



Chapter 5

Economy and Employment

“To strengthen the employment base and economic profile of Louth that builds on the designation of Drogheda and Dundalk as Regional Growth Centres and maximises the strategic location of the County along the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor. The prioritisation of Drogheda and Dundalk for economic investment with the complementary supporting economic role of the smaller towns and villages will ensure the Job:Workforce ratio continues to improve thus creating more balanced and sustainable communities.”

5 ECONOMY AND EMPLOYMENT

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This Plan seeks to support and facilitate viable economic development and job creation, across a range of sectors, in accordance with the principles of proper planning and sustainable development. As the population of Louth continues to grow, it is essential that the County continues to be well positioned to facilitate further economic investment and respond to any economic uncertainties.

This chapter will set out the vision and strategy for economic development in the County during the life of the Plan. It will identify the opportunities for Louth to strengthen its economic base and continue to attract investment and support job creation for both indigenous and international businesses. The spatial framework for enterprise and employment development is consistent with and aligned to national, regional and local level economic development policies.

5.2 ECONOMIC PROFILE OF LOUTH

The locational advantage of Louth along the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor with excellent access to Dublin and Belfast City Centre, Airport, Port, and surrounding Key Towns in the Region means the County is well positioned to attract economic investment.

The identification of Drogheda and Dundalk as Regional Growth Centres (RGCs) in the National Planning Framework (NPF) and Regional Strategic Economic Strategy (RSES) is recognition of the importance of these settlements at both a regional and national level in facilitating future population and economic growth.

Economic development and employment in the County is concentrated in business parks, industrial estates, and town centres in Drogheda, Dundalk, Ardee, and Dunleer. Outside of these settlements there are smaller scale enterprises in the small towns, villages, and open countryside.

With over 35,000 jobs in the County and a Jobs:Workforce ratio of 0.71 recorded in Census 2016, the economic benefits associated with the strategic location of the County, and in particular the strength of the employment base, are apparent. With a net outward migration rate of almost 30% of resident workers travelling outside the County, the majority of whom work in Dublin, the interdependency between Louth and Dublin is also evident. At a settlement level, Dundalk is the primary centre of employment in the County, with almost 14,200 jobs in 2016. This equates to 40% of the total jobs in the County and is an indication of the strength of this Regional Growth Centre as a location for employment. The Job:Workforce ratio in the town was 0.99 in 2016, highlighting the close alignment between population and employment growth in the town and the sustainable platform on which the town is developing. Drogheda is also an important centre of employment with over 12,300 jobs in the town in 2016¹. The lower Job:Workforce ratio is an indication of the interdependency of the town with Dublin, due to the higher volume of outbound commuting for employment.

¹ This includes the Southern Environs of the town which had 1,216 jobs and 3,700 resident workers in 2016.

Ardee and Dunleer have a solid employment base, with both towns experiencing a sustainable balance of population and employment growth. When compared to settlements of similar sizes, it is apparent that both towns outperform many other towns in the Region and across the country with regard to total jobs. This is an indication of the importance of the towns in employment and service provision in their surrounding hinterland. Dunleer is the only town in the County with a net in-flow of workers in that there are more jobs in the town than resident workers, resulting in the town having a Job:Workforce ratio of 1:10.

The smaller settlements in the County have a more limited employment base resulting in fewer jobs. Carlingford and Castlebellingham/Kilsaran are the exceptions with these towns having a Job:Workforce ratio of 0.8 (370 jobs in the town) and 0.65 (295 jobs in the town) respectively.

The remaining smaller settlements are dependent on outbound commuting and have a Job:Workforce ratio ranging between 0.17 (Clogherhead) and 0.32 (Termonfeckin). This is an indication of a weak employment base. Full details of the breakdown of resident workers, total jobs and jobs ratio in each settlement in Louth are set out in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.2 provides a breakdown of the occupational groups in the County in 2011 and 2016. It is a useful indication of the broad range of employment in the County, in addition to highlighting the skill sets of the workforce. These include business and administrative roles, corporate management, research and engineering, and skilled trades. There was a modest increase in most occupational groups between 2011-2016, with professional and service occupations recording the highest increase. Skilled construction trades recorded the largest decrease during this period.

Fig 5.1: Resident workers, jobs, and jobs ratio in Louth by settlement in 2016

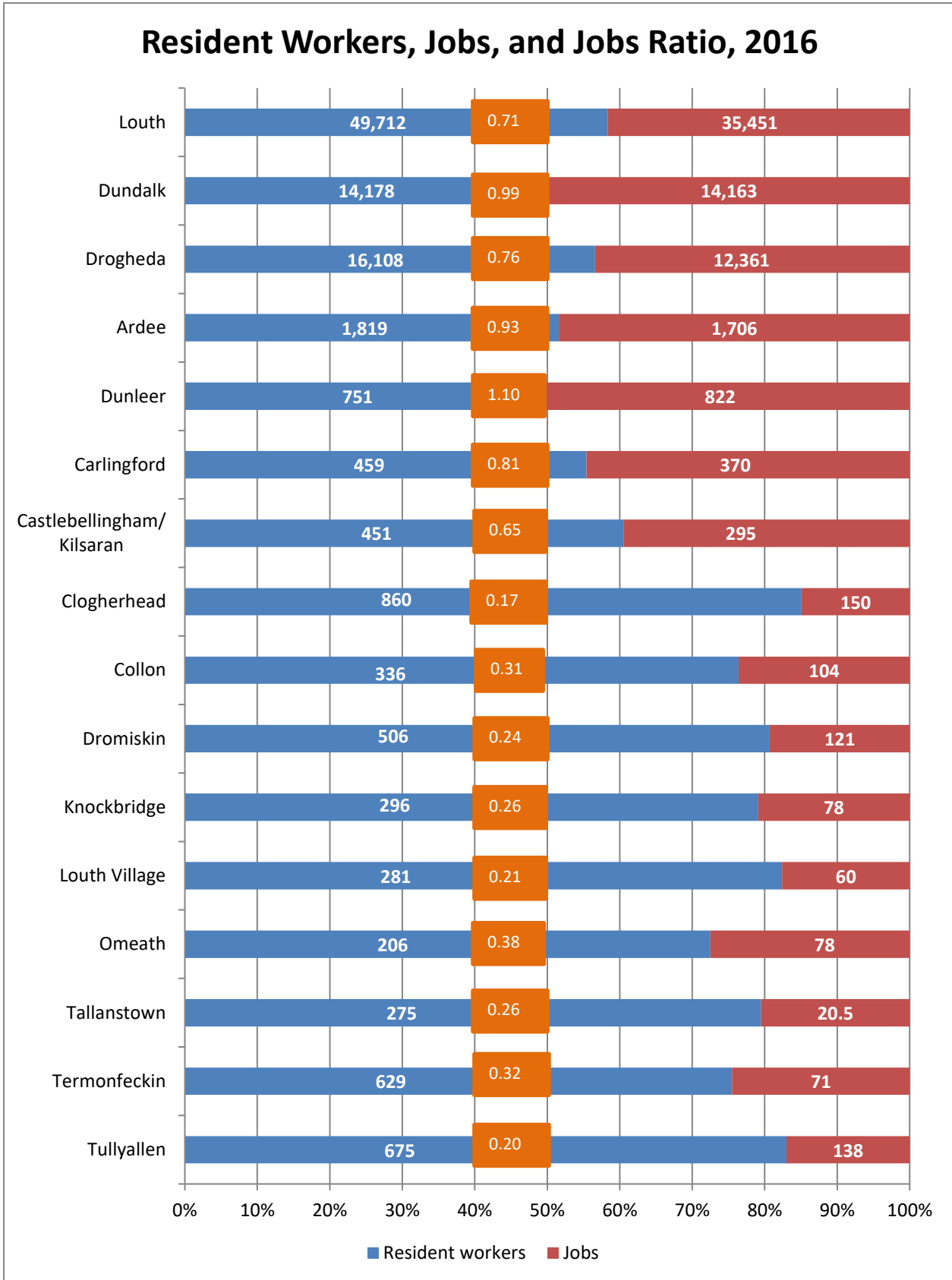
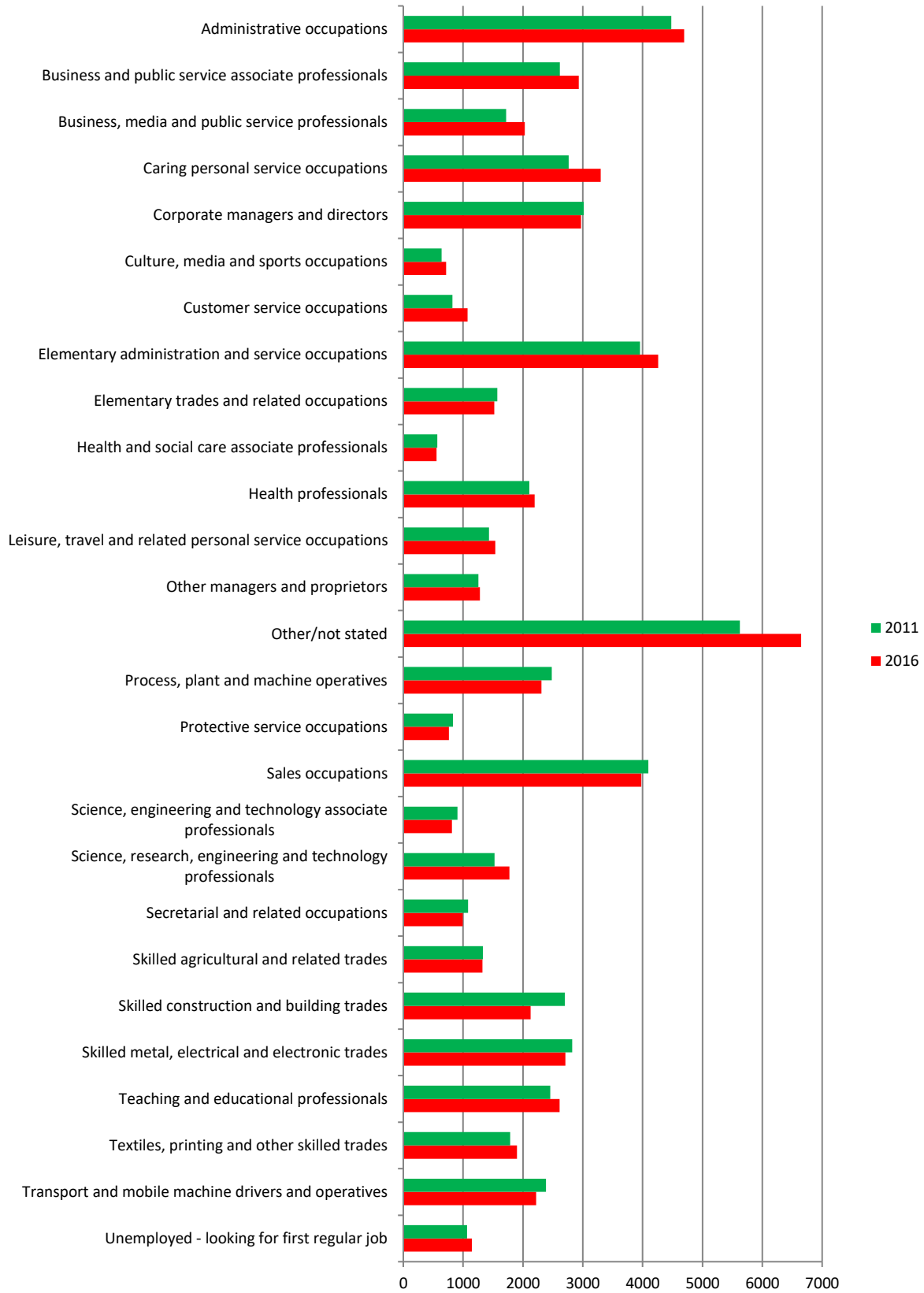


Figure 5.2: Breakdown of the labour force in Louth in 2011 and 2016

Labour Force Breakdown 2011 & 2016



5.3 EMPLOYER PROFILE

There are a broad range of employers from various industrial sectors based in Louth. The most prominent sectors include bio-pharma, food and beverage production, manufacturing, financial services and ICT.

