

For Tipperary County Council

Thurles Town Centre Renewal Strategy

September 2021
Prepared by LUC



Rialtas
na hÉireann
Government
of Ireland

Tionscadal Éireann
Project Ireland
2040



Department of Rural and
Community Development

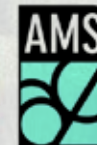
An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail



Comhairle Contae Thiobraid Árann
Tipperary County Council

Thurles
Duolas Éile

Developed for Tipperary County Council in collaboration with:



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Project

Thurles Town Centre Renewal Strategy

Client

Tipperary County Council

LUC Project Number

10921

Project Team

This report has been prepared by a team led by LUC in collaboration with HRA Planning, Cundall, AMS, and Dr Judith Hill. All comments and contributions to the development of the report are gratefully acknowledged.

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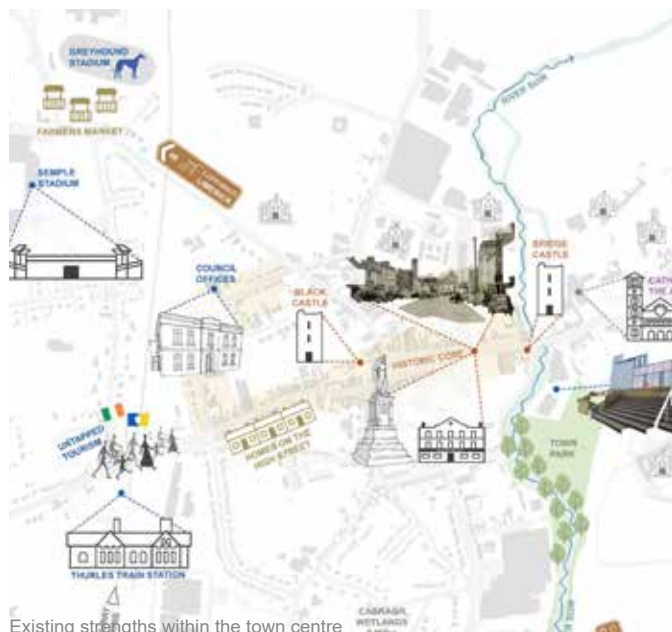
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Executive Summary

The Renewal Strategy reflects a collaborative effort between the local authority and the community of Thurles to present an informed and evidence-based 10-year vision, grounded on an appreciation of the key characteristics and issues within the Town Centre.



Background and Preparation

The Renewal Strategy is to be used by organisations to assist with improving Thurles in response to the changing dynamic of the town, and to national trends, and ensuring Thurles fulfils its role as a Key Town in the Southern Region.

The Renewal Strategy was completed in 2020 and coincided with the Covid-19 Pandemic. The initial 6-month delivery period was subsequently extended to 12-months in order to accommodate a mid-project postponement.

A threefold process of desktop research, site survey and consultation was used by the consultant team to gather data necessary to inform the Renewal Strategy. This was consulted on with the local Elected Members, stakeholders, and the community through an online survey, and a series of presentations and workshops. This enabled residents, community groups and organisations to engage and contribute towards identifying areas of opportunity, and to provide crucial local knowledge to the evidence base. The engagement information received was summarised in a video to ensure that there was a continual feedback mechanism in place.

The summary findings of this process are listed opposite.



Presentation to local stakeholders








Feedback at a community workshop

Key Strength to Build-Upon

- **The Thurles community**, who have demonstrated that they are responsive and ready to engage;
- **The Liberty Square Enhancement Scheme**, which will have a transformative effect on the Town Centre;
- Designation of **Thurles as a Key Town** in the RSES, and national support for town renewal;
- **Active business structures**, the Local Authority, Chamber of Commerce, Thurles Town Centre Forum;
- Strategic and **highly accessible location**, including clustered tourism links with the neighbouring Rock of Cashel and Holy Cross Abbey.
- Strong cultural heritage, principally the **GAA** and Semple Stadium and **Heritage assets** - the streetscapes, Black Castle, Bridge Castle, and the Cathedral of the Assumption, and the latter's associated ecclesiastical centre;
- Strong **educational offering** and expansion objectives of both the LIT and MIC on existing campuses adjacent to the Town Centre;
- Large, **undeveloped town-centre backland plots** between Friar Street and Castle Avenue; and
- The **River Suir** corridor as an amenity and connection.

Key Issues to Resolve

- The **economy**, **vacant buildings**, the **lack of job opportunities**, and the need for more Town Centre housing.
- **Traffic related issues** and a **lack of sustainable transport provision**, and the **overall image** of the town.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
| The Creation of a Compact, Low-Carbon Climate Resilient Town | The Creation of a Vibrant and Living Town Centre | The Delivery of a Connected Town & Enhanced Public Realm | The Creation of a Destination Town | The Exposure and Showcasing of Thurles Historic & Natural Heritage |

Proposed Vision Objectives and Projects

Having acquired a thorough understanding of Thurles, the above shared vision objectives were developed, along with a series of projects which aim to deliver and support the vision objectives. Close alignment was made between the proposed projects and the NPF's National Strategic Outcomes (NSO's), the Climate Action Plan 2019, and the RSES Southern Region's Regional Policy Objectives (RPO's).

For each project, information is provided on:

- The background and nature of the project;
- Project outcomes and benefits;
- Project champions and stakeholders;
- Prioritisation; and
- Case studies that may inform delivery options.

The project concepts put forward are intended to provide inspiration for what can be achieved in Thurles. These are

spatially flexible and can be adaptable across the Town Centre.

A second round of consultation was undertaken in October 2020 to gather feedback on the draft Renewal Strategy report, including the proposed objectives and projects. Additional project suggestions and the nomination of local project champions were also welcomed during the process.

A final 10-year action plan was compiled based on the findings of the consultation. The Strategy is intended to inform and add weight to future applications for funding by community and business groups in Thurles with the support of the local authority.



Exhibition board used in the consultation

Final List of Projects

| Objective | Project |
|---|---|
| The Creation of a Compact, Low-Carbon Climate Resilient Town | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Development of Key Strategic Regeneration Areas ■ Develop Masterplan for Friar Street/Castle Avenue ■ Develop Masterplan for St Patrick's College ■ Thurles as a Sustainable Community |
| The Creation of a Vibrant and Living Town Centre | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Vacant Property Strategy ■ Homes on the High Street ■ Pop-Up Shops ■ Regeneration through Recreation, Education and Support for Local Producers: Thurles Market Quarter ■ Public Realm Design Guide ■ Purple Flag Status ■ Guidelines in Response to Covid-19 ■ Thurles Street Art |
| The Delivery of a Connected Town & Enhanced Public Realm | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Local Transport Plan ■ Gateway Point Enhancement ■ Wayfinding and Interpretation Strategy |
| The Creation of a Destination Town | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop a Unique Offer Linked to the GAA ■ Thurles as a Destination Town ■ Thurles Marketing - The Heart of Our Town |
| The Exposure and Showcasing of Thurles Historic & Natural Heritage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Community Growing Scheme ■ Parklets ■ Urban Tree Network ■ Architectural Research & Conservation Strategy ■ Archaeological Heritage Research Framework ■ Town and River Walks ■ A Riverside Destination |



Chapter 1
Introduction

Introduction

Purpose, Background and Scope of the Renewal Strategy

The purpose of the Renewal Strategy is to provide a framework to create a thriving, vibrant, climate resilient Town Centre, delivered in partnership with stakeholders and the local community, ensuring Thurles fulfils its role as a Key Town in the Southern Region.

The Renewal Strategy will provide a new shared vision for the Town Centre, allowing it to be re-imagined and, faced with the modern-day challenge of climate change, will set out how the town can develop in a truly sustainable way.

The Renewal Strategy reflects a collaborative effort between the local authority and the community of Thurles to present an informed and evidence-based 10-year vision, grounded on an appreciation of the key characteristics and issues within the Town Centre, to be used by organisations to assist with improving Thurles in response to the changing dynamic of the town, and to national trends.

The Renewal Strategy focuses on Thurles Town Centre, with the area designated as 'Town Centre' within the Thurles and Environs Development Plan Land-Zoning Map used to inform a study area boundary. It is essential however that the principles of the Strategy are not limited by defined boundaries, and as such consideration to how the Centre interacts with the surrounding hinterland and wider spatial context is also given.

Key project objectives were developed as follows:

- Carry out a review of the existing Town Centre, assessing its current condition, through a desk-top review, site survey, and through a series of stakeholder and community engagement activities;
- Identify actions for creating a thriving and vibrant Town Centre which will support the future growth of the town and the needs of its residents, and enabling Thurles to fulfil its role as a Regional 'Key Town';
- Develop a suite of projects that are deliverable at a local business and community level.; and
- Undertake public consultation and engagement to refine the Renewal Strategy.



Red line boundary illustrates the Town Centre area which is the focus of the Renewal Strategy (Source: Google Earth)

Introduction

Creating a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Town

Climate action and sustainability will form a guiding principle within this Renewal Strategy.

Project Ireland 2040 and the Climate Action Plan 2019 have set out the scale of the climate change challenge with decarbonisation as a priority for all new developments.

Creating a low-carbon society and circular economy will require significant changes in how we plan and develop our cities, towns and rural areas and how we work, live, travel and access services.

Climate action and sustainability will form a guiding principle within this Renewal Strategy. Project Ireland 2040 and the Climate Action Plan 2019 have set out the scale of the climate change challenge with decarbonisation as a priority for all new developments. Creating a low-carbon society and circular economy will require significant changes in how we plan and develop our cities, towns and rural areas and how we work, live, travel and access services.

The National Planning Framework (NPF) emphasises that the plan-making process places a key role in the implementation and integration of climate action objectives. This can be achieved through the compact growth of our cities and towns, place-making, sustainable transport, and the focus on the location of development in sustainable locations which will bring fundamental benefits to climate change mitigation. The Renewal Strategy will build on the existing planning framework to prioritise national objectives and through supporting collaborative innovative responses across the community.

Tipperary County Council as a signature of the Covenant of Mayors is committed to a shared vision to accelerate the decarbonisation of the county and to drive the energy transition from fossil fuels to more secure, sustainable and affordable energy. This Renewal Strategy seeks to set out a pathway for this transition in Thurles through the delivery of a series of collaborative and integrated projects. Projects will include strategic regeneration proposals incorporating best practice in low-carbon placemaking and design, the promotion of sustainable transport modes and the enhancement of bio-diversity in the town through blue and green infrastructure developments.

The transition to a low carbon energy future will require a wide range of responses across the public and private sectors and in communities, to change how we use energy at home, in our work and how we travel. Communities are already leading the way across Tipperary and there is a national objective under the Climate Action Plan to scale-up and improve the Sustainable Energy Communities and Better Energy Communities programme and enlist a wider range of organisations to anchor its collective approach. This Renewal Strategy will also seek to foster a community led collaborative approach to planning the future energy needs in Thurles.



Urban tree planting and sustainable drainage systems are key green infrastructure tools in improving adaptation and resilience to climate change. Source: Grey to Green Sheffield UK, Nigel Dunnet

Introduction

How the Strategy was Prepared

Who will Deliver the Renewal Strategy

The Renewal Strategy was commissioned in December 2019 by Tipperary County Council.

The Renewal Strategy was prepared by Landscape Architects and Urban Designers at LUC in collaboration with the following team of specialist sub-consultants:

- HRA Planning - Town planning;
- AMS Consultants - Archaeological heritage;
- Dr Judith Hill - Architectural heritage; and,
- Cundall - Transport planning.

Approach and Method

The project began with a full review and familiarisation of the baseline information and best practice, focusing on the

existing urban form, history, culture, socio-economic profile, and planning context - specifically the NPF and RSES.

The Town Centre analysis began with a desk-based review, using Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and aerial photography to map the existing condition of the town. A number of GIS datasets and background documents were provided by the Tipperary County Council (TCC) for use during this study. We prepared annotated mapping and summary text to identify and assess the following areas:

- Existing reports, studies and initiatives that have already been undertaken in Thurles;
- Attractions, destinations and key facilities;
- Movement and connectivity for vehicular and non-vehicular users;
- Green and blue infrastructure, including open space;
- Townscape character;

- Heritage assets and historic development; and,
- Land-use zoning.

A site visit and survey was undertaken by the design team to confirm the accuracy of the mapped data and gather more detailed information on the current condition of the Town Centre, including aspects such as vacancy levels, alongside potential opportunities for enhancement.

In order to supplement the analysis work, a number of studies were also completed by specialist sub-consultants:

- A strategic movement assessment, reviewing aspects such as car parking and transport links;
- A planning policy context and demographic review;
- An architectural heritage assessment, reviewing the historic development of Thurles and an appraisal of the town's three Architectural Conservation Areas; and



- An archaeological heritage assessment, reviewing the known archaeological sites within Thurles Town Centre, and an initial appraisal of the archaeological potential of the area.

All of the above information was compiled in order to build-up an image of the town. The baseline evidence and potential opportunities within the Town Centre were then discussed and consulted with the local Elected Members, stakeholders, and the community through an online survey, and a series of presentations and workshops. This enabled residents, community groups and organisations to engage and contribute to identifying areas of opportunity, and to provide crucial local knowledge to the evidence base.

Having developed a thorough understanding of Thurles, a series of shared vision objectives were developed for the Town Centre, and a series of projects to deliver and support the

objectives. In addition to each project having strong links to the local community, close alignment was also made between the proposed projects and the NPF's National Strategic Outcomes (NSO's), the Climate Action Plan 2019, and the RSES Southern Region's Regional Policy Objectives (RPO's).

The draft Renewal Strategy was finally subject to further engagement with the local Elected Members, stakeholders, and community through a series of online presentations and workshops. This allowed tangible links to be made between the project proposals, and the assignment of a 'lead' or 'champion' to each project.

A final 10-year action plan was compiled based on the findings of the consultation, including a strategy for implementation and management.


Covid-19

The Renewal Strategy was completed in 2020 and coincided with the Covid-19 Pandemic. The initial 6-month delivery period was subsequently extended to 12-months in order to accommodate a mid-project postponement.

The original engagement strategy was revised in response to current Irish Government Guidance, and also what was appropriate with regards to the constraints of social distancing alongside the requirement of comprehensive social inclusion.

A future proofing of the Renewal Strategy will be required, which finds a balance between optimising activities and keeping people safe.





Chapter 2 Background to Thurles

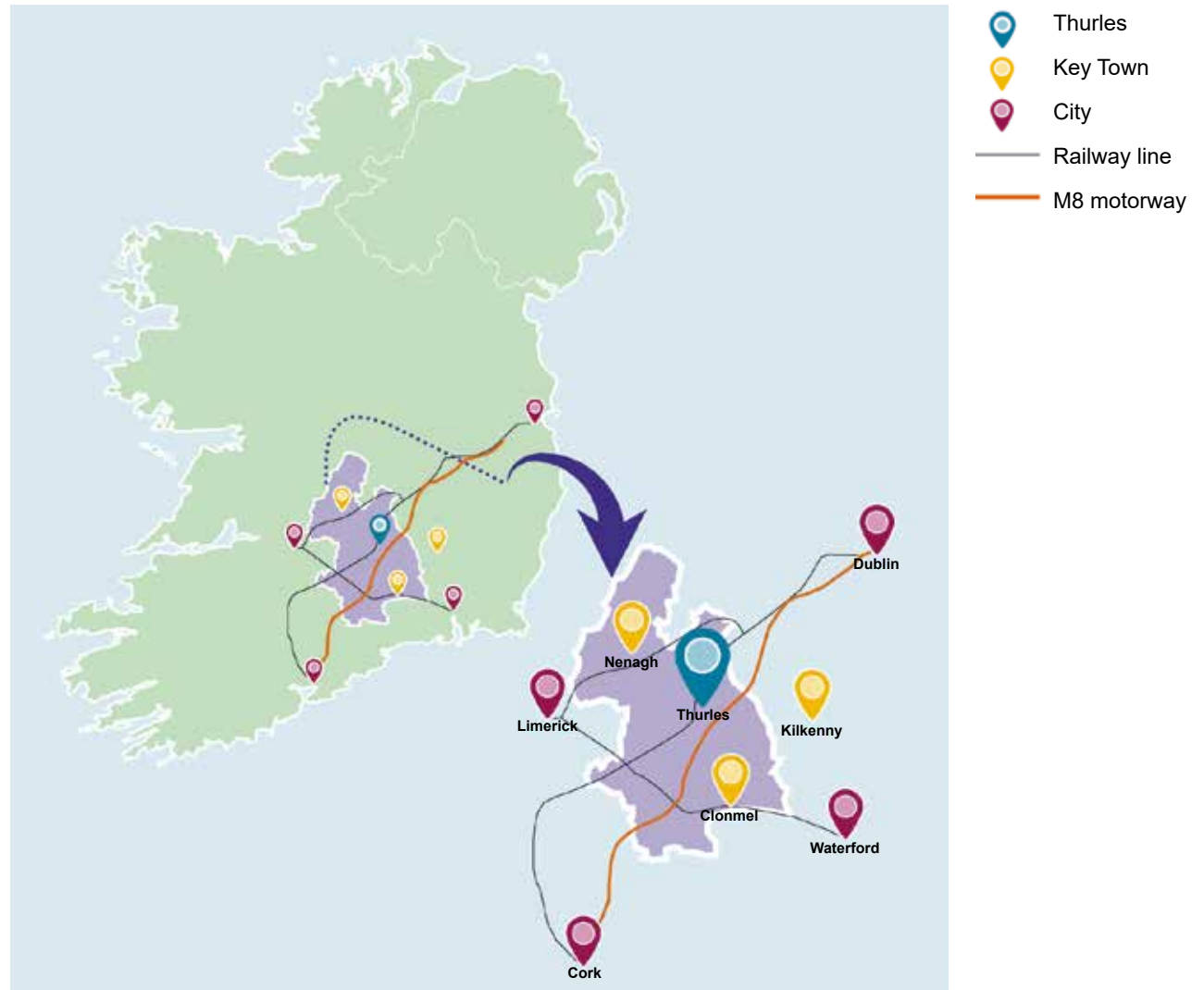
Background to Thurles Introduction & Location

This chapter serves to “set the scene” against which the Renewal Strategy has been developed. An understanding of the town’s geographic and historical context, along with prevalent policies and ongoing initiatives provides a base from which the subsequent analysis findings and proposals are made.

