

A Strategy for Rural Retailing



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FOREWORD

“I am delighted to have been asked to introduce this strategy for the development of the retail sector in rural towns. I come from a rural town, and in my personal capacity as a rural dweller, I see at first hand the effect on rural life and community wellbeing of the declining importance of some rural town centres. On the other hand, I also know of other towns which are flourishing and I feel that we can learn from their experience. I welcome the fact that Retail Excellence Ireland (REI) has been actively working, over the past year or so, on a project to develop an indicative framework to help local authorities, retailers, consumers, citizens and communities energise and reinvigorate their towns.

Their strategy evolved from the engagement of REI with their retail partners, local and community leaders and other stakeholders. With their assistance, REI carried out an analysis of the current challenges facing rural retailers and came up with a range of strategic interventions which could alleviate them.

Central to their strategy is a strong belief that actions can be taken which will increase the engagement and relevance of rural town centres to local communities. These actions would be developed in partnership with, and implemented through “Town Teams” which must comprise active stakeholders from public, private, voluntary and community groups. Evidence has shown that success is assured, when these town plans are developed through active collaboration of all stakeholders, not simply a few ‘good citizens’, a definite, prioritised and costed plan is put in place and the Town Team is given a strong and supportive mandate to deliver on measurable actions.

The strongest messages I take from this strategy are first of all that a lot can be done to improve the vibrancy and relevance of rural towns and cities, if communities are willing to work together on a cohesive plan and secondly that REI has actually provided a robust framework which will help communities take the first step along the way. This is an excellent, practical and most welcome document which I strongly hope will get the attention it deserves”.

Go n-éirí an bóthar leat.

Ann Phelan TD

Minister of State for Rural Affairs



FOREWORD

“In recent years more and more retailers have expressed concern as to the wellbeing of Ireland’s many towns and villages dotted around our nation. While there are many reasons for the deterioration in the wellbeing of our towns and villages which are explored at length in this document, what is clear is that if some simple shopping centre management principles were to be applied in our towns and villages, the future of our towns and villages would enjoy a marked improvement.

These shopping centre management principles can only be applied by bringing all of the town stakeholders together to work in a cohesive and co-operative manner. This document is non-prescriptive but does endeavour to highlight actions which could be implemented and which may greatly improve the wellbeing of our towns and villages and that of the citizens and stakeholders who rely on a functioning, vibrant and engaging civic focal point.

This Rural Retailing strategy document has been devised following consultation with many progressive town centre management bodies and retailers and is intended to motivate stakeholders to come together in towns and to take ownership of their public realm.

What is inspiring is the fact that many of the ideas outlined in this document and not just ideas on a page, they are being applied in practice in many of our towns around our beautiful Country. Places such as Limerick, Letterkenny, Mullingar and DunLaoghaire have taken the leap of faith and are now beginning to enjoy some of the rewards that come with Town Revival.

I would like to personally thank Ann Phelan Minister of State for Rural Affairs for assisting in the construction of many of the solutions detailed within and particularly for accommodating the important matter of town revival into her very busy portfolio. We are indebted.”

David Fitzsimons,
Chief Executive,
Retail Excellence Ireland





MISSION

This document has been created to provide guidance and motivation to stakeholders in all of Ireland's towns and villages to work together collaboratively to design and implement a plan which will reinvigorate towns and villages which in-turn will re-engage with citizens and customers alike.

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this document is to offer guidance to Local Authorities, retailers, other businesses, landlords, stakeholders and citizens as to how best to manage towns and villages to ensure the delivery of a safe and engaging customer experience.

It is our contention that out of town and in-town retailing alternatives both play a crucial role in modern society. Out of town retailing locations including shopping centres and retail parks offer shoppers a distinct proposition and this document in no way sets out to undermine the valuable role out of town shopping locations play. It is however important to highlight that town centres in modern day Ireland have become less engaging and relevant to Irish consumers.

It is the purpose of this document to highlight strategies which can be implemented to improve the relevance and presentation of Ireland's town centres.

This document sets out how all stakeholders can work in a collaborative fashion for the betterment of the town, its citizens, stakeholders and local Government.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Many Irish towns and villages are in a very distressed state. Following years of out of town retail development, the growth of on-line 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 as 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.

As we see it the primary issues afflicting Ireland's town centres are –

OUT OF TOWN RETAIL PREFERENCE –

Most retailers and especially international fashion brands have preferred to open new stores in out of town shopping centre locations. Such centres offer a controlled retailing environment, larger and “clean” retailing space and a better quality of neighbouring tenants.

WEAKENING TOWN CENTRE RETAIL MIX –

Many town centre retailers and especially the traditional indigenous department store anchor (such as Dearys in Dundalk or Morans in Ennis) have ceased to trade. The remaining retail mix, while of value, generally trades off footfall rather than creating it. The existence of destination retailers in the town centre is dissipating.

GREATER CONSUMER MOBILITY –

The growth of car ownership has led to a significant increase in consumer mobility. Thus a significant cohort is no longer reliant on public transport which predominately links suburban areas to the town centre. These car bound consumers are willing to travel longer distances to visit primary destination shopping centres and in some cases such centres claim to enjoy a shopper catchment area of over 100 square kilometres.



CARPARKING CHARGES & ENFORCEMENT –

The application of parking charges and the rigorous enforcement of same in the town centre has increased the appeal of the out of town shopping alternative. Most out of town parks and shopping centres offer complimentary car parking and apply light touch parking enforcement. Furthermore inferior town centre car parking with limited availability, especially at peak shopping periods, can act as a significant deterrent to visiting the town centre.

PROACTIVE MANAGEMENT –

Many out of town shopping centres employ expert centre management teams who work to promote the centre, maintain their property, create occasions to visit and co-ordinate and deliver many services to shoppers and tenants alike. No such structure exists in the town centre with the exception of three Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and the valued efforts of chambers of commerce and business associations nationwide.

MIXED LANDLORD BASE –

Town centre vacancy levels remain higher than out of town shopping centres. Out of town locations are commonly owned by a single entity who, motivated by rental yield, eagerly seeks new tenancies. The town centre property stock is owned by a mixture of landlords, some who are eager to retain a tenant in their premises, but some others who are less engaged.

