

Reimagine Athenry

A community led vision for a historic Irish town

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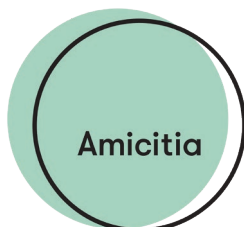
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This document has been prepared
by DMAU - Public Space design and
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February - October 2019

Re-imagine Athenry



NOTE: GRD cannot accept responsibility for omissions or inaccuracies contained herein.

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INTRODUCTION

Reimagine Athenry is a **community led vision** for Athenry's town and its environs commissioned by Athenry Community Council and funded by LEADER. The project sets out a future framework for the town based on the ambitions of the community as documented from public consultations and an online survey.

Part I of this final report outlines the project process, the town context and the results of the consultations;

Part II we outline the challenges facing the town and key areas that need immediate attention before presenting the future vision in Part III.

All the work has been developed within the context of the statutory 2022 Local Area Plan and Draft 2008 Public Realm Plan.

Everyone recognises Athenry's potential to become a great place. A 13C medieval town steeped in heritage, the town walls have given shape to the centre with its fine urban grain and human scale streets and squares.

Today Athenry functions as a commuter town with great regional road and rail connectivity providing strong links to Galway City, the west coast and the midlands. It is home to a vibrant community providing a welcoming living environment for families.

Athenry is at its heart, a great family town.

Despite these qualities the town is suffering from several factors common to similar size Irish towns. In the centre, derelict sites and shop fronts bring a feeling of disrepair while car-dominated streets and public spaces leave little room or comfort for the pedestrian.

Developments at the periphery have changed the traditional face of the town and the centre needs new investment to again make it both a local regional meeting point. The town centre must reconsider its role and function on both a regional and local level.

In this context the community has Reimagined Athenry, by mapping out the challenges facing the town. From this we have defined a vision for the town which provides a framework for future development while simultaneously addressing concerns.



THE PROJECT



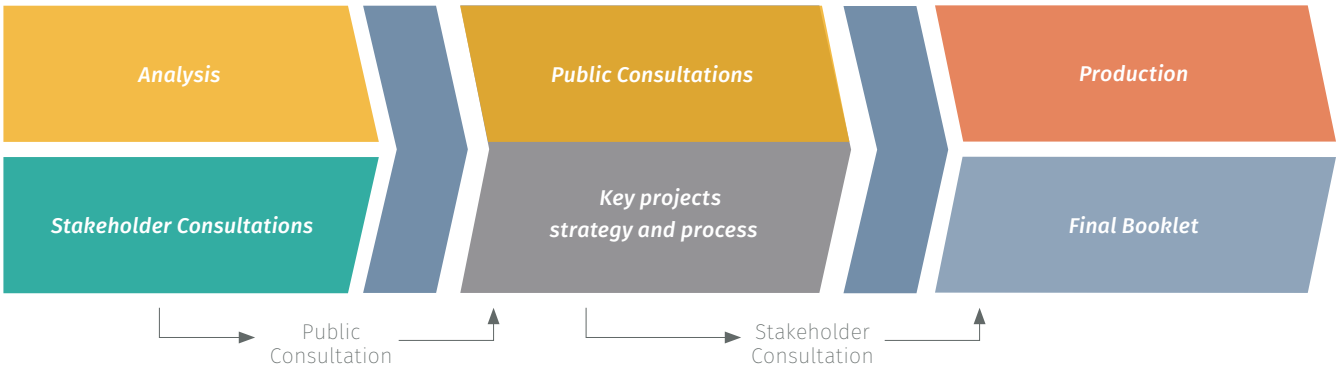
Please describe Athenry in five words?



*****Online Survey questions and answers appear with a yellow band throughout the document.***

The main objectives of the project as outlined by Athenry Community Council were:

- **To establish a shared vision and re-imagine the future of Athenry**
- **To explore the potential of innovations such as town greenways, safe cycle routes, nature playgrounds, community garden networks, connected neighbourhoods and age-friendly practices.**
- **To deliver recommendations and promotional materials which will help guide the ACC in their vision for making Athenry an inclusive place for young and old.**



The project has been developed in three phases run between Feb and October 2019.

Phase One:

- Involved consultations with the Community Council and identified several initial ideas, formulating key projects and priorities for the town
- Urban analysis of the town and environs.

Phase Two:

- Consultation with wider community and presentation of the findings to the community.
- In the second phase we presented the key projects to the community and conducted an online survey to determine the support for the key projects.
- Presentation of the work to the community council

Phase Three:

- Developing the work into framework vision and final report.

BUILDING UPON

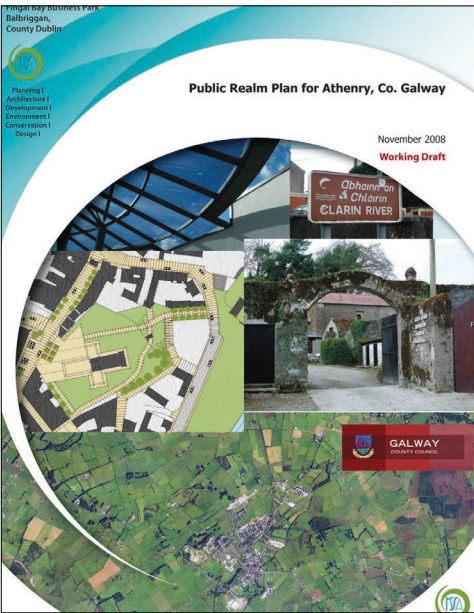
The project builds upon a number of key statutory planning documents. Athenry has already been defined across the scales in the significant planning and policy work that has been carried out. Brought together these documents outline a strategic regional position for Athenry and illustrate improvements and strategies for its heritage and public realm.

The Town Walls Conservation Strategy provides a detailed report into the history and structure and condition of the Town Walls, setting out a conservation strategy; some of which has been implemented in a careful and respectful manner, providing a tasteful reference as to how the town could approach future public realm improvements.

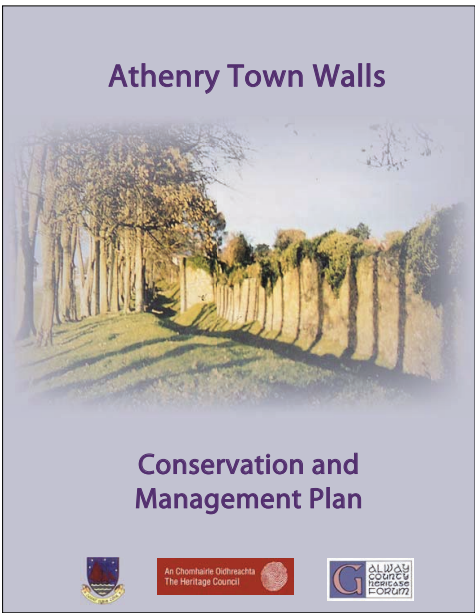
The vision set out in the Draft **2008 Public Realm Strategy** which was never adopted. Focused primarily looked at the town centre “to

create a vibrant and bustling town core which achieves a sustainable and harmonious balance of pedestrian space versus vehicular space within a framework which combines physical, social and economic initiatives that lead to a positive change within Athenry’s Public Realm” was derived from a public consultation where a lot of ideas from the local community were put forward, some of these ideas have been realised, a lot still have to be achieved. For this project we want to build upon this work and find which opportunities should have highest priority for implementation and what are the strategic steps towards their implementation.

Since the 2008 Public Realm Plan, Galway County Council has adopted the **Athenry Local Area Plan** providing a strategic vision for the wider development of the town. The LAP sets out through several Key Objectives policies for the sustainable development of the town and



2008 Draft Public Realm Plan



Town Walls Conservation Plan



improved connections between the town centre and its suburbs and hinterlands.

Finally the **Galway County Development Plan** positions Athenry as a regional key town. Key towns have a high degree of self-sufficiency, reduce the demand for travel and provide a good quality of life for residents. Self-sufficiency refers to where a large proportion of the population, living in the town or surrounding area, can live, work, shop, go to school and enjoy recreation without the need for constant travel.

Reimagine Athenry wants to bring the good ideas found in these documents to the fore and integrate them with our consultation findings to create a designed vision for the town.



Local Area Plan 2012-22



Galway County Development Plan 2012-22



Athenry Context



WHAT MAKES ATHENRY A GREAT IRISH TOWN?

Irish towns share a lot of common characteristics; they balance a fine-grained urban form with suburban residential development, they usually have a river or landscape feature connecting the town with a wider ecological network. They also have an active community and social networks that stretch into the surrounding hinterlands. These qualities make the town one of our biggest assets when dealing with the challenges of our current times.

In recent years derelict sites and shop fronts, car-dominated streets and public spaces, alongside big box retail developments on the

periphery have changed the traditional face of the town and made it a less inclusive and accessible place for younger and older members of our society.

However Athenry retains many strong built, spatial and social qualities. These elements; Heritage, Streetscape, Location and Community form the foundations for creating a great town with a unique sense of place. Any future interventions and developments, need to be sensitively integrated into this context. The following pages look at these elements in more detail.

What are the best things about Athenry?





1 Athenry Castle



2 Heritage Centre and Church



3 Priory



4 Outer Wall



5 Loro Gate

Its Medieval Heritage

The town walls were built in the 14th century and have since then, defined the shape and form of the town centre. They continue to have a major influence on the townscape today, the area inside the walls retains its compact medieval structure and this contrasts with the townscape outside the walls, where we find a looser car based suburban morphology without traditional street patterns.

The walls alongside the other medieval structures of the Castle, Priory, Collegiate Church and Market Square provide Athenry with a rich heritage that is currently underutilised but retains tremendous potential.

A public realm project that links the heritage and history together with the everyday townscape, will provide Athenry with the revitalisation it needs to tackle the problems facing the town.



6 North Gate



Its Medieval Streetscape

When we see the photographs of the streets next to each other we can see the true qualities of the medieval urban fabric. Despite the predominance of cars the town retains its human scale and fine urban grain.

When these human scale environments become dominated by cars and parking it reduces the amount of space for people and buildings, shops and cafes, to connect with the town. This in turn reduces the potential for social encounters and the towns primary function as a marketplace and meeting point.



1 Towards Old Church Street



2 Market Square



3 Cross Street from Market Square



4 Burkes Lane



5 Old Church Street

Its Unique Structures

Athenry is very lucky to have a number of unique urban elements within the town walls. The park, Kenny Park stadium and the handball court, While these may seem ordinary to local residents they are extraordinary when seen through the eyes of a visitor. These specials and the events that take place there are one way to secure Athenry’s position on the tourist map.

Hurling is part of Athenry’s brand, this rich history should be brought to the fore, events in Kenny Park should be promoted on the Wild Atlantic Way website to bring more tourists looking for a true Irish experience to the town. **Make the ordinary extraordinary.**

The Handball court is a fantastic piece of public architecture. While it no longer meets the standards for todays handballs needs, its architectural form offers potential for many different interpretations. It could be used during summer events as an outdoor cinema, or for theatrical performances. Or it could be transformed into a skatepark facility for the youth of the town.



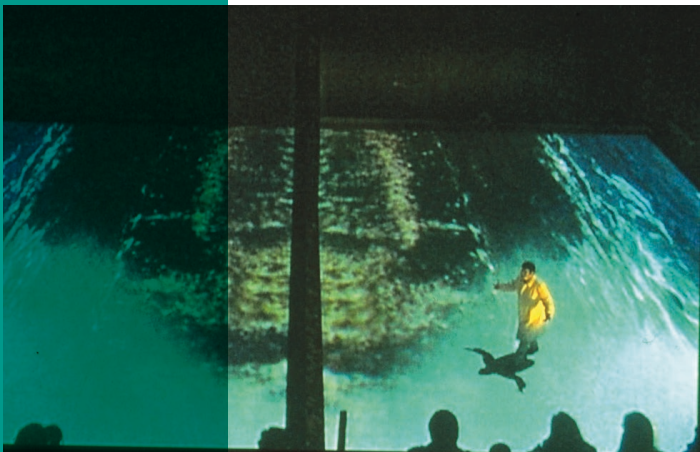
Kenny Park



Handball Court

Reference Handball Alley Chaism by Dorothy Cross

A performance during the Galway Arts festival in two handball alleys in Galway City. Projections on the floor of the courts re-imagined the space creating a dramatic setting for this performance art.



Reference: Chaism, Dorothy Cross

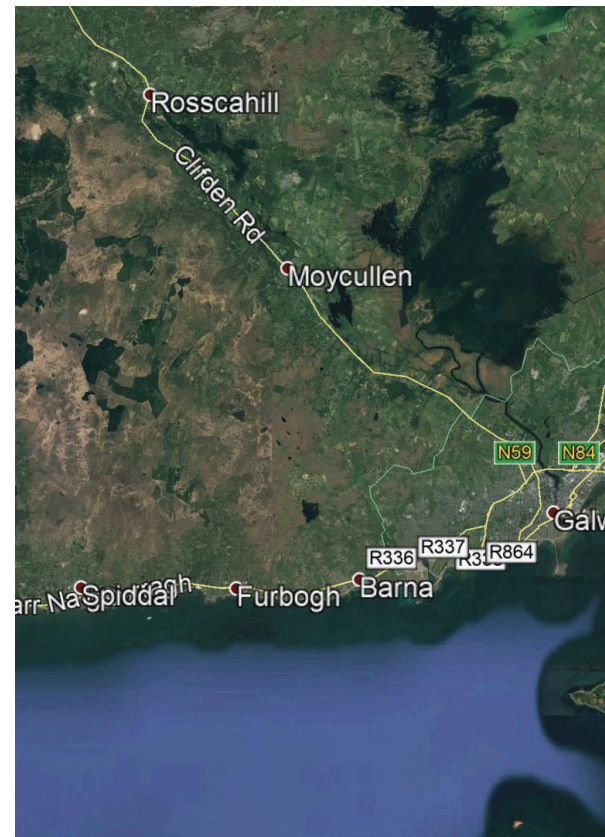
Its location at “The crossroads of Connaught”

Athenry is a key town in the wider Galway region, and on a national level an incredibly well connected settlement. Located at the edge of the M6 Galway to Dublin and the M17 which connects Tuam to the M18 linking to Shannon and Limerick. Next to this Athenry is the rail node between the Galway - Dublin line and the Western Rail Corridor between Galway and Limerick - Cork. A feasibility study has recently been commissioned to look at the reopening/extension of this railway line to the north linking with Tuam - Claremorris Ballina Westport and eventually Sligo.

