



CHAPTER 7

RETAIL & TOURISM



Tá Tainn Bó Cuailgne ar chomhar de réir na hÉireann. Tá sí ina bean
 scéil Chíchuláin, ar fáil le hÉireann. Tá sí ina bean scéil
 ar fáil le hÉireann. Tá sí ina bean scéil ar fáil le hÉireann.
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The Tainn Bó Cuailgne or the Cattle Raid of Cooley is one of Europe's oldest
 tales. Featuring Cúchulainn, with mythological origins, the tale recalls
 the efforts of Maevius Queen of Connaught, to steal the fabled brown bull of
 Cooley in an attempt to match the wealth of her husband, Ailill. Ultimately
 Maevius's plans are defeated but not before a series of battles that result in
 the death of Fionn following a bloody fight with his foster brother and
 best friend, Cúchulainn.

There is a legend by John Brehon highlights some of the key aspects of the
 Tainn including Cúchulainn's birth, his first meeting with Eithne Ni Fhuat, and
 his battles with Queen Maeve's army.

The Tainn is very much associated with Dundalk and north Leath. Cooley is
 located just to the north of Dundalk, and it is around Dundalk and the
 coastal plain of Mourne that Cúchulainn is reported to have grown up.

**I Cúchulainn ar pháistín a mháthar, Deichléine, agus a eas
 léinn**

*He had to attend school in his mother's house, Deichléine,
 and attend school in his foster father's house.*

**I Cúchulainn as a baby on his mother, Deichléine's
 knee**

*He was reared, Purgus said, by his father and mother in their
 native house on Mourne Hill.*

Duine de na daoibh sin a bhí ann is ea John Brehon agus é sa bhliain
 1850. Tá sé ina scríbhneoir agus é ina scríbhneoir. Tá sé ina scríbhneoir
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7 RETAIL AND TOURISM

7.1 Introduction

Retail and tourism represent two of the major economic drivers within the local and regional economy, accounting for significant employment levels in Dundalk. This chapter sets out the strategy for retailing and tourism in Dundalk.

7.2 Retail and Town Centre

Town centres across the country are facing unprecedented challenges. The proportion of retail sales transacted online for all Retail Businesses in Ireland was 5.8% in January 2022 compared to 3.2% in January 2021.¹

Notwithstanding the growth of online sales and subsequent decline in footfall in town centres, most retailing in Ireland still takes place in physical stores.

Shoppers are availing of an omnichannel approach whereby retailers combine a physical network of stores with an online presence or a combination of the two platforms e.g. 'click and collect'.

Whilst internet sales are likely to increase, and changes are continuing as to how people shop, an opportunity exists to improve the range of experiences available to shoppers within town centres, which will encourage them to spend more leisure time without compromising the overall retail function.

7.3 Policy Context

There is a wide suite of national and regional planning guidance which promote and encourage regeneration whilst acknowledging the ever-changing role of the town centre, these are outlined in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1: National and Regional Planning Context

Planning Document	Guidance in Relation to Town Centre
Retail Planning Guidelines and Design Manual 2012	These guidelines require an evidence-based approach to be taken to the formulation of policy objectives and strategy with regard to retailing. The associated Retail Design Manual sets out key principles of urban design which may form the framework for policies to promote quality design in development plans and local area plans
National Planning Framework	The aim of revitalising towns and urban areas is strongly reflected in the objectives and priorities of the National Planning Framework. There is a focus on improving towns and delivering more compact settlements by prioritising population, residential and employment growth on infill and brownfield lands and in areas close to services and amenities.
National Development Plan 2021- 2030	Mirrors the national strategic objectives of the National Planning Framework and provides specific funding measures to support the compact growth agenda, regeneration, strengthening rural/urban economies and communities, and sustainable transport.

¹ Retail Sales Generated Online January 2022 (Provisional) - CSO - Central Statistics Office



Planning Document	Guidance in Relation to Town Centre
Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region	The RSES includes a Retail Hierarchy for the Region (Table 6.1 in the RSES). Dublin City Centre is identified as a Level 1 Metropolitan Centre. Major Town Centres, including Dundalk, are identified as Level 2 Centres in this Hierarchy. The RSES seeks to co-ordinate land use and to provide for sustainable retail development in Dundalk.
Climate Action Plan	Promotes extensive retrofitting of existing premises and housing stock and the prioritisation of brownfield and compact development.
Town Centre First-Policy Approach for Irish Towns	Recognises the importance of towns in enabling social, economic, and environmental development. Acknowledges that there is a need to reverse the pattern of stagnation, which may require the identification and establishment of new roles and new functions, including the enhancement of local infrastructure and amenities or a greater emphasis on services, hospitality, and social interaction.

7.4 Dundalk’s Historical Context

Commerce and trade have played a significant role in the overall development of Dundalk. In medieval times, the Castletown River, located to the north of the town was a vital trade route. To facilitate the transport of wares, the town developed in a linear manner along Clanbrassil Street toward Market Square which was the settlements’ commercial heart. Many of Dundalk’s traditional shopping streets are located within Architectural Conservation Areas reflecting their role in Dundalk’s development as a historic market town. Today, Clanbrassil Street remains Dundalk’s primary shopping street along its Core Retail Area.

Blackrock is located to the southeast of Dundalk and developed as a fishing village in the early 19th century. The construction of a wall along the beach and several lodgings in the mid 1800’s marked Blackrock’s rapid development as a popular holiday resort.

