

Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

Custom House

Dublin

DO1W6X0

23 Oct. 17

Re: Draft National Planning Framework (Consultation)

Dear Sir

I wish to commend the Department on the production of the Draft Framework and believe that its arguments and conclusions are well founded. The consultative procedures adopted for the making of the Framework were rational and transparent. In particular, the documentation is clear, well designed and presented. I hope that the Government will adopt the Framework as published and that local authorities will speedily adopt its provisions and incorporate them into their plans.

From the publication of the 'Issues and Choices' paper in February the vision of the future Framework could be discerned—in particular the desire to improve town centres by utilising brownfield and infill sites while ensuring that greenfield expansion respected best environmental practice.

To test these concerns, I decided to make my own study as to how such policies might play out in my home town of Tullamore, which is a typical example of the forty one Irish towns in excess of 10,000 persons. Over the summer I prepared 'IMPROVE THE CENTRE- EXPAND TO THE SOUTH- Suggestions for a New Plan for Tullamore', a copy of which I attach and which I have circulated to local organisations and interested individuals.

The Draft Framework as published, suggests that of the anticipated national population expansion of 1m. persons by 2040, a quarter will be accommodated in the forty one towns referred to above. Accordingly c. 5,000 will arrive in Tullamore, which on the basis of the actual growth of the town to date, seems reasonable. The Framework requires that 30% of the anticipated housing growth be accommodated in the built up area which means that between 600 and 700 dwellings, depending on occupancy rates, will be directed to appropriate sites.

As may be seen, Tullamore contains five prime sites in excess of 0.5 hectares which comprise almost a quarter of the zoned historic central area. Four of these are vacant and immediately developable, while the fifth is in the ownership of a State body. Their regeneration, particularly for housing, would bring nothing but benefit for the town centre.

The National Spatial Strategy and its misguided Midland Gateway concept decreed massive residential expansion of Tullamore- largely on four peripheral greenfield sites. No projections were made as to the contribution that sites in the central area might make to the housing stock.



Today, little development of the peripheral housing sites has occurred and central area dereliction is widespread. The sole legacy of the NSS in Tullamore will be its justification of the installation of an out of town food store on the bypass- probably the greatest strategic planning mistake in the history of the town. Hopefully the town will be served better by the new Framework and an era of more sensible planning can begin.

While the Framework will require that new housing be prioritised in the historic core, one option (and I concede that there may be many others) for the delivery of the remaining c. 1,500 dwellings might be the creation to the highest environmental and urban design standards, of a new coherent neighbourhood on the zoned but undeveloped lands to the south of the town centre, rather than their dispersal as individual additions to peripheral estates. These extensive southern lands, which are already ear marked for a new neighbourhood in the present Development Plan, are proximate to the railway station which provides a regular 55 minute service to Dublin- a time that will probably decrease as Galway expands. The lands are well placed therefore to cater for Dublin overspill.

As the delivery of such more sustainable options is now made more realistic by the publication of the Framework, I welcome its vision and look forward to its provisions being incorporated into the future plans for Tullamore and to their enforcement by the Planning Regulator.

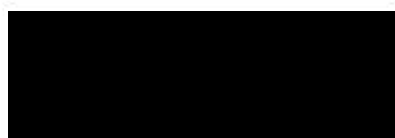
The Tullamore Town Development Plan 2010-2016 (now extended to 2020) is no longer a useful document for guiding the future of the town and its replacement or revision at the earliest possible date is essential. This might come about through compliance with the provisions of the Vacant Sites Act 2015, but a new and comprehensive examination of the town, its problems and renewal potentials, particularly the value of its architectural heritage, should commence straightaway and I would ask that the Department urge the local authority to do so

In conclusion, I hope that my detailed study demonstrates that the National Planning Framework will be beneficial for the future of the towns in excess of 10,000 population such as Tullamore.

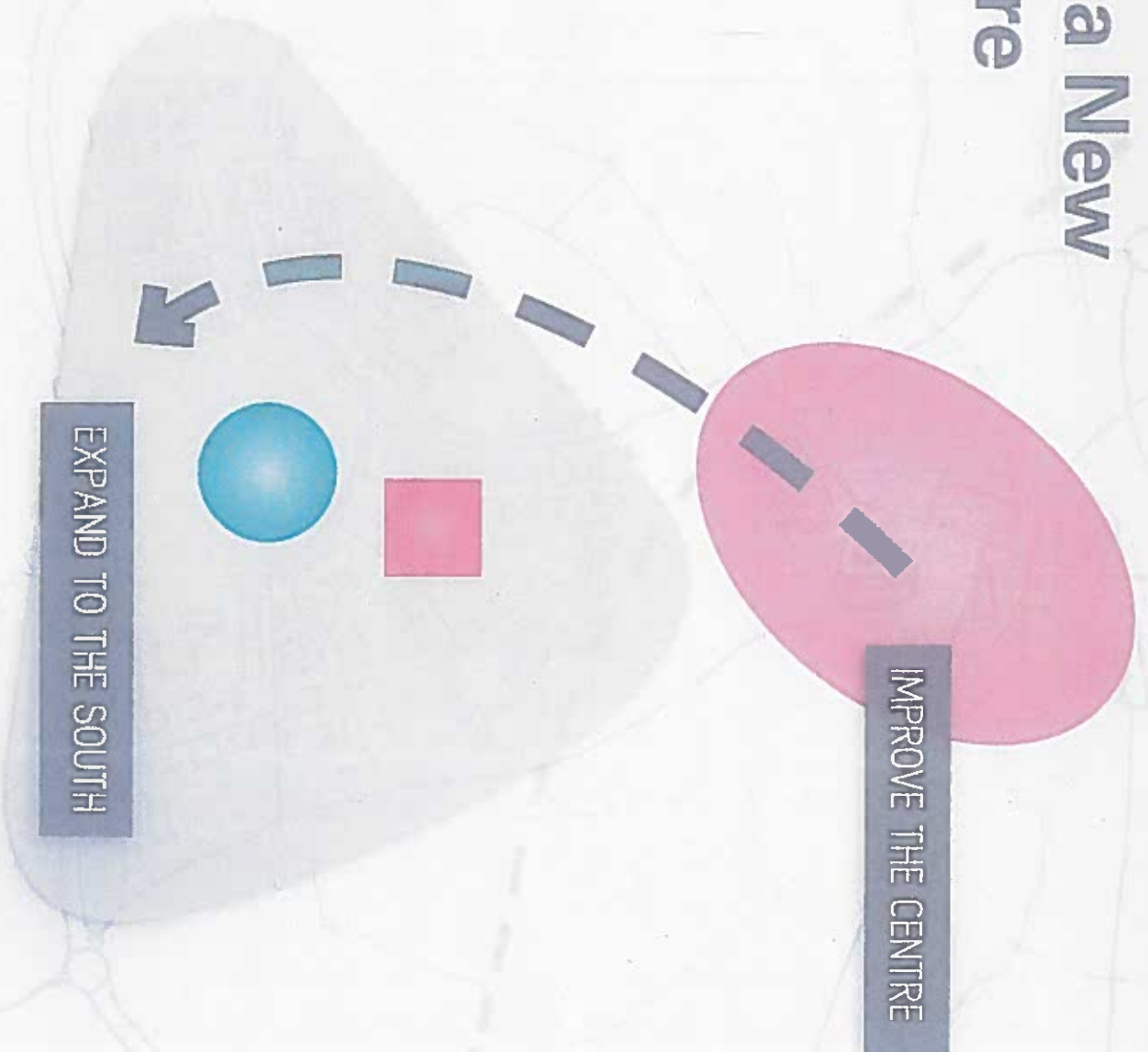
Yours Sincerely



Fergal MacCabe



Suggestions for a New Plan for Tullamore



'IMPROVE THE CENTRE- EXPAND TO THE SOUTH'

Suggestions for a New Plan for Tullamore
Fergal MacCabe

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This paper outlines ideas and projects which might influence or be incorporated into the Tullamore Municipal Area Development Plan 2020-2026.

It has been prepared by Fergal MacCabe, a Tullamore born architect, town planner and artist.

