Letterkenny: Heart of Donegal
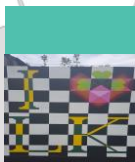
LETTERKENNY

October 2018

Comhairle Contae
Dhún na nGall
Donegal County Council

RGDATA
LOCAL SHOPS - LOCAL COMMUNITIES

QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST
ESTP1845

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all of the individuals and organisations who assisted in the completion of this research by generously offering their time and expertise with special thanks to Eunan Quinn and Sinead McAuley (Donegal County Council) for acting as clients and Ali Harvey (Heritage Council) for her generous support of this project.

Dr Neil Galway and MSc Planning & Development students

MSc Planning and Development students being briefed at Dillon's Hotel in January 2018

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Many town centres across Ireland face the myriad challenges of vacancy associated with declining High Streets, low residential populations, car-dominated streets and tired public spaces. The students completing the MSc Planning and Development programme were tasked with considering how town centres can adapt to these challenges by creating an Urban Design Strategy and thematic Town Centre Plans for Letterkenny. These modules were completed with the planning staff in Donegal County Council Development Plan team acting as client.

Letterkenny, as the largest town in Donegal, is not only the county's commercial centre but it also services the cross-border rural hinterland of the Northwest Region with Derry.

It also acts as a gateway to the popular tourist destinations for which the county is best known with the Wild Atlantic Way and the nearby Glenveagh National Park being part of the reason why Donegal was ranked top of National Geographic's Cool List in 2017. [1]

Methodology

During two field trips to Letterkenny in January and February 2018, MSc planning students completed urban design analysis, land use surveys, pedestrian counts, public and retailer questionnaires and interviews with key stakeholders to gain an understanding of how the town centre functions.


The class were briefed by council staff on the existing plan for the town and their initial concepts were critiqued in Belfast by representatives of Donegal County Council, the Heritage Council, RG Data and the Cathedral Quarter Group in March. After submitting their reports they were invited back to Letterkenny in June to present a series of their ideas at a workshop for councillors and local stakeholders. This event was part of a wider consultation exercise for the council's emerging plan for Letterkenny.

[1] http://www.natgeotraveller.co.uk/smart-travel/features/cool-list-17-2017/

2. Historical Development of Letterkenny

Letterkenny is described in the Civil Survey of 1654 as *"a town wch hath a Markett evry ffryday and two faires in the yeare, with a large stone house, a bawne of fower flankers, a faire Church and a bridge at the east end of the river Swolly".*

Today the town's identifiable Main Street spine dates to the mid-Nineteenth century when the town's "expansive prosperity" was subject of comment (see right – with 1837-42 six inch map OSI inset). This expansion was due to burgeoning trade and commerce with a weekly steamer to Glasgow in peak summer months.
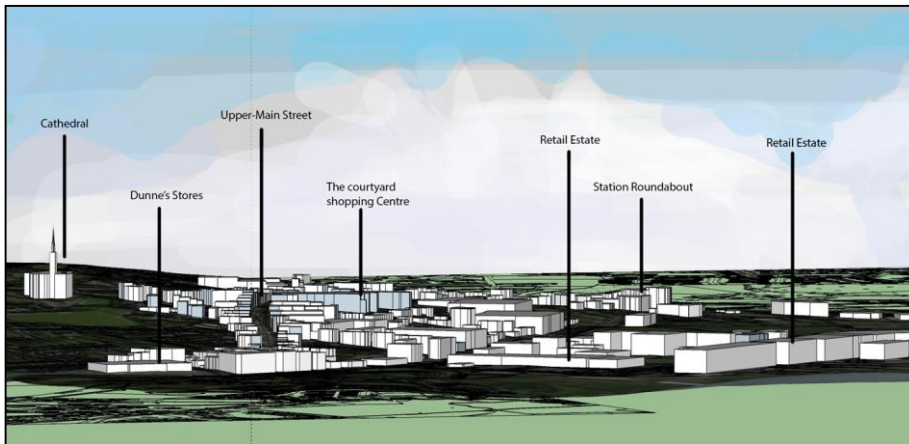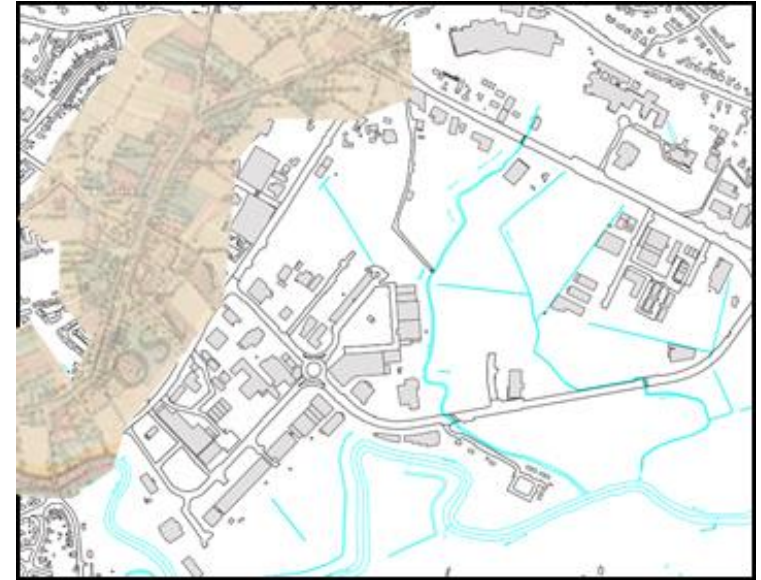

Letterkenny's topography was central to the development of the town: *"Set in a peaceful landscape of lush meadows backed by mountain screens, the town still has the air of a big village, and rather an untidy one, lacking architectural accents. It consists principally of one main street straggling up the side of a steep hill and down again"* [2].

In recent years, the town has expanded to the Southeast into the lower lying meadows with large retail warehouse developments and the new council building at the eastern edge of the large town centre boundary.

[2] Rowan, A. (1979) *Buildings of Ireland: North West Ulster,* London: Penguin
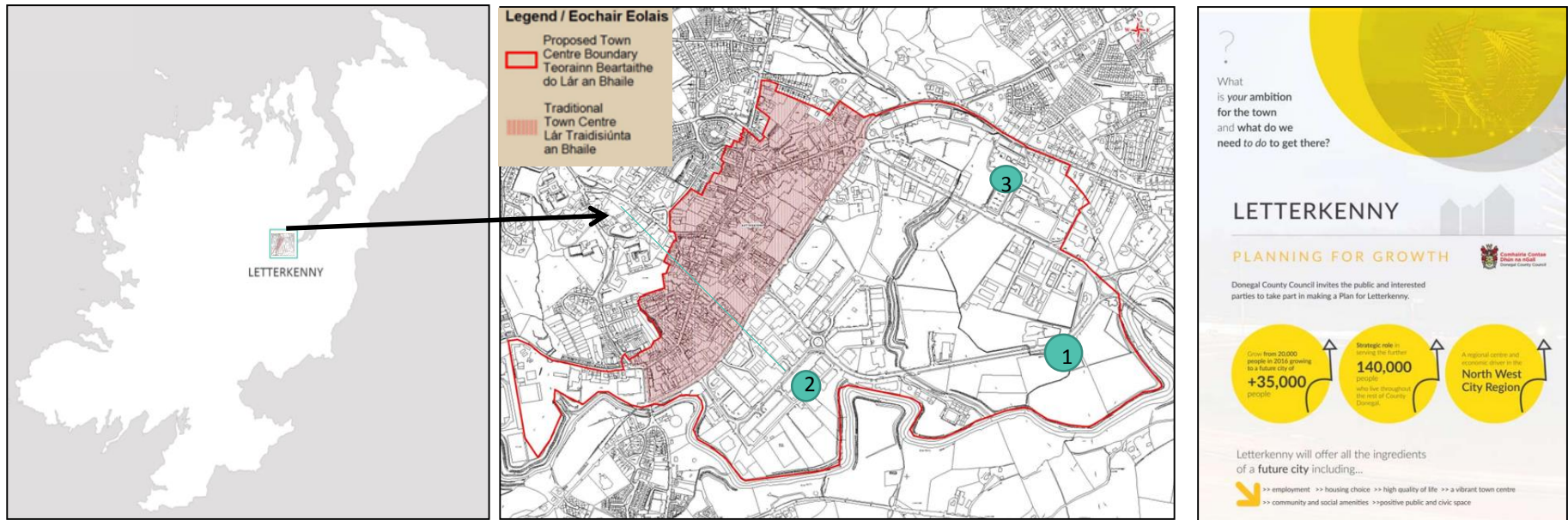
Letterkenny is the commercial heart of Donegal with a population of 19,274 which is almost three times more than the second largest town of Buncrana (6785 occupants - CSO: 2016 census). The extent of the study area was set to correspond with the proposed town centre boundary in Draft County Donegal Development Plan 2018-2024 (see above centre and Appendix 1).

This boundary zoning clearly identifies the traditional town centre around Main Street but it also includes a significant amount of land to the east of this area. This reflects the ambition to grow Letterkenny's town centre uses between Main Street and new council building at point 1 on the above map. These lands include undeveloped infilled land, industrial units, retail park development (marked 2) and Letterkenny Institute of Technology (marked 3).

The project parameters reflected the council's aspiration to grow Letterkenny to 35,000 by 2038. The student brief was to plan for a liveable Letterkenny with a town centre that catered for all ages and household types.

