

Solving our own problems!

A two day workshop identifying

Bandon's

issues and coming up with solutions

Summary Report



Bandon Walled Town
Committee



Parade photograph courtesy of Bandon Walled Towns Committee

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1.0 Introduction to Bandon Workshop

1.1 Background

This report details the findings from a two day town health check seminar called Solving our own problems! Held in Bandon, Co. Cork on October 21st and 22nd, 2016, the event's concept was that six experts/mentors in various areas (tourism, heritage, public realm, retail and planning) would help the people of Bandon come up with ideas to help tackle their place's issues. The role of the mentors was to assist the people of the town in coming up with solutions that are feasible, i.e. that are doable, taking into account the skills and abilities of those who live there.

The Friday session comprised of lectures from the mentors (c.50 local attendees). On Saturday, a town walkabout and workshops were held (c.30 local attendees).

The weekend was devised and coordinated by the Irish Walled Towns Network (IWTN). The IWTN was founded by the Heritage Council in order to unite and co-ordinate local authorities involved in the management, conservation and enhancement of historic walled towns in Ireland, both north and south. One of the core roles of the Network is to enable people to make better decisions for their town. This is mainly done through a training programme. The Solving Our Own Problems weekend was part of that programme.

The right of hosting the event was decided through a competition held amongst IWTN member towns. Bandon won. They did so because they had the most community buy-in to the concept. The resulting event was a partnership between the town and the IWTN. Support was also provided by Cork County Council.

The six mentors were:

- Ian Doyle, Head of Conservation, The Heritage Council – Heritage led regeneration
- Edmund O'Callaghan, Head of Department of Retail Management Studies, DIT – Retailing
- Will Brady, Planning Lecturer, School of Planning, UCC – Planning
- Josephine O'Driscoll, Client Services Manager Fáilte Ireland – Tourism
- Giulia Vallone, Town Architect, Cork County Council & Simon Wall, Westport Town Architect, Mayo County – The Public Realm

All six presentations from the Friday session are available to watch on the Heritage Council's YouTube channel (<https://youtu.be/HQbD375zK1U>).

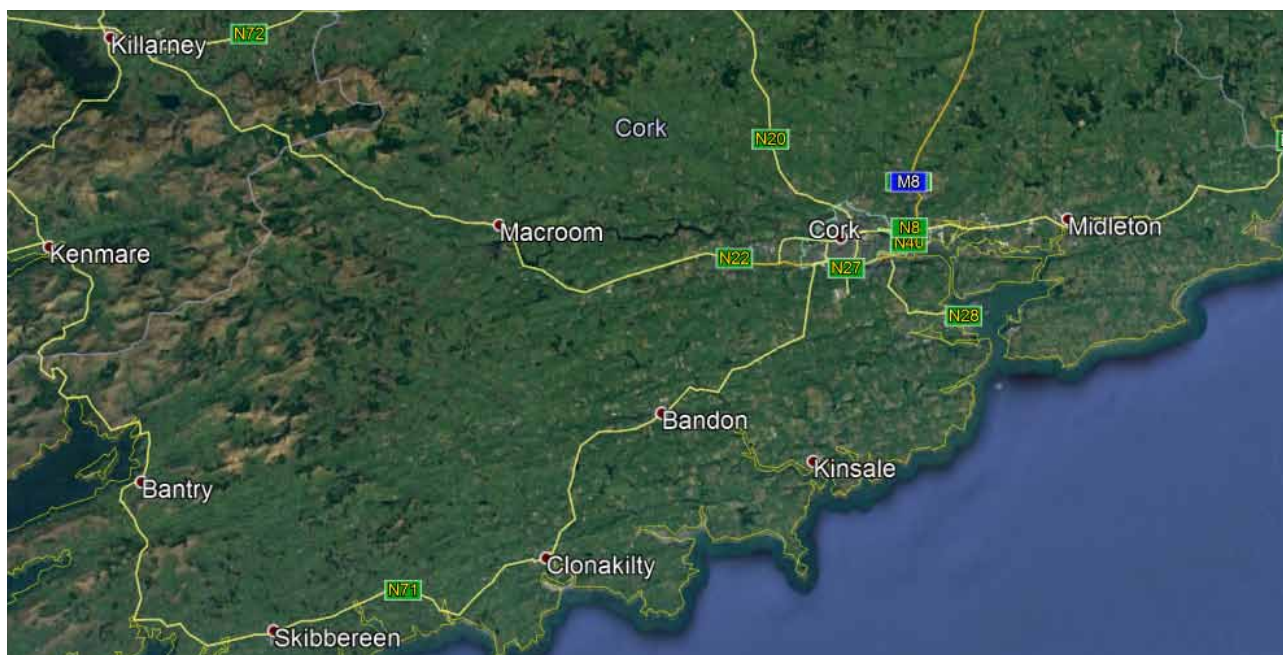
1.2 Site Location and Context

Located 29km to the southwest of Cork City, Bandon's dominant character is that of rural market town (figure 1.1). The town's population is 6,640 (CSO, 2011). Over the past two decades a large commuter population has developed both within and immediately surrounding the town. In 2011, 23% of the workforce was faced with a daily commute in excess of 30 minutes. The vast majority of these would have been travelling to Cork City. Overall, there are lower proportions of professional, managerial and non-manual workers living in the town than the state average. Unemployment is marginally higher than the national average. House vacancy stands at over 18% (CSO, 2011).

Bandon markets itself as the gateway to West Cork. Unfortunately for the town, it is a very open gateway, with relatively few tourists stopping. Those that do typically use the town as a place to eat and tend not to linger. Bandon is not located on the Wild Atlantic Way. The main tourist attraction is the West Cork Heritage Centre. The volunteer run museum has a fine collection of local artefacts. However, partially because of irregular opening hours and inadequate marketing it attracts only a few thousand visitors a year. There is a low amount of available accommodation when compared to some neighbouring towns.

