



# THE TOWN CENTRE



## **Chapter 10**

### **THE TOWN CENTRE**

#### **10.1 Introduction**

Drogheda town centre acts as the social, economic, retail and cultural focal point for a large surrounding area incorporating the Borough Council area and adjacent parts of East Meath and South Louth. During the course of the previous plan period the attractiveness of Drogheda Town Centre as a retail destination was compromised due to a variety of factors including the physical and pedestrian environment, traffic congestion, parking and a lack of retail diversity in comparison to other centres in neighbouring areas such as Fingal, Dublin City and Louth.

This shopping deficit will be reduced during the Plan period as a number of large scale town centre developments are completed, notably in the Laurence's Street and Dyer Street and South Quay Areas. The perceived problems associated with the physical environment are being partly addressed by Drogheda Borough Council through the West Street Pedestrianisation Scheme. The Borough Council will build on the opportunities presented by pedestrianisation in order to further enhance the built fabric of the Town Centre. Traffic movements around the Town Centre will be addressed by Drogheda Borough Council's Traffic Management Study. The enhancement of the Town Centre has the potential to benefit Drogheda's tourism prospects. Drogheda Borough Council will further increase the potential for tourism by developing key Urban Opportunity Sites which will encourage sensitive re-development of the Old Abbey Lane and Backlanes areas.

#### **10.2 Urban Form**

The main shopping area has traditionally been concentrated on West Street and its environs to the south and east including Laurences Street, Peter Street, Shop Street and Dyer Street. In the recent past the town centre also operated to the south of the river in the area around The Bullring and James Street. This area was effectively removed from the retail core of the town centre following the implementation of large scale road schemes. However the role of the southern portion of the Town Centre will become increasingly important during the life of the Plan as significant new retail developments are completed in the South Quay / Marsh Road area.

#### **10.3 Town Centre Issues and Opportunities**

Drogheda Borough's town centre contains the greater proportion of the Borough's archaeological, cultural and historic heritage, the shopping, commercial and administrative core, and key community and residential uses. In common with many urban centres of a similar size, the core of the town has become depopulated as land use has become predominantly commercial, however in the immediate environs of the centre, significant residential areas remain and are in a strengthening role. Drogheda Town Centre remains an attractive location in which to shop, do business or live. It has retained much of the day and night vitality which other centres lack once business hours cease. A variety of

factors contribute to this vitality, many of them to be found in the unique built form and heritage of the streets and urban spaces themselves. These factors include the town centre's compact nature, the topography, the skyline, the presence of the river, the level of permeability offered by the medieval street and lane networks and the wide mix of activities to be found in a relatively small area.

Drogheda Borough Council views the town centre as the jewel in the crown of Drogheda, a place where people should have the widest variety of shopping, entertainment, cultural and leisure facilities, a place where people can walk safely and feel secure, while enjoying a pleasant environment and experiencing the heritage of architecture and urban space. Drogheda Borough Council will continue to ensure that the town centre offers opportunities for investment and urban renewal that is in keeping with the historic fabric. It is important that retail developments outside the town centre which mirror its established functions, are resisted except where such developments are permitted by other policies in the plan.



