



Lár Bailte ar dTús
Town Centre First



Comhairle Chontae An Longfoirt
Longford County Council

CONNECTED
People • Place • Opportunity



Ballymahon Town Centre First Plan Appendices

Longford County Council

Contents

**Appendix 1 – Ballymahon Town Study:
Urban Analysis January 2025 1**

**Appendix 2 – Digital Town Blueprint Report:
Ballymahon, Co. Longford/February 2025 28**

Appendix 3 – Ballymahon Town Centre Health Check 72

Appendix 4 – Ballymahon Town Walkability Audit 109

Appendix 1 – Ballymahon Town Study: Urban Analysis January 2025

Ballymahon Town Study

Urban Analysis

January 2025

Study including assessment on Heritage, Nature, Permeability, Vehicular and Pedestrian movement, Height and Massing, Character Areas and potential opportunity sites.



Ballymahon Town Study

1.0 Heritage

- 1.1 Historical Mapping
- 1.2 Protected Structures
- 1.3 Historical Streetscapes
- 1.4 Architectural Features

2.0 Height and Massing

- 2.1 Building Height
- 2.2 Key Landmark Buildings
- 2.3 Historic Open Space

3.0 Nature & Environment

- 3.1 Landscape and Vegetation
- 3.2 Flooding

4.0 Movement & Carparking

- 5.1 Walkability/ Pedestrian movement
- 5.2 Permeability and Connectivity Opportunities

5.0 Character Areas

6.0 Potential Opportunity Sites

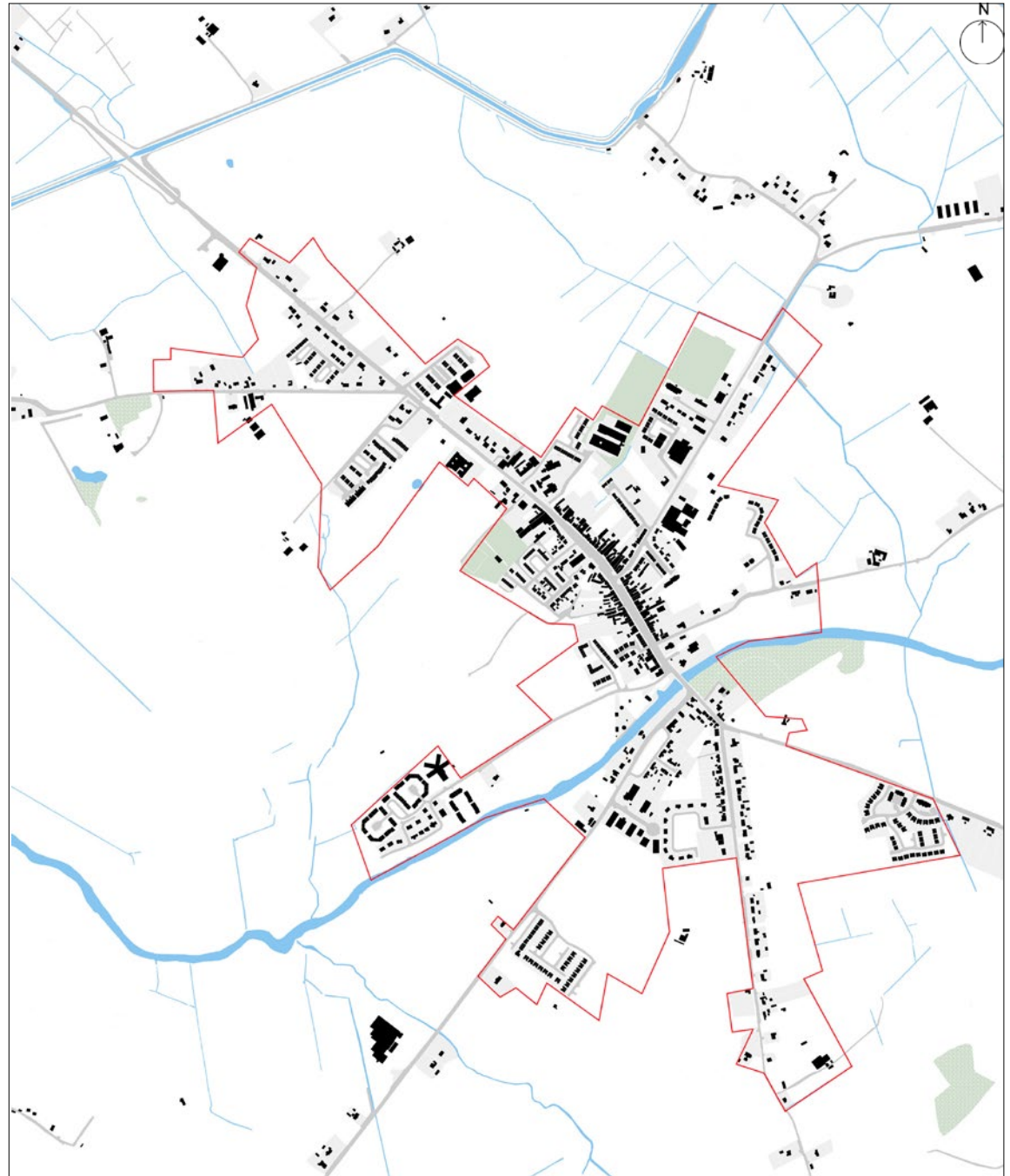


Fig.01 Ballymahon Town 2025 (Map based on OSI 2025 Map)

1.0 Heritage

1.1 Historical Mapping

Ballymahon Town Core and Wider Context

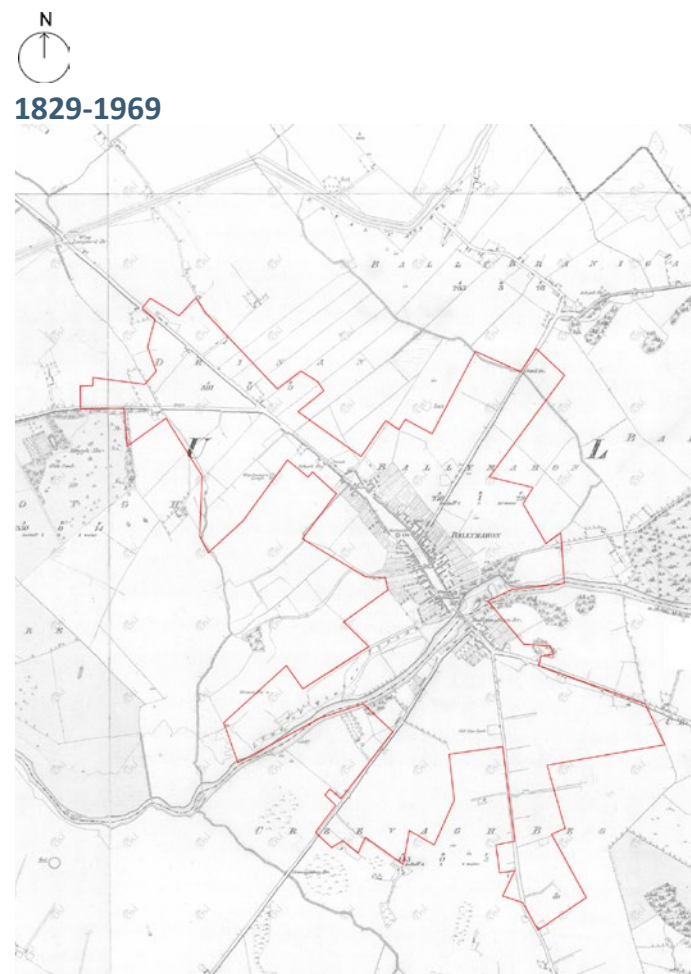


Fig.02 Ballymahon Town and Wider Context- 6Inch Historical Map

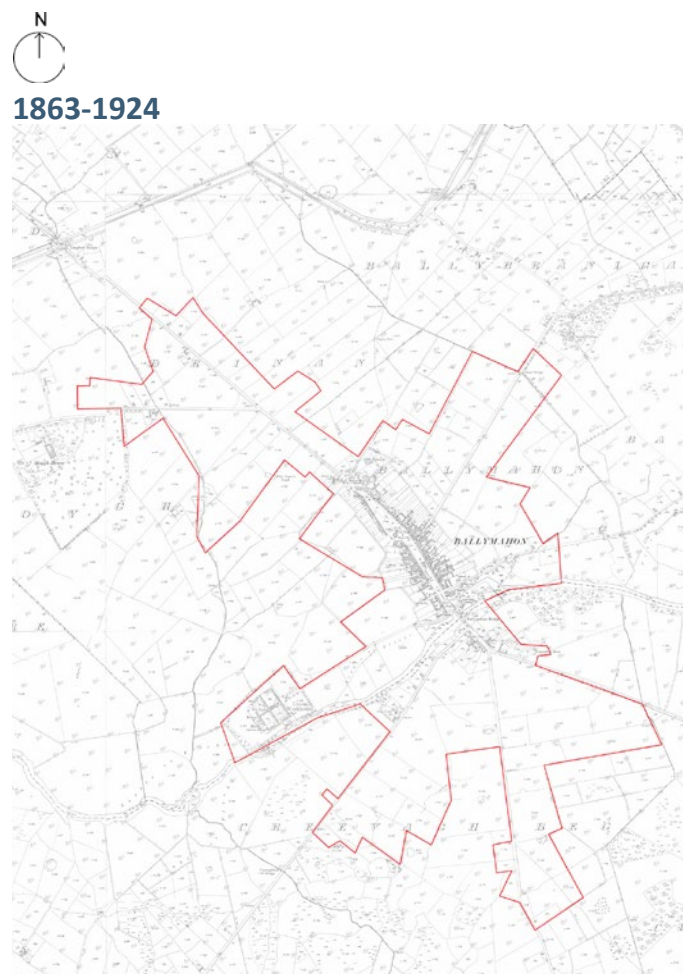


Fig.03 Ballymahon Town and Wider Context- 25Inch Historical Map

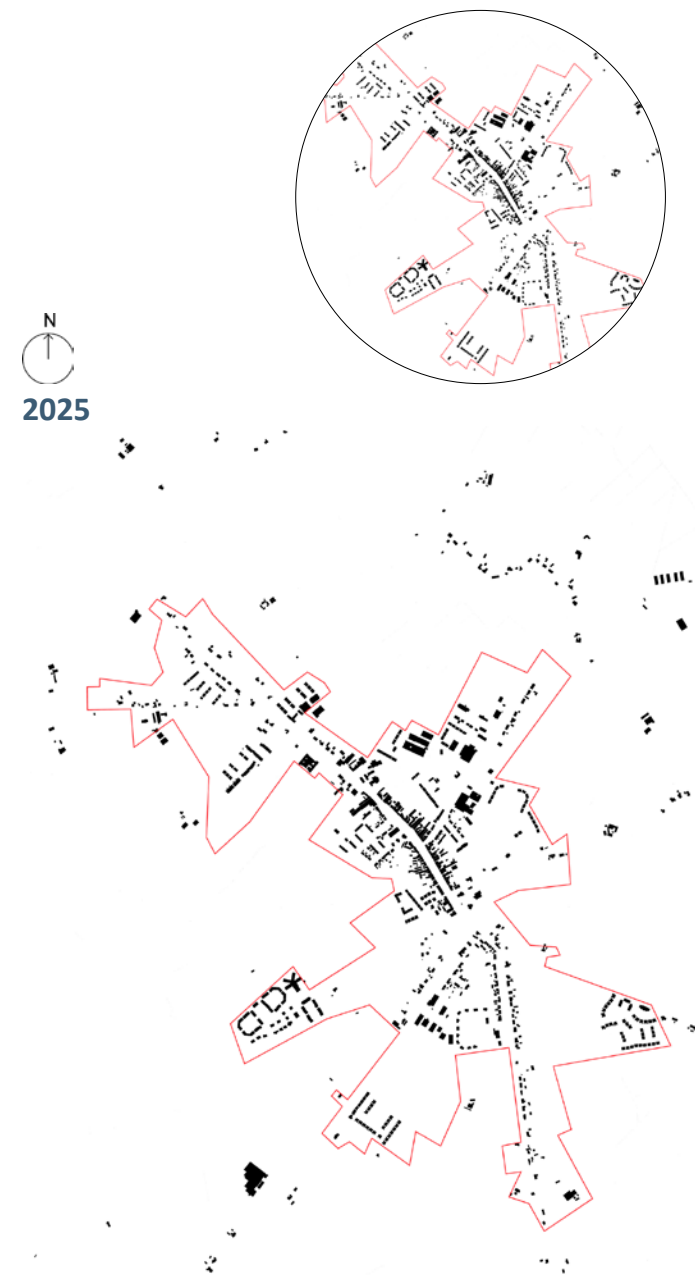


Fig.04 Ballymahon Town and Wider Context- 2025 Figure Ground Map

1.0 Heritage

1.1 Historical Mapping

Ballymahon Town Core Evolution



Fig.05 Ballymahon Town Core- 6Inch Historical Map

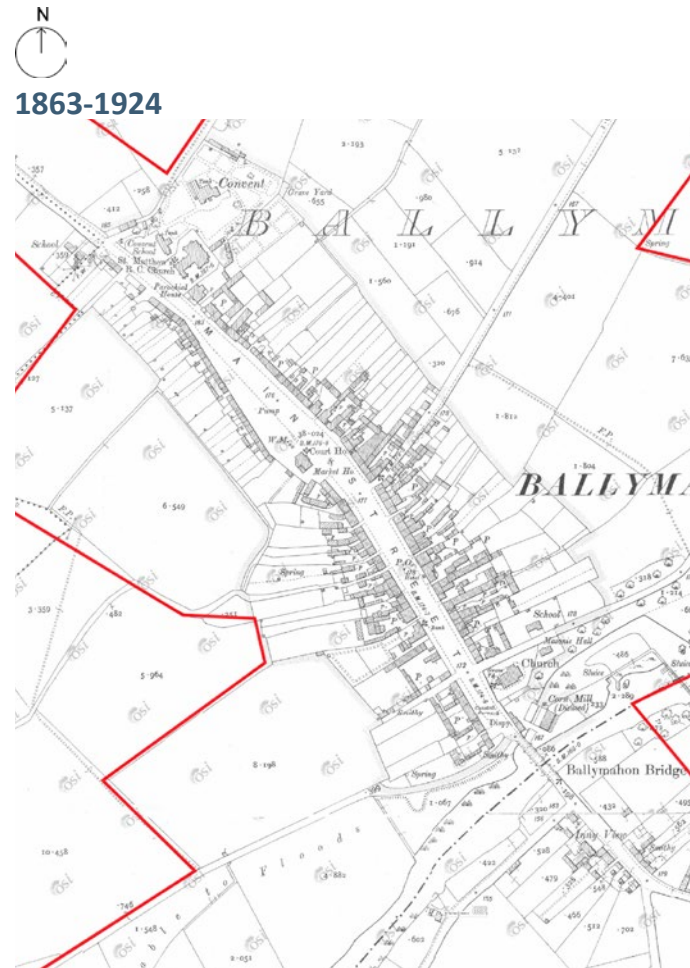


Fig.06 Ballymahon Town Core- 25Inch Historical Map



Fig.07 Ballymahon Town Core- 2025 OSI Base Map

1.0 Heritage

1.2 Protected Structures

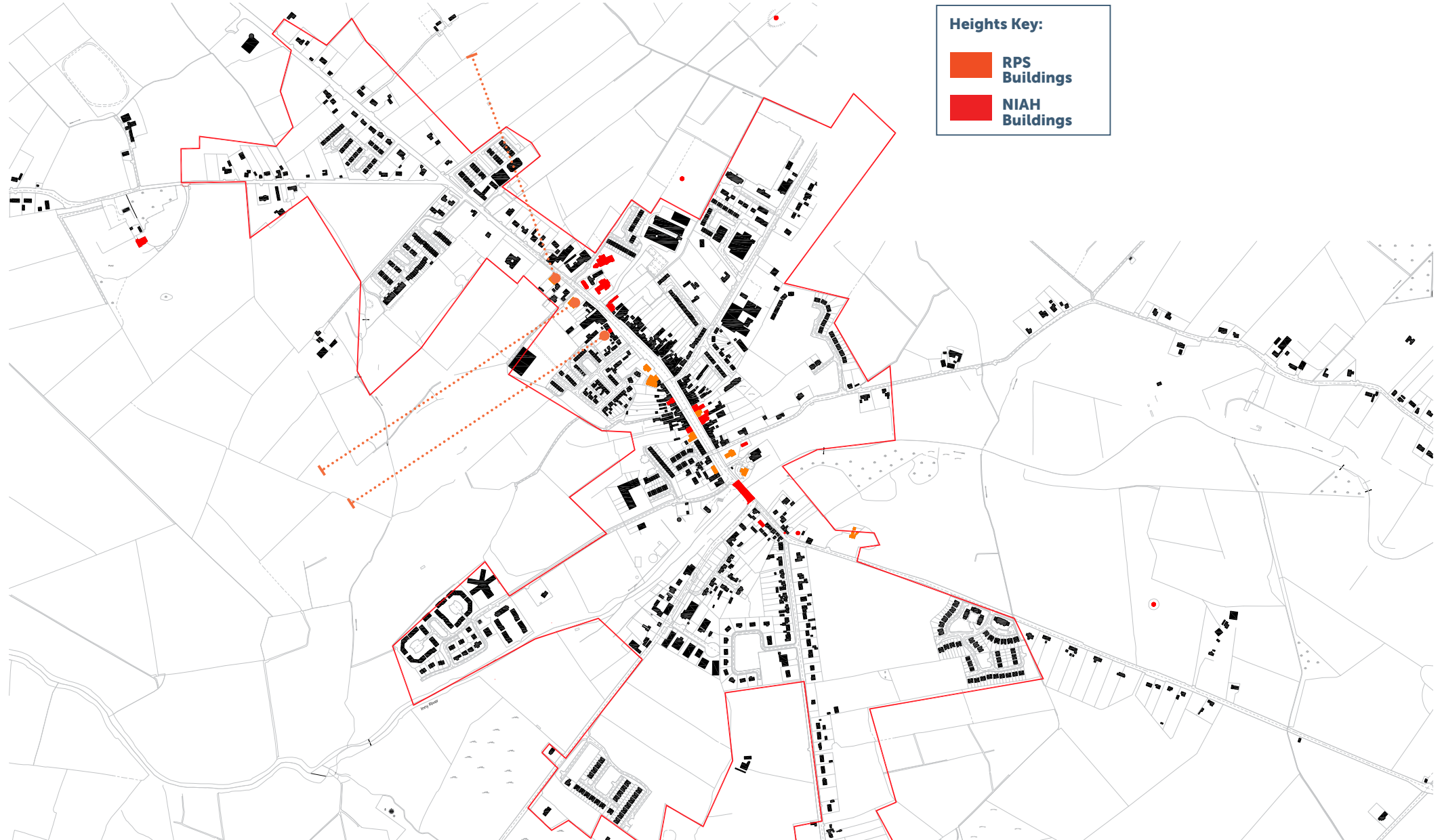


Fig.08 Ballymahon Town- 6Inch Historical Map

1.0 Heritage

1.2 Protected Structures & Architectural Heritage

Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Colmcille
NIAH 13316003 (1915-1925)
RPS 255

01.



Fig.09 Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Colmcille, Ballymahon

House
NIAH 13316014 (1925-1935)

02.



Fig.10 Private House, Ballymahon

Claffey House,
NIAH 13316029 (1810-1830)

03.



Fig.11 Claffey House, Ballymahon

Bank of Ireland/Financial Institution
NIAH 13316015 (1865-1870)
RPS 106

04.



Fig.12 Bank of Ireland, Ballymahon

Dean Egan Library
NIAH 13316028
RPS 103 (1925-1935)

05.



Fig.13 Dean Egan Library, Ballymahon

Ballymahon Courthouse & Market House
NIAH 13316010
RPS 100 (1815-1830)

06.



Fig.14 Courthouse & Market House, Ballymahon

House
NIAH 13316014 (1860-1900)

07.



Fig.15 Private House, Ballymahon

RIC Barracks
NIAH 13316016 (1810-1830)
RPS 102

08.



Fig.16 RIC Barracks, Ballymahon

1.0 Heritage

1.2 Protected Structures & Architectural Heritage

Ballymahon Bridge
NIAH 13316030 (1700-1750)

09.



Fig.17 RIC Ballymahon Bridge, Ballymahon

Convent of Mercy School
NIAH 13316006 (1875-1925)

10.



Fig.18 Convent Mercy School, Ballymahon

Convent of Mercy - Convent
NIAH 13316005 (1880-1900)

11.



Fig.19 Convent Mercy Convent, Ballymahon

House
NIAH 13316012 (1810-1830)

12.



Fig.20 Private House, Ballymahon

Innyview House
NIAH 13316020 (1820-1840)

13.



Fig.21 innyview House, Ballymahon

Saint Matthew's Catholic Church
NIAH 13316007 (1905-1910)

14.



Fig.22 St Matthew's Church, Ballymahon

House
NIAH 13316008 (1870-1890)

15.



Fig.23 Private House, Ballymahon

House
NIAH 13316013 (1760-1800)
RPS 105

16.



Fig.24 Private House, Ballymahon

1.0 Heritage

1.2 Protected Structures & Architectural Heritage

Skelly's / House
NIAH 13316017 (1820-1840)

17.



Fig.25 Skelly's Bar & House, Ballymahon

House
NIAH 13316018 (1820-1840)

18.



Fig.26 Private House, Ballymahon

Nally's Yard
N/A
RPS 107

20.



Fig.27 Nally's Yard, Ballymahon

Water Pump
NIAH 13316021 (1890-1910)

19.



Fig.28 Water Pump, Ballymahon

Saint Catherine's Church (Shrle-Noughaval)
NIAH 13316019 (1800-1825)
RPS 104

21.



Fig.29 St. Catherine's Church, Ballymahon

Ballymahon Masonic Hall
NIAH 13316025 (1840-1860)

22.



Fig.30 Ballymahon Masonic Hall, Ballymahon

Water Tower
NIAH 13316022 (1940-1960)

23.

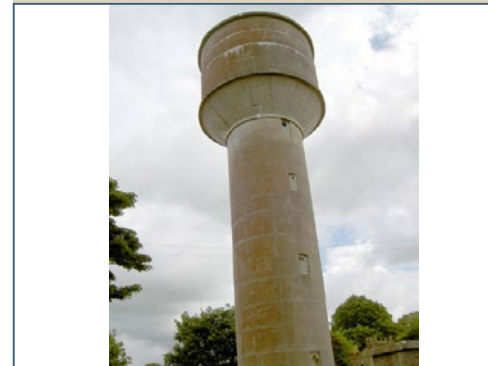


Fig.31 Water Tower, Ballymahon

Cornmill
N/A
RPS 101

24.



Fig.32 Cornmill, Ballymahon

1.0 Heritage

1.2 Protected Structures & Architectural Heritage (*Beyond Town Core*)

Moygh House- Gates/Railings/Walls
NIAH 13402605 (1770-1830)

25.



Fig.33 Moygh House Entrance, Ballymahon

Moygh House - House
NIAH 13402606 (1770-1830)

26.

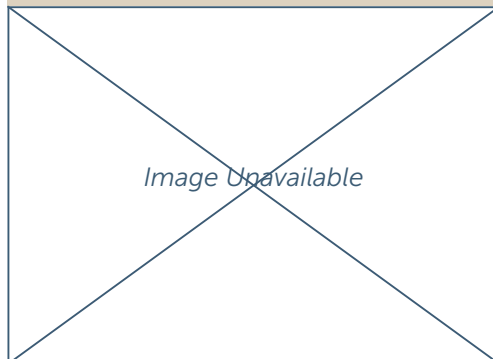


Fig.34 Moygh House, Ballymahon

Castlecor House : gates/railings/walls
NIAH 13402604 (1845-1865)
RPS 143

27.



Fig.35 Castlecor House Entrance, Ballymahon

Castlecor House
NIAH 13402608 (1730-1770)
RPS 144

28.



Fig.36 Castlecor House, Ballymahon

Castlecor House : gate lodge
NIAH 13402603 (1845-1865)

29.



Fig.37 Castlecor House Gate Lodge, Ballymahon

Antely House
NIAH 13402704 (1860-1900)
RPS 93

30.



Fig.38 Antely House, Ballymahon

Creevaghbeg House
NIAH 13316026 (1840-1880)
RPS 206

31.



Fig.39 Creevaghbeg House, Ballymahon

Inny Lodge
NIAH 13316023 (1850-1890)

32.



Fig.40 Inny Lodge, Ballymahon

1.0 Heritage

1.3 Historical Streetscapes



Fig.41 Main Street Panorama 01.

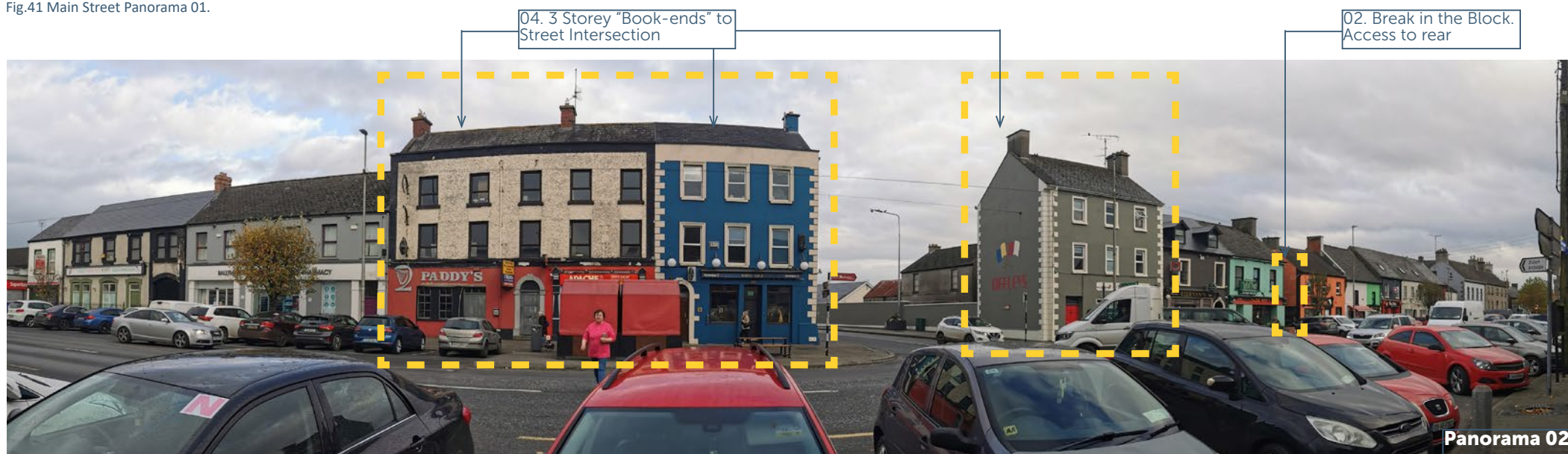


Fig.42 Main Street Panorama 02.

