

Chapter 4 Town Centre and Urban Renewal

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The Town Centre within the Heritage Quarter

The Town Centre lies within the Heritage Quarter. The Heritage Quarter is characterised by the many historical areas and buildings. It contains a higher proportion of Architectural Conservation Areas (ACA's) than any other character areas. The iconic Millmount complex commonly known as the 'Cup and Saucer' forms an intrinsic part of this character area.

The Heritage Quarter is dominated by land zoned for Town Centre and Dockland use. The Local Area Plan for the Docklands area was adopted in 2007. There is also a portion of residential development located to the north east of the neighbourhood. There are three main road transportation corridors providing access to the Heritage Quarter. These are the Dublin, Donore and North roads. The railway also forms a key transportation corridor into the Quarter and the Town Centre. Land to the north of the Heritage Quarter slopes steeply downward toward the River Boyne rising again steeply toward Millmount effectively enclosing the Town Centre within the wider Quarter.



Strategic Objective 4 Enhance the established role of Drogheda Town Centre as the retail, social and transport focus of the entire Borough and pro-actively position the town centre as a destination of choice for both visitors and residents alike with a special emphasis on the role played by the town walls

4.1.2 Town Centre

1. Boundary

The Town Centre boundary encompasses the core retail area and analogous areas extending north from the river to the George's Street, Patrick Street junction, west to Simcock's Lane along Trinity Street, East to Constitution Hill, King Street and south across the river to encompass an area of the Dublin Road, Old Cornmarket Hill and the Bus Station.

2. Town Centre: Function and Role

At a functional level the Town Centre encapsulates the full range of retail and service functions which would be expected of a large national scale urban centre. There are also elements of commercial and industrial uses including pockets of manufacturing, logistics and transportation. At a more fundamental level for the wider Drogheda area the economic importance of the Town Centre has been recognised in successive studies of Drogheda. It is the policy of Drogheda Borough Council to prepare a detailed Framework Plan for the Town Centre within the context of the wider Heritage Quarter during the life of the Plan.



Policy TC 1

To prepare a detailed Urban Design Framework Plan for the Town Centre within the context of the wider Heritage Quarter.

3. Town Centre Ambience

Retail provision is not the only function of the Town Centre. The Town Centre provides a number of functions and operates on a number of levels. Retail policies and objectives must be pursued in conjunction with a significantly enhanced public realm that establishes a sense of place and which embraces and celebrates the strong history and heritage in the town. In this respect, Drogheda Borough Council will encourage design which focuses on urban spaces, buildings, linkages, design and interpretation of the town's heritage through sculpture and other forms of public art.

Drogheda Borough Council will also seek to encourage development proposals including change of use proposals which add social vibrancy to the Town Centre. Proposals may include arts / cultural venues / entertainment venues / restaurants / bistros / cafes etc. The maintenance of a healthy evening economy will be a priority and in this respect Drogheda Borough Council will encourage public safety measures including the installation of CCTV.



Town Centre development proposals will be guided by the town centre zoning contained within the overall zoning map for the Borough and also by the provisions contained within the Louth Retail Strategy 2009.

Policy TC 2

To consolidate, strengthen and enhance the social, economic, retail, cultural, historical and environmental strengths of Drogheda Town Centre, while addressing any constraints which hinder its sustainable development;

Policy TC 3

To encourage activities including cultural and entertainment uses that add to the diversity of the Town Centre thereby enlivening the evening economy and contributing to its vitality and viability.

4.2 Urban Renewal

The process of enhancing and re-vitalising the centre of Drogheda throughout the Plan period will help to project a positive image of the town as a thriving place in which to do business, live and socialise, and will be important in the context of realising Drogheda's significant tourism potential. The process of urban renewal is vital for the continued health and vitality of any town centre including those such as Drogheda with a rich historical legacy. However in the case of historically significant urban centres such as Drogheda, this process must be carried out with great sensitivity and respect for the rich urban grain which has been created through centuries of renewal and regeneration.



Policy TC 4

Continue the sensitive renewal and enhancement of Drogheda's Town Centre as a vibrant and attractive urban entity that will act as a catalyst for the further development of the Borough as a primary development centre strategically located along the Eastern Corridor.