**Town Centre Riverside Boardwalk**

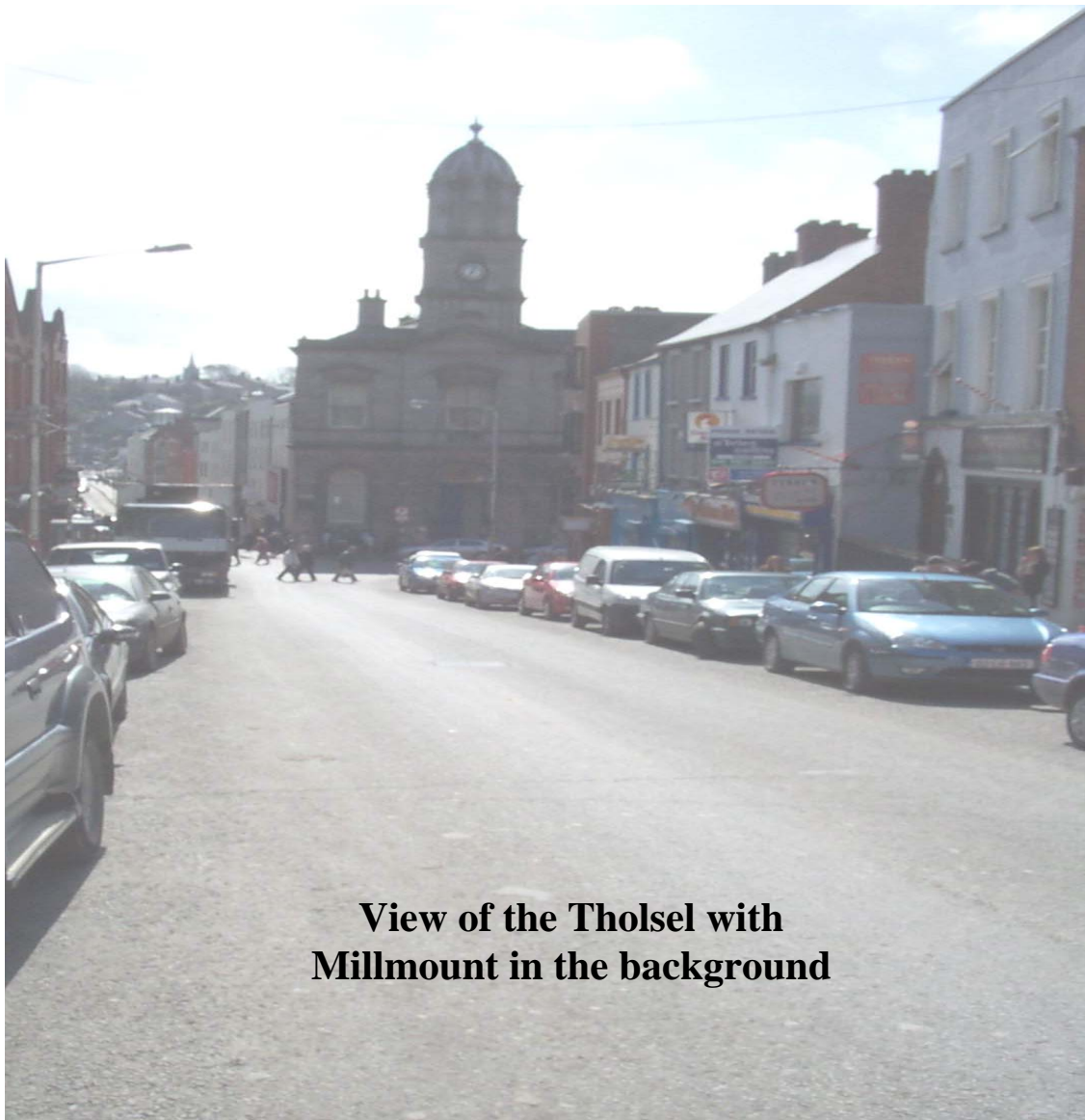
#### 10.4 Townscape

The character of Drogheda is derived from an interlinked layout of streets, public spaces and buildings which in its present built form remains in large part medieval despite the loss of much of the actual medieval fabric of the town over the years. This tremendous sense of place is enhanced by the topography of the town centre built as it is in a relatively narrow river valley. This basic structure has been enhanced over the centuries by later building styles such as Georgian and Victorian to blend into a unique and lively townscape. Drogheda has numerous church towers and civic buildings in or adjacent the town centre which dominate the vertical elements of the townscape. These include, most notably, St. Peter's (RC) Church, St. Peter's (CoI) Church, St. Mary's (RC) Church, Old Abbey Lane, The Magdalene Tower, The Augustinian Church, The Tholsel, Lawrence's Gate and Millmount. Apart from these, older buildings in the town centre do

not generally exceed four storeys over basement in height. When considering proposals for development, Drogheda Borough Council will seek to ensure that they conform to good architectural standards and respect the scale and character of the existing street scene, roofscape and layout of the town centre.

