

# Gort Inse Guaire

## Town Centre First Plan

September 2023



An Roinn Forbartha  
Tuaithe agus Pobail  
Department of Rural and  
Community Development



Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe  
Galway County Council



Lár Bailte ar dTús  
Town Centre First

momentum  
transport consultancy



Venture*i*

**BDP.**



## Town Team Foreword

*The Gort Town Team is delighted to present the Gort Town Centre First Pilot Plan. This Plan has been developed through a range of public engagements that reflect the ambitions of our local community, businesses, and stakeholders. Our greatest asset is our local community and by working with everyone to deliver this plan, we will meet those objectives which have been identified by the people of Gort.*

*The Town Centre First Plan identifies key proposals for future sustainable growth by recognising our strengths and opportunities. It defines real possibilities for our town to secure funding based upon these proposals and is a significant first step in the long-term development of Gort.*

*This Plan harnesses the great potential of our town and delivers a clear strategy that brings the heart back onto our town centre, making it an even better place to live, work, study, and visit, both now and for future generations.*

*We, the Town Team, look forward to working in partnership with our community, Galway County Council, and other stakeholders to assist in the delivery of the proposals outlined in this Plan.*



Gort Town Team | Source: Gort Town Team



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# 01

## Introduction

This section provides an introduction to Gort Inse Guaire, the Town Centre First policy including the process of developing the plan, timeline of events as well as the context of national and local policy.

- 1.1 | Setting the scene
- 1.2 | The process
- 1.3 | Developing the plan
- 1.4 | Compliance with policy

## 1.1 Setting the scene

Gort Inse Guaire Town Centre First Plan sets out a clear strategy for the future development and revitalisation of Gort Town Centre. The proposals detailed within the Plan will assist in the regeneration of the town centre, making it an attractive place to live, work and visit.

The Plan has a central focus on improving the attractiveness of the town, tackling vacancy and dereliction, embracing arts and culture, and providing more opportunities to enjoy the town centre and surrounding landscape for residents and visitors alike. The aim of the plan is provide a strategic framework to support the community in their aspirations to revitalise Gort. Ultimately, the plan should enable the Town Team, in collaboration with Galway County Council, to leverage funding in order to to implement the identified proposals.

The Plan has been prepared in collaboration with Galway County Council, the Town Team and the planning, design, research and engagement team led by BDP, with support from Venture International Limited.

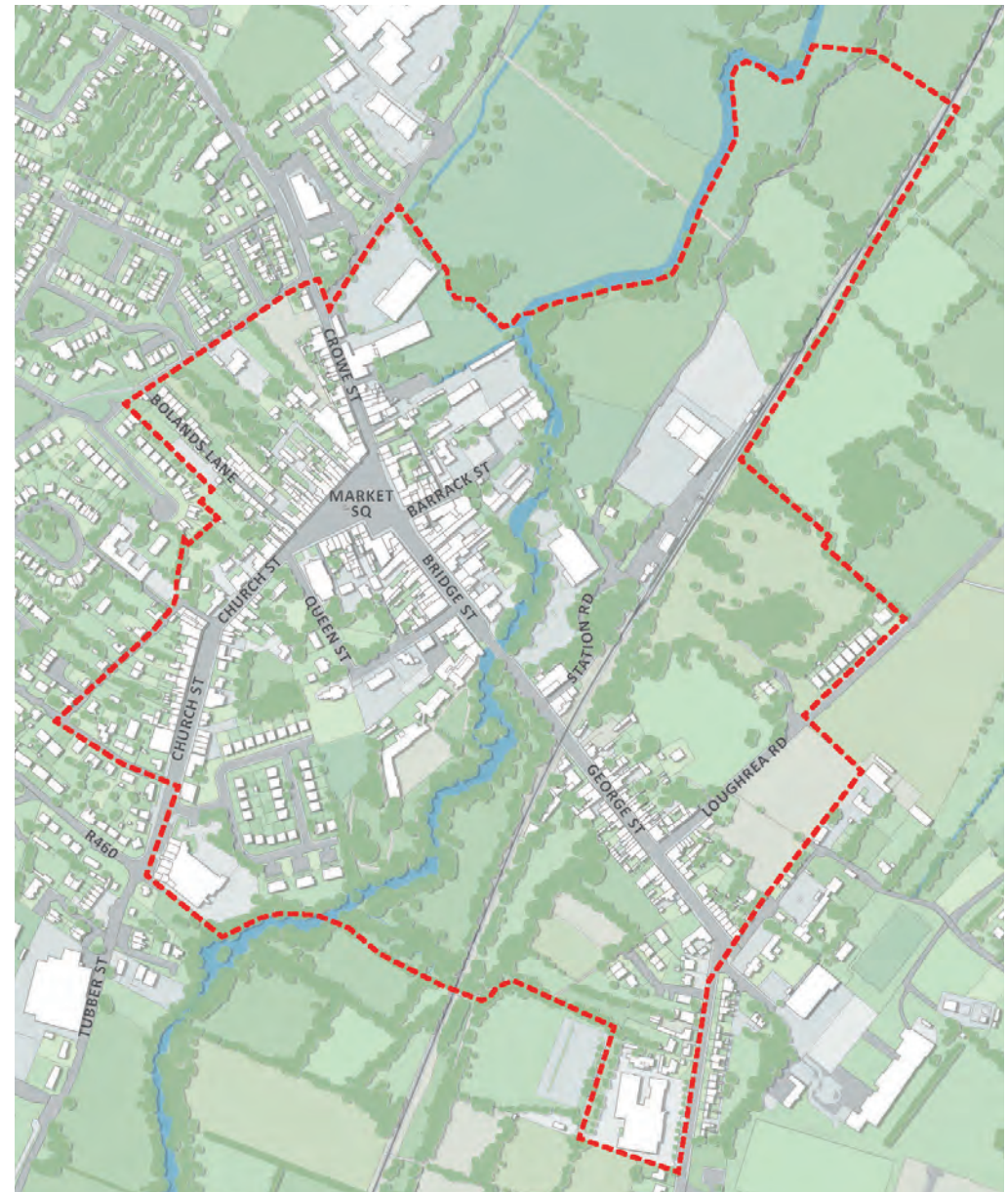
The Plan's content, particularly the identified themes and proposals, have been developed following extensive research, analysis, and community and stakeholder engagement in Gort. A full review of this is contained within the Policy, Profile and Priorities Report (contained in Appendix A).

The Need and Project Identification and Justification report established the

justification and rationale for the identified themes and proposals within the Plan, drawing upon analysis of available data, policy sources and through various forms of engagement with the community and key stakeholders.

The study area covered by the plan is highlighted in Figure 1. It consists of the defined town centre, community and amenity areas and main arterial routes into the town.

Figure 1 | Town Centre First boundary | Source: BDP





## 1.2 The process

The Town Centre First Policy is a new approach from the Government towards town centre regeneration. It positions the community and local business owners at the heart of re-imagining their and planning the future development priorities for the town towns and planning their future.

The policy aims to breathe new life into town centres by adapting to the changing world and embracing the opportunities that come with technological, climate and demographic change. The policy emphasises the importance of tailoring a plan around the unique characteristics and qualities of the town.

It is important that this Plan reflects and responds to the vision as set out by the Town Centre First Policy (see Figure 2).

Gort was one of the first of 26 pilot towns to receive funding for a Town Centre First Plan. A Town Regeneration Officer was appointed by Galway County Council to support and enable the Town Team as well as the delivery of the Plan.

The establishment of the Town Team brought together local business owners, community representatives and stakeholders who assisted in the delivery of this Town Centre First Plan.

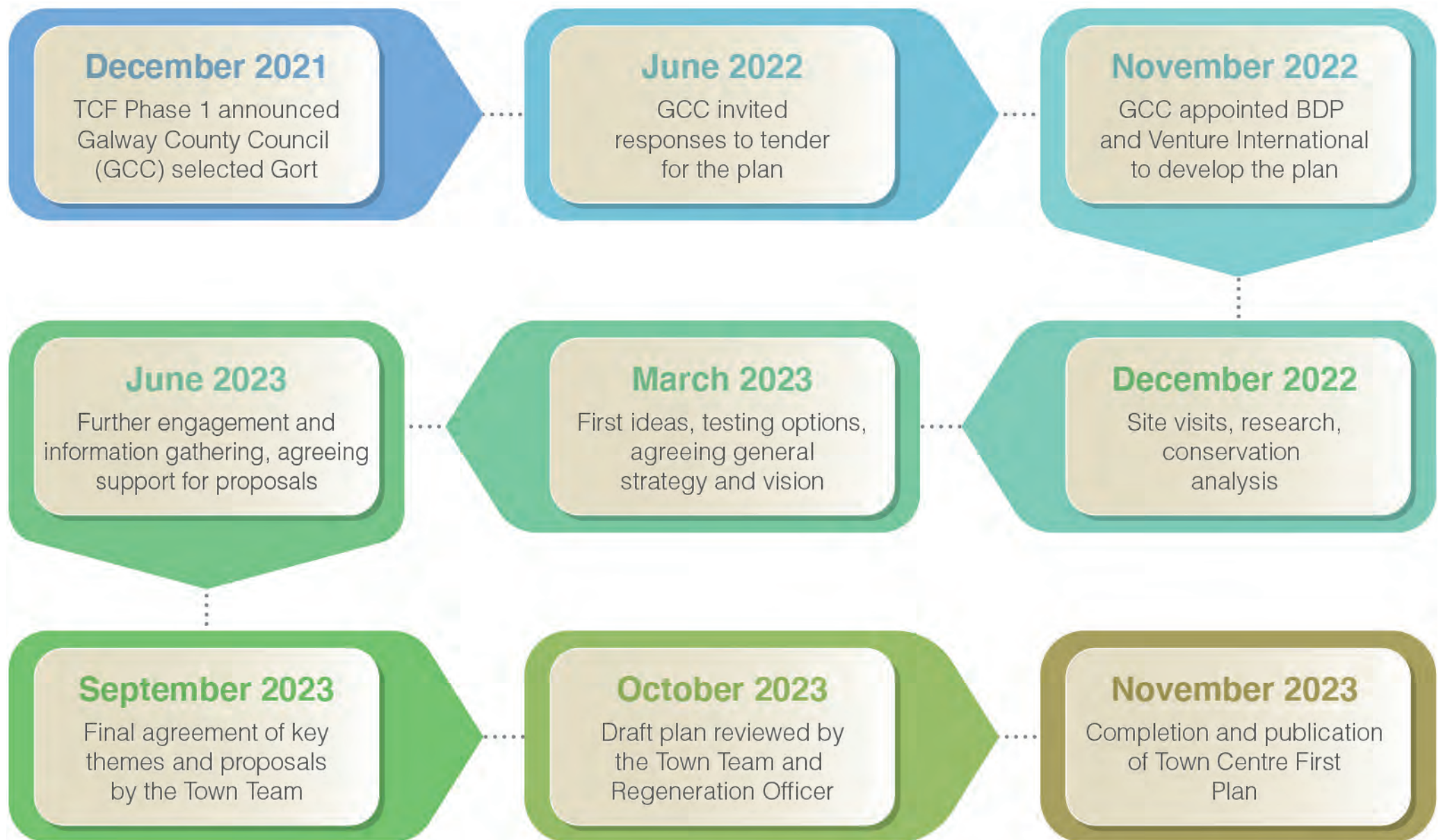
Figure 2 | Vision | Source: Town Centre First

Our Town Centre First Vision is for:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Places that are shaped by the communities that live there, where local residents and the business community are enabled to plot the future for their own towns and villages;</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Towns that embrace the opportunities presented by technology, climate action and demographic change;</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Places that are the fulcrum of economic, social, cultural and recreational activity, with a sustainable mix of commercial, retail, service and hospitality offerings;</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Town centres that reflect the current and future needs of the local community, with quality public realm, sustainable mobility infrastructure and green spaces that facilitate vibrant, connected local communities and economies;</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Vibrant, accessible and lived-in town centres that are home to young and old, which are not seen as a second-best option to more peripheral locations.</b></li> </ul>

Figure 3 | Successful Places | Source: Town Centre First

The Town Centre First policy recognises that successful places:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Are characterised by an attractive public realm (streets, spaces and parks) that is designed to invite people to meet, mingle and dwell;</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Contain a variety of services/shops that provide employment opportunities, enable people to shop locally and meet the needs of the local community;</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Provide a range of cultural, recreational and community spaces (that includes scope for periodic events and festivals) that bring together community members and attract visitors/tourists;</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Contain a well maintained building stock that creates visual interest and animates streets and spaces;</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Conserve, adapt and highlight historical buildings and streetscapes that provide the town with a unique identity;</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Are attractive vibrant places for enterprises to grow and develop;</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Are well connected and accessible to sustainable modes of transport, enabling a high proportion of journeys to be made by foot and/or bicycle from the immediate hinterland (e.g. the '10 minute town' concept);</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Manage traffic within central areas so that streets prioritise vulnerable users (pedestrians and cyclists), enabling them to move about safely and in comfort;</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Provide a mix of housing typologies and tenures to cater for diverse communities in terms of age, income and mobility;</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Utilise digital technology to enhance the experience of living and working in towns, enabling greater choices in terms of location and lifestyle;</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Provide opportunities for the amenity, health and well-being of residents, workers and visitors.</b></li> </ul>

## 1.3 Developing the plan



# 1.4 Compliance with policy

The following provides a high level review of the national, regional and local policy context which has informed the development of this Plan. A full overview of the policy context which has underpinned this Plan is contained within the Need and Project Identification and Justification Report (Appendix A).

## National Policy Context

**Town Centre First** | The implementation of a strategic approach to town centre regeneration through utilising existing buildings and unused lands for new development, addressing vibrancy and future function while promoting residential occupancy; are all central elements to securing a sustainable future for rural towns and villages.

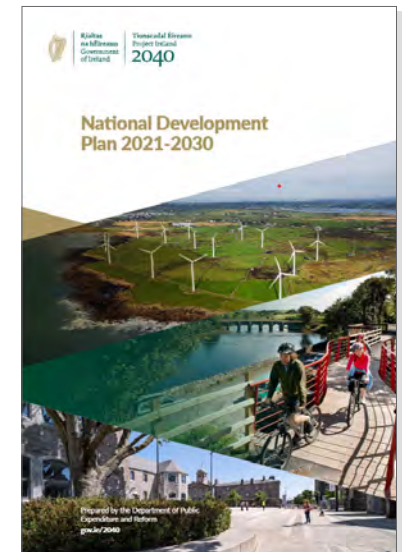
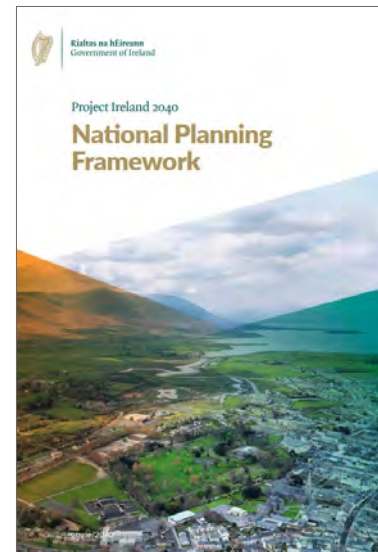
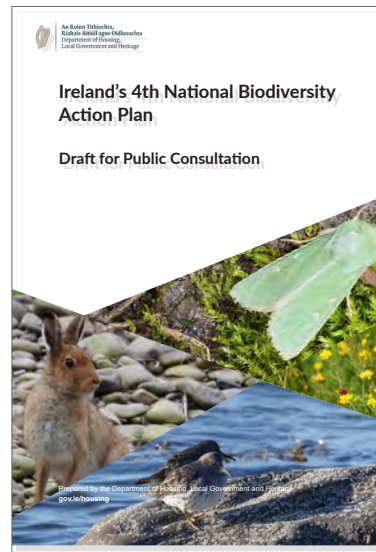
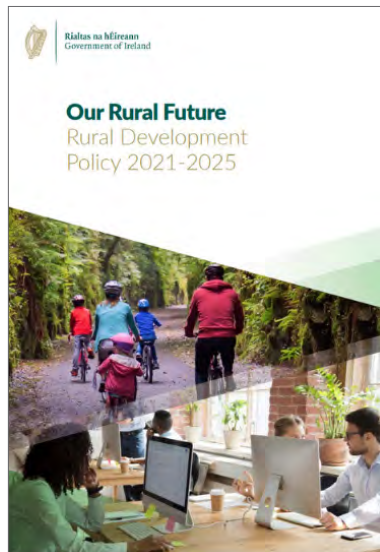
**Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025** | A framework for the development of rural Ireland over the next five years. The policy is forward looking and ambitious and addresses both the challenges facing rural areas and the opportunities which rural economies and communities can benefit from in the coming years.

**Project Ireland 2040** | Project Ireland 2040 provides overarching strategic objectives for planning for the social, cultural, and economic development of Ireland. It is underpinned by the National Planning Framework (NPF), which provides the vision and strategy for development across Ireland, and the National Development Plan (NDP) which enables the investment and capital funding to implement the strategy.

**Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan** | The Plan sets out actions through which a range of government, civil and private sectors will undertake to achieve Ireland's 'Vision for Biodiversity', and follows on from the work of the first and second National Biodiversity Action Plans. It has been developed in line with the EU and International Biodiversity strategies and policies.

**National Planning Framework (NPF)** | The overarching policy and planning framework for Ireland. The NPF strongly reflects the aim of revitalising our towns and urban areas in objectives such as: compact growth, strengthened rural economies and communities, sustainable mobility, enhanced amenities and heritage, and the transition to a low carbon society.

**National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2030** | The NDP mirrors the national strategic objectives of the NPF and provides specific funding measures to support the compact growth agenda, strengthened rural economies and communities, and sustainable transport. The updated Plan identifies specific investment vehicles that will support the Town Centre first policy.



**Climate Action Plan 2023** | Sets out a road map for taking decisive action to halve Ireland’s emissions by 2030 and reach net zero no later than 2050. It sets out how Ireland can accelerate the actions that are required to respond to the climate crisis, putting climate solutions at the centre of Ireland’s social and economic development.

**Housing for All - A new Housing Plan for Ireland** | A multi-billion Euro Plan to improve Ireland’s housing system and deliver more homes of all types for people with different housing needs. The average need is for 33,000 new homes each year between 2021 and 2030.

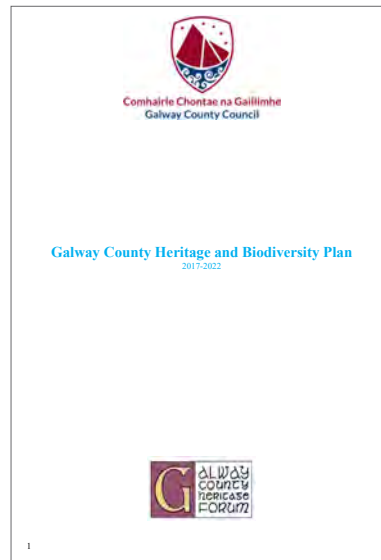
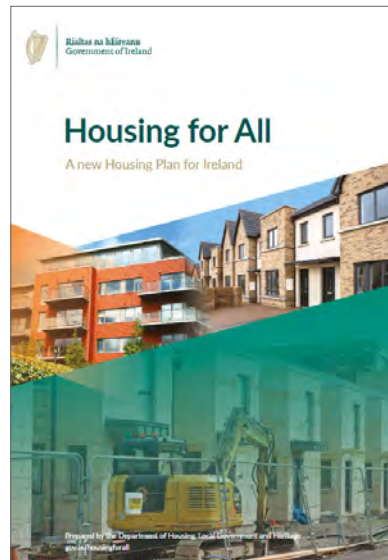
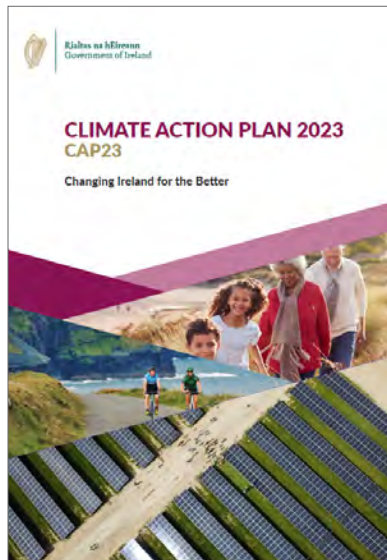
**Making Remote Work: National Remote Working Strategy 2021** | The Strategy’s objective is to ensure that remote working is a permanent feature in the Irish workplace in a way that maximises economic, social and environmental benefits.

**Regional Policy Context**

**North West Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES) 2020-2032** | The RSES provides a high-level development framework for the Northern and Western Region with a 12-year strategy to deliver the transformational change. The five growth ambitions are: vibrant, natural, connected, inclusive and infrastructure. This

is consolidated by a settlement strategy focusing on ‘People’ and ‘Places’, pursuing compact growth to ensure sustainable growth of urban and rural settlements, supported by jobs, houses, services and amenities, rather than continued sprawl and unplanned, uneconomic growth.

