

ERM Environmental Resources management Ireland Ltd (ERM) has been commissioned by Leitrim County Council to prepare a retail strategy for the county. This report is the *Draft Report* for the study. The aim of the strategy is to ensure that future retail and town and village development in the county is accommodated in a manner that is efficient, equitable and sustainable.

The strategy has been prepared in accordance with the *Retail Planning Guidelines for Local Authorities 2000* (the Retail Planning Guidelines).

1.1**METHODOLOGY**

The following methodology has been prepared through the implementation of a comprehensive and inclusive methodology including:

- A review of current local, regional and national policy;
- Consultation with Leitrim County Council, representatives of the Leitrim County Development Board, local Chambers of Commerce, County Enterprise Board and local development organisations;
- Consultation with local real estate agents;
- A survey of local shoppers and retailers;
- A review of current CSO Statistics for the county;
- A review of the county rates book; and
- A visual survey of retail provision and urban design issues in the county.

1.2**LOCAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL POLICY**

This strategy document has been informed by a number of key local, regional and national policies and strategy documents including:

- Retail Planning Guidelines for Local Authorities 2000;
- County Leitrim and Carrick-on-Shannon Development Plan;
- Ensuring the Future- A Strategy for Rural Development in Ireland 1999;
- County Leitrim Rural Transport Audit; and
- Appropriate research papers of the National Spatial Strategy.

Other documents and reports that have informed the strategy including:

- The Impact of the Draft Retail Planning Guidelines on the Retail Sector (2000).
- CAAS Environmental Services (various town assessments for the county).

1.3**STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT**

The remainder of the Strategy is divided into the following sections:

- **Chapter 2:** County Profile

- **Chapter 3:** Retail Activity in the County
- **Chapter 4:** Future Retail Growth Potential
- **Chapter 5:** Retail Hierarchy
- **Chapter 6:** The Viability of Retail Centres in County Leitrim
- **Chapter 7:** Viability and Vitality of Key Centres
- **Chapter 8:** Retail Catchments and Competing Retail Centres
- **Chapter 9:** Recommendations.

County Leitrim occupies an area of 1,876 square kilometres and is located in the north west of Ireland. It is bounded by County Donegal to the north, Counties Fermanagh and Cavan to the East, Counties Longford and Roscommon to the South and South West, and County Sligo to the West. As such, the county lies on the border of the Republic and Northern Ireland, and is part of the Border Region.

Leitrim is one of the smaller counties in Ireland, and is the smallest of the six counties in the Border Region, with a population of around 26,000 people. It is seen in the national context as the county that has sustained the most significant population decline and yet holds a level in quality of life that is unsurpassable on the Island.

The county is divided into 5 rural districts:

- Ballinamore;
- Carrick-on-Shannon;
- Kinlough;
- Manorhamilton; and
- Mohill.

The largest of these districts, Carrick-on-Shannon, has a population of approximately 6,000 people and is the centre for administration and recreation within the county. The town has experienced significant growth and has the potential to be a local gateway with regard to the National Development Plan and the BMW Operational Programme.

2.1

POPULATION PROFILE AND PROJECTIONS

The size and structure of the population will influence the existing range and quality of retail provision in the county and future demand for new retail development.

Over much of the last century, the population of Leitrim has been in decline. At the time of the 1996 Census of Population, the county had a population of 25,057 people, reflecting a 60.5% population decline in the seventy year period from 1926 and a decline of 7.6% in the period from 1986 to 1996. In contrast, the state experienced a population increase of 2.4% over the period from 1986 to 1996.

The population decline in Leitrim can be primarily attributed to migration from the county, however since 1986, the population has also been in natural decline (deaths have exceeded births).

The largest population decreases have been experienced in the north east of the county and in central locations, which are located the greatest distance from large urban and employment centres, while population increases were

most evident in the larger towns, particularly in areas close to significant urban, employment and commercial centres of Sligo, Cavan and Longford.

2.1.1 *Population Profile*

An analysis of the population profile for County Leitrim indicates that:

- The county has an aging population.
- The proportion of residents in the 'productive' age group of 20 to 39 in the county is 22.9%, significantly below that for the state, which is 29.5%. This indicates a high rate of outward migration of residents after they reach the age of 19.
- The number of males exceeds the number of females in every age group, and the county as a whole has a 52:48 male to female ratio. This is usually indicative of a declining, largely rural population.

2.1.2 *Population Projections*

Future population growth in the county will have a significant impact on the demand for retail and on the type of retail development that is suitable for the county.

The Central Statistics Office has released regional population projections for 2001 to 2031. These include population projections for the Boarder Region, however projections are not provided at a county level. It is projected that the population of the Border region will increase by 4.7% over the period from 1996 to 2031. This represents a growth rate of 0.13% per annum, primarily resulting from natural increases (births exceeding deaths). Applying these figures to Leitrim it can be estimated that the current population of the county is approximately 25,252 people and that, by 2031 the population will have increased to approximately 26,235 people.

Alternatively, projections prepared by the Department of the Environment based on trends in housing completions and household size, estimate that the population of County Leitrim will reach 33,000 by 2006, representing an increase of 32% over a 10 year period, or 3.2% growth per annum ⁽¹⁾.

In reality, population growth is likely to be somewhere between these two projections.

2.2 *SETTLEMENT SIZE*

The size and growth of settlements in the county will have a considerable impact on the type, range, size and quality of retail and commercial development. The size of settlements in County Leitrim currently ranges from

(1) Leitrim Housing Strategy, Strategic Planning Alliance, 2001

143 people in Drumsna, to 1868 people in Carrick-on-Shannon. Two settlements in the county, Carrick-on-Shannon and Roosky, straddle the county between Leitrim and Roscommon.

The population, and recent population change of settlements in the county is outlined below.

Table 2.1 *Population Changes - Settlements*

Town	Number of Persons		Percentage Change		
	1986	1991	1996	1986-1991	1991-1996
Carrick-on-Shannon	1984	1858	1868	-6.4	0.5
Manorhamilton	1031	995	1008	-3.5	1.3
Mohill	930	796	808	-14.4	1.5
Ballinamore	810	743	782	-8.3	5.2
Drumshanbo	595	588	634	-1.2	7.78
Dromahaire	353	329	346	-6.8	0.2
Kinlough	255	305	286	19.6	-6.2
Drumkeerin	238	244	220	2.5	-9.8
Carrigallan	278	243	251	-12.6	3.3

Source: CSO Census of Population 1996

It is expected that growth will predominately occur in larger towns in the county, particularly Carrick-on-Shannon and in areas that are located close to larger centres outside the county borders, most notably Sligo, Longford and Cavan.

2.3 *EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE*

At the time of the 1996 Census of Population, approximately 51% of Leitrim's population aged over 15 years were in the labour force. This is significantly below the national average of 55.4%.

A very high 23% of Leitrim's population is employed in agriculture, in comparison to 10 % for the state. In contrast, the county has a much lower proportion of people working in other sectors, including manufacturing, commerce, finance, professional services and transport than other areas in the state.

Growth in the county's industrial and manufacturing sector has been stagnant in recent years. The county has experienced a contraction in its textile sector and job losses in the 'food processing', 'electrical and optical production' and 'transport equipment manufacturing'. These were offset by large scale job creation in the 'wood and wood products' sector, 'rubber and plastic products', 'basic metals and metal products' and 'machinery and equipment'.

Despite this, employment in the other sectors (other than agriculture) experienced significant growth over the 1991 to 1996 period, broadly in line with national growth.

Unemployment remains, however a significant problem in the county. At the time of the 1996 Census, the overall unemployment rate was 11%, however this varied significantly across different areas. In some areas, unemployment rates were as high as 20 to 30%. In general, these high unemployment rates were in north Leitrim and in a central band north of Ballinamore. The county also has a low proportion of residents with third level and technological qualifications.

As such, Leitrim has a relatively low overall socio-economic profile. Concentrations of different socio-economic groups are evident in different areas of the county. People in higher socio-economic groups are primarily located in the bigger settlements, while the proportions of farmers are highest in rural areas of the county.

2.3.1 *Incomes*

Total household income in County Leitrim was an estimated €345 million in 1999 and there were approximately 9,112 households in the county. As such, total income per household was an estimated €37,862 per annum. Disposable household income in the county was an estimated €31,497 per household in 1999 ⁽¹⁾.

Total and disposable income figures for Leitrim are significantly below regional and state averages, however they are well above figures for the neighbouring counties of Donegal and Cavan. In addition, while it is evident that disposable incomes in the county have risen significantly in recent years (by approximately 43% from 1995 to 1999) the county's position in comparison to the state has fallen (from 88.4% to 86.3% from 1996 to 1999).

(1) CSO Household Income in Ireland 1999-2000

The establishment of accurate, up to date baseline information on retail activities in the county is a key requirement in developing a retail strategy. This provides the basis for assessing existing retail, forecasting future retail requirements and monitoring to ensure the strategy remains relevant over time.

3.1 RETAIL EXPENDITURE

The total retail expenditure of residents of County Leitrim has been estimated using statistics from the CSO Household Budget Survey 1999 – 2000 and household income statistics for the county.

As previously outlined, disposable household income in the county was an estimated €31,497 per household in 1999. This equates to a weekly household disposable income of €605.

The CSO Household Budget Survey 1999 – 2000 provides a breakdown of household expenditure in the state. The majority of households in County Leitrim are classified as rural in the survey – they are located outside the boundaries of a town with a population of 1,000 people or more. As such, for the purpose of estimating retail expenditure in County Leitrim, statistics have been applied from the ‘All Rural Households’ category of the survey (incorporating farming, and rural non-farming households).

The average weekly expenditure of rural households across the state was an estimated €515.75 in 1999-2000. For the purpose of this strategy, an assumption has been made that this figure is applicable to County Leitrim. It is therefore estimated that households in Leitrim spent a combined total of approximately €4,699,514 per week on retail commodities in 1999-2000.

3.1.1 Expenditure on different commodity types

The CSO Household Budget Survey 1999 – 2000 also provides information on the types of commodities on which rural households spend their income. This is outlined in *Table 3.1*.

Table 3.1 *Average weekly household expenditure for rural, non-farm households and estimated household expenditure for County Leitrim*

Commodity Group	Expenditure €	% Expenditure	Estimated weekly expenditure for County Leitrim
Food	€118	22.83%	€1,075,216
Alcoholic drink and tobacco	€36	6.9%	€328,032
Clothing and footwear	€31	5.9%	€282,472
Fuel and light	€23	4.5%	€209,576

Commodity Group	Expenditure €	% Expenditure	Estimated weekly expenditure for County Leitrim
Housing	€38	7.3%	€346,256
Household durable goods	€23	4.38%	€209,576
Miscellaneous goods	€16	3.1%	€145,792
Transport	€99	19.19%	€902,088
Services & other expenditure	€120	23.30%	€1,093,440
Other (not specified)	€10.75	2.08%	€97,954
Total	€515.75	100%	€4,690,402

As indicated in *Table 3.1*, expenditure on food products accounts for an estimated 23% of all retail expenditure of rural, non-farm households, followed by expenditure on services and other 23%, transport 19.19%, housing 7.3%, alcoholic drinks and tobacco 6.9% and clothing 5.9%.

However, this does not reflect total retail turnover in the county, as the estimate does not account for household spending outside the county boundaries, and does not incorporate the share of total turnover contributed by visitors.

3.2 RETAIL AND CUSTOMER SURVEYS

In order to gain some appreciation of spending patterns in the county, customer and retail surveys have been undertaken. The objectives of the survey were to indicate:

- where households conduct their food and non-food shopping;
- the mode of transport used and frequency of trips; and
- inflows of tourist/visitor expenditure.

Street surveys were undertaken on the Friday 5th and Saturday 6th of April 2002 in Carrick-on-Shannon. Retailer interviews were also undertaken on these dates.

The surveys found that:

- Carrick-on-Shannon is the main shopping, tourist and employment destination in the county. It dominates comparison retailing in the county and enjoys significant tourist/visitor patronage.
- Sligo and Longford are the most popular shopping destinations outside the county for Leitrim households and the majority of shoppers travel to either of these centres to undertake higher order comparison shopping and, significantly, to undertake weekly food shopping.
- Almost all shoppers travel to Carrick-on-Shannon and other retail centres by car. Frequency of trips varies according to distance travelled. People who live within the town and its immediate surrounds are likely to travel

into town more than 3 times per week. People living elsewhere in the county, travel to Carrick-on-Shannon 1-2 times per week. The majority of shoppers in Carrick indicated that they live between 1 and 15 miles of the town. On weekdays, a significant number of shoppers are people who work or go to school in Carrick.

