

# BALLYCLARE TOWN CENTRE

BAESLINE REPORT

APRIL 2010



TRIBAL

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This report is the first substantive output of the commission to prepare a Regeneration Masterplan for Ballyclare Town Centre. It is a background document and sets out the background information collated during the initial phase of the project, based on a review of existing materials and consultations with key stakeholders. It is from this baseline position that development options and proposals will be generated.

## Policy Context

The national planning policy framework for Northern Ireland seeks to identify sites for high quality, mixed use developments in existing urban areas, most notably in town centres (PPS1). This may include elements of residential accommodation (PPS5). This in turn helps deliver the PPS3 policy aims of more sustainable transport choices, greater accessibility and reducing the need to travel.

PPS5 underlines the importance of completing a Town Centre Health Check (see below) and recognises the need to sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of town centres. The policies seek to promote retail development in town centres, although it recognises the role commercial leisure development can play in town centres. PPS5 also recognises the important contribution town centre living can make to vitality and viability.

Much of Ballyclare Town Centre is designated as an Area of Townscape Character. Within such areas, PPS6 ensures that new development respects this context and

that buildings contributing to the character of the area are protected. In addition, PPS8 encourages the provision of adequate open space within town centres as a means to enhancing the quality and amenity of the locality. Strengthened links to the Six-Mile Water Park should therefore be encouraged.

The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) recognises Ballyclare as one of seven small towns near to Belfast with potential to accommodate future growth relating to the Belfast Metropolitan Area (BMA). In particular, it is expected that Ballyclare will begin to take on the wider role of 'Main Town', of similar standing to Antrim, Downpatrick, Larne and Newtownards, in the BMA hinterland. RDS policies of relevance to Ballyclare town centre seek to:

- Develop community cohesion;
- Direct and manage future housing growth, including innovation in the form of housing development;
- Promote a balanced spread of economic development;
- Promote a sustainable approach to the provision of tourism infrastructure and enhanced 'first impression points';
- Develop and enhance the Regional Strategic Transport Network and improve public transport;
- Manage traffic demand and better integrate land use planning and transportation;
- Encourage walking and cycling;
- Conserve the built environment; and
- Facilitate access to a range of recreational and cultural activities.

Historically, the growth of Ballyclare has been restrained as a result of an outdated green belt designation. It is currently recognised in the Newtownabbey Area Plan 2005 as a 'County Town' and in the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015 as a 'Small Town within the Metropolitan Rural Area'. The Town Centre is also specifically designated as one of five large town centres, other than Belfast and Lisburn City Centres, within the BMA.

The BMAP policies of most relevance to Ballyclare Town Centre include:

- SETT 3: Supports and enhances the vitality and viability of town centres;
- HOU 4: Promotes the growth of housing stock in town centres;
- HOU 5: Protects existing housing stock in town centres through three Protected Housing Area designations;
- TRAN 1: Ensures adequate provision for public transport, walking and cycling;
- TRAN 5: Ensures the re-provision of parking spaces where publicly owned surface car parks are redeveloped;
- R 1: Permits retail development within the town centre;
- OF 1: Promotes office developments within designated town centres;
- UE 3: Ensures key features of the Area of Townscape Character are protected and enhanced;
- UE 4: Sets a high standard of quality for new non-residential developments;
- UE 6: Prevents the provision of ground floor parking along street frontages in town centres;

- ENV 3: Restricts development within the designated Local Landscape Policy Area; and
- OS 1: Prevents development on land identified as open space.

Ballyclare is classed as part of the BMA for the purpose of transport funding. The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP) 2015 seeks to improve facilities for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as improving public transport services. The BMTP also makes provision for the construction of the Ballyclare Relief Road.

### **Development Context**

Four planning applications relating to the Ballyclare Relief Road and associated 'West Ballyclare' urban extension have been submitted by private developer KPL Contracts. The scheme will result in the construction of circa 2,000 new homes and a new road link from the A57 Templepatrick Road to the B94 Rashee Road via the B95 Dough Road. This will result in a population increase of approximately 6,000 over a 20-year build period. The new road is expected to reduce traffic congestion in the town centre.

In addition, there are three further development schemes in the pipeline to provide additional residential accommodation near to the town centre. Within the Town Centre, planning applications have been submitted within the past 5 years relating to over 70 further residential units, as well as 7 large (e.g. 5,000 sq ft) retail units and office accommodation. During discussions with key stakeholders, we have also been made aware of pre-planning proposals for the construction of two large retail

units, office accommodation and several apartments on the site of the old BP Service Station fronting onto Main Street.

We also understand that Mr Hall, the owner of Ernest Hall menswear store on The Square, is also considering re-development options for land to the west of The Square that may incorporate new retail units, a cafe, office accommodation and apartments. In the long-term, this scheme may also offer the potential to provide improved connections between the town centre and a new education campus on the site of the Ballyclare Primary School.

Finally, we have been made aware of significant development proposals relating to the development opportunity sites adjacent to Asda and to the rear of Main Street. Much of this land is within the control of Mr David Chick, who has worked for over 5 years on a number of comprehensive schemes for the land. At present, he is working in partnership with Asda to provide new service access arrangements to the existing superstore and the construction of 6 retail units, 1,325 sq m of office accommodation and 24 apartments on the site opposite Woodside's Supervalu. Redevelopment in this location offers significant potential to better connect Asda and the rest of the town centre.

### **Transport and Access**

Pedestrians are catered for by footways on both sides of all approach roads, but are inadequate and narrow in some locations. There is no footway linking the Harrier Way car park into the town centre. Paving quality is variable, but

recent improvements have been carried out in the heart of the town. There is little public space within the town centre, with the area around the town hall being given over to parking. The one-way system around the Square also effectively makes it a traffic roundabout.

The town centre streets are dominated by both parked and moving traffic, both visually and in terms of impact on pedestrian behaviour. Despite a number of good signal controlled pedestrian crossings, they are not located on pedestrian desire lines and can often be inconvenient and uncomfortable.

Ballyclare Town Centre has a high reliance on the private car and a consequent low proportion of shoppers walking, travelling by taxi or using the bus. This high dependency on the car has led to chronic congestion on all the roads approaching the town centre, which is exacerbated by a narrow carriageway width along Main Street, parked cars, the one way system around the town hall and confusing junction layouts in the south of the town centre.

A relief road is proposed to the west of the town in conjunction with the development of 2,430 homes. It is anticipated that this will lead to significant reductions of traffic volumes in the town centre, leading to more free-flowing traffic conditions within the centre.

There are two off-street car parks operated by Roads Service within Ballyclare town centre, as well as a large private car park associated with Asda. The public car

parks appear to be used more in the winter than the summer. There are also a number of on-street parking bays available on Main Street and The Square.

Ballyclare has a bus station located about 500 metres to the south of The Square. There is also an hourly town bus service (356) which serves the bus station, the square and a number of outlying housing areas. The presence of a local service in a town of less than 10,000 people is a positive feature, although passenger demand appears to be too weak to support a more frequent service. There are also a limited number of bus links to Belfast, Antrim, Larne and Ballymena, although there are no services on a Sunday and only Belfast can be reached on a Saturday.

There is currently no cycle provision within Ballyclare, but Roads Service would welcome a unified approach to the provision of cycle facilities in the future.

### **Market Analysis**

The town of Ballyclare benefits from having a good reputation as a desirable commuter town in close proximity to Belfast, Antrim, Larne and Ballymena. Ballyclare is the dominant town within its surrounding hinterland serving smaller locations such as Ballynure, Parkgate, Straid, Doagh, Tildarg, Ballyrobert and Parkgate amongst others. The town centre is busy, reflecting this dominant status.

In terms of location, Ballyclare benefits from excellent road links to other population major centres which can be construed as both an asset (in terms of attracting custom and trade to the town) and a hindrance (in terms of

facilitating leakage to competing retail centres). Resolving the considerable traffic congestion issues and attracting new better quality retailers to the town are key requirements to stemming any leakage and promoting the inflow of trade to the town centre.

The compact Town centre boasts a number of well established independent retailers in addition to a small number of multinationals. Notwithstanding the congestion issues, the accessibility and quantity of public car parking within the town centre is considered to be good at all but peak traffic times.

It is also apparent that the existing stock of town centre retail property is not suitable for modern retailers both in terms of specification and size. The character of, and feel within the town centre is being compromised by aging buildings and too many poor quality retail fascias. There is a lack of both good quality local and multinational retailers and other similar “footfall drivers”.

This is not to overstate the potential for attracting a wide range of multinationals. Due to its close proximity to Belfast, Ballymena, Glengormley and the Abbey Centre, Ballyclare will find it difficult to attract retailers already represented elsewhere within its catchment amidst their fears of “cannibalising” trade. Rather, Ballyclare will need to offer a point of difference, seeking to promote a retail offer different to what can be found in these larger locations. It is suggested that there is scope for Ballyclare to position itself such that it attracts niche / boutique retailers focusing on ladies, gents and kids fashion in addition to homewares and giftware.

There are distinct pockets of affluence within the Ballyclare catchment area and there is little doubt that a sufficient critical mass of good boutique stores could draw customers from Greater Belfast to Ballymena. There is little in Co. Antrim providing this retail offer and this should be construed as a key opportunity for Ballyclare town centre to offer a competitive advantage over rival retail centres.

Over the course of the masterplan timeframe we envisage there being demand to justify an addition to the existing stock of retail floorspace in the town centre. This is likely to be on the scale of a “streetscape” rather than a traditional covered Shopping Centre. It is concluded that the local independent sector would prefer to own the freeholds of their units therefore a new scheme would need to accommodate a mix of tenures. Any addition to the current stock of town centre floorspace should build on the strengths of the independent retail sector in Northern Ireland. These retailers are important attractors to the town centre. Future development should be of a large enough scale to accommodate a number of multinational brands. Multinational retailers like to cluster together.

More generally, shopping has become more of a leisure activity to be combined with other leisure / recreation and evening uses. Shopping has become more about fun and entertaining experiences. Improving the town centre should be retail led, but mixed-use incorporating as many alternative leisure attractors as possible. More restaurants and bars are stressed as potential ways to boost the evening economy and increase the vitality and vibrancy of the town centre. Such uses are conspicuous by their

absence in the town and the proposed additions to the housing stock in the town can only further enhance the viability of these uses going forward.

All of which is set in the context of a town which is set to grow (with planning permission granted for 2,000 new homes) and which already comprises a number of large schools which will be of considerable benefit in attracting new retailers.

With a rejuvenated retail sector in which a number of new multinational retailers are attracted to the town along with new locally run fashion boutiques, complemented by an enhanced range of restaurants and cafes, Ballyclare would become an attractive place in which to live, work and visit.

### **Retail Capacity Baseline**

XXX

### **Urban Design Analysis**

XXX

### **Town Centre Health Check**

XXX

### **Summary and Conclusions**

XXX



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of this Report

This report is the first substantive output of the commission to prepare a Regeneration Masterplan for Ballyclare Town Centre. The Masterplan was commissioned in December 2009 by the Department for Social Development (DSD) working in partnership with Newtownabbey Borough Council and is being prepared by a consultant team led by Tribal. It sets out the baseline from which the development options and proposals will be generated.

The study area for the commission is the Town Centre limit, as defined in the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015. Although this is the defined study area it is recognised that the town must be looked at in its broader context where relevant to the study.

This Draft Baseline Report is a background document and sets out the information collated during the initial phase of the project based on a review of existing materials and consultations with key stakeholders. While the programme of consultations is on-going, the baseline report summarises the consultant team's emerging understanding of the key issues affecting the town centre. On the basis of this understanding future stages of the project will generate options and proposals for the regeneration of the town centre.

## 1.2 Structure of the Report

The report is structured in the following way:

- Section 2 reviews the current policy context;
- Section 3 summarises the development history and current context;
- Section 4 deals with transport and accessibility issues;
- Section 5 is concerned with the property market;
- Section 6 provides a brief overview of the Retail Capacity Study, including a summary of initial findings;
- Section 7 sets out our understanding of the physical qualities and character of Glengormley Town Centre; and
- Section 8 provides a brief overview of the Town Centre Health Check for Glengormley.



# 2. Policy Context

## 2.1 Introduction

The regeneration of Ballyclare town centre will be guided by national, regional, sub-regional and local planning guidance and other relevant policy guidance, strategies, design guidelines and technical reports. A detailed consideration of the relevant policies is contained throughout this section.

## 2.2 Planning Policy Statements (PPS)

The national Planning Policy Statements (PPS) include a suite of documents intended to supersede a series of localised policies and policies contained within the Rural Strategy for Northern Ireland.

### ***Planning Policy Statement 1: General Principles***

This Statement sets out the general principles that the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland observes in carrying out its planning functions, namely formulating planning policies, making development plans and exercising control of development.

The Department's approach to planning focuses on guiding appropriate developments to the right places, while preventing developments that are not acceptable. This involves the planning and delivery of sustainable development and quality development, with significant emphasis placed on design considerations and the promotion of mixed use development, particularly in town centres.

One of the main planning aims is ensuring that development "must secure economy and efficiency as well as amenity in

the use of land." It states that "good design should be the aim of all those involved in the development process and will be encouraged everywhere". In relation to townscape, PPS1 states that "the Department will not attempt to impose a particular architectural taste or style arbitrarily. It is however proper to seek to promote to reinforce local distinctiveness particularly where this is supported by clear development plan policies or design guidance".

PPS1 also indicates that development plans should be used to identify sites for high quality, mixed use developments, built on large sites, within existing urban areas. Such sites should contain the following attributes or characteristics to make the development function correctly:

- Compactness;
- A mixture of uses and dwelling types;
- A range of employment, leisure and community facilities;
- Appropriate infrastructure and services;
- High standards of urban design;
- Access to public open space and green spaces;
- Ready access to public transport; and
- Facilitation of walking and cycling.

These characteristics will be applicable when considering the development options for the key opportunity sites within Ballyclare town centre.

### ***Planning Policy Statement 2: Nature Conservation***

PPS2 'Nature Conservation' aims to ensure that issues of nature conservation are protected in development proposals.

**Planning Policy Statement 3: Access, Movement and Parking and PPS3 (Clarification)**

PPS 3 and its accompanying clarification document promote greater integration of transportation and land use planning by:

- Promoting more sustainable transport choices;
- Promoting greater accessibility for all; and
- Reducing the need to travel, especially by private car.

Accordingly, new developments within Ballyclare town centre should be planned to take account of accessibility by all transport modes and the need to mitigate adverse transport impacts and promote road safety. When considering potential development sites within a town centre, the requirements for the main transport infrastructure which developers will be expected to provide should be considered. Where appropriate, development plans will identify existing and proposed town centre car parks and may bring forward local policies as part of an overall parking strategy.

The following PPS3 policies are particularly relevant to this study:

- Policy AMP 2: Access to Public Roads,
- Policy AMP 4: Protection for New Transport Schemes; and
- Policy AMP 7: Car Parking and Servicing Arrangements.

Multi-storey car parks are considered in the context of their design and impact on townscape, with active frontages

encouraged and the scale of the development appropriate to context.

**Planning Policy Statement 5: Retailing and Town Centres**

PPS5 echoes the principles of town centre vitality which are considered by the RDS and these policies will be particularly important in considering the masterplan options for Ballyclare town centre. The momentum which the study will produce in identifying needs in the economy of the town can be carried forward with a co-ordinated approach to development which does not replicate the existing provision, but compliments and fosters a varied range of services informed by local identity.

