

Chapter 7

Economic Development, Employment and Tourism

7.1 Introduction

County Louth has a tradition of entrepreneurial flair and industrial innovation. Over the course of the *County Development Plan 2003 – 2009*, the county shared in the benefits associated with the Celtic Tiger and has become well positioned as a major manufacturing, commercial and service centre catering for both domestic and international markets. Louth Local Authorities have proactively engaged with the private sector and other agencies to create strong economic partnerships. This has been coupled with the development of a holistic approach to economic development which involves educational institutions, cross border engagement and the establishment of concrete targets for job creation and economic development.

The key economic strengths and drivers in County Louth include, inter alia, its strategic location, high quality infrastructure, people resources, education and skills of its workforce and the high quality of life available to its residents.

Louth enjoys a very favourable location along the Dublin-Belfast corridor with close proximity to Dublin and the related advantages of easy access to Dublin Airport, Dublin Port, third and fourth level educational institutions and domestic and international markets. It is also very accessible to Belfast and the highly urbanised north east including proximity to Belfast International and City Airports and the sea ports in Belfast and Larne.

The A1/M1 motorway linking Dublin and Belfast runs through the heart of the county providing high quality access to national roads and motorway infrastructure. The improved level of rail infrastructure and services provide an alternative and sustainable transportation option for both goods and passenger traffic.



Louth is highly urbanised and has a high density of population compared to other rural counties. This is primarily as a result of having within its boundaries two of the largest provincial towns in the country, namely Dundalk and Drogheda. This generates critical mass and a large and well educated labour force pool, which is an essential resource for economic activity and expansion.

The high quality of life enjoyed by the residents of County Louth and which is available to potential investors is regarded as a major economic strength of the county.

7.1.1 County Louth Economic Development Strategy 2009 - 2015

This report presents an economic development strategy for County Louth for the period between 2009 and 2015, which coincides with the timeframe for the Plan. It focuses on the following:

- Assessment of the economic strengths and weakness of Louth
- Identification and making of recommendations on economic opportunities that can be successfully delivered
- Identification of current and future challenges and threats facing the county
- Making of proposals for a unique County Louth brand and a supporting marketing strategy
- Identification of potential funding sources and mechanisms

Whilst it is accepted that the majority of employment growth will be focused on the two principal urban areas of Dundalk and Drogheda, the Strategy also recognises that there is considerable scope for new economic opportunities in rural County Louth.

Table 7.1: Key Development Opportunities for Louth as identified by County Louth Economic Development Strategy

Location	Louth is ideally placed to capitalize on the advantages afforded to the county arising from its approximate location to Dublin along the Dublin Belfast economic corridor.
People Resources	The significant commuter population in County Louth points to an opportunity to leverage the high skilled labour pool to market Louth as a location for future investment.
Economic Sectors	Existing and emerging strengths would suggest that there are potential significant development opportunities for Louth in foreign owned and domestic owned high value industry and internationally traded services, including high end, specialised manufacturing, financial and business services and other commercial activities, including retail. Louth has particular advantages such as high quality visitor attractions, easy access to Dublin Airport and accommodation which indicate significant opportunities to further develop the county as a high quality destination for overseas and domestic holiday and business visitors.

The following recommendations for the promotion of economic development of the county are contained within the Strategy.

1. The county development plan should target an increase in the population of the county and its main towns to approach 150,000 persons in the county and around 190,000 persons in the wider economic area surrounding the county by 2020.
2. The county development plan should facilitate commercial and other development to provide additional employment of between 17,000 and 22,000 jobs in the administrative and economic areas respectively, to support the targeted expansion in population.
3. County Louth should develop a diversified economic base to reduce its vulnerability to any one sector or a limited number of potentially vulnerable sectors.
4. A labour and skills strategy should be implemented which supports the required growth in the workforce while addressing the specific skills required to support the sectoral economic strategy.
5. Continued and intensified efforts should be directed as a priority at addressing specific challenges faced by the county in the areas of unemployment and social exclusion.
6. Deficits in important key infrastructure, such as high quality broadband availability should be addressed in the county to facilitate economic and population growth.
7. Town centre development should continue to focus on ensuring the development of attractive centres for the county's main towns.
8. A marketing and branding strategy should be implemented which capitalises on the strengths of Louth and its constituent main towns as locations for investment and tourism.
9. A co-ordinated and consistent approach to the implementation and delivery of the development strategy is required, supported by appropriate structures at local authority and agency level.
10. A range of public, private and public private partnerships (PPP) funding options should be explored to support the delivery of infrastructure and other priorities.

Economic development strategies have also been prepared for the towns of Dundalk, Drogheda and Ardee. The Plan will support the implementation of these in addition to the economic development strategy for the county.

Policy

EDE 1 To capitalise on the location, natural and people resources of County Louth in the pursuit of the economic development priorities identified in the *County Louth Economic Development Strategy 2009 - 2015* and *Economic Development of Ardee 2009 - 2015* and support the implementation of similar strategies for Dundalk and Drogheda.

