

3

Defining Clara

Defining Clara

This section of the TCF Plan focuses on “Defining Clara” which includes establishing a future Vision for Clara Town Centre and presenting the high level themes and their associated objectives and outcomes.

Future Vision for Clara Town Centre

The future Vision for Clara Town Centre is a key component in the overall shaping of the Plan. The Vision presents an image or an idea of the Town Centre and its future direction along with the potential opportunities that could be delivered over the long term.

The Vision has been informed by a number of key contributors which include, inter alia:

- Public consultation with the local community in the town.
- Engagement with the Town Centre First Team and Town Regeneration Officer.
- Baseline research work particularly in terms of an urban, transportation and placemaking analysis of Clara that has identified strengths and weaknesses.

Themes

The Vision for the Town Centre is supported by a number of key regeneration elements which include:

- Environmental quality
- People-focused
- Sustainable movement
- Placemaking
- Economic vibrancy
- Connectivity

Further information regarding the regeneration elements and their importance for Clara Town Centre are summarised in Table 3.1.

“The vision for Clara is to ensure a better quality of life for all through the delivery of an attractive, sustainable, vibrant and prosperous Town Centre. The Town Centre First Plan for Clara is a long term strategy providing a cohesive and planned approach for future development with the aim of generating economic, social, cultural, and environmental opportunities that will create a Town Centre that can be enjoyed by all.”

