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Chapter 1
Background

Introduction
Tipperary has a strong network of towns spread across the county, all of which have felt the effects of the downturn in economic activity to a greater or lesser extent. Tipperary County Council, as the new unified authority for Tipperary, identified a need to develop a coherent Town Centre Strategy to help restore vibrancy and vitality to the retail areas in the centre of the major towns.

Scope of the initiative
The towns of Clonmel, Nenagh, Thurles, Carrick-on-Suir, Roscrea, Tipperary, Cashel, Cahir and Templemore represent 40% of the population of Tipperary and the influence of these towns extends across the full county. This was considered an important fact in terms of focusing particular targeted attention to these centres. The population of the towns is shown in Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>2011 Population</th>
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<tr>
<td>Clonmel</td>
<td>17,048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nenagh</td>
<td>8,439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurles</td>
<td>7,933</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carrick-on-Suir</td>
<td>5,886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roscrea</td>
<td>5,403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tipperary</td>
<td>5,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cashel</td>
<td>4,051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cahir</td>
<td>3,578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Templemore</td>
<td>2,071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Population</strong></td>
<td><strong>59,719</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 1: Towns included the Town Centre Initiative and their Population

Description of the Initiative
Experience from Ireland and abroad demonstrates the value of local partnerships in developing well-considered and effective solutions and this was at the core of the Town Centre Initiative (TCI). The success of measures to support town centres is predicated on facilitating a strong town centre partnership vision and strategy that takes account of the town people, economy, heritage, physical features and role within the wider network of town centres.

The initiative focused on two parallel approaches – facilitating town centre groups and consolidating a range of other council supports to town centres, backed by additional, innovative measures.

Town Centre Forums
Retail Excellence Ireland recently published a “Strategy for Rural Retailing” document which emphasises the importance of town centre groups in driving positive change for towns. It suggests that these groups should comprise local stakeholders from across the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. Facilitating these groups to organise effectively and devise plans to drive increased footfall and commercial activity in the town centre, thus generating increased vibrancy and vitality, was a key requirement of this initiative.

Town Centre Forums had already been developed in South Tipperary under the South Tipperary Retail Development Programme 2012, therefore the initial objective of this process was to evaluate the effectiveness of these models, identify...
a model of best practice and implement this model across the towns in Tipperary.

The Town Centre Forums were subsequently tasked with contributing to the development of their own 3-year Action Plan, including identifying priorities and sourcing potential funding.

**Complementary Council Supports**

The council provides a wide range of additional supporting measures, including grants and incentives for retailers, support to groups to deliver festivals in their town, and business mentoring supports amongst others.

In the context of the Town Centre Initiative (TCI), the council will commit to providing some seed funding over the 3 years for initiatives agreed by the Town Center Forum. It is expected that this seed funding will be matched by contributions from the retail trade itself and/or other sources. The Council will also commit to having an appropriate senior staff member attend the TCI meetings, including convening and minuting the meetings if so required by the group. Finally, the council will use the advice and knowledge at its disposal to assist the TCF groups to maximize the value for their area.

**External Funding Sources**

There are a number of programmes and other initiatives run by government departments and agencies to support towns to help themselves which will be identified in this report.

**Methodology**

As part of this research, the following work was undertaken to inform the content of the action plans:

- A review of National, regional and local policies and strategies and identifying the overarching retail policy considerations and objectives to be implemented by planning authorities. Particular emphasis was placed on the settlement hierarchy; enhancement of the built and natural heritage and vitality of the nine town centre’s; and assessment of the appropriate retail mix in each of the towns.

- A full SWOT analysis was undertaken and a physical audit of the retail streetscape was undertaken. Within the analysis there are details on vacancy, retail mix and suggested usages to be targeted.

The review also included a comprehensive overview of retail and economic data which includes national and local trends. A review of the grocery and comparison goods sectors was undertaken with particular emphasis on the impact that online retailing has on the sectors. The potential role of technology in retailing within each of the towns is also assessed.

**Consultation with Stakeholders:**

A consultation process with stakeholders was conducted. Key stakeholder opinions were sought and documented. On completion, a briefing document was distributed to each of the towns which incorporated the opinions expressed. This has formed the basis for discussion regarding the development of the Town Centre Forums.

Following on from this and taking into account the research undertaken with retailers, other stakeholders and consumers and customers, an action plan was developed for each town. The component of each plan consists of:

1. An analysis of the town and its retail sector including a review of the vacancy and retail mix.
2. Identification and analysis of each town’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats – a SWOT analysis.

3. Development of a mission (or purpose) statement for each of the towns.

4. The recommended model for the Town Centre Forum structure

5. Town specific marketing recommendations (as applies).

6. Presentation of a draft three-year Action Plan with specific goals and objectives for each town to assist the initial work of the newly established Town Centre Forums and to enable the development of basic strategies to fulfil their mission or purpose.

**Conclusion**

An overall Town Centre Strategy for Tipperary with detailed strategies for each of the nine towns is presented. Funding sources have been identified through all existing and potential national programs (including LEADER programs) plus European programs. It also includes a detailed and targeted marketing plan framework.

Findings and recommendations with particular emphasis on a county and sub county perspective are presented also.

The report is conscious of new game changing innovative strategies and incentives that could be submitted to Central Government and existing European projects for possible funding for either the towns or county.
Chapter 2
Macro Environment of Town Centres

Introduction
Many Irish towns and villages are in a very distressed state. Following years of out of town retail development, the growth of online shopping and reduced consumer spending, the town centre can lack consumer engagement, in many cases suffers from significant vacancy and has for some become a secondary shopping alternative for many consumers. The problem is not a result of the economic cycle – the problem will remain long after market growth returns. It is likely that the deterioration of Ireland’s towns and villages will intensify without strategic intervention.1

Understanding the Macro Environment of Irish Town Centres
In order to understand the macro environment of Irish town centres, the PESTEL framework was used. This framework highlights six environmental factors in particular; political, economic, social, technological, ecological and legal. This range underlines that the environment is not just about economic forces; there is an important non-market environment2. The key impact areas are identified under the various headings rather than exhaustive lists.

Political
There appears to be a general acceptance in Irish Government that town centre retailers and other businesses are experiencing difficult times and that a strategic approach is needed to revitalise town centres. In September 2015, a €30 million package of spending was announced by the government to revitalise the attractiveness and sustainability of towns and villages.

Some of the key policy documents in Retail and Town Centre Development currently referred to by government include:

- Retail Ireland – Strategy for Retail 2014 - 20163,
- Retail Planning Guidelines 2012,
- Retail Excellence Ireland ‘A Strategy for Rural Retailing4
- Ireland’s Rural Development Programme 2014 – 20205

At a local government level, the key policy documents which are relevant in this project at a County level are:

- South Tipperary County Development Plan 2009 - 20156
- North Tipperary County Development Plan 20107
- South Tipperary County Retail Strategy 20108
- North Tipperary County Retail Strategy 20119
- South Tipperary Retail Development Programme 201210

At a town level, the most important policy documents are the Town Development & Environoms Plan which set out the strategic objectives for town centres and these have been referenced in this document.

Economic
In 2015, Retail Ireland Director Thomas Burke stated that “Outside of construction, the retail sector was the worst hit by the recession with sales falling by a staggering 24% from the peak. While the recovery is gaining momentum in major urban centres, many regional towns and villages are still struggling with a lack of consumer spending and empty retail units on the main street. Urgent investment is needed to make them more attractive places for consumers and businesses alike, and ensure they are not left behind by the recovery.”11
In a more positive vein, Retail Excellence Ireland CEO, David Fitzsimons commented on October 23\textsuperscript{rd} 2015 in *Checkout* magazine that “Q3 2015 experienced the best quarterly performance since Q2 2007 as all major sectors rebounded (Diagram 1).

**Diagram 1: Retail Sales Index August 2015.**

![Retail Sales Index August 2015](image)

**Source: CSO\textsuperscript{13}**

There was a decrease of 1.7% in the value of retail sales in August 2015 when compared with July 2015 and there was an annual increase of 5.6% when compared with August 2014.

If Motor Trades are excluded, there was a monthly increase of 0.3% in the value of retail sales and an annual increase of 3.7%. According to the CSO Retail Sales Index Report for August 2015, the sectors with the largest month-on-month volume increases were Furniture & Lighting (+13.2%), Other Retail Sales (+5.8%) and Hardware, Paints & Glass (+4.1%).

The sectors with the largest monthly decreases were Motor Trades (-4.6%), Books, Newspapers/Stationery (-0.3%) and Non-Specialised Stores excluding Department Stores (-0.2%) (Diagram 2).

However, David Fitzsimons contends that the Grocery sector continues to track behind the retail industry average as it sees intense competition and continued price deflation. Considered a good barometer of footfall and consumer activity, the Hot Beverage category saw quarterly gains of 13.15%. A recent Kantar Worldpanel report for the 12 weeks to October 11\textsuperscript{th} 2015, “…show a year-on-year growth in sales of 2.1% across the Irish grocery market”. This tells a more positive story about the Irish grocery market.

