

The Design and Management of a Midlands Town

**The Development of Edenderry
1809-1845 and 2000-2010**

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The Design and Management of a Midlands Town: The Development of Edenderry 1809-1845 and 2000-2010.

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Images and drawings are the author's own, unless otherwise stated.

The constant Interest which I have for Twenty years taken in the Welfare and Prosperity of the once 'deserted village' of Edenderry and of the adjacent Estate, the Effects of which care are sufficiently apparent to every stranger who passes through it.¹

(Lord Downshire, 1829)

Bad or absent planning is not victimless. There is no doubt a systemic failure of planning in Ireland helped inflate the property bubble, leaving in its wake a great deal of poor quality development, reckless overzoning, chaotic sprawl, a legacy of 'ghost' development and widespread environmental degradation.²

(An Taisce, 2012)

1 Maguire, W. A., *Letters of a great Irish Landlord*. (Belfast: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1974). Letter from Lord Downshire to the Rev. James Colgan, parish priest at Edenderry, 10 November 1829, concerning the arrears of rent of the Edenderry estate.

2 An Taisce, *State of the Nation: A Review of Ireland's Planning System 2000-2011*, (Dublin: An Taisce, 2012), p. 2.

1. Introduction



Figure 1.1: Statue of Lord Downshire, Church Walk, Edenderry

The statue of Lord Downshire overlooks his town (figure 1.1). From his vantage point, one sees the main street, JKL Street, in the middle ground. The form of the street has changed little in the 200 years since Lord Downshire and his agents reconfigured it. Behind JKL Street, however, a new and unfamiliar sight has emerged; rows of yellow houses, one of the town's 21st century housing estates.

Twice in the past two hundred years of Edenderry's existence, its built environment has undergone significant change. The first period of significant change occurred between 1809 and 1845 when the town was in the ownership of the 3rd Marquis of Downshire. The second period of significant change took place in the first decade of the 21st century. The management of the town's development in these eras differed greatly; from absentee landlord to local Planning Authority; from considered space-making to hypocritical policy-making; from controlled to complaisant.

Edenderry is situated in the north eastern corner of Co. Offaly; a border town to Co. Kildare. The town stretches along the curving spine of JKL Street which trails off to become St. Mary's Road at the south-western end. It is a decidedly linear town, there are no crossing streets, no blocks; secondary roads diverge from the central artery and meander across the countryside, often bog, to the next village. A spur of the Grand Canal enters the town from the south.

In many respects, Edenderry could be described as a typical midlands town. For most of the 20th century, it was a medium sized market town, with a small manufacturing base and a strong dependence of its working population on the surrounding bog lands and local peat-powered electricity generating stations. Towards the end of the century it had become a commuter town, primarily servicing Dublin and the computer industries based in north Kildare. It is a service town for its rural hinterland with a catchment area that spreads into Kildare, Meath and Westmeath. Other nearby competing towns include Tullamore, Mullingar, Newbridge and Portarlington.

The town's historic development is also quite typical. The town began as a Norman settlement under the protection of the De Berminghams. Tethmoy or Tuath-dá-Muighe, as it was then called, became Coolestown when Queen Elizabeth granted Henry Cooley the manor and castle of Edenderry during the plantation of Laois and Offaly. Over the next two centuries the town passed from landlord to landlord through inheritance and marriage. Eventually, in 1786, Edenderry became the property of Arthur Hill, the 2nd Marquis of Downshire.³ His son, also Arthur Hill, the 3rd Marquis of Downshire, was responsible for a period of great growth and change in Edenderry in the first half of the 19th century. In that same period, these changes to the built environment were similarly taking place in many other Irish towns due to a climate of relative political stability and good economic growth. The dramatic alterations in urban form began in Dublin in the 18th century and spread to provincial towns at the beginning of the 19th century.⁴

*The most extensive modifications to the built environment in Ireland historically probably took place in the last half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century — building, development and improvement in landscape and townscape which were probably comparable to the impact of the tiger economy.*⁵

3 Evans, M. & Whelan, N., *Edenderry Through The Ages*. (Edenderry: Edenderry Historical Society, 1999?).

4 Shaffrey, P. & Shaffrey, M., *Buildings of Irish Towns; Treasures of Everyday Architecture*. (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 1983), pp. 11-14.

5 Duffy, P. J., *Exploring the History and Heritage of Irish Landscapes*. (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), p.101.

The turn of the 20th century and the creation of the Irish Free State brought an end to the Downshire influence in Edenderry and heralded the era of local government; first in the guise of Edenderry Town Commissioners and later Offaly County Council.⁶ The first decade of the 21st century, the decade of Ireland's building boom, saw another period of dramatic change and growth in the town.

Edenderry does not have an *Irish Historic Towns Atlas* dedicated to it.⁷ One will not find it in the index of any book about the morphology of Irish towns. It is ordinary and ignored. Like so many Irish towns, no research has been undertaken into its design. The process of studying a town's urban form should, however, uncover its worth and make it possible to ascribe a value to that form. This research into the development of Edenderry's built environment during two periods, 1809-1845 and 2000-2010, aspires to be a step in that process.

These two eras of intense development, as an estate town under the management of Lord Downshire in the first half of the 19th century, and as a modern town under the management of Offaly County Council in the first decade of the 21st century, will be examined and contrasted. The management of the town during these periods, through autocratic governance in the former and through bureaucratic governance in the latter, and the effects of this management on the morphology and built fabric of the town, will be scrutinised.

The methods and motives behind town planning and management in both periods will be explored. Important, and sometimes radical, building projects will be examined. The outcomes of direct engagement in the design process through an informal framework by Lord Downshire will be contrasted with the outcomes of the heavily formalised and regulated, but ultimately passive, planning process engaged in by local government.

6 Murphy, M., *Edenderry; A Leinster Town*. (Tullamore: Offaly County Council, 2004).

7 Various Authors, *Irish Historic Towns Atlas*. (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1981-2012).

2. Management: motive and modus operandi

In this section, the management of the town, and the objectives and methods of those in power, are examined.

In its simplest terms, one could describe the 19th century development of Edenderry as being controlled by a single individual; the landlord. Lord Downshire was an absentee landlord. He managed his estate through his agents who had the responsibility of collecting rent.

The management of Edenderry's development in the first decade of the 21st century involved a number of key players; for the most part, at least in principle, agencies and organisations rather than individuals. Town planning was undertaken by Offaly County Council, who exerted their influence through the medium of Development Plans, land-use zoning and through the granting or denial of planning permission.

2.1 19th Century: agents and rent

Lord Downshire's father, the 2nd Marquis of Downshire, who died in 1801, was 'a typical absentee landlord'; he had let Edenderry 'run down and had amassed debts on the estate.'⁸ Sir Charles Coote confirms this sorry state of affairs in his survey of 1801: 'Almost the whole town and neighbourhood is now out of lease and has a very miserable and shabby appearance. Many houses are falling to ruin; if some policy is not adopted and better encouragement given for building, the town will soon be a heap of ruins.'⁹

The entirety of the Downshire Estate, comprising mostly of land in County Down as well as smaller, but still substantial, holdings in Antrim, Wicklow and Offaly, underwent a dramatic change in management with the coming of age of Lord Downshire in 1809. According to W. A. Maguire, Lord Downshire made the liquidation of his late grandfather's and father's debts 'a major object of his life [...], he personally directed the management of the vast property [...] and was the effective manager of the entire concern.' His 'extraordinary activity as a landlord' was evident in his dealing with both his staff and his tenantry. One

8 Evans & Whelan, p. 37.

9 Coote, S. C., *Statistical Survey of the King's County*. (Dublin: The Dublin Society, 1801).

of his main motivators was a 'desire for administrative efficiency'.¹⁰ His estate was his source of income. Edenderry needed to function efficiently to be profitable.

Rents were collected and the town was managed through Downshire's agents, the most notable of the period being James Brownrigg, agent from 1800-1817, and Thomas Murray, agent from 1819-1850.¹¹ Brownrigg had been a senior partner in a firm of surveyors, Brownrigg, Longfield and Murray. This firm carried out a survey of the entirety of the Downshire Estate in Ireland in 1803-1804. Brownrigg went on to use his surveying skills and intimate knowledge of the town to aid the town's urban development. He is described by Maguire as 'intelligent and well read' and sympathetic to the plight of the tenantry.¹² Murray, however, may have been a less honourable character.

'For most of the eighteenth century the agents were Dublin solicitors who appeared in the vicinity merely to collect the rents or to advertise the farms to be let.'¹³ Murray appears to have continued this tradition of absentee agents. When in 1831, Francis Farrah, a clerk from the Hillsborough office, was sent to assist him in sorting out the problems of outstanding rent in Edenderry, 'he found that Murray was absent and was residing in Sligo, only occasionally calling to collect the rent. Nearly every lease on the estate had lapsed; arrears were dating to 1824'. 'With so many defaulters it was clear that Murray was not doing his job.'¹⁴

As Edenderry historian, Ciarán Reilly remarks: 'Murray in particular was an interesting character, as it appears that he was dishonest in his practice as agent of the estate but was never relieved of his duties.'¹⁵ During the time period when Farrah was industriously trying to sort out the arrears of the Edenderry estate, Downshire 'wrote directly to some of the tenants. Tenants who were felt to be doing their best were given encouragement in this way, as those who were recalcitrant were upbraided and pressed.' Maguire describes Downshire's actions as 'the most extraordinary instance of the landowner's acting as his own chief executive'.¹⁶

10 Maguire, W. A., *The Downshire Estates of Ireland 1801-1845; The management of Irish landed estates in the early nineteenth century*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 7.

11 Evans & Whelan, p. 37.

12 Maguire, *The Downshire Estates of Ireland 1801-1845*, p. 189.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 232

14 Reilly, C. J., 2007. *Edenderry 1820-1920; Popular politics and Downshire rule*. (Dublin: Nonsuch Publishing), p. 26.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

16 Maguire, *The Downshire Estates of Ireland 1801-1845*, p. 212

Lord Downshire did not visit his southern towns of Edenderry and Blessington as regularly as his other towns; he was ‘resident at Hillsborough for part of every year [...], visiting Dundrum in the summer and hunting at Hilltown’.¹⁷ He appears to have visited, however, a good deal more than his father, the 2nd Marquis of Downshire, who ‘came only once between 1796 [and] 1799’.¹⁸ He kept in close contact with his agents through letters of unusual frequency and detail. Agents were required to provide him with ‘running accounts of the progress and problems of each estate at least once a week.’¹⁹

Despite the growth and development in Edenderry in this period it was, compared to Downshire’s other towns, difficult to manage. Edenderry’s administrative difficulties, aside from absenteeism, Maguire posits, may also have arisen from a number of other factors; a lack of middlemen in Edenderry, or a lack of efficiency in the agents, or an indulgent attitude to larger, reputable tenants. As Thomas Murray saw it, much of the blame lay with the unindustrious and untrustworthy nature of the catholic tenants. All of these factors, combined with high rents and economic underdevelopment — a lack of manufacturing, large areas of unprofitable bog land, a lack of improvements in farming technique — added up to Edenderry being less successful as an estate town compared to Downshire’s northern concerns.²⁰

*Lord Downshire was motivated by a strong sense of duty, particularly in relation to his financial obligations, an attitude reinforced by a penchant towards the plain, solid and business-like in everything, from the choice of carriage harness to the choice of an agent. He set, and expected his staff to follow, high standards of principle and hard work. He was not a man of original ideas, but he employed good men and made it his business to see that they were active in his service. He was an active managing director rather than a nominal president.*²¹

