

Chapter 4 Town Centre, Retail & Renewal

4.0 Aim

To sensitively and sustainably enhance the historic town centre through the provision of high quality public realm. To ensure that the retail hierarchy is commensurate with the settlement strategy in order to facilitate a competitive and healthy retail environment and to support the future vitality and viability of Birr town centre and Crinkle village. These aims will improve the attractiveness and functionality of Birr as a place in which to live, work and visit.

4.1 Context

4.1.1 SWOT Analysis of Birr Town Centre

Strengths	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Healthy niche retail along Main Street - Diverse recreation opportunities and facilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compact and walkable scale - Excellent architecture both historic and contemporary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hospitality - Central regional location - Fishing - Strong town structure, squares and streets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Festivals and entertainment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Connection from Castle to Main Street – St. Brendan's ruins <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - River access - Role of Birr as a base for tourism - Restoration of significant buildings – old workhouse, distillery, mill, etc. - Cattlemart and courthouse redevelopment, restoration and reuse <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cycleways - Bypass - Signage and town identity/branding
Weaknesses	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Large amount of cars and traffic along Main Street - Poor connections between castle and town <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of public transportation - Wayfinding system not clear, difficult to navigate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Derelict buildings - Pedestrian and cyclist facilities - Street clutter - Inappropriate shop signage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Traffic congestion - Parking reaching capacity - Out of town retailing

4.2 Strategy

4.2.1 Birr Town Centre – Built Form

The town's influential Georgian heritage has given Birr a strong urban form within its central core. The urban core has clearly defined urban spaces such as Emmet Square and John's Place as well as the tight urban grain prevalent along the two main axes Main Street/Emmet Street and John's Mall. All the major routes converge at Emmet Square making it the central focal point of the town. Beyond the compact central core, however, the urban form of Birr "dissipates" into lower density development typically associated with the 20th century. The result is less clearly defined open spaces and in areas, a lack of distinctive character or identity, with a lack of pedestrian circulation.

The protection and enhancement of the historical core of Birr town is a priority of the Councils. This will be facilitated by all available means including the provision of car parking, environmental improvements, the upgrading of access to service areas of commercial establishments, the promotion and facilitation of the appropriate reuse/renewal of existing buildings in the town centre. The Councils will also endeavour to achieve high standards of pedestrian safety and comfort in the town centre area by traffic calming. The architectural character of the existing built fabric in the commercial area will be protected and enhanced where possible.

4.2.2 Residential Areas and the Town Centre

The Councils will seek to maintain a strong residential base in the town centre area, and to prohibit undue encroachment of commercial uses into established residential areas and streets such as Oxmantown Mall and John's Mall. This is

considered desirable in order to protect the residential amenities of existing properties, to retain residential character and to foster and protect architectural integrity of the streets and individual buildings.

The Councils consider that the indiscriminate conversion of small/medium sized houses into a multiplicity of minimum scale residential units is an inappropriate form of development in the town. The Council intends to resist this trend and, while treating each individual case on its merits, will prohibit an undue concentration of this type of accommodation in any part of the town. In areas of the town of particular heritage importance, such developments will be discouraged.

The Councils will encourage the appropriate re-use of rear gardens where adjoining landowners can co-operate to create new streets and/or cohesive developments. Such opportunities will arise from time to time and will be assessed in the context of masterplans prepared by co-operating landowners and the development control standards as outlined in Chapter 14.

4.2.3 Birr Public Realm Plan 2009

Public Realm is a broad term used to describe the form and use of outdoor areas that are accessible to the public. This includes all public spaces such as streets, squares, paths, parks and car parks. The Council adopted the Birr Public Realm Plan in April 2009. The purpose of the study was to identify areas where improvements can be made in all elements of the public realm and to ensure a coordinated approach to any improvements. The Birr Public Realm Plan 2009 is key to informing Birr Town Council's approach in all matters within and around the town centre.

Some key points arising from the analysis and of the study include:

- Key character areas are well defined.
- Mill Street and Wilmer Road have weaker defined character.
- The river is detached from the town.
- Birr Castle is a permanent barrier to the west.
- Key views are the townscape and castle.
- Landmarks are evenly spread through the town.
- Scattered neighbourhood spaces.