1.0 Heritage

1.3 Historical Streetscapes



Fig.43 Main Street Panorama 03.

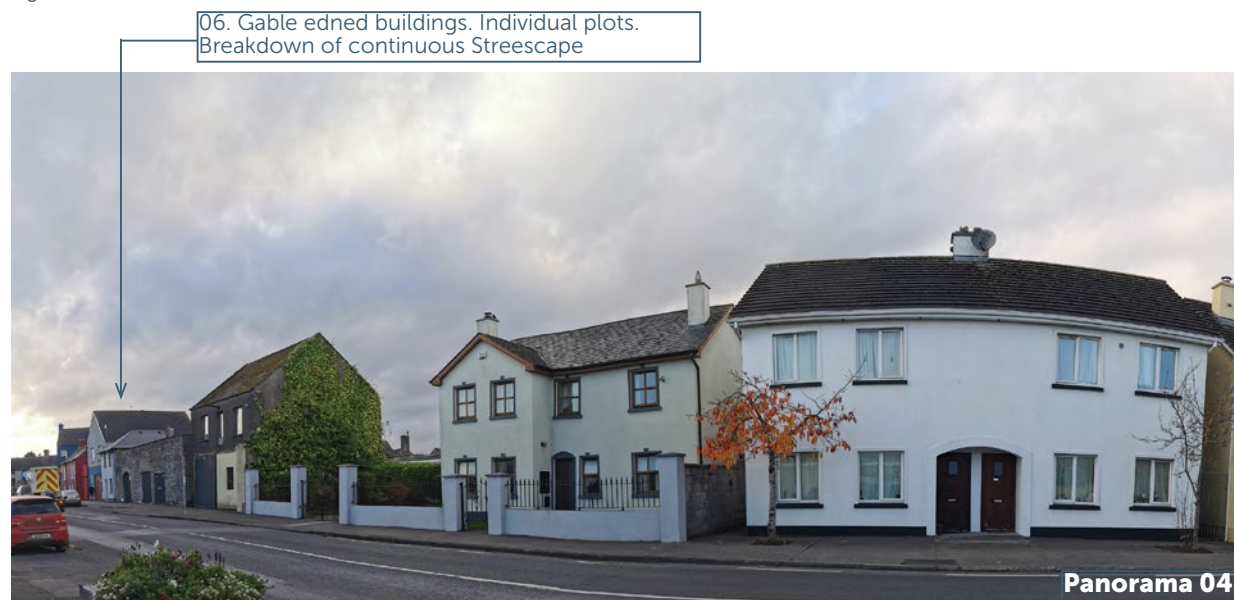


Fig.44 Main Street Panorama 04.



Fig.45 Main Street Panorama 05.

1.0 Heritage

1.3 Historical Streetscapes



Fig.46 Main Street Panorama 06.



Fig.47 Main Street Panorama 07.

1.0 Heritage

1.3 Historical Streetscapes

07. Variety of plot widths. Continuous Frontage

04. Landmark Corner Buildings



Note: Image taken from Google Earth (Image not full up to date in 2025)

Panorama 08

Fig.47 Main Street Panorama 07.

04. Landmark Standalone Church building

07. Variety of plot widths. Continuous Frontage



Note: Image taken from Google Earth (Image not full up to date in 2025)

Panorama 09

Fig.48 Main Street Panorama 08.

1.0 Heritage

1.3 Historical Streetscapes

04. Landmark Stand Alone building & open green space



Panorama 10

Fig.49 Main Street Panorama 09.

05. Continuous Terrace with some accesses for rear areas

04. Landmark Stand Alone buildings



Panorama 11

Fig.50 Main Street Panorama 10.

1.0 Heritage

1.3 Historical Streetscapes

01. Break gap in continuous streetscape. Access to rear backlands

05. Continuous Terrace with some accesses for rear areas

04.



Panorama 12

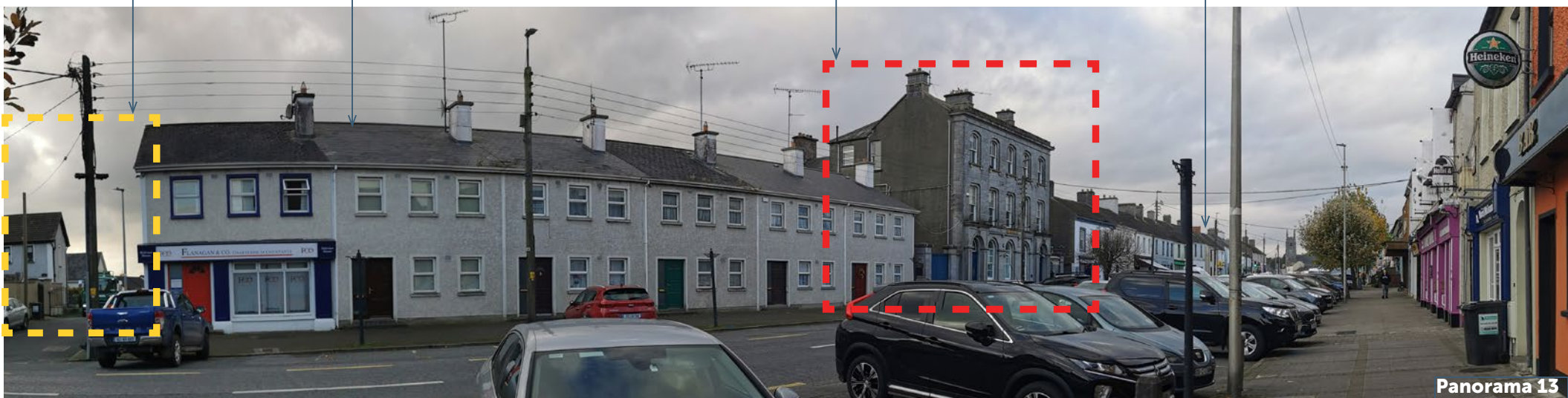
Fig.51 Main Street Panorama 12.

01.

05. Continuous Terrace with some accesses for rear areas

04. Landmark Building. Increased height and break either side of adjacent terraces

05. Continuous Terrace with some accesses for rear areas



Panorama 13

Fig.52 Main Street Panorama 13.

1.0 Heritage

1.3 Historical Streetscapes



Fig.53 Main Street Panorama 14.

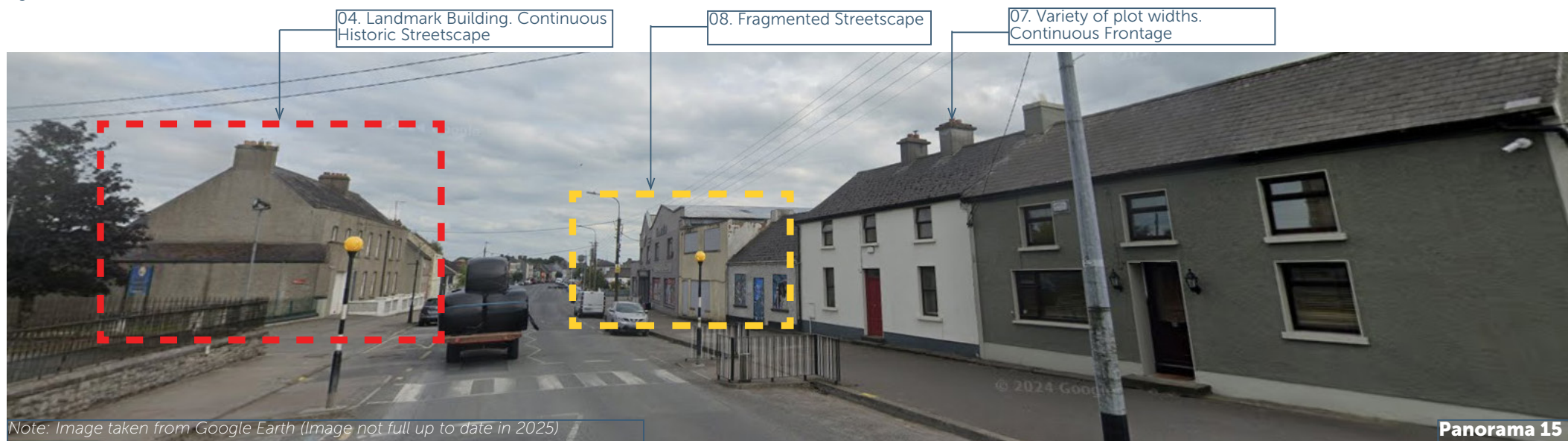


Fig.54 Main Street Panorama 15.

1.0 Heritage

1.4 Architectural Features

Gates & Rear Access details:

- Arched head detail
- Regular block breaks with access to the rear of properties
- Simple Slatted Wooden and semi-industrial Metal Gates access (Vehicular and Pedestrian)
- Single direction width of openings
- Majority of these opens as a result of natural break in the block.
- Some single storey vehicular openings within the block frontage maintaining the street parapet line.



Entrance doors details:

- Rounded Fanlights
- Solid Timber Entrance doors
- Rounded detail to window head and gated entrance of Market Building(Library) and Old Barracks

Urban Realm Deatils:

- Metal Fencing/Rail enclosure to a number of Historic properties.
- Defined buffer between public and semi-private space
- Level changes (esp. to the Southern Street side)
- Stepped access to a number of properties within the footpath

2.0 Height and Massing

2.1 Building Heights

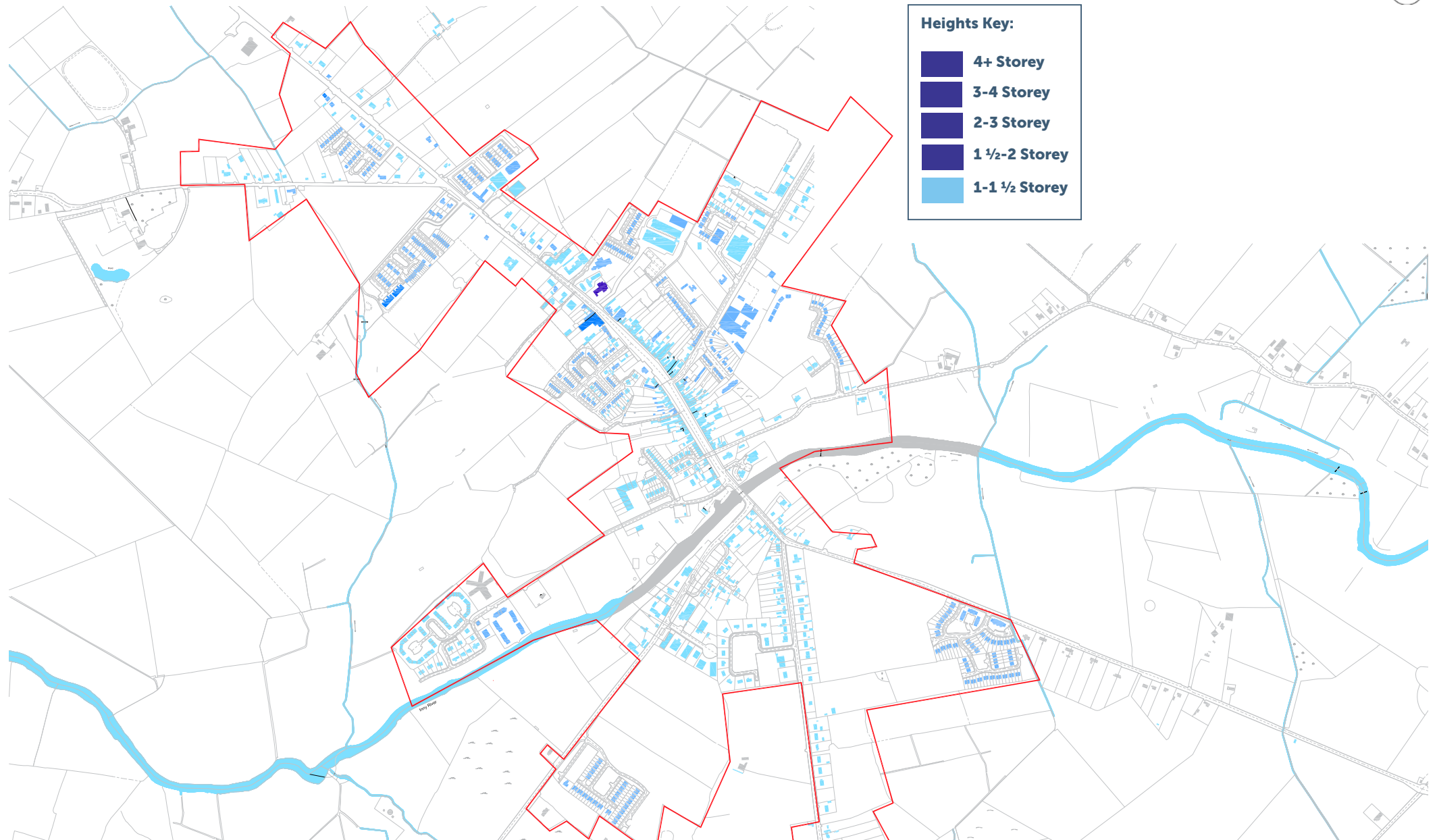


Fig.55 Storey Height/ Massing Map for Ballymahon

2.0 Height & Massing

2.2 Key Marker Buildings



Fig.56 Landmark Buildings - Ballymahon Town Core

2.0 Height & Massing

2.3 Historic Open Space

1829-1969



Fig.57 Ballymahon Urban Realm - 6Inch Historical Map

1863-1924

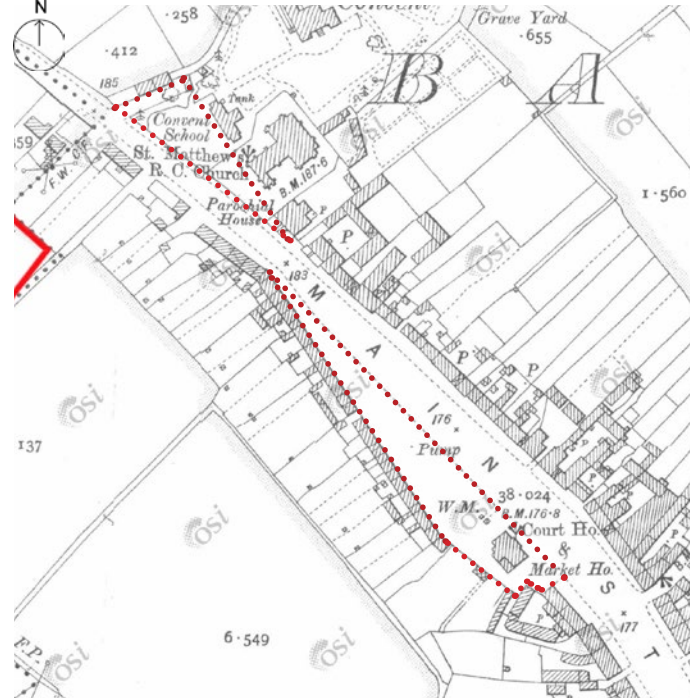


Fig.58 Ballymahon Urban Realm - 25Inch Historical Map

2025

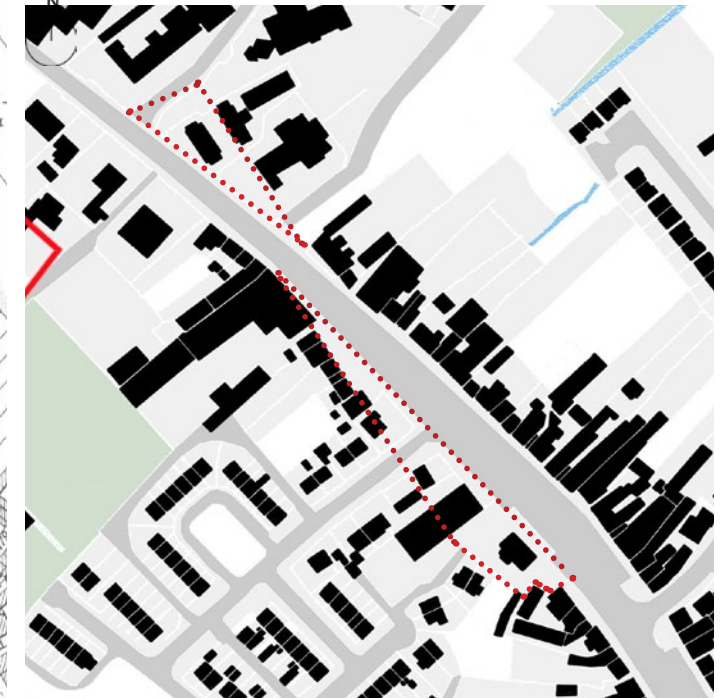


Fig.59 Ballymahon Urban Realm- 2025 OSI Base Map



Fig.60 Ballymahon Green Open Space- 2024 Site Photos

2.0 Height & Massing

2.3 Historic Open Space

1829-1969



Fig.61 Ballymahon Green Open Space- 6Inch Historical Map

1863-1924

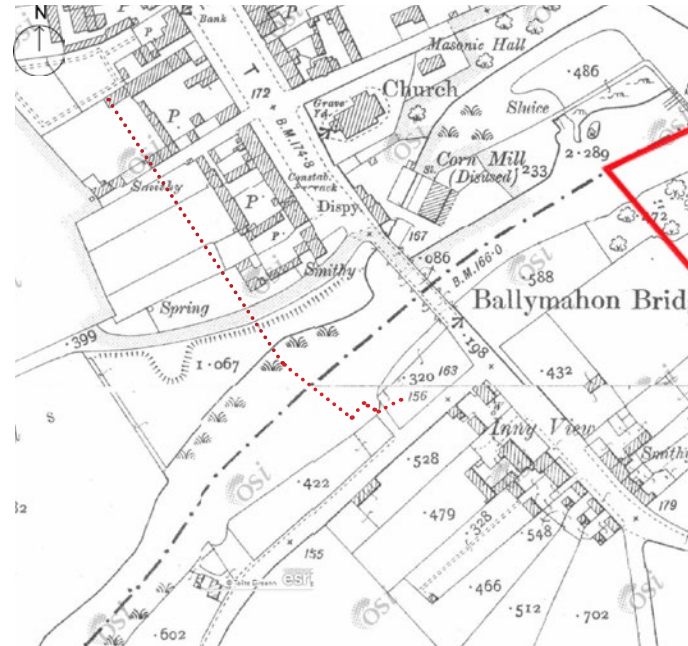


Fig.62 Ballymahon Green Open Space- 25Inch Historical Map

2025



Fig.63 Ballymahon Green Open Space- 2025 OSI Base Map



Fig.64 Ballymahon Green Open Space- 2024 Site Photos

3.0 Nature & Environment

3.1 Landscape & Vegetation



Fig.65 Ballymahon Planting and Vegetation



Key:	
	Recreation Area
	Treatment Area
	Pedestrian Route
	Agricultural Land
	Street Trees

3.0 Nature & Environment

3.2 Flooding

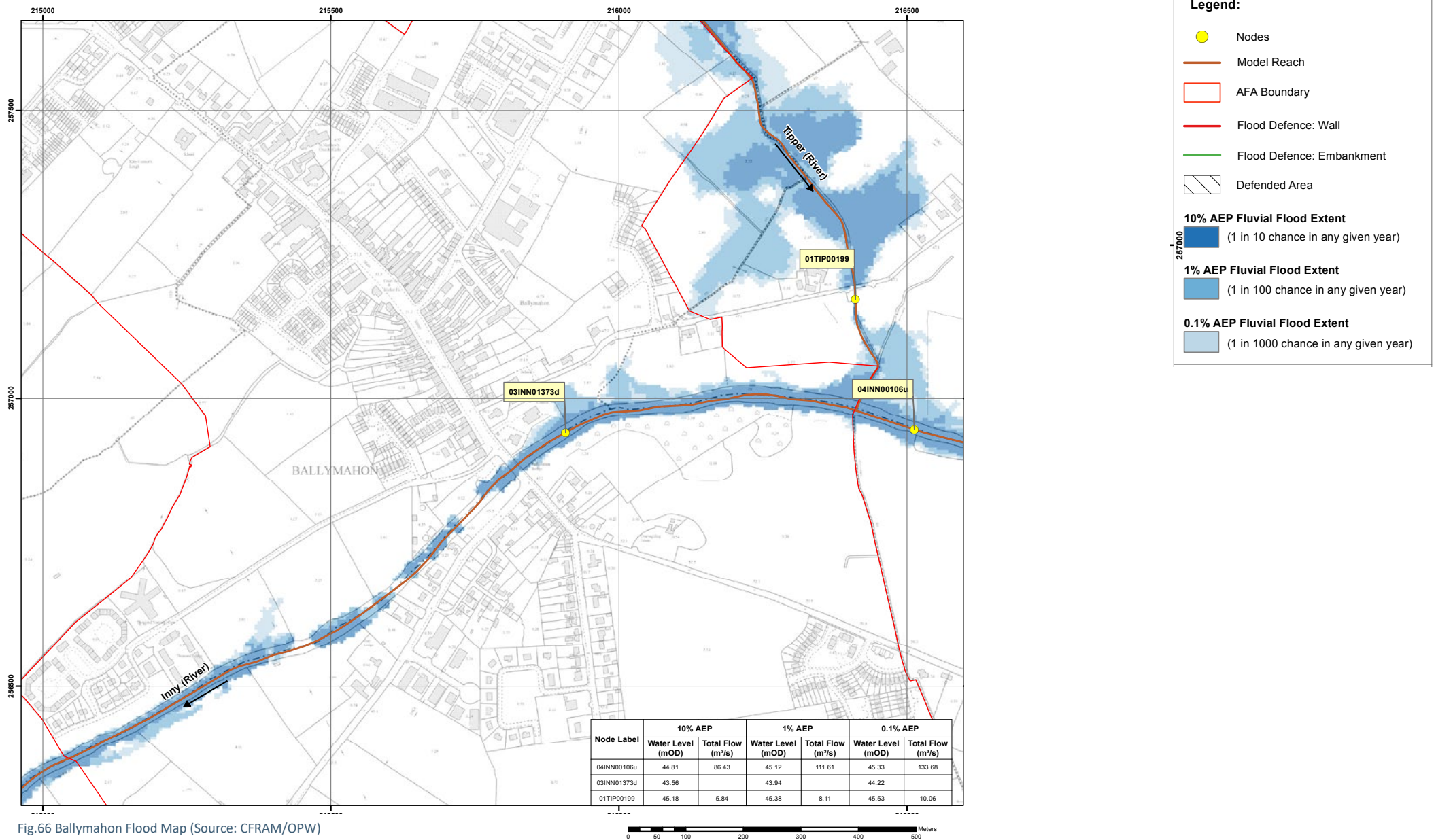


Fig.66 Ballymahon Flood Map (Source: CFRAM/OPW)