4.2.1 Town Centre Objectives

Within the Town Centre, a total of six priority objectives and a range of associated actions have been identified. These are detailed below

Table 4.1: Priority Objectives and Actions for the Town Centre

| | Priority Objective | Actions |
|---|----------------------------|--|
| 1 | Heritage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasise Drogheda's Town Centre by requiring new built development to recognise the circuit of the town walls ▪ Consolidate the existing urban grain of the Town Centre ▪ Transform the Old Abbey area into a new urban cultural quarter. ▪ Seek the sympathetic reuse of the Tholsel building in West Street in a manner consistent with the other policies and objectives for the Town Centre ▪ Promote West Street as the main civic space of the town. ▪ Identify opportunity sites at strategic locations within the Town Centre. |
| 2 | Mixed Uses | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Require a sustainable mix of uses in the core retail area ▪ Require retail on the ground floor with a mixture of uses on upper floors |
| 3 | Access and Permeability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide new connection points to the Town Centre as detailed in the Drogheda Transportation Study 2006 ▪ Upgrade existing connections points within the town |
| 4 | Remove Physical Barriers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enhance the public realm within the Town Centre including providing historic cues ▪ Improve and refurbish existing infrastructure |
| 5 | Enhance Entrance Points | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create and re-establish identified gateways into the Town Centre as detailed in the Drogheda Transportation Study 2006 ▪ Create a hierarchy of landmark buildings at key approaches to the Town Centre ▪ Improve movement patterns in the Town Centre ▪ Improve signage within the Town Centre |
| 6 | Enhance Riverside Ambiance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Exploit the link with the existing natural resource of the river to complement the urban environment subject to the preparation of a habitats assessment where any development potentially impinges upon a Natura 2000 site |

4.2.2 Opportunity Sites

The Town Centre has benefited from considerable physical enhancement to some of the main streets thereby increasing the attractiveness of the urban space as a whole. It is recognised however that considerable work remains to be done to regenerate certain areas of the Town Centre if this renaissance is to continue. This Plan details a number of targeted areas which would benefit from significant renewal. Drawing on the recommendations contained within studies such as the Indecon Economic Development Strategy, a total of 6 individual sites have been identified as key opportunity sites within the Town Centre. Refer to Map 4.1 Opportunity Sites.

Table 4.2 Opportunity Sites

| No. | Location | Description | Constraints |
|-----|---|--|---|
| 1 | Mill Lane | Former Bed and Breakfast | Poor physical access Dependent upon adjoining land owners for access |
| 2 | Mill Lane | Overall street | Owned by various individuals Poor physical access |
| 3 | Georges Street, north of Narrow West Street and west of Scholes Lane. | Block of land | Archaeology Protected structure located on site Huge difference in ground level between Fair Street and Narrow West Street In the number of different land owners Architectural Conservation Area |
| 4 | South of Narrow West Street including Old Abbey Lane. | Block of land | Number of land owners Archaeology Protected Structures ACA |
| 5 | Fair Street / | Borough Council Offices and service areas | To be evaluated as part of redevelopment process Protected Structure |
| 6 | West Street | The Tholsel – Originally built as a guildhall and later also used as a courthouse, it became a bank in 1889. | Protected Structure Architectural Conservation Area |
| 7 | East of Scholes Lane | Block of Land | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Architectural Conservation Area ▪ Protected Structures ▪ Archaeology |

