

Clara Town Centre First Plan

Ár dTodhchaf
Tuaithe
Our Rural
Future



Rialtas na
hÉireann
Government
of Ireland

Tionscadal Éireann
Project Ireland
2040



Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí
Offaly County Council



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Prepared By: RMLA

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Preface

“The Town Centre First policy aims 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.”

Town Centre First - A Policy Approach for Irish Towns

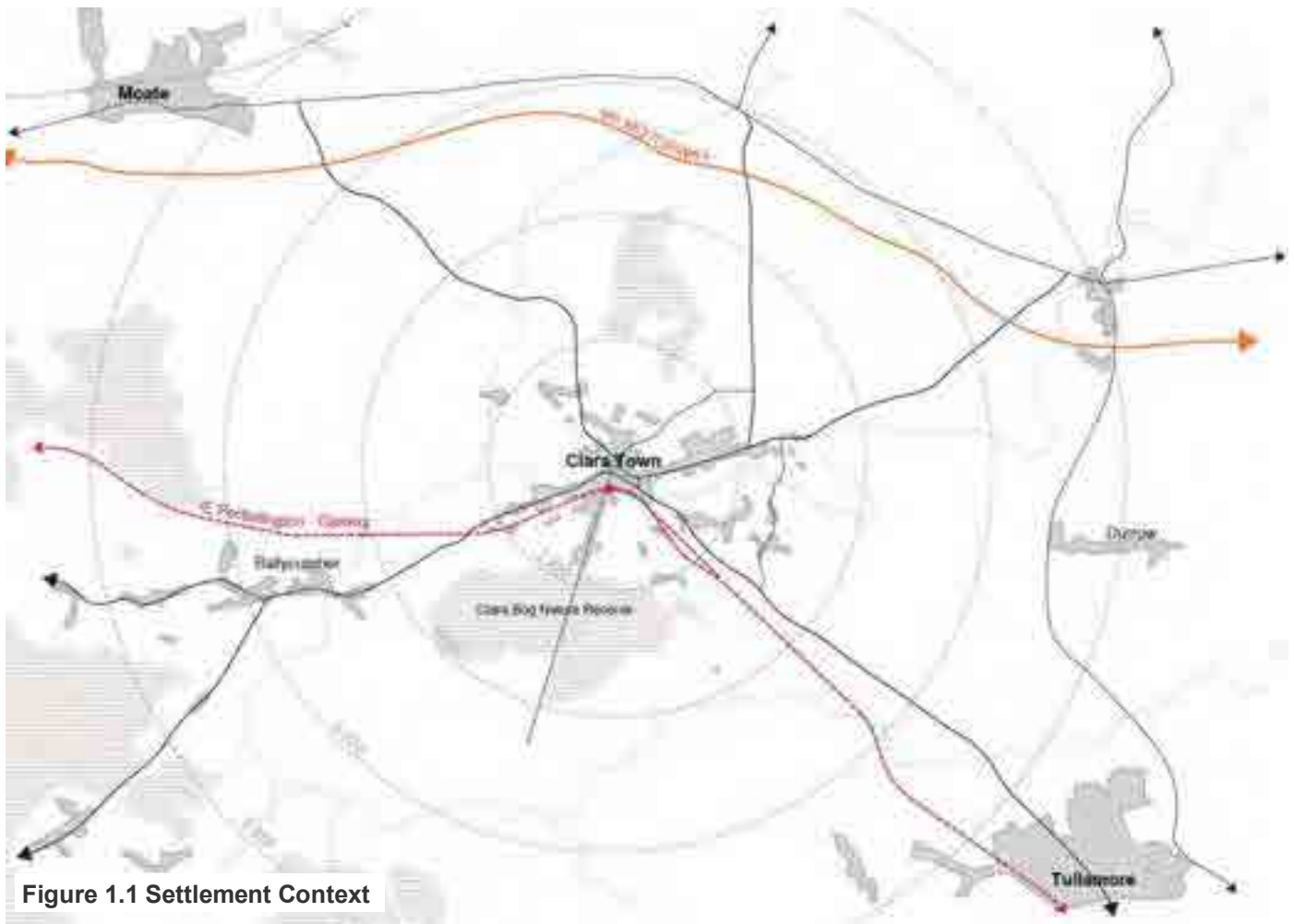
Introduction

Clara is located within the north west area of County Offaly and is situated on the River Brosna. As recorded by the 2016 Census, the town had a population of 3,336 persons. Clara has a strategic location within the Midlands with proximity to the settlements of Athlone to the north west and Tullamore to the south east which are designated as a 'Regional Growth Centre' and 'Key Town' respectively within the Eastern and Midland Region RSES.

Clara is situated on a plain which provides the origin of its meaning in Irish, being '*Clóirtheach*'. Of significance is the Clara Bog Nature Reserve which is renowned ecologically having been previously nominated for UNESCO World Heritage Site status.

The town has a rich industrial history which is largely associated with the Goodbody family who moved to Clara in 1825. The family introduced industry to the town and a long association began with the textiles sector and the development of the country's largest jute factory. Today, the town continues to provide important service and employment functions for its residents and wider hinterland areas.

This Town Centre First Plan for Clara (hereafter 'the Plan') has been prepared by RMLA, Urban Agency and SYSTRA in line with the Town Centre First policy brought forward by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the Department of Rural and Community Development.



Clara Town Centre First - Study Area

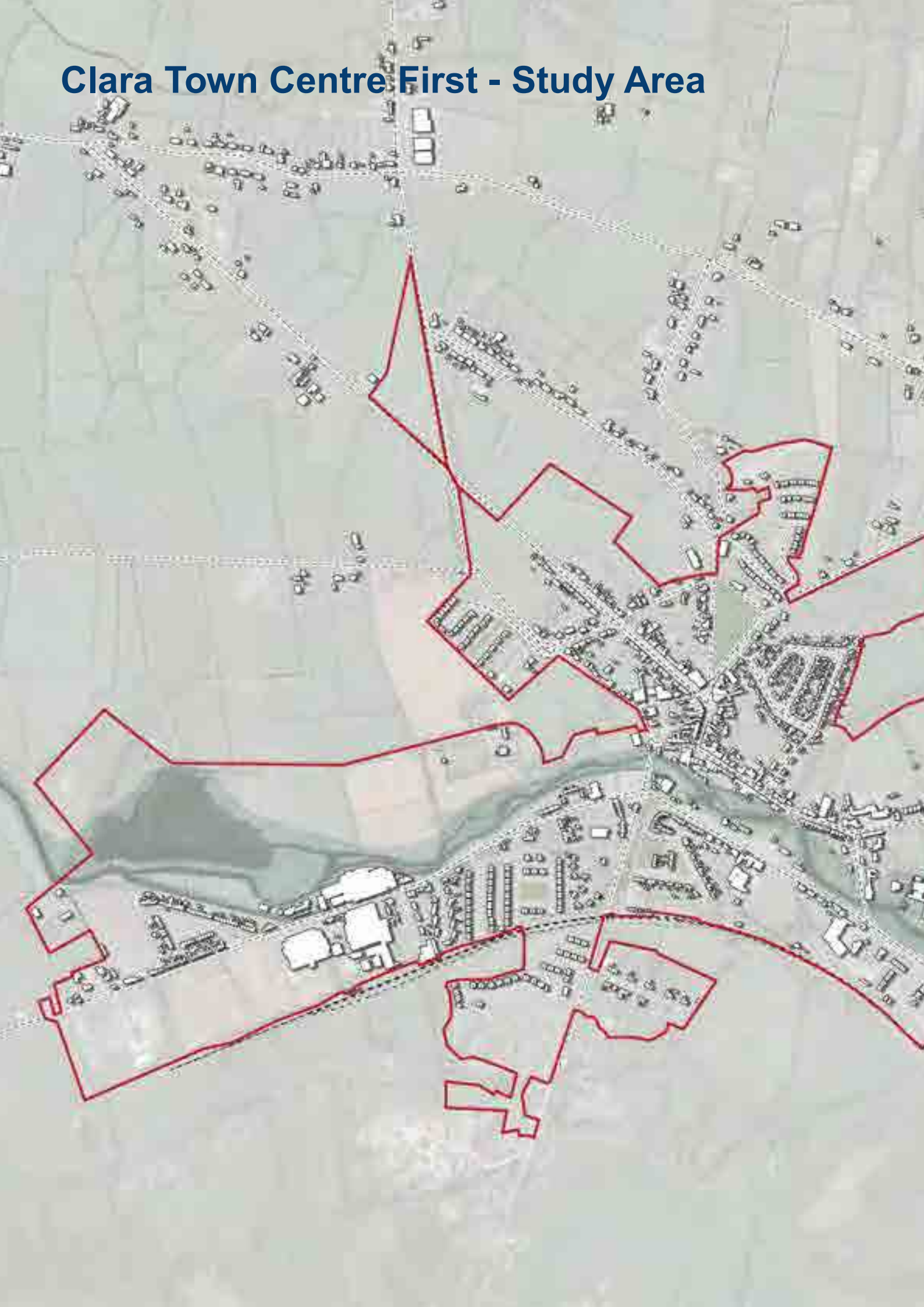
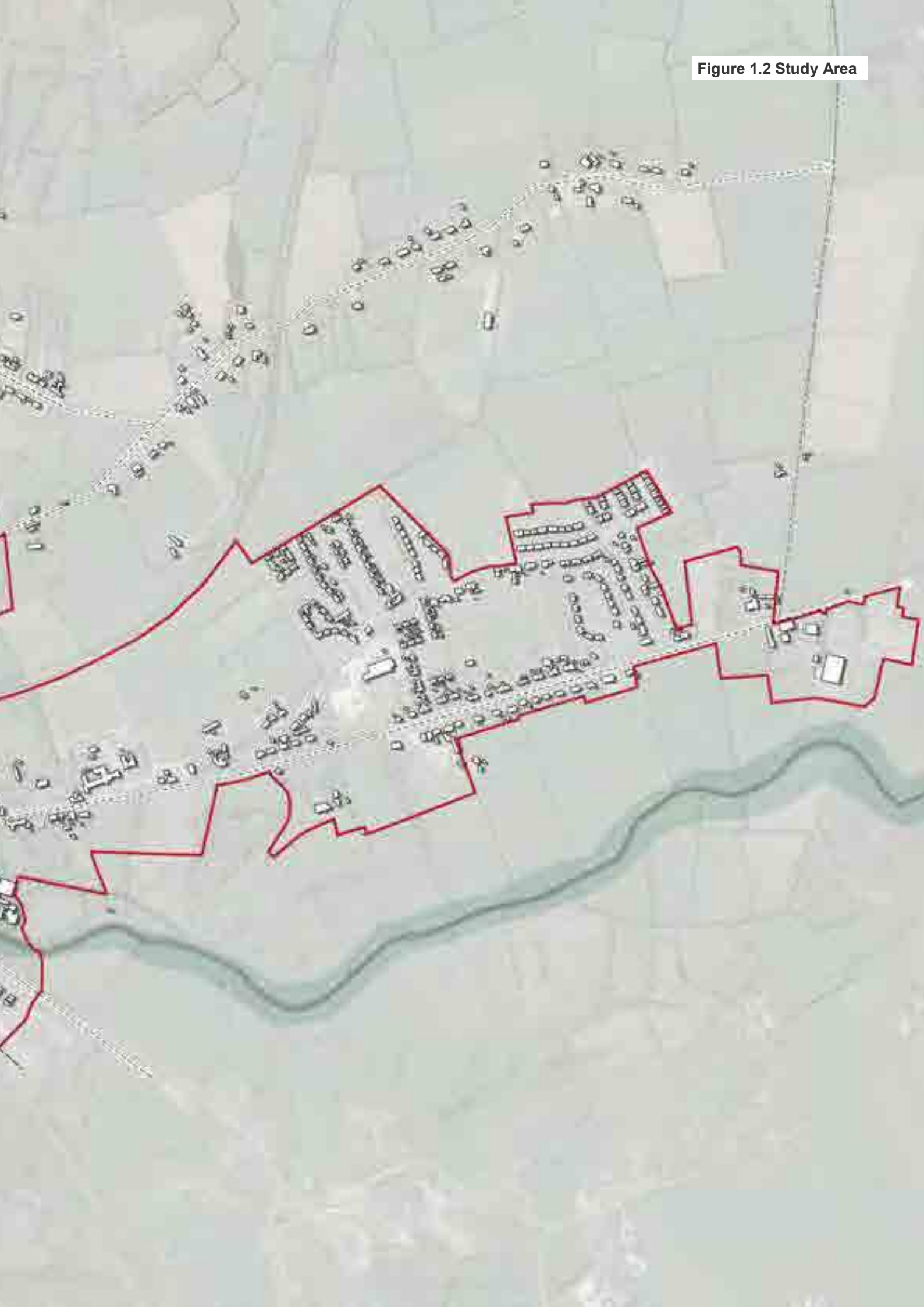


Figure 1.2 Study Area



History and Settlement Evolution

The modern day settlement of Clara was established in the 18th century by the Quakers. However, evidence shows that there have been settlers in existence in the Clara area since the 12th century.

The various archaeological sites and monuments which are situated on the periphery of the town are testament to the long history of settlement in Clara and surrounding areas.

The historic map images below and overleaf provide an illustration of how the settlement of Clara has evolved since c.1829.

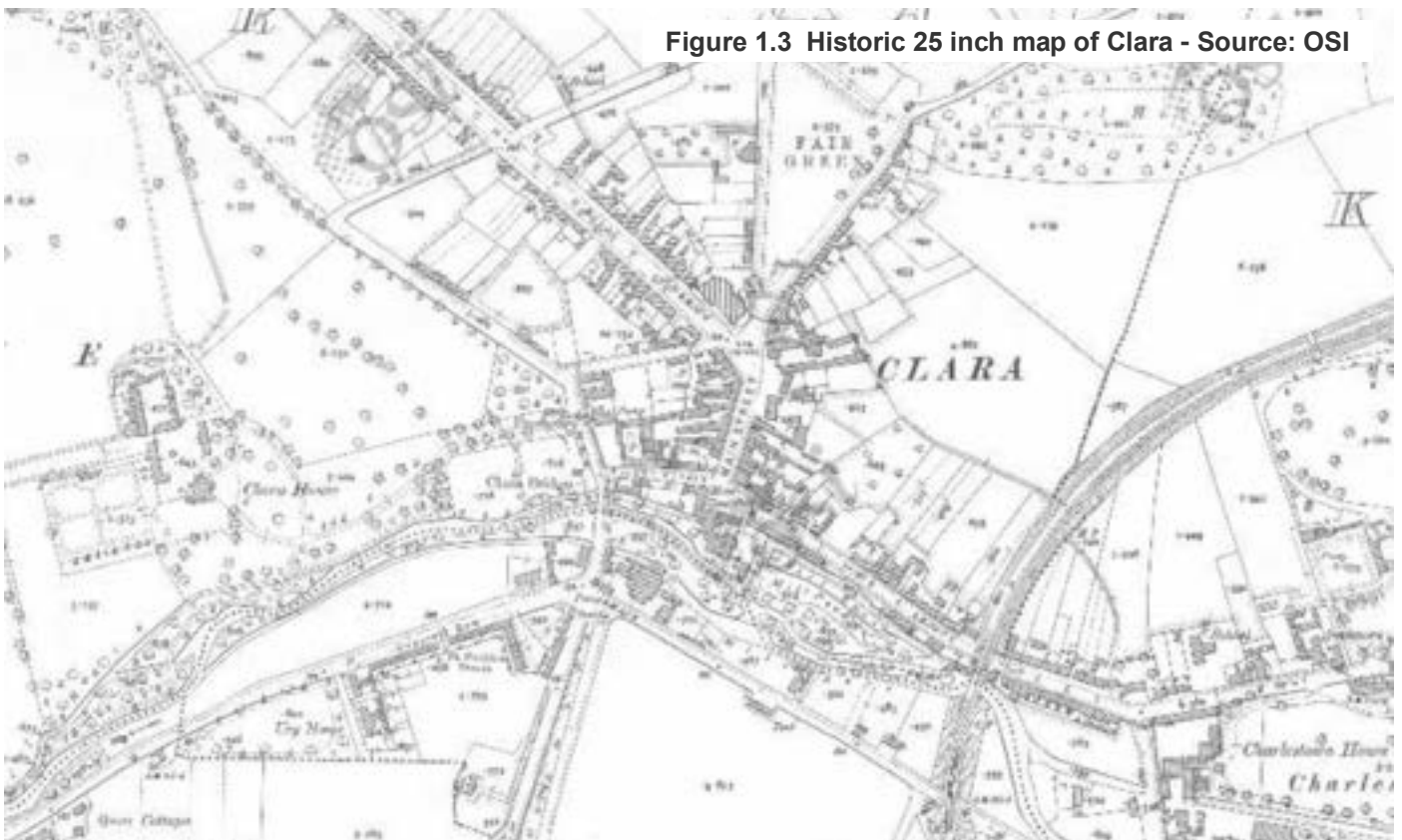


Figure 1.3 Historic 25 inch map of Clara - Source: OSI

Figure 1.4 Historic 6 inch map of Clara - Source: OSI

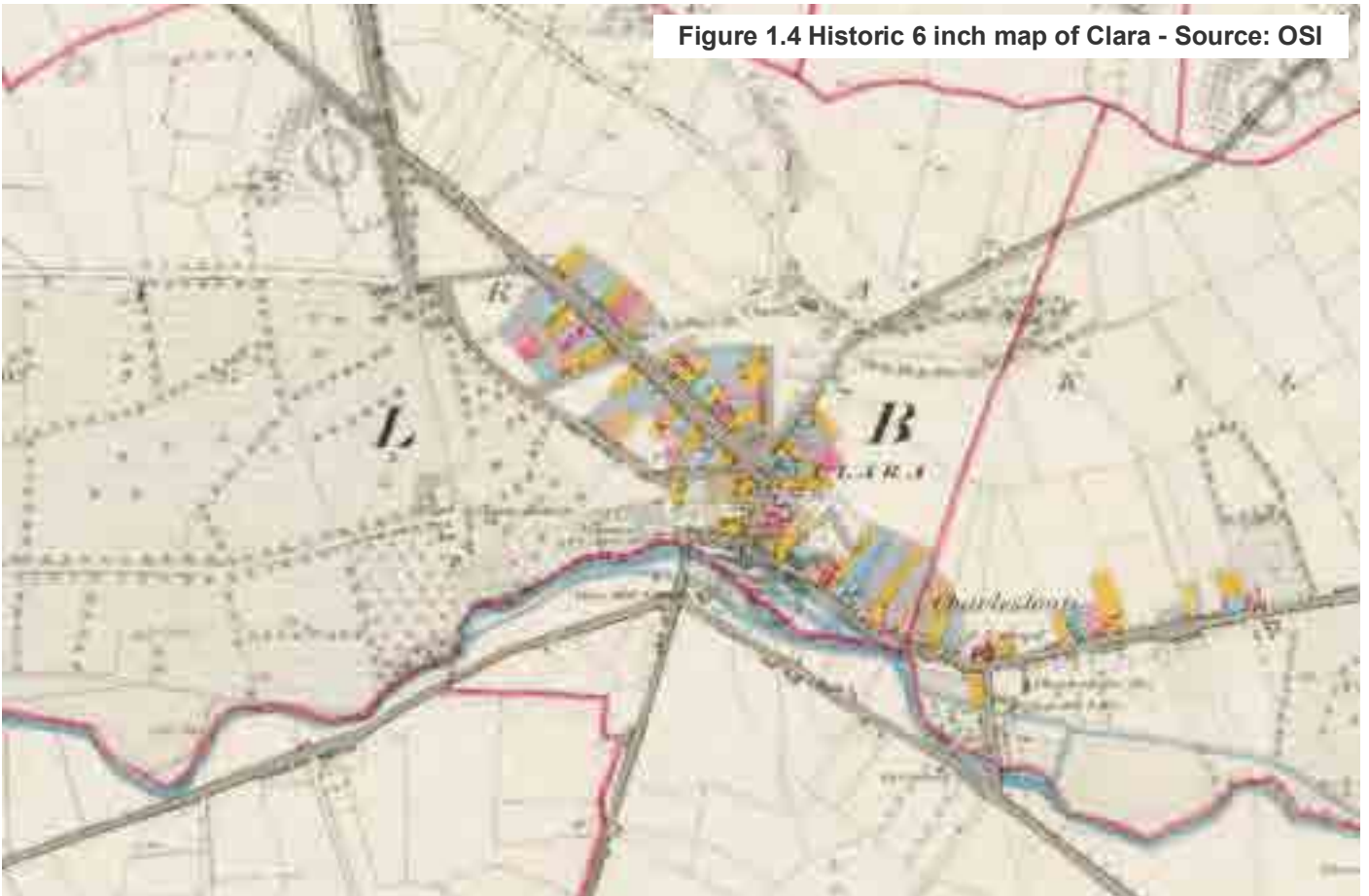
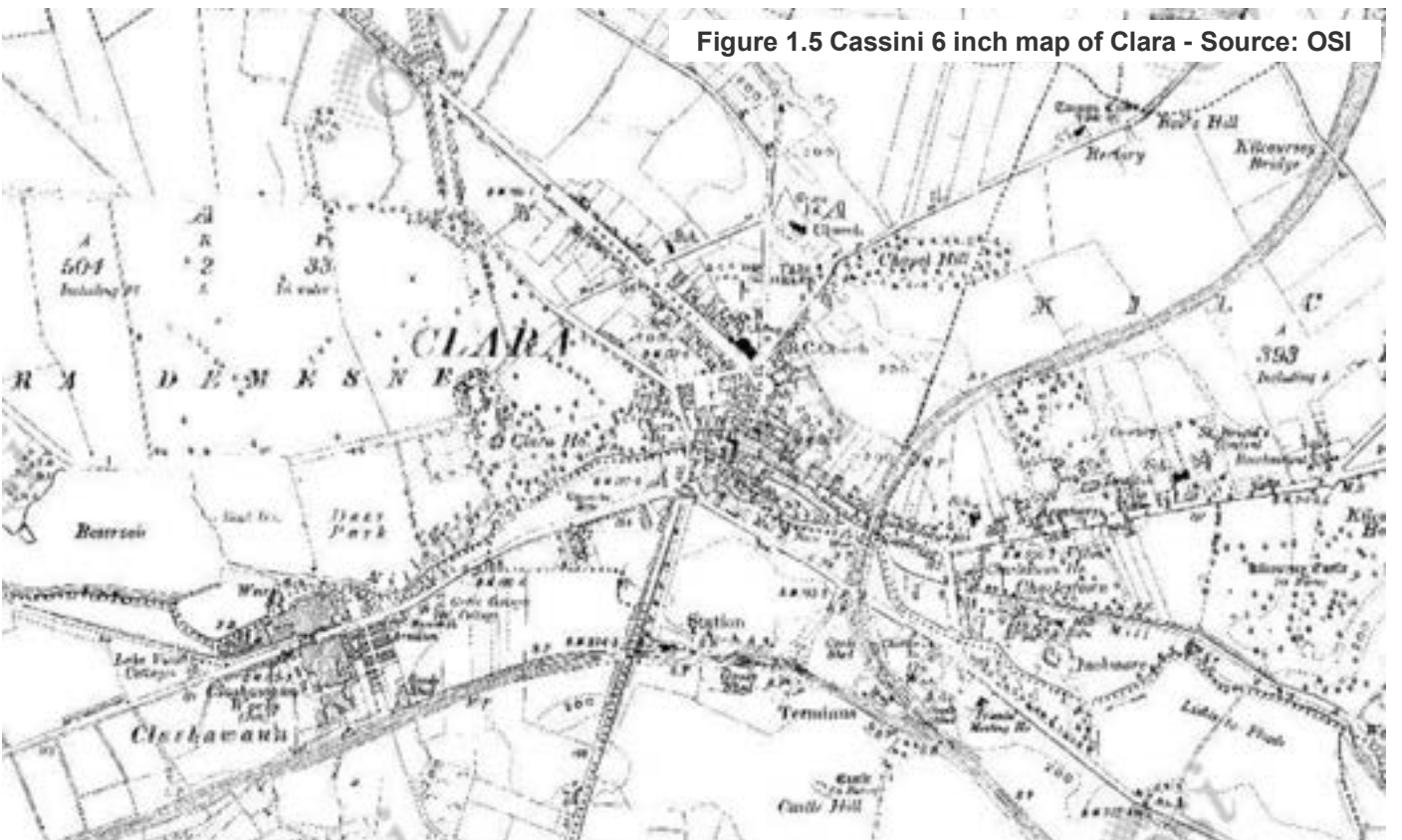


Figure 1.5 Cassini 6 inch map of Clara - Source: OSI



Town Centre First Policy

The 'Town Centre First - A Policy Approach for Irish Towns' represents a new approach to the development of our towns where local communities and local businesses can be central to reimagining their own towns and planning their own futures. The policy aims 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.¹



The Town Centre First policy recognises that successful places:

- Are characterised by an attractive public realm (streets, spaces and parks) that is designed to invite people to meet, mingle and dwell;
- Contain a variety of services/shops that provide employment opportunities, enable people to shop locally and meet the needs of the local community;
- Provide a range of cultural, recreational and community spaces (that includes scope for periodic events and festivals) that bring together community members and attract visitors/tourists;
- Contain a well maintained building stock that creates visual interest and animates streets and spaces;
- Conserve, adapt and highlight historical buildings and streetscapes that provide the town with a unique identity;
- Are attractive vibrant places for enterprises to grow and develop;
- Are well connected and accessible to sustainable modes of transport, enabling a high proportion of journeys to be made by foot and/or bicycle from the immediate hinterland (e.g. the '10 minute town' concept);
- Manage traffic within central areas so that streets prioritise vulnerable users (pedestrians and cyclists), enabling them to move about safely and in comfort;
- Provide a mix of housing typologies and tenures to cater for diverse communities in terms of age, income and mobility;
- Utilise digital technology to enhance the experience of living and working in towns, enabling greater choices in terms of location and lifestyle;
- Provide opportunities for the amenity, health and well-being of residents, workers and visitors.

¹ Town Centre First - A Policy Approach for Irish Towns, pg. 3

Response to Town Centre First Policy

The structure of the TCF Plan for Clara has been prepared to ensure alignment with the core elements of the Town Centre First Policy - see table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1 Clara TCF Plan Structure

Clara TCF Plan Section	TCF Policy Core Element	Clara TCF Plan Response
Section 1	Core Element 1: Collaboration & Communication	The Town Centre First Plan for Clara has undertaken a comprehensive engagement process which has included collaboration with the Town Team, local residents and business owners, Elected Members and Offaly County Council. The collaborative process ensures that 'people' are at the heart of the TCF Plan. Section 1 of the Plan sets out details regarding the public engagement undertaken.
Section 2	Core Element 2: Understanding The Place (Analysis & Appraisal)	Section 2 of the TCF Plan contains a socio-economic, urban, transportation and placemaking analysis of Clara to establish its baseline position. This analysis has provided the Plan team with a detailed understanding of Clara. This section provides a SCOT (Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Threats) analysis which has been informed by the baseline analysis.
Section 3	Core Element 3: Defining The Place (Objectives & Actions)	High level themes are established in Section 3 which are determined as having significance and importance for Clara over the long term. Themes presented for the Town Centre are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community - A Town for People • Heritage Tourism • Natural Infrastructure • Placemaking Objectives and outcomes are presented in relation to each theme and their alignment with the Town Centre First Policy.
Section 4	Core Element 4: Enabling The Place	Section 4 of the TCF Plan describes the proposed project interventions and a pathway for their delivery and implementation in Clara. A number of case studies are described which provide details of similar projects throughout the country. In terms of delivery and implementation, information regarding project costs, timelines, phasing, actors etc are highlighted in this section of the Plan.

1

Collaboration & Communication

Collaboration & Communication

A Collaborative Process

The TCF Plan for Clara has undertaken a collaborative process which has included input from, *inter alia*, Offaly County Council, the Town Team, Town Regeneration Officer and local residents and business owners.

The collaborative process and engagement with local stakeholders has been central to the preparation of the Plan with public consultation events held in Clara. Online surveys have also been made available for comments. A timeline of the public consultation process is set out overleaf.

The results of the consultative process are important and are integrated into the remaining sections of this Plan. As part of this process, a number of topics emerged which provided a focus for the Plan and an emphasis for the project interventions as proposed.

For information, the Town Team is comprised of members of the Community Council, Heritage Society, GAA, Tidy Towns, Family Resource Centre, Roman Catholic Church, Church of Ireland, local Primary Schools, local business owners, local Councillors, Chamber of Commerce.



Public Consultation Event

Clara Town Centre First Plan

Share your views

On Thursday 08th Dec.
5.30pm to 7pm
Clara Family Resource Centre

 **Comhairle Chontair Uíbhí Phárlaí**
Offaly County Council

 **Riathas na hÉireann**
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Consultation Timeline

**July
2022**

Project Kick-Off

- Initial project kick-off meeting held with Offaly County Council, Town Regeneration Officer and Clara Town Team.

**November
2022**

Online Survey

- An online survey was made available on the Offaly County Council website for the public. The survey took the same format as the upcoming public consultation workshop.
- The survey allowed views, opinions, local knowledge and ideas to be captured from those who were unable to attend the public information session.
- The survey proved to be an effective engagement tool with a total of 55 replies received, demonstrating the interest of the local community.

Public Consultation 1

- The public consultation was held at the Community and Family Resource Centre on River Street on 17th November 2022.
- The public consultation involved the presentation of information boards which focused on core subjects: Urban Design & Public Realm; Planning & Environment and Movement & Transport.
- An interactive table session followed whereby participants

were encouraged to relay their views and opinions on particular areas.

- Those attending the consultation were encouraged to note their comments and ideas in the booklets (based on a SWOT analysis) and drawings provided, with a general comment box also provided to capture views.
- A wide range of responses were gathered during the session.
- This was a key element of the TCF Plan process as comments/view collated during this stage provided local knowledge regarding core issues facing Clara. This helped to identify the key themes of the TCF Plan.

December 2022

Youth Workshop

- A youth workshop was held on 8th December 2022 prior to the second public consultation event. A group of students from post-primary schools in the local area were invited to express their views on Clara.
- The purpose of the youth workshop was to gain an understanding of the key issues that affect the lives of young people living in Clara.
- The session provided a new perspective on the Town, assisting in the development of the TCF Plan and project interventions.

Public Consultation 2

- The Plan team met with members of the Clara community and presented their baseline analysis findings and research on

8th December 2022 at the Community and Family Resource Centre.

- Four key theme areas were presented: Community; Heritage Tourism; Natural Infrastructure and Placemaking. Potential interventions and projects were presented for each of the theme areas in which participants were encouraged to engage and share their views regarding same.
- The result of this process has directly informed the proposed interventions identified in this TCF Plan.

Town Centre Plan

- Town Centre Plan is presented to the Town Team and Elected Members.
- Public Information Session held in Clara Library on the 21st June 2023, where the key themes and conceptual projects from the Draft Plan were on display for public viewing.



Social media engagement - Clara TCF Plan

June 2023



Public Consultation Event - 8th December 2022



Project Kick Off Meeting - 19th July 2022



Project Kick Off Meeting - 19th July 2022

Selection of comments obtained during the Public Engagement Process

Theme 1: Community

- Good community spirit in Clara.
- Sports facilities and play areas need to be improved.
- Housing needed for all.
- Increased services to meet growing population.
- Enterprise building / remote working hub needed (for e.g. Erry Mill).
- Clara is generally a good place to live.
- Lack of investment due to proximity to Tullamore.
- Lack of evening economy and visitor accommodation.

Theme 2: Heritage Tourism

- Impressive architectural heritage - positive to see them utilised.
- Regenerate and re-use the old factory and mill buildings.
- Tourism a real opportunity for Clara.
- Museum for Clara's industrial heritage.
- History of the River Brosna and how it provided energy for industry - reviving the old industrial buildings.

Response:

The strong community spirit associated with Clara was highlighted by local residents as a key theme during the public consultation process.

As such, a primary outcome of the Town Centre First Plan for Clara is to create a welcoming, useable and accessible Town Centre for the local community and a Town Centre that generates civic pride and a place for people to meet, shop, live and work.

Response:

The Town Centre First Team and local community assisted the Plan team in terms of providing important local knowledge and information regarding key heritage sites within Clara and highlighting the industrial history associated with the town. The public consultation process has assisted in the identification of heritage sites which are under-utilised and in need of re-use and regeneration, allowing for potential opportunities for these buildings with a particular focus on tourism-based development.

Theme 3: Natural Infrastructure

- Clara Bog and River Brosna are good natural assets.
- Proper plan for River Park is needed.
- Beautiful countryside surrounding the town.
- The disused railway line could be used for a new cycleway/greenway.
- Potential of blue infrastructure in Clara.
- New walkways would be helpful.

Response:

The public consultation process highlighted the quality of the natural infrastructure in Clara which is characterised by Clara Bog and River Brosna which are key blue/green assets for the town.

The comments provided by the local community has allowed the Plan team to focus on utilising the town's natural green and blue assets as a means of enhancing the experience of Clara's natural environment for all.

Theme 4: Placemaking

- Vacant buildings affecting the appearance of the town.
- Bridges are attractive feature and could be improved with lighting.
- Parking can be problematic/traffic calming needed.
- Cycling infrastructure is poor.
- Too much reliance on private cars for journeys.
- More seating in the Town Centre.
- Traffic flow from Main Street to River Street is problematic.
- Improved street lighting.

Response:

Responses in relation to 'Placemaking' highlighted the negative impact that vacant/derelict buildings are having on the visual quality and appearance of the Town Centre. Creating an attractive Town Centre for Clara is a key objective of this TCF Plan as case studies from around the country have shown how Town Centres that portray a visual quality and distinctiveness are attractors of people that generate significant socio-economic benefits.

2

Understanding Clara

Understanding Clara

The Town Centre First Plan for Clara sets out a strategic framework for the regeneration of the town over the long term. The overarching aim of the Plan is to strengthen the social, cultural, economic and environmental life in Clara for those who live, work, socialise and visit the town.

The Plan addresses the key strengths, challenges and opportunities which the town possesses along with identifying key interventions and proposals which are designed to ultimately strengthen Clara's Town Centre.

The strategic approach in formulating the Plan for Clara has been to identify and build on the town's existing strengths in order to enhance its long term social, cultural, economic and environmental resilience. Similarly, the Plan has identified weaknesses within Clara that also present future opportunities for the town.

On foot of the consultation and engagement process and the baseline analysis work that has been undertaken by the Plan team (details of which are provided within this Section), a number of Clara's strengths as a rural town have been identified and include, *inter alia*:

- A strong community spirit as evidenced by the number of local residents and business owners, for example, who attended the various consultation events and who submitted comments online.
- A local community who generally consider Clara as a good place to live and who wish to see the town prosper.
- A history of industrial heritage which has an interesting story to be celebrated.
- High quality natural infrastructure assets which are exemplified by the River Brosna and Clara Bog.

“Everyone has the right to live in a great place. More importantly, everyone has the right to contribute to making the place where they already live great.”

Fred Kent, Urban Planner

- Presence of heritage buildings and Protected Structures that provide Clara with character and identity.
- Majority of residents who live within a 15 minute walk and 10 minute cycle of Clara Town Centre.
- Recent placemaking enhancements that have improved the appearance of the Town Centre.

Clara's identified strengths have been used to formulate four key themes for the Town Centre which comprise:

- Community - A Town for People.
- Heritage Tourism.
- Natural Infrastructure.
- Placemaking.

Each of the key themes will make a positive contribution to the economic, social, cultural and environmental resilience of Clara over the long term - themes are set out in further detail in Section 3 of this TCF Plan.

National Policy

The following sections of this TCF Plan provides the national, regional and local policy framework which the Plan has alignment with.

Project 2040: National Planning Framework

The National Planning Framework (hereafter 'NPF') is the government's high-level strategic framework for guiding Ireland's future growth and development to 2040.² The NPF's goal is to help rural and urban Ireland successfully accommodate growth and change by supporting a shift toward Ireland's regions and cities while simultaneously acknowledging the importance of rural areas. The NPF is made up of ten National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs), which drive Ireland's economic, environmental, and social growth at the national, regional, and local levels.

The NPF's purpose is to create a shared vision and set of goals for all communities across the country. These objectives are referred to as NSOs and the NPF is responsible for achieving them. The following NSOs are, *inter alia*, relevant to the Clara Town Centre First Plan:

- **Compact Growth:** Carefully managing the sustainable growth of compact cities, towns and villages which will add value and create more appealing places in which people can live and work.
- **Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities:** Rural areas play a key role in defining our identity, in driving our economy and our high-quality environment and must be a major part of our future development.
- **Enhanced Amenities and Heritage:** This objective will ensure that our cities, towns and villages are desirable and can offer a

good quality of life. Investment will be required in well-designed public realm, which includes public spaces, parks and streets, as well as recreational infrastructure.

Furthermore, the NPF provides a number of policy objectives structured around the National Policy Objectives (NPOs). The following objectives³ should be noted in relation to this plan:

- **National Policy Objective 4:** Ensure the creation of attractive, liveable, well designed, high quality urban places that are home to diverse and integrated communities that enjoy a high quality of life and well-being.
- **National Policy Objective 5:** Develop cities and towns of sufficient scale and quality to compete internationally and to be drivers of national and regional growth, investment and prosperity.
- **National Policy Objective 6:** Regenerate and rejuvenate cities, towns and villages of all types and scale as environmental assets, that can accommodate changing roles and functions, increased residential population and employment activity and enhanced levels of amenity and design quality, in order to sustainably influence and support their surrounding area.
- **National Policy Objective 7:** Apply a tailored approach to urban development, that will be linked to the Rural and Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, with a particular focus on reversing the stagnation or decline of many smaller urban centres, by identifying and establishing new roles and functions and

² Project Ireland 2040, National Planning Framework, pg. 10.

³ Project Ireland 2040, National Planning Framework, pg. 55.

enhancement of local infrastructure and amenities and in more self-contained settlements of all sizes, supporting a continuation of balanced population and employment growth.

- **National Policy Objective 11:** In meeting urban development requirements, there will be a presumption in favour of development that can encourage more people and generate more jobs and activity within existing cities, towns and villages, subject to development meeting appropriate planning standards and achieving targeted growth.
- **National Policy Objective 15:** Support the sustainable development of rural areas by encouraging growth and arresting decline in areas that have experienced low population growth or decline in recent decades and by managing the growth of areas that are under strong urban influence to avoid over-development, while sustaining vibrant rural communities.
- **National Policy Objective 16:** Target the reversal of rural decline in the core of small towns and villages through sustainable targeted measures that address vacant premises and deliver sustainable reuse and regeneration outcomes.
- **National Policy Objective 18a:** Support the proportionate growth of and appropriately designed development in rural towns that will contribute to their regeneration and renewal, including interventions in the public realm, the provision of amenities, the acquisition of sites and the provision of services.
- **National Policy Objective 18b:** Develop a programme for 'new homes in small towns and villages' with local authorities,

public infrastructure agencies such as Irish Water and local communities to provide serviced sites with appropriate infrastructure to attract people to build their own homes and live in small towns and villages.

- **National Policy Objective 27:** Ensure the integration of safe and convenient alternatives to the car into the design of our communities, by prioritising walking and cycling accessibility to both existing and proposed developments, and integrating physical activity facilities for all ages.
- **National Policy Objective 28:** Plan for a more diverse and socially inclusive society that targets equality of opportunity and a better quality of life for all citizens, through improved integration and greater accessibility in the delivery of sustainable communities and the provision of associated services.

The Eastern and Midlands Region of Ireland will have a population of approximately 2.85 million by 2040, at least half a million more than currently. The Midlands area consists of Laois, Longford, Westmeath and Offaly. Although these counties are not located immediately adjacent to Dublin, the wider effect of the Metropolitan area has resulted in some settlements experiencing rapid unsustainable population growth and others a decline.

The position of the Midlands is strategically significant, bordering both the Northern and Western, and Southern Regions. Its central location in Ireland can be leveraged to enable significant strategic investment to a greater extent than at present, supported by a sustainable pattern of population growth.⁴

⁴ Project Ireland 2040, National Planning Framework, pg. 33.

Key future planning and development and place-making policy priorities for the Eastern and Midland Region include:⁵

- Enabling the complementary development of large and county towns in the wider Greater Dublin Area and Midland areas on the key strategic and public transport routes in a regionally coordinated manner, with an enhanced emphasis on measures to promote self-sustaining economic and employment based development opportunities to match and catch-up on rapid phases of housing delivery in recent years.
- More emphasis on consolidating the development of places that grew rapidly in the past decade or so with large scale commuter driven housing development with a particular focus on addressing local community and amenity facility provision in many of the larger commuter towns through targeted investment under relevant NPF National Strategic Outcomes.
- Preparing and implementing a regional priorities programme, to shape and inform delivery of the Regeneration and Development Initiative. Part of this programme should identify significant ready to-go city, rural town and village and rural rejuvenation priorities which could harness publicly owned land and other assets that are not being used actively at present such as former healthcare, military, transport and other complexes and combining the potential of such assets with community and wider private and public sector support and investment to bring about the transformation of both urban and rural areas and places in an integrated manner.

National Development Plan 2021-2030

As part of Project Ireland 2040, the National Development Plan (NDP) sets out the Government's investment strategy and budget for the period 2021-2030. It is an ambitious plan that balances the significant demand for public investment across all sectors and regions of Ireland with a major focus on improving the delivery of infrastructure projects to ensure speed of delivery and value for money. The NDP will incorporate a total public investment of €165 billion over the period 2021-2030.⁶

Since the adoption of the NPF in 2018 a range of supporting measures have been implemented which includes the roll-out and operation of the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF). The URDF has proved to be vital in the promotion of co-ordinated investment in the renewal and redevelopment of cities and towns. Launched as part of the previous NDP, it will be extended to 2030 with an associated level of additional investment targeted in an integrated, dynamic and responsive way to underpin the NPF by supporting the regeneration and rejuvenation of our towns and cities with particular focus on compact growth.⁷

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of the quality of our urban living spaces and in this context the role of URDF has gained an increased significance as a catalyst for post-Covid-19 economic recovery, social renewal and regeneration of cities and towns.

URDF funding is to be directed across a number of strands that will separately address the needs of cities and towns across the country, reflecting both the experience of the funding calls to date, and the objectives of Housing for All in terms of accelerating new supply and tackling vacancy in towns, which is reflective of the Town Centre First approach.

⁵ Project Ireland 2040, National Planning Framework, pg. 35.

⁶ Project Ireland 2040, National Development Plan, pg. 41.

⁷ Project Ireland 2040, National Development Plan, pg. 57.

Towns aligned with the Town Centre First approach will seek to provide a toolkit for the enablement of specific visions for towns and specific criteria will be included in the URDF to encourage the activation of vacant properties, and to bring stock back into productive use.

The bulk of funding has been assigned through a competitive bid process, however the time is now favourable, particularly with the enabling focus under “Town Centre First”, for the Department to work with local authorities to ensure a steady pipeline of projects for consideration for URDF funding rather than a competitive bid process.⁸

Our Rural Future - Rural Development Policy 2021-2025

Our Rural Future provides a framework for the development of rural Ireland up to 2025. The policy is forward-looking and ambitious and addresses both the challenges facing rural areas and the opportunities which rural communities can benefit from in the coming years.

The Government will deliver innovative solutions to key policy challenges affecting rural areas through this policy including investment, job creation, sustainable population growth, balanced regional development, access to services, broadband connectivity, social cohesion and inclusion, Brexit and climate change adaptation. The implementation of this policy will have a transformative effect on rural areas and assist rural Ireland which is integral to our national recovery and future development.⁹

The strategy promotes a comprehensive, place-based approach to rural development, encouraging and supporting rural communities to establish cohesive and integrated plans to address their area’s long-term requirements. This strategy recognises that there is no one-

size-fits-all solution to satisfy every area’s developmental needs and advocates a holistic, place-based approach to rural development which encourages and supports rural communities to develop cohesive and integrated plans to meet the long-term needs of their own local area.

Our Rural Future focuses on the following thematic objectives:

- Supporting improved quality employment and career opportunities in rural areas.
- Assisting the regeneration, repopulation and development of rural towns and villages. Enhancing the participation, leadership and resilience of rural communities.
- Enhancing public services in rural areas.
- Supporting a Just Transition to a climate neutral economy.
- Nurturing our culture and heritage.

One of the key deliverables in the plan is **Revitalising Rural Towns and Villages** which is to be delivered through the following measures:¹⁰

- Put the future development and regeneration of rural towns at the heart of decision-making through the Town Centre First approach.
- Invest significantly in the revitalisation of rural town centres through the €1 billion Rural Regeneration and Development Fund.
- Expand the Town and Village Renewal Scheme as a key enabler to bring vacant and derelict buildings and sites back into use as multi-purpose spaces and for residential occupancy.

⁸ Project Ireland 2040, National Development Plan, pg. 58.

⁹ Our Rural Future - Rural Development Policy 2021-2025, pg. 8.

¹⁰ Our Rural Future - Rural Development Policy 2021-2025, pg. 11.

- As part of Budget 2022, examine the scope to introduce new financial supports to encourage increased residential occupancy in rural towns.
- Review and extend the regulations which exempt certain vacant commercial premises, such as “over the shop” type spaces, from requiring planning permission for change of use for residential purposes.
- Provide seed capital to Local Authorities to provide serviced sites at cost in towns and villages to allow individuals to build homes and encourage town living.
- Encourage Local Authorities to use their powers under CPO, where appropriate, to tackle vacant and derelict properties in Town Centres, to bring vacant properties back into use.
- Identify potential State owned properties in rural towns and villages which can be used for community purposes.
- Examine the feasibility of introducing ‘meanwhile use’ legislation so that empty buildings and shopfronts on main streets can be brought back into use on a short-term, temporary basis as pop up shops, street markets, exhibitions spaces and other purposes.
- Provide funding to support the upgrade and enhancement of shopfronts and street facades in towns and villages and for the adaptation of town centres for outdoor socialising.
- Fund Local Authorities to adapt and improve outdoor public spaces for cultural events and activities all-year round.
- Invest significantly in the development of parks, green spaces and recreational amenities in town centres to make them vibrant hubs for community enjoyment, and to increase footfall for local businesses.
- Provide grants to retail businesses in rural towns and villages to establish an online presence to complement traditional footfall trade.

Housing for All - A New Housing Plan for Ireland

Housing for All is the Government’s housing plan to 2030 which seeks to improve Ireland’s housing system and deliver more homes of all types for people with different housing needs. In order to address vacancy (Housing Policy Objective 19), a new *Croí Conaithe (Towns)* fund has been included within Housing for All that seeks to bring forward serviced sites for housing to attract people to build their own homes and to support the refurbishment of vacant properties and enabling people to live in small towns and villages in a sustainable way.

New housing that is brought forward under the *Croí Conaithe (Towns)* fund will provide new choices for people to live in towns, villages and rural parts of the country, initially through the provision of a grant to support the refurbishment of vacant properties, with priority given to areas where the level of vacancy or dereliction is high.

Town Centre First - A Policy Approach for Irish Towns

Town Centre First represents a new approach to the development of our towns where local communities and local businesses can be central to reimagining their own towns and planning their own futures.

“The Town Centre First policy aims 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.”¹¹

The Town Centre First policy sets out a range of Actions which collectively will create the framework required to support our towns to achieve the desired outcomes and deliver on their own unique vision. These Actions are centred around improving our knowledge and understanding of our towns and what they need. Key priorities in establishing and growing this framework include:¹²

1. **A Network of Town Regeneration Officers** to bring a co-ordinated approach to delivery across the country.
2. **Capacity Building Programmes** for Town Teams to increase the skills and capabilities of Town Teams and enable them to deliver effectively.
3. **A National, Integrated and Scaled-up Health Check Programme** for towns which builds and expands on the success of the Heritage Council’s Collaborative Town Centre Health Check model and results in a national database of towns.
4. **A Town Centre First Toolkit to include a Web Portal** which will provide access to all available TCF resources and funding. The Toolkit will provide a best practice model for developing TCF plans that is

informed by existing models and include specific strands targeting key issues.

5. **A Targeted Investment Programme** to support towns in delivering the interventions identified in their bespoke Town Centre First Plans.
6. **Pathfinder Towns** will be immediately assisted to act as initial demonstrators of the TCF policy approach. A key ongoing focus of the policy will also be to identify early-stage towns where local stakeholders require more support to collaborate as part of a Town Team and to access investment programmes.
7. **Mechanisms to put Town Centres at the heart of decision making** including a methodology to assess the impact of development on town centres for applicability within the statutory planning system.
8. **Better data which enhances our understanding of Ireland’s towns** and builds an evidence base for the ongoing evolution of the TCF policy.
9. **A new National Town Centre First Office** established.
10. **Cross-Government focus and alignment** through a National Oversight and Advisory Group

The Programme for Government recognised the need for, and committed to, the development of a co-ordinated, strategic approach to town centre regeneration that would maximise the impact of the Government’s considerable investment in urban regeneration. This Town Centre First policy, informed by the model in Scotland, encourages Government Departments, Local Authorities, businesses and communities to put town centres at the heart of decision-making.

¹¹ Town Centre First - A Policy Approach for Irish Towns, pg. 5.

¹² Town Centre First - A Policy Approach for Irish Towns, pg. 6.

Climate Action Plan 2023

The Climate Action Plan sets out Ireland's strategic objective in transitioning to a climate-resilient, biodiversity-rich, environmentally sustainable and climate-neutral economy by 2050. Key climate targets for the country include:

- A reduction in emissions from electricity generation and large industry sectors by 43% by 2030.
- A reduction in emissions from all other sectors by 30% by 2030.
- An economy-wide 2030 reduction in emissions by at least 55%.¹³

In order to reach the above targets, sustained efforts will be required in terms of matters such as electricity generation through the rapid build-out of renewable generation capacity, accelerating the electrification of road transport and a modal shift to public and active transport, retro-fitting of buildings and acceleration of zero-emissions heating in commercial buildings for example.

Offaly Climate Change Adaptation Strategy

Offaly's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (CCAS) was adopted by Elected Members in September 2019. The CCAS sets out that the Strategy is the start of the process of adaptation planning in Offaly County Council and is the first step in increasing knowledge and understanding of our changing climate, growing resilience, and enabling effective responses to the threats posed by climate change.

The purpose of the CCAS is to:

- Ensure a proper comprehension of the key risks and vulnerabilities of climate change.

- Bring forward the implementation of climate resilient actions in a planned and proactive manner.
- Ensure that climate adaptation considerations are mainstreamed into all plans and policies and integrated into all operations and functions of Offaly County Council.¹⁴

National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland

The National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland (NIFTI) 2021 sets out clear principles for the consideration of future transport investment and is closely aligned with key Government policy priorities and commitments, such as the Climate Action Plan and the National Development Plan.

The NIFTI sets out four key priorities for transport investment:

1. Decarbonisation.
2. Protection and Renewal.
3. Mobility of People and Goods in Urban Areas.
4. Enhanced Regional and Rural Connectivity.¹⁵

Heritage Ireland 2030

Heritage Ireland 2030 is a framework for the protection, conservation, promotion, and management of Ireland's heritage for the next decade and beyond. Heritage Ireland 2030 recognises the importance of heritage for its intrinsic value, for economic development, tourism and innovation and the role it plays in individual and societal well-being.

The objectives of Heritage Ireland 2030 are set out under three themes:

¹³ Climate Action Plan 2023, pg. 31.

¹⁴ Offaly Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, pg. 2.

¹⁵ National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland, pg. 8.

1. **Communities and Heritage:** local communities have a vital role to play in protecting heritage. As enshrined in the Faro Convention, communities are at the frontline in caring for, enjoying and sharing those things that are special about their places, their history and local traditions.
2. **Leadership and Heritage:** the need for a highly effective heritage policy and regulatory infrastructure is recognised.
3. **Heritage Partnerships:** build stronger heritage partnerships, enabling stakeholders to better work together to ensure the protection and value of Ireland's heritage.¹⁶

The Digital Connectivity Strategy for Ireland Draft Paper 2022

The Draft Paper sets out that the availability of high speed, reliable digital connectivity will support the delivery of Ireland's economic and social ambitions in the digital era. This digital connectivity will support more balanced regional development, as well as supporting the green transition, including by enabling remote working, and the implementation of the Government's Remote Working Strategy, and facilitating greater access to regional talent and skills. It will contribute to the reinvigoration of town and villages and help to address the digital divide for rural areas, including the delivery of connectivity to even the most remote rural locations, facilitating the joining up of national networks.

Digital targets include:

- All Irish households and businesses will be covered by a Gigabit network no later than 2028.
- All populated areas covered by 5G by no later than 2030.

- Complete the delivery of digital connectivity to all Connected Hubs and all Schools by 2023.¹⁷

Digital Town Blueprint 2023 Town Report, Clara Co. Offaly

The Digital Town Blueprint (DTB) is an entry-level assessment for local authorities, chambers of commerce, and other local community groups interested in understanding the current digital readiness of their town. The DTB has been designed to help towns rapidly and cost-effectively:

- Understand their current digital town readiness and digital competitiveness;
- Compare their town against Irish and international benchmarks; and
- Stimulate stakeholder engagement on digitalisation.

The Town Centre First policy explicitly recognises that successful places utilise digital technology to enhance the experience of living and working in towns, enabling greater choices in terms of location and lifestyle.

The digital town study of Clara (March 2023) was prepared for the Department of Rural and Community Development by the Irish Institute of Digital Business at DCU Business School, University of Galway and .IE.

The preliminary study assessment gave Clara an overall Digital Town Score of 44, placing the town within the 'Digital Readiness' which is a 'Clearly Defined and Documented' category stating that "*there is clear evidence of digital readiness. Use and sophistication of digital technologies and capabilities are documented and planned. KPIs are competitive relative to peer towns and regional, national and EU averages.*"¹⁸

¹⁶ Heritage Ireland 2030, pg. 41-50.

¹⁷ Digital Connectivity Strategy for Ireland Draft Paper 2022, pg. 14.

¹⁸ Digital Town Blueprint 2023 Town Report Clara, Co. Offaly, pg. 54.

National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022-2024

The new (second) Implementation Plan aims to build on the structures and mechanisms from the first Plan and to develop and integrate additional approaches in areas identified through review and consultation as requiring further action. It sets out Ireland's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) implementation strategy for 2022-2024 and forms part of a series of consecutive Implementation Plans, each building on the previous iteration, to work towards achieving the SDGs.

Strategic Objectives set out within the Implementation Plan include:

1. To embed the SDG framework into the work of Government Departments to achieve greater Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development.
2. To integrate the SDGs into Local Authority work to better support the localisation of the SDGs.
3. Greater partnerships for the Goals.
4. To further incorporate the principle of Leave No One Behind into Ireland's Agenda 2030 implementation and reporting mechanisms.
5. Strong reporting mechanisms.¹⁹

¹⁹ National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022-2024, pg. 14-16.

Regional Policy

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region 2019 - 2031

The Eastern and Midland Region's (EMRA) Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) outlines the regional policies for the next 9 years of growth and provides the basis for sustainable development. The RSES identifies regional assets, opportunities and pressures and provides appropriate policy responses in the form of 16 no. Regional Policy Objectives. The vision for the RSES is:

“To create a sustainable and competitive Region that supports the health and wellbeing of our people and places, from urban to rural, with access to quality housing, travel and employment opportunities for all.”²⁰

The population of the Region previously stood at 292,300 persons (Census 2016), however preliminary Census 2022 data determines the regional population as being 316,799 persons, an increase of c.8.4%, with an increase in the County Offaly population of c.6% over the same period to 82,668 persons.

The Regional Policy Objectives, which are linked to National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) of the NPF, that have particular relevance to Clara include:

- **Compact Growth and Urban Regeneration:** Promote the regeneration of our cities, towns and villages by making better use of under-used land and buildings within the existing built-up urban footprint and to drive the delivery of quality housing and employment choice for the Region's citizens (NSO 1).
- **Rural Communities:** Support sustainable rural development and strengthen rural networks, economies and communities. Manage urban generated growth in areas under strong urban influence and encourage sustainable growth in areas that have experienced decline or stagnation (NSO 1, 3, 4).
- **Healthy Communities:** Protect and enhance the quality of our built and natural environment to support active lifestyles including walking and cycling, ensure clean air and water for all and quality healthcare and services that support human health (NSO 10).
- **Creative Places:** Enhance, integrate and protect our arts, culture and heritage assets to promote creative places and heritage-led regeneration (NSO 5, 7).
- **Integrated Transport and Land Use:** Promote best use of Transport Infrastructure, existing and planned, and promote sustainable and active modes of travel to ensure the proper integration of transportation and land use planning (NSO 2, 6, 8,9).
- **Support the Transition to Low Carbon and Clean Energy:** Pursue climate mitigation in line with global and national targets and harness the potential for a more distributed renewables-focused energy system to support the transition to a low carbon economy by 2050 (NSO 8, 9).
- **Enhanced Green Infrastructure:** Identify, protect and enhance Green Infrastructure and ecosystem services in the Region and promote the sustainable management of strategic natural assets such as our coastlines, farmlands, peatlands, uplands,

²⁰ RSES for the Eastern and Midlands Region, pg. 6.

woodlands and wetlands (NSO 8, 9, 11).