7.1.2 Employment Opportunities in smaller Towns and Villages

The main centres for employment within county Louth are Dundalk, Drogheda, Ardee and Dunleer and the council supports the role of these towns as the primary locations for employment generating activities within the county. However, the council also acknowledges the need for greater employment opportunities in smaller settlements and in rural areas. The spread of employment opportunities throughout the county is

considered necessary in order to revitalise and sustain rural communities where traditional employment sources, such as agriculture, are in decline.

The following settlements are identified as suitable for small scale businesses and enterprise and it is proposed that lands for employment activities will be identified and zoned in the review of the local area plans.

- Clogherhead
- Castlebellingham / Kilsaran
- Greenore
- Louth Village
- Collon

Policy

- EDE 2** To protect and enhance the status of Dundalk, Drogheda, Ardee and Dunleer as the principles centres of employment, industrial and commercial activity within the county.
- EDE 3** To secure a spread of employment opportunities at key strategic locations throughout the county and facilitate the development of local based micro and start –up enterprises.
- EDE 4** To identify and zone additional lands, if required, for employment activities in the review of the local area plans for Clogherhead, Castlebellingham/ Kilsaran, Greenore, Louth Village and Collon.

It should be noted however that the above policies do not preclude the location of industrial and commercial activity elsewhere in the county, where consideration will be given on the merits of each individual proposal.

7.1.3 Development at Motorway Interchanges

The M1 has the potential to act as a major stimulant of economic development and activity by providing high quality road infrastructure and connectivity to air and sea ports and thereby to domestic and international markets. Motorway interchanges are strategic locations much sought after by developers due to the desirability and benefits of having immediate access to the primary road network.



However, uncontrolled and poorly regulated development at interchanges can often be problematical. This can be due to such development being solely dependent on roads transport, the possibility of traffic congestion on national routes, the impact on rural landscapes and environments and the costs involved in the provision of other infrastructure such as piped services, electricity and gas. Such development can

also detract investment from existing towns and settlements that are badly in need of renewal and development.

In order to maximise the benefits accruing to the county from the motorway and to regulate development in a sustainable and appropriate manner along its route, the following policies will be applied.

Policy

EDE 5 To promote and facilitate development at urban-related* interchanges in accordance with the zoning provisions of the *Dundalk and Environs Plan* and the *North Drogheda Environs Local Area Plan 2004*.

EDE 6 To resist development at rural-related** motorway interchanges.

**Urban –related interchanges are Ballymascanlon, Castleblayney Road, Dundalk South interchange and Drogheda North.*

***Rural –related interchanges are Carrickcarron junction, Drumleck, Charleville, Mooremount and Woodlands.*

7.1.4 Cross Border Economic Co-Operation

The emergence of a lasting peace in Northern Ireland presents significant opportunities for co-operation between local authorities, community groups and the private sector in the promotion and development of the region on a cross border basis for the mutual benefit of both.

To this end, the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD) has developed a number of concepts which include the Newry-Dundalk Twin-City Region and a Newry-Dundalk International Services Zone. It is considered that a twin-city region would have the capacity to facilitate an integrated approach to the strategic planning and special needs of the area and to promote a sustainable central corridor strategy on the eastern seaboard. The International Service Zone concept is based on the Derry-Letterkenny modal. Newry-Dundalk is considered a prime location as a centre for internationally traded services due to its location at the centre of the Dublin-Belfast economic corridor.

Consideration will also be given to the carrying out of an economic analysis and development strategy focusing on the M1 corridor extending into Northern Ireland and to the counties of Meath and Fingal.

Policy

EDE 7 To support joint initiatives between local authorities, community groups and private sector for co-operation and promotion of the region on a cross border basis for the mutual benefit of both.

7.1.5 Adoption of a Partnership Approach

A key facet of the economy in County Louth has been the adoption of a partnership approach towards growing the economy. This is manifested in the work of organisations such as the County Development Board, Louth County Enterprise Board, DKIT, FÁS, the Chambers of Commerce and Louth Leader Partnership, Enterprise Ireland, the IDA, and the Newry-Dundalk Business Linkage Programme. The partnership approach has been most successful in the work undertaken by the Dundalk Economic Development Group. The DEDG was established by the Louth Local Authorities in 2006, as a partnership initiative bringing private and public sector leaders together to promote Dundalk as an ideal place to live, invest or visit. Its work has been recognised at a national level.

Policy

EDE 8 To work in partnership with development agencies within the county to promote economic development, enterprise and employment.

7.1.6 Employment Trends and Opportunities

County Louth has traditionally had a strong employment and industrial base centred primarily on the towns of Dundalk, Drogheda, Ardee and Dunleer. The significant foreign direct investment in new enterprises supported by the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) has taken place in county Louth in more recent years and this has made a very valuable contribution to economic development and employment opportunities. The Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT) provides a range of high quality third level diploma and degree courses in the sciences, engineering, building and construction and the number of highly qualified graduates passing through the college each year is a major strength and opportunity for the county.



