

SEPTEMBER 2023



# ABBEYFEALE

DRAFT

## TOWN CENTRE FIRST PLAN

# CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION .....	03
2. POLICY CONTEXT .....	07
3. UNDERSTANDING ABBEYFEALE .....	15
4. CONSULTATION APPROACH .....	30
5. VISION AND KEY PRINCIPLES .....	38
6. FRAMEWORK PLAN .....	42
7. DELIVERY OF THE PLAN .....	84

1.

# INTRODUCTION



The Government launched the Town Centre First Policy in February 2022, it is a new initiative, which seeks to revive town centres, it aims to create centres that function as viable, vibrant and attractive locations for people to live, work and visit, while also functioning as the service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community.

The policy recognises that Irish towns are facing significant challenges, having experienced continued decline for many years, with high levels of vacancy and dereliction and a general lack of direction. However, many of these towns possess lots of opportunities for rejuvenation which requires a coordinated and comprehensive response, in order to address the decline.

The Town Centre First policy recognises that every town is unique, and accordingly requires a tailored response to address the issues that exists. It lays the foundation for each town to develop their own plan – led approach to revival. This will be expressed through a tailored Town Centre First Plan, which is underpinned with a clear diagnosis of the local strengths and challenges.

Abbeyfeale has been selected as one of first towns in Ireland to be awarded funding to prepare a Town Centre First Plan, along with 25 other towns across the country, which will undergo this process. Abbeyfeale is a typical Irish market town centre, dominated by the Limerick to Kerry National Road (N21) running through the town, the streets lined with many two to three-storey buildings and at the heart of the town, the Town Square, once the economic hub of the town, where markets were held, business was transacted and people gathered socially from the rural hinterland. However, like many Irish towns, the town centre has suffered decline in



recent years, with the closure of many independent retailers, loss of local residents, growth of online shopping, increased business rates, congestion in the town centre and a general shift away from town centre business to remote working. The Town Centre First Plan introduces a fresh approach to the development of towns across Ireland, empowering local communities and businesses to shape the future of their own towns. The primary goal of this strategy document is to address the social, economic, cultural, and environmental issues emerging in Abbeyfeale and integrate them into a comprehensive regeneration plan to make the town centre vibrant again.

This Town Centre First Plan will be driven by the local community and businesses as part of a Town Team who will be supported by Town Regeneration Officer and technical expertise within the Local Authority. The Town Centre First Policy is underpinned by existing funding streams spread across a number of Government schemes, which will provide the basis for the town to deliver the objectives/projects set out in this Plan.

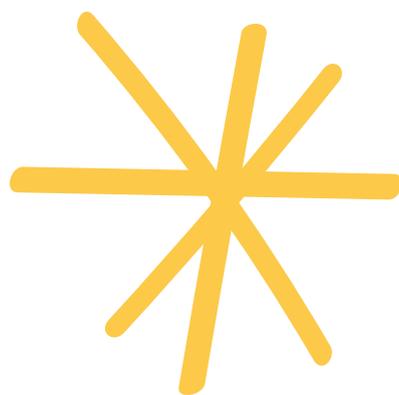
This strategy document outlines a range of actionable initiatives that align with the planning framework established in the Draft Abbeyfeale Local Area Plan 2023 – 2029, which is currently being prepared by Limerick City and County Council. These proposals can be implemented in a phased manner, paving the way for future funding and investment opportunities that can support the rejuvenation of Abbeyfeale.

It should be noted that the Town Centre First Plan does not propose to alter existing land use zonings or to rezone lands in Abbeyfeale.

All planning policies and objectives relating to Abbeyfeale are set out in the Limerick Development Plan 2022 – 2028, the Abbeyfeale Local Area Plan 2014 – 2020 (as extended) and the Draft Abbeyfeale Local Area Plan 2023 – 2029.

A Town Team comprising of representatives of local residents, business people, community/voluntary groups and other stakeholders with the support of the Local Authority has been established and have been informing the preparation of this Plan and will follow through on the delivery of the all-important priority actions identified to make their area a better place to live, work and visit.

The ambition of the Town Centre First Plan is to revive Abbeyfeale and make it a modern market town, with an appropriate mix of retail, leisure, cultural, commercial, residential and social activity. The town will again become a vibrant place, which celebrates its past and embraces its future.



2.

# POLICY CONTEXT



The EU Urban Agenda represents a new multi-level working method promoting cooperation between Member States, Cities, the European Commission and other stakeholders in order to stimulate growth, liveability and innovation in the Cities of Europe and to identify and successfully tackle social challenges.

The Territorial Agenda is a strategic policy document for Europe, its regions and communities. It provides a framework for action towards territorial cohesion and a future for all places in Europe. The EU Sustainable and Smart Mobility Policy is also relevant in the context of urban and inter-urban mobility.

One particularly important feature of the European approach to urban development is its “integrated place-based approach” to policy making which assumes that the geographical context, with its unique spatial, social, cultural and institutional characteristics, thoroughly matters. A place-based policy is tailored to the context of a territory and is based on the effective use of its development potential. This place-based approach is particularly well suited to Town Centre First. The Town Centre First Plan is an evidence based non-statutory plan, for Abbeyfeale set in the context of the national, regional and local planning policy and sets out a place based approach to addressing the issues that existing in Abbeyfeale. The following section outlines the key policy documents, which have shaped the Town Centre First Plan for Abbeyfeale.

## Sustainable Development Goals

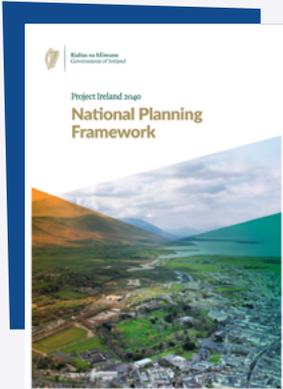
Ireland is a signatory to the United Nations Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) as set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Transforming our World. The 17 no. SDGs reflect economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and set a framework for national level policies and agendas to 2030, higher level plans, such as the National Planning Framework, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, Limerick Development Plan 2022 – 2028 and the Draft Abbeyfeale Local Area Plan 2023 – 2029 have been informed by the Goals and these principles have been used to inform the preparation of the Town Centre First Plan for Abbeyfeale.

### SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



## National Policy Context

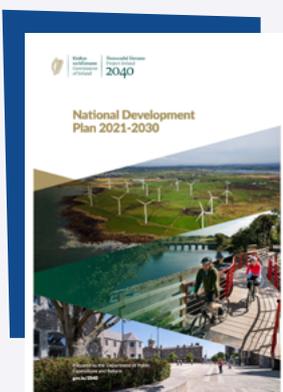
There is a strong national policy framework in place, which supports the Town Centre First approach, from the overarching aspect of Project Ireland 2040, through to specific policies on compact growth, town centre living climate action, housing and rural development.



### **Project Ireland 2040 – National Planning Framework (NPF)**

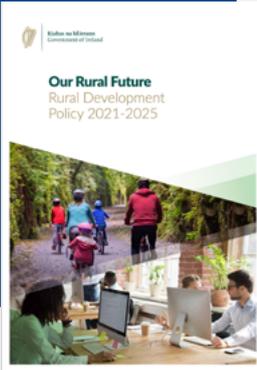
Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework (NPF) is a strategic framework which seeks to guide public and private investment, and to protect and enhance the environment. It sets out a spatial planning hierarchy of urban centres, which are in line for significant population and economic growth. It also sets out the key principles that will guide future development across the country, addressing issues such as, compact growth, making stronger urban places, creating strong and vibrant communities, and ensuring a healthy, liveable environment.

The Town Centre First Plan for Abbeyfeale accords with a number of the National Strategic Outcomes, which are critical to the delivery of the NPF, including NSO 1 – Compact Growth, NSO 2 – Enhanced Regional accessibility, NSO 3 – Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities NSO 4 – Sustainable Mobility, NSO 5 – A Strong Economy supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills, NSO 7 – Enhanced Amenity and Heritage, NSO 8 – Transition to a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society, NSO 9 – Sustainable Management of Water, Waste and other Environmental Resources and Climate Resilient Society and Climate Resilient Society and NSO 10 – Access to Quality Childcare, Education and Health Services.



### **Project Ireland 2040 – National Development Plan (NDP)**

Aligned with the NPF, the National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2030 sets out the government's overarching investment strategy and budget for that period, enabling delivery of the National Strategic Outcomes and priorities set out in the National Planning Framework. This significant funding source supports both urban regeneration and rural rejuvenation through €3 billion Regeneration and Development Funds. The NDP seeks to ensure that well targeted public capital investment is distributed appropriately, which can have a transformative impact on employment opportunities, economic development and regional growth.



### **Our Rural Future – Rural Development Policy 2021 – 2025**

This policy represents the Irish Government’s blueprint for the post-COVID recovery and development of rural Ireland. It provides the framework to achieve the vision of transforming the quality of life and opportunities for people living in rural areas.

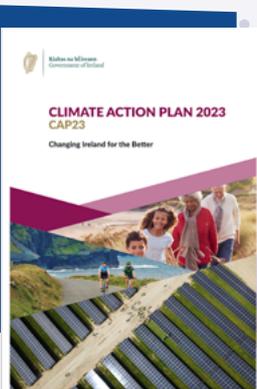
Our Rural Future contains a number of key commitments that deliver on the aim to support the regeneration, repopulation and development of rural towns and villages to contribute to local and national economic recovery, and to enable people to live and work in a high quality environment.



### **Town Centre First – A Policy Approach for Irish Towns**

The Town Centre First Policy seeks to support and complement existing policy documents and the key objective of this policy is to create town centres that function as viable, vibrant and attractive locations for people to live, work and visit, while also functioning as the service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community.

The policy lays the foundation for towns to develop their own plan, which paves the way to rejuvenate their town centre and sets the foundations for funding streams to deliver projects, which are crucial to this revival.

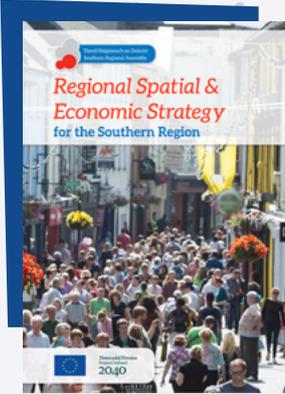


### **Climate Action Plan 2023 – Changing Ireland for the Better**

The Climate Action Plan sets out a roadmap for taking decisive action to half our emissions by 2030 and reach net zero no later than 2050, as committed to in the Programme for Government. Climate Action Plan 2023 sets out how Ireland can accelerate the actions that are required to respond to the climate crisis, putting climate solutions at the centre of Ireland’s social and economic development.

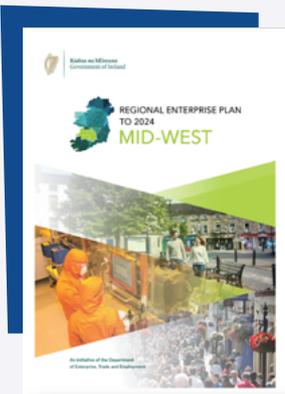
The Town Centre First policy, seeks to align with the policy framework of the Climate Action Plan, in terms of delivery of compact growth, enhanced connectivity and sustainable travel and enhanced quality of life through enhanced access to amenities and services.

## Regional Policy Context



### **Regional, Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region**

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) is a strategic plan which identifies regional assets, opportunities and pressures and provides appropriate policy responses in the form of Regional Policy Objectives. At this strategic level, it provides a framework for investment to better manage spatial planning and economic development to sustainably grow the region to 2031 and beyond. The principal statutory purpose of the RSES is to support the implementation of Project Ireland 2040 – National Planning Framework and National Development Plan 2021 – 2030 and the economic policies of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the development of the Region.



### **Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 – Mid – West**

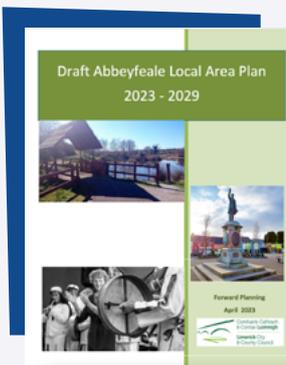
The Regional Enterprise Plan for the Mid-West seeks to drive enterprise growth in the region, it also support enterprise growth and job creation through collaborative initiatives. The Plan identifies five Strategic Objectives, with actions to: enable a Digital Economy and make the Mid-West Ireland’s leading Smart City-Region; achieve a step-change in progress toward a Low Carbon Economy in the region; continue to develop workforce skills and talent and enhance the attractiveness of living and working in the Mid-West; develop the Region’s capacity to deliver economic growth; and build a coordinated Regional messaging brand for consistent communication.

## Local Policy Context



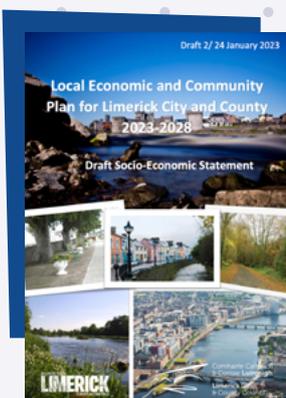
### **Limerick Development Plan 2022 – 2028**

The Limerick Development Plan 2022 – 2028 sets out the blueprint for the physical, socio-economic, and environmental development of Limerick over a six-year period up to 2028 and beyond and sets out the overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of Limerick over the plan period. The Plan has been formulated to comply with the requirements of the National Planning Framework and the Regional, Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region. The Plan aligns with the principles of compact growth, developing sustainable transport and capitalising on natural assets, enhancing connectivity and supporting a high quality of life for the residents of Limerick.



### **Abbeyfeale Local Area Plan 2014 – 2020 (as extended) and Draft Abbeyfeale Local Area Plan 2023 – 2029**

The Local Area Plan sets out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of Abbeyfeale, in the context of the Limerick Development Plan 2022 – 2028, the National Planning Framework and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region. The Local Area Plan sets the local framework for development, taking account of local issues. The Abbeyfeale Local Area Plan is currently under review and will be finalised by the end of 2023. The Town Centre First Plan and the Local Area Plan will align to support the development of Abbeyfeale.



### **The Limerick Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP)**

The Limerick Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) is a 6-year plan to support local economic and community development across Limerick. It is about working to achieve the sustainable development of communities in Limerick. Limerick City and County Council have commenced the review of the existing LECP and published the Draft Socio Economic Statement in January 2023. The LECP and the Local Community and Development Committee have an important role to play in co-ordinating and overseeing local and community development funding, which may be important in supporting the delivery of projects in Abbeyfeale.



## Abbeyfeale Community Enhancement Plan 2015

Abbeyfeale Community Development Association prepared the Abbeyfeale Community Enhancement Plan in 2015, with the assistance of Leader funding, the purpose of the Plan was to provide an outlet for the local community to express their vision of how they would like the town to develop. The underlying purpose of the Plan, was to promote community involvement in the development of the town and to allow the community members take ownership of the implementation process. The Plan provided an important basis for the formulation of the Town Centre First Plan and it sets out the ambitions of the local community, and also highlights the commitment of the local community, in seeking to develop the town of Abbeyfeale.



3.

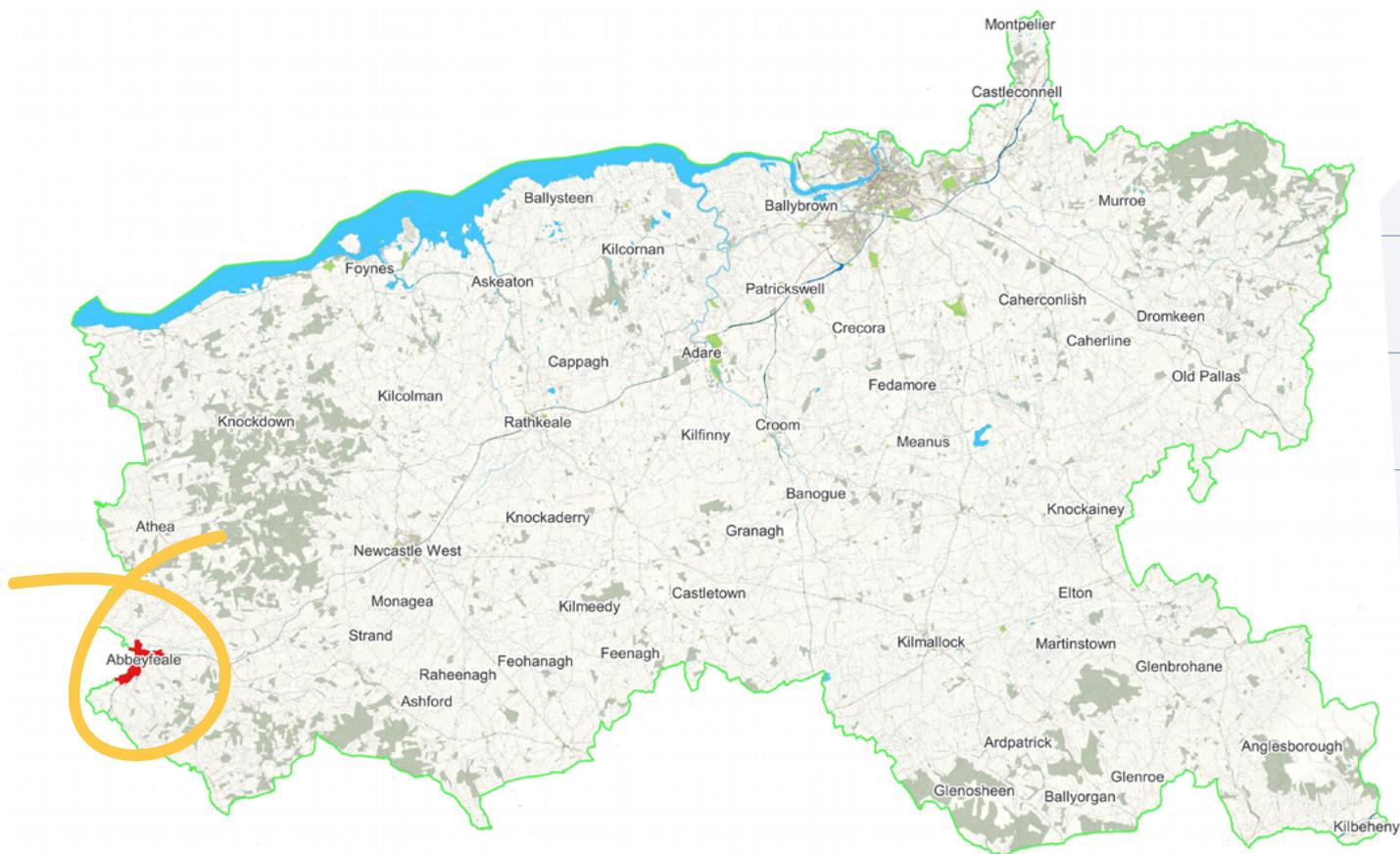
UNDERSTANDING

ABBEYFEALE



Abbeyfeale is located on the Limerick – Kerry border, on the N21 National Route, approximately 65km south-west of Limerick City.