Figure 1.1

Location of Bandon



(Source: Google Earth, accessed 1/12/2017)

1.3 Methodology

This document comprises short summaries of the discussions from the eventual four working groups. The groups each focused on one of the following topics: the public realm, tourism, planning and retail.

1.4 Implementation

The implementation of this document is up to the town. Once the report has been published a follow-up meeting is to be held between relevant community stakeholders and outside agencies. Stakeholders include Cork County Council, West Cork Development Partnership and the Heritage Council. Please note that this list is not exhaustive. The kick-start meeting will review the document and decide upon actions for the coming year. Responsibilities are to be ascribed and minutes kept. Follow-up meetings are to be arranged as deemed necessary by a broadly based town team.

1.5 Author Identification

The summaries were prepared by a representative from each of the four working groups. The authors are: Edmund O'Callaghan, Simon Wall, Liam Mannix, Philip McLaughlin and Rita O'Driscoll. The report was edited by Liam Mannix, Project Manager of the Irish Walled Towns Network. Ian Doyle, Head of Conservation at the Heritage Council, and Hollie Kearns, Project Manager of the Irish Walled Towns Network reviewed the document. Additional comments were also received from Denis Boyle.

1.6 Acknowledgements

The IWTN acknowledges the help of Philip McLaughlin, Clare McCutcheon, Sandra Crean and Rita O'Driscoll in the preparation of this report. We would particularly like to thank Maria McLaughlin for her help in making the weekend happen. Our greatest thank you goes to the six mentors that so willingly gave their time and expertise: Ian Doyle, Edmund O'Callaghan, Will Brady, Josephine O'Driscoll, Giulia Vallone and Simon Wall.

2.0 The Public Realm

Mentors: Simon Wall, Westport Town Architect and Guilia Vallone, Cork County Architects Dept.

Author: Simon Wall

Issue Identified: The existing playground suffers from lack of maintenance and functionality.

Policy:

Create dynamic and safe public play areas.

Actions:

- a. Enhance the existing play area through repairs and maintenance.
- b. Create a section of the playground for tweens and teenagers where there are seating areas and other attractions that are age appropriate. This would allow them to have their own creative space and discourage those in the older age groups from disrupting the space for younger children (look at Weaver Park in Dublin as an example).
- c. Smaller pocket play parks could be created elsewhere in the town.
- d. The area of Begley's Lane should also be enhanced in order to allow a natural flow of movement from the Main Street to the playground and Town Hall area.

Possible Funding:

Municipal District Capital Fund Scheme.

Issues Identified: There is something of a disconnect between both sides of the town. There is potential for a more natural flow of movement between both sides that makes it more appealing to cross over to the playground, the Town Hall and North Main Street where so much of our history lies in Allen Square (figure 2.1).

Policy:

Upgrade the appearance of Begley's Lane in order to attract more footfall to North Main Street and the Town Hall Area. Create a natural flow of traffic between the two areas.

Actions:

- a. Renew this route and make it an attractive and vibrant connector.
- b. Brighten the appearance of Begley's Lane. This may include both temporary and permanent artist led interventions. The participation of local youths is to be encouraged.

Possible Funding:

Support may be available from the Cork County Council, Leader and the IWTN.

Figure 2.1

North Main Street



(Source: The Heritage Council, 2016)

Issues Identified: Without having a definitive name for an area, it is hard to care for or allow a connection to be built with a space. This often also causes people to be confused as to where an attraction may be. Currently, there are a few areas in Bandon that carry more than one name and this leads to lack of clarity in where one may be referring to.

Policy:

Name all bridges and walkways.

Actions:

- Agree on exact names for different areas of the town. Engage in community consultation session(s).
- Map these areas officially.
- Devise a standardised set of name plaques, orientation signage and town maps (figures 2.2 & 2.3). Town maps should be located at the bus stops and main car parks.

Possible Funding:

None required for naming. Support available from Cork County Council, Fáilte Ireland, Leader and the IWTN for signage and maps.

Figures 2.2 & 2.3

Directional signage and orientation map in Waterford City



(Source: The Heritage Council, 2015)

Issues Identified: The position of Bandon's bus stops lies on either side of the main route to Cork (Glaslynn Road, N71). This poses an obstacle to passengers walking to and from the bus stop as they need to navigate the busy roads of this area. The derelict ESB lands also have a back area that leads onto Oliver Plunkett Street. The area offers huge opportunity to hold a public car park. As a location, it reduces pressure of traffic from the Main Street where people prefer to walk through and lends a much needed facility to the town. The bus stop could then be relocated to an area closer to this point to allow a more direct pedestrian path to the Main Street.

Policy:

Conversion of derelict ESB lands to public car park.

Actions:

- a. Make the bus stops more accessible.
- b. Create a well designed public car park.

Possible Funding:

Cork County Council or from the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Issues Identified: The Church Steps area leads from Market Street to St Patrick's Church. It is an area that has controlled access via wrought-iron gates yet sees a lot of footfall for pedestrians. As a public space, this area could encourage the townspeople to congregate and share a space for activities such as a flower festival, giving a fresh and vibrant look to the space at the same time. More public areas are needed within Bandon to allow the community to gather and enjoy the town, take pride in various areas and to encourage neighbourly rapport.

Policy:

'Church Steps' area to become utilised as a public space.

Actions:

- a. Develop a series of events and artist driven interventions to activate the space.
- b. Enhance the surface.

Possible Funding:

In certain cases, no funding in particular would be required here, simply obtaining the correct permissions to hold such an event would be needed. Funding for artist driven interventions could come from the Arts Office of Cork County Council. Further funding may be required to enhance the surfaces.

Issues Identified: As previously mentioned, there is a lack of public space areas which allows groups of people to gather and take time in the town to meet and greet. Bandon offers beautiful views and buildings but not necessarily the space and opportunity to appreciate them. At St Patrick's Place there is a junction where a fountain currently sits which is no longer the best use of the area. A structure akin to 'kissing chairs', where people may sit together and enjoy the space, would work well at this site. As it is on the cusp of the town's hub, it allows groups to take a moment near the historical fringes before moving towards the shopping districts.

