

# RATHDOWNEY TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN DECEMBER 2008



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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Purpose of the Masterplan

The key purpose of a masterplan is to ensure that development areas are assessed in their entirety and that lands are developed to their full potential incorporating all necessary support elements including physical and social infrastructure and amenities. This approach ensures that all development is sustainable, integrated, does not occur in a piecemeal or uncoordinated fashion and safeguards against any developable site becoming landlocked or overdeveloped with substandard amenities or services.

A masterplan establishes a framework that will be used to assess any future planning applications, and provides advice on the nature of acceptable development, potential uses, design issues and phasing.

The Council has prepared this Masterplan to guide the redevelopment of key sites within Rathdowney Town Centre. The masterplan provides a detailed design and development framework for two significant land banks in the town. The masterplan has been prepared having regard to the Rathdowney Town Plan and the relevant development standards contained therein.

Following a consultation period, the Council will consider all responses, and amend the draft document as appropriate. The results of the consultation exercise, along with the amended masterplan will be reported back to the Forward Planning Section before being presented to the Council members for

### 1.2 Status of the Masterplan

It is an objective of the Rathdowney Town Plan 2007-2013 to prepare two masterplans for the town in the lifetime of the Plan (Section 9): one for lands beside the town centre, the other at Knockhiel



southwest of the town centre.

In addition, this masterplan has been prepared in the context of the Laois County Development Plan 2006-2012.

### 1.3 The Area

The Masterplan Area is within the development boundary of Rathdowney. Lying just off the central square of the town, it covers an area of approx. 4 hectares [9.8 acres].

The area currently has a number of land uses including commercial, residential and pastoral agriculture. All of the lands in the Masterplan area are zoned General Business.



### 1.4 Vision

A core element of the masterplan process is the articulation of a vision which is clear, concise and outcome focused.

“The vision for this masterplan area is the creation of a sustainable, high quality commercial and residential environment which is attractive, vibrant, safe, adequately serviced, easily accessed and well connected”.

### 1.5 Masterplan Objectives

In order to realise the vision for the Masterplan area, the following key objectives have been identified:

- 1) To rejuvenate and expand the existing town centre;
- 2) To facilitate the development of a diverse range of appropriate uses including commercial and residential which are complementary to but not in competition with the existing town centre;



- 3) To provide a broad network of community and recreational facilities serving the needs of the business community, workers, residents and visitors;

- 4) To create a vibrant, attractive, safe and secure environment;
- 5) To achieve high levels of accessible and inclusive design in all new buildings, places and spaces;

- 6) To promote high standards of public realm design;



- 7) To enhance access to the Main Square whilst protecting it;

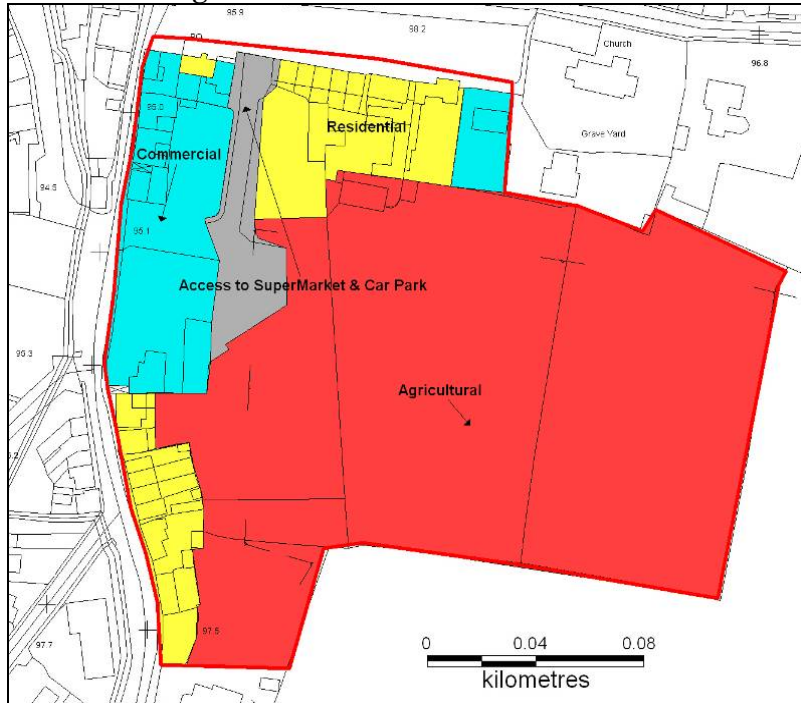
- 8) To reduce the impact of traffic congestion on the surrounding environment and to prioritise linkages for pedestrians and cyclists in the area;



- 9) To establish a streetscape that has a unique identity and lends character to the entire town;

## 2.0 SURVEY OF THE AREA

### 2.1 Existing Land Uses



Located immediately adjacent to the town centre, the masterplan area is bounded:

[a] to the north by a combination of longstanding terraced dwellings, various outhouses and farm buildings and the Church of Ireland property all of which front onto Main Street/town square,

[b] To the east by undeveloped farmland zoned Residential in the Town Plan;

[c] To the south by more undeveloped farmland also zoned Residential in the Town Plan;



(Both [b] and [c] locations install a suburban, semi-rural ambience despite the town centre location)



[d] To the west by a number of commercial properties including convenience retail outlet, post office, licensed premises and long established terraced dwellings fronting onto Regional Route R433 Rathdowney/Johnstown section.

