

6.0 INTRODUCTION

The Retail Planning Guidelines clearly highlight how the concepts of vitality and viability are central in maintaining and enhancing town centres. The realisation of these essential qualities depends on a balance of many factors, including the range and degree of activities in a centre, its mix of uses, its accessibility to people living and working in the area along with its general amenity, appearance and safety. As the attainment/maintenance of town centre vitality and viability are crucial in attracting both retail businesses and consumers, an examination of the 'health' of the county's principal settlements formed an essential research element of this review. The process by which these qualities are assessed for a specific centre is known as a *health check*. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to provide an overview of the *health checks* undertaken of the county's main centres and update the information presented in the 2004-2009 Retail Strategy.

6.1 ADOPTED 'HEALTH CHECK' APPROACH

A health check assessment essentially analyses the strengths and weaknesses of town centres. The Retail Planning Guidelines provide general direction as to the fundamental factors contributing to a 'healthy' town centre. These include:

- *Attractions* – these underpin a town and comprise the range and diversity of shopping and other activities which draw in customers and visitors.
- *Accessibility* – successful centres need to be accessible to the surrounding catchment area via a good road network and public transport facilities, and to encompass good local linkages between car parks, public transport stops and the various attractions within the centre.
- *Amenity* – a healthy town centre should be a pleasant place to be in. It should be attractive in terms of environmental quality and urban design, it should be safe, and have a distinct identity or image.
- *Action* – to function effectively as a viable commercial centre, things need to happen. Development and improvement projects should be implemented efficiently; there should be regular and effective cleaning and maintenance and there should be co-ordinated town centre management initiatives to promote the continued improvement of the centre.

Although the Retail Planning Guidelines are explicit in stating that no single indicator on its own can measure the performance of a town in relation to these four elements of general 'health', the Guidelines do note that it is possible to gain a good appreciation by undertaking a health check assessment using a variety of indicators. In this way the strengths and weaknesses of town centres can be analysed systematically and planning authorities, such as Longford County Council, will be able to ascertain how well centres are performing in terms of their attraction, accessibility, amenity and action programmes.

Whilst the majority of those 'health' indicators suggested for use by the Guidelines were used when conducting health check assessments of the county's principal settlements, a limited number of the indicators recommended in the Guidelines are neither appropriate nor available for centres outside of the main metropolitan areas; for example- shopping rents; pattern of movement in retail rents within primary shopping areas. Nevertheless, the approach adopted in this update and review is more detailed than that undertaken in the preparation of the previous 2004-2009 Retail Strategy.

In view of the above, the health checks were structured as follows:

- Location and Accessibility
- Demographic Trends of the Settlement
- Environmental Quality
- Levels of Vacancy
- Diversity of Uses
- Retail Representation

6.2 SETTLEMENTS ASSESSED

In keeping with standard practice the health check assessments for this review, which were conducted in February 2007, were restricted to the principle town centres in the county and therefore did not include Longford's smaller settlements or the environs areas of the larger towns in the county. Consequently health check assessments were undertaken for the following settlements:

- Longford Town
- Granard
- Ballymahon
- Edgeworthstown

Although not assessed to as great a depth as those settlements noted above, reference is also made to the following villages:

- Lanesboro
- Keenagh
- Newtownforbes
- Drumlish
- Carrickglass

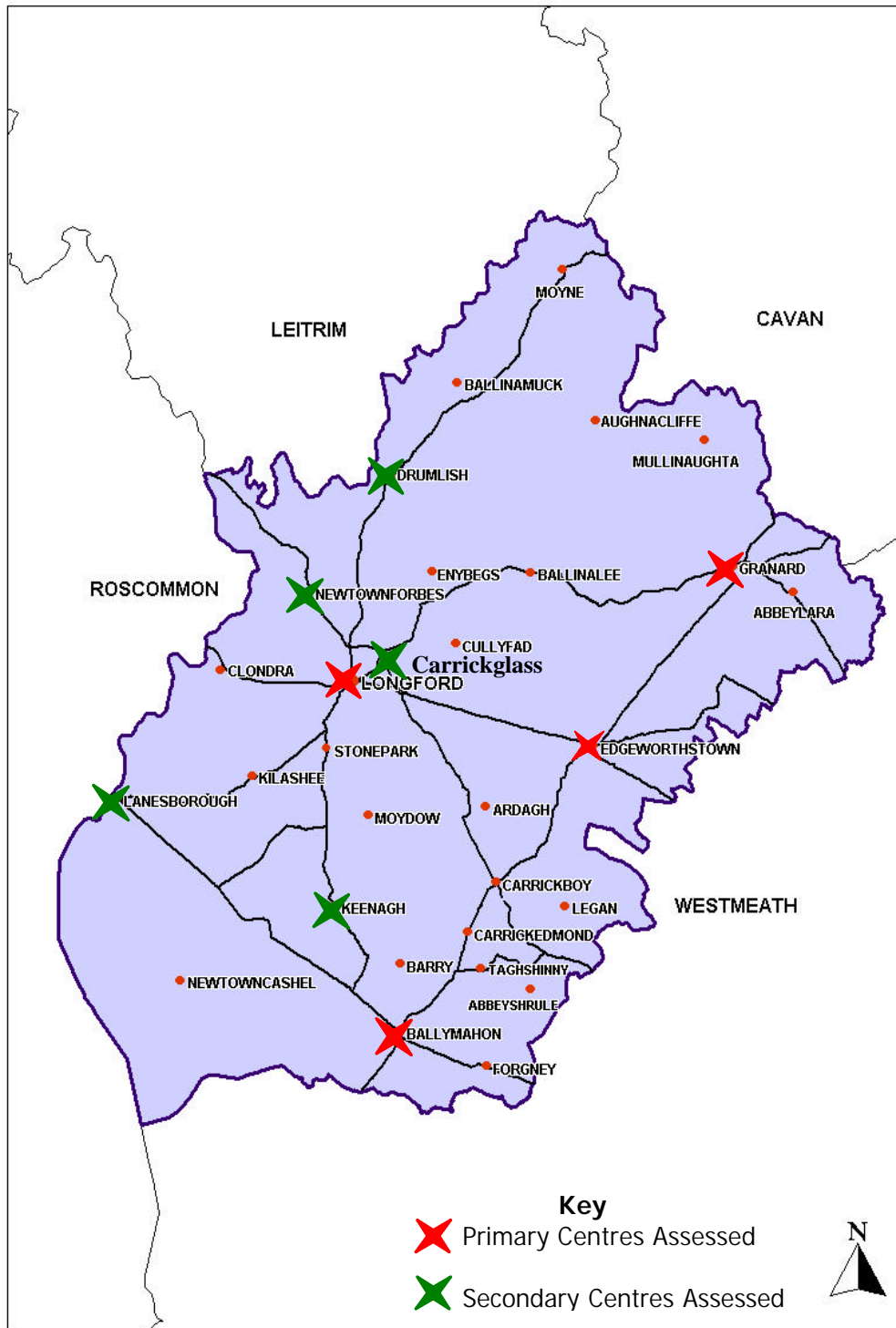


Figure 6.1
Map of County Longford showing centres assessed in this study

6.3 LONGFORD TOWN

6.3.1 Location and Accessibility

Longford Town is the County Town of County Longford and is situated slightly west-of-centre within the county boundary on the Camlin River, approximately 5 miles southeast of its confluence with the River Shannon. The land within the town boundary is predominantly flat, with a pronounced rise towards the southeast. Longford town is strategically located at the junction of the N4 from Sligo and the N5 from Castlebar, which together form the two National Primary Routes connecting the north-western seaboard with Dublin. In addition, the N63, a National Secondary Route linking the town to Roscommon, and the N55 linking Athlone and Cavan, along with several smaller regional routes connecting Longford with the wider midland, eastern, border and western regions, ensures the settlement's position as one of Ireland's most important inter-regional centres. As detailed in Table 6.1, the town enjoys relative proximity with several of both the main regional and national retailing centres.

Settlement	Distance in Km
Dublin	126
Sligo	90
Athlone	45
Mullingar	42
Cavan	48

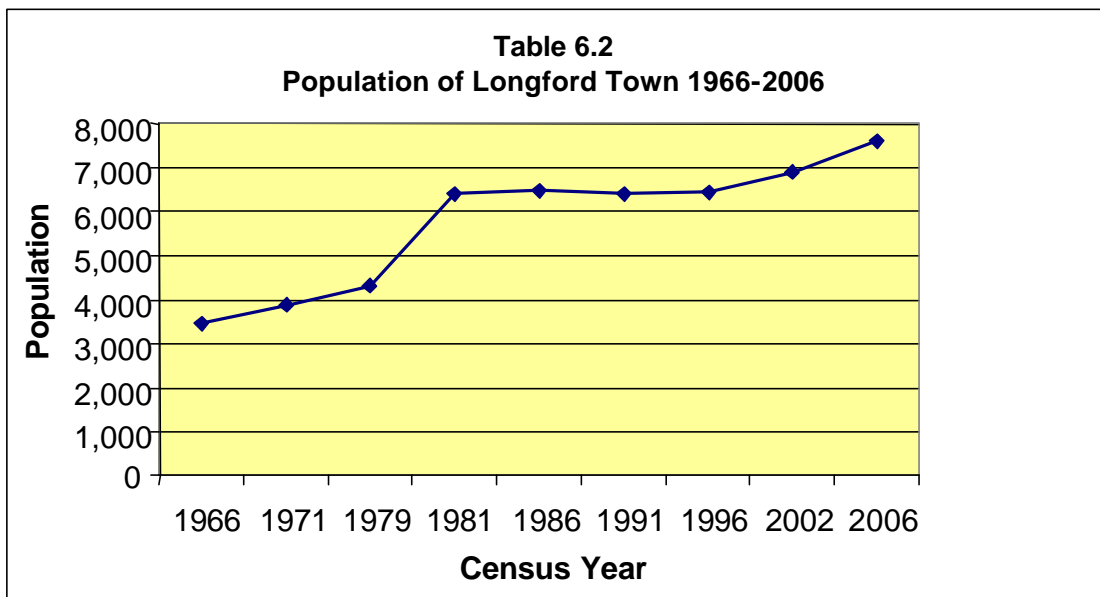
The N5 passes through the centre of Longford. As a result almost all of the Towns commercial streets form part of the National Primary Route, including, Main Street, Ballymahon Street, Dublin Street, and New Street. A one-way traffic system operates on Dublin Street, New Street and Ballymahon Street. However, the Town suffers from poor traffic circulation due to heavy vehicular traffic utilising the N5. Illegal parking and the loading and unloading of goods further exacerbate this problem. Car parking is provided in the town at a number of locations including: the Longford Shopping centre, Aldi Retail Park, Lidl supermarket, the front and rear of the Market Square, at the rear of the main street, at the cathedral, and at the County Council offices on Great Water Street. In addition, there is a car parking area currently under construction to the rear of Ballymahon Street.