The changing employment profile of Ireland has been manifested locally in a shift towards information, communications and technology (ICT) based industries, specialised engineering and food processing. Today, the county is rapidly becoming one of Ireland's principal industrial centres and has attracted new growth in the engineering and IT sectors, principally to the two major towns.

The quality of infrastructure in terms of road, rail and access to sea and air ports in addition to the high quality of the environment and quality of life, makes the county an attractive location for investment and as a place to live.

7.1.7 Employment Sectors

The breakdown of sectoral employment within the county is set out in table 7.2. Currently the majority of employment in Louth is in commerce (31.1%), education, health and social work (22.3%) and manufacturing (17.9%). A relatively low proportion of the county is involved in farming or agricultural activities, reflecting the highly urbanised nature of the county and the general decline in agricultural employment in recent years.

Table 7.2: Sectoral Breakdown of Employment in County Louth

Economic Sector	Number Employed	Percentage of Total
Commerce	10,756	31.1
Education, health and social work	7,705	22.3
Manufacturing industries	6,200	17.9
Construction	1,828	5.3
Public administration	1,720	5.0
Transport, storage and communications	1,583	4.6
Other	4,752	13.8
Total	34,545	100.0

Source: CSO, POWCAR dataset

As might be expected, the economic boom of the past decade has resulted in significant increase in employment opportunities within the county and a corresponding decrease in the unemployment rate from a peak of 22.3% in 1996 to 11.1% in 2006 (CSO 1996 and 2006). However the 2006 figure of 11.1% is significantly higher than the national average of 8.5%, which is reflective of the existence of high social exclusion and high unemployment within the RAPID areas of the towns of Dundalk and Drogheda. The deteriorating economic climate that has emerged in late 2008 and is continuing, could have serious implications for employment in county Louth and it is likely that the unemployment rate will increase, if temporarily, until such time as there is a sustained economic upturn.

Policy

EDE 9 To work in partnership with national and local economic development and employment promoting agencies to support employment generating initiatives within the county.

7.2 Development Management Standards for Industrial and Commercial Developments

The council will require that industrial and commercial lands be developed to a very high standard in campus style settings combining aesthetics with enterprise and attracting high calibre business occupiers. In spatial terms this will mean the development of a series of innovative landmark buildings set in attractive landscaped grounds. New development proposals should aim to provide design excellence realised within a hierarchal road structure and a hard and soft landscaping framework.

7.2.1 Landscaping and Amenity

Commercial and industrial development should present a pleasant aspect aided by a high quality of landscape design, including tree planting, within both public and private domains. The existing landscape framework and its associated topography should be respected.

Landscaping should be such as to ensure that the buildings will not be dominated by extensive areas of parking, hard standing and roads, thereby detracting from the quality of the environment. A detailed, high quality landscape plan, planting schedule and planting programme will be required with all applications. Planting shall include semi-mature trees in order to reduce the visual impact of structures on surrounding areas.

The provision of a buffer zone of not less than fifteen metres in width will be required where industrial and other land uses adjoin to ensure amenities of adjacent properties are not adversely affected. There should be no significant amenity loss (by way of noise, smell or other nuisance) to immediate neighbours or the area in general resulting from the nature of the proposed business, the amount of traffic generated or the servicing arrangement.



7.2.2 Surface Water Drainage

Adequate measures should be taken by commercial/industrial users and developers in the treatment and disposal of surface water to prevent pollution, including the adoption of the principles of sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS) in designing surface water management arrangements.

7.2.3 Sustainable Design

All commercial and Industrial development should adopt a sustainable approach to design and building methods including passive design, use of solar energy, low energy performance buildings and the use of renewable energy supplies, in association with Sustainable Energy Ireland and having regard to the Guidelines for Sustainable Design and Energy Efficiency in Buildings as set out in paragraph 9.7 of the Plan..

7.2.4 Car Parking, Loading and Unloading Provision

Car parking shall be provided in accordance with the standards detailed in table 8.6 within chapter 8 of the Plan. However in order to encourage modal shift, a reduction in the car parking standards will be considered where alternative transport arrangements involving greater use of sustainable transport solutions such as public transport, walking and cycling is provided.

All surface car parking areas should preferably be located behind the building line, out of view of the general public. Where this is not practical, parking areas should be suitably screened and landscaped. All car parking areas should be suitably surfaced and illuminated. Individual parking spaces should be permanently marked and shall not be less than 5.0m X 2.5m in dimension and shall have appropriate access and circulation aisles.

Sufficient loading and unloading bays should be provided. These should be of sufficient size to accommodate loading and unloading operations without encroachment onto any public road, footpath or interfere with the safety and free flow of vehicular traffic or pedestrians.

7.2.5 Design

Where two or more commercial or industrial buildings are being developed, a uniform design for boundary treatments, roof profiles and building lines is recommended. The scale and design of proposed development should be in keeping with the surrounding area and adjoining developments.

7.2.6 Site Coverage and Plot Ratios

The maximum site coverage permitted in industrial areas shall be 50% and the maximum plot ratio shall be 2:1.

7.2.7 Open Storage

Any open storage areas shall be located behind the building line and be adequately screened from public view.

