

Chapter 4 Main Street Strategy

4.1 Introduction

The viability and vitality of any town centre is a barometer of the overall health and well being of the entire town. Traditionally, town centres consisted of a wide range of uses that included residential, retail, services, social and cultural activities. However with the emergence of the motor car as the preferred mode of personal transportation, most new developments in the town has occurred primarily on out of centre sites. As a consequence there has been a significant decline in many of the traditional town centre uses which is having a direct impact on the economy of the town centre and on the quality of the built environment as vacancy rates increase and property prices fall, resulting in many buildings falling into disrepair. Arklow is not immune to these changing circumstances with the result that there are many areas within the town centre that are in need of renewal and redevelopment.

4.2 Strategy

A strategy for the reinvigoration of the Main Street is now vital to counteract the trade draw that has occurred with the construction of the Bridgewater. The retail and commercial function of the Main Street requires to be reinforced by appropriate strategies and objectives.

The factors that make a town centre economically viable and attractive to visitors are numerous and often hard to predict and influence, but for the purpose of this land use plan, the strategy for the Main Street will comprise the following elements:

- addressing vehicular and pedestrian traffic circulation;
- addressing car parking;
- enhancing the 'public realm';
- addressing dereliction and vacant sites;
- protecting the buildings, features and places of heritage value;
- ensuring high quality of urban design and form;
- encouraging a varied mix of uses in the core area;
- reinvigorating the retail role of the core through application of an appropriate retail strategy.

4.3 Vehicular and pedestrian circulation

While Arklow's Main Street is the principle distributor of north-south traffic in the town centre, (and is required to retain this function in the absence of an alternative river crossing), a town centre dominated by moving traffic and the noise and hazards associated with same, taken in conjunction with the relatively narrow footpaths necessitated by the wide road carriageway is not highly attractive to pedestrians and shoppers. There is only one pedestrian crossing on the Main Street, which has the effect of bisecting the core area into two halves. In order to address this problem, it is the strategy of this plan to identify appropriate circulation routes for both vehicles and pedestrians that allow both modes access to the Main Street in an efficient and safe manner.

Map 5.1 indicates the circulation routes. The 'red' route is the Main Street itself, where the priority is vehicular traffic. However, the 'blue' routes, being the Main Street footpaths, side lanes and secondary streets, offer alternative routes, particularly for pedestrians around the town. These 'blue' routes connect users to car parks and amenity area and are suitable routes for moving pedestrians around the core area.

Vehicular & pedestrian Objectives

- VP1** To maintain the Main Street as the principle vehicular route through the town centre, and to exploit any opportunities that arise to improve safety for both vehicles and pedestrians.
- VP2** To promote the pedestrian use of all 'blue' routes and avail of any opportunities to improve footpaths and pedestrian routes.
- VP3** To facilitate the improvement of existing and the development of new linkages from the Main Street to car parks and amenity areas; in particular to require redevelopment proposals that have frontage on both Main Street and any 'blue' route to include new pedestrian routes through the site.

4.3.1 Car Parking

Edge and out of centre shopping centres are attractive to users due to ease of accessibility and an abundance of usually free car parking. However, there is considerable paid parking available on and around the Main Street, at reasonable rates. These car parks are well located and convenient to the Main Street and its side roads.

Car Parking Objectives

- CP1** To maintain existing and provide new car parking options as funding allows, in proximity to the Main Street and along 'blue' routes.
- CP2** To avail of opportunities to remove public car parking on the Main Street and at amenity areas, subject to due consideration of the commercial needs of Main Street, including loading parking.
- CP3** To require new development on the Main Street to incorporate pedestrian links where feasible to existing or new public car parks.
- CP4** Deviations from the minimum car parking requirement set out in Chapter 5 Section 5.9.9 of this plan shall be considered in the Main Street Strategy area as shown on Map 5.1 where a public car park is within 200m walking distance to the site. In such cases, only the needs of long-term users (e.g. employees and residents of the development) will have to be addressed by the developer.

4.3.2 Enhancing the 'Public Realm'

The 'Public Realm' can be best described as the form and use of outdoor areas and spaces that are accessible to the public. This includes many familiar types of place, such as streets, squares, parks, car parks and beaches, as well as the physical and visual connections between them, and with buildings. Quality public realm can provide the venue for multiple activities, including commerce, recreation, education and of course, fun and enjoyment for residents and visitors alike.

