

# **GREATER CARLOW GRAIGUECULLEN URBAN AREA**

## **RETAIL STRATEGY 2012 TO 2018**

**Carlow County Council  
Laois County Council  
&  
Carlow Town Council**

**2012**

**URBTOWNPLANNING**



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## INTRODUCTION

Carlow County Council, Carlow Town Council and Laois County Council have prepared a Joint Spatial Plan for the Greater Carlow Graiguecullen Urban Area 2012 -2018. An Issues paper was published in April 2011 which sought comment from stakeholders and public alike on the key issues and challenges for the area. This Retail Strategy has been prepared to review and update the 2009 County Carlow Retail Strategy and informed the preparation of the new Joint Spatial Plan.

The requirement to undertake a retail strategy derives from the Retail Planning Guidelines 2005. These 2005 Guidelines are currently under review, and the Draft Retail Planning Guidelines 2011 direct at para. 1.2 that *“Pending finalisation of the draft Guidelines, planning authorities should take account of the principles and practices outlined herein both, in their forward planning and development management policies and practice, and in particular should begin to apply the revised retail caps.”*

However, with regard to joint or multi-authority retail strategy preparation, it advises that prior to adoption of the new Guidelines, Planning Authorities shall revert to the established 2005 Guidelines for the purposes of plan preparation

The preparation of this Retail Strategy is guided by Section 46 of the Retail Planning Guidelines 2005 which directs that for this area it is necessary to provide a *general statement of strategic intentions and future policy.*

Section 42<sup>1</sup> of the Guidelines clarifies that *“The strategy to be incorporated into development plans should provide guidance as to the general location .....of new development. In order to achieve greater certainty, it will be necessary to provide a broad indication of the general scale of development envisaged at various locations as well as the precise boundaries of the core retail area of the town centres.”*

Paragraph 47<sup>2</sup> directs that the retail strategy should provide *“A broad assessment of requirements for additional development reflecting the local evidence of market interest and the need to provide good opportunities for retail provision to serve the main population centres in the county ought to be sufficient in order to formulate appropriate policies and criteria for dealing with new development proposals”.*

Annex III of the Retail Guidelines sets out those issues which should be addressed by cross-boundary retail strategies. It highlights that planning authorities should assess the following matters relating to the requirement to assess market demand and the need for additional retail development:

- a. Existing retail floorspace.
- b. Assessment of demand.
- c. Assessment of the need for additional development.

This Retail Strategy has been prepared against a very different context to its predecessors. While former strategies faced the challenge of how to manage and direct rapid economic and demographic growth, this strategy is set against a backdrop of recession, population stabilisation, and fiscal

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<sup>1</sup> Section 4.5 of Draft Retail Planning Guidelines 2011 confirms this statement

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

conservatism. It also has the advantage of reviewing the impacts and consequences of previous strategies and what has transpired for retail in the town, and planning overall.

The new Joint Spatial Plan seeks to provide a detailed framework for the management and regulation of spatial development and use of land. Its goal is to retain the unique and special character of the Greater Urban Area, while also fostering positive change and good development. It is concerned with steering development so that it contributes positively to social, economic and environmental well-being, prioritising changes that are needed and identifying opportunities to enhance the Greater Carlow Graiguecullen Urban Area and the available quality of life.

The Joint Spatial Plan is a wide-ranging strategic policy statement dealing with issues such as population and settlement patterns, economic and employment trends, retail, commercial and industrial development; education, healthcare and community facilities; environmental management and heritage protection, infrastructure including transportation, energy and communications; waste water treatment and water supply.

The Retail Strategy for Carlow seeks to promote and encourage new retail development in Carlow. The Strategy sets out policies intended to guide new retail development to the right location, depending on the size and scale and nature of the retail development.

In line with national guidelines on Retail Policy there is a strong emphasis on new retail development being located in town centres, with other locations to be considered by way of the 'Sequential Test', to see if the proposed location of the development is appropriate for new retail development.

## OVERALL OBJECTIVES

This 2012 Retail Strategy has been prepared in accordance with Paragraph 36 of the Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2005<sup>3</sup>. The RPG state that the following items should be included in all future development plans:

- I. 'Confirmation of the retail hierarchy, the role of centres and the size of the main town centres.*
- II. Definition in the Development Plan of the boundaries of the core shopping area of town centres.*
- III. A broad assessment of the requirement for additional retail floorspace.*
- IV. Strategic guidance on the location and scale of retail development.*
- V. Preparation of policies and action initiatives to encourage the improvement of town centres.*
- VI. Identification of criteria for the assessment of retail developments.'*

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<sup>3</sup> This paragraph is broadly similar to Table 4.2 of the Draft Retail Planning Guidelines 2011. Item 2) of table 4.2 states "Definition of core retail areas of town centres as distinct from the historical centres of cities and towns". Item 5) refers to "Active Land Management policies and initiatives to encourage appropriate redevelopment and improvement of city/town centres"

## 2. POLICY CONTEXT

This section examines how the Greater Carlow Graiguecullen Urban Area is expected to perform in terms of development, settlement growth and retail provision within the strategic and statutory policy documents at the national, regional, county and sub-county levels. This policy context is set out in the paragraphs that follow.

### NATIONAL POLICY REVIEW

There are a number of national policy documents which provide the framework for the strategic development of the country at a national level. This section outlines the relevant national planning and retail policies which will influence the preparation of the 2009 Draft Retail Strategy. The relevant policy documents include:

- Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2005
- Draft Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2011
- National Spatial Strategy 2002 - 2020
- National Development Plan 2007 - 2013.

### Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2005

The RPG issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, provide the principal statutory framework for retail planning guidance in the State. Local authorities and An Bord Pleanála must have regard to these guidelines when determining relevant planning applications. The RPG provide a comprehensive framework to guide local authorities in the preparation of development plans and the assessment of applications for planning permission. In addition, they seek to assist retailers and developers in formulating development proposals. It is upon this guidance that the regional and local retail policies are based.

Paragraphs 21 to 26 of the RPG advocate five key policy objectives, in order to establish the best location for retail development, enabling it to be accessible to all sections of society, while ensuring the continued prosperity of existing centres with retail activity. Each carry equal weight and can be summarised as follows.

- The first objective outlines that all development plans should incorporate clear policies and proposals for retail development
- The second objective states that a competitive and healthy environment for the retail industry should be facilitated
- The third objective promotes development which is easily accessible, particularly by public transport, in locations which encourage multipurpose shopping, business and leisure trips
- The fourth objective supports the continuing role of town and district centres
- The final objective supports a presumption against large retail centres located adjacent or close to existing, new or planned national roads/motorways as such centres lead to an inefficient use of costly and valuable infrastructure.

Other elements of the RPG which should be highlighted for the benefit of the Retail Strategy are contained in the paragraphs that that follow:

## Retail Hierarchy

The RPG introduced a four tier retail hierarchy for the country, classifying areas of urban development depending on their importance as retailing settlements. Dublin represents the highest tier, Tier 1, which reflects its unrivalled nature, quality, diversity and scale of retail offer, both with its national and international catchment. It is stated in Paragraph 5 of the RPG that below Dublin *'there are no clearly defined cut-off points between levels of the hierarchy'*. Centres at the lower levels in the hierarchy should seek to fulfil their function and support the role of Dublin City. The regional capitals of Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford represent Tier 2. Together with Dublin, these centres provide a range of high-order comparison shopping which is largely unmatched elsewhere.

In relation to the third tier of towns, there are two levels. Level 1 of Tier 3 *'cannot be precisely defined'* however the RPG state that some of these towns are attaining functions previously found only in higher order centres. Carlow is identified as a Level 1 Tier 3 centre together with Athlone, Castlebar, Clonmel, Drogheda, Dundalk, Ennis, Kilkenny, Letterkenny, Monaghan, Mullingar, Newbridge, Portlaoise, Tralee, Tullamore and Wexford.

## Sequential Approach

The fourth objective of the RPG as set out in Paragraph 25 promotes that the continuing role of town and district centres be supported. It is considered that this objective is best achieved by giving priority to sites within a town centre (or district or major village centre) with the next preference to edge of town centres consistent with the requirement to achieving good access especially by public transport and further stating that only where there are no sites, or potential sites, within a town centre or on its edge, should out of centre development be considered. The main objective of the RPG is to maintain the vitality and viability of existing city, town and district centres which provide a broad range of facilities and services and which fulfil a function for the community within close proximity to public transport.

**Convenience Floorspace Caps:** The RPG confirm the large convenience store floorspace cap as 3,000 sq.m net sales area. They continue that the caps should apply to new development or extensions to existing stores which would result in an aggregate increase in sales floorspace. The RPG do state however that where necessary local authorities can introduce a downward revision to this floorspace cap in appropriate circumstances.

**Assessment Criteria:** The RPG recognise that some large scale retail proposals could have an adverse impact on the vitality and viability of a town centre where Annex I states that the term *'town centre'* is used to cover city, town and district centres. To ensure that proposals do not have an adverse impact the RPG provide a set of criteria against which new retail developments should be assessed. These criteria are provided in Paragraph 65 of the RPG which states.

*'In making an application for planning permission for retail development which local authorities consider to be large scale in relation to existing town centres, the onus is on the applicant to demonstrate compliance with the development plan and that there will not be a material adverse impact on the vitality and viability of any existing town centre. In submitting evidence in relation to retail impact the applicant shall address the following criteria and demonstrate whether or not the proposal would:*

- *Support the long term strategy for town centres as established in the development plan and not materially diminish the prospect of*
- *attracting private sector investment into one or more town centres.*

- *Cause an adverse impact on one or more town centres, either singly or cumulatively with recent developments or other outstanding planning permissions, sufficient to undermine the quality of the centre or its role in the economic and social life of the community.*
- *Diminish the range of activities and services that a town centre can support.*
- *Cause an increase in the number of vacant properties in the primary retail area that is likely to persist in the long term.*
- *Ensure a high standard of access both by public transport, foot*
- *and private car so that the proposal is easily accessible by all sections of society.*
- *Link effectively with an existing town centre so that there is likely to be commercial synergy.’* (paragraph 65)

It is upon these criteria that the assessment criteria within the 2009 Retail Strategy were based.

The Greater Carlow Graiguecullen Urban Area, or indeed County Carlow are not identified as an area requiring a detailed retail strategy. Nevertheless this Retail Strategy has had regard to the guidance provided in Paragraph 36 of the RPG which states that the following matters are to be included in all future development plans for counties and cities:

- i. *‘Confirmation of the retail hierarchy, the role of centres and the size of the main town centres.*
- ii. *Definition in the development plan of the boundaries of the core shopping area of town centres.*
- iii. *A broad assessment of the requirement for additional retail floorspace.*
- iv. *Strategic guidance on the location and scale of retail development.*
- v. *Preparation of policies and action initiatives to encourage the improvement of town centres.*
- vi. *Identification of criteria for the assessment of retail developments’.* (paragraph 36)

With regard to general strategies Paragraph 47 of the RPG also states that:

*‘In addressing items (iii) and (iv) it should not be necessary to estimate in any detail the future requirement for additional development. A broad assessment of requirements for additional development reflecting the local evidence of market interest and the need to provide good opportunities for retail provision to serve the main population centres in the county ought to be sufficient in order to formulate appropriate policies and criteria for dealing with new development proposals.’* (paragraph 47)

The Retail Strategy has had regard to the matters outlined above in determining the retail hierarchy, the core retail area, the distribution of new retail development and the preparation of specific policies and proposals for the Greater Carlow Graiguecullen Urban Area.