PART ONE

'plan' (n.) 'a scheme for accomplishing a purpose'

Introduction

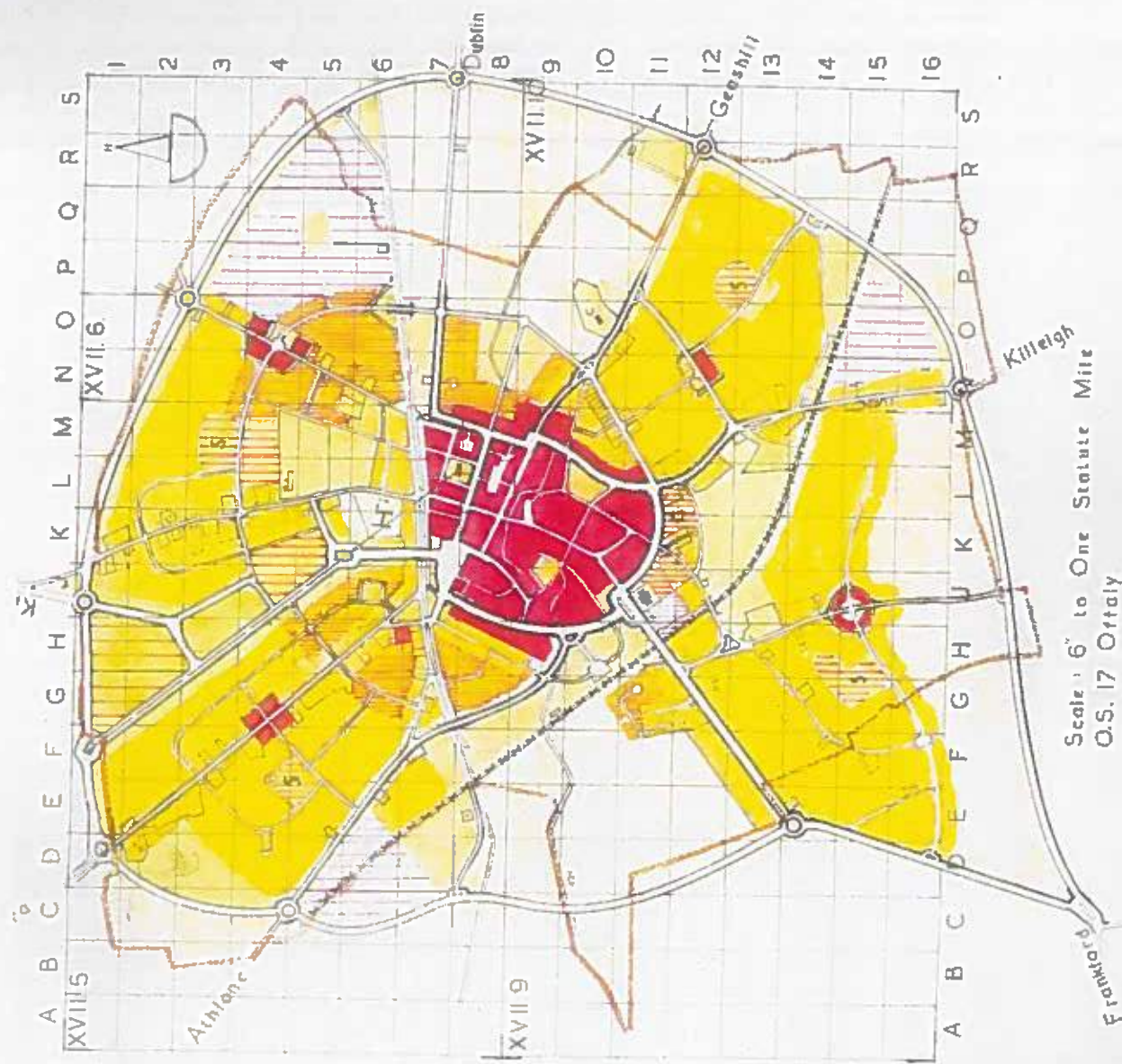
'All of us in our work-a-day lives are planners in one degree or another, for we cannot live without anticipation and a belief in tomorrow'

- Frank Gibney 1943

Ever since the architect and town planner and designer of the Bord na Mona villages, Frank Gibney (1905-1978), made the first development plan for Tullamore Urban District in 1950, the growth of the town has been guided by seven successive plans which have seen its population rise from about 6,000 to 14,600 persons today. The town has generally evolved along the lines envisaged by the plans, most of whose proposals are now in place, save for those relating to improvements in the public realm, which have yet to arrive.

The most recent plan was made in 2010 and unsurprisingly the implementation of most of its objectives fell foul of the economic crash. The Urban District Council was disestablished in 2014 and subsumed into the larger Tullamore Municipal District, which became the new planning unit.

To reflect this administrative change, the date for adopting a new plan for the new Municipal District was extended to 2020 to coincide with the making of the next Offaly County Plan.



Frank Gibney AMTP Town Planning Consultant

29 March 1943

Figure 01: Frank Gibney, Tullamore Town Plan

Why a New Plan is Needed?

A New Plan

By 2020 at the latest therefore, Offaly County Council must adopt a new Development Plan for the Tullamore Municipal District, including the town itself.

The new plan will determine how the town and its immediate hinterland will develop up to 2026 at least. It will try to estimate how much shopping, housing, employment and social facilities should be built and where each use will go. It will decide what kind of development will be fostered and what will be prohibited or discouraged. It will identify where scarce public and private investment will reap the most benefit for the community and while encouraging those who wish to develop their properties, will also protect and enhance public and private amenities.

As it looks as if the economy is returning to 4% plus growth rates once again, the policies and objectives of the next plan, unlike those of its predecessor, will most likely be achieved and change the face of the town for better or for worse. Sometime in 2018 therefore, the staff of Offaly Co. Co. will begin the process of making the plan by seeking the views of the public as to what the plan should be about. These opinions will feed into their deliberations and hopefully inform their first draft. It is then the role of the Councillors to adopt (or reject) the proposals of their professional staff and to finally formally ratify the plan.

It is important that the general public- either personally or through their social organisations- take ownership of the plan making process. Certainly, other interested parties will attempt to influence it- particularly those in the commercial world.

This is the opportunity for the people of the town to take its future into their hands and to use the next three years discussing and resolving the kind of place that they and their children wish to live in.

I would like to contribute to the debate by setting out my own vision of how the town might evolve and look forward to discussing the different views that will inevitably emerge.

'This is the opportunity for the people of the town to take its future into their hands and to use the next three years discussing and resolving the kind of place that they and their children wish to live in.'

An Amended Plan

It is possible however, that an amendment to the 2010 Plan will be needed sooner rather than later.

To respond to the growing housing crisis, the Government passed the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015. The primary purpose of the legislation is to ensure that zoned and serviced lands which are capable of development for residential purposes in a reasonable time scale, are not held back or hoarded but brought forward as quickly as possible for the provision of housing. As the development potential of such lands has come about by the provision of public services, particularly drainage and water supply, and their uncontested zoning implies a readiness to develop, this is not unreasonable.

To commence the process, the Chief Executive Officer of Offaly Co. Co. must present to the elected members a report as to which lands in excess of 0.05 Hectares are considered appropriate by virtue of the need for housing in the general area and their state and location. This will be preceded by a notice to the owners of lands zoned for residential or town centre uses and in excess of 0.05 Ha. Informing them of the intention of placing their lands on the Vacant Site Register and seeking a response.

On receipt of the responses, the CEO will prepare a report for the members of the Council who will then select the appropriate sites and make their development an explicit objective of their Development Plan. This will require either a variation of the 2010-2016 Plan or the making of a Local Area

Plan which will identify such lands as 'Residential' or 'Regeneration' land.

These lands will then be entered on the 'Register of Vacant Sites'. In June of next year notices will be sent to the owners requesting them to commence their development, failing which in January 2019, a levy of 3% of their value will be applied each year until their development is complete.

90% of the collected levy will be devoted to the provision of housing and 10% on civic improvements or projects such as the protection of significant structures, local cultural or educational initiatives or the upgrading of shopping streets.

This exercise will inevitably result in a debate on the robustness of the 2010-2016 Plan as some targeted landowners may seek to avoid the payment of the levy.

It is my belief that if the Council were to identify appropriate vacant sites in the centre of Tullamore for regeneration, then the preparation of a Local Area Plan rather than a simple variation of the 2010 plan would be the better answer as it would provide a more reliable context for their development.

'It was anticipated that by 2016 alone a further 5,000 persons would already have arrived, requiring 2,000 new houses at least.'

The 2010-2016 Plan

The present plan for Tullamore was made in 2010 and is a creature of the National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020 which envisaged the town combining with Athlone and Mullingar to create a new and dynamic 'Midlands Hub'.

In order to comply with the vision of the Strategy, the Plan zoned sufficient land to accommodate a total population of 24,500 persons by 2022. It was anticipated that by 2016 alone a further 5,000 persons would already have arrived, requiring 2,000 new houses at least.

These new houses would largely be built in four greenfield districts, three on the northern side of the town and one - the largest - on the southern side. Each new district would have its own local centre and primary school and three would have post primary schools. Building would commence in all four districts simultaneously, starting from the areas closest to the town centre and working outwards. The schools would be provided by the Department of Education as needs arose.