- Tourist and visitor spending make up a significant proportion of retail turnover in the town. A number of retailers indicated that they rely to some degree on tourist spending include books, gift, art and craft retail, specialty shops (such as fishing and bike hire) and some food retailers.

3.3 *ACTIVITY IN THE COMMERCIAL AND RETAIL SECTORS*

Two methodologies have been implemented to determine activity in the retail sector in County Leitrim. Information was gathered from the county rates book on the number and value of retail and commercial properties in the county, and a visual survey of retail in the county has been undertaken.

3.3.1 *Rateable properties*

The level of activity in the commercial and retail sectors can be assessed by identifying the number of ratepayers in an area. This assessment indicates that the highest levels of commercial and retail activity are found in and around the biggest towns in the county, particularly Carrick-on-Shannon, Manorhamilton, Mohill and Ballinamore.

Commercial activity in the county has significantly increased in recent years. In the period from 1995 to 2001, the rateable valuation of commercial properties in Leitrim has risen from €22,885.17 to €35,598.85, an increase of approximately 55%. This reflects an annual growth rate for the county of approximately 7%, while the state has experienced an average increase of 8% per annum ⁽¹⁾.

There has also been an increase in the number of planning applications for commercial and retail development received by Council, with significant applications received for retail development in Carrick-on-Shannon, including retail units recently developed adjacent the Landmark Hotel, and proposed retail development in an existing vacant site located between the Bush Hotel and the Landmark Hotel. In other centres, recent applications have been received for small convenience and local comparative shops.

This indicates that current activity in the retail sector has been relatively high in the county, with a particular concentration in Carrick-on-Shannon.

(1) Leitrim County Development Board, Profile of Cultural, Economic and Social Development in the County, 2001

3.3.2 *Retail floorspace*

The last census of total commercial and retail floorspace in Ireland was the CSO Census of Service, undertaken in 1988.

At this time there were 361 retail outlets in County Leitrim. Of these, 31% were groceries and 31% were public houses and off licenses, (5 were filling stations, motor vehicle or motor cycle outlets, 7.5% clothing stores and footwear, 7% other food and 5% tobacco, sweets and newspapers. The majority of businesses were owner operated and employed 789 people. At this time, the total turnover of retail outlets in the county was identified as being approximately £29,221 (€37,110).

There were 55 retail outlets in Carrick-on-Shannon in 1988, and 33 outlets in Manorhamilton town. Food shops and public house/off licenses made up the majority of these premises.

3.3.3 *Visual Survey*

A visual survey was undertaken of retail in County Leitrim. The survey identified a total of retail and services premises in the county (including, pubs, banks, post offices and real estate) and assessed the quality of retail available. Results were recorded by location (town or village) and by retail category. Results of the visual survey are presented in *Table 3.2*.

The survey indicated that convenience retail, including shops selling food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages and non-durable household goods make up the majority of retail outlets in the county, followed by lower order convenience goods such as clothing, shoes, books, newspapers and magazines and medical and pharmaceutical products. This is consistent with retail expenditure figures, which indicate that spending on these types of goods makes up at least 36% of weekly household expenditure in rural areas.

3.3.4 *Rate book*

A review of the County rate book was undertaken to identify any anomalies in the visual survey data and identify any additional shops not counted. This information has been fed into the visual survey assessment.

3.4 *ACTIVITY IN THE RETAIL SECTOR 1988 - 2002*

In comparing the 1988 Census of Services data with current retail provision, growth in the retail sector over the last decade has been exceptional in many areas of the county. Total growth in retail outlets has been in the order of 20 - 25%. However the key growth centre in the county has been Carrick-on-Shannon, where retail provision has increased 95%. In contrast, the number of retail outlets in Manorhamilton has not changed. Food stores and public houses/off licenses remain the most common stores in the county, however there is increased provision of comparison retail, particularly in Carrick.

Table 3.2 Overview of retail provision identified in visual survey

Town	Local Store	Local Super market	Petrol Filling Station	Butcher	News agent	Pharmacy	Off License	Clothing/ & Shoes	Gift Shop	Specialty Shops & Services	Pub/ Bar	Hotel	Take Away Food	Restaurant & cafe	Post Office	Bank	Real Estate
Carrick-on-Shannon	2	4	2	5	2	2	2	16	12	24	14	2	2	9	1	4	4
Agamore	1										1				1		
Aughavas	1										1				1		
Ballinamore	3	2	4	4		2	1	2	3	11	14		2	3	1	3	2
Carrigallon	1	1	1	1				1		2	6		1	6	1	2	2
Cloone	2									1	3				1		
Crossroads	1		1														
Dowra	1	2	1	1					1		4			1	1	1	
Dromahair	1	1		1	1			1			2		1	1	1		
Dromod					1					1					1		
Drumkeeran				3						1	5			1	1	1	
Drumshanbo	1	3	2	1		1	1	3		7	11		2	3	1	2	
Drumsna	2		1							1	3				1		
Fenagh	1										2				1		
Glenfarne			1								2				1		
Jamestown											1						
Keshcarrigan	1	3								1	3			2	1		
Killarga	1										1				1		
Kinlough		1	1	1					1	2	4				1		
Kinlough		1	1	1					1	1	4				1		
Kityclogher				1						1	2				1		
Leitrim	1		1							1	5		1	1	1		
Lurganboy											1						
Manorhamilton	1	3	1	3		1		2	2	1	12				1	4	2
Mohill	2	2	5	3		1		3	3	7	11			5	1	3	2
Newtowngore	2	1									4			1	1		
Roosky	2		1								2						
Rossinver											1				1		
Tullaghan											2		1		1		

The future growth of retail in County Leitrim will be influenced by a range of factors, including population growth and growth in the economy, however it will also be substantially influenced by changes in lifestyle and shopper behaviour.

4.1**RETAIL EXPENDITURE AND RETAIL CHANGE IN IRELAND**

Retail expenditure in Ireland has substantially increased in recent years. In 1997, the Irish retail sector comprised 33,000 enterprises, earning a total turnover of €22.7 million¹. Turnover within the sector more than doubled between 1988 and 1997, while the number of retail enterprises grew by 4% in this period. It is therefore evident that growth in demand has been exceptional ⁽²⁾.

The types and structure of retail in Ireland has also significantly altered over the last ten years. There has been a large reduction in grocery shops, which has been offset by large increases in the number of shops providing personal services, recorded in the 'other' retail outlets category.

Larger retailers are now more the norm and there has been a substantial increase in the number of international retailers entering the Irish market. In addition, different retail types have emerged, such as petrol forecourt retailing, retail parks and larger specialist stores. Out of town and edge of town locations have increased in importance due to rising car ownership and increasing congestion.

Three key reasons have been identified for recent growth in retail demand:

- unprecedented growth in the domestic economy;
- a demographic structure which favours retail spending (high percentage of population in working age cohort); and
- lifestyle changes that have increased demand for a wide range of retail products, including consumers demand for a greater range of prepared consumer foods, increased importance of the quality of the shopper environment, increased car ownership and consumer mobility.

4.2**IMPACTS ON RETAIL EXPENDITURE PATTERNS AND GROWTH IN COUNTY LEITRIM**

Retail and retail expenditure trends evident for the state as a whole are evident in County Leitrim, although to a lesser extreme.

(1) ¹ CSO Annual Services Enquiry 1997

(2) The Impact of the Draft Retail Planning Guidelines on the Retail Sector, Report submitted to the Tanaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment and to the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, 2000

Retail expenditure in County Leitrim is estimated to have substantially increased in recent years, consistent with increases in disposable income and this is reflected in the increased rateable value of commercial and retail property in the county. Changes in spending on different commodities have also occurred, albeit to a lesser extent than experienced in urban areas.

The CSO Household Budget Survey 1999 – 2000 indicates that changes in retail spending have been most pronounced in urban areas. People in rural areas continue to spend the largest proportion of their income on convenience goods, such as food and groceries, while this proportion of spending has substantially decreased in urban areas.

It is clear however that household expenditure on comparative goods and has increased, as has expenditure on luxury goods and services such as entertainment (restaurants and cinema etc) and travel. This is reflected in recent growth in the number and variety of these types of services, such as new restaurants, specialty food stores and comparison stores in Carrick-on-Shannon.

However, retail in County Leitrim is small scale, and has been substantially affected by increased car ownership and mobility and the development of larger shopping centres, supermarkets and ‘superstores’ in larger towns and urban areas. As indicated through shopper surveys, an increasing number of shoppers are willing and able to travel significant distances to shop in larger centres such as Sligo and Longford, particularly when shopping for comparison goods. This is largely due to a desire for greater variety of goods as well as the desire to drive to the centre and obtain a parking space within a convenient distance.

4.2.1 *Opportunities for retail growth in the county*

Retail growth in County Leitrim will continue to occur though population growth and growth in the economy. There are however a number of opportunities available to offset the impact of larger centres and ensure the county derives maximum benefit from economic growth and changing lifestyle and expenditure patterns through real retail turnover growth. These include:

- Providing a shopper environment of the highest quality.
- Increasing tourism in the county and attracting increased tourist expenditure.
- Providing convenient access to high quality convenience stores.
- Improving parking provision and reducing traffic congestion.
- Ensuring new retail development is located within existing retail cores.
- Developing new employment and education opportunities within or close to existing town centres.

There is also a need for careful planning to ensure that demands for new retail development are met (including the potential future development of larger

retail outlets) while ensuring that the character, vitality and viability of existing towns and villages is maintained.

4.2.2 *Floorspace requirements*

A key function of retail planning in Leitrim in the future will be ensuring that new retail development in the county is of an appropriate size and variety to meet consumer needs and increase the competitiveness of centres, while maintaining the historical character of towns and villages.

While there are no current floorspace figures available for individual shops in the county, it is estimated that approximately 90% or more of existing retail floorspace in the county is under 150 – 200m². This is consistent with traditional shops sizes around Ireland. The key exceptions to this are likely to be foodstores operated by symbol groups (such as Supa Value and Centra) and other once off comparative stores (such as furniture stores or large garden centres).

Research in Ireland has shown that 97% of independent foodstores and 35% of symbol groups are less than 186 m² in size. An additional 53% of symbol group retail outlets have a floorspace of less than 1,000 m².

In contrast, 88% of multiple retailer stores, such as Tesco or Dunnes (which are not currently present in the county) have a retail floorspace of 900 m² or over, with 42% having a floorspace of between 1,858 and 3,000 m². Development of this kind could provide benefit to local retail if located within a town centre by acting as a magnet store and reducing the number of people who travel outside the county to shop, however it could also have a serious and detrimental impact on existing retail in the county, particularly if it is located outside an established retail core.

Similarly, trends in Ireland and around the world show a consistent increase in average shop sizes, with for example, average 'high street' shops sizes in the United Kingdom increasing from approximately 110 m² to 250 to 300 m².⁽¹⁾

While these trends reflect consumer demand, there is a need to develop general guidelines to ensure that there is continued variety in shops sizes, and that appropriate shops are developed for different locations in the county in order to maintain competition, ensure the best possible provision of services to the local community, conserve the amenity and increase the vitality and viability of traditional town and village centres.

However, controls on shop sizes should not be *too* restrictive for a number of reasons:

(1) Frank Knight Retail Review, Winter 1999 Edition

- Maintaining a variety of shop sizes is important for the continued vibrancy of retail areas, and have a variety of different small retailers is reflective of the historical character of towns and villages in Leitrim.
- Floorspace requirements differ according to use.
- Floorspace restrictions could result in increased costs for retailers, and ultimately, increased prices for consumers by impacting on the efficiency and productivity.

The Retail Planning Guidelines imposes a floorspace cap of 3,000 m² on new retail development outside the Dublin metropolitan area.

4.2.3

Tax Incentives: The rural renewal scheme

The rural renewal scheme represents an exceptional opportunity to encourage new retail development in County Leitrim. The scheme was introduced in 1998 with the aim of regenerating parts of the Upper Shannon region. The scheme provides tax incentives for the construction of new buildings and the refurbishment of older buildings and includes commercial, industrial and residential development.

This chapter identifies the existing hierarchy of retail activities in County Leitrim. The retail hierarchy provides an indication of the role and size of town centres and reflects the settlement patterns of the county.

5.1 RETAIL HIERARCHY IN IRELAND

The retail hierarchy for the county is based on the retail hierarchy for Ireland outlined in the Retail Planning Guidelines. This hierarchy identifies five tiers of retail centre in Ireland. The tiers provide an indication of the specific functions provided by different retail centres. An overview of the retail hierarchy in Ireland is provided in *Table 4.1*.