4.0 Movement

4.1 Walkability & Vehicular Movement

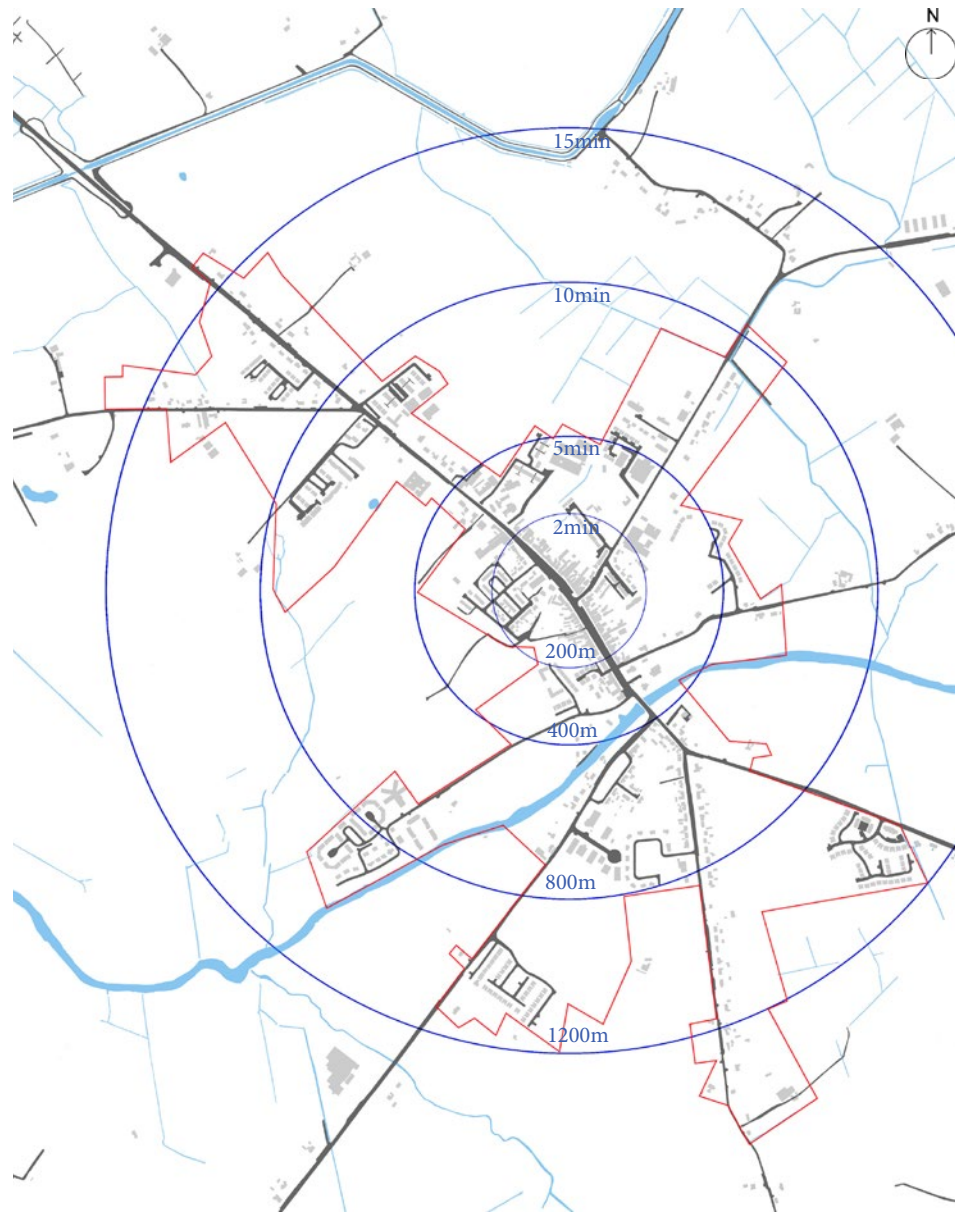


Fig.67 Ballymahon Town Walkability- Distances

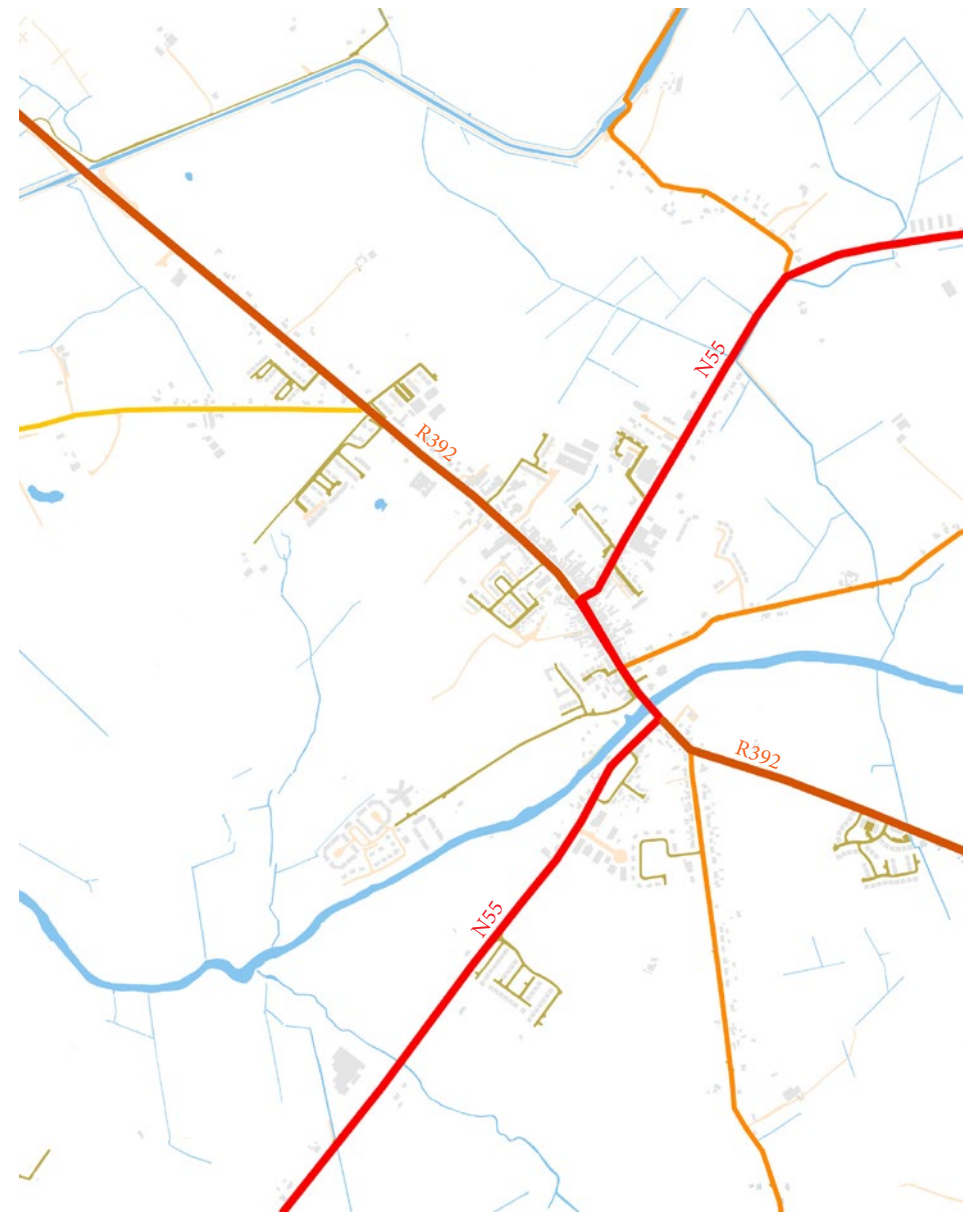


Fig.68 Ballymahon Town- Roads Layout & Hierarchy

4.0 Movement

4.2 Permeability & Connectivity Opportunities



Fig.69 Ballymahon Town Walkability- Distances

**Appendix 2 – Digital Town
Blueprint Report: Ballymahon,
Co. Longford/February 2025**



An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
Community Development

Digital Town Blueprint Report Ballymahon, Co. Longford

February 2025



An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
Community Development

Digital Town Blueprint

Ballymahon, Co. Longford

February 2025

A study prepared for the Department of Rural and Community Development by the Irish Institute of Digital Business, University of Galway, and .IE

© Dublin City University, 2025

This study was carried out for the Department of Rural and Community Development by:



Theo Lynn
Colm O’Gorman
Jennifer Kennedy
Timothy Kennedy
Maggie O’Gorman

Irish Institute of Digital Business
DCU Business School
Dublin City University
Glasnevin
D09 Y074
Ireland

iidb.ie | business.dcu.ie



Pierangelo Rosati

J.E. Cairnes School of Business & Economics
University of Galway,
University Road,
Galway,
H91 TK33
Ireland

www.universityofgalway.ie



David Curtin
Oonagh McCutcheon
Sean Tobin

.IE
2 Harbour Square
Dún Laoghaire
Co. Dublin
A96 D6R0
Ireland

www.weare.ie

Acknowledgments: The authors would like to acknowledge the contribution of Maggie O’Gorman, Aoife Lynn, Jamie Lynn, Guy Tattan, Brian Waugh, Harry Begg, Charlotte Recktenwald, Michel Jijon, David Kearns, Ryan Hagerty and Conner Malone to the project.

Disclaimer

DCU, University of Galway and .IE have prepared this report based on an agreed scope of work with the Department of Rural and Community Development. This report is commissioned by and prepared for the exclusive use of the Department of Rural and Community Development, unless agreed otherwise. It is subject to and issued in accordance with the agreement between the Department of Rural and Community Development and DCU. Except where expressly stated, DCU, University of Galway and .IE have not verified the validity, accuracy or comprehensiveness of any information supplied to DCU, University of Galway and .IE for its reports. DCU, University of Galway and .IE are not responsible and will not be liable to any other person or organisation for or in relation to any matter dealt within this report, or for any loss or damage suffered by any other person or organisation arising from matters dealt with or conclusions expressed in this report (including without limitation matters arising from any negligent act or omission of DCU, University of Galway and .IE or for any loss or damage suffered by any other party relying upon the matters dealt with or conclusions expressed in this report). Other parties should not rely upon the report or the accuracy or completeness of any conclusions and should make their own inquiries and obtain independent advice in relation to such matters.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Introduction	34
2 Infrastructure for Connectivity	36
3 Digital Business	46
4 Digital Public Services	50
5 Digital Education	54
6 Digital Civil Society	56
7 Digital Tourism	59
8 Governance of Digital Town Initiatives	64
9 Digital Town Score	69

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 ABOUT THE DIGITAL TOWN BLUEPRINT

The .IE Digital Town Blueprint¹ (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. It was originally designed by the Irish Institute of Digital Business at Dublin City University (DCU) with funding from .IE. The DTB used in this report is an updated version based on Lynn et al. (2022).²

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
- Stimulate stakeholder engagement on digitalisation

The National Planning Framework³ and Our Rural Future⁴ policies set out a vision to develop thriving Irish Towns which are integral to Ireland's national economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing and development. This vision is built on the interdependence of urban and rural areas, and recognises the diversity of individual towns, the centrality of people, the importance of vibrant and lived-in places and the potential to create quality jobs and sustain a shared environment. The Town Centre First policy seeks to support the delivery of this vision and complement a wide range of Government policies impacting on Irish towns. It provides a cross-cutting and collaborative framework for central government, Local Authorities, public and private sector stakeholders, and especially communities, to build sustainable vibrant town centres. 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 Town Centre First policy (p.19) states:

“There is also the opportunity to utilise technology to enhance the experience of living and working in towns, and to integrate digital technology into daily commercial and social life. Digital technology can improve the quality and accessibility of services, and can be used to address challenges faced by our towns, providing them with new roles in the digital economy.”

The DTB analyses digital readiness across seven dimensions. This is accomplished through a combination of primary research, desk research, secondary data, key informant interviews and automated data collection techniques. The findings of the assessment are synthesised into a digital town readiness score and assessment report. The seven dimensions are:

¹ <https://www.weare.ie/ie-digital-town-blueprint/>

² Lynn, T., Rosati, P., Conway, E., Curran, D., Fox, G., & O’Gorman, C. (2022). Digital Towns: Accelerating and Measuring the Digital Transformation of Rural Societies and Economies (p. 213). Springer Nature.

³ <https://npf.ie/>

⁴ <https://assets.gov.ie/132413/433aebac-f12a-4640-8cac-9faf52e5ea1f.pdf>

- I. Infrastructure for connectivity - the deployment of fixed and mobile broadband infrastructure and the availability of free public Wi-Fi and digital rural hubs.
- II. The Digital Economy and Digital Business – the use of digital technology by local businesses and their level of sophistication.
- III. Digital Public Services – the use and sophistication of digital technology by both local government and health, and the availability of local open data.
- IV. Digital Education – the support for and use and sophistication of digital technology by education providers, and the provision of training and education in digital technologies across all levels.
- V. Digital Technologies and Civil Society – the use and sophistication of digital technologies by community and voluntary groups in a town.
- VI. Digital Tourism – the use and sophistication of digital technology to attract tourists and deliver a distinctive tourism experience.
- VII. Governance of Digital Town Initiatives – the degree of coordination across the town on digitalisation including (a) integration across different elements of policy making, and across policy and other stakeholders, and (b) integration across different levels within the governance or policy sphere.

The selected dimensions and variables can provide towns with useful insights on their digital readiness, and allow them to compare across time and to benchmark against other towns.

As agreed with the DRCD, this abridged report does not include subsections of analysis on e-government in Digital Public Services and analysis of pre-primary, primary and secondary education in Digital Education.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

The objectives for this report are:

- Assessment – to obtain an initial characterisation of the digital readiness of infrastructure and service providers in Ballymahon.
- Comparative Analysis – to undertake a comparison of DTB assessments (a) between an initial selection of towns, and (b) regional, national and EU benchmarks, where appropriate and possible.

This report is an assessment of Ballymahon, Co. Longford. For the purposes of this report and to be consistent with Town Centre First, measurements are calculated within a 2km radius of the town centre for each town. Data was collected from June to October 2024 unless otherwise stated. Feedback and clarifications on a draft report were requested from Town Regeneration Officers in December 2024 and January 2025. Such feedback was included, as deemed appropriate.

2. INFRASTRUCTURE FOR CONNECTIVITY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Infrastructure for connectivity includes broadband and mobile connectivity, free public Wi-Fi, rural digital hubs, amongst others. Increased connectivity can contribute positively to economic growth and household income levels, and can result in increased employability, retail transactions, time-savings, and other community benefits.⁵ Free public Wi-Fi provides both access to the Internet and consumer cost savings. Research suggests that free municipal public Wi-Fi access can provide benefits including economic development, community branding, collaboration between other public service providers in a municipality, provision of internet connectivity (and associated services) to low-income and underserved citizens, and revenue generating activities.⁶ Free public Wi-Fi forms part of the European Tourism Manifesto for Growth and Jobs which encourages free Wi-Fi for visitors in tourist attractions, events and destinations.⁷ Rural digital hubs have been proposed as a potential solution to improve broadband connectivity, improve digital literacy for individuals, workers and businesses, attract new residents and visitors, and stimulate economic activity.⁸ Rural digital hubs are a physical space, which can be fixed or mobile, focused on digital connectivity, digital skill development and/or emergent technologies.⁹ In 2021, the Irish government launched a National Hub Network and has supported funding for over 500 remote working hubs ('connected hubs') to date.¹⁰

The connectivity dimension of the DTB presented in this report consists of five indicators weighted as follows:

- Fixed broadband (35%)
- Mobile broadband (35%)
- Competition (10%)
- Free public Wi-Fi (10%)
- Rural digital hubs (10%)

No data at the town-level was available from Comreg or the CSO for broadband or mobile take-up at the time when this research was carried out. It is important to note that broadband coverage and quality statistics may not always reflect user experience due to disparities in actual vs. advertised speeds, the quality and setup of equipment, local interferences, building construction, network congestion, service outages, amongst other factors.

⁵ <https://cebr.com/reports/tinder-foundation-and-go-on-uk-call-for-urgent-digital-skills-funding-to-support-government-2020-fast-broadband-for-all-pledge/>

⁶ Lynn, T., Rosati, P., Conway, E., Curran, D., Fox, G., & O'Gorman, C. (2022). Digital Towns: Accelerating and Measuring the Digital Transformation of Rural Societies and Economies (p. 213). Springer Nature.

⁷ <https://tourismmanifesto.eu/>

⁸ European Network for Rural Development. (2017). Revitalising rural areas through digitisation the experience of three rural digital hubs. https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/tg_rural-businesses_case-study_rural-digital-hub_0.pdf

⁹ Rundel, C., Salemink, K., & Strijker, D. (2018). CORA diagnostic survey results: Results and guiding measures. <https://northsearegion.eu/media/7485/corareport-diagnostic-survey-results.pdf>

¹⁰ Department of Rural and Community Development, 'Our Rural Future Progress Report 2' (2022) <https://assets.gov.ie/133735/6bbb1ebf-2a7a-4948-9ae2-fe0e1f5e2805.pdf>, p. 9

Table 1 Irish Broadband Coverage (DESI, 2022) ¹¹

	Ireland			EU
	DESI 2022	DESI 2023	DESI 2024	DESI 2024
Overall internet take-up (% of households)	97.50%	NA	93.92%	93.09%
Share of fixed broadband subscriptions (>=100 Mbps) (% of fixed subscriptions)	46.56%	53.46%	61.04%	66.17%
Share of fixed broadband subscriptions (>=1 Gbps) (% of fixed subscriptions)	4.27%	7.97%	9.48%	18.52%
Fixed Very High Capacity Network (VHCN) coverage (% of households)	89%	83.82%	86.99%	78.81%
Fibre to the Premises (FTTP) coverage (% of households)	62%	72.07%	78.48%	63.99%
5G spectrum (Assigned spectrum as a % of total harmonised 5G spectrum)	29%	62.50%	62.50%	73.40%
5G coverage (% of households)	72%	83.92%	85.32%	89.30%
5G coverage in the 3.4-3.8 GHz band (% of households)	NA	55.97%	56.68%	50.60%
5G SIM cards (% of total population)	46.56%	53.46%	24.43%	24.62%
Mobile broadband take-up (% of individuals)	98%	98.39%	93.07%	89.94%

2.2 DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

2.2.1 Fixed Broadband Coverage

A snapshot of fixed broadband coverage in Ballymahon can be gleaned from the interactive mapping tool provided by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. As illustrated in Figure 1, commercial operators deliver high-speed broadband (colour-coded blue in Figure 1) in the urban centre around the Ballymahon area. Areas in light blue, extending outwards from the urban centre, indicate areas where a commercial provider has committed to commercial rural deployment plans to roll out high speed broadband. The remainder of Figure 1, shaded in amber, are target areas for the State intervention under the National Broadband Plan (NBP).¹²

¹¹ https://digital-decade-desi.digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/datasets/desi/charts/desi-indicators?period=desi_2024&indicator=desi_iuse&breakdown=ind_total&unit=pc_ind&country=AT,BE,BG,HR,CY,CZ,DK,EE,EU,FI,FR,DE,EL,HU,IE,IT,LV,LT,LU,MT,NL,PL,PT,RO,SK,SI,ES,SE

¹² <https://nbi.ie/>

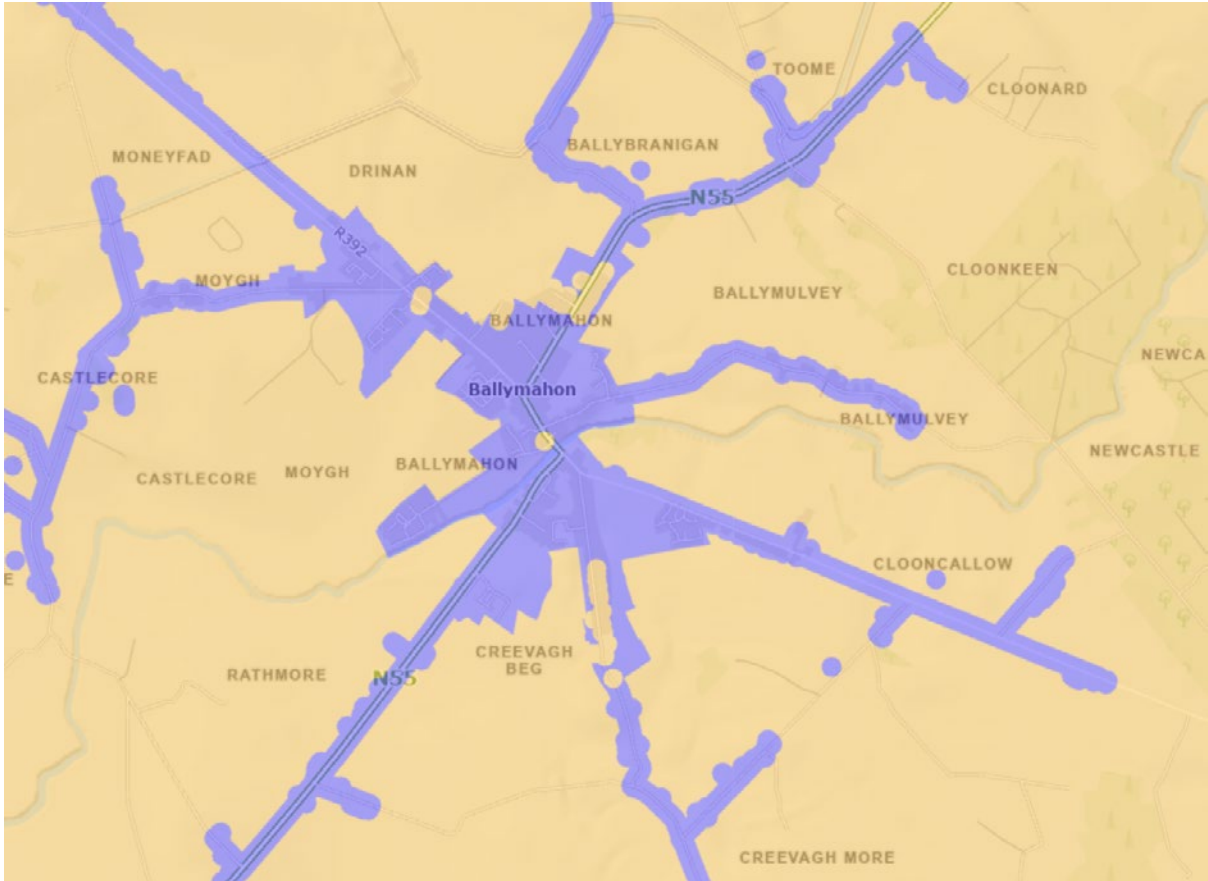


Figure 1 High-speed broadband rollout in Ballymahon and adjacent townlands (Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment)¹³

Table 2 provides further details regarding the number of premises in each townland which are either covered by commercial broadband or are designated as forming part of the intervention area. The figures provided in Table 2 indicate a 100% level of fixed broadband coverage across the Ballymahon townlands in question. This figure compares favourably to the average fixed broadband coverage across EU member states (97.7%) and at a rural level (92.5%). Ireland’s overall fixed broadband coverage was measured at 97.2% in June 2023.¹⁴

¹³ <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/topics/Broadband/national-broadband-plan/high-speed-broadband-map/Pages/Interactive-Map.aspx>

¹⁴ Broadband Coverage in Europe 2023. Mapping progress towards the coverage objectives of the Digital Decade - Final Report: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/digital-decade-2024-broadband-coverage-europe-2023>, p. 52.

Table 2 Townlands – Premises within commercial broadband coverage or NBP intervention (Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment)

Townland	Premises	NBP Intervention	Covered by Operators
Ballymahon	611	32	579
Ballymulvey	29	1	28
Clooncallow	32	12	20
Creevagh More	27	4	23
Creevaghbeg	276	18	258
Carrickbeg	0	0	0
Rathmore	44	11	33
Castlecore	8	0	8
Moygh	28	4	24
Moneyfad	7	1	6
Drinan	185	13	172
Ballybranigan	24	1	23
Toome	28	9	19
Total	1299	106 (8.16%)	1193 (91.84%)

2.2.2 Mobile Broadband Coverage

The European Commission's DESI measures mobile broadband coverage and take-up (see Table 1) as part of its connectivity dimension. In 2024, 90% of people in the EU used a mobile device to access the internet (up from 73% in 2016). During 2024, Ireland ranked eighth among the EU Member States for the uptake of mobile broadband with 93% compared to an EU average of 90%. Ireland has a higher 5G coverage than the EU average, however this is primarily in the most populous areas. Ireland ranks 18th among the EU Member States on the 5G spectrum indicator at 62.5% (the EU average is 73.4%).

Ballymahon also appears to have near universal mobile broadband coverage. However, this coverage displays variability across townlands when classified in terms of data speed. The Commission for Communications Regulation (Comreg) provides an interactive mapping tool that visualises mobile broadband quality across Ireland. For mobile technology types 2G (voice calls and text messages), 3G (voice calls, text messages and data), 4G (smart phone for data and voice), and 5G (data and voice) coverage provided by commercial providers is ranked as very good; good; fair; fringe; and no coverage (see Table 3 for descriptions of each category). There are eleven mobile service providers in total currently operating in Ballymahon, though only four provide 5G broadband (see 2.2.3 below).

Table 3 Comreg classifications of mobile broadband coverage (Comreg)¹⁵

Rating	2G coverage	3G coverage	4G coverage	5G coverage
Very Good (=5)	Strong signal with very good connections	Strong signal with maximum data speeds	Strong signal with maximum data speeds	Strong signal with maximum data speeds
Good (=4)	Strong signal with good connections	Strong signal with good data speeds	Strong signal with good data speeds	Strong signal with good data speeds
Fair (=3)	Fair signal may be attained, but disconnections may occur at weaker signal levels	Fast and reliable data speeds may be attained, but marginal data with drop-outs is possible at weaker signal levels	Fast and reliable data speeds may be attained, but marginal data with drop-outs is possible at weaker signal levels	Fast and reliable data speeds may be attained, but marginal data with drop-outs is possible at weaker signal levels
Fringe (=2)	Disconnections likely to occur	Disconnections likely to occur	Disconnections likely to occur	Disconnections likely to occur
No Coverage (=1)	Likely to have no coverage in this area	Likely to have no coverage in this area	Likely to have no coverage in this area	Likely to have no coverage in this area

Eir offers 5G coverage in 460 towns and cities in all 26 counties of the Republic of Ireland, claiming to reach over 70% of the population.¹⁶ Three claims to reach over 90% of the population.¹⁷ The Comreg Outdoor Mobile Coverage Map shows that 5G coverage is available in Ballymahon.¹⁸

In order to assess mobile broadband quality across commercial providers for each of the Ballymahon townlands in question, we code the Comreg classifications from 1-5 (with 5 denoting “very good”). We then calculate the average coverage quality for each townland, as well as across townlands (see Table 4).

¹⁵ See COMREG <https://coveragemap.comreg.ie/faq/>. Codes added by authors.

¹⁶

<https://eirevo.ie/communications/mobile/5g/#:~:text=We%20are%20Ireland's%20Largest%205G%20Network&text=We%20currently%20offer%205G%20coverage.of%20the%20Republic%20of%20Ireland.>

¹⁷ <https://www.three.ie/why-choose-three/5g.html>

¹⁸ Comreg interactive broadband coverage mapping tool, <https://coveragemap.comreg.ie/map>

Table 4 Average classification of mobile coverage in Ballymahon Townlands (Comreg)¹⁹

Townland	2G Coverage	3G Coverage	4G Coverage	5G Coverage
Ballymahon	4	4	3.82	1.64
Ballymulvey	4	4	3.64	1.91
Clooncallow	3.91	4.91	4	1.82
Creevagh More	4	4	3	1.64
Creevaghbeg	4	4	3	1.64
Carrickbeg	4.18	4.18	3.18	1.91
Rathmore	4.64	3.82	3.27	1.82
Castlecore	4.64	4.18	3.64	1.82
Moygh	4	3.64	3	1.73
Moneyfad	3.64	3.18	2.64	1.55
Drinan	4	3.64	3	1.82
Ballybranigan	4	4.09	3.36	1.82
Toome	4	3.64	3	1.55
Average	4.08	3.94	3.27	1.74
Weighted Average ²⁰	4.02	3.95	3.3	1.75
Rating	Very Good	Very Good	Good	Fair

Mobile broadband coverage in Ballymahon may extend across townlands but broadband speeds decrease as one moves out from the town centre. In particular, focusing on 4G provision in Ballymahon highlights variations in digital connectivity within Ballymahon and surrounding townlands.

2.2.3 Competition

As can be seen from Table 1, broadband in Ireland (based on broadband price index scores) has become more competitive over time. Notwithstanding this, recent EU research carried out by Empirica and TUV Rheinland²¹ suggests that compared to all EU27 countries:

- Prices for fixed broadband in Ireland are much higher than the EU average
- Prices for household broadband baskets in Ireland are somewhat higher than the EU average

In both cases, no commercial offers were found to be less expensive than the EU average. Prices for mobile broadband in Ireland show a different pattern compared to EU27 countries overall. Whereas consumers requiring 20GB mobile data with 300

¹⁹ Comreg interactive broadband coverage mapping tool, <https://coveragemap.comreg.ie/map>

²⁰ Weights = number of premises in each townland.

²¹ Source: Mobile and Fixed Broadband Prices in Europe 2021: <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/dae/redirection/document/88311>

calls find offers very much lower than the EU average, those seeking 0.5 GB mobile data with no calls find prices somewhat higher than the EU average.

Competition among Irish telecom providers is evident from recent consumer price movements. From January 2022 to September 2024 the communication prices component of the consumer price index (CPI) increased by 3.1 percentage points, while the overall CPI index increased by 14.4 percentage points over the same price period (see Figure 2).

