

Armagh City, Banbridge &
Craigavon Borough Council

Local Development Plan 2035

Draft Plan Strategy

TECHNICAL SUPPLEMENT 4

Retailing and Town Centres

September 2026



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Armagh City
Banbridge
& Craigavon
Borough Council

Contents	Page No.
1.0 Introduction	3
2.0 Legislative Context	6
3.0 Policy Context	7
4.0 Borough Profile- Retailing and Town Centres	32
5.0 Preferred Options Paper	52
6.0 Stakeholder Engagement	68
7.0 Draft Plan Strategy Policy Approach	74
8.0 Consideration of Soundness	75

List of Tables

- Table 1: Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council – Existing Hierarchy of Centres
Table 2: City/Town Centre Vacancy 2018-2023
Table 3: Position of Adjoining Councils in regard to Retailing and Town Centres
Table 4: Consideration of Soundness

List of Figures

- Figure 1: Average (%) Vacancy Across the Five City/Town Centres, 2018 - 2023
Figure 2: Proposed Classification for the Hierarchy of Centres (as presented in the POP, Page 111)
Figure 3: Retail & Commercial Leisure Study - Recommended Updated Classification of Centres
Figure 4: Retail & Commercial Leisure Study – Recommended Hierarchy of Centres
Figure 5: Retail & Commercial leisure Study – Proposed Centre/ Retail Core Boundary Amendments

List of Appendices

- Appendix 1: Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council- Evening Economy Development Strategy (2018) and Action Plans - Propositions, Opportunities and Barriers to Growth & Development and the associated Action Plans (including Action Plan beyond 12 months) for Armagh City, Banbridge, Craigavon, Portadown and Lurgan
Appendix 2: Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council - Evening Economy Development Strategy (2018) -Suggested monitoring measures for the evening and nighttime economy

1.0 Introduction

Purpose of this document

This Technical Supplement brings together the evidence base that has informed the preparation of the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council's Local Development Plan (LDP) 2035 draft Plan Strategy (dPS). It is one of a suite of topic based Technical Supplements that should be read alongside the dPS to understand the rationale and justification for the planning policies proposed within it.

This Technical Supplement includes key updates relating to Retailing and Town Centres in the Borough which have emerged since the publication of the Council's original evidence base Preparatory Paper. It was one of a series of papers which provided baseline information that helped inform the options presented in the Council's Preferred Options Paper (POP). The POP, published in March 2018, provided an overview of the Key Issues of strategic significance affecting the Borough and the Preferred Options to address them.

This Technical Supplement also seeks to provide an update on the Council's progress in its approach towards Retailing and Town Centres in the Borough and the development of associated planning policies, since the publication of the POP.

To reflect the range of matters considered in developing the Council's approach to Retailing and Town Centres, and in formulating the associated draft Plan Strategy policies, this Technical Supplement is structured as follows:

- **Sections 2 and 3** summarise the legislative, regional and local policy context relevant to the LDP, with particular emphasis on retailing and town centres;
- **Section 4** provides an overview of retailing and town centres within the Borough;
- **Section 5** outlines the relevant Key Issue and Preferred Approach identified in the Preferred Options Paper (POP), together with a summary of POP commitments and relevant representations, particularly those relating to policy development;
- **Section 6** summarises the policy review, consultation and engagement undertaken in preparing the draft Plan Strategy policies. It also considers neighbouring councils' approaches to retailing and town centres, including any potential cross-boundary issues;
- **Section 7** explains how the draft Plan Strategy policies for Retailing and Town Centres have been developed, including the rationale for any amendments made to existing planning policy where they were considered necessary and appropriate; and
- **Section 8** sets out how the draft Plan Strategy policies for Retailing and Town Centres have been prepared in accordance with the tests of soundness set out in the Department for Infrastructure's Development Plan Practice Note 6: Soundness (Version 2, May 2017).

The information and data presented in this Technical Supplement has been derived from a number of different sources however, where possible, the most recent datasets available have been utilised.

It is important to note that this Technical Supplement has been collated at specific point in time and therefore it may be necessary for the Council to review and update it as the plan is progressed. The notional end date of the plan period has now been amended to 2035. The Council will continue to work with key stakeholders to ensure that retail and town centre development in the Borough are managed in an appropriate and sustainable manner throughout and beyond the plan period of 2035.

Retailing and Town Centres

Town centres are promoted as destinations that provide an experience beyond that of a regular shopping trip, to influence consumer spending, lifestyle trends and improve footfall within our centres. The promotion of diversification to provide a mixture of retailing and related facilities, including employment, leisure and cultural uses will serve to enhance the vitality, viability and sustainability of our town centres as important hubs for our local economy and assist in supporting growth and investment within our Borough by meeting our retail, employment and leisure needs. Due to the complexity of their role and function, town centres have a key role in contributing towards sustainable development and therefore it is vital that the Council, through the LDP, pursues policies to support and enhance their vitality, viability and sustainability.

To develop economically competitive and vibrant town centres, address vacancy rates and ensure their position as the appropriate first choice locations for retailing and other complementary functions it is essential that diversification of appropriate town centre uses is promoted. Therefore, it is necessary to bring forward a strategy for town centres and retailing which will contain appropriate policies and proposals to promote town centre first for retail and other main town centre uses and recognise the importance of a mix of uses within town centres, in addition to ensuring that our town centres are well connected and accessible.

The challenge for the LDP is to promote competitive and sustainable centres that provide customer choice and a diverse offer that reflects the individuality and specific circumstances of our centres, and our Borough as a whole.

Retail and Commercial Leisure Study

In 2022 Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council commissioned Nexus Planning to prepare, lead and co-ordinate a Retail and Commercial Leisure Study on its behalf. The purpose of the Study is to inform the preparation of the Local Development Plan (LDP) and aims to provide the Council with an up-to-date, objective assessment of retail and commercial leisure development needs in the Borough and considers possible strategic policy responses to any prevalent or emerging issues.

The Retail and Commercial Leisure Study (January 2023) has been prepared to reflect the latest Department for Infrastructure (DfI) guidance provided in the Regional Development Strategy 2035 (RDS) and Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS, September 2015).

The Key information set out in the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study includes:

- A summary of the key national and local retail policy context relevant to the Study
- A summary of key current and future retail trends
- Detail on the Study Area, including the Household Survey undertaken to inform the Study
- Health-check assessments for:
 - Armagh
 - Banbridge
 - Craigavon
 - Lurgan
 - Portadown

- Dromore
- Gilford
- Keady
- Markethill
- Rathfriland
- Tandragee
- Legahory District Centre

Health checks are recognised as important planning ‘tools’ for appraising and monitoring the changes in the overall vitality and viability of town centres and informing both plan-making and decision-taking at the local level. This section also includes the findings of the stakeholder consultation that took place as part of the study.

- A Benchmarking exercise- entailed a comparative review of the performance of Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon, Lurgan, Portadown, Keady, Markethill, Tandragee, Dromore, Gilford and Rathfriland against similar centres in Northern Ireland.
- Guidance to inform the emerging Local Development Plan on a number of matters including the hierarchy of centres, the spatial extent of centres, review of opportunity sites and recommended planning policy approach.

The preparation of the Study also involved specialist input from NEMS Market Research on the empirical survey work, and Experian on data production.

Whilst the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study should be read alongside this Technical Supplement, Key findings of the Study are detailed in Section 4 ‘Borough Profile’.

2.0 Legislative Context

The key pieces of legislation relating to this subject area include the following:

The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (hereafter referred to as the 2011 Act) is the principal planning legislation in Northern Ireland, which underpins the reformed two-tier planning system that commenced on 1 April 2015. It introduced the plan-led system, where the LDP is the primary consideration for decision making on all new development schemes and proposals will be required to accord with its provisions unless, exceptionally other material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Planning (Local Development Plan) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

The Planning (Local Development Plan) Regulations set out the sequence in which the Council's new LDP is to be prepared and provides detail on the content and procedure of each stage in the plan preparation process and independent examination.

The Planning (Local Development Plan) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016

The Planning (Local Development Plan) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 amend the transitional provisions in the Planning (Local Development Plan) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 to include development plans prepared and adopted by the Department under the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 within the definition of a departmental development plan under the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016

The Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 provides a statutory duty on public authorities to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, and when designing and delivering public services and came into effect for Councils in June 2017.

3.0 Policy Context

Regional Policy Context

The key pieces of regional policy relating to this subject area include the following:

Programme for Government (PfG) 2024-2027 ‘Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most’ (2025, Northern Ireland Executive)

The PfG ‘Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most’ outlines the NI Executives priorities for making a real difference to the lives of everyone living and working in Northern Ireland. It sets out the following three long term Missions, underpinned by a cross-cutting commitment to Peace, through which improved wellbeing, long term sustainability, and a thriving economy will be delivered.

People: Working to support everyone at all stages of their life to ensure they have the chance to succeed by improving life opportunities.

Planet: Harnessing the potential of a green growth economy while ensuring we provide an equitable transition to a sustainable and affordable society as we take responsibility for decarbonising our economy and society.

Prosperity: Improving our economic productivity while making sure that we have an economy that works for everyone, and our story continues to be an inspiration to others.

The nine cross-cutting priorities aimed at delivering the PfG missions are as follows:

- Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy
- Deliver More Affordable, Accessible, High-Quality Early Learning and Childcare
- Cut Health Waiting Times
- Ending Violence Against Women and Girls
- Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs
- Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing
- Safer Communities
- Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment
- Reform and Transformation of Public Services

Within the PfG there are a wide range of actions aimed at addressing the above priorities and delivering the missions, including multi sector investment and reform, the delivery of a Sub-Regional Economic Action Plan, the development of Northern Ireland’s Climate Action Plan, publication of the Third Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme and the delivery of actions identified within the Lough Neagh Report and Action Plan.

The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035

The RDS 2035 is the key policy guiding development in Northern Ireland and is underpinned by a Spatial Framework and Strategic Planning Guidelines. The Spatial framework consists of urban hubs and clusters. The RDS 2035 identifies Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon as main hubs. It states that they have the potential to form a cluster and both Craigavon and Banbridge are well positioned on two Key Transport Corridors with Armagh positioned on a Link Corridor.

The RDS 2035 acknowledges the importance of accessible, vibrant city and town centres which offer people greater local choice for shopping, social activity and recreation. The RDS also makes specific reference to the retailing sector in the Borough, recognising that Central

Craigavon has a well-established retail function, in addition to a strong manufacturing and industry base and in Banbridge there is a strong employment base in retail, manufacturing and construction due to its strategic location on the Belfast Dublin Corridor. Although the RDS makes no specific reference to retailing in Armagh City, it does acknowledge Armagh as a rich heritage and tourism destination with an abundance of cultural product.

Regional Guideline (RG) 1 seeks to ensure adequate supply of land to facilitate sustainable economic growth. Whilst the focus is on industrial and business uses, it does refer to the importance of strengthening the larger urban centres and regional gateways, to take advantage of their locations on the regional transport network.

RG7 in supporting urban and rural renaissance, places importance on 'Developing innovative ways to bring forward under-utilised land and buildings, particularly for mixed use development'. The RDS recognises the importance of accessible, vibrant town centres which offer people more local choice for shopping, social activity and recreation

Strategic Framework Guidance (SfG) identifies that to compete successfully at a global level Northern Ireland's private sector needs to grow. This will lead to an increase in productivity and to an enhanced market share in products and services which will in turn result in better employment opportunities and reductions in economic inactivity and unemployment. Inward investment needs to be attracted, and local firms encouraged to grow. To promote economic development opportunities, the RDS guidance makes the following recommendations:

- Promote and exploit the potential for economic development. Hubs are all performing economic roles and have potential for further economic expansion. Small businesses and service sector offices could locate in these towns.
- Consider Hubs and clusters of Hubs first. When new development is being considered, the relationship and benefits between towns/cities in the clusters should be considered. The Hub and the higher performing town/city in the cluster should be considered first in the decision process.

The RDS also highlights that we must strive to keep our rural areas sustainable and ensure that people who live there, either through choice or birth, have access to services and are offered opportunities in terms of accessing education, jobs, healthcare and leisure. It also acknowledges that to sustain rural communities, new development and employment opportunities which respect local, social and environmental circumstances are required.

SfG 13 recognises that there are wide variations across Northern Ireland in terms of the economic, social and environmental characteristics of rural areas and therefore there is a need for local development to reflect these regional differences. Such approaches should be sensitive to local needs and environmental issues including the ability of settlements and landscapes to absorb development. SFG 13 acknowledges that a sustainable approach to further development will be important to ensure that growth does not exceed the capacity of the environment, or the essential infrastructure expected for modern living. It also states that the expansion of rural tourism and development which is both sustainable and sensitive to the environment should be encouraged. This includes the ability of settlements and landscapes to absorb development.

Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland - Planning for Sustainable Development, 2025 (SPPS)

The aim of the SPPS is to support and sustain vibrant town centres across Northern Ireland through the promotion of established town centres as the appropriate first choice location of retailing and other complementary functions, consistent with the RDS.

The regional strategic objectives in relation to town centres and retailing include:

- secure a town centres first approach for the location of future retailing and other main town centre uses;
- adopt a sequential approach to the identification of retail and main town centre uses in Local Development Plans (LDPs) and when decision taking;
 - ensure LDP's and decisions are informed by robust and up-to-date evidence in relation to need and capacity;
- protect and enhance diversity in the range of town centre uses appropriate to their role and function, such as leisure, cultural and community facilities, housing and business;
- promote high-quality design to ensure that town centres provide sustainable, attractive, accessible and safe environments; and
- maintain and improve accessibility to and within the town centre.

For the LDP to deliver the objectives above, the SPPS sets out a range of actions that should be implemented:

- define a network and hierarchy of centres – town, district and local centres, acknowledging the role and function of rural centres;
- define the spatial extent of town centres and the primary retail core;
- set out appropriate policies that make clear which uses will be permitted in the hierarchy of centres and other locations, and the factors that will be taken into account for decision taking;
- provide for a diverse offer and mix of uses, which reflect local circumstances; and
- allocate a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and form of retail, and other town centre uses.

Regarding office development, the SPPS states that the Plan may also set out restrictions as to where particular types of economic development should be located in order to meet particular Plan objectives. For example, office uses may be restricted to town or district centres to promote the vitality and viability of the centre. Furthermore, appropriate proposals for UCO Class B1 business uses (such as offices and call centres) should be permitted if located within city or town centres, and in other locations that may be specified for such use in a LDP, such as a district centres.

The SPPS directs that inappropriate retail development in the countryside should be resisted, however allows for some limited exceptions which includes farm shops, craft shops and shops serving tourist or recreational facilities. The SPPS requires that such retail facilities should be located within existing buildings and that all policies and proposals must ensure there will be no unacceptable adverse impact on the vitality and viability of an existing centre within the catchment and meet the requirements of policy elsewhere in the SPPS.

It is important to note that the SPPS is silent in respect of roadside service facilities. Although the SPPS states that inappropriate retail facilities in the countryside will be resisted, roadside service facilities are not one of the specified exceptions to the general presumption against retail development in the countryside.

Planning Policy Statements (PPSs)

The operational planning policy contained within Planning Policy Statement 5 (PPS 5) 'Retailing and Town Centres' was cancelled by the introduction of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS). As such the provisions of the SPPS, as detailed above, in relation to retailing and town centres are material to all decisions on relevant planning applications and appeals. Other PPSs of relevance include:

- Planning Policy Statement 4 'Planning and Economic Development' (PPS 4) sets out the planning policies for economic development uses and indicates how growth associated with such uses can be accommodated. In relation to office provision this policy aims to tackle disadvantage and facilitate job creation by ensuring the provision of a generous supply of land suitable for economic development.
- Planning Policy Statement 6 'Archaeology and Built Heritage' (PPS 6) recognises the importance of archaeological and historical features. The policies aim to promote economic vitality and growth through the on-going regeneration of our built environment and seek to ensure that built heritage remains in continued use or active reuse as an integral part of the living and working community. The policies recognise that conservation can play a vital role in promoting economic prosperity and encouraging inward investment. In return, economic prosperity can secure the vitality of historic areas and buildings. Within the Borough there are 5 Conservation Areas (Armagh, Loughgall, Richhill, Dromore and Lurgan).
- Planning Policy Statement 6 (Addendum) 'Areas of Townscape Character' provides additional planning policies (ATC 1 to ATC 3) which relate specifically to Areas of Townscape Character (ATC). The 3 policies cover the demolition of buildings, new development and control of advertisements within ATCs. Within the Borough there are 16 Areas of Townscape Character (ATC), 4 within the former Craigavon Borough and 12 in the former Banbridge District.
- Planning Policy Statement 12 'Housing in Settlements' (HS 1) identifies that 'Living Over the Shop' brings many social and economic benefits and is a cost-effective means of accommodating additional housing. Underused or wasted space is brought back into use and the fabric of buildings is put into good repair and maintained. It can provide a useful source of affordable rented housing and can contribute to the vitality and viability of town centres.

A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland (PSRNI)

Policy IC 15: Roadside Service Facilities states that the provision of roadside service facilities on the trunk roads network in the open countryside may be considered acceptable where there is a clear indication of need, subject to any retailing being ancillary to the main petrol filling station use. In respect of 'need' the policy states that it is reasonable to expect a driver to travel at least 12 miles along the main traffic route network before reaching a petrol filling station or service centre (on either side of single carriageway roads) and therefore proposals for new facilities within 12 miles of existing services will therefore not normally be acceptable. However, the policy states that proposals for the extension of facilities at existing filling stations may be considered. Such facilities will not be acceptable adjacent to every filling station - again a spacing of 12 miles between services is considered appropriate.

The Policy also states that on routes not forming part of the trunk roads network there will normally be no necessity to locate petrol filling stations or roadside services in the open countryside. Such facilities will normally be directed to existing settlements unless local circumstances indicate that such a policy would lead to undue hardship for the residents. The Policy acknowledges that the upgrading of existing filling stations will normally be acceptable unless increased trade would create or exacerbate a road traffic hazard.

The policy also acknowledges that many petrol filling stations function as the local shop or small supermarket serving the surrounding population and states that importance of recognising this role of retail provision. However, it states that such shops should however

clearly remain secondary to the use as a petrol filling station, with proposals for larger units providing general retailing not considered appropriate and secondary uses such as vehicle sales or vehicle repairs not normally acceptable in countryside locations.

The policy also requires consideration of parking and access, location, siting, design, landscaping and signage considerations.

Supplementary Planning Guidance

- 'Living Places: An urban Stewardship and Design Guide for NI' (2014) sets out the key principles behind good place making, which is often of particular importance in town centres. The Guide seeks to inform and inspire all those involved in the process of managing (stewardship) and making (design) urban places, with a view to raising standards across Northern Ireland. It acknowledges that for Northern Ireland to continue on its path to a brighter, more prosperous future for all, it is vital the planning, design and management of urban places is improved, identifying that stronger cities, towns, villages and neighbourhoods will be central to the fulfilment of this overall objective.

Development Control Advice Notes (DCANs) set out the criteria and technical standards to be considered when dealing with specific categories or particular aspects of development.

DCANs of particular relevance to town centres and retailing include:

- DCAN 1 'Amusement Centres'
- DCAN 3 'Bookmaking Offices'
- DCAN 4 'Restaurants, Cafes and Fast-Food Outlets'
- DCAN 5 'Taxi Offices'
- DCAN 7 'Public Houses'

However, it is important to note that on the adoption of the Plan Strategy, existing guidance contained within DCAN 1, 3, 4, 5 and 7 will cease to have effect in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough and therefore they shall not be a material consideration from that date.

Other Strategies, Information and Documents

UK Marine Policy Statement

The UK Marine Policy Statement (MPS) was published in September 2011 under the Marine Coastal Access Act 2009 and provides the policy framework for the marine planning system and taking decisions affecting the marine environment. The MPS provides the high-level policy context within which marine plans will be developed and monitored and will ensure consistency in marine planning across the UK marine area. The MPS will contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom marine area. Although the Borough does not directly connect to a coastline, waterways will have connectivity to marine areas, therefore the draft Plan Strategy has had regard to the MPS.

Draft Marine Plan for Northern Ireland

The draft Marine Plan for Northern Ireland has been prepared under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (MCAA) and the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 (The Marine Act) and within the framework of the UK Marine Policy Statement. Published in April 2018, it provides a framework of policies to be considered by public authorities taking decisions that affect or might affect the marine area. The Northern Ireland marine area is made up of an inshore and

an offshore region. The marine area comprises all marine waters including seabed, subsoil, sea loughs and tidal rivers, so far as the tide flows at Mean High Water Spring Tide. Although the Borough does not directly connect to a coastline, waterways will have connectivity to marine areas, therefore the draft Marine Plan for NI has been taken into consideration in the preparation of the draft Plan Strategy.

Everyone's Involved - Sustainable Development Strategy 2010 (Northern Ireland Executive)

The Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland (2010) promotes sustainable communities and the protection of environmental resources, recognising the need to adapt to climate change and manage environmental risks. In this regard, the Strategy supports development which contributes to the long-term sustainability and resilience of communities.

Guidance on Accessibility Analyses and the Preparation of Planning Policies for Transport (DfI) 2021

The guidance acknowledges that the LDPs are a fundamental tool in the implementation of central government policies and strategic objectives. The purpose of the guidance is to assist Councils with the drafting of sound operational policies to be included within the LDP, it provides both essential background information and the key considerations that should be taken into account to ensure robust local operational policies are formulated and the reasons why these policy considerations are important.

The guidance states that in the LDP the Council may wish to take account of 14 listed Key Considerations, from integration of land use and transportation to temporary car parks, highlighting that failure to take account of the Key Considerations could result in a LDP being found to be unsound. The Guidance in respect of petrol stations is included under Key Consideration 6- Protected Routes.

In specific regards to petrol filling stations, the guidance states that local operational policy should require that proposals for new petrol filling stations in the countryside, within 12 miles of existing services, will not be acceptable. The guidance clarifies that it is considered reasonable to expect car users to travel at least 12 miles along a protected route network before reaching a petrol filling station or service area (on either side of side of single carriageway roads). Furthermore, the guidance states that where a protected route is already adequately serviced by existing services, the creation of new petrol filling stations will not be acceptable. The guidance highlights that all such development for petrol filling stations should meet normal planning, environmental and road safety considerations.

High Street Task Force- Call for Evidence (2021, Northern Ireland Executive)

In 2021 the Executive Office held a Call for Evidence to hear views on its initial findings and potential solutions to support Northern Ireland's high streets and contribute to the development of thriving and sustainable city, town and village centres.

The Vision of the High Street Task Force is:

“Sustainable city, town and village centres which are thriving places for people to do business, socialise, shop, be creative and use public services, as well as being great places to live.”

The Call for Evidence also highlighted that Northern Ireland's city / town / village centres are facing a range of issues and challenges, ranging from the recovery from Coronavirus, adaptation and mitigation of climate change, vacancy and rate levels and accessibility by

public Transport (including active travel). These themes formed the basis of the Call for Evidence and were aimed at stimulating ideas and suggestions that may make the Vision of the Taskforce a reality.