Today it is a vibrant Urban Village and continues to function as an attractive residential and tourism destination.

7.4.1 Town Centre and Core Retail Area

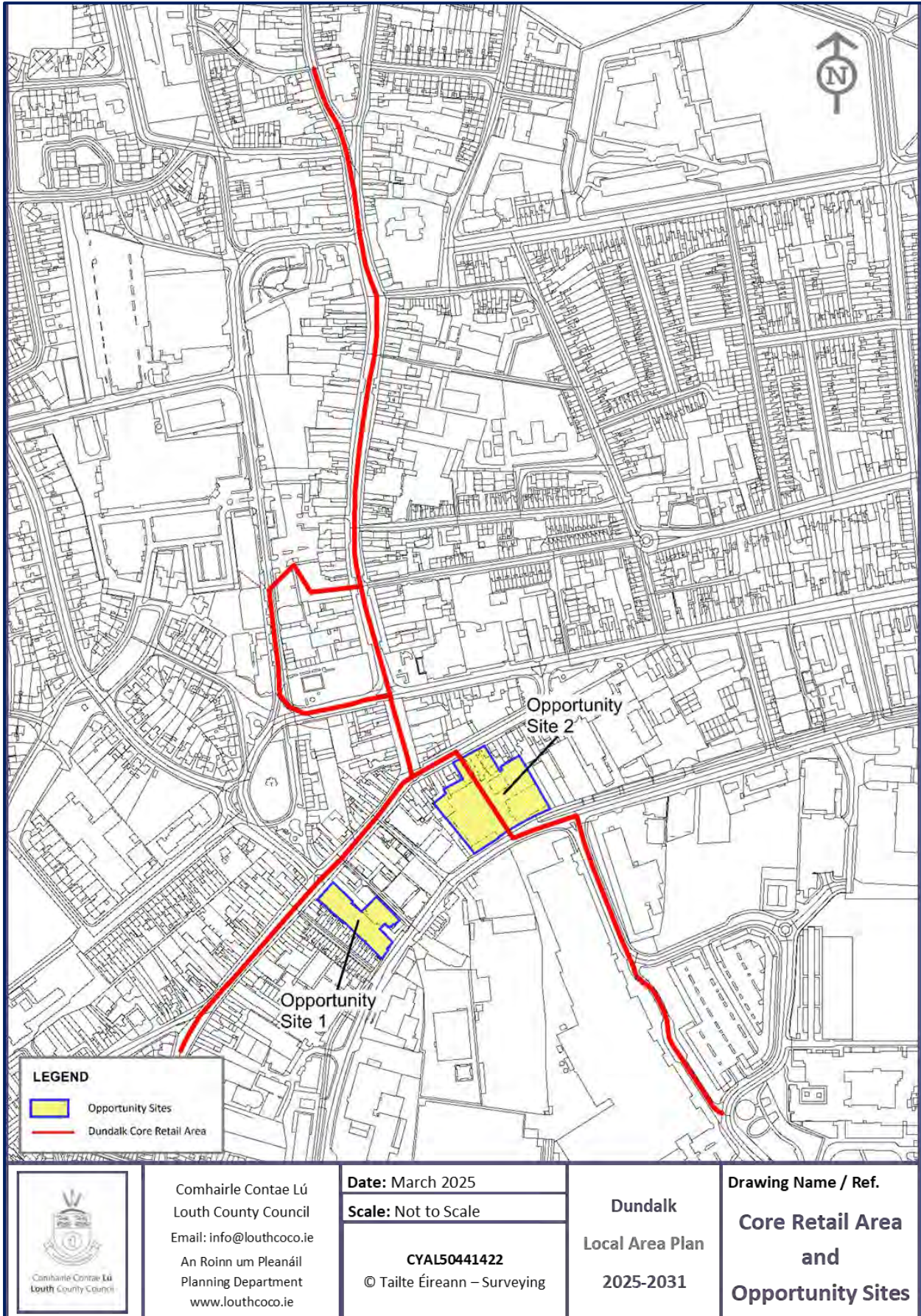
Dundalk’s Core Retail Area is set out in Map 7.1. It stretches from St. Nicholas Church of Ireland southward along Clanbrassil Street incorporating the Clanbrassil Street Shopping Centre and its surrounds as well as Market Square. It continues southward extending through Williamsons Mall and encompasses the Marshes Shopping Centre. The Core Retail Area also extends westward along Park Street.

The function of Dundalk’s town centre and indeed Core Retail Area has evolved and developed over time with an increase in the provision of service and leisure facilities as well as cafés, bars, and restaurants.

Whilst the primacy of the core shopping areas retail function ought to be retained it is considered that the increasingly ‘blended’ role of the town centre has the potential to generate additional footfall and improve its overall vitality and viability.



Map 7.1: Dundalk's Core Retail Area





7.5 Dundalk’s Retail Hierarchy

In the County Retail Hierarchy Dundalk is identified as a Level 1 Centre. This is reflective of the retail provision in the town, its status as

the County Town and its designation as a Regional Growth Centre. Within Dundalk there is a sub-retail hierarchy as follows:



1. Level 1 – Dundalk Town Centre

Dundalk Town Centre is located at the top of the retail hierarchy providing (in conjunction with Drogheda), the predominant shopping destination for the County. There is a broad range of comparison shopping available that includes high street brands and higher order independent stores. It also provides a significant quantum of public office and civic functions including the Town Hall, court service, public library, and museum. Dundalk is also an important transport hub for the County; The Longwalk Bus Station is located along the core shopping area and Clarke Train Station is only a 3-minute walk away. In addition, the town centre offers a range of tourist accommodation and attractions, refer to Section 7.8 of this chapter for further details.