The river basins of the River Feale and River Allaughan converge in the town, in the foothills of the Mullagherricks mountains. The N21 Limerick to Kerry national primary route – a key access route in the South West transverses the town centre along Main Street. The urban form of the town has developed in a linear nature extending along the National Road (N21) and Regional Road (R524).



Abbeyfeale location map

The Square, the River Feale and the town centre with its traditional streetscapes are important elements in the make-up of the town's physical appearance. Abbeyfeale is typical of an urban settlement located in a predominantly rural area. The town performs important civic and services function with a concentration of civic amenities including schools, a library and a church. These provide services not only for the resident population but also for a much wider rural based population. Abbeyfeale town centre stretches along the N21 and consists mainly of retail, commercial, public/institutional buildings and some residential dwellings. The Market Square forms the focal point of the town containing the statue of Fr. William Casey. A more loosely knit pattern of development, consisting mainly of housing, spreads further east and southwest. The majority of the town's building stock is of nineteenth and early twentieth century origin. The town displays a number of notable buildings, including: Leen's Hotel, the old convent and old cinema buildings on the Limerick approach to the town and many fine buildings in the centre of town.

## Historical Context

Abbeyfeale owes its name to a Cistercian Abbey founded in Abbeyfeale in 1188 and the adjoining River Feale. The Abbey, located north of the present-day town square, founded by Donal O'Brien, King of Limerick, King of Thomond and King of Munster, has since all but disappeared, and the only identifiable remnants is that of the lower section of the Gable end of an 18th - 19th Century Thatched Chapel, which is just inside the entrance gates to the Old Abbey Site. The settlement subsequently developed as an important market town, administrative civic centre and logistics centre for stage coaches and rail transport in the 1800's in West Limerick. The urban form of the settlement developed in a linear pattern along the present day N21 and the R524, built circa 1787 and 1836 respectively.

The railway line opened in 1880 and associated business and trade, such as pubs, a hotel, financial services and agri-business and trades operated in the town serving its agricultural hinterland. From the early 19th century, Abbeyfeale grew in importance and expanded as a market town and commercial centre. A new Market Square was laid out, with new streets leading off it, and the building trades found a new demand for their skills. This vibrant economy contributed to the unique Stucco architectural detail by Pat McAuliffe's found on many of Abbeyfeale's buildings, in the town centre. Pat McAuliffe (1846 - 1921) was a local Listowel plasterer and

builder, who used stucco or external plaster to decorate the facades of townhouses and shops in the town and surrounding area. The Market Square located in the heart of the town has historically played an important hub of economic and social activity for the residents of the area and continues to do so to date.



*...from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Abbeyfeale grew in importance and expanded as a market town and commercial centre...*

By the 20th century, the town continued to expand, with low density housing and businesses, such as the Mart and Kostal Manufacturing Plant, locating on the edge of the town. By the mid to late 20th century, housing estates developed in the town to accommodate a growing population, on the Clash Road, Killarney Road and on New Street.

The local community developed a substantial community park on the edge of the town on the Killarney Road by the early 21st century. The development of the Limerick Greenway to the north of Abbeyfeale, in recent years offers many opportunities for the town to grow a tourism base, in West Limerick.

## Settlement Socio-Economic Profile

The principal demographic trends for Abbeyfeale as set out in Census data 2016, which identifies the population of Abbeyfeale, as being 2,023, however, a recent release from the Central Statistics Office indicates that the population of Abbeyfeale has grown to 2,206 in 2022, growth of 8.3% over the period 2016 – 2022, unfortunately, in the absence of the full analysis of the Census 2022 data, there is a reliance on 2016 data for the purposes of the development of the socio economic profile. Some of the key challenges that are identified for Abbeyfeale, include a high dependency rate with an increasing young and older population in the town, low median income, a high unemployment rate and a lower educational attainment rate.



# Abbeyfeale Socio-Economic Profile

Census 2016

2,023

## Population Increase

Population in 2016 - an increase of 0.8% since 2011. During 2006-2016 the population increased by 4.3%.

14.88%

## High Unemployment Rate

Unemployment rate in 2016 which is considerably higher than the national average of 8.37% in 2016.

20.3%

## Increasing Young Population

Percentage of the population in the 0-14 age cohort in 2016. In 2011 18% of the population were in the 0-14 age cohort.

23.2%

## Employment by Sector

Percentage of the workforce employed in Manufacturing which accounts for the largest proportion employed, followed by Commerce and Trade at 22% and professional services at 18.4%

15%

## Increasing Older Population

Percentage of the population aged 65+ years. In 2011 13.55% of population were aged 65+

29,095

## Median Income

Percentage of the workforce Median gross household income, which is significantly lower than the national average of €45,256 and Limerick average of €41,824

17.2%

## Family Cycle

Percentage of families at the Pre-school and Early School cycles

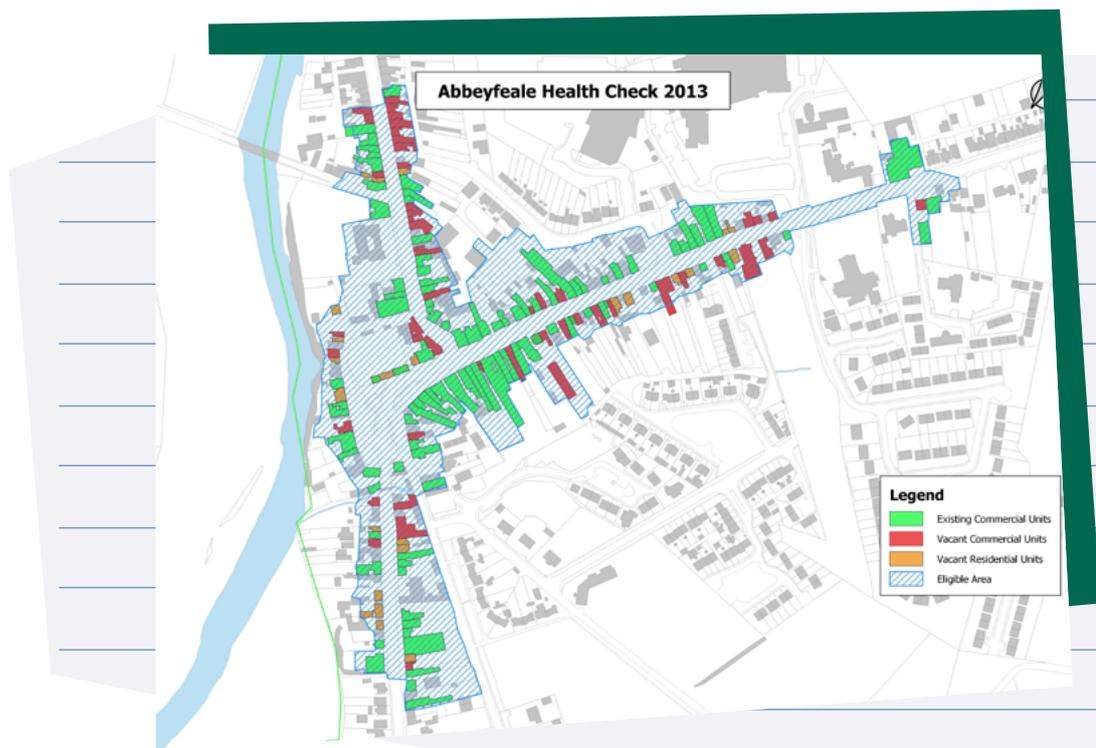
25.7%

## Educational Attainment

Percentage of population age 15 years and over with third level education attainment, which is lower than the Limerick average of 38.5%

## Town Centre Health Check

The Town Centre Health Check seeks to establish an innovative baseline, to help monitor and drive the development of the town centre going forward, it usually includes land use surveys to establish the overall vacancy rates in the town, business surveys to establish current levels of commercial activity and outlook, consumer opinion and attitudes and movement and accessibility assessments. Town Centre Health Checks are a means of assessing the vitality, resilience and performance of town centres over time. Limerick City and County Council have been monitoring vacancy in towns across the county, over the last 10 years. Vacancy in Abbeyfeale town centre was previously surveyed in 2013. The map below outlines a very simplistic overview of vacancy of both commercial (red properties) and residential properties (orange properties).



A follow up Town Centre Health Check was undertaken by the Council in August 2022 which identified that 30% of existing commercial/residential units are currently vacant, many of the buildings have remained vacant since 2013, and include prominent buildings such as the Old Cinema, Old Convent, many vacant public houses, old shops and dwelling houses, on the Main Street and New Street in particular.

According to GeoDirectory, Abbeyfeale was amongst 15 towns in Munster with the highest retail vacancy rates 30% in Q2, 2022, which correlates with the survey carried out by the Council. The retail and commercial sectors are pivotal to the revitalisation of the town, as they determine footfall, which in turn has positive spin-offs in terms of social interaction, cultural and civic activities, perceptions of safety, and improved visual appearance, community pride and place-making, and general ambiance of the town.



The below figure outlines a comparative analysis of the changes in both commercial and residential vacancy in Abbeyfeale between 2013 and 2022, while there are been limited change, the change has been in a positive direction, particularly in terms of addressing residential vacancy. The introduction of funding stream, such as Croí Conaithe will continue to assist in terms of addressing vacancy, as well as work undertaken by the Local Authority in terms of tackling dereliction and vacancy.

2013

2022

**28%** Residential  
Vacancy

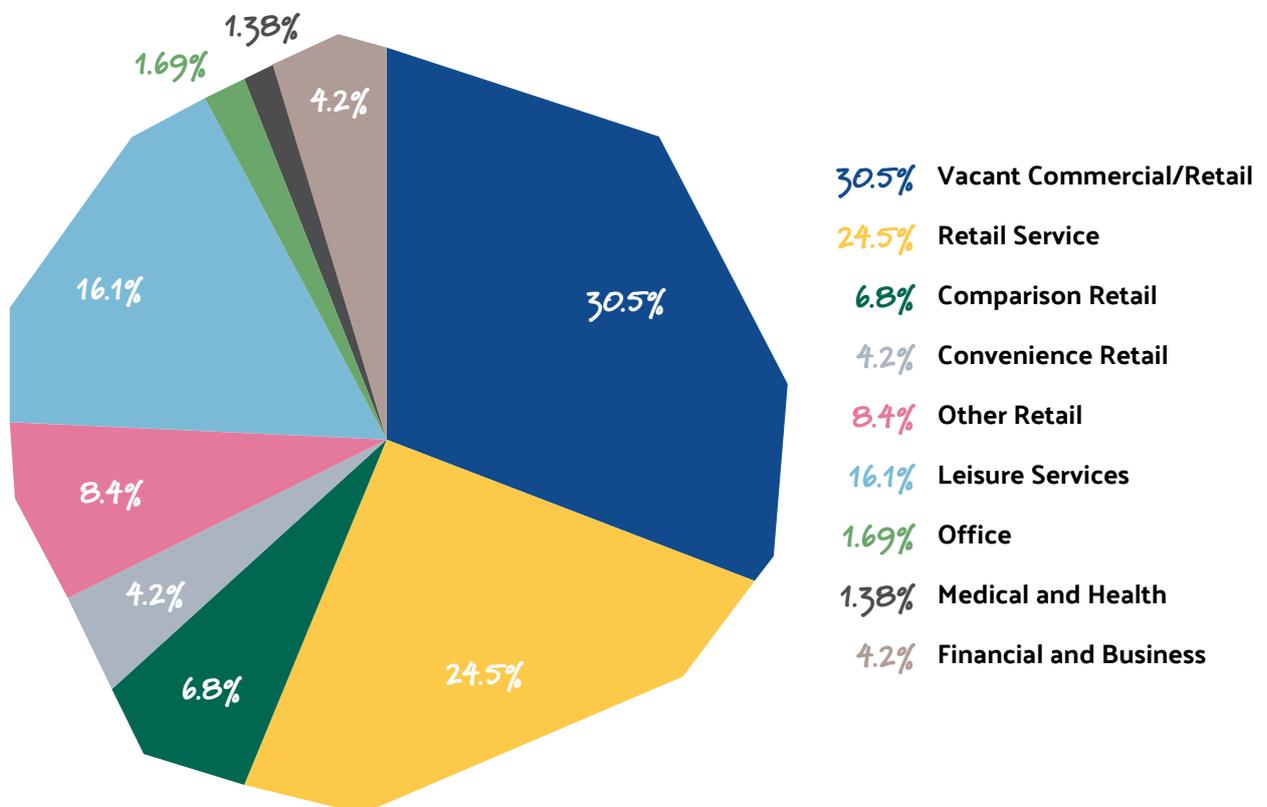
**31%** Commercial/  
Retail Vacancy

**Residential and  
Commercial/Retail  
Vacancy in Abbeyfeale  
Town Centre 2013-2022**

**23%** Residential  
Vacancy

**30%** Commercial/  
Retail Vacancy

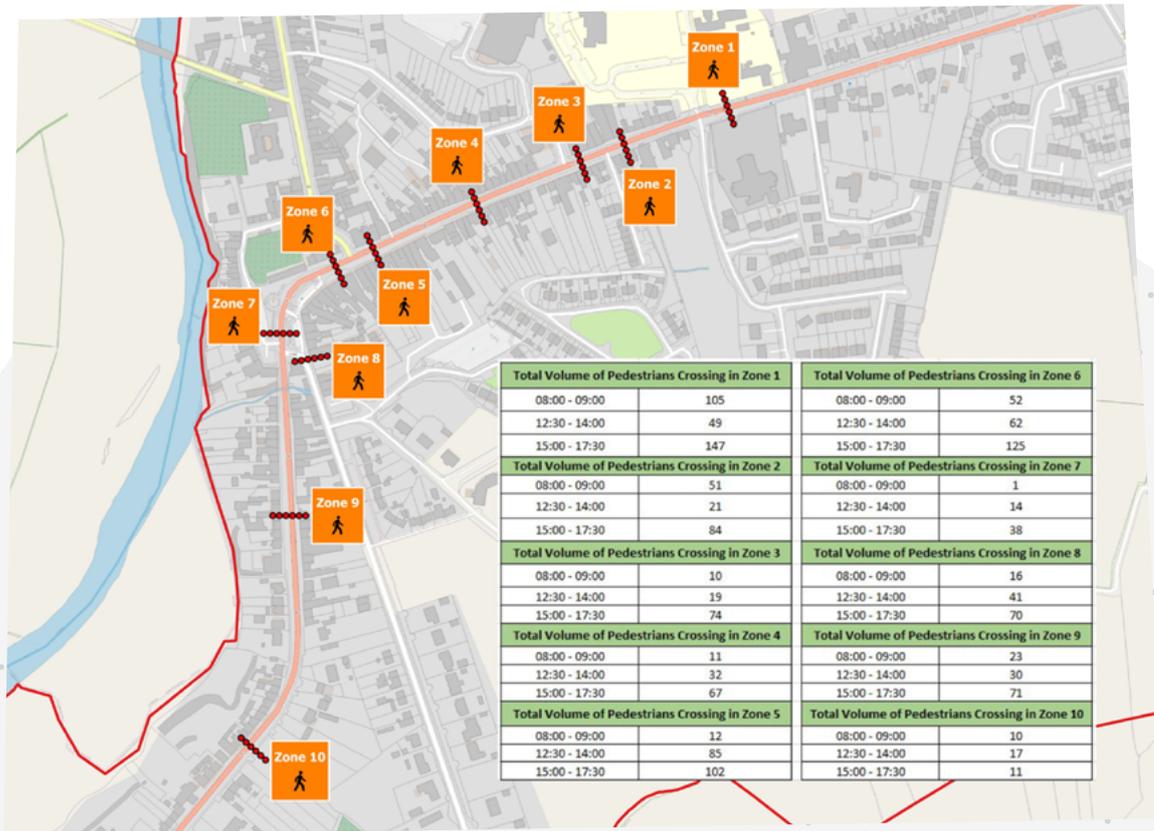
There are 82 businesses currently operating in the town centre, providing a wide array of services, including retail services, health and medical services and some office and manufacturing facilities. The figure below outlines the percentage breakdown of services by business type in Abbeyfeale.