### 2.2 Site Topography

In terms of topography, ground levels are relatively flat with a slight decline as one proceeds south-eastwards. There are no watercourses of any significance in the area. Field boundaries consist of mature hedgerows and stone walls.

### 2.3 Archaeological Assessment

A desk based archaeological assessment of the masterplan area has been undertaken. This found that there are no recorded sites within the study area. Neither is any section of the Masterplan area within zone of archaeological significance as indicated in the County Development Plan.

Nonetheless, given the proximity of the area to Rathdowney Town Centre which has a rich archaeological legacy as well as numerous protected structures, it is possible that the subject lands also have some potential in this regard.

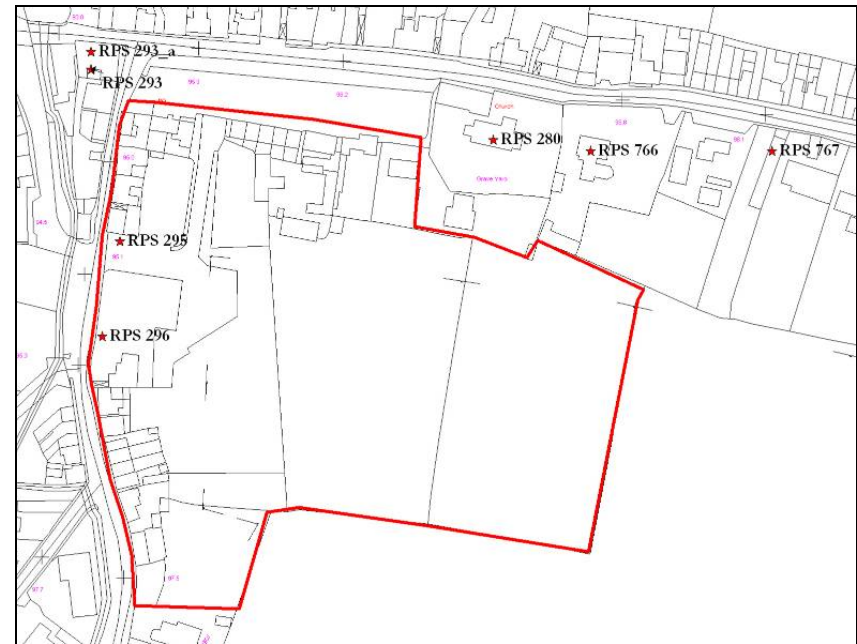
## 2.4 Architectural Assessment

There are 2 no. protected structures within in the masterplan area; RPS 295 and RPS 296. Dating from the late nineteenth, early twentieth century both are currently in use as licensed premises. There are a number of other protected structures immediately outside the masterplan area e.g. Church of Ireland.

Protected structures are a key element of successful place making. Any proposal involving works to a protected structure or within the vicinity of a protected structure must submit an Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment based on advice contained in Architectural Heritage Protection – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2004).

### 2.4.1 Protected Structures/Existing Buildings

PROTECTED STRUCTURES		
RPS No.	Description	Façade
RPS 280	Detached Georgian Gothic Church of Ireland church, dated 1818, with tower having needle spire. Renovated, c. 1865, with projecting porch and chancel added. Extended, c. 1990, with plant room added to chancel.	Church
RPS 293	Terraced three-bay two-storey house, c. 1820, with integral carriageway. Renovated, c. 1920, with pub front inserted to ground floor. Now amalgamated with building to right.	J.A O'Malley
RPS 293_a	End-of-terrace two-bay two-storey house, c. 1900, with render pub front to ground floor and four-bay two-storey lateral range.	J.A O'Malley
RPS 295	End-of-terrace four-bay two-storey house, c. 1920, with integral carriageway and timber pub front to ground floor.	Tuohy's
RPS 296	Terraced six-bay two-storey former hostel, c. 1890. Renovated, c. 1985, with shop front inserted to ground floor having residential accommodation over.	SuperValu
RPS 766	Detached five-bay two-storey former Glebe House, c. 1815, with curved flanking screen walls having piers with castellated coping. Extended to rear comprising two-storey return. Now in private residential use.	Glebe House
RPS 767	Detached five-bay two-storey former Courthouse, c. 1830, with three-bay single-storey range. Now in residential use.	Courthouse



