



Lár Bailte ar dTús
Town Centre First



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government
of Ireland

Tionscadal Éireann
Project Ireland
2040

Ár dTodhchaí
Tuaithé
Our Rural
Future



Comhairle Chontae
Laoise | Laois
County Council



Mountmellick
TOWN TEAM

Mountmellick Town Centre First Plan

*SLR



Mountmellick mural, 2025

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1. Introduction to Mountmellick Town Centre First Plan

1.1 Introduction and Purpose of Plan

In November 2024, Laois County Council appointed the multidisciplinary team from SLR Consulting to develop a Town Centre First Plan for Mountmellick, in collaboration with the Mountmellick Town Team. The Town Team encompasses various key stakeholders and elected representatives in Mountmellick, offering extensive and varied insights into all aspects of the town, including social, cultural, economic, and environmental aspects.

This Town Centre First Plan has been formulated in alignment with the Government’s Town Centre First Policy, which is part of the Our Rural Future initiative aimed at revitalizing rural Ireland through a renewed emphasis on regeneration. The objective of this policy is to enhance our town centres by improving streetscapes and repurposing vacant and derelict buildings into multi-functional community spaces, thereby ensuring they serve as viable, vibrant, and appealing locations for residents, workers, and visitors, while also acting as the service, social, cultural, and recreational hub for the local community.

The Mountmellick Town Centre First Plan aims to establish a vision for Mountmellick town, concentrating on key regeneration projects and enhancing connectivity within the town. This plan reviews the historical and current context of the town

and is informed by detailed studies and community consultations. It conducts an assessment of strengths, challenges, opportunities, and threats, ultimately crafting a vision for the town.

In accordance with the Town Centre First Policy, the Mountmellick Town Centre First Plan includes proposals and actions for the regeneration of the town centre, as well as opportunities to enhance the surrounding landscape. This plan will serve as a reference document for future developments in Mountmellick and will aid the Town Team and Laois County Council in securing funding to implement the identified proposals for the town’s regeneration, making it a desirable place to live, work, and visit.



O'Moore Street, Mountmellick, 2025

1.2 Introducing the Town Team



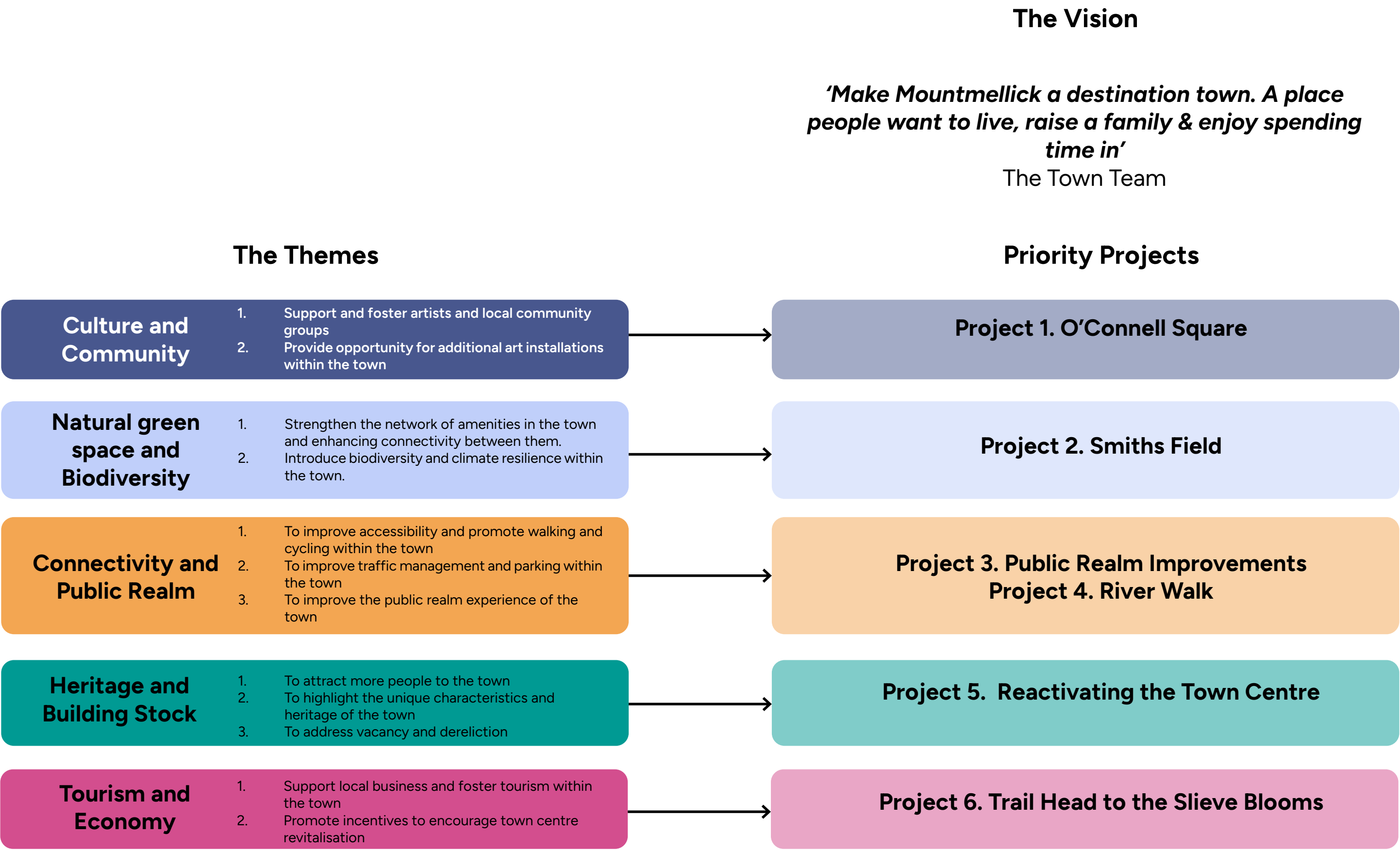
The Mountmellick Town Team was established in April 2024 with the purpose of developing a Town Centre First Plan for Mountmellick. Over the past year the Town Team which is made up of key representative stakeholders from Mountmellick have been working tirelessly to identify key areas for regeneration in the town centre. The focus has been on projects which will revitalize the town centre for residents, businesses and visitors to Mountmellick.

The projects contained in this plan will require investment from local and national Government but we believe with the support of the local community and in collaboration with stakeholders such as Laois County Council, the Office of Public works and the public and private sector we are confident that we will deliver these projects over the next 10 years.

Fran Baker, Chairperson, Mountmellick Town Team

The Town Team has demonstrated both leadership and initiative over the past year. It was important for us that we developed a plan which would be representative of the entire town. To this end, we sought to ensure we had as much public consultation and stakeholder engagement as possible. As part of this engagement, we conducted an online survey to which over 300 residents responded to. The feedback received as part of these consultations has informed the vision and projects contained in this plan.

1.3 Introducing the Plan - Vision and objectives



1.4 Challenges facing Town Centres

1.3.1. Background

Vacancy and dereliction have become increasingly apparent in our towns, adversely affecting the vitality of town centres, negatively impacting the viability of town centres and leading to a deterioration of some of their historical character and appeal. The gradual decline of our towns has been driven by a shift away from both residential, retail and commercial activities.

Employment opportunities are also affected by the rise of out-of-town and online shopping, leading to the closure of smaller businesses within the town centre. The development of homes on the edge of towns, while closer to peripheral urban centres and employment opportunities, has come at the expense of the core town centre itself. Additionally, inadequate infrastructure and connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists can lead to increased car dependency.

The attractiveness and dynamism of town centres are increasingly vital for drawing economic investment, especially in the tourism and hospitality industries.

Town centre regeneration is a transformative process, enabling the town centre to adopt new roles and functions, enhance infrastructure and amenities, and place a greater focus on services, hospitality, social interaction, cultural and community activities.



Derelict Central Garage, Mountmellick,



Congestion due to street parking Mountmellick, 2025



Vacant properties in Mountmellick, 2025

1.5 Town Centre First Policy: A Policy Approach for Irish Towns - Plan Process

The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF), and the Town and Village Renewal Scheme (TVRS) are both part of the broader effort to revitalise rural Ireland. The RRDF is a key part of Our Rural Ireland, the Government’s five-year policy designed to reinvigorate Rural Ireland. The RRDF fund provides funding for larger, capital projects, often exceeding €500,000, while the TVRS focuses on smaller to medium-sized projects, typically between €50,000 and €500,000, that support town and village centre economic and social recovery, aligning with the goals of TCF to make town centres vibrant and attractive.

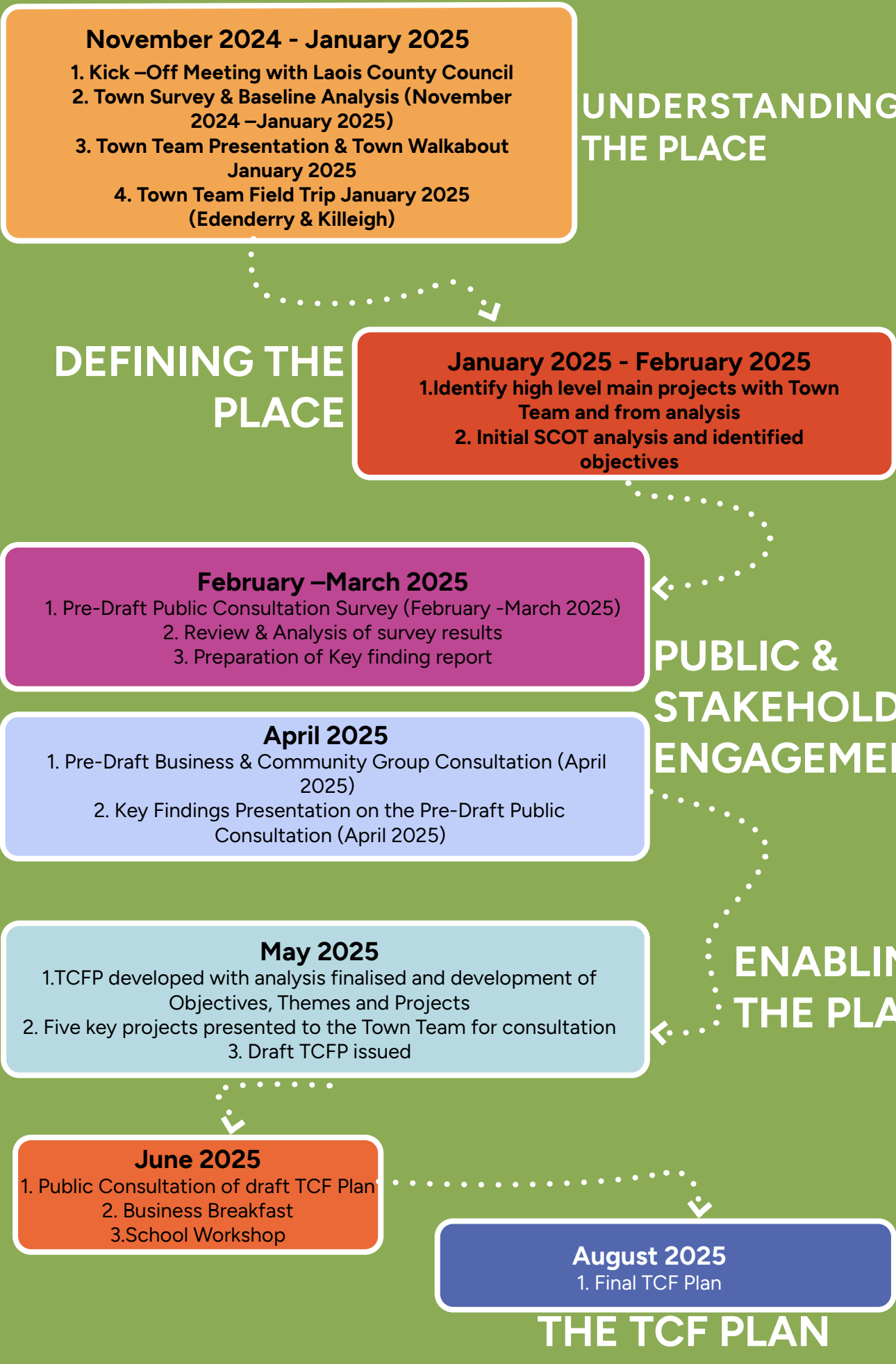
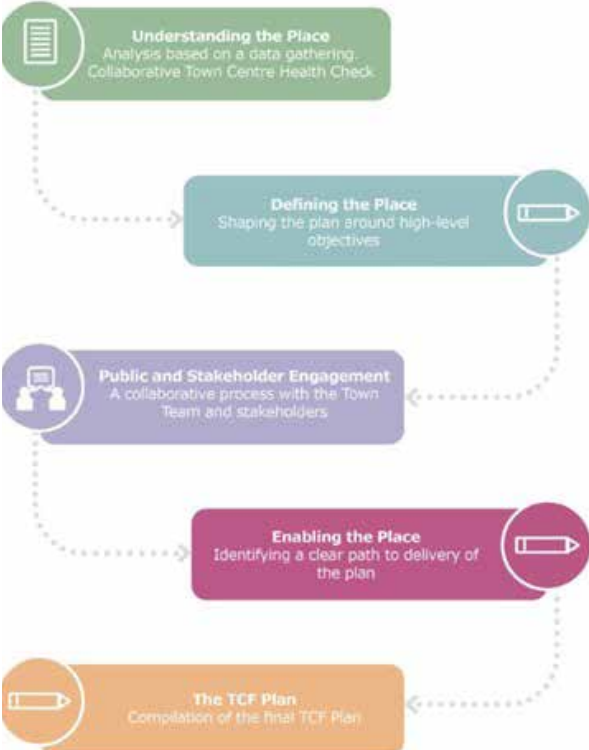
TCF is a cross-government policy initiative aimed at tackling vacancy and dereliction in Irish town centres and breathing new life into them. The policy acknowledges the significant challenges being faced by Irish towns, such as the provision of employment opportunities and the effect of vacancy and dereliction on the vitality and attractiveness of towns. TCF presents a means of response to these challenges.

The TCF policy recognises that every town is unique and allows for each town to develop their plan-led path forward at a local level, while considering local strengths and weaknesses. The TCF process is driven by a Town Team comprised of the local community and businesses, supported by appointed Town Regeneration Officers and technical expertise within the Local Authority. The RRDF is also identified as a funding opportunity under this initiative.

In February 2024, the Government launched a new Town Centre First Suite of Supports, providing an investment of €4.56 million. Measure 2 of this Suite of Supports includes funding of €30,000 to support the development of a TCF plan in 26 towns across the country, with Mountmellick being one such town selected.

The Town Centre First policy recognises that successful places:

- Are characterised by an attractive public realm (streets, spaces and parks) that is designed to invite people to meet, mingle and dwell;
- Contain a variety of services/shops that provide employment opportunities, enable people to shop locally and meet the needs of the local community;
- 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;
- Contain a well maintained building stock that creates visual interest and animates streets and spaces;
- Conserve, adapt and highlight historical buildings and streetscapes that provide the town with a unique identity;
- Are attractive vibrant places for enterprises to grow and develop;
- 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);
- Manage traffic within central areas so that streets prioritise vulnerable users (pedestrians and cyclists), enabling them to move about safely and in comfort;
- Provide a mix of housing typologies and tenures to cater for diverse communities in terms of age, income and mobility;
- Utilise digital technology to enhance the experience of living and working in towns, enabling greater choices in terms of location and lifestyle;
- Provide opportunities for the amenity, health and well-being of residents, workers and visitors.

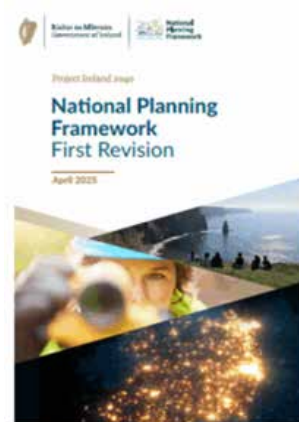


1.6 National Policy Context

Project Ireland 2040

Project Ireland 2040 is the Government's overarching policy initiative to improve Ireland for all and build a more resilient and sustainable future. It is set out under two documents: the National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan 2021 – 2030.

National Planning Framework First Revision (April 2025)



The first revision of NPF, published in April 2025 sets a target of delivering 50,000 new homes per year for a projected population between 6.1 and 6.3 million people by 2040. The revised NPF reinforces and expands on the original compact growth policy, with a continued target of providing at least 40% of all new homes nationally within the existing built-up areas of cities, towns and villages. This policy is linked to the need for the accelerated housing delivery and urban regeneration.

National Policy Objective 12: *Ensure the creation of attractive, liveable, well designed, high quality urban places that are home to diverse and integrated communities that enjoy a high quality of life and well-being.*

National Policy Objective 13: *Develop cities and towns of sufficient scale and quality to*

compete internationally and to be drivers of national and regional growth, investment and prosperity.

National Policy Objective 14: *Regenerate and rejuvenate cities, towns and villages of all types and scale as environmental assets that can accommodate changing roles and functions, increased residential population and employment activity, enhanced levels of amenity and design and placemaking quality, in order to sustainably influence and support their surrounding area to ensure progress toward national achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.*

National Policy Objective 25: *Target the reversal of rural decline in the core of small towns and villages through sustainable targeted measures that address vacant premises and deliver sustainable reuse and regeneration outcomes.*

National Policy Objective 26: *Continue to support the proportionate growth of and appropriately designed development in rural towns that will contribute to their regeneration and renewal, including interventions in the public realm, the provision of amenities, the acquisition of sites and the provision of services.*

National Policy Objective 34: *Continue to facilitate tourism development and in particular a Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways, and a Blueway's and Peatways Strategy, which prioritises: A coordinated approach to the sustainable management of outdoor recreation sites; Projects on the basis of their environmental sustainability, achieving maximum impact and connectivity at national and regional level while ensuring their development is compliant with the National Biodiversity Action Plan, the national climate change objective and*

requirements for environmental assessments.

National Policy Objective 67: *Support the circular and bio economy including in particular through greater efficiency in land and materials management, promoting the sustainable re-use and refurbishment of existing buildings and structures, while conserving cultural and natural heritage, the greater use of renewable resources and by reducing the rate of land use change from urban sprawl and new development.*

National Policy Objective 82: *Integrated planning for Green and Blue Infrastructure will be incorporated into the preparation of statutory land use plans while maintaining ecosystem services and ecosystem functions and conserving and/or restoring biodiversity.*

National Policy Objective 89: *Protect, conserve and enhance the rich qualities of natural, cultural and built heritage of Ireland in a manner appropriate to their cultural and environmental significance.*

National Policy Objective 93: *Improve air quality and help prevent people being exposed to unacceptable levels of pollution in our urban and rural areas through integrated land use and spatial planning that supports public transport, walking and cycling as more favourable modes of transport to the private car, the promotion of energy efficient buildings and homes, heating systems with zero local emissions, green and blue infrastructure planning and innovative design solutions.*

National Development Plan 2021 – 2030



The National Development Plan 2021 – 2030 (NDP) is the Government's overarching

investment strategy for the country to 2030. The NDP underpins the delivery of the strategy laid out in the NPF and contains a budget of €165 billion. A particular focus within the plan is placed on housing, climate ambitions, transport, healthcare, jobs growth in every region and economic renewal. The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme, LEADER programme and Town and Village Renewal Scheme are some of the funding opportunities identified within the plan.

The National Development Plan Review 2025 was published in July 2025. This updated National Development Plan sets out to unlock housing, upgrade water and energy infrastructure, deliver more roads and provide better public transport. The updated National Development Plan (NDP) provides objectives for investment and reform to deliver for all people and all regions across Ireland over the next five years, with resources to match that ambition – by investing over €275.4 billion. Included in this investment strategy, is the Flood Relief Scheme for Mountmellick.

Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021 – 2025



Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021 – 2025 builds on the Action Plan for Rural Development 2017 – 2019 and represents the Government's blueprint for the development of rural Ireland to 2025. The agenda set out in Our Rural Future is supported by investment set out in the NDP 2021 – 2030 and is complimented by the roll out of the National Broadband Plan.

The plan contains 152 actions which fall under nine key deliverable areas, which are:

- Optimising Digital Connectivity
- Supporting Employment and Careers in Rural Areas
- Revitalising Rural Towns and Villages
- Enhancing Participation, Leadership and Resilience in Rural Communities
- Enhancing Public Services in Rural Areas
- Transitioning to a Climate Neutral Society
- Supporting the Sustainability of Agriculture, the Marine & Forestry
- Supporting the Sustainability of our Islands and Coastal Communities
- Implementation of the Policy

Climate Action Plan 2025

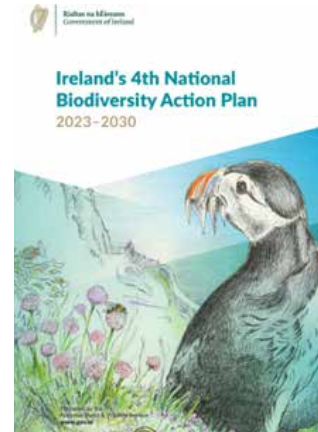


The Climate Action Plan 2025 is the fourth annual update to the country's Climate Action Plan. This provides a roadmap towards achieving national climate objectives, with the goal of halving Ireland's emissions by 2030 and transitioning to a climate neutral economy by no later than 2050.

The updated plan contains goals, objectives and actions to combat climate change and meet national and international targets, which have not been met in preceding years. A legally binding carbon budget is associated with this plan, which provides sectoral emissions ceilings for electricity, transport, built environment, industry, agriculture and other remaining sectors. Mountmellick, as with all other towns in Ireland, plays an important role in delivering

on the climate targets laid out within this plan.

Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030



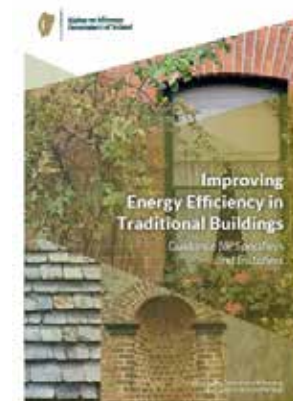
Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan sets the national biodiversity agenda for 2023-2030, aiming for a "whole of government, whole of society" approach to the governance and conservation of biodiversity. The plan builds on the progress made under previous plans, with 24% of the actions under the previous action plan implemented and a further 66% in progress.

The action plan consists of five objectives:

- Adopt a Whole-of-Government, Whole-of-Society Approach to Biodiversity
- Meet Urgent Conservation and Restoration Needs
- Secure Nature's Contribution to People
- Enhance the Evidence Base for Action on Biodiversity
- Strengthen Ireland's Contribution to International Biodiversity Initiatives.

The action under these objectives emphasises the role of local authorities in the protection of biodiversity, for example, by the end of 2026, all local authorities shall have adopted a Biodiversity Action Plan, in line with the relevant guideline standards.

Improving Energy Efficiency in Traditional Buildings: Guidance for Specifiers and Installers



Key to meeting the country's ambitious targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is improving energy efficiency in the traditional building stock. Traditional buildings in Ireland generally include those built with solid masonry walls, lime-based mortars, single-glazed windows and a timber-framed roof, typical of buildings from the medieval period to the second quarter of the twentieth century. These guidelines provide advice on respecting the integrity of these buildings while retrofitting them.

Conservation Principles are provided as 'Dos' and 'Don'ts', such as 'do ensure the building is in good repair before carrying out upgrade works', 'do use the experts where necessary and get independent advice from competent people' and 'don't consider upgrading works in isolation: consider them in the context of the building as a whole'. Sensitive retrofit measures for roofs, floors, windows and doors, solid walls and airtightness are provided within the guidelines.

UN Sustainable Development Goals



In September 2015, UN Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ("Transforming our World"). The 2030 Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity and applies to both developed and developing countries. The focus of the 2030 Agenda is the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (pictured) and their respective 169 sub-targets.

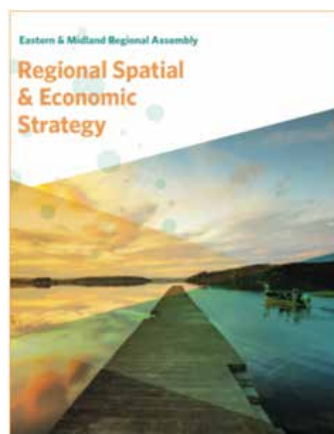
The SDGs cover ambitions such as:

- sustainable economic development
- protection of the environment
- access to health and education services

The SDGs build on the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and have a broader agenda that applies to all countries.

1.7 Regional Policy Context

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern & Midlands Regional Assembly 2019 – 2031



The Eastern & Midlands Regional Assembly is one of the three regional-level authorities in Ireland, covering nine counties and containing twelve local authorities and three sub-regions: Dublin, Eastern and Midlands. County Laois is within the Midlands sub-region.

The primary statutory objective of the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy is to support the implementation of Project Ireland 2040 and the economic and climate policies of the Government through a long-term strategic planning and investment framework for the region.

The strategy highlights the challenges that rural areas face, for example urban and commuter development undesirably affecting the character and cohesion of rural places. There are several Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) that seek to remediate these problems, including:

RPO 4.77: *In development plan policy local authorities shall prioritise the regeneration of rural towns and villages through identification of significant regeneration projects for rural*

villages and rural areas which could harness untapped assets with community and wider private and public sector support and investment including the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund.

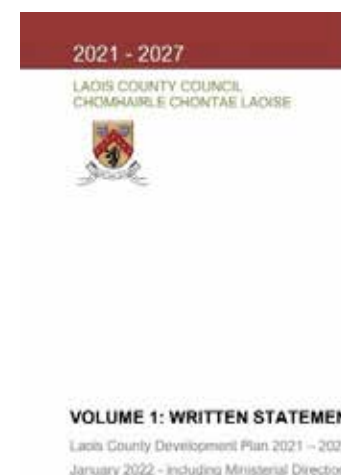
RPO 6.14: *EMRA will support the use of targeted financial incentives to re-establish the dominant role of town centres provided for in planning policy to encourage a greater take up of town centre development opportunities for retail, residential, commercial, and leisure uses.*

The strategy also contains RPOs that are focused upon the protection and promotion of heritage within the region:

RPO 9.27: *EMRA will support local authorities to work with local communities to promote historic towns in the Region in the practice of heritage led regeneration, to promote the sensitive and adaptive reuse of historic building stock and industrial structures where appropriate, and to strengthen their capability to draw down European and national funding.*

RPO 9.30: *Support the sensitive reuse of protected structures.*

Laois County Development Plan 2021 – 2027



The Laois County Development Plan 2021 – 2027 (LCDP) was adopted on 25th January 2022 and came into effect on 8th March 2022. Mountmellick is identified as a '**Self Sustaining Town**' within the settlement hierarchy of the LCDP. Self-Sustaining Towns are towns with high levels of population and a weak employment base which are reliant on other areas for employment and/or services and require targeted 'catch up' investment to become more self-sustaining. It is stated that the development of these towns needs to increasingly be aimed at consolidating growth within them and better matching it to the development of social and physical infrastructure.

The NPF population projection for Mountmellick laid out in the LCDP projects the town's population to reach 5,331 by 2031. Mountmellick is specifically identified within the LCDP as having a role to play in supporting the Key Towns of Portlaoise and Tullamore. Mountmellick is also identified as providing an important employment function and is suitable for economic development opportunities.

Policy Objective HPO 5 (Housing Development) *specifically identifies Mountmellick as one of the towns where active land management and site activation measures, including the implementation of the vacant site levy, should be implemented to address dereliction and vacancy.*

Policy Objective ED 15 (Economic Development) *identifies Mountmellick as one of the locations in the county where the development of remote working / co-working*

space should be supported and facilitated.