The health of the town centre in regard to its offer across various sectors can be measured and the results used to identify additional capacity or vulnerability. The development of performance indicators for town centres has enabled comprehensive measurement of the health of town centres across Northern Ireland. The need to “sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of town centres” in a manner which ensures that the health of local business and employment opportunities are optimised is emphasised in all of the policies contained within PPS5.

The PPS underlines the importance of a strong evidence base for the preparation of a town centre masterplan, including an assessment of existing retail patterns and floorspace provision, a town centre health check and an examination of future retail need. Strategies are then required to address the following issues:

- Encouraging greater accessibility, particularly for non-car modes;
- An appropriate level of additional retail and commercial leisure opportunities;
- Protection of the existing retail provision in town centres;
- Protection and promotion of other key town centre land uses;
- Promotion of urban renewal and regeneration, while protecting environmental assets;
- Promotion of environmental improvements and safe environments; and
- Promotion of tourism and cultural development.

The policies of most relevance to the formulation of a Town Centre Masterplan for Ballyclare include:

- **Policy RRP 3: Retail Development** – The Role of Non Regional Town Centres - The “primary retail core of town centres will be the first choice location for comparison shopping and mixed retailing” as well as “major convenience retailing proposals”. Such proposals within should provide high standards of access, high standards of design and should not prejudice the implementation of development plan or development scheme policies and proposals. Furthermore, planning permission will only be granted for comparison shopping and mixed retailing within the remainder of the town centre when it can be demonstrated that no suitable sites exist within the primary retail core.
- **Policy RRP 4: Primary Retail Cores and Primary Retail Frontages** – Proposals for non-retail uses at ground floor level are not normally desirable within the

Primary Retail Core. Such uses will only be permitted where they do not result in a significant loss of retail floor space or where they do not undermine the shopping function of the core as a result of the accumulation of non retail uses.

- **Policy RRP 12: Commercial Leisure Development** – Proposals for commercial leisure development may be permitted within existing town centres where the proposals will not adversely affect the vitality and viability of the centre, will result in a high standard of design, are accessible by a choice of means of transport, will not result in adverse traffic impacts and which will be accessible for people with disabilities. However, commercial leisure development will not normally be permitted in ground floor locations within the primary retail core, unless it is an element of a mixed use, retail led development scheme.

***Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage (incl. Addendum to PPS6: Areas of Townscape Character)***

Although there are no conservation areas within Ballyclare town centre there are buildings of historic quality dotted around the town and much of the town centre is designated as an Area of Townscape Character. PPS 6 acts to ensure that new development respects its context in regard to built heritage and archaeological sensitivity.

In relation to Areas of Townscape Character, the Policy suggests such designations would be appropriate in certain areas that exhibit a distinct character based on their historic built form or layout. Local policies and guidance for such areas should be set out in the relevant area Plan. Further

guidance for Areas of Townscape Character is outlined in an Addendum to PPS6. Policy ATC 1 outlines a “presumption in favour of retaining any building which makes a positive contribution to the character of an area,” with demolition of such buildings not normally permitted. In addition Policy ATC 2 states that new development within an Area of Townscape Character will only be permitted where it “maintains or enhances the overall character and respects the built form of the area.”

### ***Planning Policy Statement 7: Quality Residential Environments***

PPS 7 provides guidance as to the appropriate building design, scale and layout of new residential accommodation. Ballyclare has a few residential areas within the town centre, some of which are protected as housing sites. It is expected that attractive environments for living in the town centre are created with mixed use sites offering combinations of residential, commercial and leisure uses.

Policy QD1 suggests that residential developments should “be based on an overall design concept that draws upon the positive aspects of the character and appearance of the surrounding area”. In many ways, PPS7 draws together the other PPS documents and relates their policies to residential development. Consequently, all proposals for residential development will be expected to respect the scale and character of the surrounding area, including built heritage, and to ensure that adequate, good quality open space is provided for residents.

In addition, it is expected that adequate provision should be made for necessary local neighbourhood facilities, to be provided by the developer as an integral part of a development. New residential developments must also provide a movement pattern which supports walking and cycling, meets the needs of people whose mobility is impaired and provides adequate and convenient access to public transport. The majority of the potential development sites within the Ballyclare town centre would have good access to public transport and be within a convenient distance of bus stops, etc. New development must also endeavour to ‘design out crime’ by considering the possible consequences of anti-social behaviour for the residents and the impact on the new buildings.

### ***Planning Policy Statement 8: Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation***

This PPS sets out planning policies for the protection of open space, the provision of new areas of open space associated with residential development and the use of land for sport and outdoor recreation. ‘Open space’ is defined as “all open space of public value”, which includes outdoor sports facilities, parks and gardens, amenity green space and children’s play areas, natural and semi-natural urban green space, allotments, cemeteries, green corridors and civic spaces.

In relation to town centres, it is the latter of these areas that are of most relevance. Civic Spaces include civic and market squares and other hard surfaced areas designed for pedestrians. There is currently little civic space within Ballyclare town centre and it could be argued that a greater

provision could help to enhance the quality and amenity of the town centre. However, it should be noted that there is a large expanse of good quality public green space in close proximity to the town centre in the form of the Six-Mile Water Park. The PPS also highlights the role open space can play in enhancing the character of civic buildings, as well as helping to attract business and tourism to a locality.

### ***Planning Policy Statement 12: Housing in Settlements***

The RDS recognises that the availability of quality housing in appropriate locations makes a vital contribution to the key policy objectives of government. It is a vital consideration in promoting economic well-being and social progress. New housing development can also stimulate urban and rural renewal. Planning Control Principle 1 advocates “increased housing density without town cramming”. This concept ensures that a minimum living space is allocated to an individual with access to open space and in an environment which has been considered with their interests in mind.

In regenerating Ballyclare town centre, it will be necessary to achieve a critical mass in the numbers of visitors to the core of the town. To achieve this, town centre living can be encouraged. Planning Control Principle 3, Sustainable forms of development, encourages the utilisation of brownfield land for new developments rather than the use of greenfield sites. Given that the development opportunity sites within the study area are mostly brownfield sites, this policy would endorse the provision of residential accommodation in the town centre.

Furthermore, Policy HS1, Living over the Shop, could also be a key consideration in reinvigorating the town centre in Ballyclare. For example, purpose built developments which include ground floor retail and residential accommodation above may be appropriate on certain sites in the town centre.

### ***Planning Policy Statement 13: Transportation and Land Use***

PPS13 provides the context for the balancing of transportation modes and the reduction in the dominance of car travel against other modes of transport, particularly public transport. The need to reduce the dominance of the physical infrastructure by the car is vital. However in locations such as Ballyclare, where the need to travel to other conurbations for employment, services and products is critical, a balanced and measured reduction is necessary.

As previously mentioned, the lands included within the study boundary are relatively well connected by public transport and this provides an opportunity for new development to maximise its use of public transport options. PPS13 recommends the development of lands in sequence starting with those which can most easily be linked to public transport networks. The policy also recommends that higher density and mixed use developments should be focused in locations benefitting from high accessibility to public transport facilities.

### **Planning Policy Statement 15: Planning and Flood Risk**

This PPS sets out planning policies to minimise flood risk to people, property and the environment. It embodies the Government’s commitment to sustainable development and the conservation of biodiversity. It adopts a precautionary approach to development and the use of land that takes account of climate change and is supportive to the wellbeing and safety of people.

Whilst most of Ballyclare is not at risk of flooding, the area around Six Mile Water in the south of the town centre is within the narrow flood plain from the river. Whilst the topography means that there is unlikely to be any widespread flooding

in the area, the land adjacent to the river, including the riverside footpath beneath Main Street, and the open space surrounding the leisure centre carry a 1% annual probability of exceeding the peak floodwater level.

As a general rule, development would not be permitted within the flood plain (Policy FLD 1) unless circumstances exist to justify an exception to this. Furthermore, Policy FLD 3 states that development outside of the flood plain would not be permitted if it was likely to increase the risk of flooding elsewhere, unless the application is accompanied by measures to mitigate this risk. As part of the precautionary approach to dealing with flood risk the Department will, where appropriate, require a drainage assessment to accompany planning applications. In considering options for development sites within the town centre, cognisance should be paid to the potential of negatively impacting flood risk.

**Figure 2.1:** NIEA Strategic Flood Map of Ballyclare



### **2.3 Regional Policy Context**

Below the national PPSs, the regional planning framework sets forth the strategic planning policy for the entire Northern Ireland region.

#### ***Shaping our Future, the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025***

Shaping Our Future is a Regional Development Strategy (RDS) which offers a strategic and long-term perspective on the future development of Northern Ireland up to the year 2025. The vision is to create an outward-looking, dynamic and liveable Region and to sustain a high quality of life for all.

The Spatial Development Strategy is a hub, corridor and gateway framework designed to:

- Guide physical development throughout Northern Ireland over the next 25 years;
- Facilitate economic growth by identifying a network of locational opportunities;
- Accommodate the necessary housing growth;
- Promote balanced community development; and
- Protect and enhance the natural and built environment.

**Figure 2.2:** Seven Towns Identified for Expansion around the BMA



It recognises Ballyclare as one of seven small towns near to Belfast with potential, through significant planned expansion, to accommodate growth relating to the Belfast Metropolitan Area (BMA). These towns are well located in relation to the key transport corridors, and have a concentration of existing facilities and infrastructure which provide a good basis for accommodating expansion comprising housing and economic development.

With further growth, it is expected that Ballyclare will begin to take on the wider role of a 'Main Town', of similar standing to Antrim, Downpatrick, Larne and Newtownards in the BMA hinterland. Although Policy HGI 4 provides a broad distribution of for the 77,500 houses allocated for the BMA and hinterland, the distribution for each district and town within the area will be made through the development plan process.

At a Strategic level, the RDS also outlines a number of other more generic policies that are of material importance when considering the regeneration of Ballyclare town centre. These can be summarised briefly as follows:

### **Developing Community Cohesion**

Policy SPG-SRC 3 aims to foster development which contributes to the better community relations, recognises cultural diversity, and reduces socio economic differentials within Northern Ireland. Furthermore, Policy SPG-ENV 4 aims to foster a stronger community spirit and sense of place in relation to local development proposals through the use of Local Development Guidelines. Perimeters

used as guidelines include identity, vitality, proximity, accessibility, amenity and quality.

### **Residential Development**

Policy SPG-HOU 2 aims to direct and manage future housing growth to achieve more sustainable patterns of residential development. In particular, the Strategy aims to:

- Concentrate major housing development in sustainable locations facilitating a high degree of integration with centres of employment, community services and public transport;
- Encourage mixed use developments including more housing in town centres; and
- Make more efficient use of land by promoting more housing within the existing urban areas and villages, availing of existing infrastructure and maintaining a compact town centre.

Policy SPG-HOU 4 aims to promote a drive to provide more housing within existing urban areas by promoting a more sustainable form of development by:

- Encouraging compact urban forms; and
- Promoting more housing within existing areas.

Policy SPG-HOU 5 aims to encourage an increase in the density of urban housing appropriate in scale and design to the cities and towns of Northern Ireland. As part of this, Policy SPG-HOU 5.1 promotes imaginative and innovative forms of housing developments, which includes:

- Encouraging the re use of buildings incorporating a mixture of housing types;
- Promoting the densification of housing developments near to public transport corridors, in town centres and, where possible, around centres of community facilities; and
- Applying the principles and standards in 'Creating Places' to higher density housing schemes.

### **Economic Development**

Policy SPG-ECON 1 promotes a balanced spread of economic development opportunities across the Region focused on the urban hubs/clusters, as the main centres for employment and services. As part of this, Policy SPG-ECON 1.3 aims to support an urban renaissance through:

- The promotion of town centres as the major locations and first choice for expanding service employment by focusing public administration, major office developments, shopping, leisure, entertainment and cultural facilities in central areas where they are accessible to all sections of the community;
- Supporting the vitality and viability of towns centres by ensuring that they should normally be the first choice for major new retail developments; and
- Promoting mixed use development in cities and towns to facilitate the start up and accommodation of small and medium sized enterprises.

### **Tourism Growth**

Policy SPG –ECON 7 aims to promote a sustainable approach to the provision of tourism infrastructure. As part

of this Policy ECON 7.1 takes a sustainable approach to tourism development which recognises:

- Visitors are increasingly attracted to a place which has a definable and genuine local character;
- The potential of 'knowledge based tourism and recreation' for which both the environment and local cultural events are key attractions; and
- Local economies gain benefit from tourism development;

Policy SPG-ECON 8.2 aims to enhance 'first impression points' and environmental image, creating user friendly and high quality environments, presenting a favourable initial image and enhance Northern Ireland's image by cleaning up the environment. Policy SPG-ECON 9 aims to protect and enhance a varied range of tourism development opportunities, including land based visitor amenities, water based visitor amenities and cultural and historic attractions.

### **Transport**

Policy SPG-BMA 3 highlights the need to develop and enhance the Metropolitan Transport Corridor Network, as well as improving the corridor links to the Regional Strategic Transport Network (RSTN). Although Ballyclare lies outside of the Strategic routes, it currently has strong links to the Northern Corridor, which links Belfast to Londonderry via Ballymoney and Coleraine.

Policy SPG-TRAN 3 aims to integrate land use planning and transportation, with paragraph TRAN 3.1 requiring the development of land use patterns which contribute to a much better range of travel choices for all, and reduce the

need to travel. This is to be achieved through a number of related initiatives, including the following which are of most relevance to the Ballyclare Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan:

- An appropriate spread of jobs, and homes to achieve a balanced spatial pattern;
- The maintenance of compact urban areas and the reduction of physical separation of key land uses through physical separation and mixed use developments; and
- The introduction of car parking policies to discourage public long-stay parking in urban areas where public transport is a realistic alternative, whilst ensuring an appropriate level of good quality, short-stay parking to maintain strong and viable town centres.

### **Conservation of the Built Environment**

Policy SPG-ENV3 aims to conserve the built environment. In particular, Policy ENV 3.2 aims to safeguard buildings of special architectural or historic interest and in particular to conserve the character of buildings listed as being of special architectural or historic interest and to exercise a presumption in favour of the preservation of listed buildings, including an innovative approach to new uses. Policy ENV 3.3 aims to conserve the character of cities, towns and village through the:

- Control and management of development within settlements, with an emphasis on maintaining local identity and a sense of place; and
- Retention of locally important buildings and features;

- Protection of designated Areas of Townscape Character (ATCs) where the inherited mix and layout of buildings of different ages, styles and functions add to the quality of life of the local community;
- Creation and management of green spaces in cities, towns and villages, to serve multiple purposes, and contribute to local distinctive character; and
- Recognition of the contribution which natural and semi-natural habitats can make to the character of urban spaces, promoting measures which will lead to the enhancement of biodiversity and the quality of our lives.

Policy ENV 3.4 aims to conserve parks, gardens and demesnes which are of historic interest, whilst Policy ENV 3.5 aims to promote the retention of vernacular buildings and industrial heritage features in urban areas.

### **Recreation and Leisure**

Policy SPG-ENV 7 aims to facilitate access to a range of opportunities for recreational and cultural activities in order to prevent town cramming. This should include the provision of adequate areas of open space, playing facilities, woodland and landscaping for physical activity, rest and leisure use. The Six-Mile Water Park provides an excellent recreational space easily accessible from Ballyclare town centre. In addition, this policy seeks to develop pedestrian and cycle lanes within existing town centres.