- **Biodiversity and Natural Heritage:** Promote coordinated spatial planning to conserve and enhance the biodiversity of our protected habitats and species including landscape and heritage protection (NSO 7, 8).
- **A Strong Economy Supported by Enterprise and Innovation:** To build a resilient economic base and promote innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystems that support smart specialisation, cluster development and sustained economic growth (NSO 5, 10).
- **Improve Education Skills and Social Inclusion:** To improve education and develop the right skills to attract employers and retain talent and promote social inclusion to ensure opportunities for quality jobs across the Region (NSO 5, 10).
- **Enhanced Strategic Connectivity:** Protect and enhance international connectivity and regional accessibility to support economic development, build economic resilience and support strengthened rural communities and economies including the blue-green economy and tourism (NSO 2, 3, 6).
- **Collaboration Platform:** Provide a regional framework for collaboration and partnerships and to support local and regional bodies in leveraging funding and partnership opportunities (NSO 2, 3, 5).²¹

Midland Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024

The Midland Regional Enterprise Plan (MREP) was brought forward by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in March 2022 and sets out projects and initiatives across the four Midlands counties of Longford,

Westmeath, Laois and Offaly.

The MREP has three strategic objectives:²²

1. **Climate action - transition to a zero-carbon economy:** support the activities of the Midlands Regional Transition Team to develop transformative projects to guide emerging low-carbon focused projects across the region.
2. **Capitalising on strengths of the Midlands through smart specialisation and digitalisation:** includes actions to capitalise and realise business, industry, and skills opportunities presented by TU status; leverage 'The Midlands Advanced Manufacturing Action Plan' to position the region as an advanced manufacturing centre of excellence and develop a Smart Connected Technologies Cluster.
3. **Positioning the Midlands as the destination of choice to live, work, visit, invest and learn:** includes actions to promote and position the region as a community of choice; to support and develop additional flexible office solutions throughout the region, including the exploration of and the development of vacant properties; to progress and support tourism development, visitor experience development plans and the experience economy across the region and finally to establish a Regional Food and Drink Cluster in the Midlands.

²¹ RSES for the Eastern and Midlands Region, Appendix I.

²¹ Midland Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024, pg. 11-20.

Local Policy

Offaly County Development Plan 2021 – 2027

The County Development Plan (CDP) for Offaly was adopted on 10th September 2021 and came into effect 22nd October 2021. The CDP sets out the policies and objectives that will guide the proper planning and sustainable development within the County over the six year Plan period to 2027. The strategic vision as contained within the CDP seeks:

“To create a sustainable and competitive county that supports the health and wellbeing of our people and places, from urban to rural, with access to employment opportunities supported by high quality housing and physical, social and community infrastructure for all, in a climate resilient manner and with respect for our biodiversity.”²³

In summary, the strategic objectives outlined in the CDP include:

- Plan for a population increase in County Offaly during the Plan period of 9,239 persons.
- Consolidate settlements to avoid undesirable and inefficient sprawl.
- Ensure better alignment between the location of population growth and employment growth.
- Reduce car dependency, and increase the use of sustainable mobility such as walking, cycling and public transport.
- Direct a significant proportion of the county’s development and population growth into Tullamore, a ‘Key Town’ as per the RSES.

- Reverse the decline/stagnation of towns and villages through renewal and regeneration, and create healthy place-making.
- Protect and enhance Offaly’s natural assets.
- Provide high quality housing with adequate infrastructure, services and amenities.
- Make more efficient use of key resources such as land, water, energy, waste and transportation infrastructure.
- Create a competitive business environment supporting economic development, job creation, tourism and prosperity for all.
- Achieve transition to a competitive, low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy.
- Encourage inclusive and active sustainable communities based around a strong network of community facilities and amenities.
- Contribute, as practicable, towards achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Settlement Hierarchy within the CDP designates Clara as a “Town”. In the hierarchy, *“towns have a local service and employment function. There is a need to promote regeneration and revitalisation of towns and support local enterprise and employment opportunities to ensure their viability as service centres for the surrounding rural areas. Those in proximity to the larger urban centres have*

²³ Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027, pg. 12.

experienced significant growth and urban generated pressures and require the levels of growth to be managed and to ensure that there is a requisite service level for the existing population.”²⁴

Clara Town Plan

Volume II of the Offaly CDP 2021-2027 contains the Clara Town Plan. The Town Plan adopts an asset based approach to the future spatial development of Clara focusing on areas which have the greatest capacity and potential for growth in line with its place in the county settlement hierarchy and core strategy.

The strategic aims for Clara include:²⁵

1. **Reinforce Clara town centre** as the heart of the town by avoiding undesirable and inefficient sprawl, achieving critical mass and consolidating new development within the built-up footprint of the town, through targeting a significant proportion of future development on infill/brownfield/underutilised sites and extending out sequentially subject to available infrastructure.
2. **Harness the economic and employment generating potential of the town** through the on-going development of the service and manufacturing sectors in the town, in particular the Lehinch Business Park, and facilitate new enterprises within the zoned and serviced areas of the town.
3. **Deliver high quality housing** of a sufficient scale, mix, tenure, sequence and density, located in optimum locations and aligned with adequate social and physical infrastructure.
4. **Promote permeable, healthy neighbourhoods** that focus on place making and a sense of wellbeing to ensure Clara is an attractive place to live and work.
5. **Promote and support innovative housing models** including live-work units, special needs housing and housing for older people in Clara Town Centre.
6. **Provision of ecological connectivity and walking and cycling infrastructure throughout the town** which links all the Green Infrastructure available to residents in Clara; Clara Bog, Eiscir Riada, River Brosna, the Goodbody Reservoir and the disused Clara – Banagher railway line.
7. **Protect Clara’s built heritage assets** which are a non-renewable resource that contributes to our understanding of the past.
8. **Early and/or timely provision** (in tandem with development), **of critical physical and social infrastructure** necessary for the future sustainable growth of Clara town.
9. **Facilitate and support a broad range of community, cultural and recreational facilities** to serve the needs of the residents of the Plan area and its wider catchment.
10. **Enhance climate adaptation and mitigation**, and accelerate a transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy in Clara.

²⁴ Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027, pg. 50.

²⁵ Clara Town Plan, pg. 3.

The Town Plan identifies a number of Opportunity Sites²⁶ which are as follows:

- **Erry Mill and lands at Frederick Street:** Erry Mill is the largest surviving Flour Mill in County Offaly and occupies a prominent site at the corner of the Ballycumber Road and Bridge Street. The site contains Protected Structures and its redevelopment should include the careful restoration and reuse of these buildings. Potential uses include a creative hub, incubation facilities, enterprise centre, community meeting spaces, conference facilities, office and residential development, a linear park and surface car park.
- **Lands to the rear of River Street/Main Street:** Situated in close proximity to the commercial heart of the town centre. It is likely that some buildings may need to be demolished in order to gain satisfactory access to these lands. Potential uses include a contemporary landmark building, mixed-use scheme, large convenience retail store, covered market space, residential development and surface car park.
- **Charlestown Mill and County Council Yard:** These properties make up a large site in close proximity to the town centre. The Mill is a Protected Structure and is a prominent gateway feature sited beside Charlestown Bridge at the edge of the town centre. Potential uses include a heritage museum, distillery/brewery, craft work, galleries, café, Third Level education facility, primary care centre, residential care facilities.

Clara Town Team's Blueprint Documents

The masterplan documents were prepared by the Town Team (refer to Appendices I and II) and in summary they recognise the potential of Clara in terms of its accessibility and connectivity to the wider Midlands Region but that it is at a 'crossroads' figuratively speaking. The masterplan (refer to Appendix I) provides a SWOT analysis²⁷ of the settlement of Clara along with recommendations in relation to a number of key areas including:

- Parking and Traffic.
- Heritage.
- Town Centre Regeneration.
- Dereliction and Vacancy.
- Open Space and Green Infrastructure.
- Biodiversity and Natural Heritage.

Local Economic and Community Plan 2016 - 2021

As set out within its Executive Summary, the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) is an integrated plan containing an Economic Plan prepared by the Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) for Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning and a Community Plan prepared by the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC). Stakeholder engagement and public consultation has played an essential part in shaping this plan to work for communities. The overarching vision for the LECP is based around Offaly's finest attributes in terms of People, Business and Place.

The purpose of a LECP is to set out the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic, local and community development of an area for a six year period.

²⁶ Clara Town Plan, pg. 7-10.

²⁷ Clara Town Team's Blueprint Documents, pg. 4.

Within the LECP, the train station at Clara, which is located on a strategic rail corridor, is categorised as being a ‘strength’ for the town, while the international significance of Clara bog is defined as being an ‘opportunity’.

Offaly Digital Strategy 2020 – 2022

The Digital Strategy sets the agenda to support the short-term rollout of digital infrastructure and services to citizens in Offaly over an initial two-year, first phase timeline from 2020 to 2022. An immediate short term strategy provides initial digital footsteps to focus efforts on immediate needs and enable plans for the medium term thereafter. The Digital Strategy is based upon three pillars being ‘Infrastructure, ‘Citizens’ and ‘Enterprise’.²⁸

Local Projects

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

Phase 2 of the Renewal Scheme (see Figure 2.1) provided for street enhancement works to Main Street, improvements to existing pedestrian footpaths along both sides of Main Street and Church Street, the upgrading of existing controlled pedestrian crossings and installation of a new pedestrian crossing, lining of on-street parallel parking areas, provision of a new kerbed verge and planting on Church Street provision of street furniture, and other associated works as necessary to facilitate the installation of the proposed street enhancement works.

The remodeling of the junction of Egan’s Lane and the Square and the junction of Egan’s Lane with Bridge Street was also included along with the restriction of traffic on Egan’s Lane to one-way outward from the Square.

The provision of marked out on-street parking on Egan’s Lane and other associated works as necessary to facilitate the installation of the proposed street enhancement works.

Offaly County Council has recently secured funding of €100,000 as awarded by the Department for Rural and Community Development’s under their Town and Village Renewal Scheme project (2022 Streetscape Enhancement Measure). This funding will be used for the improvement of c. 40 no. properties (painting works) located on Church Street, River Street and Main Street.

Part 8 Residential Development at Raheen

A Part 8 planning application (see Figure 2.2) was submitted in January 2021 for the construction of 38 no. dwellings. The housing mix provides for single and two storey units accommodating 1-4 no. bedrooms.

The proposed development also included the provision of 2 no. controlled pedestrian crossings to the R420, the realignment of the junction of the L20157 Local Road with the R420 Regional Road and the provision of a new footpath to the R420 & L2017. The proposed development is currently at tender stage and construction is expected to commence in 2023.

Active Travel Schemes

Clara has been successful in securing funding under the Active Travel Investment Grant Allocations for 2023 with funding awarded for the following schemes:

- Active Travel Footpath Improvements in Clara: Funding of €298,882; and
- SRTS Support Infrastructure Frederick Street: Funding of €9,382.

²⁸ Offaly Digital Strategy 2020-2022, pg. 13.

Figure 2.1 Street Enhancement Works Plan

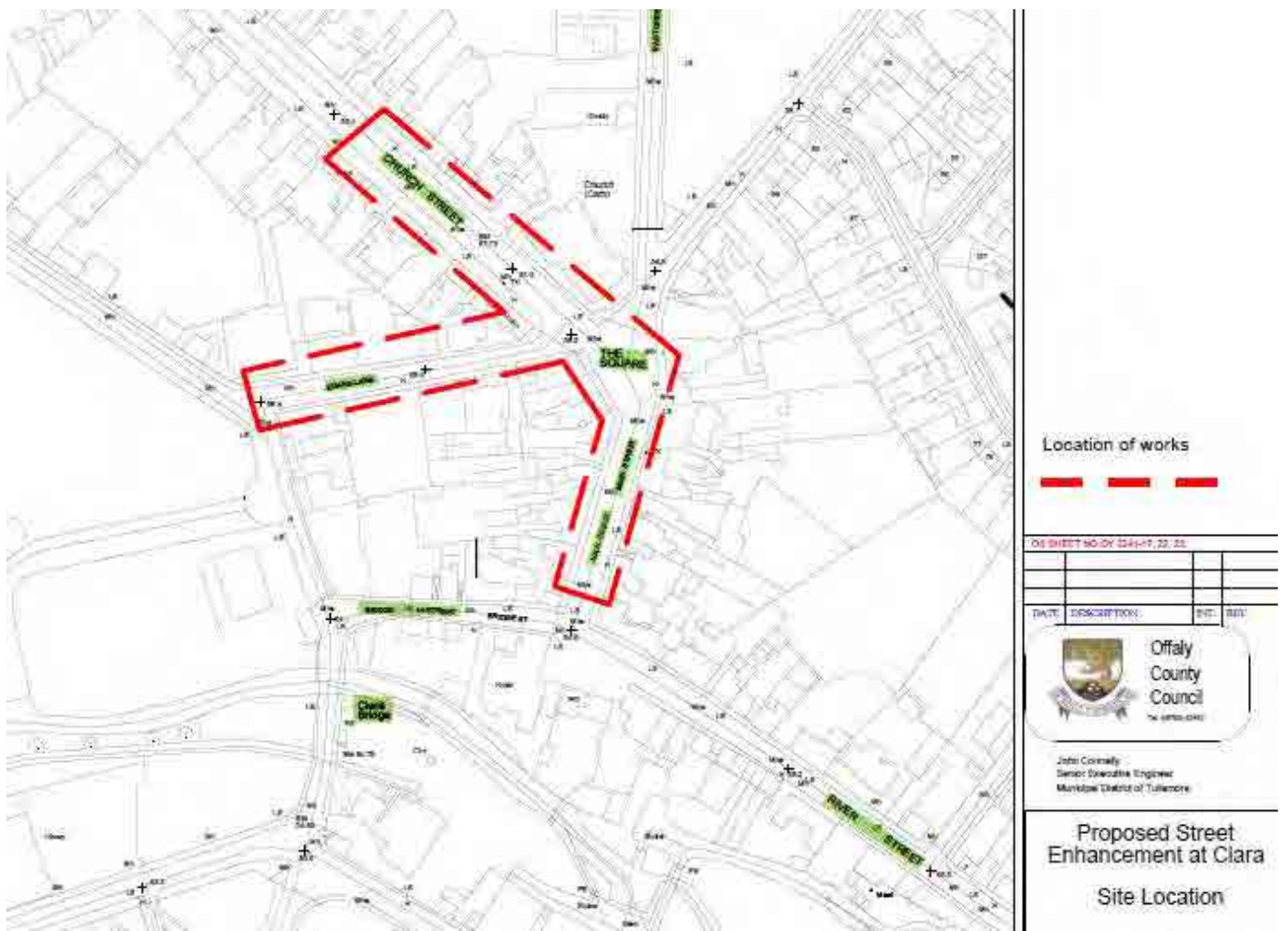


Figure 2.2 Proposed Site Layout (Part 8 Scheme)



Clashawaun River Walk Amenity

Offaly County Council (as lead organisation) along with Clara Heritage Group have secured funding of €200,000 from the Department of Rural and Community Development (under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme 2021) for the future development of a new 400m river walk amenity along the banks of the River Brosna at Clashawaun.

The proposal is to develop a river walk amenity, similar to a linear park, on the banks of the River Brosna in Clara, by opening up the riverbank and creating an accessible walkway - this project aligns with Objective NHO-01 of the Clara Town Plan.

Figure 2.3 River Walk Amenity - Section



Source: Mitchell & Associates

Source: Mitchell & Associates



Figure 2.4 River Walk Amenity - Plan

Clara Bog Trail

Offaly County Council (as lead organisation) along with Clara Community Council secured funding of €72,000 from the Department of Rural and Community Development (under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme 2019) for the Clara Bog Trail project. This project provides a 450m section of footway from Clara Bog Visitor Centre to the Clara Bog Nature Reserve. This section of footway connects to the existing boardwalk within the Nature Reserve. This project aligns with Objective NHO-06 of the Clara Town Plan.

Clara Bog Trail



Aerial Photograph of Clara Bog Trail



Age Friendly Town

Clara has been selected as one of 25 Age Friendly pilot towns across the country. The age friendly strategy in Clara has been a collaborative one between the Council, the community and local businesses.

The overall aim for each Age Friendly Town is to enhance the quality of life of older people in the community through the delivery of improvements in matters such as outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation, housing and social participation for example.

Drayton Villa Lands - Masterplan

Lands encompassing and situated north of Drayton Villa on Kilbeggan Road have been identified in a masterplan proposal for new residential and educational uses comprising c.71 houses within the northern and central portions of the site and a new post-Primary School in the southern portion of the site along with adjoining playing pitches. Within the masterplan proposal, allowance has also been given for lands for additional buildings for Scoil Pronsias Naofa while accommodating a pathway through the existing woodland area to the north/north west.

Example of Age Friendly Parking in Malahide, Co. Dublin



Socio-Economic Analysis

This section of the Report presents an analysis of socio-economic information for Clara which has been primarily informed by data obtained from the Central Statistics Office (CSO). The analysis undertaken provides the baseline social, demographic and economic structures of Clara along with other citizen-related information such as educational attainment and modes of transport used by residents.

Social and Demographic Structure

Population

The settlement of Clara had a population of 3,336 persons as recorded by the Census undertaken in 2016. While the preliminary results from the recent 2022 Census have not yet released Clara's 2022 settlement population, the preliminary results do provide an updated population figure for the Clara Electoral Division area which recorded a population figure of 4,204 persons. This represents a rise of c.6% over the intercensal six year period from 3,956 persons. The preliminary 2022 Census results reveal that the population of the County has risen to 82,668 which is a c.6% percentage increase since 2016. For comparative purposes, the populations of the Electoral Divisions for Tullamore, Birr and Edenderry, as recorded by the 2022 Census, are provided at Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Electoral Division Populations (2022)

Settlement	ED 2022 Population
Clara	4,204
Tullamore	11,894
Edenderry	7,502
Birr	4,729

Age Structure

In terms of age structure, c.43% of Clara's population was aged between 0 and 29 years with c.39% aged between 30-59 years. Those aged 60 years and older accounted for c.18% of the town's population as identified in the 2016 census results (see Figure 2.5). Clara is considered to have a young population with c.57% of its population aged 39 years or younger.

Marital Status

Single persons accounted for more than half (c.55%) of all persons living in Clara as recorded by the 2016 Census. Those who were identified as being 'Married' represented 35% of the population. Persons who were recorded as being either 'Separated' and 'Widowed' were 4% each.

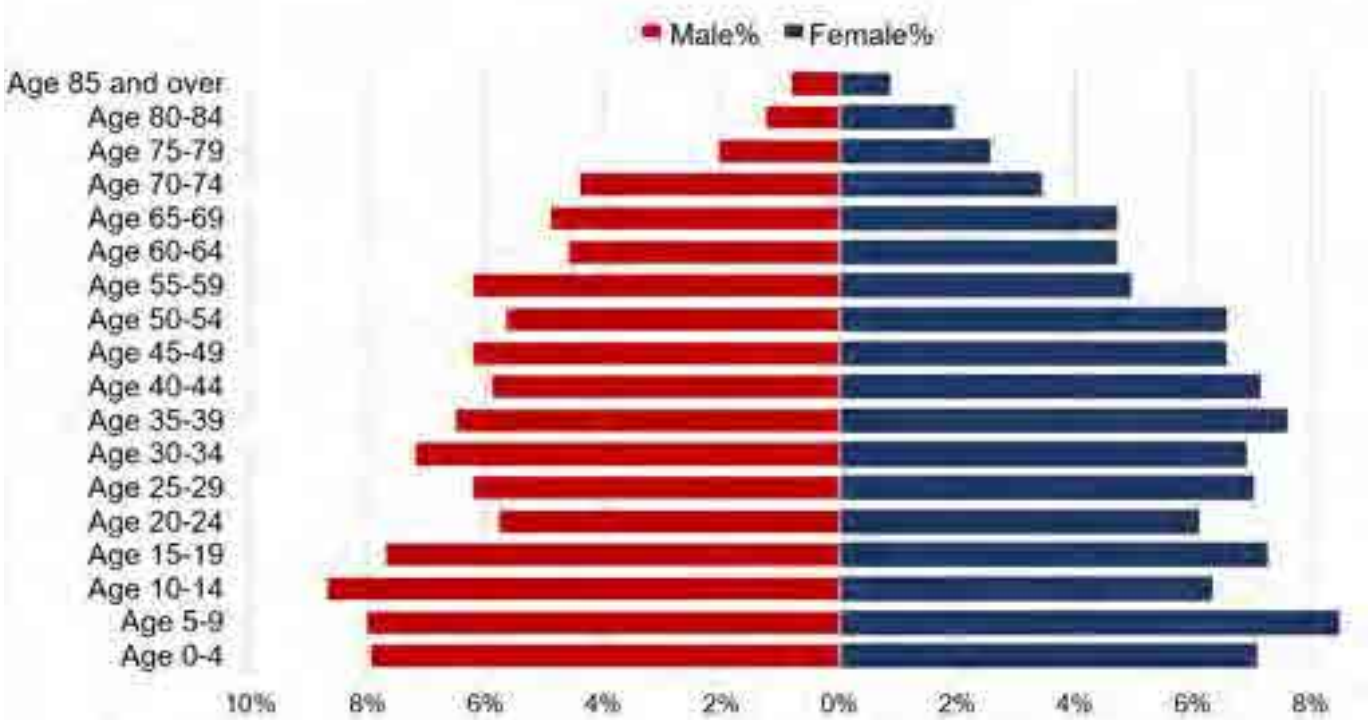
Household Size

A 'One Person' household size accounted for c.23% of all households in Clara with a slight increase to c.28% for 'Two Person' households. Cumulatively, over half of all households in Clara had no more than two persons while three persons and over accounted for c.48% of the town's household size.

Household Type

The most common household type recorded for Clara was 'Married Couple with Children' with just over one quarter of all households (c.27%) within this category. Those in the 'Cohabiting with Children' category represented only c.6%, while 'One Parent Family (Mother) with Children' accounted for c.14% of all households in the town.

Figure 2.5 Age Structure - Clara (2016 Census)



Housing Tenure

In terms of housing tenure, c.33% of private households in Clara were 'Owned with a Mortgage or Loan' with the 'Owned Outright' tenure accounting for c.35%. Having regard to rented accommodation, c.13% of households were rented from a 'Private Landlord' with c.17% of Clara's households being 'Rented from Local Authority or a Voluntary Housing Body'. In total, just over two-thirds of Clara's households had ownership of their property.

Occupancy Status

As recorded by the 2016 Census data, c.89% of dwellings in Clara were occupied with c.2% falling into the 'Temporarily Absent' category. 'Other Vacant Dwellings' and 'Unoccupied Holiday Homes' accounted for c.9% of the total housing stock in Clara.

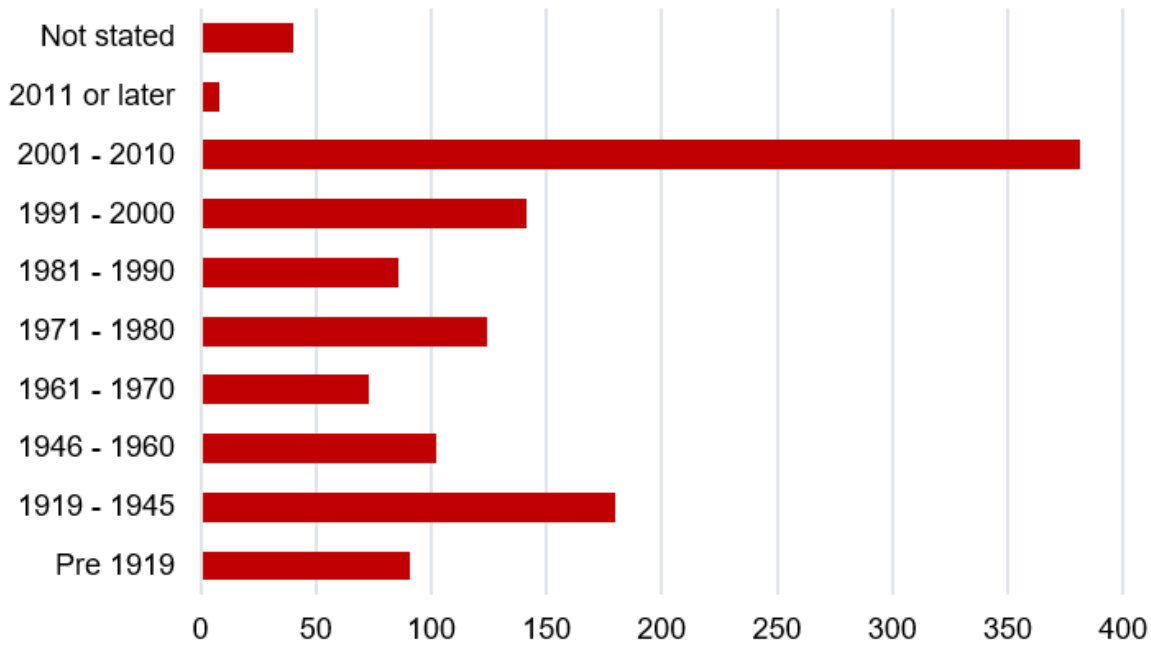
Housing Stock

In relation to Clara's housing stock, a total of 389 no. houses (c.32%) were constructed from the year 2001 onwards with only 8 no. houses (c.1%) built from the year 2011 and onwards (see Figure 2.6). New housing stock is classified as being constructed from 1991 onwards, and this category accounted for c.43% of the total housing in Clara. Older housing stock built prior to the year 1990 represented over half of all stock in Clara at c.54%.

Educational Attainment

For persons aged 15 years and above, a total of c.22% of Clara residents had attained an 'Upper Secondary' level of education with c.8% achieving a 'Technical or Vocational' qualification. In relation to Third Level education, c.10% of residents had achieved an 'Ordinary/Bachelor's Degree' with a further c.3% in total having obtained a Postgraduate qualification.

Figure 2.6 Housing Stock - Clara (2016 Census)

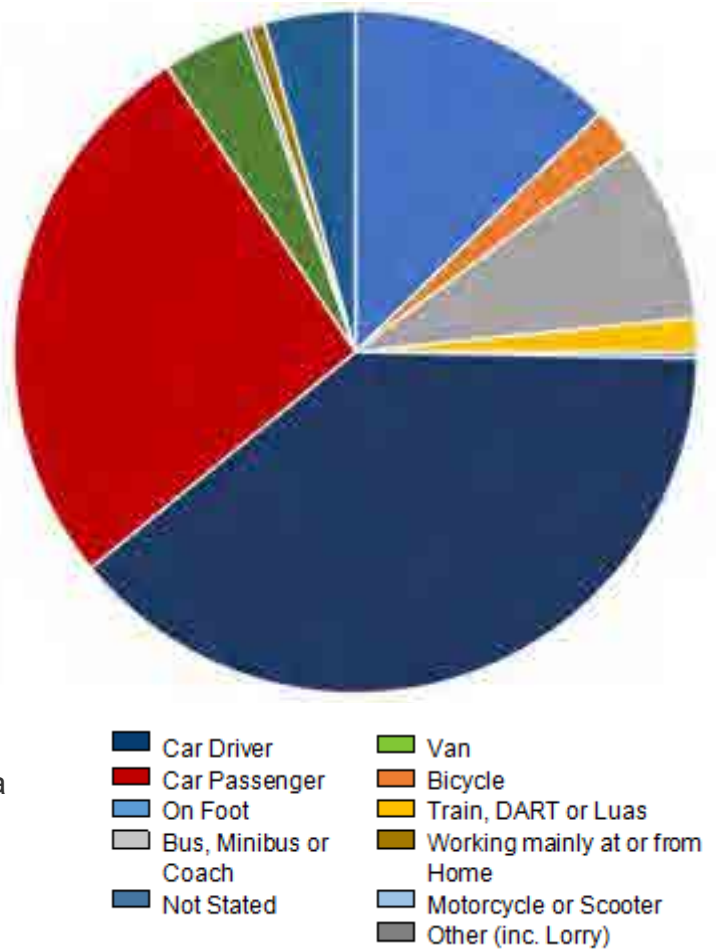


Commuting & Journey Duration

In terms of modes of transport used for commuting trips (to work, school and/or college), the dominant mode of travel in Clara was the 'Private Car' (accounting for both car driver and car passenger), which represented a figure of c.65% of journeys (see Figure 2.7). The second most popular means of travel was 'On Foot' with c.13% of journeys undertaken by this mode. Sustainable modes of transport i.e. Walking, Bus, Train etc. cumulatively accounted for around one-quarter of all journeys made.

For commuting journeys undertaken, less than half (c.45%) of journeys were 15 minutes, while c.30% of the commuting trips had a duration of between 15 to 30 minutes. A small percentage (c.7%) had a journey of one hour and more. In terms of car ownership, three quarters (75%) of all households in Clara had ownership of up to 2 cars with 20% of households not having access to a car at all.

Figure 2.7 Commuting - Clara (2016 Census)



Economic Structure

Principal Economic Status

For persons aged 15 years and above, c.45% of Clara's workforce population were recorded as being 'At Work' with c.11% being 'Unemployed' while the same percentage were classified as being 'Students'. Those persons who had retired amounted to c.15%. A total of c.7% of the town's workforce were unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2 Principal Economic Status - Clara Workforce (2016 Census)

Economic Status	Total Persons	Total %
At Work	1,140	44.5%
Looking for First Regular Job	28	1.1%
Unemployed	281	11%
Student	284	11.1%
Looking after Family/Home	248	9.7%
Retired	394	15.4%
Unable to Work (Permanent Sickness/Disability)	178	6.9%
Other	9	0.4%

Industry Group

The highest percentage of Clara's residents were recorded as being in employment in the 'Manufacturing Industries' group at c.23%, followed closely by 'Professional Services' at c.22%. Cumulatively, those industry groups accounted for just under half of Clara's total residents. Those persons employed in 'Commerce and Trade' accounted for c.20%. Industry group figures for Clara are illustrated at Figure 2.8.

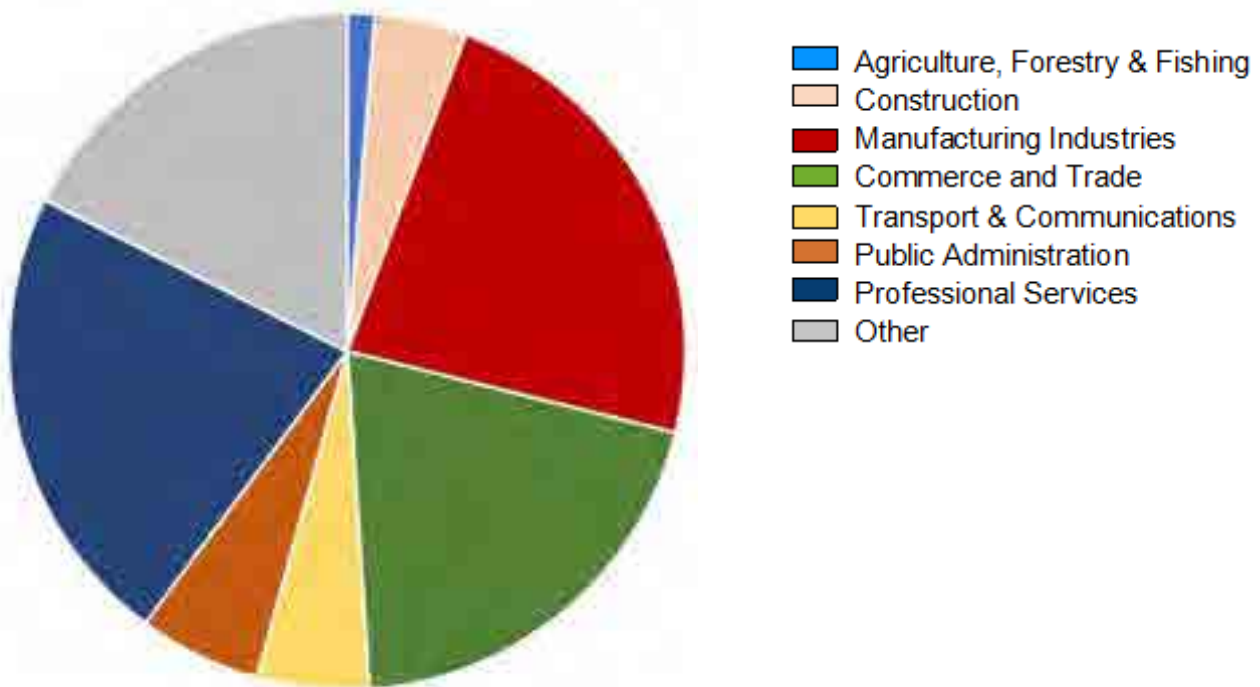
Occupational Status

Residents in Clara held a wide range of occupations. Discounting the 'Other' category, the highest percentage of Clara's population held an occupation within the 'Process, Plant and Machine Operatives' group at c.16%. 'Skilled Trade Occupations' was next at c.12% of all residents. Cumulatively, c.21% of residents in Clara held a position within a senior/managerial occupation which included positions such as Directors, Managers, Senior Officials, Professional and Technical roles etc.

Salary Values

Clara's population generated a significant salary value to the County that was c. €42.3 million per annum (as at 2016). The 'Professional Services' industry group generated the highest group salary amount at c. €11.7 million followed by 'Manufacturing Industries' at €10.3 million. The lowest salary generator per industry group was 'Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing' which amounted to c. €600,000 annually. The average annual salary for County Offaly in 2016 was €35,217.

Figure 2.8 Industry Group - Clara (2016 Census)



Infrastructure

The settlement of Clara is situated on the axis of two regional roads being the R420 (which runs north west-south east) and the R436 (which runs east-west). The M6 motorway provides a key transport link and is situated a relatively short distance away, being c.8km to the north.

Clara benefits from having a location on the rail network that provides sustainable transport connectivity to settlements such as Dublin, Galway, Westport and Ballina and more locally to Athlone, Tullamore and Kildare. By road, Clara is situated c.12km north west of the settlement of Tullamore.

In terms of digital connectivity, a total of 63% of all households had broadband internet access with just over half of all Clara households having their own personal computer.

Economic Assets

The adopted County Development Plan (CDP) designates a Retail Core which is centred around the River Street/Church Street locale. This provides a focus for retailing in the town.

Situated to the north on the R420 road is Carraig Mór Industrial Estate which provides modern industrial units for use. On the western periphery of Clara, there are a number of commercial/industrial operators such as Paltech, Rosderra Irish Meats, Waste Matters and Thrace Synthetic Packaging Ltd which are situated on the R436 route. This area of Clara is designated for Industrial and Warehousing land uses in the adopted CDP.

To the eastern periphery, also on the R436 route, there are a number of health/pharma employers at Europharma Concepts Ltd and Nelipak Healthcare Packaging Europe Ltd. A sand and gravel quarry is located off L2015 New Road.

In terms of its geographic location, Clara benefits from being a short distance from the county town of Tullamore. The settlement of Athlone, which is a designated Regional Growth Centre in the RSES, is less than 30 km from Clara to the north west on the M6 motorway.

As referenced in Section 1, the LECP sets out that the train station at Clara is categorised as being a ‘strength’ for the town. Clara bog, which has international ecological status, is defined as being an ‘opportunity’ for the town.

Value of the Economy

A metric that can be utilised to appraise levels of economic value/activity is ‘Gross Value Added’ (GVA). CSO data for the Midland region placed a GVA value per person of €21,248 (basic prices) for the year 2016²⁹. If this value is applied to Clara’s population (which is taken as 3,336 persons), a GVA value for the town is calculated as being c.€71 million.

Taking a regional perspective, the population of the Midland region in 2016 was 292,301 persons and, similarly, if the GVA value is applied to the regional population, a regional GVA figure of €6.2 billion is generated. Through a comparative assessment of the GVA figures as set out above, it is estimated that the settlement of Clara contributes c.1% of the Midland region’s overall GVA figure.

Land Rental Values

Data obtained in relation to property rental values can provide an indicator regarding potential economic value. Available information sourced from the Property Services Regulatory Authority in respect of a select number of rental properties in Clara with different land uses and associated rental values is summarised in Table 2.3.

Socio-Economic Analysis - Key Findings

- **c.43% of Clara’s population aged between 0- 29 years with c.57% aged**

Table 2.3 Rental Values - Clara

Property Location	Land Use	Average Annual Rent
Garran an Chaislean	Community	€4,200
Clara House	Agricultural	€3,600
River House	Retail	€15,600
Main Street	Unknown	€20,800

39 or younger.

- **More than half of residents (c.55%) were of ‘Single’ status with c.35% being ‘Married’.**
 - **c.51% of all households in Clara had no more than two persons.**
 - **Just under half of the labour force (c.45%) in Clara were considered to be ‘At Work’.**
 - **Foremost industry group that residents belonged to was ‘Manufacturing Industries’ at c.23%.**
 - **Annual salary generation in Clara was estimated at just over c.€42 million.**
 - **c.10% of Clara’s population have obtained a Third Level degree with an additional c.3% achieving a Postgraduate qualification.**
 - **For commuting journeys to places of work, c.65% of Clara residents used a private car with only c.14% using sustainable modes. For trips to school and college, sustainable modal share increased to c.23%.**
 - **Clara has a high level of car ownership with 50% of households having ownership of one car while c.75% of households have ownership of up to two cars.**
- c.21% of employees in Clara held a senior occupation such as a Director, Manager or Senior Official.**

²⁹ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/cirgdp/countyincomesandregionalgdp2019/>

Urban Analysis

This section of the Plan presents an urban audit of the settlement of Clara in terms of, *inter alia*, its streetscapes, public spaces, built form, core areas, character areas, landmark and heritage buildings and overall settlement pattern.



Clara - Locational Context

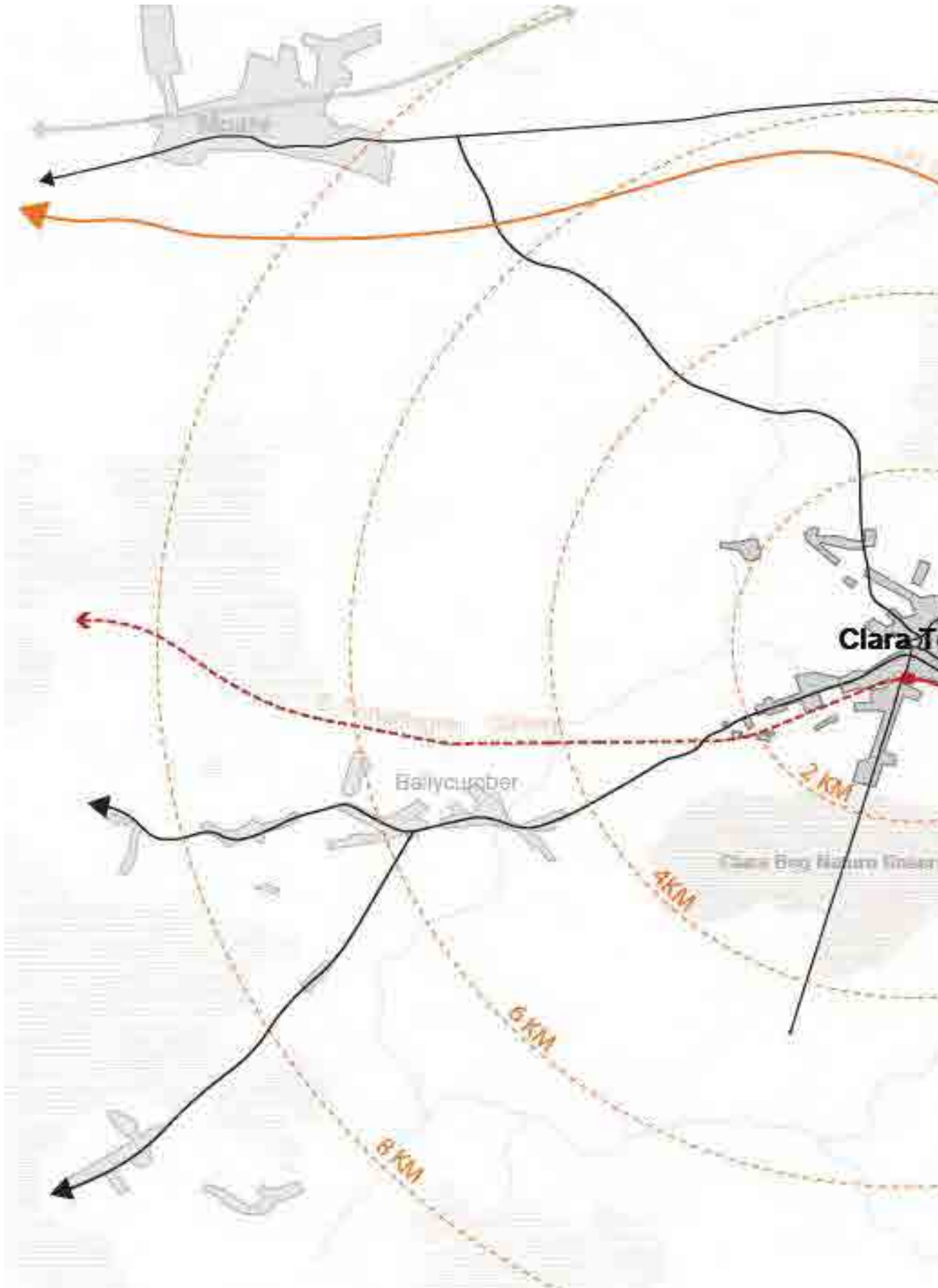


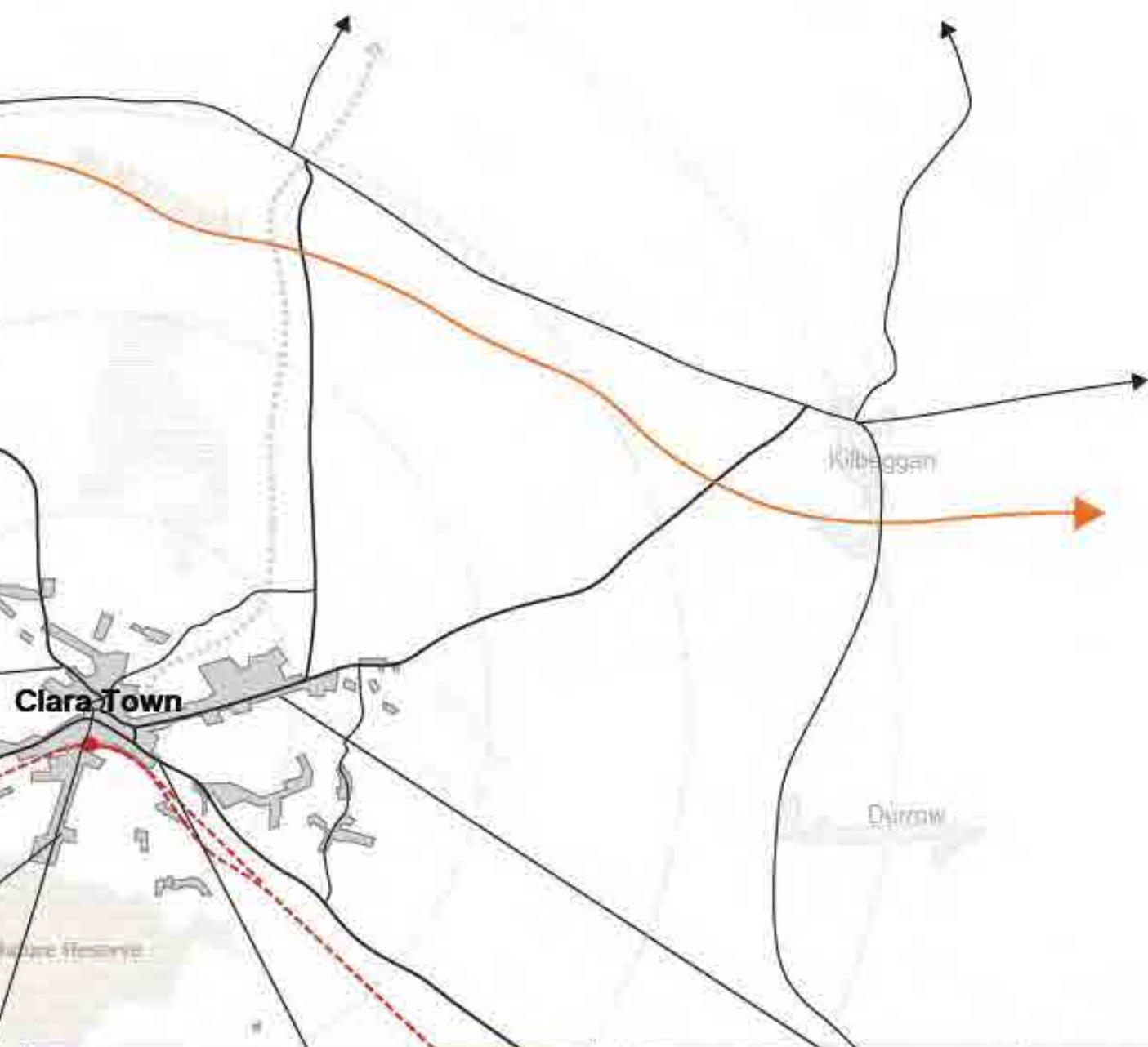
Figure 2.9 Locational Context



Clara - Approach to Town Centre



Figure 2.10 Approach to Town Centre



Clara - Land Use Analysis

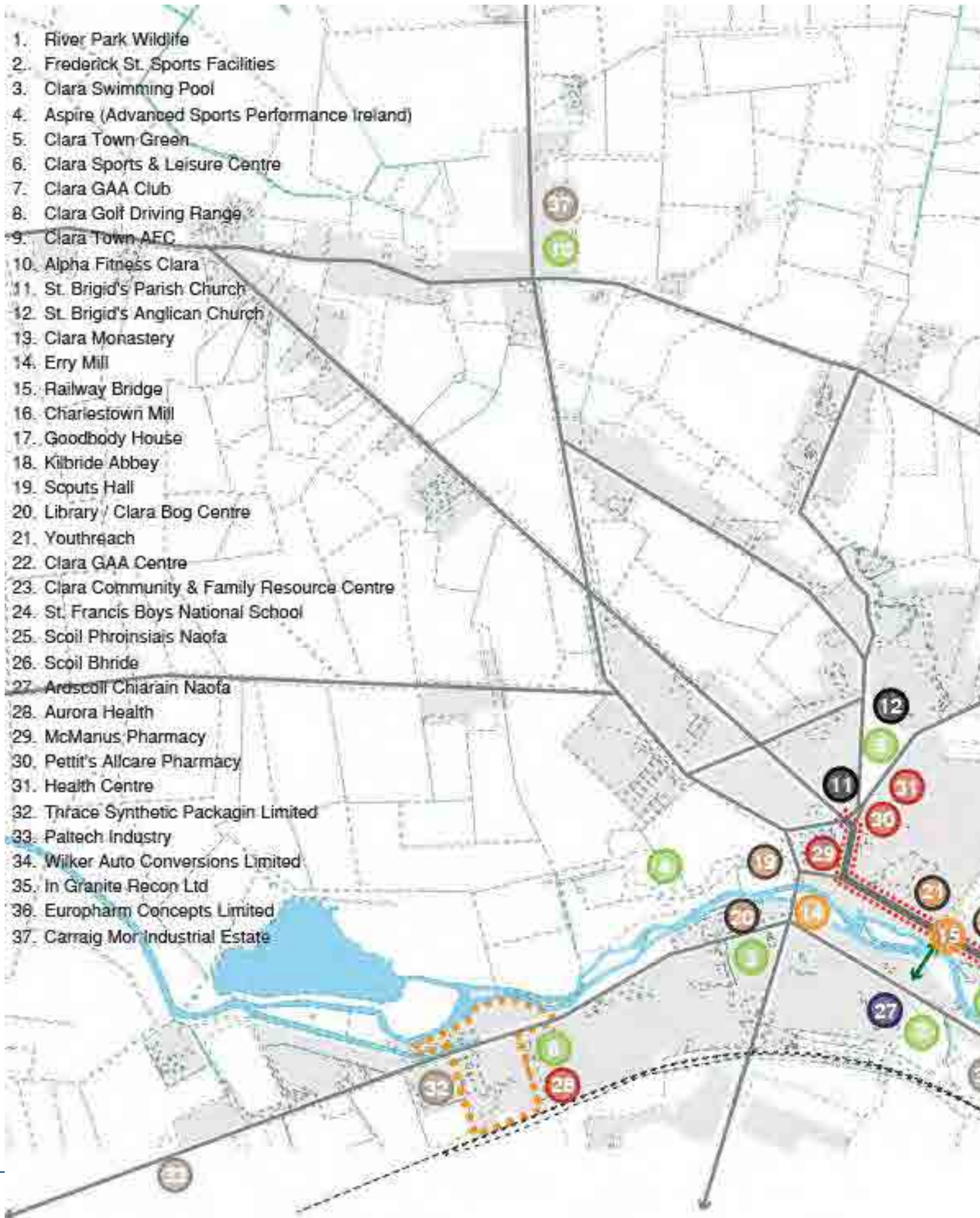
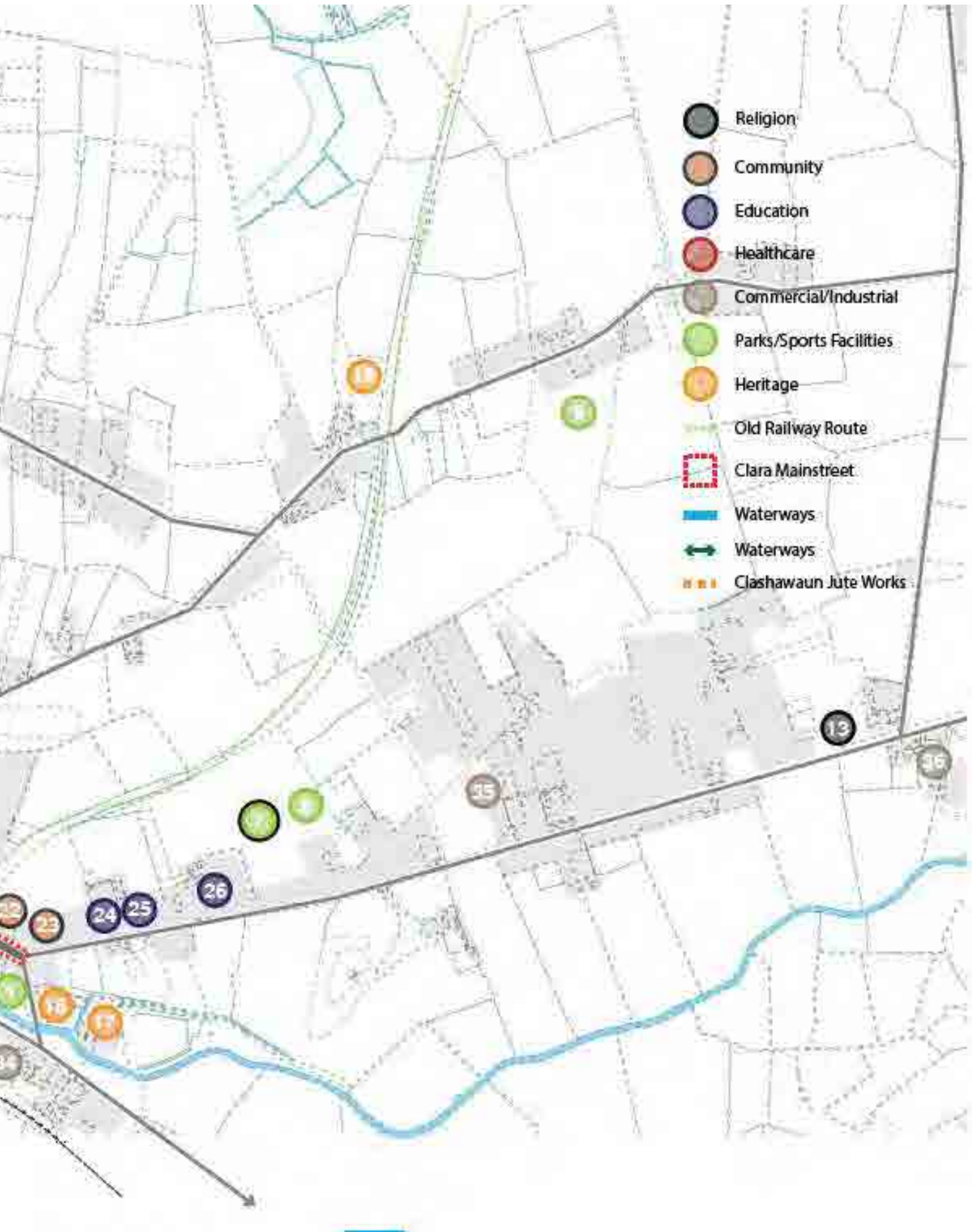


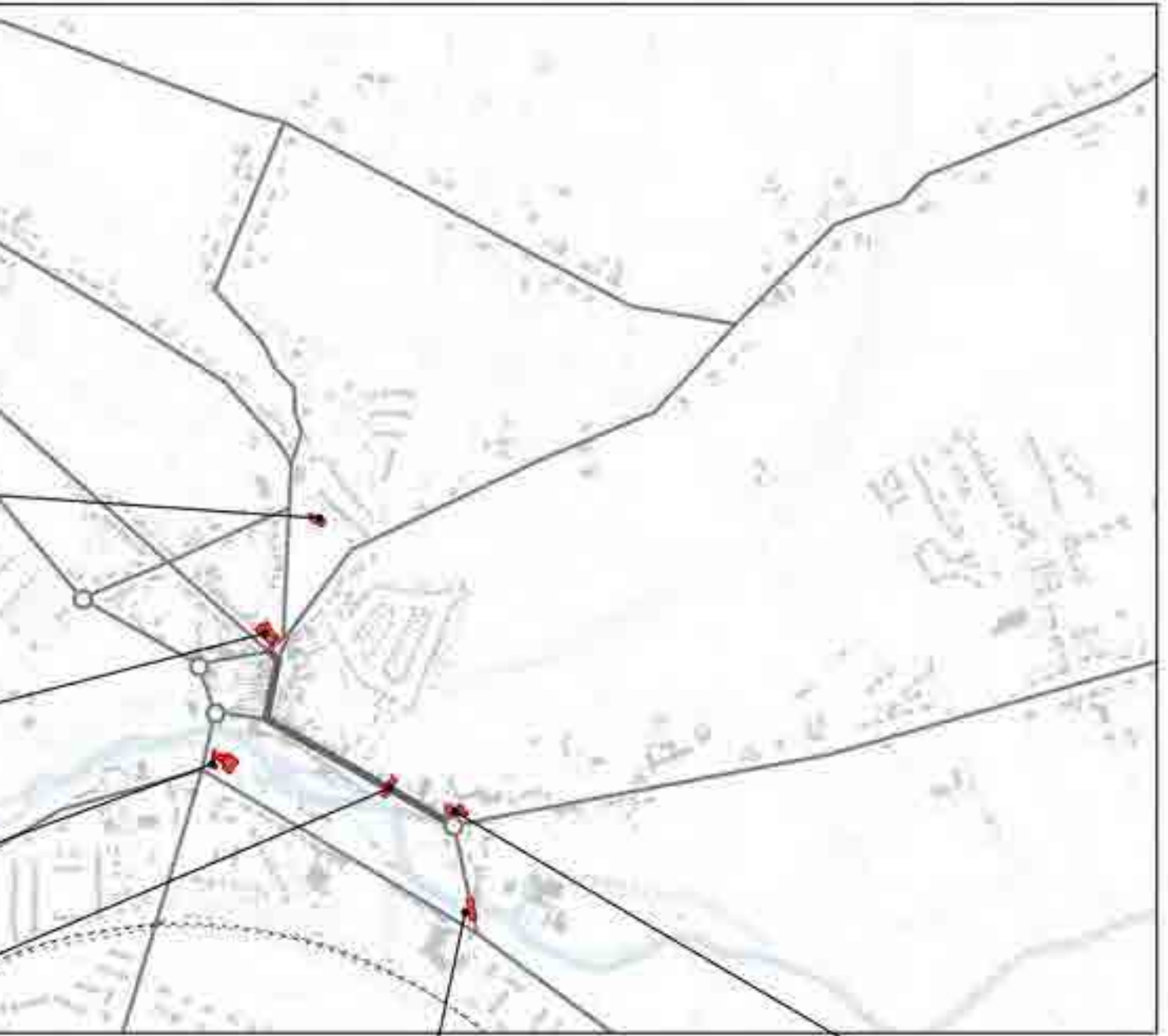
Figure 2.11 Land Use Analysis



Clara - Landmarks



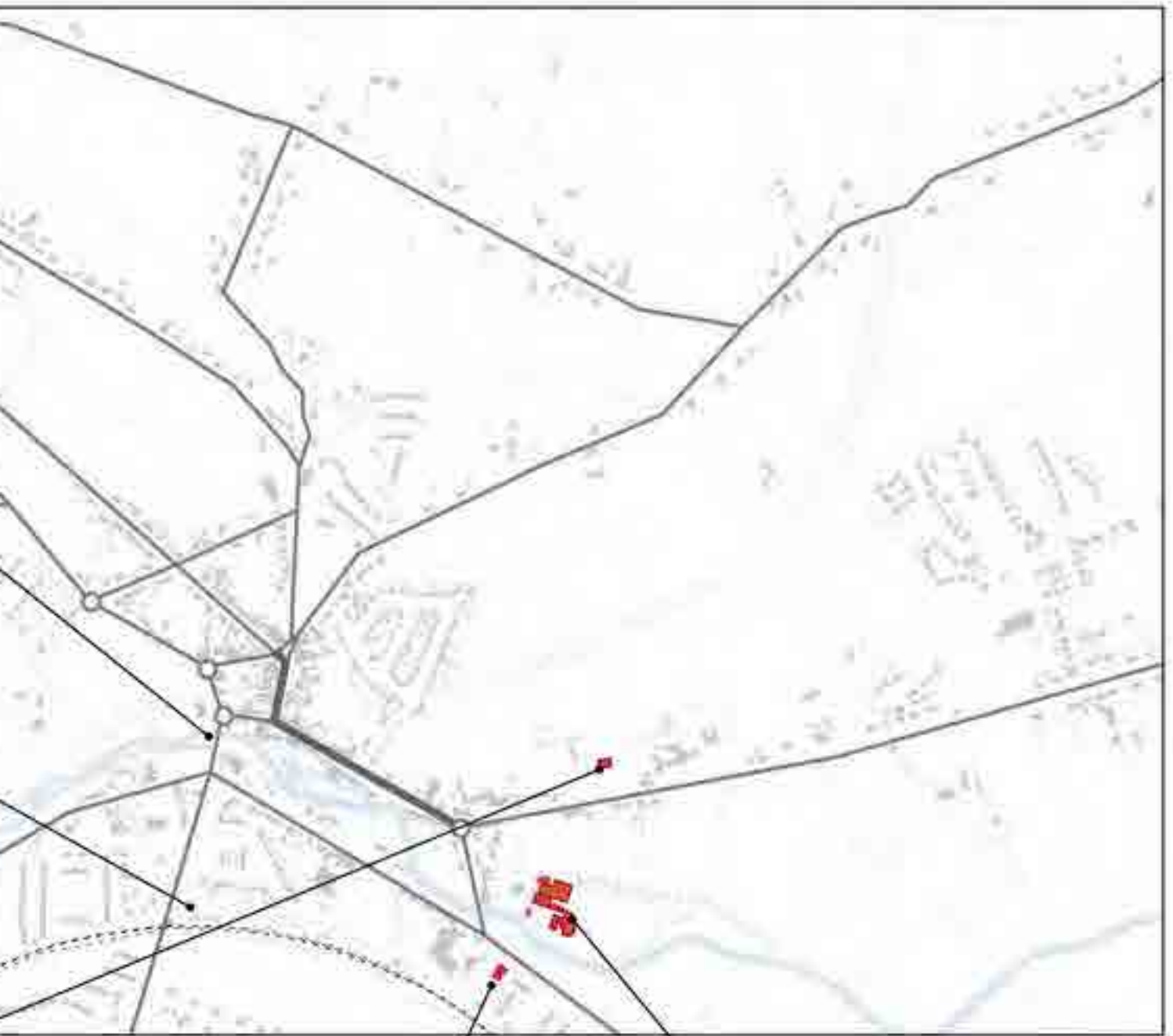
Figure 2.12 Landmarks



Clara - Heritage Assets



Figure 2.13 Heritage Assets



Clara - Unoccupied Properties (in proximity to Town Centre)