ACCESSIBILITY –

Many out of town shopping alternatives are serviced by primary motorway access, in some cases such access is mandated by the planning process. Furthermore the growth in ring-roads has made shopping at out of town shopping locations much more accessible from a larger geographic footprint. In contrast the town centre suffers from access routes which were planned and developed for yesteryear. These narrow and poorly planned routes contribute to poor town centre accessibility.



CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR –

The spending patterns of today's consumer have changed drastically in the last decade. The consumer is now far more willing to drive long distances to primary out of town shopping locations. Today customers want mid-week convenience and weekend experience. This translates into midweek shopping in grocery stores on the edge of the town and at weekend we will drive to major retail and hospitality destinations for a "day out". What is also clear is that there is a direct link between the distance travelled and the consumer spend – the further the distance, the greater the spend. The high street consumer is normally a public transport user and in turn displays weaker spending propensity.

ON-LINE COMPETITION –

In many cases the town centre is not only losing market share to out of town shopping alternatives; it must also face significant on-line competition. REI estimates that Irish consumers will spend €4.75billion on-line in 2014.

PLANNING POLICY –

The proliferation of out of town shopping alternatives, especially large grocery anchored formats, has negatively impacted on the viability of town centre retailing. Central and local Government policy regarding planning and inconsistency in the application of the sequential test have contrived to undermine town centres nationally. It is noted that the recent amendment to the planning laws will more rigorously enforce the sequential test. Furthermore the management and planning of town and city space in respect of pedestrianisation, disability access, focal point provision and the general usability of public spaces should be given far greater consideration in planning policy formation. Furthermore it is noted that Retail Planning Guideline are just that – guidelines. Thus elected members of local Councils are entitled to vary their own policies based on local needs.

IMPORTANT INTERVENTIONS

The following offers guidance as to interventions which might be considered for implementation in towns across the country. International experience would indicate that the implementation of even some of these interventions will benefit all stakeholders –

- Citizens – Can enjoy a vibrant, engaging and safe public realm
- Businesses – Can improve their commercial livelihood and grow employment
- Local Government – Can protect and grow the rates base
- Landlords – Can improve property valuations and occupancy rates

1.1. EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS OR “TOWN TEAMS”

There is a necessity for town centre partnerships to be established involving all relevant stakeholders. For the partnership to be an “effective partnership” it must comprise public, private, voluntary, community sectors and all other relevant stakeholders. The town centre is unique as it is used by every section of the community.


The “Town Team” could comprise –

- Local authorities
- Retailers
- Town centre shopping centre managers
- Landlords
- Employers
- Local media
- Chambers of Commerce
- Business Associations
- Residents
- Tourism Groups and Agencies
- An Gardaí
- Charities & Community groups
- Educators – Universities, Colleges, Schools

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

These partnerships must focus on the needs of the town and city centre and devise a succinct and measurable plan for the town centre. The partnership must take responsibility for the plan and engage with all stakeholders, thus becoming a “Town Team”.

Effective partnerships need to look at the existing town or city’s status perhaps through a SWOT analysis and then plan a realistic, collaborative, prioritised and costed action plan. 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 innovation approach.



Effective partnerships currently exist around the country and with the full support of Local Government and all other stakeholders these partnerships can be energised to deliver effective actions for their towns and cities.

The effective partnership or “Town Team” must embrace all strands of society, have a clear mandate and deliver on measureable actions.

To enhance the effectiveness and financial wellbeing of the “Town Team” partnership, the Town Team could establish a limited company. The company could perhaps implement a membership scheme which invites financial contributions from all stakeholders and citizens. In effect the members buy a share in the town and city centre operation and invest in a process which should deliver a return in the form of a commercially, socially and culturally vibrant town and city centre.

1.2. TOWN & CITY INCOME


It is important that an income model is applied which is equitable. The BID model of funding is equitable as everyone pays a fair proportion rather than a few “good citizen” businesses being the sole contributors.

It is noted that the matter of town and city income is a challenging one. Local Authority resources are stretched due to a reduced rates base and central Government intervention, while fundraising models which apply an additional levy to businesses, such as the BID model, may not be found to be acceptable by a majority of businesses.

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. Indeed the continued existence of upward only rents and the considerable ability of private owners of such developments to distort the rent review and arbitration process through the publication of dubious rent evidence ensure that these schemes are much better funded than the high street with which they compete. 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.

A potential method to allow town and city centre stakeholders to take an active control of the management and promotion of their towns and cities is the application of the business improvement district (BID) system. While there are mixed views regarding the BID funding model (a levy is charged as a proportion of the local authority rates) it is clear that the movement of power to the stakeholders, thus allowing town and city stakeholders to shape their own destiny, has proven to be a success.

Perhaps a funding model involving the apportionment of a proportion of Local Authority car parking charges to the Town Team or BID would ultimately result in a positive outcome. The funding of the Town Team or BID through a proportion of the car parking revenues would lead to a more active engagement between the town and potential visitors, thus potentially leading to increased car parking fees which in turn will result in a type of performance related remuneration paid to both the Local Authority and the Town Team or BID – in essence all boats will rise. It is important to note that should this funding method be applied, car parking charges should not be increased to accommodate the allocation of funds to the Town Team.



There are also many other funding methods which could be applied to promote regeneration and improvement of the town and city streetscape. Examples include –

- Divert existing European infrastructural funds to town and city improvement works
- Offer local authority rates relief for regeneration projects
- Apply local authority rates on vacant premises. This matter requires careful consideration and a more prudent strategy might be to offer taxation relief to improve occupancy rates in the short-term leading to the application of rates on vacant premises in the medium term. It is also suggested that rates be applied immediately on un-kept or derelict buildings.

In summary there are many ways by which finance can be generated to fund the activity of the “Town Team” or BID including –

- Establish a BID and apply its proven funding model. As noted above the application of an additional levy may not be acceptable to local businesses.
- Seek Town Team memberships from citizens and stakeholders alike.
- Seek sponsorship from local industries and other partners.
- Implement rates on derelict vacant premises and apportion a percentage to the Town Team or BID. It is noted that legislative change is required to pursue this strategy.
- Apply for funding from the National Lottery as a “cohesive community” initiative or to part fund specific town events.
- The Town Team may be able to deliver services on behalf of the local authority in a more cost effective and efficient manner which will derive profit for the Town Team to re-invest in the town. It is clear that with demand increasing for Local Authority services, the provision of these services by the Town Team could be a challenge.
- An application for support of town events or occasions could be made to a tourism agency such as Failte Ireland. It is noted that like most state agencies, Failte Ireland faces budgetary pressures.