Little residential development was anticipated or planned for in the town centre where, though nine 'Opportunity Sites' were identified, no suggestions were made as to how each would be developed. While the Planning Acts require the inclusion of objectives for the development and renewal of Obsolete Areas in Development Plans, none were designated either, though several sites around the town clearly fell into this category.

The delivery of a Public Realm Strategy was intended, but it fell foul of the economic downturn. Sites for seven Landmark/Gateway/Tall Buildings were identified, but no rationale given for their selection and some appeared quite inappropriate. No specific amenity works such as street planting were proposed.

The future shopping needs of the town were informed by a separate Retail Study which had been commissioned in 2007 to estimate how much would be needed to serve the anticipated population explosion. It concluded that Tesco at Cloncollig had mopped up the need for any more food shopping well into the future. There would however be a need for 7,800 sq. m. of comparison (non food) shopping up to 2015 and a total of 23,000 net sq. m. by 2020. No specific recommendations as to the precise location of future shopping were made other than that it should be as close to the centre as possible.

Extensive new employment and industrial areas were designated on the south and east of the town adjoining the, about to open, by-pass.

While the Plan abounded with worthy policies and strategies and commitments to 'facilitate', 'encourage' or 'support' private development, unlike previous plans, it was vague as to what specific works, other than the pedestrian bridges over the canal (whose funding came partly from the Regional Authority) and the Street Enhancement Scheme, would be undertaken by the Council from its own resources. The general approach was that the private sector

would do all the developing and would be guided and constrained by the myriad (but often conflicting) aspirations of the Plan.



Figure 02: Tullamore Development Plan 2010

The Outcome of the 2010-2016 Plan

The process of making the 2010-2016 plan had begun in 2007/2008 and in hindsight you could not have picked a worse time.

The Irish economy was still firing on all cylinders. The property market was booming. The general expectation was that it would ascend to even greater heights and it seemed as if everyone was borrowing to get in on it. The expectations were for ever greater growth and expansion. The ambitious projections on which it was based, particularly retail, seemed almost believable.

Then - just as the plan was ratified- the crash occurred and any development whose funding was not already committed, was abandoned. Nationally, unemployment soared and emigration re-commenced.

When the Census of 2016 was published it showed that the population of Tullamore Urban had risen by only 98 persons and Tullamore Rural by 186- a total of 284 persons and a far cry from the expected 5,000. This suggests that there is presently a significant oversupply of lands zoned for residential purposes.

The outcome of the forthcoming National Framework Plan will be a central factor in deciding how much residential zoning will be required in the future. The grandiose projections of the Retail Strategy of a need for a further almost 25,000 sq. m. gross of new shopping space were also in tatters.

Instead of the anticipated expansion, many shops and pubs had closed while the only substantial retail proposal in the town centre (the Tesco/Texas Tom site) was put on hold. Retrenchment rather than expansion was the reality and the conversion of a long established public house in Harbour St. to five well appointed dwellings was a more accurate reflection of the health of the commercial property market.

The whole basis of the National Spatial Strategy (which had never seriously been supported by Government anyway) had been exposed as pie in the sky and it was quietly shelved. Nevertheless, even though it was now a largely irrelevant document, being firmly based on a whole set of now abandoned projections, the life of the Tullamore Town Plan was extended out to 2020 to coincide with the next review of the County Offaly Development Plan. As a consequence, Tullamore could be without a realistic Development Plan for a further three critical years.

This, I believe is an argument for the making of a new Development Plan as soon as the new National Framework Plan has been ratified or at least the making of a Local Area Plan for the town centre- but certainly not muddling along with an outdated and increasingly irrelevant Plan.

'Many shops and pubs had closed while the only substantial retail proposal in the town centre (the Tesco/Texas Tom site) was put on hold.'

Tullamore Today

The footprint of the built up area of Tullamore is almost exactly as it was in 2010, but the significant changes that occurred in the growth of the town, particularly in the boom years between 2000 and 2010 are evident.

Up to 2000 new development had expanded out along the main roads in the form of ribbon development but after that the lands between began to be developed. The bypass to the eastern side of the town arrived in 2009 and a substantial commercial centre including major food shopping and extensive free car parking, established at its junction with the Portarlington Road at Cloncollog. New employment areas had arrived on the north west and south east.

However, this infilling and development was mainly confined to the northern and eastern sides of the town- principally between the Kilbegan and Rahan roads. This northerly expansion was already jumping Collins Lane and extending beyond two kilometers from the town centre.

To the south, other than linear expansion along the Portarlington Road, the railway line operated as an effective barrier. Any development would require the improvement of Spollenstown bridge at least and no concrete proposals to achieve this were part of the Development Plan.

The only, but certainly the most significant, change during the plan period, was the establishment of the DEW Distillery to the south of the town, with access from the new bypass.

Built up area of Tullamore 2017



Figure 03: Tullamore 2017

National Planning Framework

The Government is now in the process of preparing a new National Framework plan to guide future development out to 2040. As I write, I see that at their recent Cabinet meeting in Celbridge, the possibility that Ireland could be a united political entity by 2040 and the creation of a new city in the Midlands as a counterbalance to Dublin, was discussed.

I recollect that Frank Gibney in his 'Irish National Plan' made precisely similar proposals seventy four years ago.

The quip of Voltaire that 'intellectuals are frequently right about the outcome of events, though generally wrong about their timing' comes to mind.

Maybe this time it will happen, but our previous efforts at national physical planning (the Buchanan Report, the National Spatial Strategy) have not had the same success as our economic planning.

Unlike an economic plan, it is easier to identify the short term winners and losers in a physical plan and inevitably local politics will compromise a solution that may be in the longer term national interest but which will resonate poorly at the next outing to the ballot box.

We will have to await the unveiling of the new Framework Plan in the Autumn to see what future is envisaged for Tullamore. Will the Midlands 'Hub' of Athlone, Mullingar, Tullamore be resurrected? Will

the town be viewed as a commuter suburb on the periphery of Dublin? Will it revert to its previous role as the County town, serving just its own local catchment? And of course, which town will be a loser and which a winner? Many believe that the concentration of investment in any other town-particularly Athlone-will necessarily be to the detriment of Tullamore.

My own view is that Buchanan was right back in the 1960s and that the correct approach for the distribution of growth on a small island with a relatively tiny population, is the expansion of the existing cities of Cork, Galway and Limerick/Shannon, as a counterbalance to Dublin and the creation of high capacity links between them and the capital rather than artificially boosting intermediate locations.

Investment capital is still a scarce resource and should only be directed to projects whose success will benefit all, rather than succumbing to the often louder voices of political necessity. The one lesson we should have learnt from the last boom-bust cycle is that the 'One for everyone in the audience' approach leads to failure and waste.

For that reason, I remain to be convinced that pouring resources into the creation of a new city in the Midlands is justified in national terms. Athlone may very well expand organically but I see little reason as to why its growth should be artificially stimulated and the same goes for Tullamore.

But I might change my tune, if in November, to everyone's surprise, Government designates Tullamore as its new Midland capital! All will soon be revealed.



"Unlike an economic plan, it is easier to identify the short term winners and losers in a physical plan and inevitably local politics will compromise a solution that may be in the longer term national interest but which will resonate poorly at the next outing to the ballot box."

2020-2026 Plan

Before commencing to make a new plan it is worthwhile re examining what Tullamore has got going for it and what is holding it back. We will all have our own views but in no particular order, these are I believe the strengths and weaknesses of the town today:

Opportunities/Strengths

- Tullamore Dew- International Brand attracting tourists to the Midlands Whiskey Trail
- County Hospital- Medical Centre of Excellence
- Legal and administrative Centre
- Top class schools
- Good hotel base- location in the centre of the island
- Good Employment base with available zoned and serviced land
- Location of Government offices
- Good transport links-proximity to national motorway network, rail commuter link under an hour to Dublin
- Relatively intact historic core
- Significant central area redevelopment potential
- Excellent recreational facilities
- Good broadband coverage
- Street Enhancement Scheme announced
- New Community Arts Centre announced
- Well located and accessible central area parking
- Large open land bank to the south
- Proximity to the wonderful amenity of Charleville Forest
- Potential for Grand Canal tourism

Threats and Weaknesses

- Poor state of the historical core (inappropriate uses, visual blight, through traffic, poor presentation of historic buildings, inaccessible amenities, little street planting)
- Poor traffic circulation in the central area
- Bottlenecks in the road infrastructure (Spollenstown, Bury Bridge, Tanyard)
- The barrier of the railway line
- Lack of useful pedestrian areas and links
- Lack of integration of the Tullamore River with the town
- Significant numbers of unused or vacant commercial premises
- Falling central area population
- Lack of integration of suburban housing with the centre or with secondary schools
- Further expansion/consolidation of suburban shopping at Cloncollog could lead to further car dependency and threat to revitalisation of town centre
- Expansion of northern suburbs beyond walking distance of central facilities
- A superfluity of residentially zoned land under the 2010-2016 Plan

Suggested Parameters of a New Plan

The forthcoming National Framework Plan will probably determine the future pace of growth in Tullamore, but not necessarily its quantum or location.