### ***Regional Transport Strategy for Northern Ireland 2002-2012***

The (RTS) for Northern Ireland identifies strategic transportation investment priorities and considers potential funding sources and affordability of planned initiatives over the next 10 years. It supports the RDS in making a significant contribution towards achieving the longer-term vision for transportation, which is “to have a modern, sustainable, safe transportation system which benefits society, the economy, and the environment and which actively contributes to social inclusion and everyone’s quality of life”.

Ballyclare should technically be classified as an Other Urban Area (OUA) - those towns described as main or local hubs in the RDS and other towns outside the BMA with a population greater than 5,000. However, for the purpose of transport infrastructure funding, Ballyclare is included within the BMA, which is earmarked to receive around 25% of total expenditure. There are no specific interventions relating to Ballyclare outlined in the RTS.

### **2.4 Sub-Regional Policy** ***Sub-Regional Transport Plan 2015***

The Sub-Regional Transport Plan (SRTP) has been prepared by the Department for Regional Development (DRD) and deals with the transport needs of the whole of Northern Ireland with the exception of the Belfast Metropolitan Area and the rail and trunk road networks. The document analyses the transport modes for each district and considers the requirements for the development of transport options up until 2015.

As previously mentioned, as part of the Newtownabbey District, Ballyclare Town Centre is classed as part of the BMA, which is covered by the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (see below).

## **2.5 Local Policy**

There are three development plans that are materially relevant to Ballyclare Town Centre. Whilst the former two plans are largely outdated, they remain the current, adopted development plans covering Ballyclare. An up-to-date replacement, the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan, is currently being drafted, but is yet to be adopted.

### ***Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001***

Whilst this plan is technically 'out of date', it is still materially relevant. Adopted in 1987, the purpose of the Plan was to establish physical development policies for the Belfast Urban Area up to 2001, clarifying the extent and location of development and providing a framework for public and private agencies in their investment decisions relating to land use. The principal aims of the Plan were to:

- Maintain and strengthen Belfast's position as the regional centre for Northern Ireland;
- Create a physical environment and framework for social and economic activity which will enhance the quality of urban living; and
- Facilitate and efficient, economic and orderly pattern of development.

The Plan comprises a strategic development plan for the continuous built-up area of the Belfast conurbation and a statement of rural planning policy for those areas outside the conurbation which come within its immediate sphere of influence. Ballyclare falls within the Green Belt designated around the Urban Area to:

- Control the expansion of urban development into the surrounding open country;
- Maintain the rural character of the countryside within the Green Belt and prevent its spoliation by ribbon or scattered development; and
- Prevent the towns and settlements around Belfast from merging with Belfast Urban Area or with each other.

In brief, the Green Belt policies set out a presumption against further development within the Green Belt. However, a blanket ban on development within the rural area of the Newtownabbey District was not deemed acceptable for the established settlements of the Borough and these policies, as they relate to Ballyclare, have since been updated through the Newtownabbey Area Plan 2005.

### ***Newtownabbey Area Plan 2005***

The Newtownabbey Area Plan was adopted in 1993 to inform the public and potential developers of the broad land use proposals and policy framework that will be used to guide development, primarily in the rural part of the Borough up to 2005. The Belfast Urban Area Plan continues to provide the strategic planning and land use framework for the urban part of the Borough. The Green Belt policies still apply throughout the rural part of the



Borough outside the established settlements. Although this plan is technically 'out of date', it is still materially relevant as the only adopted planning policy for the area.

Ballyclare is recognised as the Country Town, the main centre in the rural area for housing, shopping and commerce, industry and employment, education and recreation. Policy SE1 states that it will consequently play an important role in the future development of the rural community and "be the focus for the provision of improved infrastructure and services."

The Policy Framework sets out a number of strategic policies of relevance to the Ballyclare Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan, including:

- **Policy H1:** Additional housing will be directed primarily within the development limits of Ballyclare;
- **Policy E1:** Small businesses will be encouraged in Ballyclare as a means of creating locally based employment opportunities and reducing dependence on commuting;
- **Policy T6:** Public transport will be facilitated where possible by appropriate traffic management measures; and
- **Policy A2:** The needs of persons with disabilities will be taken into account in the layout of car parks and footpaths, in considering proposals for the environmental improvement of public space and the development of public and commercial buildings.

In addition, Part 4 of the Plan sets out a number of specific proposals relating to Ballyclare. Of most relevance to the town centre, the Plan aims to:

- Improve and develop the road network and traffic circulation in and around the town centre as well as improve accessibility to the town centre;
- Promote the attractiveness of Ballyclare town centre by encouraging the development, consolidation and environmental upgrading of the Market Square and its surrounding properties as well as the whole of Main Street;
- Improve the quality of the wider urban environment; and
- Improve accessibility for disabled people.

To deliver these objectives, Policies TNC1 states that "future retail and office growth will be directed towards Ballyclare town centre", with a scale suitable to retain and consolidate the viability of Ballyclare town centre uses and which relates closely to the main shopping streets. Policy SHP1 echoes the commitment to retail development in the town centre, particularly along Main Street, Lower Main Street, the Market Square and the northern part of the town centre.

Policy TNC2 aims to rationalise traffic movements in the town centre to ease traffic congestion and minimise vehicular/pedestrian conflict. Policy TNC3 commits the Department to continuous review of the need for public parking facilities in or close to the town centre, while Policy TNC4 ensures that a scheme to deal with traffic problems in the Market Square and improve its amenity is agreed.

***Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015: Draft Plan November 2004***

BMAP is a development plan currently under preparation for the council areas of Belfast, Lisburn, Carrickfergus, Castlereagh, Newtownabbey and North Down. Once adopted, the plan will replace both the Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001 and the Newtownabbey Area Plan 2005.

The Plan aims to “provide a planning framework which is in general conformity with the RDS in facilitating sustainable growth and a high quality of development in the Belfast Metropolitan Area throughout the Plan period, whilst protecting and where possible, enhancing the natural and man-made environment of the Plan Area.” The overarching Plan Strategy, as far as it is of relevance to Ballyclare, consists of the following main elements:

- **Strengthening the Metropolitan Area** and providing a framework to strengthen the important and complementary roles of the adjoining Boroughs, including Newtownabbey;
- **Promoting Urban Renewal**, which includes giving priority to supporting and enhancing the role of town centres and promoting the renewal of distinctive places which play an important role in local community life;
- **Sustaining a Living, Working Countryside**, supporting the network of towns, villages and small settlements in rural areas and the role smaller settlements, like Ballyclare, play in providing development opportunities for local services in keeping with their scale and character; and

- **Enhancing Quality of Life**, through the creation of balanced local communities, improvements in public transport, supporting and strengthening the role of town centres as a foci of community life and as centres of retail and office development, increased provision for walking and cycling, a reduction in car travel, protecting the natural and built heritage and requiring high standard of development in key location including, for example, town centres.

Policy SETT 1 recognises Ballyclare as a Small Town within the Metropolitan Rural Area. The Town Centre is also specifically designated as one of five large town centres, as well as Belfast and Lisburn City Centres, within the whole plan area.

In addition to this, the following policies are of direct relevance to Ballyclare town centre.

**Settlement**

Policy SETT 3 states that planning permission will only be granted for proposals which support and enhance vitality and viability of Town Centres by:

- Reinforcing them as the main locations for retail, office, leisure and cultural activity; or
- Providing for a diverse mix of uses including housing; or
- Enhancing their roles by increasing activity and accessibility.

## **Housing**

In relation to town centre living, Policy HOU 4 states that planning permission will be granted for proposals that increase the housing stock in designated Town Centres where they meet regional planning policies and are in accordance with the Plan Proposals. BMAP recognises that town centre living is a key element in contributing to a vibrant centre, encouraging a more sustainable pattern of development and optimising existing infrastructure. Opportunities to increase housing provision in town centres include:

- The full and part conversion of existing buildings, particularly long-term vacant buildings;
- The conversion of upper floors within the primary retail cores; and
- The inclusion of residential development within mixed-use retail schemes.

In addition, Policy HOU 5 seeks to protect existing housing areas within town centres, through the designation of specific Protected Housing Areas. There are three Protect Town Centre Housing Areas within Ballyclare Town Centre at Ballyeaston/Ballycorr Road, Abercorn Drive and Mill Road (see Figure 2.4).

## **Transport**

Within the overarching aim of sustainable development, Policy TRAN 1 ensures that development proposals incorporate, where appropriate, adequate provision for public transport, walking and cycling routes, and measures to ensure access by people with impaired mobility.

Of particular pertinence in Ballyclare, Policy TRAN 5 states that “planning permission will only be granted for development on publicly owned off-street surface parks in designated City and Town Centres, provided that all existing car spaces are replaced either on site or in an appropriate location in the vicinity of the site and that the spaces are reserved for short-stay use only.”

## **Retailing**

Where no Primary Retail Core is designated in a town centre, as is the case in Ballyclare, Policy R 1 states that planning permission will be granted for retail development proposals anywhere within the designated town centre boundary. This designated town centre boundary for Ballyclare is shown in Figure 2.4 below.

## **Offices**

Policy OF 1 states that planning permission will be granted for office developments in designated office areas, which includes designated town centres. Ballyclare town centre is recognised as a destination for expanding service employment. The promotion of office development within such areas will support sustainable development, assist an urban renaissance and provide local jobs. In the town centre of Ballyclare, office development will be expected to be appropriate in size and in balance with other functions of the town centre.

## **Urban Environment**

As can be seen in Figure 2.4, much of Ballyclare town centre is designated as an Area of Townscape Character. Designation BR 15 outlines a number of key features



Figure 2.4: Ballyclare Town Centre (BMAP 2015)

**Key**

-  Town Centre
-  Development Opportunity Sites
-  Protected Town Centre Housing Area
-  Area of Townscape Character
-  Local Landscape Policy Area
-  Area of existing Open Space

relating to the area that will be taken into account when assessing development proposals, including:

- The pre-Victorian properties along Main Street including the Old Presbyterian Church and Session House;
- The early nineteenth century Ollar Lodge;
- The disused station building, engine sheds and stationmaster's house (1877); The Italianate Bank (1863) at the Doagh Road;
- The Town Hall (1877), formerly the market house, at Market Square;
- The north-south linear pattern of Ballyclare's informal streetscape, which creates a variety of views and vistas, and the long curving layout of Main Street as it extends from the south side of the Six-Mile Water and over the bridge to Market Square;
- The 1880/90s uniform terraced housing found to the south of Main Street at the "Foot of the Town" and to the north of Market Square on the Rashee, Ballyeaston and Ballycorr Roads; and
- The grand dwellings located along Coronation Terrace in Hillhead Road and on nearby Green Road and Ballynure Road.

Within such areas, Policy UE 3 states that development should protect or enhance the key features of the designated area, meeting a number of key design criteria relating to building height, density/building footprint, landscape quality, uniformity of design/layout, townscape quality/detailing and historic buildings and structures.

According to Designation BR 15, the key design criteria of most relevance to the Ballyclare Area of Townscape Character are:

- **Uniformity of Design/Layout:** New or replacement buildings shall replicate existing forms, layout, materials and detailing of buildings within the area; and
- **Townscape Quality/Detailing:** New works shall not disrupt the existing silhouette of a roof.

Policy UE 3 also states that special regard will be given to the important compositional role of corner sites and key buildings.

Policy UE 4 sets a high standard of quality for new non-residential developments, requiring that proposals meet a set of criteria relating to respecting the context and built heritage, providing adequate open space and landscaped areas, supporting walking and cycling, making adequate provision for parking, drawing upon local traditions of form, material and detailing and in designing out crime. In addition, Policy UE 6 prevents the provision of ground floor parking along street frontages in town centres.

### **Natural Environment and Open Space**

The area surrounding the leisure centre (see Figure 2.4 above) is designated a Local Landscape Policy Area (LLPA). Designation BE 18 outlines the features, or combination of features, that contribute to the environmental quality, integrity or character of this area, which include:

- Archaeological site and its surroundings – A scheduled motte is situated on the south bank of the river in the War Memorial Park (adjacent to the town centre);
- Area of local amenity importance – The Six Mile Water river corridor including the town parks, leisure centre, playing pitches, mill pond and lake; and
- Area of local nature conservation interest – Low lying wetland, valley slopes, Craighill Quarry and associated vegetation including a significant group of trees (mostly outside of the designated town centre).

Policy ENV 3 restricts any development in this area that would be liable to adversely affect those features, or combination of features, that contribute to environmental quality, integrity or character. Where proposals are within and/or adjacent to a designated LLPA, a landscape buffer may be required to protect the environmental quality of the LLPA.

The same area is also designated as an area of existing open space. Policy OS1 also prevents any development on land identified for the provision of open space.

### **Newtownabbey District Proposals**

Ballyclare is the largest settlement within the rural area of Newtownabbey, with a population of 8,654 in 2001. It is recognised as a local service centre with a significant dormitory role in relation to the BMA, as well as the main focus within the rural area for housing, shopping and commerce, industry and employment, education and recreation. The specific policies and designations

associated with Ballyclare town centre are discussed under the relevant policy section preceding this section.

The Town Centre designation (BE 22) is designed to encompass the concentration of all existing and planned uses which have a town centre function, including retailing, professional services, restaurants, banking, estate agents, other office uses and community uses. The boundary is shown in Figure 2.4 above and includes two Development Opportunity Sites on land between Main Street and Six Mile Water Leisure Centres (BE 23) and land between 22-26 Main Street and Park Street (BE 24).

The latter of these two sites has since been developed as an ASDA Superstore, whilst the former has been partially redeveloped to provide the new Woodside's Store. For the remainder of the BE 23 site, a flood risk assessment of the Six Mile Water floodplain, 20m to the east of the site, is required to inform proposals for the development of the site and access arrangements will need to be discussed with Roads Service.

Policy BE 26 provides urban design policy specific to Ballyclare Town Centre. The criteria to be applied include:

- Development shall respect the established building line;
- Building heights should generally be 2 – 3 storeys on principal streets to reinforce scale and character. Taller buildings of up to 5 storeys will only be acceptable where it is demonstrated that it acts as a landmark building, which aids legibility; and

- The external façade of development sites shall reflect the fine pattern and traditional character of the Town Centre.

### ***The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015, November 2004***

The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP) is the local transport plan for the BMA. It is the first of its type for the BMA and takes forward the strategic initiatives of the Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS) for Northern Ireland 2002-2012. The BMTP will deliver a phased and costed implementation programme of transport schemes to 2015, the implementation of which will be subject to detailed economic appraisal, funding availability and statutory processes.

### **Walking and Cycling**

The BMTP proposes wide-ranging initiatives to improve facilities for pedestrians and cyclists so that walking and cycling can form a more significant element of overall travel in the BMA. The provision of improved facilities for walking and cycling as a means of providing greater travel choice is therefore a key principle of the 2025 Strategy. In Ballyclare, this should include the provision of high quality walking routes within the urban centre.

### **Public Transport**

The BMTP recognises a clear need to substantially improve the quality of public transport services within the BMA, especially in terms of journey ambience, frequency and reliability and the way that it extends travel choices for all

sections of the community. The 2025 Strategy contains a range of initiatives to improve the quality of public transport provision.

Of most relevance to Ballyclare are the proposals to provide improvements to rural bus services. The route to Ballyclare from Belfast City Centre is recognised as a key route which should provide an enhanced conventional fixed route rural bus service with increased frequencies and regular timetable. Ballyclare itself is a key interchange point between the urban and rural networks formed by existing long-distance bus and coach routes.