He was a practical and improving landlord. Although politics were of paramount importance to his mother, who was the head of the Downshire property empire from his father’s death in 1801 to his coming of age in 1809, Lord Downshire made no attempt to increase his family’s political influence at the expense of his economic circumstances. In his encouraging of agricultural improvements to his estate he ‘was among the best Irish landlords of his day’; he spent ‘a respectable proportion’ of his gross income on improvements

17 Ibid., p. 233

18 Evans & Whelan, p. 26

19 Maguire, *The Downshire Estates of Ireland 1801-1845*, p. 211

20 Ibid., pp. 218-244.

21 Maguire, *Letters of a great Irish Landlord*, p. 27.

and was one of the founders of the Royal Dublin Society's farming society.²² 'At Edenderry during the period 1826-1836, an average of £368 was spent each year on drainage, slating, building, labour, stone, timber, lime, trees and work on the barracks and the Market house; this sum was equivalent to six per cent of the rental.'²³

Despite how active, 'responsible and high-minded'²⁴ Downshire may have been as a landlord, the town's development was affected by many individuals and outside forces; poverty, disease, agrarian unrest among them. According to Reilly, 'a simmering discontent lingered throughout the first half of the nineteenth century'.²⁵ Agent Brownrigg petitioned for a permanent military force to be stationed in the area to combat sectarian violence and social unrest.²⁶ Poverty was widespread. As Brownrigg wrote to Lord Downshire in 1815: 'every investigation I make into the pecuniary resources of the tenantry confirm and extend my apprehensions of their inability to pay the rent laid upon them.'²⁷ Brownrigg himself died in an epidemic of cholera which affected many in Edenderry and added to the plight of the poor.²⁸

Lord Downshire's tenure ended with his death in 1845. Fittingly, he died while out riding and inspecting his Blessington estate.²⁹ His death came on the cusp of a period of irrevocable change; the eve of the Great Famine. The Downshire estate in Ireland was slowly dissolved as property was sold off. The estate's holdings in Edenderry had halved to less than 7,000 acres, mostly bog, by the foundation of the Irish Free State. 'When the process of land purchase was completed under the Irish Land Commission legalisation of 1923, only the ground rents in the town remained to the former landlord.'³⁰

22 Ibid., pp. 24-25.

23 Maguire, *The Downshire Estates of Ireland 1801-1845*, p. 76.

24 Ibid., p. 7.

25 Reilly, p. 22.

26 Ibid., p. 23.

27 Maguire, *The Downshire Estates of Ireland 1801-1845*, p. 262. Letter from James Brownrigg, agent at Edenderry in the King's County, to Lord Downshire, 31 August 1815, explaining the situation at Edenderry.

28 Reilly, p. 17.

29 Maguire, *The Downshire Estates of Ireland 1801-1845*, p. 8.

30 Evans & Whelan, p. 45.

One must be mindful of the complex circumstances in which Downshire operated; the often fraught social and political context, the reliability of agents to collect rent and the willingness or ability of tenants to pay it. Ultimately, however, responsibility for the development of the town came down to the landlord. Lord Downshire owned the town.

2.2 21st Century: population projection and Development Plans

At the start of the new millennium, Edenderry, like many other midland towns within commuting distance to Dublin, was experiencing a period of rapid growth.³¹ Due to the economic boom, both the construction and pricing of housing were on the rise. In 1996, 33,725 houses were completed in Ireland. The average price of one of these new houses was £68,677. In 2000, 49,812 houses were completed in Ireland. The average price of one of these new houses was £133,249.³²

In an effort to slow the rate of rapidly increasing house prices, the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, Noel Dempsey, had introduced the Serviced Land Initiative in 1997. Through the initiative, funding would be made available to local government to provide water and sewerage services to undeveloped, residentially zoned land to encourage the building of more houses.³³ On the 10th January 2001, the Minister announced a slew of these schemes to service sites for 31,000 houses around the country. The schemes were ‘in areas identified by local authorities as suitable for housing development’.³⁴ Sites for 3,000 of these houses, almost one tenth of the national total, were allocated to Edenderry.³⁵ This figure of 3,000 houses, which was criticised by An Taisce Heritage Officer, Ian Lumley, as a potential ‘fiasco’ for the town without proper planning,³⁶ loomed large in Edenderry’s planning for the following decade.

Under the Planning and Development Act, 2000 every planning authority was obliged to make a Development Plan every 6 years which ‘set out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area’.³⁷ In its *Development Plan 2001*, Offaly County Council predicted, for Edenderry, a ‘population increase of 10,000 people over the next 20 years’; a projected total population of 15,000. This assumed population increase of more than 200% was based on the 3,000 houses that would be built and

31 Thompson, S., ‘Country towns get a city lifestyle’, *The Irish Times*, 19 April 2000.

32 Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, *Annual Housing Statistics Bulletin*, (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 2000).

33 Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, *www.environ.ie.*, [Online] <<http://www.environ.ie>> [Accessed 07.11.2012].

34 Carey, T., ‘Plan for 3,000 house sites in town criticised’, *The Irish Times*, 23 January 2007.

35 Devlin, M., ‘New £30m bid to clear the way for 31,000 more houses’, *The Irish Independent*, 11 January 2001.

36 Carey, 2007.

37 Government of Ireland, *Planning and Development Act, 2000*, (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 2000)

occupied in Edenderry.³⁸ In order to facilitate this projected population explosion, Offaly County Council rezoned 351 acres of land for residential use. (Figure 2.2)

$$(351 \text{ acres} \times 10 \text{ dwellings per acre}) \times 3 \text{ people per dwelling} = 10,530 \text{ people.}^{39}$$

10 housing units per acre was a very low density. Using the County Council's method of calculation but substituting the minimum recommend density of 14 housing units per acre — from the contemporaneous document *Residential Density; Guidelines for Planning Authorities*— this newly zoned residential land could house at least 14,700 extra people. In this scenario the total population of the town could theoretically reach over 20,000 people.⁴⁰

$$(351 \text{ acres} \times 14 \text{ dwellings per acre}) \times 3 \text{ people per dwelling} = 14,742 \text{ people}$$

In 2003, Offaly County Council commissioned a *Land Use and Transportation Study* by Atkins and Brady Shipman Martin. The report advised: "The peripheral location of land zoned [...] is likely to further focus new residential development away from JKL Street and the Market Square towards the Dublin and Tullamore road. The construction of several large as yet undeveloped planning permissions, on the periphery, would further weaken the structure and vitality of the town. There is a need during the next twenty years to focus new development within a more consolidated built environment."⁴¹ Offaly County Council did not heed this warning in its *Local Area Plan 2005*.

The *Local Area Plan 2005* states that, based on analysis carried out by Offaly County Council, Edenderry's housing demand was for 86 new housing units per annum, or 516 housing units over the six year period of the plan.⁴² In its *Development Plan 2001*, Offaly County Council had projected that 3,000 houses would be built in the town over 20 years, hence, 150 housing units per annum. Despite having almost halved its projected housing demand, it increased the amount of residentially zoned land from the previous Plan. In total, by 2005, enough land was zoned residential to accommodate easily over 4,000 new houses. (Figure 2.3)

38 Planning Section, Offaly County Council, *Development plan for town of Edenderry*. (Tullamore: Offaly County Council, 2001), p. 4.

39 Ibid., p. 5.

40 Government of Ireland, *Residential Density; Guidelines for Planning Authorities*. (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1999), p. 11.

41 Atkins; Brady Shipman Martin, *Edenderry Land Use and Transportation Study; Final Report*, (Cork: Atkins, 2003), p. 9.

42 Planning Section, Offaly County Council, *Edenderry Local Area Plan 2005*. (Tullamore: Offaly County Council, 2005), p. 17.

The actual population increase over the decade was indeed very high; from approximately 4,200 in the 2002 census to approximately 6,500 in the 2011 census, an increase of 2,300.⁴³ It seems unlikely, however, that the town's population will increase by a further 7,700 by 2021 as predicted by the County Council in 2001. Indeed, Offaly County Council projected, in its *Local Area Plan 2011*, a relatively modest 'higher end population estimate' of c. 8,200 for the year 2017. The amount of land zoned for residential use in this Plan was accordingly reduced dramatically.⁴⁴ (Figure 2.4)

The extreme overzoning of land that was applied in Edenderry was also endemic in the ever widening Dublin commuter belt. Frank McDonald and James Nix, authors of *Chaos at the Crossroads*, cite Dunboyne, Rathoath and Clonee, Co. Meath; Gorey, Co. Wexford; Rochfortbridge, Co. Westmeath; Dunleer, Co. Louth; and Kill, Clane and Rathangan, Co. Kildare as just some of towns that were subject to overzoning of land.⁴⁵

The 2001, 2003 and 2005 Development Plans all list the following objectives in relation to land use:

- 'to encourage new residential development, concentrating on the lateral back lands of the town'
- 'to encourage residential infill around the town centre'
- 'to control the spread of the town outwards, away from the historic town core'.⁴⁶

The zoning of the land, however, entirely contradicted these worthy objectives.

Offaly County Council's motives in the management of the town are perplexing. Its *Local Area Plan 2005* states as its purpose: 'to set out a framework for the physical development of Edenderry Town, so that growth may take place in a sensitive, co-ordinated and orderly manner, while at the same time conserving the town's character and heritage value.'⁴⁷ The actions of the County Council, however, contravened this purpose. Not only did Offaly County Council zone all the land needed for a 20 year period of population expansion all at once, instead of incrementally, it also grossly overestimated the amount of land needed

43 Central Statistics Office, *Central Statistics Office- Census 2011*. [Online] <<http://census.cso.ie>>, [Accessed 07.11.2011].

44 Planning Section, Offaly County Council, *Edenderry Local Area Plan 2011*. (Tullamore: Offaly County Council, 2011), p. 12.

45 McDonald, F. & Nix, J., *Chaos at the Crossroads*. (Kinsale: Gandon Books, 2005), pp. 34-71.

46 *Development plan for town of Edenderry*, 2001, p. 5. Planning Section, Offaly County Council, *Development Plan- Town of Edenderry*. (Tullamore: Offaly County Council, 2003), p. 32. *Edenderry Local Area Plan 2005*, p. 34.

47 *Edenderry Local Area Plan 2005*, p. 1.

to house the projected increased population. The *Land Use and Transportation Study* it commissioned was ignored.

One cannot discern a logical motive behind its actions. If Offaly County Council's actions were not borne out of logic or out of the objectives of its Development Plans for Edenderry, should one assume they were borne out of ignorance or a desire for gain, its own or that of others? McDonald and Nix assert that many Development Plans were 'used as tools to rezone land at the behest of those who [stood] to gain from it.'⁴⁸ This may have been the case in Edenderry.



