

A Community Seat at the Planning Permission Table

About David Lamont

David Lamont is a Rathkeale Champion and former committee member of the Rathkeale Community Council and Team Rathkeale business group. He represented the town on the PNN and JPC. He remains the weekly media correspondent for the town and manages both the rathkeale.com website and Facebook page. The Rathkeale Champion Awards, the Welcome Centre, Supplies for Ukrainian refugees, and Cyclist Friendly Rathkeale were among the programmes he initiated.

David believes the town must develop a unique value that it can sustain. It's not good enough to exist; to have the Greenway if visitors don't shop downtown; to have half the population shop for 5 months instead of 12; to have a full industrial estate that only employs a few people; or to have amenities when neighbouring towns have better ones. It is lasting infrastructure development that makes the town more competitive and therefore the draft LAP should be amended before adoption.

David acknowledges the good work of the planners, the use of data to support decisions and the positive intent of the plan. He makes the following comments to present a more local perspective.

Summary

Every town's wellbeing depends on its local economy that provides good/services, employment, amenities as well as contributions to social clubs and societies. Vibrancy can be judged by the number and diversity of shops. Demand for such shops attracts investment that upgrades and occupies buildings, mitigating a run-down ambiance that repels both shoppers and new residents.

Key Points

- The LAP addresses residences (dwellings) but not the more important occupancy that underpins the town's economy. The LAP should have clearer occupancy goals.
- Conclusions about the desirability of single bedroom dwellings are not supported by more recent data.
- Plans for retail (more shop, services downtown) require demand. Demand comes from residents and visitors, but Rathkeale has an atypical occupancy that lowers consumer spending.
- Occupancy (12 months vs 5 months per year) is a factor of dwelling type and demographics (age, family, culture.)
- Occupancy and economic vitality are intertwined. With finite space for new dwellings actual planning permission decisions have the potential to help or hurt Rathkeale's competitiveness.
- The Special Development Area grants extra rights that favour one community, potentially reinforcing segregation. The Special Development Area should also come with listed responsibilities to ensure the town remains attractive, both inside and outside the designated area.
- Rathkeale's unique environment is best addressed by giving a town champion¹ a say in planning permission decisions and by using the best information available at the time, including commissioned surveys.

¹ Local intimate knowledge unavailable elsewhere. The representative might be from the long-established Rathkeale Community Council.