Having regard to the location of Abbeyfeale on a major national artery, connecting Limerick and Kerry, the town is shaped by the significant traffic volumes that traverse the town on a daily basis, as part of the formulation of the Traffic Management Scheme, a number of traffic surveys were carried out in 2019 and 2021, the Annual Average Daily Traffic travelling through the town exceeds 10,000 vehicles, figures were lower in 2021, as a result of the Covid pandemic. These volumes have a significant impact in terms of shaping the town. Limerick City and County and Council in conjunction with Transport Infrastructure Ireland are progressing to planning, the development of a bypass for the town, which will have a transformation effect on the town and offer significant opportunity for enhanced public realm and quality of lives for the residents of the town.

Coupled with high volumes of traffic is pedestrian safety, there are currently two pedestrian crossing points in Abbeyfeale, however, as outlined above, the town is linear in nature and the locations of the pedestrian crossing do not always accord with the desire lines of the pedestrians. Pedestrian surveys were undertaken in April 2021 and highlight the desire lines in Abbeyfeale, the Traffic Management Scheme has taken account of these locations and incorporates a number of new pedestrian crossings to enhance pedestrian safety throughout the town.





Abbeyfeale Pedestrian Zones Map

## SCOT Analysis

The SCOT Analysis examines the Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, and Threats which currently exists in Abbeyfeale. This assessment identifies the crucial issues within the town and identifies opportunities to tackle these challenges. The findings from the SCOT analysis has played a vital role in shaping the overall development strategy for the Town Centre First Plan.

## → Strengths

- \* Strategic location on N21 National route between Limerick and Kerry with good connectivity via the regional road network to Glin, Listowel and the wider Shannon Estuary.
- \* High proportion of residents who live and work in the town (51%);
- \* Strong local business community with a diverse range of services and facilities located in the town centre;
- \* High quality educational facilities – primary, post-primary, post-leaving cert/vocational/technical training;
- \* Abbeyfeale offers excellent quality of life, affordable housing costs and is a welcoming and inclusive place;
- \* Broad range of community and voluntary groups, representing various interests in the town;
- \* Strong community spirit and volunteerism ethos, with a good record in delivery of many projects in the town, including The Town Park, the recently opened Tourist Office and Biodiversity Park. Community Groups such as Abbeyfeale Community Council, the Tidy Towns group and Town Park Committee are key to building the town;
- \* Rich historical built fabric and traditional streetscape, many buildings reflecting the unique architectural style of Pat Mc Auliffe;
- \* Location on the Limerick Greenway and the associated tourism potential;
- \* Abbeyfeale has capacity on a number of brownfield sites within the town centre for the delivery of compact and sustainable development;
- \* Natural assets offered by the Town Park, Feale and Allaughnán Rivers and the recently opened Biodiversity Park;
- \* Strong cultural and sporting traditions, including established festivals – such as Fleadh by the Feale and the Gary Mc Mahon Singing Weekend and community theatre space – The Glórach Theatre;
- \* Good existing outdoor sporting facilities, including GAA, soccer, rugby, cycling clubs, etc.;
- \* Abbeyfeale takes great pride in its place and has been successful over a number of years in winning awards in this regard, including, Limerick’s Going for Gold winners over a number of years, International Green Flag award for the Town Park and Today FM’s Sound Town competition;
- \* Strong market town – focused on traditional crafts and skills, with many skilled crafts people located in the town;
- \* Strong linear streetscape, with lots of potential for enticing the passer-by, to stop, shop and dwell.

## → Challenges

- \* Traffic congestion and heavy traffic through the town centre, which impacts on potential development opportunities and on the quality of life of the residents;
- \* High vacancy rate in town centre, both residential and commercial properties;
- \* Limited connectivity and permeability for both the pedestrian and cyclist within the town;
- \* Cluttered public realm in the town centre, dominated by car parking and signage;
- \* Limited availability of enterprise/workshop space;
- \* Lack of connectivity from the Limerick Greenway to Town Centre and to the Abbeyfeale Town Park;
- \* Lack of availability of high speed broadband in some locations in the town;
- \* Presence of the Lower River Shannon Special Area of Conservation designation;
- \* Lack of connected open space;
- \* High Unemployment rates, with a lack of employment opportunities and industry;
- \* Poor public realm and low quality civic open space in the town centre;
- \* Delivery of enhanced water and wastewater infrastructure;
- \* Attracting economic activity and building economic growth, to support phased growth;
- \* Addressing flood risk management;
- \* Transitioning to a low carbon economy;
- \* Enhancing the potential for blue – green infrastructure, while balancing environmental challenges;
- \* Delivery of high quality residential accommodation in the right places;
- \* Presence of anti-social behaviour;
- \* Lack of facilities for young people;
- \* Lack of a family resource centre and associated wrap around services;
- \* Lack of available childcare facilities, which in turn impacts on availability for employment.
- \* Limited tourist accommodation options for tourists passing through the town or using the Limerick Greenway – such as Camping and Hostel accommodation
- \* Lack of night time offering – restaurants, entertainment opportunities
- \* Lack of promotion and marketing of the tourism possibilities available in Abbeyfeale and the wider area

## → Opportunities

- \* Delivery of compact development, close to the town centre, which has potential for enhancing connectivity and a high quality of life for all its residents;
- \* Abbeyfeale Traffic Management Scheme - opportunity to provide multi-functional streets, which enhances the streets for all users, in particular pedestrian and cyclists;
- \* Abbeyfeale by-pass scheme, which will help ease traffic congestion in the town centre and enhance the quality of life for all residents;
- \* Increase sustainable transport mode share for short journeys through compact development and improving pedestrian and cycle network and other forms of micro mobility;
- \* Significant enhancement to public realm, particularly in The Square and along the Main Street - inclusion of outdoor seating, performance space, market areas etc.
- \* Shopfront incentive scheme to enhance appearance of the town centre retail offering;
- \* Potential for further tourism development in promoting local heritage and outdoor recreational opportunities - the Limerick Greenway and the heritage assets within the town;
- \* Enhanced amenities at the Abbeyfeale Town Park and better connectivity, to the town centre and the Limerick Greenway;
- \* Enhanced digital connectivity, remote work opportunities and the potential of the Workbase E-Hub in the town centre;
- \* Rural Regeneration and Development Funding to tackle vacancy and dereliction in the town, which is being pursued by the Local Authority.

## → Threats

- \* Comparatively low disposable income levels of residents living in the town;
- \* Potential for lack of co-operation from key landowners could negate the development of Opportunity Sites identified in this Plan;
- \* Comparatively high unemployment rates and low third level education attainment rate;
- \* Anti-social behaviour;
- \* Proximity to Newcastle West, Listowel and Castleisland, as competitors;
- \* Climate change impacts and associated weather events may present risk for Abbeyfeale, including flood risk, erosion, etc.
- \* Growth of online retail and changing consumer patterns may impact upon viability of town centre retailing, leading to further vacancy.
- \* Limited infrastructure to retain people in the area – such as swimming and recreational facilities
- \* Limited Incentives for people to open new businesses in the Town
- \* Lack of safe cycling infrastructure around the town and from the Limerick Greenway



Abbeyfeale's people are its greatest asset, the strong sense of belonging and being part of the community is very important to the town's inhabitants.

The Town Centre First approach seeks the delivery of a collaborative approach with local communities and the formulation of a Town Team to drive the delivery of this Plan. The Town Team in Abbeyfeale has been fundamental in the formulation of the Town Centre First Plan, its group is representative of a cross section of individuals who are interested in making Abbeyfeale more successful.

Public consultation is a fundamental cornerstone of the preparation of this Town Centre First Plan, this Plan has been prepared following extensive consultation with the local community in Abbeyfeale, which included: drop in open evenings, group meetings, invitations to make submissions, schools consultation with primary and secondary school children, consumer surveys, business surveys and a research field trip with the Town Team to Clonakilty.

The Plan has been informed by the aspirations of local community in Abbeyfeale and the Town Team in particular, the community want to see Abbeyfeale return to a thriving market town, which is busy, vibrant and full of opportunities in all sectors of society. The community recognise the challenges and threats that exist in terms of achieving their goals, however, are committed to the delivery of high quality projects that will make Abbeyfeale, a great place to work, live and visit.

A number of key themes were recurrent throughout the consultation including consensus on the need to tackle vacancy and dereliction, in particular significant buildings such as the Old Cinema and the Old Convent, the needs to reduce traffic congestion through the town and the impact that the constant flow of traffic is having on business and residents on the Main Street. There was widespread support for improvements to public realm throughout the town and the positive impact that it could have on the town centre, with mixed opinion in relation to car parking

– many strong views seeking the need for additional car parking on the Main Street and some views that car parking on the Main Street should be removed to allow for further public realm enhancements and free flow of traffic. There was positive feedback around the potential of the Limerick Greenway and the benefits that it is already bringing to the town and the potential for further enhancements through a safe link from the Greenway to the town centre.

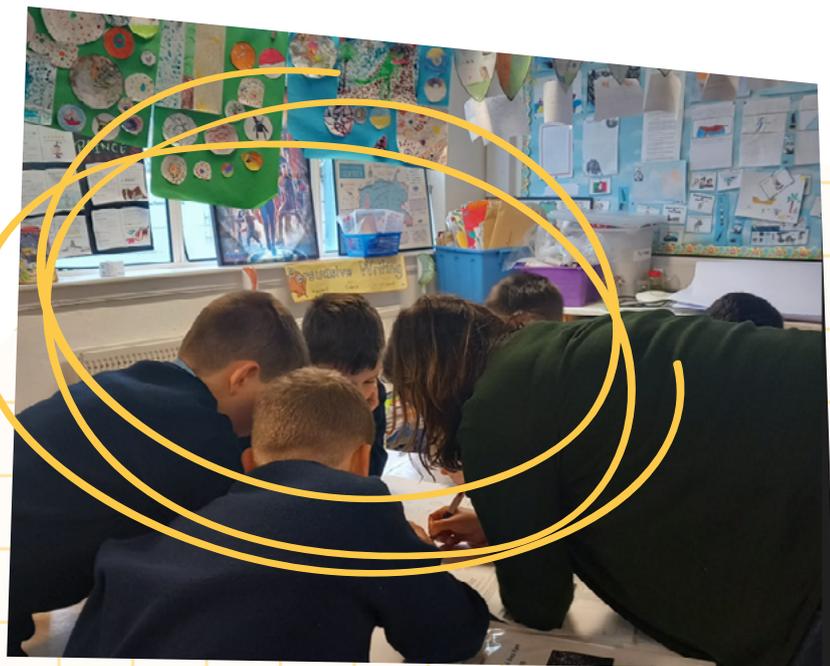
Consultation also identified a strong need for family supports to assist the diverse community that reside in Abbeyfeale, particularly a family resource centre, with the associated wrap around services they deliver, also a community purpose built crèche, as there is currently no childcare facility in Abbeyfeale to cater for the 0 – 3 age cohort in the town. Additional infrastructural needs were also identified, such as heritage centre, arts facility, more shops, better playing facilities and more employment opportunities, as key contributors to enhance the quality of life for residents in Abbeyfeale.

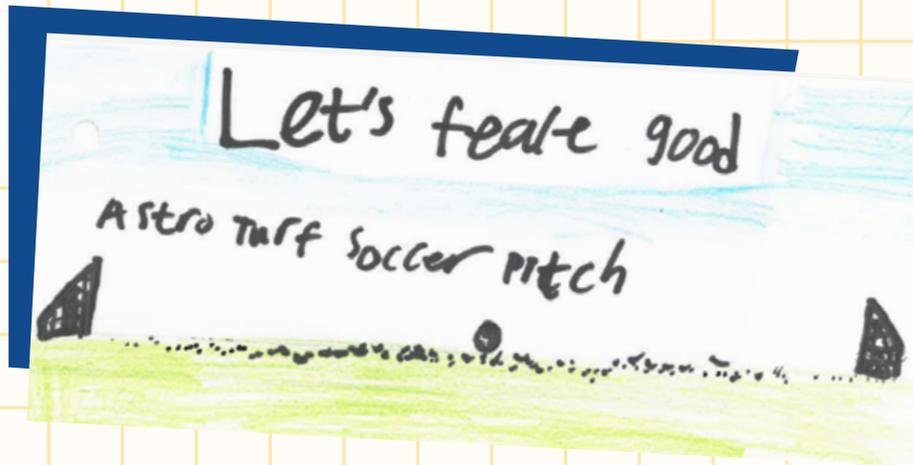


*...the community want to see Abbeyfeale return to a thriving market town, which is busy, vibrant and full of opportunities...*

*It is critically important to involve children and young people in the plan making process and to consult with them on the development of their town.*

Children have an important role to play in the building of a more sustainable communities and can greatly add to the plan making process, bringing their unique perspectives to the plan and offering solutions, that maybe overlooked by adults. As part of the research and analysis carried out, a school consultation programme was devised for both primary and secondary school pupils, which was developed to align with the school curriculum's. The primary school pupils raised many issues in terms of issues of traffic safety, lack of facilities, need for enhanced green areas and connected spaces, while secondary school students, identified issues around lack of employment opportunities, lack of quality housing, lack of retail opportunities and also a lack of youth facilities and supports. These issues have been considered in the formulation of the Plan.





## → Consumer Survey – Opinions and Statistics

Key Strengths identified include: Community Spirit, Limerick Greenway, Location and Availability of Services.

Concerns raised related to Vacancy and Dereliction, Poor Public Realm, Poor Broadband, Competition from neighbouring Towns like Listowel, Newcastle West and Killarney.

98% of people surveyed, all of whom lived within a maximum distance of 10km from Abbeyfeale, always drive to Abbeyfeale – some less than 1km from the town centre.

Facilities such as Family Resource Centre, Crèche, Youth Facilities and a Primary Health Care Centre were the key priorities for investment identified.

In terms of informing the Vision for Abbeyfeale – most consumers surveyed wanted a vision that included an Attractive Place to Live and Visit, Community Focused, Improved Infrastructure and Connectivity and a Greener Town.

## → Business Survey – Opinions and Statistics

95% of businesses surveyed felt that there is significant room for improvement in supporting existing business and to attract new businesses to Abbeyfeale.

Key Strengths in locating a business in Abbeyfeale include: Location, Low Rents, Accessibility and Affordable Housing.

Key Challenges identified for doing Business: Congestion, Lack of Parking, Lack of available workforce and Poor Broadband.

Top three priorities for Abbeyfeale: Enhanced car parking, tackling Vacancy and Dereliction and Enhanced Infrastructure.

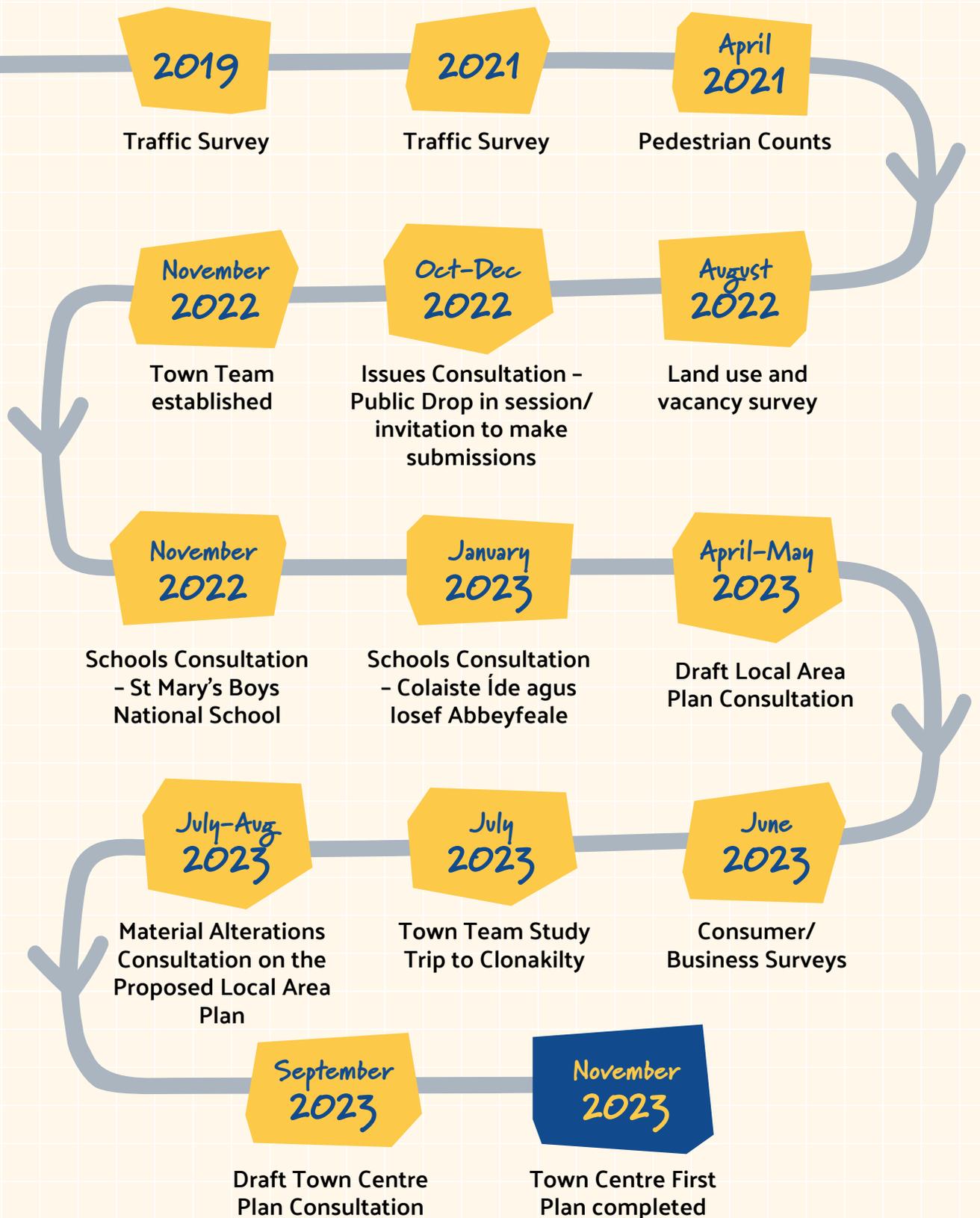
In terms of informing the Vision for Abbeyfeale – most businesses surveyed wanted a vision that included Improved infrastructure and Connectivity, an Attractive Place to Live and Visit and Community Focused.