With such constraints and challenges facing fundraising it is suggested that the Town Team implements the most cost effective initiatives first, thus proving their success, winning support and potentially then achieving financial investment into the medium-term.

1.3. THE TOWN TEAM PLAN

It is imperative that the Town Team creates a healthy town and city centre plan. The plan must take account of all the stakeholders needs and must clearly express the vision for the town or city, the actions required and who is responsible for what. To write, and more importantly implement a good plan the Town Team must take account of “internal factors” affecting the town rather than the external factors such as the state of the economy.

The plan must be published and allow for a period of consultation before being signed by all of the stakeholders – the Town Team.

The plan must also provide for key performance indicators (KPI’s) or ways of assessing if the plan is working or otherwise. Thus it must measure current performance and



construct a picture of what is currently happening. Performance measures could include footfall, vacancy rates, customer exit surveys or local economy spending.

The plan must also provide for regular reviews to ensure there is active communication and engagement amongst the Town Team and the wider stakeholder group. E-mails, newsletters, local media, websites, briefing meetings are just some ways that all stakeholders can be kept informed and engaged with the plan.

The plan should set measureable and achievable goals which are listed in different time frameworks of 1 year, 3 years, 5 years and 10 years.

Our experience tells us that most Town Revival Plans have three distinct parts:-

Section 1 – Retail and Hospitality Investment. This part of the plan highlights how best the town team can improve occupancy and the retail and hospitality mix in the town centre. There is much discussion regarding car parking charges in town centres and parking charges are sometimes blamed for a town's demise. This may or may not be true, but it is a fact to state that without a compelling and engaging retail and hospitality mix, the town will not succeed. Occupancy can be improved in many ways. Some examples are –

1. Applying innovative uses to empty buildings. Why not consider hosting a town crèche, a town tourist office, a town student support centre.
2. By having a rates and rent controlled zone in the town centre many smaller businesses might consider opening. The English Market is an ideal example of how rent and rates controlled areas can thrive. Some local authorities now offer incentives for artisan producers and craft makers to open permanent stores in the town centre.
3. One should consider the evening economy. In many towns the evening economy is worth more than 30% of the total local economy. Are there uses which can be applied to vacant buildings which will enhance the evening economy?
4. Can the local authority offer incentives for businesses to open in the town centre first? While the local authority might be prohibited from offering a rates reduction, they might consider offering a grant to new businesses locating in the town.

Section 2 – Citizen engagement. 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 the 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. Events do not and indeed should not be commercially motivated. Other ways to re-engage and reacquaint citizens with their town centres include –

1. Develop a citizen database thus allowing the town team to send regular updates and reminders to citizens regarding upcoming events i.e. don't forget next week is dine out week, next Thursday is outdoor cinema evening, this weekend is family weekend etc...

2. Develop and promote an incubated spending scheme which retains spending in the town centre. There are some local town voucher schemes in some towns in Ireland which very effectively incubate spending in that town. The voucher is sold to local businesses who buy it as a Christmas gift for employees. The voucher can only be spent in local stores and businesses. These schemes can ring fence spending very effectively.
3. Whilst one off events can have a very powerful effect, regular events can greatly influence behaviour and can create repeat and frequent visits into the town. Farmers markets and other weekly events can attract many citizens into the town centre.
4. Car parking fees can sometimes act as a barrier to a town visit. In the UK many towns have carried out a day-part analysis to assess what parts of the day are quiet in term of parking quantum and in turn the local authority then offers free car parking for those day parts which are slow. An example is a town which found that parents were collecting their children after school in town and were then leaving town immediately. In response the town ran a “free after three” car parking promotion which succeeded in keeping a proportion of parents in the town.


Section 3 – Standards and Security. This part of the plan investigates how best to deliver a clean, safe and engaging civic space. It is obvious that no matter how impressive the retail mix and how engaged citizens are with their civic space, if the standard of the town centre is in anyway substandard, citizens will lose pride and loyalty to their town centre and a very negative cycle can begin. For this reason the town must take a professional approach to cleanliness and safety, in the same way that many of the shopping centres do. Some ways to ensure a safe and clean public realm include –

1. Appoint street ambassadors for each street in the town or village. The ambassadors will be responsible for keeping a watchful eye over the cleanliness of the street and he or she can report any issues which arise.
2. Conduct street audits regularly to measure levels of cleanliness. What gets measured gets done and a professional assessment of street cleanliness can work very well. A full audit document is available from Retail Excellence Ireland.
3. Involve the Gardai in the Town Team. Through their involvement our experience tells us that they are more than willing to assist locally and will respond to any issues raised.
4. There can sometimes be safety issues at evening time. Awards such as the Purple Flag can unite a community around providing a safe and vibrant evening economy.

1.4. CARPARKING

The quantity of parking must match the town size and be located close to the main shopping area. A maximum five minute walk or ¼ of a mile approximately is internationally viewed as the furthest acceptable location of parking. This can be increased for larger towns and cities. It is also internationally accepted that park and ride services do not act as a good substitute to convenient town centre car parking.

Payment systems which allow for payment of parking on departure rather than on arrival encourage longer shopping trips and greater consumer spend. There is a necessity for pay and display car parking alternatives to be replaced, where possible,



with barrier systems. This parking method increases dwell time in towns and cities and does not rely on the customer predicting how long they must remain in the town or city centre. It is noted that barrier systems are more expensive to operate as the use of a barrier requires supervision by car park personnel.

Other methods promoting longer dwell times should be investigated including the provision of a “Parkbytext” scheme which allows customers to pay for on-street car parking using their phone, thus customers can top-up their parking time without having to return to their car. Each parking scheme must be assessed as some can prove to be cost prohibitive.

Short stay parking provision encourages town centre visits for convenience purchases. It is noted that such provision is open to abuse as these spaces can frequently be used by long-stay users, thus more rigorous enforcement of maximum parking times must be applied.

The town centre parking provision should offer tariffs which favour visits of up to 3 hours thus discouraging commuters from occupying shopper’s spaces. Pricing policy should motivate commuters to use less convenient car parks. Car park owners could be encouraged financially to offer upper levels or furthest from entrance areas of their car park to commuters at lower parking rates, thus valuable parking spaces are retained for shoppers and other citizens visiting the town.

