

# A FRAMEWORK FOR TOWN CENTRE RENEWAL

SUCCESS  
PREMISES  
FOOTFALL  
STATISTICS  
PURPLE FLAG  
PRODUCTIVITY  
OCCUPANCY  
SOCIAL ENTERPRISE  
CHAMPION  
TOWN TEAM  
STREETSCAPE  
INVESTMENT  
FUNDING  
GARDAÍ  
LOCAL AUTHORITY  
REGENERATION  
SUCCESS  
REPRESENTATION  
TOURISM  
PUBLIC REALM  
NIGHTTIME ECONOMY  
RESIDENTS  
INTERVENTION  
TOWN CENTRE  
RETAIL  
VITALITY  
VILLAGE  
STRATEGY  
GROWTH  
EDUCATORS  
RENT  
COMMUNITY  
INFORMATION  
TRANSPORT  
YIELDS  
PROPERTY  
LANDLORDS  
EMPLOYMENT  
BIDS  
ACTION PLAN  
VIBRANCY  
BUSINESSES  
CHAMBERS  
PARTNERSHIP  
STAKEHOLDERS  
QUALITY  
CUSTOMER  
PARKING  
CLEANLINESS  
HEALTH CHECK  
JOBS  
EVENTS  
RATES  
MANAGER  
SCHEMES  
BUILDINGS  
SUPPORTS  
RURAL  
SHOPS



RETAIL  
CONSULTATION  
FORUM

# A Framework for Town Centre Renewal

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## Foreword by the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation



I am delighted to welcome the publication of this Framework for Town Centre Renewal.

As Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation I travel the length and breadth of the country to support job creation and business growth. I have witnessed first-hand the improvements in the business environment and in confidence in towns around the country that comes as a result of greater employment opportunities and the hard work of the Irish people and business community to make Ireland strong again.

Over the past number of years, the Irish economy has made a strong and sustainable recovery. The unemployment rate for the fourth quarter of 2016 was 7.1%<sup>1</sup>, its lowest level since 2008 and the monthly live register figures continue to fall in 2017. Over 200,000 more people are in employment than at the start of 2012, the year that the Action Plan for Jobs was launched by the Government.

However, I am keenly aware that the positive impact of strong economic growth is not being felt in all towns and villages across Ireland. The Irish Government has identified sustainable economic development and employment growth in regional and rural Ireland as a top priority. This is evidenced in the Programme for Government, the Action Plan for Jobs, the Regional Action Plans for Jobs, the Action Plan for Rural Development, Rebuilding Ireland and in the preparation of Ireland 2040 Our Plan, the next National Planning Framework.

All across the country there are scores of people who work tirelessly, largely in a voluntary nature, to make their towns and villages better places in which to do business, to socialise, work and, most importantly, live. Irish towns and villages have struggled with the decline of the town centre over recent years, a phenomenon which has been experienced by many of our European neighbours. The recession compounded this decline and has left an indelible mark on many towns and villages in Ireland, with many town centres experiencing high commercial vacancy rates.

As Chairperson of the Retail Consultation Forum, I recognise the key role that the retail sector plays in creating and supporting jobs in every city, town and village in the country. One in every eight people going to work each day works in the retail and wholesale sector. It is the largest private sector employer in the country. A vibrant retail sector supports vibrant towns and communities and helps to make a place attractive to live in, to invest in and to visit.

This Framework for Town Centre Renewal has been prepared by a Working Group within the Retail Consultation Forum. A key challenge identified by the Forum was the issue of Town Centre Renewal and the need to develop a coherent and collaborative approach to implementing town centre renewal. Development of a Framework for Town Centre Renewal was a key priority for the Retail Consultation Forum under the Action Plan for Jobs 2017.

The Framework sets out the key characteristics of a successful town centre and identifies existing supports and best practice examples from around the country. Most importantly, the

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<sup>1</sup> CSO, QNHS Quarter 4 2016 data

Framework includes an Action Plan for Town Centre Renewal which is intended to be a blueprint for towns and villages, guiding them through the three stages of town centre renewal: carrying out a town centre health check, forming a local steering group or Town Team that is representative of key local stakeholders and preparing a Town Centre Plan. The Framework includes a number of case studies which provide practical examples of best practice from a number of towns and villages around the country which demonstrate the significant improvements that can be achieved through the dedication and hard work of the people throughout Ireland who are passionate about their town or village.

I am confident that this Framework will provide a blueprint for stakeholders in towns and villages across the country to enhance their existing efforts or start them on the path towards sustainable town centre renewal by adopting the approach set out in the Action Plan for Town Centre Renewal contained in the Framework.

The Government is committed to providing supports that will assist the key stakeholders in towns and villages to make their centres vibrant and vital. The Action Plan in this Framework will be a useful tool for towns and villages applying for funding under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2017 launched by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Incentives to support urban regeneration are also to be rolled out shortly by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

I am also delighted to forward this Framework to Minister Coveney, Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government as a submission by the Retail Consultation Forum to the preparation of Ireland 2040 Our Plan, the new National Planning Framework.

I would like to pay tribute to Seamus Neely, Chief Executive of Donegal County Council for his Chairmanship of the Working Group and to Pat Daly of Limerick City and County Council, David Fitzsimons, CEO of Retail Excellence Ireland and all members of the Working Group for their valuable contributions to the drafting of this Framework for Town Centre Renewal.

With the right supports, a collaborative and structured approach to town centre renewal and the continued passion and dedication of people in local communities, we can achieve our ambition to create vibrant, thriving town centres to meet the changing needs of Irish society and to make Irish towns and villages great places to work in, socialise in and live in.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mary Mitchell O'Connor', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mary Mitchell O'Connor, T.D.  
Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

## Executive Summary and Recommendations of the Working Group

The Framework for Town Centre Renewal is a key document prepared for the Retail Consultation Forum, chaired by Minister Mary Mitchell O'Connor T.D.

The Retail Consultation Forum was set up in response to the devastating impact that the recession had on the retail and wholesale sector, a sector which has been experiencing a slow but steady recovery in jobs growth and retail sales growth but which still faces many challenges. The Forum provides a platform for engagement across the retail sector and with Government Departments and public bodies and a means of identifying ways to support sustainable employment growth in the retail and wholesale sector.

A challenge identified by the Forum is the issue of Town Centre Renewal and the need to develop a coherent and collaborative approach to implementing town centre renewal. The Working Group on Town Centre Renewal, chaired by Seamus Neely, Chief Executive of Donegal County Council, was set up in response to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation report entitled “Policy Options to Support Business Growth and Job Creation and Retention in Town and Village Centres”.

A key deliverable of the Working Group in the Action Plan for Jobs 2017 was to prepare a Framework for Town Centre Renewal. The Framework identifies the key attributes of a successful town centre, it also sets out an Action Plan and the existing supports for Town Centre Renewal.

The Action Plan, included in the Framework for Town Centre Renewal, provides a structure for collaborative partnerships among stakeholders to achieve successful town centre renewal, whether a large town or small village. It involves three key steps:

### **Step 1 - Stakeholder Engagement and Health Check:**

This involves understanding your town and the key stakeholders, identifying strengths and weaknesses, challenges and opportunities.

### **Step 2 - Establish a Town Centre Management Partnership or “Town Team”:**

This will have the support of all the stakeholders involved at step one.

### **Step 3 - Prepare and implement a Town Centre Plan:**

The Plan should clearly express the vision for the town, the actions required, and who is responsible for what.

Highlighted in the Framework are a number of examples of best practice including:

- **Waterford’s Purple Flag accreditation:** This recognises excellence in the management of the evening and night-time economy (ENTE).

- **Sligo Business Improvement District:** The key objective of the BID is to develop and implement initiatives designed to promote and improve the trading environment.
- **Roscommon Town Teams Project:** Town Teams work collaboratively with retailers, local businesses, the community/voluntary sector, key agencies and service providers to develop new innovative initiatives to reinvigorate their towns.

## Recommendations of the Working Group

Set out below are the recommendations by the Retail Consultation Forum to address the need for greater collaboration and support for town centre renewal across the country, with a particular emphasis on the role that the business community can play in collaboration with Local Authorities and other key stakeholders in setting a town on a sustainable path towards vitality and vibrancy.

1. The Action Plan for Town Centre Renewal (Part 2 of this Framework document) should be disseminated across Local Authorities, Chambers, business associations and other stakeholder groups as a toolkit or support for coordinated local renewal;
2. A coordinated approach across Local Authorities to town centre management should be considered for inclusion in Ireland 2040 in order to deliver a successful place making strategy at local and national level;
3. The Framework should support the implementation of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2017 to deliver economic impact in towns and villages across the country;
4. Identify further funding streams for town centre renewal and for funding specific projects;
5. Establish a panel of Town Centre Renewal mentors to support towns that are implementing a Town Centre Plan;
6. Support the extension of the Purple Flag scheme to other towns in Ireland and development of an accreditation scheme for daytime economy;
7. Develop a training programme in consultation with the Association of Town and City Managers for town centre coordinators, key local stakeholders and Local Authority staff;
8. Examine and implement, where appropriate, recommendations from “Revitalising Ireland’s Towns”, the pilot Town Centre Health Check programme run by RGDATA and the Heritage Council;
9. Develop a portal to house town centre renewal resource material and case studies.

## Introduction

The Framework for Town Centre Renewal was prepared by the Retail and Town Centre Renewal Working Group for publication by the Retail Consultation Forum.

## Context

The Retail Consultation Forum was established in May 2014 under the Action Plan for Jobs 2014 to provide a platform for structured engagement between the retail sector and relevant Government Departments. The purpose of the Forum is to enable issues of relevance to the retail sector to be discussed, with a view to identifying practical actions which could be taken by Government, by industry itself or together, to support the sector with particular emphasis on achieving sustainable jobs growth in the sector.

Addressing the challenges of town centre renewal was identified as a key issue by members of the Retail Consultation Forum as a means of strengthening the fragile recovery in the retail sector, both in terms of sustainable jobs growth and retail sales. Town and village centres across Ireland have faced considerable difficulties, in particular in recent years, to retain vibrancy and vitality in the face of a number of challenges. From a retail perspective, these challenges include the rise in out-of-town shopping centres and retail parks, the increase in online shopping by the Irish consumer and migration to larger urban centres. The recession exacerbated the effects of the changes that had been taking place, leading to widespread closures of businesses and job losses throughout our towns and villages.

Following a series of Hearings with relevant stakeholders in 2014, the Joint Oireachtas Committee (JOC) on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, published a report on “Policy Options to Support Business Growth and Job Creation and Retention in Town and Village Centres” in April 2015. The Retail Consultation Forum held a special meeting to consider the report and its recommendations and in October 2015, three Working Groups were established by the Retail Consultation Forum to examine a number of the recommendations made in the JOC Report and identify initiatives which the Forum could support in response to the recommendations.