Longford is also strategically located on the main Sligo-Dublin rail line. Nine services depart daily to the Dublin Connolly station and five to Sligo. In addition, Iarnróid Eireann operates a comprehensive freight service out of Longford. Indeed, the MRPGs note the strategic location of Longford Town as an inter-regional link within a broader polycentric model that incorporates the Midlands Gateway by stressing its function as a transport hub, with the N4 and N5 at Longford Town, combined with the Sligo-Dublin rail line providing a natural freight depot in the centre of the country. As is the case with most medium to large size towns in Ireland, Longford is no longer wholly contained within the functional area of the Town Council.

6.3.2 Demographic Trends of the Settlement

Longford Town functions as the county's primary administrative, residential, commercial and industrial centre offering both the immediate population and those of its wider hinterland a range of job opportunities and a selection of higher order goods and services not found elsewhere in the county.

Reflecting this position as the county's most important town is the modest, but sustained growth of Longford's population since 1996 (Figure 6.2). It is likely that population growth will grow at a faster rate in the next inter-censal period following the opening of the Irish Prisons Services Headquarters on the edge of the town centre.



6.3.3 Environmental Quality

Longford has an attractive streetscape. Many of the town's traditional shopfronts have been maintained while newer developments along the main streets have often sought to tastefully replicate traditional motifs. However, while the majority of shop fronts in the town centre are well presented some long-established shop fronts and upper floor windows have been marred by the inappropriate replacements of traditional wooden sash windows with PVC replicas. This mirrors the situation experienced in most Irish towns where an increasing use of PVC/aluminium windows in the upper floors of Georgian and Victorian properties is evident. While some notable examples of timber sliding sash windows remain, there is a need for a proactive approach to retain these and reinstate timber sash windows where they have been lost.



A vibrant traditional style shopfront;

The importance of grounding visually obtrusive cabling has been recognised by both the Town and County Councils in the extensive works currently been undertaken in ducting the lines. Also, the new lighting stands erected by the Council, which are sensitively designed to the town's traditional appearance, have greatly improved the public realm along Longford's main thoroughfares.

As noted above, relatively poor parking provision and general vehicular congestion are both prevalent in the town centre. This excessive vehicular activity seriously detracts from the attractiveness of Longford's centre and is a matter which requires immediate attention should the vitality and viability of the retail core be maintained.

The town centre has benefited from an upgrade in paving with most of the retail core suffering from poor quality paving. Throughout the town the requirements of vehicles

are dominant over those of pedestrians. There is also a poor provision of safe pedestrian crossing points. This needs to be improved so as to ensure that the town becomes a more attractive environment for pedestrians.

In addition, it is held that the traditional town centre would benefit from more pedestrian linkages in tandem with the slowly expanding retail core area which would thereby enhance the character and accessibility of the town. Recognising this, the Council has adopted a proactive approach in encouraging a pedestrian link with dual frontage shops on Brendan's Lane (linking Dublin Street and New Street) by implementing a scheme for the development of the area.

Litter bins are provided throughout the town and there does not appear to be a significant litter problem. Indeed, the Irish Business Against Litter (IBAL) issued Longford Town with "Litter Free Status" in its 2006 anti-litter league, placing the town at position number 20 in the league.¹

However, the environmental quality of the town centre is somewhat eroded by a noticeable lack of active frontage along the western elevation of Longford Centre, a negative design feature compounded by the building's poorly proportioned bulk.



¹ Established in 1996, Irish Business Against Litter (IBAL) is an alliance encompassing more than 30 member companies, employing in excess of 70,000 staff. Members share a belief that continued economic prosperity - notably in the areas of retail, tourism, and direct foreign investment - is contingent on a clean, litter-free environment. As part of the IBAL Anti-Litter League, all towns with a population 6,000 and over are monitored independently by An Taisce in accordance with international grading standards. Towns are graded on an annual basis and provided with a comparable score which forms the basis of the Anti-Litter league.

6.3.4 Levels of Vacancy

Although vacancy does not appear to be a problem in the southern areas of Main Street, the vacancy rates rise sharply towards the central and northern sections of the town's principle thoroughfare, particularly at the junction with Great Water Street. However, it may be the case that the construction of a number of new retail units adjacent to the cinema at the former AIPB site which is currently underway may help provide the impetus required to draw pedestrian traffic north of Camlin Bridge and thereby encourage operators into the aforementioned vacant shops.

