

Chapter 3: Town Centre and Regeneration

Strategic Aim:

To sensitively and sustainably enhance Edenderry's historic town centre through the provision of healthy place-making. To facilitate a competitive and healthy retail environment and to support the future vitality, diversity and viability of Edenderry town centre. Reinforce Edenderry town centre as the heart of the town, by avoiding undesirable and inefficient sprawl, achieving critical mass and consolidating new development within the built-up footprint of the town, through targeting a significant proportion of future development on infill/brownfield/under-utilised sites, and extending out sequentially subject to available infrastructure. These aims will improve the attractiveness and functionality of Edenderry as a place in which to live, work and visit while also functioning as the business, service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community.

3.1 Context

The town centre of Edenderry is concentrated around the long linear historical core running east to west from O'Connell Square, a large square dominated by the Town Hall civic building, to an area at the Grand Canal Harbour. The centre takes in JKL Street. The layout of this historic core dates principally from the turn of the 19th Century and the width of the street allowed Edenderry to function as a market town. The town centre of Edenderry is the traditional centre of trade and commerce for the town and its mainly rural hinterland and it continues to provide these key functions with predominant land uses including retail and services and there is a noteworthy presence of residential use within the town centre.

From the linear core, the remainder of the town emanates. The Grand Canal Harbour provides an amenity right in the heart of the town centre. The Church Walk leads from JKL Street to the Castropetre Church which acts as a landmark visible from many points around the town. The town centre adjoins Blundell Park to the south. This Park is currently under transformation with the provision of additional amenities, landscaping and linkages.

Large grocery stores, such as ALDI, LIDL and Tesco are grouped closely on the edge of the town, with Dunnes Stores and smaller retail outlets in the more central Edenderry Shopping Centre

The protection and enhancement of the historical core of Edenderry town is a priority of the Council. This will be facilitated by all available means including environmental improvements, the promotion and facilitation of the appropriate reuse/renewal of derelict, vacant and underutilised buildings in the town centre. The Council will also endeavour to achieve permeability and connectivity in the town centre for cyclists and pedestrians. The architectural character of the existing built fabric in the commercial area will be protected and enhanced where possible.



Figure 3.1 View of JKL Street

3.1.1 SCOT Analysis of Edenderry Town Centre

Strengths	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diverse recreation opportunities and facilities - Compact and walkable scale - High quality historic architecture - Strategic location within the centre of the Eastern and Midland Region - Grand Canal - Farmers Market - e-hive digital hub - Attractive O'Connell Square 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A Self-Sustaining Town - Restoration of significant vacant and derelict buildings - Cycleways and pedestrian permeability - Co-ordinated wayfinding system (directional signage) - Support healthy ecosystems and local biodiversity - Plant more trees - Improve walking and cycling permeability / linkages and public transport provision - Get people back living in the town centre - Visitor accommodation e.g. hotel - Further improve public realm - Blundell Land Masterplan rejuvenation - Improve vehicular circulation through improved vehicular transport links - More social infrastructure; cinema, swimming pool, bowling, community / sports hall - Removal of visually dominant water tower - Greater integration of the Grand Canal and Greenway with the town - Rapid development of Edenderry Business Campus following completion of approved relief road - Re-use former railway line as a rail / cycleway.

	- Increase tourists through attractions and accommodation
Challenges	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Large amount of cars and traffic along JKL Street - Extensive scale of derelict and vacant buildings - Continued management of street clutter including advertising signage - Instances of inappropriate shop signage - Provision of more jobs for resident population for example industry - Volume of commuters - Wastewater treatment infrastructure near capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Traffic congestion - Out of centre retailing - Closure of last remaining bank - Poor development of high speed broadband within the town by external providers - Continued weak economic function if jobs to resident worker population ratio remains low

3.2 Regeneration

3.2.1 Healthy Place-Making

The Healthy Place-Making Strategy outlined under the Eastern and Midland Region Assembly Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) aims to improve both physical and social infrastructure to create places that are healthy and attractive to live, work, visit and invest. Healthy Place-making is one of three principles outlined in the Offaly County Development Plan that will support the County Strategic Outcomes. Healthy Place-making encompasses compact growth, liveable settlements, regeneration, attractive places, sustainable settlement patterns, permeability, appropriate redevelopment of Opportunity Sites and universal and lifetime adaptable design etc. The Council will support and encourage the principle of healthy place-making in Edenderry Town.