The Call for Evidence acknowledged that these challenges currently faced by Northern Ireland's city / town / village centres cannot be addressed by one government Department working in isolation but instead require action by central government Departments alongside councils, non-governmental bodies and the business community.

The Call for Evidence also identified that 'a good high street' is likely to have many or all of the following characteristics:

- Accessible and connected;
- Easier to get to and move around in;
- Welcoming and safe;
- Has unique characteristics and culture;
- Collaborative, responsible and ongoing;
- Enjoyable;
- Has a diversity of uses and activities;
- Is a nicer place to be;
- Has a better mix of uses so that more people will want to go there, spend time, live and do business there;
- Has found a way of managing them well.

Delivering a 21st Century High Street (High Street Task Force – Report and Recommendations, Executive Office, 2022)

'Delivering a 21st Century High Street' and its accompanying Call for Evidence 2022 Report, published in March 2022, present the recommendations, findings and summary of the Call for Evidence carried out in 2021 (as detailed above).

Whilst 'Delivering a 21st Century High Street' acknowledges that addressing the challenges facing the High Street will require significant changes in many sectors, including planning, regeneration and investment, it also identifies that there are new opportunities including the potential to:

- Create a more diverse High Street;
- Address social needs as well as economic sustainability; and
- Deliver green growth.

'Delivering a 21st Century High Street' sets out a number of challenging and innovative recommendations and proposals which were informed by both the views of the High Street Task Force and responses submitted in respect of the Call for Evidence. The 14 recommendations of 'Delivering a 21st Century High Street' for consideration by Ministers are summarised as follows:

1. *Executive Support for Our Cities and City Regions* – recommends that the cities and city regions are supported by the Executive as key drivers of economic growth and prosperity and that it considers the 'support needed to strengthen their role in positioning the region for investment and innovation and to address the objectives of increasing city centre living'.
2. *Living High Streets Programme*- recommends that the Living High Streets Craft Kit (sets out why the high street is important, who should be involved in shaping it and how to go about doing so) is rolled out, with the necessary support for implementation, in each high street, village, town and city centre.

3. *Living High Streets Fund*- recommends that a fund is created in order to support initiatives, such as the Living High Streets Craft Kit,
4. *Immediate Rates Relief*- recommends that the NI Executive should reinstate the Back in Business Rate Relief Scheme to encourage vacant properties to be brought back into use. It also recommends extending the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme to ensure that there is protection for small and start-up businesses by extending the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme. In addition, it recommended that proposals should be brought forward to improve the Rates Hardship Fund and examine ways to support business growth.
5. *High Street Investment Programme*- recommends that the NI Executive priorities the delivery of place-making by developing and implementing an investment programme for blue-green infrastructure, cleaner and greener public realm and sustainable transport. It highlights that investment must be balanced across the region and that rural communities should see their village centres become home to community hubs that make use of heritage buildings where possible.
6. *High Street Council Plans*- strongly recommends that District Councils develop dereliction strategies and action plans and that they use their existing powers to transform streets and village centres so to attract new levels of footfall, retain spending power and benefit from a growing rates base.
7. *Smart High Streets*- recommends the appointment of a lead minister to champion Smart High Streets so to optimise the role of high streets 'through universal Wi-Fi access, the Internet of Things, augmented reality and a range of other initiatives which can secure the benefits offered by digital technologies.'
8. *Fair Work on Our High Streets* - recommends that the Executive implements the commitments made in the 'New Decade New Approach'¹ to promote this policy and ensure best work practices and high standards in our high streets.
9. *High Street Challenge Fund*- recommends that the Executive establishes a Challenge Fund- a competitive fund, open to bids from the private, voluntary and community sector, as well as public bodies that would harness the creativity of those who value our village, town and city centres.
10. *High Street Investment Programme (Long Term recommendation)* - recommends that the High Street Investment Programme is developed within the overarching Investment Strategy.
11. *Review of Planning Processes*- identifies that the importance that the planning system works efficiently and effectively and recommends that the Executive works to implement the recent review of the Planning Act 2011 to ensure that it acts as an enabler of sustainable development in city, town and village centres. In addition, it recommends that Executive review the operation and implementation of the existing Town Centre First Retail Planning policy to ensure that it is working, and, where it is not working, identify appropriate measures to fix it. It also identifies that opportunities should be taken to streamline processes so that the changes identified as necessary for town centres through local initiatives (such as the Living High Streets Craft Kit) can be implemented without delay or undue cost.
12. *Local Government Powers*- recommends that Ministers engage with elected representatives from local government and the Assembly to explore the benefits of devolving further powers to local government, including those needed for regeneration.
13. *Review of Fiscal Policies* - recommends that there is a review of non-domestic rates.
14. *A Five-Year Programme* – recommends that the High Street Task Force is kept in place for the next five years for monitoring, evaluation, research and outreach due to the ever-

¹ 'New Decade New Approach', published in 2020 by the Northern Ireland Office and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, was a deal to restore devolved government in Northern Ireland.

changing nature of the High Street environment which will continue to see changes in transportation, homes, workplaces etc.

Local Policy Context

Existing Area Plans

The existing 4 statutory Area Plans covering the Borough provide the policy framework against which development proposals are considered.

- The Armagh Area Plan (AAP) 2004
- The Armagh Area Plan Alteration No 1: Countryside Proposals
- The Banbridge, Newry and Mourne Area Plan (BNMAP) 2015
- The Craigavon Area Plan (CAP) 2010
- The Craigavon Town Centre Boundaries and Retail Designations Plan 2010
- The Dungannon and South Tyrone Area Plan (DSTAP) 2010

Due to the varying ages of the extant Development Plans, there are inconsistencies in approach with regards to a number of planning issues as well as the degree of emphasis in respect of the principles of sustainable development. However, the existing Plans are an important consideration in the LDP process, and as such have been considered in the development of the draft Plan Strategy. Policies within the respective Development Plans that are related to town centres and retailing are laid out below. The LDP provides an opportunity to address inconsistencies in the approach to Town Centres and Retailing in line with the regional strategic direction.

Armagh Area Plan 2004

The Armagh Area Plan (AAP) 2004 and AAP Alteration No 1 (Countryside Proposals) provide a planning framework for the growth and development of the Armagh area.

The Armagh Area plan designates a Central Area Limit for Armagh along with a commercial area. The central area limit equates to the Town Centre Boundary, and the Commercial Area equates to the Primary Retail Core.

In respect of Armagh's Central Area, the Armagh Area Plan 2004 states that office development proposals, both public and private, will be considered on their particular locational merits, however generally they will be acceptable in most of the Central Area except within the established ecclesiastical, educational and residential areas. It is acknowledged that there are a wide number of specific land uses in the Central area, including shopping, commerce, housing, civic and cultural, recreational and business which gives the City its unique function and character.

An objective within the AAP is 'to promote vibrant towns and villages by increasing their attractiveness as places to live, work, use and invest'. The Plan identifies that Armagh's commercial area continues to provide the best location for retail and office use due to its ready accessibility by a variety of modes of transport. For shopping purposes Armagh provides a relatively compact centre with a range of retail outlets. The main shopping and commercial streets include Upper English Street, Market Street, Scotch Street and Thomas Street and have a variety of shops, cafes, banks and services, the majority of which are independently owned. Since the adoption of the Plan two small shopping centres have been developed at the Mall and Ogle Street. Secondary Shopping streets at Barrack Street, Ogle Street, Dobbin Street, College Street and Lower English Street also contribute to the overall vitality and viability of the town centre. Non-retail uses may be acceptable in these areas provided that they complement the retail function of the centre, and the plan undertook to monitor the

situation throughout the Plan period to ensure an imbalance between retail and non-retail uses did not arise.

The AAP also noted the contribution made by housing within and close to the Central Area such as Charlemont Gardens, Callan/Navan Street, Banbrook Hill, Victoria Street and Barrack Street and aimed to protect and retain existing housing while providing support and encouragement for new housing on derelict or backland sites and proposals to re-use upper floors of properties within the Central Area for residential uses. It is acknowledged that specific housing areas make a positive contribution to the attractiveness, security, vitality and viability of the town centre.

The AAP identifies that it is necessary to protect the countryside from inappropriate development, however, acknowledges that it is also important to ensure the countryside does not stagnate and that the economic potential of rural areas is encouraged in appropriate ways.

Whilst Development Opportunity Sites (DOSs) were designated in both the Banbridge, Newry and Mourne Area Plan 2015 and the Craigavon Area Plan 2010, no DOSs were designated within the Armagh Area Plan 2004.

Banbridge, Newry and Mourne Area Plan 2015

The Banbridge Newry and Mourne Area Plan (BNMAP) 2015 acknowledges that Banbridge is the primary commercial centre within Banbridge district, and its town centre is well served by shops, banks, offices and retail services. In respect of 'other town centre uses other uses', BNMAP acknowledges that they have an important role, complementing the primary shopping function of city and town centres, and contributing to tourism and the evening economy. Furthermore, BNMAP envisages that retail services, offices and leisure uses will also locate within city and town centres.

Banbridge town centre has a multi-functional role being a main focus for Commercial activity along with educational, health, administrative, community and recreational facilities. The main shopping area is along Newry Street, Bridge Street, Scarva Street and Rathfriland Street. The town has a broad range of retailers providing both comparison and convenience goods. Both a town centre boundary and primary retail core have been designated in Banbridge to ensure the continuance of a compact and attractive shopping environment, offering both choice and convenience. As with the other Plans development proposals will be processed in accordance with prevailing regional planning policy and relevant policies within the Plan. The Primary Retail Core centres around Newry Street, Bridge Street, Scarva Street, Rathfriland Street, Linenhall Street and Old Kenlis Street.

The BNMAP identifies that retail parks, retail warehousing and other forms of shopping are part of the retail landscape and are often found outside of town centres. The Plan clarifies that any new or further expansion of these facilities may be considered within the context of prevailing regional policy.

The Boulevard outlet shopping centre, Banbridge, was under construction at the time of publication of BNMAP 2010. In the Area Plan the site was zoned for mixed use development- Zoning BE 35 Cascum road (north) (24.51 hectares) with the following Key Site requirements:

Development shall not include the following uses as specified in the Planning (use Classes) order (Northern Ireland) 2004:

- Class A1: Shops (except for Factory outlet Centre or retail warehouse) Park as defined in Planning Policy Statement 5 – retailing and Town Centres.
- Class C1: dwelling houses.

The Policy for the control of development on zoned sites, such as BE 35, is contained in Policy SMT 2 of the Plan.

Policy SMT 2 DEVELOPMENT ON ZONED LAND states that planning permission on zoned sites will be granted for the specified uses as well as any range of uses included within the Key Site requirements and any specified complementary uses.

Development proposals on zoned land will be considered in the context of all prevailing regional planning policy and with any relevant Plan Policies and Proposals, including, where specified, key site requirements. Key site requirements have been used where appropriate to specify such uses and identify unacceptable land uses.

Key site requirements may include access / infrastructure requirements, public open space provision, landscaping, provision for walking and/ or cycling and other site-specific requirements. In the case of larger sites, the submission to the department of a Concept Master Plan may be a key site requirement in the interests of comprehensive and quality development.

The BNMAP aims to promote more sustainable forms of development, including the sensible and sensitive use of the rural environment. One of the strategies of the Plan is to sustain a living and working countryside, whilst supporting the growth and regeneration of towns and villages and protecting from inappropriate development those areas that are vulnerable to development pressure or that are visually or environmentally sensitive, through rural Policy area designations.

Within the Banbridge Town Centre twelve Development Opportunity Sites are identified. These Sites are identified within the Plan as having special merit for a particular land use. The BNMAP is also the only existing Statutory Plan that designated DOSs in its Local Towns: Dromore, Rathfriland and Gilford. The status of the DOSs is illustrated in in Section 4.0 Borough Profile.

Craigavon Area Plan (CAP) 2010 & Craigavon Town Centre Boundaries and Retail Designations Plan 2010

The Craigavon Town Centre Boundaries and Retail Designations Plan 2010 is additional to the Craigavon Area Plan 2010 (CAP) which was adopted in August 2004 without town centre boundaries or related retail designations.

The Craigavon Town Centre Boundaries and Retail Designations Plan acknowledges that Lurgan and Portadown town centres each have a number of banks, building societies and other financial services operating from ground floor premises. Furthermore, they also have a number of other offices operating from smaller premises, often above existing shops. The Plan also acknowledges Central Craigavon as an administrative centre, accommodating Craigavon Civic and Conference Centre, Craigavon Courthouse and Marlborough House.

The Craigavon Urban Area has three main shopping cores: Central Craigavon, Lurgan and Portadown. Lurgan Town centre is characterised by its attractive townscape, now a Conservation Area, and a predominance of local independent traders. The Plan Strategy is to facilitate a level of commercial growth in the three town centres which reflects their individual status as towns and to ensure the availability of adequate opportunities for regeneration and the mix of uses appropriate to town centres, such as offices, leisure and civic uses and promote viable and vital town centres.

Town Centre Boundaries and Primary Retail Cores have been designated for each of the three main centres. This is to ensure the continuance of a compact, lively and attractive and to offer

protection to retail uses under regional policy. Primary retail frontages have also been designated within Lurgan and Portadown and protection for the retention of retail uses in these areas is provided by specific policy.

The CAP identifies that the rural area of Craigavon Borough comprises a number of rich and diverse landscapes that have been moulded and modified by thousands of years of man's presence and a long-established agricultural heritage. Whilst the Craigavon Area Plan acknowledges that the countryside will continue to change over time, it recognises that it is necessary to operate strict planning controls within certain parts of the countryside, which are vulnerable to development pressure or are environmentally sensitive.

The CAP is the only statutory plan that has designated a district centre, Legahory District Centre, located in Brownlow. The CAP identifies that the existing Legahory Centre is centrally located and well connected to the surrounding estates and that it accommodates a number of local shops/businesses, a church, primary school, health centre, police station, leisure facilities and a car parking area.

Plan Policy C/DC 1 'Legahory District Centre' directs that within the District Centre, planning permission for retail, office, community and business uses will be granted provided that:

- the proposal would not lead to a detrimental impact on residential amenity, traffic movements and road safety;
- the arrangements for access and car parking are satisfactory;
- the proposal gives priority to access by pedestrians, cyclists, buses and, in particular, access for the disabled; and
- the design, layout and scale of the proposal is compatible with the existing buildings within the centre.

Within the CAP Development Opportunity Sites are identified for Lurgan and Portadown. These Sites are identified within the Plan as having special merit for a particular land use. The status of the Development Opportunity Sites is illustrated in Section 4.0 Borough Profile.

Dungannon and South Tyrone Area Plan 2010

The Plan's Retailing, Services and Offices policies are set out at RSO 1-5 of the Plan and the content of those policies fully accords with the regional planning guidance in place at the time the Plan was adopted.

The policies are designed to, inter alia, help manage development proposals in town centre locations, primary retail core where designated and development opportunity sites where designated.

Other Council Documents and Strategies

'Our People, Our Place, Our Future'- The Councils Corporate Plan 2023 – 2027

The Corporate Plan 2023-27 sets out the vision, values and priorities of the Council and represents its aspirations and dedication to continuous improvement. It is the roadmap for delivering Council's Community Plan 2017 – 2030 and sets out the Councils commitment to uphold the highest standards of service delivery, facilities, projects, and programmes for the benefit of our people, our place and our future.

The Vision of the Corporate Plan is to create “*a happy, healthy and connected community, a vibrant and sustainable economy and appealing places for living, working and learning*” aligning with the aspirations of the Community Plan.

The priority of the Corporate Plan is to improve economic, social and environmental well-being through place shaping in order to attract visitors, investors, and to encourage people to be active, with a focus on promoting health and wellbeing. The Council aims to improve participation in arts and culture and strengthen the Borough as a visitor destination as well as supporting the growth of our local economy, by securing investment in infrastructure and connectivity, and providing opportunities in skills development.

The Corporate Plan proposes five priorities, each with three commitments outlining what the Council are going to do alongside actions aimed at achieving the commitments.

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council Community Plan 2017- 2030 ‘Connected’

Councils across Northern Ireland have a statutory responsibility to participate and lead in Community Planning. The Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014 and the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 create a statutory link between the Community Plan and the LDP. It outlines that the LDP will provide ‘the spatial expression of the Community Plan.’

The Council’s Community Plan is an overarching strategy for the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough. ‘Connected’ was launched on 4th May 2017 and updated in 2025. It provides a strategic framework for collaborative working, helping to integrate other local and regional strategies and the delivery of positive change for communities.

The Vision of the Councils Community plan is to ‘have a happy, healthy and connected community, a vibrant and sustainable economy and appealing places for living, working and learning.’

The Community Plan aims to achieve the vision through three strategic themes of *Community*, *Economy* and *Place* and nine shared outcomes, as follows:

1. *Community*: Connected | Healthy | Welcoming
2. *Economy*: Enterprising | Inclusive | Skilled
3. *Place*: Creative | Revitalised | Sustainable

The three cross-cutting themes at the centre of the Community Plan are: *Connectivity*, *Equality* and *Sustainability*. These form the foundation of, and underpin, the Plan.

The Community Plan includes a number of Long Term and Short-Term outcomes that are considered relevant to retailing and town centres, including retailing development in the countryside:

- Our Borough is a safe, respectful and peaceful environment – provision of safe and welcoming town centres for people of all walks of life;
- Our distinctive and vibrant urban and rural areas are at the heart of community and economic life - reflected by City and town centre vacancy rates; and
- We are delivering innovative solutions to physical, economic and social urban and rural renewal through more integrated investment, regeneration and planning policy and practice.

The LDP, as the spatial reflection of the Community Plan, will have a pivotal role in the delivery of inclusive, diverse, distinctive and sustainable town centres for our Borough through the

provision of appropriate policies and proposals to secure a town centres first approach to retailing and other main town centre uses. It will also seek to support physical, economic and social renewal across both urban and rural areas, without compromising our future generation's ability to develop, grow and flourish.

Craigavon Integrated Development Framework (CIDF) (DSD, 2010)

The Craigavon Integrated Development Framework was published in 2010. Its purpose is to guide how the town centres of Central Craigavon, Portadown and Lurgan will develop and thrive over the next 20 years. It also sets out a strategy for regeneration for the three centres.

The CIDF focuses on achieving an integrated vision for the 3 centres as the complete package- where they will be three complementary and successful centres all with a unique offer, each having a distinct role and identity and each benefiting from a greatly enhanced environment and range of facilities. The CIDF aims to project this vision through scores of individual actions, projects and development schemes that will strengthen each individual centre and contribute to the overall regeneration of Craigavon.

The CIDF offers guidance on a number of issues and advocates a planned approach to retail, leisure, business, housing, infrastructure and community development.

The CIDF made the following recommendations for each of the three Centres:

Central Craigavon:

- Development of town centre uses, with a focus on larger units and facilities that would not find a natural home in the traditional town centres
- Marketing sites in public ownership for daytime leisure and hotel use
- New transport links
- Improvements to the public transport network
- Improved pedestrian links
- Promotion and marketing of the centre as a place to invest.

Development sites were identified at lands situated between Central Way and Highfields, lands to the north and south of the Civic centre and lands to the west of Lakeview Road abutting Rushmere.

Lurgan:

- Redevelopment of key sites in Castle Lane.
- Physical improvements to the public realm, particularly along Market Street/High Street and towards Brownlow House and the park.
- Developing loose zones for 'shopping' in the middle of High Street/Market Street, 'relaxing' at the NW end and 'living and working' at the SE end.
- Refurbishment of derelict buildings for housing and community uses, living over the shop.
- Promotion of tourism, such as investigating the potential development of Brownlow house.

Other development sites were identified at lands situated between William Street and ulster Street, the car park off Wesley Place/William Street, Johnston's Row car park and backlands, east end of High Street facing First Lurgan Presbyterian Church and lands to the SE end of Millennium Way.

Portadown:

- Redevelopment of key sites including a major riverside mixed-use scheme, including housing, offices, hospitality, hotel and retail and service sector expansion on existing car parks.
- Clustering of 'evening economy' uses and cultural facilities in existing building close to the church as well as by the river.
- Physical improvements to the public realm.
- Developing a riverside green walkway.
- Vastly improving links across the Northway/railway.
- Public transport improvements including redevelopment of the station (already completed)
- Promotion of the water sports centre.
- Promotion of empty offices to public sector
- Car parking routes and signage project

Other development sites were identified at lands off Castle Street, the car park to the rear of Magowan West Shopping Centre, the car park to the rear of High Street Mall, Shillington Street car park, Shillington Street council depot, lands abutting Bridge Street/Bridge Street south, car parks to the west of meadow lane, Ulster Carpets site and the RA Irwin & Co factory site.

The CIDF also contains an overarching strategy for transport and access and identifies various issues which should be addressed to create more sustainable transport patterns, including using public transport to connect the three centres for everyone.

The Council's Regeneration and Development Strategy (R&DS) 2015-2020

The R&DS acknowledges that regeneration and development of the Borough is the Council's number one priority. The Strategy recognises the importance of establishing a clear, strategic direction for the Borough in supporting and developing the local economy and is driven by the ambition of the new Council to be the foremost local authority with respect to economic regeneration, business creation and development.

The document contains a number of strategic aims that will help the council to "play an ambitious and dynamic role in reversing the effects of recent economic decline and equipping the area for the future", including:

- Supporting new and existing businesses to grow, invest and offer employment
- Developing to the full the distinctive character of the Borough by investing in its city, towns, villages, and rural areas to make them "places of choice"
- Investing in the people of the Borough and the communities they live in to make them inclusive and sustainable
- Positioning the area as a dynamic place in which to live, work, invest or visit in the eyes of Northern Ireland, national and international markets

The LDP will play an important role in assisting the Council to deliver the R&DS, by providing a planning policy framework against which future regeneration and development proposals can be considered.

Recovery & Growth Framework

The ABC Recovery and Growth Framework was launched in February 2021 and focuses on how the Council can create the right social and economic conditions to help the borough recover from the covid pandemic and drive sustainable long-term growth for the region.

It sets out a series of aims which will meet the needs of companies within the borough, such as boosting tourism and footfall in towns, and delivering support to business of all sizes, as well as longer-term interventions which will boost efficiency and competitiveness.

The Framework emphasises the regional focus on driving economic investment for Northern Ireland around key sectors such as; agrifood, health and life sciences and advanced manufacturing, where the borough already excels and which, with support to improve skills, connectivity, and productivity, can become global exemplars.

It addresses the need for a specific focus on the case for investment in sustainable roads and rail infrastructure, for urban regeneration and rural development; for education and training to upskill the talent pool; for support of technological developments including Industry and investment in manufacturing research & development; and a commitment to driving regional competitiveness through the development of a start-up and innovative business ecosystem.

These targeted actions are aimed at accelerating the borough's recovery and set it on a path of renewed inclusive growth and prosperity.