Figure 2.1: Land zoning map, 1996. Scale 1:7,000



Figure 2.2: Land zoning map, 2001. Scale 1:7,000

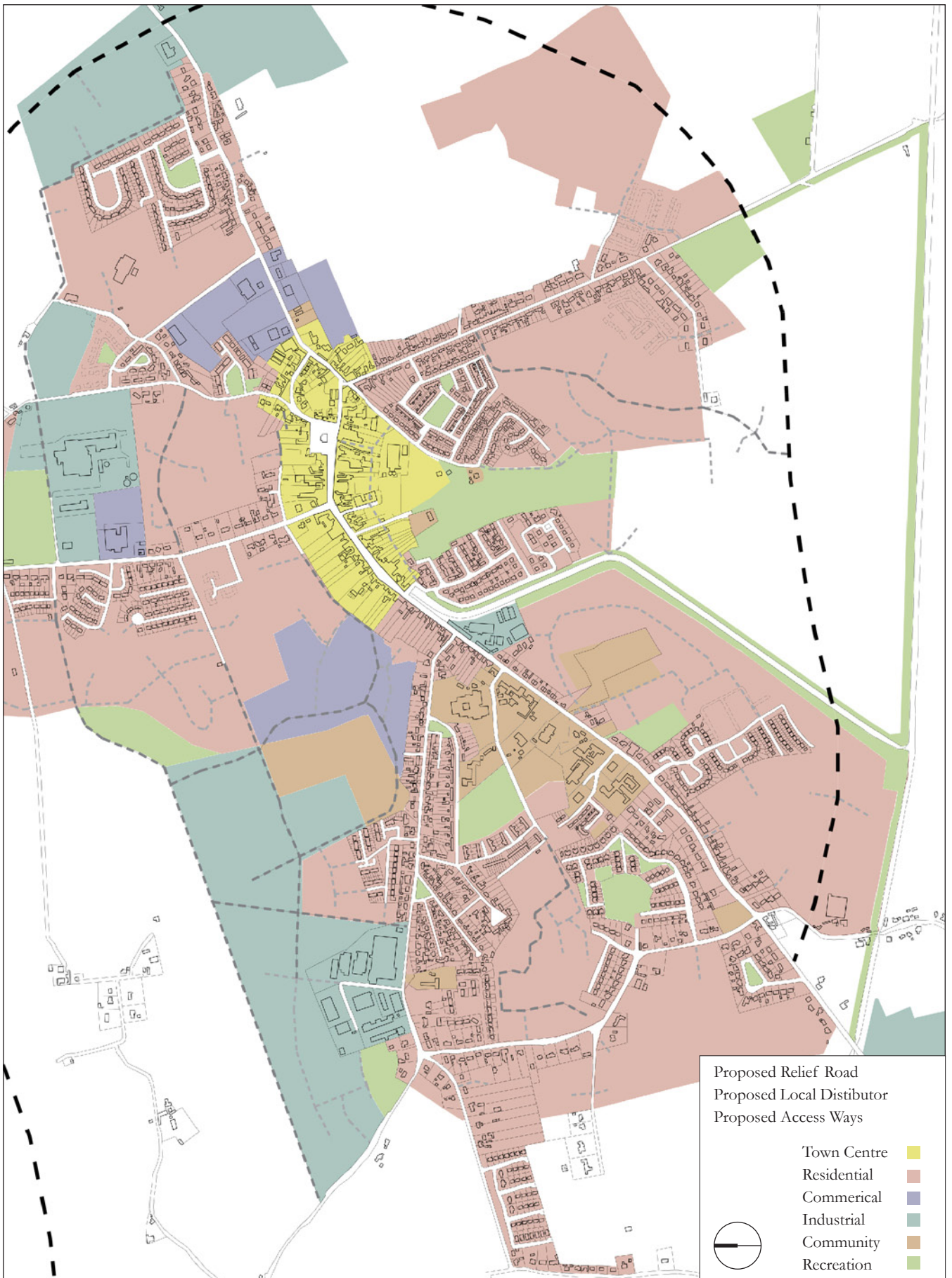


Figure 2.3: Land zoning map, 2005. Scale 1:7,000



Figure 2.4: Land zoning map, 2011. Scale 1:7,000

3. Radical remaking

In this section, two important design and construction projects are discussed; the 19th century rebuilding of Edenderry's main street and the 21st century construction of the Downshire Centre Development. Both projects were of a large scale and significantly redefined the town's urban form. The manner in which these seminal projects were carried out, however, differs greatly. In the 19th century 'ownership was used to facilitate improvement in towns using leases [...] to implement a coherent urban plan [and] encourage a better quality of housing'.⁴⁹ In the 21st century, profit seems to have been the primary goal.



Figure 3.1: Partial map of Edenderry, c. 1800. Scale 1:3,000.

Drawing based on: Anon., *Map of Edenderry Town*, (Belfast: Public Record Office Northern Ireland, Downshire Papers. Reference: D671/M/6/28, c. 1800). See Appendix A.

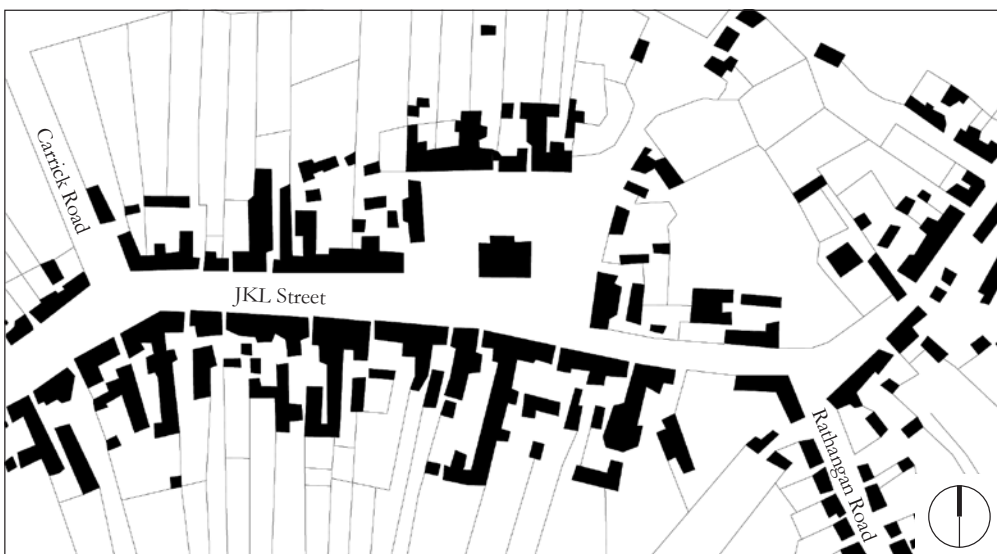


Figure 3.2: Partial map of Edenderry, c. 1836. Scale 1:3,000.

Drawing based on: Ordnance Survey Ireland, *6 Inch Ordnance Survey Map of Edenderry*. (Dublin: Ordnance Survey Ireland, 1836-1838). See Appendix B.

3.1 19th Century: the rebuilding of JKL Street

In studying the development of Edenderry's main street, now called JKL Street, during the period of Lord Downshire's tenure, one witnesses the considered forming of a public thoroughfare. In comparing the partial plan of Edenderry from the c. 1800 map (figure 3.1) to the 1830s Ordnance Survey map (figure 3.2), one can see a dramatic change in the form and plotlines of JKL Street. This is particularly true of the section between the junctions of Carrick Road and the Rathangan Road to the north of the street.

It appears that all the buildings to the north of this section of the street were replaced. The street was widened significantly. Many buildings in the back lands of the street were removed. Plotlines were regularised to run perpendicular to the street and be of a uniform length, generally 400 feet. An example of this kind of reworking of a plot can be seen in figure 3.3. This drawing shows a reformed plot to the south of the street intended to be let to Joshua Eves and Thomas Hoowe.

Downshire's agent, James Brownrigg, oversaw this complete reworking of the plots. In 1811, he suggested to Lord Downshire 'that leases should be executed as quickly as possible in order to encourage building in Edenderry'.⁵⁰ Until the early 19th century most leases were granted 'at will'. As the leases expired in the 1810s and 1820s, the plots were remade and were granted for much longer periods; the majority were granted for three lives and ninety-nine years.⁵¹ Through the media of the plot map and the lease, Downshire and Brownrigg slowly, but radically, redesigned Edenderry's main street.

The built fabric of the town changed and improved greatly during the 3rd Marquis' tenure. Indeed, many of Edenderry's building projects were partly sponsored by Downshire. It appears that he was more generous in his assistance for building projects in Edenderry than in his other towns:

Improvements to buildings were carried out by tenants, except at Edenderry, where any tenant who built a good slated house got the full cost —timber, slates and labour—of the roofing [...], the landlord occasionally gave the whole cost of the building.⁵²

50 Edenderry Historical Society, *The Influence of Lord Downshire III on the Downshire Estate at Edenderry 1809-1845*, (Edenderry: Edenderry Historical Society, 1996), p. 11.

51 Ibid.

52 Maguire, *The Downshire Estates of Ireland 1801-1845*, p. 71.

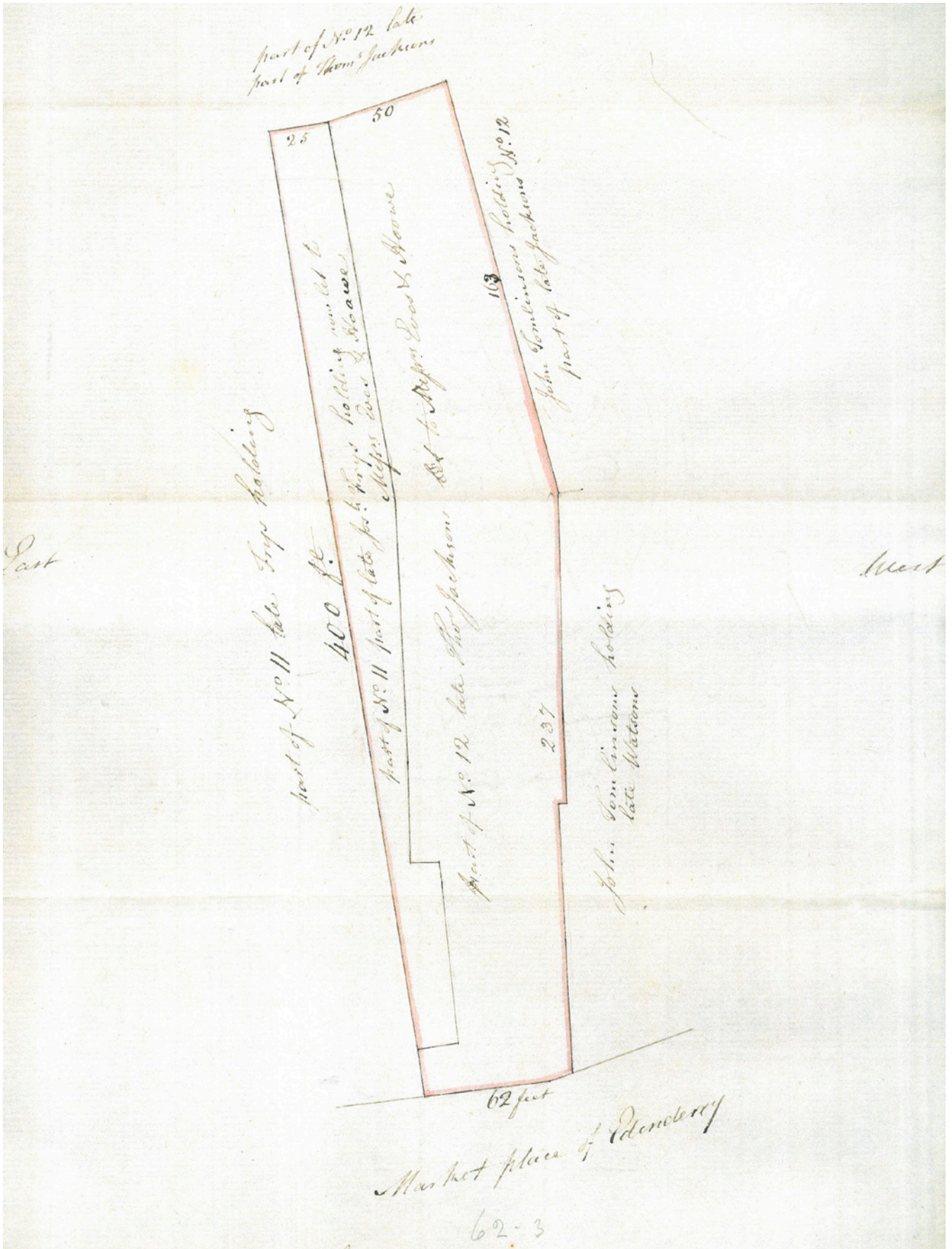


Figure 3.3: Drawing of Plot Layout. Anon., *Pro-forma tenants' proposals for Edenderry Town*. (Belfast: Public Record Office Northern Ireland, Downshire Papers. Reference: D671/C/253F, 1810-1819).

