

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the Draft Report of the reviewed and updated 2004-2009 County Longford Retail Strategy as been prepared by *Cunnane Stratton Reynolds* for Longford County Council and Longford Town Council. It updates the existing strategy to 2015 and provides an overview to 2020.

This document has been divided into a series of sections corresponding to different research methods used and their specific foci. However, all sections are centred around the theme of retail. Each section feeds into a number of policy recommendations regarding retailing in County Longford.

The document concludes that Longford Town, as the County Town is trading well with a good mix of both independent and multiple retailers. In addition to Longford Town there are a number of smaller towns, which continue to contribute to the growth and development of the county and Midlands Region. Although there is a degree of variation in the performance of the county's different settlements, the commercial and demographic characteristics of these centres can be consolidated to assist in achieving the required critical mass within the region to facilitate the aims and objectives of National, Regional and Local retail policy.

This document identifies that there is scope for the county to improve and enhance the quantum and quality of its retail offer. It is also concluded that developing the retail offer of the county, especially in respect of high-end high street comparison shopping, is vital if Longford is to remain competitive and arrest the levels of both convenience and comparison expenditure leakage to centres outside of the county. This is identified as been particularly important for Longford Town if it is to build upon its strategic role, as outlined in the Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines, as a Principal Town within the broader polycentric model for the Region including the Linked Gateway. In this regard, this document concludes that that the growth of Longford Town, demographically, economically, in terms of its retail offer and as a strategically located inter-regional link which serves as a vital urban anchor in an otherwise predominantly rural county, necessitates the expansion of the core shopping area from that defined as "centre" in the existing County Longford Retail Strategy 2004-2009. This redefinition necessitates the changing of much of the area currently designated as "centre" to "town Core", the area currently designated as "edge-of-centre" to "centre" and some of the area currently designated as "out-of-centre" to "edge-of-centre".

Apart from Longford Town, the other retail centres in the county are small both in terms of population size and quantum of retail floorspace. Whilst the improvement of the retail offer of these centres needs to be encouraged and facilitated, it is foreseen that if County Longford's retail needs are to be achieved *within* the county and expenditure leakage to other areas notably reduced, then the strategic priority must be to focus on enhancing the retailing environment of Longford Town. The reviewed and updated broad capacity assessment of the requirement for additional retail floorspace reveals that there is sizeable latent expenditure potential to provide for both the quality and quantum of additional retail floorspace requisite for Longford Town. This document concludes that there exists an additional convenience floor space requirement of

between 3,000 and 7,000 sq m over the 2007-2015 period. This document also concludes that there exists an additional comparison floor space requirement of between 7,000 and 16,000 sq m during the same period. While it is recognised that these requirements for additional retail floorspace provide a useful quantifiable platform against which to assess trends in retail development within the county, it is important to stress that these figures are considered conservative, especially in light of the region's recent socio-economic advances. Also, it is essential to note that the nature of such new retail floorspace must resolve the deficiencies within the county's retail offer if the vitality and viability of the county's centres, particularly Longford Town, is to be protected. Specifically, future additional retail provision within Longford Town and its environs should address the insufficiency of the centre's high-end high street comparison retail offer and traffic congestion problems.

This document proposes a series of strategic, general and specific policy additions and changes to the existing policy provisions of the current Retail Strategy.

This document also proposes a series of criteria against which all applications for significant new retail development should be assessed. However, it is acknowledged that what is significant will differ between Longford Town and other centres in the county. Thus, varying thresholds are established which relate to the size, location and retail profile of the centres. Noting the characteristics of each centre and the general size of existing outlets, the following is recommended as a guide:

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

Finally, this document suggests a series of continued monitoring and review mechanisms to ensure that both the baseline information and policies remain up to date. These mechanisms also help ensure the effective implementation of the policies adopted by the Council, and where necessary, facilitate their amendment in response to changing circumstances.