In addition to providing direct employment, the large businesses and employers in the County create higher productivity in the wider economy as they provide indirect employment in areas such as service provision, maintenance and logistics.

Health and education are also prominent employment sectors, with two hospitals (Our Lady of Lourdes in Drogheda and Louth County Hospital in Dundalk) and a third level education facility (Dundalk Institute of Technology, (DkIT) and Drogheda Institute of Further Education, (DIFE)) located in the County.

Within the various employment sectors in the County there are opportunities for continued growth and expansion.

5.4 ECONOMIC STRATEGY

The Plan provides a framework for economic growth and investment at a County level. This framework is closely aligned with national and regional policy and has taken account of recent government publications relating to economic development, including the Action Plan for Jobs and Enterprise 2025. The economic strategy for the County is based on a vision of developing a strong economic base supported by enterprise, innovation and skills. This Plan seeks to reinforce this vision by aligning with the key economic principles set out in the RSES.

Whilst a Development Plan cannot create employment, it has a critical role to play in facilitating development and supporting economic growth. If a Plan is to support economic growth, it needs to ensure that there are sufficient lands available for investment and that these lands can be serviced by the required roads, water services, energy, and telecommunications infrastructure. Any deficits in infrastructure can result in inefficiencies, loss of output, and higher costs for businesses which ultimately impacts on economic competitiveness. Regular engagement and collaboration with infrastructure agencies and providers in identifying and progressing projects that will facilitate economic growth is required to ensure there is a coherent and holistic approach to development. Furthermore, creating the right environment for enterprise and employment to thrive can deliver high-quality places as they become attractive locations to work, live, invest, study and visit.

The primary location for employment related development during this Plan will be in the Regional Growth Centres of Drogheda and Dundalk. These settlements have a strong employment base, a wide range of services, and a large market and catchment, with capacity to accommodate further investment in centrally located areas where there are opportunities to cluster with existing enterprises.

By concentrating growth in these settlements there is an opportunity to create a critical mass of population that will support infrastructure investment and consolidate development in these large urban areas.

Figure 5.3



5.5 POLICY CONTEXT

In response to the high levels of unemployment experienced across the country during the recession, the Government published a number of policy initiatives aimed to support economic growth and job creation. The key publications are as follows:

5.5.1 Action Plan for Jobs

This is an annual publication by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment that outlines the Government's approach to maximising job creation across the country. It has been ongoing since 2012, with each Action Plan including specific targets relating to employment growth.

Regional Enterprise Plans have also been prepared, with Louth located within the North East/North West Region. This Enterprise Plan recognises that this region has a diverse enterprise base and a flourishing Small and Medium sized Enterprise (SME) sector with capacity for expansion. The talent base and location of Institutes of Technology in the Region are recognised as being important in providing an educated workforce. The *North – East Regional Enterprise Plan* aims to build on the strengths of the Region, support continued collaboration between businesses, stakeholders and public agencies, and increase employment.

5.5.2 Realising our Rural Potential Action Plan for Rural Development

In recognition of the challenges facing rural areas, an *Action Plan for Rural Development* was published in 2017. This Action Plan [‘Realising Our Rural Potential’](#) aims to boost economic development in rural areas by improving infrastructure, rejuvenating towns and villages, addressing social exclusion and supporting job creation.

5.5.3 Strategic Policy

The NPF and RSES set out the planning policy approach for economic development at a national and regional level. There is an emphasis on taking a plan led approach to economic development that focuses on building resilience in the economy, promoting collaboration, innovation, and entrepreneurship, enhancing connectivity and accessibility and aligning infrastructure investment with settlements designated for growth.

The RSES seeks to support economic growth and job creation in the Region through the concept of smart specialisation. This is a European Strategy that seeks to boost economic growth by enabling Regions to identify and develop competitive advantages. It is a partnership approach that brings together local authorities, universities, business groups and organisations, and the general public. The RSES has identified Drogheda and Dundalk as Regional Growth Centres and recognises the significant potential of these settlements to function as drivers for economic development in the Region.

5.5.4 Local Economic and Community Plan

As part of the restructuring of local government through the implementation of [‘Putting People First’](#) and the *Local Government Reform Act 2014*, local authorities were given a greater role in economic development. This included the creation of a Local Enterprise Office in each local authority, which replaced County Enterprise Boards, and the requirement for each local authority to prepare a *‘Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2022 (LECP)’*². The [Louth LECP](#) was adopted in March 2016. The economic goals of the LECP are closely linked to the 10 point plans prepared by Louth Economic Forum. The primary objective of the LECP is to create a thriving economy and community where both indigenous and international businesses can prosper. The LECP is required to be consistent with the County Development Plan and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, meaning it is closely aligned with planning policy at a local, national, and regional level.

² Section 44 of the Local Government and Reform Act 2014 sets out the requirements to prepare for each local authority to prepare a Local Economic and Community Plan.

Figure 5.4: Louth LECP Economic Goals



5.5.5 Louth Economic Forum

Louth Economic Forum was established in 2009 and consists of a multi-disciplinary team from the public and private sector including local businesses, state agencies, and the Council. The forum functions as a one stop shop for potential investors providing advice and information.

A 10 Point Plan published by the Forum identified 10 specific areas on which to focus. A series of Action Plans have been prepared by the task groups in the Forum. These Action Plans provide a useful insight into the local economy in Louth in addition to setting out a vision as to how it is intended to grow and develop the economy³.

5.6 RECENT ECONOMIC TRENDS

The Irish economy was performing strongly until March 2020 when the economic shock associated with the Covid-19 pandemic became apparent. At the time of writing there were various arrangements and policy responses in place for people, businesses, and government agencies and services across the economy and society to cope and manage in these uncertain times. These responses are impacting on economic output and performance.

Prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic the Irish economy had emerged from a prolonged period of economic contraction and stagnation to become one of the best performing economies in Europe in recent years. Year on year growth had been experienced since 2014, resulting in increased employment, wages, and consumer spending. In Q4 of 2019 the unemployment rate was 4.8%, the lowest since 2007⁴.

The pace of growth in comparison to the rest of Europe was evident by a comparison of growth rates.

Between 2010-2019 the annual average growth rate of the Irish economy was 4.5%, whilst in the rest of Europe, during the same period, it was 1.6%⁵.

Economic projections following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic indicate that the economy will shrink in 2020 and fall into recession⁶. This is in contrast to the projections prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, which had projected a continuation of growth, albeit on a more modest trajectory than previous years. Due to the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic, it is difficult to predict its long term economic impact. However it is widely accepted it will take a significant period of time to return to a normal functioning economy.

This Plan will support the collaboration between the Council, its Local Enterprise Office and the agencies such as the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) and Enterprise Ireland in working closely with businesses and employers in responding to the pandemic and providing assistance where possible. It will also seek to set out a framework that will support the creation of an environment attractive for economic investment and employment creation when growth begins to return to the economy.

³ Click [here](#) to access the Action Plans published by the Louth Economic Forum

⁴ [Labour Force Survey Q4 2019](#)

⁵ [ESRI Quarterly Economic Commentary Winter 2019](#)

⁶ [ESRI Quarterly Economic Commentary Spring 2020](#)

5.6.1 Challenges to Future Economic Growth

Covid-19: The Covid-19 pandemic is the greatest threat the Irish economy has faced since the global financial crisis. The response to the spread of the virus has resulted in significant job losses across the economy, with an unemployment rate of 28.2% recorded in April 2020⁷. In September 2020 the Government published a *‘Resilience and Recovery Plan for Living with COVID 19’* to manage the risk associated with the pandemic and deal with the social and economic consequences. Due to the uncertainty surrounding the medium-long term impacts of the pandemic it is anticipated that the opportunities for economic growth and investment in the immediate future will be limited.

International Trade Tensions: Ireland has an open economy which means it is exposed to any changes or volatilities to the economic environment at a global level. Foreign owned multinational companies make a significant contribution to the Irish economy in terms of jobs, exports, and fiscal revenue. The restrictions on international travel and the lockdown put in place in countries across the world, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, has had significant implications for international trade, commerce, and tourism. Ireland’s open economy is exposed to these volatilities.

The reliance and interdependency of Ireland on global trade and investments means the response of the global economy to the management of the pandemic will have a significant impact on the future performance of the Irish economy. Other concerns in the global economy relate to ongoing trade tensions between the US and China, and the uncertainty surrounding the future partnership between the UK and the EU following their withdrawal from the EU.

These uncertainties may result in businesses holding back on investment and a reduction in consumer spending, with people saving more of their disposable income.

Brexit: The location of Louth along the border makes the County particularly exposed to the uncertainties surrounding Brexit, with businesses having customers, supply chains, and producers on both sides of the border. At present there is a seamless transfer of goods and services across the border as both countries are within the Single Market. The agri-food sector will be particularly affected by any changes to these circumstances as it will impact on supply chains and logistical arrangements.

The possible introduction of tariffs, or regulatory divergence, would increase costs and result in delays in transporting goods and services and would therefore increase the cost of doing business. Fluctuations in currency also have an impact on costs and can result in changing patterns of consumer behaviour, particularly in border locations where people take advantage of the lower exchange rates. This can have a particular impact on tourism, with less visitors travelling from Northern Ireland and Britain due to the devaluation of sterling. Whilst there are challenges to the Irish economy as a result of Brexit, opportunities also exist. Ireland will retain all the benefits of EU membership and the access to an educated, skilled, English speaking workforce will be an important factor in attracting foreign direct investment.