**Galway County Heritage and Biodiversity Plan 2017- 2022** | Places heritage and biodiversity at the heart of public life in the county. This will be achieved through increasing awareness, participation, enjoyment, knowledge and understanding of Galway County’s shared heritage to lead to its proper conservation, management and protection and safeguarding it for future generations.



## Local Policy Context

**Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028** | The Galway County Development Plan sets out policy objectives for development across the county until 2028. The Development Plan aims to “*promote the creation of an attractive county to live, work, visit and enable businesses to flourish in an attractive environment that offers a range of housing options, robust and diverse range of employment opportunities, access to quality infrastructure and community facilities with a high quality sustainable environment for all*”.

The Galway County Development Plan identifies Gort as a self-sustaining town, which is characterised by high levels of population growth and a limited employment base which is reliant on other areas for employment and/or services and which require targeted “*catch-up*” investment to become more sustaining.

The growth strategy for Gort is to consolidate its designation as a self-sustaining town and continue to support expansion of its employment base along with facilitating residential development to support the sustainable growth of Gort. The Plan sets out an additional population allocation of 800 people between 2022-2028 for Gort, with a housing allocation of 460 dwellings during the same period. This is divided into 138 units to be delivered on infill/brownfield sites and 322 units to be delivered on greenfield sites. The County Development Plan sets a density of 25 residential units per hectare for Gort town centre with the quantum of land required for residential development at 12.9 ha of

greenfield and 6 ha of brownfield land.

**Gort Local Area Plan (LAP) 2013-2023 (As extended)** | At the time of writing, the Gort LAP 2013-2023 (as extended) was close to reaching the end of its lifespan, and as such GCC were commencing work on a new LAP. The new LAP will set out the future policies, land use zoning and policy objectives for Gort and will pay cognisance to the Gort TCF Plan. Nonetheless, this Plan has taken into consideration the current LAP (2013-2023).

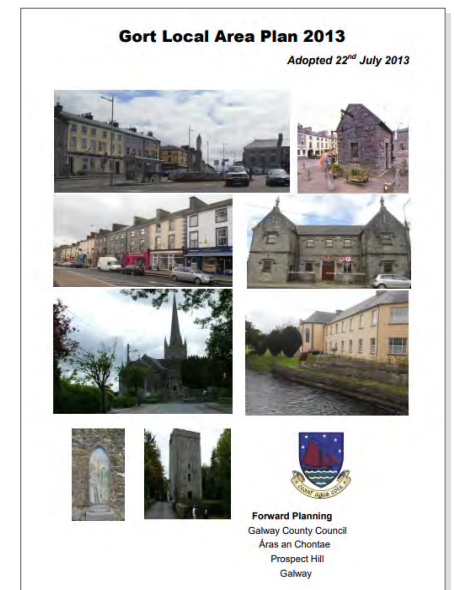
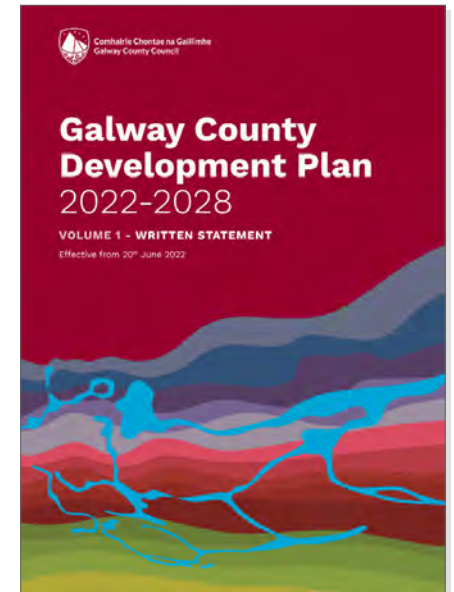
### Summary of the Gort LAP:

The Gort LAP sets a strategic vision as: “*Gort will be a sustainable, self-sufficient, vibrant, socially inclusive and innovative growth centre within the county, protecting and enhancing its attractive medieval character and natural environment, supporting an educated workforce, providing a range of supporting services/facilities/amenities and with a high quality of life for the local community. This will be delivered through a managed and phased development strategy on appropriately zoned and serviced lands in a manner that is balanced and sustainable for Gort and the immediate environs that it serves*”.

The strategic vision is informed by a number of guiding principles within the Local Area Plan. These include;

- Realising the town’s potential;
- Reflecting the needs and aspirations of local communities;
- Promoting sustainable land use and transport;

- Maintaining a strong and vibrant town centre;
- Facilitating the provision of a range of facilities, amenities and supporting services;
- Fostering economic development and employment creation;
- Supporting the delivery of support infrastructure;
- Promoting strong community spirit, social inclusion, civic pride and local identity;
- Protecting and enhancing the heritage and character.





# 02

## About Gort

Section 2 provides a summary of the contextual analysis of Gort which has laid the foundations for the Plan. This includes a review of Gort's character, identity, the historic significance and cultural history of the Town. The section also examines transport, connectivity as well as the socio-economic impacts and demographics of Gort.

- 2.1 | Context
- 2.2 | Facilities and amenities
- 2.3 | Vacancy and dereliction
- 2.4 | History and cultural heritage
- 2.5 | Transport and connectivity
- 2.6 | Socio-economics, demographics and housing
- 2.7 | SCOT analysis

## 2.1 Context

Gort is a market town in the west of Ireland, located in south Galway. The town is located approximately 32 kilometres south of Galway and 64 kilometres north from Limerick on the Atlantic Economic Corridor. Gort is connected to the M6 Galway to Dublin motorway via the N18 at Oranmore and via the N66 at Loughrea.

The railway station within the town centre operates daily connections to Galway and Limerick, as part of the Western Rail Corridor. Shannon airport is approximately a 40-minute drive from the town. The strategic geographical location of Gort makes it accessible to most major towns and tourist attractions in County Galway and County Clare.

As an early settlement, Gort developed on elevated ground adjacent to the present Market Square which forms the principal open space and focus of the town. The expansion of the town has occurred on relatively flat, low lying land surrounding the square. The Cannahowna/Gort river, which meanders from the south through this land, is subject to considerable flooding and has acted as a constraint on the development of some areas. The Ennis - Athenry portion of the Western Rail Corridor railway line runs parallel to the river, and this too has tended to act as a physical barrier to the expansion of the town centre.

Gort town has a rich architectural history that spans several centuries since its founding in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century. Most significantly, two civic spaces lie at its heart, the Market Square and Canon Quinn park to the rear

of St. Colman's Catholic church. Other important spaces include the graveyard of the former Church of Ireland. There is also a substantial amount of private open space in the town centre mainly in the form of yards and gardens to the rear of buildings. These backlands offer considerable potential for future development including access which should take place in a planned and integrated manner so as to maintain the town's character. Church Street and Queen Street form part of an urban block with Bridge Street and Market Square at the centre. Barrack Street, running broadly northeast from Market Square, leads to an area which includes the former barracks, workshops and the local Garda Station. The main road through the town forms part of the R458 and encompasses Crowe Street, Bridge Street and George's Street. Gort is also served by bus routes 434, 51 to Galway as well as the 934 to Loughrea.

Buildings lining the main streets vary in size, style and age, those fronting Bridge Street and around Market Square are generally more imposing, typically 3 stories. Towards the edges of town, along the southern end of Georges Street, Crowe Street and western end of Church Street, most buildings do not exceed two stories.

Gort provides an important retail, educational and service function for a catchment area, extending into County Clare. There are significant employment opportunities within the town, which has a active commercial core. Retail and commercial uses are primarily located along Bridge Street and

Figure 4 | General context map of Gort | Source: BDP



around Market Square. The IDA continues to manage a business/enterprise park to the west of the town and adjacent to the M18 motorway. Residential growth within the town has been (mainly) located to the northwest and south of the town centre.



The town of Gort has 2,870 inhabitants according to the 2022 Census. However, it is noted that the geographic definition of Gort as a settlement has changed from the 2016 Census to the 2022 Census, therefore any comparison between the population figures can give a false impression. Based on the comparative analysis of settlement size, in real terms, the population of Gort is 3,155 inhabitants, based on the settlement boundaries in the 2016 Census. This represents 5.4% population growth in real terms from the 2016 Census. Prior to the 2022 Census, the population of the town had remained relatively stable for approximately 10 years, prior to which there was a significant growth in population between the years of 2002 and 2006. Between these years, the Census recorded an increase from 1,776 (in 2002) to 2,734 residents (in 2006).

Gort is one of the most ethnically diverse towns in Ireland, with over one third of the population being non-Irish citizens. 15% of Gort's total population is made up of citizens from countries outside of Ireland and outside of EU countries. This is compared with 2% of the population of the County (as based on the 2022 Census figures). This can be partially attributed to the significant Brazilian population that moved to reside in Gort primarily for employment from the 1990s onwards, and Gort is now often referred to as 'Little Brazil.'

Gort's local economy benefits from tourism attracting both national and international visitors. Significant tourist attractions include Coole Park, Thoor Ballylee, Kilmacduagh Monastic Settlement, while Gort also benefits from proximity to the Burren. Gort is also within Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, a popular touring route of rich landscapes and rural towns. It is relatively close to the Sliabh Aughties, a mountain range in West Ireland. The Wild Atlantic Way, a 2,500km coastal road from County Donegal to County Cork, is within the region of Gort and is part of the Burren Discovery Trail. Finally, Gort is set to be a destination on the emerging Galway to Athlone Cycleway project which is expected to bring an increase in visitors.



3. Saint Colman's Church



4. Gort Town Hall



5. Coole Park



6. Market Street



7. Thoor Ballylee

Figure 5-9 | Source: GCC

## 2.2 Facilities and amenities

Gort provides an important retail, educational and service function for its catchment area, which includes south Galway and extends into County Clare.

Retail and commercial uses are primarily located along Bridge Street and around Market Square, this provides convenience shopping, hospitality and professional services with some well established local businesses. In addition to this, market hall on Church Street has significant employment and retail uses, Crowe Street has a large number of smaller retail outlets. The town centre is served by four major retailers, Aldi, Lidl, Centra and SuperValu. A market takes place in Market Square every Friday throughout the year.

Over the last year there have been a number of new businesses opening in the town centre and evidence of improvements being made for future businesses opportunities.

The Grove/Kinicha serves as a local employment area with a gym, car centre and other local enterprises. Centra is an important supermarket and local employer in the town. Remote working facilities are available at ForgeWorks (Remote Working Hub) which helps support a good work life balance and contributes towards reducing carbon emissions.

Gort has a business park, managed by IDA, to the west of the town adjacent to the M18. There are two hotels within the town which both provide a full hospitality offer with significant facilities for larger events. They serve the local community as well as

entertaining coach parties on a regular basis.

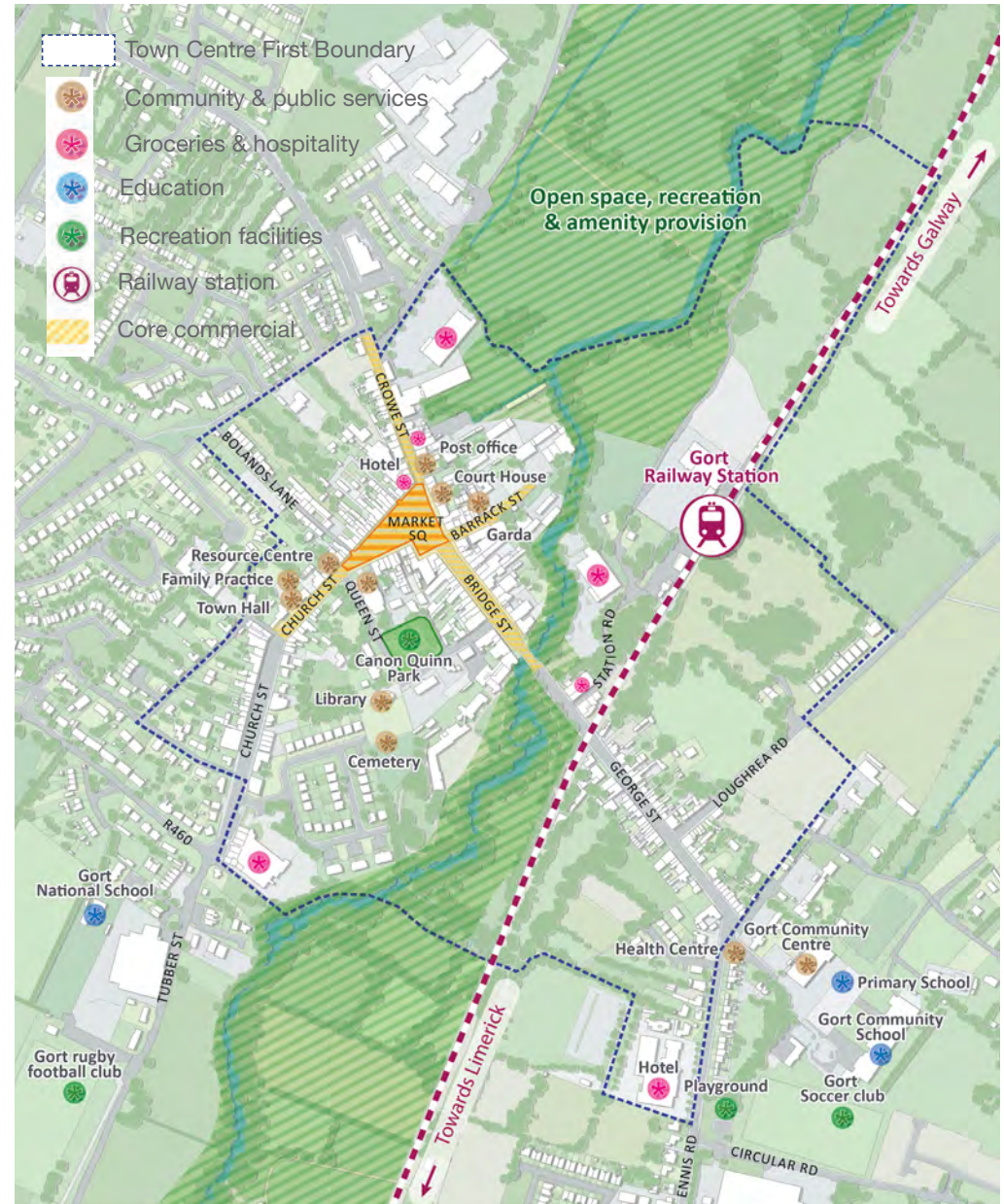
Gort has a public Library located in the former Church of Ireland off Queen Street. The Town Hall, located on Church Street, is leased by the Gort Town Hall Management Committee and provides community space for local groups including the Wild Swan Theatre Company. The Gort Resource Centre is also located on Church Street. The local community is serviced by two medical GP practices.

Gort has several schools, including the award-winning community school with 990 pupils and 100 employees, and national school with 222 pupils and 25 employees, as well as the Gealscoil na bhFilí. Both of these schools have expansion plans and all schools generate considerable traffic before and after school operation hours. Gort national school has DEIS status—a clear indicator of educational disadvantage. Gort has approximately eight local pre-schools/creches which are vital to life in the town.

Furthermore, GRETB is an Further Education and Training centre offering an extensive range of courses such as Outdoor Education, Music Education and Youth Services.

Many of the amenities are dispersed throughout the town centre. Although short distances, the lack of a comfortable environment for pedestrians and cyclists has led to a car dominated town centre with people regularly driving from one amenity to the next and seeking to park as close as physically possible to their destination.

Figure 10 | Map of facilities and amenities in Gort town centre



## 2.3 Vacancy and dereliction

Gort, as with many small rural towns in Ireland, has suffered the loss of key industries and has a relatively high rate of vacant premises, many of which are long standing vacancies. This has resulted in the resident population moving out and the primary focus of the town becoming the movement of vehicular traffic. Whilst it still acts as the primary shopping area in terms of convenience goods for the local hinterland, that tends to attract people as far as the supermarket car parks and no further.

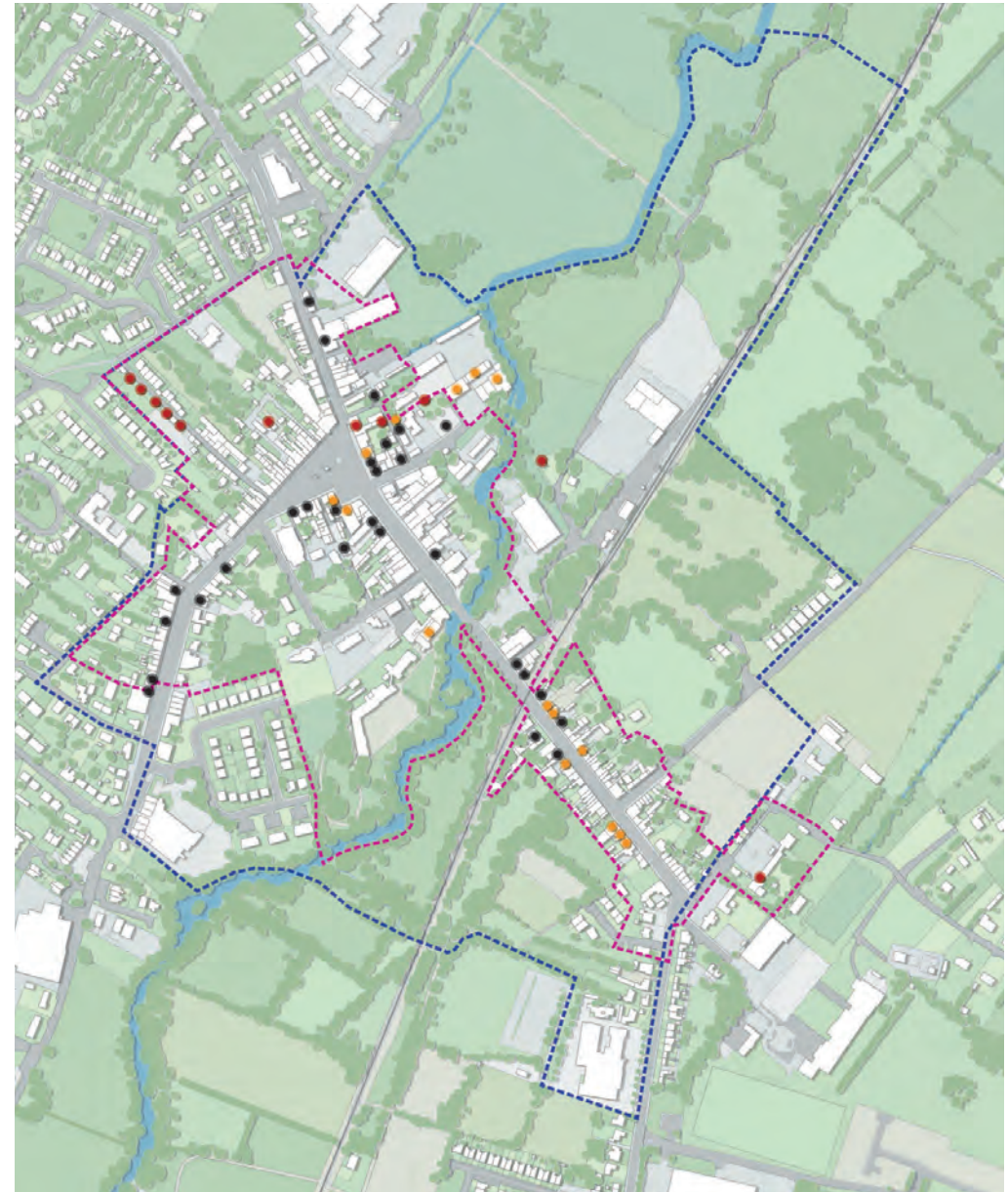
According to the Northern and Western Regional Assembly Regional Vacancy and Dereliction Analysis (January 2022), Gort had a commercial vacancy rate of 15.7% in 2020. This was above average for the region and for the state. However, this was a lower rate than in 2015, showing a reduction in vacancy rate over time. Likewise residential vacancy rates reduced in Gort in the years between 2015 to 2020. The rate in 2020 was 5.6% which was comparably low for the region, but still higher than the state average at 4.9%.

Despite reductions in vacancy over time, this continues to be a key priority for Gort, and as such has been a key feature in discussions with the town team and the community as part of the process of making this plan. It is also identified that there is housing need, including social housing demand within the Loughrea Municipal District as per the County Development Plan 2022-2028.



- Vacant building
- Vacant / significant maintenance
- Buildings 'at risk'
- Town Centre First boundary
- ACA boundary

Figure 11 | Map showing the vacant buildings in Gort town centre, correct at time of research | Source: BDP



## 2.4 History and cultural heritage

Gort's history can be traced back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century, when it was home to Guaire, the King of the South Galway Aidhne tribe. This is where Gort gained its traditional name, Gort Inse Guaire, which translates to 'Island Field of Guaire'.