2. Level 2 – Blackrock Village and District Centres

At Level 2 there are two different typologies of centres: Blackrock Urban Village and Ard Easmuinn District Centre. The District Centres provide an appropriate range of retail and non-retail functions to serve the needs of the community and their respective catchment areas. The urban village at Blackrock comprises of a medium sized convenience store, a comparison goods store, pharmacy, and a number of art/gift shops as well as, retail services, and food / beverage outlets.



3. Level 3 – Neighbourhood Centres

The next level down comprises of the Neighbourhood Centres at Hoey’s Lane, the Fairways and at the Castletown and Avenue Roads. They provide an important economic, social, and physical focal point for their community. Additionally, there is undeveloped land zoned as a Neighbourhood Centre along the Old Golf Links Road. The planned expanded population increases in the Haynestown and Mount Avenue areas could support further local retail provision in accordance with the growth strategy of this Plan.



4. Level 4 – Corner/Local Shops

The lowest level of the hierarchy relates to small corner / local shops. Such local retail facilities provide a valuable local function to the communities that they serve.



7.5.1 Vacancy

The vacancy rate of a town is a clear indicator of the economic and social health. In Dundalk, the vacancy rate for commercial properties (which includes retail properties) in Q4 2023 was 19.1%, which is 4.8% higher than the national average (14.3%), and 6.5% higher than the average for Leinster (13%). Between Q4 2022 and Q4 2023 the commercial vacancy rate in Dundalk was unchanged at 19.1%.²

The current rate of vacancy in Dundalk is thought to be associated with the increasing costs of doing business in terms of energy costs and food inflation as well as interest rate increases which are generating pressure for commercial owner occupiers and tenants. It is also considered that trends such as working from home, sustainability and energy efficiency have resulted in an increase in commercial vacancy.

Along Dundalk's Core Shopping Area there is a concentration of vacant properties on the western side of Clanbrassil Street at its junction with Yorke Street, to the north of Earl Street on both sides; and the former Dunnes building along Park Street has remained vacant for some time. A map indicating vacant properties in the Core Shopping Area of Dundalk in Q1 2024 is set out in Map 7.2.

The level of vacancy in Dundalk is an indication of the challenges facing the retail sector and businesses in the town. In response to these issues this Plan recognises the need to create attractive, vibrant spaces in the town centre area.

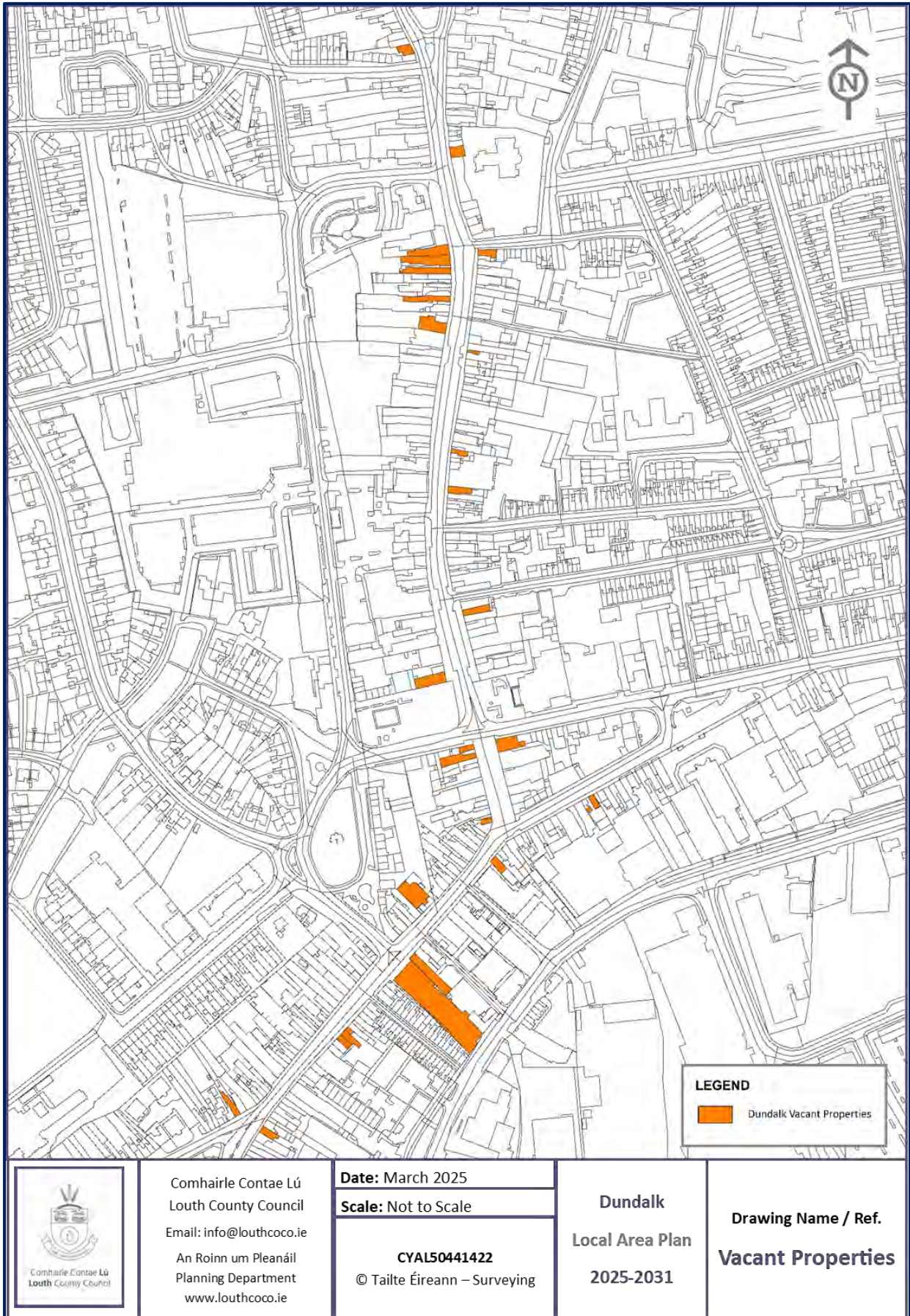
It will support an expansion or diversification in the range of uses in the town centre, particularly in vacant or under-utilised buildings and spaces, that takes account of the changing nature of retail and the need to provide shoppers and visitors with an 'experience' that will encourage them back on a regular basis.

