Chapter 4: Built Environment

Aim 4 Built Environment
To continue to promote Clonmel as the main County town and as a regional nodal centre, while securing and enhancing the heritage character of the town centre.

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4.1 Clonmel Town Centre

Town Centre Strategy

4.1.1 The overall Development Plan Strategy is underpinned by a vision of Clonmel Town as the primary centre for the County and the region’s key driver in terms of social, economic and cultural vitality. The health and vitality of a town centre is an important contributory element to the success of the region and a dynamic town centre can help create economic and social growth for the wider area that it serves. Clonmel's growth must therefore be robust and sustained if it is to effectively fulfil this role. Measures to increase the attractiveness of the town and its immediate environs as a place to live in, to invest in and to visit, including land use policies, environmental improvements and infrastructure, are all essential objectives of the Plan.

4.1.2 The centre of Clonmel has a compact and traditional urban form that complements its function as the principal market town of the region. Whereas historically the urban area had developed in small increments along the river valley, rapid development during the last 50 years or so has led to expansive housing areas extending to the north, west and east of the town centre. Most recently, housing and employment uses have continued to expand across the railway line and the Frank Drohan Road to encroach on the higher lands and ridgeline to the north.

4.1.3 The town centre itself is vibrant with a good mix of multiple and independent retailers offering a wide range of goods and services. In addition the professional services sector is well represented with office, educational and health functions contributing to the diversity and viability of the Central Area.

4.1.4 Clonmel is distinguished by its historic core as well as other areas of special historic interest. Streets of particular cultural and architectural merit include O’Connell Street and Gladstone Street, and those in the vicinity of St. Mary’s Church (including Anne Street), which are included within a designated Architectural Conservation Area, as well as containing numerous Protected Structures (as illustrated on Appendix Map 1.3).

4.1.5 Roads leading into the town centre are frequently congested during peak times, with traffic movement through the narrow streets often obstructed by on-street parking and delivery vehicles.

Town Centre Objectives

4.1.6 The key issues affecting the town are addressed in a range of Borough-wide policies and a number of specific objectives set out in this Chapter. The main aim is to enhance the town centre for a wide range of attractions and activities to ensure that its vitality and viability is maintained.

**Policy TC.1: Town Centre**

It is the policy of the Council to strengthen the main County town function of Clonmel as a commercial, cultural and living centre by encouraging appropriate uses that support vibrant activity in the Central Area whilst complementing its distinctive townscape character.

4.1.7 The town centre is dependent on continuing confidence and investment, not only in new schemes but also in the redevelopment and refurbishment of existing properties. It is reasonable to promote and accommodate such schemes in order to stimulate investment.
4.1.8 It is important to continue to improve the public realm of the town centre for the benefit of both local people and visitors. Although much has already been achieved by way of resurfaced footpaths, raised ramps, and improvements to the Main Guard, it is the policy of the Council to pursue a range of measures to further improve the pedestrian environment.

**Policy TC.2: Environmental Enhancement**

**Improvements to the appearance of the town centre will continue to be sought, in conjunction with developers, property owners and relevant organisations.** Particular attention will be given to the following areas:

a) Streetscape improvements to the Central Area;
b) The Suir River Corridor; and
c) The Quays.

4.1.9 The Council will actively pursue measures for achieving a more pedestrian-friendly town centre, including pedestrian prioritisation and traffic calming schemes as resources permit, improved pedestrian access and circulation throughout the town centre area and to car parks and the Quays, and convenient and safe links to surrounding areas. Particular emphasis will be placed on the prime retail areas of O’Connell Street, Gladstone Street, Mitchell Street and Market Place, aimed at:

- Reducing pedestrian/vehicle conflict and improving pedestrian safety;
- Enhancing the appearance of the town centre through careful design and selection of appropriate surfacing and street furniture;
- Under-grounding of overhead cables;
- Promoting the retention and enhancement of traditional shop fronts; and
- Safeguarding the structure and appearance of heritage buildings by reducing the impact of vehicles.

4.1.10 The Suir River Corridor is an important natural asset for the town and specific objectives for the protection and enhancement of this resource are set out in the Spatial Strategy (refer Policy DP.5) and Natural Environment Policies of this Plan (refer Chapter 5.5). Policy TC.6 sets out the Council’s objectives for town centre development of The Quays. It is recognised that as part of the overall strategic development of the town centre, greater utilisation of the river as a key asset will be fundamental. This will not only relate to promoting development opportunities along the river front, but will also focus on improving the overall access to the river for pedestrians to enjoy this high quality environment and setting.