Car parks must be well maintained and secure. The implementation of uniformed security officers and CCTV would improve security levels. Furthermore the non-implementation of park and display tickets will act as a deterrent to crime as the time of return to the vehicle will no longer be in public view.

The provision of toilet facilities and adequately sized spaces should be mandated through the planning process when applications are received for the construction of new car parks.


Signage should be provided on major access routes to the town or city highlighting car parking location and availability.

1.5. RETAIL MIX & PLANNING

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 under-representation of national brands will weaken footfall levels and customer engagement.

It is also very important for the “Town Team” to consider the retail mix uses which create and drive footfall to a location and the uses which simply trade off the available



footfall. For a town centre to thrive it is very important that a productive mix of retail, dining and other uses is applied.

It is important that the retail mix assessment takes full cognisance of the important role post offices and banks play in the well-being of the town and city. Thus incentive might be given to these uses.

While out of town retail has an important role to play in a modern retail industry, Local Authorities must rigorously apply the sequential test to investigate as to whether there is a suitable location in the town centre for the “small box” retail entrant.


It is questionable whether the sequential test has been too easily bypassed in previous years. Where large grocery store formats are appropriate, town centres can struggle to provide appropriate floor space. This coupled with a tendency for the large grocery multiples to pursue a standardised retail footprint can lead to out of town first planning practice. The rigorous enforcement of the test should seek the separation of the many product categories which are now a modern part of the large scale grocery offer including book, music, pharmacy, optical, DVD, home, fashion and electrical categories. Such separation will more adequately allow for the town centre to be considered as a viable alternative. It is noted that the recently modified planning guidelines announced by Minister Phil Hogan will more strictly enforce a “town first” approach to planning.

It can be the case that many of these planning applications are made by large grocery multiples who are expert in the planning process and are commonly the proponents of an out of town planning outcome. It is thus the case that the retail impact assessment process seldom addresses the medium term impact of planning decisions. Furthermore the assessment process also requires the Local Authority to have considerable capacity, skills-sets and funds available to assess and challenge planning proposals and may be exposed to expensive legal challenges from well resourced retail proponents.

1.6. LOCAL DISTINCTIVENESS & BRANDING

The retail planning process must endeavour to maintain and grow the local distinctiveness of the town and village. While major brand names will drive footfall into town centres and play a pivotal role in the retail mix, there is a necessity to deliver an alternative and distinct offering to customers. The provision by the Local Authority of a rent and rates controlled retail area, where only owner occupiers can trade from, will deliver such distinctiveness. A case in point is Cork’s English Market which imposes a ceiling on rents and rates and insists on owner occupier tenants. It is noted that such a zone would have to be owned by the Local Authority, if not, some incentive would have to be provided to the private landlord.

Furthermore there is a common misconception which shapes much town centre planning. This is to equate the public good with the lowest possible price available to the consumer. This misconception may favour the growth aspirations of many large stores, and especially the large format grocery multiples, but ultimately this results in a concentration of consumer choice in the hands of a relatively limited number of retailers.



The Town Team must ensure that a brand is devised which will clearly communicate the town's USP (unique selling proposition) and provide consistent and clear delivery of customer communications.

1.7. STREETSCAPE

The streetscape refers to the physical aspects of public spaces in town centres. This includes the quality of the spaces between buildings and the furniture and equipment that occupies these spaces. There is a need for the Town Team to prepare a design guide highlighting the co-ordination of design, the type of materials to be used and the quality of the workmanship to be applied. Most importantly it must deliver a co-ordinated focus to streetscape design and planning.

The streetscape plan must provide for –

- Illumination strategy including lighting of the primary and secondary streets from a safety and consumer use perspective
- The provision of occasional decorative lighting for events such as Christmas and Easter
- The illumination of public buildings or those of architectural merit
- The presentation of cohesive fascias by providing fascia design guidelines for landlords, retailers and designers. The guidelines should provide for colour schemes and quality standards. Without such guidelines streets can look cluttered.
- The implementation of cohesive, attractive and informative pedestrian signage.
- The application of regular street care audits highlighting works needed including cleaning, removal of graffiti, the painting of street furniture et al.
- The implementation of window dressing in vacant premises.
- The employment of litter wardens.
- The provision of litter and cigarette bins which are regularly emptied and maintained.
- The implementation of planting and floral schemes.
- The installation of public art including sculptures and murals.
- There must be rigorous enforcement of signage policy including the removal of illegal signage.

1.8. BENCHMARKING PERFORMANCE

Only when we benchmark the town or village performance against pre-determined criteria can we identify and share best practice. The development of this framework will assist in the establishment of town centre management KPI's, the measurement of same and the dissemination of best town centre management practices. Furthermore the establishment of "Town Teams" will assist in the desire to implement such practices.

With this in mind Retail Excellence Ireland (REI) collated a town and city centre management review in 2012. The purpose of this review was to better understand what consumers want from their town and city. The findings of this review are available by contacting Retail Excellence Ireland.

1.9. TOWN CENTRE REPRESENTATION

A failing town centre can have a devastating effect on the social and cultural wellbeing of the local population. Furthermore it can trigger an anti-social behaviour environment and in effect create a negative spiral for the town.

Unlike large department stores, retail parks and especially shopping centres, the town centre can often lack co-ordination and a single voice. Whilst many town centres are represented by many social and business representative groups, often there is a myriad of needs represented without a cohesive plan formed. This document recognises the work invested by Minister of State for Rural Affairs Ann Phelan in the realm of Town Revival. We look forward to working with the Minister to improve the lot of rural towns and villages.

1.10. PROPERTY LEGISLATION


There is a view that there is a lack of economic drivers to encourage re-letting of premises at market rents. Some landlords are reticent to re-let their premises and accept a lower rent due to the negative impact this will have on their asset value. This can be a contributor to town and city centre property vacancy which in turn thwarts business development and investment.

There is a necessity for property legislation to promote occupancy and dissuade vacancy. The application of local authority rates on vacant premises into the medium term would have a very positive impact and motivate landlords to re-let premises. This matter requires careful consideration and a more prudent strategy might be to offer incentive to improve occupancy rates in the short-term leading to the application of rates on vacant premises in the medium term. It is thus recommended that a period of say 2 years rates free is provided for vacant premises after which local authority rates are applied on a phased basis.