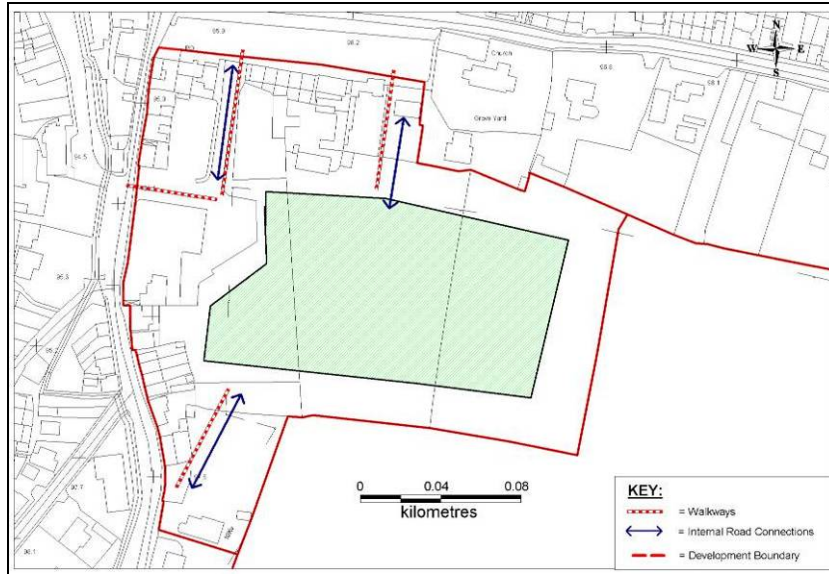
**RPS 295**



**RPS 296**



## 2.5 Access



The closest public roads to the subject site are the Strategic Regional Route R433 to the north and the Strategic Regional Road R435 to the west.

Currently, there is no direct access from the masterplan site onto Strategic Regional Route R433. To gain access would involve the removal of at least one building on Main Street. While any demolition is regrettable, the likely building chosen is considered the least valuable in terms of its contribution to the existing amenity of the streetscape. Another potential access option is via the supermarket complex which already has a vehicular access extending southwards from the square.

Access onto the Strategic Regional Route R435 is achievable at two points: via a vacant, undeveloped property in the southeast corner and/or another cul de sac serving the supermarket complex from the west. Of the two options, the former is preferred.

The other laneway is problematic on a number of grounds, for example:

- It has no footpath;
- Is very narrow and is heavily used by commercial traffic delivering to the supermarket.

## 2.6 Services

At present, in common with other urban centres in Co. Laois, there is a major deficit in terms of foul drainage capacity in Rathdowney. Many large scale planning applications have been refused or deferred long term for this reason. This situation is likely to remain unchanged until mid-2009 at which stage it is expected, subject to departmental approval that contracts will commence for the necessary upgrade of the treatment plant in the town.



Regarding potable water supply in Rathdowney, improvements works are scheduled to be carried out in 2008 as part of the Small Schemes Programme.

## 2.7 Planning History

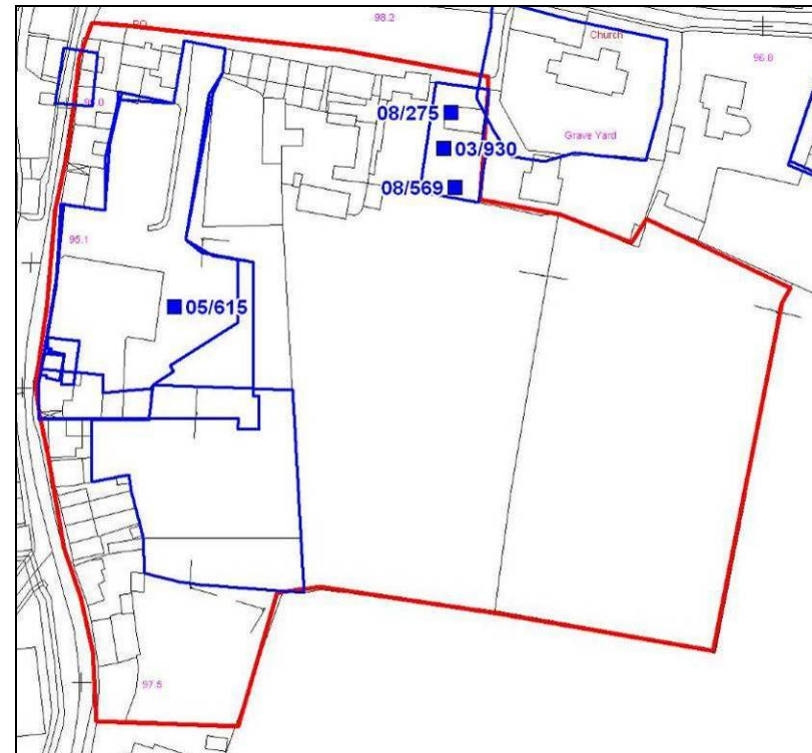
There have been 4 no. recent applications for development within the masterplan area.