Some key points arising from the concept of the study include:

- Elevate and enhance Emmet Square as the heart of Birr.
- Sustain mixed-uses on Emmet and Connaught Streets to ensure the town centre remains lively through different times of the day and week.
- Create strong connections with Birr town and castle via Church road using St. Brendan's Old Churchyard as a node in between.
- Establish key gateways.
- Integrate town with Camcor River.
- Extend river pathway network to Old Distillery and beyond.
- Improve the quality of small neighbourhood spaces.

In order to achieve and deliver the vision set forth in the Birr Public Realm Plan 2009, the Birr Public Realm Plan 2009 contains specific initiatives and objectives. These projects vary in size and scope but all work together to enhance the quality and experience in the town.

A total of 27 projects have been proposed with the intention that each project can be delivered individually based on their importance, complexity and availability of funding (refer to the Birr Public Realm Plan 2009 for further details).

4.2.2 Retail

4.2.2.1 Retail Planning Guidelines

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) published "Retail Planning: Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2000" which was subsequently updated in 2005 with amendments, particularly relating to retail warehouses. These guidelines advise Local Authorities on preparing development plans and assessing applications for retail developments and guide retailers and developers in formulating development proposals. The guidelines state that the matters to be included in all future Development Plans are as follows:

1. Confirmation of the retail hierarchy, the role of centres and the size of the main town centres.
2. Definition in the Development Plan of the boundaries of the core shopping area of town centres.
3. A broad assessment of the requirement for additional retail floorspace.
4. Strategic guidance on the location and scale of retail development.
5. Policies and action initiatives to encourage the improvement of town centres; and
6. Identification of criteria for the assessment of retail developments.

New retail development will also be encouraged at local neighbourhood outlets (which will also serve areas that are a distance from town or village centres). The Council will have regard to the Retail Planning Guidelines 2005 and the Offaly County Retail Strategy when assessing retail applications.

4.2.3 Approach

Recent trends in Birr have indicated a preference by multiple operators in grouping together and locating in out-of-town sites, with traditional smaller shops remaining in the town centre. The Councils recognise that new retail developments are best located within the existing shopping areas/retail core areas of Birr and Crinkle respectively.

It is necessary to retain the vitality and viability of Birr town centre and Crinkle village, therefore, a sequential approach (from the centre–outwards) will be applied in the location of retail developments. The Councils consider that the size and scale of retailing provision should follow the established size of Birr town and Crinkle village and be located within the settlement i.e. concentration of retailing within the town centre, where possible.

The Retail Planning Guidelines 2005 recommend that Planning Authorities adopt a 'Sequential Approach' to the location of retail development in towns. In line with this recommendation, the Councils will assess the size, availability, accessibility, and feasibility of developing both sites and premises, firstly within the town centre of Birr and secondly on the edge of the town centre. Alternative out of centre sites will be considered **only** where it can be demonstrated that there are no town centre or edge of centre sites, which are suitable, viable and available.

4.2.4 County Retail Strategy to 2015

4.2.4.1 Sections of Executive Summary of the County Retail Strategy to 2015

Context

'Retail Planning: Guidelines for Planning Authorities' specifies that "Development plans should provide an indication of the general scale and form of retail development that is required in the future." The same paragraphs also identify a town centre based approach - the sequential approach - as the basis for decisions on the location of new retail development and emphasise the need for new development to be appropriately serviced and accessible by different modes of transport.

This Retail Strategy for County Offaly acknowledges the implications of these provisions. It identifies future floorspace requirements to 2015. The retail hierarchy identified is consistent with the settlement strategy identified in the County Offaly Development Plan 2009-2015.

Retail expenditure patterns have been identified through an extensive survey of households across the County. While most grocery and convenience expenditure of County residents is made in local centres, a significant proportion of their

spending on comparison goods – fashion, furniture, household and electrical goods etc – flows to centres outside the County such as Athlone and further afield.