The towns advantageous location and good infrastructural connections have inversely led to it becoming a dormitory town, sandwiched between the regional hubs of Galway and Tuam. This position places additional pressure on the town to find its unique selling points and build upon them rather than trying to compete with larger economic forces in the region.

To begin to address these issues this project has been commissioned by the Athenry Community Council (ACC) and funded by a LEADER development grant. The ACC define the scope of the project to develop a vision that builds upon the positive aspects of the town's natural setting and topography, its links to the wider landscape and environs, its natural and built heritage and its diversity and mix of uses, in order to make it a more attractive place to live, work and visit.

Recently there has been much renewed national interest in the public qualities and civic opportunity of the traditional Irish Town. Athenry itself was selected alongside 11 other market towns around Ireland as part of the Free Market exhibition for the 2018 Venice International Architecture Biennale. We hope this project can continue the conversation and bring fresh ideas to the debate around the future of the Irish Town.



**It's a great family town,
with a strong and
vibrant community.**

Athenry has a strong sense of community, with lots of different active groups, we want to build upon this strength and explore opportunities for connecting these groups with different places through the key projects utilising both public spaces and community hubs.





Creating a Vision Together...



CONSULTATION EVENING

After our initial stakeholder meeting with the community council we held a successful first public consultation in Amicitia on Old Church street in Athenry on the 10th of April 2019. With an attendance of 34 people, the work presented on the evening was also available for comments during a drop-in consultation the following week

The evening began with an opening presentation Then attendees were then were split into groups, we had 4 tables of 5-6 people per table. Each table had a chairperson responsible for noting the ideas in the group and presenting the ideas to the wider audience.

The first part of the evening started with participants sharing their dreams for the town, this was followed by three brainstorm sessions, looking at the Town Centre; Suburbs and Daily Life; Region and Hinterland. For the last brainstorm session each group focused on a key project and developed this further. The conclusions have been integrated throughout this document.

Re-imagine Athenry

Re-imagine Athenry

Share your ideas for the town...



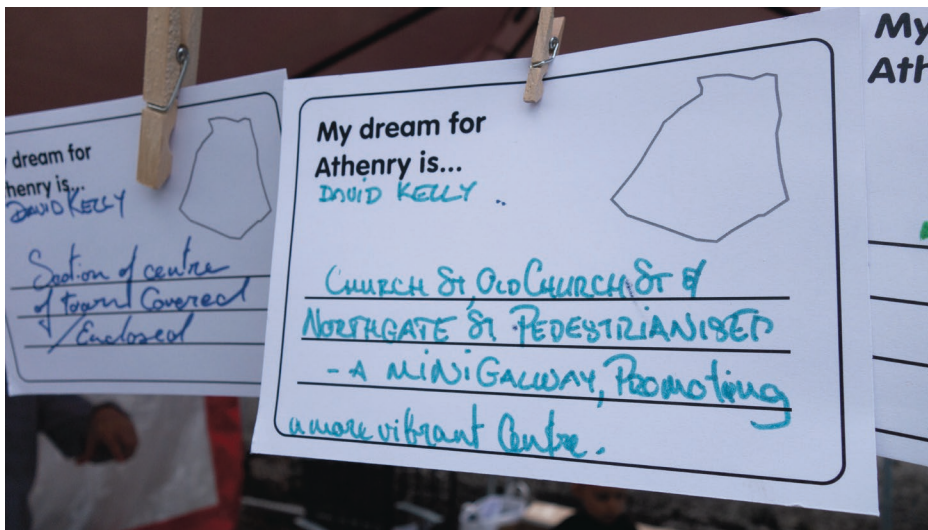
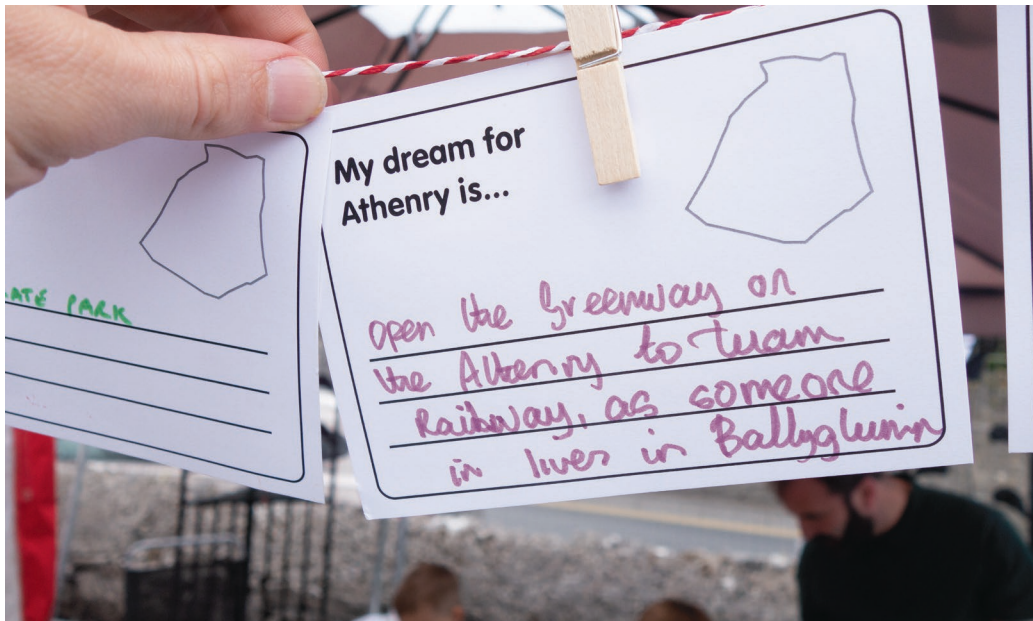
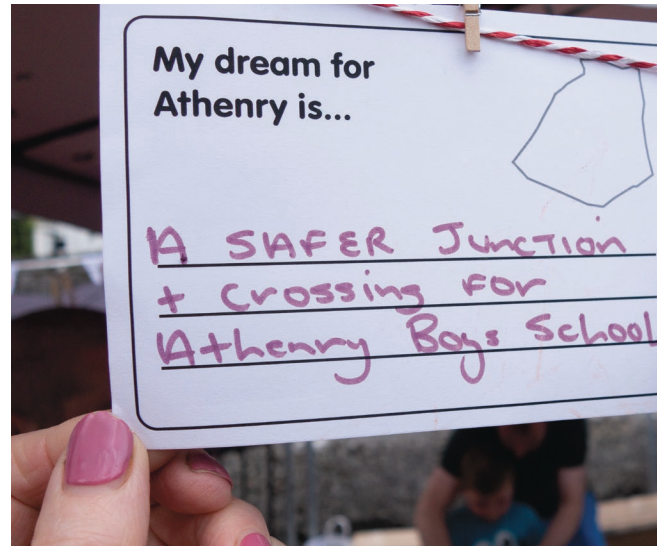
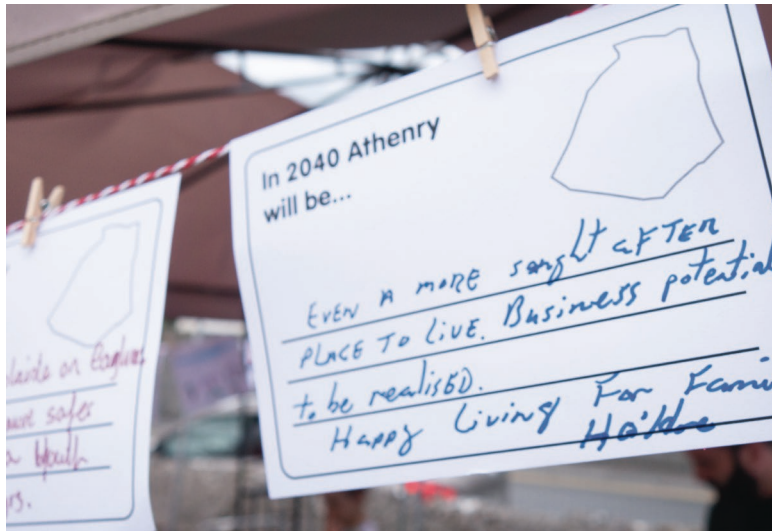
Evening Workshop
10 April 19:00 - 22:00

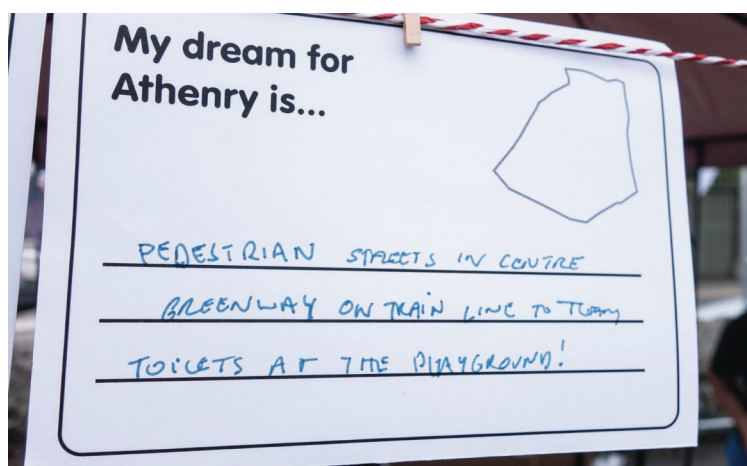
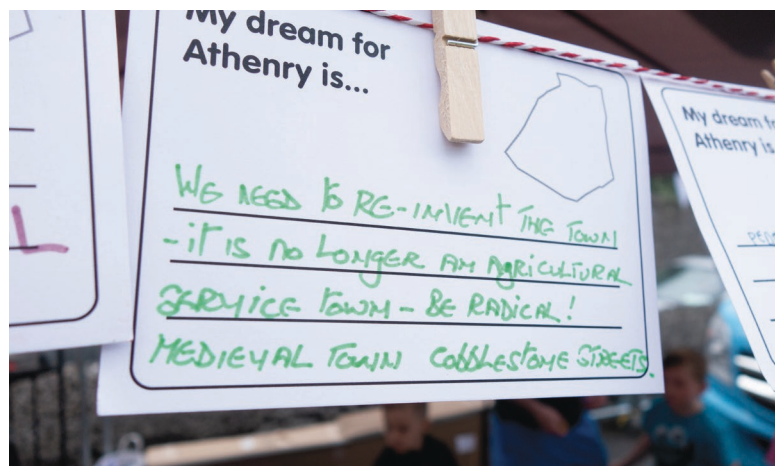
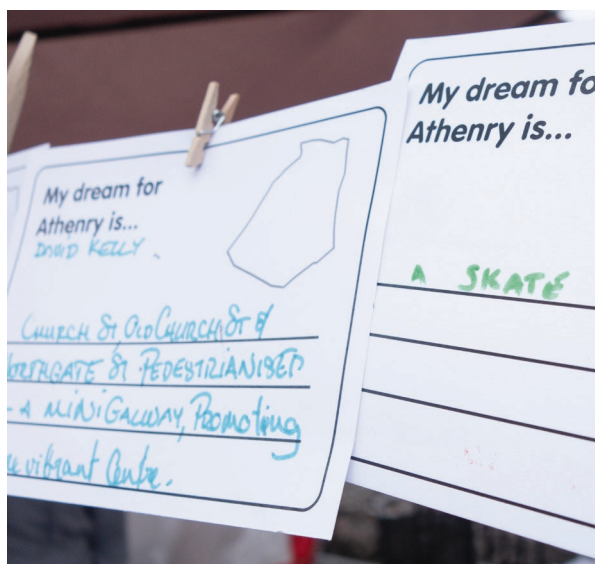
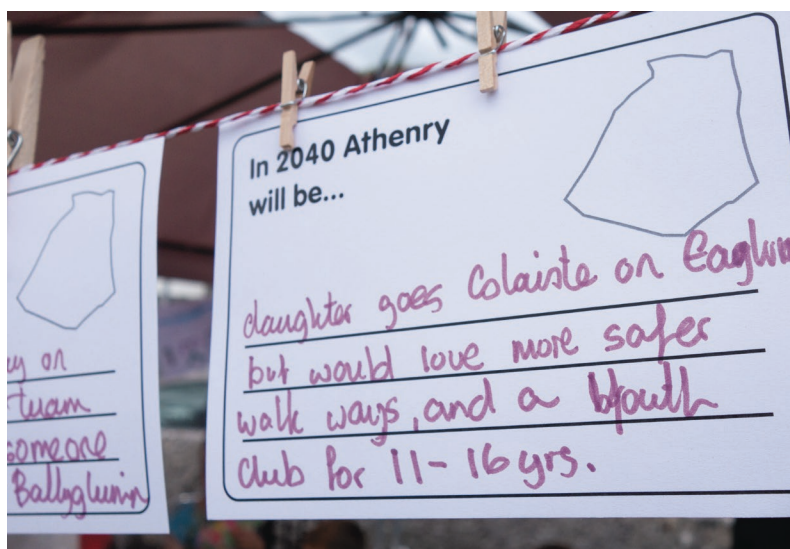
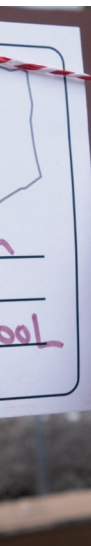
Drop-in Consultation
10 April - 10 May 2019

Amicitia
Old Church Street









Over 200 people helped us create a model of the town at the Bia Lover Festival

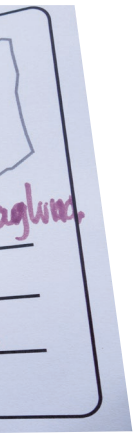
my dream for
Athenry is...

