

To Be Strictly Retained
 To Be Protected

4. URBAN RENEWAL

4.1 The Integrated Area Plan (1998)

The 1998 Integrated Area Plan referred to the Courthouse Block as 'The Weaker South-East'. A very significant portion of the block was identified as Area 1 in the IAP, with the remainder area (excluding the Courthouse) being identified as Area 6 (refer to Map 15). In relation to this area, the IAP had this to say of the area:

'Previous designations have caused migrations of retail use to the north-west of the town core leaving the streets in the south-east devoid of activity. A shadow effect is felt in this south-eastern area. The area consists mainly of small businesses trading in the 60 square meters to 100 square meters size category, many of them interspersed with vacant units of the same capacity.'

The traders of the area are of the opinion that they could trade well as a fringe shopping area for specialist comparison goods if they operated in sufficient quantity to create a critical mass. This mass they feel would be secured, if small craft shops and specialist others were to develop in the vacant space among them. Most of these craftspeople and small shop owners have a low tax exposure and tend to develop initially in areas in which rent values are low. Auctioneers have identified Market Street, High Street and Connolly Street as areas in which rent values are low. Similar circumstances exist on parts of Castle Street and Teeling Street.

The structure of this area (centred on High Street and Market Street) is linear and axial with one end linking to the central shopping core of the town. Castle Street and Market Street converge to link to the centre via Grattan Street. The combined pedestrian activity gives Grattan Street good retail exposure but this is not as good in either Castle Street or Market Street, due to reduced activity at the opposite end of these streets. The creation therefore of one or two 'events' to fulfill this focal requirement would help to sustain activity along the radials. If this focus contained a car park or transportation set down point, its strength would be further enhanced.....'

The IAP made reference to a proposal for a hotel and multi-storey car park in the vicinity of the Connolly Street/Burton Street area with easy access from Pearse Road or Mail Coach Road, indicating that this could support the role of the area. It also suggested another focal development (or 'edge flag ship') in the Abbey Street area which could enliven the east end of Market Street in the form of a tourist focus. The reintroduction of the proposed multi-storey car park for the Abbey Street Block (delineated by Abbey Street – Charlotte Street – Quay Street - and Teeling Street) is likely to have a similar effect.

The IAP also highlighted the threatened position of residential areas on the perimeter of the central business district. It also stated that 'designation should be conservation led and be matched with a strict properly-informed protection policy by the local authority.'

Map 15 shows the delineation of designated sites in the 1999 Urban Renewal Scheme (following the preparation of the 1998 IAP).

Sub-Area 1 achieved the following incentive categories:
 Commercial (2 & 3)
 Residential Owner-Occupier (5 & 6)
Residential Investor – New Build 7A
Residential Investor – Refurbishment 7B.

Sub-Area 6 achieved the following incentive categories:
 Residential Owner-occupier (5 & 6)
Residential Investor – New Build 7A
Residential Investor – Refurbishment 7B.

Note: Incentives in bold apply only from 5th December, 2001.

The IAP stated that Sub-Area 1 was an 'area of older, small business fabric identified to receive designation with a preference for refurbishment. For buildings in this area, identified as of architectural value on diagram 401 (refer to Map 16) only refurbishment will qualify for designation, and this must be carried out in strict accordance with the requirements of the Planning Authority. On other sites, however, on those identified as derelict, and to the rear of existing frontage buildings, incentives will encourage a limited amount of new construction, in strict accordance with the conditions of the Planning Authority.