Policy:

Create more public spaces.

Actions:

- a. Implement the Bandon Transportation and Public Realm Plan.
- b. Ensure that people have areas within the town to pause, absorb their surroundings and spend time together (figure 2.4).

Other efforts to improve Public Realm sector in Bandon:

- c. Allow more connection between McSwiney's Quay and South Main Street. This may include the connecting buildings of O'Donovan's Electrical, Bank of Ireland, AIB, O'Brien's Saddlery and Bob Deane's.
- d. Join up and allow continuity of the river walk between the playground and the MUGA park (figure 2.5). Enhance the surfacing and character of the existing walkway.
- e. Establish even more public gathering space for civic events and celebrations such as the space at Ballymodan Place.
- f. Widen the footpaths, especially those on South Main Street and add trees (figure 2.6).
- g. Implement a shop front improvement scheme and colour scheme.
- h. Connect the Churches historically and ecumenically. Consult closely with the clergy and the various congregations.
- i. Devise a traffic and pedestrian management plan for the town's main entrances.
- j. Manage a civic space outside of the Town Hall. Include landscaping and encourage a public gathering point (figure 2.7).

Possible Funding:

Cork County Council, the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Department of Transport Tourism and Sport.

Figure 2.4

Main Street, Clonankilty. The paving on the road slows traffic down and creates a stronger sense of a shared space. Kissing chairs are viewable in the background. Wider footpaths have allowed businesses to use the area for additional seating.



(Source: The Heritage Council, 2016)

Figure 2.5

The existing river walk along the River Bandon



(Source: The Heritage Council, 2015)

Figure 2.6

South Main Street



(Source: The Heritage Council, 2015)

Figure 2.7

Carpark in front of Town Hall being used for Walled Towns Day



(Source: The Heritage Council, 2014)

Issues Identified: The West Cork Heritage Centre is a wealth of historical artefacts and recordings which hold enormous value for the community (figure 2.8). It is a much undervalued asset which needs to be improved upon in terms of marketing and activities in order to unveil to locals and tourists alike the hidden treasures inside. Through marketing campaigns, better signage and publicity literature being distributed to key areas, the footfall of Bandon's heritage centre could rise steadily. In achieving a higher audience, it may then be possible to focus on the repair and maintenance work that is needed on the building. The success of this is partially dependent on the centre being open at structured times during the peak tourist season.

Policy:

West Cork Heritage Centre revival.

Actions:

- a. Establish definitive opening hours.
- b. Fully advertise the centre.
- c. Connect through historical lanes.

The Heritage Centre is dealt more comprehensively in the tourism section of this document.

Possible Funding:

Fáilte Ireland, the Local Authority and the IWTN.

Figure 2.8 **West Cork Heritage Centre**



(Source: The Heritage Council, 2016)

3.0 Retail

Mentor: Edmund O'Callaghan, Head of Department of Retail Management Studies, DIT

Authors: Edmund O'Callaghan and Philip McLaughlin

Context for Retail Review of Bandon Town Centre

The retail core of town centres in Ireland have experienced significant decline since the economic crash of recent years. Despite this, they perform a vital social and economic role in the lives of local communities. Undoubtedly, the survival of retailing in traditional town centres can now be called into question as is evidenced by reduced consumer spending, increasing vacancy rates and the growing challenge of on-line competition and professionally managed shopping locations. Town centres, the traditional social and economic hub of local communities, have lost their competitive advantage to larger cities, out of town and edge of town shopping centres and retail parks during day-time hours. Many are effectively deserted after dark, due to the absence of venues for social activities.

British town centre research indicates that consumers who visit town centres with family and friends spend more money per visit than an individual, spend more time per trip and experience higher levels of satisfaction. The socialisation of the town centre is achieved through a wider choice of cafes, restaurants and bars and general entertainment activities and venues.

Changes in the consumer shopping journey have survival implications for all retailers, but particularly the unplanned and un-managed town-centre that is competing with planned and professionally managed retail locations. Bandon, like many Irish town centres, needs to develop a coherent and consistent retail strategy that enhances the shopping experience in the town centre. The achievement of this objective requires co-operation between national policy makers, local investors/entrepreneurs and Cork County Council, informed by accurate and timely information on local consumer behaviour and attitudinal research. The stark choice for Bandon town centre is that of adaptation or significant decline.

Issue Identified: There appears to be a lack of retailer collaboration among town centre retailers. It is vital that all retailer stakeholders in the town centre understand the stark choice referred to above. If a strategy to rejuvenate retailing in the existing town centre is not generated, then the vacancy rate for retail premises in the town will likely increase in the coming years, with obvious consequences for all.

Policy:

An agreed policy is required to focus on 'The Bandon Town Centre Shopping Experience'.

Action:

The town's former 'Marketing Group's' retailer members need to form the now proposed Bandon Retail Town Development Group. This should be created immediately and be constituted by at least 80% of retailers in the town. The implementation of many of the recommendations within this section of the report requires an effective working retail group.

Possible Funding:

This needs to be a funded by retailers in Bandon town centre.

Issue Identified: The existing retail mix in the town centre does not serve well either the local or tourist segment of the market (either during the day or evening). Two time zones exist (before/after 6pm). There is a lack of a social hub for both these time zones, evidenced by the poor footfall on South Main Street and throughout the core town centre during the day and the almost complete lack of footfall after 6pm (bars and fast-food outlets appear to be the primary source of footfall).

Policy:

There is a need to identify a greater breadth and depth of retail offerings that will have a broader appeal to both the local resident (families in particular) (the local catchment area of 24,000 inhabitants) and the tourist segment. This should aim to develop differing shopping experiences for the target markets. A policy needs to be developed for both the daytime customer and the evening customer (after 6pm).