Location

Thurles is located in the heart of mid-Tipperary and the Southern Region.

It is recognised as one of the most connected towns in the Region with motorway and intercity rail connections, a sporting capital with a strong sporting tradition - the founding location of the GAA and, a centre with significant employment potential.



Background to Thurles

The Physical Development of Thurles

Rocque's map, 1755 Source: Tipperary Local Studies, Thurles



1755

One of the earliest map of Thurles showing individual buildings is a Rocque map of 1755, which primarily charts the military encampment of Thurles. This map shows block outline buildings at either side of the River Suir and as far as the western limit of Liberty Square; Black Castle or the motte of Thurles are depicted, with castle gardens laid out to the north, north west and northeast of the tower and house, and Castle Avenue is in place.

Earl of Llandaf Estate Map, 1827 Source: Tipperary Local Studies, Thurles



1827

A map of 1827 of part of the earl of Llandaff's estate, surveyed in 1818, survives and provides a record of properties and estate leaseholders in Thurles at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This map shows New Street and Nicholas Street in place, as well as new buildings on the north side of Friar Street.

Ordnance Survey (OS), 1839: Survey for 1st ed OS, printed 1843, scale; six inches to a mile. Source: <http://map.geohive.ie/>



1839

This map indicates the site of the original 'moat' or motte of Thurles as a circular feature (not annotated). The Black Castle is also clearly shown. Also evident are the plots on Liberty Square, Westgate and the south east end of Friar Street. These were long and narrow, with the longest and most clearly delineated on the south side of Liberty Square.

In the 1830s a diocesan college, St Patrick's, was built on land to the south of Main Street (present-day Cathedral Street). It can be seen set back from the road, opposite the chapel.

OS, 1903: Survey for 2nd ed OS map, printed 1904, scale; twenty five inches to a mile. (1: 25,000). Source: <http://map.geohive.ie/>



OS, 1953: Survey 1903, Levelled 1953, published 1955, scale; twenty five inches to a mile. Source: <http://map.geohive.ie/>



Ordnance Survey (OS), 2020. Source: © Ordnance Survey Ireland. All rights reserved. Licence number: 2019/10/CCMA/TipperaryCountyCouncil



1903

1953

2020

The Catholic institutional sector continued to develop in this period. The major building project was the construction of the cathedral between 1865 and 1872.

Main Street lost the market house in 1901, but gained a 1798 monument.

The nineteenth century was also a period of transformation which saw the arrival of the Great Southern and Western Railway to Thurles, with the railway station built in 1848 and evident above.

Since Independence in 1921 Thurles has expanded significantly. Thurles commemorated this event by unveiling in 1922 the monument to Archbishop Croke, located at the west end of Liberty Square.

Mathew Avenue and Castle Avenue were opened 1928. This curving street to the north of Friar Street was the location of semi-detached privately-built middle class housing set in gardens.

Sports infrastructure was important in 20th-century Thurles. A municipal swimming pool was built in 1974 and the greyhound stadium opened 1950. The sports stadium that is now known as Semple Stadium was built in 1910.

Recent years have seen extensive private housing developments to the east, south and west of the town, and in 2006 The Source Arts Centre was built on vacant ground to the east of the bridge bringing contemporary architecture into the historic core.

Thurles Shopping Centre opened in 2000. Thurles Municipal District Offices opened in 2017 (former Carnegie Library and Technical School) on Castle Avenue.

Background to Thurles Strategic Policy Context

Key objectives contained in national, regional, and local planning policy will guide the content and delivery of the Renewal Strategy.

Project Ireland 2040: National Policy Framework (NPF)

The NPF sets out the strategic framework for future development and investment in Ireland until 2040.

A strong emphasis is placed on compact urban growth, through the promotion of urban infill and 'brownfield' redevelopment. A component part of this is enhancing the attractiveness, viability, and vibrancy of towns as a means of achieving more sustainable forms of development, building on existing assets, and encouraging greater Town Centre living.

National Policy objectives are presented in support of 'making stronger urban places' amongst which include; creation of attractive, high quality urban centres; facilitation of towns of sufficient scale to drive growth, investment and prosperity; and to encourage renewal of towns and villages as environmental assets whilst accommodating population growth and land-use changes which support their hinterlands. Sustainable mobility, and the transition to more sustainable modes of travel (walking, cycling, public transport) within an urban context is also outlined. This Renewal Strategy will deliver all the key NPF components through it's proposed projects and action plan.

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy - for the Southern Region RSES)

A key component of the RSES is to strengthen the settlement structure of the Region, to capitalise on the individual and collective strength of the three City and Metropolitan areas of Cork, Limerick-Shannon and Waterford as well as, the

strong network of strategically located towns and villages in this region. Within this regional tier, Thurles is defined as one of fourteen 'Key Towns' designated immediately below the city/metropolitan centres due specifically, to its significant employment potential, regional and inter-regional connectivity. Thurles will thus have a critical functional role to play in facilitating growth beyond the cities at the 'sub-regional' level.

The RSES envisages that Thurles will be the focus of growth in its residential, service and enterprise base with scope for creating synergies with other Key Towns whilst also, promoting the enhancement of the Town Centre - including specifically, Liberty Square. Given its strategic and accessible location, the potential of Thurles to provide significant employment growth serving Dublin, Cork and Limerick is advocated in Regional Policy RPO16. This strategic economic and employment function is supported further by the EU designation of Thurles as one of 6 locations for the piloting of the next generation of the bio-economy, including bio-energy and bio-technology.

Key infrastructural requirements within Thurles are also outlined, specifically the provision of the Thurles Relief Road and other transport measures through a Local Transport Plan.

North Tipperary County Development Plan

In the context of Tipperary, Thurles is designated as one of the two 'Sub Regional Towns' in the North Tipperary County Development Plan. This County Plan, recognises the importance of Thurles as a driver of economic growth in the region given its population base, and its transportation links, retail offering and services all of which support smaller settlements and a large rural hinterland. The County

Plan sets out strategic objectives to increase residential development within the urban area; to improve the attractiveness of the town for commerce and investment; and, to protect the historical and cultural character and appearance of the town.

Thurles & Environs Development Plan 2009 (As Extended)

This Plan sets out the land-use policy framework for the development and use of land within Thurles Town and Environs including its Town Centre. The Plan is based on a vision of Thurles as a vibrant, self-contained, socially inclusive, and competitive town, driven by the high quality of life and diverse industries, which respects and enhances the quality of its natural and built environment. The Plan recognised that the Town Centre not only provides a wide range of shops, particularly convenience shops, to meet the needs of the residents, workers and visitors, but also provides an important sense of place and community identity, and in addition to shopping facilities, as well as other services, tourist and leisure facilities.

The emphasis in the Plan is to protect and reinforce the role and viability of the Town Centre. Strategic Policies seek; to increase urban residential development within the urban area; to improve the attractiveness of the town for commerce and investment; and, to protect historical and cultural character and appearance of the town.

Specific measures are also contained within this Plan, intended to conserve and enhance specific aspects of the built environment of the Town Centre. These include the designated

Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) which encompasses Liberty Square/West Gate/Friar Street.

Templemore Thurles Municipal District Town Centre Initiative Report March 2016

This initiative sought to create a consensus based Town Centre strategy to help restore vibrancy and vitality to the retail areas in major towns in Tipperary, including Thurles. The initiative focused on two parallel approaches – facilitating Town Centre groups and consolidating a range of other council supports to Town Centres, backed by additional, innovative measures.

The Report included a detailed review of the retail provision within Thurles Town Centre, an analysis of the town's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and a series of recommendations. This included: Town specific marketing; a 3-Year action plan under the following themes of governance structure, leveraging resources and local engagement, town branding and marketing, and the preparation of Liberty Square Enhancement. This Renewal Strategy will look to build upon these proposals, and other work undertaken to date.



Hierarchy of the policy context

Background to Thurles Existing and Ongoing Initiatives

This Renewal Strategy will build on the investment made to date within Thurles.

The Town Centre will be transformed over the next few years with the delivery of a major public realm project in Liberty Square, re-imagining the heart of Thurles, and contributing towards an increase in footfall and market confidence.

Liberty Square Enhancement Project

Liberty Square lies at the heart of Thurles Town Centre. Liberty Square has been the commercial centre of Thurles since the early modern period and traditionally been the primary Town Centre open space, performing a market-place role. Today, Liberty Square has a more modern day requirement of car parking and the converging of numerous roads. A recent Part 8 approval has been secured for the major public realm transformation of the Square, which will see the re-instating of the historic Civic Space to the centre of the town.

The scheme, funded under the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, will include widening of footpaths with high quality paving, realignment of carriageways to improve traffic circulation, and the provision of street furniture, tree planting and landscaping, information boards, signage, feature lighting, and a colour scheme for building/shop front enhancements. Work on the project began in December 2019, with completion of the whole Enhancement Project set to conclude in 2021.

Thurles Town Park

The Park opened to the public in October 2015, and forms the most significant green infrastructure asset within the town. The Park comprises an equipped children's play area, a skate park, outdoor gym equipment, a wetlands areas, and large areas of grass lawn and ornamental planting. The Park has created a significant amenity for the town, providing opportunities for recreational and cultural activities, as well as a place for people to meet and socialise.



Artists sketch scheme proposal for Liberty Square Source: Aecom



birthplace of
gaelic games

a thriving
business town

a town steeped in
culture and history

a progressive
education hub

The Source Regional Arts Centre and Library

The Source Regional Arts Centre and Library was completed in 2006 and comprises state of the art Thurles Library, a 250 seat theatre, visual art gallery, community studio space and a café/bar. The Source Regional Arts Centre is Tipperary's principal cultural and entertainment venue presenting music, dance, comedy, film, children's events, and visual art.

Thurles Leisure Centre

Adjacent to the Source Regional Arts Centre and Library sits Thurles Leisure Centre, which was completed in April 2008 and includes a 25metre 5-lane swimming pool, high-specification techno gymnasium, aerobics studio, spa area with sauna, steam room and jacuzzi. Services provided include full fitness classes, teen fit club, aqua aerobics, private swim lessons, adult swim lessons and children's swim school.

Inner Relief Road

A design has been completed for the provision of an Inner Relief Road to link the N62, Horse and Jockey Road, with the N75, Two-Mile-Borris Road. The project will involve a new bridge over the River Suir and a new high quality road, with cycle lanes and footpaths, and assist with the alleviation of Town Centre traffic congestion. The project is identified as strategically important in the National Development Plan and is a key piece of infrastructure in terms of the town traffic management and the provision of sustainable transport measures in the Town Centre.

Town Centre Forum, Branding and Signage

As a direct result of the actions contained within the Thurles Town Centre Initiative Report, the Town Centre Forum was established in May 2017 to support the commercial and tourism development of Thurles. The Forum is made up of representatives from Templemore-Thurles MD, Community & Economic Development Section, Thurles Chamber of Commerce, Friar Street Traders, Refresh Thurles, Tourism Sector, Heritage Sector, Community Sector.

Town branding was identified as a priority project and key to raising the profile of the town. Following a consultative process, the branding of Thurles was developed with a logo identifying:

- (i) An Arts and Cultural Centre;
- (ii) A Business Strongfort;
- (iii) A Sporting Destination; and
- (iv) A Centre of Education, and also incorporating environmental awareness and sustainability, diversity and social inclusion (see logo opposite, each leaf representing one of the areas identified).

The T in Thurles is joined to the L representing Barry's Castle and the River Suir Bridge. This branding was carried through to the development of a signage plan for the approach roads into Thurles town.



Thurles branding and signage palette Source: Thurles Town Centre Forum

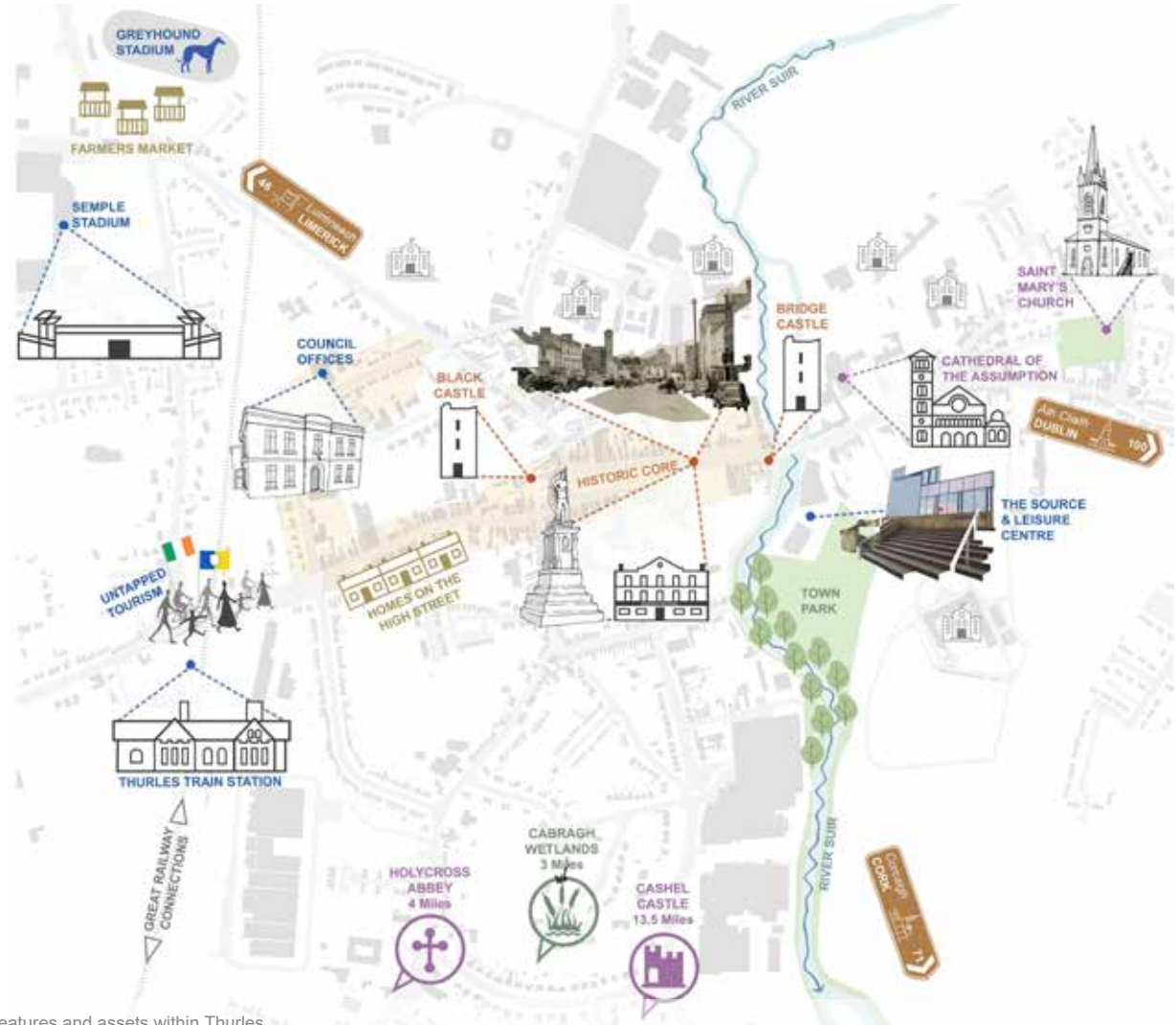
Chapter 3 Thurles Today



Thurles Today Introduction

“Thurles is located at the centre of the Southern Region. The town is one of the most connected in the Region with motorway and intercity rail connections. Thurles has a strong sporting tradition, modern sporting facilities and is the founding location of the GAA. It has a population of 7,940 (2016) and 3,369 jobs with a jobs-to-resident’s workers ratio of 1:2. With the 445-hectare site at Lisheen, Thurles will be a significant national economic and employment driver following its designation as one of 6 sites within the EU for piloting the next generation of the bio-economy, including bio-energy and biotechnology. As a result, Thurles will be the focus of associated residential growth and growth in its service and enterprise base. There is also scope for creating greater synergies between Thurles and other Key Towns.”

RSES for the Southern Region, page 78



Key features and assets within Thurles

For the Renewal Strategy to be meaningful, it was essential that an accurate picture of the town's strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities be formed. This chapter summarises the findings of this process.

It is ordered thematically and illustrated using survey plans and photos taken of the town. Summaries of key opportunities and considerations are highlighted for each theme. Refer also to Appendix 2, 3, and 4 for additional supporting information.

1. Saint Mary's Church
2. Cathedral of the Assumption
3. Presentation Secondary School
4. The Source Arts Centre
5. Thurles Leisure Centre
6. Thurles Town Park
7. River Suir
8. Mary Immaculate College
9. Bridge Castle
10. Hayes Hotel
11. Liberty Square
12. Black Castle
13. Parnell Street car park
14. Friar Street



Aerial view of Thurles Town Centre. Source: Tipperary County Council

Thurles Today People and Place

The defined settlement of Thurles comprises a population of 7,940 persons (CSO Census of Population 2016), although the services and function of Thurles extend beyond that of its town boundary and serve a substantial rural hinterland.

