Chapter 4  Economic and Tourism Development

4.0  Introduction

Ireland is currently in the midst of a global recession and remains in an economically challenged position with limited growth including cutbacks in public spending and limited private sector investment. This situation will undoubtedly have a significant impact on the rate of economic development and the pace at which many of the objectives of the Plan can be realised.

In this context, this Chapter looks at the employment structure in Portlaw and economic development in terms of industry and enterprise, tourism, and retail development. Portlaw’s economic future requires the timely and adequate provision of land for employment needs including sites at suitable locations for industrial and enterprise uses. In addition, it requires a partnership approach to optimise the opportunities for the Town, particularly in relation to harnessing the tourism and enterprise potential.

The Council aims to:

- Ensure the provision of adequate lands to expand the employment sector in Portlaw;
- Strengthen the competitiveness of the local economy through balanced landuse planning;
- Encourage the expansion of the Town Centre to allow for a mixed and extended range of retail outlets and services; and
- Harness the tourism potential of the Town.

4.1  Employment Structure

Historically, industry and manufacturing have played an important role in shaping the Town and community. Over the period of the last Local Area Plan, Portlaw witnessed limited investment in the industrial/enterprise sectors.

The objective of the Council is to ensure that Portlaw can function meaningfully as a Town and tourist centre in East Waterford. This includes offering a mix of employment opportunities relating to enterprise, local services, and tourism sectors.

An analysis of the labour force in Portlaw under Census 2011 is a useful indicator of where the residents of Portlaw are employed. Of the 769 workers enumerated in Portlaw 384 (70%) worked outside Portlaw indicating that there are limited employment opportunities in the
Town. The unemployment rate in Portlaw was 27.7% compared with a national average of 19%, as recorded in Census 2011.

The daytime working population (resident and non-resident) of Portlaw was 190 with professional services being the largest industry.

### 4.2 Existing Industrial Development

Under the 2002 Plan, a significant area of land was zoned to provide for industrial development to the north of the Town. Within this area, planning permission has been granted for infrastructural services to facilitate the development of an Industrial Business Park of 10.90 hectares. Site works commenced in 2006. In addition, a number of sites have been granted permission for warehouse units. There is an additional 20 hectares (46.73 acres) of Industrial land adjoining the proposed business park, which is not yet committed to development. In conjunction with this a further 9.37 hectares (i.e. 23.17 acres) of Industrial Reserve lands are available to the east of the existing business park. Industrial Reserve lands may be reviewed by the Planning Authority over the lifetime of the Plan where specific need arises. This shall be subject to the availability and capacity of waste and water services and where the existing Industrial lands to the west have been developed/or committed to development by way of grant of planning permission. Development of these lands would also be considered where it can be demonstrated that the existing Industrial lands are unsuitable to a proposed development that is significant in scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industrial Zoned lands</th>
<th>Area (hectares)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constructed or under construction</td>
<td>10.9 ha</td>
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<tr>
<td>Available for development</td>
<td>20 ha</td>
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### 4.3 Retail Development

In recent years Portlaw has lost some of its retail importance, which has resulted in the need for local people in the Town and surrounding hinterland increasingly having to travel to other centres for the majority of their shopping and other service needs.

There are four convenience stores in the Town, a newsagent and one comparison store (pharmacy). A survey undertaken by the Planning Authority in February 2012 recorded the vacancy level at 19%. These vacant shop units when combined with the limited retailing activity in the Town have a negative impact on the quality and attraction of the Town Centre.

The Square has traditionally been Portlaw’s retailing centre, however the retailing base has increasingly become dispersed from the Square with the Town gradually losing its retailing
core. Given that the Town Centre is the functional heart of any settlement and its renewal and maintenance is a vital part of maintaining the viability and vitality of the Town, the challenge is to facilitate and encourage the growth of Portlaw’s retailing function while also protecting its existing retailing function.

Given Portlaw’s rich architectural heritage, development proposals shall be designed to the highest architectural standards and new developments will be required to be sympathetic to the setting and appearance of the established streetscape and built fabric of Portlaw. Proposals for new retail development shall be considered in appropriate locations as defined by the zoning map. Through its zoning objectives, the Planning Authority will only allow appropriate uses within the Town Centre. Furthermore retail development at out of town centre locations will only be permitted where it is deemed not to detract from the vitality and vibrancy of the Town Centre.