This report is a summary of some of the student projects that were devised by the class in close consultation with the people of Letterkenny. The following pages summarise the students' analysis of the town centre land uses and footfall before the report moves into specific thematic sections with analysis and projects on: Town Centre Living; Commercial and Retail; Public Realm; Tourism, Cultural and Built Heritage; and Movement and Access.
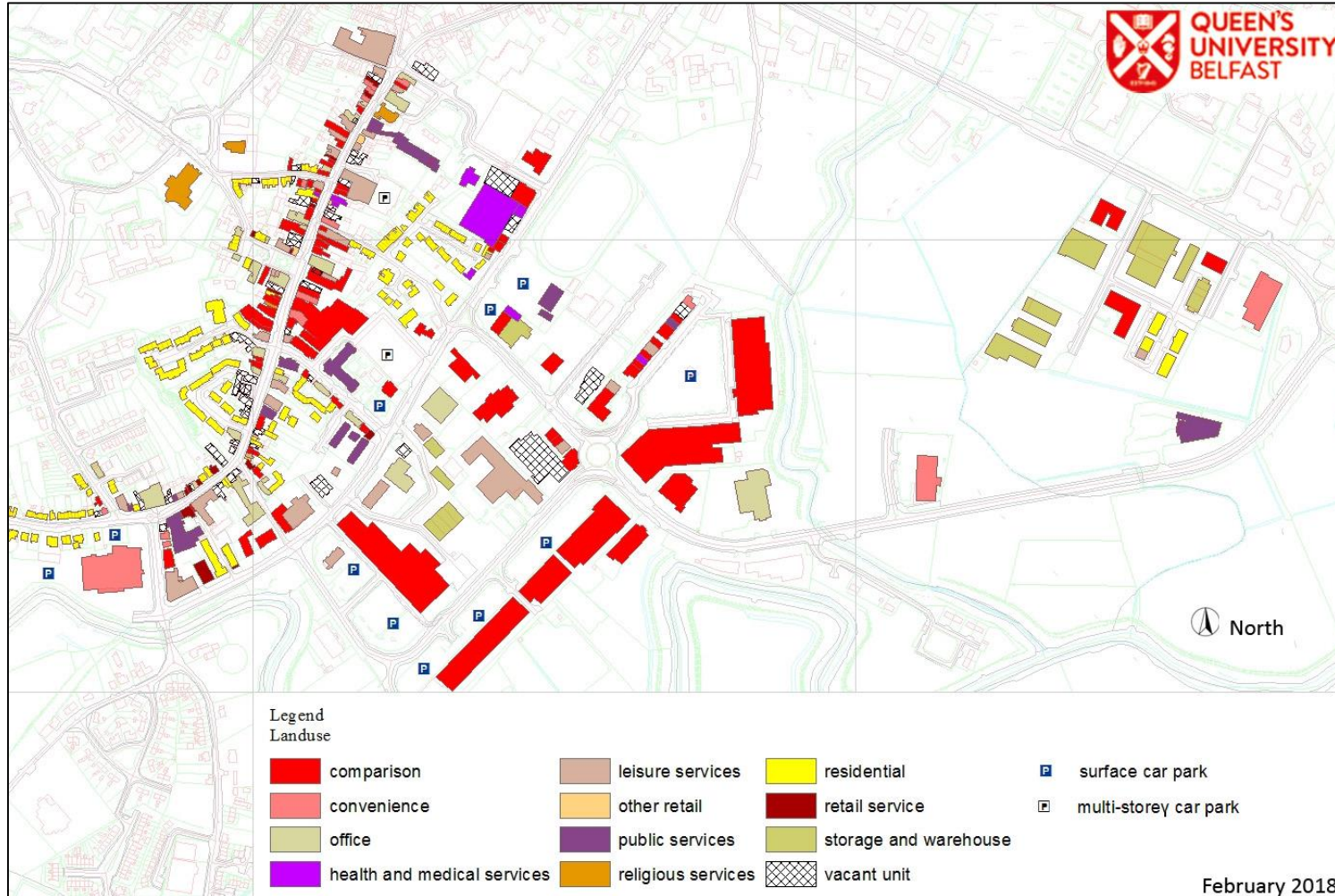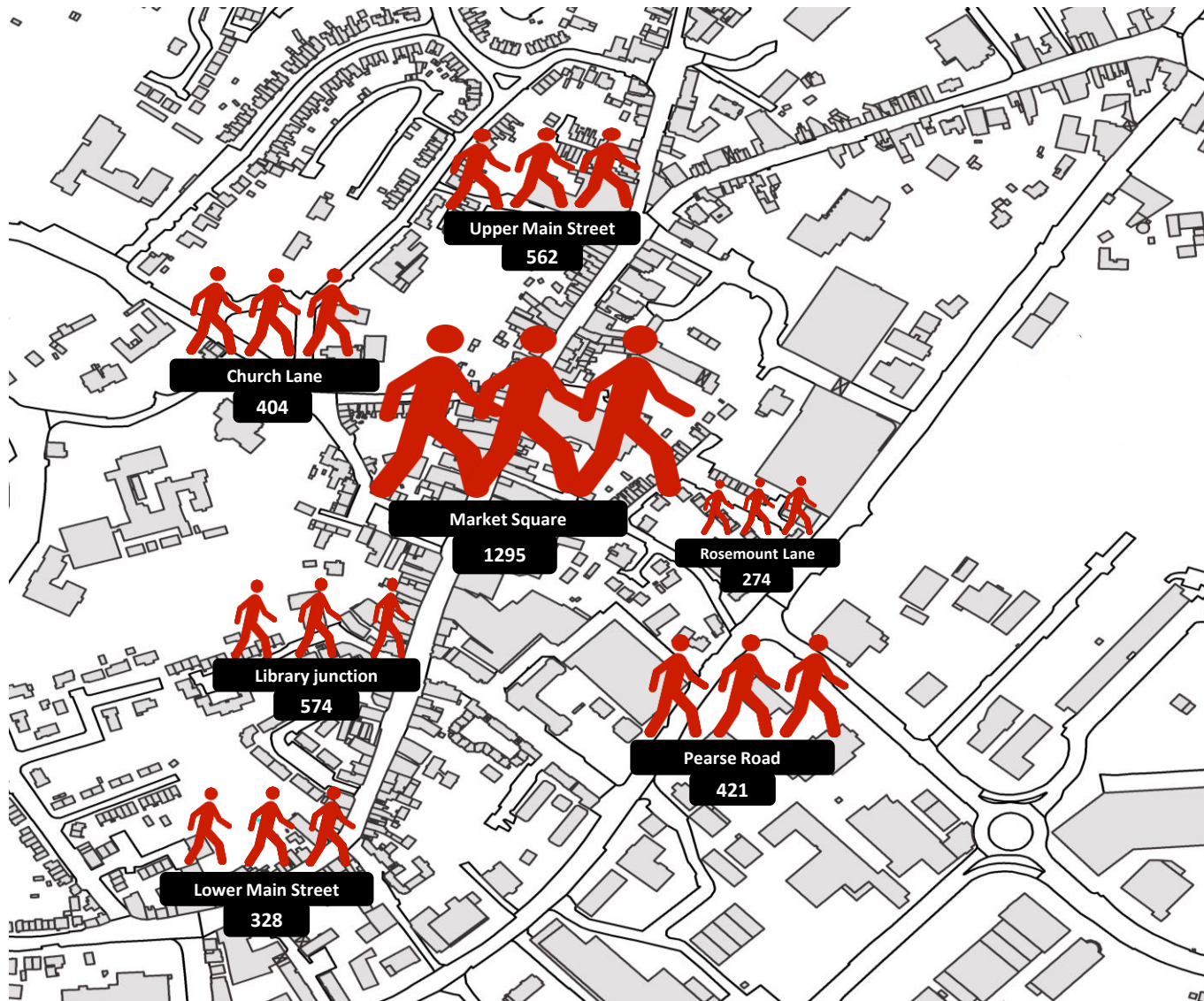
18%
Main Street Ground floor vacancy rate

Land uses were recorded using the GOAD classification (see appendix 2). The land use map shows how much retail floor space was created to the southeast of Main Street during the Celtic Tiger period. It also illustrates pockets of dereliction and vacancy in Lower Main Street.

Legend
Landuse

comparison	leisure services	residential	P surface car park
convenience	other retail	retail service	multi-storey car park
office	public services	storage and warehouse	
health and medical services	religious services	vacant unit	

North

February 2018

Colour code utilised from Heritage Council's Pilot Town Centre Health Check methodology.

Survey of Footfall in Letterkenny Town Centre

Upper Main Street
562

Church Lane
404

Market Square
1295

Rosemount Lane
274

Library junction
574

Pearse Road
421

Lower Main Street
328

Pedestrian counts were undertaken at seven count points within the town centre, at three different intervals on Friday 2nd and Saturday 3rd of February, 2018.

The predominantly cold and wet weather conditions experienced during the survey analysis could have impacted upon the footfall experienced on a Friday and Saturday.

Letterkenny Project Proposals
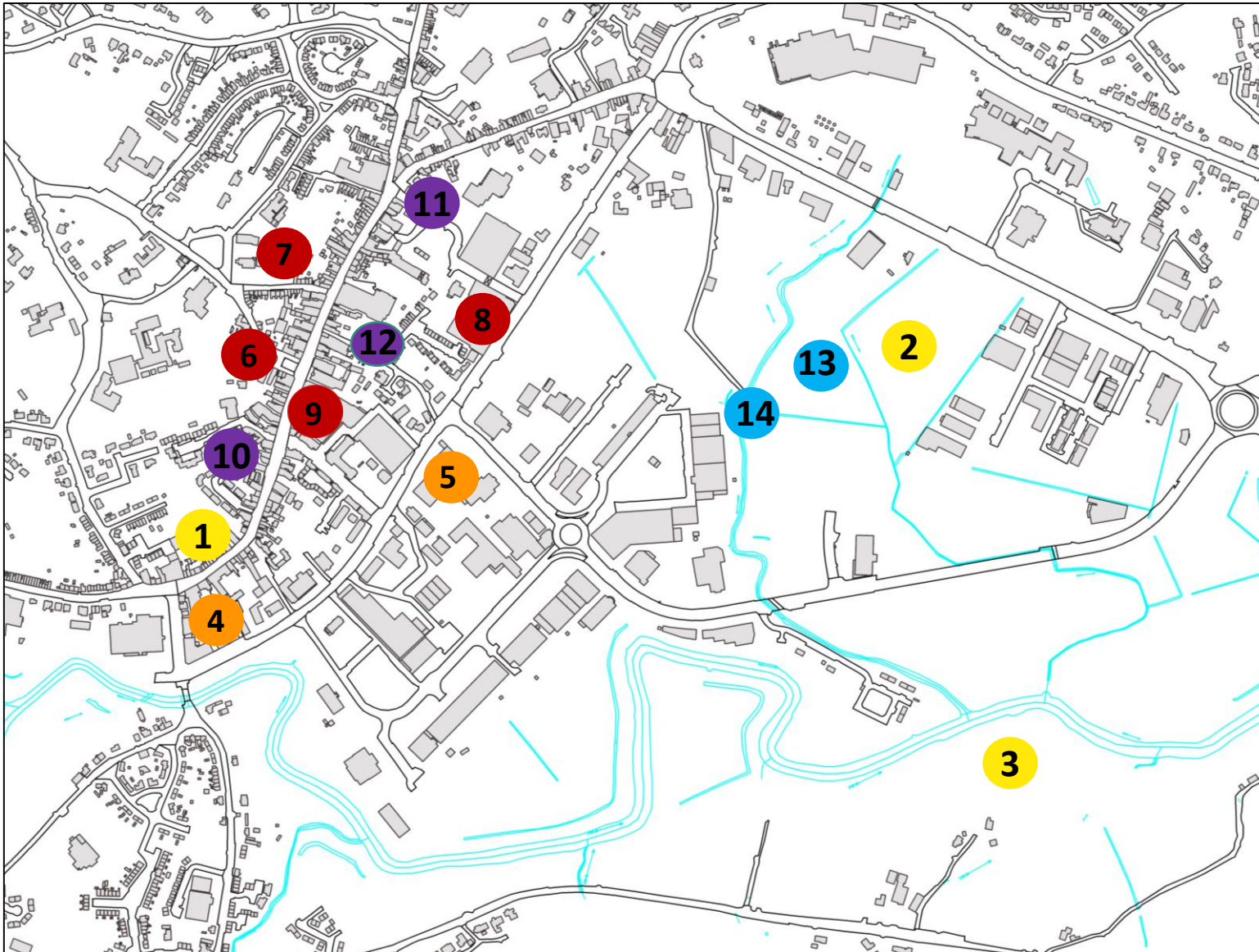
HOUSING
1. Living above the shops
2. Mixed-use residential development
3. Riverside Housing

COMMERCIAL & RETAIL

4. Pop-Up shops
5. Mixed-use development

PUBLIC REALM
6. Market Square
7. Church Lane
8. Carpark greening initiative
9. Parklets

TOURISM, CULTURAL AND BUILT HERITAGE
10. Charles Kelly building
11. Courthouse
12. Laneways / Slip Strategy

MOVEMENT & ACCESSIBILITY
13. Transport Hub
14. Greenway

4. TOWN CENTRE LIVING

Numerous residential pockets exist within the town centre. However, much of the housing in the traditional town centre is characterised by poor quality and substandard properties resulting in vacancy and undesirability. A further characteristic of the town centre is underdeveloped land and gap sites which accentuate the disjointed and disconnected nature of Letterkenny town centre.

The Riverside Apartments located between Pearse Road and lower Main Street exemplify the current issue of poor design and poor quality of many of inner town centre accommodation.

Service Provision

- Primary and post-primary schools are experiencing oversubscription and are currently insufficient to meet projected population increases.

- The current healthcare provision would be insufficient to service the projected population growth rate of Letterkenny town centre.