### **Newtownabbey District Proposals**

The BMTP also contains a number of measures specific to the Newtownabbey area, which can be summarised as follows:

- The construction of the Ballyclare Relief Road and the completion of the Hightown Road, which will require developer contributions; and
- Encouraging the greater use of public transport and more walking and cycling, thereby reducing car dependency, through the development of an integrated network of walking and cycling routes and through improved frequencies on core local routes to Ballyclare.

## **2.6 Department of Social Development Policy Guidance**

The Department of Social Development (DSD) has produced several policy documents which are of particular relevance to the Ballyclare masterplan. The policies

emphasise the key prior tiers of successful regeneration with a particular emphasis on social regeneration as well as physical.

### ***Vital and Viable: A Good Practice Guide for Breathing New Life into Towns and Cities***

This guide produced by DSD indicates that plans for the successful regeneration of cities and towns must also address the following key priorities:

- **Sustainability:** Development must be sustainable for it to succeed. For city and town centres this means that social inclusivity, environmental impact and economic health must be taken into account when plans are prepared, development is proposed and government support is considered.
- **Design:** High quality building design is a key success factor, linked with the provision of public realm to an equivalent standard. The creation of new iconic buildings or the re-development or preservation of landmark buildings, coupled with sensitive design, can create a real sense of place.
- **Retailing:** The retail offering remains key to the vast majority of successful city and town centres and is being influenced by the increasing dominance of national retailers and international brands coupled with the growth of out-of-town shopping centres. The challenge for cities and towns is to project a unique identity and preserve the local retail offering in a way which is easily accessible.
- **Variety:** Leisure, entertainment, sporting and recreational pursuits in city and town centres provide other uses for

town centres for the local community and visitors to the area. Evening and night time economies are now an integral element contributing to the vibrancy of towns and can work supportively with town centre living.

### ***The Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy***

This strategy targets deprivation using a partnership approach to involve the communities affected by social problems. Neighbourhood Renewal will have four interlinking strategic objectives:

- **Community Renewal:** To develop confident communities that are able and committed to improving the quality of life in the most deprived neighbourhoods;
- **Economic Renewal:** To develop economic activity in the most deprived neighbourhoods and connect them to the wider urban economy;
- **Social Renewal:** To improve social conditions for the people who live in the most deprived neighbourhoods through better co-ordinated public services and the creation of safer environments;
- **Physical Renewal:** To help create attractive, safe, sustainable environments in the most deprived neighbourhoods.

### ***Department of Social Development - Corporate Plan 2008-2011***

DSD's Corporate Plan over the period 2008-2011 sets out how the Department will deliver on its responsibilities under the Executive's Programme for Government and the overall priorities for social development which are:

- Investing in housing and addressing the housing crisis;
- Building communities, tackling disadvantage and encouraging social responsibility; and
- Creating vibrant cities, towns and urban areas.

### ***Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2008-2018***

The Northern Ireland Executive established three key investment objectives which will guide development. These are:

- **Economic:** Investment in infrastructure to help grow a dynamic and innovative economy, and help to deliver modern high quality and efficient public services;
- **Societal:** Investment in infrastructure to help promote tolerance, inclusion, equality of opportunity and the desirability of good relations, promote regional balance in future development, and tackle areas of social disadvantage; and
- **Environmental:** Investment in infrastructure to help protect and enhance our environment and natural resources.



# 3. Development Context

## 3.1 Introduction

As part of the process of establishing the best way forward for a number of 'key' sites in the study area, it is essential to fully understand the current conditions 'on-the-ground'. In order to achieve this, a review of the recent planning history in Ballyclare Town Centre over the past 5 years has been completed.

We have also met with a number of landowners and developers with a current interest in Ballyclare Town Centre, to ascertain their current intentions and aspirations with regards to the town centre. Those consulted as part of this exercise have included:

- Mr Harold Montgomery, Ballyvesey Holdings, Developer;
- Inspector Martin Ruddy, PSNI;
- Mr David Chick, Landowner/Developer;
- Ballyclare Chamber of Trade;
- Mr Abe King, Landowner;
- Mr Ernie Hall, Landowner;
- Mr Ross Ellerby, KPL Contracts; and
- Mr George Wiley, NEELB Property Services.

Alongside the proposals within the town centre, we are aware of proposals for a significant urban extension to the west of the town. Given the potential impact of this major population increase, we have addressed this scheme below, followed by a brief summary of the other recent planning applications within, and impacting upon, the town centre.

## 3.2 'West Ballyclare' Urban Extension

Private developer KPL Contracts have recently submitted a number of planning applications for the construction of a western relief road, opening up a significant proportion of land to the north and west of Ballyclare for residential development (see Figure 4.7).

The road will link the A57 Templepatrick Road to the west of Ballyclare to the B94 Rashee Road to the north of Ballyclare via the B95 Doagh Road. This proposal has been on the cards for nearly 20 years and was most recently included in the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015. As well as providing a new, more efficient route from the north to south of Ballyclare, avoiding the congested Main Street, the road's construction will open up almost 260 acres of land for the construction of approximately 2,000 new homes. This is expected to increase the population by up to 6,000 people, which will in turn place additional demand on the services provided within the town centre.

Four planning applications have been submitted in relation to the scheme and are currently pending a decision. In brief, the applications can be summarised as follows:

- **U/2006/0377/O:** Outline planning permission was sought by Annmar Developments Limited in July 2006 for the "provision of first phase of relief road along the western edge of Ballyclare (Including bridge over six mile water) and new residential neighbourhood." This relates to the southern section between the Dough Road and Templepatrick Road.

- **U/2009/0405/O:** Outline planning application submitted in September 2009 by KPL Contracts for the “major urban extension”, including: “residential neighbourhood, northern section of Ballyclare Relief Road, local centre, central park and other open spaces, equipped children’s play areas and ancillary works”. This refers to the element of the scheme to the north of Dough Road.
- **U/2009/0406/F:** Full planning application for phase one of the scheme on lands to the west of 188-190 Rashee Road, to the north of Ross’ Avenue and to the south of 101 Rashee Road was also submitted in September 2009 by KPL Contracts. This phase will deliver 157 residential units, including: “35 detached, 78 semi-detached, 32 terraced dwellings, 12 apartments”, alongside associated “open space, landscaping and ancillary works.”
- **U/2009/0407/F:** Full planning application for the relief road was also submitted in September 2009 by KPL Contracts. The road is described as: “Ballyclare Relief Road comprising: 3.1km long road, 350m long secondary link road, 3 roundabouts, a bridge over the Six Mile Water river, landscaping and ancillary works.”

Therefore, alongside the 2,000 dwellings and relief road, the scheme will deliver a mixed use local neighbourhood centre incorporating local shops, small scale offices and community facilities, extensive parkland and connected open spaces. Assuming planning permission is forthcoming, the first phase of housing is due to commence in April 2010. It is anticipated that the relief road will take one year to construct and be opened to traffic in mid-2011. In year five, the local centre comprising 1000 sq.m of

**Figure 3.1:** How the new housing estate and relief road will look



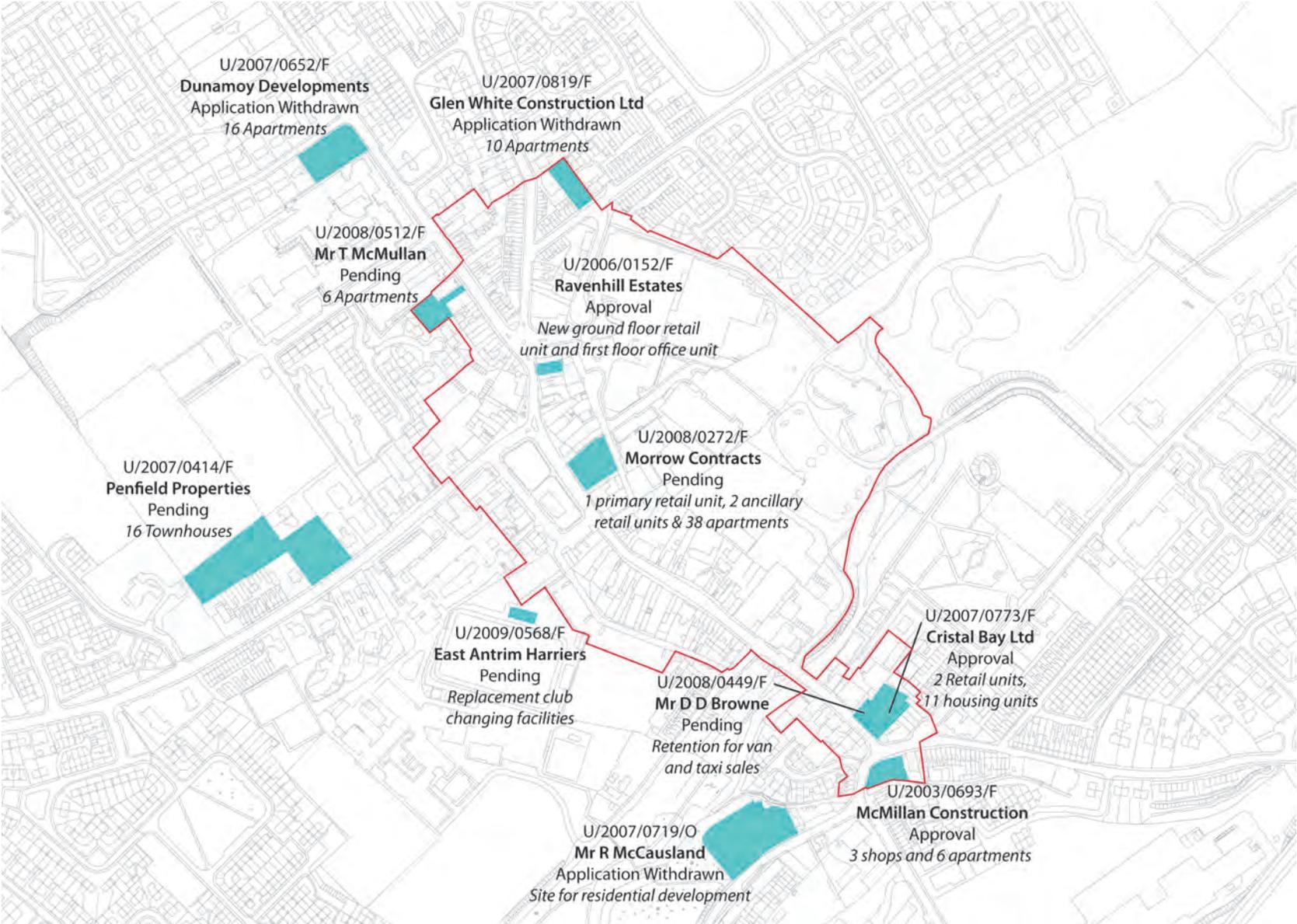
neighbourhood shops, 500 sq. m. of offices and 1,500 sq m of community services and facilities will be constructed, with the remaining houses expected to progress at a rate of approximately 125 houses per year, delivering over 2,000 houses over the 20-year build period.

### 3.3 Other Residential Applications

As well as the ‘major urban extension’ there are a number of smaller residential schemes proposed in close proximity to the town centre. Most notably, these include:

- **U/2007/0414/F:** Full planning application was submitted by Penfield Properties in June 2007 for 16 townhouses on land at 36a Dough Road and land behind 38-58 Dough Road. The decision is currently pending.
- **U/2007/0719/O:** An outline planning application was submitted by Mr R McCausland in October 2007 for a residential development on land at 14 Mill Road. The applicant later withdrew the application.

**Figure 3.2: Planning Applications Affecting Ballyclare Town Centre**



- **U/2007/0652/F:** Full planning application was submitted by Dunamoy Developments in September 2007 for 16 apartments at 33 Rashee Road and 2 Hillmount Avenue. The application was later withdrawn.

### 3.4 Town Centre Applications

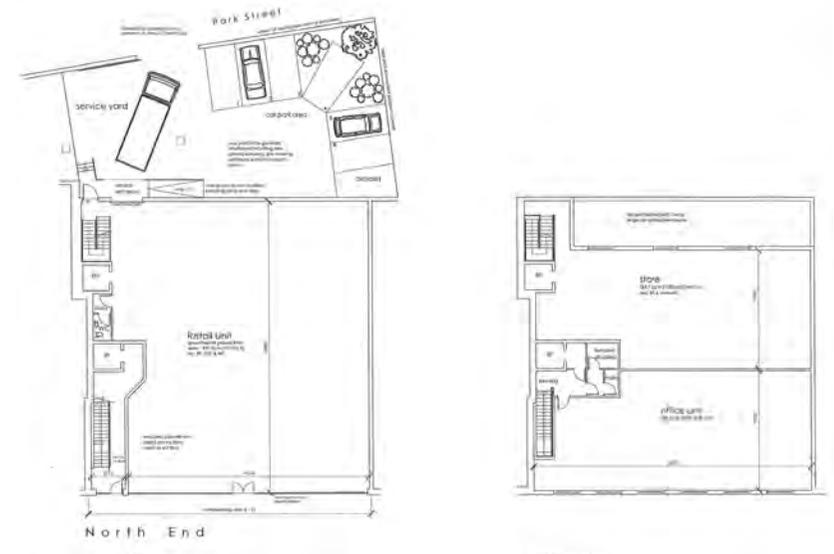
Within the town centre, a number of applications have recently been submitted for both residential and retail development (see Figure 3). These can be summarised as follows:

- **U/2003/0693/F:** Detailed planning consent was granted in April 2005 for the demolition of the existing buildings and erection of 3 shops and 6 apartments. Despite receiving consent, McMillan Construction is yet to commence development on the site at 7-13 Mill Street. The completed apartments, however, are advertised for sale on McMillan’s Estate Agency website. Condition 1 of the planning approval requires development to begin within 5 years of the date of permission. Therefore, if development has not commenced by April 2010, the consent will lapse.
- **U/2006/0152/F:** Ravenhill Estates received full planning permission in September 2006 for the erection of a new 5,000 sq. ft ground floor retail unit and 2,000 sq. ft first floor office unit at 10-12 North End.
- **U/2007/0819/F:** A detailed planning application was submitted by Glen White Construction Ltd in December 2007 for the construction of 10 apartments on land at 25 Ballycorr Road. The application was considered by the Council in November 2008, but was later withdrawn by the applicant.

Figure 3.3: Artist Impression of New Development at Mill Road



Figure 3.4: Plans for 10-12 North End



- **U/2007/0773/F:** Cristal Bay Ltd were granted full planning consent in August 2008 for the construction of two retail units fronting onto Main Street, with 11 residential units behind. The site at 4-6 Main Street is currently vacant and is adjacent to the vacant site at 12 Main Street (see above).
- **U/2008/0272/F:** A detailed planning application was also submitted by Morrow Contracts in April 2008 for the demolition of the former Woodside's building at 8-14 The Square and the development of a primary retail unit with two ancillary retail units and 38 apartments above. A decision is currently pending.
- **U/2008/0449/F:** Full planning permission is currently pending for the use of land at 8-12 Main Street for van and taxi sales. The application was submitted in July 2008 by Mr D D Browne.
- **U/2008/0512/F:** A full planning application was submitted in September 2008 by Mr T McMullan for the construction of 6 apartments at 19 Rashee Road. A decision is currently pending.
- **U/2009/0568/F:** A detailed planning application was submitted in December 2009 by East Antrim Harriers for the replacement of their changing facilities at Dixon Park. The application is currently pending.

