



Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council

MID ULSTER

Town Centres and Retailing – Policy Review

Town Centres and Retailing

Purpose: To provide members with an opportunity to consider existing planning policies as they pertain to Town Centres and Retailing and to consider the need to tailor these policies for Mid Ulster District in light of the forthcoming Local Development Plan (LDP).

Content: The paper provides:

- (i) An outline of the working objectives of the Councils new Local Development Plan as relevant to retailing and town centres.
- (ii) An outline of the working objectives contained in the Sustainability Assessment of the LDP as relevant to this subject and a summary of the findings of the Community Plan engagement thus far on this subject.
- (iii) An overview of the existing planning policy on this subject and how it relates to working objectives the for the new LDP.
- (iv) Summary of retail and town centre designations within the three current Area Plans.
- (v) Proposed Retail Strategy and consideration of the options for the approach to planning policy for this subject in the new LDP and discussion of the preferred option.
- (vi) Potential wording of the policy based on the preferred option.

Recommendation: That the policy options, including the preferred options, contained within this Paper are subjected to Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment (SA/SEA), before a decision is made on the options that will go forward for public consultation in the Preferred Options Paper (POP).

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this paper is to inform the Planning Committee of the current planning policy for town centres and retailing and to consider how it relates to the working objectives of the forthcoming LDP and those within the SA/SEA whether they need to be tailored to the specific needs of Mid Ulster. The paper aims to set out the policy options for this subject so as to ensure the

implementation of the LDP objectives. Town centres are the focus of much economic and community activity and provide important employment opportunities. Retailing and related activities affect the vitality and viability of our town centres and it is important to be mindful of this when considering the policy options for Mid Ulster.

- 1.2** This Policy Review Paper is somewhat different to the other papers that have been compiled on the various Subject Policies in that the operational planning policy contained within Planning Policy Statement 5 (PPS5) Retailing and Town Centres has been cancelled by the introduction of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS). For this reason this paper will therefore consider the strategic planning policy within the SPPS and not PPS5. Consideration of retail trends in the Region as well as an overview of town centre policy within the three extant Area Plans and a review of the current Master Plans as well as the health and vitality of existing towns in Mid Ulster has already been carried out and is contained within Position Paper 4 Town Centres and Opportunity Sites dated March 2015.

Legislative Context

- 1.3** Article 5 of The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 states that the creation of planning policy as part of the Plan Strategy must be done so with the objective of furthering sustainable development and in doing so, must take account of policies and guidance issued by OFMDFM, DOE and DRD (now the Executive Office and Department for Infrastructure). Examples of such policies and guidance include the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035 and the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS).

2.0 The Objectives

LDP Working Objectives

- 2.1** In developing the evidence base for the new LDP and as part of the plan preparation a number of working objectives for the LDP have been formulated. These objectives will develop over time as they are subjected to the SA/SEA process and the evidence gathering and preparation process continues. At this time there are a number of the working objectives relevant to this subject:
- a) To build Cookstown, Dungannon and Magherafelt as economic and transportation hubs and as the main service centres for shops, leisure activities, public administrative and community services including health and education. These are the most populated places and the town centres are the most accessible locations for people to travel to including those without a car.
 - b) To protect and consolidate the role of local towns and villages so that they act as local centres for shops and community services meeting the daily needs of their rural hinterlands.
 - c) To provide for vital and vibrant rural communities whilst protecting the countryside in which they live by accommodating sustainable growth within the countryside proportionate to the extent of existing rural communities.

- d) To facilitate the development of new community facilities at locations accessible to the community they serve, through a variety of modes of transportation in accordance with the community plan.
- e) To facilitate the creation of 8,500 new jobs by 2030 at a variety of locations where they are accessible to all members of the community, including those without a private car.
- f) To promote diversity in the range of jobs recognising the importance of employment in the primary sector, secondary sector and tertiary sector (administration, commerce, retailing, leisure and tourism).
- g) To recognise the importance of self-employment and home working, particularly in rural locations.

Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Objectives

2.2 Sustainability Appraisal is systematic process which must be carried out during the preparation of the LDP in order to promote sustainable development by assessing the extent to which an emerging plan will achieve required environmental, economic and social objectives. To-date the SA/SEA scoping report contains a number of objectives and those that are relevant both directly and indirectly to this subject area include:

- a) To improve accessibility to key services, especially for those most in need.
- b) To maintain and enhance the character and quality of landscapes and townscapes.
- c) To encourage sustainable economic growth.
- d) To offer everybody the opportunity for rewarding and satisfying employment.
- e) To reduce disparities in economic performance and promote sustainable regeneration.

Mid Ulster Community Plan

2.3 Section 66 (6) of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 requires that;
'...in the discharge of its duties under subsection (1) a council must where appropriate have regard to its plan strategy and its local policies plan under sections 8 and 9 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011.'

2.4 Subsection (1) states that the Council must initiate, maintain, facilitate and participate in community planning for its district. In other words the Local Development Plan must have regard to the community plan and vice versa.

2.5 The Community Planning Team of MUDC carried out public community consultation in October – December 2014 in the preparation of the draft Community Plan. Relevant to PPS21, this feedback suggested that in the context of town centre regeneration a priority should be to:

- Maintain the focus on and work in/for the three main town centres, e.g. sustain and build on Cookstown's retail vigour in particular and drive forward opportunity sites such as Ann Street, Dungannon and in Maghera

2.6 Further consultation was also carried out with Stakeholders and in February 2016 the priority above was again confirmed as part of that feedback.

In addition, that consultation exercise also identified that in the context of town centre regeneration the following is a priority:

- Larger retail outlets are taking over from small town centres due to their provision of free car parking: town centres need free parking (a consistent approach across all the main towns) and good central area traffic management

Regional Development Strategy (RDS)

2.7 The RDS 2035 is the key policy guiding development in Northern Ireland and is underpinned by a Spatial Framework and Strategic Planning Guidelines. The Spatial framework consists of urban hubs and clusters. The RDS 2035 identifies Dungannon and Cookstown as main hubs and Magherafelt as a local hub. It states that the three towns have the potential to form a cluster and are well positioned on two Key Transport Corridors.

2.8 Policy SFG 11 in the RDS 2035 aims to promote economic development at hubs specifically to promote and exploit the potential for economic development and consider hubs and clusters first.

Level 1 (Villages): These are locations that will have shops primarily to meet residents daily needs (e.g.) pub, post office, petrol station. Any growth is likely to be minimal. Consideration could be given to defining village centres in the LDP.

Level 2 (Urban or District Centres/Smaller Towns): These are locations that meet both the daily and weekly needs of surrounding residents. They offer supermarkets, restaurants and a mix of retail facilities.

Level 3 (Regional Towns/Clusters): These are locations where the proximity of business facilitates competition from which all consumers are able to benefit and maximises the opportunity to use a means of transport other than the car. They will have shops to meet the weekly and longer term needs of residents. They will also have a mix of different activities (e.g.) shopping centres, retail warehouses, range of restaurants/bars

Level 4 (Principal Cities): department stores, specialist shops, arts and cultural activities

2.9 It is recommended that District Centres be included in this hierarchy in the context of NI. These are locations within an existing Town, but not necessarily within the Town Centre Boundary. They provide locally accessible convenience goods to meet the daily and weekly needs of local residents (e.g.) Oaks Centre in Dungannon.

