Sustaining and Growing Retail Activity in South Tipperary, 2012-2014.
(Ver.10, Approved by SPC and for circulation, to go before Council, Monday 3rd October)

Section One: Introduction

Over the last number of years the retail sector and small service sector in South Tipperary has experienced on-going and growing difficulties in terms of sustaining their business as a result of the current decline in the broader economic health of the country. This experience has broadly been (but not exclusively) one which has resulted in the closure of retail outlets; in retail outlets struggling to pay their bills (including their rates) and little if any perceived support out there for this sector on either a national, regional or local basis. It is important to recognise that the retail and small service sector are, and could continue to be, significant employers in this county. They are an important element in terms of ensuring the vibrancy of a town/region and are also a critical element in attracting continuing inward investment in terms of jobs etc. It is in everyone's interest that this sector remains vibrant and that it meets the needs of the citizens of this county.

Section Two: The Retail Sector in South Tipperary: An Introduction

In order to arrive at realistic and implementable solutions to the challenges identified, the background to the performance of the retail sector in South Tipperary needs to be understood. A review, in the context of a declining economy, was undertaken of the 2002 Retail Strategy in 2019. However, it is also recognised that since the Retail Strategy was completed in 2010, the economy has degenerated further and this has had a negative impact on the retail sector in particular.

The County Retail Strategy was prepared in 2009. Retail planning requires consideration of retail catchments beyond local authority boundaries. The Retail Strategy 2009 is based upon the core strategy population projections for the county. The level and type of retail services which the Planning Authority can facilitate is enabled by the position of the settlement within the settlement structure: It is within this context that the performance of the towns between 2002 – 2006 should be interpreted.

The following table shows the population projections for the main settlements to 2016 (County Development Plan). They are important for retailing as they illustrate the projected populations for the towns and also illustrate the key role that Clonmel has in the retail hierarchy for the county and region. The focus for growth going forward will be on the urban areas, this has benefits for the retail sector as it will help achieve critical mass and reduce travel costs for customers.

% Population Share	Growth Location	Projected Population 2016
24%	**Clonmel**	**23,247**
7%	**Carrick-on-Suir**	**6,780**
7%	**Tipperary Town**	**6,780**
4%	**Cashel**	**3,875**
4%	**Cahir**	**3,875**
20%	**District Service Centres**	**19,373**
34%	**Local Service Centres, Settlement Nodes, Open Countryside**	**32,933**

A comparison of existing retail floor space, 2002 and 2009, shows that the amounts had almost doubled in that seven year period.

Table 2.4 Composition of existing retail floorspace 2002				
Location	Convenience	Comparison	Retail Warehousing	**Total Sqm**
Clonmel	10,378	18,722	1,050	**30,150**
Carrick-on-Suir	2,668	3,609	312	**6,589**
Tipperary Town	4,595	5,249	1,062	**10,906**
Cashel	2,114	1,573	480	**4,167**
Cahir	1,207	3,647	4,000	**8,854**
Fethard	524	784	0	**1,308**
Dovehill	0	250	0	**250**
Total Sqm	**21,486**	**33,834**	**6,904**	**62, 224**
Including Vacant Floorspace (5.3%)				**65,521**

Table 2.5 Composition of existing retail floorspace 2009				
Location	Convenience	Comparison	Retail Warehousing	**Total Sqm**
Clonmel	18,122	29,653	14,901	**62,676**
Carrick-on-Suir	3,374	4,586	3,516	**11,476**
Tipperary Town	7,503	7,173	6,062	**20,738**
Cashel	5,324	5,721	2,620	**13,665**
Cahir	1,402	3,647	4,000	**9,049**
Fethard	546	611	0	**1,157**
Dovehill	0	5,700	0	**5,700**
Total Sqm	**36,271**	**57,091**	**31,099**	**124,461**

Figures for 2011 are not available though it is unlikely that they have decreased substantially on those for 2009, though there is an element of vacancy now.

The Strategy found that the variety and choice of retail floor space had increased substantially since 2002 (convenience increased by 68%, comparison by 69% and bulky goods by 780%). The percentage change for total retail floor space from 2002 to 2009 in the main locations was as follows:

Table 2.6 Percentage change for total retail floorspace from 2002 to 2009 in the Settlement Centres		
Location	% 2002 of total floorspace	% 2009 of total floorspace
Clonmel	48.5	50.4
Carrick-on-Suir	10.6	9.2
Tipperary	17.5	16.6
Cashel	6.7	11.0
Cahir	11.2	7.3
Fethard	2.1	0.9
Dovehill	0.4	4.6

There was intense growth in retail floor space between 2002 and 2009 in response to economic activity and demand. However since then there has been a severe downturn in retail and consumer activity and therefore the amount of retail floor space does not match the demand for goods. This therefore leads to very strong competition among retailers with some succeeding and others failing and units becoming vacant.