Actions:

- a. The appointment of a retail development manager is essential to oversee and manage the perceived retail needs of the town centre. This could be a full-time or part-time position depending on the perceived need from the retailer group.
- b. An immediate audit of the retailers in the town centre should be carried out to identify gaps in the existing offering, for both time zones. For example, thinking of different uses for vacant premises, e.g. gym, crèche facilities and additional eating facilities that bring people into the town centre during day-time hours and the development of a night-time social offer i.e. pubs/restaurants, clubs and accommodation. National and international brands would also increase the attractiveness of the town centre as a shopping destination and should be targeted.
- c. There is a need to generate a support hub for new retail businesses in the town centre. New local enterprises should be supported through a financial package of measures needed to break down barriers to entry (e.g. rent allowances, rates holiday, funding of fit-out costs, mentoring for marketing and financial management of the businesses, etc).
- d. The encouragement of pop-up shops—particularly in vacant premises would add to the vitality and appeal of the town centre (a good example is the pop-up Lismore Craft Collective shop in Lismore). A special start-up package should be developed for new retail entrepreneurs that allow them to trial their business ideas. This should be aided by the town's retail development manager.
- e. Outside of the development of a social hub, the town centre retailer should organise social and commercial activities that generates interest and brings consumer spending into the town.

Possible Funding:

Economic Development section of Cork County Council for funding of a retail audit of the town for both time zones. Local secondary school transition year students might also be engaged. The Local Enterprise Office in Clonakilty offers a range of services for new businesses, from training and development to mentoring services for start-up and existing businesses. For example, the Local Enterprise Office offers a Food Academy Start Course and also an Erasmus Programme for New Entrepreneurs. Feasibility study grants are also available for prospective new business. Support for events that would animate the town centre are available from the Irish Walled Towns Network and Cork County Council.

Issue Identified: Lack of Retail Focal Points in Town Centre to generate consumer footfall. There is a lack of focal points in the town, with the one exception being the Riverside Shopping Centre on the edge of the town centre which is the central focal point for shopping in Bandon. There is a need to create other focal points for shoppers that provide different shopping experiences (cannot be the same as the existing Riverside Shopping Centre) and thereafter connect these focal points in the mind of the shopper to increase the likelihood of consumers shopping the entire town. For example, 90% of respondents interviewed in the Riverside Shopping Centre car park on the day of the mentor's visit (Friday, 21st October, 2016) stayed within the confines of the shopping centre to do their shopping and did not go into the town centre. The majority of the sample were on an individual shopping trip, with the principal purpose being the weekly grocery shop in SuperValu. In terms of footfall, the cold spots in the town need to be converted to hotspots. Shopping is habitual, and shoppers need to be re-directed from their habitual shopping routes in order to maximise the average time spent in the town centre by both local and visiting consumers.

Policy:

Develop additional focal points that will attract and hold consumers

Actions:

- a. Additional focal points need to be developed in the town centre (minimum three, and maybe four) (table 3.1). Each focal point requires a specific function to attract shoppers and enhance the customer experience. This needs to be differentiated from the sole purpose shopping journey (weekly shop) in the existing focal point in the town (Riverside Shopping Centre). The development of new focal points with specific objectives should be decided by Bandon town stakeholders. However, some ideas that might be considered are the following: the old market/Bandon Shopping Centre could be developed as a food market (celebrating the food heritage of west Cork) or children's zone to encourage consumers/families towards that end of the town. Another focal point could be at the other end of South Main Street on Bridge Street/Fish Corner and environs, where a restaurant/café/ bars social hub could be developed. Opportunities should be examined for a music venue. An artisan, local crafts hub might be considered for the McSwiney Quay/Riverview Area. These focal points would appeal to both consumers in the local catchment area and tourists alike.

Table 3.1 **Retail focal points**

Focal Point	Area
1	Riverside Shopping Centre (Existing Focal Point)
2	Old Market/Bandon Shopping Centre/Market Street Area
3	Bridge Street/Fish Corner Area
4	McSwiney Quay/Riverview Area

(Source: Edmund O'Callaghan, 2016)

- b. Develop signage that directs the shopper between all retail focal points (but specifically from the existing sole focal point (Riverside Shopping Centre) to other focal points. For example, attractive branded signage should direct shoppers from one focal point to the other (same design palette as tourist signage). Additional seating should also be installed in the town centre.

- c. Develop connectivity between the differing shopping experiences through imaginative pedestrian facilities that direct the shopper to the different focal points. Engage with artists to create bespoke interventions (e.g. Studio Weave). This would be appealing to both the local shopper and town visitor.

Possible Funding:

Cork County Council and OPW need to be engaged to allow a vision for the future of the town centre to emerge.

Issue Identified: Lack of town branding suite.

Policy:

The town needs to develop a town branding policy. What does the town stand for? Can it be marketed as the 'Gateway Town to West Cork' that is a must for tourists to visit. Key unique selling points for the town need to be assessed, addressed and communicated to target markets (locals and tourists). The branding image or story of Bandon should be manifested in the quality of the public realm and the events that are needed to animate these spaces.

