

3. CONTEXT

3.1 Topography

The site slopes significantly from south to north. The highest levels are recorded along Old Market Street where a spot level of 15.6 metres is recorded. Spot levels on Castle Street give readings of just 6.38 metres near the Lady Erin Statue and 7.3 metres on the east end of Castle Street. These readings indicate that there is a difference of approximately 9 metres from the north end to the south end of the block. A difference of 9 metres equates to approximately 2 to 3 storeys. On this basis, development in the backlands on the north end of the block closer to Castle Street has the capacity for greater building heights than backland development in the southern end of the site (closer to Old Market Street), particularly when considered in the context of protecting the visual integrity of the impressive Courthouse tower.

3.2 Land Use Structure

3.2.1 Ground Floor Usage

The commercial focus of the block is along Castle Street and Market Street. The intensity of commercial and retail activity weakens along High Street, with an increasing incidence of vacancy evident. Since 2001 approximately six properties have been converted from a vacant state into active use, primarily commercial/retail, however during the intervening period vacancy arose in a further five properties. The situation has thus remained fairly stable, but with no obvious signs of improvement.

3.2.2 Upper Floor Usage

Although it is difficult to confirm the upper floor use of buildings from a visual survey, the general utilization of the upper floors can be determined. Surveys in 2004 reveal that approximately nine properties (on all streets around the block) that had upper floor residential use in 2001 are now vacant and/or used for storage purposes. Upper floors in these streets are not used extensively by separate residence, presumably because of difficulties which relate to insurance, but perhaps also due to difficulties with car parking and general residential amenity (i.e., lack of gardens; balconies; problems with overlooking; traffic congestion; etc.).

Regarding other uses, the upper floors of a very significant number of properties would appear to either under-utilised (in a commercial capacity) or vacant.

There are few residential dwelling units on Castle Street (none at ground floor level). On Market Street and Castle Street there would appear to be just three dwellings at the ground floor level, with an additional three properties with residential activity on the upper floors or to the rear (one of which includes a number of apartments). Residential use, however is a significant land use activity on the ground and upper floors of Old Market Street, where there are single family dwellings and multi-family dwellings on individual plots.

3.3 Building Condition

An external visual examination of the perimeter properties of the block had been carried out in 2001, as part of the Sligo and Environs Development Plan (2004-2010) preparation process. This exercise was repeated in October, 2004.

While some properties have been improved during the period of 2001 to 2004, others have gone into disrepair or have not been adequately maintained. Overall, however, the pattern has remained unchanged. Properties along Castle Street, Teeling Street and the north end of Old Market Street (near the junction with the Pearse Road) have been relatively well maintained. There have been a number of improvements along Market Street, suggesting perhaps that this area is starting to see improvements, given its close proximity to Grattan Street and Castle Street (the most significant shopping streets after O'Connell Street).

The condition of High Street would appear to have remained relatively unchanged, and in a few instances the building fabric has deteriorated. However, planning permission has been granted for the redevelopment of a number of small derelict plots at the junction of Old Market Street and High Street (Map 12 – Reference PD 103/03) and another property is being refurbished with apartments (Map 12 – Reference PD 99/00).

3.4 Pedestrian Counts

Pedestrian counts undertaken during the preparation of the Sligo and Environs Development Plan, 2004-2010, revealed that after O'Connell Street, Castle Street had the highest pedestrian flows in the town centre. The only other street around the Courthouse Block that was examined, was Market Street, and despite its proximity to the Grattan Street/Castle Street area, the pedestrian counts here were significantly lower than either Stephen Street or Rockwood Parade. Stephen Street provides direct access to the Connaught Road car park, while Rockwood Parade, is a waterside pedestrian route with strong amenity values. It suggests that the amenity value of Market Street is significantly lacking and/or that the presence of an edge of centre car park on the south end of High Street/Burton Road would provide a greater footfall in the area thereby assisting its regeneration.

The pedestrian realm is marred by the very significant traffic volumes that are experienced on Castle Street, Market Street and High Street. It is also an objective of the Development Plan to pedestrianise O'Connell Street, Grattan Street, Castle Street and Market Street following the completion of the proposed Inner Relief Road (Objective T10.1 in the Sligo and Environs Development Plan 2004-2010). This initiative is likely to significantly improve the pedestrian/vehicular conflict that exists in these areas and significantly improve the image of the northern part of the block.