The aim of Chapter 7 of the LCDP ('Retail and Town / Village Centre Management') is to ensure that the town and village centres of Laois retain their vitality and viability and that all future retail development is plan led in line with the settlement strategy. Within this chapter, Mountmellick is identified as possessing the lowest commercial/retail vacancy rates across the county. Mountmellick is identified within Level 4 Neighbourhood Centres/ Local Centres – small towns and villages under the Laois County Retail Hierarchy 2021-2027.

Some of the findings of Retail Excellence Ireland's review of towns in 2015 are given. Mountmellick, whilst performing well in terms of respondent's views on safety, family-friendliness and town centre presentation and maintenance, performed poorly in terms of things to do and see in the town centre and the number of events and promotions being run in the town centre. The retail, restaurant and pub choice in Mountmellick was considered poor by respondents.

Policy Objective TC 2 (Town/Village Centre Management) *aims to support and facilitate the development of town centre and public realm strategies, through liaison with residents, visitors and other relevant stakeholders.*

1.8 Local Policy Context

Policy Objective ABT 2 (Activity Based Tourism) Support in principle and investigate the feasibility of, subject to compliance with the Habitats and Birds Directive, developing and marketing off-road Slieve Bloom Mountain Biking Trail by Coillte, Mountmellick –Portlaoise –Abbeyleix Greenway (and potential extensions onto Portarlinton to connect with the Offaly Greenway network) and Durrow Green Network Cycle Trail in co-operation with relevant stakeholders including Durrow Development Forum.

Policy Objective TRANS 14 (Transport) A Draft Local Transport Plan is being prepared for Mountmellick by the Roads Section and will be incorporated by way of Variation into the Laois County Development Plan 2021–2027. It will be based on Active Travel principles.

Under the Laois Towns Experience Project, several towns were identified to contain a central story/ historic theme that could enhance visitor experience. Mountmellick's Quaker historic origins were identified for initial consideration, with two towns being envisioned for selection as pilot projects.

Policy Objective DT 2 (Destination Towns) encourages the development of such themes to strengthen 'sense of place' within towns and villages in Laois.

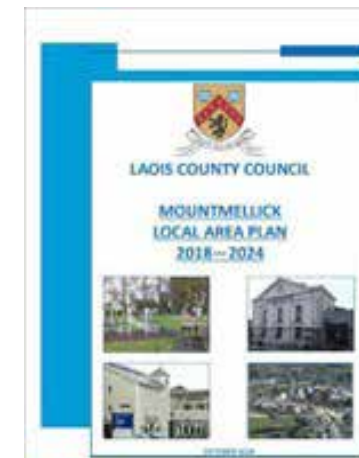
Policy Objective BNH 33 (Biodiversity and Natural Heritage) promotes the development of the Grand Canal for cycling, walking and nature study, and aims to investigate the possibility of developing the disused Mountmellick Grand Canal Line into walking routes or greenways. Two public rights of ways exist in Mountmellick:

Mountmellick Sli Na Slainte and Mountmellick Alternative Sli. Both right of ways are along footpaths and public roads. Policy Objective

BNH 47 is in place to protect public right of ways identified in the LCDP.

Policy Objective ACA 3 (Architectural Conservation Area) seeks to investigate the designation of further ACAs and prepare a character statement appraisal and area specific policy for each ACA in the county, and several additional towns, including Mountmellick. O'Connell Square in Mountmellick is identified as an architectural asset whilst the Work Museum and Mill Buildings are identified as archaeological assets.

The mapped zoning objectives for Mountmellick are contained within Map 3.2 (Figure 01). This map establishes the development boundary, extent of the town centre (shown in red) and other zoning objectives throughout the town. The town centre core area borders along several banks of land zoned for Community, Educational & Institutional use, as well as Existing Residential, to the northwest.



Mountmellick Local Area Plan 2018 – 2024

The Mountmellick Local Area Plan 2018-2024 is currently under review and will be updated and incorporated into the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 (CDP) by way of a variation. The LAP acknowledges the constraints posed by the Owenass River and associated floodplain, the zoning map for the town was incorporated into the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 informed by the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment carried out in tandem.

The strategic aims of the LAP fall under seven headings: economic development, town centre revitalisation, key infrastructure, transport and movement, housing, community services and culture and built and natural heritage. The LAP highlights the need to provide sufficient employment opportunities to reduce unemployment and build a sustainable community.

Mountmellick is also identified as the closest town to the Slieve Bloom Mountains for tourists travelling from the east and south of the country. The town also possesses the River Owenass and Barrow for recreational and leisure usage and various Quaker cultural features, which make up

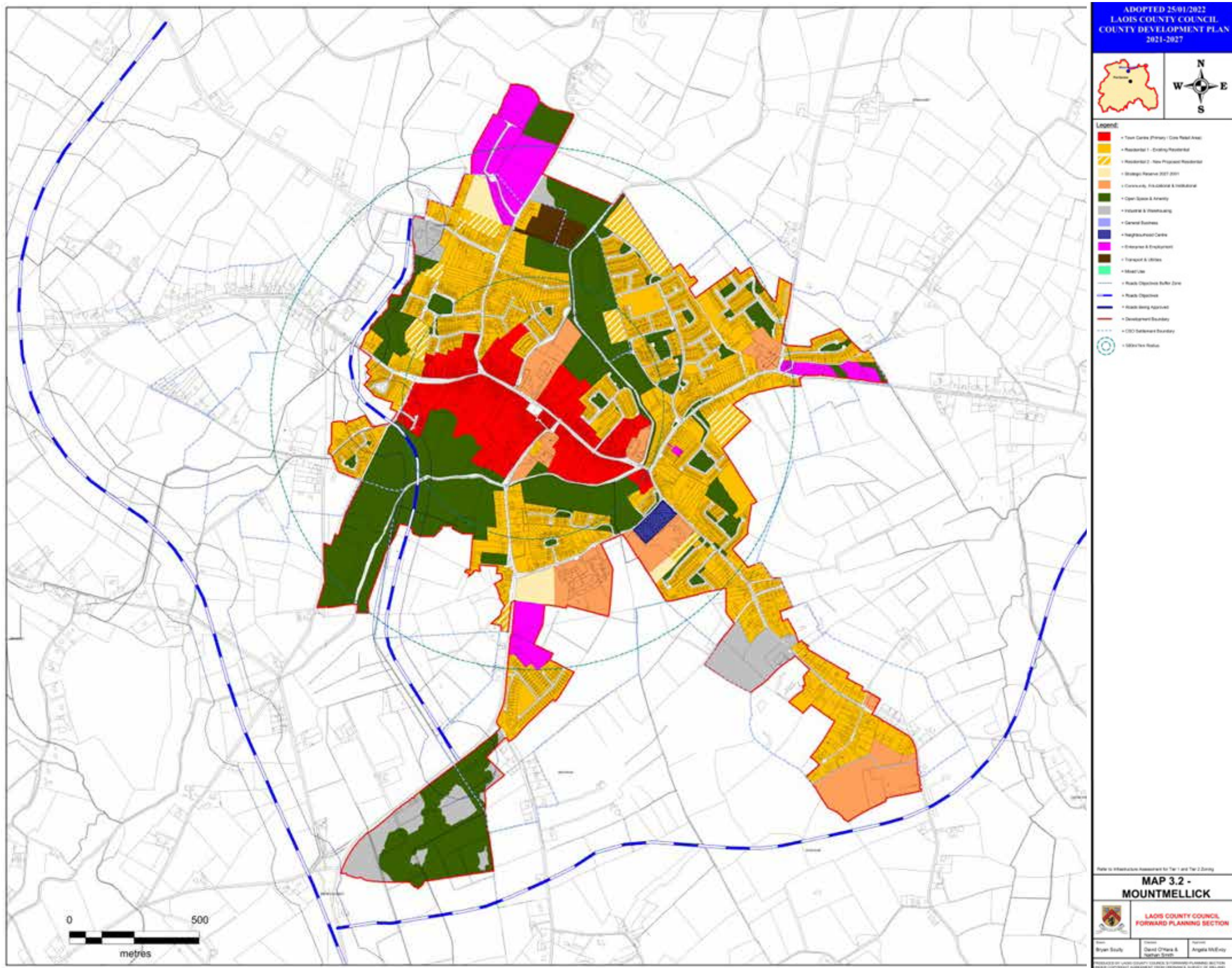


fig. 01: Mapped zoning objectives for Mountmellick.

Laois Local Economic and Community Plan 2023 – 2028



The Laois Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) was adopted in March 2024 and sets out the objectives and actions required to support economic, local and community development in County Laois. It was prepared in consultation with communities and various stakeholders throughout the county, with community workshops carried out in Mountmellick, among other towns, as part of the consultation period.

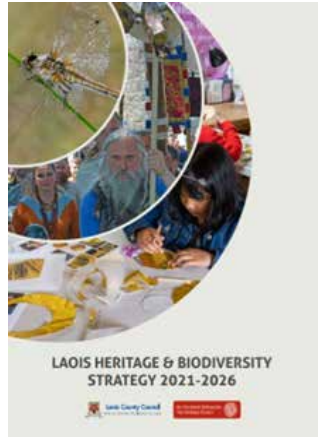
The plan consists of 10 high level goals which emphasises a sustainable culture of innovation and entrepreneurship, diverse local economies, equality and inclusiveness and enhanced town and village centres.

Sustainable Objective 6.1 is *“to make our towns and villages attractive places to live and work through the provision and upgrade of both community and appropriate public infrastructure”.*

Sustainable Objective 6.3 is *“to encourage the re-use/ re-purposing of properties and sites within our towns and villages to address vacancy and underutilisation.”*

The LECP provides an important framework for how Laois’ communities, economy and built environment will progress over the next five years.

Laois Heritage and Biodiversity Strategy 2021 – 2026



The Laois Heritage and Biodiversity Strategy 2021 – 2026 was adopted in December 2021 and lays out a framework within which agencies, organisations and other stakeholders can work together with Laois County Council to enhance, celebrate and commemorate the county’s heritage. Annual Action Plans are to be prepared in line with this strategy, representing a shift away from largely action-based overarching strategies, in response to changing environmental, policy and investment conditions.

Objectives under this strategy are laid out across eight action areas. Of relevance to this Town Centre First Plan are:

Objective 3: *Support the work of heritage and biodiversity champions and build the capacity of local communities to conserve, commemorate, and celebrate local heritage and strengthen pride of place.*

Objective 6: *Enhance the integrated experience of heritage and biodiversity at visited sites, and the connections between heritage places across Laois and further afield, to strengthen our sense of place and reveal our storied landscapes.*



Mountmellick Arts Centre, 2025

2. Understanding the Place

2.1 Socio Demographic

Definition of Area

The town of Mountmellick covers approximately 1.6 square kilometres. As of the 2022 census, it had a population of 4,905, resulting in a population density of about 3,021 people per square kilometre.

Surrounding the urban centre is the Mountmellick Rural Electoral Division, which spans 16.7 square kilometres (approximately 6.5 square miles). This area includes several rural townlands such as Agracar, Avoley, and Derrygile, contributing to the town's agricultural and residential landscape.

Settlement

The average household size in Mountmellick is 2.78 people. There are 1,767 inhabited households and a total of 1,975 in the housing stock. 62% of these are owner occupied, 15% are rented private and 19% are social.

Population

Mountmellick makes up 5% of the county of Laois, making it the 3rd largest settlement by population. Despite these challenges, Mountmellick's population has shown modest growth, increasing by 2.7% between 2016 and 2022 to reach 4,905 residents. The population is increasing, there is expected to be a further 6.6% increase from 2022 to 2027.

Age profile

Mountmellick has a population of approximately 4,900 people. Of this, 25.6% are under 17 years old, 60.7% are between 18-64 and 13.6% are above 65. The CSO Census 2016 showed a breakdown of population age in Mountmellick as being relatively young, with 50% of the population below 35 years of age, compared to 47.1% elsewhere in the State.

Ethnicity

As of the 2022 census, County Laois, had a population of 91,284. The ethnic breakdown was as follows:

- White Irish: 79.0%
- Other White: 9.2%
- White Irish Traveller: 0.9%

- Black or Black Irish: 2.1%
- Asian or Asian Irish: 2.2%
- Other ethnicities: 1.7%
- Not stated: 5.0%

Education

There are four schools located within the Mountmellick town boundary. The schools are made up of:

Mountmellick Community School - A mixed school of approximately 700 pupils, post primary, inter denominational school.

- St Paul's National School - 2 teacher co-educational primary school. A mixed school of approximately 40 pupils, mixed, Church of Ireland.
- St Joseph's Girls' National School - Catholic girls' primary school, approximately 230 girls.
- Mountmellick Boys' National School - Catholic boys' primary school, approximately 220 boys.
- Mountmellick Further Education Centre - Located on Harbour Street, the FEC provides a range of full and part time courses from Level 3 to 6, both day and evening times. There are a range of courses; IT, cooking, arts and craft, beauty, business and administration, general learning and employment skills. The FEC also has a valuable Youth reach programme.

Affluence and Deprivation

42.5 % of the Mountmellick population are living in disadvantaged areas, as per the settlement profile. In the housing sector, the median price of a dwelling in the Borris/Mountmellick area was €150,000, with the median income of purchasers at €52,600 annually. These figures are lower than those in nearby areas like Portlaoise, indicating more affordable housing options.

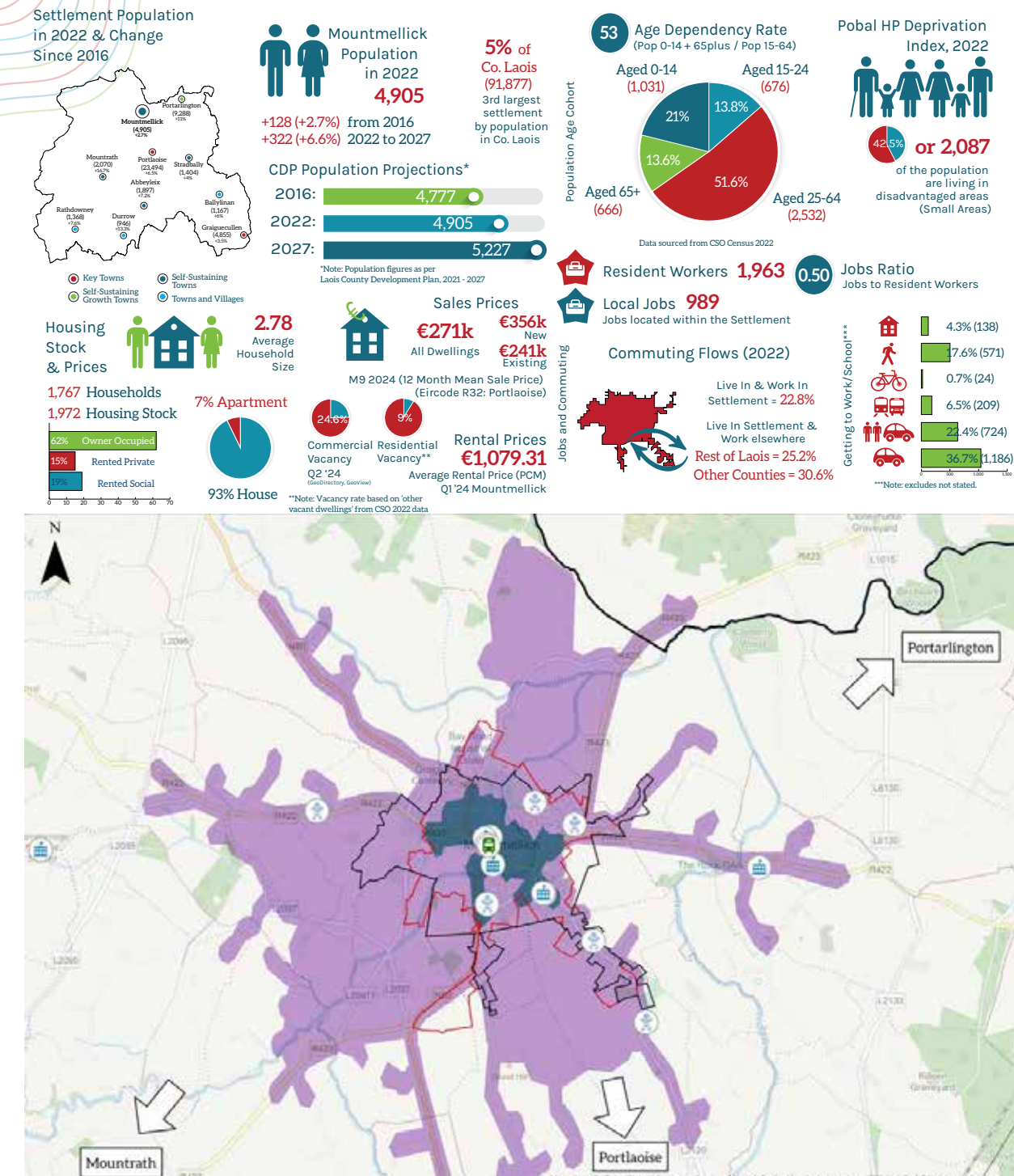
Employment

Mountmellick faces a significant unemployment issue, with a rate of 12.5% (as per the CSO figures for 2022), nearly three times the national average of 4.5%. This high unemployment rate is compounded by a high level of out-commuting for work with only 22.8% of residents working within the settlement (CSO, 2022).

Mountmellick – Proximity Analysis

SETTLEMENTS 02

Self-Sustaining Town



2.2 Access and Connections

Mountmellick is positioned on the N80 national secondary road, which connects Tullamore to Carlow and on to Rosslare and further southeast to Enniscorthy in County Wexford. Additionally, the town is intersected by regional roads R422 and R423, facilitating access to nearby towns such as Clonaslee, Portarlinton, and Mountrath.

The town experiences significant traffic congestion, with over 8,500 vehicles, including a substantial number of heavy goods vehicles (HGVs), passing through daily. This has led to long-standing discussions about constructing an Inner Relief Road to divert traffic away from the town centre. Despite being proposed over 50 years ago, the project has yet to receive funding, prompting local representatives to advocate for its prioritisation. The delivery of an N80 relief road is considered a strategic piece of infrastructure which will help alleviate traffic congestion and promote positive impacts for the high street and town centre.

Public Transport

Mountmellick is served by several bus operators, providing connectivity to nearby towns and cities.

- *Slieve Bloom Coach Tours*: Offers direct services between Mountmellick and Portlaoise, with journeys taking approximately 15 minutes
- *Bus Éireann*: Operates routes connecting Mountmellick to Athlone and Waterford, with three daily services in each direction.
- *TFI Local Link Laois Offaly*: Provides rural transport services, including door-to-door options, enhancing accessibility for residents in surrounding areas.

Proposed Public Transport Enhancements

Under the Connecting Ireland initiative, new bus routes have been proposed to improve regional connectivity.

- *Route A30*: Connecting Birr to Portlaoise via Kinnitty, Clonaslee, and Mountmellick, with a minimum of three return trips daily.
- *Route A31*: Linking Mullingar to Portlaoise through Kinnegad, Edenderry, Portarlinton, and Mountmellick, also with at least three return trips daily.

Active Travel

A Draft Local Transport plan is being prepared for Mountmellick by the roads section and will be incorporated by way of Variation into the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 and will be based on Action Travel principles.

Suggestions from the survey:

- Promote walking and cycling
- Traffic Management
- Designated pedestrian and cycle lanes
- Creation of N80 bypass
- Connection to Slieve Bloom Mountain
- Repair/bike hire / cycle lanes / cycle loop around town
- Copy Portarlinton - main street is one-way, and also has a number of car parks
- GreenWay to Rosenallis
- More lighting
- Use the river Owenass as route to develop cycle ways to the north and south
- Widen and improve footpaths
- Better public transport
- Walking groups advertised at local notice boards

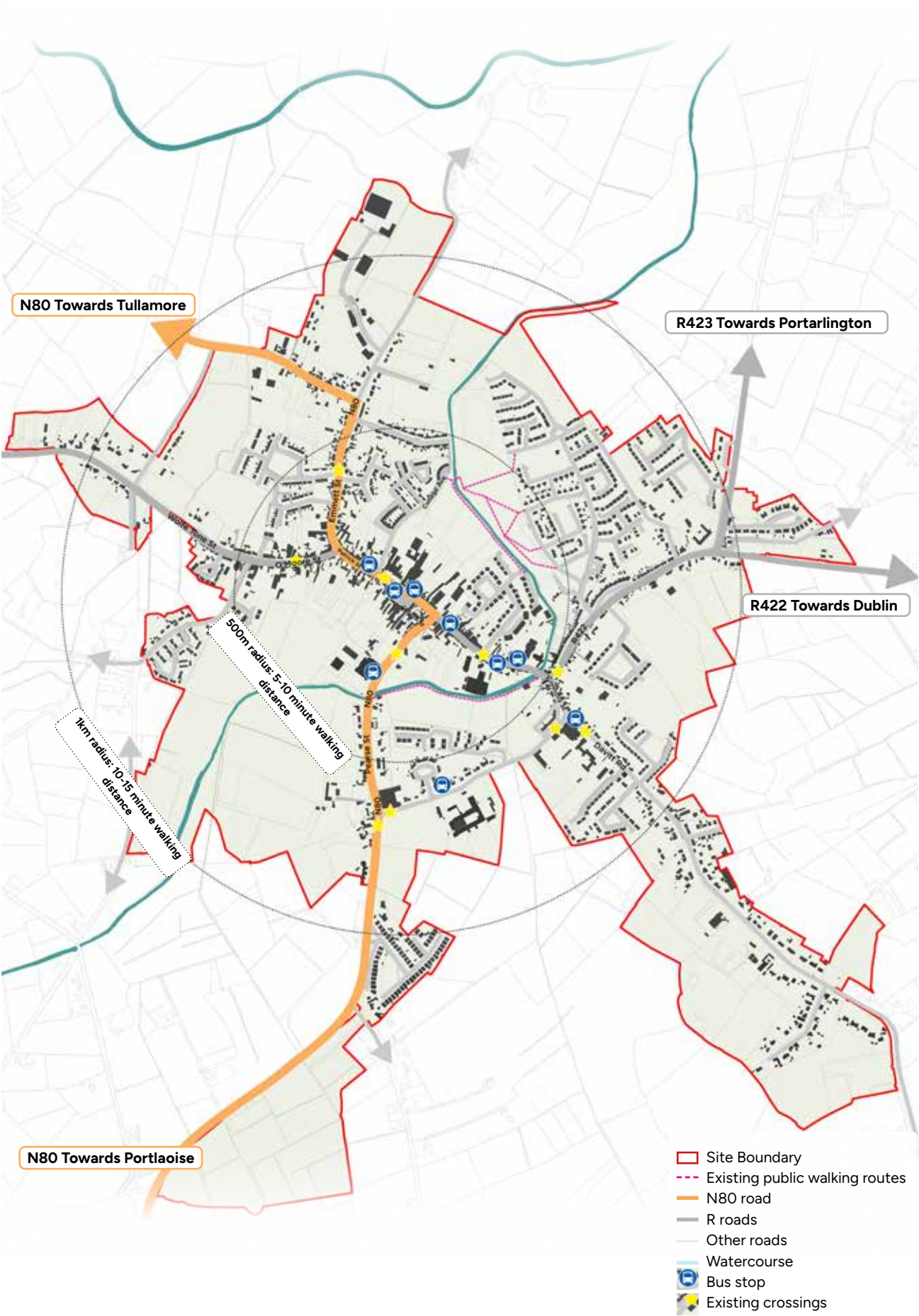


fig. 02: Transport and Connections Diagram

2.3 Location

Mountmellick is a heritage town located in the north of County Laois, Ireland, approximately 6 km north of Portlaoise. It is well connected with the N80, a secondary national road, running north - south through the centre of the town. This connects Mountmellick with Tullamore, in County Offaly, and to Portlaoise. The N80 continues to, Carlow, Waterford and Rosslare to the south, and Mullingar and Athlone to the north.

Mountmellick is also within easy reach of the M7 and M8 to the south past Portlaoise. This allows access east and west of Ireland and to Dublin and Dublin airport, which is approximately 1.5 hours drive to the east.

Mountmellick’s central location allows for great connectivity with the surrounding natural environment, in particular, the Slieve Bloom Mountains, which are a 15 minute drive to the west.

The R422 and R432, regional roads, connect Mountmellick, with surrounding towns and villages.

As per the Local Area Plan, 2018-2024,

‘Mountmellick is the largest and most important service town in the county, performing vital retail, residential, service, amenity functions and support services to the surrounding hinterland, while supporting the upper tier of the urban hierarchy’.