Such a building project was undertaken by James Whitaker. As he stated in a *Proposal to Build* dated January 1814:

I do bind myself hereby to build [...] two substantial dwelling houses of lime and stone covered with slates [...] according to the ground plan and elevation hereunto annexed [...] the whole to be finished in a proper and workmanlike manner, all the opens in said houses to be thorough arched and the windows to be revealed either with Brick or Cut Stone.⁵³

Another letter, dated 24th June 1818, from Robert Walpole, proposed:

to pay to the Most Noble Marquis & Marchioness of Downshire two Shillings a foot for fifty feet of Doctor Grattan's Holding adjoining Mr Hunter's House & to build a house thereon three storey high provided I get the materials now on the premises which I propose to take down forthwith & to have the house built in eighteen months from the date hereof.⁵⁴

It is clear from the proposals of both tenants that the replacement of structures with buildings of high quality was encouraged if not required by Lord Downshire. As described in Pigot's Directory of 1824: 'the town has been much improved within these last few years, most of the thatched cabins have been taken down and replaced with stone built and slated houses.'⁵⁵ One can also see a commitment to a certain style and standard of architecture. Many fine houses from this period line JKL Street to this day, with archways, cut stone windows and fanlights above front doors with keystone decoration being typical features. Indeed there are 18 such houses on JKL Street from this period listed in the Record of Protected Structures.⁵⁶

(Figure 3.4)

Many important Edenderry buildings were constructed during the 2nd Marquis' tenure. They include Blundell House (the agent's house, 1813; construction was overseen by James Brownrigg), a new Quaker meeting house (1813), Downshire Parochial School (sponsored by Downshire at a cost of £159, 1813),

53 Whitaker, J., *Proposal to Build*. (Belfast: Public Record Office Northern Ireland, Downshire Papers. Reference: D671/C/253F/9, 1814)

54 Walpole, R., *Letter to Matthew Lync, Blundell House, Edenderry. 24th June 1818*. (Belfast: Public Record Office Northern Ireland, Downshire Papers. Reference: D671/C/253F/19, 1818)

55 Pigot, J., *Provincial Directory of Ireland*. (Manchester: Pigot & Co., 1824)

56 Offaly County Council, *Record of Protected Structures - Offaly County Development Plan 2009-2015*, (Tullamore: Offaly County Council, 2009).

Killane Catholic Church (Downshire contributed one acre of ground and 50 guineas towards the building, 1816), the Market House (discussed below), a police barracks (1833), and a Catholic Boy's School (partly sponsored by Downshire, 1835).⁵⁷ By 1833, 'the town began to assume its present day aspect and layout.'⁵⁸

In comparing Coote's 1801 description of a 'miserable and shabby'⁵⁹ Edenderry with Samuel Lewis' 1837 description, one can appreciate the scale of Downshire's progress. 'The town consists of one wide street, from which diverge several smaller streets, and contains 214 houses, well-built of stone and slated; it is well paved and supplied with water, and is rapidly improving.'⁶⁰ Downshire himself was aware that the 'constant Interest which [he had] for twenty years taken in the welfare and prosperity of the once "deserted village" of Edenderry' had made such an obvious improvement to the town that it would be 'apparent to every stranger who [passed] through it'. This care shown by Downshire and his agents in the design of the town's streetscape is evident to this day.



Figure 3.4: 50 JKL Street, Edenderry. House c. 1820. This house is listed in the Register of Protected Structures; it is a typical example of a house from this period.

57 Evans & Whelan, pp. 37-42. Reilly, p. 21.

58 Evans & Whelan, p. 38

59 Coote, 1801.

60 Lewis, S., *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*. (London: S. Lewis & Co, 1837).

3.2 21st Century: the Downshire Centre Development

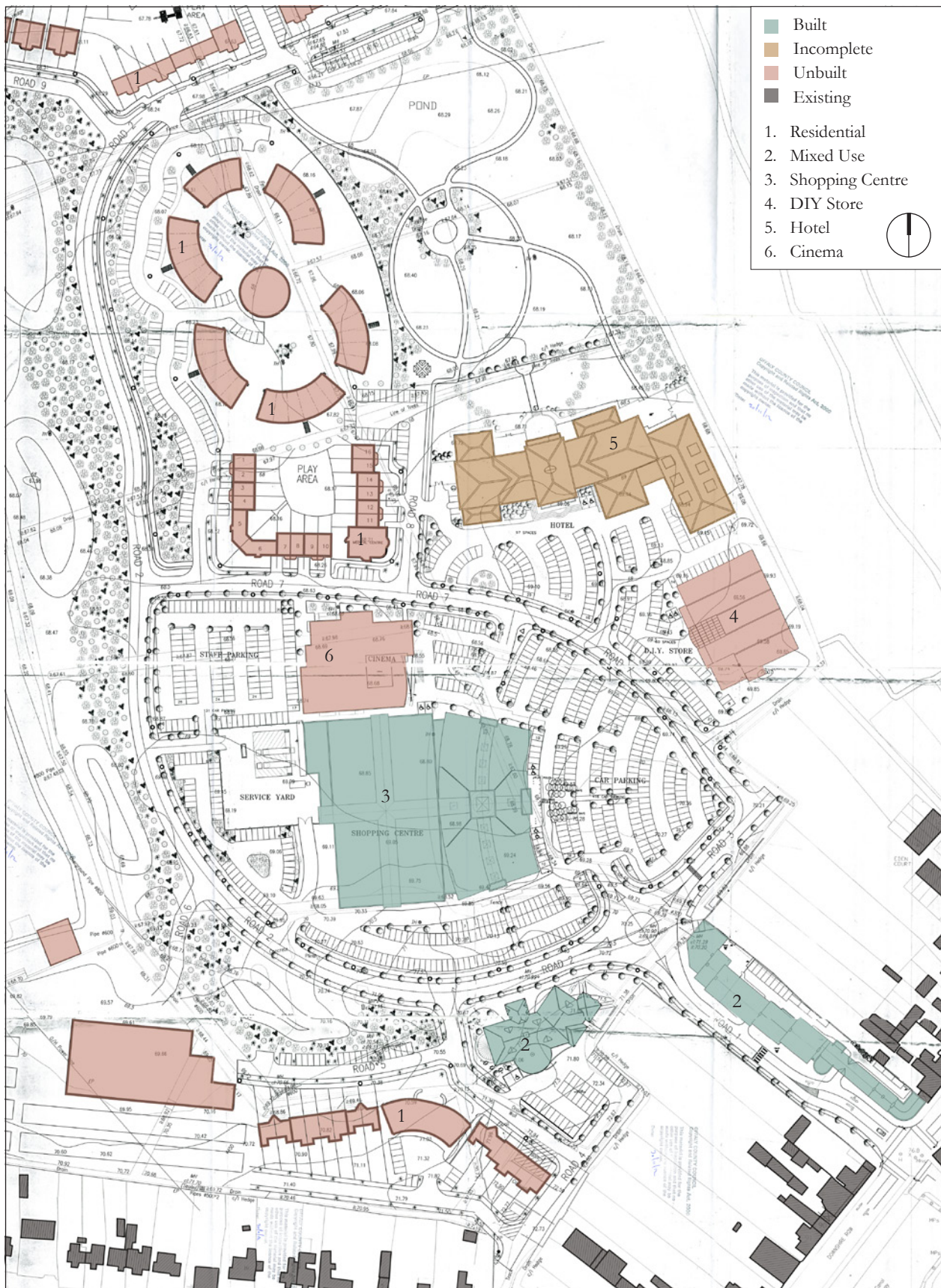


Figure 3.5: Chris Ryan Architects, *Original planning drawing*. (Tullamore: Offaly County Council Planning Archive. File Reference: PL2/01/480, 2000.)

The Downshire Centre Development was certainly one of the most important building projects of the first decade of the 21st century in Edenderry. It takes up a large parcel of land, almost 30 acres, to the north of JKL Street bounded by St. Francis Street to the west and Carrick Road to the east. A great deal of new infrastructure was required for the project; several new roads and roundabouts were constructed to facilitate the scheme. In its original form the proposed development included the construction of 124 dwellings, 19 apartments, cinema, DIY store, public house, hotel, leisure centre, medical centre, crèche and playground.⁶¹ (Figure 3.5)

The development was the largest scale proposal for Edenderry of the 21st century and, indeed, of the 20th century also. It was constructed at the height of Ireland's building boom. Other large scale developments of the period include many peripheral housing estates, perhaps most notably The Sycamores and Boyne Meadows, as well as the partially completed Edenderry Business Campus with its associated dead-end road. (Figure 3.6) These projects, as well as many other smaller residential schemes, greatly impacted on the town's urban form, but none has had as great an influence, both physically and socially, as the Downshire Centre Development.

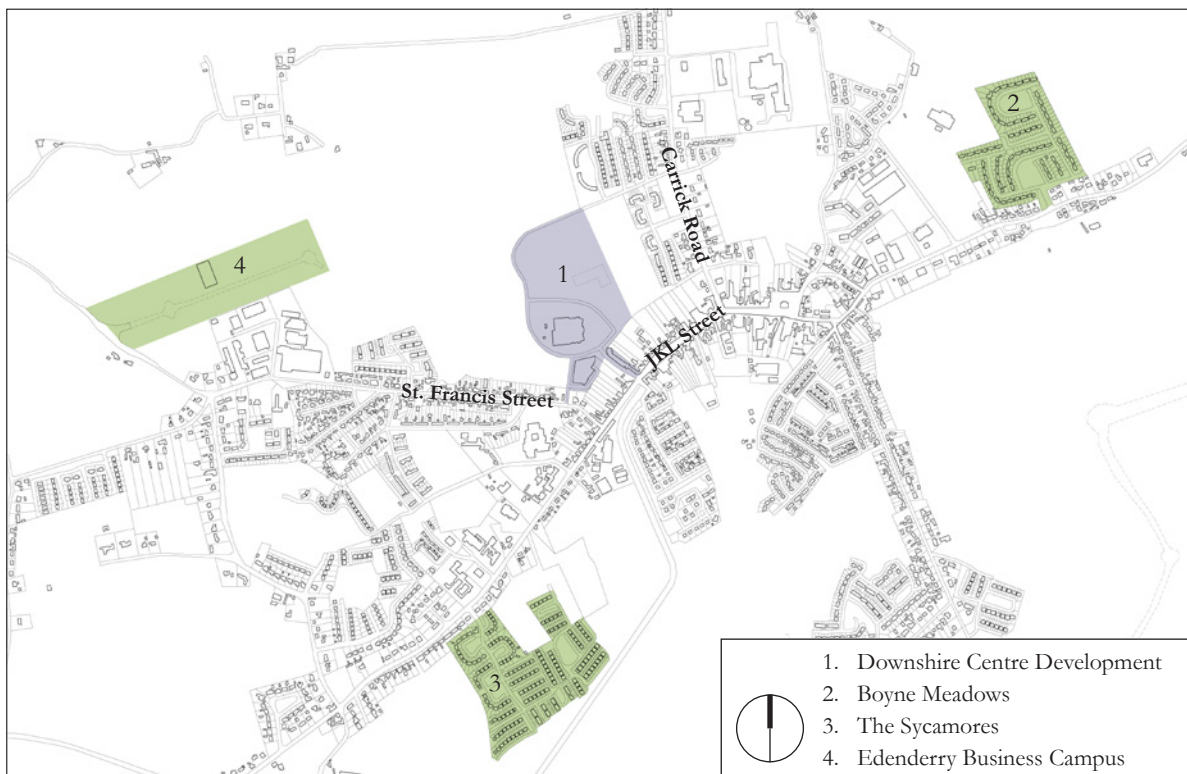


Figure 3.6: Map of Edenderry showing key sites.