Table 5.1 *Retail hierarchy in Ireland*

Retail Tier	Retail Centre
Tier 1	<p>Metropolitan Dublin, which contains a little over 30% of the population of Ireland, but accounts for 41% of all comparison turnover and 31% of all convenience turnover.</p> <p>As well as providing the broadest range of comparison good shopping, it supplies retail functions of a specialist nature not found elsewhere in the state.</p>
Tier 2	<p>Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford, with a combined urban population accounting for 10% of the state, and accounting for 19% of comparison turnover between them, and 15% of convenience turnover. Together with Dublin, these centres provide a range of high-order comparison shopping which is largely unmatched elsewhere in Ireland.</p>
Tier 3	<p>This tier cannot be defined precisely, but includes Athlone, Carlow, Castlebar, Clonmel, Drogheda, Ennis, Kilkenny, Letterkenny, Monaghan, Mullingar, Newbridge, Portlaoise, Tralee, Tullamore and Wexford. The combined populations of these towns amounts to 6% of the state and they account for a further 18% of comparison turnover.</p> <p>There are a further group of towns which may also be regarded as third tier shopping locations, albeit to a more limited extent. These contain convenience goods outlets on a par with settlements listed above. Most have national supermarket chain representation. Examples are Arklow, Athy, Ballina, Cavan, Dungarvan, Enniscorthy, Killarney, Longford, Mallow, Midleton, Naas, Navan, Nenagh, New Ross, Sligo, Swords and Thurles. These centres are of particular importance in the less densely settled areas of the state, where they provide urban anchors for a rural economy which is undergoing rapid change.</p>

Retail Tier	Retail Centre
Tier 4	The fourth tier comprises a large number of small towns in the 1,500 to 5,000 population category. There are some 75 in all, comprising 6% of the state population, most of which provide basic convenience shopping, either in small supermarkets or convenience shops and in some cases, lower order comparative shopping, such as hardware pharmaceutical products and clothes.
Tier 5	Local level shopping, provided by corner shops in suburban areas and village stores and post-offices. The village shop and post office is recognised as having particular importance in supporting social and economic life in remoter rural areas.

There are no towns in County Leitrim that fall within tiers 1, 2 or 3 of the retail hierarchy for Ireland. Carrick-on-Shannon has a population of approximately 1,900 people and falls into Tier 4 of the hierarchy, while all other towns have a population of under 1,000 people and lie below Tier 4.

5.2

RETAIL HIERARCHY FOR RURAL AREAS AND COUNTY LEITRIM

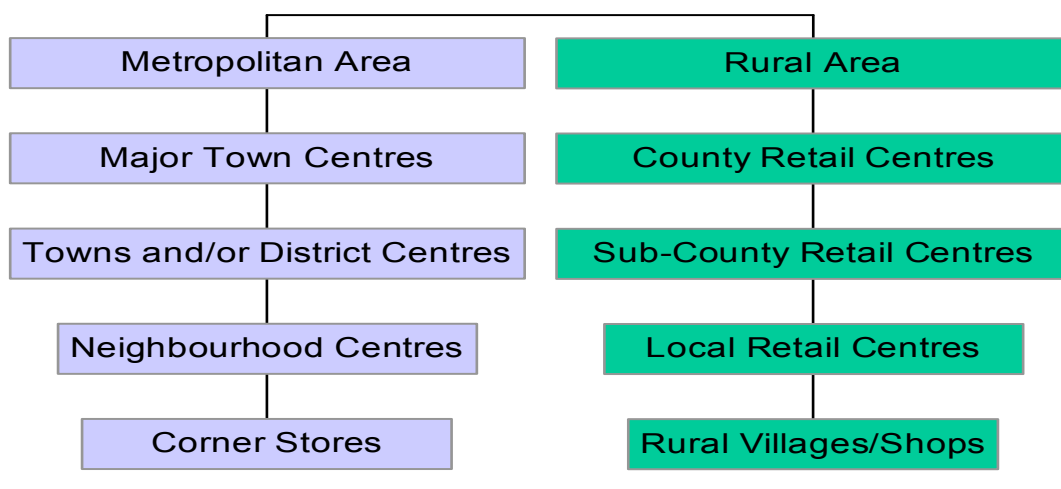
County Leitrim is a rural county. There are a number of clear distinctions between retail hierarchies when applied to metropolitan and rural areas.

As is evident from the visual retail survey (see *Table 3.2*) retail centres in Leitrim are small, predominately catering for local convenience and lower order comparative retail and serve local catchments - there are no major multinational chain stores, such as large supermarkets in County Leitrim. Carrick-on-Shannon enjoys a high market penetration within the local authority area, but limited trade draw from neighbouring counties.

Figure 5.1 provides a comparison of the retail hierarchy found in rural areas, such as County Leitrim, in comparison to metropolitan hierarchies.

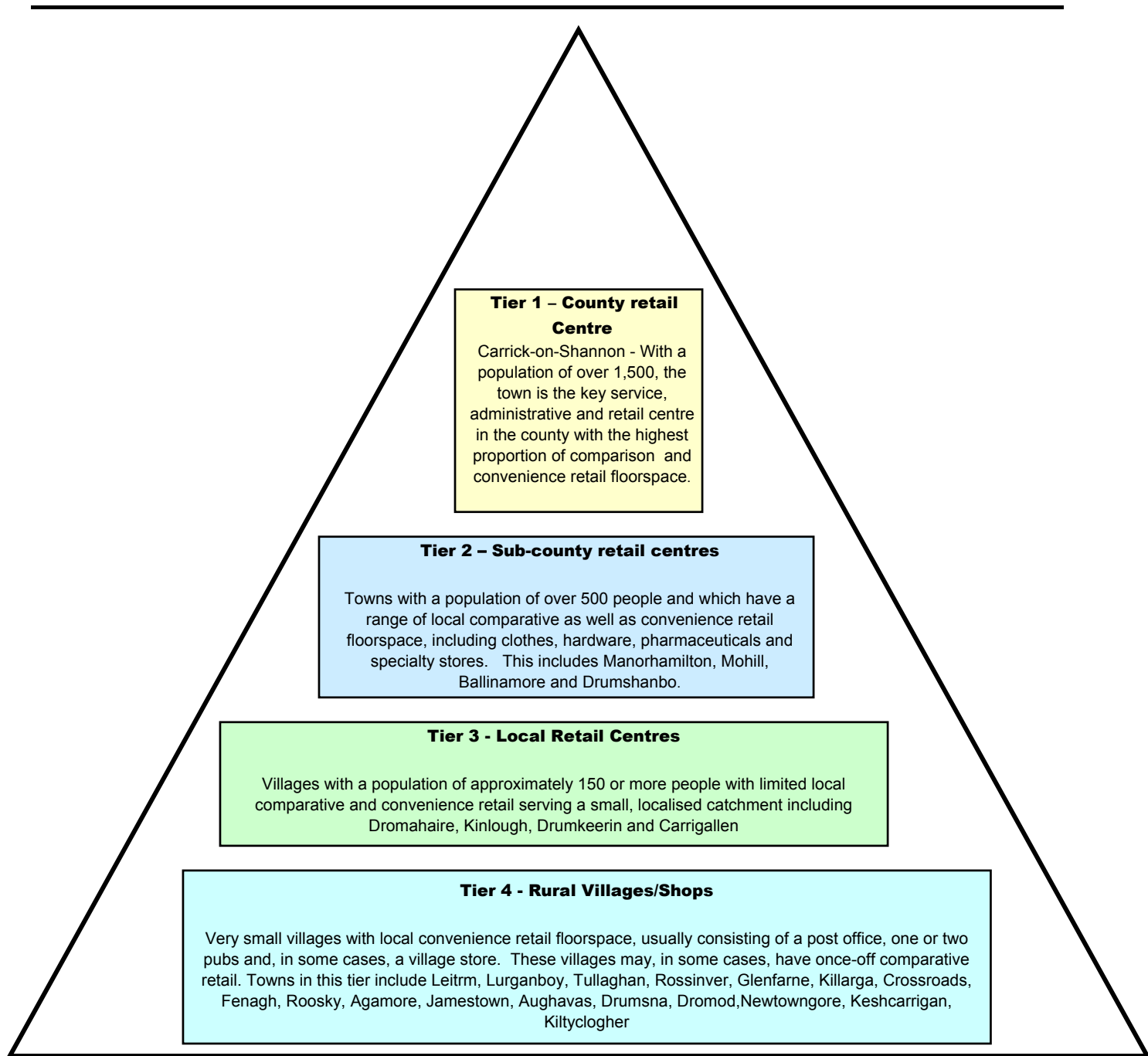
Box 5.1

Retail Hierarchy - Comparison between metropolitan and rural areas



As such, in developing a retail hierarchy for County Leitrim, tiers of local level shopping have been identified which are applicable to rural areas and the scale and types of settlements in the county. Towns have been classified into four different retail tiers according to population and the number, range and type of retail provided in the town. These tiers, and the towns identified as being within them are outlined in *Figure 5.2*.

It is the clear objective of national policy to support the continuing role of town centres. The pattern of the hierarchy in the county should, in general, be maintained and enhanced through planning policy. This should occur by encouraging development in existing, traditional centres. However, some retail formats may have difficulty conforming with a formal retail hierarchy. This type of retail development should not be prejudiced because they do not fit, instead, there is a need for planning policy to acknowledge the relevance of non-conforming retail and identify conditions under which it is acceptable.




The following map provides a visual illustration of the location of town and village centres in the county and their classification on the retail hierarchy. Any towns too small to be indicated on the map fall into *Tier 4* of the hierarchy.

Map 4.1 - County Leitrim Retail Hierarchy



Legend

County Retail Centre - Carrick-on-Shannon 
 Sub-County Retail Centres - 

Local Retail Centres - 
 Rural Villages/Shops - 

The vitality and viability of town centres are key factors influencing opportunities for continued growth and development. This chapter provides an assessment of town centres in County Leitrim against key indicators influence a centre's viability and vitality including attractions, accessibility, amenity and action.

6.1***ATTRACTIONS***

Retail activity in County Leitrim is focused in village and town centres. As outlined in the Retail Planning Guidelines, town centres are the focus for a range of commercial and community activities, resulting in a mix of, often interdependent, land uses that contribute to a sense of place and identity. They include a combination of natural features: historic buildings, cultural, civic and governmental buildings as well as public spaces. This mix of use and functions make town centres different and give them greater character than shopping centres.

Attractions in retail or town centres include the types and variety of activities undertaken in the centre and the amount of space that is in use for different functions, such as offices, shopping, tourism, leisure, cultural and entertainment activities, pubs, cafes and restaurants, hotels, education and housing, and the ways in which the balance of activities has been changing.

6.1.1***Retail Attractions***

Retail activities in the county are primarily local convenience, with some small scale, local comparative activities located in the larger centres, particularly Carrick-on-Shannon. The most common types of local comparative retail are local clothing and shoe stores pharmacies and speciality goods, for example furniture, homewares and gifts, electrical goods, tiles and hardware (see *Table 3.2*). The retail centres typically attract people from a local catchment, with very little draw from neighbouring settlements or counties.

6.1.2***Vitality and viability of shops in small towns and rural areas***

Small towns and villages in the county are now less self-sufficient than they were 20 or 30 years ago. Today, there is an increasing dependence on larger centres for the provision of goods and services as well as for employment. As a result, some smaller towns may have lost or be in danger of losing many of the functions previously found within them, including retail functions. This process is cumulative. The closure of a single outlet may represent a general decline in local business in rural areas. This reduces local self-sufficiency and forces people living in rural areas to increasingly rely on urban centres for goods and services.

Post offices/local shops, foodstores and supermarkets often play a vital role in maintaining shopping in smaller rural town centres and assist in anchoring the surrounding rural economy. There is a clear national government policy objective to support the role of town centres. As such, local planning policies should be supportive of local facilities in small towns that provide an effective and valuable service to the local community. There is a need to ensure that such centres provide not only for food, but also some comparison shopping.

The range of goods and services provided in the majority of centres in Leitrim is, in the most part, appropriate to meet daily, convenience local shopping needs. However, as outlined previously, there is a significant amount of travel to larger centres in the region for weekly and comparison shopping trips (to visit large supermarkets and department stores in particular) and for higher order comparison shopping. This pattern is likely to continue, as retail centres in County Leitrim will not be able to compete with the larger centres for many of these types of goods.

However, as outlined in Chapter 4, there are significant opportunities to take capitalise on economic growth and changes in retail spending patterns to increase retail attractions in town centres, develop niche retail markets and upgrade and improve town centres to make them more accessible and more enjoyable places to visit and shop. This will, in turn, increase the vitality and viability of the centre.