Key
Existing residential pockets
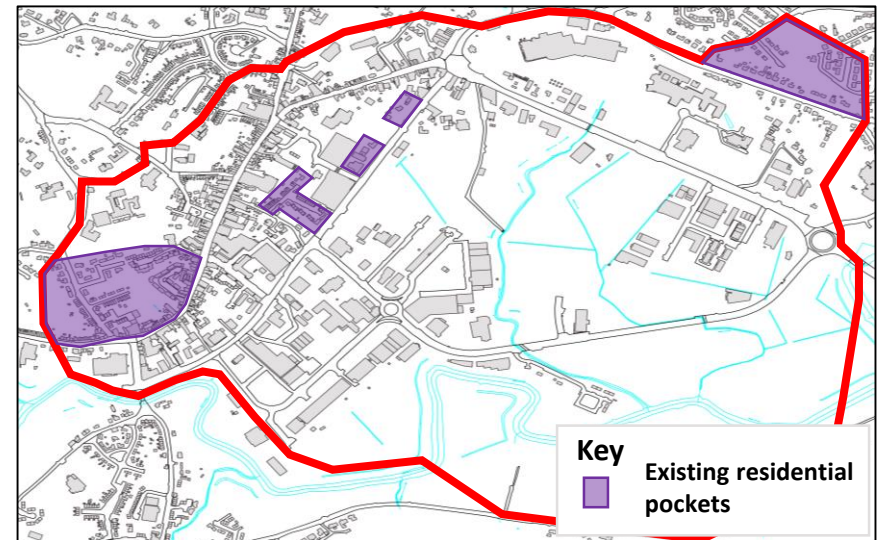
Respondents' Opinions of Town Centre Living and Green Space

Housing desirability in Letterkenny Town Centre

53% of respondents indicated a desire for more mixed housing developments

35% of respondents identified a need for more affordable and social housing

What type of new housing would you like to see more of?

- Above the shop **8%**
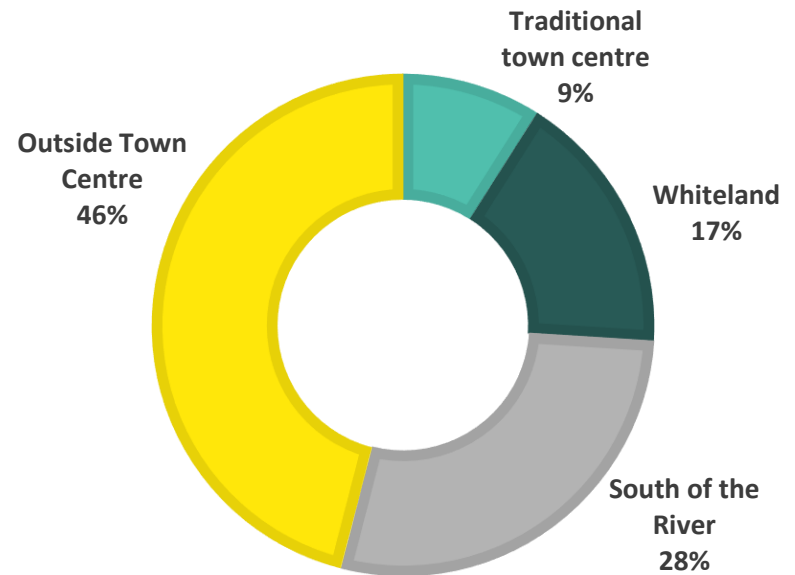- Town houses **10%**
- Detached **12%**
- Apartment **12%**
- Mixed **26%**
- Semi-detached **32%**

32% of respondents wanted a greenway in Letterkenny

Where would you like new housing to be located?

- Outside Town Centre **46%**
- Traditional town centre **9%**
- Whiteland **17%**
- South of the River **28%**

Importance of green space

58% of respondents stated there is currently a lack of green space in the town centre

51% of respondents expressed a desire for the incorporation of green space into new housing developments

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Proposal 1
Living Over The Shops

The promotion of housing in the traditional town centre, primarily in the form of converted above the shop space, provides sustainable development and regeneration. Living over the shop (LOTS) allows for the integration of communities together with the appropriate level of infrastructure and service provision.

Traditional town centre living will increase demand on retail and commercial services, boosting the local economy and creating a vibrant town centre. This would promote further investment and an attractive place to live. The scheme to the right is a good example from a Heritage Lottery Funded project in Bridge Street in Lisburn.

The implementation of LOTS could help to tackle the lack of available social housing by providing the funding to complete the necessary repairs of suitable vacant upper floor spaces to bring them up to liveable standards.

BEFORE   **AFTER**

Image source: Orla Murphy – Town : https://vimeo.com/98429001

Proposal 2
Mixed-Use Development

Mixed-use development offers a combination of residential and non-residential units which complement each other, providing urban-style living with walkable communities.

The economically underperforming site composed of the whiteland located between Pearse Road and Port Road presents a prime opportunity for a mixed-use development where there would be a presumption in favour of mixed tenure including a 15% provision for social and affordable housing. The necessary service provision for a growing population would be incorporated into the development, including a primary and secondary school, healthcare and a care home.

Legend:
- Transport hub
- Mixed housing
- Secondary school
- Student Housing
- Primary school
- GP and care home
- Community facilities
- Enterprise zone

The provision of high quality, high density sustainable housing ensures the maximum number of housing units available to meet the needs of a growing population and will encourage town centre living.

Benefits

- Provides greater housing variety and density
- Reduces distances between housing, workplaces, retail businesses and other amenities
- Reduces reliance on the car
- Creates a strong neighbourhood character and sense of place
- Incorporates green, open space
- Promotes a pedestrian and bicycle-friendly environment
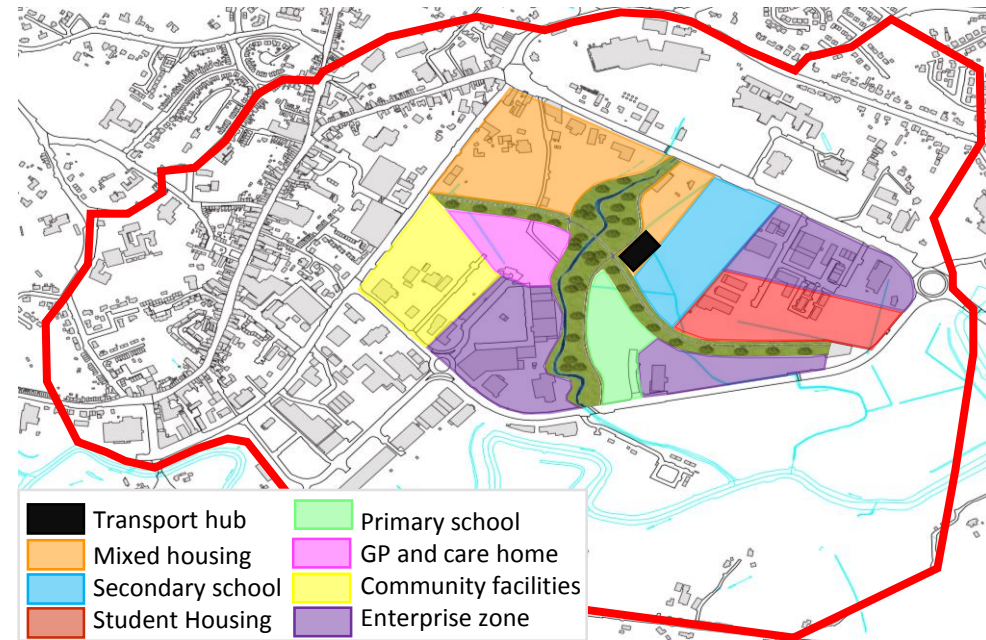
Proposal 3
Riverside Housing

Embracing the River Swilly and providing lower density housing on the whiteland North and South of the river will add to the variety of housing within the town centre, as well as creating an attractive and sustainable environment for residents and visitors.

It is acknowledged that Letterkenny presents a flood risk; however, development could be acceptable on the land North and South of the River Swilly if the appropriate mitigation measures are put in place.

Key

■ Proposed area for riverside housing

Potential Development at Leck Road
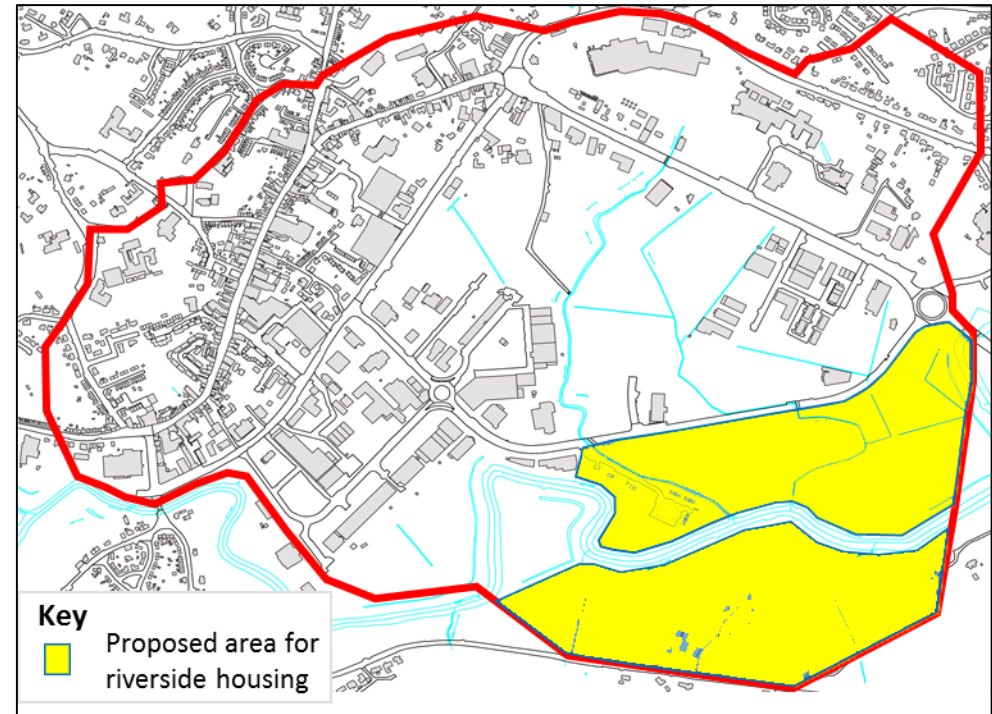
5. COMMERCIAL AND RETAIL

The commercial and retail sector is separated into two areas: Main Street and the retail park. Main Street is composed of mixture of independently owned businesses, cafés, bars and restaurants. The retail park is composed of multi-national stores, entertainment services and car dealerships. There is noticeable disconnection between the the two main retail areas due to the poor walkability of parts of the town.
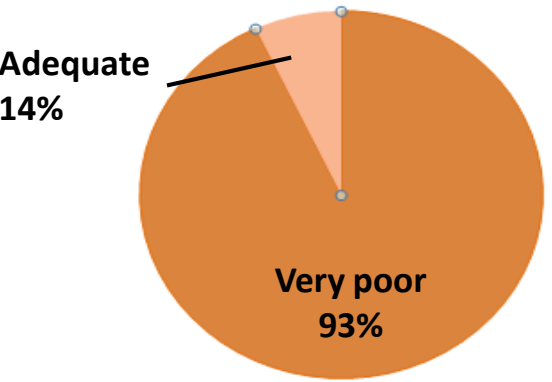
Main Street is currently negatively impacted by vacant units and dead frontages, which breaks up the coherence and continuity of the streetscape and detracts from the vibrancy of the local street life. Vacancy is also an issue within the retail park and adjacent industrial area as large units are sitting vacant.