7.2.8 Roads and Footpaths

The width of all internal industrial estate roads shall, generally, not be less than 7.3 metres with minimum radii of 10.5 metres at junctions.

Visibility splays shall not be less than 70m x 4.5m x 1.05m within speed control zones and 160m x 4.5m x 1.05m elsewhere.

Footpaths shall not be less than 1.8 metres in width.

7.2.9 Nuisance

The 'good neighbour' principle should be applied in respect of all industrial and commercial developments where possible conflict could arise with other established uses. In particular, noise emissions, whether from plant, machinery or traffic, shall comply with the provisions of Noise Regulations (S.I. No. 140 of 2006).

7.2.10 Foul Sewerage

All discharges of trade effluents to sewerage networks or receiving waters shall be subject to a Water Pollution Act Discharge Licence. Specified appropriate pre-treatment of trade effluents shall be required prior to discharge to council sewers.

7.2.11 Public Water Supplies

All supplies to industrial developments shall be metered and consumers shall be charged on basis of usage in accordance with guidelines set out in the *Water Services Pricing Policy*.

7.2.12 Fire Prevention

Adequate storage and hydrant capacity should be provided in consultation with the fire department of the council.

7.2.13 Building Regulations

Designers, developers and owners should ensure that all buildings and structures comply with the requirements of the *Building Regulations 1990*.

7.2.14 Signage

Signage shall be kept to a minimum. In order to ensure high quality signage and to safeguard the amenities of the area, a uniform signage scheme should be devised and submitted as part of the planning application for the development to which it relates. Billboards or free standing signage will not normally be permitted.

7.2.15 Public Artwork

Public art should be provided within an open space or focal point within new development schemes, through the *Percent for Arts Scheme* administered by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The council should be consulted on opportunities for permanent art.

7.3 Commerce and Retail

7.3.1 Introduction

The level of commerce and retail activity is reflective of the overall economic well being of the economy. County Louth, by reason of its border location, has suffered as a result of different pricing structures, monetary and taxation regimes, north and south of the border. This is particularly evident in recent months and is being further exacerbated by the current economic downturn. The importance of commerce and retail in County Louth is evident from the proportion of the total labour force, some 31.1%, employed in the sector.

Traditionally, the main destination for shopping has been town and village centres. These also acted as the focus for a variety of other activities including business, social, leisure and residential uses.

Recent trends have seen the decline of small independent grocers and the emergence of larger supermarkets, franchise based local convenience stores, discount food stores and retail warehouses at out-of-town locations. These emerging trends in the retail sector

have increasingly influenced shopping patterns and have created a demand for large shopping centres at locations where extensive car parking facilities are available.

The council recognises the importance of retaining the primary role of town centres for commercial and retail activity. Therefore, the retail policies outlined in the Plan aim to preserve the viability and vitality of the town and village centres of the county whilst also recognising the need to provide for new retailing formats to meet consumer demands.

7.3.2 Louth Retail Strategy 2009

The *Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2000* were issued under the provisions of *Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000* and were subsequently revised in 2005. The purpose of these guidelines is to:

- Promote a healthy competitive retail environment.
- Promote forms of retail development which are easily assessable by public transport.
- Protect the role of town centres and resist large scale out of centre shopping malls
- Resist large retail centres close to national roads or motorway interchanges
- Assist local authorities in the preparation of retail policies for incorporation into development plans

In order to comply with the guidelines planning authorities are required to prepare retail strategies.

The *Louth Retail Strategy* was prepared and adopted in 2002 and subsequently reviewed in 2009. The 2009 Strategy has informed the retail policies of this development plan.

The purpose of the *Louth Retail Strategy 2009* is to:

- Promote a healthy, vibrant and competitive retail environment within County Louth
- Identify the core shopping areas in Dundalk, Drogheda and Ardee
- Formulate policies to protect the vitality and viability of existing town and village centres
- Ensure the provision of appropriately scaled convenience retail outlets in new residential areas
- Establish a county retail hierarchy
- Define criteria for the assessment of future significant retail developments

The Strategy has confirmed that there has been a 127% increase in the retail floor space available within the county since the previous strategy was completed in 2002, with increases of 170% in Drogheda, 108% in Dundalk and 49.2% in Ardee. This represents a very significant increase and is reflective of the progressive development of the county over that period.

Table 7.3: Percentage Increase in Retail floor space between 2001 and 2008

County	Dundalk	Drogheda	Ardee
127%	108%	170%	49.2%

One of the important functions of the retail strategy was to establish a county retail hierarchy which is set out in table 7.4. The primary positions of Dundalk and Drogheda at level one is recognised whilst the local importance of Ardee places it at level 2. Other important local centres of Blackrock, Dunleer, Collon and Carlingford are included at level 3 and all other villages are at level 4.