Alongside this a series of minor applications have also been considered within the town centre relating to shop front improvements, advertisement consent and minor extensions to nearby residential properties.

**Figure 3.5:** Land at 8-12 Main Street



### 3.5 Pre-Planning Application Projects

During our consultation with the key stakeholders, we have also become aware of a number of development projects that are currently in the pipeline. In each case, we understand that the landowner intends to submit a planning application in due course and have been happy to share this information with us as part of our baseline evidence. We have therefore not reported any information provided in confidence, or any information that may be considered commercially sensitive.

In brief, these development initiatives can be summarised as follows:

#### ***Ballyvesey Holdings***

Ballyvesey Holdings Limited own a number of properties within Ballyclare town centre, including:

- **8.10 Dough Road:** unit currently housing Subway;
- **Bluehouse, 42-48 Main Street:** 3 storey red brick building and units next door currently housing Barnados and Burt McCormick; and
- **16 Main Street:** Cedar Tree Florists.

Ballyvesey are also in posetion of the vacant site at 22 Main Street, which was originally the BP Service Station adjacent to the old Asda store. They have formulated a mixed-use scheme for the site, comprising two retail units fronting onto Main Street, two office units fronting onto the river and apartments above. A parking courtyard to the rear enables servicing and deliveries for the retail units

The scheme seems to be well thought through and would deliver modern retail units and office accommodation, whilst removing the eyesore currently caused by the derelict site in a prominent location on Main Street.

**Figure 3.6:** Ballyvesey Holdings Proposals for 22 Main Street



### **Mr Ernie Hall**

Ernie Hall has had a presence in Ballyclare for over 20 years and currently owns and operates two retail units:

- Ernest Hall, The Square; and
- B. Craig and Co. Ltd, Main Street.

He is not a ‘developer’ in the traditional sense, but a retailer who will engage in property development to further his retail businesses. He also currently owns a number of properties adjacent to his premises on The Square, which when combined represent a significant development opportunity. In brief these properties include:

- **79 Main Street:** Unit currently home to B. Craig and Co. Ltd.
- **3-11 The Square:** Location of current Ernest Hall store (No. 5), as well as whole block from Action Cancer to the Photography unit;
- **Office block, Dough Road:** Relatively new office accommodation to rear of Strands hair salon, fronting onto Dough Road. It is currently occupied by the Ulster Farmer’s Union and Accountants; and

In the short to medium term, we understand that Mr Hall intends to redevelop the larger site - fronting onto the square - to provide new, larger retail units for his two businesses, as well as a café on the ground floor fronting onto The Square and potentially office accommodation and apartments above. Whilst no plans have been developed to date, we understand that he would envisage the new development being set back from The Square, with a hard

**Figure 3.7: Land Owned by Ernie Hall**



landscaped are to the front with outdoor seating to serve the café.

As part of this scheme, B Craig and Co. Ltd would be relocated to the new development leaving the existing unit on Main Street vacant. It is then likely that this could be sold for redevelopment. This is a large unit with the potential for double frontage onto Main Street and Harrier Way. Internally it has several split levels which are not ideal for modern retail.

### **Ballyclare Primary School**

We have spoken to both the Principal at Ballyclare Primary School and North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) Property Services team regarding the potential relocation of the Primary School in the future.

In short, the we understand that the School have been on a waiting list for relocation for almost 20 years, but are yet to receive approval for the new premesis. The current plans would see the School moving, along with the Ballyclare Nursery, to a new, purpose built facility opposite the cemetery further along the Dough Road. An Economic Appraisal for their move has been prepared and is presently awaiting ministerial approval.

If the relocation goes ahead, the site currently operated by the Primary School would become available for redevelopment. At present, NEELB would hope to be able to provide a new, purpose built, post-16 campus on the site, to be operated jointly by Ballyclare Secondary School and Ballyclare High School. Tentative proposals for such a facility were developed by the two schools a number of years ago, but this is now on hold pending the relocation of the Primary School.

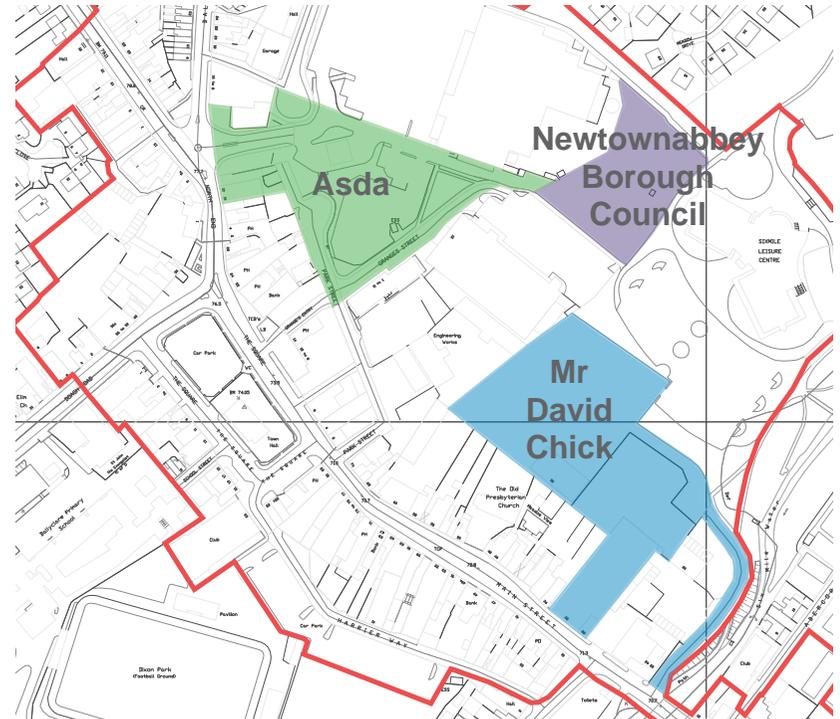
We would hope that it would be possible to develop stronger linkages between any new school facilities on the site and the town centre. In particular, School Street already provides a physical connection, although at present this is to an unused rear gate to the Primary School. In addition, there may be scope to incorporate the existing library within the town centre, which lies adjacent to the rear exit from the site on School Street, into any new development scheme. This could result in the delivery of a new education/learning campus on the site, with much stronger links into the town centre.

**Mr David Chick / Asda**

Mr David Chick owns or has options to purchase a number of large development sites in Ballyclare town centre (see Figure 3.8), including:

- **Former Asda Store:** 30-32 Main Street, including the car park to rear;
- **Adjacent Haulage Yard:** land between rear of Main Street properties and the leisure centre car park;
- **Access Road:** un-adopted access road running along the north side of the river;

Figure 3.8: Land Ownership to rear of Main Street



- **Car park to rear of new Asda:** Site currently Council owned, but Mr Chick has agreed an option to buy the land as part of an extensive redevelopment scheme; and
- **Asda overflow car park:** Site currently owned by Asda and used as an additional overflow car park. Mr Chick has an option to buy the land as part of the extensive redevelopment scheme.

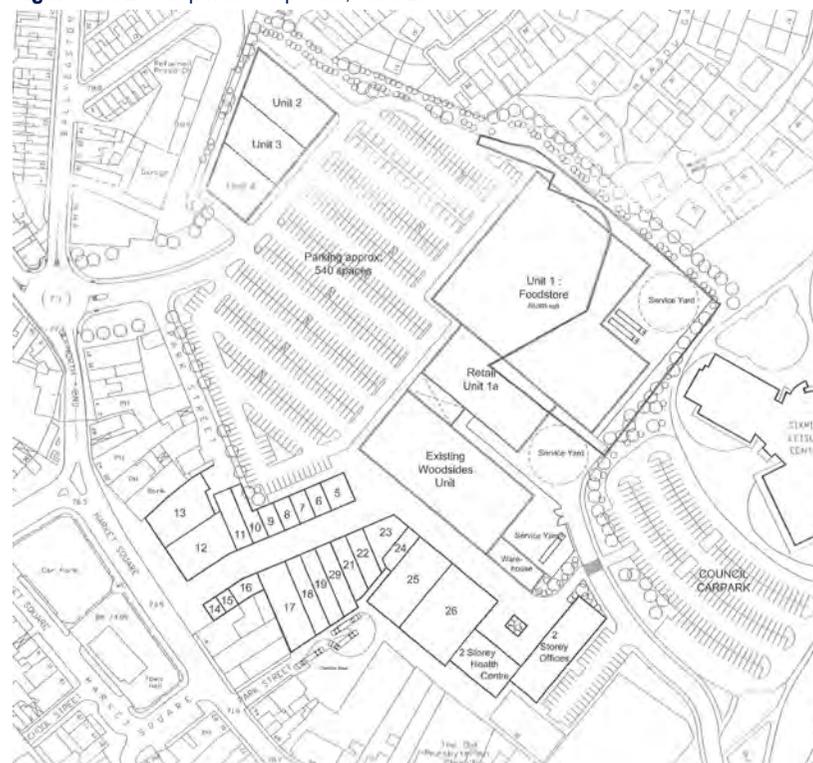
### Pre-2007

Prior to construction of the new Asda store in 2007, Mr Chick had worked with a number of parties to develop a comprehensive development scheme covering all of development sites to the rear of Main Street. This included the land now occupied by the new Woodside's store, as well as the old Woodside's site and the pubs to either side.

The proposed scheme, developed in partnership with Asda in June 2006, sought to better integrate Asda into the town centre. A new pedestrianised retail street would have provided a safe walking route between the leisure centre, Market Square and Asda food store, as well as the 540 parking spaces. The retail units proposed provided a mix of types and sizes and included the new Woodside's Unit, intended to front onto the pedestrianised street to the south. The scheme also included a 2-storey health centre and 2-storey office accommodation.

However, having been unable to secure agreement from all parties to deliver this comprehensive scheme, the new Woodside's store and adjacent retail units have since been constructed.

**Figure 3.9:** Development Proposals, June 2006



The orientation, positioning and access arrangements for these new units have now removed the possibility of delivering a comprehensive redevelopment of the land, as well as the potential to create an additional through route linking the land to the rear of Main Street into the land adjacent to Asda. The Asda store has since been constructed and the sites fronting onto The Square have also since been sold.



# 4. Accessibility

## 4.1 Introduction

The section of the baseline report deals with transport and accessibility issues in relation to Ballyclare Town Centre. Baseline data are reviewed for each of the modes of travel, together with a commentary on how well the various policy objectives are being met. It also indicates the key issues emerging from the baseline review.

## 4.2 People - Walking and Sojourn

Pedestrians are catered for by footways on both sides of all the approach roads to and within the town centre. Some of these are quite narrow, with inadequate width for more than two people to pass, for example North End (east side) and the southern end of Main Street. Harrier Way is the main link from the Harrier Way car parks into the town centre, but it has no footway for most of its length (see Figure 4.1).

Paving quality is variable, but recent improvements have been carried out in the heart of the town centre. These improvements have been carried out on the basis that the traffic arrangements will continue as at present, with two-way working in most of Main Street, and one-way working around the town hall square.

There are very few spaces where people can rest or sojourn. The space around the town hall is given over to car parking, partly public and partly private. The town hall is encircled by one-way traffic, which in effect makes it a traffic roundabout. The square cannot in this configuration function as a social space or focal point for the town. The railings, gates and warning signs also detract from any civic character.

Two small spaces have received some landscaping attention in the town centre. The first is a small triangular space has been paved and planted in North End, but it has no seating, and railings prevent people walking through it, and so it is not used. The second is a small space at Mill Street and Main Street junction, which does have bench seating, but the busy traffic environment and lack of frontage activity makes it an unpleasant place to be. There are apparently no other places to sit in the town centre, and space that potentially could be used as amenity space is almost all occupied with vehicle parking or servicing. The result is a town centre that has very little appeal as a place to spend time, to meet, or relax.

The town centre streets are dominated by moving and parked vehicles, both visually and in terms of impact on pedestrian behaviour. Crossing the street for the most part involves finding a gap in the traffic. There are significant stretches of Main Street that have no provision for pedestrian crossing movements, and observation shows that many people “shelter” behind parked vehicles to shorten their crossing distance. The streets are laid out and managed as traffic priority areas, and drivers tend to perceive that they have unbroken right of way.

Signal controlled crossings are provided at two locations in Main Street, and at some other locations in the town such as outside Ballyclare primary school in Doagh Road.

Informal crossing places are provided in other locations, especially junctions, mostly with level surface (dropped kerb) provision. However, these provisions are often located

**Figure 4.1:** Harrier Way - main link to public parking and yet has inadequate footways.



**Figure 4.2:** Town hall square – no place for people



**Figure 4.3:** Green Road and Ballynure Road - parts of the road network have unpleasant and inconvenient pedestrian provision.



**Figure 4.4:** Millburn Mews - no place to walk; lack of concern for pedestrians



for the convenience of drivers rather than pedestrians. For example they are set back from the desire line across the junction at George Avenue off Rashee Road, and Avondale Drive off Main Street. At junctions with “splitter islands” pedestrians have to cross the street in two or more separate stages, for example at the Asda junction (North End) and Doagh Road at the town hall square. These arrangements may be regarded as safe, but they are not convenient or comfortable, and contribute to the traffic domination of the environment.

The Asda store has been developed without regard to access on foot. The store is set well away from the road and the front door faces the car park and is not visible from the most direct walking route from the town centre.

### 4.3 Private Motor Traffic Movement

In 2001 about a quarter of households in Ballyclare had no access to a car or van, a little lower than the Northern Ireland average. The proportion of households with access to two cars or vans was 28%, a little higher than the 24% average (see Figure 4.5). Mode split data are available only for the journey to work.

There are reports from Roads Service and from the local sources that congestion occurs on roads within and approaching Ballyclare town centre. However, there appear to be no data on the delays experienced, such as the impact on journey times, variability from hour to hour or day to day. The causes of delay are judged to be (RPS Transport Assessment for BRR, see below) as follows:

Figure 4.5: Journey to work mode split (Census)

Main Mode	% NISRA data for 2001	% Census data quoted in RPS Transport Assessment
Car/Van/MC Driver	63	79
Car/Van Passenger	8	79
Car/Van Pool	5	79
Walk	11	13
Public Transport/Taxi	7	7
Cycle	0.5	1
Other	5.5	-
Work from Home	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Figure 4.6: Heavy Traffic at Main Street and Green Road Junction Mid-afternoon



- Narrow available carriageway width along the Main Street;
- Parked cars along Main Street;
- Junction layouts at Mill Road/Hillhead Road and Main Street/Ballyclare Road, and the one way system around the town hall”

From traffic counts undertaken in November 2009 at the Asda roundabout, it appears that the morning peak hour is from 8.30 to 9.30.

The Ballyclare west relief road (BRR) is to be built in conjunction with the development of 2,430 homes, and will be funded by the development. The road has been justified (in part) in BMAP by the relief it might bring to town centre traffic. The development site and route of the BRR are shown in Figure 4.7.

The likely traffic impacts of the BRR have been analysed in the Transport Assessment for the development (RPS). At the time of writing the results were still pending verification with Roads Service, but the indications are that the project will lead to significant reductions of traffic volumes in the town centre.