Actions:

Improve the shopping environment of the town-centre. Shopping in Bandon needs to be experiential, rather than simply functional. This will require:

- a. A symbol for Bandon, the Heritage Town, needs to be developed by all stakeholders (existing symbol may suffice but perhaps something that is a little more contemporary) (figure 3.1). This should subsequently be used throughout the town as a marketing tool by all retailers, food producers and hospitality businesses. The symbol/logo should also be used by Cork County Council and displayed on banners and signage at entry points to Bandon and throughout the town. A competition might be a useful vehicle for this and would also create local interest and publicity.
- b. Improving the appearance of the town's main streets. This could be done through simple building maintenance and paint schemes for structures. It could also be realised by the creation of public 'dwell' places. Areas outside café/restaurants and/or judiciously replaced car parking spaces should be converted into pleasant public spaces that encourage consumers to linger in the town and visit the new retail focal points (follow Westport's example) (figures 3.2 & 3.3). Widen the footpaths where possible.
- c. Improving shop front exteriors. Traditional and colourful shop fronts are used to market Ireland abroad. An annual competition for 'Best Shop Front' would encourage retailers to improve the exterior facade of their premises. These could also be entered in national competitions for maximum advantage for the town (figure 3.4).
- d. Improve the frontage of vacant premises (figure 3.5).
- e. A calendar of annual events need to be developed (perhaps with a minimum of one event per month), that will attract locals and visitors to spend more time in the town centre. This will generate greater interest in the town centre and allow the town to showcase itself.
- f. A customer loyalty scheme needs to be developed by retailers in the town for local shoppers. This will require the extensive participation of town centre retailers (otherwise, of limited advantage). Advantages include the reward of local consumption, increased retailer collaboration and tracking of purchase behaviour (look at the Letterkenny model).

- g. Shoppers visit physical stores in town centres for excellent customer service that cannot be replicated online. Customer Service Awards should be developed by the town's retailers that would encourage staff in local businesses to excel in the area of service provision.
- h. Retailer training should be provided.

Possible Funding:

Cork County Council for town-centre improvements and painting scheme. Local Retailer Group for Customer Service Awards. Cork County Council, the Arts Council and the Irish Walled Towns Network for event funding. Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht for streetscape conservation.

Figure 3.1 **Kilkenny's medieval mile brand**



(Source: http://visitkilkenny.ie/irelands_medieval_mile, accessed 1/12/17)

Figures 3.2 & 3.3 **Improvements in the public realm, Westport, Co. Mayo**



(Source: Simon Wall, 2014)

Figure 3.4

Shopfronts on Oliver Plunkett Street



(Source: The Heritage Council, 2016)

Figure 3.5

Vacant shop units in the Rocks, Sydney are elegantly dressed so as to add to the streetscape and encourage new lease holders



(Source: The Heritage Council, 2016)

Issue Identified: Digitalisation of the Bandon town centre retail offering. The growth of e-commerce and m-commerce cannot be ignored, as shoppers increasingly divert their product service consumption from physical retail stores to virtual on-line offerings. Product related searches are also a common online activity prior to a visit to a retail town centre. While some individual retailers in Bandon have an on-line presence, the role of digital technology in enhancing the town centre customer experience is under-developed. Bandon town centre needs to become a virtual marketplace to ensure that consumers have timely and accurate information about the availability and location of retailers, their products, brands, services and events.

Policy:

Develop a digital strategy for Bandon town centre that enables technology to support rather than replace the town centre experience.

Actions:

- a. A town centre website needs to be developed that would be a virtual shopping centre for consumers. This will need a comprehensive marketing campaign for both market segments (local and tourist) and would also be effective in encouraging greater footfall to the town centre. Perhaps the town centre website could form part of a wider tourist website. Further research on the merits of this is required.
- b. Develop one-stop digital information points at each of the retail focal points. This should be supported by widely accessible wi-fi in the town and/or dedicated store-finder and brand-finder mobile phone apps.
- c. Existing community networks should be targeted with online advertising and calls to actions that encourage them to use town centre meeting places, particularly after work or during evenings. News of the free car parking availability throughout the town should be a key part of this campaign.

Possible Funding:

Local community enterprise funding.

Issue Identified: Traffic in the town centre gets very congested making for an unpleasant shopping experience.

Policy:

Encourage lorries to take the bypass. Promote traffic calming measures to slow town centre traffic.

Actions:

- a. Examine the bypass – possibly raise Kilbrittain road to make the bottom of the bypass less steep for trucks.
- b. Implement the Bandon Transportation and Public Realm Plan
- c. Develop a parking strategy that encourages people into the town. This may involve have longer hours of free parking in certain areas and directing consumers to free or low cost car parks.
- d. More bicycle stands and general improvement in cycling environment needed.
- e. Get rid of aggressive clamping signs coming into town and around the town. Clamping should no longer be continued. Fines would be a more suitable deterrent against inappropriate parking.

Possible Funding:

Cork County Council, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and TII.

4.0 Tourism

Mentor: Josephine O'Driscoll, Client Services Manager, Fáilte Ireland

Authors: Liam Mannix

Issue Identified: Bandon has a high number of places and stories that although attractive to tourists are not easily accessible or well known. Often what we think is ordinary, visitors think of as being extraordinary.

Policy:

Clearly identify the town's assets: cultural, heritage, retail, sporting, transport. Use them to attract visitors.

Actions:

- a. Knowledge of various places of interest and events should be collated and disseminated weekly during the tourist season (April-September). A part-time project manager should be contracted. Experiential packages involving music, sport, history and accommodation could be developed.
- b. Sheep's Hole and Rock's Hole swimming areas – where possible, make accessible for bathers and install interpretation (check out The Weir Pool in Thomastown and the Forty Foot in Dun Laoghaire for inspiration).
- c. Allmans Whiskey and Bass Ale – Their story in Bandon should be interpreted using events and signage.
- d. Little Norah soft drink – produce limited amount of the drink and sell only in Bandon.
- e. The Bandon Banshee – In Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, Gilderoy Lockhart claims to have defeated the Bandon Banshee. Local folklore should be consulted for evidence of a banshee. If one is present, the story could be interpreted and promoted.
- f. Greenway – complete path along Dublin rail line to Innishannon. In the long term investigate the feasibility of creating a greenway incorporating the Chetwynd Viaduct all the way to Cork. As part of this plan investigate connecting with Clonakilty and Kinsale along the route of the Cork, Bandon and South Coast Railway. This would create a strong network of greenway routes desirable for tourists and people living within County Cork. By involving the communities of Innishannon, Clonakilty and Kinsale the likelihood of funding being secured is increased considerably. The plan should be seen within the wider context of a great southern coast cycle route (i.e. connecting with the Waterford Greenway and its likely extension to New Ross and the planned greenway between Youghal and Macroom). The greenway must be complemented by a pleasant cycling environment in the town.
- g. Churches – Bandon has a fine collection of churches. The stained glass windows in St Patrick's Church are particularly noteworthy (figure 4.1). Develop a church trail with discreet on-site interpretation. Care must be taken so as to not undermine the religious character of the buildings (visit St Canice's Cathedral in Kilkenny for inspiration and advice). Close cooperation with the various congregations is essential.
- h. Sport – Matches at the local GAA pitch should be promoted. Many foreigners would also be interested in seeing road bowling and rugby matches. Local golfing opportunities should be promoted. There is good horse riding opportunities around Bandon. These too should be promoted.
- i. Horse riding – the horse riding possibilities need to be promoted locally and be part of packages for accommodation providers in the town and its hinterland.
- j. Fishing – the River Bandon's fishing possibilities need to be promoted locally and be part of packages for accommodation providers in the town and its hinterland. Rod rental and day fishing licences should be made easily available.