### **Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2011**

Para. 1.2 of the Draft Retail Guidelines states that “Pending finalisation of the draft Guidelines, planning authorities should take account of the principles and practices outlined herein both, in their forward planning and development management policies and practice, and in particular should begin to apply the revised retail caps.”

The Draft Guidelines note that the Retail Hierarchy reflects the settlement pattern of the State, including the various Gateway and Hub town locations identified in the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) 2002-2020.

At a Sub-Regional level it states; “Beyond the Dublin and regional retailing destinations other important towns such as Arklow, Athy, **Carlow**, Dungarvan, Enniscorthy, Longford, Midleton, Naas, Navan, Nenagh, New Ross, Swords and Thurles perform important sub-regional retailing functions including the major national retailing chains”

The convenience retail floorspace cap of 3,000 sq.m. is maintained for those areas outside of the four Dublin local authority areas, and the cities of Cork, Limerick/Shannon, Galway and Waterford, and the retail warehouse floorspace cap is maintained at 6,000 sq.m. The petrol filling station shops floorspace cap is maintained at 100 square metres irrespective of location.

Other noted policies included at section 1.7 are:

- When the issue of trade diversion is being considered in the assessment of a proposed retail development, planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála should assess the likelihood of any adverse impacts on the vitality and viability of the city or town centre as a whole, and not on existing traders.
- Planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála should balance quantitative estimates of future demand for retail floorspace, when assessing applications for new or expanded retail development with considerations in regard to vibrancy, choice, vitality and other qualitative issues.
- No distinction is being made in the draft Retail Guidelines between retailers based on their pricing policies. The distinction therefore between ‘discount stores’ and other convenience goods stores will no longer apply.

The new Draft Retail Guidelines advocate a ‘Plan-led Retail Policy Framework’ at Chapter 3 outlining the following national policy objectives

1. Retail development should be plan-led, including the identification of retail requirements and appropriate planning policies and objectives, and the implementation of city and town centre management strategies aimed at securing development plan objectives.
2. The planning system should focus on promoting and supporting the vitality and viability of city and town centres in facilitating the requirements of the retail sector.
3. The planning system should play a key role in ensuring competitiveness in the retail sector, particularly through city / town centre management strategies and active land management approaches aimed at new market entrants, encouraging necessary development in suitable locations, and advancing choice of retail outlets for the consumer.
4. The planning system should promote forms of retail development that in themselves will encourage greater use of sustainable transport modes including public transport, cycling and walking in accordance with the Smarter Travel strategy.
5. Retail development has a key role in delivering quality in the built environment by contributing to a high standard of urban design.

The fifth national policy objective ‘Retail Development and Urban Design’ (section 3.7) highlights that the realisation of quality urban environments that counteract suburban trends is an integral part of retail planning:

*Planning authorities should promote quality design in their development plan and/or retail strategies and then implement this through the development management process. This is of particular importance for retail development because of the dominant visual and use role it plays in a city, town or village streetscape.*

### **National Spatial Strategy 2002 - 2020 (NSS)**

The NSS represents a twenty-year planning framework designed to deliver a more balanced social, economic and physical development between regions. The need for the NSS was formally recognised by the Government with the publication of the 2000-2006 National Development Plan (2000 NDP) which stated:

Under the NSS, the settlement hierarchy encourages future development and growth within Gateways as regional cities, Hubs as regional towns and large and medium sized towns as suitable locations within rural areas. Carlow is identified as a County Town in the South East Region.

The South East Region encompasses counties Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary South, Waterford and Wexford. The NSS states that the Region will be enhanced with Waterford performing as a Gateway, supported by Kilkenny and Wexford as Hubs. It also stipulates that these three together will form a nationally strategic '*growth triangle*'. Furthermore, the NSS determines that:

*'Waterford, Kilkenny and Wexford will drive regional growth by providing a large and skilled population base, substantial capacity for additional residential and employment related functions and an improving transport network'. (pg 83)*

The NSS anticipates that the County Towns will provide a supporting role for economic development throughout the Region, by complementing the Gateway and Hub approach.

Carlow Town is identified as a '*County Town*' within the South East Region. The role of the County Town is to support and complement the roles of Kilkenny and Wexford as the Hubs and Waterford as a Gateway within the Region. It is indicated that the County Towns provide good bases for population and services which will attract investment and employment activities additional to those that need to be located in or near a gateway. The NSS states that there are development opportunities for Carlow between Kilkenny and Dublin. It is also noteworthy that Carlow is strategically located on the intersection of two National Transport Corridors linking Wexford with Athlone and Waterford with Dublin.

The NSS also recognises that in the southern and eastern parts of the Midlands adjacent to the GDA that there are a number of '*strong county towns that are experiencing extensive commuter-based development e.g. Portlaoise and Carlow.*' (pg 44) It further stipulates that '*these towns must be developed in terms of their economic self-sufficiency to minimise the need for commuting and support the development of surrounding areas.*' (pg 44) To do this, the NSS states that Carlow needs to sustain a good employment base and a wide range of shopping facilities and social infrastructure. These requirements have been considered as part of the assessment with respect to the need for future retail development in the Greater Carlow Graiguecullen urban area.

### **National Development Plan 2007-2013**

The 2007 NDP is a strategic investment framework for the delivery and implementation of a programme of infrastructure projects. It integrates strategic development frameworks for regional development, rural communities, all-island co-operation and protection of the environment with common economic and social goals. One of the key aims of the 2007 NDP is to tackle economic and social infrastructure deficits in areas such as transport, energy, housing, water, education and health. The provision of infrastructure is based on an examination of population projections founded on Census 2002 data which may have implications on the future provision of infrastructure in the region in the short term.

The 2007 NDP regards Waterford as the principal city within the South East Region. Its strengths are considered to include its strategic location, proximity to a major national port, being a compact city with high quality urban fabric and estuarine setting, an educational centre of excellence and a fast developing retail and local services sector. Key development and investment priorities under the 2007 NDP included:

- Completion by 2010 of the M/N9 Dublin-Waterford road and N25 bypass;
- Enhanced intercity rail services between Waterford and Dublin;
- Development of industry/Institute of Technology linkages within the South East Region.
- Designation of Carlow Town to accommodate sections of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment as part of the Decentralisation Sub Programme under the Government Infrastructure Programme.

## REGIONAL POLICY REVIEW

The regional authorities were established to implement the NSS at regional level. While Carlow is located within the South East Region, it is also highlighted that parts of the town's environs are within the jurisdiction of County Laois and are located in the Midlands Region. As a result, this policy context examines the regional planning guidelines prepared for each of the two regions in terms of planning and development and, in particular, retail planning and the implications on Carlow.

### Regional Planning Guidelines for the South-East 2010 - 2022 (SERPG)

The South-East Regional Authority is a statutory authority comprising of the following Local Authorities: Carlow, Kilkenny, South Tipperary, Waterford, Waterford City and Wexford. The Regional Planning Guidelines provide a strategic planning framework for the South-East Region with the objective of implementing the National Spatial Strategy at regional level and achieving balanced regional development. The RPGs incorporate high level policies which inform and advise local authorities in the preparation and review of their respective Development Plans, thus providing clear integration of planning and development policy from national to regional to local level.

Under the heading of "Strategic Vision" it states that

*By 2022 the South-East will be recognised as a distinct and cohesive region that is prosperous and competitive, where the benefits of economic success are shared equitably throughout the region and throughout society and which offers a good quality of life in an environment rich in heritage and landscape value.*

Of the various measures cited to realize this goal, the following is referred to:

*Combining the strengths of the cities and towns in the region to achieve sufficient critical mass to compete with larger urban centres in other regions.*

The SERPG includes the following Strategic Goals:

- B.** *To support the development of the Gateway and combine the strengths of the cities and towns in the region, as envisaged in the National Spatial Strategy, to achieve sufficient critical mass to compete with larger urban centres in other regions by:*
- B1** *Planning for a sustainable regional population of 580,500 by the year 2022.*

- B2** Supporting the development and growth of the Waterford City Gateway as the Driver for the region.
- B3** Planning and providing for population growth in each of the two Hubs of Wexford and Kilkenny and the County Towns of Carlow, Clonmel and Dungarvan.
- B4** Developing the main urban settlements as attractive places for people to live in and want to move to, where efficient public transport and quality public services and a high quality environment make them attractive places to live, to work in and do business in. This is the key to building critical mass and achieving population targets.
- B5** Promoting strategies to prioritise urban regeneration in order to improve and revitalise cities, towns and neighbourhoods and support local economies.
- B6** Ensuring the availability and affordability of housing in cities, towns and villages, supported by clear rural settlement strategies, to achieve critical mass and a strong, competitive urban network.

At section 3.5, the SERPG refers to Hubs and County Towns. It specifically refers to ‘Hub’ towns and ‘County’ towns, such as Carlow in an equivalent approach:

*Kilkenny City and Wexford Town have been designated in the National Spatial Strategy as Hubs. They are strategic urban centres that support and are supported by the Gateway and reach out to wider rural areas of the region that the RPGs are targeting for significant levels of growth. In addition, the County Towns are recognised as critical elements in the structure for realising balanced regional development, acting as a focus for strengthening their own areas.*

*The National Spatial Strategy suggests that Hubs with populations in excess of 10,000 persons would need to grow to a population of 30,000 persons or more in the years to 2020 and beyond. The two Hubs in the South-East, Kilkenny and Wexford, fall into this category.*

*Targeted investment in transport links and other socio-economic infrastructure such as water services, third-level education and serviced business locations will be required to facilitate the achievement of critical mass at the two hubs of Kilkenny and Wexford. Critical mass will only be achieved if populations of 30,000 or more are realised.*

*Local authorities, government departments and semi-state agencies are encouraged to focus their activities and investment decisions in such a manner as to accomplish these targets. Also, the County Towns have significant potential for growth and development and are critical to the achievement of critical mass and balanced development across the region. In the case of Kilkenny, Wexford, Carlow, Clonmel and Dungarvan, there are Borough and Town Councils with responsibility for planning policy in the centre with County Councils responsible for the environs.*

Under the heading of Retail, the SERPG states at section 4.7.1 City/Town Centre Development:

*People are often attracted to cities and larger towns, where there is a vibrant social and cultural life, coupled with broad employment opportunities and a wide range of services including education, healthcare and childcare facilities, transport systems and ready access to entertainment and amenity facilities. The elements that contribute to the attractiveness of such places include:*

- *a thriving, human-scale, cultural and social environment, concentrated around distinctive street patterns mixes of restaurants, cafés, bars and attractive shops;*

- a high quality physical setting in terms of sensitive conservation of structures of architectural heritage merit, contemporary architecture, street paving, formal and high quality public spaces and parks;
- pedestrian-friendly zones.