# Issues

emerging throughout the public consultation



# Abbeyfeale Town Centre First Plan Timeline



5.

# VISION AND KEY OBJECTIVES



The preparation of this Town Centre First Plan for Abbeyfeale offers an opportunity to unlock the potential of the town, to drive the regeneration of the town and to capitalise on its key assets.



## VISION

*The vision for Abbeyfeale is to create a modern market town, with a distinctive identity, a place people can be proud of, with a strong visitor economy, and a high quality residential offer in the town centre.*

A transformed town centre, which is more vibrant, attractive and accessible, with available sustainable travel choices, enhanced biodiversity, a town which fosters community cooperation, is safer, more integrated, more prosperous, a place where people want to live, work and visit, place.

The strategic vision for Abbeyfeale aligns with its designation as a Level 3 settlement in the Limerick Development Plan 2022 – 2028. This entails facilitating population growth through well-designed residential developments that offer a variety of housing choices and tenures, alongside educational and employment opportunities. The vision also emphasises sustainable mobility options, a revitalised retail and commercial core in the town centre, improved community infrastructure, enhanced active lifestyles, recreational choices, and the preservation of Abbeyfeale's unique heritage assets. The future development of Abbeyfeale will prioritise low carbon practices, sustainability, and cohesive spatial growth.

The Town Centre First Strategy aims to establish a thriving, attractive, and functional town centre that serves as a hub for residents, workers, and visitors. It aspires to address vacancy, tackle dereliction, and inject new vitality into the town centre. The strategy encompasses a range of supportive measures and tools designed to assist local businesses and the community in realising the vision for the area.

# KEY OBJECTIVES

Transform the urban environment, to create spaces and places in Abbeyfeale, that encourages people to live, work and visit.

Embrace the rich heritage that exists in Abbeyfeale and seek to safeguard this heritage through the revitalisation of historic buildings, throughout the town.

Deliver a sustainable transport network throughout the town, with enhanced traffic management regime, high quality public realm, which supports sustainable mobility and connectivity throughout the town.

Re-image Abbeyfeale, through the repopulation of the town centre, connecting local neighbourhoods and green spaces, enhancing biodiversity and quality of life for all residents.

Improve the quality and diversity of Abbeyfeale's business offering supporting an increase in footfall and dwell time within the town centre.

Support development that realises the full potential of Abbeyfeale town centre, as a key economic driver in Limerick.

Enhance Abbeyfeale's visitor economy.

Promote an enhanced town centre residential offer.

Attract new investment into Abbeyfeale town.

Link the town centre to local neighbourhoods through high quality public realm, green infrastructure and enhanced pedestrian and cycle networks.

Provide increased opportunities for independent businesses to develop and expand in the town centre.

Capitalise on Abbeyfeale's location and develop synergies with neighbouring towns, such as Listowel, Newcastle West and Castleisland, seek to cluster business and create connections to support business growth.

6.

# FRAMEWORK PLAN



The Town Centre First policy sets out that the process of analysis and appraisal, which will set the basic building blocks for a responsive Town Centre First Plan -

- a plan that provides a holistic response that builds upon existing assets, directly addresses pressing issues and identifies future challenges. This plan is shaped around the delivery of 10 high level priority actions, followed by a list of initiatives identified to realise each of the priority actions. The Plan seeks to address the key pressing issues, which arose throughout the public consultation and identify measures, which attempt to alleviate concerns raised.

This Plan seeks to complement the Local Area Plan for Abbeyfeale, which is currently being prepared and also aligns with national and regional policy, which seeks to create compact, vibrant town centres across the country that complement each other rather than compete. Abbeyfeale is strategically located, close to large centres, such as Listowel, Castleisland, and Newcastle West, regional planning policy recognises the synergies that these centres have and seeks to capitalise on the potential of developing strong business and community relationships to strengthen the wider region which is supported in the Local Area Plan and this Plan, also seeks to strengthen these links, through clustering of new business opportunities, collaborating on tourism initiatives or peer learning in terms of the delivery of community led projects.

The overall objective of the Town Centre First Plan, is to entice people back to the centre of Abbeyfeale, by putting in place the building blocks, to create a desirable place to live, work and visit, it is anticipated that the priority action, will kick start the action necessary to deliver progress on the revitalisation of Abbeyfeale.

# PRIORITY ACTIONS

## Priority Action 1:

Revive the Town Centre through the delivery of compact growth

## Priority Action 6:

Create a Sustainable, Innovative and Competitive Economy

## Priority Action 2:

Continue to tackle Vacancy and Dereliction in Abbeyfeale

## Priority Action 7:

Capitalise on Abbeyfeale's Tourism Assets

## Priority Action 3:

Enhance Sustainable Mobility and Connectivity

## Priority Action 8:

Green Abbeyfeale

## Priority Action 4:

Invest in Public Realm and Place-Making

## Priority Action 9:

Make Abbeyfeale more Climate Resilient and Adaptable

## Priority Action 5:

Create a Resilient, Connected and Inclusive Community

## Priority Action 10:

Enhance Abbeyfeale's Digital Blueprint

## Priority Action 1.

### Revive the Town Centre through the delivery of compact growth

Town Centre First policy seeks to attract people back to reside in town centres, through sustainable compact growth. By increasing the town centre's residential population, it will help support the wider regeneration of Abbeyfeale, by increasing footfall and demand for services. There is a need for the delivery of high quality accommodation, in suitable locations, in tandem with employment opportunities and an abundance of services and facilities to deliver an overall high quality of living for occupiers of our towns, in order to attract people back to reside in Abbeyfeale. The development of residential accommodation will also provide excellent opportunities to bring back vacant or under – utilised sites and buildings back into active and sustainable uses. The Draft Abbeyfeale Local Area Plan 2023 – 2029 is being prepared in tandem with this Plan, it seeks to redress much of the shift that has occurred in the town and identifies a number of key opportunity sites, which could accommodate significant mixed use developments, with potential for an overall transformational impacts in the town centre.

The Town Centre First Initiative has been developed on the basis of creating a thriving town centre with a strong service and social function. This is based on the principle of the 10 Minute town concept. The 10 Minute Town concept seeks to have all community facilities and services accessible within a 10-minute walk or cycle from homes which are accessible by public transport services connecting people in towns and villages across the country. The development of housing can play a major role in creating strong and sustainable places, as well as supporting key policy objectives around active travel, affordable and independent living and walkable neighbourhoods. Housing brings people and people bring activity and animation. Through the re-use of buildings, infill development, re-purposing of under-utilised lands, within the town centre for mixed uses, including residential, shops or creative workspaces, this Plan seeks to promote the consolidation of the town rather than encourage sprawl. This needs to be supported by investment in high quality pedestrian/cyclist's friendly public realm and attractive public spaces, where people can gather socially. The provisions of the Traffic Management Scheme will support enhanced connectivity in the town, in particular on Main Street, with high levels of permeability, as well as the delivery of high quality public realm, including paving, street furniture and soft landscaping, to enhance the quality of the environment in the town.

The following section identifies a number of key sites located within the town centre, which offer real opportunity to deliver compact growth, which would support urban living in the town centre, which could be supported by a diversity of complementary uses and high quality place – making, to make the town centre a more desirable place to reside.

### **Backland development - North of Main Street**

This backland site is located to the rear of Main Street and New Street. Pedestrian access to the site is possible via a laneway from Main Street adjoining Murphy’s Bar and has two rear shared access points onto Colbert Terrace. Some of the site is presently in use as a tile centre and associated storage yard. Given its location, the site presents considerable opportunity to allow for improved pedestrian permeability and town centre consolidation through securing a high-density mixed-use scheme. The site presents a real opportunity for town centre living coupled with commercial development. The lands are zoned town centre in the Draft Local Area Plan, which supports a mix of uses, to support and enhance the town centre. The lands have potential to accommodate ground floor commercial uses with apartments on the upper floors. The lands offers a huge opportunity for enhanced connectivity between the town centre and Colbert Terrace and New Street and also potential for some off street parking.



*Backland  
development*

### Backland development - South of Main Street (East)

This large backland area presents considerable opportunity for creating multiple redevelopment opportunities within the heart of the town centre. This area consists primarily of under-utilised backlands to Main Street, with several narrow plots, bounded to the south by the Council owned public carpark and Collins Park housing estate. The potential development would allow for town centre expansion, which includes a range of housing types and new commercial uses, with a focus on a new urban civic square, fronted by retail development and over the counter commercial services where possible. A pedestrian street is proposed linking the new urban civic square and the Main Street. Residential developments in the form of family townhouses and apartments could front the through streets. The new urban form should promote pedestrian scale and permeability, with vehicle access restricted to shared space treatment and home zones. Pedestrian links to Main Street and to a possible future public park located on the vacant strip of land between Collins Park housing estate and Cedarville/Belfry housing estates is encouraged. Overall any proposed development of this area would require plot amalgamation and the co - operation of multiple landowners. The proposal would have to demonstrate a well-planned, integrated scheme for the redevelopment of the entire area. These lands are zoned town centre in the Draft Local Area Plan for Abbeyfeale, which supports a mix of uses to enhance the town centre. Having regard to the scale of this opportunity site, there is real potential for a development of scale, which could have a real transformational impact on the town centre. These lands present a real opportunity for transforming the centre of the town, with potential for ground floor commercial units with apartments overhead. A new link street connecting Grove Crescent to the Main Street, with car parking. There is potential capacity for commercial/retail units and enterprise space, to support a live work environment, which will be supported by public open space, civic squares and pedestrian and cycle connectivity.



### Backland development – South of Main Street (West)

This backland site is located to the south of Main Street and to the west of the proposed link road, the site has potential to accommodate residential and commercial mixed use development to complement the rear of existing properties on the Main Street, the proposal also link with public realm upgrades associated with the Traffic Management Scheme and the linkages to Grove Crescent and the has the potential to maximise the use of under – utilised lands.

The Lands are located off the new link street and to the rear of the Main Street and in close proximity to the town centre.

The lands have potential to accommodate terraced residential family units, fronting onto the new Grove Crescent link street.

There is also potential for the extension of existing businesses, which are existing on the Main Street.



### Backland development

### Old Cinema Site

The former cinema located towards the eastern end of Main Street has been derelict since the 1980's. In 2013 the 'tidy town' group carried out improvement works to the façade. The building is a Protected Structure and entered onto the NIAH Building Survey of Ireland. It is a Detached three-bay, three-storey Art Deco style former cinema, built c. 1940. Its symmetrical design includes towering pilasters which coupled with an angular parapet wall creates a sense of increased height to this impressive façade. Adjoining properties in the block include O'Tobins garage, also with a distinctive angular facade, with single storey residential adjoining. An extensive rectangular under-utilised open space extends southwards behind the block to Collins Park.

This site has the potential for the re purposing of the old cinema building, for community and/or leisure uses.

Commercial business/enterprise units overlooking the open space and shared priority access route from the Main Street to connect with Grove Crescent and Fr. Casey Close.

There is also potential for the development of active recreation facilities to be provided.



Old Cinema Site

## → Delivering sustainable compact development ambitions

- \* Promote the development of the 10 minute Town - deliver consolidate development within the town centre and focus development on the revitalisation of the town centre on brown field and infill development, as the key priority for residential, commercial, retail and community uses.
- \* Encouraging a mix of housing types within all developments, promoting lifecycle accommodation, which focuses on providing multiple housing choices in all neighbourhoods.
- \* Promote higher densities and a diversity of uses in the town centre to support the development of a vibrant and occupied town centre, coupled with high quality public realm and employment opportunities.
- \* Focus on providing affordable and step down housing options that accommodate the evolving needs of the community, ensuring a sustainable and inclusive living environment.
- \* Foster a sense of place and community pride by creating attractive, pedestrian-friendly streetscapes, incorporating green spaces, street furniture, and public art.
- \* Promote adaptive reuse of vacant and derelict structures, encouraging their repurposing for commercial, residential, cultural, or community use, while respecting their architectural significance.

## Priority Action 2.

### Continue to tackle Vacancy and Dereliction in Abbeyfeale

High levels of vacancy and dereliction have detrimental impacts on all sectors of society, including, in particular on economic activity, also, environmental impacts, and as social impacts, they also have a cotangent impact on streetscapes and Abbeyfeale experiences a high level of vacancy and dereliction on many of its streets.

However, the Council has a proactive regime in place, which aims to tackle the issues of dereliction and vacancy throughout Limerick and have been working tirelessly in Abbeyfeale, with property owners, to address issues that exists. A dedicated team within the Council work on a continuous basis seeking to reduce vacancy and dereliction, through the various tools available, including the Derelict Sites Act 1990 to tackle derelict. The Council were successful in securing Rural Regeneration and Development Funding (RRDF) under Call 2 in 2019/2020, receiving grant approval of €2.5 million, which sought to address the serious issue of dereliction and vacancy in towns and villages cores, in 12 no. settlements across Co. Limerick. Abbeyfeale was one of the towns selected in this application process. The aim of the project is to bring derelict properties in the settlements, back into use, with the main emphasis on the delivery of housing.



Examples of properties  
been tackled under the  
RRDF Project

The funding received included financing the purchase or compulsory acquisition of derelict properties or brownfield lands that can be repurposed for housing or repurposed for an alternative use, where housing cannot be accommodated. The benefits of this scheme in Abbeyfeale are becoming evident and the team continue to work through the various mechanisms that are available to tackle dereliction. There are a number of properties at various stages of development within this programme and the Council will continue to progress this regime, subject to funding. The cottage above is located on Covent Road in Abbeyfeale and is an example of a redeveloped property to builders finish and brought to the market for sale. The other property, currently being progressed through the necessary consent processes to redevelop the property.

However, while progress is being made and this is evident in the town, with a number of key buildings in private ownership, remaining vacant and have potential for occupation, which would benefit property owners and the wider community in terms of economic activity and uplift to the town. Reoccupation of vacant and derelict properties can deliver much need housing, enterprise and employment opportunities and potentially new retail offerings, as well as accommodating community uses.



Abbeyfeale has also benefitted from funding secured under other funding schemes, to bring vacant properties, back onto use, including: The acquisition of the former Provisional Bank and its redevelopment as a e-work hub WorkBase on Main Street and the acquisition of the former Bank of Ireland in the Square and repurposing for temporary residential use.

## → Dereliction and Vacancy ambitions

- \* Continue to work with property owners to address dereliction and vacancy in Abbeyfeale, support property owners in utilising available sources of funding, to bring property back into use and compliment these uses with high quality public realm.
- \* Bring back into use prominent long term vacant building in Abbeyfeale, such as the Convent Building and the Old Cinema, subject to available resources.
- \* Liaise with relevant Government Departments and bodies, such as the Heritage Council to identify funding supports available to refurbish/redevelop historic buildings, in the town.

## Priority Action 3.

### Enhance Sustainable Mobility and Connectivity

Abbeyfeale's location on the national road network, the main Limerick – Kerry thoroughfare, brings high volumes of vehicular traffic to the town centre on a daily basis and presents many challenges in terms of the delivery of sustainable mobility. Annual Average Daily Traffic (ADDT) figures indicates that the volume of traffic traversing Abbeyfeale on a daily basis exceeds 10,000 vehicles per day. The town experiences significant levels of congestion on a daily basis, with particularly high volumes during the summer season and bank holiday weekends.

#### **Abbeyfeale Traffic Management Scheme**

The Council have formulated a Traffic Management Scheme for the town, with particular focus on addressing the Main Street, addressing traffic calming, enhancing the public realm and delivering an enhanced streetscape. The purpose of implementing the scheme is to improve the legibility of the town centre in terms of improved traffic management, better access to car parking, improved pedestrian linkages and the provision of dedicated bus parking. This Traffic Management Scheme has undergone the necessary consent process and has been formulated with significant consultation with local community and business owners in Abbeyfeale. The Council will seek to implement the traffic management scheme, subject to funding, in conjunction with the local community in Abbeyfeale. The Traffic Management Scheme and associated public realm scheme seeks to redress the imbalance between pedestrians and vehicles, particularly at key junctions and support the functioning of the Main Street, more effectively.



The Traffic Management Scheme will have a transformational and uplift effect on the town centre of Abbeyfeale and will specifically include: modified traffic lane widths along the N21 and within Abbeyfeale town centre with revised parking layouts, additional traffic signals, additional pedestrian crossings, coach parking set downs and enhanced connectivity. The scheme also includes for significant opportunities for public realm enhancements to the Main Street and The Square.