Figure 3.1 Inputs into the Vision for Clara Town Centre

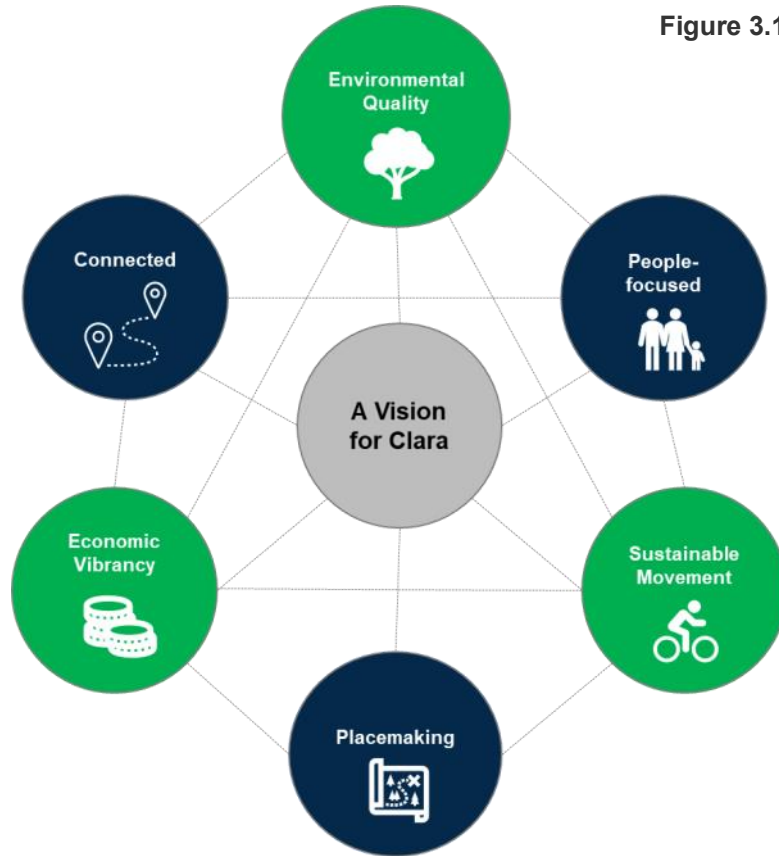








Table 3.1 Inputs into the Vision for Clara Town Centre

<p>Environmental Quality</p> 	<p>The quality of both the natural and urban environments has a role to play in creating attractive places that people are drawn to. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the value of the environment was highlighted in terms of the significant increase in demand for outdoor places and spaces that people sought to utilise for amenity purposes. The natural and urban environments can complement one another in Clara in order to create a visually desirable Town Centre destination.</p>
<p>People-focused</p> 	<p>A key element of the Town Centre First Vision is to ensure that the Plan has a ‘people-focus’ as essentially the Plan is being brought forward for the people who live, work, socialise and visit Clara. This approach can deliver positive outcomes such as enhancing civic pride and strengthening the relationship between ‘people’ and ‘place’.</p>
<p>Sustainable Movement</p> 	<p>The baseline analysis of Clara revealed that nearly two-thirds of all journeys to places of employment and education were undertaken by private car with only one-quarter of trips being made by sustainable modes. High use of the private car is unsustainable over the long term and promoting greater sustainable movement is a key input into the Vision.</p>
<p>Placemaking</p> 	<p>Placemaking is a significant input into the Vision for Clara as it relates to all of the public spaces and public realm in the town and therefore it has a premium value regarding the physical, cultural and social identity of Clara. Creating places that are welcoming, useable, accessible and connected and that have visual quality and distinctiveness are places that attract people and generate vibrancy.</p>
<p>Economic Vibrancy</p> 	<p>The local economy is an important consideration for Clara’s population as it influences how and where people live, how and where they spend their income and how they travel, for example. Having a Town Centre that is economically vibrant is advantageous as it creates employment and opportunities and provides services and functions for the local population.</p>
<p>Connected</p> 	<p>Connectivity is an important element of the Town Centre Vision as places, services and functions that are difficult to access, or which are considered isolated, are places that do not attract people. By enhancing ‘connectivity’, the Town Centre will attract a greater mass of people thereby generating intensity and vibrancy.</p>

Main Street - Present Day



Figure 3.2 Main Street - Future Vision option



Themes

The high level themes for Clara Town Centre have been appropriately informed by the comments received during the public consultation process, as set out in Section 1, and the socio-economic, urban and transportation analysis and SCOT analysis in Section 2.

The themes comprise four regenerative elements which are considered to be of significant importance for the future Town Centre of Clara.

The relevance of the four themes for Clara are set out in further detail on the page opposite. Over the remainder of this Section, theme objectives and outcomes are provided along with theme case study exemplars from towns located nationwide.

The outcomes as proposed for each theme are inter-related with the overarching outcomes for the TCF Plan for Clara which seek to deliver the following:

- 01** **A Place for Living**
- 02** **A Connected Place**
- 03** **An Attractive Place**
- 04** **A Sustainable Place**
- 05** **A Vibrant Place**
- 06** **A Place for Everyone**
- 07** **A Welcoming Place**

Community: A Town for People

Community engagement is central to the development of a TCF Plan for Clara. As established during the public consultation process, there is a strong community spirit in Clara which is advantageous as it provides a strong foundation for the Plan.

Community spirit is important for any town as it enhances quality of life and liveability for existing residents. A town for people is one where people actively choose to live, to shop and to socialise which cumulatively can create a successful Town Centre.

Heritage Tourism

Clara has a rich industrial heritage with an interesting story to be told. Regeneration of the town's heritage, as demonstrated by case studies from around Ireland, can deliver significant economic, cultural and environmental benefits.

Clara's industrial heritage buildings, which are largely vacant with some in poor physical condition, can be re-imagined in order to provide new opportunities for tourism-led development as well as other potential uses such as residential, community, office and leisure for example.

Natural Infrastructure

Clara has a high quality of framework of natural assets which includes blue and green assets such as Clara Bog, River Brosna, the former railway line and The Green.

Clara's natural assets can be promoted to both enhance the quality of life for residents and to attract visitors to the town.

Clara's natural assets can deliver environmental, social and economic benefits for the town over the long term.

Placemaking

Placemaking is the process of creating quality places that are attractive to people to live, work, visit, and socialise in.

Clara's existing urban structure and arrangement of streets, spaces and buildings etc may be restricting it's success, particularly economically, in terms of why local people are not utilising the Town Centre in greater numbers in terms of the retail, residential, commercial and other services it provides.

Theme 1: Community - A Town for People

The National Planning Framework sets out that at all scales, our cities, towns and villages offer a range of opportunities for community and social interaction, potential for innovation and prosperity and support and enable their surrounding rural areas. Town centres are important places for people as they provide a variety of services and facilities that meet the needs of our communities on a daily basis.

The community spirit that is evident in Clara is a key asset for the town, and provides a strong foundation for the development of the Town Centre First Plan that is centred on engagement with its residents. Two overarching outcomes of the Plan are ‘a place for living’ and ‘a place for everyone’.