Gort has a number of key historic features, including ecclesiastical, monastic and religious buildings and structures, a historic core, street pattern, plot arrangement and historic streetscapes. A summary of the items below has been provided by the Gort Town Trail:

**Market Square** | Planned by Viscount Gort in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the triangular, spacious square is central to the character of Gort. Historic market dating back to the 9<sup>th</sup> century and having been revived continues to be held every Friday throughout the year.

**Weigh House** | Located in the centre of Market Square, and thought to have been in use since before the 18<sup>th</sup> century where people came from all over the Burren Lowlands area on market days. Produce was weighed to make sure people paid their tolls and the Weigh Master would mark the weight of an item on the seller's hat. The weigh house went out of use c.1950 and is now owned by An Taisce and is Gort's Tourist Office.

**The Courthouse** | Built in 1815, this was one of the earliest local examples of this class of public building. It has been remodelled over the years so that only the staircase survives in its original form. It remains a functioning courthouse.

**Sullivans Hotel** | A historic building located on the Market Square, with connections to the famous Irish artist J. B. Yeats who used to sit in the front window and sketch.

**Bolands Lane** | Named after the merchant family who got the lease for all of the houses in 1834 and housed the first official bank in Gort.

**Town Hall** | Built in 1847 as a national school (Irish Primary School) and now used by the community including the local drama group, the Wild Swan Theatre Group, for performances.

**Catholic Church** | Built in 1825 by the Pain brothers, enlarged and modified many times since.

**Library and Cemetery** | The library was the former Protestant church built in 1810. The design was attributed to the architect Pain. The two galleries were for the Gregorys (the north) and the Goughs (the south), presented to the town of Gort in 1972.

**Canon Quinn Park** | This small park used to be the place where sheep were washed on market day. It has quorn stones from a local mill. It is now a recreational area owned by the Catholic church. All houses on this square originally faced onto it.

**Glynns Hotel** | This building saw many interesting guests, Count John McCormack, Prince Rainier and Princess Grace of Monaco all visited here and it was the favourite hotel of Lady Gregory's grand-daughters. The exterior of the building is still the same as it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Figure 12: Gort ordnance Survey map 1893 | Ordnance Survey Ireland



Figure 13: Market Square, n.d. | Source: Gort Library



**Convent (Bridge House)** | Dating from the 1760s and originally the home of Lord Gort. It is probably the oldest inhabited dwelling in the town. At various stages until 1857 it served as a doctor's residence, a police barracks and an auxiliary workhouse during the Great Famine. The founding sister of the community served with Florence Nightingale in the Crimea.

**Gort River** | Sourced from the Owendalulleagh river in the Slieve Aughty mountains. It flows into Lough Cutra in the parish of Beagh and becomes The Beagh river. After 3k the river is swallowed in a depression known as the 'Devil's Punchbowl' and then reappears under a naturally formed arch known as 'Pollduagh' a grotto type cave well worth seeing. From here it is called the Cannahowna river and reaches the town of Gort where it is called the Gort river. Leaving Gort it sinks and rises until it reaches Coole Lough and from there makes its way to Kinvara Bay.

**The Old Fever Hospital** | Built around 1846, a Tudor style building which was built to deal with the epidemics brought about by the famine.

**The Lady Gregory Hotel** | From 1969 to 1995 this building served as Our Lady's College, a boys' secondary school. Many of its rooms are named after members of the Irish Literary Revival who lived in South Galway. It is run by a local family as part of the Great National Hotel Group.

**The Old Forge** | Built around 1800 and was still in operation until the 1960s. W. B. Yeats used to get his horse shod here.

**Burke's Shop** | Was established by Daniel F. Burke in 1841 and remaining within the family, this establishment is a fuel and farm shop and a pub. The building frontage demonstrates skilled timber and carving craftsmanship.

**Gort Railway Station** | Opened in 1869 bringing prosperity and employment to Gort. The line closed in 1970 but was reopened in 2010 as part of the Western Rail Corridor.

**The Bridewell** | Built in the early 19th century, it served as a jail. On the wall is a plaque commemorating the hanging of a fighter from the 1798 rebellion. The site is now occupied by the Centra supermarket and Quinn's pharmacy.

**Old Military Barracks** | Located on Barrack Street and once housed around eighty men. Across the road is the remains of the stables where over a hundred horses were kept. The building is now Honan's warehouse. The barracks were built on the site of Gort Castle which was destroyed c.1650.

Figures 14- 21 | Heritage in Gort | Source: GCC and BDP



14. Market Square | GCC



18. The Convent | BDP



15. The Courthouse | BDP



19. The Weigh House | GCC



16. Gort Library | GCC



20. Canon Quinn Park | BDP



17. Burke's Shop | BDP



21. The Town Hall | GCC

Most of the town sits within the Architectural Conservation Area (ACA).

The objectives of an ACA are:

- To protect, conserve and enhance the essential character of the ACA through the control of the design, location, and layout of new properties or the alteration or extension of new one;
- To require proposals for development outside the ACA but which would affect its setting or views into and out of it, to respect its character and appearance;
- To promote the conservation and retention of traditional features and building elements such as shop fronts, windows, glass, doors and door cases. Where replacements are necessary to ensure that they respect the original character of the building or setting in which they are situated;
- To protect existing street patterns, spaces and relationships which contribute to the setting of the ACA;
- To respect the character of existing buildings, important views, spaces and the historic settlement in terms of scale, height, grouping, density, design and materials;
- To encourage rehabilitation of an existing building as a more sustainable option than redevelopment;

- To avoid the waste of unnecessary building demolition, foster the development of specialised conservation skills, and maintain the contribution of old buildings to the character of their area.

Gort's principal significance lies in the arrangement of its street pattern, plot sizes, architectural coherence, distinctive landmark buildings or groups and countryside setting. The combination of architecturally coherent buildings, narrow lanes with overhead carriage arches, extant military structures and traditional shop fronts mark Gort's unique significance. For its size, Gort contains a generous number of buildings of national or regional significance. The town as a whole is potentially very attractive.







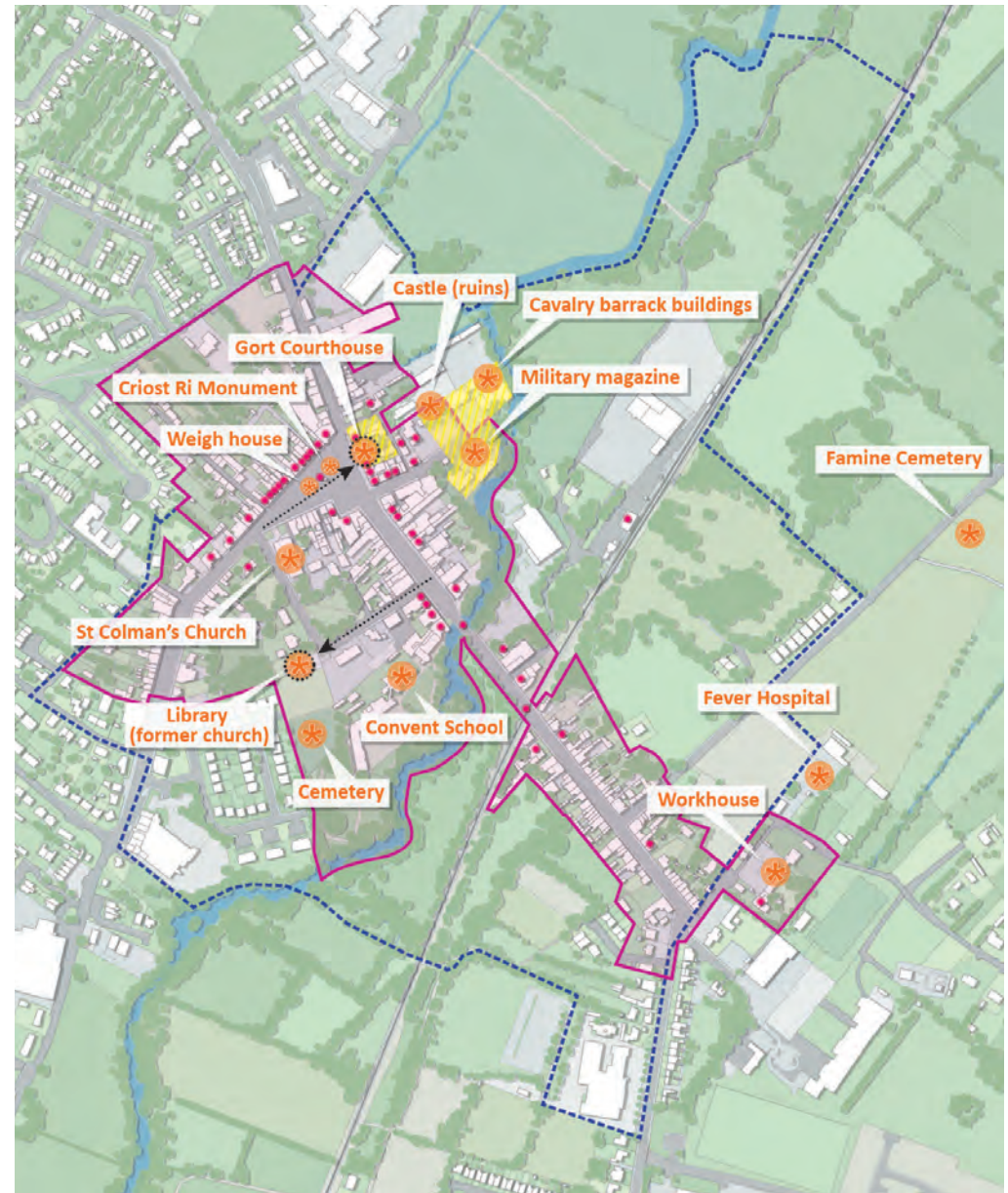
-  Historically important public building
-  Other designated heritage building
-  Town Centre First boundary
-  ACA
-  Planned vistas to be enhanced
-  Areas of significance to be enhanced

Figure 22 | Map of heritage buildings and significant historic monuments | Source: BDP



Gort and the surrounding areas of south Galway have a strong cultural history, embedded in the founding of the Irish literary scene and the legacy of Lady Gregory and W. B. Yeats.

Isabella Augusta, Lady Gregory (1852-1932) was an Irish dramatist, folklorist and theatre manager. She grew up between Gort and Loughrea and went on to marry Sir William Henry Gregory, of Coole Park Estate. Lady Gregory is known for contributing enormously to cultural nationalism and her role in the Irish Literary Revival.

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) was an Irish poet, dramatist, writer and politician, also known for being the driving force behind the Irish Literary Revival. Originally from County Dublin, he was introduced to Lady Gregory in 1896 and began spending his summers at Coole, which became the backdrop to his poetry. Later in life, Yeats purchased Thoor Ballylee (pictured right) which was his inspiration for many more poems.

Several sites around Gort have strong significance and attract many visitors due to their cultural connections, including:

- Thoor Ballylee, a 16<sup>th</sup> century fortified Norman castle which was the former home of W. B. Yeats, is open to visitors and run by volunteers;
- Kiltartan Gregory Museum, an award winning museum featuring pieces of history from the Gregory family and the Irish literary renaissance. It is situated two miles northeast of Gort on the N18;
- Kilmacduagh Monastery, known as one of the jewels of West Ireland, set against the backdrop of the Burren mountains and with the highest round tower in Ireland. Sir William Gregory paid for the restoration from 1879.
- Coole Park, a nature reserve managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and comprising over 400 hectares of woods, lake, river, limestone. Coole Park was the subject of Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats' work, and their presence is still visible across the landscape today;

Figure 23: Thoor Ballylee | Source: GCC



## 2.5 Transport and connectivity

This section summarises the existing transport and movement conditions across Gort, which has been analysed by Momentum Transport consultants.

**Traffic** | Traffic is busiest in Gort town centre on weekday mornings and afternoons. The predominant flows are between Crowe Street and Market Square and Church Street and Market Square. Approximately 90% of motor vehicle traffic is cars. 8% is light goods vehicles (LGVs), and the remaining is other goods vehicles (OGVs) and public transport. The Market Square becomes particularly congested during events (weddings, funerals etc.). It should be noted that there is a large volume of farm machinery at seasonal times during the year which can impact traffic in the local area.

**Parking** | There is ample on-street parking in the town centre, with a total of 437 spaces. The majority of these are two hour pay and display, though Church Street has some long-term free parking.

Market Square has 119 spaces and receives the highest occupancy rates out of all of the parking.

It is generally busiest on Saturdays, with Saturday afternoons reaching over 90% occupancy. The most common pattern of parking is for people to stay for 2 hours or less in the afternoon. Bridge Street is the second busiest on-street parking area.

Gort has three large off-street car parks, one of which is the train station car park, while Lidl and Aldi also provide parking for their customers.

There is no off-street car park in the town centre for town centre users which has led to an abundance of on-street parking at the expense of safe pedestrian and cyclist space. There is a lack of EV charging in the town centre, with one public charging point at the train station and two charging points provided at Lidl.



Figure 24 | Market Street | Source: BDP

Figure 25: Bar chart of parking occupancy in Market Square | Source: Momentum

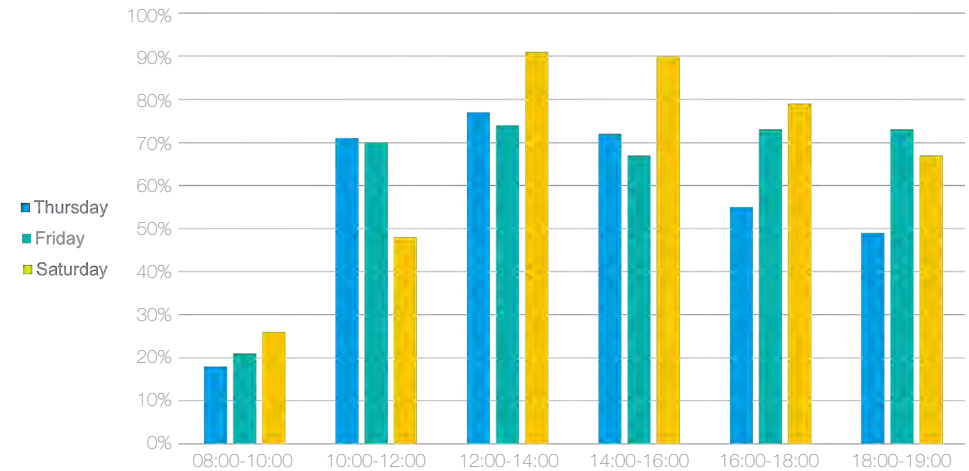


Figure 26: Map of town centre on-street parking capacity | Source: Momentum





**Accessibility** | Accessibility and wayfinding in Gort is considered poor. This is due to a lack of maintenance on the roads and footways which show many major and minor defects, making it dangerous for those with lower accessibility such as elderly people, disabled and parents with buggies.

Some of the pavements, such as those on Queen Street are very narrow, creating a feeling of being too close to the traffic with little room to pass oncoming pedestrians.

There is a lack of wayfinding in the town, such as signposts, maps, and public transport timetables.



**Pedestrian Environment** | There is a poor pedestrian environment in Gort town centre due to vehicle dominance and a lack of crossing points.

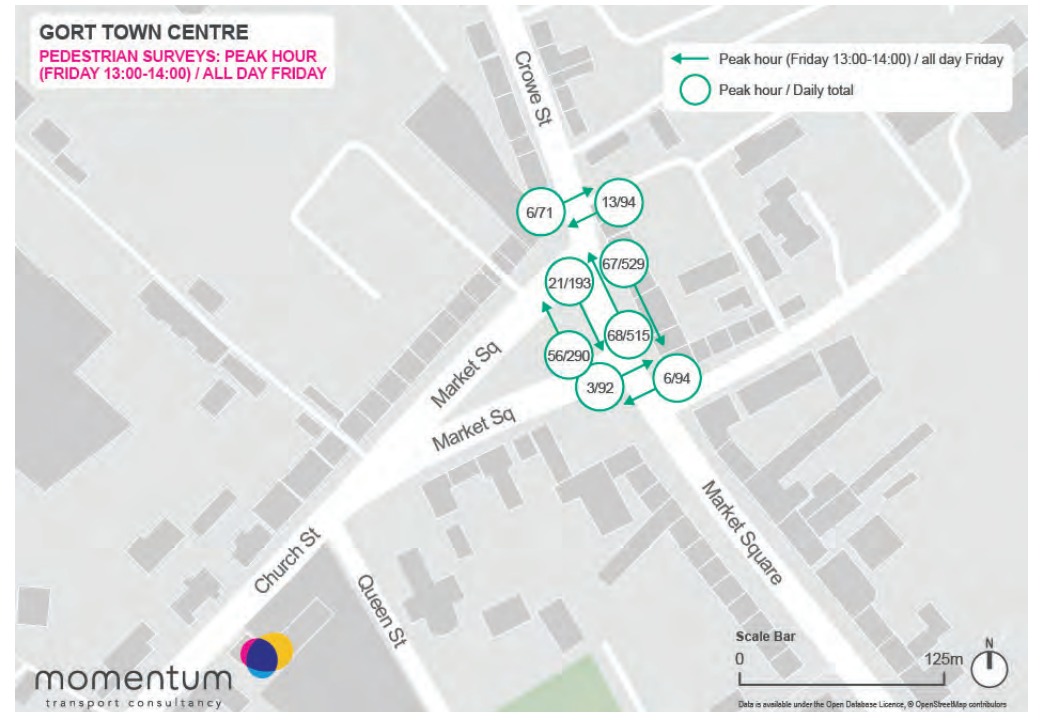
The pedestrian counts showed that the majority of pedestrians use the eastern side of Bridge Street, indicating that people avoid crossing at Market Square. High numbers of pedestrians are crossing from the south of Market Square, towards the hotel, without a dedicated crossing point which can be dangerous. To use a crossing facility, pedestrians have to walk further south to the signals outside Keane's Shop.



Figures 27-29 | Photos highlighting some accessibility and connectivity issues in the town centre



Figure 30: Pedestrian survey map | Momentum



**Cycling** | There is a clear desire to cycle within the town centre and wider context. The historic road patterns with varying widths present a challenge to provide dedicated cycle lanes, instead opportunities for other routes need to be explored, revised street layouts including traffic calming measures need to be introduced to encourage more cycling and make it safer. There is a lack of cycle parking which limits the opportunity for passing cyclists to spend time in the town centre.

Gort is located on the emerging Galway to Athlone Cycleway which aims to create a car-free corridor between Galway and Dublin for cyclists and walkers. It is anticipated that a planning application for this project will be submitted in late 2024. Gort should aim to capitalise on being an identified location on this cycleway.

**Public Transport** | Feedback from stakeholders and observations on site indicate that public transport is well used in the town, however both buses and trains are infrequent, and finish early. There are two bus stops in Gort, opposite each other; one adjacent to the square, and the other outside AIB.

The bus stops serve four bus routes. The 51 is an intercity service that connects Cork and Galway. It serves Gort hourly in each direction, between 07:55 and 19:45. The other intercity service is the 434, which routes between Galway and Gort once a day on weekdays.

There are two local services; the 934 which connects Gort to Loughrea, twice a day on weekdays, and the 349, which routes to and from Scariff once a day on a Friday.

Gort train station has a service between Galway and Limerick, with the journey time with a journey time of approximately one hour in either direction an hour to reach both. The trains are fairly infrequent, serving the station every few hours on average. The train station is not very well connected with the town centre and could be enhanced to improve the service.

Figure 31 | Pedestrian link to the railway station | Source: BDP



Figure 32 | Galway to Athlone Cycleway | Source: GCC



## 2.6 Socio-economic and demographic profile

This page summarises the socio-economic and demographic context of Gort. A full overview of this data and analysis which has underpinned this plan is contained within the Need and Project Identification and Justification Report (Appendix A).

### Population:

As of the Census 2022, Gort has a population of 2,870 inhabitants. However, it is noted that the geographic definition of Gort has changed between the 2016 and 2022 Censuses, where comparison of population figures can give a false impression. According to the Western Development Commission's (WDC) comparative analysis of population size, Gort's population in real terms is 3,155 inhabitants which is a 5.4% increase from 2016. During the same period, the population of County Galway has increased by 7.4%.

### Age:

Gort's population is dominated by the 25-50 age group, exceeding the County rate in these age categories (in percentage terms). It is expected that these are working adults, likely to be in the labour force, with many

having families thus indicating the need for a range of affordable family friendly facilities, services and activities. Gort displays lower numbers of population in the 55-74 age categories which is below the County levels for the same age groups.

### Citizenship:

Gort displays a significant level of population diversity with over 1,000 of its residents having citizenship (and usual resident population) being from a country outside of Ireland. Compared to County Galway, Gort has 23% less residents with Irish citizenship. There are a very significant number of international residents (from outside of the EU) in Gort at 15% compared to 2% across the County. It is noted that Gort has a significant Brazilian population.

Gort has a significantly lower percentage of residents who were born in Ireland compared to the County level. Gort also displays a significantly lower 'white' population than the rates at the County and National level.