Population within the Town Centre

The Town Centre study boundary forms only part of the existing 7,940 persons in Thurles. Detailed analysis of the study area using an extrapolation of small area population statistics, indicates a population of circa 604 persons live in this central area, roughly 7.6% of the settlement population.

The age structure, illustrated opposite, is dominated by those aged between 19-64 years (63% of the population), 22% are aged 65 and over, and 15% represent the youngest cohort aged between 0-18 years.

Whilst the Census suggests 82% of the population classifies itself as Irish Nationals, only 77% of the population were born in Ireland with 14% born in the UK or other European Countries, and 9% from the rest of the world.

Family Composition within Town Centre

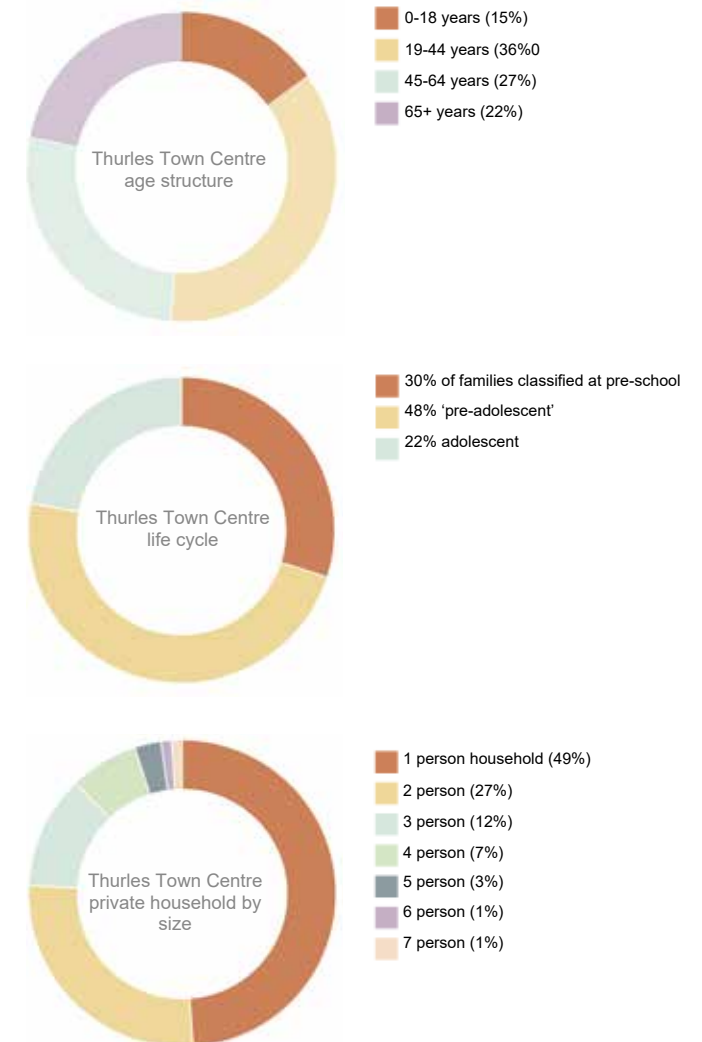
- 304 households;
- 135 families: 32 families with youngest child under 9, 23 families with youngest aged between 10-19, and 27 families with youngest child aged over years;
- The predominant family structure is with no children (55%), followed by; with 1 child or more (45%).30 one parent families; and
- 27 families classified as being retired.

Family Life Cycle

- 30% of families classified at pre-school 'early-school', 48% 'pre-adolescent', and 22% adolescent.

Private Household by Size

As illustrated opposite, 1 person households comprise the largest household formation (49% of private households),



Pie charts illustrating key Thurles Town Centre statistics

followed by '2-persons' (27%), '3-persons' (12%), '4-persons' (7%) and the remaining 5% of households comprising 5+ persons.

Housing

- 76% of persons stated as living in 'house or bungalow';
- 19% in 'apartments';
- <1% in bedsits; and
- 4% not stated.

Permanent Household Structure

- 34% privately rented;
- 31% owner outright; and
- 11% Local Authority Housing

Principle Economic Status (age 15+)

Some 526 persons fall within the category aged 15 and over, 44% of which are in employment. 11% are unemployed, 22% are retired, 9.5% are classed as 'students' and 7% each, are classified as either looking after the family home, and, are unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability.

Population by Employment Type

Within the Town Centre, the largest defined working cohort is in 'Managerial and Technical' (20%); followed by; 'Non-Manual' (16%), 'Semi-skilled' (15%), 'Skilled-manual' (13%), 'Unskilled' (5%), 'Professional' (3%). The remaining undefined group represented 28% of those gainfully employed. 16% of those aged >15 years, are either still at school, college or education.

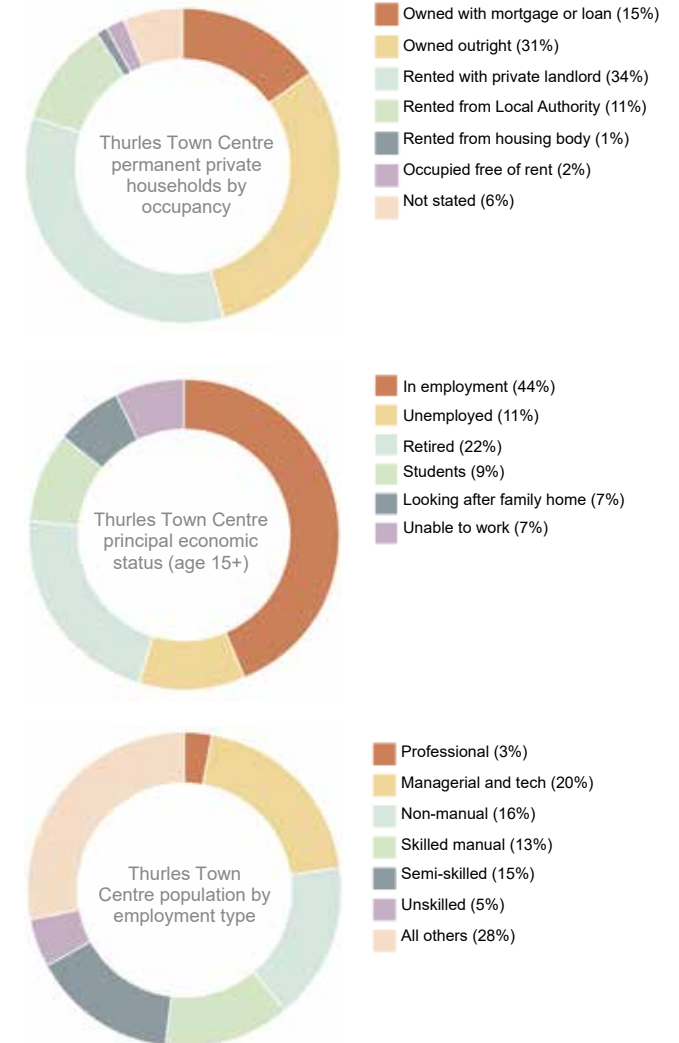
Travel to Work

- 69% of those aged >5 years leave their home to their place of work, school or college between 6:30am-9:00am. 22% leave their home after 9:00am and 10% were not stated;
- 51% of all stated commutes were under 15 minute travel time to work, 30% were under 1 hour, and 6% were in excess of 1 hour; and
- 34% of households (304 households) do not have a car, 60% have 1 car or more, and 5% didn't state.
- Circa 50% of households have a computer and have access to the internet. Broadband use was at 50% of those with access to the internet.

Summary

Population analysis reflects the diverse land-use patterns occurring within the Town Centre and confirms; a declining residential population base, and a diverse range of nationalities and different household and family structures.

The demographic analysis reflects a diverse residential base consistent with what would be expected in a Town Centre. Housing however, has and is concentrated to the edge of centre locations with a notable absence of infill and Town Centre apartment type developments.



Pie charts illustrating key Thurles Town Centre statistics

Thurles Today Land and Building Uses

The Town Centre has a compact urban form, with the medieval layout of market place and narrow streets clearly visible, and areas of ribbon development extending along the main roads into town. Beyond the central streets, the urban form of Thurles has a character typical of 20th century development.

Liberty Square and adjacent streets consist of a diverse range of commercial and retail services and activities. There include many independent retailers, including butchers, bakers and ladies fashion, and national brands such as Tesco and Supervalu, interspersed with licensed premises and cafes, which helps to encourage a lively main street throughout the day. Retail floorspace within the central area is defined by, and to an extent, limited by the narrow building plots which reflect the traditional building form.

In contrast, the shopping centre is anchored by a large convenience and comparison retail store within a covered mall with associated multi-storey parking. The centre includes a substantial number of smaller retail units occupied by various convenience and comparison retailers including for example, national retailers 'Boots' and 'Eason' which would be expected

to occupy prime town-centre positions.

The spatial distribution of town retail activities is split between the historical market centre concentrated around Liberty Square and its radiating streets, and, the more recent Thurles Shopping Centre, situated on the N62 Slievenamon Road, a distance of circa 420m south from Liberty Square.

Accommodation within the Town Centre is limited to the Hayes Hotel within Liberty Square, and Ryan's Daughter Restaurant and B&B. Anner Hotel and The Coachyard Inn provide accommodation just outside of the town centre.

Thurles has a strong provision of education facilities, and benefits from four secondary schools (Thurles C.B.S., Coláiste Mhuire co-educational school, Presentation Convent and the Ursuline Convent) and two Third Level Facilities; the Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT Thurles Campus) and St Patrick's College (incorporated into St. Mary's Immaculate College, Limerick) and is also within short commuting distances to many others.

A 2018 Town Centre land-use survey recorded the presence of 1,823 different business interests and activities occurring within the defined 'Town Centre' area. Vacancy level in Thurles is marginally higher than the County average for Tipperary (14.3%) , and higher than the 13.3% National average (where the lowest level of vacancy was recorded at 10.1% and the highest at 18.9%).

There are also large areas of undeveloped land currently described as 'backlands' within the Town Centre, which are fundamentally undeveloped brownfield land. Two of these backland areas are designated as 'Opportunity Areas' within the Thurles and Environs Development Plan, including the Friar Street Backlands, and Parnell Street Car Park.



Thurles on market day, 1848. Source: Tipperary Local Studies, Thurles



Health & Harmony, Baker Street



Devlin Medical Hall, Liberty Square



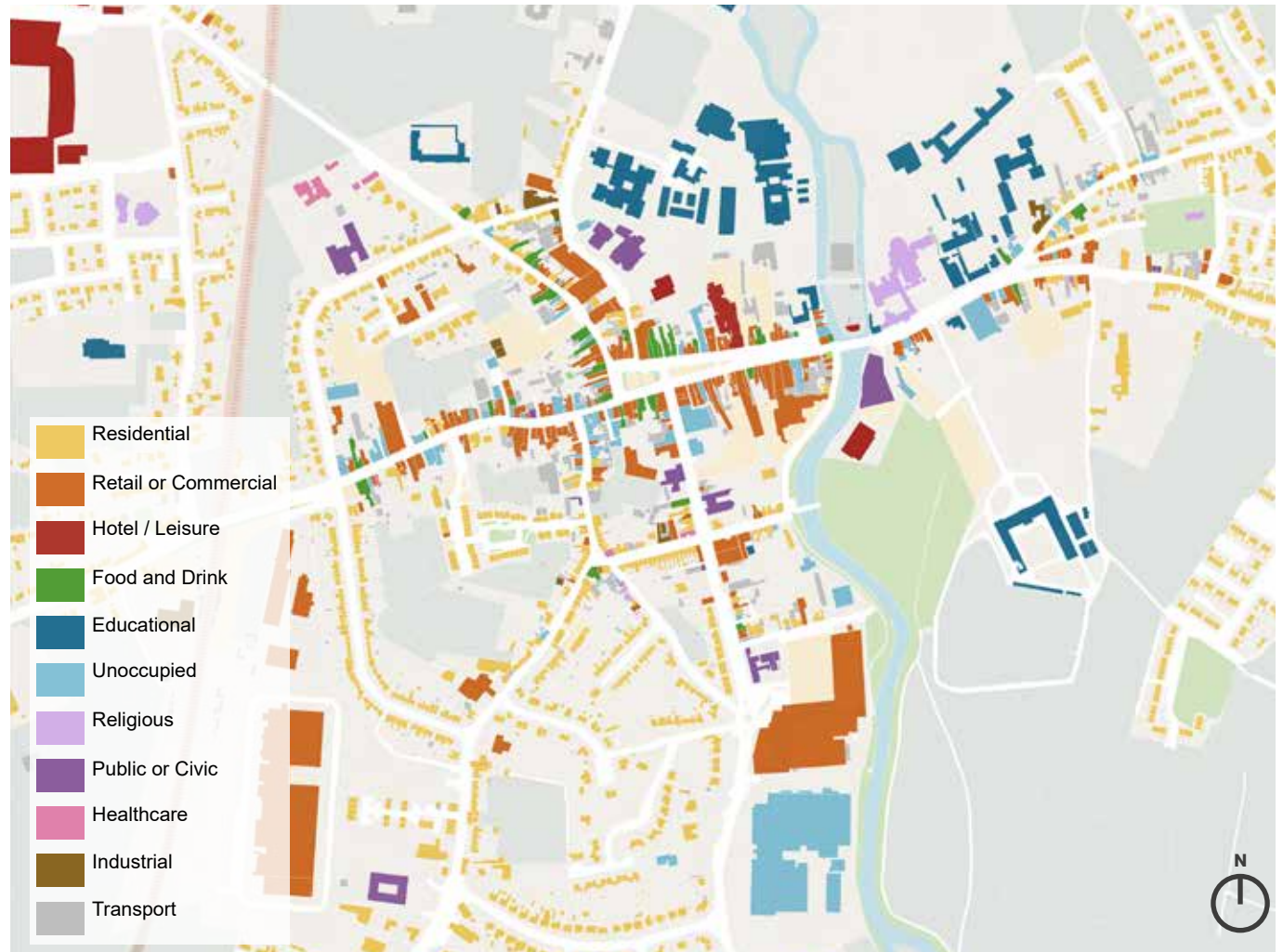
Lacey's Butchers, Friar Street



Town House Deli, Slievenamon Road

Opportunities and Considerations

- In terms of enhancing the retail offer, there are opportunities to develop the home grown artistic talent and Irish craft industry. There is also an opportunity to explore the creation of more active frontages to retail units within the town;
- The limited provision of accommodation in the Town Centre will need to be addressed if Thurles is to fulfil it's potential as a tourism destination;
- Hot desking office spaces, digital hubs, and the creation of temporary 'pop-up' shops are all examples of successfully re-using vacant units in Town Centres;
- Town Centre vacancy is a complex issue. To increase footfall and stimulate demand, there are many different strategies which can be utilised: the introduction of Town Centre living, more visitor destinations, and recreational facilities; and
- The backlands areas offer a huge potential for redevelopment. Some are landlocked and therefore would require new access points if they were to be developed.



Map illustrating Town Centre building uses

Thurles Today Culture and Heritage

Thurles Town Centre has a wealth of architectural and archaeological heritage features, as well as recorded protected structures, including Black Castle, Bridge Castle, The Cathedral of the Assumption, and St Mary's Church.

The physical fabric of Thurles was developed largely in the late 18th and early 19th centuries as building in the Town Centre subsequent to 1840 was minimal. Thus, the built form of Thurles is composed of very traditional materials such as brick, stone, slate and timber. The materials used and the manner in which they are used in the buildings all possess historical significance and render a sense of place and identity. Construction and architectural details such as doors, windows, cornices, consoles, cast iron gutters, decorative plaster hood mouldings and brick dressings are critical elements in determining the heritage character of the town.

Thurles has three designated Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs), as outlined in the Thurles and Environs Development Plan 2009–2015. The Plan states, *“the physical quality and character of Thurles’s Architectural Conservation Areas are derived from the grouping of buildings and their relationship to one another, which create a ‘sense of place’.”* A full description and appraisal of Thurles’ Architectural Heritage is included in Appendix 2.

Ecclesiastical Heritage

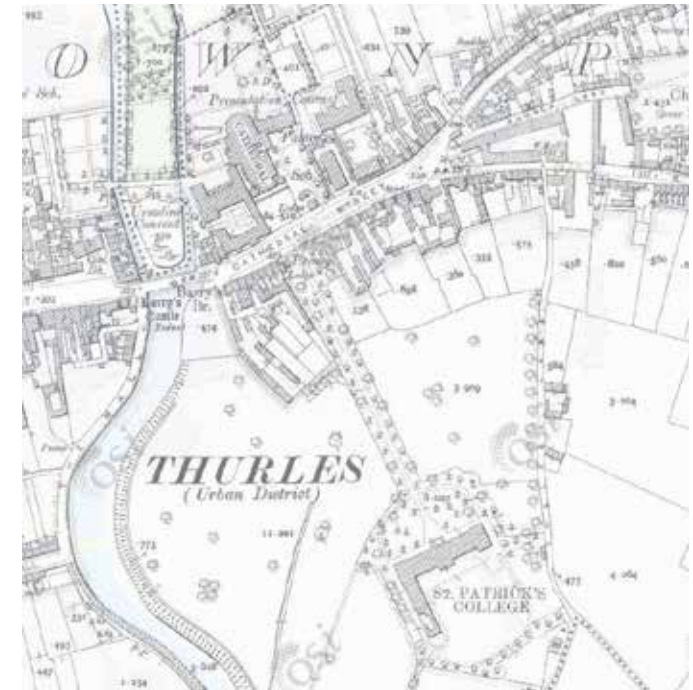
At the east end of the Town Centre, across the River Suir, stands the ecclesiastical church of the town, boasting The Cathedral of the Assumption. This is the mother church of the ecclesiastical province of Cashel and the cathedral church of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Cashel and Emly.