6.3.5 Diversity of Uses

Longford Town provides an extensive range of retail and commercial facilities. The town also accommodates several major financial institutions, such as AIB, Ulster Bank and Bank of Ireland along with representatives of the legal and medical professions, and a significant number of insurance and accounting services.

Industrial development in the town is located in three main areas: The first industrial zone is located adjacent to the south-west of town centre in the Town Parks area, which extends west across the Athlone Road. The eastern part of these lands is experiencing significant development pressure due to its location immediately adjacent to the Town Centre. The second bank of industrial land is located north-east of the town at the IDA Industrial park and Abbot Ireland with the third area of industrial lands located at the Masterec Business Park to the west of the town.

The town enjoys a number of high quality public open spaces, including the recreation spaces at Mall Park, along the River Camlin, and along the Royal Canal. Recreational sporting facilities are also available at the Mall Sports Complex, the swimming pool located at Market Square (which is to be relocated to a new premises at the Mall Complex which is currently at an advanced stage of construction), a private pool and leisure centre at the Longford Arms Hotel, a golf course, Pearse Park GAA grounds, soccer pitches at Abbeycartron, a rugby club, a tennis club and a snooker hall. In addition, Longford Town Soccer Club have a modern all seated ground at Mullolagher about 3 kilometres from the town, on the Strokestown Road, while a bowling and recreational complex is located on the Athlone Road approximately one and a half kilometres outside the town. Leisure facilities are provided by way of a cinema at Bridge Street and the Backstage Theatre at Slashers GAA ground.

6.3.6 Retail Representation

6.3.6.1 Convenience

Longford Town has a reasonable level of convenience representation. The main convenience store in Longford Town is Tesco's which anchors the Longford Centre shopping centre. SuperValu has recently located from Market Square in the town centre to the Town Parks area to the south west of the town centre, with a Centra store now occupying the old SuperValu premises. There are also two discount stores in Longford town; Aldi, which is located in the Town Parks Retail Park to the south-west of the town centre and Lidl to the east of the town.

6.3.6.2 Comparison

The main comparison anchor in the town centre is Penny's which is located in the Longford Centre shopping centre. There is also a non-food Dunnes Stores on Main Street along with a number of independent stores in the town centre. Recent additions to the town's comparison offer has included Elvery's Sports which opened in the Lanesborough Road Retail Park, along with Homebase and Argos in the Longford N4 Axis Centre Retail Park to the north of the town centre. However, there is a deficiency of high end comparison retail provision in the town.

6.4 GRANARD

6.4.1 Location and Accessibility

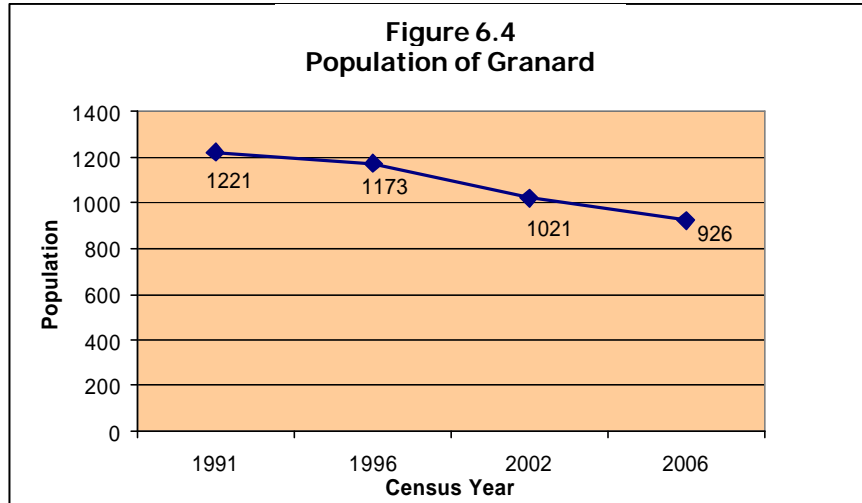
Granard is located approximately 25km north east of Longford Town and 12km to the north east of Edgeworthstown, close to the border with County Cavan. It is bisected by the N55 and the R194, both of which pass through the Main Street. As a result of this, the town regularly experiences large volumes of heavy traffic travelling from the midlands and mid-west to Cavan, Dundalk and Larne. This traffic has negative implications in terms of vehicular and pedestrian circulation within the town, particularly with regard to congestion, poor parking practices and road surface quality.



Figure 6.3
Map of Longford indicating the Location of Granard.

6.4.2 Demographic Trends of the Settlement

Although Granard is County Longford's second settlement, a scheduled town for which a Local Area Plan has been prepared, the centre has experienced a decline in population over the last number of years (Figure 6.4).



6.4.3 Environmental Quality

The principal feature and character defining element of Granard is the large Motte and Bailey built by Richard Tuite in 1190. Standing some 165.5 metres (543ft) above sea level, it is reputed to be the highest motte in Ireland and dominates the landscape from all directions. Located immediately north west of the motte and overlooking Main Street is St Mary's Church, built in 1897. The main part of the contemporary town dates from the early nineteenth century, and most of the significant buildings date from this period. Like Longford Town, Granard has an attractive streetscape, largely resultant from the preservation of a substantial portion of the town's traditional shopfronts. However, as with the County's main town, several long-established shop fronts and upper floor windows have been disfigured by the incongruous replacement of traditional wooden sash windows with PVC replicas.