The Town Centre First Approach notes that a Town Centre should function as the ‘business, service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community’. This LAP has had regard to the Town Centre First – A Policy Approach for Irish Towns (TCF Policy), 2022. As per the TCF Policy, the Council recognises the importance of having vibrant, accessible and lived-in town centres that are home to both young and old. It is the Council’s aim to embed an age-friendly approach to the design of the public realm. The vision for Edenderry is that growth planned for the town over the life of the Plan occurs in a sustainable and sequential manner, characterised by a compact, consolidated and permeable pattern of development linked by sustainable modes of transport including a robust network of pedestrian and cycle routes. The grafting of a new ‘green twist’ upon plans for enhancing public spaces / realm in the town is encouraged.



Figure 3.2 Healthy Place-making Strategy (Source: Figure 9.2 of EMRA RSES)

3.2.2 Vacancy, Dereliction and Backlands

Edenderry carries forward a legacy from the economic downturn of 2008-2009 that is quite evident in the town centre area in the form of derelict sites and vacancy rates in prime retail and commercial units.

Within the centre of the town are many vacant units that skew the overall commercial vacancy rate to 29% (December 2019); the highest rate in Ireland (national average 13%). In turn, this creates scope to reimagine the town centre and add to the growing variety of independent stores sustaining the town's individuality.

In addition to promoting compact growth and sustainable transport modes, the Council will encourage the regeneration and the appropriate redevelopment of brownfield and infill sites for residential and mixed uses within the existing built-up footprint of the historic town of Edenderry. The Council will support making better use of under-utilised land and buildings in Edenderry including vacant, derelict and under-occupied buildings. Continued enhancement and improvement of Edenderry will not only improve how the town functions on a day-to-day basis but will have longer term socio-economic, cultural and environmental benefits for residents, businesses and visitors.

The Council will aim to support the reduction of vacancy in properties by 20% during the life of the Plan, subject to resources and funding.

Long narrow plots are characteristic of many of the properties facing onto JKL Street and with potential rear vehicular access; backlands may be extremely suitable for development depending on all other relevant site-specific considerations. There are many more sites within the town centre with potential pedestrian, cyclist and vehicular access and which, if redeveloped appropriately, would have an extremely positive impact on the town. A joined up approach is encouraged whereby landowners work together in amalgamating sites to bring forward a comprehensive and coherent development proposal. The Council supports the principle of the development of backland areas off JKL Street where adequate access can be achieved and different landowners work together to secure their comprehensive development. Achieving the proper and sustainable delivery of key accesses set out in the zoning objectives map will be fundamental to opening access to backland areas.

3.2.3 Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SuDS)

There are many amenity benefits that are intrinsic to SuDS – good SuDS design often provides amenity benefits while delivering water quantity, water quality and biodiversity benefits. In turn, it helps regenerate a town by contributing to healthy place-making and thereby improving quality of life. The table below demonstrates how SuDS can add such amenity value to a town.

Table 3.1 Amenity Benefit of SuDS

SuDS Amenity Benefit	Examples
Air quality Improvements	SuDS using blue and green areas, including grass and trees, provide significant air quality improvement, by for example, removing fine particulars from urban streets.
Air and building temperature regulation	Green and blue infrastructure buffer and moderates extreme temperatures caused by climate change.
Biodiversity and ecology	Green and blue SuDS help to support flora and fauna.
Carbon emission reduction	Plants and soils take in and store Co2 and other greenhouse gases, so where SuDS use plants this potential can be exploited.
Community cohesion	By increasing opportunities for human interaction and creating more enjoyable environments, people are more likely to feel they belong to the community and take a greater pride in their neighbourhood. This is especially the case if the community has been involved in the SuDS design and process and in some cases the maintenance process.