61 BPMK LTD., *Planning Application: PL2/01/480*, (Tullamore: Offaly County Council Planning Department Archive, 2001).

Offaly County Council zoned the land on which the proposed development was to be built as commercial in the *Development Plan 2001* in order to facilitate the proposal. As stated in the Plan: ‘the purpose of rezoning [...] was to apply the appropriate zoning for the shopping complexes which have been proposed.’⁶²

There were some appeals made to An Bord Pleanála in relation to the Downshire Development. These objections were made based on concerns mostly connected to traffic, access, and privacy. None of these objections was upheld. None of the objections related to the appropriateness of the scale, or quality of the design of the proposal. One letter to the County Secretary from Blundell Wood Residents Association, a nearby housing estate, expressed a prophetic concern:

*In principal, this proposal is to be greatly welcomed, as the town badly needs this type of infrastructure. However we would sincerely request that, should the council decide to grant planning permission in this case, some mechanism would be put into place to ensure that all aspects of the proposal are proceeded with to their full conclusion. The town would not benefit from another large housing estate with no social/ cultural services. Therefore we would consider it vital that the council ensure that the shopping centre, the hotel and especially the cinema complex would be provided at the earliest stage.*⁶³



Figure 3.7: Downshire Centre Development, Shopping Centre

62 *Development plan for town of Edenderry*, 2001, p. 6.

63 Lynch, M., *Letter form Blundell Wood Residents Association to Ms. B. Kinsella, County Secretary. 12th June 2001*. (Tullamore: Offaly County Council Planning Department Archive. File Reference: PI.2/01/480, 2001).

BPMK LTD., the development company, applied for planning permission for the ambitious scheme on May 10th 2001 and was issued with a notification of decision to grant permission, along with a schedule of 41 conditions on February 27th 2002. These conditions dealt with issues of water, sewerage, roads, compliance with building regulations and access. Only two conditions touched on aspects of the architecture or design, or as the schedule put it; ‘in the interest of visual amenities’ ‘details of all external finishes, including samples, shall be submitted to and agreed with the planning authority prior to the commencement of development’ and ‘timber windows shall be used unless otherwise agreed with the planning authority’.⁶⁴ There were no conditions relating to ensuring the social value of the development, there was no obligation to prioritise the construction of the cinema or playground.

The residential and mixed use buildings which line the new roads created for the project, the shopping centre and a vast car park were the only parts of the development that were completed (figure 3.7). The cinema, DIY store, playground, medical centre and many of the proposed residential blocks were never built. The hotel’s construction stopped due to lack of funds in 2007 and remains a steel skeleton with exposed concrete lift shafts (figure 3.8). The hotel’s developers applied for liquidation in October 2008.⁶⁵



Figure 3.7: Downshire Centre Development, Partially constructed ‘Edenderry Plaza Hotel’.

64 Planning Section, Offaly County Council, *Notification of Decision to Grant Permission and Schedule of Conditions*. 27th February 2002. (Tullamore: Offaly County Council Planning Department Archive. File Reference: PL2/01/480, 2002).

65 Anon., ‘Edenderry hotel jobs lost’, *Offaly Express*, 13 October 2008.

Many of the premises, both within the shopping centre itself and along the associated new streets, are currently without tenants.

The *Development Plan 2003* states as a policy: ‘to ensure new development will contribute to and enhance the existing townscape, by ensuring that the design of structures harmonises in terms of form, style and scale with the established pattern in the street.’⁶⁶ The Downshire Centre Development not only ignored this policy but did the opposite; one cannot reconcile this development’s notably suburban model with the existing scale and pattern of the townscape.

This huge project was conceived as car-oriented. The developers built roads not streets; there is no sense of enclosure, no attempt to make external space anything more than a car park. The public space is even more let down by the unfinished nature of the scheme. Its connection to the main street was overlooked and yet its effect on the street was profound; many established businesses moved to the new shopping centre weakening the viability of the town’s core. The lack of care in its design is palpable.

The Downshire Centre Development did not live up to its namesake. There was little consideration for the quality of space created; the careful judgement of scale and proportion which is so evident in the 19th century remaking of JKL Street was entirely lacking in this 21st project.

66 *Development Plan- Town of Edenderry, 2003*, p. 32

4. Market place

Commerce and public space are inextricably linked. ‘The whole pattern of towns in Ireland was based on the need for markets [...], their possession of trading facilities for the rural community gave them the most essential function of any town in any age.’⁶⁷ A town is an economic entity, commerce is vital to its survival. In this section, the treatment of the market function of Edenderry is explored. The level of engagement in the design and management of the town’s commercial centres by the 19th century landlord and the 21st century planning authorities is analysed.



Figure 4.1: *Cattle Fair, Edenderry, Co. Offaly*, The Lawrence Photograph Collection, The National Library of Ireland.



Figure 4.2: Tesco, Edenderry

67 Freeman, T., ‘Irish Towns in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries’ In: *The Development of the Irish Town*. (London: Croom Helm, 1977), p. 102.

4.1 19th Century: the Market Square and Hall

Edenderry's Market Square remains the most significant public space in the town, though markets are confined to the first Tuesday of the month and the Square's main function is currently car parking. The Market House sits in the centre of the square and has done so since 1826. The Market Square and House were first proposed, however, 35 years earlier by John Hatch, an agent of Lord Downshire's father, the 2nd Marquis of Downshire. Reilly blames this significant delay on the high cost of supplies and the impact of the 1798 rebellion.⁶⁸ A series of proposed designs were put forward for the Market House as early as

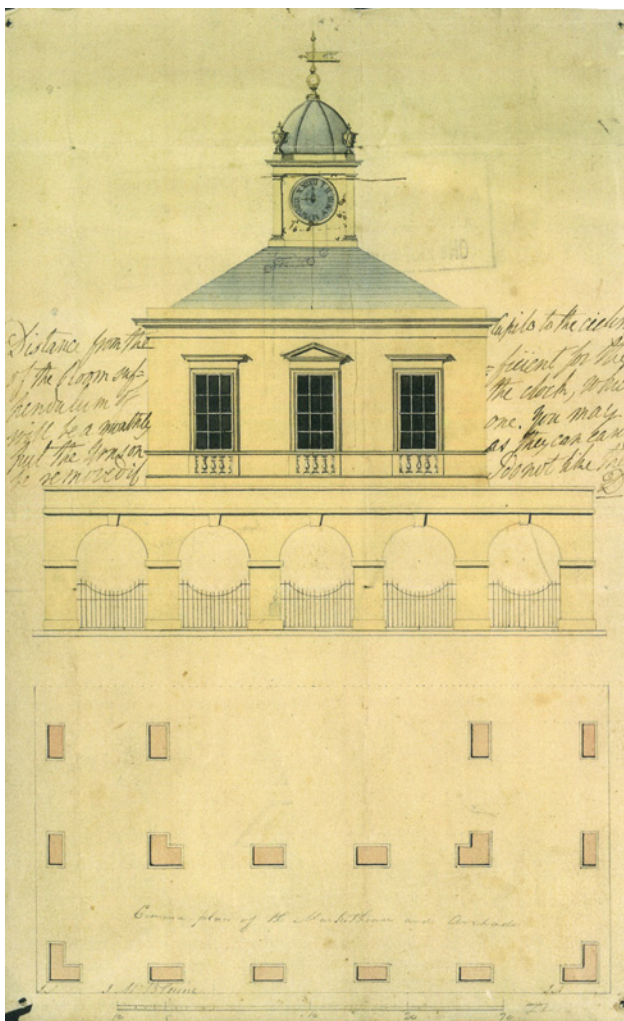


Figure 4.3: McBlaine, J, *Plan of Market House and Arcade, Edenderry*. (Belfast: Public Record Office Northern Ireland, Downshire Papers. Reference: D671/P/6/8, c. 1800).

Note the 2nd Marquis' handwritten comments.

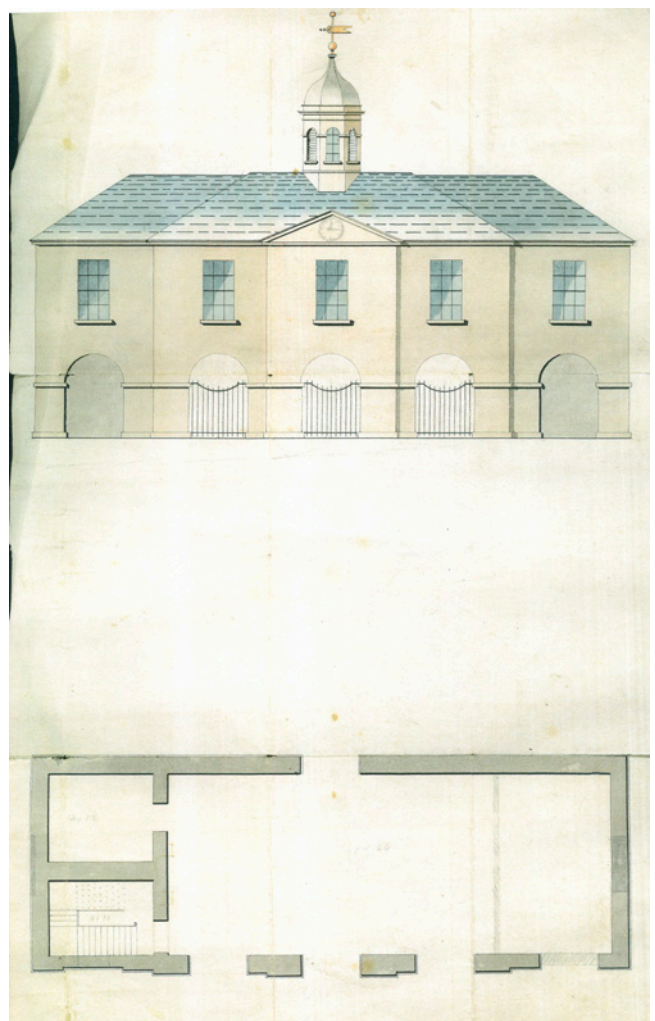


Figure 4.4: McBlaine, J, *Plan of a Market House, Edenderry*. (Belfast: Public Record Office Northern Ireland, Downshire Papers. Reference: D671/P/6/9, c.1800).