As is a common feature in rural Irish towns, the presence of overhead wiring can at times detract from the streetscape quality and reduce views to important landmarks such as St Mary's Church. However, the Council is rectifying this problem by ducting such overhead cables as part of the Urban and Village Renewal Scheme.

With the exception of the playground at Higginstown Road, there are few areas of public open space within the town. As identified in the Granard Local Area Plan, there is a need to provide a public park around the Motte, in order to make it more accessible to the public. In general, quality open spaces are limited to the small greens contained within housing estates, and are for the most part, poorly articulated. The current mixed use redevelopment of the lands to the rear of Main Street provides an opportunity to strengthen the town morphology in a manner that provides improved passive recreation space in the urban setting. As noted in the current Granard Local Area Plan, street furniture in the town is adequate along the Main Street, with occasional unique features such as hydrants and vent pipes providing variation which is in keeping with their surroundings. However, overhead cabling is imposing and creates a poor impression.

The presence of poor parking arrangements in the town centre, in conjunction with large volumes of heavy traffic passing through Main Street has ensured that congestion is an acute problem in the town centre. This excessive vehicular activity seriously detracts from the attractiveness of Granard's centre. Compounding this vehicular dominance is a poor provision of safe pedestrian crossing points. While many of the paths throughout the town have recently been repaired and upgraded, most notably along Main Street, work remains to be carried out on some of the towns paved areas and in some areas, footpaths are in particularly poor condition. It is important that permeability through to the core area of Granard is achievable. On the north side of Main Street pedestrian access is available to designated back land parking areas and

new mixed use developments currently under construction. In order to achieve an appropriate level of vitality and viability in these areas it is crucial that all new pedestrian and vehicular links with new retail units to the rear of Main Street be of a high design standard that facilitates town centre permeability and ensures the safety of users.



6.4.4 Levels of Vacancy

At the time of the health check, vacancy levels in the town were moderately high. These were especially evident in older, smaller units where there is less potential with respect to the adaptability of floorspace. Although the vacant units were spread throughout the settlement, there was a marginal concentration of vacant units at the south western end of Main Street.

6.4.5 Diversity of Uses

Given its population, Granard enjoys a good diversity of uses including several employment generators such as an Agricultural Mart, which operates year round, 'Pat the Baker', one of the largest employers in the area, Lite Pak, and Lakeland Dairies. The town also has both a primary and secondary school. In addition, Granard has a GAA grounds and a sizeable community playground area. The town provides an important stopover point for passing tourists visiting nearby attractions such as Lough Shellin and Lough Kinale. This function is reflected in the presence of two hotels; The Greville Arms and Hourican's Hotel.

6.4.6 Retail Representation

6.4.6.1 Convenience

The town has a number of symbol group convenience retailers such as SuperValu and Londis, along with a number of smaller independent retailers.

6.4.6.2 Comparison

The principal comparison retailer in town is Garland's Hardware & Furniture Shop currently relocating from Main Street to a new unit under construction to the rear of Main Street.

6.5 BALLYMAHON

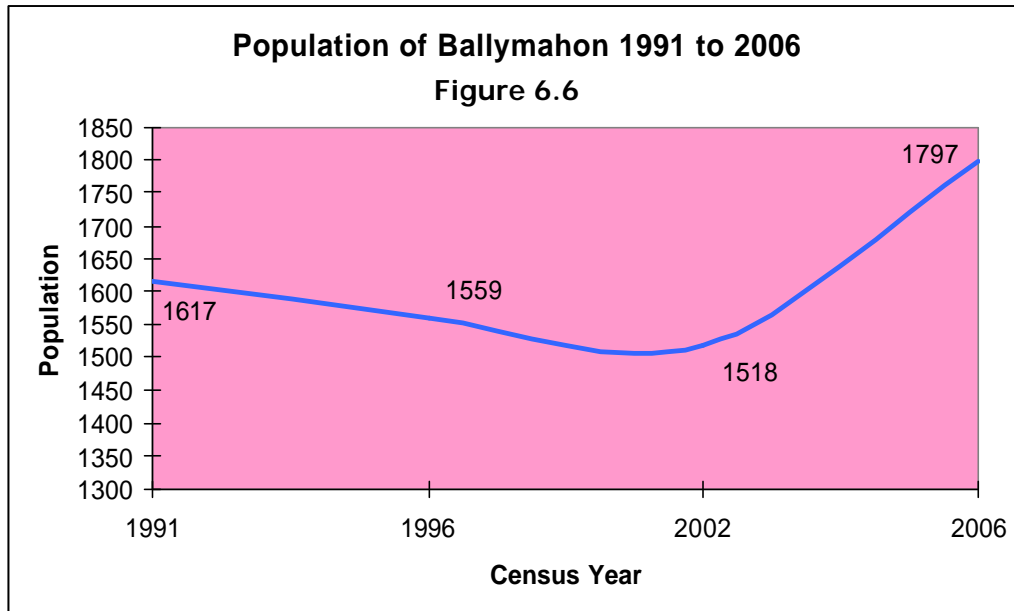
6.5.1 Location and Accessibility

Ballymahon is located approximately 22 km south of Longford Town on the River Inny and is situated almost centrally between the large settlements of Athlone to the south west and Mullingar to the east. The town is served by an adequate road network, with both the National Secondary Route (N55) from Athlone to Cavan and the regional route (R392) from Lanesboro to Mullingar passing through the town. The strategic location of Ballymahon in relation to Longford, Mullingar and Athlone has provided opportunities for commuters, facilitating substantial residential development in the town.