The Traffic Management Scheme will deliver high quality public realm, where people can spend time, socialise and where businesses can thrive. The project offers an opportunity to redress the dominance of the car, in favour of people, which will play an important role in energising the core of the town centre.

The scheme once implemented will have a positive effect on the town and enhance the experience for both local people, residents and visitors coming to the town through; improved traffic management for the through flow of traffic in the town; improved car parking arrangements; enhanced access to the Grove Crescent car park; increased number of dedicated bus parking in the centre of the town and improved vehicular traffic movement along Colbert Terrace, following the demolition of a building and road widening. Improvements in the public realm will also provide additional amenity space for the community.

The scheme has potential to enhance connectivity and legibility in the town, offering opportunities for greater permeability for pedestrian and cyclists.

### **Sustainable Travel and Connectivity**

As can be seen from the 2016 CSO statistics for Abbeyfeale, the car dominates most movement in Abbeyfeale, however, enabling ease of movement and more active travel is critically important to deliver on ambitions with regards to reducing private car – use, which in turn will have a positive impact on the environment, physical health and reducing emissions. Enhanced public transport and connectivity within the town, will assist in reducing the needs to travel by car, particularly for short journeys, such as the school drop off/collection etc.

The Plan seeks to enhance connectivity through a number of interventions, which will enhance permeability, linking neighbourhoods and key destinations and amenities.

Furthermore, the Local Area Plan identifies a critical link from the Killarney Road to the Hill Road, which seeks to alleviate traffic congestion at the Cellar Bar and would provide for two way traffic with a controlled junction at either end, as indicated below.



### **N21 Abbeyfeale Road Scheme**

Limerick City and County Council is currently working in partnership with Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) and the Department of Transport to develop a scheme to relieve congestion on the N21 Limerick to Tralee Road through Abbeyfeale. This is an important project to enhance regional connectivity and to improve road safety. Subject to funding, the design process will be developed in stages, with opportunities for the public to participate in the consultation at key stages. The Road Scheme will have a significant impact on alleviating some of the through-traffic in Abbeyfeale. Improved accessibility is identified as a major enabler for balanced regional development in the National Planning Framework - a key element in the Government's Project Ireland 2040 Strategy. The project will also enhance the quality of lives of the residents of Abbeyfeale and offer an opportunity for further public realm enhancements once the reduction in traffic occurs.

# Abbeyfeale Persons aged 5 years + by Commute to Work, School or College Census 2016

## Active Travel

**21%** Commute by walking. This is significantly higher than Limerick (14.8%). In 2011 24% walked their commute in Abbeyfeale.

**<1%** Less than 1% commute by bike in 2016 - no change since 2011.

## Public Transport

**3.4%** Commute by public transport. In 2011 3.8% commuted by public transport.

## Journey Time

**28.3%** Percentage of commute journeys that were between 8.30am and 9am.

## Private Car

**39%** Drive a car for their commute - a slight decrease on 2011 when 40% drove their commute.

**21%** Travel as a passenger in a car. In 2011 18% commuted as a passenger in car.

## Short Commute Times

**51.6%** Percentage of journeys that were under 15 minutes in 2016 - higher than the Limerick (37.7%) and State (34.9%) average. In 2011 53.5% of commute journeys were less than 15 minutes in Abbeyfeale.

**17.5%** Percentage of commute journeys duration between 15-30 minutes.

### **Deliveries and Servicing**

As outlined above, Abbeyfeale suffers from traffic congestion, this issue is often exacerbated by set down of delivery trucks and waste collection trucks, it is acknowledged that these are crucial to the operation of business and in some cases there is no alternative available, but to set down or store refuse bins on the Main Street, however, these do have an impact on the vitality and vibrancy of the town centre. Time bound limitations on waste collection and deliveries should be considered throughout the Main Street, limiting the operations to outside peak shopping hours, consideration shall be had for utilisation of rear access points where appropriate and landowners working together to address the issue that existing in terms of refuse management and also potential deliveries.

The Traffic Management Scheme and associated works have the potential to enhance the streetscape in Abbeyfeale, coupled with the potential by – pass in the longer term, has the potential to transform the town centre.

## → Sustainable Mobility and Connectivity ambitions

- \* Implement traffic calming measures throughout the town in line with the permitted Traffic Management Scheme.
- \* Support the progression of the N21 Abbeyfeale Road Scheme to planning stage, in line with available funding.
- \* Provide a new carpark located off Main Street, which requires the demolition of a vacant/derelict property, providing additional car parking spaces, close to the town centre.
- \* Rationalise existing car parking on the Main Street, in line with the requirements of the Traffic Management Scheme.
- \* Deliver a high quality, versatile and dynamic destination in the Town Square, which supports commercial activity, which can also flexible to support events and markets. Support the redevelopment of retail space fronting The Square, to enliven the space.
- \* Improve permeability and connectivity throughout the town, enhancing the pedestrian and cycling linkages within the town.
- \* Work with transport providers to enhance bus services for Abbeyfeale, connecting to local areas and beyond – such as Bus Éireann and Local Link.
- \* Enhance car parking signage to identify the location of available spaces, to entice passing traffic to stop in the town, providing enhanced economic benefits for the town.
- \* Improve connectivity to sporting facilities, enhancing opportunities for safe access for users utilising sustainable travel modes.
- \* Implement Safe Routes to School measures in conjunction with the NTA, to promote the use of sustainable travel modes, to reduce congestion during rush hour peaks.
- \* Seek to deliver the link road between the Killarney Road and the Hill Road, to assist in alleviate congestion in The Square.
- \* Seek to address issues with deliveries and refuse collection, with the implementation of time constraints and also seek to deliver an alternative access to address refuse bin storage on the Main Street.

## Priority Action 4.

### Investing in Healthy Place – Making and Public Realm in Abbeyfeale

Place – making means creating places and focusing on transforming public spaces to strengthen the connections between people and places. Place – making is a process centered on people and their needs, aspirations, desires, and visions, which relies strongly on public engagement. Great places must do more than meet the basic requirements, if they want to foster greater community attachment. A strong sense of attachment can result in residents who are more committed to the growth and success of their community. As outlined about Abbeyfeale, has a strong community that are very committed to developing its people and places, through the Traffic Management Scheme, significant engagement has been undertaken to engage the public in relation to the development of the town’s streetscape and public realm and it is important that this is recognised in this Town Centre First Plan.

Throughout Abbeyfeale, there are lots of opportunities for enhanced public realm, enhanced streetscapes and places, throughout the public consultation process concerns were highlighted regarding lack of quality open space, lack of usable public space and poor quality streetscapes. High quality public realm is important, as it supports more inclusive communities, provides space to facilitate events and festivals and it also increases the use of public space and increases support for the businesses that are located adjoining public spaces. The Traffic Management Scheme supports the development of high quality public realm throughout the Main Street. All new developments should support high quality public realm, connecting people and places, creating greater linkages to the town centre and support the enhancement of the town.

#### **Revitalising Abbeyfeale Town Square**

The Square is the principal public space in Abbeyfeale, it forms an important focal point in the town, surrounded by buildings on three sites and open to the National Road, on the other side. The space is dominated by car parking, however the public space offers so much potential and held a very important market space in the past. This space has considerable potential to become a multi – functional space, with capacity to host markets, festivals and events. The space is currently home to a small farmers market on Friday’s and a Craft Market on alternate Saturdays.

Upgrading the space, would strengthen the capacity of the space, to host larger events and also to attract commercial businesses to locate onto The Square. The Traffic Management Scheme seeks to rejuvenate The Square, enhance the public realm, rationalise car – parking and install the necessary physical infrastructure to support events and festivals.



### **Shopfront and streetscape enhancement**

Shopfronts are one of the most important elements in determining the character, quality and perception of the streets in towns and villages, throughout the country. The Council is committed to promoting good quality shopfronts, and seeks to encourage that key design principles are incorporated in to the redevelopment or the upgrade of such properties. Abbeyfeale contains a number of traditional shopfronts, which have retained many key features. The Local Area Plan seeks to address the improvement of shop fronts and facades, particularly within the Architectural Conservation Area, which encompasses much of the Main Street. The issue of streetscape enhancement and the development of a paint scheme was raised throughout the consultation, the Council will work with the Town Team to implement a paint scheme, in association with the Traffic Management Scheme for Abbeyfeale.

### Approaches to Abbeyfeale

There are a number of approach road that converge in Abbeyfeale, the most prominent is the N21 National Road, concerns were highlighted that the approaches to town were poor and failed to signify a sense of arrival and work is required to enhance the approach areas to the town. The development of enhanced signage to signify a sense of arrival, is an important element of Place - Making. This plan supports the development of architectural led signage, signifying a sense of arrival in Abbeyfeale.

## → Enhanced Place - Making and Public Realm ambitions

- \* Work with local businesses and property owners to examine the potential of enhancing or refurbishing existing shopfront throughout Abbeyfeale, subject to funding.
- \* Support local businesses in securing funding from relevant bodies, to assist in the upgrade/refurbishment of buildings, in the instance of Protected Structures or within the Architectural Conservation Area proposals shall be developed in line with the requirements of the Conservation Officer.
- \* Support the implementation of a streetscape enhancement programme and paint scheme for Abbeyfeale, subject to funding and in conjunction with the delivery of the Traffic Management Scheme.
- \* Explore opportunities to develop signage for the approaches to the Town, which are unique to the town and which provide a sense of arrival on reaching Abbeyfeale on the relevant approach roads.

## Priority Action 5.

### Creating a Resilient, Connected and Inclusive Community

Local communities are empowered, when they have a say in decisions that affect their lives, places and spaces. An increased level and quality of community participation in local decision-making structures, particularly by the most marginalised and disadvantaged communities, leads to better and more sustainable decisions for everyone. The interface between the Local Authority and its community will be pivotal to the success of Town Centre First Plan. There is clearly an opportunity in the delivery of the Town Centre First policy at a local level to engage with the Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs), the Public Participation Networks (PPNs), the community and voluntary sector, and local development organisations. The Locally-led approach outlined in the Town Centre First policy is key to the delivery of this plan.

Health and wellbeing of all residents is a key ingredient to having a resilient community, providing the necessary support and working with relevant health care providers was identified as an important element of the Plan, by stakeholder groups. Limerick City and County Council continue to work with local communities to promote social inclusion and celebrate diversity, as the community diversifies, it is necessary that the structures are in place to support new residents that come to live in Abbeyfeale.

A top priority that emerged through the consultation for the town is the need for a family resource centre, it is considered that the provision of such a facility would provide a range of universal and targeted services and development opportunities that would specifically address the needs of families in the community. In addition, to the family resource centre, there is a need for a crèche in the town, there is no dedicated childcare facility for the 0 – 3 age group, with parents travelling to neighbouring towns and villages, to drop children off prior to starting work. This may also be a deterrent for individuals seeking employment and may correlate with the high numbers of unemployment in the town.

Volunteering, in particular, allows individuals to connect with their community to make it a better place and contribute to a healthier and more resilient community. Capturing some of the community and voluntary sector's spirit, experience, networks and infrastructure in the Town Centre First delivery process will be crucial to its success. Abbeyfeale has a thriving community, with a strong tradition of volunteerism and have led many community initiatives including recent development, such as an educational Biodiversity Park, on New Street and the opening of the Tourist Office in the WorkBase on Main Street, in June 2023.



Páirc Cois Féile or Abbeyfeale Town Park is a 12 hectare amenity on the banks of the River Feale with over 7km of walkway, an astro-turf mini-pitch, outdoor exercise equipment, pond, woodland, playground, basketball court, fairy park, public art sensory area and many other health and recreational amenities. The Park was developed and is maintained by the Town Park Committee and has been awarded the international accreditation Green Flag Award, in recognition of the quality of this amenity in terms of accessibility, biodiversity and facilities. The Council are seeking to carry out upgrade works to the Multi Use Games Area in Abbeyfeale Town Park at present in conjunction with local community groups.

It is critical that community and social infrastructure is delivered with growth in residential development, consultation with the Department of Education, indicated that there is sufficient capacity at both primary and secondary level to cater for the growth anticipated in Limerick Development Plan 2022 – 2028.

Consultation with the primary school children highlighted concerns with regard to the distance and lack of connectivity of the Town Park and the town centre and the potential for the development of a link, to connect the Greenway, Town Park and the town centre. Consultation with secondary school children highlighted a lack of activities for teens in the town, such as youth club, youth café or youth hub, where young people could gather for social or recreational purposes.

Building upon Abbeyfeale's existing community and social services, while considering its unique characteristics and history. There is a need to focus on collaboration between local actors, community organisations, and the Local Authority.



## → Developing a Resilient, Connected and Inclusive Community ambitions

- \* Explore the feasibility of developing a youth café/youth club or hub in Abbeyfeale.
- \* Carry out a feasibility study to examine the potential development of a Family Resource Centre in Abbeyfeale, that serves as a central hub for various social and support services. This centre can provide information, counselling, and referral services, host community events and workshops, and serve as a gathering place for residents.
- \* Establish a programme of Community Wraparound services for Family Support Services in the community, utilising multi agency co-operation, to support families experiencing disadvantage in the town.
- \* Carry out a feasibility study to examine the potential development of a purpose built community crèche in Abbeyfeale.
- \* Develop programs and services that cater to the needs and interests of older adults, promoting active and healthy aging. This can include senior fitness classes, social clubs, educational workshops, and support services that enable older residents to live independently and actively participate in the community.
- \* Support local entrepreneurs and social enterprises by providing resources, training, and mentorship programs. Encourage the development of businesses that address specific community needs, such as childcare services, eco-friendly initiatives, or innovative solutions for seniors' well-being.
- \* Establish and promote volunteer networks that connect individuals and organisations seeking volunteer opportunities with community projects and initiatives. This can include providing resources and training for volunteers, recognising their contributions, and facilitating partnerships between community groups and volunteers.
- \* Collaborate with mental health organisations and professionals to improve access to mental health services in Abbeyfeale. This can involve establishing counselling centres, hosting mental health workshops and awareness campaigns, and fostering a supportive environment that reduces the stigma associated with mental health issues.

- \* Explore the establishment of community gardens and allotments, where residents can grow their own produce and foster a sense of community through shared gardening spaces. This initiative promotes healthy lifestyles, food security, and community engagement.
- \* Identify opportunities to enhance existing sports and recreation facilities, such as upgrading the playground, expanding walking and cycling paths, and creating additional sports fields. Consider partnerships with local sports clubs and organisations to offer a wider range of recreational activities for residents of all ages.
- \* Support the development of cultural and artistic initiatives that celebrate the town's creativity and skills. This can involve establishing an arts/artists in resident's space etc., organising regular cultural events and festivals, and providing spaces for local artists to showcase their work.
- \* Utilise digital platforms and technology to enhance community engagement and access to services. This can involve creating an online community portal or mobile application that provides information on local services, events, and opportunities for community involvement.
- \* Work with education providers to develop and deliver programmes based on diversity and inclusion and celebrate the culture of minority groups that reside in the town.
- \* Continue to raise awareness and seek the necessary interventions to address social inclusion, such as autism awareness, literacy awareness and isolation. Seek to develop initiatives with the local library/local businesses to assist, such as autism friendly slots in local shops etc.

## Priority Action 6.

### Creating a Sustainable, Innovative and Competitive Economy

Abbeyfeale has experienced challenges in employment generation and the local economy, as revealed by the 2016 Census data. The census indicated that the percentage of the population aged 15 or over engaged in work was 42.12%, lower than the county average of 50%. The town's unemployment rate stood at a high 14.8%, significantly surpassing the national average of 6.3%.