4.1.11 Whereas Clonmel has experienced considerable residential and commercial growth in recent years, the majority of this activity has taken place beyond the town centre area. There has also been progress on some of the larger sites adjoining the Central Area, in particular the Poppyfields and Tesco developments located on the Frank Drohan Road, but there exist a number of key sites that remain undeveloped in close proximity to the town centre that have significant potential to contribute to the continued regeneration of Clonmel (refer also Chapter 6.6 Retail Development).

**Policy TC.3: Town Centre Redevelopment**

The redevelopment of under-utilised and derelict town centre and edge of centre sites and buildings for retail and other forms of commercial development will be actively encouraged by the Council, including an element of residential, where in accordance with Policy TC.5, subject to the character of the area being maintained.
4.1.12 The Clonmel Integrated Urban Strategy (2003) sets out comprehensive Development Briefs that provide a clear guide to developers and the public on the potential of these key redevelopment opportunities. The sites are located mainly within the Central Area and at Irishtown and Davis Road, comprising in total approximately 18 hectares of commercial development land.

4.1.13 The location of these sites in relation to the Central Area is shown below, and the current status of each is given in Appendix 4 of this Plan. Due to changing circumstances it is likely that some of them will come forward for redevelopment during the Plan period, and the Council considers it reasonable and in principle desirable to accommodate such schemes in order to further stimulate investment and commercial confidence in the town centre. The refurbishment and re-use of derelict and under-utilised properties will also be actively encouraged. Such redevelopment schemes need not be restricted solely to retail uses. An element of office or residential uses may be appropriate, but it is essential that retail is the predominant use, particularly on the ground floor.

**Figure 4:**
Key Redevelopment Sites in relation to the Central Area

**Policy TC.4: Commercial Uses**
Retail uses will be expected to remain the predominant activity at ground floor level throughout the Central Area, and in particular in the primary shopping areas of O’Connell Street; Gladstone Street; Mitchell Street; and The Market Place Shopping Centre. Non-retail commercial uses will generally be supported on upper floors of properties situated in the primary shopping streets. The loss of existing commercial uses within and adjacent to the Central Area will be resisted unless it can be demonstrated that the proposed alternative use will be of comparable benefit to the vitality and viability of the area.
4.1.14 It is acknowledged that in certain instances office-based businesses or food and drink outlets, particularly on the ground floor, can have a detrimental impact on the retail function of the town centre. This process could eventually influence its competitiveness against other centres, while reducing the level of shopping facilities available to local residents. A proliferation of non-retail activities may also lead to a change in the appearance and function of the Central Area.

4.1.15 In order to prevent a concentration of non-retail commercial premises in the Central Area, the Council will apply a restrictive approach to such changes of use unless it is clear that the impact of a proposal will not undermine its primary shopping function. In particular, the Council will resist an excessive concentration of nightclubs, take away/fast food outlets and amusement centres in any particular part of the Central Area.

**Policy TC.5: Town Centre Residential**

The creation of dwellings in the town centre will be encouraged, except in circumstances where existing commercial uses would be lost. Residential uses will be sought as an integral part of development proposals within the town centre.

4.1.16 Empty space above commercial premises in the town centre is a wasted asset, and the Council will normally support opportunities that come forward to re-use such space. The provision of dwellings contributes to the vitality of Clonmel, particularly during the evening, and will also be encouraged through suitable apartment development schemes and initiatives such as ‘living over the shop’.

4.1.17 Commercial redevelopment schemes will be assessed by the Council to determine the scope for incorporating dwellings into the design and will expect such provision to be made in appropriate circumstances.

**Policy TC.6: The Quays**

In accordance with Policy TC.3, the continued redevelopment and/or change of use of property along The Quays will be actively pursued by the Council, subject to the character of the area being enhanced.

4.1.18 The River Suir is an important part of Clonmel’s heritage and the remaining old warehouses and mills along the quays provide a reminder of the earlier prosperity of the town as a thriving industrial, commercial and business centre.

4.1.19 Although some redevelopment of The Quays has occurred under the Urban Renewal Scheme, mostly for residential uses along Old Quay, the opportunity exists to re-evaluate the potential of this important waterfront area for securing a high quality environment that complements and reinforces the overall image of Clonmel.