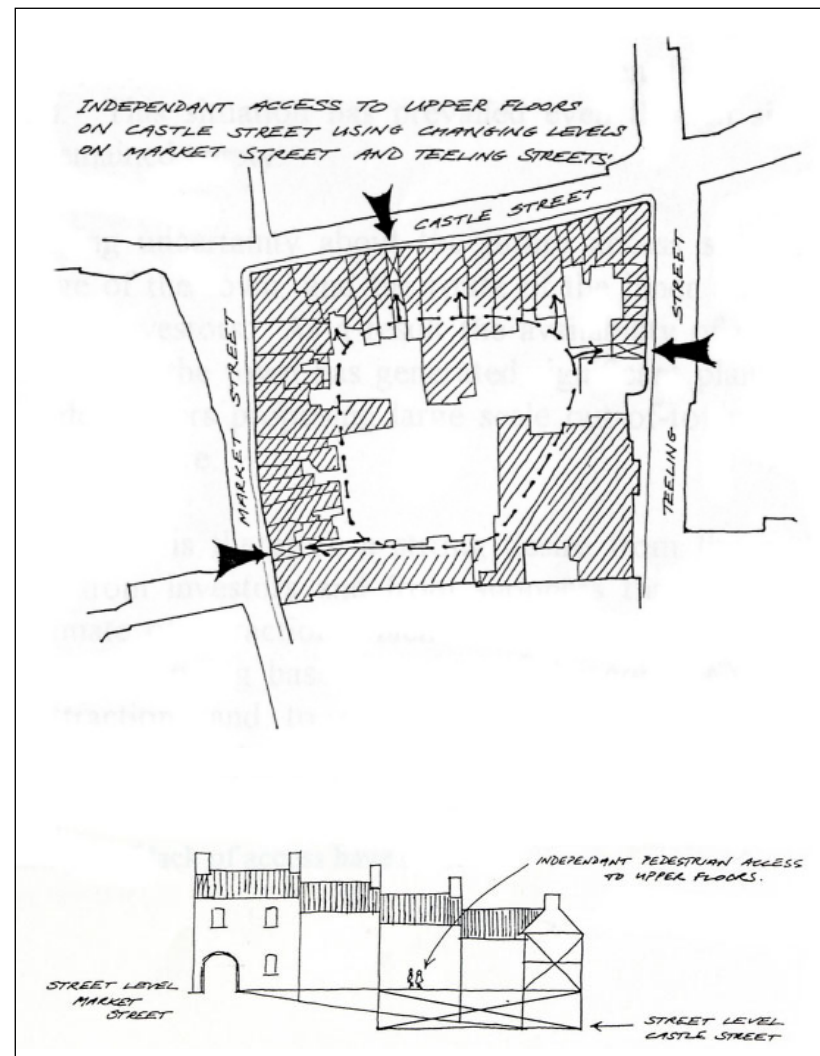
Incentives in this area may be availed of for retail/commercial and residential use only. Residential use however, will be encouraged only on frontage sites.

The maximum size of any single development to be certified for designation in this area must not exceed 5,000 sq. m. The local authority will assist land owners in the Grattan Street and Castle Street areas in the development of independent access to upper floors as illustrated in diagram 501' (refer to Sketch 1).

In relation to Sub-Area 6, the IAP stated that 'incentives to refurbish and reinforce residential communities will be applied in order to maintain the equilibrium of such communities beside adjacent commercial developments. Refurbishment only will be permitted to buildings as of value in the architectural inventory (refer to Map 2) and only works which comply with the strict conservation guidelines of the planning authority will be eligible.'

The key points to be gleaned from this are that:

- Incentives for the area may be availed for retail, commercial and residential use only.
- Residential use is only to be encouraged on frontage sites.
- The maximum size of any single development to be certified for designation in this area must not exceed 5,000 sq. m.



Sketch 1

- Independent access to the upper floors of properties on Castle Street was to be encouraged from within the block.
- There is a need to encourage a flag-ship development in the area to the south of the block to anchor the south end of the town centre and encourage greater footfall along the High Street-Old Market Street area
- The need to create retail identities for fringe streets and speciality shopping as part of the event shopping experience in Sligo.
- The protection of existing social fabric and residential amenities – the IAP refers to the ‘threatened position of residential precincts in the perimeter of the CBD’ and makes reference to ‘front line properties’ which are vulnerable.
- Only works which comply with strict conservation guidelines of the planning authority will be eligible for tax incentives.