The elements in and around Arklow's Main Street that contribute mostly to the quality of the public realm are:

- the streetscape;
- landmark buildings and appearance of principle junctions / gateways;
- building frontages, in particular materials, colours and shop fronts;
- the relationship of the Main Street to the river;
- urban open spaces and parks, and the juxtaposition of structures to spaces;
- footpaths, lighting, seating and other street 'furniture'.

Public Realm Objectives

- PR1** To protect and enhance the streetscape of Arklow Main Street through the appropriate control of alterations to existing buildings and the development of new structures; in particular building lines and heights which diverge from the established form will require to be justified.
- PR2** To strive to improve the appearance of junctions and gateway areas into the Main Street, particularly the Main Street – Bridge Street junction.
- PR3** To appropriately control the design and appearance on building frontages, particularly shopfronts; 'dead' frontages, i.e. those with no goods on display to the street or those where views of the interior are completely blocked by non-transparent materials etc will not be considered.
- PR4** New or extended / refurbished units shall, at all times that the unit is not in active use, provide an attractive temporary display or professionally designed artwork affixed to the glass frontage. The temporary use of the space during such times for creative, cultural or community purposes will be encouraged; however, such change of use may require planning permission, and advice will be provided by the Council on a case by case basis in this regard.
- PR5** To support opportunities to create better linkages between the Main Street and the river, in particular access routes and views between the two.
- PR6** To maintain the existing bandstand and support other possibilities for the development of new urban spaces.
- PR7** To improve footpaths, lighting, seating and other street 'furniture' as funding allows, and require private development providing such features to meet the highest standards of design and siting.

4.3.3 Dereliction and vacant sites

While the Main Street is substantially intact with no gap sites, a number of properties are vacant and are suitable for appropriate redevelopment. As important is the potential of side streets to be redeveloped, to draw users around the 'blue' routes. Key locations include the River Walk and Castle Park. A significant number of backland areas are currently used for car parking associated with the main buildings fronting onto Main Street. In this regard, it is important that flexibility be applied with regard to car parking provision for any proposed new developments at such locations. In particular, given the proximity of such sites to public car parks, car-parking requirement should be limited to the needs of the residential elements of any development with commercial needs being met by the public car parking area.

Derelict and Vacant Objectives

DV1 To facilitate substantial redevelopment of under-utilised or vacant properties on the Main Street.

DV2 To facilitate appropriate infill development of vacant backland and private car parking areas along 'blue' routes.

4.3.4 Buildings, items and places of heritage value

Arklow Main Street is the location of a number of structures / features listed for preservation. These play an important part in adding to the overall attractiveness of the Main Street and contribute to the traditional town centre appeal of the street.

Objectives

BH1 To positively consider proposals to improve, alter, extend or change the use of protected structures so as to render them viable for modern use, subject to suitable design, materials and construction methods.

BH2 To strongly resist the demolition of protected structures, unless it can be demonstrated that exceptional circumstances exist.

4.3.5 Mix of uses in the core area

In order for the Main Street to remain vibrant, it will be necessary to ensure an appropriate mix of uses. In particular, ground floors will be encouraged in all locations to incorporate commercial uses, particularly uses with active frontage such as shops and restaurants / cafés. Furthermore, in order to ensure activity at night, specific encouragement will be given to residential use of upper floors.

Objectives

CA1 To support and facilitate activities and developments that will improve the vitality and vibrancy of the Main Street area.

CA2 Redevelopment proposals in the town centre shall generally be required to provide commercial use at ground floor / street level.

CA3 All non-residential floors will be required to be designed to be suitable to a range of users.

CA4 To control and restrict where necessary uses at ground / street level to ensure that the town centre is not blighted by an excessive number of single outlet types / formats e.g. bookmakers, off-licences (including off-licences in convenience stores), charity shops, amusement centres and financial institutions.

CA5 Active 1st floor uses will be required in all new developments and particular encouragement will be given to 'living over the shop'. Where such use is proposed, a relaxation in density, car parking and open space standards will be considered, where the development meets very high quality of design and accommodation.