David Berry, Director at Kantar Worldpanel, explains: “This is the most positive performance the market has seen in over five years. The growth in sales this period was ahead of the rate of inflation indicating that consumers are becoming less restrictive in what they buy and adding extra items to their baskets.”

**Diagram 2: Annual & Monthly Volume % change for Combined Groups.\textsuperscript{14}**
This positive trend towards less restricted purchasing patterns among Irish consumers also bodes well for non-grocery retailers.

**Consumer sentiment**

It should be noted that there are differences in consumer sentiment between Dublin and the rest of the country. There is a general perception that the Irish economic recovery has been concentrated to a large degree in Dublin with far less perceivable improvements in the regions. This view is supported by the differences and divergence in consumer sentiment highlighted in Diagram 3.

![Diagram 3: What Does the Recovery mean for the Average Irish Consumer?](image)

National improvements in the state of the retail sector need to be considered in the context of the consumer sentiment differences identified here. Anecdotal evidence suggests that significant challenges remain for retailers in rural towns with consumer spending improvements perceived as marginal at best.

**Access to Credit**

Access to appropriate debt finance and other funding options continues to be a challenge for businesses. The issue is substantiated in the report by the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) *Energising Ireland’s Rural Economy* which identifies the need “to improve access to finance by enterprises by addressing problems with loan guarantee and micro finance schemes”.

**Retail and Tourism**

The economic opportunities created by tourism are significant for town centre development. Increased footfall and visitor numbers to Town Centres create opportunities for retail sales among retailers.

Revenue from overseas tourism in 2014 was €3.5 billion so Government expects an increase of in excess of 42% in overseas tourism revenue up to 2025. This represents a very significant economic opportunity for town centre businesses. The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport policy, ‘People, Place and Policy Growing Tourism to 2025,’ also refers to the economic opportunities presented by the Diaspora and the opportunities to make local communities more attractive through festivals and events.

**Social**

Macro environmental social considerations for town centre development include megatrends like an aging population and the depopulation of town centres. The overall share of the national population living in towns fell from 12% to 9% between 1991 and 2011.

There are several interrelated drivers behind these developments which when taken together undermine the social and economic viability of many towns which, in turn, has affected their capacity to attract and sustain investment.
Other pertinent social issues include the responsible use of alcohol and anti-social behavior, ethical sourcing of products, fair business practices and the promotion of healthy lifestyle choices. Making town centres safer and more appealing for night time trade is of significant importance from both a social and economic perspective.

**Technological**

Online shopping and the opportunities presented through Digital Marketing including Social Media are the key considerations here. The joint committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation in their March 2015 paper - Policy Options to Support Business Growth and Job Creation and Retention in Town and Village Centres state that “according to the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Irish consumers are now spending more than €6 billion online every year. However, less than a third of this spend goes to Irish retailers, and only 23% of small Irish companies have engaged in online sales.”

Retail Ireland identified a strategic action around ecommerce and assisting retailers operating bricks and mortar outlets in Ireland to gain a larger share in the growing online market in the following ways:

- Annually surveying members regarding their existing online presence, their plans to develop that presence and their experience of online retailing.
- Identifying barriers to online trading and drawing up proposals that would help members to provide an online offering.
- Presenting proposals to increase domestic retailers share of this market to the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and other stakeholders.
- Working with the IBEC Retail Skillnet to provide advice and training to retailers seeking to trade online, or improve their online offering.

In the 2013 book ‘Social Media Marketing – A strategic Approach’, Barker et al define Social Media Marketing as “… a term that describes the use of social networks, online communities, blogs, wikis or any other online collaborative media for marketing, sales, public relations and customer service. Common social media marketing tools include Twitter, blogs, LinkedIn, Facebook, Flickr and YouTube. In the context of internet marketing, social media refers to a collective group of web properties whose content is primarily published by users and not direct employees of the company (e.g. the vast majority of video on YouTube is published by non-YouTube employees). Typically, the end goal of social media marketing is a “conversion”, such as the purchase of a product, subscription to a newsletter, registration in an online community, or some other desirable consumer action.”

A key recommendation of this report is the continued and augmented support of businesses and towns to harness the power of Digital Marketing and to explore options around online sales.

**Environmental**

The natural and built environment is a strategic resource for many towns in Ireland. The result of Fáilte Ireland’s survey (Diagram 4 over) indicates the importance of the natural and built environment for tourists visiting Ireland.
Protecting, appreciating and leveraging the natural and built environment are all equally important considerations in town centre development. Many of the towns under review have extensive resources available to them, resources which could be perceived as under-appreciated and under-utilised.

The alignment between the economic management of these resources and local access to them for the purposes of augmenting the attractiveness of towns for both local people and visitors, can pose a problem for local initiatives.

The Retail Planning Guidelines 2012\textsuperscript{23} refer to the importance of design quality in supporting town centre environments:

“Quality design ensures attractive, inclusive, durable, adaptable places which contribute positively to making places more pleasant for people to work in, to live in, to shop in, or pass through”.

\section*{Legal (including Legislative and Regulatory considerations)}

The key Irish Government Policy Document which sets out the required best practice and regulatory considerations in Retail Development in Ireland is the Guidelines for Planning Authorities Retail Planning 2012. The key messages in the document are:

\begin{itemize}
  \item To continue to support competitiveness and choice in the retail sector commensurate with promoting the vitality and viability of city and town centres.
  \item The retail sector is a key element of the national economy in terms of employment, economic activity and the vitality of Ireland’s cities and towns.
  \item From a retail planning context, development must:
    \begin{itemize}
      \item Follow the settlement hierarchy of the state and be appropriate to the scale and function of the settlement or part of the settlement in which it is located.
      \item Enhance the vitality and viability of city and town centres in all their functions through sequential development.
      \item A range of caps on the size of convenience and retail warehouse stores is required to ensure both competitiveness in the retail sector and strong city and town centres.
      \item The planning system has facilitated a major expansion of retail development and activity; however more work needs to be done to ensure that such
  \end{itemize}
\end{itemize}
development takes place in city and town centres.

- Planning for retail development must also take account of the wider policy context in relation to relevant planning guidelines, smarter travel, climate change and architecture.

**Opportunities and threats to Town Centre and Retail Development**
The following represent the most significant opportunities and threats for Town Centre Development in County Tipperary.

**Opportunities**
- Town centres need to capitalise on a projected increase in excess of 42% in overseas tourism revenue up to 2025, to increase footfall to town centres and thus an increase in town centre retail revenues.
- Leverage off the natural and built environment to improve the attractiveness of towns and generate increased footfall.
- Digital Marketing and Online Sales opportunities. Collective and digital marketing of town centres, digital marketing of individual businesses and business groups, collective online sales opportunities and individual online sales opportunities (e.g. LEO Trading Online Vouchers).
- Festival and events to create a buzz in towns, generate the activities and stories to market towns both online and offline and generate increased footfall in town centres
- Creating and maintaining links with the Diaspora

**Threats**
- Spend leakage due to online sales
- Town depopulation and the resultant reduction in town centre vitality, vibrancy and potential reduction in customers
- Challenges for towns to achieve a balance between conserving heritage and using natural heritage challenge of overcoming issues regarding access.
- Lack of recovery in consumer spending in regional towns compared to large urban centres like Dublin.
- Lack of accessible and appropriate finance for business development.
Chapter 3

Strategic Capabilities

The key resources that all subject towns have could be listed under the following six headings:

1. Natural and Built Environment
2. Heritage
3. History
4. Culture
5. Local People
6. Retail and Services Offering

Towns have differing key resources with some towns stronger than others. The resources are to a large extent fixed in nature – towns have what they have. The key determinant of development, success and progress is in how these resources are appreciated, leveraged and capitalised on.

This is where competencies in Town Centre development; the systems and processes by which they are managed; the relationships and cooperation between people; their adaptability; their innovative capacity; their relationships with customers and suppliers and the experience and learning about what works well and what does not are vital.

Some of the key competencies required in towns are as follows;

Structures that allow people to work effectively together e.g. Town Team structures as suggested by Retail Excellence Ireland\(^4\) and the Association of Town and City Management.

Organised Groups. Within any Town Team structure there needs to be cohesive and well organised groups who have particular areas of interest. These groups can operate as sub groups in the Town Team Group structure to lead relevant actions for the benefit of all. Examples would include Tidy Town Groups leading public space enhancement projects or Chamber of Commerce groups leading vacancy reduction initiatives.

Partnership approaches between local community groups, business groups and government agencies including the local authority. Creating a forum where such relationships can be forged and developed to drive the local agenda maximises the potential and resources of all.

Stakeholder engagement in supporting and developing their ‘local place’.

Activation of resources

In general terms, the research of this project found that resources in towns are often under-appreciated and under-utilised, particularly in how they can be leveraged to improve the vitality, vibrancy and commercial success of towns. Notwithstanding, some towns and their stakeholders have engaged proactively in developing these competencies.

Good stakeholder engagement is the key competency which is a fundamental precursor to developing all other key competencies.