- k. Kayaking – create a feasibility study to ascertain the possibility of having seasonal kayak rentals in Bandon on the river. The initiative could include historic tours of the town via kayak and a kayaking blueway to Innishannon and Kinsale.
- l. The various local clubs (bridge, walking, cycling, etc) should be encouraged to develop events that would be attractive to people from clubs around the country and further afield. The events should be concentrated during the tourism season's shoulder periods of March, April, September and October.
- m. Set dancing – set dancing classes that are open to everyone should be promoted.
- n. Traditional music – pubs that have high quality traditional music sessions should be promoted. Traditional music sessions during the summer months should be encouraged through advice and small grants to cover the cost of quality musicians (consult the Lee Sessions project manager in Cork for advice).
- o. Graham Norton – After first consulting Graham, some of his best quotes could be inscribed in large print and installed along Main Street.
- p. Food – Bandon has a fine collection of quality restaurants and cafes. There is also a cookery school and an excellent farmer's market held each Saturday. This quality deserves greater visibility. A food festival celebrating what Bandon has to offer should be held during the tourism sector's shoulder period (e.g. checkout Savour Kilkenny and the Waterford Food Festival in Dungarvan for inspiration and guidance). The possibility of having the farmers market on both Saturday and Sunday during the tourist season should be investigated.
- q. Festivals – Bandon Walled Towns Day and the Music Festival are strong performers. They should be enhanced with additional funds, mentoring and training for organisers.
- r. Underground Bandon – There are crypts in the basement of the Methodist Church (figure 4.2). Across the river there are basement passages which were used during the War of Independence. A feasibility study should be created and the conservation requirements ascertained to create an underground tour of Bandon. If such an attraction was created, it would be like no other in Ireland.

Possible Funding:

The Arts Council, Fáilte Ireland, Cork County Council, IWTN and The Heritage Council.

Figure 4.1

Stained glass, St Patrick's Church



(Source: The Heritage Council, 2016)

Figure 4.2

Methodist Church



(Source: The Heritage Council, 2016)

Issue Identified: The West Cork Heritage Centre is an interesting attraction with low visitor numbers.

Policy:

Sustainably develop the heritage centre's potential.

Actions:

- a. Review how the centre is managed.
- b. Create regular opening hours for the West Cork Heritage Centre.
- c. Consider renaming to Bandon Heritage Centre.
- d. Develop a brand identity attractive to key audiences identified by Fáilte Ireland research.
- e. Create a simple, high quality website with images of the collection and site, opening hours, contact details for group bookings, location map, etc.
- f. Enhance the visual marketing of the museum within the town and via publicity material in Cork and Kerry.
- g. Train local volunteers to provide interesting tours of the heritage centre. The tours should be made available at regular times each opening day during the summer season and for groups.
- h. Conserve objects and the building as required (figure 4.3).
- i. Enter into the Museum Standards Programme of Ireland.
- j. The heritage centre should be the base for regular free historic tours of the town during the tourist season.
- k. As the recently discovered 17th town house on North Main Street becomes developed for tourists and the community, the heritage centre and the house should be managed and promoted together.

Possible Funding:

Fáilte Ireland, Cork County Council, IWTN and The Heritage Council.

Figure 4.3

Local Orange Order banner depicting King William of Orange, now undergoing conservation

(Source: The Heritage Council, 2016)

Issue Identified: The key story is that it is possible to tell the story of 17th century Ireland in Bandon.

Policy:

The 17th century story of Ireland through Bandon is the key to sustainably developing the town's tourist potential.

Actions:

- a. Focus should be placed on presenting a social history of 17th century Ireland rather than on kings.
- b. Create a feasibility study and conservation plan on how best to sustainably use the recently rediscovered 17th century house on North Main Street (figure 4.4). Investigate the rest of the street for other 17th century structures.
- c. Implement the recommendations of the Bandon Town Walls Conservation and Interpretation Plan (figure 4.5).

Possible Funding:

Fáilte Ireland, Cork County Council, IWTN and The Heritage Council.

Figure 4.4

17th Century house located behind later facade



(Source: The Heritage Council, 2016)

Figure 4.5

Section of 17th Century town wall leading to SuperValu



(Source: The Heritage Council, 2015)

Issue Identified: Local apathy.

Policy:

A lot of the public seem indifferent to what happens in their town. There is a need to generate interest and encourage more people to get involved in solving the town's problems.

Actions:

- a. Target more community groups across all ages. Give each group "action" tasks to solve a current identified issue. Give them a voice and see if we can get them interested.
- b. Build confidence, capacity and interest through training, mentoring and quick and easy wins.

Possible Funding:

Cork County Council, The Irish Walled Towns Network, The Heritage Council.

Issue Identified: Town seen as a place to bypass by tourists.

Policy:

Encourage those about to bypass the town to stop.