The restriction on the scale of development to be permitted for tax incentives and the limitation on the application of residential tax incentives within the block (as opposed to the frontage properties) appears to have been based on the fact that significant plot amalgamation and comprehensive redevelopment could reduce the opportunity for adaptation of uses within the area over time as the scale of investment and future tenure arrangements would make it difficult to redevelop the area in time should this prove necessary. Residential development within blocks, particularly apartments, is fairly inflexible in its adaptability to other uses over time, unlike, for example a commercial development on a single plot.

In addition to this, the IAP envisaged that commercial premises along the perimeter of the block could intensify their activities by extending incrementally into their plot, with greater site coverage.

4.2 Recent Development Proposals

There have been a number of quite significant development proposals within the block over the last few years – some granted, some refused and some pending. There has been a remarkable degree of co-ordination between three key developments whose planning applications have been active during 2004. The sites of the larger schemes are shown on Map 12 and it can be seen that the three of these (PD 141/79, PD 04/09 and PD 04/79) are contiguous to each other with frontage onto Castle Street, Market Street, High Street and Teeling Street. The two larger applications (PD141/03 and PD 04/09) have proposed underground/basement car parking (each with their own separate means of ingress and egress). At street level pedestrian access is proposed providing access from Teeling Street to High Street and from this route a second northern pedestrian link is proposed to Castle Street. At ground floor level, retail and commercial development is generally proposed with residential apartments on the upper floors. Despite a number of specific planning concerns, there has been a significant amount of planning and coordination among each of the proponents of these development schemes.

4.3 Refocusing the IAP

Recent research from the UK on the role of secondary shopping locations suggests that by providing specialist retailers and services not found in prime shopping areas, secondary shopping centres can contribute to the prosperity of town centres. The concept of secondary shopping areas, such as the Market Street/High Street area, engaging in specialist retailing was highlighted in the IAP however despite the provision of tax incentives, little has changed. This suggests that it is now time to provide well-designed mixed use schemes with real public realm investment which would have the critical mass to alter the image of the area.

Uses that should be considered for the area, include:

- Evening restaurants to cater for the shortfall of restaurants in the town centre.
- Hotels, and in particular small to medium sized budget hotels.
- By resisting the conversion of residential properties to office space on streets such as John Street, Harmony Hill, Church Street, Charles Street and West Gardens, the Courthouse Block would have the potential to benefit as these new offices seek new locations close to the town centre.
- Other potential uses include art galleries, design and craft shops.
- Positive spin-offs can result from the concentration of similar uses in the one area of the city, so that the area gains a local reputation for an associated use, i.e., restaurants, antiques, galleries, etc.

Improvements to the public realm could be provided through –

- The provision of a central east-west pedestrian access through the block linking Chapel Street to West Gardens.
- The implementation of the pedestrianisation of Castle Street and Market Street following completion of the proposed Inner Relief Road.
- Environmental improvements to streets and pavements, particularly –
 - the removal of unsightly overhead wires which are currently mounted to building facades;
 - reinstating limestone kerbing on all footpaths that around the block with new paving;
 - reinstating the traditional flagstones and cobbles to traditional gateways;
 - consideration of a one-way system northbound on Old Market Street with widened pavement, street trees and seating so as to enhance the residential nature of much of the street.