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council- Evening and Night-Time Economy Development Strategy (2018)

In order to develop the evening and night-time economy sector in the Borough the Council commissioned an overarching Strategy, supported by individual action plans for 6 of the urban centres- Armagh City, Banbridge, Craigavon, Portadown, Lurgan and Dromore.

The Strategy was developed to contribute towards the wider regeneration of the urban centres, drawing together the separate elements of product, customer service and vibrant events to position the evening economy within the context of the wider offering of the borough and the individual urban centres.

The Strategy, and associated Action Plans, are aimed at building upon the vast number of regeneration initiatives that have taken place across the Borough including major public realm works, development of public parks and shared spaces, new public art and also the flagship events within the Borough including the food and cider festival, Country Comes to Town and also the Twilight Markets.

The Strategy acknowledges that although many sectors such as retail have experienced a decline in investment across the UK, there has been an increase in investment in the evening and night-time economy sector. Furthermore, the Strategy highlights that growth in this sector is often driven by local entrepreneurs who will tap into the culture, heritage and history of a place to create unique events- thus creating an opportunity to differentiate and give a new identity and sense of place to many locations.

The following definition of the evening and night-time economy, developed by Visit England, resonated with the Council in the development of the Strategy:

'The evening and night-time economy covers a wide range of activity in town and city centres including pubs and bars, cafes, restaurants, cinemas, theatres, events, retail etc. which combine to create a centre offer 'after dark' manifesting an economy that has its own unique qualities and is distinct from the daytime.' (Source: Association of Town and City Management: The Evening and Night-time Economy- Realising the Potential for Destination Organisations)

In the development of the Action Plans 4 Objectives were identified:

Objective 1: Wellbeing- A welcoming, clean and safe town.

Objective 2: Movement- A secure pattern of arrival, circulation and departure.

Objective 3: Appeal- A vibrant choice and rich mix of entertainment and activity- achieved through a variety and choice of eating establishments, pubs, bars, a late-night offer that complements the diverse appeal of the centre, late opening shops, creative and imaginative use of public / civic buildings in the evening and at night and a vibrant arts and cultural scene.

Objective 4: Place- A stimulating destination and a vital place- achieved through appropriate locations, diversity of uses, well designed linkages, attractive public places, active streets and building frontages and the appropriate use of natural and built features to reinforce appeal.

The evidence base, from which the Action Plans were developed, incorporated a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research, face to face interviews and web-based surveys to establish views of town centre users and local residents on what they wish to experience and access in their urban centres. It also involved workshops, business visits and telephone / email consultation with town centre businesses.

In the development of the Strategy a data base of the existing resource in terms of the scale, quality and diversity of the evening and night-time economy was created. The database organised the information into the following sectors: arts and culture / bars, pubs and nightclubs / clubs and societies / accommodation / leisure / food. The data indicated that there were 475 businesses in the 6 centres (Armagh City, Banbridge, Craigavon, Lurgan, Portadown and Dromore) that fell across the 6 sectors, with 49% falling within the food sector. Armagh City had the largest evening and night-time economy sector with 160 businesses (33%), however the data indicated that there were limited arts and cultural offering in the centres (5No. across the centres) (note: it is unclear from the Strategy what year data was collected- could be 2014 / 15 or 16).

A footfall analysis was also carried out as part of the research, interestingly only 20% of the footfall related to the hours after 5pm and the evening and night-time economy, which was up to 10% lower than the rest of the UK- the Strategy suggested that this indicated that there was potential to grow this sector of the economy (analysis was based on footfall data from 2015 / 2016).

The Strategy acknowledges that there is potential across the Borough as a whole and for the 6 centres individually, identifying that each centre has a very distinctive offer and will have specific opportunities for growth and barriers to development. In order that the distinctiveness of each location is recognised and understood the Strategy developed an evening economy proposition specific to each of the centres which identified opportunities for growth, barriers to development and target markets.

Evening and Night-Time Economy Development Strategy - Summary of Propositions

Armagh City's Evening Economy Proposition centres around its City Status, with the focus on heritage and culture, and the development of regular large-scale events such as Georgian Day or the Food and Cider Festival. The Proposition also identifies the Shambles and The Mall as potential venues for hosting large scale events such as classical music events (The Mall), twilight markets and outdoor cinemas. Other actions include the promotion of walking tours, extended retailing hours and theatre / movie meal deal packages.

Banbridge's Evening Economy Proposition seeks to capitalise on the daytime trade, which would help support a vibrant hospitality offering in the evenings. The Proposition identifies Solitude Park as a potential venue for hosting events such as Heritage Fun Fairs, Living Over the Shop initiatives and utilising the wide main street as an outdoor venue. Future opportunities, that extend beyond the 12-Month Action Plan include conversion of the old police station (to a community asset with opportunities for the evening economy), riverside plaza links to the town centre and the development of leisure services in the evenings.

Central Craigavon's Evening Economy Proposition centres around the development of the retail, leisure and hospitality sectors. The Action Plan identified a number of proposals including fashion events (Rushmere), late night marketing campaigns, events / activities in the Civic Centre after 5pm, promotion and development of pedestrian and vehicular linkages in the vicinity of the town centre. Future opportunities, that extend beyond the 12 Month Action Plan include increasing hotel accommodation and seasonal leisure promotions.

Portadown's Evening Economy Proposition reinforces its role as a traditional market town, with a mix of local and national retailers, places to eat, relax and sample culture with modern office accommodation and town centre living. Opportunities for growth include food, country and cultural diversity themed events, twilight markets- maximising the close proximity of the train station to the town centre. The Action Plan included identifying a vibrant Evening and Night-time Economy Hub (in the vicinity of Mandeville Street and William Street), educational and arts events (in association with the Arts Centre) and riverbank / river / park events to include late night festivals.

Lurgan's Evening Economy Proposition centres around the experience of a traditional town centre, including monthly evening events such as twilight markets or musical festivals, the identification of an Evening and Night-time Economy Hub in the vicinity of Wesley Street car park and Town Hall movie nights and picture clubs. The Action Plan also includes events in Lurgan Park and Brownlow House.

See Appendix 1 for the full individual propositions for each centre.

The Strategy also outlined a number of measures that could be used to monitor the development of the evening and night-time economy. See Appendix 2 for the suggested monitoring measures in respect of the evening and night-time economy.

The Armagh Place Plan (March 2022)

The Armagh Place Plan, launched by The Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Community Planning Partnership, is the first community planning led Place Shaping Plan in Northern Ireland.

Place shaping improves the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of the place, ensuring aspirations of the community are being realised.

Typologies, and associated actions, of particular relevance to town centres and retailing include:

- HIGH STREET- the Armagh Place Plan identifies that Scotch St, Thomas St, Market St and Upper English Street make up the retail core of Armagh City, which provide a connection between the Cathedrals, the Mall and other key anchor points in the city. The Plan acknowledges that all high streets are in a period of change and need to adapt to meet the challenges of declining retail, rise in online shopping, changing work patterns and opportunities for a walkable city.

Actions: The Armagh Place Plan identifies the following key actions which are aimed at assisting the delivery of the adaptation that is required, enlivening vacant spaces for new, creative and innovative uses:

- Pilot a process to adapt the High Street
- Make Market Street and the High Streets people centred
- Ensure good city stewardship through streetscape guidance and collaboration on cleansing and maintenance
- Digitally enhance Armagh City Identity

It is anticipated that these actions will create unique cultural experiences for visitors, residents and support for new ventures on the high street by businesses and people with ideas.

- **GREY SPACES-** the Armagh Place Plan identifies grey spaces as leftover spaces, overlooked and underused in the city. It acknowledges that some of the grey space in the City are functional and used as transition spaces, storage or parking, whilst others are undiscovered like the underground river below the Mall, brownfield and derelict sites. The Armagh Place Plan recognises the potential of these spaces as areas for people to linger and meet.

Actions: The Armagh Place Plan identifies the following key actions that will assist in unlocking the potential of grey spaces within Armagh City:

- Delivery of placemaking projects to enliven dead spaces, such as alleyways and backlands.
- Creation of living rooftops to enhance the liveability of Armagh, through enhancing the amenity space for city centre residents.
- 'Empty to Occupied'- Occupation of empty buildings within the city centre to stimulate the economy and activate the street frontages.
- 'Engage the Space'- Use vacant or derelict spaces to start public conversations and ideas for the city.

The Armagh Place Plan also identifies eight key strategic projects and initiatives that have the potential to act as a catalyst for cultural-led regeneration for Armagh. The strategic projects of particular relevance include:

- Housing for Armagh- the focus of this project would be to enhance mixed tenure and increase accessible and affordable housing in the city centre. The Armagh Place Plan identifies that this would assist in creating the activity and vibrancy in city centre needed to support businesses and adopt a town centre first approach. Furthermore, it acknowledged that keeping streets safe and welcoming and at the same time encouraging city centre housing would increase vibrancy and address young people's desire to build relationships across the city.
- A High Street Craft Kit- involves piloting the MAG's innovative High Street Craft Kit in the city. The project would be aimed at adapting the high street, bringing new uses and vibrancy to the city centre, helping buildings and spaces to adapt, building resilience and economic opportunities where they may not have been before.

- Armagh Streets Alive- aimed at bringing the story of Armagh alive through an immersive cultural heritage trail for the city, that will assist with the creation of places for the community to come together.
- Enliven Armagh's Grey Spaces through the delivery of placemaking projects aimed at enlivening dead spaces such as alleyways and backlands. The Armagh Place Plan identifies that the public space in Armagh is not being celebrated enough and there is a need to build pride in the city and bring all the space in the city into productive use.

The Banbridge Place Plan (March 2024)

The Banbridge Place Plan is designed around 5 outcomes; Bridging Banbridge, Green Banbridge, Healthy Banbridge, Creative Banbridge, and Growing Banbridge. The plan identifies 56 actions to bring about positive change in Banbridge. These actions include physical and non-physical interventions which have been captured under the following themes:

- Arts, Heritage and Leisure- actions include pursuing heritage funding opportunities to restore and repair historic built fabric and find sustainable uses in the Areas of Townscape Character and the creation of a community theatre space for Banbridge.
- Green Innovation- actions include the implementation of smart street furniture, smart car parks and connectivity in public places and research into initiatives such as zero waste, rewilding, tree planting, carbon neutral, sustainable travel, employment support and social value procurement.
- Spaces, Places and Natural Environment- actions include the development of new bridges and footpaths, enhancement of public amenities and improved public access to civic building grounds and green space.
- Living Here- includes actions such as the provision of new mixed tenure housing, enhancement of cycling infrastructure and the maintenance and improvement of existing play spaces.
- High Street and Investing- includes actions such as the creation of a digital innovation hub, investment in the public realm and adaption / reuse of vacant properties.

Whilst the Banbridge Place Plan is a non-statutory document, it acknowledges that it has the potential to set a framework of tangible projects and proposals for future development, to enable different stakeholders to work together to their mutual benefit and for the betterment of Banbridge.

Dromore Place Plan (May 2025)

The Dromore Place Plan outlines a strategic vision for the place and sets out five outcomes which are aimed at enhancing the quality of life for the residents, preserving the unique character of the area whilst stimulating economic growth.

The Vision for Dromore is 'A place within ambition and passion interwoven with a historic fabric, ready and committed for a new future'. It envisages Dromore as a thriving and prosperous place to live, it recognises that Dromore has the appetite and energy to develop in a way that meets the needs of the place and its people.

The plan details four big ideas, and six thematic clusters comprising of thirty-seven suggested actions, serving as a road map for the community planning partners, stakeholders, businesses and local community groups, designed to help with the shaping, transformation and development of Dromore into the future.

The four big ideas, and associated actions, that will assist in the delivery of vitality and regeneration in Dromore are as follows:

1. Tackling vacancy and regeneration- The Place Plan identifies that the key to future development within Dromore hinges around unlocking the regeneration of derelict buildings and prominent vacant sites. The Big idea recognises that it is vital that such buildings and spaces are brought back into positive use, creating social, economic and sustainable development opportunities. Relevant Actions within the Dromore Place Plan include the provision of additional integrated and inclusive community meeting spaces to support collaborative development, identify opportunities to repurpose, adapt and activate vacant properties and identify opportunities to revitalise and regenerate the town centres, including shop façade improvements, environmental improvements and capacity building to regenerate businesses.
2. Quillyburn Lands- Due to their strategic location (off the A1 Dublin to Belfast economic corridor) the Place Plan identifies an opportunity for unlock and enable strategic growth, such as industry and business regeneration. Relevant Actions within the Dromore Place Plan include encouraging the development of the Quillyburn land zoned for industry, maximising the Dublin Belfast economic corridor by promoting investment and developing infrastructure projects, and the provision of a multi-purpose enterprise and innovation working hub to assist with developing a thriving economy.
3. Dromore Viaduct- The Place Plan acknowledges the important role this historic structure played in relation to industrial and economic growth and recognises the opportunity for restoration that would bring many heritage, recreation and community benefits. Relevant Actions within the Dromore Place Plan include heritage improvements such as conservation and sensitive redevelopment to improve key heritage assets (including the viaduct, tower house and the Motte and Bailey), improving opportunities for walking and cycling through the provision of new infrastructure and the improvement of routes / trails and encouraging more dwelling time in Dromore Park through the provision of picnic tables and multi-use spaces.
4. Active Riversides- The Place Plan recognises that the River Lagan, which meanders through the heart of Dromore, provides an opportunity for development that focuses on improved connectivity, park improvements and the utilisation of rear facing gardens and gap sites, which will in turn enhance biodiversity and well-being. Relevant Actions within the Dromore Place Plan include assessing Dromore's biodiversity assets, exploring opportunities for opening access to the viaduct and the potential to create improved public areas 'under the arches' and the creation of a new footbridge across the River Lagan to alleviate congestion and facilitate active travel.

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council Markets Strategy and Action Plan 2024

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council are keen to revitalise their Markets to support the overarching Vision:

'To create a healthy, happy, connected community, a vibrant and sustainable economy and appealing places to live, work and learn'.

The Council's Market Strategy and Action Plan acknowledges that effectively operated markets have the potential to deliver growth and development of a competitive retail sector, adding to the vibrancy of each destination. Key objectives of the Strategy include:

- Providing benefit to residents, traders, visitors & shoppers.
- Delivering on the Council's key strategic priorities.
- Revitalising Markets to support & benefit the local economy and actively encourage footfall.

- Promoting partnership working with traders and traders' groups to position the Borough as a great place to visit and shop.
- The development of a Markets five-year action plan.

The findings of the Strategy recognise that the markets across the Borough are currently largely under-utilised and warrant a reconsideration of the existing offer. As such, the Strategy and Action plan make a number of recommendations with the aim of improving market offering, improving market aesthetics, improving partnership working and the promotion of the Boroughs markets.

Mid-Southwest Regional Economic Strategy (2020)

The MSW Region makes up almost half of Northern Ireland's land mass and encompasses three Northern Ireland Council areas: Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon; Fermanagh and Omagh and Mid Ulster

The Strategy sets out a vision and ambition for the region, identifies the opportunities and challenges that will be faced and sets out the priority pillars around which future investment and actions will be framed. Additionally, the Strategy provides a high-level indication of potential specific projects/interventions that may sit under each of the pillars. The priority pillars of the Strategy are as follows:

- future proofing the skills base
- enabling infrastructure
- boosting innovation and digital capacity
- building a high performing tourism economy

The Strategy identifies that the shut-down of the majority of the physical retail stores during the pandemic, alongside rapidly shifting consumer spending habits, has greatly augmented the challenges faced by our high streets and highlights that there is an urgent need to 'develop strategies to recover, reopen and re-imagine our town centres and high streets', acknowledging that future proofing will require both a digital and physical emphasis.

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council - Schemes and Consultations

Lurgan Townscape Heritage Scheme (2018) (in conjunction with The National Lottery Heritage Fund and property owners)

The Lurgan Townscape Heritage Scheme commenced in October 2018. It is an ongoing project that is funded jointly by the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, The National Lottery Heritage Fund and property owners. It is forecast that by the project's end a total of £6.6 million will have been invested in the protection and enhancement of Lurgan's historic environment.

The Scheme focuses solely on properties within the Lurgan Conservation Area. The aim of the scheme is to regenerate and reinvigorate Lurgan through enhancing the historic townscape character and visual appearance of the Conservation Area through the promotion of high standards in design, restoration, repair and maintenance.

Armagh City Townscape Heritage Scheme (2020) (in conjunction with The National Lottery Heritage Fund and private property owners)

The Armagh City Townscape Heritage Scheme closed in Summer 2025. The ambitious five-year scheme sought to conserve the built heritage of two cluster sites within Armagh City's

Conservation Area, transforming the historic streetscape and revitalising Armagh City's economic core. In addition, through education activities, it aimed to inspire and educate people about the heritage of Armagh.

£6.3m in funding was secured for the scheme, which consisted of monies from the Council, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and private property owners. The scheme focused solely on properties with the Armagh Conservation Area, with a total of 26 no. properties identified within the following streets: Upper English Street, Scotch Street and Barrack Street.

The Armagh Townscape Heritage Scheme facilitated the rebuilding and restoration of the famous terraced No. 1 Seven House which dates back to the 1770s. The building now stands tall with two stunning apartments and an office space. Armagh's Golden Teapot, an iconic part of Armagh's history, was also repaired and restored by support from the Scheme.

Dromore Revitalisation Scheme (2023) (In conjunction with the Department for Communities)

The Dromore Revitalisation Schemes sought to improve the appearance and condition of the existing buildings and to make Dromore more attractive and vibrant for businesses, residents and visitors. Dromore revitalisation works included minor repairs to buildings, shopfronts, café culture grants and grants to spruce up derelict sites. The Scheme was available to properties within the town centre of Dromore or just adjoining the boundary and included vacant buildings. In total a total of 18 no. town centre properties were funded.

Environmental Improvement Scheme Consultation (2023)

In September 2023 the Council launched a public consultation into an Environmental Improvement Scheme that will invest over £2million into the local towns of Gilford, Markethill and Rathfriland. The proposed investment will deliver new pavement treatments, lighting, enhanced shared space, street furniture, signage and decorative features.

The Scheme is one strand of the Small Settlements Regeneration Programme and is funded in collaboration with the Department for Communities (DfC), the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and the Department for Infrastructure (DfI).

Empty to Occupied Scheme (2023)

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council recognises that the quality of properties made available to let in the Borough is of great importance to encourage business growth and adds to the special character of a place. As such the Council launched an innovative regeneration programme aimed at supporting commercial premises in towns and villages across the borough.

The 'Empty to Occupied' programme was open to owners of long term vacant commercial properties who wish to undertake internal and external property improvement works; to enhance the appearance of the property, improve its quality and make a long-term vacant property fit for rental.

The objectives of the programme included:

- Tackling prominent long-term vacant properties within the Borough's Settlement Development Limits
- Impacting positively on the streetscape of our cities, towns and villages
- Providing good high specification buildings

- Creating buildings that are fit for purpose and ready to occupy
- Creating potential to attract medium or long-term tenants
- Bringing floor space back into use

The capital phase of the Scheme, funded by Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and the Department for Communities, commenced in April 2023. It aimed to transform a total of 11 derelict or vacant properties across the Borough into attractive, high-spec and fit-for-purpose buildings.

The first property to benefit from the scheme, 5 Bridge Street, Banbridge, underwent renovation involving the development of a new ground floor retail unit and two self-contained apartments on the upper floors, aimed at helping bring the property back into commercial use and supporting the local economy within the town centre.

It is anticipated that the Scheme will have delivered a total investment of more than £2.2 million to the Borough by 2024.

Fit for Future Scheme (2023) (In conjunction with the Department for Communities)

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council acknowledges that the quality of the Borough's properties is crucial to driving long term sustainable growth for the region and as such reducing commercial vacancy within the Borough must be a key priority.

In October 2023, the Council, alongside the Department for Communities, launched a grant scheme designed to help bring vacant properties back into use and support revitalisation across the Borough.

The aim of the scheme is to help improve the vitality and vibrancy of all of the settlements across the Borough, by supporting commercial property owners and tenants to invest in their buildings in order to reduce long term vacancy, attract new tenants and improve the external aesthetics of the streetscape.

The scheme aims to contribute to modern high-spec properties, enhanced streetscapes, increased occupancy and job creation and is open to property owners with a property located inside the settlement development limits of our villages, towns and city.

It is anticipated that the scheme will result in a number of positive outcomes for the Borough including:

- Tackling prominent long-term vacant properties within the Borough's 'Settlement Development Limits';
- Improving the streetscape of our city, towns and village;
- Providing high specification buildings;
- Creating buildings that are fit for purpose and ready to occupy;
- Bringing redundant/disused floor space back into use;
- Creating employment;
- Facilitating business expansion; and
- Enabling retention of commercial properties.

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council announced the third call for applications to the 'Fit For Future' grant scheme in 2025. The scheme has been instrumental in reducing commercial vacancies, fostering sustainable growth, and creating job opportunities within the borough. By transforming unused spaces into modern properties, the initiative enhances streetscapes and stimulates economic activity.

The Small Settlement Grants Scheme (2024) (In conjunction with the Department for Communities and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs)

In 2024 Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council announced the commencement of the latest Small Settlement Business Support grant scheme, a project delivered by the Council as part of the Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme and funded by Department for Communities and Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. The 2024 scheme represented the fourth call for the Small Settlements Business Grants Scheme.

The scheme is aimed at revitalising and regenerating settlements within the Borough by enhancing and improving the appearance and condition of the existing buildings, therefore making these areas more attractive for business owners, shoppers and visitors. It provides funding for facade enhancements and internal structural improvements to give local buildings a much-needed facelift and transform the aesthetic and functional appeal of communities. Two types of grants are available under the scheme, with funding up to £3,000 for building facades and up to £20,000 for reconfiguration of internal space. Settlements eligible to apply in the fourth call included Aghagallon, Bleary, Dollingstown, Donaghcloney, Drumnacanvy, Gilford, Hamiltonsbawn, Keady, Laurelvale/Mullavilly, Kinallen, Magheralin, Markethill, Rathfriland, Richhill, Tandragee and Waringstown.

4.0 Borough Profile- Retailing and Town Centres

Existing Hierarchy of Centres

Within the Borough there are five main City / Town Centres; Armagh City Centre (Central Area) and also Banbridge, Portadown, Lurgan and Central Craigavon Town Centres. The centres vary in size, with Portadown the largest (56 ha), followed by Armagh (52 ha), Craigavon (47 ha), Lurgan (36 ha) and Banbridge (32ha), the smallest in area.

These main centres represent the shopping and commercial areas that play a significant socio-economic role within the Borough, as important focal points for retail, leisure and business and as transport hubs they provide access to services and facilities.