An absolute must is the annualised implementation of a system of “certification of street worthiness” which is granted to those vacant premises which are well maintained and kept. Any vacant building that does not achieve this annual certification should lose rates exemption with immediate effect.

It would also be productive to insist on the implementation of the Derelict Sites Act 1990 allowing the Local Authority to compulsorily acquire a site or premises from a landlord who has allowed the site or premises to fall into disrepair. It is noted that there are limited or and indeed in many cases no resources currently available at Local Authority level to implement CPO's (Compulsory Purchase Orders) and that should a CPO be implemented, full market rates will apply.

The application and implementation of robust preservation orders must also be considered. While there is an obvious requirement for the preservation of buildings, the rigorous application of preservation orders can have a very negative impact on occupancy.



There is a need for a quicker and more cost effective planning process to be implemented. In many cases the process is cost prohibitive and slow. Perhaps local planners could look at ways of more transparently presenting their plan for a street and once the preferred retail mix is published, a fast track approach is applied for these retail uses.

1.11. RENT CONTROL

The primary cause of town centre vacancy is the demise of the independent retailer, thus supports and controls are required to stem this trend and support the presence of an independent retail mix. The importance of the independent retailer cannot be underestimated both in terms of bringing character and uniqueness to the retail mix but also the presence of an owner occupier delivers greater ownership of the town.

A community of landlords might investigate the provision of a rent controlled quarter or space within each town and city. The rent controlled zone could be a dedicated retail area in the town or city which would be let exclusively to independent retail owner occupiers, where the business owner must be present in the business. The provision of a rent controlled area would deliver a different and engaging retail mix and experience which would add significantly to the retail infrastructure and would dilute the commoditised nature of our town centres.

Furthermore the provision of a rent controlled zone would act as an entry point to entrepreneurs wishing to start-up in the retail industry. It would reduce the barriers to entry, especially when the market improves, and limit the risk associated with the establishment of a new retail business.


From the consumer's point of view, both citizens and visitors, the retail mix would become more unique and engaging. The commoditisation of our town centres would dilute and a more specialist retail mix would become available for consumers to enjoy. At present due to upward only rent reviews the independent retail specialist is being forced out of the market.

1.12. RATES CONTROL

There are mixed views regarding the implementation of rates reductions and incentives to promote greater occupancy. And most fundamentally, Local Authorities have no legal basis for modifying rates for one business type or location above another. However the provision of legislation to permit Local Authorities to apply rates inducements to certain business types or locations in the town or city is worth consideration.

In theory and should the law be changed it makes good sense for Local Authorities to offer rates reductions to new prospective tenant's thus incentivising occupancy and improving the retail mix, streetscape and general ambience. In practice many incumbent retailers feel that such incentives are unfair, especially should the new tenant compete directly with the incumbent retailer. In effect an unlevel playing field is created by the Local Authority.

Perhaps a more pragmatic and planned approach to incentivise occupancy is to identify a zone within the town which will be rates controlled. This would marry well with a rent



controlled strategy outlined above, thus bringing retailing and consumer life back to a specified zone within the town centre. The rates control must clearly specify the maximum “commencing rates” which can be applied on a premises and guarantee that rates will grow in line with the consumer price index within this zone over time. The agreed rates level would apply to all tenants, new and old, who trade within the controlled zone.

1.13. TRAINING SUPPORT

For a town centre to truly embrace the needs of the retail stakeholders it must also consider the training supports which these business owners require. It is clear that larger retailers have adequate resources to train their store management teams and also provide sufficient head office support, however, in many cases the independent retail owner can be bereft of any formal training and skills deficiencies can exist.

The Town Team should endeavour to bring a collective of retail owners together and deliver a training intervention which may assist these owners in their management, marketing, financial and merchandise planning and presentation techniques. Such an intervention would improve retail delivery and customer engagement, co-ordinated thinking and retail planning and in affect would bring town centre retailers together to engage, participate and share.

Retail Excellence Ireland could assist with the design and roll-out of a cost effective and perhaps accredited programme in association with a national University.

1.14. TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT

For town centres to compete with out of town retailing alternatives the Local Authority and the Town Team must manage the town as a shopping centre director would. There is a necessity for the following matters to be practiced –

- Co-ordinate town marketing campaigns.
- Co-ordinate special occasions and events i.e. discount weekend, sales start, fashion week, food festival, family weekend, cinema weekend, free parking weekend etc...
- Co-ordinate opening hours.
- Co-ordinate town branding.
- Implement a managed response to vacant units.
- The co-ordination of car parking charges and parking incentive schemes for consumers.
- Publicise and promote accessibility including car parking availability and transportation alternatives.
- “Managed spend” localised campaigns including a town gift card and generation of gift card sales to local industries.
- The introduction of a loyalty card.
- Build and market to a localised database of customers. The database is owned by the Town Team and used exclusively for town promotion and communication.
- The organisation of street parades and open air stage shows.

- The organisation of community workshops such as children's events, cooking classes etc...
- The provision of a town centre crèche.
- The provision of free Wi-Fi hotspots.
- The provision of an information kiosk in the main street for use by town residents as well as visitors to the town.
- The implementation of building and store window presentation standards.

For the town centre to be managed proactively and in a co-ordinated fashion the "Town Team" will require the assistance of a full-time town co-ordinator. The co-ordinator could be appointed through the establishment of a BID or through the secondment of a Local Authority, Chamber of Commerce or a Business Association executive team member.

The co-ordinator does not necessarily have to work exclusively for one town; they could perhaps manage a number of towns such as in the case of say County Clare the manager could be responsible for the wellbeing of Ennis, Shannon, Kilrush and Kilkee.

The management of the town centre must also take account of daily nuisances which can negatively impact on footfall levels and the enjoyment of the public space. Thus the Town Team must implement policies in respect of such nuisances as begging, charity collecting and ticket selling. The involvement of An Gardaí on the Town Team can assist with the enforcement of laws and bye laws in this regard.


The Town Team must also implement an annualised (at minimum) review of activity including seeking feedback from all stakeholders including the general public, retailers, landlords and Local Government.

1.15. DEALING WITH VACANCY

In areas where vacancy rates are high during economic downturns, there is a need to bring property owners and entrepreneurs together to create a scheme where both stakeholders can be protected into the long term.