WE NEED TO RE-IMAGINE THE TOWN
-IT IS NO LONGER AN AGRICULTURAL
SERVICE TOWN - BE RADICAL!
MEDIEVAL TOWN COBBLESTONE STREETS.

In 2040 Athenry
will be...

daughter goes Coláiste on Eagle
but would love more safer
walk ways, and a youth
club for 11-16 yrs.





And 178 people completed an online survey

After the initial consultation we conducted an online survey, which generated 178 replies. The survey has proven to be an invaluable tool for the project, providing us with a depth of detailed local knowledge highlighting areas for improvement and people sharing their ambitions for the town.


Part of the survey was structured around a polls on different strategies for improvements to the town which were developed with the community council in the first stakeholder meeting. The majority of respondents were positive to the different ideas presented, those who had concerns were allowed to add these to the survey.

Survey carried out between the 10th of April and the 24th of May

Responses: 178 people

Format: An online questionnaire via a google survey form available to view at: <https://forms.gle/QSMbCRFFBAYhrAVs7>

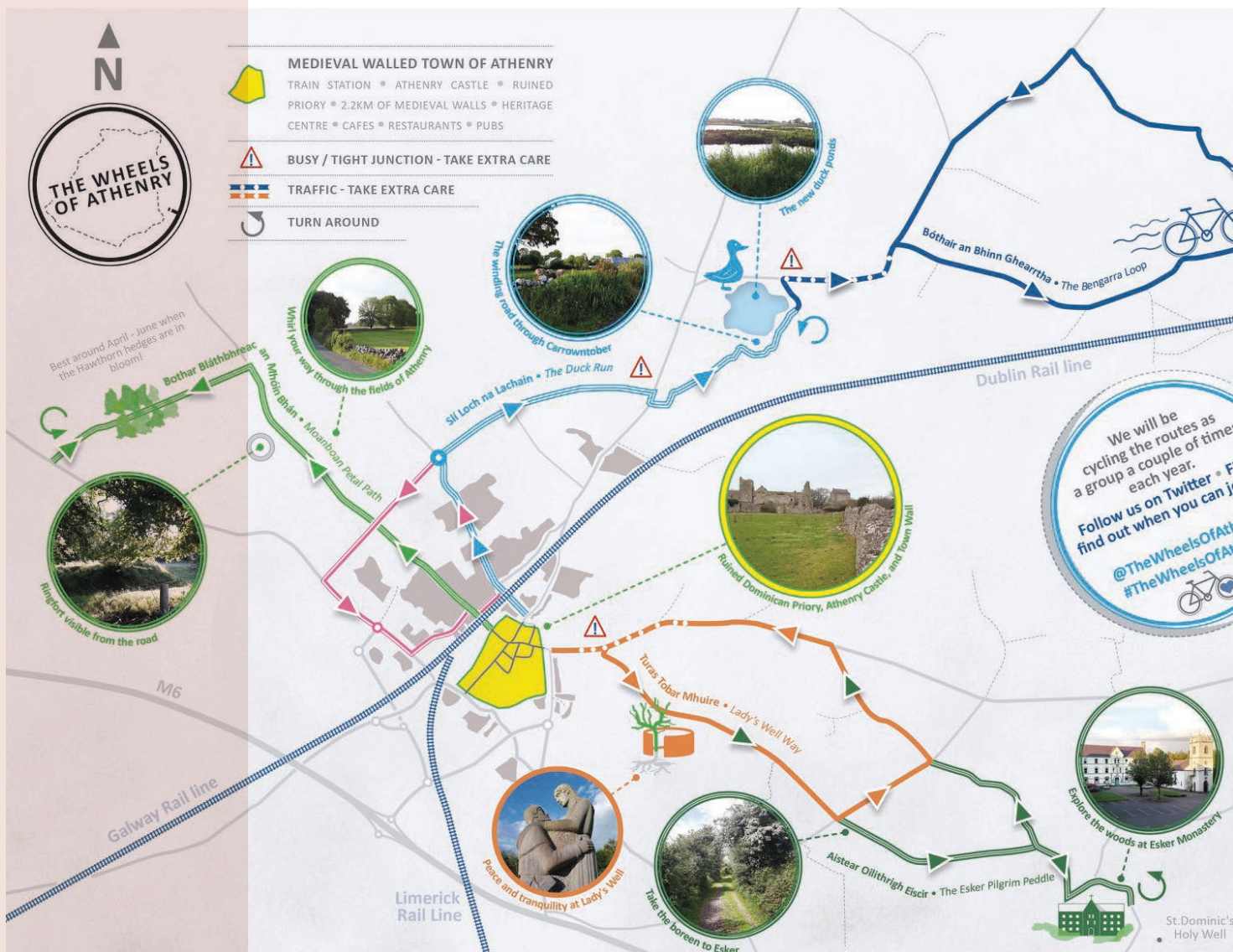


An aerial photograph of a town, overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter. Two stylized human figures are positioned on the left side of the image. The figure on the left is wearing a black t-shirt and dark shorts, while the figure on the right is wearing a brown t-shirt and dark shorts. They are both facing right, looking towards the town. A dotted line extends from the top of the figure on the right, leading to a white text box. Another dotted line extends from the bottom of the figure on the left, leading to a second white text box. The town below shows a dense arrangement of buildings, streets, and parked cars.

“We need markets, theatre, festivals, drama, historical tours...This is all available but there is no joined up thinking..We need a town map/ information booklet in every shop and business that guides people on their journey around town

“More dedicated walking cycling zones, WITHOUT TRAFFIC so we can exercise, cycle, walk with our families SAFELY!

The Wheels of Athenry a project that resulted from the consultation





CONCERNS THAT EMERGED FROM THE CONSULTATION...



"Improve public lighting, it's very poor on Tuam road near the water tower"

"A safe place to walk, it would be wonderful if children could walk in the centre of town and meet the community without the fear of traffic and falling off the narrow footpaths"





“Traffic lights on the road from the motor way to Baunmore roundabout. Build a pedestrian walk way on the bridge to Joyce’s



“The bridge on road to park needs to be made wider



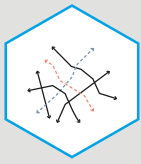
THE BIGGEST CONCERNS WHICH EMERGED FROM THE CONSULTATION...

1. Pedestrian safety and connectivity
2. Accessibility and parking - Illegal and paid parking in the centre
3. The appearance of the town, derelict buildings and vacant shopfronts
4. Enterprise - greater diversity of shops, use location as key advantage.
5. Use the potential of the heritage sites to position Athenry on the tourist map
6. Improved green spaces

And throughout all the above a more inclusive town with better facilities for both elderly and teenagers.

What are the worst things about Athenry?





Pedestrian Connectivity



Cars & Parking



Upkeep



Enterprise & Retail



Heritage & Tourism



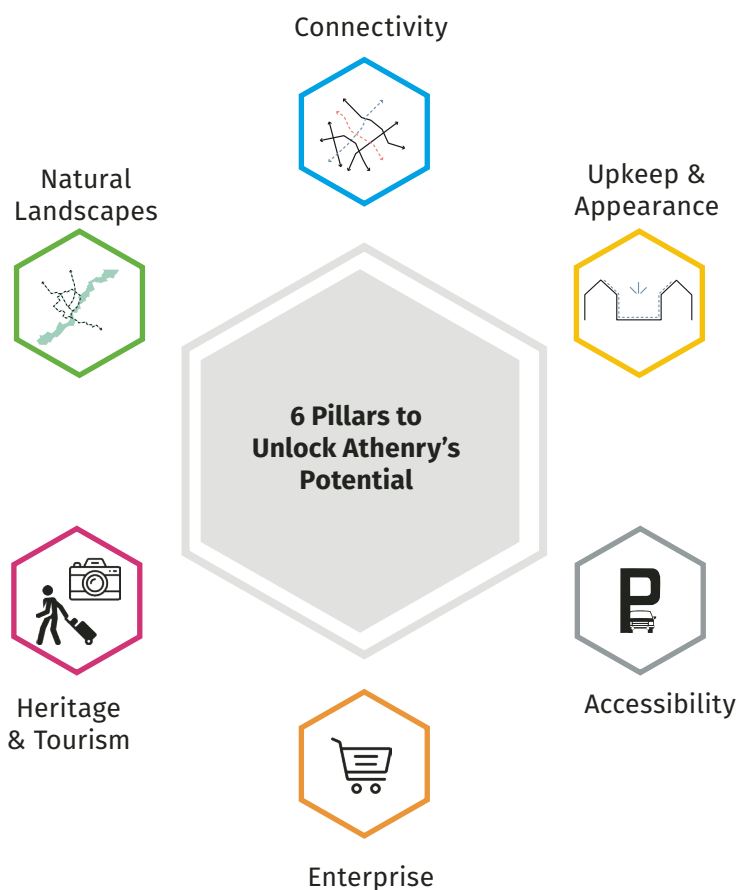
Green Spaces

Use the Biggest Concerns to shape a vision for the town

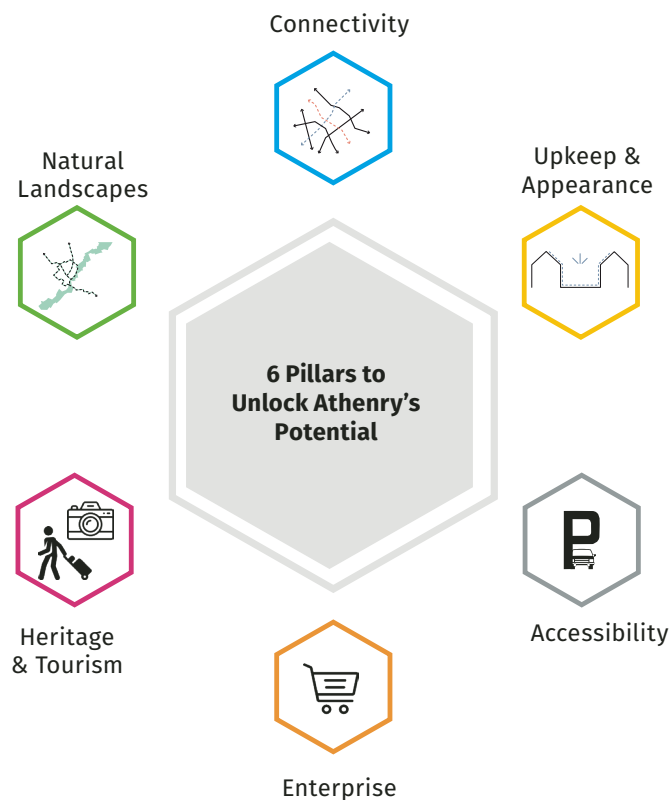
The concerns cover all aspects of everyday life in Athenry, to effectively address these concerns a holistic approach is required from future developments in and around Athenry.

As part of this vision we propose that these concerns are transformed into drivers for change. Each new development should consider how it can simultaneously address several of these drivers.

For instance heritage improvements can also provide opportunities to improve footpaths and connectivity issues at key locations, a new playground investment could be used to tell a heritage story for Athenry. This in turn helps to improve the appearance and attractiveness of the town. Each development working together to create a better Athenry for future generations.



DREAMS FOR THE TOWN...



Re-imagine Athenry

"More footfall and people to use the town"

"Outdoor gyms for the elderly"

"Housing community for the elderly – sheltered housing"

"Good quality open space; attractive to visit and live in, where young and old can thrive"

"Green spaces; less cement and stones"

"That Athenry will be worth visiting and people will be encouraged off the motorway"

"Develop the character"

*"More activities
for teenagers*

"Athenry folk park

*"More tourists
visiting the town*

*"Arts and crafts fully
integrated into the
fabric of the town*

*"Athenry will be a safe
place for children to
congregate, particularly
for teenagers*

*"A community for the elderly
in Athenry where the residents
can live independently*

*"More tourists
visiting the town*

*"Athenry will rise from the
ashes and become the town
again that it once was*

*"Don't let things
fall out of use*

*"Full connectivity along
the river and looped
walks around the town*

*"Athenry to be the
number one heritage
town in Galway.*

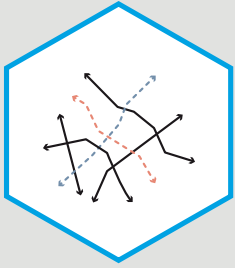
*"New life in the centre of the
town making it a fully inclusive
place for all ages and abilities*

*"The best place
to live in Galway*



Analysis & Recommendations





PEDESTRIAN SAFETY & CONNECTIVITY

Pedestrian safety and poor pedestrian connectivity are the biggest issues facing all age groups across the town. Issues were raised on both the micro and macro levels, its essential that both levels are addressed in a future connectivity plan. There is a clear desire for improved pedestrian and cycle facilities throughout the whole town, including the provision of safe walking and cycling routes, running parallel to the rail infrastructure, which connect the suburban housing areas to the schools. Alongside this lots of people were disheartened by the poor quality and size of footpaths in the centre and poor-quality street lighting was mentioned as a problem in certain areas.