Increase inward investment	SuDS contributes to the creation of attractive places which in turn improve a town's attraction as a place in which to invest, live, work and visit.
Health and wellbeing	Blue and green infrastructure can play a role in maintaining mental and physical health by providing places for recreation and relaxation.
Noise reduction	SuDS and associated trees and grassed areas can provide noise-absorbent barriers and surfaces. Green roofs provide sound insulation for buildings.
Security of water supply	Direct collection of rainwater to use for domestic and other purposes saves water, and potentially provides essential irrigation resources and long-term viability for amenity trees, vegetation and crops.
Recreation	SuDS can deliver a wide range of green and blue spaces that can be used for walking, cycling, informal play, organized sports and games etc.

Developments and public realm works require climate adaptive and resilient urban design and accordingly 'Nature-based Solutions to the Management of Rainwater and Surface Water Runoff in Urban Areas – Best Practice Interim Guidance Document, 2022' (and any subsequent editions) should be considered at design / retrofitting stage in terms of SuDS. These Guidelines seek to mimic the natural water balance of rural areas through water sensitive urban design which can be achieved through the replacement of impermeable surfacing with nature-based planted areas that are designed to absorb, retain, store and treat urban runoff prior to discharge back into the environment. This will reduce pollution and reduce flood risk as well as improving biodiversity and a greener more pleasant urban environment.

The natural slowing and filtration of runoff from our roofs, streets and public realm can be assisted by the creation of a variety of initiatives such as green building surfaces, green roofs, raingardens, swales, permeable surfaces, bioswales, natural water collection and storage ponds.

SuDs is also addressed in Chapter 6 Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure, Chapter 8 Climate Action and Chapter 9 Critical Infrastructure.

3.2.4 Town Enhancement Projects

The council will encourage and assist in the enhancement and regeneration of areas and structures in Edenderry in order to improve the quality of place and urban resilience of the town. In planning for the creation of healthy and attractive places, there is a need to prioritise and promote walking and cycling in town centres in the design of streets and public spaces. In recognition of this, a Local Transport Plan has been prepared for the town in conjunction with this Local Area Plan. In addition a, a feasibility study is complete for a pedestrian and cycle canal bridge.

The Council recognises the importance of improving the appearance of streetscapes in order to provide communities with attractive, coherent, and legible spaces.

3.2.4.1 Completed Projects

A number of improvement works and studies have been carried out in Edenderry with the aim of improving the town's appearance and functionality, with the benefit of state funding such as:

- Public realm enhancement work on O'Connell Square, which has acted as a catalyst to kick start revitalisation of the centre of Edenderry.
- Public realm improvements on JKL Street west of O'Connell Square including upgrading of bus stop with shelter and new pedestrian crossing layout.
- Refurbishment of the first floor of the Town Hall into a remote working digital hub known as e-hive.
- Undergrounding of utilities and provision of public lighting in Blundell Park.
- Completion of Blundell Avenue (a link street from Granary Court to the Fairgreen).
- Demolition and site clearance of old Tesco building and associated structures.
- Construction of high quality housing (Park View) to the east of Blundell Park.
- The provision of a Blundell Masterplan, with a 15-year vision for the Blundell area.
- Completion of the Grand Canal Greenway from Edenderry westwards.
- Completion of a report on Blundell Castle in 2020 (funded from the Community Monuments Fund), which has resulted in the removal of vegetation from the castle and the securing of loose masonry, removal of palisade fencing and making the structure as safe as reasonably possible.
- Completion of a preliminary feasibility study, options assessment and the selection of a preferred option for a pedestrian and cycle bridge over the Grand Canal spur.