During the life of the next Tullamore plan, it is inevitable that the population of the island of Ireland will rise, but at this moment at least, it is well nigh impossible to determine to what extent the town will capture a proportion of that increase as there are too many variables, such as the future growth rate of the economy and consequent immigration or emigration- the impact of Brexit- and particularly the policies of the forthcoming National Framework Plan. The correct response in my opinion is to have a basically sensible broad brush plan incorporating limited but clear cut smaller scale objectives and to implement it in the light of changing circumstances- by variations if necessary. It was this approach which brought DEW back to Tullamore.

Despite its overly ambitious projections and unrealistic time scale, the 2010-2016 Plan was basically sound in terms of its overall land use and road network strategy. The concept of four new neighbourhoods is still valid, though their phasing certainly requires reconsideration. The location and extent of the employment/industrial zones are well considered, particularly the designation of a large zone to the south proximate to the bypass. The concept and line of the longer term western bypass makes sense.

The Plan provides a coherent vision of the ultimate

growth of the town out to the limits of the bypasses- whenever that may happen. It is therefore a good springboard from which to launch the 2020-2026 Plan. However, the 2010-2016 Plan was deficient I believe, in three important respects:

It lacked a comprehensive plan for the improvement and regeneration of the town centre.

While there were several objectives relating to the centre, they were stand alone and did not fit into any overall vision. The planning and delivery of key renewal sites was left entirely in the hands of intending developers, without any guidance from the local authority.

- It anticipated that development could occur simultaneously in each of the four residential neighbourhoods.

By dispersing growth over four separate locations (as well as into other development areas outside of them) it was unlikely that essential ancillary social infrastructure, particularly primary schools (let alone secondary) would arrive until long after the children had grown up. Also, without the formulation of structured financial contribution schemes for each area, the timely delivery of social and physical infrastructure was problematical.

- Though there was a well thought out future road network, there was no plan for a town wide cycling network

Cycling will increasingly become an important transport mode and is strongly supported by national transport policy. The identification and delivery of a local cycle network is an integral part of every modern Development Plan and is overdue in Tullamore.

The new Plan should address these considerations by:

- Preparing a detailed plan for the town centre, incorporating suggestions for the development of key regeneration sites as well as a broad brush public realm strategy
- Prioritising and pre planning the development of one neighbourhood alone and taking actions to ensure the timely delivery of schools and shops alongside housing.
- Linking the suburbs and centre with a segregated cycle network.

In Part Two I will make some suggestions for the kind of actions that might be pursued in a new plan to achieve these objectives.

PART TWO

The new 2020-2026 Plan should result in the improvement of the town centre on foot of agreed plans and standards and ensure that future expansion occurs in an orderly fashion.

Town Centre Improvement

Improvement in the town centre can come about through:

- Appropriate renewal of key sites
- Setting clear cut design standards for new development
- Carrying out worthwhile public realm projects
- Improving movement and car parking

I have on 'SUGGESTED PUBLICATIONS IN CENTRAL TULLAMORE' given an example of schemes that might achieve these objectives.

'Since the building of the 'Bridge Centre' in 1995 and New Main Street in 2004, there has been little substantial redevelopment in the built up area.'

Urban Renewal

National sustainability strategy as well as tax and housing policies favour the use of 'brownfield' (serviced but redundant) lands or infill, before development is directed to 'greenfield' (unserviced agricultural) lands. However, since the building of the 'Bridge Centre' in 1995 and New Main Street in 2004, there has been little substantial redevelopment in the built up area.

Unlike many other Irish provincial towns, Tullamore has a relatively large number of potential redevelopment sites, four of which alone amount to something between a quarter to a third of the land in the central area. Were one to seek out sites which by virtue of their scale, location underutilisation and lack of multiple ownerships lend themselves readily to comprehensive redevelopment, two very central properties stand out. Three other sites are very well located and offer redevelopment opportunities also. Presumably some of these will appear on the Vacant Sites Register of Tullamore Municipal District when it is compiled.

The two Primary Sites are (A) the former Tesco/Texas Tom site combined with the adjoining land in the Council's ownership and and (B) The Grand Canal Harbour in the ownership of Waterways Ireland.

The three secondary sites are (C) the lands surrounding a potential road link between the Tanyard and High Street, (D) O'Neills Place and the former Roberts Garage, and (E) the unused Council Yard off Cormac Street combined with the adjoining private lands to the south east and accessed from Spollenstown.

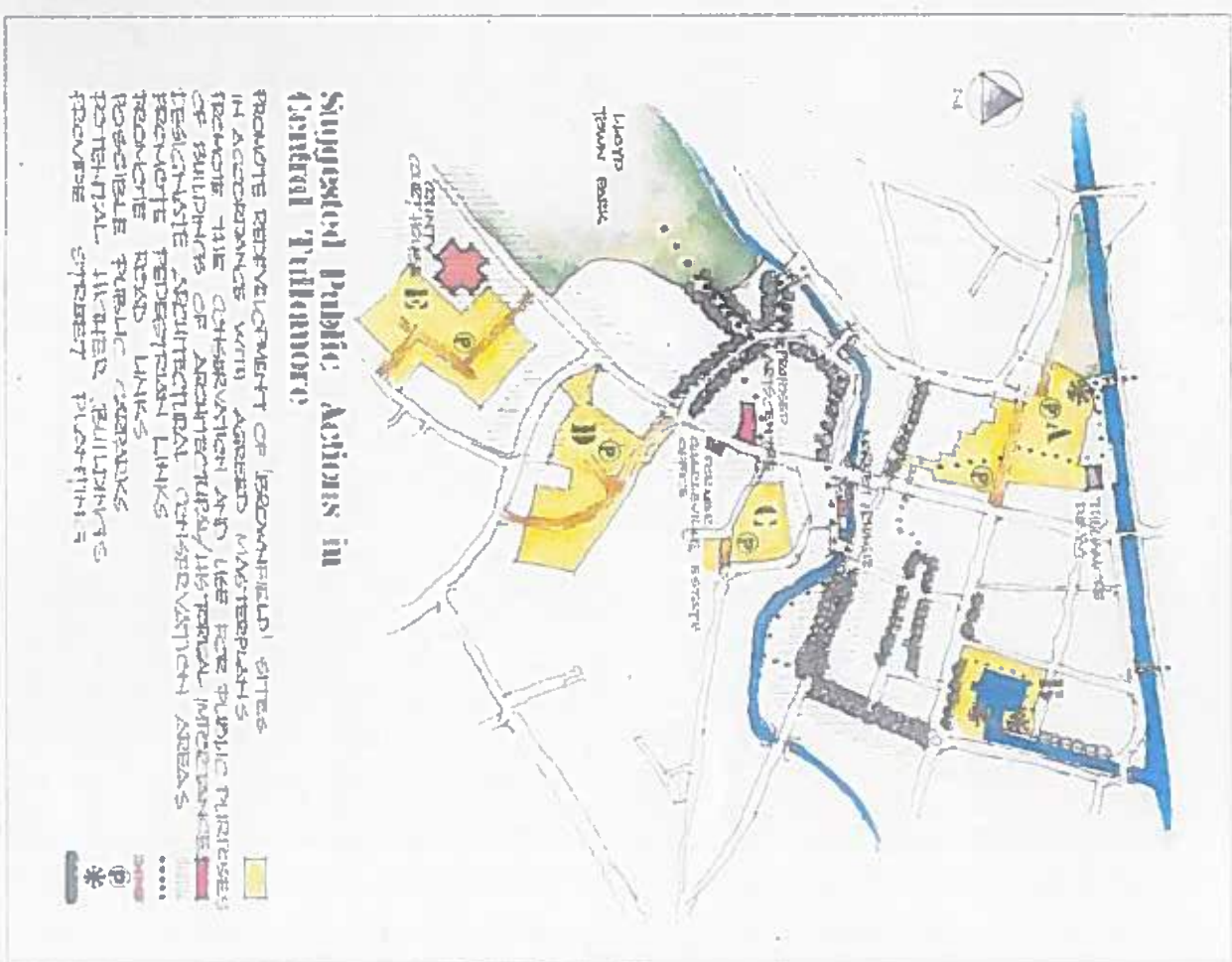


Figure 04: Suggested Public Actions in Central Tullamore

Let us look at each in detail to assess its redevelopment potential:

(A) Tesco/Texas Tom

In 2008, at the peak of the property boom, a development company called Inverine plc sought planning permission to build 28,000 sq. metres of shopping, comprising three main anchor stores and thirty seven individual units on this site. The adjoining public car park off Kilbride Street in the ownership of the Council, was included also, bringing the total redevelopment area to 2.6 hectares. A new underground car park of 704 spaces was proposed.