Actions:

- a. Develop striking signage and planting on the way into town that encourages those about to bypass Bandon to visit.
- b. Remove the negative signage concerning ticketing/clamping on the approach roads.
- c. Car parks should be easy to find with directional signage erected where required.
- d. Ensure that there are car parks that are free and/or low cost which encourage tourists to spend at least an afternoon exploring the town without ticket/clamping anxiety.
- e. The car parks should be well landscaped and have attractive signage and town maps with relevant information. There should be a suite of well-designed directional signage for pedestrians throughout the town.

Possible Funding:

Cork County Council.

Issue Identified: The town's online presence and marketing in general is poor.

Policy:

Once town branding has been created, focus on developing a marketing strategy facilitated by a revamped Bandon website, brochure and an active social media presence.

Actions:

- a. Redevelop bandon.ie as a tourist and retail focused website that is simple, clear and easy to navigate. It should render best for mobile usage. Check out www.carlingford.ie/, www.kinsale.ie/ and killarney.ie/ for inspiration.
- b. Develop a town brochure highlighting the main attractions.
- c. Develop a one day itinerary flyer.
- d. Enhance the presence of Bandon on [Tripadvisor](https://www.tripadvisor.com) and wildatlanticway.com.
- e. Create a bank of attractive images of the town and submit them to Fáilte Ireland's image content pool.
- f. Radically improve the town's social media presence. Create the stories!

Possible Funding:

Fáilte Ireland, Cork County Council, IWTN and The Heritage Council.

Issue Identified: Lack of cohesive cultural tourism product. Lack of awareness amongst prospective tourists of what Bandon has to offer.

Policy:

Focus on identifying and developing a unique brand identity that sums up what makes the town special and why people should visit. Enhance connections between local business, community and sport groups and the heritage centre. Cross promote with other nearby attractions. Cooperate with businesses and community groups in Innishannon.

Actions:

- a. Define a distinctive brand image. Create a brand that stands out and showcases the town's key attributes, particularly its 17th century origins.
 - b. Destination Bandon! Create a brand identity that sums up what makes the town special. Care should be exercised in not losing focus by falling into the trap of highlighting everything. Focus on the 17th century story of the town. Establish an elevator pitch focusing on Bandon's natural, built and intangible heritage.
 - c. Enhance links with surrounding towns and villages, particularly Innishannon.
- Branding is dealt with more comprehensively in the Retail section.

Possible Funding:

Fáilte Ireland and Cork County Council.

Issue Identified: Lack of accommodation.

Policy:

Improve the marketing of existing accommodation in the town and surrounding areas. Focus attention on the main accommodation facilities in the town, how they can be used to their maximum potential. Offer support and funding to those interested in developing other forms of accommodation, e.g. hostel, caravan/camping facilities, guesthouses, B&Bs, self catering.

Actions:

- a. Create a clear listing of accommodation in the town and surrounding area. Improve the marketing of available accommodation, particularly through the revamped bandon.ie.
- b. Identify sites that would suit a quality hostel. Develop a business case. The reuse of historic structures should be encouraged. Check out the Sallows Hostel in Clogheen for inspiration.
- c. Work with the Irish Landmark Trust on redeveloping a historic property for use as self catering accommodation.
- d. Create an area where overnight campervans are welcome. In Kinsale, Lidl has permitted the use of its carpark for overnight campervan stays. A more developed facility has been put in place in Cobh.

5.0 Planning

Mentor: Will Brady, Planning Lecturer, School of Planning, UCC

Author: Rita O'Driscoll

Introduction

The objective of those in the planning group was to identify Bandon's planning weaknesses and propose solutions. During the Saturday walkabout and subsequent workshop, the following structure to their analysis was adopted:

1. What was noticed on the Macroom Road approach?
2. What would entice a family to locate in Bandon?
3. Creative thinking: what development would the group like to see?
4. Ignore issues such as planning, ownership, access, right of ways and instead propose open-minded solutions.
5. Bandon hides its Main Street well, can this perception be changed?

It should be noted that while the group identified some properties by name, they in no way intend to upset these owners, as the exercise engaged in was purely visionary.

Kilbrogan Hill

The group identified the beautiful architecture in the area, particularly the Georgian houses with impressive arched doorways, almost all of which are mostly intact (figure 5.1). It was noted that most houses have changed to PVC windows. Two houses still have the original wooden sliding sash windows. Many doorways have limestone steps with shoe scrapers. The group identified the importance of conservation both here and throughout the town.

Figure 5.1 **Georgian houses on Kilbrogan Hill**



(Source: The Heritage Council, 2016)

The group identified the advantage of living close to the town centre. This enables walking access to the great majority of sport clubs, schools, clubs, shopping and night life, while maintaining a sense of community. This heightened the group's awareness of the importance to look at keeping development close to existing urban areas. The group were concerned at the idea of a new northern bypass as in the absence of plans for a full bypass it is likely to end up as another unfinished link. The danger is this will draw development away from the town centre toward the northern link, damaging the vibrancy of the town centre. Such development would feed the need for housing as a commuter belt to Cork rather than enhancing Bandon town.

At the rear of Christchurch the group identified a large town centre area with significant potential for a combination of development (e.g. downsizing housing, mews housing, architecturally well designed terrace housing in keeping with the proportions complementing the style of existing Kilbrogan architecture and a linear park) (figure 5.2).

The valley area is a good location for a linear park. This valley runs from the AFC Soccer Club on Macroom Road to the old Post Office/De Barras yard in the heart of the town. To landscape this linear park in a very simple manner would create a pleasant town centre park which would facilitate, dog walkers, families, students to St Brogan's school and workers at the Master Meat Packers factory. Presently, many students and the factory workers use the Old Cork road towards the town centre. This road is very narrow, has no footpaths and is dangerous for pedestrians. A linear park could alleviate this problem. This area is presently overgrown with trees and shrub but could be a very attractive to overlook with housing on the lower slope providing passive surveillance.