Figure 3.3 Public Realm Enhancements at O'Connell Square

3.4.2.2 Proposed Projects

Continued enhancement and improvement of Edenderry will not only improve how the town functions on a day-to-day basis but will have longer-term socio-economic, cultural and environmental benefits for residents, businesses and visitors. Examples of projects proposed within the town that will have regenerative benefits include the following:

Canal Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge

The Edenderry spur of the Grand Canal and Blundell Park currently function as two separate entities. The canal towpath is well utilised by the local community, but the park is tucked away and disconnected from the canal, with poor legibility between them. A strengthened route connecting the castle with the canal, creating an easy choice to travel into the park will encourage movement between the two, creating a much stronger and attractive tourism offer. The current entrances to the park from Blundell Wood are unclear, therefore, a strong route which takes a physical cue from the historic line of trees between the park and the canal will help improve legibility and create a stronger draw between the canal and park. A bridge across the canal would improve connectivity even further, linking the town and the park with the surrounding town. In view of this, it is a goal of the Council to construct a new pedestrian and cycle bridge. To date, a preliminary feasibility study, options assessment and the selection of a preferred option for the bridge has been completed, with the study area outlined in Figure 3.4 below. The proposed bridge will provide a dedicated pedestrian and cycle link between the west of Edenderry and the Blundell Park area to the east of the Grand Canal Spur, via Blundell Woods road. The bridge will also provide a crossing point for canal towpath users on a north / south axis and a symbolic gateway to the town (See Figure 3.5 below). The bridge will support the Grand Canal Greenway, which when completed will run along the Grand Canal from Dublin City to Shannon Harbour passing adjacent to Edenderry. The proposed section of greenway running eastwards between Edenderry and the county boundary with Kildare has yet to be completed. Cycleways are further discussed in Chapter 9 Critical Infrastructure.



Figure 3.4 Study Area for the Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge over Grand Canal Spur



Figure 3.5 Linkages that could form from a pedestrian and cycle bridge



Figure 3.6 View of location of proposed bridge at the Grand Canal Edenderry Spur, looking south from the eastern towpath

Blundell Lands Regeneration

The old Tesco site in combination with backland sites and Blundell Park together constitutes the 'Blundell Lands'. A Masterplan for the Blundell Lands was prepared in 2020, which sets out concepts for the future development of the lands (Appendix 1 of this LAP). The lands are recognised as an Opportunity Site in this Local Area Plan, which is further discussed in section 3.3 below.

The Council has secured Category 2 Rural Regeneration and Development Funding (RRDF) to purchase three key sites in the Blundell Master Plan area, to carry out the demolition and site clearance of 33/34JKL Street (i.e. the former Tesco site which is now complete), hire an architect-led design team consultancy service to design a new community library and Arts Base at 33/34 JKL Street and finally hire consultants to extend the Blundell Master Plan area and assess and appraise this area for a variety of activities including leisure, community, cultural and services provision for Edenderry.

Following this, a Category 1 RRDF application is proposed in order to deliver a state of the art community library with refurbished urban areas opening up access to the Blundell Master Plan area optimising opportunities for future development of community/leisure/cultural facilities, green urban spaces, linkages and recreational amenities.

To help realise the full potential for the development of the site, any application put forward should consider the County Development Plan policies, objectives and standards and shall take cognisance of the Blundell Masterplan that was prepared for the site in 2020.

3.3 Opportunity Site: Blundell Lands

The Blundell Lands constitutes a key Opportunity Site in the town centre. The lands have been identified as such because of their prominence, strategic location and underutilisation and its potential to transform the vitality of the town. The 11.67 hectare 'Blundell Lands' are of key importance to the future development of the town centre. The lands are located to the rear of JKL Street, in close proximity to O'Connell Square and adjoining residential housing developments to the east and west. The area offers the potential for high quality designed developments that will knit into the urban grain of the town centre.

In addition to promoting local economic growth, it is considered that the redevelopment of the site would contribute greatly to the renewal, enhancement, regeneration and compact growth of Edenderry Town, in conjunction with amenity uses. To help realise the full potential for the development of the site, any application put forward should consider the County Development Plan policies, objectives and standards and shall take cognisance of the Blundell Masterplan that was prepared for the site in 2020 (Appendix 1 of this LAP).