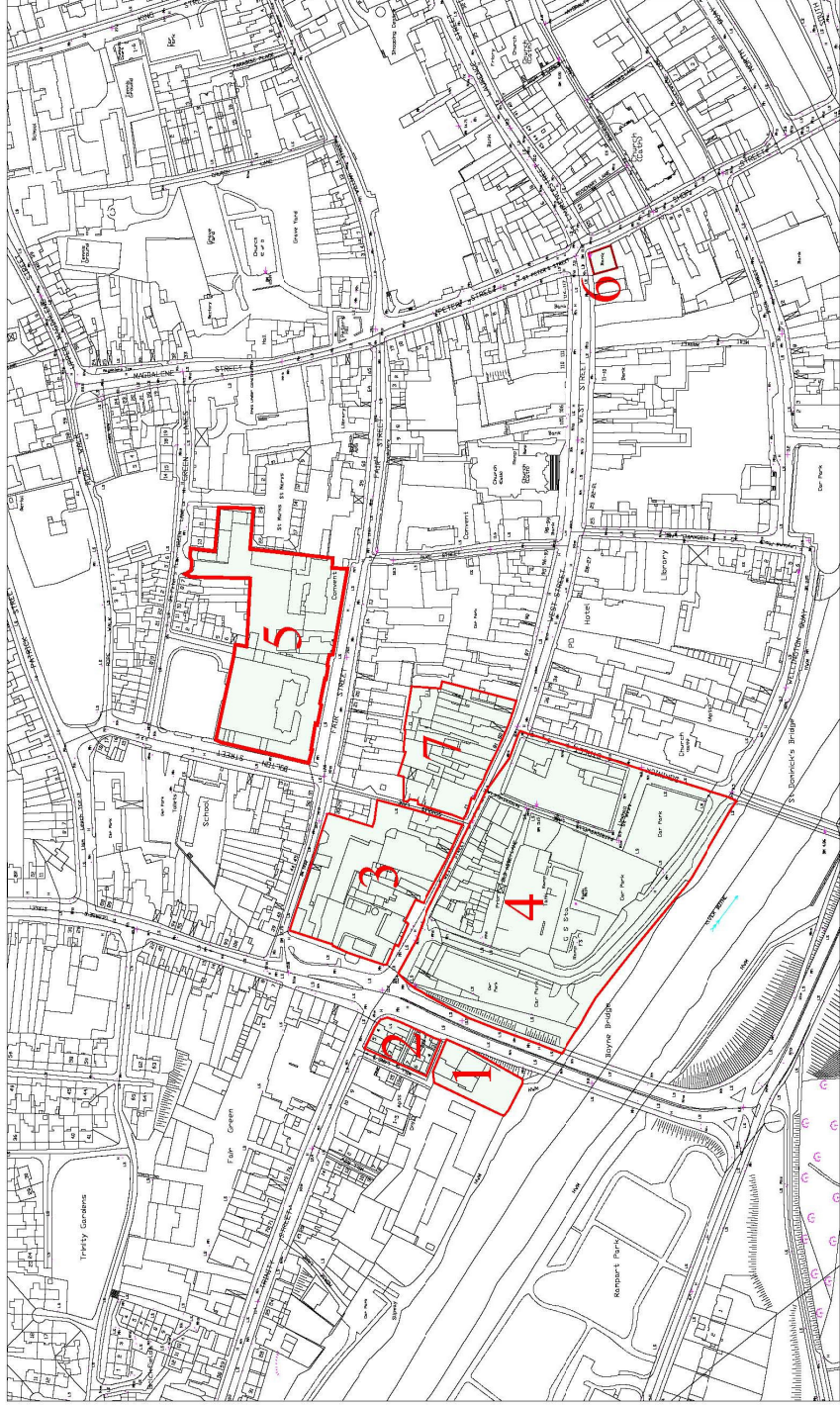
Chapter 4 Town Centre

The Drogheda Borough Council Development Levy Scheme 2010-2014 offers a 50% reduction in the contributions due for development on Opportunity Sites. It is anticipated that this shall encourage regeneration proposals to ensure that Drogheda is an attractive place to live, work and visit which in turn, will result in widespread economic benefits and attract inward investment.

Policy TC 5

Promote and facilitate the development of key Opportunity Sites within the Town Centre