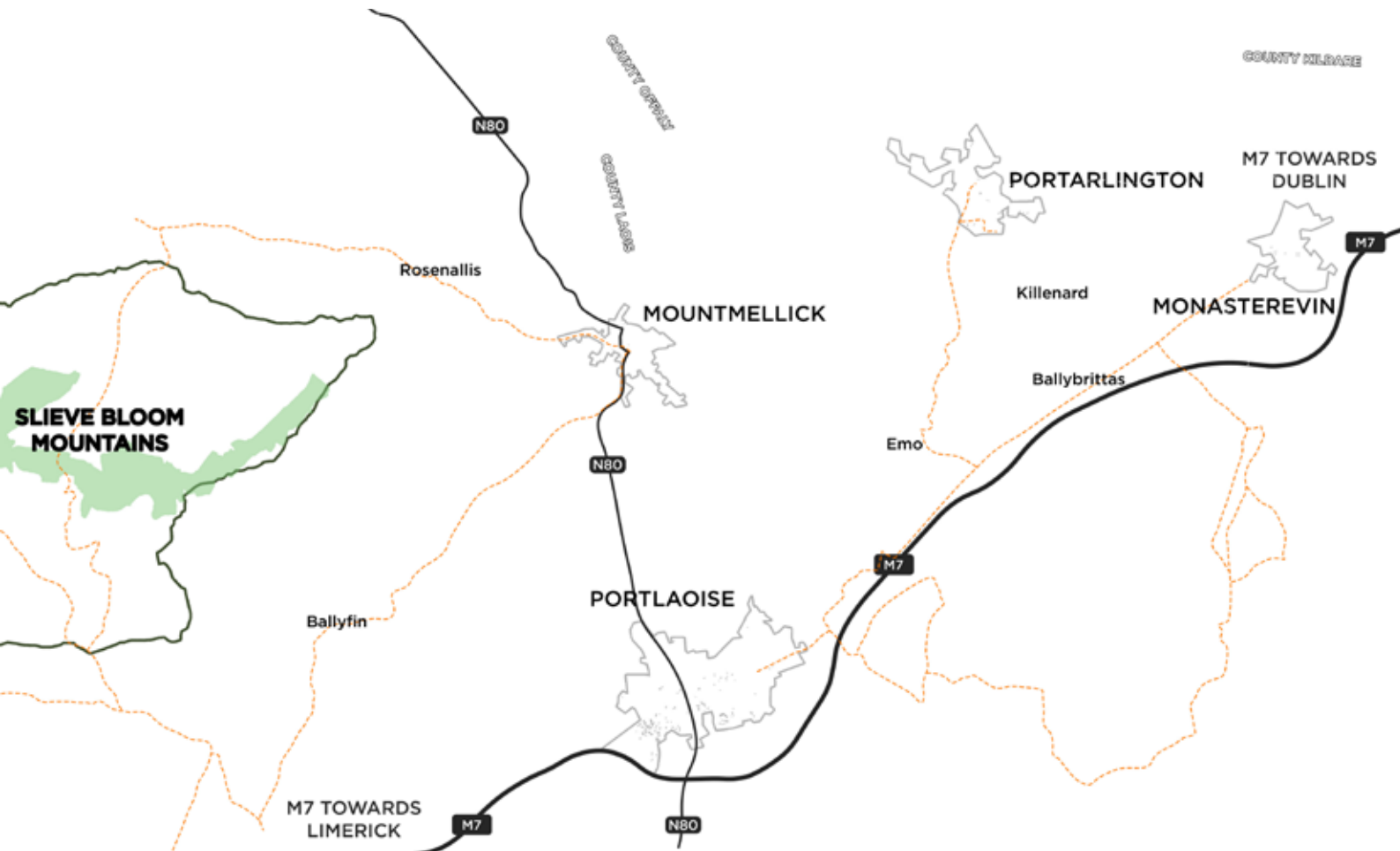


fig. 03: Location Plan

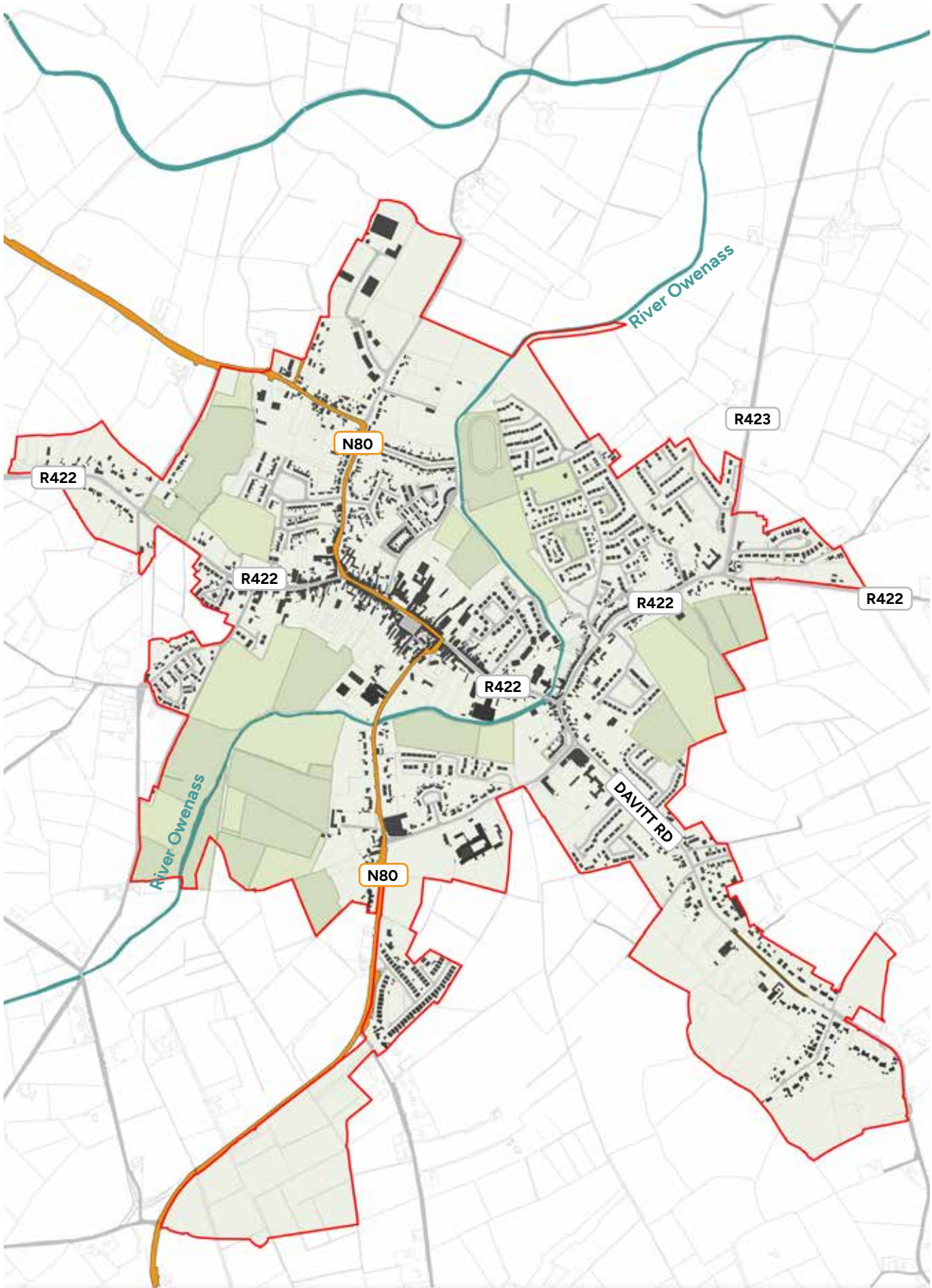


fig. 04: Mountmellick Plan

2.4 Town Centre Health Check

As part of the TCF Plan process a Town Centre Health Check (TCHC) was carried out. The TCHC is a thorough assessment, based on surveys, that evaluates the physical centre of a town. This includes examining land use, vacancy rates, dereliction, social and economic performance, as well as connectivity. The TCHC provides an insight into the town’s current state and establishes a baseline that acts as a reference for future enhancements. Furthermore, it has helped guide the Town Centre First Plan, in conjunction with data collected through public consultation.

The Mountmellick Town Centre Health Check, includes analysis from the following documents, provided by Laois County Council:

- Digital Town Blueprint Report for Mountmellick, February 2025
- Mountmellick Draft Transport Plan 2025
- Mountmellick Walkability Audit 2024
- Mountmellick Flood Relief Scheme 2024
- Mountmellick Settlement Profile and Facilities Analysis
- Mountmellick Vacancy & Dereliction Assessment

In conjunction with the Town Team and Laois County Council, a variety of surveys have been conducted to assess the health and performance of the town, revealing that Mountmellick exhibits significant levels of vacancy and dereliction, leading to diminished social and economic activity. Additionally, traffic congestion and inadequate pedestrian and cycle connectivity through the town centre, have further exacerbated issues in the town centre.

The findings from the baseline analysis are detailed within this section of the Town Centre First Plan and have shaped the, themes, emerging actions, and priority projects outlined within the Plan. Through these comprehensive studies, focusing on key characteristics of the town centre and community, SCOT analysis was carried out which identified the towns, strengths, challenges, opportunities, and threats. This is summarised at the end of the TCHC section.



2.5 History and Heritage and Built Character

2.5.1. History

Mountmellick is a heritage town and has a rich history dating back to as early as the 1400s, when it was documented as a small community on the bend of the river Owenass. The town is shaped by the joining of the old roads from Tullamore and Birr, with the axis of the Main Street crossing a ford in the River Owenass.

English Quakers settled in the area from around 1657. Industry boomed, and included breweries, tanneries, a distillery, woollen mills, cotton and glass. The town became known as the ‘Manchester of Ireland’.

In 1825, Quaker Johanna Carter introduced embroidery and place making, and Mountmellick Work (an embroidery style). In 1831, a branch of the Grand Canal was constructed which linked Portarlington to Harbour Street, Mountmellick. Passengers were brought in via boats, resulting in an increase in shoppers in the town and merchant boats distributing textiles, beer and other Mountmellick wares throughout Ireland.

This industrial movement contributed to a peak in prosperity and Mountmellick became the first town of the county in terms of wealth, industry and population.

By 1831, its population had grown to 4,577. However, by the late 1830s, Mountmellick was in decline and the decline of the town begun.

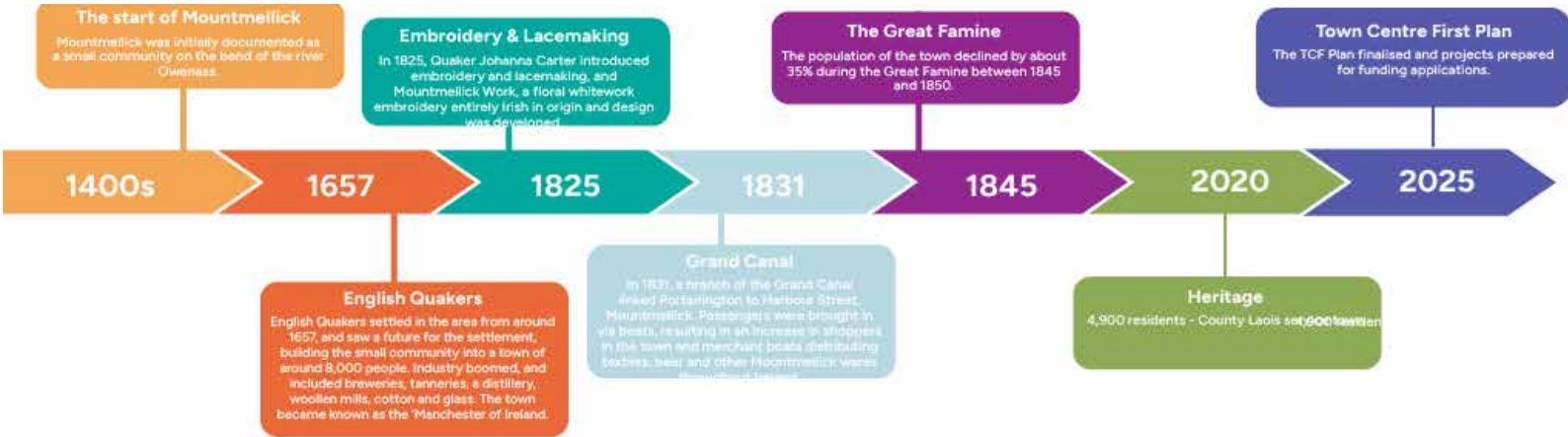
The population of the town declined by about 35% during the Great Famine between 1845 and 1850.

2.5.2. Heritage Trail

Today, the Mountmellick Heritage Trail runs through the town, and is an opportunity to explore the historical and cultural depths of the area. The trail takes the format of two circuits set in a figure of eight, which facilitates a looped walk encompassing the whole character of town.

Features of the trail include the Mountmellick Development Association where there is a museum, featuring details of the Mountmellick Work.

The Quakers influenced the evolution of the town., in particular, O’Connell Sqaure. Other sites such as the 1798 monument and Graigue cemetery also feature.



The adjacent figure and below photos demonstrate that Mountmellick is rich in historic architecture and has at least 50 buildings recorded in the Inventory of Architectural Heritage, with many clustered along the central high street, which reflects the original layout of the town. There are approximately 74 protected structures listed in the Record of Protected Structures within Mountmellick, There are various places of interest outside of the town centre boundary, these include the Old Workhouse.

Many of the buildings have been maintained and are in good condition, however there are a number of buildings which are in need of attention. And some shop fronts which have either been left to decay or are not in keeping with the surrounding historic context.

In addition to heritage buildings and statues there are two key sites which illustrate Mountmellick's industrial background, these are the old Mountmellick Railway Station and the Canal basin, both no longer in use, the railway station closed and the Canal filled in, but what

is still there today offers an opportunity to celebrate and inform visitors and residents of the towns history.

Although Mountmellick is no longer a textile hub, the local museum displays many original pieces of textiles and keeps the heritage of the town alive.

Through the years, historic features such as lighting columns have been removed and there is a less cohesive palette of public realm features, particularly in relation to heritage but the overarching character of the town centre is that of a historic centre which still retains a feel of grandeur. The heritage trail very successfully informs residents and visitors of Mountmellick's rich past, through information boards located throughout the town.



United Irishmen Monument, 1890



Methodist Chapel, 1880



Mountmellick Town Hall, 1860 and Bank of Ireland, 1860



Presbyterian Church, 1850



1 Emmett Street 1800



O'Connell Square, 1600-1800



Mountmellick Heritage trail map



Mountmellick Heritage blue sign

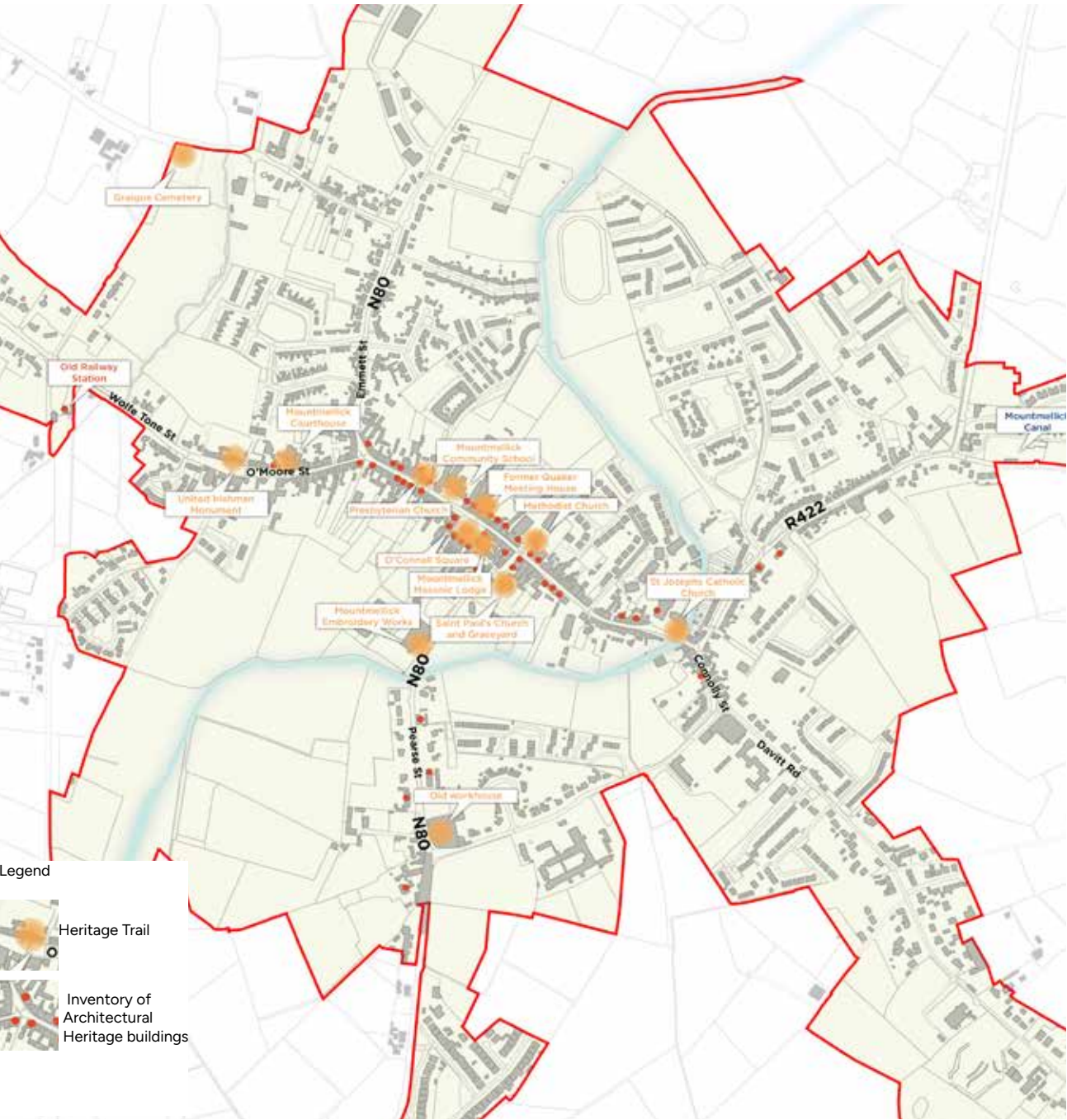


fig. 05: Cultural Asset Diagram

2.5.3. Built character

Architectural Style:

There is clear evidence that Mountmellick was once a thriving town, this can be seen in the Georgian architecture and the urban fabric of the town. There is a strong palette of materials within the town centre, with stone, predominately limestone, being used throughout and render on the Georgian buildings.

There are multiple historic shop fronts which have retained their original aesthetic and evoke a sense of place. A recurring feature throughout the town is stone arches which lead to alleyways through to the backlands. They provide a sense of rhythm as you move along the main street (Patrick Street, Market Street and Parnell Street) and an element of interest, as to where each archway leads.

Urban Form:

Mountmellick has an organic urban form with a primary street (Patrick Street and Market Street) running north to south. This organic shape has been further informed by the River Owenass which has impacted the way in which the town has expanded over the years.

Within the Local Area Plan, an Ordnance Survey Mapping from 1837, shows Patrick Street and O'Moore Street as the primary streets, with a town square in the same location as O'Connell Square is today. The primary road at that time continued to Connolly Street. The built form of the town has developed from this route, with most of the buildings extending from these roads, with thin, long plots running in to the backlands behind. The primary road is also quite narrow for it's current day uses. Understanding the original street hierarchy of the town helps to demonstrate why the introduction of the N80 along Pearce Street has in some respects severed the town by introducing a new street

hierarchy and altering the hierarchy of the streets by severing what was once the primary high street and commercial area. The alleyways leading back to the backlands are a constant recurring architectural feature and offer glimpses to the backlands.

Building Scale and Density:

Along Patrick Street and Market Street tall Georgian buildings are tightly packed in and create a dramatic streetscape, particularly with O'Connell Square providing a key public space.

Within the residential parcels, further out of town, the buildings become more domestic and low rise, with quite a different character to the original centre.



View along Parnell Street



View along O'Moore Street



Alleyway within the town centre



Historic shop front



Natural stone cobbles



Brick and natural stone with metal work



Stone Archway



The River Oweness



Brightly rendered Georgian facade



Natural stone large format steps



Natural stone



Red brick



Internal features



Brick and natural stone with metal work



Historic shop front



Quoin stone features

2.5.4. Nature and Greenspace

Mountmellick sits within a wider rural context in close proximity to the Slieve Bloom Mountains, Garryhinch Forest and Cathole Falls.

Within the town centre the largest public park is Smiths Field in the east, which is partially occupied by Mountmellick United FC in the north. The remainder has been left as open space and is currently under utilised and homogeneous. Natural desire lines are evident as people use the area to connect with the town centre.

There is one play park located opposite the MDA buildings and the equipment consists of some gym pieces and equipment for younger children. There are limited facilities for independent play and for

older children and teens. There are multiple small green spaces within Mountmellick, such as Kirwan Park and Pattison’s Estate, however, these are again, underutilised and limited biodiversity value.

The River Owenass is a major asset but it is often backed on to by the back lands, and hidden from site with most buildings turning their backs to the river. There are only small sections currently accessible by the river walkway. It is an interesting route through Mountmellick as it moves through the rural and urban environment.



Mountmellick Playground



Existing bridge crossing at College Avenue to Smiths Field



Aerial View of Smiths Field and surrounding countryside

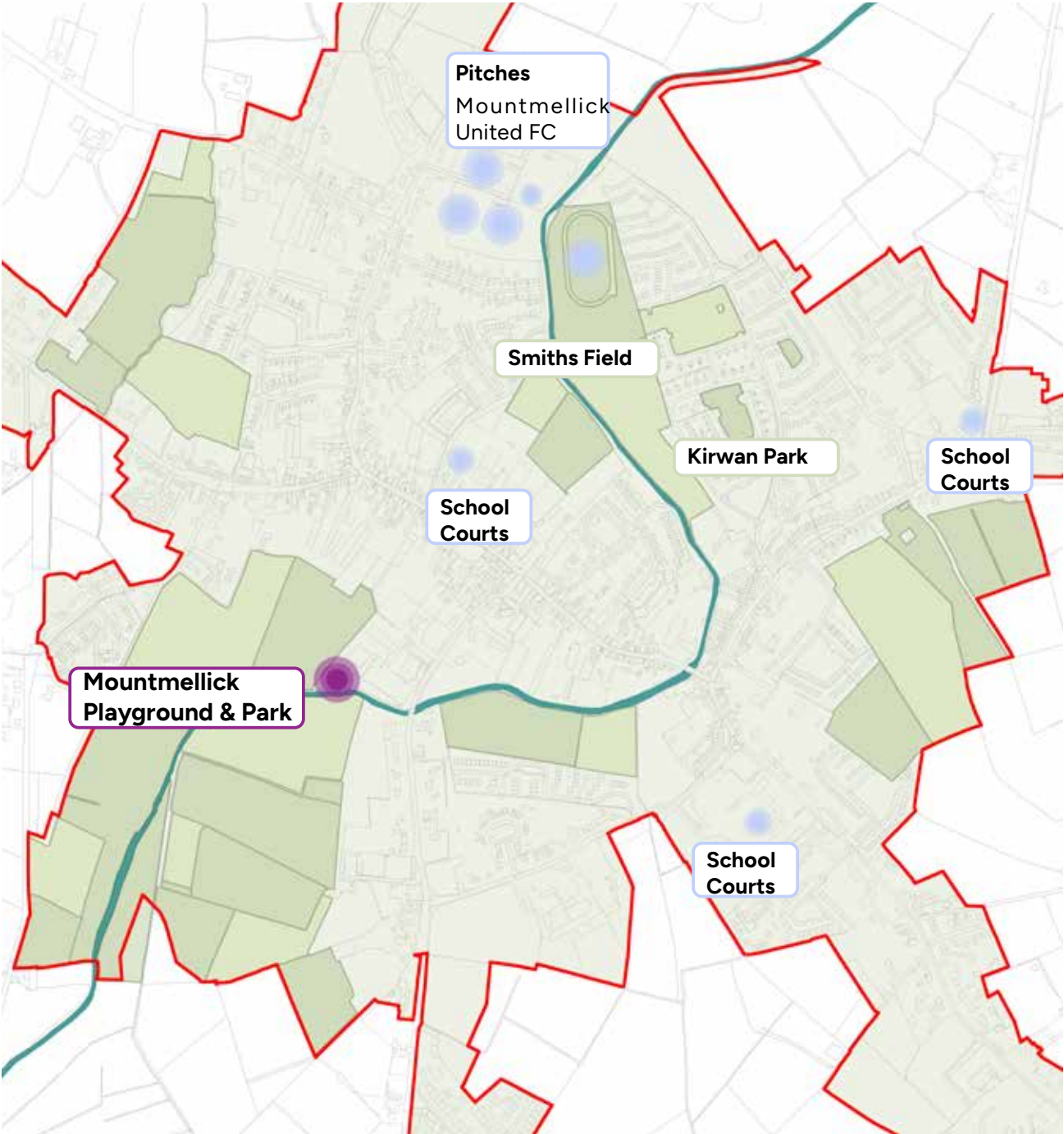


fig. 06: Greenspace Diagram

2.5.5. Vacancy and dereliction

Vacancy and dereliction is an issue within Mountmellick, with many buildings visibly uncared for and in a state of vacancy throughout the town and along the main streets, such as, Patrick Street, Market Street and Parnell Street. Tidy Towns have worked to try and improve the external appearance of several buildings, and brighten up Mountmellick through colourful motifs. It is positive that only 5 properties in total are derelict but with a total number of 86 vacant properties this is an issue which needs to be addressed. The adjacent figure shows the vacant and derelict buildings locations.



Central Garages is registered as derelict



A vacant retail unit with large display windows closed



Empty and unattractive shop unit



Tidy Towns mural

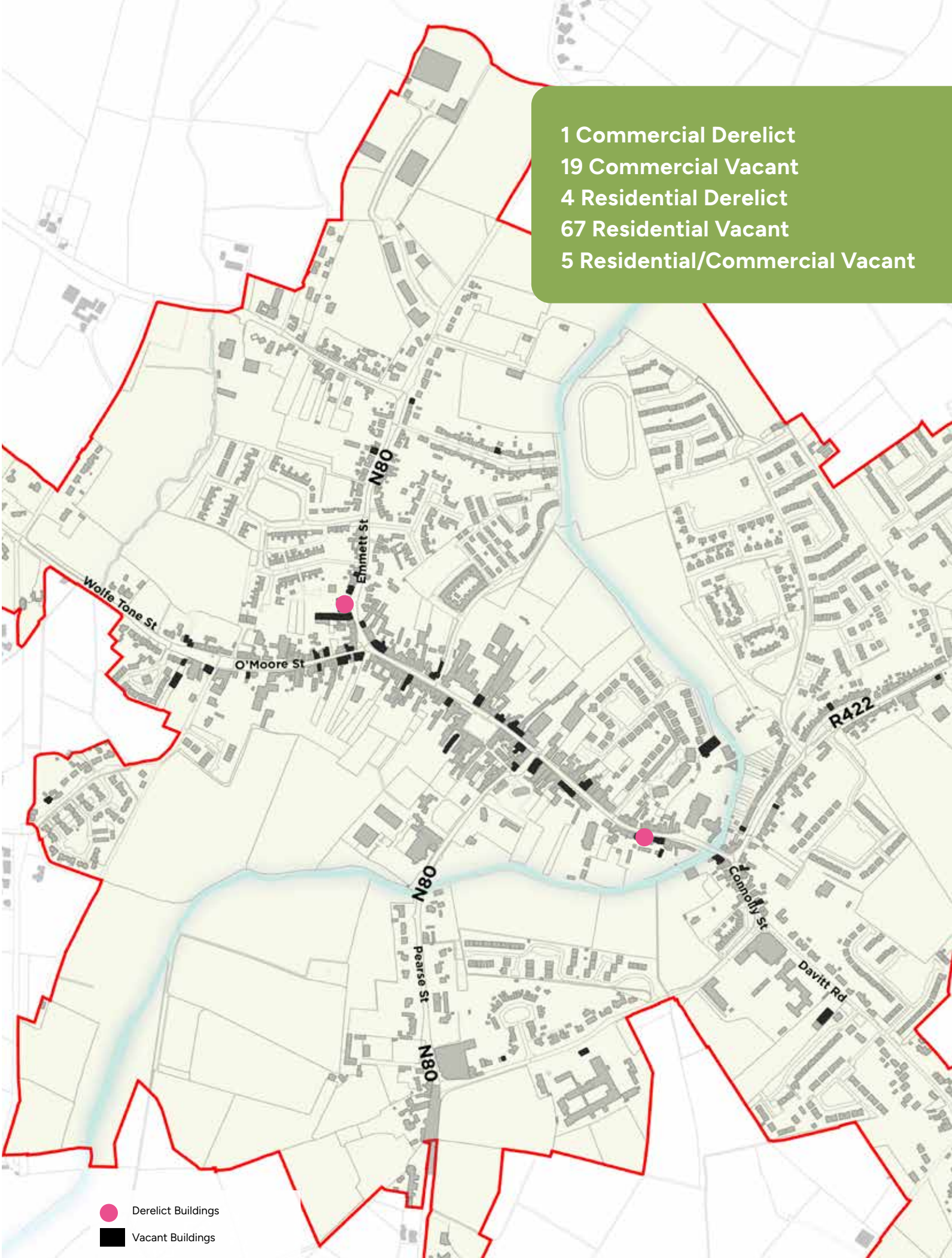


fig. 07: Vacancy and Dereliction Diagram

2.6 Community, Recreation, Cultural and Tourist Facilities

2.6.1. Community facilities

One of Mountmellick’s greatest strengths is its enduring sense of community spirit. The town combines a rich heritage with a forward-looking approach to community development.

In terms of education, Mountmellick offers a range of primary schools. Secondary education is provided by Mountmellick Community School, centrally located in the heart of the town. For younger children, there are several nurseries available, ensuring early childhood needs are well catered for.

Mountmellick Library, situated on O’Moore Street, is easily accessible and serves as a valuable resource for residents. Nearby on Parnell Street, the Mountmellick Community Arts Centre serves as a creative hub, providing rehearsal and event space for various local groups, which seats 448 people. It includes a fully equipped theatre that is actively used by residents and is home to the well-regarded Mountmellick Drama Festival, which draws visitors from across the region each year.

Mountmellick also boasts a thriving network of community groups and voluntary organisations—from youth clubs and active retirement associations to Tidy Towns and environmental initiatives—reflecting the town’s dedication to be inclusive and civic pride.