## The Retail and Town Centre Renewal Working Group

The Retail and Town Centre Renewal Working Group was set up under the Chairmanship of Mr Seamus Neely, Chief Executive, Donegal County Council, to examine and identify practical ways to give effect to some of the recommendations of the JOC report in particular those recommendations that focused on making towns and village centres better places to work, shop and live in.

The Group was tasked with identifying the best route for development of a framework for Town Centre Strategic Development Plans, the stakeholders that would need to work collaboratively to deliver such plans and best practice or success stories from around Ireland which could be replicated by towns and villages across Ireland.

Members of the Working Group included representatives of key retail sector representative bodies, retailers, academics, Business Improvement Districts, Local Authorities, the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. (full membership is listed on the back cover).

The Working Group acknowledges the relevance of a number of key documents that have addressed this issue in the past and which have influenced the content of this Framework document, in particular the Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Retail Planning published by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in 2012, A Strategy for Rural Retailing by Retail Excellence Ireland in 2014, and the submissions by members of the Retail Consultation Forum to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation in 2015.

## Scope of the Framework Document

It is well documented that the concepts of vitality and viability are central to maintaining and enhancing town centres. Keeping a town vibrant and responsive to the needs of the community is an ongoing challenge and the Working Group would like to acknowledge the concerted efforts of key stakeholders in towns and villages across the country and in particular notes the role that volunteerism plays in driving those efforts.

The Working Group recognises that large numbers of stakeholders across towns in Ireland devote a significant amount of time and effort to initiatives which contribute to the vibrancy and vitality of their towns. While the role of Local Authorities in contributing to these efforts is essential, much of the work that goes above and beyond statutory responsibilities is done on a voluntary basis by local residents and business people who are passionate about their town. In many instances local Champions can be the key drivers of initiatives to support towns. International experience demonstrates that successful town management is most likely to be achieved where there is a genuine partnership between the public and private sectors together with town residents.

Members of the Working Group have witnessed the efforts and the success stories of these key stakeholders and many have also been instrumental in supporting key stakeholders across the country and their learnings have been inputted into this Framework.

While volunteerism is essential to the development and implementation of a town centre renewal plan, a greater range of supports needs to be put in place to enable successful town centre renewal. These supports could take the form of administrative supports by the Local Authority, training supports for Town Centre Coordinators or other town stakeholders and a variety of financial supports such as further grants from the Local Authority for office fit outs, shop front grants, or supports for starting businesses. Consideration also needs to be given to greater levels of central government funding, such as funding under the Town and Village Renewal scheme or further urban regeneration funding.

This Framework for Town Centre Renewal represents the outcome of a collaborative effort by members of the Working Group to bring to bear their expertise and experience of working with members of their organisations and with towns and villages across the country. The objective of the group was to prepare a Framework which key stakeholders can use to assist them in their efforts to improve their town and village centres. A first draft of the Framework was prepared by Pat Daly of Limerick County Council and David Fitzsimons of Retail Excellence Ireland. The Group also drew on the expertise of the Association of Town and City Management in the UK which has been providing town centre management solutions, support and training to towns and cities across the UK and Ireland for over 25 years.

The Framework identifies the key attributes of a successful town centre today, sets out an Action Plan for Town Centre Renewal and references a number of existing supports for town centre renewal. The Framework also includes a number of recommendations to address the need for greater collaboration and support for town centre renewal across the country, with a particular emphasis on the role that the business community can play in collaboration with Local Authorities and other key stakeholders in setting a town on a sustainable path towards vitality and vibrancy.

## Target Audience

The intention is that this Action Plan will provide a blueprint for policy makers, Local Authorities and key stakeholders across towns and villages in Ireland for the development of a coordinated approach to town centre renewal. This can be achieved across the country through the roll out of Town Centre Renewal Action Plans for enhancing the vibrancy and vitality of towns and villages across Ireland, building on existing partnerships and structures.

The Framework will assist towns and villages that are applying for support under the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs' Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2017.

The content of the Action Plan for Town Centre Renewal in this document is essentially targeted at towns that have an established retail and hospitality presence, in particular those towns that have experienced an increasing vacancy rate or a shift in economic activity out of the town centre over the past number of years and are struggling to reverse this trend. While implementation of a wide range of interventions included in the Action Plan for Town Centre Renewal is more attainable in mid-sized and larger towns, the collaborative approach is appropriate to towns and villages of all sizes and smaller towns can be selective in their choice of interventions to make their areas better places to work, socialise and live in.

## Ireland 2040

The Government is in the process of preparing the National Planning Framework, Ireland 2040. It is intended that the National Planning Framework will be a high-level document that will provide the framework for future development and investment in Ireland, providing a long-term and place-based aspect to public policy and investment, and aiming to coordinate sectoral areas such as housing, jobs, transport, education, health, environment, energy and communications, into an overall coherent strategy. This will allow shared national development goals, including improved living standards, quality of life, prosperity, competitiveness and environmental sustainability, to be more broadly considered, as well as providing greater clarity for private sector investment. In order to ensure that positive outcomes arising from national growth can be shared by people throughout Ireland, the potential of all areas will need to be realised, relative to their capacity for sustainable development.

This Framework for Town Centre Renewal is a key contribution from the Retail Consultation Forum to the development of Ireland 2040. It sets out an Action Plan for Town Centre Renewal which, if adopted across towns and villages in Ireland, has the potential to support viable and sustainable towns and villages that meet the long term needs of our society, economy and environment.

# PART I KEY ATTRIBUTES OF A SUCCESSFUL TOWN CENTRE

## Our Town!



ONE VISION, ONE VOICE

## Town Plan



LOCAL STEERING GROUP



LOCAL BUSINESS CHAMPION

## OUR TOWN



PLACE MAKING STRATEGY

## FOR SALE



STRONG OCCUPANCY



VISUAL APPEARANCE STRATEGY



FINANCIAL SUPPORTS



ARTISAN FOOD AND  
CRAFT SUPPORTS



PROGRAMME OF EVENTS



TOURISM OFFER



ONLINE PLATFORM



## 1. One Vision, One Voice

The well-known adage of “united we stand, divided we fall” has particular significance for the future viability of town centres. One of the biggest challenges facing town centres is the individual ownership make-up of buildings. Working collectively, as owners and managers of local businesses with the support of bodies such as Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Offices, Retail Associations, and local stakeholder groups such as Chambers of Commerce and Tidy Towns Groups can create the right environment to address town centre renewal challenges.



## 2. Local Steering Group

Genuine partnership amongst key stakeholders is a prerequisite for success. Towns can often have a number of different community and business groups. Bringing these groups together through a steering group or “Town Team” that is representative of all stakeholders in the town is key to developing a vision for the town and setting out a plan that has the support of all sectors of the community. The local steering group or Town Team might also focus on area promotion which will support local businesses and attract new businesses and activity.



## 3. Local Business Champion

Town centres provide a unique, eclectic mix of business owners that are very often passionate about their town centre. While it is important that a Town Centre Plan be driven by a steering group or Town Team, there could be a role for a passionate local business champion as a spokesperson for the group that can galvanise a town centre into action and that speaks to the public about the attractiveness of their particular town centre. This champion could complement the role of a co-ordinator charged with delivering on an agreed work programme set out by the steering group or Town Team.



## 4. Place Making Strategy

As investment and people are increasingly mobile, considering the quality of a place becomes ever more important. A place making strategy is essential to ensuring that a town positions itself as an attractive location for investment, for talent and as a place to enjoy a good quality of life. Planning policy needs to place greater emphasis on place making for town centres at the key stages of development of Local Area Plans and Development Plans. Town health checks should feed into this process in a timely manner.



## 5. Strong Occupancy

The lifeblood of town centres is active, thriving occupied units. In some cases building owners are “reluctant landlords” who may not be committed to finding occupants for buildings. The reasons for this are many and varied and can include:

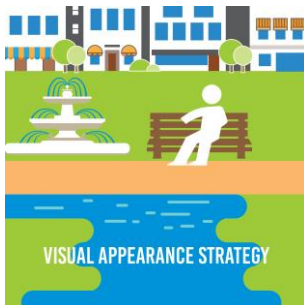
1. Lack of financial resources to redevelop building
2. Lack of capacity to find uses for buildings
3. No financial pressure to develop new uses for buildings if the building is financially unencumbered

If buildings are to find uses, there needs to be a targeted, co-ordinated approach working with building owners to improve retail, residential, commercial and leisure occupancy.



## 6. Programme of Events

Large-scale and small scale events are key anchors in promoting and attracting people to town centres. A number of key events should be organised that attract people (both local residents and visitors) into town centres. It is important to include local businesses in the planning of events to ensure that they not only support business but also act as a key marketing tool for town centres.



## 7. Visual Appearance Strategy

It is essential that town centres are attractive places to visit if they are to succeed and thrive. All too often there is an approach of waiting for a major development to transform a town centre.

However there is a new, emergent thinking that looks at revitalising spaces with cost effective, temporary uses that build on the longer term vision for a space. Examples in this regard include reclaiming previously trafficked space to accommodate a public space where seating/kiosks etc. can be provided to rebrand the space.

The transformative effect of such efforts can showcase to all that change can happen in the here and now and can act as a catalyst for future improvements. Likewise there is a requirement that the appearance of streetscapes be improved on a whole of street basis.



## 8. Financial Supports

In order to encourage a greater take up of town centre development opportunities for retail, residential, commercial, and leisure uses targeted financial incentives should be considered to re-establish the dominant role of town centres provided for in planning policy. This will provide an impetus and a financial rationale for development. Presently, the differential between development costs and financial returns in town centres versus the out of town centres can act as a barrier to development in town centres. As town centres re-establish their dominant position this barrier should in time be eroded.



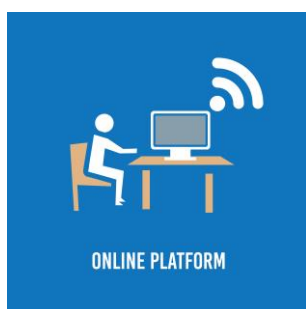
## 9. Artisan Food and Craft Supports

In order to ensure that our town centres are attractive places to work in, shop in and visit, the retail mix needs to be varied and interesting. Local indigenous artisan food and craft shops provide a unique experience in our town centres. They are often led by energetic, passionate champions that in and of themselves can be the USP that brands a town centre. Efforts should be made to support start-up artisan food and craft shops to enhance the visitor experience within town centres.



## 10. Tourism Offer

Development of the tourism offer, where appropriate, is a useful magnet to further promote Town Centres. Consideration should be given as to who has responsibility for promoting tourism in town centres and ensuring that tourism products are developed and marketed in a focussed and planned manner with local hoteliers and businesses. However, in examining its tourism development potential, towns should not lose sight of the fact that it is the local population that provides the town's sustainable customer base, which in turn ensures a more vibrant town.



