

7.0 INTRODUCTION

Both the quantitative assessment (Chapter 5: Capacity Assessment) of additional retail floorspace requirements for the county and the qualitative review (Chapter 6: Health Checks) of the various retail centres in the county outline how the principal towns within Longford are performing at present.

One of the functions of the strategy update is to review advice on the broad quantum of additional retail floorspace that is required for the county over the period so as to maintain and enhance the positive economic performance of Longford Town and County. This role also entails the provision of broad updated recommendations on where this new floorspace should be located. In this context, the location and extent of new retail development must have regard to the planning framework for the county, particularly the Retail Planning Guidelines, the Longford County Development Plan 2003-2009, the Longford Town Development Plan 2004-2010 and the various Local Area Plans prepared for settlements within Longford. Central to the provision of additional retail floorspace is the need to reinforce the retail hierarchy of the county, in existing town and village centres. Therefore, it is vital that Longford Town, as the county's principal urban centre continues to develop its retail function to meet expanding shopping needs and to ensure a healthy and competitive retail environment.

To achieve the key objectives of the strategy due cognisance must be taken of the strategic policy framework that underpins the updated specific policies and proposals in this document. This framework is set by:

- (i). Longford Town's position in the national retail hierarchy;
- (ii). Identifying the County Retail Hierarchy;
- (iii). The Spatial distribution of new retail development with the County Retail Hierarchy;
- (iv). The core retail areas;
- (v). The sequential approach; and
- (vi). A consideration of need.

7.1 LONGFORD TOWN'S POSITION IN THE NATIONAL RETAIL HIERARCHY

The update and review concluded that the limited size of the majority of the county's centres does not facilitate the quantum and quality of floorspace required by major national and international retailers. The review has also identified a requirement to upgrade the existing floorspace in the county retail offer as well as providing new space in Longford Town. The national retail hierarchy as set out in out in the Retail Planning Guidelines (RPGs) locates Longford Town within the level three retail centres.

7.2 IDENTIFYING THE COUNTY RETAIL HIERARCHY

The 2004-2009 Longford County Retail Strategy did not explicitly establish a retail hierarchy for the county. This in part is attributable to the onset of county wide development pressure at a level previously not seen. This has been addressed by the adoption of a series of Local Area Plans for the county's main settlement centres. Thus, in the current update and review of the strategy, an assessment has been undertaken of the county's extant retail policy framework and the issues and opportunities prevailing in each of the county's main centres.

From this examination, it is possible to produce a county retail centre hierarchy taking into account the influence of the national, regional and local planning policy frameworks. Based upon this, the Longford County Retail Hierarchy is set out in the table below:

Table 7.1 Retail Hierarchy		
Reviewed County Retail Strategy Retail Hierarchy	Reviewed County Retail Strategy Settlement Type	Identified County Centre
Level I	Principal/County Town	Longford Town
Level II	Key Service Towns	Granard Edgeworthstown Ballymahon
Level III	Local Service Centres	Lanesboro Drumlish Newtownforbes

7.3 SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF ADDITIONAL RETAIL WITHIN THE COUNTY RETAIL HIERARCHY

This update and review of the Longford County Retail Strategy, provides a strategic policy framework, in accordance with the provisions of the Retail Planning Guidelines, for the spatial distribution of new retail development in the county. While such a framework inherently emphasises strategic guidance on the location and scale of major retail development, it must ensure that the strategy does not inhibit appropriate scale retail development in identified centres within the county, specifically in smaller settlements. Thus, it is implicit in the key objectives of the strategy that such developments should be encouraged and facilitated where possible to enhance the sustainability, vitality and viability of smaller centres within the county. Therefore, this review provides strategic

guidance on how the retail strategy defines the distribution of strategic and non-strategic retail floor space within the county's retail hierarchy. Such guidance is provided in the table below:

Table 7.2 County Retail Hierarchy			
Reviewed County Retail Strategy Hierarchy	Reviewed County Retail Strategy Settlement Type	Identified County Centre	Appropriate Retail Type
Level I	Principal/County Town	Longford Town	Major Convenience and Comparison (with a emphasis on high-end comparison)
Level II	Key Service Towns	Granard Edgeworthstown Ballymahon	Large-medium scale convenience and middle order comparison
Level III	Local Service Centres	Lanesboro Drumlisk Newtownforbes	Lower order convenience with limited tourist related comparison
Level IV	Villages	Keenagh Carrickglass Other Villages	Predominantly lower order convenience, but not excluding tourism related comparison

7.4 CORE RETAIL AREAS

The assessment of the county's retail centres identified that the phenomenon of a 'core shopping area' relates only to Longford Town centre, with the remaining centres being too small to merit such a designation.