2.10 The RDS 2035 makes specific reference to the retailing needs of Cookstown, Dungannon and Magherafelt. It recognises that Cookstown has an emphasis on manufacturing, construction and retail and that it provides services to a wider rural hinterland. It recognises that Dungannon provides a specialist retail provision with the Linen Green which draws some 30% of its customer base from the Republic of Ireland. It also realises the commitment to public realm investment in the Town Centre. Magherafelt is identified as having a compact

Town Centre with an excellent independent retail offer. It recognises the potential of the Town to grow a stronger retail and commercial centre.

Existing Planning Policy

- 2.11** As explained, and unlike the other subjects, current planning policy for retailing and town centres is set out exclusively within the SPPS. (There is of course designations relevant to town centres and retailing contained within the three extant Area Plans for the District and they are summarised later in the paper). The SPPS states that there should be a town centres first approach for retailing and other main town centre uses. This is reflective of the “sequential approach” which was introduced in Draft PPS 5 (Draft PPS5 is no longer a material consideration in the determination of planning applications and therefore has not been reviewed within this paper).
- 2.12** The SPPS states that town centres are important hubs for a range of land uses and activities, and can have a positive impact on those who live, work and visit them. They provide a wide variety of retailing and related facilities, including employment, leisure and cultural uses. Our town's high streets also play an important role in bringing people together and can foster a sense of community and place.
- 2.13** The SPPS supports the role of town centres and contributes to their success. It seeks to encourage development at an appropriate scale in order to enhance the attractiveness of town centres, helping to reduce travel demand. The aim of the SPPS is to support and sustain vibrant town centres across Northern Ireland through the promotion of established town centres as the appropriate first choice location of retailing and other complementary functions, consistent with the RDS.
- 2.14** The regional strategic objectives for town centres and retailing are to:
- secure a town centres first approach for the location of future retailing and other main town centre uses;
 - adopt a sequential approach to the identification of retail and main town centre uses in Local Development Plans (LDPs) and when decision-taking;
 - ensure LDPs and decisions are informed by robust and up to date evidence in relation to need and capacity;
 - protect and enhance diversity in the range of town centre uses appropriate to their role and function, such as leisure, cultural and community facilities, housing and business;
 - promote high quality design to ensure that town centres provide sustainable, attractive, accessible and safe environments; and
 - maintain and improve accessibility to and within the town centre.

- 2.15** The SPPS sets out the strategic policy that must be taken into account in the preparation of LDPs and in the determination of planning applications. It states that we must adopt a town centre first approach for retail and main town centre uses.
- 2.16** It also requires that we undertake an assessment of the need or capacity for retail and other main town centre uses across the plan area and also prepare town centre health checks and regularly review these (preferably at least once every five years).
- 2.17** The SPPS states that LDPs should include a strategy for town centres and retailing, and contain appropriate policies and proposals that must promote town centres first for retail and other main town centre uses.
- 2.18** It advises that we should retain and consolidate existing district and local centres as a focus for local everyday shopping, and ensure their role is complementary to the role and function of the town centre. In these centres, extensions should only be permitted where the applicant has demonstrated that no adverse impact will result on town centres in the catchment.
- 2.19** The SPPS states that LDPs should also:
- define a network and hierarchy of centres - town, district and local centres, acknowledging the role and function of rural centres;
 - define the spatial extent of town centres and the primary retail core;
 - set out appropriate policies that make clear which uses will be permitted in the hierarchy of centres and other locations, and the factors that will be taken into account for decision taking;
 - provide for a diverse offer and mix of uses, which reflect local circumstances; and
 - allocate a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and form of retail, and other town centre uses.
- 2.20** Policies and proposals for shops in villages and small settlements must be consistent with the aim, objectives and policy approach for town centres and retailing, meet local need (i.e. day-to-day needs), and be of a scale, nature and design appropriate to the character of the settlement.
- 2.21** Retailing will be directed to town centres, and the development of inappropriate retail facilities in the countryside must be resisted. However, as a general exception to the overall policy approach some retail facilities which may be considered appropriate outside of settlement limits include farm shops, craft shops and shops serving tourist or recreational facilities. Such retail facilities should be required to be located within existing buildings. All policies and proposals must ensure there will be no unacceptable adverse impact on the

vitality and viability of an existing centre within the catchment, and meet the requirements of policy elsewhere in the SPPS.

- 2.22** The SPPS states that a sequential test should be applied to planning applications for main town centre uses that are not in an existing centre and are not in accordance with an up-to-date LDP. Where it is established that an alternative sequentially preferable site or sites exist within a proposal's whole catchment, an application which proposes development on a less sequentially preferred site should be refused.
- 2.23** It also directs that applications for main town centre uses are to be considered in the following order of preference (and consider all of the proposal's catchment):
- primary retail core;
 - town centres;
 - edge of centre; and
 - out of centre locations, only where sites are accessible by a choice of good public transport modes.
- 2.24** In the absence of a current and up-to-date LDP we are told that we should require applicants to prepare an assessment of need which is proportionate to support their application. This may incorporate a quantitative and qualitative assessment of need taking account of the sustainably and objectively assessed needs of the local town and take account of committed development proposals and allocated sites.
- 2.25** The SPPS also states that all applications for retail or town centre type developments above a threshold of 1000 square metres gross external area which are not proposed in a town centre location and are not in accordance with the LDP should be required to undertake a full assessment of retail impact as well as need. This includes applications for an extension/s which would result in the overall development exceeding 1000 square metre gross external area. Where appropriate the planning authority may choose to apply a lower threshold taking into account local circumstances such as the size, role and function of their town centres. In preparing a LDP councils will have flexibility to set an appropriate threshold for their area, above which all applications for such development should be accompanied by an assessment of retail impact and need. This threshold can be up to, but must not exceed 2500 square metres gross external area.

3.0 Consideration of existing policy against LDP working objectives

- 3.1** The existing retail policy is contained solely within the SPPS and while this is strategic policy it is considered that it will facilitate and aid Mid Ulster in achieving the relevant working objectives of the LDP and in particular the objectives to:
- a) To build Cookstown, Dungannon and Magherafelt as economic and transportation hubs and as the main service centres for shops, leisure

activities, public administrative and community services including health and education. These are the most populated places and the town centres are the most accessible locations for people to travel to including those without a car; and

- b) To protect and consolidate the role of local towns and villages so that they act as local centres for shops and community services meeting the daily needs of their rural hinterlands.

- 3.2** The thrust of the retail policy is a town centre approach, which will ensure that our three main towns continue to act as the main service centres for shops and other town centre related uses. It is considered that the current policy in the SPPS can be applied at an operational level in Mid Ulster and will allow the objectives of the LDP to be achieved but it is considered that it does need to be tailored to reflect the retail hierarchy within the district and to ensure that that hierarchy is protected. It is also considered that the planning policy within the SPPS does not afford the same level of protection to the protection of shop units with town centres as had been afforded by Planning Policy Statement 5 (PPS5) Retailing and Town Centres and while such a policy lacuna exists there is arguably risk to our towns in terms of protecting what exists.