One of the key objectives of this research was to create an atmosphere of engagement through an inclusive, positive process which culminated in a practical, deliverable action plan. The philosophy here is that creating momentum locally through the successful delivery of this action plan would further foster engagement and a sense that progress was being made. This would create further opportunities for the town team to design and develop bigger, more challenging strategies and plans.
**Benchmarking**

In order to understand what is possible in town centre development, examples of initiatives in other towns were researched.

There have been initiatives in Limerick City, Waterford City, Dublin City Centre, Carlow Town, Dún Laoghaire, Dundalk and elsewhere which have had varying levels of success.

The town centre initiative that was considered most relevant to this project is in Letterkenny Town. Their Town Team initiative commenced in mid-2014, after a consultative and strategy forming period when local stakeholders came together in partnership to actively engage with a view to improving the town for all.

Following an agreement between a local business grouping and the Local Authority, finances were put in place to recruit a Town Centre Manager to manage and steer the project. This manager took up his post in 2014 and the Town Team began the implementation phase. Some of the key challenges in Letterkenny which spurred on their project included:

- Dwindling retail mix
- Traffic management, accessibility, car parking
- Vacancy levels
- Online trading and consumer behaviour
- Rates and charges on commercial property
- Linkages to extended areas
- Currency trends

Against this backdrop, a backdrop familiar to many of the subject towns in this project (with the exception of currency trends), Letterkenny Town Team devised the following mission statement to guide their endeavors:

“To promote Letterkenny as a vibrant, modern, safe and secure town centre environment that will attract potential investors and increase citizen engagement. Utilising all available resources to the maximum potential will allow us to think globally, interact regionally and act locally”

The Town Team organised themselves into three sub committees to achieve three distinctive objectives:

1. Attracting Retail Investment
2. Fostering Citizen/Visitor Engagement
3. Transform the Town Centre

**Key activities**

There are a number of initiatives and activities under each objective. These are the key activities of most relevance:

**Attracting Retail Investment**

- Retail mix assessment and gaps identification.
- Prospectus of vacant properties.
- Proactive identification and targeting of attractive national and multinational brands.

**Fostering Citizen/Visitor Engagement**

- Development of a dynamic Marketing Plan (online and offline focus).
- Creation of a distinctive Local Brand Identity.
- Host and promote seasonally themed international, national, regional and local events.
- Engage in partnership approaches to linking with the Donegal Diaspora.

**Transform the Town Centre**

- Strive to achieve a Purple Flag status for the Town Centre’s night-time economy from ATCM.
• Introduce concepts that will increase digital footfall to the commercial sector.
• Encourage the reintroduction of traditional trading practices and street entertainment.

Underpinning all of these actions and activities is an understanding of the importance of stakeholder engagement. With this in mind, a Stakeholder Engagement Plan was devised to ensure clear, high quality communication practices were fostered and supported.

**Key Performance Indicators**
A number of Key Performance Indicators (KPI’s) were identified in order to benchmark the impact and progress of the Initiative. These were based in the following areas:

- Vacancy rates
- Footfall count
- Feedback from businesses and community
- Digital analytics and local media coverage
- Consumer behaviour analysis

**Key Results to date**

- Improvement in occupancy rates – Over an eighteen month period occupancy in the Town Team focus area, the traditional town centre, improved from 75% to 85%.
- Improvement in citizen and visitor engagement – Emphasis was placed on improving and augmenting existing events with anecdotal evidence suggesting a four to five-fold increase in the support of these events.
- Marketing Plan in place and driving increased footfall – two very prominent and well established retail businesses in the town centre installed footfall counters and reported a 30% increase in footfall in December 2015 compared with December 2014
- Local and National media interest and coverage through a number of avenues but most effectively by Letterkenny winning the title of “Ireland’s Tidiest Town 2015 for the first time.

**Key Challenges to date**
The most significant challenge experienced by Letterkenny Town Team is the absence of a sustainable funding model to maintain the initiative. The funding which sustained the model since its inception has been exhausted and alternative funding has not been secured. The initiative in its current form has therefore come to an end.

**Conclusion**
The Letterkenny strategy is relevant to all subject towns in this project. The Purple Flag award may not be a plausible or beneficial use of resources in all towns; however, reviewing the town resources through the Purple Flag framework³² could be a useful exercise, without applying to get the award.

Attracting national or international brands might not be realistic in certain towns, however understanding the town retail mix and the town’s position within the retail hierarchy and proactively dealing with a weak mix would be desirable.

All of the other objectives and the supporting activities identified would make practical sense in all of the subject towns.
Chapter 4

Structure and Governance

Structures for Town Centre Forums
There are a number of potential structures which may make sense for Town Centre Forums depending on town specific considerations.

In some towns there are existing groups/structures in place which appear suitable to drive the Town Centre agenda. This Plan reviewed these structures to ensure that their governance is appropriate and fit for purpose. If aspects of governance are deemed sub-standard, actions to address/rectify same are proposed.

In other towns there are no appropriate structures currently in place and a Town Centre Forum structure is proposed for same.

There are decisions to be made in terms of whether Town Centre Forums require an incorporated identity i.e. company limited by guarantee with no share capital, or an unincorporated identity. There are advantages and disadvantages to both options. Decisions on the appropriate form for each Town Centre Forum will be informed by factors including; pre-existing structures, whether there will be an employee(s) of the Forum, will the Forum be required to be incorporated in order to access particular funding, will the Forum Steering Committee or Board need the protection of an entity with its own legal personality and definition.

For the purposes of many Forums, a simple unincorporated structure which is run along good governance procedures is appropriate. Whether Forums decide to go the incorporated or unincorporated route, there are comprehensive advice documents, checklists and other resources available on The Governance Code website. Using the resources and templates available correctly, will ensure the Town Centre Forum is run in accordance with best practice governance procedures for organisations of this type. Examples of the most relevant documents for Forums which choose to be unincorporated and without employed staff members are the Governance Code for Type A Organisations and the Checklist for Type A Organisations. If an incorporated structure is deemed more suitable, the relevant information is included is the Governance Code for Type B Organisations and the Checklist for a Type B Organisation.

Constitution
The appropriate starting point in the governance of a Town Centre Forum is a written constitution. This document sets out what the Forum is going to do and how it is going to do it. It is a valuable document for a number of reasons:

- It is the fundamental communication tool that allows people to understand what the Forum is about.
- It sets out the basic rules of the Forum.
- It allows those outside the Forum (e.g. funders) to see that the Forum has sound fundamental procedures, is democratic and is accountable. It also serves as a reference point and allows for clarity when decisions are proving difficult or when boundaries are blurred.

Some appropriate headings for a written constitution for a Town Centre Forum, and some possible entries, are set out in the Constitutional Template shown over leaf.
### Constitutional Template

These are suggested heading which should be included in a written constitution. There will be other headings deemed appropriate depending on town specific situations.

- Name of the Forum
- Function, Purpose and Vision – (A vision statement is proposed in each of the individual Town Action Plans)
- Principle Objective (e.g. To increase the Vibrancy and Vitality of our Town Centre)
- Supporting Objectives (e.g. To increase footfall to the Town Centre; To support all activities that increase footfall to the Town Centre; To devise strategies and activities that convert footfall into business revenues; To make our Town Centre a more attractive place to live in, work in and visit, etc.)
- Membership
- Statement of Equal Opportunities
- Structure
  - Board of Directors/ Steering Committee
  - Subcommittees
  - Officers – Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer
  - Officer duties
  - Election to Board/ Steering Committee
  - Rotation of positions on Board/ Steering Committee (e.g. annually or biannually)
  - Nomination procedure & length of service on the group
  - Feedback structures to representative groups/organisations
  - Management of subcommittees
- AGM’s and other meetings
  - Board/ Steering Committee meeting frequency
  - Attendance requirements
  - Subcommittee meeting frequency
  - Communication procedures from/to board/ committees
- Rules of Procedure
  - How are decisions made? (ideally consensus or else simple majority)
  - How will meeting be run?
- Finances
  - Annual budgeting
  - Funding Partners and Status of Funding
  - Financial Management procedures
  - Spending sign off procedures e.g. two officer signatures for cheques
  - Statement of accounts at each Board/ Steering Committee meeting
  - Full financial overview statement at AGM’s
  - Annual Financial Statements for Revenue (incorporated)
- Changes to the Constitution
  - In what cases and the procedure
- Dissolution of the Forum
  - How can this decision be made
  - What is the procedure
Effective Partnerships
Retail Excellence Ireland set out some suggestions around the structure and governance of a Town Centre Forum in “A Strategy for Rural Retailing.”36 They advise that the Town Centre Forum could be drawn from a wide range of organisations and individuals including:

- Local authorities
- Retailers
- Town Centre Shopping Centre Managers
- Landlords
- Employers
- Local media
- Chambers of Commerce
- Business Associations
- Residents
- Tourism Groups and Agencies
- An Garda Síochana
- Charities & Community groups
- Universities, Colleges, or Schools.