**05/615** - Permission for the construction of a new single storey extension to existing supermarket, new signage, provision of new car parking & all ancillary site works.

**03/930** - Demolish bungalow and front boundary wall, construct two-storey dwelling, new site entrance, front boundary wall and associated site works;

**08/275** - a/ change of use from residential garage to dog-grooming service, b/ single storey commercial extension to front of garage, c/ provision of new dog holding area to rear of garage, and d/ replacing of 2 no. domestic windows with 2 no. patio doors to rear of house;

**08/569** - retain change of use from residential garage to commercial dog grooming service, construct a new dog holding area to rear of garage, construct a single-storey extension to front of garage, replace 2 no. domestic windows with 2 no patio doors to rear of house & provide a new stand alone sign to front of house.



### 3.0 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

#### 3.1 Introduction

The development of Rathdowney Town Centre is driven and supported by a range of planning and regeneration policies at the national, regional, county and local level. These include the following:

#### 3.2 National context

##### 3.2.1 The National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020

The National Spatial Strategy has been developed to promote the balanced spatial, economic and social growth of the regions throughout Ireland.

According to the National Spatial Strategy, smaller urban centres such as Rathdowney which have established residential, service and employment functions can be supported by necessary investment in key services. Demand for housing within easy reach of larger towns can be harnessed positively to strengthen the residential and other functions of such places. This can be achieved by attracting residential and other developments through availability of land and capacity of services.

#### 3.3 Regional Context

##### 3.3.1 Rathdowney

The Settlement Strategy of the Laois County Development Plan aims to promote the development of the urban and rural network in order to retain and expand its role as a vibrant living, working and cultural county in the Midlands Region.

The town of Rathdowney is identified in the 2006 Laois County Development Plan as a secondary settlement. A lot of opportunity remains for development within the town centre with large tracts of backlands with access points and infill sites. Future growth and expansion of the town can be achieved through developing Rathdowney as a significant service centre for the surrounding area.

This can also be achieved through expanding its innovative retail function as a significant national retail destination, particularly given improved accessibility with the proposed extension of the M7/M8 motorway from Dublin serving Cork and Limerick.

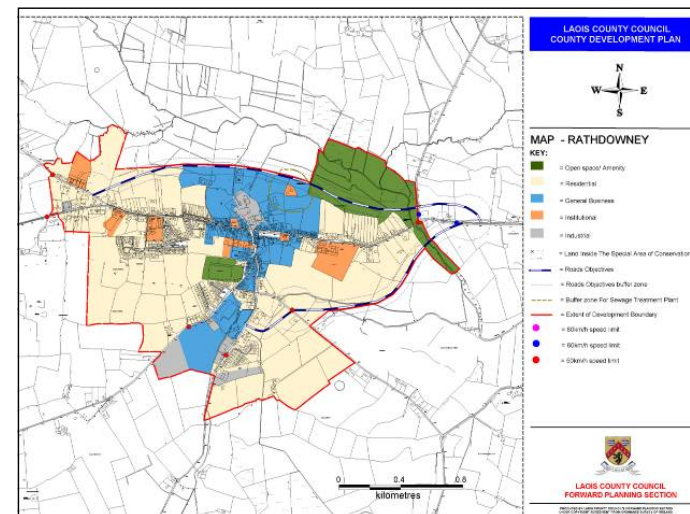
#### 3.4.1 Zoning

In the County Development Plan 2006-2012, the Masterplan area has just one applicable land use zoning: General Business.

#### 3.4.2 Land Use zoning Objectives

The purpose of zoning is to indicate to property owners and the general public the types of development which the Planning Authority considers most appropriate in each land use category. Zoning is designed to reduce conflicting uses within areas, to protect resources and, in association with phasing of development, to ensure that land suitable for development is used to the best advantage of the community as a whole. The zoning objectives, matrix content and development control standards are included in the County Development Plan 2006-2012:

General Business: To provide for general development;