### 10.5 Vistas and Roofscape

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



**View of the Tholsel with  
Millmount in the background**



## **10.6 Shopfronts & Signage**

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

## **10.7 Shopping Core**

The shopping core is defined as West Street, Dominic Street, Stockwell Lane, Meatmarket Lane, Peters Street, Shop Street, Laurences Street and all intervening lanes and courts. Whilst these streets comprise the traditional core of retailing in Drogheda, the Town Centre retail spread has now expanded across the river to encompass the South Mall / Marsh Road area. The developments in this area, when completed, will offer a broader range of retail opportunities including a significant number of national and international stores of much greater size and variety than hitherto was found in Drogheda. There is an intrinsic danger that the attractions of the newly redeveloped southern portion of the town centre will tend to diminish the role of the established shopping core. It is therefore the intention of Drogheda Borough Council to re-inforce the attractiveness of traditional shopping core by a series of proactive measures. These measures include the West Street pedestrianisation scheme, installation of revamped street furniture and floor treatments, prioritisation of public transport, a backland development policy and policies relating to shopfronts and signage.

## **10.8 Town Centre Ambience**

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

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

## **10.9 Town Centre Transition Zones**

Drogheda has potential for progressive expansion of the town centre on sites and areas adjacent to or close to the existing centre.



Suitable locations have been identified as follows:

- 1. Inner Quays Development Area**
- 2. Drogheda Transport Development Area**

Within both these areas, mixed use development will be encouraged. Such uses should be complementary to the town centre and may include retail, residential, leisure, cultural, business and commercial.

#### **10.10 Inner Quays Development Area (IQDA)**

The boundaries of the Inner Quays Development Area are defined by the Railway viaduct to the East, North Strand, Marsh Road and abutting areas of the Town Centre to the east both North and South of the River Boyne. Long-term expansion of town centre type activities is envisaged towards the railway viaduct on both the north and south sides of the river. This area is currently characterised by port related industrial and commercial uses. Ultimately the area might be better utilised as an extension of the Town Centre containing as it does, potentially attractive streetscapes, protected structures and features. Drogheda Borough Council will encourage development proposals which are sympathetic to, and build on the maritime nature of the area and which directly utilize the presence of the River Boyne. Drogheda Borough Council may request that the sequential test be demonstratively applied to major retail proposals.

#### **10.11 Drogheda Transport Development Area (DTDA)**

The DDTA boundary comprises the existing station environs together with an area extending due east of same as defined on the Land Use Zoning Objective Map. The rail station activities will provide the main activity pole for development in the DTDA area. A land use mix will be encouraged in the area. This may include residential, business (particularly New Economy Enterprises) and retail. All proposals must complement the town centre. Drogheda Borough Council may request that the sequential test be demonstratively applied to major retail proposals.

#### **10.12 Urban Opportunity Areas**

Drogheda Borough Council has designated two Urban Opportunity Sites at the North Western and Eastern gateways to the Town Centre. These areas both suffer from dereliction and urban decay but have the potential to act as catalysts for area wide redevelopment and regeneration. The Borough Council will proactively promote the regeneration of both areas in partnership with the private sector.

#### **10.13 Old Abbey Lane**

The Old Abbey Lane Urban Opportunity Area is bounded by and inclusive of Narrow West Street to the north, Patrickswell Lane to the East, the Garda Station boundary to the south and the existing perimeter wall to the west. Within this boundary and in areas immediately analogous with it, Drogheda Borough Council will encourage development proposals which are sympathetic to the creation of a cultural quarter for the town centre. Acceptable uses might include small scale craft based enterprises, tourist enterprises, arts ventures, and heritage interpretation. Specifically Arts / Cultural development may

**Plean Forbairt 2005 – 2011**

include aspects of speech, language, theatre, music, painting, sculpture, dance, literature, photography, architecture, and history. This list is not intended to be definitive as each proposal will be assessed on its own merits. Ancillary office space will be acceptable and limited residential uses will be considered.

**Development Plan 2005 - 2011**

All proposals must respect the historical aspects of Old Abbey Lane, the architectural rhythms of the area and established building materials including floor treatments.