Overall it seems pedestrians are poorly served and are often put in dangerous situations due to a lack of joined up planning for the pedestrian. We recommend a full connectivity study and strategy to help link the town placing highest priority on the locations where safety is of big concern.



A suburb stranded by recent road developments not providing a safe pedestrian crossing to connect with the town centre. Creating a dangerous crossing point for residents



“Safely cross the road and walk to school. Kids can’t walk home from the boys school to Caheroyan as there are no pedestrian crossing and the footpaths are too small and dangerous



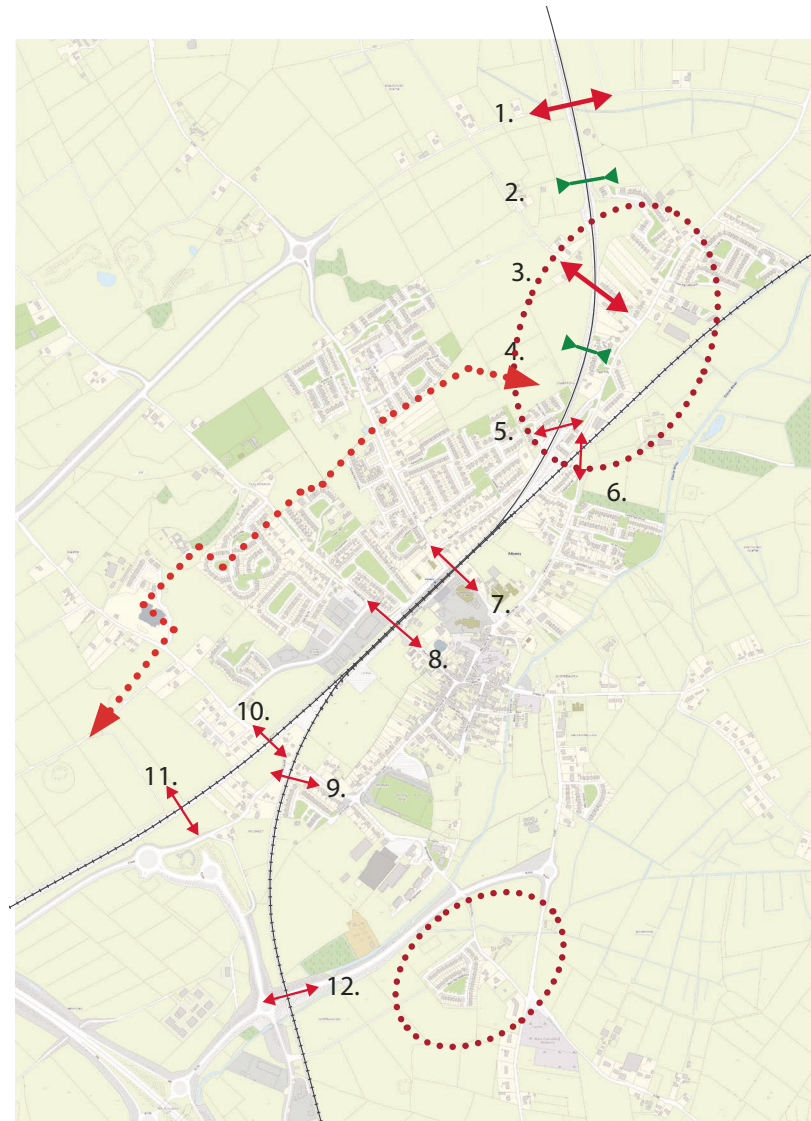
Connectivity Analysis

While there were concerns about the centre the biggest challenge lies in the suburban areas north of the rail line. Athenry is dissected by railway infrastructure resulting in limited crossing points furthermore there is limited north south connectivity between the suburbs, limiting options for pedestrians and cyclists who have to use main routes. Alongside this the cul-de-sac and car based pattern of development in the suburbs creates more distance for pedestrians and reduces overall connectivity and the potential for interaction between neighbours.

The existing suburbs are designed following a car-based pattern of development. Housing estates next to each other are often kept apart by 1.8m high walls. We would like to explore the possibility for making connections between the existing suburbs and creating new green links between the existing suburbs and future residential development areas in the Local Area Plan.



Walls between different estates, could allow a footpath as a pedestrian connection to create options for walking and cycling.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Connect the stranded neighbourhoods with safe pedestrian crossings.**
- **Provision of missing pathways be prioritised.**
- **Commission a detailed connectivity framework plan for the town and suburbs, with a long term strategy and budget for implementation.**
- **Future designs to prioritise the pedestrian.**
- **Connecting estates by removing walls increases pedestrian connectivity.**



PARKING

Parking and accessibility emerged as a big concern in the consultation, raised in several different ways:

- Paid parking in the centre vs. free parking at out of town shopping
- Illegal parking in the centre
- Cars dominating the public realm
- Always difficult to find parking in the centre.

The key challenge for Athenry centre is how to maintain its accessibility while simultaneously improving the public realm for its residents and visitors.

A key variable in retail spending is the amount of time people are willing to spend at a location. At the moment Athenry town centre caters primarily to people carrying out daily errands, there are limited options or reasons to visit the town centre as a place in itself or to spend any additional staying time. There are no commercial outdoor seats at any of the main public spaces and there is little to no public seating in the centre.

If we speak about Athenry realising its potential, then utilisation of Athenry's greatest asset, it's medieval

streetscape and fine-grained urban form is essential for creating a more social and welcoming town, for locals and visitors alike.

However, the use of primary public spaces for parking reduces the possibility for other social and economic functions to emerge. While we recognise the importance of parking for the town we do question this overcapacity of public space dedicated to the storage of the private car.

While many survey respondents were overwhelmingly in favour of reducing the space given to cars there are a number of legitimate concerns raised by those who responded against. These were primarily to do with accessibility for disabled and people with children. If parking was to be reduced in the centre it is clear disabled parking should be retained and the centre remains open and accessible for deliveries and transport.



2



3

“If you limit the traffic in town centre you need to probably aid free parking so people will be willing to walk in to town

Parking Analysis

We have counted indicates 954 parking spaces within the circle 400m from the town centre including 275 on street spaces. People want to park as close as possible to their destination in the centre which leads to the larger car parks at the edge often remaining empty.

It was acknowledged by several respondents that if parking was free at these locations people would be willing to walk that extra bit to access the town.

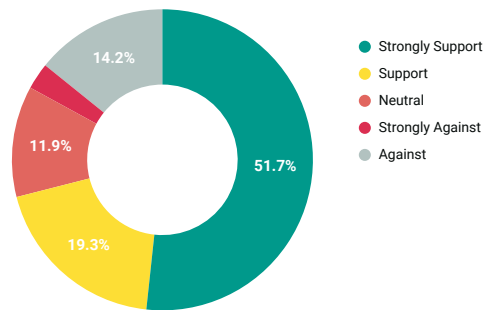


- 01 - Cars in Market Square viewed from Marys Church
- 02 - Parking on North Gate Street.
- 03 - Parking and Traffic on Cross Street
- 04 - Parking on Old Church Street
- 05 - Stadium Car Park almost empty

**All photos were taken on the same morning*

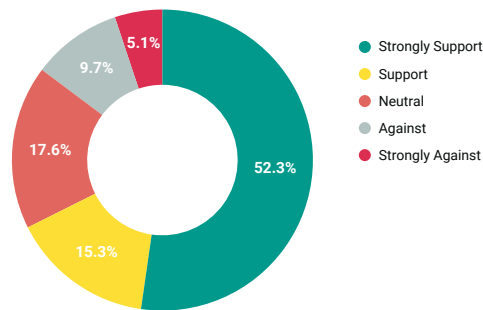


If on-street parking was reduced to help improve the town centre would you support this?



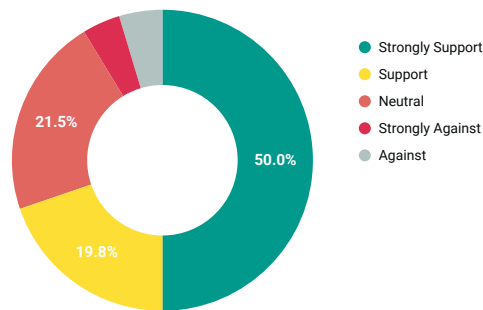
71% Support

If parking was removed from the town square, to help improve the town centre would you support this?



67,6% Support

If Burkes lane and Davis St were pedestrianised would you support this?



69,8% Support

Trial & Test

From the online survey there was a high level of support for reduction of parking in the centre in order to improve the appearance and public realm of the town.

We have identified two key locations where the dominance of parking is having a detrimental effect on both the appearance and experience of the town. Market Square and North Gate Street here a total of 16 spaces dominate in a location that should be seen as the social centre of the town.

Rather than an expensive redevelopment we recommend a phased trial for improving the pedestrian realm by introducing car free sundays and conversion of spaces during the summer to outdoor seating. The trial should be developed carefully with local traders and retailers.



*Car Free
Market Days
& Sundays*

*Heritage Trail
Improvements*

Market Square

Market Square has nine parking spaces and one taxi space, the cars dominate the central meeting point of the town. The square hosts a market on Thursdays and Fridays (check) during that time parking is reduced.

There is also an access point from the square to the heritage centre which is a key connection for tourists.

North Gate Street

Likewise along North Gate Street there is scope to remove parking and introduce public realm improvements with a widened footpath, seating, trees and space for outdoor seating for the bars and restaurants along the street.

A link across the road to the heritage centre can easily be made to connect with Market Square

Conversion of these 16 spaces into public realm improvements represents a 1.7% reduction in parking spaces in the town centre



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Free parking at the Backlawn to reduce pressure on the centre
- Parking to Public Space Trial for north gate street and market square developed with local stakeholders.
- Car free Sundays once a month during the summer.

Car Free
Town Square
Improvements

Car Free
Town Square
Burkes Lane
Davis Street

Improved
Pedestrian
Realm



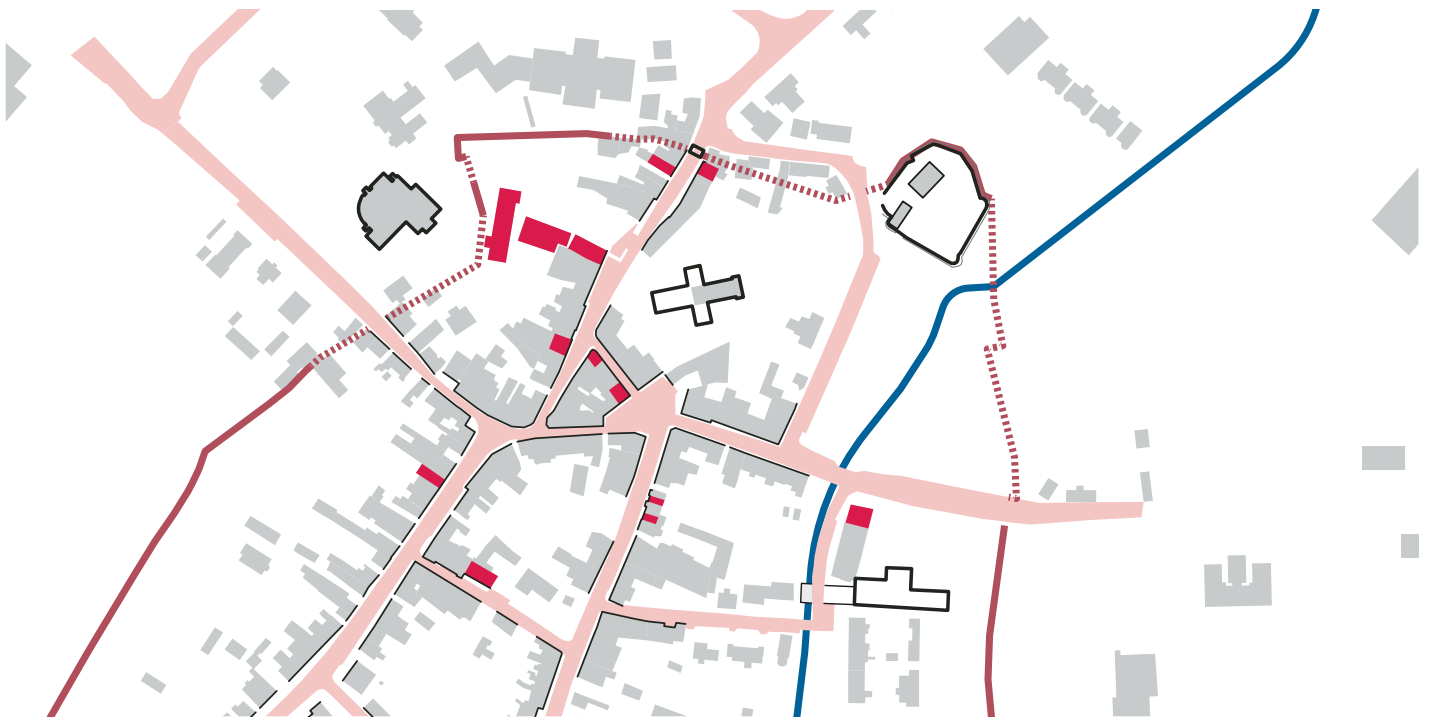
UPKEEP

A lot of responses to the consultation show how people are not satisfied with the maintenance and upkeep of several buildings in the town centre. Alongside this the high level of vacant shopfronts bring a feeling of disrepair to the centre. Especially derelict buildings at key entrance points (1) of the town.