Dead frontages
Vacant unit
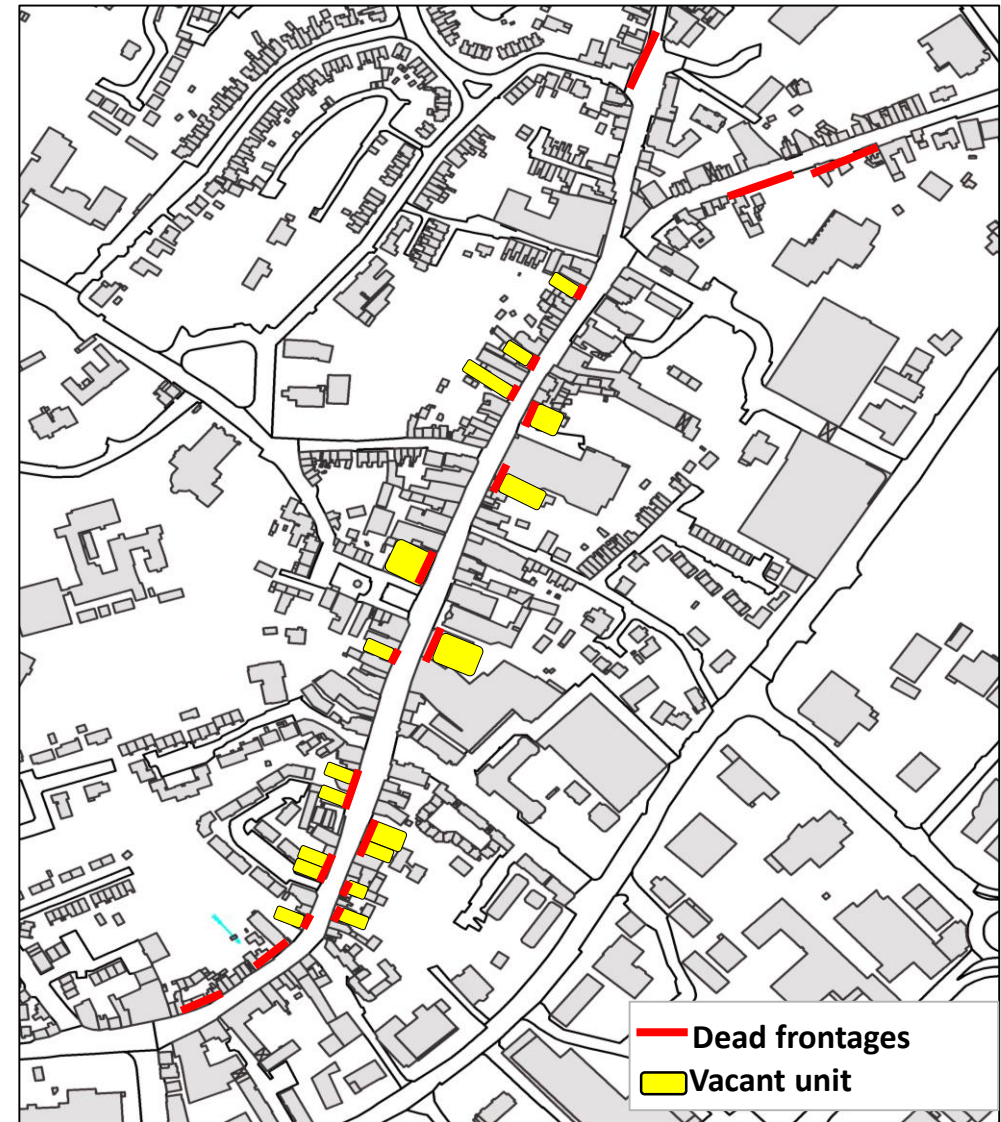
Map showing dead frontages and vacant units on Main Street

Business Owners' and Shoppers' Opinions of the Retail Sector in Letterkenny Town Centre

Land Use in Letterkenny Town Centre

Perception of connections between Main Street and the retail parks
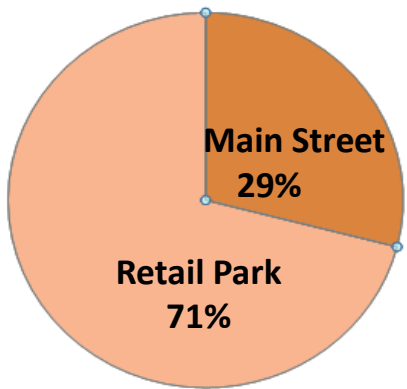
Adequate 14%

Very poor 93%

68% of Main Street retailers felt business would suffer if on-street parking was removed….
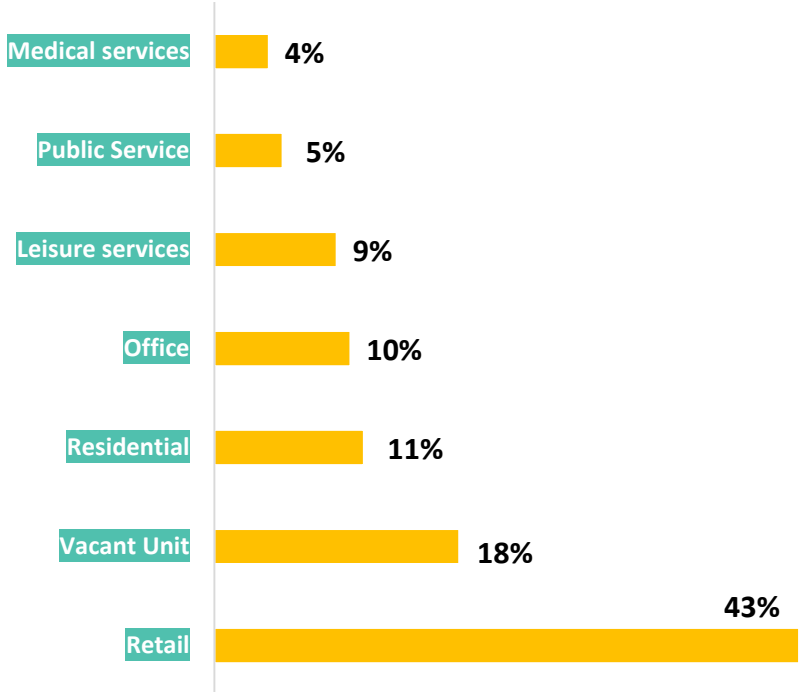
… however, 61% of shoppers felt they would be more inclined to shop on the Main Street if it was less car dominated.

What is your preferred shopping location?

Main Street 29%

Retail Park 71%

Medical services — 4%
Public Service — 5%
Leisure services — 9%
Office — 10%
Residential — 11%
Vacant Unit — 18%
Retail — 43%

Main Street vacancy

18%
Ground floor vacancy rate

BREXIT

The Impact of Brexit on Trading

87% of business operators stated they have noticed a decrease in cross-border trade since the announcement of Brexit

93% of business operators believe that Brexit will have a negative impact on their business

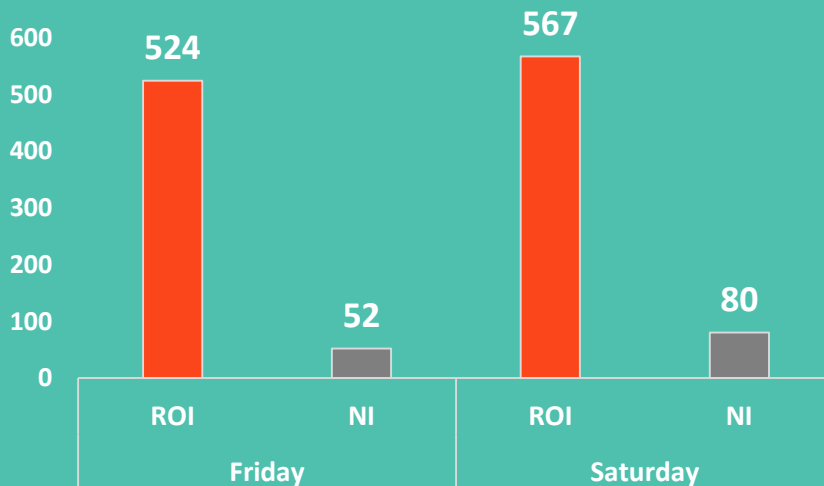**Derry/Strabane and Donegal Paper on Initial Analysis of the Impacts of BREXIT (2017):**

"Peripherality challenges in NW Region will only be compounded by the changes that Brexit will bring."

"The truth about the impact of Brexit is that it is uncertain, beyond the ability of any human being to forecast and almost entirely dependent on how the process will be managed. 'Don't know' is the technically correct answer."
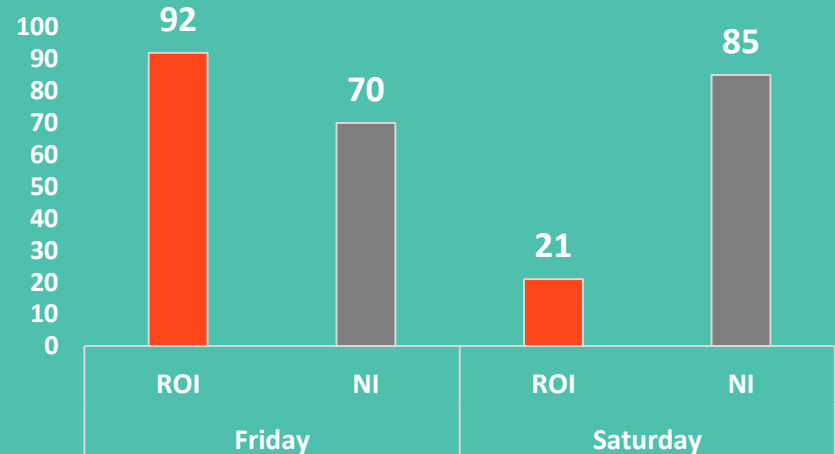
https://www.ulster.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/181415/DCSDC_Brexit_Analysis.pdf

Car registration counts taken from Main Street and the retail park over Friday and Saturday
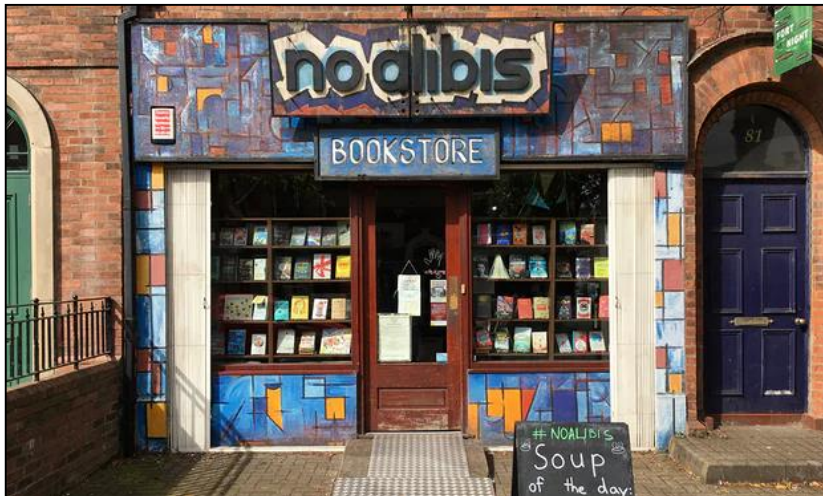
Retail Park

	Friday		Saturday	
	ROI	NI	ROI	NI
	524	52	567	80

Main Street

	Friday		Saturday	
	ROI	NI	ROI	NI
	92	70	21	85

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Proposal 4
Temporary and 'Pop-Up' Retail Units

'Pop-up shops' would attract local entrepreneurs who want to try out new ideas, offer new products and attract new customers, generating footfall for neighbouring retail outlets.

Pop-up shops aim to breathe new life into the town centre by promoting temporary uses of vacant premises for entrepreneurs trading food produce, arts and crafts and small home-based businesses. The pop-up uses have the possibility of adding to the economic activity of Main Street, whilst increasing the likelihood of a long-term tenant.

In the "Age of Experience", some traditional shops are adapting to become "third places" that offer experiences and spaces of interaction which online retailers cannot. For instance, No Alibis in Belfast holds regular concerts and readings to broaden its appeal.

Somewhereto_ offers an interesting example for the reuse of vacancy commercial premises. It is a UK-wide, Big Lottery-funded project that helps young people aged 16-25 to access underused or vacant spaces. It lets them find new platforms for their talents, build networks of peer support, and obtain skills endorsement to help them to pursue the things they love in enterprise, art, culture, and sport.

(http://www.placeni.org/somewhereto.html)

Proposal 5
Mixed-Use Development

Mixed-use development can blend retail, commercial, residential and leisure uses, where those functions are physically and functionally integrated, and is often the key to revitalising otherwise underdeveloped or blighted areas.

The economically underperforming site composed of the vacant warehouses on Pearse Road presents a prime opportunity for a mixed-use development where there would be a presumption in favour of retail and commercial at ground floor level, and residential and office space on upper floors.