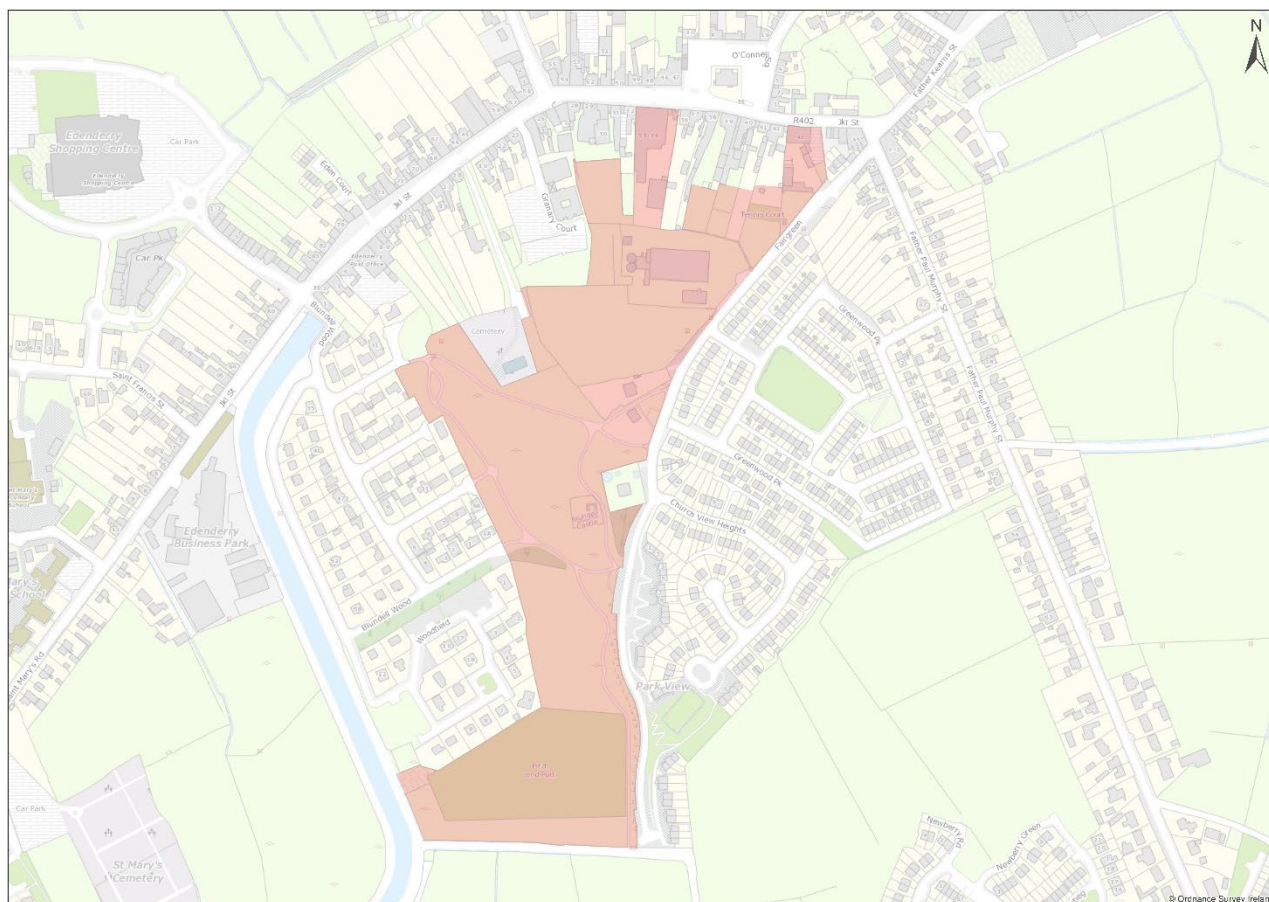


Figure 3.7 'Blundell Lands' Opportunity Site in Edenderry

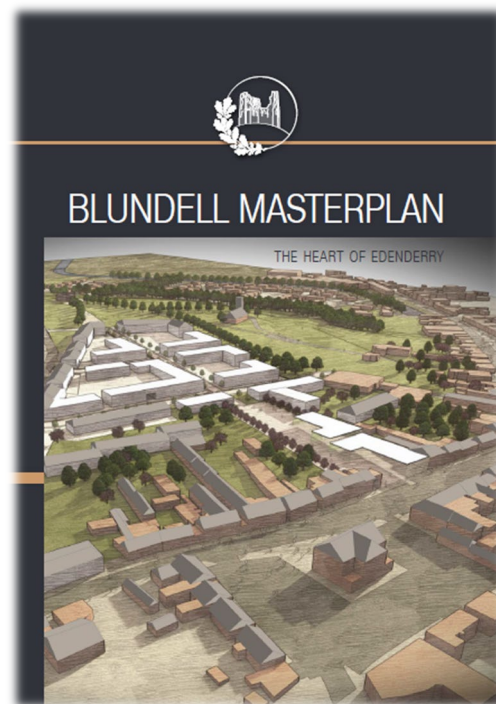


Figure 3.8 Blundell Masterplan layouts



Figure 3.9 Images of Blundell Lands

Blundell Park is the only green space situated within the town centre, yet it is poorly utilised due to its concealed and disconnected nature with JKL Street and the surroundings. The streets wrap around the surrounding areas with little connection to the park. However, some improvements have recently taken place to opening it up such as Park View housing development and its associated access road to the east of the park.

The built form of JKL Street and its long linear nature has historically provided very little opportunity for physical and visual connections between the street and the town's landmarks, such as Blundell Castle. Reconnecting the park and the town by opening up streets and laneways for pedestrians and cyclists will allow people to once again move through the area with ease.

The park and the canal are two important assets for the town. The park has the potential to provide a much stronger communal space for activity and social interaction. Better linked with the canal there is a much larger role that these two assets can play while strengthening community pride in them both.

The water tower sits in close proximity to Blundell Castle and is considerably larger in scale, dominating the skyline when viewed from the surrounding areas of the town. Consideration should be given to its eventual removal, which would add greatly to the park experience and sense of place.

The recent new street connecting Granary Court and the Fairgreen presents an opportunity to open up the JKL Street backlands, creating a thriving part of the town centre. The way in which buildings meet the street, the type of use at ground floor level, the ability to cross the street, all have a role in contributing to a positive street environment. New development fronting onto the street with active frontage and a well-considered public realm will ensure the new connection becomes a safe and inviting place for everyone.

3.4 Residential Areas and the Town Centre