An empty property scheme could persuade high street property owners to rent long-term vacant properties at a set discounted rate (for example 30% off the advertised market rent), for a short-term period of up to three years. When this timeframe elapses, tenants are given the first refusal of leasing the unit at full market value. By this time, if the rental market has recovered the property owner can be confident of leasing in much more favourable conditions. This would require the support of private landlords.

If the legislation provided Local Authorities could implement a rates strategy to deal with long-term vacancy. It would be useful for the Authority to offer some incentive on premises which are vacant for a specified period of time. Towns and cities need to target and market to tenants as shopping centres do, thus some incentive such as a rates reduction could be offered for the occupation of specified vacant premises, in tandem with incentive being provided by the landlord through discounted rent. Most importantly the Town Team must prepare an "invest in our town" type information pack



highlighting population levels and other important information which can clearly communicate reasons to invest in that town.

A policy must be drafted and agreed to deal with the issue of property accumulation. The strategy by some landlords to accumulate premises and to drive down value in the short-term by leaving the premises vacant, thus allowing for the acquisition of further neighbouring premises at a lower value must be addressed. It is noted that in certain cases the “stock piling” of property can be for the betterment of a town or city should it be undertaken to provide a larger retail footprint for say a shopping centre or large department store.

1.16. TOWN CENTRE SAFETY

Retail crime is a significant threat to the town centre. Retail crime prevention partnerships have grown in popularity and have proven their worth in preventing shoplifting activity. This is especially so in primary shopping centre schemes which employ dedicated covert and overt security personnel. Through co-operation between the Town Team and the Gardai, crime rates can be reduced through the application of information sharing and crime prevention strategies similar to the successful Business Watch initiative operated by An Gardai.

If the Town Team budget does not allow for the employment of full-time security personnel the team should implement the Business Watch initiative. The initiative unites the Gardai and the Town Team to help make shops and town centres safer.

The Town Team should participate in the local Joint Policing Committee which functions to bring stakeholders together to devise crime reductions strategies and share knowledge in the area of crime prevention.

Community alcohol partnerships (CAPs) are common place in the UK. The CAP aims to tackle the problems caused by underage access to alcohol. They work through cooperation between alcohol retailers, the Gardai and the Town Team and actively combat the purchase and possession of alcohol by those under 18.

With the creation of a dedicated frequency, radios can become a useful tool for linking together the members of a crime reduction partnership. This hands the initiative to those working to reduce anti-social behaviour. These include retailers, licensees, door staff, Gardai and CCTV control rooms (where applicable) who are able to instantly share information on related events in real time. A scheme can be established whereby local businesses can rent the necessary audio equipment and allocate the radios out to store owners and other stakeholders.

Promoting the safety of children by reuniting them with their parents could do a lot to put the minds of young families at rest. During busy shopping periods where it is easy for children to lose their parents, participating stores can be used as meeting points. ‘Caring Retailers’ could provide lost children with a place to stay until they are reunited with their family. This idea was implemented in the UK where free child wristbands have been circulated. Each wristband bears two emergency contact numbers specific to the child. Each ‘Caring Retailer’ can be identified through relevant promotional material and branding in the store window.

1.17. THE EVENING & NIGHT-TIME ECONOMY

A strategic and implementable plan must be devised for the evening economy. Many retailers and other businesses depend on this day-part and the town centre framework must accommodate this retail type. In the context of current legislation, it is vital to understand how anti-social behaviour can be minimised while ensuring the town centre encourages a vibrant night scene. This can be achieved with the help of evening economy businesses, local Gardai, transport operators and the provision of CCTV. A detailed and achievable plan which draws on a town centre's strengths and weaknesses in the evening must be developed and implemented in consultation with the relevant stakeholders.

Planning policy must not dissuade later opening hours as the fabric of the evening economy is very much dependent on a significant proportion of retail and other services and facilities remaining open in the evening time.

The evening economy plan must address ways to retain workers in the town after their working hours to ensure they can enjoy the town as a place of relaxation and enjoyment rather than simply a place of work.

The lack of frequent, efficient and safe public transport late at night, or at least the perception thereof, could have a detrimental affect on the night-time economy. As such, one way of increasing night-time visitor numbers is to promote late night travel provision. This could be done in a number of ways, including announcements made inside bars and clubs at the end of a night to inform people of their options for getting home. It could also be done through a co-ordinated communications strategy implemented by late night retailers including convenience store and food outlets.

Taxi ranks late at night are often hotspots for anti-social behaviour. This problem can be alleviated through a taxi marshal scheme, part-funded by taxi drivers. It would encourage people to form an orderly queue for their taxi, eliminating potential flashpoints and move people quickly and efficiently out of the town centre.

Evening ambassadors can improve the night scene in a town centre by acting as liaisons between the Gardai, door staff, licensees and the CCTV control room. Some UK towns and cities have pioneered a night-time management structure that involves the employment of ambassadors for the evening economy. The aim is to reduce alcohol-related anti-social behaviour and reassure the public that the town centre is a safe place to visit at night. Their tasks could include organising seminars for door staff and licensees and collating data on problem customers and venues.

The successful UK Purple Flag standard could be used as a method of implementing proven policies which will enhance the night time economy.



1.18. PROFESSIONAL ACCREDITATION OF TOWN CENTRE TEAM LEADERS

REI are currently investigating the design and delivery of a town centre team leader accreditation programme in association with the Association of Town Centre Management in the UK. We are awaiting a co-funding decision from the Department of Environment. The plan is for town team managers to join together receive training in the practice of town centre management. The programme would be run in partnership between Retail Excellence Ireland and the Association of Town Centre Management (ATCM) UK.

1.19. AUDITING TOWN CENTRE PERFORMANCE

What gets measured gets done as such there is an absolute necessity to conduct an annual audit of town centre performance. The audit could include a mystery shopping exercise, street interviews and a town centre assessment.

The annual results would be published and support could be put in place for the weaker performing towns – in effect an intensive care process could be implemented to assist the weaker towns and streets.

Furthermore the Town Team should implement quarterly exit interviews where shoppers and other town and city users are interviewed at the end of their town visit to insight what is working and what can be improved.

1.20. CASUAL TRADING & OTHER TEMPORARY USE

When planning the retail mix and the provision of casual trading and other licences it is important that full consideration is given to incumbent tenants. Quite frequently the incumbent tenant pays rents and rates for eleven months in the year in anticipation of Christmas trading only to find that temporary traders are granted licences for the Christmas period which places a significant disadvantage on the permanent trader.