This dereliction next to the priory has an extra negative impact on how visitors perceive the town and experience its heritage.



"I love Athenry as a town. I dont live there but would love to retire there . Hope it will have a better town centre by then. Right now all I see are derelict buildings. It has so much potential so lets hope that is tapped into by some good people"



Vacant and Derelict Buildings



- 01 - Derelict house at the entrance to the town
- 02 - Row of vacant shops on Mc Donalds Lane
- 03, 04, 05 - Vacancy on North Gate Street
- 06 Vacant Shop on Cross Street

**All photos were taken on the same morning*



High Quality Traditional Shopfronts

While there are a lot of vacant and derelict buildings there are also a number of traditional shopfronts that define the character of the town centre. They demonstrate a restrained approach to signage and simple colour scheme which should be adapted as a template for developments in the town centre.



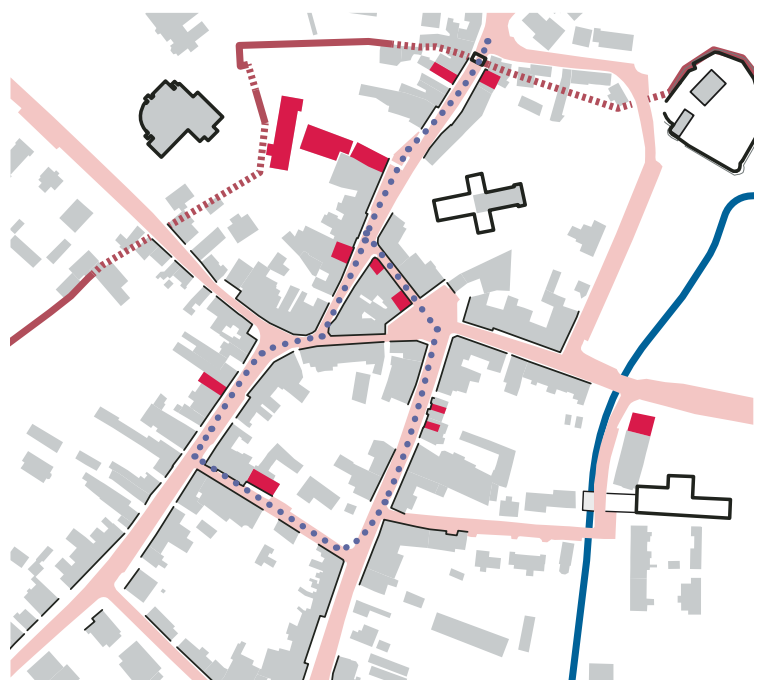
Opportunity Artwalk Athenry!

Transform the vacant shop windows into a temporary open air art gallery. Invite a local curator to develop a changing programme of exhibitions that refresh the windows once every 4 months. This is a quick, low cost and effective way to brighten the local townscape and remove the unsightly appearance of vacant properties.

The temporary nature of the project involves minimal intrusion into the properties, requiring just the space behind the windows.

Such a project can bring many benefits:

- Improves streetscape, upkeep and appearance of the town
- Provides activity for visitor could be linked with a heritage project showing the history of Athenry.
- Helps property owners to maintain their premises leading to improved opportunity for rental.
- Exhibitions can change with the seasons providing variety throughout the year.



*“Paint the place.
Keep streets
clean. Lower rates
for businesses.
Better parking”*

RECOMMENDATIONS

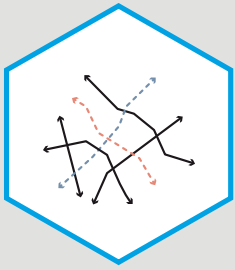
- Appoint a town manager to coordinate upkeep of properties and use of vacant windows.
- Organise a refurbishment festival where the town centre is transformed as an event.
- Develop a style guide for traditional shopfronts in the centre.
- Use vacant shop windows for temporary exhibitions
- Art Walk Athenry



Reference Artwalk Amsterdam

was a project that ran for many years in the Stadsleidenbuurt in the West of the city. Unused ground floor windows were transformed into gallery spaces for artists to show their works.

A central point provided leaflets with a map and information about the route and current artists exhibiting. New openings became festive events in the neighbourhood.



ENTERPRISE & RETAIL

While Athenrys location is acknowledged as one of its strengths it has had the negative effect of turning the town into a dormitory and commuter town. There is a clear need for more investment in Athenry both in the centre and industrial zoned lands near the motorway.

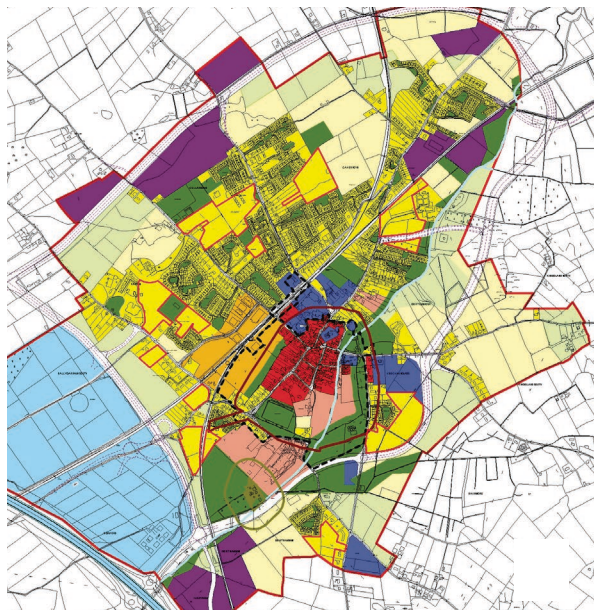
Next to this there is limited choice for shoppers with only one supermarket in town, reducing competition and value for residents, many families must travel to Oranmore to do the weekly shop which is inconvenient and reduces the attractiveness and competitiveness of the town.

The location of the town and its adjacent infrastructure was seen as one of its greatest advantages for attracting additional business close to the motorway. The potential for remote working was also highlighted.

“All shops and businesses open in town centre, traffic free areas, investment in town centre amenities, more local employment, chamber of commerce to drive the town forward as one entity”



Development Zoning in the LAP 2022





Current land use patterns in Athenry



Railway Yards building was sited as a potential incubator or workplace location.

Opportunity sites and projects

As emerged during the consultation process there are a number of opportunity sites in the town often at existing buildings locations that could be redeveloped

1. **Railway Yard Building** - Potential for a mixed use shared workspace next to the station
2. **Burkes Tyres Yard** - At the edge of town has potential to be re-purposed for community use
3. **Canton Hall** - Previously available for community groups, needs to be reopened.
4. **Finns House** - Derelict house across from the playground eyesore.
5. **Handball Alley** - Can be used for community and arts events

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Define commercial capacity and ambitions within an urban development framework.
- Invite stakeholders and investors to participate in the development of a commercial strategy for the urban development framework.



TOURISM & HERITAGE

Athenry is struggling to find its place on the tourist map, it misses out on a lot of potential visitors.

Improving accessibility to the heritage sites was seen as fundamental to repositioning the town and improving amenity for both tourists and residents. A key project to achieving this is a Town Wall Walk, alongside improved experience at the castle and driving and cycling routes to link to castles in hinterland.

A **town wall walk** has the potential to integrate many of the other community ambitions simultaneously acting as a pedestrian route which improves and links the towns green spaces and providing a tourist experience which can connect the heritage around the town.



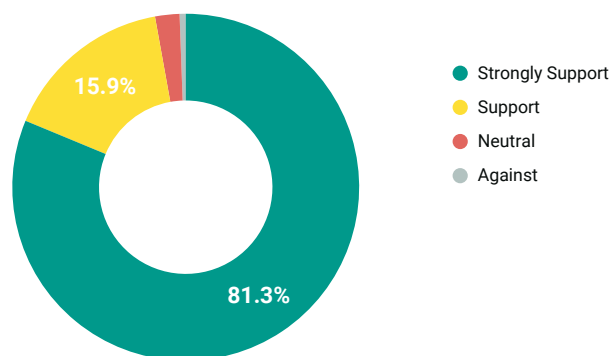
“Athenry is a beautiful town with huge potential that has never been realised. Every time we go to France or Italy we comment on how Athenry could take inspiration from their medieval towns. Properly supported and facilitated tourism projects could be a huge boost for Athenry and the surrounding areas - Monivea, Abbeyknockmoy etc. But something has to be done to attract serious investment into the town centre





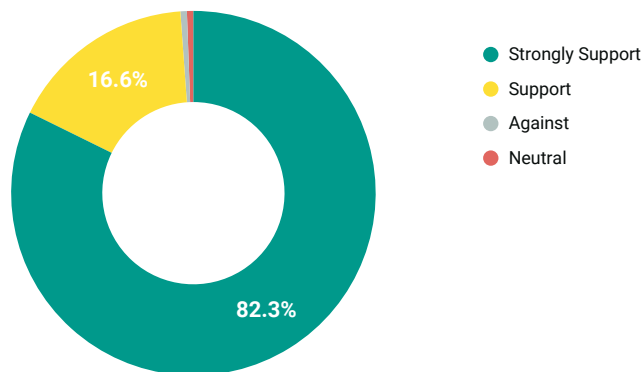
Would you support the development of a town wall walk?

97,2% Support



Would you support the development of a Clarin River walk?

98,9% Support



“Develop train station so that visitors are a little bit more oriented towards the town on arrival”

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop a Town Wall Walk
- Improve links between train station and the heritage sites
- Develop an audio tour for visitors
- Make the ordinary extraordinary
- events in the handball alley and promote hurling in Kenny Park
- Integrate Heritage into every new development to strengthen Athenry’s Brand

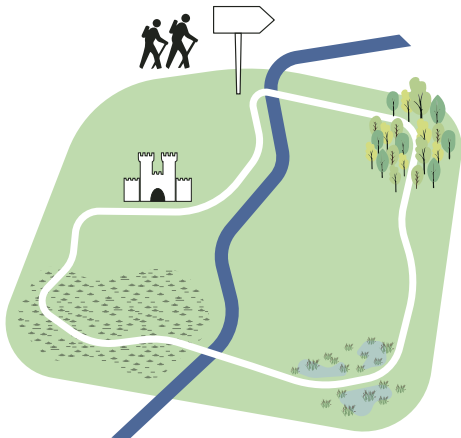
Opportunity!

Fields of Athenry - Looped Heritage Walk

A looped walk starting at Athenry Castle, from the Castle you leave the town and traverse the landscapes alongside the Clarin River before weaving through some forested and bog paths, the route links up with other regional routes or you can choose to keep traversing the fields and head back towards the town centre. Once at the town you can walk the Walls walkway and finish the trip with a meal in the town.

Outside of the town centre and the suburbs there are no safe pedestrian or cycle routes. During the consultations we want to explore the possibilities for creating looped routes and walking trails that connect the town centre with its hinterland.

There are a number of interesting historic sites that could be linked together as part of looped walking trail connecting the historic centre with the wider region.



Reference



Suck Valley way

The Suck Valley Way in Roscommon and east Galway is a project that has been developed by the county Rural Recreation Officer (RRO) and local landowners with LEADER funding. Farmers/private landowners and landholders/users are paid twice annually for five years to develop, enhance and maintain walkways through their land.

It is a national scheme and open to all landowners on National Waymarked Ways, Looped Walking Routes and Heritage Routes along other trails that have been approved by the National Trails Office. The scheme will operate where there is agreement on the entire walk and will not be available for part of a walk.

The walk itself is a 105km long distance circular trail that begins and ends in Castlerea, it is typically completed in 5 days walking.



GREEN SPACES

In the suburbs housing is often grouped around a green amenity space. We received a lot of suggestions on how to improve the quality of these spaces in neighbourhoods from increasing biodiversity to creating wild playgrounds and community gardens with sustainable drainage systems.

The locations are often just lawn and provide a basic but safe space for children to play in front of their house, however due to the nature of the space this is usually limited to football. Outlined on these pages are the suggestions we received they are diverse in scope but many can be achieved with relatively little investment.

Any adaptation of these green spaces should be done in collaboration with the local resident's associations. The improvements should be carried out simultaneously with connectivity improvements to create a green link between the different estates.



“I am not sure how many young people are in Athenry or the different age groups but you could consider a skateboard area. Also, it would be great to have some gym equipment, like on the walk way around Loughrea lake. Whatever is done around green areas you need to incorporate young peoples ideas, this could be a project in the schools.”



“Biodiversity. Community gardens. Benches and picnic area. Bins



Map showing the fragmented nature of amenity spaces, a strategy to connect these with a green walking and cycling route would connect the suburbs and create safe routes to connect to the schools.

And ideas recieved from residents during the consultation

"Encourage people to adopt an area and keep it tidy"

"Reduce mowing to encourage wild flowers, plant native trees"

"Town park in the centre, better facilities in the suburbs There is a need for walks around the town, along the walls and the river. These routes would greatly enhance the connectivity and quality of life in the town, and some paths can be implemented relatively easily leading to quick wins for amenities in the town."



Reducing Distances & Improving Green Spaces

42m apart. 960m walk

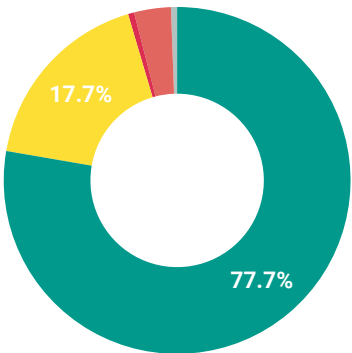
Here we highlight an example of two houses that have a distance of 42m door to door but for one neighbour to travel to the others house there is a distance of 960m between the houses. This connection can be improved by simply removing the wall between the developments, a cycle path could be included so the two green amenity spaces are connected, and this could be continued towards future development lands to provide a secondary quiet route through the neighbourhoods.



