



Pedestrian realm

2.2 The City Centre

2.2.1 Background

This section summarises elements of the 'Sligo Retail & City Centre Strategy', a supplementary report to the Sligo & Environs Development Plan. The previous section outlined the proposed policy for a number of multi-storey car parks on the edge of the city centre, with additional policies that will restrict car access on prime commercial streets, thereby enhancing the pedestrian realm and overall environmental quality of the city centre.

2.2.2 Function – A 'Gateway' City and Regional Centre for the North-West

Sligo acts as the administrative and cultural centre for the north-west region. It is home to regional cultural venues such as theatres, galleries and arts centres. In addition, several banks and insurance companies choose to locate their regional headquarters in the city and one of six national High Court houses is on Teeling Street. As is typical with a traditional market centre, Sligo's city centre is dominated by its service role with prominent retail uses.

A city centre with Sligo's regional status is required to be more than just a shopping centre. Sligo has all the necessary ingredients of an attractive and pleasant urban environment, including key natural features such as the river opening on to the estuary, a historic urban fabric with key architectural buildings, cultural and civic institutions and public spaces. It is the aim of the local authorities to enhance and expand on these qualities.

2.2.3 Existing Urban Form

Map 3.1 and 3.2 illustrate the existing ground and first floor land uses within Sligo City Centre and demonstrates that commercial retail is very much a core function. The prime commercial street in Sligo is currently O'Connell Street. Other main commercial areas include Grattan Street, Castle Street, Market Street, High Street, Wine Street and Stephen Street. The centre of activity in the city may be regarded as being where O'Connell Street meets Tobergal Lane. Sligo's office development focuses on the western end of Wine Street and along Stephen Street. The latter, in particular, is where most of the high street banks have located. The Mall continues on eastwards from Stephen Street to the 'Cultural Quarter' that features public institutional uses such as the library, museum and art gallery.

Sligo features a large centrally located block of land enclosed within Wine Street, Adelaide Street and John Street that has become known as the centre-block. The site was designated for urban renewal tax incentives under the 1999 scheme, following the preparation of the Sligo Integrated Area Plan (1998). The centre-block was subsequently the subject of a masterplan, prepared by the National Building Agency and is currently the focus of a major retail redevelopment in conjunction with developers Treasury Holdings.

The city centre also has a northern block, which features a mixture of commercial, office, residential (on its periphery) and public institutional activity; this block consists of Wine Street, Quay Street, Lower Quay Street and Union Street. The predominant feature in this area is the large area of brownfield land currently in the backlands of the block due to an incomplete development. This site is commonly referred to as the Buttermarket and, in addition to the Wine Street Centre Block, the local authority will promote city centre development here.



Pedestrian access, Sligo

2.2.4 Health of the City Centre

NBA pedestrian questionnaire surveys carried out in May 2002, indicated that 81% of those visiting the city centre were from County Sligo, 51% were residents of Sligo city and 5% were tourists. Respondents viewed the city centre's compact size and its environmental quality, particularly around the riverfront, as key features they liked about the centre. By far the biggest perceived negative was the traffic congestion and related problems - particularly on Adelaide St, Bridge St, O'Connell Street, Grattan Street and Castle Street. 'Pedestrianisation' ranked as the most popular suggested improvement for the city centre. Pedestrian activity is high in Sligo, particularly along O'Connell Street and to a lesser extent on Castle/Grattan Street. Map 12 indicates where pedestrian flows are highest.

2.2.5 Pedestrian Issues

The city centre of Sligo is characterised by vehicular-pedestrian conflict which does not contribute to a pleasant or circulating shopping environment. The conflict is most severe, and pedestrian movement is most impeded, on the main shopping streets of O'Connell Street, Grattan Street and Castle Street. It is an objective to promote pedestrian priority areas and pedestrianisation on these streets (refer to section 2.1.8).

2.2.6 Rental Levels

The areas of highest ground-floor retail rents are O'Connell Street and the associated arcades into the centre-block. Extending further from the perceived city centre of O'Connell Street into the Wine Street car park, typical rental values are still among the city's highest. An approximate hierarchy of ground floor rents following these areas would place Grattan Street in the next bracket, followed by Castle Street, Stephen Street, Market Street and finally High Street. Retail rents are on a par with other urban centres of comparable size, but have risen due to the scarcity of retail space in the city centre.

The core business and office area of the city can be identified as the area around Thomas Street and Bridge Street, extending more recently along Rockwood Parade. It is in this area that first floor rents are highest and are also assisted by urban renewal reliefs. Secondary business areas, with slightly lower first floor rents extend down Castle Street, Grattan Street, Stephen Street and Wine Street.