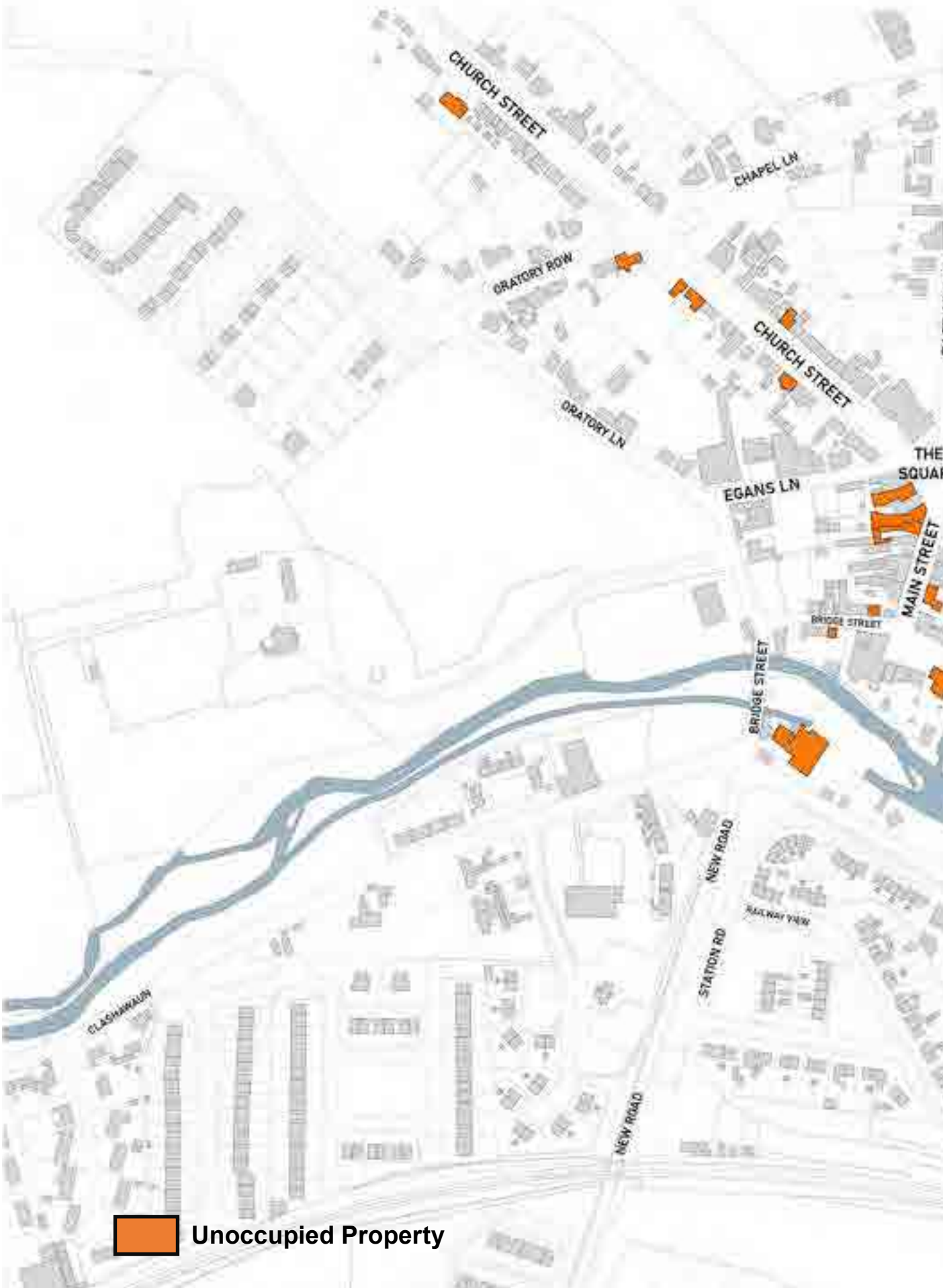
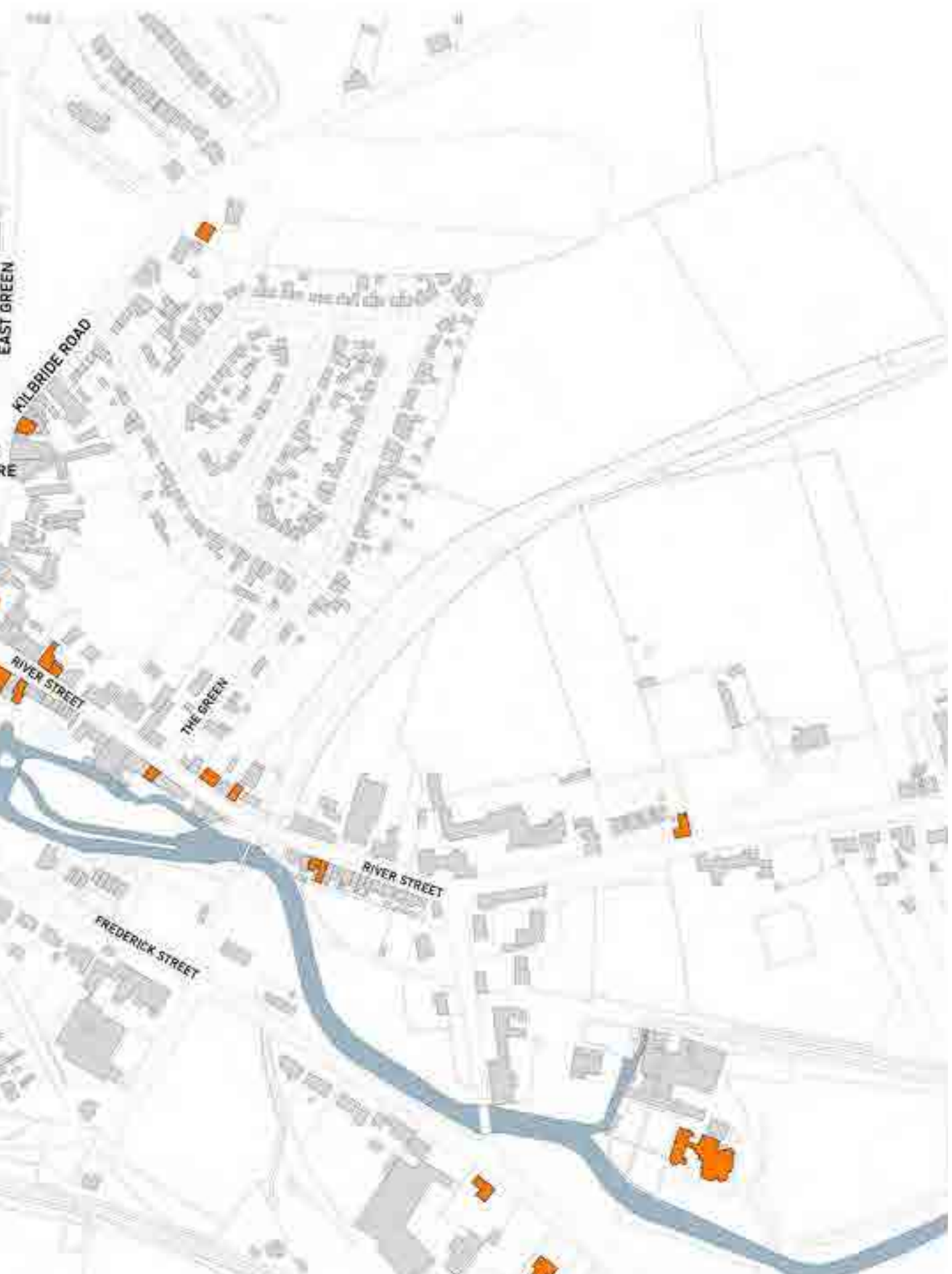


Figure 2.14 Heritage Assets



Clara - Open Spaces

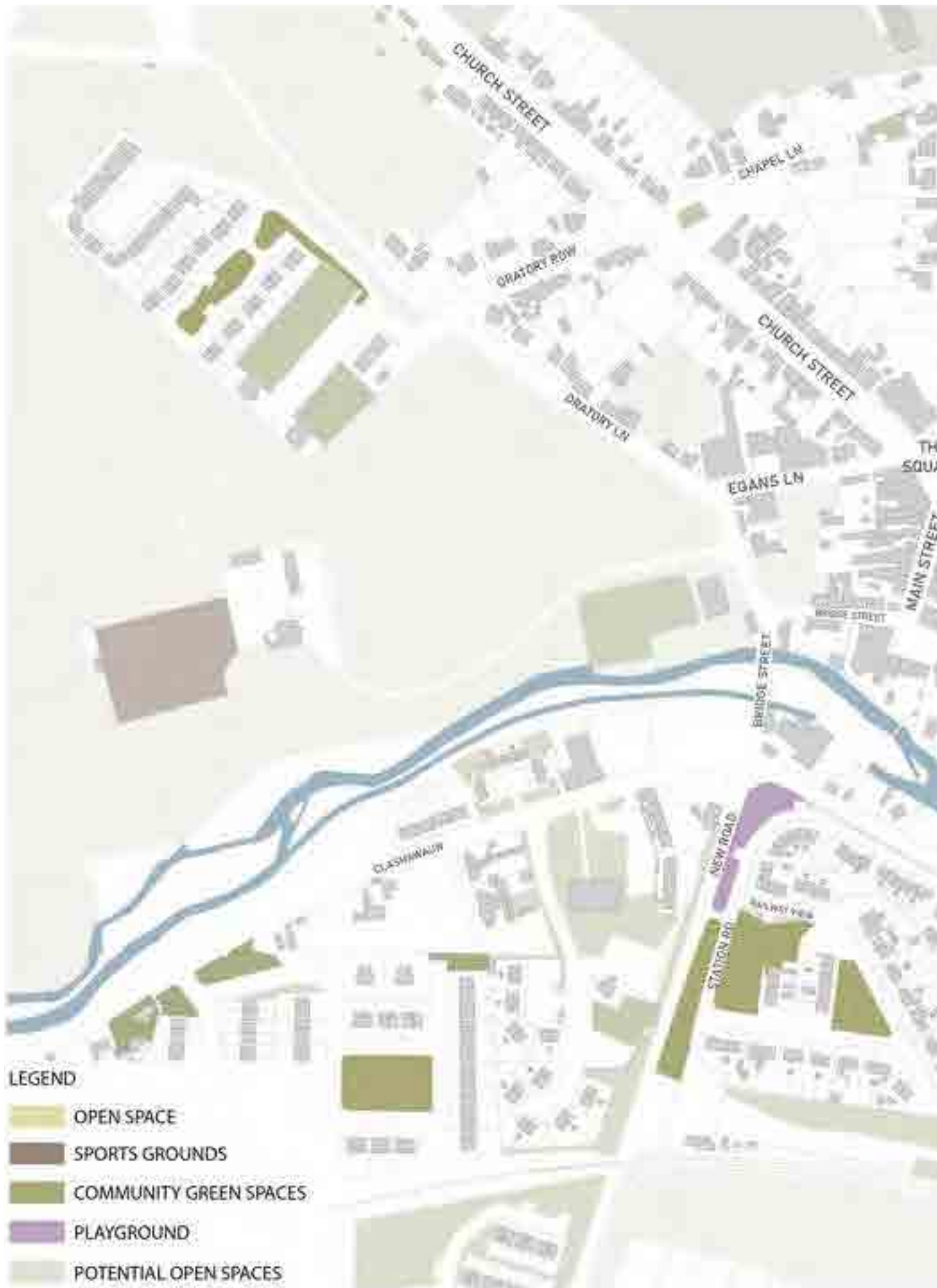


Figure 2.15 Open Spaces



Clara - Constraints

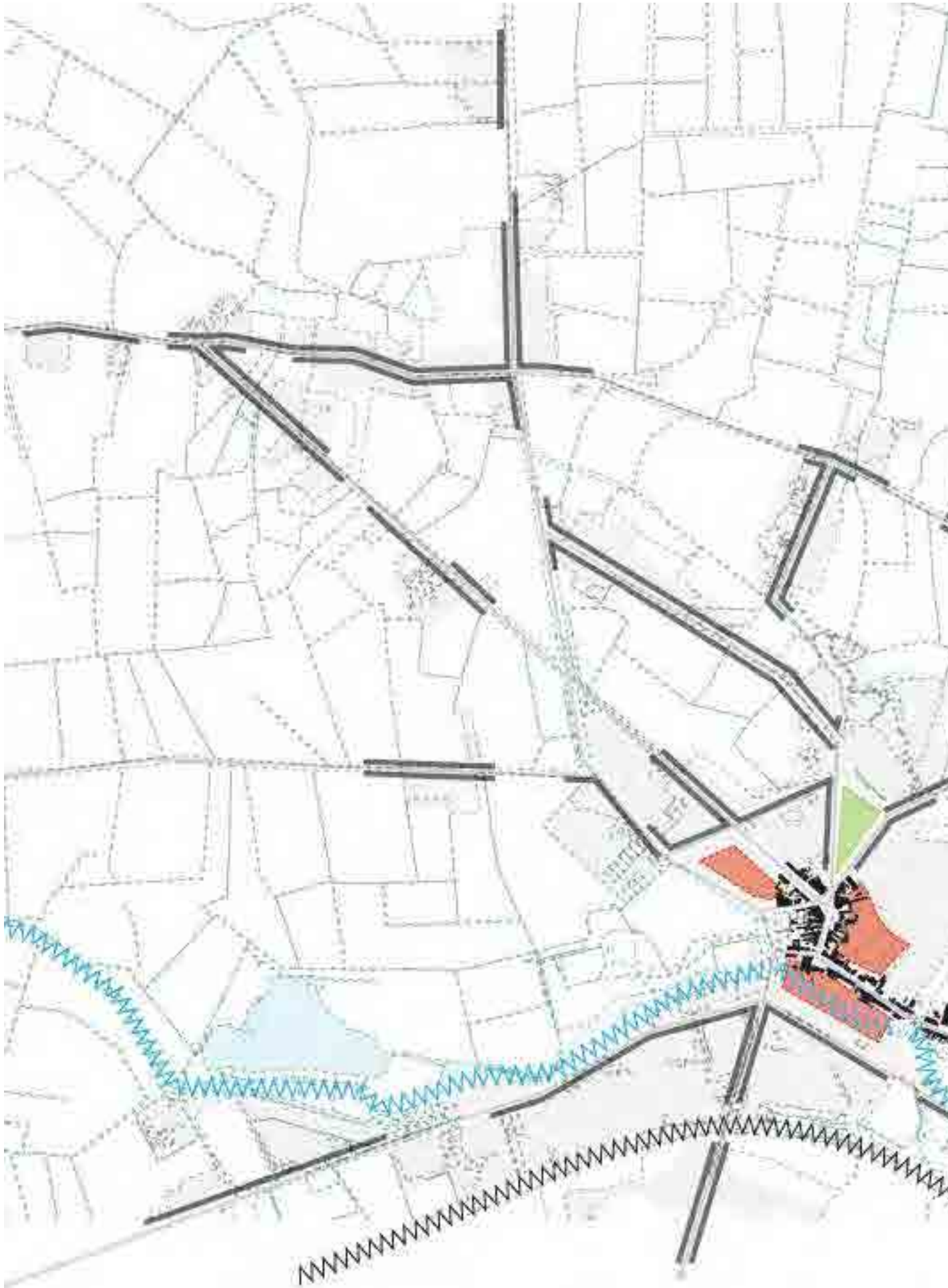
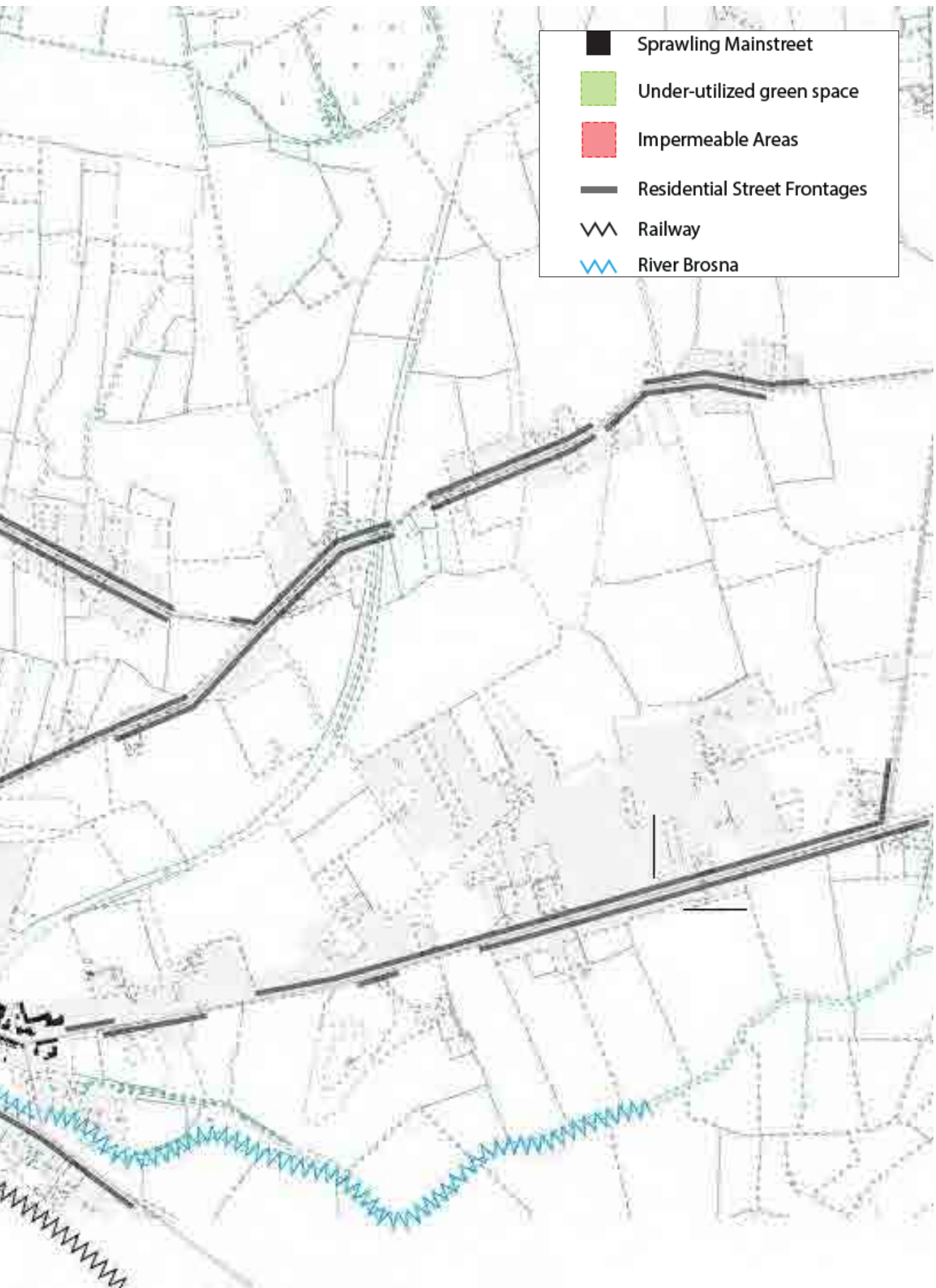


Figure 2.16 Constraints



Clara - Character Areas



Figure 2.17 Character Areas



Clara - Opportunity & Project Sites

Opportunity Sites

- 1 Erry Mill and Lands at Fredrick St
- 2 Lands to the rear of River St/ Main St
- 3 Charlestown Mill

Project Sites

- 4 Farrell Building
- 5 Railway Greenway
- 6 River Walk
- 7 Goodbody's Reservoir Nature Walk
- 8 Water Sports Facility
- 9 Main Street Connections (see Laneways and Alleyways Project)
- 10 Town Centre Parking Locations
- 11 Former co-op Building
- 12 Town Centre Cycle Routes
- 13 Heritage Buildings Opportunities
- 14 Heritage-led Competition
- 15 Star Community Hall

Laneways & Alleyways Project

- A Passageway to River Street with link to Proposed River Walk
- B Passageway to lands to rear of River Street
- C Passageway to Main Street from lands to rear of River Street
- D Passageway to The Green from lands to rear of River Street

-  PROTECTED STRUCTURES
-  POTENTIAL CAR PARKING
-  EXISTING LIBRARY
-  EXISTING SWIMMING POOL
-  EXISTING TRAIN STATION
-  PROPOSED PEDESTRIAN/CYCLE LINKS
-  ENHANCED RIVERSIDE WALKWAY
-  PROPOSED PEDESTRIAN/CYCLE LINKS

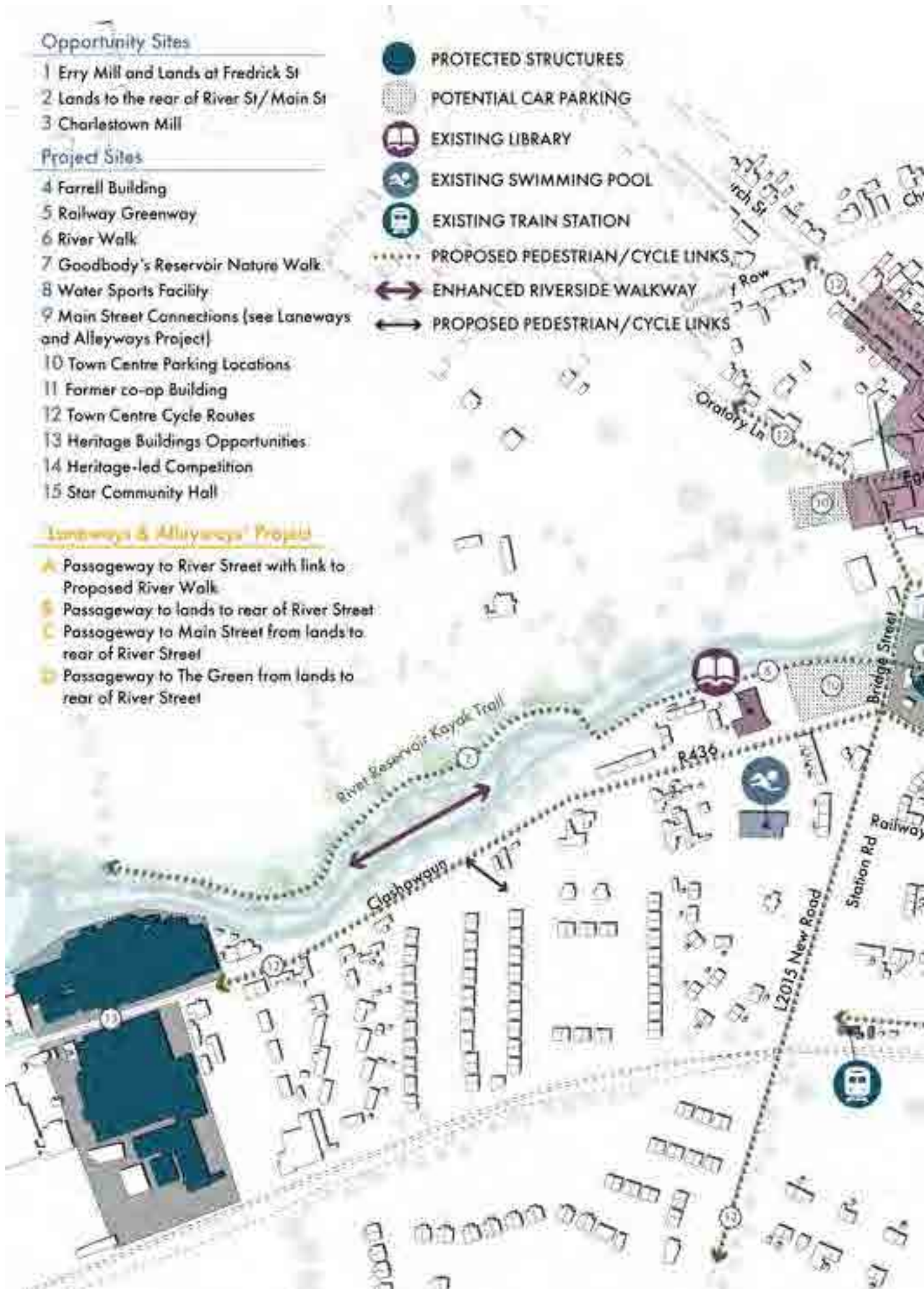
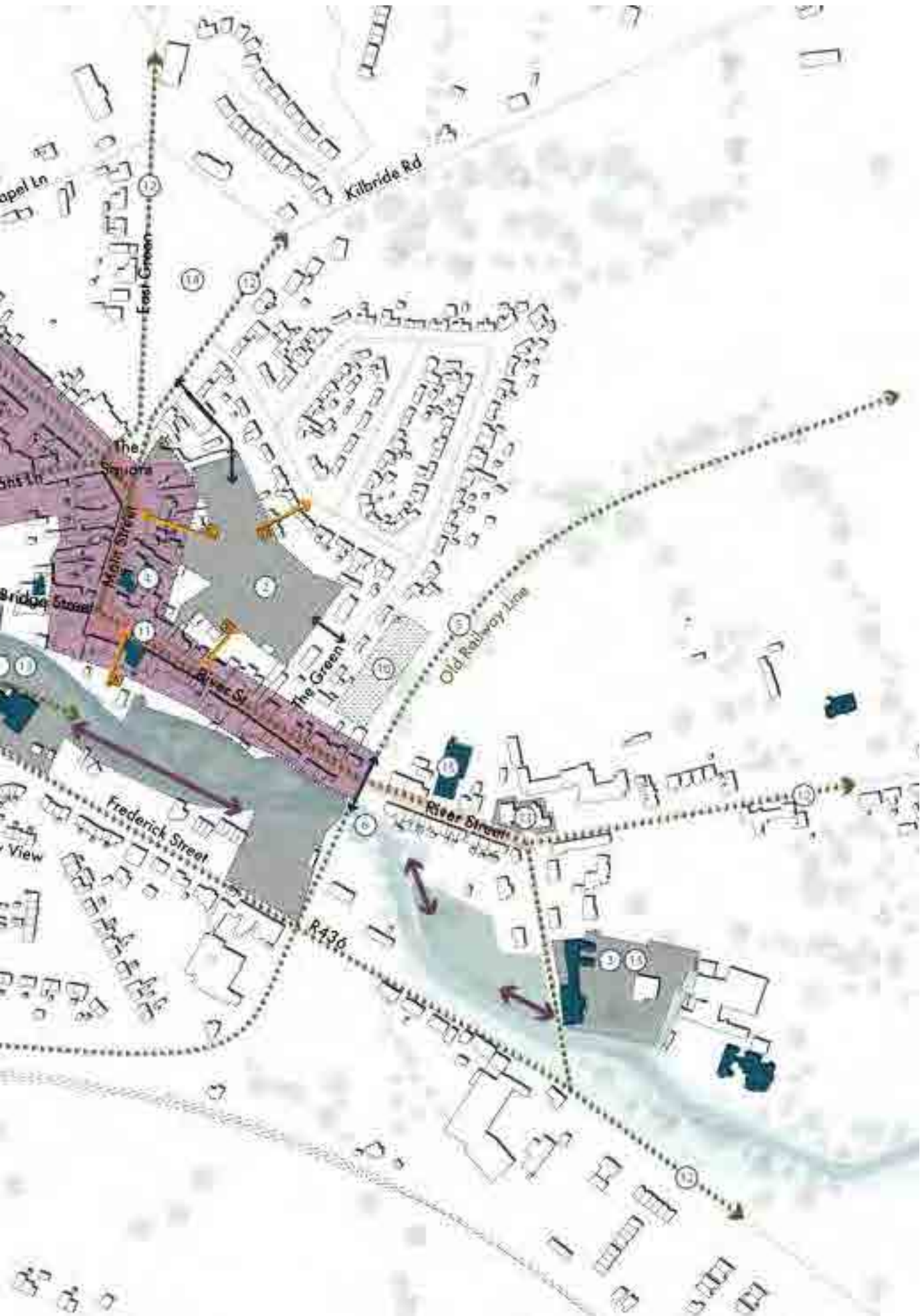


Figure 2.18 Opportunity & Project Sites



Clara - Existing Context



Figure 2.19 Existing Context



Clara Bog Nature Reserve

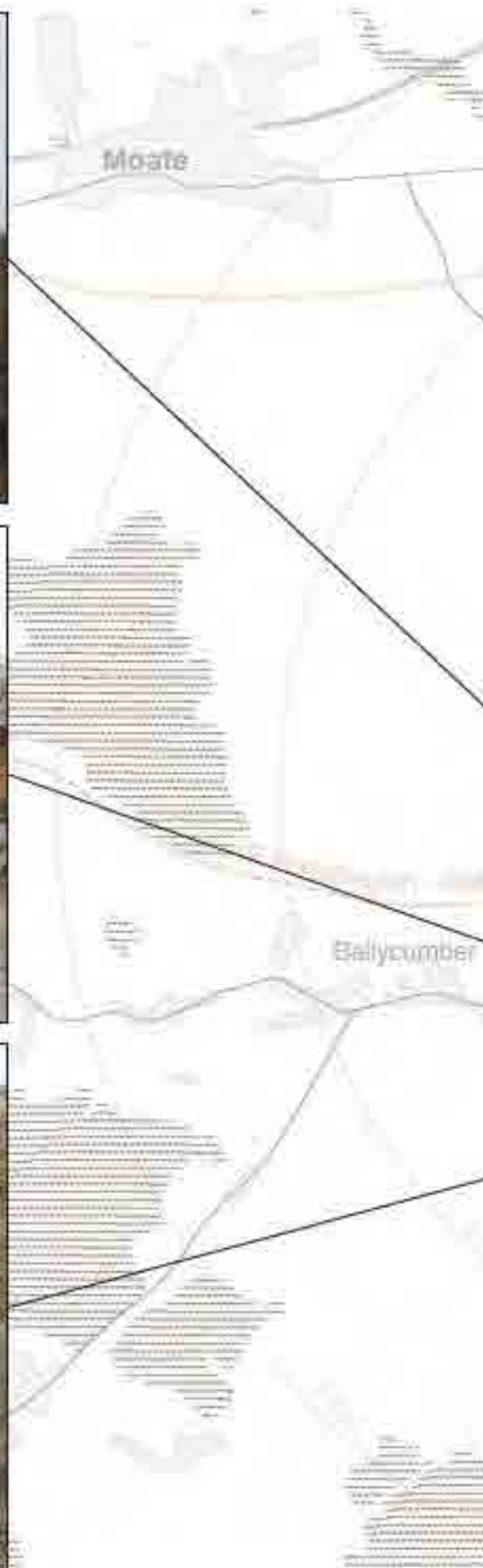
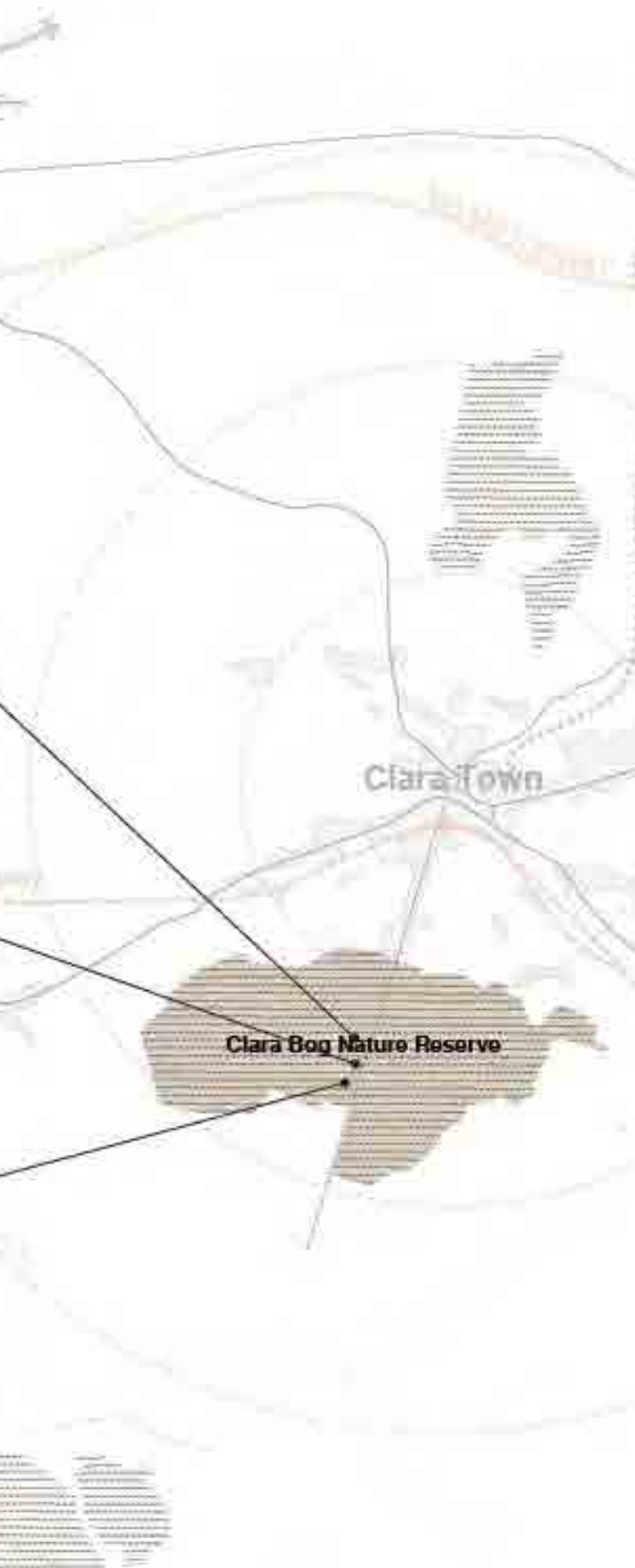


Figure 2.20 – Clara Bog Nature Reserve



Urban Analysis - Key Findings

- **Context** - Approaches into Clara could be better defined, particularly from Tullamore, with various housing developments 'leaking' out into the periphery.
- **Clara Bog** - The amenity of Clara Bog Nature Reserve is within a 5km distance from the Town Centre and is an asset to the town.
- **Main Street** - This street is long and undefined with many vacant shopfronts where it becomes difficult to define a 'beginning' and an 'end'. Main Street also turns its back on the River Brosna which runs parallel to the street. There is only one visual opportunity of the river from Main Street which exists at its eastern end.
- **Church Street** - Large set backs on the street provide an opportunity to improve public realm on the western approach into the Town Centre.
- **Residential** - Several infill opportunities around the Town Centre have been identified to help counteract the bleeding of the town into the periphery.
- **Heritage** - Multiple heritage sites, which could become anchors for Clara in terms of cultural/tourism or community assets, have been identified such as Clashawaun Jute Works, Goodbody House, Erry Mill, Charlestown Mill, Drayton Villa and the Railway Bridge.
- **Greenway** - The old railway line to the north of the Town Centre provides an opportunity to create a greenway connecting to the Galway - Dublin greenway route.

Transportation Analysis

The first section of this analysis sets out a review of the existing evidence and documentation base in the context of transport and movement in Clara, with the second section providing a review of the existing transport infrastructure in the town including walking and cycling provision, public transport, general traffic conditions and car parking.

Existing Evidence, Research and Documentation Base

The existing evidence and documentation base in the context of transport and movement in Clara has focused on the following:

- Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 - Clara Town Plan.
- Clara Town Team's Blueprint Documents.
- Clara Towns and Environs Traffic Management Study 2007.

Clara Town Plan sets out a list of objectives with an holistic approach to ensure that growth will be sustainable in the long term supported by the provision of the necessary amenities, infrastructure, services and employment. The Plan has identified the following transport objectives:

Town Centre Objectives

- TCO-04: Maintain and improve accessibility to and within the town centre and develop a comprehensive approach to the provision of car parking, pedestrian and cycle access with particular regard to the needs and access for people with disabilities.
- TCO-05: Further improve the streetscape and public realm in Clara town centre by undergrounding existing cables and

improving pavements and street furniture in particular.

- TCO-08: Provide loading bays of adequate capacity where they are needed most in order to ensure that traffic flows are not restricted.

Biodiversity and Landscape Objectives

- NHO-02: Work with relevant stakeholders to examine the feasibility of developing an amenity route along the disused Clara-Banagher railway from Kilbride Cemetery to River Street in the town.
- NHO-06: Provide a footpath linking the town with Clara Bog as shown on the Clara Settlement Plan Objectives Map.

Infrastructure Objectives - Roads and Access

- KIO-01: Investigate the feasibility of providing a future relief road to the north east of the town as indicated on the Clara Settlement Plan Objectives Map taking into account environmental sensitivities identified in the SEA Environmental Report and the policies and objectives of this County Development Plan relating to sustainable mobility, including Section 8.5.4 Corridor and Route Selection Process. The development of any relief road proposal shall be subject to the requirements of the EIA, Habitats, Water Framework and Flood Directives where relevant and appropriate.
- KIO-02: Prepare a Traffic Management Plan for Clara Town Centre.

- KIO-03: Provide where new development is proposed, new or additional access/linkages as indicated on the Clara Settlement Plan Objectives Map providing for the opening up the full development potential of back land, and developable areas in the town.
- KIO-04: Improve and upgrade all approach roads to the town as a method of enhancing the first impression of the town.
- KIO-05: Facilitate and implement measures to reduce or manage traffic associated with schools to regularise movement patterns and ease congestion.
- KIO-06: Identify car parks and other appropriate locations for the provision of battery charging infrastructure for electric cars.

Infrastructure Objectives - Walking and Cycling

- KIO-07: Support improvements in the pedestrian and cycling infrastructure in the town that will improve connectivity and permeability, and promote more sustainable modes of transport.
- KIO-08: Provide cycle lanes or adequate space for cyclists on proposed footpaths within Clara Town in the locations shown on Clara Settlement Plan Objectives Map.
- KIO-09: To provide adequate, secure and sheltered bicycle parking facilities at appropriate locations: (i) in the town centre (ii) at employment areas and (iii) adjacent to heritage, community and amenity destinations.

Infrastructure Objectives - Public Parking

- KIO-10: Support the provision of public off-street car parks at the locations shown on Clara Settlement Plan Objectives Map.

Infrastructure Objectives - Public Realm

- KIO-11: Support public realm improvement works in the town centre, focusing on pavements, dedicated parking bays, additional pedestrian crossing, street furniture, signage and the provision where possible of cycle paths.
- KIO-12: Ensure footpaths in the town provide adequate access for persons with a disability or who have impaired mobility.

Clara Town Team's Blueprint Documents

The masterplan documents were prepared by the Town Team to determine how the future of Clara can be shaped. The document at Appendix I includes a full section on 'Parking and Traffic' highlighting current issues, needs and recommendations such as:

- Clara Relief Road: Provision of Clara Relief Road to the west of the town centre from the Moate Road (R420) to the Ballycumber Road (R436), as shown on the Clara Settlement Plan Objectives Map. This infrastructure will alleviate the current traffic congestion, bringing through traffic outside of the town.
- Public Parking: On-street parking on both sides of the road increases the traffic congestion issue, in addition lack of off street parking is prejudicial to businesses. This document recommends the provision of off-street parking, outlining a number of potential locations.

In addition, it recommends:

- Adequate links should be provided to proposed off-street car parks to the town centre amenities and businesses.
- Locations for providing on-street car parking, electric vehicle parking and bike parking.

Figure 2.21 Clara Town Plan Objectives (CDP 2021-2027)

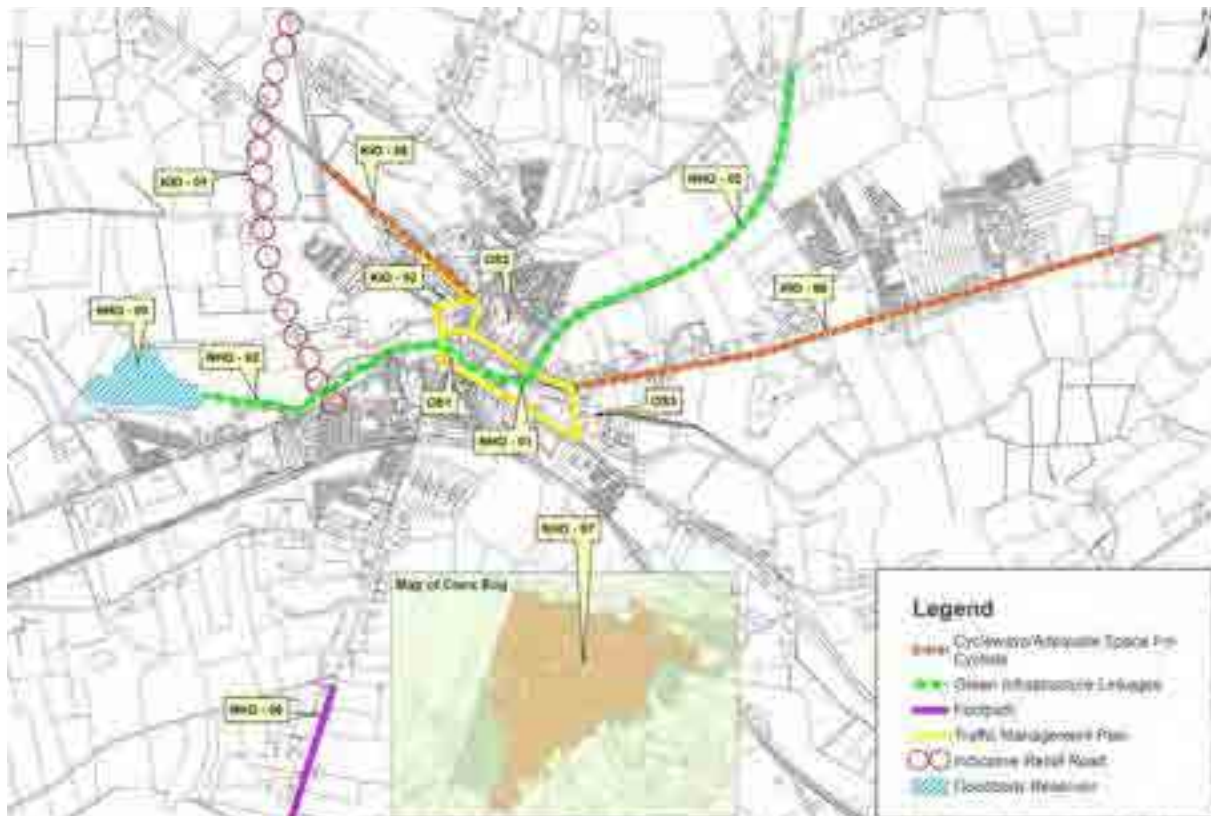
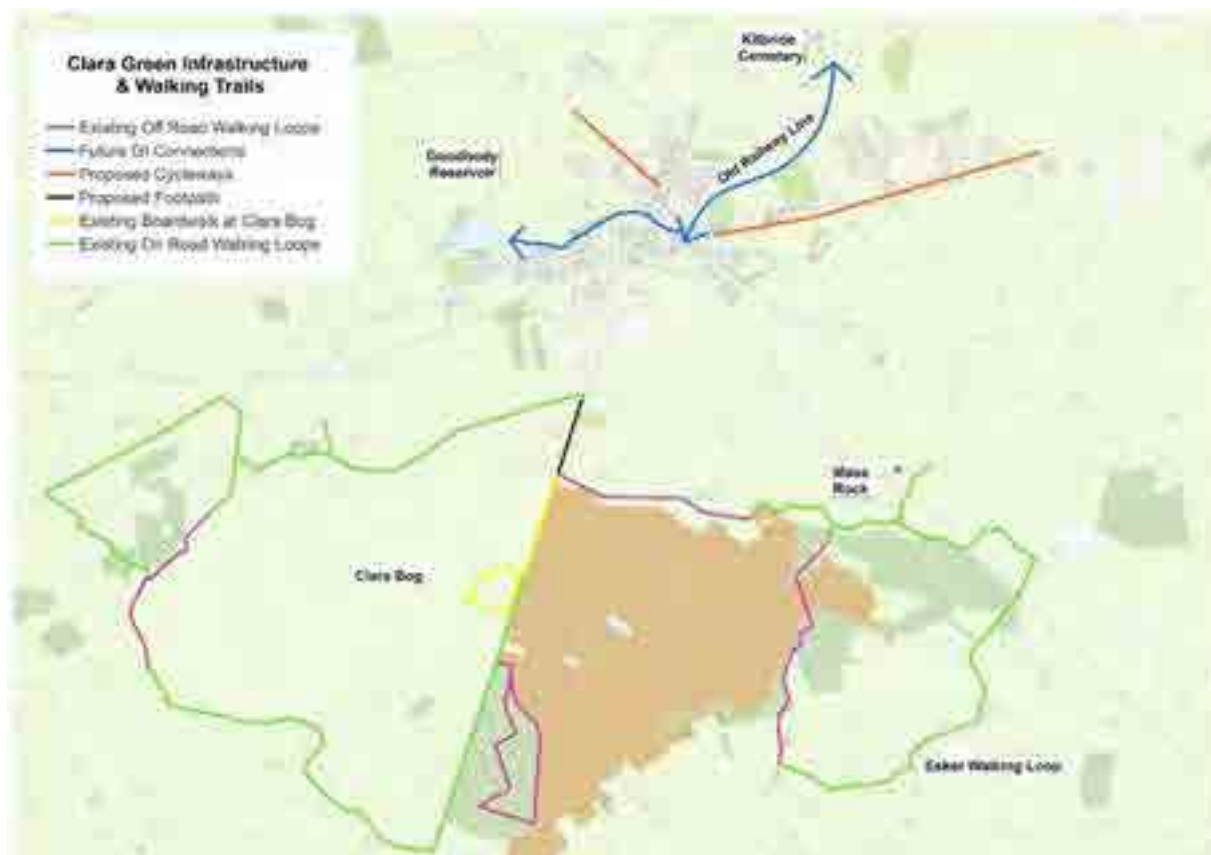


Figure 2.22 Potential Green Infrastructure Linkages and Existing Walking Routes (CDP 2021-2027)



- Recommendations for re-designing the existing on street car parking (e.g. angled parking), in some cases removing one side parking and the relocation of loading bays.
- Provision of paid parking in certain areas (commercial sector), the provision of signed parking restrictions and the need of parking enforcement.
- Disabled parking to be incorporated on the parking proposals.
- One-way system along Main Street, Egan's Lane and Bridge Street. Recommendation of providing one-way system along this loop will improve the traffic flows within the town centre.
- Bottleneck problem on the Kilbride Road. This issue should be assessed and a solution provided.
- Provide a footbridge beside the Clara Bridge.
- Increase public transport services.
- Clara-Streamstown Railway Line. The former railway line could be developed to provide a walking and cycling link which will connect several key areas, like schools, GAA social centre and Clara Family Resource Centre.
- Potential walkway from Charlestown Bridge to Clashauwan.
- River Brosna connects Kilbeggan, Clara, Ballycumber, Pullough and Ferbane, thus opening-up the midlands to wider tourist connections - Boora, Lemanaghan, Turraun Wetland.
- Continuation of the next phases of the Clashawaun River Walk Amenity project to help restore connections to the river for the community and visitors, thus weaving a connected landscape along the River Brosna.

Clara Towns and Environs Traffic Management Study

Offaly County Council commissioned RPS Consulting Engineers in May 2006 to carry out a traffic management study in the town of Clara and its environs.

The report analysed the traffic conditions in 2006, including traffic data collection, identification of traffic problems and recommendation of traffic management measures that could be implemented in the town. A list of recommendations from the 2006 report are summarised below:

- Provision of roundabouts at certain junctions.
 - Introduction of parking controls.
 - Improvements to Main Street/River Street junction.
 - Improvements to Main Street/Chapel Hill junction.
 - Provision of a number of controlled pedestrian crossings.
 - Gateway structures on the main routes into the town.
 - Roundabouts on routes entering the town to slow vehicle speeds.
- Additional information in the masterplan documents outline the need to improve, develop and promote Green Infrastructure:
- Potential of the Clara to Banagher Greenway and the Clara to Streamstown greenways –providing connectivity between major intercity rail routes and both the Royal and Grand Canals.

- Widening of footpaths to provide shared cycleway/footways along approach roads to the town.
 - Provision of a new bridge to replace Charlestown Bridge to improve the situation at the eastern entrance to the town.
 - Provision of a western relief/link road be considered from the Ballycumber Road to the Moate Road to divert traffic away from the town's main streets.
- A number of measures identified in the study have been provided, like the Street Enhancement Works along Church Street and Main Street.
- Results indicate similar levels of bus and train usage within Clara when compared to the county average. This shows good accessibility to train in County Offaly as a whole.
 - Car/Van/Motorcycle/Lorry comprised 70% of means of travel for Clara's population aged 5 years+ to work, school or college which is slightly higher than the county average at 69% and moderately higher than the State average 63%.
 - Vehicular trips to work comprised c.42% while trips for education were c.29%. The majority of trips made as car passengers are school trips with twice as many students being driven as walking to school.

Review of Transportation

This section provides a baseline assessment of the existing travel patterns, existing walking and cycling networks, existing public transport services, road infrastructure and car parking. Additionally, a further review of future proposals for cycling, walking and public transport interventions is provided.

Existing Travel Patterns

An evaluation of Census 2016 data on commuting travel patterns to and from Clara Town are summarised at Table 2.4.

- Significant percentage of Clara residents (c.13%) walk as a means of transport in which is slightly above the figure for the county.
- 2% of trips were made by bicycle which is comparable to the County average but below national targets of 10% commuting by bike by 2020³⁰. High volumes of traffic and the non-provision of cycle facilities in the Town Centre means cycling within Clara is not an attractive option.

Table 2.4 Travel Patterns - Clara and County Offaly

Mode	Clara	Co. Offaly
On Foot	13%	11%
Bicycle	2%	1%
Public Transport	10%	10%
Vehicle (Car, Van, Lorry etc)	70%	69%
Working from Home/ Not Stated	5%	8%

³⁰ <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/our-priority-programmes/heal/healpublications/national-cycle-policy-framework.pdf>

Existing Walking Infrastructure

A high level review of walking and cycling facilities along key streets and links within the study area was undertaken. For walking facilities, the assessment focused on footpath provision and pedestrian crossings.

The Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS)³¹ sets out that a minimum footpath width of 1.8m is considered adequate for areas of low pedestrian activity, whilst the desirable width is 2.5m. A minimum width of 3m is considered adequate for areas of moderate to high pedestrian activity and updated for a minimum width of 4m is considered adequate in areas of high pedestrian activity. Pedestrian crossings are described in terms of their frequency, type and provision of dropped kerbs, tactile paving, road markings and pedestrian guard rails.

Footpaths within the town centre are generally in good condition and present continuity. There are however pinch points, narrow footpaths (less than 1.8m) and lack of crossings along some desire lines. Examples are illustrated overleaf and include:

- Footpaths along Bridge Street are especially narrow (1m) and usually blocked by cars parked on the path.
- Both Charlestown Bridge and Clara Bridge present narrow footpaths and discontinuity.
- On arterial roads leading into the town centre, such as Kilbeggan Road (R436), New Road, R420 heading to Frederick Street, R436 – Clashauwan Road, there are generally footpaths on one or both sides of the road although they are quite narrow in places.
- Mini-roundabouts at Bridge Street / Clara Bridge, Egan's Lane / Bridge Street and River Street / Kilbeggan Road present

poor pedestrian facilities with no crossings provided and narrow footpaths.

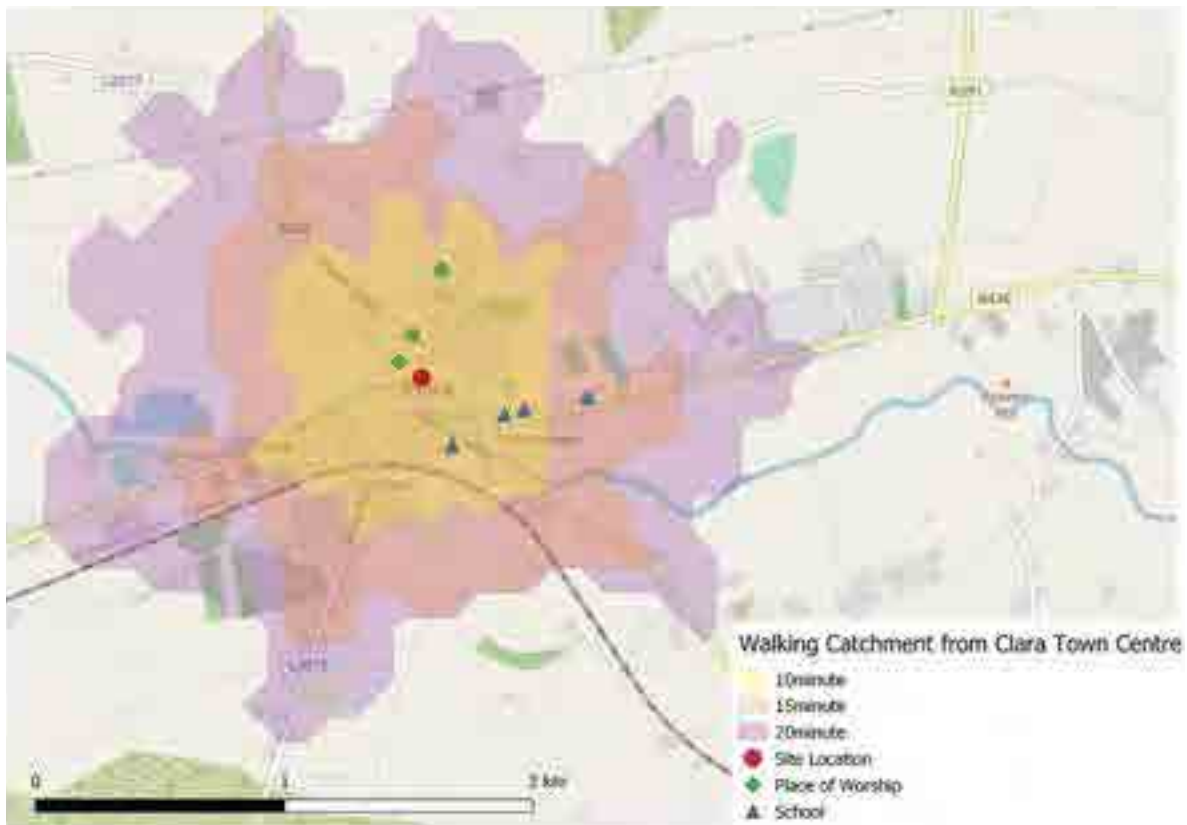
Within the town centre, works have been recently undertaken along the Main Street, Church Street and Egan's Lane with improved footpaths, public realm and provision of pedestrian crossings.

Analysis was undertaken of the areas within a 10, 15 and 20 minute walk of Clara town centre and the results are illustrated in Figure 2.23.