The participation of Clara’s residents and its community is vital in delivering a Town Centre First Plan that is unique to the town, and one that addresses its local challenges while also taking advantage of the local opportunities which exist in order to strengthen its resilience.

The vision for Clara, as set out within this Plan, recognises the valuable input of all stakeholders who have participated in the process of creating the Town Centre First Plan for Clara.

‘The greatest interest of people is other people’

Jane Jacobs



The Green, Clara (Source: Clara Town Plan)

Case Study - Abbeyleix Sustainable Communities Plan

Project Location Abbeyleix, Co. Laois

Project Summary The aim of the Sustainable Communities Plan is to build on the positive aspects of the town's natural setting and topography, its links to the wider landscape and environs, its natural and built heritage and its diversity and mix of uses, in order to make it a more attractive place to live, work and visit.

The Abbeyleix Sustainable Communities Plan is an exemplar of how positive engagement with the community can produce a strategy that is unique and specific to the requirements of a rural town in the Eastern and Midland Region. The image demonstrates the importance of 'Community', 'Economy' and 'Place' which are important elements for Clara.

Project Funding Funding provided by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht under the Government Policy for Architecture, 2009-2015.

Project Facilitators

- Laois County Council
- Abbeyleix Business and Community Development Forum.

Regeneration Benefits

- Encourage the voluntary maintenance and visual improvements to identified buildings.
- Provision of a plan for the conservation of its buildings with the Crescent and the Market Square to be selected to lead this new imagining of the town.
- Carry out public realm improvements/footpath widening at identified town centre locations including Market Square and the southern 'gateway'.
- Redevelopment of the northern 'bookend' area to make the space an attractive 'bookend' to Main Street and arrival gateway to the town by undertaking a comprehensive redevelopment of the public realm.
- Comprehensive redesign and improvement of selected green spaces.
- Secure early implementation of traffic calming measures at town approach roads.
- Implement a sequential development strategy that prioritises adaptive reuse of existing buildings and plots.

Community - Objectives & Outcomes

Objectives

COM1:

A people-focused Town Centre that is welcoming, accessible and inclusive to people of all ages and abilities.

COM2:

Restore civic pride in Clara's Town Centre through the creation of a place where people want to live, work and visit.

COM3:

Create a multi-functional Town Centre that provides a range of uses and services that meet the requirements of the local community.

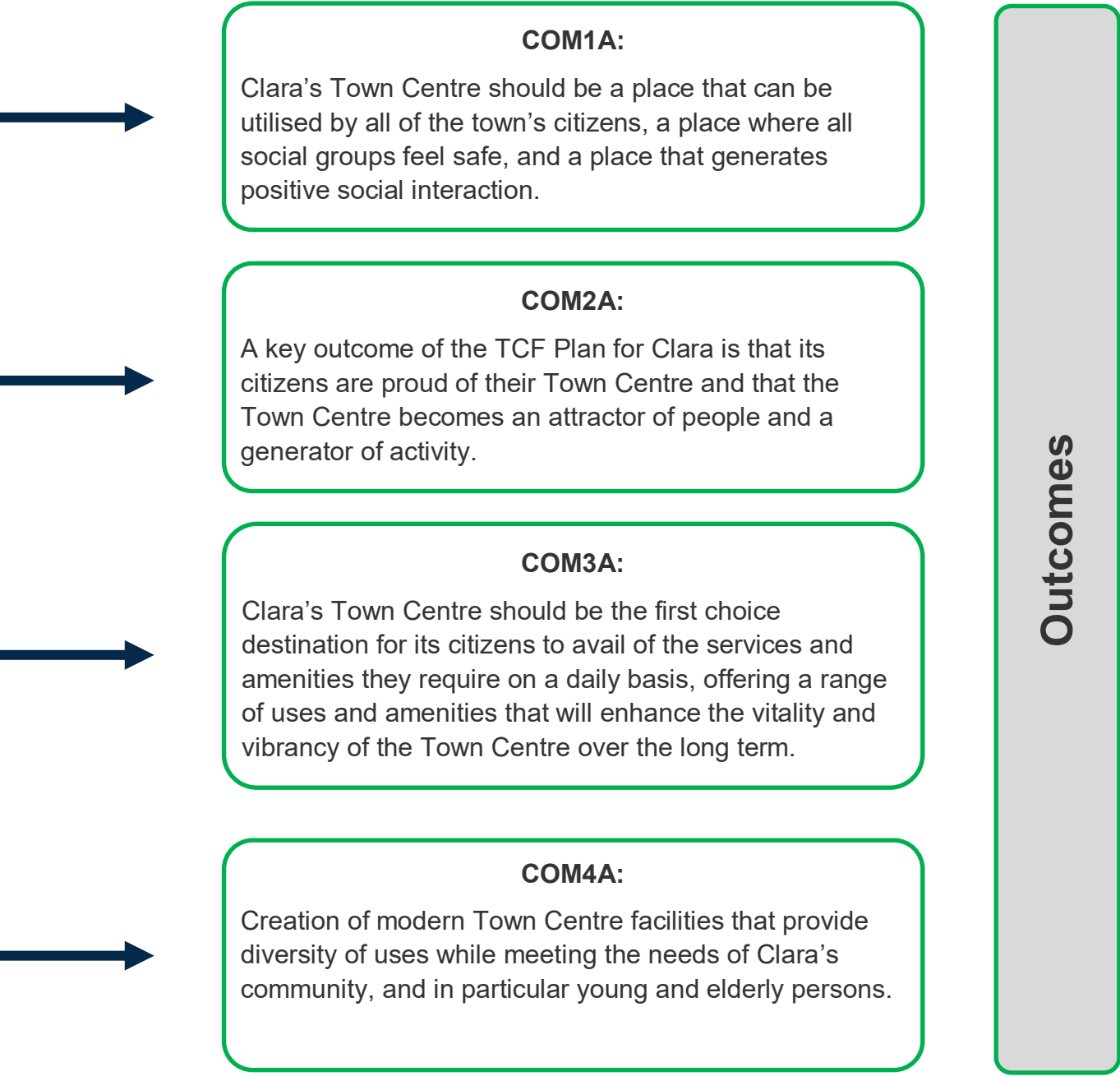
COM4:

Promote increased social interaction and commercial activity and through the identification of Town Centre properties that can be re-imagined for a range of uses (employment, community, residential etc)

TCF Policy Alignment

TCF policy recognises that successful places:

- Contain a variety of services/shops that provide employment opportunities, enable people to shop locally and meet the needs of the local community.



- Provide a range of cultural, recreational and community spaces (that includes scope for periodic events and festivals) that bring together community members and attract visitors/tourists.

Theme 2: Heritage Tourism

Clara has a rich industrial heritage. The town was well known for being a prosperous industrial town from the mid-18th century until the mid-20th century, with valuable products produced in the town during this time such as jute, grain and flour.

The town has a number of significant buildings which are synonymous with its industrial heritage such as Erry Mill, Clashawaun Jute Works and Charlestown Mill.

However, while these buildings have since fallen into a state of disrepair and presently lie vacant, they represent potential tourism and economic development opportunities for Clara through their potential renovation and reuse. The reimagining of these buildings, along with

the further promotion of existing visitor assets such as Clara Bog for example, could strengthen Clara's tourism offer.

Through the implementation of the objectives of this Plan, the story of Clara's unique and rich industrial heritage can be established through physical regeneration which, in turn, can restore civic pride and create a new destination in Clara Town Centre.

'New ideas often need old buildings'

Jane Jacobs



Case Study - Skerries Mills

Project Location	Skerries, Co. Dublin
Project Summary	<p>Skerries Mills is a 5 acre site situated in the town of Skerries, Co. Dublin. This unique historic site comprises a fully restored complex of a five sail windmill, four sail windmill, water mill and bakery with the oldest mill dating back to c.1460. Interactive and guided tours of the mill complex are available to visitors along with a café and craft shop and seasonal events.</p> <p>The mills site is part of the European Route of Industrial Heritage (ERIH) which is a tourist route of the most important industrial heritage sites in Europe. The network is run by the ERIH association, which has more than 300 members in 27 countries. In total, over 2,200 sites can be found on the ERIH website from all European countries.</p>
Funding	Project has been assisted by a framework of funding sources including Fingal County Council, Department of Rural and Community Development and Pobal.
Project Facilitators	Fingal County Council
Regeneration Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fully restored complex brings to life the authentic workings of a five sail windmill, four sail windmill, water mill and bakery of the 1800's. Complex provides visitors with examples of how wind and water energies were harnessed in the past.• The restoration of the mills has resulted in significant economic benefits and has proven to be a heritage tourism success which is evidenced by the complex attracting 75,300 visitors in 2021.• Successfully re-established the heritage story of Skerries industrial milling past.