## 11. Online Platform

Town centres need to become responsive to the changing retail landscape. Increasing numbers of shoppers now shop online for convenience. There is a unique opportunity for town centres to take their town to the next level and to capture a share of this emerging market sector by branding town centres as a collective shopping platform where you can shop for all your needs in one place. It can also have a real appeal by offering an on demand aspect that provides convenience and caters for the immediacy of every day need.

## **PART 2: ACTION PLAN FOR TOWN CENTRE RENEWAL**

### **A TOOL KIT FOR YOUR TOWN**

#### **Step One: Stakeholder Engagement and Health Check**

Identifying key stakeholders and carrying out a comprehensive Health Check are key to understanding your town and its people, identifying challenges to be addressed and opportunities that can be built on.

#### **Step Two: Establish a Town Centre Management Partnership or “Town Team”**

A core group of key stakeholders should be brought together as a Town Team or Partnership to oversee the recommendations of the Health Check and development of a Town Centre Renewal Plan. The appropriate structure for this group should be identified in the Health Check.

#### **Step Three: Prepare and Implement a Town Centre Plan**

The Town Team needs to prepare a Town Centre Plan setting out the Vision for the Town, the strategy of key objectives, priority projects and measurable goals or Key Performance Indicators. The Plan needs to be implemented, monitored, and reviewed.

# STEP 1: UNDERSTANDING YOUR TOWN: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND HEALTH CHECK

**Before any Town Centre Renewal Plan can be drawn up, it is essential to:**

1. Identify and engage with key stakeholders in the town
2. Carry out a comprehensive Health Check to gain an understanding of the key attributes, challenges, and opportunities within a town

## Stakeholder Identification and Engagement

It is very important to ensure that the Town Centre Plan that results from this Action Plan is representative of all key stakeholders in the town. The first step therefore is to prepare a database of all key stakeholders in order to engage with them as part of the Health Check.

### Key stakeholders could include:

- Business associations
- Local authorities
- Retailers
- Town centre shopping centre managers
- Landlords
- Employers
- Employees
- Chambers of Commerce
- Residents
- Tourism groups and agencies
- An Garda Síochána
- Charities, social enterprises & community groups
- Educators – universities, colleges, and schools
- Business customers
- Local media

## The Health Check

A “Health Check” will enable key stakeholders to assess the town’s vitality and viability, both of which are central to maintaining and enhancing town centres. Vitality is a measure of how active and buoyant a town centre is. Viability is a measure of the town’s commercial well-being. Carrying out a “Health Check” will give the stakeholders vital information on the town at a point in time which will help inform a Town Centre Plan. This will help to understand how the town is performing and how it is perceived by different stakeholder groups.

The Health Check will provide information which can be used to benchmark performance during the roll out of the Town Centre Plan and will also demonstrate what has changed since a previous Health Check may have been carried out. For many towns a Health Check and Town Centre Plan may build on existing structures and could serve as an update of such structures.

### Attractions

Attractions help to define a town's identity and comprise the range and diversity of shopping and other activities which draw in customers and visitors.

### Accessibility

Successful centres need to be easily accessible by the surrounding areas through road and public transport networks. Ease of access within a town between public transport stops, car parks, and key attractions is also essential.

## Key Qualities of a Healthy, Vibrant Town Centre

### Amenities

A healthy town centre needs to be a pleasant place to spend time in. It should be attractive in terms of environmental quality and urban design, it should be safe and it should have a distinct identity or image.

### Actions

Actions and initiatives are needed to ensure the viability of a town centre including delivery of improvement projects, regular cleaning and maintenance and co-ordinated town centre management initiatives to promote the continued improvement of the centre.

### Spotlight on: Blackrock Village Health Check



"The Blackrock Business Network has recently had a Health Check carried out for Blackrock Village and the results surprised us. Blackrock has a great retail and hospitality mix, is incredibly well connected and has plenty of parking, contrary to public perception. We have a number of business clusters emerging, including professional services and health care services. However, we have a very high office vacancy rate which we need to tackle.

The Health Check has helped us to identify the keys strengths and weaknesses of our Village that we will address in our Village Development Plan which will include setting up a number of task forces to implement the Plan. Thanks to the Health Check, we have a clear idea now about what we need to do to promote Blackrock as a great place to do business, to shop and socialise in and as a great place to live in."

Tom Feeney, Chairman, Blackrock Business Network  
[www.blackrock.ie](http://www.blackrock.ie)

Set out on the following pages are the Key Health Check Indicators which will help the stakeholders to understand the various elements that make up a Health Check and to identify those that are more relevant for the town in question. It is likely that external expertise would be brought in to carry out the various qualitative and quantitative assessments.

Although no single indicator on its own can measure the performance of a town in relation to the four elements of all round “health” (attractions, accessibility, amenities and actions) it is possible to gain a good appreciation by undertaking a vitality and viability Health Check assessment using a variety of the indicators below.

This suite of health check indicators provides a consistent framework for assessing vitality and viability. In this way the strengths and weaknesses of town centres can be analysed systematically and town teams will be able to ascertain how well centres are performing in terms of their attraction, accessibility, amenity, and action programmes. The first health check should inform the development of a Town Centre Plan and in the future regular health checks should be undertaken within the framework provided by the Plan in order to provide baseline and time-series information on the health of the town centre.



# HEALTH CHECK INDICATORS



DIVERSITY OF USES



COMPETITIVE OFFERING



REPRESENTATION



COMMERCIAL RENTS



ACCESSIBILITY



PROPORTION OF VACANT  
STREET LEVEL PROPERTY



ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY



PUBLIC REALM



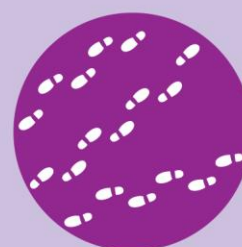
CUSTOMER VIEWS & BEHAVIOUR



PERCEPTION OF SAFETY &  
OCCURRENCE OF CRIME



COMMERCIAL YIELDS ON  
NON-DOMESTIC PROPERTY



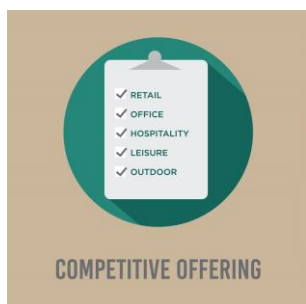
PEDESTRIAN FLOWS



## 1. Diversity of Uses

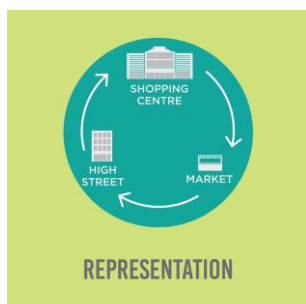
How much space is in use for different functions – such as offices, shopping, other commercial, leisure, cultural and entertainment activities, pubs, cafes and restaurants, hotels, educational uses, housing – and how has that balance been changing?

A detailed land use survey could be carried out which distinguishes between retail uses, commercial activities (such as hotel, leisure, cafes), office uses, residential uses, over the shop use and vacancy. Specifically the footprint of retail uses is very helpful in identifying the core retail areas of a city or town, the primary and secondary shopping streets, and useful in distinguishing between city/town centre and edge-of-centre.



## 2. Competitiveness

Is the current mix of retail stores offering choice to consumers? Is there a need for more innovative retail offerings and services for the benefit of consumers?



## 3. Retailer Representation and Intentions to Change Representations

It may be helpful to look at the different types of retail in the town and how that has changed over a number of years. The demand from retailers wanting to come into the centre could be examined or the reasons behind the closure of retail units. This would help to determine what works and doesn't work in the town.



## 4. Commercial Rents

Monitoring the pattern of movement in retail rents within primary shopping areas is useful and available from commercial property information sources.



## 5. Proportion of Vacant Street Level Property

It is important to identify the vacancy level of street level properties. Details of vacant property can be captured through the land use survey. However, vacancies can arise even in the strongest town centres as businesses transition in and out of properties, and this indicator should be used with care. Vacancies in secondary frontages and changes to other uses will also be useful indicators.



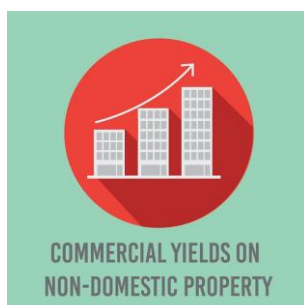
## 6. Accessibility

This indicator should assess the ease and convenience of access by a variety of travel options, including the quality, quantity, and type of car parking, the frequency and quality of public transport services, the range of customer origins served, and the quality of provision for pedestrians and cyclists. In certain circumstances car parking surveys should be considered as the circulation and car parking management strategy of a city/town/urban area can play a pro-active role in contributing to the vitality of a centre.



## 7. Customer Views and Behaviour

Regular surveys of customer views will help in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of town centre improvements and in setting priorities for the town centre plan. Interviews, both in the town centre and of residents and the local workforce, should be used to establish views of both users and non-users of the centre.



## 8. Commercial Yields on Non-Domestic Property (i.e. the capital value in relation to the expected market rental)

This demonstrates the confidence of investors in the long term profitability of the centre for retail, office, and other commercial developments. This indicator will normally only be available for the larger town centres and should be used with care as investor confidence can be influenced by a number of extraneous factors unrelated to a particular centre. For many smaller centres there are in any event only a limited number of investment attractions from which conclusions can be drawn.



## 9. Perception of Safety and Occurrence of Crime

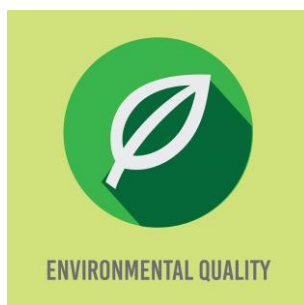
This indicator is a combination of the views of customers and residents with regard to the safety of their streets and crime statistics gathered from local Gardaí. The views of business owners can also be taken into account in this indicator.



## 10. Pedestrian Flows

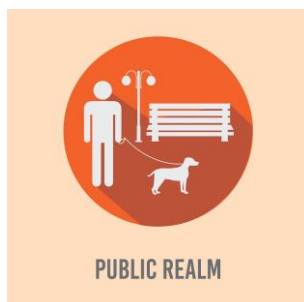
This indicator assesses the numbers and movement of people on the streets, in different parts of the centre at different times of the day and evening, who are available for businesses to attract into shops, restaurants, or other facilities.

To be effective this indicator should be monitored regularly as it is the relative values (rather than absolutes) which are important together with clear evidence of changes over time. This can be done as a comprehensive survey during a typical shopping day or it can be carried out as a sample survey of people on the streets in different parts of the city/town/urban area. Footfall measurements can contribute to the identification of the street hierarchy.