Map 4.1 Opportunity Sites



4.3 Town Centre Zoning and the Core Retail Area

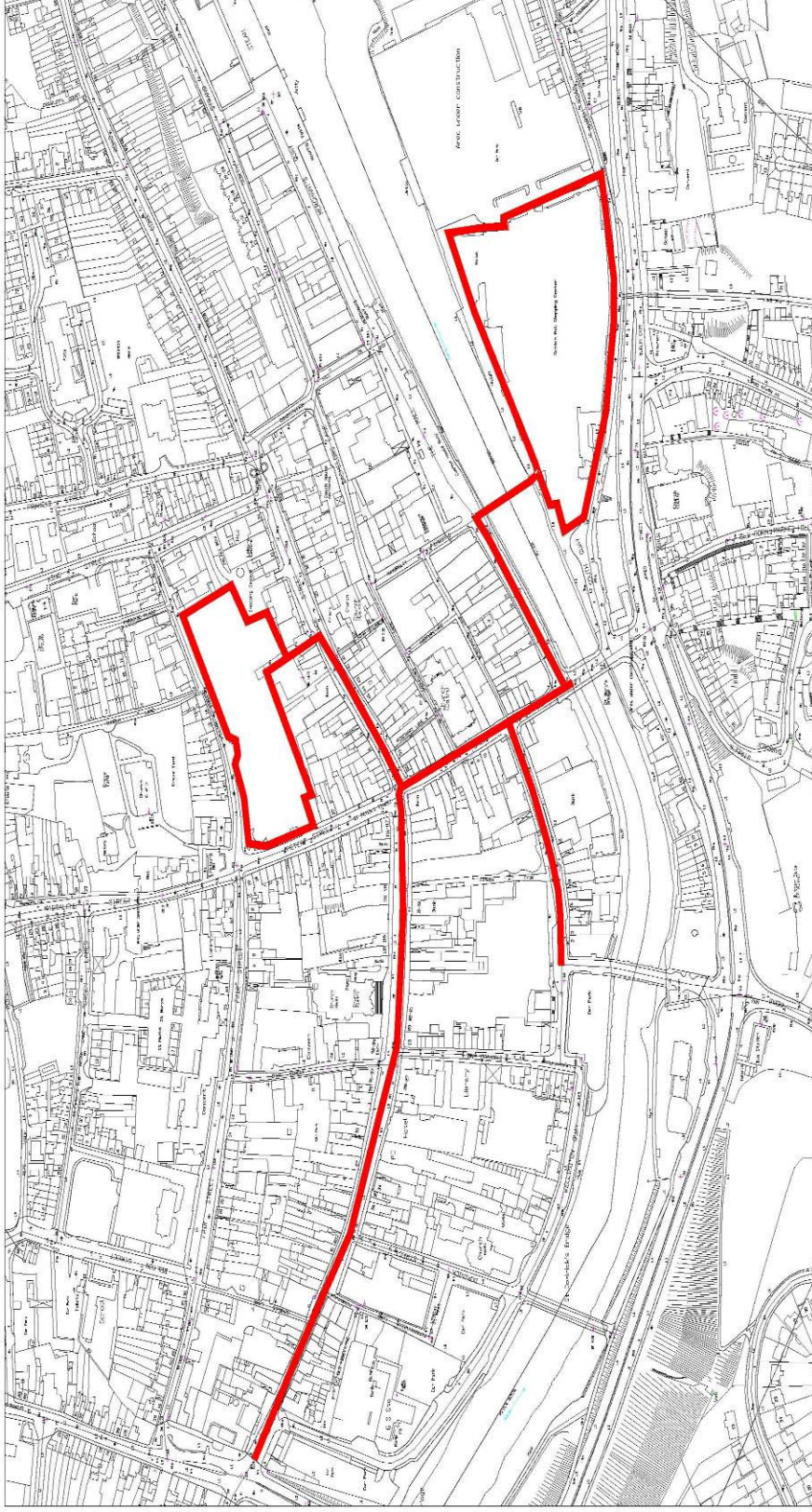
The Town Centre encompasses the Core Retail Area. The Core retail area is formed by the following streets and areas; West Street, Narrow West Street, Shop Street, Dyer Street, Laurence Street, North Quay, St Laurence Town Centre Shopping Centre and the Scotch Hall Shopping Centre. The core retail area forms the historic heart of the town, with important buildings such as St Peter's Church, the Tholsel, High Lanes Gallery and the Augustinian Church being located in the area



The Louth Retail Strategy 2009 has provided a spatial definition of the core retail area. The shopping core has been defined as West Street, Narrow West Street, Shop Street, Dyer Street, North Quay, Scotch Hall Shopping Centre, St Lawrence Town Centre Shopping Centre. For the purposes of the Plan, Dominic Street, Stockwell Lane, Meatmarket Lane, Peters Street, and all intervening lanes and courts are also defined as falling within this core retail area given the connectivity and continuity which they provide to the key retail streets. The key aim of the retail strategy is to ensure that the primacy, as a focus for retail activity, of West Street and its environs is maintained. Refer to Map 4.2, Drogheda's Core Retail Area.