A first indicator of healthy retail provision in a centre is the number and variety of brand names:

Brand Names for Convenience stores in the County Towns	
Town	**Brand names - 2009**
Clonmel	**Marks & Spencer, Tesco, Dunnes Stores, SuperQuinn, Supervalu, Lidl, Aldi.**
Carrick-on-Suir	**Supervalu, Aldi.**
Tipperary Town	**Supervalu, Tesco, Dunnes Stores, Lidl.**
Cashel	**Supervalu, Tesco, Lidl.**
Cahir	**Supervalu. Aldi**
Fethard	**N/a.**

A second indicator is the number of retail units in the Primary Retail Areas (PRA) (and it is recognised that PRA do shift over time):

Town	Location	Total Number of units
Clonmel	O'Connell Street, Gladstone Street, Mitchell Street and the Market Place Shopping Centre	126
Carrick-on-Suir	Main Street, West Gate, and Bridge Street No's 1-8 and 35-37	99
Tipperary Town	Main Street and Bank Place between Church Street and Blind Street	85
Cashel	Main Street	86
Cahir	Castle Street and The Square	43

A third is the number of shopping centres:

Shopping centres in the County's Towns	
Town	**Shopping Centres**
Clonmel	**The Showgrounds Shopping Centre, Western Road.**
Carrick-on-Suir	**N/a**
Tipperary Town	**Tipperary Shopping Centre, Limerick Road**
Cashel	**Cashel Town Shopping Centre, Cork Road**
Cahir	**N/a**
Fethard	**N/a**

A fourth is the number of warehouse parks

Town	Location
Clonmel	The Poppyfields Retail Park
Carrick-on-Suir	Tinvane Retail Park
Tipperary Town	Tipperary Shopping Centre Park, Limerick Road
Cashel	Cashel Retail Park, Ashwells Lot, Cork Road.

Based on the tables above, it was clear that there had been a very significant growth in retail development (both quantum and type) over the seven year period and this provided a very healthy situation not only for the retailer but also for the citizen. In particular, the following is noted:

- The strongest retail growth area was retail warehousing which was followed by a high growth rate in comparison retailing. Convenience retail also grew significantly. It is to be noted however that growth in floor space provision and actual retail space occupied are not the same thing: the amount of vacant space should be taken into account.

- Clonmel town increased its share of total retail floor-space from 48.5% to 50.4%. which reinforces this settlement as the main retailing centre of the county.
- % share of total retail floor-space in Carrick on Suir decreased from 10.6 to 9.2%. This is a cause for concern as Carrick is not retaining its competitiveness notwithstanding that it is the second largest settlement after Clonmel.
- % share of total retail floor-space in Tipperary has also decreased from 17.5%–16.6% but its share of total retail floor-space is significantly in excess of Carrick's. In addition, notwithstanding the decrease on the % share of retail floor-space, significant new retail floor-space has located in Tipperary Town
- % share of total retail floor-space in Cashel grew very strongly from 6.7% to 11.0%. This is notwithstanding the fact that Cashel is the 4th largest settlement in the county.
- Whilst Cahir experienced significant population growth, the % share of retail floor-space decreased (11.2% - 7.3%)

However the increase in retail floor-space over the years 2002 – 2009 also introduced new trends/types of retailing not previously present in the market. The emerging trends included:

- ***Reduction in the number of small independent retailers:*** Generally this is seen as a result of competition from national and international multiples and symbol stores as well as a growing demand by the broader market for these type of retail uses
- ***Reduction in the number of small local convenience outlets in rural settlement:*** Local convenience outlets play a vital role in community self sufficiency, especially those without access to public transport
- ***Increased concentration among fewer multiples/operators:.*** The trend of shopping in national and international brand food stores of a medium to larger floor space can be seen through increased representation of retailers such as Dunnes Stores and Tesco and the discount operators (Aldi and Lidl)
- ***Emergence of mixed goods retailing:*** Comparison retailers whose offer includes bulky as well as non-bulky goods has implications for retailing policy and creates uncertainty as to whether stores should be classified as bulky or comparison goods and whether they are best located in the town centre or out of the town centre
- ***The emergence of new forms of retailing, especially in out of centre locations***:- these include retail warehousing, retail parks, factory outlet centres, e-retailing etc.

It is probably fair to say that all of the above was driven to a significant degree by the demands of the market for a different type of retail offering and a more "customer convenient" type of retail offering. It has also been driven by the needs of the retail operators to become more efficient and more cost effective. These trends will continue to grow and others will become more prominent (such as e-retailing etc). The Council has produced a document in 2010 which outlines how the planning system will assist in maintaining the vibrancy of the retail/service sector and in particular has concentrated on the restating and developing of policies to reinforce the primacy of the Primary Shopping areas. However, whilst planning policy can play a role in trying to maintain the vibrancy of a retail/service sector, it is clearly only one cog in this wheel and other factors also need to be considered. This needs to be borne in mind in the context of the options to be considered below.