Each of the five centres have a diverse range of shops, retail services, offices, housing and other business, reflecting that the function and role of town centres extend beyond retailing and includes a variety of uses:

- Armagh City has a strategic role as a centre of employment and services, providing a range of administrative, employment, health, education, shopping, tourism and recreational services whilst also being recognised for its rich historical and ecclesiastical heritage. Although Armagh was granted City status in 1994 it is currently designated as a Town Centre (Central Area) in the Armagh Area Plan (AAP) 2004. Armagh contains a designated Conservation Area and a number of green spaces/ parks including The Mall, Astropark and Cathedral Gardens.
- Central Craigavon Town Centre is a large and modern town centre which includes a number of civic and office uses, alongside a significant retail offering consisting primarily of Rushmere Shopping Centre and Marlborough Retail Park. The urban form and modernist design of Central Craigavon was shaped by the 1965 Craigavon 'New Town' designation. It is located adjacent to Craigavon Lakes and the new South Lake Leisure Centre.
- Portadown Town Centre benefits from a modern functional public realm and is comprised of a number of independent retailers, services and wide selection of cafes and restaurants. The Centre is relatively large, composed primarily of the main high street (Market Street and High Street) and some side streets leading south. The Centre includes three shopping centres: Magowan West, High Street Mall and Meadows Shopping Centre.
- Lurgan Town Centre is characterised by its attractive townscape and contains a Conservation Area around its central core. Its Centre is concentrated primarily around the main high street (Market Street and High Street) and the area surrounding Shankhill Parish Church to the northwest of the Centre. There is a predominance of local independent retailers, and the town boasts an active weekly market. Lurgan Park, the largest urban park in Northern Ireland, is located immediately adjacent to the town centre.
- Banbridge Town Centre is concentrated around the main high street (Newry Street and Bridge Street) and has a multi-functional role being a focus for commercial activity along with educational, health, administrative, community and recreational facilities. The Boulevard Outlet Shopping Park/ Bridgewater Retail Park complex is located approximately 3 km from the town centre.

Also, within the Borough there are six Local Towns² and a District Centre designated in Legahory, Craigavon (discussed further below) that have a variety of important roles in serving their local communities and provide a role that is complementary to the functions of our hubs.

² Dromore, Gilford, Rathfriland, Keady, Markethill, Tandragee

It is evident that the Boroughs centres vary greatly in terms of their role, function, offering and size due to the different approaches and age of the various extant plans. Due to the varying ages of the current Statutory Plans, there is a clear variation in the approach to town centres and retailing across the Borough- including inconsistencies towards the Hierarchy of Centres. For example, whilst the Banbridge Newry and Mourne Area Plan 2015 designated town centres in Dromore, Gilford and Rathfriland, the Armagh Area Plan 2004 did not designate any town centres in the Local Towns of Keady, Markethill and Tandragee.

Furthermore, Legahory District Centre (Craigavon) is the only District Centre that is designated in the Borough. The Craigavon Area Plan 2010 (Policy C/DC 1 Legahory District Centre) acknowledged that the existing Legahory Centre accommodates a number of local shops/businesses, a church, primary school, health centre, police station, leisure facilities and a car parking area. Furthermore, the CAP identified that there is a significant number of vacant units within the centre and that the area is centrally located and well connected to the surrounding estates by way of pedestrian and vehicular links.

The existing Hierarchy of Centres, as set out in **Table 1** below, does not accurately reflect the role and function of our centres in terms of the retail provision and services that they provide.

Table 1: Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council - Existing Hierarchy of Centres

Existing Hierarchy of Centres	
Hubs: Main City / Towns	The following main city / towns have designated town centres: • Armagh City • Banbridge • Central Craigavon • Lurgan • Portadown
Local Towns	The following town centres have been designated in the Banbridge, Newry and Mourne Area Plan 2015: • Dromore • Gilford • Rathfriland No town centres were designated for the following Local Towns in the Armagh Area Plan 2004: • Keady • Markethill • Tandragee

	The Craigavon Area Plan did not designate any Local Towns
Village Centres	There are no village centres designated in the Borough
District Local Centres /	Legahory District Centre is the only District Centre designated in the Borough (designated through the Craigavon Area Plan 2010)

The Councils approach to 'Defining a New Hierarchy of Centres for the Borough' is considered later in this section.

Health Check Assessment of the Borough's Centres

Paragraph 6.274 of the SPPS directs that councils, in preparing LDPs, must prepare town centre health checks and regularly review these (preferably at least once every five years).

Health checks are recognised as important planning 'tools' for appraising and monitoring the changes in the overall vitality and viability of town centres and informing both plan-making and decision-taking at the local level.

Whilst Preparatory Paper No. 4 'Town Centres and Opportunity Sites' (2015), provided a summary of historic town centre health checks for Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon, Lurgan, Portadown, Keady, Markethill, Tandragee, Dromore, Rathfriland and Gilford, the Retail and Commercial Leisure Need & Capacity Study (2023) carried out an up-to-date health check assessment of the centres³.

The health checks were carried out in accordance with the SPPS (Paragraph 6.285) which sets out a number of key performance indicators used to help assess and monitor the overall health and performance of the centres:

- existing town centre uses, including resident population;
- vacancy rates;
- physical structure and environmental quality – including opportunities, designations constraints;
- footfall;
- retailer representation;
- attitudes and perceptions;
- prime rental values; and
- commercial yields.

Sections 5 to 17 of the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study, which should be read alongside this Technical Supplement, sets out the methodology used and also the findings of the health check assessments, including the results of the stakeholder consultation that took place as part of the study. Alongside other evidence gathering and considerations, the findings of the health check assessments has enabled the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study to recommend an appropriate hierarchy of centres for the Borough, taking account both of

³ Health Checks were carried out for: Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon, Lurgan, Portadown, Dromore, Gilford, Keady, Markethill, Rathfriland, Tandragee and Legahory District Centre

present circumstances, and the Council's wider plan-making aims and objectives. The Councils approach to 'Defining a New Hierarchy of Centres for the Borough' is considered later in this section.

Existing Town Centre Boundaries, Primary Retail Cores and Primary Retail Frontages

Due to the varying ages of the current Statutory Plans, there is a clear variation in the approach towards town centre boundaries, Primary Retail Cores (PRCs) and Primary Retail Frontages (PRFs).

For example, the existing statutory plans designate town centre boundaries and PRCs within Central Craigavon, Portadown, Lurgan and Banbridge, whilst the Armagh Area Plan designates a Central Area Limit for Armagh along with a Commercial Core⁴.

The PRC is a defined area where retail development is concentrated and is designated to control the scale and nature of new development and ensure the continuance of a compact, lively and attractive shopping environment. As such, PRCs are generally protected from loss to other functions/uses, with proposals for retail development in city and town centres directed towards the primary retail core in the first instance.

Whilst the SPPS directs LDPs to define the PRC (paragraph 6.277), it is silent on the merits or function of the PRC designation. The Banbridge Newry and Mourne Area Plan 2015 acknowledges that the purpose in identifying a PRC is to allow control to be exercised over development inside that area to ensure the continuance of a compact and attractive shopping environment, offering both choice and convenience. The Craigavon Town Centre Boundaries and Retail Designations Plan 2010 acknowledges that PRCs normally contain the traditional concentration of retailing and other town centre functions and highlights that the purpose in identifying a PRC is to control the location, scale and nature of new development in each core and to provide conformity with the retail uses to ensure the continuance of a compact, lively and attractive shopping environment, offering both choice and convenience, and to control the intrusion of non-retail uses in prime shopping areas. Whilst there is no specific policy for the Commercial Core, the Armagh Area Plan 2004 acknowledges that the attractiveness of the commercial centre also depends on the concentration within the shopping core of non-retail uses relative to retail at ground floor level. It identifies that too many non-retail uses such as offices, banks and building societies can detract from the area's attraction for shoppers.

PRFs are areas that include a high proportion of retail uses, however unlike PRCs, the SPPS does not direct LDPs to define them. Currently, PRFs are only designated in Banbridge, Lurgan and Portadown, with none delineated in the Armagh Area Plan 2004. The Banbridge Newry and Mourne Area Plan 2015 identifies that the PRF is designated to retain the focus of retail uses and ensure the maintenance of a compact shopping environment and therefore directs that proposals for non-retail uses at ground floor level within the primary retail frontages will be resisted. Furthermore, it directs that exceptionally, bars, cafes or restaurants may be acceptable in primary retail frontages where it can be demonstrated they form part of a mixed-use retail led development which contributes to the vitality and viability of city or town centres.

The Craigavon Town Centre Boundaries and Retail Designations Plan 2010 identifies that the PRFs in Lurgan and Portadown town centres comprise those parts of the town centres that should be retained in retail use and directs that proposals for non-retail uses at ground floor level within the primary retail frontages will be resisted in order to retain the focus of retail uses and ensure the maintenance of a compact shopping environment. Whilst the Craigavon Town Centre Boundaries and Retail Designations Plan acknowledged that bars, cafes and

⁴ It has been established through the PAC that Armagh's Central Area Limit equates to the Town Centre Boundary, and the Commercial Core equates to the Primary Retail Core

restaurants complement the primary shopping function of town centres by contributing to the range and choice of facilities available to residents and visitors it directs that such uses will normally be expected to locate outside the PRF.

The LDP provides an opportunity for the Council to evaluate and review the existing Central Area Limit / town centre boundaries, PRCs and PRFs and to introduce a consistent approach across the Borough. The Councils approach to 'Defining the spatial extent of the Boroughs Town Centres and Primary Retail Cores', informed by LDP Team Surveys and the findings of the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study, is considered later in this section.

City / Town Centre Vacancy

Although there is no single indicator that can effectively measure the health of a Town Centre, vacancy rate levels are useful indicators of the performance of a town centre and offer a framework for assessing vitality and viability.

As highlighted in the Councils Retail and Commercial Leisure Study, the retail sector endured a particularly difficult pandemic, with multiple lockdowns and online competition leading to the permanent closure of many shops and businesses. In addition to these challenges, there has also been significant increases to business costs endured by shops and businesses including energy and transportation costs. UK high streets have already been in continuous decline since the 2007 recession, with consumer habits moving away from the traditional high street experience.

City / Town Centre	% Vacant Properties April 2018	% Vacant Properties April 2019	% Vacant Properties May 2020	% Vacant Properties April 2021	% Vacant Properties April 2022	% Vacant Properties April 2023	% Vacant Properties April 2024
Armagh City Centre	22.8%	22.9%	21.7%	22.6%	21.2%	17.5%	16.4%
Banbridge Town Centre	20.8%	20.1%	18.0%	15.9%	16.0%	16.5%	16.4%
Craigavon Town Centre	5.4%	5.6%	8.7%	10.0%	8.9%	10.8%	7.9%
Lurgan Town Centre	25.3%	26.0%	23.0%	22.5%	22.1%	20.1%	21.1%
Portadown Town Centre	25.7%	25.7%	22.3%	21.7%	21.1%	20.6%	21.0%
Average Vacancy	20.0%	20.06%	18.74%	18.54%	17.86%	17.1%	16.56%

Table 2: City / Town Centre Vacancy 2018-2024⁵

⁵ Source: Department for Communities (DfC) Town Centre Database

Whilst the pandemic accelerated these pre-existing challenges, including creating an unprecedented rise in online shopping, it can be observed from **Table 2** above, that there has been an overall decline in city / town centre vacancy (in respect of the Hubs⁶) during the period 2018- 2024. The average % of vacant properties in 2024 across the Hubs, 16.56%, is also significantly lower than the 2024 NI average of 22.4%⁷.

Although the number of vacant properties in Craigavon Town Centre (which consists primarily of Rushmere Shopping Centre and Marlborough Retail Park) increased during the period 2018-2024 (from 5.4% to 7.9%), it has the lowest number of vacant properties of the Hubs and is significantly below the average 2024 vacancy of 16.56% for the Borough.

Figure 1 below, demonstrates the decline in the average vacancy across the five city / town centres during the period 2018-24, which could in part be attributed to the lifting of the pandemic restrictions which has boosted both footfall and retail sales, and the revival in leasing.

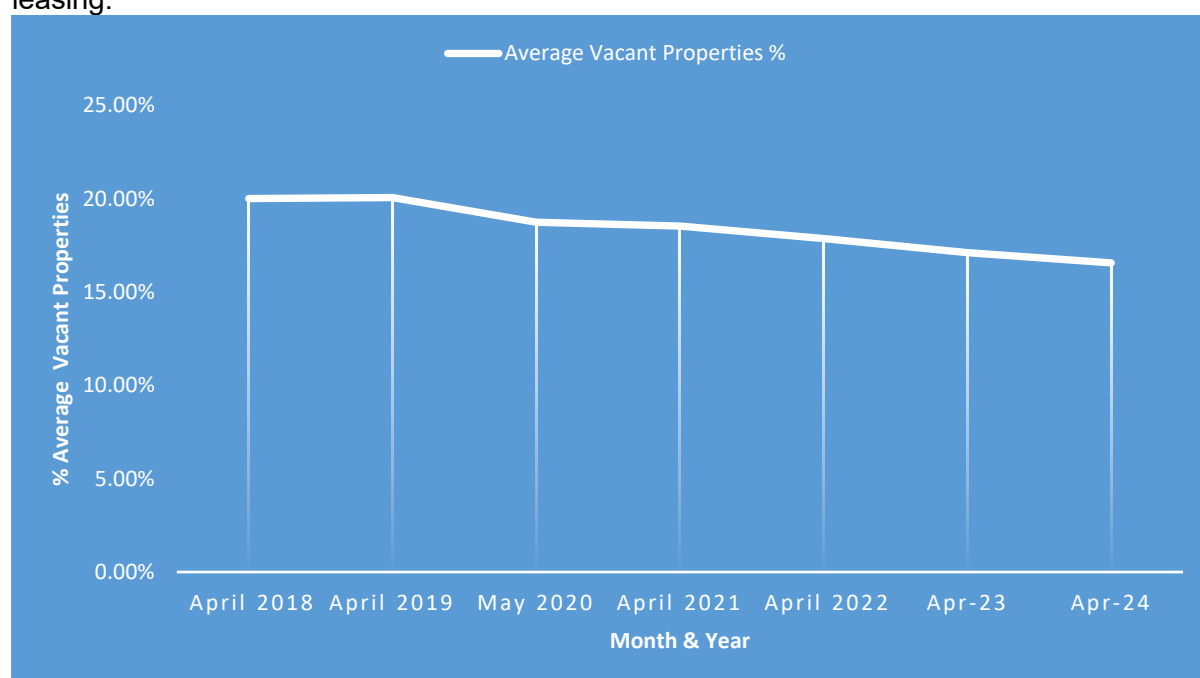


Figure 1: Average (%) Vacancy across the five City / Town Centres⁸ 2018-2024

However, it is important to be mindful that the retail sector is constantly evolving and adapting in response to consumer and lifestyle trends alongside other market influences, all of which can affect city / town centre vacancy levels. Moving forward, the decline in retail investment, rising inflation and the rapidly escalating cost of living may impact upon the performance and resilience, and ultimately the vacancy levels, of the city / town centres.

The Retail and Commercial Leisure Study also took account of vacancy levels as part of the health check assessments; however, unlike the DfC Town Centre database it considered the

⁶ Armagh City Centre & Portadown, Lurgan, Craigavon and Banbridge Town Centres

⁷ The Town Centre Database provides a set of statistics relating to 41 urban towns and cities in Northern Ireland. As the database only provides vacancy levels for one of the Boroughs Local Towns (Dromore) the table above only relates to vacancy in the Hubs.

⁸ Armagh City Centre & Portadown, Lurgan, Craigavon and Banbridge Town Centres

vacancy of all the assessed centres⁹, including the Local Towns and Legahorry District Centre (refer to sections 6 to 17 of the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study for further detail). The findings of the health check assessments indicated an average vacancy rate of 21.5% across the assessed centres, considerably higher than the UK Average of 13.8%.

The Retail and Commercial Leisure Study acknowledges that the reasons behind this significant difference are multifarious however contributing factors would typically include the general overprovision of retail and leisure uses across the UK, units not being fit for purpose (such as due to dereliction, unit size and infrastructure criteria etc), insufficient funds or levels of investment, competition from other location including those out of centre, the legacy of 'the Troubles' in NI and its effect on town centres vitality and viability, the wider offer of the centre and its USP, and the cost of both rates and rent.

Section 3 'Current National Retail and Leisure Trends' of the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study provides a more detailed overview of current UK retail and leisure trends, including an evaluation of the current state of the UK Economy, including expectations for growth in Northern Ireland, the impact of the pandemic on the retail and leisure sector and the forecasts in respect of consumer spending.

Local Development Plan Team Town Centres and Retailing Reviews and Studies

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council - Local Centre / District Centre Study

In respect of existing district and local centres the SPPS states that they should be retained and consolidated as a focus for local everyday shopping, and their role should be complementary to the role and function of the town centre. In these centres, extensions should only be permitted where the applicant has demonstrated that no adverse impact will result on town centres in the catchment.

Whilst the SPPS refers to District and Local Centres it does not provide a definition.

Whilst the SPPS refers to District Centres it does not provide a definition.

PPS 5, which is now cancelled defined District Centres as:

'Groups of shops, separate from the town centre, usually containing at least one food supermarket or superstore and non-retail service uses such as banks, building societies and restaurants.'

PPS 5, which is now cancelled, defined Local Centres as:

'Small groupings of shops, typically comprising a general grocery store, a sub post office, occasionally a pharmacy and other small shops of a local nature.'

⁹ Note: Although the Department for Communities Town Centre Database was utilised to assess vacancy levels in the hubs until 2023 the Councils Retail and Commercial leisure Study captured the vacancy rates (ground floor land-use survey findings) of the hubs alongside the Local Towns of Dromore, Gilford, Keady, Markethill, Rathfriland, Tandragee and also Legahorry District Centre at the time of the survey work in 2022 and therefore the results are not directly comparable.

The Council's Local Development Plan (LDP) Team carried out a study to consider if there were any existing centres worthy of designation as a Local Centre or a District Centre in the Plan Area.

Planning is directed by the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS: NI) in relation to district and local centres that:

- Para 6.276: 'Planning authorities should retain and consolidate existing district and local centres as a focus for local everyday shopping, and ensure their role is complementary to the role and function of the town centre. In these centres, extensions should only be permitted where the applicant has demonstrated that no adverse impact will result on town centres in the catchment'; and
- Para 6.277: 'LDPs should also define a network and hierarchy of centres - town, district and local centres, acknowledging the role and function of rural centres'.

The LDP Team considered all settlements within the Borough to establish whether there were any existing locations that could be considered as potential District / Local Centre designations in the LDP.

Legahory District Centre is the only District Centre currently designated in the extant Area Plans. Currently there are no designated Local Centres in the extant Area Plans.

All potential Local / District Centres were considered against the following assessment criteria:

Criteria for Local Centre designation:

1. Location: Located within settlement development limits and must be beyond the edge of the town centre boundary, where applicable (i.e. more than 300m from the town centre boundary).
2. Clustered form: Clustered compact grouping of units / buildings.
3. Minimum No of Uses / Units: Centre contains a minimum of 1 retail convenience use/unit and 5 other complementary uses / units meeting a local everyday need including community and cultural uses.
4. Residential catchment: Centre serves a surrounding residential catchment.
5. Linkages / Accessibility: Centre is well connected to the surrounding residential area by active travel / public transport options.

Criteria for District Centre designation:

District Centres operate at a higher level than local centres in terms of their offering and catchment. Whilst District Centres also meet a local everyday need, they provide a wider range of everyday services and facilities than local centres. District Centre uses / units include convenience retail and other complementary uses including office, business, and community and cultural uses.

District Centres should also meet requirements 1, 2, 4 & 5 of the Local Centre criteria detailed above.

The dPS approach towards District and Local Centres is further discussed later in this section.

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council - Village Centre Study

In addition to defining a network and hierarchy of centres, the SPPS (paragraph 6.277) also directs that LDPs should acknowledge the role and function of rural centres. Villages and small settlements have an important role and function in maintaining a sense of community and supporting the local needs (i.e. day-to-day needs) of the local community and surrounding

rural area, through the provision of a limited range of convenience shops and other complementary uses, such as cultural facilities or community meeting places that are of a scale, nature and design appropriate to the character of the settlement. Whilst it is recognised that such uses can be at the core of sustaining these settlements, and their rural catchments, it is our understanding that the Council no longer proposes defining centres in the Boroughs villages, as detailed in POP, or centres in small settlements to allow flexibility in considering appropriate proposals that come forward. This followed further consideration by the LDP Team of SPPS direction at paragraph 6.277 as detailed above in relation to rural centres and representations made to the Preferred Options Paper (POP).

The Council considers that the operational planning policy for retail development in villages and small settlements should support small scale retail development proposals and other complementary uses, in such locations where a local need (i.e. day-to-day needs) has been identified and can be accommodated.

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council - Review of Development Opportunity Sites

Development Opportunity Sites (DOSs) are designated with a view to promoting and regenerating our town centres, by improving our streetscapes through the closure of frontage gaps, redevelopment of vacant sites and the replacement of unattractive features. The SPPS states that LDPs should also allocate a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and form of retail and other town centre uses (SPPS Para 6.277). It is considered that the successful development of such sites can strengthen the local economy and contribute towards commercial growth of the Borough.

Under the extant Local Development Plans for the council area, there are 32 DOSs across 6 settlements.

Of those 32, 23 are designated under the Banbridge, Newry & Mourne Area Plan 2015; they are located in Banbridge (12), Dromore (7), Rathfriland (3) and Gilford (1).

The other 9 are designated under the Craigavon Town Centre Boundaries & Retail Designations Plan 2010 and are in Lurgan (4) and Portadown (5),

Currently there are no DOSs identified in Armagh or Central Craigavon, highlighting an inconsistent approach towards DOSs in the existing Statutory Plans.

DOSs are usually zoned where lands in city and town centres are under-utilised or vacant and where development of the site could promote the vitality and viability of the centre, or improve the townscape, for example, by closing frontage gaps or by replacing unattractive features. The uptake and redevelopment of such sites is a good framework against which the regeneration of our town centres can be measured.

To support our town centres, it is vital that the LDP ensures that there are adequate opportunities for regeneration by identifying suitable DOSs that would have a positive impact upon our centres and that also have a reasonable prospect of being developed.

All the existing DOSs will be reviewed at the Local Policies Plan (LPP) stage and where appropriate new DOS sites will be identified to ensure there is an adequate supply of opportunities within the centres to support the town centre first approach.

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council Retail and Commercial Leisure Need & Capacity Study (2023)

In 2022 Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council commissioned Nexus Planning to prepare, lead and co-ordinate a Retail and Commercial Leisure Study on its behalf. The purpose of the Study was to inform the preparation of the Local Development Plan (LDP) and aims to provide the Council with an up-to-date, objective assessment of retail and leisure development needs in the Borough and considers possible strategic policy responses to any prevalent or emerging issues.

The scope of work undertaken by the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study included an overview of current and future retail trends, centre health checks¹⁰, retail and leisure capacity assessment / assessment of need for additional retail and leisure floorspace, a comparative review of the performance of the centres and also recommendations / guidance to inform the emerging Local Development Plan on a number of matters, including the hierarchy of centres.