Country	Gort: Pop. By Citizenship	%	Galway: Pop. By Citizenship	%
Ireland	1,889	66%	170710	89%
UK	59	2%	3582	2%
Poland	63	2%	2910	2%
India	22	1%	937	0%
Other EU	137	5%	4240	2%
Rest of World	434	15%	4033	2%
Not Stated	240	8%	4936	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,842</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>191,348</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Central Statistics Office, Ireland, 2022 Census

Figure 33: Citizenship of Gort | Source: Central Statistics Office, Ireland

### Religion:

Gort is dominated by the Catholic religion. However, in comparison to the County, Gort has a significantly lower level of Catholics. An increasing number are indicating that they have 'no religion' - this is one of the most significant trends in the Census information across the past two periods. Overall, Gort displays a more religiously diverse settlement compared to the County.

### Education:

According to the Census 2022, 16% of Gort's total population are in education. The percentage of those in education aged below 15 years is lower in Gort (7.3%) compared to the County level (8.6%). In contrast, Gort has a higher percentage of those aged above 15 years in post-school education (8.8%) compared to the County level at 4.4%.

13% of Gort's residents have achieved Upper Secondary level education. 5% of Gort's residents have achieved Honours Bachelor Degree level education.

### Employment:

In comparison to County Galway, Gort has less people employed (in percentage terms) in the majority of the key sectors, namely: Agriculture, Commerce, Communications, Public Administration and Professional Services sectors. In the Building, Manufacturing and Other Sectors, Gort displays higher levels of employment than the County. The sectors of dominance in Gort are typically manual and offer lower levels of remuneration that the sectors more dominant

in the County, generally these are cyclical sectors which can result in people and families experiencing poverty and financial exclusion.

### Deprivation:

The Pobal Deprivation Indices by Electoral Division (2016) shows Gort with overall deprivation at marginally below average. The Deprivation Map by Small Areas shows that the centre of Gort suffers from higher deprivation, particularly around Crowe St and Boland's Court which is 'very disadvantaged'. The outskirts of Gort and the areas south of the town centre are less disadvantaged.

These figures are the most up to date at the time of writing the report.

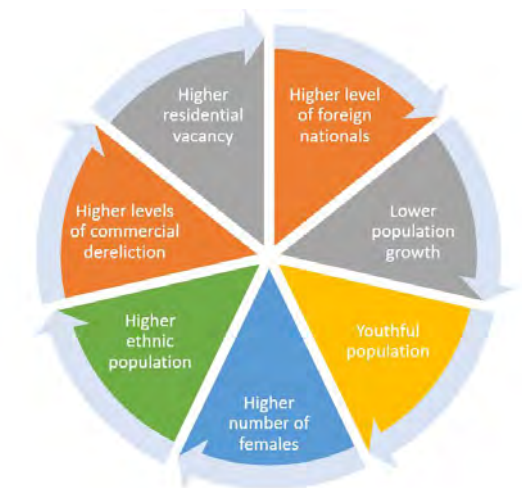


Figure 34: Key socio-economic indicators of Gort | Source: Venture analysis

## 2.7 SCOT analysis

### STRENGTHS



- Many active community groups including arts, volunteering and charity;
- Architectural heritage;
- Market Square as a focal point of the town;
- Wide streets and footpaths;
- Strong sense of community;
- Access to the river and green space;
- A range of educational facilities, cafes, eateries and hospitality businesses;
- Connections to significant literary, cultural and arts groups;
- Events and festivals organised annually;
- Young and diverse population;
- Proximity to Coole Garryland Nature Reserve;
- Strategic location close to the M18 motorway and with a railway station in the town centre, linking to Galway and Limerick;
- Gort Family Resource Centre;
- Brothers of Charity service;
- Gort River Walk community initiative.

### CHALLENGES



- The presentation of the town;
- A lack of accessible and affordable multi-functional community space;
- Barriers to accessing opportunities, particularly for the younger population;
- Higher levels of residential and commercial vacancy than average across Galway and nationally;
- Signage (both arrival and directional through the town) is poorly presented and ineffective;
- A lack of multifunctional sports and leisure facilities;
- Poor public realm and pedestrian comfort within the streets, lack of pedestrian crossings and narrow footpaths;
- Traffic dominated town centre;
- No dedicated car free public space;
- Lack of facilities for young and older people;
- Lack of safe cycle routes and cycle parking in the town centre.

### OPPORTUNITIES



- Shop front enhancements;
- Coordinated annual programme of events and festivals;
- Re-purposing heritage, vacant and derelict buildings;
- Providing multi-functional space for the community;
- Provision of Sport & Leisure Facilities
- Maximising the benefits of the river and surrounding green space to provide recreation and leisure opportunities;
- Potential to capitalise on the benefits from the Gort to Athlone Greenway;
- Improve the presentation and usability of the public realm;
- Introduce planting and street furniture which would improve attractiveness;
- Safe cycle routes and parking;
- Make the market space safer and more accessible inviting more traders and visitors;
- Improved public transport provision.

### THREATS



- Lack of coordinated leadership to ensure the delivery and implementation of proposals;
- Poor public transport connections;
- Issues over parking provision;
- Reluctance to accept change;
- Lack of funding opportunities;
- Lack of maintenance of historic buildings;
- Loss of services and facilities;
- Impactful industries including the planned biogas plant;
- Severe flooding issues.





# 03

## Collaboration and Communication

The development of the Gort TCF is rooted in consultation with its residents, businesses, community organisations and other key stakeholders. This section summarises how the plan has developed through invaluable involvement and feedback from the local community and key stakeholders.

- 3.1 | The Town Team
- 3.2 | Engagement process
- 3.3 | Key messages

## 3.1 The Town Team

In 2022, the Gorgeous Gort Forum (GGF), with a mandate from approx. 50 groups and organisations in Gort, worked closely with Galway County Council, to secure Rural Regeneration & Development Funding, for Gort town centre.

In December 2022, groups on the GGF database were advised by the council of a meeting in Sullivans Hotel scheduled for December 19<sup>th</sup> and were invited to attend. At this meeting, it was announced that a Town Team needed to be established in Gort in order to progress the Town Centre First Plan.

As GGF were already liaising with the Council, they were co-opted on the new Town Team with others present at the meeting volunteering to join.

An initial public meeting was held in Sullivans' Hotel Gort on January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023, hosted by Galway County Council and BDP, the chosen design team.

A wide-ranging consultation survey was distributed by hand to Gort residents. This was also available online.

A number of individual and public meetings were held and BDP also met with a large range of secondary school students in the local community school to ascertain their views on the future of Gort's town centre.

The Town Team is made up of a number of individuals who live or work in Gort. Members of the team share a strong belief that the TCF Plan presents us with a positive opportunity to work together to develop Gort to reach its full potential.

Membership comprises:

- Annie Rozario - Chairperson - Project Coordinator, Gort Resource Centre & Gorgeous Gort Forum;
- Bernice Forde Carolan - Town Champion - Resident;
- Marion Cahill Collins - Secretary - Resident; Town Hall Management Committee, Wild Swan Theatre Company & Gorgeous Gort Forum;
- Sally Smith - Vice Chair - Business Owner, River Walk Group, Burren Lowlands & Gorgeous Gort Forum;
- Martin Aherne - Resident & Gort Biogas Concern Group;
- David Murray - Gort River Walk, Biogas Concern Group & South Galway Flood Relief Committee;
- Ciaran O'Donnell - Resident & Gort Biogas Concern Group;
- Karen O'Neill - Burren Lowlands & Gorgeous Gort Forum;
- Fr Tommy Marrinan - Honorary Member Parish Priest.

As the team became established, the need for wider membership became evident and the Galway County Council subsequently advertised for expressions of interest from Gort business owners. Following a successful shortlisting process, the following new members were co-opted to the group on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2023.

- Shona Mac Gillivray - Gort Arts & Business

Co-Owner;

- Fiona O'Driscoll - Co-Owner of Minihane's SuperValu Business;
- Caroline Brennan - Gort Market Trader;
- Suzanne Orford - Business Owner;
- John Coughlan - Resident & Business Owner of Centra Store.

The above membership forms the core of the Town Team. However, this group recognises that additional project specific members may be required in the future.

The Town Team has been meeting in person at monthly intervals to finalise the content of the TCF Plan, its themes and the proposals. In addition to these meetings there have been online presentations and collaboration between the Town Champion and the Town Regeneration Officer as matters arise for discussion. The Town Team actively work on the ground to promote and deliver the Town Centre First Plan through future funding calls and by engaging with the local community.



## 3.2 Engagement process

Numerous consultation events and meetings have been undertaken since the start of January 2023 and the finalisation of this plan, with members of the public, the Town Team, County Council members and officers, other local groups and consultant organisations. Engagement activities and consultation events were facilitated by the BDP and Venturei teams with support from Galway County Council.

These meetings have resulted in raising awareness and establishing a wide range of comments which ultimately helped to define and inform the following:

- The local context and broader community needs and aspirations;
- An understanding of how spaces are used;
- An understanding of the current provisions in Gort and any deficits or desires identified;
- The issues and constraints of the sites and wider area;
- The overarching aspirational vision statement;
- The ten key themes which summarise the underlying principles for positive change;
- The proposals.

Figures 35 - 43 | Photos from engagement | Source: BDP



35



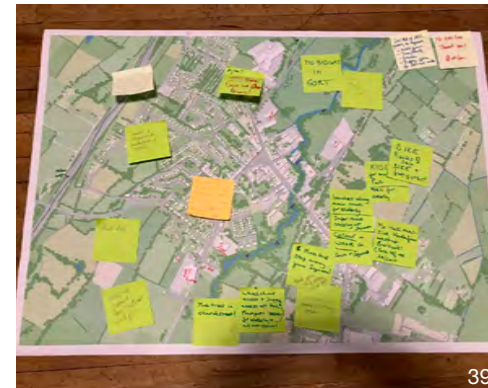
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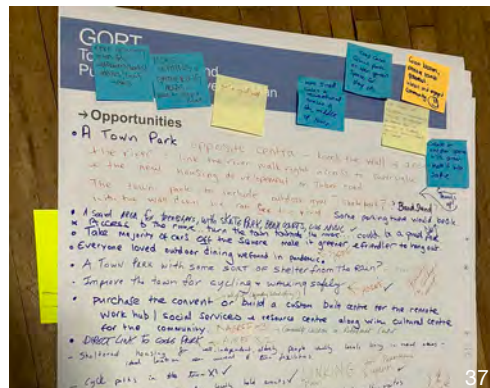
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**Public consultation drop in events**

- Thursday 12th January 2023
- Thursday 27th April 2023
- Wednesday 14th June 2023

These events were set up to raise awareness amongst the local community about the TCF process and inform them on how to get involved and share their views. The events helped to establish an understanding of how people are using the town, along with the strengths, challenges and opportunities from a local perspective. The experience also provided a space to facilitate conversations between the community and the design team. These events were well attended, which resulted in gathering hundreds of comments and informative insight for the plan. Information boards were placed on public display to present details on the plan.

**Online Consultation Survey**

- 16th January - 2nd February 2023

The consultation survey was used to gain an understanding of the likes and dislikes of the local community regarding their town about their town and further record areas of improvement. The surveys were accessible in paper format on the public consultation day in January, and in online format throughout with the possibility of sending through additional comments for the design team or Town Team.

**Workshops with invited community representatives**

- Wednesday 8th February 2023

The workshop was an opportunity for the design team to present and discuss the initial findings of the public consultation with the Town Team and other locals interested in the project and to explore more detailed aspects of the project.

**Local Community School Workshop**

- Thursday 9th February 2023

Following a low response rate from younger age groups within Gort, the design team engaged with 120 students at the Gort local community school, with ages ranging from 14-18. This session and follow up discussions recorded the students' comments in response to questions surrounding how the town centre and existing amenities in Gort could be improved, and what they would like to see within the town.

**Online workshops with business owners and stakeholders**

Updates to the project were provided through online presentations as required throughout the process.

**Semi-structured one-to-one sessions with key stakeholders**

- June-August 2023

Venturei conducted one-to-one engagement sessions with key members of the community to gain more detailed input into the plan, including:

- their perceptions on the town generally;
- the facilities and amenities;
- how Gort could be improved, particularly regarding business, culture, education, facilities, arts and housing.

This engagement took the form of written responses, followed up by phone calls and meetings. The responses have helped to shape the outcomes of the plan.

Figure 44 | Engagement material | Source: BDP



### 3.3 Key messages

Below are the comments received in the various public consultation events relating to the town centre.



**What do you like most about the town centre?**

*Architecture*  
*Heritage*  
*River walk*  
*The square*  
*Wide streets & footpaths*  
*Cafes & eateries*  
*Community*



**What do you dislike most about the town centre?**

*Traffic speed*  
*Parking*  
*Dis-repaired & vacant buildings*  
*Lack of trees & greenery*  
*Dangerous crossings*



**How could the town centre be enhanced?**

*Improve footpaths & crossings*  
*More public seating*  
*More plants & trees*  
*Improve the presentation of streets (more colours)*  
*More & improved lighting*  
*More green areas*  
*Open usable space in the town centre*



**What are your top priorities for the town centre?**

01 *Addressing dereliction & vacant sites*

02 *Public spaces*

03 *Community facilities*

04 *Greening*

05 *Walking & cycling*

06 *Commercial development*

07 *Public transport*

08 *Parking*

09 *Housing development*



Below are the comments received in the various public engagement events relating to facilities and amenities.



## How could existing amenities in Gort be improved?



### Current sport provision

- Resurface astroturf and connect to the school;
- Provide more activities at the community centre such as rock climbing;
- Improve Coole FC pitch.



### Public Realm

- Improve footpaths for accessibility;
- Outdoor seating areas for cafes and restaurants;
- Seating and benches in the town centre;
- Move the bus stop and add a shelter;
- More lighting;
- Less parking on the square;
- Improve public toilets;
- Decorate the bridge/add more colour;
- Add more greenery and street trees;
- Increased amenities for market traders;
- EV charging points;
- Improved signage.



### Gort River

- Extend the river walk;
- Link the river walk to town centre;
- Improve access to the river;
- Areas for seating;
- Recreational uses: water sports, kayaking;
- Wheel chair accessible.



### Canon Quinn Park

- Make wheelchair accessible;
- Improve connection to the town centre;
- Keeping flexible open space;
- Retaining its existing character;
- Improve lighting;
- Provide more seating.



### Community facilities

- Provide more activities in the library;
- Improve the playground;
- Improve the town hall.



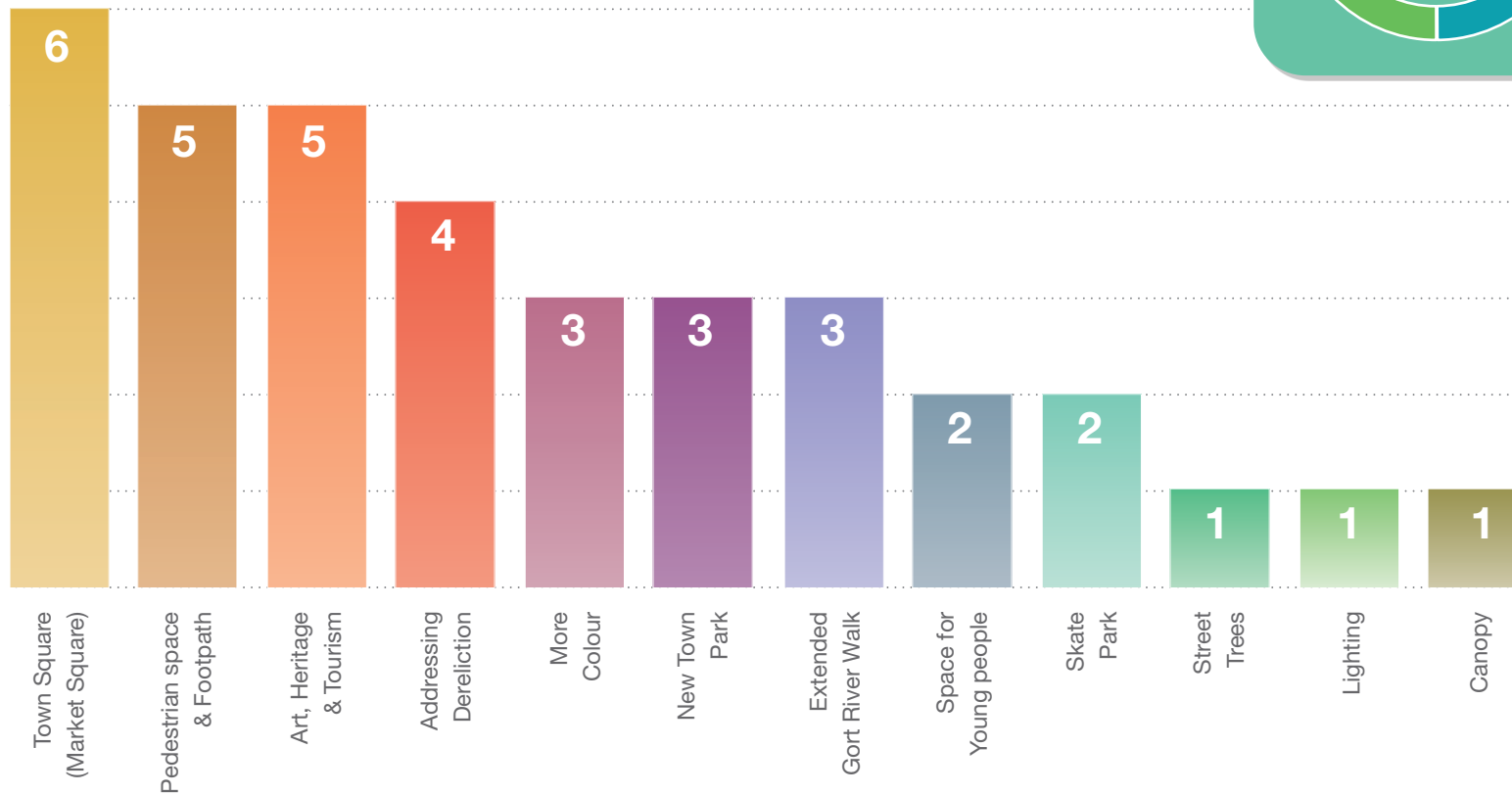
## What new amenity would you propose in Gort?



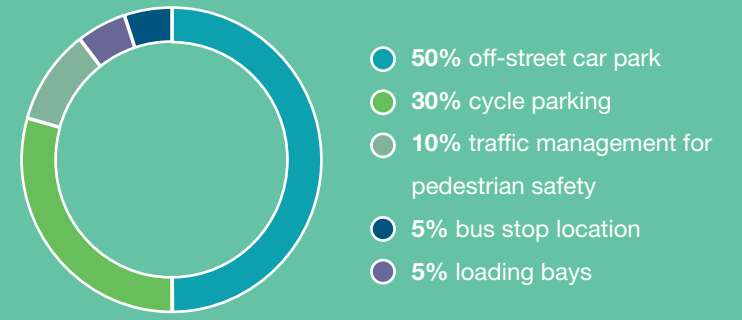
- Town park with access to the river;
- More spaces for young people;
- More recreational and sports facilities - basketball courts, tennis courts;
- New playground, skate park, pump track;
- Band stand, shelter or canopy for events and socialising in the park;
- Community garden;
- Art exhibition space;
- Outdoor dining (picnic benches/sheltered);
- Chess facilities;
- Study centre;
- Somewhere to paint/draw;
- Playground;
- Handball alley;
- Public swimming pool;
- Better horse riding places;
- Go-kart place;
- More green walking areas;
- Outdoor events area;
- Local arts displays and cultural events;
- Leisure facilities including cinemas, arcades, bowling alley;
- More restaurants, cafes and bars - such as a sports bar, coffee shops, restaurants with outdoor seating;
- Remote working hub in the town centre;
- Central community hub for support and services;
- Housing for independent elderly in the town centre;
- Spaces for pop-up shops and businesses.

Below are the comments received in the various public engagement events relating to the town centre.

**What are the key objectives for the town centre?**



**Transport initiatives: what is needed & important?**





# 04

## Defining the place

This section establishes the vision and key themes which have been curated through the analytical and engagement work. A series of proposals are presented which reflect the key themes and provide ambitious ideas and opportunities for Gort's future development.

- 4.1 | Key themes, strategic priorities and proposed interventions
- 4.2 | Vision
- 4.3 | Proposals

## 4.1 Key themes, strategic priorities and proposed interventions

The structure of the outcomes from the Town Centre First Plan process can be understood and interpreted as follows:

**Ten overarching themes** which have emerged through engagement and contextual analysis. These are reflected throughout the strategic priorities and proposed interventions.

**Proposals** within each of the themes, which outline the key priorities and interventions to drive the revitalisation of Gort. The proposals have been driven by the community's aspirations, the design and research analysis, and the wider policy context.