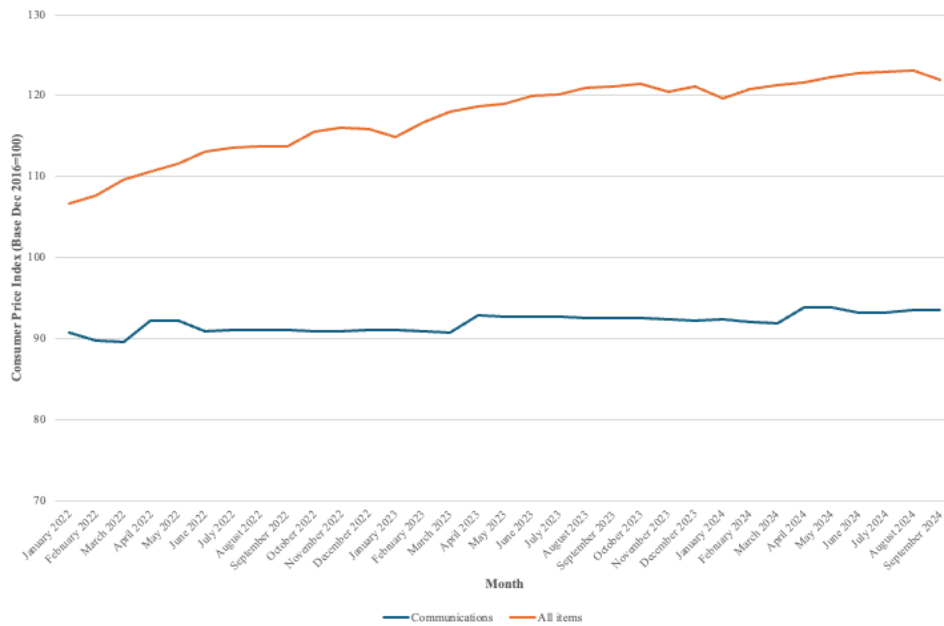


Figure 2 Consumer Price Index and Communications Sub-Component (Central Statistics Office)²²

Ballymahon is relatively well-served for both fixed broadband and mobile connectivity with eight fixed broadband providers, eleven 2G, 3G and 4G mobile providers, but only four 5G mobile providers (Table 5). It should be noted that Vodafone and other providers will sunset 3G access by the end of 2024. 2G is likely to be retained as a backstop network that uses low amounts of energy, and in the event that other forms of connection fail, 2G will be used to allow people to continue communicating using calls and SMS messages. The sunsetting of 3G may negatively impact members of the community with older phones and are likely to be members of marginalised groups, such as the elderly and those in poverty.

²² Source: Central Statistics Office (2022). Consumer Prices Monthly Series - CPM16 - Consumer Price Index: <https://data.cso.ie/table/CPM16>.

Table 5 Fixed Broadband and Mobile Providers in Ballymahon (Comreg, Switcher.ie)

Provider	Fixed Broadband	2G	3G	4G	5G
48	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
An Post Mobile	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Clear Mobile	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Eir	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
GoMo	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Lycamobile	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Tesco Mobile	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Three	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Virgin Media	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Vodafone	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Digiweb	Yes	No	No	No	No
Pure Telecom	Yes	No	No	No	No
Magnet Networks	Yes	No	No	No	No
Imagine	No	No	No	No	No
Rural Wifi	Yes	No	No	No	No
Sky	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

2.2.4 Public Wi-Fi

The Public Wi-Fi indicators (Table 6) in DTB measure the availability of municipal and free public Wi-Fi at various sites in a given town including municipal, retail, accommodation, hospitality and tourism sites. Penetration in tourism-related businesses is specifically measured i.e., for accommodation and hospitality.

Table 6 Public Wi-Fi indicators

Indicator	Ballymahon
Availability of Municipal public Wi-Fi (outdoor)	Yes
Availability of free public Wi-Fi in municipal buildings (incl. libraries)	Yes
Availability of free public Wi-Fi at tourism sites	No
Availability of free public Wi-Fi in retail outlets	Yes
Availability of free public Wi-Fi in accommodation	Yes
Percentage of Tripadvisor accommodation listings with free public Wi-Fi (n=3)	66.67%
Availability of free public Wi-Fi in hospitality	No
Percentage of Tripadvisor hospitality listings with free public Wi-Fi (n=5)	0%

2.2.5 Rural Digital Hubs

Connected Hubs is an initiative under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme operated by the Department of Rural and Community Development.²³ The National Hub Network provides a vehicle for individual hubs to come together under a shared identity to maximise the economic opportunity of remote working. Four indicators are used to measure rural digital hubs - (i) the availability of a connected hub, (ii) the number of connected hub desks available for use, (iii) the number of connected hub meeting rooms available for use, and (iv) availability of other spaces dedicated to co-working (see Table 7).

Table 7 Rural digital hub indicators

Indicator	Ballymahon
Connected hub in town	No
Number of connected hub desks available for use	0
Number of connect hub meeting rooms available for use	0
Availability of other co-working spaces	No

2.3 OVERALL SCORE

Based on the above analysis, the overall DTB score for infrastructure for connectivity is **3.4**.

²³ <https://connectedhubs.ie/>

Table 8 Infrastructure for Connectivity Dimension Scores

Indicator	Weight	Score
Fixed broadband	35%	4.5
Mobile broadband	35%	2.9
Competition	10%	4.9
Free public Wi-Fi	10%	3.5
Rural digital hubs	10%	0.0
Overall score	100%	3.4

3. DIGITAL BUSINESS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The adoption and use of digital technologies provides clear benefits to businesses in rural towns including cost savings, operational efficiency, information technology (IT) resilience and scalability, easier access to new markets, and marketing effectiveness, amongst others.²⁴ Digital technologies can represent the basis for a competitive advantage for small to medium sized businesses and enable them to compete with larger firms.²⁵

The digital business dimension comprises three sub-dimensions with equal weighting:

- Website Technology Intensity Score
- Digital technology take-up
- E-commerce take-up

No data at the town-level was available from Comreg or the CSO for digital business at the time when this research was carried out.

Research suggests that websites represent a 'digital footprint' of organisations and website data and metadata on technologies used in websites can be used to study the digital competences and sophistication of a given organisation (Lynn et al. 2020²⁶; Mazzone et al. 2023)²⁷. We use an organisation's decision to use a website and associated technologies as a proxy for its degree of digitisation as per Thonipara et al. (2020). A Web Technology Intensity Score (WTIS) was developed to measure business-level availability of eleven different web technologies:

1. A website or homepage
2. A website with evidence of sophisticated functions (e.g., live chat, recommender system, online booking etc.)
3. A website with evidence of basic analytics (e.g., visitor tracking, advertiser tracking etc.)
4. A website with evidence of sophisticated analytics (e.g., A/B testing, conversion optimisation, customer relationship management (CRM) system)
5. A website with evidence of basic online advertising (e.g., transactional email marketing, remarketing etc.)
6. A website with evidence of sophisticated online advertising (e.g., use of advertising networks, affiliate marketing, multichannel advertising etc.)
7. A website with evidence of selling online (e.g., payment acceptance, online shop, checkout functions etc.)

²⁴ Lynn, T., Rosati, P., Conway, E., Curran, D., Fox, G., & O'Gorman, C. (2022). Digital Towns: Accelerating and Measuring the Digital Transformation of Rural Societies and Economies (p. 213). Springer Nature.

²⁵ Mehrrens, J., Cragg, P. B., & Mills, A. M. (2001). A model of internet adoption by SMEs. *Information & Management*, 39(3), 165–176; Richmond, W., Rader, S., & Lanier, C. (2017). The 'digital divide' for rural small businesses. *Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship*, 19(2), 94–104.

²⁶ Lynn, T., Rosati, P., Fox, G., Curran, D., O'Gorman, C. and Conway, E., 2022, January. Assessing the impact of COVID-19 on website technology penetration on businesses in rural towns. In *Proceedings of the 55th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*.

²⁷ Leonardo, M., Fabio, P. and Massimo, R., 2023. Measuring Corporate Digital Divide with web scraping: Evidence from Italy. arXiv preprint arXiv:2301.04925.

8. A website with evidence of social media integration (e.g., social management, blog, social video platform etc.)
9. A website with evidence of international activity (e.g., multiple languages, international currencies etc.)
10. A website with evidence of mobile targeting (e.g., mobile app, mobile optimisation etc.)
11. A website with evidence of cloud computing (e.g., cloud hosting, Platform-as-a-Service etc.)

The value for the score ranged from 0 to 11 where 0 (Non-existent), 1-2 (Very Low), 3-4 (Low), 5-7 (Medium), 8-9 (High) and 10-11 (Very High). Separately, presence on social media was collected. E-commerce adoption, use of cloud computing and social media presence are all measured at the EU level. Digital technology take-up was measured by the percentage of businesses adopting the different technologies in the WTIS in addition to a social media presence. A list of organisations within a 2km radius of Ballymahon town centre was sourced from GeoDirectory, resulting in 131 businesses. Following data cleaning, 18 businesses had to be removed from this list due to duplication, non-commercial operation (e.g., public service or civil society), or inactivity. As well as a manual check, a commercial website profiler was used to extract technology information.

3.2 DIGITAL BUSINESS

87% of the 113 businesses analysed had some sort of online presence, that is they have either a website or a social media profile. While 24% of them are only on social media, 49% of them have both a website and social media accounts. There is significant room for improvement. Furthermore, mere presence does not infer successful online trading or marketing. Table 9 presents the relative frequency of businesses with a website in Ballymahon by WTIS level.

Table 9 Businesses Website Technology Intensity Score - Businesses (n=113)

Website Technology Intensity Score	% of Businesses
Non-existent (0)	45
Very low (1-2)	5
Low (3-4)	12
Medium (5-7)	24
High (8-9)	12
Very high (10-11)	2

Figure 3 illustrates the percentage of businesses by Website Technology Intensity Score level and by economic activity based on NACE Rev. 2 industry codes. The results are consistent with EU studies that suggest that relatively small percentages of firms in the agriculture, construction and transport and storage industries have high

or very high Website Technology Intensity Scores. The high percentage of businesses in the information and communication industry with a non-existent level of sophistication is due to the low number of businesses included in this category (1).

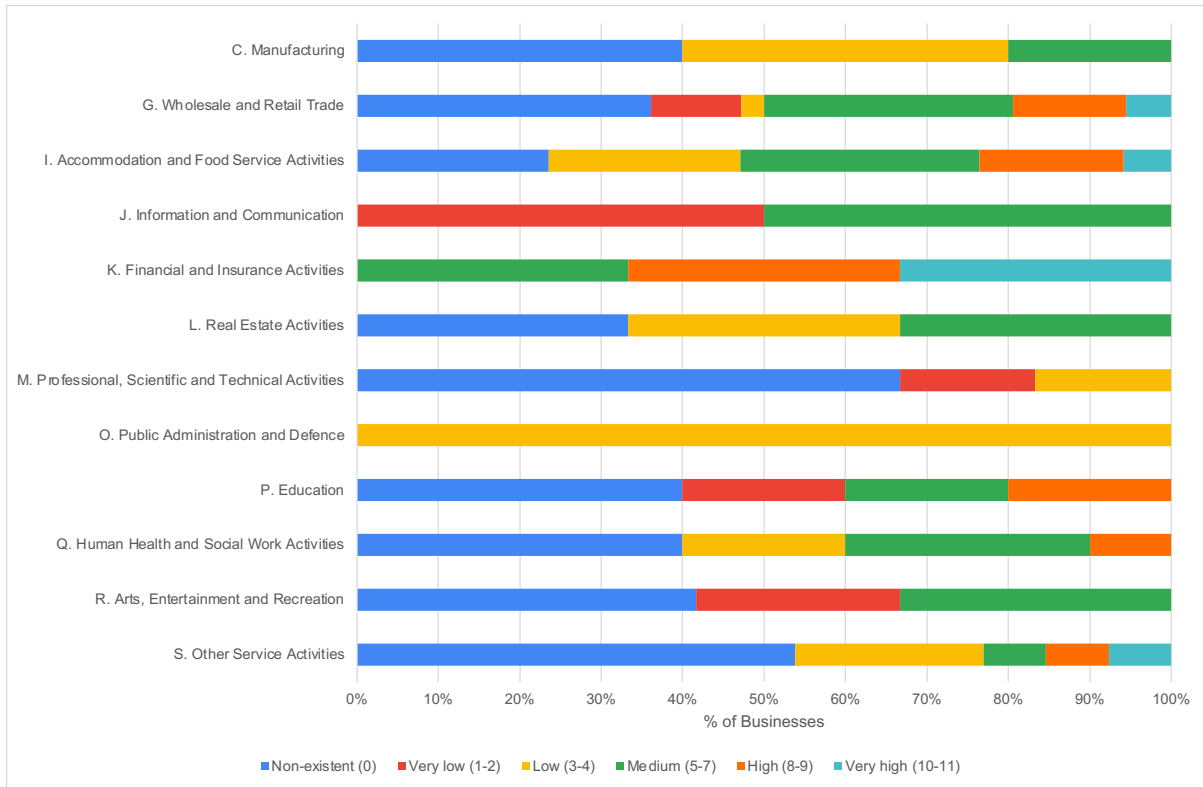


Figure 3 Businesses Website Technology Intensity Score by Economic Activity

Table 10 presents the degree of penetration of different digital technologies featured in the WTIS with comparative data, where available. It is important to note that DESI only includes firms that employ ten persons or more in their analysis. As rural businesses employ less than ten persons, they are typically under-represented in DESI analysis.

Table 10 Key Digitisation Take-up Indicators - Businesses (% of businesses) (n=113)

Indicator	Ballymahon 2024	Ireland DESI 2024	EU DESI 2024
A website or homepage	63	NA	NA
A website with evidence of sophisticated functions	21	NA	NA
A website with evidence of basic analytics	33	37.10	33.20
A website with evidence of sophisticated analytics	35	NA	NA
A website with evidence of basic online advertising	22	NA	NA
A website with evidence of sophisticated online advertising	4	NA	NA
A website with evidence of selling online	20	30	19.1
A website with evidence of social media integration	32	NA	NA
A website with evidence of international activity	33	NA	NA
A website with evidence of mobile targeting	54	NA	NA
A website with evidence of cloud computing	31	53.1	38.9
Social media presence	73	31.5	31.5

3.3 OVERALL SCORE

Based on the above analysis, the overall DTB score for digital business is **2.4**.

Table 11 Digital Business Dimension Scores

Indicator	Weight	Score
Website Technology Intensity Score	33.3%	2.7
Digital technology take-up	33.3%	2.5
E-commerce take-up	33.3%	2.0
Overall score	100%	2.4

4. DIGITAL PUBLIC SERVICES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Governments play a key role in our society by providing citizens and businesses with access to a range of essential public services. Digital technologies can improve transparency, responsiveness and efficiency in the delivery of these services. As discussed earlier, this abridged report does not include subsections of analysis on e-government in Digital Public Services as per the full DTB and only includes analysis on e-health and open data.

E-health is a specific type of service that is a high priority for digitalisation, and this digitalisation accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Local healthcare providers (e.g., general practitioners and pharmacists), play a central role in facilitating access to and delivery of care in rural areas as they represent the main point of contact between the healthcare system and citizens. Another aspect of digital public services that is often not considered explicitly is the availability of open data. This involves making data, in this case public sector information (PSI), freely available in open formats and ways that enable public access and facilitate exploitation. A host of benefits are associated with open data which includes providing the scope for faster government decision-making, better resource allocation, efficient and effective delivery of more personalised public services, increased citizen participation, and greater private sector innovation.^{28,29}

Following DESI, the digital public services dimension comprises two sub-dimensions:

- E-health
- Open data

They are weighted as follows – e-health (66.6%) and open data (33.3%).

E-health was measured using the WTIS presented in Section 3 and an additional three domain-specific items:

- Support for e-prescriptions
- Availability of online consultations
- Electronic exchange of medical data

The additional items are based on similar items used by DESI. Unlike DESI, evaluation was not limited to general practitioners but also included pharmacies and other human healthcare providers. Healthcare providers were identified through GeoDirectory and manual searches on Google and local online directories.

Open data was assessed based on the extent to which an open data policy is easily accessible on the county council website, the publisher status of the county council on

²⁸ Ubaldi, B. (2013). Open government data: Towards empirical analysis of open government data initiatives. OECD Working Papers on Public Governance.

²⁹ Lynn, T., Rosati, P., Conway, E., Curran, D., Fox, G., & O'Gorman, C. (2022). Digital Towns: Accelerating and Measuring the Digital Transformation of Rural Societies and Economies (p. 213). Springer Nature.

data.gov.ie, and the availability of local datasets specific to the town on five open data portals.

4.2 E-HEALTH WEB INTENSITY SCORE

5 healthcare providers were identified in Ballymahon. These included general practitioners, pharmacists and other healthcare providers e.g. dental practices, opticians, and physiotherapists. Table 12 compares healthcare providers with the overall business community.

Table 12 Website Technology Intensity Score - Healthcare Providers (n=5)

Website Technology Intensity Score Level	% of Healthcare Providers	% of Businesses
Non-existent (0)	40	37
Very low (1-2)	20	9
Low (3-4)	20	13
Medium (5-7)	20	26
High (8-9)	0	11
Very high (10-11)	0	4

Table 12 presents the degree of penetration of different general web technologies featured in the Website Technology Intensity Score with comparative data against the general business population in Ballymahon.

Table 13 Key Digitisation Take-up Indicators – Healthcare Providers (n=5)

Indicator	% of Healthcare Providers	% of Businesses
A website or homepage	60	63
A website with evidence of sophisticated functions	20	21
A website with evidence of basic analytics	0	33
A website with evidence of sophisticated analytics	0	35
A website with evidence of basic online advertising	20	22
A website with evidence of sophisticated online advertising	0	4
A website with evidence of selling online	0	20
A website with evidence of social media integration	20	32
A website with evidence of international activity	20	33
A website with evidence of mobile targeting	40	54
A website with evidence of cloud computing	20	31

5 health service providers were contacted; 5 responded to the survey. Since COVID-19, DESI has ceased reporting detailed e-health data. No EU data is available for online consultations.

Table 14 presents e-health services take-up by healthcare providers in Ballymahon.

Table 14 E-health Services Take-up (% of healthcare providers) (n=5)

Indicator	Ballymahon 2024	DESI Ireland 2019	DESI EU 2019
Use e-prescriptions	100	8	50
Using an electronic network to exchange medical data with other healthcare providers	60	63	43
Providing online consultations	0	NA	NA

4.3 OPEN DATA

S.I. No. 376 of 2021, the European Communities (Open Data & Re-use of Public Sector Information) Regulations 2021 emphasises that Irish public sector bodies should adhere to the principle that public sector data should be open by design and default, and requires that where data is made available for re-use in open format, this data must be linked to the national open data portal, data.gov.ie. These regulations apply to all public sector bodies including local authorities. There is a very limited amount of open data available on Ballymahon. A review of the five main open data portals in Ireland identified only two data sets.³⁰ Longford County Council is listed as a publisher on data.gov.ie, the Irish national open data portal.

³⁰ The following sources were checked: AIRO, data.gov.ie, data.epa.ie, eHealth Ireland, OSI Open Data

Table 15 List of Town Open Data Available

Name	Description	Publisher	Source
Ballymahon (Newcastle) Rainfall Data	Daily and monthly rainfall records for our station at Ballymahon (Newcastle) in Co. Longford. This station is now closed.	Met Éireann	data.gov.ie
Ballymahon (Voc.Sch.) Rainfall Data	Daily and monthly rainfall records for our station at Ballymahon (Voc.Sch.) in Co. Longford. This station is now closed.	Met Éireann	data.gov.ie

4.4 OVERALL SCORE

Based on the above analysis, the overall DTB score for digital public services is **1.6**.

Table 16 Digital Public Services Dimension Scores

Indicator	Weight	Score
E-health	67%	1.9
Open data	33%	1.0
Overall score	100%	1.6

5. DIGITAL EDUCATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Digital education refers to the use and sophistication of digital technologies for teaching and learning in formal and non-formal education within a community, and the infrastructure required to support such provision.³¹ The adoption and use of digital technologies in education is driven by a variety of rationales. They can help prepare citizens to participate, work and function more fully in a society permeated by digital technologies, increase accessibility to education, differentiate educational institutions, and increase the efficiency, cost effectiveness and quality of education delivery, amongst others.³² As discussed earlier, this abridged report does not include subsections of analysis on pre-primary childcare providers, primary education and secondary education as per the full DTB and only includes analysis on the availability of general training across the town.

This abridged digital education dimension comprises four sub-dimensions with equal weightings:

- Availability of digital skills courses for young people
- Availability of vocational and further education digital skills courses
- Availability of digital skills courses for seniors
- Availability of other digital skills courses

This abridged section examines the availability of digital skills education and training in Ballymahon outside of the primary and post-primary education system at all levels from basic to advanced. Education businesses are included in Section 3 where appropriate.

5.2 DIGITAL SKILLS EDUCATION AVAILABILITY

Table 17 presents the digital skills education availability indicators for Ballymahon.

Based on publicly available data, digital skills provision in Ballymahon shows a limited offering across different demographics with notable gaps in availability for most cohorts.

The inclusion of e-learning options available at Ballymahon Library (e.g., cybersecurity, web development, Microsoft Office, Adobe Captivate, and SEO skills, amongst others) offers resources for all age groups to access independently.

Young people are specifically catered for through Ballymahon Library which offers a Lets Code Coding Class to children aged 8 to 18. Similarly, Ballymahon Vocational School offers junior and senior cycle students' courses in Information Technology and computer science respectively. Boosting the development of digital skills from an early age and in a continuous manner is essential for influencing the level of digital skills of

³¹ Lynn, T., Rosati, P., Conway, E., Curran, D., Fox, G., & O'Gorman, C. (2022). Digital Towns: Accelerating and Measuring the Digital Transformation of Rural Societies and Economies (p. 213). Springer Nature.

³² Ibid.

the population and the number of male and female students that will consider studies and career in the ICT.³³

There is no evidence of vocational and further education digital skills courses on offer. Data from the EU’s Agency for the Development of European Vocational Education and Training shows the importance of digital skills for jobs, and shows that digital skills are explicitly mentioned by employers in close to 40% of online job advertisements.³⁴

Similarly, the data does not show any specific digital skills provision targeting seniors directly. While the e-learning offered by Ballymahon Library may be accessible to seniors, there is no clear indication that these programs are designed or marketed specifically for older adults. This could represent a gap in provision, as older individuals often need tailored digital literacy programs to overcome barriers like limited prior exposure to technology.

Table 17 Digital Skills Education Availability Indicators

Indicator	Availability
Availability of digital skills courses for young people	Yes
Availability of vocational and further education digital skills courses	No
Availability of digital skills courses for seniors	No
Availability of other digital skills courses	Yes

5.3 OVERALL SCORE

Based on the above analysis, the overall DTB score for education is **2.2**.

Table 18 Digital Education Dimension Scores

Indicator	Weight	Score
Availability of digital skills courses for young people	25%	3.8
Availability of vocational and further education digital skills courses	25%	1.7
Availability of digital skills courses for seniors	25%	1.7
Availability of other digital skills courses	25%	1.7
Overall score	100%	2.2

³³ https://hadea.ec.europa.eu/calls-proposals/boosting-digital-skills-young-pupils-particular-girls_en

³⁴ <https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en/latest/briefs/digital-skills-deep-dive>

6. DIGITAL CIVIL SOCIETY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Salamon and Anheier (1998, p. 216)³⁵ define civil society as collection of entities that share five characteristics:

- organisations, i.e., institutionalised to some meaningful extent
- private, i.e., institutionally separate from government
- non-profit distributing, i.e., not returning profits generated to their owners or directors
- self-governing, i.e., equipped to control their own activities
- voluntary, i.e., involving some meaningful degree of voluntary participation

Civil society includes a wide range of organisations with varying roles and purposes including those involved in culture and recreation, education and research, health, social services, environmental sustainability, development and housing, law advocacy and politics, philanthropic intermediaries and voluntarism promotion, international activities and promotion, religion, business and professional etc.³⁶ They play an important role in society by promoting community engagement and citizenship values, advocating distinct interests and diverse points of view, delivering services, and creating economic value. For example, in 2018, there were over 19,500 such organisations registered in Ireland with nearly 200,000 voluntary directors or trustees and paid employees; they are a significant economic force with over €10.9 billion in annual turnover.³⁷ Civil society is a critical part of the social fabric throughout Ireland, and one might argue especially in rural communities whose identity may be linked to a local parish, sports club, or other social activity.

The civil society dimension measures the use of digital technologies by voluntary bodies or social groups serving the needs of the Ballymahon community. It includes sports clubs, charities, political organisations, and other community groups. The civil society dimension comprises three sub-dimensions - WTIS, digital technology take-up, and e-commerce take-up as per Section 3.

Given the nature of these organisations, web intensity, digital technology and e-commerce take-up were weighted evenly at 33.3%.

6.2 DIGITAL CIVIL SOCIETY

A WTIS was calculated for each digital civil society organisation. Table 19 summarises the findings for digital civil society in Ballymahon. 17 voluntary and social groups were identified. 12% had a discrete website. A small number featured on an affiliate website e.g. a political party.

³⁵ Salamon, L. M., & Anheier, H. K. (1998). Social origins of civil society: Explaining the nonprofit sector cross-nationally. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 9(3), 213–248.

³⁶ Lynn, T., Rosati, P., Conway, E., Curran, D., Fox, G., & O'Gorman, C. (2022). Digital Towns: Accelerating and Measuring the Digital Transformation of Rural Societies and Economies (p. 213). Springer Nature.

³⁷ The Wheel, 2018, Enabling Citizens - Powering Civil Society. https://www.wheel.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2018-08/Powering%20Civil%20Society_0.pdf

Table 19 Website Technology Intensity Score - Civil Society and Businesses (n=17)

Website Technology Intensity Score	% of Civil Society Organisations	% of Businesses
Non-existent (0)	76	37
Very low (1-2)	6	9
Low (3-4)	12	13
Medium (5-7)	6	26
High (8-9)	0	11
Very high (10-11)	0	4

Table 19 presents the degree of penetration of different digital technologies featured in the Website Technology Intensity Score compared to businesses in Ballymahon.

Table 20 A comparison of WTIS Indicators – Civil Society and Businesses (n=17)

Indicator	% of Civil Society Organisations	% of Businesses
A website or homepage	24	63
A website with evidence of sophisticated functions	12	21
A website with evidence of basic analytics	6	33
A website with evidence of sophisticated analytics	6	35
A website with evidence of basic online advertising	6	22
A website with evidence of sophisticated online advertising	0	4
A website with evidence of selling online	0	20
A website with evidence of social media integration	6	32
A website with evidence of international activity	6	33
A website with evidence of mobile targeting	6	54
A website with evidence of cloud computing	12	31
Social media presence	71	73

6.3 OVERALL SCORE

Based on the above analysis, the overall DTB score for civil society is **0.4**.

