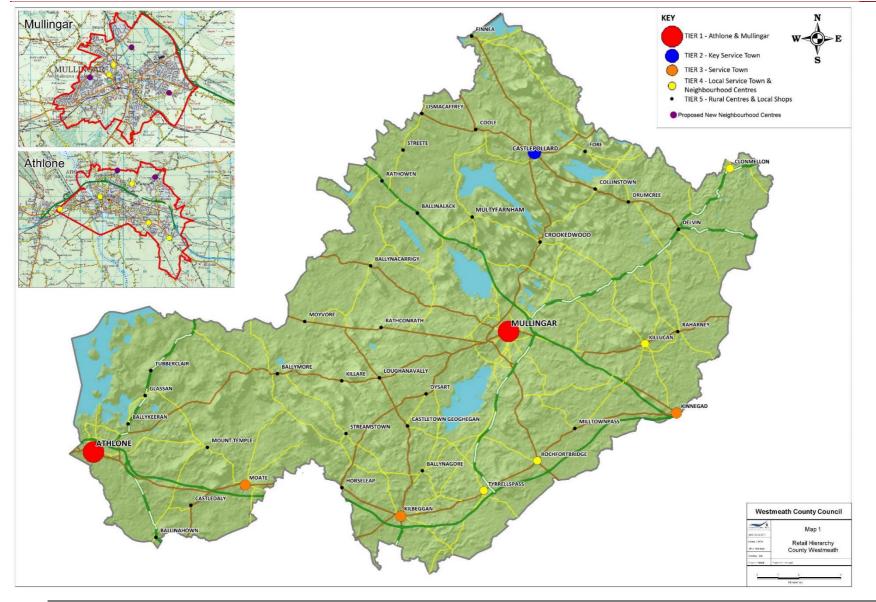
Map 5: Moate Retail - Opportunity Sites

Map 6: Kinnegad Retail - Opportunity Sites

Map 7: Kilbeggan Retail - Opportunity Site and Civic Space

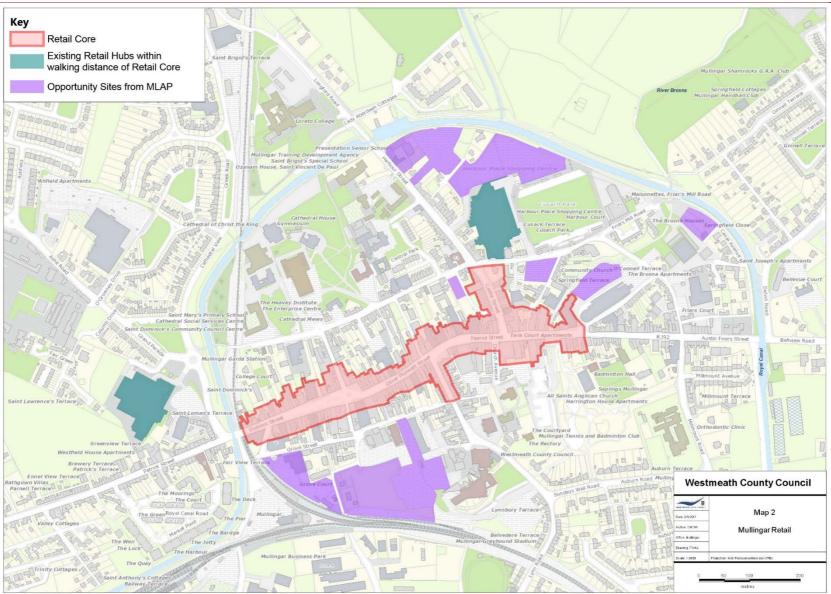






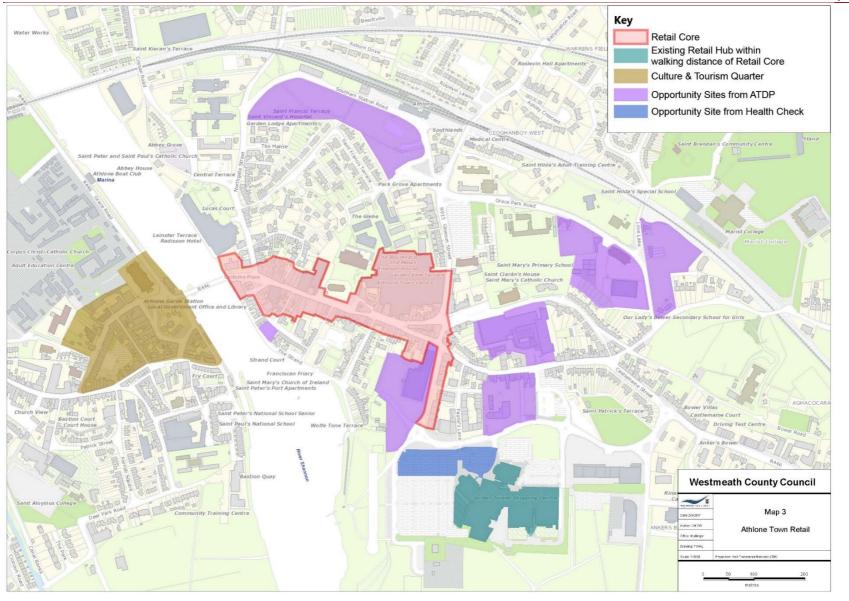


Westmeath County Retail Strategy





Westmeath County Retail Strategy