Heritage Tourism - Objectives & Outcomes

Objectives

HT1:

Promote the story of Clara's unique and rich industrial heritage which is synonymous with the town's culture and identity.

HT2:

Restoration and re-activation of the Erry Mill industrial buildings as a heritage tourism development project.

HT3:

Protection and regeneration of the town's valuable architectural and heritage buildings and their potential re-purposing for new uses.

HT4:

Ensuring alignment of project interventions to support the wider heritage tourism offering in Clara Town Centre.

TCF Policy Alignment

There is recognition that heritage-led regeneration can support and make best use of existing resources. Several towns have begun to reap the reward of heritage-led regeneration and investment in public realm improvements, and the conservation of built heritage, including



HT1A:

Promoting the story of Clara’s industrial heritage past can deliver economic and cultural benefits to the town over the long term.



HT2A:

The Erry Mill site represents an opportunity to bring the former mill back into active use as a tourism offer. The building’s location on the river and in proximity to the heart of the Town Centre is advantageous for this proposal.



HT3A:

Conserving and re-activating Clara’s heritage buildings can assist with tackling vacancy while providing new homes and services in the Town Centre with social, economic and environmental benefits.



HT4A:

Project Interventions such as the River Walk and former Co-Op Building collectively can assist with optimising Clara’s heritage tourism offer through a joined-up approach.



Outcomes

the promotion of natural assets and biodiversity networks. Clonakilty, Kilkenny and Westport are good examples of where place has become a key element of the economic proposition with the importance of developing local heritage assets.

Theme 3: Natural Infrastructure

Green and blue infrastructure is the term that encompasses the network of natural and semi-natural areas, features and spaces that are found within and surrounding our towns and villages.

Green infrastructure can take the form of parks, soft landscaped areas, trees and playing fields for example, while blue infrastructure includes rivers, reservoirs, lakes, canals and SuDS features. Such natural infrastructure can provide social, community and environmental benefits such as sustainable walking and cycling routes, biodiversity and habitat protection, climate change resilience and flood protection measures.

Maximising the presence of blue and green infrastructure can also increase the visual quality and attractiveness of urban places and spaces that can lead to distinct economic benefits.

Clara has significant blue and green assets such as Clara Bog and the River Brosna that provide a high quality natural infrastructure framework for the town. These natural assets can be sensitively developed and promoted in order to attract increased visitors to the town while delivering placemaking and quality of life benefits for local residents.



Lough Boora Parklands signage

Case Study - The Suir Blueway

Project Location	Suir Blueway, Co. Tipperary
Project Summary	<p>A Blueway is defined as: “A network of approved and branded multi-activity recreational trails and sites, based on, and closely linked with the water, together with providers facilitating access to activities and experiences.” (Fáilte Ireland)</p> <p>The Suir Blueway in County Tipperary opened in 2019 at a cost of just under €6 million and runs for 53km in an east-west direction from Carrick-on-Suir to Cahir via Clonmel.</p> <p>The route is made up of a walking/cycling trail for 21km which runs from Carrick-on-Suir to Clonmel and a further 32km of waterway along the River Suir which can be canoed or kayaked. It is the river-based element of the route that makes it a Blueway rather than a Greenway. The project has been developed in a phased approach over a seven year period as funding was secured.</p>
Funding	Project was initially brought forward as part of an EU INTERREG Green and Blue Futures project. Variety of funding sources has been utilised to finance this project including Tipperary County Council, INTERREG, Embracing Ireland’s Outdoors Fund, Heritage Council.
Project Facilitators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tipperary County Council• Department of Rural and Community Development• Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport• Waterways Ireland• Sport Ireland• LEADER Rural Development Programme
Regeneration Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creation of local employment opportunities.• Attraction of increased visitor numbers and association with other tourist destinations.• Promotion of sustainable mobility and healthy lifestyles.• Recreational activity within a shared space.• Significant contribution to local town economies in County Tipperary.

Natural Infrastructure - Objectives & Outcomes

Objectives

NI1:

Enhancement and promotion of Clara's natural assets with the aim of delivering significant benefits for the town over the long term.