The REI document makes further suggestions on structure and approach:

It is noted that for the team to be effective it should have a core of perhaps ten members or less. It must actively communicate decisions and progress reports to all other town stakeholders.

These partnerships must focus on the needs of the town and devise a succinct and measurable plan for the town centre. It must be a realistic, collaborative, prioritised plan and the inclusion of costings is necessary. The partnership must take responsibility for the plan and engage with all the relevant stakeholders.

To enable implementation of agreed actions the partnership requires funding. It is unfair and unrealistic to expect one partner to fund the plan and thus the partnership must implement a more collaborative and innovative approach to funding its activities.

Recommendations for Structure and Governance
The Key recommendations for the structure and governance of Town Centre Forums in Tipperary are as follows:

1. Ensure the correct stakeholders are involved. Local situations will direct this, but the key relevant stakeholder groups may include:
   - Tipperary County Council,
   - Chamber of Commerce,
   - Business Associations,
   - Retailer Specific Groups,
   - Tidy Towns,
   - Festivals & Events Groups,
   - South Tipperary Development Company,
   - North Tipperary LEADER Partnership,
   - The Office of Public Works.

2. The group should be unincorporated unless there is a specific reason to incorporate it (e.g. if it is a requirement to access particular financing or funding or if it is deemed necessary to protect the Directors or those running the Forum). A suitable incorporated form would likely be a company limited by guarantee with no share capital.

3. The representative groups (i.e. non agency) need to elect a new person every two years and no one person
can serve for more than 2 consecutive years on the Forum (non-agency).

4. The steering committee would have a chairperson, secretary and treasurer.

5. Three to five sub committees formed, each with an agreed set of actions.

6. Each subcommittee has a convener and one other nominee to an overall steering committee. The convener and nominee would be elected by the subcommittee and rotate every 2 years as would the steering committee membership.

7. Initially the Steering committee meets every 2-3 months and sub committees every month.

8. Clear communication procedures between steering committee and sub committees.

9. Decisions based ideally on consensus but alternatively on simple majority vote.

10. A Stakeholder Engagement Plan devised and actioned to ensure clear, high quality communication.

11. Each action of the Town Centre Forum Strategic actions will be identified. It is recommended that a partnership approach is adopted in relation to funding.

12. These structures can be adjusted to accommodate town specific requirements.

13. Adoption of a written constitution or guidance document as described previously.
Chapter 5
Marketing for Town Centres

Marketing
In a recent presentation on Strategic Marketing Professor John Fahy, University of Limerick, refers to creating a business model which involves value creation and value capture. In terms of town centre development; tourism, festivals, local events, markets and similar activities which generate footfall in the town centre represent value creation activities. These create increased footfall levels and therefore increased numbers of potential customers for retailers. The focus for retailers then needs to be “How do we convert this footfall into retail sales?” This is the value capture. In order to develop an effective Marketing Plan, this question, in terms of the Marketing Mix, needs to be addressed. In this context, designing an effective marketing plan for a town needs to focus on marketing the town as a whole.

Towns will differ in terms of their SWOT analysis and target markets and each Town’s specific considerations will be dealt with in the individual town plans.

In a recently produced document called Local Authority Retail Support – Improving our Cities and Towns, it is stated that “A positive retail experience is often sufficient reason for people to return to a town. However, the provision of added attractions impacts the overall visitor experience, and contributes significantly to footfall. These include heritage and civic buildings together with ancillary activities such as festivals and events, which are all critically important to provide that added value and boost retail trade.”

Further to this, Retail Excellence Ireland’s strategy for rural retail suggests that “Our town centres are owned by the people. It is their public realm. It is thus important that we remind citizens that the public realm is theirs to enjoy. Anything that attracts citizens into their town and increases their dwell time in that town must be cherished. As stated above, a fundamental to citizen engagement is having an engaging retail and hospitality product. But many other matters can influence consumer behaviour such as reminding people that the town is theirs to enjoy and support.

There are many ways to engage citizens with their public realm. One of the best ones is to host regular events in the town centre. Any town marketing plan needs to incorporate tourism, festival and events, as well as retail, into its design.

Whilst the focus of a marketing plan on the town as a whole for certain activities/promotions is important, it is equally important to develop actions that bring strict focus upon the retail strengths of the town. Choosing a particular marketing theme such as ‘the grey pound’, ‘youth days’; ‘sport’ themes; or town ‘shoe blitz’ days, and by retailers selling similar products collaborating together, greater reach can be made into a wider and broader catchment area.

Retail Marketing
There is numerous worthwhile collaboration with the retail sector involving market research, marketing and promotion. The four Dublin authorities publish a quarterly Dublin Economic Monitor that includes retail sales as one of its key indicators. Tourism websites have
also been used to brand locations with a positive impact on retail, including examples such as www.intokildare.ie and ‘Destination Athlone’. Similarly, Tipperary Tourism Company in conjunction with Tipperary County Council has commenced the development of a Strategic ‘Tourism Marketing, Experience and Destination’ Development Plan for County Tipperary.

In March 2015, the Joint Committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation in their submission “Policy Options to Support Business Growth and Job Creation and Retention in Town and Village Centres” made two recommendations to government under the heading “Online Sales and Creating a Digital High Street.” The recommendations in relation to online sales and marketing requirements of the nine towns in Tipperary are currently being progressed and rolled out by the Tipperary LEO.

**The Marketing Mix Model.**
There are opportunities for improvement in marketing in every town. Using the Marketing Mix Model as the basis for a generic Marketing Plan one can focus on important opportunity areas:

**Diagram 5: Marketing Mix Model**

![Diagram 5: Marketing Mix Model](image-url)
Online presence
The areas identified in the market model mix above for this initiative in relation to promotion are particularly relevant to all towns.

By dividing promotion into online and offline promotion some of the key questions in regard to online promotion present themselves:

Maintaining an Online Marketing Strategy.
Development of Social Media Marketing and Online Marketing of towns is a key recommendation of this report. In order to ensure the successful implementation and efficacy of these key marketing strategies, it is important that a subcommittee is established who will have responsibility for the implementation process and assuring the continued commitment to fulfilling the actions outlined in the strategy, particularly in relation to updating the website.

Online Promotion

**Town website**
- Does one exist?
- Is the best domain name being used?
- Is the content current and updated regularly?
- Is there an identified person for maintaining and updating the website?
- Is the website design modern and attractive?
- Is high quality photography being used?
- Is the website optimised?
- Are the appropriate key words being used?
- Are the marketing messages consistent with our target market requirements?
- Is video being used?
- Are we connected with our Social Media platforms?
- Is the site easy to navigate?
- Does the website represent the town well?

**Social Media**
Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other social media platforms provide the opportunity to promote and market to a wide range of potential customers.

**Facebook Tactics**
Facebook is the most popular social network, with more than 750 million users. The following list of Facebook tactics could be progressed by any of the nine towns:

- If not already in place, create an officially branded town Facebook page (not account) that represents the town and allows users to follow or become fans of the town.
- Customise the page to reflect the town’s style and values.
- Frequently update the town page with content that is relevant and engaging.
- Focus on content:
  1. Create share worthy content that encourages further discussion among the target market to advance the brands position by making the brand more memorable or personable.
  2. Content needs to be light, funny and informative.
  3. Offer a special deal or value.
  4. Give away free products to encourage likes so that the town’s brand will spread rapidly through Facebook friend networks.
  5. Run contests or offer discounts to Facebook members to convince people to follow a Facebook profile. Contests should be tailored to the product being offered.
  6. Give useful tips, or ask open questions which will interest the audience.
  7. Not every content item must be original; sharing links to interesting items can also be valuable.
- Facebook is about personal connections, so letting some personality through in updates and
giving a human voice to a brand are some of the most powerful advantages of this social networking platform. Facebook is an excellent tool for business to consumer marketing.

- Use Facebook to offer special deals when visitors check in.
- Create local market events, or host a charity drive to bring visitors to the Places page.
- Use Facebook advertisements to generate traffic to the town website.

Twitter tactics
Twitter is a free social networking service that allows broadcasting of short posts called tweets. Tweets are limited to 140 characters, and because tweets can be delivered to followers in real time, and they are permanent, searchable and public interactions. The following tactics can be applied in any marketing plan:

- Customise the town profile page consistent with the town brand.
- Use Twitter to start a discussion or to participate in an ongoing conversation.
- Use targeted follow strategy – search for and follow target markets and always follow back.
- Putting out updates when people are online to see them is essential to make an impact; research shows that midday and midweek tend to produce the best results.
- Promptly respond to questions and comments.
- Ask for opinions and product reviews to seek feedback and engage the followers.
- Tweet things that are of interest to your target market. Be sure to use the appropriate hash tags(#).
- Twitter profile must answer the question, “Why follow and listen to the messages being offered?”

- Offer special deals on Twitter including coupons, promotional discounts and special products.