Housing

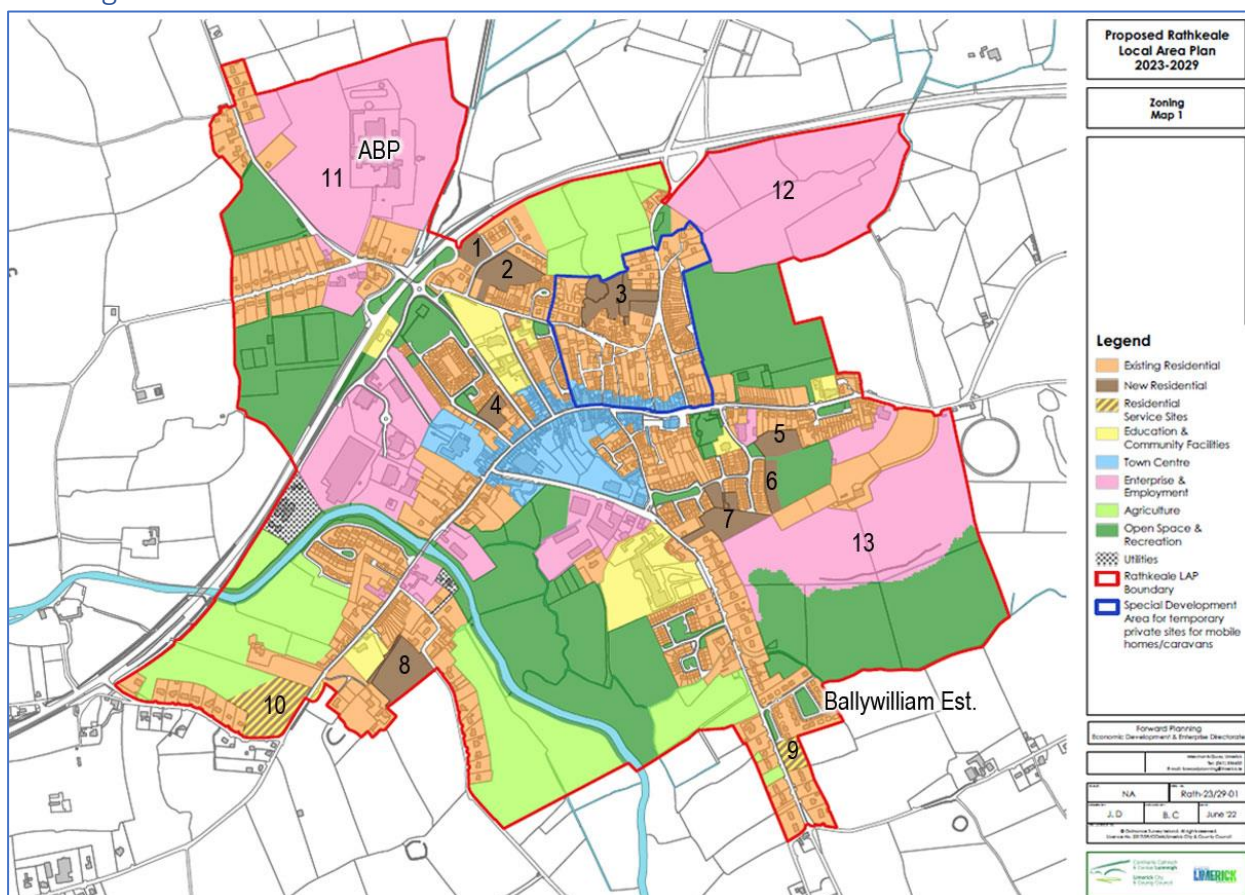


Figure 1: Zoning Map 1 with site numbers from Map 6 and landmark site names.

Note the LAP area cuts Castlematrix road (near zone 10) in half, including some but excluding other neighbours.

The LAP zoning facilitates more residents and more businesses within Rathkeale, both important components for the town’s rejuvenation. It also acknowledges Rathkeale’s migrant Traveller community and an apparent demand for Council one-bedroom dwellings.

If the ten New Residential and Serviced Sites are fully built to the minimum level and the new dwellings are occupied all year by the average 2.59 member households, the plan could exceed the projected population growth by 69%², potentially creating a much-needed boost in the Rathkeale economy.

In this scenario, the need for single-bedroom housing would be accommodated by existing dwellings, over-shop additions, taller new buildings with a small footprint and/or worker residences in Enterprise zones.

Hectares	Site	Min.		
		Dwellings	Households	People
0.4	1 new res.	9	23	59
1.039	2 new res.	23	59	153
1.57	3 new res.	35	89	232
0.36	4 new res.	8	21	53
0.601	5 new res.	13	34	89
0.82	6 new res.	18	47	121
1.27	7 new res.	28	72	187
1.3	8 new res.	29	74	192
0.427	9 serviced	4	11	29
1.785	10 serviced	18	46	120
9.572	Total	184	477	1235
8.3	LAP Projections (p10)	147	156	403
	Difference (aver. household)	37	321	832

However, the LAP is not specific enough to ensure this optimistic outcome, especially when it calculates 55% vacant dwellings resulting from the annual migratory nature of a large proportion of Rathkeale’s Traveller community. As such, a different mix of dwellings and occupants could severely and permanently hurt Rathkeale’s economic vitality because the space is finite.

² 403 population growth (2016-2018) relative to space for 803 if the sites are built out and accommodate 2.59 person households. - <https://www.omnicalculator.com/math/percentage-difference>

Using the LAP projections, not the full capacity high occupancy calculation, the anticipated 403 additional population, (156 households of 2.59 people) by 2028 could contribute €1,143,993 to the town economy if each household spends €200 per month for 12 months (i.e. full-time occupants, no new migrants.) If all those households were migrants (same 2.59 people per household) that were in the town for 5 months instead of 12, the contribution to the economy is €476,664, 82% less. If those households were smaller, say 1.5 people in one-bedroom dwellings and present 12 months, the contribution to the economy is €662,544, 53% less. Although these examples use the extreme scenarios, occupancy can be seen to underpin economic development.

Occupancy vs. Dwellings

The largest New Residential zoned³ area expands the Special Development Area for Temporary Private Sites for Motorised Vehicles, Mobile Homes and Caravans, created for the Traveller community. According to the plan this one area adds a minimum of 35⁴ dwellings, 24% of the targeted 147 new residences required by 2028.

The LAP Special Development Area⁵ potentially reinforces existing segregation between Traveller and settled families in Rathkeale. A survey⁶ would show that some property owned by migrants can be boarded up and/or neglected when they are absent, making the town unattractive. With the extra benefits in the Special Development Area there should be extra responsibilities to ensure unoccupied properties do not appear noticeably different from occupied ones. Additionally, the unique considerations for motorised vehicles, mobile homes and caravans should require dwelling-specific planning permission outside⁷ the Special Development Area and all Council standards regarding the boarding up of buildings and property maintenance should be enforced.