4.0 Town Centres and Retailing Workshop

- 4.1** In considering and assessing the policy approach to be taken in Mid Ulster in relation to Retailing and Town Centres a workshop was held with members and council officers to explore the current planning policy with the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS). The workshop also sought to discuss any issues specific to Mid Ulster within the subject area and to then consider where planning policy may need to be tailored to meet local circumstances. There was broad agreement by members and officers that a town centre first approach is the correct and appropriate approach in our towns. Indeed some members queried whether the approach of protecting the town centre, in particular in Dungannon, has been applied on the ground. Some members did comment that broad town centre limits can be exploited to effectively take retailing out of the centre. The general point was also made at the workshop that when you are a retail shop you want to be surrounded by retail uses.
- 4.2** The role of the Primary Retail Core (PRC) was discussed and the location of the primary retail cores within the three main towns and within Maghera and lack thereof in Coalisland. There was no consensus on extent of the PRC in any of the three main towns or indeed in the two local towns however, in Dungannon it was suggested that it could be extended to include Irish Street, William Street, Scotch Street and Shambles. In Cookstown some members suggested that the success of the town is due to the compact nature of the PRC. In Magherafelt it was suggested that Queen Street should be included within the PRC. There was also discussion on garages and concerns that the shops at them sell anything which means they compete with, rather than compliment the town centre. Discussion on Opportunity Sites also took place

and concerns were raised that some of the sites chosen may never be in a position to be developed and it was suggested that the use of a time restriction could be applied to encourage the sites to come forward for development. The concept of local centres was also discussed however there was no consensus on whether they are necessary for Mid Ulster.

- 4.3** In relation to District Centres reservations were raised regarding the designation of the Sweep Road area as one. It was however clarified to the group that the purpose of the designation here could be to consolidate the retail provision to avoid any further expansion or development that would affect the town centre. The overall conclusion of the workshop was that we must ensure a planning approach that ensures that we have viable town centres with healthy retail provision and that existing shops must be protected from non-retail related uses. Finally the advantages and disadvantages of designating village centres was also discussed however a consensus was not arrived at as to whether this approach was appropriate particularly given that retail is dispersed in many of the villages. The SPPS approach to retail in the countryside was also clarified to the workshop.

5.0 Existing Area Plans

- 5.1** The Area Plans for Cookstown, Dungannon and Magherafelt are the statutory plans for these areas and provide the policy framework against which to assess development proposals.
- 5.2** The existing Area Plans designate Town Centre boundaries and Primary Retail Cores (PRC) within Cookstown, Dungannon, Magherafelt and Maghera. A Town Centre boundary only is defined for Coalisland. However the operational policies for determining applications in these areas are now contained within the SPPS. Where town centres are defined it was anticipated that commercial activity would concentrate within them. The vitality and viability of the town centres is retained by new shopping and office development. Within the Area Plans Development Opportunity Sites are also identified for the three main towns and the two smaller towns. These Sites are identified within the Plans as having special merit for a particular land use. Within a number of the towns the Plans also designate areas of constraint including Areas of Townscape Character, Conservation Areas, Areas of Archaeological Potential and Local Landscape Areas. However, these constraints do not unduly limit the potential for retail development within the towns.

Cookstown Area Plan 2010 (CAP 2010)

- 5.3** Cookstown town centre continues to provide the best location for retail and office use due to its ready accessibility by a variety of modes of transport. For shopping purposes Cookstown provides a convenient and compact centre with a range of retail outlets. In Cookstown, the primary retail core underpins the attractiveness of the town centre by maintaining a compact and accessible retail pitch and comprises James Street, William Street and Burn Road where the town centres main shopping attractions are located. This part of the town also hosts a Saturday Street Market. Secondary Shopping Frontages are

designated along James Street and Molesworth Street in recognition of the contribution that they make to the overall vitality and viability of the town centre. Non retail uses may be acceptable in these areas provided that they complement the retail function of the centre. Elsewhere within the town centre changes of use from shops will be considered on their merits.

- 5.4** The Plan also contains a policy on town centre housing. It is acknowledged that specific housing areas make a positive contribution to the attractiveness, security, vitality and viability of the town centre and accordingly there is a policy restricting change of use to non residential uses. Members should also note that the Town Centre of Cookstown contains a number of public car parking facilities which are to be protected. Seven Opportunity Sites are designated in the Town Centre.

Dungannon and South Tyrone Area Plan 2010 (DSTAP 2010)

- 5.5** As with Cookstown, the Dungannon town centre continues to provide the best location of retail and office uses. It provides a convenient and compact centre but would benefit from an increase in the range of shops and provision of larger units. The Plan Strategy is to retain and provide development opportunities for shops, services, leisure activities and mixed use development within the town centres of Dungannon and Coalisland where they will contribute to their overall vitality and viability. This Area Plan also designates a number of car parks within Dungannon town centre that are to be protected.
- 5.6** In Dungannon a Primary Retail Core in the area of Market Square and Scotch Street has been designated to offer protection to retail uses under regional policy. The Dungannon Town Centre Partnership in recent years has questioned the extent of this boundary as it does not afford protection to Irish Street. The Plan also designates eight Development Opportunity Sites within Dungannon.
- 5.7** The DSTAP 2010 describes Coalisland as an industrial and local service centre with many of its high order services continuing to be provided in Dungannon. The town centre provides a convenient and compact centre with a range of local retail outlets complemented by restaurants, cafes, bars and services. Coalisland also contains two Development Opportunity Sites and a number of public car parks which are to be protected.
- 5.8** A District Shopping Centre is also located at Oaks Road Dungannon and any retail proposals at that location will be determined in accordance with prevailing regional policy to ensure that any future development does not have an adverse impact on the vitality and viability of Dungannon town centre. It should be noted that the sequential test does not favour district centres as out of centre locations for new major retail developments.

Magherafelt Area Plan 2015 (MAP 2015)

- 5.9** Magherafelt town is the main shopping and retail service centre for the Magherafelt District and surrounding rural area. The Plan identifies a Town Centre for Magherafelt and the Development Strategy seeks to accommodate growth in the commercial role of the town by extending the town centre

boundary and identifying a primary retail core. As with the other Plans development proposals will be processed in accordance with prevailing regional planning policy and relevant policies within the Plan. The Primary Retail Core centres around Broad Street, The Diamond, Market Street and Rainey Street with an extension to the south to include the Meadowlane Shopping Centre. The Plan states that the purpose of the Primary Retail Core is to ensure the continuance of a compact and attractive shopping environment, offering both choice and convenience. It also acknowledges the existence of a number of non-retail uses in the area, which if allowed to expand, could have a negative impact on the vitality and commercial viability of the area.