The following are key points from the Transport Assessment as at March 10, 2010, prepared by RPS:

- “Due to BRR providing an alternative link over the Six Mile Valley and into the strategic network for commuter traffic it is clear that traffic on the majority of links within the Town Centre will experience a significant decrease

Figure 4.7: Proposed New Development and Relief Road



in traffic volumes...”;

- Ballyclare bound traffic at Lindsey Corner will no longer use station road – 60% will use BRR instead;
- 30% traffic on Mill Road will transfer to BRR;
- 50% traffic on Rashee Road heading into Ballyclare will use BRR, 30% northbound; and
- Dough Road – 20% Ballyclare bound traffic diverted

The report concludes:

*“...proposed development will have a nominal impact on the adjacent road network in Ballyclare with the provision of the BRR. The construction of the proposed BRR will lead to traffic volumes within the Town Centre decreasing significantly, leading to more free-flowing traffic conditions within Ballyclare Town Centre.”*

According to RPS the expected traffic reductions will lead “to more free-flowing traffic conditions within Ballyclare Town Centre”. While that is likely to be the case if the town centre road network and management remains unchanged, the gains from traffic reduction can be “consumed” in other ways, such as greater provision for pedestrians, or priority for buses, or more roadspace made available for parking and servicing activity. It should not be automatically assumed that the best way of using the benefit is to speed the flow of vehicular traffic. Indeed, in a town centre environment giving priority to benefiting the economy and environmental conditions may be more appropriate than journey time savings. This is likely to be a key issue for the development framework for Ballyclare.

### **Parking**

There are two off-street public car parks operated by Roads Service in Ballyclare town centre. These are shown in Figure 4.8 below (from RS website: <http://applications.roadsni.gov.uk/carparking/TownCarparks.aspx>).

The usage pattern for the two charged car parks in Ballyclare are shown in Figure 2.5 for two sample periods (summer and winter). This indicates that there is much greater usage in the winter than in the summer. The daily average number of parking acts is 175 in the summer, and 318 in winter.

**Figure 4.8:** Roads Service Parking Provision in Ballyclare Town Centre

Location	No. of Spaces	No. of Disabled Spaces	Tariff Category
Harrier Way	100	No	T13
Harrier Way	33	Yes	None
Market Square	53	No	T13
<b>Total</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>

*Tariff category t13 is as follows*

Time	Price (£)
Up to 1 hour / Within 1 hour of closing	0.30
Over 1 hour and not exceeding 2 hours	0.60
Over 2 hour and not exceeding 3 hours	0.90
Over 3 hour and not exceeding 4 hours	1.20
Over 4 hour and not exceeding 5 hours	1.50
Over 5 hour and not exceeding 6 hours	1.80
Over 6 hour and not exceeding 7 hours	2.10
Over 7 hour and not exceeding 8 hours	2.40
Over 8 hours	2.70

**Figure 4.9:** Usage of Ballyclare Pay an Display Car Parks (two sample periods)

Car Park	Machine No.	11-17th July 2009	7-13th November 2009
Market Square	BLC004	372	464
	BLC005	184	558
<b>Total</b>		<b>556</b>	<b>1,022</b>
Harrier Way	BLC001	178	337
	BLC002	230	440
	BLC003	258	432
<b>Total</b>		<b>666</b>	<b>1,209</b>

There are in addition private off-street car parks associated with individual land uses. By far the largest of these is the Asda car park, which with around 200 spaces exceeds the total number of public spaces.

On-street parking is available in marked bays on Main Street and The Square, at unmarked kerbside elsewhere, without restriction or charge. Yellow line parking restrictions apply on Main Street and around The Square. Although there are no data, many of the on-street parking opportunities closest to The Square appear to be used by long-stay parkers. Enforcement of the yellow line restrictions appears to be effective.

#### 4.4 Public Transport

##### **Buses**

Ballyclare has a bus station with a limited park and ride function. It is located about 500 metres (about 7 minutes walk) from the square.

There is a town bus service in Ballyclare, number 356, performed by a single vehicle making an hourly one-way tour of some of the housing areas and out-lying places such as Ballyeaston and Burnside. It starts and ends by calling at the bus station and the square.

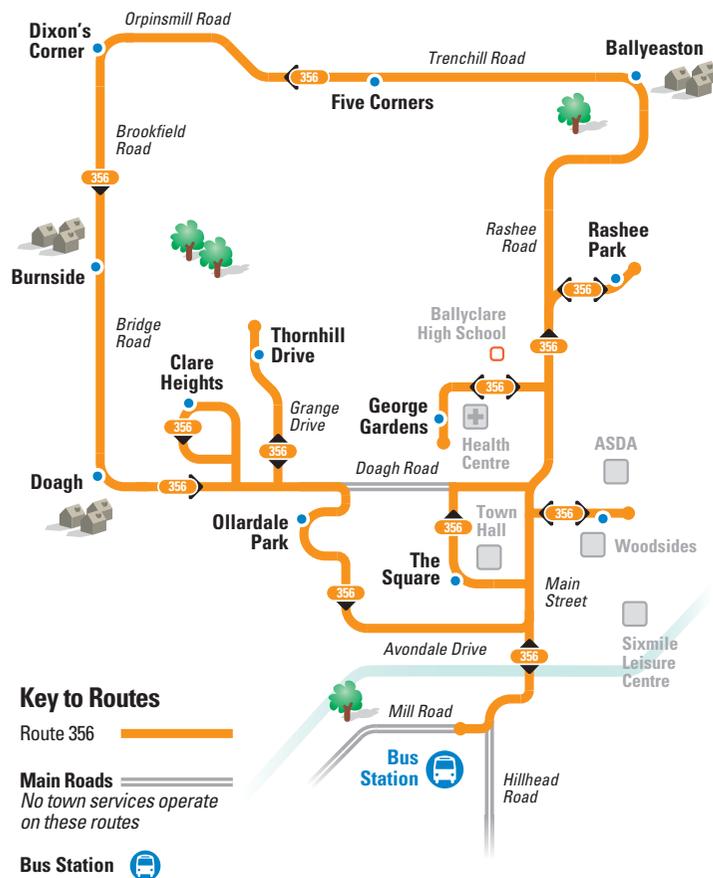
The presence of a local service in a town of less than 10,000 people is a positive feature, although passenger demand appears to be too weak to support a frequent and comprehensive service. The 356 is likely to be used only by people without a car at their disposal, and only for shopping. It cannot be used for journeys to work because it does not operate in the peak hours. Apart from the limited hours of service (Mondays to Fridays only, between 9.15 and 17.50), the service is slow. It provides a classic example of why buses should not be run as circular tours. For example, From The Square to Ballyeaston takes 9 minutes, but to get from Ballyeaston to The Square takes 32 minutes! The route diagram is reproduced in Figure 2.6.

Bus links to other towns are provided by the following services:

- Belfast: 153 and 153A, otherwise numbered as 553A (via Glengormley) runs Mondays to Fridays (17 journeys) and Saturdays (11 journeys);
- Belfast express (via motorway) between Ballyclare Bus Station and Belfast: 253, peak hour only;
- Antrim 154/156: 8 times daily Monday to Friday only from Ballyclare Bus Station (in the afternoon the service also goes to Larne);
- Ballymena, route 148 (changed from 149) runs twice a day Mondays to Fridays only.

Figure 4.10: Ballyclare Town Bus Service

**Translink Ulsterbus Ballyclare Town Service (356)**



There are no bus services on a Sunday, and on Saturday only Belfast can be reached.

It is fairly clear from the above summary that bus services are fairly rudimentary and difficult to understand, and are therefore unlikely to appeal to people with a car at their disposal. The 2001 census stated that 79% of public transport users in Ballyclare came from households with access to a car. But of course not everyone in a household has exclusive access to the car.

There are currently no proposals to provide any bus priority in Ballyclare. Buses are subjected to the same delays experienced by general traffic, and this can disrupt journey schedules and reliability.

The two stops serving The Square are on opposite sides of The Square. The other main pair of stops for the town centre is at the lower part of Main Street. This enables shoppers to alight at one end of Main Street, and board at the other end having completed their shopping tour. The bus station is not convenient for the main shopping area: although the walking time is not excessive, it is more than would normally be tolerated by shoppers. Most services, however, serve The Square and Main Street as well as the bus station.

The residents survey revealed that 14.10% of shoppers travel to their local centre by bus. In the shoppers survey, none of the visitors to Ballyclare surveyed had travelled to the town centre by bus. By comparison 67.67% had travelled in a private car and 31.30% had walked.

Timetables made easy: Click 028 90 66 66 30 or call [www.translink.co.uk](http://www.translink.co.uk)

Translink Information awaited (requested 22 Feb. 2010)

#### **4.5 Cycle Movement and Parking**

There are no cycle routes in Ballyclare. No publicly available cycle parking in Ballyclare town centre has been recorded. From observation, cycling accounts for a small proportion of travel in Ballyclare, although no data are available.

The new link and relief roads in connection with the major 2,340 home development to the north west of Ballyclare will have shared foot/cycle paths on the southeast side.

There are few cycle parking opportunities in the town centres, but it is intended to improve provision in future, as a low cost measure to boost cycling. Roads Service would welcome a unified approach to the provision for cycling in the town centres. This might include, for example, whether provision should be in advance of demand or whether it should follow demand, and whether provision of cycle routes should be on road, shared, or separate. (Information from Roads Service cycling officer, Brian Bailey.)

#### **4.6 Taxis**

There are three taxi companies in Ballyclare, and a further three in the area around the town.

# 5. Market Analysis

## 5.1 Introduction

This section of the Baseline Report has been prepared by Colliers CRE. It aims to assess Ballyclare Town Centre from primarily a retail perspective and outlines what potential opportunities and threats it faces in the short-medium term. We offer a number of recommendations that we believe would significantly benefit the Town Centre.

In the preparation of this study, we have primarily taken cognisance of the findings of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan: Retail Sector Study (2003). Key Findings of this included:

- Reducing traffic congestion was deemed to be the most important issue facing the town;
- 87% of retailers were in favour of adding to the net retail floorspace in the town centre to enable new retailers (Dunnes, Marks and Spencers and Next were favourites) to locate in the town;
- There was widespread feeling that the existing positioning of Ballyclare was too downmarket;
- There was a dearth of non-bulky comparison goods floorspace; and
- Vacancy rates were 82% above national averages.

## 5.2 UK Retail Market Overview

The UK Retail Market is currently undergoing a period of correction. Colliers CRE 2009 Midsummer Retail Report forecasts that rental values will fall by 23% by the end of 2010. The worst economic recession since the 1930s has taken its toll on the retail sector with capital values for some properties falling by up to half.

Retailers have reported “challenging” trading conditions across the board with the notable exception being those at the value or discount end of the spectrum apparently trading much better than those positioned at the middle and higher ends.

2009 and 2010 have witnessed a large number of high profile retailer administrations, the net effect of which has been to increase the rate of voids in UK shopping centres and high streets. Opportunistic discount retailers are taking the opportunity of ever increasing voids to negotiate low rents and large incentives in taking new units.

Landlords appear to have learnt the lesson of the early 1990s, in part forced upon them by the Government’s implementation of full vacant rate payments and are now prepared to keep units occupied almost on any terms. Rent free periods and/or incentives equal to two or three years are common place with extreme examples of five or even six years rent free being accepted. Short term leases on a turnover basis are often being entered into. The occupancy of a unit helps maintain vibrancy and a feeling of well-being in shopping centres and high streets.

The recession has witnessed the first drop in prime rents since the recession of the early 1990s, when rental values fell for three consecutive years from 1991 by -2.4%, -4.1% and -3.2% respectively, highlighting the comparative severity of the current economic climate and its impact on the retail market.

### **5.3 Ballyclare Context**

Ballyclare enjoys a good strategic location on the Larne line approximately 12 miles from Belfast, 12 miles from Larne and 15 miles from Ballymena. The town's proximity to Belfast and the motorway network (via the M2) has helped consolidate its position as a popular commuter town, a trend which is set to continue with the proposed construction of a large number of new homes in the town.

In retail terms, it is the principal shopping town for the inhabitants of smaller towns and villages throughout the peninsula such as Ballynure, Parkgate, Straid, Doagh, Tildarg, Ballyrobert and Parkgate. Ballyclare's dominance as a retail town within this hinterland is therefore well established which is reflected in the relative size of its Town Centre and its popularity for weekly shopping amongst those based in nearby rural locations.

The perception is that there is considerable leakage to nearby competing retail centres such as Belfast City Centre (15-20 minutes drive time), Larne (again 15 minutes drive time), Newtownabbey (10-15 minutes) and Ballymena (15 minutes drive time) all of which currently are differentiated by a more diverse and comprehensive retail offer.

Ballyclare has a comparatively smaller stock of business units, in the form of offices and warehousing. There is however a considerable number of smaller offices and warehouse units in the town supporting a small number of local business.

From a leisure perspective, Ballyclare town centre whilst accommodating a considerable number of smaller pubs offers little for families and visitors to the area in terms of good quality restaurants and evening entertainment.

### **5.4 Ballyclare Retail Market** ***Current Retail Landscape in the Town Centre***

Ballyclare has a compact town centre with a large number of surface public car parks making the town centre attractive and accessible for shoppers, if somewhat congested. The Primary Retail Core is centred around Market Square and the north end of Main Street with secondary retailing found on the Southern end of Main Street.

As is discussed in more detail below, the majority of the occupiers in the town centre are primarily low quality smaller independents, banks, estate agents and charity shops which in our opinion fail to generate a sense of place or an attractive shopping environment. These retailers tend to occupy small "lock up shops" in converted terrace buildings. Fit-outs and shop-fronts are generally aging and tired which creates a town centre lacking in quality and in need of comprehensive upgrading and inward investment.

It appears to be an opportune time to re-visit the retail provision in the town, upgrading and adding to it as appropriate. The planned expansion of the town (with the proposed addition of 2,000 new homes) in addition to the popularity of the two schools, combine to provide a positive backdrop to the future prospects of retailing in the town centre.

**Figure 5.1:** Northern Ireland Retail Rents

Centre	2008
Belfast	265
Belfast - Forestside S.C.	185
Bangor - Bloomfield S.C.	135
Londonderry	115
Newtownards - Ards S.C.	90
Ballymena	90
Belfast - Abbey S.C.	90
Belfast - Connswater S.C.	90
Coleraine	90
Lisburn	90
Newry	90
Enniskillen	75
Bangor Town Centre	60
Newtownards - Town Centre	50
Downpatrick	45
Armagh	40
Larne	35
<b>Ballyclare</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Banbridge</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Magherafelt</b>	<b>25</b>

### ***Retail rents – Ballyclare***

Ballyclare’s retail position is illustrated in Figure 5.1 showing retail rents across NI. The established Zone A rent for Prime Retail Units in Ballyclare was c. £25-30 up until mid 2007. Since then there have been relatively few transactions in line with wider market trends. As is the case in the majority of towns across Northern Ireland we would expect to see some reduction in established rental levels in the Town Centre.

Headline rents are likely to remain the same but large incentives packages needed to attract ingoing retailers will almost certainly have led to a fall in net effective rents.

In the future however, this could be viewed as a potential strength of the Town Centre in the event that suitable retail accommodation can be supplied at a relatively lower cost than that which is offered in competing retail centres.

To be competitive, the Town Centre will have to build from a relatively low base in rental terms. It will find it hard to compete with its competitors unless it can provide an alternative lower cost option than that which is offered in the competing alternatives. The key challenge will be in procuring a suitable site to enable the cost base to remain relatively low in order to facilitate lower rentals. The reduction in build costs since 2007 should assist with the viability of any proposed development in the town centre.