Table 21 Digital Civil Society Dimension Scores

Indicator	Weight	Score
Website Technology Intensity Score	33.3%	0.5
Digital technology take-up	33.3%	0.6
E-commerce take-up	33.3%	0.0
Overall score	100%	0.4

7. DIGITAL TOURISM

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a significant economic sector in Ireland. It is often the only major source of employment outside of agriculture in many rural areas. It is a key element of Irish rural development policy and features prominently in both the National Planning Framework,³⁸ Our Rural Future,³⁹ and Town Centre First.⁴⁰ Digital tourism is often confused with smart tourism although they share the same goals i.e. supporting innovation and driving positive transformation within destinations using technology, data analysis and digitalisation. Whereas smart tourism is concerned with connecting the digital and physical world, digital tourism is building wider digital connections between organisations, people, and places. In this sense, digital technologies not only play an important role in helping visitors discover, experience, and develop a long-standing relationship with a place, in this case, a rural town.

The tourism dimension seeks to measure the use and sophistication of digital technology to attract tourists and deliver a distinctive tourism experience. The digital tourism dimension comprises three sub-dimensions:

- Digital readiness of tourism businesses
- Smart tourism and digital tourism infrastructure
- Tourism destination website and maturity

The digital readiness of tourism businesses was weighted at 60% with the other two dimensions weighted equally at 20%.

Digital readiness of tourism businesses is assessed using the WTIS, digital technology take-up and e-commerce take-up measurements as per Section 3 and comprises accommodation, hospitality and retail businesses.

Smart tourism and infrastructure assess the degree to which there is evidence of smart tourism and digital tourism infrastructure in the town and at primary tourist destinations within the town. This includes public Wi-Fi, digital transport signage, digital information points/kiosks, availability of online itineraries, voluntary tourism alert systems, mobile apps, event websites, and use of augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR) or QR codes etc.

Tourism destination website and maturity assesses the availability and maturity of a dedicated tourism website.

7.2 DIGITAL READINESS OF TOURISM BUSINESSES

A WTIS was calculated for each tourism business website. Table 22 summarises the findings for tourism businesses in Ballymahon and compares the percentages for all businesses in the town. 53 accommodation, hospitality and retail businesses were assessed.

³⁸ <https://npf.ie/>

³⁹ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/4c236-our-rural-future-vision-and-policy-context/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/473d3-town-centre-first-policy/>

Table 22 Website Technology Intensity Score - Tourism Businesses (n=53)

Website Technology Intensity Score	% of Tourism Businesses	% of Businesses
Non-existent (0)	32.1	37
Very low (1-2)	7.5	9
Low (3-4)	9.4	13
Medium (5-7)	30.2	26
High (8-9)	15.1	11
Very high (10-11)	5.7	4

Table 23 presents the degree of penetration of different digital technologies featured in the WTIS with comparative data, where available. In addition, the degree of penetration of general businesses in Ballymahon is provided to compare tourism businesses with business as a whole in the town.

Table 23 Key Digitisation Take-up Indicators – Tourism Businesses (n=53)

Indicator	% Ballymahon Tourism Businesses 2024	% Ballymahon Businesses 2024	% DESI Ireland 2024	% DESI EU 2024
A website or homepage	68	63	NA	NA
A website with evidence of sophisticated functions	25	21	NA	NA
A website with evidence of basic analytics	40	33	37.10	33.20
A website with evidence of sophisticated analytics	42	35	NA	NA
A website with evidence of basic online advertising	28	22	NA	NA
A website with evidence of sophisticated online advertising	6	4	NA	NA
A website with evidence of selling online	25	20	30	19.1
A website with evidence of social media integration	43	32	NA	NA
A website with evidence of international activity	40	33	NA	NA
A website with evidence of mobile targeting	60	54	NA	NA
A website with evidence of cloud computing	38	31	53.1	38.9
Social media presence	68	73	31.5	31.5

As this report is designed to support the Town Centre First programme, tourism attractions and destination sites listed on TripAdvisor and Google Travel (Things to Do) within 2km of the town centre were also assessed for digital readiness. We recognise that this may exclude tourist attractions that benefit towns in the study however in many cases such tourist attractions also benefit other towns in proximity to the attraction. Consequently, a decision was made to limit it to a 2km distance from the town centre. The tourist attractions assessed include natural amenities or heritage sites, festivals and events, and commercial businesses, amongst others. The DTB assesses whether these destination sites have a discrete web presence and the sophistication of those websites based on the WTIS. 7 such attractions and destination sites were identified for Ballymahon; 3 of which had a discrete website (Table 24).

Table 24 Website Technology Intensity Score - Tourist Attractions (n=7)

Website Technology Intensity Score	% Ballymahon Tourism Attractions	% Ballymahon All Businesses
Non-existent (0)	57	37
Very low (1-2)	0	9
Low (3-4)	0	13
Medium (5-7)	29	26
High (8-9)	14	11
Very high (10-11)	0	4

7.3 SMART TOURISM AND DIGITAL TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE

Smart tourism and infrastructure assess the degree to which there is evidence of smart tourism and digital tourism infrastructure in the town and at primary tourist destinations within the town. Table 25 presents the list of Smart Tourism and Digital Tourism Infrastructure indicators.

Table 25 Smart Tourism and Digital Tourism Infrastructure Indicators

Indicator	Ballymahon
Availability of free public outdoor Wi-Fi	Yes
Availability of other free public Wi-Fi	Yes
Availability of digital transport or other digital signage	No
Availability of tourism information outside of normal working hours e.g. via a digital kiosk	No
Availability of online itineraries	No
Availability of town-specific tourism mobile apps	No
Availability of voluntary tourism alert systems	No
Availability of augmented reality tourism services	No
Availability of virtual reality tourism services	No
Availability of QR code-based information services	Yes

7.4 TOURISM DESTINATION WEBSITE AVAILABILITY AND MATURITY

Tourism destination website availability and maturity measures the extent to which common tourist information and services are available through the town website and the WTIS scores for the town website(s). Ballymahon does not have a town destination website. Table 26 summarises the tourism destination website availability and maturity indicators for Ballymahon, respectively.

Table 26 Tourism Destination Website Availability and Maturity Indicators

Indicator	Ballymahon
Availability of town website or portal	No
Availability of contact form or contact details for town website	No
Availability of local tourist office information	No
Availability of town social media presence	No
Availability of accommodation information	No
Availability of hospitality information	No
Availability of retail information	No
Availability of information on tourist activities or attractions	No
Availability of information on transport to and from the town	No
Availability of information on public Wi-Fi	No
Ability to subscribe for town updates	No
Ability to complete transactions on the town website	No

7.5 OVERALL SCORE

Based on the above analysis, the overall DTB score for digital tourism is **1.6**.

Table 27 Digital Tourism Dimension Scores

Indicator	Weight	Score
Digital readiness of tourism businesses	60%	2.3
Smart tourism and digital tourism infrastructure	20%	0.9
Tourism destination website and maturity	20%	0.0
Overall score	100%	1.6

8. GOVERNANCE OF DIGITAL TOWN INITIATIVES

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The delivery of complex and multifaceted policy objectives such as digitalisation requires significant coordination among a wide range of stakeholders. As such, it requires appropriate governance mechanisms that enable widespread participation while also guiding the implementation of the policy objectives. The Governance of Digital Town Initiatives measures two types of governance mechanisms - horizontal and vertical integration (Table 28). Horizontal integration refers to integration across different elements of policy making, and across policy and other stakeholders. Vertical integration of policy making refers to the integration across different levels within the governance or policy sphere.

Table 28 Indicators for the Governance of Digital Town Initiatives (Lynn et al. 2022)⁴¹

	Indicator	Description
Horizontal integration	Coordination of digitalisation	The extent to which different digitalisation initiatives within a town are coordinated
	Citizen participation plan	The extent to which there is a defined plan for involving citizens into digital town initiatives
	Representation and scope	The extent to which different stakeholder types are represented and involved in the planning phase.
	Technical expertise	The extent to which technical expertise is used to assist with the design and development of a community engagement strategy
	Commitment to public engagement	The extent to which digital town initiatives are accessible and communicated to the public
	Commitment to local capacity building	The extent to which digital town initiatives are committed to local capacity building by collaborating with other organisations and communities
	Town-level platform availability	Availability of an integrated town-level platform availability to promote digital initiatives
	Town-level platform maturity	Maturity of the integrated town-level platform availability to promote digital initiatives
Vertical integration	Cross departmental integration	The extent to which different administrative departments contribute to digital town initiatives and management
	Establishment within the local authority	The extent to which digital town initiatives are assigned to one department and resources allocated
	Monitoring and evaluation	The extent to which progress toward a digital town and compliance with requirements is being monitored and reported
	Multilevel government	The extent to which the local authority cooperates with other authorities from different levels

⁴¹ Lynn, T., Rosati, P., Conway, E., Curran, D., Fox, G., & O'Gorman, C. (2022). Digital Towns: Accelerating and Measuring the Digital Transformation of Rural Societies and Economies (p. 213). Springer Nature.

	Indicator	Description
	Alignment	The extent to which digital town initiatives are aligned with government policy

For the purposes of the DTB, horizontal integration is weighted 75% and vertical integration is weighted 25%.

8.2 HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION

Coordination of digitalisation measures the extent to which different digitalisation initiatives within a town are coordinated. As per 7.4, Ballymahon does not have town destination website. Ballymahon has been selected as a target town under the Department of Rural and Community Development which indicates representation, and a commitment to local public engagement. A Longford County Council Town Regeneration Officer has been appointed, and a Town Centre First Committee comprising local stakeholders has been established. Funding for Ballymahon has been allocated by the Department of Rural and Community Development to Longford County Council. Town Centre First Committees may include local capacity building and digital initiatives, however no local coordination of digitalisation could be identified.

Table 29 summarises the indicators for horizontal integration of digital town initiatives in Ballymahon.

Table 29 Indicators for Horizontal Integration of Digital Town Initiatives

Indicator	Ballymahon
Coordination of digitalisation	No
Citizen participation plan	No
Representation and scope	Yes
Technical expertise	No
Commitment to public engagement	Yes
Commitment to local capacity building	No
Town-level platform availability	No
Town-level platform maturity	No

8.3 VERTICAL INTEGRATION

A wide number of local authority departments and state agencies contribute to digital initiatives that may impact Ballymahon including Longford County Council, the Department of Rural and Community Development, Fáilte Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, amongst others. Furthermore, Longford County Council has allocated funds to Ballymahon to support its participation in the Town Centre First programme. Eight relevant plans and reports were reviewed for evidence of coordination with regards to digitalisation (Table 30). These included:

1. Ballymahon Local Area Plan 2009-2015
2. Longford County Council Service Delivery Plan 2024
3. Longford Digital Strategy 2021-2023
4. Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027
5. Longford Corporate Plan 2019-2024
6. County Longford Tourism Strategy 2023-2027
7. Longford Climate Action Plan 2024-2029
8. County Longford Age Friendly Strategy 2015-2020

Both digitalisation and Ballymahon are widely referenced in many regional reports however often in different contexts. Explicit references to digital projects for Ballymahon could be more established in other regional thematic reports for prioritisation.

Table 30 Summary of Digitalisation References in Selected Town-related Reports and Plans

Document	Geographic Focus	Digital Reference
Ballymahon Local Area Plan 2009-2015	Town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No reference to digital.
Longford County Council Service Delivery Plan 2024		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic objective to improve connectivity and accessibility, both infrastructural and digital to attract and support the business community and people incl. access to information on the County Council website, library services, STEAM projects, basic digital skills delivery including older people. • Reference to developing delivery of online capability to improve access to information and other services of the Environment section, implementing a new digital file management system for culture and heritage files, supporting the HR function. • Promote the development within the Council including reducing the digital divide between all employees. • References to supporting the rollout of broadband, digital and innovation hubs and the digitalisation of small firms. • Integrating computer science in all secondary schools in Longford and supporting initiatives. • No specific reference to Ballymahon.
Longford Digital Strategy 2021-2023	County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital strategy organised around four pillars and supporting actions - (1) digital infrastructure and connectivity, (2) smart communities, (3) digital economy and enterprise, and (4) digital transformation of public service delivery. • No substantive references to Ballymahon.
Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027	County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • References to supporting the provision and development of digital hubs for remote working. • References to the need to improve connectivity and accessibility, both infrastructural and digital, to attract and support the business community and people in Longford.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> References to develop emerging digital segments and areas of strategic growth such as big data including making Longford an attractive location for data centres. References to supporting the rollout of high speed broadband and the implementation of the National Broadband Plan as well as the provision of public Wi-Fi zones in public spaces where possible. References to use new technologies to develop smart communities throughout the county. References to history, statistics, utilities and key developments in Ballymahon (e.g. Ballymahon Gas Pipeline and Center Parcs). No digital references in this context. References to towns in Longford, including Ballymahon, clustering and becoming locations for smart enterprises - a number of objectives and actions are set for smart enterprises including the provision of hotdesking in Ballymahon. Reference to Ballymahon as a self-sustaining town with high population growth and a weak employment base requiring targeted 'catch up' investment. No digital references in this context. References to promoting place-making, retail growth, resource-based tourism initiatives at Ballymahon and Ballymahon as a destination town. No digital references in this context.
Longford Corporate Plan 2019-2024	County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> References to improving connectivity and accessibility, both infrastructural and digital, to attract and support business community and people in Longford including supporting the roll out of the National Broadband Plan and the Public Service ICT Strategy. References to taking advantage of new digital tools and techniques to tailor service delivery in response to the changing needs of citizens. References to Center Parcs and growth of Ballymahon. No digital references in this context.
County Longford Tourism Strategy 2023-2027	County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outlines digital marketing strategy incl. destination marketing, brand development, the longford.ie website and promotion through various media channels, online reviews, and online influencers. Ensuring that all attractions are making best use of digital technology is a specific objective. References to Still Voices Film Festival and Oliver Goldsmith Festival in Ballymahon, support for bike hire in Ballymahon. No digital references in this context.
Longford Climate Action Plan 2024-2029	County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reference to e-Planning System, Digital Champions showcase for secondary school students prize for best climate action project, supporting local businesses with adapting to climate change and digital transformation, including administering Digital Start. Reference to the need to promote smarter working practices through IT and increase the energy efficiency of Council's IT systems.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> References to local settlement information and EV chargers in Ballymahon. No substantive digital references in this context.
County Longford Age Friendly Strategy 2015-2020	County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reference to the desire to increase the number of older people who are confident using digital technology. Reference to poor internet access and slow broadband in many parts of Longford. Reference to the provision of training in the use of technology for social and leisure purposes. This will include: mobile phones and other technological devices; Internet usage including online service provision, email, Skype and FaceTime. Reference to older people's fear of technology. Reference to good broadband in some parts of Longford. References to Ballymahon & Granard MD as a support partner. No substantive digital references in this context.

Table 31 summarises the indicators for vertical integration of digital town initiatives in Ballymahon. While the score for vertical integration is high, this reflects the fact that Ballymahon was designated for Town Centre First and this DTB assessment is being completed in support of this effort.

Table 31 Indicators for vertical integration of digital town initiatives

Indicator	Ballymahon
Cross departmental integration	Yes
Establishment within the local authority	Yes
Monitoring and evaluation	Yes
Multilevel government	Yes
Alignment	Yes

8.4 OVERALL SCORE

Based on the above analysis, the overall DTB score for governance is **2.2**.

Table 32 Governance of Digital Initiatives Dimension Scores

Indicator	Weight	Score
Horizontal integration	75%	1.3
Vertical integration	25%	5.0
Overall score	100%	2.2

9. DIGITAL TOWN SCORE

A key objective of this analysis is to provide an insight into key indicators for improvement at a town-level. The numbers individually have very little meaning without comparators however as presented do show gaps between performance today and potential in the future. Table 33 provides a guideline for interpreting the readiness score and dimension levels in Figure 4 and Table 34. Please note that as this abridged report does not include subsections of analysis on e-government in Digital Public Services and analysis of pre-primary, primary and secondary education in Digital Education, the calculations for weightings for the dimensions (W2) differ from the full Digital Town Blueprint in TCF Phase 1. Specifically, Digital Public Services is weighted at 5% (compared to 15%) and Digital Education is weighted at 5% (compared to 15%). To counter this, Vertical and Horizontal Integration is weighted higher at 30% (compared to 10%) as this dimension recognises alignment with local and national government initiatives and priorities.

Table 33 Guideline Readiness Descriptions by Readiness Score and Dimension Level

Dimension Level	Readiness	Guideline Description
1	Non-Existent	<p>Digital Readiness is Non-Existent or at a Very Low Level.</p> <p>The use and sophistication of digital technologies and capabilities likely do not exist. If they do exist, they are at very low levels of use and sophistication, largely informal and not documented, managed or measured at a town level. KPIs are significantly below regional, national or EU averages.</p>
2	Ad Hoc	<p>Digital Readiness is Ad Hoc and Mostly Not Documented.</p> <p>Some evidence of digital readiness in the use and sophistication of digital technologies and capabilities. Most are not documented and not managed. Performance may be measured and reviewed periodically but mostly informally. KPIs are below regional, national or EU averages.</p>
3	Defined Competitive	<p>Digital Readiness is Clearly Defined and Documented</p> <p>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.</p>
4	Significant Differentiating	<p>Digital Readiness is Clearly Differentiating and Significant</p> <p>The use and sophistication of digital technologies and capabilities and levels of digitalisation are significant and clearly differentiating compared to peers. KPIs are higher relative to peer towns and regional, national and EU averages.</p>

5	Leading	<p>Digital Readiness is Leading</p> <p>The use and sophistication of digital technologies and sophistication and levels of digitalisation are best-in-class and approaching optimum states/full digitisation with clear plans for further optimisation. KPIs are at the highest levels when compared to peers and regional, national and EU averages.</p>
---	---------	--

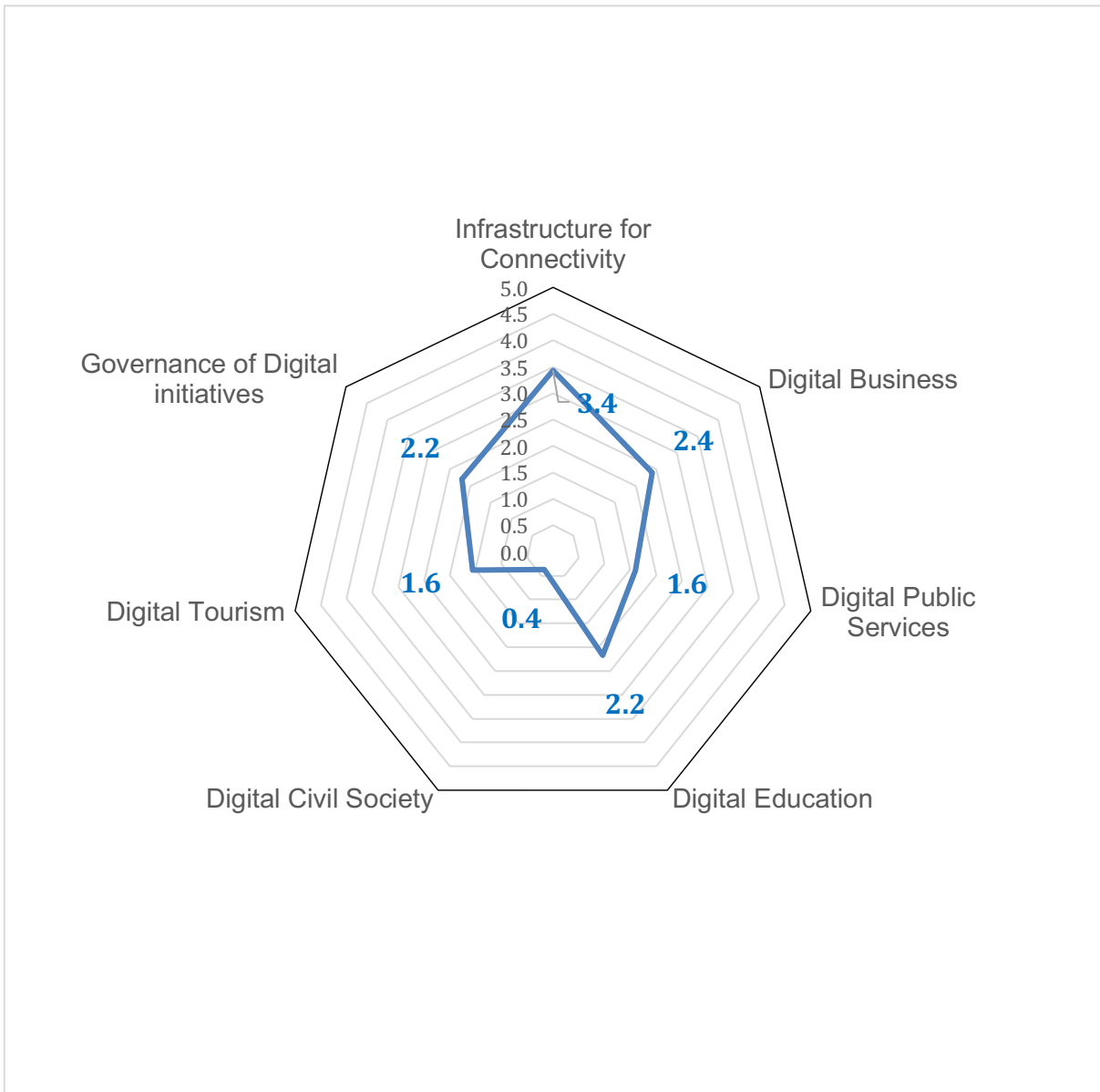


Figure 4 Ballymahon Digital Town Readiness Dimension Score

Table 34 Digital Town Readiness Index with Weightings

Digital Town Dimension	Sub-dimension			Dimension	Readiness Score			Readiness Score Contribution by each dimension
	Score (out of 5)	W1 Weighting	Weighted score	Score	W2 Dimension Weighting	Weighted score	out of	
Infrastructure for Connectivity								
Fixed broadband	4.5	35%	1.58	3.4	20%	0.7	1.0	13.7
Mobile broadband	2.9	35%	1.02					
Competition	4.9	10%	0.49					
Free Public WiFi	3.5	10%	0.35					
Digital rural hubs	0.0	10%	0.00					
Digital Business								
Website Technology Intensity Score	2.7	33%	0.90	2.4	20%	0.5	1.0	9.6
Digital technology take-up	2.5	33%	0.83					
eCommerce take-up	2.0	33%	0.67					
Digital Public Services								
e-Health	1.9	67%	1.27	1.6	5%	0.1	0.25	1.6
Open data	1.0	33%	0.33					
Digital Education								
Digital skills courses for young people	3.8	25%	0.94	2.2	5%	0.1	0.25	2.2
Vocational and further education digital skills course	1.7	25%	0.41					
Digital skills courses for seniors	1.7	25%	0.41					
Other digital skills courses	1.7	25%	0.41					
Digital Civil Society								
Website Technology Intensity Score	0.5	33%	0.17	0.4	10%	0.0	0.5	0.7
Digital technology take-up	0.6	33%	0.20					
eCommerce take-up	0.0	33%	0.00					
Digital Tourism								
Digital readiness of Tourism Businesses	2.3	60%	1.38	1.6	10%	0.2	0.5	3.1
Smart Tourism & Digital Infrastructure	0.9	20%	0.18					
Tourism destination website and maturity	0	20%	0.00					
Governance of DT initiatives								
Horizontal integration	1.3	75%	0.90	2.2	30%	0.7	1.5	13.2
Vertical integration	5.0	25%	1.30					
					100%	2.2	5.0	44.1

Appendix 3 – Ballymahon Town Centre Health Check

Ballymahon

TOWN CENTRE HEALTH CHECK 2024



Lár Bailte ar dTús
Town Centre First



Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	75
Introduction	76
First Impressions	77
Policy Context	78
Land Use	83
Vacancy Assessment	84
Footfall and Vehicular Movements	86
Desire Line Assessment	87
Car Parking Assessment	88
Public Realm	91
Questionnaires	93
SCOT Analysis	104



Main Street in Ballymahon

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the individuals and organisations who assisted in the completion of this report by generously offering their time and expertise with special thanks to the staff from Longford County Council for the support for this study. This report summarises the analysis completed by students from a number of planning courses from Queen's University Belfast.

Edited by: Siobhán Keogh, Matthew Green, Shane Campbell, Neil Galway, Ross Blackbourne and Aleksandrs Nazjuta.

Additional QUB Study Participants: Scott Allen, Amé Hulleman and Alena Romanovskaya.



Inny River

Introduction

This Collaborative Town Centre Health Check report was completed in partnership with Longford County Council by planning students from Queen's University Belfast in October 2024.

The report begins with an overview of relevant national, regional and local planning policies, as well as ongoing plans for public development. The report then presents an analysis of quantitative data gathered during a survey visit to Ballymahon on the 18th of October 2024, covering detailed land use within the town centre, footfall and vehicular traffic counts, desire line and car parking assessments, and a public realm analysis. These assessments were supplemented by an online and hard-copy questionnaire.

The report concludes with a strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats (SCOT) analysis, summarising the study's key findings. By highlighting Ballymahon's strengths and opportunities, as well as addressing identified challenges and threats, the report aims to contribute to well-informed future decision-making for the town.



Ballymahon library

First Impressions

On first impression, Ballymahon presents a diverse range of amenities and a character that reflects its historic and rural identity.

The town is centred along its Main Street, which offers a variety of conveniences, including food and drink establishments, retail stores, three schools, two churches and other essential services such as a post office and a bank. Some vacancy and mostly commercial dereliction are evident throughout the town. The library on Main Street acts as the town's focal point, while public art installations, particularly those honouring writer and poet, Oliver Goldsmith, add cultural interest to its public realm. A variety of street furniture, such as benches, chairs and shelters, are available throughout the town. However, Ballymahon's car-dominated environment is also noticeable, with on-street parking impacting visual appeal and pedestrian accessibility. While the wide pavements encourage walkability, inconsistencies in their quality and limited pedestrian infrastructure in some areas can pose challenges. Green spaces, such as the Inny River walkway and playground, contribute to the town's community feel, however, both could benefit from updates to attract more users.

Overall, Ballymahon's foundational amenities and public realm improvements reflect a welcoming town with strong potential for enhanced connectivity and further development.



Ballymahon's Main Street

Wider Policy and Funding Context

Ballymahon is a market town located in South County Longford. Longford is located within the Midlands region and within the province of Leinster. Current and future development follow the adopted Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027, and the general planning strategies, guidelines and principles set out by the Irish state in national institutions and at a national planning policy level such as the three Irish regional assemblies and the Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework (NPF). Ireland is a European Union member and is eligible for EU funding mechanisms.