Key healthcare services such as GP clinics, pharmacies, dental practices, care centres, and public health nurses are located within a 15-minute walk from the town centre.



Mountmellick Library



Tidy Towns



Free Market Event in O’Connell Square

Community Groups

- **Mountmellick Development Association**
The MDA was formed in 1982, is a non profit organisation working to improve the social, cultural and economic development of the town of Mountmellick.
- **Mountmellick Photographic Society**
Club meetings take place every second Wednesday at 8pm in the MDA building, Irishtown Mountmellick.
- **Mountmellick Community Arts Association**
The group hosts the Annual Mountmellick Drama Festival in March. The centre hosts Bingo every Sunday Night. The ‘Balcony Cinema’ has screenings every Wednesday evening.
- **Mountmellick Walking Group**
This group was set up in conjunction with Get Ireland Walking to suit the needs of all walkers by catering for every range of fitness.
- **Mountmellick Youth & Family Resource Centre (MYFRC)**
Established in 2018, the group offers support including Youth Work, Family Support, Community Development, Support Groups and Counselling.
- **Mountmellick Men’s Shed**
The group meets every Monday night from 8pm to 10pm in the building behind the Community Arts Centre.
- **Mountmellick Tidy Towns**
This is a community group which aims to improve the public realm and built environment of Mountmellick
- **Yarn Bombing Mountmellick**
Knitting/crocheting/pompom making to improve the town

Parish Groups

- **St. Vincent de Paul Society**
The Holy Family Conference of St. Vincent de Paul meet on Wednesdays.
- **Pioneer Total Abstinence Association**
The PTAA meet on the second Monday of every month.
- **Parish Prayer Group**
The Parish Prayer Group meet on Thursdays at 8.00pm.
- **Parish Finance Committee**
The Parish Finance Committee advises and assists the priests of the parish.
- **Mountmellick Lourdes Pilgrimage**
- **Kildare & Leighlin Co-Op Lotto**
- **Ivy Cemetery Committee**
- **Fatima Pilgrimage**
- **Tuesday Club**
A group meet for a chat and a cup of tea, aimed at older generation

Suggestions from the survey:

- “More evening activity... Regular use of the cinema hall.”
- “Something for young people to do.”
- “Community gardens.”
- “Senior citizens club.”
- “Mental Health services.”

Mountmellick is well provided for in terms of services, as is demonstrated in the adjacent, figure, financial institutions such as banking, credit union, post office, pharmacy, garda station, all fundamental services for a liveable, walkable town centre. However, the town does not have a varied offering of retail outlets and hospitality services such as, cafés, restaurants and retail shops.

Spaces such as, O'Connell Square and Church Street have significant historical character but are visually tired and in need of physical renewal (e.g. upgraded paving, lighting, street furniture). There is also a general lack of inviting public realm space, with outdoor seating areas or landscaped spaces for gatherings. However, there are spaces with the framework to function as successful public gathering spaces with the necessary upgrades. For example, O'Connell Square could successfully host markets and be used as a community space, as demonstrated during the Free Market event.

The collage consists of three photographs. The top photo shows a stall with a large 'FREE MARKET' sign in orange letters. A sign on the stall reads 'Exhibition Accompanied Ward'. The middle photo shows a mannequin in a white dress and a sign for 'Knots and Ties'. The bottom photo shows a group of people at a stall with a red and white striped awning.



A photograph showing the exterior of a building with a stone wall and a wooden picnic table. The building has a white-painted section with a window and a dark awning. The stone wall is made of rough-hewn stones. A wooden picnic table with a bench is in the foreground. There are potted plants and a small tree next to the table. The ground is paved with light-colored tiles.

Map of Mountmellick showing various facilities categorized by color-coded icons. The map includes a legend in the bottom left corner with categories: Site Boundary (red outline), Leisure (green circle), Government (blue circle), Religious (orange circle), Medical (yellow circle), Retail/Services (purple circle), Education (blue circle), Community (light blue circle), Vet (dark blue circle), and Gym (teal circle). Labeled facilities include: Playing Fields, Smiths Field, RIAS Kids Academy, Mountmellick FET Centre, Mountmellick Community School, Mountmellick Primary Care Centre, St Vincent's Community Nursing Unit, St Josephs Girls National School, Mountmellick Boys National School, Laoise Civil Defence, Post Office, Pharmacy, Bank, Fire Station, Community Arts Centre, Playground, Tennis Courts, St Pauls National School, Gym, Library, Vet, Garda Station, and Mountmellick GAA.

CYAL50441412
© Tailte Éireann – Surveying.

2.6.3. Tourism

Culture & Heritage

The Mountmellick Heritage Trail

This self-guided walking tour leads visitors through significant historical sites, including the Quaker Meeting House and Burial Ground, offering insights into the town’s rich past.

Mountmellick Embroidery & Heritage Museum

Housed in a restored 1830s grain mill overlooking the Owenass River, this museum celebrates the town’s Quaker roots and its renowned 19th-century white-on-white embroidery, known as Mountmellick Work. Visitors can explore intricate textile displays and learn about the craft’s history and techniques.

Community Arts Centre (Balcony Cinema part of)

A restored Art Deco cinema seating 450, the centre hosts plays, concerts, and the annual Mountmellick Drama Festival each March. The Balcony Cinema offers weekly classic film screenings in a unique vintage setting.

Natural Features

Slieve Bloom Mountains

The Slieve Bloom mountains, c. 12km from the town, provide extensive hiking and biking trails. Mountmellick is on the Slieve Bloom Village & Heritage Driving Route and located close to the Glenbarrow and Capard Looped walks as well as the Slieve Bloom Nature Reserve.

Emo Court & Gardens

A short drive from Mountmellick, this neoclassical mansion, designed by James Gandon in 1790, is surrounded by landscaped gardens and parklands, ideal for leisurely walks and picnics.

Other notable features include Brittas Lake and Forest, Glenbarrow Waterfall and Garryhinch Forest and Recreation area.

Food and Drink

Cafés such as Hares Corner, Notions Coffee and Nora’s Cake Shop offer spots for refreshments, often featuring local produce and traditional Irish dishes. Public houses and bars provide authentic Irish pub experiences, serving hearty meals and hosting live music sessions that showcase local talent.

Accommodation

There are several options for accommodation within the town, including several Air Bnb’s, a self catering guest house and a boutique hotel, The Forum, all providing a base for tourists to explore Mountmellick and the wider area.

Tours

The Forum offers a variety of sightseeing tours from Mountmellick, ranging from day trips to multi-day tours. Emo Gardens and Slieve Bloom Mountains are just some of the destinations and local tours include ‘Mountmellick Historic Tour’ and ‘Mountmellick Embroidery Museum’.

Experience Ireland Tours provide private tours for either day trips or wider Ireland multi day trips.

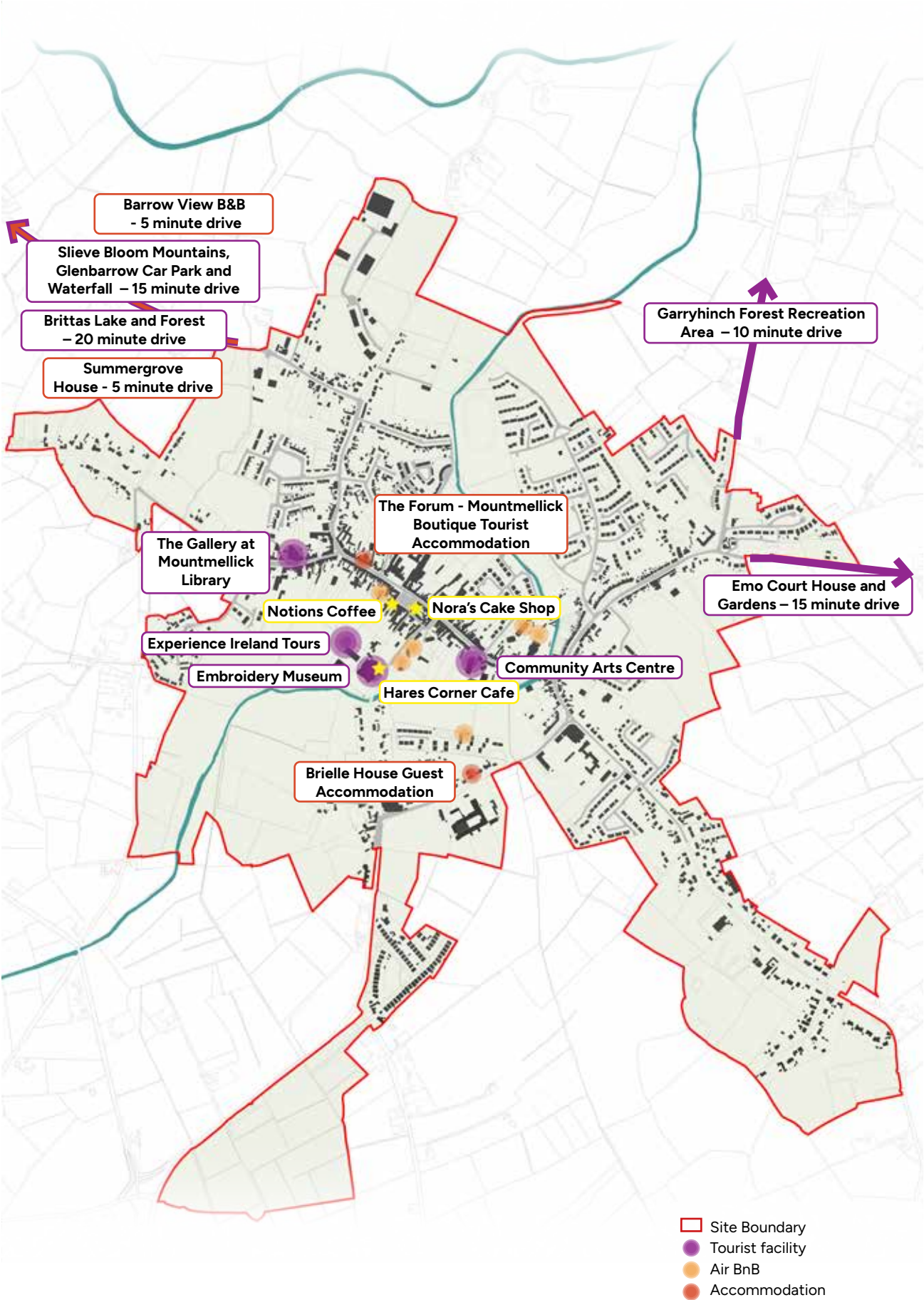


fig. 09: Tourism Diagram

2.7 Business and Employment Profile

Business Development

Mountmellick boasts several facilities that are aimed at promoting business development, including:

Mountmellick Development Association (MDA)

A voluntary community development organisation supporting local, integrated, social, cultural and economic development. The MDA, working with the community, aims to ensure that priority attention is given to the development of integrated programmes to increase employment and job creation while also improving the quality of people’s lives. They manage a business park that includes commercial kitchens, hot desks, offices and industrial units.

Webmill Remote Working Hub:

A facility that offers co-working spaces, attracting companies like Nostra, an IT service provider that expanded its operations to Mountmellick, creating numerous jobs in engineering, IT support, and cyber security.

Beale Centre for Business Excellence:

Funded with over €218,000 from the Regional Enterprise Development Fund, this centre aims to support entrepreneurship and job creation in the area.

Mountmellick also actively participates in initiatives to promote enterprise and community development, including the National Enterprise Town Competition and Digital First Day at the Webmill Hub.

Independent retailers

Mountmellick boasts numerous independent shops that reflect its community spirit and local town identity. They include, some cafés, and various shops such as Victor Cox, a long-standing retailer offering various products.

Digital Town Blueprint February 2025

- **Rural Digital Hub**
Connected hub in town - Yes
Desks available - 44
Meeting rooms - 3
- **Connectivity scores**
Total score is 3.5 with free public WIFI scoring low at 2.5 & rural digital hubs scoring 0.5.
- **Digital Business**
Significant room for improvement - 56% on social media and 44% website plus social media.
- **Tourism Business**
56% of tourism business has no online presence and a total digital score of 52.1

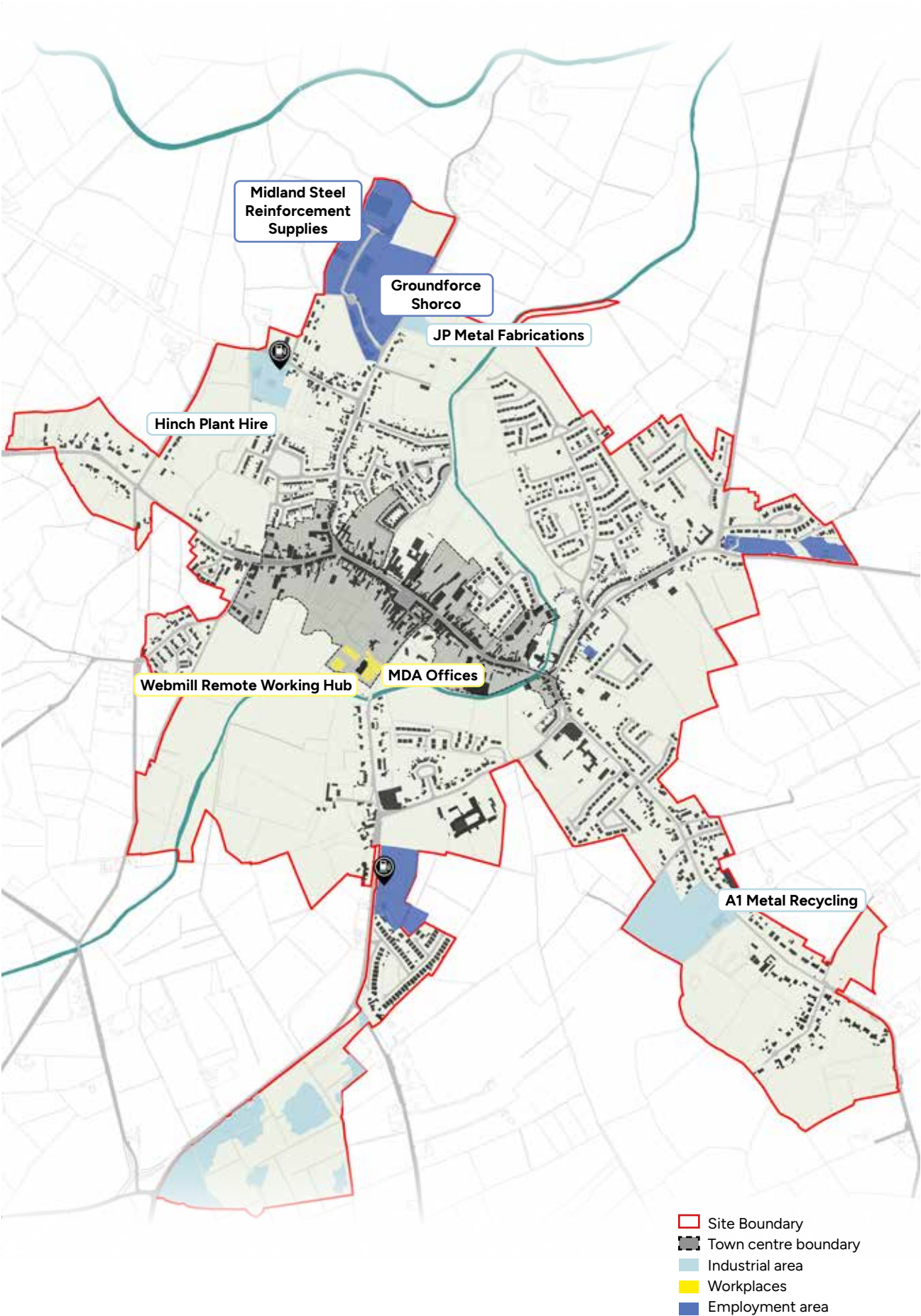


fig. 10: Business and Employment Diagram



Parking on footways



Congested highways with parking



Rear of MDA



Rear of St Joseph's Church

2.7.1. Parking Analysis

Like many small towns, Mountmellick has issues with parking, in particular on-street parking which impacts, residents, businesses and visitors and poses a real risk to safety. It was highlighted in the Walkability Audit as an ongoing issue. It was also noted that signage to existing car parks was not adequate. Illegal parking, in particular on footways, poses a risk to pedestrians and cyclists and people with disabilities.

O'Connell Square is also used primarily as a car park and is one of the only central areas of paid public parking. Formalised parking is identified in the adjacent list and below diagram.

Existing car parking within town centre

1. **Public parking** at O'Connell Square, which includes approximately 49 parking spaces, 2 disabled bays and an EV charging point.
2. **Customer parking** at Tirlán Country Life
3. Significant **residential parking**
4. **Employee parking** at Procon Pumps
5. **Customer parking** at MDA Development Association

Existing car parking within town centre first plan boundary

6. Significant residential parking
7. Visitor parking at St. Vincent Nursing Unit
8. Significant residential parking
9. Parking at St Vincent's School
10. Significant parking at neighbourhood centre

The below has been taken from the **Mountmellick Draft Local Transport Plan, which identifies three areas where car parking could be formalised through either a short or medium term projects:**

1. *Provide parking to the rear of the MDA incorporating disabled, EV and bicycle parking facilities and associated modifications to existing car park to facilitate access- Medium Term Project ,LTP*
2. *Reconfigure area to rear of Arts Centre to formalise parking, provide disabled, EV and bicycle parking facilities with access to R422- Short Term Project , LTP*
3. *Formalise parking behind St. Joseph's Church, incorporating disabled, EV and bicycle parking, and facilitating access to proposed active travel links - Medium Term Project , LTP*

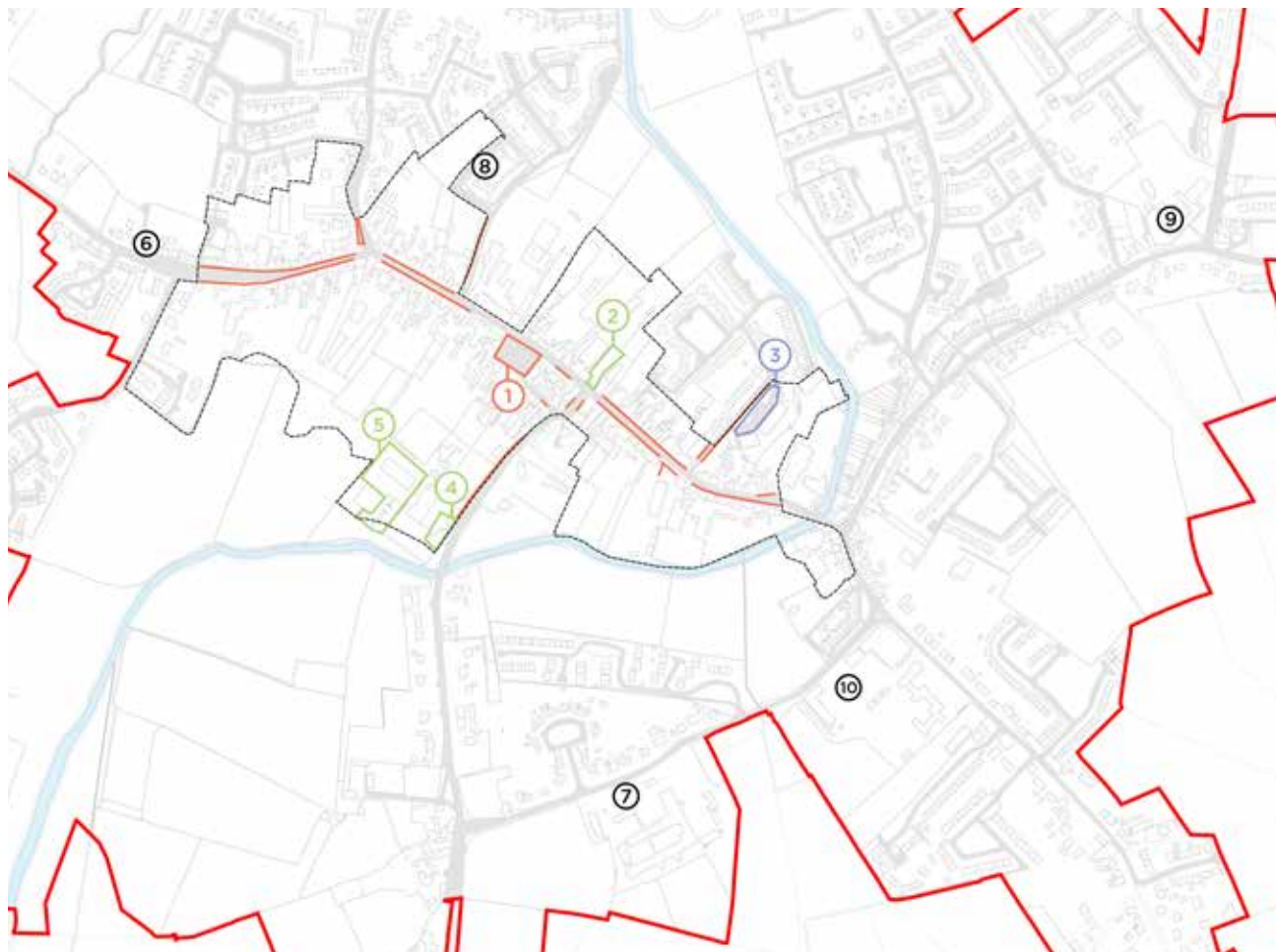


fig. 11: Existing parking Diagram

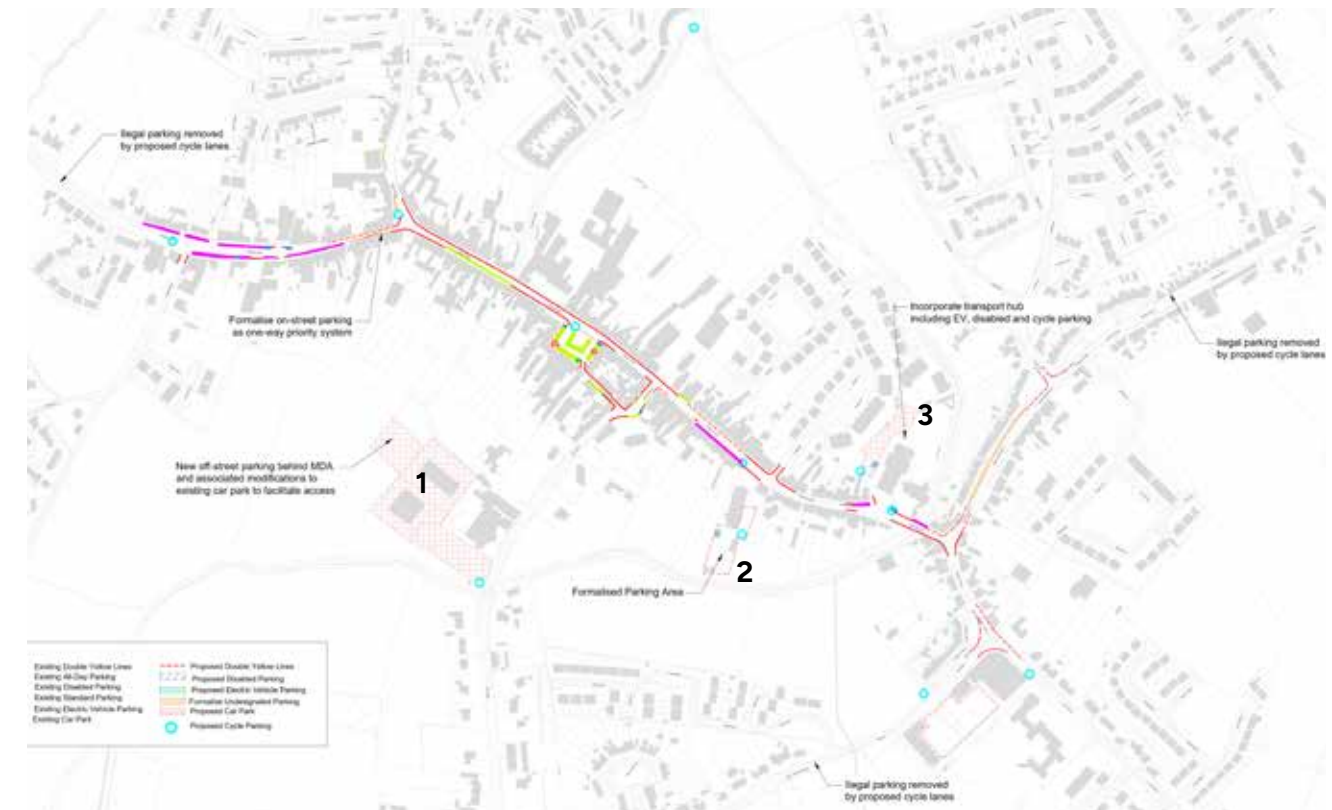


fig. 12: Existing and parking Diagram, taken from the Draft Local Transport Plan, 2025

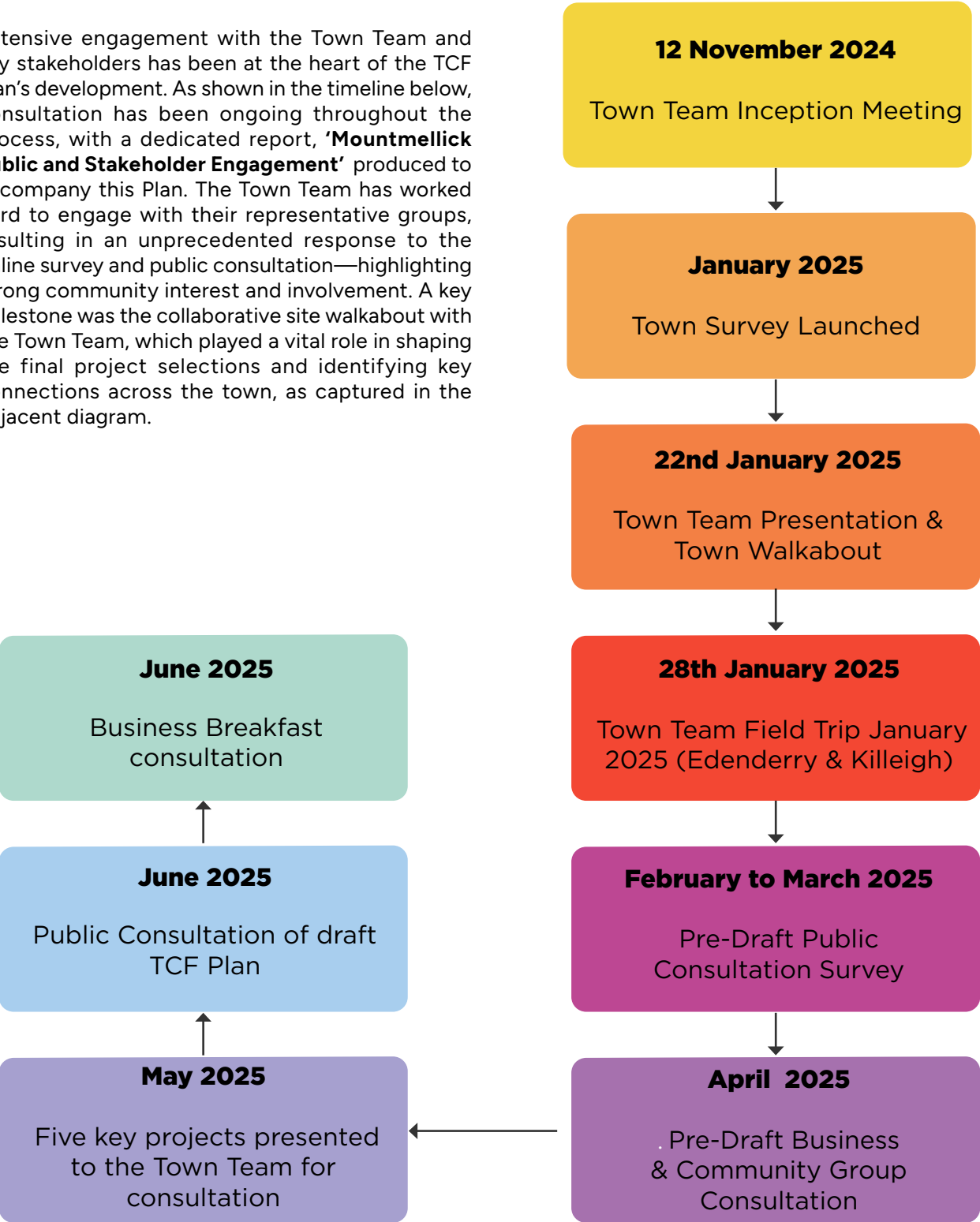
2.8 SCOT Analysis

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
• Cultural Heritage • Community Spirit • Sporting & Arts Groups • Tourism Potential -Gateway to Slieve Blooms • Local shops & pubs • Proximity to the M7 • Potential for Growth • Natural Environment - River Owenass	• National Road By-Pass needed • Vacancy & Dereliction • Car-parking • Lack of public transport • Lack of public realm cohesion • Lack of public lighting • Lack of biodiversity in public realm • Flooding • Lack of affordable supermarkets • Anti-social reputation • Lack of connection to nature in town	• Opportunity Sites - Maltings, - Central Garages, - Whites Building • Connectivity to key facilities & Sites • Flood alleviation Works • River Walk Loop - boardwalk along Owenass to mitigate against bank erosion and flooding • Greenway to Slieve Blooms • New commercial services: - New Café - Community hub - Business/shops - Community Noticeboard - Bike Schemes, cycle lands & bike parking • Additional Amenities: - Dog park, - Parkrun, - Playground, - Skate park, - Farmers market • Cohesive Public Realm Strategy	• Flood Risk • Vacancy & Dereliction • N80 Traffic • Competition from local towns • Sewerage System • Air & Noise Quality from N80 traffic • Poor public transport links • Lack of lighting • Car parking • Repetitive Shops/Sector Gaps • Untapped Tourism potential • Lack of Employment Opportunities

3. Public & Stakeholder Engagement

3.1 Community Engagement

Extensive engagement with the Town Team and key stakeholders has been at the heart of the TCF Plan’s development. As shown in the timeline below, consultation has been ongoing throughout the process, with a dedicated report, **‘Mountmellick Public and Stakeholder Engagement’** produced to accompany this Plan. The Town Team has worked hard to engage with their representative groups, resulting in an unprecedented response to the online survey and public consultation—highlighting strong community interest and involvement. A key milestone was the collaborative site walkabout with the Town Team, which played a vital role in shaping the final project selections and identifying key connections across the town, as captured in the adjacent diagram.