4.1.20 As set out in Chapter 5.5 of this Plan, it is intended that the River Suir Amenity Area designation will provide a focussed set of actions to address the specific requirements of this important area. Appraisal of the Quays for suitable waterfront development will form an integral part of this initiative. This would include identifying opportunities for the redevelopment and/or change of use of property along The Quays, including areas of backlands, derelict sites and incidental open spaces, for appropriate town centre uses. Development will be facilitated through the objectives of Policy DP.5 and, where considered necessary, through implementation of the Derelict Sites Act (1990) to prevent or remove injury to amenity arising from dereliction.
4.1.21 The Quays also present the opportunity for creating a more attractive riverside amenity, with improved pedestrian links to the town centre and along the River Suir Corridor, and the Council will seek improvements to the public realm of the waterfront as an integral part of the Amenity Area.

**Policy TC.7: Development Management**

The Council will enforce strict control of town centre development and conversion of existing buildings, including particularly change of use, alteration, repair, maintenance and decoration of buildings, where such development would impact on the proposed Architectural Conservation Area and/or Protected Structures.

4.1.22 Much of the town centre core lies within a proposed Architectural Conservation Area (refer Chapter 4.3), the character of which will be preserved and enhanced. Consequently any redevelopment scheme will have to be of the highest quality. This does not preclude contemporary or innovative approaches to design, but any proposal will respect the special qualities and historic context of the area as regards scale, form, building lines, and materials.

4.2 Built Heritage Generally

4.2.1 Clonmel has a rich heritage of townscape and buildings that needs to be fully recognised and protected. The conservation and renewal of the built environment is a major function of the Plan. There are considerable urban archaeological features, protected structures, and important streetscapes that require robust policies to ensure that the architectural and historical character and the quality of the town are preserved and wherever possible enhanced.

4.2.2 The Council will seek to preserve and enhance Clonmel's special architectural and heritage by protecting historic buildings, groups of buildings, the existing street pattern, plot sizes and scales, while encouraging the development of appropriate mixed-use development where appropriate to the historic context. It is also an objective to develop the tourist and recreational potential of the built heritage where possible and appropriate.

**Policy BH.1: Built Form**

It is the policy of the Council to seek to enhance the quality of the built form within Clonmel by:

a) Focussing action and investment within areas identified as of lower townscape quality and/or areas of social exclusion;

b) By maintaining and enhancing the character of existing higher quality townscape;

c) By protecting and enhancing buildings, open spaces, streetscapes and other areas of cultural and historic interest;

d) Encouraging the use of locally sourced or sustainable materials for conservation or enhancement works; and

e) By protecting and enhancing natural areas within the town and creating linkage where development opportunities arise.

4.2.3 The protection and enhancement of the built environment is important in the achievement of sustainability and is therefore a prominent feature of the Development Management strategy (refer Chapter 9).

4.2.4 Policy BH.1 aims to preserve where high quality exists and to enhance where there is a need to make improvements. This will be achieved through the Council’s development
management decisions and other townscape initiatives that may be developed in partnership with other organisations. Specific conservation objectives include:

• The designation of Architectural Conservation Areas;
• The re-appraisal of protected structures;
• Encouraging and advising on the restoration and preservation of the town’s traditional shop fronts;
• Seeking the placing underground of all overhead statutory services wherever possible, in the interest of visual amenity.

4.2.5 The traditional shop fronts in Clonmel are also important to the architectural heritage of the town, and contribute considerably to its distinctiveness. The Council will encourage the retention of shop fronts of quality, and promote the repair of traditional shop fronts according to the Council’s guidance (refer Chapter 9.5). New shop fronts will also be expected to respect the traditional character of the town.

![Clonmel’s diverse built heritage.](image)

4.3 **Architectural Conservation Areas**

4.3.1 An Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) is a place, area, group of structures or townscape which is either of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest or which contributes to the appreciation of protected structures. In an ACA, protection is placed on the exterior of all structures, and any works that would have a material affect on the character of an ACA will require planning permission.

4.3.2 The designation of an area as an ACA has to be regarded in the context of zoning and other strategies pertaining to the protection of the built heritage, and where the planning authority is of the opinion that its inclusion is necessary for the conservation of the special character of an area.

4.3.3 Within the ACA’s set out below, the Council will have particular regard to:

• The impact of proposed development on the character and appearance of the area in terms of compatibility of design, colour and finishes, and the overall massing of built form in relation to its neighbours;
• The impact of proposed development on the existing amenities, character and views of and through the area; and
• The need to retain important architectural and townscape elements such as shop fronts, sash windows, gutters and down-pipes, decorative plasterwork, railings and street furniture.
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Policy BH.2: Old St. Mary’s Architectural Conservation Area

The area which has formed around old St. Mary’s Church, having special architectural and townscape qualities which derive from the traditional layout, design and unity of character, be designated as an Architectural Conservation Area.