It was the initial opinion of both the County Architect and Senior Planner of Offaly County Council that the proposed centre was very poorly designed, but it was felt that amended plans could overcome most of the deficiencies and Tullamore Town Council decided to grant permission, attaching conditions that made some attempt at amelioration.

The proposal was referred to An Bord Pleanála, whose Inspector tore into its design and layout. For anyone interested in an outsiders view of the architectural character of Tullamore, PL 83.232394 makes useful reading.

The Inspector observed that the proposal:

'does not constitute sensitive redevelopment'

'will not be assimilated into the fabric of town to any reasonable degree'

'bears no relationship to the existing streetscape at Columille St. or to the overall townscape in terms of scale or urban grain. I cannot discern any attempt of the designer to interpret the strong and relatively intact characteristics of Tullamore town centre in any way, modern or otherwise.'

He recommended that the Bord refuse permission because its:

'scale, massing in a single large block and excessive site coverage would be unduly visually obtrusive and out of character with the streetscape and townscape of Tullamore town centre and would materially impact on the DEW Heritage Centre and on the visual amenity of the Grand Canal'

The Bord however were still smarting from their strategic error some years previously in overriding their Inspectors advice and permitting (contrary to national retail policy but supported by the absurd and soon to be discredited National Spatial Strategy) a major food outlet in a suburban location on the bypass, which had damaged shopping in the historic town centre.

To now reject a redevelopment proposal (however poorly designed) would not look well and so, in an essentially political decision, they once again disregarded the advice of their Inspector and in October 2009 granted permission to Inverine plc. subject to conditions which would hopefully reduce the impact on the protected structure, increase permeability and enhance the public realm.

As planning permissions have a life of five years, the grant would have lapsed in 2014 had not Offaly County Council decided to pump another five years life into it. Nevertheless, unless development begins and is substantially advanced by October 2019, the permission will finally expire. So far, no intention to commence has been announced.

Because of dramatic changes in retail patterns and demand since 2008, it seems very unlikely that the development will ever be built in exactly the same form as originally permitted. Nevertheless, because of its unified ownership and planning history, the site is the most attractive in central Tullamore and therefore commercial interest will inevitably prompt a new or modified proposal. When that time arrives, the local authority, rather than any developer, should be in the driving seat with a clear view of what is the best form of development in the interests of Tullamore. As a significant part of the 2.6 Ha. site is in their ownership, Offaly Co. Co. are firmly in control of the outcome.

The site could accommodate a whole range of uses, retail, apartments, hotels, entertainment and only a dialogue with a serious applicant will resolve the correct mix. However, a plan should be prepared well in advance, with the advice of a skilled urban designer, setting out the basic structure and design parameters of any future scheme, its height, access, public areas, relationship to the Canal and to the DEW/Visitor Centre etc. and public approval obtained for this before a new developer with his own preconceived and possibly inappropriate ideas, rolls up.

Offaly County Council should be proactive rather than reactive on this key site. Indeed, the existence

of a clear and approved framework plan would be welcomed by most investors as it will bring clarity, certainty and confidence to their ambitions.

'When that time arrives, the local authority, rather than any developer, should be in the driving seat with a clear view of what is the best form of development in the interests of Tullamore.'



Figure 05: Tesco/Texas Tom Site

'SUGGESTED LAYOUT OF THE NORTHWEST SECTOR OF TULLAMORE'

To stimulate a debate, I have prepared a rough sketch of one development option. Regardless of what is proposed, I believe that certain basic principles relating to the role of this important site in central Tullamore, should prevail:

- There should be a direct pedestrian connection between the DEW Visitor Centre and Patrick St, so that tourists are drawn into the town centre. This might be combined with the further widening and landscaping of the footpath on Patrick St, to improve the trade of the restaurants there.
- Harbour St. should be extended into the site (the grant of permission to Inverine was is dependant on this) to provide vehicular access and then linked through to Kilbride St. so as to create a traffic circulation route around the centre and service new underground or multi storey car parking.
- The pedestrian link might incorporate a new south facing public space
- New retail would provide at least one anchor food store (to forestall pressure for another in a less central location) and be sufficiently flexible to accommodate a range of comparison shops of various sizes. The use of the unit on the canal frontage, beside the Visitor Centre, should be subject to the approval of DEW as the principal tourist attraction of the town.
- Insofar as possible, residential accommodation should be provided above the retail units in the

form of apartments or as single dwellings with deck access.

- Should demand for a hotel emerge, a location overlooking the canal and Kilbride Park would be appropriate- particularly if a higher building were proposed.

My proposal requires the removal by agreement of the single storey industrial structure adjoining the Visitor Centre which accommodates the Offaly Historical and Archaeological Society and the Offaly Travellers Movement and its replacement with a new building which would relate better to the protected status of the old Bonded Warehouse.

Any redevelopment would be contingent on both organisations relocating to better premises. Reflecting their valuable contribution to Offaly heritage, OHAS should be accommodated in a more architecturally prominent building in the town centre- ideally a renovated former Charleville Estate Office, were that ever to become available.

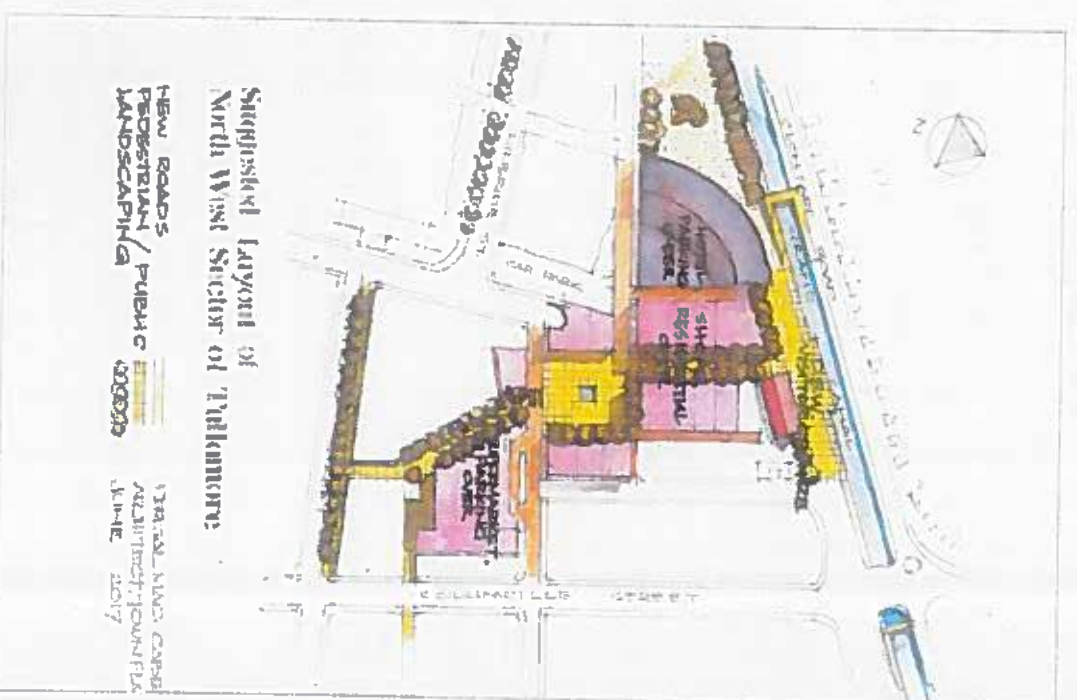


Figure 06: Suggested Layout of North West Sector of Tullamore

(B) Grand Canal Harbour

All over the world, the first choice sites for urban renewal and revitalisation are former docks and harbours. Waterside amenity creates high residential values and is attractive to both investors and residents. In Dublin, Grand Canal Dock and Blessington Basin are two of the most sought after addresses in the city. The problem however with many harbours or docks is that they are often remote from the town centre or located in run down industrial areas with few local facilities such as shops, restaurants and pubs.

Tullamore Harbour on the other hand is unique in Ireland at least, in being located right in the centre of town, proximate to pubs and restaurants, dominated by the local church and with many attractive facilities within walking distance. It has extraordinary potential for redevelopment as a first class residential environment.