Retail Planning: Guidelines for Local Authorities 2005 details the importance of town centre retailing: in meeting the retail requirements of residents and others who use or visit town centres: in contributing to levels of activity and town centre viability and health; and in supporting their general improvement. The guidance notes the considerable investment that has been directed to central areas and the vital role of planning policy in sustaining and enhancing their role. A centre-based approach is therefore adopted consistent with national and regional planning policy.

Retail Hierarchy

The guidelines also require County-level retail strategies to examine the retail hierarchy, the role of the main retail centres and the relevant size of each centre¹. In the context of this updated Strategy, Offaly's retail hierarchy comprises:

- Primary Tier: Tullamore town centre;
- Secondary Tier: Edenderry, Birr and Clara town centres;
- Tertiary Tier: Banagher, Ferbane, Kilcormac and Portarlinton. Daingean is also included;
- Fourth Tier: Villages and rural settlements, including all other villages and smaller centres such as sraids, as well as small local shops; and
- Retail warehousing, such as that on the edge of Tullamore town.

Strategy Principles

The Retail Strategy reinforces the provisions of the Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines 2004 and the County Offaly Development Plan 2009-2015, outlining an approach which:

- Reinforces and extends the high order retail functioning of Tullamore as a linked Gateway, enabling it to: effectively reduce retail expenditure exported from the County to other centres; and further develop its retail influence in the Midlands consistent with its linked Gateway designation;
- Supports the roles identified for Edenderry, Clara and Birr by encouraging retail floorspace 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.

To further the strengthening and consolidation of Tullamore and the County's main centres, these are the preferred locations for retail development.

Comparison and convenience² retail floorspace requirements

A substantial part of the quantitative requirement at County level to 2015 has already been met through a combination of built and committed development, effectively reducing the scope for major retail development over this period. This reflects the high levels of development witnessed between 2002 and 2007 and the large volume of floorspace in the retail development pipeline. Nevertheless, there is a quantitative requirement for some 7,800 sq.m net comparison floorspace in the County to 2015.

In addition, between 2007 and 2015 there is scope for further development to address qualitative deficiencies or identified gaps in provision.

¹ 'Retail Planning; Guidelines for Local Authorities' (2005), paragraph 36 (i) – (vi).

² Experian's Retail Planner briefing note 5.1 (Nov 2007) defines convenience goods as: low-cost everyday items that consumers are unlikely to travel far to purchase. Defined as food and non-alcoholic drinks, tobacco, alcohol, newspapers and 90% of non-durable household goods. Comparison goods are all other retail goods.

Beyond 2015, there is considerable scope for further development, particularly of comparison retail facilities. The identified requirement to 2020 is 30,530 sq.m (net). As an indicative requirement, Tullamore should accommodate a minimum of 75% of the County's future comparison goods floorspace requirement i.e. a further 22,900 sq.m net to 2020. The distribution of the remainder should be mainly targeted to Birr, Edenderry and Clara.

For convenience goods, only limited additional provision is required to 2020. However, additional provision may be warranted where gaps in local provision can be identified and where qualitative improvements are effected. In meeting convenience shopping needs, the strategy supports the provision of local and accessible facilities, to actively encourage a sustainable approach to shopping activity, through a reduction in distances travelled by motor vehicle, linked to greater opportunities to maximise linked shopping trips.

A sequential approach to retail development

The preferred location for retail development is within existing town centres. In those instances where development cannot be accommodated in defined centres edge-of-centre locations may require to be identified. Only when these options are exhausted should out-of centre locations be considered providing there is no significant adverse impact on existing centres

The provisions of paragraphs 55 to 65 of the Retail Planning Guidelines outline the main principles for assessing new retail proposals. These should be referred to inform site selection, the scale and form of development, access and servicing arrangements, linkages and support for the maintenance and development of a competitive retail sector throughout Offaly.

4.2.5 Town Centre

There is a prominent retail corridor concentrated along Main Street and O'Connell Street in the town centre. The protection and improvement of the central shopping area of Birr is a priority of the Councils. This will be facilitated by the provision of car parking, environmental improvements and the upgrading of access to service areas of commercial establishments. The Councils will also endeavour to achieve high standards of pedestrian safety and comfort in the town centre area by traffic calming, having regard to the recommendations arising from the Birr Public Realm Plan 2009. The architectural character of the existing built fabric will be enhanced where possible.