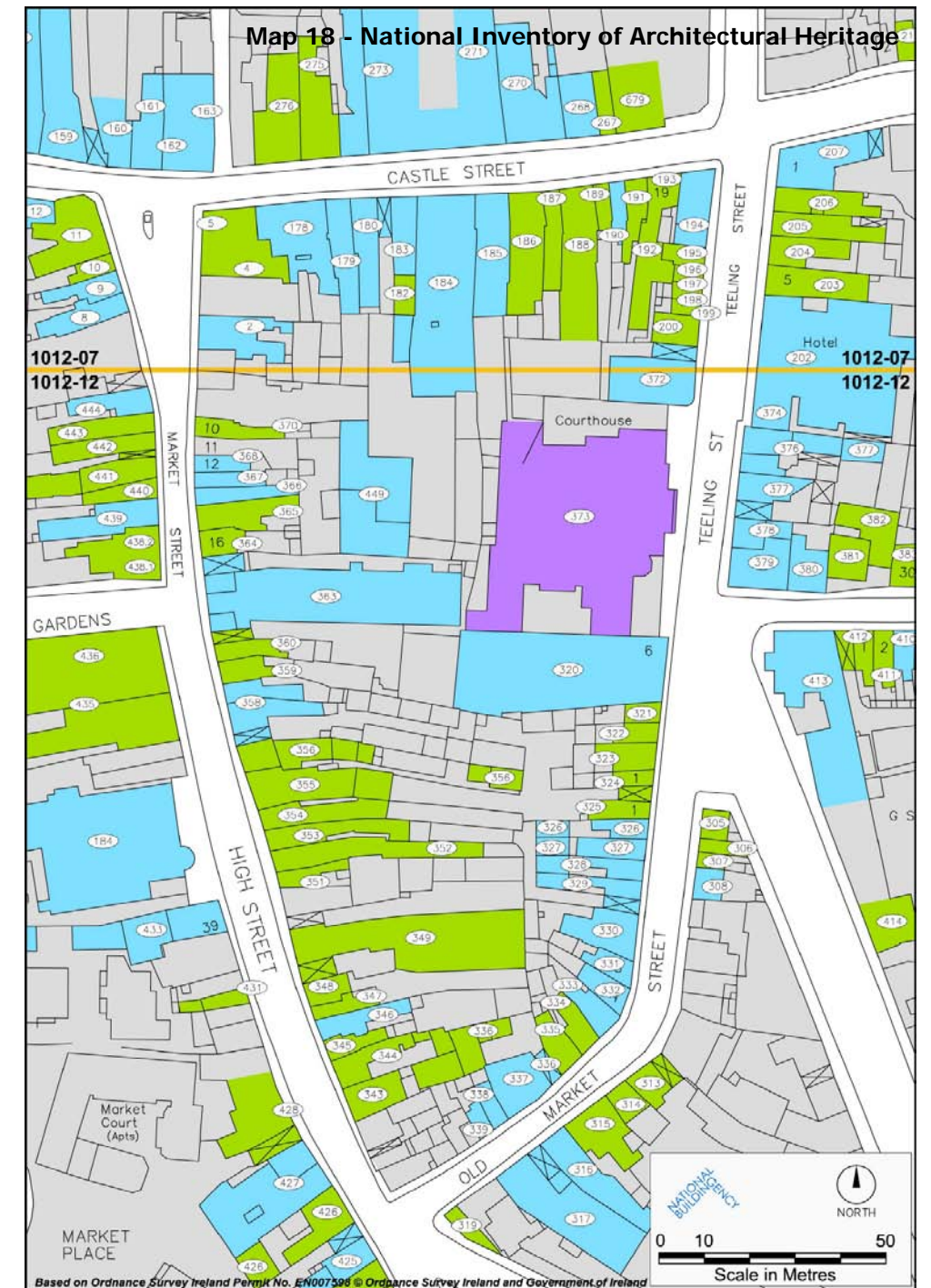
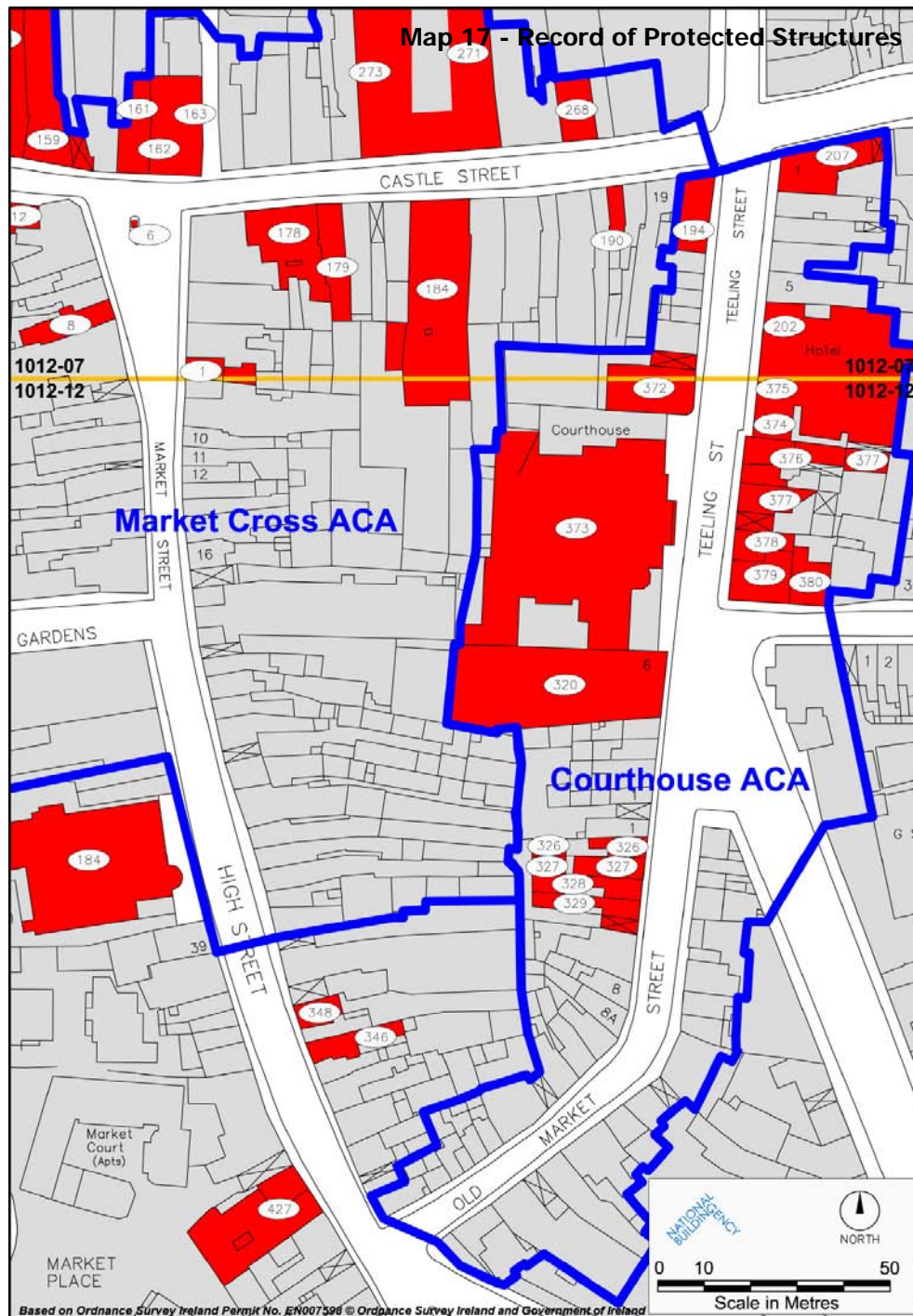
In relation to recent development proposals, the scale of development and particularly the significant amount of residential development within the block represents a departure from the detail of the Integrated Area Plan (1998). The degree of coordination between the schemes that is possible, as represented in these planning applications, is something that could not have been anticipated at the time of IAP preparation despite the significant amount of public consultations that took place during the IAP process. The crux of the matter is whether the nature and intensity of development now being proposed within the block is acceptable.