Re-imagine Athenry

Would you support the development of a walking and cycling route connecting the suburbs?

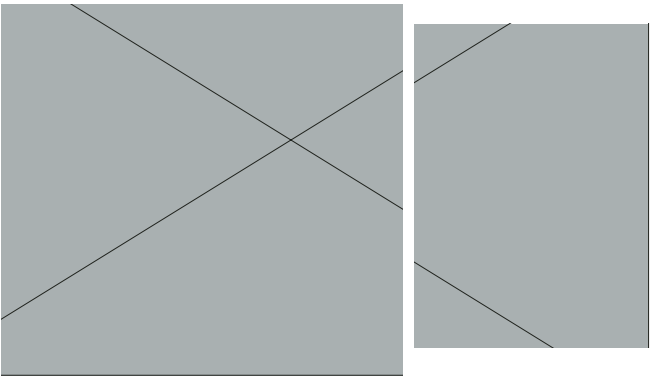
95,4% Support



- Strongly Support
- Support
- Strongly Against
- Neutral
- Against

If you live in a neighbourhood with walls would you support removing the walls to make a path/ cycleway to the next neighbourhood?

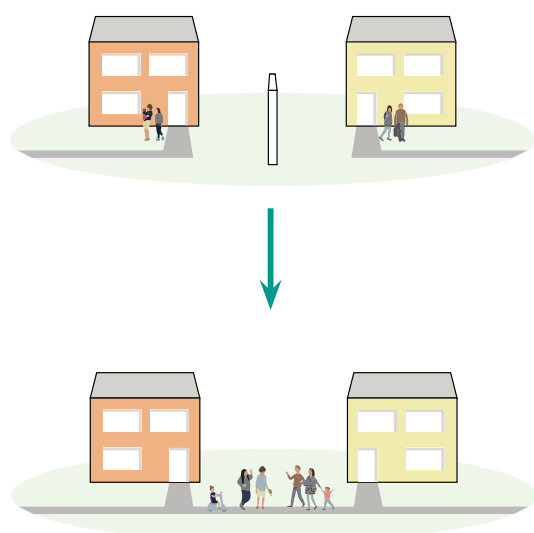
54,3% Support





Improve Green Space and remove wall to connect neighbours

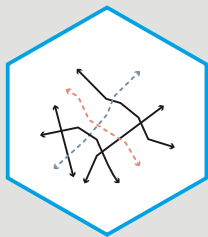
Walls between different estates, could allow a footpath as a pedestrian connection to create options for walking and cycling.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop connectivity strategy for linking the suburbs to the schools
- Improve green spaces with local resident groups
- Link green space improvements to initiatives like all ireland pollinator plan
- Make simple natural playgrounds
- Connect green spaces with an ecological corridor

RECOMMENDATIONS



Pedestrian
Connectivity

- Connect the stranded neighbourhoods with safe pedestrian crossings.
- Provision of missing pathways to be prioritised.
- Commission a detailed connectivity framework plan
- for the town and suburbs, with a long term strategy and budget for implementation.
- Future designs to prioritise the pedestrian.
- Connecting estates by removing walls increases



Cars & Parking

- Free parking at the Backlawn to reduce pressure on the centre
- Car free Sundays once a month during the summer.
- Parking to Public Space Trial for north gate street and market square developed with local stakeholders.



Upkeep

- Appoint a town manager to coordinate upkeep of properties and use of vacant windows.
- Organise a refurbishment festival for the town centre with a curator
- Develop a style guide for traditional shopfronts in the centre
- Use vacant shop windows for temporary exhibitions - Art Walk Athenry



Enterprise & Retail

- Define commercial capacity and ambitions within an urban development framework for the town centre
- Invite stakeholders and investors to participate in the development of a commercial strategy for the urban development framework.



Heritage & Tourism

- Develop a Town Wall Walk
- Improve links between train station and the heritage sites
- Develop an audio tour for visitors
- Build a Heritage themed Playground
- Make the ordinary extraordinary - events in the handball alley and promote hurling in Kenny Park
- Integrate Heritage into every new development to strengthen Athenry's Brand



Green Spaces

- Develop connectivity strategy for linking the suburbs to the schools
- Improve green spaces with local resident groups
- Link green space improvements to initiatives like all Ireland pollinator plan
- Make simple natural playgrounds
- Connect green spaces with an ecological corridor



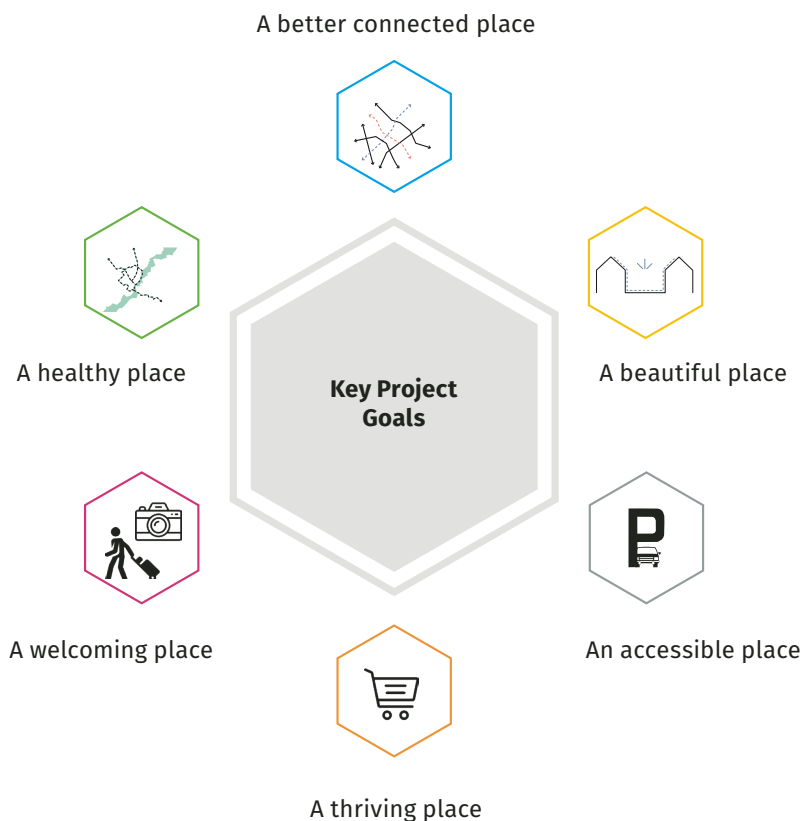
The Vision



THE VISION

A Community Framework

The consultation process has provided us with a clear set of goals that any future developments can be measured against. Each development can be judged on the basis of these criteria and how they respond to these challenges. For example new developments should strive to respond to as many criteria as possible in order to fulfil Athenry's potential. This is essential if we want to ensure avoiding the same mistakes that have been made in the past.



1. A better connected place

a fully connected town and hinterland with a safe pedestrian network.

2. A beautiful place

a town that embraces it's medieval heritage, unique character, streetscape and sense of place.

3. An accessible place

"the crossroads of connaught"

Ireland's best connected town, regional links with road and rail, a centre accessible by pedestrian, cyclist and motorist.

6. A healthy place

a great place to live for young and old with amenities for all ages.

4. A thriving place

a revitalised and vibrant town with a diversity of retail, bars, restaurants, cafes and community meeting spaces.

5. A welcoming place

a tourist hub providing an authentic local experience and an ideal base for exploring the west.

A Connected Town

Extending outwards from the centre a network of safe cycle and pedestrian routes connects the liner heritage park around the walls to the wider town. Routes through the suburban areas connect to the schools and this allows children to cycle safely to school reducing further the influence and impact of the car on the suburban areas of the town.