The growth of Longford Town, demographically, economically, in terms of its retail offer and as a strategically located inter-regional link which serves as a vital urban anchor in an otherwise predominantly rural county, necessitates the expansion of the core shopping area from that currently defined as "centre" in the previous County Longford Retail Strategy 2004-2009. This redefinition includes the changing of much of the area designated as "centre" to "town Core" , the area designated as "edge-of-centre" to "centre" and some of the area previously designated as "out-of-centre" to "edge-of-centre". These new definitions are shown in Map 1. This provides a better reflection of

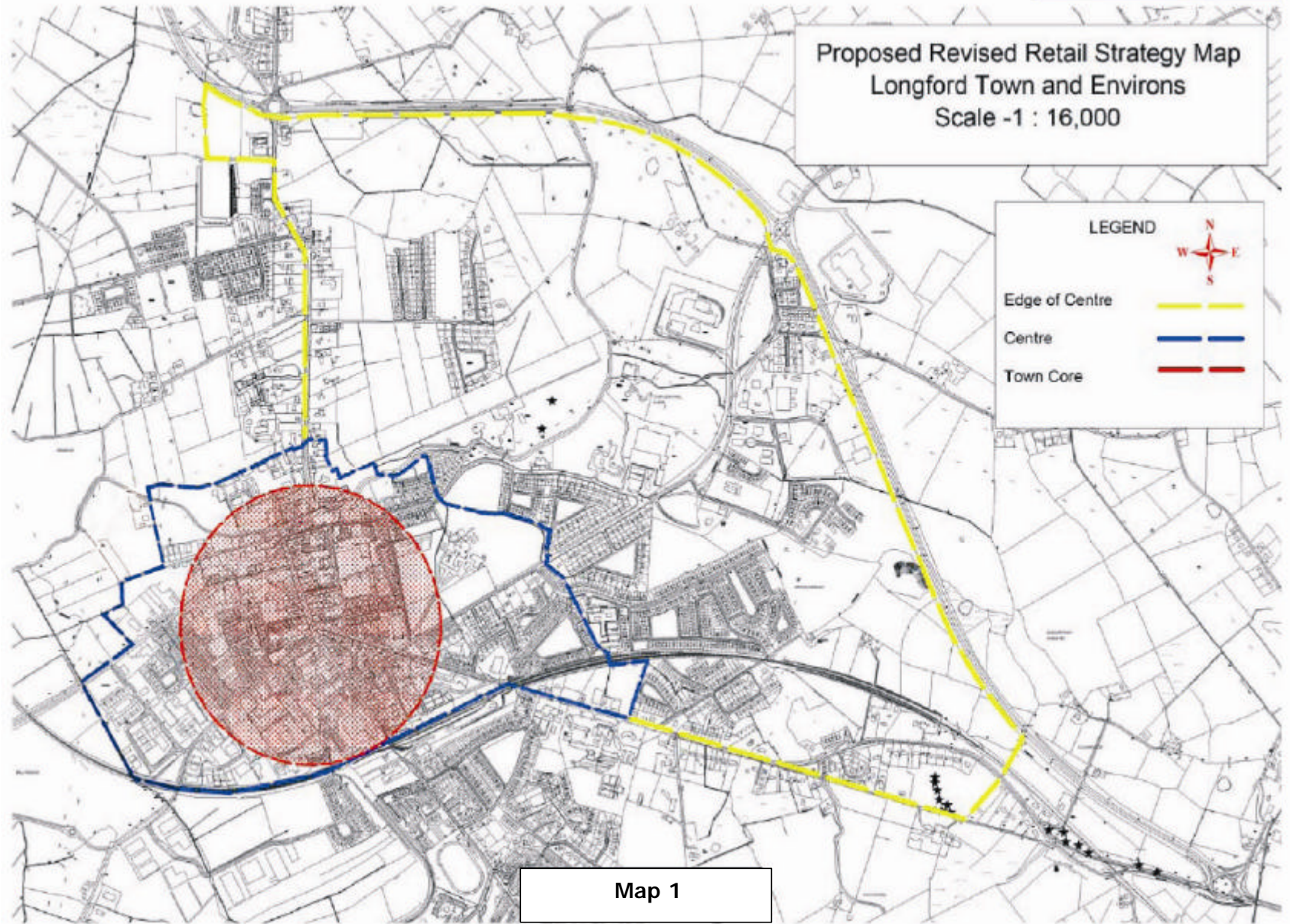
the town's retail morphology, while encouraging the continued vitality and viability of the existing core area in an economically sustainable manner.