It is important that the footprint of large foodstores and associated parking does not damage the fine grain of the urban fabric. The Councils will seek to maintain a strong residential base in the town centre area, and to prohibit undue encroachment of commercial uses into established residential areas and streets, such as Oxmantown Mall and John's Mall. This is considered desirable in order to protect the residential amenities of existing properties, to retain residential character and to foster and protect architectural integrity of the streets and individual buildings.

As highlighted in the Birr Public Realm Plan 2009, many of the town centre streets such as Emmet and Connaught Streets have developed a mixture of uses along their lengths overtime, adding a healthy diversity of activity to the town. In particular Emmet/Townsend Street with its strong urban grain creates a pleasant entry to the retail centre of the town, Emmet Square. The Councils will aim to sustain such mixes, to ensure that the town centre remains lively through different times of the day and week. This includes residential properties, as well as offices and public houses (refer to Map 4.1 for an outline of the town centre boundary).

4.2.6 New Development in the Town Centre

For residential developments, the Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas and its companion document Urban Design Manual (DoEHLG 2008) provide a framework for the best advice in urban design and illustrates how design principles can be translated into practice for the creation of sustainable communities. Developers should therefore have due regard of the advice and guidance contained in these guidelines. This will result in proposed sustainable developments of sufficiently high design quality.

Where relevant, it is also of importance that new developments share the key visions of Birr Public Realm Plan 2009 and compliment/integrate with the projects identified in same. Specifically, the Birr Public Realm Plan 2009, Appendices: "Guidelines for New Development" should be consulted during the development management process by all interested parties.

It is important that new development, where appropriate and particularly on the periphery of the town centre, positively contributes and extends the urban grain of the town centre core. The creation of new integrated streetscapes and public spaces, overlooking the public realm with well-defined pedestrian linkages, is key to extending the strong urban grain of the town centre. Within the town centre, there is considerable potential for the urban renewal and renovation of existing building stock. The Councils will require landowners to co-operate and co-ordinate a holistic approach to the development of lands (in differing ownerships) with the aim of site assembly and the renewal and regeneration of larger sites within the town centre.

4.2.6.1 Town Centre – "Opportunity Area"

Two key opportunity sites on the periphery of the town centre are "The Mart" and "Rectory Lands" (refer to Map 4.1). These two sites are potentially connected to the built form of the town centre through Emmet/Townsend Street. Both of these sites offer the potential for high quality designed developments that will knit into the urban grain of the town centre. Emmet/Townsend Street already has established streetscapes catering for a range of compatible town centre land uses and is naturally a continuation of urban grain of the town centre. The inclusion of Emmet/Townsend Street in the "town centre" makes Emmet Square a more central focal point, allows for the objectives of the Birr Public Realm Plan 2009 to be implemented i.e. pedestrian friendly town centre, reduces the need to travel within the town centre and allows for the two identified key opportunity sites to develop in tandem into the town centre, in accordance with the sequential approach.

Development on the "Mart Site" will act as a landmark building on entry to the town centre. Located at a vehicular junction, it will become a natural cut off point/ end to the town centre in a northern direction. Development proposed on this site must have a strong 'mixed-use' emphasis and be of sufficiently high stature, quality, design and overall benefit to the town to justify the once-off opportunity presented by the site. The impact on the town centre must be carefully assessed. The residential amenities and the protection of the heritage character of the town must be respected.

While development guidance has been given to proposals on the "Rectory Lands" (refer to Chapter 6: Local Area Strategies, 6.6.2 Land Parcel 5), it is important to note the strategic importance of the site for the town centre. As illustrated in map 4.1, although this site is not included as part of the town centre boundary for mixed-use development, it still is of key importance to future development of the town centre. This site is to the rear of Emmet/Townsend Street, in close proximity to Emmet Square and adjoining residential housing developments to the east and north. Development guidance on this site proposes a mixture of residential tenure and density, with adequate land available for a new school and car parking facilities. The mixture of residential type density will offer variety and choice to residents on the edge of the town centre rather than the typical housing estate layout. Additional parking facilities on the edge of the town centre will relieve the demand for parking in the town centre core and allow key projects of the Birr Public Realm Plan 2009 to be achieved.