Since 2010, the economy has continued to decline and this has continued to adversely affect the retail trade. Whilst every aspect of retail is being hit, it would appear at the outset that it is having a disproportionate effect on the smaller independent retailer, the small rural convenience outlets and the comparison goods sectors. Notwithstanding an increase in population numbers from 2006 levels (to now reach 88,000) there has been a very obvious reduction in expenditure per capita and this is clearly having a knock-on effect in terms of discretionary spend in particular. This situation will pertain until such time as the economy recovers. However, on the positive side from the county's perspective we are in a position where

- The strong underlying population growth of the county will be a significant plus when the economy begins to pick up
- South Tipperary is not as strongly affected by a "gateway" pull and has the ability to be self-sufficient in terms of its retail offering, particularly when one looks at the retail infrastructure currently in place. This view is reinforced by the results of the recent survey undertaken by Clonmel Chamber [1].

In the interim, the collaboration by the various stakeholders in assisting the retail sector to sustain itself until such time as the economy picks up is vital and it is hoped that this project/process can contribute in some way to this initiative. We need to be cognisant of the market needs of the industry as well as the requirements of the citizens and we need to be open to new ways of doing business and new ways of developing appropriate retail policies.

.

[1] Clonmel: Consumer Perceptions and Spending Patterns 2011, report prepared by Rikon at W.I.T.)

Section Three: Response by Council

As a result of this issue being raised at a Council meeting, it was agreed that options needed to be explored with all stakeholders as to how to address this genuine concern and what supports/assistance could be provided either collectively or individually. The Council tasked the S.P.C. for Physical and Economic Planning and Development to work with the relevant stakeholders on the issue.

At its meeting on the 26th April, 2011 the S.P.C. agreed to set up a sub-committee to examine ways to sustain and grow the existing retail activity in the towns and villages of the county.

a) The sub-group agreed to work with the key stakeholders to identify the key issues and to ascertain what options, if any existed to try and address the difficulties facing this sector
b) It agreed to seek buy-in from other economic and development agencies through the CDB structure who, at a later meeting, endorsed the action of the Council and indicated its support
c) The SPC and its sub-group then proceeded to engage with the relevant stakeholders both large and small through a variety of different mediums and each town was also facilitated to input into the discussion

The issues/challenges identified are outlined in Section 4 below.

It is to be noted that quite a number of actions impacting positively on the retail sector have already been initiated or at least investigated by local authorities within the county. They are noted in Appendix 1.

Section Four: The Issues Raised and how they were dealt with

The issues raised in the consultation span national, regional and local concerns, a variety of stakeholders and a number of possible owners. They have been discussed by the sub-committee and where appropriate, grouped together with an introductory paragraph. A list of possible actions has been included, based on what seems relevant, actionable, specific and realistic. They will be discussed with the stakeholders. The list of agreed actions will then go to the SPC sub-committee to consider. The outcomes from the attached document can act as a template for the other towns in South Tipperary and it can be moulded to meet the specific needs of that individual town relative to its size and function

1 Planning and provision of retail:

The Primary Retail Area & the Issues Pertaining to it:

One of the key concerns raised by groups during the consultation process related to the decline of the Primary Retail Area. The growth and attraction of out-of-town centres were identified as the key reason as to why such centres were declining. This is clearly a complex issue and there are, as always, a number of inter-relating factors which contribute to this trend. The list below is not exhaustive but it does give an indication as to the complexity of the issues to be addressed if the PRA is to retain its former position

- Modern customer demand is for a spacious well lit shop with up to date goods displayed in an appropriate manner.
- Modern shopping demands have altered but the townscape or the existing retail outlets have not kept pace with this change.
- Access to parking is critical as is accessibility in and around the shop in question
- Attractive pedestrian-friendly shopping streets are always an attraction – it is the pedestrian who "window shops" not the car driver and we need to focus on how to best achieve this
- The larger shop needs an adequately sized site – such sites are difficult to amalgamate or access within the PRA which generally has a very historic layout, small plot sizes, generally in different ownerships – the quandary is then do you allow the larger modern shop facility to move to another town or locate on a site which is not PRA but at a minimum will keep shoppers in the area.
- Greenfield sites are cheaper to build on and easier to purchase than the central sites and there is generally less individual objections.
- Rents in the PRA are perceived as particularly high and therefore unattractive, particularly in the current environment.
- Today's citizen requires easy access for their weekly convenience shop – their needs are different to the "recreational retail user".
- Different size settlements will have different scales of retail development. The type of uses in say the Clonmel PRA will differ to that of the Cashel PRA and the needs and type of retail offering in the District Service centre will differ again. Therefore appropriate responses are required with respect to the settlement type

The above non-exhaustive list shows that the resolution of revitalising the PRA area cannot be left to the Planning Authority alone as it does not have the necessary influence or authority to deliver the retail change required by the modern market. The Council has a role in certain areas but it is only one cog in this complex wheel and we need all of the cogs working together if we are to retain and develop a vibrant retail centre of activity in our towns which match the needs and requirements of the markets.