*Greenway
around the
town*



*Natural ad-
venture play-
ground*



*Wildflower
planting*



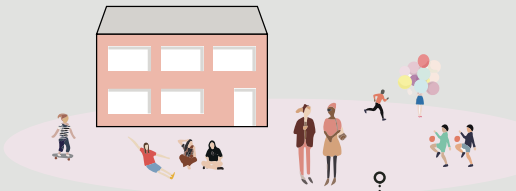
*Sustainable
drainage as a
playscape*

KEY PROJECTS

Develop the Markets



Youth Hub



Green link through town

Connecting Neighbourhoods

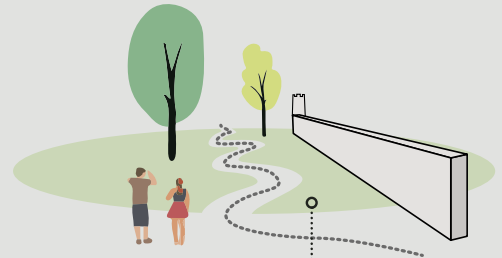




Car free square



Community Garden



Town Walls Walk



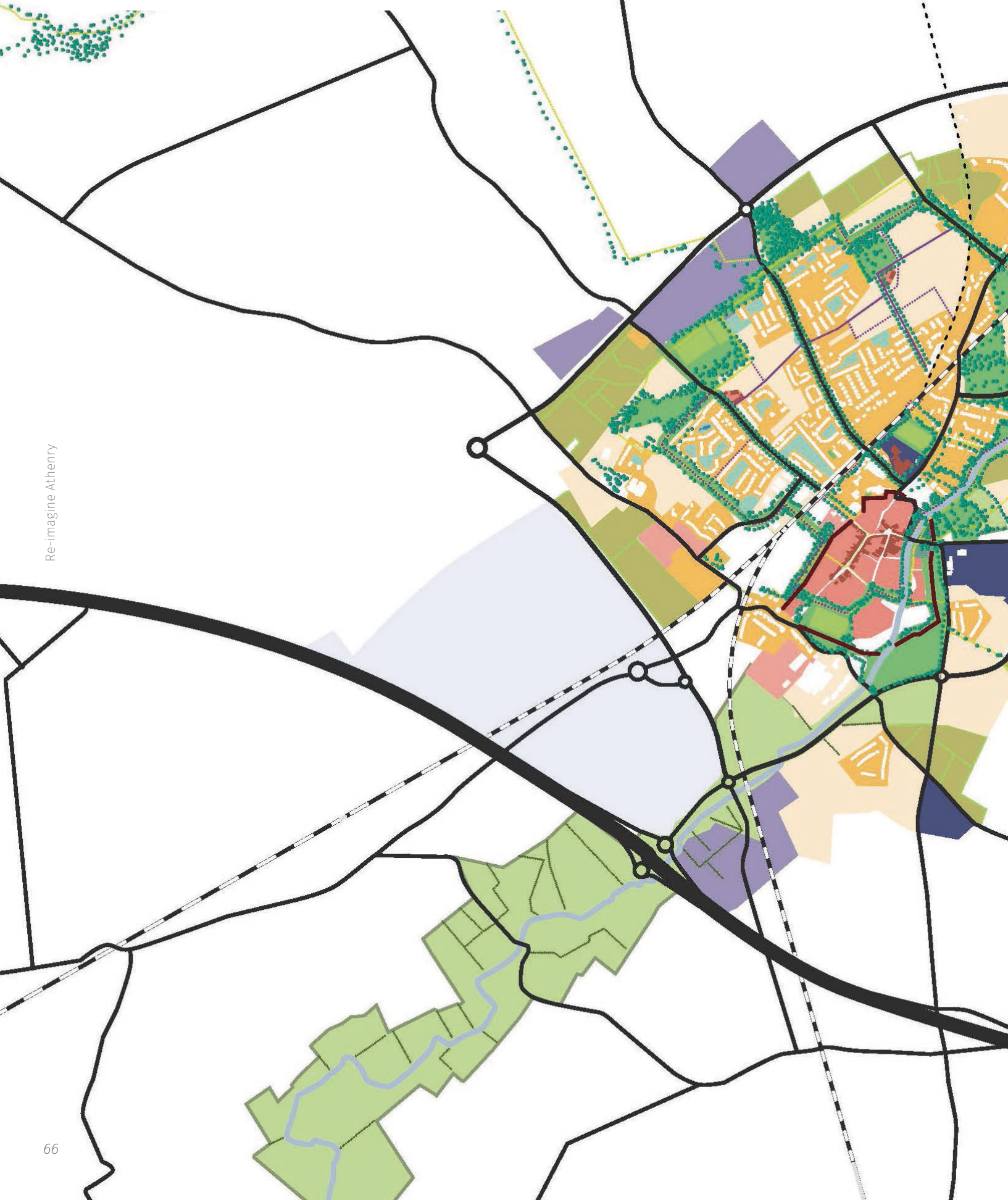
A special place for events

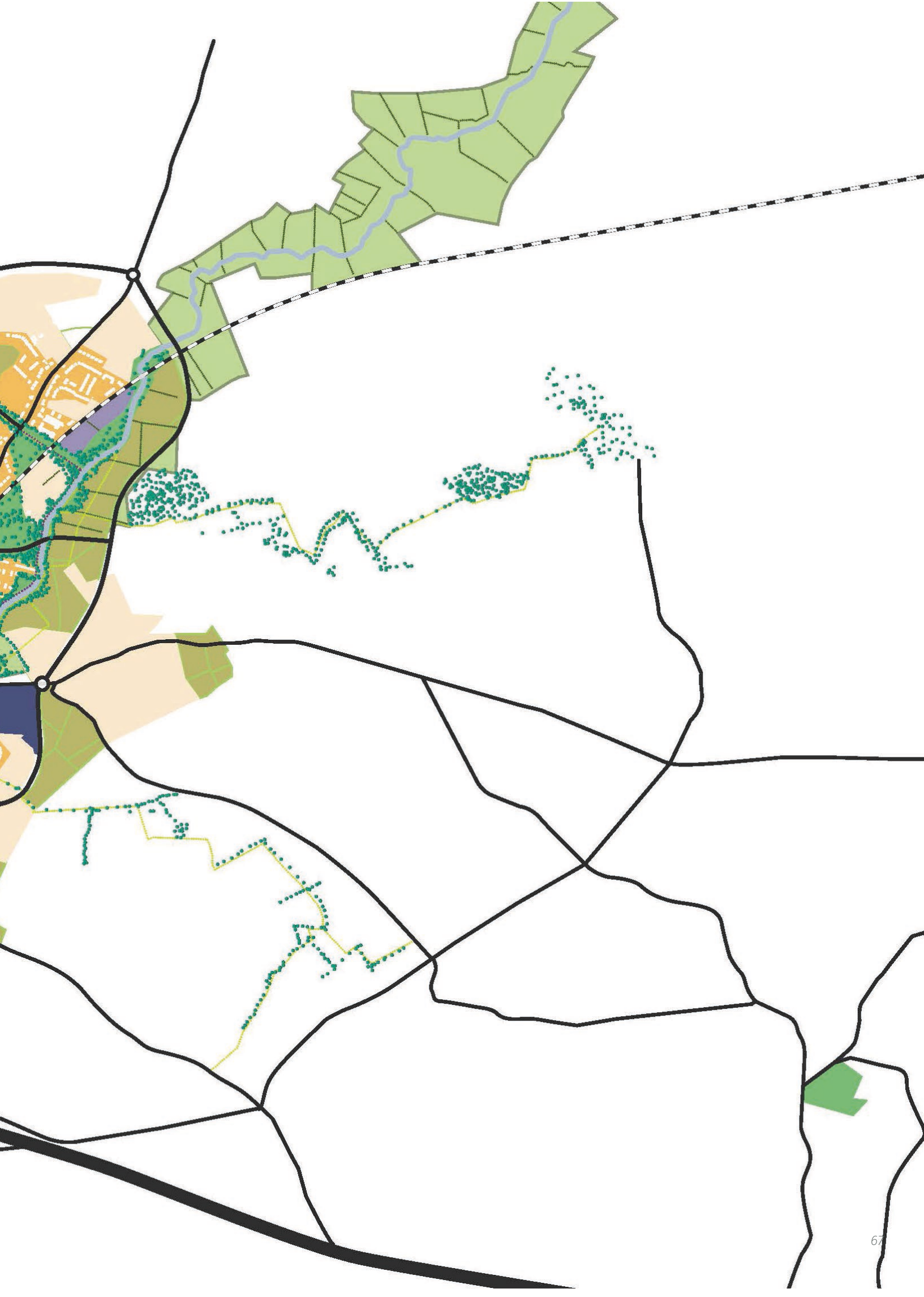


Community Meeting Point



**Moving from a Local Area Plan
towards an integrated future
vision for the whole town.**

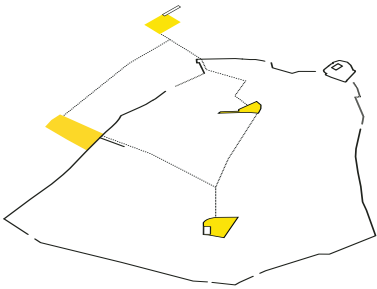




TOWN CENTRE VISION

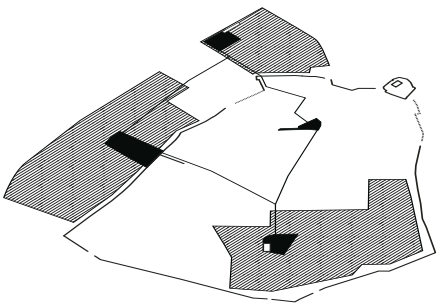
4 squares

The Vision takes the central element of Athenrys existing urban form; the square. and uses this as the central organising point for future developments. An upgraded market square is linked to three new squares each of which respond to their context. Station Square welcomes visitors to Athenry, a square in Bradys field links with the wall and monumental trees and finally Athenry House frames a square which overlooks the Clarin River park lands.



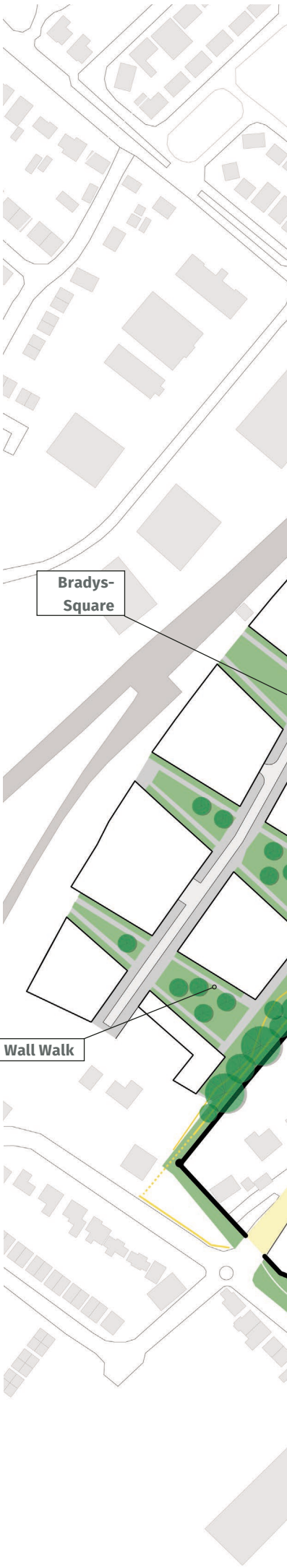
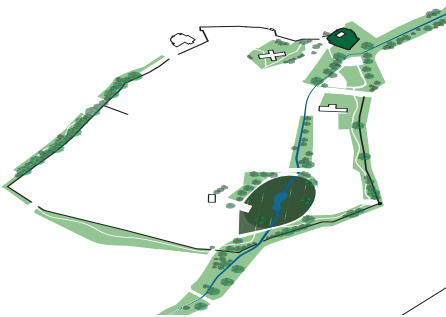
3 Neighbourhoods

The three new squares form the centre point for three new neighbourhood developments. These neighbourhoods provide a great opportunity for strengthening the town centre and creating a compact mixed use urban environment. Our vision plan illustrates how these neighbourhoods could be formed utilising Athenrys best assets; its built heritage, river landscape and monumental treelines.



1 Linear Park

Finally a linear looped park connects everything. The park runs alongside the town walls, linking the heritage sites. An accessible civic amenity for both residents and tourists. Along the route a number of special moments are created that respond to the character of the walls, the surrounding landscapes and the town itself.





Station
Square

Station
Quarter

Car Free
Square

Family
Housing
Plots

View to
Tower

Clarin River Wetlands

Clarin River Walk

Athenry House Square

Integrating Heritage to Create Better Public Spaces!

Improvements to the traffic circulation and parking system in the centre also brings the opportunity to integrate the history of the town into every aspect of the design of the public realm.

Clear demarcation of the town centre through materialisation brings a sense of continuity to the urban realm and the village feel of Athenry.

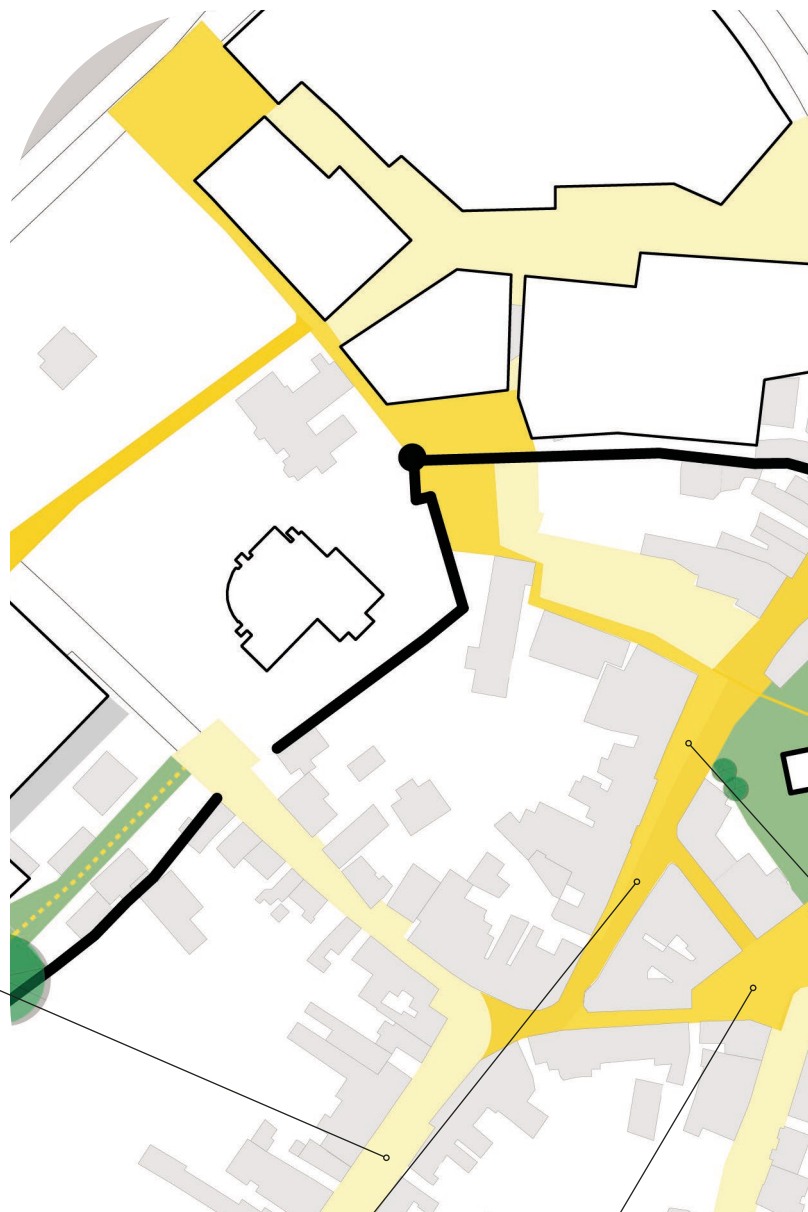
Re-imagine Athenry



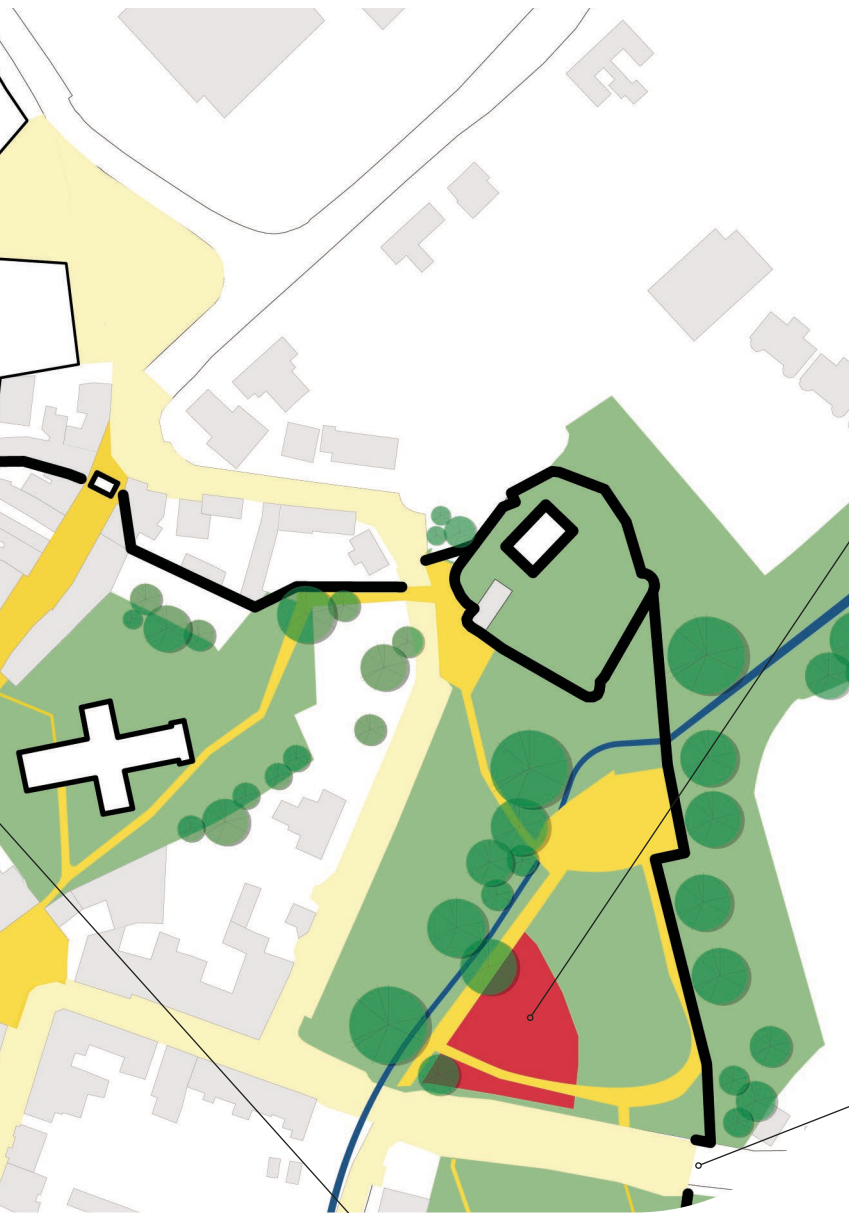
*Old Church Street on controlling the car and making a pedestrian friendly town.
Reference Clonakilty*



*North Gate Street as a shared space with clearly defined spaces for cars and pedestrians.
Reference Youghal*



*Bronze cast of medieval town structure in town square.
Reference: Waterford*



Markings in public space to highlight location of medieval walls.
Reference Kilkenny



Markings in public space to highlight location of medieval walls.
Reference Kilkenny



Opportunities for seating in public space along North Gate Street to make a more age and pedestrian friendly town.
Reference Clonakilty

The Centre Davis Street and Market Square

A transformation of the existing town centre responds simultaneously to the biggest issues raised in the consultation; the quality of the pedestrian environment, the appearance of the town, controlling the car and improving the retail and tourist experience can all be addressed by developing an integrated strategy for town centre improvements.