Unfortunately, not only is the harbour presently inaccessible, but as a working industrial estate it presents a cluttered and down at heel appearance. An ordinary industrial use of this kind would long since have been removed from such a prominent town centre location.

For many years now the Council have sought to develop the Harbour for more appropriate purposes, particularly residential. My 'SUGGESTED LAYOUT OF NORTH EAST SECTOR OF TULLAMORE' (illus.) was incorporated into the 2004 Development Plan as a guide to how that might happen.



Figure 07: Grand Canal Harbour Site

Thirteen years later, agreement with the occupiers, Waterways Ireland as to their moving out to a more appropriate site would not appear to have progressed any further. The next Development Plan should move this up the table of priorities- possibly by finding and/or purchasing an alternative site on the Canal and engaging with the company to move to it. So long as there is both canal and road access and the site is secure, there are no locational requirements that cannot be replicated elsewhere.

It is well past the time when this key site which represents one of the most important and historical amenities in the town should be incorporated into its fabric and not sealed off as it is. Any costs in purchasing and developing an alternative site would be more than adequately reimbursed from the value of the released harbour lands and their residential potential. The potential of the car park of the Church of the Assumption for residential purposes might also be explored in any overall plan.

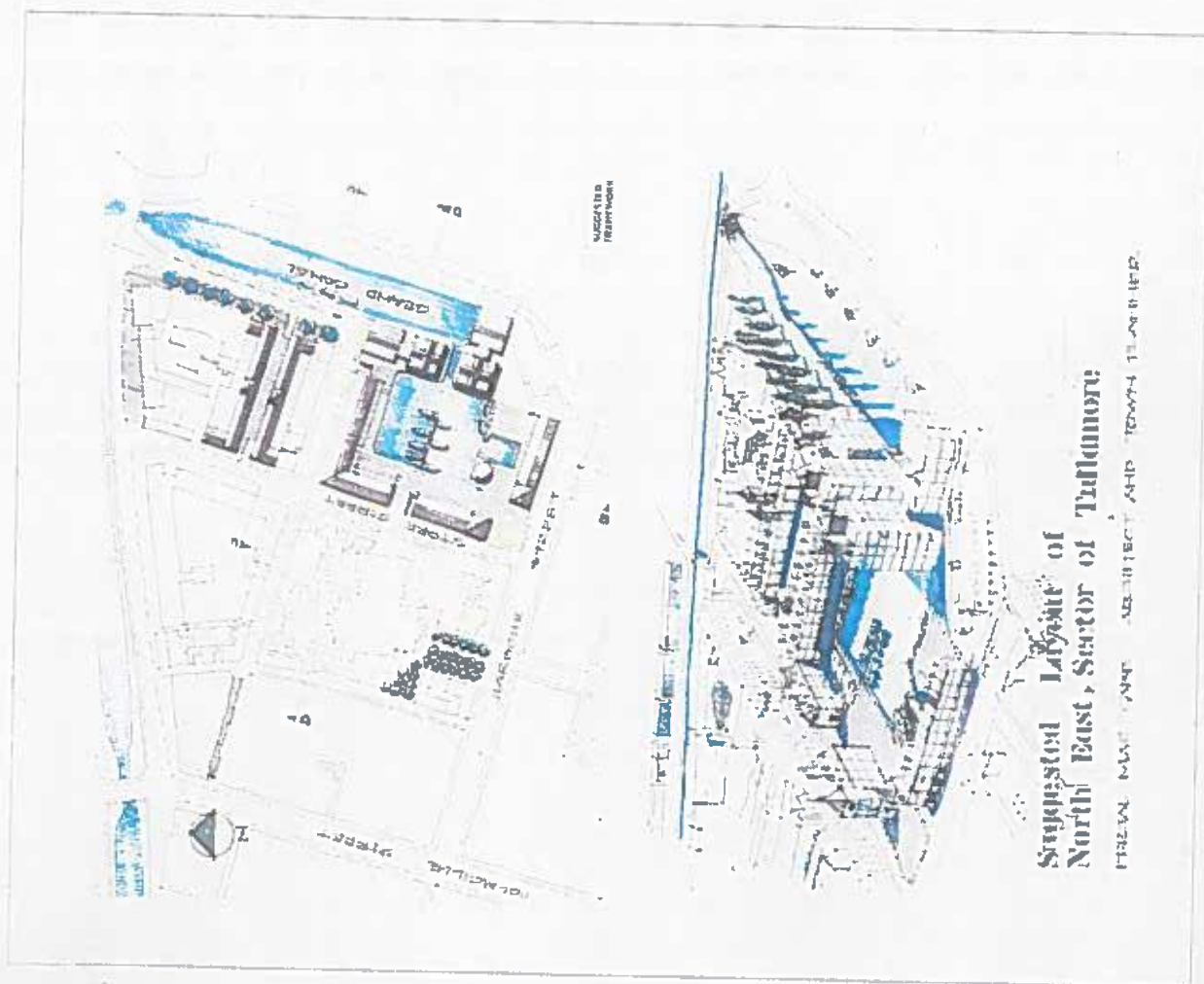


Figure 08: Suggested Layout of North East Sector of Tullamore

(C) Tanyard/High Street

The suggestion has been made that the making of a road connection between the Tanyard and High Street via 'Roselawn' would have the merit of opening up the backlands of the redundant commercial premises for more intensive uses. This has much merit and would have the added benefit of the provision of public car parking which would assist in the replacement of the car parking spaces displaced by the complete pedestrianisation of O'Connor Square.



Figure 09: Tanyard/High Street Site

(D) O'Neill's Place/Roberts/Hurst's

This site incorporates the Council's car park and the directly adjoining lands of the former Roberts Garage (0.52 Ha.) for which permission (P/ 83.213566) was granted by An Bord Pleanála in 2006 for a very extensive office and residential development. Once again, as in the case of the Tesco/Texas Tom site and the food store at Cloncollog, the Bord overruled their Inspector who had recommended a refusal for reasons of adverse impact on the vernacular heritage of the town and traffic hazard. That permission expired in 2011.

To service the combined sites, a new access road could be provided from High Street via O'Neill Place and consideration might be given to extending it to connect to O'Moore Street thereby releasing lands in the Hurst's Garage complex for more intensive development.

The present quantum of car parking should be retained and increased. The entrance onto High Street could be visually improved-possibly by a new infill building with an arch under to provide access. The single storey structures on the High Street/Carmac Street junction could be replaced by higher, more appropriate buildings.



Figure 10. O'Neill's Place/Roberts/Hurst

(E) Council Yard Cormac Street/ Spollenstown

The combination of the unused Council yard and adjoining commercial and residential properties would deliver a very extensive site. Access could be provided from existing points on Cormac Street and Spollenstown. A combination of office/technology/ administrative/residential uses would seem the most appropriate. Public car parking would be an element also.

Subject to the recognition of the architectural importance of the Court House, higher structures would be capable of being assimilated within such a complex.

'But all need some kind of coherent vision prepared by the planning authority, prior to proposals arriving from private developers.'



Figure 11: Council Yard Cormac Street/ Spollenstown Site

New Plans

The future layout of the these key sites for comprehensive redevelopment could be presented as non-statutory Urban Framework Plans or Master Plans or even as part of a statutory Local Area Plan for the town centre - but all need some kind of coherent vision prepared by the planning authority, prior to proposals arriving from private developers.

Development Standards

The New Plan or Local Area Plan should set out broad standards governing the design and protection of existing and future important buildings in the town. Issues which might be explored would include:

Building Height

Most buildings in central Tullamore are either two or three storey- the sole exceptions being the graceful spire of the Church of the Assumption, which dominates the town and the five storey former D.E. Williams grain store built in the 1930s ('Texas Tom'). The former is an iconic building which defines the town and is a protected structure- the latter makes little architectural contribution and is not listed for protection.

Higher buildings (should they be commercially necessary because of their developmental needs ie. hotels or higher density residential) might be located so as to contribute to the civic improvement of the town and so as not to overlook existing residential properties or conflict with the dominance of the Church spire or other protected structures. Certainly, the most

appropriate locations for increased height would be beside parks or water bodies which can absorb their impact and enhance their attractiveness.

Two suggested locations therefore would be the sites overlooking the Grand Canal and Kilbride Park and at the entrance to the Grand Canal Harbour, framing the view of the Church spire.

Architectural Heritage

Protection should be accorded to buildings or areas which contribute to the history or attractiveness of the town. Whilst many of the architecturally important buildings of Tullamore enjoy protected status, the civic character of the historic core of the town requires protection also. This has been recognised in the present Development Plan which proposes awarding Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) status to key historic areas to ensure the protection of their intrinsic character. However, as of yet no specific proposals have emerged.