Theme 01

**Reanimating  
Heritage**



Theme 02

**Revitalising  
Culture & The Arts**



Theme 03

**Social Inclusion,  
Community Spirit  
& Well-being**



Theme 04

**Connectivity**



Theme 05

**Re-purposing Vacant &  
Derelict Buildings**



Theme 06

**Vibrant Local  
Economy**



Theme 07

**Sustainable Urban  
Living**



Theme 08

**Attracting Visitors**



Theme 09

**Natural  
Environment &  
Biodiversity**



Theme 10




















**Re-imagining  
Public Spaces**



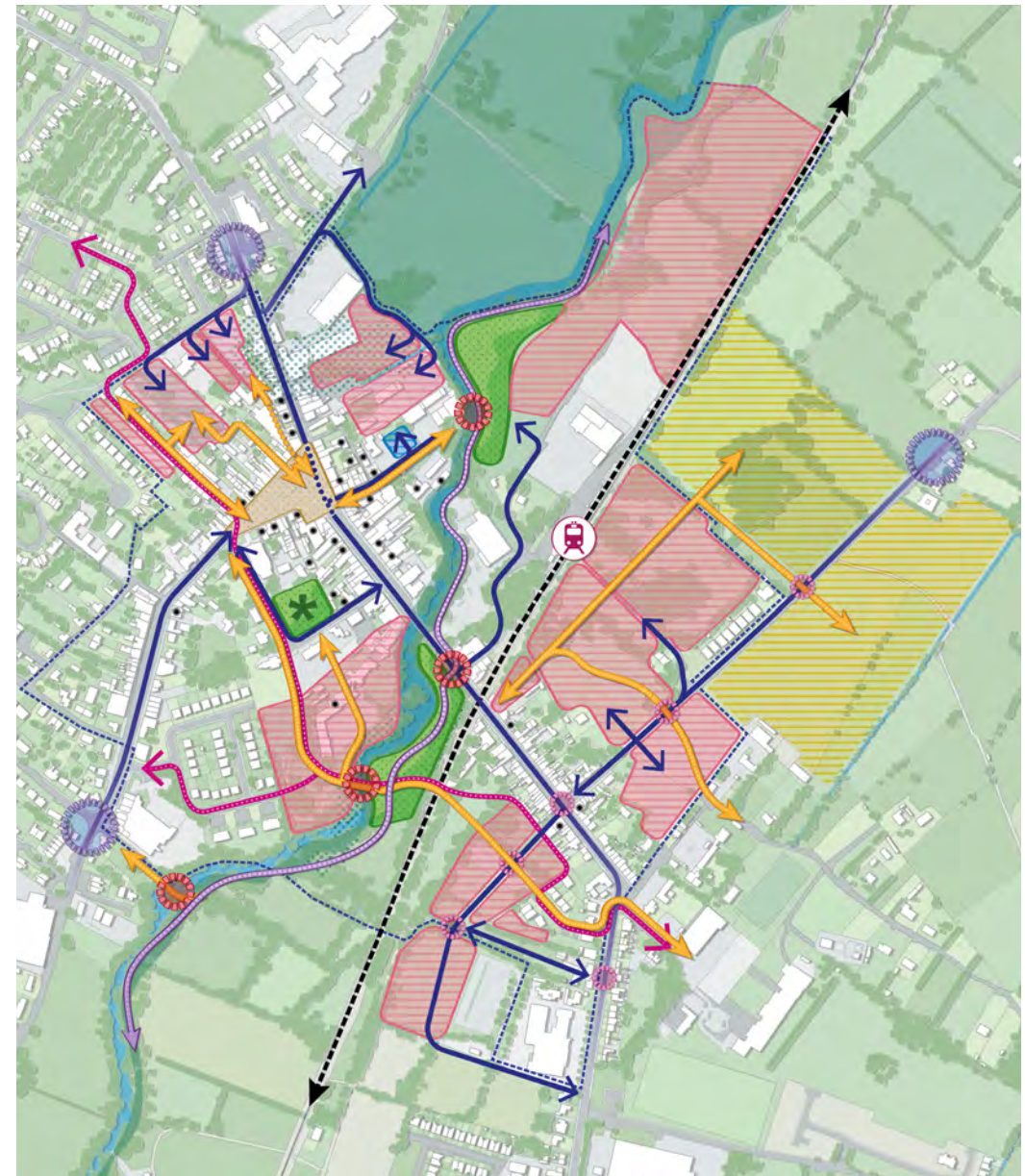
## 4.2 The vision

The vision for Gort is of a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable town, steeped in history and character, with Market Square at its heart and access to green space and the Gort River. A desirable place to live, work, learn and visit.

Figure 45 | Proposed vision map of Gort town centre | Source: BDP

- |   |                                    |   |                              |
|---|------------------------------------|---|------------------------------|
|  | Flood zone A - 1% probability      |  | Railway line                 |
|  | Flood zone B - climate change      |  | Pedestrian links             |
|  | Green amenity spaces               |  | Extended Gort River Walk     |
|  | Canon Quinn Park                   |  | TCF boundary                 |
|  | New off street parking             |  | New cycle and pedestrian way |
|  | Existing parking                   |  | Gateways to town centre      |
|  | Market Square                      |  | Pedestrian nodes             |
|  | Opportunity sites                  |  | New connecting elements      |
|  | Opportunity sites outside TCF plan |  | Vacant buildings             |
|  | Vehicular access                   |   |                              |

Areas are accurate at the time of writing this report.



## 4.3 Theme 01 | Reanimating heritage



### Introduction

A key tenet of the vision for Gort is the strengthening of the town's unique heritage and celebrating its rich history.

A historic market town, the heritage of Gort is still very much visible in the town's layout and architecture. The town and the wider area already attracts a significant number of visitors for the purposes of heritage and cultural tourism. However, the town could do more to celebrate and embrace its natural, built and cultural heritage. Much of Gort's heritage assets are well maintained and in good condition, however some require intervention to improve and support them for the future.

The ambition is to reanimate heritage to reflect the local pride and interest in the history of the town, along with an aspiration to bring the heritage features to life.

### Proposals

#### 01- Conservation Management Plan for Cavalry stables and barracks

**Background** | Located on Barrack Street and once housed approximately eighty men. Across the road is the remains of the stables where over a hundred horses were kept. The building is now Honan's warehouse. The barracks were built on the site of Gort Castle which was destroyed c.1650. This area is a key heritage asset for the town. It would benefit from further attention and improvement.

#### Proposal

- In conjunction with landowners, commission a conservation and management plan for the Cavalry barracks & former castle site;
- Commission a feasibility study to determine possible future uses;
- Assess the existing building fabric and steps needed to restore and reuse.

#### Benefits

- Protecting the heritage of the town;
- Regeneration, potential complementary offer within the town centre;
- Potential to connect to the Gort River walk and future Greenway as an arrival in to the town centre.

Figure 46 | Historical map of the Barracks, 1893 | Ordnance Survey Ireland

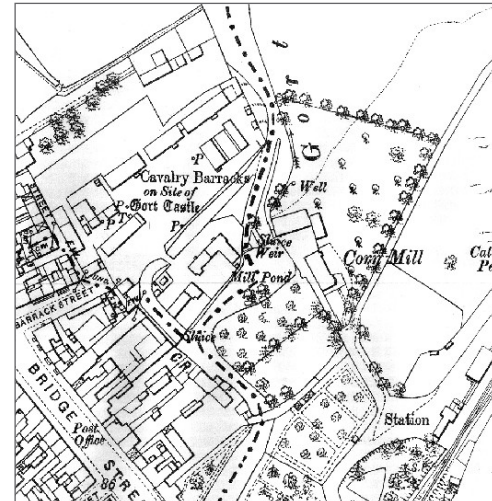


Figure 47 | Satellite view of the Barracks | Google Earth



Figure 48 | Aerial view of the Barracks | Source: GCC



## 02- Updated & Enhanced Heritage Trail

**Background** | An existing Heritage Trail by the Burren Lowlands (part-funded by Galway County Council) provides a valuable resource to pinpoint the town’s key heritage assets and share interesting stories linked to their existence. This is an attractive resource for residents and visitors alike.

### Proposal

- Update and expand the existing heritage trail – including stories from the local community;
- Trail markers and signage to tie in with the overall wayfinding;
- Lighting of heritage buildings/frontages;
- Create an online Heritage Trail resource for locals and visitors to use;
- Opportunity to incorporate events and performances within these historic settings.

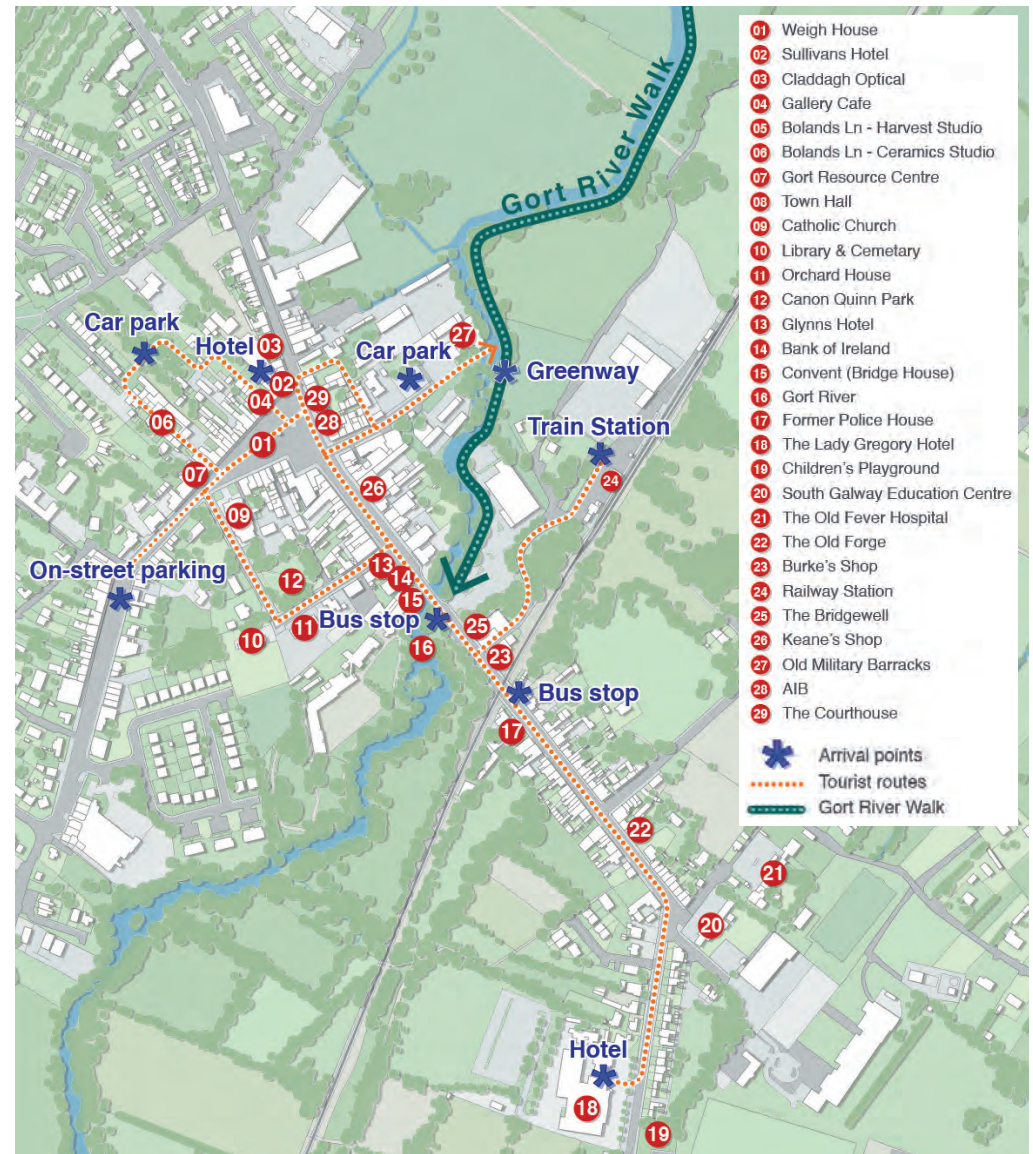
### Benefits

- Strengthened local identity;
- Improve the visitor offer of Gort;
- Education resource for locals/site visits;
- Ensures the historic built environment is well-maintained;
- Opens historic sites which are currently under-utilised.



Figures 49-51 | Key points of interest on the existing Heritage Trail | GCC & BDP

Figure 52 | Heritage trail map | Source: BDP



## 4.3 Theme 02 | Revitalising culture and the arts



### Introduction

Gort has a long-standing ambition to better embrace its cultural identity and to create a locus for cultural expression, coming from the local community and businesses.

A 2019 Review of Arts Centres and Venues (June 2019), commissioned by the Arts Council and City and County Management Association (CCMA), found that the overall national provision of arts centres and venues is 2.9 per 100,000 persons, but the figure for County Galway (excluding Galway City) is just 0.6 per 100,000. The Arts Council and CCMA Framework for Collaboration agrees that they will work together more strategically in developing the arts in Ireland and a priority for the partnership is to develop the infrastructure for the arts. In order to address this significant deficit in provision for the arts, culture and creative sectors, the Town Centre First plan aims to revitalise the local arts and culture scene. This will provide appropriate space to encourage the arts to grow and become the focus of the town, breathing new life into the town centre.

It is recognised that there are a range of existing cultural and artistic activities ongoing in Gort, and it is the intention of the plan and proposals within to support and grow these existing endeavours. These include the work by the Wild Swan Theatre Company, the Gort Vibes Cinema Club, Coole Music and Arts, Cooley-Collins festival, Gort Arts and the Ploughed Field Collective poetry group and the work of local artists.

The emphasis on arts and culture within this plan has been strongly supported by the wider community who showed a shared ambition to provide more spaces, support and opportunities for arts and culture in Gort Town Centre.

### Proposals

#### 01 - The Town Hall Performance Space

**Background |** Built around 1870, St Colman's Town Hall is a key heritage building in Gort town centre, and is a Protected Structure (Register No. 442). The Gort Town Hall Management committee are leasing the building until the year 2029. They are a very successful local theatre group who have been running for over 20 years. The building has also been used for other community uses including by Gort Vibes Cinema Club, Ploughed Field Collective Poetry Group, meetings by the local GAA Club, first responder training and as a venue to hold Irish Wake Ceremonies.

**Proposal |** The proposal is for further renovation of the Town Hall including roof repairs and interior works to support the community activities and particularly the work of the Wild Swan Theatre Company and local artists using this building. Bringing this historic structure which has a 100-seat performance space to a higher standard, including increased accessibility (elevator) and providing a suitable rehearsal and performance space for the local community would be invaluable to the town of Gort.

### Benefits

- Provide the right environment to promote media and performing arts as a primary aspirational pathway;
- Recognise the undervalued role for everyday creative practices and forms;
- Use creative arts to address issues such as poverty, inequality and employment;
- Use the creative arts to encourage alliances and inter-linkages between groups and institutions that reflects the challenging complexity, diversity and cooperation that characterises everyday life;
- Retaining and enhancing existing character and distinctiveness, using the heritage assets of the quarter as an inspirational starting point;
- Help to increase night-time trade for local cafes, restaurants and hotels.

#### 02 - Art & Creativity in the Town Centre

**Background |** There are currently a number of art installations as murals on blank walls within the town centre. The ambition is to build upon this to enhance the identity and character of the town.

**Proposal |** The proposal is to identify and incorporate public art into the fabric of the town to inspire creativity and reinforce the unique identity of the town, and establish dedicated exhibition spaces such as a gallery within the town. Potential locations for murals and art/sculpture will complement what exists today, and the Convent Church would be an ideal space for a gallery.

- Assessment of existing murals/ installation/sculptures;
- Identify other complementary locations for new public art in the town centre;
- Ensure the process is collaborative and engaging the community and in consideration of Gort's heritage;
- Identify space for a gallery to showcase local artists and their creativity;
- Identify a gallery and workshop space, for showcasing artists and skill sharing that also includes workshop spaces for community hands-on engagement.

### Benefits

- Provides a focal point for the town centre;
- Creates a sense of local identity;
- Community/local ownership;
- Opportunities for local artists and creative businesses;
- Attract visitors and new users to the town;
- A more pleasant experience of the town will increase visits and time spent in town.



### 03 - Literary links: Developing connections to Lady Gregory & Yeats

**Background** | Gort has a strong cultural history, embedded in the founding of the Irish literacy scene and the legacy of Lady Gregory and W. B. Yeats. Gort has the potential to strengthen and better promote these links, providing space and support for these endeavours to flourish.

**Proposal** | The proposal is to consider and explore how connections to the Irish Literary Scene, particularly to Lady Gregory and W. B. Yeats can be strengthened and promoted, and capitalise on existing connections through creative performance, festivals and events which will provide dedicated exhibition space to explore and animate the literary links of Gort.

#### Benefits

- Developing Gort’s unique cultural identity;
- Providing opportunities to attract more visitors;
- Increasing trade for local cafes, restaurants and hotels;
- Ensure the legacy of the Irish Literary scene remains alive.



Figure 53: Lady Gregory | Source: Pictorial Press Ltd / Alamy Stock Photo

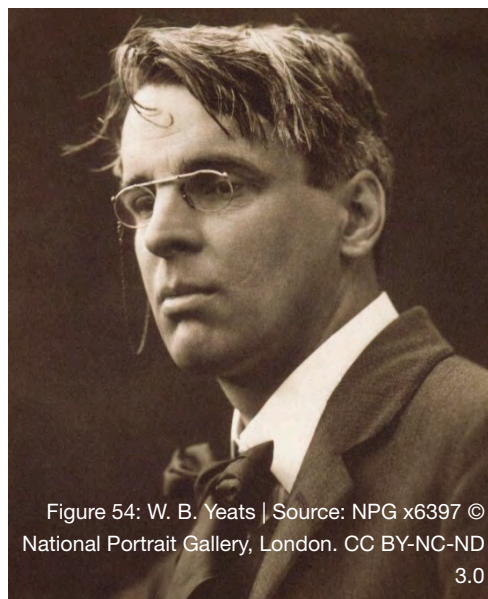


Figure 54: W. B. Yeats | Source: NPG x6397 © National Portrait Gallery, London. CC BY-NC-ND

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### 04 - Outdoor performance space

**Background** | Currently there is no car free space within the town centre that can be used for activities and events. The Friday market utilises existing parking spaces and is difficult to access given the dominance of roads and vehicles. The only open green space within the town centre is Canon Quinn Park, which could also provide a setting for outdoor performances with a park setting.

**Proposal** | The proposal is to ensure that the public realm improvements to the town centre create usable, flexible and accessible car free space. This includes:

- A revitalised Market Square which can be used by the market and is able to facilitate a programme of events throughout the year;
- Consideration of the provision of shelter and infrastructure such as power

supplies to facilitate events;

- Creation of a small amphitheatre space and associated stage in Canon Quinn Park;
- Improved access to the public spaces for all users.

#### Benefits

- More people spending time in the town centre;
- Opportunity for a programme of events to take place without the need to use parking spaces;
- Opportunity for local artists to use the town centre in a creative way to showcase their talents;
- Encourage all ages to be involved including links with the schools and theatre.

Figure 55 Market Square | Source: GCC



## 4.3 Theme 03 | Social inclusion, community spirit & well-being



### Introduction

A sense of community and social inclusion is a key element of a thriving town. This Plan aims to promote and strengthen Gort's existing strong sense of community, by identifying key priorities and proposals which have emerged through engagement with the local community and ensuring that the provision of appropriate spaces for the community are secured.

Gort has faced a number of economic, social and cultural challenges, including including social integration of diverse ethnic groups, a comparably young population, and a higher proportion of people working in typically manual, lower-paid sectors. Gort has a large number of Brazilian residents and families, who have made the town their home since the 1990s. Whilst many of these residents have been in Gort for a long time, stakeholder responses suggested that the community rely on translation services in the town and that community development could be developed further to support the diverse population. Across Gort, stakeholder-reported concerns have raised issues of early school leavers and young people not in employment, education or training.

The social services within the town are currently dispersed and, in some cases, inadequate. An opportunity to co-locate these services into a singular synergistic location will offer fantastic opportunities for the people of Gort to have appropriate access to all the services in one place, and allow for better interaction between the services offered.

### Proposals

#### 01 - The Convent: multi-purpose remote working, innovation, cultural & community centre

**Background** | Gort has an identified deficit in multi-functional community spaces and an ambition to build the capacity and sustainable growth of the remote-working, cultural, creative and community sectors in the town centre. The provision of this will ensure Gort's liveability as a vibrant hub and ensure that Gort will be the premier location for talented people to work and live, a town to develop careers and economic potential and to raise families.

International and national precedence demonstrates that community centres rooted in and driven by a committed community are valuable arts, culture, heritage and tourism contributors and have a strong educational, community and social inclusion and integration remit. A compelling innovation centre with a dynamic management commitment, operated by skilled and knowledgeable management, marketed on a local, regional and national basis, energised through stimulating educational programmes, would significantly enhance the facilities offering in South Galway.