## 11. Environmental Quality

This indicator should assess the physical condition of a town centre (e.g. clutter, litter, and graffiti) and the environmental attributes (e.g. quality of shopfronts, landscaping, and open spaces). A good source of information is the local Tidy Towns committee and the Local Authority.



## 12. Public Realm

The public realm should be an integrated element in the design of the overall development of a street/area, using quality hard and soft landscaping, street furniture, public signage etc.

## STEP 2: ESTABLISHING A TOWN TEAM OR TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT PARTNERSHIP

The objective of this stage is to establish a Town Centre Management Partnership (TCMP) or “Town Team” which is representative of the town or village and has the support of all stakeholders involved in the first step of the process.

The town centre is unique as it is used by every section of the community. Whilst many town centres are represented by many social and business representative groups, there can often be a myriad of needs represented without a cohesive plan formed. Taking account of existing structures and past successes towns could consider establishing or strengthening a town centre management partnership model or a “Town Team”.

For the Town Team to be an “effective partnership” it should comprise public, private, voluntary, and community sectors as well as all other relevant stakeholders.

This process may be driven by a local “champion”, someone who is already active in supporting town centre initiatives. However, the involvement of the Local Authority is also essential at this stage, either as a participant/provider of support or as the main driver of the process. Stakeholders should discuss and identify a Town Centre Management Partnership model that is a good fit for their town or village, drawing on the recommendations in the Health Check.

An effective partnership should embrace all strands of society and have a clear mandate resulting from the Health Check to oversee the preparation and delivery of a Town Centre Plan. Ideally a core team of 10-15 is a productive number. Representatives from the key stakeholder groups identified for the Health Check could be invited to participate at the outset.

For town centres to develop and drive an impactful Town Centre Plan, there is a need for the Town Team to manage the town centre in a similar manner to how a shopping centre director would manage their centre. Consideration therefore needs to be given to the appointment of a Town Coordinator to report to the Town Team. The Town Coordinator needs to be salaried and be given a clear mandate by the Town Team to deliver on the recommendations of the Health Check. The Town Coordinator needs to be accountable to either the Town Team, the Local Authority, or both.

## **Town Team case study: Roscommon**

The Roscommon Town Teams Project was initiated by Roscommon County Council, as envisaged under the Local Government Sectoral Strategy to Support Economic Recovery and Jobs (2012) and the Action Programme for Effective Local Government (2012). The Town Team initiative was strongly supported by Roscommon Leader Partnership. In 2014 Roscommon County Council established a Business Enterprise and Innovation fund following agreement from elected representatives to forgo a 1% reduction in Business Rates. This fund, totalling €100,000, was used to fund the Town Team initiative.

Town Teams were created in six key areas within County Roscommon. Town Revitalisation Team meetings were held in the six designated towns during late 2014 to early 2015. These towns were in need of new innovative initiatives to reinvigorate their social, cultural and business environments following the economic downturn.

Roscommon County Council, supported by Roscommon LEADER Partnership and Roscommon Local Enterprise Office, established committees in each of the six towns comprising of representatives from business, social and community groups supported by Local Authority staff. The Town Teams work collaboratively with retailers, local businesses, the community/voluntary sector and key agencies and service providers. Town Teams were also provided with initial training on social inclusion best practices. Facilitated workshops were held in each town to ascertain the views of local activists; a SWOT analysis was undertaken and a vision was identified for each town; and the actions to achieve the vision were identified. Training needs for community development champions were also identified. Following the workshops committees worked collaboratively with Roscommon County Council to draw up detailed action plans for each town. The committees report regularly to their Municipal District which ensures that the Elected Members have an ongoing and proactive involvement in the process.

The Town Teams have taken a leading role in securing funding for collective actions. Actions delivered to date include: Town centre business friendly car parking initiative, shop front enhancement schemes, community and retail surveys and shop local promotions, business mentor sessions, development of a digital communication platform to act as a collaborative umbrella marketing tool for all businesses and groups in the area, derelict premises cleaning and painting schemes, development of Town Centre rejuvenation plans, development of local heritage and recreation trails, installation of permanent and temporary street-scape enhancements, youth engagement initiatives, and age friendly pilot town.

To assist the Town Teams Roscommon County Council has provided access to a number of supports including: a dedicated Town Team Coordinator, a Planner to assist with Town Centre Urban design development plans, access to a Council Tourism Officer and a Council Arts Officer. The Council facilitates the Town Team Forum, and provided the supports to establish the Town

Teams as Companies Limited by Guarantee to ensure appropriate governance and expenditure of Public Finances at all times.

A key learning from the initiative has been that all stakeholders need to be transparent and open in their respective duties in order to create a common bond of trust and co-operation to drive forward projects and new ideas.

### Case Study – ‘An Chistin’ Castlerea Food Hub

Castlerea Town Team has been working to champion the development of a Food Hub. Roscommon County Council, Roscommon Leader Partnership and the Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board (GRET) collaborated with the Town Team and Enterprise Castlerea on the project. Roscommon County Council succeeded in



securing €100,000 under the REDZ Programme 2016 which, together with investment from Roscommon County Council’s own resources, will fund Phase I, due for completion during 2017. This involves developing a commercial-grade training kitchen in an existing industrial unit in Castlerea town. GRET have agreed to schedule catering programmes at the facility and they will be an anchor partner in the initiative. Phase II, anticipated to start in 2018 will involve building new food incubation units at an adjoining site and includes land which Roscommon County Council has made available. The development of ‘An Chistin’ Castlerea Food Hub would not have been realised without the Castlerea Town Team. The Town Team has leveraged support from the agencies and is working collaboratively with the private and public sector to capitalise on this significant training and employment opportunity for their town.

For further information please visit: [www.townteamsroscommon.com](http://www.townteamsroscommon.com)

## The Business Improvement District Model (BID)

Business Improvement Districts can play a pivotal role in high street revival and the regeneration of towns, especially in rural Ireland. The BID model's flexibility enables the private and public sectors to work together and invest in improvements to the local business environment while contributing to the wider regeneration of the local economy.

A Business Improvement District (BID) is driven by a company comprised of business persons working in conjunction with their local authority (which nominates a minority of members to its board) to carry out activities over and above those already carried out by the Local Authority. Its functions are agreed by the business persons themselves at the outset of the process in consultation with, and following the agreement of, the Local Authority. It is funded by a levy on ratepayers within the BID area and may also generate income from other sources (these might include, for example, participation in EU or cross-border programmes, joint co-funding with their local authority, etc.).

Following the requisite consultation, a vote by rate payers in favour of proceeding with the BID proposal and the support of a resolution by at least one third of Councilors, the BID comes into effect on a date set down in the resolution.

There are currently more than 3,500 Business Improvement Districts worldwide, with over 200 Business Improvement Districts in the UK and Ireland alone.

The BID model is not the solution for all towns in Ireland. However, used correctly and in the right context, BIDs can be a powerful tool for successful economic development as BIDs:

- Provide structure and a funding mechanism for five years;
- Require the active involvement of the local business community;
- Have an inbuilt co-operation with the local authorities and other government agencies;
- Create tangible projects that can make a real difference to towns, their residents, businesses and visitors.

There are currently five BIDs in Ireland: Dublin, Dundalk, Dun Laoghaire, Sligo and Sandyford.

### Spotlight on: Dún Laoghaire Business Improvement District

"Setting up a Business Improvement District in Dún Laoghaire has most certainly had a positive impact on the economic recovery of our town. Since its inception in April 2014, more than 110 new businesses have opened in Dún Laoghaire creating in excess of 800 jobs in the town. Our new Digital Cluster strategy, 'Digital Dún Laoghaire', helped put our town on the map for digital, tech and creative companies that are now considering Dún Laoghaire as an alternative to city centre locations."



Anthony Quigley, Chairperson, Dún Laoghaire BID [www.dunlaoghaire.ie](http://www.dunlaoghaire.ie)

## Case Study: Sligo Business Improvement District



**Sligo County Council accepting their Highly Commended award in the category of Building a Sustainable Town or City Centre Community at the 2016 Association of Town and City Management (ACTM) Awards**



**Sligo designated the first coach friendly town in Ireland from the Coach, Tourism, Transport Council of Ireland (CTTC)**

Sligo BID (Business Improvement District) was the first BID to form on the west coast of Ireland in March 2016. The BID formed as a direct result of the INTERREG IVA, “Better Towns through Partnership” Project run by Sligo County Council from September 2013 to March 2015 and was actively promoted by those businesses that had worked on winning a Purple Flag for Sligo.

Sligo BID has a membership of 758 local businesses who contribute a levy calculated at 3.09% of their respective rateable value giving the BID an annual budget of approximately €375,000 per annum. The key objective of the BID is to develop and implement a series of initiatives (agreed by the members) that are designed to promote and improve the trading environment and to drive footfall to the BID zone.

Fundamental to the BID is establishing a good working relationship with the local council (both management and elected representatives) and to date in excess of 16 projects have been completed in a spirit of productive collaboration. Worthy of note is that the BID process was supported by Sligo County Council, Sligo Chamber, Sligo Tourism, IT Sligo and Sligo Tidy Towns.

The work of the BID has already engendered positive results. Sligo won a Purple Flag award for excellence in the management of the evening and night-time economy in 2015, a highly commended award from the Association of Town and City Management (ATCM UK and Ireland) in 2016 for the strength of the town team partnership. In January 2017, Sligo was awarded the first designated coach friendly town in Ireland from the Coach, Tourism, Transport Council.

Further details are available at [www.sligobid.ie](http://www.sligobid.ie)

## STEP 3: PREPARE A TOWN CENTRE PLAN

It is essential that the Town Team creates a Town Centre Plan that takes account of the stakeholders' needs that were identified in the Health Check. The Plan should clearly express the vision for the town, the actions required, and who is responsible for what. The Town Team should set up a sub-group to co-ordinate, review, and assist in drafting the Town Centre Plan and to oversee the work of the town coordinator or external consultants. All information available needs to be gathered: results of health check, existing research on the town, county development plans, and other town strategies. To write, and more importantly, implement a good Town Centre Plan the Town Team must take account of "internal factors" affecting the town rather than the external factors such as the state of the economy.

The Town Centre Plan must be published and allow for a period of consultation before being signed by all of the stakeholders in the Town Team. The Plan must also provide for Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) or ways of assessing if the Plan is working.

The Town Centre Plan must also provide for regular reviews to ensure there is active communication and engagement amongst the Town Team and the wider stakeholder group. Emails, newsletters, local media, websites, and briefing meetings are just some ways that all stakeholders can be kept informed and engaged with the overall Plan.