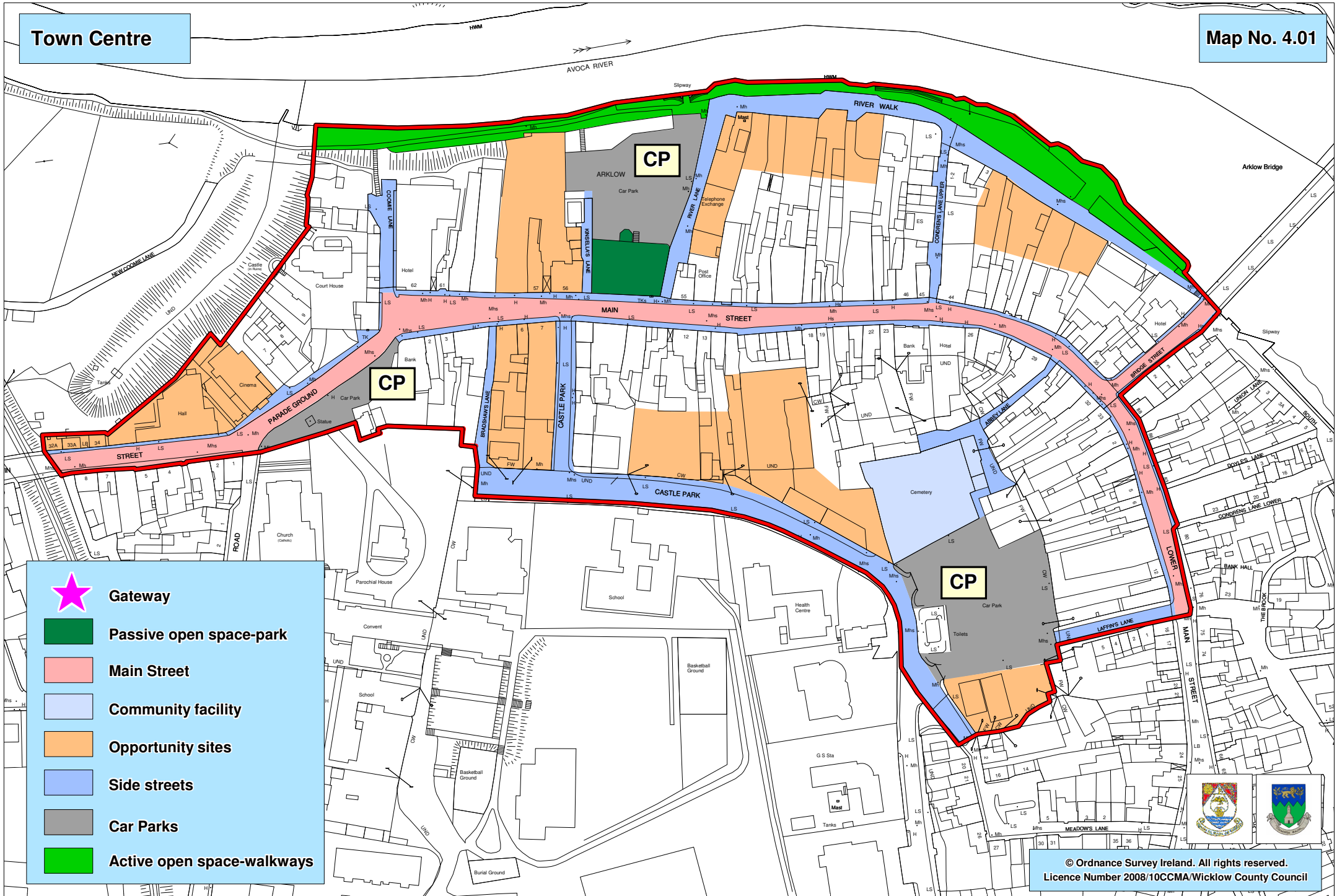
4.3.6 Retail role of the core

The continuation of the retail function of the Main Street is key to its future viability. A main street requires the passing trade of shoppers to maintain both non-retail services such as banks, cafes, hairdressers etc, as well as its role as a meeting place for its citizens. Notwithstanding the recent shift of retail focus to the north quay, the Main Street must be maintained as the principle retail area of the town. In this regard, it is the stated policy of the County Retail Strategy to promote and encourage improvements to retailing and other town centre activities in the core area of Arklow and to generally control further retail development to- :

- conversion of non-retail premises in the core area to retail use,
- renovation and expansion of existing retail premises in the core retail area,
- redevelopment of derelict or brownfield sites in the core, and
- replacement of existing facilities within the town.

Objectives

- RC1** To support the function of the Main Street and associated side streets as the principle retail area in Arklow.
- RC2** To support proposals to merge or assemble buildings / sites in order to develop modern retailing formats, including department stores or malls.
- RC3** To promote and facilitate the conversion of non-retail premises to retail/retail service use and to strongly resist the conversion of existing retail/retail service premises to alternative, less active, uses that would diminish vibrancy and daytime activity in the area.



-  Gateway
-  Passive open space-park
-  Main Street
-  Community facility
-  Opportunity sites
-  Side streets
-  Car Parks
-  Active open space-walkways



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