Vacant and derelict warehouses on Pearse Road at the entrance to the retail park are unattractive and uninviting

Benefits
- Stimulates variety in the built environment
- Promotes dense, compact and efficient use of land
- Creates walkable and accessible environments
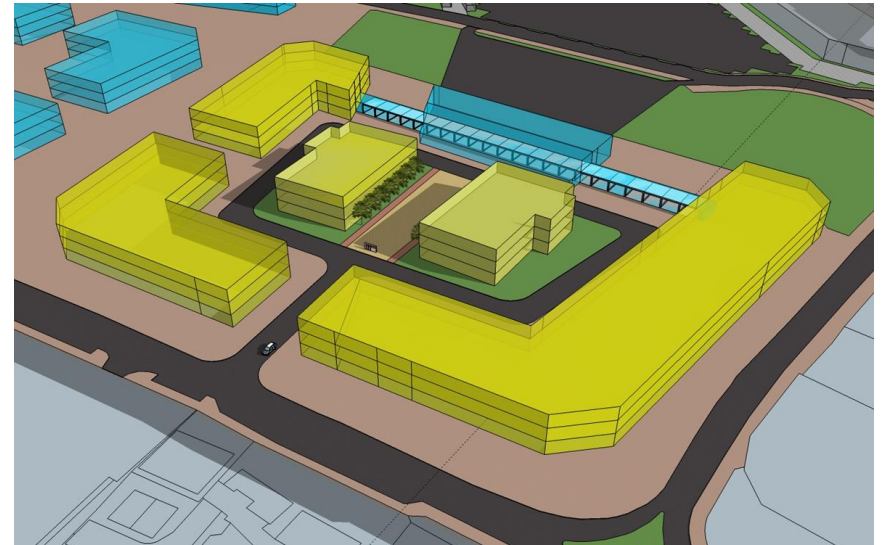
6. PUBLIC REALM
Current Situation

Market Square

Observations of the market square revealed that it was enclosed, inaccessible and claustrophobic. The multi-level layout as well as numerous obstructions including the monument, benches and over-grown trees contributed to the under-use of the space.

Cathedral Quarter

The historical and cultural significance of the Cathedral Quarter has made it a place of investment, through the grass-roots urban rejuvenation project, which centred around breathing new life into an old and historic local street, Church Lane. Physical restoration to building fronts, as well as organised local events have encouraged independently-run businesses, such as a café, florist and vegan food store, to set up shop on Church Lane.

The undeveloped site on Church Lane, opposite St Eunan's Cathedral, presents a prime opportunity to introduce further revitalisation into the Cathedral Quarter, and add to its local and touristic interest.



The current enclosed and inaccessible Market Square

St Eunan's Cathedral serves as a focal point due to its scale and hilltop location.

The undeveloped site on Church Lane is a prime opportunity for rejuvenation

Public Perception of Public Space Quality in Letterkenny

How would you rate the quality of Main Street?

- Poor 12%
- Unsatisfactory 15%
- Satisfactory 42%
- Good 18%
- Excellent 13%
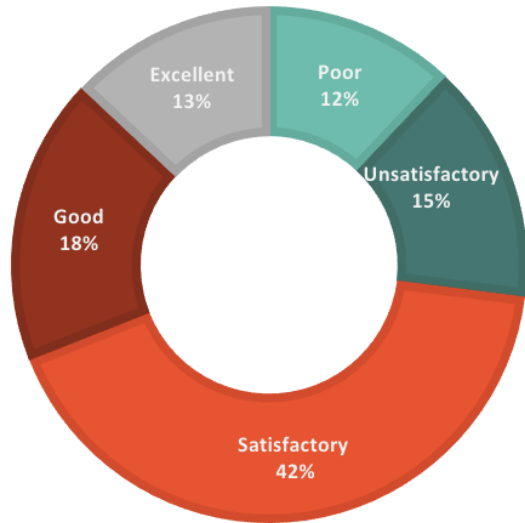
Just over two-thirds of respondents felt that there was insufficient town centre parking...

However, the majority of respondents demonstrated a lack of knowledge and awareness of existing car parking facilities throughout the town centre
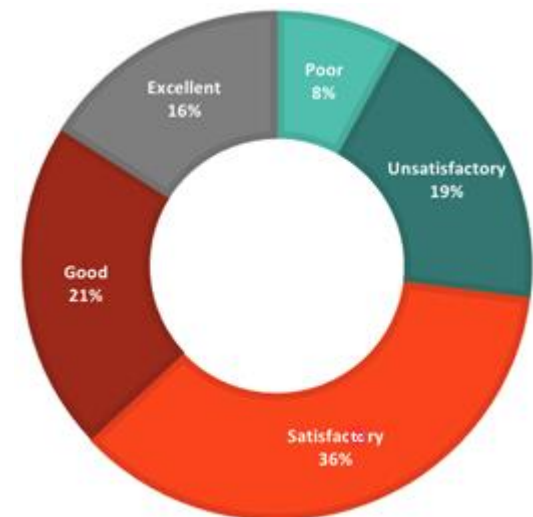
80% of respondents travelled into Letterkenny town centre by car

58% of respondents felt that there was not enough public and outdoor space in the town centre

How would you rate the quality of Cathedral Quarter?

- Poor 8%
- Unsatisfactory 19%
- Satisfactory 36%
- Good 21%
- Excellent 16%

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Project 6
Market Square Redevelopment

"Towns used to have town squares. A space where people gathered. A place where ideas were shared, where art was born, where businesses were started and philosophies debated. Possibility lived here. It was the heart of the city."

Redevelopment of the market square would create an open, accessible and reenergised public space which the whole community could enjoy. The historical market background could be reinstated in the new more open public square, fostering the community ethos to create a heart of the town.

Project 7
Church Lane Gap Site

Development of the Church Lane gap site could enhance the Cathedral Quarter by providing a user-friendly, functional and versatile open space. The design proposal incorporates an amphitheatre and could accommodate the reinstallation of the bandstand from Market Square. For this space to work it requires active stewardship which should include a programme of events to animate this new place. The detailed design ought to consider an appropriate mix between active and passive design elements to create an intergenerational appeal.

Project 8
Carpark Greening Initiative

Lack of awareness of multi-storey car parks exists in Letterkenny town centre. Incorporating a living wall or rooftop garden would make carparks a place of interest, thereby increasing common knowledge of their existence.

Living Wall

Greenery can be used to transform functional buildings, such as multi-storey car parks, into a fine example of sustainability, while also adding aesthetic improvements and biodiversity.
Environmental benefits of a living wall include attraction of wildlife, CO_2 absorption and filtering of rainwater.

Rooftop Garden

Underutilised space from the rooftop of multi-storey carparks can be converted into garden spaces for the community.
A rooftop garden provides not only decorative benefits, but provides a smart way to enjoy a tranquil space in the heart of the town centre, where green space is lacking.

Ireland's first green wall at Skainos Centre, Belfast - https://www.skainos.org/about-us/

Underutilised multi-storey car park on Pearse Road

Multi-storey carpark roof transformation

Key

Underutilised multi-storey carparks

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Public Realm
Laneways

The revitalisation of the alley ways will reinforce a positive image of an urban environment, repair missing links and re-stitch Letterkenny, addressing the disconnection between traditional town centre and the retail park.

A harmonious and walkable environment could be created through a strategy comprising repaving, improved lighting, CCTV and the introduction of street art.

Public Realm
Greening Initiative and Street Furniture

The current vegetation present in the traditional town centre is overgrown and inappropriate in scale, causing visual obstruction and over-dominance. Vegetation could be used to create visual interest, and to spatially organise and soften the built environment.

The overgrown and inappropriately scaled vegetation currently existing in Market Square

Whilst the quantity of street furniture in the town centre could be deemed acceptable, the quality and positioning could be improved as a lack of uniform light structures and benches were observed.

Aesthetic improvements to the style and continuity of the existing street furniture could make the street feel vibrant and user-friendly.
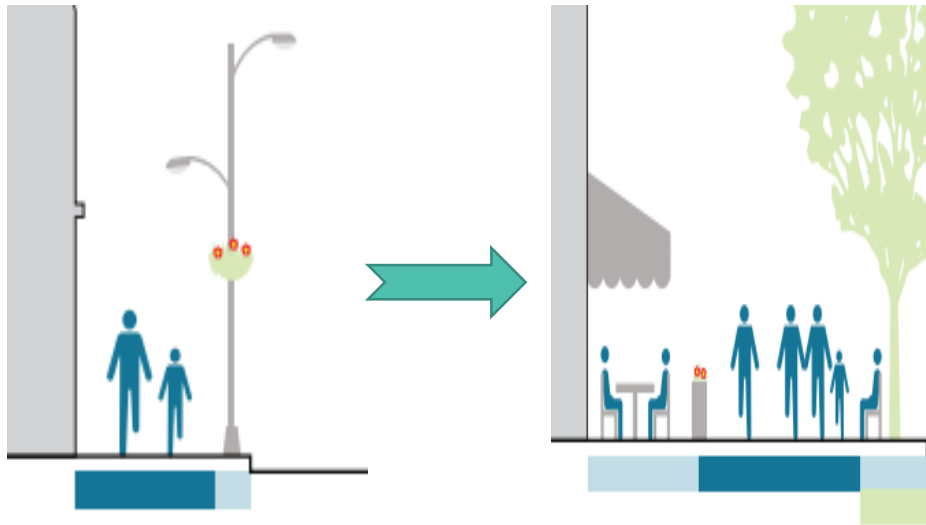

Updated street furniture has been introduced on part of Main Street, however, lower Main street remains neglected, discouraging footfall.

Public Realm
Pedestrian vs Car Dominant

There is a perception among locals that there is nowhere to park in the centre of Letterkenny, however, the private multi-storey car parks can accommodate over 1,200 cars and are all within a five minute walk, or less, from the main street.

The current car dominant nature of Main Street

Computerised signage of available off-street parking

- Free car parking in the retail park
- 14 car parks which were underutilised
- 1748 car parking spaces
- Maximum 2 hour stay at on-street parking

The incremental removal of the short-stay on-street parking and promotion of existing off-street parking within the town centre through well placed directional signage and displaying of parking availability could reduce the car dominance currently experienced in the town and make the streets more walkable and pedestrian-friendly.

Due to the high pedestrian volume observed at the Library junction, the implementation of a pedestrian crossing would be advisable to promote pedestrian safety and walkability of the town.

Creating streets to be pedestrian-friendly rather than car-friendly will increase footfall and vitality in the town centre.

Project 9
Parklets on Main Street

Another way to improve the pedestrian environment and create a less car dominated town is through the use of Parklets, which originated in San Francisco. They could be used as a way to take back the street in an incremental manner building upon the previous public realm project by providing a social setting and humanising an area previously used for on-street parking. This temporary form of intervention is planned to be trialled in Belfast in September as part of Better Bedford Street.

7. TOURISM, CULTURAL AND BUILT HERITAGE

Letterkenny is a growing market town that functions predominantly as a commercial centre in a county that is best known for its rugged scenery and associated tourism which made Donegal top of National Geographic's Cool List for 2017. Added to this has been the marketing success of the Wild Atlantic Way and established attractions such as Glenveagh National Park (below). Letterkenny has a local reputation for its nightlife and attracts regular visitors from neighbouring counties but the town does not appear to maximise the potential of its cultural and built heritage to attract visitors to the wider region.

Letterkenny has a good variety of cultural heritage attractions with the Regional Cultural Centre and Donegal County Museum being housed in existing and future heritage buildings within the town. The location of the tourism information office in the periphery of the town centre was deemed to limit the potential to raise awareness of local cultural events and exhibits hosted by these venues.

Built Heritage

Letterkenny's traditional spine along Main Street with the adjacent Cathedral Quarter contains a number of significant protected commercial, religious and former institutional properties with the Cathedral being the dominant architectural form within the town due to its height and prominent location. The Cathedral Area which is designated as an Architectural Conservation Area contains pockets of derelict historic buildings which also afflict Lower Main Street.