### Key considerations when developing the Town Centre Plan:

- Be aware of the reasons for developing a Plan and who the target audience is
- The Plan needs to be sensitive to the needs of multiple stakeholders
- Make the Plan interesting but concise and factual
- Include financial information detailing core funding and project funding opportunities
- Include photographs or images
- Ensure that the Plan is realistic and achievable within the timeframe
- Allow for review and updates

**A successful Plan will include the following four components:**



1. A **vision** for the town centre that sets out the overall aim which is both consensus building and which people can relate to.
2. A **strategy of key objectives** which should ideally fall into three categories in priority order:
  - Retail and Hospitality Investment – without a compelling and engaging retail and hospitality mix the town will not succeed.
  - Citizen Engagement – the town centre is owned by the citizen, it is their public realm and it is therefore essential that they are engaged in enjoying and supporting their town.
  - Standards and Security – a key part of the plan should address how best to deliver a clean, safe and engaging civic space.
3. A **listing of projects** related to each key objective with a cost, target date, and associated sponsor.

The projects can be prioritised by the Town Team and businesses could also be given the opportunity to identify the projects which they would like to support. The following section sets out a range of interventions to consideration for inclusion in the Town Centre Plan, ranging from practical Town Centre Management plans, to car parking, night time economy and streetscape.

International experience would indicate that the implementation of even some of these interventions will benefit all stakeholders:

- Citizens – can enjoy a vibrant, engaging and safe public realm
- Businesses – can improve their commercial livelihood and grow employment
- Local Government – can protect and grow the rates base
- Landlords – can improve property valuations and occupancy rates

4. A listing of **Key Performance Indicators** to monitor the impact of the Town Centre Plan which could include:



Only when we benchmark the town or village performance against pre-determined criteria can we identify and share best practice. The development of this framework will assist in the establishment of town centre management KPIs, the measurement of same and the dissemination of best town centre management practices. Furthermore the establishment of “Town Teams” will assist in the desire to implement such practices.

What gets measured gets done. As such, there is an absolute necessity to conduct an annual audit of town centre performance. The audit could include a mystery shopping exercise, street interviews, and a town centre assessment. The annual results would be published and support could be put in place for the weaker performing towns.

Measureable and achievable goals should be set as KPIs which are listed in different time frameworks of 1 year, 3 years, 5 years, and 10 years.

# INTERVENTIONS TO CONSIDER FOR INCLUSION IN THE TOWN CENTRE PLAN

## OVERALL MANAGEMENT OF THE TOWN CENTRE

**A good approach to the practical management of a town centre is that of a shopping centre manager. The Town Team could consider taking such an approach to the management of the town in order to implement the Town Centre Plan.**

| INTERVENTION                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | TIME-LINE  |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Marketing Plan</b>                       | The Town Team should prepare a town marketing plan including the scheduling of advertising campaigns, events and promotions. The plan could schedule a range of activity which will engage with consumers and drive footfall and town centre activity. The plan could be supported by local media who will also benefit from a vibrant and thriving business community.                                                | <b>S T</b> |
| <b>Customer Communication</b>               | The Town Team should implement strategies to ensure the town can actively, but in a managed and professional manner, communicate with the town's customers. The Town Team could launch a co-ordinated customer database where, on arrival into any store in the town, customers are asked to provide their contact details and the Town Team then schedules e-mail or text communications over the course of the year. | <b>S T</b> |
| <b>Updates and Reminders</b>                | The Town Team could develop a citizen database which will allow the town team to send regular updates and reminders to citizens regarding upcoming events i.e. "don't forget next week is dine out week"; "next Thursday is outdoor cinema evening"; "this weekend is family weekend".                                                                                                                                 | <b>S T</b> |
| <b>Co-ordinated Communications Strategy</b> | It is important that a cohesive and powerful message is presented to customers thus any event or occasion should involve the application of a co-ordinated communications strategy including street banners, store window posters, all store staff wearing branded t-shirts etc.                                                                                                                                       | <b>M T</b> |
| <b>Social Media</b>                         | The Town Team should take advantage of social media opportunities including using Facebook and Twitter to "push out" town messages to consumers including promotions, competition and news.                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>S T</b> |
| <b>Banners</b>                              | The Town Team could use lamppost banners to highlight festivals and events. The banners could be changed intermittently between a standard welcome banner and different events and promotions banners.                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>M T</b> |
| <b>A Town Crèche</b>                        | The Town Team might trial the establishment of a town crèche. The crèche could be located at vacant centrally located premises. The crèche could offer discounted child minding services for town shoppers on presentation of a shopping receipt for that day. (It should be noted that there has been mixed reaction to town crèches where used and therefore needs to be carefully considered.)                      | <b>M T</b> |

|                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |            |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Free Wi-Fi</b>                | The Town Team could consider the provision of free Wi-Fi access in the town. This can be a considerable draw, in particular for young adults.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <b>S T</b> |
| <b>Customer Events</b>           | The Town Team could create an events schedule highlighting different events to be hosted in the year including open air shows, parades, children's events, cooking class, film festival etc.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>M T</b> |
| <b>Customer Promotions</b>       | The Town Team could also schedule a number of promotions to increase footfall to the town centre especially over quieter day parts. Promotions could be organised in a co-ordinated manner by bringing all the stakeholders together. Promotions could include "Shop today and receive a free entry in a competition to win a prize", "Today only: car parking is half price"; "Receive 10% off in the following listed stores" etc..                          | <b>S T</b> |
| <b>Incubated Spending Scheme</b> | The Town Team could consider the introduction of an incubated spending scheme which retains spending in the town centre. There are some local town voucher schemes in some towns in Ireland which very effectively incubate spending in that town. The voucher is sold to local businesses who buy it as a Christmas gift for employees. The voucher can only be spent in local stores and businesses. These schemes can ring fence spending very effectively. | <b>M T</b> |

## LOCAL DISTINCTIVENESS AND BRANDING

**The retail planning process should endeavour to maintain and grow the local distinctiveness of the town and village. While major brand names will drive footfall into town centres and play a pivotal role in the retail mix, there is a necessity to deliver an alternative and distinct offering to customers. Consideration could be given to the provision by the Local Authority of a rent and rates controlled retail area, where only owner occupiers can trade from, will deliver such distinctiveness.**

| INTERVENTION                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | TIME-LINE  |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Local Distinctiveness and Vision</b>     | The Town Team should devise a vision for the town. The vision must clearly express what sets it apart from other towns and shopping alternatives. The Town Team could incorporate into the town plan important interventions which promote distinctiveness. | <b>S T</b> |
| <b>Developing Branding</b>                  | The Town Team should create a brand which is then used to promote and market the town in a consistent and engaging manner.                                                                                                                                  | <b>S T</b> |
| <b>Co-ordinated Application of Branding</b> | The Town Team should devise a plan to ensure that the Town brand is applied across multiple consumer communication opportunities including local retailer advertising, in store windows, on all consumer communications, on parking and other signage etc.  | <b>S T</b> |

## RETAIL AND HOSPITALITY MIX AND PLANNING

In the design of a retail and hospitality mix, a balance needs to be struck between national retail brands, local specialists and a mix of daytime and evening cafes, bars and restaurants. The town centre should welcome a variety of businesses, from large retail operator to local specialists or artisan shops. The town centre should also accommodate retailers that trade evening hours thus retaining town centre life and vibrancy beyond standard office hours and potentially motivating town workers and residents to combine shopping and evening entertainment.

| INTERVENTION                             | TIME-LINE                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Prospectus for Potential Tenants</b>  | The Town Team should prepare a clear and professional prospectus for distribution to potential new tenants highlighting reasons to open in the town. S T                                                            |
| <b>Incentives for New Tenants</b>        | The Town Team could consider putting in place incentives for new tenants without creating an unfair bias against incumbent tenants. S T                                                                             |
| <b>Audit of Retail Stock</b>             | The Town Team could conduct an audit of retail stock by quantum and type thus highlighting retail mix weaknesses and opportunities. S T                                                                             |
| <b>Retail Wish List</b>                  | The Town Team could consider devising a "wish list" of retail types spanning differing trading hours. S T                                                                                                           |
| <b>Online Property Listings</b>          | The Town Team could include a property section on its website which could attract potential investors / tenants to the town. Collaboration with commercial estate agents is essential. M T                          |
| <b>The Sequential Test</b>               | The Town Team could consider measures to ensure the application of the sequential test, thus ensuring that the town centre is considered first as a viable location for new retail tenants. M T                     |
| <b>Measure Commercial Vacancy Levels</b> | The Town Team could measure town commercial vacancy levels and identify the reasons for vacancy levels. This could in turn influence planning practice and act as an important KPI (key performance indicator). S T |

## CARPARKING

The quantity of parking must match the town size and be located close to the main shopping area. A maximum five minute walk or ¼ of a mile approximately is internationally viewed as the furthest acceptable location of parking. This can be increased for larger towns and cities. Payment systems which allow for payment of parking on departure rather than on arrival encourage longer shopping trips and greater consumer spend.

| INTERVENTION                | TIME-LINE                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Car Parking: Quantum</b> | The Town Team should conduct an audit of car parking spaces and establish the quantum versus the town population. M T                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Car parking charges</b>  | In consultation with the Local Authority, the Town Team could examine car parking provision, possible improvements to parking charges to ensure maximum shopper utilisation, a policy on the use of enforcement measures and consideration of promotional car parking initiatives. M T |

|                        |                                                                                                                                                                                         |            |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Parking Quality</b> | Audit car parking stock from a security, lighting and safety perspective. Implement clear and co-ordinated car parking signage on the main access routes into the town where necessary. | <b>M T</b> |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|

## STREETSCAPE

The streetscape refers to the physical aspects of public spaces in town centres. This includes the quality of the spaces between buildings and the furniture and equipment that occupies these spaces. Many towns across Ireland enter the Tidy Towns competition and have a dedicated Tidy Towns team that works year-round to address many of the interventions listed below. The Town Team needs to ensure that there is close collaboration with the Tidy Towns team. Ideally the Tidy Towns team should be represented on the Town Team.