The Council as a body are acutely aware of the out-of-town shopping centre issue, and seek to manage it. However both the public and the retail trade actively seek these large retail spaces with adjacent parking. Until they are provided within the core of the towns, the 'doughnut' effect will continue to cause a difficulty. The consultations held have indicated that appropriate sites exist in the middle of the main towns which could be suitable for large retail units. But the questions that should be asked are

- Are they available for development and if they are within more than one ownership, have all landowners signed up to their disposal as a package?
- Are they mapped, packaged and actively marketed?
- If owners were not agreeable to signing up as a package, is there a willingness to have them compulsorily purchased by the Council (i.e. a stronger local government interventionist policy)?
    - If there is the will to progress with this initiative, are stakeholders aware that this could take a number of years (due to the procedures and processes involved)?
    - Have the relevant authorities the available capital to spend on the acquisition of such sites?
    - What happens if a large new retail business looks to locate in town whilst this is in the process of being progressed? Should the development be refused (and allow additional leakage) or should it be granted on the basis of preventing further leakage out of the area?
- There is also the need for landowners to (1) agree to sell and (2) accept realistic prices so that the local authority would get its investment back (and not risk impact upon its services).
- The rejuvenation of the town centre, with or without the placing of large shopping centres in their core, is another issue to be considered so as to bring footfall back into the town.
- One possible answer is to regard each town centre as an ‘outdoor shopping centre’ in itself with a town centre-wide uniformity of street furniture and surfaces, etc, appropriate traffic management and services such as shopping trolleys available throughout the town. We are some way towards this vision with, for example, street enhancement planned in Clonmel as well as trolleys being available some distance from Superquinn and possibly being available for use in other shops.

Given the position as stated above we now need to ask what opportunities, linkages or possibilities are there for the centre of town retailer and what leverage can be gained from the existence of the larger store which would maximise the return to the PRA traders. Ascertaining what these opportunities are is an area that needs further investigation.

One of the negatives associated with the opening of a larger retailer is the reported loss of skills and jobs in the small independent retailer outfits. Whilst this has to be weighed against the number of jobs on offer at the larger venue it is an issue for that particular trader. Some aspects however, while very important in their own right, are less amenable to action at this level than others but there may be possibilities to minimise the damage of job loss by working off the opportunities and synergies afforded by the larger retailer.

Actions

1. **The Council to develop and fund an appropriate action plan in conjunction with the traders' representatives which, using a retail marketing expert, identifies a) the opportunities and synergies that could be developed between the larger multiple at edge of centre and the local independent centre of town retailer; b) indicate the actions that need to be taken to capitalise on this (and by whom) to ensure that there is value to both retail types**

2. **Traders and Council to work together to identify appropriate large sites for potential retail development within the PRA. Such sites to be mapped, constraints identified (with appropriate solutions) and ownership identified Relevant stakeholders to work with the owners to ascertain the feasibility of packaging, marketing and selling the appropriate land banks**

2 Current Business Issues:

The smaller town centre shop, like all retail business today, is facing difficult times. Their role needs to be examined, to see what markets to be in and then to create collaborative marketing programmes for a wider catchment area and focus on key markets. They need to consider how marketing and retail will develop in future. Initiatives may arise which might attract in new shops/reopen vacant shops. They should investigate gaps in the retail service provision and work collaboratively to fill this gap. The only way the small retailer can survive is to offer something unique and good value.

Data is an important factor here. While leakage of customers from a town should not be encouraged it is important to note that viewed from the other side, leakage from elsewhere is a potential market. The actual leakage from towns needs to be quantified. A recent report shows that Clonmel grocery leakage is only 2% for example. Data is vital for discussion and agreement on appropriate niches for towns, and their smaller shops. Each town in South Tipperary could develop their own particular flavour and niche markets (Tipperary and Carrick-on -Suir in particular).

Holding of events in towns to increase footfall is also seen as vital. It is occurring to a reasonable degree at present and there is substantial support of festivals and heritage events in towns by the local authority. There is also very significant community involvement in the development of same. However there are probably opportunities for better co-ordinated marketing which will benefit all towns

Support for local business education, training and business start up has been mentioned in the consultation. Again much of this work is being done already but co-ordination and communication re: opportunities may have to be increased. Consultation may result in an awareness of gaps. It has been pointed out, for example, that some state business agencies are restricted in what services they can offer to the retail, trades and services sector. This leaves innovators in these areas unsupported but we do have to recognise the dangers of displacement.