The Cathedral was constructed between 1865 and 1872, and with the completion of the extensive St Patrick’s College opposite, a straight, tree-lined avenue was constructed on axis with the west door of the Cathedral. The formality of this landscaping and the grandeur of the buildings further emphasised the importance of Thurles as an ecclesiastical centre. The Ursulines and Presentation orders contributed with newer and larger buildings on the north side of Cathedral Street.

Thurles’ Castles and Walls

Black Castle is situated to the south of Parnell Street car park, and present remains consist of a four-storey high lobby-entrance tower house built from coursed limestone rubble with a pronounced base-batter. The Castle is not publicly accessible, although the upper levels can be seen in the distance looking west up Liberty Square.

Bridge Castle is situated at the east end of Liberty Square next to the bridge, and is a visual anchoring point for Liberty Square. Bridge Castle is evidence of an East Gate into the town, but there is not clear evidence as to whether a circuit of medieval town walls was ever constructed. A West Gate stood on Friar Street until the nineteenth century. Some commentators have suggested that both Black Castle and Bridge Castle may have been mural towers in a defensive wall circuit, but this has not been conclusively proven.



Main Street area, Catholic Institutional sector OS, 1903 Source: geohive.ie



Cathedral of the Assumption



St Mary's Church



Liberty Square with Black Castle and the motte to the west, Bridge Castle to the east OS, 1842 Source: geohive.ie



John James Barralet, c.1779–93, 'The town of Thurles with the castle wherein the Duke of Ormond was born; the new market house and part of the Knights' Templars' castle (Original in National Library of Ireland)

Parnell Street car park is the site of a levelled motte castle, a late 12th-century earthen castle which had substantial precincts by the 14th century. The first-edition six-inch OS map indicates the site of this castle as a circular feature, bounded by Moat Lane to the north and Hickey's Lane to the south.

The GAA

The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) was founded on November 1st 1884 at a meeting in Hayes' Hotel, Thurles, by a group led by Michael Cusack who had the foresight to realise the importance of establishing a national organisation to make athletics more accessible to the masses and to revive and nurture traditional, indigenous sports and pastimes. Within a few weeks of the organisation's foundation, Thomas Croke, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Cashel and Emley, gave his approval and became its first patron.

Originally titled as the "Gaelic Association for the cultivation and preservation of national pastimes," the organisation became known in the shortened version as the "Gaelic Athletic Association" - and celebrated as one of the greatest amateur sporting associations in the world.

Thurles today has a rich fabric of GAA heritage throughout the town, which includes the Semple Stadium - the second largest GAA stadium in Ireland with a capacity of 53,500, second only to Croke Park in Dublin. The grounds on which Semple Stadium is built were formerly known as Thurles Sportsfield. The Stadium today is the home of hurling and Gaelic football for Tipperary GAA. The Stadium is also the "spiritual home" of Munster hurling and many famous matches, especially Munster Finals, have been played here. In 1984 it hosted the All Ireland Hurling Final to celebrate 100 years since the founding of the GAA in Thurles.



Semple Stadium Source: Thurles.ie



Taffy's Bar GAA Mural



Carr's Bar GAA Mural Source: Balls.ie



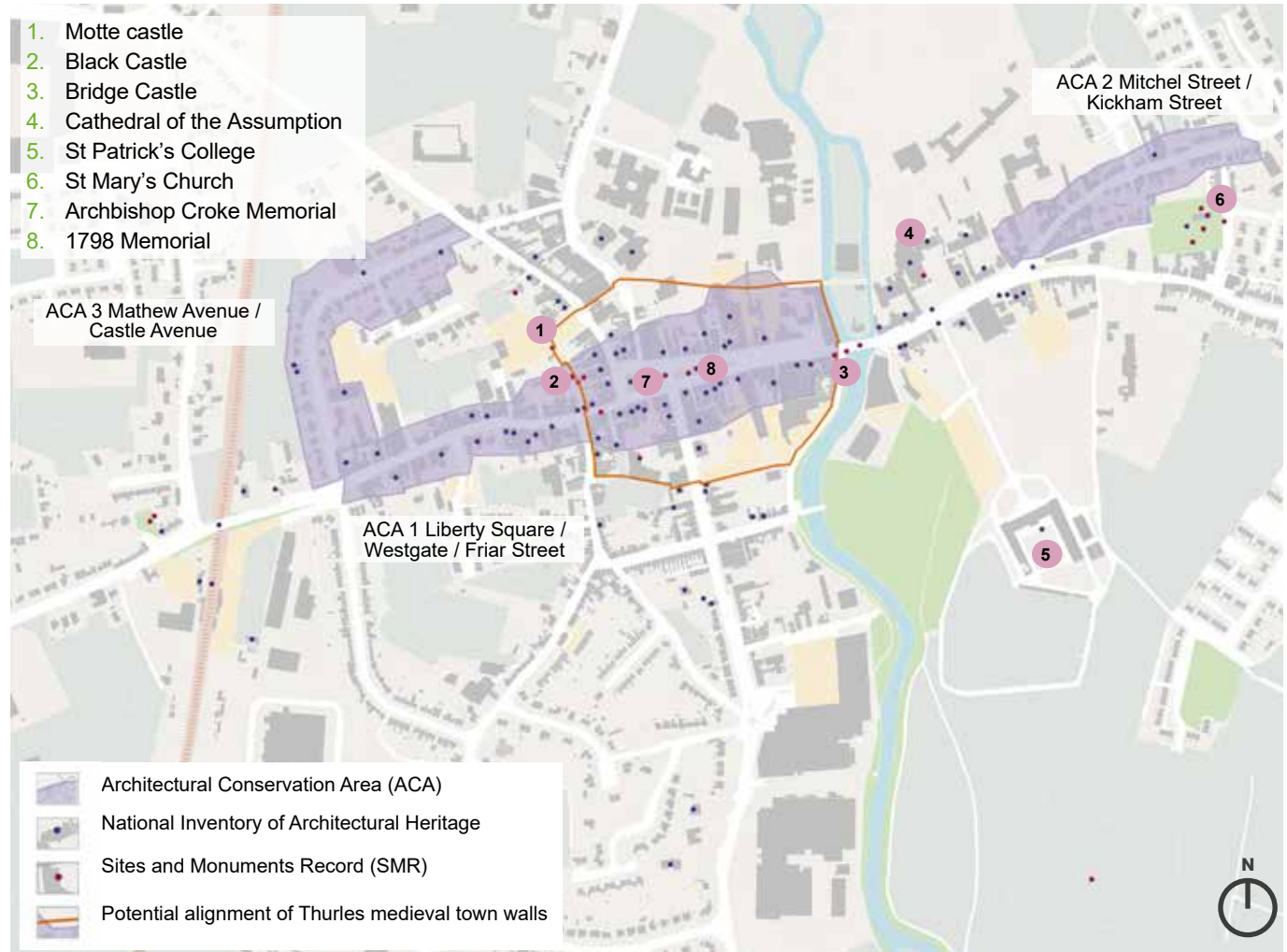
Hayes Hotel Source: Independent.ie



'Home of Tom Semple' plaque

Opportunities and Considerations

- The GAA has undeniably brought economic benefits to the town, however greater potential exists for the GAA to play a more central role in showcasing Thurles' history and developing Thurles' tourism offer;
- A sporting based tourism offer should also be linked to Thurles' other sporting connections, such as being awarded the prestigious title of European Town of Sport for 2012, the first town in Ireland to claim the accolade;
- The Strategic Tourism Marketing, Experience and Destination Plan 2016-2021 is aiming to build on the town's history and folklore, including expanding the Butler Trail to the strongholds in Thurles and examining new opportunities around the ecclesiastical heritage and links to Holycross Abbey;
- An enhanced research framework (analysis of historical development and significance) would allow for the full understanding of the ACAs and to review their boundaries; and
- The Black Castle and its grounds, presently closed to the public, represents a fantastic potential environment to be enjoyed. Work has already been undertaken by Tipperary Heartlands Voluntary Tourism Network, reviewing the commercial possibility of establishing the Castle as a cultural and tourism attraction.



Map illustrating Town Centre cultural and heritage features

Thurles Today

Education

Thurles is a strong education centre with a wide selection of highly acclaimed schools and colleges.

Heritage

Education in Thurles has a long history. The Ursuline Convent was founded in 1737, the Presentation Convent in 1817, and the CBS in 1818.

The foundation stone for St Patrick's College was laid by Archbishop Robert Laffan of Cashel on 6 July 1829 and opened as an educational institution in September 1837. The college was once proposed as the location for John Henry Newman's Catholic University, and there were visions of it becoming the Oxford of Ireland. In 2012, after almost two centuries of educational excellence, the college began an academic alliance with the University Of Limerick.

Primary, Secondary, and Third Level Institutions

Today, the primary schools serving the area include Gaelscoil Bhríde, Scoil Ailbhe CBS, Scoil Angela (Ursuline Convent) and Scoil Mhuire na Toirbhirte (Presentation Convent).

Secondary schools include Thurles C.B.S., Coláiste Mhuire co-educational school, Presentation Convent and the Ursuline Convent.

Thurles also benefits from two Third Level Institutions; the Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT Thurles Campus) and St Patricks College (incorporated into St. Mary's Immaculate College, Limerick). Other third-level and further education

schools include Colaiste Eile, Colaiste Mhuire Adult Education and Thurles Community Training Centre.

Future Roles and Expansion

The Thurles Chamber Enterprise Centre is located on the LIT Thurles Campus complex, while the Tipperary Technology Park is adjacent, creating an integrated ecosystem to support new enterprise development.

There are future expansion objectives at the MIC campus adjacent to the Town Centre, with the development of student residential accommodation, recreational facilities, and teaching spaces in the land to the rear of the existing campus.

Opportunities and Considerations

- The strong student presence is an asset to be harnessed, through enterprise and entrepreneurial activities, and the facilitation of living in the Town Centre.
- Students have the potential to be the driving force behind the prioritisation of cycling in Thurles.



Presentation Convent (undated). Source: Lawrence Collection NLI 1870 to 1910



Postcard of Ursuline Convent. Source: Tipperary Studies



LIT Thurles Campus. Source: lit.ie



St Patrick's College. Source: mic.ul.ie

Thurles Today

Tourism

Thurles is rich in built, natural and cultural heritage from its historic streetscapes to its setting on the River Suir, to its proud sporting history. However, the tourism destination potential within the town is largely undeveloped.

In terms of things to see and do within the town, the Castle's and the Cathedral are landmark features, and the architecturally attractive arts centre, The Source, has a good programme offering theatre, music and comedy. Thurles also has a modest, but very well-renowned, local live music scene, accommodated at The Monks Pub (O' Gormans) and Jim Kennedy's.

The Semple Stadium and Thurles Racecourse are just outside of the Town Centre and frequently host sports events. Thurles Farmers Market also takes place at the Greyhound Stadium every Saturday. The popular market regularly hosts around 15 stalls, and shoppers can buy a range of fresh, local goods. The town's Famine Museum and Lar na Pairce GAA Museum have both closed in recent years, as well as a Town Centre cinema, Capitol, on Castle Avenue.

Thurles was host to the Féile Festival, which ran from 1990 to 1997 and was held in Semple Stadium. At the height of its success, an estimated 100,000 people attended the festival. The festival had a resurgence in 2019, with Sinead O'Connor

among others playing.

Within the wider Tipperary context, Thurles is located within the 'Ireland's Ancient East' initiative, and is located 20km from two of Ireland's most popular visitor attractions - Rock of Cashel and Holycross Abbey. Annually, Rock of Cashel has in excess of 372,000 visitors, and Holycross Abbey 200,00.

Opportunities and Considerations

- Thurles has a strong framework of attractions and a rich history, although there is scope to increase the current list of 'things to do.' The resurrection of the unique Famine Museum and Lar na Pairce GAA Museum would be of huge benefit to the town's overall attraction provision;
- The town's sporting history is also an opportunity to be harnessed, and the presence of outstanding facilities including a major venue at Semple Stadium lends itself to attract major festivals and events;
- The Farmers Market currently operates outside of the Town Centre. Traditional markets bring huge benefits to modern-day Town Centres;
- With appropriate research and development, the town's heritage assets, namely the Castles, Cathedral, and the unconfirmed medieval town walls, all have the attributes to be developed further as part of Ireland's Ancient East; and
- Thurles is ideally located to capitalise on the huge passing trade experienced at Rock of Cashel and Holycross Abbey.



The Source Arts Centre, adjacent to the River Suir. Source: McCullough Mulvin Architects



Holycross Abbey, 7km from Thurles. Source: Irish Times



Rock of Cashel, 20km from Thurles. Source: Irish Highlights

Thurles Today

Green and Blue Infrastructure

Thurles itself is surrounded by a high quality natural environment, located on the River Suir and close to natural amenities such as the Devil's Bit Mountain and Cabragh Wetlands. As a compact medieval town, open space is relatively limited in the Town Centre. Liberty Square has traditionally been the primary open space, performing a market-place role.

Today, Liberty Square has a more modern day requirement as a retail core, with car parking and the converging of numerous roads.

River Suir and Town Park

The River Suir and Thurles Town Park form the most prominent green and blue infrastructure assets within the town. The Park is a significant amenity, providing opportunities for recreational and cultural activities, as well as a place for people to meet and socialise. The creation of this Park has also highlighted the potential of the River Suir as a recreational amenity and tourism resource for Thurles.

Street trees and planting

Mature street trees and small areas of ornamental planting are scattered throughout the Town Centre streets, and garden vegetation is often found growing over residential curtilages, providing a softened streetscape appearance. Liberty Square has the largest abundance of trees outside of the park and riverside, and includes mature London Plane, Caucasion Elm, Norway Maple and Lime trees. The majority of these are being retained as part of the Enhancement Scheme proposals.

Historically, trees lined many of the main avenues leading into the Town Centre, as illustrated on the comparison images opposite of Slievenamon Road. The tree-lined avenue between the west door of the Cathedral and St Patrick's College is still a grand and notable feature today.

Green spaces

Sports pitches are plentiful within the Town Centre, connected to the numerous education facilities, and give Thurles a very green appearance within aerial photography, although these spaces are publicly inaccessible.

The Peace Garden in Saint Mary's churchyard was opened in 2000 to honour the 72 men from Thurles who died in World War I (1914-1918). The Garden features numerous artefacts and seating opportunities, and offers a space of quiet contemplation within the church's green setting. Saint Bridget's Churchyard, opposite the railway station entrance, also provides a green and tranquil refuge.



Tree-lined Slievenamon Road, undated (formerly The Mall). Source: Tipperary Studies



Slievenamon Road, in 2020, with Liberty Square in the distant centre-ground. Source: Google Earth



Winter trees in Liberty Square, with the Croke Monument to the right



Tree lined avenue approaching St Patrick's College. Source: Mark O'Neill

Opportunities and Considerations

- The value of green infrastructure within the public realm is extensive. A high-quality public environment can have a significant impact on the economic life of urban centres big or small, and is therefore an essential part of any successful renewal strategy;
- The baseline review identified many opportunities to either enhance green infrastructure features or create new features at different scales of ambition and cost. These include improvements to existing green spaces like the Town Park, or create new pocket parks within the town itself with street trees and ornamental planting; and
- The Tipperary Green and Blue infrastructure Masterplan Roadmap for Tipperary Waterways sets out a comprehensive vision for the enhancement of green and blue infrastructure along the River Suir. The proposals would ensure the riverside setting is celebrated and utilised within the town.



- Green infrastructure: street trees and areas of planting
- Green infrastructure: publicly accessible green space
- Blue infrastructure

Map illustrating green and blue infrastructure within the Town Centre

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Thurles Today

Public Realm

Within the Town Centre, Thurles has a strong framework of landmarks which span above the building horizon line, creating a series of helpful landmarks within the townscape and assist with visual orientation.

Landmarks

Visual landmarks within the Town Centre include the spires and towers associated within St Mary's Church, The Cathedral the Black Castle, and the Bridge Castle.

There are two monuments within Liberty Square. At the west end of the Square is the statue of Archbishop Croke. The 'Stone Man,' commemorating the first centenary of a rebellion in 1798 is central to the Square. Both statues will be retained in their current location within the Enhancement Scheme proposals.

Signage

There is little signage and interpretation within the town for residents and visitors. It is difficult for visitors to fully appreciate, when navigating the streetscape, all that Thurles has to offer. There are, however, numerous plaques throughout the town, illustrating information relating to significant buildings and local people, and adding an attractive layer of detail to the town's heritage.

Public Art

There are numerous murals throughout the town, on the side of public houses and more temporary features outside unoccupied units. These positively contribute towards the character and sense of place within the town.

Paving

The current streetscape paving palette predominantly comprises grey in-situ concrete or cobblelock paving in neutral brown or red tones, all with concrete kerbs. The Liberty Square Enhancement Scheme is proposing a grey granite mix featuring setts and cubes, with shared surfaces in a buff-coloured asphalt.

There are very few areas within the town where traditional paving materials are still evident and intact. Limestone steps to building frontages, and limestone kerbs along building curtilages, are visible around Liberty Square. Limestone and stone rubble walls are located along the river and forming boundary treatments throughout the town, which adds an attractive sense of place to the streetscape.