5.11 Unlike the DSTAP 2010 and the CAP 2010 the Magherafelt Area Plan does not designate car parking areas to be protected within the town centre. Within Magherafelt town centre six Development Opportunity Sites are identified.

5.12 Maghera is described in the MAP 2015 as the second town serving the northern portion of the District as the main shopping centre. A Town Centre is designated within the Plan and it includes Main Street, Bank Square, St. Lurarch's Road and small sections of Church Street, Hall Street, Coleraine Road, Station Road and Fair Hill. The Primary Retail Core includes most of Main Street and part of Coleraine Road. The main concentration of retail floorspace in the town centre should continue to be within this primary retail core and assessed in accordance with prevailing regional planning policy. Within Maghera town centre three Development Opportunity Sites.

6.0 Retail Strategy for Mid Ulster

6.1 In preparing our LDP there is a duty on the Planning Authority to bring forward a strategy for town centres and retailing which will contain appropriate policies and proposals to promote town centre first for retail and other main town centre uses. This strategy, together with the appropriate policies, will reflect the aims and objectives of the SPPS but needs to reflect but be tailored to our own specific circumstances in Mid Ulster. The strategy will also take into account two of the key objectives of the LDP (detailed at the outset of this paper) and also include an objective tailored to the countryside:

- a) To build Cookstown, Dungannon and Magherafelt as economic and transportation hubs and as the main service centres for shops, leisure activities, public administrative and community services including health and education. The best location for retail and related uses are town centres since these are the most populated places and the town centres are the most accessible locations for people to travel to including those without a car; and
- b) To protect and consolidate the role of local towns and villages so that they act as local centres for shops and community services meeting the daily needs of their rural hinterlands.

- c) To secure the vitality and viability of the countryside by providing opportunities for farm shops, craft shops and shops serving tourist or recreational facility.
- 6.2** Our retail strategy for Mid Ulster is primarily to adopt the ‘town centre first’ approach for retail and town centres uses as required by the SPPS and in order to ensure that this approach is supported it is necessary to then define our Retail Hierarchy for the district. The proposed retail hierarchy for Mid Ulster is set out in the table at Appendix 1 for our Hubs, Local Service Centres and Rural Area. This hierarchy adopts the principle of town centre first, and is focused on, and confirms the towns of Cookstown, Dungannon and Magherafelt as the three main towns. Town centres are the best location for retail and town centre uses, including cultural and community facilities, retail, leisure, entertainment and businesses, as they are accessible to all members of the community including those without access to private transport. Our strategy also seeks to recognise the role of local towns and villages as service centres catering for the daily needs of those living within the settlement and surrounding catchment. As per the SPPS our strategy is to resist inappropriate retail development in the countryside but allow for farm shops, craft shops and shops serving tourist or recreational facilities.
- 6.3** Based on the town centre first approach town centre boundaries are an important designation and they are already defined within the three extant Area Plans, referred to earlier in the paper. It is proposed to adopt those existing boundaries at this time for the purposes of public consultation on our Preferred Options Paper. It is also considered appropriate to adopt the District Centre Boundary that already exists for the Oaks Centre at Dungannon and to also define a tight District Centre Boundary around the retail offering at Sweep Road Cookstown, This approach will conform with the SPPS and will ensure that the retail offering at Sweep Road is contained and controlled so as to provide a level of protection to the Town Centre and reduce the possibility of competition with Cookstown Town Centre.
- 6.4** Furthermore, in order to adopt the town centre first approach a Primary Retail Core has been defined for the three main towns and the two local towns inside which new retail development will be facilitated and protection will also be given to existing shop units for retail or retail related use at ground floor level. The protection of such shops at ground floor level is important in enhancing the vitality of a town centre and also ensuring that there is an attractive retail provision both for the shopper and the investor. It is acknowledged that issues associated with dilapidated and derelict buildings in town centres can be an issue affecting the vitality of a town and this it is something that the Council may wish to give attention to in our main towns.
- 6.4** The proposed Primary Retail Core for the three main towns and two local towns are mapped and identified at Appendix 2 of this Paper. Additionally, in towns outside of the town centre proposals of more than 1000sq.m will be required to demonstrate a quantitative and qualitative need and to provide a Retail Impact Assessment to demonstrate no harm to the town centre. There is a recognition of the role of neighbourhood shops and therefore it is considered that suitably

located neighbourhood shops of up to floor area of 100sq.m net will be looked upon favourably.

- 6.5** Within villages it is not our intention to define village or local centre boundaries given that retail activity in the villages and small settlements tends to be extremely dispersed. For retail proposals coming forward in villages applicants will be required to demonstrate that there is a need for the development and that it will not result in the closure of shops in the core of the village. Such proposals will be restricted to 100sq.m net floorspace.
- 6.6** At the Local Policies Plan stage proposals will be brought forward where appropriate to improve the attractions, amenities and accessibility of the town centres and additional retail designations may be classified and revisions made to both the town centre and Primary Retail Core boundary designations. A Retail Study will be commissioned which will inform this for the Mid Ulster District.

7.0 Retail Policy Approach Options

Towns and Villages

- 7.1** In order to take forward the Retail Strategy for Mid Ulster there are a number of Policy Approach Options open to the Council and these are outlined below:
- 7.2** **Option 1:** The first option is to run with the designations as per the three current Area Plans for the district and to bring forward strategic planning policy in relation to Out of Town development directly in line with the SPPS and leaving any further or specific designations and opportunity site locations to the LPP stage of the Plan making process. It is considered that the problem with this approach is that when the Department introduced the SPPS and at the same time removed Planning Policy Statement 5 (PPS5) Retailing and Town Centres a planning policy lacuna has been created in relation to the protection of existing shop units within town centres. Furthermore, because we have three different Area Plans, one covering each of the three main towns, the approach to designations in each town and specifically in the approach to the designation of the Primary Retail Core is different and somewhat inconsistent. To adopt this approach to retailing in Mid Ulster is not considered to be consistent with the objectives of the LDP or indeed the Retail Strategy and would leave a policy lacuna until the second stage of the LDP which is not an acceptable situation.
- 7.3** **Option 2:** A second policy approach open to the Council is to redefine and define a Primary Retail Core at this stage in both the three main towns and two local towns and to bring forward a planning policy to ensure that shops are directed to town centres but to ensure an exception for neighbourhood shops which are important facilities in many areas. This approach would ensure that all of the towns have an appropriate level of protection to existing retail units and that the PRC is defined or redefined in a consistent manner. One issue with this approach is that it deals with the town centre but does nothing to define District Centres or Village Centres. The introduction of a District Centre designation at Sweep Road Cookstown is something that could be a matter for the Preferred Options Paper (POP) in order to establish the views of the

community. It is not however recommended to define local centres or to designate village centres as the dispersion of retail within villages would make it particularly difficult to do so and indeed it could result in a constraint to development where it is not necessary.

- 7.4** ***Option 3:*** Another approach is to bring forward all designations and related planning policy at this stage of the process and to define village and local centres. The issue with this approach is that it may be overly constraining in the case of villages and local centres when it is not necessary for the District.