The largest concentration of extant historic buildings is in the O'Moore Street, Cormac Street and High Street area and also around O'Connor Square and this ensemble deserves designation and protection. Church St. and O'Carroll St, which still maintain their original character, should be included also. The views expressed by the inspectors of An Bord Pleanála in the case of the two aforementioned planning appeals, show that outsiders recognise that the centre of Tullamore has a quality of vernacular architecture

worthy of protection and a study to identify its extent and character is overdue.

Public Projects

The Plan should clarify the actions which the local authority will take to support the improvement of social facilities and the protection and improvement of natural and man made amenities. These might include:

Arts and Community

The fostering of artistic and community benefits is a legitimate objective of a Development Plan and previous plans have supported such efforts. The great number of sporting, social and artistic associations in Tullamore will be able to bring forward their own proposals, but I suggest that the Plan should as a first priority, concentrate on the planned delivery of the conversion of the former Kilroys premises in High Street as a Community Arts Centre and its integration with the surrounding backland.

'Outsiders recognise that the centre of Tullamore has a quality of vernacular architecture worthy of protection and a study to identify its extent and character is overdue.'

Other projects which might be considered would include:

- The acquisition by agreement of the former Charleville Estate office. This magnificent 18C Building (possibly designed by Richard Cassels, the architect of Leinster House) is by virtue of its design, history and prominence, one of the most important buildings in the town. Though not in public ownership, in poor condition and architecturally compromised, its restoration to its original state and use for appropriate public purposes should be a primary objective of the Plan
- In years past, the upper floor of the Market House in O'Connor Square (in which John Wesley once preached and the most architecturally important building in the town) was used for exhibitions and lectures and the possibility of restoring that use by agreement with the present owners might be an objective of the new Plan. The planned pedestrianisation of the northern side of the Square will create a new and important public space and increase the attractiveness and potential of buildings on that side.

Amenity

The principal natural or recreational amenities of the town centre are:

- The Lloyd Town Park
- The Grand Canal, its banks and Harbour
- The Tullamore River

The Park is the glory of the town, but its two access points are some distance from the central area, though no more than 30 metres actually separates it from the Bridge Centre car park. The possibility of creating a third access point, leading directly from the town centre might be explored. This could be combined with a direct cycling route to the centre from the railway station.

The banks of the Grand Canal are already being exploited for their amenity benefit in terms of walking, fishing and cycling. Their pedestrianisation at the DEW Visitor Centre and the provision of a deck over the canal, has proved popular. The potential amenity of the Harbour in the very centre of the town for a similar form of development is obvious. A well designed redevelopment would bring it to national attention and be a powerful marketing tool for the attraction of potential investors in, and visitors to, the town.

Nowhere are the banks of the Tullamore River accessible to walkers. Yet, particularly along the northern bank behind the houses on Church St., it presents a delightful wooded character with pleasant views up and down its length. The possibility of opening up a route along the bank, between the bridge at the back of the Library and O'Carroll Street, which would provide a pleasant riverside walk, might be explored.

Street Planting

Thanks to its rebuilding after the fire in 1785 and the

redevelopment to accommodate the arrival of the Grand Canal, Tullamore has several fine, broad and regular streets whose architectural character would be enhanced by the addition of street trees, most notably along both sides of Church St. and O'Carroll St. While these streets are used for kerbside parking, some of this might be decanted elsewhere so that the balance is biased more towards the improvement of the amenity character of these historic streets.

The northern side of Patrick Street contains several restaurants and a pub. On its western end the pavement has been widened and some planting provided. The success of this initiative suggests that it might be extended further eastwards to provide sunny spill out space for pavement dining along its full length.

The substantial planting of the Market Square car park would also assist in the greening of the town centre.

The proposal by the Council as part of its Street Enhancement Scheme to provide a pedestrian bridge over the river and connecting Millennium Walk with the Bridge Centre car park might also form part of a structured scheme to complement the already existing planting.

Movement and Parking

The plan should clarify what steps will be taken during its lifetime to improve all means of circulation - from car borne to walking and the provision of future car parking.

Traffic Circulation

A primary objective of the plan might be the creation of a road system which allows cars to circle around the central area and to access peripheral car parks from which customers can walk to shops. This was the basis of Frank Gibney's proposal of 1950 which regrettably was not continued in its entirety into later plans.

In addition, new public roads should be provided so as to open up presently inaccessible backlands while expanding the existing road system. New Main Street, which provided new retail, commerce and car parking and a link between Kilbride Street and the R 443 is a good example of a local authority initiative in this regard. Though part is in private ownership, the link between Distillery Lane and O'Neill's Place, which serves the Bridge Centre car park, is another example of new roads opening up redevelopment opportunities and increasing permeability.

A very useful new public road would be the extension of Harbour Street westwards to create a link between Colmcille Street and Kilbride Street. This was part of Gibney's Plan and repeated in successive plans up to 2010 but dropped from the 2010-2016 Plan- even though the redevelopment of the Tesco/Texas Tom site depended on it. This would be useful for the distribution of traffic in the northwest sector of the town and might be reinstated as an objective.

A Tanyard Lane/High Street link would be of use also in moving through traffic out of O'Connor Square and providing redevelopment opportunities. A High Street/

O'Moore Street road link has merit also for much the same reason.

A road link between Cormac Street and Spollenstown would serve to open up an extensive area of land for redevelopment.

All of these would be designed to public road standards and eventually taken in charge by the local authority as part of the town's road network.

Cycling

Government policy as expressed in the 'Smarter Travel' initiative, seeks to promote cycling to the point where by 2020, it will constitute at least 10% of all local journeys. In particular the policy wishes to foster cycling to school, as this mode of travel declined by 83% between 1986 and 2006.

Financial incentives are available for the provision of cycleways and towns such as Westport and Dungarvan have availed of these to provide schemes attractive to locals and tourists alike. Being no more than four kilometers across and relatively flat, Tullamore is ideal for the encouragement of cycling as a means of getting to school, work and recreation.

An ideal route would be one which linked the residential areas with secondary schools and playing facilities, while traversing the town centre. If designed as a continuous, safe and segregated route, this could also become a recreational facility in itself.

One suggested approach (illus. opposite) would be the creation of two loops, to the north and to the south and circling the town centre. These would serve all the major recreational facilities (O'Connor Park, The Harriers) as well as the secondary schools and the railway station. It would also connect the major employment locations of the Regional Hospital, business parks etc.



Figure 12. Suggested Cycleways

Part of the route would be along existing roads- part designed into the new areas. On the north, it could run along the Clara and Kibeggan roads with a link across Collins Lane. On the south it would link Clonminch and Charleville roads via a new dedicated route. A link from the new bridge at Bury Quay could connect to the railway station via Main Street, the proposed bridge at Millennium Plaza and the Lloyd Town park.

The network could also connect to a Dublin- Shannon Grand Canal cycleway.

Pedestrian Links

The function of pedestrian routes is to create short cuts through the urban area. While cars have to go around a block, the pedestrian can go through the centre of it. Routes must be direct, busy, well used and at night, well lit; otherwise they will be perceived as dangerous. Ideally they should have uses along them that offer supervision, such as houses, shops or parks.

Commonly they are used to bring pedestrians from their parked cars directly into the town centre; a good example being the route between the Market Square car park and Colmcille Street.

A long standing objective of previous Development Plans for Tullamore has been the making of a connection between O'Connor Square and the Market Square car park via the old bridge across the Tullamore River. The Tullamore Street Enhancement Scheme proposes the

provision of a pedestrian bridge across the river to link Millennium Square and the Bridge Centre car park. There would appear to be much merit in designing these two projects as an entity. This would provide a well designed route past the Bridge House Hotel along the line of the old Distillery Lane and via the pedestrianised northern side of O'Connor Square.

The possibility of extending this route south westwards into the Lloyd Town Park might be explored as might the possibility of the reopening of Meath Lane in conjunction with the redevelopment of the former Kirov's premises as a Community Arts Centre.

As I have outlined above, a key pedestrian route would be the linkage between the DEW Visitor Centre and Patrick Street. As this would serve as the first introduction to Tullamore for many tourists it should be designed and built to the highest standards.

Parking

Extending Harbour Street to link with Kilbride Street would create a continuous route serving public car parks at O'Neill's Place, Bridge Centre, Main Street, the future Tesco/Texas Torn site and Market Square.

As land values increase, alternative development options for surface carparking may emerge. This should be welcomed as a more sustainable land use and any new substantial parking facilities provided in either underground or multi-storey form.

'Being no more than four kilometers across and relatively flat, Tullamore is ideal for the encouragement of cycling as a means of getting to school, work and recreation.'

WHERE?