### ***Recent Transactions***

Recent transactions within the Primary Retail Core have been fairly limited. This is largely due to two reasons. Firstly,

the implications of the “credit crunch” and its constraining effect on the expansionary policies of retailers. Secondly, Ballyclare’s relatively small size and its secondary status in terms of retail positioning when considered with neighbouring retail centres, has rendered it relatively less attractive for both multinationals and indigenous retailers alike, in terms of their expansion within the region.

An example of letting activity within the retail core includes:

- The **Original Factory Shop** have agreed to take the former Asda store on Main Street though are not yet trading. The rental reflects a low overall rate of c. £5 per sq ft which is commensurate with a unit of this size, in this location and in the current market.

Colliers have marketed this unit for a considerable period and have had little interest in the unit highlighting difficult trading conditions generally.

### ***Proposed Developments***

Our research would suggest that there are no advanced proposals for the town centre in terms of retail development. We have spoken to local property owners and developers who do have plans to redevelop existing properties within the town centre but are not actively pressing forward with their proposals.

The principal coercive influence stalling development is the wider economy and the perceived difficulty of securing finance to fund speculative development projects and then attracting tenants on acceptable terms. Importantly also,

the relatively fragmented nature of town centre ownerships makes it apparent that no single developer has a holding of sufficient size to allow them to undertake a sizable retail development. The importance of developing a “critical mass” of retail accommodation is discussed later.

In the absence of joint venture arrangements, it is apparent that the public sector may be able to play a role in facilitating the assembly of a suitable site.

### ***The Local Independent Sector***

Ballyclare town centre is known for its good, but limited range of local independent retailers. Some of the better known of these retailers include: **Wardrobe** a well established ladies fashion boutique; **Ashers Bakery**, an established bakery in the centre of the town; **Woodside**, a Northern Ireland based discount department store with representation in a number of towns across the province; **The Paper Shop**, a locally run Newsagent; and **Ernest Hall**, a suit and suit hire business. **Homestyle Interiors** are another well regarded local independent homewares retailer pitched towards the higher end of the market.

### ***Multinational Retailers***

There are few national multinational retailers in the town. Again the town’s proximity to other larger retail centres is stressed as a coercive influence in attracting such retailers to the town. One notable exception is **Peacocks**, who reportedly trade well in the town. **Boots** chemist also occupies a unit within the town centre as do **Lidl**, **Card Factory**, **Xtravision** and **Spar**.

Most of the major banks are represented in the town centre including **Ulster Bank, Northern Bank, Bank of Ireland, Nationwide** and **First Trust**.

**Semi Chem** were represented in the town however have ceased trading reportedly due to poor trade.

### **The “New” Asda – Its Role as Town Centre Anchor**

In what has otherwise been a relatively stagnant retail environment, Ballyclare’s new Asda store has been a very significant development within the town centre. Colliers CRE were involved in the site assembly acting on behalf of Asda. Since opening (on 17 March 2008) the store has proved to be a resounding success, emphasising if nothing else, that the customers are there and will visit the town centre for a good retail offer.

Notably, despite the town’s smaller size, Asda decided to open its larger town format incorporating both a George (fashion) and a homewares offer. This was due to the perceived lack of competition in the town for both types of product. We understand that both perform well.

Asda is now an important anchor to the town centre and is proving to be a considerable draw to it. The wider question of its positive effects on the rest of the town centre is less clear. Shoppers and local retailers typically assert that most shoppers park in the Asda car park, do their food-shopping, then leave without venturing onto the Main Street.

A number of observations emerge. Firstly, it appears that there is little in the town centre otherwise to draw shoppers

into the established primary retail core from the Asda car park. The Asda appears to be providing its vital anchor function in drawing shoppers to the town, but the town is not capitalising on this in terms of deriving additional spend. It is suggested that a better “link through” from the Asda store to the top of Main Street could be instrumental in providing a much needed link between it and the established retail core.

Second, it is suggested that there is a degree of physical separation between the Asda store and the Main Street. Again an attractive “link through” streetscape which more directly linked the Asda store to the top of Market Square / Main Street could be instrumental in providing a link to the existing retail core and facilitating additional shopping in the town. It is proposed that this link through would best take the form of a retail parade or streetscape.

The town centre is also anchored by **Woodsides / Supervalu** a locally owned department store who trade in a number of similar towns across Northern Ireland. Again, the extent to which Woodsides “feeds” the rest of the town centre is questionable. Its location beside the Asda store seems to be physically disjointed from the town in the absence of an amenable link through to the Main Street.

Further, the store almost seems to have its frontage at the rear of the shop (facing away from the town centre) which further serves to negatively impact its integration with the rest of the Main Street.

### **5.5 Competing Retail Centres – Potential Leakage**

Ballyclare's market town status and relatively large catchment population is an obvious strength from a retail perspective however its proximity to competing retail centres is, by implication a threat.

The principal competition can be listed as follows:

#### ***Belfast City Centre***

The City Centre has been somewhat rejuvenated from a retail and leisure perspective with the opening of Victoria Square Shopping Centre. This scheme is Northern Ireland's largest shopping centre. It provides a number of points of difference relative to regional towns. Its strong retail offer (House of Fraser, Build a Bear, Tom Tailor, LK Bennett for example) complemented by a strong restaurant offer (Nandos, Pizza Express, TGI Fridays) provide the rationale for shoppers to visit. The majority of the schemes Tenants are not represented elsewhere in Northern Ireland.

#### ***Abbey Centre, Newtownabbey***

The Abbey Centre is within a 15 minute drive time from Ballyclare. The scheme is anchored by Dunnes, River Island, Next and others in addition to a Marks and Spencers and Tescos in the adjacent retail parks further serves to strengthen its appeal.

There are a large number of multinational retailers in Abbey Centre and the surrounding retail park who are not represented in Ballyclare.

#### ***Ballymena***

Ballymena is within a 15 minute drive time of Ballyclare. The town centre is anchored by two shopping centres, the Fairhill Shopping Centre and the Tower Centre. Between the two schemes, most of the larger UK multinational brands have representation.

A large Sainsburys on the edge of town is also anecdotally reported to be popular with Ballyclare residents.

#### ***Larne***

Larne is located within a 10-15 minute drive time of Ballyclare. As such, the towns directly compete with one another for the attentions of shoppers, predominantly those who live between them.

It is thought that Ballyclare's Asda store is currently drawing from Larne and surrounding areas in the absence of a similar foodstore in Larne. This is set to change however. Larne is to get its own new Asda store with a provisional opening date of Monday, June 7 2010.

Like Ballyclare, Larne otherwise has experienced a fairly stagnant retail environment in recent years. The development of the Laharna Retail Park in 2004 is however a good example of how Larne has sought to address the problem of having insufficient units of modern Grade A size and specification. Such units are now provided in Laharna and occupied by Argos, New Look, Peacocks, Menarys, M&Co, Going Places, Lidl, B+M Bargains, Carphone Warehouse, 02 and The Street.

Given such competition, the need to upgrade and improve the shopping experience in the town centre is stressed if Ballyclare is to assert its position amongst the strong opportunity set of competing alternatives.

### ***Junction 1***

Junction 1 Outlet Village and Retail Park whilst not itself a traditional town centre will attract retail spend from Ballyclare. Indeed, this is not unusual and its status as Outlet village means that it is designed to attract custom from across Northern Ireland. However, given its range of good coffee shops, fashion outlets and well landscaped surroundings, it does act as a competitor to Ballyclare Town Centre.

Further, as mentioned above the Asda in Ballyclare is a considerable draw to the town centre and currently a source of competitive advantage. However, a new Asda store is under construction at Junction 1 in Antrim. This in addition to the new store in Larne is perceived to be of detriment to the important role that the Asda currently plays in the town centre. The importance therefore of upgrading and improving the retail offer to compensate for this is stressed.

## **5.6 Future Retail Strategy**

### ***Multinational Retailers***

#### **Multinationals who may be attracted to Ballyclare**

In our opinion for a town of the size of Ballyclare, the multinational sector is underrepresented. This should not be overstated however. Ballyclare simply does not offer the catchment to be considered by the large majority of

multinational brands (in particular, many of the fashion retailers) but there are, in our opinion a limited number who would consider the town if an appropriate retailing environment could be provided. Retailers with whom we have visited the town have typically been enthused by the amount of schoolchildren in the town centre and this is a key attractor to them.

Large multinational dominated shopping destinations are characterized by “critical mass”, that is a large number complementary retailers which together attract a diverse range of shoppers.

These retailers are listed below. Some of them are well known “footfall drivers” and would certainly be of benefit to the town centre, not only in terms of attracting shoppers but also in helping to improve the character of and “feel” within the retail core.

- New Look – 5,000 sq ft
- Argos – 7,000 sq ft
- M&Co – 7,000 sq ft
- B&M Bargains – 7,000 sq ft
- Poundstretcher – 5,000 sq ft
- Home Bargains – 6,000 sq ft
- Poundland – 5,000 sq ft
- Poundworld – 4,000 sq ft
- Semi-Chem (were in the town but vacated – could possibly be attracted back to occupy a unit within a suitable scheme) – 2,000 sq ft
- Savers / Superdrug – 3,000 sq ft
- Holland and Barrett – 1,500 sq ft

To some extent, this list reflects the current economic climate and the fact that those retailers who are currently acquisitive tend to be towards the value end of the spectrum. Attracting such retailers to the town potentially conflicts with our later recommendations that Ballyclare should seek to accommodate higher end boutique retailers.

By way of further explanation, we believe that Ballyclare can and should offer both. Perhaps a zone towards the northern end of Main Street (close to the Asda perhaps as part of a link through onto Main Street) could allow for the development of a suitable scheme to attract the limited range of “target” multinational retailers. The southern end of Main Street would therefore cater for the boutiques.

It is also worth noting that some of the names in this list are unlikely to be particularly well received by some town centre stakeholders. Pound shops and discount chains are widely regarded as anathema to improving town centres. In this it is stressed that Poundland and Poundworld are a world apart from locally run fixed price retailers. Rather, they invest heavily in attractive fit-outs and merchandising. These retailers are proven footfall generators and attractors to town centres and shopping centres alike.

Crucially however, multinational retailers will not be attracted to the town on a piecemeal or one by one basis. They will only come to a new development of sufficient critical mass and which promotes a tenant mix that will draw a wide range of customers. We would suggest that any new retail provision would comprise at least 7-8 new appropriately sized retail units such that the above

named retailers can take comfort from knowing that other good complementary retailers can be accommodated alongside them. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, the development of Laharna Retail Park is a good example of how a new scheme can attract a range of multinational retailers hitherto not represented in the town.

It is suggested that the town does not however meet the size and specification requirements of typical multinational retailers, as such, legitimising a role for the development of suitable accommodation in the town.

### **Size and Specification Requirements of Multinational Retailers**

In general terms, the size and specification requirements of such retailers are discussed below:

- Units ranging from 2,500 – 10,000 sq ft.
- Regular shaped units without steps / ramps or other changes in level at ground floor level.
- Minimum frontage: 6 metres (8-10 metres for larger units).
- Floor to ceiling shop fascias for display.
- 3 Phase electricity supply.
- Goods lifts / Amenity Block / Disabled W.C's / Screeded floors.
- Rear service access and servicing areas.

The potential to create a critical mass of well specified larger units in competing retail centres (Abbey Centre, Ballymena and so on) is in contrast to a lack of “fit for purpose” retail units in the town centre and in our view, largely accounts

for the dearth of the UK multinational retailers who would consider the town (mentioned above).

Retailers increasingly demand large box retail with ground floor floor-plates of between 2,500 sq ft and 10,000 sq ft. The existing building stock in the Primary Retail Core could broadly be described as aging converted terrace buildings which do not adequately meet the needs of modern retailers.

### **Those Multinationals who are unlikely to come**

In the interests of properly informing retail policy direction it is believed worthwhile to consider those retailers who are deemed unlikely to pursue the town of Ballyclare in their expansion plans. In this, it is noted that discussions with residents and local retailers concerning what might benefit the town centre usually results in the same large anchor stores being mentioned.

For the avoidance of doubt therefore, whilst the following retailers would undoubtedly benefit the town, it is unlikely that they would consider opening a store there:

- Marks and Spencers
- Primark
- Dunnes
- Zara
- H&M Hennes
- Debenhams
- Next
- Arcadia brands (Top Shop / Dorothy Perkins / Burtons / Principles etc)

It is possible that Marks and Spencers (whilst not currently acquisitive) may consider the town for its smaller Simply Food format within the masterplan timeframe.

It follows therefore that it will prove very difficult for Ballyclare to try to compete with the Abbey Centre, Ballymena and Belfast City Centre in seeking to offer a comparable multinational dominated tenant “line up”. Rather Ballyclare will need to compete on providing a point of difference, satisfying latent demand for goods and services not currently provided in any of the competing centres. Increasing the provision of niche / boutique stores is suggested as one way of achieving this and is considered in more detail below.

### ***Northern Ireland Based Independent Retailers***

There are also a number of indigenous Northern Irish retailers who we believe would consider the town including:

- Hanna and Browne
- SD Kells
- Menarys / Tempest
- Houstons

The lack of a town centre anchor at the southern end of Main Street is an important consideration. If a suitable site could be identified with sufficient car parking towards this lower end of Main Street, a dumbbell effect could be created, with Asda at one end (north) and another anchor at the other (south) with positive implications for those trading in between. It may be possible to anchor the

southern end of Main Street with one of the above named local independent retailers.

We have undertaken some research into these retailers and their intentions regarding Ballyclare. The following summarises their position:

#### **Hanna and Browne**

Hanna and Browne are a well established Northern Ireland based cookware and homeware retailer and are represented in a number of towns across Northern Ireland. We believe that they would consider a presence in Ballyclare as part of a comprehensive improvement of the primary retail core. However they would ideally like to purchase and occupy a larger unit within the town centre.

#### **Menarys / Tempest**

Menarys / Tempest are a local fashion retailer with outlets in larger towns across Northern Ireland.

Tempest are an obvious target for the town, in that they provide a range of concessions under one roof of larger retail brands who could not justify having a standalone store in the town.

Brands include La Senza, Warehouse, Oasis and Wallis, none of which retailers would consider a store in the town but might well consider opening a concession.

Upon speaking to this retailer it was clear that there was concern over the lack of good adjacencies and complementary retailers or a critical mass of fashion

boutiques. Of importance is that they would consider opening a store if there were more such complementary retailers.

We have spoken to a number of well regarded local independent retailers across the province. Whilst the ongoing recession has quelled their enthusiasm for new stores generally, most have a fairly positive view of trading in Ballyclare and could potentially be attracted to the right development.

#### **SD Kells**

S D Kells is a well known department store with a longstanding reputation in ladies fashion, menswear, children's wear, bedding and household as well as wedding gifts and formal hire wear.

S D Kells trade across Northern Ireland.

We believe that this retailer trades well in Banbridge which is a comparable town to Ballyclare. AS such, we believe that they could be attracted to the town as part of a comprehensive upgrading of the retail offer

#### **Houstons**

Houstons is a department store trading from Banbridge, Ballymena, Downpatrick and Lurgan. We believe that they could be attracted to the town if the right retail environment could be provided.

## **Tenure**

Whilst a number of the retailers detailed above are likely to be interested in Ballyclare, it is likely that their interest will only be on the basis that they can purchase the freehold interest in the unit which they occupy. This is particularly true of family businesses and the local larger department type stores who we find to be particularly averse to renting premises.

It follows that there is likely to be interest amongst Northern Ireland's indigenous retailers for new retail space in Ballyclare. If anchor independent retailers can be secured but who will only agree to enter the Ballyclare market if they can purchase their unit, then this should be facilitated where possible. It may be that a developer would be unwilling to compromise on this and require that all units are leased. In our opinion, this will significantly reduce the potential occupiers list, to the detriment of the potential vitality of the Town Centre.

