

7 REVIEW OF POTENTIAL SITES

- 7.1 The preceding sections have provided the baseline facts and information in respect of the need and potential for additional retail floorspace in the town. It is clear from the review and analysis of the information that there is need and capacity for additional major new floorspace within Athy and its catchment area. To address the specific objectives and requirements of Policy RS10 of the Development Plan, this section of the report reviews and appraises the sites which have the scope for delivering potential and re-establishing and enhancing Athy's role, importance and competitiveness not only as the Sub County Town Centre serving the south of the County but also as one of the key centres within its sub regional area.
- 7.2 The process of identifying the range of potential sites has been based on the following suite of factors and considerations:
- i. Current development plan zonings;
 - ii. Review of submissions to the Development Plan;
 - iii. Independent health checks of the town and site visits/appraisals;
 - iv. Consultations with Council Members and Officers;
 - v. Consultations with the Town Engineer;
 - vi. Consultations with the Chamber of Commerce and key development interests in the town; and
 - vii. Review of submissions on the study – summaries of the submissions are provided in Appendix A.

SETTING THE PARAMETERS FOR SITE IDENTIFICATION

- 7.3 On the basis of the above, this section sets out the sites that have been identified, followed by a summary assessment of each against selected criteria. As the boundaries of the sites selected are only indicative, specific site sizes have not been provided, apart from where details have been provided in submissions or from consultations with different development interests.
- 7.4 It is important to highlight that the approach adopted in respect of consultations with individual development interests was agreed with the Council and all parties had made submissions or, in the case of the Shaws' site, had a live planning application. This is stated to highlight that the approach was wholly transparent.

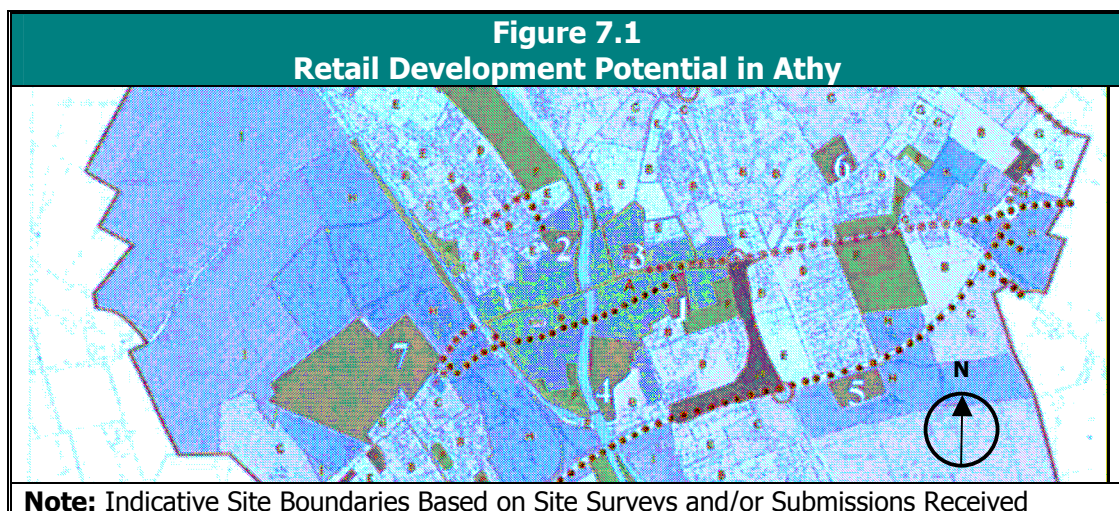
- 7.5 In total, some thirty sites were examined in the review of potential sites. Given the lack of investment to date in the town centre and the current live market interest in redressing this issue, following detailed consultations with Council Members, it was concluded that the priority in the Retail Strategy should be on ensuring the potential for these proposals being delivered. However, to ensure conformity with the Development Plan which indicates that certain retail needs may be better met outside of the town centre, it was agreed a small number of sites that would be appropriate for either large supermarkets and/or retail warehousing should be identified at this stage with the position being re-examined in respect of other sites as part of the review of the Plan which is required in 2010.
- 7.6 In view of the heavy traffic congestion that prevails in Athy Town Centre, the second critical factor which underpinned the evaluation of the potential sites was that of the delivery of strategic road infrastructure. This took due account of the following in respect of the key road infrastructure objectives in the Development Plan:
- **Inner Relief Street:** the delivery of this, with associated other traffic management and parking initiatives, is recognised as fundamental to Athy Town Centre having the road capacity to accommodate any major retail and other town centre development. This will be a critical factor in the consideration of development proposals specifically in respect of the contribution that any proposals will make to securing its implementation.
 - **Southern Relief Road:** the implementation of this proposal is essential to the opening up of the development potential of lands bounding the preferred route of the road. The role and potential of the road is also intrinsically linked to the delivery of the Inner Relief Street and the linkages which can be achieved between both to ensure an integrated framework and approach to the sustainable expansion of the town centre and the town as a whole. It is an objective in the Development Plan which is subject to the necessary funding becoming available whether that be through public sector resources or development contributions. Proposals which emerge prior to the Southern Relief Road being well advanced in construction and completion would be viewed as premature unless otherwise comprehensively proven.
 - **Northern Relief Road:** as has been noted in Section 4, although an objective of the Plan, this proposal is recognised as having a longer term delivery timescale than either the Inner Relief Street or the Southern Relief Road. The feasibility study on the route options is ongoing. While the route may be determined in the timescale of the current Development Plan, its implementation is more likely to be within the timescale of the next Plan. As such, this has consequences for the potential of sites that are related to its delivery and implementation.
- 7.7 Finally, while there are a number of lands and buildings within and around Athy Town Centre and the town as a whole which individually and collectively have the potential to enhance the retail offer and attraction of the town, the catalyst to these being realised is set by a critical mass of floorspace being delivered in the town centre. While all of these have been reviewed in the study, although they are not discounted, the focus of the study has been on land and buildings which have the