3.5 Rental Values

Ground floor rental values on the block's streets are less than those in the O'Connell Street area and follow the pattern of pedestrian footfall counts.

3.6 Access and Car Parking

Most of the development within the block or along its street edges is catered for by means of on-street car parking. Traditional access to the backlands of the block is by means of traditional gateway access through buildings at street level. Such gateways only provide access to a limited number of plots and frequently just one. There is evidence that a number of the traditional gateways have been built over, usually to provide extended retail frontage to the street.

Despite the rather narrow nature of the gateways, vehicular access is possible. Nonetheless, car parking within the block is limited at the present time – usually providing access to sole traders, such as at Gurries Yard on High Street. The McCosker Site off Castle Street appears to serve several traders in the area.

According to some local residents, it was common in days gone by to walk from Market Street to High Street/West Gardens by a route that passed through the block (through the Monument Sculptors Yard on High Street). It was also possible to pass through a gateway in Teeling House to High Street along an arcade of small craft shops in the backlands of High Street.

3.7 Circulation

Traffic is extremely congested on Teeling Street (two way) and High Street/Market Street (one way northbound). Both of these routes feed into Castle Street and Grattan Street, which are the most congested in the town centre and are also fed from the north by Thomas Street and from the east by Abbey Street. Old Market Street (two way) is not as intensively used and traffic movements are moderated by on-street car parking.

3. Traditional timber sash window - facade in need of maintenance
4. Overgrown backlands - views to rear of plot on High Street
5. One of the few examples of car parking within the block