## ***Attracting Higher End Retailers and Fashion Boutiques – Providing the Right Environment***

Boutique shops often trade from converted terraces and smaller high street shops. They have a typical ground floor square footage requirement of 750 sq ft – 1,000 sq ft. Aging buildings often exhibit characteristics (high ceilings and period features) which often complement the fit out of the boutique trader. All of which is to say that it is likely that refurbishing the existing properties to the south end of Main Street would be sufficient to satisfy the property needs of these potential occupiers.

Crucially however, there are a further number of characteristics which appear to be missing from Main Street which would otherwise help to attract these retailers. The first is attractive, ornate or period shopfronts. These help to elevate the “feel” within town centre streetscapes making the town visually more attractive and therefore more appealing to visit. There is perhaps a role for the public sector here in co-ordinating the upgrading of existing to boutique style shop-fronts.

The second is an attractive streetscape. Public realm works such as paving, seating and artistic commissions can help to create the “boutique” feel, setting the scene for stylish retail environments where more affluent customers want to visit. An example where this works very well is The Linen Green, Moygashel in Dungannon, which is a tourist attraction in its own right. The recent upgrading of Market Square and Main Street are a definite step in the right direction towards promoting a boutique feel.

Thirdly is the need for a strong catering offer. Good coffee shops and restaurants are seen as synonymous with fashionable retail areas. This need not necessarily be a multinational chain. Rather, it is more likely to be locally run, but of a higher calibre than that which is currently on offer. The presence of good quality butchers / bakeries and delicatessens again are hallmarks of successful niche retailing environments.

Finally, is a focal point for children. Whether this in the form of a children's play facility (privately run or otherwise) or a catering offer specifically aimed at children, a feature

of successful niche retailing areas is that they cater for children as well as adults.

### ***“Bulky Goods” Retail Warehousing***

In recent years there has been strong demand from retailers for modern well configured retail warehousing in schemes across Northern Ireland. Given this trend, it is notable that there is a dearth of a good retail warehouse or “bulky goods” scheme in Ballyclare. The towns close proximity to Belfast may account for the lack of such development. There is a considerable offer in nearby Newtownabbey perhaps accounting for the lack of such developments in the town.

Whilst we would not advocate “bulky goods” retailing the town centre, one reason accounting for leakage in retail spend to competing retail centres is the lack of “out of town” retail parks in Ballyclare and the existence of such parks in competing centres. These easily accessible parks have become key attractors for car borne shoppers.

At the current time, we do not envisage there being a sufficient level of demand to justify the development of an out of town retail warehouse scheme. It is possible however that such retailer demand will emerge during the course of the masterplan timeframe to legitimise a small scale development.

As opposed to competing with the town centre, these parks are important attractors to the town and together with a vibrant town centre will help to promote a sense of both destination and place.

### **5.7 Ballyclare Office Market**

Notwithstanding a few larger office buildings typically occupied by Public Sector bodies, the office market in the town would be characterized by a relatively large number of smaller offices in converted terrace buildings located at the edges of the retail core along Main Street and Market Square. These tend to be either owner occupied or rented space in small office buildings or above retail or commercial space. Typical occupiers include solicitors, accountants and other similar small consultancy practices.

The town centre office market in Ballyclare is unlikely to witness major change in the short to medium term. We are not aware of any substantial current or imminent public or private sector requirements. Following from this, speculative development of large offices in the town centre is deemed unlikely and inefficacious from a viability perspective.

From a master-planning perspective in the wider provincial market place, demand for new build offices while limited is focused on small pavilion style own door office units of 1,500 – 2,000 sq ft with associated parking on the edge of town. Take-up of this type of scheme has been particularly good but generally only from a freehold perspective where local companies have been able to acquire buildings for placement within their own pension funds. The viability of such a scheme in Ballyclare is deemed to be marginal – we do not believe that demand is such that it would legitimise development in excess of a total of 8,000 – 10,000 sq ft for this use.

## **5.8 Leisure and Tourism**

The Leisure and Tourism market in Northern Ireland is undergoing significant expansion with year on year increases in visitor numbers to the province over the past number of years.

The Executive's Programme for Government has set Northern Ireland tourism challenging targets over the next three years. These include increasing visitor numbers from 1.98million to 2.5million by 2011, and growing tourism revenue from £370 million to £520 million.

It is widely acknowledged that Northern Ireland is rich in natural beauty with widespread areas of special interest. Ballyclare could benefit from increased tourist numbers and seek to capitalise on increased tourist revenue over the coming years. In this, its proximity to the Port of Larne, the International Airport and the Glens of Antrim are stressed as potentially positive influences on the town's future ability to attract tourist spend.

### ***The Leisure Centre***

The Leisure Centre is viewed locally as an excellent resource and is seen as an important attractor to the town centre. The facility comprises a swimming pool suitable for both adults and children and a comprehensive gym facility which was comprehensively refurbished in February 2009. It also has a large sports hall which accommodates activities such as children's summer schemes, 5-a-side football and evening fitness classes.

The nearest comparable facility is offered at Valley Leisure centre. Therefore the Leisure Centre offers an important point of difference for Ballyclare Town Centre with its modern facilities providing a comprehensive regional draw.

The facility is not particularly well integrated with the town centre and "feels" physically disjointed from it, despite there being a number of pedestrian links. It is suggested that these links could be improved. The Leisure Centre is not obviously accessible when approaching particularly from the north of the town and initiatives such as better signage and clearer vehicular access may be of benefit.

The role of the Leisure Centre as Leisure anchor to the town centre is however stressed. It already provides an important focal point for the town centre and is a key reason for people to visit the town centre outside of normal business hours.

### ***Existing Hotels / Restaurants / Pubs and Clubs***

There are a considerable number of pubs / bars in Ballyclare town centre. For the large part, these are considered to be more traditional drinking establishments and not particularly amenable to families and young people.

The Sportsman, The Grange and The Comrades (Social Club) are probably the best known of the town centre bars. In terms of restaurants, there are no particularly well known town centre restaurants. Within the immediate area, Barnabies, Oregano (both in Ballyrobert) and bamboo (edge of town centre) are well thought of locally. However, the absence of a good town centre offer is of

obvious detriment to both the shopping experience and the evening economy.

Other than this, there is a proliferation of relatively low quality fast food outlets in the town centre. These offer little to boosting dwell times within the primary retail core and contributing to the feel within the town centre.

Addressing this and seeking to attract high quality restaurant and bar operators should be a key priority of the masterplan.

### **5.9 Future Leisure Market**

In terms of bolstering the existing Leisure offer, the following potential uses should be investigated and promoted where possible:

#### ***Hotel***

There are no active requirements in the town at present from the national hotel chains or local hotel operators. The hotel sector is currently undergoing a period of consolidation. Over the course of the masterplan, there is perhaps scope for a new hotel in the town, most likely a purpose built facility. This is unlikely to be within the town centre but would be a good attractor to the town in general. This should be facilitated where possible in increasing the number of visitors to the town, and of raising its profile as a leisure destination.

#### ***Children's Indoor Play Park***

These are proving to be very popular and a number of national chains have now entered the province. They are

proving to be a considerable attraction and in the case of Ballyclare, this type of provision would be an obvious way of attracting young families to the area. As mentioned, this kind of offer complements very well the provision of boutique / niche retailing. The typical requirement is for 3,000 – 5,000 sq ft.

#### ***Restaurant / Cafés***

A strong Catering offer has never been more important in “creating places” and bolstering both the retail and night time economies. This is conspicuous by its absence in Ballyclare town centre and is stressed as an important facet not only to the daytime shopping experience but also to promoting an evening economy.

#### ***Drive thru***

Whilst seemingly at odds with seeking to reduce the level of traffic and congestion in the town centre, it is nonetheless true that Drive Thru's are a key attraction to town centres amongst young families and young people alike.

If a suitable opportunity site could be identified which was deemed to be of only negligible further detriment to the towns traffic congestion problems, we believe that this would be a viable use with the following parties being potentially interested. A unit of 2,500 sq ft would be required with an adequate external circulation area.

- KFC
- Supermacs
- McDonalds

### **5.10 The Town Centre Residential Market**

Town centre living is of obvious benefit to improving the vitality of the town centre. Whilst we believe that there would be limited demand for new build apartments and townhouses (given the fall in property values across NI and the relative affordability of traditional housing) we do however believe that some of the typically run down terrace buildings on the edge of the town centre could be refurbished to provide attractive town centre residential accommodation.

These buildings are typically former residential terraces which have since been converted into retail use and subsequently have become vacant and disused. As such, they provide an unattractive and uninviting entrance to the town centre.

We are cognizant of the impending increase in out of town centre residential stock in the form of the proposed 2,000 new homes to be constructed on the new relief road. However, it is likely that this type of housing will appeal more to young families and older people and less so to younger professionals. It is proposed that the latter would prefer to live in the town centre (assuming a rejuvenated retail and leisure sector) and the significant number of run down buildings on the edge of the town centre could, once refurbished, provide an ideal location for such people.

Moreover, there may be added scope to convert some of this stock into social housing or managed accommodation for the elderly. Improving and upgrading not least the

façade of these properties which currently provide an unattractive gateway to the town centre should be a key consideration for town centre stakeholders.

### **5.11 The Importance of Public Realm**

Shopping has become more of a leisure activity. Customers increasingly demand shopping environments that are attractive and pleasant. Successful retailing has become about customers having an authentic experience. Increasing footfall and dwell times accounts for why so much effort is put into creating attractive destinations where people want to visit.

All of which is to say that any future town centre scheme should be designed around significant public realm. The provision of high quality paving, sculptures, seating and street lighting (like that which has just been undertaken on Market Square and Main Street) in any proposed additional development would have very significant implications for the attractiveness of the town centre for visitors and shoppers alike.

As part of any public realm improvements, good signage provisions should signpost the main features / attractions in the town. There should also be clear and accessible linkages within the town centre such that it is an accessible, easily navigated and attractive place.

### **5.12 Vision**

Ballyclare is a good town and has many positives. The town's location within a densely populated hinterland

is perhaps its greatest asset accounting for why it has remained one of Northern Ireland's better market towns over the last few years.

The vitality and viability of the Town Centre is however currently under threat amidst traffic congestion and a stagnation in new retail development to provide high quality retail floorspace which the modern retailer demands. Ballyclare "shares" its catchment with a number of other good quality retail destinations so the need to upgrade, improve and create a point of difference is clear.

At the heart of our vision for Ballyclare Town Centre is a rejuvenated and comprehensive retail offer incorporating the following:

1. A limited number of new multinational retailers.
2. Complementary local retailers / department stores
3. Boutique / niche retailers specialising in higher end fashions, homewares and giftware.
4. An enhanced catering offer incorporating an increased range of good quality bars and restaurants.

We would envisage that this would be complemented by other footfall drivers befitting a market town of its stature. For example, a regular farmers market tied into the existing variety market could become an important draw to the Town Centre if a suitable site could be identified. We believe that this has already been initiated on the town hall site on a small scale. Initiatives such as this will create a point of difference between Ballyclare and nearby competing retail centres.

# 6. Retail Capacity Baseline

## 6.1 Introduction

XXX







# 7. Urban Design Analysis

## 7.1 Introduction

XXX







# 8. Town Centre Health Check

## 8.1 Introduction

Each of the Planning Policy Statement 5: Retailing and Town Centres indicators outlined in this Town Centre Health check can be brought together to present an overall picture of the vitality and viability of Ballyclare Town Centre. This in turn can then inform a 'SWOT Analysis', considering the relative strengths and weaknesses of the Town Centre, the opportunities to improve the overall vitality and viability of the centre and the factors that could threaten the success of improvements.

As part of the preparation of the Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) 2015, a 'Health Check' for Ballyclare Town Centre was completed in 2003. It concluded that Ballyclare Town Centre was 'generally unhealthy', but suggested that proposed improvements in the convenience retail offer could act as a catalyst for regeneration and improvements in future vitality and viability:

*"...generally fairly unhealthy, the development of a new Safeway superstore may trigger the qualitative improvements which are also necessary in the centre's comparison goods shopping provision."*

The information provided in this 'Health Check' therefore provides an overview of how Ballyclare Town Centre has changed over the past six years.

## 8.2 Accessibility

As well as being outlined as part of the Town Centre Health Check, issues relating to the accessibility of Ballyclare

Town Centre are also included in detail in Section 4 of this Baseline Report.

## 8.3 Land Use Profile

The land use survey recorded a total of 269 units within the town centre, of which 83 are residential units. With the exception of the vacancy rate, this is broadly comparable to the UK average distribution.

The number of convenience retail outlets has almost halved since 2001, but is now more akin with the national average. This provision is dominated by the new Asda superstore and adjacent Woodside's Supervalu. Of concern, the tow units vacated by Asda and Woodside's remain vacant.

Although the number of comparison outlets has increased slightly since 2001, the overall proportion has fallen almost six per cent. Comparison retail is also significantly below the national average. Distribution of comparison units throughout the centre is relatively even and contains a high proportion of independent, local businesses.

The survey reveals that the service sector is the strongest sector within Ballyclare town centre, representing almost half of the total units. The majority of these units are hair and beauty and takeaways, resulting in a weak leisure service sector. Despite the new Six Mile Leisure Centre, the development of a vibrant leisure economy would require more restaurants, cafes and assembly facilities.

The vacancy rate within Ballyclare is almost double the national average. Whilst this high rate can, to a certain extent, be explained as part of a baseline level of vacancy, it is likely that the continued high vacancy rate reflects the inadequacy of some of the units for modern retail. Some concentrations of vacant units or sites may, however, present a valuable opportunity for redevelopment.

#### **8.4 Footfall**

Footfall has increased significantly over the past seven years, suggesting improved vitality and increased viability for store consider location in the town. The top two locations remain the northern end of Main Street and the eastern side of the square, reflecting the strength of the traditional retail core in the north of Main Street. Friday remains the busiest day, suggesting that many local people choose to shop at other major centres, such as the Abbey Centre, Belfast City Centre and Ballymena, on a Saturday

However, there have been significant reductions in footfall to the southern end of Main Street, where a cluster of vacant units are found around the old Asda store. This underlines the importance of attracting a high footfall generator to anchor the south end of Main Street. Likewise, footfall has also fallen dramatically at North End, again with an associated cluster of vacant units.

Elsewhere, footfall continues to tail-off to the west side of the Square, although this remains broadly comparable to the pedestrian flows recorded in 2003. At the entrance to the park, pedestrian flows are only 20.3% of the peak flow. This suggests that the park is a significantly under-utilised

resource, with a lack of attraction and poor linkages to the town centre. Nevertheless, with improvements this could become a major footfall generator in the south end of Main Street.

#### **8.5 Market Indicators**

As well as being outlined as part of the Town Centre Health Check, issues relating to the market conditions in Ballyclare Town Centre are also included in detail in Section 5 of this Baseline Report.

#### **8.6 Customer/Shopper Views**

XXX

#### **8.7 Retailer Views**

XXX

#### **8.8 Urban Design Appraisal**

As well as being outlined as part of the Town Centre Health Check, an urban design analysis of Ballyclare Town Centre is also included in detail in Section 7 of this Baseline Report.

#### **8.9 Summary and Conclusions**

XXX





# 9. Conclusions

## 9.1 Introduction

XXX









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