NI2:

Strengthen Clara's blue and green infrastructure framework in order to enhance the visual quality and experience of the urban environment for residents and visitors.

NI3:

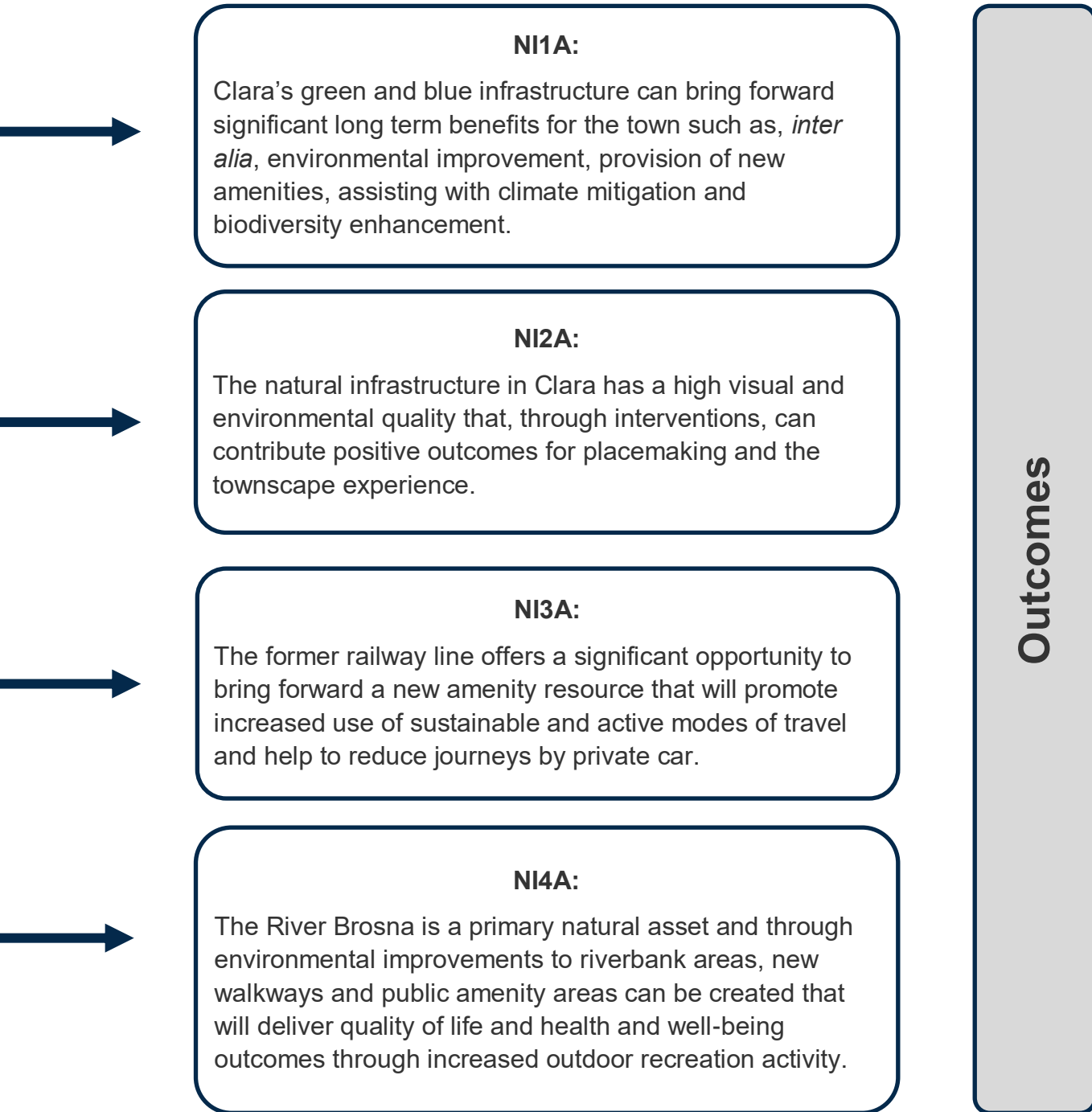
Regeneration and re-use of the former railway line for the purpose of developing a new greenway active travel route.

NI4:

Enhancement of Clara's blue infrastructure through the development of new biodiversity/ecological walking routes on the River Brosna.