4.3.4 Old St. Mary’s Church forms an axis around which a distinctive residential area has been formed. Several of the streets in the area were laid out in relation to the Church, and several of these terminate with gates which bound the grounds of the Church. All are residential streets of two or three storey, dating from the early 19th century.

4.3.5 The most notable street in the area is Anne Street, designated in the 2002 Development Plan as an ACA. This Plan extends the boundaries of the Anne Street ACA to include Wolfe Tone Street and Gordon Place to the south, Grattan Place to the west, part of Mary Street, Morton Street, and part of William Street to the east (for location refer Appendix 1, Map 1.3).

Policy BH.3 O’Connell Street and Gladstone Street Architectural Conservation Area

The main shopping streets of O’Connell Street and Gladstone Street, having special architectural and townscape qualities which derive from the traditional layout, design and unity of character, be designated as an Architectural Conservation Area.

4.3.6 Both O’Connell Street and Gladstone Street contain fine terraces of three or four storey buildings that relate to the focus of the Main Guard building. At the western end of O’Connell Street, the West Gate forms a significant element of the streetscape. The two streets contain numerous buildings of social, cultural and architectural interest which, together with several small lanes contained within the ground floor facades of buildings, combine to create a coherent townscape pattern of distinctive character.

4.3.7 The physical quality and townscape character of the two ACAs is derived from a combination of traditional elements that together create a distinctive ‘sense of place’ worthy of particular recognition and protection. The Council will undertake to carry out detailed ACA Statements for these areas in order to record their inherent qualities and to refine detailed boundaries.

4.3.8 The designation of the ACAs provides a different level of protection to buildings than the Protected Structures mechanism as it does not contain restrictions to the interior of structures. The ACA is not intended as a restrictive tool that precludes future development. However, the carrying out of works to the exterior of structures within the ACAs will not be considered as exempted development where these works would materially affect the character of the area.

4.3.9 In assessing development proposals within the ACAs, the Council will take into account the material effect that the proposed development would be likely to have on the character of the area.
4.4 Protected Structures

4.4.1 Under the provisions of the Planning and Development Acts (2000-2006), the planning authority has a duty to compile a Record of Protected Structures, including every structure which, in its opinion, is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest within its functional area. This obligation imposes a responsibility on the planning authority to review the structures in its area and to form an opinion whether or not they are of such special interest so as to warrant inclusion in the Record. The compilation and maintenance of the Record is central to the effective protection of the architectural heritage.

**Policy BH.4: Protected Structures**

It is the policy of the Council to protect structures included on the Record of Protected Structures, or proposed Protected Structures, and to encourage their appropriate use/re-use and restoration. The Council will resist:

a) Demolition of Protected Structures, in whole or in part;

b) Removal or modification of features of special importance; and

c) Development that would adversely affect the setting of the Protected Structure.

4.4.2 The inclusion of structures in the Record of Protected Structures denotes their special interest and inherent value to the community. The entire building (interior and exterior) and curtilage of a Protected Structure is protected under The Planning and Development Acts (2000-2006). Owners/occupiers may request a Declaration from the planning authority which will identify works that can or can not be carried out in the absence of planning permission, as exempted development regulations are not applicable to Protected Structures where proposed works materially affect the character of such structures.

4.4.3 The planning authority will offer such expert advice on conservation as is available to them. It also administers the Conservation Grants Scheme run by the DoEHLG. Those seeking to alter a Protected Structure are advised to discuss their proposal with the planning authority before any alteration is made.
4.5 Archaeology

4.5.1 The Council has full regard to the ‘Record of Monuments and Places’ issued by the National Monuments and Historic Properties Service (1997) and the ‘Urban Archaeological Survey for County Tipperary South Riding’ issued by the Office of Public Works (1993) and, in particular, to the Zone of Archaeological Potential for Clonmel as identified in these documents (as shown in Appendix 1, Map 1.3).

Policy BH.5: Archaeology

The town’s archaeological assets will be protected through the development management process (in-situ where practicable or as a minimum, preservation by record) comprising all monuments included in the Record of Monuments and Places. The Council will also seek to protect, where practicable, the setting of and access to sites.

4.5.2 When considering applications for planning permission for development on or in the vicinity of archaeological sites or monuments, the Council will seek the advice of DoEHLG, The Heritage Council and An Taisce. The Council may also request that archaeological field evaluation take place as part of the application or before development proposals are implemented, particularly in or adjacent to the Zone of Archaeological Potential, where there is evidence that archaeological remains are present.