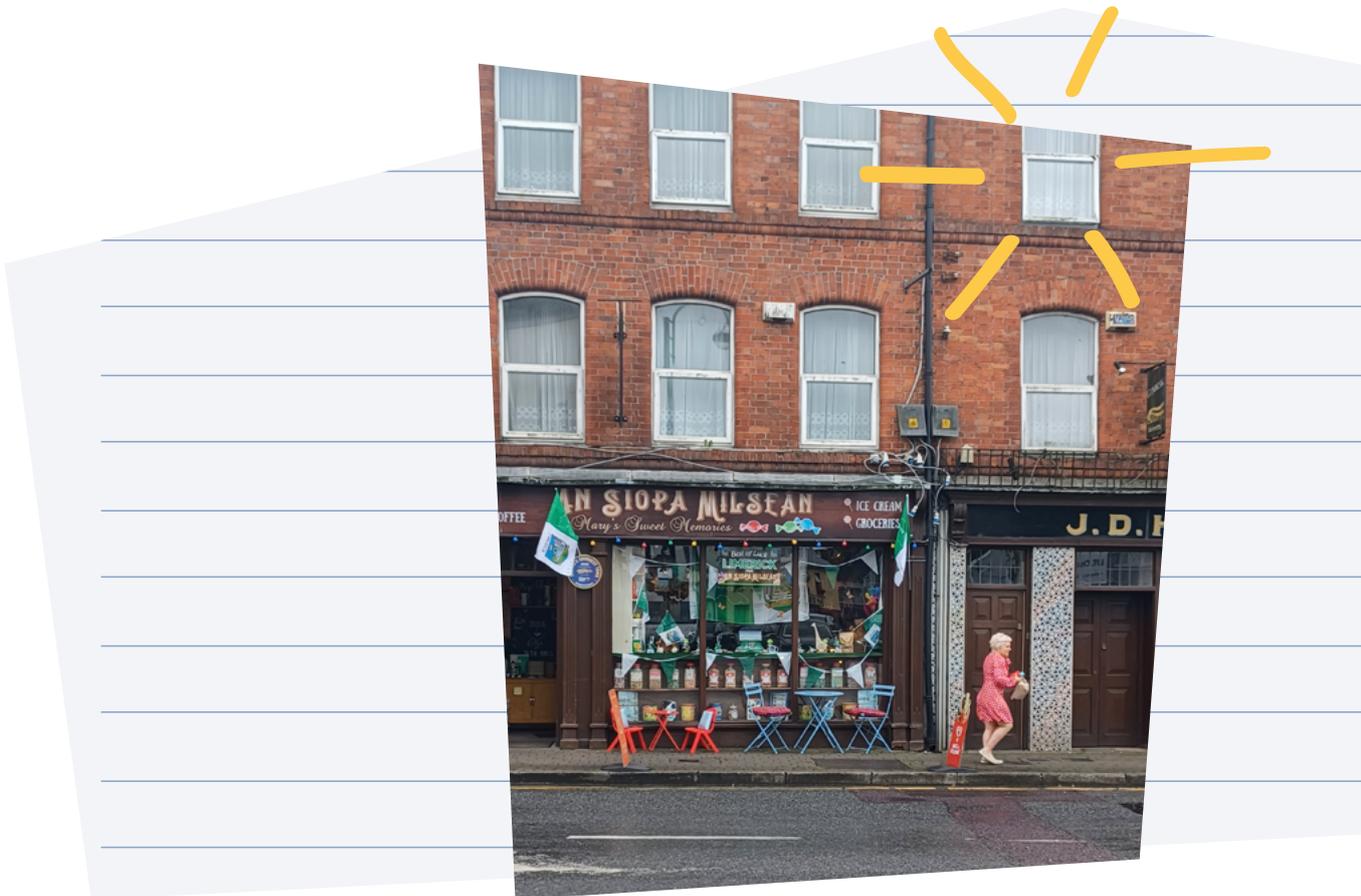
Notably, Abbeyfeale attracts a considerable number of workers from neighbouring areas, with 836 individuals commuting into the town for employment. This influx reflects the economic significance of Abbeyfeale within County Limerick. Census figures demonstrate a dependency on manufacturing industry, within the town, such as Kostal, which is a significant employer in the town, manufacturing products for the automotive industry. However, changing dynamics in terms of employment sees increasing sectors such as services and education and training providing significant employment opportunities in the town. Recognising the opportunities presented by digitalisation and remote work, the Local Authority actively promotes Abbeyfeale as an attractive location for remote working, culture/creative enterprises, and smart tech industries. Encouraging the town to capitalise on the knowledge economy and foster enterprise opportunities, for example the WorkBase co-working hub (former Provincial Bank) on Main Street.

To support employment generation and economic growth, the Draft Abbeyfeale Local Area Plan emphasises the creation of high-quality employment opportunities, such as those in business and technology development. The LAP aligns with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and the overarching Limerick Development Plan. Within the Draft Local Area Plan, approximately 36 hectares of land are zoned for enterprise and employment development. These areas, including the Abbeyfeale Business Park, Mountmahon, Killarney Road, and Railway Road, offering substantial potential for economic activity, however, a significant portion remains undeveloped.

The historical context of Abbeyfeale's employment and local economy is multifaceted. Over the years, the town has served as a centre for trade and

commerce, with various industries contributing to its growth. These have included agriculture, retail, hospitality, and skilled trades. While facing challenges, Abbeyfeale has shown resilience and adaptability, leveraging its unique position in the region; proximity to the River Feale, National Road system and Kerry border.

The business world is changing and how we shop and do business is dominated by technological advances, however, Abbeyfeale has taken a different approach and through the development of An Síopa Milseán, a unique sweet shop, which certainly offers the authentic experience, which is like stepping back in time, with an array of old style sweets on sale, however, the shop also supports a number of home producers and their mission is to support the local businesses and help the community flourish. It's no secret that young consumers are craving experiences that they can share on social media, An Síopa Milseán, is paving the way in this regard. An Síopa Milseán embraces the concept of experience led shopping, providing the authentic old fashioned sweet shop experience in modern town, led by the community, supporting the community.



The town also supports a Farmer's Market on Friday's and a Craft Market on alternative Saturday's, the Feale Crafters have developed a Co-op, which has brought together crafts people, to take a hobby to a commercial operation.

As the town moves forward, it seeks to address employment gaps, boost entrepreneurship, and attract sustainable industries, by foster economic activity, creating employment opportunities, and enhance the overall prosperity of Abbeyfeale and its community.



## → Sustainable, Innovative and Competitive Economy ambitions

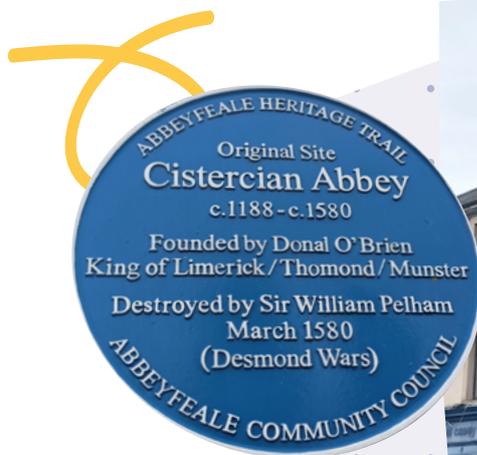
- \* Support collaboration between the Town Team and the local community to create a comprehensive business support program tailored to the specific needs of Abbeyfeale.
- \* Formulate a Chamber of Commerce in Abbeyfeale, to support business and to foster a greater sense of engagement.
- \* Provide resources, workshops, and mentoring opportunities to assist local entrepreneurs in starting and growing their businesses, in conjunction with the Local Enterprise Office.
- \* Work with the Limerick - Clare Education and Training Board to enhance the education and training offering in the Abbeyfeale Campus, with a particular focus on Apprenticeships.
- \* Promote partnerships between local businesses and the schools to deliver targeted training programs and industry-specific support to students.
- \* Promote the sequential approach in the development of employment generating uses, promoting reuse of appropriately zoned vacant units and infill sites within the established core.
- \* Support the delivery of affordable workspace, shared resources, and mentorship programs to support the growth of start-ups and small businesses within the town centre.
- \* Promote the development of mixed-use buildings in the town centre, incorporating commercial spaces on the ground floor and residential or office spaces above.
- \* Support the integration of employment opportunities within new developments, fostering a vibrant live-work environment.
- \* Promote a buy local campaign, encouraging businesses and residents to prioritise sourcing goods and services from local suppliers, including the revitalisation of the market space in the town.
- \* Support local traders at the Friday Farmer's Market and the Saturday Craft Market to enhance the offering available at the market and seek to attract further artisan producers to trade at the markets.

## Priority Action 7.

### Capitalising on Abbeyfeale's Tourism Assets

Tourism is a proven economic driver, and can play a significant role in the overall development of Abbeyfeale, sustaining employment and providing opportunities for new business and services. Abbeyfeale has many attributes, that already attracts tourists to the town, including its fine built heritage, with many buildings containing the unique stucco architectural detail by Pat McAuliffe found on many of Abbeyfeale's buildings, in the town centre. Abbeyfeale Community Council have developed a Heritage Trail in the town, which identifies key building of historical interest, each of the key structures have a plaque attached outline the heritage assets and a brief description, as identified below. The Community Council shall consider the development of online heritage trail, which guides visitors through the trail and also provides more detailed history via a QR link that can be viewed on your smartphone.

Having regard to the rich history of Abbeyfeale and the significance of the fabric that remains in the town, the community feel that the development of a heritage centre in Abbeyfeale is a key piece of infrastructure that is missing from the town. A feasibility study would have to be explored to examine the potential proposal and a suitable building secured to accommodate the use.



Abbeyfeale is famous for its musical tradition and performance arts. Abbeyfeale is home to annual traditional Irish music and singing festivals, and is home to the voluntary theatre Glórach, which plays hosts to children's workshops, youth theatre, and many other community events all year round. The local community organise events such the Fleadh by the Feale and Garry McMahon Traditional Singing Weekend and Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann annually, it is critical in developing public realm in Abbeyfeale that performance space is provided to accommodate such events.

Abbeyfeale has significant further tourism opportunities, in particular as a hub with access to the Limerick Greenway and Kingdom of Kerry Greenway, the Greenway is located to the north of the town, and is a cycling/walking/running amenity extending from Rathkeale, Co. Limerick into the Kingdom of Kerry Greenways, along the re-purposed former Limerick – Kerry railway line. Public access to this amenity is currently located at the former Railway Station in Abbeyfeale. The Abbeyfeale railway station was once one of the busiest stops on the Limerick to Tralee railway, sitting on the border between Kerry and Limerick, as the system was expanded in 1880.

The Limerick Greenway offers huge economic and tourism opportunities for the town of Abbeyfeale, in terms of the development of tourism accommodation, café/restaurants, and other niche tourism products, however, linking this amenity to the town centre is critical for Abbeyfeale to capitalise on the potential of the Greenway. Accommodation already exists in Abbeyfeale, in terms of Leen's Hotel and a number of B&B's, however, there is potential to explore additional facilities, such as camping, glamping and campervan facilities, within the town and environs.



The Council are currently examining the feasibility of delivering a safe walkway/cycleway connection from the Limerick Greenway to Abbeyfeale Town Centre, to promote sustainable mobility and to capitalise on the tourism potential of Abbeyfeale. Options are currently being examined to determine the optimum solution, in terms of making the connection, consultation will take place in the coming months, to ascertain, public opinion on the available options. This is a critical missing link in the town and will assist in attracting additional tourism potential into the Town and also in terms of promoting sustainable travel in Abbeyfeale.

Limerick City and County Council were successful in securing funding to carry out concept development proposals for a Greenway hub, at the former goods store, on the Limerick Greenway in Abbeyfeale, under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) Category 2 call in 2021 and intend to seek further funding to develop the proposal under the 2023 RRDF call for proposals. Proposals currently being examined include for accommodation for bike rental facilities, toilet facilities and coffee dock.

Critical to the enhancement of the Greenway, is appropriate marketing and promotion and working with providers along the Kingdom of Kerry Greenway to collaborate in the development and delivery of packages breaks for Greenway users to enhance the Greenway experience for users.



artists impression of proposed restored railway goods shed

## → Tourism Development ambitions

- \* Seek to deliver a safe connection from the Limerick Greenway to Abbeyfeale Town Centre.
- \* Seek to redevelop the Former Goods Shed on the Limerick Greenway, as a Greenway Hub.
- \* Support the development of complimentary tourist accommodation in Abbeyfeale - such as camping, glamping, campervan facilities etc.
- \* Seek the promotion and marketing of Abbeyfeale - locally, nationally and internationally, through the recently opened Abbeyfeale Tourist Office and [www.abbeyfeale.ie](http://www.abbeyfeale.ie) website.
- \* Seek to further develop the heritage trail in Abbeyfeale, examine the potential of developing an online trail with QR codes at each of the existing plaques, to provide tourists with full historical context in a digital format.
- \* Explore the feasibility of developing a heritage centre in Abbeyfeale, which could host a large array of artefacts in community ownership and assist in telling Abbeyfeale's story.
- \* Seek to develop complimentary tourism products to increase visitors dwell time in Abbeyfeale - such as eco-tourism, outdoor activities etc.
- \* Seek to further enhance the offering along the Limerick Greenway, working in co-operation with Kerry County Council and other stakeholders, to deliver products to enhance the Greenway experience.
- \* Promote and market the Limerick Greenway in collaboration with the Kingdom of Kerry Greenway and work with local providers to develop and deliver packages that will enhance the Greenway experience for all users.
- \* Develop tourism packages, trails, and events that showcase the town's cultural offerings, collaborating with local businesses to create employment opportunities within the tourism and hospitality sectors.
- \* Support the night time economy in Abbeyfeale, through festivals, events, arts and culture, which celebrates Abbeyfeale and its history and heritage.
- \* Develop an Arts Programme for Young People, which encompasses all elements of the arts and work with the Glórach Theatre to deliver the programme.
- \* Support the greater use of the Glórach Theatre - including hosting art exhibitions etc.
- \* Foster creative industries in the town, with the necessary supports.

# Priority Action 8.

## Green Abbeyfeale

The landscape of Abbeyfeale is an important aspect in defining the character and identity of the town, situated on the River Feale, at the foothills of the Mullaghareirk Mountains, the town is surrounded by natural assets and potential to connect blue and green infrastructure to enhance the quality of life for the residents of the town. Green - Blue infrastructure describes the network of natural and semi-natural spaces and corridors, located in a place. These include open spaces, such as parks and gardens, allotments, woodlands, fields, hedges, lakes, ponds, playgrounds, coastal habitats, footpaths, cycle routes and water courses.

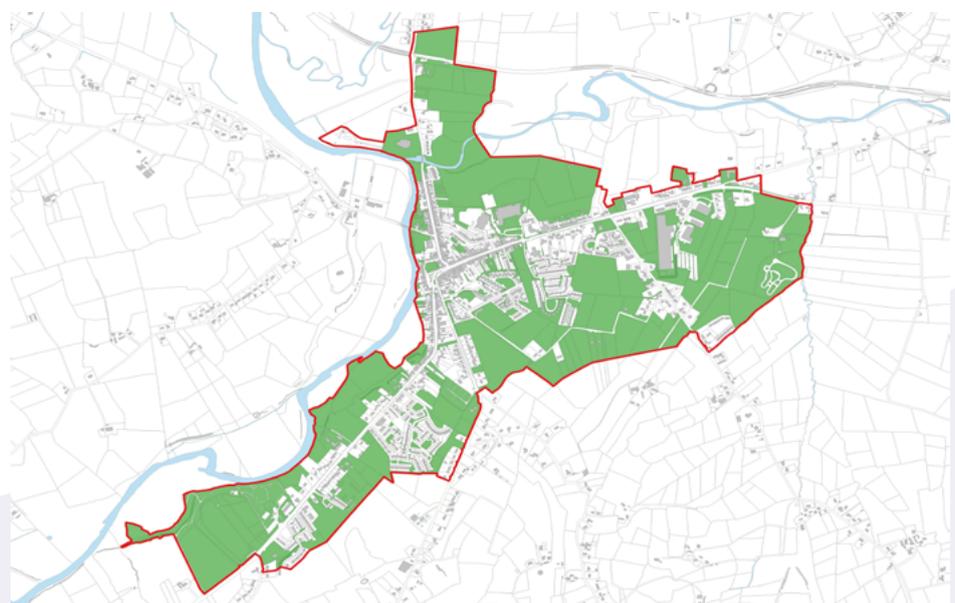
The development of Green - Blue Infrastructure and in particular the connecting of green - blue assets has multiple benefit for communities, in enhanced biodiversity, climate mitigation and adaptation benefits, such as carbon sequestration, provides for recreational space and in turn enhances quality of life and mental health, by providing opportunities for social interaction and community cohesion. The Limerick Green - Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Limerick City and Environs which was recently completed, considered the benefits as identified below.

 <p><b>Biodiversity</b> Conservation priorities Designated sites Habitat networks</p>	 <p><b>Landscape and Recreation</b> Landscape character Open space provision Urban greening</p>	 <p><b>Access and connectivity</b> Active travel Public Rights of Way Public transport</p>
 <p><b>Blue Infrastructure</b> Watercourses Flood risk Water quality</p>	 <p><b>People, Communities, Health and Well-being</b> Health and well-being Deprivation Community food growing</p>	 <p><b>Tourism, Culture and the Economy</b> Historic sites and heritage Economic benefits Tourist destinations</p>

Furthermore the Draft Local Area Plan goes on to identify the key assets for Abbeyfeale in terms of green – blue infrastructure to include: River Feale, Allaugnán River, Abbeyfeale Town Park, Slí na Slainte walking loop, the Biodiversity Park on New Street, the Limerick Greenway and connections on into the Kerry Greenway Network. The Draft Local Area Plan also seeks to examine the feasibility of developing a riverside walk, connecting the Town Park, the Town Centre and on to the Limerick Greenway. This would have huge benefits for the town in terms of linking key infrastructure assets, should this be achieved.

The delivery of additional green – blue assets can be incorporated into all new developments within the town, including new housing development, redevelopment of brownfield sites for commercial or residential purposes, active travel measures, etc. the use of Sustainable urban Drainage Solutions, such as swales, green roofs, green walls etc.. There is also potential for the development of pocket parks, addition of greening and tree planting in the town, which will enhance the overall appearance of the town. During consultation, some concerns were raised with regard to the location of the Town Park, removed from town centre and the ability of older members of the community to walk to the park, without the need for a car. Pocket parks can provide space for local people to meet their neighbours outdoors, the inclusion of seating and trees in a small space can often provide the space needed in the town centre.

Linking green blue infrastructure and connecting up assets is considered an important element in enhancing the quality of life for the residents and visitors in the town. Utilising the natural assets available to the community to enhance the liveability of town is important in attracting people back to live and work in the town centre.