critical mass to provide the catalyst for significant regeneration of the town centre and deliver the quantum of floorspace required for the retail objectives of the Development Plan and Retail Strategy to be realised.

KEY SITES WITH STRATEGIC POTENTIAL

7.8 Founded on the above principles and parameters, seven sites were assessed as having strategic potential to contribute to the objectives of the Development Plan being met. The numbering of the sites has been ordered by the tests of the Sequential Approach – Core Retail Area/Town Centre, Edge of Centre and Out of Centre respectively. The sites are listed below and identified in Figure 7.1:

- **Site 1:** Land off Leinster Street
- **Site 2:** Land adjacent to Pettitts' Supermarket
- **Site 3:** Land off Stanhope Place
- **Site 4:** The Abbey Site
- **Site 5:** Land opposite Mansfield Grove, Dublin Road
- **Site 6:** Former Esta Factory
- **Site 7:** Land off Ballylynan Road.



ASSESSMENT OF SITE POTENTIAL

- 7.9 Each of the sites has been assessed according to the following factors and influences:
- i. Tests of the Sequential Approach;
 - ii. Road and other infrastructure influences; and
 - iii. Short, medium and long term potential with: 2006 – 2012 being short term; 2012 – 2018 medium term; and, 2018 – 2020+ being long term.

Core Retail Area

Site 1: Land off Leinster Street

- 7.10 **Description:** this vacant site is located behind the backlands of the Core Retail Area, off Leinster Street to the east of Athy Town Centre. It is approximately 1.25 hectares (ha) in size and is zoned 'Town Centre' in the Development Plan. A small segment of the north east of the site fronts onto the Core Retail Area/Leinster Street. The site is bounded by housing to the east and west, the backlands of commercial and residential units on Leinster Street to the north and the open space of the Peoples Park/St. Michaels Court and the Rectory and grounds to the south. The majority of the site is overgrown pasture with the Leinster Street frontage comprising two vacant residential and retail properties (Blanchfields Plants and Presents) and their associated backlands.
- 7.11 Access to the main street from the site will require the demolition of the two vacant residential and retail properties on Leinster Street. This will provide a narrow access route and frontage (approximately 20 metres) to the site. The site is in close proximity to the N78 National Secondary Road, the main route through Athy linking Kilkenny to Dublin, and sits on the eastern end of the proposed Athy Inner Relief Street.
- 7.12 **Assessment:** bounded to the north east by the Core Retail Area combined with its Town Centre zoning, this site meets the tests of the Sequential Approach. Additionally, it has good accessibility and connectivity to the town centre as a whole. The logistics of its development in terms of access and parking will require to be examined in a Traffic Impact Assessment (TIA). It is a key opportunity within the town centre and would secure the use and regeneration of vacant backlands. The site has the potential for both convenience and comparison floorspace but the

emphasis should be the latter. In the final stages of the preparation of the Retail Strategy, a planning application for a retail anchored mixed use scheme was lodged. This site has the scope and potential to be delivered in the short term.