While retail use of privately owned property in the main cannot be interfered with, it is important for the Town Team to provide advice to landlords as to which retail use is least provided for, thus adding to the town and city mix rather than allowing for an over population of one retail type leading to business failure and a lack of consumer engagement. It is noted that many pop-up stores simply compete with the incumbent tenants rather than adding to the breath of the retail mix.

GETTING STARTED

Listed below are the suggested steps which might be considered to improve the well-being of a town centre. By establishing a Town Team which prepares and disseminates a Town Plan the team can map out the ambitions and ideas for implementation which will improve the well-being of the town centre.

It is important that the Town Team sets achievable goals, thus the actions listed below also offer a timeline for achievement. These are suggested timelines – S|T – Short term (0–3years), M|T – Medium term (3–5years), L|T – Long term (5–10years).

The plan might address a number of very important interventions including –

INTERVENTION	ACTIONS	TIME-LINE
Establish a Town Team Partnership	Invite all town stakeholders to participate in the Town Team - a team of 10-15 is a productive number.	S T
	The Town Team forms a Board, schedules Board meetings and allocates responsibility for differing functions - planning, parking, marketing etc...	S T
	The Town Team forms a limited company. The company should be limited by guarantee with the Town Team board members listed as shareholders.	M T
	The Town Team documents and seeks funding from differing sources including memberships, Local Authority subvention (percentage of car parking charges perhaps), private funding from industry, sponsorship, National Lottery etc...	M T
	The Town Team develops a database of town stakeholders including all property owners, tenants and other stakeholders including educational establishments, the Local Authority, the Gardai, industry etc...	S T
INTERVENTION	ACTIONS	TIME-LINE
Develop a Town Team Plan	The Town Team conducts a SWOT analysis of the town. This analysis will highlight important points of difference and assist with the definition of a town vision.	M T
	The Town Team document a Town Plan highlighting clear measureable actions for implementation.	M T

INTERVENTION	ACTIONS	TIME-LINE
Car Parking		
Quantum	The Town Team must conduct an audit of car parking spaces and establish the quantum versus the town population.	M T
	If provision is weak the Town Team must devise a plan to improve provision including the acquisition of land to increase provision.	M T
	The Town Team must then research day-part parking trends and highlights any under and over utilisation time points.	M T
	The Town Team must measure commuter parking trends and use of town centre car parking stock.	M T
	The Town Team must devise a parking plan for major occasions and events - Christmas, Easter etc... The plan must account for parking charges, temporary parking provision and communication of same to consumers.	M T
Parking Charges & Regulation	The Town Team must devise a parking plan including consideration of modification to parking charges to ensure maximum shopper utilisation.	M T
	The Town Team must modify the parking charges based on over and under utilisation trends.	M T
	The Town Team must build flexibility into the car parking fee structure to allow for the implementation of parking promotions.	M T
	The Town Team must draft a policy regarding the use of clamping and other parking enforcement measures and ensure clear communication of same to consumers.	M T
	The Town Team must implement parking charges which dissuade commuter use i.e. time limited parking.	M T
	The Town Team must consider the implementation of car parking payment on departure.	M T
Parking Quality	Audit car parking stock from a security, lighting and safety perspective.	M T
	The Town Team must implement clear and co-ordinated car parking signage on the main access routes into the town.	M T

INTERVENTION	ACTIONS	TIME-LINE
Retail Mix & Planning		
Open for Business	The Town Team must prepare a clear and professional facts sheet for distribution to potential new tenants highlighting reasons to open in the town.	S T
	The Town Team must put in place incentives for new tenants without creating an unfair bias against incumbent tenants.	S T
	The Town Team must conduct an audit of retail stock by quantum and type thus highlighting retail mix weaknesses.	S T
	The Town Team must devise a "wish list" of retail types spanning differing trading hours.	S T
	The Town Team must launch a town website which can be referenced remotely by potential investors / tenants in the town.	M T
Planning Practice	The Town Team must put in place measures to ensure the application of the sequential test, thus ensuring that the town centre is considered first as a viable location for new retail tenants.	M T
	The Town Team must measure town vacancy levels which in turn will influence planning practice and act as an important KPI (key performance indicator).	S T
INTERVENTION	ACTIONS	TIME-LINE
Local Distinctiveness	The Town Team must devise a vision for the town. The vision must clearly express what sets it apart from other towns and shopping alternatives.	S T
	The Town Team must incorporate into the plan important interventions which promote distinctiveness i.e. rent and rates controlled zone open only to specialist owner occupier businesses.	S T
	The Town Team must create a brand which is then used to promote and market the town in a consistent and engaging manner.	S T
	The Town Team must devise a plan to ensure that the Town brand is applied across multiple consumer communication opportunities including local retailer advertising, in store windows, on all consumer communications, on parking and other signage etc...	S T

INTERVENTION	ACTIONS	TIME-LINE
Streetscape	The Town Team must prepare a design guide which highlights the required streetscape look and feel.	M T
	The Town Team must devise an illuminations strategy highlighting how streets will be lit ensuring the presentation of a welcoming and safe civic space.	S T
	The Town Team must devise a plan for occasional decorative lighting for occasions and events.	S T
	The Town Team must implement an illuminations strategy for the lighting of buildings of architectural merit.	S T
	The Town Team must provide guidelines for store facade design ensuring a consistent and professional image. The guidelines must reference colour type and quality standards.	M T
	The Town Team must implement cohesive, attractive and informative pedestrian signage.	L T
	The Town Team must conduct regular street care audits highlighting clearing, repair and improvement works needed.	S T
	The Town Team must devise a policy for dealing with vacant store units.	M T
	The Town Team must consider a policy for litter management including the employment of litter wardens and the provision of litter and cigarette bins.	M T
	The Town Team must prepare a plan to implement planting and floral schemes.	S T
INTERVENTION	ACTIONS	TIME-LINE
Property Legislation	The Town Team should lobby for the application of Local Authority rates on vacant premises after a pre-defined period of vacancy.	M T
	The Town Team should implement a "Certificate of Street Worthiness" scheme. With certificates only issued to well kept and maintained vacant premises.	M T
	The Town Team should lobby for the immediate application of Local Authority rates on vacant premises which do not achieve a certificate of street worthiness.	M T
	The Town Team could work with local landlords of vacant premises to agree an occupancy incentive to new businesses including a rent free period, a turnover based rent and other supports.	S T