## 4.0 GENERAL DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

### 4.1 Introduction

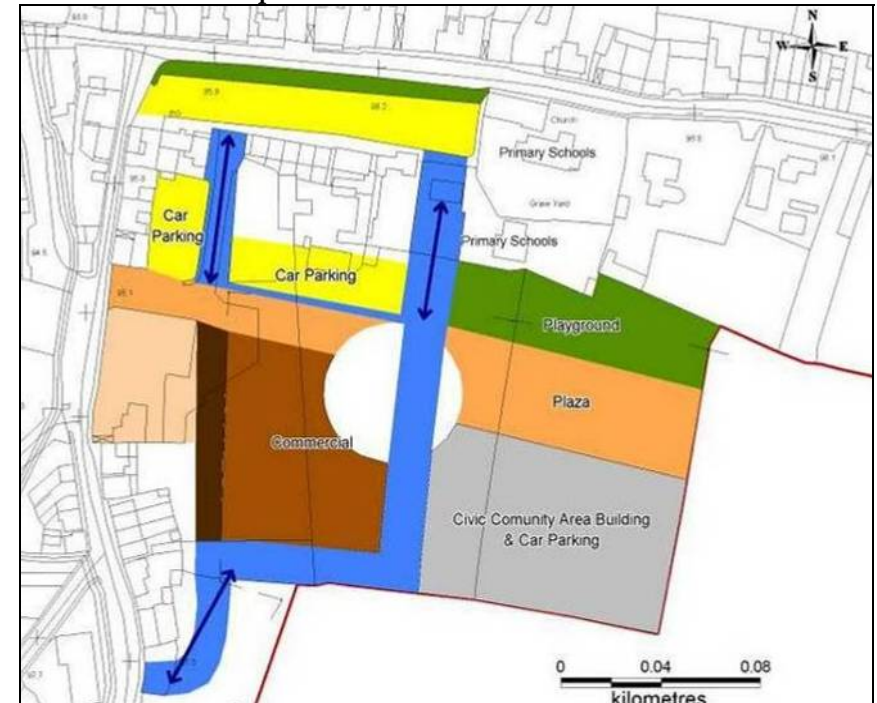
There are a number of underlying principles which should be adhered to in the development of the town centre masterplan area. These general and site specific principles are a starting point for design and are a means to an end, not an end in themselves.

### 4.2 Golden Rules

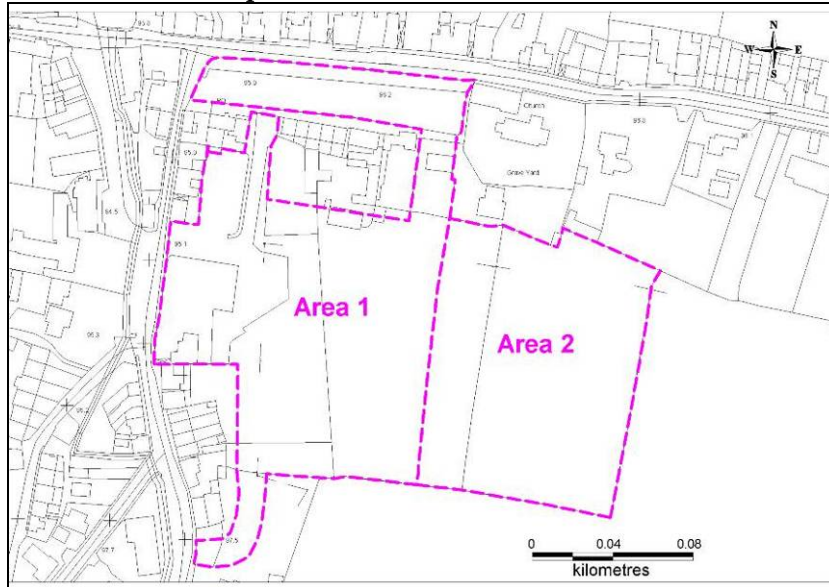
Four 'Golden Rules' underpin these development principles and should also underpin any planning applications for the masterplan area:

- Buildings should make a positive contribution to the public realm; its character, hierarchy and scale;
- Buildings should relate positively to neighbouring structures (both old and new) to create a harmonious whole entity;
- Developments should not limit the future flexibility of neighbouring plots beyond the constraints already imposed; and
- Development adjacent to the main thoroughfare shall be of the highest quality design, integrating successively with the character, ethos and integrity of the existing built environment.

## 4.3 The Masterplan Area – Indicative Uses



#### 4.4 The Masterplan Areas



##### 4.4.1 Area 1

Preferred Uses: Having regard to the zoning of the lands, adjoining uses, streetscape, topography, previous planning decisions and proximity of a no. of protected structures, the preferred land uses are as follows:

Mixed Residential/Commercial: Density not to exceed 12 units/acre. This equates to the figure of 30 units/hectare as recommended for this type of site in recent Sustainable Residential Development Guidelines.

Mix of house types and sizes including conventional dwellings and apartments; formal terraced layout also provision of dwelling units over ground floor commercial space.

Likely commercial uses include office, convenience and comparison retail, restaurant [takeaway excluded]. High quality shopfront design only to be considered. Ancillary parking to accommodate proposed development and existing shortfall where identified.



Create linkages-vehicular, pedestrian and cycle-to the square.