As in previous years, it is inevitable that the town will grow incrementally through the development of infill sites or by urban renewal. However, if the National Framework Plan suggests that Tullamore should be targeted for expansion beyond ordinary growth levels, the quantum and location of new greenfield housing will require further consideration.

I believe that expansion lands should be sought in the light of the following criteria

- Their location within the bypass or Collins Lane
- Their location between one and two kilometers of Hayes's Cross
- The avoidance of sites within the floodplain of the Tullamore River or the environmentally sensitive land in or proximate to, Charleville Forest
- Their potential for large scale comprehensive development

The map entitled 'BUILT UP AREA OF TULLAMORE-2017' indicates that while there are a number of individual sites on the northern side of the town which would satisfy these criteria, by far the largest area of free land lies to the south and southeast. In particular, the lands between the Clonmink and Charleville Roads appear suited to the creation of a properly planned new self contained neighbourhood by virtue of:

- Their open character, with no physical or topographical impediments
- Their proximity to the town centre, railway station, County Offices and the amenities of Charleville and Ballard Forests
- Their proximity to the large area of employment zoned lands to the east of the DEW Distillery.

It is interesting to note that as far back as 1950, these lands were designated in Gibney's Town Plan as a new neighbourhood centering around a local park.



Figure 13 Built up area of Tullamore

HOW?

As the map entitled 'SUGGESTED SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD' suggests, this area should be planned as a stand alone neighbourhood, with its own local centre, primary school (possibly secondary school, if the lands between the Clonminch and Gaeshill roads are to be included) and in particular a central and extensive local park which would cater for active and passive recreation.

Main road access would come principally from Spollensstown across a new higher capacity railway bridge. This could continue through the neighbourhood to the Charleville Road. Secondary access would come via the Clonminch Road and link with the main road at a neighbourhood centre containing shops, primary school and any other essential public uses.

These main roads would contain cycleways linking to secondary schools and employment.

The provision of pedestrian routes linking to existing housing areas should be considered, as should a pedestrian link over the railway line via 'Corbets Grove' and the Cemetery, in order to give access to schools and shops.

While the lines of the main roads and cycling network would be predetermined, lesser estate roads would be a matter for individual developers.

Outline design specifications for the buildings of the local centre and the scale and location of other key buildings might be suggested-otherwise the individual layouts would be a matter for each developer also. The advice of a skilled urban designer should be sought

to ensure the delivery of a high quality and attractive residential environment.

These design parameters would form part of a statutory Local Area Plan to be adopted by the Council after a period of public consultation. The Plan would be accompanied by a financial contribution scheme which would quantify the costs of the necessary drainage and roads and amenity infrastructure (particularly the improvement of the bottle neck railway bridge at Spollensstown) and apportion them to individual developments.



Figure 14: Suggested Southern Neighbourhood of Tullamore

WHEN?

The overall objective however, should be the creation of one well designed neighbourhood and the timely arrival of its ancillary facilities, rather than dispersing housing around the town into several other greenfield locations with inadequate schools and shops. Volume house builders should be incentivised to build here rather than in other locations by a guarantee of faster decisions due to more intensive pre-planning, as well as a more favourable contributions regime and the earlier delivery of local amenities by the Council itself, particularly the local park.

The availability of houses in a well designed scheme proximate to a quick rail link to Dublin should prove attractive to a wider market.

Were the forthcoming National Framework Plan to envisage a more dynamic role for Tullamore which would require an accelerated rate of employment creation and housing provision, the possibility of designating the entire of the housing and employment zoned lands between the Clonminch and Charleville roads as a Strategic Development Zone might be considered. This would put a brake on their early, development, but in the medium term make them more attractive to new industries and house builders because of the speed and certainty which the ratification of the SDZ would bring.

'The creation of one well designed neighbourhood and the timely arrival of its ancillary facilities'

WHAT SHOULD OFFALY CO COUNCIL DO?

The primary duty of the 'planners' is to involve the 'planned'.

As early as possible, the Council's officials should set out the issues and specific projects which they believe will feed into the making of a new plan. How much housing will be required and how much will be delivered by the Council itself? What social facilities - schools, health centres, waste disposal, recreation, etc will be necessary? What roads, car parks, bridges, pedestrian and cycle routes and water supply or drainage infrastructure will have to be built?

In particular, some financial estimate of the costs to the public purse of these works should be set out and potential sources of funding ('Rebuilding Ireland', 'Town and Village Renewal Scheme', Property Taxes, Financial Contribution Schemes, 'Smarter Travel' etc.) identified. These fiscal programmes should be included for public discussion.

Once some broad consensus has emerged and after consultation with the elected members, the officials might publish a series of options both physical and financial, for the achievement of their programme. The outcome of this debate would be a draft plan which will then be ratified by the Councillors to create a final plan.

Its day to day implementation will then depend on the professional skill and flexibility of the Council's planners and officials, who in their delivery of Main Street and the DEW Distillery have demonstrated their abilities.

The process of designating sites for inclusion in the Register of Vacant Sites and consequential amendments to the 2010-2016 Development Plan, may require the commencement of this process at a date earlier than anticipated.

WHAT SHOULD THE PUBLIC DO?

Get Involved - If you are a property owner, you will hope that a new plan will protect or benefit you. If you have an interest in the heritage of the town you will probably seek actions and investment for its improvement and conservation. If you are a parent you will hope for better housing, educational facilities and convenient shopping. If you are an employer you will seek encouragement to trade and expand. If you are a builder you will seek reliable development opportunities. If you are a trader in the town centre you will hope that it will improve and become more attractive to shoppers.

Once the Plan is adopted the Council is obliged to pursue its implementation. If later on, it proceeds to carry out works required by the Plan such as building a road, widening a bridge or removing car parking to create a public space, the ability to argue against them in principle is much weakened. The public consultation process is the appropriate opportunity for opposition or support to be debated and resolved.

WHAT SHOULD THE NEW PLAN ACHIEVE?

It should deliver clarity, certainty and confidence. It should encourage and stimulate.

Above all it should inspire the citizens of the town by outlining an enticing civic vision and describing the small, incremental steps that will be taken to secure its final accomplishment, though that may be well into the future.

WHAT SHOULD THE NEW PLAN AVOID?

Disillusionment and obfuscation.

The plan should under promise but overdeliver. Unlike the multitudinous, but unfulfilled targets of the 2010 plan, a new plan should take a more modest and realistic approach and confine its details to the projects which are genuinely achievable.

The document itself should be short and clear. It should be possible for the ordinary person with little understanding of the statutory planning system to pick up the new plan and understand exactly what is going to happen in the next six years as well as what might be achievable in the longer term. This should be demonstrated by simple text, diagrams and illustrations.

The necessary legal or technical aspects of the document (the survey material, references to other legislation or statutory bodies, guidelines, tables, development standards etc.), whilst interesting and important in themselves, should be separated out and confined to an Appendix, where they will be available to the likes of sad town planning consultants and eagle eyed lawyers who thrive on finding errors and inconsistencies in public documents but are otherwise unmoved by their good intentions.

'The public consultation process is the appropriate opportunity for opposition or support to be debated and resolved.'

'Publish a series of options both physical and financial, for the achievement of their programme'

Conclusion

Some years ago, I gave a talk to the Offaly Historical and Archaeological Society on the operation of the statutory planning process as it had been applied in Tullamore through the making of seven development plans.

Going through back issues of the Tullamore Tribune to Frank Gibney's first plan of 1950, I was struck by how, despite political differences, the Town Councillors (under the guidance of their great chairman, Joe Kearney) generally came together to make a plan in the best interest of the town as a whole and how that approach had continued in the making of successive plans over the years.

These days the involvement of local councillors with the planning system evokes a certain public cynicism - largely due to the corrupt practices of some Dublin County Councillors in promoting unjustified rezonings in the 1990s and which led to the Flood/Mahon Tribunal. I believe that was a situation unique to that time and place and should not be used to judge the performance of the remainder of Irish elected members.

In contrast, over my thirty five years working as a town planning consultant all around Ireland, I developed a great respect for local Councillors and the skills which they bring to the making of their development plans. Unlike professional planners, they have an unerring instinct for what is actually achievable and what will

simply not work. Sometimes they can be a bit timid or open to special pleading but not infrequently they will take (and have taken) brave and farsighted decisions.

When they come to make their 2020-2026 Plan, I have little doubt that the members of the new Tullamore Municipal Council will act in the same spirit as their Tullamore Urban District Council predecessors did. I wish them and the planners and officials of the County Council, every success in making a new plan for the town and urge the public to engage with and support them in their work.

I believe that the motto of their new plan should be:

'IMPROVE THE CENTRE- EXPAND TO THE SOUTH'

Fergal MacCabe

Fergal MacCabe
October 2017