*If balanced regional development is to work, the spatial structure must be supported by policies aimed at enhancing the attractiveness of areas for people to ensure that there is a combination of social and cultural facilities for both people and business.*

### **Midlands Regional Authority Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 – 2022 (MRPG)**

The Graiguecullen part of the strategy area is located in County Laois, and as such falls under the influence of Midland Region which also comprises the counties of Longford, Offaly and Westmeath.

Section 4.8 of RPG, ‘Joint Local Area Plans’ refers to Carlow/Graiguecullen as one of Three settlements that have been identified in the Midland Region as requiring a joined up planning approach.

It further notes (p.79) that *“Graiguecullen is located in the extreme southern tip of the SDA and is heavily linked and connected to Carlow and the adjacent South East Region for the majority of its services. In the case of the preparation of any plans for Graiguecullen, these RPGs support and acknowledge the necessary cooperation required between not only the Local Authorities (Carlow and Laois) and other relevant agencies and bodies but also the Regional Authorities concerned. These RPGs recommend that a Joint Local Area Plan for Carlow and its Environs, including Graiguecullen, be prepared with the respective elements in each planning authority being adopted by the respective councils.”*

Under Policy SDA P4 it is the policy of the RPG to:

*Support the preparation of Joint Local Area Plans amongst the relevant Local Authorities to provide a planning framework for the future physical, economic and social development of Carlow/Graiguecullen.*

### **COUNTY POLICY REVIEW**

There are a number of adopted plans and strategies which influence the development of the County. These planning frameworks are listed below and the relevant policies outlined in the paragraphs that follow:

- Carlow Local Authorities Retail Strategy 2009
- Carlow Town Development Plan 2009 - 2015
- Carlow Town Environs Local Area Plan 2008 - 2014
- Carlow County Development Plan 2009 - 2015
- Graiguecullen Local Area Plan 2007-2013
- Laois County Development Plan 2011 – 2017
- Laois County Retail Strategy 2011 - 2017

### **Carlow Town Development 2009 – 2015 (Town Plan)**

The 2009 Town Plan seeks to develop Carlow as a centre of excellence for creativity in all sectors whilst ensuring the continued protection and enhancement of the town’s built and natural heritage, develop and promote its cultural, artistic and education/research base together with promotion of all

sectors of the local economy. This will ensure that the town will be a vibrant and attractive place for people to visit, work and living in as it fulfils its role as a regional centre for the South East Region and beyond. Key principles of the Development Strategy for Carlow include:

- Promoting the sustainable development of the town so as to enable it to fulfil its role as a regional centre within the South East Region.
- Providing the highest quality living environment possible to all the citizens of Carlow
- Guiding the location and pattern of development whilst ensuring that a relatively compact form is maintained.
- Creating a more permeable connected and linked town that encourages new pedestrian routes in the town centre and new links between adjoining areas and suburbs.
- Making Carlow a fully accessible town with ease of movement for all along roads and footpaths.
- Promoting balanced and sustainable economic development and employment by ensuring that a diverse range of economic sectors are developed.
- Supporting the enhancement and further development of Carlow as a national centre for third level education and research.
- Developing an integrated transport strategy for the town and environs linked to land use objectives, which facilitates access to a range of transport modes.
- Protecting, conserving and enhancing the built and natural heritage of Carlow Town for future generations.
- Promoting the regeneration of the town centre, in particular identified key sites/opportunities for development in the town and to protect and promote the town centre as the commercial and cultural focus for Carlow and beyond.
- Promoting high quality architectural design in all new buildings in the town – commercial, public buildings and residential with energy efficiency designed into all new buildings.

It is the mission of the Council to work in partnership with the people of Carlow and relevant agencies to deliver quality services and to promote sustainable development. The development strategy proposed is designed to reinforce the town centre as a place for working, shopping, educating and living.

### **Carlow Town Environs Local Area Plan 2008 - 2014 (LAP)**

The LAP details future land uses and development objectives for areas surrounding Carlow Town in response to *'definite development pressures'*. This requires the area to be planned in an effective, sustainable manner to meet the future needs of the town. The LAP recognises that both the Town Council and County Council need to promote investor confidence in the town. Therefore it is acknowledged that a clear vision is needed *'that incorporates the physical, environmental, social, economic, community and cultural aspects of the town's development into the environs area.'*

In relation to future retail requirements, the LAP acknowledges that Carlow Town has an extensive retail catchment area which extends to parts of counties Kilkenny, Laois, Kildare and Wicklow. It also recognises that the core trading area of Carlow Town has migrated eastwards over recent years serving the wider catchment area of the Environs to the east. The LAP specifies that there are limited retail facilities located within the Environs Area and that newly developed residential estates generally have to obtain all retail services (particularly higher order retail services) from Carlow Town centre. The LAP states that due to the limited availability of public transport, and the distance that customers must travel, unnecessary vehicular traffic is being generated.

In respect of retail provision it is stated in the LAP that recent studies of the town suggest *'that sufficient retail demands exist within the plan area to justify the creation of additional retail space'*. Therefore it is considered in the LAP that additional retail space can to be provided within the Environs Area to meet local demands. However the LAP states that new retail developments *'will have to be of an appropriate scale and location so as to ensure that such retail space provides for local needs, does not detract from the town centre facilities and links effectively with the existing town centre so that there may be commercial synergy.'*

The LAP further states that the established retail core of Carlow Town must be maintained and promoted as the main retail centre in the immediate catchment area and that local retailing will be promoted in all smaller centres at central focal points where there is existing car parking available. It is specified that these areas will generally cater for neighbourhood provision. The LAP also specifies that future retail provision should have regard to the application of the *'sequential test'* in the identification of retail locations. Only local and neighbourhood retailing is encouraged in the LAP through the planning application process.

### **Carlow County Development Plan 2009-2015**

The County Plan Strategy seeks to develop the County through the promotion of sustainable economic, social and cultural development, taking advantage of its strategic regional location in the South East Region and the recognition of Carlow as a strong base for employment, education and research. The strategy also supports the development of cohesive communities in the towns and villages and rural areas and promote a high quality environment and amenities. It is recognised in the strategy that Carlow is a destination for many visitors and tourists who enjoy the natural amenities, heritage and cultural life of the county.

To implement this strategy the County Plan includes objectives and goals which relate to:

- Prompting the highest quality living environments possible, in both urban and rural area to all the citizens of Carlow.
- Sustaining rural communities, by supporting agricultural, and other rural based economic activity and promoting balanced development of rural settlements.
- Providing for a sustainable spatial development strategy (Settlement Strategy) to guide the location of development within the county.
- Promoting balanced and sustainable economic development and employment by ensuring that a diverse range of economic sectors are developed.
- Promoting and supporting the provision of improved public transport.
- Promoting the provision of local based series throughout the County, such as post offices.

The proposed settlement hierarchy as set out in the proposed plan designates Carlow as the Primary Centre.

### **Laois County Development Plan 2011-2017**

Appendix 4 of the Laois County Development Plan comprises of the Laois County Retail Strategy 2011-2017. Section 4.9 of the document specifically refers to Graiguecullen – Carlow Environs.

It notes that historically development in Graiguecullen located around Chapel Street and Chaff Street, and significant development in recent years in terms of both housing and retail warehousing, assisted by major road construction including the northern relief road. Reference is made to the Shamrock Business Park and Sleatygraigue Retail Park (Carlow Business Park). It considers the area is highly accessible by road and public transport.

In the Laois County Development Plan, retail development is subject to the spatial context for different types and quantum of retail development set down in the Retail Strategy.

Retail development is an importance component of economic development in the County, as stated above. The Council has prepared a Retail Strategy 2011-2017 to coincide with the review of the County Development Plan 2011-2017 which sets out retail trends to date, the Council's objectives and detailed policy in relation to retail development in the County for the next Plan period .There are significant opportunities for the development of further comparison shopping and retail warehousing in County Laois. Retail development is also essential in relation to community sustainability. One of the essential elements of the Retail Planning Guidelines 2005 is the retention and enhancement of the vitality and vibrancy of the town centre cores.

**Within Table 16 County Retail Hierarchy, Graiguecullen, Co Laois is indicated as a District Centre with the following**

District Centre	Graiguecullen	Develop joint and mutually beneficial retail policies with Carlow County Council	Southern Area Service Town Graiguecullen
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### **Laois County Retail Strategy 2011-2017**

The Laois County Retail Strategy 2011-2017 sets out the general strategic retail intentions and future retail land use policies of Laois County Council for the period of the current County Development Plan [2006-2012] and beyond to 2017. It reviews and updates the findings of the previous [2003] Retail Strategy which was carried out in the form of a variation to the then County Development Plan and follows on from the conclusions of the review of that strategy dating from 2006.

In summary, the Strategy consists of four main elements:

- *firstly it presents an overview of all relevant baseline information as well as the statutory and strategic context governing retailing in County Laois,*
- *secondly, it examines the state of existing retailing provision throughout the county,*
- *thirdly, it quantifies how this level of provision is likely to change over the coming years and the demographic, expenditure and turnover context to such change,*
- *fourthly, it offers recommendations as to how this local authority can best deal with and manage the evolving retail environment in the interests of the proper planning and sustainable development of County Laois.*

Principally, there has been an estimated **45%** increase in the amount of net retail floorspace in County Laois since 2002. Moreover, if approved planning applications from 2006 onwards are included, there is the potential for a further **62%** increase in the retail quantum of the county. These statistics are **exclusive** of retail warehousing which has also witnessed substantial floorspace expansion especially in Portlaoise and Carlow Environs where it has been the predominant form of recent retail activity.

### **Graiguecullen Local Area Plan 2007 - 2013**

The LAP for Graiguecullen notes at section 2.10 that on the basis of very high population growth in recent years, the Council [Laois] has designated Graiguecullen as a District Centre in the County's Retail Hierarchy in the County Development Plan 2006-2012. The County Development Plan also states that it is the Councils policy to identify and zone, in Local Area Plans, appropriate locations for

new district and neighbourhood centres within large residential areas and where large scale residential development is planned.

The LAP identifies the area at Sleaty Road/Northern Relief Road (under a General Business Zoning) as a District Centre. There are also two neighbourhood centres identified in the plan area, shown on Objectives Map 3.3, on the Castlecomer Road and Crossneen, which shall provide retail facilities the scale of which will be determined having regard to the retail study submitted in support of any future proposal.

It is the policy of Laois County Council under policy 2.10.2 Retail/ Commercial that all applications for large retail development will be examined in the context of the Laois Retail Strategy 2003 and any subsequent revisions, and the Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2005 and Carlow Retail Strategy; to encourage and facilitate the development of the new district and neighbourhood centres in performing an important retail function for the local community subject to the protection of the residents amenities of the surrounding area.

## CONCLUSIONS

The review of the suite of policy documents has indicated that Carlow is influenced at strategic, national, regional and local level by a number of objectives and policies. These objectives influence the spatial and physical planning of Carlow Town and County. The most influential policy document is the RPG, which provides national guidance on the retail hierarchy. This hierarchy has been incorporated into regional, county and local area plans within and around Carlow. The designation of Carlow as a Town in Level 1 of Tier 3 in the RPG has been replicated down through the SERPG, Carlow County Plan, Carlow Town Plan and the numerous local area plans prepared within County Carlow.