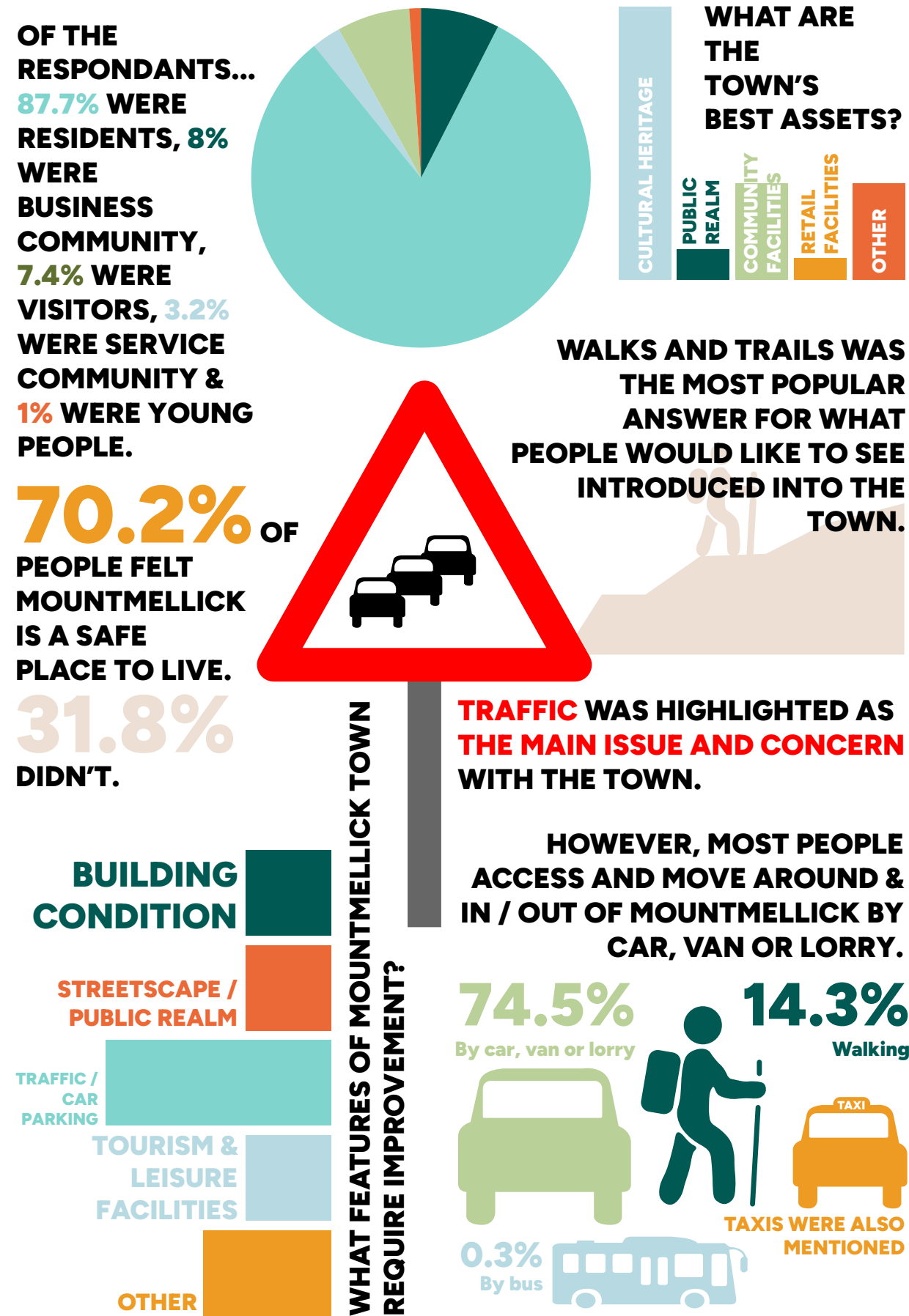
22nd January 2025 Town Team Presentation & Town Walkabout summary

Noted below are observations and comments made whilst on the walkabout.

1. Potential for O’Connell Square to be improved and act as the central public space for events and markets.
2. South-western corner - pedestrian access via back lands to MDA landbank and parking area.
3. Connectivity opportunity.
4. Maloney’s Gaelic Bar - an outdoor area which links to lands at rear.
5. Roundabout at O’Moore Street - property with laneway with direct access to backland. Potential for a single carriageway/pedestrian/ cycle route.
6. Possible access off O’Moore Street
7. O’Moore St. Permission for 2no. 2 bed, two storey dwellings & 1 bed, two storey apartment.
8. Opportunity site - possible link onto O-Moore Street. Bus stop on Emmett St.
9. Planning permission for nursing home
10. O’Moore street - one-way street to allow the

- re-introduction of public realm & trees.
11. Macra hall on main street - Issue with parking
 12. College Avenue - Opportunity to open an access and allow school buses to park on school grounds.
 13. Doctors surgery - on street parking issues.
 14. Property - restoration of building with apartments upstairs and restaurant downstairs. Famers market/pop up food court here.
 15. Tirlan lands -huge potential site. Opportunity for links to lands at rear.
 16. Starts at MDA lands and follows the River to Manor Road Junction- Black Path
 17. Flood Relief works - proposal for cycle path along here too.
 18. Bridge at Sarsfield Street - creating visual amenity here
 19. Existing river walk - needs upgrading and will form part of plans for flood relief
 20. Gas works building and is now an Air bnb.
 21. Canal Masters House – with stone wall on RHS part of Canal.
 22. Old Railway House- possible trail head.





In summary the response received is that the community is **VERY SUPPORTIVE** of the plan.

O-Connell Square was the project with the most **mixed response**, a lot of concern over **parking** being reduced, particularly from business owners. Alternative parking must be available prior to any reductions. But there is obviously a **desire to improve the square**, the seating, lighting, tree planting etc. and make it flexible for community uses.

Smiths Field project was well received with comments that it is a **wonderful amenity** that can be enhanced, but there are concerns over **anti-social behaviour**. Interesting suggestions for **different uses**, such as; a running track, a bike track for teens and, a dog park and to enhance its **biodiversity** even further.

The majority of responses were very supportive of the **Public Realm** project, but there were limited additional comments. Primarily comments related to **connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists**.

The River Walk and **Trail Head** were very well received. Both seen as a **wonderful amenity** that would enhance the town for residents and visitors. A main comment with the River Walk is that the **path should run the length** of the river and open back up in areas that are now inaccessible. The trail head again highlighted peoples request for **better cycle routes and connections to the wider areas**.



Photos of June consultation in Mountmellick Library

4. Enabling the Place

4.1 Vision Statement

'Make Mountmellick a destination town. A place people want to live, raise a family & enjoy spending time in'

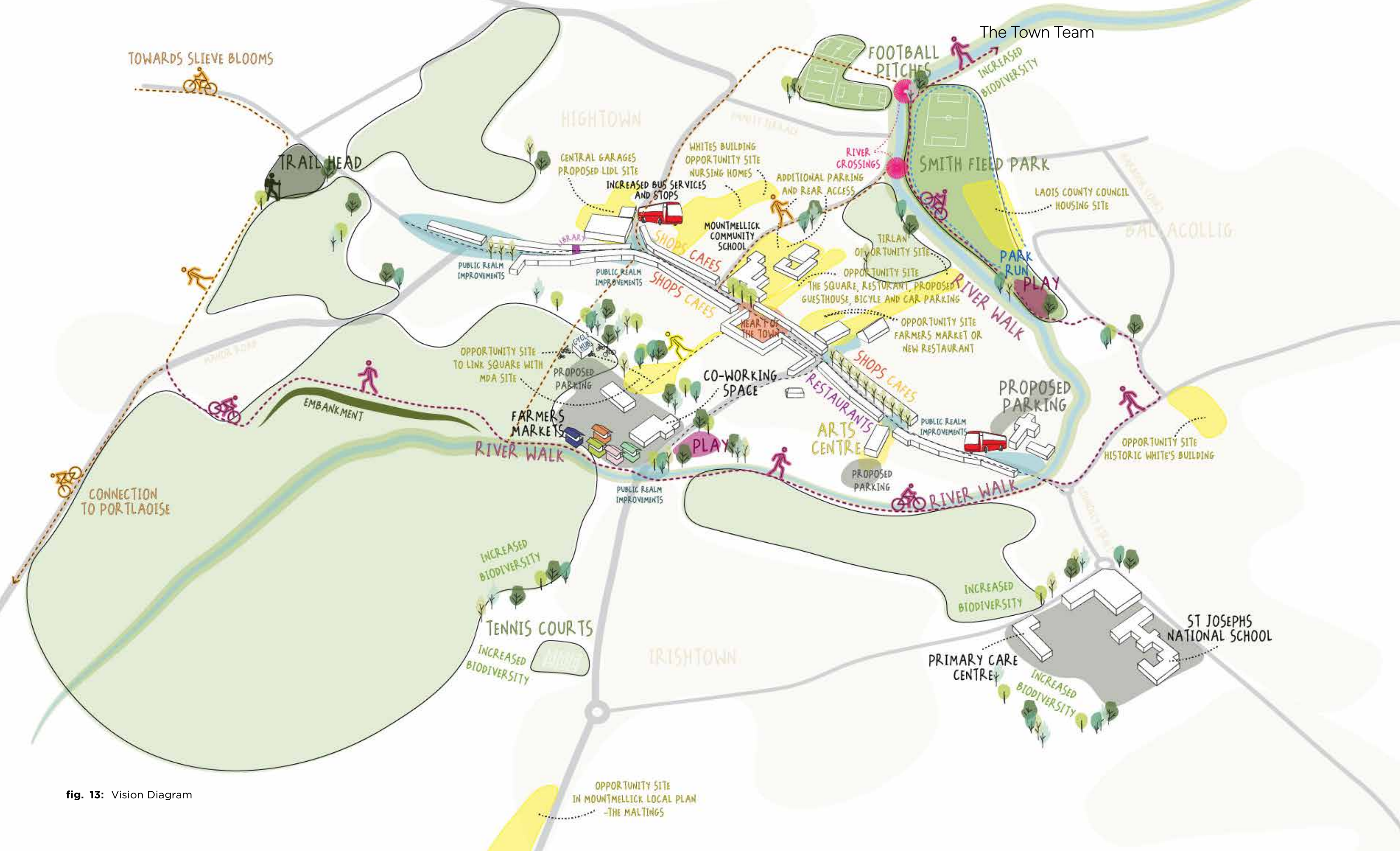


fig. 13: Vision Diagram

4.2 Project Themes and Objectives

Five themes have been identified which link back to the overarching initiative that a TCF Plan should aim to revitalise a town through community-driven ideas , with a sustainable approach which celebrates the towns sense of place.

Culture and Community	1. Support and foster artists and local community groups 2. Provide opportunity for additional art installations
Natural green space and Biodiversity	1. Opportunity to protect and enhance biodiversity connectivity 2. Introduce biodiversity and climate resilience within the town - protect existing flood plains, identification of SuDS and NbS.
Connectivity and Public Realm	1. To improve accessibility and promote walking and cycling 2. To improve traffic management and parking 3. To improve the public realm experience of the town
Heritage and Building Stock	1. To attract more people to the town 2. To highlight the unique characteristics and heritage 3. To address vacancy and dereliction
Tourism and Economy	1. Support local business and foster tourism 2. Promote incentives to encourage town centre revitalisation

4.3 Emerging Actions



Culture and community		1. Support and foster artists and local community groups 2. Provide opportunity for additional art installations within the town
Artists and Craftspeople		Promote local artists and crafts people Support opportunity for art exhibitions and studio spaces within vacant buildings Support artist to exhibit in vacant retail windows. Work with Mountmellick Art Centre.
Public Art		Review existing and identify new areas where public art can be incorporated into the fabric of the town, such as murals, sculptures and dedicated art spaces in conjunction with local community groups. Produce a Town Public Art Strategy and from this design briefs should be set for each piece of public art dependent on location. Support opportunity to utilise vacant buildings. 1. 2.
O'Connell Square		Provide a revitalised O'Connell Square which can be used as an outdoor, flexible space for markets and community gatherings and events. Ensure there is a permanent space available for the Community Christmas Tree and nativity scene. Enhance the public realm of O'Connell Square to improve the look and usability of this historically important Square. This will generate greater footfall, animation and provide a space for community gatherings. Prepare a detailed design for O'Connell Square based on the principles set out in the TCF Plan
Community Facilities		Explore opportunity for increased community facilities, including a swimming pool, parkrun, additional play areas and expand the heritage museum. 1.

PROJECT NO.1

Natural green space and Biodiversity

1. Opportunity to protect and enhance biodiversity connectivity
2. Introduce biodiversity and climate resilience within the town - protect existing flood plains, identification of SuDS and NbS.

Parks

Incorporate new green areas and new play spaces and strengthen the network of existing green space within the town centre environment. Provide a strategy which identifies existing and opportunity sites for further green spaces and play areas, which connects with future pedestrian, cycle links. To tie in with the SuDS and NbS strategy.

- 1.
- 2.

Planting

1. Increase the opportunity for biodiversity and native planting. A strategy demonstrating detailed planting mixes which can then be utilised throughout Mountmellick which increase biodiversity and habitat creation, whilst responding to climate change.
2. Connectivity through native species, genetic flow and healthy ecosystems
3. Develop an invasive species plan to identify and remove occurrences throughout the town

- 2.

Blue and Green Infrastructure

Develop a Blue and Green Infrastructure Strategy to promote tourism and connection to the regional network of Rivers and natural heritage. To identify different character areas and soft landscape details. To be coordinated with the Public Realm Strategy.

- 1.
- 2.

Smiths Field

Produce a detailed design for Smiths Field based on the design intent laid out in the TCF Plan. Ensure SuDS and biodiversity enhancements are incorporated.

- 1.
- 2.

PROJECT NO.2



Owenass River

Promote the Owenass River as a valuable asset for the community, enhance its utilisation, including recreational activities such as kayaking and educational activities such as biodiversity and aquatic workshops

- 1.
- 2.

SuDS

Introduce sustainable urban drainage and Nature Based Solutions as appropriate. Ensure all future schemes within the town should seek to incorporate these in accordance with Water Framework Directive (200/70/EC) via the Water Action Plan 2024.

- 2.

Flood Defence

Capitalise on flood defence works to encourage enjoyment of the River. Ensure any future schemes and works around the river are fully coordinated with the Flood Relief Scheme.

- 1.
- 2.

Nature Trail

Develop a Biodiversity/Natural Heritage Trail through the town. Noticeboards of flora and fauna and ID signs for trees.

- 1.
- 2.

4.4 Emerging Actions

Connectivity and Public Realm

1.

To improve accessibility and promote walking and cycling within the town

2.

To improve traffic management and parking within the town

3.

To improve the public realm experience of the town

Traffic Calming

Implement Traffic Calming measures throughout Moutmellick to promote pedestrian movement and safety. Prepare a strategy to identify streets which would benefit from traffic calming in collaboration with the Draft Local Transport Plan. Identifying Priority streets for the first phase of works.

1.

2.

Cyclists and Pedestrian routes and amenities

1.

Develop Cycling Lanes and pedestrian paths to enhance connectivity within the town and its surroundings. A strategy would be produced which identifies streets which would benefit from cycle lanes and pedestrian paths in collaboration with the Draft Local Transport Plan and to incorporate overarching design ethos for these links and design details

2.

To include cycle parking and cycle repair stations

1.

3.

Public Realm Improvements and Connections

1.

Create a materials palette for all public realm areas within the town centre to promote cohesion and visual connectivity across the town, including lighting, street furniture and CCTV where appropriate

2.

To prepare a Public Realm Design Code which can be applied to all public realm schemes from detailed design, to planning and delivery.

1.

2.

3.

Car Parking

1.

Explore opportunities for the use of backland for off-street parking

2.

Introduce E.V. Parking and additional accessible parking within the town centre

2.

PROJECT NO. 3



Town Entrances

Develop a Strategy for the town entrances which specifies a design palette for hard and soft landscaping, incorporating public art on the roundabouts within the town and enhance the approaches to the town

2.

3.

Wayfinding

Conduct an evaluation of the current signage within the town and formulate a Wayfinding and Signage Strategy in collaboration with the local community, which includes considerations for tourism, heritage, and all users, such as pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles.

1.

2.

3.

Street Clutter

Reduce visual clutter by undergrounding overhead cables and removing unnecessary signage where appropriate

1.

3.

Town by-pass

Support delivery of the by-pass to alleviate traffic congestion.

2.

River Walk

Opportunity to upgrade and implement a continuation of the River Walk in coordination with the Flood Relief Scheme. Prepare detail design to incorporate connections identified in the TCF Plan.

1.

3.

PROJECT NO. 4

Heritage and Building Stock

- 1. To attract more people to the town
- 2. To highlight the unique characteristics and heritage of the town
- 3. To address vacancy and dereliction

Heritage Buildings

- 1. Promote the retention and enhancement of historic built form
- 2. Promote adaptive reuse strategies to re-purpose historic structures.
- 3. Prioritise heritage buildings which are identified as high importance whilst ensuring the most vulnerable in a vacant state are high priority.

- 2.
- 3.

Building Uses

Promote a mix of commercial, residential and recreational spaces to create a vibrant town centre. Produce guidelines demonstrating proposed building uses.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Revitalise the Town Centre

Identify key locations to address vacancy and dereliction to help revitalise the town Centre. This will be aligned with the public realm strategy.

- 1.
- 2.

Sustainability

- 1. Prioritise sustainable building materials and practices
- 2. Promote energy-efficient and eco-friendly technologies

- 3.

PROJECT NOS



Opportunity Sites

Promote the activation of opportunity sites which could provide opportunity for increased commercial and residential diversity within the town centre

- 1.
- 3.

Heritage Trail

- 1. Update & expand the Heritage Trail, including trail markers and signage in conjunction with public realm design palette
- 2. Develop a bi-lingual online Heritage Trail to encourage tourism throughout the town, this should be linked in with public realm and commercial amenities within the town

- 1.
- 2.

Building Façades

- 1. Provide a façade enhancement scheme to encourage shop and building owners to improve the presentation of their buildings on the street
- 2. Create a frontage design guide to provide guidance on façade treatments suitable for the town in keeping with its historical nature.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



4.5 Plan Priorities

Through consultation and discussions with the Town Team and stakeholders it is apparent that there is a strong sense of community within Mountmellick and a sense of pride, particularly in relation to the heritage and history of the town. Whilst it is suffering from issues such as, vacancy and dereliction; the national road; poor pedestrian priority, particularly within the town centre, it has many assets; the River Owenass; historic buildings of great value; connections to the wider area and an active community.

It is a town which will be proactive in achieving the following projects and actions. The five main projects were identified relatively early on in the analysis and consultation stage, with the detail evolving during the progression of the Town Centre First Plan. The long list actions have emerged during the Health Check and consultation.

The five priority Projects are as follows:

1. O'Connell Square
2. Smiths Field Park
3. Public Realm Improvements
4. River Walk
5. Revitalise the Town Centre
6. Trail Head to the Slieve Blooms

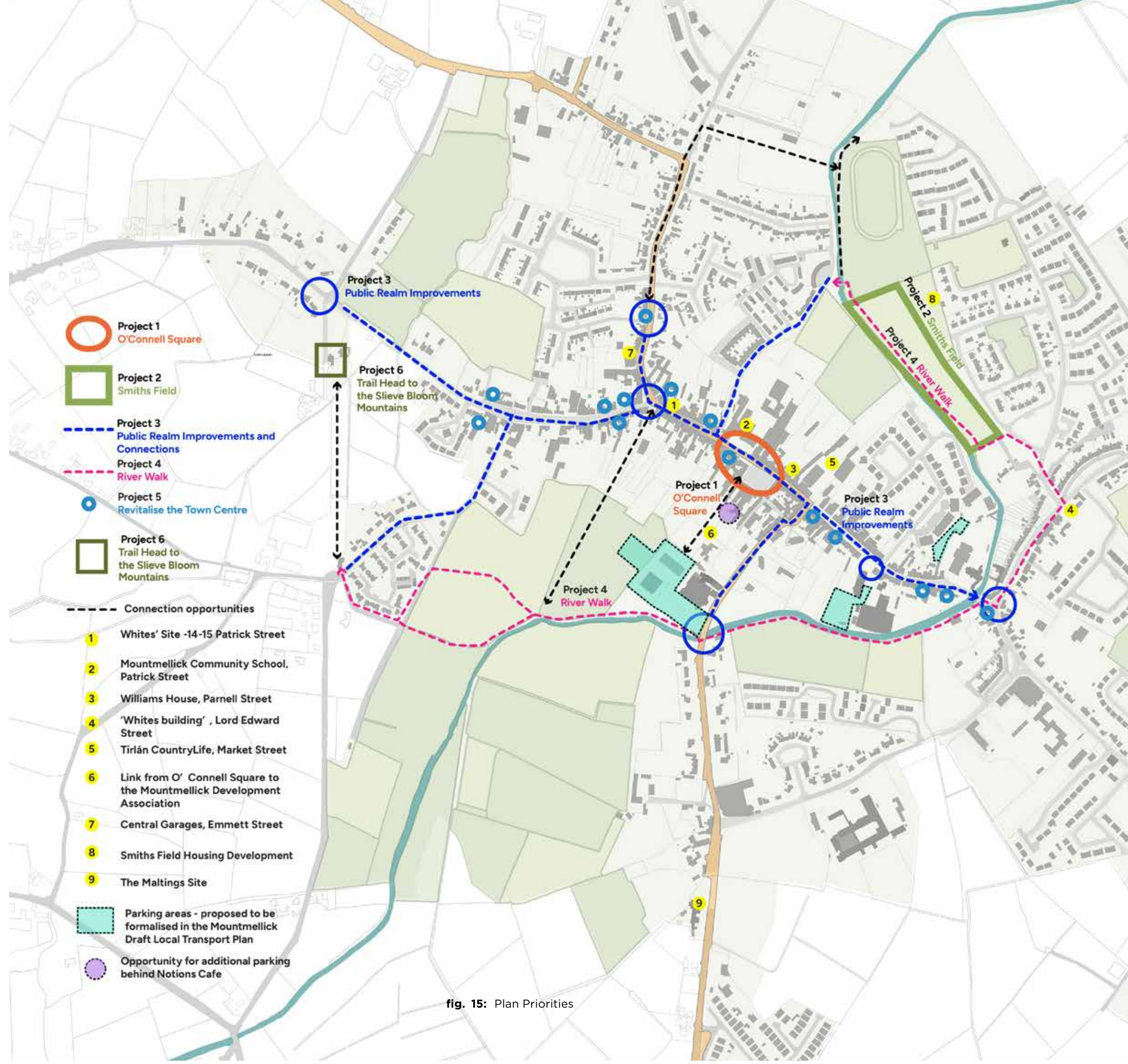


fig. 15: Plan Priorities

4.6 Project 1

O'Connell Square

Culture and Community

O'Connell Square sits at the centre of Mountmellick, located off Market Street, the N80. The close proximity of the N80 means the square is often busy and loud from the large number of heavy goods vehicles travelling along this route. There is also a bus top adjacent to the square which causes further congestion.

However, it has great heritage value, with buildings dating from the 1600's on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage. At present the square is primarily a parking area with car parking around the perimeter and within the centre. There is a small area in the very centre that is pedestrianised and contains some brick planters, trees, signs and benches, but it is not particularly unified and is a very hard area, uninviting for use by pedestrians and particularly for people to stop and dwell.

The surrounding buildings have a variety of uses as shown in the adjacent diagram but they are not all utilised and there is a small area dedicated for external seats for the cafe.

In the southwest corner there is a connection through one of the alleyways to a small building with a cafe and other uses. There is a pleasant view towards St Paul's Church in the south west corner

along Church Street. The signage is dated but does contain a vast amount of interesting information about the history of Mountmellick and O'Connell Square is included as one of the stops on the heritage walk. Some of the shop fronts are not in keeping with the heritage buildings and pavements around the edge of the square are fairly tight. It does not feel as though pedestrians have priority and there are no facilities for cyclists.

There is a mix of materials and they have been identified on the following pages. It is evident that works have been carried out in recent years, with relatively new paving in places but it is not cohesive across the whole square.

O'Connell Square has plenty to offer to become a unique heritage feature of Mountmellick and a key public realm space where the community can gather and utilise for a variety of activities.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

PUBLIC REALM

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

RETAIL FACILITIES

OTHER

WHAT ARE THE TOWN'S BEST ASSETS?

From the survey:

The Main Street was one of the highest recorded responses to areas that would benefit from regeneration improvements.

Concerns included:

- Lack of uniform palette of materials.
- Lack of usable public realm.
- Too much parking.
- Traffic and car congestion.
- School bus parking in the square leading to further congestion in square and on N80.
- Retaining space for the annual Christmas tree display.