Longford has a vibrant retail core but has a notable deficiency in high-end, modern comparison retail floor plates. The lack of high value comparison anchors in the town core has undoubtedly contributed to the growth of expenditure leakage from the town's catchment area as the retail profiles of competing centres have developed at a faster pace. In order for Longford Town to compete effectively with other urban centres of a similar scale, it is imperative that sufficient high-end comparison shopping is in place in the town core area. The Retail Strategy Review has identified the need for a significant growth of comparison retail provision up to 2015 to address this deficiency and enhance the retail profile of the town core. It is essential in terms of the sustainable development of the Town going forward that this high-end comparison shopping provision is retained and substantially enhanced within the Town core area and that leakage to the periphery is prevented.

A proactive approach to urban design will be taken and substantial redevelopment in the core area should utilise opportunities to facilitate attractive and vibrant environments designed at a human scale, with enhanced pedestrian permeability, visually engaging, secure and inviting public realms that promote and encourage passive and active recreation.

Any significant convenience retail development proposed in any area other than the town core or centre will only be considered where this is proposed in tandem with a substantial and appropriate redevelopment of the core area, with significant and tangible benefits, including improved traffic access circulation and car parking, ensuring the continued vitality and vibrancy of the central area into the future.

Proposed Revised Retail Strategy Map
Longford Town and Environs
Scale -1 : 16,000



7.5 THE SEQUENTIAL APPROACH

The locations of retail developments will be assessed against the principles of the *Sequential Approach* outlined in the Retail Planning Guidelines (RPGs). This approach can be described as follows:

- i. The preferred location for new retail development, where practicable and viable, is within a town centre (or district or major village centre) ;
- ii. Where it is not possible to provide the form and scale of development that is required on a site within the town centre then consideration can be given to a site on the edge of the town centre. An edge of centre site, for the purposes of the Retail Planning Guidelines, is taken to be one which is within an easy and convenient walking distance from the primary shopping core of a town centre. The distance considered to be convenient will vary according to local circumstances;
- iii. Having assessed the size, availability, accessibility, and feasibility of developing both sites and premises, firstly within a town centre and secondly on the edge of a town centre, alternative out of centre sites should be considered only where it can be demonstrated that there are no town centre or edge of centre sites which are suitable, viable and available.

In accordance with the recommendations of the RPG's and paragraph 62 in particular each individual case will be assessed on its merit, and the site's relative performance against the various planning and transportation factors will be evaluated.

In order to protect, encourage and enhance the vitality and viability of both the retail offer and public realm of the town, any future large scale retail units which would be out of proportion with the absorption capacity of the town centre may require location outside of the core shopping area in the best interest of the vitality and viability of the core area.

7.6 CONSIDERATION OF NEED

Developing the retail offer of the county, especially in respect of high end high street comparison shopping, is vital if Longford is to remain competitive and arrest the levels of both convenience and comparison expenditure leakage to centres outside of the county.

This is particularly important for Longford Town if it is to enhance its strategic role as outlined in the Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines, as an integrated link and a principal town in the broader polycentric model for the Region including the linked gateway. It is also critical given the town's position as a crucial urban anchor providing essential services in an otherwise predominantly rural county.

Apart from Longford Town, the other retail centres in the county are small both in terms of population size and quantum of retail floorspace. The improvement of the retail offer

of these centres needs to be encouraged and facilitated. Concurrently, in order to reduce expenditure leakage to other areas, then the strategic priority must be to focus on enhancing the retailing environment of Longford Town.