Site 2: Land adjacent to Pettitts Supermarket

- 7.13 **Description:** this site sits north of Edmund Rice Square and is 150 metres north of the Duke Street frontage of the Core Retail Area. Although not within the Core Retail Area, as it is adjacent to one of the key shopping locations in the town centre for the purposes of the assessment it has been taken to be a Core Retail Area site. As it is likely to form part of a larger development site, there is no information available on the size of the site. It is zoned 'Town Centre' in the Development Plan. The site is approximately 150 metres to the north of Duke Street. It is bounded by open space to the north, the River Barrow to the east, Pettitts SuperValu to the south and south east and Scoil Eoin CBS and Greenhills Housing Estate to the west. At present, the site is a large expanse of relatively flat green open space.
- 7.14 Road access to the site is at present limited and will require to be in agreement with adjacent owners. There is pedestrian access along the River Barrow and from the adjacent area of open space. However, Objective M2 of the Development Plan seeks to construct vehicle access from Barrack Lane to the adjacent Council owned lands to serve the community and also mixed use development of the area. This would provide the mechanism for the opening up of the site and adjacent lands for retail and other town centre development.
- 7.15 **Assessment:** the site is adjacent to an existing important town centre shopping area, some 150 metres from the Core Retail Area and zoned Town Centre. It, therefore, would be judged to meet the tests of the Sequential Approach. The site is of a sufficient size for a sizeable retail development and this would be enhanced if the development parcel incorporated adjacent lands as part of a more comprehensive town centre scheme. Its development potential is currently very limited due to access constraints but these are set to be redressed by the planned road improvements from Woodstock Street to Barrack Lane. Additionally, we are informed that there are potential flooding issues. Access and other issues will, therefore, have to be addressed in traffic and engineering studies. Consultations have indicated that there are emerging proposals for large scale retail development of the site, including replacement/expansion of the existing adjacent supermarket. These will enable consolidation and widening of the town centre. Given that delivery of the site/area will be dependent on the new access road, the site would be defined as having medium term development potential.

Site 3: Land off Stanhope Place

- 7.16 **Description:** the site is located close to the Core Retail Area along the junction of Chapel Lane and Stanhope Place off Leinster Street, to the east of the town centre. It is the smallest of the potential sites identified and is zoned 'Town Centre' in the Development Plan. The site is bordered by a private residence to the north, a Presbyterian Church to the north west, commercial and retail properties fronting onto Leinster Street to the south and south west and Chapel Lane to the west. On the opposite side of Chapel Lane there is a newly constructed two storey development consisting of a number of retail and residential units. The retail units are currently vacant. The site is currently operated as a garage and motor repairs centre.
- 7.17 The accessibility of the site is poor despite the fact it is located within the town centre just off the main thoroughfare. Chapel Lane and Stanhope Place are both narrow lanes which link to Leinster Street. Road improvements would be required if the development potential of the site is to be opened up.
- 7.18 **Assessment:** the site is located adjacent to the Core Retail Area and is zoned Town Centre. It, thus meets the tests of the Sequential Approach. Given the access constraints and the fact that it is currently in commercial use, the site would be defined as having medium term potential for small or medium sized retail development.

Edge of Centre

Site 4: The Abbey Site

- 7.19 **Description:** this site is located on the River Barrow on the east side of the town centre and is approximately 2.5ha in size. It is a brownfield site zoned 'Town Centre' in the Development Plan. The site is surrounded predominantly by town centre development, with new residential development to the south. Its environmental setting on the river makes it a key site in terms of its role and importance in the regeneration of the town centre. Access to the site is currently restricted and there are issues of potential flooding.
- 7.20 **Assessment:** the site is located less than 300 metres – 400 metres from the Core Retail Area and would, thus, be defined as an edge of centre site under the tests of the Sequential Approach. It is a key opportunity site for the regeneration of the town centre given its central and waterfront location and its potential as a catalyst within the wider MP2 masterplan context within which it sits. In the final stages of

the preparation of the Retail Strategy, a planning application for a retail anchored mixed use scheme was lodged. Given the momentum behind the proposals, this site would be defined as having short term development potential.

Out of Centre

Site 5: Land opposite Mansfield Grove, Dublin Road

- 7.21 **Description:** the site is located to the south of the GAA and other sports grounds to the south east of the Town Centre. It is zoned 'Industrial and Warehousing' in the Development Plan. The plan, however, indicates that there is provision for retail warehousing in the general area. It is bounded by housing and community uses to the north and land is zoned for industrial and warehousing uses and large areas residential development to the south.
- 7.22 At present, there is poor access to the site via a very narrow country lane. However, it is located on the proposed route of the Southern Distributor Road which will greatly open up the area's accessibility and potential.
- 7.23 **Assessment:** under the tests of the Sequential Approach, the site is defined as out of centre. The current Development Plan zoning would permit retail warehousing. However, this will only be possible following the implementation of the Southern Distributor Road. At that stage, it may also have potential for providing for the local shopping needs of the expanding residential suburbs of the south of the town. Given the need for the new road to open up the site's potential, it would be defined as a medium to long term retail site.