The proponents of these schemes point to the Sligo's recent designation as a Gateway City – they see its role as a key urban centre and economic growth driver as a justification for the greater intensity of development now envisaged.

¹ CB Richard Ellis, 'The Role and Vitality of Secondary Shopping: A New Direction', National Retail Planning Forum, 2004.

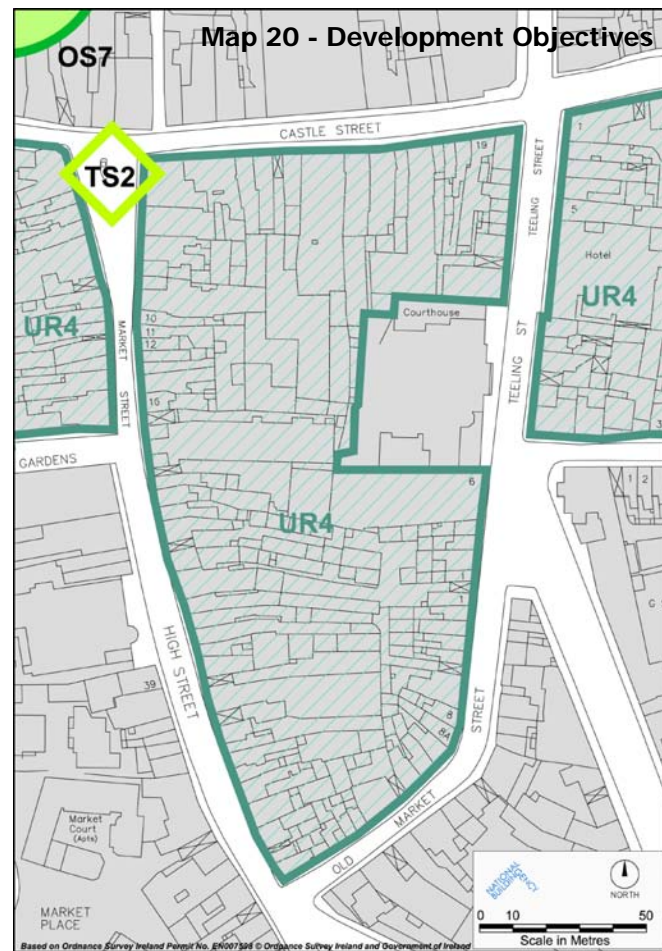
The 1998 Urban Renewal Scheme Guidelines (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 24th November, 1997) sought 'to ensure that the physical renewal contributes to social renewal'. The guidelines make reference to achieving a minimum 'critical mass' (page 7) for example, to enable a mix of uses to be sustained, and to enable support facilities for residential development to be provided within reasonable distances. Taking the Courthouse block as a sub-element of the IAP, this could be interpreted that it too should be able to achieve the critical mass of activity in order to achieve rejuvenation with which to transform the weaker south east quarter of the town centre.

The guidelines also point to the fact that the IAP should be 'as simple, pro-active and flexible as possible' (page 9). The Sligo IAP makes reference to this too, stating that 'designation should clearly support the centre with balanced incentives, but should support the edge with flexible incentives'. On this basis, it is felt that the Sligo Integrated Area Plan (1998) should be amended to permit residential development within the block, however the maximum size of any single development to be certified for designation in this area must not exceed 5,000 sq. m., as originally outlined. The reason for this is to maintain some degree of identity and coherence to the area, through the overall scale and intensity of development.





- C1 - Town Centre Uses
- C2 - Commercial and Mix Land Uses



- UR4 Continue to promote the renewal and regeneration of previously identified sites
- TS2 Enhance presentation of the Lady Erin Statue
- OS7 Develop a system of Linear Parks and/or Waterfront Amenity Areas with Walkways and Cycleways

4.4 Maintaining Identity and Coherence

The IAP guidelines issued by the Government was clear that ‘the focus should be on building on an existing sense of coherence and identity within the area, based on such factors as:

- archaeology, architecture and history
- strong urban and community identity
- common social/economic needs
- specific area-based opportunities for renewal
- recognizable geographical boundaries...