The reviewed and updated broad capacity assessment of the requirement for additional retail floorspace reveals that there is sizeable latent expenditure potential to provide for both the quality and quantum of additional retail floorspace requisite for Longford Town.

Table 7.3 Minimum and Maximum Additional Floorspace Requirements for County Longford 2007-2015		
	Convenience	Comparison
	In the range of:	In the range of:
Additional Floorspace Requirements (m²)	3,000 to 7,000	7,000 to 16,000

While it is recognised that the minimum and maximum requirements for additional retail floorspace outlined in Table 7.3 above provide a useful quantifiable platform against which to assess trends in retail development within the county, it is important to stress that these figures are considered conservative, given recent population growth and continued residential development.

Future additional retail provision within Longford Town and its environs should address the insufficiency of the centre's high-end high street comparison retail offer and traffic congestion problems.

7.7 POLICIES AND PROPOSALS

The following policies and proposals have been designed to facilitate the realisation of the County Retail Strategy's key objectives and are formulated to ensure that:

- i. County Longford possesses a clear policy framework which helps guarantee that its strategic and local convenience and comparison retailing needs are achieved;
- ii. The competitiveness of the county's main centres is protected and enhanced;
- iii. Existing or emerging issues within the county's retail profile can be adequately addressed by a coherent and easily implementable policy framework; and
- iv. The expenditure capacity potential for additional retail floorspace is harnessed over the life of the strategy and beyond.

The particulars of the policies and proposals are described under the three following policy categories:

Policy Category	Focus of Policy
Strategic Policies:	Policies related to the spatial distribution of centres, their role in the national and county retail hierarchies and the strategic aims of the County Retail Strategy.
General Policies:	Policies that establish planning principles which should be applied throughout the County Retail Hierarchy.
Specific Policies	Policies which address specific issues relating to the county's retail profile that need to be resolved.

7.7.1 Strategic Policies

The reviewed strategic policy of the County Retail Strategy and the actions required for their successful implementation are outlined below.

Strategic Policy 1:

Principal Town/County Town (Longford Town)

It is the policy of the Council to promote and encourage major enhancement of town centre activities within Longford to enable it to maintain its strategic role as defined in the Midlands RPGs.

In order to achieve this it will be necessary to build upon the strong services function of the town and encourage an increase in high-end high street comparison retailing in the core shopping area.

Strategic Policy 2:

Key Service Towns
(Granard, Edgeworthstown, Ballymahon)

It is Council policy to encourage the growth and development of retail floorspace and other town centre services/functions in Granard, Edgeworthstown and Ballymahon in order to support their transition into more self-sustaining centres within the county's settlement and retail hierarchies.

The Council will encourage the consolidation and increase of the retail functions of these centres to enable them to fulfil their important retail/services function within the county settlement/retail hierarchy; to realise their role as 'key service towns' under the provisions of the Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines; and help them to maintain their position within the hierarchy outlined in the Retail Planning Guidelines.

Strategic Policy 3:

Local Service Centres (Lanesboro, Drumlish, Newtownforbes)

It is the policy of the Council to consolidate, promote and encourage the provision of local scale retail development in these towns with a view to strengthening their position as local service centres.

These centres provide important local service functions which will be actively encouraged.

Strategic Policy 4:

(Keenagh, Carrickglass, Other Villages)

It is Council policy to assist and encourage small scale retail development throughout the villages of the county in recognition of their important role as rural centres in the county retail hierarchy.

Local level retail development in rural villages will be supported where this is consistent with their organic growth patterns and subject to the directions of the sequential approach.

7.7.2 General Policies

The general policies and the actions required for their successful implementation are outlined below.

General Policy 1:

Enhancement of towns and villages

It is the policy of the Council to encourage and facilitate the enhancement and environmental improvement of the county's towns and villages.

To facilitate this Longford Local Authority will;

- Prepare clear design guidelines for retail development in urban centres
- Assess the potential of new retail developments with regards to existing traffic congestion problems
- Promote and facilitate improvements in the public realm.