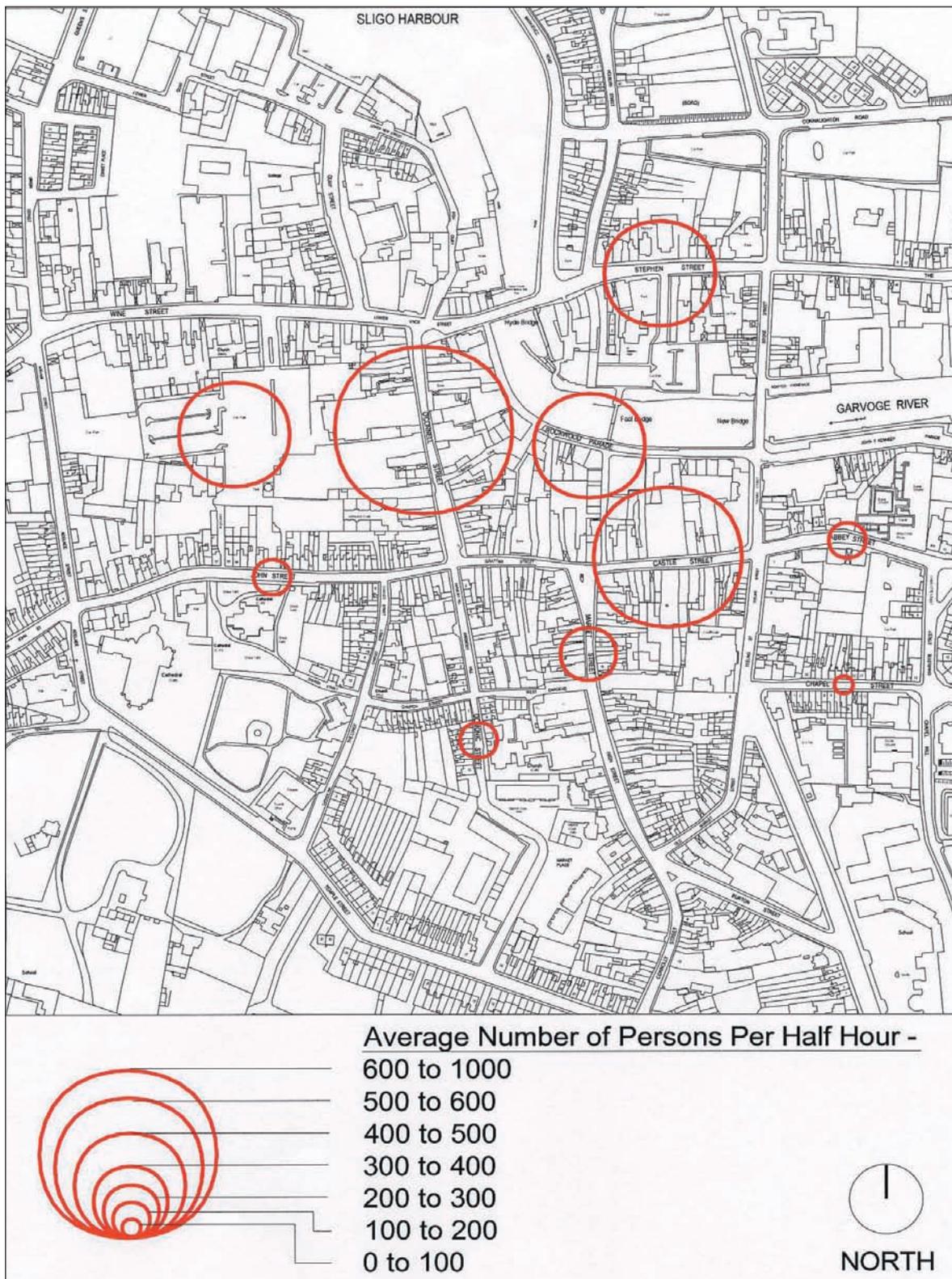
2.2.7 Crime and Safety

Results from the pedestrian questionnaire survey reveal that there is a negative perception in relation to safety in Sligo centre, during the evening/night time. Late night fast-food outlets provide a particular focus for this unwelcome activity, following pub closing. Crime and public order is an issue that needs to be addressed so as to ensure a good quality of life for the city's residents and visitors alike.

Encouraging people to live within the city centre, via initiatives to provide residential accommodation above shops available for living space, will assist in creating a more vibrant and safer environment. The sort of crime and anti-social behaviour that were highlighted in the survey will often thrive in areas that are not occupied at night by residents. Neighbourhoods that have a residential element are, by their very nature, more community focused and as such more carefully supervised and protected.