Countryside

- 7.5** It is considered that there is no real alternative option to the SPPS approach to retailing in the countryside and particularly if the 'town centre first' approach is to be adopted in Mid Ulster in a meaningful way. In line with the SPPS an appropriate policy for the countryside is worded within the composite policy which follows and which allows for a number of acceptable retail scenarios in the countryside, as provided for in the SPPS.

Preferred Approach

- 7.6** In all three Options for Towns and Villages further work will still be necessary in order to finalise the extent of any proposed designations or indeed any other retail designations or proposals to improve the Town Centre. In order to realise the relevant objectives of the LDP and to adopt the Retail Strategy for Mid Ulster it is considered that the preferred approach is Option 2. It is considered that Option 2 does what we need it to do for Mid Ulster at this point without being overly prescriptive on matters that need to be informed by further field work and assessment. While the District Centre designation at Sweep Road forms part of the Preferred Approach Option the public consultation carried out on the POP can be used to test this approach with the views of the community. The concept of Local Centres and Villages Centres could also be explored at the POP stage. While no alternative approaches to the issue of retailing in the countryside has been offered it is important to note that the chosen approach does recognise that some opportunities do exist in the form of farm shop, a craft shop and a shop serving a tourist or recreational facility as acceptable in the countryside subject to a floor area restriction.

- 7.7** In order to translate the approach of Option 2 into planning policy that can then be applied in the determination of planning applications it is considered that the wording of the planning policy could be along the following lines:

Development within Town Centres

Proposals for new retail and retail-related development will accord with the Plan where they are located within the Primary Retail Core. Where sites are unavailable within the Primary Retail Core favourable consideration will be given to retail and retail related uses elsewhere within the Town Centre boundary.

Outside of the Primary Retail Core and within Town Centres favourable consideration will be given to other main town centre uses such as cultural and community facilities, leisure, entertainment and businesses that would add to the vitality and viability of the town centre.

New development within Town Centres should respect any conservation interests and the unique character of that centre.

Where sites are not available within the Primary Retail Core and Town Centre boundary, preference will be given to edge of centre locations over a location further from the town centre.

Any development outside of a Town Centre, other than a neighbourhood shop with a floorspace not exceeding 100sq.m net, will be required to provide an analysis of the availability of Primary Retail Core and Town Centre sites and where necessary edge of centre sites.

Any development outside of the Town Centre above 1000sq.m gross external area should be accompanied by a Retail Impact Assessment and Traffic Impact Assessment.

Retail Development Outside of Town Centres

Retail development outside of Town Centres will only accord with the Plan where it has been demonstrated that there are no suitable sites available within the Town Centre or Primary Retail Core. Favourable consideration will be given to edge of centre sites before out of centre locations and providing it has been demonstrated that there is a need for the retail provision and there will be no significant impact on an existing centre.

Any development over 100sq.m net floor area will require an assessment of available/alternative sites including any land at edge of centre locations.

Any development above 1000sq.m gross external area should be accompanied by a Retail Impact Assessment and Traffic Impact Assessment.

Retention of Shop Units in Town Centres

Change of Use from shops to local services such as building society, offices, banks, estate agents, restaurants and hot food take-aways will accord with the Plan except where:

- There would be a significant loss of retail floorspace at ground level;***
- It would result in the creation of a cluster of more than 3 non-retail uses at ground floor level;***
- The area overall is tending to be dominated by non-retail uses.***

The loss of ground floor units within the Primary Retail Core to non-retail or non-retail related uses will conflict with the Plan.

Neighbourhood Shops

Within towns suitably located neighbourhood shops will accord with the Plan providing the floor area does not exceed a net floor area of 100 square metres and it does not conflict with the character or amenities of a residential area. Such shops should normally be located within mixed use areas as opposed to a residential area.

Villages and Small Settlements

New retail development within villages and small settlements will accord with the Plan providing it is of a scale that is appropriate to the settlement and will not have a significant impact on retail provision within town centres, other villages or adversely impact on or lead to the closure of existing retail provision within the core of the village/small settlement. Development will normally be restricted to a net floor area of 100 square metres unless it is accompanied by an assessment of Retail Impact to demonstrate no significant impact on an existing centre.

Countryside

Within the countryside new retail development proposals for a farm shop, craft shop or a shop serving a tourist or recreational facility or a convenience shop linked to an existing service station will accord with the Plan. Development will normally be restricted to a net floor area of 100 square metres.

Proposals for convenience shops not linked to a service station or development of comparison or bulk good shops, which should be located within a settlement, will conflict with the Plan.

Until such times as the Local Policies Plan is adopted Town Centre boundaries and Opportunity Sites will remain as defined in the three extant area plans.

8.0 Conclusion

- 8.1** In light of the evidence gathering and the discussions which have taken place as part of the Retail Workshop it is felt that the general policy approach of the SPPS to adopt the principle of town centres first is appropriate to Mid Ulster to assist in realising the relevant objectives of the LDP and the Retail Strategy for the district and a Proposed Retail Hierarchy for this is contained at Appendix 1. As discussed above however a planning policy lacuna has been created in relation to the protection of existing shop units within town centres. Furthermore, because we have three different Area Plans, one covering each of the three main towns, the approach to designations in each town and specifically in the approach to the designation of the Primary Retail Core is different and somewhat inconsistent. Planning policy has therefore been compiled to ensure protection of existing shop units within town centres and to ensure that a town centre first approach is applied in the determination of retail planning applications. The protection of such shops at ground floor level is important in enhancing the vitality of a town centre and also ensuring that there

is an attractive retail provision both for the shopper and the investor. It is acknowledged that issues associated with dilapidated and derelict buildings in town centres can be an issue affecting the vitality of a town and this it is something that the Council may wish to give attention to in our main towns. Members may wish to be aware that the Department has issued a consultation, which seeks to gain views on the most appropriate approach to be taken in developing a legislative regime to address dilapidated / dangerous buildings and neglected sites. The consultation advises that, "Ultimately, the desired outcome is that councils will have access to an effective, fit for purpose, regime that is applied consistently and proactively across all council areas, thereby enhancing the environment for all". A joint response to the consultation from building control, environmental health and planning will be brought before members later this month before being submitted to the Department.

- 8.2** In addition to compiling planning policy, the Primary Retail Cores for all of the three main towns and the two local town has now been defined in a consistent manner (Appendix 2). It is also suggested that the area of Sweep Road Cookstown be designated as a District Centre however, this is something that can be explored further through the public consultation on the Preferred Options Paper. Finally, until such times as the Local Policies Plan is adopted Town Centre boundaries and Opportunity Sites will remain as defined in the three extant area plans.