General Policy 2:

Innovation in retail

It is Council policy to promote innovation in the county's retail offer and attraction and to;

- Exploit the strategic inter-regional position of Longford Town and its role within the midlands region to encourage a wider range of high-end high street comparison retail functions to regenerate and reinvigorate the town core.
- Monitor emerging trends and innovations in the EU and US retail sectors. Seek the transposition of appropriate new retail operating methods and retailing types into the county.

General Policy 3:

Retailing in tourism and leisure

It is Council policy to build upon, promote and facilitate the expansion of retailing within the tourism and leisure sectors.

The Council will provide guidance and assistance where possible to appropriate tourist retail developments. The location of such developments will be subject to meeting the tests of the sequential approach and all other relevant planning criteria.

General Policy 4:

It is the policy of the Council to actively encourage and facilitate the re-use and regeneration of appropriately located derelict land and buildings for retail use.

In line with the sequential approach, the council will where possible encourage and facilitate the regeneration and re-use of derelict buildings and/or brownfield sites in appropriate areas. Only when suitable, available and viable brownfield land and/or derelict buildings cannot be found should alternative new build options be considered.

7.7.3 Specific Policies

The following specific policies required to address important issues identified are outlined below.

Specific Policy 1:

Improving comparison offer of Longford Town

It is the policy of the Council to facilitate the expansion of high-end high street comparison retailing in Longford Town.

The County Council and Town Council, will encourage high-end high street comparison retail operators to locate in Longford Town.

Specific Policy 2:

Resolving congestion in Longford Town

It is the policy of the Council to improve the retailing environment of Longford Town by facilitating a resolution to the centre's current traffic congestion problems.

In line with the provisions of Paragraphs 62 and 63 of the Retail Planning Guidelines and the sequential approach, it is recognised that not all core shopping areas possess sites that are suitable in terms of size, parking, traffic generation or servicing arrangements for large-scale developments in the town centre itself. In order to minimise the potential for adverse impact on the public realm, only new retail development which is of an appropriate size, scale and type to a town centre location will be permitted in Longford Town's core shopping area.

7.8 FRAMEWORK FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF FUTURE RETAIL DEVELOPMENTS

Longford Town is the commercial, retail and administrative centre of Longford County, and also acts as an inter-regional centre for Counties, Roscommon, Leitrim, Cavan and Westmeath. The town itself is a rapidly growing commercial and residential centre, offering a wide range of jobs, services and facilities. All of these activities require modern, easily accessible and appropriately located retail facilities. This retail strategy indicates the criteria under which proposals for new retail developments will be considered. The aim of the strategy is to provide Longford with modern retail facilities of the highest standards recognising its regional position.

It is intended that all proposed new retail developments are assessed against the criteria that are set out in this chapter.

7.8.1 Location and Design

Map 1 broadly indicates edge and out of centre locations based on existing compatible zonings within the relevant Development Plans for the Town and County. These designations apply on appropriately zoned land only.

In order to protect the viability and vitality of the town centre, it is proposed that the majority of normal retail activity be retained within or adjoining the commercial core (see **Map 1**). Where the required scale and design of the proposed development cannot be accommodated within this envelope, and where the proposal incorporates the principles of sustainable development, edge-of-centre¹ and out-of-centre sites will be considered on appropriately zoned land (see **Map 1**).

Information obtained over the course of the review of the Longford Town Development Plan and during pre-planning discussions with potential developers would indicate that there is a lack of suitable sites available for retail development within the town core. For

¹ Edge-of-centre is as defined in *Annex 1* of the retail planning guidelines - a location within easywalking distance of the primary retail area of a town centre with parking facilities serving the core area as well as the new development, thus enabling one trip to serve several purposes.

this reason, **edge-of-centre** sites, on appropriately zoned land, where in compliance with other relevant planning and environmental criteria, will generally be considered favorably for appropriately scaled retail developments.

Out-of-centre² sites will be considered on appropriately zoned land, only where it has been demonstrated, through a sequential study carried out as part of the application or planning permission and dealing with issues such as availability, accessibility, feasibility, viability and sustainability, that there are no suitable alternative sites within the commercial core area.