There is a need to avoid youth dissatisfaction, with a renewed focus on the evening economy and enhanced leisure facilities. The provision of more outdoor entertainment events on late-night shopping evenings would increase vibrancy and create a pleasant environment.

Map 12: Pedestrian Flow



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Cafe Culture, Sligo

2.2.8 Evening Economy

In order to achieve gateway status, Sligo will undergo large-scale, and comparatively rapid, increases in population. Sligo therefore will need to appeal to the mobile workforce that will most likely make up the bulk of in-migrants to the city. For Sligo to both function as a regional capital, and to attract this future influx, it is absolutely critical that the city hosts a vibrant evening economy. The promotion of a vibrant evening economy may well help to alter perceptions of the city centre as an unsafe place after 7pm in the evening.

The regeneration of areas along the riverfront such as Rockwood Parade provide a suitable setting for outdoor cafes, as would other areas subject to pedestrianisation in the future. The Irish weather has historically limited utilisation of outside space for leisure purposes, but street cafes can increasingly operate in colder climates using the latest technology of outdoor street heaters. The area around the riverfront has begun to evolve in this way during the summer months, and this trend can be expected to continue.

Issues of capacity and saturation will need to be tackled to avoid an over-concentration of pubs, bars, clubs and fast-food outlets in particular areas. Further introductions of food & drink use, bars and nightclubs in the vicinity of Grattan Street and O’Connell Street, should be restricted, since it is an area of identified stress where the capacity to accommodate the evening economy has been reached.

2.2.9 The Historic South-East

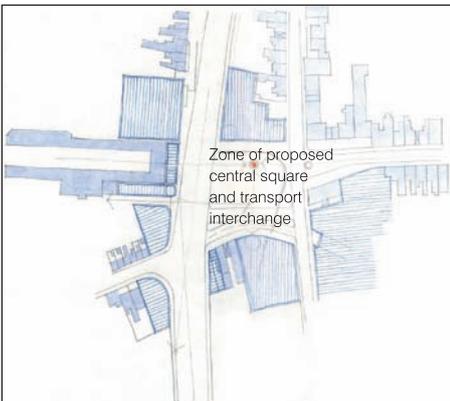
The slow migration of retail activity to the city centre’s north and west has resulted in a shadow effect being felt in the south-eastern area. However, there is much potential to build upon the area’s traditional attractiveness and the proposals for eventual pedestrianisation on Market Street should assist in enhancing the environmental quality of this area.

2.2.10 Central Square

A new civic square is proposed between the train station and the west end of Wine Street (refer to objective T4.1, section 2.1). It would be a key focal entry-point into Sligo City Centre and would provide the necessary connection between the city centre and the bus and train stations. The square would act a ‘Transport Hub’, a dropping off point for buses and taxis. The square proposal will consist of an area of bus and taxi pick-ups and an area of public space that can be utilised for cafes or other service uses. A new building to the south of the proposed square on the site of the current bus maintenance depot, will tie into the existing streetscape and has potential for a prestige office block, with more active ground floor uses.

The location of the proposed ‘Central Square’ on the Inner Relief Route will act as a cue, signal or ‘gateway’ to the city centre. Pedestrians arriving from the public transport nodes should be encouraged to enter the city centre via the centreblock in order to maximise commercial opportunities. Pavement widening on Adelaide Street and the provision of ground floor retail uses on the street will assist in maintaining the flow of pedestrians through the retail areas of the centreblock, rather than along the more office orientated Wine Street.

The site would also provide an extremely suitable location for the provision of a tourist information booth. This would enable advice and guidance to be issued to tourists at their point of entry into Sligo.



Sketch of Central Square



View of Quay Street Car-Park, Sligo

The location of ticketing outlets for Iarnród Éireann and Bus Éireann on the central civic square would also be of considerable benefit, with the possible provision of a pedestrian sky-walk over the Inner Relief Road providing direct access from the square to the station and resolving the problem of severance of the bus and train stations from the city centre.

2.2.11 Quay Street Car Park and Harbour South Bank

The proposed provision of large areas of multi-storey car-parking in the centre block and more particularly in the adjacent Buttermarket site, will allow the removal of the existing surface level car park at Quay Street to create a public open space that would eventually link into a proposed river walkway. The proposal is dependent on the future provision of replacement car-parking in the Buttermarket or within a development scheme on adjacent sites.