The key findings of the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study regarding direction for retail development were as follows:

Convenience Floorspace

One of the key aims of the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study was to provide recommendations on the capacity for new retail floorspace over the plan period to 2035. The quantitative assessment of capacity found there to be no capacity to support further convenience goods floorspace across the Borough when considered as a whole, by 2035.

However, it is important to note that the Study highlights that the use of long-term projections should be treated with caution and reviewed regularly, as external, national and international factors, such as the impact of lock-down during the pandemic, can influence the wider performance of the economy, which can have trickle down effects on local shopping patterns.

Whilst it identified that Lurgan Built-Up Area has a quantitative capacity for between 2,992 sqm net and 4,069 sqm, the Study recommended that caution should be exercised, as whilst the local position is that there is an identified capacity, the Borough-wide position is that there is not enough money in the system to support all existing traders. Furthermore, a larger proportion of the capacity identified arises because of the overtrading position of the town centre Tesco store, and any further food store provision would necessarily be complementary to the Tesco rather than unduly harmful to it.

The Retail and Commercial Leisure Study therefore recommends that the scale and function of any future provision in Lurgan must be considered very carefully and that no sites are brought forward as part of the Local Plan to accommodate convenience retailing.

Comparison Floorspace

The quantitative assessment of capacity found a relatively small amount of capacity for comparison goods floorspace, amounting to between 4,006 and 6,296 sqm net by 2035. However, comparison goods capacity does not equate to need, and consideration of impact is highly relevant. Furthermore, the results of the household telephone survey did not suggest any significant discontent with the Borough's comparison-goods shopping facilities and as such the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study does not consider it necessary to trigger a 'Call for Sites' consultation.

¹⁰ Health Checks were carried out for: Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon, Lurgan, Portadown, Dromore, Gilford, Keady, Markethill, Rathfriland, Tandragee and Legahory District Centre

The quantitative assessment of capacity shows that the majority of the identified capacity sits within Craigavon Built-Up Area (between 1,883 sqm and 2,959 sqm net) and as such the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study recommended that the majority of new retail floorspace is directed to Craigavon Town Centre. The second largest capacity quantum sits in Portadown Built-Up Area (between 1,131 sqm net and 1,777 sqm net) and as such the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study recommended that new retail floorspace is also directed to Portadown Town Centre.

The quantitative assessment of capacity found a small amount of capacity for comparison goods floorspace in Armagh Built-Up Area (between 443 sqm and 697 sqm net). Whilst this very modest level of capacity does not require the allocation of sites, the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study recommended that any future applications in Armagh Built-Up Area are directed towards Armagh City Centre.

Whilst the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study concluded that no comparison capacity has been identified in the Banbridge and Lurgan Built-Up Areas, the quantitative assessment found a small amount of capacity for comparison goods floorspace in other Areas in the Borough (between 540 sqm and 849sqm net), located outside of Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon, Lurgan and Portadown Built-Up Areas.

The key findings of the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study regarding direction for leisure development were as follows:

Whilst the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study identified a level of dissatisfaction with the provision of facilities for children in the Borough as a whole, it concluded that neither the qualitative, nor quantitative assessment of leisure need identified any significant gaps in the provision of larger commercial leisure facilities in the Borough and the provision of leisure facilities within the Borough is, on the whole, seemingly in line with resident expectations and viable operating capacities

The results of the 'benchmarking' exercise were used to inform the Study's conclusions with regards to the prospective future need for additional commercial leisure facilities, as detailed below:

Health and Fitness Capacity- Whilst the results of the survey work indicates low demand for new leisure centres or gymnasiums the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study recommends that the Council remains welcoming of commercial competition in general, not least because of the health and well-being benefits for residents, but that there is unlikely to be a requirement to allocate any specific site for this purpose.

Cinema Capacity- the 'benchmarking' exercise suggests that the current provision of 24 screens is more than sufficient to serve the needs of the resident population to the end of the Plan period. Furthermore, the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study notes that the quantitative findings indicate relatively little discontent with existing provision, with just 1.7% of respondents requesting additional cinema facilities

Ten-pin bowling Capacity- based on the assumed benchmark, the Borough's population supports between 12 and 14 lanes over the Plan period. On this basis, it is evident that the current facility in Craigavon (Airtastic Entertainment Centre, Craigavon- 12 lane bowling facility) is sufficient to support the needs of the Borough population. Whilst the Household Survey indicated some suggestion of a requirement for additional provision in the Armagh area (5.1% of respondents to Q50), the recent closure of the facility in Lurgan (8-lane provision at Centrepont Leisure, Lurgan)

is likely to suggest that there is insufficient commercial demand for a second facility within the Borough over the Plan period.

Restaurants, Pubs, Bars and Café Capacity- In order to identify the future spending available to support additional food and beverage floorspace (in the form of restaurants, pubs, bars, café etc.) over the Plan period to 2035, the Study undertook an assessment of the potential capacity for additional food and beverage floorspace across the Borough. This assessment utilised current market shares as identified through the Household Survey, population and spending growth rates and benchmarking against current levels of provision. The Study found a total food and beverage spending surplus across the Borough of £52.5m by 2030 and £61.5m by 2035. By adopting an average sales density of £5,000 per sqm at 2022 the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study calculated the typical restaurant, pub and café floorspace that could be supported by the identified surplus expenditure, up to 9,720 sqm at 2030 and 10,880 sqm by 2035 (N.B. The Study highlights that these figures should be only considered as a rough guide). However, the Study, in acknowledging that the figures show that there is likely to be a substantial pent-up consumer demand for additional spending in this area, this does not mean that all of that demand should be met through new floorspace. The Study is highly cognisant of the fact that the recent pandemic will have resulted in the closure of a large amount of restaurant, bar and café floorspace across the Borough and as such recommends that the potential re-occupation of vacant floorspace should be accounted for in the first instance.

Cultural uses (theatres / museums / art galleries) Capacity- the household survey suggested that over half of residents looked towards Belfast for their cultural activities (54.8% of respondents). The survey also established that there was a low level of demand for new cultural facilities in the Borough, with only 1.2% of respondents suggesting that they would like to see a concert hall and theatre come forward in the Borough respectively, and 0.5% suggesting they would like to see more museums or art galleries.

The Study, in its conclusion, highlighted that all of the assessed centres have a lower amount of leisure units (averaging at 16.7%) present compared to the UK average (25.2%) and as such there is a general opportunity to improve the overall provision. The Study also found that all assessed centres could perform better in respect of the night-time economy.

Further information in respect of the above, including methodologies, the study area and the results /analysis of the Household Survey / Cross Border Survey are detailed in the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study (2022) and its associated appendices.

Local Development Plan - Retail Strategy

Paragraph 6.275 of the SPPS directs that LDPs should include a strategy for town centres and retailing.

The LDP's Strategy for retailing has developed from a robust evidence base including the POP (including the feedback received), the baseline evidence detailed in Preparatory Paper No. 4 'Town Centres and Opportunity Sites' (May 2015), updated evidence detailed within this Technical Supplement and Consultee and Councillor Engagement. It has also taken account of the existing statutory plans for the Borough, the RDS, regional direction of the SPPS (particularly paragraphs 6.267- 6.292) and any relevant Council documents and strategies including the Community Plan. The Retail Strategy has also been informed by the recommendations and guidance detailed in the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study (Nexus Planning, 2023) and survey work / studies carried out by the LDP team, which are detailed above. In developing the Retail Strategy, the Council has also taken account of the emerging LDP's of our neighbouring councils, and it is not considered to be in conflict with them.

The LDPs strategic approach to Town Centres and Retailing is set out below:

The LDP's Retail Strategy is to promote and support a town centre first approach towards the location of retailing and other main town centre uses across the Borough, consistent with the RDS and SPPS. By adopting the town centre first approach and directing such uses to the larger centres of population, which benefit from high levels of accessibility, the LDP will assist in promoting sustainable development and enhancing the vitality and viability of the Borough's city and town centres. The Local Development Plan's (LDP) Retail Strategy will be achieved through the following aims:

- To define a network and hierarchy of centres (a Retail Hierarchy) appropriate for the Borough (set out below);
- To identify the broad type and scale of retail and other main town centre uses considered appropriate for each tier of the Retail Hierarchy;
- To promote and support the Borough's city and town centres as the preferred locations for retail and other main town centre uses;
- To adopt a sequential approach to the identification of retail and main town centre uses;
- To protect and enhance diversity in the range of town centre uses appropriate to their role and function, such as commercial leisure, cultural and community facilities, and business;
- To maintain compact, lively and attractive centres through the designation of Primary Retail Cores in the Boroughs City / Large Town Centres;
- To support and sustain the Boroughs villages and small settlements by facilitating appropriate opportunities for small scale retail development to meet the daily needs of local residents;
- To support and sustain the Borough's rural communities by facilitating appropriate retail development in the countryside;
- To promote and maintain high quality design to ensure the provision of sustainable, attractive and safe environments; and
- To maintain and improve accessibility to and within the Boroughs city and town Centres.

The LDP's Retail Strategy and aims will be facilitated through the strategic operational policies for retailing and town centres, detailed in Part 2, in addition to any other relevant planning policies, including those relating to design and placemaking.

The LDP will also seek to promote diversity in the range of town centre uses by implementing policies aimed at: supporting appropriate opportunities for town centre living (HOU 1 'Housing in Settlements') and promoting the city and town centres as the primary focus for retail, office, leisure, community and cultural and entertainment uses.

Outside of the LDP, the Council will continue to work alongside its statutory partners, and other stakeholders, to bring forward and support actions aimed at creating attractive and sustainable centres, including measures to improve accessibility and safety, reduce vacancy levels and promote high quality design.

Defining a New Hierarchy of Centres for the Borough

As highlighted previously, the SPPS directs that LDPs should define a network and hierarchy of centres - town, district and local centres, acknowledging the role and function of rural

centres (paragraph 6.277). It also requires that LDPs set out appropriate policies that make clear which uses will be permitted in the hierarchy of centres and other locations, and the factors that will be taken into account for decision taking.

'Defining a hierarchy of centres' was identified in the Preferred Options Paper (POP) as one of the Key Issues of strategic significance likely to influence the direction of future development within the Borough. The hierarchy of centres will ensure that the nature and scale of new retail development is appropriate to each particular centre. For example, the higher up in the Retail Hierarchy a centre is, the more varied you might expect its range of town centre uses to be, and the more resilient and welcoming of new developments within, or close by, its centre it might be. The hierarchy of centres is also the starting point for the consideration of retail impact and the sequential test.

The LDPs approach towards the hierarchy of centres has been informed by a number of considerations including the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study, POP responses, and LDP team studies.

In respect of the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study a number of detailed health checks of the centres was carried out, which involved an analysis of the health of the centres under a series of checks specified by SPPS, as well as understanding market shares and qualitative likes and dislikes deriving from a widespread household telephone survey. Furthermore, the study sought to corroborate the results through a series of workshops with stakeholders in each of the main centres and examined a series of quantitative assessments to understand what, if any, gaps there are in local retail and leisure provision. The culmination of this work allowed the Study to recommend an appropriate hierarchy of centres for the Borough, taking account both of present circumstances, and the Council's wider plan-making aims and objectives.

Defining the spatial extent of the Borough's Town Centres and Primary Retail Cores

The SPPS directs that LDPs must define the spatial extent of town centres and primary retail cores (PRCs) (paragraph 6.284), going on to state at paragraph 6.288 that applications for main town centre uses will be required to be considered in the following order of preference (and consider all of the proposal's catchment):

- primary retail core;
- town centres;
- edge of centre; and
- out of centre locations, only where sites are accessible by a choice of good public transport Modes.

Whilst the SPPS does not define the PRC, its position at the top of the order of preference, as detailed in paragraph 6.288 of the SPPS, acknowledges its position as the primary location for retailing in town centres.

The spatial extent of the Borough's Town Centres and PRCs was addressed under Key Issue ECN 6 'Protecting and strengthening town centres' in the Preferred Options Paper (POP) as it was considered to be one of the Key Issues of strategic significance likely to influence the direction of future development within the Borough.

The LDP approach towards the town centre boundaries and PRCs has been informed by a number of considerations including the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study, POP responses, and LDP team studies.

Centre Boundaries

In relation to the Borough's existing centre boundaries, it is worth highlighting the following points:

Legahory is the only current District Centre and will be the only proposed District Centre under the dPS, having regard to the criteria for District Centre designation set out above.

Centre boundaries are currently defined for 3 of the Council's 6 designated small towns - Dromore, Gilford and Rathfriland. However, they are not defined for the other 3 - Keady, Markethill and Tandragee.

Currently there are no Local Centres designated in any of the extant LDPs for the Borough. However, the location and boundary of new Local Centres will be defined at LPP stage.

Currently there are no village or small settlement centres designated in the Borough, nor are any proposed under the dPS to allow flexibility in managing proposals for retail development in such settlements over the plan period.

The Retail & Commercial Leisure Study carried out a review of all existing City Centre, Town Centre and District Centre boundaries as identified in the extant LDPs for the Borough. Those centres are listed in Table 1 above.

Following a review of the existing boundaries, the Study made the following recommendations:

- Armagh: The existing boundary should be amended to exclude residential and commercial areas that do not relate well to the rest of the centre.
- Banbridge: The existing boundary should be amended to exclude a vacant site which has planning permission for residential use.
- Craigavon: The existing boundary should be amended to exclude a vacant landscaped area of land.
- Lurgan: The existing boundary should be amended to exclude residential and commercial/retail areas that do not relate well to the rest of the centre and include 2 small areas with a concentration of commercial/retail properties.
- Portadown: The existing boundary should be amended to exclude a mainly residential area that does not relate well to the rest of the centre.
- Dromore: No amendment proposed.
- Gilford: No amendment proposed.
- Rathfriland: No amendment proposed.
- Legahory: The centre currently includes undeveloped land to the south - west of the centre buildings. The study recommends the boundary be amended to exclude this land and instead include Legahory Centre, Brownlow Health Centre and Moylinn House, as these buildings provide shops and everyday services which serve local everyday needs.

In addition to the above, the study recommended that boundaries for the local towns of Keady, Markethill and Tandragee should be drawn on the basis of the existing location of town centre uses.

The recommendations of the study can be viewed in Figure 5 of Section 5 of this Technical Supplement.

Based on the rationale provided by the study, the Council resolved to accept all the proposed amendments except for Banbridge. In the case of Banbridge the study recommended the extant town centre boundary be retained with one exception, which was to exclude a 0.29 ha site at the junction of Commercial Road and Linenhall Street. This is a DOS site (BE 49) as identified by the extant Banbridge, Newry & Mourne Plan, which is partially developed for residential purposes with extant planning permission for residential use on the remainder.

Given the Council will not be identifying the location and boundaries of new DOSs until the LPP stage, it has decided to retain site BE 49 within the town centre, contrary to the recommendation of the Retail & Commercial Leisure Study.

PRC Boundaries

The Retail & Commercial Leisure study carried out a review of PRC boundaries, as designated by the extant LDPs for the council area.

Currently PRCs only exist for the main city/town centres (hubs), which are: Armagh City, Banbridge, Craigavon, Lurgan and Portadown.

The study made the following recommendations:

- Armagh City: The existing boundary should be amended to exclude certain areas that are either vacant and/or redundant, or primarily in residential use, or are too distant to be considered part of the PRC.
- Lurgan: The existing boundary be amended to exclude a residential area that does not relate well to the rest of the PRC.
- Portadown: The existing boundary be amended to exclude an area hosting light industrial uses and car parks.

No amendments are proposed to the existing PRCs for Banbridge and Craigavon. Furthermore, PRCs are not recommended for any of the small towns.

Based on the rationale provided by the study, the Council resolved to accept the proposed amendments and, for that reason, the dPS will include maps illustrating the proposed boundary changes to Armagh, Lurgan and Portadown and showing unchanged boundaries for Banbridge and Craigavon.

The maps showing the proposed boundaries for Town and District Centres and PRCs can be viewed at Appendix 13 of the dPS.

It is worthy of mention that the Retail & Commercial Leisure Study did not include a review of village and small settlements. This follows further consideration by the LDP Team of SPSS direction at paragraph 6.285 in relation to villages and small settlements and representations made to the POP.

The Council considers that the operational planning policy for retail development in villages and small settlements should support retail development proposals of an appropriate scale, where a local need (i.e. day-to-day needs) has been identified and can be accommodated without causing unacceptable adverse impact to the vitality and viability of any higher order centre within its catchment).

The Boulevard Outlet Shopping and Banbridge Retail Park, Banbridge

Policy Context

The aim of the SPPS is to support and sustain vibrant town centres across Northern Ireland through the promotion of established town centres as the appropriate first choice location of retailing and other complementary functions, consistent with the RDS.

For the LDP to deliver on the regional strategic objectives, the SPPS sets out six actions that should be implemented, including defining a network and hierarchy of centres – town, district and local centres, acknowledging the role and function of rural centres. Out of centre retail parks, such as The Boulevard Outlet Shopping complex, do not fall within the definition of any of the classifications in the Hierarchy of Centres as set out in the SPPS.

The SPPS also requires LDPs to set out appropriate policies that make clear which uses will be permitted in the hierarchy of centres *and other locations*, and the factors that will be taken into account for decision taking.

The Banbridge, Newry and Mourne Area Plan (BNMAP) 2015 acknowledges that retail parks, retail warehousing and other forms of shopping are part of the retail landscape and are often found outside of town centres. The Plan clarifies that any new or further expansion of these facilities may be considered within the context of prevailing regional policy.

The Boulevard Outlet Shopping complex was under construction at the time of publication of the BNMAP. The site is zoned for mixed use development, Zoning BE 35 Cascum Road (north) (24.51 hectares) with the following Key Site Requirements:

Development shall not include the following uses as specified in the Planning (use Classes) order (Northern Ireland) 2004:

- Class A1: Shops (except for Factory Outlet Centre or retail warehouse) Park as defined in Planning Policy Statement 5 – retailing and Town Centres.
- Class C1: dwelling houses.

The Policy for the control of development on zoned sites, such as BE 35, is contained in Policy SMT 2 of the Plan.

Policy SMT 2 'Development on Zoned Land' states that planning permission on zoned sites will be granted for the specified uses as well as any range of uses included within the Key Site requirements and any specified complementary uses.

LDP Approach – The Boulevard Outlet Shopping and Banbridge Retail Park

It is important that The Boulevard Outlet Shopping complex performs at a level that is appropriate and consistent with the objectives of the SPPS, so support and sustain Banbridge Town Centre as the first-choice destination in Banbridge for retail and other town centre uses. Therefore, it is essential that a policy is brought forward in the LDP that will support appropriate and sustainable proposals at The Boulevard Outlet Shopping complex yet will ensure that it remains complementary to Banbridge Town Centre.

As detailed in Section 5.0, the Preferred Options Paper (POP) did not include a specific Key Issue relating to The Boulevard Outlet Shopping or out of centre retail parks in general. However, one POP response suggested that the Council should consider the inclusion of an additional classification within the hierarchy of centres, below the Main Town Centre and above District Centres, specifically for The Boulevard Outlet Shopping complex.

Section 19 of the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study ('Policy and Proposals') seeks to provide an overview of the available offering¹¹ at The Boulevard Outlet Shopping complex, highlighting that it functions differently to Banbridge Town Centre as its offer predominantly consists of national multiple retailers, as opposed to independent traders. It also acknowledges that the limited food and beverage offer is designed to cater for the needs of those visiting the park for shopping purposes, as opposed to being an attraction in its own right. However, the Study also identifies that there is a strong convenience offer in the general locale, due to the close proximity of The Boulevard Outlet Shopping complex to Banbridge Retail Park (which hosts The Range, Tesco Extra, Home Bargains and M&S Food).

The evidence gathered by the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study indicates that although the draw of retail expenditure from The Boulevard Outlet Shopping complex (and Banbridge Retail Park) from the Study Area is 22% less than that of Banbridge Town Centre, it is the biggest out-of-centre attraction in the Borough. However, the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study notes that a significant number of units at The Boulevard Outlet Shopping complex are currently vacant and that Banbridge Retail Park has planning permission for expansion, therefore suggesting that there is potential for the market share attracted to this location to increase significantly in the future.

As such, The Retail and Commercial Leisure Study highlights that The Boulevard Outlet Shopping complex (together with Banbridge Retail Park), could create significant competition for (and therefore negatively impact on) Banbridge Town Centre (as well as other centres in the Borough), if its growth is not carefully monitored and managed. The Study goes on to recommend that the Boulevard Outlet Shopping complex (together with Banbridge Retail Park) should be classed as out-of-centre destinations, highlighting that including these locations within the retail hierarchy would mean that further expansion may be possible without the need for adherence with the impact, needs and sequential tests. The Retail and Commercial Leisure Study concludes that this would be highly likely to be detrimental to Banbridge Town Centre, as well as potentially other centres nearby.

The Council, in line with the recommendations of the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study (paragraph 19.52), will bring forward an appropriate LDP policy that provides policy direction for the consideration of 'out of centre' proposals that will align with the 'centres first' direction of the SPPS and incorporate the impact, need and sequential tests.

LDP Approach - Villages and Small Settlements

In addition to defining a network and hierarchy of centres, the SPPS also directs that LDPs should acknowledge the role and function of rural centres (paragraph 6.277). It also instructs that policies and proposals for shops in villages and small settlements must be consistent with the aim, objectives and policy approach for town centres and retailing, meet local need (i.e. day-to-day needs), and be of a scale, nature and design appropriate to the character of the settlement (paragraph 6.278).

The Council acknowledges that the Boroughs villages and small settlements have an important role and function in maintaining a sense of community, and supporting the local

¹¹ At the time of undertaking of the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study, 2022

needs (i.e. day-to-day needs) of the local community and surrounding rural area, through the provision of a limited range of convenience shops and other complementary uses, such as cultural facilities or community meeting places that are of a scale, nature and design appropriate to the character of the settlement.

Whilst the POP proposed defining centres in the villages, the Council no longer considers this to be the appropriate approach to support sustainable development throughout the Boroughs villages. Instead LDPs operational policy for retail development in villages *and* small settlements will aim to support small scale retail development proposals and other complementary uses, in such locations where a local need (i.e. day-to-day needs) has been identified and can be accommodated.

The LDP approach towards villages and small settlements, has been informed by a number of considerations including the SPPS, the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study (The Study), POP responses, and LDP team studies.

LDP Approach - Retail Development in the Countryside

The countryside, defined as land lying outside of settlement limits, is often viewed as a desirable place in which to live and work. The Council acknowledges that appropriate use of the countryside is key to ensuring the long-term sustainability of this important asset and as such it is important that LDP facilitates appropriate rural development, which contributes to the character, economy and social fabric of the Borough but also protects its natural resources and its environmental assets.