## → Greening ambitions

- \* Seek to develop a Green - Blue Infrastructure Strategy for the town (subject AA and SEA requirements including screening, as relevant) - key objective is to connect infrastructure assets and enhance biodiversity.
- \* Plant pollinator friendly plants in Abbeyfeale to provide food for pollinating insects, in line with the All Ireland Pollinator Plan.
- \* Support biodiversity initiatives in the Biodiversity Park and the Town Park, such as Don't Mow, Let it Grow and other similar Local Authority led programmes.
- \* Explore the feasibility of developing a Riverside Walk connecting the Town Park, the Town Centre and the Limerick Greenway, to improve permeability to key recreational assets and in the interest of enhancing biodiversity and developing ecological corridors.
- \* Promote community food growing initiatives with existing housing developments, examine the feasibility of the development of community gardens or allotments to foster community cohesion.
- \* Ensure enhancement, protection and maintenance of green infrastructure and recognise the benefits through involving the local community within the planning and development process and raising environmental awareness.
- \* Promote local knowledge of the native trees in the Town Park and the Biodiversity Park by placing tree plaques displaying tree names.
- \* Integrate provision for biodiversity within public open space provision and sustainable water management measures, including Sustainable urban Drainage Systems, where possible and appropriate.
- \* Animate the blue infrastructure by facilitating water - related activities i.e. angling, canoeing, rowing, etc.

## Priority Action 9.

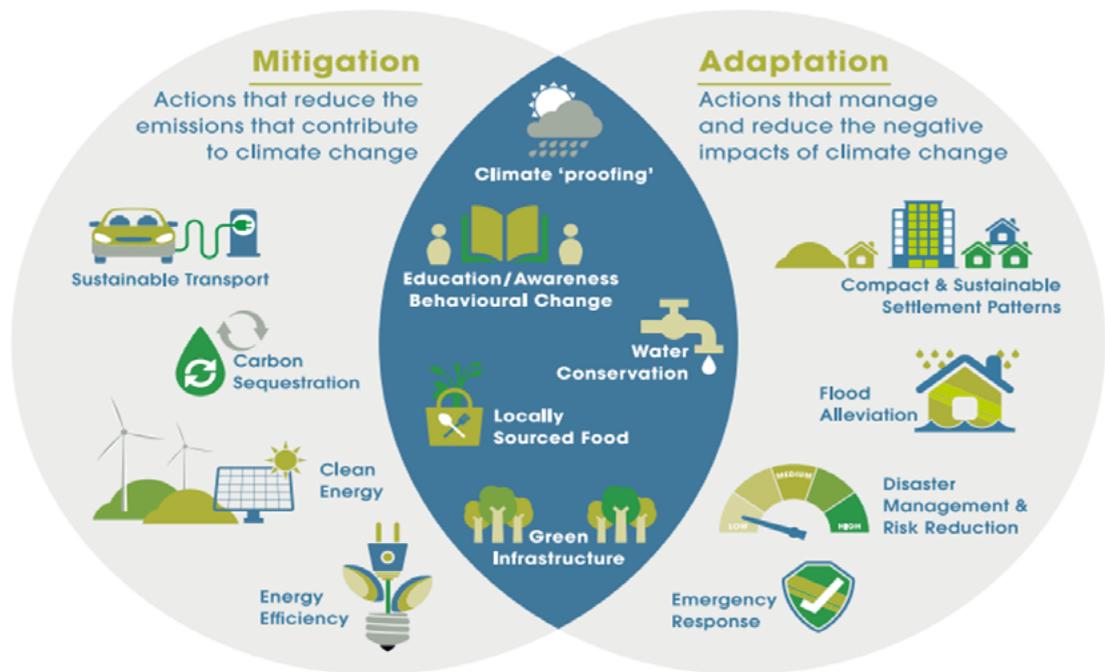
### Make Abbeyfeale More Climate Resilient and Adaptable

Climate resilience and adaptability is crucial for the development of our towns and local communities, as they develop. The effects of climate change are quickly becoming the biggest challenge facing society today posing a serious threat to quality of life, communities, businesses, the environment and biodiversity. While Ireland's continues to transition to Net Zero and achieving a climate neutral economy by no later than 2050, there are critical gaps between climate policies that are endorsed and the action that is taking place in practice.

There is no doubt that our climate is changing rapidly and the effects on our lives is becoming more evident, by each season. The response to the effects are wide ranging costs associated with them, including economic costs for local businesses, environmental costs on the local biodiversity and social costs on society. Unfortunately, human activities are increasingly influencing climate change, spurred on by both the need for climate action and energy security.

Climate mitigation and adaptation are crucial elements in seeking to address climate change. Mitigation seeks to reduce emissions that contribute to climate change and adaptation seeks to manage and reduce the negative impacts of climate change, local interventions can have impacts on quality of life on local communities. Abbeyfeale has already commenced action with regard to becoming climate resilient, with actions such as the reuse of vacant and derelict buildings, redevelopment of a vacant site for a biodiversity park, installation of a drinking water point in the town, education of school children in terms of awarding of Green Flags.

However, there is room for further action, at a national, regional and local level, in terms of addressing climate action. As identified above, it is clear that compact growth is a key contributor to more sustainable communities, reducing the need to travel and promoting more cohesive communities. Actions such as water conservation, increased awareness and promoting behavioural change must be instilled throughout the community to achieve results.



The Council will continue to work with the local community to seek funding to implement climate action measures.

## → Climate Action ambitions

- \* Prioritise the reuse and adaptation of buildings, rather than demolition and rebuild.
- \* Enhance connectivity, reduce the need to travel by motorised vehicles - reducing emissions.
- \* Incorporate urban greening initiatives, into the redevelopment of buildings and public realm projects, such as green walls, swales and green roofs.
- \* Close the loop on the Circular Economy.
- \* Promote educational programmes in schools and in the community around addressing climate action and addressing climate adaptation and mitigation.
- \* Seek to enhance the energy efficiency of buildings, particularly in the redevelopment of vacant and derelict buildings.
- \* Develop a community energy plan for Abbeyfeale town, including an energy audit, which looks at retrofitting options for properties within the town.

## Priority Action 10.

### Enhance Abbeyfeale's Digital Blueprint

The National Planning Framework and Our Rural Future recognise the importance of digital readiness in the development of thriving towns and explicable in the Town Centre First Initiative recognises that successful places utilise digital technology to enhance the experience of living and working in towns, enabling greater choice in terms of location and lifestyle. Digital technology can improve the quality and accessibility of services, and can be used to address challenges faced by our towns, providing them with new roles in the digital economy.

The Department of Rural and Community Development commissioned Dublin City University and .IE to conduct a Digital Town Blueprint (DTB) for all the towns selected for funding under the Town Centre First Initiative 2021. The DTB was designed to help towns understand their current digital town readiness and digital competitiveness, compare their town against Irish and international benchmarks and to stimulate stakeholder engagement on digitalisation.

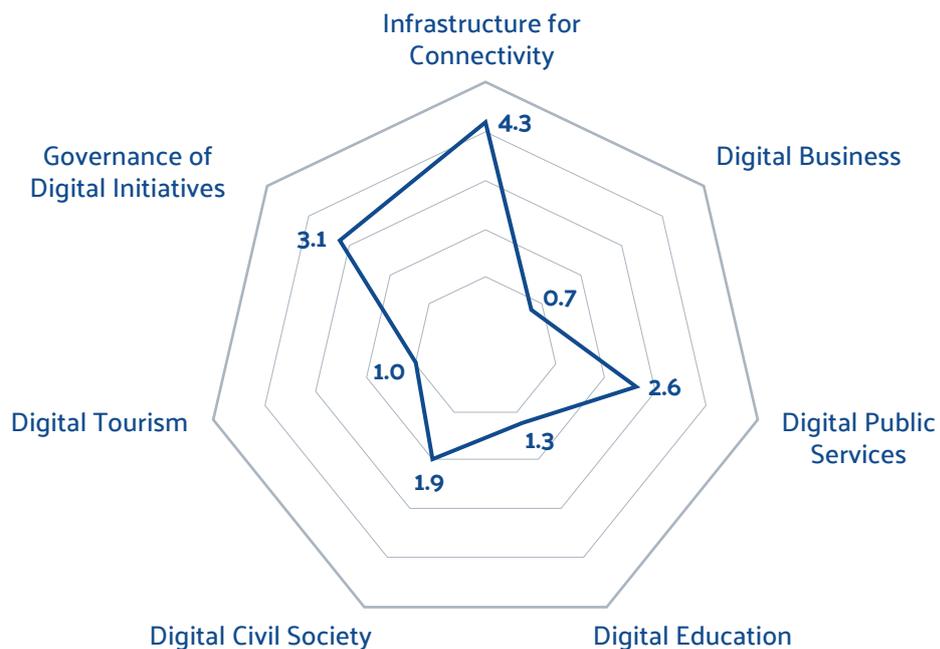
Each town was scored against key criteria, including Infrastructure for connectivity, Digital Business, Digital Public Services, Digital Education, Digital Civil Society and Digital Tourism.

The score for the town was reasonably good terms of infrastructure for connectivity and recognised the benefits of the Rural Digital Hub in the Provincial Bank on the Main Street, however, it did highlight limited availability of public wi - fi, as a constraint in terms of connectivity to digital services.

The report highlights a low level of digital readiness in terms of Digital Business, which examines the presence of local businesses online, the report highlights significant room for improvement in terms of enhancing online trading and marketing of the business in the town. There are supports in place that through the Local Authority Enterprise Office, such as Trading Online Vouchers, Digital Start Programme and Local Enterprise Office mentoring programme, which would support businesses in developing an online presence.

In terms of Digital Public Services and Digital Education and Digital Tourism in Abbeyfeale, the report highlights potential for improvement across all sectors, however, failure from some sectors to respond to the assessment, may have skewed the overall results. In terms of digital tourism, the report highlights concerns regarding the lack of or maturity of a digital tourism presence online. The report does highlight the destination website [www.abbeyfeale.ie](http://www.abbeyfeale.ie) and since the publication of the report a tourist office has opened in the town, which both seek to promote Abbeyfeale as a tourist destination.

The report highlights some gaps and opportunities, which could enhance Abbeyfeale's digital readiness, which could increase revenue and promotion of both business and tourism offering throughout the town. The spider diagram below provides a summary of Abbeyfeale's digital readiness over the key 7 themes, which are identified in the diagram below and based on the analysis undertaken in this process Abbeyfeale was given an overall digital town score of 44.



There are opportunities to enhance smart streets in Abbeyfeale, which combine physical infrastructure of streets with digital infrastructure, which provides for better quality of lives for residents and readily available access to information.

## → Digital Enhancement ambitions

- \* Further promotion of the E - Hub, within the region, to seek to attract large numbers of remote workers, than may wish to reside in Abbeyfeale and utilise the facility.
- \* Further promote the Tourist Office in Abbeyfeale, as a focal point in the town, for visitors.
- \* Promote business supports and upskilling opportunities to assist and promote enterprise in the town - such as Trading Online Vouchers, Digital Start Up Programme, Digital Marketing Training Programme, and the Local Enterprise Office Mentoring Programme etc.
- \* Support the development of digital infrastructure to enhance Smart Town Technologies - such as smart bins, smart benches, smart lighting etc.
- \* Work with service providers to enhance broadband connectivity and speeds within the town.
- \* Develop partnerships with local educational institutions to offer training programs in digital skills and entrepreneurship, equipping residents with the necessary tools for remote work and digital entrepreneurship.
- \* Promote and market Abbeyfeale on all media platform, to enhance the digital reach.

7.

DELIVERING

THE PLAN



The priority actions have been formulated and are evident based, following on from extensive consultation on the issues and needs of the community and in terms of the delivery of the Plan, it needs to be supported by the community in order to attain maximum benefit for Abbeyfeale.

Significant change only comes about when you have all the stakeholders working together to deliver the same goals. The Town Team will carry out the delivery of many of the projects outlined in the Plan in collaboration with the Local Authority and the Town Team will have a continuous role in overseeing the ultimate execution and review of the Plan in the long term. The Town Regeneration Officer will support the ongoing work of the Town Team, ensuring the development and delivery of the Town Centre First Plan.

Formulation and nurturing of collaborative groups are critical to the delivery of the Town Centre First Plan, it is anticipated that the Town Team will seek to deliver some of projects in collaboration with the Local Authority and other partners as appropriate. A robust partnership approach is required to deliver on the Town Centre First Plan over the short, medium and long term.

Implementing this Plan will involve Limerick City and County Council helping to facilitate, promote, support and coordinate stakeholders in their activities in a way that is consistent with existing and emerging plans setting out public policy for sustainable development, including that relating to the economy, communities, infrastructure, land use tourism and environmental protection and environmental management.

This Plan is situated alongside this hierarchy of statutory documents that has been subject to environmental assessment/screening for environmental assessment, as appropriate, and forms the decision-making and consent-granting framework. The Plan does not provide consent or establish a framework for granting consent and will not be binding on any decisions relating to the granting of consent.

The Plan fully aligns with the provisions of the existing National Planning Framework, Ireland 2040, National Climate Action Plan 2023, Housing For All 2021, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031, the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 and the Abbeyfeale Local Area Plan 2023-2029, all of which have been subject to legislative requirements relating to public consultation and environmental assessment/screening for environmental assessment. As such, the Plan is wholly subject to the requirements of the provisions set out in these documents, encompassing measures relating to sustainable development, environmental protection and environmental management that have been integrated into these documents, including through SEA and AA processes, and does not introduce any alterations or additions to those provisions.

In order to be realised, projects included in this Plan (in a similar way to other projects from any other sectors) will have to comply, as relevant, with various legislation, policies, plans and programmes (including requirements for lower-tier Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment and other licencing requirements as appropriate) that form the statutory decision-making and consent-granting framework. It is a specific provision of this Plan to ensure that all of the provisions from the Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028 and the Abbeyfeale Local Area Plan 2023-2029 identified in the accompanying Screening for SEA and AA reports shall be complied with throughout the implementation of this Plan. The delivery of the Town Centre First Plan for Abbeyfeale needs to draw on resources available through the various Government Departments and Agencies to ensure an integrated and co-ordinated approach to addressing the priority actions outlined above. The Plan sets out clear priority action and initiatives under each action, many will require multi agency and multi funding streams to be co-ordinated and delivered.

## Priority Action 1:

### Reactivate the Town Centre through the delivery of compact growth

Initiative	Owners	Support	Funding	Timeline
Promote the development of the 10 minute Town.	Developers	Town Team/LCCC	Private investment	Ongoing
Encouraging a mix of housing types within all developments.	Developers	Town Team/LCCC	Private investment	Ongoing
Promote higher densities and a diversity of uses in the town centre.	Developers	Town Team/LCCC	Private investment	Ongoing
Focus on providing affordable and step down housing options.	Developers and LCCC	Town Team	Private Investment and Government Funding	Ongoing
Identify opportunities to enhance the public realm.	Town Team and LCCC	TII	Depends on nature of works	Short term
Foster a sense of place and community pride in new developments.	Developers and LCCC	Town Team	Private investment	Ongoing
Integrate sustainable design principles into new developments.	Developers and LCCC	Town Team	Private investment	Ongoing
Promote adaptive reuse of vacant and derelict structures.	Town Team and LCCC	Developers	Private investment	Ongoing

## Priority Action 2:

### Continue to tackle Vacancy and Dereliction in Abbeyfeale

Initiative	Owners	Support	Funding	Timeline
Continue to work with property owners to address dereliction and vacancy in Abbeyfeale.	Town Team and LCCC	Tidy Towns	Private Investment/ RRDF	Ongoing
Bring back into use prominent long term vacant buildings.	Private landowners	LCCC and Town Team	Heritage Council	Annually
Liaise with relevant Government Departments and bodies, such as the Heritage Council to identify funding to redevelop historic buildings.	Town Team	LCCC	Heritage Council	Annually

## Priority Action 3:

### Enhance Sustainable Mobility and Connectivity

Initiative	Owners	Support	Funding	Timeline
Implement traffic calming measures throughout the town.	LCCC	TII/NTA/Town Team	TII/NTA	Short term
Support the progression of the N21 Abbeyfeale Road Scheme to planning stage, in line with available funding	LCCC	TII/Dept. of Transport	TII/Dept. of Transport	Long term
Provide a new carpark.	LCCC	TII/NTA/Town Team	TII/NTA	Short term
Rationalise existing car parking on the Main Street.	LCCC	TII/NTA/Town Team	TII/NTA	Short term
Deliver a high quality, versatile and dynamic destination in the Town Square.	LCCC	TII/NTA/Town Team	TII/NTA	Short term
Support the redevelopment of retail space fronting The Square, to enliven the space.	Private owners	Town Team/LCCC	Private funding	Medium/long term
Improve permeability and connectivity throughout the town.	LCCC/NTA/TII	TII/NTA/Town Team	TII/NTA	Short term
Work with transport providers to enhance bus services.	LCCC/Town Team	NTA	NTA	Short term
Enhance car parking signage.	LCCC	TII/NTA/Town Team	TII/NTA	Short term
Enhance streetscapes in Abbeyfeale.	Town Team/LCCC	Tidy Towns	DRCD	Short term
Improve connectivity to sporting facilities.	LCCC/NTA	Town Team	NTA	Short term
Implement Safe Routes to School measures in conjunction with the NTA	LCCC/NTA	Town Team/Schools	NTA	Short term
Seek to deliver the link road between the Killarney Road and the Hill Road.	LCCC/TII	Town Team	TBC	Long Term
Seek to address issues with deliveries and refuse collection.	LCCC/Business Owners	Town Team	Private businesses	Medium term