The enhanced retail offer now available in the newer areas of the Town Centre centred around the Scotch Hall Shopping Centre and St Lawrence Town Centre has tended to diminish the role of the older areas of the core retail area located along West Street and Narrow West Street. In order to address these trends a range of targeted interventions will be introduced for those areas of the core retail area which have suffered some decline since the retail focus moved geographically south and eastwards. These are outlined below in the section on Opportunity Sites. The detailed policies associated with retailing in the Town Centre are detailed in Chapter 3.

Map 4.2 Drogheda's Core Retail Area



4.3.1 Retailing: General Principals

Within the defined core retail area, any proposed development that would involve a net loss of convenience or comparison shopping floor space at ground level will be resisted.

Permitted uses at ground floor level should be predominantly retail but may also include financial and professional services, where the premises are frequently visited by the public and where an active window display is maintained at street level. Proposed development within upper floors should seek to include residential development in order to enhance the vibrancy of the Town Centre, particularly outside of business hours.

There has been increasing pressure placed on the shopping core for non-comparative shopping uses. In order to protect and safeguard the retail uses and street frontages in the core retail area and to reinforce the attractiveness of the core retail area, it will be necessary to restrict change of uses from comparison shopping and encouraging the further development of retail frontages.

Throughout the core retail area, applications for retail service outlets such as internet cafés, call centres, bookmakers, take-aways, off-licences, amusement arcades, car rentals, financial institutions, pubs, cafes and restaurants at ground floor level will be assessed on their merits and may only be permitted where such development would not result in a predominance of similar non-retail frontages on the street, in order to protect and safeguard the retail uses and street frontages in the core shopping area.

Policy TC 6

To strengthen the role of the Core Retail Area by restricting change of use from comparison shopping and encouraging the further development of retail frontages

Resist the conversion of ground floors of retail premises to non retail uses in the Core Retail area. Any proposed development within the Core Retail Area shall endeavour to include provision for residential development in upper floors

Policy TC 7

To limit, except where specifically permitted by other policies within the Plan, retail developments outside the core retail area. The sequential approach detailed in the Retail Planning Guidelines 2005, should be adopted where it is demonstrated that no Town Centre site is available.

4.4 Drogheda Docklands Area

A detailed Land Use Plan has been prepared for the Drogheda Docklands Area (Drogheda Docklands Area Plan – DAP). This area incorporates St. Laurence’s Town Centre / Laurence Street, the eastern side of Shop Street, the western side of Constitution Hill and North Quay / The Mall to the south which can be termed the Backlanes. It also extends across the river to include the south quays as far as the Dublin Road where it intersects with Poorhouse Lane and the Marsh Road to a point close to Weir Hope.



Figure 4.1: Drogheda Docklands Area



The DAP also considers wider links and connections to surrounding areas. The area contains a number of key nodes in the form of small squares, largely utilised for parking purposes, together with a variety of streets and lanes interspersed with numerous protected structures. In its entirety the DAP area forms a rich urban fabric with significant architectural merits and represents a valuable historical and cultural resource for the Borough as a whole. All proposals for development in this area must be in accordance with the Drogheda Docklands Area Plan

4.5 Gateway Sites

The respect afforded to the existing townscape value of Drogheda will however not necessarily preclude consideration of taller structures at key sites particularly where such sites form gateways into the Town Centre and facilitate the development of key opportunity sites within the Town Centre.

The development of gateway sites at strategic locations should signal a distinctive entrance to the Town Centre. Such development can provide for focal points and improve legibility within the town. Gateway development sites are most appropriate along the major approach corridors where these are near the Town Centre. Suitable locations may include;

- Donore Road / James Street Area
- North Road / Georges Street Area

Other locations may be considered on a case by case basis. Consideration may also be given to the construction of gateway buildings in the Drogheda Transport Development Area, as the railway in itself constitutes a major approach corridor to the Town Centre.