Such uses include the provision of a mix of shopping, leisure, office, and residential uses in an attractive and family friendly environment. This approach will ensure that the town centre can adapt to change in the retail sector and is consistent with the Government's Town Centre First policy.

²<https://www.geodirectory.ie/news/geodirectory-commercial-buildings-report-q4-2023>



Map 7.2: Dundalk Vacant Properties (Survey January 2024)





7.6 Strategy to Support the Town Centre

To ensure Dundalk's long-term sustainability, viability and vitality it is important that the town centre can adapt to changing consumer demands and behaviours, and the challenges posed by online retailing. To attract the shopper to the town centre there must be a vibrant mix of shopper experiences and additionally, it must function as a business, service, social, cultural, and recreational hub for the local community. Ongoing and new measures to achieve this are detailed below.

7.6.1 Development of Brownfield/Infill Sites and Adaptive Reuse of Vacant Properties

The town centre is Dundalk's commercial hub, its function and role is constantly evolving. This on-going transition has resulted in a number of infill/brownfield sites and vacant properties within the town centre and surrounding streets.

This Plan strongly encourages the development of brownfield/ infill sites and the re-use and/ or change of use of vacant and underutilised properties including historic buildings. It also advocates for developers, landowners and the Council to coordinate and work together in relation to site assembly.

It is recognised that there may be instances where a developer or the Council may purchase a group of buildings or plot(s) of land to ensure a co-ordinated, integrated approach to a regeneration project. This Plan promotes such initiatives and, where required, will support the Compulsory Purchase Order process to facilitate the progression of these projects.

Whilst it is acknowledged that there can be challenges in adapting older and historic buildings, their re-purposing can contribute positively to the character and uniqueness of the town centre and surrounding area.

Examples of vacant and under-utilised sites



Two examples of vacant and under-utilised sites close to the Core Shopping Area of the town are No. 2 and 3 Anne Street, the backland areas of No.'s 44-50 Park Street and the former warehouse to the rear of No. 65 Anne Street. Both sites have been vacant for a considerable period of time and have significant development potential given their proximity to the town centre. Whilst it is recognised that there can be challenges in developing such lands, this Plan shall seek to facilitate any proposals that would be compatible with surrounding land uses and make a positive impact on the local streetscape.

The re-purposing of buildings (including historic assets) and development of infill/ brownfield sites such as those referred to above can inject new life into an area by increasing the footfall and social and economic activity, addressing vacancy and dereliction, as well as improving permeability and overall connectivity with the town centre. Furthermore, such projects can also have a multiplier effect within an area.



7.6.2 Encourage Redevelopment of Opportunity Sites

This Retail Strategy has identified two opportunity sites in Dundalk’s Core Shopping area: The Former Dunnes at Park Street and Williamsons Mall. It is considered that the development of these sites provides an excellent opportunity to reinvigorate the areas in which they are located and improve permeability.

Opportunity Site 1 (OS1) – Former Dunnes Stores, Park Street

The former Dunnes Stores premises occupies a highly prominent and extensive retail façade along Park Street. Dunnes Stores traded from the premises from the late 1960’s up to 2009. The premises have remained vacant since the closure of the store, and this has contributed to a reduction in footfall and vibrancy along Park Street.

Opportunity Site 1 – Former Dunnes at Park Street



The building also accesses onto River Lane and the rear of the premises backs onto the Ramparts. The site provides an opportunity to reinvigorate this area of Park Street and provides a further opportunity to improve linkages to River Lane and the Ramparts. It is noted that an application for a ‘sports entertainment centre’ at this opportunity site was granted in August 2024 and works had commenced on site in Q4 2024.