The consultation also received comments regarding the difficulties local suppliers have in gaining entry to the local authority market. While the frustration of local businesses, unsuccessful in tendering, is real we have to note that public sentiment, and government policy, is that local authorities must reduce their costs substantially. Public procurement policy aims to so reduce local authority costs, including the cost of supplies, equipment etc by means of larger, coordinated orders on a lowest costs basis, giving no weight to supplier location. Public procurement is likely to grow stricter, not less, as further savings and efficiencies are demanded. However, some work could be done in this area to assist potential local markets in tendering for such services and it may assist or better enable local traders to tender successfully.

The Council notes and commits to continue to support, within the context of available resources etc, the good work of development groups such as the Cahir Development Association, Carrick on Suir Economic Forum (progressed by COSTEDC) and the Tipperary Town Economic Steering Group. Clonmel Borough Council has established a number of committees with the Association of Clonmel Traders to examine and progress a number of projects.

Actions

1. **The County Council is willing to investigate the acquisition of the services of a retail expert in working with the trade in each town to identify a) the level of leakage from a town and b) to identify the type of retail/service uses which should be available in that town but which are not. Arising from this**
    - **Chambers/Traders to be asked to derive and develop a coherent and agreed marketing focus for their town.**
    - **Town Marketing groups be set up in each town, funded by a cooperative application to LEADER, to implement their marketing focus**

2. **Facilitated meeting of all business education providers to audit services provided to the retail sector and disseminate results to relevant groups.**

3. **Council to liaise with and support local groups/Chambers/Traders in the creation of 'packages' so as to bring more visitors to towns.**

4. **Graduate internships: Possibility of having a graduate intern, in appropriate disciplines such as marketing, business, for each town to be investigated by the Local Authority. Interns to support and develop projects.**

5. **Council to arrange a workshop on public procurement.**

3 Economy in general/Promotion of Towns

As we are all too well aware, our economy is inseparably linked to the European and world economies. The all-powerful internet economy has brought with it huge changes where, for example, it is now normal to order books from a supplier hundreds of miles away, sight unseen, paid up front, arriving in days rather than the previous system of ordering from a local bookshop, paying only when they arrive, often weeks later. Businesses need to follow these trends but not all may be able to or want to. They require training and awareness on the new electronically transmitted economy to maximise the opportunities.

A general need at present is to boost confidence in the economy/country so as to encourage spending by consumers. This is a wider action and is not possible for this group, at a national level but actions for/within the county are possible. There is a need for representative groups to work together to promote a positive image and generate a better working environment between all stakeholders. South Tipperary County Council continues to promote county and business in the county as do Town Councils, the Chambers/Traders etc.

Actions

1. **County promotional video to be published in September with an agreed county wide and external distribution and use strategy.**

2. **Traders/Chambers/CEB/and the County Development Board Business Support Unit to be asked to organise/facilitate social media training in each town (keeping LIT/Tipperary course in mind also).**

3. **Promote PLATO business succession issues service. PLATO is a business support forum for owner-managers of SME. It is currently providing support, assisted financially and otherwise, by the County Council and the CEB, to two groups in the county as well as providing such general services.**

4 Towns, Streets, Signs and Events;

Signage, or perhaps the hoped-for effects of the signage, was an important part of the retail consultation. While signage in any town is the responsibility of the particular town council, it is clear that the retail trade want to see the existing signage reviewed for effectiveness. Signage on the motorways through the county, directing people to the major towns was also mentioned. Roads section in the County Council would see these as generally adequate but there are current discussions with the NRA regarding a Tourism Signs Strategy for the motorways.

Actions

1. **All towns consider the review of signage in consultation with the broader community and Chambers/Traders representatives and implement a phased plan accordingly.**

2. **County Council to progress Tourism Signs Strategy with NRA for motorways**

3. **Community and Enterprise section to facilitate a meeting between Chamber/Traders re public transport in Clonmel (and possibly elsewhere)**

4. **Town Councils, advised and in partnership with Chambers/Traders, to consider ways of linking out of town shopping centres and town centres.**

5. **Town Councils, in partnership with Chambers/Traders, to consider changes to town streetscapes.**

6. **Business bodies such as Cahir Development Association to be asked to continue their actions re: events in towns. The Council to work with the various voluntary groups and to continue to support festivals, arts and heritage in towns (and such support publicised)**

7. **County Council to actively encourage on-street activity by commercial units to positively influence the atmosphere and vitality of the principal town centre streets by examining opportunities, promotion and accessibility including for example tables and chairs associated with restaurants/cafes and to request the Borough and Town Councils to similarly consider such.**

5 Parking

In the modern world, parking for motorised personal transport is an important requirement for most shoppers. Unless society, and its organisation, changes radically this will continue to be the case. Retailers are understandably anxious to have parking charges as low as possible but the fact is that such income is an important source of funding for local authority services. Their desire to see charges set uniformly across the county in the hope that customers will move to their particular town ignores the reality that each local authority is an independent company setting its budget separately, based on its own needs and income. Characterisation of parking at shopping centres as ‘free’ does not take account of the fact that the retailers within that centre are paying a service charge which includes a charge for the parking spaces. They are therefore covering the car parking cost for their customers.