This designation confirms Carlow as a County Town within the South East Region after the Gateways and Hubs, with strong links to the Midlands Region and the GDA, strong population growth, an important education function, large employment base and beneficiary of major infrastructural investment. The recent growth in retail developments confirms this status, and which informed the preparation of the 2012 Retail Strategy.

In addition to issues of hierarchy, it is also important to have due regard to the policy themes being developed at national and regional level. There is a strong emphasis on sustainable development, encapsulated in the SERPG as *developing the main urban settlements as attractive places for people to live in and want to move to, where efficient public transport and quality public services and a high quality environment make them attractive places to live, to work in and do business in.*

This is reflected in the new Draft Retail Planning Guidelines where the 5 national policy objectives highlight the implementation of city and town centre management strategies aimed at securing development plan objectives, supporting the vitality and viability of town centres in facilitating the requirements of the retail sector, ensuring competitiveness, sustainable transport modes and delivering quality in the built environment by contributing to a high standard of urban design.

## 3. POPULATION TRENDS AND FORECASTS

This section examines national, regional and county trends in terms of existing population growth, distribution of population and influence of policy documents on future population estimates for the County. This analysis of population informs the *'broad assessment of the requirement for additional*

*retail floorspace* within the 2012 Retail Strategy for the period of the emerging development plan as advocated for general retail strategies by the RPG.

This examination of existing trends focuses on the key characteristics of the demographic, such as population growth and the spatial distribution of the resident population at the national, regional, county and sub-county levels.

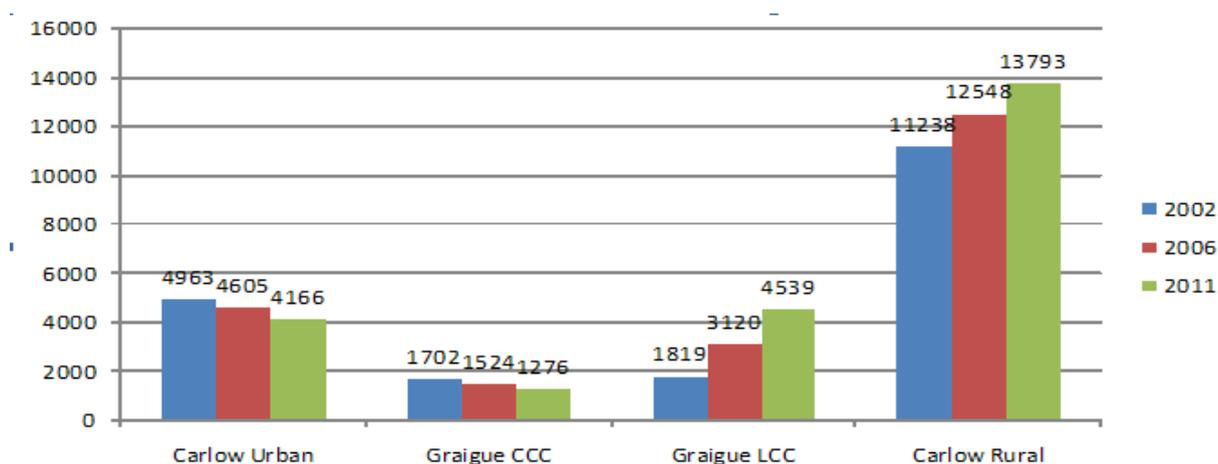
### Population Trends

It is estimated that the current population (2011 Census) of the Greater Carlow Graiguecullen Urban Area is 22,585. It is evident that the population of this area has doubled in the space of 15 years, and that the majority of population growth in the County has been concentrated in this area. Also, the proportion of County Carlow's population residing within the Greater Carlow Graiguecullen Urban Area also continues to increase, with growth of 8.9% in the last inter-censal period.

The distribution of the population within the Greater Urban Area is increasingly dispersed, with the population of inner-urban electoral divisions (Graigue Carlow, Carlow Urban) actually declining and exhibiting an older age profile.

**Table 3.1 Population Growth in Greater Carlow Graiguecullen Urban Area 1996 to 2011**

Census Period	Greater Carlow Graiguecullen Urban Area	Carlow County	Proportion of County Carlow Population Residing in the Greater Urban Area
2002	18,487	46,014	40%
2006	20,724	50,339	41%
2011	(preliminary) 22,585	54,532	41.4%



### National Level

Figures published in the 2011 Census indicate that the population of the State grew from 4,239,848 to 4,581,269 persons between 2006 and 2011, representing an increase of 8.05%. This was a similar

increase to that recorded in the inter-censal period of 1996-2002 where the population rose by 8.2%. Table 3.2 illustrates that the growth of the South East Region is slower than national growth rates at 7.9% between 2006 – 2011.

### **Regional Level**

An overview of population trends for Carlow together with other counties in the South East Region between 1996 and 2011 are provided in Table 3.2. Trends for the State and South East Region are also included for comparative purposes.

**Table 3.2: Population Growth Trends 1996 to 2011**

Area	1996	2002	2006	2011	1996–02	2002–06	2006-11
<b>Wexford</b>	104,371	116,596	131,749	145,273	11.70%	13.00%	10.26
<b>Carlow</b>	41,616	46,014	50,349	54,532	10.60%	9.40%	8.31
<b>Kilkenny</b>	75,336	80,339	87,558	95,360	6.60%	9.00%	8.91
<b>Tipperary South</b>	75,514	79,121	83,221	88,433	4.80%	5.20%	6.26
<b>Waterford</b>	94680	101546	107961	113,707	7.30%	6.30%	5.32
<b>South East</b>	391,517	423,616	460,838	497,305	8.20%	8.80%	7.91
<b>State</b>	3,626,08	3,917,203	4,239,848	4,581,269	8.00%	8.20%	8.05

**Source:** Census 2011

The population of County Carlow increased by 8.3% during the period 2006-2011 which was slightly higher than the State (8.05%) and the South East Region (7.9%) in the same period. However this was lower in percentage from that registered in the previous inter-censal period where there was a 9.4% increase, and 10.6% before that.

### **Future Population Estimates**

#### **Policy Influences**

The future population of the County will be informed by the following range of population data sources which include:

- Census of Population 2002, 2006 and 2011
- Regional Planning Guidelines for the South East Region 2010 - 2022
- Regional Population Targets
- National Population Targets and National Spatial Strategy

The South East Regional Authority included population targets in Table 3.1 of the SERPG 2010 – 2022 (Table 3.3 below). The proposed possible allocation of the regional population targets based on the revised national and regional projections are provided below:

**Table 3.3 SERPG Population Targets**

<b>TABLE 3.1 SOUTH-EAST REGION POPULATION TARGETS 2010-2022</b>				
<b>LOCAL AUTHORITY AREA</b>	2006	2010	2016	2022
WATERFORD CITY	45,748	48,500	51,000	55,000
KILKENNY	87,558	96,872	105,598	111,903
WEXFORD	131,749	146,139	156,065	166,083
CARLOW	50,349	56,155	59,451	63,536
SOUTH TIPPERARY	83,221	91,302	96,863	104,483
WATERFORD COUNTY	62,213	68,932	73,223	79,495
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>460,838</b>	<b>507,900</b>	<b>542,200</b>	<b>580,500</b>

<b>TABLE 3.2 SOUTH-EAST REGION POPULATION TARGETS 2010 - 2022</b>				
<b>MAIN SETTLEMENTS</b>	2006	2010	2016	2022
WATERFORD CITY & ENVIRONS	49,213	52,500	56,500	62,500
KILKENNY CITY	22,179	24,000	25,800	28,200
WEXFORD TOWN	18,163	21,000	23,500	26,700
CARLOW TOWN	20,724	22,126	23,768	25,000
CLONMEL	17,008	20,750	23,000	25,000
DUNGARVAN	8,362	10,000	11,600	13,400

**Source:** Regional Planning Guidelines for the South East Region 2010-2022

The SERPG projects continued strong population growth up to 2016 of 5% and 5% again up to 2022 with an additional 2,415 persons projected to settle in the area.

### **Housing Land Requirement for the Greater Carlow Graiguecullen Urban Area**

The South East Regional Planning Guidelines Population targets for Carlow Town have been amended in light of discrepancy between the original Regional Planning Guidelines baseline figure and population figures in the 2011 preliminary census results (difference of 1,623 in County Carlow). Housing lands within Graiguecullen, County Laois were determined by the Laois County Development Plan 2011-2017 Core Strategy which accords with Midland Regional Planning Guidelines.

**Table 3.4 Carlow Local Authorities Core Strategy Population and Housing Projections**

<b>(1) Area Concerned</b>	<b>(2) Core Strategy Population Increase 2012-2018</b>	<b>(3) Housing Land Requirement (ha)</b>	<b>(4) Existing Zoning (ha)</b>	<b>(5) Proposed Zoning (ha)</b>
<b>Greater Carlow Graiguecullen Urban Area</b>	2771	107	483	107
<b>Settlement Strategy within Greater Carlow Graiguecullen Urban Area</b>				
<b>Carlow Town – Town Centre Zoned Lands</b>	50	None	None	None

<b>Carlow Town – Residential Zoned Lands</b>	1235	30	43	30
<b>Graiguecullen, County Laois</b>	395	20	89	20
<b>Carlow Town Environs</b>	1090	57	351	57
<b>Total</b>	<b>2771</b>		<b>482</b>	<b>107</b>

Table 3.4 reflects that the core strategy projects an increase in population of some 3,068 persons up 2018, which reflects the over estimate of the population for 2010 contained in the SERPG.

#### 4. QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT

The concept of vitality and viability is central to sustaining and enhancing town centres. As defined in the RPG:

*'Vitality is a measure of how active and buoyant a centre is, whilst viability refers to the commercial well-being of a town'.*

It is acknowledged that these characteristics combined, highlight the relative strength and success of the town in the retail hierarchy. This depends on many factors, including the range and quality of activities in a centre, mix of uses, accessibility to people living and working in the area and general amenity, appearance and safety. These indicators are used to determine the 'health' of a town/village centre.

As part of the 2009 Draft Retail Strategy, a series of 'health checks' or qualitative assessments were undertaken for each of the main urban centres within the County including Carlow Town. A health check customer street survey was undertaken in October 2011, and the health check was reviewed in January 2012 as part of the preparation of this updated Draft Retail Strategy. The outcome of the qualitative appraisal the town centre and provides an indication of each areas' weaknesses and opportunities. The main indicators assessed include:

- i. Character of the Centre;
- ii. Retail Mix;
- iii. Vacancies;
- iv. Diversity of Uses;
- v. Accessibility; and
- vi. Environmental Quality.