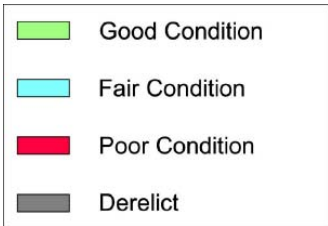
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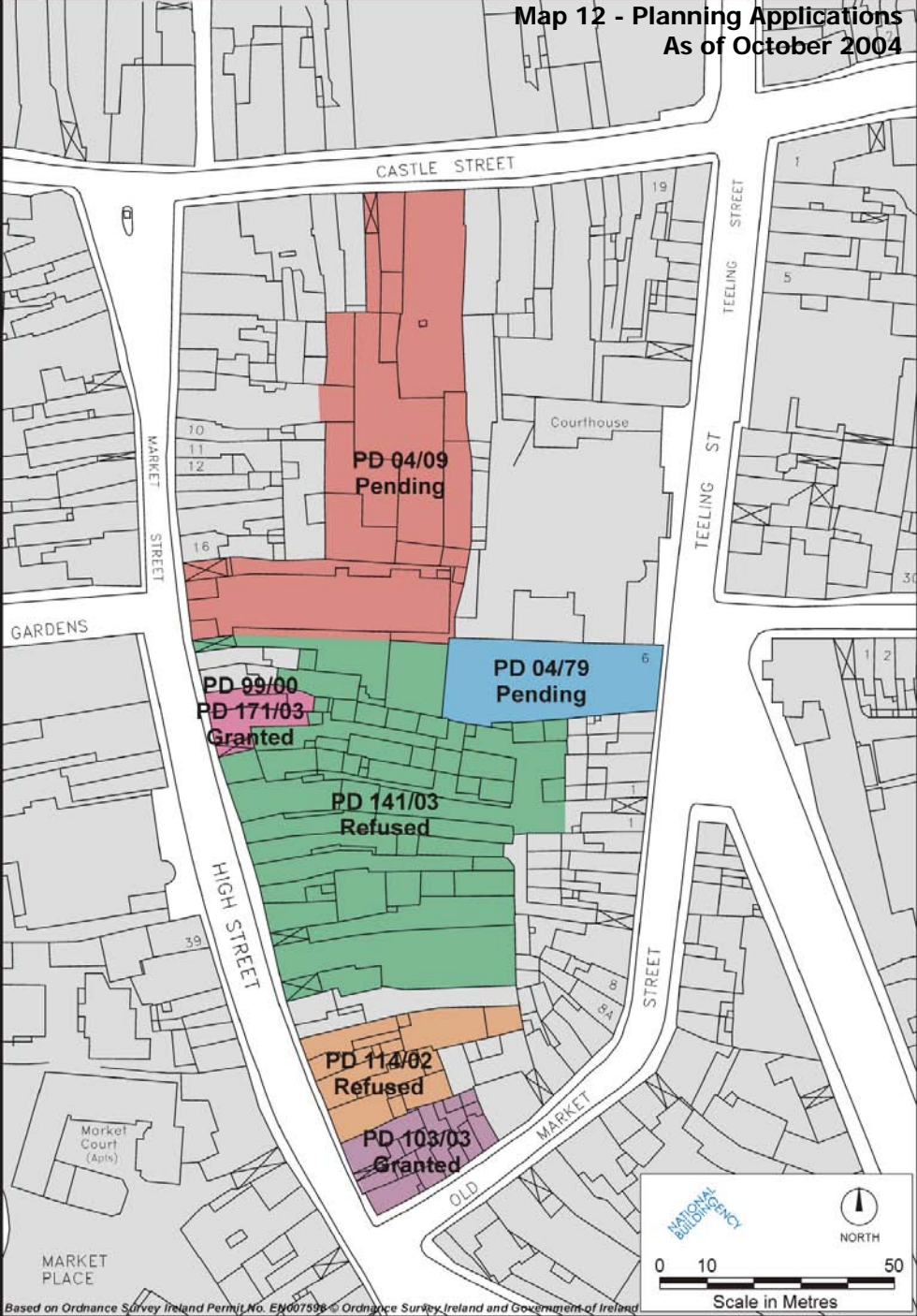
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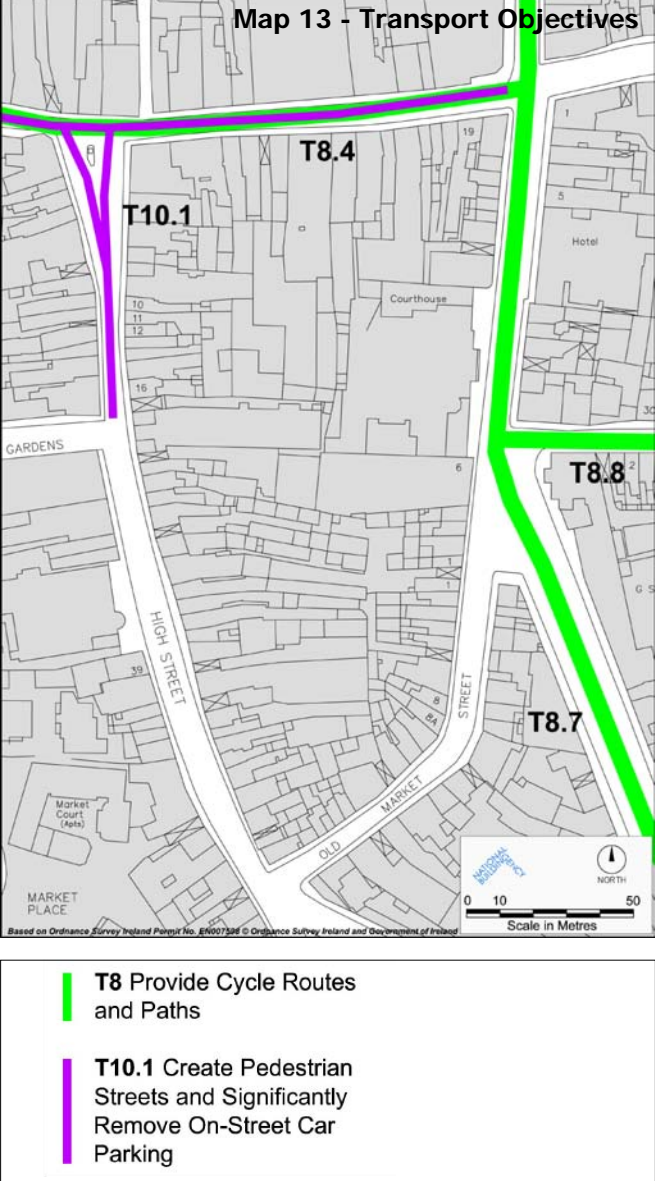
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Map 12 - Planning Applications
As of October 2004



Map 13 - Transport Objectives



Map 14 - Pedestrian Flows