2.2.12 The Cultural Quarter

North of the river, the Model Arts and Niland Gallery site is located in what can loosely be termed Sligo's cultural quarter. This area is the subject of a competition and a bid to North-West Tourism for further funding and development. Strong linkages between this area and the city centre should be maintained so as to encourage 'event' shoppers to make combined trips. The local authority will also support the development of this area as the city's cultural quarter.



The Model Arts and Niland Gallery Building, Sligo

North-West Tourism has identified a need for concert-hall facilities in Sligo. This is the type of development that the city needs to promote itself as a regional capital and somewhere within the urban fabric of the cultural quarter would be a suitable location - reinforcing this emerging character (though key landmark sites on the edge-of-centre near the port may also prove desirable). Connaughton Road will also be the most suitable site for a multi-storey car park to serve the northeast area of the city centre, supporting its role as a cultural quarter.

2.2.13 Stephen Street Car Park - Proposed New Civic Amenity

The area around Stephen Street Car-Park in Sligo offers a suitable amenity area that is not used to its full potential at present. High quality urban design exists on the opposite bank at Rockwood Parade and also to some extent on the north riverbank towards Hyde Bridge. However, the scenic potential of the area could be maximised with the removal of existing car parking at the Stephen Street car-park, which currently acts as a barrier to any further improvements to the riverside setting. Furthermore, it does not currently act as an incentive for pedestrians, particularly event shoppers and tourists, to explore the north bank of the city. As a result the potential benefits of the footbridge are not fully realised.

The provision of car parking at edge-of-centre sites such as Connaughton Road would allow the removal of the existing car-park on the riverside to open up this key city centre location for public amenity, including a street market. Street markets can greatly add to the attractiveness and the vitality of a cosmopolitan city centre, as successful examples in Galway and in Temple Bar (Dublin) serve to illustrate. Even within the context of the existing layout, there exists under-utilised incidental grassland adjacent to the car-park on the east side, which would allow the provision of a market area with more immediate affect, albeit on an initially small scale. The site also serves as a useful intermediate zone, between the main retail area and the emerging cultural quarter to the north-east.



Temple Bar Market, Dublin



Rockwood Parade Riverfront, Sligo

At such a key location it may be necessary for the licensing authority to place restrictions on the range of goods sold. The market would provide a platform for local artists, craftspeople, locally produced organic food, and specialist hot food stalls. The aim is a high quality urban amenity that will appeal to the tourist and event shopper alike.

2.2.14 City Centre Riverfront

There is much scope for continuing the success of developments like the Rockwood Parade scheme, further along the Kempton Promenade riverfront on the northern side. This would allow greater enjoyment of the river and provide important connections to the J. Fallon Footbridge, creating additional attractive commercial opportunities (particularly for bars and restaurants). Enhancements on the southside of the Garvogue River along J.F.K. Parade will also be encouraged.

2.2.15 Abbey Street

The Abbey is the only nationally recognised Heritage site in Sligo City and the city's only surviving medieval building. It has potential to be promoted as a more prominent feature and as a symbol of the city. Although now a ruin, the remaining structure is in good condition, with many of the tombs, monuments and features retaining much of their original splendour. It has the oldest high altar in any Irish monastic church, dating to the 15th century. The Abbey is under state care and managed through Duchas, the Heritage Service.



The Abbey, Sligo

The surrounding setting does little to enhance the Abbey or encourage the inquisitive tourist to investigate. As a result the area has a fringe city centre feel, although it is actually within 400 metres of the perceived city centre of O'Connell Street. As such, Abbey Street represents an extremely suitable area for expansion for smaller specialist outlets that can both capitalise on, and enhance this important historical landmark. It is essential that the frontage opposite the Abbey is treated sensitively, and uses are encouraged that enhance this setting of great potential, such as tourist, gift and craft items, that could be related to the Abbey itself. In addition, once more people are attracted to the street, there is potential for a cafe to provide refreshment for visitors in a scenic setting, which is slightly removed from the bustle of the core shopping streets down Castle and Grattan Street.

On the north side, the area between the Abbey and the river, currently sites single storey commercial uses not suited to a city centre. It should also be a longer-term objective to remove them and open up views between the Abbey across the river to the new pedestrian walkway on the north bank.