Key

▮ Protected Structures

▮ Architectural Conservation Area
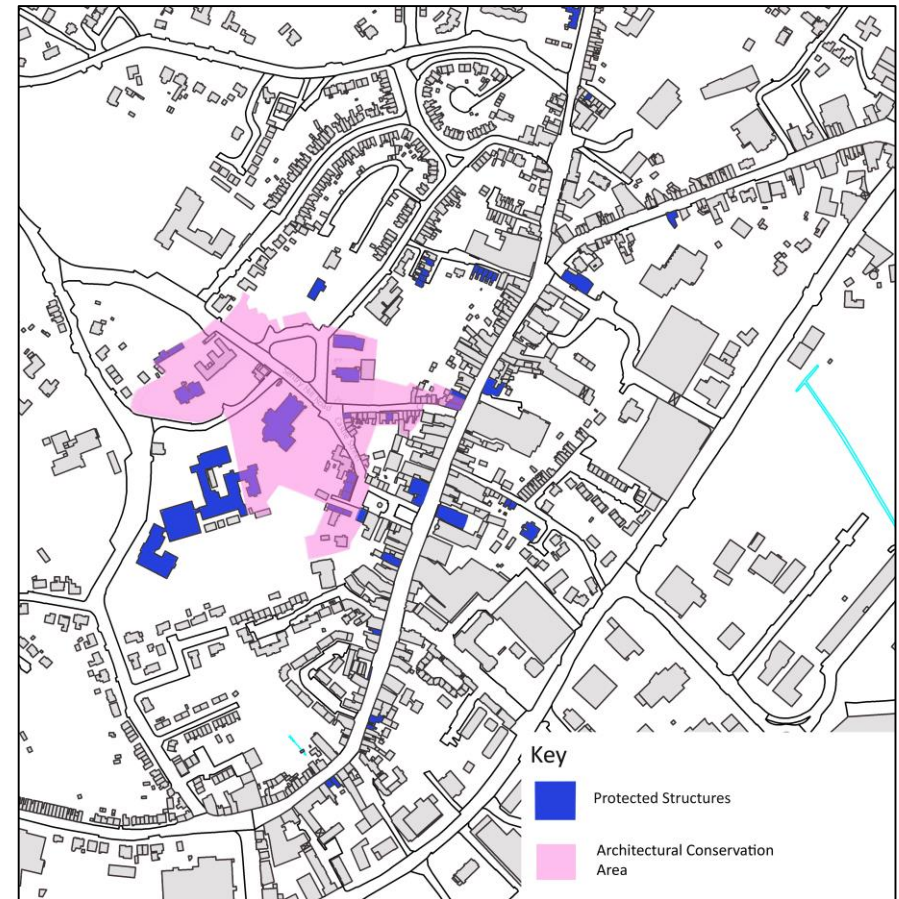
Respondents' Opinions of Tourism, Culture and Built Heritage in Letterkenny

Do you think Letterkenny is a tourist destination?

- Indifferent 12%
- Yes 22%
- No 66%
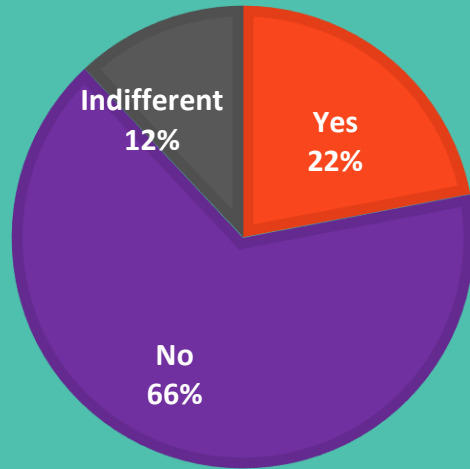
What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of Letterkenny?

- SHOPPING
- CATHEDRAL
- TRAFFIC
- NIGHTLIFE
- TOURISM
- INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

72% of respondents stated that Letterkenny had a good night time economy...

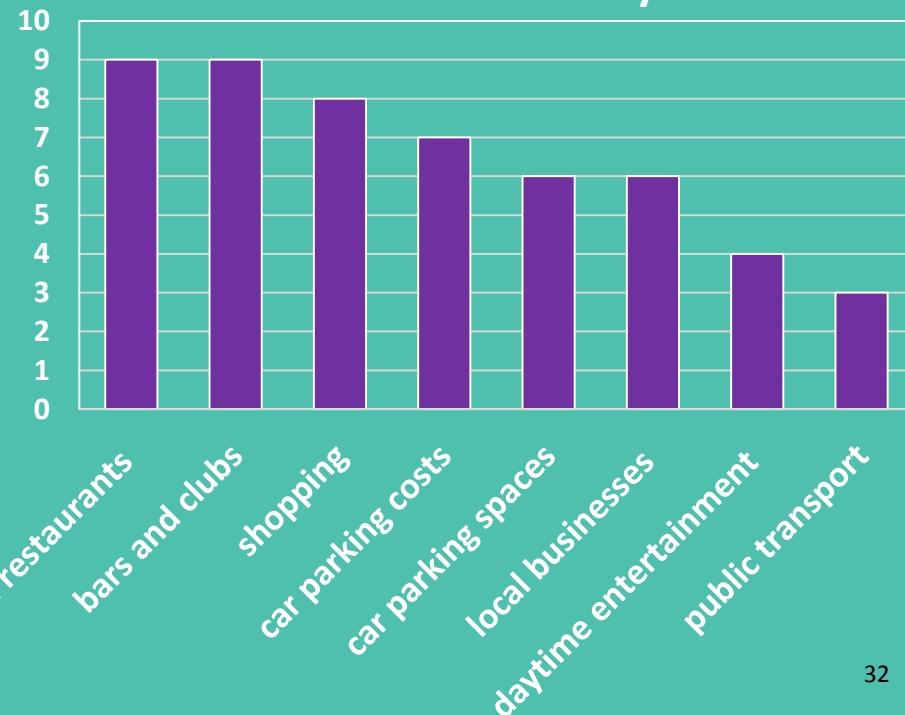However, **32%** of respondents stated that they did not feel safe in Letterkenny in the evenings

58% ...of respondents see Letterkenny as Donegal's Commercial hub

What would improve Letterkenny's tourism?

- More promotion of historical assets
- Better signage
- More central location for the tourist office
- More events and attractions

How would you rate the following services in Letterkenny?

Service	Rating
cafes and restaurants	9
bars and clubs	9
shopping	8
car parking costs	7
car parking spaces	6
local businesses	6
daytime entertainment	4
public transport	3

Projects 10 & 11
Charles Kelly Building
Old Courthouse

Adaptive Re-use

Adaptive reuse is a sustainable form of development as it incorporates existing structures into new developments that will breathe new life into the town centre, while still maintaining its built heritage.

Charles Kelly Building

A prime location for adaptive reuse is the historically significant Charles Kelly building that is situated on lower Main Street. The previous use of the building was associated with the 19th Century Letterkenny town corn market. The proposal is to reuse the building as a high tech multifunctional and diversified cultural, arts, and education centre based around sustainable living. This would help in regenerating lower Main Street around sustainable innovation that would help increase the low foot fall levels in the area.

Old Courthouse

Another opportunity site for adaptive reuse, is the proposal for a small tourist centre at the vacant Old Courthouse. This would greatly improve the accessibility of Letterkenny's tourist assets in the town due to its central location. The opportunity site will encompass a multi-use development which includes a small tourist office, community café and an exhibition centre. To make the site more accessible a shared space project for the large junction outside the building has been proposed. This would allow safer movement and access to the location and improved accessibility for other forms of transport.
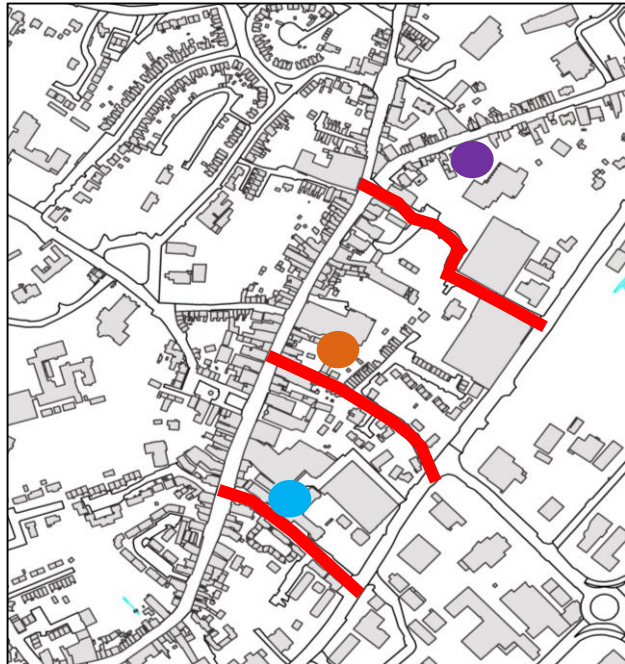
Proposal 12
Laneways/Slip Strategy

The promotion of retail development in vacant units on Main Street and on the laneways/slips such as Justice Walsh Road, Rosemount Lane and St Oliver Plunket Road would improve walkability and connectivity between Main Street and the retail park.

Filling vacant units and encouraging new retail services would not only introduce economic vibrancy into the town, but would also re-stitch the current disconnection and create one cohesive primary retail core.

Updated example on lower Main Street of a retail establishment rejuvenated, creating a more attractive setting helping to increase the low foot fall counts in the area.

Laneway/slip improvement areas

Gap sites and vacant buildings are a common feature of the slips (secondary streets) between Main Street and the retail park. Justice Walsh Road, Rosemount Lane and St Oliver Plunket Road could offer prime locations for reanimation of frontages and development of gap sites. The regeneration of these secondary streets through a "slips strategy" could help to re-stitch the two disconnected retail areas.

8. MOVEMENT AND ACCESSIBILITY

Letterkenny is the primary economic hub in Donegal and it serves a large rural cross-border hinterland. The private car is the dominant means of transport with congestion particularly evident at peak times in Letterkenny especially on Main Street as there are poor public transport alternatives. The quality of the footpaths between Main Street and the commercial retail park was identified as a particular problem with Rosemount Lane (below) having a rural character with no footpath.

The closure of the railway line generations ago coupled with the poor provision of bus services (with no town bus service) means that there are no viable alternative means to private cars for longer journeys. This manifests itself in the town with the above image typical of our experience with high levels of on-street parking and slow-moving traffic running through the heart of Letterkenny. This reliance on cars is in part due to the suburban sprawl of the town with significant development opportunities to get more people living within walking distance of the town's commercial and cultural amenities.

Respondents' Opinions of Transport and Movement in Letterkenny

How often do you walk into Letterkenny town centre?

- More than once a week: **27%**
- Less than yearly: **34%**
- Monthly: **7%**
- Weekly: **11%**
- Yearly: **6%**
- Never: **15%**

Would you use the bus if a better public transport service was introduced in the town?

- Yes **62%**
- No **23%**
- Unsure **15%**
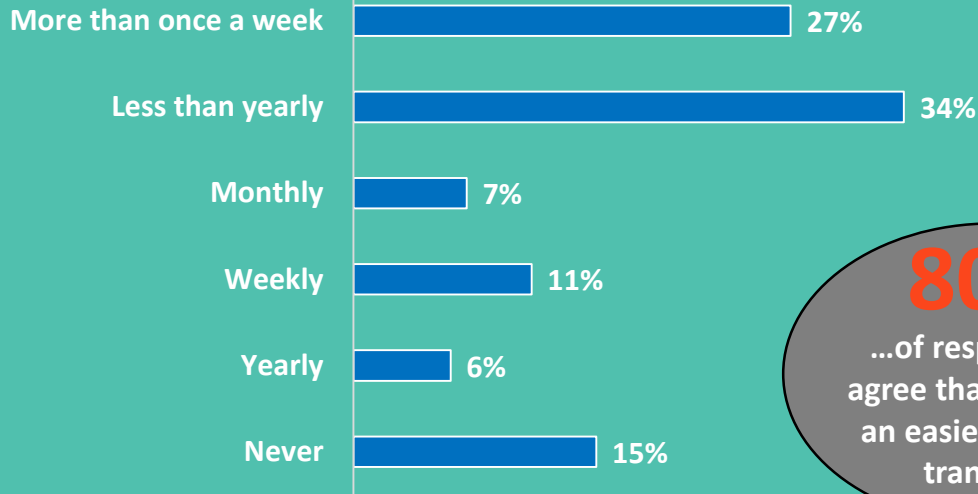
80%
...of respondents agree that the car is an easier mode of transport
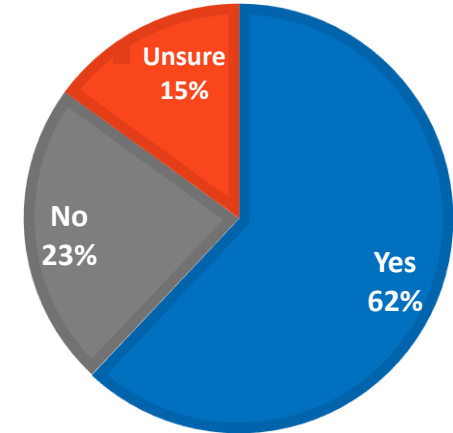
How much do you agree/disagree that driving is easier than using public transport?