All applications for significant new retail development will be assessed against a range of planning criteria. However, what is significant will differ between Longford Town and other centres in the county. Thus, varying thresholds have been established which relate to the size, location and retail profile of the centres. Noting the characteristics of each centre and the general size of existing outlets, the following will be used as a guide:

- i. Longford Town: developments of or over 1,000 m² (gross) convenience and of or over 2,000 m² (gross) comparison should be tested by the criteria.
- ii. Other settlements: proposals of or over 500 m² (gross) convenience and comparison developments should be considered against the criteria.

The Retail Planning Guidelines criteria to be considered in the assessment of significant applications have been reviewed and additional criteria added. These criteria should include, but not necessarily be limited by, the following:

- There is demonstrable need for development;
- The size and nature of the development;
- Testing the proposal against the sequential approach;
- The quality of the design and layout;
- The potential effect on the adjacent environment;
- Proposed servicing arrangements;
- The impact on town and village centres, including cumulative impact;
- The baseline information and capacity/impact assessment is fit for purpose and transparent;

² Out-of-centre – a location which is clearly separate from the town centre but within the urban area, including the environs area as included in the Longford County Development Plan, 2003-2009.

- The expenditure capacity within the relevant catchment area, taking account of all extant planning permissions and development proposals/opportunities identified in development plans;
- The relationship of the application to any development plan allocation;
- Its role in improving the competitiveness of the county;
- Its contribution to site and/or area regeneration;
- The quality of access by all modes of transport and by foot and bicycle;
- Provision for car parking;
- Its role in sustaining rural communities;
- The Extent to which it is relevant to consider the imposition of restrictions on the range of goods permitted for sale; and,
- Any other relevant development plan policies and allocations.

New retail developments shall be designed to the highest standards in terms of architectural quality, materials used and layout. New developments will be required to make a positive contribution to the streetscape and the built fabric of the urban centre and its environs.

Vehicular circulation and pedestrian access, including access for the parents with children, elderly and disabled and the alleviation or avoidance of congestion shall be considered in terms of the location of any proposed new development. This will include layout of parking areas, location of accesses and consideration of existing or proposed public transport routes. Parking areas, service yards and entrances (subject to achievement of minimum required sightlines as per National Roads Authority standards) shall be landscaped to the highest standard, particularly when located on approaches to the commercial core area.

Pre-planning discussions are highly recommended in relation to large retail developments, regardless of location.

In accordance with the Retail Planning Guidelines, in such instances, it will not be mandatory for the applicant to provide supplementary supporting background studies. Nevertheless, the onus remains with an applicant to persuasively demonstrate that the proposal does conform closely to the development plan. Where there is doubt on any aspect of a planning application, the planning authority should require a comprehensive justification in respect of the matter that is questionable.

7.8.2 Development Types

7.8.2.1 Large Convenience Stores

The RPG's have set a 3000m² upper floorspace limit on food store development outside of the Greater Dublin area. This retail strategy will uphold this limit on applications for permission for individual developments in Longford Town and its environs, in terms of new development or extensions to existing schemes that will result in an aggregate increase in sales floorspace. Specifically, this limit will apply to:

- Total net retail sales space of superstores³
- Convenience goods net retail floorspace of hypermarkets⁴ (as defined within planning application documentation)

7.8.2.1 Specialist Development

This section deals with specific retail and leisure development proposals, which may influence the emphasis that is given to each of the criteria outlined in Section 7.8 in the assessment of new development.

(a) Regional Shopping Centres

Due to its rapid development in recent years and its location at a strategic point on national infrastructure, Longford has traditionally acted as an inter-regional centre for the surrounding Counties. In order to maintain the role of Longford Town as a driver of development in the North Midlands and to maintain its position within the national retailing hierarchy, the potential for Regional Shopping Facilities⁵ will be considered subject to the relevant planning criteria contained within this plan.