⁷ [CSO Monthly Unemployment, April 2020](#). Note that when persons on the special pandemic payment are excluded, the unemployment rate was 5.4%.

Opportunities: The location of Louth along the border, where there is excellent connectivity with both Dublin and Belfast and access to a well-educated and skilled workforce, makes the County an attractive location to UK businesses who require access to the European market and Irish, European, and International businesses who require access to the UK market.

5.7 DUBLIN-BELFAST ECONOMIC CORRIDOR

Louth is strategically located between the two largest cities on the island, Dublin and Belfast. The excellent connectivity between the cities via the high capacity road link (M1 Motorway), which forms part of the EU TEN-T Core Network, the inter-city rail link, in addition to the international links via the ports and airports, has created significant opportunities for economic investment and job creation.

The NPF and RSES highlight the importance of this corridor in supporting economic growth and maintaining economic competitiveness. Opportunities to strengthen links along this corridor and in particular, the cross border links between Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry, have been identified as a potential driver for economic growth. The international dimension of this corridor has added significance in the context of the UK withdrawing from the EU.

In addition to the cross-border links, there is also a strong connection between Louth, Meath, Monaghan and Cavan in the provision of services, employment, and education, which creates a wider cross-border network of counties and settlements in the north-east of the country.

This Plan will continue to promote and support economic development along this Corridor. As part of the strategy of developing centres of scale, the Regional Growth Centres of Drogheda and Dundalk will be identified as the primary locations for economic growth.

| Policy Objective | |
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| EE 1 | To maximise the economic potential of Louth by building on its locational advantage along the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor and promoting and marketing the Regional Growth Centres of Drogheda and Dundalk for economic investment. |

| Policy Objective | |
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| EE 2 | To engage and work closely with the Eastern and Midlands Regional Authority and adjoining Local Authorities in promoting economic development along the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor. |

5.7.1 Cross Border Investment

There is strong support from governments on both sides of the border for continued co-operation in cross border projects and initiatives. The economic potential of the Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry network is identified in the NPF and RSES. These settlements have the critical mass to compete in the global economy and appeal to higher value segments of the business chain by offering sizeable pools of suitably qualified workers, supporting infrastructure, and high quality public and commercial services.

EU Structural Funds such as the INTERREG VA Structural Programme provides funding for cross border projects. This fund is designed to help overcome issues that arise due to the existence of a border. The issues can range from health, transport, environmental issues, and enterprise development. The fund is managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB). There is a commitment from the EU to continue funding for cross border projects after the UK withdrawal from the EU.

At a local government level cross border cooperation is evident in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that was developed and signed by both Louth County Council and Newry, Mourne, and Down District Council. The MOU sets out the detailed workings, which seek to support and promote the economic development and competitiveness of the region. The focus for both Councils is on strength in people working together to help and support the local communities they serve. An example of some of the ongoing cross-border projects in the area are set out in Table 5.1.

5.8 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

A well-educated, skilled, and adaptable labour force is a fundamental part of economic growth and development. Louth has benefitted from the presence of a higher education facility in the County, with Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) providing opportunities for education and skills development for people and collaboration between local businesses and industry.

DkIT is the focal point for higher education in the north-east and has a catchment extending to both sides of the border. The research portfolio of DkIT in addition to the access to an educated workforce strengthens the knowledge based economy in the County which makes the area attractive to potential investors.

DkIT has responded positively to the changing educational and training needs of both business and industry. A strong partnership has developed between DkIT and local employers, with the Institute adapting modules and courses to be more responsive to the needs of employers. This partnership approach has been a key element in supporting enterprise development in the County.

The Louth and Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB) was awarded funding in June 2020, through the Border Enterprise Fund, for an Advanced Manufacturing Education and Training Centre in Dundalk. The investment and development of this facility will provide the labour force with opportunities to develop and enhance their skills in Advanced Manufacturing techniques, which is a recognised area of innovation and competitive advantage required if businesses are to successfully compete in the global market.

Drogheda Institute of Further Education (DIFE) provides a range of Further Education courses for school leavers and adults returning to education. The modern facilities available, and the close relationship with employers means courses remain relevant and students can become familiar with the technology of the workplace.

Table 5.1 Ongoing Cross-Border Projects in Louth

| Themes | Projects |
|---|---|
| Renewable Energy and Green Technology | VARITIES, Action for Biodiversity; Energy Efficiency and Micro Generation; Source to Tap; SWELL project |
| Tourism and Recreation | Carlingford Lough Greenway; Tourism Management; Greenore to Greencastle Ferry; EU_SHAFE |
| Sustainable Economic Growth and Job Creation | Drogheda/Dundalk/Newry Cross Border Economic Zone, CO INNOVATE |
| Emergency Planning | Major Emergency Management Service |

5.9 CO-WORKING FACILITIES AND HOME-BASED ACTIVITIES

Advances in technology have resulted in changing working environments. There are occupations where employees do not have to be in their main place of employment all the time, as they have the ability to work remotely. This is recognised by employers who acknowledge the benefits of remote working. These benefits include an improved quality of life for employees due to a reduction in commuting, with businesses benefitting from a reduction in costs for large areas of office space in prime commercial locations.

This Plan supports the development of co-working facilities which provide flexibility in the working arrangements that will meet the needs of both start-up enterprises and established businesses, where employees have a local base that reduces the requirement to commute long distances on a daily basis.

It is also recognised that small scale home based economic activities can be appropriate in certain locations, subject to the nature of the business operations and uses not negatively impacting on the character and amenities of the area in which they are located.

Policy Objective

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| EE 3 | <p>To facilitate and support the sustainable growth of the economy in County Louth whilst maintaining and improving environmental quality. This economic development policy shall strive to deliver the following key aims:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To strengthen existing employment centres supported by enterprise, innovation and skills; • To strengthen the integration between employment, housing and transportation with a view to promoting compact urban areas and reducing car dependency; • To promote measures to improve the County’s attractiveness as a location for investment and increase entrepreneurial activity; • To improve the cluster-specific business environment by putting in place a favourable business ecosystem for innovation and entrepreneurship that supports the development of new industrial value chains and emerging industries; • To facilitate economic growth by consolidating existing industrial and commercial areas and by ensuring that there is an adequate supply of serviced employment lands at suitable locations; • To promote the regeneration of underutilised industrial and town centre areas in a manner which enhances the local economy and encourages a sequential approach to development; and • To provide for a range of business accommodation types, including units suitable for small business. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 4 | <p>To work in partnership with national employment agencies including Enterprise Ireland and the IDA, the EMRA, and the Council’s Local Enterprise Office in promoting Louth as a location of choice for economic investment and supporting employment generating initiatives and maximising job opportunities within the County.</p> |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 5 | <p>To work closely with the IDA and other agencies in promoting and facilitating foreign direct investment in Louth.</p> |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 6 | <p>To collaborate and work in partnership with infrastructure agencies including Irish Water, Gas Networks Ireland, ESB Networks, the National Transport Authority, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, and the Office of Public Works in identifying and progressing infrastructure projects required to facilitate economic development in the County.</p> |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 7 | <p>To engage with the Local Community Development Committee, the Local Enterprise Office, Louth Economic Forum and various stakeholders in supporting the implementation of the Local Economic and Community Development Plan 2016-2021 and any subsequent Plans.</p> |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 8 | To promote the work of the Louth Local Enterprise Office in providing support and guidance to small and micro enterprises in the County. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 9 | To continue to promote collaboration and partnerships between business and industrial groups and DkIT that will encourage research and development and provide further education and training opportunities for workers. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 10 | To collaborate and work in partnership with Local Authorities in the Eastern and Midland and Northern and Western Regions in attracting and facilitating economic investment and employment generating projects and developing the all-island economy. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 11 | To engage with Government agencies and key stakeholders in Northern Ireland in developing joint economic programmes and initiatives that support cross-border economic co-operation and development. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 12 | To support the development of a strong economic base particularly along the Dublin-Belfast economic corridor that is supported by enterprise, innovation and skills whilst maintaining environmental quality. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 13 | To support businesses and enterprises, in association with agencies and stakeholders including the IDA Enterprise Ireland, and the Council’s Local Enterprise Office, in responding to challenges and uncertainties associated with the UK withdrawal from the EU. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 14 | To ensure there are sufficient appropriately located lands identified for enterprise and industrial uses in the County in accordance with the designation of each settlement in the Settlement Hierarchy that will support economic investment and employment growth. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 15 | To promote and facilitate the provision of a range of employment and enterprise units of different size, scale, and layout that will increase the choice of such facilities to meet the requirements of the various enterprise and employment sectors in the County. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 16 | To facilitate and support unexpected opportunities for valid propositions for enterprise development that may emerge for which there are strong locational drivers that do not apply to the same extent elsewhere. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 17 | To recognise that attractive, healthy, and sustainable communities have a fundamental role in delivering economic success and attracting foreign and domestic investment. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 18 | To encourage and facilitate the re-use and rejuvenation of vacant and under-utilised industrial, enterprise, manufacturing, and warehousing units. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 19 | To identify locations in the County for different enterprise activities including start-up/incubator units, small-medium sized enterprise development, micro enterprises and large international businesses and corporations. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 20 | To recognise the significant economic and employment benefits of similar enterprises clustering in an area. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 21 | To support the implementation of the concept of ‘smart specialisation’ as part of the Economic Strategy for Louth. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 22 | To recognise the importance of and to encourage and facilitate the growth and development of local indigenous enterprises in appropriate locations in the County. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 23 | To support the provision of co-working facilities and digital hubs that promote flexible working arrangements for established businesses, self-employed persons, and start up enterprises. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 24 | To support home based economic activity where it can be demonstrated the nature of the business operation is of an appropriate scale for its location and would not be detrimental to the character or amenities of the area. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 25 | To support on-site renewable energy projects and any other initiatives by businesses to reduce their carbon footprint, which will contribute to achieving national targets for net zero emissions by 2050. |
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5.10 MARINE OPPORTUNITIES INCLUDING PORTS

Louth has a coastline of over 90kms providing significant opportunities for the support of a range of marine activities such as aquaculture, defence, energy, fisheries, mining and aggregates, ports, harbours, and shipping, telecommunications cables, tourism, safety at sea, sport and recreation, and waste-water treatment and disposal.

The National *Marine Planning Framework* (NMPF) is Ireland's first plan for more sustainable, effective management of marine activities. This will guide decision makers, users and stakeholders towards more strategic, plan-led and efficient use of marine resources.