At present, key problems that need to be tackled in regards to retail attractions in the county include the quality of shops (in terms of the quality and age of stock and the layout and upkeep of shop exteriors and interiors). Vacant, run down, semi-derelict and derelict shops and buildings located in the town centre have also been identified as a problem in the county, particularly in Manorhamilton, Mohill and Drumkeerin.



Photo 6.1 and 6.2 - Examples of run-down shop fronts and buildings in the retail core of Carrick-on-Shannon (left) and Manorhamilton (right).

6.1.3

Maintaining a consolidated retail core

Ensuring the maintenance of a consolidated retail core is of importance in retail development in towns of all sizes, but is of particular significance in small towns and villages.

The provision of out-of-centre retail development should not be allowed as it is likely to lead to a reduction in the range of local facilities, affect the diversity of shops or lead to the loss of general food retailing from the centre of smaller towns. It also considerably reduces opportunities for transport accessibility and therefore, sustainability and is in conflict with national policy to support town centre development.

As such, the scope for superstore or other large scale retail developments is limited in small rural towns and there is a need for planning policy to limit the size of stores consistent with maintaining a variety of shops in the area and protecting rural retail provision. However, it is important that actions that would inhibit competition in the retail market are avoided.

Retail should generally be directed to existing settlements and development in the countryside should be restricted. Retail facilities outside the development limits of settlements and beyond green belts could be acceptable in the following circumstances:

- A shop that is ancillary to activities arising from farm diversification.
- A shop designed to serve tourist or recreational facilities, and secondary to the main use.
- A small scale shop attached to an existing or approved craft workshop retailing the product direct to the public.
- A small scale shop designed to serve a dispersed rural community.

Retail development in some towns in County Leitrim has become dispersed with 'ribbon' development along approach roads and, as a result, the towns lack a central retail 'hub' or focus. This is evident in settlements such as Leitrim, Drumshanbo and Manorhamilton (to a small extent). Policies need to be put in place to ensure that this is avoided and where possible, improved in the future.

6.1.4

Petrol filling stations

In petrol forecourt retailing, there is a trend towards alliances being formed between supermarket operators and oil companies, which has resulted in the development of new filling station convenience store formats targeted at local residents as well as motorists. There is a need to ensure that this is limited to avoid weakening the structure of town centres.

Petrol filling stations in County Leitrim are predominately on the periphery of larger towns. A number of these incorporate convenience shops. It is imperative that the development of petrol forecourt retail floorspace is limited

in order to protect existing local retailers and conserve the function of town centres. The Retail Planning Guidelines for Ireland propose a floorspace limit of 100m² on petrol forecourt retailing.

6.1.5 *Village Stores and Post Offices*

Village and post offices play a vital role in rural areas of County Leitrim by providing essential day-to-day needs of local people, particularly the elderly, disabled, and people without access to a car, or who are poorly served by public transport. The loss of such shops can have a dire effect on the community.



Photo 6.3 – Public bar and car park at Newtowngore

A large proportion of towns in the county are very small, with retail being limited to a local post office/shop and a pub. Some of these centres, such as Newtowngore, have become run-down. It is crucial that they are maintained and enhanced.

6.1.6 *Employment, Education and other services*

Employment and education opportunities are key town centre attractions and are effective in drawing people into centres and generating additional retail spending (particularly on convenience goods and food and drink) and encourage multi-purpose shopping trips.

6.1.7 *Employment and education*

In Leitrim, both employment and education act as key attractions in a number of towns. There are a number of business parks in the county, including three in Carrick-on-Shannon, enterprise units in Manorhamilton and enterprise centres in Mohill, Drumkeerin, Drumshanbo and Ballinamore. Significant recent development includes the establishment of an MBNA operations centre in Carrick-on-Shannon. The operations centre employs approximately 300 people in the fields of administration, security, finance and telemarketing. Carrick is also the key administration and service centre in the county and is home to Leitrim County Council offices.

Secondary schools are located in the larger towns, including Carrick-on-Shannon, Ballinamore, Mohill, Drumkeeran, Drumshanbo and Carrigallen and school students make a significant contribution to local retail, particularly through purchasing food and drink.

It is important that existing employment and education services are maintained and, where possible, that new employment activities and education services are developed within town centres to draw people into the town and encourage spending at local retail outlets.

6.1.8 *Other services*

The provision of key services, such as banks, real estate and community and medical services are also important local attractions.

At present, there is a relatively high representation of major banks and credit unions in major towns in the county (seven towns have banks, and four of these have three or more). It is critical for the vibrancy and viability of local centres that these services are maintained.

Other services are also predominately located within major towns and include medical centres, hospitals and libraries.

6.1.9 *Tourism*

Leitrim has excellent potential to attract tourists. The county is endowed with substantial tourist attractions, including a high quality landscape, access to the Shannon-Erne Waterway, linking the River Shannon to the numerous lakes and rivers of Lough Erne, and providing over 300km of navigable waterways, walkways, and spectacular hills and mountains.



Photo 6.4 – High landscape value in County Leitrim

Consultation with retailers has identified tourism as a key attraction and substantial contributor to retail in some towns, particularly in Carrick-on-Shannon where there are significant numbers of shops, such as angling, fishing, souvenir, art and craft shops, that rely on tourist trade. The most

common tourism activities in the county are angling/fishing and cruising on the Shannon-Erne Waterway, and, as such, towns located on waterways currently enjoy the greatest and increasing numbers of tourists.

Despite this, the number of tourists visiting the county is still relatively low. Visitors to Leitrim account for just 8% of visitors to the north west region, and almost 60% of all tourists visiting the county are of Irish origin. Of overseas visitors, 76% are from Britain, with figures suggesting that returning emigrants, from Leitrim to Britain are the majority group.

A number of towns in County Leitrim have significant potential to be further developed to attract tourists. Key towns and villages with high tourism potential include Carrick-on-Shannon, Ballinamore, Drumshanbo, Manorhamilton, Dromahair, Carrigallen, Leitrim, Rossinver, Kinlough, Tullaghan, Jamestown, Drumsna and Dromod. All of these towns are located on or close to waterways (or the ocean) and have some existing tourism accommodation. There are a number of smaller villages in these areas that also have potential to be developed for tourism.

However, in order to attract increased tourism, there is a need to improve tourism infrastructure as well as the quality of tourism attractions. Retail attractions, such as art and craft, specialist retail (such as angling/fishing shops) food, restaurants and entertainment venues can contribute to this. Leitrim's existing tourism infrastructure, especially accommodation, is weak. There is a clear concentration of visitor accommodation around Carrick-on-Shannon, Ballinamore and (to a lesser extent) Drumshanbo. These towns are located on navigable waterways. There is, however, very little tourism infrastructure in the central and northern areas of the county.

6.1.10 *Entertainment and Leisure*

Entertainment and leisure opportunities provide a substantial attraction to retail centres. This includes pubs, hotels, restaurants and night clubs as well as sports and leisure centres.

Carrick-on-Shannon currently has the greatest number and range of entertainment in County Leitrim, including a large number of pubs, two high quality hotels, a number of restaurants, including a Chinese restaurant an Indian restaurant and a Lebanese restaurant. There are also two night clubs, which draw significant numbers of people to the town, particularly on weekends.

Facilities in other, smaller towns are not as well developed, however and towns such as Mohill and Manorhamilton, for example, are poorly served by restaurants and entertainment services. In addition, consultation with shoppers and retailers has identified entertainment as one of the key attractions that needs further development in the county in terms of quantity and quality, particularly in second tier towns with high tourism potential.

6.2 ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility is one of the most significant issues affecting the vitality and viability of retail centres. It relates to transportation modes, including public transport, traffic and parking.

6.2.1 *Public transport*

The private car is the most common form of transport in County Leitrim. This is largely due to the rural nature of the county and the lack of public transport. Bus Eireann and Iarnrod Eireann operate services from Carrick-on-Shannon to Dublin and Sligo (there is also a train station in Dromod) however there is no extensive bus or train services operating within the county itself. Due to the small and dispersed nature of the county population, it is unlikely that the development of a public transportation system within the county will be viable in the short to medium term future. As such, there is a need to develop more sustainable retail centres by ensuring that travel distances are minimised and walking and cycling is encouraged.

6.2.2 *Traffic and Parking*

Traffic and parking are among the major contributing factors to the vitality and viability of retail centres, and parking has been identified as one of the major issues facing the existing and future development of retail in Leitrim.

Almost all people who shop in County Leitrim travel to retail centres by car. The predominant reason for this is convenience – it is perceived as being the quickest and easiest way to travel to the centre and transport goods home. In addition, there is an expectation among shoppers that they will be able to park close to, or in front of, the shop that they are visiting. If shoppers experience difficulty in finding a parking space, they are likely to travel to a different centre where parking is not a problem.



Photo 6.5 – On street parking in Carrick-on -Shannon

The key centres in which parking has been identified as a problem are Carrick-on-Shannon, Ballinamore and Drumshanbo, and to a lesser extent, Mohill. These problems primarily relate to on street parking capacity and a lack of high quality off street parking. None of these towns have on street parking restrictions in place. Disk parking is currently enforced in Manorhamilton, and on street parking problems in the town have been observed to be significantly less.

There is therefore a need to manage parking to ensure provision is sufficient to meet demand, however, this must be coupled with strategies to encourage alternative transportation modes and reduce car dependence. Ensuring that retail development is consolidated within retail cores will assist in reducing the number of trips undertaken by shoppers.

6.3 *AMENITY*

The level of amenity in a town or village centre has a significant impact on the attractiveness of the centre as a place to visit and shop. Amenity refers to the visual attractiveness of the town, the amount of litter and dirt, the quality and upkeep of shop fronts, the number of derelict and dilapidated buildings, the level and quality of landscaping, street furniture and the location of power lines as well as pedestrian access and traffic flow.

County Leitrim has a high quality landscape, and many towns and villages are located in attractive natural settings. The county is also endowed with high quality built heritage, with some 400 buildings in the county listed on the Record of Protected Structures, as introduced under the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act 1999. However some significant settlements are blighted by litter, dereliction and dilapidation of structures. This seriously weakens the nucleus of the towns.

6.3.1 *Natural features*

A large proportion of settlements suffer to some degree from development that 'turns it's back' on the natural features of the town (such as waterways and views/vistas). There is a need for town centre development, as well as open space and pedestrian facilities to create physical and visual linkages between retail centres and key natural features of a town. Carrick-on-Shannon, Ballinamore and Manorhamilton are key centres that require attention in this regard.

6.3.2 *Entry statements*

The amenity of entrance points into a retail centre has a significant impact on the perception of visitors to the town on the quality of the centre. Entrance points should serve to draw people into a town and encourage them to stop in the town and visit local attractions.

Entry statements to the retail cores of the majority the major towns in the county are generally unappealing and could be upgraded through landscaping and urban design treatments.



Photo 6.6 – Key entry point to Manorhamilton from Carrick-on-Shannon on the R280

6.3.3

Shop - fronts

Of particular importance to retail centres is the quality and upkeep of shop-fronts. Shop-fronts form an important part of the streetscape and it is vital that they are in harmony with their natural surroundings and create an appealing interface with the street. A high quality shop-front should also be open, allowing customers to see into the premises from the street and be successful in drawing people from the street into the shop. A key problem identified in County Leitrim are run down, dated, cluttered and ‘closed off’ shop fronts. Examples of these are found in settlements around the county, with particular problems identified in Mohill and Manorhamilton.



Photo 6.7 – Shop-front with 1960's - 70's materials that is run down and not interactive

Poor design and excessive advertising can mar an otherwise attractive building. Key problems identified in relation to signage include excessive hanging signs on shop-fronts, names and signs on buildings that are unrelated to the structure or use of the building, the use of materials that are unrelated to the building materials, and the provision window, door and façade signage that is not connected or related. This tends to spoil the rest of the shop façade.

In addition, design and advertising should be consistent within a retail area to provide an enhanced perception of consolidation and unity within the retail core.

The design of a new shop front should relate to the architectural character and scale of the building that it is part of, as well as compliment the character of surrounding buildings. The materials used should be sympathetic to the building.

Materials have been identified as one of the key problems affecting all towns in the county. The county contains many remnants of the architecture of the late 1960's and early 1970's. This is manifested in a proliferation of mosaics and plastic signs (*see photo 6.7*). The use of such materials should be discouraged as they clash with one another and are not consistent with the character of the built fabric of towns and detracts from high quality architecture and heritage buildings. The horizontal lines of a new façade or shop front should also match as closely as possible with those of adjacent buildings and the street façade generally.