Site 6: Former Esta Factory

- 7.24 **Description:** the site is located on the Kildare Road and is approximately 1.5ha in size. It is zoned for District Centre uses in the Development Plan. The site is bounded by residential areas to the south and west and land to the north and east is zoned for residential development. The former Esta factory buildings occupy the site. A planning application for a District Centre is currently being considered by the Council.
- 7.25 There have been concerns regarding the suitability and capacity of the local road network to accommodate a District Centre. However, the road widening proposed at the site, along with that which is coming forward with the residential development to the north and west, plus the proposals for the N9 link road and the Southern Distributor Road are expected to mitigate the potential for any problems.

- 7.26 **Assessment:** under the tests of the Sequential Approach, the site is defined as out of centre. The correct zoning is in place for a District Centre on the site. The development of the site for a District Centre would secure the regeneration of the site and better meet the bulky convenience shopping needs of existing and emerging residential areas. It is, therefore, suitable for convenience anchored retail development. The scale and nature of centre will be determined by its size and the capacity of the local road network and it may be more appropriate that it is of a Neighbourhood rather than a District Centre size. Its potential also requires to be considered in the context of the wider bulky convenience shopping needs of the east of the town. Set against these considerations, it is viewed of a site with Neighbourhood Centre potential and a short term horizon retail development site.

Site 7: Land off Ballylynan Road

- 7.27 **Description:** the site is located 1km from the Core Retail Area on the west side of the town and is approximately 12ha in size. It is zoned 'Industrial and Warehousing' in the Development Plan. The site is bounded to the north by agricultural land, the Tegral factory and other industrial uses to the south and east and predominantly residential lands to the south west. There is a large expanse of residential zoned land to the south of the site, some of which has already been developed. There are a number of individual bulky goods retail warehouse units within the industrial estate.
- 7.28 The site has access directly onto the N78 National Secondary Road and, thus, it has good strategic accessibility. It is, however, disconnected from the town centre and the east of the town. The proposed Inner Relief Street route crosses near the south eastern boundary of the site and would improve access and connectivity considerably. It could be conveniently accessed on foot by people living in the surrounding and growing residential areas.
- 7.29 **Assessment:** under the tests of the Sequential Approach, the site is defined as out of centre. The current Development Plan zoning would permit retail warehousing but no other retail uses. It is the strategic western gateway to the town in a rapidly expanding residential suburb of Athy. The area is significantly under provided for in meeting the bulky convenience shopping needs of people currently living in the west of the town. The issue is further heightened by the congestion difficulties of getting into the town centre to meet these needs. It is a position which will be reinforced as the population continues to grow. In the context of the retail planning of the town, the site has potential for a District Centre or large Neighbourhood Centre and retail warehousing. These would serve to ensure that the distribution of retail floorspace in and around the town was more efficient, equitable and sustainable. However, to ensure that any development does not prejudice the town centre and edge of centre schemes being delivered, it has been agreed by Council Members and Officers that the development of a District Centre should only be permitted when the town centre

and edge of centre schemes are at an advanced stage and in the interim only a standalone supermarket and bulky goods restricted retail warehousing would be acceptable. In the final stages of the preparation of the Retail Strategy, planning applications for a District Centre and retail park were lodged. The former would not be permissible under the current Development Plan zoning. If needs are to be met in the interests of the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, then the Council requires to consider whether the current zoning remains appropriate. Given the live planning applications, providing zoning constraints were addressed, this site would be defined as having short term retail development potential.

CONCLUSION

- 7.30 The immediate, medium and longer term retail potential and appropriateness of the suite of potential sites has been wholly focused on the following two issues:
- Ensuring the key focus for new retail and other town centre development is in Athy Town Centre
 - That the delivery of all proposals can be accommodated in the capacity of the existing and emerging road network and, thus, not exacerbate the significant traffic congestion which already currently prevails.
- 7.31 These are sound principles that are wholly defensible and articulate the objectives of the Development Plan. However, as it is the objective for Athy to secure major enhancement and expansion of its retail offer and attraction then, as part of the review of the Development Plan in 2010, there will be a further review of potential retail sites at this time.