A Town Parking Strategy, taking all factors into account, for each town is probably the way to proceed. It could examine suggestions such as a free initial period (an attractive idea to the retail trade but perhaps financially damaging to the local authority and the services it provides) or even the method of creating the charge, i.e. pay as you used rather than paying in advance for a certain time. Again there are financial issues resulting, not only in terms of the return but also of the cost of the barriers and their maintenance. A Town Parking Strategy could also take account of perhaps special offers for certain days or certain events as well as looking at the perception of each car park and the enforcement of parking regulations. It is important for the retail trade that parking spaces for customers be made available, by enforcement if necessary and by ensuring, in some agreed way, that for example parking by retail staff and owners are not hindering that by potential customers.

Actions

1. **Each town authority to consider the creation of a parking strategy for the town, if not already underway or completed**
2. **Each town authority to consider providing free parking for identified special events**
3. **Recommendations re. differing advertisement media to be included in parking strategy**
4. **Employers to seek to have staff sign up to any reserved parking scheme leaving parking in main streets available for customers.**
5. **Consideration by Chamber/Traders of proposals to reimburse shoppers for parking charges as a method of attracting shoppers into their centre**

6 Co-ordination across the county

Co-ordination was thought to be an important factor in generating a supportive environment for the retail trade. Prevention of clashes in, for example, Farmers Markets or St. Patrick's Day parades could enable larger events, and hopefully more sightseers and retail customers. A collaborative approach by the Chambers/Traders organisations across the county might also assist.

Actions

1. **Community and Enterprise to invite organisers of St. Patrick's Day events and Farmers Markets to a facilitated meeting with the aim of seeing if a more co-ordinated approach could be taken in the county.**

2. **Have a retail development fund to create events etc in towns (see below)**

3. **Community and Enterprise Section, County Council to facilitate networking meeting of Chambers/Traders to create a county focus for retail sector**

4. **Integrate town councils into this process by providing this template of actions to Borough/Town Councils for their consideration**

7 Financial issues

In a time of reduced public expenditure and poor consumer sentiment, the retail sector finds its cash flow squeezed. It is natural therefore for retail businesses to seek to lower all costs. Rates are one of the costs they face. However it is important to remember that the actual framework of the valuation system is set at national level. A report to the national authorities on the financing of local government has been prepared by the County Council. It points out the 'startling decrease' in funding provided to local government by central government in recent years. It is also important to note that the local authorities are taking account of the difficulties being faced by rate payers: The County Council, Cashel Town Council and Clonmel Borough Council all have not increased their rates for the last three years and meet with rate payers on an ongoing basis to discuss options for payment e.g. by instalment.

The retail sector also wants to know how the finance raised by rates is being spent and are efficiencies and economies being made? The local authorities are certainly reducing their costs as acknowledged in a recent report on the Croke Park Agreement. Some suggestions as to cuts to be made to reduce budgets, e.g. in the number of local authorities and councillors can only be made at national level. The funds raised in the county are accounted for on a county basis to provide several hundred different services across the county. Some funds are transferred to the county authority from the town authority to take account of services provided by the county for the towns e.g library, fire services. Fundamentally any decision to set the rate amount is one for the members of each local authority at their Estimates meeting.

It has been suggested that start-up businesses might pay less rates but this is not only not feasible but there is also the issue of neighbouring older businesses being put at a disadvantage. Any possible scheme would have to take account of existing businesses and their needs. There is a definite argument however that filling vacant premises in a particular area would be to the benefit of all businesses by attempting to increase footfall and create a more vibrant town centre.

Actions

1. **Investigate the options around assisting new businesses to locate in vacant premises for 2012**
2. **Local authorities to consider a reduction of development contributions to be considered at the appropriate time (when Schemes are being renewed) in areas where retail development is to be encouraged**

8 DSC/Village shops and Services:
While the retail sector in towns is under severe pressure in recent years, the retail provision in the villages and countryside has been diminishing for longer. Essential services such as food, petrol etc are less and less available locally. Economic pressures such as the lesser purchasing power of smaller retailers are an issue but so is the consumer decision to buy elsewhere, aided by the access to private transport. Less people are living in rural areas over time too. While planning policies can seek to support villages by concentrating settlement in or close to them, fundamentally if local consumers do not support local shops, then they will not survive. It is not clear what can be done except perhaps alerting local consumers to the potential effects of their choices, both of living and shopping locations.

Actions

1. **Community and Voluntary forum to be consulted further re possible actions**
2. **Council to facilitate the provision of a seminar for rural retail trade on how to maximise their profits/stay in business**
3. **Possible scheme in relation to vacant premises to also apply to retail units in District Service Centres**

9 Tourism/Promotion
Tourism is seen as one of the solutions to our present economic difficulties. The retail sector seeks campaigns to promote the strengths of the county as well as the strong involvement of the local authorities. Much of this is being done and it may be that what is initially required is the communications of the current work being done and the current difficulties being faced.