## Priority Action 4:

### Invest in Place - Making and Public Realm in Abbeyfeale

Initiative	Owners	Support	Funding	Timeline
Examine the potential of enhancing or refurbishing existing shopfronts throughout Abbeyfeale.	LCCC/Town Team	N/A	TBC	Short/ Medium Term
Support local businesses in securing funding from relevant bodies, to assist in the upgrade/ refurbishment of buildings.	LCCC/Town Team	Heritage Council	TBC	Short/ Medium Term
Support the implementation of streetscape enhancement.	LCCC/Town Team	Tidy Towns	TBC	Short/ Medium Term
Explore opportunities to develop signage for the approaches to the Town, which are unique to the town and which provide a sense of arrival on reaching Abbeyfeale on the relevant approach roads.”	LCCC/Town Team	TII	TBA	Short/ Medium Term

## Priority Action 5:

### Create a Resilient, Connected and Inclusive Community

Initiative	Owners	Support	Funding	Timeline
Explore the feasibility of developing a youth café/ youth club.	Town Team	LCCC	TBC	Medium/ Long term
Carry out a feasibility study to examine the potential development of a Family Resource Centre.	Town Team	LCCC/HSE	TBC	Medium/ Long term
Establish a programme of Community Wraparound Family Support Services in the community.	HSE	LCCC/Town Team	TBC	Short term
Carry out a feasibility study to examine the potential development of a purpose built community crèche in Abbeyfeale.	Town Team	LCCC	TBC	Short term
Develop programmes and services that cater to the needs and interests of older adults.	Town Team	LCCC	TBC	Short term

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Owners</b>	<b>Support</b>	<b>Funding</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Support local entrepreneurs and social enterprises by providing resources, training, and mentorship programs.	Town Team/LCCC	WLR	TBC	Medium term
Establish and promote volunteer networks that connect individuals and organisations seeking volunteer opportunities.	Town Team/LCCC	WLR	TBC	Medium term
Collaborate with mental health organisations and professionals to improve access to mental health services.	Town Team/LCCC	HSE	TBC	Medium term
Explore the establishment of community gardens and allotments.	Town Team/Tidy Towns	LCCC	TBC	Medium term
Identify opportunities to enhance existing sports and recreation facilities.	Town Team	Sporting organisations	TBC	Medium term
Consider partnerships with local sports clubs and organisations to offer a wider range of recreational activities.	Town Team	Sporting organisations	TBC	Medium term
Support the development of cultural and artistic initiatives that celebrate the town's creativity and skills.	Town Team/LCCC	Arts Council	TBC	Medium term
Utilise digital platforms and technology to enhance community engagement.	Town Team/LCCC		TBC	Short term
Work with education providers to develop and deliver programmes based on diversity and inclusion.	Town Team/LCCC	Dept. of Education/ LCETB	TBC	Short term
Continue to raise awareness and seek the necessary interventions to address social inclusion.	Town Team/LCCC	Dept. of Education/ LCETB	TBC	Short term

## Priority Action 6:

### Create a Sustainable, Innovative and Competitive Economy

Initiative	Owners	Support	Funding	Timeline
Support collaboration between the Town Team and the local community to create a comprehensive business support program.	Town Team	LCCC	TBC	Medium term
Formulate a Chamber of Commerce in Abbeyfeale.	Town Team/ Business Owners		TBC	Medium term
Provide resources, workshops, and mentoring opportunities to assist local entrepreneurs in starting and growing their businesses.	Town Team/LCCC		TBC	Medium term
Work with the Limerick - Clare Education and Training Board to enhance the education and training offering in the Abbeyfeale Campus.	Town Team/LCCC/ LCETB		TBC	Medium term
Promote partnerships between local businesses and the schools to deliver targeted training programs.	Town Team/LCCC	Business owners	TBC	Medium term
Promote the sequential approach in the development of employment generating uses.	Developers	Town Team/LCCC	Private investment	Ongoing
Support the delivery of affordable workspace, shared resources, and mentorship programs.	Private Developers/ LCCC	LCETB	TBC	Medium term
Promote the development of mixed-use buildings in the town centre.	Town Team/LCCC	Developers	Private investment	Ongoing
Support the integration of employment opportunities within new developments.	Developers	Town Team/LCCC	Private investment	Ongoing
Promote a buy local campaign.	Town Team/LCCC	Community	TBC	Short term
Support local traders at the Friday Farmer's Market and the Saturday Craft Market.	Town Team/LCCC	Community	TBC	Short term

## Priority Action 7:

### Capitalise on Abbeyfeale's Tourism Assets

Initiative	Owners	Support	Funding	Timeline
Seek to deliver a safe connection from the Limerick Greenway to Abbeyfeale Town Centre.	LCCC/NTA	Town Team	NTA	Short term
Seek to redevelop the Former Goods Shed as a Greenway Hub.	LCCC/Town Team	Community	RRDF	Short Term
Support the development of complimentary tourist accommodation in Abbeyfeale.	Developers	LCCC/Town Team	Private investment	Medium/long term
Seek the promotion and marketing of Abbeyfeale.	Town Team	LCCC	TBC	Short term
Seek to further develop the heritage trail in Abbeyfeale.	Town Team	LCCC	TBC	Short term
Explore the feasibility of developing a heritage centre in Abbeyfeale.	Town Team	LCCC	TBC	Medium/long term
Seek to develop complimentary tourism products to increase visitors dwell time in Abbeyfeale - such as eco-tourism, outdoor activities etc.	Developers	LCCC/Town Team	TBC	Medium/ Long term
Seek to further enhance the offering along the Limerick Greenway, working in co-operation with Kerry County Council and other stakeholders.	Town Team/LCCC	Failte Ireland	Failte Ireland	Short/ Medium term
Promote and market the Limerick Greenway in collaboration with the Kingdom of Kerry Greenway.	Town Team/LCCC	Failte Ireland	Failte Ireland	Short/ Medium term
Develop tourism packages, trails, and events that showcase the town's cultural offerings.	Town Team/LCCC	Failte Ireland	Failte Ireland	Short/ Medium term
Support the night time economy in Abbeyfeale, through festivals, events, arts and culture.	Town Team/LCCC	Arts Council	Arts Council	Short/ Medium term

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Owners</b>	<b>Support</b>	<b>Funding</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Develop an Arts Programme for Young People, which encompasses all elements of the arts and work with the Glórach Theatre.	Town Team/LCCC	Arts Council	Arts Council	Short/ Medium term
Support the greater use of the Glórach Theatre.	Town Team/LCCC	Arts Council	Arts Council	Short/ Medium term
Foster creative industries in the town.	Town Team/LCCC	Arts Council	Arts Council	Short/ Medium term

## Priority Action 8:

### Green Abbeyfeale

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Owners</b>	<b>Support</b>	<b>Funding</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Seek to develop a Green - Blue Infrastructure Strategy for the town (subject AA and SEA requirements including screening, as relevant) - key objective is to connect infrastructure assets and enhance biodiversity.	Town Team/Tidy Towns	LCCC	TBC	Medium term
Plant pollinator friendly plants in Abbeyfeale.	Tidy Towns	LCCC/Town Team	TBC	Short term
Support biodiversity initiatives in the Biodiversity Park and the Town Park.	Tidy Towns	LCCC/Town Team	TBC	Short term
Explore the feasibility of developing a Riverside Walk.	Town Team/LCCC	Community and Landowners	RRDF/ORIS	Medium term
Promote community food growing initiatives.	Tidy Towns	LCCC/Town Team	TBC	Short term
Ensure enhancement, protection and maintenance of green infrastructure.	Tidy Towns	LCCC/Town Team	TBC	Short term
Promote local knowledge of the native trees.	Tidy Towns	LCCC/Town Team	TBC	Short term
Integrate provision for biodiversity with public open space provision.	Developers	LCCC/Town Team	TBC	Short term
Animate the blue infrastructure by facilitating water - related activities.	Town Team/LCCC	Sporting groups	TBC	Short/ Medium term

## Priority Action 9:

### Make Abbeyfeale more Climate Resilient and Adaptable

Initiative	Owners	Support	Funding	Timeline
Prioritise the reuse and adaptation of buildings.	Developers	Town Team/LCCC	Private Investment	Ongoing
Enhance connectivity, reduce the need to travel by motorised vehicles.	LCCC/NTA	Town Team	NTA	Short/ Medium term
Incorporate urban greening initiatives, into the redevelopment of buildings.	Developers	LCCC/Town Team	TBC	Ongoing
Close the loop on the Circular Economy.	Community	LCCC/Town Team	N/A	Short term
Promote educational programmes in schools and in the community around addressing climate action.	Education and Training providers/ Tidy Towns	LCCC/Town Team	TBC	Short term
Seek to enhance the energy efficiency of buildings.	Property owners	LCCC/Town Team	Private Investment	Medium/ Long term
Develop a community energy plan for Abbeyfeale town.	Town Team	LCCC	Climate Action Funding	Long term

## Priority Action 10:

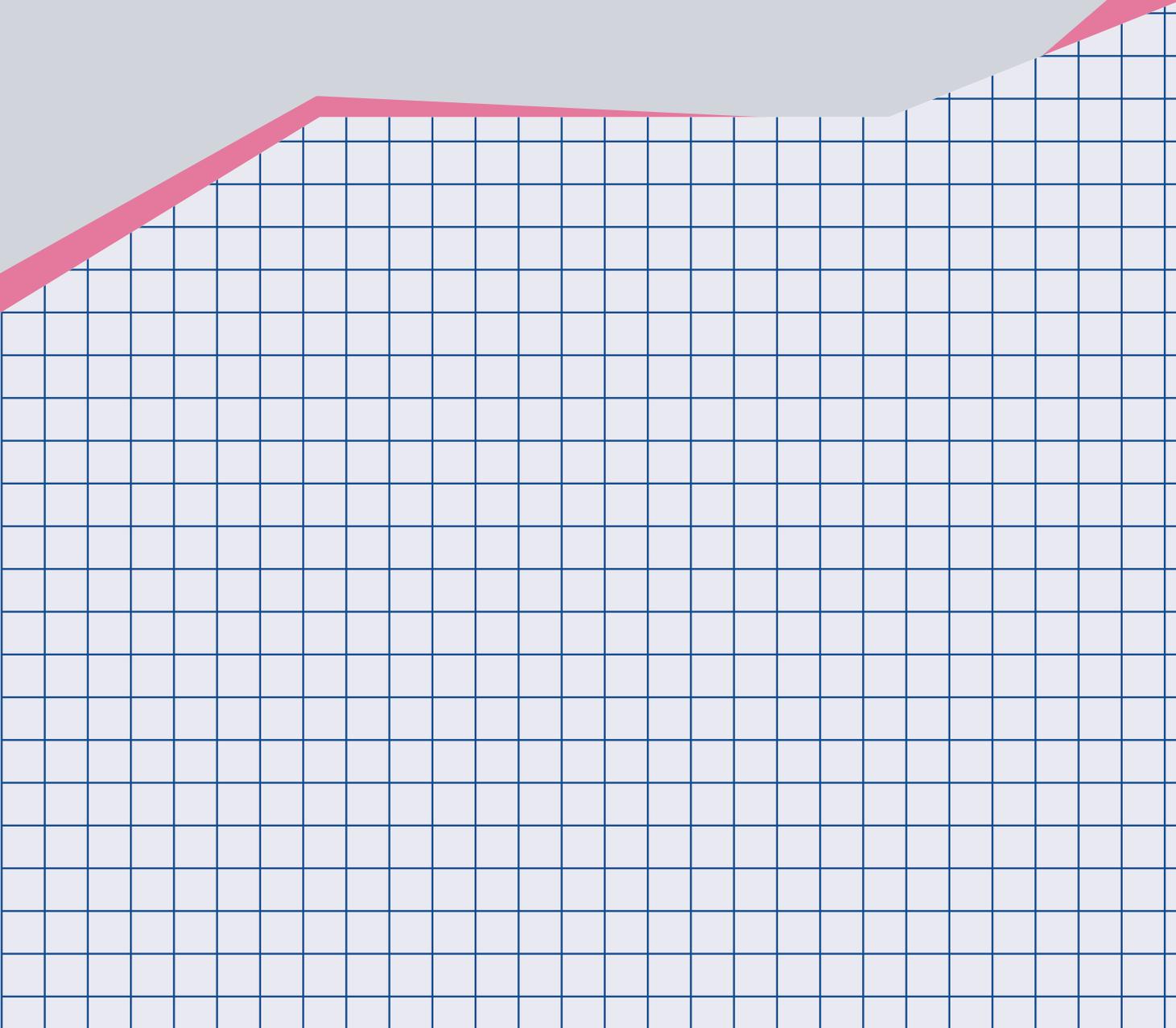
### Develop Abbeyfeale's Digital Blueprint

Initiative	Owners	Support	Funding	Timeline
Further promotion of the E - Hub, within the region.	Town Team	LCCC	N/A	Short term
Further promote the Tourist Office in Abbeyfeale.	Town Team	LCCC	N/A	Short term
Promote business supports and upskilling opportunities to assist and promote enterprise in the town.	Town Team/LCCC	Business owners	N/A	Short term
Support the development of digital infrastructure to enhance Smart Town Technologies.	Town Team	Town Team	TBC	Medium term

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Owners</b>	<b>Support</b>	<b>Funding</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
<b>Work with service providers to enhance broadband connectivity and speeds within the town.</b>	LCCC	Town Team/ Broadband providers	National Broadband Plan	Short/ Medium term
<b>Develop partnerships with local educational institutions to offer training programs in digital skills and entrepreneurship.</b>	Town Team/LCETB	LCCC	TBC	Short term
<b>Promote and market Abbeyfeale on all media platform, to enhance the digital reach.</b>	Town Team	LCCC	N/A	Short Term

APPENDIX

— FUNDING  
OPPORTUNITIES



## Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) is a funding programme that is investing €1 billion in rural Ireland up to 2027. This fund is aimed:

- Supporting job creation in rural areas;
- Addressing de-population of rural communities;
- Supporting improvements in towns and villages.

RRDF funding is available for towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000. The funding is awarded through a competitive bid process, proposals are invited from Local Authorities and other locally/regionally based organisations such as Local Development Companies.

## Housing For All - Croí Cónaithe Fund

The Croí Conaithe (Towns) is a grant introduced by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. This grant is a key initiative that underpins the policy objectives set out in Pathway Four 'Addressing Vacancy and the Efficient Use of our Existing Stock' of 'Housing for All'. The grant is aimed at addressing the blight of vacant and derelict properties across cities, towns and villages by bringing them back into use, adding vibrancy and providing new accommodation on these areas.

Croí Conaithe has two streams with different supports:

- Stream 1, which is the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant, provides people with a grant of up to a maximum of €50,000 to support the refurbishment of vacant properties, and up to €70,000 for derelict properties.
- Stream 2, which is the Ready to Build Scheme, provides local authorities with the ability to make serviced sites available, at a discount on the market value (up to a maximum of €30,000) within towns and villages to potential individual purchasers (building must be occupied as the principal private residence of the purchaser).

## Town and Village Renewal Scheme

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme is a funding scheme first introduced in 2016 as a measure to rejuvenate rural towns and villages throughout Ireland. This scheme is part of “Our Rural Future - Ireland’s Rural Development Policy 2021 - 2025” and is funded under Project Ireland 2040. Since the launch of the scheme over €149 million has been allocated to more than 1,600 projects. This scheme is supported by the Town Centre First Policy and the priorities under the scheme are reviewed each year with the scheme revised as appropriate. This scheme is similar to the RRDF, is a competitive process where Local Authorities submit application forms to the Department of Rural and Community Development.

## LEADER Community Led Local Development (CLLD)

The LEADER Programme is funded by both the EU and Irish Government and provides grants, advice and training to support business start-up, expand or develop new products; communities projects to be planned and carried out and assist projects that help the rural environment. The LEADER programme is administered at a local level by local action groups. The Limerick Local Community Development Committee are responsible for selecting and awarding LEADER funding to projects within their geographical area. The Programme funds proposals local and community projects in the local area.

## European Regional Development Fund

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) provides funding to public and private bodies in all EU regions to reduce economic, social and territorial disparities. The Fund supports investments through dedicated national or regional programmes. In 2021-2027, the fund will enable investments to make Europe and its regions more competitive and smarter, through innovation and support to small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), as well as digitisation and digital connectivity, greener, low-carbon and resilient, more connected by enhancing mobility, more social, supporting effective and inclusive employment, education, skills, social inclusion and equal access to healthcare, as well as enhancing the

role of culture and sustainable tourism and closer to citizens, supporting locally-led development and sustainable urban development across the EU.

## Historic Towns Initiative

The Historic Towns Initiative, led by the Heritage Council, aims to provide support to historic towns engaged in a programme of heritage-led regeneration. In 2022, the focus was particularly interested in projects that address residential vacancy in town centres, that proposes the re-use of historic structures and that can act as a demonstrator for future projects, which directly aligns with the plan being prepared.

## Miscellaneous funding opportunities

Aside from the funding opportunities described above, there are other grant schemes which would support the regeneration of Abbeyfeale. The following is a non-exhaustive list:

- Housing for all initiative – such as Repair and Lease, Buy and Renew, etc.
- Creative Ireland Grant Scheme;
- Heritage Council Community Heritage Fund;
- Dept. of Housing, Local Government and Heritage Community Monuments Fund;
- SEAI Community and Business Grants;
- Local Authority Community Grants;
- Fáilte Ireland Small Grants Scheme;
- Local Enterprise Office Financial Supports;
- NTA Active Travel Grants Programme.

# ABBEYFEALE

TOWN CENTRE FIRST PLAN

DRAFT