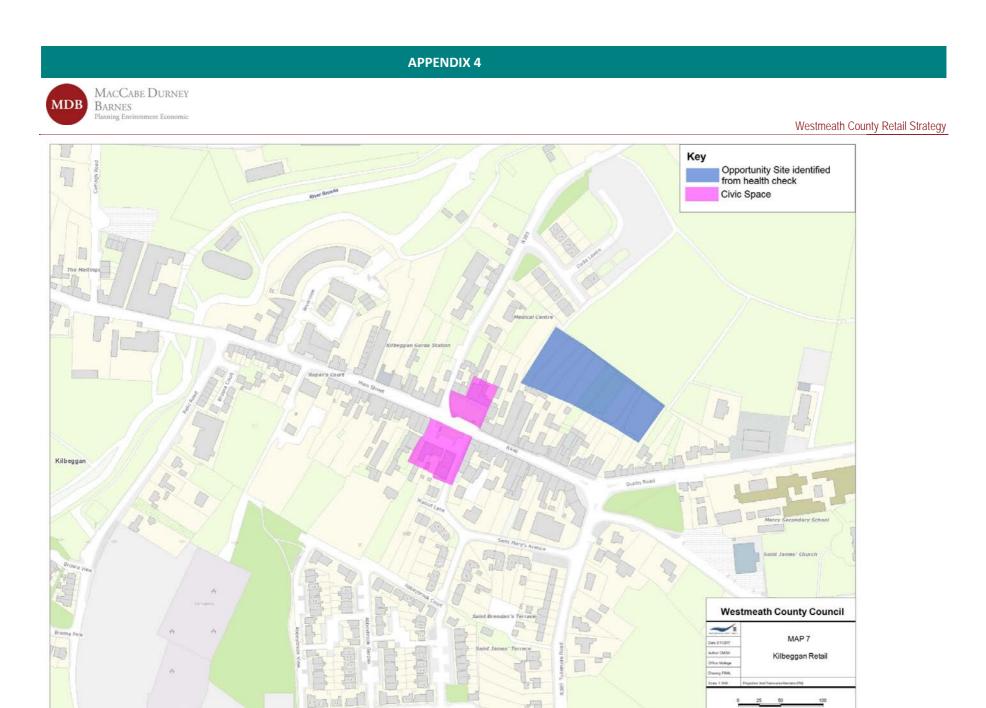
Westmeath County Retail Strategy





Westmeath County Retail Strategy





P

metres



www.westmeathcoco.ie A Westmeath County Council Publication

Westmeath County Council, Áras an Chontae, Mount Street, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath

Tel: 044-9332000 Email: info@westmeathcoco.ie Web: www.westmeathcoco.ie