The Horgan site and the unused back gardens at Kilbrogan Hill were identified as an ideal area for the development of high quality housing. The advantages of this type of development would be: a) its proximity to the town centre, b) living near a park, c) encourage people to downsize as families disperse. This in turn would open up existing houses in the town to the market.

Figure 5.2 **Area for linear park and retirement/downsizing new housing**

Area of possible retirement/downsizing houses of high standard ●

Proposed route of linear park ●



(Source: Rita O'Driscoll, 2016)

Between Tobin's Lane and Emmet Row the group noticed how the area's attractive buildings were underappreciated due to the constant traffic engulfing the area. Landscaping, change of traffic flow and amended parking could all enhance this area. The Shambles Green should be redeveloped and made more family friendly (figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3 **The Shambles Green being used for Walled Towns Day**



(Source: The Heritage Council, 2014)

From the Courthouse and Town Hall there is a lack of proper signage to indicate a car park and children's playground. This area is linked by the foot bridge to the centre of town but the narrow entrance to the bridge corralling pedestrians and the lack of landscaping in an area diminishes its appeal. With plans for a new footbridge this is the time to enhance this whole area.

Deanes Yard

The rear of Deanes Hardware has an attractive lane with old stone buildings (figure 5.4). These should be conserved and used as units for artist and craft businesses. An appropriate model to follow would be the craft yard in Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny. If this lane is linked through the main premises or a neighbouring premises it would create a link from midway on McSwiney Quay to midway along South Main Street. The advantage of this development would be to entice more pedestrian traffic to the quay and promote retail/leisure development in this area which presently has many empty premises.

Figure 5.4

Deanes Yard



(Source: The Heritage Council, 2015)

Begley's Lane to Ballymoden Place

Begley's Lane is a much used link from the Quay to South Main Street and has so much more potential. It should be noted that premises are well painted and presented. Each Saturday at Ballymoden Place, under St Peter's Church, there is a successful and high quality farmers market. This whole area was identified for landscaping as a civic space with pedestrian priority. Thought should be given to allowing the Market to spill across the street for a few hours each Saturday. Consideration should be given to having the market take place on Friday's in addition to each Saturday during the tourist season. A busy market will attract people to the town and this will benefit all businesses in Bandon. This is a vital area for the future enhancement of the town. Several derelict buildings here and backing onto the adjacent car park need to be addressed.

The following image is of the old Supervalu premises and car park (figures 5.5 & 5.6). A proposal to create a new Town Square was put in the public domain in 2013 by Rita O'Driscoll when the site was for sale. Using photoshop an image was created to show the potential of the area with multiple uses for a civic space by removing the old supermarket and library. The linking arteries from Ballymoden, South Main Street and Market Street would open up a town square where adjacent bars and restaurants could have daytime alfresco areas creating a pleasant ambience in a family friendly public space. The new redevelopment of the elderly housing adjacent would enhance the area. The proposal got much public support.

Figures 5.5 & 5.6

Proposed new town square on old SuperValu site and existing library (marked in yellow)



(Source: Rita O'Driscoll, 2013)

South Main Street

Street lighting along the town's most important shopping street was identified as a serious problem. On dark winter evenings the lighting is dismal and does not create a pleasant atmosphere. The group identified the lack of cafes/restaurants for day/night life on the main street. Improvements throughout the town would attract more of these types of businesses. The junction of Bridge St/Pearse St/Bridge Lane is an area that merits attention. Traffic is high. This does not attract shoppers to this end of the street. Serious consideration should be given to the pedestrianisation of Bridge Lane and making Pearse Street pedestrian priority. A civic space at this point would entice pedestrians from the top of South Main Street, helping to balance the town.

Harte's Car Park and Patrick's Quay

Harte's car park and Patrick's Quay requires urgent improvement as traffic entering the town travels along this section and does not see the South Main Street (figure 5.7). Therefore, it is vital this area entices travellers to stop at this point. The streetscape facades need to be enhanced and the public realm in general improved. Artists could be commissioned to create interesting interventions along Patrick's Quay.

Figure 5.7

Patrick's Quay



(Source: The Heritage Council, 2015)

The River

In recent times the river has been seen as a threat but with remedial work taking place it should now be promoted for leisure (e.g. canoeing, fishing, nature trails and walking). The river is dealt with more comprehensively in the Tourism section of this document.

Conclusion

The general feeling was traffic is choking Bandon town. The lack of action to improve the junction of the Bypass/Killbrittain Road was seen as being largely responsible for this. Heavy duty trucks will have to be removed from the town to allow a civic spirit to ignite. It was felt the partial Northern bypass proposal would do more damage to the town as it will bring trucks down one of the most architectural appealing streets, Kilbrogan Hill.

The planning group started this workshop to identify Bandon's weaknesses and propose solutions. They identified that Bandon has many strengths but general decay has undermined their merits.

Their key recommendations are:

1. It is essential that the junction at Kilbrittain Road/Bypass be improved so that heavy-duty trucks can be removed from the town. The town is choked by traffic and it needs to be reclaimed for the civic good.
2. The architecture is underestimated and must be embraced, conserved and appropriately reused. Active encouragement and support is to be given to businesses and residents to improve and maintain buildings.
3. Urgent need for Leadership. Now that Town Councils no longer exist Bandon needs a Coordinator/Leader. A town team made up of a cross section of community sector, private sector and public sector representatives is essential.
4. The development of a design/architectural detail guide should be urgently developed.
5. Hidden green areas within the town basin should be identified for quality development to entice town living.
6. Create small pockets of play facilities dotted around the town so that parents walking children can stop for short periods, shop and have a meal.
7. Hotel development should be encouraged.
8. Swimming pool and cinema required. Perhaps this could be in tandem with a hotel.
9. Music venues and night life should be developed.
10. The river area should be developed for leisure. This would reduce anti-social behaviour.

Notes

Notes



**Bandon Walled Town
Committee**