YouTube Tactics
YouTube is the second most popular social media platform, with more than 450 million unique monthly visitors. As more people chose to consume information visually, YouTube’s vast (and growing) reach and compelling content makes it the perfect platform for engaging consumers to drive word of mouth recommendations:

- Create authentic videos with real people in actual locations to make the videos more persuasive in order to engage viewers. Offbeat and unusual videos tend to get more attention.
- Include links to video on all other social media properties (Facebook, Twitter etc.).
- Actively comment on videos that relate to your sector in order to make connections. The more influential you appear in the community, the more credibility you will have.
- Get to the point quickly -make your video two minutes or less. Research shows that less than 45% stay beyond the 1 minute mark, while only 24% stay past the 2 minute mark.
- Cross marketing: Include links to your website or other social media properties in your videos, and promote the video on your town website and social media properties.

Conclusion
All towns need to consider the information above and apply it. There are specific marketing actions and plans relevant to different towns which are covered in the individual town sections but what is consistent across the towns is necessity to assign responsibility for the continuous online promotion and updating.
Chapter 6
Finance and Funding

Introduction
The recent Retail Excellence Ireland document – A Strategy for Rural Retailing references the funding challenges being experienced by town centre retailers: “Many high street and city centre retailers complain that it is impossible to compete “toe to toe” with the many out of town shopping locations which are better resourced and organised. It is therefore necessary to explore a new funding methodology to allow town and cities to control their own destiny and thus promote their own unique point of customer engagement.”

Local Government Retail Initiatives
To date, Tipperary County Council has worked with traders in supporting a number of initiatives to improve and revitalize their town centres including:

- Developing and implementing town and village enhancement initiatives.
- The revitalisation of vacant and derelict properties/shop units.
- Active funding and personnel support for Tidy Town and festival groups.
- The establishment of retail forums which are responsible for developing, marketing and promoting retail.
- Appropriate tourism infrastructural development and other actions and supports which assist the independent retailer in increasing footfall and encouraging additional spend.

The following are some of the more recent initiatives implemented by Tipperary County Council:

Christmas 2015 Retail Support Programme
The Christmas Retail Support Programme is an additional support to the aforementioned measures aimed at providing assistance to towns and villages to implement strategies designed to attract new customers, retain existing customers and encourage increased spend in Tipperary’ towns and villages over the festive period.

Commercial Incentive Scheme
The Commercial Incentive Scheme has been designed and developed to reduce the number of vacant retail units and to stimulate a differing and engaging retail mix and experience by limiting the risk associated with the establishment of a new retail business and providing an entry point to entrepreneurs wishing to start-up in the retail industry.

Painting Grant Scheme
A Painting Grant Scheme is a scheme that provides a financial incentive to support and encourage individuals to upgrade their buildings thus to enhance the character and appearance of the townscape.

Support of Festivals and Events
The Local Authority in County Tipperary have historically grant aided festivals, Saint Patrick’s Day parades, Tidy Towns Committees, Christmas lights and other cultural and heritage groups within their
administrative area. Such events are normally staged in town centres and add to the colour and vibrancy. Retailers can perhaps better align their offerings with such events in order to attract the additional visitors into their premises, increase their turnover and add to the reputation of the town as a visitor centre.

Support of Tidy Towns initiatives
The Tidy Towns competition is organised each year by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. SuperValu sponsor the competition. The competition involves villages, towns and cities being rated on all aspects of their local environment. Thus it assists in improving the environmental quality of the towns.

Government Funding Initiatives

National Initiatives

Town and Village Renewal Scheme
This scheme was announced in September 2015 and will run over six years with a budget of €30 million euro. The initiative will be channelled through the Local Authorities with oversight by the Local Community Development Committees. Projects eligible under this scheme will extend to the enhancement of villages, small towns and the surrounding countryside.

Projects such as greenways, cycle-ways, upgrading parks and civic areas, public utilities such as street lighting and renovation of relevant derelict buildings are just some of the possible projects which could qualify for this funding.\[^{42}\]

Rural Economic Development Zone (REDZ) funding
The 2014 CEDRA\(^{43}\) report identified “Rural Economic Development Zones or REDZ as functional rather than administrative geographic areas that reflect the spatial patterns of local economic activities and development processes, i.e. they are the sub-county zones within which most people live and work.” Funding support was provided to a number of such zones in Tipperary to assist in revitalizing rural towns and rural catchments.

The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government envisage that pending the success of the pilot initiative that a call for proposals for a more extensive REDZ initiative under the LEADER elements of the Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020 (RDP) will take place during 2016 and all of the nine towns the subject of this report should be in a position to bid for funds to realize some of the actions in this plan.

Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020
The County Tipperary Local Development Strategy\(^{44}\) recognises the issues facing rural villages and towns and has aligned its strategy funding to assist in addressing some of these issues and needs. It is anticipated that the call for applications for funding under this programme will be made mid 2016 and again all nine towns will be eligible to access appropriate funds to meet some of the actions identified in these retail action plans. The total public funding allocated to deliver the ‘Rural Development Programme 2014-2020’ in Tipperary is €10 million euro.

Irelands Ancient East
In 2015, The Minister for Tourism, Transport and Sport, announced €1.2 million euro in funding for capital projects in Ireland’s Ancient East along with an additional €600k for the first stage of branded signage for all counties within the region. The €1.2million euro capital funding is the first phase of investment...
through Fáilte Ireland’s ‘New ideas in Ancient Spaces’ Capital Grants Scheme and is for an initial 12 projects within the Ireland’s Ancient East initiative\(^45\). This scheme is to encourage the development of compelling visitor experiences throughout the Ireland’s Ancient East region. This is intended to be the first phase of funding to ensure that the Ireland’s Ancient East brand delivers on its promise to visitors. There are opportunities for the nine towns, where it is appropriate and practical, to access funds under this particular stream.

**National Festivals and Participative Events Programme 2016**
Fáilte Ireland provides considerable support to festivals, investing nearly €3.5 million euro in 214 festivals and events in 2015. The eligibility criteria for this programme are such that a sub-county or county wide initiative would need to be considered in order to have a reasonable opportunity to successfully attract funding through this competitive grant process.\(^46\)

**The Arts Council**
There are various funding opportunities available through The Arts Council for Local Authorities, Organisations, Individuals, Festivals and Events.\(^47\)

**The Heritage Council**
Fethard Walled Town Medieval Festival was funded in 2008. The Thomas MacDonagh Heritage Centre and the ‘Old School’ The Commons, both in Tipperary, received a grant offer in 2015.\(^48\) There may be additional opportunities for the relevant towns to access funds under this structure.

**Innovation vouchers**
The Innovation Voucher initiative allows small and medium-sized limited companies to apply for a €5,000 euro voucher. The voucher can be used to purchase academic support from one of the thirty eight registered knowledge providers, listed on the website [www.innovationvouchers.ie](http://www.innovationvouchers.ie). The aim of the Innovation Voucher Scheme is to improve a company’s innovation capability and to build links between Ireland’s public sector knowledge providers and the small business community. With a number of exceptions\(^49\), small and medium-sized limited companies, in all sectors of the Irish economy are eligible to apply for an innovation voucher.

**Online trading vouchers**
The Department of Communications, Energy & Natural Resources (DCENR) launched an Online Trading Voucher Programme in 2015 and have teamed up with the Local Enterprise Offices to deliver this to Irish business. Vouchers are available to a maximum value of €2,500 euro or 50% of eligible expenditure (Inclusive of VAT)\(^50\)

**Clann Credo**
Clann Credo is a social lending organisation and is part of the Community and Voluntary Sector of Ireland. Clann Credo provides loans to community organisations, charities and social enterprises. They assist organisations in achieving their social, economic and financial potential on terms and conditions that may not be available to them commercially.\(^51\)

**Community Tourism Diaspora Initiative**
The Community Tourism Diaspora Initiative is administered at county level where local authorities seek applications for support from local community events. The objectives of the initiative are to provide support in the form of small-scale funding incentives to community-based
tourism events that have the capacity to carry through on the legacy of The Gathering. This is a €3 million euro fund over three years.

**Microfinance Ireland**

Microfinance Ireland (MFI), as a not-for-profit lender, has been established to deliver the Government’s Microenterprise Loan Fund. All business sectors are eligible to apply for unsecured loans ranging from €2,000 to €25,000 with a term of three to five years.

Applying Companies may be Sole Traders, Partnerships or Limited Companies with fewer than 10 employees and an annual turnover of less than €2m.

Loans may be used to fund the start-up of a business, including for the purchase of stock, equipment, machinery and business vehicles. They also fund loans to established enterprises.

### Key Funding Recommendations for Towns in Tipperary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensure appropriate Tipperary County Council representation on the Town Centre Forum with knowledge of funding streams currently available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure administrators of LEADER funding either sit on the forum or be in regular contact with them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintain linkage with the PPN who will be in a position to advise of other potential funding options.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nominate someone on the Forum (Treasurer) to maintain a constant overview to identify potential funding and financing sources. Some funding opportunities are time sensitive with limited windows of opportunity for applications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop well-crafted business cases and applications when seeking to access funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for feedback on applications from funding or financing bodies, whether applications are successful or unsuccessful. Seek to be continuously improving application abilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure the Forum is always seeking to maximise the benefits generated from funding received.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be an easy group to invest in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure there are effective financial and funding management procedures in place, and that the funding required corresponds to the Town Forums needs as outlined in the town forums action plan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 7

Town Overviews

Introduction
Tipperary covers a geographical area of 4,282 sq. km with a population of 158,754 (census 2011). The region is part of the central plain of Ireland and is traversed by key arterial routes such as M7, M8, N24 as well as train lines from Dublin to Cork and Limerick and Waterford to Limerick.