The LAP should recognise that the outside world considers towns as single entities and thereby enhance Rathkeale's capacity to compete for fulltime residents, visitors, shoppers, resources, and positive attention. The expected population growth⁸ will be determined by action, not circumstance, so a proactive plan that attracts more families from the 99% of the Irish population, in addition to more migrants from the 0.6%⁹, is in the best interest of both¹⁰ communities. This competitiveness is aided if a Rathkeale champion is given a say in planning permission decisions.

Household Size

With high occupancy in mind, the LAP draws a potentially flawed conclusion¹¹ about important considerations for future housing. The plan states "A preliminary assessment of the housing waiting list for the town indicated that 40% of requests¹² for Council accommodation are for single bedroom units. Household size has decreased from 2.66 persons to 2.59 persons between the census periods of 2011 – 2016. These are important considerations for future housing provision in the town."¹³

³ Area 3 of the Settlement Capacity Assessment Map 6 with 1.57 hectares (p 71) is the largest zoned for New Residential development.

⁴ Housing Strategy and Objectives (page 20) requires a minimum density of 22 dwelling units per hectare on residentially zoned lands.

⁵ Special Development Area for Temporary Private Sites for Motorised Vehicles, Mobile Homes and Caravans.

⁶ The survey could be simple drive around observation in the third quarter of the year outside the Christmas Period. A survey of perspectives could resolve differences of opinion about aesthetic standards.

⁷ There are Travellers with caravans next to the Community Centre car park who are not in the Special Development Area.

⁸ 403 expected new residents divided by 2.59 per household = 155 family households.

⁹ Irish Travellers account for approximately 0.6% of the Irish population, consisting of between 29,000-40,000 individuals. – [Science Foundation Ireland](#), 2017.

¹⁰ "A rising tide, raises all boats." Both Travellers and Settled own residential and business property in Rathkeale so their net worth is similarly impacted by property value changes that result from changes in demand.

¹¹ 6.1 Residential Development – Density, Housing Type and Mix

¹² Limerick City and County Council should reveal the basis of the 40% waiting list statistic. How many data points over what period? Who is on the waiting list, old people, low-paid factory workers and/or others? This matters because Rathkeale has a low turnover of residential property according to the PSRA (97 units in Rathkeale out of 18,625 for the entire county in the 6 years of 2011 through 2016.) It would also be unacceptable to use Rathkeale to house a disproportionate number of disadvantaged people.

¹³ Section 6.1 page 17 (p 22 in pdf)

The Council's Rathkeale waiting list, which could result in too many single bedroom dwellings in areas for new development, does not appear to reflect the housing needs of the county. One-bedroom dwellings are not family-friendly and are unlikely to even meet the needs of the stated 2.59-person household¹⁴. Additionally, more recent CSO and PSRA figures indicate 3+ bedroom dwellings better suit the needs of both the county and town.

The CSO¹⁵ Characteristics of Residential Property Purchasers 2010-2019 report states that seven in ten people who bought a dwelling in 2019 were aged between 25 and 44. Only 6.6% of purchasers were aged over 65 in 2019, indicating that general demand favours family dwellings. The median age for all transactions fluctuated but was largely unchanged at 38 years in 2019 compared to 2013, the earliest date in the [report chart](#).¹⁶ The median age in Limerick County for sole purchasers by local authority was 39 and joint purchasers were aged 38.

According to the [CSO](#), the 2019 median price for residential purchasers in Limerick County by the local authority was €165,000 for sole transactions and €225,000 for joint transactions. For 2019 in Rathkeale the median price of residential property can be calculated using PSRA data at just under €110,000. The average price in Rathkeale was €116,540 with the highest price being €250,000. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that with the median price between 40% and 69% lower in Rathkeale compared to Limerick County that the town would be attractive to family house purchasers, especially if a new Foynes-to-Limerick Road bypasses the Adare traffic bottleneck, shorting the travel time to/from Limerick City.

With both Rathkeale residents and the Council wanting the best for the town, it is desirable that a representative of the town has a say in planning permission decisions and new decisions reflect the best information available at the time.

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¹⁴ A household of more than 2, especially if not a married couple, would require at least 2 bedrooms.

¹⁵ [Characteristics of Residential Property Purchasers 2010-2019](#)

¹⁶ Report chart - <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/FP/FP-cropp/characteristicsofresidentialpropertypurchasers2010-2019/ageofpurchasers/>