Following the preparation of the Marine Spatial Plan the Council will ensure that there is alignment and consistency between land use and ocean based planning. A challenge to the maritime economy is the effective management of available space and the ability to maximise the economic, social and environmental benefits of access for all. Consideration will be given to the co-existence of activities where possible.

This will enable activities to continue and/or grow while minimising competing demands for limited space and/or resources. This is particularly important in areas close to the coast where many locations are already busy, with aspirations for emerging growth, such as in Carlingford and Clogherhead.

The Council recognises the importance of the blue economy and maritime heritage and recognise that there are significant opportunities in the marine or blue economy relating to fishing, renewables, seaweed harvesting, aquaculture, and tourism.

Ports have an important role in enabling economic growth and providing international connectivity. This is

recognised in the RSES, which identifies regional ports as important centres of economic activity. Regional Policy Objective 8.23 of the RSES supports the protection of marine related functions of the ports in the Region while also pointing to the potential opportunities around offshore renewable energy development. There are three commercial ports in Louth at Drogheda, Dundalk and Greenore, all of which have been identified as Ports of Regional Significance in the National Ports Policy 2013⁸. Drogheda is the largest of these ports, and principally handles bulk traffic. It also operates a limited roll-on, roll-off service.

Greenore Port is a deepwater port with lift on/lift off facilities. It handles non-containerised cargo including bulk animal feed, feed chemicals, fertiliser, rock, steel, and woodchip. There are bulk dry storage facilities a short distance from the Port that can cater for a range of dry bulk products. Dundalk Port is a general cargo Port. The Port imports materials such as plasterboard, feedstuff, oil, coal, timber, and steel. Exports include scrap metal and turf. Clogherhead Port functions primarily as a fishing port. The harbour area was recently upgraded which provides facilities for a large fishing fleet. In addition there are facilities for sea anglers.

Figure 5.5 provides details of the tonnage of goods handled by commercial ports in Louth in 2019⁹.

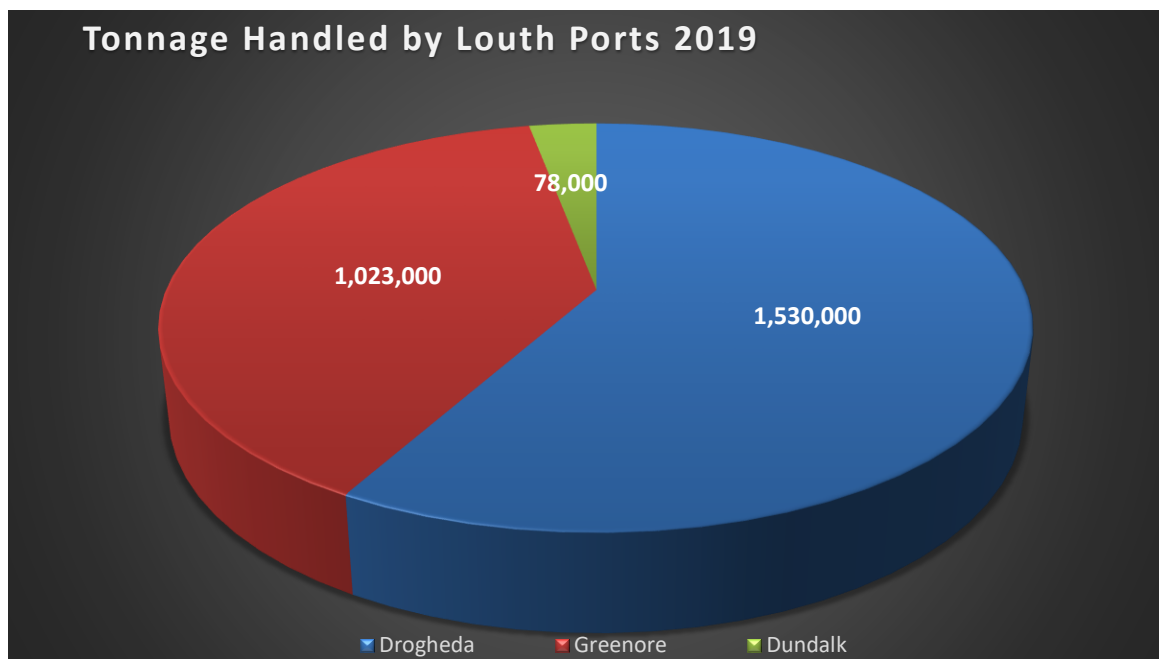
This highlights the volume of goods passing through the ports and is an indication of the importance of these facilities in providing international connectivity to business and industry in the region.

This Plan will support the expansion and improvements to Port facilities in the County in order to maintain connectivity and competitiveness and support the economic growth of the County and wider Region.

⁸ Table 2.8 of the National Ports Policy (2013, Dept. of Transport, Tourism and Sport

⁹ [Statistics of Port traffic, CSO](#)

Figure 5.5: Tonnage handled by Louth Ports 2019



Policy Objective

EE 26 To ensure alignment between the policy objectives of this Plan and the Marine Spatial Plan following its publication.

Policy Objective

EE 27 To support the development and growth of the maritime economy and balance the competing demands for available space along the coast by different users and encourage co-location and co-existence of activities and infrastructure while having regard to appropriate environmental considerations.

Policy Objective

EE 28 To recognise that the Port facilities at Drogheda, Greenore, Dundalk, and Clogherhead are an important economic resource and to support any improvements or expansion to these Port facilities at Drogheda, Greenore and Clogherhead and the consolidation of Dundalk Port, subject to the preparation of a Masterplan and appropriate environmental considerations.

5.11 AREAS TO BE IDENTIFIED FOR GROWTH

The following sections of this chapter will provide an overview and strategy for employment related development in the County.

5.11.1 Regional Growth Centres

The NPF identified settlements below city level with an important function in the context of regional development. In the Eastern and Midland Region the settlements identified were Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk. In the RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region these settlements were designated ‘Regional Growth Centres’ and are to be a focal point for population and employment growth. The following section will provide an overview of the Regional Growth Centres of Drogheda and Dundalk.

The concentration of development in these settlements will create a critical mass of population and employment opportunities and will allow these settlements to develop as centres of scale, and act as a counter balance to Dublin thereby supporting more balanced regional development.

Regional Policy Objective 6.30 of the RSES seeks to support existing smart city initiatives such as Smart Dublin and the All Ireland Smart Cities Forum, as well as supporting the development of smart city programmes in Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk. Smart cities boost the location’s attractiveness for people and business, especially those who want to innovate.

While there is no universal definition for a ‘Smart City’ this term generally refers to a city or town that uses technology to provide services and solve city/town problems such as improved access to transport services, reducing waste and inconvenience and maximising social inclusion. A key component to a ‘Smart City’ is the use of real-time data to support the introduction of tools that create well-being within that city/town.

Policy Objective

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| EE 29 | To prioritise economic development in Drogheda and Dundalk taking account of the strategic importance of the settlements along the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor and their designation as Regional Growth Centres in the RSES. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 30 | To take a positive and pro-active approach when considering the economic impact of major planning applications in the Regional Growth Centres of Drogheda and Dundalk in order to support economic development and employment growth and to deliver high quality outcomes. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 31 | To promote and facilitate the Regional Growth Centres of Drogheda and Dundalk as creative and innovative centres that are competitive, accessible and attractive, each with their own distinct identity and built heritage. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 32 | To promote the delivery of essential infrastructure and utilities that support businesses in establishing a competitive and resilient stronghold at local, regional and national level. |
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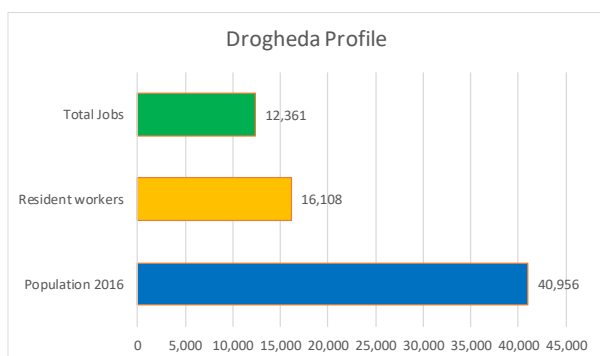
Policy Objective

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| EE 33 | To support the development of Smart City Programmes in the Regional Growth Centres of Drogheda and Dundalk. |
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5.12 DROGHEDA

5.12.1 Profile

Drogheda¹⁰ is strategically located on the southern boundary of Louth, approximately 30 minutes from Dublin airport. The town functions as an important service centre for the south of the County with a catchment extending to east Meath and north Fingal.



5.12.2 Existing Employment

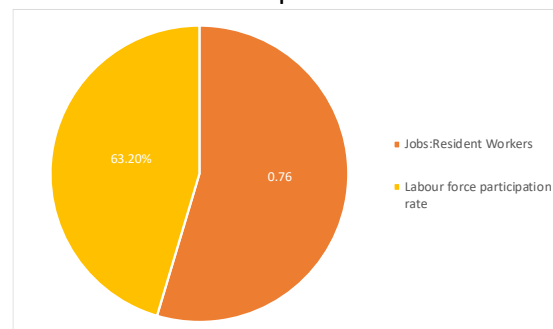
Employment sectors in the town include information and communications technology, business, professional and financial services, manufacturing, healthcare, food and drink processing, tourism and hospitality services, and retailing. In 2016 there were over 12,300 jobs in Drogheda¹¹ which represents almost 35% of the total jobs in the County.

Outside the town centre, established employment areas are in proximity to the Port along the Boyne Road and along the Donore Road in the western part of the town.

Our Lady of Lourdes hospital at Moneymore in the northern part of the town also provides significant employment. RHI Magnesita (Premier Periclase) manufacturing facility is a significant employer adjacent to the Port.

The nature of the works at this facility requires a large landholding and associated structures.

Closer to the town centre on the Greenhills Road, the Greenhills Industrial Estate includes manufacturing and services based enterprises.



The Boyne Business Park is located to the rear of this facility and is the base for a number of indigenous engineering, environmental, and food processing enterprises. On the southern side of the River Boyne along the Marsh Road there is a Marine Terminal operated by Flogas.

There is potential for additional employment uses on undeveloped lands adjacent to this facility. Drogheda Industrial Park is located on the Donore Road on the western side of the town in proximity to Junction 8 of the M1. This Park hosts a mixture of businesses related to wholesale, retailing, and servicing enterprises.

¹⁰ The economic profile for Drogheda includes the Southern Environs of the town which is in the administrative area of Meath. In 2016 the population of Drogheda within the administrative area of Louth was 34,199. There were 12,408 resident workers in the Louth area of the town and 11,145 jobs resulting in a Job:Workforce ratio of 0.90.