Opportunity Site 2 (OS2) – Williamsons Mall

This site boasts a double frontage onto Francis Street to the north and onto the Ramparts to the South, via ‘Williamsons Mall’. The site is used for surface car-parking and is enclosed by buildings which are primarily commercial/retail in nature extending to approximately 0.648 hectares. The site provides an opportunity to improve linkages and legibility between the traditional town centre area and the Marshes Shopping Centre.



Opportunity Site 2 – Williamson’s Mall



7.6.3 Creation of an Attractive Public Realm (streets, spaces, and parks)

The regeneration of Market Square and Clanbrassil Street in conjunction with the painting of properties and implementation of the ‘SEEK’ project have assisted in the transformation of Dundalk’s town centre. Future projects including the regeneration of The Longwalk and St. Nicholas Quarter will encourage regeneration, improve permeability and strengthen the attractiveness of the town by enticing people to meet, mingle and dwell. This Plan has also identified Park Street, Francis Street and St. Patrick’s Church as a ‘Key Development Areas’ and recognises the potential benefits of environmental and public realm improvements in providing a sense of place and stimulating investment.

7.6.4 Provide a Range of Cultural, Recreational and Community Spaces (that includes scope for periodic events and festivals)

Cultural attractions including the Oriel Centre at Dundalk Gaol, An Táin Arts Centre and the County Museum, as well as activities such as ‘Frostival’ and the Saint Brigid’s festival play a key role in attracting additional day and evening footfall as well as bringing people together and attracting visitors/tourists. The Council will continue to support, develop, and promote cultural activities in Dundalk.



7.6.5 Realising Dundalk's Cultural and Heritage Assets

The conservation, adaptation and enhancement of historical buildings and streetscapes assist in providing the town with its own unique identity. The Council will continue to seek to capitalise on Dundalk's heritage potential and generate additional footfall through enhanced placemaking.

7.6.6 Supporting Residential Use in the Town Centre

An increase in the residential population within the town centre would assist in providing the essential critical mass required to support shops and services, a night-time economy, and an overall safer environment. The Council will encourage, support, and promote more residential units as part of mixed-use developments or through the reuse/retrofit of the upper floors of existing buildings. Consideration will also be given to the change of use of vacant/under-utilised ground floor units in certain circumstances where it would not compromise the retail function of Dundalk's core shopping streets. The provision of residential accommodation in the town centre should seek to provide a mix of housing typologies and tenures to cater for diverse communities in terms of age, income, and mobility.

7.6.7 Improved Connectivity and Sustainable Transport

Louth County Council recognise, and support, active travel modes and sustainable movement in Dundalk enabling a high proportion of journeys to be made by foot and/or bicycle (e.g. the '10-minute neighbourhood' concept). The Council will support any investment or upgrades to the Longwalk Bus Station and improved connectivity between the bus and train stations.

This Plan will encourage and promote the roll out of EV infrastructure to support more sustainable travel associated with retail and tourism.

The public realm improvement scheme at St Nicholas Quarter will improve permeability in the area as well as providing a vital connection between the town centre and the Castletown River. It is also anticipated that any public realm improvements along Francis Street and Park Street would have the potential to improve connectivity between the town centre and the Marshes shopping centre to the south.

7.6.8 Business Improvement District

The purpose of a Business Improvement District (BID) is to enable the ratepayers within its boundaries draw up a scheme of projects, services and works which are additional to those provided by the Council and which will benefit the area.

Dundalk was the first town in the State to successfully implement a BID scheme and appoint a town centre manager.

The key objective of the Dundalk BID, is to enhance the cultural identity of the town, boost its international profile and image and further promote and improve the trading environment of the town. To date the BIDs Office has been proactive in various initiatives to enhance the streetscape and attract visitors to the town. This includes projects such as SEEK Urban Arts Festival, the painting of building facades, and the Christmas Lighting Festival Frostival. The Council will continue to support the work of the Dundalk BIDs office.

7.6.9 Restrictions on Uses

There is a need to maintain the vibrancy, vitality, and integrity of the town centre area. As such, an over-concentration of certain uses will be discouraged.



The Council will seek to ensure that the quantum of bookmakers, fast food outlets, public houses, off-licences and amusement and gaming arcades is not disproportionate to the overall size and character of the area.

Applicants proposing such uses will be required to demonstrate that there is not an over-concentration of these uses within an area.

The supporting documentation with any application shall include a map detailing all such facilities within 500 metres of any proposal within the core retail area of the town.

7.6.10 Shopfronts

Shopfronts are one of the most important features in the character and perception of Dundalk's town centre. The Council are committed to promoting high quality shopfront design.

Dundalk boasts a number of traditional shop fronts which contribute significantly and complement the historic character of the town. This Plan seeks to protect traditional and original shopfronts and ensure that any alterations do not detract from their overall integrity. The use of reproduction traditional style shopfronts on buildings ought to be avoided and instead a modern, high quality contemporary shopfront should be utilised. Applications for shopfronts shall be in accordance with the 'Shopfront Design Guidelines' for Louth County Council or any subsequent updated guidance.

7.6.11 Food Clusters

Distinct clusters exist in Dundalk which are linked to food and beverage provision including Park Street and the urban village of Blackrock. These food clusters support shopping and destination experiences as well as playing an important role in the night-time economy. The on-going development and enhancement of these areas is supported by this Plan.

7.7 Need and Location of Future Retail Floorspace

The data from the Retail Strategy in the 2021-2027 County Development Plan has been used to inform the Retail Strategy for this Plan.