4.3.1 The County Retail Strategy

The County Retail Strategy is due for review. It is anticipated that this review will commence imminently with a Joint Retail Strategy being prepared for Waterford City and County.

A Joint Retail Strategy’s primary purpose is to support the statutory plan making process and ensure that adequate provision is made for new retail development in the most appropriate locations and to ensure that excessive provision of retail space is avoided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy ETD 1</th>
<th>To facilitate and promote new retail and community development and commercial outlets of a range and type consistent with the functions of the land zoned Town Centre and also consistent with the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Policy ETD 2</td>
<td>Ensure the sustainability, vitality and viability of the Town Centre by encouraging and facilitating the refurbishment and redevelopment of buildings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy ETD 3</td>
<td>Require a high standard of design for all new development and the refurbishment of existing properties, taking account of the natural and built heritage of the Town to ensure developments enhance and respect the character and setting of Portlaw.</td>
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</table>
Policy ETD 4
The Council shall have regard to the County Retail Strategy (or any revision of same), the Retail Planning Guidelines and accompanying Retail Design Manual (2012) when guiding retail development in Portlaw.

Objective ETD 1
Provide sufficient zoned land to accommodate the Town’s retail function and to cater for the population of Portlaw.

Objective ETD 2
Facilitate the provision of a petrol station at an appropriate location within the Town boundary, preferably on an access road into the Town.

4.4 Future Development Strategy

The Council recognises the importance of industrial and commercial development in terms of employment creation and the economic and social development of Portlaw. Whilst the Local Area Plan cannot directly influence future industrial and commercial development, it can adopt a “plan led approach” by:

- Ensuring that sufficient and appropriate land is zoned and available for industrial and commercial development;
- Providing or facilitating the provision of infrastructure such as roads, drainage, water etc;
- Facilitating start-up/enterprise type development at suitable sites within the Town;
- Promoting Portlaw as a viable location to work and live; and
- Supporting the development of the tourism product of the Town.

Policy ETD 5
To promote Portlaw as a base for small to medium enterprise through the zoning of appropriate industrial lands.

Policy ETD 6
To support the economic development initiatives of relevant agencies such as the IDA and Enterprise Ireland.
Policy ETD 7
Co-operate with research institutes and development agencies as a means of supporting and encouraging industrial and ‘Research & Development’ in Portlaw in order to support the development of a knowledge-based economy in the Town.

4.5 Tourism

Portlaw Town and surrounding area contains a wealth of not only historical aspects, but also wonderful natural environment and ecologically important systems and areas. Given its location adjacent to the Curraghmore Estate and in close proximity to the Comeragh Mountains, and the large number of buildings of unique and special architectural and cultural interest the Town possesses, tourism has the potential to play a central role in the sustainable development of the Town. However, at present this potential is not being fully realised.

The development of the tourism product in Portlaw would have a significant impact on the vitality and vibrancy of the Town and has the potential to attract investment in other sectors. Development of Portlaw’s industrial heritage is one aspect that should be harnessed. Other areas of potential include outdoor activities such as orienteering in Portlaw Woods and fishing in the adjacent watercourses.

Co-operation between the various interest groups in the area is vital in the development of a comprehensive tourism package based on the many opportunities the area presents. Promotion and marketing are also important to the development of Portlaw as a tourist and activity location.

It is considered that in order to capitalise on the tourism potential in Portlaw, the following areas should be explored as part of enhancing the tourism product in the Town:

- Development of Portlaw’s industrial heritage, linking it to other model villages in Ireland and elsewhere. Improved promotion and marketing of the industrial history of Portlaw.
- Promotion of heritage tourism, amenity and walking trails and build upon its proximity to Curraghmore Estate and the Comeragh Mountains.
- Investigation of the feasibility of the development of the canal and lock as a water amenity for boating etc.
- Improve linkages with key tourist sites and attractions in the area, cross marketing with Dungarvan and Waterford City, familiarisation trips from the City to the County and vice versa open to all.
**Objective ETD 3**
To continue to work with relevant tourist and community bodies to promote and develop the range of tourist facilities and attractions in Portlaw.

**Objective ETD 4**
To promote the development of sustainable tourism through the conservation, enhancement and promotion of the Town’s built and natural environment.

**Objective ETD 5**
Protect and promote the architectural, historical and heritage features within the Town as part of the overall promotion of Portlaw as a tourist destination.