Fig. 4.1 Tullow Street, Carlow

## Carlow Town

### Character of the Centre:

Carlow, including Graiguecullen, has been traditionally recognised as a busy market town surrounded by a rich and strong agricultural hinterland. Physically this was reflected by a large livestock market located at a central position in the town and the presence of one of the country's sugar beet processing factories. However over the years the livestock market has been redeveloped and the sugar factory has closed. Changes in the economy have prompted Carlow to exploit its comparative advantage and seek out new opportunities upon which it can prosper. The economic growth which has been experienced over the past decade has enabled Carlow to become a strong urban centre within the South East Region. Located 86km from Dublin and 75km from Waterford, Carlow occupies a central position from which it functions as a service centre for the surrounding hinterland and county. Carlow's location on the N9/M9 Corridor and the Dublin Waterford Intercity Rail Line have made it increasingly accessible.

Historically Carlow developed on the confluence of the River Burren tributary with the River Barrow and was established as the bridging point over both rivers. The River Barrow joins the Grand Canal and facilitated trade between New Ross, Waterford and Dublin. From this, the town developed as a principal trade centre for agricultural produce. The development of the town from historic times to present is still evident in the physical form of the town's layout, which is illustrated by fine old buildings and narrow streets and laneways.

In response to escalating traffic levels and congestion combined with the narrow and historic street structure the main Dublin to Waterford route through the town, Dublin Street, was relocated eastward to Barrack Street. Over time Barrack Street also became heavily congested. To help reduce this congestion a relief road has been constructed to the east of the Fairgreen Shopping Centre which links in with the Kilkenny Road south of the Carlow Institute of Technology. The opening of the M9 motorway has facilitated the removal of through-traffic and heavy goods vehicles from town centre areas.

The traditional town centre is recognised as Tullow Street and Dublin Street. The town used Government tax designated urban renewal schemes which kick started an expansion of the town centre eastward. This resulted in the development of the Carlow Shopping Centre on Kennedy Ave. Since its development the town has continued to expand through the redevelopment of the livestock mart (Fairgreen Shopping Centre) and the development of lands further south (Hanover Retail Park). Shamrock Plaza forms a landmark at the Barrack St./Tullow St. junction.

The Council recognises that Carlow's success is partly based on its accessibility. This is a quality that it will seek to protect. As the town centre continues to be developed a number of detailed strategies and initiatives have been prepared and implemented to improve the quality of the public realm. Strategies which project the vision of the Council are set out in the Town Plan.

Initiatives completed include the partial pedestrianisation and street improvements along Tullow Street, upgrading of pavements, pedestrian crossings, centrally located bus depot and improvements to the public realm around the Courthouse and the Potato Market. It is recognised by the Council that the continued enhancement of the public realm and the introduction of pedestrian friendly measures must be progressed further in order to ensure that Carlow maintains this momentum.

**Retail Mix:** In 2005 the Council commissioned the Carlow Town Retail Study which estimated that there was some 30,161sq.m net retail floorspace of which 7,812sq.m convenience (26%), 12,673sq.m comparison (42%) and 9,676sq.m bulky goods floorspace (32%) and a further 2,721sq.m bulky goods floorspace in the Environs Area.

These figures were updated as part of the 2009 Retail Strategy and it is estimated that there is 39,648sq.m of net trading floorspace in Carlow Town which consists of 10,179sq.m convenience (26%), 19,793sq.m comparison (50%) and 9,676sq.m bulky goods (24%). This illustrates that Carlow Town continues to be a comparison dominated shopping centre. In addition there is 12,600sq.m bulky goods floorspace located in the Environs Area.

The health check floorspace survey identified that of the existing retail outlets available in Carlow Town 70% represented comparison units. Independent and family owned shops are located within the traditional town centre along Tullow Street and Dublin Street. These independent retailers comprise smaller units with limited floorspace in comparison to the bigger multiples which have much larger stores in modern formats. While the number of multiples operating in the town is high, the independent retailers still maintain a strong presence within the core retail area that is Tullow/ Dublin Street. It is also noteworthy that there are a number of independent high order comparison ladies clothes and shoe boutiques which add an enhanced richness to the retail offer that Carlow provides.

Additionally there are a number of international and national retailers such as Benetton on Tullow Street, Oasis, Principles and Dorothy Perkins in Houstons and Warehouse in Shaws. The street had a pedestrianisation scheme until 2011, when limited traffic was re-introduced.



Fig.4.2 Tullow Street, Carlow



**Fig.4.3 Shamrock Plaza**

### **East of Town Centre Developments**

Since the preparation of the 2003 Retail Strategy, there have been a number of major retail developments to the east of the traditional town centre and Carlow Shopping Centre. These developments include the redevelopment of the livestock mart site, now established as Fairgreen Shopping Centre anchored by the relocation of Tesco from the Hanover Shopping Centre within a new enlarged format. Other retailers introduced as part of this phase included Heaton's, A Wear, Pamela Scott and Barratt's. The second phase comprises River Island, Next, New Look and more recently Argos.

Further south of Barrack Street and east of Hanover Road, there are further retail developments. These include Aldi to the south of the Burren River and the Hanover Retail Park west of Hanover Road anchored by Woodies and which also includes other operators such as Carpet Right, Harry Corry and Right Price Tiles.

To the north east of the town within the environs, on the R448 with frontage onto the main Dublin Road, is the new Four Lakes retail park with Homebase as the anchor store. Furthermore, Deerpark Retail Park opposite the IDA Business Park on the Dublin Road accommodates furniture and interior design bulky goods retailers. A summary table of shops and their location within the town is provided below.

### **Major Retail operators in Carlow Town and their locations**

#### **Potato Market / Kennedy Avenue**

Centra, Shaws, O2, O'Briens, Specsavers, Clarks, 3G, Penneys, Design Edge Fashions, Bay Trading, Carphone, Vodafone, Xtravision, Burton, Warehouse.



Fig. 4.4 Market Stalls at Potato Market

#### Tullow Street / Dublin Street

Supervalu, Shaws incl. Houstons, United Colours of Benetton, Warehouse, Mexx, Principles Centra, Evans, Oasis, Esprit, Hanleys, Euro Shop, Clarks, Dorothy Perkins, Wallis



Fig. 5.5 United Colours of Benetton, Tullow Street

### Carlow Shopping Centre

Japan, Superquinn, Claires, Accessories, Serena, No Name, Vero Moda, Chartbusters, Peter Mark

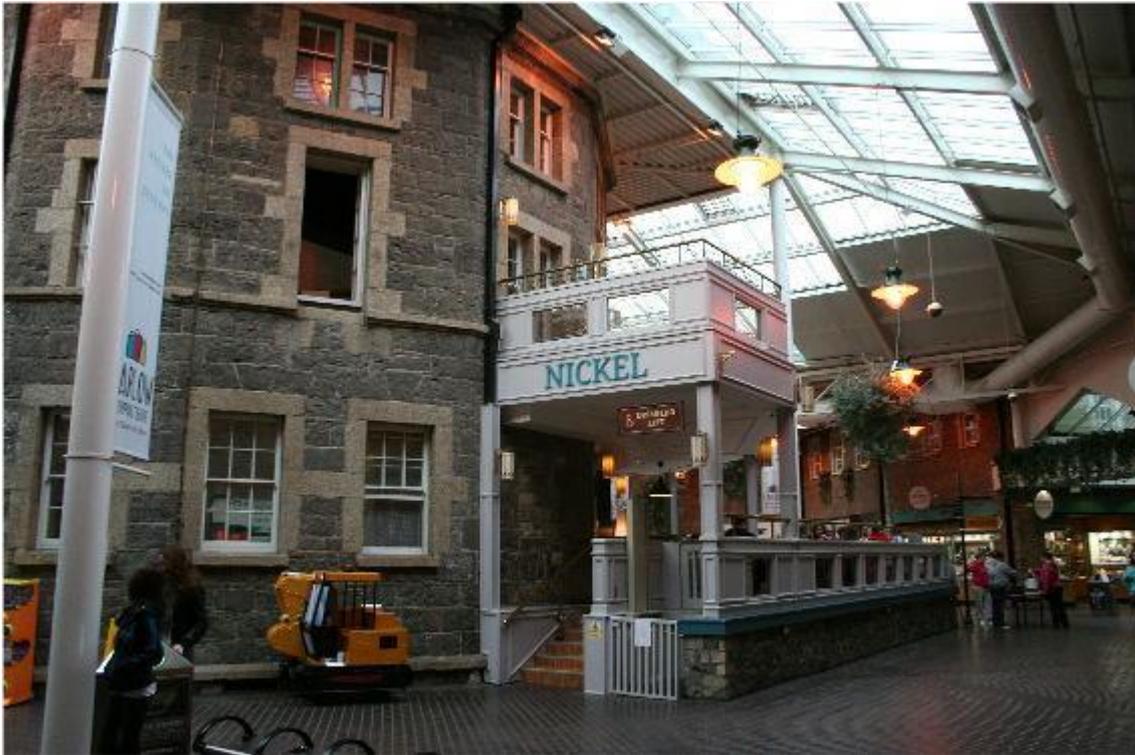


Fig. 5.6 Carlow Shopping Centre

### Fairgreen Shopping Centre

Tescos, Sasha, Costa Café, Communicate Now, Heatons, Pamela Scott, Roxy, New Look, Jeanscene, A Wear, Gamestop Best Vila Birthdays, Barratts, Next, JF Sports, Argos, Jack Jones, River Island



Fig. 5.7 Fairgreen Shopping Centre



**Fig. 5.8 Cineplex Complex**

**Carlow Retail Park, Hanover**

Woodies, ElectoCity, Petmania, Right Price Tiles, Carpet Right, Halfords, Homestore & More.



**Fig. 5.9 Carlow Retail Park, Hanover, Carlow**

**Miscellaneous**

Aldi, House of Tiles, Lidl, Cineplex



Fig. 5.10 Lidl, Tullow Road



Fig. 5.11 Aldi, Hanover Road



**Fig.5.12 Four Lakes Retail Park, Dublin Road**



**Fig.5.13 Four Lakes Retail Park, Dublin Road**

### **Graiguecullen**

Graiguecullen forms the western environs of Carlow Town, across the River Barrow within the jurisdictions of both County Carlow and County Laois. Historically development located around

Chapel Street and Chaff Street. However westwards towards Laois, there has been significant development in terms of both housing and retail warehousing. These developments have been assisted by major road construction including the northern relief road.

The Sleatygraigue Retail Park (Carlow Business Park) includes Dunnes Stores, Lifestyle Sports, and Hughie Doyle Furniture in addition to the Talbot Hotel and Dome Bowling Alley and Arcade. Recently a number of units have become vacant e.g. the 4Homes Store. The Shamrock Business Park includes Doyles, K-Lan Furniture Flooring and Lighting and other retail warehousing as well as the Graigue Shopping Centre which consists of neighbourhood facilities such as a Spar. Land of Furniture & Zokia and Brooks building materials are located on Sleaty Road, while Lowry Carpets is located on Castlecomer Road.

As these sites are still being developed a number of units remain unoccupied. It is clear however that Graiguecullen is striving to achieve its role in the Midland Regional settlement hierarchy as a Service Town and within the County's retail hierarchy as a District Centre. The shopping provision within Graiguecullen Town Centre contributes towards Carlow's ability to compete with other centres including Portlaoise, Kilkenny and Newbridge.