Regional Assembly and Irish Governmental Supports

County Longford is a part of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly and falls under the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031 (RSES). The three cross-cutting key principles of this strategy are: Healthy Placemaking; Climate Action; and Economic Opportunity. In addition to the overarching strategies for regional and spatial planning, Ballymahon and Longford County Council are eligible for state funds, loans and grants, such as the Rural Regeneration and Development fund, Town centre first scheme and Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) for projects such as housing developments.



National Policy

Project Ireland 2040

Project Ireland 2040, launched in 2018, is the Irish government's plan for managing the current and future opportunities and challenges that Ireland will face up to 2040. Project Ireland 2040 has had many revisions since inception due to the vast uncertainty over recent years since its publication.

National Planning Framework (NPF)

Regarding the NPF is a national document that provides guidance for Ireland for over the coming decades. The NPF factors in sustainable growth within strategic planning and development, with more compact growth in Ireland's towns and cities. In July 2024, the Draft First Revision to NPF was published and was out for public consultation between 10th July 2024 and 12th September 2024.

National Development Plan (NDP) 2021 - 2030

The NDP 2021-2030 sets out the Irish Government's plan to transform Ireland's infrastructure and public services over the course of the 2020s. The NDP plans to invest a total of €165 billion of public money over the period to reach these goals. This document outlines plans such as public transport investments, the planned waste, water and electrical infrastructural expansions and for increased access to childcare, healthcare and education for residents.

The NPF, in tandem with the NDP, lay out a comprehensive plan for infrastructural investment and sustainable strategic development from a national perspective. The NPF and the NDP provide a framework for local authorities and regional assemblies to base their strategic and economic plans such as local development plans (LDPs) and Spatial & Economic Strategies, respectively.



Local Policy

Ballymahon lies on the N55 Athlone to Cavan, which is an important road running across Ireland's midlands, further connecting the region to the West of Ireland and on to Northern Ireland. This puts Ballymahon in a strategic geographical position making it an attractive location with good connectivity in the heartlands of Ireland. Therefore making Ballymahon a prime location for sustainable development of employment sectors such as logistics and transport, tourism, agricultural and environmental jobs, and more.

Honing in on Ballymahon's urban core, the centre of the town primarily centralises around Main Street, with Mostrim Road forming a secondary urban thoroughfare. Ballymahon's streetscape is endowed with a wealth of historical and important buildings which date back centuries, with buildings of importance having a Georgian, Victorian or Gothic Revival architectural style. Much like many other rural towns, contemporary Ballymahon has sprawled out from its old town centre to cater for the demands of a growing population, with many of the housing units being built in the fifty years.

Longford County Development Plan 2021 - 2027

According to the Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027, Ballymahon is referred to as a 'Self-Sustaining Towns' in the Town in the Settlement Hierarchy for County Longford. 'Self-Sustaining Towns' is described as having " ... *high levels of population growth and a weak employment base which are reliant on other areas for employment and/or services and which require targeted 'catch up' investment to become more self-sustaining.*", Table 4.13 in section 4.8.5. In essence, Ballymahon is an important rural hub for County Longford, partially- or fully-servicing the needs of those from across across the the town's hinterlands and its part of the county.



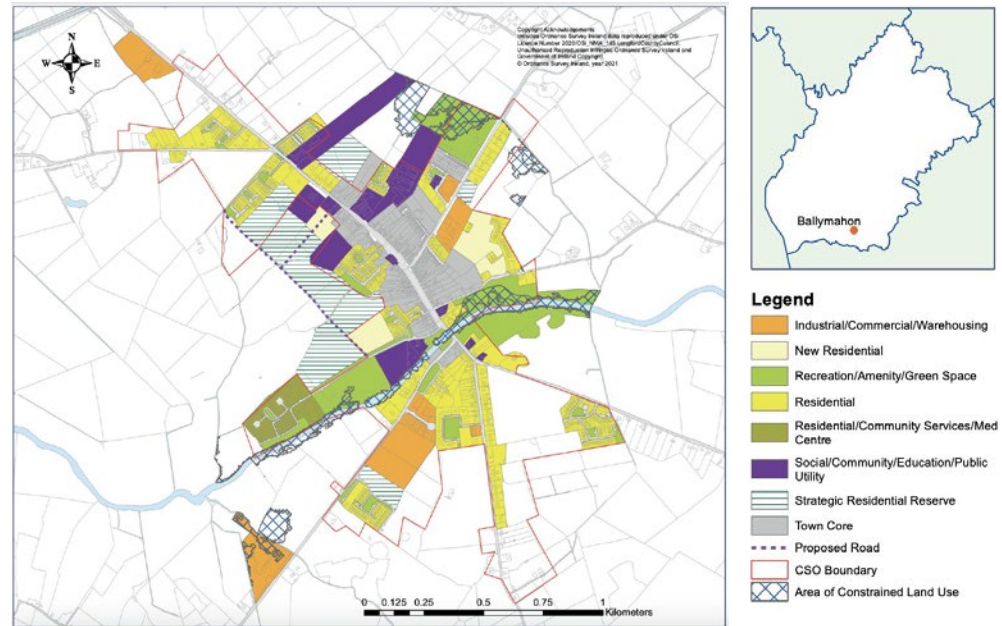
Local Policy

Longford County Development Plan 2021 - 2027 continued

In the Longford County Council Development Plan 2021 - 2027 Vol.1 Written Statement, the Self-Sustaining Towns policy objectives section outlines the future strategies for the three Self-Sustaining Towns in the county, (Edgeworthstown, Ballymahon and Lanesborough). In this section, the council outlines its aims to promote sustainable economic growth and the attraction of new businesses, in tandem with enhanced sustainability of services, jobs and local environment, 'proportionate' population growth and to reduce vacancy and dereliction as key priorities.

Ballymahon is located in a strategic location for workers looking to live somewhere that is well connected to Athlone and Galway, and to Mullingar and Dublin. County Longford and Ballymahon itself has more affordable property prices culminating in a lower overall cost of living. Ballymahon is a half hour drive to both Athlone and to Mullingar, one-hour-and-fifteen minute drive to Galway and a one-and-a-half hour drive to Dublin City.

In the Longford County Council Development Plan 2021 - 2027 Vol.2 Appendix, the diverse range of existing and new zonings were shown on a zoning map. As shown in the map, consolidation of land uses near the 'Town Core' is a priority for Longford County Council. The 'Strategic Residential Reserve' zonings are lands to be used for future residential development, should the 'New Residential' zoned land be built upon. In short, the zoning of Ballymahon promotes mixed-use neighbourhoods and development within the town centre and in the town's periphery (to a lesser extent). The town has a strong Industrial and Commercial base and is seeking to expand that along with newer residential units, recreational and green space and the provision of more public, social and community spaces.



Ballymahon Zoning Map, 2021 - 2027

Developments

Pobal le Cheile is a proposal developed by Longford County Council in Ballymahon's northern edge of the town centre. A 'Part 8' application allow for projects that require planning permission to be submitted by local authorities. This is according to the Planning and Development Act 2000 and the Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2021. The project encompasses a handful of important civic, educational and religious buildings into a huge public realm and to facilitate more community uses in Ballymahon. This project is seen to be transformational for Ballymahon helping to provide a completely renewed space for Ballymahon's residents to congregate. Along with the rehabilitation of old buildings, the development of a new remote working hub and a community centre will be a part of this project. Ancillary uses such as set down areas and parking will also be incorporated in the project as accessibility of all transport modes is essential. Sustainably sourced materials and colour rendering that blends in with the local buildings such as the Dean Egan library and Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Colmcille be formative elements of the renewed structures. This is to ensure harmony between the project and the surrounding environment in both a conservation perspective and a visual perspective.

There is also a proposal to construct a Lidl supermarket between the Pobal le Cheile site and Nally's Circle K filling station. The development of this rough hard-cored site, which currently acts as car parking, could act to further regenerate the Northern approach to Main Street. The most significant development in the Ballymahon area in recent years, is the opening of the only Centre Parcs resort in Ireland. Since opening in July 2019, there have been over one million visitors to this popular family holiday resort, which is less than 4km from Ballymahon.



Project 3D design renderings (c. Kenny Lyons & Associates Architects)



Bridgeways Family Resource Centre (one of the buildings involved)



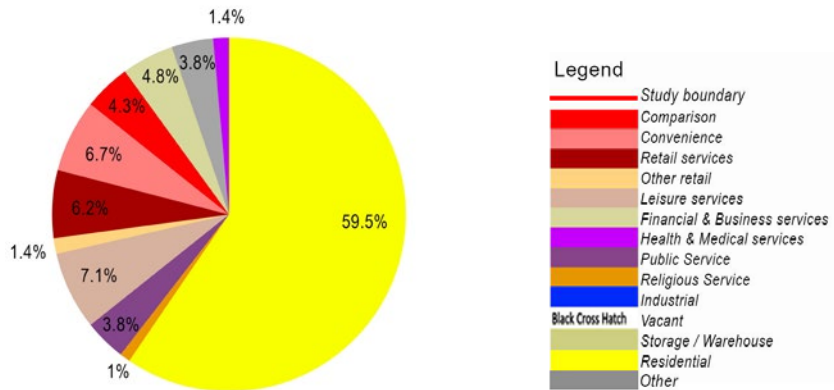
Centre Parcs, Longford Forest (from [Center Parcs Longford Forest - Longford.ie](https://www.centerparcs.com/ireland/longford-forest))

Land Use Map

The land-use survey was completed on the 4th of October, 2024. Land-uses were indicated as the main or prevailing use of the building. Land uses of the ground floors of the units found in Ballymahon town centre have been recorded according to the goods, opportunities, amenities and development (GOAD) classification.

Residential land use accounted for over half of the total land use of the study area. The second most frequent land use was retail, with combined retail (convenience, comparison, services and other) accounting for 18.6% of the total. Leisure services (bars, cafes, restaurants, gyms, etc.) were the third most frequent land use with 7.1%.

Land use classifications tended to occur in clusters, with the majority of convenience retail in the very centre of town and public service buildings to the north and south of the town centre.



Vacancy Assessment

Vacancy was noted during the completion of the land-use surveys, based on on-site observation. Only units that could be determined beyond reasonable doubt as vacant were noted. Vacancy rates across various land uses are as follows:

Overall vacancy rate: **9%**

Residential vacancy rate: **3.2%**

Non-residential / commercial vacancy rate: **17.6%**

Overall vacancy rates were relatively low. The overall vacancy rate was significantly impacted by the notably low residential vacancy rate. Residential vacancy was significantly lower than that recorded in the 2022 CSO data for Longford county of 12.18%.

Commercial vacancy in Ballymahon is higher than the National Commercial Vacancy Rate of 14.4%¹.

Vacancy was clustered along Main Street. There is evidence of some very long term vacancy, with units falling into a state of severe dereliction, as detailed on the following page.

1. Ireland, E. (2024). *GeoDirectory Commercial Vacancy Rates Report Q2 2024*. [online] Ey.com. Available at: https://www.ey.com/en_ie/news/2024/09/geodirectory-commercial-vacancy-rates-report-q2-2024.



Vacancy Observations

Vacancy is evident along the full length of Main Street, with many properties appearing to have been unoccupied for an extended period as indicated by their visible disrepair as shown below. Some efforts have been made to minimise the negative impact of these vacant buildings on the town's overall appearance, such as by painting murals as shown in the first photograph, which contribute positively to the streetscape. However, other vacant buildings remain in a neglected state.



Murals on a vacant building



A building with no roof



Vacant commercial properties



Former post office building

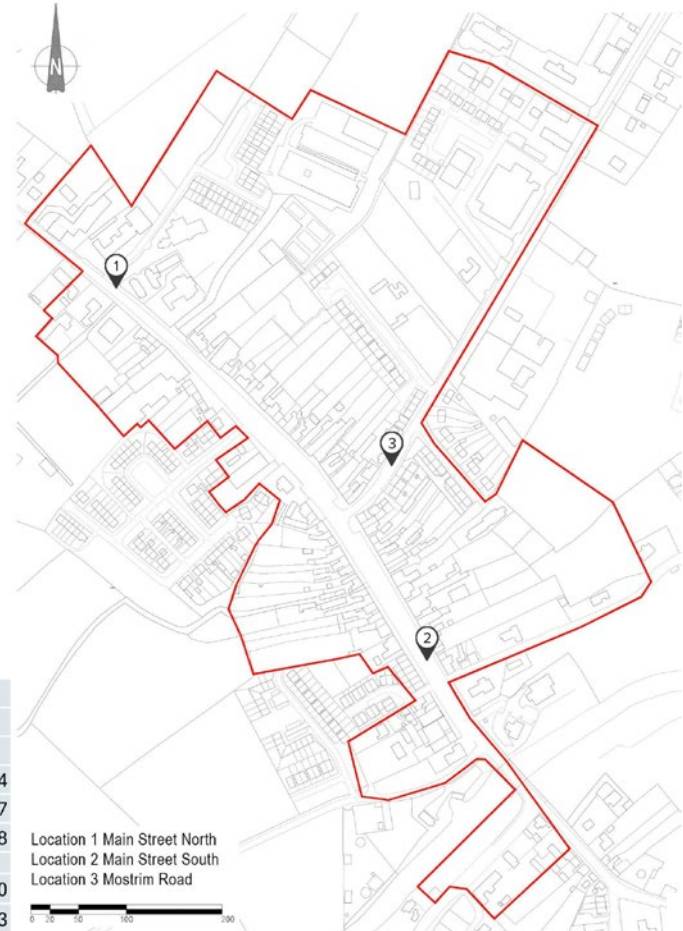
Footfall and Vehicular Movements

Footfall and vehicle counts were undertaken at three locations over a three hour period on the 18th of October, 2024.

Overall, the total average number of all journeys that was made by vehicle was 91.6%. Even taking into account there were exceptionally poor weather conditions on a Friday afternoon, this number is notably very high.

The highest average vehicle count was taken at location 2, Main Street South, suggesting that a majority of vehicles traveling towards the town centre on Mostrim Road, turn left and continue their journey south.

Very few cyclists were observed, but weather conditions may have been a contributing factor. Conditions may also have contributed to lower than normal pedestrian footfall.



Ballymahon

Day / date	Time Interval	Loc. 1 (Main Street North)			Loc. 2 (Main Street South)			Loc. 3 (Mostrim Rd)	
		Vehicles	Pedestrians	Cyclists	Vehicles	Pedestrians	Cyclists	Vehicles	Pedestrians
Friday	12.30 - 12.45	136	17	1	217	29		119	14
18/10/2024	14.00 - 14.15	202	23		295	26		167	17
	15.30 - 15.45	180	12		312	19		182	8
Overall average		172.7	17.3	1.0	274.7	24.7		156.0	13.0
Overall % travelled by vehicle		90.7			91.8			92.3	

Desire Line Assessment

A desire line refers to the informal paths that people create by walking a direct route rather than following pre-designed pedestrian infrastructure. Identifying desire lines can be valuable because they reflect the real usage patterns of public spaces. Shown on the map in black are the two existing pedestrian crossings within the study area. Shown in pink are the desire lines observed during the survey visit and identified in the questionnaire responses.

The primary observation is that the current pedestrian crossings on Main Street are inadequate due to the heavy vehicular traffic, which makes crossing it challenging. Perpendicularly parked cars densely line the street, obstructing visibility and making it difficult to see oncoming vehicles.

Desire lines 1 and 2 on the map extend pedestrian routes along Main Street. Desire line locations 3, 4, and 6 similarly indicate extended routes and suggest additional crossings directly on Main Street. Additionally, residents have expressed a need for traffic lights to be introduced at locations 3 and 6 for more effective traffic management. The desire line labelled 5 offers a more accessible shortcut connecting Thomond Hall and the town playground to Main Street. Its establishment was also likely prompted by the abrupt termination of the pavement before the junction of Thomond Hall and Main Street, which further intensifies the challenges pedestrians encounter when navigating this area.



An existing crossing on Main Street



Challenging to cross Main Street



Desire line 5 in the grass connecting Main Street to Thomond Hall

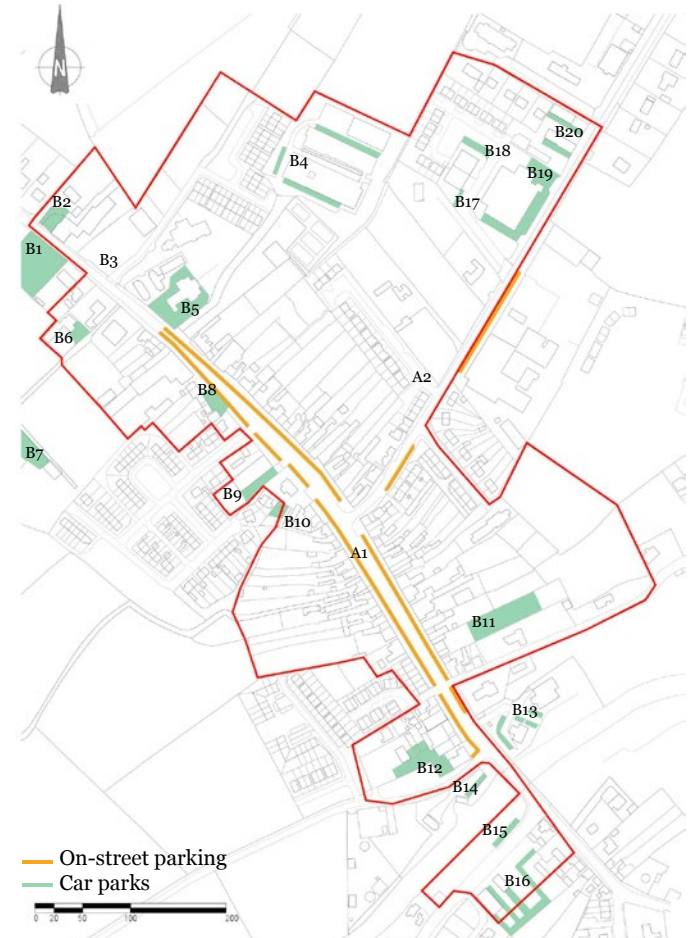
Parking Assessment

The car parking survey was completed on the 18th of October 2024. The map on the right shows all of the identified car parking spaces both designated car parks and on-street parking within the town centre of Ballymahon. Car parking spaces were monitored throughout the day, to check for fluctuations and changes. Ballymahon offers ample car parking options.

The key on-street parking observation relates to the town's Main Street, labelled A1, either side of which has a row of perpendicularly-oriented car parking spaces. The majority of these spaces were observed full or close to full. In particular, the spaces in the middle of Main Street were sought after considering their proximity to popular businesses in the town centre. A long stretch of unpaved land in front of the Longford/Westmeath Farmers' Mart on Mostrim Road had a few cars parked there during the survey visit, labelled A2.

Ballymahon also has a number of designated car parks, some of which are customer-only. Starting from the top of the map, all of the car parks along Main Street are assessed. A car park marked B1 was observed nearly at its capacity at all times which could be explained by its proximity to the Circle K filling station and the Spar shop in it, as well St Matthews School. The designated customer car park at the aforementioned filling station is marked as B2 on the map and only has seven parking spaces, all of which were observed taken. Next, an unpaved site at the corner of Main Street and Church View, labelled B3, is used as a car and bus park and was also actively used during the survey visit. The Mercy Secondary School has a private car park on its grounds, marked B4 on the map, which was about three quarters full. The grounds of the St Matthew's Catholic Church represent an asphalted, non-delineated car park, with one car observed on the grounds, labelled B5 on the map. There is a customer-only car park at the Riverinny Veterinary Clinic, labelled B6.

The assessment continues on the following page.



Parking Assessment *(Continued)*

An unpaved area near the town's astroturf is also used as a car park, marked B7. A car park was established on a wide pavement, marked B8 on the map, despite several signs advising against it. Another customer car park, B9, at the Ballymahon Autoparts store was observed at nearly its capacity, with vehicles also parked on the pavement. There is a small gated car park adjacent to the library building, marked B10. A large car park is available to the customers of the Cooney's Restaurant, labelled B11. Another car park is available behind the O'Hanlon's Pharmacy, marked B12. Although there are no signs indicating or specifying that it is intended exclusively for customer use, its location reasonably suggests this to be the case. This car park successfully reduces the use of on-street parking on Main Street. The Rivercourt apartment complex has a residents' car park, was observed half-full during the survey, B13. The designated public car park by the Ballymahon Bridge, marked B14, was the only car park along Main Street which was completely unused during the survey visit. This could be possibly explained by its location at the bottom of the town centre but also by the lack of the pavement leading to it on Main Street, making accessing it more difficult.

Moving across the Ballymahon Bridge, an unpaved car park along Athlone Road, B15, was also seen underutilised. However, the Maxol filling station and Centra's car park on the opposite side of the street, B16, was more than half-full. The high occupancy rate of this car park can be explained by the popularity of this business which is strategically located at one of the three main access points to the town.

The assessment continues on the following page.

Location	Estimated Capacity, Spaces	Occupied Spaces	Occupancy, %
A1	248	240	97
A2	50	2	4
B1	38	30	79
B2	7	6	86
B3	50	16	32
B4	60	30	50
B5	40	1	3
B6	7	5	71
B7	40	0	0
B8	8	3	38
B9	15	15	100
B10	5	1	20
B11	70	5	7
B12	30	13	43
B13	40	20	50
B14	11	0	0
B15	14	2	14
B16	24	23	96
B17	50	10	20
B18	20	10	50
B19	15	2	13
B20	70	45	64
Estimated total	912		

Parking Assessment *(Continued)*

Lastly, the following three designated car parks were surveyed on Mostrim Road. There is an employee-only car park in front of the town's Fire Station, marked B17. A car dealership next to it also has its designated car park, which in addition to the adjacent public street was observed at capacity, labelled B18. Considering the nature of business, some of the observed cars could have been those for sale. A retail complex in front of the dealership has ample customer car park, labelled B19. Lastly, the Applegreen filling station and convenience store's customer car park was observed nearly three quarters full, marked as B20.

Other car parking observations include clearly marked disabled parking locations and designated EV charging docks throughout the town centre area.

To conclude the parking assessment, the on-street parking along Main Street was observed the preferred and most heavily utilised. Although some businesses have designated car parks, their levels of occupancy vary and are summarised in the table on page 16. These variations could be explained by their size, location, popularity of the business, time of the day and other factors.



On-street parking along Main Street



Designated public car park, B1



An unpaved parking area on Main Street, B3



Cars parked on pavement, B8



A car park behind a pharmacy, B12



An area of no pavement at Lower Main Street which makes challenging accessing a designated car park with EV chargers, B14



Public Realm

Ballymahon offers a variety of food and drink establishments, convenience and retail shops, three schools, day care facilities, two churches, as well as services such as a post office and a bank branch which is an amenity that many smaller rural towns do not always have. Ballymahon's well-equipped library serves as the town's focal point on Main Street. Several public art installations celebrate the work of poet and writer Oliver Goldsmith, who was born nearby in Pallas.

Most of the pavements in the town centre are wide, allowing for easy passing and stopping without impacting other pedestrians. The quality of the pavements varies across the town centre, with some showing signs of wear. Additionally, some rainwater gutters could benefit from maintenance due to wear. Ballymahon has three busy filling stations, highlighting the car-centric nature of the town. Pedestrian infrastructure continuity along these stations could be improved. Although the recently constructed filling station on Athlone Road includes features to accommodate pedestrians, the infrastructure disappears near the other two stations on Main Street and Mostrim Road.

Some businesses attempt to spill into the street by the introduction of outdoor seating, however, these efforts are limited in success due to the dominance of vehicular traffic and on-street parking along Main Street.

Public realm improvements are also evident through the addition of outdoor furniture, such as benches, tables and shelters. These installations could be further enhanced with additional elements, such as planters for wind protection and privacy, more bins and additional rain shelters.



Ballymahon library and town core



Homage to Oliver Goldsmith



Sheltered outdoor seating



Outdoor seating which could benefit from improvements



Outdoor seating which could benefit from improvements



An example of public artistic expression

Public Realm

Several walking trails are advertised around the town. Ballymahon also has an astroturf, a playing field and a GAA pitch, while two privately-owned gyms operate in the town. The Bridgeways Family Resource Centre is a popular community space offering various activities, including outdoor exercise equipment.

The Inny River walkway by the Ballymahon bridge has benches and was seen used by the residents during the survey visit. Further enhancements such as street lighting, better surface and bins could make it more welcoming and increase its popularity. Across the river, the town's playground sits adjacent to the Inny Kayak Club building, an area that could also benefit from some updates. Apart from a few bicycle racks, cyclist infrastructure is notably absent in the town.

Ballymahon has one bus stop serving either direction, however, neither one has a bus shelter. Vehicles were observed parked in the bus stop areas which impedes the use of public transport.

Overall, Ballymahon has a solid foundation in the variety of amenities and infrastructure available to its residents. Examples of improvements to the town's public realm include various street furniture and public art installations. However, the car-dominated environment remains a complex issue, with community members expressing different views on how it should be addressed. Longford County Council's Pobal le Chéile project aims to expand available facilities and make further improvements to create a more inviting and sustainable town environment.



Bridgeways Family Resource Centre offers various activities including an outdoor gym on its grounds



River Inny walkway and Ballymahon playground could benefit from improvements to boost their functionality, appeal and safety



Ballymahon offers several walks which are advertised throughout the town

Questionnaire Responses

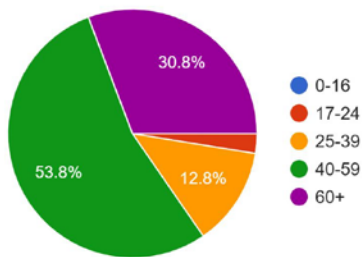
I: Introduction and Demographics

During the study, questionnaires were made available for online and physical completion, and it is through the answers given to the questions provided that we are able to gain an understanding of what is most important to the local population. In total, 40 responses to the questionnaire were gathered. The questionnaire itself can be divided into three main sections. The first of these touches upon general introductory questions and demographic data. This allows for an analysis of why individuals are interested in the town, but also to give a general feel of some of the broader aspirations, wants and needs individuals have for the town.

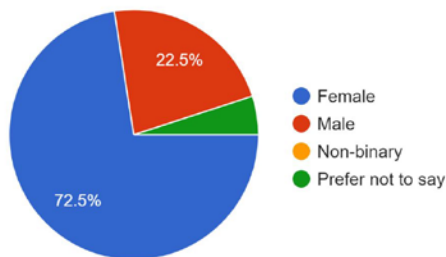
In terms of demographics, the majority of respondents were within the 40-59 year old age bracket, representing **53.8%** of all responses. There was also a relatively high response rate from those aged 60+, which stood at **30.8%**. Response rate falls as age range decreases. There were only **12.8%** of the overall responses from those aged between 25 - 39. Only **2.6%** of responses were from those aged 17-24 and there were no responses from those under 16. This suggests a limited pool of respondents to the questionnaire and this presents limitations on how the data collected can be interpreted and used. The majority of questionnaire responses came from women, who accounted for **72.5%** of all completed surveys, while men represented only **22.5%** of the total respondents.