| INTERVENTION                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | TIME-LINE  |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Streetscape Design Guide</b>    | The Town Team could prepare a design guide which highlights the required streetscape look and feel and delivers a co-ordinated focus to streetscape design and planning.                                                                                                                                                           | <b>M T</b> |
| <b>Illuminations Strategy</b>      | The Town Team could devise an illuminations strategy highlighting how streets will be lit ensuring the presentation of a welcoming and safe civic space. This could include an illuminations strategy for the lighting of buildings of architectural merit and a plan for occasional decorative lighting for occasions and events. | <b>S T</b> |
| <b>Guidelines for Facia Design</b> | The Town Team could consider providing guidelines for store facia design ensuring a consistent and professional image. The guidelines could reference colour type and quality standards.                                                                                                                                           | <b>M T</b> |
| <b>Pedestrian Signage</b>          | The Town Team could implement cohesive, attractive and informative pedestrian signage.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>L T</b> |
| <b>Planting and Floral Schemes</b> | The Town Team could prepare a plan to implement planting and floral schemes.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>S T</b> |
| <b>Street Care Audits</b>          | The Town Team could conduct regular street care audits highlighting clearing, repair and improvement works needed.                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>S T</b> |
| <b>Vacant Unit Policy</b>          | The Town Team could devise a policy for dealing with vacant store units.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>M T</b> |
| <b>Litter Management</b>           | The Town Team could consider a policy for litter management including the employment of litter wardens and the provision of litter and cigarette bins.                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>M T</b> |
| <b>Street Ambassadors</b>          | The Town Team could appoint street ambassadors for each street in the town or village. The ambassadors will be responsible for keeping a watchful eye over the cleanliness of the street and he or she can report any issues which arise.                                                                                          | <b>M T</b> |
| <b>Cleanliness Audits</b>          | The Town Team could conduct street audits regularly to measure levels of cleanliness.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>M T</b> |

## THE EVENING AND NIGHT-TIME ECONOMY

A strategic and implementable plan could be devised for the evening economy. The evening economy plan should address ways to retain workers in the town to ensure they can enjoy the town as a place of relaxation and enjoyment rather than simply a place of work. The plan should also take into consideration the recreational needs of local residents. The plan should also ensure that night-time retailers and businesses are provided with support and assistance.

| INTERVENTION                 | TIME-LINE                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Public Transport Plan</b> | The Town Team could devise a night-time public transport plan which promotes access into the town centre but also provides convenient and accessible transport for visitors to get home safely. Such late night transport provision could be communicated through hospitality locations and late night retailers' premises. <b>M T</b> |
| <b>Evening Ambassadors</b>   | The Town Team could consider the employment of evening ambassadors who liaise with Gardaí, door staff and publicans and reassure the visiting public that the town centre is safe. <b>M T</b>                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Purple Flag award</b>     | The Town Team could consider setting out an objective to achieve the Purple Flag award which can unite a community around providing a safe and vibrant evening economy. <b>M T</b>                                                                                                                                                     |

## DEVELOPING TOURISM AND ATTRACTING VISITORS

| INTERVENTION               | TIME-LINE                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Town Visitors</b>       | The Town Team could consider how to appeal to visitors to the town. The design of a town welcome pack for visitors might be considered in association with local hotels. The pack could contain important town information, details of sites to see and things to do, details of events or promotions being run over the next month and details of offers and incentives being offered by retailers exclusively for the benefit of the Visitor. <b>M T</b> |
| <b>Information Signage</b> | The Town Team could consider the installation of information signage to provide directions and help to visitors as well as providing information pertaining to the town or city. <b>M T</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

## CASUAL TRADING AND OTHER TEMPORARY USE

When planning the retail mix and the provision of casual trading and other licences it is important that full consideration is given to incumbent tenants. Quite frequently the incumbent tenant pays rents and rates for eleven months in the year in anticipation of Christmas trading only to find that temporary traders are granted licences for the Christmas period which places a significant disadvantage on the permanent trader.

| INTERVENTION          | TIME-LINE                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Casual Trading</b> | While retail use of privately owned property in the main cannot be interfered with, it is important for the Town Team to provide advice to landlords as to which retail use is least provided for, thus adding to the town and city mix rather than simply competing with the incumbent. <b>M T</b> |

| PROPERTY LEGISLATION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                              |           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <p>Some landlords are reticent to re-let their premises and accept a lower rent due to the negative impact this will have on their asset value. This can be a contributor to town and city centre property vacancy which in turn thwarts business development and investment.</p> |                                                                                                                                                              |           |
| INTERVENTION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                              | TIME-LINE |
| Property Legislation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | The Town Team could lobby for the application of Local Authority rates on vacant premises after a pre-defined period of vacancy.                             | M T       |
| Certificate of Street Worthiness                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | The Town Team could implement a "Certificate of Street Worthiness" scheme. With certificates only issued to well-kept and maintained vacant premises.        | M T       |
| Lobbying on Vacant Premises                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | The Town Team could lobby for the immediate application of Local Authority rates on vacant premises which do not achieve a certificate of street worthiness. | M T       |
| Occupancy Incentives                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | The Town Team could work with local landlords of vacant premises to agree an occupancy incentive to new businesses.                                          | S T       |

| VACANCY                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <p>In areas where vacancy rates are high during economic downturns, there is a need to bring property owners and entrepreneurs together to create a scheme where both stakeholders can be protected into the long term. An empty property scheme could persuade high street property owners to rent long-term vacant properties at a set discounted rate (for example 30% off the advertised market rent), for a short-term period of up to three years. When this timeframe elapses, tenants are given the first refusal of leasing the unit at full market value. By this time, if the rental market has recovered the property owner can be confident of leasing in much more favourable conditions. This would require the support of private landlords.</p> <p>There are mixed views regarding the implementation of rates reductions and incentives to promote greater occupancy. And most fundamentally, Local Authorities have no legal basis for modifying rates for one business type or location above another. However many Local Authorities offer grants to landlords and prospective new tenants to offset against rates in order to incentivise occupancy and improve the retail mix, streetscape and general ambience.</p> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |           |
| INTERVENTION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | TIME-LINE |
| Vacancy Strategy                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | The Town Team could develop a plan to deal with vacancy and vacant premises. The vacancy strategy should take a balanced approach and not undermine existing stakeholders. The Team might consider an empty property scheme where landlords agree to offer a short-term rent at a discounted rate below the market value. | M T       |
| Vacancy Protocol                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | The Town Team could apply a protocol when a building becomes vacant including requesting the landlord to allow the Town Team to use the window to promote upcoming events or promotions. The Town Team in consultation with the Local Authority could devise maintenance standards which could apply to vacant premises.  | M T       |

|                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                              |            |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Promotion of Grant Schemes</b> | The Town Team should ensure awareness of relevant grant schemes for vacant premises and work with the Local Authority to encourage landlords and potential tenants to avail of such schemes. | <b>M T</b> |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|

### TOWN CENTRE SAFETY

Retail crime is a significant threat to the town centre. Retail crime prevention partnerships have grown in popularity and have proven their worth in preventing shoplifting activity. This is especially so in primary shopping centre schemes which employ dedicated covert and overt security personnel. Through co-operation between the Town Team and the Gardaí, crime rates can be reduced through the application of information sharing and crime prevention strategies similar to the successful Business Watch initiative operated by An Garda Síochána.

| INTERVENTION                         |                                                                                                                                                       | TIME-LINE  |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Town Centre Safety</b>            | The Town Team could appoint a Board member to take responsibility for town centre safety and liaise with Gardaí on town centre safety measures.       | <b>M T</b> |
| <b>Business Watch Scheme</b>         | The Town Team could consider the implementation of the successful Business Watch scheme. The Town Team could join the local Joint Policing Committee. | <b>M T</b> |
| <b>Community Alcohol Partnership</b> | The Town Team could consider the launch of a Community Alcohol Partnership (CAP) to combat the purchase and possession of alcohol by those under 18.  | <b>M T</b> |

### TRAINING SUPPORTS

The Town Team could also consider the training supports that town centre business owners might require.

| INTERVENTION                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | TIME-LINE  |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Customer Service Training</b> | The Town Team could consider training interventions to ensure a superior standard of service is delivered by all businesses within the town. Similar initiatives exist in privately owned shopping centres which have proven to be very successful. Businesses that participate and successfully qualify could be awarded with a mark of excellence and standards could be assessed using mystery shopping or customer exit interviews. | <b>M T</b> |
| <b>Tailored Training</b>         | The Town Team could identify or organise training interventions specific to the needs of the business owner including finance, merchandise planning, marketing and customer engagement training.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>M T</b> |

# PART 3

## DEVELOPING SUPPORTS FOR TOWN CENTRE RENEWAL ACROSS IRELAND

Town centre renewal is not a new concern for either retailers, Local Authorities or Central Government. Town centres were fighting to remain vibrant and vital long before the recent recession which left many towns around the country crippled.

The clear message from the retail sector representative bodies, in addition to other key stakeholders that presented to the Joint Oireachtas Committee in 2015, is that there is a need for a coordinated response to address town and village renewal across the country.

The Retail and Town Centre Renewal Working Group recognised that there are already a large number of supports available from Local Authorities and also from retail associations and other organisations. However, members of the Working Group would not only like to see an increase in supports available, but would emphasise the need to see greater coordination of the range of supports put in place to enable successful town centre renewal. These supports could take the form of administrative supports by the Local Authority, training supports for Town Centre coordinators or other town team stakeholders and financial supports to fund the implementation of Action Plans for Town Centre Renewal.

In this section we have highlighted some of the existing supports aimed at supporting town centre renewal, including a number of best practice examples. We have also included recommendations that the Working Group believe could deliver a greater degree of collaboration and sharing of best practice among key enablers and would also provide towns with the necessary tools to develop and implement Town Centre Plans.

### National Policy Context

The Working Group welcomes the emphasis in the Programme for a Partnership Government, May 2016, on revitalising communities across the whole country through measures on Town and Village Renewal and Urban Regeneration.

Town Centre Renewal has been recognised as a key policy objective in a number of recent Government documents, including the Action Plan for Jobs 2017, the Regional Action Plans for Jobs, the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, the Action Plan for Rural Development and the launch of the consultation process for Ireland 2040, the National Planning Framework.

The Action Plan for Jobs 2017 identifies the need to “maximise retail potential of our town centres” and one of the key actions under the Retail chapter of the APJ is the launch of this Framework for Town Centre Renewal. In addition, the Regional Action Plans for Jobs recognise

the importance of a high quality living environment in attracting talent, visitors and investment in regional Ireland.

The Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, Rebuilding Ireland, launched by Minister Coveney includes actions to address urban regeneration which is to be welcomed. The Action Plan makes commitments to developing measures to “catalyse renewal, regeneration and private investment” in particular to address the increasing problem of dereliction in many urban centres. A high-level Senior Officials Group, chaired by Minister of State for Housing and Urban Renewal, Damien English T.D. was established in 2016 and tasked with bringing forward new proposals for urban regeneration.

The Group has been examining appropriate measures to regenerate our urban centres, many of which have been adversely impacted by recent economic difficulties, and its focus includes:

- Addressing vacancy in urban areas, with a view to bringing currently vacant units into productive uses;
- Examining planning legislation to consider the possible the change of use of vacant commercial premises in urban areas, including vacant or under-utilised areas over ground floor premises, into residential units without having to go through the planning process;
- Evaluating the current use of the derelict sites legislation to see can it be made more efficient in addressing the problem of dereliction in many urban centres;
- Introducing new schemes, and mandating local authorities with better land management powers.

The Group hopes to issues its Report in the coming months.