The key to any development on this site is that it knits into and further extends the built form/urban grain of Emmet/Townsend Street and hence the town centre. It is also seen as an opportunity to integrate housing developments to the north of the town centre into the urban fabric of the area. Movement and access through the site for vehicles and pedestrians from Emmet/Townsend Street and adjoining housing estates is of key importance to its future development. Public spaces, access points and routes must be fronted and overlooked by development. Potential exists for mixed-use development in the backlands of Emmet/Townsend Street overlooking any new development on Rectory Lands and incorporating improved public access from Emmet/Townsend Street onto the site. Potential also exists for the development of the backlands of existing residential developments at John's Mall, but this may prove more difficult due to the need to protect the character of buildings of significant importance on these site plots.

4.2.7 Crinkle Village

The Councils recognise the important function of local shops located in local centres and neighbourhood centres. New retail development will be encouraged at local neighbourhood outlets such as Crinkle, which perform an important function in local centres for the needs of the local community and in particular the elderly, the disabled, the young and those with no personal transport or inadequately served by public transport.

4.2.8 Tullamore Road

Significant retail developments have been permitted and constructed in the Tullamore Road area of the town, north of the town centre. It is considered that future developments in the area should be of a complimentary nature to the existing permitted development and comprise mainly of small-scale commercial or residential uses. Further retail development should be limited so as to avoid further impacting on the vitality and viability of the town centre.

4.2.9 Out of Town/Village Retail

All applications for retail development outside of the town centre shall be assessed in the context of a sequential approach and with regard to impact of any such development on the vitality and viability of the town centre. Small neighbourhood shops intended to serve suburban residential neighbourhoods will be considered favourably.

4.3 Urban Renewal

4.3.1 Derelict Sites

The Derelict Sites Act 1990 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.

4.3.2 At a National Level...

National strategies and policies that influence urban regeneration include central governments urban renewal schemes, National Spatial Strategy, National Anti-poverty Strategy, the social partnership agreements and the National Development Plan.

Over the period of the Birr Town and Environs Development Plan 2004-2010, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government/Department of Finance included measures that sought to address the issue of regeneration and renewal including the Urban and Village Renewal Scheme (2000-2006). This was a grant-aided scheme which sought to improve the physical environment of towns and villages and assist in enhancing and making these settlements more attractive to live and work in.

The Councils identified and proposed renewal projects for consideration by central government under this renewal scheme (which formed part of the National Development Plan 2000-2006 and was supported by the EU under the Regional Operational Programme for the two Regions (BMW & SE). A number of projects under this scheme have been successful in recent years in enhancing the overall visual appearance of Birr town, for example undergrounding of cables.

The Councils continue to be concerned that there are a number of derelict sites which are in need of re-development in Birr. The Councils are undertaking a survey of derelict sites in the town as is required under the Derelict Sites Act, 1990. Appropriate action is being considered to remove dereliction. Where appropriate, the Councils will secure and encourage the renewal of obsolete and derelict areas close to the town centre which utilises undeveloped backlands.

4.3.3 The Role of Planning

The role of planning in relation to regeneration and renewal is primarily established through the formulation of policies and objectives and their subsequent implementation through the development management process.

The Council acknowledges that a collaborative approach between central government, the local authority, private sector and voluntary associations is necessary to successfully achieve the revitalisation and renewal of areas within the County which are in need of regeneration

4.3.4 Best Practice Methods – Regeneration and Renewal

In 2006, Offaly County Council completed a successful regeneration project in Birr with the redevelopment of the former convent site which now houses the civic offices and library. This regeneration project entailed significant works both internally and externally, as illustrated in the pictures taken of some of the works undertaken as part of this project.

Former Convent Site Birr - Presently Civic Offices, Birr.