In all cases, any proposed gateway building must respect the existing town landscape and fabric. Each proposal will be evaluated on its own merits but within the context of the wider policies and objectives for the Town Centre.

Policy TC 8

Seek to develop a number of Gateway sites at key gateways to the Town Centre

4.6 Drogheda's Walls

Drogheda's Heritage Quarter, as defined in this Plan, is to a large extent reflective of the walled area of medieval Drogheda. This area comprised some 45 hectares making it one of the largest walled towns in medieval Ireland and indeed Europe. The circuit of the walls on both sides of the River Boyne no longer survives intact above ground however fragmentary remnants survive, the most notable structure being the imposing St Laurence's Gate. Whilst the walls themselves no longer form an immediately visible part of the Heritage Quarter, the medieval street pattern which they enclosed, remains intact. This gives Drogheda Town Centre and the wider Heritage Quarter a unique legacy which, when combined with the valley-like topography of the town, the river and the wide range of striking protected structures scattered across the Town Centre, provides Drogheda with a rich urban asset which is unrivalled on the east coast of Ireland. The potential to exploit this asset in a sustainable manner has yet to be fully realised, especially given Drogheda's geographical position as the natural centre from which visitors could base themselves whilst visiting the extensive range of visitor attractions located close by in the Boyne Valley.

Policy TC 9

Build on the potential of the historic legacy of the Town Centre as defined by the circuit of the town defences to highlight and develop the potential of Drogheda as the natural focus point of the Boyne Valley and as a major tourist and retail attraction in its own right.