6.3.4 *Dereliction/Vacant Buildings and Sites*

Derelict and vacant buildings and sites serve to seriously weaken the structure, function and amenity of a retail centre. There are problems, to varying degrees, with vacant and derelict buildings in all significant centres in County Leitrim. Centres where particular problems are evident include Mohill, Manorhamilton and Drumkeerin.

The majority of vacant buildings are suitable for renovation to a new use, such as accommodation or restaurants. The location of new retail, services and facilities in existing buildings is preferable to the development of new buildings and should be given priority. Some buildings may be suitable for community/civic use, and there may be opportunities for temporary uses to be identified for some buildings until long term commercial use become viable. This should be encouraged through local authority policies and initiatives.

6.3.5 *Litter*

Excessive litter can seriously detract from the amenity of retail areas. Litter is a problem in towns and cities around Ireland. Litter in County Leitrim is not considered to be a bigger problem than elsewhere in Ireland, however there is

a need to ensure that town centres are kept litter free in order to enhance amenity and the overall attractiveness of the centre.

6.3.6 *Landscaping and street furniture and lighting*

Landscaping and street furniture can have a dramatic impact on the visual appeal of retail centres. Landscaping refers to the planting of street trees, and the treatment of street verges and traffic islands etc. Street furniture includes the provision of seats, street art, litter bins and the provision of planters etc.

At present, landscaping and street furniture provision in the majority of settlements in County Leitrim requires upgrading. Seats are provided in a large number of settlements, however in most cases they are of outdated, unattractive design and are often broken, vandalised and scruffy. Street furniture should be provided that is in keeping with the character of the town or village. The furniture should have a very high standard of paintwork and the use of bold colours should be avoided.

Attention should also be provided to the maintenance of street furniture by repairing breakages and damage to seats etc. and regularly tending to planting in tubs. Litter bins should be provided at areas likely to generate a large amount of rubbish, and should have a sympathetic design and be regularly emptied.

The majority of settlements have not had any significant landscaping in the retail core. Street trees have been planted in some areas, such as in the retail centre of Drumshanbo however there is a need for such treatment to be extended to all major settlements in the county.

The quality of lighting and lampposts also has a significant impact on the visual amenity of an area. While lighting and lampposts have been upgraded in some towns in the county, such as in the retail core of Manorhamilton, there is a need for general upgrading across the county.

6.3.7 *Overhead power lines*

Overhead power lines cause visual intrusion and reduce the amenity value of an area. This is often aggravated by an ad-hoc and un-co-ordinated approach to installation. Minimising the detrimental impact of power lines requires the under grounding of power cables or attachment of cables to buildings, together with careful installation and maintenance. This is required in a number of major settlements in Leitrim, most notably Carrick-on-Shannon and Mohill.

6.3.8

Pedestrian access and paving/road treatments

Transport in County Leitrim is car dominated and, as a result, town and village centres are dominated by roads, large intersections and on street parking. This significantly detracts from the amenity of the towns and reduces the capacity for other forms of transportation, particularly pedestrian footpaths and cycle paths/lanes.

Footpaths in almost all towns in the county are narrow and run down and fail to provide continuous access. There are very few pedestrian crossing islands or crosswalks in any settlement, and there are a number of significant intersections leading into town centres, or indeed within them, that fail to provide any pedestrian facilities at all. There are no cycle paths or cycle lanes in the county.

The streetscapes of the large majority of towns are dominated by on-street parking. This detracts from the built form and character of the town and reduces the overall attractiveness of the centre. There is a need for on street parking to be reduced and for increased parking control. This would open up retail centres and allow for the provision of improved pedestrian and cycle facilities, landscaping, traffic calming and urban design treatment.

6.4

ACTION

In order for a commercial centre to function effectively development and improvement projects should be implemented efficiently, there should be regular cleaning and maintenance and co-ordinated town centre management initiatives to promote the continued improvement of the centre.

In general, new retail and commercial development in County Leitrim has been limited in recent history, largely due to the steadily declining population. However, with significant economic growth over the last 10 years there has been some significant new retail development and retail proposals as well as substantial housing and employment development in some towns, in particular, Carrick-on-Shannon, Manorhamilton, Drumshanbo. This suggests that these centres are growing and 'healthy'.

There have been a number of large retail proposals submitted to Council for retail development in Carrick-on-Shannon and a large marina, residential/commercial development is currently being constructed on the Roscommon side of the town. Many smaller villages have also experienced significant new residential and/or retail development in comparison to their size. One notable exception is Mohill, which has had very little recent new development or development proposals.



Photo 6.8 – New residential and commercial development in Keshkerrigan

This new development can be at least partially attributed to government rural taxation incentives, the rural renewal scheme. The rural renewal scheme was introduced in 1998 with the aim of regenerating parts of the Upper Shannon region. The scheme provides tax incentives for the construction of new buildings and the refurbishment of older buildings and includes commercial, industrial and residential development and should be actively promoted by Council.

There have also been some initiatives implemented to improve towns in the county, for example:

- Paving of the main street in Manorhamilton, removal over overhead power lines and provision of new street lighting.
- Upgrading of shop fronts and improvements to shop signage in Ballinamore and removal of overhead power lines.
- Restoration of the market house centre in Carrick-on-Shannon.
- Street planting in Drumshanbo.

There is a need for these schemes to be extended in the future.

An individual assessment of vitality and viability has also been undertaken for the five largest towns in the county (within tiers 1 and 2 of the retail hierarchy) Carrick-on-Shannon, Manorhamilton, Mohill, Ballinamore and Drumshanbo. These are provided below (in alphabetical order).

7.1 *BALLINAMORE*

Ballinamore is located on the canal on the Drumshanbo-Killeshandra Road, approximately half way between Keshkerrigan and Newtowngore. It consists of a main street and two side streets, which form the commercial and urban core of the town.

7.1.1 *Attractions*

Retail Attractions

There are a wide variety of goods and services available within Ballinamore including groceries, petrol, clothing and shoes, gift shops, pub and restaurants, post office, and three banks. The quality of the goods available is high.

Tourism

The main tourist attraction for the area is the Shannon-Erne waterways. Ballinamore is an attractive stopping point along the river, and a new service point on the canal provides mooring points together with toilet facilities, shower, laundry room and concealed area for rubbish.



Photo 7.1: Start of Main Street, Ballinamore, and view of amenity area on the canal.

There are a relatively large number of visitor accommodation facilities in Ballinamore, highlighting the importance of tourism for the town.

The Genealogy centre within the town is of particular interest to visitors tracing their family history. This is particularly relevant to Leitrim as many visitors are returning emigrants looking for information on their ancestors.

Recreation and Leisure Facilities

Ballinamore and the surrounding areas are well serviced in relation to recreation and leisure facilities. The canal and Shannon-Erne waterways provides for numerous boating and angling opportunities for both locals and tourists to the area. The Ballinamore Golf Club is also located in the area, as is the Ballinamore Sports Complex.

A number of festivals occur within the area. The Annual Ballinamore Festival and Agricultural Show occurs in August, and the Ballinamore One Act Drama Festival later in the year.

There are four nightclubs located within County Leitrim. Freddie's nightclub is located within Ballinamore town and operates on a Saturday night.

Education and Employment

FAS operate a Computer Training scheme in Ballinamore. In addition, Ballinamore Post Primary School and a vocational school are also located within the town.

7.1.2

Accessibility

Ballinamore is well serviced by major roads and is easily accessible from other towns both within and outside the County.

As in many towns within the County, car parking provision is a considerable problem in Ballinamore. Both sides of Main Street provide majority of on street parking, with some additional parking provided in Chapel Lane. Generally parking spaces are unmarked, leading to ad hoc parking arrangements, and there is no parking time limit or disc parking arrangements operational within the town.

The only available off street parking is located behind the Library in Main Street, though this is poorly lit, difficult to access and a locked gate prohibits pedestrian access to Main Street. It is generally underused.

There is a need for increased off-street parking and the introduction of time restriction on on-street parking to reduce all day parking use by local workers. Removal of some on street parking would allow for improvements to the streetscape, improved pedestrian facilities and some traffic calming.



Photo 7.2: Car park behind the Library, providing the only off street parking in Ballinamore. Pedestrian access to Main Street is provided, however a locked gate prohibits access. The gate is located to the right hand side of the main building.

Pedestrian access within the town is generally adequate, with footpaths provided on both sides of Main Street and High Street. Pedestrian access in Chapel Lane however, is less adequate, with car parking often intruding on the footpath. Improved links to existing off street car parking are also required.

7.1.3

Amenity

The overall amenity of Ballinamore is high. The premises in the commercial centre of Ballinamore are to be commended on their choice of colour scheme and the general standard of maintenance. Building condition is generally considered good. The main problems lie in the use of materials. The town contains many remnants of the architecture of the late 1960's and early 1970's which manifests in the proliferation of mosaics and plastic signs.



Photo 7.3: Main Street, Ballinamore. The buildings are generally considered in good condition and the overall streetscape is attractive, though on the dominance of on-street car parking is of some concern.

Of concern is a number of non-commercial properties fronting the street, particularly at the top of High Street. Such properties detract from the street frontage and such developments should be discouraged in future.

Overhead wiring has been removed, which enhances the visual amenity of the town, however there is a need for additional urban design treatment and removal of on-street parking to reduce the visual dominance of roads and parking.

7.1.4 *Action*

The overall maintenance of the town is high and there has been recent effort to improve the streetscape and upgrade shop fronts. In relation to retail outlets, the Leitrim County Council has granted planning permission for the following in Ballinamore, though construction has not yet begun:

- Supermarket extension (Supervalu)
- Petrol filling station and car wash
- Three extensions to existing retail properties
- Three new single shop retail developments
- Hardware storage and retail facility outside the town boundaries.

In addition, permission has been granted for an additional 76 residential dwellings in the town, and a further 22 dwellings have recently been completed.

7.1.5 *Boundaries of Retail Development*

The development of new retail outlets in Ballinamore should only be considered where existing buildings are inappropriate for the envisaged use.

Where new retail development is considered appropriate, it should be confined to the town centre, and should not be located outside the following areas:

- To the north, no retail development should take place beyond the existing development on Main Street.
- To the east, no retail development should take place along the Main Street past the National School at the fork in High Street.
- To the south, development should not occur beyond the existing retail development on the south side of Main Street.
- To the west, no new retail development should occur beyond the canal. It is acknowledged that some retail development exists past this point, but new development in this area should not be encouraged in the future.

7.2 CARRICK-ON-SHANNON

Carrick-on-Shannon is the largest town within County Leitrim and is located on the banks of the Shannon River.

7.2.1 *Attractions*

Retail Attractions

Carrick-on-Shannon offers considerable retail attraction in comparison to smaller towns within the County. As the largest town within the County, it has the largest variety of available goods and greatest number of retail outlets. The town has approximately 106 retail outlets including the following:

- 6 grocery stores;
- 28 clothing/shoes or gift shops;
- 14 pubs;
- 11 restaurants, cafes or take away food outlets; and
- Post office and four banks.

Carrick-on-Shannon has a number of speciality retail outlets that, while being available to the local community, are generally geared to visitors to the area. Such shops may include the Fishing and Tackle shop catering for the needs of passing boats on the Shannon River, or the Leitrim Design House, providing high quality local arts and craft. The further development of niche retail markets in Leitrim in general, but particularly in Carrick-on-Shannon, should be encouraged.

Tourism

The Shannon-erne Waterway links the River Shannon to the numerous lakes and rivers of Lough Erne, resulting in over 300km of waterways which are ideal for holiday cruises and short boat rides. As such, boating, fishing and angling facilities are major attractions in the area. Carrick-on-Shannon is a natural stopping place for boat cruises, grocery and other shopping being an important reason for this.

Within the County, there is a concentration of tourist accommodation in Carrick-on-Shannon, Ballinamore and to a lesser extent, Drumshanbo. The wide variety of available accommodation in Carrick-on-Shannon plays a considerable role in attracting visitors to the area.

The Tourism Office for the County is located near the Shannon River in Carrick-on-Shannon. In addition, two of the four night clubs within the county, The Buzz and Rockin' Robbins, are located in the centre of the town.

Recreation and Leisure

There are 14 pubs and 9 restaurants/ cafes located in Carrick-on-Shannon, providing the largest variety of eating and drinking establishments of any town within the county.

In terms of sport and recreation facilities, in addition to boating, fishing and water based activities, Carrick-on-Shannon provides the following:

- Playground and walking tracks near MBNA offices,
- Shannon Boat Rally (July)
- The Regatta (August)
- Carrick-on-Shannon Fishing Festival (September)
- Carrick-on-Shannon Sport and Leisure Centre

While there has been considerable recent entertainment development, the demand for services such as restaurants in the town appears to be high and increasing and should be generally encouraged. There may also be opportunities for Council to initiate new arts and craft festivals in the town and the county as a whole. The market square may be a suitable location for such events.