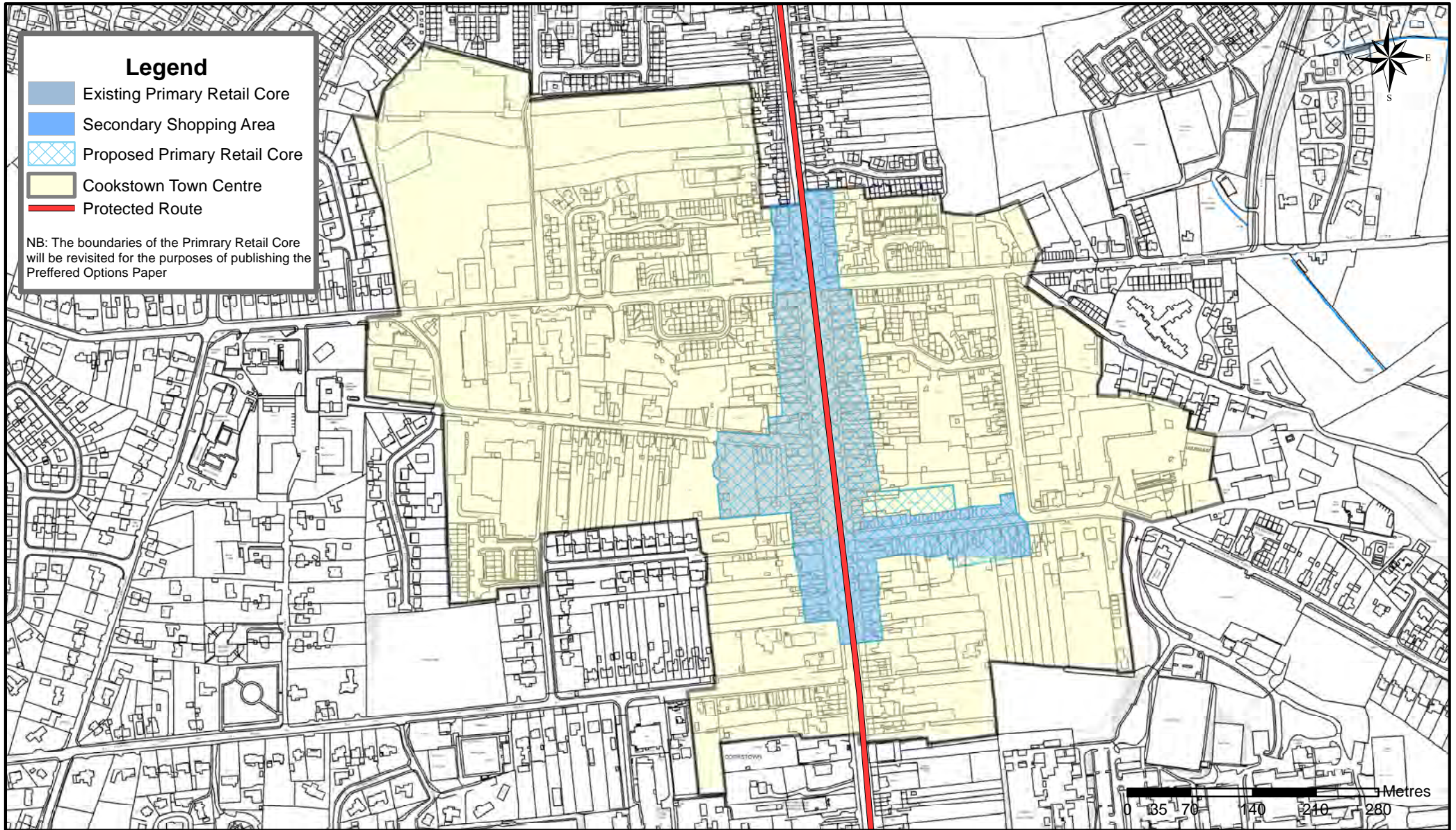
9.0 Recommendation

- 9.1** The policy options, including the preferred options, contained within this Paper are subjected to Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment, before any final decisions are made on which will go forward for public consultation in the Preferred Options Paper.

Proposed Retail Hierarchy for Mid Ulster District

	Hierarchy	Purpose	Location	Designation/Boundary
Hubs	Town Centre	To provide for a wide variety of retail and retail related uses for residents within the catchment	Cookstown Dungannon Magherafelt	Town centre boundary designation Primary retail core extended and Opportunity Sites exist
	District Centre	To provide for the daily shopping needs of residents with that quadrant of the town	Oaks Centre	District Centre Boundary
			Sweep Road	None Designated
	Local Centre	To provide for the daily needs of local residents within a neighbourhood	None	None Designated
	Out of Town Retail Outlet Centre	To promote and reflect the town traditional links with linen and textile industry	Linen Green	No Boundary/ Designation
	Edge of Centre Supermarkets and Superstores	To compliment the town centre in meeting the daily needs of residents within the catchment	Tesco at Dungannon	No Boundary/ Designation
Local Service Centres	Local Town Centres	To provide for a range of users to meet the day to day needs of small towns and rural hinterland	Coalisland Maghera	Town centre boundary designation. Primary retail core exists in Maghera and proposed in Coalisland. Opportunity Sites exist
	Villages	To provide limited retail and related uses to meet the day to day needs of the village and its rural surroundings	As proposed for the new settlement hierarchy for Mid Ulster	No boundary or designations
	Small Settlement	To provide village shops for the daily needs of residents in the locality	As proposed for the new settlement hierarchy for Mid Ulster	No boundary or designations
Rural	Countryside	Farm shops, craft shops and shops serving tourist or recreational facilities	N/A	N/A