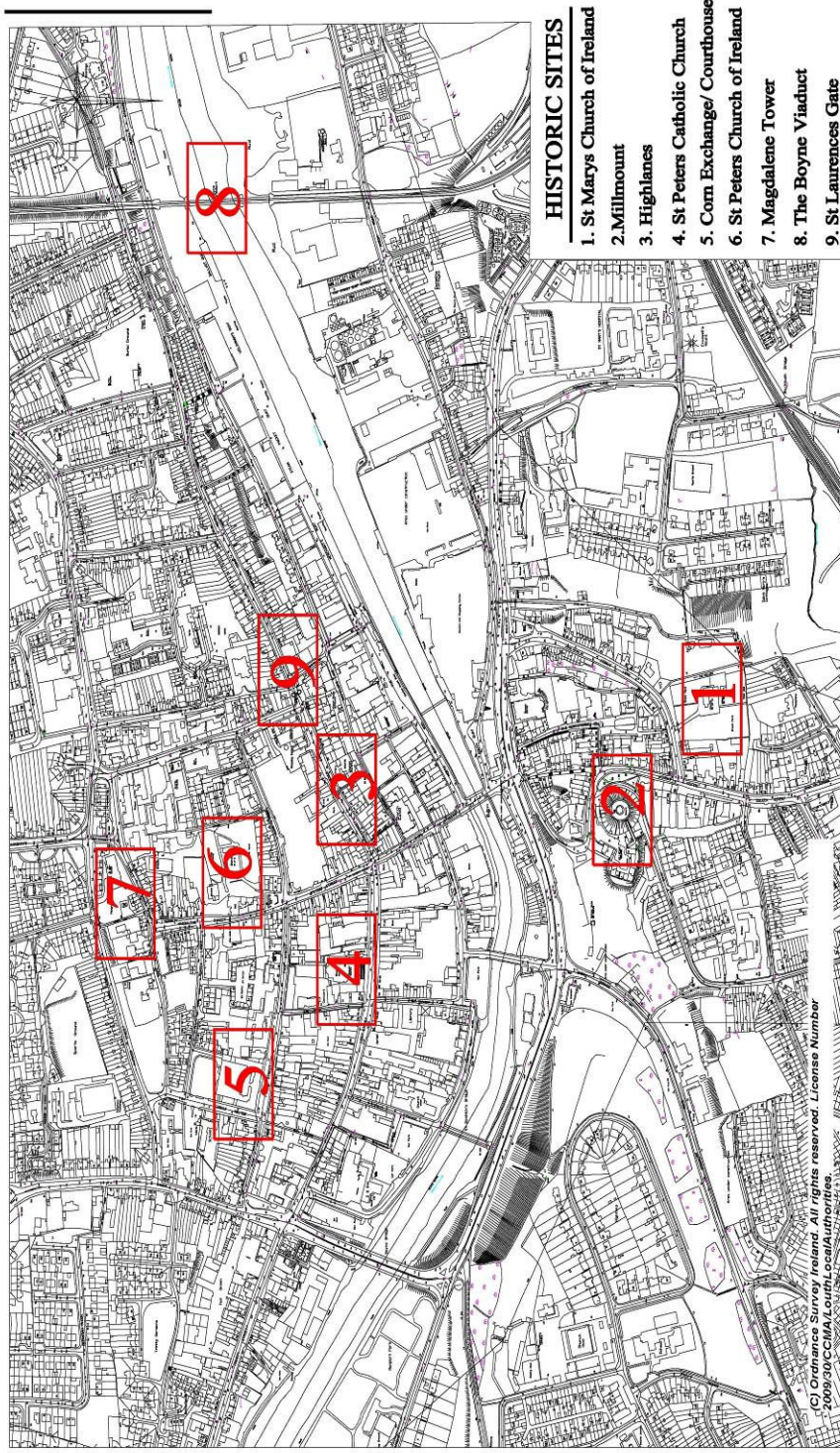
4.7 Townscape

The character of Drogheda is derived from an interlinked layout of streets, public spaces and buildings which in its present built form remains in large part medieval, despite the loss of much of the actual medieval fabric of the town over the years. This tremendous sense of place is enhanced by the topography of the Town Centre built as it is in a relatively narrow river valley. This basic structure has been enhanced over the centuries by later building styles such as Georgian and Victorian to blend into a unique and lively townscape.



Drogheda has numerous church towers and civic buildings in or adjacent the Town Centre which dominate the vertical elements of the townscape. These include, most notably, St. Peter's (RC) Church, St. Peter' (Col) Church, St. Mary's (RC) Church, Old Abbey Lane, The Magdalene Tower, The Augustinian Church, The Tholsel, Lawrence's Gate and Millmount. Apart from these, older buildings in the town centre do not generally exceed four storeys over basement in height. When considering proposals for development, Drogheda Borough Council will seek to ensure that they conform to good architectural standards and respect the scale and character of the existing street scene, roofscape and layout of the Town Centre. Refer to Map 2.3 Historic Buildings.

Map 4.3: Historic Buildings



4.7.1 Design

Good urban design is essential for the provision of a strong sense of identity and the forging of a link between planning and design to produce a better quality built environment. A comprehensive design guidance is included at Appendix 2 and this guidance should be considered and taken on board by designers of development proposed within the Town Centre. In brief, developments should:

- Respect the character of the streetscape and area in terms of design detail and materials
- Conform to the scale, massing, layout, height and urban grain of the streetscape as far as possible to ensure continuity of street frontages and clear definition of public and private spaces
- Respect and not restrict important views, vistas or landmarks within the townscape
- Contribute to enhancing the focus of pedestrian movement within the Town Centre

4.7.2 Vistas and Roofscape

The topography of Drogheda means that vistas over roofs are important. They are especially significant in views over the Town Centre at the junction of Magdelene Street / Fair Street, on the approach from the South along the Donore Road, on the approach from the South along the Rathmullan Road and on the approach from the South along the Dublin Road. This list is not definitive and the impact of proposed developments upon the vistas and roofscape of Drogheda Borough will be assessed on a case by case basis.

4.7.3 Shopfronts & Signage

Good signage on shops and commercial premises can contribute to the character, appearance and vitality of the Town Centre. Drogheda has many fine examples of traditional shopfronts together with some contemporary shopfront treatments which respect traditional design. However the appearance of large parts of the Town Centre is marred by the imposition of inappropriate signage and shopfronts. This takes the form of both poor design and inappropriate use of materials. Drogheda Borough Council seeks to encourage sympathetic shopfront and signage treatment. Further guidance is contained within Appendix 2.

Policy TC 10

Encourage a high quality built environment within the Town Centre and ensure compliance with Urban Design Guidance outlined in Appendix 2.