The SPPS supports a town centre first approach for retail and other main town centre uses (paragraph 6.270) through the promotion of established town centres as the appropriate first choice location of retailing and other complementary functions, consistent with the RDS. However, it is vital that the LDP supports and sustains rural communities by bringing forward planning policies that will resist inappropriate retail facilities and facilitate appropriate retail development proposals in the countryside without negatively impacting upon the vitality, viability and sustainability of our town centres.

As detailed in the following Section, 5.0 'Preferred Options Paper', the POP did not include a specific Key Issue relating to retail development in the countryside. Instead, the Preferred Option Paper (Key Issues ECN 5-9) focused upon the promotion of town centres as the appropriate first choice locations for retailing and other complementary town centre uses, consistent with the regional direction. However, the POP highlighted that the Councils approach to town centres and retailing would be informed by a Retail Capacity Study (see Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council Retail and Commercial Leisure Study 2023) and that the LDP policies will identify what types of development would be permitted in the hierarchy of centres and other locations, and the factors that will be taken into account for decision taking- this includes the countryside.

The LDPs operational policy for retail development in the countryside is therefore aimed at supporting opportunities for sustainable retail development, that will help to support and sustain rural communities, whilst promoting the town centre first approach and protecting the countryside from undesirable development, consistent with the provisions of the SPPS.

The development of inappropriate retail facilities in the countryside will be resisted, however, as a general exception to the overall policy approach the LDP will include provision for some retail facilities that may be considered acceptable. As these are only exceptions to the overall presumption against retailing in the countryside, the LDP does not include specific provision for this form of retailing in the hierarchy of centres.

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Markets

The Council currently manage and run two markets, the Shambles Variety Market on Cathedral Road and Market Square in Armagh City and Lurgan Market on the Town Plaza.

The Shambles Variety Market sells everything from fresh fruit and vegetables to locally caught fish and one-of-a-kind giftware as well as delicious treats and eats. Lurgan Market is home to long-standing traditional market traders, offering a variety of products and services as well as hosting many exciting events. The established outdoor market has ample car parking within the vicinity of the market and nearby off-street parking as well as easy access by bus and train. There is also an indoor market in Portadown at the Millennium Court in William Street, which is open Friday and Saturday.

There is also a market operating in Banbridge, which takes place on Rathfriland Street near the Solitude Park.

As part of the centre health-checks the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study examined outdoor and farmers markets within the Borough, as the quality and offer of a market can give an indication as to whether a centre is vital and viable. The results of the household survey shows that only around 15% of residents in the Study Area chose to visit outdoor/farmers markets in general. As such, the Study concludes that there is a general opportunity to improve markets throughout the Borough and recommended that a Market Strategy is developed for the Borough. A Market Strategy for the Borough is in the initial stages of development by the Council.

Further information regarding the health of the Boroughs markets can be found in the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study and has been derived from Nexus's own research and observations of the centres, the household survey, as well as stakeholder consultation.

5.0 Preferred Options Paper

The Council published its Preferred Options Paper (POP) in March 2018. The main purpose of the POP was to promote focused debate on key issues of strategic significance likely to influence the direction of future development within the Borough, so to inform the next stage in the LDP process, the Plan Strategy.

The POP outlined the vision and strategic objectives of the Plan, along with 38 Key Issues and the possible options available to address them, including the Council's Preferred Option. The Key Issues emerged from our evidence base; from engagement with Elected Members and Section 75 Groups; and from formal and informal consultation with Statutory Consultation Bodies. To inform the POP, a preliminary review of operational planning policy was also carried out, with a commitment to complete a more detailed policy review in advance of the Plan Strategy.

The POP did not cover every issue, policy and proposal that will be included in the LDP, instead focusing upon the main planning issues that had been identified through the work undertaken in developing the evidence base for the LDP, including consultation with statutory consultees and council officials, workshops with Elected Members and through the Community Plan process.

For example, the POP did not specifically address the provision of fuel filling stations / roadside service facilities, The Boulevard Shopping Park or retail development in the countryside, instead focusing upon the promotion of town centres as the appropriate first choice locations for retailing and other complementary town centre uses.

A total of 201 responses, from members of the public and statutory consultees, were received during the 9-week public consultation period, these included a wide range of comments in relation to the POP, supporting documents and the POP consultation process.

The five Key Issues of particular relevance to retailing and town centres were as follows:

- Key Issue ECN 5: Defining a hierarchy of centres
- Key Issue ECN 6: Protecting and strengthening town centres
- Key Issue ECN 7: Supporting the evening and night-time economy
- Key Issue ECN 8: Facilitating office development (Class A2 Uses)
- Key Issue ECN 9: Identifying Development Opportunity Sites (DOSs)

These Key Issues and the preferred options to address them are discussed in further detail below.

Key Issue ECN 5

Key Issue ECN 5 in the Preferred Options Paper (POP) was 'Defining a hierarchy of centres'.

Preferred Option

The preferred approach to ECN 5 was to identify a new hierarchy of centres within settlements, based upon the current role and function of our centres and identify new centres where appropriate.

The preferred approach recommended a review of the existing hierarchy of centres so it would more accurately reflect the role and function of the centres in terms of the retail provision and services that they provide.

The preferred approach aligned with strategic regional direction which requires that the LDP defines a network and hierarchy of centres, in which centres are classified according to their role and function, including city / town centres, district and local centres, in addition to acknowledging the role and function of rural centres.

The SPSS does not define the specific tiers of the hierarchy, however in respect of town centres it clarifies that they are ‘important hubs for a range of land uses and activities....and provide a wide variety of retailing and related facilities including employment, leisure and cultural uses’ (Para 6.267). It also acknowledges that the high street also plays an important role in bringing people together and can foster a sense of community and place. Footnote 57 of Paragraph 6.629 clarifies that ‘town centres’ includes both city and town centres and Footnote 58 defines the main town centre uses as including ‘cultural and community facilities, retail, leisure, entertainment and businesses.’

The POPs proposed classification for the hierarchy of centres is set out in Figure 2, below. In addition to adjusting the classifications of existing centres the preferred approach also recommended identifying new Village / District / Local Centres, in appropriate locations, where there is an existing level of service and/or shopping provision which would benefit from being centre designations to serve our local communities and the centre catchment.

Tier	Classification	Example of Role
1	Main Town Centre	May involve such role as: Provides (or has the potential to provide) a broad range of shops, businesses, facilities and services to serve a significant hinterland. It is both the focus for the community and public transport networks.
2	District Centre	May involve such role as: Provides (or has the potential to provide) a range of shops and non-retail service uses (e.g. banks, building societies, restaurants) to serve a hinterland which may include neighbouring villages.
3	Local Centre	May involve such role as: Provides (or has the potential to provide) a small grouping of shops, typically comprising a general grocery store, a sub post office, occasionally a pharmacy and other small shops of a local nature.
4	Village Centre	May involve such role as: Provides (or has the potential to provide) a limited number of shops to serve local needs within a village hinterland.

Figure 2: Proposed classification for the hierarchy of centres (as presented in the POP, p111)

Summary of POP Commitments in Respect of ECN 5

The POP detailed the following commitments in respect of ECN 5 ‘Defining a hierarchy of centres’:

- Review of the existing hierarchy of centres and identify new centres where necessary / make adjustments to existing centres classification to accurately reflect their role and function.
- Define the purpose and vision of the of the centres, based on their role, unique characteristics and appropriate growth potential.
- Set out appropriate thresholds for each tier within the hierarchy at Plan Strategy Stage.
- Identify new Village / District / Local Centres in appropriate locations.

POP Representations in respect of the Preferred Approach to ECN 5

Of the 201 representations received 23 No. made comment in respect of Key Issue ECN 5. A significant proportion of the responses, 78%, were generally supportive of the preferred approach whilst only 17% of the responses were considered to be unsupportive. 4% of the responses were classified as being non-committal or unclear.

A number of the respondents offered alternative suggestions to the proposed hierarchy of centres, for example one respondent considered that the Craigavon Area Plan 2010 failed to designate Waringstown as a Local Town, and as such considered that it would be appropriate for Waringstown to be designated as a District Centre in the LDP (POP ref 012).

Another respondent considered that the identification of centres should not be restricted to those within settlements, as many 'centres' exist outside settlement limits that service nearby populations. The respondent suggested one example, highlighting that the Fruitfield Complex located in Richhill, currently operates and performs the majority of functions of a local centre as described in the POP and therefore should be designated as a Local Centre in the LDP. The respondent highlighted that Richhill is largest village in the council area, both in terms of its physical size and population size, and therefore it is important to ensure that it has an appropriate level of local services and retail provision to accommodate existing residents and future growth (POP ref 071).

One of the respondents proposed a hierarchy consisting of 3 tiers: Tier 1: City / Town Centre, Tier 2: District Centre and Tier 3: Local Centre. The respondent suggested that this would be sound, consistent and would accord with the classifications in the SPPS, with scope to consider additional smaller scale retail facilities (Village / Neighbourhood Centre) based on need, as per the SPPS (POP ref 148).

Another respondent acknowledged that the Key Issue does not reference out of town shopping centres, locations which do not fit neatly into any of the retailing centres hierarchy. As such the respondent suggested an additional tier (a five-tier hierarchy as opposed to a four-tier hierarchy) within the hierarchy, just below Main Town Centre and above District Centre (POP ref 185).

A number of the responses were unsupportive of the preferred approach to designate village centres in the retail hierarchy. One of the respondents considered that villages should not have designated centres identified within the village as the village itself constitutes the centre within its rural area (POP ref 134) whilst another highlighted that the SPPS only advises designating City, Town, District and Local Centres (POP ref 179). Another respondent suggested a more flexible approach, highlighting that rural communities need to be supported by vibrant villages and small settlements where there is appropriate flexibility to accommodate demands and support dispersed rural communities (POP ref 148).

One of the respondents suggested that provision should be made in the LDP for local shopping facilities and petrol forecourt facilities which often will not be in designated centres (POP ref 134). It also considered that the definitions of district and local centres appeared to have been based on PPS 5 definitions and suggested that these definitions are no longer appropriate. The respondent also considered that whether a site serves as a local centre is a question of its function rather than its form- stating that a site with a single unit may function as a local centre with a general grocery store, post office and deli under one roof. As such the respondent considered that the view that only a group of small shops constitutes and functions as a local centre is out of date and unreflective of the convenience retail sector.

One of the respondents (POP ref 113) considered that the retail hierarchy classifications should include an 'Accessibility Analysis' by walk, cycle and public transport, advising that the current classification assumes adequate links and travel time by all modes, however this is not necessarily the case and should be confirmed by Accessibility Analyses.

Consideration of Preferred Option ECN 5A

Section 19 'Policies and Proposals' (Page 117) of the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study (Nexus Planning, 2023) provides guidance to inform the emerging Local Development Plan on a number of matters, including the hierarchy of centres, having taken account of extant planning policy, the Council's Preferred Options Paper alongside the evidence gathered during the study.

The evidence, detailed in Sections 5 – 17 of the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study, included a detailed health-check of the twelve centres identified in the POP¹² which included an analysis the health of each centre under a series of checks specified by SPPS, as well as understanding market shares and qualitative likes and dislikes deriving from a widespread household telephone survey.

Furthermore, Nexus Planning sought to corroborate the results through a series of workshops with stakeholders in each of the main centres and examined a series of quantitative assessments to understand what, if any, gaps there are in local retail and leisure provision. The culmination of this work allowed an appropriate hierarchy of centres for the Borough to be recommended, taking account both of present circumstances, and the Council's wider plan-making aims and objectives.

Based on the findings, as well as prevailing planning policy guidance contained in the SPPS, the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study made a number of comments on the suitability of the retail hierarchy classifications, as proposed in the POP, including:

- A four-tier hierarchy would be in keeping with the SPPS (para 6.227), where it recommends a hierarchy of town, district, local and rural centres.
- Utilisation of the term 'main town centre' instead of 'town centre' is helpful, as it distinguishes between the colloquial term for all types of centre (i.e. a town centre), and what is meant to be a specific tier in this hierarchy (i.e. a Main Town Centre).
- Beyond listing a four-tier hierarchy at 6.277, the SPPS is silent on how each category should be defined. The Council has therefore rightly sought to define its own 'role' to each tier of the hierarchy which accurately describe the intended tier in the hierarchy and provide for a clear distinction between each tier.
- Some minor text changes would ensure there is no ambiguity around the types of goods and services which would usually characterise each centre.
- Acknowledgement of a further review of the title of each of the four tiers in the hierarchy undertaken by the Council, whereby tiers 2, 3 and 4 would be described as 'Small Town Centres', 'District Centres' and 'Local Centres', respectively. Nexus considered that there would be no issues with this review, provided that the description of the 'role' could be substantiated in each case.
- Recommendation that Tier 1 is re-titled as 'Large City/Town Centres' to regularise the term of reference between Tier 1 and Tier 2 i.e., 'large' and 'small', as opposed to 'main' and 'small'.

On the basis of the above, the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study recommended an updated classification of centres, detailed in Figure 3, below.

¹² Armagh City, Banbridge, Central Craigavon, Lurgan, Portadown, Dromore, Gilford, Rathfriland, Keady, Markethill, Tandragee, Legahory District Centre

Tier	Classification	Example of Role
1	Large City / Town Centre	Provides (or has the potential to provide) a broad range of shops, retail and non-retail services (including banks, restaurants etc), businesses, offices, residential, leisure and community and cultural facilities to serve a significant hinterland. It is both the focus for the community and public transport networks.
2	Small Town Centres	Provides (or has the potential to provide) a range of shops, retail and non-retail services (including banks, building societies, restaurants etc), businesses, offices, residential and community & cultural facilities to a hinterland which may include neighbouring villages, small settlements and the rural area.
3	District Centres	Provides for (or has the potential to provide) a range of units including retail, office, business, community and cultural facilities to meet local everyday needs. The role of District centres is to remain complementary to the role and function of the town centre within their catchment.
4	Local Centres	Provides (or has the potential to provide) a small number of shops, mainly for the sale of convenience goods, and other complementary uses including community and cultural facilities, to meet local everyday needs. The role of Local Centres is to remain complementary to the role and function of any higher order centre(s) within their catchment.

Source: Nexus Planning

Figure 3: Retail and Commercial Leisure Study- Recommended updated classification of Centres

As acknowledged in the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study, there is no set methodology for defining a retail hierarchy and as such Nexus utilised empirical evidence to assess a range of criteria that would provide a suitable basis for supporting the proposed hierarchy. Additional information on this assessment is presented in Figure 19.18.1 'Retail Hierarchy Indicators' on page 121 of the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study, which provides an assessment of each of the twelve centres in respect of a number of indicators including population, number of units, comparison and convenience goods market share, convenience goods provision) and community services provision.

Based on these indicators, the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study recommended the hierarchy of centres set out at Figure 4 below.

Nexus also analysed their empirical household survey work to see if there are any notable market shares derived by other centres beyond the twelve centres that have been the main subject of this Study, with a view that they might be classified in the retail hierarchy as either 'District Centres' or 'Local Centres'. Nexus stated that based on their market share assessment at Appendix 3, the Council might consider Richhill, Hamiltonsbawn and Middletown if they were looking to define an expanded list of such centres, as each is observed to attract some notable degree of spend from the Study Area. They advise this list should be viewed as being indicative only, as their assessment is based purely on market share analysis and is not informed by site visits.

Classification	Example of Role	Centres
Large City / Town Centre	Provides (or has the potential to provide) a broad range of shops, retail and non-retail services (including banks, building societies, restaurants etc), businesses, offices, residential, leisure and community & cultural facilities to serve a significant hinterland. It is both the focus for the community and public transport networks.	Armagh Banbridge Craigavon Lurgan Portadown
Small Town Centres	Provides (or has the potential to provide) a range of shops, retail and non-retail services (including banks, building societies, restaurants etc), businesses, offices, residential and community & cultural facilities to a hinterland which may include neighbouring villages, small settlements and the rural area.	Dromore Gilford Keady Markethill Rathfriland Tandragee
District Centres	Provides for (or has the potential to provide) a range of units including retail, office, business, community and cultural facilities to meet local everyday needs. The role of District centres is to remain complementary to the role and function of the town centre within their catchment.	Legahory
Local Centres	Provides (or has the potential to provide) a small number of shops, mainly for the sale of convenience goods, and other complementary uses including community and cultural facilities, to meet local everyday needs. The role of Local Centres is to remain complementary to the role and function of any higher order centre(s) within their catchment.	Location and boundary of Local Centres to be defined at LPP stage.

Source: Nexus Planning

Figure 4: Retail and Commercial Leisure Study- Recommended Hierarchy of Centres

The LDP Team also undertook a study to establish whether there were any existing locations in the Borough that could be considered as potential District / Local Centre designations in the LDP. Further detail on this study is provided in Section 4 'Borough Profile.'

In addition to defining a network and hierarchy of centres, the SPPS (paragraph 6.277) also directs that LDPs should acknowledge the role and function of rural centres. The Council acknowledges that the Boroughs villages and small settlements have an important role and function in maintaining a sense of community, and supporting the local needs (i.e. day-to-day needs) of the local community and surrounding rural area, through the provision of a limited range of convenience shops and other complementary uses, such as cultural facilities or community meeting places that are of a scale, nature and design appropriate to the character of the settlement.

Whilst it is recognised that such uses can be at the core of sustaining these settlements, and their rural catchments, the Council no longer proposes defining centres in the Borough's villages, as detailed in the POP, or centres in small settlements, to allow flexibility in considering appropriate proposals that come forward. This amended approach is a result of further consideration by the LDP Team of SPPS direction and representations made to the

POP, as detailed above. Instead, it is considered that the operational planning policy for retail development in villages and small settlements should support small scale retail development proposals and other complementary uses, in such locations where a local need (i.e. day-to-day needs) has been identified and can be accommodated.

Key Issue ECN 6

Key Issue ECN 6 in the Preferred Options Paper (POP) was ‘Protecting and strengthening town centres’.

Preferred Option

The preferred approach to ECN 6 was to review and identify town centre boundaries and Primary Retail Cores, where appropriate, accompanied by policy to protect and strengthen town centres.

As detailed in the Local Policy Context & Borough Profile sections of this Technical Supplement, the existing Statutory Plans are inconsistent in their approach to town centre boundaries and Primary Retail Cores. Therefore, the preferred approach would enable the Council to introduce a consistent approach across the Borough whilst also reviewing the existing Town Centre Boundaries, Primary Retail Cores and Primary Retail Frontages for our centres and amend where necessary.

The Primary Retail Core is the central shopping area within a town centre, designated to control the scale and nature of new development and ensure the continuance of a compact, lively and attractive shopping environment. As such, Primary Retail Cores are generally protected from loss to other functions/uses, with proposals for retail development in city and town centres directed towards the primary retail core in the first instance.

By assessing and reviewing the spatial extent and function of our existing Town Centre Boundaries and Primary Retail Cores, and amending boundaries where necessary, the preferred approach would help to ensure that our town centres are equipped to deliver a diverse range of land uses, without prejudicing the core shopping areas or the availability of sufficient land to meet future demand.

Summary of POP Commitments in Respect of ECN 6

The POP detailed the following commitments in respect of ECN 6 ‘Protecting and Strengthening Town Centres’:

- Review of existing town centre boundaries, PRCs and PRFs and amend where necessary, informed by the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study. The Retail and Commercial Leisure Study will not only inform the extent of the town centre and primary retail core boundaries to determine their need and capacity but will also enable the Council to deliver the correct balance of land use to reflect the unique circumstances of our centres and their vision for the future.
- Providing policy to protect and strengthen core retail areas and reinforce the town centres first approach to retailing.

POP Representations in respect of the Preferred Approach to ECN 6

Of the 201 representations received 24 No. made comment in respect of Key Issue ECN 6. 84% of the responses were generally supportive of the preferred approach and only 8% were

categorised as being unsupportive. A further 8% of the responses were considered to be non-committal or unclear.

One of the respondents considered that retailing units should not have priority in town centre property and that town centres should be open to all businesses (POP ref 004) whilst another suggested that the full potential of historic environment assets in centres should be captured alongside consideration of the potential impact on the historic environment from future growth (POP ref 080). It was also recommended that the review of town centre boundaries and primary retail cores should also consider environmental constraints such as biodiversity or flooding (SA ref 001).

Another of the respondents considered that town and city centres have been too constrained to accommodate growth and provide flexible, varied floorspace for multinationals and local independents, thus resulting in a proliferation of edge of centre and out of centre retail proposals. As such, the respondent highlighted the need to identify redevelopment sites or amalgamation sites to accommodate larger retail units in City and Town centres (POP ref 148). The respondent also considered that redefining the PRC, accompanied by policy to substantially protect and promote retail uses at ground floor and the designation of sites for mixed uses, will enable policies to come forward to promote active retail frontages, drive footfall and protect the vitality and viability from competing non-retail uses.

Although they considered that the preferred approach aligned with the SPPS, one respondent suggested that planning policy should not restrict opportunities for future growth and diversification in town centres and that they should incorporate a degree of flexibility in relation to scale and use (POP ref 100). Another respondent (POP ref 111) acknowledged that a healthy range and balance of uses within centres is important to ensure their vitality and vibrancy, welcoming that employment is one such use considered acceptable in town centres.

One of the respondents (POP ref 134) considered that it is appropriate to review town centre boundaries and primary retail, highlighting that in the context of an evolving retail sector policies for town centres and primary retail cores need to support investment and deliver development. The respondent also considered that the LDP should contain suitable flexibility for local shopping facilities beyond designated centres, for example where levels of provision are inadequate or where an existing business requires investment and /or redevelopment. Furthermore, the respondent requested that there is appropriate flexibility for modern petrol forecourt and local shopping facilities on main roads across the Borough Council, suggesting that the LDP should recognise that often such facilities will not be in designated centres.

One of the respondents suggested that town/city centre living needs to be encouraged in the LDP and that opportunities for affordable accommodation should be identified (POP ref 174). Another respondent highlighted that town centres are generally the focus of walking, cycling and public transport networks and therefore strong town centres will naturally assist in increasing use of sustainable transport modes (POP ref 113).

In respect of Primary Retail Cores, one of the respondents considered that PRC policies may be considered inflexible in certain locations and have been detrimental to the vitality and viability of town centres due to them being unresponsive and unable to adapt to changing economic and social pressures (POP ref 185).

One of the respondents (POP ref 113) acknowledged that it is important that planning supports the role of town centres and contributes to their success, however considered that in the absence of an up-to-date retail capacity study it was difficult to appraise to what extent this option will protect and strengthen town centres.

Consideration of Preferred Option ECN 6A

Although the SPPS directs LDPs to define the spatial extent of town centres and the Primary Retail Core, it is silent on the merits or function of the Primary Retail Core. It also requires applications for main town centre uses to be considered in the following order of preference: primary retail core; town centres; edge of centre; and out of centre locations. In judging between sites outside of town centre boundaries, the SPPS states that the measuring or ranking of alternatives should include an assessment of the physical distance and functional linkage of sites with the primary retail core, and other relevant factors.