1791. Architects Charles Lilly and James McBlaine both submitted designs for the Market at the turn of the century (figure 4.3 & figure 4.4). Both men had worked for the 2nd Marquis on different building projects.⁶⁹

The form and location of the Square itself was not always intended to be as it would later be built. A drawing from c. 1820 shows two separate proposals for the Market Square overlaid on top of each other (figure 4.5). The 'Present Market Square', as shown in the c. 1800 map (figure 3.1), was to be maintained whilst a new square would be created adjacent to it. This version of the square was to be formed by widening the street on both sides; the space would be held by the Market House to the north and two dwelling houses to the south. This scheme was to contain an arcaded Market House, a clerk's office, a weigh

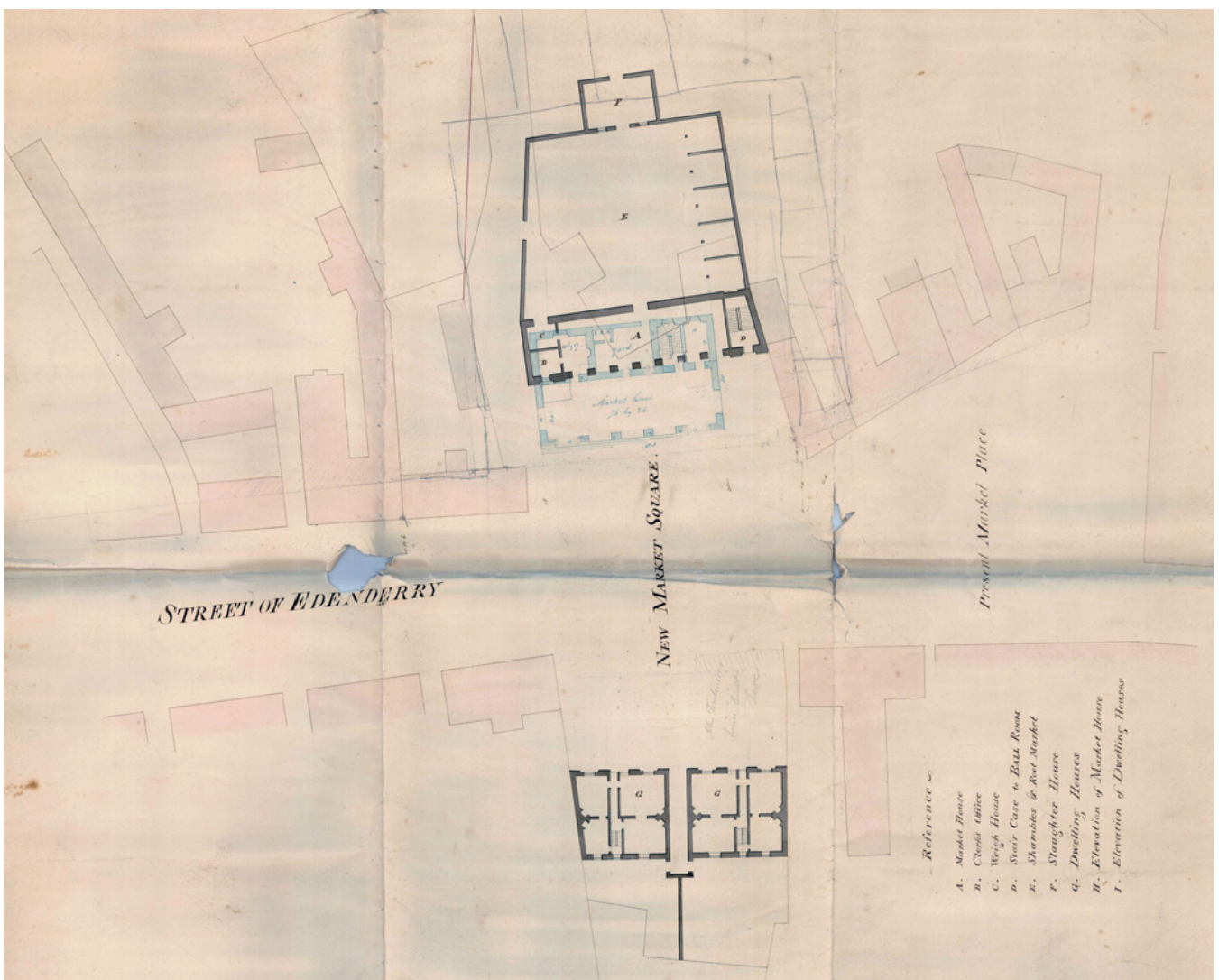


Figure 4.5: *Map of Edenderry town showing proposed buildings.* Anon., c. 1820. Belfast: Public Record Office Northern Ireland, Downshire Papers. Reference: D671/M/40.

69 Irish Architectural Archive, *The Dictionary of Irish Architects 1720-1940*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.dia.ie/> [Accessed 07.01.2013].

house, a shambles and root market, a slaughter house and an upstairs ball room as well as the associated dwelling houses.

The eventual plan for the Market Square was much more ambitious, whilst the c. 1820 proposal created a square by pushing back the street line on each side, the final design involved the demolition of all the buildings lining the contemporaneous 'square' and the creation of an entirely new, formal, rectangular square. This square appears to have been designed and formed by the town's management rather than by an architect. Like the main street, the space was shaped through the remaking and leasing of plots. The design drawings for the final proposal for the Market House show none of the surrounding buildings; the urban design was undertaken by the agent and landlord.

The Market House, designed by architect Thomas Duff, was funded by Lord Downshire at a cost of £5,000. It contained a market space, court house and assembly rooms. Duff's design is similar to that of James McBlaine (see figure 4.4), whose plans had been approved of by the 2nd Marquis of Downshire. Thomas Duff's design was discussed thoroughly with William Reilly, Downshire's chief agent at Hillsborough, as well as with Downshire himself, through a series of letters. In one such letter, dated 26th January 1827, Duff suggests changes to the assembly rooms:

I send you by this day's post a second plan for the assembly rooms at Edenderry which you will be kind enough to give me your opinion of at your convenience [...] By curving the end of the room as per plan; a suitable place is obtained for the orchestra with a small tearoom on the right: the lobby of stairs also would be considerably enlarged, and the ball room of course would be much handsomer: as it would be more uniform.⁷⁰

Describing the Market House in 1837, Thomas Murray stated that: 'The town hall is decorated with five arches and the orchestra is finished with a drawing of the King's Arms and fine crown fixed over it. I have made a point that none of the common people are to be admitted, if they don't pay, as they would do harm to the floor and walls.'⁷¹

70 Duff, Thomas, *Letter to Mr. W.E. Reilly, Hillsborough. 26th January 1827*. (Belfast: Public Record Office Northern Ireland, Downshire Papers. Reference: D671/P6/13B, 1827).

71 Reilly, p. 21.

The creation of the market was a means to an end. Pragmatically, the market can be seen as an essential piece of economic infrastructure for the town. Efficient economic activity equalled wealth creation equalled money for rent. Its creation was also, however, the formation of a set piece of urban fabric and public space. The building provided for the social life as well as the economic life of the town. The market made manifest the town's connection to its rural hinterland; 'Irish towns and villages pulsed to the ritual rhythm of the agricultural season'.⁷² In the development of Edenderry's Market Square and House it is clear that there was a direct engagement in the design process by those in power. The architecture was carefully considered; its design was deemed important.

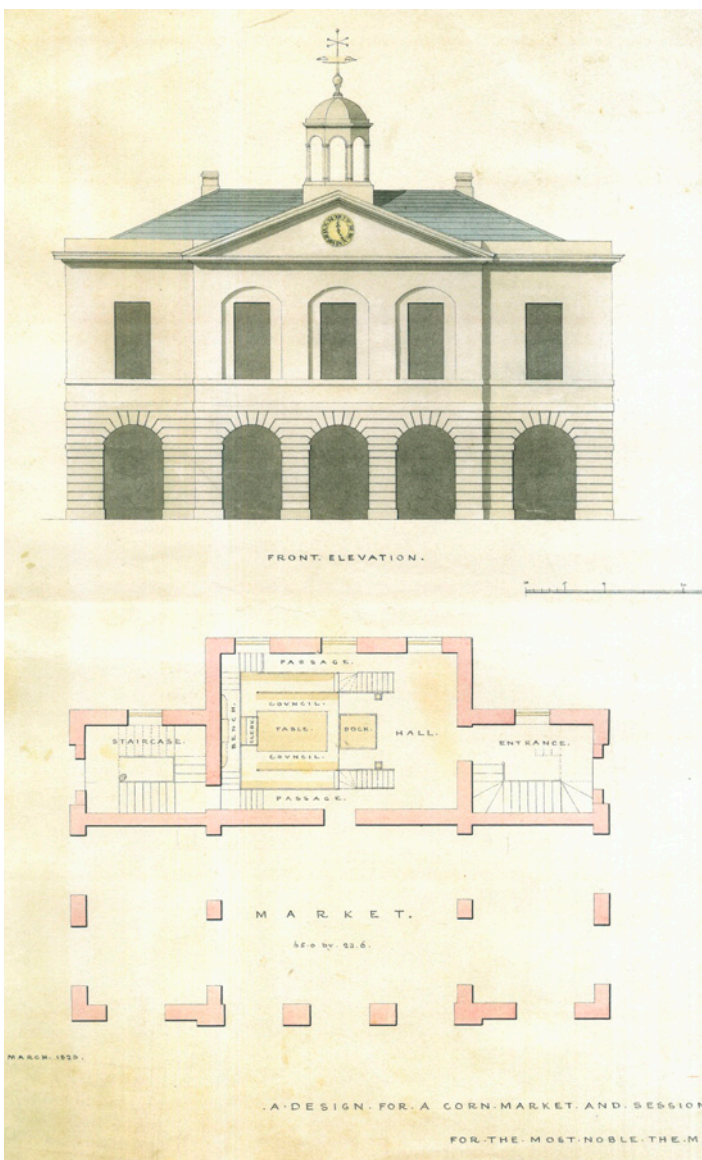


Figure 4.6: *A Design for a Corn Market and Sessions*. Duff, T. (Belfast: Public Record Office Northern Ireland, Downshire Papers. Reference: D671/P6/13B.)

72 Whelan, K., 'Town and Village in Ireland: A Socio-Cultural Perspective', *The Irish Review*, Issue 5, (1988), pp. 34-43.

4.2 21th Century: the supermarket

M.P. O'Brien established Universal Providing Stores on JKL Street, opposite the Market Square, in 1885; these premises were to become the focal point of retail in the town for more than a century. Quinnsworth bought O'Brien's in 1983 and traded there until it was replaced by Tesco in 1998.⁷³

The area to the south of JKL Street between Church Walk and Fair Green, i.e. behind Tesco, was identified as an 'action area' in the *Development Plan 1996*.⁷⁴ In successive Development and Local Area Plans, the 'back land' area to the south of JKL Street was deemed a crucial region for consolidation and development. As important as this area was for the town in theory, it was ignored in practice.