4.8 River Boyne Riverside Walkway

The Borough Council will endeavour to foster and develop the potential of the River Boyne for both passive and active recreational pursuits taking full account of the need to protect the natural heritage of the river and the need to avoid significant adverse impacts on Natura 2000 sites and species protected by law. Development proposals will be encouraged to address the presence of the River Boyne whilst respecting its status as key element in the local ecosystem.

Policy TC 11

It is the objective of the Borough Council to have a continuous uninterrupted walkway on both sides of the river which links existing residential areas and the Town Centre. The design of the walkway including use of materials, finishes etc. shall be agreed with Drogheda Borough Council. Any walkway proposals which might impinge upon the integrity of a Natura 2000 site must ensure that a screening exercise for Appropriate Assessment is carried out. Where required, full Appropriate Assessment must be carried out for any plan or project which, individually, or in combination with other plans or projects, is likely to have a significant direct or indirect impact on any Natura 2000 site.

4.9 Connectivity in and around the Town Centre

Key components of effective connectivity and permeability in and around the Town Centre include the:

- Improvement of pedestrian and cycle connectivity between the Town Centre, Historic Quarter and other parts of the Borough.
- Enhancement of mobility and access for all sections of the community by adopting the 'Aging Cities Initiative' and by the provision of dropped kerbs, tactile paving, obstruction free footpaths, appropriate signalling and pedestrian crossings (Appendix 1).
- Implementation of the Town Centre parking strategy by requiring the provision of car parking as part of new development proposals (subject to relaxation in certain circumstances), the promotion of multi-storey car parking and the restriction of extensive surface car parking.
- Improvement of directional signage throughout the Town Centre
- Drogheda Borough Council shall investigate the possibility of improving connectivity between the historic sites of Buttergate and Millmount.

Policy TC 12

Promote greater connectivity and permeability throughout the Town Centre through the provision of improved roads, pedestrian and cycling facilities, parking and signage

4.10 Town Centre Office Development

Within the core retail area it is important to maintain a predominance of shopfronts at ground level in order to retain continuity and vitality in the main shopping area. Therefore there will generally be a presumption against business office development at ground floor level in the main shopping frontages. Office development will be permitted in these areas above ground floor level and behind frontages. Separate access to office developments in these locations is desirable in order that future use of upper floors is not prejudiced. Beyond the core retail area office development will normally be permitted in established commercial areas.

The intrusion of office use into established residential areas both within the Town Centre

and immediately adjacent to it, will normally be resisted in the interests of maintaining the Town Centre housing stock. In those areas where there is already a mix of housing and commercial uses, conversion of the remaining dwellings may be considered subject to meeting normal planning requirements.

4.11 Housing within the Town Centre

The Borough Council acknowledges that residential development within Drogheda's town centre can make a very positive and significant contribution to its vitality.

Town Centre housing provides continued after-hours life and activity and informal surveillance in the centre outside normal commercial hours. The provision of new Town Centre housing will be favourably considered on suitable Town Centre sites. Drogheda Borough Council will also actively encourage the conversion of disused or under used commercial or other properties for residential use.

Reutilisation of Upper Floors for Residential Purposes

Drogheda Borough Council will encourage residential use above shops and other business premises, within the Town Centre, provided that the primary retail core and commercial functions are not prejudiced and that they comply with normal planning environmental considerations.

Through the Development Contribution Scheme Drogheda Borough Council will offer financial incentives to encourage reutilisation of upper floors for residential purposes in designated areas of the town. The area designated for the Reutilisation of Upper Floors for Residential Purposes will be:

West Street

4.12 Community Uses

Drogheda Borough Council is aware of the advantages which a central location can give to community uses and will assist in identifying opportunities for new or extended community facilities in response to identified needs.

4.13 Open Space within the Town Centre

Within the Town Centre and Heritage Quarter there are limited areas of open space. It is therefore important that where such areas do exist, that they are protected through the Plan process. The protection of these small areas of open space is important for the quality of the environment and the quality of life for the residents of the Historic Town Centre and the surrounding areas.



Policy TC 13

Maintain and protect existing areas of open space within the Town Centre and Heritage Quarter and resist any loss of such open space.