Education and Employment

Carrick-on-Shannon provides for a variety of employment and education opportunities. The MBNA have recently opened offices on the outskirts of the town, providing for approximately 300 jobs. St Patricks Community Hospital and the Leitrim County Council are the other major employers in the town, though the post office and insurance offices also provide considerable employment.

Given the number and variety of retail stores within the town, it is reasonable to expect that the retail industry is also a considerable employment source within the town. Figures on retail employment in Leitrim are not available.

Close proximity and good access by road to other employment centres such as Longford, allow a variety of employment opportunities for residents of the town.

Carrick-on-Shannon provides a number of education facilities. The Teacher Training Centre provides a range of courses including a Diploma in Education Management, and is accessed by residents of Leitrim, Longford and Roscommon. Also available is a FAS tele- services course, and a Post Leaving Certificate Secretarial course, providing 43 places. A Community School is also located within the town.

The development of new employment and education opportunities in the town should be supported, however, these should be located in town centre locations where possible.

7.2.2

Accessibility

Access to Carrick-on-Shannon is provided via the N4, a major road route through the north west of Ireland. The town is also easily accessible from the smaller towns and villages in the county.

There is a possibility that a new bypass will be constructed to bypass Carrick-on-Shannon. This will reportedly have the effect of reducing traffic congestion, improving the physical environment of the town, encourage further investment in the region through improved infrastructure and reduce travel time on the National road network. The need for the scheme has been identified in the National Development Plan (2000-2006) and the National Roads Needs Study (1998).

Car parking is the most pressing accessibility problem in the town. On street parking is mainly available in Main Street and Bridge Street. Public off street car parking facilities are available at St George's Terrace, St Mary's Close, Priest's Close and the Quays area. Off street parking is also available between the Bush and the Landmark Hotels, and near the Fire Station. These locations however, while not located more than a few minutes stroll from the retail core of the town, are not well used. This is particularly the case for the parking between the hotels. This may be in part due to the fact that the areas are generally unmarked, unlit, not signed from the road, and adequate pedestrian linkages are not provided to the main streets.

On street parking is extremely congested, this detracting from the attractiveness of Carrick-on-Shannon as a retail centre. Currently there are no time limitations or disc parking arrangements operating within the town. This is unfortunate. Consultation has indicated that a number of shop owners and retailers park their vehicles on the main streets, decreasing the turnover and availability of parking for shoppers. Timed parking arrangements may avoid this situation.

In relation to other access, Carrick-on-Shannon does not provide adequate facilities for pedestrians. Paving and footpaths are inconsistent, pavement levels vary and often there is little consideration for pedestrian safety. There is little obvious provision for disabled parking or access.

7.2.3

Amenity

In general, Carrick-on-Shannon is an attractive town and the streetscape is of considerable quality. There are a number of issues however, that affect the streetscape and general amenity of the town.

There are a number of non-commercial properties within main retail core of the town. These properties do not have active street frontages and many have fallen into disrepair, detracting from the attractiveness of the streetscape.



Photo 7.4: Streetscape, Carrick-on-Shannon.

The quality and consistency of shop fronts and signage also needs careful consideration. The use of mosaic tiles on a number of shops fronts within the town is unfortunate and not in keeping with the general character of the area. Many overhead shop signs are also inappropriate in both design, use of materials, height, and colour. The proliferation of inappropriate signage should also be discouraged, and any new additional signage should provide a positive addition to the streetscape.

A number of shops within the town provide little visual access to the contents of the store. This may be because of dark, opaque windows, but more commonly, because of curtains or other window dressings. Such windows are not inviting the shoppers and thus detract from the attractiveness of the retail centre.

In general, the entrance and approach to the core retail area from major access points is poor in terms of visual amenity. There is little to attract or encourage visitors to stop in the town. Particular emphasis should be placed on entrance statements for two main access points: the entrance from river, and view looking towards the town, and entrance from N4 from Dublin. High visual amenity at these points, and significant entrance statements, will play an important role in attracting visitors to the town.

Overhead wiring detracts significantly from the visual amenity of Carrick-on-Shannon and should be removed. This has been completed in many of the smaller towns within the county.

The quality of retail outlets in Carrick-on-Shannon is generally very good. The needs of local residents are provided for, and, as the town is dependent of the tourist trade, the needs of the visitors to the area are also well catered for. The development of niche market and quality produce retail outlets should perhaps be encouraged in the future. While Carrick-on-Shannon may not be able to compete with larger centres for comparison shopping for example, the development of specialist products and services within Carrick-on-Shannon

will act as a magnet attraction to the town. Marketing and advertisement of such products will play an important role in the success of this type of retail development, but will increase the vitality and viability of retailing in general.

7.2.4 *Action*

A number of buildings are being upgraded/renovated within the town and some significant construction is occurring.

A number of new retail development have occurred over the last 12 months, but perhaps the most prominent being located near the Landmark Hotel on the banks of the Shannon River. These shops form part of a larger residential development and are considerably out of character with the existing retail development in the area. Notably, a number of these shops still remain vacant, reportable because the rent is too high.



Photo7.5: New retail development in Carrick-on-Shannon

Permission has recently been granted for new a retail development between Main Street and Landmark Hotel. Information gained from council indicates that the development will consist of a supermarket (1,476m²), and seven smaller retail outlets ranging in size from 33m² to 101m². The development also includes the provision for 95 paved and marked car parking spaces. No timeframe has been provided to the expected completion of this project.

Boundaries of Retail Development

In general, retail development in Carrick-on-Shannon should be confined to the existing retail centre of Main Street and Bridge Street, though infill development between existing shops and the Landmark Hotel would be appropriate. In addition, there are a number of vacant or rundown premises within the retail core, and the amenity of the area would be improved these were developed for retail purposes. The development of new retail outlets should therefore only be considered where existing buildings are inappropriate for the envisaged use.

Where new retail development is considered appropriate, it should be confined to the town centre, and should not be located outside the following areas:

- To the north, no retail development should take place beyond the Fire Station or the petrol filling station on the Leitrim Road.
- The roundabout to the Dublin Road near Shannon Lodge should form the boundary of retail development to the east. A more realistic boundary may in fact be the National School on the Dublin Road, but it is acknowledged that retail development may be appropriate to the roundabout in order to accommodate future growth.
- To the south, development should not occur beyond the existing retail development near the Landmark Hotel. Infill development of the land behind the hotel should be encouraged.
- To the north west, the Shannon River forms the boundary of the County and thus for retail development in Carrick-on-Shannon. It must be acknowledged however, that Roscommon County Council may approve retail development on the other side of the river that may potentially impact on the retail situation in Carrick-on-Shannon.

7.3 *DRUMSHANBO*

Drumshanbo is located on the southern shore of Lough Allen, seven miles southeast from Carrick-on-Shannon.

7.3.1 *Attractions*

Retail Attractions

The commercial centre consists of two main streets, Main Street and Church Street, and provides a variety of services including convenience and comparative shopping, two banks, health centre, fire brigade and community centre.

Drumshanbo provides a reasonable number of shops but there is little variety in the nature of goods able to be purchased. There are a number of food stores (including a local store, 3 local supermarkets and a butcher) and only limited local comparison shopping for items such as clothing and shoes.

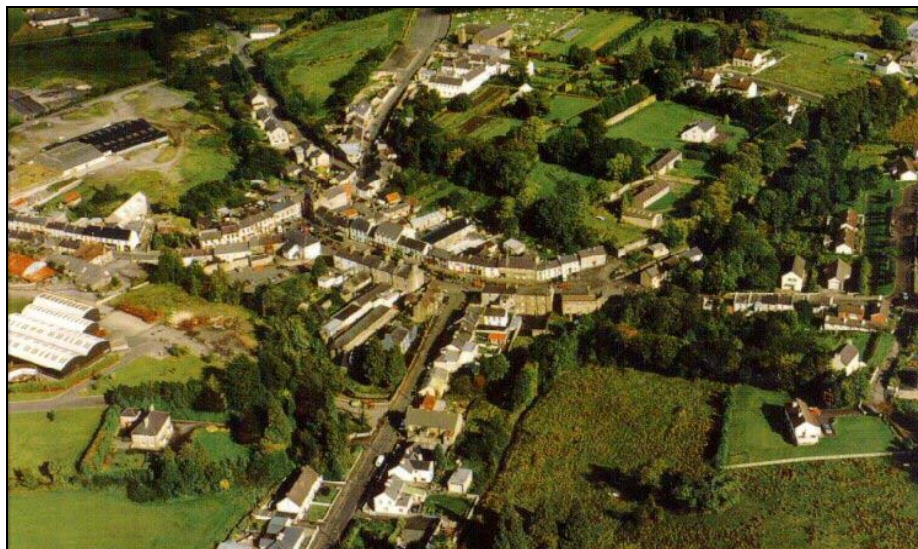


Photo 7.6: Aerial Photograph depicting the core town area. Main Street is located in the centre of the photo, and Church Street heading out to the west.

Tourism

Drumshanbo is located on the shores of Lough Allen, and thus provides access to fishing, angling and boating activities. Lough Allen is considered a world class pike and other coarse fish angling location and attracts visitors from both inside and outside the borders of County Leitrim.

The town also attracts visitors to the Sliabh an Iarainn Visitor Centre, the annual An Tostail Festival held in July and the Percussion Festival (Samba).

Recreation and Leisure facilities

Lough Allen provides for a wide variety and large number of recreational and leisure opportunities. As mentioned in the previous section, angling, fishing and boating activities are well catered for within the town. In addition to water based activities however, the Moorlands Equestrian and Leisure Centre provides for equestrian and horse riding tutorial activities.

Education and Employment

Drumshanbo provides a number of employment and educational attractions.

The Town provides Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses in:

- Traditional Irish Music Course (17 places)
- Media Studies and Sound Engineering (17 places)
- Call Centre operator (27 places)
- Computer Studies (27 places)

Also located within the area are the annual Joe Mooney Summer School of Traditional Music, Song and Dance (which culminates in a festival in July) and Vocational School Drumshanbo. A livestock market facility operates within the area, providing for the sale of local livestock.

7.3.2

Accessibility

Drumshanbo is well serviced by major roads and is easily accessible from other towns both within and outside the County.

Car parking within the town is poor. Most on-street car parking is provided on Main Street, and Church Street, though there is some provision for parking on the Carrick Road. This considerably decreases amenity in the town centre and detracts from the urban fabric. Consideration should be given to placing parking restrictions on on-street parking.

The only off street parking area is located in the centre of the town next to the Bank of Ireland, though is very well used and is generally full. It is likely that line markings in this car park would increase the number of vehicle spaces and therefore maximise use of the site.

The intersection of Main Street, Church Street and the Derryhallagh Road is busy and confusing, and detracts from the general amenity of the area. Parking in this area contributes to the problem, with unmarked spaces leading to ad hoc parking arrangements.

Pedestrian access within the town is generally poor, particularly over the canal in Church Street. Current development works in this area contribute to the problem. In general, consistent paving and safe pedestrian access would greatly improve pedestrian access and mobility within the town. Paving and pedestrian access only should be provided in the elevated portion of the main street.

7.3.3

Amenity

Within Drumshanbo, there are a number of retail vacancies in prime locations. Hogan's Meats for example, occupies a corner location in the centre of town and is highly visible from the approach from Drumkeerim. The visual amenity of the town is reduced by vacant stores and thus should be avoided if possible, particularly in obvious locations.

Signage over retail outlets within Drumshanbo is somewhat confusing and there is little uniformity in height, size, design or colours. The removal of overhead wiring would greatly improve the visual amenity of the town.

There is a considerable break between the retail outlets in Main Street and Church Street due to bridge over the canal. The visual amenity and quality of shop fronts in the Main Streets area is higher than that of Church Street, where there is little pedestrian access, congested on street parking, and less active street frontages.

7.3.4 *Action*

A vacant site next to the canal is currently being developed for retail purposes, which will greatly reduce the gap between Main and Church Streets. It is understood that pedestrian access in this area is also to be improved.

Some repainting and building façade improvements is evident within the town.

Leitrim County Council granted planning permission for three new retail developments within the town, comprising of a coffee shop, laundrette and shop, and retail outlet with accompanying residential dwelling. As of August 2001, the construction of these developments had not yet begun.

Within the tow, Council has granted permission for approximately 49 new houses and 22 apartments, though as above, construction had not been completed in August 2001. In addition, there is an additional proposal for 28 council houses to be built to the south of the town.