The results indicate that the majority of population living in Clara are within a 10 minute walk of the town centre. This suggests that there is an opportunity to encourage increased levels of active travel through improvements to the walk and cycle network.

³¹ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/3360b1-design-manual-for-urban-roads-and-streets/>

Figure 2.23 Walking Catchment - Clara



River Street / Kilbeggan Road Roundabout - substandard pedestrian facilities (no crossings and narrow footpaths)



Bridge Street / Clara Bridge Mini-Roundabout (no crossings and narrow footpaths)



Bridge Street (narrow footpaths, cars parked on footpath)



The Green (narrow and discontinuous footpaths)



River Street (ground level difference between footpath and carriageway)



Charlestown Bridge (lack of footpath on eastern side)



Frederick Street/R436 (narrow footpaths and wide carriageway on approach to Town Centre)



Age Friendly Ireland - Walkability Audit

An Age/Disability Friendly Walkability Audit was undertaken in Clara on 12th April 2022 and 16th June 2022. The participants were a mix of ages and mobility levels, from a variety of associations and from Offaly County Council. Four routes were covered over 2 days. During the audit notes were taken of areas or items identified as impacting on mobility and ease of access, noted areas of concern and also highlighted recommendations for improvements. A number of questions were asked to the participants with the following results to highlight:

Footpaths: the overall rate given by the participants to the footpaths on the survey is **OK/Good**. However, the following issues were found:

- 92% of the participants responded that cars parking on footpaths is a problem.
- 62% responded that 'Street furniture', such as bins, plant boxes, or signs block the footpaths.
- Only 35% responded that the footpaths are ramped at kerb and easy to negotiate.
- 42% responded that footpaths are not wide enough for two people to walk side by side.

Crossings and Junctions: the overall rate given by the participants to the crossings and junctions is **GOOD**. With the following positive results to note:

- 65% responded that crossing points are convenient to where people need to go.
- 62% responded that busy streets/junctions are well equipped with pedestrian crossings.
- 81% responded that most drivers yield to pedestrians.

- Only 15% responded that pedestrian crossings have a clear sound signal and that slow moving pedestrians can get across the street in the time allowed by traffic lights.

Aesthetics Look & Feel: the overall rate given by the participants to Aesthetics Look & Feel is **OK/GOOD**.

Public Spaces, Parking & Buildings: the overall rate given by the participants to Public Spaces, Parking & Buildings is **GOOD**.

However, the participants highlighted issues like lack of bike parking, public toilets and benches/rest areas around the routes. In addition, a 46% of responses were negative with regards availability of car parking spaces with 65% stating bicycle parking facilities weren't available close to amenities.

Safety & Comfort: the overall rate given by the participants to Safety & Comfort is **GOOD** with one issue to note:

- 54% responded that car speeds are too fast in the area.
- 50% responded that cyclists sharing the footpath can be a problem.
- 54% responded that the street lighting is good in the area walked.
- 92% responded that they would feel safe walking alone on this route in the daytime.

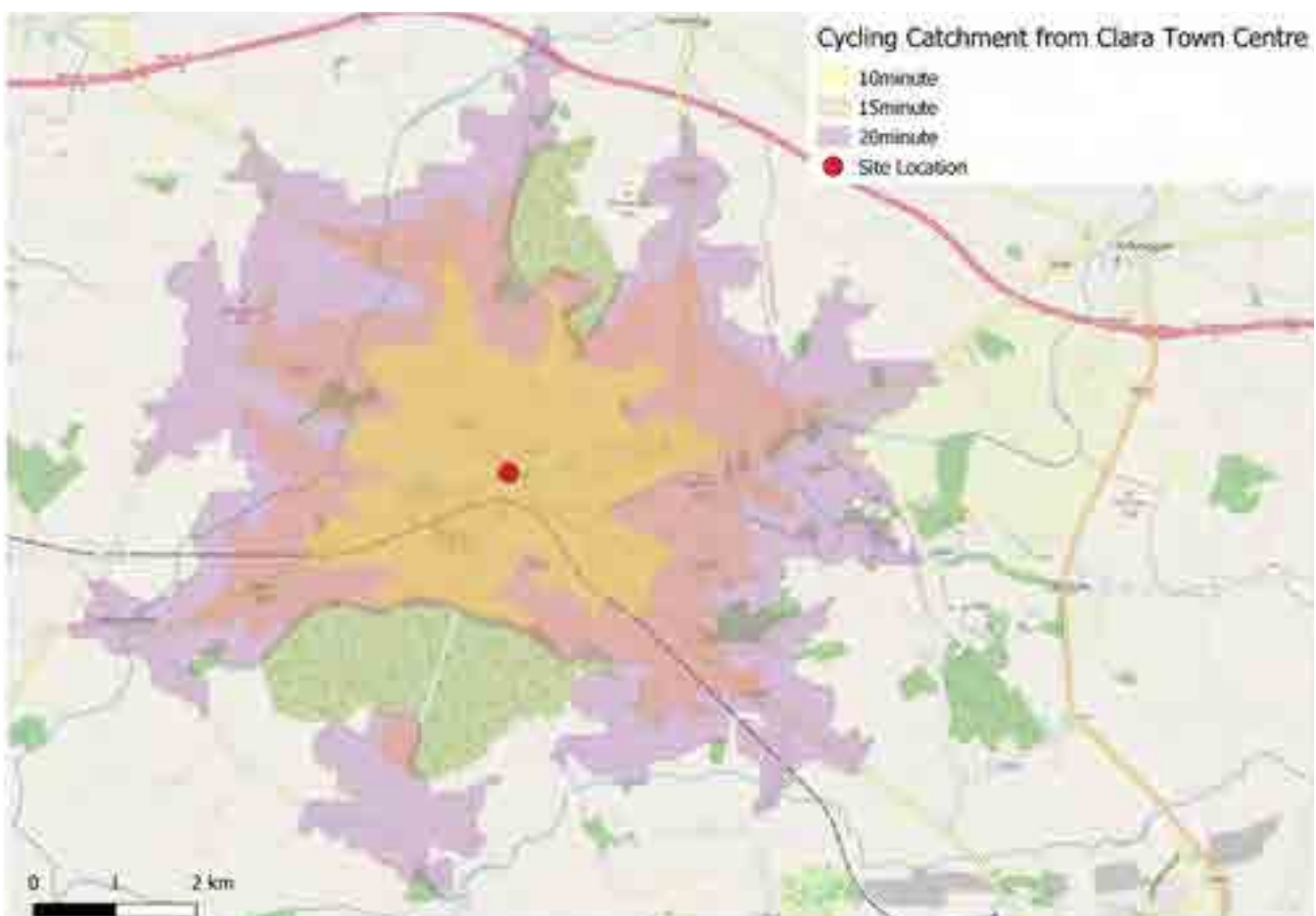
Existing Cycling Infrastructure

There are currently no dedicated cycle lanes within the town. There is scope for improvements to provide cycle facilities, cycle parking and cycle priority at junctions along the existing roads leading to the town centre to connect the residential areas, GAA pitch, library, schools and wider recreational areas. The prevalence of roundabouts and wide junctions at intersections within the town also create safety issues for cyclists.

The County Development Plan 2021-2027 identifies the location of potential cycleways along Kilbeggan Road and Church Street.

The Cycling Catchment map at Figure 2.24 shows that the full town is within a 10 minute cycling distance.

Figure 2.24 Cycling Catchment - Clara



Existing Public Transport Services

Clara town is currently served by the following public transport services:

- Irish Rail
- Bus Éireann
- Flagline Coaches
- Local Bus Links

Clara Train Station is located to the south of the town centre within walking distance of the full extent of the town. The station is on the main Dublin to Galway and Dublin to Westport/ Ballina line, offering regular services to Dublin (9 no. per day), Galway, Westport and Ballina as well as other important settlements such as Athlone, Tullamore, Portarlinton and Ballinasloe.

Bus Éireann Route 73, Waterford - Athlone – Longford, is operated twice a day in each direction, stopping in Clara at Church Street Bus Stop and St. Brigid's Church bus stop.

Route 818 Athlone to Tullamore operated by Flagline coaches (private company) also operates a service running four times daily connecting Clara to the settlements of Athlone and Tullamore.

TFI Local Link Route 840 Banagher to Tullamore, operates an all week service, with frequency during weekdays being 2hrs 40 minutes and weekends 3hrs 15 minutes with stops at Church Street Bus Stop and the Train Station.

Figure 2.25 Existing Bus Stop Locations and Train Station



Existing Road Infrastructure

Road Network Conditions

The primary roads serving Clara are the R420 in a south east to north west direction and the R436 in a east to west direction. These roads connect Clara with nearby towns and the M6 Motorway to the north at Junctions 5 and 6.

The aforementioned approaching roads serving Clara are generally in good condition and are relatively wide. It is considered the approaches to Clara would benefit from a Gateway entrance treatment.

In the town centre, the roads are generally two-way carriageways presenting a reasonable width with the exception of a number of pinch points on the two bridges situated over the Brosna River and Egan's Lane.

Traffic Surveys

Automatic Traffic Counts (ATC) were undertaken by NDC (National Data Collection) in 2019 on two sites in Clara town, which are shown on the map below at Figure 2.26. Table 2.5 provides information regarding the annual number of vehicles in a 7-day average. The total includes heavy vehicles which account for a small amount of the overall traffic, as shown by the percentage figures.

Public Car and Bicycle Parking

A review was undertaken of existing public car and bicycle parking provision within Clara with the following key points summarised:

Figure 2.26 ATC Locations - Clara

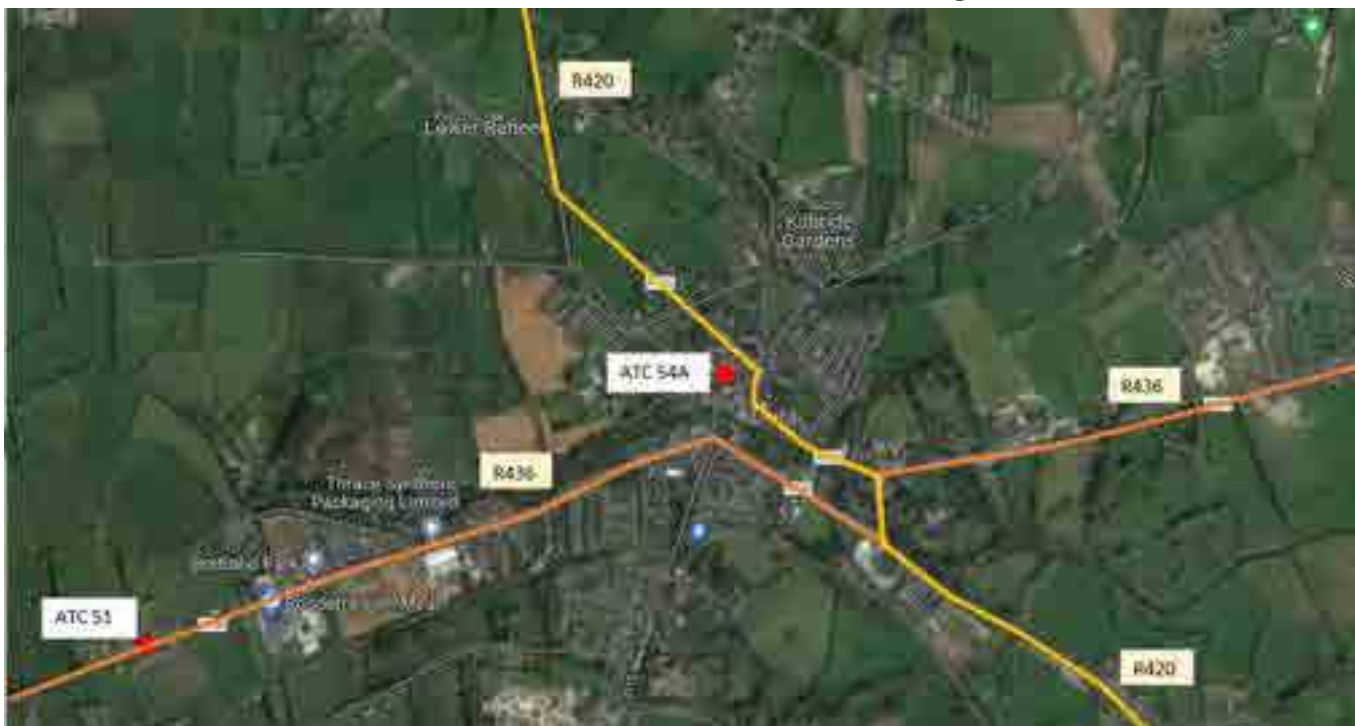


Table 2.5 Annual Number of Vehicles in a 7-day Average - Clara

Traffic Data	54A - Bridge Street	51 - R436
No. of Vehicles 7-Day Average	1,407	3,306
Two-Axle Truck/Bus	3%	8%
Three-Axle Truck/Bus	1%	0.1%

- Majority of streets/roads offer free parking on both sides with the exception of some sections in the Town Centre and areas closer to junctions.
 - Clara Library offers free public car and bicycle parking (c.36 no. car spaces). Train Station has 35 no. parking spaces including spaces for EV charging. Currently, there is no bicycle parking provision available at the Station.
 - There are no other off-street car parks within the town, apart from private parking spaces located at workplaces, schools, the GAA club and St. Brigid's Church for example.
- (e.g. traffic counts, pedestrian counts, Air Quality, car parking occupancy) and Qualitative Data (community feedback surveys).

Transportation Analysis - Key Findings

- **Clara has a compact, walkable Town Centre with recent public realm improvements on Church St & Main St.**
- **Vast majority of the town's population is located within a 15 minute walk of the Main Street and a 10 minute cycle.**
- **Majority of trips made as car passengers are school trips, with twice as many students being driven as walking to school.**
- **Offaly CDP 2021-2027 (Clara Town Plan) supports the development of a Relief Road. Clara Town Plan sets out objectives to maintain and improve accessibility to and within the Town Centre, improve connectivity and permeability, and promote more sustainable modes of transport including green infrastructure and linkages.**
- **'Clara Town Centre First Masterplan Blueprint' provides parking and traffic recommendations including the provision of a Relief Road, off-road car parks, traffic management, increase of public transport services and the development of the Clara-Streamstown Railway Line greenway.**
- **Prioritisation of integrated transport and land use, supported by investment in public transport, active travel networks and shared, low carbon mobility options will improve people's travel choices and support safe, sustainable and healthy lifestyles.**
- **Clara strongly benefits from its location on the strategic rail network.**

Clara Relief Road

Provision is made within the extant CDP for a Relief Road to the west of the Town Centre from Moate Road (R420) to the Ballycumber Road (R436). Such a scheme could facilitate a new one-way system within the Town Centre, creating additional space for new cycling network infrastructure.

One Way System Option

It is considered that this proposal should be further explored through an Options Study to determine which is the preferred one-way system to be implemented in the Town Centre to provide a calmed traffic environment and more space for pedestrians and cyclists while also facilitating public amenity improvements. A pilot one-way system could be trialled prior the implementation of the final scheme. This could be undertaken as a rapid build scheme, with bolt down kerbs, planters, street furniture, bollards and temporary traffic management. Throughout the course of the inception and implementation of the one-way system trial, consultation and engagement should be undertaken. A Monitoring and Evaluation Report could be prepared to assess the outcomes of the trial, with quantitative data

Sustainable Placemaking

Introduction

Clara is situated within the north west area of County Offaly and is designated as a 'Town' in the county's settlement hierarchy as set out with the extant County Development Plan 2021-2027.

The town is located equi-distant between the cities of Dublin and Galway (being c.100 km due west of Dublin and c.115 km due east of Galway). At a county level, Clara has relative proximity to Athlone to the north west and Tullamore to the south east which are designated as a 'Regional Growth Centre' and 'Key Town' respectively within the Eastern and Midland Region RSES. The settlement of Clara benefits from proximity to strategic transport infrastructure comprising the Train Station (see Figure 2.27 for historical image) and the M6 Motorway.

Geography & History

In relation to its geography, Clara is situated on a plain (which provides its meaning in Irish being 'Clóirtheach') with the River Brosna flowing through the town. Of significance is the Clara Bog Nature Reserve which is internationally renowned in ecological terms having been previously nominated for UNESCO World Heritage Site status.

Clara has an industrial history which is largely associated with the Goodbody family who moved to the town in 1825 and developed the country's largest jute factory. This gave significant employment in the district from 1864 onwards (for around 700 workers) and ran as a very successful business for the next hundred years³³.

Figure 2.27 Historical Images of Clara³²



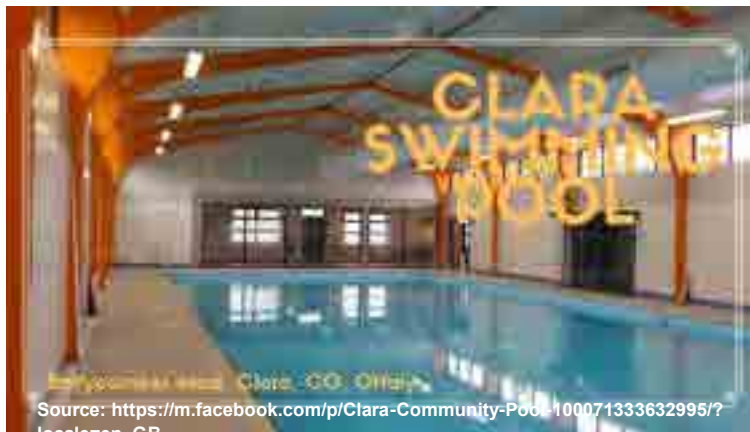
The town also was known for having other industrial premises such as flour mills, distilleries, breweries and food processing. In 1881 St. Brigid's Church (see Figure 5.1) was constructed with the spire later added in 1930³⁴.

³² www.offalyhistory.com

³³ www.offalyhistoryblog.wordpress.com

³⁴ www.buildingsofireland.ie

Clara Bog Nature Reserve



Clara Today

Clara provides important retail, residential and service functions for its inhabitants and local hinterland with linkages to the larger settlements of Athlone and Tullamore which have significant importance as designated by the RSES. The town is also connected via the strategic motorway and rail networks to the cities of Dublin and Galway.

Clara had a population of 3,336 persons as recorded by the 2016 Census. The town experienced a population increase of c.3% over the census period 2011 to 2016. While 2022 Census data has yet to be released specifically for Clara, the population of the Clara Electoral Division at 2022 rose by c.6% (preliminary results) over the period 2016 to 2022, and it is therefore expected that the population of the settlement of Clara will also increase.

Clara is considered to have a young population with c.57% of its population aged 39 years or younger. Residents who had retired (taken as above 65 years) accounted for c.13% of the overall population.

Clara has many key resources available to its resident population including its train station, swimming pool, community centre and library. Clara Library provides a welcoming and accessible space for community engagement, research, education and recreation, and was awarded the first Age Friendly Charter for Offaly Libraries in 2019.

In line with national public library strategies and **Offaly Libraries Interim Development Plan 2022 – 2023: Creating Collaborative Communities**, Offaly Library Service is committed to developing and expanding Clara Library as a dynamic, innovative and welcoming

cultural destination at the heart of its community.

Clara has a rich sporting tradition. The GAA club grounds are located on Kilbeggan Road with the soccer club grounds situated on Kilbride Road. Offaly County Ladies team have their playing facility located at Bretland Park on Ballycumber Road.

Education

Regarding educational attainment, c.10% of Clara's residents have achieved an 'Ordinary/Bachelor's Degree' which aligned with the State average with a further c.3% of residents attaining a Postgraduate level qualification.

Clara is located in proximity to the Technological University of the Shannon (TUS) campus situated in Athlone which has road and rail network connectivity to Clara. TUS offers a range of Third Level courses of study in subjects including Business, Accounting, Engineering, Education, Nursing, Pharmaceutical Science, and Biotechnology for example.

The TUS campus offers access to Clara residents to achieve Third Level qualifications and to secure high quality employment. Having a young and well educated workforce with access to Third Level institutions such as TUS is a positive economic factor for Clara and can provide a base for future growth.

Employment & Industry

As per the 2016 Census, c.45% of the workforce in Clara were recorded as being 'At Work'. The highest percentage of Clara's residents were recorded as being in employment in the 'Manufacturing Industries' group at c.23% with a total of c.21% of employees holding a senior/managerial role (such as Directors, Managers, Senior Officials, Professional and Technical roles etc.). Clara residents generated a significant salary value to

the County that was c.€42.3 million per annum (as at 2016).

Given the largest industry group that Clara residents belonged to was 'Manufacturing'. It is considered that this sector is an economic strength for the town with employers such as Paltech and Thrace Synthetic Packaging Ltd already well established. Given the presence of such operators there may be opportunities for Clara to establish itself as a 'manufacturing hub' within the County and wider Midlands Region which could create synergies with other employment sectors (for e.g. IT/tech, R&D) to deliver future growth for Clara.

Within today's manufacturing sector, automation and robotics are being increasingly utilised to produce goods. TUS offers an undergraduate Automation and Robotics Engineering course of study and potentially linkages could be created between the manufacturing sector in Clara and TUS to promote the sector. Economically, the town centre can also benefit from sector growth through increased wage spend on local goods and services by residents and employees for example.

Heritage

Clara has a historic character which is evident by the number of heritage buildings and protected structures that potentially offer the possibility of renovation and repurposing for new uses.

The Charlestown Mill grain store building, shown overleaf, is one such example (as identified by the Clara Town Plan). The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) describes the building as a three storey, eight bay former grain store built in 1853 by the Goodbody family. Although now in a poor state of repair, this building remains structurally sound and attests to the building skills at the time of construction. This proud building stands

³⁵ <https://www.buildingsofireland.ie/buildings-search/building/14802016/kilcoursey-clara-co-offaly>

as a reflection of the industrial heritage of Clara, once a thriving industrial town³⁵.

The heritage sector can deliver potential placemaking and economic benefits through the renovation, repurposing and re-use of its old buildings that can reinforce Clara's evident historic character, particularly its industrial heritage. This sector can play an important role in the regeneration of the Town Centre.

A potential avenue for Clara to explore in relation to the promotion of its industrial history is through the 'European Route of Industrial Heritage' (ERIH). The ERIH, which is supported by the EU, represents a network of over 2,200 industrial heritage sites across Europe. The ERIH seeks to raise public awareness of the values of the man-made environment (cultural landscape and architectural heritage), highlight the economic resources of this heritage for sustainable development, and to encourage voluntary work to protect and preserve this heritage³⁶.

Membership of the ERIH has many advantages including, *inter alia*:

- Opportunity of co-financing for promotional activities within the Creative Europe Programme.
- Opportunity to exchange experience and good practice with similar sites within the ERIH network.
- Access to experts' database.
- Free publicity: The ERIH network and its experiences are presented throughout the year by ERIH Board members at a range of international conferences, seminars and promotional meetings attended by regional, national and European decision makers and journalists.

Culture & Tourism

In terms of culture/tourism, the second annual 'Clara Music and Literary Festival' took place in August 2022 in Clara House, Bridge Street. A children's arts festival, known as 'Hullabaloo' was held in November 2022 across the County with workshops taking place in Clara. Similar to heritage, the cultural sector can also bring increased vibrancy to the Town Centre through the running of festivals for example (music, food and literature for instance) that can attract visitors to Clara along with associated economic benefits.

Clara Library offers a wide variety of free cultural and community events programmes for all age groups and supports local engagement with many literary and creative opportunities. Quality broadband and ICT provision such as self-print facilities also prove popular with local people and tourists visiting the area.

Clara Bog is a tourism asset to the Town and the development of the Clara Bog Visitor Centre in 2010 and 1km boardwalk in 2017 has served to promote this natural asset. Clara Town Plan sets out that, "*the provision of a footpath for the full 2km stretch between Clara Bog, the town and its visitor centre and the investigation of the feasibility of providing an additional boardwalk on Clara Bog to the east of the public road are major objectives*".³⁰

The town has a number of well known persons which include professional golfer Shane Lowry (winner of the 2019 Open Championship and 2009 Irish Open) and Brian Cowen who served as An Taoiseach from 2008 to 2011.

Town Centre Enhancement

Clara has recently benefited from the Phase 2 Renewal Scheme which included street enhancement works to Main Street, Church Street, and Egan's Lane. Works provided for, *inter alia*, the improvement and upgrade of

³⁶ <https://www.erih.net/about-erih/erih-history-and-goals>

existing controlled pedestrian crossings, installation of a new pedestrian crossing, lining of on-street parallel parking areas, provision of a new kerbed verge and planting (Church Street), provision of street furniture, remodeling of the junction of Egan's Lane and the Square and the junction of Egan's Lane with Bridge Street, restriction of traffic on Egan's Lane to one-way outward from the Square and marked out parking on Egan's Lane.

As referred to in the Local Projects section of Chapter 1, Offaly County Council have been awarded €100,000 by the Department for Rural and Community Development under their Town and Village Renewal Scheme project (2022 Streetscape Enhancement Measure). This funding will be used for the improvement of properties (painting works) located on Church Street, River Street and Main Street. This funding and the associated improvement of properties will further assist with town centre enhancement in Clara.

Unoccupied Properties

As of December 2022, Offaly County Council completed an audit of unoccupied properties within Clara. The audit findings reveal that just over half (c.52%) of all unoccupied properties in the town are centrally located on Main Street, Bridge Street, River Street and Church Street.

These unoccupied properties affect the vibrancy and vitality of the town centre and their occupancy and re-use for, *inter alia*, residential, retail, commercial and/or community uses, for example, can assist with the regeneration and consolidation of Clara's town centre which aligns with the objectives of the Town Centre First Policy.

Development Activity in Clara

Recent development activity includes planning approval for 38 no. dwellings at Raheen (Part 8 scheme) along with the construction of a 450m

section of footway from Clara Bog Visitor Centre to the Clara Bog Nature Reserve. Clara has received funding for streetscape enhancement of properties on Church Street, River Street and Main Street, as mentioned, as well as financial assistance for a new river walk at Clashawaun.

In August 2022, a residential scheme comprising 44 no. units was approved by Offaly County Council at lands at Kilcoursey. A planning application was submitted in February 2023 for a further residential scheme, also in Kilcoursey, for 25 no. units. Lands encompassing and situated north of Drayton Villa on Kilbeggan Road have been identified in a masterplan proposal for new residential development and a post-Primary School.

Green / Open Space

As set out within the Clara Town Plan, existing open space provision consists primarily of the Fair Green, a small existing open space area along the River Brosna adjacent to Charlestown Bridge and a number of playing pitches with additional areas around Kilcoursey Castle and the Goodbody's Reservoir. As mentioned, playing pitches for Clara GAA and soccer clubs are situated on Kilbeggan Road, Ballycumber Road and Kilbride Road.

Draft Architectural Conservation Area Report

A report is currently being prepared and a public consultation process is required to be carried out for a proposed ACA.

³⁷ Proposed Architectural Conservation Area, Clara Co. Offaly, 2022, pg. 5.

Clara - Town Plan Opportunity Sites

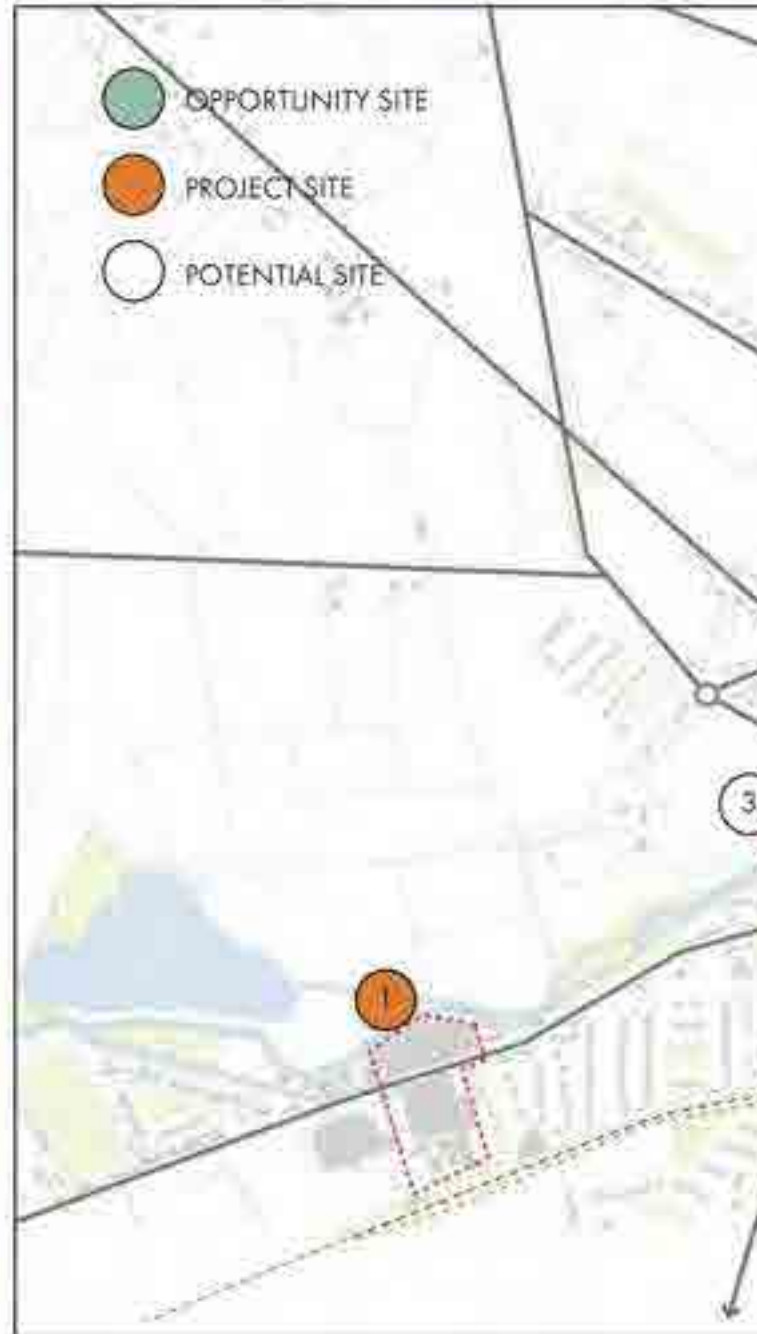
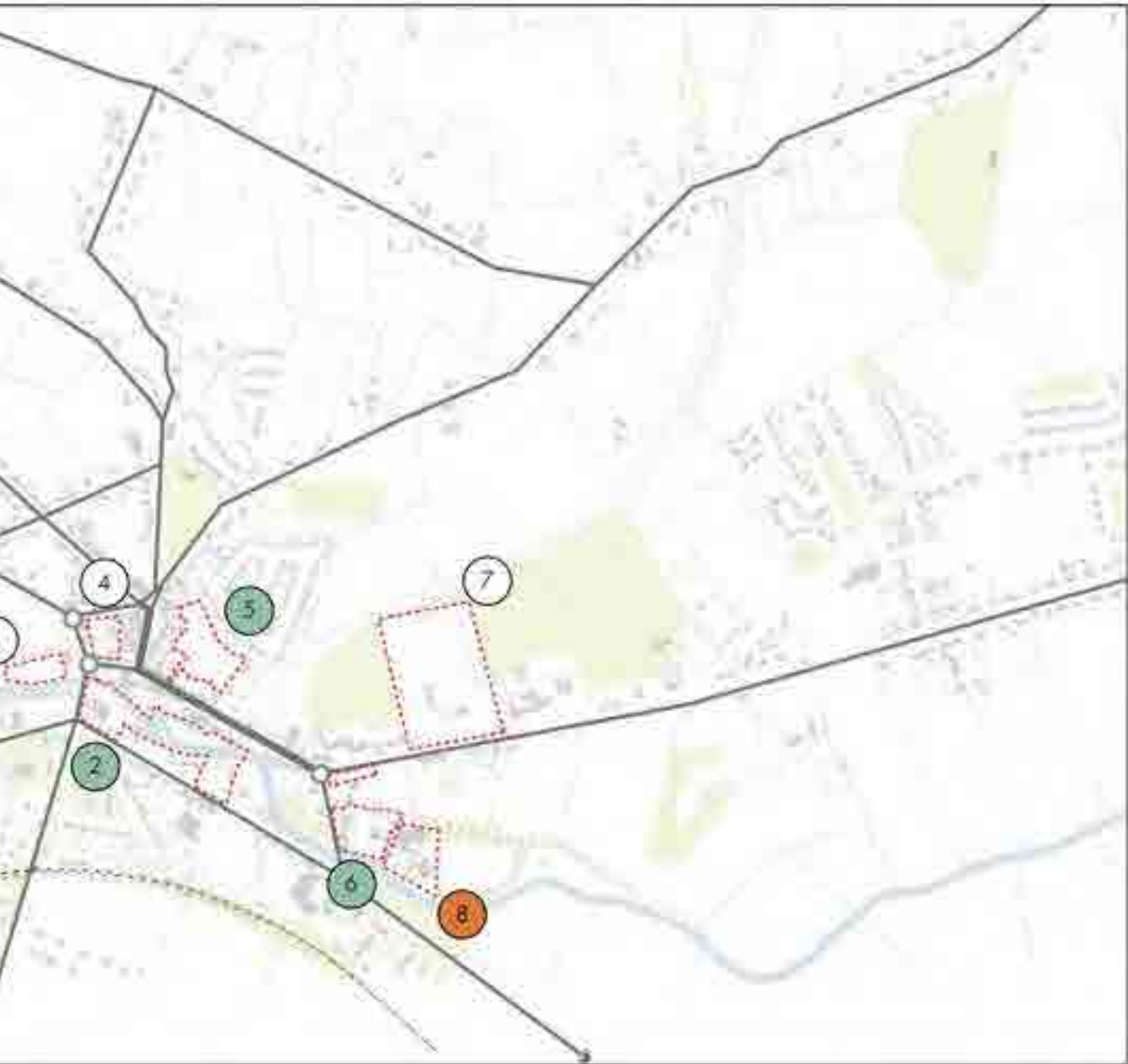


Figure 2.28 – Clara Town Plan Opportunity Sites



Clara - Resource Infrastructure



Clara Train Station



Clara Swimming Pool



Clara GAA Grounds



Clara Bog Visitor Centre

Clara - Opportunity Links

- Clara Bog Pedestrian Route
- Railway Route Link
- River Kayak Trail
- River Brosna Pedestrian Route
- Mainstreet River Link
- Relief Road

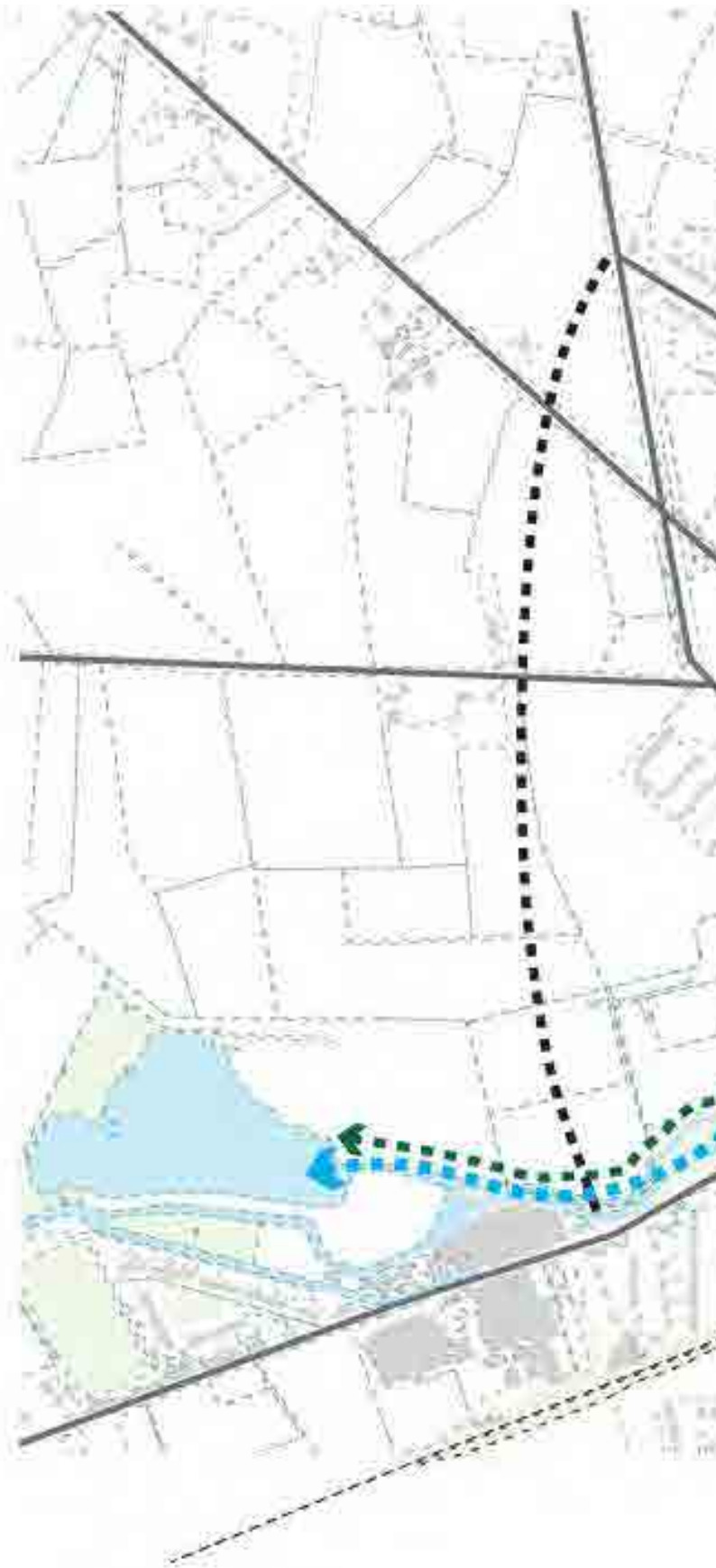
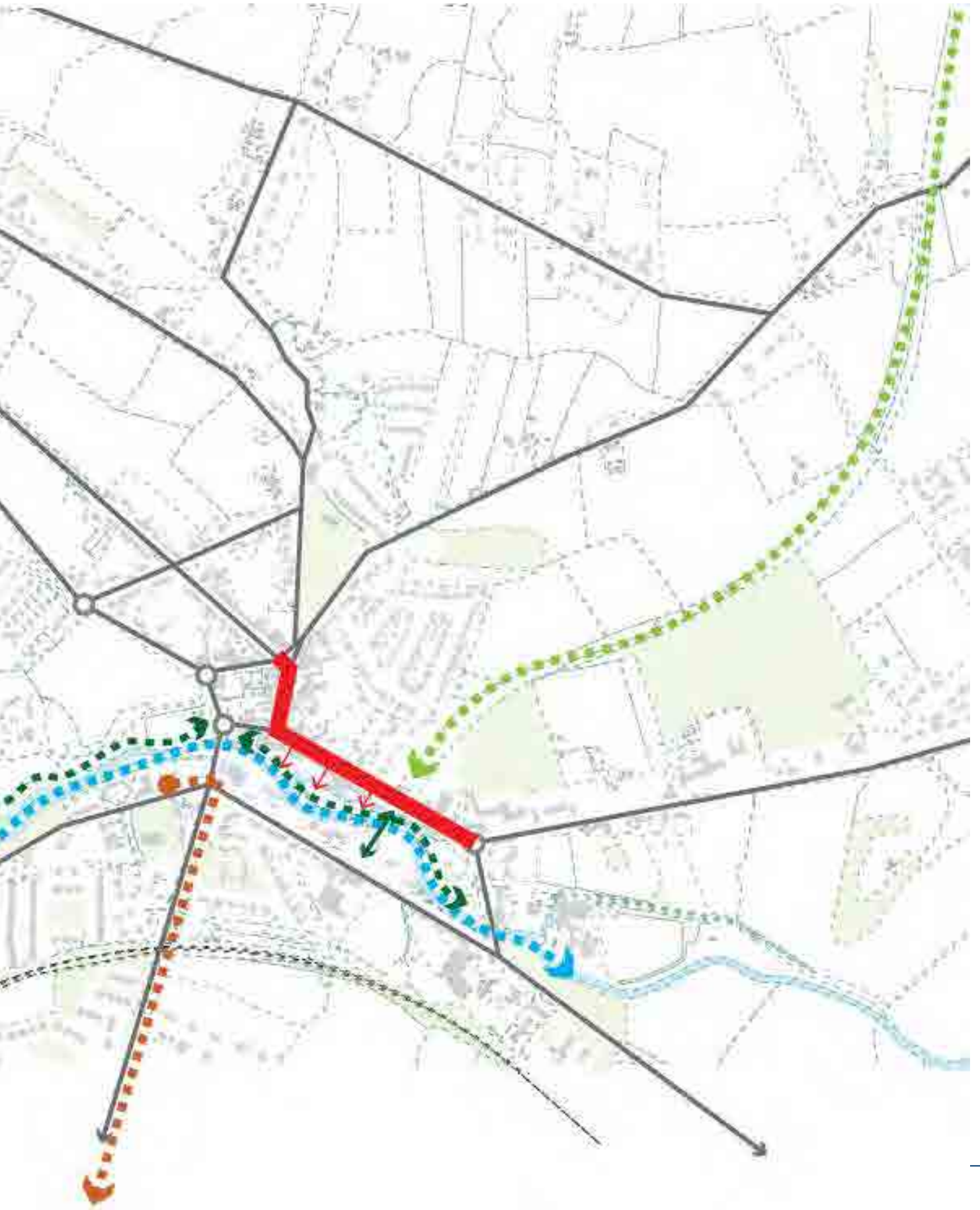


Figure 2.29 – Opportunity Links



Clara - Transport/Physical Infrastructure Issues and Opportunities

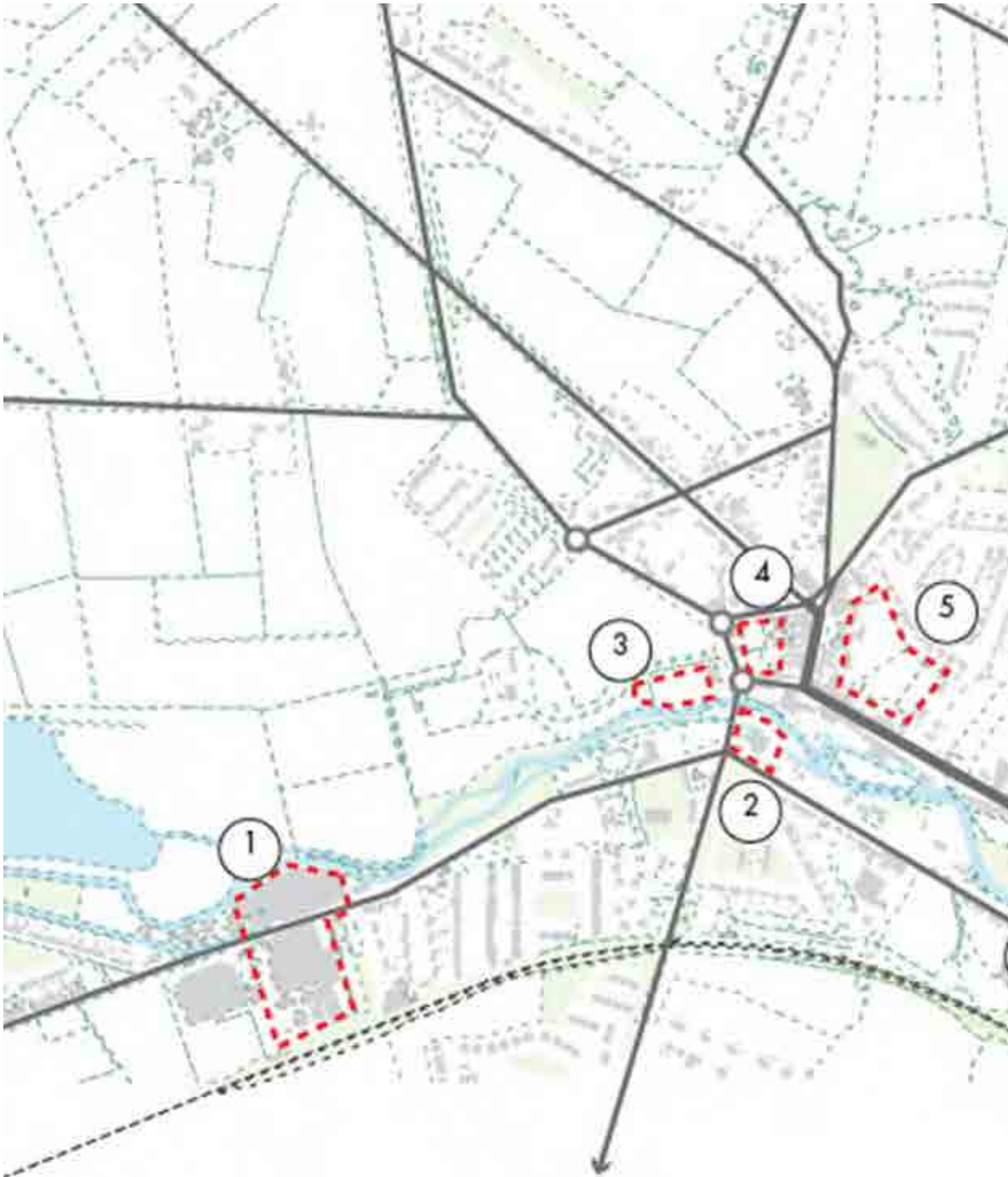


Figure 2.30 Transport/Physical Infrastructure Issues and Opportunities



Site No.	Site Location
1	Clashawaun Jute Works
2	Erry Mill
3	Clara Bridge Site
4	Bridge Street Site
5	Infill Site
6	Charlestown Mill
7	Drayton Villa
8	Goodbody House

The transport and physical infrastructure issues and opportunities associated with the identified sites are summarised overleaf.

Clara - Transport/Physical Infrastructure Issues and Opportunities

Site No./Location	Transport / Physical Infrastructure Issues Identified
1. Clashawaun Jute Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow footpaths along Clashawaun Road. • Lack of cycling infrastructure provision.
2. Erry Mill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No issues identified as the site is in the Town Centre with access to good pedestrian facilities.
3. Clara Bridge Site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow and discontinuous footpaths along the adjacent streets. • Lack of pedestrian crossings to access this property.
4. Bridge Street Site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow and discontinuous footpaths along the adjacent streets. • Lack of pedestrian crossings to access this property.
5. Infill Site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This site is to the rear of existing properties and the most suitable pedestrian and vehicular access should be identified by a feasibility study.
6. Charlestown Mill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow and discontinuous footpaths along Charlestown Bridge. • Lack of pedestrian crossings to access the mill.
7. Drayton Villa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow footpaths along Kilbeggan Road. • Lack of cycling infrastructure provision.
8. Goodbody House	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Goodbody House site is isolated with the main vehicular access from the R420 provided over an old bridge.

Table 2.6 Transport/Physical Infrastructure Issues and Opportunities

Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within a 15 minute walking distance from town centre and a 5 minute cycling distance, this site could benefit from investment in walking and cycling infrastructure (active travel) including a crossing to connect both sides of the site. • The site is well connected to the east and the west along the R436 route.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If open to the public, this site could facilitate access to a potential River Brosna Pedestrian Route and River Kayak Trail which could also potentially connect the site with other amenities like the potential Railway Route Link. • The gates on Frederick Street could be used for vehicular access to the property.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The site is located in the town centre and it could benefit from investment in walking and cycling infrastructure (active travel) and traffic management measures. • If open to public, this site could facilitate access to a potential River Brosna Pedestrian Route and River Kayak Trail which could also potentially connect the site with other amenities like the Clashawaun Jute Works.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The site is located in the town centre and it could benefit from investment in walking and cycling infrastructure (active travel) and traffic management measures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This site could present an opportunity to provide an off-street car park with access from River Street. • The site is located in the town centre and it could benefit from investment in walking and cycling infrastructure (active travel) and traffic management measures along River Street.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The site is located in the town centre and it could benefit from investment in walking and cycling infrastructure (active travel) and traffic management measures. • The site is beside the River Park Wildlife, this connection could be improved.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The site is located in the town centre and it could benefit from investment in walking and cycling infrastructure (active travel) and traffic management measures along Kilbeggan Road. • The site could be linked to the potential Railway Route Link.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate vehicular access and walking and cycling infrastructure (active travel) should be provided with linkage to the Charlestown Mill site.

Clara - Transport/Physical Constraints

Constraint No.	Constraint Descriptor
1	Narrow bridges for traffic and pedestrians
2	Lack of off-street parking
3	Town Centre Traffic congestion
4	Public Transport: regional services low frequency
5	Lack of pedestrian crossings along desire lines
6	Narrow footpaths along the arterial roads

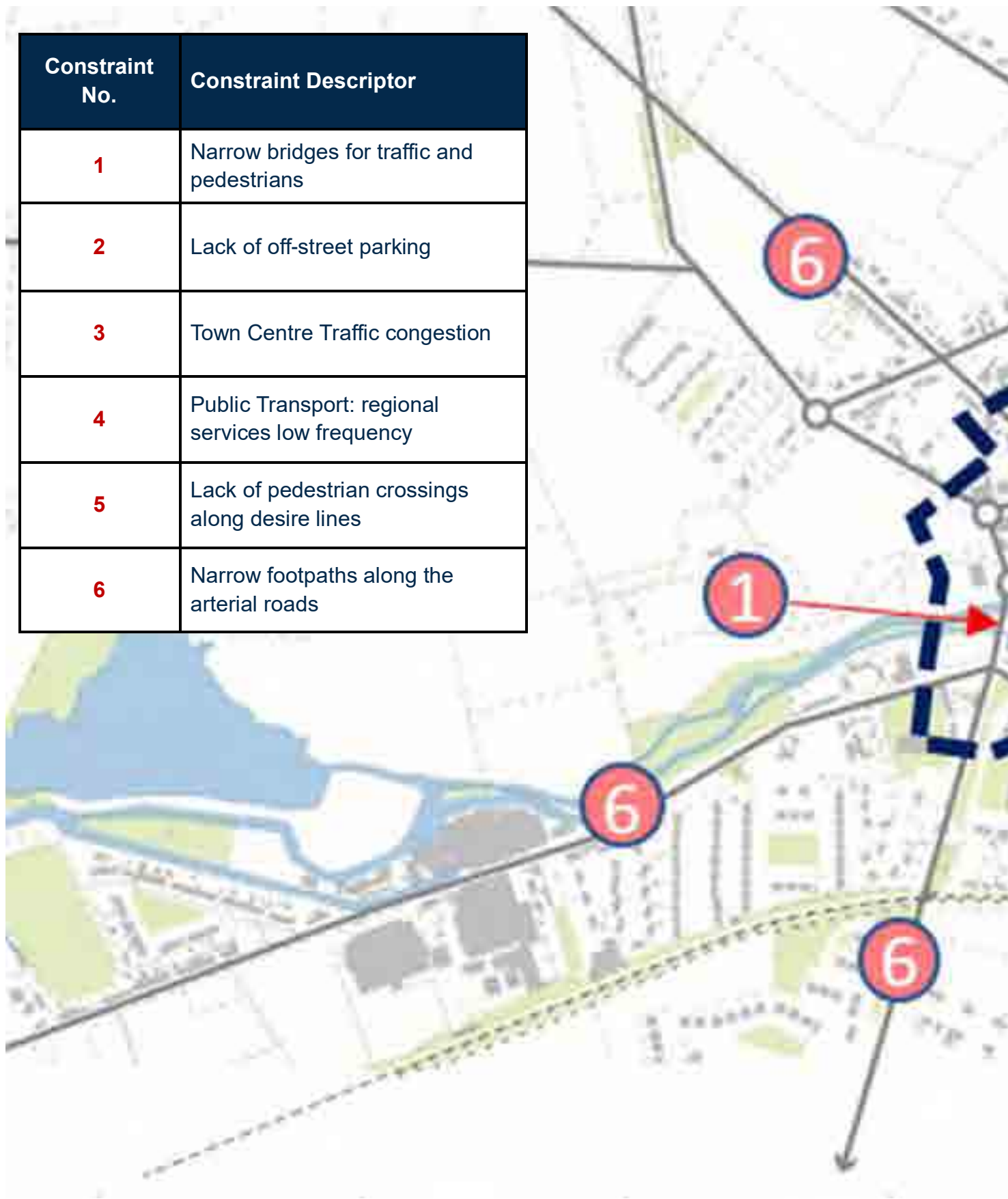
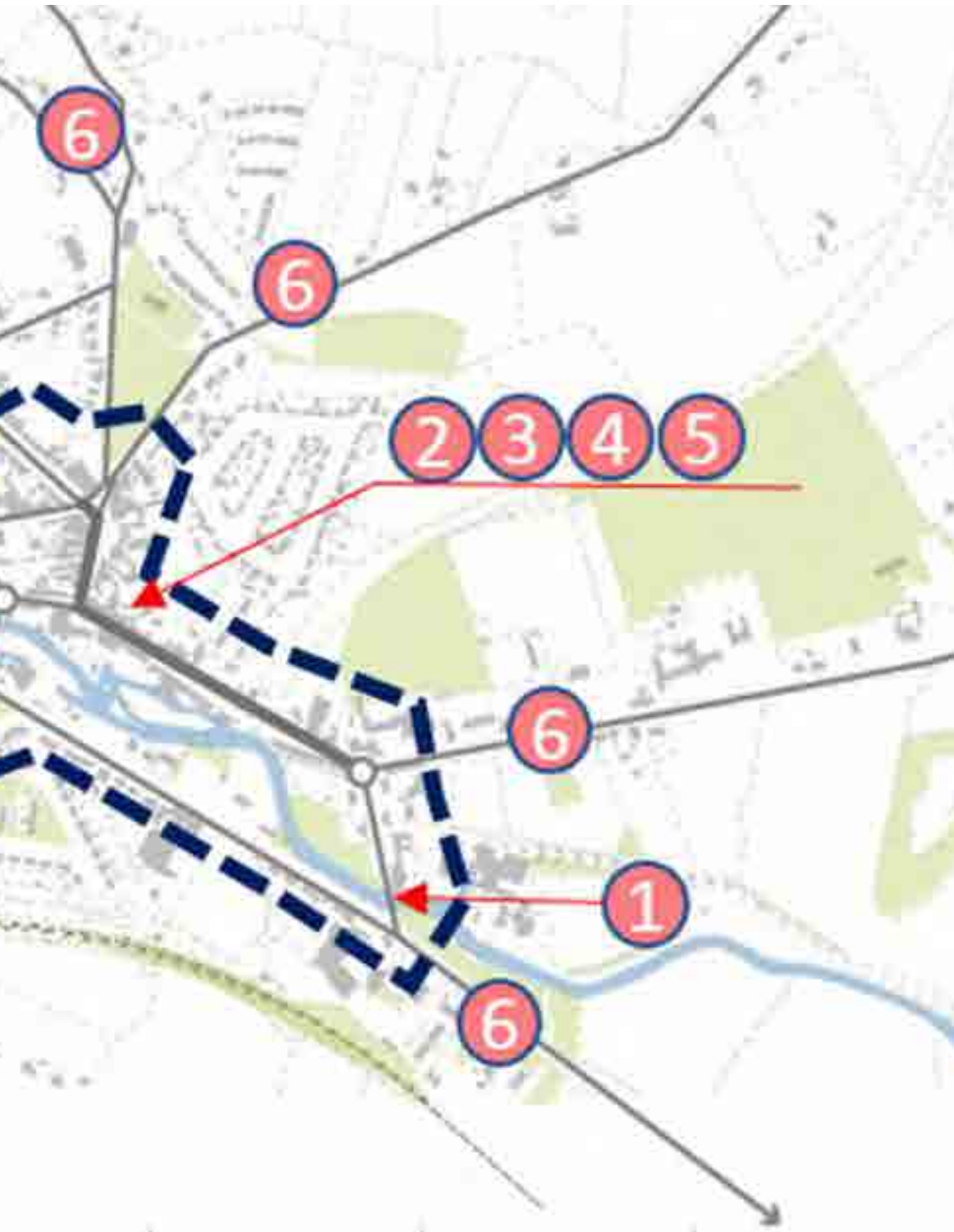


Figure 2.31 – Transport/Physical Constraints



Clara - SCOT Analysis

As mentioned at the beginning of Section 2, the public consultation process and the baseline analysis work has provided a detailed

understanding of Clara. Consequently, this has allowed Clara's strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats to be identified

Strengths

- A strong community spirit that is present in the Town.
- Residents who consider Clara to be a 'great place to live'.
- A rich industrial heritage with an interesting story to be celebrated.
- High quality blue and green natural infrastructure assets that are characterised by Clara Bog and the River Brosna.
- Recent street improvement works that provide a basis for further placemaking interventions in the Town Centre.
- Presence of heritage buildings and Protected Structures.
- A young population is resident within Clara with c.57% of its population aged 39 years or younger.
- A train station making the Town accessible for residents and visitors.
- Swimming pool as a resource strength for Clara residents and visitors.
- High levels of sporting success through the various clubs and organisations.

Challenges

- Pedestrian and cycling infrastructure doesn't encourage sustainable movement/trips and needs to be upgraded.
- Dominance of private car use over sustainable modes of transport as highlighted by Census 2016 data.
- Town Centre traffic congestion and parking behaviours.
- Vacant / derelict buildings which make a negative contribution to the economic vitality of the Town Centre.
- Identifying project interventions to specifically accommodate elderly and young people.
- Generating increased vibrancy within the Town Centre.
- Creating more spaces for people in order to promote enhanced social interaction.
- Providing a diversity of uses within the Town Centre.