Comprehensive redevelopment may require the production of a masterplan for the entire area.

Some incentives may be available from Drogheda Borough Council in the form of limited infrastructure provision.

**10.14 The Backlanes**

The Backlanes Urban Opportunity Site is bounded by and inclusive of the southern side of St. Laurence's Street / Laurence Street, the eastern side of Shop Street, the western side of Constitution Hill and North Quay / The Mall to the south. The area contains a number of key nodes in the form of small squares, largely utilised for parking purposes, together with a variety of streets and lanes interspersed with numerous protected structures. In its entirety the Backlanes form a rich urban fabric with significant architectural merits and represents a valuable historical and cultural resource for the Borough as a whole.



The area forms the gateway to the northern portion of Town Centre as approached from the proposed pedestrian link over the River from the newly redeveloped areas on South Quay. Drogheda Borough Council wishes to capitalise on the natural gateway formed by the Backlanes through the promotion of environmental regeneration of the urban fabric and built heritage of the area.

Development within the Backlanes will be controlled with the primary aim of ensuring the retention and enhancement of the area's character. The aim will be to preserve the individual buildings and groups of buildings upon which that character depends. Within the area, appropriate and sensitive renovation and improvement rather than demolition and replacement is desirable. Where demolition is unavoidable, or where infill development is required, it is essential, that new development should reflect the distinctive character of the area. Well designed, landmark modern building proposals may be considered appropriate for key nodes within the area, particularly at the main entry points.

Environmental improvements for the area will be strongly encouraged. Measures might include improved treatment of the streetscape including footpath repaving, street furniture, amenity lighting and tree / shrub planting.

Existing town centre uses are permissible however proposals of a cultural nature within a similar range to that of the Old Abbey Lane Urban Opportunity Area will be encouraged.

### **10.15 Backland Development**

The form of the shopping core is mainly linear with only limited in depth behind the main retail frontages. There is scope for expansion of the shopping area in depth by development to the rear of existing frontages. This is particularly the case to the north of West Street. Drogheda Borough Council will encourage development comprising predominantly small scale retailing, cultural, craft based and services in these areas. Developments will be accessed and serviced primarily through enhanced pedestrian links incorporating provision for those with reduced mobility.



**Meatmarket Lane Redevelopment**



### **10.16 Urban Renewal Scheme**

Under the auspices of the Urban Renewal Scheme 1999, a total of 7 no. sites or sub-areas within Drogheda Borough were designated for tax incentives. Following an initially slow start, take-up of the scheme improved significantly. Within the Town Centre, 3 no. sub-areas were designated. The largest site stretches from Shop Street to Stockwell Lane and the designation of this area has resulted in several major redevelopments particularly the landmark developments fronting the river. A further area to the north of the Town Centre will involve substantial regeneration of the environs of Magdalene Street / Greenlanes whilst the large area north of Laurence's Street and South of William Street (town centre shopping development) will witness comprehensive redevelopment during the course of the Plan.

### **10.17 Transportation**

The continued success of the Town Centre depends on maintaining a high level of accessibility by all modes of transport. In this respect, Drogheda Borough Council will seek to provide a traffic circulation system which will facilitate satisfactory vehicular circulation, ensure that the supply of car parking is sufficient to meet demand and seek to retain maximum access close to the shopping core in pedestrian priority areas, for public transport. The needs of people with reduced mobility will be taken into account in the assessment of all development proposals and public works.

### **10.18 Town Centre Office Development**

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

Beyond the shopping core office development will normally be permitted in new or established commercial areas within the defined town centre. Office development in the DTDA and Inner Quays Development Area will be encouraged.

The intrusion of office use into established residential areas both within the town centre and immediately adjacent to it, will normally be resisted in the interests of maintaining the town centre housing stock. In those areas where there is already a mix of housing and commercial uses, conversion of the remaining dwellings may be considered subject to meeting normal planning requirements.



### 10.19 Town Centre Housing

Housing provision within a town centre attracts a wide cross section of interest but in particular the young and elderly who value the convenience of town centre facilities. Town Centre housing has the added value of providing continued after hours life and activity, and providing informal surveillance in the centre outside normal commercial hours. The provision of new town centre housing will be favourably considered on suitable town centre sites. Drogheda Borough Council will also actively encourage the conversion of disused or under used commercial or other properties for residential use.