7.3.5 *Boundaries of Retail Development*

The development of new retail outlets in Drumshanbo should only be considered where existing buildings are inappropriate for the envisaged use.

Where new retail development is considered appropriate, it should be confined to the town centre, and should not be located outside the following areas:

- To the north west, no retail development should take place on Church Street past the Church.
- To the north east, no additional retail development should take place along the Derryhallaghan Road.
- To the East, no retail development should take place along the Ballinamore Road, past the health centre.
- To the south east, development should not occur along the Dristernan Road, past the junction of the Ballinamore Road.
- To the south west, no new retail development should occur along the Carrick-on-Shannon Road.

7.4 *MANORHAMILTON*

Manorhamilton is located on the N16 at the junction of the roads from Dromahaire, Bundoran, Belcoo, Garrison and Sligo. The Owenmore River runs to the south of the town and the smaller Owenbeg river runs along the west. The town has a compact retail/residential centre most of which is located along Main Street with part of it located along New Line Road and Castle Street. Main Street runs from south to northwest sloping upwards and falling again, and forms the commercial centre of the town.

7.4.1

Attractions

Retail Attractions

There are a total of 33 retail outlets in Manorhamilton, consisting of grocery shopping, clothing and gifts, pubs, post office and three banks. The variety of goods available however, is somewhat poor.

Tourism

As with many of the towns within Leitrim, close proximity to rivers and lakes provides a significant attraction for visitors. Manorhamilton provides access to a number of water based, boating and angling facilities and activities. Other nearby attractions include Lough Melvin, Lough Macnean, Lough Allen and Lough Gill.

Archaeological features and information is another attraction to the town. Interesting archaeological features include the surrounding hills in general, and in particular, the Star Fort, the Castle and the old church.

Manorhamilton also provides access to the Leitrim Way, a marked, long distance hill-walk between Drumshanbo and Manorhamilton. Also, the North Leitrim Walking Festival occurs in Manorhamilton in October.

The Manorhamilton Castle Heritage Centre is a valuable resource for historical and genealogical information.

Recreation and Leisure

In addition to the activities mentioned above, Manorhamilton has a sports ground, community centre and the Glens Centre, a theatre and arts facility.

Education and Employment

Education and employment opportunities are somewhat limited in Manorhamilton. Eaton Automotive and Menenda Limited are the main source of employment in the area, though the town does include a school and Our Lady's Community Hospital. A livestock market also provides for the sale of local cattle.

7.4.2

Accessibility

Manorhamilton is well serviced by major roads and is easily accessible from other towns both within and outside the County.

Access to the town from the N16 is provided via a narrow windy road and is only appropriate for light vehicles. The road travels behind many of the buildings on Main Street and the removal of parts of a traditional bluestone wall, replaced with concrete, is not an attractive entrance statement. In addition, much of the development on the south side of the road is residential, and thus the use of the road as a thoroughfare is inappropriate.

The approach from Carrick-on-Shannon is adequate, however unsightly, being dominated by car parking and the back of Burger Magic, a former restaurant now vacant. While the building is attractively painted on the frontage to Main Street, the back is unpainted and larger in scale than the surrounding buildings. Car parking in this area is chaotic and would benefit from line markings to create more spaces and greater consistency.



Photo 7.7: Approach to Manorhamilton from Carrick-on-Shannon. The former Burger Magic building (centre left) is highly prominent, as is the on-street car parking.

The availability of car parking within Manorhamilton is reasonable. Parking is mainly provided along Main Street, though some parking is provided on entrance road to town from Carrick-on-Shannon (see above). A disc parking scheme operates in the town, this likely to be the reason for the improved parking situation in comparison to other towns within the county.

Off street parking is provided in Church Lane, behind the shops in Main Street. While this car park is not paved or marked, it is well used and allows cars to be parked off the main street. Business owners and retailers in particular, should be encouraged to use this space.

A substantial amount of the Main Street has been entirely paved, and bollards are used to separate the road surface from the pedestrian walkways. Paving in other areas of the town however, are not so consistent and does not provide adequate access to shops and services. Consistent paving along the eastern end of Main Street, for example, and the appropriate development of the vacant site on the corner of the Carrick-on-Shannon Road, would provide access and linkages to existing retail outlets in this section. Currently the quality of these outlets is below that of the general standard of the town and improved access may improve this.

7.4.3

Amenity

There are a reasonable number of vacant and derelict buildings in Manorhamilton, a number of these being located on prominent sites. These have the effect of weakening the structure of the town and reducing the number of visitors to it.

Ribbon development along the approach road to Manorhamilton also weakens the retail core. New development within the area should be encouraged to locate within the existing town boundaries. This would serve to increase the variety of retail outlets in the town and improve or upgrade derelict sites.

Many shop frontages have fallen into disrepair, this greatly detracting from the streetscape. General improvements such as painting, repairing damaged facades and the removal of irrelevant signage would improve the visual amenity of the area.

There is an existing square in the centre of the main street, occupied by an attractive, but run down building which previously housed the Tourist Information Office. This space has much potential to enhance the streetscape. A use for the building should be found as soon as possible, and landscaping and the addition of quality street furniture would allow the square to be a focal point of the town.



Photo 7.8: Public square in Manorhamilton. Additional planting and street furniture would improve the square. A use for the building on the left of the square should be found.

7.4.4

Action

The town is generally in disrepair, though there is some evidence of recent building maintenance such as painting. Overhead wiring has been removed, increasing the attractiveness of the streetscape.

The County Council has recently granted planning permission for three new retail development in Manorhamilton. These developments all fall within the retail boundaries identified below, and all incorporate a residential element. As of August 2001, construction had not begun on any of these developments.

A number of new residential developments in the town have also been granted planning permission by the council, but have yet to begin construction. If all proceed, approximately 114 houses and 33 apartments will be built within the town. The population of the town is therefore likely to increase in the coming years, increasing the permanent retail base of the area.

7.4.5 *Boundaries of Retail Development*

Given the number of vacant retail shops in Manorhamilton, the development of new retail outlets should only be considered where existing buildings are inappropriate for the envisaged use.

Where new retail development is considered appropriate, it should be confined to the town centre, and should not be located outside the following areas:

- To the north, no retail development should take place on the New Line Road past Park Road.
- To the east, no retail development should take place off Main Street, and should not proceed up the Boley Hill Road.
- To the south, development should not occur along the Carrick-on-Shannon Road, south of the road providing access to the town from the N16.
- To the north west, on Castle Street, the bridge over the Owenbeg River should provide a natural boundary for retail development.

7.5 *MOHILL*

Mohill is located at the Junction of the R202 and the R201, quite close to the border with County Longford. It is 17 km from Carrick-on-Shannon, the largest Town in County Leitrim, and 9km from Dromod, a smaller in size and population than Mohill. The layout of the town is cruciform with the main street dominating the visual landscape.

7.5.1 *Attractions*

Retail Attractions

Mohill has a number of retail outlets, though in general, the variety and nature of goods available is poor. The town has a number of grocery outlets, including two local supermarkets, and number of pubs and associated restaurants. Comparison shopping for clothes or shoes for example however, is poor. The addition of a number of quality retail outlets would greatly improve the attractiveness of the town for retail spending.

Tourism

Mohill's proximity to Lough Ryan Drive and the Leitrim Lakeland Drive, developed in conjunction with Bord Failte and the European Development Fund, have meant that angling, fishing and boating have become the major tourist attractions in the area. In addition, historical attractions such as the Old Railway Building also draw visitors to the area.

Recreation and Leisure

As mentioned above, there are a number of fishing lakes surrounding the town including Lough Rynn, Lough Erril and Lough Cloonfinnan, and as such, angling is an important pastime for both local residents and visitors to the area. Other recreational facilities in the town include local GAA Park (St Manachans), library and community centre.

In additional, the annual Mohill Storytelling Festival attracts visitors to the area, as does Nitelinks Nightclub, one of only four nightclubs within the County.

Employment and Education

There are a number of educational institutions in Mohill, including Marian College and Mohill Vocational School. FAS operate also operate two computer training courses in Mohill. The Livestock Market provides for the sale of local cattle.

7.5.2

Accessibility

The main issues in relation to accessibility in Mohill are the lack of car parking facilities and inconsistent footpaths and street paving.

There is no off-street car parking available within the town, and existing on street parking is chaotic and disorganised, decreasing the visual attractiveness of the main street. This is particularly the case in Hyde Street near the Supervalu Supermarket, where there are no lined parking spaces and very poor pedestrian access.



Photo 7.9: View of Supervalu supermarket and on street car parking.

Footpaths within the town generally require upgrading to provide consistent access to shops and services. A number of areas have been identified in the *Mohill Town Study* (CAAS 1995) as requiring upgrading including:

- Carrigallen Road requires a footpath;
- Hill Street road surface is poor and a footpath is required. Overhead wires are present;
- R202 (from the north), footpath required on the left hand side of the road;
- R201, footpath and road surface require attention;
- Glebe Lane, gullies need attention;
- Main Street requires resurfacing with bitmac and additional tree planting;
- The junction of Chapel Lane and the Carrick-on-Shannon Road requires definition via a new paved area. Seaters and planters should also to be provided; and
- The narrow road leading up to the County Landfill Site be formalised as an urban route connecting the former station buildings, and the Carolan statue and Castle St. Road should be paved and resurfaced.

7.5.3

Amenity

In general, the quality of the streetscape in Mohill is poor. There is some dereliction of individual sites and vacant sites are widespread.

Overhead wiring detracts from the visual amenity of the town, as does inconsistent signage. Timber signs should replace plastic ones and timber frames on windows should be maintained. Other improvements to shop fronts could include the removal of canopies and the multiplicity of projecting signs

In relation to shop frontages, there is little consistency between use of materials, height or colour. There are a number of properties in Main Street that have non active street frontages which are not inviting to visitors and the widespread use of mosaic façade treatments is unfortunate and should be removed.



Photo 7.10: Mohill streetscape. Note inconsistent signage and inactive street frontages.

In general, road verges should not be allowed to become unkept and overgrown. Road surfacing and signage should be maintained to a high standard and all other signage should be kept to a minimum.

7.5.4 *Action*

The Leitrim County Council has granted planning permissions for two new retail premises in Mohill, though construction has not yet begun. There are located within the main town.

Unlike the other major towns within the county, no planning permission has been sought for new residential development in the town, though 36 council dwellings have proposed to the south of the town. Permission has been granted however for a total of 49 dwellings outside the central town area.

7.5.5 *Boundaries of Retail Development*

Given the number of vacant or derelict retail shops in Mohill, the development of new retail outlets should only be considered where existing buildings are inappropriate for the envisaged use. If new development is considered appropriate, it should be confined to the town centre and should not be located beyond the following areas:

- To the north, no retail development should take place beyond the petrol filling station on Glebe Street.
- To the east, no retail development should take place beyond the Hotel in Hill Street.
- To the south east, no development should not occur on Station Road beyond the Garage.
- To the south, no retail development should occur beyond the Supervalu Supermarket in Hyde Street.
- The junction of Chapel Lane and Main Street should form the western boundary of retail development.

An analysis of customer and retail surveys and analysis of key issues identified through stakeholder consultation has provided an indication of the trading characteristics of shopping centre in the region and identified important trends relating to the trade draw of different centres, including Sligo, Longford, Athlone, Cavan and Enniskillen. This section provides an overview of these centres and their likely current and future influence on retail development in County Leitrim.

8.1 *COMPETING RETAIL CENTRES*

Following is a broad overview of the size and role of key urban and retail centres located close to Leitrim and that directly compete for retail spending.

8.1.1 *Sligo*

Sligo town is a seaport and commercial centre. It is located to the south of county Leitrim and has been identified as a significant draw from County Leitrim households, particularly households in the northern parts of the county.

In 1996 the population of County Sligo was 55,645 people covering an area of 1836km². The Sligo County Development Plan 19996-2000 indicates that the amount of retail space in Sligo town in 1998 was 231,000 square feet. The development of new retail outlets in Sligo has increased the amount of retail space in Sligo town by 27% (50,000 square feet) over the period from 1988 to 1998. Sligo town is regarded as third tier shopping locations in the Retail Hierarchy for Ireland. National supermarket chain representation includes Tesco's and Dunnes Stores. Wine St Car Park Development (20 units) and Johnston Court (8 units) are the two major retail outlets in Sligo town.

Sligo has been identified as a potential gateway town in the National Development Plan and, if designated, it is likely to be the focus of significant new development in coming years.