TCF Policy Alignment

Town centres that reflect the current and future needs of the local community, with quality public realm, sustainable mobility infrastructure and green spaces that facilitate vibrant, connected local communities and economies.



Successful town centres are well connected and accessible to sustainable modes of transport, enabling a high proportion of journeys to be made by foot and/or bicycle from the immediate hinterland (e.g. the '10 minute town' concept).

Theme 4: Placemaking

Placemaking is the process of creating quality places that are attractive to people to live, work, visit, and socialise in. It includes the spatial arrangement of buildings, streets and spaces and takes into consideration the built and natural heritage, public realm, open space and areas for recreation for instance.

The relationships of these matters are important in understanding the urban structure and placemaking characteristics of Clara and, further, what opportunities exist in the town to enhance the quality of 'place'. Clara's existing urban structure and arrangement of streets, spaces and buildings may be restricting it's success, particularly economically, in terms of why local people are not utilising the Town

Centre in greater numbers in terms of the retail, residential, commercial and other services it provides.

'It's very important there's public life in public spaces'

Jan Gehl



River Street, Clara

Case Study - Clonakilty Urban Design Masterplan

Project Location	Clonakilty, Co. Cork
Project Summary	<p>The town of Clonakilty developed an Urban Design masterplan ('Clonakilty 400') in conjunction with its residents that sets out a long term vision for the town. Clonakilty is a traditional market town, however like many rural towns in Ireland it was suffering from issues such as vacancy, dereliction, poor visual streetscape quality with a reduction in its service function along with flooding issues.</p> <p>The Scheme has been widely recognised, winning multiple awards (including the Royal Institute of Architects Best Public Choice Award 2014, 'Best Place of the Year 2017', Gubbio Price 2018), and is often cited as an exemplar for Town Centre renewal, placemaking.</p>
Project Funding	Funding for this project was provided by Cork County Council.
Project Facilitators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cork County Council
Regeneration Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community aware of the heritage value of its townscape.• Preservation of traditional shop fronts and re-establishing social activities on the street.• Town main square changing from a car focused and derelict town centre to a hub that can facilitate increased socio-economic activity, socialising and well being.• Reimagining Emmet Square based on new movement patterns.• New horizontal (raised table courtesy crossings) and vertical (pinch points) deflections, integrated with landscape works.• Removal of car spaces on Main Street to provide pocket parks.• New street furniture and planting of trees to encourage social interaction.• Cork County Council has observed that "<i>Higher property prices and previously empty buildings are now occupied, delivering new urban vibrancy and a real sense of community</i>".

Placemaking - Objectives & Outcomes

Objectives

PL1:

Re-establishing Clara's Town Centre as a vibrant, welcoming and attractive destination for living, working, visiting, shopping and socialising.

PL2:

Promote increased interaction of people and the urban environment they inhabit through the creation of attractive places and spaces with enhanced permeability, connectivity and wayfinding that makes Clara Town Centre a legible place to navigate.

PL3:

Future growth of the Town Centre to align with the principles of compact growth through urban consolidation, diversity of uses, sustainable movement, use of previously developed land and re-use of existing buildings for example.