Street furniture

Seating is scattered throughout the Town Centre streets and spaces. The Town Park has a selection of contemporary stainless steel benches, bins, light columns and cycle racks, around the bandstand and eastern side of the Park. The addition of Irish inscriptions helps to reinforce sense of place and identity.

Lighting

The existing amenity lighting throughout the town is functional, highlighting the main routes through the town. Feature lighting



Croke Monument Source: Patrick Comerford



Plaque outside St Mary's Churchyard



Barrett's Bar GAA Mural



Carr's Bar GAA Mural Source: Balls.ie



The Stone Man, Liberty Square Source: Tipperary Studies

is also used to highlight historic and cultural features within the town, including the Cathedral and Bridge Castle, and the brightly coloured GAA murals found on the outside walls of licensed premises.

Colour and Character

Shopfronts in Thurles are varied in design and colour, and an attractive feature of the Town Centre. Traditional shop fronts display the vernacular architecture of Thurles and are an important expression of local history.

Within Liberty Square, shopfront walls are almost all rendered, and painted in a variety of colours. While many buildings are of a neutral or muted colour, vibrant colours such as green, red and blue are also evident.



Colour and detail variety in the Town Centre

Opportunities and Considerations

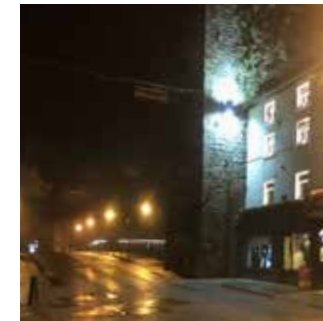
- The design palette proposed for Liberty Square, including paving, street furniture, and lighting should be the starting point for all streetscape enhancements within the town;
- Lighting can play a key role in the cultural development of a place and could be used to great effect in enhancing the role of landmark buildings and features in Thurles. Improving Thurles' lighting can enable commercial and tourism activity to be extended beyond its core times of the day and year - encouraging retail activity later on in the evening and on dark winter afternoons. A lighting strategy, that builds on what is already proposed within Liberty Square, should be considered as an integral part of public realm design in the future.
- The current Town Centre signage and interpretation should be developed to ensure the 'key stories' of Thurles are understood;
- There is an opportunity to have a clear hierarchy of urban streets and spaces, coherent quality material localised within the historic Town Centre character areas and directional signage;
- GAA-focused murals are effective at establishing a distinct sense of place within the town. The introduction of additional, similar public art would help orientate people so that they can navigate their way around the town easily and give clear indications of the routes to popular destinations at key decision points; and
- Introduction of key gateway features would help to highlight main entry points into the historic town core.



Shop frontage design in Liberty Square



Liberty Square at night time. Source: Thurlestown



Illumination of Bridge Castle



Taffy's Bar at night time

Thurles Today

Strategic Movement

The Liberty Square Enhancement Scheme will transform the heart of Thurles. The widening of footpaths, realignment of carriageways and the relocation of on-street car parking will improve both the pedestrian environment and overall Town Centre traffic circulation.

Roads Links

Thurles has excellent connectivity by road, being strategically located north of the M8 Dublin to Cork Motorway. A number of major traffic routes converge at Thurles, including the N62 National Route from the north and south, and the N75 from east.

An Inner Relief Road is planned between Mill Road and Slievenamon Road, which would further improve Town Centre traffic circulation, as well as provide a new crossing of the River Suir and provision for pedestrians and cyclists.

Rail Links

Thurles is located on the main Dublin to Cork Rail Corridor, with direct rail connections to Dublin, Cork and Limerick. This is an important attribute and opportunity for Thurles to exploit particularly in respect to the future planning and development

of the town consistent with the settlement hierarchy as set out in the RSES.

The rail station is located within a convenient walk of the Town Centre, however, there are currently poor pedestrian routes and signage linking the rail station to the Town Centre. There are also poor cycle facilities at the station and a poor cycle route to the rail station.

The growth in rail patronage between 2012 and 2018 is very significant. In 2012 there were 504 boardings and 458 alightings. In 2018, there were 817 boardings and 787 alightings. This demonstrates the rail station as an opportunity to be further developed as a transport hub for the wider hinterland.

Bus Links

Thurles is currently not well served by bus as all interurban routes between the main cities completely bypass the town via the nearby M8 motorway. Some local link services between Liberty Square and Thurles Shopping Centre are currently provided to meet local access needs.

Pedestrians and Cyclists

Pedestrian circulation within the Town Centre generally aligns with traffic routes. The pedestrian routes between the Semple Stadium and railway station (on match days), and Liberty Square and Thurles Shopping Centre are particularly well frequented. Many of the Town Centre footpaths are narrow and there are few pedestrian crossing places, restricting movement, compromising experience and reducing accessibility.

Cycling infrastructure within the Town Centre is limited, with cycle parking facilities available at the Leisure Centre



Traffic movement within Liberty Square today Source: Wiki



Liberty Square 1894. Traditionally always bustling. Source: Tipperary Studies












Thurles Railway Station

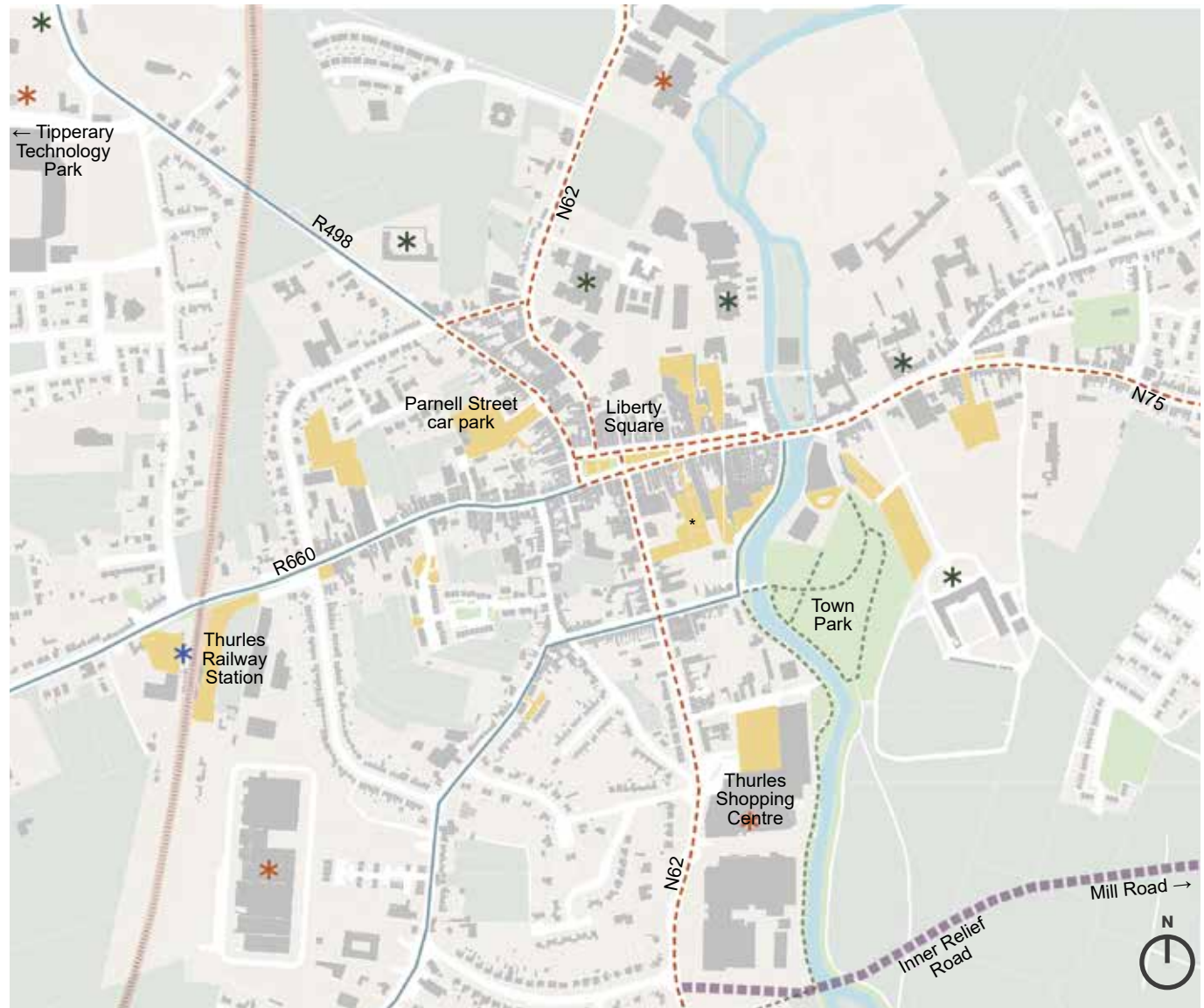
and Shopping Centre. The permitted Lidl development on Slievenamon Road includes a section of the Thurles Relief Road, and provision for cycle lanes and cycle parking.

Recreational routes, for pedestrians and cyclists, include a greenway along the western edge of the River Suir, routed between the Town Park and the former Erin Foods site, and the network of footpaths within the Town Park.

Town Centre Destinations

In addition to the Town Centre retail core, the other key destinations within the Town Centre comprise the railway station, major educational facilities, including the MIC and LIT campuses, and key areas of employment, such as Tipperary Technology Park. These are illustrated on the plan opposite. A future cycling strategy should seek to link these destinations, along with the retail core and the main residential areas.

-  National Road
-  Regional Road
-  Railway Line
-  Pedestrian and Cycle Route
-  Proposed Relief Road
-  Car Parking (*including the proposed additional Liberty Square car parking)
-  Major educational facilities
-  Town Centre edge employment areas
-  Transport hub



Map illustrating strategic movement routes and destinations within the Town Centre

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Car Parking

Thurles Town Centre is very well served by car parking, with 440 off-street surface-level car parking spaces and 670 on-street spaces. There is high demand for car parking, particularly in the vicinity of Liberty Square and within the Parnell Street Car Park, which serve the Town Centre retail core. Car parks located on the immediate periphery of the retail core, including at the railway station, to the rear of Supervalu on Friar Street, and at Thurles Leisure Centre, are also well frequented.

There will be a reduction in the current on-street parking provision within Liberty Square to facilitate the on-going public realm improvements. Additional and replacement parking will be conveniently introduced within a backlands area immediately south of the Square, behind the existing building line.

Transport and the RSES

The RSES sets out a series of key infrastructural requirements for Thurles. This includes: the upgrading of roads, including the R498 to Nenagh; the implementation of the Thurles Inner Relief Road; and, the improvement of rail services and the enhancement of Liberty Square. In addition, as a Key Town, Thurles will require the preparation of a Local Transport Plan (LTP).

Opportunities and Considerations

- Thurles shares similar issues to many towns across Ireland in addition to throughout the rest of the world. Whilst it is relatively compact in nature, its transport network has been developed over many years and

struggles to meet the competing demands of the various modes of transport passing through the town, with the legacy of prioritising the motor vehicle at the expense of other modes providing a challenge to address without a change in ethos.

- The preparation of a LTP will seek to create a modal shift from the private car to more sustainable transport modes, in an integrated and co-ordinated way.
- The LTP will not be about banning the private car as it still has its purpose. It is instead about considering means by which more sustainable travel practices could be adopted for certain journeys thereby reducing the number of vehicles travelling on certain routes and for certain journey purposes. Reducing the traffic flow can address the town's existing issues which include:
 - Peak hour congestion;
 - Parking issues relating to a lack of parking spaces or congestion generated by drivers looking for a space;
 - Providing additional space for pedestrians and cyclists;
 - Reducing congestion for bus services; and
 - Providing a more welcoming environment for visitors to the town centre with the associated economic benefits.
- The long-term progression of the Inner Relief Road will improve traffic circulation within the Town Centre, and facilitate the delivery of other significant transport objectives for the Town Centre in relation to walking and cycling.



Tipperary Technology Park, Thurles. Source: Shannonproperties.ie



Thurles River Walk



On-street parking along Friar Street



Barry's Bridge congestion



Chapter 4
**Consultation and
Engagement**

Consultation and Engagement Starting the Conversation

Innovative consultation lies at the heart of the Renewal Strategy. Effective, creative and dynamic consultation is critical to both obtaining detailed information and opinion, bolstering engagement and achieving buy-in to proposals.

An engagement strategy was developed which included a series of both online and face-to-face consultation tools. The project team worked closely with Tipperary County Council, utilising their existing contacts and social media audience, to ensure an extensive level of community and stakeholder engagement was achieved. A robust, audience-specific set of engagement techniques were developed, to manage expectations and maximise participation, at each event.

The following engagement events were undertaken as part of the first round of consultation, at the start of 2020:

- Elected Members briefing and round-table discussion session – 18 February 2020
- Online survey, published via the platform Survey Monkey - 31 January 2020 to 28 February 2020.
- Stakeholder workshop – lunchtime, 4 March 2020
- Community workshop – evening, 4 March 2020.

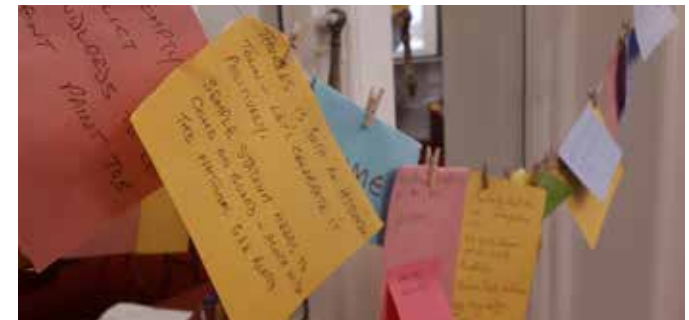
The second round of consultation was originally planned for May 2020, but was postponed to October 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We revised our original approach to include a mix of online and offline engagement events to best imitate the essence of our initial strategy:

- An Elected Members briefing and round-table discussion, via the online platform Zoom.
- A purpose-built consultation website, hosted by TCC, aimed at both the community and stakeholders, featuring a link to the Renewal Strategy document in full, and an online questionnaire.
- The creation of a temporary display at The Source and Thurles MDC Offices with paper feedback forms.

Refer to the Appendix 1 for a detailed analysis of the consultation process.



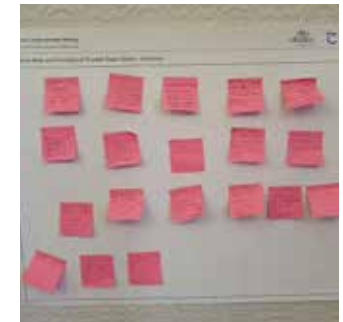
Briefing presentation at the stakeholder workshop



Feedback bunting at the community workshop



Activities at the community workshop



Stakeholder prioritisation exercise



Community workshop poster

Consultation and Engagement Online Survey

The online survey started the conversation with the community. It was published via the user platform 'Survey Monkey' and advertised by Tipperary County Council through their social media outlets, and email distribution to stakeholders and local community groups. The survey received 675 responses.

We also provided paper versions of the online survey at the community consultation workshop, to ensure feedback was captured from those without access to the internet.

The survey offered the platform for the community to discuss the issues, constraints and opportunities relating to Thurles Town Centre. Feedback has been grouped into the following key themes:

Built and Natural Environment

It is acknowledged that Thurles' buildings and architecture are assets within the town, but it is also noted that the issue of vacant units in the Town Centre needs resolving. The Town Park and river walks are positive natural features and there is the opportunity to develop these further, and to extend this natural environment into the Town Centre.

Accessibility and Travel

Thurles has excellent rail and car connectivity nationally, although there is a need to balance the vehicle dominance and traffic congestion with an accessible and safe pedestrian environment. Parnell Street and Liberty Square were identified as particular areas of concern, especially with regards to on-street parking and the presence of HGVs. There is little cycling infrastructure or activity currently in the town. Introducing a ring-road, increasing the provision of cycling infrastructure, and reducing the amount of on-street parking were all offered

within the feedback. Increasing the scope of bus services was also mentioned.

Economy and Re-purposing Vacant Buildings

Thurles Shopping Centre has shifted the traditional shopping core of the Town Centre. There are also many vacant buildings within the Town Centre, particularly along Croke Street and Friar Street. Recommendations focused on the provision of alternative goods and services in the Town Centre, not offered in the Shopping Centre chain stores, and the diversification from retail towards a more sustainable future.

Tourism and Heritage

Thurles is rich in cultural and sporting history, being the birthplace of the GAA, and has two castles located in the Town Centre. The town also has a distinct sense of place from its architecture and Town Centre square. The town has a lot of unrealised potential.