Sectoral Employment Breakdown
Diagram 6, below, provides a percentage breakdown of the total employment across the various sectors in County Tipperary.

What is evident is that the Wholesale and Retail sector accounts for the largest proportion of the total employment at 14.96%.

This sector accounts for on average 17% of the total employment in each of the nine towns encompassed in the Town Centre Initiative (TCI) with the sector accounting for 20% of the total employment in the towns of Tipperary and Thurles.

Diagram 6:
Population Aged 15 Years and Over in the Labour Force (Number) by Broad Industrial Group in County Tipperary in 2011
Settlement Hierarchy
A settlement hierarchy of towns and villages was developed in the South Tipperary County Development Plan, 2009 (as varied), having regard to national and regional level guidance. Information pertaining to the settlement population, the availability/capacity of services and infrastructure, geographical location and facilities in the key urban centres, including health, education, legal and transport facilities was used for the development of the settlement hierarchy in the county.

The Map below illustrates the settlements defined as Regional, Sub-Regional and District Towns. The strategic objectives for the planning and development of each of these settlement tiers are outlined below.

**County Planning Settlement Hierarchy**

**Regional Town**
As the largest town in Tipperary, Clonmel is designated as a 'Regional' level town with economic and social indicators operating in line with, or above designated ‘Hub’ town status. Clonmel is targeted for expansion with an important role in realising balanced regional development and providing regional level retailing as outlined in the Retail Planning Guidelines for Local Authorities (DECLG 2012). Clonmel has significant potential to attract large employers and regional services, amenities and infrastructure to Tipperary. The Council will support the role of Clonmel as a location for large-scale and high-tech industry, third-level education and as a strong and attractive residential centre with a growing population.

**Sub-Regional Towns**
Nenagh and Thurles provide complementary roles to Clonmel as regional towns in the hinterland of the Limerick-Shannon Gateway. Both are strategically located in the centre and north of the county and are supported by national rail and road transport infrastructure. Both towns offer a range of service functions to attract and drive future growth in the county.

**District Towns**
These towns have been identified as District Towns due to their respective strategic locations and roles in Tipperary.

Tipperary Town and Carrick-on-Suir are acknowledged as having strategic roles in the south west and south east. The towns of Roscrea, Templemore, Cashel and Cahir form a strengthening spine from north to south.

Collectively the District Towns underpin and strengthen rural Tipperary. The District Centres will continue to perform an important role in the county by providing employment opportunities, high quality retail choice, regional transport services and community services for their hinterlands in line with their capacities for growth and expansion.
Retailing in Tipperary

Tipperary County Council recognises the role of retail quality and choice in settlements in meeting local shopping needs and in contributing to the viability of town centres and the wider economy.

County Retail Hierarchy

It is the policy of the council to promote and facilitate a competitive and healthy environment for retailing, providing for consumer choice and maintaining the vitality and vibrancy of town centres, having regard to the County Retail Hierarchy and having regard to the Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Retail Planning, (DECLG 2012) and any amendment thereof.33

Retail Premises Value Definition

The current retail strategy documents relevant to Tipperary, the North Tipperary County Retail Strategy 2011 and the South Tipperary County Retail Strategy 2012 both categorise retail premises as:

1. **High Retail Value**: Retail, Pubs, Restaurants, Shops.
2. **Medium Retail Value**: Service, Health and Beauty, Educational.
3. **Low Retail Value**: Residential/Office, Auctioneer, Turf Accountant.

Much of the analysis that follows focuses on High Value Retail uses.

Retail Mix

The recent Retail Excellence Ireland document – *A Strategy for Rural Retailing*34 references the importance attached to an appropriate retail mix. It is important that the town centre is welcoming to many use types, whether a national retail operator or a local specialist.

The town centre’s retail mix must also accommodate retail types which trade evening hours thus retaining town centre life and vibrancy beyond standard office hours and potentially motivating town workers to remain in the town to socialise. What is most important in the design of a retail mix is that a balance is struck between national retail brands and local specialists. While the national retail brands will attract footfall, overpopulation can mar local distinctiveness and the sense of place. And while the independent specialists provide a unique consumer experience, an underrepresentation of national brands will weaken footfall levels and customer engagement.”

This report provides an overview of the retail mix in each of the nine towns and potential opportunities. Importantly, the retail mix assessment is undertaken in the context of the town’s position in the retail hierarchy. However, while the author suggests potential opportunities, it is important to note that this is the author’s opinion; the commercial viability of a particular business opportunity is a matter for an individual/interested party to discern.

The component of each plan consists of:

1. An analysis of the town and its retail sector including a review of the vacancy and retail mix.
2. Identification and analysis of each town’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats – a SWOT analysis.
3. Development of a mission (or purpose) statement for each of the towns.
4. The recommended model for the Town Centre Forum structure Town Specific Marketing Recommendations (as applies).
5. Presentation of a draft three-year Action Plan with specific goals and objectives for each town to assist the initial work of the newly established town Centre Forums and to enable the development of basic strategies that to fulfil their mission or purpose.

A comprehensive strategic plan for each of the nine towns incorporating National, Regional and Local policies and strategies with the research gleaned from the consultation process with retailers, other stakeholders and consumers/customers is prepared. The plans provides a set of actions under a number of Themes.
Nenagh

Introduction
Located towards the northern end of County Tipperary, Nenagh is described as a primary service centre in the North Tipperary County Development Plan 2010–2016 with a population of 8,439 in 2011; this was up 8.9% on the 2006 population of 7,751. The North Tipperary County Retail Plan (NTRCS) 2012 estimates that the population of Nenagh will reach 9,590 by 2022.

Retail Hierarchy
In relation to the Retail Hierarchy Nenagh has an important sub-regional role with a good range of convenience and comparison offer. The town services a large rural catchment and is expected to compete directly with the other sub-regional town of Thurles. Nenagh town has strong established central areas and their strengthening and environmental improvement is a priority to Tipperary County Council.

The Principle Retail Areas (See Diagram 7 below) are “Pearse Street to Kickham Street, Mitchell Street, the top part of Silver Street and three quarters of the way along Kenyon Street.

Diagram 7: Principle Retail Area, Nenagh Source: Nenagh Town and Environs Development Plan 2013-2019

Retail Overview
A review of the retail mix was carried out in September 2015. The area surveyed included all retail units in the Town Centre Zone, (Area marked in red in Diagram 8 below). It is important to note that a review such as this is fluid and therefore may not represent the actual situation on the date of reading the report.
Retail outlets were identified by their perceived primary function e.g. if a shop appeared to primarily sell ladies clothing although there may be some gents products, it is identified as a Ladies Clothing shop. If a Pub has a food service element and offering that appears to be the dominant business, it will be described as a restaurant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retail Uses Nenagh Sept 2015</th>
<th>TOWN CENTRE ZONE</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clothing and Footwear</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ladies fashion (independent)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s fashion (multiple)</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Men’s fashion (independent)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s fashion (independent)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s fashion</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Fashion</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Footwear</td>
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<td>Accessories</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bridal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports shop</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Food/ Drink</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supermarket (multiple)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supermarket (independent)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience store</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Butcher</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakery</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish monger</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grocer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fruit and Veg</td>
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<td>Health food</td>
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**Services**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
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<th></th>
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<tr>
<td>Design shop</td>
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<td>Home Décor</td>
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<td>Outdoor shop</td>
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<td>Domestic fuel</td>
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<td>Forecourt</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solicitor</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barber</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentist</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locksmith</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casino</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Nenagh Town and Environs Development Plan Map 2013-2019
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wine shop</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>MABS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist (e.g. African/Polish)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off license</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dry cleaner/ laundry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pub</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Mobile phone shop/repairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Retail</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Black tie/ suit hire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewelers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Shoe repairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haberdashery/ fabric/ wool</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Computer repairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsagent</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Insurance broker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardware</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hair and beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€ shop/ discount shop</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tanning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookshop</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Physio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift shop</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Acupuncture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music shop</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tatoo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd hand clothes/ thrift</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Alterations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass design and picture frames</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Health/ Leisure centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bike shop</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Florist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist shop</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Stationary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vapour</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Funeral bouquets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charity shop</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Printing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lingerie</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridesmaids attire</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Factors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Café/ deli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pet supplies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fast food</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the high profile of Nenagh as a convenience shopping destination, the comparison offer of the town centre is limited. National and multinational brand names are underrepresented. Nenagh has potential to enhance the profile of its town centre comparison offer with town centre vacant units available to new retail development at present.\(^5\)\(^8\)

There is no shopping centre in the town with O’Connor’s Shopping Centre now vacant. There are retail warehousing units located at Nenagh Retail Park.