All proposals for Town Centre Housing will be subject to the normal planning process including density limitations and to satisfactory arrangements for access and car parking.

### 10.20 Community Uses

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

### 10.21 Statutory Instruments

Each Local Authority is required to include a Record of Protected Structures (RPS) in its development plan, which should contain all buildings it considers to be of special interest under one or more of the following headings:- Architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical. The Council may add to or delete a structure from the record at any time but this is often done in conjunction with a review of the Development Plan. The RPS currently contains 297 structures. The Local Authority is also required to include an objective in its development plan to preserve the character of places, areas, groups of structures or townscape it considers of special interest. Only the exteriors of buildings or areas are protected in an Architectural Conservation Area. A total of 17 ACAs are described in the current Development plan. The National Monuments Acts 1930 - 1994 protect the archaeological heritage and the historic town core is protected as a zone of archaeological potential.

#### **OBJECTIVES ( TOWN CENTRE )**

- **TC 1**  
*To strengthen the role of West Street as the primary shopping street through restricting change of uses from comparison shopping.*
  
- **TC 2**  
*To limit, except where specifically permitted by other policies within the Drogheda Borough Council Development Plan 2005 – 2011, retail developments outside the town centre retail core. Retail developments within the DTDA and IQDA will be assessed on their individual merits. The sequential approach should be adopted if it is demonstrated that no town centre site is available.*



- **TC 3**  
*To improve the vitality of the town centre by encouraging a mix of upper floor uses including inner urban living such as apartments over shops and commercial uses*
- **TC 4**  
*To incorporate public art and high quality urban design, street furniture and landscaping into the urban environment of the Town Centre*
- **TC 5**  
*To ensure that refurbishment and redevelopment proposals contribute to the environmental quality, and have regard to the character of the Town Centre, and do not result in damage to the town's archaeological or architectural heritage*
- **TC 6**  
*To retain and enhance the existing street pattern, to encourage the retention and refurbishment of existing buildings of character, and to continue to upgrade the physical environment of the Town Centre's streets and urban / civic spaces.*
- **TC 7**  
*To co-operate with the relevant statutory bodies in the implementation of a Town Centre Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) system.*
- **TC 8**  
*To consolidate, strengthen and enhance the social, economic, retail, cultural, historical and environmental strengths of Drogheda town centre, while addressing any constraints which hinder its sustainable development;*
- **TC 9**  
*To maintain and enhance the role of the town centre as the dominant commercial and retailing area of Drogheda Borough and the Greater Drogheda Environs.*
- **TC 10**  
*To maintain and enhance the environmental quality and physical appearance of the town centre, in terms of the built environment, urban spaces, streets and laneways, in order to create an attractive and user friendly environment;*
- **TC 11**  
*To encourage a diversity of uses in the town centre, recognising the needs of those who shop, work, live and recreate in the town centre.*
- **TC 12**  
*To encourage activities that promote the social well being of the Town Centre and enliven the evening economy, including cultural and entertainment uses*
- **TC 13**  
*To facilitate the development of an accessible town centre with particular reference to persons with reduced mobility, pedestrians and cyclists and to improve the availability of public transport, and short, medium and long stay car*



*parking facilities in collaboration with the private sector, transport providers and other public bodies.*

- **TC 14**  
*To ensure effective pedestrian linkages between the Drogheda Transport Development Area and the Town Centre*
  
- **TC 15**  
*To control the spread of uses which could lead to a reduction in the attractiveness of, and the retailing function of, the principal shopping streets*
  
- **TC 16**  
*To ensure a mix of uses across the Town Centre including retail, service uses, employment uses, community and cultural facilities.,*
  
- **TC 17**  
*To protect established residential areas in and adjacent to the central area from encroachment by commercial development and associated activities*
  
- **TC 18**  
*To encourage sympathetic redevelopment of the designated Urban Opportunity Areas at Old Abbey Lane and The Backlanes.*