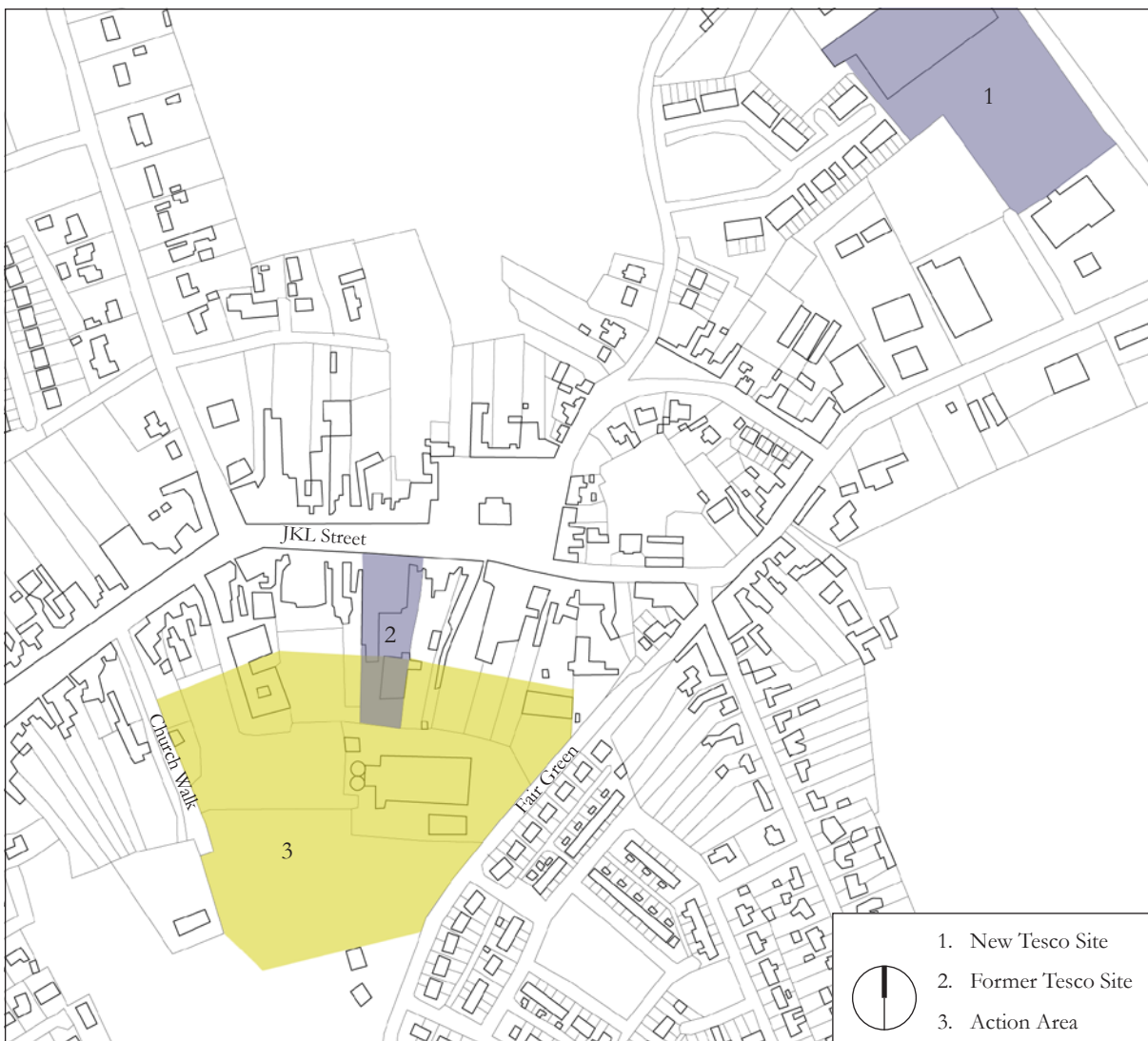


Figure 4.7: Partial plan of Edenderry showing key sites.

73 Evans & Whelan.

74 Planning Section, Offaly County Council, *Development Plan- Town of Edenderry, 1996*. (Tullamore: Offaly County Council, 1996), p. 20.

A development company, Clonmullen Partnership, bought a parcel of land, located off the Dublin Road, from Offaly County Council in February 1999. The land had been zoned as commercial in the *Development Plan 1996*. The sale came with the condition that Clonmullen Partnership would build part of the proposed ring road, which the County Council would take charge of on a phased basis.⁷⁵

Clonmullen Partnership initially sought, and was granted, permission to build a hotel and retail units on the site.⁷⁶ In 2005, however, a new planning permission was sought; for a new, out-of-town-centre, Tesco supermarket.

Clonmullen Partnership met little resistance from the public in obtaining planning permission for the new supermarket, with only one letter, expressing concern about traffic, sent to the Planning Department of Offaly County Council.⁷⁷ In a request for further information, the County Council asked Clonmullen Partnership to demonstrate that the proposal complied with the *County Development Plan Retail Strategy* and the *Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities*, and to submit a *Retail Impact Assessment*, as ‘the Planning Authority had a number of serious issues about the proposed development and the impact on the vitality and viability of Edenderry town.’⁷⁸

Clonmullen Partnership commissioned a private company, the Development Planning Partnership, to write this *Retail Impact Assessment*. The key argument of the report was that as the new Tesco store was simply replacing an old, outdated one, there would be no negative impact on retail in the town. In fact the move would encourage ‘commercial synergy’. ‘The proposed foodstore [...] would complement, not compete with the town centre offer which is diverse, and subject to further investment, will become a stronger district facility’.⁷⁹ The town had many successful businesses and hence the argument was that it would not suffer if the main retail centre moved from the centre. Among the businesses listed were ‘Maguils’, ‘Carl’s

75 Offaly County Council, *Memorandum to Each Member of the County Council. 4th February 1999*. (Tullamore: Offaly County Council Planning Department Archive. File Reference: PL.05/254, 1999). *Development Plan- Town of Edenderry, 1996*. (Tullamore: Offaly County Council, 1996), p. 18.

76 Clonmullen Partnership, *Planning Application: PL2/99/1250*. (Tullamore: Offaly County Council Planning Department Archive, 1999)

77 Mangan, M. et al., *Letter to Planning Section, Offaly County Council. 15th April 2005*. (Tullamore: Offaly County Council Planning Department Archive. File Reference: PL2/05/254, 2005)

78 Planning Section, Offaly County Council, *Request for Further Information, PL2/05/254*. (Tullamore: Offaly County Council Planning Department Archive, 2005).

79 The Development Planning Partnership, *Retail Impact Assessment*, (Dublin: Offaly County Council Planning Department Archive. File Reference: PL.05/254, 2005), p.15.

designer menswear' and 'Dermot Hobb menswear', actually called McGreal's, Carroll's Designer Menswear and Dermot Hall.⁸⁰

The report contended that the existing Tesco site would create a 'viable commercial opportunity [...] that would be redeveloped as a three storey structure in line with the best features of the town centre' and asserted that 'in the event of planning permission being granted on the Clonmullen site, a planning application for an appropriate redevelopment of the Tesco site would be submitted within six months.'⁸¹

Offaly County Council accepted this report and planning permission was granted for the new Tesco store in July 2005. The new store opened on June 6th 2006, at the height of the building boom. In 2006, Ireland had 'the highest house building rate in Europe'.⁸²

In July 2006, an application was lodged with the planning authority for the demolition of the former Tesco buildings and the construction of a mixed use, three to four storey development which would include 632 m² 'town centre use' at ground floor level and 99 apartments at upper levels.⁸³ Planning permission was refused in September 2006; the scheme was excessively dense, impinged on the privacy of its neighbours and 'by reason of its built form and architectural treatment, [failed] to relate satisfactorily to the character of the town'.⁸⁴ A second version of the proposal, with fewer apartments (38) but a great deal more retail space (4261 m²), sought planning permission in May 2008. In a request for further information, Offaly County Council expressed serious concerns about the apartment block; its design was considered 'wholly inadequate'.⁸⁵ The planning application was withdrawn in March 2009.⁸⁶ In September 2008, Ireland's economy was officially in recession.⁸⁷

80 Ibid., p. 11.

81 Ibid., p.15.

82 Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, *Annual Housing Statistics Bulletin*, (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 2006), p. 12.

83 Kenndel Partnership, *Planning Application PL2/06/936*, (Tullamore: Offaly County Council Planning Department Archive, 2006).

84 Planning Section, Offaly County Council, *Reason and Considerations for Refusal of Planning Permission; PL2/06/936*. (Tullamore: Offaly County Council Planning Department Archive, 2006)

85 Planning Section, Offaly County Council, *Request for Further Information; PL2/08/502*, (Tullamore: Offaly County Council Planning Department Archive, 2008)

86 Kenndel Partnership, *Planning Application PL2/08/502*, Tullamore: Offaly County Council Planning Department Archive, 2008).

87 O'Halloran, B., 'Economy to deteriorate in months ahead - experts: Slump in construction and spending fuels contraction.' *The Irish Times*, 26 September 2008.

The old Tesco building in its prime location remained vacant and fell into disrepair. A charity shop opened in the premises in late 2012. It could be argued that Tesco, like Quinnsworth and O'Brien's before it, had been the 'anchor tenant' of JKL Street. Following its relocation many established businesses left the street, some of them moving to the Downshire Shopping Centre, others closing down, unable to survive the recession.

The poorly written and error-ridden *Retail Impact Assessment* that had been produced on behalf of the Tesco developer had neither been independent nor unbiased. The *Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities*, to which this development was subject, states: 'the onus is on the applicant to demonstrate compliance with the development plan and that there will not be a material adverse impact on the vitality and viability of any existing town centre.'⁸⁸ The developer, not the Planning Authority, had deemed that it was compliant.

The opportunity to retain the town's market function in its successful historic location was lost. The original Tesco site had been repeatedly singled out by planners as a key area for future development. The Planning Authority, however, was entirely complicit in the removal of Edenderry's retail core.



Figure 4.8: Former Tesco Site, JKL Street, Edenderry.

5. Conclusion

Although historians such as Ciarán Reilly and W.A. Maguire have done a considerable amount of research on Edenderry and the Downshire Estate, little research has been carried out in relation to the town's design and urban morphology. Edenderry's urban form has been undervalued not just in recent history but perhaps since the mid-1800s. Since the days of Lord Downshire, no individual or organisation made the bold, but necessary, move of creating a new street. The town had been allowed to elongate along existing routes through both private and public building projects for decades before the 21st century. An ordinary town, such as Edenderry, with no national historic importance, with no exceptional beauty in its setting or in its architecture, is still worthy of considered and thoughtful urban planning so that any new developments will improve and enhance its built environment. It still, undoubtedly, merits investigation and study. Through understanding and respecting the morphology of a town one can make an informed judgement about its future development. Perhaps, if Edenderry had been deemed worthy of a mention in *Irish Country Towns*,⁸⁹ if its urban form has been studied, understood and valued, its 21st urban planning may have been given greater consideration.

In 19th century Ireland 'within a period of no more than forty years the physical form and layout of many towns as we know them today was established. It was a tremendous achievement in building and state development, even by today's standards [...] Ireland is fortunate that this significant phase of urban development coincided with a period of high standards in design and taste throughout Europe. Architecture, urban design, art and sculpture were all of social importance.'⁹⁰ It is clear that Lord Downshire and his agents valued architecture and urban design. They were aware of the social significance of a town's civic space and buildings.

In the first decade of the 21st century, design was of little social importance. This is apparent in the attitudes of Offaly County Council planners, local government and general public. Offaly County Council's lack of concern for good design is evident in its policy for the town's development. Urban planning was not concerned with urban design. Lines on maps marked proposed inner relief roads, never streets. No proposals were made for how to infill suitably back-land areas or for the appropriate layout of houses in the

89 Simms, A. A. J. (ed.), *Irish Country Towns*. (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1994).

90 Shaffrey, P. & Shaffrey, p. 11.

newly zoned residential land. It is unfair, however, to lay the blame for Edenderry's irresponsible growth solely on Offaly County Council's Planning Section. They operated within a national framework, a system organised and controlled by government. Urban design was not part of their job description; they made their Development Plans and granted planning permission to proposals on suitably zoned land. They acted as geographers; design was not part of their skill set.