Action

- **Report to sub-committee re: work being done in Tourism to be prepared for discussion and then SPC.**

10 Possible Funding Mechanisms and Projects: A Retail Fund

As noted above, one possible mechanism of support for the retail sector would be a fund to assist in the implementations of initiatives. It is envisaged that this fund would be set up by the County Council, be partly funded by it and be used to support some of the initiatives below.

a. Set up a central fund at county level, contributed to by all of the towns, to assist in implementing the actions contained in the document
b. Work with all relevant business bodies; state and local agencies to access and leverage additional appropriate funds to implement actions contained in the document

Implementation and Review
It is important that progress on the actions listed above be reviewed. It is therefore proposed that a review meeting of the relevant stakeholders be held one calendar year from this document's adoption by Council to do so.

Conclusions
The retail sector, like all other sectors of our economy, is struggling in a very difficult economic climate. Each stakeholder can only do so much on its own. Together they can support a separate, additional number of realistic and attainable objectives for the support and sustaining of the retail sector in the county.

Appendix

Existing Actions by the Town Councils to Sustain and Grow Retail Activity

Tipperary Town Council is committed to promoting and developing Tipperary Town as a primary destination for shopping, tourism and as a place to live and work. In doing so it recognises that a robust, progressive and forward thinking development plan is the roadmap to ensuring that the future prosperity, vitality and viability of the town is to the forefront of the mind's of people who may be in a position to effect positive change in the future including in the area of retail sustainability and growth. The review of the current plan has commenced and an appropriate focus on this area will be included in the forthcoming draft. The Town Council is also represented on the Economic Steering Group which was formed to develop a sales/marketing programme for the town and will continue to support it in its endeavors to promote the town as a location for industrial and commercial growth.

Linked with signs were the physical links between out of town shopping centres and it is understood that this issue is being looked at, for example, in Clonmel by the Borough Council. Access routes (pedestrian, cycle and motorcar) between the two areas could bring more people into the town centre (but also perhaps the other direction) and the Community and Enterprise section could facilitate a meeting between the stakeholders and transport providers. This approach could be considered in other towns. The attractiveness of streetscapes to visitors and shoppers was also a concern of the retail trade and it is certainly important that the public realm be appropriate. Clonmel Borough Council is working on a Public Realm Plan for the town centre. Cashel Town Centre already has one and it is been implemented on staged basis. It would be important for town Chambers/Traders to give specific proposals to their local authority in relation to those areas where they consider works are required. In addition, the level of Tidy Town Activity in nearly all towns at this stage is at a very high level and they undertake excellent work with the support of their Council.

The efforts by some business groups to create events to bring people to their towns e. g. Cahir Development Association, is to be praised and encouraged and is an action that could be expanded upon. These events add both footfall and business value to their town.

Town Councils provide significant support to events in their towns. Clonmel Borough Council provides a substantial amount of support, in various ways, to the following festivals/events/groups

- St. Patrick's Day celebrations,
- Junction Festival
- Suir Valley International Cycle Race
- Busking Festival
- Various athletic events
- Bianconi 225 Initiative Celebrations 2011
- Banna Cluain Meala
- and others

Cashel Town Council has worked to support the Gold Star disability access system to promote Cashel as an ‘access for all’ town and is actively lobbying for the Rock of Cashel to remain on the UNESCO World Heritage Status Tentative List.

Tipperary Town Council is proactive in developing linkages and connectivity between the Town Centre and out of Town developments. In 2011 it completed the development of a footpath from town to the Dunnes Stores centre on the Limerick Road. The Council is also progressing the provision of a Radial Interconnector between the Limerick Road and the Emly Road, which will alleviate congestion and enable the development of further traffic management improvements in the Town Centre. In terms of the tourist offering the Town Council has undertaken initiatives including:

- Provision of a Historic Town Trail;
- Launch and implementation of the “Tipperary Hills Improvement Plan”;
- Partner with Excel Heritage Centre in the development of the “Tipperarytown.ie” website, Tourist Brochure including Visitor Guide, postcards and map;

The Council is also an active supporter of Community events and community organisations that organise events that increase footfall in the town such as:

1. Tipperary Peace Convention – Annual Peace Awards,
2. Pride of Tipperary Festival,
3. Tipperary Hills Appreciation Day,
4. Various cycling events,
5. C. J. Kickham Brass and Reed Band;
6. Tipperary Excel Heritage Centre.