The CAP 2010 and BNMAP 2015 both acknowledge that the purpose of identifying a PRC is to ensure continuance of a compact, lively and attractive shopping environment, offering both choice and convenience. The CAP highlights that this will be achieved by controlling the location, scale and nature of new development in each core and provide conformity with the retail uses and by controlling the 'intrusion of non-retail uses in prime shopping areas'.

Having taken account of extant planning policy, the Council's Preferred Options Paper and the evidence gathered, the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study provides guidance to inform the emerging Local Development on the spatial extent of the town centre boundaries and Primary Retail Cores. It also offers policy recommendations aimed at protecting and strengthening core retail areas and reinforcing the town centres first approach to retailing.

The Retail and Commercial Leisure Study identifies (refer to Section 4 'Market Shares and Capacity Assessment', Page 15) that there is very little evidence of projected capacity for future floorspace in the Borough, and that, where any capacity does arise (for comparison goods floorspace only), it is very likely to be able to be accommodated within existing vacant units or land. As such, the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study concludes that there is therefore no obvious pressure to expand either Town Centre or Primary Retail Core areas to cater for new development.

The Retail and Commercial Leisure Study proceeds to consider whether the current boundaries of the legacy Plans for the area are appropriate, acknowledging that the range of delineations include:

- a. Primary Retail Core;
- b. Town Centre;
- c. Edge-of-centre; and
- d. Out-of-centre.

In keeping with the SPPS, the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study clarifies that edge-of-centre is defined as sites which are within a 300m walking distance of the town centre boundary, whilst out-of-centre is defined as those areas beyond that 300m and as such it highlights that defining suitable town centre boundaries is important in this context.

In offering guidance on town centre boundaries, the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study highlights that a balance must be struck between the advantage of having a sufficiently large, defined area to cater for the likely demands of the range of existing and future town centre uses within a centre and the disadvantages of defining too wide an area, whereby a number of sites which are not suitable for development fall within the edge-of-centre category.

On the basis of the Study's findings (detailed in Section 3 'Current National Retail and Leisure Trends', Page 9 of the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study), alongside the impacts of online

trading and the pandemic, the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study highlights that the future of the High Street is likely to evolve quickly and that there is some danger in being closed to the idea of non-retail uses at ground floor level within the heart of town centres.

In light of this, the Study advises that it is unnecessary to unduly constrain the availability of potentially beneficial and footfall generating sites by defining a Primary Retail Core too widely in Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon, Lurgan and Portadown. In respect of all other tiers of the hierarchy the Study highlights that a more flexible approach to manage their uses in the coming years is required (please refer to Section 19 'Policy and Proposals' of the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study for further detail). The Study also concludes that there is no overriding policy requirement to have two layers of protection, and therefore advocates omitting Primary Shopping Frontages in the LDP. As detailed in Section 4 'Borough Profile' only Banbridge, Lurgan and Portadown currently have annotated primary retail frontages.

The centre / retail core boundary amendments as proposed in the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study for the 12 identified centres are detailed in **Figure 5**, below.

Centre	Centre Boundary	Primary Retail Core (PRC)
Armagh	Amend the existing boundary to exclude certain residential and commercial areas that don't relate well to the rest of the centre.	Amend the existing boundary to exclude certain areas that are either vacant and/or redundant, or primarily in residential use, or are too distant to be considered to be part of the PRC.
Banbridge	Amend the existing boundary to exclude a vacant site with planning permission for residential use.	No change is proposed.
Craigavon	Amend the existing boundary to exclude a vacant (landscaping) area.	No change is proposed.
Dromore	No change is proposed.	n/a
Gilford	No change is proposed.	n/a
Keady	No adopted boundaries are present. Draw a boundary based on the existing location of town centre uses.	n/a
Legahory	The adopted boundary contains undeveloped land to the south-west of the centre buildings. Replace this to include Legahory Centre, Brownlow Health Centre and Moylinn House, as these buildings provide shops and services which serve local everyday needs.	n/a
Lurgan	Amend the existing boundary to exclude residential and commercial/retail areas that don't relate well to the rest of the centre and include two small areas with a concentration of retail/commercial properties.	Amend the existing boundary to exclude a residential area that does not relate well to the rest of the PRC.
Markethill	No adopted boundaries are present. Draw a boundary based on the existing location of town centre uses.	n/a
Portadown	Amend the existing boundary to exclude a mainly residential area that doesn't relate well to the rest of the centre.	Amend the existing boundary to exclude an area hosting light industry uses and car parks.
Rathfriland	No change is proposed.	n/a
Tandragee	No adopted boundaries are present. Draw a boundary based on the existing location of town centre uses.	n/a

Figure 5: Retail and Commercial Leisure Study- Proposed centre / retail core boundary amendments

The preferred approach also committed to providing policy to protect and strengthen core retail areas and reinforce the town centres first approach to retailing. To achieve this, the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study recommended that operational planning policy for town centres and retailing seeks to enshrine a 'town centre first' approach by including criteria which:

- Support proposals which promote the identified centres as the preferred locations for town centre uses, including retail, leisure, office, and appropriate residential and community and cultural facilities.
- Ensure that development proposals are in keeping with the defined role of each centre; and
- Stipulate that the retail hierarchy is the starting point for the consideration of retail impact and the sequential test, where proposals for town centre uses outside of town centre locations is concerned.

Recommendations in respect of the above, including specific policy recommendations for proposals resulting in the loss of town centre uses in town centre locations, proposals for town centre uses in out-of-centre Locations and retail impact are detailed in Section 19 'Policy and Proposals', page 127 onwards, of the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study. The findings and recommendations detailed in the Study have been taken into account in the preparation of the draft Plan Strategy, including the operational policies for town centres and retailing.

Key Issue ECN 7

Key Issue ECN 7 in the Preferred Options Paper (POP) was 'Supporting the evening and night-time economy'.

Preferred Option

The preferred approach to ECN 7 was to promote town centres as first choice locations for a variety of complementary town centre uses to facilitate inter alia growth of the evening and night-time economy. The preferred approach recommended the provision of a framework that would enable the Council to develop the Borough's evening and night-time economy through the promotion of the town centres as first choice locations for a range of cultural and community facilities, retail, leisure, entertainment and office uses.

Summary of POP Commitments in Respect of ECN 7

In respect of commitments towards ECN 7 'Supporting the evening and night-time economy', the POP acknowledged that the extent and nature of the evening and night-time economy that is appropriate will vary across our town centres and that the offering should capitalise on the centres unique characteristics and customer demand.

POP Representations in respect of the Preferred Approach to ECN 7

Of the 201 representations received 21 No. made comment in respect of Key Issue ECN 7. A significant number of the responses, 86%, were generally supportive of the preferred approach and only 9% were categorised as being unsupportive. 5% of the responses received in respect of ECN 7 were considered to be non-committal or unclear.

One of the respondents welcomed the preferred approach to 'enhance evening regeneration' on the basis that it could assist in the rejuvenation of under and/or unused heritage assets, helping to provide a sense of cultural identity, authentic place and local character (POP ref 080).

Another respondent considered that the preferred approach would enable town centres to respond to the challenges faced by the retail sector (POP ref 100) however another respondent highlighted that the range and type of uses must be diverse to appeal to the widest number of users and attract significant footfall (POP ref 148).

One of the respondents highlighted that city/town centre living can help to support the growth of the night-time economy by bringing more people into the centres, who can use facilities and services (POP ref 174).

Consideration of Preferred Option ECN 7A

As detailed in the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study, the term 'night-time economy' is used to describe a wide range of activities that (typically) take place after 5pm. This could range from a trip to the theatre or cinema, to a family meal, a night out at a club or to picking up groceries after a late work shift. The night-time economy is about catering for a wide range of demographics and interests.

The Council recognises that in response to the challenges faced by the retail sector, and with a view to promoting our town centres as spaces offering a wide range of retail, commercial, leisure and social functions, it is vital that the evening economy of our town centres is promoted and enhanced. As such, the LDP has an important role in protecting and enhancing our town centres, so that they are inclusive, distinctive and vibrant; through the promotion of town centres as the appropriate first choice locations for retailing and other complementary uses.

The SPPS does not make specific reference to development of an evening and nighttime economy however the regional strategic objectives in relation to town centres and retailing include securing a 'town centres first' approach for the location of future retailing and other main town centre uses and protecting and enhancing diversity in the range of town centre uses appropriate to their role and function, such as leisure, cultural and community facilities, housing and business.

For the LDP to deliver the objectives, the SPPS sets out six actions that should be implemented. The following actions are relevant to the development of an evening and night-time economy:

- set out appropriate policies that make clear which uses will be permitted in the hierarchy of centres and other locations, and the factors that will be taken into account for decision taking;
- provide for a diverse offer and mix of uses, which reflect local circumstances; and
- allocate a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and form of retail, and other town centre uses.

Developing the evening and night-time economy through promotion of the town centres as first choice locations for a range of cultural and community facilities, retail, leisure, entertainment and business uses is consistent with the strategic objectives of the SPPS.

The Retail and Commercial Leisure Study, in assessing each centre, examined opening hours, availability and the extent to which there is an evening and night-time economy offer and found that all centres could perform better in respect of the night-time economy. For example, in respect of Armagh, the Study identified that there is evidence of a growing night-time economy; the centre benefits from an Omniplex Cinema and the Market Place Theatre & Arts Centre, alongside cafes and restaurants that are starting to open later in the evening. However, it also acknowledges that the offering is still limited, with the entertainment and cultural offering of Armagh Centre identified as being underwhelming by stakeholders. Further detail on the evening economy offering in the Borough, including centre specific recommendations, is detailed in Sections 6-17 (centre Health Checks) of the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study.

Evidently the extent and nature of the evening and night-time economy that is appropriate will vary across our city / town centres. The Council acknowledges that the offering should

capitalise on the centre's unique characteristics and customer demand and may include restaurants, bars and hotels in addition to cultural or entertainment venues. The LDP will provide a framework that will enable the Council to develop the evening and night-time economy by affording opportunities for town centre living and by promoting the city / town centres as first choice locations for a range of cultural and community facilities, retail, leisure, entertainment and business uses. This is consistent with the aim of the SPPS which is to support and sustain vibrant town centres across Northern Ireland through the promotion of established town centres as the appropriate first choice location of retailing and other complementary functions, consistent with the RDS. Furthermore, the LDP will assist the Council in realising its vision for distinctive and sustainable town centres as identified in the Community Plan, Regeneration and Development Strategy and various masterplans.

Key Issue ECN 8

Key Issue ECN 8 in the Preferred Options Paper (POP) was 'Facilitating Office Development (Class A2 Uses)'.

Preferred Option

The Preferred Approach to ECN 8 was to bring forward a sequential approach towards Office Development (UCO Use Class A2: Financial, professional and other services) in town centres. This approach would require planning applications for office use to be considered in order of preference (town centre first, followed by edge of centre and then out of centre locations) so to ensure that the diversity of the town centres would be promoted. As opposed to restricting office development to town centres only, the preferred approach offered flexibility so to ensure that there would be opportunities for office development in circumstances where there is no appropriate site in the town centre.

Summary of POP Commitments in Respect of ECN 8

There were no specific commitments detailed in the POP in respect of ECN 8 'Facilitating Office Development (Class A2 Uses)'.

POP Representations in respect of the Preferred Approach to ECN 8

Of the 201 representations received only 21 No. made comments in respect of Key Issue ECN 8. The majority of the responses received, 81%, were generally supportive of the preferred approach, with only 14% categorised as being unsupportive. 5% of the responses were considered to be non-committal or unclear.

One of the respondents highlighted the potential of re-using vacant or underused historic structures (designated and non-designated) and sites (POP ref 080) for A2 office development in town centres. Another respondent welcomed the preferred option and considered that it complied with regional strategic policy set out in paragraph 6.271 of the SPPS, however considered that it could be improved by including the issue of transport accessibility as part of the sequential approach (POP ref 113).

One of the respondents, who was unsupportive of the preferred approach considered that the promotion of a sequential approach for A2 office development, which largely focussed on town centres at the expense of other district, local or village centres would be detrimental to the viability of these other centres as a whole. Instead, the respondent recommended that the sequential approach should only apply to instances whereby class A2 uses are proposed outside of any of the listed centres, whereby consideration should be given to if there is availability in the next nearest centre (POP ref 185). Another respondent disagreed with the

town centre first approach and was of the opinion that businesses should not be restricted in where they can operate (POP ref 004).

Consideration of Preferred Option ECN 8A

Town centres are important hubs for our local economy and assist in supporting growth and investment within our Borough by meeting our retail, employment and commercial leisure needs. The Council acknowledges that to develop economically competitive and vibrant town centres, address vacancy rates and ensure their position as the appropriate first choice locations for retailing and other complementary functions it is essential that diversification of appropriate town centre uses is promoted.

It is therefore necessary to bring forward a strategy for town centres and retailing which will contain appropriate policies and proposals to promote town centre first for retail and other main town centre uses and recognise the importance of a mix of uses within town centres. The Council recognises that facilitating employment opportunities (such as Class A2 and B1(a) office development) in the centres, which are located at the heart of transportation networks and therefore accessible to everyone, it will not only assist in generating employment opportunities but will also enhance diversity in the range of town centre uses.

The aim of the SPPS is to support and sustain vibrant town centres across Northern Ireland through the promotion of established town centres as the appropriate first choice location of retailing and other complementary functions, consistent with the RDS. The SPPS (footnote of page 98, SPPS) defines main town centre uses as including cultural and community facilities, retail, leisure, entertainment and business uses, however does not make specific reference to office use. The Planning (Use Classes) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 defines A2 Uses as offices which provide financial, professional and other services that are appropriate in shopping areas where the services are principally to visiting members of the public. As such, it is considered that A2 office uses clearly fall within the SPPS definition of 'other main town centre uses.'

The Retail and Commercial Leisure Study (refer to Section 19 'Policies and Proposals' of the study) recommends that the LDP policy for town centres and retailing seeks to enshrine a 'town centre first' approach by including criteria that not only support proposals that promote the identified centres as the preferred locations for town centre uses (including retail, leisure, office, and appropriate residential and community and cultural facilities) but also stipulate that the retail hierarchy is the starting point for the consideration of retail impact and the sequential test, where proposals for town centre uses outside of town centre locations is concerned.

It remains the Council's view that the preferred approach is in line with both paragraph 6.278 of the SPPS, which seeks to secure a town centres first approach for the location of future retailing and other main town centre uses (including A2 office development), and the findings / recommendations of the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study and as such will be carried forward in the LDP.

Key Issue ECN 9

Key Issue ECN 9 in the Preferred Options Paper (POP) was 'Identifying Development Opportunity Sites (DOSs)'.

Preferred Option

The Preferred Approach to ECN 9 proposed a review of the current Development Opportunity Site designations (Lurgan, Portadown, Banbridge, Dromore, Gilford and Rathfriland) and the

identification of additional sites, which may be underutilised or vacant and would benefit from redevelopment. The preferred approach sought to adopt a consistent approach towards Development Opportunity Sites across the Borough, by also considering possible Development Opportunity Sites within Central Craigavon, Armagh City and the Armagh Local Towns.

Summary of POP Commitments in Respect of ECN 9

The POP detailed the following commitments in respect of ECN 9 'Identifying Development Opportunity Sites (DOSs)':

- Evaluate and review the current DOS designations.
- Identify additional DOS sites, where appropriate.

POP Representations in respect of the Preferred Approach to ECN 9

Of the 201 representations received, 25 No. made comment in respect of Key Issue ECN 9. A significant number of the responses, 88%, were generally supportive of the preferred approach with only 4% of the responses unsupportive. 8% of the responses were categorised as being non-committal or unclear.

One of the respondents highlighted the opportunity for Development Opportunity Sites to help address the number of vacant buildings through adaptive reuse (POP ref 080) whilst another considered that Key Site Requirements should include employment and offices amongst the acceptable uses (POP ref 111). Another respondent requested that the LDP acknowledges housing as one of the potential suitable land uses on Development Opportunity Sites (POP ref 174), emphasising their strong support for the redevelopment of brownfield sites.

One of the respondents, who was supportive of the review of existing DOSs and the identification of new sites, cautioned that only those which have a realistic possibility of delivery during the Plan period should be identified (POP ref 134).

A small number (3No.) of non-committal responses were received in respect of this Key Issue. Whilst these responses did not offer a specific opinion on the preferred approach, one suggested that consideration of biodiversity constraints and an ecological assessment should be included in the identification of Development Opportunity Sites (POP ref 082) whilst another suggested that urban biodiversity, as well as flooding, should be taken into account (SA ref 001).

Consideration of Preferred Option ECN 9A

The SPPS directs that LDPs should allocate a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and form of retail and other town centre uses (SPPS Para 6.284). It is considered that the successful development of such sites can strengthen the local economy and contribute towards commercial growth of the Borough.

The Local Policies Plan (LPP) will incorporate site specific land use zonings for Development Opportunity Sites to facilitate a mix of uses including retailing and other main town centre uses. Such sites will ensure there is an adequate supply of opportunities within the centres in support of the town centre first approach.

Other Relevant Retailing and Town Centres POP Feedback

A number of the POP responses included additional recommendations / suggestions in respect of retailing and town centres:

- The LDP should provide appropriate flexibility to accommodate modern petrol forecourts and local shopping facilities on main roads and suggested that it should be recognised that inevitably such facilities will more often than not be beyond the boundaries of designated centres (POP ref 134).
- One respondent highlighted that the Boulevard offers an important leisure and retailing function, and whilst it does not fit neatly into any of the retailing centres hierarchy, given its catchment and importance to the Borough, it does warrant some form of designation and a policy to support its continued revival. The respondent suggested that a mixed-use zoning with Key Site Requirements relating to appropriate uses could be applied to the site. However, due to its location and the nature of its offer, it serves a much wider catchment. In that sense, the respondent acknowledged that The Boulevard is unique and could possibly merit the inclusion of an additional classification within the hierarchy, sitting just below the Main Town Centre and above District Centres (POP ref 185).
- Modern, locally accessible, convenience shopping should be encouraged in the LDP. Such shops have a critically important place and role in community life across the Council area. Considers that local convenience shopping supports local suppliers, contributes to local service provision, reduces vehicle trips and strengthens local communities, brings life to streets, regenerates small settlements, villages and arterial routes and neighbourhoods in towns and cities, provides local employment (typically 20-30 full and part time staff) and delivers increased business rates. The provision of locally accessible, convenience shopping is consistent with the 5 core planning principles established in the SPPS. The LDP should provide a planning framework which is supportive of modern, locally accessible convenience shopping to secure the wide range of social, physical and economic benefits which arise from the local convenience retail sectors (POP ref 134).
- Supportive of objectives and policies that encourage existing and new businesses to invest and grow in the Borough, particularly those that support, regenerate and promote vibrant towns and City Centres, Villages and Small Settlements (POP ref 148).

For further detail on the POP responses, and the Council's consideration, refer to the POP Public Consultation Report, available on the Council's website.

6.0 Stakeholder Engagement

Internal Stakeholders

Planning Officers in Development Management and Enforcement Sections

Consultation was carried out with planning officers in the Planning Department's Development Management and Enforcement Sections as part of the policy review process; to establish any difficulties they experienced in the application of existing planning policies and to provide an opportunity to critique the draft policies. Officers' views were taken into consideration in finalising draft policies prior to being presented at Council Members workshops.

Other Council Departments

Representatives from relevant Council departments have been engaged to ensure that due account has been taken of Council's Community Plan, as well as other Council strategies and initiatives.

This engagement was undertaken by way of individual meetings with council departments, in particular the Community Plan Team to ensure account was taken of the Council's Community Plan.

A meeting also took place with a 'Project Management Team.' The Project Management Team was comprised of Officers from a range of council departments, including Community Plan, Tourism, Economic Development, Environmental Health and Environmental Services.

Elected Members

Section 8 (7a) of Part 2 (Local Development Plans) of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 requires the Plan Strategy to be adopted by resolution of the Council. As such, Elected Members have been engaged throughout the LDP process, including the preparation of the draft dPS policies.

Engagement with the Elected Members has been facilitated through a series of workshops held between 2019 and 2026. That engagement included a presentation on the Retail and Commercial Leisure Study, prepared on behalf of the Council by Nexus Planning and the draft Retailing and Town Centre Policies set out below:

- *Policy RTC 1 - Retailing and Other Main Town Centre Uses*
- *Policy RTC 2 - District Centre*
- *Policy RTC 3 - Local Centres*
- *Policy RTC 4 - Villages and Small Settlements*
- *Policy RTC 5 - Retailing in the Countryside*
- *Policy RTC 6 - Roadside Service Facilities*

Elected Members were in agreement with the draft policy wording and Retailing and Town Centres designations.

External Stakeholders

Government departments and agencies

Section 8 (5) of Part 2 (Local Development Plans) of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 requires the Plan Strategy to take account of the RDS, any policy and guidance issued by the

Department and other relevant government strategies and plans. As such the Council has engaged key consultees representing relevant central government departments and agencies in the preparation of the draft Plan Strategy policies, including DfI.

Cross Boundary Context and Consideration of Neighbouring Council Approaches

In developing draft-planning policies for retailing and town centres consideration has also been given to the approaches of adjoining Councils.

The Borough adjoins the boundary of five neighbouring Council areas, 4 of which are in Northern Ireland and one of which is in the Republic of Ireland:

- Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council (by Lough Neagh);
- Newry Mourne and Down District Council;
- Mid Ulster District Council;
- Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council; and
- Monaghan County Council, in the Republic of Ireland.

The Preferred Options Papers (POPs), supporting evidence base and draft Plan Strategies (where published) of adjoining Councils have been taken account of, in addition to regional guidance, to identify any cross-boundary issues / conflicts.

Table 3, below, outlines the position of adjoining councils regarding retailing and town centres.