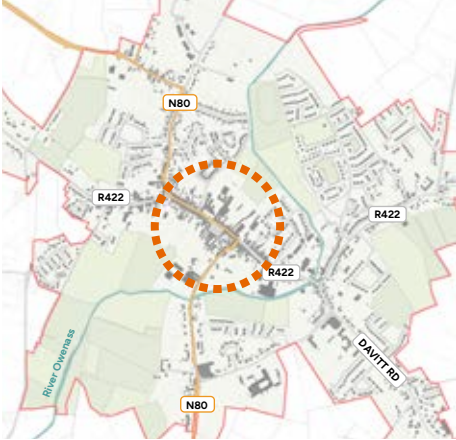


fig. 16: O'Connell Square Analysis



Aerial view of O'Connell Square



Bus stop and brick planters



cafe with small space for table and chairs

Existing condition



fig. 17: Diagram of existing materials within O'Connell Square

Parking Survey

A parking survey was carried out to establish if the parking within O'Connell Square is being used to capacity or if there is opportunity to remove some bays to enhance the public realm and allow area to be fully pedestrianised.

Existing number of spaces in O'Connell Square

- 45 Standard Spaces
- 2 Accessible Spaces
- 1 E.V. Charging space

48 spaces total within the Square

The adjacent table demonstrates that the parking was only at capacity during school pick up and drop off times.

Date	Time	Spaces Remaining	% Spaces Available
Tuesday 12th November 2024	13.00	25	48
	19.00	22	42
Wednesday 13th November 2024	10.00	20	28
	12.00	19	36
	14.00	21	40
Friday 13th June 2025	10.00	19	36
	11.00	15	28
	12.00	13	25
	13.00	-	-
	14.00	19	36
School Pick-up	15.00	14	26
	16.00	9	17
	17.00	21	40
Saturday 14th June 2025	10.00	14	26
	11.00	17	32
	12.00	18	34
	13.00	16	30
	14.00	21	40
	15.00	19	36
	16.00	22	42
	17.00	20	38
Wednesday 18th June 2025	10.30	26	50
	11.30	28	53

June 2025 Public Consultation Layout

Following initial consultation with stakeholders a sketch layout was produced for the public consultation in June 2025, which showed removal of parking bays to create a pedestrianised area on the west side of the square, as shown below.

The parking survey carried out, demonstrated that the square was rarely at capacity apart from at school drop of and pick up. However, during

consultation some residents raised concerns over the reduction of parking, particularly if it were to happen prior to alternative parking being brought forward, therefore, an alternative option has been developed for the Town Centre First Plan with minimal parking bays removed and an alternative option, which can be implemented at a later date, once alternative parking has been formalised in the town centre is also included.

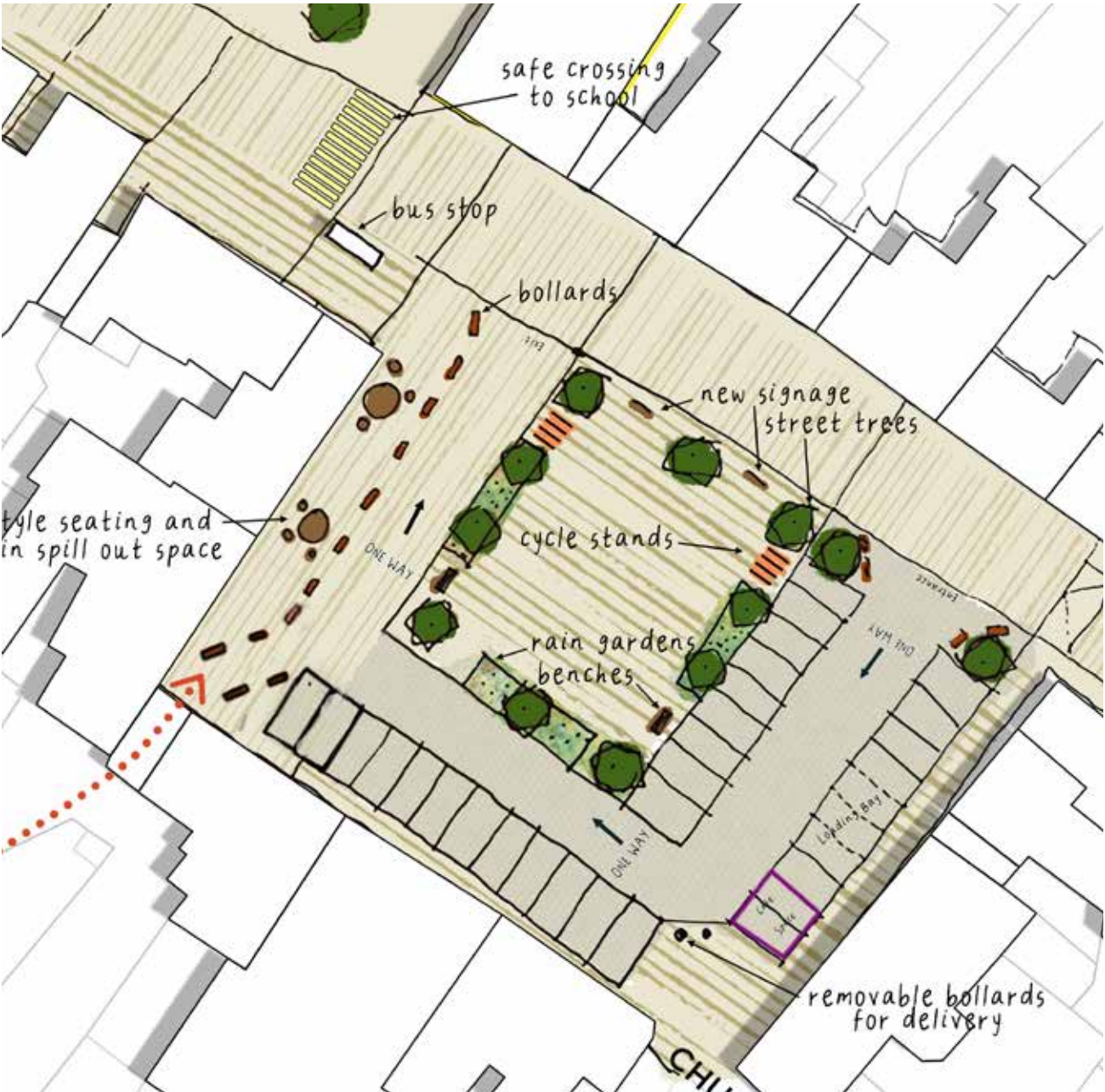


fig. 18: Consultation layout

Final proposals

This project seeks the detailed design for the square based on the adjacent plan and phasing on the following page. The project demonstrates the need to improve the appearance, community value and function of the square.

Street furniture, cyclist provision, SuDS and Nature-based solutions and tree planting are proposed within the central space and new paving to tie in with the crossing points and surrounding perimeter foot ways. The Christmas tree was raised several times throughout consultation and it's location has to be accommodated within the central space.



Illustrative image of the Town Christmas Tree



Illustrative image of a Farmers Market

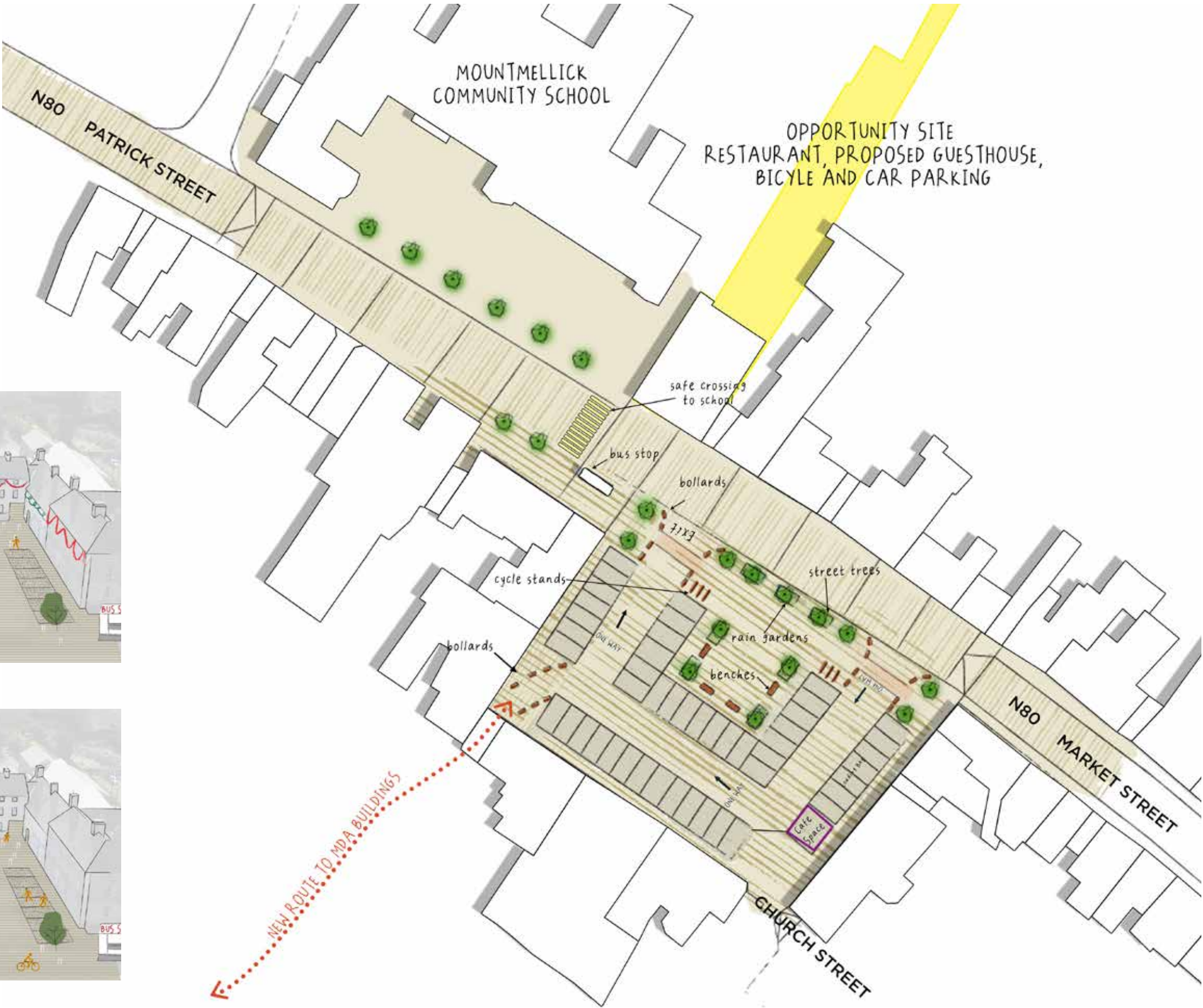


fig. 20: O'Connell Square Final Proposed Plan
CYAL50441412
© Tailte Éireann - Surveying.

Phase 1a



fig. 21: O'Connell Square Phase 1 diagram

Phase 1a - The design should propose a cohesive palette of materials throughout the square and where possible prioritise pedestrians at crossing points. The parking bays that have been proposed to remove, are at the pedestrian crossing points to ensure a safer route through the square.

It is proposed to move the bus shelter further west to remove congestion within the front of the square, and for it to tie in with a crossing point to the school.

Phase 3

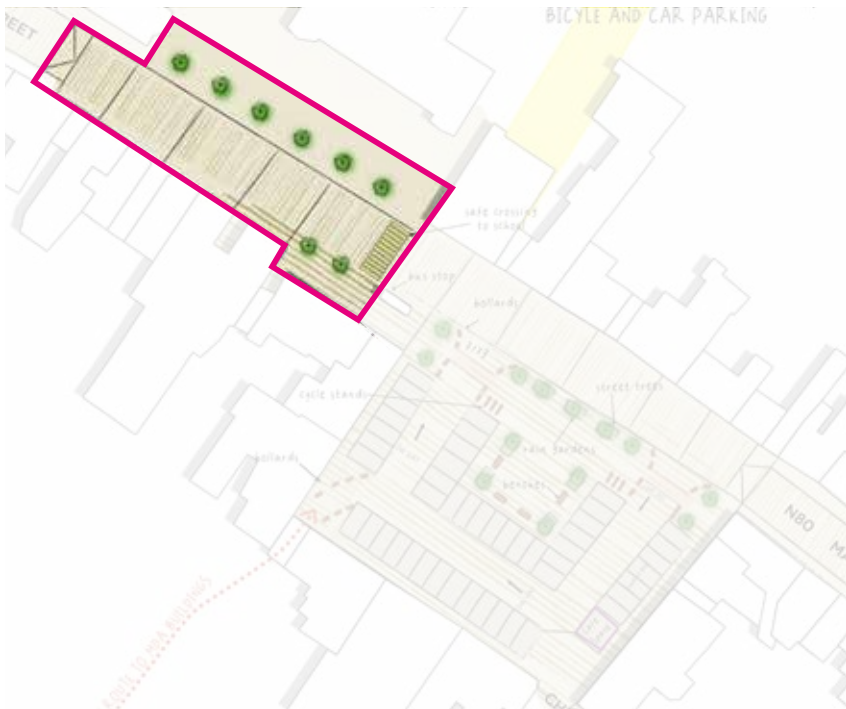


fig. 23: O'Connell Square Phase 3 diagram

Phase 3 - The third phase looks to continue the public realm enhancements along the carriageway to the Community School and aims to prioritise pedestrians and cyclists within this central space.

Phase 2

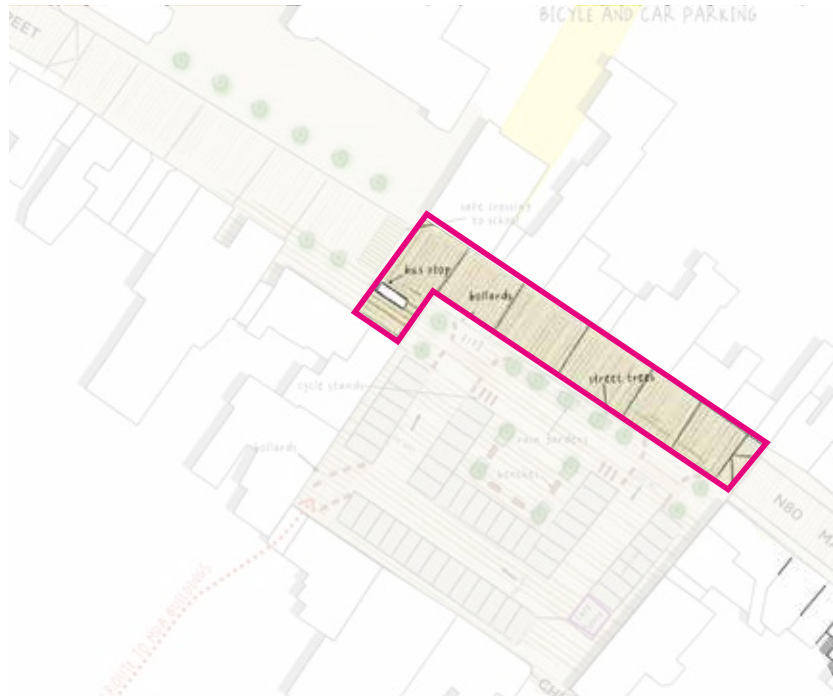


fig. 22: O'Connell Square Phase 2

Phase 2 - Traffic calming has also been taken in to consideration with a second phase proposed, continuing a level surface across the carriageway with speed ramps either end to encourage drivers to reduce speeds.

Future Phase

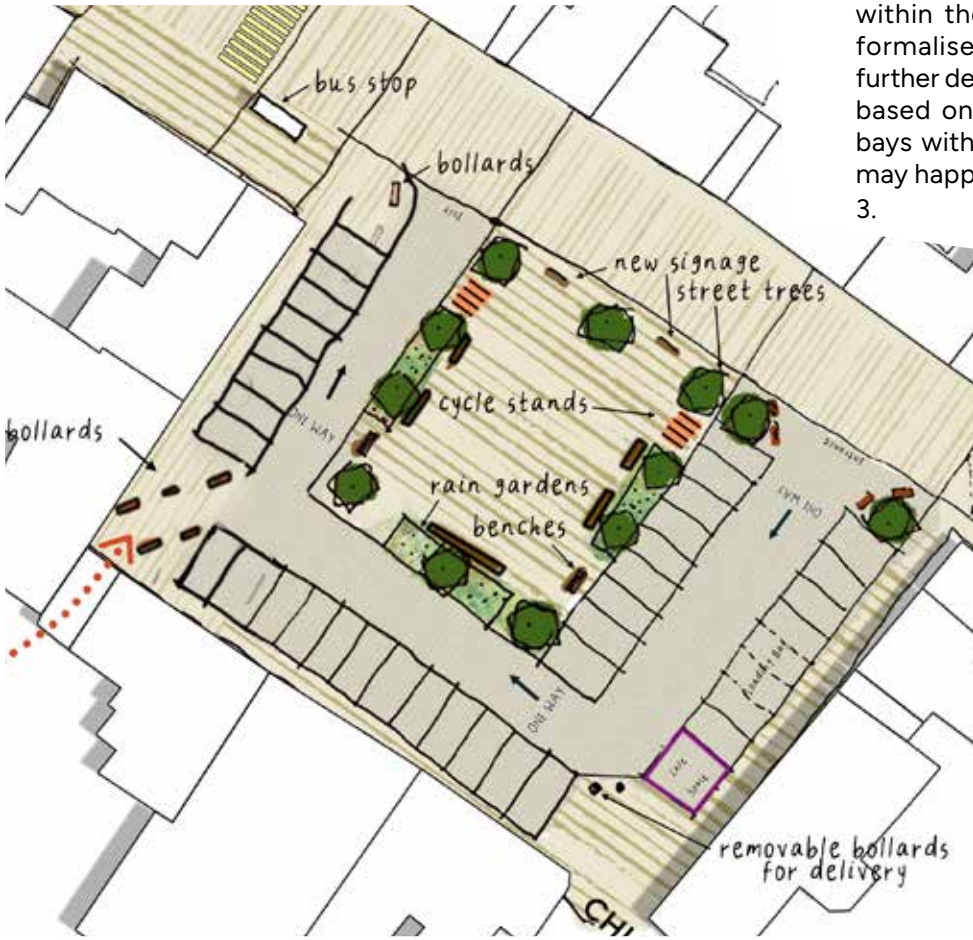


fig. 24: O'Connell Square Phase 3 diagram

Once additional parking areas within the town centre have been formalised and are being utilised, further designs should be progressed based on the reduction of parking bays within the central square. This may happen post Phase 2 and Phase 3.

Kinsale, Ireland



Donegal Town



Portlaoise Plaza



Montage depicting character of O'Connell Square

4.7 Project 2

Smiths Field

Located adjacent to the River Owenass, and the playing fields, Smiths Field is currently an under utilised green space which would benefit from enhancements to provide a space for residents and visitors, to walk, play, and socialise, outside in nature. Currently this is minimal within the existing recreational facilities.

The project has taken into consideration future developments to the playing fields in the north and overlaps with the River Walk project, with a path proposed the length of the park, adjacent to the river. The proposals are light touch and include 3 different character areas. Natural play, with features such as, earth mounds, boulders and timber stepping logs. To the south an informal cycle track is proposed, aimed at younger children. Meadow area, which provides for older children with larger climbing boulders. And a woodland area, which proposes small clusters of trees with picnic benches. A priority of this project is to enhance biodiversity and habitat opportunities, something referenced throughout consultation. And to utilise Nature-based solutions (NbS) and SuDS where required.

This project seeks for a detail landscape proposal to be developed based on the adjacent plan, taking in to consideration the River Walk Project and Mountmellick football club proposals.

Opportunity for community activities, such as a park run should be considered and whether there is scope and space for a dog park, as per consultation responses.



Drone shot of Smiths Field

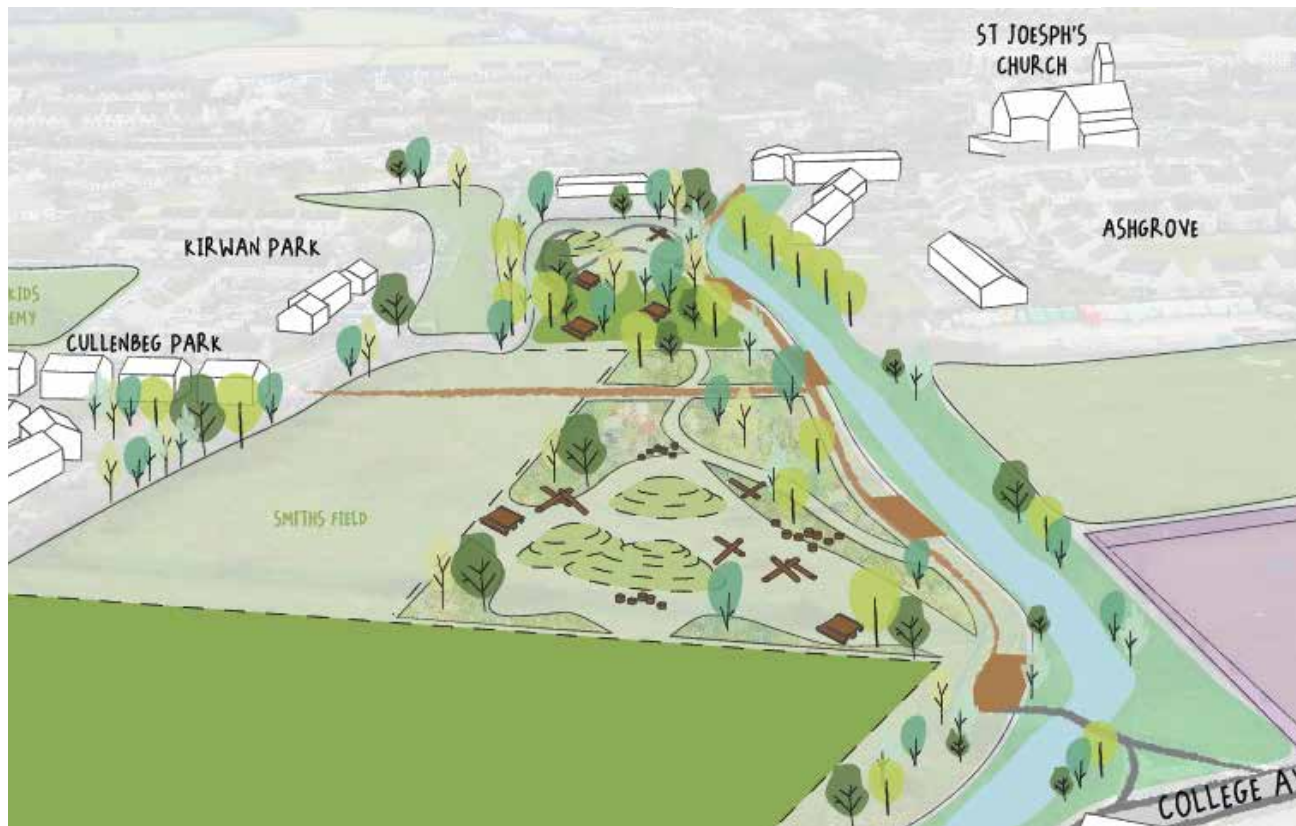


fig. 25: Smiths Field Park Vision



From the survey:

1. Lack of recreation and play facilities was raised several times within consultation responses.
2. Highlighted as an opportunity site by the Town Team
3. Nature based improvements were requested along with opportunity for a parkrun.
4. Vandalism and anti-social behavior is an issue
5. More biodiversity, trees - make it wild
6. Can it include a small playground
- 7., Bike track should be for teens

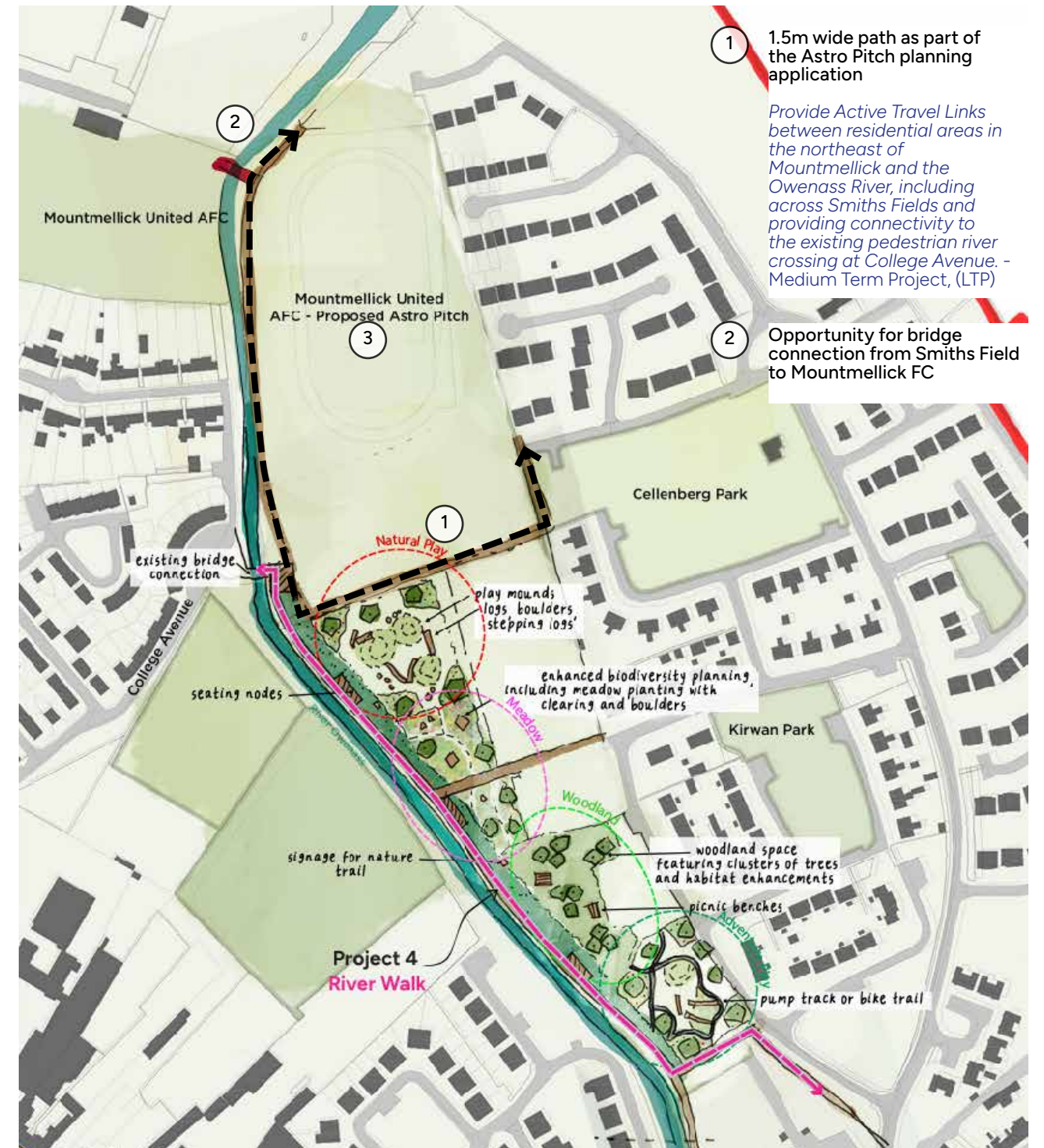


fig. 26: Smiths Field Park Proposed Plan



Natural Play



Informal play



Nature Trail



Playful boulders



Picnic Areas



Meadow wildflower - biodiversity



Montage depicting character of Smiths Field

4.8 Project 3 Public Realm Improvements and Connections

Connectivity &
Public Realm

Mountmellick currently suffers from a non-cohesive approach to public realm, with many areas in need of upgrading and replacement of street furniture. Numerous streets are, cluttered by signage, have cars parked on pavements, uneven surfacing, and steps, which makes moving through the town as a pedestrian, cyclist or less able person very difficult.