Cookstown Primary Retail Core



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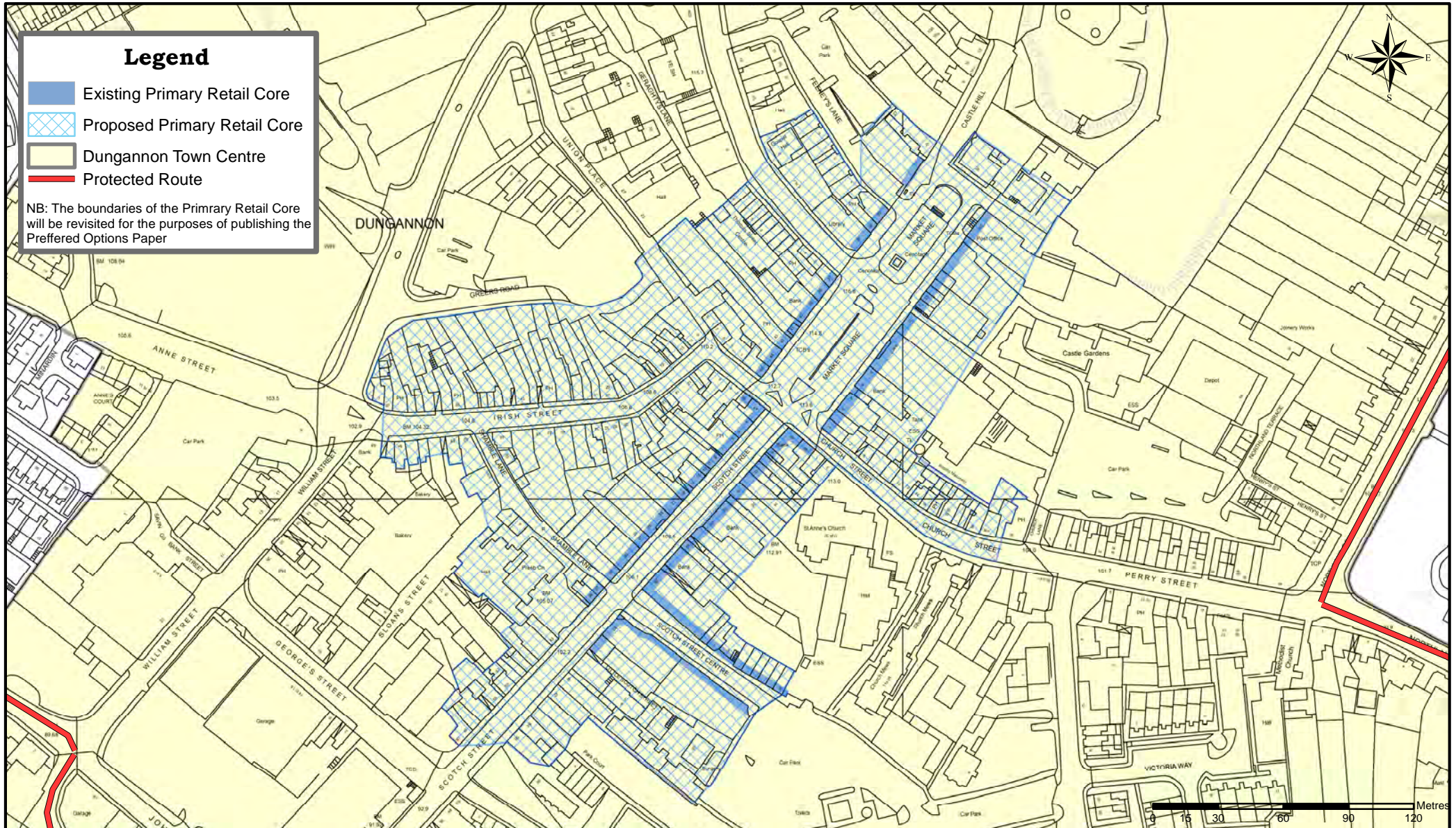
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Dungannon Primary Retail Core

Legend

-  Existing Primary Retail Core
-  Proposed Primary Retail Core
-  Dungannon Town Centre
-  Protected Route

NB: The boundaries of the Primary Retail Core will be revisited for the purposes of publishing the Preferred Options Paper



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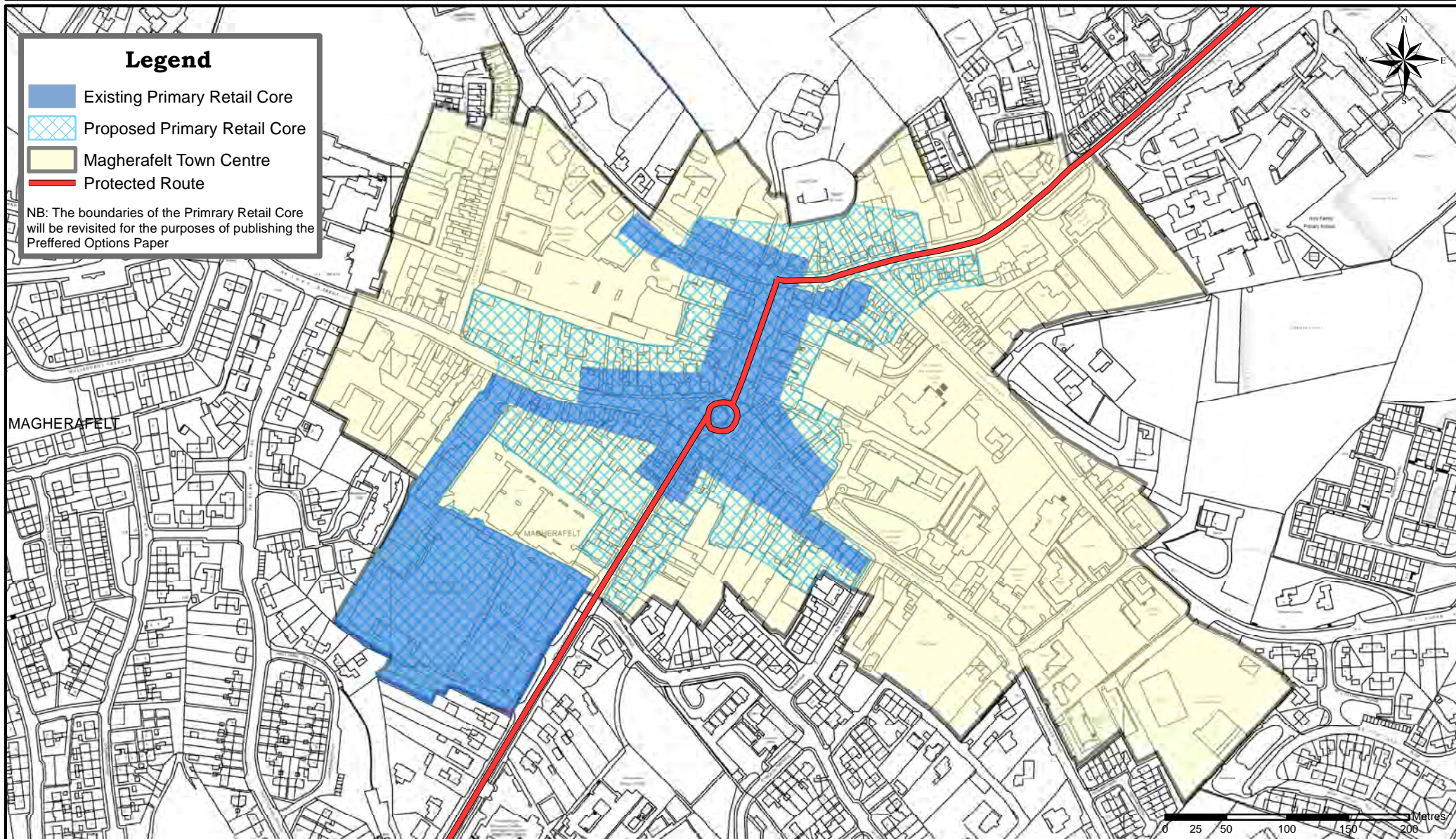
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Magherafelt Primary Retail Core