The private sector has also completed projects which involved the restoration/reuse of older buildings and have enhanced the town such as apartment conversions at a number of locations along the River Camcor.

4.3.4 Town and Village Improvement Works

Character of a Settlement/Area

The character of an area is enhanced by development that responds to and reinforces local distinctive patterns of development, landscape and culture.

Public Realm

The public realm i.e. streetscapes, parks and greenspaces, riverfronts, public buildings and cycling and pedestrian facilities, provides the key element in the overall urban fabric of Birr and is therefore an important contribution to achieving an overall sense of place, increasing safety and enhancing visual amenity. A collaborative approach between central government (funding), the local authority, private sector and voluntary associations is required to successfully achieve the revitalisation and renewal of areas within the public realm (having regard to the Birr Public Realm Plan 2009). The Councils acknowledge the important role that Tidy Towns and other voluntary associations contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of Birr.

Streetscape

Birr Town Council has a direct role in the regeneration and renewal of Birr through the provision of infrastructure, street furniture and hard and soft landscaping which are vital in contributing to the visual amenity and attractiveness of individual settlements. The Councils will have regard to the Birr Public Realm Plan 2009 in this regard.

4.4 Policy

Public Realm

BTEP 04-01 It is the Councils' policy to progressively implement the visions/objectives and projects of the Birr Public Realm Plan 2009.

BTEP 04-02 In keeping with the overall objective of safeguarding the town's built heritage, it is the Councils' policy to encourage environmental improvements in the town centre shopping area. The provision of convenient and safe pedestrian facilities through the town will be a priority (including disabled access) as will landscaping developments, and the requirement of high standards of design and finish of commercial development.

Town Centre – Mixed Use Development

BTEP 04-03 It is the Councils' policy to encourage the use of upper floors of commercial premises for residential purposes and facilitate schemes such as "**Living over the Shop**".

BTEP 04-04 It is the Councils' policy through its development management powers, to protect the primary residential content of areas adjacent to the town centre such as Oxmantown Mall and John's Mall from commercial development.

BTEP 04-05 It is the Councils' policy to ensure that commercial development compliments the existing town centre in terms of design, siting and function and does not prejudice the heritage value and environmental character of the town.

Retail

BTEP 04-06 It is the Councils' policy to implement the retail hierarchy, as set out in the Offaly Retail Strategy. The Councils will seek to locate retail development in the retail core areas of Birr and Crinkle, subject to normal planning and land-use considerations.

BTEP 04-07 It is the Councils' policy to address leakage of retail expenditure from Birr by providing the means to strengthen the range and quality availability of its retail offer.

BTEP 04-08 It is the Councils' policy to resist the loss of retail units to non-retail use, at pedestrian level, particularly in the primary shopping frontages of towns.

BTEP 04-09 It is the Councils' policy to encourage and facilitate the re-use and regeneration of derelict land and buildings for retail uses with due cognisance to the sequential approach.

BTEP 04-10 It is the Councils' policy to encourage retail development, including new forms of shopping which can assist in the regeneration of Birr and Crinkle's retail core areas. Proposals, which would undermine the vitality and viability of retail core areas, as a whole will not be permitted.

BTEP 04-11 It is the Councils' policy to encourage and enhance the role of Birr as a retail and commercial centre serving a wide catchment area and to encourage consolidation of commercial development in the town centre area.

BTEP 04-12 It is the Councils' policy to ensure that commercial development compliments the existing town centre in terms of design, siting and function and does not prejudice the heritage value and environmental character of the town.

Urban Renewal

BTEP 04-13 It is the Councils' policy to encourage and facilitate the physical renewal and revitalisation of areas and the enhancement of amenities and promotion of sustainable development throughout Birr. It is the Councils policy to seek the redevelopment and/or renewal of derelict sites throughout the town, which are listed in the Urban Councils Derelict Sites Register.

BTEP 04-14 It is the Councils' policy to encourage and facilitate backland development, where this development strengthens the commercial or residential functions of the town centre or areas close to the centre, provided that such development is done in a coordinated fashion and does not adversely affect the intrinsic character of the historic centre of the town.