¹¹ Including 1,216 jobs in the Southern Environs

5.12.3 Drogheda Port

Drogheda Port is an important economic asset to the town and local businesses for importing and exporting raw materials and products. It provides for both general freight and container services and can handle various types of cargo. There are two facilities for the loading and discharging of cargo; the inner north quays port and the deep water facility at Tom Roes Point Terminal.

Tom Roes Point is the primary container and paper and timber handling facility, while the inner north quay port is a general cargo facility catering for products including bulk grains, steel, and timber. In addition there is a private hydrocarbon facility and a private bulk cement/magnesite/coal facility. The regional significance of the Port ¹² is recognised in the RSES.



This Plan also recognises the economic importance of the Port in providing access to international markets for local businesses and therefore supports the sustainable growth of the facility, subject to any expansion meeting the necessary environmental criteria. Section 5.10 provides additional details in relation to port facilities in the County.

5.12.4 Undeveloped Employment Lands

The existing industrial parks in the town are well established with limited capacity for expansion.

There are two large parcels of undeveloped lands zoned for employment uses to the north of the town. These are located adjacent to the M1 Retail Park and opposite Tom Roes Point ferry terminal.

The release of employment lands opposite Tom Roes Ferry terminal will require the delivery (or partial delivery) of the Port Access Northern Cross Route (PANCR) and water services infrastructure. The PANCR is part of the long term transport strategy for Drogheda that would improve connectivity to the port and remove port related traffic from the town centre and facilitate the regeneration of town centre lands.

At present there is no funding available for the construction of this road or the water services infrastructure therefore its delivery would have to be developer driven. Taking account of the extent of these lands and the interdependency of the lands with the construction of the PANCR and delivery of water services infrastructure, a Masterplan will be required to be prepared and agreed with the Planning Authority prior to any planning application being lodged.

A Masterplan will also be required for the employment lands in the vicinity of the M1 Retail Park. Provision of the aforementioned Masterplans will ensure a holistic and co-ordinated approach is taken to the development of the lands. These Masterplans will set out a conceptual layout and provide infrastructural details including roads, water services, and surface water in addition to a phasing programme for the build out of the lands.

¹² Regional Policy Objective 4.12 of the RSES supports the role of Drogheda Port.

5.12.5 Employment Areas in the Southern Environs of Drogheda

In developing a coherent employment strategy for Drogheda, consideration must be given to existing employment lands in the Southern Environs of the town located in County Meath. These employment lands include an IDA Business and Technology Park along the Donore Road, which has had limited success in attracting investment, and a substantial tract of undeveloped employment lands south of the Platin Road.

As part of the Joint Urban/Local Area Plan with Meath County Council, a co-ordinated approach to the future development of employment lands will be required to ensure the town develops in a holistic manner.

Policy Objective

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| EE 34 | To promote the Regional Growth Centre of Drogheda as a primary centre for employment in the County that maximises the locational advantage of the town along the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 35 | To develop an economic vision and strategy for Drogheda in association with Meath County Council and other stakeholders as part of the Joint Urban / Local Area Plan for Drogheda. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 36 | To promote Drogheda as a location for Foreign Direct Investment. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 37 | To recognise that the Port facility at Drogheda is an important economic resource and to support any improvements or expansion to the Port facilities subject to the preparation of a Masterplan and compliance with relevant planning and environmental criteria. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 38 | To support the development of employment lands in the town including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) The lands in the northern part of the town adjacent to the M1 Retail Park ii) The lands adjacent to Tom Roes Point <p>The development of these lands shall be for economic investment and employment generating uses. Development shall only take place in areas where a Masterplan has been agreed in writing with the Planning Authority in accordance with the requirements set out in Section 13.5 'Masterplans' in Chapter 13 - Development Management Guidelines.</p> |
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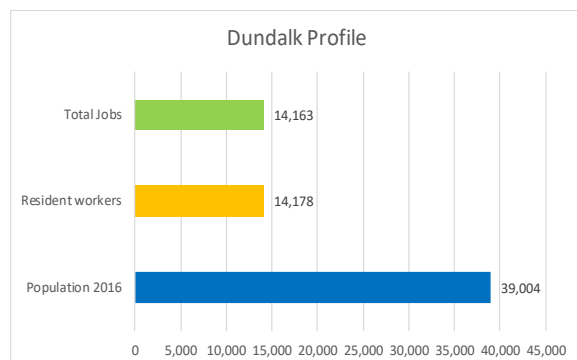
Policy Objective

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| EE 39 | To support the delivery of the Port Access Northern Cross Route which will release strategically located lands for economic development and employment related uses. |
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5.13 DUNDALK

5.13.1 Profile

Dundalk is an important employment hub in the north-east of the country with an established base of both indigenous and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) businesses.

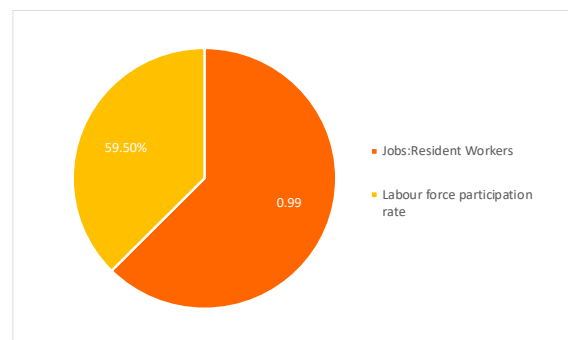


The town has continued to broaden its employment base and has benefitted from the presence of a third level education facility in the town, with Dundalk Institute of Technology developing a partnership with local businesses and enterprises and providing employers with a skilled and educated workforce. In 2016 there were over 14,100 jobs in Dundalk, which equated to 40% of the total jobs in the County.

5.13.2 Existing Employment Environment

The location of the town on the border provides challenges and opportunities. The challenges relate to uncertainty and increased costs of doing business as a result of the UK withdrawal from the EU, which may ultimately result in a loss of customers and trade. On a more positive note, there are opportunities for both UK based and EU based companies who wish to retain strong connections with both jurisdictions, to locate in Dundalk due to the accessibility to both markets from the town.

There are employment parks and industrial estates located in various parts of the town, with the older, established industrial estates closer to the town centre on the Coes Road and Ardee Road.



Local and indigenous businesses are located in these estates and include manufacturing, engineering, servicing, and wholesale suppliers.

Foreign Direct Investment companies are clustered in an established education and industrial zone in the southern part of the town, where there are approximately 450 hectares of land identified for employment related uses. The Mullagharlin Masterplan area (see Appendix 4 of the Dundalk LAP) consists of an extensive area of strategically located lands to the south of Dundalk Town Centre and west of Blackrock. The total quantum of lands within the Masterplan area is c. 434 hectares. At the time of writing approximately 267 hectares of the land remain undeveloped. The Masterplan area includes Finnabair Business Park, Xerox Technology Park, Dundalk Science and Technology Park and DKIT.

5.13.3 Dundalk and Greenore Ports

Dundalk is connected to international markets via the existing port facilities in the town and at Greenore.

These facilities are an important resource to local businesses in the import and export of products and raw materials to international markets. Section 5.10 provides further details on these facilities.

5.13.4 Sustainable Energy Zone

Dundalk has been at the forefront in the area of energy conservation and development of renewable technologies through the identification of a ‘Sustainable Energy Zone’ in the town. The objective of the designation was to promote and stimulate a shift in the use of energy by industry, public bodies, education facilities, and residential communities. This Plan will continue to support the creation of sustainable energy communities.

5.13.5 Creating an Attractive Public Realm

As part of the strategy of creating an attractive environment for people to live and work, the Council is in the process of implementing a Public Realm improvement project in the centre of the town. This includes improvements to the streetscape, replacement of street furniture and landscaping, with the objective to improve access for people in the town centre whilst also retaining ease of access for buses, cyclists and cars.

5.13.6 Strategy for Future Employment Growth

The strategy for economic development in Dundalk during the life of this Plan, is to build on recent economic successes and continue to maximise the potential of the town for job creation and economic growth. The Council will continue to work closely and engage with infrastructure providers in investing in infrastructure and identifying future requirements to facilitate economic development.

Future employment and enterprise development in the employment areas will be concentrated on appropriately zoned lands in the northern and southern parts of the town. FDI investments will continue to be concentrated primarily in the IDA Business Park at Mullagharlin. The employment generating lands on the Armagh Road, and the south-west of the Ballymacscanlon roundabout, opposite Dundalk Stadium, are suitable for various uses including offices, industrial, storage, warehousing and logistics operations.

| Policy Objective | |
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| EE 40 | To promote the Regional Growth Centre of Dundalk as a primary centre for employment in the County that will allow the town to function as a driver for economic growth in the border area. |

| Policy Objective | |
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| EE 41 | To continue to promote collaboration and partnerships between business and industrial groups and DkIT that will encourage research and development and provide further education and training opportunities for workers. |

Policy Objective

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| EE 42 | To support the role of DkIT as a centre of excellence for education, innovation and research and to support it in achieving Technological University status. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 43 | To promote Dundalk as a location for Foreign Direct Investment. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 44 | To continue to support the implementation of the Mullagharlin Masterplan (see Appendix 4 of Dundalk LAP) which will ensure that future development in the Masterplan area will be of a design and layout of international quality that will allow Dundalk to continue to compete for international investment. |
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Policy Objective

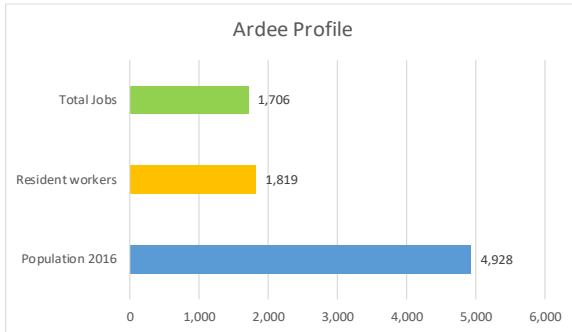
| | |
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| EE 45 | To support the development of undeveloped employment lands in Dundalk for economic investment and employment generating uses. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 46 | To support economic development and regeneration at Dundalk Port Harbour area. |
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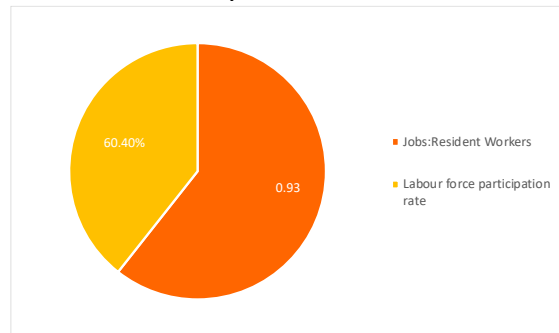
5.14 ARDEE

The designation of Ardee as a Self-Sustaining Growth town is testament to the solid employment base in the town, where, in 2016 there was a Jobs:Workforce ratio of 0.93, with in excess of 1,700 jobs in the town.