Theme 1: Community - A Town for People

Theme 2: Heritage Tourism

which are summarised below. Furthermore, this process has informed the development of the TCF Plan themes.

Opportunities

- Historic buildings in the Town Centre present valuable opportunities for restoration and re-use for a mix of land uses - for example a remote working hub.
- Former industrial heritage sites and buildings offer the potential opportunity to bring forward a new tourism development use - linked to this is the opportunity to celebrate Clara's industrial heritage story.
- Undeveloped backlands can be developed in order to create a compact urban structure in Clara that can promote sustainable forms of development and movement.
- The former railway line presents an opportunity for a new greenway route that can deliver positive environmental and economic outcomes.
- With nearly one-quarter of Clara's population aged 14 or under, there is an opportunity to provide youth-orientated facilities for the Town's future residents.

Theme 3: Natural Infrastructure

Threats

- Continued dominance of the private car for journeys, particularly short trips, will fail to encourage sustainable modes of transport and prevent placemaking enhancements.
- Feedback received from Clara's young people highlights they have limited facilities/spaces in which to interact - they are the future of the town and need to be suitably accommodated.
- Lack of required private investment in Clara and rural Ireland.
- At implementation stage, proposed project interventions require the involvement of various stakeholders at national, regional and local levels.
- Post-TCF Plan stage, proposed project interventions are dependent upon the availability of public funding streams to realise same.
- By doing 'nothing', 'nothing' will happen in Clara Town Centre.

Theme 4: Placemaking

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

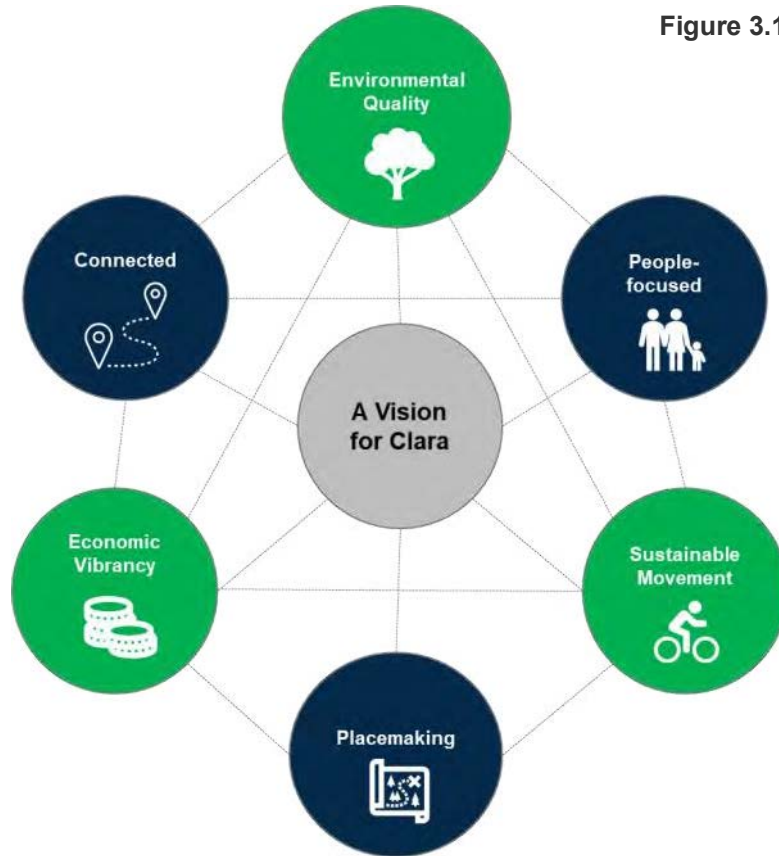








Table 3.1 Inputs into the Vision for Clara Town Centre

<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.

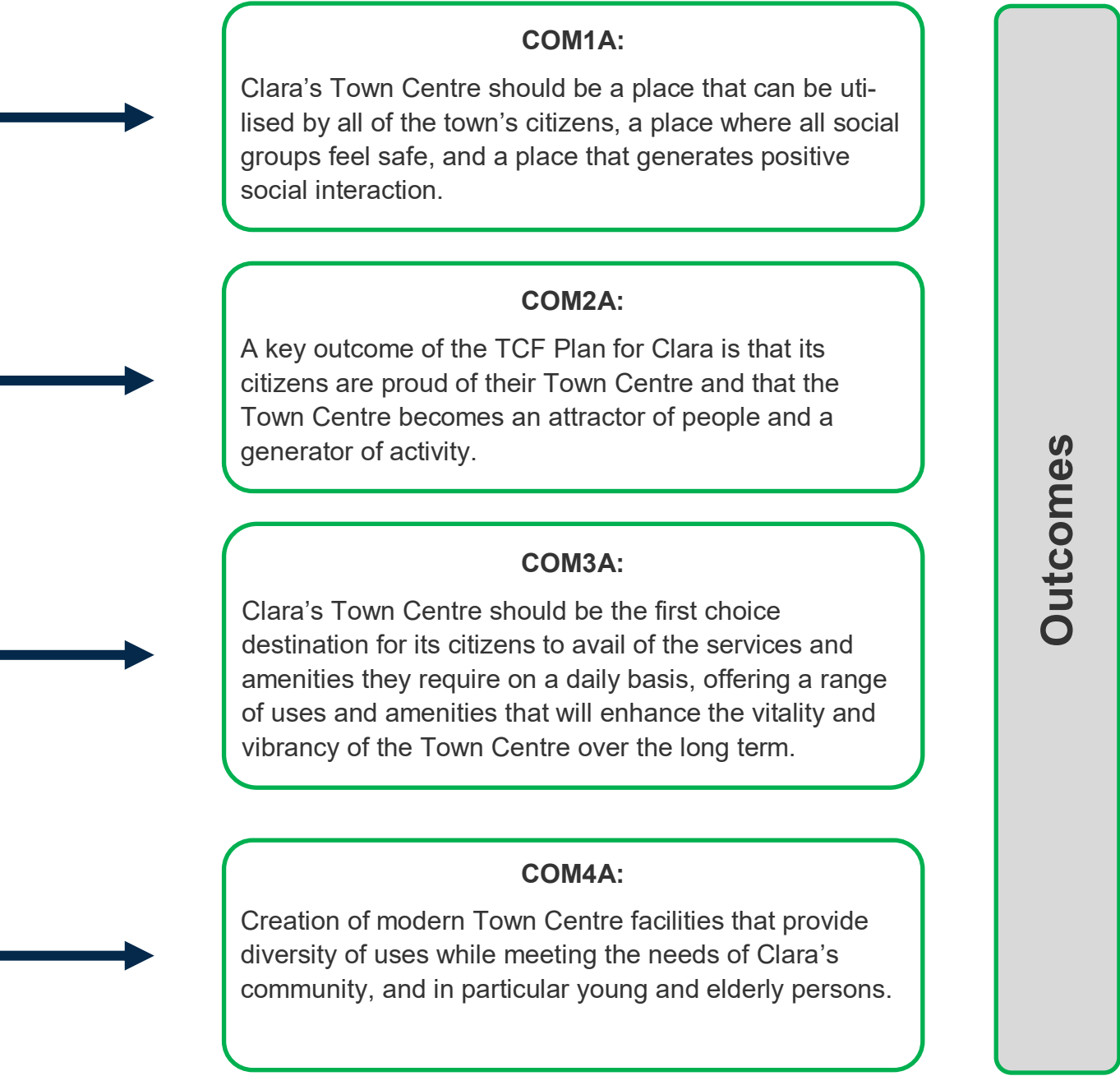
COM4:

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



Erry Mill Site, Clara

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.



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:

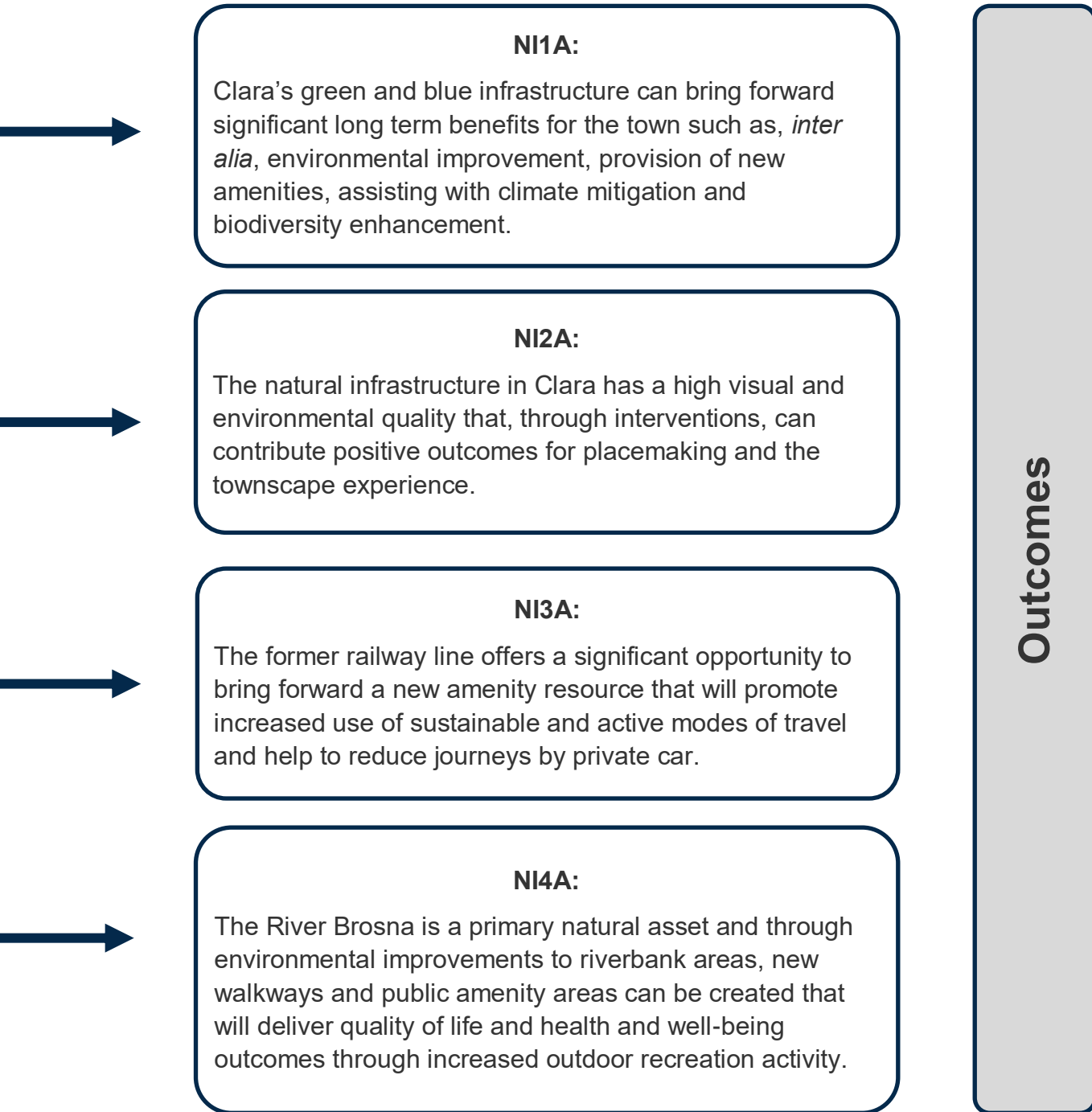
Regeneration and re-use of the former railway line for the purpose of developing a new greenway active travel route.

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.

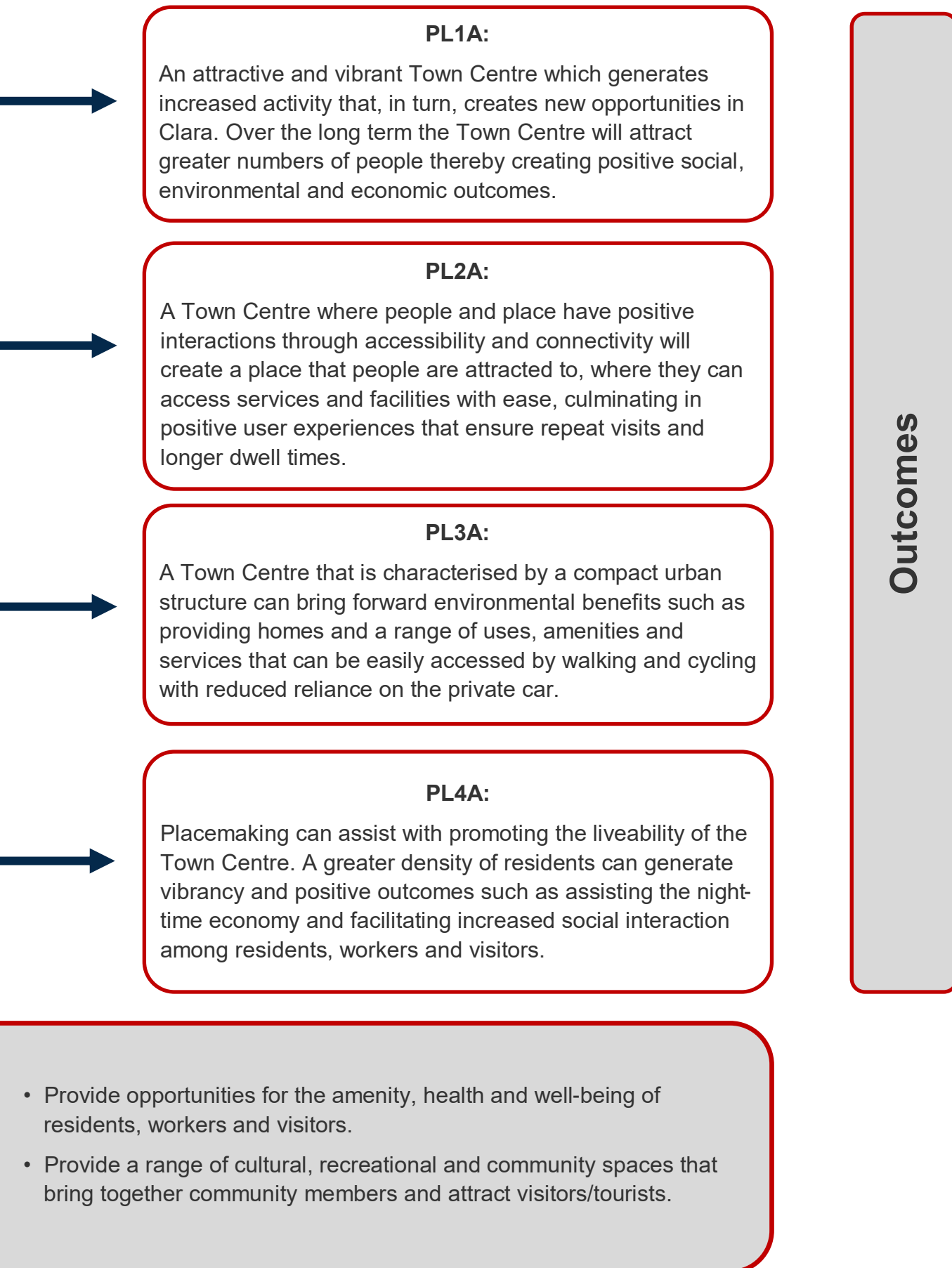
PL4:

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

4

Enabling the Place

Enabling the Place

The identification of project interventions to enable the regeneration of the Town Centre follows a structured approach whereby such interventions are directly related to the TCF Plan themes and objectives and wider project areas. The Plan themes also align with the Town Team’s 1st blueprint document and the public consultations that took place.

The Plan team have undertaken an analysis of the urban fabric, movement and land use characteristics of the Town Centre along with identifying strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats that exist. The information provided across Sections 1-3 of this TCF Plan has led to the development of a number of wider project areas which comprise the following:

- **Sport & Recreation**
- **Town Green & Main Street**
- **Heritage & Tourism Loop**
- **Linkages & Connections**

The analytical work undertaken has allowed key project interventions to be established that support and align with the objectives of the TCF Plan and the Town Centre First Policy. The linked relationships of the Plan Themes and Project Areas are illustrated below.

The latter part of this section provides detailed information regarding the implementation and delivery of the proposed project interventions for Clara Town Centre, enabling the Town Team to develop Clara over the lifetime of the Plan.

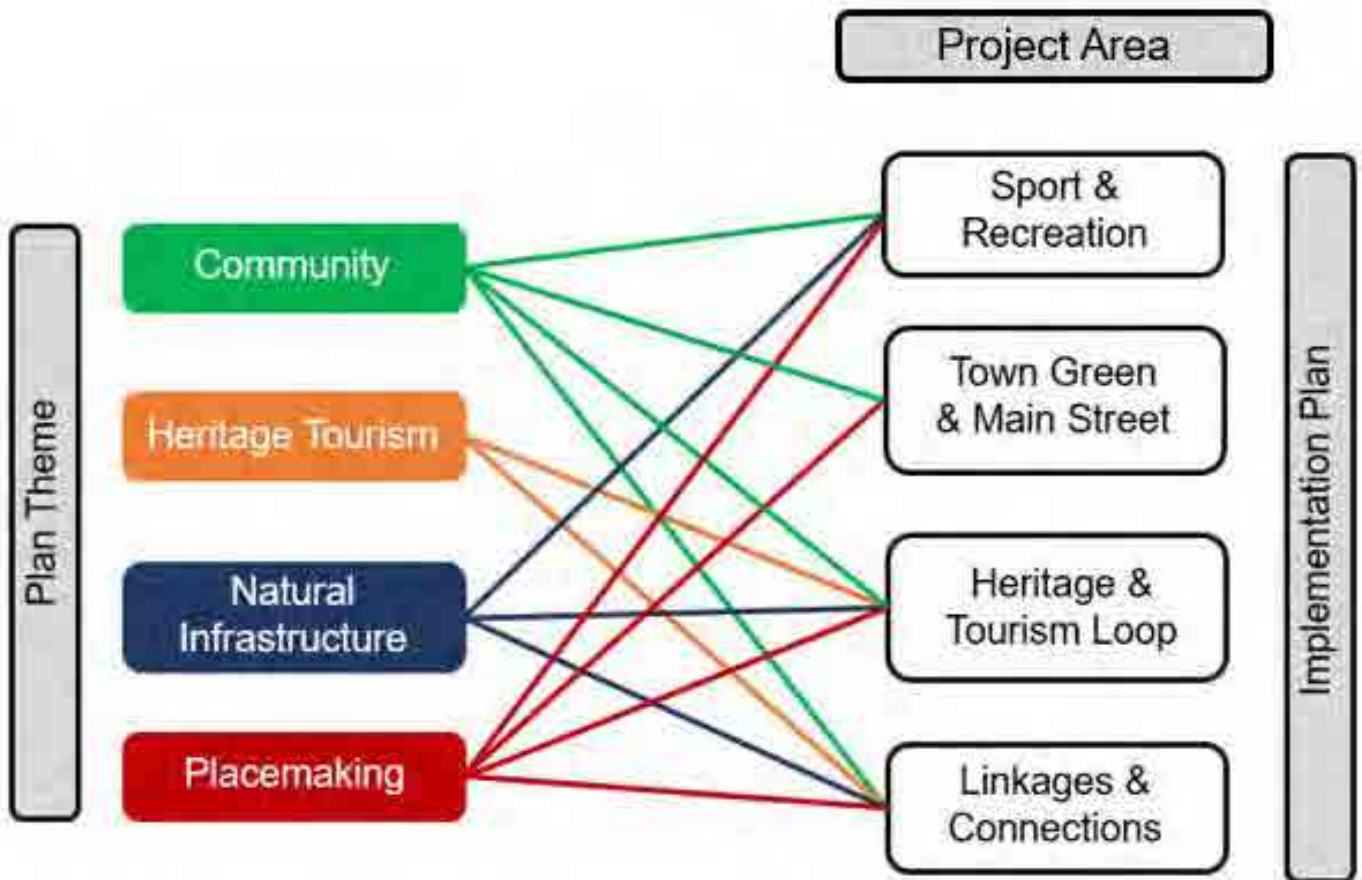


Figure 4.1 Relationships between Themes and Project Areas

Projects Overview Map

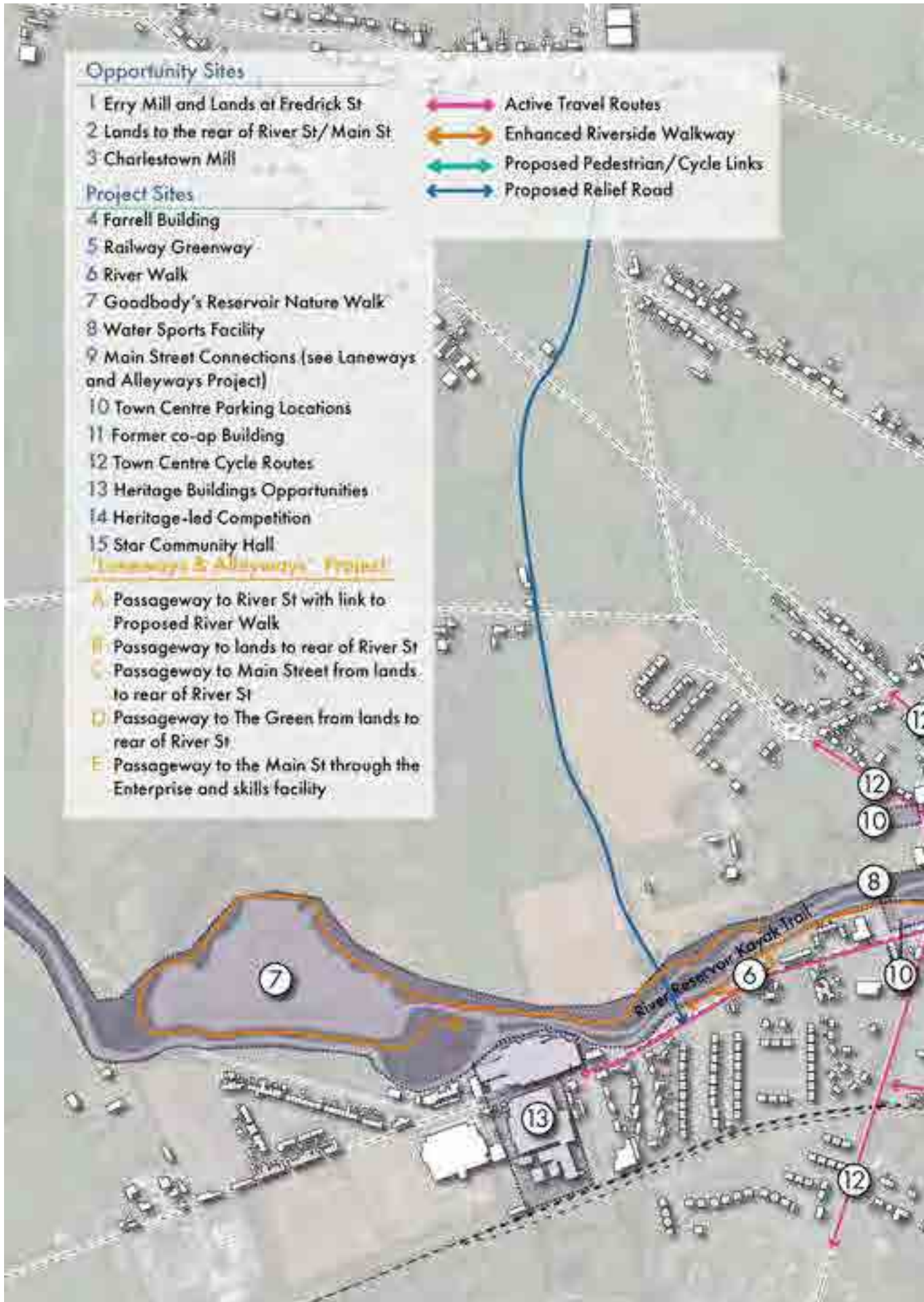


Figure 4.2 Projects Overview Map



Clara Future Context



Figure 4.3 Clara Future Context



PROJECT

1

Townscape Project

Enhancing the appearance and visual quality of the Town Centre.





Project Area - Town Green & Main Street

Townscape Project

The Town Centre First Policy recognises that successful places are characterised by, *inter alia*, an attractive public realm (streets, spaces and parks) that is designed to invite people to meet, mingle and dwell and that attractive, vibrant places allow enterprises to grow and develop. The quality of the public realm and the visual attractiveness of Clara can help its Town Centre to become a more vibrant place where people will want to be, to work, to socialise and to visit. It is proven that attractive places attract people and generate civic pride.

There are many components within Clara that can add value to the quality of the townscape. These include, *inter alia*, shopfront design, façade treatment, signage, lighting, soft and hard landscaping, street furniture, activation of upper floor levels, for example. A further key component regarding the overall townscape quality includes the level of vacancy in the Town Centre.

The Purpose of this Project

The purpose of this project is to improve the appearance of the streetscapes within Clara Town Centre including the refurbishment of vacant/derelict properties and bringing them back into use. There are a number of funding options available for such schemes including:

- Croí Cónaithe (Towns) Fund Scheme - DHLGH.
- Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) - DHLGH.
- Buy and Renew Scheme (BRS) - DHLGH.
- Streetscape Enhancement Scheme - DRCD (€100,000 secured by Offaly County Council in 2022 for Clara Town Centre).
- Historic Towns Initiative - DHLGH.

As stated in the Clara Town Teams 2nd Blueprint document, “*public realm must be utilised as a long term investment and not a quick and cheaply done fix.*”

Project Features

- Enhancing the attractiveness of Clara’s network of streets.
- Re-use of vacant and derelict buildings.

Project Physical Changes

- Upgrade works to improve building facades, elevational treatments etc.
- General works to improve the quality and functionality of streets (for example, removal of inappropriate signage, general clutter, new planting, new street furniture).
- Refurbishment of under-utilised properties.

Project Outcomes

- Vacant buildings (including heritage buildings) re-activation for a variety of uses.
- A more visually attractive Town Centre for Clara.
- Better perceptions of the Town Centre from residents, employers/employees, visitors etc.
- Greater animation and vibrancy at street level through activation of vacant/derelict buildings.
- Upper building levels re-purposed (for example, living over the shop).
- To encourage private investment and development.



Figure 4.4 Main Street, Clara - Future Vision Option



Figure 4.5 Church Street, Clara - Future Vision Option

PROJECT

2

River Walk

Utilising one of Clara's key natural assets to provide a new amenity resource.





Project Area - Heritage & Tourism Loop

River Walk

The River Brosna is a significant blue infrastructure asset in Clara that is currently under-utilised and one that makes an important contribution to the overall quality of the urban environment. The length of the River Brosna that flows through Clara is considerable, and such natural assets can enhance the overall liveability of settlements and their utilisation and promotion should be optimised for wider social and environmental benefits.

The Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the River Walk project is to maximise the benefits this natural infrastructure asset has to offer the local community in Clara. As mentioned, the River Brosna is a key natural asset and through environmental improvements to the riverbank areas, new walkways and riverside public amenity areas can be created.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE



Engaged River Park



Subsequent River Area Activation

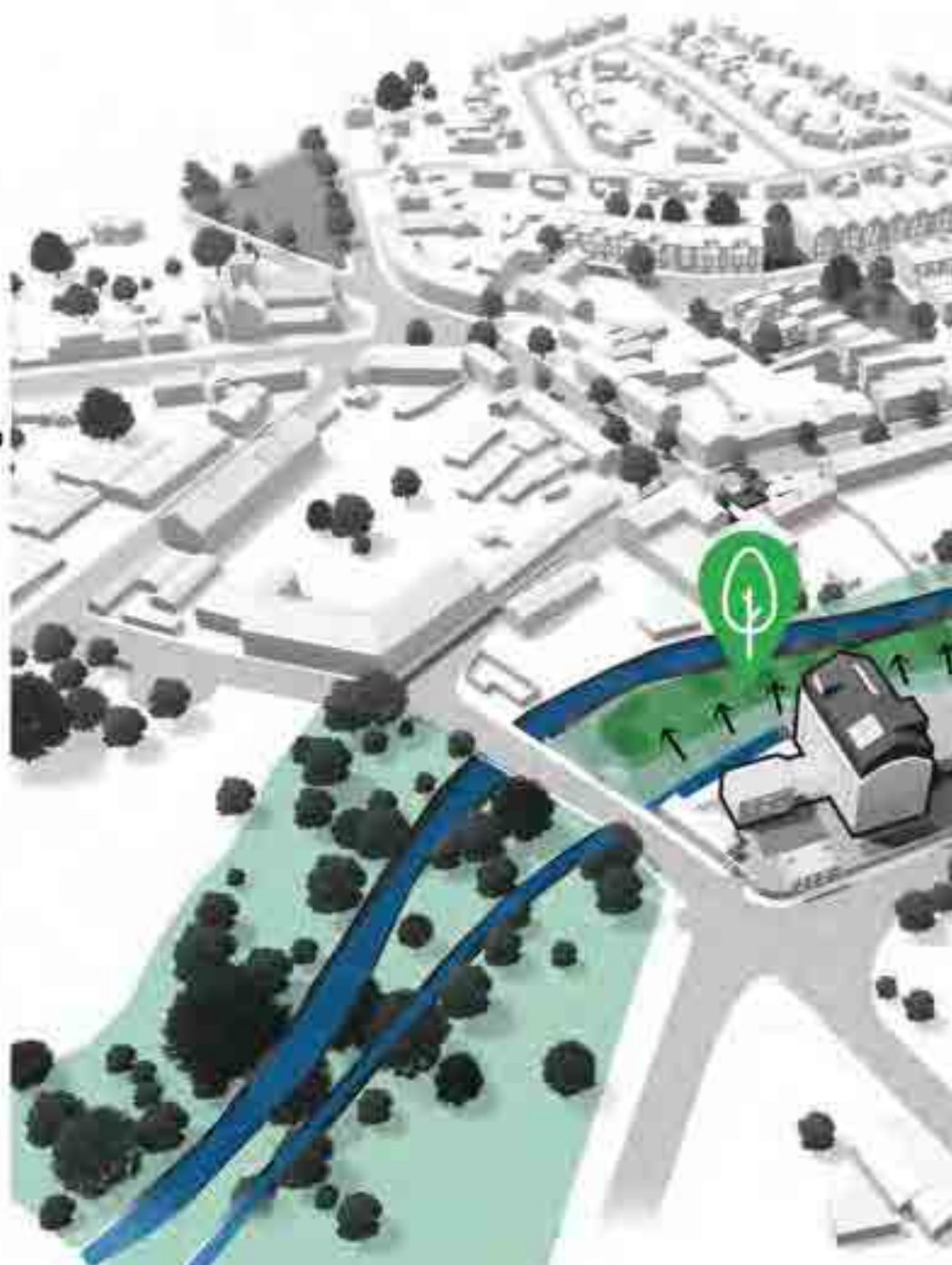


Figure 4.6 Green Infrastructure

The delivery of an enhanced riverbank route will not only result in the river becoming a more visually prominent feature within the Town Centre, it will also bring forward quality of life and health and well-being outcomes for residents. This new amenity resource also contributes to the enhanced tourism offer being promoted within this TCF Plan.



Project Features

- Creation of a new River Walk route.
- Creation of clear pedestrian routes from the Main Street to the river.
- Increased accessibility to the natural assets of Clara.
- A convenient, accessible, inclusive and inexpensive space for physical activity and active travel.
- Opportunity for year round activity along the River Brosna.
- New spaces along the River Walk designed for uses such as a fitness trail, picnic areas and rest areas.

Project Physical Changes

- Environmental improvements to the riparian areas of the River Brosna.
- Provision of appropriate lighting, signage and wayfinding along the River Walk.
- Facilitates increased pedestrian and cycle movement along the river.
- Provision of a new riverside boardwalk.
- New connections across the river to the Town Centre.

Project Outcomes

- New amenity resource for the local community to enjoy.
- Provides opportunities for increased social interaction.
- Promotes physical activity, recreation, and health and well-being.
- Project can potentially be added to the enhanced tourism offer in the town that can deliver positive economic outcomes.

The River

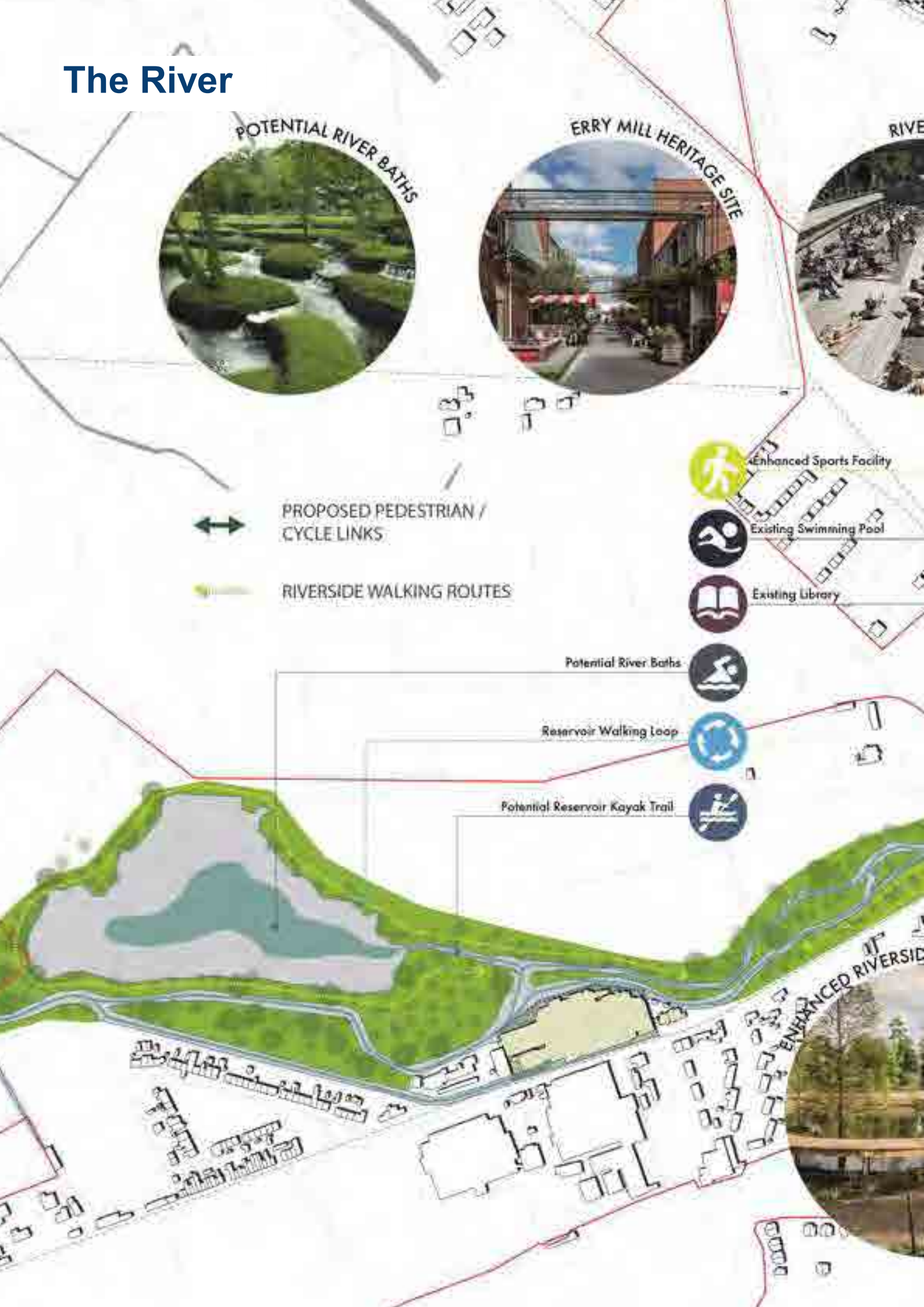


Figure 4.7 The River



PROJECT

3

Town Centre Cycle Routes

Establishing a new local cycle route network for the Town Centre.





Project Area - Linkages & Connections

Town Centre Cycle Routes

The transportation analysis undertaken for the Town Centre highlighted the fact there are currently no dedicated cycle lanes within Clara and the existing infrastructure does not promote and support cycling as a mode of transport.

Clara Town Plan references the lack of cycleways and states *“there are currently no dedicated cycle lanes within the town and these may be incorporated into new development and on existing roads such as along the R436 (Ballycumber Road) to the Town Centre and the R436, linking the Kilcoursey residential area, the primary schools and the Town Centre.”*

The Town Centre First Plan provides a unique opportunity to identify and bring forward a new cycle route network for the Town Centre. As illustrated by the image opposite, there is scope to deliver a new cycle network in Clara based on the existing road and street infrastructure characteristics.

The Purpose of this Project

The purpose of this project is to establish a new local cycle route network for the Town Centre. The existing conditions in Clara do not support or indeed promote cycling as a sustainable transport option. Based on the transportation analysis carried out, a number of cycle lane typologies are proposed which include:

- Dedicated cycle Lane
- Mixed/Shared Street
- Off-Road Cycle Track

This project has the advantage of being aligned with the Railway Greenway project that cumulatively can enhance cycling as a viable mode of transport over the long term.

Project Features

- Creation of a new cycle route network for Clara.
- Promotion of active travel and health and well-being.
- Increased movement options for residents, employees and visitors.

Project Physical Changes

- Increased cycle movements generated throughout the Town Centre.
- Variety of cycle routes appropriate to their existing context.
- Enhanced cycle infrastructure for Clara.

Project Outcomes

- Promotion of increased use of active travel modes.
- Reduced use of private car particularly for short trips.
- Provision of a more calmed Town Centre environment.
- Enhanced connectivity throughout the Town Centre.
- Alignment and connectivity with proposed Railway Greenway project.



Figure 4.8 Town Centre Cycle Routes

Town Centre Cycle Route Details

1. Proposed Cycle Lanes: From R420/Cluain Abhainn Junction to R436/St Patrick's Terrace junction.

2. Proposed Cycle Lanes: From R436/St Patrick's Terrace junction to Armstrong Grove/L2015 New Road.

3. Proposed Mixed/Shared Street (measure includes traffic yielding to cyclists and cycle road marking/signage): From River Street/R420 junction to Church Street/Sráid an Droichid junction.

4. Proposed Mixed/Shared Street (measure includes traffic yielding to cyclists and cycle road marking/signage): From River St/R420 junction to Sráid an Droichid roundabout south, to Sráid an Droichid roundabout north to Church Street/Sráid an Droichid junction.

5. Proposed Cycle Track segregated by Kerb: From Church Street/Sráid an Droichid junction to 63-65 Church Street.

6. Proposed Mixed/Shared Street (measure includes traffic yielding to cyclists and cycle road marking): From River Street/R420 junction to R420/R436/Kilbeggan Rd roundabout.

7. Proposed Mixed/Shared Street (measure includes traffic yielding to cyclists and cycle road marking/signage): From the Square/The Green to the junction in front of Celtic Park building.

8. Proposed Mixed/Shared Street (measure includes traffic yielding and cycle road marking/signage): From R420/R436/Kilbeggan Road roundabout to R420/Frederick Street R436 Junction.

9. Proposed Cycle Lanes: From R436/St. Patrick's Terrace junction to Ballycumber Road/Cork Hill junction.

10. Proposed Mixed/Shared Street (measure includes traffic yielding to cyclists and cycle road marking/signage): From Sráid an Droichid roundabout north to Egan's Lane/Oratory Row roundabout.

11. Proposed Mixed/Shared Street (measure includes traffic yielding to cyclists and cycle road marking/signage): From The Square/The Green junction to Church View/Church Road junction.

12. Proposed Cycle Lanes: From R420/R436/Kilbeggan Road roundabout to Clara Cemetery.

PROJECT

4

Former Co-Op Building

Regeneration of a key heritage building for a new community facility along with active travel connectivity and a new civic plaza.





Project Area - Town Green & Main Street

Former Co-Op Building

The former Co-Op building is located on River Street and in close proximity to the junction with Sráid an Droichid and Main Street which provides the building with a prominent location in the Town Centre. The building is two storey with frontage to River Street. To the ground floor are a number of arched windows and doorways that give the building an interesting architectural style. Over the years the building has had many uses including a street mill, school, co-operative, retail and residential. The physical condition of the former Co-Op building appears to be relatively good at present.

The Purpose of the Project

The regeneration of the former Co-Op building presents an opportunity to bring a prominent building back into active use as a new community building that will provide spaces for the many community groups in the town such as the Community Council, Town Team,

Heritage Society, Tidy Towns and Chamber of Commerce.

The rejuvenation of the building aligns with the themes of 'Community' and 'Placemaking' as set out within this Plan and will create a bespoke facility that meets the needs of Clara's community, in particular young and elderly persons as well as the aforesaid groups.

The re-development of the former Co-Op building also incorporates a new active travel link running south over the river and connecting with the Erry Mill site. The current parking area to the front of the post office is proposed to be re-imagined as a civic plaza as part of this project. A new parking location on River Street (2 min walk away) is proposed within this Plan. The regeneration of the former Co-Op building, new active travel connectivity and new plaza area will transform this Town Centre locale and bring forward positive placemaking outcomes.

Project Features

- Re-activation of prominent Town Centre building.
- New active travel link across the river.
- New civic plaza area.

Project Physical Changes

- Improvement works to regenerate the former Co-Op building.
- Active travel link running south and over the river for increased connectivity.
- Repurposing the existing car parking area as a new plaza area.

Project Outcomes

- Facilitating remote work and employment uses that meets the needs of the community.
- Assists with tackling of vacancy in the Town Centre.
- Visual quality enhancement of the streetscape in the River Street/Bridge Street/Main Street locale.
- Promotion of increased social interaction through the creation of a new civic plaza area.
- Sustainable use of an under-utilised building in the Town Centre that additionally can generate increased vibrancy and vitality in the Town Centre.
- Facilitating a new re-purposed community building in the Town Centre.



Figure 4.9 Former Co-Op Building, Active Travel Link and Civic Plaza - Future option



Figure 4.10 Former Co-Op Building, Active Travel Link and Civic Plaza - Future option

Case Study - Exchange Building, Dublin

Community Development

Introduction

The Exchange in Dublin is a not-for-profit organisation located in a previously vacant building on the northside of Dublin.

The group is operated by young people as a place to socialise, discuss ideas, meet people and have as an event space. It has been hugely successful and has helped many people in this space go onto establish careers in the creative arts sector.

One of the main goals that Exchange Dublin strives for is social well-being. The organisation is 'volunteers-only' to ensure it remains a

non-commercial space where everyone in the venue is there because they desire to be.

Developing skills is a core founding of the organisation, the belief is that regular participation in group activities can greatly benefit the youth by developing their skills, giving them the necessary elements that they need for future life.

The Centre offers a safe space for the youth of Dublin to explore art and socially interact with each other on a regular basis. The Centre allows for an outlet for the youth where they



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10155594265260556&set=pb.100067823325660.-2207520000>

otherwise might not have one due to individual circumstances, providing a safe space.

What Do They Do?

Many different activities and outlets are on offer in an attempt to accommodate as many people as possible. The regular events that are hosted are open to people of all ages, allowing everyone in the community to participate.

Activities include:

- Discussions in which a large group of like-minded people can all sit down and discuss what they want to create and how they will go about achieving this
- Gigs in which people can perform their art in a musical fashion. Numerous performance workshops are available and gives the opportunity for the performers of the pieces to bring their vision to life on the stage in front of a live audience.
- Various craft courses are also provided allowing people to create anything they want using tools provided by the centre, allowing young people to examine potential life skills.
- Various based activities including fitness classes, yoga, reading, English language lessons, female meeting groups, computer games competition.

Funding

The organisation works from charitable donations in which any money that is donated or made by fundraising immediately goes straight back into the organisation to better help the community and provide better services for everyone free of charge.

‘Hopefully, through their innovative and caring organisation and venue, less of the youth population will act out in anti-social ways as they now have a safe outlet if they need it.’

Exchange Dublin

PROJECT

5

Goodbody's Reservoir Nature Walk

Delivering a new active travel route and amenity resource that enhances access to a prominent blue infrastructure asset in Clara.



Project Area - Sports & Recreation

Goodbody's Reservoir Nature Walk

Situated within the west area of the Town Centre is the Goodbody's Reservoir which is part of Clara's industrial past. From the mid-18th century onwards the town's development was strongly influenced by the linen industry and the Goodbody family who were associated with various enterprises in the 19th century. The Goodbody's Reservoir provides an additional destination along the industrial heritage route that will be created by the new

River Walk and attached to the redevelopment of the Erry Mill site as a tourism development within a joined up approach.

Similar to the proposed River Walk route as set out in this section, the addition of an amenity resource to the western side of the Town Centre will benefit the local residents by providing a new active travel route and enhanced accessibility to a former heritage asset.

Figure 4.11 Goodbody's Reservoir Nature Walk and phasing approach



The Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to further promote and bring a focus to Clara's unique and rich industrial past while also providing a public amenity that will promote increased walking trips and outdoor recreation activity. These elements, in turn, support health and well-being for the local population. The creation of the Reservoir Nature Walk will provide a new destination and 'place' within the Town Centre that previously was restricted in terms of its connectivity, while delivering environmental improvements.



Project Features

- Creation of a Nature River Walk around the Goodbody Reservoir in conjunction with the River Walk.
- Increased accessibility to a blue infrastructure asset.
- Promotion of active travel.
- Provision of convenient, accessible, inclusive and inexpensive space for physical activity.

Project Physical Changes

- Facilitates increased pedestrian and cycle movement at the Reservoir.
- New pedestrian and cycle infrastructure for the Town Centre.
- Provision of signage and wayfinding detailing the history of the Goodbody's Reservoir.

Project Outcomes

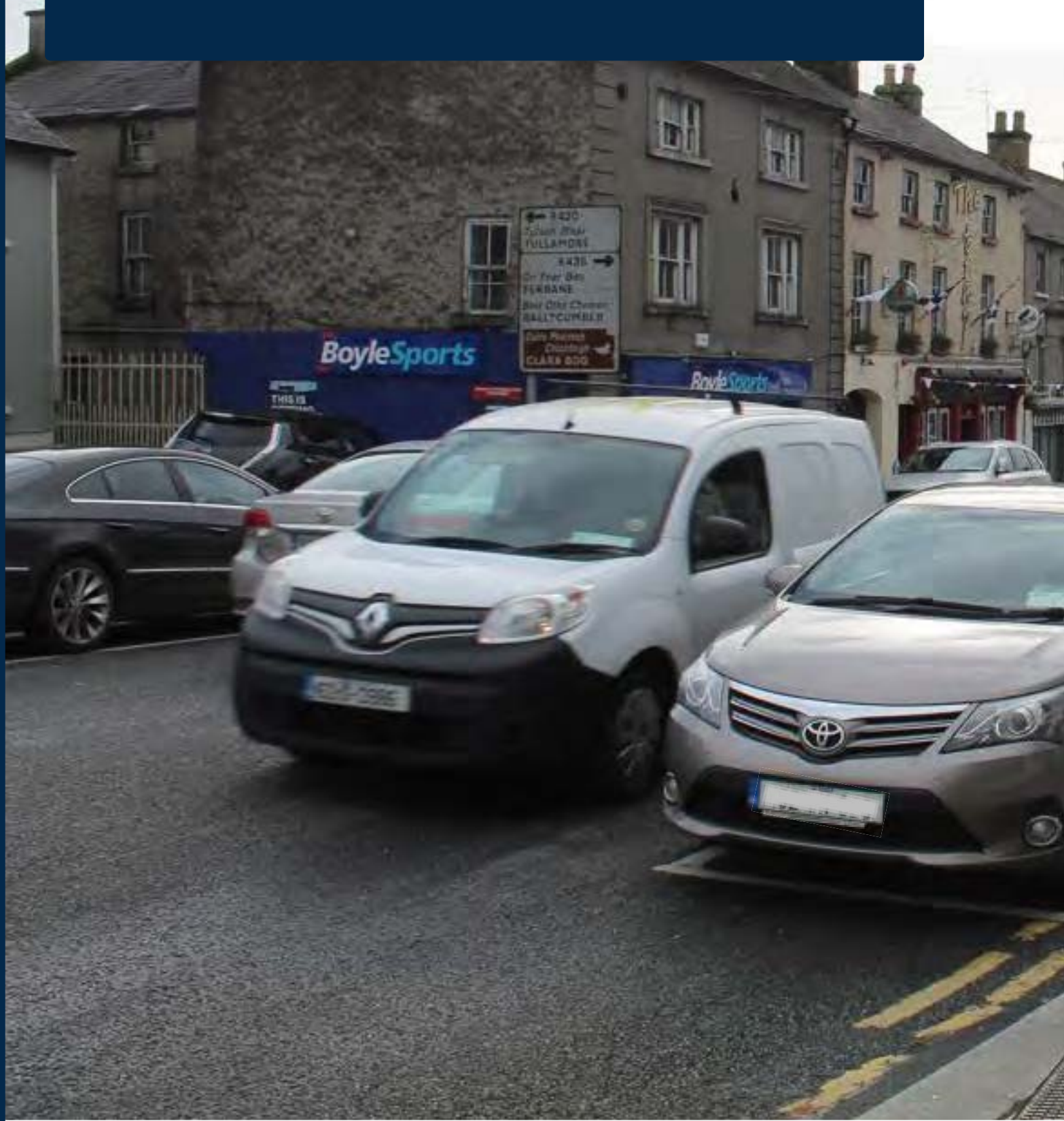
- A public amenity that will promote increased walking trips and outdoor recreation.
- Preservation and enhanced education of Clara's industrial history.
- Increased desirability and attractiveness of the Town Centre by providing a new amenity and destination and environmental upgrades.

PROJECT

6

Town Centre Parking Locations

Rationalising on-street parking to promote the accessibility of Clara's streets.





Project Area - Linkages & Connections

Town Centre Parking Locations

The public engagement process has provided feedback in relation to the subject of car parking within Clara. Matters highlighted referenced the lack of provision of appropriate off-street parking locations within the Town Centre and that streets such as River Street, Bridge Street and Egan's Lane provide car parking on both sides of the street, reducing the carriageway width which creates pinch points and traffic congestion. In addition, the footpaths are generally narrow and unsuitable.

Presently within Clara, there is a disproportionate amount of on-street parking when compared to off-street parking options. For the Town Centre going forward, there needs to be an optimal balance achieved whereby the parking of private vehicles is successfully managed so as to ensure Clara's streets are accessible places for all.

The Purpose of this Project

The purpose of the project is to create new off-street parking locations within the Town Centre. The identified locations are situated within a short walking distance less than 5 mins walk from the Main Street locale. Through the delivery of new dedicated parking locations, private vehicles can be accommodated in off-street locations. This approach has the potential to create a more calming, welcoming and accessible Town Centre where greater movement by sustainable walking and cycling modes is supported. This approach aligns with the Town Team's Public Realm Solution 3 (as set out within the Clara Town Team's 2nd Blueprint document) that states, *"loss of car parking allows for an opportunity to create an inviting landscaped public realm, with spaces that in themselves attract people to the centre of town."*

Project Features

- Rationalisation of car parking arrangements in the Town Centre.
- Dedicated off-street car parking locations (3 no.) that are located a short walking distance from the Main Street locale.
- Parking locations can support other project interventions such as the Erry Mill tourism development and River Walk as well as local amenities and school sites.

Project Physical Changes

- Operation of new car parking locations in close proximity to Main Street.
- Affords the opportunity to reduce the number of vehicles in key locations (such as Main Street and River Street) while still providing access to services and facilities.
- Assists with safer and increased pedestrian and cycle movement within the Town Centre.

Project Outcomes

- Contributes to a more people - focused Town Centre that is accessible to all ages and abilities.
- Dominance of people rather than vehicles in Clara's Town Centre.
- Promotes greater social interaction within a more welcoming Town Centre environment.
- Greater mass of people attracted to the Town Centre with socio-economic benefits.

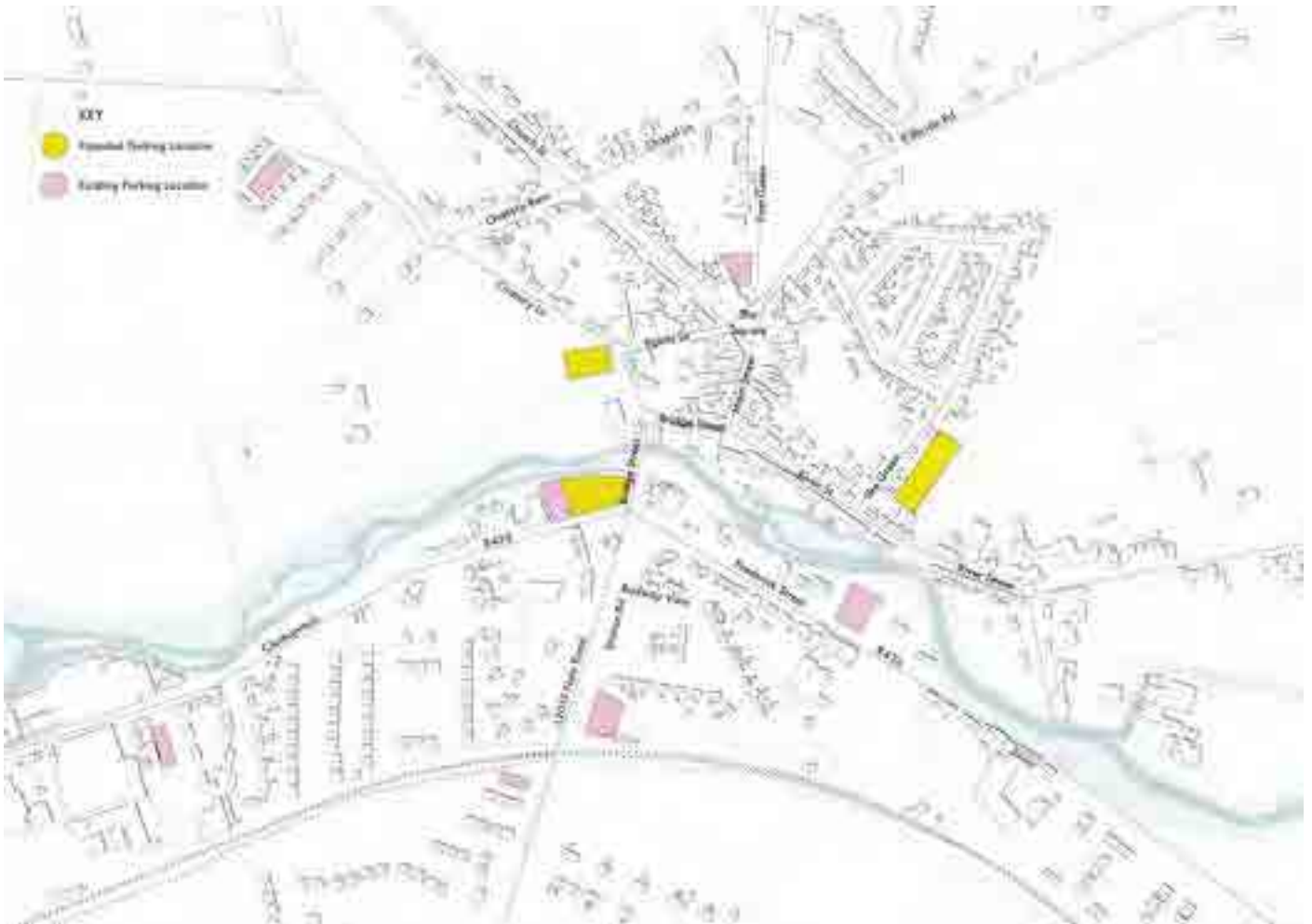


Figure 4.12 Existing and Potential Parking Locations

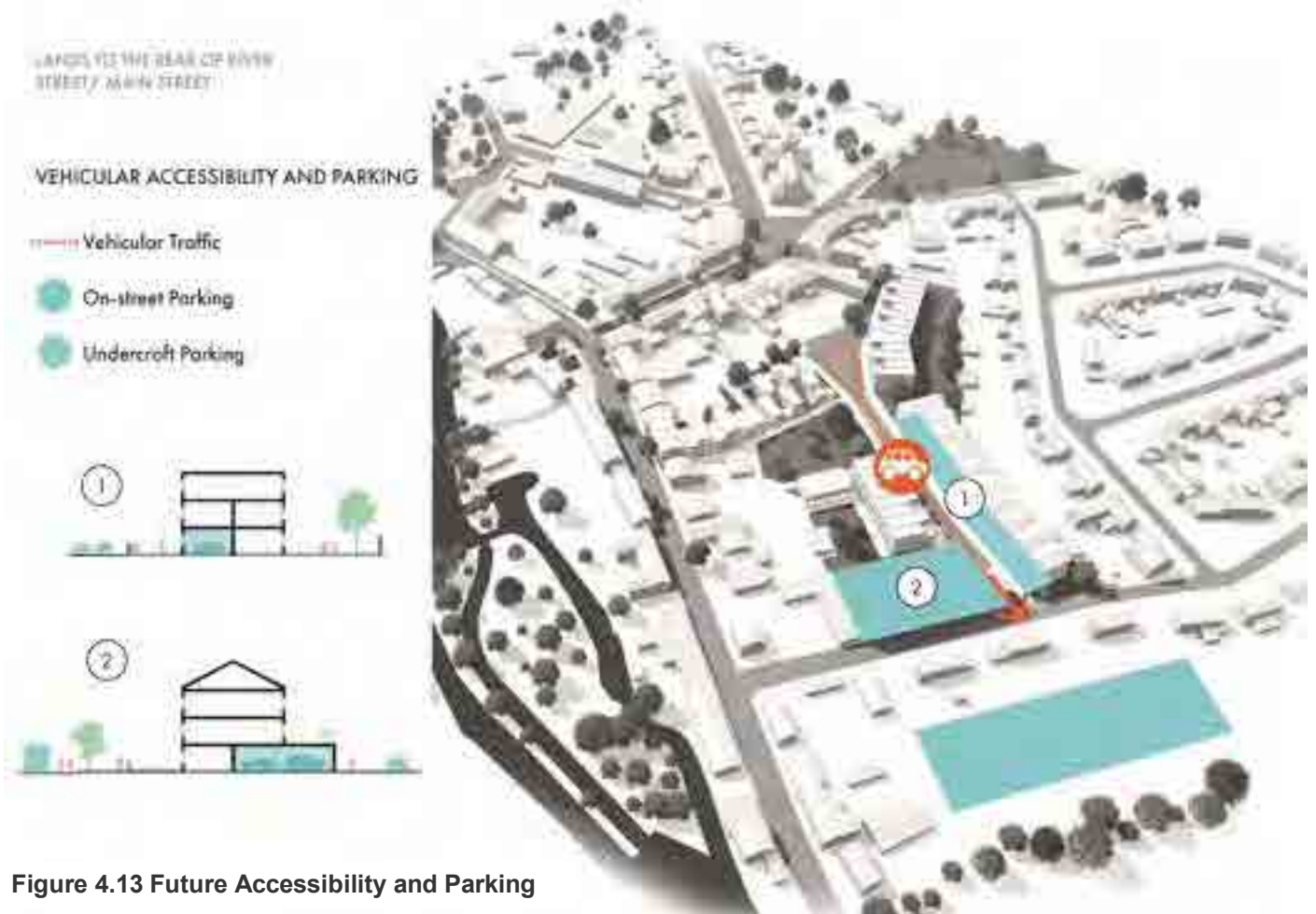


Figure 4.13 Future Accessibility and Parking

PROJECT 7

Star Community Hall

Upgrade and renovation works to facilitate a new multi-purpose community space in the Town Centre.