Table 7.4: County Retail Hierarchy

Level	Settlement
1	Dundalk, Drogheda
2	Ardee
3	Blackrock, Dunleer, Collon and Carlingford
4	Other smaller towns and villages



The Strategy highlights that Dundalk and Drogheda are well positioned to be the leading retail centres within their respective catchments. It is considered that there is sufficient convenience retail spare capacity in both towns to satisfy requirements up until the year 2012 but thereafter additional convenience floor space will be required depending on demand driven by population growth. In terms of retail warehouses and retail parks the strategy suggests that there is considerable existing

floor space and that there is unlikely to be any additional need or demand over the period of the Plan.

The also concludes that Ardee should continue to develop its convenience retail offer in tandem with its expanding population and that there is a current need for an additional convenience retail store up to 2500 square metres. However, it considers that there is no justifiable need for retail park development. Furthermore, the development of Ardee's retail comparison offer should be closely linked to the evolution of the town's untapped tourism potential.



In the other towns and villages, the priority is to cater sufficiently for the basic convenience and lower order comparison requirements of their existing populations, and the aim is to facilitate retail development commensurate with their population sizes, location and traditional built environment.

The retail policies as set out below are inclusive of those recommended in the retail study.

Policy

- EDE 10 To promote a healthy competitive retail environment within County Louth and to maintain the vitality and viability of town and village centres and their role as primary retail core areas.
- EDE 11 To ensure that applications for retail development comply with the provisions of the *Retail Planning Guidelines 2005* and the *Louth Retail Strategy 2009*.
- EDE 12 To support the development of Dundalk and Drogheda as important regional shopping centres and to maintain the role of Ardee as a sub county retail centre and the retail function of all other settlements, commensurate with locally generated needs.
- EDE 13 To resist the provision of large scale retail developments outside town centres subject to the application of the sequential test and demonstration that the existing town centre will not be adversely affected.
- EDE 14 To promote the provision of local retail centres serving small, localised catchment populations in new residential areas, commensurate with locally generated needs.
- EDE 15 To generally discourage permission for change of use from retail or service (including banks and similar institutions with over the counter services) to non-retail or non service uses at ground-floor level.

7.3.3 Town and Village Centres

Rural town and village centres have traditionally been at the heart of the economic commercial, social and cultural heart of rural communities. They were bustling centres of activity which had a complex mix of uses including residential, retail, professional and other services, leisure and cultural activities. The advent of the motor car and changing consumer demands have resulted in a decline of the role of town and village centres as both the residential and commercial functions sought to relocate to more desirable and accessible out of town locations. This has had a negative impact on the fabric and environment of many towns and villages, resulting in a loss of vibrancy and activity particularly outside of business hours.

The council recognises the important role that rural town and villages play in the social and economic life and therefore considers it necessary to devise policies that will protect the vitality and viability of these settlements. The retail policies outlined above which are derived from the *Retail Planning Guidelines 2005* and the *Louth Retail Strategy 2009* seek to preserve the retail function of town and village centres. It is considered that, though important, retail policies alone will not be sufficient to protect the broader range of essential town and village centre uses.

7.3.4 Town and Village Centre Environments

It is important that town and village centres are attractive, safe and easily accessible to all. A number of town and village improvement schemes have been carried out during the period of the last plan, in co-operation with local Tidy Towns Committees. The success of

Louth's towns and villages in the Bord Failte sponsored Tidy Towns Competition bears testimony to the improvements made.

Improvements to footpaths, street lighting, street furniture and landscaping make a valuable contribution to the attractiveness of the environments of town and village centres. The council will continue to co-operate with local groups towards further improvement in towns and villages throughout the county.

Policy

- EDE 16** To promote the improvement of the environment of town and village centres through good design in all development, landscaping, street furniture and public art works.
- EDE 17** To improve traffic mobility through traffic management, improvements to pavements, provision of access for mobility impaired and public transport waiting facilities.
- EDE 18** To co-operate with local Tidy Towns Committees and other community groups in the implementation of environmental improvement schemes.

7.3.5 Architectural Conservation Areas and Protected Structures

Many of the towns and villages within the county have designated architectural conservation areas (ACA) and a number of protected structures. Any proposed developments within an ACA or involving modifications to a protected structure shall comply with the requirements as set out in chapter 2 of the Plan.

7.3.6 Living over the Shop

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

Policy

- EDE 19** To promote the provision and modernisation of residential accommodation over commercial premises in towns and villages in order to improve the vibrancy of their centres.

7.3.7 Shopfronts

The towns and villages of County Louth contain numerous examples of traditional shopfront design together with large numbers of more modern design, much of which reflects a certain amount of corporate harmonisation. The council will encourage the preservation of authentic, traditional shopfronts and the provision of good quality contemporary designs.

Design criteria for shopfronts should ensure that:

- Entrances are fully accessible to all people with mobility difficulties.
- Where a shopfront involves two or more units, that it is divided with separate fascias and columns to reflect the separate units.
- The shopfront respects the building's elevation and architectural details. Period shopfronts on protected structures and in ACAs should be retained.
- The design takes into account adjacent shopfronts where they make a positive contribution to the streetscape.

Policy

EDE 20 To encourage the preservation of authentic, tradition shopfronts and good quality contemporary designs.