Here we illustrate what form a transformation of Davis Street and Market Square could take if they were developed into a more pedestrian friendly area. Improved paving, freshly painted buildings and removal of street clutter helps to restore the visual coherence of the public realm. The private car is given less priority however north gate street remains accessible for motorists.

In a medieval town centres such as athenry the car should be seen as a guest and not allowed to dominate the social and visual environmant. The standard traffic engineering of road signage and markings needs a different approach that respects the traditional heritage context.

*"A safe place to
wonderful if ch
in the centre o
community wit
and falling off*



...e to walk, it would be
...f children could walk
...e of town and meet the
...without the fear of traffic
...off the narrow footpaths



The Centre Davis Street and Market Square

What is the best possible environment that can be created in the centre of Athenry? When we asked this question during the consultations a car free Market Square was seen by many as the biggest transformative change that can happen to the town.

Such an intervention requires a phased approach and a careful traffic management plan for the town centre. It is also an intervention that can be trialled and tested with limited means with planters and movable seating. Before being implemented in a longer term fashion.

Social public places for people to linger and meet form the heart of the best urban areas. Here we illustrate what such a place could be like in the centre of Athenry.



“The Square would be developed to encourage ‘street culture’ eg; benches and market services, water and electrics, Tourist friendly signage, a Square you want to spend time in with benches, a public toilet, occupied shops, compliant prettier legal shop signage

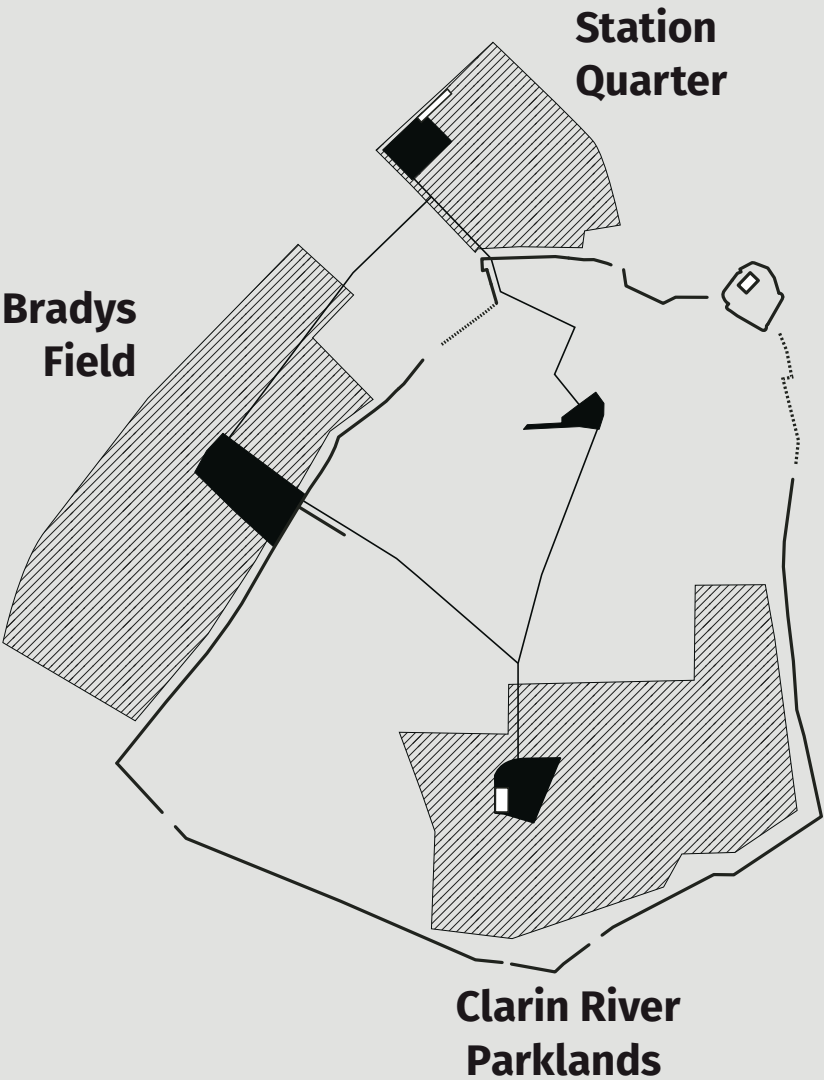




THREE NEIGHBOURHOODS

Alongside Athenrys existing qualities like its built heritage, transport links and family friendly scale. It has tremendous development potential inside and adjacent to the historic town centre. These sites need to be developed carefully in order to realise their full potential while becoming seamlessly integrated with the existing medieval structure of Athenry.

Here we provide an illustrative outline framework to highlight the potentials we find within each location.



STATION QUARTER

A large site with existing schools at adjacent to the train station. The presentation college has recently moved from this location to a new school at the edge of town. The area is currently zoned for community facilities in the LAP, however this zoning may not allow the location to reach its full potential, with its central location directly connected to the rail station.

Spatially an opportunity exists to form a **new station square** that creates a welcoming entrance to the town for rail passengers. From the station square a new pedestrian extends to connect with the town walls, across North Gate Street to the heritage centre and onwards to market square.



Potential built carparking serving station and town centre

Potential location for elderly lifetime community housing

Station Square town entrance

New Retail and Office street

Improved pedestrian link to town centre and heritage sites from station

CLARIN RIVER PARKLANDS

A large area located inside the town walls with great potential for bringing transformative change for Athenry town Centre. The area is zoned for town centre functions in the Local Area Plan. Its has incredible natural landscape, ecological and heritage attributes which provide a rich context for future development.

An illustrative public space framework indicates how these features can give shape to future development plots. The floodplain of the Clarin River gives shape to a ecological wetland park at the centre of the plan. The park is overlooked on three sides by new developments, with mix of housing, leisure and recreational buildings. Athenry House is fronted by a generous square that overlooks the parklands. On the southernside the monumental trees along the town wall form a border to the park.



Re-imagine Athenry

Weaving its way around the edge of the site is the town wall linear park which connects to the wider context and heritage sites.



BRADYS FIELD

A large development area located between the rail line and western wall. A large stand of mature trees forms an impressive green boundary to the site. The site is zoned for enterprise but due to its, size central location and landscape features we recommend the inclusion of high density residential development. A series of high quality large 3 story family townhouses which can benefit from the proximity to the centre, new schools and the high quality landscape features already found at the location.

Below we outline a framework for how such a development could take shape. Commercial and enterprise developments sit at the entrance to the site. The housing is situated in rows where the parking is organised in the centre of the development plot, the front doors open onto large green areas which link to the historic context of the town wall.

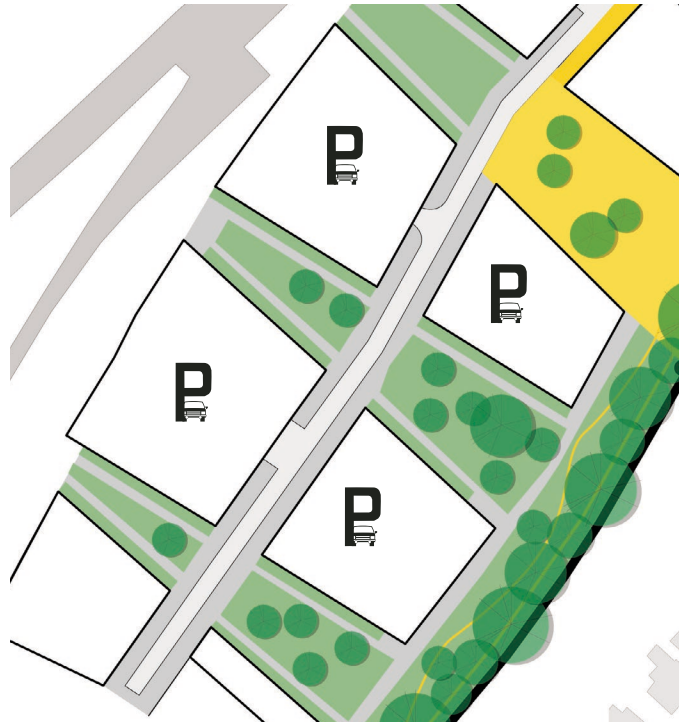
Development plots are angled to gain views towards the wall and reduce noise impact from the railway line.



Neighbourhood Development Principles

Control The Car

Define a generous plot size for the high density housing that allows residents to park in the centre of the plots. Front doors then open onto a large car free public green space, linked to the linear park.



Re-imagine Athenry

Family Housing

High density High Quality Family housing connected with the town centre, railway and local green spaces provides the basis for sustainable urban development and interesting vibrant towns.

Reference: Braksma Roos Housing in Zwolle

Reference below of such a neighbourhood layout in Sion Rijswijk near Delft in The Netherlands.





Integrate neighbourhoods with the natural landscape

The development locations already have incredible natural landscape, biodiversity and heritage features, it is essential that future developments retain these assets and makes them accessible for all residents of Athenry.

These features will in turn bring value to any future development and already provide the basis for creating great neighbourhoods.



One Linear Park

A linear looped park running alongside the town walls, the park town wall walk can link the existing heritage sites, new neighbourhoods and knit together the town centre. Providing an amenity for both residents and tourists alike. There is a possibility to create a number of special moments along the route that respond to the character of the walls, the surrounding landscapes and the town itself.



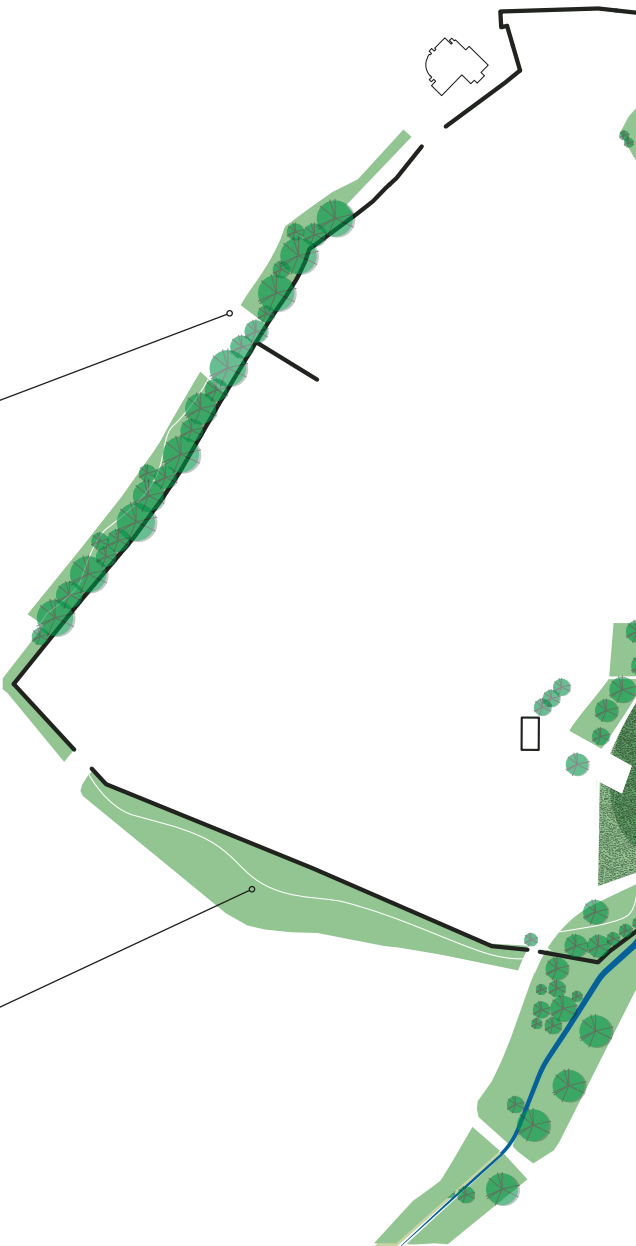
Re-imagine Athenry



Opportunities to create more urban spaces along the wall that connect the heritage with potential new developments.



Wildflower gardens along the wall to improve biodiversity and create a seasonal landscape.



Landmark playground integrated with the heritage of the town



Play elements can be designed sensitively so as to maintain the identity of the park landscape.



Pathways can be designed to respond to the form of the wall



A new bridge crossing the Clarin River leading towards a new square at the spittle gate entrance.



IN 2040 ATHENRY WILL HAVE...



A Station Square as a welcoming entry to the town



A Car Free Market Square as the social centre of the town



A Square at Athenry House overlooking the Park

Central neighbourhoods with High quality family housing integrated with and complementing the traditional medieval urban fabric





A Pedestrian friendly centre



A Landmark playground telling the history and heritage of the town



New streets linking with the old landmarks



Retained its rich biodiverse riverside embankments





Reimagine Athens