The town has a well-connected road network within the region and border areas via national primary and secondary roads in addition to being in proximity to the motorway. This strategic location, in addition to the availability of lands for employment uses, places Ardee in a strong position to accommodate further employment growth during the life of this Plan.

Existing employment in Ardee is concentrated in Ardee Business Park, on the eastern side of the town, and Farrell’s Business Park, to the north of John Street, on the western side of the town. There are also a number of individual businesses operating in various parts of the town. St. Brigid’s Hospital, which is a HSE residential facility, is located on the N52.



On the northern edge of the town off the N33 at Cappocksgreen there is a large parcel of undeveloped lands zoned for employment related uses. These lands have the capacity to accommodate significant economic investment. There are also lands available adjacent to Farrell’s Industrial Estate which are presently undeveloped.

Policy Objective

EE 47 To continue to promote Ardee as a competitive and attractive location for economic development emphasising Foreign Direct Investment.

Policy Objective

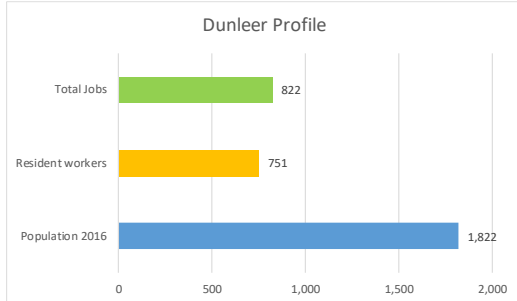
EE 48 To work in partnership with development agencies in the County to promote economic development, enterprise, innovation, research and development, and employment in Ardee.

Policy Objective

EE 49 To promote and support the development of the lands zoned for employment generating uses at Cappocksgreen in the northern part of the town.

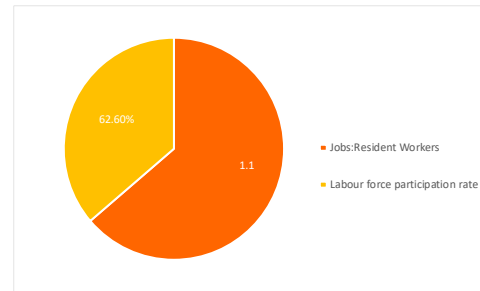
5.15 DUNLEER

Dunleer benefits from convenient access to the motorway which makes the settlement an attractive location for economic investment.



Whilst it is a relatively small settlement in terms of population, it has a solid employment base with in excess of 800 jobs in the town in 2016. In the 2016 census the town had the highest Jobs:Workforce in the County with a ratio of 1.1.

Employment in Dunleer is concentrated in the Enterprise Park on the Ardee Road where there are a cluster of businesses located, and on the Barn Road to the south east of the town centre.



This Plan will continue to promote the economic growth of Dunleer which will allow businesses to cluster with established enterprises thereby strengthening and broadening the employment base and ensuring the town continues to develop on a sustainable platform. Lands in the south-western edge of the town to the west of the R132 have been identified for employment related development. The development of these lands will be subject to the preparation of a Masterplan.

Policy Objective

EE 50 To continue to promote Dunleer as a competitive and attractive location for economic development.

Policy Objective

EE 51 To work in partnership with development agencies in the County to promote economic development, enterprise, innovation, research and development, and employment in Dunleer.

Policy Objective

EE 52 To require the preparation of a masterplan for the lands zoned for Industry, Enterprise and Innovation uses in the south western part of the town. This Masterplan shall include details of the conceptual layout, infrastructure details, and phasing of the development (including the provision of infrastructure).

5.16 SELF-SUSTAINING TOWNS

A number of the self-sustaining towns such as Clogherhead, Tullyallen and Termonfeckin have experienced residential growth in the absence of employment generating development, resulting in the towns having a weak employment base. This Plan has identified these settlements for locally based employment growth including start up and micro-enterprises.

Policy Objective

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| EE 53 | To promote Self-Sustaining Towns as an employment base for start-up businesses and rural based enterprises. |
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5.17 SMALL TOWNS

Below the Self-Sustaining Towns within the Settlement Hierarchy is a network of small towns that provide an important function at a local level. The employment base in these settlements is not as broad as the larger settlements and is reflective of the size of the settlements and supporting infrastructure available. Locally based employment generating development of a scale reflective of the size of the settlement will be supported.

Policy Objective

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| EE 54 | To promote employment and enterprise development in Small Towns in order to develop a cluster of enterprises and support the rejuvenation of rural settlements. |
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5.18 RURAL NODES

The Rural Nodes in the County have a lower provision of services and amenities than Small Towns. There is a map setting out the development boundary of the Rural Nodes, however, there is no specific land use zoning within the settlement boundary. Whilst the Plan will support small scale rural enterprises in these Nodes, including start-ups or incubator units, any development of scale should be located in the larger settlements where there is capacity to accommodate growth.

Policy Objective

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| EE 55 | To support the development of small scale rural enterprises where the scale and nature of the enterprise is appropriate for the location and surrounding land uses. |
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5.19 RURAL ECONOMY

Rural areas make an important economic contribution to County Louth, including the provision of local employment, access to areas of high amenity, and the output of high quality agricultural produce. In 2016 33.9% of the population was identified as living in rural areas in Louth¹³. This Plan supports the sustainable development of rural communities and seeks to address the challenges they are facing. It will support job creation, social inclusion, the rejuvenation of towns and villages, and improvements to infrastructure including transport and broadband.

At a national level, the Action Plan for Rural Development [‘Realising Our Rural Potential’](#) published in 2017 sets out the policy approach for Rural Development by the Government.

The EU LEADER Programme supports private enterprises and community groups in delivering projects that aim to improve quality of life and diversification of economic activity in rural areas. Between 2014-2020 Louth received an allocation of €6.1 million to support rural development projects and initiatives.

The rural economy in Louth consists of a range of businesses and enterprises including agriculture, equine, construction, manufacturing, and tourism. There is often a high degree of interdependency between rural enterprises in both the supply and manufacturing of products and materials. This is particularly evident in the agricultural and equine industry, where the nature of activities is such that there is a high level of direct and indirect employment. Any volatility in the agricultural sector therefore extends into the wider rural economy.

5.19.1 Agriculture

The agriculture industry is facing challenges which may have significant impacts on the profitability of farms. Irish farms are heavily dependent on the UK as an export market and the uncertainty surrounding any trade agreements associated with Brexit brings serious concerns to farmers in relation to prices, potential tariffs and the associated higher operating costs associated with this. In addition the industry is coming under pressure to play a greater role in climate change and the reduction of carbon emissions. This may require changes to farming practices which may result in higher costs. The EU Farm to Fork Strategy and EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 are key policy documents in the development of sustainable agriculture and the protection integration and management of wildlife habitats. This Plan will continue to support the agriculture industry and will promote any changes to farming practices that will adapt to climate change and provide more sustainable methods of production.

¹³ [The Census defines an ‘aggregate rural’ area as anywhere with a population of 1,500 or less](#)

5.19.2 Diversification

The changing pattern of employment in agriculture has resulted in a new approach to the sustainable use of the countryside. Farm diversification has been identified as a method of broadening the employment base of rural areas and providing an alternative source of income to traditional farming methods. Examples include renewable energy development, energy crops, forestry and forestry recreation, rural tourism such as open farms/pet farms or equestrian activities, and the production of speciality products such as cheese or beef or artisan food and drink on a farm. This Plan will support rural diversification projects subject to the use and scale of the development being compatible with the surrounding area.

5.19.3 Rural Enterprises

Rural businesses and enterprises are an important source of local employment in the County. This includes agricultural, equine, engineering/manufacturing, recreational, tourism, energy/renewable energy, and rural resource based enterprises. Whilst this Plan supports such enterprises and the diversification of the rural economy, it is also recognised that a balance is required between supporting rural based enterprises and projects and protecting the local environment.

In the first instance, new employment related developments are directed to settlements where services are available and lands have been identified for employment uses.

It is also recognised that there are instances where a development can be more readily accommodated or is more appropriate to a rural area.

This can be due to a locational specific, or resourced based development, or a development of regional or national importance.

An Economic Business Zone has been identified at Carrickcarnan which will facilitate employment related development, subject to the preparation of a Masterplan. These lands are strategically located along the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor and will assist in providing strategic employment to the surrounding rural area. The location of this Economic Business Zone is identified on Map 3.2 (Volume 1A) and Section 4 of Volume 2.

In relation to the expansion of an existing rural enterprise, consideration will be given to the scale of the existing and proposed development, the capacity of local infrastructure to accommodate the expansion, and the compatibility of the development with the surrounding area.

Any development of a rural based enterprise, either new or expansion to existing in the open countryside, must take account of the traffic related impacts and in particular the traffic movements and capacity of the road network to accommodate a development. There are restrictions on accesses to National and Protected Regional Roads in order to maintain the efficiency and functionality of the National and Regional road network which shall be considered if the development is to be accessed off a Protected Road. Further details on these restrictions and exemptions are set out in Tables 7.9 and 7.10 in the Movement Chapter. Chapter 13 (Section 13.13.11) provides further information on employment development in rural areas.

Policy Objective

EE 56 To support rural entrepreneurship and rural enterprise development of an appropriate scale at suitable locations in the County.

Policy Objective

EE 57 To support the implementation of the LEADER Programme for the County.

Policy Objective

EE 58 To recognise the contribution of niche enterprises such as distilleries and breweries in supporting economic development and promoting tourism.

Policy Objective

EE 59 To support the provision of whiskey maturation facilities within the open countryside where the scale of such development is appropriate to the location and surrounding area which is located in reasonable proximity to appropriate levels of infrastructure and road access.

Policy Objective

EE 60 To secure vibrant and viable rural communities by supporting the development of rural based enterprises.

Policy Objective

EE 61 To continue to support the agricultural sector and to facilitate the development of environmentally sustainable agricultural activities.

Policy Objective

EE 62 To facilitate the diversification of the agricultural sector by supporting alternative farm enterprises subject to the nature and use of any enterprise being compatible with the environment in which it is located.

Policy Objective

EE 63 To consider, subject to the preparation of a Masterplan, the development of the Economic Business Zone at Carrickcarnan for commercial development including an Off line Motorway Services area, truck stop, service, repair and parking area and associated ancillary infrastructure to include motel/hotel, ancillary retail shop and dining facility, light industrial, storage and logistics facilities, retail warehousing (bulky goods only) and motor sales.

Policy Objective

EE 64 To ensure that all applications for industrial and enterprise development submit a carbon footprint calculation and demonstrates how the new buildings and processes/activities will seek to achieve the targets set out in the Climate Action Plan 2019 or any amendments to targets.