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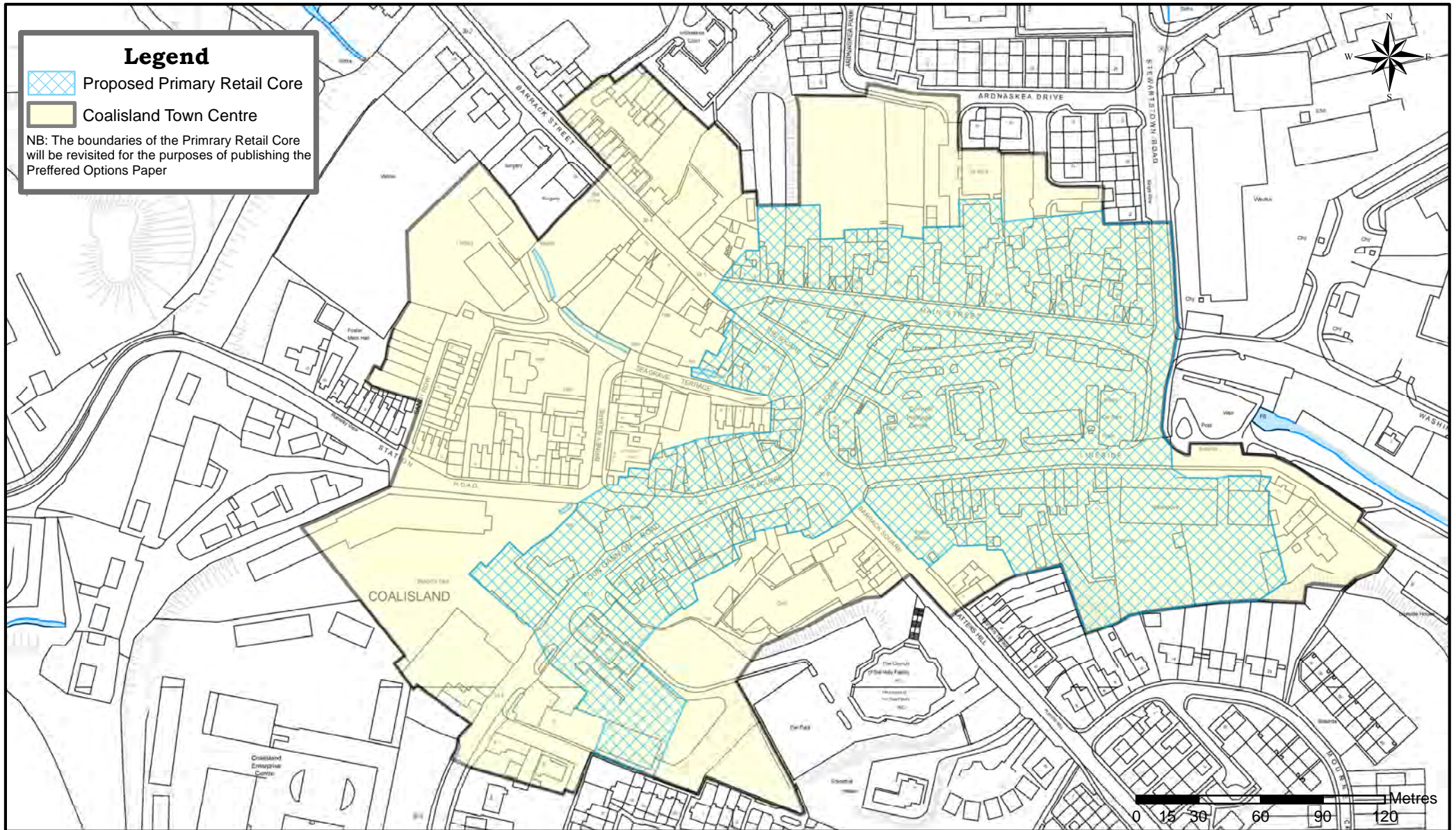
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Coalisland Primary Retail Core



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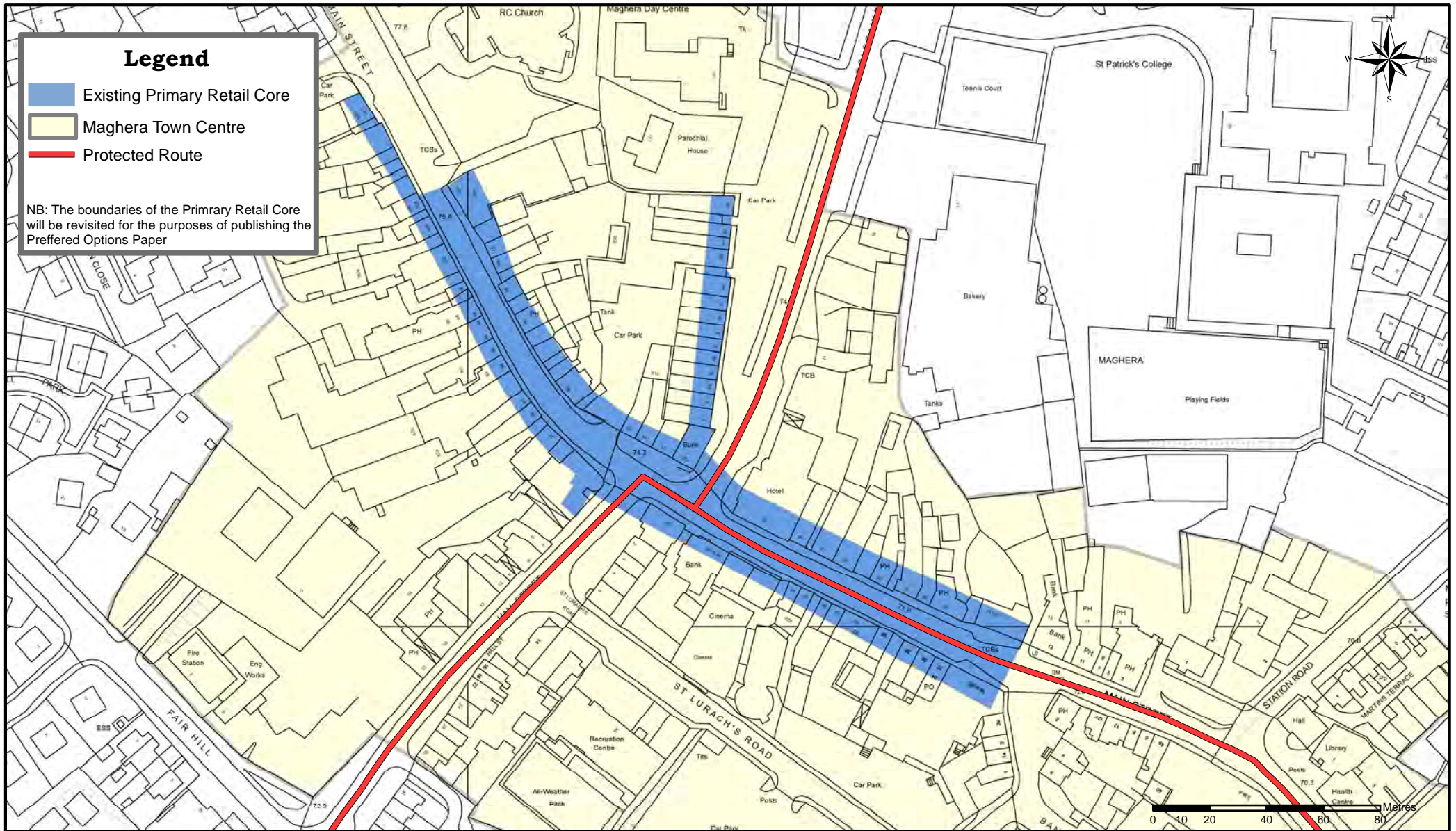
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Maghera Primary Retail Core



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