The questionnaire results revealed that for a vast majority of respondents, their main reason for visiting Ballymahon town centre was that they lived there (**67.5%**). The second most common reason for visiting was working in the town, accounting for **10%** of responses. While individuals provided a range of other reasons, such as shopping, events and culture, or tourism, the data, as shown below, indicates that most respondents concerned with the quality of living and experiences in Cavan town are those who live there.

What is your age?



Which gender do you identify as?



What is your main reason for visiting Ballymahon?



Questionnaire Responses

I: Introduction and Demographics

Respondents were asked to name one word which they associate with Ballymahon town centre. The answers to this question are presented on this page in a form of a word cloud where the more popular responses appear larger, while the less common replies are shown in a smaller font. This word cloud visually represents the diverse perspectives and experiences shared about Ballymahon.

The responses were broadly positive, with strong reference to a sense of community. Many people appear to have a strong positive perception of Ballymahon, using words like 'lovely', 'friendly', and 'peaceful'.

Negative responses were also recorded including 'dilapidated', 'dated', and 'boring'. Suggesting there are areas for improvement in the built environment and public realm as well as more variety of activities available. However words like 'improved' and 'better' were also recorded, suggesting some respondents feel that Ballymahon has had recent improvements.

Key themes from the word cloud:

Car-centric nature of the town: traffic, busy, parking, traffic-jams

Community and lifestyle with positive or neutral connotations: home, community, local, lovely, peaceful, diverse

Commerce: busy, business-town, shopping, Center Parcs, cosmopolitan

What is the first word you associate with Ballymahon?



Questionnaire Responses

I: Introduction and Demographics

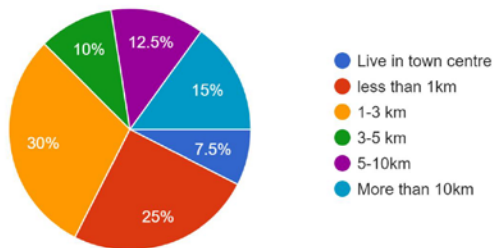
When asked about the travel distance to Ballymahon town centre, over **72.5%** of all respondents stated that they lived within 5 km of the town centre. A majority of respondents within this group live between 1 and 3 km of the town. A relatively low proportion of respondents to the questionnaire (**15%**) stated that they live over 10 km away from the town centre. This corresponds with the number of respondents who stated in a previous question as to 'living there' being their main reason for being in Ballymahon.

The questionnaire also sought to understand how much time individuals typically spend in Ballymahon, providing insights into how people interact with the town centre. This information is essential for ensuring that any future refocusing or repurposing of the town aligns with current usage patterns and better meets the needs of both visitors and residents.

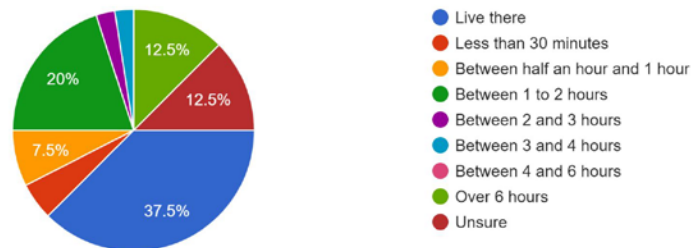
When asked 'how long would you normally spend in Ballymahon?', the largest portion of respondents stated that they lived there (**37.5%**). This suggests that these people consider themselves to live in the town centre or very close to it. The second largest portion of respondents said 'between 1 and 2 hours' (**20%**) suggesting that these are people coming to the town centre to run errands, do their weekly shop, attend meetings or other activities. **12.5%** of respondents said they spend 'over 6 hours' in the town, suggesting that these are people who work in the town centre.

This information is useful when it comes to recognising how best to tailor existing or forthcoming services, such as parking management, but also what needs to be encouraged to get more people to spend longer in the town.

How far do you have to travel to get to Ballymahon?



How long would you normally spend in Ballymahon?



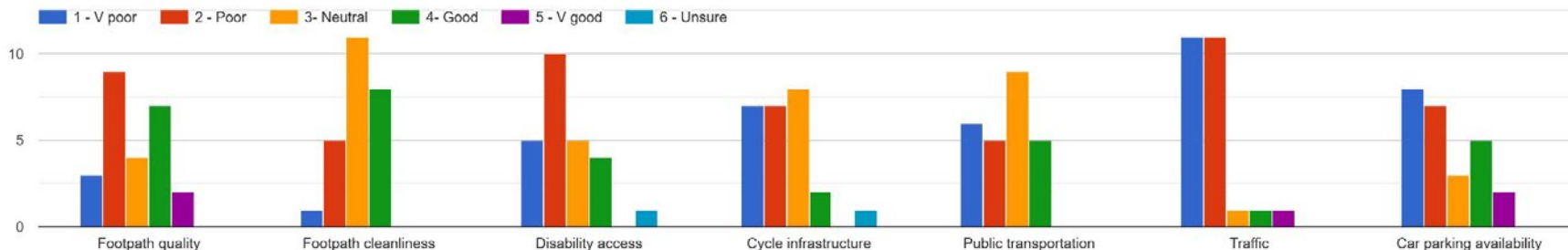
Questionnaire Responses

II: Facilities

The second section focuses on the opinions held by respondents regarding the facilities available in Ballymahon. This includes a focus on how well the current infrastructure is geared towards movement and accessibility, what sort of goods and services individuals buy in Ballymahon and how well respondents rate existing facilities and amenities in the town.

As stated, individuals were asked to rate existing infrastructure within the town based on how well it contributes to good movement and accessibility around Ballymahon. The results of this question can be seen below. Respondents were given the chance to take each individual piece of infrastructure, such as the town's cycling infrastructure, disability access, or traffic, and rank it on a scale of it either being 'Very Poor', 'Poor', 'Neutral', 'Good' or 'Very Good'. Individuals were also able to select 'Unsure' if they felt unable to rank the infrastructure in place. Most forms of public infrastructure, such as footpath quality and cleanliness, as well as public transportation and cycle infrastructure, were all seen in a relatively neutral light, albeit with a negative skew. Only footpath cleanliness saw a proportionately high number of 'Good' responses. In particular, and in common with issues raised elsewhere in the questionnaire, here respondents highlighted their lack of satisfaction with traffic and parking in the town centre. Traffic management, and parking, received mostly negative responses, with Traffic receiving an overwhelmingly negative judgement, as shown in the graph below. This goes hand in hand with requests for traffic lights and a possible bypass rerouting HGV's from entering the town. Disability access also received a negative response, with 'Poor' being the most common response to the question above. This is also in line with the high number of 'Poor' responses footpath quality received.

How good is the following infrastructure in Ballymahon for movement and accessibility?



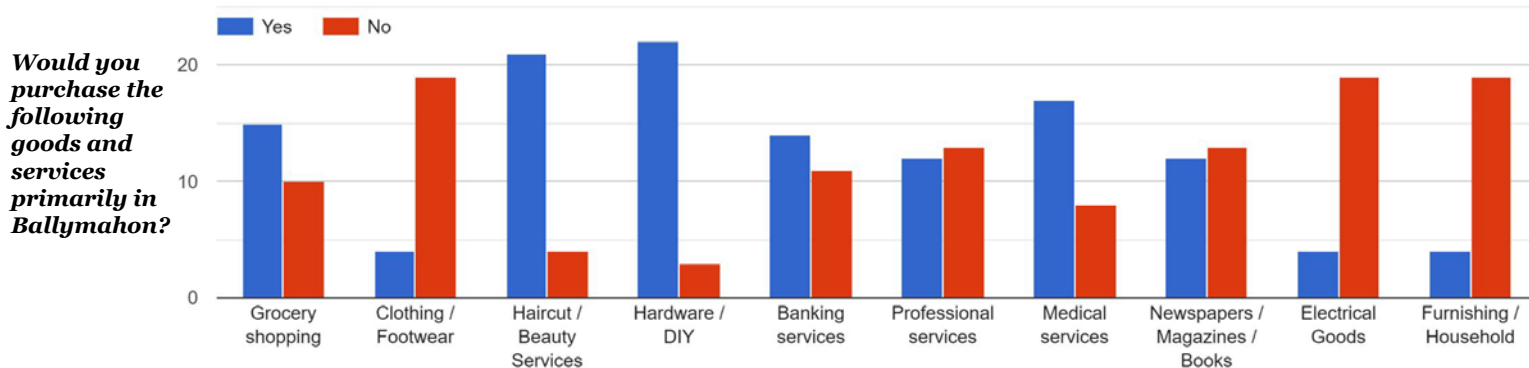
Questionnaire Responses

II: Facilities

Another question focused on the spending habits of respondents to the questionnaire. Participants were asked to answer *yes* or *no* about the type of goods and services they purchase in Ballymahon, the results of which can be seen below. Respondents were asked about grocery shopping, retail shopping, banking services, household goods, and more. As can be seen, there are some goods and services which are overwhelmingly purchased in the town centre. These include haircut or beauty services, and hardware.

With regards to the remaining goods and services below, many received balanced responses as to whether they are purchased in Ballymahon or elsewhere. Grocery shopping, banking services and medical services are all fairly balanced but skew more towards being purchased in Ballymahon, whereas professional services, and newspapers, books and magazines skew more towards being purchased elsewhere. Electrical goods, household items and furnishings, and clothing and footwear are all overwhelming purchased outside the bounds of the town. A lack of clothing shops was raised by respondents elsewhere in the questionnaire, as was the need for a 'better' supermarket. There was less of a push for shops catering to electrical goods and household furnishings, and with these shops often requiring large amounts of square footage, they are more suited to being placed outside the town centre's boundaries.

Respondents to the questionnaire were also asked to state what locations they would use to purchase goods and services that they do not primarily get in Ballymahon. The most common responses to this were larger local towns, such as Athlone, Longford, and Mullingar.

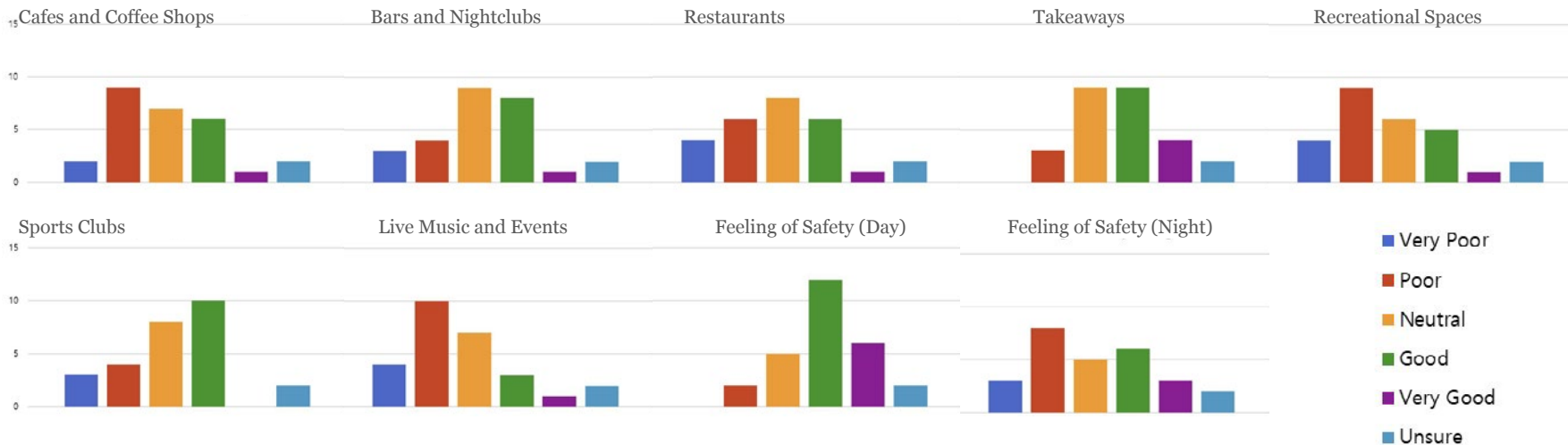


Questionnaire Responses

II: Facilities

Respondents were asked to rate a range of amenities and facilities in Ballymahon. As shown below, feeling of safety during the day and sporting facilities were seen to be the most positively perceived facilities within the town. Nevertheless, a vast majority of the facilities and amenities listed below were viewed in a relatively balanced way, with cafés, restaurants, recreational spaces, live music and events, and feeling of safety at night all receiving a more negative skew. On the other hand, the balanced outlook towards the towns bars and nightclubs and takeaways all skewed more towards a positive perception. These opinions are reflected elsewhere in the questionnaire. When asked about which services participants believed to be missing from the town, some respondents outlined the need for cafés which stayed open past 5pm, whilst other claimed a need for more restaurants. Whilst some stated that the gyms and the GAA grounds were a positive in the town, some individuals outlined the old sports centre on the Moigh Road as being one of the places in the town which could be improved upon. With regards to recreational spaces, some respondents stated the need to have an inclusive community centre.

How would you rate Ballymahon for the following facilities or amenities?

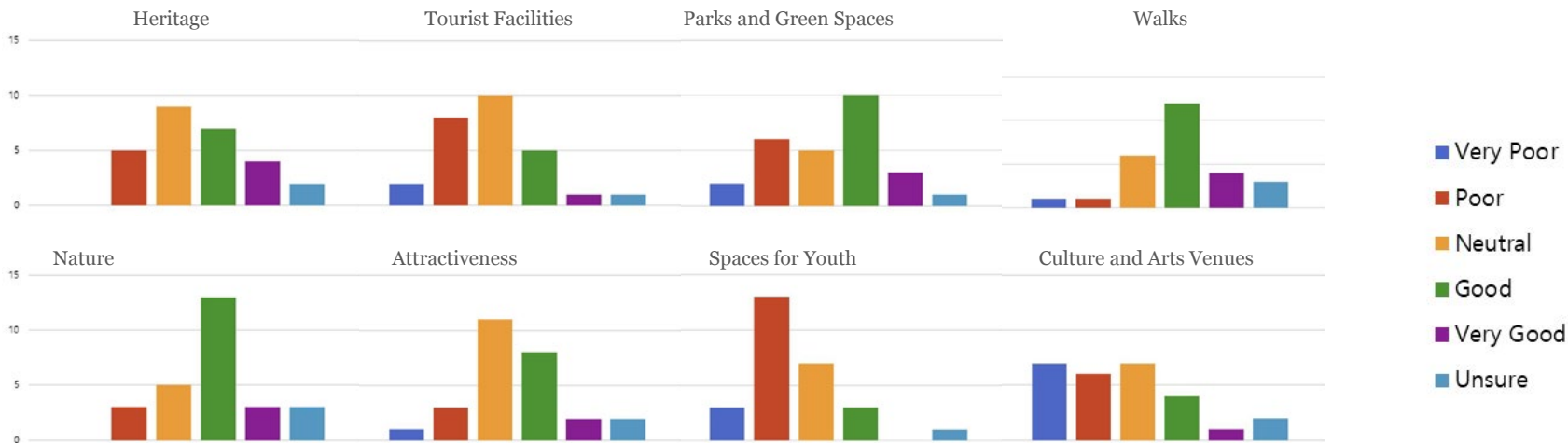


Questionnaire Responses

II: Facilities

Many of the town’s more natural aspects were more positively viewed. The town’s parks and green spaces, walks, nature, and levels of attractiveness were all viewed positively. In particular the towns canal walks were listed as being one of the recognised ‘good places’ within the town. Furthermore, the positive reception to the town’s setting within nature helps to create and add to the peaceful perception that some of the respondents believe can be associated with Ballymahon. On a whole, the town’s heritage, tourist facilities, and culture and arts venues were all viewed in a relatively neutral light. Heritage skewed towards a positive perception, whereas respondents gave the town’s tourist facilities and cultural venues a more negative outlook. Spaces for youth was seen in an overwhelmingly negative light, as ‘poor’ was the most common response to the respective question. This was raised as an issue by several respondents to the questionnaire, who raised the need for the playground to be improved in terms of both its cleanliness and safety. Individuals also stated that there was a lack of options available for teenagers to get involved with and encourage socialising.

How would you rate Ballymahon for the following facilities or amenities?



Questionnaire Responses

III: Town Centre Liveability and Local Commercial Activity

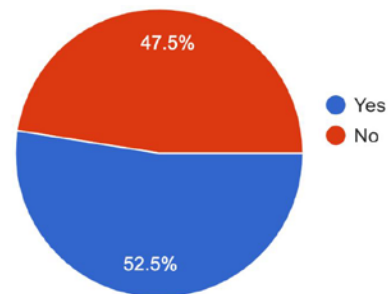
The third and final portion of the questionnaire contain questions that focus on how liveable respondents consider Ballymahon and its town centre are. As a result, participants were asked about their perceptions of local vacancy rates in comparison with other towns, what the individual believed to be the most important factors in making Ballymahon town centre into a better living environment, which housing tenures would be most needed going forward and the quality of changes in the town over the last 10 years.

As previously stated, given that a limited number of participants state that they live in Ballymahon town itself (52.5%), with the results from these questions being restricted in the impact they can have on future decision making. This questionnaire did not ask whether residents lived in the town centre i.e. along the town's main streets as opposed to the housing estates on the periphery of the town but this is still an important statistic to note as Ballymahon is a small town, where everything is in relatively close proximity to each other. This question provides interesting insight into who goes into Ballymahon, with almost half not residing in the town.

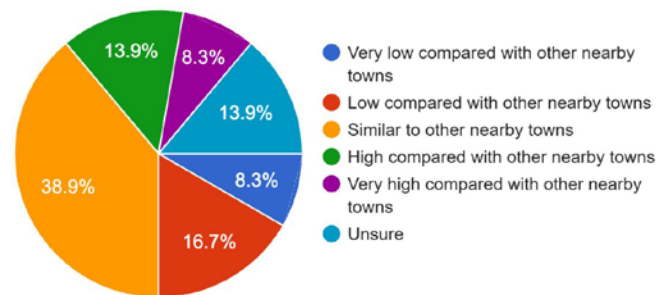
Respondents to the questionnaire were asked how they believed Ballymahon town centre to be doing comparatively with other nearby towns in terms of vacancy and dereliction. Overall, public perception on this matter appeared to be mostly balanced. The most common response to this question (38.9%) was that respondents believe vacancy and dereliction to be similar to other nearby towns. On a whole however, the response skews more towards perceiving Ballymahon's vacancy rate to be lower in comparison to other nearby towns.

As stated earlier in this report, Ballymahon's town centre does struggle with some vacancy. All in all, Ballymahon town centre carries an overall vacancy rate of 9%. In comparison, Granard, which underwent a similar Town Centre Health check, has an overall vacancy rate of 17.2%, which is almost double Ballymahon's overall vacancy rate, vindicating many of the questionnaire respondents.

Do you live in Ballymahon?



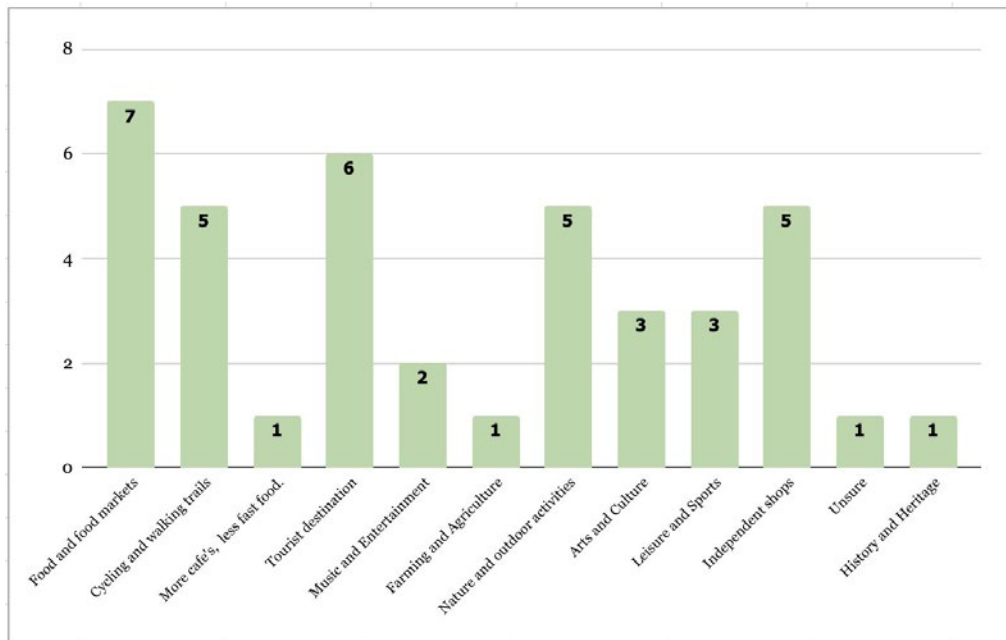
Do you think the number of vacant and derelict buildings in Ballymahon Town Centre are:



Questionnaire Responses

III: Town Centre Liveability and Local Commercial Activity

Keeping Ballymahon's identity in mind, do you think any of the following themes could be explored to promote Ballymahon as a destination?



Respondents were then asked to select themes that they believe should be explored to make Ballymahon a 'destination'. The graph on the left shows the amount of respondents who chose each option (**40 responses overall**). The most common selection was the 'Food and food markets' (**17.5%**), followed by the "Tourist destination" option (**15%**) while themes such as 'history and heritage', 'farming and agriculture' and 'more cafe's, less fast food' options were the least favourable themes for respondents.

These responses give strong indications that Ballymahon's residents and visitors would like to see more gastronomic and touristic investments in the town. Perhaps these two themes could be explored in tandem, as they could have synergistic effects for Ballymahon's economy and quality of life.

Another takeaway from this poll is that it could be viewed as a litmus test for public support for the exploration of these themes by Longford County Council.

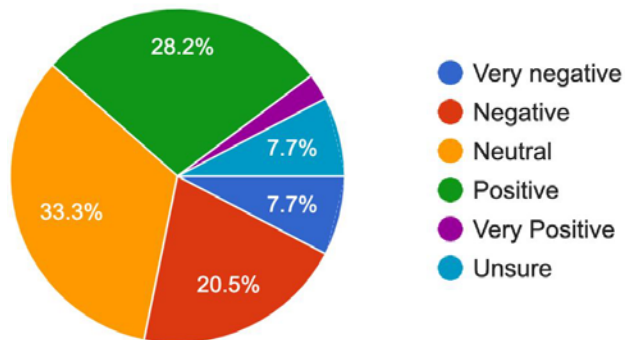
Piloting of new gastronomic festivals and the provision of more tourist beds could be possible interventions that would assist in actualising these themes for Ballymahon.

Questionnaire Responses

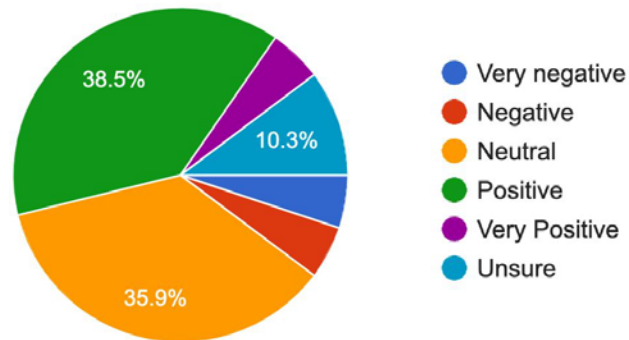
III: Town Centre Liveability and Local Commercial Activity

Along with previous questions surrounding town centre liveability, questionnaire respondents were also asked questions about how they feel about the current business climates in Ballymahon. This was gauged through two questions about current and future levels of ‘commercial activity’ in Ballymahon. When viewing these two questions side by side, a subtle juxtaposing theme emerges; current feelings about commercial activity in Ballymahon are seen to be more neutral, followed by feelings of positivity and negativity while future feelings about commercial activity in Ballymahon are projected by respondents to be more positive, followed by neutral and those unsure. This highlights that people have more positive sentiments about the future of Ballymahon’s commercial activity in the future i.e. respondents have a somewhat optimistic view for Ballymahon’s commercial sector. These optimistic sentiments could be reflected through more indigenous investment in Ballymahon and aided by business and entrepreneurship training, business development grants and assistance programmes.

How do you feel about current levels of commercial activity in Ballymahon?



How do you feel about the future of commercial activity in Ballymahon?



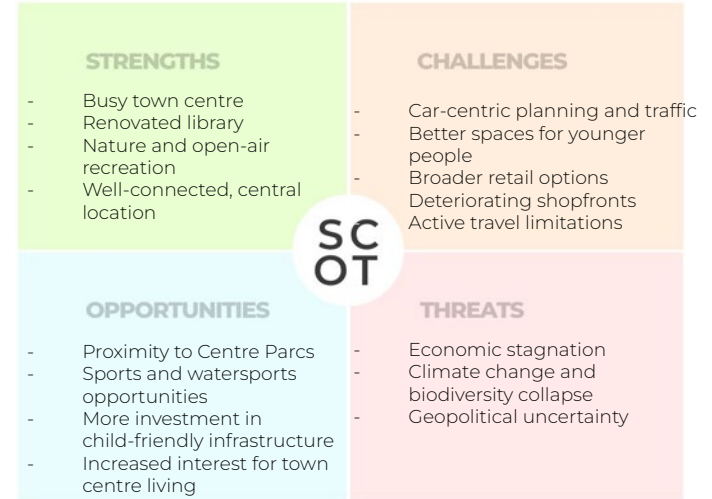
SCOT Analysis

The report concludes with a strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats (SCOT) analysis of the key findings of this study and is based on both the physical survey work and public consultation data.

Strengths and challenges relate to Ballymahon on a micro level, focusing on the town's abilities in itself, that is, an internal vantage of the town's prospects.

Opportunities and threats, however, look towards the exterior; the external impacts which could alter the town such as the economy at large, the context of the wider region, Irish state or the world. The bottom half of the SCOT analysis investigates Ballymahon's integrities and vulnerabilities to outside socio-economic, geographic and political context or contexts.

To conclude, the SCOT analysis presents many various internal factors and potential external impacts on the town's functions.



SCOT Analysis

Strengths

Busy town centre – Ballymahon's busy Main Street offers a range of shops, food and drink places, as well as retail and public services. Wide pavements encourage walkability, while the town's compact size means that most amenities are within walking distance.