**Fig. 5.14 Sleatygraigue Retail Park**

The 2011 Laois County Council Retail Strategy considers that *existing and emerging convenience and comparison retail representation in Graiguecullen reflects its role in the County Settlement Hierarchy as a District Centre. It is envisaged that this type of retail provision will be enhanced and sustained. From the health check it is evident that residents do need to travel to larger shopping centres in order to fulfil their comparison shopping needs. Given the proximity to Carlow town it is important that the future retail development of Graiguecullen compliments that of Carlow town and does not have a negative impact on the Carlow town core retail area.*



Fig. 5.15 Graigue Village Shopping Centre



Fig.5.16 Sandhills District Centre, Hacketstown Road

## Conclusions

**Vacancies:** It is generally accepted that all town centres will experience some level of vacancy caused by changes of ownership, amalgamation of sites, expiration of leases and shop fit outs. From an examination of the vacant units some units formed part of sites about to be redeveloped and others were undergoing a change of use, refurbishment or a change in ownership. The actual level of vacancy is estimated at 12%. The level of vacancy in Carlow is above normal acceptable standards, but is considered to be typical of retail vacancy levels nationally in towns of this size.

The overall feeling is that the town is robust in terms of retail provision for a County Town and that the more recent developments have not had a significant negative impact on the overall viability of the town. However vacancy is an indicator that tends to fluctuate and therefore must be monitored carefully. Main shopping streets in Ireland are particularly vulnerable to changes in the retail market and vacancy rates of 15% in are becoming normal. Carlow is no less vulnerable to this trend than other locations.

**Diversity of Uses:** In general the number of retail outlets is considered to be a major attraction for shoppers and visitors. Apart from the retail functions that the town accommodates, Carlow also offers a wide range of ecclesiastical, educational and employment functions. The presence of Carlow Institute of Technology and St Patrick's College and Teagasc has enabled the town to develop as a key educational and institutional centre. As a result, the town has a significant student resident population which add to the eclectic mix of shops and services. Many of the town centre uses cater for this young population in terms of recreation, entertainment and accommodation. This is evident in the number of recent apartment developments around Kennedy Avenue. The town has many bars, restaurants, cafes, takeaways, hotels, nightclubs and a cinema to cater for local residents and visitors evening entertainment needs. Existing tourist facilities within the town include Carlow Castle, County Carlow Military Museum, Carlow Brewing Company as well as the navigable River Barrow which flows through the town. The VISUAL and George Bernard Shaw Theatre further enhances the existing tourist attraction of the town and will amplify the potential of the sector in terms of employment generating uses and initiatives. In addition the Carlow County Museum in College Street is due to open in 2012.

The recent shopper survey (October 2011) highlighted that one of the key reasons for shoppers going elsewhere was the 'Shopping Experience' and 'Range and Quantity' of goods.

**Accessibility:** Carlow Town is highly accessible by road and public transport. Located on the intercity line between Dublin and Waterford, Carlow has excellent connections to both cities in addition to the Hub, Kilkenny. In addition Iarnod Eireann runs a commuter service which facilitates both commuters and business located within the hinterland of the town. Bus Eireann and private operators provide daily bus services within the County, to surrounding counties and nationwide from the bus interchange adjacent Hanover Bridge. In addition to bus and rail services, there is an official taxi rank at the Potato Market providing a 24 hour taxi service. It is recognised that this good accessibility has positive connotations for the town adding to its attractiveness and competitiveness. The M9 increases accessibility and linkages between Dublin and Waterford.

In terms of pedestrian accessibility, the car tends to have priority over pedestrians in the Town. In places, the town is currently considered to be impermeable with poor connectivity or accessibility to cater for the needs of pedestrians e.g. between Barrack Street and Tullow Street. Opportunities to improve permeability should be developed in a similar way to the street pattern that exists in the historic Town core.

**Environmental Quality:** The town is relatively free from litter and graffiti. Landscaping measures are provided throughout the town centre particularly along Kennedy Avenue, the Potato Market and the Fairgreen Shopping Centre. The Barrow and Burren rivers are unique amenities for the town and are being recognised through the provision of a boardwalk and footbridge over the Burren and development of the town park along the banks of the Barrow. However it is recognised that these assets need to be further exploited.

Traditional shopfronts are largely maintained in the core along Tullow and Dublin streets. These contribute to the built form and townscape character of Carlow Town in addition to the more notable buildings of particular historical architectural merit such as Carlow Cathedral, the Courthouse and St. Patrick's College.

However, there is scope for improvements in maintenance and management of public places, and quality of lighting, street planting, and comfortable pedestrian public space.

Carlow is the principal shopping centre in the County, and an important centre for the region. The quality and quantum of retail goods on offer in the town reflect its role and function in the national regional retail hierarchy as a Level 1 Tier 3 Centre.

## 5. Broad Capacity Assessment

This section of the 2012 Retail Strategy for the Greater Carlow Graiguecullen Urban area provides a broad capacity assessment which will assist the Council in making the necessary provision to facilitate retail floorspace. This assessment has regard to the population at 2011 and population forecasts for 2018, (end of the development plan period), and 2016/22, end of the SERPG horizon, projections included in the 2009 Retail Strategy, but also broader trends.

The preparation of this Retail Strategy for the Greater Carlow Graiguecullen Urban Area is set against a context of national and international recession, and significant changes in the retail industry (particularly internet retailing). Therefore, providing certainty with regard to floorspace and expenditure projections and additional development requirements can become a precarious task, and one that should be approached with some caution. The Retail Planning Guidelines (2005) are clear, that a detailed quantitative of retail floorspace need is not required in this location, or for the plan under preparation. Paragraph 47 states:

*'In addressing items (iii) and (iv) it should not be necessary to estimate in any detail the future requirement for additional development. A broad assessment of requirements for additional development reflecting the local evidence of market interest and the need to provide good opportunities for retail provision to serve the main population centres in the county ought to be sufficient in order to formulate appropriate policies and criteria for dealing with new development proposals.'*

This section will refer to the Broad Assessment of floorspace requirements contained in the 2009 Retail Strategy for County Carlow. Regard will be had to the impact of this policy, relevant planning permissions, market activity, and the implementation of permitted development. It is noted that the international banking crisis has had a significant impact on the capacity of developers to construct, and that different sites have relative advantages and disadvantages in terms of access to finance.

This Retail Strategy is also cognisant of the Draft Retail Planning Guidelines 2011, where it states at section 3.5 that *'The planning system should not be used to inhibit competition, preserve existing commercial interests or prevent innovation.... planning authorities and the Board should avoid taking actions which would adversely affect competition in the retail market'*.

The 2005 RPG state that the broad assessment of the requirement for additional retail floorspace should not be used as a prescriptive cap on new retail development:

*‘these assessments of future retail requirements are intended to provide broad guidance to the additional quantum of convenience and comparison floorspace provision. They should not be treated in an overly prescriptive manner and should not seek to inhibit competition’.*

The broad capacity assessment should be used in combination with the qualitative assessment which addresses each planning application on its merits. The broad capacity assessment will enable the Planning Authority to ensure that a retail development proposal is not out of scale with the existing and future development pattern. It will enable the Planning Authority to ensure that a proposal meets the locational requirement of the Development Plan and the need for a particular type of retail floorspace within a particular town centre.

## **Population Projections**

Population trends and projections have been set out in section 3 of this Retail Strategy. The 2011 population of the Greater Carlow Graiguecullen Urban Area is 23,030. This population has doubled in the space of 15 years, with the majority of population growth in the County focussed in this area. Also, the proportion of County Carlow’s population residing within the Greater Carlow Graiguecullen Urban Area also continues to increase, with growth of 8.9% in the last inter-censal period.

The population of the Plan area is projected in the Core Strategy to increase from 23,030 (2011) to 25,653 within the life of the plan (2018).

The SERP projected the population of Carlow Town to grow from 22,126 in 2010 to 23,768 in 2016 and 25,000 by 2022. So overall, a target population of 25,000 with growth of some 3,000 persons is consistent between projections.

It is also accepted that the catchment area of the town is not restricted to its immediate environs, but does extend into Counties Kildare, Kilkenny, Laois and potentially Wicklow and Wexford. As a County Town, Carlow naturally attracts shoppers from outside the town, and across boundaries. The extent of this catchment, and the population contained therein, is highly dependent on the function of the shopping trip (i.e. convenience food shopping versus expensive fashion (comparison)). Recent research shows that that one-stop shopping patterns are primarily local, with consumers rarely travelling more than 10 minutes in urban areas, and rarely more than 15 minutes elsewhere to do their main weekly shopping<sup>4</sup>.

## **Population Expenditure Estimates**

The 2009 Retail Strategy estimated per capita expenditure figures are calculated using projected annual growth rates for per capita convenience and comparison expenditure between 2005 and 2016.

The average convenience per capita growth rate per annum projected real increases of 1.5% between 2005 - 2016. The average comparison per capacity growth rate per annum projects real increases of 3.9% between 2005 - 2016. Having regard to macro-economic circumstances it is prudent to assume that there has been no growth in per capita expenditure figures since the 2009 Retail Strategy.

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<sup>4</sup> Mary Portas (December 2011)The Portas Review, An Independent Review into the Future of our High Streets

## Broad Trends

It is noted above that the study area has experienced strong population growth over the last 15 years. This has been accompanied by a significant increase in retail floorspace. In 2005 the town health check recorded that the town and environs had a total net floorspace of 32,873 sq.m. which was nearly 24% convenience, 38.6% comparison and 38% bulky goods. A recent review of extant planning permissions identifies that the total actual and emerging floorspace in the town and environs has increased by the order of 52,365 sq.m., with only 25% of this within the traditional core<sup>5</sup>. As noted above there has been a marked movement in the last 10 years of the town centre eastwards to Fairgreen and around the inner relief road. Significant permissions in Retail Strategy area include redevelopment of Penny's at Hanover (which inter alia provides for a 4727sq.m Debenhams) and Naus Developments at Barrow Track which included 10,981 sq.m. floor space, including a convenience anchor of 3,000 sq.m. and 5,827 sq.m. comparison.

### ***Additional Expenditure Potential***

The 2009 County Retail Strategy highlighted that County Carlow needs to enhance the quantity of its retail provision in order to accommodate the needs of the expanding population.

It assumed that the convenience attraction of Carlow Town will remain strong given that most of the national and international operators are located either within the town or its environs. Some changes in shopping patterns will occur as vacant sites are redeveloped consolidating the town centre and improvements are made to the accessibility and permeability of the town.

As stated in the previous strategy, following a review of planning register and health check assessments, with the exception of bulky goods, the comparison retail offer within Carlow and the County still needs to be improved. It is apparent that a large quantum of bulky goods floorspace has been granted planning permission. However a number of these sites have not yet become operational. This may be attributed to the number of retail warehousing parks compared to the number of available anchor tenants. It is important that the nature of retail floorspace within these retail warehousing parks is restricted to the sale of bulky goods. This will ensure that the town centre is safeguarded from undesirable comparison retail development in out of centre locations.

Having regard to the comparison retail offer available in Naas, Newbridge, Kildare Town, Kilkenny, Wexford and Waterford and retail centres closer to Dublin, such as Tallaght, Liffey Valley and Dundrum, it is clear that Carlow faces considerable competition from other towns and cities with potential for significant changes in shopping patterns. Given the rank and role of Carlow within the national, regional and county retail context it is important the comparison retail offer is sustained and enhanced in order to compete with other similarly ranked centres.