Clonmel Borough Council recognizes that there is a need to create linkage between out-of-town shopping centres and the town centre and in this regard the Council did undertake a project on connectivity between the Showgrounds Shopping Centre and Parnell Street. This report, which was recently presented to the Elected Members, addresses issues in relation to creating a pedestrian friendly environment to attract shoppers to the town centre. Proposals are contained in the report to improve pedestrian crossings, streetscape, street furniture, planting, improvement of appropriate public lighting in the area of the Mall, parking for bicycles etc. Some immediate proposals are presently being examined in respect of improving traffic lights in this general area. It is proposed to consult with the Clonmel Chamber of Commerce and the Association of Clonmel Traders before a formal Part 8 process would be initiated.

The Borough Council has interacted in a very positive way over the last number of years with Clonmel Chamber of Commerce, the Association of Clonmel Traders and other Agencies/Community/Voluntary Groups to promote and enhance the town, in order to make it an attractive place to visit and shop. Following one of our meetings with ACT, it was decided to establish a number of committees, with representatives from the Borough Council and ACT, to examine and progress various projects as follows:

a).Town Centre Development/Shop front Enhancement Scheme Committee.

This committee has met on a number of occasions to discuss the sourcing of funding for a Pilot Scheme to improve shop fronts, including vacant premises, in the town centre. Ms. Isabel Cambie, South Tipperary Development Company attended one of the meetings to advise on LEADER funding for this project. An application for funding is presently being prepared by ACT for submission to STDC for specific premises in the town centre, with support from the Borough Council. A further meeting of this committee is due to take place on the 16th September next.

b).Information Signage Committee.

Significant progress has been made by this group. Information Maps/Signage ,indicating retail services in the town, have been provided at strategic locations. It is also proposed to provide signage on the approach roads to Clonmel to encourage passers-by to visit and shop in the town.

c).Floral Displays/Flags/Information Boards Committee.

In addition to the floral displays provided by the Borough Council, which are presently located in various areas in the town, this committee are examining proposals to encourage the retail sector to provide and maintain hanging baskets and flags on poles in the town centre. This is an ongoing process.

7. A number of other positive actions have been undertaken by the Borough Council, and financial and other supports have been provided by the Council as follows:

a).The Council were instrumental in relocating the Tourist Information Office from Old St. Mary’s to a strategic location at the Main Guard. Appropriate signage for the Tourist Office has also been provided.

b).The Council works closely with the Clonmel Local Tidy Town’s Committee including the funding of the preparation of a Three Year Strategic Plan for the Tidy Towns Committee. The Council covers the cost of Public Liability Insurance and provides advice on various aspects of the submission made to the National Tidy Towns Competition. It is Important to note that Clonmel has achieved Gold Medal status, in its category, over the last three years. It has also achieved a very high ranking in the Irish Business Against Litter League (IBAL) --- in the top 8, with a “Clean to European Norms” designation over the last two years. This is a clear indication of the positive work being done by the Local Tidy Towns Committee and the staff of Clonmel Borough Council.

Cashel Town Council

The Council has supported a number of community events and also the Tidy Town Committee so as to create additional footfall and a pleasing environment in the town

Parking
Local issues predominate in the parking arena. The question of a multi-storey car park for Clonmel town centre is one, of course for the Borough Council who are presently assessing proposals. In Cashel parking may be linked with the aspiration to bring more of the tourists who visit the Rock down into the town and in Cahir a traffic management plan is in the process of being drawn up.

A charge of€ 1 per hour applies for on-street parking in Clonmel. This rate of charge has not been increased for a number of years. It is also important to note that the Borough Council, some years ago, introduced a €0.50 charge for 30 minutes in the town centre and this continues to apply. In relation to car parks, the Council has a free car park at Suirside on the Old Waterford Road and at the town side of St. Mary's Church, Irishtown. An all-day charge of €2.50 also applies at the car parks at Gordon Place, Suir Island and Old Quay, near the Gashouse Bridge.

In 2009, the Council introduced an initiative of a monthly charge of €30 at Suir Island car park to facilitate employees in the town centre to park all day. There was very little take up on this. We are endeavoring to acquire additional land at this location to improve the car parking facilities at Suir Island. Over the last number of years free parking in the Council's car parks in the town centre has been provided by the Council in the period leading up to Christmas, in consultation with the Chamber of Commerce and the Association of Clonmel Traders, to facilitate Christmas shoppers. This will be repeated in the current year for each Saturday in December 2011.

The provision of a multi-storey car park in the town centre is high on the Council's agenda. Proposals in relation to locating this facility at Mary Street are being considered. The Council is also in discussions with BORC Development Company in relation to the development of a multi storey car park at the old Clonmel Arms site as part of a mixed development, for which planning permission has been granted. A meeting with the developers was scheduled to take place in August to discuss and consider options.

Cashel Town Council has introduced a formal twenty minutes free on-street parking scheme. A Parking Strategy has been introduced following a parking survey.

Tipperary Town Council
With regard to parking it is important to note the availability of in excess of 170 free parking spaces provided by the Town Council in close proximity to the town centre