National and International brand names in the Town Centre Zoning include; Easons, Elvery Sports, Subway, Holland & Barrett, GameStop, Centra and SpecSavers.

**Retail Mix**

There are fifteen ladies fashion shops in town; a concentration that gives significant choice in these products. There are also twenty businesses involved in hair and beauty. There is less choice in men’s and children’s fashion with six and two shops respectively. There is a strong food retail sector with twenty seven restaurants/ pub restaurants, cafés and delis.

Some gaps\(^5\)\(^9\) identified in the retail provision in Nenagh Town Centre include no department store, no specialist ethnic food store (African, Polish or similar), although 1,642 non Irish people live in Nenagh according to the 2011 census (20% of the town population). However, there is a Polish food store located outside of the Town Centre Zone.
There is one health food shop, one fish monger, one independent supermarket and one convenience store. There is one national ladies wear brand and two children’s fashion outlets. Artisan and gourmet food shops would also augment the retail offer albeit that Nenagh has nine Café/Deli outlets which satisfy this demand to a degree.

Vacancy Rate
A survey of vacancy in the Town Centre zoned area suggests that of property occupied or available for high, medium and low retail uses, 19% of this property is vacant (54 vacant units out of 290) in comparison to the national average commercial vacancy rate of 12.6% according to GeoView, Q4 2015 edition.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths
- Location in the centre of Ireland, with close proximity to Limerick and to Shannon Airport.
- There is three entry/exit points to the M7 motorway.
- Good range of businesses from family businesses to businesses operated by younger people.
- Good built environment with an absence of serious dereliction.
- Built Heritage – Nenagh Castle, Courthouse, Jail, and Church.
- Strong Sporting clubs – GAA, Rugby, Golf, Tennis, Soccer, Cycling, Track & Field and Triathlon etc.
- Hotel accommodation (two hotels in the town).
- Leisure facilities, Town Park, Arts Centre, Scouts Hall.
- Big rural hinterland with a strong farming community.
- Established companies – Carey Glass, Abbey Machinery, Chilled Meats, and Procter & Gamble.
- www.nenagh.ie website.
- Clean Environment. Well-maintained streets, with good use of flowers and planting.
- Perceived ‘Artisan culture’ in the town.

Weaknesses
- O’Connor’s Supermarket site is currently vacant and compromises the appearance of that area of Nenagh. Signage suggests the site has been purchased.
- A perceived lack of promotion of the Arts Centre, Castle and other built resources.
- Lack of an obvious public area/meeting area at the centre of town
- Lack of focal points where people could gather/ dwell
- Stakeholder’s partnerships for the benefit of the town should be developed.
- Vacancy in prominent locations
- Lack of Sunday trade
- Lack of Evening trade

Opportunities
- Tourism infrastructure such as Nenagh Castle, The Courthouse, the Heritage Centre and The Arts Centre. Nenagh Castle is attracting 11,000 visitors per annum compared to 66,737 visitors to Cahir Castle. (OPW Top Twenty visited sites for 2014 Report).
- REDZ funding for the further development of the Ormond Way which has the potential to attract additional tourists to the area
- Proximity to Lough Derg - The vision is to develop Lough Derg as a key destination for superb water based activities combined with a range of very high quality walking, cycling, heritage, culture and food experiences.
that will entice the domestic and international visitors to stay longer. Nenagh could be the designated “Gateway to Lough Derg”

- Unique character as a Market Town. Historically there were six traditional market days & opportunities exist to develop a permanent market location.
- ‘Fair Day’ – potential for a week-long festival themed around ‘fair day’ markets - street activities and music.
- Create a historic core/cultural quarter.
- Evening trade- Purple Flag status.
- Sunday trade
- Explore the possibility of producing a programme based on by-passed towns on the M7 with Nenagh as the success story.
- Inclusion of Nenagh Castle in signage programme for Ireland’s Ancient East
- Develop links and strategies with large local employers like Proctor & Gamble, Arrabawn Co-op, Abbey Machinery, Carey Glass and others
- Digital Marketing and Online Sales opportunities.
- Creating and maintaining links with the Diaspora.

**Threats**
- Spend leakage due to online sales and spend leakage to Limerick
- Town depopulation and the resultant reduction in town centre vitality and vibrancy. Also the potential reduction in customers
- Challenges for towns to fully utilise natural and built assets due to the economics of access to same
- Lack of recovery in consumer spending in regional towns compared to large urban centres like Dublin
- Lack of accessible and appropriate finance for business development

**Stakeholder Engagement and Preferred Structures**

There were four stakeholder meetings. Stakeholders represented at consultation meetings included; Tipperary County Council, North Tipperary Leader Partnership, Chamber of Commerce, Tidy Towns, Accommodation Providers, Retailers and others. There was no previous retail forum structure for Nenagh. The structure recommended is a three subcommittee structure facilitated and managed by a steering committee.
Diagram 9 Suggested Nenagh Town Team Structure

It is recommended that an additional retailer representative could be considered for the steering committee to supplement the current Chamber of Commerce President who is a retailer.

A broad discussion document which proposes potential actions and strategies which would need to be considered and assessed was submitted by the Chamber of Commerce.

Town Specific Marketing
The requirements of a Marketing Plan are set out in Chapter 5 and in the Action Plan below and are appropriate for Nenagh. The development plan has an objective to promote Nenagh as a hub for walking, cycling and water based tourism activities. Adventure travellers, sports enthusiasts and Great Escapers are significant target markets here and value propositions need to be created and communicated.

The built resources including Nenagh Castle, the Jail and Heritage Centre, Genealogy Centre, The Courthouse and the Arts Centre are also key resources which create potential value for the Culturally Curious.

Three year Action Plan
A proposed Strategic Vision Statement and supporting Actions are presented overleaf. The 3 Year Action Plan for Nenagh Town Centre Forum is proposed under the following themes:

1. Governance Structure
2. Town Appearance and Local Engagement
3. Town Marketing
4. Festivals, Events and Tourism
5. Training and Up-Skilling
6. A sustainable Town Forum Model.
3 Year Action Plan – Nenagh

Strategic Vision Statement for Nenagh

To harness the positive momentum, ideas and energy among stakeholders to reinvigorate Nenagh from the Town Centre out. This will be achieved through increased footfall and visitor numbers by leveraging all of the town’s resources including its people, heritage, history and organisations.

All Actions outlined below need to support this Strategic Vision Statement

*An annual action plan should be reviewed each year and updated in terms of its achievements or otherwise.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1</th>
<th>Governance Structure</th>
<th>Lead Group</th>
<th>Partner(s)</th>
<th>Estimated Cost</th>
<th>Funding source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Formulation and adoption of constitutional and governance framework (see Chapter 4).</td>
<td>Tipperary Co Co</td>
<td>Nenagh Town Team /Nenagh Chamber/ Other retailers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Hold an open public meeting to introduce the Town Centre Forum, its vision, its action plan and its structure. Invite stakeholders to get involved in one of the three subcommittees.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 2</th>
<th>Town Appearance &amp; Local Engagement</th>
<th>Lead Group</th>
<th>Partner(s)</th>
<th>Estimated Cost</th>
<th>Funding source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2a.</td>
<td>Town appearance</td>
<td>Sub committee 1</td>
<td>TCF</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>Tipp Co Co/ LEADER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Develop a phased Building Façade &amp; Painting Improvement Scheme and implement in a targeted and time lined manner. Develop a grant based scheme to encourage take up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Collaboration between Retailers and the County Council to identify key locations to be targeted over a 5 year period. This to involve the development of a communication approach to contact and encourage all relevant town centre building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
owners within the key location to participate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2b. Local Engagement</th>
<th>Lead Group</th>
<th>Partner(s)</th>
<th>Estimated Cost</th>
<th>Funding source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Engage with schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. To support town appearance initiative (e.g. Community environmental projects)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Engage with schools to create opportunities for students to generate ideas to improve their town (e.g. town branding suggestions)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Develop a citizen engagement plan which informs the public as to what is being progressed in the town and which highlights the offers available in the town or events taking place</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Develop a Town Centre Presentation and Planting Plan - Engage with local business owners to champion the benefits of well presented premises, window boxes, window presentation etc. and provide training supports for same</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Develop Greater Synergy with the Nenagh Arts Centre and Local Arts Groups to develop the bundling of offers on the night of Theatre/Arts Events.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Continue to deliver appropriate supports to the retail trade through the operation of initiatives such as the Commercial Incentive Scheme and the LEO Training supports</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 3. Research Marketing and Communications</th>
<th>Lead Group</th>
<th>Partner(s)</th>
<th>Estimated Cost</th>
<th>Funding source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3a). Improve the marketing of Nenagh</td>
<td>Sub committee 2</td>
<td>TCF</td>
<td>€25,000</td>
<td>Tipp Co/LEAD ER/Chamber of Commerce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Review all current marketing initiatives in the town (across all groups) to adopt the most effective and inclusive marketing strategy.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Develop and manage a Digital Marketing Plan for Nenagh which includes a Social Media strategy and a review of the town website and its future management.