A qualitative assessment of future retail floorspace requirements has been undertaken, this exercise has updated the quantitative retail analysis in the Louth Retail Strategy (see Appendix 3 for more details).

Table 7.2 sets out the indicative potential for additional convenience, comparison and bulky comparison floorspace in Dundalk up to 2030.

Table 7.2: Indicative Floorspace Potential for Dundalk up to 2030

	Indicative Floorspace Potential sq. m - 2030
Convenience	2,649
Comparison	970
Bulky Comparison	1,818

In accordance with the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012, the indicative floorspace requirements set out in the tables above are only intended to provide broad guidance as to the additional quantum of floorspace provision. The quantum of floorspace should not be considered as upper or lower limits, merely as indicative of the scale of new floor space required to meet the needs of existing and future population and expenditure within Dundalk.

Any additional new floorspace proposed could replace some existing, outdated or poorly located retail floor space. In the event that a planning application is submitted for retail development which does not conform to the scale outlined in this Retail Strategy the onus is on the applicant to prove to the Planning Authority that the development will not detract from the vitality or viability of the town centre.



7.7.1 Convenience Retail Floorspace

Dundalk's convenience offer has remained consistent since 2020. In terms of convenience shopping there are five large grocery retailers presently operating in Dundalk.

Table 7.3: Large Grocery Retailers in Dundalk

Convenience Operator	Location
Tesco x2	Tesco Extra and the Longwalk Shopping Centre
Dunnes x3	Ard Easmuinn, Marshes Shopping Centre and Hoey's Lane
Aldi x2	Ramparts and Newry Road
Lidl x2	St. Helenas and Avenue Road
Super Valu	The Fairways Centre

In total, the above operators trade from approximately 20,740 sq.m. of grocery floorspace, with Dunnes Stores holding the highest percentage share within the town.

Permission has been granted for a new Lidl at Tom Bellew Avenue; this is to replace the existing Lidl at Avenue Road. The new store at Tom Bellew Avenue will have a net retail floor area 229m² greater than the store at Avenue Road. At the time of writing, it was unclear if the future use of the existing Lidl Store at Avenue Road will be for convenience retailing or an alternative use. In Q4 2024 works commenced on the change of use of the former Dunnes on Park Street to a sports entertainment centre.

An application for a Lidl store at Knockshee Avenue was under consideration at the time of writing (net retail sales area of 1,499m²), if permitted it is anticipated that this will serve the existing and future residents of Blackrock and Haynestown.

This Plan will continue to promote the development of appropriately scaled convenience retail development in the town, particularly in new residential areas where a demand is identified, or in areas identified for regeneration and where such development can provide an important anchor to secure the vitality and viability of urban villages and neighbourhood centres.

7.7.2 Comparison Retail Floorspace

There has been no significant change in Dundalk's comparison retail offer since 2020. The Marshes Shopping Centre is the main destination for comparison shopping within Dundalk. The centre is anchored by Penneys and Dunnes Stores (which includes a significant clothing and homewares offer). The centre also includes a number of other national and international comparison retailers including Carraig Donn, Clarks, H&M, Jack & Jones, River Island and Lifestyle Sports. Dundalk's historic town core offers a range of high-end independent clothes and household retailers.

Tesco (convenience only) continues to be the anchor store for the Long Walk Shopping Centre. It is noted that an application for the redevelopment of a number of units within the Long Walk Shopping Centre was under consideration at the time of writing. Along the northern section of Dundalk's Core Shopping area there is a larger concentration of vacant properties.

The Council will continue to promote the core shopping area as the primary location for comparison retailing.

7.7.3 Bulky Comparison Floorspace

The overall quantum of bulky comparison floorspace in Dundalk has increased since 2020. A range of bulky comparison retailers are located within Dundalk Retail Park, located on the Inner Relief Road.



The Retail Park is anchored by Woodies and includes operators such as Homestore & More, Smyths Toys, Right Price Tiles and Currys PC World.

North Link Business Park, also located on the Inner Relief Road houses a number of bulky comparison operators including, Franks Furniture, Wogan Interiors and The Bed Store.

The North Link Business Park has expanded the range of uses therein to include leisure and business whilst the Coes Road has seen an expansion in the volume of bulky comparison floorspace.

7.7.4 Policy Objectives

RT1

To affirm and maintain the status of the Dundalk's retail core as the premier shopping area in the town, affording a variety of shopping, cultural and leisure attractions. In line with the Retail Planning Guidelines, 2012, the core shopping area should be the key location for supporting competitiveness and choice and in turn promoting vitality and viability.

RT2

To promote town centre and urban village vitality through the sequential approach to retail development, enable good quality development in appropriate locations, and facilitate a modal shift towards more sustainable modes of transport.

RT3

To promote and support omni-channel retail such as 'Click and Collect' services which can reduce e-commerce deliveries and bring footfall to the town centre.

RT4

To acknowledge the unique attraction/distinctiveness of specialist shops/independent/indigenous retail in the town centre which contribute to its overall character and attractiveness.

RT5

To support and ensure the resilience of Dundalk Town Centre by facilitating retailers and businesses adapt to changing trends in retail demand and developing appropriate opportunities to further diversify the Town Centre as a place to live, work and socialise.