'One of the problems in Ireland is that we have turned the constitutional right to private property into a presumptive right to develop land, whatever the public interest may require.'⁹¹ This attitude was prevalent in Edenderry, among developers and local government alike, even after the building boom came to a shuddering halt. At a meeting of Edenderry Town Council in 2008 one Councillor described the Downshire Centre Development as 'a total disaster' which had 'destroyed the town'. This 'scurrilous' allegation was refuted by another Councillor: 'four people (one of whom was a County Councillor) put money up for a hotel and lost their shirts [...] they could not [have done] more for this town.'⁹²

The attitude of the general public must also shoulder some responsibility; progress was good, building meant employment and investment opportunities. A blinkered optimism prevailed. No objections to the planning permission for the Downshire Development lodged with the County Council dealt with its architecture; the public, like the planners, were not concerned with design.

Just as Lord Downshire left an indelible mark on Edenderry's urban form, so too have the planners and developers of the 21st century. Whilst Downshire's legacy was a wide street lined with fine houses and well planned public space, the 21st century's legacy has been incoherent suburban sprawl.

In the wake of the Celtic Tiger, a damning report from An Taisce gave Offaly County Council a D grade in its ranking of the performance of County Councils in relation to planning; no council received an A or B grade.⁹³ In comparing the post-boom Edenderry *Local Area Plan 2011* to its predecessors, one can see a much more rational and considered approach to its planning and policy. The *Local Area Plan 2011* is more measured in its forward planning and admits that 'the Local Area Plan for Edenderry between 2005 and

91 McDonald & Nix, p. 353

92 Anon., 'Destruction of Edenderry', *Offaly Express*, 17 September 2008.

93 An Taisce, *State of the Nation: A Review of Ireland's Planning System 2000-2011*, (Dublin: An Taisce, 2012), p. 5.

2011 had excessive amounts of land zoned for residential use.⁹⁴ The 2011 plan greatly reduces the amount of residentially zoned land, going so far as to dezone land where proposals had been granted planning permission; it states that ‘in the interests of ensuring consistency with national and regional objectives, the subject lands are not zoned under this plan.’⁹⁵ There is also a marked shift in recent planning policy in relation to the importance of design; architecture and design were mentioned only 14 times in the *Local Area Plan 2005* but 75 times in the *Local Area Plan 2011*. Unfortunately this change in policy has come too late; pre-2011 planning policy has left a chaotic legacy.

Town planning in the 19th century was autocratic; it was ultimately dictated by one man. There was no formalised system of planning; building projects were simply discussed through letters, and leases were arranged through agents. The people in charge, the landlord and agents, had an active role in the design of the town and its buildings.

Town planning in the 21st century was bureaucratic; it was undertaken by civil servants who, though not elected, should represent the best interests of the community. The planning system was one of regulation and legislation; policy was written, land was zoned and rezoned, planning applications were received and permissions were granted. The Planning Authority, however, had a passive role, if any, in the design of the town and its buildings.

One could argue, in both cases, that the real control over the architecture of the town was with he who held the purse strings. In the 19th century, planner and owner were one and the same; in the 21st century, the developer, and not the Planning Authority, held that power. To reiterate an earlier point: ‘the purpose of rezoning [...] was to apply the appropriate zoning for the shopping complexes which [had] been proposed’,⁹⁶ developers, rather than strong town planning, were facilitated.

In the 19th century the town benefited from good urban planning. Much was achieved during Downshire’s reign; the making of enduring public space and fine buildings. This was in spite of social unrest, prevailing poverty and an absentee landlord who, though more generous in his expenditure in Edenderry than elsewhere, was generally monetarily cautious. In the first decade of the 21st century, there seemed to be

94 *Edenderry Local Area Plan 2011*, p. 12.

95 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

96 Development plan for town of Edenderry, 2001, p. 6.

no shortage of money or willing investors. Although developers were prepared to make a large capital investment, there seems to have been no intellectual investment. Real thought and consideration for the quality of building projects was wholly lacking. The primary tool employed by planners, the land zoning map, was a blunt instrument. Due to its two-dimensional, imprecise and simplistic nature, it could never hope to describe adequately a coherent and multifaceted vision for Edenderry, or indeed for any town. The three-dimensional spatial planning undertaken by Lord Downshire and his agents could, in contrast, successfully accommodate a variety of different uses. The section, and not only the plan, was carefully considered. To achieve this kind of three-dimensional planning, design-based disciplines must be incorporated into the urban planning system in Ireland.

One must wonder what might have been achieved in Edenderry with better planning and guidance from an engaged County Council and investment from developers who were interested in quality as well as profit. This lost opportunity seems tragic, but not as tragic as the destruction caused by the absence of care shown by these stakeholders.

An absentee landlord did not need to fit within a framework, follow guidelines, heed objections from the public or worry about the concerns of developers. Without any of these constraints, he could lay out a town as he saw fit; and this he did very well. In contrast, Offaly County Council, theoretically operating within strict guidelines and a national planning framework, nevertheless reneged on its social responsibility to ensure the proper and sustainable development of Edenderry's built environment.

Lord Downshire may well have been a dedicated and improving landlord, but his tenure was an autocracy, in every sense of the word; the vast majority of his tenantry were oppressed and incredibly poor. Despite this sobering fact, in terms of the built fabric of the town, Lord Downshire's era of town planning greatly strengthened the urban fabric of Edenderry; his 21st counterparts, it must be concluded, weakened it greatly.

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Appendix A: Map of Edenderry Town, c. 1800.



Anon., *Map of Edenderry Town*,
(Belfast: Public Record Office
Northern Ireland, Downshire
Papers. Reference: D671/M/6/28,
c. 1800).

Appendix B: 6 Inch Ordinance Survey Map of Edenderry.

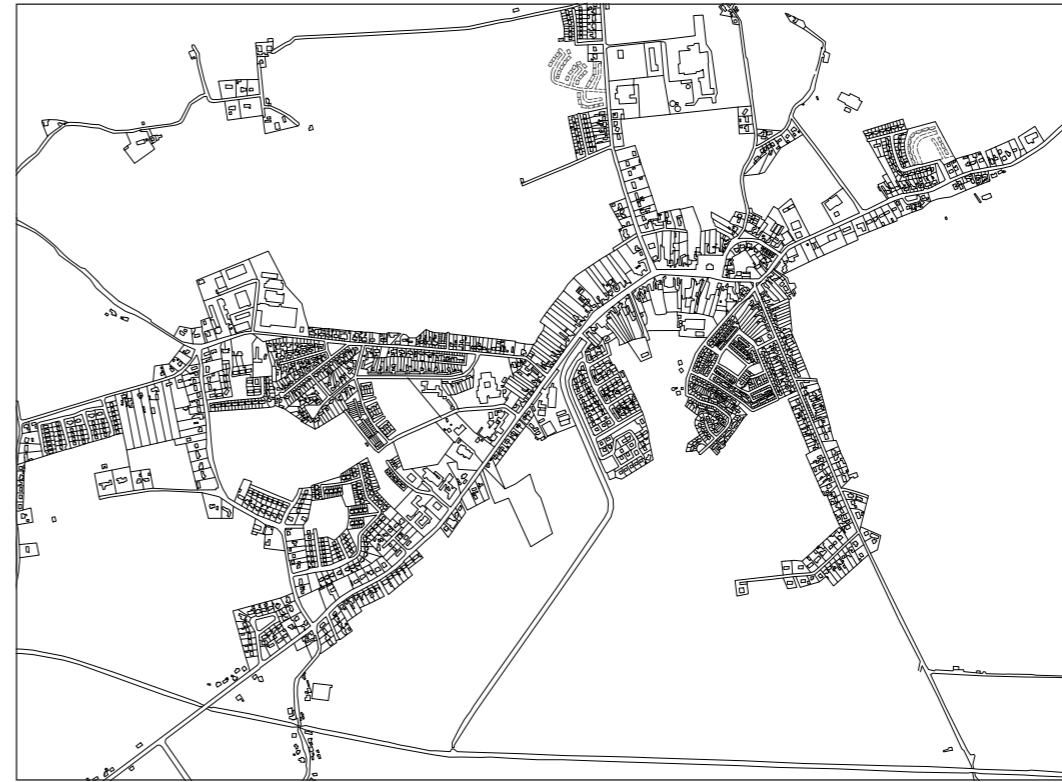


6 Inch Ordnance Survey Map of Edenderry. (Dublin: Ordnance Survey Ireland, 1836-1838).

Appendix C: Evolution of Edenderry.



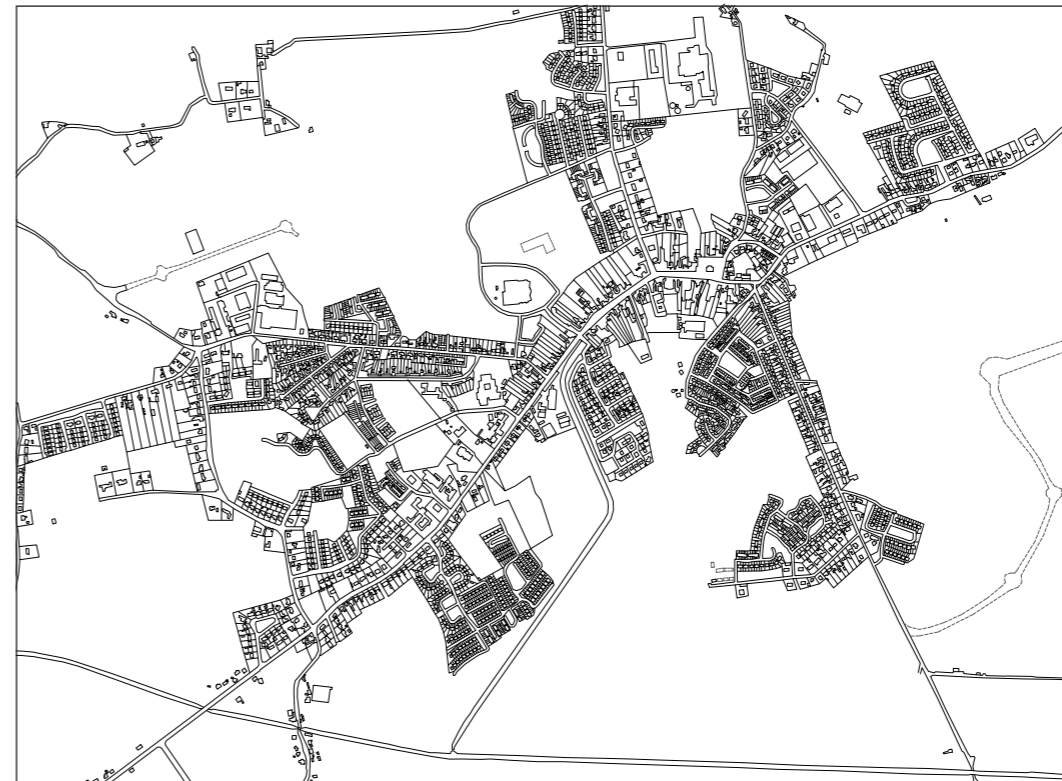
Plan of Edenderry, c. 1836



Plan of Edenderry, 2001



Plan of Edenderry, 1995



Plan of Edenderry, 2012