7.3.8 Security Shutters

Whilst the council recognises the need for the sufficient security for commercial premises the installation of security shutters can detract from the appearance, visual amenity and safety of town and village centres particularly at night and weekends. The council will discourage the mounting or location of rollers on the exterior of shop premises where such shutters would detract from the streetscape and ambience of the town. However innovative solutions involving tradition wrought iron window guards or shutters which provide a high degree of transparency which allows the window display to be visible will be considered.

Policy

EDE 21 To discourage the mounting or location of rollers on the exterior of shop premises where such shutters would detract from the streetscape and ambience of the town or village.

EDE 22 To consider innovative solutions including tradition wrought iron window guards or security shutters which provide a high degree of transparency which allows the window display to be visible.

7.3.9 Canopies and Blinds

Blinds were traditionally incorporated into the shop front fascia and designed be retracted into it when not in use. This is still the best way to handle a blind where one is required. Curved and Dutch style canopies are unsympathetic to the traditional streetscape will be discouraged.

Policy

EDE 23 To encourage the incorporation of blinds, where required, into the shopfront fascia so that they are capable of being retracted when not in use. Curved and Dutch canopies will be discouraged.

7.3.10 Signage

The size, shape and position of signs should reflect the scale and façade of the building on which they are located. Hand painted signs or illumination by bracket or wash lighting are preferred to internally illuminated fascia signs. In general signs should not be located above fascia level.

Signage forms an integral part of most shop fronts and commercial areas. However, the proliferation of insensitive displays of advertisements can seriously detract from the visual quality of the area and have implications for public safety.

The following guidelines should be applied in the design of town and village centre signage:

- Signage should be kept to a minimum and be of a size, design, scale and degree of illumination which is compatible with the surrounding area.
- Signage above fascia level, free standing signage and billboards will not normally be permitted.
- Only one projecting sign per unit will be permitted at fascia level.
- Signs should not adversely affect the safety or free flow of traffic, including pedestrian traffic.
- The location of free standing advertisements and other objects shall be discouraged in the interest of pedestrian safety. Any such objects shall be subject to licence under Section 254 of the *Planning and Development Act, 2000*.
- In new development a uniform signage scheme should be prepared and submitted with the planning application for the relevant development.

Policy

EDE 24 To discourage a proliferation of signs within town and village centres which would detract from the visual amenities of the streetscape and which would interfere with the free flow and safety of vehicular and pedestrian traffic movements.

7.3.11 Site Coverage

Site coverage shall not exceed 80%.

7.3.12 Height

The height of proposed buildings should respect the height of adjoining structures on either side. Normally buildings in excess of four storeys in height will be discouraged except at key locations or landmark sites where taller buildings might be acceptable. The height of new developments should not detract from views of existing protected structures and landmark buildings.

7.3.13 Overshadowing and Overlooking

Where three or four storey buildings are proposed adjoining lower buildings, the council will require that the developer submit daylight and shadow projection diagrams and

demonstrate that the adjoining properties will not be unduly affected by the proposed development.

Windows and balconies of new building should avoid overlooking of adjoining property, particularly residential property.

7.3.14 Car Parking Provision

Car parking shall be provided in accordance with the standards detailed in table 8.6 within chapter 8 of the Plan. A relaxation of the car parking standards may be allowed where alternative sustainable solutions such as access to public transport, accessibility by foot or cycle or where adequate car parking is already available in the area. A contribution in lieu will be required where car parking standards are relaxed.

7.4 Tourism

7.4.1 Introduction

The *Economic Development Strategy for County Louth 2008* identifies the potential of tourism to contribute significantly to the economic development of the county. The attractions of County Louth as a tourist destination include an unspoilt natural landscape, areas of outstanding natural beauty, clean uncluttered beaches, a pollution free environment, a wealth of historical and architectural heritage and a



range of high quality tourist attractions and facilities. The county is conveniently located to the heavily populated areas of Greater Dublin and the north east of the island, centred on Belfast, which provides a large population mass within a one hour drive of the county.

The improved road and rail infrastructure which has been put in place, both north and south of the border in recent years and accessibility to east coast air and passenger ferry ports makes the county very accessible to the international tourism market.

7.4.2 Tourist Attractions

The broad range of tourist facilities and attractions of County Louth include, inter alia, the following:

- Historic towns of Dundalk, Drogheda, Ardee and Carlingford
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- 120 kilometres of clean coastline and blue flag beaches



- Marina, sailing and sea adventure centres
- Clean air and water
- A large number of archaeological sites and monument
- Historic Boyne Valley and Battle of the Boyne Site
- A large number of historic houses and landscaped gardens
- Equestrian based activity
- High quality golf courses
- Identified cycling and walking routes
- Cultural based activities
- High quality hotels and other accommodation
- Places of recreation including theatres, cinemas, pubs and restaurants
- All weather racing track and international standard ice rink



7.5 Regional Tourism Policy

Fáilte Ireland East and Midlands Regional Tourism Plan 2008-2010 provides a road map for both national and local agencies, local authorities and other public bodies to contribute to the sustainable development of tourism in the region. Louth is one of eight counties included in the remit of this plan which aims to deliver increased tourism benefits to the region by providing better hospitality, greater appeal and an improved quality of visitor experience.