The Heals



Project Area - Town Green & Main Street

Star Community Hall

The Star community hall is situated on River Street in Clara. In terms of its appearance, the building has a non-traditional façade with only one window remaining at both ground and first floor level. At ground floor level there are four sets of double doors. The building is somewhat unique within the Town Centre due to its design and setback from the public road. The position of the building differs to the built form on the northern side of River Street which accommodates terraced two storey dwellings that are located immediately to the rear of the public footpath.

The Star community hall is still in active use however the building is of its time and requires improvement works to create a modern facility that will, in turn, generate greater use of the building by residents of all ages. The provision of new community facilities in Clara will promote the overall liveability of the town.

The Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to provide a rejuvenated multi-purpose community hall for the people of Clara. Having a flexible, multi-purpose space in the Town Centre is socially advantageous in that it acts as a conduit for people to interact with one another, provides modern spaces for community-related activities while also making a significant contribution to community cohesion and the overall social infrastructure of Clara.

Project Features

- Rejuvenation of an existing facility in order to bring forward a new multi-purpose community hall in Clara.

Project Physical Changes

- Physical changes to improve the internal use and external appearance of the community hall structure.
- Contributes to the visual enhancement of River Street.
- Greater activity and animation within the Town Centre.

Project Outcomes

- Improved vibrancy on River Street through the intensification of use of the building.
- Upgraded and modern resource for the local community to utilise.
- Contributes to the social infrastructure network in the Town Centre.
- Enhanced social interaction amongst residents that assists with creating a strong community spirit.



Figure 4.14 Location of the Star community hall on River Street (Aerial View)



Figure 4.15 Location of the Star community hall (Town Centre Context)

PROJECT 8

Heritage-led Competition for The Green

Engagement with the local community to generate ideas for the optimal use(s) of this public open space.





Project Area - Town Green & Main Street

Heritage-Led Competition

Located to the north of The Square in Clara is the 'The Green', a large triangular area of grassed open space. The Green is an important amenity area located in the heart of the Town Centre that has the potential for a range of uses. The Green is situated between and provides a link between two historic religious structures being Saint Brigid's Church to the north and Saint Brigid's Catholic Church situated to the southern end of The Green.

Green spaces and amenity areas can create attractive places and spaces within the urban environment that is primarily dominated by buildings. Integrating green spaces within the urban context can bring forward environmental benefits, while also providing active open spaces for walking, cycling and nature.

The provision of new green spaces can promote the liveability of towns and can act as an attractor in bringing people back to live in the Town Centre thereby assisting its vibrancy. Presently, it is considered The Green is an under-utilised amenity resource in Clara.

The Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to seek the involvement of the local community to determine the optimal use of The Green. This approach offers the opportunity for positive engagement with the community to establish a future use for The Green that can benefit the local community.

Project Features

- Establish a heritage-led competition to determine the future use of The Green amenity area.
- Encourages the re-use of a large open green space in the Town Centre that is currently under-utilised.
- Contributes to a sense of place for Clara.

Project Physical Changes

- Physical changes will be dependent on the future use of The Green.

Project Outcomes

- Potential for improved vibrancy and activity at the northern end of the Town Centre.
- Creation of new destination in Clara Town Centre.
- An improved resource for the local community.
- Selected future use may act in attracting more people to live in the Town Centre.



Figure 4.16 The Green public amenity space in the Town Centre



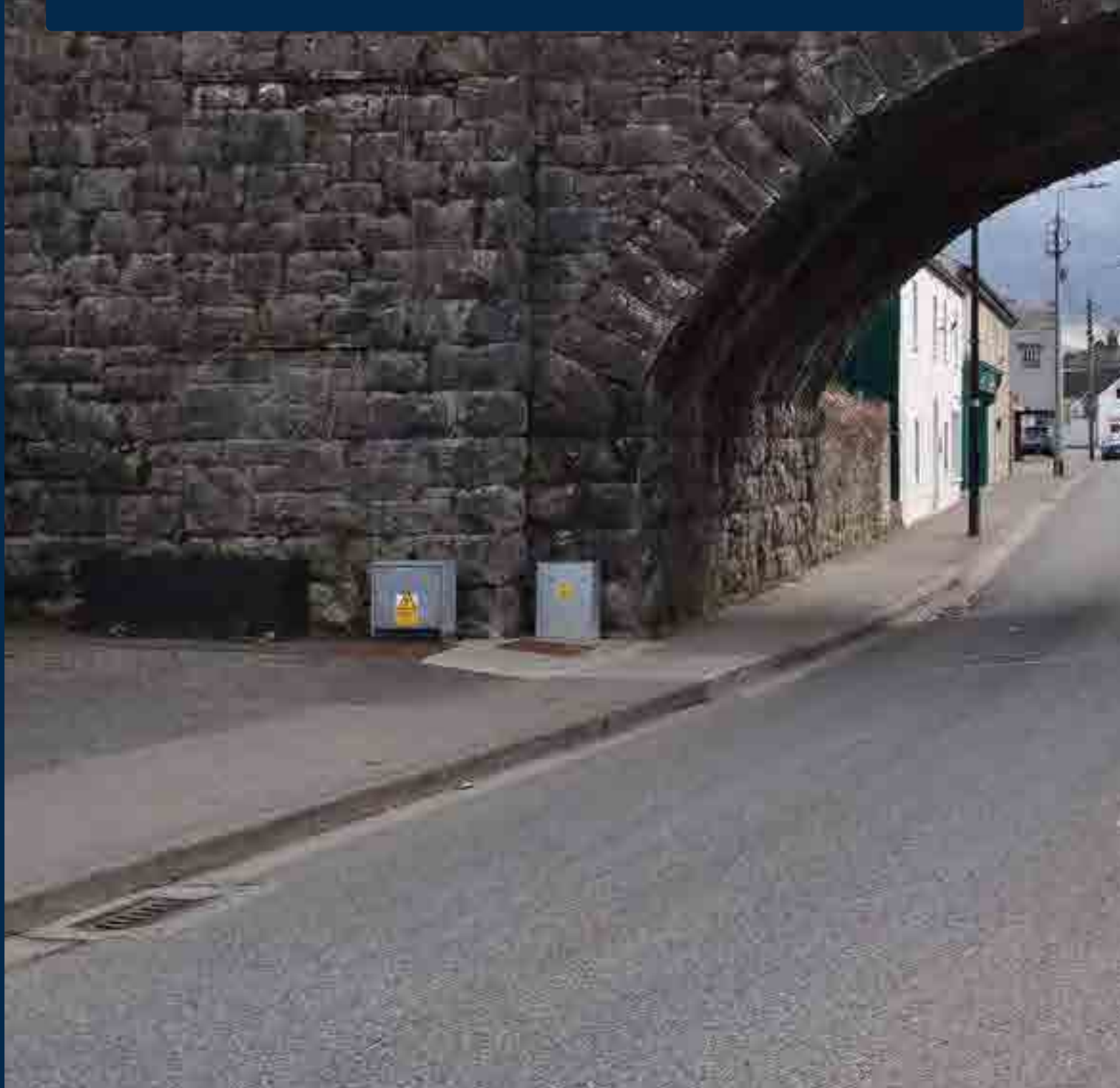
Figure 4.17 St. Brigid's Anglican Church, Clara

PROJECT

9

Railway Greenway

Restoration and re-use of a former railway line to create a new Greenway active travel route.





Project Area - Sports & Recreation

Railway Greenway

Situated to the north-east of the Town Centre is the disused Clara-Banagher railway line from Kilbride Cemetery to River Street. The former railway line is another layer to the rich industrial heritage that was present in Clara from the mid-18th century to the mid-20th century. It is envisioned that the disused railway line can provide a new recreational/leisure use in the form of a greenway.

Comments provided by the local community during the public consultation process highlighted the fact that Clara has a requirement for more walking and cycle routes. The former railway line provides an opportunity for a new greenway route that will provide a new amenity resource for the local community, as well as being an attractor of visitors to the town. The southern end of the greenway would connect to the Town Centre with the creation of a new entrance point at the

railway bridge on River Street, and through time becoming an established part of the urban fabric of Clara.

The Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the greenway project is to maximise the environmental, social and economic benefits this significant green infrastructure asset has to offer the town. The greenway can become a unique asset for Clara by attracting increased visitors, while also providing a new amenity for the local community. In addition, the greenway will promote active modes of travel and sustainable movement in and out of the Town Centre while also encouraging physical activity and health and well-being outcomes.

Project Features

- Creation of a new greenway along the former railway line.
- Promotion of active travel and health and well-being.
- Provision of a convenient, accessible and inexpensive space for physical activity.
- Celebrating and regeneration of Clara's former railway heritage.

Project Physical Changes

- Increased pedestrian and cycle movement.
- New connectivity with the residential areas to the north east of the Town Centre.
- Creation of a new entrance point at the railway bridge on River Street.
- Environmental improvement and visual quality of Town Centre enhanced.
- Provision of new pedestrian and cycle infrastructure for Clara.

Project Outcomes

- Provision of a public amenity that will promote increased use of active modes of transport.
- Stimulate job growth and revenue through tourism, recreation, and construction.
- Potential to attract new businesses (for e.g. food and beverage, bike hire), residents and visitors to the Town Centre, thereby providing economic benefits to the local economy.



Figure 4.18 Future Railway Greenway link on River Street



Figure 4.19 Cyclist on the Waterford-Dungarvan Greenway

Proposed Greenway & Active Travel Routes

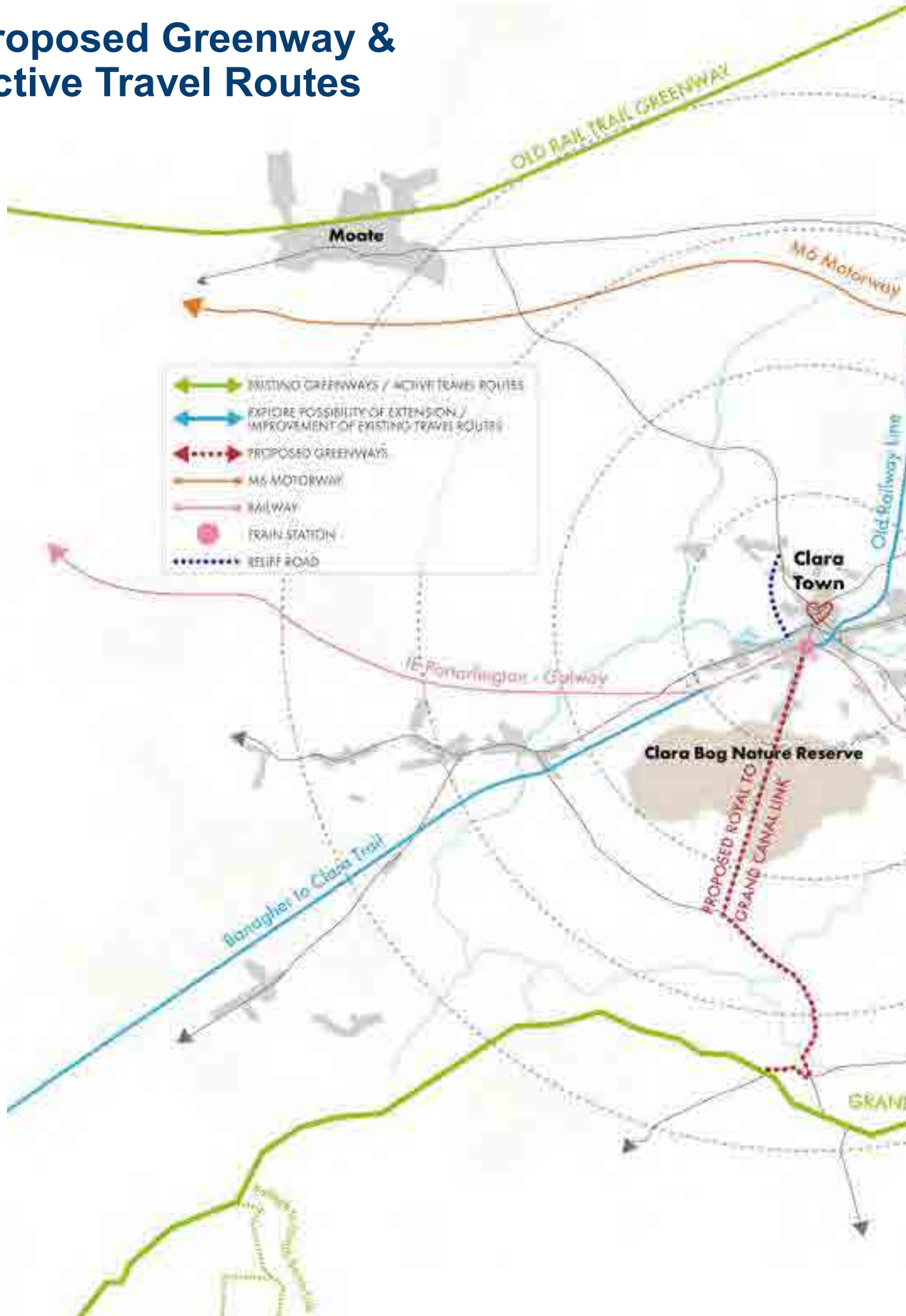





Figure 4.20 Proposed Greenway and Active Travel Routes




Benefits of Greenways

 **Economic:** Greenways located throughout Ireland are bringing forward significant economic benefits for cities, towns and villages. Greenways play a significant economic role in terms of attracting visitors for day and overnight trips along with the creation of associated enterprises such as bicycle hire and food and beverage operators. The economic benefits of the greenway are then indirectly shared throughout other businesses in the area (e.g. accommodation and food & beverage) as a result of increased visitor numbers.

 **Environmental:** Greenways help to protect important habitats and provide corridors for people and wildlife while also helping to improve air and water quality. Greenways provide enjoyable and safe options for active travel for people of all ages and abilities with quality of life benefits also associated with greenways.

 **Heritage:** Greenways have the ability to connect us to our heritage past by preserving historic places and by providing increased access to them. They can give citizens a sense of place and an understanding past events and practices.

 **Health and Recreation:** In many communities across the country, people do not have access to trails, parks, or other recreation areas close to their homes. Greenways provide a safe and relatively inexpensive option for regular exercise while encouraging more people to walk or cycle to short distance destinations, thereby promoting active travel.

Greenways Project Funding through Transport Infrastructure Ireland

Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) have allocated €63m for the development of around 70 Greenway projects throughout Ireland for 2023.

The funding will see construction continue on a number of projects, with other projects moving through planning and design stage, recent examples include:

Offaly County Council

€4.76 million of funding has delivered a further 35km of the Grand Canal Greenway in County Offaly from Edenderry to Lough Boora.

Wicklow County Council

€2,550,000 has been allocated through TII Projects including:

- Blessington Greenway - €1,800,000
- Arklow to Shillelagh Greenway - €500,000

Clare County Council

Over €2.1 million has been allocated towards Greenway projects in County Clare:

- West Clare Railway Greenway - €950,000
- Limerick to Scariff Greenway/Blueway - €780,000
- Shannon to Bunratty, Sixmilebridge and Limerick - €300,000

Waterford City and County Council

€1.5 million in funding has been allocated for projects which include:

- Waterford to Rosslare - €50,000
- Dungarvan to Mallow - €300,000
- Marlfield Blueway Clonmel - €300,000



Figure 4.21 Edenderry to Lough Boora Greenway



Figure 4.22 Edenderry to Lough Boora Greenway

PROJECT 10

The Farrell Building

Rejuvenation and re-activation of a prominent heritage building in the Town Centre.



A R R E L L



Project Area - Town Green & Main Street

The Farrell Building

The Farrell building is located on Main Street and its architectural characteristics and quality provide it with prominence within the streetscape. According to the NIAH, the building was originally constructed c.1800 and had use as a shop (grocers). The NIAH record of the building states that it has “*noteworthy features which enliven its façade such as the smaller sized windows to second floor level and the rendered fascia board. The shopfront and display window are a reflection of the modest shopfronts of the past and of the time of the small grocer*” and further, “*the tooled stone door surround contrasts with the timber shopfront, creating textural variation and adding to the structure’s visual appeal, making it positive contributor to the streetscape.*”

Presently, the Farrell building is unoccupied but despite its age, it appears to be in a relatively good physical condition. The building’s vacancy

detracts from contributing to an active and vibrant Main Street.

The Purpose of the Project

The regeneration of the Farrell building aligns with the themes of ‘Community’ and ‘Placemaking’ as set out within this TCF Plan. The re-purposing of the building as a possible enterprise and skills centre will create a bespoke facility that will provide training and upskilling opportunities and a new learning space for Clara’s community with the potential for specialising in key employment sectors.

Additionally, the redevelopment of the building and site as part of the ‘New Neighbourhood Quarter’ project, will provide key linkages and connections and contribute to a high quality public realm with increased pedestrian activity within this area.

Project Features

- Redevelopment of the Farrell building as a new enterprise and skills facility for residents.
- Enhances pedestrian activity in the Town Centre.
- Creation of a visually attractive public realm and streetscape for Main Street.

Project Physical Changes

- Redevelopment and re-purposing of an architecturally prominent vacant building.
- Contributes to re-activation of Main Street.
- New sustainable movement link connecting Main Street further eastwards.

Project Outcomes

- Assists with tackling of vacancy in the Town Centre.
- Positive contribution to the overall quality of place.
- Social interaction through meeting the needs of the community while contributing to a diversity of uses within the Town Centre.
- Sustainable use of an under-utilised building and restoration of local heritage.
- Promotes increased vibrancy and vitality in the Town Centre.
- New upskilling and training opportunities for the local community.



Figure 4.23 Main Street - Future Vision option

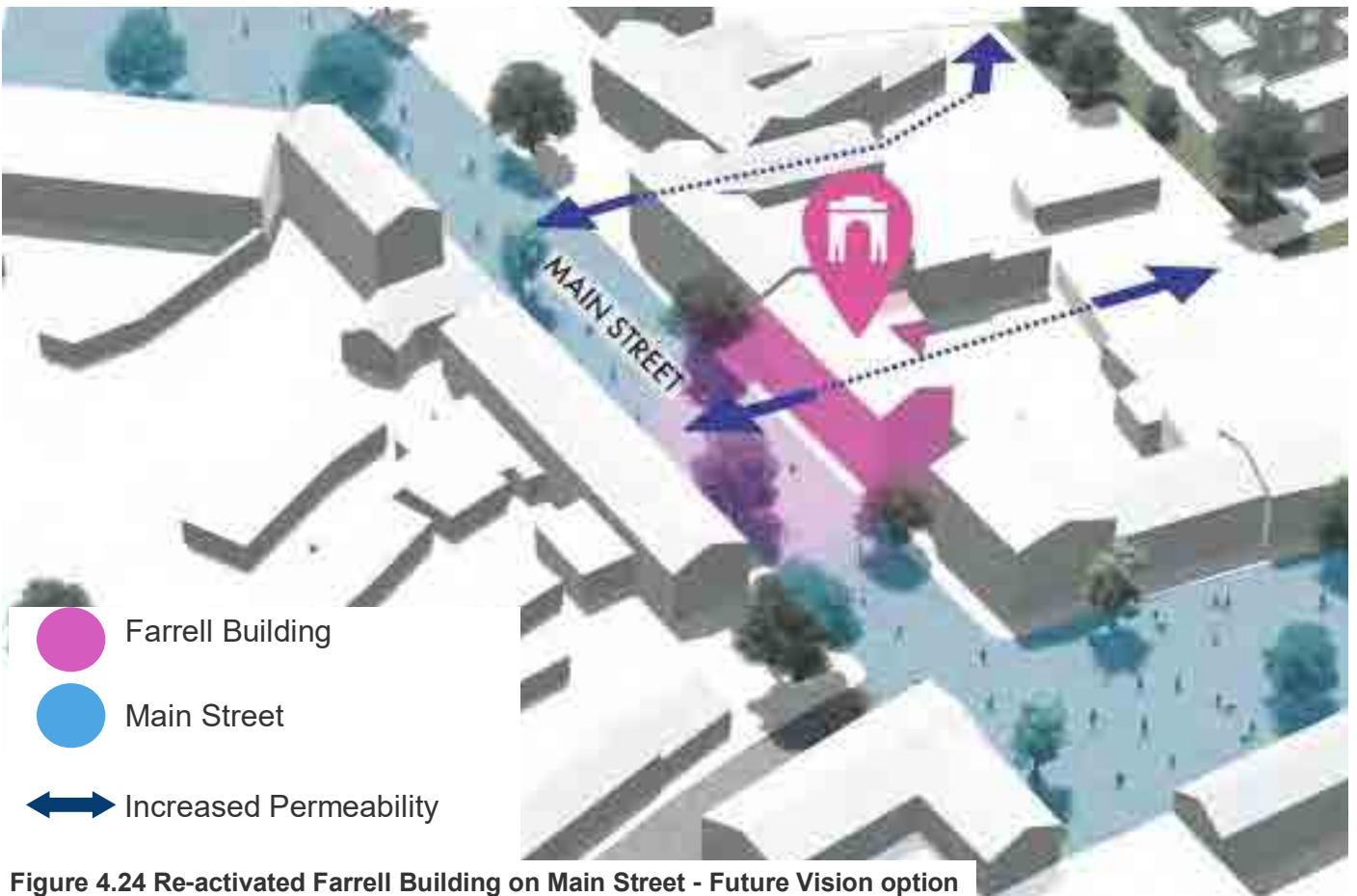


Figure 4.24 Re-activated Farrell Building on Main Street - Future Vision option

PROJECT

11

Water Sports Facility

Optimising Clara's blue infrastructure for leisure and recreational uses in the Town Centre.





Project Area - Sports & Recreation

Water Sports Facility

Aligning with the project interventions comprising the River Walk and Reservoir Nature Walk, a water sports activity facility is proposed on the River Brosna as a new amenity for residents and visitors.

Participation in outdoor water-based activities, as well as other outdoor-based pursuits, grew rapidly during the Covid-19 pandemic and water-based recreation has continued to remain popular for people of all ages. As mentioned within this TCF Plan, the location of the river affords a significant resource for the Town Centre and one that can be promoted with the aim of delivering social, economic and environmental advantages.

Notwithstanding the proposed water sports facility, additionally there is potential for river baths to be developed along the western section of the River Brosna, providing a unique recreational facility/attraction for the town. Further opportunities to provide

additional recreational facilities that utilise the River Brosna may come forward in future years as a result of this initial project intervention.

The Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to provide a facility that both the local community and visitors to Clara can enjoy for recreational purposes. The project aims to increase the utilisation of the River Brosna as an existing natural blue resource available to the town.

Project Features

- Delivery of a water sports facility situated on the River Brosna providing activities such as kayaking and canoeing.
- Utilises the River Brosna for recreational and leisure-based activities.
- Project can act as a generator of increased visitors to Clara.
- Adds to the portfolio of new destinations in the Town Centre.

Project Physical Changes

- Facilitates increased activity on the River Brosna.
- Location of water sports-based infrastructure on the river.

Project Outcomes

- Re-invention of the river as a location for year round activity.
- Stimulates job growth and revenue by way of tourism and recreation.
- Promotes physical activity and health and well-being.
- Associated with other water/nature related projects that can place a positive focus on Clara as a place to visit.



Figure 4.25 Re-activated River Brosna - Future Vision option

PROJECT

12

Main Street Connections

Enhancing the future connectivity and permeability of Clara Town Centre.





Project Area - Linkages & Connections

Main Street Connections

The baseline analysis of Clara undertaken by the Plan team established that linkages and connections into the heart of the Town Centre, particularly Main Street and River Street, could be significantly improved in order to make the Town Centre a more permeable and connected destination. Connectivity from areas adjacent to and surrounding the Town Centre is critically important as it provides people with options in how they access services and facilities and how they move around Clara.

The Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to enhance connectivity and permeability of Clara Town Centre. Strategically, this TCF Plan seeks to improve and enhance linkages and connections from key locations such as Clara railway station, the proposed tourism development at Erry Mill and from the River Brosna. By improving linkages and connections, the Town Centre can be re-imagined as a people-focused place.

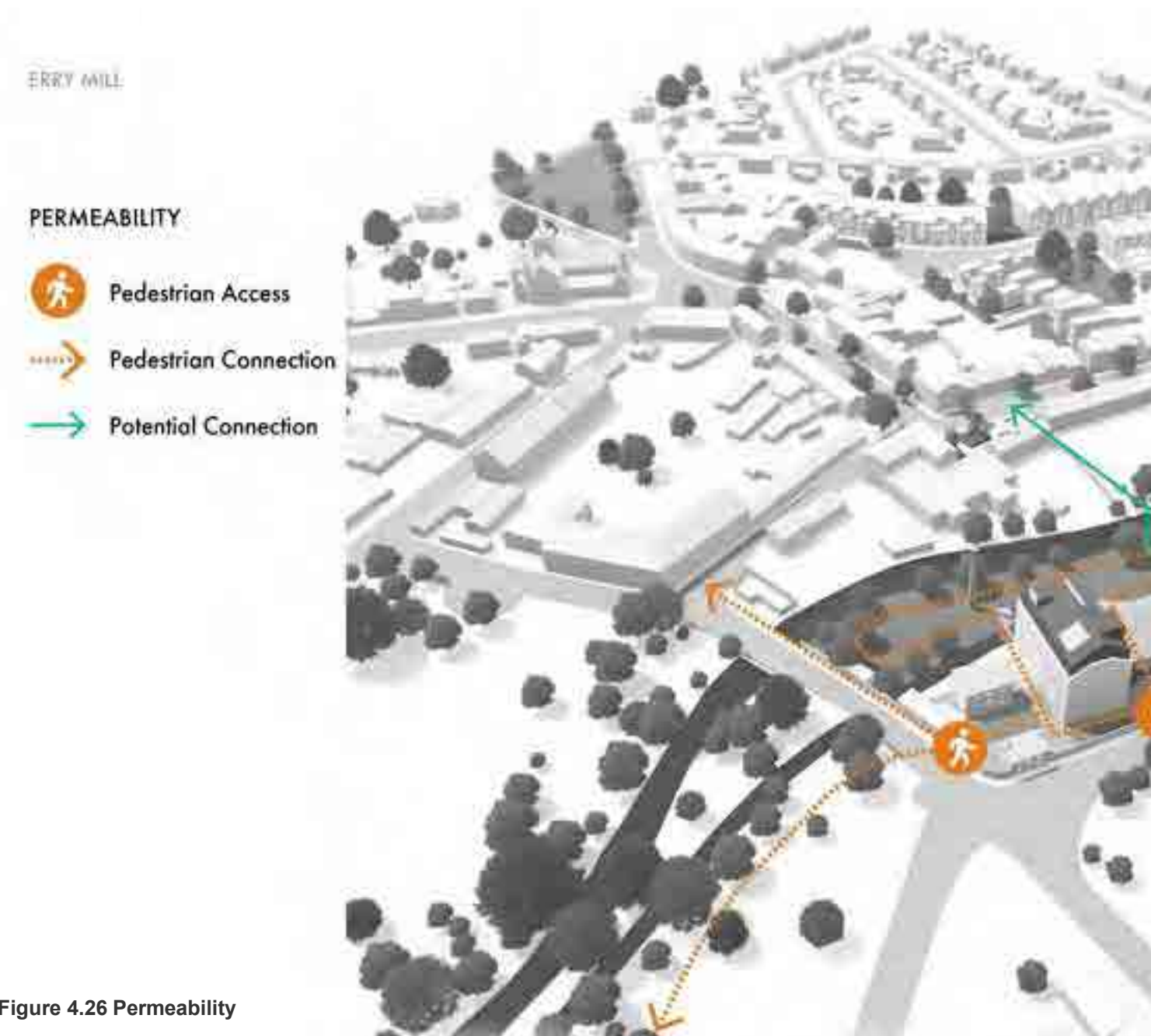


Figure 4.26 Permeability

Creating a more permeable and legible Town Centre destination that facilitates an ease of movement for residents, workers, and visitors will entice people to spend more time in the Town Centre, contributing positivity to its vitality and vibrancy.



Project Features

- Upgrade and improvement of existing active travel linkages to and from Main Street and River Street.
- Promotes a Town Centre that prioritises active travel modes over private car use.
- Provides for greater pedestrian and cyclist activity in the Town Centre.
- Project contributes to an enhanced and integrated public realm.

Project Physical Changes

- Increased pedestrian and cycle movements to and from the Town Centre.
- Construction of pedestrian/cycle bridge(s) across the River Brosna connecting River Street, Frederick Street and the Erry Mill site.
- Upgrades to the existing connection from Clara railway station to the Town Centre including the provision of a new bicycle hub.

Project Outcomes

- Enhanced connectivity between Main Street, River Street, the River, Erry Mill and the railway station.
- Promotion of sustainable modes of travel within the Town Centre.
- Greater activity and vibrancy within the Town Centre producing social and economic benefits.
- Safer and more welcoming Town Centre where citizens have more movement options.

PROJECT

13

New Neighbourhood Quarter

Regeneration and redevelopment at a key location in the Town Centre.





Project Area - Town Green & Main Street

New Neighbourhood Quarter

The proposed new neighbourhood quarter is located at the axis of Main Street (west) and River Street (south) and stretches in an easterly direction to The Green. The built form of the streetscape on Main/River Street has a traditional arrangement whereby buildings are generally two-three storey, have immediate frontage to the street, with outbuildings and undeveloped lands positioned to the rear. The density of development is less on The Green, comprising residential dwellings with front and rear gardens, with bungalows located on the site side of this road. The lands comprising the site for the proposed quarter are characterised by a large central greenfield area.

The Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the project is to regenerate an important backlands opportunity site, as identified in the Clara Town Plan (Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027, Volume 2:

Settlement Plans), in the Town as a new neighbourhood quarter that can create increased vibrancy in the Town Centre. The creation of a new quarter can bring forward a number of outcomes such as promoting a compact urban structure, re-developing Town Centre lands in an efficient and sustainable manner, bringing sterile backlands into active use, promoting Town Centre living and providing a range of uses that will benefit the community over the long term.

A key element of the neighbourhood quarter will be to increase permeability from The Green/ River Street to Main Street through the provision of new linkages that will result in a more connected Town Centre. The new quarter aligns with the Clara Town Team's 2nd Blueprint document that recommends "*new streets created in brownfield sites designed to accommodate mixed housing*".

Project Features

- Redevelopment of brownfield and greenfield lands situated in a key backlands opportunity site in the Town Centre for a new mixed-use neighbourhood quarter.
- Increased opportunity for Town Centre living where services and amenities can be accessed by walking and cycling modes.
- New central area of public open space to complement the built form.

Project Physical Changes

- Physical redevelopment of existing buildings and undeveloped backlands within the Town Centre.
- New public open space area.
- New walking and cycling route network.
- Improvement in the visual quality of the urban environment.

Project Outcomes

- Regeneration of a key backlands location within the Town Centre that will promote a mix of uses and Town Centre living.
- Efficient redevelopment of under-utilised backlands and buildings that align with the principles of compact growth.
- Enhanced permeability and connectivity.



Figure 4.27 Main Street, Clara - Present Day



Figure 4.28 River Street, Clara - Present Day

New Neighbourhood Quarter



Figure 4.29 New Neighbourhood Quarter



Figure 4.30 Infill Site Activation

LANDS TO THE SOUTH OF RIVER STREET / MAIN STREET

INFILL SITE ACTIVATION

Ø Uninhabited lands

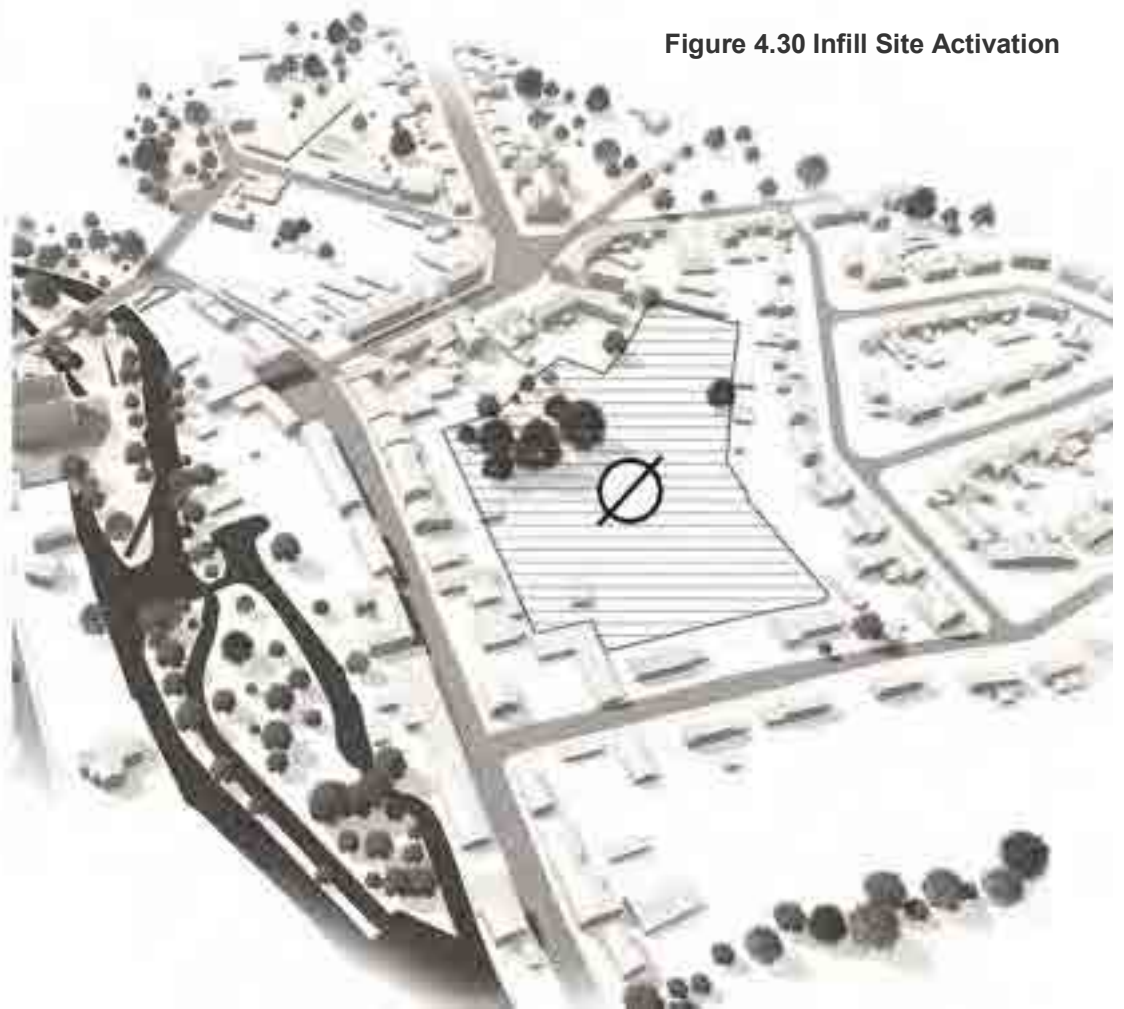


Figure 4.31 Building Plots

LANDS TO THE SOUTH OF RIVER STREET / MAIN STREET

PROPOSED SCHEME STRUCTURE

● Building Plots

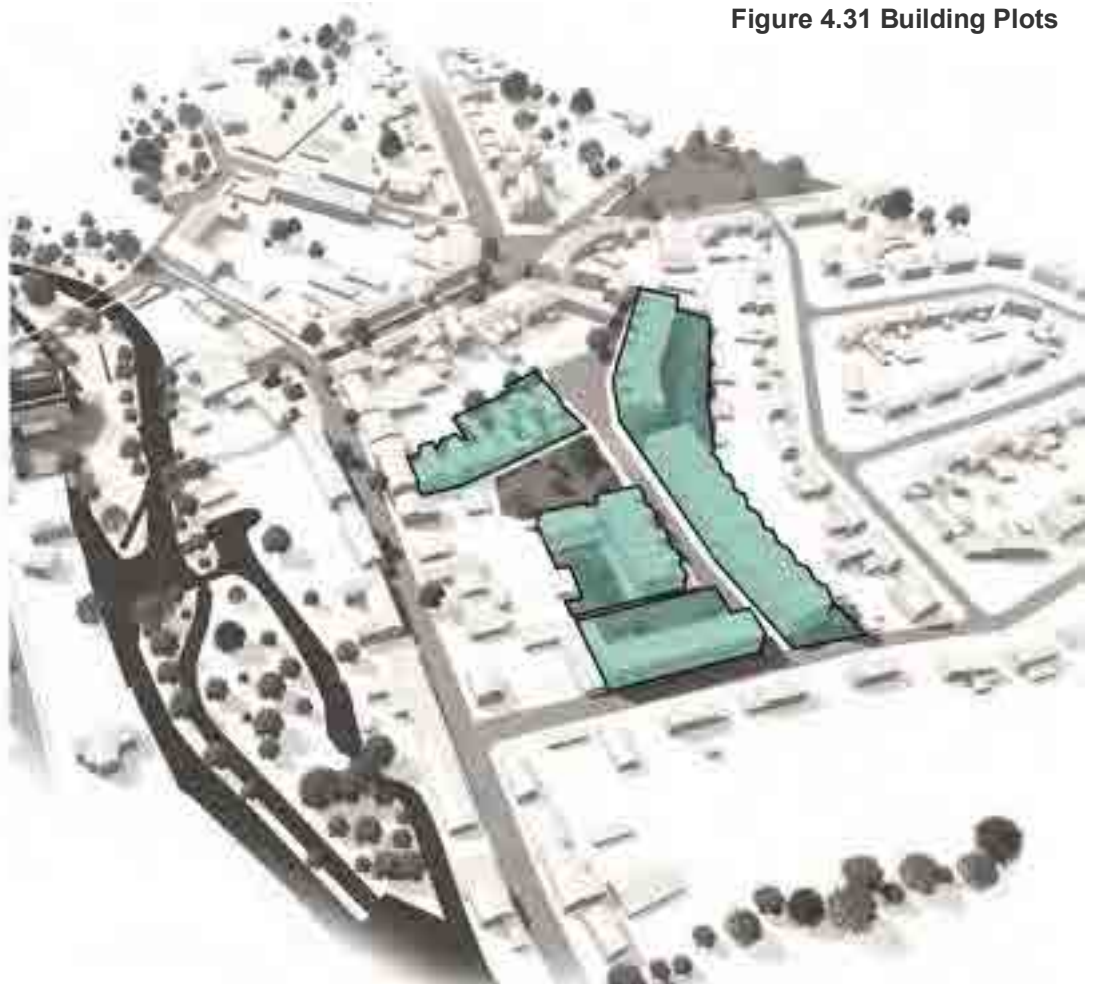


Figure 4.32 Housing Typologies

LANDS TO THE REAR OF RIVER STREET / MAIN STREET

HOUSING TYPOLOGIES

- Detached house
- Semi-detached house
- Terrace house
- Apartments
- Duplex

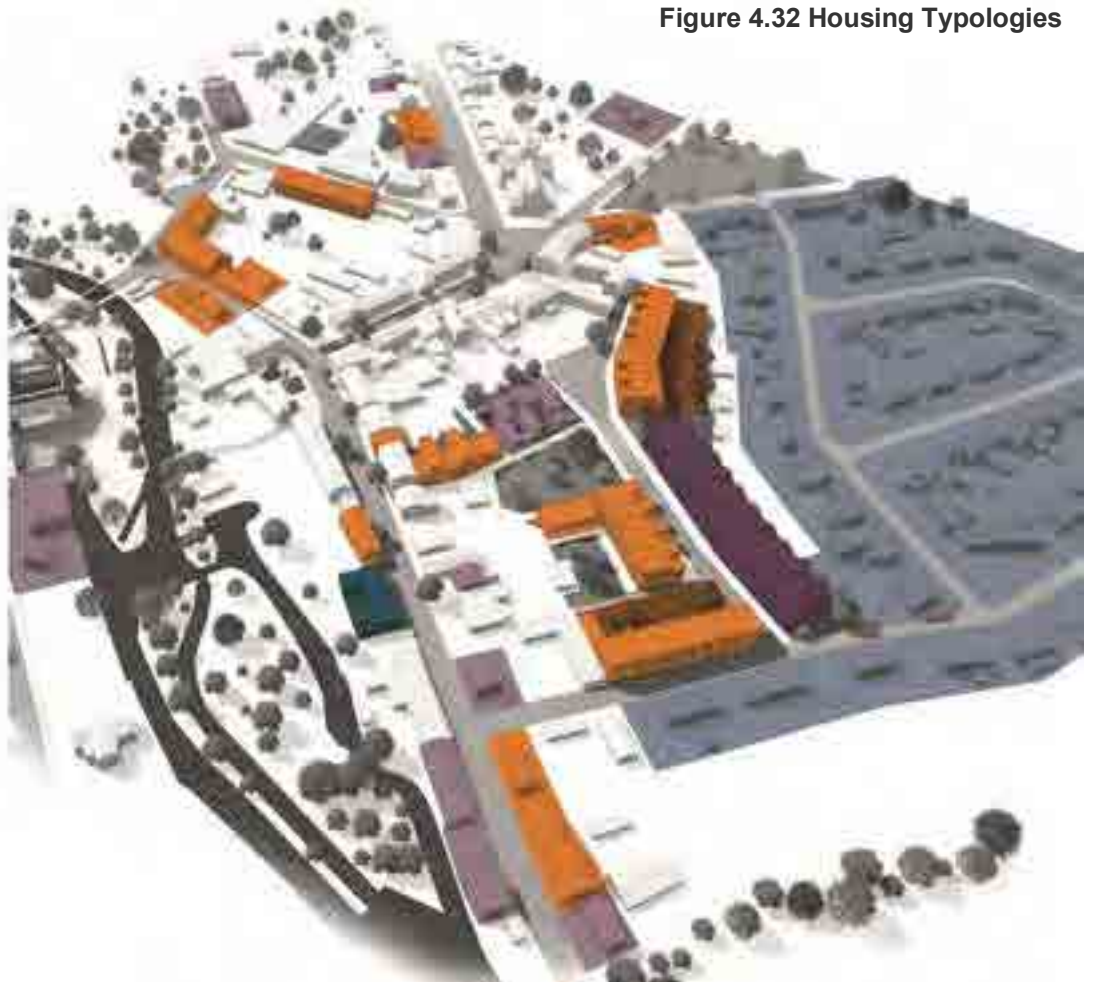


Figure 4.33 Access Points

LANDS TO THE REAR OF RIVER STREET / MAIN STREET

CONSOLIDATION OF THE MAIN STREET

- Access points

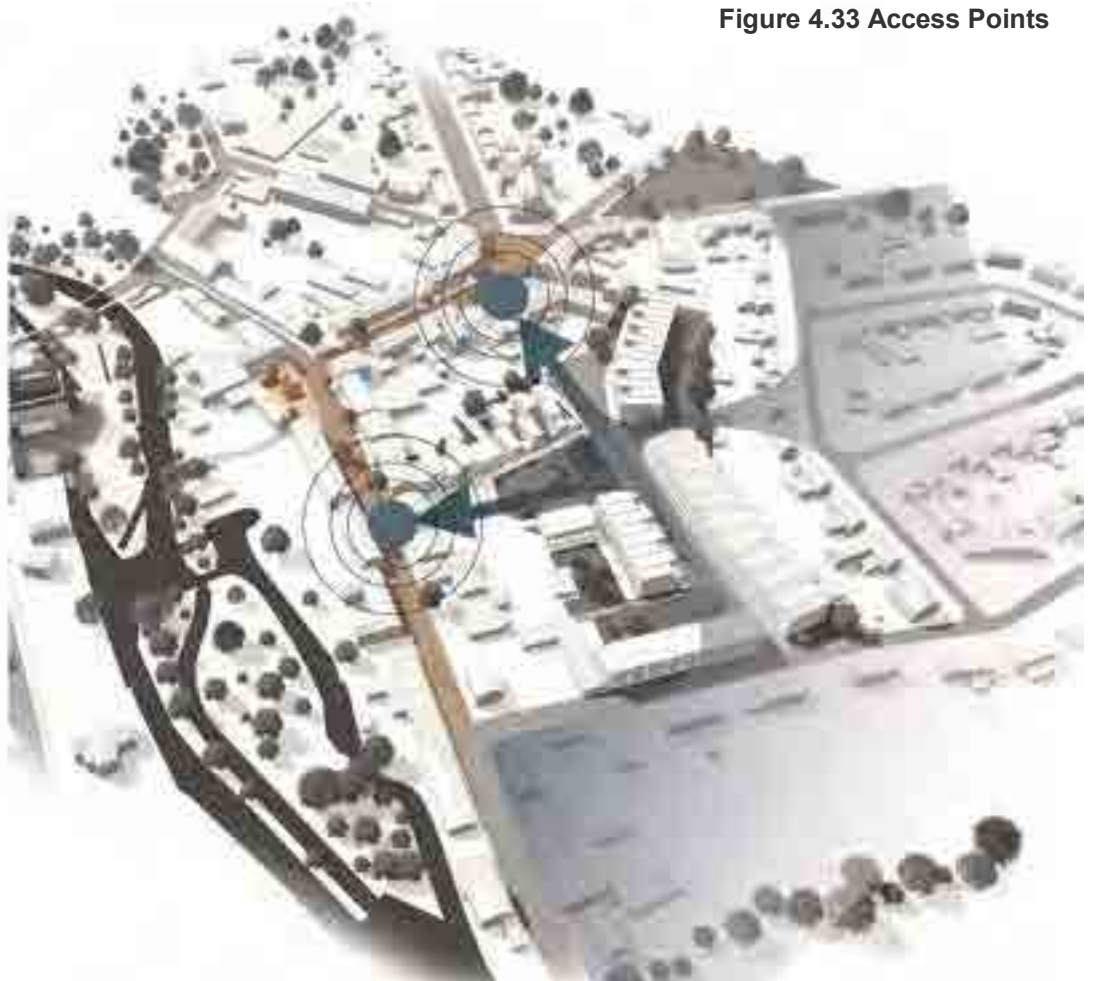


Figure 4.34 Vehicular Accessibility & Parking

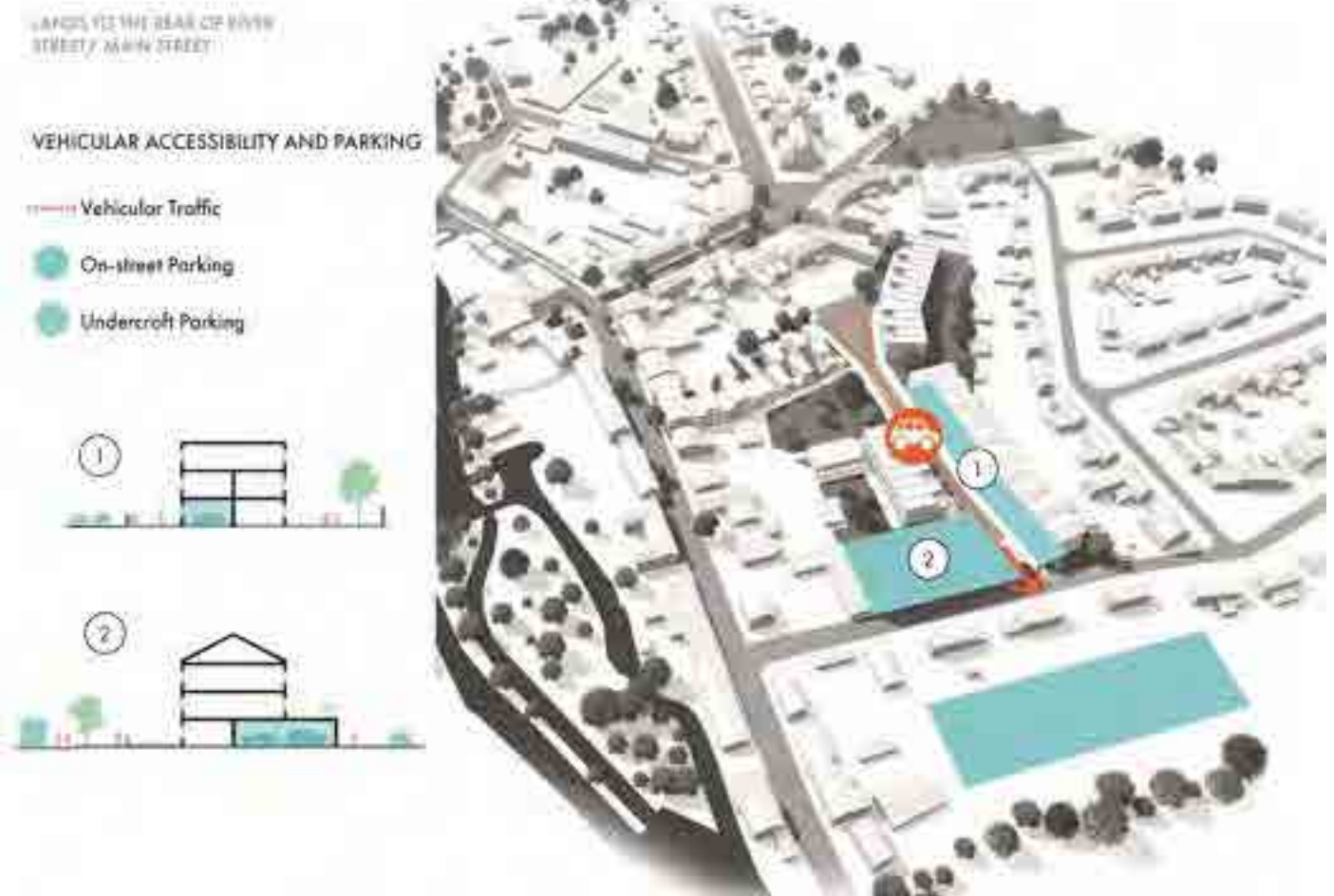


Figure 4.35 Unit Types

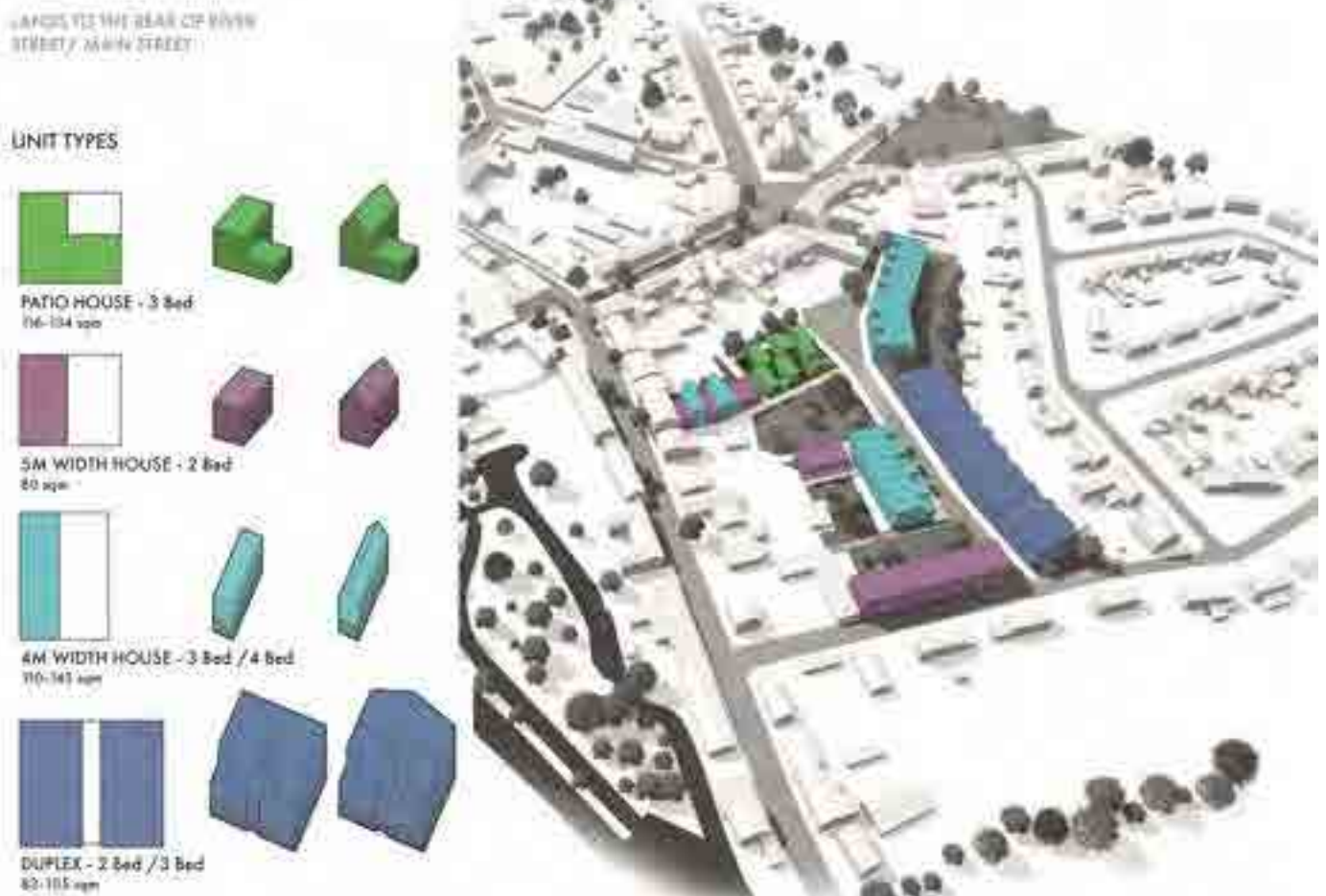


Figure 4.36 Green Courtyard

LANDS TO THE REAR OF RIVER STREET / MAIN STREET

GREEN COURTYARD

- Private Open Space
- Semi-Public Open Space
- Public Open Space

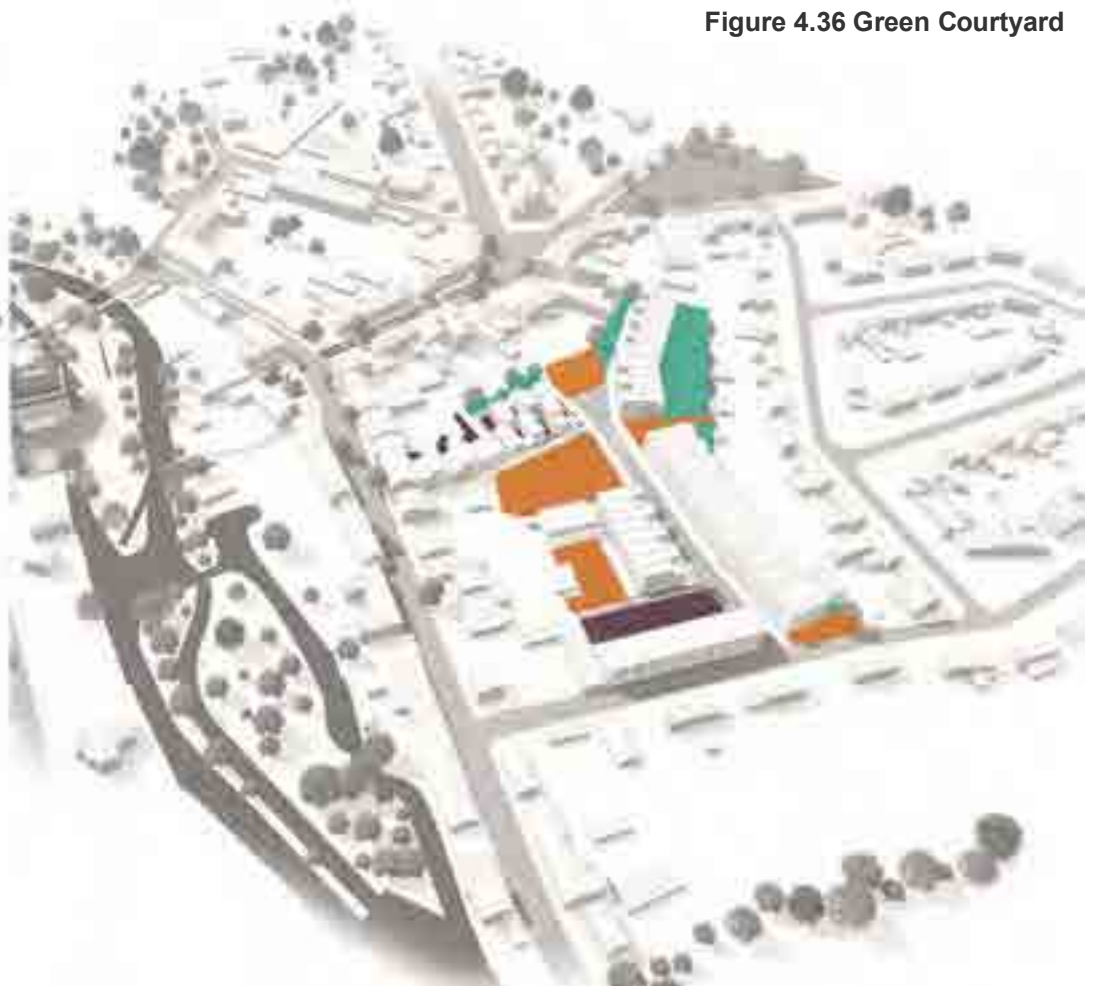
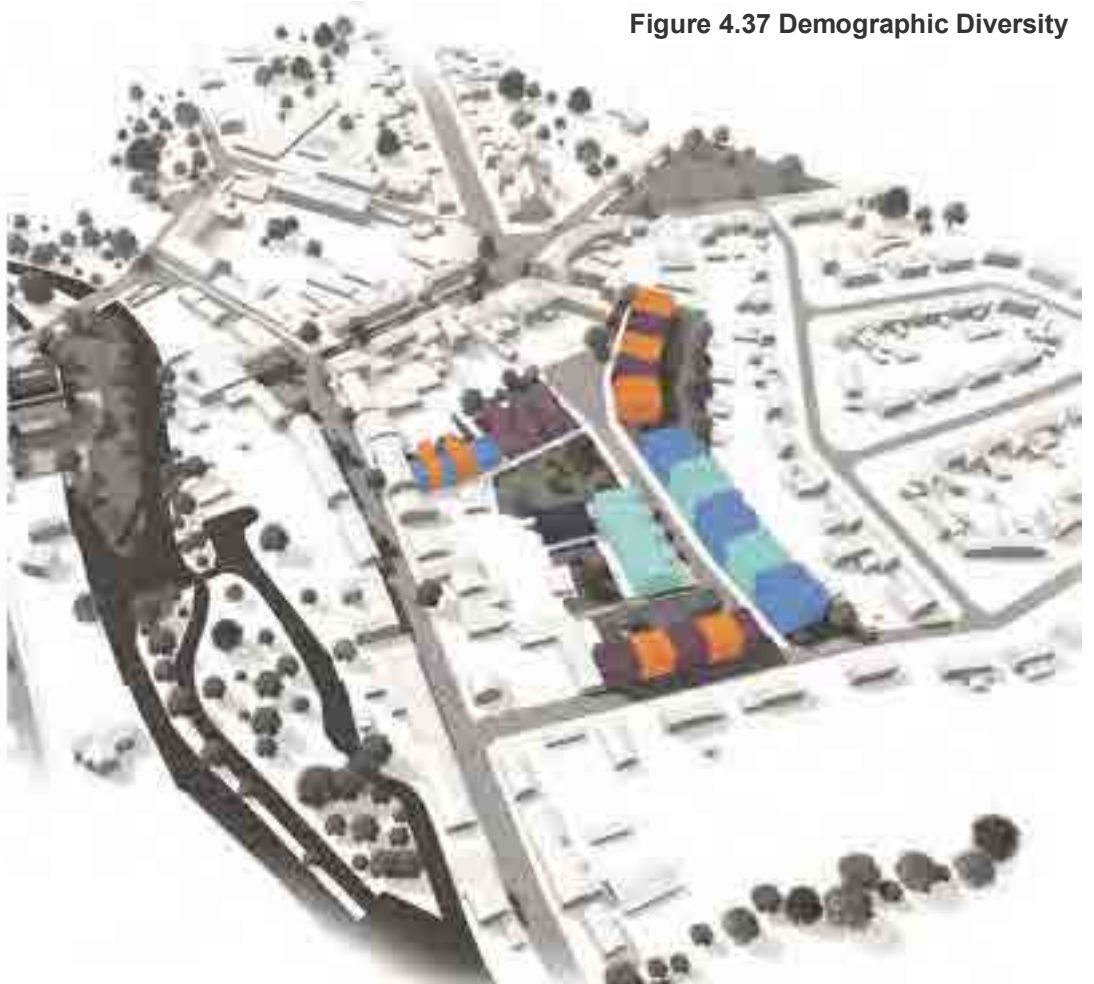


Figure 4.37 Demographic Diversity

LANDS TO THE REAR OF RIVER STREET / MAIN STREET

DEMOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY

- Individuals
- Students
- Couples
- Families
- Elderly



New Neighbourhood Quarter



Figure 4.38 New Neighbourhood Quarter - Future Option



PROJECT

14

Erry Mill Site

Celebrating the story of Clara's unique and rich industrial heritage at the Erry Mill site.