INTERVENTION	ACTIONS	TIME-LINE
Rent & Rates Control	The Town Team should devise a plan to create a rent and rates controlled zone. The zone could either be privately owned or owned by the Local Authority. The zone should enjoy a guaranteed maximum level of rates and rent but the tenants must agree to meet certain guidelines and must be an owner occupied business.	L T
INTERVENTION	ACTIONS	TIME-LINE
Training Support	The Town Team must put in place training interventions to ensure a superior standard of service is delivered by all businesses within the town. Similar initiatives exist in privately owned shopping centres which have proven to be very successful. Businesses that participate and successfully qualify could be awarded with a mark of excellence and standards could be assessed using mystery shopping or customer exit interviews.	M T
	The Town Team must deliver important training interventions specific to the needs of the business owner including finance, merchandise planning, marketing and customer engagement training.	M T
INTERVENTION	ACTIONS	TIME-LINE
Town Centre Management	The Town Team must manage the town as a Shopping Centre manager would manage their scheme. To do this the Town Team must put in place a Town Centre Operations plan and perhaps employ a town centre co-ordinator.	M T
	The operations plan must address such matters as marketing campaigns, promotional campaigns, maximising benefit from occasions, co-ordinated trading hours, loyalty programmes, "managed spend" campaigns, organisation of events etc....	M T
Marketing Plan	The Town Team must prepare a town marketing plan including the scheduling of advertising campaigns, events and promotions. The plan must schedule a range of activity which will engage with consumers and drive footfall and town centre activity. The plan could be supported by local media who will also benefit from a vibrant and thriving business community.	S T
Customer Communication	The Town Team must implement strategies to ensure the town can actively, but in a managed and professional manner, communicate with the town's customers. The Town Team could launch a co-ordinated customer database where on arrival into any store in the town customers are asked to provide their contact details and the Town Team then schedules e-mail or text communications over the course of the year.	S T

	It is important that a cohesive and powerful message is presented to customers thus any event or occasion must involve the application of a co-ordinated communications strategy including street banners, store window posters, all store staff wearing branded t-shirts etc...	M T
	The Town Team must take advantage of social media opportunities including using facebook and twitter to "push out" town messages to consumers including promotions, competition and news.	S T
	The Town Team should implement lamppost banners to highlight festivals and events. The banners could be changed intermittently between a standard welcome banner and different events and promotions banners.	M T
Consumer Services	The Town Team might trial the establishment of a town crèche. The crèche could be located at vacant centrally located premises. The crèche could offer discounted child minding services for town shoppers on presentation of a shopping receipt for that day.	M T
	The Town Team should consider the provision of free Wi-Fi access in the town.	S T
Customer Events	The Town Team must create an events schedule highlighting different events to be hosted in the year including open air shows, parades, children's events, cooking class, film festival et al.	M T
Customer Promotions	The Town Team should also schedule a number of promotions to increase footfall to the town centre especially over quieter day parts. Promotions could be organised in a co-ordinated manner by bringing all the stakeholders together. Promotions could include shop today and receive a free entry in a competition to win a prize, today only car parking is half price; receive 10% off in the following listed stores etc...	S T
INTERVENTION	ACTIONS	TIME-LINE
Vacancy	The Town Team must develop a plan to deal with vacancy and vacant premises. The vacancy strategy must take a balanced approach and not undermine existing stakeholders. The Team might consider an empty property scheme where landlords agree to offer a short-term rent at a discounted rate below the market value.	M T
	The Town Team must apply a protocol when a building becomes vacant including requesting the landlord to allow the Town Team to use the window to promote upcoming events or promotions.	M T

	The Town Team in consultation with the Local Authority must devise maintenance standards which must apply to vacant premises. Those which meet the standards are provided with a certificate of street worthiness and thus can continue to enjoy rates relief.	M T
INTERVENTION	ACTIONS	TIME-LINE
Town Centre Safety	The Town Team must appoint a Board member to take responsibility for town centre safety and liaise with Gardai on town centre safety measures.	M T
	The Town Team should consider the implementation of the successful Business Watch scheme. The Town Team should join the local Joint Policing Committee.	M T
	The Town Team should consider the launch of a Community Alcohol Partnership (CAP) to combat the purchase and possession of alcohol by those under 18.	M T
	The Town Team should investigate the implementation of a radio communication system allowing retailers, Gardai and hospitality operators to stay in touch and report shoplifting or anti-social behaviour.	M T
	The Town Team should implement a "Child Safe" initiative thus putting parent's minds at rest. The "Child Safe" initiative involves a wristband being provided to children with the band including the child's parents contact details should the child get lost.	M T
INTERVENTION	ACTIONS	TIME-LINE
Town Visitors	The Town Team should consider how to appeal to visitors to the town or city. The design of a town welcome pack for visitors might be considered in association with local hotels. The pack could contain important town information, details of sites to see and things to do, details of events or promotions being run over the next month and details of offers and incentives being offered by retailers exclusively for the benefit of the visitor.	M T
	The Town Team should consider the installation of temporary visitor welcome centres whether on-street in the form of a kiosk or in an existing high profile building. The service could provide directions and help to visitors as well as providing information pertaining to the town or city.	M T
INTERVENTION	ACTIONS	TIME-LINE
The Night-time Economy	The Town Team must devise a plan to ensure that night-time retailers and businesses are provided with support and assistance.	S T

	The Town Team must devise a night-time public transport plan which promotes access into the town centre but also provides convenient and accessible transport for visitors to get home safely. Such late night transport provision could be communicated through hospitality locations and late night retailers' premises.	M T
	The Town Team must review the merits of a late night taxi marshal system which encourages people to form an orderly queue eliminating potential flashpoints and moving people quickly and efficiently out of the town or city centre.	M T
	The Town Team should consider the employment of evening ambassadors who liaise with Gardai, door staff and publicans and reassure the visiting public that the town centre is safe.	M T
INTERVENTION	ACTIONS	TIME-LINE
Measuring Performance	The Town Team must put in place measurement tools to allow for an objective assessment of town performance. While REI will assist with the establishment of a national measurement and benchmarking system the Town Team must define and measure Key Performance Indicators (KPI's). Such KPI's might include footfall levels, trading data from retailers, exit interviews of consumers, mystery shopping service standards etc...	S T