The Council 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. This is 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 Council will encourage the appropriate re-use of rear gardens where adjoining landowners can co-operate to create new streets and/or cohesive developments.

The Council will encourage the use of upper floors of existing retail/office units within the Town Centre as residential accommodation in order to contribute to the daytime and night time activity of the Town Centre, and improve the liveability factor of the town.

3.5 Retailing

Edenderry is designated a 'Self-Sustaining Town' in the Offaly County Development Plan. Appropriate levels of convenience and comparison floor space will be encouraged and supported in Edenderry, where it is required to serve the existing and projected population catchment, subject to consideration of the impact on the core retail area and existing retail developments. In the interests of Town Centre First principles, there will generally be a presumption against the development of retail parks accommodating retail warehousing in Edenderry. Where retail warehousing is proposed, careful consideration shall be given to the level of existing provision, the levels of vacancy, pressure to entertain or accommodate inappropriate uses at existing sites and the justification for additional retail warehouses. Any retail application received by the Council will be assessed under the remits of the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012 or subsequent editions.

3.5.1 Sequential Approach

The Council recognises that new retail development is best located within the existing core retail areas of Edenderry.

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

3.5.2 Core Retail Area

The Core Retail Area of Edenderry Town contain the primary retail streets where the main concentration of retail activity takes place (as set out in Figure below). These areas are the preferred areas for retail development. This Plan anticipates that new retail provision will be predominantly achieved through a combination of appropriate regeneration and renewal of sites within Edenderry Town.