BTEP 04-15 It is the Councils' policy to secure the renewal of properties on Mill Street, Castle Street, Main Street and Church Street.

BTEP 04-16 It is the Councils' policy to secure the relocation of the cattle mart (New Road) and to facilitate the redevelopment of this site.

BTEP 04-17 It is the Councils' policy to encourage and assist active participation by government bodies, heritage groups, community associations, and local people, where appropriate, in the conservation and restoration of landmark buildings and structures (both of local and or regional/national importance). This may include the aiding and funding of conservation and restoration works.

BTEP 04-18 It is the Councils' policy to promote and encourage the re-utilisation of suitable redundant or obsolete structures, ensuring that the improvement and screening of neglected sites and the renewal, repair and/or maintenance of structures is in line with the Councils' powers under the Derelict Sites Act 1990.

BTEP 04-19 It is the Councils' policy to require the retention, refurbishment and improvement of an original structure which is of local importance insofar as it is possible to provide sufficient internal and external space and is sympathetic in scale mass, design and materials to the landscape character and character of existing structures in the locality. In instances where it can be appropriately demonstrated that this is not possible, the Planning Authority may require that the original building is removed in the interests of amenity.

BTEP 04-20 It is the Councils' policy to seek to encourage the redevelopment of derelict or vacant buildings as an alternative to new build on new undeveloped sites.

Opportunity Area

BTEP 04-21 It is the Councils' policy to require that any proposal brought forward for each of the two sites (Mart site and Rectory lands) in the "opportunity area" as identified on Map 4.1, will include a comprehensive urban design plan showing the rationale behind the proposal and how it will interact with its context and the town centre area.

BTEP 04-22 It is the Councils' policy to support the key projects of the Birr Public Realm Plan 2009 and specifically how they relate to the identified "opportunity area" i.e. proposals for Emmet/Townsend Street.

BTEP 04-23 It is the Councils' policy to ensure that the fine urban grain/fabric of the town centre core is knit/extended into the identified "opportunity areas".

BTEP 04-24 It is the Councils' policy to require landowners to co-operate and co-ordinate a holistic approach to the development of lands (in differing ownership) with the aim of site assembly and regeneration of larger sites within the town centre.

4.5 Objectives³

BTEO 04-01 To consolidate the existing retail and commercial function of the town centre area.

BTEO 04-02 To provide additional town centre car-parking in part of the 'Rectory Lands' to the rear of St Johns Hall.

BTEO 04-03 To encourage and facilitate, where appropriate, the development and renewal of areas of Birr which are in need of regeneration and in particular to implement any government funded renewal schemes/incentives. The Councils will facilitate and promote sensitive re-development of underused or derelict town centre areas.

BTEO 04-04 To exercise the Councils' powers under the **Derelict Sites Act 1990**, to identify areas of dereliction, which are suitable for redevelopment, in accordance with Birr's Derelict Sites Register.

BTEO 04-05 To identify and reserve suitable sites for Community/Public use as part of urban renewal schemes.

BTEO 04-06 To remove unauthorised advertising, where possible.

BTEO 04-07 To seek the designation of central areas any future urban renewal initiatives as a mechanism for securing restoration and rehabilitation of the built fabric.

BTEO 04-08 To provide for the relocation of the Cattle Mart and redevelopment of the site.

BTEO 04-09 To encourage and facilitate the redevelopment of identified derelict sites and where appropriate to require owners of derelict property to carry out suitable improvements to prevent or remove injury to amenity arising from such derelict sites.

BTEO 04-10 To identify renewal projects and seek funding to assist in such projects as per the NDP 2007-2013.

BTEO 04-11 To implement on a phased basis, a program of undergrounding existing overhead cables throughout the town centre and developed areas of the town up to and including 38Kv lines; and seek departmental financial support to undertake such works.

BTEO 04-12 To remove unauthorised advertising/signage where possible and to encourage new signage which is appropriate to the streetscape and is not internally illuminated.

³ The order of listing of objectives is not intended to indicate priorities. Subject to the availability of resources, it is the Councils' aim to monitor and accomplish the objectives listed in this section within the period of the plan.