Project Area - Heritage & Tourism Loop

Erry Mill Site

The Erry Mill site is located at the junction of Frederick Street and Clara Bridge and makes a significant contribution to the story of Clara's unique and rich industrial heritage. The main mill building is a substantial and prominent building within this part of the Town Centre and streetscape, being six storeys in height. Unfortunately, through time, the physical condition of the mill building has deteriorated with the roof almost fully collapsed.

The grouping of buildings and structures on the site also includes the distinctive tall red brick chimney, mill manager's house and forge/ smithy building that are in view from the public road network. The additional buildings in this locale, as described, are in a better condition than the mill building and also contribute positively to the streetscape. Collectively, this group of former industrial heritage buildings make a significant contribution to the townscape of Clara.

The Purpose of the Project

The Erry Mill site offers the potential opportunity to not only regenerate a number of noteworthy buildings within the Town Centre, which in itself is important, but also to celebrate and promote the story of Clara's former industrial history.

The regeneration of the Erry Mill site aligns with the themes of 'Heritage Tourism' and 'Placemaking' within this TCF Plan through the conservation and restoration of key heritage buildings for a new tourism development use. Benefits of this project intervention also include wider environmental improvements to the overall site and an enhancement to the visual quality of the urban environment around Frederick Street.

Project Features

- Sympathetic redevelopment of the Erry Mill site for a new tourism-based development.
- Conservation and re-use of a number of significant and valuable heritage buildings.
- Promotes a tourism offer for the Town Centre.
- Access to a key heritage asset within Clara.

Project Physical Changes

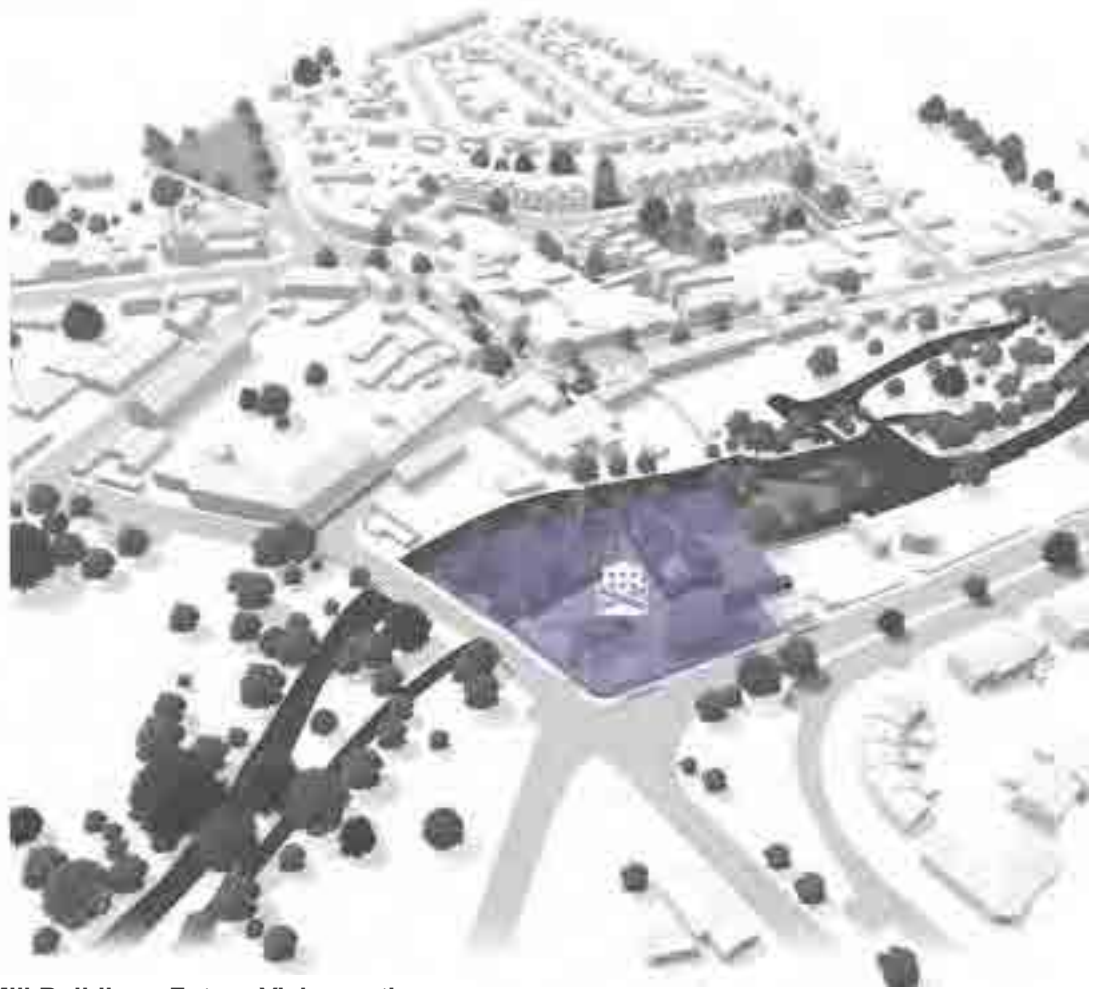
- Physical restoration of the Erry Mill site and associated buildings.
- Construction of new pedestrian links to the Town Centre.
- Improvements to the overall quality of the townscape.

Project Outcomes

- A new tourism development for Clara.
- Increased visitor numbers to Clara that can generate additional economic benefits.
- Vibrancy and connectivity between the train station and River Street.
- Visual representation of Clara's industrial heritage past.
- Creation of a new 'destination' within Clara.

ACTIVATION OF DERELICT SITE

 Erry Mill Lands



4.39 Re-activated Erry Mill Building - Future Vision option

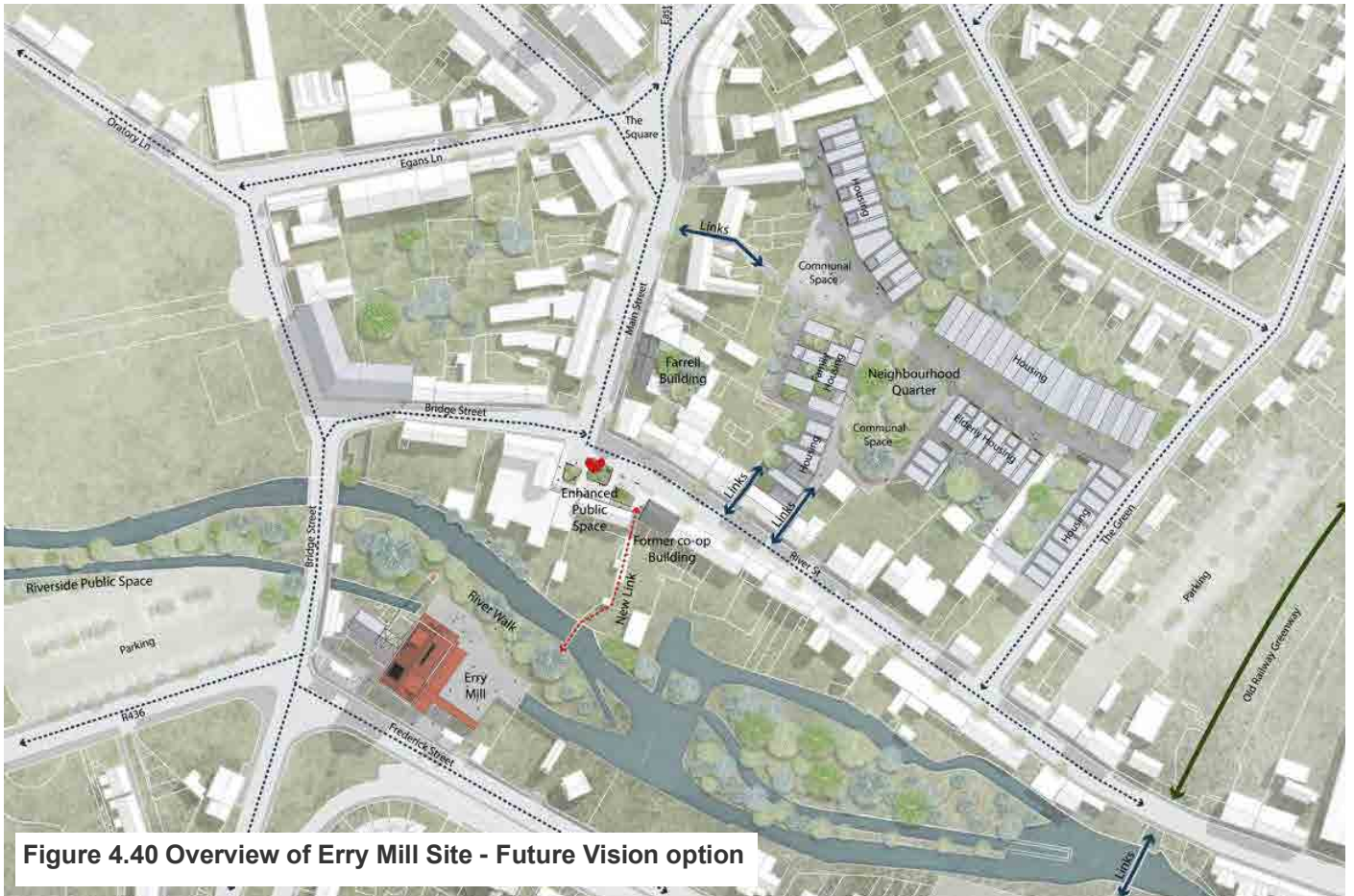


Figure 4.40 Overview of Erry Mill Site - Future Vision option

Erry Mill Redevelopment



Figure 4.41 Erry Mill Redevelopment



Figure 4.42 Town Centre Regeneration

ERRY MILL

TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION

-  Erry Mill
-  Potential Cultural Hubs

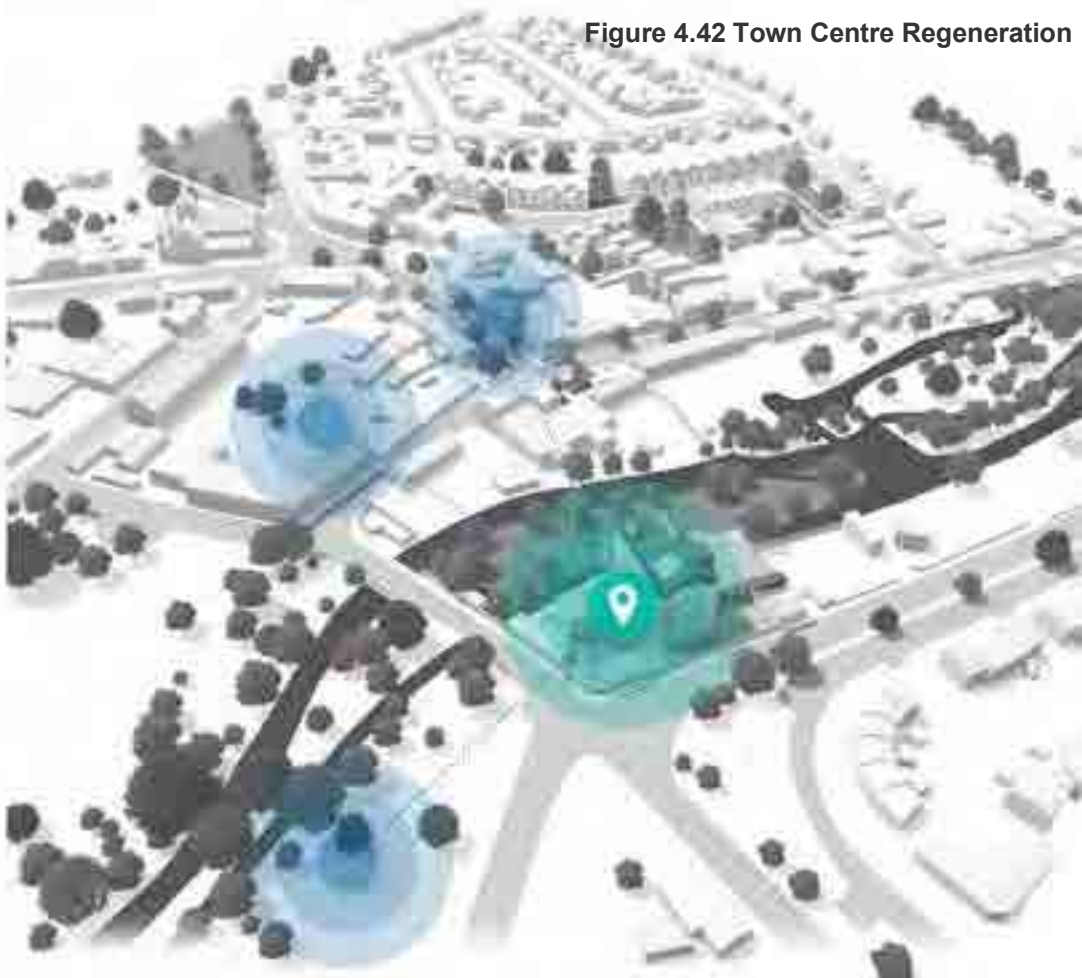


Figure 4.43 Permeability

ERRY MILL

PERMEABILITY

-  Pedestrian Access
-  Pedestrian Connection
-  Potential Connection

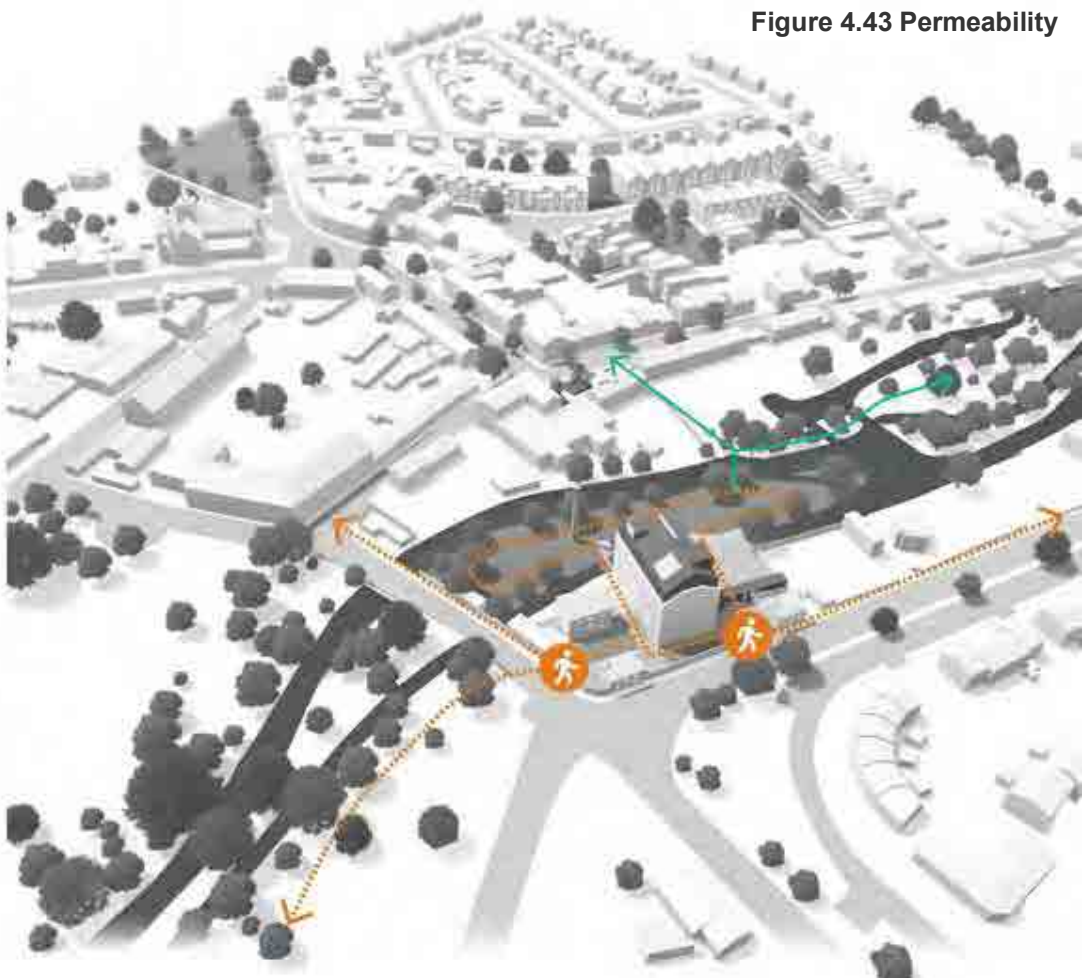
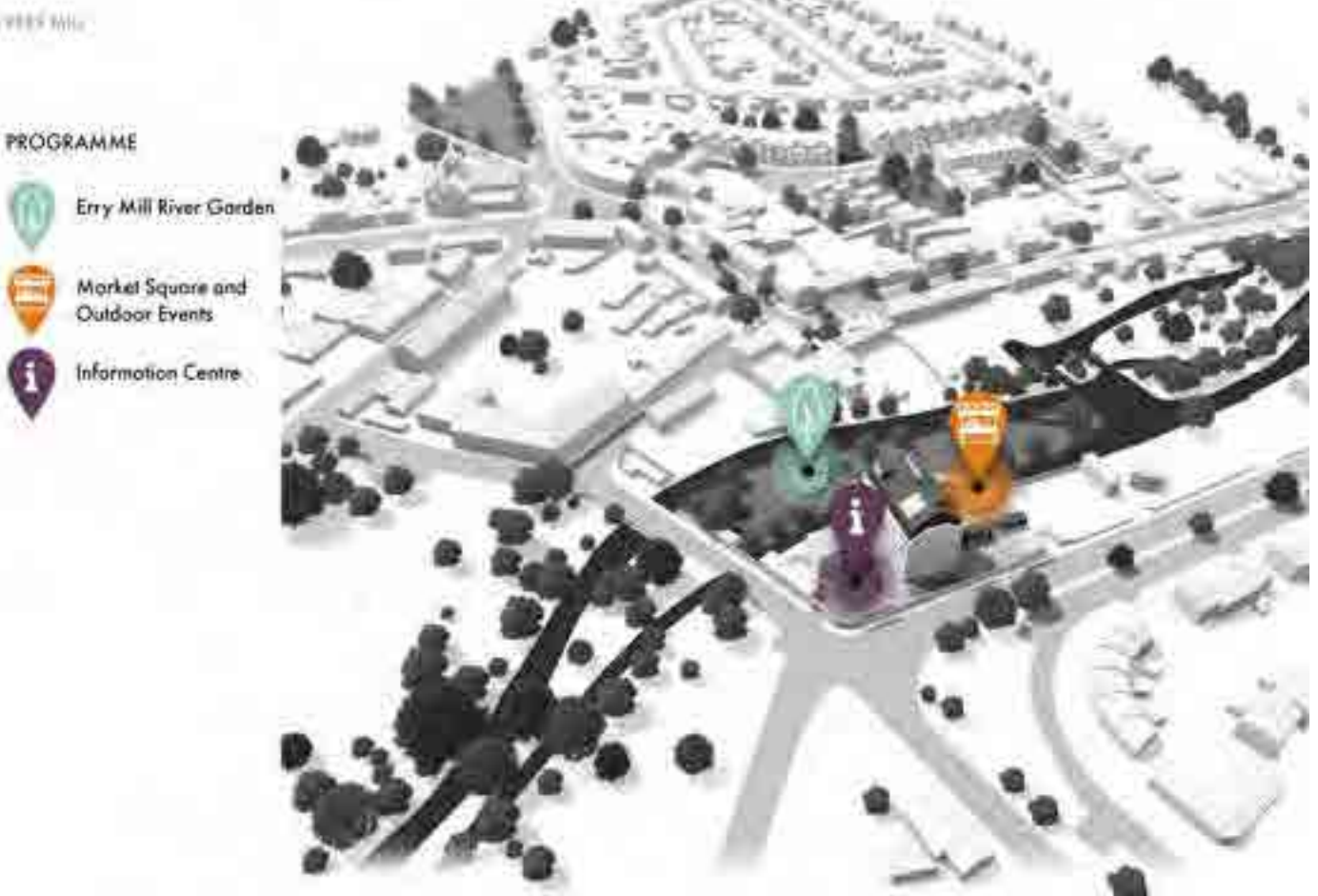


Figure 4.44 Landmarks



Figure 4.45 Programme



Case Study - Church of Oak Distillery, Monasterevin, Co. Kildare

Heritage Regeneration

Introduction

The former Cassidy's Distillery occupies a c.2 hectare site a short distance north of Monasterevin, Co. Kildare. The town has a long-established whiskey-making tradition dating back to the 1780s when John Cassidy opened his distillery. The original Ballykelly Mills site dates back to the early 1800s and began as a large corn and flour mill.

This significant heritage regeneration project comprises the development of a distillery and visitor centre (including ancillary development such as café and maturation facilities). The project involves the restoration of the former seven storey Ballykelly Malthouse building, a Protected Structure. The heritage project is under construction and is nearing completion.

As well as its primary use as a functioning high-end whiskey distillery, the distillery features whiskey tasting rooms, a roof garden, terrace, gallery rooms and an exhibition area for visitors.

The distillery has an advantageous location and is situated adjacent to the Grand Canal which forms part of the Barrow Blueway. The Blueway is a 46km multi-use shared leisure route which runs alongside the Barrow Line of the Grand Canal between Athy and Robertstown.



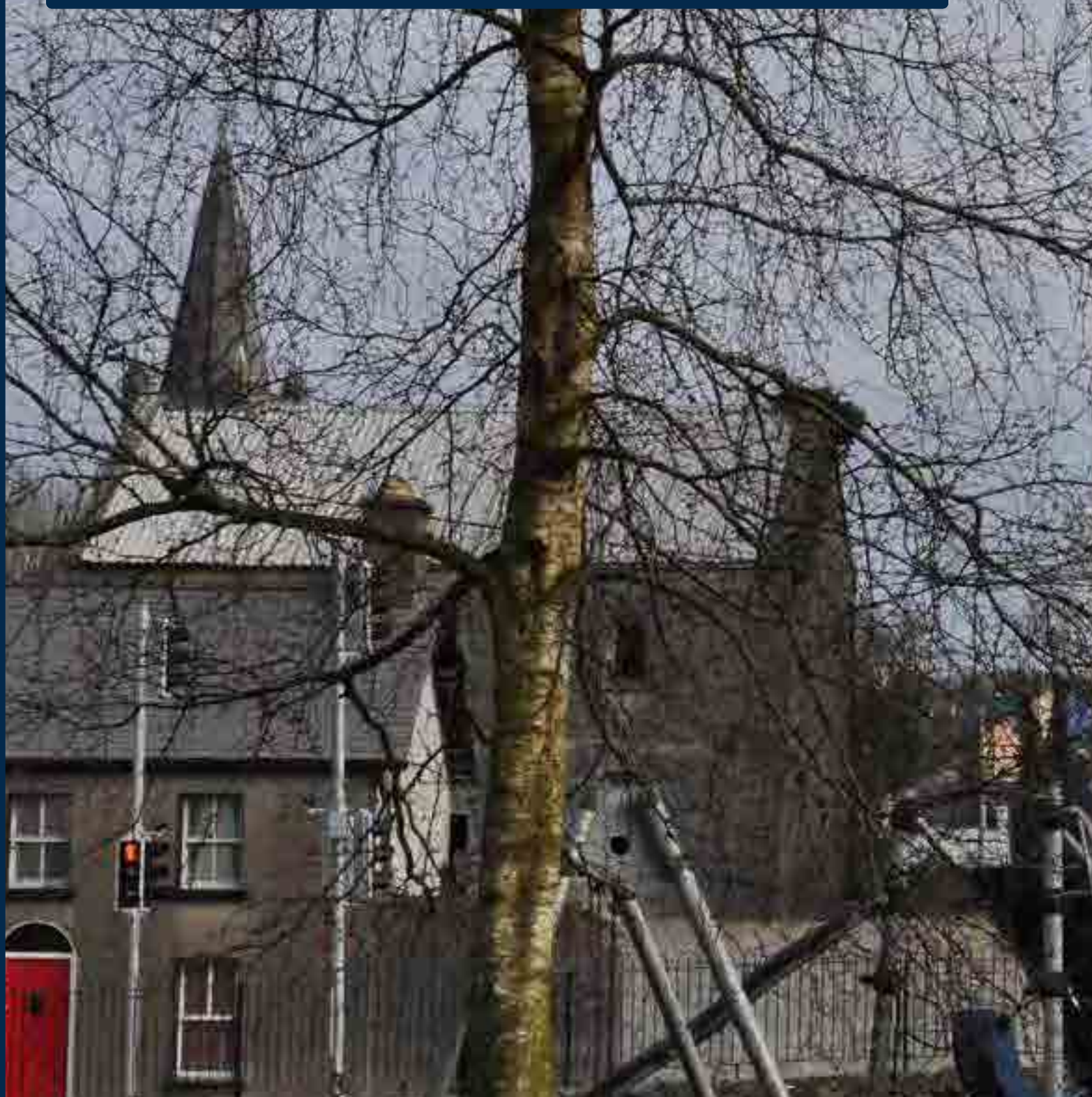


PROJECT

15

Heritage Buildings Opportunities

Regenerating and re-activating Clara's valuable heritage buildings.





Project Area - Town Green & Main Street / Heritage & Tourism Loop

Heritage Buildings Opportunities

Clara has a rich network of heritage buildings that are located throughout the Town Centre. These buildings provide a unique insight into Clara's past and the evolution of the settlement through time. Clara's heritage buildings and Protected Structures are a valuable built asset for the town and local community. They provide significant architectural, historic, and cultural value and interest.

This project comprises a number of prominent heritage buildings in Clara. However, this project is not limited to these buildings only. Rather, this project is brought forward to highlight the benefits and opportunities heritage buildings in general can generate for Clara. The heritage buildings highlighted within this project include:

- Erry Mill (Frederick Street).
- Charlestown Mill (R420).

- Clashawaun Jute Works (Brendan Street).
- Lehinch Monastery Abbey (Kilbeggan Road).
- Family Resource & Community Centre (River Street).

The Purpose of this Project

The purpose of this project is to direct a focus on Clara's valuable built heritage assets. Through renovation and regeneration, these buildings offer a range of land use opportunities comprising residential, commercial, cultural, tourism and leisure uses, for example. Funding opportunities, such as the Historic Structures Fund, can assist with the conservation and enhancement of heritage buildings for the benefit of the community and public. As set out within this Section, Erry Mill has been selected as a key project intervention that could realise a new heritage tourism development within the Town Centre.



Figure 4.46 Clashawaun Jute Works - Present Day



Figure 4.47 Erry Mill Site - Future Vision option as a new Heritage Tourism development



Figure 4.48 Charlestown Mill - Present Day

Heritage Building Case Study 1

Pot Duggan's, Ennistymon, Co. Clare



Project Summary

Pot Duggan's bar and restaurant is located in the town of Ennistymon, Co. Clare. The two storey building originates from c.1840-1880 and is a Protected Structure (RPS Ref. 356). The building's original use was a private residence with outbuildings to the rear. Around the turn of the century, a timber pilaster shopfront was installed and the structure changed use to a shop. Further renovation and refurbishment works were carried out in 2017-2018.

The current commercial enterprise is an example of how a small scale Protected Structure can be successfully restored as a contemporary food and beverage premises. The works to the building have retained its original character and it makes a significant contribution to the quality of the New Road streetscape and the vibrancy of the local area, delivering positive environmental, social and economic outcomes for Ennistymon.

Heritage Building Case Study 2

The Millhouse, Slane, Co. Meath



Source: www.themillhouse.ie

Project Summary

The Millhouse is located in the village of Slane, Co. Meath. The complex of heritage buildings and Protected Structures were originally constructed in 1766 and comprised a former corn mill that evolved to become a linen manufacturer in time. On site, the Protected Structures include a former miller's house (RPS Ref. 90696), mill building (RPS Ref. 90694), gate lodge building (RPS Ref. 90689) and chimney (RPS Ref. 90695).

In 2006, the complex was fully restored and transformed into a contemporary commercial enterprise as wedding venue. Guest accommodation, glamping and retreats are also available on site. The Millhouse is an example of how a large scale former industrial complex, with Protected Structures, can be rejuvenated and brought back into active commercial use. The complex is only 850 metres from the village centre and it has delivered positive outcomes for Slane through the generation of new employment opportunities and sympathetic restoration of the aforesaid heritage buildings.

Clara Heritage Assets

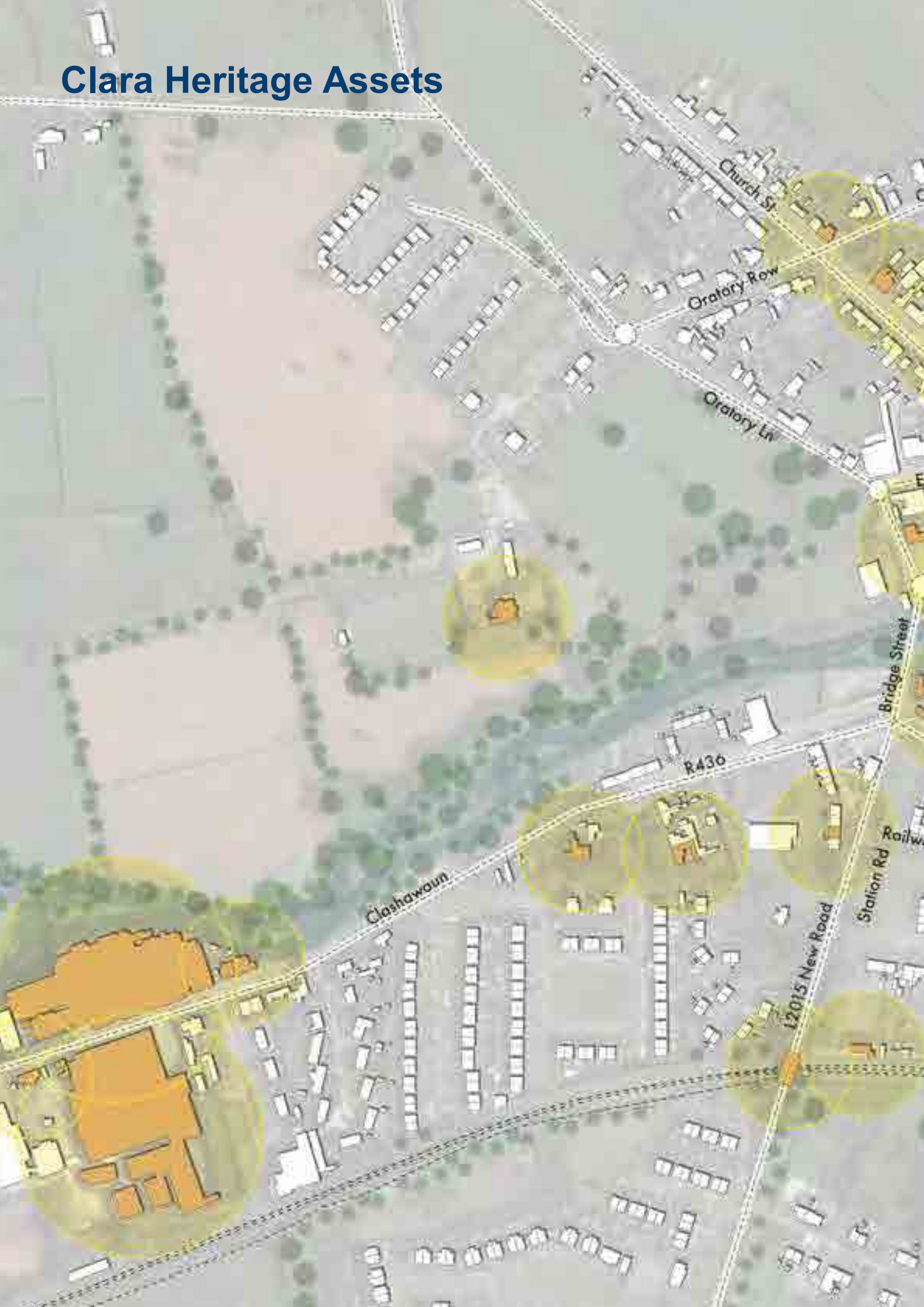


Figure 4.49 Clara Heritage Assets



Clara Vacant Buildings



Figure 4.50 Clara Vacant Buildings



Clashawaun Jute Works - A Case Study

Background

The Clashawaun Jute Works site is situated on the R436 route in the western area of Clara. The buildings that comprise the Jute Works were originally constructed in 1864 and they represent a significant part of Clara's industrial heritage.

By the 1900s, employment at the Jute Works had exceeded 600 people which demonstrates the economic importance of the works to the town. Uniquely, it was the only Jute Works in operation in Ireland at that time which again illustrates its significance. The Jute Works ceased operation in 1971 after 106 years of operation however the works had firmly placed Clara on the industrial map of Ireland.

The architectural heritage value of the Jute Works is evidenced by a number of the buildings on site being Protected Structures including the weaving works factory (RPS Ref. 12-39) and spinning works factory (RPS Ref. 12-37).

The Clashawaun Jute Works, while no longer in operation, form a key part of the living heritage of Clara and retain a significant level of historical interest for the town's population. Due to the former operations that took place on site, and taking cognisance of the numerous buildings and structures that still remain, the Jute Works site offers a multitude of potential uses that can allow the site and its buildings to be regenerated and re-used for the benefit of the town and the local community.



Source: Google Earth

Clashawaun Jute Works - Future Options

Regeneration Potential

As described, the Clashawaun Jute Works has significant regeneration and redevelopment potential to accommodate a variety of future uses given the physical size of the site and the number of buildings present. The images below present regeneration options for Clashawaun and are examples that have been sourced from a number of European towns. Former industrial sites such as Zollverein in Essen and Landschaftspark in Duisberg, Germany, are case studies of how former industrial sites have been successfully regenerated and re-purposed for different land uses.

Festivals and Events



Heritage & Tourism



Sport and Recreation



Climate and Ecology



Sustainable Energy



Clara - Future Townscape



Figure 4.51 Clara Town Centre - Future Vision



Table 4.1 Summary of Project Intervention Alignment with Town Centre First Policy document

Project Details	Project Alignment with TCF Policy
Townscape Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes to attractive public realm. • Contributes to building stock that creates visual interest and animates streets and spaces. • Conserve, adapt and highlight historical buildings and streetscapes that provide the town with a unique identity. • Attractive vibrant places for enterprises to grow and develop.
River Walk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes to the range of cultural, recreational and community spaces that bring together community members and attract visitors/tourists. • Well connected and accessible to sustainable modes of transport. • Provide opportunities for the amenity, health and well-being of residents, workers and visitors.
Town Centre Cycle Routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well connected and accessible to sustainable modes of transport. • Provide opportunities for the amenity, health and well-being of residents, workers and visitors.
Former Co-Op Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes to attractive public realm. • Contributes to well maintained building stock that creates visual interest and animates streets and spaces. • Well connected and accessible to sustainable modes of transport. • Attractive vibrant places for enterprises to grow and develop.
Reservoir Nature Walk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes to the range of cultural, recreational and community spaces that bring together community members and attract visitors/tourists. • Well connected and accessible to sustainable modes of transport. • Provide opportunities for the amenity, health and well-being of residents, workers and visitors.
Town Centre Parking Locations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage traffic within central areas.
Star Community Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes to well maintained building stock that creates visual interest and animates streets and spaces. • Conserve, adapt and highlight historical buildings and streetscapes that provide the town with a unique identity. • Well connected and accessible to sustainable modes of transport.
Heritage-led Competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes to attractive public realm. • Contributes to the range of cultural, recreational and community spaces that bring together community members and attract visitors/tourists. • Provide opportunities for the amenity, health and well-being of residents, workers and visitors.
Railway Greenway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes to the range of cultural, recreational and community spaces that bring together community members and attract visitors/tourists. • Well connected and accessible to sustainable modes of transport. • Provide opportunities for the amenity, health and well-being of residents, workers and visitors.

Project Details	Project Alignment with TCF Policy
Farrell Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adds to variety of services/shops that provide employment opportunities. • Contributes to well maintained building stock that creates visual interest and animates streets and spaces. • Conserve, adapt and highlight historical buildings and streetscapes that provide the town with a unique identity. • Well connected and accessible to sustainable modes of transport. • Attractive vibrant places for enterprises to grow and develop.
Water Sports Facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes to the range of cultural, recreational and community spaces that bring together community members and attract visitors/tourists. • Attractive vibrant places for enterprises to grow and develop. • Well connected and accessible to sustainable modes of transport. • Provide opportunities for the amenity, health and well-being of residents, workers and visitors.
Main Street Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes to attractive public realm. • Well connected and accessible to sustainable modes of transport. • Prioritise vulnerable users (pedestrians and cyclists), enabling them to move about safely and in comfort. • Provide opportunities for the amenity, health and well-being of residents, workers and visitors.
Neighbourhood Quarter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes to attractive public realm. • Contributes to building stock that creates visual interest and animates streets and spaces. • Well connected and accessible to sustainable modes of transport. • Provide a mix of housing typologies and tenures to cater for diverse communities in terms of age, income and mobility. • Utilise digital technology to enhance living. • Provide opportunities for the amenity, health and well-being of residents, workers and visitors.
Erry Mill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adds to variety of services/shops that provide employment opportunities. • Contributes to the range of cultural, recreational and community spaces that bring together community members and attract visitors/tourists. • Conserve, adapt and highlight historical buildings and streetscapes that provide the town with a unique identity. • Well connected and accessible to sustainable modes of transport. • Attractive vibrant places for enterprises to grow and develop.
Heritage Buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes to attractive public realm. • Adds to variety of services/shops that provide employment opportunities. • Contributes to the range of cultural, recreational and community spaces that bring together community members and attract visitors/tourists. • Contributes to well maintained building stock that creates visual interest and animates streets and spaces. • Conserve, adapt and highlight historical buildings and streetscapes that provide the town with a unique identity. • Well connected and accessible to sustainable modes of transport. • Attractive vibrant places for enterprises to grow and develop.

Implementation and Delivery Plan

This Town Centre First Plan builds on Clara’s existing strength as a great place to live as characterised by the strong community spirit that was evident during the public engagement process.

Vision

The TCF Plan is centred around its core Vision which seeks to ensure a better quality of life for all through the delivery of an attractive, sustainable, vibrant and prosperous Town Centre. In order to achieve the Vision, key themes representing important regeneration elements have been identified and associated with each theme are project interventions and a series of related objectives and outcomes.

Interventions

As outlined in this section, the project interventions seek to regenerate and rejuvenate Clara’s Town Centre as a place that exhibits the TCF Plan outcomes as well as alignment with national, regional and local policy.

The next steps forward from the identification of project interventions is to establish a strategy for project delivery and to secure funding. Funding and delivery are crucially important steps as the Vision for the Town Centre will only be realised by ensuring the projects as proposed are followed through and ultimately delivered on the ground.



Figure 4.52 Intervention, Funding & Delivery Elements

Delivery

The preparation of a Town Centre First Plan for Clara is the first step in the delivery of a revitalised Town Centre. The TCF Plan sets out the Vision and the interventions required to re-imagine and regenerate Clara over the long term with the objective of ensuring a quality of life for all through the delivery of an attractive, sustainable, vibrant and prosperous Town Centre.

The delivery process undertaken in respect of the proposed project interventions, and ultimately the success of the Town Centre First Plan, will involve a framework of different stakeholders at national, regional and local levels. The degree of success in relation to the delivery of project interventions will be reliant upon the successful interaction and engagement of stakeholders at all levels.

Broadly, the composition of stakeholders will involve the participation of:

- Government departments
- State sponsored agencies
- Regional Assembly
- Local Authority & Town Team
- Clara Chamber of Commerce
- Private landowners / private developers
- Non-governmental organisations
- Local community

The Town Centre First Policy sets out that, at national level, a National Oversight and Advisory Group (NOAG) will be established with the purpose of monitoring and guiding the overall delivery process. NOAG will also have the responsibility of providing a shared forum for engagement with Government departments and stakeholders at a national level.

At a local level, the role of the Town Team in the wider development and delivery process is crucial (Figure 4.52). The role of the Town

Team is supported by Offaly County Council (OCC) and the Town Regeneration Officer. Within its role, OCC has responsibility at a county level for matters concerning housing, enterprise, heritage, public amenities, transportation for example, all of whom are important for the future Town Centre Vision. The Town Centre First Policy establishes the delivery of projects will be done in collaboration with the local authority (and others as required) which effectively demonstrates the importance of the role of OCC. Furthermore, the Council provides the Town Regeneration Officer who contributes to the delivery process by assisting local authority co-ordination and engagement with multi-disciplinary teams.

It is considered that the overall timeframe for the implementation and delivery of the project interventions in Clara will not exceed a period of 15 years in order to maximise the economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits anticipated by the interventions. An important step in the delivery of the project interventions is to determine project priority.

Due to the differing characteristics of each project intervention, in terms of their size, detail, funding requirements, stakeholder participation etc., it is advantageous to establish project priority for Clara. This approach is beneficial for a number of reasons such as targeting 'early project wins' whereby early momentum and trust among stakeholders can be achieved and projects brought forward relatively quickly within the Town Centre. Additional considerations in relation to project priority potentially include:

Project Finance: targeting funding streams that presently have financial assistance available for certain project types which align with the Town Centre First Plan (for example, tackling vacancy and dereliction).

Project Value for Money: certain projects may be prioritised on a 'Value for Money' basis and particularly where a project(s) can create

additional indirect benefits (for example, Greenway development throughout Ireland has provided new recreation and leisure amenities for residents and visitors, however they are proven to deliver significant economic benefits).

Project Complexity: prioritising the less complex projects at the start of the regeneration process to gain momentum.

Project Land Requirement: utilising lands within Local Authority ownership as a means of project delivery that doesn't require third party agreement which can lead to project delay.

Project Need: it may be the case there is an identified regeneration need within a particular town and which is considered to be the main priority over short to medium terms (for example, enhancement of walking and cycling infrastructure).

Regarding project delivery, undertaking the appropriate public/stakeholder engagement prior to commencement is critically important to ensure that local stakeholders are fully understanding of the project and its desired outcomes. An additional step in the overall delivery of projects is the monitoring and evaluation of same once completed - see overleaf.

Funding

The funding of project interventions will require a joined-up and coordinated approach due to the various stakeholders that will play a role in the funding process. At a high level, the actors involved will include, but are not limited to:

- Central government departments
- State sponsored agencies
- Regional assembly
- Local authority & Town Team
- Private landowners / private developers
- Non-governmental organisations
- Local community

To date, Clara has been successful in securing funding that allowed for the preparation of this Town Centre First Plan which is the first stage in the long term rejuvenation of the town. Clara has received funding over €300,000 under the National Transport Authority's Active Travel Investment Grant Allocations (2023) for a number of schemes which include active travel footpath improvements and 'Safe Routes to School' support infrastructure for Frederick Street. This funding will help to enhance safe sustainable movement in Clara and provides a firm basis for future enhancements to the sustainable movement infrastructure in the town.

The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF), which is administered centrally through the Department of Rural and Community Development, will be a potentially important source of future funding for Clara. Presently, this funding source has a value of €1 billion up to the year 2027 for settlements of less than 10,000 people outside of the five city metropolitan areas with Clara falling into this category.

The RRDF has the ability to assist projects that have a focus on, inter alia:

- Town centre living
- Building vacancy
- Community/public facilities
- Enhancement of heritage/community assets including recreational facilities

As set out within this TCF Plan, a number of the project interventions in Clara have alignment with projects that can be brought forward with the help of RRDF funding. The project interventions will require the necessary public and private funding in order to deliver their objectives and to ultimately realise the Vision for Clara. Given the variety of stakeholders that will be involved in the regeneration process, as referred to, funding

and investment for Clara Town Centre may be secured from a range of sources including:

- Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) - a €1 billion fund distributed by central government to be invested in rural Ireland over the period 2019 to 2027 for settlements of less than 10,000 persons.
- European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) - funding distributed by regional assemblies which supports the sustainable regeneration of towns and urban centres using a Town Centres First Framework.
- Town & Village Renewal Scheme - funded under Project Ireland 2040 as part of Our Rural Future – Ireland’s Rural Development Policy 2021-2025. For 2022, the funding focus sought to bring vacant and derelict buildings and sites back into use.
- National Transport Authority’s (NTA) Active Travel Investment Programme for sustainable transport projects.
- EU Just Transition Fund supports tourism initiatives, small business start-ups and town and village regeneration in the Midlands.
- Offaly County Council funding programmes as available.

New funding and investment streams, not currently in operation, may become viable options for Clara in future years and cognisance needs to be given to same.

In terms of funding generally, the Town Team will play a key role in identifying and securing the appropriate funding to assist the delivery of the project interventions as set out.

A key funding stream for Clara, as mentioned above, is the EU Just Transition Fund (JTF) 2021-2027.

The JTF shall contribute to the single specific objective of **enabling regions and people to address the social, employment, economic**

and environmental impacts of the transition towards the Union’s 2030 targets for energy and climate and **a climate-neutral economy** of the Union by 2050, based on the Paris Agreement.

There are a select number of Counties and Municipal Districts within certain Counties approved as part of the territorial Just Transition plans in Ireland. The approved territory includes the entire counties of Offaly, Laois, Westmeath, Longford and Roscommon. In addition, the Municipal Districts of Ballinasloe (Galway), Carrick-on-Suir (Tipperary), Thurles (Tipperary), Athy (Kildare) and Clane-Maynooth (Kildare) fall within the approved Just Transition territory.

The ‘EU Just Transition Fund Programme 2021-27’ was formally adopted by the European Commission on 15th December 2022.

The Programme is centred around 3 priorities and the following fund allocation for each:

Priority 1 (€87 million) – Generating employment for former peat communities by investing in the diversification of the local economy. The Priority 1 fund allocation will focus on projects relating to the following actions:

- o Economic Diversification (€38m)
- o LECP/REP Schemes (€29m)
- o Bio-economy (€20m)

Priority 2 (€57 million) – Supporting the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets.

The Priority 2 fund allocation will focus on projects relating to the following actions:

- o Peatland Restoration (€12m)
- o Farming Wet Peat Soil (€15m)
- o Networks of Trails (€30m)

Priority 3 (€18 million) – Providing former peat communities with **smart and sustainable mobility options** to enable them to benefit directly from the green transition. The Priority 3 fund allocation will focus on projects relating to the following actions:

- o Electric Buses (€2m)
- o Support to Transport (€1m)
- o Charge Points (€15m)

Funding Schedule 2023

Funding opportunities for the year 2023 include the following:

January: €50m Community Recognition Fund open for applications.

February: Financial allocations under 2023 Local Improvement Scheme announced; and Walks Scheme expansion process opened.

March: 2023 Building Acquisition Measure to open for applications under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme; 2023 CLÁR Programme to open for applications; Community Centre Investment Fund to open for applications for new build centres; and Call for proposals to open under Community Services Programme.

April: Call for proposals under the Libraries Capital Programme 2023-2027; and Libraries Measure Call under Dormant Accounts Fund to open.

May: Call for Local Authority Action Plans under PEACE Plus; Call for applications under the PEACE Plus Reimaging Communities Investment Area – Large Capital Spaces; and 2023 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme to open for applications.

June: Town and Village Renewal Scheme to open for applications – main scheme and Project Development Measure.

November: Category 1 call for applications to open under 2023 Rural Regeneration and Development Fund.

Monitoring and Measuring Success

An important task is to monitor the Plan's progress at periodic intervals. For Clara Town Centre, this will be a key step in the overall regeneration process as it allows for Plan objectives, outcomes, priorities for example to be evaluated in light of changing circumstances, funding availability or other relevant matters.

As set out within the Town Centre First policy document, there will be a continuous role for the Town Team in overseeing delivery, communicating with stakeholders and reviewing the Plan over time so that they retain ownership of the process.

Catalyst Projects

As part of the Implementation and Delivery Plan for Clara, a number of projects have been identified as catalyst projects whereby they have the potential to deliver the greatest impacts and outcomes for the Town Centre.

A summary of the catalyst projects is provided below at Table 4.2. A summary of all project interventions proposed for the Town Centre is provided overleaf at Table 4.3.

Table 4.2 Catalyst Project Summary

TCF Project Intervention	Project Description	Estimated Cost	Timeframe	Key Actors
New Neighbourhood Quarter	Regeneration of brownfield and under-utilised lands/buildings as a new neighbourhood quarter that can deliver a mix of uses and increased vibrancy in the Town Centre.	c. €15 million - €20 million	5-15 years	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage Department of Rural and Community Development Town Team Private Landowners
Former Co-Op Building	Restoration of a prominent building on River Street as a new community facility along with new active travel link to Erry Mill and new civic plaza area.	c. €2 million - €2.5 million	0-5 years	Department of Rural and Community Development Town Team Private Landowners
Erry Mill Site	Heritage-led project delivering the restoration and re-use of former mill buildings as a new tourism development within walking distance of Main Street.	c. €5 million - €6 million	5-15 years	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage Department of Rural and Community Development Town Team Private Landowners Heritage Council
River Walk	Promotion and utilisation of the River Brosna for recreational use with new active travel routes and environmental improvement outcomes.	c. €1 million - €1.5 million	0-5 years	Department of Rural and Community Development Town Team Private Landowners National Transport Authority
Railway Greenway	Re-use of a former railway line as a new greenway active route providing new connectivity to River Street in the Town Centre.	c. €1.5 million - €2 million	5-10 years	Department of Rural and Community Development Town Team Private Landowners National Transport Authority
Star Community Hall	Internal and external upgrade works to provide a modern multi-purpose community space.	c. €1.5 million - €1.75 million	0-5 years	Department of Rural and Community Development Town Team Private Landowners

Table 4.3 Project Cost, Phasing, Timeframe and Implementation Summary

Project	Stakeholders	Priority	Timeframe	Project Cost (exc. VAT) *
Townscape Project	DRCD Town Team Private Landowners Heritage Council	Medium	0 - 5 years Multiple Phases	Various
River Walk	DRCD Town Team Private Landowners NTA	High	0 - 5 years Multiple Phases	c. €1 million - c.€1.5 million
Town Centre Cycle Routes	DRCD Town Team Private Landowners NTA	Medium	0 - 5 years Multiple Phases	c.€2.75 million - c.€3 million
Former Co-Op Building	DRCD Town Team Private Landowners Heritage Council	High	0 - 5 years Multiple Phases	c.€2 million - c.€2.5 million
Reservoir Nature Walk	DRCD Town Team Private Landowners NTA	Medium	0 - 5 years Single Phase	c. €500,000 - c.€750,000
Town Centre Parking Locations	DRCD Town Team Private Landowners	Low	0 - 5 years Multiple Phases	c. €400,000 - c.€500,000
Star Community Hall	DRCD Town Team Private Landowners	High	0 - 5 years Single Phase	c. €1.5 million - c. €1.75 million
Heritage-led Competition	Town Team Private Landowners	Low	0 - 5 years Single Phase	c. €10,000 - c.€20,000
Railway Greenway	DRCD Town Team Private Landowners NTA	High	5 - 10 years Multiple Phases	c. €1.75 million - c.€2 million
Farrell Building	DRCD Town Team Private Landowners Heritage Council	Medium	5 - 10 years Single Phase	c. €1.75 million - c.€2 million
Water Sports Facility	DRCD Town Team Private Landowners	Medium	5 - 10 years Single Phase	c. €750,000 to c. €1 million
Main Street Connections	DRCD Town Team Private Landowners NTA	Medium	5 - 10 years Multiple Phases	c. €1.5 million - c.€2 million
Neighbourhood Quarter	DHLGH DRCD Town Team Private Landowners	High	5 - 15 years Multiple Phases	c. €15 million - c.€20 million
Erry Mill	DHLGH DRCD Town Team Private Landowners Heritage Council	High	5 - 15 years Multiple Phases	c. €5 million - c.€6 million

* All project costs should be subject to review to allow for inflation and for other economic factors to be fully considered.