These specific factors are reflected in the views of local residents within the area who are not opposed to development, but are concerned about the scale, massing, lack of respect to local history, loss of their residential amenity (and possibly property values) and the degree to which new residents may be transient (young renters) as opposed to being a meaningful part of the local community. These are legitimate concerns that have to be factored.

A respect for the historicity of the place and the conservation of the area, bring about a variety of benefits to the community – cultural, economic and social. Cultural benefits include historic resources that offer aesthetic enrichment as well as the more elusive ‘sense of place’ and ‘sense of attachment’ that is often associated with places and structures long after their original use has disappeared.

4.5 National Inventory of Architectural Heritage

The Integrated Area Plan made reference to Diagram 401 – ‘Important Buildings to be Retained and Protected’ (refer to Map 16), which outlined buildings ‘to be strictly retained’ and buildings ‘to be protected’. This map was based on previous studies including the National Architectural Audit, 1995; An Foras Forbartha, 1973; and UAHS Sligo Review, 1979. Since the preparation of the IAP much of this work has been superseded by the ‘National Inventory of Architectural Heritage’ which has become the basis for identifying structures for inclusion on the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) with recommendations from the Minister for the Environment and Local Government. On this basis, it is proposed that references to Diagram 401 are replaced with references to both the RPS as contained in the Sligo and Environs Development Plan 2004-2010 (refer to Map 17) and to those structures of local, regional or national importance on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage, as outlined on Map 18.

4.6 Sligo and Environs Development Plan 2004-2010

There are a number of policies and objectives in the plan which relate to the block. These are briefly outlined.

The block is zoned C1: Town Centre Uses which seeks to promote a vibrant and flexible mix of uses associated with a vibrant commercial city centre (refer to Map 19).

Objective UR4: ‘Continue to promote the renewal and regeneration of previously identified sites as identified on Objectives Map 21.1’ (refer to Inset Map 20).

Objective T10.1: ‘Following completion of the Inner Relief Road, pedestrianise O’Connell Street, Castle Street, Grattan Street and Market Street. In the interim, prior to completion of the Inner Relief Road, it is an objective of the local authority to widen the pavement on O’Connell Street, Market Street, Castle Street and Grattan Street significantly and remove current on-street car parking, as a means of enhancing the public realm.’ (refer to Map 14).

Section 2.5 of the Sligo and Environs Development Plan relates to ‘Townscape Management and Building Heritage.’ The plan identifies a need for comprehensive townscape management (Section 2.5.2) and outlines a number of criteria, including – ‘Protecting key buildings of the city’s architectural heritage (through the Record of Protected Structures)’ (refer to Map 17). ‘Protecting and enhancing key streetscapes and elements of townscape (primarily through Architectural Conservation Areas)’ (refer also to Map 17).

The Development Plan gives a description of these areas and their rationale for inclusion as an ACA. A copy of this is provided in Appendix 1 as Sections 2.5.6 and 2.5.7 in particular provide a number of specific policies and objectives in relation to development in traditional townscapes, including matters that relate to the Record of Protected Structures and Architectural Conservation Areas. It also outlines a number of general management policies for development within ACAs.

Recent planning applications in the block (refer to Map 12 for an outline of some subject sites) have tended to either ignore or push the limits in terms of the interpretation of these policies and objectives. Where flexibility was introduced in the Development Plan, this appears to have led to confusion or lack of clarity.

In light of some potential conflicts in the interpretation of some policies contained within the main body of the Development Plan (principally in relation to plot amalgamation and building heights), a fresh examination of the Townscape Character will be undertaken in order to establish some principles for the renewal and conservation of the area.