Overriding objective is to strengthen the town centre as the predominant part of the town and add to its base, character, distinctiveness and variety.

Building Heights: Maximum height shall not exceed two-storeys. The prevailing building stock in Rathdowney is predominantly two-storey.

Protected Structures: In assessing applications for extensions to a protected structure, the planning authority will have regard to the Department of the Environment's guidance document, Architectural Heritage Protection which also serves as a useful guidance document to potential developers.

### 4.3.3 Area 2

Preferred Uses: Having regard to the zoning of the lands, adjoining uses, streetscape, topography, previous planning decisions as well as the need to highlight this area's critical centrality, civic potential and urban function, the preferred land uses are as follows:

Civic Space/Plaza: A dedicated, centrally located urban space to be used for a no. of purposes including passive and active recreation, parking and as the preferred site for a one-stop-shop style community building is proposed for this area. Similar type facility as that recently rolled out in Portlaoise albeit on a smaller scale. Incorporate features of public art and street furniture.



Recreational Space: Laois County Council through its Sport and Leisure Section has been proactive in the provision of playground facilities in towns and villages throughout the county.

A similar type development to those already in place in Stradbally and Abbeyleix for example, is earmarked for the northern part of the masterplan area, immediately adjacent to the schools complex. There will be a hierarchical approach to design and layout of facilities on offer, so as to accommodate all age cohorts.



Linkages-vehicular, pedestrian and cycle, to be created to the square and sub masterplan area 1.

One-stop-shop building: To create focal point for town centre; optional uses include Council sub-office, library, HSE health centre [existing facility on Mooreville Road is very constrained], community creche, meeting hall, MABS centre etc.



Building Heights: Maximum height shall not exceed two-storeys. The prevailing building stock in Rathdowney is predominantly two-storey.


#### 4.5 Urban Design Principles

The objectives of the plan will be met through the following steps:

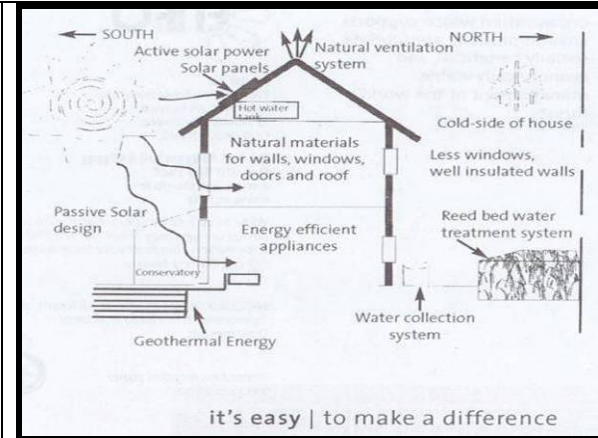
**a) Design**

- The establishment of, and strict adherence to, building design guidelines which make a positive contribution to the existing high quality urban character of Rathdowney.
- Preparation of architectural conservation reports where appropriate.
- Opportunities for landmark buildings at key nodes and focal points;
- Adherence to appropriate density standards;

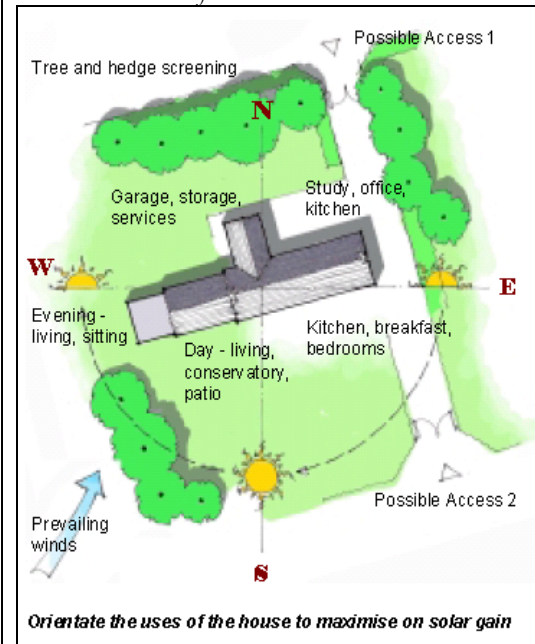
<b>Density</b>	The council acknowledges the social, economic, transport and environmental benefits of higher densities but shall consider proposals for high density on a case by case basis. Higher densities must not be achieved at an unacceptable amenity cost to the surrounding amenity cost to the surrounding dwellings and the residents of the proposed development.
<b>Urban grain and scale</b>	Single use and overly large development blocks should be avoided and permeable facades created where possible in order to enhance the flow of people.
<b>Building heights</b>	The following criteria are relevant to buildings which are substantially taller than their neighbours and/or which significantly change the skyline. The criteria are not listed in order of importance; the relative importance will depend on the circumstances of the site and the project. Applicants seeking planning permission for tall buildings should ensure therefore that the following criteria are fully addressed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No buildings shall exceed two storeys in height in the Masterplan Area;</li> <li>• The relationship to context, including natural topography, scale, height, urban grain,</li> </ul>