The 2009 County Retail Strategy considered indicative turnover ratios (turnover divided by floorspace) this which implied convenience sector turnover of €10,478 per sq.m. This turnover is very healthy and reflects the scale of modern format retail provision in the Carlow. A similar exercise for comparison turnover ratios however results in a turnover of €3,851 per sq.m. This suggests that comparison good floorspace is slightly under trading. This may be attributed to inefficient floorspace or an oversupply of bulky goods floorspace which in combination will reduce the turnover per square metre. This assessment remains consistent with current analysis of the retail market.

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<sup>5</sup> DTZ Piedad Consulting, Retail Impact Statement for Penny's, Kennedy Ave.

### Capacity for Additional Floorspace

The 2009 Carlow County Retail Strategy highlighted a limited capacity for additional floorspace in the County. It estimated net spare expenditure capacity for the period 2009 to 2016 as negative with -€5.6m for convenience and -€94.2m for Comparison (both high growth scenarios). Having regard to the impact of Retail Warehousing, (excluding bulky goods) it estimated expenditure capacity at €51.3m (high growth scenario) over the period 2009 to 2016.

The 2009 Retail Strategy projected that the demand for additional retail space was negative for convenience goods, and comparison overall. However, if bulky goods were excluded a capacity for an additional 7,340sq.m. (high) or 6,195 sq.m. (low) was identified for the county overall.

It concluded there appears to be limited capacity for additional floorspace in the County overall for bulky goods / retail warehousing. It is evident that additional floorspace needs to be provided in some towns within the retail hierarchy particularly Carlow Town to cater for a shortfall in high street retail capacity.

The foregoing figures reflect observations of retailing in the Greater Carlow Graiguecullen Urban Area, where high street vacancy is considerable concern, and there is notable trend in the difference in performance between the more peripheral retail parks, where some appear to be trading poorly.

Overall, this Broad Assessments reflect that significant floorspace has been developed in the study area, particularly in the last 10 years. Recent quantitative analysis (2009) shows limited capacity for additional floorspace. This is noted in parallel with a reluctance in the market to implement significant permissions on key sites. This retail strategy therefore considers that there has been no marked change in circumstances to 2009 floorspace projections. At the same time, it is not the purpose of the Retail Strategy to limit competition, and therefore there is an obligation to consider robust arguments for renewal and investment in new floorspace.

## 6. Retail Strategy

This section sets out the retail planning strategy for Carlow which is provided under each of these headings.

- **Confirmation of the Retail Hierarchy,**
- **Town Centre Boundary**
- **General Scale of Development Envisaged**

In order to confirm the Retail Hierarchy this Retail Strategy has examined the policy context at national, regional, county and sub-county levels. These are summarised in the paragraphs that follow.

- Under the national retail hierarchy described in ***Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2005*** Carlow is designated as a Level 1 Tier 3 Centre. It is the only centre of this designation in the County.
- ***Under the National Spatial Strategy*** The County does not accommodate a Gateway or a Hub. However Carlow Town is a County Town.
- ***The South East Regional Planning Guidelines*** confirms the national designation of Carlow Town as a County Town. The guidelines refer to towns with a population in excess of 5,000 as Larger Towns. The SERPG states that ‘hub’ towns and county towns have many common qualities.
- ***Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 – 2022*** - in terms of Graiguecullen it is identified as Service Town in the settlement hierarchy.
- ***County Settlement Hierarchy***  
In terms of the proposed settlement hierarchy, as defined in the Carlow County Development Plan 2009-2015, Carlow Town is the Primary Town in the County. In County Laois Graiguecullen is indicated as a Service Town in the settlement hierarchy.

The national, regional and county settlement hierarchies identify Carlow Town as the key centre for the County. Carlow Town dominates the County in terms of the role and function it provides.

### **Definition in the Development Plan of the Boundaries of the Core Shopping Area of Town Centres**

Paragraph 42 of the RPG states:

*‘The strategy to be incorporated into development plans should provide guidance as to the general location (name of town, district or major village centre) of new development. In order to achieve greater certainty, it will be necessary to provide a broad indication of the general scale of development envisaged at various locations as well as the precise boundaries of the core retail area of the town centres.’*

In recognition of the RPG, it is acknowledged by the Planning Authority that the preferred location for retail development is within Carlow town centre, and defined district centres in the Carlow environs area and Graiguecullen.

The Town Centre is defined as per the area identified as Town Centre in the Draft Carlow Town Development Plan 2012 – 2018. This is considered to be established town centre area, under a series of planning decisions, which in effect defines the commercial and mixed use centre of the town. Within this Town Centre, a core retail area has been defined, this includes the traditional commercial core of Tullow Street and Dublin Street as well as the twentieth century core of Kennedy Avenue and more recently developed key shopping areas such as Barrack Street including Fairgreen and also Hanover.

District Centres are identified at Sleatygraique and Sandhills. Smaller neighbourhood centres are identified in residential areas (see Retail Hierarchy map appendix).

Paragraph 58 and 59 of the RPG state:

*'58. The preferred location for new retail development where practicable and viable, is within a town centre (or district or major village centre). Where it is not possible to provide the form and scale of development that is required on a site within the town centre then consideration can be given to a site on the edge of the town centre so as to encourage the possibility of one journey serving several purposes. An edge of centre site, for the purposes of these guidelines, is taken to be one which is within an easy and convenient walking distance from the primary shopping core of a town centre. The distance considered to be convenient will vary according to local circumstances but typically is unlikely to be much more than 300-400 metres from the edge of the prime shopping area, and less in smaller settlements.'*

*59. Having assessed the size, availability, accessibility, and feasibility of developing both sites and premises, firstly within a town centre and secondly on the edge of a town centre, alternative out of centre sites should 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. This is commonly known as the sequential approach to the location of retail development.'*

All proposed retail development should demonstrate that the sequential approach to the location of the subject proposal has been undertaken. In smaller centres where the core retail area may not exist due to their fragmented nature development proposals should be centrally located. In all cases, each retail development proposed will be assessed based on its merits and how it addresses the Criteria for Assessment as set out in this strategy.

### **Strategic Guidance on the Location and Scale of Retail Development**

The challenge to be faced in the preparation of this strategy is quite different from previous versions. Rather than dealing with pressures to accommodate the additional development driven by demographic and economic growth, the challenge is to consolidate the retail structure of the town and complement the new Joint Spatial Strategy.

It is evident that not all formats and locations are performing well, which gives rise to pressures to bring changes to established hierarchies, and plan objectives. At the same time the retail strategy must seek to deal with new demands in a way that is efficient, equitable and sustainable.



The retail hierarchy provides an indication of appropriate type of retail development relative to each level in the hierarchy. However, all applications for retail development will be considered on their merits. New retail development must be of a scale and nature appropriate to the level of the retail hierarchy within which it will be located and should adhere to the criteria for assessing retail proposals and assessed against the assessment criteria for retail development and the policy and objectives of local area plans and village plans, where relevant.

It is an objective of the planning authority to facilitate a competitive and healthy environment for the retail industry of the future. It is not the purpose of the planning system to inhibit competition, preserve existing commercial interests or prevent innovation.

It is important that sites are developed sequentially in order to ensure that the optimum location for new retail development is accessible to all sections of society and is of a scale that allows the continued prosperity of existing town and village centres. A range and types of retailers are located within the plan area. The purpose of the retail hierarchy provides guidance on the distribution, scale and nature of new retail floorspace throughout the greater Carlow area, as follows.

#### **Carlow Town Centre:**

Carlow Town functions and performs the role of the main town centre within the County. Carlow is a market town and service centre. It has the additional appeal of being a key tourist destination and symbolises the Gateway to the South East Region.

Carlow accommodates an excellent range of functions not found in other towns within the County and dominates the settlement hierarchy befitting its role as the County Town.

With respect to retail floorspace provision, Carlow Town provides a good range of convenience and comparison shopping floorspace selling goods not found elsewhere within the County. All types of retail floorspace are considered to be appropriate within the Level 1 Centre, particularly centrally located comparison floorspace at Kennedy Ave and Killkenny Road.

A permitted scheme for renewal at the Penny's site includes some 26, 071 sq m gross floor area retail development (17, 767 sq m net) comprising 36 units of 13,492 sq m (net) comparison shopping and 580 sq m (net) convenience shopping; 975 sq m Café and Food Court, an occasional Farmers Market, Offices and 30 residential units.

**District Centres:** The provision of District Centres will be based on major growth in population or a clear proven level of under provision. These centres do not necessarily need to be mall based therefore the planning authority will encourage District Centres to be street based, where possible, in the interests of good quality urban design and integration with new residential and mixed use areas. District Centres are identified at Sleatygraigue (Sleaty District Centre) and Sandhills (Hacketstown Road).

**Neighbourhood Centres:** The quantum of space to be provided in neighbourhood centres should not be too small as this could result in a failure to achieve the necessary focus. New centres should not be located so close to any existing local centre that it would draw trade away from it. The development of neighbourhood centres should not precede the surrounding residential development they are intended to serve. They should be developed in accordance with the phasing sequence of development.

**Large Foodstores:** Large foodstores should be provided in the town centre, wherever possible. In some cases it will not be possible to bring forward sites which are within the Core Shopping Area because of the site size requirements of large foodstores, environmental constraints in historic towns or because the road network does not have the capacity for additional traffic and service vehicles. In these circumstances an edge of centre location may be acceptable but only subject to a sequential assessment of Core Shopping Area sites and where it can be demonstrated that the site will be linked to the existing Core Shopping Area and contribute to the town centre's viability and vitality.

Retail development on these sites will be considered where it can be proven that they will benefit the Core Shopping Area. These sites need to demonstrate that they can be linked to the Core Shopping Area and will contribute to the vibrancy and vitality of the town.

The Draft Retail Planning Guidelines set as a National Policy Objective that retail developments within Town Centre Areas contribute to the overall urban quality, and are not suburban and mono-use in nature. This is consistent within with the definition of such areas as town centre, and not as suburban retail parks.

Large foodstore formats must take cognisance of the character of the town and the area in which they will be located. The planning authority will require applications for large foodstores to provide strong building lines fronting on existing or new streets.

The Council is also conscious of trends for significant areas of non-food retailing provided in new superstore formats. Applications for significant comparison shopping floorspace, have significant potential to negatively impact upon primary town centre functions, and negate any potential for synergy between convenience and comparison shopping trips, and the potential positive impact on the town.

**Retail Parks and Retail Warehouses:** It is accepted that in general retail warehouses do not fit easily into town centres given their size requirements and the need for good car parking facilities and ease of servicing. In some instances it may be possible to locate retail warehouse groups on the edge of town centres.

Generally speaking, the evidence is that planned retail parks do not have any material impact on town centres provided that the range of goods sold is limited to truly bulky household goods or goods generally sold in bulk. In addition to the principles of the sequential approach the planning authority will consider the impact on existing town centres when considering applications for non-food retail parks. If a number of similar applications for retail warehousing units or parks have been granted permission within a short space of time (three years) in the same town then the planning authority will require applicants to provide an assessment of the cumulative impact of their development.