(b) District Shopping Centres

District shopping centres⁶ will be considered in the context of their location in town centre or edge-of-town locations. In addition to the assessment criteria included in Section 7.8, applicants will be required to illustrate the compatibility of their proposal with the County Development Plan and provide a comprehensive report outlining and addressing the issues contained in Section 7.8, including a demonstration of a deficiency

³ Superstores defined as single level, self service stores selling mainly food, or food and some non-food goods, usually with at least 2,500 m² net sales floorspace with dedicated surface level car-parking

⁴ Hypermarkets defined as single level, self-service stores selling both food and a range of comparison goods, with net floorspace in excess of 5,000 m² with dedicated surface level car-parking

⁵ Regional shopping centre defined as out-of-town malls generally of 50,000 gross retail floorspace or more, typically enclosing a wide range of clothing and other comparison goods with extensive dedicated car parking. These do not generally incorporate retail warehousing

⁶ District centre is defined as either a traditional or purpose built group of shops separate from the town centre and either located with the built-up urban area or in a suburban location on the edge of an urban area, usually containing at least one food supermarket/superstore and non-retail services such as banks, building societies and restaurants.

in the provision of particular floorspace types and an indication of the demand for the proposed additional floorspace.

(c) Large Convenience outlets

This description covers supermarkets, superstores, discount food stores⁷ and hypermarkets. An accepted component of the retail industry throughout the country, large convenience outlets are generally accompanied by substantial car-parking provisions due to the space requirements because of the weekly nature of many of the shopping trips they generate.

Large convenience outlets will be encouraged to locate within the town centre or edge of centre where this can be demonstrated as recognisably beneficial to the town core area, in order to provide universal accessibility and alleviate traffic congestion. In particular, edge of centre developments will need to be linked with substantial and appropriate redevelopment proposals for the town core area. Vehicular and pedestrian access and circulation provisions shall be dealt with as a matter of priority, in addition to the other criteria contained in the previous section.

(d) Retail Parks and Retail Warehouses

Retail warehouses⁸, due to their large retail floorspace requirements, the bulky nature of their goods and the consequent heavy requirement for car parking are generally located on the edge or outside of the built-up urban area.

Due to the specialist nature of these parks, it is not considered that their location outside of the commercial core will adversely impact on the vitality and viability of the town centre. Consideration will be given to retail parks on appropriately zoned land in the edge and out-of-centre locations as illustrated in Map 1, where goods sold are predominantly bulky goods that are difficult to accommodate within the town centre.

Applications will be subject to the criteria as outlined in Section 7.8. Grouping of units into retail park situations (up to a maximum total retail floorspace in the region of 8,000 m²) to facilitate sustainable transport patterns and reduce congestion in the town centre will be encouraged. However, proposals to increase cumulative retail floorspace in any single park in excess of 8,000m² must be accompanied by a detailed study illustrating the potential impact of the proposal on the town centre in accordance with the criteria as laid down in Section 7.8.

Individual retail warehousing units in out-of-centre locations will generally be subject to a minimum gross retail floorspace in the region of 700m². This is to prevent potential adverse impact on the vitality of the town centre. Maximum gross floorspace of individual units in such locations will be in the region of 6,000m² (this includes external display area, for example, ancillary garden centres). These minimum and maximum

⁷ Discount food stores are defined as single level, self-service stores normally between 1,000 and 1,500 m² of gross floorspace, selling a limited range of goods at competitive prices, often with adjacent carparking.

⁸ Retail warehouses are defined as large single-level stores specialising in the sale of bulky household goods such as furniture and electrical goods and bulky DIY items, catering mainly for car-borne customers and often in out-of-centre locations. Retail parks are defined as single developments consisting of at least three retail warehouses with associated car parking.

floorspace criteria apply to proposed new developments and extensions to or subdivisions of existing developments or those previously granted planning permission.

(e) Local Shops

Local shops located in neighbourhood centres are an important element of the retailing industry in the urban area. Primarily convenience outlets, local shops because of their proximity to large residential areas, provide a readily accessible service for basic goods, especially for the less mobile sectors of the community such as the elderly and disabled.

Where appropriate, local shops shall be recognised in the relevant Development Plan and provision made for the establishment of neighbourhood shops and services in the zoning of additional land for residential development.

7.9 CONTINUED MONITORING AND REVIEW

It is essential to ensure that:

- i. The Retail Strategy and its baseline information are kept as up to date as possible;
- ii. There are mechanisms in place to monitor progress in the implementation of policies; and,
- iii. There is a mechanism that can facilitate change which is responsive to emerging trends and opportunities.

The above can be achieved by establishing a framework for regular monitoring of expenditure and population forecasts.