	streetscape and built form, and the effect on the skyline; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The effect on the whole existing environment, including the need to ensure that the proposal will conserve or not damage or detract from;</li> <li>• Archaeology.</li> </ul>
<b>Edges, consistency and variety</b>	Proposals for new development in the town centre should demonstrate a consideration of the following design objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That development on a plot considers its relationship with that on adjoining plots in terms of design, height, building line, façade and frontage;</li> <li>• That development on a plot demonstrates a coherence and consistency with its neighbouring plots, whilst maintaining a degree of variety in design and architectural style.</li> </ul> 
<b>Designing Out Crime</b>	Good design of buildings and their relationship with the environment affects peoples' perception of an area, as well as the opportunity for anti social or criminal behaviour. Active frontages, a mix of uses and a high quality public realm will help ensure the optimum level of natural surveillance. Developers are encouraged to liaise with An Garda Síochána early in the design process.

<p><b>Sustainable Design and Construction</b></p>	<p>Proposals for new development in the Masterplan area should demonstrate a consideration of the following objectives from a sustainability point of view:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Massing and thermal performance; Passive environmental design; Exposure to sunlight and natural daylight penetration; Energy efficiency; Renewable energy sources; thermal and acoustic insulation;</li> <li>• Optimise the location and orientation within a site, make use of the layout, form and fabric to moderate energy demands, reduce heat demands by using high insulation standards with heat recovery ventilation systems, meet the remaining heat demand with efficient plant and controls, minimise cooling needs through the use of fabric, maximise the use of natural ventilation;</li> <li>• Development proposals will be required to demonstrate reduced energy consumption in their design and construction, seeking ultimately to provide developments with zero-heating requirements by way of innovative design solutions and high performance building/insulation materials in their construction.</li> </ul> <p>Designs should incorporate alternative energy technologies such as bio-energy, solar energy, heat pumps, heat recovery while larger developments could consider the use of district/block heating/cooling systems, combined heat and power and wind energy.</p>
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Source: ENFO Leaflet



Source: Draft Limerick Rural Design Guide

**b) Open Space**

*“The most successful neighbourhoods contains streets, squares, parks, public gardens that are as good in quality – if not better than the private buildings and spaces within the neighbourhood”. Urban Design Manual – A best Practice Guide, DoEHLG (February 2008)*

Centrally located open space provides for good surveillance, while an encircling footpath provides for pedestrian and cyclist usage


- ✓ Natural features should be enhanced and incorporated into open space;
- ✓ High quality design and provision encourages a sense of place and ownership;
- ✓ Narrow and dysfunctional provision of open space;
- ✓ Elevated and landscaped features do not allow for low intensity sporting activities.



<p><b>Tree Planting</b></p>	<p>Trees can contribute positively to landscape character; reduced carbon dioxide emissions, nature conservation, urban open space and the provision of natural shading in sunny conditions. In developing within the Masterplan Area, due regard must be given to the preservation of existing trees and tree masses, and ensuring that the number of trees is increased overall.</p>	
<p><b>Public Art</b></p>	<p>The appropriate use of public art is supported in the masterplan area. Innovative public art in new or existing schemes can enhance a building and its environs by promoting local character and identity and can help make a development more user friendly, thereby increasing its prestige. The art must be linked to local features, landmarks or folklore.</p>	
<p><b>Urban enclosure</b></p>	<p>The public spaces, which include the streets, bridges, greens and squares, should be strongly defined by the surrounding built edges. The groups of buildings that provide these edges should be designed to respect one another and the open space, creating a consistent and coherent façade, rather than a collection of unrelated buildings. That development on a plot demonstrates a positive contribution to the edges of public spaces (streets, greens and squares); and that development facing the river demonstrates a positive contribution to the waters edge and nearby bridges.</p>	

**c) Uses**

- Satisfactory mix of housing types and sizes, all of which shall be designed to ensure the enhancement of local character and compliance with relevant design and development management standards as set out in the development plan;
- Compliance with Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000-2004 and the Housing Strategy with regard to the provision of social and affordable housing;

<p><b>Active frontage and ground floor use</b></p>	<p>In order to animate the streets and the public realm, and create a lively and interesting street scene, it is important to accommodate and encourage active frontage and ground floor use in new development. This will include shop fronts, entrances to residential or commercial properties and windows, to ensure passive surveillance of the public realm.</p> 
<p><b>Mixed Use</b></p>	<p>The Council encourages an appropriate mix of uses both vertically and horizontally with commercial units on the lower floors and residential units on the upper floors.</p>
<p><b>Social and Affordable Housing</b></p>	<p>The Council will encourage the integration of housing provided under Part V of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2004, into private development in a layout that prevents segregation and promotes good design and layout.</p> 

**Housing Mix**

The Council strongly encourages the avoidance of single housing type tenure of all kinds in residential developments in the masterplan area. Development proposals should offer a wide choice of tenure options at urban block, street and neighbourhood level in a way which does not distinguish tenure by grouping or house type. Proposals are also required to bring balance into existing mono-tenure areas.