Generally speaking smaller units of much less than 700sq.m gross floorspace are more easily capable of being accommodated in town centres and, in any event, tend to sell a less bulky range of goods. Consequently, the planning authority consider it appropriate to impose a minimum size condition preventing the construction or subdivision of units into stores substantially less than 700sq.m. Conversely, large-scale single retail warehouse units in excess of 6,000sq.m gross (including any ancillary garden centre) are considered unacceptable due to their effect on the surrounding road network and their potential for creating local monopolies, which would inhibit competition within local catchments areas.

The planning authority will impose appropriate conditions to prevent the provision of single large units either through new development, coalescence or the linking together of two or more stores. Consideration will also be given to reinforcing such conditions by a legal agreement under Section 47 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

Applications for individual retail warehouses outside a town centre or on its edge will generally be discouraged in order to reduce the number of car journeys. Furthermore, because of their visual impact, the sporadic siting of free-standing retail warehouses along major road corridors will be discouraged. The planning authority maintains a presumption against large retail developments located adjacent or close to existing, new or planned national roads/motorways in the interests of the County Development Strategy and the County Retail Hierarchy.

It is evident that peripheral retail parks in the Joint Spatial Plan's area are experiencing vacancy, and declining customer numbers, which gives rise to operators to seek alternative planning use for the site. However, any such trends will be strongly opposed by the local authorities.

**Local Shops:** Local shops perform an important function in urban areas. In addition to town centres, small neighbourhood centres and local shops can provide a valued service, catering particularly for the daily or casual needs of nearby residents or of those passing by. Local shops encompassing both foodstores and important non-food outlets such as pharmacies have significant social and economic functions; they offer a particularly important service for those who are less mobile, especially elderly and disabled people, families with small children, and those without access to a car, particularly, in peripheral housing estates where they may provide the only readily accessible shopping facilities. This need will however need to be proven in applications.

**Petrol Filling Stations:** Petrol filling stations can provide a wide range of retail goods in an associated shop. In rural areas, some function as the local shop or small supermarket. Whilst the important role of such provision is recognised, such shops should, remain secondary to the use as a petrol filling station particularly where these are located on isolated sites outside of town and village centres. In order to restrict the scale of retail provision in locations outside town centres there shall be a size limit of 100sq.m of sales space on any shop associated with a petrol filling station. Furthermore the layout of the station forecourt shall be so arranged to allow dedicated parking for those shopping in the shop. Where retail space in excess of 100sq.m of net retail sales area associated within a petrol filling station is sought the sequential approach to retail development will apply.

### **Retail Policies and Actions**

Policies relating to retail development in the County include:

- It is the policy of the Council to sustain Carlow in its level in the national retail hierarchy.
- It is the policy of the Council to work with other local authorities in the South East Region in the preparation of a Regional Retail Strategy.
- It is the policy of the Council to ensure that retail development is accessible by both public transport and private car, so as to ensure accessibility to all groups of the population, particularly the needs of the elderly and families with young children.
- It is the policy of the Council to promote specialist and small-scale tourist related retail outlets which will increase the potential to attract event shoppers and tourists to the County.
- It is the policy of the Council to restrict retail warehouse developments solely to the sale of 'bulky' comparison goods, and ensure they are of appropriate scale.

- It is the policy of the Council that applications for significant retail development should be accompanied by Design Statements which should include a statement of how the proposal contributes to the enhancement of the existing town and village centres.
- It is the policy of the Council to development of infill and under utilised backland sites in the town centre area, especially in the interests of achieving the most efficient use of urban lands and to stimulate regeneration of the more disadvantaged areas of the town.
- It is the policy of the Council to generally discourage permission for change of use from retail or service (including banks and similar institutions with over the counter services) to non-retail service at ground-floor level within the Core Shopping Areas as defined for Carlow. Where it can be demonstrated that a proposed alternative use for such sites will have a positive impact on street activity, pedestrian footfall, and the sustainable re-use of the building, the Local Authorities will consider redevelopment proposals on their merits.

### **Level 1 County Town Centre: Carlow**

The following retail policies and actions are developed for the:

- Town Centre
- Environs areas

#### **Town Centre**

##### ***Policies***

- It is the policy of the Council to facilitate and encourage the consolidation and improvement of retailing and other town centre activities.
- In accordance with national policy objective for urban design, new retail developments within the defined town centre core should complement the defined urban nature of its location, and have a positive impact on urban design with long-term sustainable uses, and contribution to the town, where mixed-use and urban renewal is appropriate.
- It is the policy of the County to ensure that new development create, or positively contribute towards, a connected network of streets and spaces, putting the requirements of pedestrians and cyclists as a priority by creating direct routes that connect to the main areas of shopping activity.
- The Council will seek a robust and thorough analysis in respect of the Sequential Test for all significant retail developments in accordance with the Retail Planning Guidelines.
- It is the policy of the Council to develop a traffic management strategy and provide for a good quality car-parking programme linked to the pedestrian network in the town.
- It is the policy of the Council to continue programme of urban landscaping including measures to improve pedestrian safety, convenience, and accessibility through the town centre.
- It is the policy of the Council to encourage activities that enliven the evening economy, including culture and entertainment uses.

##### ***Actions***

- Promote access to car parks in the town centre and publicize approach routes to each car park/multi storey car park in the Carlow Town Centre, by adopting a circulation system that directs cars to these car parks.
- Adopt car parking management standards within the town centre that reduces on-street car parking in favour of off-street car parking and a restriction on long term car parking (i.e, commuter) facilities in favour of short term (business, retail and leisure) car parking use.

- There is a presumption against surface car parking in the Town Centre, which tends to be visually unattractive, undermines the vitality of town centre and represents inefficient use of land. Underground car parking facilities provide a more efficient use of land, subject to archaeological investigations. Where car parking is not underground or integrated into the building shell (i.e. Multi storey), car parking facilities should be provided behind established building lines in each development and shall be screened and to the rear of buildings so as to avoid the view of expansive car parks and to assist in providing continuous development blocks and building lines expected within a new street form.
- Implementation of the proposals for Plas na Saoire with particular focus on delivery of environmental improvement of spaces, buildings, linkages, the public realm, the town's heritage and specifically its relationship to the River Burrin/Barrow.
- Encourage late night shopping and amenities that will help promote it, including effective advertising and provision of street entertainment.
- Upgrade the quality of pedestrian streets within the centre, restricting on-street car parking and undertaking environmental improvements.
- Incorporate public art and high quality urban design, street furniture and landscaping, etc., into newly pedestrianised areas.
- Focus on providing a safe and clean pedestrian street environment at all times throughout the day and evening.
- The local authorities will consider implementing free controlled parking schemes for parts of the day (particularly on weekday afternoons).
- Seek to establish town centre partnership including Local Authorities, Retailers, Commercial Interests and Residents to progress town centre initiatives, proactively manage the town centre and consider diversified funding mechanisms for town centre improvement.
- Establish a working group to encourage facilitate and simplify positive re-development initiatives in the traditional urban core (both small and large scale) and explore and disincentives to town centre development, and vacancy.

## **CARLOW – GRAIGUECULLEN ENVIRONS AREA**

It is the policy of the Local Authorities to:

- Provide for the development of new/existing neighbourhood centres to serve the needs of new/existing residential areas within the Environs of Carlow – Graiguecullen
- The size of neighbourhood centres should be in line that specified in the Retail Planning Guidelines 2005 and as amended
- Promote the development of District Centres at the identified locations within the environs of Carlow –Graiguecullen
- Resist the change of use of previously permitted retail warehousing within the Environs area to alternative retail uses which may compete with the town centre retail area
- Ensure that new development within neighbourhood / District Centres contribute positively towards the community
- Ensure that new development within neighbourhood / district centres is complimented with public realm proposals which include a connect to the existing network of streets

- and spaces, putting the requirements of pedestrians and cyclists as a priority by creating direct routes that connect to the main areas of shopping activity
- Promote and work with private landowners to ensure that a programme of urban landscaping including measures to improve pedestrian safety, convenience, and accessibility within neighbourhood and district centres.

### **Identification of Criteria for the Assessment of Retail Developments.**

In making an application for planning permission for retail development which the planning authority considers to be large scale in relation to existing town centres, the onus is on the applicant to demonstrate compliance with the development plan and that there will not be a material adverse impact on the vitality and viability of any existing town centres. Retail impact assessments will be expected where proposals exceed 1,000sq.m gross retail area for convenience developments and 2,000sq.m gross retail area for comparison within Carlow and Environs. Thresholds above which a retail impact assessment will be required in all other areas are 500sq.m gross retail area for convenience developments and 1,000sq.m gross retail area for comparison. If developments through extensions or mezzanines exceed these thresholds a retail impact statement will be required as part of the planning application.

In submitting evidence in relation to retail impact the applicant should address the following criteria and demonstrate whether or not the proposal would:

- Support the long-term strategy for town centres as established in the development plan and not materially diminish the prospect of attracting private sector investment into one or more town centres.
- Cause an adverse impact on one or more town centre, either singly or cumulatively with recent developments or other outstanding planning permissions, sufficient to undermine the quality of the centre or its role in the economic and social life of the community.
- Diminish the range of activities and services that a town centre can support.
- Cause an increase in the number of vacant properties in the primary retail area.
- Ensure a high standard of access both by public transport, foot and private car so that the proposal is easily accessible by all sections of society.
- Provide adequate access for private cars to shopping centres.
- Link effectively with an existing town centre so that there is likely to be commercial synergy.
- Traffic Assessments will be required for major retail developments - which will presume against large scale retailing adjacent to National routes.

In addition applications and/or retail impact statements should include the following information:

- how applications meets with the Sequential Test;
- confirm the extent or the range of goods permitted for sale;
- the quality of access by all modes of transport and by foot and bicycle;
- the need for the proposed development;
- the adequacy of existing retail shopping outlets;
- the size and location of existing retail shopping outlets;
- the quality and convenience of existing retail shopping outlets;

- the effect on existing communities, including in particular the effect on established retail shopping outlets and on employment
- the needs of those who may be dependent on the availability of retail shopping outlets within walking distance;
- the need to counter urban decline and to promote urban renewal and to promote the optimum utilisation of existing infrastructure in urban areas; and
- the impacts on road traffic.

## **IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING**

In assessing all applications for planning permission for new or expanding retail activity, the planning authority will be guided by the Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities, and as subsequently amended.

In the context of changing market conditions the Carlow Retail Strategy should reviewed on a regular basis to any significant changes to the baseline data which informed the assumptions upon which Strategy is based.

- To enable the efficient monitoring of the Retail Strategy and its review, data on retail planning consents and the delivery of retail schemes should be collated at regular intervals.
- The planning authorities will seek to undertake regular surveys of town centre/retail health indicators health including vacancy, footfall, customer satisfaction on the town centre, and other retail locations within the Joint Spatial Strategy.
- The Council will seek to establish a register of land lords for the town centre and retail sites within the Local Authorities area.
- The Council will seek to establish a register of vacant sites and their respective ownerships.