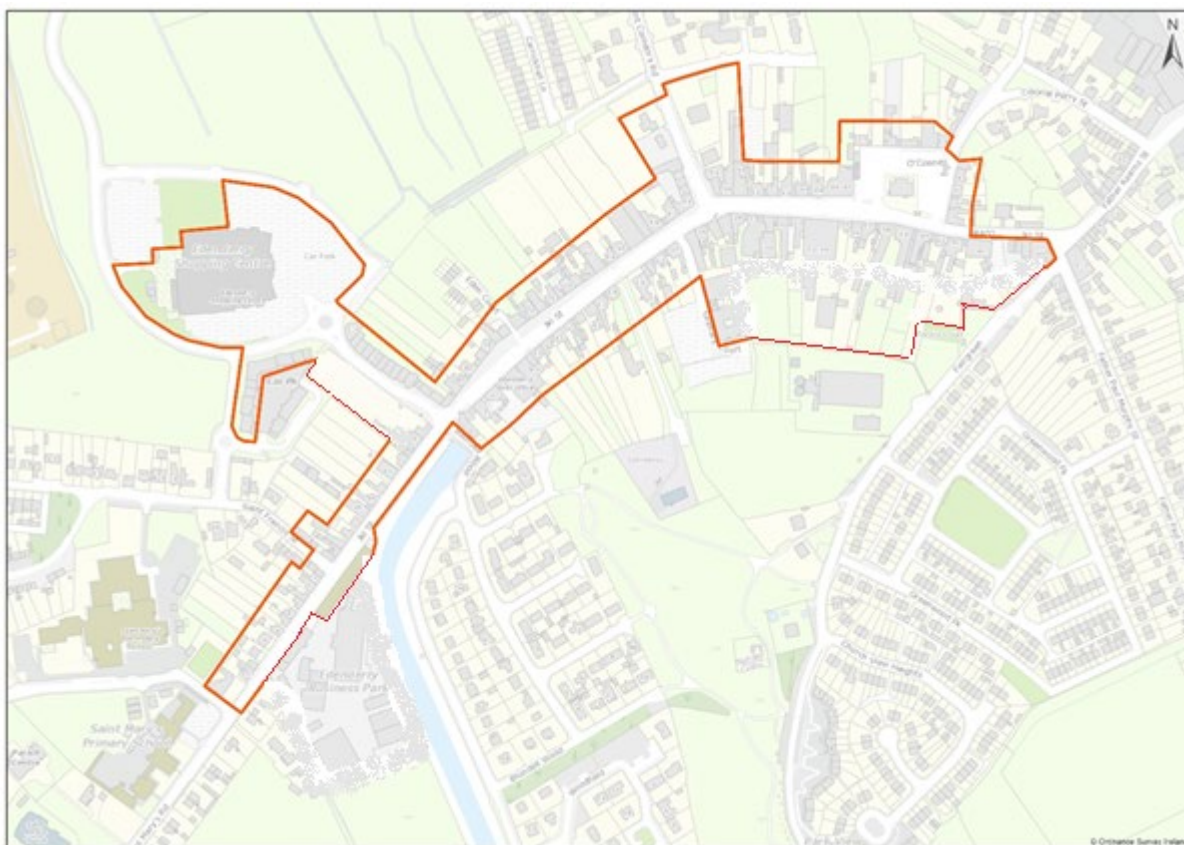


Figure 3.10 Edenderry Core Retail Area

3.5.3 Shopfronts

Edenderry has many examples of well-designed shopfronts contributing positively to enhance the streetscape. Shopfronts provide colour and add variation to main streets, older shopfronts can contain clues of the history of commerce and the development of the town. New shopfronts may reflect a more traditional design or be more contemporary in approach but they should have regard to the features of the building that they front, particularly when they occur in protected structures. The design and material used for shopfronts should be of high quality materials and the colour scheme should integrate successfully with that of existing buildings in the vicinity.

The Council encourages the design of shopfront and signs in accordance with the Advice Leaflet 'Guide to Shopfronts and Signs' by Offaly County Council. The leaflet addresses, fascias, signs, lighting, windows, entrances, elements of traditional shopfronts, principles of good design.