**d) Infrastructure**

- The provision of satisfactory public infrastructure and other support services in compliance with relevant objectives of the development plan.



**e) Access**

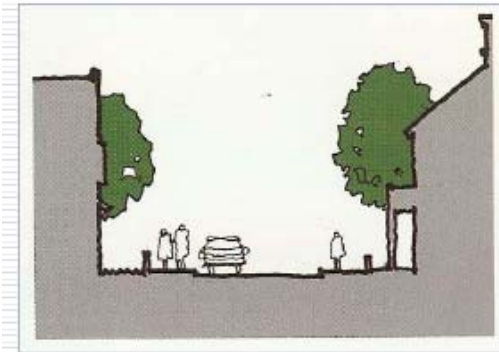
- Proposals for improved vehicular, pedestrian and cyclist access between the study area and the town centre;
- Connectivity and permeability as against enclosed and gated enclaves and also the identification of ventilation points for adjoining lands;
- Priority of movement and accessibility throughout the study areas for pedestrians and cyclists.



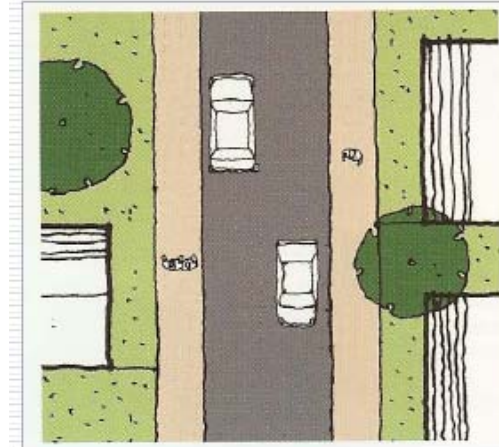
<p><b>Connection and accessibility</b></p>	<p>New development in the masterplan area should be designed to improve connections within the area and to neighbouring areas of the town. In particular, accessibility and legibility for pedestrians and cyclists should be improved and new public routes should be created. All new pedestrian routes, open spaces and public realm improvements should give consideration to the needs of mobility impaired users.</p>
<p><b>Access and servicing</b></p>	<p>A number of access points have been included in this master plan to reserve access to backlands, and are shown on development area maps. This routes are classified into;                  Primary Routes– provide through routes for vehicular, pedestrian and cyclist traffic in a calmed environment.                  Secondary Routes - provide local access for pedestrians and cyclists.                  Proposals should have regard to these access points and</p>



consult with the Road Design Section of Laois County Council in this regard prior to the submission of a proposal.



*Figure 14: Indicative plan and layout drawings of a secondary road where carriageways of 6m and dedicated pedestrian paths will be favoured.*



<p><b>Car and cycle parking</b></p>	<p>To create a high quality environment, residential or commercial private parking should be provided safely out of sight, either underground or contained within the interior of blocks. Large areas of surface parking should be avoided. In general parking provision shall be provided in accordance with the County Development Plan.</p>
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**5.0 REQUIREMENTS FOR PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

Planning Applications for any one of the key development sites will require a range of documentation and supporting information to enable the Council to determine the proposals and comply with the *Laois County Development Plan 2003-2009* and the Rathdowney Town Plan 2007-2013.

The following indicative list identifies the statements that will most likely be required for developments within the Masterplan Area:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental Impact Assessment, where required under Schedule X of the Planning and Development Regulations;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design and Access Statement explaining the design principles and concepts that have informed the development and how access issues have been dealt with;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where relevant a desktop assessment of the potential archaeological value of the site;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traffic Impact Assessment, where development is likely to have a significant transport impact, the scope of which should be agreed at an early stage with the Council;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parking Strategy;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retail Impact Assessment in accordance with Retail Planning Guidelines;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy Assessment;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A detailed sunlight/daylight assessment;</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remediation Strategy to address contamination and demolition within the existing site where relevant ;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waste Management Plan;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phasing Strategy.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statements of community involvement summarising pre-application consultations undertaken by the applicant, the findings of that consultation and demonstration as to how the application has been altered as a result of the findings of the consultation shall be submitted with the application.</li> </ul>

The Council welcomes pre planning application discussions concerning the scope of supporting reports regarding new build and major application.