- STRONGLY AGREE: **43%**
- AGREE: **37%**
- NO OPINION: **8%**
- DISAGREE: **12%**
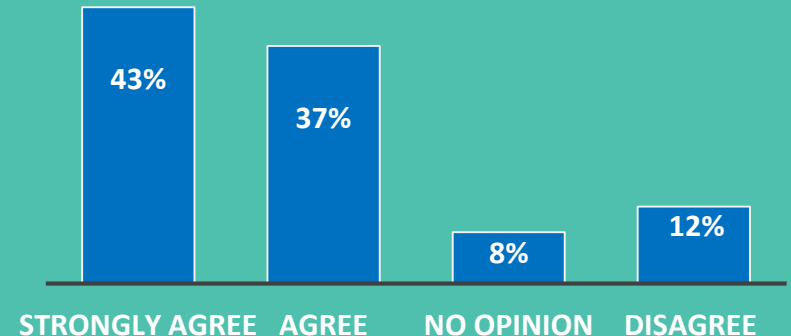
43% ...of respondents identified a greater need for public transport to improve the accessibility of Letterkenny.

Other issues identified for accessibility improvements included:
- Better lighting
- Road safety measures
- Cycle paths
- Public footpaths

36

Project 13
Transport Hub

To encourage modal shift from the private car in the spirit of the below sustainable transportation hierarchy, Letterkenny needs to create more sustainable communities. Ideally these would comprise mixed use developments that incorporate medium-high density residential units with commercial opportunities and commercial facilities within walking distance with improved cycle infrastructure. A proposed multi-modal transportation hub (example from Bratislava pictured) opposite Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT) with pedestrian and cycle linkages onto the Linear Park and a town centre bus service would offer alternatives to the private car and reduce the need for car parking.
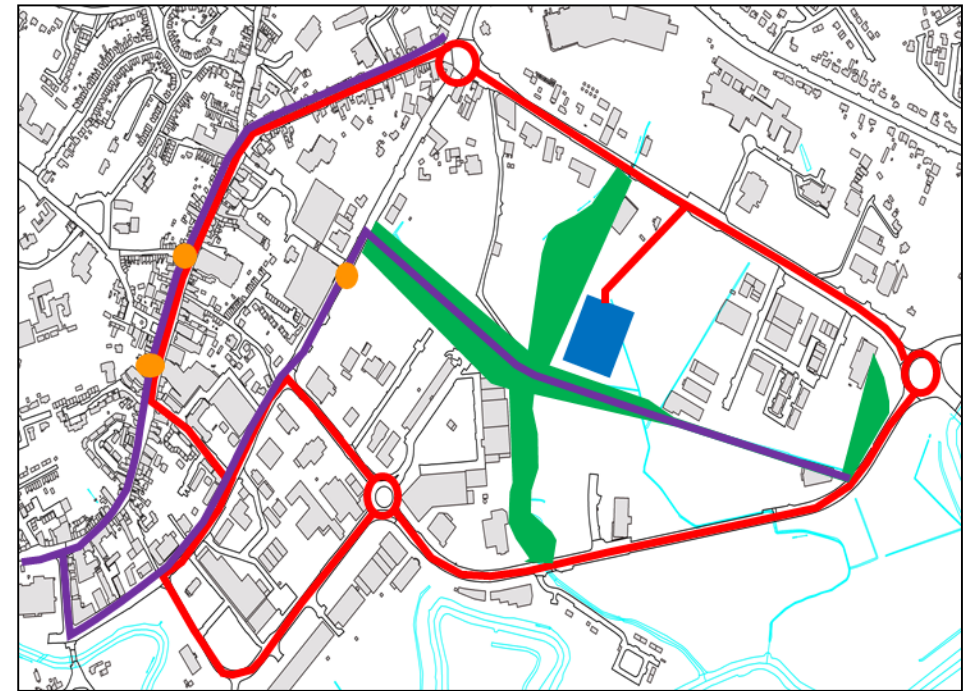
— Proposed bus route ■ Proposed transport hub
— Proposed cycle lanes ■ Proposed linear park
● Proposed controlled crossings

The proposed linear park could act as a cycleway that integrates into the NW Greenway Plan, which proposes to enter the town centre at the tourist information office. The new greenway would offer a traffic-free route rather than the current proposals to send cyclists along the Neil T Blaney Road.

Project 14
Suilleach Greenway

To grow the traditional Main Street core towards the council building to the east it will be necessary to invest in high quality urban infrastructure to attract businesses and town centre residents. The creation of a cruciform linear park from the tourist information to the east to the fringes of the traditional retail core in the west and Letterkenny Institute of Technology in the North to the river Swilly in the south could provide an attractive and resilient space which could act as a catalyst for the wider development of the enlarged town centre. Drawing upon local legend, it is proposed to name the greenway after the mythic dragon, Suilleach, from which the river Swilly derives its name.

Improved Natural Habitat
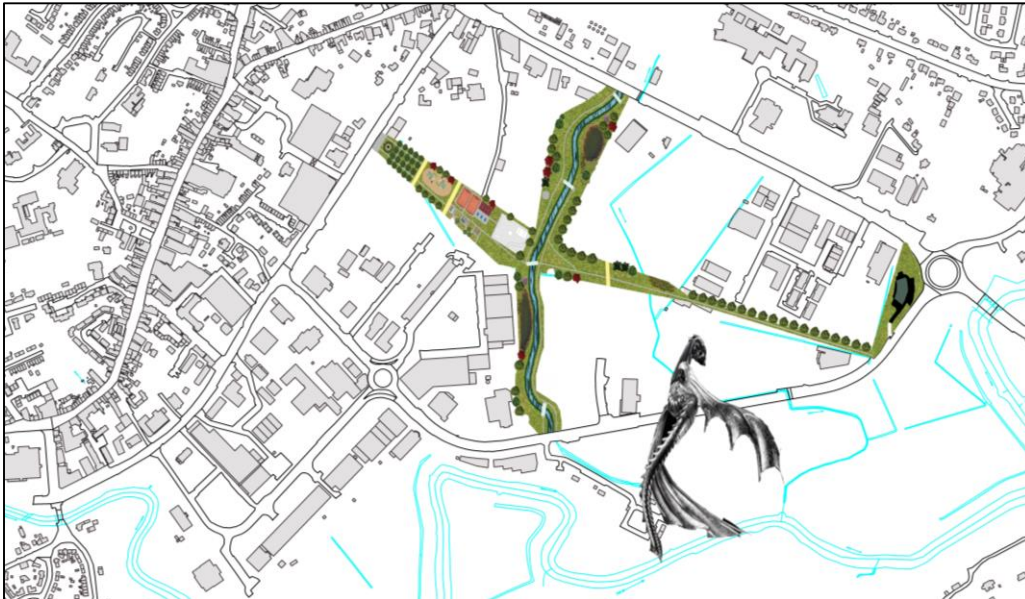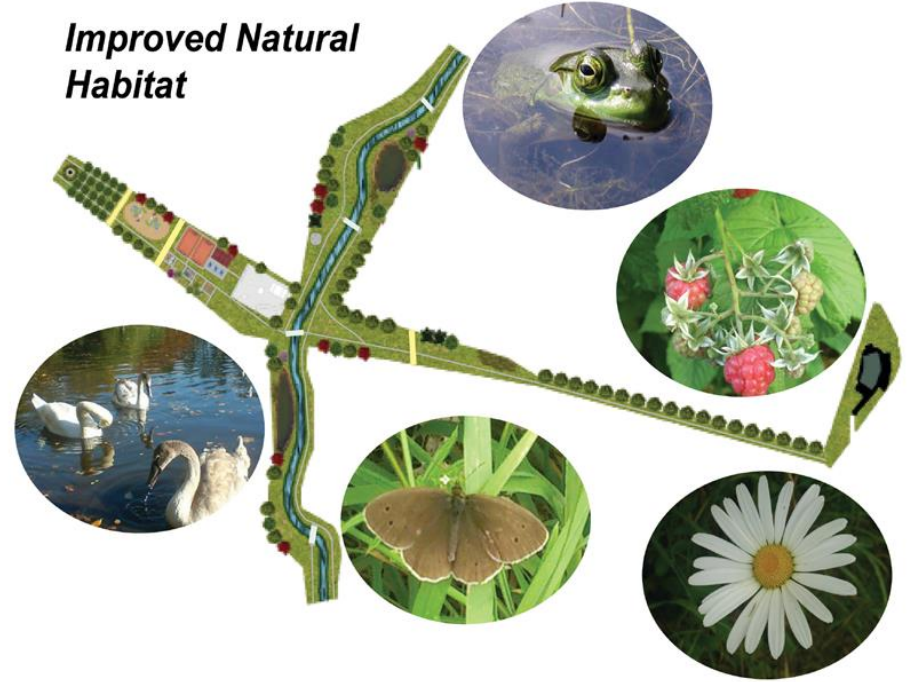
Biodiversity

The greenway will offer an opportunity to enhance natural habitats within the town centre through the utilisation of biophilic design principles. Planting which complements the existing natural assets and ecosystem services will be integrated into the final design to provide better ecological corridors. The Suilleach Greenway will offer an urban oasis for residents to experience nature.

Movement and Accessibility
Suilleach Greenway

Flood Mitigation

Offline ponds are great run off attenuation features that can also act as natural habitats for pond and bird life. These features force water out of the river into pre-constructed storage areas before releasing it back into the watercourse. The example from Rabalder Park in Copenhagen is a skate park that can act as an overflow store when water levels are high. Natural interventions such as afforestation can contribute to Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) by increasing interception and storage and reducing surface run off.