This project highlights areas particularly in need for public realm improvements and has been coordinated with the Draft Mountmellick Local Transport Plan in areas that over lap, as can be seen in Figure 28. Public realm improvements across Mountmellick are proposed and Figure 28 highlights priority areas for upgrade.

This project also includes scope for the possible incorporation of a one way street at this location. While such a traffic system would provide more space for adequate footways, on street parking and public realm opportunities, its traffic impact on the town would have to be considered also.



Heritage lights in O'Connell Square



Existing street furniture



The public realm improvements seek to:

- Improve appeal, safety and functionality of streets and public spaces.
- They will primarily be streetscape improvements.
- A design code should form part of the approach to ensure a cohesive palette of materials and approach to street furniture, signage, planting, SuDS and Nature-based solutions (NbS) and street tree planting, and comply with the Water Framework Directive (200/70/EC) via the Water Action Plan 2024.
- Proposals should include upgrades to paving and road materials, to prioritise traffic calming and prioritise pedestrians and cyclists.
- All historical material, buildings and features should be retained and conserved.
- The Design Code should take in to consideration vernacular materials and any Arts Strategy produced through Project 5, Revitalising the Town Centre.
- A town wide survey should be carried out to establish opportunity for one-way streets to reduce traffic and open up more accessible space for public realm improvements and pedestrian / cycle movement, and opportunity to include accessible parking bays.
- Reduce visual clutter and move overhead cables underground in primary locations.

From the survey:

1. Most apparent issues in Mountmellick? Building condition and vacancy scored very highly.
2. What would you like introduced? Public realm improvements scored second.
3. Residents would like to see better signage.
4. This project should be a priority
5. Original design of Arts Centre included an external canopy - is there opportunity to include this and have a covered public realm space
6. More Street Trees
7. Pavement clutter makes it very hard to navigate for people with restricted mobility

From the Draft - Mountmellick Local Transport Plan:

The Draft Mountmellick Local Transport Plan also recognises areas requiring public realm improvements and will be considered when locations for public realm improvements are considered.

Example project of public realm improvements at O'Moore Street junction

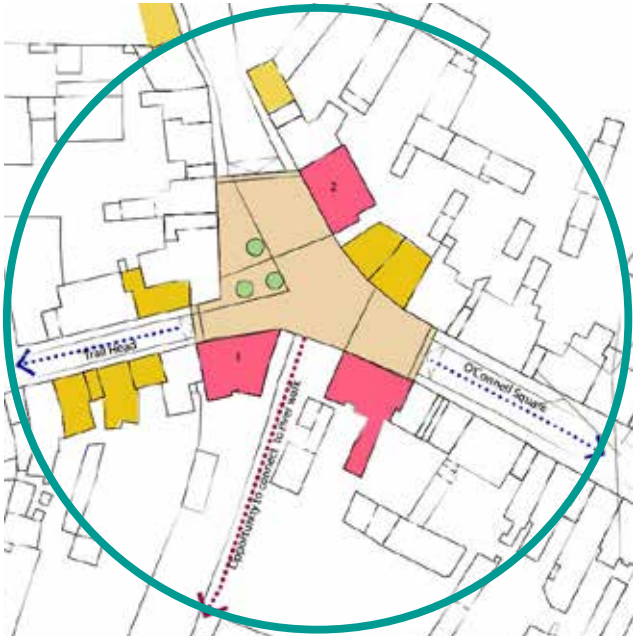


fig. 27: Plan showing proposals at O'Moore Junction



Listed on National Inventory of Architectural Heritage
Rating: Regional
Category: Architectural, Artistic

- Heritage Building - opportunity to highlight the heritage of Mountmellick
- Vacant or derelict building - opportunity to improve facade at key public realm improvement points



Existing junction condition at O'Moore Street



Illustration of Public Realm Improvements to O'Moore Street

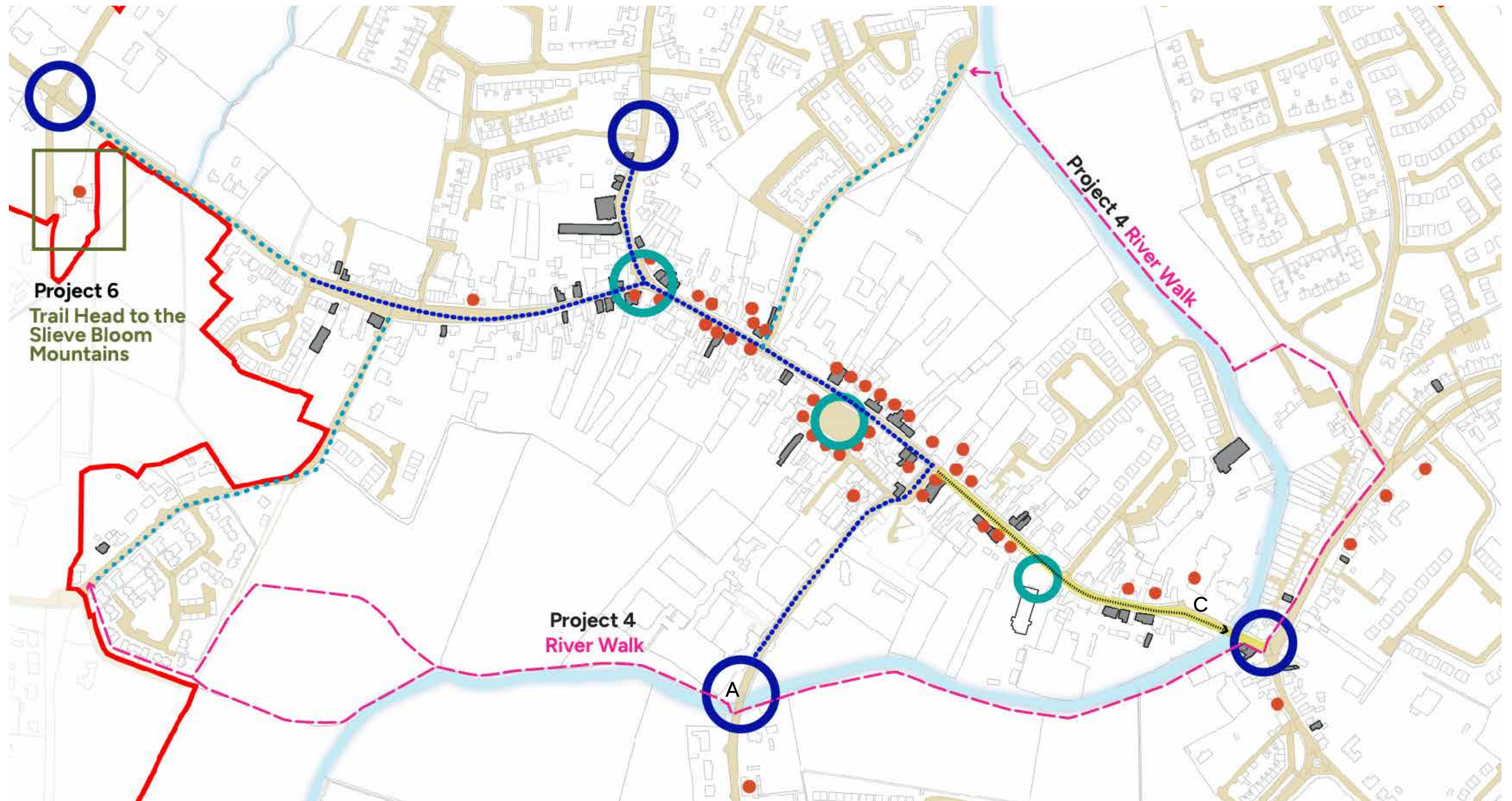


fig. 28: Public Realm Improvements Proposed Locations



Precedent images of Athlone's Public Realm Improvement scheme



Precedent images of integrated SUDS and public realm enhancements, surfacing and street furniture



Dublin Docklands



Portlaoise Plaza



Montage depicting character of Public Realm Improvement

4.9 Project 4 River Walk

Connectivity & Public Realm

Mountmellick lies to the east of the Slieve Bloom Mountains and to the south of the River Barrow, within north County Laois. A number of rivers pass through and around the town, making it vulnerable to flooding from the Owenass and Pound Rivers and their tributaries. Very significant flooding occurred in November 2017, when the rivers burst their banks, causing flooding to property, roads and fields and necessitating the evacuation of a number of housing estates.

Although the Office of Public Works CFRAM Study, completed prior to the 2017 flood, identified Mountmellick as a town which would benefit from a flood relief scheme, the need and urgency for such as scheme has been brought into focus by the events of 22nd November 2017.

With this in mind, Laois County Council, along with project partners the OPW, have appointed the JBA & EGIA JV team to assess, develop and design a viable, cost-effective and sustainable flood relief scheme which aims to minimise risk to the existing community, social amenity, environment and landscape character.

The Flood Relief Scheme for Mountmellick has been designed to provide protection for a 1 in 100 year flood event. The scheme, when constructed, will provide protection for 165 properties, including 90 properties flooded in 2017. The planning and compulsory purchase order documentation for the



View of the River Owenass

Mountmellick Flood Relief Scheme will be submitted to An Coimisiún Pleanála for their consideration and decision in October 2025

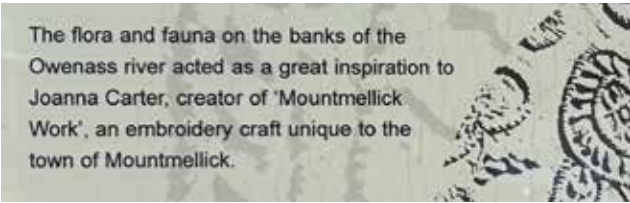
At present there are well used sections of the river walk, along the River Owenass, but it does not form a continuous path or loop. Through consultation it is apparent that many residents have a historic connection with the river and value it as a recreational asset which if improved would benefit the community enormously. The consultation process has also highlighted the need for improved connectivity for both pedestrian and cyclists, something residents are seeking to improve for safe and sustainable movement around Mountmellick and further afield. If improved, the river walk would also provide a much-needed route away from the central streets.

The proposal has taken on board, both the Flood Relief Scheme and the Draft Mountmellick Local Transport Plan and coordinated with them where necessary.

This projects seeks a detail design and proposal for the river walk based on the TCF proposals on the following page.

The detail design should:

- Include pathway upgrades to existing paths, such as re-surfacing paths and widening, where possible, to allow for a shared pedestrian, cycle path. If widening is not achievable explore options for a separate cycle path in close proximity to the walking route;
- Ensure the river walk ties in to the surrounding key connections;
- Enhanced planting to encourage biodiversity;
- Tie in with any Arts Strategies and take inspiration from the below (raised during consultation);



- Explore options for nature/heritage trail;
- Improved public realm, including, seating nodes along the walk to provide resting spaces, wayfinding, dog waste bins, litter bins;
- Detail for new sections of path to tie in with existing to ensure a continuous path;
- Where possible retention of structures which have heritage value, such as the stone wall.



Formalised river path south of the Mountmellick Playground



Blocked river walk path behind MDA buildings

Consultation responses:

1. Town Team proposed it as a project in the first meeting

2. 'How would you improve Mountmellick' River Loop

3. Path needs to run the length of the river and loop back in to town

4. It would be a wonderful amenity

5. Open up path from MDA to Manor Road

6. Keep the beautiful old wall

7. Upgrade path and expand to where it went before

8. Would enhance aesthetic of the town

9. Would help with biodiversity and water pollution targets

10. Town Team proposed it as a project in the first meeting

Essential to health and well being



Existing stone seating - to be incorporated in proposals



Existing river walk path and bridge at MDA buildings

- 1

Existing bridge from College Avenue to Smiths Fields and short stretch of formalised river walk path
 - 2

Proposed river walk formalised path for pedestrians and cyclists, to tie in with path from College Avenue path to the southern end of Smiths Field Park
 - 3

Due to restricted space in Area A where there is a proposed flood defence wall (red) this option looks to divert the river walk briefly along Kirwan Park, Briar Lane, and on the Lord Edward Street, before rejoining the river walk at Sarsfield Street Bridge
 - 4

Existing river walk path from Sarsfield Street Bridge to Pearse Street Bridge, to be formalised and upgraded. Redline indicates proposed flood relief defence wall

Provide Active Travel Link along the River Owenass upgrading the existing path where present and forming part of a Southern Orbital Active Travel Route. - Long Term Project, (LTP)
 - 5

Proposed river walk formalised path for pedestrians and cyclists, to tie in with path from Pearse Street Bridge to Manor Road. To utilise Flood Relief proposed embankment and flood defence wall
 - 6

Opportunity use backlands to connect from town to river walk
 - 7

Provide Active Travel Links to connect Irishtown Road to the existing river walk. - Medium Term Project, (LTP)
 - 8

Possible future greenway along historic railway line.

Support provision of Kilkenny to Mountmellick Greenway along disused rail line and provide connection east to Southern Orbital Active Travel Route along River Owenass - Long Term Project, (LTP)
 - 9

Opportunity to provide alternative, quieter and safer route for pedestrians and cyclist than the N80 and connect back to O'Moore Street.

Public Realm Enhancement/Shared Zone - Short Term Project, (LTP) (northern section of road only)
Proposed 30 kmph Zone - Medium Term Project, (LTP)
- Proposed river walk - informal path within flood area

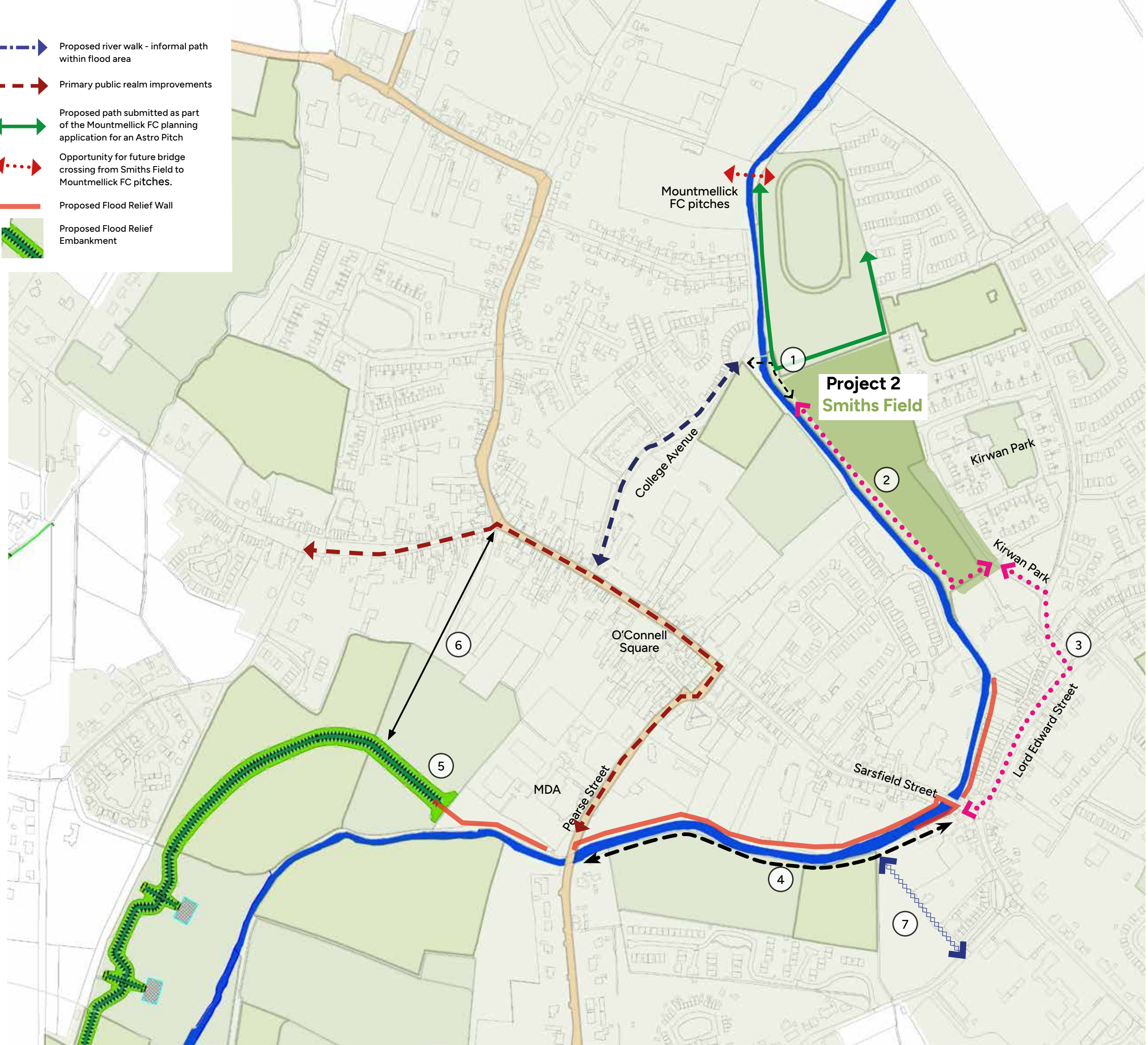
Primary public realm improvements

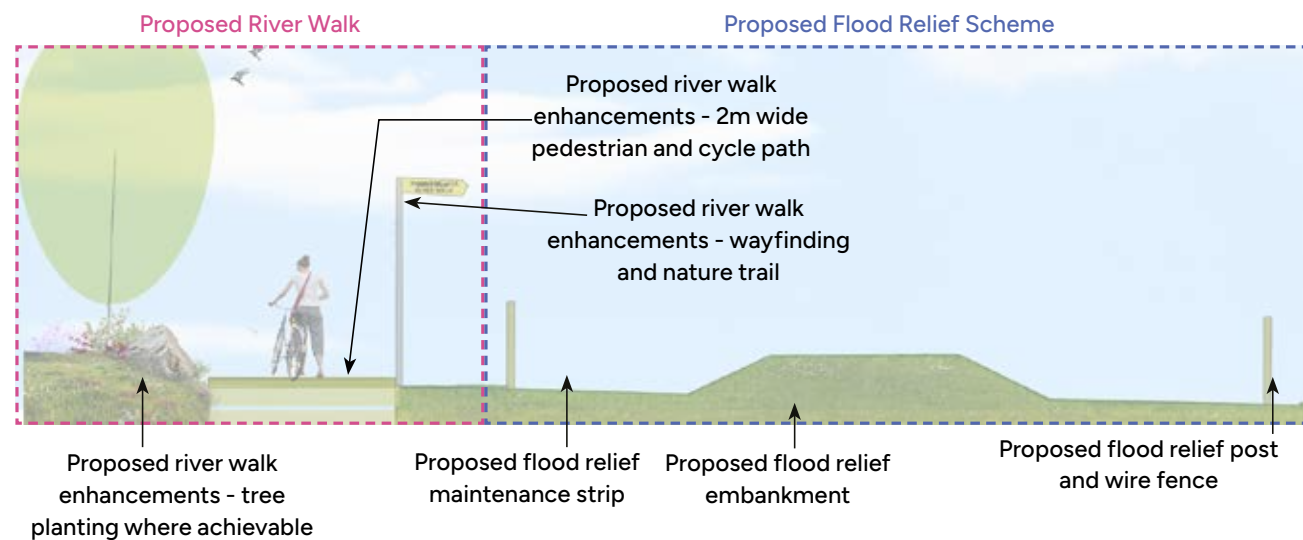
Proposed path submitted as part of the Mountmellick FC planning application for an Astro Pitch

Opportunity for future bridge crossing from Smiths Field to Mountmellick FC pitches.

Proposed Flood Relief Wall

Proposed Flood Relief Embankment





Illustrative section for river walk and Flood Relief proposals



Formalised, wide, wheel dust path



Opportunity for seating and gathering nodes



Montage depicting character of River Walk

4.10 Project 5 Revitalise the Town Centre

Heritage & Building Stock

Dereliction and vacancy is a major issue in Mountmellick which impacts the feel, look and opportunities within the town centre. Improving the appearance of vacant buildings can boost the appeal of a neighbourhood, deter vandalism, and even attract potential tenants or investors.

Below are some short, and long term strategies to help deal with vacant and derelict properties:

- Short Term
- QR codes in windows to link to derelict and vacancy strategy and any heritage buildings information
 - Paint façades, in keeping with heritage but also opportunity for bright, uplifting colours
 - Vacant retail - Window space could be dressed up or rented to a retail/ advertising / banners inside windows or photos / pictures or they could have information about the heritage for example
 - Clear of vegetation
 - Repairs to windows / doors etc to ensure secure, weather tight
 - Heritage - signs restored.
 - Collaborate with Tidy Towns
 - Collaborate with Public Arts

- Longer Term
- Pop-ups - shops / cafés / exhibition spaces, low rent, short period
 - Multi-use - / co-working -is there opportunity for another work hub in centre of town.
 - Vacant houses - housing department for social housing.

Detailed proposals should be produced based upon the short and long term strategies above and feasibility of such strategies. They should be considered along side the heritage trail and primary buildings for attention should be listed. An overarching strategy for Mountmellick should be produced and incorporate a Public Art Strategy.



Embroidery in Mountmellick Library



Vacant Buildings



Banners or artwork in retail windows



Public Art Strategy



Community Projects Heritage

Tidy Towns

4.11 Opportunity Sites

The opportunity sites listed below have been identified through discussions with the Town Team, local business owners, and the community as locations that present opportunities to rejuvenate the town centre and advance the objectives specified in the Town Centre First Plan.

1. 'Whites' Site -14-15 Patrick Street

This opportunity site at 14-15 Patrick Street, comprises of c. 1ha of land with frontage onto Patrick Street and considerable back lands which extends to College Avenue to the rear. Planning permission was granted on the 9th of October 2020 (file Ref: 19428) for the construction of "a 62 bedroom two-storey nursing home, 8 two storey step down apartment units, landscaped gardens, parking area, service yard, refuse areas, esb transformer room, new service connections and all ancillary works". This permission is due to expire on the 6th of July 2026.

If developed this opportunity site could provide a significant level of accommodation and a valuable service in the centre of Mountmellick Town.

2. Mountmellick Community School, Patrick Street

Mountmellick Community School encompasses a substantial landbank located in the centre of Mountmellick Town. Adjacent to Patrick Street and College Avenue, this landbank offers the potential to create extensive facilities for the school, as well as enhanced parking and access arrangements. If further developed, this site could help reduce parking and bus congestion in O'Connell Square, thereby fostering a more efficient and safer environment for the entire community. Further opportunity to provide enhanced pedestrian connectivity across the River Owenass via College Avenue should also be explored.

3. Williams House, Parnell Street

This opportunity site has potential to provide a number of services to the town centre. The Main building fronting onto Parnell Street provides residential accommodation over three stories with further residential accommodation to the extended rear. The historic arched laneway at the side of the main building provides access from Parnell Street to a cobbled courtyard with historic structures which if restored could provide opportunity for additional commercial facilities in the town centre.

4. 'Whites building', Lord Edward Street

This historic building and extensive landbank was built in the 1800s for the staff of the Grand Canal Company. The building is part of a row of houses that were constructed during that time. The site is located adjacent to the Grange Hall residential development and could provide opportunity for the reuse and refurbishment of an historic building for alternative residential use.

5. Tirlán CountryLife, Market Street

Tirlán CountryLife is an extensive agricultural store located at Market Street, Mountmellick. The site is a long narrow site which extends from Market Street to the River Owenass. Access to the site is via Market Street at the N80 junction with Pearse Street. This narrow junction is heavily trafficked and often congested. This business is an important economic driver in the heart of Mountmellick Town. However, the site is underutilised and there could be potential to provide additional facilities on site.

6. Link from O'Connell Square to the Mountmellick Development Association

The re-imagining and redevelopment of O'Connell Square has been identified within the Town Centre First Plan as a significant initiative for the Mountmellick community. There is opportunity to extend this redevelopment to include a connection between O'Connell Square and the Mountmellick Development Association (MDA) Lands. This proposed site would create a pedestrian pathway from O'Connell Square to the MDA lands, enhancing pedestrian access within the town centre and offering an alternative parking solution and meeting point for both tourists and local residents.

7. Central Garages, Emmett Street

A planning application has been lodged by Lidl Ireland GmbH (File Ref: 2560333) for the development of a discount food store supermarket with ancillary off-license at the former Central /Nissan Garage Complex. This development includes the demolition of 8 no. existing vacant buildings and removal of ancillary derelict structures. Provision will be made for car and bicycle parking on site.

If successful, the development of this prime opportunity site will provide an additional retail and off-street parking provision within the town centre. A decision on the application is due on the 24th of July 2025.

8. Smiths Field Housing Development

This opportunity site forms part of a larger opportunity site and will provide for additional housing and public open spaces. The development will complement the existing housing in the area and provide passive overlooking and connectivity to the proposed new public park.

9. The Maltings Site

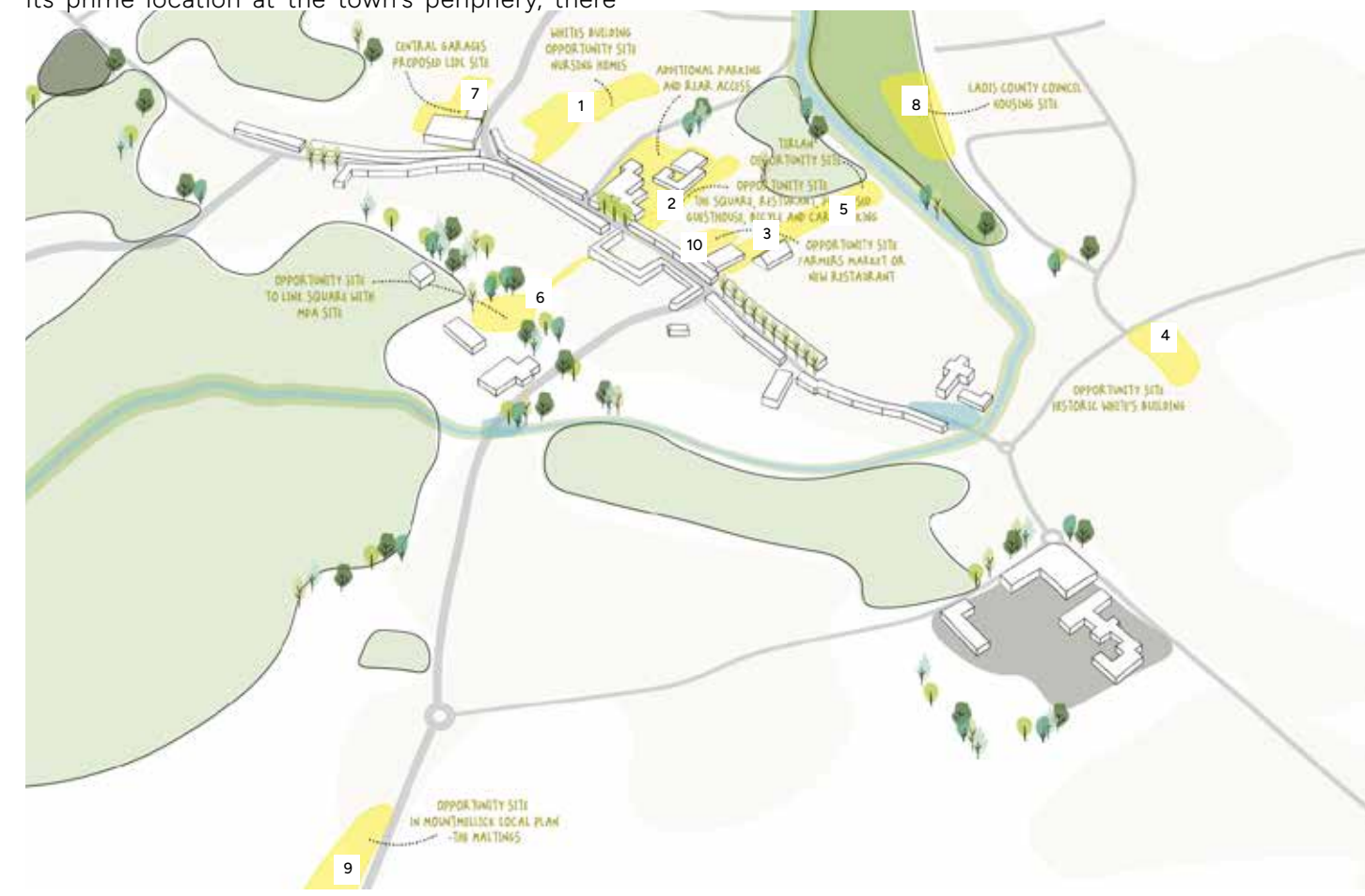
This opportunity site features a former grain mill, recognized as a protected structure and one of the historical landmarks of Mountmellick. Situated at the edge of the town, facing the Portlaoise Road, the site spans approximately 0.37 hectares and was designated as an opportunity site in the Mountmellick Local Area Plan for the years 2018-2024. Considering its prime location at the town's periphery, there

exists a potential to create a significant or landmark development that could integrate residential elements within a historical framework.