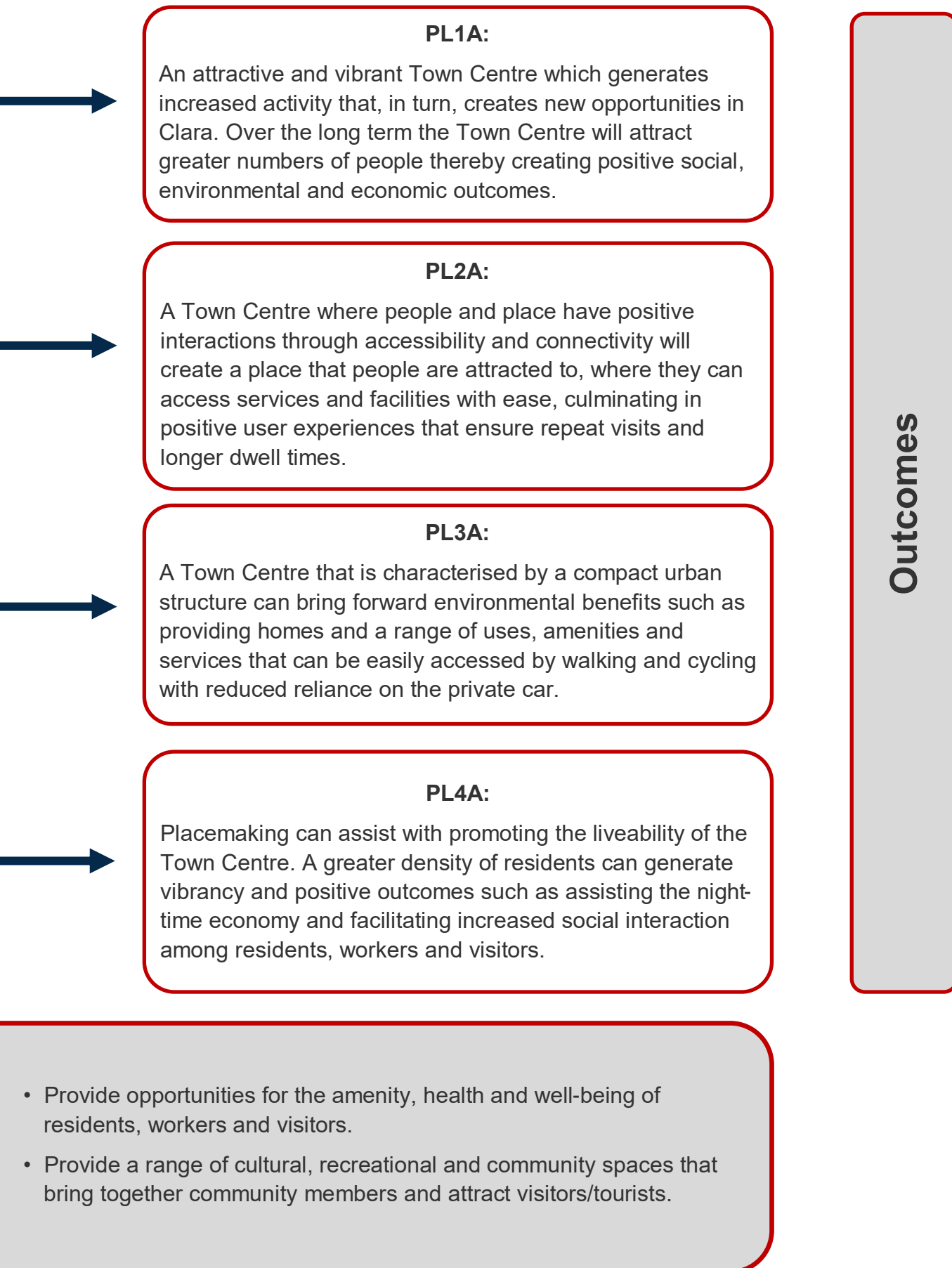
PL4:

Promote the re-activation of unoccupied properties and the creation of quality places and spaces with the aim of making the Town Centre a more attractive place to live with a particular focus on the Church Street, Main Street and River Street locale.

TCF Policy Alignment

TCF policy recognises that successful places:

- Are characterised by an attractive public realm that is designed to invite people to meet, mingle and dwell.
- Provide a mix of housing typologies and tenures to cater for diverse communities in terms of age, income and mobility.



Theme Objectives supporting Sustainable Development

Economic

- Town Centre that provides a range of uses and services.
- Physical regeneration of former industrial buildings.
- Strengthen Clara’s blue and green infrastructure.
- Regeneration of former railway line as greenway route.
- Re-imagine Clara’s Town Centre as a vibrant destination.
- Re-activation of unoccupied properties.

Social

- A people-focused Town Centre.
- Restore civic pride in Clara’s Town Centre.
- Multi-purpose community building for all social groups.
- Enhance visual quality and experience of the urban environment for residents and visitors.
- New active travel routes.
- Vibrant Town Centre that promotes social interaction.

Environmental

- Physical regeneration of former industrial buildings.
- Strengthen Clara’s blue and green infrastructure.
- Regeneration of former railway line as a Greenway route.
- New active travel routes.
- Re-activation of unoccupied properties.
- Enhance visual quality and experience of the urban environment for residents and visitors.



Figure 3.3 UN Sustainable Development Goals



St. Brigid's Anglican Church, Clara