2.2.16 City Centre Management

The concept of city centre management aims to bring together a partnership of key stakeholders, sharing aspirations, expertise and resources to take forward a joined up and holistic plan to meet local needs and strengthen regional resources. The city centre can be managed in a similar approach to a shopping centre. Local city centre management initiatives range from ad hoc partnerships to companies limited by guarantee. Usually a core management group called a Management Board or a Steering Group clarifies the roles and responsibilities of all partners. Ideally participation should not be confined to local government and retailers, but should include restaurateurs, leisure operators, head office operators, transport providers, investors and land owners, voluntary community groups, as well as such service providers as solicitors, accountants, financial services, the police, education and health. Sligo would benefit from the creation of a formal, structured City Centre Management Group. This will be particularly vital in a period which is likely to witness rapid and large-scale change and development. The local authority should play a pivotal role in instigating the process, in consultation with the user groups mentioned.

2.2.17 Policies

It is the policy of the local authorities to:

- Promote Sligo City Centre as the administrative and cultural centre of the north west.
- Give preferential consideration to applications which locate the regional headquarters of companies within Sligo city centre.
- Encourage a diversity of uses in the city centre, recognising the needs of those who shop, work, live and recreate in the city centre.
- Ensure a vibrant mix of retail, service uses, employment uses, community and cultural facilities, natural features, and civic buildings in the city centre.
- Encourage provision of improved Leisure and Community facilities to attract families and 'event' or 'long-distance shoppers'.
- Improve the vitality of the city centre by encouraging a mix of upper floor uses including inner urban living such as apartments over shops.
- Encourage activities that enliven the evening economy, including culture and entertainment uses.
- Encourage late night shopping and amenities that will help promote it, including effective advertising and provision of street entertainment.
- Ensure that the Buttermarket Block is readily accessible to both north and south bound vehicles via the inner relief road.
- Establish effective pedestrian linkages from the Buttermarket Block to the proposed public open space on the former Quay Street Car Park and south to the Centre Block across Wine Street.
- Avoid further proliferation of on-street parking in the city centre.
- Incorporate public art and high quality urban design, street furniture and landscaping, etc., into newly pedestrianised areas.
- Seek to promote effective pedestrian linkages between the city centre and key tourist sites, particularly the Abbey and Model Arts and Niland Gallery.
- Ensure effective pedestrian linkages between the Bus and Train Stations and the City Centre, via the Wine Street centreblock development.
- Encourage the location of ticketing outlets for Iarnród Éireann and Bus Éireann on the proposed central civic square.
- Promote initiatives to increase the vitality and viability of the historic southeast.
- Encourage and facilitate appropriate development that addresses and encourages public enjoyment of the waterfront along Rockwood Parade, J.F.K. Parade and along Kempton Promenade and in the environs of the existing Stephen Street Car-park.
- Restrict further introductions of fast food & drink use, bars and nightclubs in the vicinity of Grattan Street and O'Connell Street, an area of identified stress where the capacity to accommodate the evening economy has been reached. Such outlets will be encouraged to locate elsewhere in the city centre to diffuse anti-social behaviour.
- Restrict the conversion of residential dwellings to office and retail use on John Street, Charles Street and Church Street, especially where this would require 'demolition and rebuild' or an alteration to existing residential facades.
- Promote a partnership-based City Centre Management Group and appoint a city centre manager for Sligo city centre.

2.2.18 Objectives

It is the objective of the local authorities to:

- CC1** Promote and facilitate the development of the **Central Square** in the vicinity of the Wine Street-Adelaide Street Junction, as a new civic amenity and gateway to the city centre.
- CC2** Create a Public **Open Space** on the existing site of Quay Street Car Park following provision of a multi-storey with replacement car-parking within the Buttermarket development.
- CC3** Open up views from J.F.K. Parade to the Abbey in the longer term, by creating a stronger visual link with the riverside and creating a stronger visual impression of the Abbey from the proposed riverside walkway on the northbank.
- CC4** Ensure that any developments along Adelaide Street (including road widening or the provision of new building lines) incorporate a widened pavement so as to encourage **pedestrian linkage** from the proposed civic square to the entrance of the centre-block.
- CC5** Promote the development of a '**Cultural Quarter**' to the immediate north west of the city centre along The Mall, building on the work to date in the development of the Model Arts and Niland Centre and the proposals for the County Museum in this area and the development of a County Library along Connaughton Road.
- CC6** Develop Stephen Street car park as a **public square with a specialist market area** for the sale of arts, crafts, antiques, and specialist food items, including locally produced organic fruit and vegetables on the weekends. This market could provide an outlet for local artists and organic farmers, building on Sligo's reputation for culture and fine food produce. It would also provide an attractive, south facing civic square with river frontage in the heart of Sligo city that would provide a niche market in the retail strategy, linking the city centre to the proposed cultural quarter.
- CC7** Provide a public toilet at a central location within the city centre. Possible locations could be the Wine Street Centre Block Development, the proposed central square, Quay Street or Stephen Street car park.