### **Town and Village Renewal Scheme**

In the Action Plan for Rural Development, launched in 2016 by the Minister Humphries, Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs a key objective under Pillar 1 is to “Make rural Ireland a better place to live and work by revitalising our town and village centres”.

As part of the Action Plan, Minister Humphries launched the Town and Village Renewal Scheme in 2016 with funding of €10 million for towns and villages across all Local Authority areas. The Scheme forms part of a concerted effort by Government to support the revitalisation of towns and villages in order to improve the living and working environment of their communities and increase their potential to support increased economic activity.

The Town and Village Renewal scheme 2017 has now been launched with funding of €20 million being made available through Local Authorities over a fifteen month timeframe. Up to 300 towns and villages will benefit under the enhanced 2017 Scheme. The scheme is specifically targeted at rural towns and villages with populations of less than 10,000. Applications from towns can range from €20,000 to a maximum of €100,000 and funding of

up to €200,000 will also be considered for a limited number of projects which can deliver exceptionally strong economic benefit to a town and its outlying areas.

Successful proposals will demonstrate close collaboration between communities and business interests in the design and delivery of proposed projects and must have the support of the Local Authority. This Framework for Town Centre Renewal will assist towns and villages in the preparation of their proposals for funding under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme.

## Ireland 2040

The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government is leading the preparation of the National Planning Framework, or 'NPF', on behalf of Government, with input from other Departments and Agencies. It will be particularly relevant where there is a long term and place-based aspect to public policy and investment, including areas such as housing, jobs, transport, education, health, environment, energy and communications.

One of the principal purposes of preparing the NPF will be to co-ordinate all of these specific departmental or 'sectoral' areas into an overall strategy. This will allow shared national development goals, including improved living standards, quality of life, prosperity, competitiveness and environmental sustainability, to be more broadly considered. This will also provide greater clarity for private sector investment.

It is intended that the Ireland 2040 Plan will be a high-level document that will provide the framework for future development and investment in Ireland. It will be the overall Plan from which other, more detailed plans will take their lead, including city and county development plans and regional strategies. The National Planning Framework will also have statutory backing.

The National Planning Framework will also be a tool to assist the achievement of more effective regional development. In order to ensure that positive outcomes arising from national growth can be shared by people throughout Ireland, the potential of all areas will need to be realised, relative to their capacity for sustainable development.

By looking ahead in a co-ordinated and strategic manner, the NPF will seek to identify how best to work towards all of these shared goals for the benefit of the country as a whole. To ensure implementation, the Framework will need to credibly connect these goals to places.

It is intended that the Ireland 2040 Plan will answer the questions outlined below.

- What should Ireland look like in 20 years?
- How do we ensure that every place can realise its potential?
- Where will we live and what types of housing will be needed?

- What key services are needed?
- How should a National Planning Framework be implemented?
- What does success look like?

The Retail Consultation Forum will submit this Framework for Town Centre Renewal to the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government for consideration in the preparation of the National Planning Framework.

## Local Authority supports

The Retail and Town Centre Renewal Working Group welcomes the increased role for the Local Authorities in economic development as provided for in the Local Government Reform Act 2014, in particular with the establishment of the Local Enterprise Office within each Local Authority.

There is increased emphasis on the need to address town centre renewal by Local Authorities, particularly in relation to the role that place-making plays in making a town attractive to live, work, and shop in. As has been already mentioned, Local Authorities are central to the enabling of supportive networks and collaborative arrangements. There are many examples of collaboration between Local Authorities, retail businesses, business associations, and communities around the country. More recently, these collaborations have been structured into Town Teams or similar partnership structures, such as in Carlow, Roscommon, Waterford City and Tipperary.

A number of incentives are offered by different Local Authorities around the country to stimulate business development in town centres including shop front improvement grant schemes; retail fit out schemes; grant relief for arts, crafts & artisan food shops; new business incentive schemes; and the trading online voucher scheme.

**“Local Authority Retail Support, Improving our Cities and Towns”,  
County and City Managers’ Association, June 2015**



In 2015, as part of the Action Plan for Jobs, the County and City Managers’ Association (CCMA) was asked to prepare a report, identifying best practice initiatives undertaken by local authorities to support retail at local level which could serve as exemplars for consideration by other local authority areas.

In its report, the CCMA noted that “Local authorities are in a unique position to support business in general and retail in particular. They are directly responsible for the planned development and improvement of town centres where retail is

primarily located. The quality of the retail experience is directly linked to the quality of the town centre. Each of our cities and towns has its own unique character, but the quality of the visitor experience is influenced by a range of common denominators, all of which can be directly influenced by local authorities.”

The report highlights supports offered by Local Authorities and best practices from around the country in a number of key areas:

- **Improving business conditions:** such as rates, financial incentives, traffic management and parking, marketing and collaborative networks;
- **Creating a welcoming environment:** public realm, streetscape, cleanliness, orientation;
- **Adding to the retail experience:** festivals, heritage & culture, parks and playgrounds, tourism and the night-time economy;
- **Community, well-being and safety:** CCTV & policing, civic pride programmes, town centre management initiatives.



In highlighting examples of best practice, the report offers an insight into work undertaken by local authorities in support of retail business which can be replicated by others to enhance the range of supports currently on offer in their area.

The report was prepared under the auspices of the City and County Management Association (CCMA) and the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG).

## Revitalising Ireland's Towns – 'Pilot' Town Centre Health Check (TCHC) Training Programme 2016–2017

Building on the unique cultural engagement and collaboration generated as part of the 2016 Centenary Celebrations, the Heritage Council of Ireland (Lead Partner), RGDATA and the Retail Consultation Forum, in collaboration with the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DoHPLG), the Irish Planning Institute (IPI), the Irish Landscape Institute (ILI), the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) and Third-level Institutes (north and south), have delivered a 'pilot' trans-disciplinary National Town Centre Health Check (TCHC) Training Programme. The pilot consisted of workshops in September 2016 and March 2017 and town centre survey programme/mentoring during October–December 2016.

The training supports the creation of robust Town Centre Health Checks (TCHCs) for 10 Irish towns, which are formally linked to the statutory planning system, through the review of county development plans (CDPs) and Local Area Plans (LAPs).

**'Pilot' Aims and Objectives** - a key aim of the 'pilot' TCHC Training Programme is to raise awareness, understanding and appreciation of the critical role that our historic town centres and townscapes play and the wide-ranging impacts that their vitality, vibrancy and viability have on overall socioeconomic, environmental and cultural growth and development, and on quality of life for citizens and visitors alike.

The 'pilot' TCHC training programme hopes to inform the design and implementation of a new collaborative TCHC National Investment Programme which support various government public policies and strategies, including the planned **National Heritage Plan** and the:

1. Formulation and implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF);
2. Implementation of the National Landscape Strategy 2015-2025 (NLS);
3. Implementation of Planning Policy Statement 2015 i.e. evidence-based planning;
4. Implementation of the Section 28 (as amended) Retail Planning Guidelines, 2012; and
5. Implementation of Government Policy on Architecture 2009-2015.

In addition, the 'pilot' TCHC training programme supports the delivery of the **Heritage Council's Policy Proposals for Ireland's Towns**, which was launched in 2015.

Additional aims of the 'pilot' TCHC training programme are to establish:

- An Irish Town Centre Management (TCM) Network; and
- A National Town Centre Management Policy Research and Development (R&D) Programme.

There are four key pillars in the collaborative 'pilot' Town Centre Health Check training programme:

1. Local Authorities;
2. Chambers of Commerce;
3. Local Civic Groups, e.g. Tidy Town Groups; and
4. Third Level Institutes – north and south, e.g. the Heritage Council has arranged for UCD to work in partnership with Monaghan County Council.

As a result, this innovative national 'Towns' capacity-building and networking programme is designed by, and for, Local Authorities, town centre businesses and local citizens/community groups, with close mentoring support from government departments and agencies, and professional practitioners and academics who are experienced in town centre revitalisation, urban design, place-making, and planning, heritage and environmental management in Ireland, and elsewhere.

#### **Initial Outcomes and Recommendations from the Pilot TCHC:**

- The establishment of a central project office to manage the roll out of a National Programme of Town Centre Health Checks (TCHC) and provide information and advice about developing Town Plans and Town Centre Management.
- The inclusion of a Town Centre Health Check every two years in the statutory planning system.
- Allow Town Teams carrying out Town Centre Health Checks access to Ordnance Survey Ireland and Valuation Office maps and online tools.
- Provide funding for trans-disciplinary research by third level organisations/institutes to explore and determine the future role and function of Irish Towns.
- The TCHC pilot has highlighted the challenges of undertaking and collating market research and surveys relating to town centres so further action is required to develop innovative methods to undertake user, operator and visitor surveys and identify a menu of methods and surveys suitable for the different types of Irish Town. All of this information should then be made available via a Town Centre Health Check/Town Centre Management portal developed and co-ordinated by the central project office.
- The project office would also co-ordinate the development of an 'agreed' Land use classification for Irish Towns in collaboration with all partners using the experience of the pilot health checks.
- Funding to develop the portal and other digital/electronic opportunities to support the collaborative TCHC approach and overall place marketing of and enterprise growth in towns – e.g. mobile apps, GIS and data sets, SPSS, social media, web-sites, on-line training courses, etc.

## Purple Flag Programme

Purple Flag is an accreditation and award programme run by the Association of Town and City Management which recognises excellence in the management of the evening and night-time economy (ENTE). 18 towns now have Purple Flag status in the Republic of Ireland, with 4 new towns having been awarded for the first time in 2017. There are 5 towns in Northern Ireland with Purple Flag recognition.

Purple Flag sets standards across a number of key town criteria including:

- Wellbeing (Safety, Care, Regulation, Services, Business Partnership, Perceptions)
- Movement (Public transport, Car Parking, Pedestrian safety, Crowd management, Information, Transport Partnership)
- Appeal (Food & Dining, Early evening shopping and Entertainment, Arts & culture, Pubs & bars, Late night venues, Public buildings)
- Place (Location, Diversity, Clarity, Animation, Design, Identity)
- Policy (Data & statistics, Strategy, Co-ordination, Leadership, Partnership, Community engagement)

Towns that apply for a Purple Flag are assessed under each of the headings above. They have an opportunity to attend a Purple Flag academy to assist them in applying for the international accreditation. The process is ongoing. A full assessment process must be undertaken every 2 years in order to maintain the Purple Flag. Therefore, towns not only reach the required standard but they are required to maintain and improve upon those standards.

In addition to the vibrancy of a town/city centre, Purple Flag is all about town/city partnerships and management. One of the key criteria for achieving and maintaining Purple Flag status is demonstrable public-private partnership. A Purple Flag will not be awarded unless there is a clear unity of purpose and vision between the public and private sector. In Dublin for example, the Purple Flag committee has the active participation of Dublin Town (the city's business improvement district company), Dublin City Council, The Gardaí, Fáilte Ireland and representatives from the area's ENTE operators.