It notes that visitors are attracted to the region because of the diversity of tourist attractions. Within County Louth the Cooley Peninsula has proved attractive as a natural base for outdoor pursuits, whilst the major heritage and historic sites such as those at Monasterboice, Mellifont and the historic towns of Dundalk, Drogheda, Ardee and Carlingford combine to provide a rich heritage menu.

7.5.1 Tourism Plan 2008 - 2012

Louth Hospitality, which is a local authority supported partnership with the private tourism sector in the county, recently published the *Tourism Plan 2008-2012*. The mission statement of this action plan is 'to attract tourists to County Louth by providing a quality experience'. It aims to offer compelling reasons to motivate tourists to visit Louth and to make attractions more accessible and tangible. To facilitate the development of Louth's heritage sites as top class visitor attractions, it is an objective of the action plan to provide the necessary infrastructure, visitor services and promotional material to market the sites.

Policy

- TOU 1** To support the implementation of the *Tourism Plan 2008 - 2012* and the *Faillte Ireland East and Midlands Regional Plan 2008 – 2010*.
- TOU 2** To promote the sustainable development of Louth as a quality tourist destination themed on heritage, culture and an unspoilt natural environment.
- TOU 3** To assist in the development and marketing of County Louth in conjunction with the local authorities north and south of the border.
- TOU 4** To support the development of community festivals, cultural activities and other outdoor activities.

7.5.2 Co-Operation with other Bodies

The council is aware that the development of tourism in County Louth would benefit greatly from a co-operative approach with other local authorities and relevant agencies both north and south of the border. Such initiatives could involve the co-funding of tourism infrastructure, product development and marketing. Co-operation on a number of projects has already taken place and it is proposed to pursue and bring to fruition these initiatives during the course of the Plan.

7.5.3 Cross Border Ecologically Themed Project

During the period of the Plan, the council will explore with the relevant authorities north of the border the development of an integrated themed cross border project based around the common themes of a high quality landscape and natural heritage. This is most strongly manifested in the geological underpinnings which characterize the Cooley Peninsula, Mourne Mountains and Slieve Gullion. This common bond has left a legacy of great beauty and economic potential which can be harnessed to greatest effect by the respective local authorities adopting a collaborative approach to the development of the regions natural wealth.

Much of Cooley, the Mournes and Slieve Gullion comprise of dramatic mountainous areas where the visual impact is increased by proximity to both the open sea and Carlingford Lough. The open moorland of the higher areas has a variety of undisturbed flora and fauna together with large pockets of coniferous forest

In human terms, the area is rich in archaeological items and renowned in legend and folklore. These factors together with the isolation and tranquillity combine to give a very broad appeal for visitors and locals alike.

Policy

- TOU 5** To pursue the development of an integrated themed cross border tourism project including joint marketing, promotion and where appropriate and viable, infrastructure provision.

7.5.4 Narrow Water Bridge

The provision of a road link through the construction of a bridge between the Cooley Peninsula in County Louth and the southern portion of the Mourne Mountains in County Down at Narrow Water would make a valuable contribution to the development of tourism in Louth and the Mournes. Initial funding for the project has been provided in the *National Development Plan 2007-2013* and preliminary design work commenced.



(Artists impression)

Policy

TOU 6 To co-operate with the authorities in Northern Ireland in the provision of a road bridge between Cooley and south County Down.

7.5.5 Oriel 2012

Oriel 2012 aims to promote the Newry and Mourne and the Louth region as a base for pre-games training camps for participants in the 2012 London Olympic Games. Given the region's proximity to London, the cluster will also put in place strategies to attract teams and spectators to the region in their pursuit of leisure and recreational activities. Membership of the Oriel 2012 cluster is open to businesses, sporting organisations, schools and support organisations that are keen to tap into the opportunities that will inevitably arise from the training camps. The council is fully supportive of this initiative.

Policy

TOU 7 To support the Oriel 2012 project and co-operate with relative authorities, business interests and stakeholders north and south to advance its implementation.

7.5.6 Boyne Valley

The historic Boyne Valley, Brú Na Bóinne, is a world heritage site. It also contains the site of the historic Battle of the Boyne. The Boyne Valley falls partially within the functional area of Louth County Council, Meath County Council and Drogheda Borough Council. The heritage town of Drogheda which is located on the Boyne Estuary is the gateway to the historic Boyne Valley.

The council recognises the significant contribution and potential of the Boyne Valley for the development of tourism in County Louth and is keen to participate in a joint approach

with Meath County Council and Drogheda Borough Council in its protection, development and promotion.

Therefore it is proposed to co-operate with Meath County Council and Drogheda Borough Council in the preparation of a strategy for the protection, development and promotion of this important heritage site.

Policy

TOU 8 To co-operate with Meath County Council and Drogheda Borough Council in the preparation of a strategy for the protection, development and promotion of the Boyne Valley heritage site.