5.20 RETAIL

5.20.1 Introduction

The retail sector has long been a key sector and a major employer both nationally and locally and accounts for the largest proportion of the workforce in Ireland, with 298,000 employees working in the sector (CSO, 2019).

At a local level, the 2016 Census confirmed that the retail and wholesale sector was the largest industrial sector in the County employing 15.9% of the total working population. The retail sector also supports indirect employment within the County, in sectors such as logistics and distribution.

In this regard, the sector plays a crucial role in providing sustainable employment and supporting a vibrant economy in County Louth.

The retail sector has and continues to experience significant change.

The exponential growth of online shopping has altered the dynamic of consumer behaviour.

Nonetheless, the in-store shopping experience remains the most immediate interaction between consumer and product. The retail store continues to offer the most intrinsic connection between the consumer and product and spans across each settlement in the country.

The town and village centres also act as a focus for a variety of other activities including business, social, leisure and residential uses. The retail policies outlined in the Plan aim to preserve and enhance the viability and vitality of the town and village centres whilst recognising the need to provide for flexible retail formats in line with changes in consumer behaviour.

5.20.2 Policy Context

The policy context in relation to retail is derived from guidance documents at a national and regional level including the National Planning Framework (NPF), the *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031* and the *Retail Planning: Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2012*.

5.20.2.1 National Planning Framework

National Policy Objective 7 in the NPF sets out the approach to urban development nationwide. This includes:

- Encouraging population growth in strong employment and service centres of all sizes;
- Reversing the stagnation or decline of smaller urban centres, by identifying and establishing new roles and functions and enhancement of local infrastructure and amenities;
- Addressing the legacy of rapid unplanned growth, by facilitating amenities and services catch-up, jobs and/or improved sustainable transport links to cities, together with a slower rate of population growth in recently expanded commuter settlements; and
- Supporting a continuation of balanced population and employment growth in self-contained settlements.

One of the key future planning and development and place-making policy priorities for the Eastern and Midland Region includes:

“A focused approach to compact, sequential and sustainable development of the larger urban areas along the Dublin – Belfast economic and transport corridor, along which there are settlements with significant populations such as Dundalk and Drogheda.”

5.20.2.2 Retail Planning: Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2012

The *Retail Planning: Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2012* require local authorities to prepare retail strategies and policies for their areas which are to be incorporated into county development plans.

The 5 key Policy Objectives contained within the *Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2012* are to:

- Ensure retail development is plan led and follows the settlement hierarchy;
- Promote town centre vitality through a sequential approach to development;
- Secure competitiveness in the retail sector by actively enabling good quality development proposals to come forward in suitable locations;
- Facilitate a shift towards increased access to retailing by public transport, cycling and walking in accordance with the Smarter Travel Strategy; and
- Deliver quality urban design (Retail Design Manual).

The Louth Retail Strategy has been prepared in compliance with the Retail Planning Guidelines and is included within Volume 3, Appendix 4 of this Plan. The *Retail Planning Guidelines* are accompanied by the *Retail Design Manual* (2012).

The Design Manual provides a planning framework for future development of the retail sector in a way which meets the needs of modern shopping formats, while contributing to protecting, supporting and promoting the attractiveness and competitiveness of city and town centres as places to live, work, shop and visit.

5.20.2.3 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, 2019-2031

The RSES indicates that the retail sector is a significant employer and economic contributor in the Eastern and Midland Region and acknowledges the important role retail plays in place making and creating attractive liveable environments. It also acknowledges that retail can play a key role in the regeneration of areas.

The RSES states that EMRA will “*support and drive the preparation of a new retail strategy for the Region under the requirements of the Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2012, or any subsequent update, to update this hierarchy and apply floorspace requirements for the Region*”.

The Strategy also contains specific Regional Policy Objectives (RPO) concerning retail developments.

Table 6.1 of the RSES sets out the Retail Hierarchy for the Region, including County Louth, as follows:

Table 5.2: Table 6.1 of the RSES

| Retail Hierarchy for the Region | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Level 1 | Metropolitan Centre |
| Level 2 | Major Town Centres and County Towns – Drogheda & Dundalk |
| Level 3 | Town and/or District Centres & Sub-County Town Centres (Key Service Centres) – Ardee, Drogheda District Centre: Matthews’ Lane; Dundalk District Centres: Dublin Road & Ard Easmuinn. |
| Level 4 | Neighbourhood Centres, Local Centres, Small Towns and Villages. |
| Level 5 | Corner Shops/Small Villages |

5.21 LOUTH RETAIL STRATEGY

The Louth County Retail Strategy (Volume 3, Appendix 4) has been prepared by Louth County Council in accordance with provisions set out in the *'Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities'* published by Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) in 2012.

The Retail Strategy informs the policy objectives of the Plan 2021-2027 in respect of retail development and ensures that such policy objectives are based on the most up to date information. The overarching aim of the Strategy is to ensure that future retail development in the County is accommodated in a manner that is efficient, equitable and sustainable. The Strategy provides important information on the quantum, scale and types of retail development required over the period to 2027, with a further outlook to 2030.

A key focus of this Retail Strategy is to provide an up to date picture of the current retail landscape in Louth and to implement the objectives of the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012 with regards to future retail provision within the County. Its applied methodology considers the various trends within the sector and the ever changing nature of retail in Ireland.

It has been prepared in the context of national economic recovery in which the retail market is showing signs of improvement, with marked increases in the volume of recorded sales. However, the Strategy was prepared over the period of late 2019 and early 2020, prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is widely acknowledged that the impact of this global pandemic on the retail sector in Ireland will be wide reaching.

However, the long-term impact will not be measurable for some period of time and therefore, it is considered premature to attempt to capture such impacts within this Retail Strategy.

The Strategy provides a 'Health Check Analysis' for the towns of Drogheda, Dundalk and Ardee. It is noted that there are significant levels of retail vacancy recorded in areas of the core shopping streets, particularly in Drogheda and Dundalk.

It recommends that where high levels of sustained vacancy are evident in Drogheda and Dundalk, uses other than retail should be considered, where this would contribute towards improving the overall vitality and viability of the town centre and which complement the town centre retail offer.

Policies to promote complementary non-retail uses in town centre areas (outside of the Core Retail Area) where a sustained level of vacancy is evident, have been included.

The Strategy also addresses the requirement for future retail floorspace within the County. The floorspace requirement is estimated having regard to the changes to population, population forecasts, updated information on expenditure, trading retail floorspace and vacant retail floorspace. A summary of the floorspace requirements is set out in Tables 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6.

5.22 LOUTH COUNTY RETAIL HIERARCHY

The purpose of establishing a county retail hierarchy is to indicate the role and importance of each development centre and to guide retail development in accordance with the framework provided, thus enabling each centre to perform its

overall function within the County's settlement hierarchy. The retail hierarchy for County Louth is illustrated in Table 5.3 below and is consistent with the Regional Retail Hierarchy set out in Table 6.1 of the RSES.

Table 5.3: County Louth Retail Hierarchy

| Retailing Level | Type of Centre | Centre |
|---|--|--|
| Level 2 * *Level 1 is Dublin City Centre | Major Town Centre / County Town | Drogheda Dundalk |
| Level 3 | Town and/or District Centres and Sub County Town Centres | Ardee Drogheda District Centre: Matthews Lane Dundalk District Centres: Dublin Road & Ard Easmuinn |
| Level 4 | Neighbourhood Centres, Local Centres, Small Towns And Villages | Dunleer, Annagassan, Bellurgan, Baltray, Castlebellingham/Kilsaran, Carlingford, Clogherhead, Collon, Dromiskin, Knockbridge, Louth Village, Omeath, Tallanstown, Termonfeckin, Tullyallen, Drogheda Neighbourhood Centres, Dundalk Neighbourhood Centres |
| Level 5 | Small villages | Various |

5.23 REGIONAL GROWTH CENTRES

5.23.1 Drogheda

Drogheda is a multi-modal settlement with excellent bus and rail connections, advantageously located adjacent to the M1. The town is a designated Level 2 Centre in the Retail Hierarchy, reflective of its status as a ‘Regional Growth Centre’ in the National Planning Framework.

The ‘Love Drogheda Business Improvement District’ (BID) came into operation in 2020. A key objective of the Love Drogheda BID is to continue to develop and implement a series of new initiatives designed to both further promote and improve the trading environment for the area, within the proposed BID area, in which the ratepayers operate their businesses.

Drogheda is well provided for in retail terms. The core retail area is delineated from Narrow West Street through to Scotch Hall Shopping Centre.



Narrow West Street faces particular challenges with regards to vacancy and dereliction, while the remainder of West Street (further east) remains relatively strong and vibrant comprising a mix of convenience and comparison shopping, complemented by cafes and restaurants. Laurence Shopping Centre, which is located in the core retail area, has experienced high levels of vacancy since opening in 2005.

There is a large volume of retail floor space available within the town centre including units with modern floor plates particularly within the Laurence Shopping Centre and redevelopment opportunities in the Narrow West Street area. There is a large quantum of convenience floorspace throughout the town beyond the core retail area including supermarkets operated by Tesco, Dunnes Stores, Aldi and Lidl.

The M1 Retail Park and Donore Road Retail Park (located within County Meath) are the principle destinations for bulky goods shopping within Drogheda.

The Retail Strategy included within Volume 3, Appendix 4 of this Plan provides further details in relation to Drogheda’s retail environment.

5.23.2 Dundalk

Dundalk is strategically located along the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor with excellent road and rail connectivity to both cities. It is designated as a Regional Growth Centre in the RSES. The accessibility of the town has helped to attract significant investment in recent years. The town also benefits from having Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) located on its southern approaches, attracting students from throughout the north east region.

There is a Business Improvement District (BID) scheme in operation in Dundalk. The scheme is a not for profit organisation charged with creating a welcoming and economically viable town centre environment.

It includes a collective of 1,200 businesses in the town centre, who work collaboratively with stakeholders, to enhance the appeal of the town centre as the place for shopping, recreation and business development by increasing footfall and collectively improving its overall trading performance.

Dundalk has a number of prime redevelopment sites within the town centre, offering the opportunity to further enhance the town centre. The town also has appealing shopping streets including Clanbrassil Street and Park Street which offer a good range of high end independent clothing stores.

Market Square has been regenerated in recent years and offers an attractive public space for seasonal events and festivals.



The Marshes Shopping Centre continues to attract a wide range of national and international retailers while Dundalk Retail Park is the principle destination for bulky goods shopping. There remain challenges within the retail environment, specifically in relation to vacancy and the proliferation of lower order retail and retail service units within the retail core.

The Retail Strategy included within Appendix 4, Volume 3 of this Plan provides further details in relation to the retail environment within Dundalk.