Renovated library – Ballymahon's library is a valuable local asset located in the historic courthouse building in the town centre. As a focal point and an educational and cultural hub, it serves the community in multiple ways, from offering a range of books and resources to hosting community events. The library provides a quiet and inclusive space where community members can gather, thus fostering a sense of belonging. By promoting literacy, creativity and lifelong learning, Ballymahon's library enriches the cultural life of the town.

Nature and open-air recreation – Surrounded by nature, Ballymahon offers a variety of open-air recreation and sports activities. The walking trails by the Inny River and the town playground provide a peaceful contrast to the town's busy core. The astroturf and playing field, GAA pitch and kayak club offer spaces for team sports and physical activity to residents of all ages. These facilities encourage a healthy and active lifestyle.

Well-connected, central geographic location – Ballymahon benefits from strong connections to neighbouring towns like Athlone and Mullingar, as well as major cities like Dublin and Galway.

STRENGTHS

- Busy town centre
- Renovated library
- Nature and open-air recreation
- Well-connected, central location



Ballymahon's town centre

SCOT Analysis

Challenges

Car-centric planning and traffic – County Longford’s rurality, Ballymahon’s small size, and residential expansion during the Celtic Tiger have led to a sprawl of the town limits. Even though the pavements in the town centre are mostly wide, the ample parking in the area and weak rural public transport have increased residents’ reliance on private cars to access goods and services. This, combined with workers and visitors driving into the town and some through traffic, causes congestion on Ballymahon’s roads, especially during peak times.

Better spaces for younger people – Ballymahon currently offers some spaces for youth engagement, particularly through the Bridgeway Family Resource Centre. There are also sports facilities available, however, they are limited in their capacity and variety. The Pobal le Chéile project is anticipated to address some of these challenges by expanding and enhancing the available facilities. However, through the questionnaire responses, residents have expressed a desire for more dedicated spaces tailored specifically to the younger residents of the town.

Broader retail options – Although Ballymahon offers a range of convenience and retail shops, residents have expressed a strong desire for a wider variety of retail options, particularly a larger supermarket to better accommodate weekly food shopping needs.

Shopfront improvements – The presence of vacant and derelict properties along Ballymahon’s Main Street detracts from the town’s appeal, impacting both local businesses and visitor impressions. These neglected shopfronts contribute to a sense of decline, potentially discouraging foot traffic and new investment in the area. Improving these facades by restoring them or using temporary covers or art displays could regenerate Main Street, creating a more inviting atmosphere that encourages local shopping.

Active travel – Currently, there are very limited active travel options in Ballymahon. Even though the town’s wide streets have the capacity to accommodate dedicated cycle infrastructure, the only evidence of such infrastructure is a few cycle racks at the town’s library. Improving cycle infrastructure would create stronger connections to neighbouring towns and help establish Ballymahon as a destination for active travel enthusiasts.

CHALLENGES

- Car-centric planning and traffic
- Better spaces for younger people
- Broader retail options
- Deteriorating shopfronts
- Active travel limitations



A mural artwork on a derelict building on Main Street

SCOT Analysis

Opportunities

Proximity to Centre Parcs – Centre Parcs location near Ballymahon presents a unique opportunity for the town to attract additional visitors and stimulate its economy. However, current footfall from Centre Parcs guests appears low, suggesting that stronger marketing efforts, targeted attractions or other partnerships could help draw more of these visitors into the town. Ballymahon could become an appealing additional destination by turning this proximity into a valuable economic asset.

Sports and watersports opportunities – Ballymahon's natural setting and access to the Inny River and nearby lakes presents excellent potential for expanding sports and water sports offerings. While the town already has an astroturf, playing field, GAA pitch and kayak club, there is room for additional activities that could make better use of the town's natural and water resources, such as paddleboarding, fishing, seasonal sports events or other activities. Developing these offerings would not only attract more visitors but also create opportunities for residents to engage in outdoor recreation and boost the local economy.

More investment in child-friendly infrastructure – Questionnaire responses indicate that Ballymahon's single playground requires improvements to better serve local families, with some suggesting that it should be relocated to a more central location. Investing in an updated, safe and inclusive playground, as well as other facilities dedicated to children, would enhance the town's family appeal and boost overall community satisfaction.

Increased interest for town centre living – Town centre living is attractive to many individuals such as young professionals and retirees. Increased investments in schemes like Town Centre First and others, has led to a town centre living renaissance across Ireland, with trends also present in many other countries. Rejuvenating our town centres goes hand-in-hand with a population living in the urban core. It is more important than ever for town centre living to be supported. Town centre living typically decreases car dependency, thereby reducing carbon emissions and brings vibrancy back into the centres of towns.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Proximity to Centre Parcs
- Sports and watersports opportunities
- More investment in child-friendly infrastructure
- Increased interest for town centre living



Ballymahon's potential in recreational activities

SCOT Analysis

Threats

Economic stagnation – While the Irish economy as a whole has been strong, the wider European and global economy is facing challenges, which could pose a threat to potential future foreign direct investment into Ballymahon and County Longford as a whole. As investors elsewhere become more prudent, this could stimulate a lack of confidence in the wider economy.

Climate change and biodiversity collapse – With the looming threat of climate change and biodiversity collapse engulfing the world, it is important for policy-makers to factor in more sustainable practices when strategizing, planning and enacting new policies.

Geopolitical uncertainty – Geopolitical crises of the 21st century are becoming ever-present, with COVID-19, the various wars in Ukraine, the Middle-East, Africa and Asia impacting global connectivity and trade. Black swan events such as Brexit and turbulent American and European elections have led to paradigm shifts and rapidly changing policies that impact the costs of business for companies relying on international trade.

THREATS

- Economic stagnation
- Climate change and biodiversity collapse
- Geopolitical uncertainty



Ballymahon Bridge over Inny River

Appendix 4 – Ballymahon Town Walkability Audit

Ballymahon Town Walkability Audit Report

01/10/2024



Introduction

Age Friendly Ireland

Age Friendly Ireland is a shared service of local government that manages the national Age Friendly Programme in Ireland. Age Friendly work is delivered in the context of population ageing which will become a significant challenge both in Ireland and internationally. As life expectancy increases, the need to ensure that Ireland becomes a great country in which to grow old is increasing too. We need to plan now to create the kinds of communities in which older people live autonomous and valued lives.

One of the eight pillars of the World Health Organisation's Age Friendly Programme focuses on the built environment. Assessing the 'walkability' of a town or village is fundamental to understanding how people access their community.

Each Local Authority in Ireland manages a local Age Friendly Programme with the involvement of multidisciplinary stakeholders. Older people's participation and co-design of the programme is facilitated by a local Older People's Council in every local authority area.

These Local Age Friendly Programmes work to provide walkable streets, housing and transportation options, access to key services and opportunities for older people to participate in community activities. By doing so, these communities are better equipped to become great places, and even lifelong homes, for people of all ages.

Age Friendly principles are a core part of government policy, embedded in the new Programme for Government (2020) particularly with reference to housing, the built environment and health.

Age Friendly Walkability Audit

Good design of roads and streets in our towns and cities is key to ensuring that people can get out and about in their local area and participate in all their community has to offer. Age Friendly Walkability Audits have been carried out in many locations across Ireland over the past decade.

The National Transport Authority initiated a process of developing a Universal Design walkability audit tool in 2019. This was largely based on the original Age Friendly survey but was developed further with input from Age Friendly Ireland, the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design and An Taisce, as part of their Green-Schools Programme. To reflect a Universal Design approach, it is important to have participants with a diverse range of ages and abilities undertaking the audit. This includes for example, parents with buggies, children, wheelchair users, older people with reduced mobility and people with low vision.

Walkability audits using a Universal Design approach provide valuable evidence of the features of roads and streets that can prevent people with a wide range of ages and abilities from easily accessing local amenities, shops and services in their community. At local level, walkability audits can highlight where changes can be made that will benefit older people and all members of the community.

Town Centre First

The Town Centre First (TCF) 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.

The Town Centre First policy recognises that every town is unique. It lays the foundation for each town to develop, at a local level, their own plan led path forward. This will be expressed through a tailored TCF plan which is underpinned by a clear diagnosis of local strengths and challenges. The TCF plan will be driven by the local community and businesses as part of a Town Team.

Before deciding what interventions work well, we need to understand our towns better and collect the right data to allow us to compare between places. In order to understand our town better, a Town Centre Health Check will be carried out. This will inform us of current opportunities and constraints and inform the development of an action plan that will meet the needs of the town.

Why is a Walkability Audit important?

Determining the walkability of Ballymahon is essentially an attempt to enhance and improve the lives of all people who live in and visit Ballymahon. By attaining a level of walkability, people with a range of ages and abilities are encouraged to actively participate in social places, encouraged to walk their town, expected to be visible on the street or in the park, as well as contributing to the local business economy. Physical barriers to social inclusion often exist by default and may not be immediately obvious to people, but can be identified in a walkability audit, using an Universal Design approach.

Objective

The objective of this Universal Design Walkability Audit is to increase awareness of the specific spatial needs of people with a wide range of ages and abilities, including for example, parents with buggies, older people and persons with disabilities. It aims to promote walkability and a Universal Design approach in the existing urban environment of Ballymahon.

It is anticipated that the outputs from this walkability audit will inform the development of the Ballymahon Town Centre First Plan and the identification of actions in the plan, through evidence-based, public participation informed engagement.

What is Universal Design?

Universal Design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. An environment (or any building, product, or services in that environment) should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to use it. This is not a special requirement, for the benefit of only a minority of the population. It is a fundamental condition of good design. If an environment is accessible, usable, convenient and a pleasure to use, everyone benefits.

Ballymahon Walkability Audit

A walkability audit was undertaken in Ballymahon on 16th September 2024. The process involved four walking groups, who walked the dedicated routes shown on the following map and observed a range of physical barriers to the walkability of Ballymahon. Each group consisted of several participants with a range of ages and abilities, including individuals with mobility aids, people with low vision, older people with reduced mobility and young people. Some participants were accompanied by assistants. A leader walked the route with each group. Each group also designated a photographer and a note-taker. There were 30 participants in total.

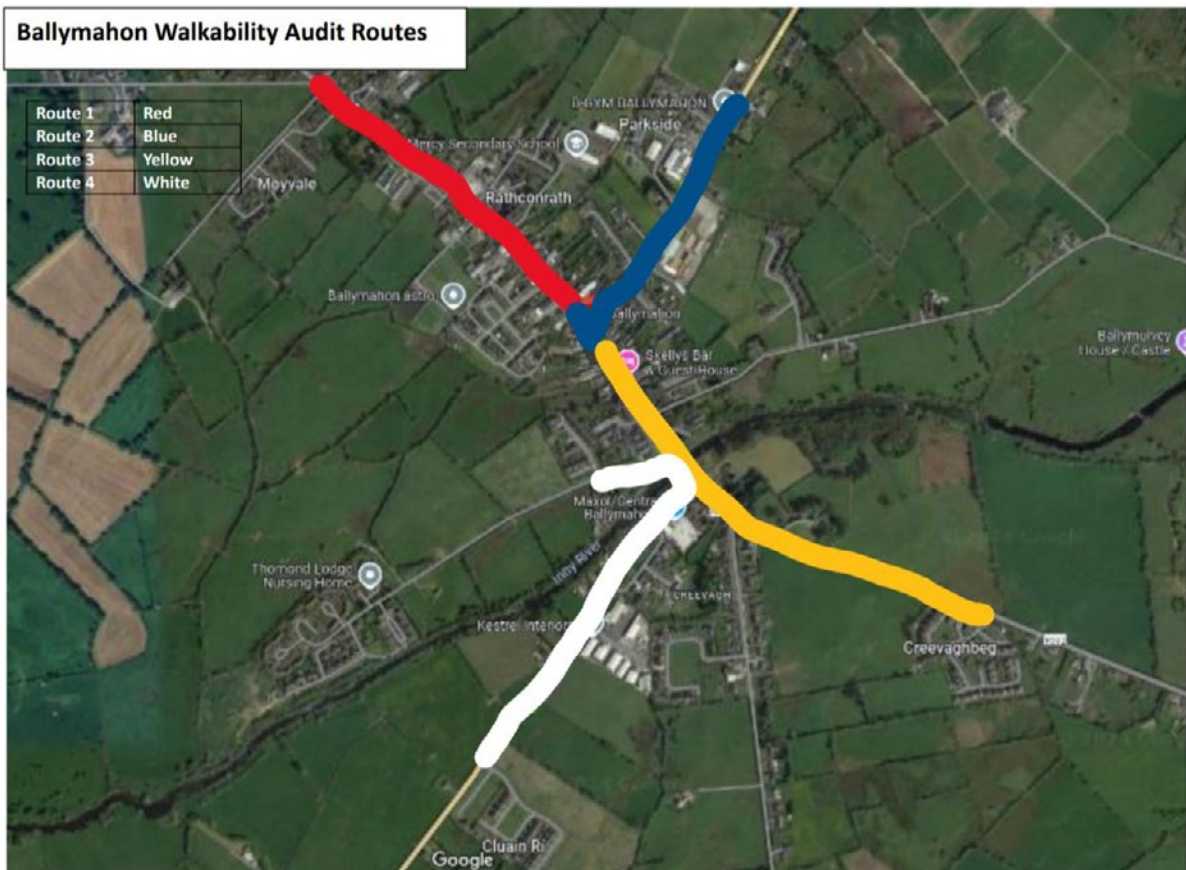


Group prior to commencement of audit

After the walkability audit a de-briefing meeting was conducted with participants where the issues identified during the walkability audit were discussed. Each group filled out the walkability audit tool and the main findings by each group were then presented to the overall group.

As noted above, the walkability audit was undertaken on four routes in Ballymahon. These routes were identified for their access to particular assets within the town, for example housing estates, GAA grounds or schools.

The four routes walked are shown on the map below:



Route 1 was selected to start at the library. The group walked along the R392 westwards as far as the junction with the Moygh Road and then back in along the opposite side of the road. This route was selected because as it included the primary school and two secondary schools, as well as Bridgeways Family Resource Centre. This route also included the crossing of several junctions to residential estates and crossing the busy R392.

Route 2 was selected to start at the library again. This group crossed to the opposite side of the road and made their way out the N55 Edgeworthstown Road as far as the GAA grounds and back in again on the opposite side of the road once they got back to the Mart. Once back into the Main Street, they made their way eastwards as far as the traffic lights and crossed at the crossing and back up to the library. This route was selected because of the link to the GAA grounds and creche, as well as the Mart.

Route 3 was selected to start at the library. This group walked eastwards from the library out towards the Mullingar Road as far as Creevaghbeg housing estate. They then walked back in the R392 and crossed to the opposite side of the road once they reached the footpath. They walked back up to the pedestrian crossing and crossed over and returned to the library.

Route 4 started at the playground along Thomond Hall, crossing the bridge to the junction with the Athlone Road. The group crossed the road here and walked out the N55 Athlone Road as far as Newcastle Court housing estate. This route is important because of the number of people travelling out to the meat factory and the residents of the estate accessing the town for services.

Several points were acknowledged and noted before the audit commenced with the group, including the lack of off-street car parking, the lack of crossing points and an issue with school buses particularly in the afternoon.

Findings from the Walkability Audit

1. Footpaths

The footpaths were rated from 'Very Poor' to 'Good' by the participants in different parts of the town, with the majority response considering them to be poor. While the participants on Route 4 indicated that the footpaths were good, they also noted some improvements are needed. Some participants noted that the footpaths in general are wide, and this was welcomed. However, the condition of the footpath throughout the town was noted to be in poor condition generally. As one moves from the town core towards either end of the Main Street the footpath tends to reduce in quality. Also, while it is noted that the footpaths are generally wide, they narrow significantly in parts, particularly near the schools, causing issues for the large number of students moving along the road.

There was a lack of colour contrast on tactile paving and in some cases the tactile paving was very worn, leaving it very difficult for some participants to navigate the town. In addition to the lack of colour contrast on the paving, there was also a lack of colour contrast on some of the street furniture, for example bollards with a lot of greys used. Paths were noted to not be flush with the road in parts with crossings in poor condition and not joined up.

Tree roots were lifting pavements in some locations, causing a trip hazard. There were also footpaths rocking with unsteady cobble and uneven surfaces. Gullies and channel drains were also located in the centre of some footpaths, causing a hazard for visually impaired users of the town. There was found to be a very steep gradient on one side of the street that is challenging to navigate for those with mobility issues.



Tree uprooting pavement



Narrow footpath past primary school



Channel drain within footpath



Pole in middle of footpath

2. Crossings and Junctions

One of the positive features of Ballymahon is its wide Main Street. However, this does lead to difficulties for pedestrians wishing to cross the street, especially those with mobility impairments. Participants on all routes noted the need for improved crossing points for pedestrians. It was noted that crossings are needed at the garage on the Athlone Road, SuperValu/Post Office and library and the Edgeworthstown Road junction.

Participants noted that where there were junctions with minor roads off the Main Street, there was a lack of pedestrian priority, including wide junctions and lack of signalling, leading to conflicts. On Route 4 along the Athlone Road, it was noted that there were 6 concealed entrances with no signage to indicate they were there. Along this route also, a wheelchair user would need to go onto the road which is very busy and despite a 50kph speed limit, traffic travels fast.



Lack of tactile paving at road crossing



Lack of priority for pedestrians and conflict at entrance



Lack of tactile paving at crossing



Lack of crossing point on Athlone Road

Although the audit was carried out during the daytime, lighting at the pedestrian crossing at the church was noted to be poor at night time by the participants, leading to motorists not seeing pedestrians crossing until late and could give rise to an accident.

3. Facilities

The participants noted significant variation in the availability of seating throughout the town. On Route 1 from the library to the Vocational School, which serves several older housing estates there was only one bench, located at the bus stop. However, there was no bus shelter at the bus stop on either side of the road. In contrast on Route 3 there were several seats, but they were felt to not be located in the correct locations. New Age Friendly seating has been provided in locations. However, there is no shade at these seats. The seating in the 1916 park was also considered to be facing the wrong direction.



There were no public toilets noted on the audit, apart from those within private businesses, for example the garage on the Athlone Road and the bars/hotels on Main Street. The amenity area to the front of the Kayak Club could present a hazard with the stairway down to the water and no barrier preventing children/buggy from running down. There are also no handrails to go down the steps. This is an amenity area but can be used as a car park by people. A Health and Safety review of this area would be beneficial. It could also be enhanced through the provision of additional seating.

Signage to amenities was generally found to be poor, for example it is difficult for people to find the playground or the River Inny walk. A review of names on the entrances to the housing estates is needed. The playground is a bit dated and located out of the way.



Existing playground which is dated



1916 Memorial Garden

Participants on the majority of the routes noted that there were not enough bins and those that were available were full and over-flowing. There is also not enough cycle parking throughout the town.

4. Road User Behaviour

A concern noted on all routes was the speed of traffic approaching the town. There are 50kph speed limits on all approach roads, but this is not visibly enforced leading to high-speed levels and a lack of sense of safety for the pedestrian. There is also an issue with cycling and scooting on footpaths. Despite the wide road and footpaths, cars were noted to park on footpaths throughout the town. This leads to problems for those with mobility impairments or visual impairments navigating the town.

Cars without wheelchair badges were also noted to park in the disabled parking bays. Buses picking up school children in the afternoon also often park across the disabled parking bay to the front of the library, causing difficulties for those with mobility issues wishing to access the facilities within the town.

5. Safety

In response to the query on safety, participants rated the sense of safety moving around the town between poor and OK. The reasons identified for this include the lack of pedestrian crossings throughout the town, speed of traffic making it difficult to cross the road and clutter and confusing layout at Applegreen. The level of lighting throughout the town and particularly at the pedestrian crossing at St. Matthew's Church gives rise to safety concerns.

Barriers and rails in locations around the town are in poor condition and could in fact lead to an accident. The rail to the front of St. Matthew's primary school could fall over causing children to spill into oncoming traffic. Overgrown trees are also causing concerns around safety. There is a need for the reflective bollards to be cleaned or the reflective surface changed.

The lack of signage for amenities and housing estates can cause confusion and conflict, leading to safety concerns.



Steep access to River Inny could be hazard

6. Look and Feel

The general look and feel of the town was found to be between OK and good with very positive comments on the presentation of the town, in particular the flower beds on Main Street and at entrances to housing estates and other environmental initiatives in place on sections of the N55.

However, a lot of congestion on the N55 Edgeworthstown road negatively impacts the look and feel of the town. There are also several derelict buildings within the town, particularly to the western end which detracts from the streetscape and negatively impacting on the look and feel of the town.

There was some litter noted on the Athlone Road. However, that was the exception with the majority of the town kept clean and tidy. There was also a lack of places for shade and shelter noted throughout the town.

Dog fouling was not noted as an issue throughout the town, with one small incidence of dog fouling evident on the day of the audit and it is not something that has been raised as an issue during community consultation.

7. Outside the School Gates

Only one route covered all the schools, and the audit was carried out outside school drop off/pick up times. Therefore, there were no problems identified during the audit. However, the feedback from participants noted that significant delays occur, and school drop off and pick up times. The three schools are located in close proximity at one end of the town and so the school traffic is all concentrated in this one area of the town. At school pick up time, approximately 17 buses gather in the town to collect students from the secondary schools. These block car parking spaces and footpaths and create a hazard for drivers trying to navigate the town.

The footpaths narrow around St. Matthew's primary school and towards the Vocational School resulting in pupils walking out into the traffic when they are moving in large groups.

8. Parking and Car Parks

As with many towns, the subject of parking is hotly debated. Ballymahon has most of its parking on the Main Street, with cars driving into spaces and reversing back out into the carriageway. The audit also identified that there are not sufficient blue badge parking spaces or any age friendly parking spaces. The paint on the existing blue badge spaces is faded and as a result people often park in those spaces.

While not specifically assessed on the audit, it was acknowledged that the lack of a public car park causes issues for businesses/visitors to the town. It is an aim of Longford County Council to provide an off-street carpark that will reduce the pressure on the parking on the Main Street.

There are not enough disabled parking bays and the ones that are in the town, particularly those located at the library and Post Office are faded.

There is no loading bay for SuperValu/Fresh Today which causes traffic and parking issues when delivery lorries have to unload. Parking on the footpath is an issue in parts of the town, causing difficulties to those in wheelchairs or visually impaired.



Car parked on footpath



Painting faded on disabled parking spot

Feedback

Below is several positive points that were made on the day of the audit:

- a) Town is very clean, litter free
- b) Wide footpaths
- c) Beside the river

- d) Community Park
- e) Nice buildings
- f) No dog fouling.
- g) 1916 garden
- h) Nice walkways
- i) Playground
- j) Oliver Goldsmith
- k) Age Friendly seating
- l) Planters, flowerbeds at estate entrances and on Main Street

Things people disliked most about the route/town.

- a) Poor road/path surfaces
- b) Excessive speeds
- c) Very heavy traffic and congestion and junctions
- d) Difficult trying to cross the road.
- e) Lack of bike routes
- f) Visibility at junctions

Actions

Issue	Activity	Timeframe	Responsibility	Requirements
Footpaths	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide dropped kerbs and tactile paving at junctions and pedestrian crossing points. 2. Design a priority list for footpath repair works in conjunction with the relevant stakeholders. 3. Carry out a review of connectivity between the Main Street and existing housing estates and provide footpaths where they are not provided, for example along the road to Thomond Hall 	Medium	Longford County Council	Funding
		Short	Ballymahon Town Team	Design Review of town
		Medium	Longford Older Person's Council	
Crossing and Junctions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Carry out a survey to identify the most appropriate locations for the provision of safe, accessible pedestrian crossing points, including pedestrian crossings throughout the town. 2. Provide safe, accessible pedestrian crossing points at appropriate locations identified in survey. 3. Review lighting at pedestrian crossings and upgrade lighting where identified necessary. 4. Review existing pedestrian crossings to ensure that they are fully accessible, that is sound is working and upgrade where required. 	Short	Longford County Council	Survey
			Ballymahon Traders Association	Funding
		Medium	Ballymahon Town Team	
		Short	Ballymahon Tidy Towns	
Facilities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide public seating at appropriate locations in the town 2. Work with the local businesses to improve access to public toilets in the town 3. Carry out review of the amenity area to front of Kayak club to review health and safety and how this area can be improved as an amenity area. 4. Carry out a review of signage in the town with a view to preparing a signage strategy for the town. 	Short	Longford County Council	Funding
		Short	Ballymahon Town Team	Engagement with local businesses
		Short	Ballymahon Traders Association	
		Medium	Local Businesses Transport Companies	

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Improve bicycle access throughout the town through new cycle lanes. 6. Identify a more central and accessible location for the playground. 7. Provide bus shelters at the bus stops. 	<p>Medium</p> <p>Medium</p> <p>Medium</p>		
Road User Behaviour	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engage with An Garda Siochana to improve visibility along access roads into the town to reduce speed of traffic entering the town. 	Short	<p>An Garda Siochana</p> <p>Ballymahon Town Team</p> <p>Longford Older Persons Council</p>	Resources from An Garda Siochana
Safety	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review railings throughout the town, in particular to the front of St. Matthew's National School and replace where they are not in good condition. 2. Review bollards in town and clean/replace reflective surface, as appropriate. 	<p>Medium</p> <p>Medium</p>	Longford County Council	Funding
Look and Feel	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Carry out a vacancy and dereliction survey of the town to identify buildings that are vacant and derelict. 2. Engage with the landowners of vacant and derelict buildings to encourage them to invest in their properties or sell them. 	<p>Short</p> <p>Medium</p>	Longford County Council	Staff resources
Outside the school gates	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investigate the potential for the provision of additional bus parking off the Main Street to alleviate the current traffic backlogs 	Medium – Long	<p>Longford County Council</p> <p>Department of Education</p> <p>Primary and Secondary schools</p>	<p>Land</p> <p>Funding</p> <p>Design</p>
Parking and Car Parks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Carry out car parking survey of town to identify need, current usage levels, staff car parking. 2. Identify and purchase suitable site for off-street car park 3. Prepare plans and submit funding application for development of off-street car park 	<p>Short</p> <p>Medium</p> <p>Long</p> <p>Medium</p>	<p>Longford County Council</p> <p>Ballymahon Traders Association</p> <p>Ballymahon Town Team</p>	<p>Funding</p> <p>Land</p> <p>Resources</p>

	<p>4. Review disabled parking bays in town. Where necessary, provide additional disabled, age-friendly and family friendly parking bays in appropriate locations.</p> <p>5. Re-paint existing disabled parking bays to improve visibility.</p> <p>6. Provide loading bay in town centre to service existing businesses.</p> <p>7. Review bicycle parking and provide new bicycle parking where required.</p>	<p>Short</p> <p>Medium</p> <p>Medium</p>	<p>Older Persons Council</p>	
--	--	--	------------------------------	--