7.6 Tourist Accommodation

Growth in the tourism sector will result in a corresponding need for more visitor accommodation and facilities across the county. The council is keen to ensure that there is a range of high quality and affordable accommodation provided in order to meet the needs of visitors and tourists to the county. However, care will be needed to ensure that the unspoilt natural environment and landscapes of the county which have been identified as a major reason why tourists come to County Louth are not compromised by inappropriate tourist accommodation development.

7.6.1 Hotel, Guest House and Bed and Breakfast Accommodation

The number of hotel beds within the county has increased significantly over the period of the last county development plan as a result of the construction of new hotels in Carlingford, Drogheda and two in Dundalk. The council will encourage the provision of additional hotels including leisure and conference facilities, within the county in order to attract more visitors and to boost employment.



Custom built guest houses should be located within existing towns and villages to avail of and support existing services. Bed and breakfast accommodation is normally provided

within existing dwellings and can be accommodated in both urban and rural areas.

Low cost, high quality guest houses and bed and breakfast accommodation are an important component in the range of accommodation choice required for a vibrant tourism industry.

Policy

- TOU 9** To encourage the provision of additional hotel, guest house bed spaces and bed and breakfast accommodation in County Louth in conjunction with leisure, conferencing and other associated facilities and amenities, subject to the protection of the unspoilt natural environment and landscapes of the county.

7.6.2 Holiday Homes and Self-Catering Accommodation

Holiday homes are defined as '*purpose built self-contained residential units, which provide accommodation on a short term basis for visitors to the area*'. The council will resist the proliferation of holiday home developments in rural areas except where the development would involve the conversion or restoration of existing vernacular buildings and derelict dwellings.

In order to manage the provision of tourist accommodation in a manner that meets the needs of the tourist while at the same time supports the local economy, it is considered important that the provision of holiday homes and self catering accommodation should, by and large, be provided within the network of existing settlements and be of a scale that the settlement can sustain. Therefore the council will resist proposals for the development of holiday homes and self catering accommodation in the countryside, except where existing stone buildings of character are to be converted or where the restoration of vernacular dwellings is proposed.

Policy

- TOU 10** To facilitate the limited provision of holiday homes and self-catering accommodation in locations within existing towns and villages, of a scale that the settlement can sustain.
- TOU 11** To resist proposals for the development of holiday homes and self catering accommodation in the countryside except where existing stone buildings of character are to be converted or where the restoration of vernacular dwellings is proposed.
- TOU 12** To limit the floor area of all holiday homes and self catering accommodation to a maximum of a 100 square metres.

7.6.3 Caravan Parks

The provision of caravan parks which are popular, particularly in coastal locations, can have a serious detrimental impact on the amenities of the coast unless they are sensitively located and properly managed and maintained. Proposals for new caravan parks will only be favourably considered where they are located within a secluded and a mature landscaped setting and where there is an adequate road network to serve the development.

The focus of the council's policy in relation to caravan parks will be to secure the upgrading of existing parks particularly in relation to wastewater treatment, general facilities and amenities.

Policy

- TOU 13** To permit new caravan parks only where they are located within a secluded and a mature landscaped setting and where there is an adequate road network to serve the development.
- TOU 14** To encourage the upgrading of existing caravan parks in approved locations.

7.6.4 Budget Hostels

Hostel accommodation, catering primarily for those travelling on a limited budget, occupies an important niche within the tourist accommodation market. Whilst the individual spend on accommodation is by definition, low, there can be considerable ancillary spending by such tourists on local services.

Policy

- TOU 15** To facilitate the provision of budget hostels within existing urban centres or close to public transport facilities.

7.7 Tourism Related Signage

The provision of directional and promotional signage is important in facilitating tourists and enhancing their overall experience and enjoyment of their visit. The provision of finger posts and other directional signs is a function of the local authority and is provided under the roads capital budget. Significant improvements in this area have taken place in recent years and the council will continue to improve road signage where required and subject to the availability of adequate funding.

In addition to the road signs provided by the council, Section 254 of the *Planning and Development Act, 2000*, makes provision, under license from the planning authority, for additional road signage to facilitate existing significant activities including tourist related attractions and amenities.

The council will favourably consider the granting of licenses for Failte Ireland approved finger post signage where appropriate. However, it should be recognised that excessive numbers of signs is counter productive as it leads to clutter and confusion which detracts from the appearance of buildings and rural landscapes and may conflict with essential local authority directional and safety signage. Such a proliferation of signage will be resisted by the council.

Tourism related promotional and advertisement signs are also important for the industry. Such signs should be suitably designed and appropriately located on the building or within the curtilage as appropriate so that they do not detract from the visual amenities of the area.

Policy

- TOU 16** To continue to improve local authority directional road signage to facilitate visitors to the county.
- TOU 17** To facilitate the licensing of Failte Ireland approved tourism related signage subject to a demonstrate need and the avoidance of clutter and confusion with existing road signage.
- TOU 18** To ensure that tourism related promotional and advertisement signs are suitably designed and appropriately located so that they do not detract from the visual amenities of the area.