8.1.2 *Longford*

County Longford is situated in the Irish midlands, adjacent to County Leitrim. Longford town is the largest town in the county with a population of 6,500. Longford town has been identified as a third tier shopping location in the Retail Hierarchy for Ireland. The town has national supermarket chain representation including Supervale, Tesco, Dunnes Stores, Aldi and Lidl and its catchment extends into County Leitrim, with a particular influence in the more southern areas of the county.

8.1.3 *Enniskillen*

Enniskillen is the county town of Fermanagh, Northern Ireland and is located almost exactly in the centre of the county. The population of Enniskillen was 11,500 in 1996. Enniskillen is the retail centre of County Fermanagh and has substantial convenience and comparative retail, including multiples, high street stores and small independent traders. The Erne side shopping centre is a new development located just outside Enniskillen town that has recently boosted its retail attractions. The catchment of Enniskillen's retail centre extends into County Leitrim, with particular draw from the northern and border aspects of the county.

8.1.4 *Cavan Town*

Cavan is an inland border county in the province of Ulster covering an area of 1931 km². In 1996 the population of Cavan was 52,903. The county is mostly rural and agricultural with 16.3% of the population in 3 town centres. According to the Cavan County Development Plan, Cavan town dominates the retail structure of the county accounting for 44% of total county turnover and 42% of the counties' retail employment. Cavan town is considered to be a third tier shopping location on the Retail Hierarchy. Cavan town draws significant retail spending from County Leitrim, in particular the southern and eastern aspects of the county.

8.1.5 *Athlone*

Athlone town is the urban capital of the Midlands and is strategically located in the centre of Ireland. In 1996 the population of Athlone town was 15,544, however this is expected to reach 31,000 by 2006 due to increased development in the town and its environs. Athlone town is also one of the 16 towns, which form the third tier of the Retail Hierarchy for Ireland. Some of the common retail outlets found in Athlone are Woodies, Tesco, Dunnes Stores, Boots, Argos, Toy City, Lidl and Penneys. In addition, The Golden Island Shopping Centre employs over 600 people. Athlone has some draw from the southern areas of County Leitrim, particularly for comparative shopping.

Athlone has been identified in the National Development Plan as the potential gateway to the Midlands and, if designated, it is likely to be the focus of significant investment and new development in the future.

8.1.6 *Roscommon*

Roscommon is an inland county with a population of approximately 51,881 people (1996) and lying to the north east of County Leitrim covering an area of 2547km². The largest town in the county is Roscommon Town. The town currently serves as the county retail centre and is classified as tier 4 on the Retail Hierarchy for Ireland. The town does not have significant draw from County Leitrim to date however there is a proposal to build a Tesco just outside the town, which may increase draw potential.

8.1.7

Bundoran

Bundoran is located in County Donegal, on the northern, coastal border of County Leitrim. The population of the town is approximately 1,796 people. Bundoran town is a holiday centre in the northeast where the population and retail demands increase throughout the summer months. Bundoran draws some local retail expenditure from adjacent towns in County Leitrim.

Figure 8.1 Competing Retail Centres



This chapter provides recommendations and identifies strategic actions for the future development of retail centres in County Leitrim. This predominately includes general recommendations for actions that need to be undertaken throughout the county. These recommendations should be incorporated into the Development Plan and be used by local authority planners as criteria for the assessment of new retail development.

9.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1.1 General Recommendations

The following general recommendations are made in regards to retail development in the county:

1. Leitrim County Council develops clear policies and proposals to be integrated into the Development Plan that provide for:
 - i. The consolidation and support of the existing retail hierarchy in the county.
 - ii. The identification of priority settlements and areas for upgrading and which to encourage new retail development. It is recommended that these include Mohill, Manorhamilton, Drumkeerin and Newtowngore, however the upgrade of Carrick-on-Shannon should remain a principal priority.
 - iii. Support the continuing role of town centres as centres of social and business interaction.
 - iv. Support mixed development in town centres.
2. That Council carry out a vitality and viability 'health check' assessment of all towns and villages in the county once every five years. This should use a consistent methodology and be undertaken within a framework provided by the development plan.

9.1.2 Combating the dominance of larger retail centres

Ensuring that retail centres in the county remain competitive and attract a substantial market share is a key aim of this strategy.

3. It is therefore recommended that Council develop appropriate policies and make a commitment to:
 - i. Providing a shopping environment of the highest quality.
 - ii. Increasing tourism in the county to attract increased tourist expenditure.

- iii. Providing convenient access to high quality convenience stores.
- iv. Improving parking provision and reduce traffic congestion.
- v. Ensuring new retail development is located within existing retail cores.
- vi. Developing new employment and education opportunities within or close to existing town centres.

9.1.3 *Variety and quality*

The quality and variety of retail outlets in a town will play an important role in the sustainability, vitality and viability of the retail core. It is therefore recommended that Council:

- 4. Develop policy to encourage banks and post offices to remain in small towns.
- 5. Ensure the development of a range of retails type and scale within town centres. In general the proliferation of a particular type of store should be discouraged, except in circumstances where a niche market has developed and the new development will contribute to the further growth of that market.

9.1.4 *Vacant buildings and derelict sites*

Vacant buildings and derelict sites significantly detract from the vitality and attractiveness of a town. They also present a significant opportunity for refurbishment and renovation to accommodate new retail outlets.

It is recommended that:

- 6. New retail development is encouraged to establish within existing vacant premises.
- 7. Council does not allow for the development of new buildings to house retail development unless the developer can establish that there are no suitable vacant premises available to accommodate the use.
- 8. Council actively promotes the Rural Tax Incentive scheme to ensure maximum benefit for the county and encourage use of the scheme to renovate existing buildings.
- 9. Where appropriate, Council should use powers provided under the Derelict Sites Act 1990 to upgrade, renovate or demolish derelict sites in retail areas.
- 10. Vacant and derelict retail buildings in the county should be identified and priority buildings identified for refurbishment.

9.1.5 *Maintaining a consolidated retail core*

Maintaining a central, consolidated retail core is essential to the viability of retail development in towns. In this regard, it is recommended that:

11. Vacant buildings in the retail core should be used for retail purposes.
12. Ribbon development along the approach roads to towns should be discouraged.
13. The preferred location for retail development should be within town centres. If there are no development sites available within a town centre then the next preference should be location on the edge of the town centre. Only where there are no sites or potential sites within a town centre or on its edge, or satisfactory transport accessibility realistically can not be ensured within a reasonable period of time, should out of town centre development be contemplated.
14. New development should only be developed in the retail core. Where a boundary to commercial development is identified for a town, this boundary should be respected and no retail development should occur outside this boundary.
15. Retail facilities outside the identified boundaries however, may be appropriate in the following circumstances:
 - i. A shop that is an ancillary to activities arising from farm diversification.
 - ii. A shop designed to serve tourist or recreational facilities, and secondary to the main use.
 - iii. A small scale shop attached to an existing craft workshop retailing the product direct to the public.
 - iv. A small scale shop designed to serve a dispersed rural community.

9.1.6 *Tourism*

Tourism plays a major role in the success and viability of retail centres within County Leitrim. In order to maximise benefit from this activity, it is recommended that:

16. A tourism strategy be prepared for the county with particular emphasis on tourism infrastructure in the central and northern areas of the county, these areas having fewer natural tourist attractions than the southern half of the county.
17. High quality retail outlets, selling high-end goods, are encouraged to locate in appropriate locations, so as to maximise the potential for tourist retail spending within the county.

18. Retail attractions of particular interest to visitors are encouraged to locate within town centres and be actively supported by Council. An example of such an initiative is the Leitrim Design House located in Carrick on Shannon, initiated and supported by the County Development Board. It is recommended that this centre is further developed to include a monthly market in the courtyard of the centre, during summer months, showcasing local goods and products.

9.1.7

Access

Access to retail outlets is perhaps one of the most important factors in the viability of any retail centre. In order to ensure adequate access, it is recommended that:

19. On street parking be restricted through the use of time limits or disc parking schemes in order to maximise parking turnover.
20. Retail employers and employees are encouraged to park in areas off the main street, though care should be taken to ensure that adequate linkages are provided to the retail core and safety measures such as lighting and sightlines are considered.
21. New off street parking is provided in appropriate locations which are accessible to retail centres. Adequate linkages, which are well lit, landscaped and safe, should be provided to retail outlets.
22. Existing off street parking facilities are upgraded, with marked parking spaces and improved pedestrian linkages.
23. Cycling and walking to retail centres be encouraged through the development of high quality cycling paths/lanes and footpaths of an adequate width and connectability.
24. Pedestrian crossing facilities be provided in all main towns including zebra crossings and pedestrian refuge islands.

9.1.8

Amenity

In order to enhance the attractiveness of a town, and thus potentially increase additional retail spending, it is recommended that:

25. Overhead wires are removed from all towns within the county, particularly Carrick-on-Shannon.
26. Development in towns and villages is focused towards existing natural features and create appropriate linkages to such features through landscaping, pedestrian access and the development of recreation and leisure facilities (such as picnic facilities on river foreshores).

27. Extensive tree planting be undertaken in towns and villages in order to improve both streetscape and amenity.

9.1.9 *Shop Facades*

Shop facades play a major role in the perceived attractiveness of a retail area. In this regard it is recommended that:

28. Council develop appropriate policies to ensure:
 - i. All shop fronts create an appealing interface with the street.
 - ii. Mosaics and inappropriate façade treatments be removed and replaced with material confirming to the dominant character and design of the town.
 - iii. Paintwork is of a high quality and is well maintained.
 - iv. The use of bold colours is discouraged.
 - v. New infill development is consistent in height, design and character with the existing streetscape. Care should be taken to ensure that horizontal lines of a new façade or shop front should match as closely as possible with those of adjacent building, and the streetscape generally.
 - vi. Closed, dark or curtained shop fronts are discouraged as they detract from the general streetscape and amenity of the area.

9.1.10 *Urban design*

Many of the towns within Leitrim would benefit from a number of urban design improvements. The attractiveness of a retail centre can be enhanced through high quality urban design and it is therefore recommended that:

29. Landscaping be undertaken to verges and roundabouts, particularly at town centre entrance points.
30. Existing street furniture is upgraded, including seats, litter bins and planters.
31. New, high quality street furniture is provided in all towns and villages across the county.
32. A street furniture maintenance programme is implemented.
33. High quality, attractive lighting be installed to enhance safety and add to the character of the area.
34. Street art, including sculpture, be considered in appropriate locations to enhance the amenity of the town. Where possible, local artists should be commissioned to such projects.

35. Litter bins are provided in areas likely to generate a high amount of rubbish.
36. All new retail developments should be designed to accommodate waste management by the inclusion of the of the necessary facilities and infrastructure as required by the *Connaught Regional Waste Management Plan*

9.1.11 Floorspace Restrictions

In regard to future retail development in the county, it is recommended that:

37. Planning policy seeks to maintain a variety of retail floorspace in towns and village centres.
38. The scale of all retail development should be consistent with the existing character of its surrounds and be consistent in scale to any adjacent development or buildings.
39. Retail development with a floorspace over 200m² should generally be discouraged in **Tier 4 of the County Leitrim Retail Hierarchy** villages unless it can be demonstrated that the retail is subsidiary to another use or activity that brings benefit to the county (such as tourism) **and** it can be demonstrated that the development will not have an adverse impact on existing retail in the area.
40. No retail development should occur out of town or village centres unless the retail is subsidiary to another use or activity that brings benefit to the county (such as tourism) **and** it can be demonstrated that the development will not have an adverse impact on existing retail in the area.
41. No retail development in out of town centre locations should be over 100 m² in floorspace, unless it can be demonstrated that the types of use requires additional floorspace to operate productively.
42. Petrol filling station forecourt retailing may not be in excess of 100m².
43. Retail development with a floorspace of under 50m² should generally be discouraged unless it can be demonstrated that the proposed size is appropriate and efficient for the proposed retail type.
44. Retail development of a scale considered by the County Council to be large scale in relation to existing town centres, the applicant must demonstrate compliance with the development plan and that there will not be a material impact on the vitality and viability of any existing town centre. In submitting evidence in relation to retail impact, the application should address the following criteria and demonstrate whether or not the proposal would:

- i. Support the long term strategy for towns centres and not materially diminish the prospect of attracting private centre investment into one or more town centres.
- ii. Cause an adverse impact on one or more town centre, either singly or cumulatively with recent developments or other outstanding planning permissions, sufficient to undermine the centre or its role in the economic and social life of the community.
- iii. Diminish the range of activities and services that a town centre can support.
- iv. Cause an increase in the number of vacant properties in the primary retail area.
- v. Ensure a high standard of access by public transport, foot and private car so that the proposal is accessible by all sections of the community.
- vi. Link effectively with the existing town centre so that there is likely to be commercial synergy.

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