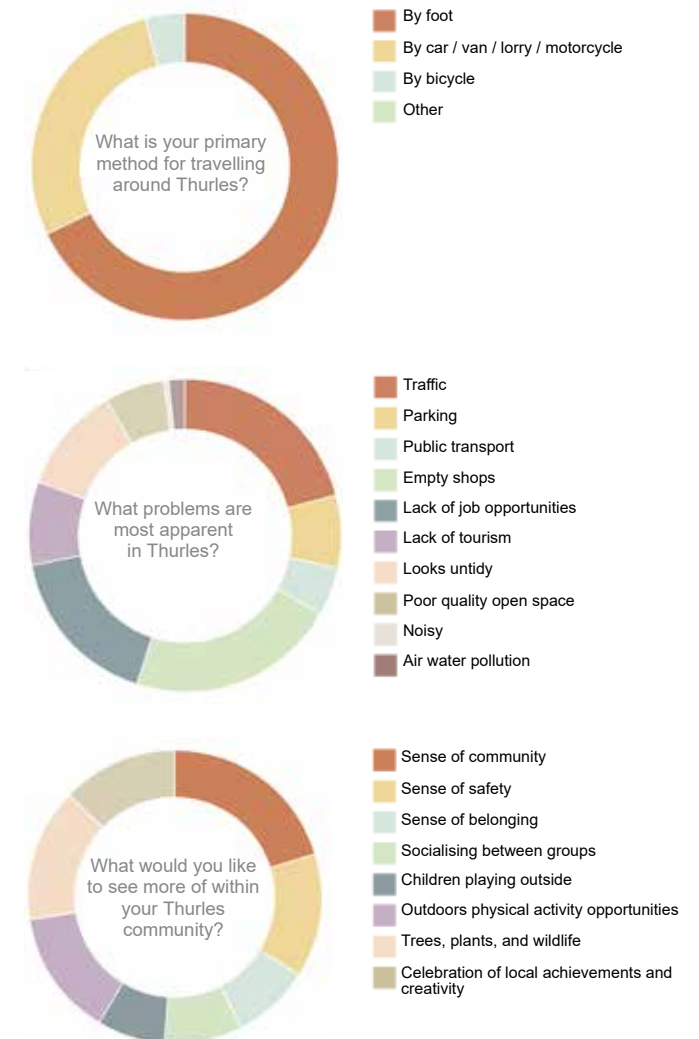
Community Perception and Image

There is a strong sense of community spirit within the town, and while there were some negative views, many strengths were identified.

Education

Thurles has a strong existing education offer and is home to 7 schools and colleges. This can offer both key challenges and opportunities for inclusion within the Renewal Strategy.

A full account of the online survey findings can be found in Appendix 1.



Pie charts illustrating some key responses to the online survey

Consultation and Engagement

Working with Elected Members and Key Stakeholders

Elected Members

On 18th February 2020, Local Elected Members were briefed on the project and invited to provide initial feedback during a round-table discussion session. The briefing session included the initial feedback received to date from the ongoing online survey (which was in progress at the time, and had been online for 3 weeks).

Key Stakeholders

A stakeholder workshop took place during a lunchtime session on the 4th March 2020. Key, local stakeholders were identified and invited by Tipperary County Council. This included representatives from local businesses, schools, and community groups. 27 people attended the workshop.

The session began with an introductory presentation and then proceeded to a prioritisation exercise where constraints and opportunities within the Town Centre were identified. A full account of the stakeholder workshop findings can be found in Appendix 1.

Stakeholders were asked to prioritise their top 3 key opportunities within Thurles:

- 1. Tourism & Heritage:** Feedback was focused on the town's links to the GAA and its excellent facilities, as well as the town's heritage assets, such as the Black Castle.
- 2. Re-Purposing Vacant Buildings:** Opportunities relating to the local economy and the re-purposing of vacant buildings were listed as the second priority. The feedback received focused on:

- The introduction of residential accommodation to the Town Centre;
- Utilising backland areas and vacant shops;
- Attracting outside investment from large companies by making Thurles more attractive;
- The relocation of the Farmer's Market to the Town Centre.

- 3. Accessibility & Travel:** Comments focused on the introduction of sustainable transport infrastructure within the town, and the capitalisation of the town's existing excellent rail links.

Stakeholders were also asked to prioritise their top 3 issues within Thurles:

- 1. Economy:** Issues relating to the economy and the town's vacant buildings were the most commonly listed priority.
- 2. Accessibility & Travel:** There was a strong focus on parking and traffic congestion within the Town Centre. Poor local bus connectivity was also highlighted.
- 3. Community Perception & Image / Tourism & Heritage:** Issues relating to both the local community and tourism were joint listed as the third most common issue. The feedback received in relation to community issues discussed the lack of public facilities, anti-social behaviour in the Town Centre at night time and on the weekends, and the lack of good communication and town management structure, with an inclusive town team offered as a possible resolution. The feedback received in relation to tourism was centred on the lack of tourism development within the town.

Stakeholders were also asked:

What is the future role and function of Thurles?

- *“Student influences.*
- *Leisure, social and event spaces.*
- *Opportunities to eat, drink, relax, meet people - a hang-out place.*
- *Small craft shops, and nice coffee shops.*
- *A country market in Liberty Square*
- *A community centre in the old Post Office.*
- *Town Centre pedestrianisation.*
- *A tourism and heritage focus.*
- *Hubs and hot desks.*
- *A University town.*
- *Heart of the town - comfortable, clean, safe, informing, directional.*
- *A thriving town with excellent road and rail connections to all major cities.*
- *Residential development - both rental and purchase.*
- *Strong links to the GAA.*
- *A cultural town.*
- *More good quality dining opportunities.”*



Prioritisation exercise at the community workshop

Consultation and Engagement A Face-To-Face Community Workshop

A face-to-face community workshop took place during the evening of 4th March 2020 at the Hayes Hotel, Liberty Square, Thurles. 50 people attended the session. The workshop had a 'drop-in' format and featured plans and graphics demonstrating the initial desk-based research findings and analysis from the online questionnaire.

Innovative and hands-on feedback methods were employed including thematic-focused graffiti walls and feedback bunting to allow members of the community to comment on specific elements of the project and see what other people are saying in an anonymous format. A summary of the key areas of feedback are listed below. A full account of the community workshop findings can be found in Appendix 1 of this Strategy.

Key Issues and Problems

The community were invited to discuss and highlight the key issues and problems that they felt were most apparent within Thurles. Responses focused on the economy and the vacant buildings within the Town Centre, the lack of job opportunities, and the need for more Town Centre housing. There was also a focus on traffic related issues, and the overall image of the town.

“My favourite thing about Thurles”

The community were also asked to think about their favourite thing about Thurles. Questions such as this can encourage further positive discussions focussed on the opportunities the town has to offer, and can trigger memories and anecdotes that the project team area unaware of. Comments included:

- “The park is a great asset to the town.
- Thurles is such a historical town - let's celebrate it.
- The creative people.

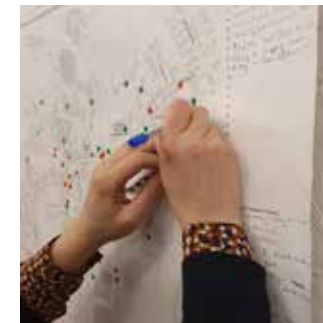
- *Connections to nature.*
- *Semple Stadium.*
- *The Farmers Market. Could it be moved to the town park or a car park area in the centre?*
- *The people. People are friendly, creative and supportive. They just need more projects to actually support and build a sense of community.”*

What would you like to see more of within your Thurles community?

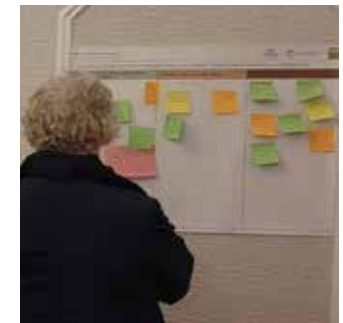
- *“More non-drink related spaces for events and activities, e.g. bowling alley, arcades etc.*
- *Bicycle parking.*
- *Level paving for people with mobility issues.*
- *Empty buildings being used for employment, tourism, and recreation.*
- *Better public transport, more bus stops.*
- *Removal of obstacles leading to improved ambience, housing provision, and a vibrant community.*
- *More community involvement; residents association, community activities, tidy towns.*
- *Initiatives to encourage others to enhance / repair / improve derelict buildings.*
- *Street signs and road markers.*
- *Acknowledgement and celebration of local achievements.*
- *Opportunities for groups who don't normally mix together to get the opportunity to mix through activities other than hurling.*
- *Traffic management.*
- *Create a river town park with walkway and bandstand.*
- *Less talk, more actions.”*



Lively debate at the community workshop



Thematic focused graffiti wall



Post-it note prioritisation activity



Feedback bunting at the community workshop

Consultation and Engagement

The Second Round of Engagement

The online Consultation Hub was hosted on Tipperary County Council's website and was live from Monday 5th October for 4 weeks. The platform was promoted via the existing email databases we had gathered from our first stage of engagement, and through the local press and social media. We also simultaneously created a temporary display at The Source and Thurles MDC Offices with paper feedback forms.

67 people responded to the online survey, and 15 people responded to the paper survey. We also offered an element of face-to-face engagement, with members of the community invited to book a virtual appointment to discuss the Draft Renewal Strategy with representatives from TCC and LUC. We had no uptake on this offer.

A full account of the engagement findings can be found in Appendix 1.

Vision Statement

Our draft vision statement:

"We will establish Thurles as a sustainable, thriving and vibrant town centre, which will support the future growth of the town and the needs of its residents through the development of both its natural and built environment. Thurles will capitalise fully on its rich cultural and built heritage, and highly strategic location, and be an attractive and prosperous place to live, work and visit."

83% of respondents agreed with the vision statement. Those who did not agree suggested the following elements for inclusion:



Projects

50% of respondents think we haven't missed any potential projects.

Those who thought we had missed a potential project suggested the following:

- Age-friendly living and design;
- A project related to sporting events generally, not just GAA;
- A project which focuses on commercial / industrial space – what is needed and projections for future growth;
- A community arts centre – not just a library;
- Youth and child provision;
- Art-focused projects;
- Develop cultural / social offer – food, arts, theatre;
- Accessibility / walkability / cycling project;
- IT / broadband upgrading to ensure future resilience;
- Additional detail required within the transport proposals; and,
- Further community engagement.

Draft Thurles Town Centre Renewal Strategy

1

Thurles Renewal Strategy

The purpose of the Renewal Strategy is to provide a framework to create a thriving, vibrant, climate resilient Town Centre, delivered in partnership with stakeholders and the local community, ensuring Thurles fulfils its role as a Key Town in the Southern Region.

Having acquired a thorough understanding of Thurles through research, site visits and consultation with the community and stakeholders, 5 vision objectives have been developed for the Town Centre. These objectives define the key aim of potential projects around Thurles.



Renewal Strategy Objectives



The Creation of a Compact, Low-Carbon Climate Resilient Town



The Creation of a Vibrant & Living Town Centre



The Delivery of a Connected Town & Enhanced Public Realm



The Creation of a Destination Town



The Exposure & Showcasing of Thurles Historic & Natural Heritage

Renewal Strategy Projects

The following sheets set out a series of projects which aim to deliver and support the 5 objectives. The projects may be championed by the Council, Stakeholders or Town Centre Groups and will be supported through on-going collaboration. Additional actions and feedback on the suggested ideas is very much welcomed through this public consultation phase.



What would you like to see more of within your Thurles community?





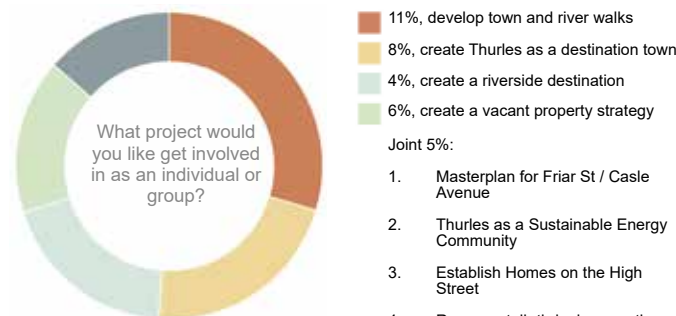
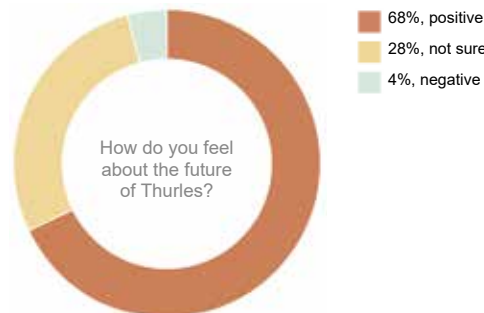
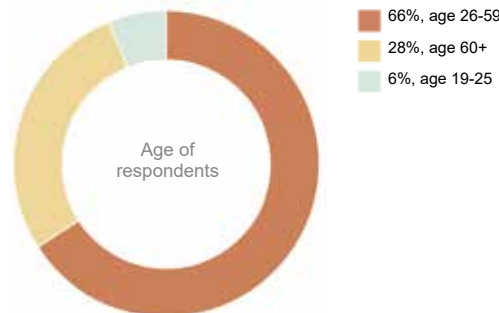
Introductory exhibition board used in the temporary display

Select comments focused on general feedback:

- Disappointed with lack of project proposals aimed at quality of life for older people;
- Job creation is vital;
- Very impressed at the scale and breadth of the work;
- Planning and Heritage constraints are still seen as major barriers to renewal;
- Excellent strategy, the development of Thurles Town centre as a living town is essential as there is too many vacant buildings on the square. Above shops are empty and run down. Business owners should be encouraged/ helped to regenerate;
- Age-friendly facilities including walking routes / pavements are key;
- I was disappointed to read the very limited piece on Bus Links; and,
- The traffic situation, in that the flow through town could easily be helped along simply by having courtesy pedestrian crossings instead of the zebra/light crossings that currently exist. These work excellently in the likes of Kilkenny, which is a much busier city;

The draft Renewal Strategy was updated following the second round of consultation to accommodate the following:

- The addition of suggested projects, including one focused on local arts/creativity, reference to accessibility/age friendly design, and a marketing focused initiative;
- Further collaboration with the Renewal Strategy transport consultants, with additional detail added to the Local Transport Plan project and the 'strategic movement' baseline analysis; and,
- A compilation of the engagement findings in an appendix.



Joint 5%:

1. Masterplan for Friar St / Casle Avenue
2. Thurles as a Sustainable Energy Community
3. Establish Homes on the High Street
4. Regeneratuib through recreation, education, and support for local producers
5. Create parklets

Draft Thurles Town Centre Renewal Strategy 6

Objective 5 - The Exposure & Showcasing of Thurles Historic & Natural Heritage

Community Growing Scheme:
The identification of suitable areas for a community growing scheme, alongside an initial engagement programme to establish interested parties.

Parklets:
The transformation of underused street corners and parking bays into temporary raised planters and seating areas.

Urban Tree Network:
The planting of trees along the Town Centre streets and the perimeters of the many existing green spaces including school grounds, sports fields, church yards, grass verges, the River Suir and the Town Park.

Architectural Research & Conservation Strategy:
A detailed understanding of the Town Centre fabric, built, and social environment will help to inform future regeneration proposals and stimulate investment in the built environment.

Archaeological Heritage Research Framework:
A more comprehensive understanding of the archaeological heritage of Thurles is required in order to inform subsequent actions. The framework will focus on the conservation of archaeological assets within the town, including the Black Castle, supported by appropriate interpretation and wayfinding.

Town and River Walks:
The development of a connected network of walking trails.

A Riverside Destination:
The provision of new riverside activities to activate the River Suir corridor.

Project-focused exhibition board used in the temporary display

A historical black and white photograph of a busy street market. The street is filled with numerous horse-drawn carts and wagons, many of which are heavily loaded with goods, including large bundles of hay or straw. People are seen walking through the market, some standing near the carts. The buildings lining the street are multi-story, with many windows, and a tall clock tower is visible in the background. The overall scene depicts a bustling, traditional marketplace.

Chapter 5 Summary of Our Findings

Summary of Our Findings Strengths and Key Issues

A threefold process of desktop research, site appraisal and consultation was used by the consultant team to gather data necessary to inform the Renewal Strategy. In addition information and advice was supplied to the team by the project steering group through regular meetings and correspondence during the course of our appointment.

Strengths to Build-Upon

- **The Thurles community**, who have demonstrated that they are responsive and ready to engage;
- **The Liberty Square Enhancement Scheme**, which will have a transformative effect on the Town Centre;
- Designation of Thurles as a **Key Town** in the RSES, and national support for town renewal;
- **Active business structures**, the Local Authority, Chamber of Commerce, Thurles Town Centre Forum;
- Development of the town park co-joined with other civic and recreational amenities including **Source Arts Centre, and Leisure Centre and River Suir**;
- The strategic and highly accessible location, with a well-frequented Town Centre **railway station**;
- **Strong residential base and neighbourhood**, and dynamic family composition;
- Strong cultural heritage of the **GAA** and national importance of **Semple Stadium**;
- Strong educational offering and student presence.
- Expansion objectives of both **LIT and MIC** on existing campuses adjacent to the Town Centre;
- Large, undeveloped **town-centre backland plots** between Friar Street and Castle Avenue;
- Continued **online presence** of Thurles (Thurles.ie);
- The **river corridor** as an amenity and connection;
- Striking streetscape enclosure of Liberty Square, extending between Friar Street and Cathedral Street;
- Heritage assets - the **Black Castle, Bridge Castle, and the Cathedral of the Assumption**, and the latter's associated ecclesiastical centre; and
- Clustered tourism links with the neighbouring **Rock of Cashel and Holy Cross Abbey**.

Key Issues to Address

- **Empty shops, traffic and lack of job opportunities** - key issues highlighted at the community workshop;
- **Vacant buildings and a lack of sustainable transport provision** - key issues highlighted by stakeholders;
- Visual dominance and **poor aesthetic quality of road space, parking and overhead cable infrastructure**;
- **Cluttering of directional signage**, poor parking signage, and absence of cultural/heritage information or assets;
- **Diversity of ground floor commercial shopfronts**, including materials and fascia particularly on the northern side of Liberty Square;
- **Changing retail and economic patterns**;
- Continued rise in **Town Centre vacancy**;
- **Loss of independent retail activities** from the Town Centre and Thurles Shopping centre as preferential location for new retailers;
- **Lack of open space and green infrastructure**;
- An incomplete **understanding of the town's archaeological and architectural history**; and
- **Closing of Lár na Páirce** - GAA Museum and the Famine Museum, with few activities related to tourism; and
- **The need to address climate change**.