Adjoining Council	Position
Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council	Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council (ANBC) adopted its Plan Strategy in July 2025. ANBC has identified a retail hierarchy that recognises the traditional town centres of Antrim, Ballyclare, Crumlin and Randalstown, and one in Metropolitan Newtownabbey. These are complemented by two District Centres and a number of local centres. The Plan Strategy recognises the importance of accessible and vibrant town centres and advocates that they are promoted as the appropriate first choice location for retailing and other complementary uses. As such ANBCs town centres shall be the preferred location for future retail growth and investment and the principal focus for the development of other town centre uses and complementary services. Furthermore, to afford appropriate control over competing development ANBCs Plan Strategy requires that a sequential test, as set out in Policy DM 7 'Development Outside Centres', will be applied to retail development and town centre uses proposed outside these centres. The Plan Strategy sets out a presumption against out of centre food store/ supermarkets in Ballyclare, Crumlin and Randalstown to avoid adverse impact on the health of the

	centres. Small shops are permitted in out of centre location where they are no more than 200 m2 gross floorspace and meet a local need. Retail development in villages and Hamlets is supported where it is a small-scale convenience store which meets a local need. A specific policy for retail development in the countryside is not included. However, Policy DM 7 'Development Outside Centres' includes a small policy section guiding retail development in the Countryside which states that the development of appropriate small-scale retail and ancillary commercial leisure uses in the countryside such as farm shops, craft shops, and shops/cafes serving tourist or recreational facilities where they are an integral part of and ancillary to an existing business or facility will be supported. It also seeks to control future retail development at The Junction Retail Outlet and Leisure Park in Antrim in accordance with Policy DM 8, to help maintain the vitality and viability of the nearby Antrim town centre. DM 8 brings forward a presumption against additional comparison goods floorspace, subdivision of large commercial units and removal of planning restriction for bulky goods retail. ANBC will identify the detailed boundaries of their retail centres in the Local Policies Plan and will undertake regular health checks in the future to monitor their vitality and viability.
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council	Newry Mourne and Down District Council (NMDDC) published its Local Development Plan 2035 draft Plan Strategy in June 2025. The consultation period was carried out over a twelve-week period, from Friday 27 June 2025 to Monday 22 September 2025. NMDs LDP Retail Strategy seeks to promote a town centre first approach for retailing and other main town centre uses. It brings forward a hierarchy of centres which provides a framework to allow a sequential test to be applied to planning applications relating to main town centre uses, ensuring that they are directed to the most appropriate locations. The accompanying narrative includes links to NMDs Community and Corporate Plans, the RDS and SPPS, and a detailed local context (which includes findings of their Retail Study and a brief narrative to accompany their Retail Hierarchy- which is set out within their strategic policy, see below). The Retail Strategy also sets out the two LDP objectives relating to this policy topic e.g. 'To achieve strong and vibrant city and town centres supported by a hierarchy of other centres that sustainably meet the shopping, working and leisure needs of the district' and 'To protect and sustain the role of local and small towns so they act as local centres for

	shops, employment and leisure of an appropriate scale and support our villages to meet the needs of the surrounding rural area'. NMDs retail strategy applies a city/town centre first approach for the location of retailing and other main town centres- consistent with regional direction. Policy RET 1 applies the sequential approach- where it is established that an alternative sequentially preferable site or sites exist within the catchment the applicant must demonstrate why such sites are not practical alternatives in terms of their availability, suitability and viability. Policy RET 4 allows for a for a small-scale convenience shop which does not exceed 200 square metres gross external area outside of city / town centres, but within the settlement limits. NMD's dPS also allows for a convenience retail facility at a roadside service facility (within settlements) of no more than 200 square metres. However, for roadside service facilities in the countryside (RET 7), no threshold is applied for retail floorspace. NMD have not applied a floorspace restriction for their local centres, however for convenience shopping over 500msq, a RIA will be required. They also do not permit comparison shopping in local centres.
Mid Ulster District Council	Mid Ulster District Council submitted its draft Plan Strategy to the Department for Infrastructure in May 2021. MUDCs Retail Strategy supports the introduction of a town centre first approach to retailing in Cookstown, Dungannon and Magherafelt, which aims to focus retail and other town centre uses, which generate a need to travel, within the boundaries of the town centre. To further enhance the vitality and viability of town centres MUDC dPS also identifies opportunity sites which can accommodate a range of uses (to be identified in the LPP). The town centre first approach is also aimed at offering protection for existing retail within town centres from out of centre competition. MUDC also identifies a Primary Retail Core to ensure that nonretail uses don't reduce the attraction of shop frontages to the shopper and also to ensure that retail uses remain clustered together for convenience and ease of access. To implement the retail strategy, MUDC has identified a retail hierarchy, within which the purpose of town centres is to provide for a wide variety of residents within the hinterland of the town and to act as the focus for retail investment and other town centre uses. MUDC has also identified that it is important within town centres that existing residential uses are protected where a change to another use would be inappropriate. To complement Dungannon town centre MUDC has also identified a District Centre at Oaks Road, Dungannon so to provide for the daily shopping needs of residents and to retain

	and consolidate existing provision. Inside villages and small settlements, the dPS directs that retail development should be of an appropriate scale, nature and design to the character of the settlement and within the countryside inappropriate development should be resisted (Development will normally be restricted to a net floor area of 100 sq. metres). The Retail Strategy is supported by seven operational policies including Policy RE 7 'Financial and Professional Services, Office/ Business Use Development' which directs financial and professional services towards existing centres or mixed-use areas, office and business uses towards town centres or economic development zonings.
Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council	Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council adopted its Local Development Plan 2032, Plan Strategy in September 2023. In respect of retailing and town centres, it aims, inter alia, to: . Promote the regeneration of city and town centres as quality places to live, work, shop and visit . Promote Lisburn City Centre as a vibrant destination offering a mix of residential, shopping, employment, high grade office development, leisure and community uses; and better transportation linking people and places . Support our towns and villages, encouraging appropriate retailing, offices, mixed use and housing opportunities . Support the role of the District and Local Centres in accordance with the Retail Hierarchy . Promote regeneration and reuse of existing buildings and previously developed land for mixed use development, whilst maintaining environmental quality and protecting residential amenity . Promote a vibrant and thriving night-time economy in our city and town centres to support economic growth, furthering opportunity for enhancing their vitality and viability The retail hierarchy recognises a number of town centres (see below) which are complemented by a District and Local centre. The Plan will support development proposals that: a) promote town centres, retailing and other uses within the City and town centres to enhance their vitality and viability in accordance with their role and function in the retail hierarchy b) support the role of the District and Local Centre. A range of town centre uses including office development is promoted within Lisburn City Centre and the towns of Carryduff, Royal Hillsborough & Culcavy and Moira. Retailing in the countryside will be by exception based on an identified need only The approach is consistent with the SPPS.

Monaghan County Council	Monaghan County Council adopted its County Development Plan 2025 - 2031 on 26 May 2025. The Retail Hierarchy and objectives of the Plan are informed by a Retail Strategy, the overriding aim of which is to create the appropriate conditions necessary to foster a healthy and vibrant retailing environment. The LDP includes 13 retail objectives and one operational policy.
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Table 3 - Adjoining Councils Position – Retailing and Town Centres

The Council has responded to neighbouring councils' Preferred Options Papers and Draft Plan Strategies, as they have been published.

Although there are some differences in the policy wording and various approaches neighbouring councils have adopted towards retailing and town centres, it is not considered that there are any significant conflicts with the draft PS for Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council.

7.0 Draft Plan Strategy Policy Approach

As analysed above, the Council's draft retailing and town centre policies and relevant draft policy provisions within the suite of General Policies and Design and Placemaking Policies have evolved from a review of extant regional planning policies, other key policy and guidance documents, the POP, responses to the POP and a series of engagements with key stakeholders, including the following:

- DfI and other key statutory consultees.
- Elected Members of the Council.
- Officers from the Development Management section of the planning department; and
- Officers from other relevant departments of the Council.

In preparing the draft policies, the Council has taken account of a range of relevant matters, including the following:

- The RDS (RG7) and SPPS (in particular paragraphs 6.274- 6.299).
- PPS6: Built Heritage with respect to policies to protect historic buildings, archaeological features and remains and areas of importance to the historic environment such as Conservation Areas, all of which may fall within town centres.
- The Council's Community Plan (especially in terms of the Plan's commitment to deliver a revitalised place where vibrant urban and rural areas are at the heart of community and economic life - see page 24-25), ongoing council initiatives and the neighbouring council context.
- The adopted /draft Plan Strategies of neighbouring councils – the draft policies are not considered to conflict with any of those.

The draft policies have been subject to a Sustainability Appraisal (SA), the findings of which are set out in the accompanying SA Environmental Report.

In conclusion, the draft policies are founded on a robust evidence base which includes baseline information contained in this Technical Supplement, the POP, responses to the POP and subsequent engagement with consultees.

8.0 Soundness

The LDP has been prepared in accordance with the tests of soundness set out in the DfI's Development Plan Practice Note 6: Soundness (Version 2, May 2017). The draft Plan Strategy, insofar as it relates to retailing and town centre policies, is considered to be sound, as it satisfies the relevant tests of soundness, as summarised in Table 4 below:

Table 4: Consideration of Soundness

Procedural Tests	
P2	Policies SGS 1, SGS 6 and RTC 1 – 6 have evolved from the POP and have taken account of responses to the POP and the POP Consultation Report.
P3	Policies SGS 1, SGS 6 and RTC 1 – 6 have been subject to Sustainability Appraisal, including a Strategic Environmental Assessment. Further details are included in the Sustainability Appraisal Report.
Consistency Tests	
C1	Policies SGS 1, SGS 6 and RTC 1 – 6 have taken account of the RDS and in particular RG 7.
C2	Policies SGS 1, SGS 6 and RTC 1 – 6 have taken account of the Council's Community Plan, particularly in terms of the Plan's commitment to deliver a revitalised place where vibrant urban and rural areas are at the heart of community and economic life - see page 24-25).
C3	Policies SGS 1, SGS 6 and RTC 1 – 6 have taken account of existing planning policies as contained within the SPPS, in particular paragraphs 6.274 – 6.299, along with PPS 6: Built Heritage and corresponding paragraphs of the SPPS (6.1 to 6.30).
C4	Policies SGS 1, SGS 6 and RTC 1 – 6 have taken account of the existing development plans within Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough, ongoing Council initiatives and the neighbouring council context, including the Republic of Ireland.
Coherence and Effectiveness Tests	
CE1	Policies SGS 1, SGS 6 and RTC 1 – 6 have taken account of the emerging LDPs of our neighbouring Councils in Northern Ireland and neighbouring council in the Republic of Ireland (Monaghan County Council) and are not considered to conflict with those.
CE2	Policies SGS 1, SGS 6 and RTC 1 – 6 are founded on a robust evidence base which includes the baseline information contained in this technical supplement, the POP and responses to it and subsequent consultation with consultees.
CE3	As part of the Council's ongoing monitoring framework, the number of approvals granted for main town centre uses contrary to policy provision including the sequential test will be annually monitored and assessed against relevant indicators to determine whether the strategy and policies are being implemented effectively, remain appropriate and continue to support the Plan's objectives. Monitoring findings will inform the future review of the Plan and any necessary policy intervention.
CE4	Policies SGS 1, SGS 6 and RTC 1 – 6 will be reviewed at Plan Review stage. Where appropriate, the need for flexibility has been built into the strategic approach and draft policies to allow for changing circumstances. Local Policies Plan stage will provide further opportunity to review existing and introduce new local policies, provided this is underpinned by robust evidence base and is consistent with the adopted Plan Strategy.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council- Evening Economy Development Strategy (2018) and Action Plans- Propositions, Opportunities and Barriers to Growth & Development and the associated Action Plans (inc. Action Plan beyond 12 months) for Armagh City, Banbridge, Craigavon, Portadown and Lurgan

Armagh City

Armagh Evening Economy Proposition

Armagh City will provide a full spectrum of evening to night time economy activities, befitting city status, acting as a major draw to position the Borough's wider evening economy offer. The focus will be on heritage and culture including support for key events, showcasing the award winning local produce and restaurants, with a focus on safety and authenticity.

Opportunities for Growth

- Further consolidating and raising the profile of the destination's cultural offer.
- Development of the Gaol into a Boutique Hotel
- Development of large-scale international events - Georgian Day, St Patrick International Festival, Food and Cider Festival
- Use of Shambles for large scale evening events including Twilight Markets, events which showcase local food and drink such as the Food and Cider Festival, culture and heritage and outdoor cinema

Barriers to Development

- Lack of taxi ranks and adequate provision to meet current demand.
- Walkability of the city at night – lack of a proper walking trail, poor lighting, lack of directional and interpretative signage, safety perceptions.
- Lack of consensus around a distinct proposition, identity and brand for the ENTE sector
- No sustained marketing or social media
- No collaborative working

Armagh City Action Plan - includes:

- Refurbishment of these key pedestrian linkages will create a more attractive safe environment for pedestrians in the city centre during the hours of darkness.
- Develop series of seasonal Theatre/dinner, movie/dinner packages.
- Making Shambles the hub of a family-orientated evening economy.
- AMMA Centre Programme of Education/Learning Activity- Supporting the centre to extend its programme of digital creativity to the evening.
- Pilot Extension of Retail Opening Hours to facilitate early evening visitors; link this in with meal deals and promotions.
- Event on The Mall- A classical music event to be staged on the Mall and make better use of this asset.
- Regular and Co-ordinated Programme of Events- Building on the previous events programme including Georgian Day, Seven Hills Blues Festival, bring these together into a package/programme.
- Shambles Market Yard- Council will pilot the introduction of open-air evening entertainment in Market Street, Armagh making use of the natural amphitheatre style of the space and infrastructure. This could include engaging local community and cultural groups, hosting busking evenings and hosting concerts/street entertainment. As part of these events, council will work with the hospitality sector to encourage the use of outdoor space around their venues, will trial traffic restrictions and their impact during events and will develop the

space as part of the drive to improve the evening economy. Consultation will take place with businesses in and around this location prior to the introduction of the pilot.

- Armagh at Night Walking Tour- A specific initiative to attract visitors and boost business by linking in with bars and restaurants using NFC apps and comms.
- InstaMeets- Online boost for profile and presence of ENTE in Armagh. An InstaMeet is a group of Instagrammers meeting up to take photos and videos together of a special place or event.
- Pedestrianise Market Street- The impact of parking in the Market street area has a negative impact on the ENTE in the City Centre. A pilot project closing market street to traffic between 6pm and 6am should be tested to assess any positive or negative impacts.

Armagh City Action Plan- BEYOND 12 MONTHS

- Accommodation offer needs to be enhanced
- Music festivals
- Food heartland brand development
- Movie nights
- Theatre nights
- Lighting and planting strategy
- Heritage signage
- Free standing electronic information points
- In built heritage trail with pavement directions to guide visitors
- Better walks and green links
- Redesigning the gateway at Lower English Street close to residents

Banbridge

Banbridge Evening Economy Proposition

Banbridge will primarily be an early evening economy offer, capitalising on the busy day time trade and transitioning to a vibrant hospitality offer. The major focus of the Banbridge Evening Economy will be to foster and build a sense of community, meeting the needs of the local working population and family market, including unique local restaurants (showcasing local food and drinks under the Heartlands initiative, pubs offering additional activities/ entertainment and cafes with extended opening hours i.e. Supper clubs, themed evenings.

Opportunities for Growth

- Investment in commercial operations.
- Better use of park as venue for events, markets etc.
- Rejuvenate the Busking Festival with local pubs and add a local food element such as Street vendors – utilise the wide Main street as an outdoor venue
- Living over the Shop initiatives

Barriers to Development

- No collaborative working
- Lack of consensus around an identity and brand for the ENTE sector
- No sustained marketing or social media

Banbridge Action Plan- includes:

- Annual Family Heritage Fun Fair in Solitude Park- Early summer fun fair for which Banbridge becomes well known.
- Shutters Up Night with Street Animation- A learning event to demonstrate how different a town can be when the shutters are up and windows are well lit.

- Street Food Festival- Building on the street food training programme, food trucks lined up along parts of the main street and entertainment in the middle of the street.
- Speeding Cars Enforcement- Regular Police action on speeding cars on the main street.
- ENTE New Business Development Programme: Phase Two Supporting new ENTE business start-up with training, pop up venue and mentoring.
- Pilot Extension of Retail Opening Hours- Facilitate early evening visitors; link this in with meal deals and promotions.
- InstaMeets- Online boost for profile and presence of ENTE Banbridge.

Banbridge Action Plan- BEYOND 12 MONTHS

- Brighter lighting on secondary streets
- Litter at takeaways-more bins and early removal
- Create gateways to the main street
- Leisure services – opportunity for gym activity improving the ENTE
- Riverside plaza links to town centre
- Old Police station conversion to community asset and opportunities for ENTE

Central Craigavon

Central Craigavon Evening Economy Proposition

“Build on the established evening economy to develop a comprehensive and varied offer that includes retail, leisure and hospitality. Key to this is the creation of packaged trips incorporating restaurants, cafes, shopping, dining and leisure and entertainment options.”

Opportunities for Growth

- Consolidation of Borough’s leisure services will provide additional opportunities for linked trips
- Rushmere Expansion Plans

Barriers to Development

- Perception as a stand-alone venue, not part of the wider mix
- Pedestrian links to different areas of Rushmere
- Public transport to the centre after 6pm

Central Craigavon- Action Plan- includes:

- Evening Fashion Event in Rushmere- Catwalk showcasing latest styles from within the centre including gift and goodie bags.
- Reward and Discount Card- Develop and evening economy reward and discount scheme for shoppers.
- Meal Deals and Shopping Promotions-Targeted at the evening economy and centre footfall measured to assess impact.
- Marketing Campaign- Specifically targeting late night opening.
- Civic Centre-Highlight events/activities in the Civic Centre taking place after 5pm, specifically those targeting younger and family audience with a focus on sport and link across to Rushmere promotions.
- Linkages Programme-Carry out a review of pedestrian/vehicular linkages around the wider Rushmere area.

Central Craigavon Action Plan- BEYOND 12 MONTHS

- Leisure activity promotions in spring and summer months.

- There is potential to boost the ENTE in this area by adding to the number of available bed nights. Hotel accommodation for both businesses and leisure is an opportunity here to be pursued and investigated.

Portadown

Portadown Evening Economy Proposition

The evening economy proposition will reinforce the positioning of Portadown as a traditional, multi-faceted market town, with a rich mix of local and national retailers, places to eat, relax and sample culture, modern office accommodation and town centre living. It will kick-start the development of the riverfront as a modern, attractive site for a differentiated, design led leisure and hospitality offer with new linkages to the public transport interchange and traditional evening economy clusters in the town centre. The Millennium Court will provide additional opportunities for differentiating evening economy activity.

Opportunities for Growth

- Development of the Canal (Pump House) will provide a cluster of activity with early evening potential
- Events such as Country Comes to Town provide a hook for local pubs and restaurants to buy into
- Additional themed events/ activity around country theme i.e. music, markets would attract a wider catchment
- Maximising the benefit of having a train station in close proximity to the town centre.
- Build on successful Twilight Markets

Barriers to Development

- Perceptions of safety
- No collaborative working
- Lack of consensus around an identity and brand for the ENTE sector
- No sustained marketing or social media

Portadown Action Plan- includes:

- West End Definition as ENTE Hub- Mandeville Street across to Zio's in William Street to include decoration and lighting as a vibrant ENTE end of town.
- Retail Late-night Opening- Extend retail hours until at least 8pm on Thursday and Friday nights.
- Artisan Food Festival/Country comes to Town- Supported by local restaurants and making use of local produce and crafty food extending into the evening.
- Millennium Arts Centre Programme- Educational and arts/craft activities to bring people into the town centre.
- Millennium Court Twilight Market/Market Lane- The current day time market format is tired. Revive interest in this market area by developing a twilight theme (linked to the Arts Centre?)
- Pubwatch Scheme- To connect the bars in the town and specifically those around an emerging ENTE hub to address any concerns about safety.
- River, Riverbank and Peoples Park Events- Schedule programme for river and park events e.g. River racing, dragon boats or movies and family orientated "night light" festivals.
- Promotions and Incentives- General restaurant promotions and deals.
- Cultural Diversity Festival- Rich diversity of cultures and backgrounds living and working in and around Portadown with a culture of outdoor evening activity.
- Safety Campaigns:
 - Home Safe and Street Safe campaigns.
 - Taxi rank and taxi help point at Church Street.

- Street Pastor scheme on Friday and Saturday nights.
- A uniformed Police presence in the short term to dispel fears around safety and security.
- ENTE Marketing Campaign- Linked to the wider City Centre marketing campaign.
- Connecting the Riverside to the Town- Signage and route marking.

Portadown Action Plan - BEYOND 12 MONTHS

- Canal opportunities, better walks and green links as an extension of the town centre rather than as a competitor
- Train safety / lighting at subway
- Redesigning the gateways
- Litter at takeaways-bins and regular removal
- Cascades leisure offer and promotions for evening economy deals and packages
- Living in the town centre options

Lurgan

Lurgan Evening Economy Proposition

Lurgan's evening economy will complement the relaxed shopping and leisure experience of a traditional town centre. The town centre will capitalise on the emerging cluster of new restaurant and pubs, adding to the established venues. The attractive public realm and compact layout will be further enhanced by establishing links to the park and the lake. Arts, heritage and culture will be key hooks to differentiate the evening economy offer with Brownlow House as the flagship.

Opportunities for Growth

- Significant investment in venues and independent restaurants and bistros will further consolidate the offer
- Heritage Lottery Funding will enhance and create a unique identity for the Public Realm and further regenerate under-utilised and vacant properties.
- Re-development of Brownlow House
- Re-development of Lurgan Park
- Build on successful Twilight Markets

Barriers to Development

- Perceptions of safety
- Lack of consensus around an identity and brand for the ENTE sector
- No sustained marketing or social media
- No collaborative working

Lurgan Action Plan- includes:

- Monthly Evening Event- Regular scheduled monthly evening event in Spring/Summer (twilight market, music festival, comedy night) at Wesley Place car park establishing this area as an ENTE hub.
- Pubwatch Scheme- To connect the bars in the town and specifically those around an emerging ENTE hub to address any concerns about safety.
- Car Club Meet- Facilitate quarterly car club meets in supervised conditions perhaps in re-purposed car park (Wesley Place) and proactively manage this event with food trucks and PSNI.
- Vacant Units- Pilot – Vacant units “dressed” and lit at nighttime.

- Town Hall Movie Night/Picture Club- Support a local community-based organisation with grant aid to introduce a movie night in the Town Hall (Autumn/Winter).
- Lurgan Park- Enchanted Park evening event in Winter.
- Brownlow House- summer concert in gardens.
- ENTE Marketing Campaign- Linked to the wider Town Centre marketing campaign.

Lurgan Action Plan- BEYOND 12 MONTHS

- Street signage and identity
- Redesigning the gateways
- Litter at takeaways-bins and regular removal
- Big car parks for drive-in movies
- Lurgan Park Night Run
- Lurgan Park Night Rally
- Lurgan Show evening activity programme
- WAVES

Appendix 2: Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council- Evening Economy Development Strategy (2018)-Suggested monitoring measures for the evening and nighttime economy

Quantitative measures which are relevant to the evening economy, and which could form part of regular reports, include:

- Overall numbers of restaurants, pubs and clubs
- Numbers of new openings (and use of vacant shops and buildings)
- Investment levels
- Estimates of the number of people employed at night in the centre
- Diversity of visitors to the town centre, for example in terms of the numbers coming from outside the GL5 post code
- Number of late-night licenses in different parts of the town
- Disturbances (crime/arrests)

Qualitative measures could be drawn from:

- Online surveys and street surveys with different groups- residents, young people, older, businesses
- Views on the state of streets Saturday/Sunday mornings
- Positive/negative press coverage
- Other press references, for example, national.
- Descriptions in travel and food guides etc.

INTERESTED IN DEVELOPMENT

in the Armagh City,
Banbridge and
Craigavon Borough

Please contact

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