Remote working facilities are proven to provide communities with a higher quality of life, generating material benefits for the local economy and the society, directly and indirectly. Our Rural Future 2021-2025 sets out the government's focus for the development of our rural communities over the coming years, its focus on the opportunities remote working offer to revitalising rural communities is the

cornerstone of the vision for the future which focuses on *"importance of vibrant and lived-in rural places, and the potential to create quality jobs"*.

The Convent building is at the heart of Gort town. Originally known as Bridge House, it was built approximately 260 years ago as one of Gort's first inhabited dwellings and is now listed as a protected structure. However, it is at risk of falling into disuse and disrepair. The building itself has 1416 square meters of usable internal gross floor area spread over three floors.

The reuse of the Convent building was spearheaded by the local community, many of them having been educated by the Sisters of Mercy in their childhood. The building is an imposing, historically important building in the heart of the town. The size of the building and the potential refurbishment costs indicated that a single use proposal was not going to be feasible on site.

The redevelopment and retention of this prominent historic building in the centre of Gort will facilitate the provision of a centre for the innovation, community and arts within Gort, both meeting the existing needs of the local population and attracting visitors to the town.

**Proposal** | To acquire and renovate the main Convent building, *"Bridge House"* and the primary school to the rear of the convent. It is proposed that the Convent will be renovated into a multi-purpose remote-working, innovation, cultural and community centre which could host an art gallery, workshops, a

display area, concerts and potentially generate income.

This will offer independent, dedicated and customised facilities for a range of complimentary uses, innovative, enterprise, community, artistic, heritage and cultural endeavours. The Gort centre will accommodate and develop the activities of existing business, including remote working facilities as well as local arts and performance-based groups; provide exhibition space for visual media and conference and meeting facilities for local and regional businesses and agencies. The buildings involved in this project will be restored in such a way that the heritage of the building is safeguarded, and any historical and cultural significance of the building truly enhanced, leaving a lasting legacy for the Sisters of Mercy in the local community.

The conceptual vision is that the Convent will facilitate the following:

**Chapel** - A multi-purpose performance and exhibition space to facilitate all types of performance such as visiting national and international groups, but with a strong emphasis on community drama and musical groups in a commercial context. This could include retractable seating bank providing a capacity for around 60 persons along with a removable stage area.

**The "Hub"** - A place where entrepreneurs and other members can convene, network, learn, create, and celebrate. The *"Hub"* is to be housed in an iconic building redesigned to



facilitate connections and collaborations and will host events big and small. The “Hub” may also be home to partners who wish to co-locate and may feature a café or other spaces for informal meetings, reflection, or refreshment.

### **Social community facilities and providing seamless access to support & services from cradle to grave**

The Gort resource centre will work alongside the Department of Social Protection, and provide seamless access to support, services and information, the Convent location will operate as a one stop shop for the town. There will also be capability to operate back to work schemes with access to the remote working facility, with training and bridge job opportunities.



Figure 56 | The Convent | Source: BDP



Figure 57: The Convent Interior | Source: GCC

- **Community cinema facilities** - Influenced by the Gort Vibes Cinema Club, a successful community cinema in Gort. In the Convent this could include a range of independent film-makers work, films of local interest or films that celebrate the culture and heritage of ethnic communities. It could also act as a base for film clubs.

Galway County Council and the Town Team have already been in communication with potential tenants which are the Gort Family Resource Centre, the Social Welfare offices and the Forge Works Remote Working Hub.

Gort Resource Centre established in 2003, forms part of the Family Resource Centre Programme which is Ireland’s largest National Family and Community-based support programme. They are a not-for-profit independent legal company with its own voluntary board of directors which aims to identify and address the needs within our own local catchment area. They provide prevention and early intervention for the whole-life course. The Gort Resource Centre is outgrowing its current space, not to mention the growing needs over the next 5-10 years. Therefore, they would seek to be accommodated in the renovated Convent.

The Department of Social Protection does not currently have adequate premises within the town and are operating out of a cramped office space. They would benefit from being co-located alongside the resource centre as the design and layout of the building can take account of the sensitive and confidential nature

of both organisations operations and provide shared space to carry out these functions. In addition, the benefit of co-locating the DSP with the innovation hub and remote working facility will create a symbiotic relationship between the job creation, training and those unemployed or looking for new skills.

The existing Gort Forge Works remote working facility has been operating since January 2021 and is run by the Burren Lowlands. They are looking for more long-term and permanent facilities to grow and expand.

There is also further potential to redevelop the former primary school adjacent to the Convent, which could provide town centre living, such as apartments, along with access improvements from Queen Street.

### **Benefits**

- Offer local employment opportunities and a high-quality working environment;
- A combination of social, cultural and community services in a one-stop shop;
- Sustainable restoration and re-purposing of a key heritage asset, preventing urban decay;
- Potential to have a knock-on effect for trade at local cafes, shops, restaurants and hotels;
- Ensuring that there are a range of facilities, amenities and supporting services including educational, recreational, social, community and civic requirements for children, youths, adults, the elderly, to serve a growing community;
- Promoting a strong sense of community

spirit, civic pride, local identity and social inclusiveness in the locality that is distinguishable from other areas;

- Increasing footfall in the town through new cultural attractions, exhibitions and events;
- Maintaining and promoting a strong and vibrant town centre which sustains the ability; to attract new businesses and meets the retailing and service needs of the town and its surrounding hinterland;
- Placement of Gort as an artist destination/retreat; becoming a focal point both nationally and internationally for the arts community;
- Opportunities for business growth, expansion and creation as a result of the new innovation hub facility.

**02 - Multi-sports facility including new pitches, boxing facilities, tennis and basketball courts**

**Background** | Stakeholder engagement has identified that sports, recreation and leisure should be an important theme/consideration within the Gort Town Centre First Plan. The rationale for this is as follows:

- The town has a young population in comparison to many other communities across the county. Access to sports, recreation and leisure facilities adds to the attractiveness of the settlement from a family perspective and also to the quality of life experience to these young people;
- There needs to be alternatives to traditional team sports;
- Indoor and outdoor facilities are required which are accessible and affordable;
- Families and older people also require access to casual recreation space (outdoor parks, walks as an example);
- There is limited existing facilities which could be used by sport clubs and informal groups of people; potential to share multi-use sports facilities/pitches/3G provision with the community school and the wider community;

- Some of the local sports groups, such as Tobar Pheadair Boxing Club, Coole Soccer, South Galway Athletics Club and Gort Rugby Club, have difficulty in locating suitable and appropriate facilities in the town;
- There is limited permanent existing facilities which could be used by sport clubs and informal groups of people; potential to share multi use sports facilities/pitches/3G provision with the community school and the wider community.

**Proposal**

- A multi-use/functional indoor sports and leisure hub to support multiple sports;
- Potential for an additional pitch/3G pitch adjacent to Gort Community School used by the school during the school day and by the community in the evening;
- Identify space for a boxing facility;

**Benefits**

- Promote healthy lifestyles;
- Provide recreation facilities, particularly for the younger population;
- Provide opportunities for integration with different cultures and nationalities.

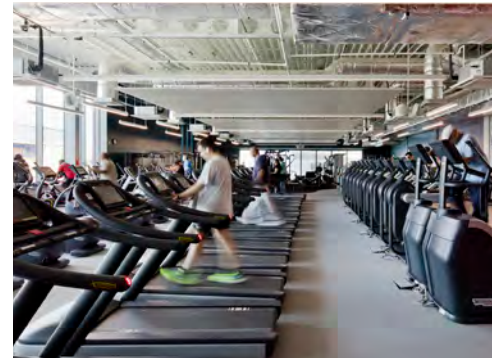


Figure 58 and 59: Example of multi-sport facilities | Source: BDP



Figure 60: The Convent Aerial View | Source: GCC



## 4.3 Theme 04 | Connectivity



### Introduction

Movement within and around Gort is a key issue when considering the future of the town. The town needs to become better connected, easy to move around by pedestrians, cyclists and through public transport, with less reliance on the car.

### Proposals

#### 01 - Improving sustainable transport connectivity (walking, cycling and public transport)

**Background |** Gort is well connected by road and rail due to its location between Limerick and Galway and just 40 minutes from Shannon Airport. Gort is poised to develop as an important local growth centre offering an alternative solution to business and residents refocusing development outside of principal cities like Dublin, Galway and Limerick.

However, Gort is a car-dominated town, with a lack of priority given to walking, cycling and public transport. This should be reversed, to encourage active, sustainable lifestyles and to help reach low-carbon commitments. Therefore, the following proposals aim to provide a high-quality people-focused town centre, improving the pedestrian, cyclist and public transport accessibility, with consideration to all users including those with

reduced mobility.

**Proposal |** Improve the connectivity of Gort via active and sustainable transport modes (walking, cycling and public transport). This includes:

- Improving the pedestrian environment through wider footpaths, regular and safe crossing points and opportunities to dwell within the town centre;
- New walking and cycle routes which connect key destinations and take the opportunity to use potential links which are both off road and on quieter streets;
- Reduce carriageway widths and introduce a road layout which naturally slows vehicular speeds and makes the town centre environment safer for all users, including pedestrians and cyclists;
- Providing better links to the train station;
- Relocate the bus stops to be able to provide an enhanced Market Square and future proof these for expansion;
- Improve wayfinding and signage;
- Improve the connectivity of Gort town centre to Coole Park;
- Work with public transport services to improve local connectivity with 5-10km, e.g

local links services or request bus stops in Coole, Kiltartan, Lough Cutra, etc.

#### Benefits

- Better quality of life for residents to Gort;
- Improves the sustainability of the town;
- Reduces reliance on cars;
- Improved safety and accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists.

#### 02 - Lady Gregory roundabout | Swans Sculpture

**Background |** A key ambition of Gort's is to capitalise on its cultural and natural heritage, including the links with the Irish literary scene and to famous natural resources including the Burren Discovery Trail and Coole Park.

This is increasingly important considering the emerging Athlone - Galway Cycleway which will provide a walking and cycling route from Dublin to Galway, passing Gort and Coole Park on the way.

**Proposal |** A soft landscaping scheme incorporating public art on the roundabout and grass verges of Junction 16 exit from the M18 at the entrance of Gort Town. The design should seek to dramatise this location as a gateway to the Burren Discovery Trail.

The existing featureless landscape provides no visual enticement to see all of what Gort has to offer. The landscape plan will

seek to replicate such sites as the Halfway Roundabout, Co. Cork, whose scheme gives a nod to the Wild Atlantic Way through the use of jagged peaks created from gravel and grass.

#### Benefits

- Create an increased sense of arrival into Gort town;
- Add interest and a stronger connection to the links between Gort town, Coole Park and the Burren Discovery Trail;
- Raising awareness around Gort's connections to Irish literature, namely, Lady Gregory.

Figure 61: Roundabout at Junction 16 from the M18 Aerial View | Source: GCC





### 03 - Wayfinding & signage strategy

**Background** | Currently there is an array of different sign types and messages throughout the town. A strategy is needed to rationalise and coordinate what signage is required to ensure ease of understanding and minimise street clutter.

**Proposal** | Complete a full assessment of the existing signs within the town and produce a strategy which coordinates for all users including pedestrian, cyclists and vehicles. This includes a consideration for the position of all statutory road signs and parking signage. Given there is much heritage in the street and spaces within the town an effective way to provide in interpretation also needs to be considered. All new signage will be mindful of people with disabilities with regards to the height, size, colour choice and font.

#### Benefits

- A well coordinated town centre;
- Better for visitors and tourists to find their way around;
- Reduction of clutter on the streets.

Figure 62: Indicative conceptual proposal for signage | Source: BDP

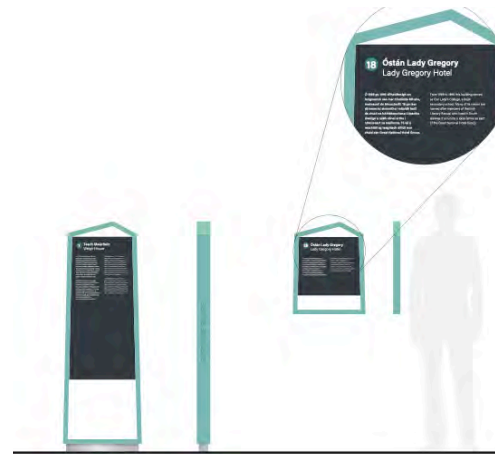
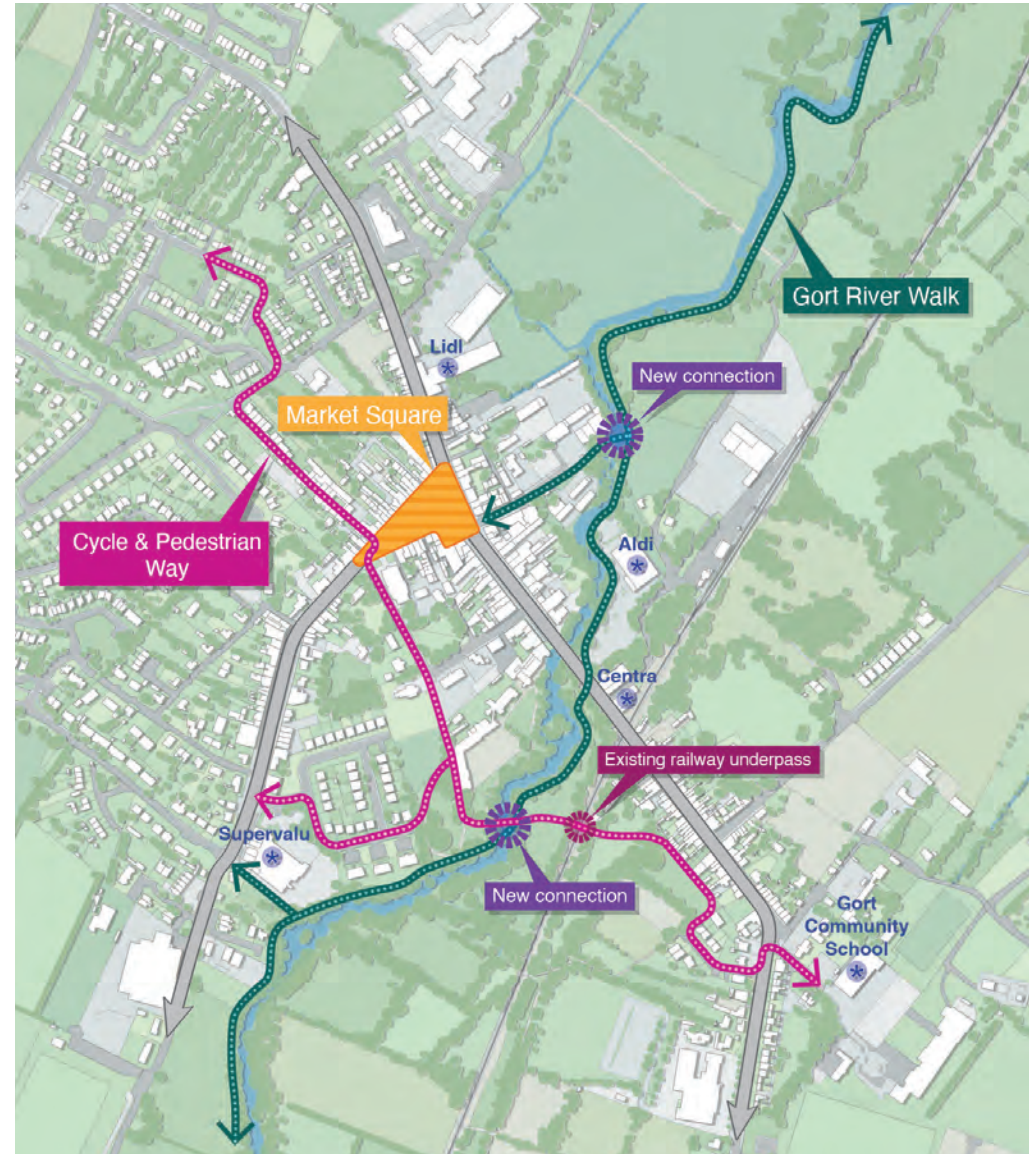


Figure 63: Example of signage and wayfinding | Source: BDP



Figure 64: Proposed indicative cycle routes in Gort | Source: BDP



## 4.3 Theme 05 | Re-purposing vacant & derelict buildings



### Introduction

The economic vibrancy of towns and villages is – amongst other things – measured by the level of vacant properties; with vacancy representing a significant issue for many towns and villages across the Northern and Western Region. Apart from the loss of a much-needed housing stock, vacant and derelict properties detract significantly from the attractiveness and presentation of the settlement. Reducing the level of vacant properties within towns and villages will be a key component in revitalising the economy and implementing the population and compact growth targets outlined in the National Planning Framework and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy of the Northern and Western Region, with such targets central to delivering sustainable settlement patterns in the coming years.

Gort has a higher rate of commercial vacancies of 15.7% compared to the state average of 11.4% and the county Galway average of 13.4% (according to the Northern and Western Regional Assembly Calculations). These statistics confirm that commercial vacancy is a major challenge in Gort and one which the plan should seek to address.

Residential vacancy is also slightly higher than the average for the state at 5.6% compared to a national average of 4.9%. Although Gort has a lower rate of residential vacancy than the Northern and Western Region which was at 10.1% (according to the Northern and Western Regional Assembly

Calculations).

The importance and urgency of this issue was further highlighted through the community survey undertaken during the development of this plan. It found 81% of survey respondents identified public spaces and dereliction as their first priority to address in Gort town centre. This confirms the importance of the issue amongst the local community. As such, this plan contains a range of proposals which should seek to create the conditions to reverse this scenario, including the following proposal which is targeted specifically at this issue.

### Proposals

#### 01 - Improving the use and presentation of vacant and derelict buildings

**Background |** Gort has a higher vacancy rate than the national average for both commercial and residential properties. This contributes to a poor street scene, lack of attractiveness and generally unappealing image.

**Proposal |** The proposal is to implement a scheme to encourage shop and building owners to address the presentation and use of vacant and derelict buildings. There are currently a number of funds available to help the enhancement and reuse of buildings which should be encouraged for the benefit of the town as a whole.

### Benefits

- Improve the visual attractiveness of Gort;
- Bring vacant properties back into use;
- Improve the compactness of the town centre, by having facilities and amenities located close to one another;
- Increase the perceived safety of the town;
- Increase sales potential once the building is refurbished;
- Reinvigorate the town centre through renewed footfall, activity and businesses;
- Provision of homes to those in need of housing;
- Properties secured from vandalism and anti-social behaviour.



Figure 65 | Vacancy in Gort town centre | BDP



## 4.3 Theme 06 | Vibrant local economy

### Introduction

The success of towns relies on an active, functional and sustainable economy. Gort has a population and hinterland which can support the shops, businesses and amenities within the town centre. It is important to ensure that the town is accessible, attractive and a place where people want to be and spend time within.

### Proposals

#### 01 - Gort Smart Town

**Background** | In March 2023 Gort had a Digital Town Blueprint Assessment which analysed the digital capacity of the town across infrastructure, business, public services, education, civil society and tourism. Gort had a digital town score of 38 out of 100, meaning that digital readiness is ad hoc and mostly not documented. The assessment recommended a series of interventions to increase the digital capacity of the town which can improve the quality and accessibility of services, address challenges and provide opportunities in the digital economy.

**Proposal** | To implement a coordinated digitisation of Gort including improvements across:

- A town website or portal;
- Increase the number of websites for local businesses;

- Improve the availability of digital skills courses for young and senior people;
- Increase the availability of co-working spaces in the town centre;
- Implement the availability of municipal public WiFi.

#### Benefits

- Improve the quality and accessibility of services;
- Address challenges facing rural towns;
- Provide opportunities in the digital economy;
- Improve the online marketing of Gort;
- Attract new visitors and businesses.

#### 02 - Building frontage improvement scheme

**Background** | Gort has an historic network of streets with some well-preserved traditional shop fronts which creates an attractive setting in the town centre and supports local businesses. The community engagement revealed that local people were keen to add more colour and interest to the core town routes and preserve and maintain the historic character of the streets.

**Proposal** | Promote a Streetscape Enhancement Scheme for local building owners/occupiers:

- Encourage residents and shop owners to engage with the good practice design guide and use the principles to restore their building according to the established principles;
- Empower residents to be able to access funds or schemes to be able to carry out restoration and improvement projects;
- Introduce a thoughtfully designed lighting scheme to sensitively highlight the qualities and colours of the building frontages, whilst respecting the historic character of the town routes;
- Provide street furniture across the historic core and adjoining streets to further enhance the experience of spending time within the town;
- Create a Frontage Design Guide to help give guidance for how improvements to frontages should be implemented.

#### Benefits

- Restoration of traditional painted frontages;
- High quality material palette;
- Improved identity and aesthetic of the town;
- Increased spill out space for local businesses;
- Improved and increased community spaces;
- Phased design approach which allows for future phases;
- Sensitive lighting to encourage the night time economy, particularly in winter.



Figure 67: Burke's Shop, George's Street | BDP



Figure 68: Proposed indicative colourful building frontages in Gort | Source: BDP

## 4.3 Theme 07 | Sustainable urban living



### Introduction

Urban areas in Ireland are under increasing land pressure, where demand is high and increasing. Development of land within urban areas can have the potential to rejuvenate towns and cities, by providing much-needed services, community uses and town centre housing.