10. No. 3 The Square

Planning Permission was granted to 'The Forum Mountmellick- Tourist Accommodation Limited', on the 22nd of July 2024 (File Ref: 2460163) for the change of use of the existing buildings on site to a 6-bedroom guesthouse, a restaurant, administration office, 1-bedroom apartment, bicycle and car parking and all associated site works.

This development would provide much needed tourist accommodation and associated facilities in the town centre



4.12 Project 6

Trail Head to the Slieve Bloom Mountains

Culture and Economy

During the Town Team walkabout the historic Mountmellick railway station, on Wolfe Tone Street, was raised as an opportunity site to facilitate a trail head to the Slieve Bloom Mountains which is approximately a 15 minute drive. This not only celebrates one of Mountmellick's heritage features but would also help encourage tourists to Mountmellick, whilst also providing a base for visitors when visiting local walking trails and other tourist attractions. This project had a very positive response during consultation, with many residents supporting how beneficial such an amenity could be for Mountmellick, both in terms of tourism and to encourage local communities to access recreational landscapes.

The old railway line has also been highlighted in the draft Mountmellick Local Transport Plan as a long term project, to connect, with a cycle route, Mountmellick to Portlaoise via the old railway track, which would in turn encourage sustainable transport and opportunity for people to live in Mountmellick whilst commuting to a larger town.

This proposal seeks for the production of detailed feasibility studies, which should look at options for the old railway platform building as a trail head, which will help to encourage tourism and economic revenue, whilst also providing a community facility.

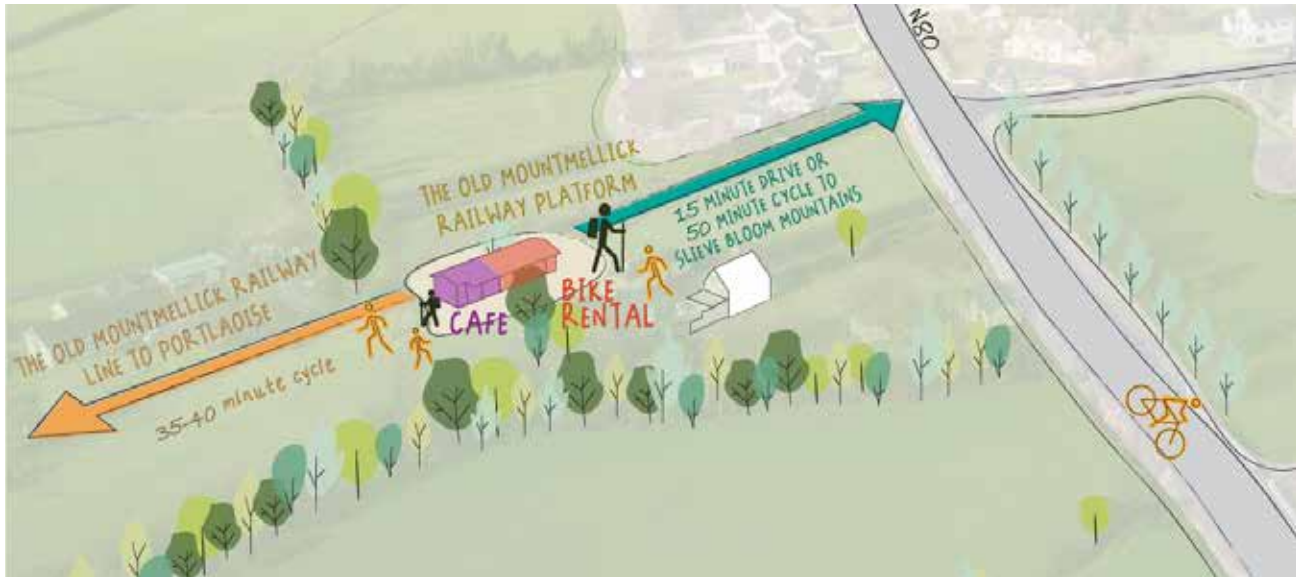


fig. 30: Trail Head vision



Drone shot of Mountmellick's Train Station

Proposals need to tie in with the wider connectivity, in to Mountmellick, the river walk and further afield to Slieve Blooms and Portlaoise.

Consideration should be made for other activities on the site, such as campervans as an additional source of revenue.

Consultation responses:

1. Town Team walkabout highlighted Old Railway House as a possible trail head
2. The towns best asset - 70% responded heritage - residents also chose proximity to Slieve Bloom Mountains, this was seen as an opportunity for Mountmellick
3. Improved walking and cycling routes was a common response by consultees
4. 'What would you like introduced in town' - highest score was walks and trails There are no cycle lanes in the town - would welcome a trail head
5. Cycle route to Portlaoise urgent
6. Trail head would be a huge asset
7. It would open up Slieve Blooms to numerous, ever growing groups and visitors
8. The old railway Station could be a museum and coffee shop

'Greenway from Mountmellick to Slieve Bloom for Tourism'



The existing platform building



Station House, Wolfe Tone Street

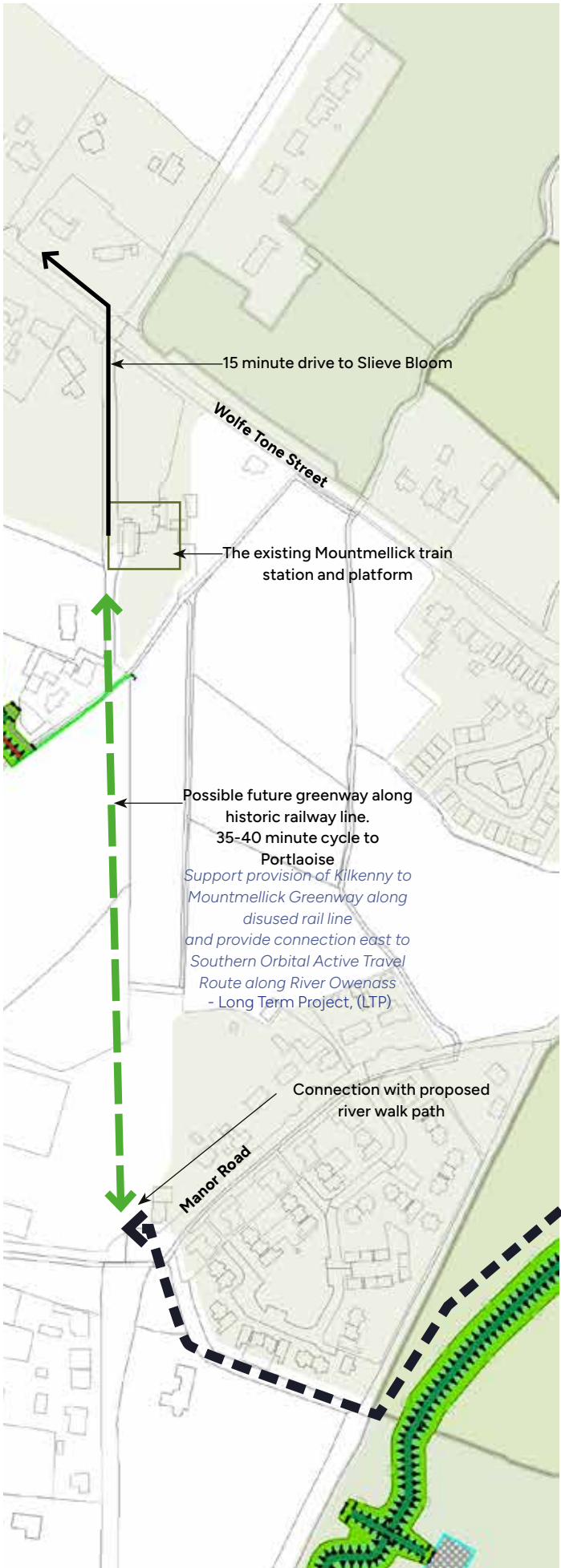
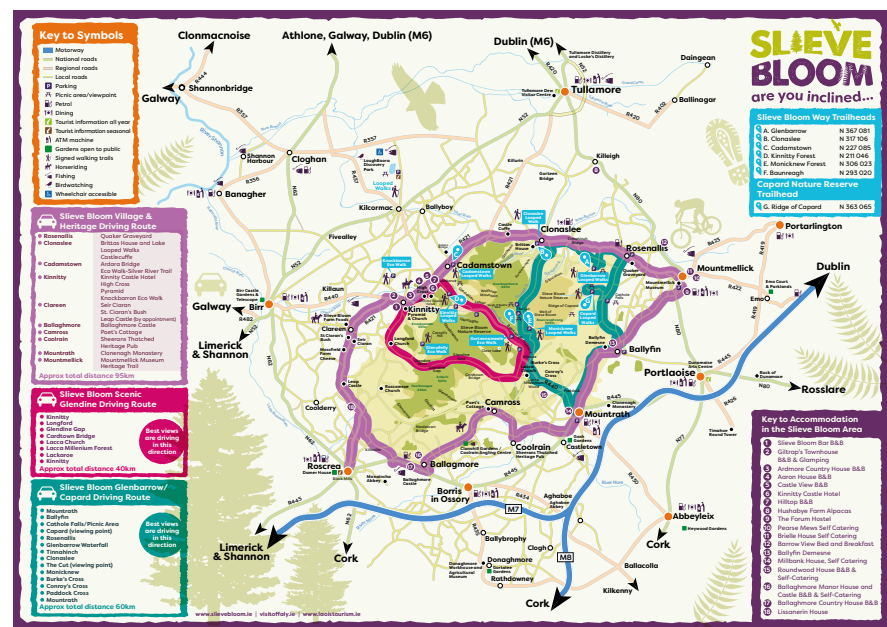


fig. 31: Plan proposals for Trail Head



Sieve Bloom Tourism leaflet



Precedent images of visitor centres



5. Implementation

5.1 Action Plan

In addition to the six priority projects already identified, a further 28 projects have been proposed to support the continued development and regeneration of Mountmellick. These initiatives span a broad range of themes and focus areas. Each project outlines specific actions to be undertaken, identifies key stakeholders, and highlights potential funding opportunities.

No.	Project	Actions	Key contributors / Stakeholders	Funding
1	O'Connell Square	• Prepare a detailed design for O'Connell Square based on the principles set out in the TCF Plan Project No.1. • Source alternative nearby opportunity sites for parking. • Provide a revitalised O'Connell Square which can be used as an outdoor, flexible space for community gatherings and events. • Ensure there is a permanent space available for the Community Christmas Tree and nativity scene. • Enhance the public realm of O'Connell Square to improve the look and usability of this historically important Square. This will generate greater footfall, animation and provide a space for community gatherings.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team, Business Owners, Landowners, Laois Partnership.	Town & Village Renewal Scheme (TVRS) RRDF Funding Creative Ireland Façade Enhancement Scheme Shop Front Improvement Scheme
2	Smith's Field	• Develop a detailed masterplan for Smiths Field which will focus on maximizing potential for natural green space and facilities in a town centre location. • Progress to detailed design -walking routes linking Smiths Field to the town centre. • Ensure SuDS and biodiversity enhancements are incorporated.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team, Local Community & Residential Groups, Laois Partnership.	Town & Village Renewal Scheme Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) Community Climate Action Grant
3	Public Realm Improvements	• Create a materials palette for all public realm areas within the Town Centre to promote cohesion and visual connectivity across the Town, including lighting, street furniture and CCTV where appropriate. • Consider the existing brand guidelines of the Town Team when developing these.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team, Local Community Groups, including Tidy Towns. Business Owners, Landowners, Laois Partnership.	Town & Village Renewal Scheme Community Climate Action Grant Active Travel Grants
4	River Walk	• Develop a detailed design of the River Walk Project (no. 4 of the TCF) to incorporate connections identified in the TCF Plan. • Explore opportunities to upgrade and implement a continuation of the River Walk in coordination with the Flood Relief Scheme and Project no. 4 of the TCF.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team, The OPW, An Bord Pleanála, Laois Tourism, Laois Partnership, Waterways Ireland.	Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) Community Climate Action Grant Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO)
5	Trail Head	• Explore opportunities to provide a trail head and enhanced connectivity to the Slieve Bloom Mountains and increase tourism footfall.	Private Landowner, Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team, Laois Tourism, Laois Partnership.	EU Just Transition ORIS TVRS Active Travel Grant Fáilte Ireland Small Grants Scheme

6	Traffic Calming	• Implement Traffic Calming measures to promote pedestrian movement and safety.	Laois County Council, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, Mountmellick Town Team.	Town & Village Renewal Scheme Active Travel Grant
7	Car Parking	• Explore potential for the use of backlands and opportunity sites for off-street parking. • Introduce E.V. Parking and additional accessible parking within the Town Centre.	Private Landowners, Laois County Council.	
8	Town Entrances	• Develop a Strategy for the Town Entrances which specifies a design palette for hard and soft landscaping, incorporating public art which will enhance the experience of visitors to the Town.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team, Laois Partnership.	TVRS
9	Wayfinding	• Conduct an evaluation of the current signage within the Town and formulate a Wayfinding and Signage Strategy in collaboration with the local community, which includes considerations for tourism, heritage, and all users, such as pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team.	TVRS
10	Street Clutter	• Reduce visual clutter by undergrounding overhead cables and removing unnecessary signage, where appropriate.	Laois County Council, Laois Partnership.	TVRS RRDF
11	Town by-pass	• Identify and explore opportunities to bring forward the Town by-pass to alleviate traffic congestion within the Town Centre. • Liaise with Laois County Council to examine ways to alleviate the traffic congestion in the Town centre.	Laois County Council, Transport Infrastructure Ireland.	Transport Infrastructure Ireland
12	Heritage Buildings	• Promote the retention and enhancement of historic built form including all heritage structures. • Promote adaptive reuse strategies to re-purpose historic structures. • Explore opportunities to utilise vacant buildings.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team, landowners, businesses, Laois Partnership, The Heritage Council.	RRDF THRIVE Croi Conaithe RLS Façade Enhancement Scheme Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS) Historic Structures Fund
13	Building Uses	• Promote a mix of commercial, residential and recreational spaces to create a vibrant town centre.	Laois County Council.	
14	Sustainability	• Prioritise sustainable building materials and practices. • Promote energy-efficient and ecofriendly technologies.	Laois County Council.	SEAI
15	Opportunity Sites	• Promote the activation of opportunity sites which could provide opportunity for increased commercial and residential diversity within the Town Centre.	Private Landowners.	Building Acquisition Measure (BAM)
16	Heritage Trail	• Liaise with Laois County Council's heritage officer and local heritage groups to: ◦ Update & expand the Heritage Trail, including trail markers and signage in conjunction with the public realm design palette. ◦ Develop a bi-lingual online Heritage Trail to encourage tourism throughout the Town, this should be linked in with public realm and commercial amenities within the Town.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team, Community Groups, businesses and landowners, Laois Partnership.	

17	Heritage Building Facades	- Liaise with Laois County Council to develop a signage policy for shop fronts in the Town Centre which can be incorporated into the Local Area Plan for Mountmellick. This should include a frontage design guide to provide guidance on façade treatments suitable for the Town in keeping with its historical nature. - Provide a façade enhancement scheme to encourage shop and building owners to improve the presentation of their buildings on the street.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team, Community Groups, businesses and landowners.	Façade Enhancement Scheme Shop Front Improvement Scheme Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS) Historic Structures Fund
18	Parks	- Incorporate new green areas and new play spaces and strengthen the network of existing green space with the Town Centre environment. - Provide a strategy which identifies existing and opportunity sites for further green spaces and play areas, which connects within future pedestrian, cycle links, to tie in with the SuDS strategy. - Liaise with Laois County Council to ensure continued development of existing playgrounds and examine the potential for new play areas at other areas in the town. - Establish a dog park in the town.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team, Community Groups, businesses and landowners, Laois Partnership.	TVRS, Community Climate Action Fund Local Biodiversity Action Plan
19	Planting	- Increase opportunities for biodiversity and native planting. - Develop a strategy demonstrating detailed planting mixes which can then be utilised throughout Mountmellick which will increase biodiversity, habitat creation, and SuDs whilst responding to climate change. - Develop an invasive species plan to identify and remove occurrences throughout the Town. - Develop an up-to-date landscape and biodiversity plan for the town which will increase the opportunity for biodiversity and native planting.	Laois County Council.	TVRS, Community Climate Action Fund Local Biodiversity Action Plan
20	River Owenass	Promote the River Owenass as a valuable asset for the community, enhance its utilisation, including recreational activities such as kayaking and educational activities such as biodiversity and aquatic workshops.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team, Community Groups, businesses and landowners, Waterways Ireland.	Waterways Ireland Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO)
21	SuDS	Introduce sustainable urban drainage, including nature-based solutions, as appropriate.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team.	Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO)
22	Flood Defence	- Capitalise on flood defence works to encourage enjoyment of the river. - Ensure any future schemes and works around the river are fully coordinated with the Flood Relief Scheme.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team, OPW.	OPW
23	Air and Noise Quality	Carry out an assessment of the air and noise quality within the town centre which should include measures to improve the overall environment in this area.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).	Community Climate Action Fund
24	Local Business	- Review the existing business incentive scheme to encourage and promote business development in the town centre. - Provide opportunity for collaboration amongst local business and community groups to cross-sell and promote the unique heritage of Mountmellick.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team, Laois Chamber Alliance, Community Groups, businesses and landowners.	Business Incentive Scheme
25	Tourism	- Liaise with Laois County Councils Tourism Officer and Laois Tourism to promote the towns' unique location and heritage and through the use of roadshows or events. - Ensure the heritage trail and clear wayfinding of heritage assets is developed further and implemented. - Host local tourism provider events and invite tour operators. - Support festivals and markets in the Town.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team, Community Groups, businesses and landowners. LEO and Tourism Stakeholders, Fáilte Ireland.	EU Just Transition Fund ORIS TVRS Active Travel Grant Fáilte Ireland

26	Tourism amenities and facilities	Promote tourism amenities and facilities through digital presence and way finding.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team, Community Groups, businesses and landowners, Laois Partnership.	EU Just Transition Fund ORIS TVRS
27	Digital Mountmellick	- Examine the potential of Mountmellick to develop into a SMART town. - Address the findings of the Digital Blueprint for Mountmellick and implement digitalisation of Mountmellick, including an online bilingual heritage and information trail. - Provide improved availability of digital skills courses and free public WIFI.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team, Community Groups, landowners. Local Enterprise Office.	SEAI Community Grant
28	Co-working	- Provide incentives for increased coworking spaces and studios in the town centre. - Explore the possible use for vacant buildings at low rent.	Laois County Council, landowners, Laois Partnership and Local Enterprise Office.	
29	Town Centre Living	- Encourage Town Centre Living. - Advertise the amenities provided for town centre living.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team, landowners.	
30	Footfall	Encourage footfall in the town centre to support local shops and businesses. To be developed in tandem with connectivity and public realm projects which will assist in encouraging pedestrian footfall.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team, Community Groups, landowners.	
31	Mountmellick Town Team	- Establish the Mountmellick Town Team as an independent organisation to enable them to apply for various funding streams. - Build capacity of the Mountmellick Town Team to enable them to drive projects independently and in collaboration with statutory bodies and other community groups.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team.	
32	Artists and Craftspeople	- Liaise with Laois County Council's Art Office to promote facilities and grants available for local artists and craftspeople. - Collaborate with local artists to explore opportunities for pop up shops and exhibition spaces in vacant buildings. - Explore opportunities for the Mountmellick Arts Centre and the public realm area in front of the building with the Arts Centre Committee in order to maximise its usage.	Laois County Council, Arts Centre Committee, Mountmellick Town Team, Community Groups, landowners, Laois Partnership. Arts Council.	
33	Public Art	Produce a Town Public Art Strategy and from this design briefs should be set for each piece of public art dependent on location.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team, Community Groups, landowners. Arts Council.	
34	Community Facilities	- Explore opportunity for increased community facilities, including a swimming pool, parkrun, additional play areas and expansion of the heritage museum. - Liaise and collaborate with Laois Sports Partnership and Laois County Council's Sport & Recreation Officer to ensure the sustained development of community facilities and the promotion of initiatives to increase their usage.	Laois County Council, Mountmellick Town Team, Community Groups, landowners.	

5.3 Implementation

The implementation of the Mountmellick Town Centre First Plan will be a dynamic process closely associated with the collaborative engagement of various stakeholders, including the Town Team and the Local Authority.

This Town Centre First Plan is designed to be a flexible and adaptive document, subject to regular reviews in light of current funding and landowner opportunities.

According to the Town Centre First Policy, the Town Team will maintain an ongoing role in supervising the execution of projects, engaging with the community, and periodically reassessing the Town Centre First Plan.

The effective revitalization of the town will necessitate a cooperative approach characterized

by robust communication and contributions from all stakeholders, such as Laois County Council, The Mountmellick Town Team, and the Mountmellick Community.

Initially, the emphasis should be placed on site-specific projects for which funding sources have been identified and are readily accessible.

The commencement of projects outlined in this Plan will serve as a catalyst for additional initiatives within the town centre, fostering a stronger sense of place and community.

5.2 Funding Sources

Relevant Funding Opportunities

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF)

The RRDF represents an investment of €1 billion to target smaller urban centres, rural towns and villages. It provides funding for the development of capital projects to support the regeneration and growth of rural towns and villages. The fund is targeted at rural areas with fewer than 10,000 people and are located outside the five city metropolitan areas. Since its inception, €584 million has been allocated to 243 projects.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme was first introduced in 2016 and is funded under Project Ireland 2040. The Scheme is primary intended for towns and villages with a population of 5,000 or less, meaning that Mountmellick qualifies for this scheme, with all funded projects needing to be completed within a 12-to-18-month period. Since its inception, the scheme has provided €177 million of funding for almost 1,800 projects.

Cróí Cónaithe Towns Fund Scheme

The Cróí Cónaithe Towns Fund Scheme is a grant introduced by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, which underpins Pathway

4 of Housing for All, the government's housing plan, 'Addressing Vacancy and the Efficient Use of our Existing Stock.'

The grant is split into two schemes: the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant, which applies to properties that have been vacant for two or more years, and the Ready to Build Scheme, which involves local authorities making serviced sites available in towns and villages at a discounted rate for those who want to build their own home.

The Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant is up to a maximum of €50,000, whilst an additional €20,000 is available for refurbishment costs for derelict properties. The discounts applied under the Ready to Build Scheme is up to a maximum of €30,000, applied to those who intend to make the property their principal private residence.

LEADER Community Led Development

The name of this programme is derived from a French phrase translated as "Links between activities for the development of rural economy". The programme aims to involve local actors in rural areas through the forming of Local Action Groups which actively engage and direct the local development of their area. The Laois Local Action Group is the Laois Community

Development Committee (LCDC).

European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) 2021-2027

The ERDF provides funding to public and private bodies to reduce economic, social and territorial disparities. Projects eligible under this fund should have an impact on employment and contribute to a region's economic competitiveness, amongst other requirements.

Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS)

The ORIS provides funding for new outdoor recreation facilities in rural locations, as well as support for repairing, maintaining and enhancing such facilities. All projects submitted under this scheme must be consistent with the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030 and the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027.

THRIVE

THRIVE is the Town Centre First Heritage Revival Scheme. It had an initial allocation of €30.7 million to support local authorities and citizens transform their town centres and publicly owned vacant or derelict heritage buildings. THRIVE allows communities to reimagine heritage buildings, creating vibrant urban spaces, whilst preserving their historical and cultural significance.

A second call under Strand 2 of THRIVE was opened on 16th January, with awards of up to €7 million available to refurbish, restore and adapt publicly owned heritage buildings.

EU Just Transition Fund

This EU fund is 1 pillar of the Just Transition Mechanism. It supports the up- and reskilling of workers, investment in small and medium-sized enterprises, creation of new firms, research and innovation, environmental rehabilitation, clean energy, job-search assistance and transformation of existing carbon-intensive installations. Its current duration is from 2021 to 2027, with a total budget of €19.32 billion.

CLÁR

CLÁR (Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais) is a targeted investment programme that aims to provide funding for small infrastructural projects in rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population. This funding assists in building the resilience of these rural communities. It will be delivered through three separate measures: developing community facilities and amenities (Measure 1), delivered via local authorities; mobility, cancer care, community first responder and meals on wheels transport (Measure 2) and; 'Our Living Islands' (Measure 3), which will fund interventions on inhabited offshore islands.

CLÁR's funding allocation has increased to €11 million in 2025.

Microfinance Ireland

Microfinance Ireland is a government-supported small business loan scheme. It provides loans up to €50,000 to both start-ups and established businesses having difficulty getting access to funding. The loans are available to microenterprises with viable business propositions with fewer than 10 full time employees and annual turnover must be less than €2 million.

The fund is run by Microfinance Ireland, which works closely with Local Enterprise Offices.

Local Business Incentive Scheme

Laois County Council introduced this scheme to encourage the use of vacant commercial properties within the designated areas of Portlaoise Mountmellick Mountrath Abbeyleix Rathdowney and Portarlington. The intent of this scheme is to incentivise new businesses to set up in premises that have been vacant for more than six months. The scheme offers a series of incentives including grants and supports including a reduction on commercial rates over a three year period.

NTA Active Travel Investment Programme

The National Transport Authority (NTA) have a dedicated Active Travel team who deliver hundreds of active travel projects across the county, such as the development of segregated cycle lanes and widened footpaths, new walking and cycling bridges, and new pedestrian crossings. A key aim of the Investment Programme is to increase the number of walking and cycling networks so that walking, cycling and public transport will account for 50% of all journeys made by 2030.

Projects are funded by the Department of Transport through this programme and are managed and delivered by Local Authorities. In 2023, 290 million euros was allocated by the NTA to enhance the delivery of hundreds of projects

Other funding opportunities

- Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant
- Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS)
- Community Climate Action Grant
- Façade Enchantment Scheme
- Heritage Council Community Heritage Fund
- Creative Ireland Grant Scheme
- Dept. of Housing, Local Government and Heritage Community Monuments Fund
- SEAI Community and Business Grants
- Local Authority Community Grants
- Fáilte Ireland Small Grants Scheme
- Laois Local Enterprise Office Financial Supports
- Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS)
- Historic Structures Fund
- Building Acquisition Measure (BAM)
- Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO)