Figure 6.5
Map of Longford indicating the Location of Ballymahon.

6.5.2 Demographic Trends of the Settlement



6.5.3 Environmental Quality

As with several small to medium sized settlements in the region, Ballymahon exhibits a typical nineteenth century market town structure, based around a strong linear north-west/south-east axis which has been substantially extended by recently completed and ongoing developments. The existing retail provision in Ballymahon is centred on Main Street. As the town has grown so has the demand for a greater range of commercial facilities. At the time of this health check the town centre appeared to be relatively vibrant with a reasonably high pedestrian flow. The town's centre still retains a number of older and attractive shopfronts and the streetscape is by and large vibrant.

However, the heavy nature of through traffic in Ballymahon has negatively impacted on the environmental quality of the town centre and significantly detracts from the overall experience of Ballymahon as a retail destination. This problem is further compounded by the lack of designated loading bays and poor parking practices which frequently results in significant delays for traffic. Given the volumes of traffic, especially HGV traffic, it is sometimes difficult for pedestrians to cross Main Street as there is only one pedestrian crossing facilities in place.

Pavement quality in the town centre is mixed, and allows much room for improvement, while the presence of mature trees along the kerb line enhances the appearance of the town. However, the Council is seeking to address such issues via improvements carried out under the Urban and Village Renewal Scheme. Nevertheless, a noticeable litter problem was evident during the health check assessment and seriously reduces the quality of the public realm.

6.5.4 Levels of Vacancy

There is a low vacancy rate and Main Street includes a variety of pubs and restaurants. Retail provision in Ballymahon has traditionally comprised small high street premises in the town centre, with no shopping centre facilities available.

6.5.5 Diversity of Uses

The town incorporates a mixed pattern of use. The town is well catered for in terms of cafes, coffee shops, small restaurants and pubs. A number of independent boutiques, financial institutions, and some service providers are also located within the town. The importance of Ballymahon to the local farming community is evidenced by the large livestock mart on the Edgeworthstown Road, while industry within the town is primarily centred along the Athlone Road with Kepak and Scientific Games Limited been two of the area's principal employers.

6.5.6 Retail Representation

6.5.6.1 Convenience

Ballymahon has a total net retail floor space of approximately 1,300m², with about half this space occupied by the symbol group stores of SuperValu and Gala, with the remainder occupied by a small range of independent convenience operators.

6.5.6.2 Comparison

There exists a limited range of comparison goods in Ballymahon, although a narrow range of bulky goods are available in Lovell's and Diffley's hardware stores.



Vibrant Shopfront, Ballymahon

6.6 EDGEWORTHSTOWN
6.6.1 Location and Accessibility

Edgeworthstown is situated at the junction of the N4 and N55 approximately 15 km to the south east of Longford Town. As with the county town, Edgeworthstown is strategically located on the main Sligo-Dublin rail line. Nine services depart daily to the Dublin Connolly station and five to Sligo from Edgeworthstown and provide an important inter-regional link to both businesses and commuters in the town.



Figure 6.7
Map showing location of Edgeworthstown

6.6.2 Demographic Trends of the Settlement

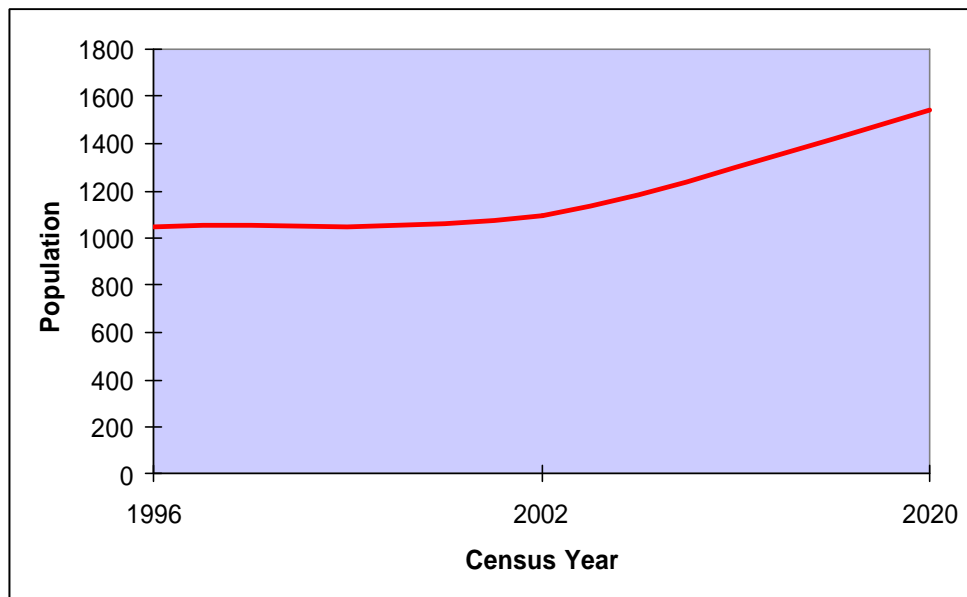


Figure 6.8
Population of Edgeworthstown 1996 to 2020

The Preliminary Results of the 2006 Census indicate that the population of Edgeworthstown has significantly increased since the 2002 census. Indeed, this intercensal period witnessed an increase of 445 persons or 40.5% in the population of the settlement.