Flood Mitigation Features

Skate Park - Rabalder Park, Copenhagen

Offline Ponds as run-off attenuation features

Leisure

Bike hire

River walk & greenway

Arboretum/public art

Inclusive furniture
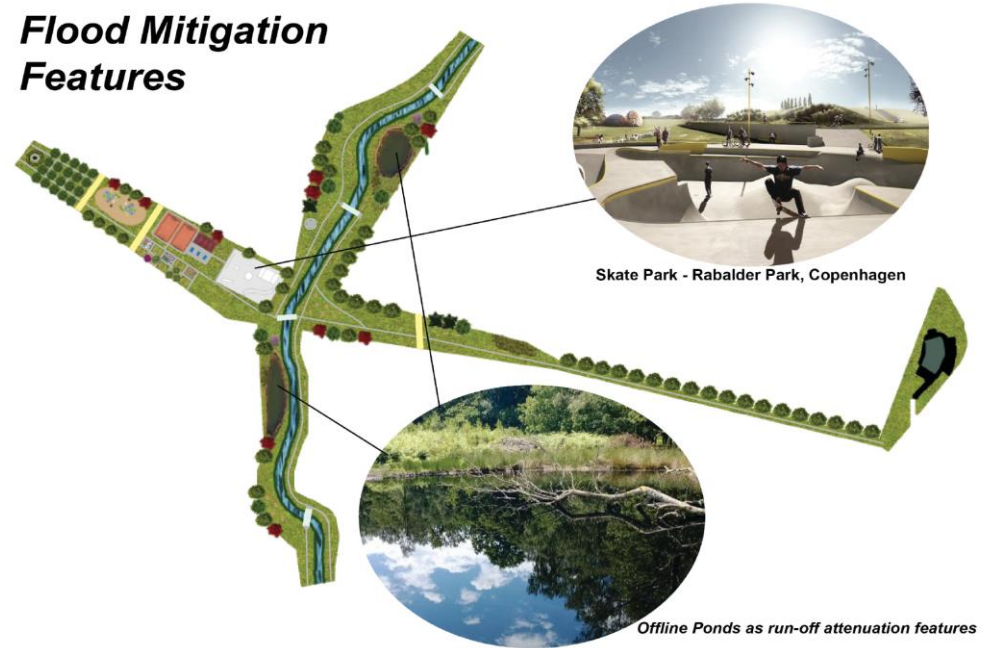
Coffee
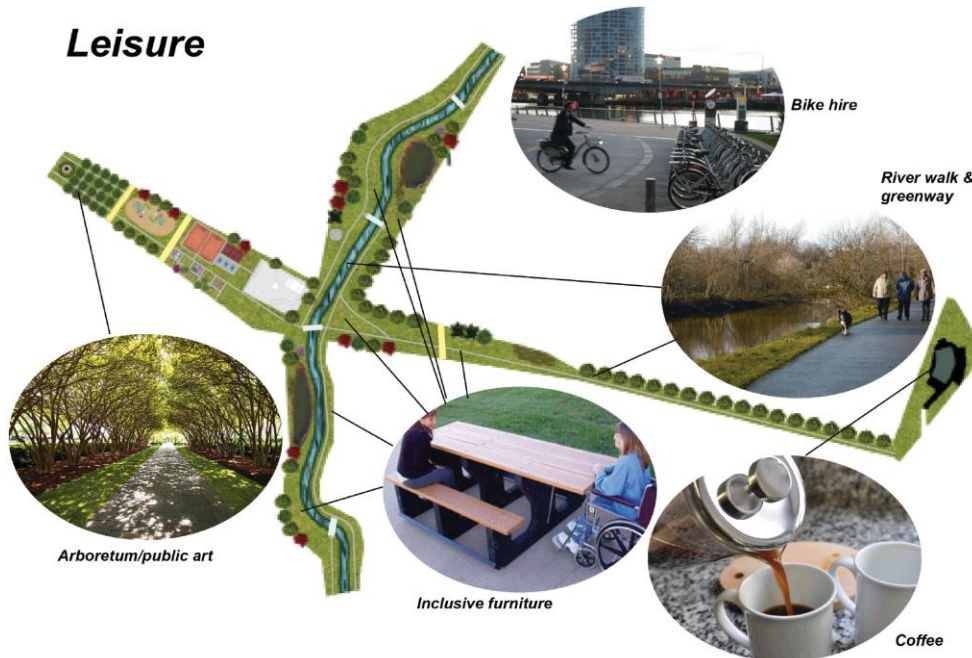
Leisure facilities

To cater for all sections of Letterkenny society, the Suilleach Greenway has been designed to incorporate both active and passive zones which should ensure that it works both as a transport corridor and a place for social interaction as well. The greenway will be connected to the new transport hub to allow for segregated cycling into the centre with links to the NW Greenway to the west and east of the Suilleach. The inclusion of sports facilities and sittable spaces will create a degree of urban surveillance to ensure that the site is safe.

To realise the ambitious growth targets for Letterkenny it will be necessary to ensure that the planning system focuses new development within the large town centre boundary as planning practice in Letterkenny is at a crossroads. Does it continue with the type of suburban and rural sprawl which fuels car-dominated urbanism or focus on creating a sustainable town centre community?

To re-humanise Letterkenny town centre, MSc planning students recommend utilising its vacant built assets, regenerating its underperforming spaces and creating high quality urban infrastructure that will stimulate private sector commercial and residential development. This potential investment in public spaces and infrastructure would demonstrate a leadership that prioritises the quality of life of existing and future residents. In-so-doing it will make the town a destination for the tourists that enjoy Donegal's dramatic landscapes.

POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

Whilst this is a student exercise, the pragmatics associated with the phasing of projects was part of the wider brief.

YEAR 1

Whilst the challenges associated with ownership are acknowledged, the adaptation and reuse of existing heritage assets proposed in projects 1, 4, 10 and 11 were deemed to be most easily implementable short-term projects. Similarly, the utilisation of tactical urbanism for the light touch interventions of car park greening and parklets (projects 8 and 9 respectively) are reversible and have lower implementation costs and could be realisable in the short-term. To identify historic properties that can be restored and adapted it is recommended that a Building Condition Survey of Historic Buildings is undertaken.

YEAR 2

The projects identified as medium term involve the regeneration of existing underperforming spaces in the traditional town centre. These include projects 7 – Market Square and 12 – lane/slip strategy. The slip strategy is vital to create the linkages necessary
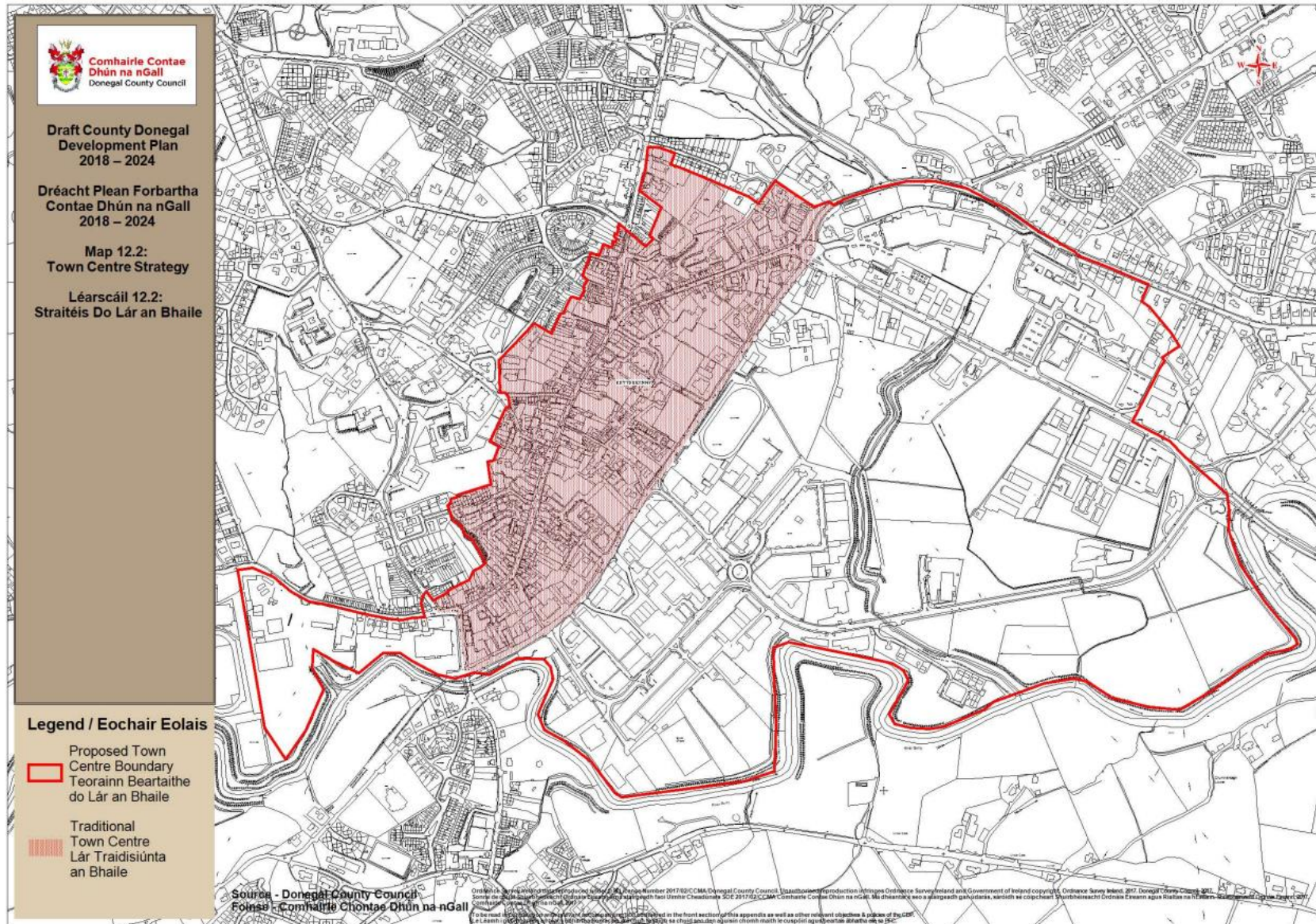
for the redeveloping new town centre to be sutured onto the traditional town centre and the redevelopment of Market Square is necessary to create a vibrant focal public space. Whilst these projects may not be realised in the short term, further research into their design and viability could be commissioned in the short term. Similar lane strategies have developed in Melbourne and Glasgow[3] and are being developed in Dublin.
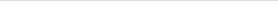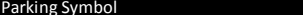
YEAR 3

The remaining projects 2, 3, 5, 7, 13 and 14 were deemed to be more long-term due to their cost and location as priority was given to the restoration of the existing buildings and public spaces in the short and medium term. The implementation and investment in quality urban infrastructure such as the Suilleach Greenway and Transportation Hub will be crucial as a catalyst to drive the creation of a new town centre that is a desirable location for all.

[3] https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/parking-and-transport/streets-and-pedestrians/Pages/love-your-laneways.aspx
https://www.glasgowcitycentrestrategy.com/city-centre-lane-strategy.htm

'Pilot' TCHC Training Programme 2016 - General Town Centre Health Check Land/Building use Classification

Town Centre Boundary - TCHC Study Area	▬▬▬▬▬	Preferably should match the boundary set out in the Local Area Plan (LAP) or County Development Plan (CDP), as per pilot TCHC methodology -please state source
Primary Retail Area (PRA) - optional	▬▬▬▬▬	Sourced from LA Retail Strategy or other adopted documents and stratgies - optional - please state
GOAD Classification:	***Fill (on GIS land use map)***	***Description of use***
Comparison		Non-food/non-perishable items where customers compare prices e.g. Clothes, jewellery, footwear, furniture, etc.
Convenience		Food items (perishable) which people do not normally travel far to purchase e.g. Convenience stores, deli, bakers, CTN (confectionary, tobacconist, newsagent)
Retail Service		Services including hairdressers, post offices, dry cleaner, clothes hire shops, beauty salon, etc.
Other Retail		None of the above or listed - uses not listed in COM1-COM36, CNV 1- CNV11, RS1-RS13
Leisure Services		Bars, restaurants, cinemas, fast food takeaways, cafes, hotels and guest houses, concert halls, theatres, etc.
Financial and Business Services		Building society, banks, legal services, legal services, financial services, etc.
Health and Medical Services		Dental surgery, health centre, nursing home, doctors surgery, veterinary surgery, etc.
Public Service		Council offices, advice centre, library, tourist information, community centre, emergency services, educational establishment
Religious Service		Place of workship, churches, church halls, religious meeting rooms, etc.
Vacant Unit	Select Black Cross Hatch	**Vacant premises - black hatch with previous or preceived use as an underlay, wherever possible**
Storage and Warehousing		Storgage / Warehouse (excluding retail warehouse - see COM 4, 11, 12, etc.)
Residential		**Residential - for vacant residential please use black hatch as overlay**
Open Space		Open space, park
Walkways/cycleways/bridle paths		Walkway, cycleway, bridle path
Other Buildings		For buildings generally outside the study area.
Car Park - Surface	Parking Symbol	Surface car park
Car Park - Multi-Storey	Parking Symbol	Multi-Storey car park

Prepared by Heritage Council, UCD, Kerry County Council, Tipperary County Council and DoHPCLG, February 2017