Figure 3.11 Cover of A Guide to Shopfronts and Signs by Offaly County Council

3.6 Purple Flag Accreditation

There is an opportunity for Edenderry town to obtain 'Purple Flag' accreditation by raising the standard and broadening the appeal of the town centre between the hours of 5pm and 5am. Areas that are awarded the 'Purple Flag' are recognised for providing a vibrant and diverse mix of dining, entertainment and culture while promoting the safety and wellbeing of visitors and local residents. The Council recognises the importance of achieving 'Purple Flag' accreditation for Edenderry Town. Obtaining a 'Purple Flag' for Edenderry town will play a valuable role in raising the standard and broadening the appeal of Edenderry town's night-time economy.

3.7 Town Centre & Regeneration Policies

It is Council Policy to:

TCP-01 Protect and promote the vitality and viability of Edenderry's Core Retail Area, and to ensure that it remains the primary location for retail development, through the application of a sequential approach to development.

TCP-02 Support and promote the function of Edenderry town centre as the business, service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community and ensuring that it is vibrant, accessible and lived-in in accordance with the Town Centre First - A Policy Approach for Irish Towns 2022.

TCP-03 Facilitate the redevelopment and enhancement of the Blundell Lands Opportunity Site for a mixture of uses that will contribute to the vibrancy, diversity, vitality, attractiveness, safety, liveability and compact growth of Edenderry Town Centre. In conjunction with this, proposed developments must demonstrate how they will interact within its context and the wider urban area and shall be in accordance with section 3.3 of this Local Area Plan and section 7.2.4 of the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 and the Blundell Masterplan 2020.

TCP-04 Encourage and facilitate the appropriate reuse and regeneration of derelict, vacant, backland and underutilised lands and buildings, including large rear gardens, in the town centre for retail, residential and other mixed uses, through the co-operation of adjoining landowners and/ or through legislative measures and / or by supporting the progression and delivery of projects funded by the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and other appropriate funds. This may include for the creation of new streets and / or cohesive developments.

TCP-05 Support and encourage the principle of healthy place-making in Edenderry Town.

TCP-06 Ensure that growth planned for Edenderry town over the life of the Plan occurs in a sustainable and sequential manner, characterised by a compact, consolidated and permeable pattern of development linked by sustainable modes of transport including a robust network of pedestrian and cycle routes.

TCP-07 Embed an age-friendly approach to the design of the public realm.

TCP-08 Further improve the streetscape and public realm in Edenderry town centre by undergrounding existing cables and improving pavements and street furniture in particular.

TCP-09 Ensure that traditional shop fronts are retained and restored, and that new shopfront design contributes positively to and enhances the streetscape and that the design of shopfront and signs are in accordance with the Advice Leaflet 'Guide to Shopfronts and Signs' by Offaly County Council.

TCP-10 Provide loading bays of adequate capacity where they are needed most in order to ensure that traffic flows are not restricted.

TCP-11 To require that developments within or adjacent to the area of the Blundell Masterplan, Edenderry, 2020 demonstrate adherence to the urban design, place making and connectivity principles for the masterplan area.

TCP-12 Support the development of sustainable low-carbon climate resilient communities and encourage a climate adaptation and mitigation approach to developments, which will enable regeneration.

TCP-13 Incorporate Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) and other nature-based solutions in accordance with the 'Nature-based Solutions to the Management of Rainwater and Surface Water Runoff in Urban Areas – Best Practice Interim Guidance Document, 2022' and any subsequent editions.

TCP-14 Support the removal of the water tower at Blundell Park.

TCP-15 Prohibit the proliferation of any individual use within the town centre which would by way of increased presence and use, detract from the amenities of the area and work against the policy of encouraging appropriate development to contribute positively to the vitality and viability of the town centre.

TCP-16 Seek a survey of existing numbers of bats, swifts and swift/nests for planning applications for renovations, redevelopment or demolition of old buildings in Edenderry Town centre. Where bats and/or swifts are shown to be present, specific mitigation measures during and after construction shall be proposed.

3.8 Town Centre & Regeneration Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

TCO-01 Assess retail development outside the Core Retail Areas of Edenderry in accordance with Town Centre First principles, the Offaly County Development Plan and Chapter 4 'Retailing and Development Management' of the Retail Planning Guidelines (DECLG, 2012).

TCO-02 To reduce the extent of vacant properties in Edenderry by 20% during the Plan period, subject to resources and funding.