6.6.3 Environmental Quality

The visual amenity value of Edgeworthstown's streetscape is somewhat reduced by the presence of untidy overhead wiring. This is compounded by cluttered signage and the poor maintenance of several traditional shopfronts in the town centre.

Although the recently completed road bypass of the town has effectively removed Sligo-bound traffic from the town centre, Edgeworthstown still suffers from a high level of HGV movements along its main streets. Such traffic generates considerable noise, results in a rapid reduction in the road surface quality, and provides a potentially dangerous environment for pedestrians; the latter of which is intensified by the poor provision of pedestrian crossing facilities in the town centre. Although the Edgeworthstown has benefited from some limited environmental improvement works, such as the upgrading of the footpath area outside of SuperValu in the town centre, the quality of paving throughout the town is generally less than adequate and in need of repair.

6.6.4 Levels of Vacancy

The health check analysis identified that Edgeworthstown is significantly less vibrant than Longford Town, Granard or Ballymahon, with vacancy of smaller retail units being common, particularly on the periphery of the town centre.

6.6.5 Diversity of Uses

A limited diversity of uses are accommodated within the town centre, with only a small range of services available for either passing traffic or the town's immediate hinterland. The biggest employer in the town is the C&D pet food factory located just west of the town centre, with a number of warehousing units located nearby.

6.6.6 Retail Representation

6.6.6.1 Convenience

Convenience retailing predominates in the town. The settlement's principal retailer is Supervalu, which is also its only symbol group store. However, this store is set to relocate to the Livestock Mart site to the rear of the town's main thoroughfare. A Costcutter Express and several smaller independent retailers comprise the remainder of the town's retail offer.

6.6.6.2 Comparison

There exists a limited range of comparison goods in Edgeworthstown, with just two stores selling clothing, footwear and bulky goods. However, Edgeworthstown Shopping Centre was granted planning permission in May 2005. Once operational, this development will greatly enhance the quality and quantum of the town's retail offer. The shopping centre, which is currently under construction, will provide Edgeworthstown with an additional 11 retail units along with almost 1,000m² of net convenience floor space.



6.7 Village Settlements

6.7.1 Lanesboro

6.7.1.1 Location and Accessibility

Lanesboro is located at the junction of the N63 and R392 on the eastern banks of the River Shannon at the northern end of Lough Ree. Approximately 15 km to the south west of Longford Town, the settlement is divided in two by the River Shannon. The portion of the town on the western side of the river lies in County Roscommon and retains the old Irish name for the settlement of Ballyleague.

6.7.1.2 Retail Representation and Diversity of Uses

Lanesboro primarily acts as a service centre for its immediate hinterland, mainly providing for local 'top-up' shopping requirements. Although evidence of specialised higher order retailing is evident in the town, this is limited. The net retail floorspace of the settlement is approximately 550m², which is predominantly convenience retailing comprising a number of small independent operators and the three symbol group stores of Spar, Gala and Costcutter. Comparison shopping is limited to a pharmacy and a newsagent.

6.7.1.3 Environmental Quality

Haphazard parking and excessive vehicular movements through the town centre reduce the quality of the public realm. With the notable exception of the amenity area on the shores of Lough Ree, there are few areas of public open space within the town core.

6.7.2 Kenagh

6.7.2.1 Location and Accessibility

Kenagh is situated in the south of County Longford approximately 13 kilometres from Longford Town, via the R397 and N67. The R397 dissects Kenagh and leads on to Ballymahon via the R392. The village is also situated adjacent to the Royal Canal which flows from Dublin to Clondra in Co. Longford.

6.7.2.2 Retail Representation and Diversity of Uses

Kenagh is a service centre for the rural hinterland in the southern portion of the county. The town is relatively well serviced, possessing a number of shops, a hardware store, bakery, hairdressers and drapery. There are also a number of pubs and restaurant facilities within the village and a Post Office which provides financial and administrative services.

6.7.2.3 Environmental Quality

The village's streetscape is defined largely by the presence of nineteenth century buildings that are strong and symmetrical in design. This endows the town with a deep historic character and a well articulated streetscape. Open space, trees and other such soft landscape features play an important role in adding to the character and townscape of a village. These features are complemented by tracts of forestry that create a notable backdrop to the settlement, particularly on entering Kenagh from the north-west. In addition to this, the presence of numerous stone walls enhances the character of the village.

6.7.3 Newtownforbes

6.7.3.1 Location and Accessibility

Newtownforbes is located in the west of County Longford, approximately 7 km north west of Longford town. It is a rapidly expanding settlement, which functions primarily as an attractive low density residential base for people working in and around Longford Town.