RT6

To encourage sensitive reuse, refurbishment and change of use of existing buildings including historic assets, thereby contributing to the continued revitalisation of Dundalk's Town Centre.

RT7

To support and encourage developers, landowners and the Council to co-ordinate and work together in relation to site assembly and to support the engagement of the Compulsory Purchase Order process to acquire buildings and land thereby ensuring an integrated approach to regeneration projects.

RT8

To promote and facilitate existing and emerging food clusters in the town including Park Street and the urban village of Blackrock and support their role in making the town more attractive for residents, workers, and visitors and in creating employment.

RT9

To support and facilitate evening / night-time economy uses that contribute to the vitality of the town centre and that support the creation of a safe, balanced and socially inclusive evening / night-time economy without adversely impacting on residential amenity.

**RT10**

To protect and enhance existing traditional shopfronts and to encourage development of high quality contemporary new shopfronts in accordance with the 'Louth County Council Shopfront Design Guidance' or any subsequent guidance published.

RT11

To support and promote Dundalk's Business Improvement District (BID).

7.8 Tourism

Nationally, the number of full-time equivalent employees working in tourism was estimated to be 284,800 in 2019 and these employees worked in almost 46,000 tourism-related enterprises.

Dundalk's location in proximity to key destinations along Ireland's Ancient East such as Carlingford, the Cooley Mountains, Slieve Gullion and Faughart provides opportunities to attract visitors into the town.

A major issue facing tourism in Dundalk is the short dwell time, with a high number of visitors to the town and surrounding area taking day trips.

Increasing the time visitors spend will have a significant benefit to tourism in Dundalk and the surrounding area. In terms of tourist accommodation in Dundalk there are three hotels:

- The Imperial,
- The Fairways and
- The Gateway Hotel.

There is also a strong supply of bed and breakfasts, and short term lets.

7.8.1 Dundalk's Tourism Offering

Ireland's Ancient East - showcases Ireland's living culture and ancient heritage and brings it to life through stories that create unique visitor experiences, unite stakeholders and supports vibrant communities.

Louth plays a central role in this living and ancient culture with Dundalk ideally located to service visitors to many of these unique attractions.

In 2019, tourism in Ireland's Ancient East was worth €1.7bn to the regional economy, supporting approximately 55,000 jobs.

Tourist Attractions - As a medieval town located on the banks of the Castletown River, at the foot of the Cooley Mountains and the gap of the North, Dundalk has a significant potential to grow and capitalise on its tourism product.

Dundalk has a wealth of natural and built heritage assets with the Castletown River flowing into Dundalk Bay, Castletown Motte and the rich architectural heritage within the town.

A successful local tourism product creates resilient and indigenous revenue which has benefits for many other sectors such as agriculture, hospitality, transport, and retail. As a result, tourism is a vitally important industry for the economic prosperity of Dundalk.

This Plan will support and promote tourism in Dundalk through maximising assets, facilitating improvements to the public realm and the provision of additional accommodation and visitor facilities.

Dundalk has a vibrant nightlife and hospitality sector. In particular, Park Street has a range of eateries and bars featuring outstanding food and music.

The town also has a range of tourist attractions which have both national and international appeal.

Many attractions feature a distinct local narrative, archaeology, architectural and urban heritage associated with the town and the immediate surrounding area.



Within Dundalk, many attractions celebrate the archaeology and architecture within the historic town core, while the town benefits from its close proximity to the Cooley Mountains, Hill of Faughart, Castle Roche and many other nationally significant assets.

The principal assets within Dundalk include:

- **Castletown Motte:** The ruin of a late 18th century castellated house known as 'Byrne's Folly' stands on top of the mound of Castletown Motte. It was built by Patrick Byrne, a well-known pirate, in 1780 AD. The motte is built on the site of a pre-Christian fort called Dún Dealgan, meaning 'The Fort of Dealga'.

This site is important in Irish mythology as it is said to be the birthplace of the legendary warrior – Cú Chulainn.



- **The Oriel Centre:** based in Dundalk Gaol, is one of eight strategically placed regional resource centres under the auspices of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (www.comhaltas.ie) servicing the five north-eastern counties of Cavan, Monaghan, Louth, Meath, and Armagh. The Oriel Centre combines the role of a resource centre, a visitor attraction, a social and a performance space, and provides facilities for teaching, archives, recording, rehearsal, performance, and session playing.

- **Urban Art Murals:** The hugely popular SEEK murals illustrate Dundalk's story, highlighting aspects of the town's rich heritage and culture. Some of the world's best outdoor muralists and urban artists have taken part in the festival and left behind a colourful legacy, and outdoor art gallery, for all to enjoy.



Image Courtesy – Martin McElligott

- **An Táin Arts Centre:** is an independent arts space based in the former Táin Theatre, Town Hall, Crowe Street. An Táin Arts Centre houses a 350-seat main theatre, a 55-seater studio theatre, a visual arts gallery and two workshop spaces.

The programme includes a diverse collection of local arts, national tours, workshops, exhibitions and in house productions.

- **Louth County Museum:** The County Museum is located in a beautifully restored late 18th century warehouse at Roden Place in Jocelyn Street.





The museum opened in 1994 and offers an extensive programme of permanent exhibitions, temporary displays, drama presentations, music recitals, lectures, and film. The strength of the Museum nonetheless resides in its collection. Chronicling the historical development of County Louth from the Stone Age up to the present, the museum, through a combination of artefacts and computer interactives, presents this story over three galleries of permanent exhibition.