The concept is designed for the Evening and Night-time but many towns have found it useful in building structures that now also benefit the day-time economy. In 2017, ATCM are going to also offer new Development workshops for smaller towns and villages and those towns that may not be ready for a full-scale application for Purple Flag.

The following graphic identifies the 18 Purple Flag locations in the Republic of Ireland and the five located in Northern Ireland with the key attributes associated with their Purple Flag status.

# VIBRANT & WELL-MANAGED EVENING & NIGHT-TIME ECONOMY



## Purple Flag Case Study – Waterford

Developing a vibrant evening and night time economy was identified by Waterford's City Centre Management Group as a strategic goal in their City Centre Management Plan. A Steering Group was established and they followed the Purple Flag Academy route to securing accreditation in February 2015.



A workshop meeting was organised for all businesses within the Zone to ascertain the best route for bringing the programme forward. A Working Group was established consisting of local stakeholders representing a variety of sectors including Waterford Chamber of Commerce, An Garda Síochána, Waterford City & County Council, Waterford Business Group, Comhairle na nÓg, WIT Students Union and ENTE businesses. A Forum database was established to maintain communications with all other businesses.

The Steering Group has the strategic overview of policy and budgets while the Working Group prioritises actions via the Action Plan which emanated from the Forum Workshop. Clear lines of responsibility are critical to the smooth running of the Purple Flag programme.

The business community is actively engaging with the initiative, with some including the Purple Flag logo on their uniform and/or flying the flag from their buildings. Waterford City & County Council have committed to creating a strong awareness of the Purple Flag accreditation and its core messages. A key tool is the mascot 'Hoot the Nightowl' (pictured). "Hoot" is used in photo opportunities and parades at various community events to raise awareness and spread the message that Waterford is a vibrant and well-managed evening and night-time destination.



Projects undertaken in 2016 include: a training programme designed in partnership with Skillnet and WIT for Purple Flag front of house staff, production of a "Waterford, it's a great night out" video in collaboration with Visit Waterford and the upgrading of street lighting by Waterford and City Council in an area identified as being a "no-go" area during the Self-Assessment phase.

Key Achievements of the Purple Flag initiative include a new level of partnership and teamwork among representative groups who are working together with a shared vision and the development of specific policing programmes by the Gardaí following assessment of the requirements under Purple Flag criteria.

Purple Flag Waterford is working towards greater integration of retail, leisure, restaurants and bars as a means of developing the ENTE and thus a vibrant City Centre. A key goal of Purple Flag Waterford is the development of the North Quays. This has the potential to revitalise this asset by sustainably integrating everyday city life with the river.

Waterford is proud to promote the Purple Flag initiative.

Further information can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/purpleflagwaterford/>

## Association of Town and City Management

The Association of Town and City Management (ATCM) is a London based, not for profit organisation aimed at promoting towns and cities in Europe. It is affiliated with the Washington based International Downtown Association. It has an Irish branch that operates on both sides of the border. Membership of the ATCM is open to all town centre management practitioners, including Local Authorities, Town Teams and Business Improvement Districts. There are 5 BIDs in the Republic of Ireland and 5 in Northern Ireland. The ATCM provides networking opportunities for members together with training in town centre management principles and BID management.

The ATCM is currently completing a day time economy accreditation system. This is being developed in partnership with the Institute of Place Management (IPM). Formed in 2006, the Institute of Place Management is the international professional body that supports people committed to developing, managing and making places better.

The process is likely to consider many of the topics included in the Purple Flag programme but with a greater emphasis on those matters relevant to the day time economy. Therefore, there is likely to be greater consideration of the interaction between car parking, access by other modes of transportation and the management of the pedestrian environment and experience.

## Funding Streams for Delivering the Town Centre Renewal Plan

It is clear that the matter of income to support town centre renewal is a challenging one. However, to implement and sustain a Plan for Town Centre Renewal, it is necessary to identify an income model to fund both the day to day delivery of the key objectives of the Town Centre Plan and the specific projects throughout the year. It is important that an income model is applied which is equitable and sustainable.

Key to success is ensuring that any funding that is available at a national level or through the Local Authorities is availed of by local stakeholders to ensure delivery of their Town Centre Plan.

Given the difficulties that town centres experience in competing with out of town shopping locations and with the increase in online shopping, it is necessary to explore all possible options for funding to allow towns and villages influence their own destiny and thus promote their own unique point of customer engagement.

A potential method to allow town centre stakeholders to take an active control of the management and promotion of their towns and cities is the application of the business improvement district (BID) system. While there are mixed views regarding the BID funding model (a levy is charged as a proportion of the local authority rates) it is clear that the movement of power to the stakeholders, thus allowing town and city stakeholders to shape their own destiny, has proven to be a success. The BID model of funding is equitable as everyone pays a fair proportion rather than a few “good citizen” businesses being the sole contributors.

There are many other ways by which finance can be generated to fund the management and delivery of Town Centre renewal projects, including:

- Seek Town Team membership fees from businesses, citizens and other stakeholders;
- Seek sponsorship from local industries and other partners for specific projects;
- Ensure the Town Team maximises existing grant funding opportunities by the Local Authority for festivals, business and cultural promotion;
- Explore options for grant relief with the Local Authority, looking at the options available across a number of different Local Authorities;
- Apply for funding from the National Lottery as a “cohesive community” initiative or to part fund specific town events;
- The Town Team may be able to deliver services on behalf of the local authority in a more cost effective and efficient manner which will derive profit for the Town Team to re-invest in the town. It is clear that with demand increasing for Local Authority services, the provision of these services by the Town Team could be a challenge;
- An application for support of town events or occasions could be made to a tourism agency such as Fáilte Ireland.

With such constraints and challenges facing fundraising it is suggested that the Town Team implements the most cost effective initiatives first, thus proving their success, winning support and potentially then achieving financial investment into the medium-term.

# APPENDIX I: KEY REFERENCES

## Useful Documents:

“Guidelines for Planning Authorities: Retail Planning”, Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, April 2012:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Planning/FileDownload,30026,en.pdf>

“Local Authority Retail Support, Improving our Cities and Towns”, County and City Managers’ Association, June 2015,

[http://www.lgcsb.ie/sites/default/files/150615\\_local\\_authority\\_retail\\_support-web.pdf](http://www.lgcsb.ie/sites/default/files/150615_local_authority_retail_support-web.pdf)

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation report on “Policy Options to Support Business Growth and Jobs Creation and Retention on Town and Village Centres”:

<https://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/committees/Final----Policy-Options-to-Support-Business-Growth-and-Job-Creation-and-Retention-in-Town-and-Village-Centres.pdf>

“Customer Cohorts and what determines visits to towns and cities”, Retail Excellence Ireland publication: <http://www.retailexcellence.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Customer-Cohorts.pdf>

“Retail Excellence Ireland: Town and City Review 2012”, <http://www.retailexcellence.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/REI-Town-City-Review-2012.pdf>

“Retail Excellence Ireland: A Strategy for Rural Retailing”, <http://www.retailexcellence.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Strategy-for-Rural-Retailing.pdf>

“Retail Ireland : Shaping the Future of Irish Retail 2020”:

[http://www.retailireland.ie/Sectors/RI/RI.nsf/vPages/Media\\_and\\_Events~shaping-the-future-of-irish-retail---a-strategy-for-irish-retail-2017-2020-23-03-2017?OpenDocument](http://www.retailireland.ie/Sectors/RI/RI.nsf/vPages/Media_and_Events~shaping-the-future-of-irish-retail---a-strategy-for-irish-retail-2017-2020-23-03-2017?OpenDocument)

## Useful Websites:

Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs:

<http://www.ahrrga.gov.ie/>

Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/>

National Planning Framework: <http://npf.ie/>

Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation: <http://www.djei.ie/>

Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) and County and City Management Association:

<http://www.lgcsb.ie/> for a listing of all Local Authorities

### **Business Improvement Districts:**

Dublin Town: <http://www.dublintown.ie/>

Dundalk BID: <http://dundalktown.ie/>

Dun Laoghaire BID: <http://www.dunlaoghaire.ie/do-business/about-bid/>

Sandyford BID: <http://sbid.ie/>

Sligo BID: <https://sligobid.ie/>

Chambers Ireland: <http://www.chambers.ie/>

DIT Retail and Services School of Management:  
<http://www.dit.ie/business/schools/retailandservicesmanagement/>

The Heritage Council & RGDATA pilot National Health Check Programme:  
<http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/projects/town-centre-health-check-training-programme>

Purple Flag Ireland: <http://www.purpleflagireland.org/>

Retail Excellence Ireland: <http://www.retailexcellence.ie/>

Retail Ireland: <http://www.retailireland.ie/>

RGDATA: <http://www.rgdata.ie/>

### **International Websites:**

Association of Town and City Management <https://www.atcm.org/>

Institute of Place Management <http://placemanagement.org/>

International Downtown Association: <https://www.ida-downtown.org/eweb/>

British BIDs: <http://www.britishbids.info/>

London Plan for Canada: <http://thelondonplan.ca/>

## APPENDIX 2: MEMBERS OF THE RETAIL AND TOWN CENTRE RENEWAL WORKING GROUP:

**A Framework for Town Centre Renewal** was prepared by the Retail and Town Centre Renewal Working Group for the Retail Consultation Forum which is chaired by the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Mary Mitchell O'Connor TD.

### Members of the Retail and Town Centre Renewal Working Group:

Chambers Ireland

Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs

Department of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation

DIT School of Retail and Services Management

Dolmen Catering

Donegal County Council (Chair)

Dublin Town (BID)

Irish Pharmacy Union

ISME

Limerick City and County Council

Musgrave Group

Retail Excellence Ireland

Retail Ireland

RGDATA

**A Framework for Town Centre Renewal was Published in April 2017**



This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The word "Notes" is printed in a bold, dark blue font at the top left corner. The rest of the page is filled with evenly spaced horizontal lines, typical of notebook paper.

“A Framework for Town Centre Renewal” was prepared by the Retail and Town Centre Renewal Working Group for the Retail Consultation Forum which is chaired by the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Mary Mitchell O’Connor TD.

Members of The Retail and Town Centre Renewal Working Group:

|                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Chambers Ireland                                                  |
| Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs |
| Department of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation                       |
| DIT School of Retail and Services Management                      |
| Dolmen Catering                                                   |
| Donegal County Council (Chair)                                    |
| Dublin Town (BID)                                                 |
| Irish Pharmacy Union                                              |
| ISME                                                              |
| Limerick County Council                                           |
| Musgrave Group                                                    |
| Retail Excellence Ireland                                         |
| Retail Ireland                                                    |
| RGDATA                                                            |