Chapter 6
Our Shared Vision

Our Shared Vision Objectives

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
| The Creation of a Compact, Low-Carbon Climate Resilient Town | The Creation of a Vibrant and Living Town Centre | The Delivery of a Connected Town & Enhanced Public Realm | The Creation of a Destination Town | The Exposure and Showcasing of Thurles Historic & Natural Heritage |

Visioning Objectives

Having acquired a thorough understanding of Thurles, the above shared vision objectives have been developed for the Town Centre.

Using this Section

The following section sets out a series of projects which aim to deliver and support the objectives listed above. The projects are described in detail over the forthcoming pages, and then will be summarised within an 'Action Plan' in the final report.

Close alignment has been made between the proposed projects and the NPF's National Strategic Outcomes (NSO's),

the Climate Action Plan 2019, and the RSES Southern Region's Regional Policy Objectives (RPO's).

All projects outlined are indicative – the ability of each project to deliver the number of functions highlighted is dependent on effective planning, siting and design. This chapter is designed to provide support for the prioritisation of projects for delivery as funding becomes available or opportunities arise, or as an initial reference point for further detailed feasibility and master planning work. The projects may also be used in negotiations with developers to help best direct developer contributions coming forward.

The concepts put forward are meant to provide inspiration for what can be achieved in Thurles. These are spatially flexible and can be adaptable across the Town Centre. These ideas

are meant to be transferable and not necessarily confined to the recommended locations.

For each project, information is provided on:

- The background and nature of the project;
- Project outcomes and benefits;
- Project champions and stakeholders;
- Prioritisation; and
- Examples from elsewhere that may inform delivery options (if relevant and available).

Our Shared Vision

Objectives and Projects Summary List

The following is the final list of proposed Town Centre Renewal projects.

These projects may be championed by the Council, Stakeholders and Town Centre Groups and will be supported through on-going collaboration.

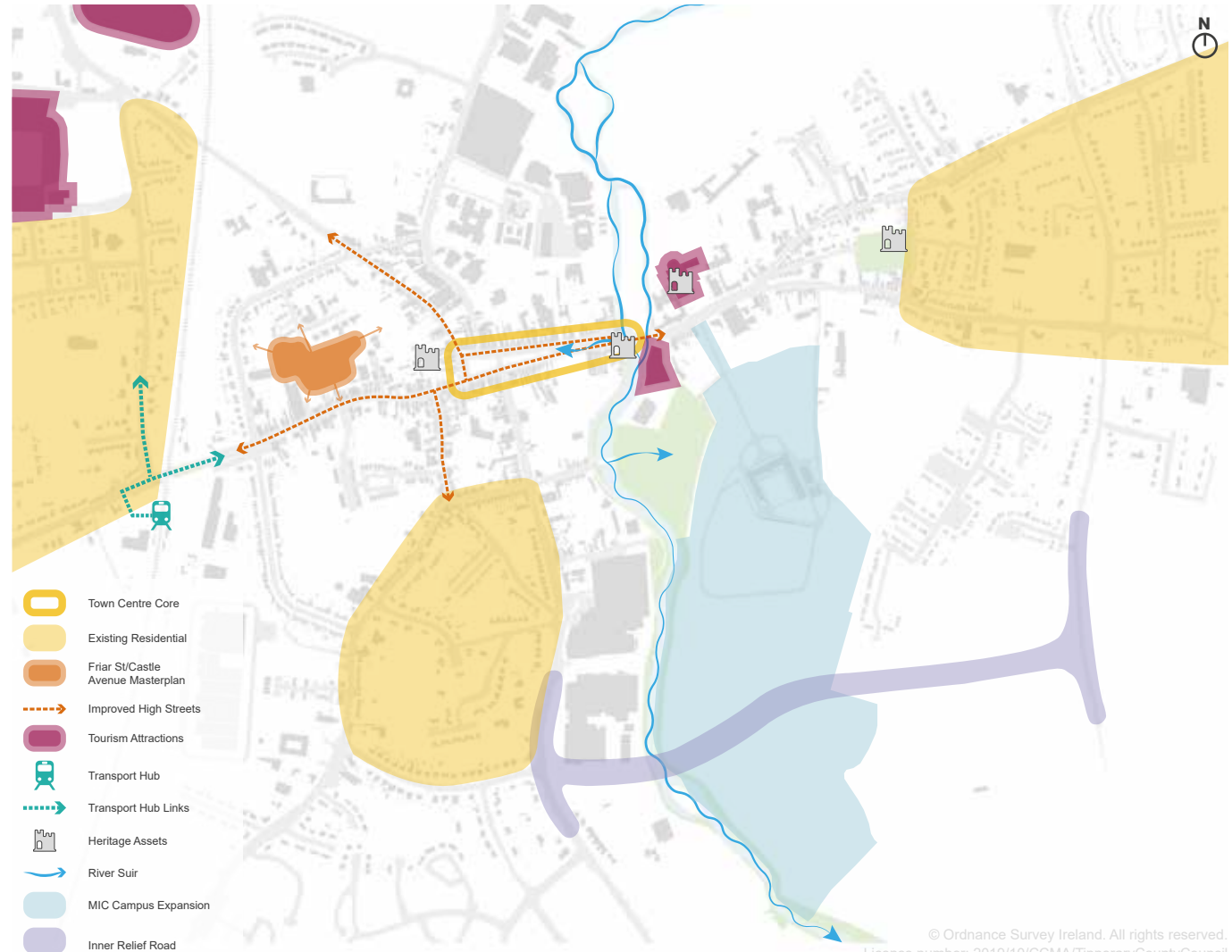
| Objective | Project | Timeframe |
|--|---|-----------------------------|
| <i>The Creation of a Compact, Low-Carbon Climate Resilient Town</i> | Development of Key Strategic Regeneration Areas | Sort, medium, and long term |
| | Develop Masterplan for Friar Street/Castle Avenue | Short term |
| | Develop Masterplan for St Patrick's College | Short to medium term |
| | Thurles as a Sustainable Community | Short to medium term |
| <i>The Creation of a Vibrant and Living Town Centre</i> | Vacant Property Strategy | Short term |
| | Homes on the High Street | Short to medium term |
| | Pop-Up Shops | Short term |
| | Thurles Market Quarter | Short term |
| | Public Realm Design Guide | Short to medium term |
| | Purple Flag Status | Short to medium term |

| Objective | Project | Timeframe |
|--|--|------------------------------|
| <i>The Creation of a Vibrant and Living Town Centre (continued)</i> | Guidelines in Response to Covid-19 | Short term |
| | Thurles Street Art | Short term |
| <i>The Delivery of a Connected Town & Enhanced Public Realm</i> | Local Transport Plan | Short, medium and long term |
| | Gateway Point Enhancement | Short to medium term |
| | Wayfinding and Interpretation Strategy | Medium term |
| <i>The Creation of a Destination Town</i> | Develop a Unique Offer Linked to the GAA | Short term |
| | Thurles as a Destination Town | Short to medium term |
| | Thurles Marketing | Short term |
| <i>The Exposure and Showcasing of Thurles Historic & Natural Heritage</i> | Community Growing Scheme | Short term |
| | Parklets | Short term |
| | Urban Tree Network | Short to medium term |
| | Architectural Research & Conservation Strategy | Short to medium term |
| | Archaeological Heritage Research Framework | Short, medium, and long term |
| | Town and River Walks | Medium to long term |
| | A Riverside Destination | Medium to long term |



Delivering the Vision Development of Key Strategic Regeneration Areas

An overview of the key strategic regeneration areas within Thurles, illustrating how the Town Centre relates and connects to other aspects of the Renewal Strategy.



| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|------------------------------------|---|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | <p>Enabling urban infill development</p> <p>Improving 'liveability' and quality of life, enabling greater densities of development to be achieved</p> <p>Building on existing assets and capacity to create critical mass and scale for regional growth</p> |
| NSO7 Enhanced Amenity and Heritage | <p>Encouraging greater Town Centre living, enhanced recreational spaces and attractiveness from a cultural, tourism and promotional perspective</p> |



Delivering the Vision Develop Masterplan for Friar Street/Castle Avenue

There is a large, vacant backland area between Friar Street and Castle Avenue which has scope to be re-developed as part of a mixed-use scheme masterplan.

Background

The RSES seeks a dynamic approach to land use within the footprint of existing settlements. Urban regeneration and infill development must be maximised to achieve the sustainable compact growth of settlements of all scales. The development of a masterplan for the Friar Street/Castle Avenue area would achieve this, and allowing for a higher density population in the Town Centre.

The Friar Street/Castle Avenue area is also ideally located immediately adjacent to the primary retail and commercial Town Centre and has excellent connectivity as a result of its close proximity to the train station.

Project Proposals

The design of a masterplan that encompasses the following objectives:

- Facilitate the delivery of a Low Carbon Neighbourhood, with high quality homes;
- Meet social/affordable housing requirements in the town;
- Meet the needs of any future demands for student housing in the Town Centre;
- Establish opportunities for a broad range of housing needs including young people and older members of the community;
- Maximise opportunities presented by the close proximity to the existing retail core and commercial Town Centre including the railway station; and
- Ensure scheme proposal are consistent with national strategic outcomes and meet compact growth principles.



Aerial view of the masterplan site location, in the context of the wider Thurles Town Centre. Source: Google Earth



Example of backland redevelopment in Westport, featuring new civic spaces. Source: The regeneration of Westport - Simon Wall, YouTube

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|------------------------------------|---|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | <p>Enabling urban infill development</p> <p>Improving 'liveability' and quality of life, enabling greater densities of development to be achieved</p> <p>Building on existing assets and capacity to create critical mass and scale for regional growth</p> |
| NSO7 Enhanced Amenity and Heritage | <p>Encouraging greater Town Centre living, enhanced recreational spaces and attractiveness from a cultural, tourism and promotional perspective</p> |



Delivering the Vision Develop Masterplan for St Patrick's College

MIC is committed to continuous multi-annual capital investment to facilitate the future growth of MIC Thurles Campus, and has identified three primary needs for further development: teaching spaces, student residential accommodation and recreational facilities.

Background

MIC Thurles Campus is located close to the centre of Thurles Town Centre and the College is committed to integrating the Campus into the fabric of the town.

The College is committed to expanding the range of facilities which it offers and to allowing access to the campus for recreational purposes. This Plan supports the opportunities which the campus offers to become a “green lung” for the town while also supporting its continued expansion to provide a high quality third level educational facility.

Project Proposals

A Masterplan Study has been completed and proposes the following:

- The opening of the lands to the rear of the Campus;
- Construct new buildings at suitable locations within its grounds to accommodate additional international standard teaching spaces and the expansion of all the associated facilities required to provide students and staff with the resources they need;
- Construct additional blocks of student residential accommodation at appropriate locations within its grounds; and
- Enhance and expand the recreational facilities available on the Campus. In the same way as MIC has already forged a relationship with the Thurles Leisure Centre, it is the College's ambition that any new sports facilities are open and available to the population of Thurles. While public access to the existing facilities are limited due to the present restricted access to the Campus, the proposed link road will allow much improved access.

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|--|--|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | <p>Enabling urban infill development</p> <p>Enabling greater densities</p> <p>Building on existing assets</p> <p>Ensuring transition to more sustainable modes of travel</p> |
| NSO10 Access to Quality Childcare, Education and Health Services | <p>Expand and consolidate third-level facilities at locations where this will further strengthen capacity</p> |



Existing layout of the MIC Campus Thurles. Source: MIC Masterplan Study.



Delivering the Vision Thurles as a Sustainable Energy Community

The development of Thurles as a Sustainable Energy Community would enable a collaborative community led approach to drive the transition of the town to a low carbon community and economy.

Background

Climate Action and the Low-Carbon Energy Transition were identified as key issues and priorities for the community of Thurles during the first round of consultation. The establishment of a Sustainable Energy Community will build on this momentum and facilitate the cross-sectional community approach to decarbonisation with the town, creation of economic opportunity and enhancing quality of life for residents.

The aim of the network is to encourage and support a national movement in every part of the country. An SEC can include a range of different energy users in the community such as homeowners, sports clubs, community centres, local businesses and churches.

Project Proposals

To develop a community-led plan and network to support the transition of Thurles Town to a low-carbon society:

- Seek to establish a Sustainable Communities Committee by determining interest in the project across the various sectors and community organisations in Thurles;
- Develop a community charter and prepare an Energy Masterplan and audit of energy use/demand across the town. This Plan will look at how energy use can be addressed in a sustainable way;
- Prepare Energy Audits for Community Buildings etc. and identify potential energy efficiency projects;
- Work within the network to provide awareness training with the town; and,
- Seek opportunities to develop new smart technologies across the town and as part of community led projects.

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|--|---|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | Ensure transition to more sustainable modes of travel and energy consumption within an urban context |
| NSO8 Transition to a Low Carbon and Climate Resilience Society | Strengthen energy security and resilience Consideration of carbon neutral electricity generation |
| NSO9 Sustainable Management of Water and other Environmental Resources | Improve sustainable drainage and reduce the risk of flooding in the urban environment |



Templederry Community Energy Wind Farm, Tipperary. Source: Tipperary Energy Agency



The Iona Heat Network, Scotland, serves the island of Iona from a shared ground source heat network. The new system will initially save over 150 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year. Source: Sustainables Scotland



Delivering the Vision Vacant Property Strategy

A suite of measures is proposed to stimulate demand, increase footfall and reverse the current trend in high vacancy rates.

Background

With a change in working patterns, connectivity and shopping habits, high streets in towns face the dual challenge of decreasing footfall and reduced demand. In addition, analysis reveals that there is also a declining residential population base, with families and individuals moving out of the Town Centre.

Project Proposals

A suite of measures is proposed:

- **Business Improvement District (BID):** TCC, Thurles Town Centre Forum, and the Chamber of Commerce to determine collectively, the business interest, leadership and resources to establish momentum for either a formal or informal structure of incentives such as a Business Improvement District (BID) (or a town-scale equivalent) applicable to the Town Centre area;
- **Vacant Building Prospectus:** Establish database of properties, including details of; permitted/established use, retail and/or residential floor space, services, parking, rates applicable;
- **Vacant Property Working Group:** TCC to put in place a working group of housing, planning and engineering staff to look at applying and promoting a national scheme to bring housing back into use. TCC will work on a collaborative basis with town centre groups to apply measures and initiatives;
- **Homes on the High Street:** Seek to re-purpose vacant units into homes. This is explored in a separate project;
- **Shopfront/Paint Scheme:** TCC will continue to run this scheme, subject to resources, to enhance the

appearance of retail and commercial premises in the Town Centre, building on the initiative already undertaken on Croke Street and Friar Street.



Tholsel Street, Carlingford, where International Fund for Ireland (IFI) funding was used for the redevelopment of the formerly-vacant Tholsel Street. Source: Irelandisbeautiful.com

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|------------------------------------|--|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | <p>Enabling urban infill development</p> <p>Improving 'liveability' and quality of life, enabling greater densities of development to be achieved</p> <p>Encouraging economic development and job creation</p> <p>Building on existing assets and capacity to create critical mass and scale for regional growth</p> |
| NSO7 Enhanced Amenity and Heritage | <p>Encouraging greater Town Centre living, enhanced recreational spaces and attractiveness from a cultural, tourism and promotional perspective</p> |



Delivering the Vision Homes on the High Street

While there is an important role for a healthy and vibrant retail offer within Town Centres, there also needs to be a focus on drawing people, and their spending power, to the high street in other ways. Improving the residential offer in and around the Town Centre is arguably the catalyst to doing this.

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|------------------------------------|---|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | <p>Enabling urban infill development</p> <p>Improving 'liveability' and quality of life, enabling greater densities of development to be achieved</p> <p>Building on existing assets and capacity to create critical mass</p> |
| NSO7 Enhanced Amenity and Heritage | Encouraging greater Town Centre living |

Background

Revitalising Thurles' high streets through well planned and designed residential units could help rejuvenate the Town Centre. Changing consumer behaviour, reduced footfall, and the departure of some major retailers have all contributed to a big change in the Town Centre, with an increase in vacant properties. A greater diversity of uses, including a move away from retail and the introduction of more housing would help to increase footfall and stimulate demand. The expansion of residential uses into Town Centres requires careful consideration to ensure the creation of desirable and liveable places, and must go hand-in-hand with a placemaking strategy.

There are five main intervention types when it comes to introducing homes to the high street:

- Refurbishment of existing buildings: upgrade of finishes to an existing unit - painting, carpets, fire proofing, etc;
- Conversion to residential use: rearrangement of internal partitions, structural work, potentially new stairwell, new windows or external doors;
- Extension to existing buildings: Creation of new structure and accommodation above, to the side or rear of the existing high street building; and
- New builds.

Project Proposals

As a starting point for this project, a pilot is proposed where an existing Town Centre vacant unit is converted into a residential dwelling.



The Georgian Neighbourhood, Limerick - there has been increasing uptake of these vacant properties as residential in recent times. Source: Limerick.ie



Delivering the Vision Pop-Up Shops

The vacant units within Thurles would make an ideal location for pop-up shops and activities, helping to stimulate demand within the Town Centre and generate footfall.

Background

A pop-up shop is a short-term, temporary retail space.

Pop-up shops are a regular feature in many Town Centres these days, especially during busy times such as the run up to Christmas. Pop-up shops are a lower cost option for brands, artists, designers and makers to advertise and sell their goods and services.