Note: It should be noted the 'heritage buildings opportunities' project is not a standalone project per se. Rather, it serves to highlight the potential opportunities that Clara's heritage buildings may bring forward over the long term. Erry Mill is highlighted as the exemplar heritage project.

Implementation

This project seeks to improve the overall appearance of the Town Centre. As referred to, a number of funding options exist to enhance the appearance and physical condition of Clara's buildings and streetscapes. The project cost cannot be specified as it is dependent upon the quantum of works undertaken and engagement and cooperation of third party landowners, particularly in relation to the financial assistance available for the refurbishment of vacant and derelict properties. It is noted that Offaly County Council secured funding of €100,000 in 2022 from the Streetscape Enhancement Scheme operated by the DRCD.

This active travel recreation project covers a significant tract of land along the length of the River Brosna and will require land parcels in private ownership. Given the land area requirement to facilitate the River Walk, this project will involve multiple phases for delivery.

Due to the detailed cycle route network proposed in the Town Centre, it is considered this project will require a number of phases to complete. It is generally anticipated that the development of the cycle route network should not require the purchase of any third party lands, however this matter will only be confirmed at detailed design stage.

Multiple phases are anticipated for the completion of this project which comprises three primary elements: (i) building refurbishment (ii) active travel link and bridge (iii) new civic plaza. Final cost will be dependent on a number of related matters including the purchase of the property on River Street (and adjoining lands to the rear) and the detailed design scheme brought forward for the new civic plaza area (for example, materials, street furniture, planting, lighting etc).

Similar to the River Walk project, this outdoor recreation project will involve the purchase of third party lands. A key factor regarding the overall project cost will be to undertake an initial assessment of the existing ground conditions around the reservoir as this may have a bearing on what type of construction will be required to develop the nature walk (for e.g. pathway or a boardwalk).

The parking locations have alignment with and support a number of other project interventions such as Erry Mill, the River Walk, and Water Sports Facility. However, the delivery of the Town Centre Parking locations will require a number of project phases and the purchase of third party lands.

It is considered the upgrade works associated with this project can be delivered in a single phase on River Street.

Marketing strategy for competition will be required along with the formulation of a project committee to assess submitted proposals. Project committee to be comprised of individuals such as local stakeholders, professional persons (for e.g.

Project covers a significant tract of land along the length of the former railway line and will require purchase of lands in private ownership. Given the land area requirement to facilitate the greenway, this project will involve multiple phases.

The Farrell Building and lands to the rear are currently in private ownership. While this project has alignment with the Neighbourhood Quarter project, it can be delivered in a single phase on Main Street. A full structural survey of the building, given its age, would be required in order to inform the overall project budget.

The Water Sports Facility can be delivered in a single phase. Overall, costs will be dependent on the scale of the project facility to be brought forward (for e.g. changing facilities, equipment storage, facility office, staff requirements etc.).

The Main Street Connections project, much like the Farrell Building scheme, is attached to the Neighbourhood Quarter project. A key component of this project will be to bring forward a new pedestrian / cycle bridge over the River Brosna that will provide a new active travel route from River Street to Frederick Street and the Erry Mill site. Project costs also incorporate new lighting, signage, landscaping, footpath upgrades and a new cycle hub at Clara train station. Multiple phases will be required for this project.

Project requires the purchase of buildings and lands in third party ownership on Main/River Street and The Green. Given the land requirement, it will require a number of phases for completion and will include housing, public open space areas, access routes, enabling works. Indicative costs are based on the Local Authority delivering the residential development, however, final costs will depend on the delivery strategy adopted (for e.g. Local Authority as provider; formulation of a Public-Private Partnership etc.).

The Erry Mill project comprises the former mill site and a number of buildings situated at the junction of Frederick Street and Clara Bridge. It is considered this tourism project would required to be delivered over a number of phases. The condition of the mill building has deteriorated over time, and as such a full structural survey of the mill building would be required in order to inform the overall project budget. The condition of Erry Mill Cottage and the Mill Manager's House appear to be in good physical condition, however surveys of same would also be required to assist cost purposes.

Appendix I

Clara Town Team's First Blueprint Document



CLARA TOWN CENTRE FIRST MASTERPLAN BLUEPRINT



Introduction:

Clara Town is literally and figuratively at a crossroads in terms of its potential future development;

Situated as it is, in the heart of the Irish Midlands on the River Brosna and main East-West rail-line and dissected by the North-South R420, it has huge potential in terms of accessibility and connectivity to the wider Midlands region;

The time is now to determine how the future of Clara town is shaped by the people who know it best.



What makes a successful Town Centre?

The key Qualities of a Healthy Vibrant Town Centre include but are not limited to:

Attractions: To define a town's identity and to draw in visitors and customers;

Accessibility: To be easily accessible through road and public transport networks and ease of connectivity between transport stops, carparks and the town itself;

Amenities: A healthy town centre needs to be a pleasant space to spend time in. It should be attractive in terms of environmental quality and urban design, safe and have a distinct identity or image;

Actions: Initiatives needed to ensure long-term viability of a town centre including the delivery of improvement projects, cleaning, maintenance on a coordinated and managed way..



S.W.O.T. Analysis of Clara

Strengths

- Identity - A strong identity –an industrial heritage town, with an ancient past.
- Location – Hidden heartlands
- Accessibility - Adjacent to major transport routes
- Community - Strong community networks
- Diaspora – A well connected diaspora
- Appetite for change

Weaknesses

- Poor Parking - Absence of accessible parking
- Dereliction - Several derelict/ vacant properties in the town center
- Sprawling development - Ribbon Housing Development
- Employment - Poor range of employment options
- Deprivation – High in certain areas

Opportunities

- Identity - Establish Clara as Heritage Town with an ancient past. Industrial Tourism & employment opportunities - Develop the Heritage Hubs at Clashawaun, Erry Mill, Charlestown, as mixed development hubs.
- Heritage Tourism – Develop opportunities re genealogy tourism using Kilbride, and the other 9 cemeteries
- Green Tourism - Develop Clara as a walking/cycling hub, making us of disused railway lines, riverbanks and bog connecting all to green & blue way & train station. Greenways, Brosna river walks, promote Clara Bog & Esker Walks.
- Festivals – Clara House & the Fair green provide Eco Friendly festival opportunities
- Education – New changes happening providing opportunities

Threats

- Changes in Local or Central Government Policy
- Availability of Central Funding
- Lack of buying from local stakeholders
- International events (War in Ukraine, Brexit, Covid 19)
- Economic crisis

PARKING & TRAFFIC

A MATTER OF URGENCY

12 SLIDES

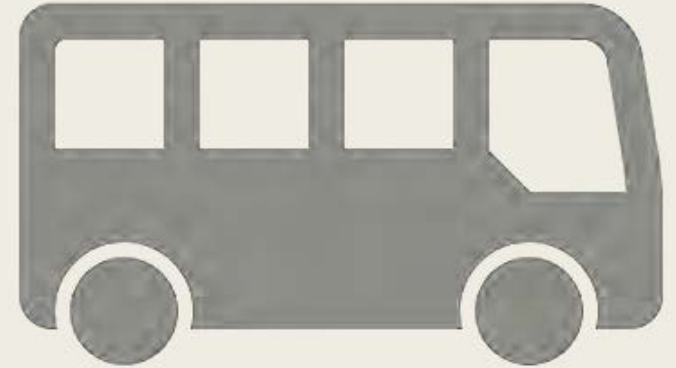


Parking and Traffic: 1/12

Town Centre First A Policy Approach for Irish Towns Document States:

The Town Centre First policy recognises that successful places : **Page 9**

- 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 minutes town’ concept);
- Manage traffic within central areas so that streets prioritise vulnerable users (pedestrians and cyclists), enabling them to move about safely and in comfort.



Parking and Traffic: 2/12

Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027

Clara Town Plan

Section 7: Critical Infrastructure

7.3: Clara Relief Road

This Plan makes provision for a new Relief Road to the west of the town centre from the Moate Road (R420) to the Ballycumber Road (R436), in order to take through traffic away from the town centre reducing congestion. The delivery of this relief road is entirely dependent on the availability of resources in the future, the location of which is shown on the Clara Settlement Plan Objectives Map.

Parking and Traffic: 3/12

Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027

Clara Town Plan

Section 7: Critical Infrastructure

7.4: Public Parking

The town centre in Clara suffers from traffic congestion as a result of the parking of cars on both sides of streets. The following locations shown on the Clara Settlement Plan Objectives Map may be suitable for off-street-car parks within the town centre and on the edge of the town centre;

- Possible Location 1: An off-street-car park off Church Street would alleviate existing parking constraints along Church Street and would serve demand generated by the Church during mass times and businesses along Church Street.
- Possible Location 2: The land to the rear of Main Street and River Street would provide great connectivity and permeability with these streets along with alleviating pressure for parking on Main Street.
- Possible Location 3: The existing pedestrian bridge across the River Brosna would provide access to River Street and the rest of the Town Centre.

Parking and Traffic Observations: 4/12

Clara is choked with traffic which in turn hampers the ability of businesses to develop and expand.

Significant traffic - flows through Clara without stopping to use its services or spend within the town.

Lack of parking availability is a key obstacle to reversing this issue. It is necessary to create off street parking that creates the necessary linkages to the services the town provides.

Parking & Traffic Recommendations: 5/12

- Several areas have already been identified, as stated on a previous slide by Offaly County Council (County Development Plan) re potential sites for off street parking;
- This should alleviate traffic congestion, provide additional parking for workers within the CBD and increase capacity for passing traffic to stop and avail of services within the town;
- Identification of ways to divert trucks from the town, reduction of speed limits and the long - term development of the proposed relief road, as resources are now available under the Town Centre First Initiative.



Fig 4. – Suggested location of off - street parking in Clara CBD

Parking & Traffic Recommendations: 6/12

The temporary use of brown field sites might relieve the immediate crisis, in addition to new off street parking a concerted approach to improving access through the town is needed by restricting on street parking to one side of **River Street (blue line)** and creating a one-way system along **Main Street, Egan's Lane and Bridge Street (green line)**.



Fig 3. – Suggested solutions to parking issues in Clara CBD

Parking & Traffic Recommendations: 7/12

- At the bridge on River Street beside Adrian's barber shop there is the potential for 5 car spaces that could serve the LOETB and GAA;
- The purchase of Alan Reck's site on River Street, demolish half the building to create vehicular access to the rear which could provide 30+ car spaces. This site also provides access to the River Brosna and potential linkages to the Mill site. River side seating and bicycling stands can be accommodated to attract cyclists and allow passing traffic to stop. We would see this site as being ideal for the provision of Electric Car Parking facilities;
- The purchase of lands at the Scouts Den. This would involve purchase of lands along the river and the old Scouts Den unit and lands to the front of the existing Scouts den. It is then envisioned to demolish the old Scouts Den, the creation of a new footbridge over the Brosna and the opening - up of a river walk. This could provide 30+ spaces and create linkages to the Library and the corner site in front of the library for future development of an Arts and Heritage Qtr. It is adjacent to the Mill site and the Bog Visitor Centre and the Swimming Pool and it would expand the Town Core out to the Pool/library area.

Parking and Traffic Recommendations: 8/12

- The provision of electric car parking facilities in the Church car park – which will attract passers-by to stop and utilise facilities and future protect the town;
- Amendments to the Square parking – for example, moving the bollards at the Church out to the double yellow lines, the raising of the road level towards the Day Care Centre to create specific parking spots, the provision of a loading bay sign from 7am to 10am on the main road in front of Centra so trucks stop reversing up towards Kilbride and blocking car parking. (Consultation with local business owners essential);
- Consultants would engage with owners with a view to acquiring the sites for the development of parking and report to OCC regarding costs and timeframe for development and provide technical expertise/advice on how to access funding for same.

Parking and Traffic Recommendations: 9/12

- Paid metered parking, mainly in the commercial sector of Clara with the support of businesses and property owners;
- Signed parking restrictions (in pre-determined areas) with 30 minutes time limit to encourage short-term parking & turnover and loading /unloading;
- Angled parking can increase overall supply of on-street parking if the street is wide enough, - Main St & Church St are possible contenders;
- Parking enforcement need to be in place;
- Lobbying Offaly County Council to in act by-laws, thus facilitating coordinated parking enforcement;
- On certain streets, parking allowed on only one side with a yellow line painted and 'Clamping in Operation' signs.

Parking & Traffic Recommendations: 10/12

- Design a solution to the bottleneck problem on the Kilbride Road, traffic lights, one-way or widen;
- Build a new footbridge across the Brosna beside but not attached to Clara Bridge. This would prevent people walking on a dangerous road and open new views of the river;
- As numbers of people living, working and visiting the Town increase engage with Iarnrod Eireann, Bus Eireann and other transport providers to increase services;
- A relevant number of disabled parking spaces would need to be incorporated in this designated & relevant areas, in particular ones suitable for parking buses;
- The purchase of Reck's by Offaly Co Council for the purpose of turning it into a Green Sustainable Hub for the Town;
- The attraction to the above-mentioned property is its size, its position and its ability to provide off street parking to people using the building;
- A major attraction for the purchases of this premises is that it provides direct access to proposed parking at Erry Mill, through a bridge, bringing access from the parking directly to the town Centre.

Parking and Traffic Recommendations: 11/12

Utilising Clara-Streamstown Railway Line

The remains of the Clara-Streamstown Railway line presents a unique opportunity to connect several key areas with high levels of traffic and children in a safe and secure manner, away from heavy volumes of traffic, associated air pollution and can provide access to additional parking sites such as the rear of the GAA Centre.

The former railway line crosses River Street and skirts the rear of:

- Clara GAA's social centre
- Clara Family resource Centre
- Scoil Naomh Phrionsias
- Scoil Bhríde
- Clara Montessorri School
- Clara GAA Grounds
- The proposed new Secondary school at Drayton Villa (formerly Parochial House) and
- The planned mixed use development at Chapel Hill Kilbride.



Fig 9 Location of key sites adjacent to former Clara-Streamstown Railway Line

Parking and Traffic Recommendations: 12/12

- Development of pedestrian / cycling access along the disused railway will significantly increase safe connectivity of three major school sites;
- Examine the possibility of safe pedestrian walking around the town including the exploration of an inner bridge at Bridge Street and a pedestrian walkway from Charlestown Bridge to Clashauwan;
- It would provide safe access to the planned developments at Drayton Villa, Kilbride / Chapel Hill reducing pedestrian traffic along narrow Kilbride Road;
- Help alleviate traffic congestion along major arterial routeway several times a day;
- Reduce exposure of children to harmful air pollution during heavy traffic periods;
- Potential to be developed as a biodiverse greenway.





HERITAGE

12 SLIDES





Heritage: 1/12

Offaly Co Council Development Plan 2021 - 2027

Chapter 7: Retail & Town Centre Strategy and Regeneration

- **RP - 05:** It is Council policy to promote heritage-led regeneration in historic towns / villages through the reuse of historic buildings, the enhancement of places of special cultural / natural interest and the protection of the historic urban fabric.
- **7. 2.11:** Offaly County Council recognises that planning for the regeneration of a historic town needs an integrated approach that balances the protection of the built heritage and the sustainable development of historic urban areas with the needs of modern living, while taking account of the concerns and aspirations of the community and key stakeholders. Bringing unused or underused spaces within our towns back into use has many advantages. In addition to reviving the economic value of an urban area, it also removes abandoned and derelict sites, and reduces the pressure to build on greenfield sites or agricultural land.

Heritage: 2/12

Use & Reuse, the Adaptive Reuse of Clara's Industrial Heritage Observations:

- **It is in nobody's interest to restrict and suspend the historic buildings and spaces of Clara as examples of a bygone era;**
- In reference to adaptive reuse, how use is dealt with, particularly change of use, is significant. It is important that potential uses be identified at the outset. Responsible and sustainable use/reuse of the sites will provide the best protection for the industrial heritage assets;
- **Heritage can be used to forge the identity of places and make them attractive to further investment.** Towns and villages that tap into a rich cultural & built heritage and harness their distinctive assets, tend to perform well, case in point Birr & Geashill;
- Adaptive reuse, by means of contemporary architectural intervention and vernacular adaptation, will create an abstract continuity and add a new layer to the story of Clara's industrial architectural heritage and past, without compromising its identity and integrity.
- **"Adaptive reuse is viewed as part and parcel of a sustainable green future as the most carbon neutral building is the one that already exists and can be reused, reinterpreted and adapted to the demands of a city/town."** Reference: Royal Institute of Architects Ireland

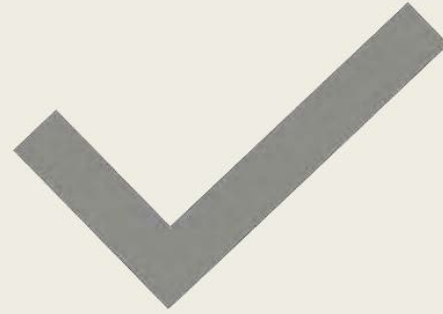
Town Centre First A Policy Approach for Irish Towns Document States:

The Town Centre First policy recognises that successful places: **Page 9**

- **Conserve, adapt and highlight historical buildings and streetscapes that provide the town with a unique identity.**

2.7 Realising the Existing Cultural and Heritage Assets of Places: Page 21

- There is a recognition that heritage-led regeneration ranging from large scale brownfield sites to the incremental re-imagining of smaller infill sites, can support and make best use of already 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 the promotion of our natural assets and bio-diversity networks;**
- There are real benefits to be gained from the sustainable management and conservation of Ireland's urban built heritage.



HERITAGE 4/14

**ADAPTIVE REUSE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CLARA'S BUILT
HERITAGE ASSETS**

Landscaptpark Duisburg-Nord, Germany: 5/12

An innovative solution to disused, vacant and sprawling industrial sites like Clashawaun Jute Works, with its beautiful, underutilized mill pond.

<https://www.landscaptpark.de>



Landschaft Park Duisburg-Nord, Germany: 6/12

<https://www.landschaftpark.de>

- Turn of the century decommissioned ironworks & furnace in Germany;
- A landmark concept celebrating recreation, leisure, heritage & art;
- An industrial colossus, turned into a place of exceptional beauty celebrating & preserving the legacy of the city's industrial heritage for succeeding generations;
- Such a development in Clara has great potential to enhance the quality of life in the community;
- Contribute to the economic & environmental well being of the town, the County & the Country, as the tourism potential is enormous.



Clashawaun Jute Works Site Potential: 7/12

This Project would require public procurement of site works including the “Pond”.

Scale of the site lends itself to multiple uses, as can be seen from Landscraftpark:

- Tourism – Industrial Museum, Education & Training, Heritage, Clara Diaspora, Eco Tourism
- Employment – Artisan space, Workshops, Film, Music & Art Studios
- Amenities – Outdoor activities on the river and Pond, Indoor Sports Hall, Café's
- Art - Gallery Spaces, Arts Centre, Concert / Theatre Space
- Biodiversity & Ecology – Creation of Wetlands, Improved Water Quality of Brosna River

Erry Mill: 8/12

Chapter 2 of the Clara Town Plan 2021 - 2027
section **2.4.1.1** Opportunity Site no 1

Utilizing the former mill would:

- Open the river to the town;
- Provide for additional river side amenities;
- Has potential for digital green hub;
- Provide Retail Units / office space;
- Provide apartments / Apart-hotel;
- Facilitate access to future riverside walkway.





Charlestown Mill Grain Store: 9/12

Chapter 2 of the Clara Town Plan 2021 – 2027, **section 2.4.1.3**
Opportunity Site no 3

Potential Uses:

Remote Green Digital Hub

- The repurposing of the Charlestown Mill Grain Store as a Green Digital Hub linking in the existing Civil Defence Building, the Offaly County Yard and the Grain Store into one project that would provide sufficient incubation space, offices, meeting rooms, parking and infill development;
- This will create adequate sustainable remote working infrastructure to provide both incubation units and landing space for businesses to develop along side remote working offices and meeting rooms.

Inchmore House: 10/12

- Compulsory Purchase Order justification under Section 14 of the Derelict Sites Act, 1990 should be considered;
- Of great historic interest and inextricably linked to the Clashawaun Jute Works, Charlestown & Erry Mills;
- This landmark building was designed by the noted Victorian Irish Architect, John Skipton Mulvany for the patriarch of the Quaker Merchant family in Clara, Robert Goodbody;
- Guglielmo Marconi spent a period of 12 months at Inchmore House as a guest of Robert Goodbody. It is well documented that he was perfecting the Telegram at the time and the Marconi Telecom Company was formed in the front room of Inchmore House after the first successful product testing;
- The identification of Inchmore House as a potential boutique hotel with landscape gardens should be investigated further;
- Additionally, the extensive land attached to Inchmore House could also be developed as a social enterprise site for camping / motorhomes, for example Graiguenamanagh, Kilkenny.

Drayton Villa: 11/12

- Use this Town Planning process to put pressure on ETB and OCC to ensure that the Drayton Villa project progresses in a timely manner with sufficient emphasis on community spaces within the campus;
- Restoration of the original walled garden, as well as the addition of a sensory garden;
- This as a facility, will be available to groups within the community with sensory issues such as special needs classes from the local schools but also for groups from the local respite houses. This will also could act as a tranquillity garden offering a place of solace to the Town as a whole;
- Alongside this garden development a similar indoor sensory space would help service the needs of teenagers and young adults with intellectual disabilities, a much-neglected sector of our community. This could be done through the use of planting and light schemes to create a green sensory room.

The GAA Centre & Old Convent Building: 12/12

- Clara GAA Centre (Star) to be upgraded / modernised/ extended/ functionalised for facilitation, promotion and development of multi sports and arts activities as a Community Centre in a central location;
- This would include extending existing facilities such as sports floor area and stage / presentation area with provision of innovative seating and audience facilities to maximise usage across the community;
- There is significant green area to the rear of the GAA Centre, which will provide space to extend. There would also be improved wheelchair facilities and insulation and energy efficient lighting and heating;
- Renovate the Old Convent building to provide hostel accommodation in a very central area, with parking adjacent and within walking distance of the train station.



**ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION AREA
FOR CLARA**

4 SLIDES



An Architectural Conservation Area as part of the Town Centre First Approach: 1/4

The identification and justification of the special interest of a proposed Architectural Conservation Area for the town of Clara Co Offaly, under part IV of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, which defines an ACA as: “... structures or townscapes, taking account of building lines and heights, that: is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest or value or contributes to the appreciation of protected structures.”

County Offaly Development Plan 2021 – 2027:

Chapter 10: Built Heritage:

- **BHO - 03:** It is an objective of the Council to investigate the designation of further Architectural Conservation Areas at appropriate locations throughout the county.
- **BHP - 14:** It is Council policy to preserve the character of Geashill Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) and any future ACAs in County Offaly by ensuring that any new development within or contiguous to the ACA is sympathetic to the character of the area and that the design is appropriate in terms of scale, height, plot density, layout, materials and finishes having regard to the advice given in the Statements of Character for each area.

Reasons for Designating an ACA: 2/4

- An ACA is designated in recognition of the special character of an area where individual elements such as building heights, building lines, roof lines, materials, construction systems, designed landscapes, public spaces and architectural features combine to give a place a harmonious, distinctive and special quality which merits protection;
- **Protecting the special character of such areas is important as this serves to reinforce the identity of local towns and villages, recognises our cultural and architectural heritage and contributes to the attractiveness of these areas as places in which to live and work;**
- From an economic perspective, Ireland's heritage is a key element of the tourism experience. It draws visitors here and is a significant part of what they enjoy once they are here;
- In acknowledging the architectural and historic significance of our towns and villages throughout the county by designating Architectural Conservation Areas, the primary aim is to provide for change while protecting character;
- In this way it is accepted that **Architectural Conservation Areas are not open-air museums** but living communities that will inevitably continue to develop and change;

Reasons for Designating an ACA: 3/4

- The aim of the planning process in managing development within ACAs is therefore to focus on ensuring that future development is carried out in a manner sympathetic to the special character of that area;
- This is achieved by giving particular consideration to the impact of proposed development on the character of the ACA, in order to achieve a balance between the need for change and the objective of retaining the special qualities for which the area was designated;
- Unless a structure is also included on the Record of Protected Structures, the protected status afforded from inclusion in **an ACA only applies to the exteriors and streetscape.**

Reference: Guidelines for the Management and Development of Architectural Conservation Areas, Cork County Council Heritage Unit

- **To this end, provision has been made within the scope of the Town Centre First Approach, to include ACAs as part of Town Centre regeneration.**

Clara Town Street Scape as part of the ACA: 4/4



- Review of Public Realm Works completed in the Square is needed;
- Works conducted on Main Square have received mixed reviews;
- Reduction of parking in favour of underutilized “public space”;
- Lessons learned from Public Realm Works to be incorporated into Master Plan I. e. greater consultancy with public / retain base.

Fig6: Before / After photos of Public Realm Works – The Square, Clara

Town Centre Regeneration

The Framework for Town Centre Renewal (Retail Consultation Forum), commissioned by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, places huge emphasis on the attributes of Place Making and Visual Appearance, in terms of planning, the built environment and a successful town centre regeneration. **A town with a distinct identity and an attractive visual appearance has an immediate impact on the perception and promotion of the town.**

9 Slides

Town Centre Regeneration: 1/9

The Framework for Town Centre Renewal (Retail Consultation Forum) furthermore states that: *“... as investment and people are increasingly mobile, considering the quality of a place becomes ever more important. A place making strategy is essential for ensuring that a town positions itself as an attractive location for investment, for talent and as a place to enjoy a good quality of life.”*

Recommendations for Masterplan:

- Mid-size towns like Clara suffer significantly from retail decline, dereliction & vacancy and new pollination of buildings and spaces has become virtually impossible. Therefore, the emphasis should be on the experience and appearance of the place rather than retail product lines;
- The first impression of a town is what remains with visitors and as such investment in well planted & maintained areas is essential, in particular on the access roads to Clara, primarily from Kilbeggan, Moate, Tullamore, Ballycumber and Rahan;
- Continued as a theme throughout the town, it will entice people who normally just pass through to stop and hopefully spend time and money in Clara.

Town Centre Regeneration: 2/9

Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027

Chapter 7: Retail & Town Centre Strategy and Regeneration:

- **RO – 09:** It is an objective of the Council to make Place-Making Strategy for towns and implementation of Town Centre Renewal Plans.

Chapter 2: Core Strategy, Settlement Strategy and Housing Strategy:

- **HP-17:** It is Council policy to encourage the compact growth of settlements; to promote healthy place- making; to increase the liveability factor of a place; to encourage the most efficient use of land; to ensure a mixture of residential unit types that are designed and constructed on the principles of universal design, life-long adaptability and energy efficiency; to support permeability and sustainable mobility with priority for pedestrians and cyclists; and in general to support the transition to a low carbon economy by way of reduction of greenhouse gases.

-THIS SLIDE TO BE READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE ADAPTED EGAN WHEEL AND PLACEMAKING DEFINITION ON NEXT SLIDE.



-Adapted Egan Wheel, Applying the Egan Wheel to your Community, Sir John Egan, 2004

3/9

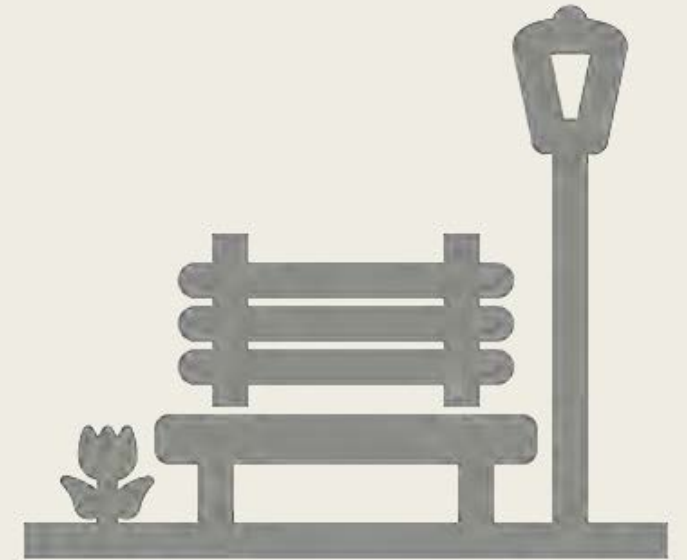
Town Centre Regeneration: 4/9

Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027: Chapter 7 Retail and Town Centre Strategy and Regeneration.

RP – 09: It is Council policy to encourage and facilitate improvements to the physical fabric and environment of the town and village centres including streetscape, street furniture, landscaping (hard and soft), signage and wire-capes, while recognising that both private & public developments can contribute to effective public realm.

Recommendations for Masterplan:

- Appropriate and high-quality street furniture including railings, planter, seats signage and bins throughout the Town and where needed;
- Information Boards, including Town maps listing sites of interest in the Town itself, at the railway station and library;
- There is no signage from the Town or its approaches to point people in the direction of the Railway Station, Swimming Pool etc and this needs to be addressed;
- Ensure roads and footpaths are in good order and provide ease of use for those with mobility issues and those with young children. Take enforcement action on those parking on pavements or prohibited areas.



Town Centre Regeneration: 5/9

- Provision of rubbish bins and Dog poo bins around the Town, especially in these proposed areas of enlarged gatherings & streets frequently used for walking/jogging
E. g. Ballycumber Road;
- Signage to be provided for all the sports and cultural facilities in Clara;
- A series of bus shelters thorough out the town to allow in the future, for collection points to and from schools, Day Care Centres, FRC, et cetera;
- A bus shelter is needed as soon as possible at St Brigid's Church to accommodate those waiting for the Flag Line and Bus Eireann;
- CCTV - This is extremely important to the Town, providing a sense of security to all members of the public, the Elderly living alone and people out on walks. This could be monitored by Offaly Co Council;
- Prevention of light pollution thus combating streetlights, spilling light into the sky dimming out the stars. This would facilitate the possible installation of a Telescope, at a suitable location in the Town, to view the night sky.



Town Centre Regeneration: 6/9

Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027: Chapter 7 Retail and Town Centre Strategy and Regeneration.

RTCO – 01: Promoting activities including events, festivals, street markets and farmer's/country markets in appropriate town and village centres in the country;

Recommendations for Masterplan:

Number of key events, both large & small-scale should be organised on a regular basis to attract people (both residents and visitors) into Clara town centre. **All events/festival & markets must be accessible to those with disabilities:**

- Halloween: A scary walk as well as the revival of 'The Scare in the Square'
- Summer picnics & music on the Fair Green
- Summer Solstice Celebration on the Fair Green
- Movie nights on the Fair Green
- Easter Egg Hunt on the Fair Green
- Christmas: A moving crib, Santa Grotto & Trail

Town Centre Regeneration: 7/9

Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027: Chapter 7 Retail and Town Centre Strategy and Regeneration.

Purple Flag Accreditation:

7. 2. 13: Purple Flag Accreditation is a town and city centre award which aims to raise the standard and broaden the appeal of town and city centres between the hours of 5pm to 5am. Areas that are awarded the Purple Flag are recognized for providing a vibrant and diverse mix of dining, entertainment and culture while promoting the safety and wellbeing of visitors and local residents. The Purple Flag can play a valuable role in raising the standard and broadening the appeal of a town's night- time economy.

Town Centre Regeneration – Destination Development: 8/9

Recommendations for the Masterplan:

- The growing importance of a local artisan food culture within the place-making strategy cannot be over-stated in the promotion of Clara as a Destination;
- A replica of Clara built from Lego and/or interactive scale model of the Town, to tell the story of Clara;
- An interactive display/model of the engineering works on the Brosna River designed by the Goodbody's, as well as a replica model of Clara Train Station with a working model steam engine train set;
- Promotion of Notable People associated with Clara, i. e. destination development:
 1. Brigid of Kilbride, the Patron Saint of the Parish, a relic of the Saint is preserved by the local Catholic Church;
 2. David Beers Quinn – Renowned Irish Historian, his achievements render him the only historian from Ireland of his generation to have gained international distinction in an area other than Irish history;
 3. Tommy Harris – Photographer Extraordinaire & a Man who corresponded with World Leaders;
 4. Guglielmo Marconi – Nobel Prize Winner in Physics for the development of wireless telegraphy (see [Inchmore House Slide no 28](#));
 5. Vivian Mercier – Renowned Irish Literary Historian;
 6. Shane Lowry – World Class Golfer.

Town Centre Regeneration: 9/9

Recommendations for the Masterplan, Retail & Office Development:

- Clara is serviced by a small Centra and a mid sized Londis for grocery. However, significant spend leaves Clara to the towns of Tullamore and Athlone. These towns have the large multiple grocery providers, but they also provide other essential shops such as laundrettes, sports shops, clothing, professional services such as accountants, engineers, legal offices, etc. Clara is poor in the provision of these services due to a lack of quality office and retail space;
- There is a need to reverse this outward spend and attract inward spend from the region. Clara can not provide what the larger towns offer, but we can provide an alternative by having easy access, easy parking, less traffic, smaller units so the quality of service/offering can be higher. To do this a retail and office quarter should be established;
- There are two main large sites that lend to this. The first is to the rear of Bridge Street and Egan's lane. This is adjacent to Expert Hardware and Londis. The second site is to the rear of the Green and River Street behind Cowen's Pub;
- It is proposed to identify the best location to develop a retail hub which would provide a large grocery unit with secondary units with the ground floor shops/offices and first floor accommodation along with associated parking. The second site could then be developed into infill residential accommodation with elderly and disability services to the fore.



**A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH IN DEALING WITH TOWN
CENTRE DERELICTION & VACANCY.**

3 SLIDES



A Collaborative Approach in dealing with Dereliction & Vacancy: 1/3

Removal of Dereliction & Vacancy Suggestions:

- Informal negotiations by Clara Community Groups in partnership with Offaly Co Council, with the owners to ascertain issues and plans;
- If an issue remains unresolved and the dereliction is ongoing, the site must be placed on the Derelict Sites Register by Offaly Co Council;
- The Derelict Sites Register can be publicly inspected, this may give potential buyers of derelict sites the opportunity to contact an owner and offer to purchase the site, and this may lead or make a step towards the removal of dereliction;
- The following year an owner must be charged a levy (7% of the market value of the property) until the dereliction is removed;
- A new grant of up to €30,000 to help first time buyers, who buy derelict properties to renovate and live in was announced on 3rd Jan 2022 by Housing Minister Darragh O'Brien should be promoted in Clara;
- The <https://vacanthomes.ie> website, developed by Mayo Co Council on behalf of the local government sector, provides a portal for individuals to anonymously log possible vacant properties and alert local authorities, who can then follow up with the owners to see whether the house can be re-used quickly, is a helpful tool.

A Collaborative Approach in dealing with Dereliction & Vacancy: 2/3

Removal of Dereliction & Vacancy Suggestions:

- “County Councils must keep an up-to-date register of all derelict sites in its area, containing:
 - Location of each derelict site
 - Name and address of the owner
 - Current market value of each site carried out by the local authority or by an authorised person;”

Reference: Cork County Council

- **The Derelict Sites Amendment Bill 2021:** Implementation of the Act to give security to local authorities, by way of creating a charge on the land concerned, in relation to the expenses incurred by the local authority in order to give effect to measures which the local authority considers to be necessary in order to prevent the land from becoming or continuing to be a derelict site, for that purpose to amend the Derelict Sites Act 1990, and to provide for related matters;
- **The Planning & Development Amendment Regulations 2018** can pave the way for Offaly Co Council to allow for the change of use of an existing commercial unit to a residential unit. Derelict two storey buildings in Clara town centre can be reconfigured to provide separate access to the upper floors which can be turned into living spaces. The ‘live above the shop’ concept falls into the regeneration strategy of a mixture of uses with-in the town centre, see **Chapter 7: RP – 06**.

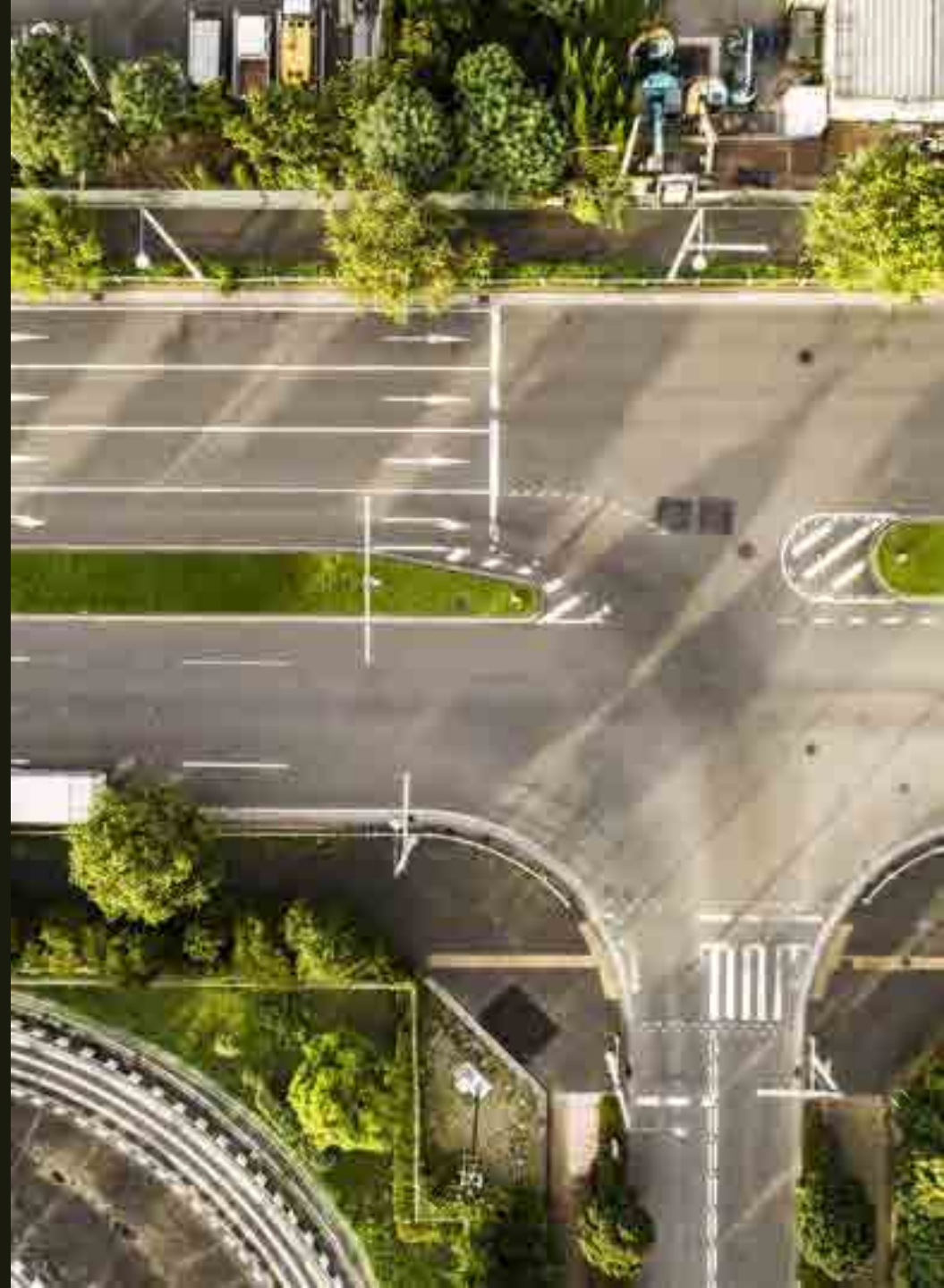
A Collaborative Approach in dealing with Dereliction & Vacancy: 3/3

Removal of Dereliction & Vacancy Suggestions:

- The ground floors of the commercial units can be redesigned to create a design with incubation units accommodating the **'Meanwhile Use'** initiative for example, while reserving the pedestrianization to bring movement and reinforce the sense of place in the town. This ties in with Offaly Co Council's objective to promote the reuse, refurbishment and retrofitting of existing buildings, see **Chapter 7: RP – 04**;
- The **'Meanwhile Use'** initiative is a short to medium term use of empty commercial units until they can be brought back into full commercial viability. The 'Meanwhile Use' arrangement can last for many years, see **Chapter 7: RP – 10**;
- **'Meanwhile Uses'** are for the benefit of the local community and help keep a town centre vibrant, as spaces are temporarily handed over to community groups and residents for meetings, informal training and learning, temporary rehearsal space, pop-up shops, start-ups, exhibitions, artists' studios and so on;
- A flexible and collaborative approach will be required from both landlords and potential occupiers. An agreement with a landlord might give the user responsibility for the paying of the business rates and utility costs but be excepted from paying rent.

OPEN SPACES & GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

8 SLIDES



Open Spaces: 1/8

Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027:

Chapter 12: Land Use Zoning Objective – Community Services/Facilities

Open Space, Amenity and Recreation:

The use of land as **‘Open Space’** shall be taken to include the use of land for; parks, public woodland, pedestrian routes and greenways, riparian zones, housing estate open spaces, development incidental to the enjoyment of open space (including playgrounds, outdoor recreation centres and sports centres, civic/market square, village greens, landscaped areas, shelters, sanitary conveniences, play equipment, dressing rooms and similar facilities). It also provides for the use of such land or such facilities for games, educational and recreational purposes. High standards of accessibility are essential.

Clara Town Plan:

Open Spaces

Chapter 5: Biodiversity and Landscape

Section 5.6: Current ‘Open Space’ provision in Clara consists primarily of the Fair Green, a small existing open space area along the River Brosna adjacent to Charlestown Bridge and a number of playing pitches. In addition, areas around Kilcoursey Castle and the Goodbodys Reservoir also meet recreational needs in the town. It is considered that a need exists for an additional area of public open space in the town by the development of a linear park along the River Brosna in the centre of the town and the development of Goodbodys Reservoir as a recreational area for the town.

Chapter 8: Social Inclusion, Community & Cultural Development

- **CECO-05:** Facilitate sports and community groups in the acquisition and/or use of lands for sports and recreation purposes;
- **CECO-08:** Support and promote the development of cultural, arts and performance spaces in Clara;
- **CECO-09:** Provide an additional playground and new skate park at an appropriate location in the town.

Open Spaces – Youth: 3/8

Recommendations for Masterplan:

- The creation of a safe zone for youngsters to come together and be allowed to interact with each other in a space specifically developed & designed for them;
- Provide cycle / BMX / skateboard park with covered seating and hang out area for youth at Chapel Hill, which would tie in to reopened disused Railway Line along educational and sports facilities. Alternative location for this youth park could be to the rear of swimming pool;
- Provide seating, picnic areas, barbeque areas, nature walk around Chapel Hill with leisure facilities and keep fit equipment for public usage and enjoyment, accessing from Kilbride and reopened Railway Line. This could tie in with walking track at Pairc Proinnsias. This area could be further extended on the site for provision of very central town park with leisure and entertainment areas to encourage mid town exercising and family meetings, while giving young people a safe central location for hanging out;
- Provide safe and easy access to the Brosna River at Scouts Den for kayaking and water sports, which would link in with the development of Clashawaun Jute Works Pond for these activities;
- Ard Scoil might be a good link with a community shed as they have both woodwork and metal work classrooms. If the school could facilitate this there would be great potential for further training/ workshops with different groups in the community to learn new skills/crafts.

Open Spaces: 4/8

Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027:

Chapter 9: Social Inclusion, Community and Cultural Development

9.16 Sport / Recreation / Open Space

Offaly Sports Partnership is an inter-agency group which is a sub structure of Offaly County Council, hosted by the Council and core funded by the Irish Sports Council. Its remit involves the achievement of sustained local increases in participation levels in sport, physical activity and active living in Offaly in line with the national participation objectives of the Irish Sports Council. **The Planning Authority has a role in protecting existing sport / recreation and open space areas and ensuring that adequate land is zoned for development to accommodate sporting and recreational facilities, both active and passive.**

Open Spaces – Sport: 5/8

- Provide bowling green / bowls pit for Active Retirement Group and indeed all public users in this area;
- Provide floodlit all weather pitch and stands at Pairc Proinnsias to facilitate County and local games at night and inclement weather with resulting greater visitation and need for catering / hospitality facilities;
- Provide all weather floodlit training area at Pairc Proinnsias for all organisations;
- Provide improved lighting along extended walking path around Pairc Proinnsias;
- Provide improved surface on extended athletics track and training area with floodlighting and changing and shower facilities at Pairc Proinnsias;
- Provide gymnasium and changing / showering facilities with personal 24/7 security access for members at Pairc Proinnsias;
- Provide sports treatment clinic area adjacent to gymnasium area.

Green Infrastructure: 6/8

- Offaly Co Council undertakes to protect existing Green Infrastructure resources and to facilitate, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, the development of Green Infrastructure that recognises the benefits that can be achieved with regards to the provision of **'Open Space'** amenities;
- The term Green Infrastructure is used to describe the interconnected networks of land, water and the rich tangible cultural heritage that both sustain environmental quality and enrich our overall quality of life;

The key themes which encompass Green Infrastructure, and how they inter-relate, interconnect, impact on and compliment each other are:

- Landscape Character
- Biodiversity
- Open Space and Recreation
- Archaeological and Built Heritage
- Sustainable Water Management

Reference: **Chapter 3 Climate Action and Energy**

Reference: **Chapter 4 Biodiversity and Landscape**

Reference: **Chapter 11 Water Services & the Environment**

Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027



Green Infrastructure: 7/8

- Clara's position in the heart of Ireland Hidden Heartland's opens the door to numerous green initiatives;
- Clara is positioned on the Eiscir Riada – an ancient route from Tara to Clonmacnoise;
- The Pilgrim's Walk skirts Clara Bog as it meanders towards Clonmacnoise;
- Potential of the Clara to Banagher Greenway and the Clara to Streamstown greenways – providing connectivity between major intercity rail routes and both the Royal and Grand Canals;
- River Brosna connects Kilbeggan, Clara, Ballycumber, Pullough and Ferbane, thus opening-up the midlands to wider tourist connections – Boora, Lemanaghan, Turraun Wetlands et cetera.

Green Infrastructure: 8/8

- Identify and map important trees and landmarks - perhaps applying for preservation orders;
- Survey the stone walls and take remedial action to restore and preserve them for future generations;
- Develop a range of self-guided walks using maps and script – written and recorded – highlighting Clara’s past industrial heritage and its environmental significance;
- Ensure biodiversity and securing natural wildlife habitat are at the forefront in the planning of all developments;
- Develop Chapel Hill as a nature reserve with educational nature trails that would be available to the public but could also be used as a learning resource by the schools and preschools in the town as well as youth groups run in the FRC and scouting groups both from the town and visiting groups;
- A sensitive exploration of how best to utilize Clara’s formal zoned ‘open space’, The Fair Green for recreation purposes, without changing its tri-angular shape and adhering to its legal status under the law, the hierarchy of open spaces stipulations, landscape character stipulations, local & national planning policies, national planning law and EU directives.

Provision of Housing: 1/1

- Of critical importance is the development of mixed housing within the core town centre to ensure town remains a vibrant and lived in town and not a place for a transient daytime population, or a transient community, with temporary accommodation dominating the towns dwelling availability;
- Housing stock must reflect the changing demographics of the town's population – providing long term accommodation for a mixed demographic, with starter housing, family homes, and step-down homes for empty nesters, encouraging a strong community;
- Exploration of suitable brown sites close to town centre;
- Opening once through lanes such as Robinson Lane to provide access to backlands of CBD. This might also enable the development of new streets within the town center;
- Use of the land between Cowan's and the Green for a new social housing development. Some of the older estates have older single occupants who may wish to move into the Town for convenience thereby freeing up larger homes for families.



Adult Education & Training: 1/2

- Establish an Adult Learning Facility in part of the old Frederick Street School when the transition occurs. To provide a comprehensive range educational and learning courses – from academic subjects and accredited courses, to leisure pursuits like flower arranging, car or cycle maintenance, music and the art – the list is endless. The rest of the building for other community uses potentially including designated usage by the Community and Family Resource Centre;
- Clara has a LOETB office, however there is scope for more development of these offices to match facilities in Birr and Tullamore. These facilities provide the courses that lead to local employment and the commencement of businesses through apprenticeships;
- Bringing the Drayton Villa Garden back to full working condition with greenhouses and cold frames could develop an industry whereby local employment schemes work all year-round planting and preparing seedlings for use by the local Tidy Towns group, but also to supply all local groups with plants and flowers that would come from the horticultural training funded by DSP. This could develop a cohesiveness in planting throughout the town and very easily lift the face of the town whilst also offering training and work experience to those availing of employment schemes to develop skills.

Adult Education & Training: 2/2

- The development of a training centre that would facilitate users such as the FET, CE Scheme, TUS, volunteer groups and general safety training that all employers are required to offer to their staff. One adequate space dedicated to learning for adults in all disciplines from trades to computers, -similar to the Training Centre at Garrycastle in Athlone;
- The proposed Youth Café for the Town - although difficult to run from the perspective of traditionally being a volunteer led venture, this could be an opportunity to expand the CE scheme in the town and offer a more diverse work experience opportunity to a wider group of people in the community and offering an age-appropriate place for young people to meet in a safe and supervised environment with good Wi-Fi access.



Biodiversity
Clara's Natural
Heritage

3 Slides

Clara's Living Bog, a Natural & Intangible Heritage Asset: 1/3

- Peatlands, like other wetland environments, are important terrestrial carbon sinks and are critical for preventing and mitigating the effects of climate change, preserving biodiversity, minimising flood risk, and ensuring safe drinking water;
- There is an increasing recognition of strong interconnections between natural and cultural heritage assets and the need for their integrated conservation;
- Clara Bog is one of the best remaining examples of a relatively intact raised bog in Western Europe and was formed approximately 10 000 BCE during the Mesolithic Period;
- It is a deeply liminal as well as a 'contested' landscape, exploited for fuel and a cultural reservoir of 'authentic' Irish identity;
- The 'bog' features significantly in Irish literature, none more so than in the poetry of Seamus Heaney, where the act of digging and peat cutting are potent metaphors of Irish creativity and identity;
- **Recognition must be given to the unique intangible culture which developed in Clara and the Midlands with cutting of the Turf in the Masterplan.**

Just Transition Projects: 2/3

- Clara like all Midland areas, has been negatively impacted by Bord Na Mona's transition from peat - based employment;
- As part of this transition, it is proposed that there would be a development of a National Pilot on Sustainability and a Rural Centre of Excellence in the Midlands Region;
- Locating this in Clara, would provide a national focus on the town and would drive in employment and business into the town. A section of Clashawaun Jute Works could be repurposed for this development. Clara is the natural gateway / central location between Rhode/Edenderry to the North and Shannonbridge to the West. The refurbishment or repurposing of an unused factory ties in with the Just Transitions ambitions;
- No Funds from the Strand 1 and 2 of Just Transition Funding were allocated to Clara, for the simple reason that no business or community group applied for same. A focus on how Clara can benefit from Just Transition is required and this will need interaction with Offaly Co Council and their plan for Clara under the Just Transition programme (for e. g. the development of the Green Energy Cluster and where Clara fits into this strategy);
- Under Just Transition, it will be necessary to set up the "Invest EU Advisory Hub". Offaly Co Council have put themselves forward to set up this Hub and Clara and the old Clashawaun Jute Works should be an ideal candidate to house same.

The River Brosna: 3/3

Recommendations for the Masterplan:

- Continuation of the next phases of the Clashawaun River Walk Amenity project to help restore connections to the river for the community and visitors, thus weaving a connected landscape along the River Brosna;
- This is a crucial development in realising the vision of turning Clashawaun Jute Works into an industrial heritage eco park;
- Industrial heritage & eco-tourism are two of the fastest growing sectors in the tourism industry and can be successfully combined as is evident in the industrial heritage eco park, Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord in Germany, which receives a million visitors per year, from all over the world;
- Clean and clear the River Brosna of invasive weeds and debris;
- Utilise the river to provide green energy by restoring/renewing the engineering systems already in place.



Conclusion:

Offaly Co Council Development Plan 2021- 2027

Chapter 7: Retail & Town Centre Strategy and Regeneration:

RP – 13: It is Council Policy to promote **a Collaborative Approach** between Offaly County Council, central government, semi-state bodies, the community, the private sector and voluntary associations to successfully achieve the regeneration of areas.

Final Observations:

- The obligation for meeting a town's needs and 'getting it right' has become the joint responsibility of both local communities and Local Government;
- Today, the key to achieving vibrant and successful towns is through cooperation and partnership with Local Government who can provide a vital role in enabling and supporting the local community in managing their own town or village.

Appendix II

Clara Town Team's 2nd Blueprint Document

CLARA TOWN CENTRE FIRST REGENERATION

Clara Town Team



THE VISION:

Clara is unique as a town due to the survivance of a significant number of elements highlighting its industrial past, which laid the foundation for the current character and appearance of the town and holds the key to its successful regeneration.

Clara town centre as a livable and vibrant place that knits together in-town-living, culture, tourism and well-being within an industrial heritage setting.

- REALISING THE VISION, LIES WITHIN THE ENHANCEMENT, LANDSCAPING, RE-DESIGNING & RE-INTERPRETATION OF CLARA'S TOWN CENTRE PUBLIC REALM.
- PUBLIC REALM MUST BE UTILISED AS A LONG-TERM INVESTMENT AND NOT A QUICK & CHEAPLY DONE FIX.



PUBLIC REALM SOLUTION: -1

- Public realm refers to all areas to which the public has access (such as roads, streets, lanes, parks, squares and bridges). This includes space between buildings, along with the spaces and any structures that enclose them;
- The public realm works will enhance the Streets by resurfacing with natural stone materials, installation of new kerbing, raised tables at key points/junctions, replacement and/or upgrade of street lighting, replacement and/or upgrade of signage, signage restoration and creation of new public spaces;
- Furthermore, the built environment enhance the public realm in a variety of ways: they model the skyline, landmark the town, lead the eye to explore, celebrate the crossing of streets. Even at the most modest level, the way that the building's details (its paving, handrails, sculpture, street furniture or signage) relate to the human scale or to the touch has an important impact on the streetscape;
- Beautification is a key aspect of public realm, and it can be an easy way to bring people together. The dictionary defines beautification as a process of making visual improvements in a town or city. This often involves planting trees, shrubbery, and other greenery. It may involve decorative or historic main street development. Towns and villages often undertake beautification projects to refurbish their town centres to boost tourism and other commerce.



PUBLIC REALM SOLUTION: - 2

ENHANCEMENT OF STREETS EXAMPLE

PUBLIC REALM SOLUTION: -3

- The creation of a multi-use pedestrianised town centre serving as a 'vehicle' to revive local businesses and improve the shopping experience by increasing footfall;
- In addition, the initial challenge of loss of car parking allows for an opportunity to create an inviting landscaped public realm, with spaces that in themselves attract people to the centre of town.



EXAMPLE:

Something similar can be replicated in front of Christy Cowen's Pub, River Street.





EXAMPLE:

- Something similar in front of Baggott's: removing the side carparking spaces and thus re-establishing a connection to the Fairgreen, albeit visually only.
- This will allow for a managing of the flow of traffic around the Fairgreen with a one-way system.



PUBLIC REALM SOLUTION: -4

- Ensuring that the vibrancy of the town centre is enhanced, through traditional shop-front preservation, appropriate signage and use of awnings, as River Street, Main Street and Church Street contain a wide variety of shop fronts;
- The older shop fronts contain clues of the history of commerce and the development of the town.





PUBLIC REALM SOLUTION: -5

- Re-designing & re-interpretation of the Public Open Space (top left) area adjacent to Charlestown Bridge;
- The concept & design (bottom left) could be adapted successfully to suit the site. The natural polished stone seating mimics the shape of Charlestown bridge's arches & compliments the industrial heritage of the bridge and Charlestown mill grain store;
- It will also open-up the river to the public and create another space of interest & attraction;
- The planting focusses on carbon reduction and biodiversity enhancement.

Reference: (image bottom left & slide 11)

LOS ANGELES RIVER MASTER PLAN - RFQ Landscape Architectural & Urban Design Services



CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS:

-1

The current street façade to be maintained and preserved.

Street furniture, lighting, bollards, crossing barriers, seating, & other street furniture such as planters, to be in line with the façade of the town and in keeping with the Victorian era which is the era where the town in its present form developed.

The square of the town be developed in tandem with the natural shape of the area which is not a square.

The Roman Catholic Church has been one of the most iconic buildings in Clara as is depicted in all past photos of the town, however the tree in front of the Church prevents people from viewing the beauty of the Church and takes away from the historical vision of the Church.

CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS:

-2



Cafés and Bars be afforded permission to open their windows in a way that allows the atmosphere to spill out onto the street, and facilitates semi outdoor eating, where the paths are too narrow or the weather too cold to facilitate outdoor eating.



The river be opened to the town.



New streets created in brown fields sites, designed to accommodate mixed housing and to maintain the traditional façade of the town e.g River Street.



Bicycle lane to circumference of the town with adequate access to the main street but not to place a bicycle lane through the main thoroughfare of the town.

PRIDE IN PLACE AND PLACE IDENTITY

04 August 2022, The Bennett Institute of Public Policy, University of Cambridge published a report entitled Townscapes: Pride in Place.

- **”Researchers say that civic pride plays an important role in boosting social capital, participation and trust – all of which help create the 'seed capital' required for economic growth. “**



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RMLA LIMITED

Unit 3B, Santry Avenue Industrial Estate,
Santry Avenue,
Santry,
Dublin 9,
D09 PH04

 admin@rmla.ie

RMLA Limited, trading as RMLA is registered in the Republic of Ireland number 720031.
Registered Address: Unit 3B, Santry Avenue Industrial Estate, Santry Avenue, Santry, Dublin 9, D09 PH04
Directors of the Company: Robert McLoughlin