- **Dundalk Stadium** is Ireland's only floodlit all-weather horse track and the world's only dual-purpose horse and greyhound track.

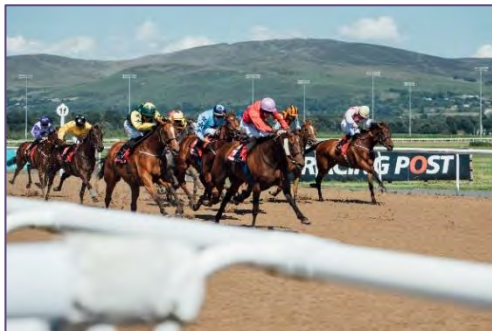


Image Courtesy Dundalk Stadium

- **St. Patrick's Pro Church:** a splendid example of a late-Georgian Gothic type. Designed by Thomas Duff under the influence of King's College Chapel, Cambridge, it contains some of Ireland's finest perpendicular Gothic windows, further enhanced by stained glass by the Mayer of Munich and beautifully executed mosaics by Oppenheimer.



Image Credit: Fáilte Ireland – Courtesy Selena Clarke

- **Blackrock** is a vibrant urban village in the south-east of Dundalk, with a busy promenade that features many popular bars, restaurants, and cafés. Its beaches are Blackrock's main attraction for swimmers, families, and water sport enthusiasts.

Its protected and world-renowned wetlands and bird sanctuaries are a huge attraction for all nature lovers.



Image Courtesy: Blackrock Tourism

The promenade is unique in its proximity to the main beach as well as to artisan shops, boutiques, coffee shops and restaurants. The village boasts award winning recreational facilities including its park with facilities for the young and old to enjoy.

The principal tourism assets located in the area surrounding Dundalk include:

- **The Cooley Mountains:** approximately 10km from Dundalk, feature two parallel mountain ridges running southeast. These mountains provide visitors with breathtaking views of the Ring of Gullion, Carlingford Lough and Dundalk Bay.



Image Credit: Tourism Ireland



- **The Hill of Faughart** is located approximately 4.5km north of Dundalk. Faughart is the traditional birthplace of St. Brigid.



Image Credit: Chris Hill Photographic for Tourism Ireland

The hill is of historical and archaeological significance and includes the ruins of a 12th century church, an ancient graveyard, St. Brigid's Holy Well, St. Brigid's Pillar, possibly the base for a high cross and St. Brigid's Bed, a horse-shoe shaped enclosure which may have been a small building and was used until recent times as a penitential station.

- **Castle Roche:** approximately 7km from Dundalk, is one of the most striking Anglo-Norman castles in Ireland and can be viewed for miles around. Located on a rocky hilltop, it commands wonderful views of the surrounding countryside. The site of the castle marked the boundary between the Gaelic province of Ulster and the Anglo-Norman 'Pale' and overlooked an ancient route into what is now South Armagh.



- **The Táin Way:** at 365miles in length the Táin Trail is a circular route which runs from Rathcroghan in Co. Roscommon to the Cooley Peninsula in Co. Louth and back again. It is fully signposted with distinctive brown bull finger post signs, as well as striking pictorial maps located in key towns along the route. The modern version of the trail was initially set up in 1985-86 to incorporate the Cooley Peninsula and was later extended to encompass the route followed by the rampaging armies of the legendary Queen Maeve of Connaught.
- **Sea Louth Scenic Food Trail** is an interactive food experience that encourages participants to register for a food passport. Using the food passport participants visit different locations throughout the County and receive a stamp to demonstrate that the participant has completed that particular location.



Dundalk Bay - Copyright Sea Louth



7.8.2 Lands Identified for Tourism Related Uses

In recognition of the potential opportunities for the continued growth of the tourism sector in Dundalk, lands have been identified for tourism related uses.

To the north of Dundalk Racecourse there is an extensive area of land zoned for tourism uses. Whilst a large proportion of these lands are within the flood zone and only suitable for water-compatible development there are approximately 16 hectares outside of the flood zone that would be suitable for a range of uses including visitor attractions/activities or accommodation.

Along the Newry Road the former Carnbeg Hotel and associated golf course, which is located on lands with an area of approximately 40 hectares has significant redevelopment potential for accommodation or recreational/leisure uses.

7.8.3 Policy Objectives

RT12

To support Dundalk’s tourist potential, in particular, its cultural heritage tourism and promote uses which activate and enhance the existing historic environment, including buildings, public realm, industrial and maritime heritage.

RT13

To support the implementation of the Fáilte Ireland ‘Ancient Destination Experience Development Plan’, specifically with regard to objectives which pertain to tourism initiatives in Dundalk.

RT14

To develop and enhance the tourism, recreational and amenity potential of the town’s waterways and coastal area, while not compromising the ecological importance of these areas.

RT15

To recognise the significant contribution that national and international tourism makes to the local economy and the vitality of the town and facilitate, in partnership and Fáilte Ireland and key stakeholders, the sustainable development of associated infrastructure, attractions, festivals and events.

RT16

To co-operate with all relevant stakeholders in the implementation of the Louth Tourism Strategy.

RT17

To continue to work with Bord Fáilte and other agencies to promote Dundalk as a tourist destination.