One of Ireland's key policy directives (within the National Development Plan, National Planning Framework and the Town Centre First Policy) is to promote compact growth. This means to promote development on urban infill lands rather than developing in unsustainable rural locations.

### Proposals

#### 01 - Town park and skate park

**Background** | The local community in Gort have identified the need for a new town park for the town centre and greater access to the Gort River.

**Proposal** | The proposal is to create a new town park which provides additional amenity for the community, including:

- A skate park facility;
- An extended river walk;
- Spaces to dwell and enjoy being within green space;
- Activity spots with a mix of play,

recreational and exercise facilities;

- Biodiversity and natural areas;
- Connection to Bridge Street.

**Benefits** | Gort has one park - Canon Quinn, which is also in need of enhancement. This new town park would very much complement the existing offer within the town centre and provide access to further green space and the river.



Figure 69: Example of town park | BDP

#### 02 - Potential Future Development: Land off Courtney's Lane

**Background** | This proposal relates to a significant plot of land in Gort town centre which is currently in Galway County Council ownership. The site is just 450m from the town centre and 350m from the train station.

**Proposal** | The proposal is for a potential future development at the site off Courtney's Lane, which is in Galway County Council ownership. As part of this potential development, it is the intention that Galway County Council would seek to acquire adjoining existing sites (both undeveloped lands and derelict properties) in order to assemble a land holding capable of being developed. This would enable the local authority to assemble a strategic land bank and make the lands available for a range of uses in a controlled manner which will bring long-term stability to the market.

#### Benefits

- Opportunities for further growth to Gort town centre;
- Potential to provide new housing, services, or community facilities at this site;
- Promoting compact growth for the town centre.

#### 03 - Potential Future Development: Land by the station

**Background** | Galway County Council currently owns 7.3 hectares of land adjacent to the railway line in the centre of Gort town. This is a sustainable town centre site close to existing shops, services and public transport.

**Proposal** | The proposal is for a potential future development at this Galway County Council-owned site which could provide opportunities for a range of uses such as residential, commercial and community. It is most likely suited to a mixed-use development.

The land in Galway County Council ownership is also adjacent to plots of disused scrub land, which may be a potential opportunity for acquisition to support mixed-use development, subject to resolving access issues.

#### Benefits

- Re-purpose vacant and disused lands;
- Increase the level of activity around the railway station;
- Increase connectivity to the railway station;
- Provide space for local services to bring more people into the town;
- Provide opportunities for future growth in Gort;
- Promoting compact growth for the town centre.



Figure 70: Town centre backlands sites in Gort

#### 04 - Potential Future Development: Town Centre Backlands

**Background** | Figure 70 highlights the potential backland areas in Gort town centre which may be appropriate for development depending on their ownership and subject to the appropriate environmental screening and planning permissions.

**Proposal** | This proposal relates to the potential future development of vacant and underused backlands within Gort town centre. The first stage would be to establish the ownerships and status of the identified lands, to start to think about how the development of these lands may support the growth of Gort town centre.

#### Benefits

- Re-purpose vacant and underused land in the town centre;
- Potential to provide spaces for increased town centre amenities and facilities;
- Potential to provide sustainable town centre homes in Gort;
- Create a more compact town centre;
- Increase activity in the town centre, to provide a more vibrant and lively feel.

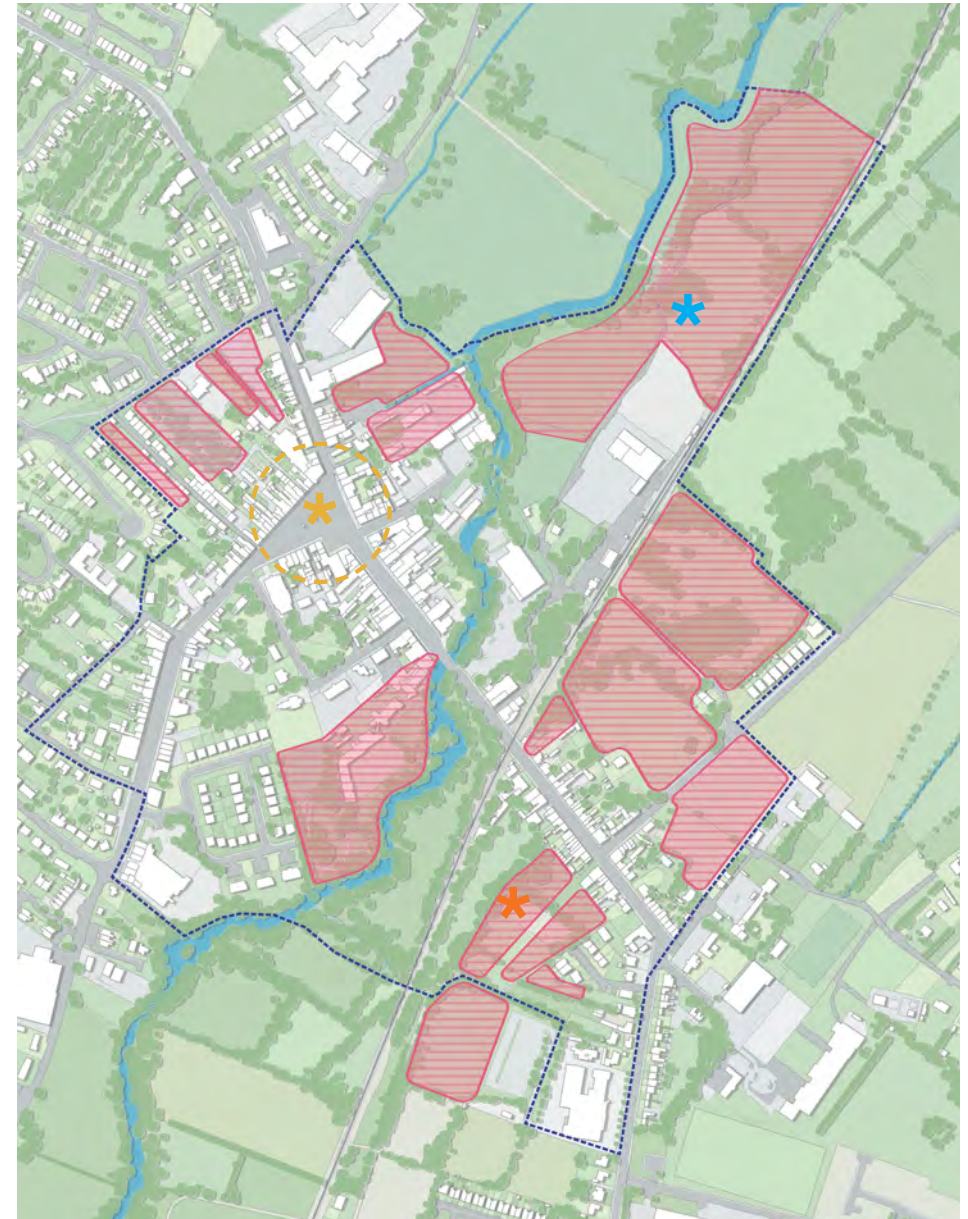
✱ Land off Courtney's Lane

✱ Land by the station

--- TCF boundary

▨ Opportunity area for improvement or development

✱ Market Square



## 4.3 Theme 08 | Attracting visitors



### Introduction

Ireland's tourism sector is undergoing a dramatic and fundamental change. Fáilte Ireland has identified the specialist activities (e.g. authentic culture and heritage) market as playing a vital role in the sustainability of Irish tourism. They emphasise that such activities play a general role in facilitating visitors' interaction with the Irish landscape and people and are also ideally aligned to the general strategic objectives of regionality, seasonality and yield.

### Proposals

#### 01 - Improved tourist facilities

**Background** | Gort is an attractive town to visit and has strong connections with resources such as Coole Park and the Burren Discovery Trail. Gort is also a location on the emerging Athlone - Galway Greenway. Furthermore, Gort has strong links to natural, cultural and architectural heritage including the Irish literary scene and the Gort River Walk. Therefore, Gort is poised to capitalise further on its tourist potential, and better promote itself as a traditional Irish market town with a wealth of things to see and do.

**Proposal** | Improve the tourist facilities at Gort, including:

- Smart interactive tourist facility/QR codes;
- Footprints providing visual links to culture and heritage;
- Dedicated tourist office;

- Provide coach drop off in the town square and nearby parking;
- Provide recreational vehicle parking in proximity to the town centre;
- The proposal aims to specifically maximise the benefits of the:
  - o Hidden Heartland (Sliabh Aughties);
  - o Wild Atlantic Way;
  - o Red Route Cycleway;
  - o Festivals and Events.

#### Benefits

- Increased footfall in the town centre;
- Increased revenue for local businesses, hotels, pubs and eateries;
- Provide jobs.

#### 02 - Programme for festivals and events

**Background** | Gort has a rich heritage and culture. There is an opportunity to showcase this through a programme of events throughout the year, building on those which exist and encouraging and inviting new talent to emerge for the enjoyment of the community.

**Proposal** | To produce a coordinated approach to event and activities in the town

centre, building on the proposal to create a central open public space and performance areas.

#### Benefits

- Attracts more people to come to the town centre which increases footfall and helps local shops and businesses;
- Builds the local culture and showcases local talent.

#### 03 - Greenway readiness

**Background** | The proposed Greenway is a significant opportunity for Gort. This will attract new people to the town centre and also provide recreational access for the community.

**Proposal** | To ensure potential connections can be made at the point of the arrival, building upon the existing and future extended Gort River Walk. Also to ensure the town and its public realm is welcoming to those on foot and cycling, as well as those with wheelchairs and disabilities with the appropriate infrastructure to support this.

#### Benefits

- More visitors arriving within the town centre;
- Access to a recreational amenity.

#### 04 - Improved connectivity to Coole Park

**Background** | Gort's proximity to Coole Park is an opportunity to enhance. Currently the links are not maximised and much could be done to connect the town with the park.

**Proposal** | Carry out a feasibility study which looks at the options for better connectivity. This could include a new bus link between Coole Park to Gort town centre and improved cycling and walking routes.

#### Benefits

- Better connection and movement of people between the town and the park.







## 4.3 Theme 09 | Natural environment and biodiversity

### Introduction

The natural environment and biodiversity are essential for the processes that support our daily lives and must be considered within urban areas. Conserving existing green spaces along with creating new natural space, introducing street trees and planting, will significantly improve our town centres for those who live within them and those who visit. Protecting and enhancing the existing biodiversity, including both flora and fauna which exists within Gort is fundamental to sustainability for the future.

### Proposals

#### 01 - Town greening and biodiversity enhancement

**Background |** Gort sits within a rural environment however the streets and recreational spaces are void of green infrastructure and natural elements. The River passes through the town centre which accompanies significant green space which is currently hard to access and has a potential to add significant value to the town centre.

**Proposal |** To determine opportunities for greening the town centre, its associated parks and ensuring that the maximum amount of accessible green space is created. The components could include:

- New appropriate street trees within the Market Square and radiating streets and protecting existing native vegetation;
- Low level bio-diverse planting within the

streets;

- More diversity of species with the parks and open green spaces;
- Introduction of sustainable urban drainage as appropriate within the streets in connection with any public realm enhancements;
- Interpretation to help educate the community about the value of biodiversity in our towns and the inclusion of green and blue infrastructure;
- Elimination of invasive species including Old Man's Beard which is pervasive around the town.

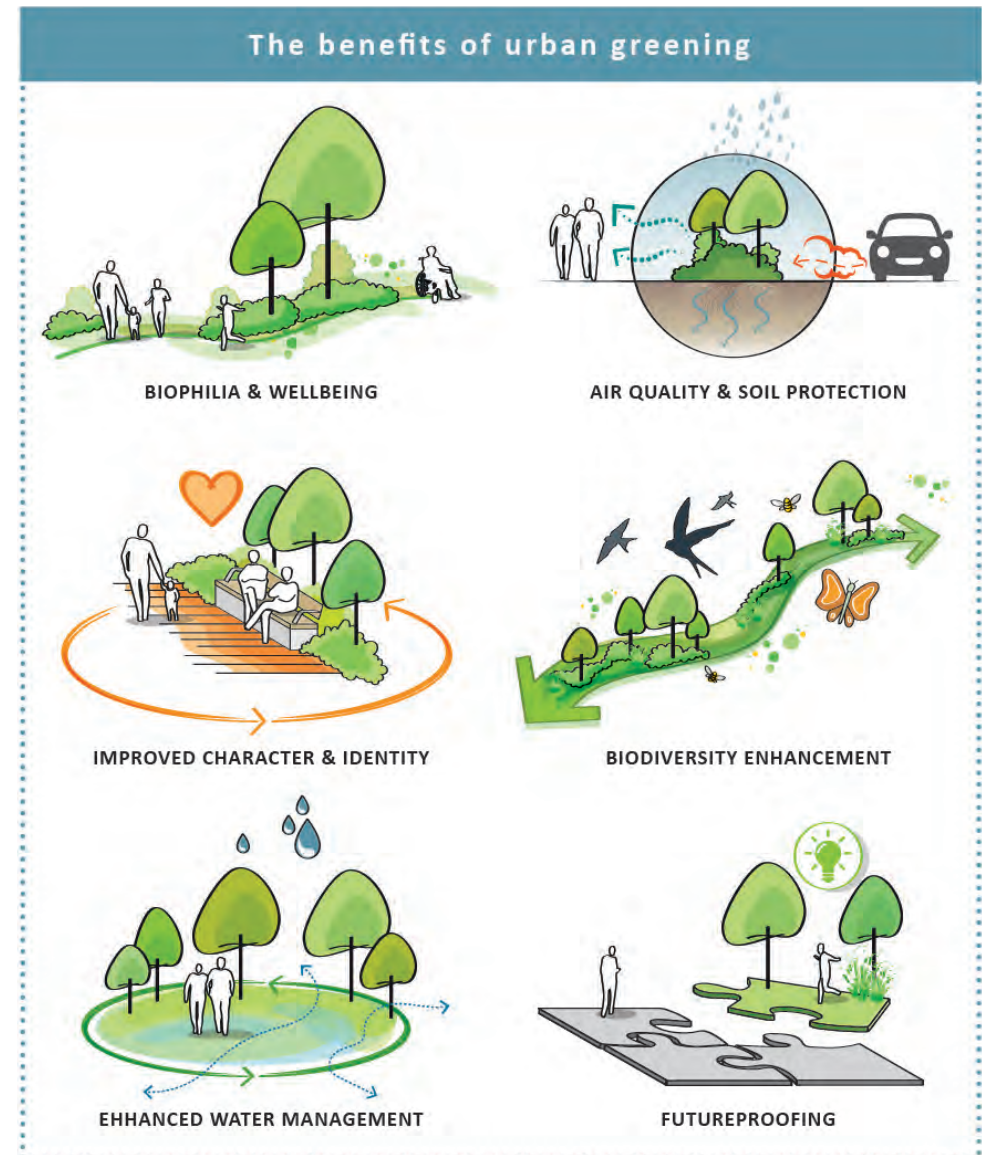
#### Benefits

- Improve the comfort and enjoyment of the town centre;
- Access to nature and biodiversity;
- More sustainable approach to water management.



Figure 72: Example of urban greening | BDP

Figure 73: Diagram of the benefits of Urban Greening | BDP



## 02 - Enhanced and extended Gort River Walk

**Background** | The Gort River flows through the centre of the town and represents a key feature of its history, whilst also providing habitats for biodiversity. The floodplains of the Gort River are within the town and must be managed appropriately, considering the threat of climate change.

**Proposal** | An extended and enhanced River Walk, with greater connectivity to Gort town centre. The aim is to maximise the benefits of this resource, ensuring it is accessible.

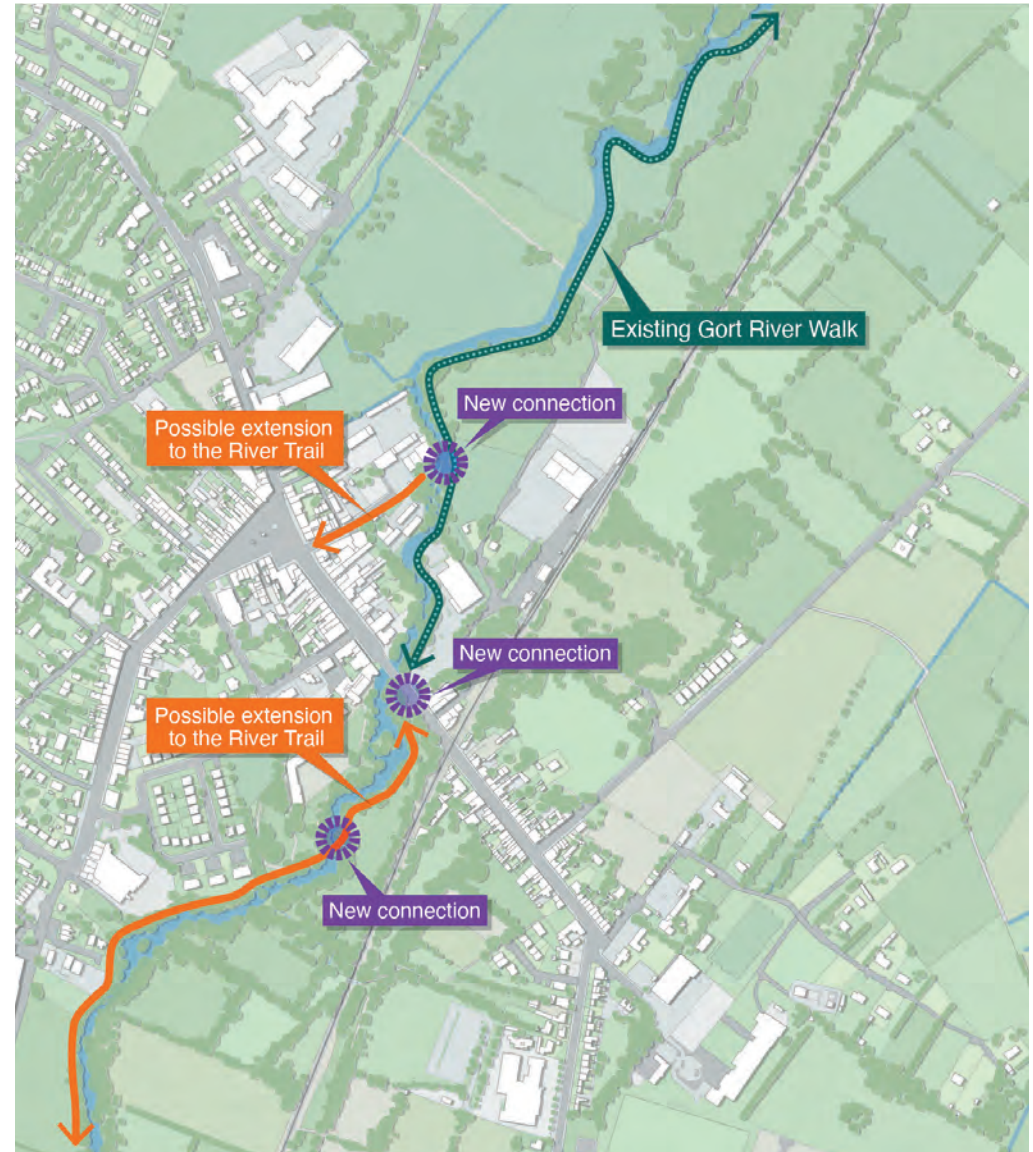
### Benefits

- Potential to increase awareness of the role of the river in the town's history;
- Improved access to the riverside for all users, enabling access to the natural environment and recreation facilities;
- Encourage tourism;
- Improved opportunities for recreation and socialising will support local businesses and community;
- Increase in biodiversity and preservation of natural assets;
- Increased access to nature, improvements in health and education;
- Encouraging footfall will increase safety and decrease antisocial behaviour;
- Enhance linkage to Galway - Athlone cycleway.

Figure 74 to 76: Gort River walk | Source: GCC & David Murray



Figure 77: Proposed indicative extended Gort River Walk | Source: BDP





## 4.3 Theme 10 | Re-imagining public spaces

### Introduction

Gort today is dominated by vehicles - both traffic and those which are parked. This is at the detriment of other uses and the enjoyment of the town centre. The built and natural assets will be greatly improved with the re-imagining of public spaces, as will the attractiveness of the town centre as a whole. This theme looks to improve the spaces and accessibility for all users which in turn will help shops and businesses and make Gort a more desirable place to live, work, visit and study.

### Proposals

#### 01 - Canon Quinn Park

**Background** | Canon Quinn Park is a historical green courtyard behind the church, which was once the place where sheep were washed on market day. It is now a recreational area owned by the church and maintained by local volunteers. However, the park is underused and requires improvement to provide a welcoming, safe green space for locals and visitors.