3. Ensure all social media platforms and town website are linked (updating one updates all)

4. Investigate opportunities to link the Town Centre with edge of centre and out of town retail centres - e.g. Springfort Retail Park, Tesco, Dunnes, and Lidl.

5. Develop a plan to introduce a Nenagh Gift Voucher system to facilitate local people in supporting local businesses.

### 3b). Engage with large businesses in Nenagh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Lead Group</th>
<th>Partner(s)</th>
<th>Estimated Cost</th>
<th>Funding source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Sub committee 2</td>
<td>TCF</td>
<td>€25,000</td>
<td>Tipp Co Co/LEADER/Cha mber of Com merce</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Develop a plan to attract ongoing commercial sponsorship from the large businesses in the town.

2. Investigate how best to engage with large businesses to consider how attract more investment and jobs to Nenagh and formally commence engagement.

### Action 4

**Festivals, Events & Tourism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Lead Group</th>
<th>Partner(s)</th>
<th>Estimated Cost</th>
<th>Funding source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Sub committee 3</td>
<td>TCF</td>
<td>€15,000 pa</td>
<td>LEADER, Tipp Co Co, Failte Ireland, Sponsorship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Work with TCC to ensure that the festivals and events currently active in Nenagh are incorporated into the County Calendar of events and explore ways to publicise existence of same.

2. Identify festivals and events which could be further developed and support development of same.

3. Explore the possibility of having a Farmers or Country Market weekly/monthly.

4. Assess the viability of the "Nenagh Market Town" idea, generating 6 market
5. Develop a Tourist Attraction Strategy utilising the key resources locally including heritage, sports & the Arts. With the support of the Tourism Company to capitalise on the development of the Lough Derg as a key destination for superb water based activities combined with a range of very high quality walking, cycling, heritage, culture and food experiences.

6. Develop a Plan around evening trade (Investigate the possibility of applying for Purple Flag Status).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 5</th>
<th>Lead Group</th>
<th>Partner (s)</th>
<th>Estimated Cost</th>
<th>Funding source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training and Up skilling:</td>
<td>TCF</td>
<td>Local Enterprise Officer, Chamber of Commerce</td>
<td>LEO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Training for retailers in areas such as online sales, the use of social media, merchandising and customer services.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 6</th>
<th>Lead Group</th>
<th>Partner (s)</th>
<th>Estimated Cost</th>
<th>Funding source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable Town Team Model</td>
<td>TCF</td>
<td>Chamber of Commerce</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Consider alternative ongoing funding mechanisms - Marketing levy, Subscription, a revenue generating social enterprise model which could attract staffing support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Consider funding streams such as local philanthropists or Diaspora.</td>
<td>TCF</td>
<td>Chamber of Commerce</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. CSR or other big business initiatives - Proctor and Gamble?</td>
<td>TCF</td>
<td>Chamber of Commerce</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Consider some of the other potential funding streams presented in the Town Centre Initiative report.</td>
<td>TCF</td>
<td>Chamber of Commerce</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 8
Common Town Centre Initiatives

A number of initiatives have been identified which could be delivered in terms of a county wide perspective such as:

Training

**Digital Marketing** is a key requirement for the effective marketing of towns and the individual businesses within the towns. There was a survey done (see Appendix 13 for summary results) as part of this project to understand the appetite for training in Digital Marketing and associated disciplines. While Tipperary Local Enterprise Office has been providing some training in this area in the various towns, it is recommended that the results of the survey are considered and that ongoing Digital Marketing and associated training programmes are made available across the various towns.

**Customer Service quality** has a profound impact on town performance and individual business performance. Customer Service in this instance includes effective communication, product knowledge, personal appearance, local area knowledge, enthusiasm, pride of place, appropriate opening times including lunchtime, ensuring customer parking facilities are not occupied by staff and respect for the customer. There are opportunities for improved customer service in all towns.

While acknowledging the work being done in this area by Tipperary Local Enterprise Office, Skillnet and others, high quality town specific customer service training programmes which have the objectives of improving the quality of customer service across the various areas mentioned above are another key requirement and recommendation.

**Visual merchandising training** or consultancy to support businesses in maximising the visual impact of their retail units would be important across all towns. Improving the general standards of merchandising, window displays, store fit out and understanding customer psychology to maximise customer spend would all support an improved customer experience in each town.

**Sales training** for customer facing staff.

**Retail Management Training**

**Town Website Development/ Tipperary Branding**

One of the challenges that exist in most towns is the maintenance of a high quality online presence for the town. Online presence is growing in importance in terms of communicating effectively with customers and attracting and retaining local business. The joint committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation figures quoted previously suggest that Irish consumers are now spending €6 billion online each year with less than a third of this revenue going to Irish businesses.

There may be an opportunity to include an online trading feature to town website design subject to funding eligibility and funding availability, but even if this is not feasible, having a high quality online presence will allow a town to disrupt some of this spend leakage and entice people back into the town centre. More importantly however, there is nothing to prevent local businesses from developing their own online shopping facility and maximising their business reach beyond
the physical boundaries of the traditional town.

It is recommended that a county wide initiative to develop the online presence of towns in Tipperary is pursued. Initial research into how this might be achieved suggests that this type of project would likely be eligible as an “Umbrella Project” under LEADER in the Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020. It should be noted that the guidelines on umbrella projects are subject to change at present.

A single funding application to LEADER for the entire project could be made by a lead partner, with each town dealing with the lead partner. An important consideration for partners is how to facilitate an ongoing maintenance plan for the online presence of each town or indeed each business and this would need to be addressed as a priority prior to any funding application being made.

Some of key challenges Entrepreneurs and Business people face is limited time and limited access to specific information on appropriate supports available to them.

Making it easy for Entrepreneurs to identify a suite of supports and incentives that suit their sector and their level of business development (setting up, growing, and expanding) would be very valuable.

These support packages should include opportunities for vacant Town Centre property owners to make their properties available for short term initiatives including pop up shops and window presentations to improve the vibrancy and appearance of the Town Centre.

**Packaged Entrepreneur Supports**

There has been a number of valuable incentive schemes made available by Tipperary County Council to Town Centre businesses over recent times. These include a Commercial Incentive Scheme, Christmas Retail Support Programme, Shop Front and Painting Scheme.

There are also a range of services available to businesses through Tipperary Local Enterprise Office including; Business Information and Advisory Services, Enterprise Support and Development Services, Entrepreneurship Support Services and Financial Support Services.

Coordinating and augmenting the incentives and services identified above into bespoke, targeted, packaged solutions for Town Centre Entrepreneurs would offer significant value.
Monitoring, Implementation & Conclusion

Experience from Ireland and abroad demonstrates the value of local partnerships in developing well-considered and effective solutions for common issues and this was at the core of this Town Centre Initiative Report. The success of measures to support town centres is predicated on facilitating a strong town centre partnership of key stakeholders that takes account of the town people, town economy, town heritage, physical features and the role of the town within the wider network of town centres.

One of the key challenges to addressing the issues facing our town centres will revolve around either a breakdown in stakeholder partnership or unwillingness for all stakeholders to work together. No one stakeholder on its own will address the issues facing our town centres. Working together, there is an opportunity to turn our town centres around. This will require not just the honest efforts of the County Council but also the honest efforts of the retail trade itself; the local citizens and consumers and the broader stakeholder base of community and business groupings.

The Action Plans laid out above for each of the towns is only the first step in the process – these plans should be managed as “fluid vehicles” with actions being added and deleted as appropriate.

However, if there is to be progress, it is important that the plans are regularly reviewed by the Steering group in an honest manner, changes made and new directions taken as required. This monitoring of the implementation is critical to the success of the plan. There will be many challenges facing the implementation of the plan, including difficulties around engagement; funding constraints; challenging economic environment; other emerging priorities etc. It is therefore important that each TCF reviews its plan at least once a year and reports on progress to its Local Municipal District/Borough District meeting.
Summary Results of TCI Retailing Online Survey

1. Do you currently sell online through your business website or through another online platform?

   ![Pie chart showing 37% Yes and 63% No]

2. Do you use social media to promote your business?

   ![Bar chart showing levels of social media activity]

3. How interested are you in developing your business online presence?

   ![Bar chart showing levels of interest]

4. If your local enterprise office were to provide low cost, high quality social media and online marketing training in your town, would you attend?

   ![Bar chart showing levels of attendance interest]

---

37
63

0 10 20 30

Not at all
Some Social Media Activity
Significant Social Media Activity

Not at all
Some Social Media Activity
Significant Social Media Activity

0 20 40 60

Not Interested
Interested
Very Interested

No
Maybe
Yes
Definitely

Definitely
Yes
Maybe
No

Definitely
Yes
Maybe
No
The agricultural sector, companies with charitable status, commercial semi state companies, "Not for profit" organisations, trade associations or company representation bodies.
The commercial viability of opening any new retail outlet would need to be investigated and duly considered by any prospective business owner.