6.7.3.2 Retail Representation and Diversity of Uses

Newtownforbes has a relatively poor retail offer in proportion to its rapid residential expansion. The centre's retail offer comprises just two small stores. However, given the function as a dormitory centre for those working in the county town, it is doubtful that there is much room for retail expansion other than for generic 'top-up' shopping.

6.7.3.3 Environmental Quality

Many of the shopfronts in Newtownforbes are finished traditionally and tastefully. Pavements along the main street in Newtownforbes are unusually wide, although the road itself is also extraordinarily wide for such a small settlement not clearly identified as an estate village. Pavement surfaces in the main street are, in places, attractively designed, while in others, are in need of attention. Newtownforbes is connected to Longford Town by the N4 which runs through the village. This road experiences a considerable amount of heavy traffic, particularly at peak times and reduces the quality of the centre's public realm.

6.7.4 Drumlish

6.7.4.1 Location and Accessibility

Drumlish is situated in the north of the County approximately 13 kilometres from Longford Town. It is primarily serviced by the R198 which is the main route from Longford Town to Cavan Town. The village lies close to the Cavan and Leitrim county borders.

6.7.4.2 Retail Representation and Diversity of Uses

Drumlish provides a service function for the rural hinterland. From a retailing perspective, the village is relatively well serviced having a number of smaller sized supermarkets, a butcher, a filling station, and a drapery.

6.7.4.3 Environmental Quality

Drumlish is a picturesque historic village whose form is centred on a crossroads junction. While there are numerous unoccupied buildings within the village centre, in recent years Drumlish has experienced a degree of suburban-type housing developments. Rarely is there meaningful continuity between these new developments and the traditional village core area. In addition, the village experiences heavy traffic due to its location on the main route, (the R198), from Longford to Cavan. This detracts from the quality of the public realm.

6.7.5 Carrickglass Demesne

Recent years have seen a sharp increase in the demand for residential development land in the Longford Town area. This has been accompanied by a commensurate increase in the level of industrial and commercial development in the vicinity of Longford Town, with the arrival of Abbott Ireland, the decentralised government offices, and the expansion of existing industrial operations such as Green Isle, Century Homes, Cameron Willis and the new enterprise centre planned for the Ballinalee Road. It is anticipated that the levels of employment generated by these private businesses and public bodies will reinforce the current high demand for quality housing in an attractive setting with a high level of amenity provision. It is the opinion of the planning authority that the development of Carrickglass Demesne, carried out in an appropriate and sensitive manner, has the potential to cater for this new dimension in residential property demand in the Longford area.

The *Carrickglass Demesne Local Area Plan 2004-2010* has been prepared for an area of land identified as the Carrickglass Demesne. This is a walled parcel of land with an area of approximately 263 hectares, 4km to the northeast of Longford Town. Cullyfad, a designated village under the Longford County Development Plan, 2003-2009, is located to the east of these lands.

Carrickglass is not predicted to provide a retailing centre in competition with the county capital. Nevertheless, the Local Authority may require the provision of local convenience 'top-up' shopping so as to service local residents.

6.8 HEALTH CHECK SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Longford Town, as the primary retail centre, has been found to be trading well with a good mix of both independent and multiple retailers. However, the quality of the town's public realm is somewhat reduced by a number of factors, the most notable of which are the high levels of traffic passing through the town, the poor parking arrangements detracts from views to the centre's many historic landmarks.

In addition to the principal/county town there are a number of smaller towns, which continue to contribute to the growth and development of the county and Midlands Region. Although the health checks carried out illustrate that 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 policy in respect of sustainable development within a broader polycentric model that incorporates the Midlands Gateway.

Granard, as County Longford's second settlement and a scheduled town for which a Local Area Plan has been prepared was found to be performing well, with a good diversity of uses and a reasonable retail mix. However, like Longford Town the centre suffered from congestion as a result of high levels of through traffic and inadequate parking arrangements. Compounding this vehicular dominance is a poor provision of safe pedestrian crossing points.

Ballymahon retains a number of older and attractive shopfronts and the streetscape is by and large colourfully vibrant. There is a low vacancy rate and Main Street includes a variety of pubs and restaurants. Retail provision here has traditionally comprised small high street premises in the town centre, with no shopping centre facilities available. As with the county's other principal towns, the heavy nature of through traffic along Main Street negatively impacts on the environmental quality of the centre and significantly detracts from the overall experience of Ballymahon as a retail destination.

Edgeworthstown has a limited retail offer comprising a small number of independent convenience store operators and a Supervalu, which is also its only symbol group store. The visual amenity value of the streetscape is somewhat reduced by the presence of overhead wiring. Streetscape quality is further reduced by cluttered signage and the poor maintenance of several traditional shopfronts in the town centre. Edgeworthstown also suffers from a high level of HGV movements along its main streets. The health check analysis concluded that Edgeworthstown is significantly less vibrant than Longford Town, Granard or Ballymahon, with vacancy of smaller retail units being common, particularly on the periphery of the town centre.

The existing network of villages completes the "regional mesh" and improves the inter-connectivity with the wider urban network and the rural area. As noted in the RPGs, the support of this village network is vital for the encouragement of locally based enterprise and commercial development, which has the potential to revitalise the villages and their outlying rural communities.