**Proposal** | The proposal is to improve the entrances to the park to allow prams and wheelchairs and provide an enhanced sense of arrival. The footpaths would be widened and upgraded to ensure accessibility. An activity zone would be developed in the north section of the park to provide facilities

for play for young children and spaces to 'hangout' for older children, teenagers and adults, along with seating and picnic tables. Consideration should also be paid to creating quiet and safe spaces for older people in parks.

#### Benefits

- Improving and encouraging the use of this vital green space;
- Discouraging anti-social behaviour;
- Improving access to town centre green space.

#### 02 - Public realm enhancement

**Background** | Gort has been successful in attracting considerable funding to enhance the public realm within the town centre. The town today is dominated by traffic and parking which detracts from the enjoyment of the town, the safety of all users and the heritage value and appearance.

**Proposal** | The proposal is for the re-imagination of the heart of Gort's public realm in the town centre including the Market Square and radiating streets. The scheme would include:

- New road alignments, narrower carriageways;
- Safer crossing points and more comfortable footpaths;
- New lighting throughout;

- A signage and way-finding scheme;
- New street furniture including designated cycle parking;
- Rationalised on street car parking with the provision of new, public use off street car parks;
- Addition of street trees, low level planting and sustainable urban drainage.

#### Benefits

- Better quality of life for residents to Gort;
- A more attractive town centre encouraging more visitors and increasing the time people stay in the town;
- An organised system of parking for all users.

Figures 78-79  
Proposed indicative sketches | Source: BDP





# 05

## Enabling the place

This section is focused on the steps to implement the proposals as set out in Section 4.

- 5.1 | Process
- 5.2 | Delivery
- 5.3 | Funding sources
- 5.4 | Next steps
- 5.5 | Policy compliance



## 5.1 Process

Gort has a strong base to help deliver a successful Town Centre First Plan. The focus should initially be on the proposals and practical initiatives that are site-specific. These are primarily the restoration and re-purposing of identified buildings, urban design interventions.

Starting the regeneration process by initiating the proposals contained within this Plan will shift perceptions around Gort, creating momentum to encourage involvement from the private sector. This should enable an environment where further initiatives come forward, both from this Plan and additional ideas that may not be included.

The successful delivery and implementation of this Plan are intrinsically tied to the collaborative involvement and contributions of various stakeholders as listed in the following:

- Galway County Council;
- Town Team;
- Local community;
- National Town Centre First Office;
- National Oversight and Advisory Group (NOAG);
- Private landowners and developers.

The following pages include a high-level delivery plan and set of actions to take forward the proposals contained within this Plan.

Figure 80: Entrance to the Heart of Gort Festival, Canon Quinn Park | Source: Town Team



## 5.2 Delivery

Proposal	Actions	Timeframe • Short term (1-2 years) • Medium term (3-4 years) • Long term (5-7 years)	Action owner
The Convent: A Multi-purpose remote working, innovation, cultural and community centre	Engage with the owners of the Convent to develop purchasing arrangements and secure funding to commission a detailed design of the Convent	Short term	GCC and Landowners
	Secure funding to be able to purchase the Convent	Medium term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
	Where appropriate, progress planning applications to bring agreed designs and plans to a state of readiness	Medium term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
	Submit funding applications to deliver the agreed proposals for the Convent	Medium term	GCC, Town Team, Gort River Walk Development Committee and Landowners
Enhanced and extended Gort river walk	Apply for funding to extend and enhance the Gort River Walk	Short term	GCC, Town Team, Gort River Walk Development Committee and Landowners
	Develop detailed designs	Short term	GCC, Town Team, Gort River Walk Development Committee and Landowners
	Undertake environmental screening and if necessary submit a planning application	Short term	GCC, Town Team, Gort River Walk Development Committee and Landowners
	Deliver the proposal	Medium term	GCC, Town Team, Gort River Walk Development Committee and Landowners
Heritage Trail	Engage with the owners/facilitators of the current heritage trail	Short term	GCC, Town Team, current owners/facilitators of the Heritage Trail, Tourist Office and Landowners
	Engage with the community and Gort Diaspora to try to gather historical narratives and stories from local people to potentially include	Short term	GCC, Town Team, current owners/facilitators of the Heritage Trail, Tourist Office and Landowners
	Develop specific proposals to enhance and extend the current heritage trail, including digitisation, signage / art installations	Medium term	GCC, Town Team, current owners/facilitators of the Heritage Trail and Landowners
	Work with tourist board and Town Team to promote the heritage trail as an attraction and destination	Medium term	GCC, Town Team, current owners/facilitators of the Heritage Trail, Tourist Office and Landowners
Multi-sports facility including new pitches, boxing facilities, tennis and basketball courts	Carry out a detailed assessment to establish need and current sports provision in Gort and nearby areas	Medium term	GCC, Town Team, Active Travel, Local Schools, Sports Clubs, Local Community Groups and Landowners
	Identify key priorities in the multi-sports centre and engage with local stakeholders e.g. schools, sports clubs	Medium term	GCC, Town Team, Active Travel, Local Schools, Sports Clubs, Local Community Groups and Landowners
	Undertake a land assessment to identify any potential sites for the development	Short – medium term	GCC, Town Team, Active Travel, Local Schools, Sports Clubs, Local Community Groups and Landowners
	Subject to finding a site, apply for funding to commission a feasibility study	Long term	GCC, Town Team, Active Travel, Local Schools, Sports Clubs, Local Community Groups and Landowners
	Subject to a positive feasibility study, develop detailed designs and submit planning application	Long term	GCC, Town Team, Active Travel, Local Schools, Sports Clubs, Local Community Groups and Landowners
	Procure a contractor to deliver the scheme	Long term	GCC, Town Team (depending on funding source) and Landowners
Town greening and biodiversity enhancement	Determine principles and opportunities with the streets and spaces within the town	Short term	GCC, Town Team, Gort Tidy Towns Group, GCC Biodiversity Officer and Landowners
	Develop strategies and specific schemes that can be implemented	Short term	GCC, Town Team, Gort Tidy Towns Group, GCC Biodiversity Officer and Landowners
	Apply and secure funding	Short to medium term	GCC, Town Team, Gort Tidy Towns Group, GCC Biodiversity Officer and Landowners
	Deliver the proposal	Short to medium term	GCC, Town Team, Gort Tidy Towns Group, GCC Biodiversity Officer and Landowners
Tourist facilities	Conduct an assessment into how tourist facilities could be improved and compare with examples of similar size Irish towns	Medium term	GCC, Town Team, tourist office and Landowners
	Identify some key priorities, such as an online tourist facility or an in-person tourist office	Medium term	GCC, Town Team, tourist office and Landowners
Lady Gregory Roundabout / Swans Sculpture	Develop initial designs for the roundabout and engage with the Burren and Coole Park along with local community to reach a preferred option	Short term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
	Apply for funding schemes	Short term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
	Secure funding to deliver the proposal	Short to medium term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners

(Table continued)

Proposal	Actions	Timeframe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short term (1-2 years)</li> <li>• Medium term (3-4 years)</li> <li>• Long term (5-7 years)</li> </ul>	Action owner
Conservation the Cavalry stables and barracks	Establish a Conservation Management Plan for Cavalry stables and barracks	Long term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
Building frontages improvement scheme	Work with building owners to help them apply for funding to improve their frontages	Short term	Town Team and Landowners
	Identify some key priorities to focus on and identify funding source to apply to	Short term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
Public art in the town centre	Secure funding for the identification and incorporation of public art into the fabric of the town as part of the public realm enhancement funding, and establish a dedicated exhibition space such as a Gallery within the town	Medium term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
	Engage local artists in an exhibition or competition style event where the local community can be involved in the selection of the art installation	Medium term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
Improving the use and presentation of vacant/derelict buildings	Carry out a detailed assessment of vacant properties in Gort and establish baseline status in terms of condition, ownership and vacancy	Short term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
	Organise and facilitate a series of workshops and information sessions on available funding opportunities including Croí Cónaithe (Town's) Fund and the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) and compulsory acquisition programme	Short Term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
Canon Quinn Park	Achieve approvals for the scheme	Short term	GCC, Consultant Team and Landowners
	Develop detailed designs for the park	Short term	GCC, Consultant Team and Landowners
	Procure a contractor	Short term	GCC, Consultant Team and Land owners
	Deliver the proposals	Short term	GCC, Consultant Team and Land owners
Town Hall – Auditorium/ Performance Space	Carry out a feasibility study	Short term	Gort Town Hall Management Committee and Landowners
	Following a positive feasibility study, apply for funding to restore and transform the Town Hall	Short term	Gort Town Hall Management Committee and Landowners
	Develop detailed design and if necessary, apply for planning permission	Short term	Gort Town Hall Management Committee and Landowners
	Procure a contractor to deliver the proposal	Medium term	Gort Town Hall Management Committee and Landowners
Connectivity and sustainable travel	The development of a coordinated plan for walking and cycling schemes within Gort including identification of land ownership	Short term	GCC and Landowners
	Prioritisation of 'quick win' Active Travel schemes within the town and submission of planning applications for 2-3 schemes	Short to medium term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
	Submission of funding applications to deliver prioritised 'quick win' Active Travel Schemes	Short term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
	Host and facilitate workshops on the potential business spin offs of greenways and active travel initiatives	Short term	Town Team and Landowners
	Commence initiatives for regional/national outdoor walking and cycling events in Gort	Short term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
Town park and skate park	Identify locations	Short term	GCC and Landowners
	Acquire sites and prepare proposals for the park and gain necessary approvals	Medium term	GCC and landowners
	Apply and secure funding	Long term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
	Procure a contractor to deliver the proposal	Long term	GCC and Landowners



(Table continued)

Proposal	Actions	Timeframe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short term (1-2 years)</li> <li>• Medium term (3-4 years)</li> <li>• Long term (5-7 years)</li> </ul>	Action owner
Public realm enhancement	Completion of detailed design, costings and Part 8 Planning applications for Market Square, the wayfinding and signage and the associated off street car park.	Short term	GCC, Consultant Team and Landowners
	Funding applications submitted to deliver the public realm scheme	Short term	GCC and Landowners
	Maintenance and upkeep of new green areas and public rights of way	Medium term	Town Team, GCC and Landowners
	Identify opportunities to deliver new and enhanced events in public spaces throughout the town	Medium term	Town Team, Local Community Groups and Landowners
Potential future development: Land off Courtney's Lane	Secure funding to commission a feasibility study including the exploration of needs, development of a concept design	Medium term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
	Engage with landowners on parcels of land that will be required for access to the site	Medium term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
	Subject to a positive feasibility study, Commission design options and capital cost proposals and a Public Spending Code Appraisal for the agreed option.	Medium term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
	Apply for planning consent	Long term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
	Apply for capital funding to deliver the preferred option	Long term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
	Procure a contractor and deliver the development	Long term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners (depending on funding source)
Potential future development: Backlands	Carry out an initial review of existing Backlands space within Gort Town Centre and including the exploration of potential land assembly and amalgamation options or opportunities	Short term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
	Via the Backlands working group, facilitate engagement with residents and landowners to determine potential future land amalgamation and land assembly options	Medium term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
	Contribute to the review of the existing County Development Plan and the development of a future County Development Plan with developed views on future use of the backlands	Medium term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
Gort Smart Town	Review opportunities for improving digitalisation across Gort	Short term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
	Apply for funding for digital programmes	Short term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners
	Deliver digital programmes	Short term	GCC, Town Team and Landowners

## 5.3 Funding sources

### Active Travel Funds

- Support the development of high-quality cycling and walking infrastructure outside of cities;
- Specifically targeted at towns and villages;
- Additional Outdoor Infrastructure Fund;
- Additional €15 million fund set up to ensure a 'Safe Outdoor Summer';
- Designed to be used to enhance outdoor urban space and improve walking and cycling infrastructure.

### CLAR

- Funding for small-scale infrastructure projects in rural areas;
- The measures funded under the CLAR are listed below:
  1. Support for schools/community safety measures;
  2. Outdoor community recreation facilities;
  3. Community well-being measures;
  4. Community gardens and allotments;
  5. Mobility and cancer care transport.

### Community Enhancement Programme (CEP)

- Small capital grants for community groups to allow them to enhance facilities in disadvantaged areas;
- Administered by Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs), with support from their local authorities.

### Community Heritage Grant Scheme

- Supports capital projects that improve access and inclusion to heritage sites.

### Connected Hubs Fund

- €5 million fund to expand existing hub facilities, providing additional hot desks, office space and meeting rooms for remote working;
- Can be used to provide electric car charging, upgrade disability access and improve IT facilities located in Hubs or Broadband Connected Points (BCPs).

### Historic Structures Fund

- Supports historic and protected structures safeguarding and maintenance;
- Grants of between €15,000 and €20,000 for the owners and custodians of historic structure.

### Irish Georgian Society

Conserves, protects and fosters an interest and a respect for Ireland's architectural heritage and decorative arts.

### LEADER Programme

- Fund for projects that improve the following:
  - Rural tourism;
  - Enterprise development;
  - Broadband;
  - Basic services targeted at hard-to-reach communities;
  - Rural youth;
  - Protection and sustainable use of water resources;
  - Local biodiversity;
  - Renewable energy;

### Outdoor Public Spaces Scheme

- Support for LAs to adapt, equip or improve public spaces for cultural events and activities;
- LAs are invited to propose capital projects for flexible outdoor spaces for year-round use;
- Up to €250,000 at a project funding rate of 90%.

### Outdoor Recreation and Infrastructure Scheme

- Supports key objectives for 'Our Rural Future';
- Funding to develop natural amenities in rural areas;
- Development of outdoor sport facilities, including outdoor trails, walkways, cycleways, Blueway's, tidal pools, floating boardwalks and bridleways;
- Funding ranges from €20,000 to €500,000 depending on the size of the scheme.

### Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

- €1 billion commitment from government to be invested from 2019 to 2027;
- Aims to support job creation in rural areas, address de-population and support investment into towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000.

### Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB)

- Active and friendly community that aims to protect and promote the wonderful, national built heritage on the whole island

of Ireland;

- Has its own committee, which currently consists of 14 members.

### Town and Village Renewal Scheme

- Set up to support the revitalisation of towns and villages to improve the living and working conditions in their communities and increase their potential to support increased economic activity;
- Maximum grant of €500,000;
- The projects that will receive funding will:
  - Increase the attractiveness of the town or village as a local commercial centre;
  - Enhance the areas environment and amenities in the interests of residents, businesses and visitors;
  - Promote the areas potential for tourism.

### UBU – Your Place, Your Space

- School supports to young people;
- Mostly community based activities.

### Historic Towns Initiative

- An initiative to promote heritage-led regeneration and to improve the quality of our historic towns and villages for residents and tourists.

## 5.4 Next Steps

### The Town Team

As set out by the Town Centre First Policy, the Town Team, in collaboration with the local authority, are responsible for the delivery of projects. The Town Team will have a continuous role in overseeing the delivery of projects, communicating with stakeholders and reviewing this plan.

### The Town Regeneration Officer

The Town Regeneration Officer will continue to support the ongoing work of the Town Team, ensuring the development and delivery of the Town Centre First Plan.

### Monitoring the Plan

It is imperative that the Town Team and Town Regeneration Officer regularly assesses the progress of the Plan. This will include measuring outcomes based on the objectives set out in the Plan and ensuring the alignment of the Plan with changing circumstances and wider factors.



Figure 81: Market Street, Gort 2023 | Source: BDP

## 5.5 Policy compliance

### LAP Policy

TCF Proposals	Gort LAP Objective / Policy
Heritage trail	LU5: Community Facilities (CF) BH1: Built heritage BH2: Cultural heritage
Conservation Management Plan for Cavalry Stables and Barracks	DS1: Orderly and Sequential Development LU5: Community Facilities (CF) BH1: Built heritage
The Town Hall Performance Space	DS1: Orderly and Sequential Development LU1: Town Centre/Commercial (C1) CF2: Community facilities and amenities BH1: Built heritage
Public Art in the Town Centre	ED4: Tourism development ED1: Economic development UD1: Urban design and landscape policy
Literary links – developing connections to Lady Gregory and Yeats	ED4: Tourism development ED1: Economic development BH2: Cultural heritage
Outdoor performance space	DS1: Orderly and Sequential Development LU1: Town Centre/Commercial (C1) LU5: Community Facilities (CF) LU6: Open Spaces/Recreation & Amenity (OS) CF2: Community facilities and amenities
Multi-sports facility including tennis and basketball courts	LU1: Town Centre/Commercial (C1) LU5: Community Facilities (CF) CF2: Community facilities and amenities ED1: Economic development
The Convent: multi-purpose remote working, innovation, cultural and community centre	DS1: Orderly and Sequential Development LU1: Town Centre/Commercial (C1) LU4: Business & Enterprise (BE) LU5: Community Facilities (CF) CF1: Social inclusion and universal access CF2: Community facilities and amenities ED1: Economic development BH1: Built heritage
Lady Gregory Roundabout / Sculpture – Sense of arrival	LU9: Transport Infrastructure (TI) ED1: Economic development BH2: Cultural heritage
Improving sustainable transport connectivity (walking, cycling and public transport) including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New cycle routes</li> <li>Improved pedestrian environment</li> </ul>	LU6: Open Spaces/Recreation & Amenity (OS) LU9: Transport Infrastructure (TI) TI1: Sustainable transport, walking and cycling TI2: Roads, streets and parking TI4: Urban street network and the design manual for urban roads and streets TI5: Transport network improvements UD1: Urban design and landscape policy
Wayfinding and signage strategy	LU9: Transport Infrastructure (TI) ED4: Tourism development ED1: Economic development TI4: Urban street network and the design manual for urban roads and streets

Improving the use and presentation of vacant and derelict buildings	DS1: Orderly and Sequential Development LU1: Town Centre/Commercial (C1) ED1: Economic development
Gort Smart Town (improving digital services)	CF1: Social inclusion and universal access ED1: Economic development
Building frontage and street improvement scheme	DS1: Orderly and Sequential Development LU1: Town Centre/Commercial (C1) ED1: Economic development UD1: Urban design and landscape policy
Town Park and Skate Park	LU5: Community Facilities (CF) CF2: Community facilities and amenities LU6: Open Spaces/Recreation & Amenity (OS)
Potential future developments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Land off Courtney's Lane</li> <li>Town Centre backlands</li> <li>Land by the train station</li> </ul>	Objective DS1 – Orderly and Sequential Development LU1: Town Centre/Commercial (C1) LU2: Residential (R) LU5: Community Facilities (CF) LU9: Transport Infrastructure (TI) LU12: Development densities RD1: Phased residential Development RD7: Compatible development ED1: Economic development
Improved tourist facilities	ED1: Economic development ED4: Tourism development
Programme for festivals and events	CF2: Community facilities and amenities ED4: Tourism development
Greenway readiness	LU9: Transport Infrastructure (TI) ED1: Economic development ED4: Tourism development TI1: Sustainable transport, walking and cycling
Improved connectivity to Coole Park	LU9: Transport Infrastructure (TI) ED1: Economic development ED4: Tourism development TI1: Sustainable transport, walking and cycling BH2: Cultural heritage NH1: Natural heritage and biodiversity CF9: Amenity network TI5: Transport network improvements TI12: Amenity/Walking/Cycling network
Enhanced and extended river walk	LU5: Community Facilities (CF) LU6: Open Spaces/Recreation & Amenity (OS) CF2: Community facilities and amenities ED4: Tourism development NH1: Natural heritage and biodiversity TI5: Transport network improvements TI12: Amenity/Walking/Cycling network TI4: Walking CF6: Open spaces CF9: Amenity network CF10: Linear park along the Cannahowna/Gort River

LAP Policy (continued)

	<p>NH5: Biodiversity and ecological networks                  NH6: Water resources                  NH7: Environmental management buffer                  NH9: Geological and geo-morphological systems                  NH11: Consultation with environmental authorities                  NH12: Protection of bats and bat habitats</p>
Town greening and biodiversity enhancement	<p>LU1: Town Centre/Commercial (C1)                  LU6: Open Spaces/Recreation &amp; Amenity (OS)                  NH1: Natural heritage and biodiversity</p>
Canon Quinn Park	<p>DS1: Orderly and Sequential Development                  LU1: Town Centre/Commercial (C1)                  LU6: Open Spaces/Recreation &amp; Amenity (OS)                  CF2: Community facilities and amenities</p>
Public realm enhancement	<p>DS1: Orderly and Sequential Development                  LU1: Town Centre/Commercial (C1)                  LU5: Community Facilities (CF)                  LU6: Open Spaces/Recreation &amp; Amenity (OS)                  CF2: Community facilities and amenities                  ED1: Economic development                  TI2: Roads, streets and parking                  UD1: Urban design and landscape policy                  BH1: Built heritage</p>
Off-street car park	<p>LU9: Transport Infrastructure (TI)                  TI1: Sustainable transport, walking and cycling                  TI2: Roads, streets and parking                  TI4: Urban street network and the design manual for urban roads and streets                  TI5: Transport network improvements                  UD1: Urban design and landscape policy</p>

Figure 82: Market Street, Gort 2023 | Source: BDP



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