5.23.3 Additional Retail Floorspace

Retail Strategies are required to provide a broad assessment of the additional retail floorspace required in counties over the lifetime of their strategies. The requirement for additional retail floorspace within County Louth is set out within the Retail Strategy. The floorspace requirement is estimated having regard to the changes to population, population forecasts, updated information on expenditure, trading retail floorspace and vacant retail floorspace.

It sets out broad guidance on the type and amount of additional floorspace that will be required to accommodate additional expenditure over the timescale of the Strategy and up to 2030.

A summary of the floorspace requirements is set out in Table 5.4. Tables 5.5 and 5.6 also set out the indicative potential for additional convenience, comparison and bulky comparison floor space in the towns of Drogheda, Dundalk and Ardee up to 2027 and 2030.

The potential floor space capacity for each town is in accordance with the settlement and retail hierarchy of the County and has been proportioned in accordance with the population target of the aforementioned settlements for 2027. In accordance with the *Retail Planning Guidelines*, the indicative floorspace requirements set out in the tables below 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 the County.

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.

Table 5.4 Indicative Floorspace Requirements for County Louth

| Year | Convenience (m ²) | Comparison (m ²) | Bulky Comparison (m ²) |
|-------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 2027 | 6,479 | 4,749 | 2,098 |
| 2030 | 8,039 | 11,242 | 5,849 |

Table 5.5: Indicative Floorspace Potential by Settlement – 2027

| 2027 | Convenience (m ²) | Comparison (m ²) | Bulky Comparison (m ²) |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Drogheda | 3,060 | 2,243 | 1,043 |
| Dundalk | 2,696 | 1,976 | 919 |
| Ardee | 399 | 292 | 136 |
| Remainder of County | 324 | 238 | - |

Table 5.6: Indicative Floorspace Potential by Settlement – 2030

| 2030 | Convenience (m ²) | Comparison (m ²) | Bulky Comparison (m ²) |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Drogheda | 3,797 | 5,310 | 2,908 |
| Dundalk* | 2,649 | 970 | 1,818 |
| Ardee | 495 | 692 | 379 |
| Remainder of County | 402 | 562 | - |

*These figures are based on the quantitative analysis carried out as part of the Retail Strategy for the Dundalk Local Area Plan 2025-2031. See Appendix 3 – Retail Strategy Quantitative Analysis of the Dundalk Local Area Plan for full details.

5.24 TOWN CENTRE FIRST APPROACH

The Town Centre First Approach recognises the importance of a holistic, cross-sectoral and collaborative approach, and of people living in town centres. It places the health of town centres at the heart of decision making. The Town Centre First Approach also reinforces the need for our towns to be thriving places for living well and requires the introduction of national programmes for the revitalisation of town centres of different scales. This approach will require a collaborative and strategic approach to the regeneration of our towns and villages. Vacant units provide opportunities for retailers to locate in town centres and add to the overall diversity of retailer representation and are a function of the economic cycle. However, where excessive levels of vacancy are evident it can be indicative of the relative underperformance of a town centre or retail core. The Council will support the preparation and implementation of Town Centre Renewal Plans for Drogheda and Dundalk by applying the national framework for 'Town Centre Renewal' comprising of three core elements:

- Town Centre Health Check;
- Formation of Town Teams; and
- Preparation of Town Centre Plan.

The Council will seek to ensure that town centres become more attractive and greener environments, that are age friendly, easily accessible, legible and which give people confidence to visit and live in the centres. This Plan will also seek for town centre to address the zero carbon agenda and mitigate climate change while building a resilient and inclusive local economy.

Taking account of the changing retail environment, a new approach is required to assist in revitalising town centres.

This Plan will support a multi-dimensional approach to re-energising and returning the vibrancy to town centres.

This includes support for different business uses that will allow town centres to become multi-functional destinations providing services, leisure, cultural, civic, and residential uses.

Part of this multi-dimensional strategy is to bring people back to the town centre, by facilitating town centre living, particularly in the upper floors of buildings. This will include the re-use or adaptation of vacant and under-utilised buildings.

Residential development may be considered at ground floor level in certain circumstances or locations where there has been a sustained level of vacancy over a prolonged period. This will normally be on lands outside the core retail area of town centres. The provision of such accommodation will only be facilitated in circumstances where it is demonstrated the development would complement the role of the town centre as a 'destination' for commercial, social, or cultural activities.

The Council will continue to promote the provision and modernisation of residential accommodation over commercial or retail premises, within the core retail area of towns and villages, in order to improve the vibrancy of their centres. This will be subject to the provision of good quality accommodation with separate and safe access from the street and the protection of residential amenities from any possible conflict with other uses.

In encouraging the residential use of the upper floors of commercial properties in established retail/ commercial areas of Drogheda, Dundalk and Ardee, the Council will consider possible dispensations from normal standards, to facilitate ‘Living-Over-The-Shop’ developments that will contribute positively to the renewal of areas, provided any proposed modifications will not have a negative impact on visual amenities or the existing streetscape.

- Derogations for older commercial buildings in appropriate cases may be given in respect of private open space, parking, and unit size standards;
- Derogations for car parking may be allowed in acceptable existing town/central locations at the discretion of the Planning Authority.

Section 3.7 ‘Town Centre Living’ in Chapter 3 – ‘Housing’ provides further detail in relation to the re-use of existing buildings in town centres for residential development.

5.25 ASSESSMENT OF RETAIL DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

In accordance with the Retail Planning Guidelines and the RSES Retail Hierarchy for the region, the County Retail Hierarchy provides the strategic policy framework for the spatial distribution of new retail development. New retail developments of significant scale should be targeted primarily within the core retail areas of Level 2 and Level 3 centres, as identified within the Louth Retail Strategy. Retail development of significant scale beyond the core retail area will only be considered in exceptional circumstances, where the Planning Authority is satisfied that there are no other sites available and the development is necessary to serve the needs of the area.

New retail development in Level 4 and Level 5 centres should be of an appropriate scale to serve the local retailing needs only. The Sequential Approach as set out in the *Retail Planning Guidelines 2012* shall be applied in the assessment of applications for new retail developments.

It recognises the importance of sustaining the vitality and viability of town and village centres. Planning applications for retail development proposals, including extensions or material change of use of existing developments (as introduced in the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012), must comply with the criteria of suitability of use, size, scale and accessibility. This will maintain the retail importance of the town centre and protect the viability and vitality of town centres within the county. The visual prominence of retail within town or village centres is acknowledged.

As such, a high standard of design will be a prerequisite for all new retail developments in these locations.

Developments which enhance the vitality of town centres and contribute positively to the area will be encouraged by the Planning Authority. The Planning Authority will promote a suitable mix of day and night time uses within these locations. This may include commercial, social, residential, civic, cultural and recreational uses.

In areas where there are sustained levels of retail vacancy, the Council will consider alternative uses at ground floor level, which may be considered to be complimentary to retail.

Provision of secure cycle storage facilities is essential for supporting the promotion and development of cycling as a more sustainable mode of transport.

High quality secure cycle storage at origins and destinations is considered to be a key element of any strategy aimed at encouraging cycling. Bicycle parking for all new retail developments shall be provided in accordance with the standards set out within Chapter 13, Table 13.12 of the Plan.

- The need to safeguard the vitality and viability of the defined core retail area and to maintain a suitable mix of retail uses;
- The proliferation of such existing facilities in the area;
- The effect on the amenities in the area arising from noise, hours of operation and litter; and
- The treatment of shop front advertising and window display.

5.25.1 Lower Order Retailing

In assessing planning applications for lower order retail uses including Betting Shops, Amusement Arcades, Casinos and Vaping Shops, the following considerations will be taken into account:

| Policy Objective | |
|------------------|---|
| EE 65 | To promote a healthy competitive retail environment within County Louth and to maintain the vitality and viability of the town and village centres and their role as primary retail core areas. |

| Policy Objective | |
|------------------|--|
| EE 66 | To encourage and support the re-use and revitalisation of vacant (and derelict) units and properties within town and village centres and assess change of use applications based on merit and overall contribution to the vitality of the town centre and the day and/or night time economy. |

| Policy Objective | |
|------------------|---|
| EE 67 | To ensure that applications for retail development comply with the provisions of the Louth Retail Strategy. |

| Policy Objective | |
|------------------|--|
| EE 68 | To generally support planning applications which propose complementary, non-retail uses in town centre areas, where sustained levels of vacancy are evident. |

| Policy Objective | |
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| EE 69 | To promote the core retail area as the primary shopping area and generally discourage non retail or service developments within this area. |

| Policy Objective | |
|------------------|--|
| EE 70 | 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 or non-service uses at ground floor level in areas where there is an existing strong retail provision. |

| Policy Objective | |
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| EE 71 | To support the ‘Town Centre First Approach’ and the establishment of any future town centre management initiatives that seek to promote this approach. |

Policy Objective

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| EE 72 | To support the establishment of a Louth County Council led Town Centre Management Team for Drogheda and Dundalk. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 73 | To create safe and clean town centre environments which give people confidence to visit centres. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 74 | To support the development of Drogheda and Dundalk as Regional Growth Centres and principle locations for future retail development, Ardee and Dunleer as Self Sustaining Growth Centres and the retail function of all other settlements, commensurate with locally generated needs. |
|--------------|---|

Policy Objective

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| EE 75 | To promote the provision of local retail centres serving small, localised catchment populations in new residential areas, commensurate with locally generated needs. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 76 | To promote the improvement of the environment and public realm of town and village centres through good design, landscaping, street furniture, improve mobility through traffic management, and co-operate with Tidy Towns Committees and other community groups in the implementation of environmental improvement schemes. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 77 | To require security shutters on new shopfronts (where required) to be transparent and placed behind the shopfront window glazing or to consider innovative solutions including traditional wrought iron window guards. |
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Policy Objective

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| EE 78 | To promote the provision and modernisation of residential accommodation over commercial premises in towns and villages in order to improve the vibrancy of their centres. |
|--------------|---|

Policy Objective

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|--------------|---|
| EE 79 | To encourage the preservation of authentic, traditional shopfronts and good quality contemporary designs. |
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Policy Objective

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|--------------|---|
| EE 80 | To have regard to the Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2011 (DAHLG) and any subsequent guidelines, when assessing applications for shopfronts on protected structures or in Architectural Conservation Areas (ACA's). |
|--------------|---|

Policy Objective

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| EE 81 | To encourage the incorporation of blinds, where required, into the shopfront fascia so that they are capable of being retracted when not in use. Curved and Dutch canopies will be discouraged. |
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Policy Objective

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|--------------|---|
| EE 82 | To ensure that all signage development complies with the relevant assessment criteria and guidance as set out within the Development Management Guidelines (Chapter 13) of this Plan unless otherwise provided for in a Local /Urban Area Plan. |
|--------------|---|