Project Proposals

Based on the Dún Laoghaire County Council model, an initiative should first of all be set-up encouraging local landlords to make their vacant buildings available for rent.

An awareness and information campaign should then follow, providing guidelines on pop-up shop requirements and characteristics, before expressions of interest are requested from local enterprises.

With the large, local student population and strong presence of Third Level Institutions within the Town Centre, there is also scope for links to be made between a pop-up shop and students and graduates to use in support of enterprising and entrepreneurial initiatives.

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|--|---|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | <p>Encouraging economic development and job creation</p> <p>Building on existing assets and capacity to create critical mass and scale for regional growth</p> <p>Encouraging and attract entrepreneurship and innovation</p> |
| NSO5 A Strong Economy Supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills | Supporting entrepreneurialism |



Dún Laoghaire County Council has a dedicated pop-up shop initiative. The main aims of the Dún Laoghaire initiative are to reduce the visual impact of empty property in the Town Centre, increase footfall in the town, create publicity for the area. Source: Eden Project Communities



The Hallam pop-up shop provides a fantastic venue for students and graduates to use in support of enterprising and entrepreneurial initiatives. With three Third Level Institutions based in Sheffield city centre, the initiative capitalises on the large student population. Source: Sheffield Winter Gardens



Delivering the Vision Thurles Market Quarter

The establishment of a flexible multi-use space, which provides for regular events such as exercise classes, matchday gatherings, markets and craft fairs, would help to enhance the sense of place in Thurles, as well as the local cultural tradition.

Background

Thurles is a historic market town with a diverse and expanding range of functions. Its student population is steadily increasing with plans to further expand the St. Patrick's MIC campus. Thurles regularly sees large influxes of people on match days and for events and concerts such as Féile, when visitors spill onto the streets pre and post the main events. This proposal seeks to provide a town centre space that can accommodate a multitude of functions to meet the many needs of this diverse town centre.

The agricultural building and car-park situated between St. Patrick's College and the Source Arts Centre has been identified as a possible location to develop a part-indoor/part-outdoor venue that could accommodate student events, markets, craft fairs, exercise classes, match day events, etc.

Along with creating a unique town centre venue, the proposal provides an opportunity improve links from the town centre to the park; to highlight the architecture of St. Patrick's College and to create an inviting public space for visitors and the community of Thurles.

Project Proposals

Provide a multi-functional town centre venue to meet the diverse and changing needs of Thurles.



Illustration of the proposed Thurles Market Quarter. Source: Tipperary County Council / EML Architects



Milk Market, Limerick, provides a centralised location for local producers, and Limerick residents and visitors with access to a wide variety of fresh, local and in-season products. Source: Tipperary County Council

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | Encouraging economic development and job creation Building on existing assets |
| NSO7 Enhanced Amenities and Heritage | Enhancing recreational spaces and attractiveness from a cultural, tourism and promotional perspective |

Delivering the Vision Public Realm Design Guide

The delivery of a public realm design guide, prioritising accessibility for all and age-friendly design, would provide a framework for all future development within the Town Centre, and build on the proposals already adopted within the Liberty Square Enhancement Scheme.

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | Building on existing assets Enhancing the attractiveness, viability and vibrancy of smaller towns |
| NSO7 Enhanced Amenities and Heritage | Enhancing recreational spaces and attractiveness from a cultural, tourism and promotional perspective |

Background

Thurles Town Centre will see a major transformation in its public realm in the coming years through the delivery of the Liberty Square Enhancement Project. This scheme will provide a palette of high quality material and street furniture which will establish common themes for future development across the town.

The next step will be to build on this transformative work and showcase Thurles' strong urban grain and framework of historic landmarks through a consistent public realm - facilitated by a design guide.

A public realm design guide would establish rules for building frontages and advertisements, and create consistency amongst street furniture, paving materials, and lighting. Accessibility for all and age-friendly design should be two guiding principles and inform footpath widths, the provision of rest places and seating opportunities, crossing points, and dropped kerbs. The maintenance of good shop fronts and the encouragement of a high quality and consistent public realm is vital to the improvement and legibility of an area.

Project Proposals

A suite of measures are proposed for inclusion within the design guide, all of which would take a starting point of reference from the Liberty Square proposals:

- A phased surfacing strategy which identifies a hierarchy of material quality throughout the Town Centre;
- A street furniture palette, with consistency of style and placement through a co-ordinated approach;
- A lighting strategy for the town, including key historic

buildings, to enhance the sense of place and ambience and to assist with wayfinding;

- Facilitate an overall street 'decluttering' exercise, with the removal of unnecessary signage, and the undergrounding of overhead wires and cables; and
- A shop front colour strategy, highlighting the best of Thurles' colour heritage and equipping building owners with a decision making tool with regards to colour selection. Reference should be made to, 'Liberty Square Thurles - A Colour Study (URS).'

The public realm design guide should also link with the proposed work undertaken within the Architectural Research Framework and Architectural Conservation Strategy projects.



Ballyshannon Design Guide: The guide highlights areas of distinctive character and other qualities valued in the town; and assists in the task of maintaining, repairing and restoring existing buildings. Source: Ballyshannon Design Guide



Delivering the Vision Purple Flag Status

The Purple Flag scheme has been set up to establish national standards and raise the image of Town Centres at night. It represents a best-in-class standard for towns and cities that provide a vibrant and safe night time experience to residents and visitors.

Background

The Purple Flag Initiative is an international accreditation scheme that rewards towns for achieving excellence in their night time economy. It represents a best-in-class standard for towns and cities that provide a vibrant and safe night time experience to residents and visitors.

There are multiple benefits associated with the achievement of a Purple Flag Award. These include an improved profile and image for an area, increased economic activity, increased tourism and improved safety. The process can also help foster new partnerships between the public and private sectors, as well as help drive a mixed-use economy.

As of 2018, 18 towns across Ireland have achieved a Purple Flag, with a total of 70 awarded across the UK and Ireland.

The Purple Flag award may not be plausible for a town of Thurles' scale; however, reviewing the town resources through the Purple Flag framework would be a useful exercise, without applying to get the award.

Project Proposals

Working with The Source Arts Centre, and local live music venues, an initial identification of opportunities should be sought.

This project could also link with the identification of a flexible event space for the project 'Town Centre Regeneration Opportunities', - which could be considered for outdoor music events.



The Source, night-time venue in Thurles. Source: Mcculloughmulvin Architects



Purple Flag in Sligo marks the town as one whose night time economy is enjoyable, entertaining, diverse and safe. Winning the award has proven a positive impact on the town, including a raised profile and an improved public image. Source: Sligo BID

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | Building on existing assets Enhancing the attractiveness, viability and vibrancy of smaller towns |
| NSO7 Enhanced Amenities and Heritage | Enhancing attractiveness from a cultural, tourism and promotional perspective |

Delivering the Vision Guidelines in Response to Covid-19

The application of national guidelines tailored to Thurles Town Centre will be required, to find a balance between optimising activities and keeping people safe.

Background

The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic reach far beyond those infected with the virus. Design guidelines, or a 'tool kit', will be required to provide people with new secure and efficient resources, which review Thurles' built environment and public realm.

Project Proposals

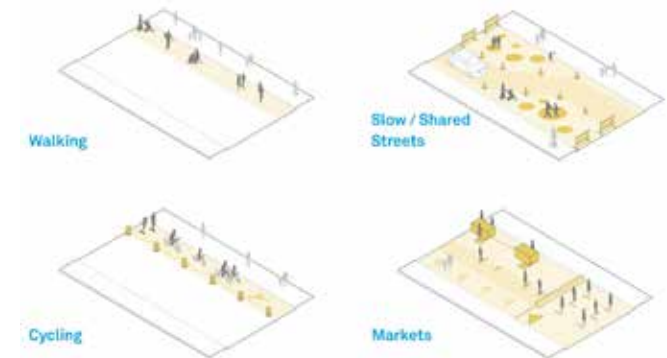
The tool kit should act as an 'audit' or 'checklist', ensuring the appropriate redesign and adaptation of spaces both during the Covid-19 crisis and in the recovery, bringing together recognised guidance and best practise design principles. A number of responses are already starting to be published around the world.

The tool kit should include all core public spaces, and cover a series of standards for each within. A non-exclusive list includes: high streets, parks, burial grounds, car parks, markets, outdoor dining, event spaces, and road crossings.

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|----------------------------------|---|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | <p>Ensure transition to more sustainable modes of travel</p> <p>Enhance the attractiveness, viability and vibrancy of smaller towns</p> |



Covid-19 Secure: Safer Public Places - Urban Centres and Green spaces (HM Government, UK, 2020) - this publication is a guidance document focusing on the design principles for safer urban centres and green spaces. Source: HM Government, UK



Streets for Pandemic Response & Recovery (NATCO, North American cities) This resource aggregates and synthesizes emerging practices in transportation and street design in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Source: NACTO



Delivering the Vision Thurles Street Art

Community initiatives to secure additional public art projects would utilise Thurles' artistic and creative culture, and build a distinct sense of place within the town.

Background

Existing murals art pieces are located throughout the town centre and contribute positively to the streetscape. This project aims to build on this, by exploring opportunities for public art throughout the town centre and providing support to street art projects.

Project Proposals

- The establishment of a Thurles Street Art working group.
- A 'crowdfunding' project to help secure additional public art projects.
- A establishment of a set of parameters for opportunity sites for potential artwork. This will consider site location, and is to be reviewed further following site investigation with all potential locations subject to consultation.



Baker Street mural. Source: Thurles Hour



Mural examples. Source: The Mid-America Mural Project



Barrett's GAA mural, Thurles Source: Balls.ie



Ducie Street, Manchester Source: TheGuardian.com

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | Enhancing the attractiveness, viability and vibrancy of smaller towns |
| NSO7 Enhanced Amenities and Heritage | Enhancing attractiveness from a cultural, tourism and promotional perspective |

Delivering the Vision Local Transport Plan

As a Key Town, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region (RSES) requires the preparation of a Local Transport Plan (LTP).



| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | Ensuring transition to more sustainable modes of travel |
| NSO2 Enhanced Regional Accessibility | Maintaining the strategic capacity of the national roads network Enabling more effective traffic management Strengthening public transport connectivity |
| NSO4 Sustainable Mobility | Expanding attractive public transport alternatives to car transport to reduce congestion and emissions Developing a comprehensive network of safe cycling routes |

Background

The primary objective of an LTP is to make sure that movement and accessibility of all forms, across all modes of transport, is considered as a key component in the development of areas at a local level. LTPs give local expression to the regional-level transport strategy and provide for local implementation of national-level land-use and transport policies.

The LTP objectives should align with the National Planning Framework's objective for Sustainable Mobility by:

- Maximising access to and encouraging use of public transport, cycling and walking; and
- Developing sustainable urban and rural settlement patterns and communities to reduce distance from education, employment, services and leisure facilities and to make better use of existing and future investments in public services, including public transport.

Project Proposals

The LTP will include a detailed demand analysis to identify travel patterns, modes of transport and reasons for travel so that an informed approach to modal shift can progress.

The Plan will consider means by which more sustainable travel practices can be adopted for certain journeys thereby reducing the overall number of vehicles on the roads. The LTP will plan for all modes of transport and will place a particular emphasis on the promotion of:

- Active travel;
- Integrated land use and transport planning;
- Public transport;

- Freight consolidation; and,
- Parking strategy.

The LTP will place a focus on the large schools, colleges and employers in Thurles in a targeted approach to modal shift. Mobility management planning for colleges and employers and the Green Schools programme will be promoted in combination with a suite of infrastructural and public realm proposals.



Attractive, green pedestrian links in Sheffield, UK. Source: Sheffield Telegraph



E-scooter hire Source: TheTimes.co.uk



Delivering the Vision Gateway Point Enhancement

The value of first impressions at gateway locations into Thurles must not be overlooked, particularly in an economy where tourism is likely to play an increasingly central role.

Background

The design and maintenance of a public space at an arrival point is important.

Visitors must be made to feel welcome and be actively encouraged to explore and spend time within the town – which will be achieved through enhancing the arrival experience at key gateway points.

This includes Cathedral Street, and the area between the railway station and Friar Street. The currently vacant building at the Friar Street junction was formerly home to Carr's licensed premises, and included a striking GAA mural. It has now been painted over.

Project Proposals

Tipperary County Council have already proposed an upgrade scheme at the Friar Street / Matthew Avenue junction. A review of this gateway point should be prioritised as the first location to be reviewed to ensure that any future development takes into consideration the gateway proposals.

A design should be developed which looks to both welcome visitors to Thurles and actively encourage them to explore the town, as well as form part of an overarching wayfinding strategy.

Gateway point enhancements should ideally feature the following public realm interventions:

- The widening of footpaths;
- The introduction of street trees, ornamental shrub planting, and planted window boxes;
- Seating opportunities and shop active frontages;

- Pedestrian crossings and a sense of 'pedestrian priority';
- Sculpture or art, referencing Thurles' culture and history; and
- Appropriate town-branded signage, directing visitors into town and encouraging them to actively explore, and linking with the town's themes and heritage brand.



A gateway space leading into Hebden Bridge town centre, UK. The area has recently been enhanced and features: pedestrian priority, through the road surface treatment; sculpture relating to the town's heritage; wayfinding; trees and planted window boxes; and shop active frontages.

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | Enhancing the attractiveness, viability and vibrancy of smaller towns |
| NSO7 Enhanced Amenities and Heritage | Enhancing attractiveness from a cultural, tourism and promotional perspective |



Illustration showing the potential gateway enhancements at the Friar Street / Matthew Avenue junction



Delivering the Vision Wayfinding and Interpretation Strategy

Improving wayfinding and interpretation within the Town Centre, and therefore revealing the history of Thurles, will improve the standing of the town as a place of cultural history and architectural heritage.

Background

The baseline review revealed that despite Thurles having a strong framework of landmarks, which span above the building horizon line and assist with visual orientation, there is very little suitable pedestrian signage and interpretation within the town for residents and visitors.

This proposal seeks to improve the signage and interpretation provision within the Town Centre, to ensure that visitors fully appreciate when navigating the streetscape all that the town has to offer.

Project Proposals

The new interpretation media should be focused on the strong underlying stories and themes relating to Thurles, and relate to the GAA, the architecture, and historical links and folklore. This should include the Butler legacy and architectural heritage and link with and build-upon the integrated 'Butler Trail' tourism already connected through Carrick-on-Suir, Clonmel and Cahir.

Specific interventions should include:

- Directional finger post signage should be introduced at key locations;
- Gateway signage or banners on the approach roads into Thurles, including along the N75, R503, and northbound and southbound N62;
- Interpretation at ground level, in the form of text, detail and graphic inlays; and
- Introduce consistency between online mapping/apps, leaflet maps and on-the-ground interpretation boards consistent.

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | Building on existing assets |
| NSO7 Enhanced Amenities and Heritage | <p>Enhancing attractiveness from a cultural, tourism and promotional perspective</p> <p>Investing in and enable access to recreational facilities, including trails networks, designed and delivered with a strong emphasis on conservation</p> |

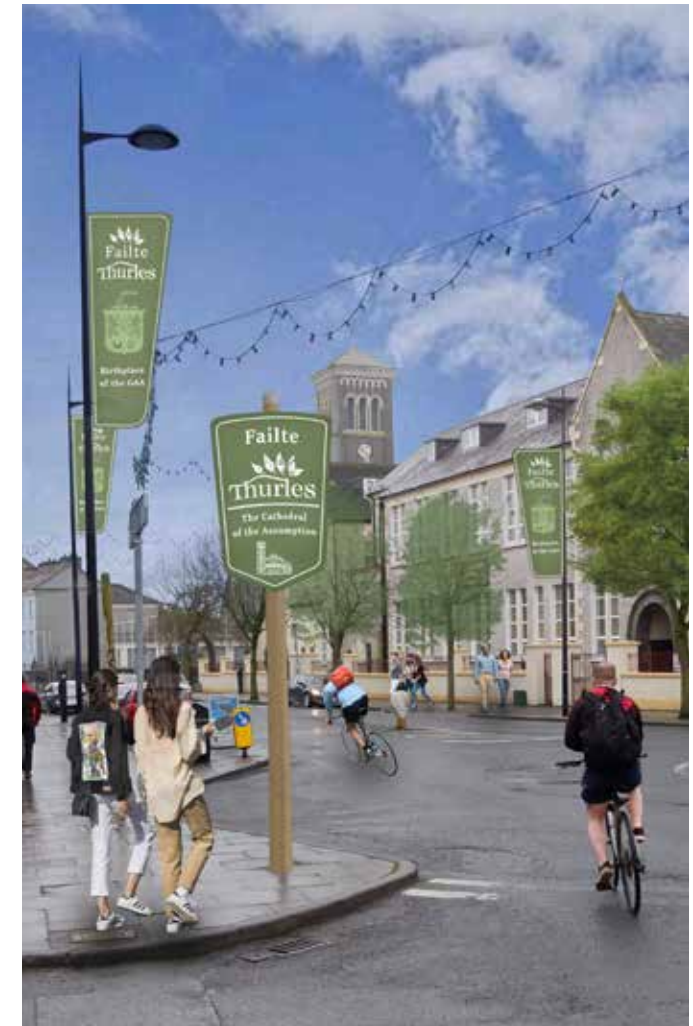


Illustration showing 'Butler Trail' style signage on Cathedral Street



Delivering the Vision Develop a Unique Offer Linked to the GAA

The GAA has undeniably brought economic benefits to Thurles, however greater potential exists for the GAA to play a more central role in showcasing the town's sporting heritage and capitalising on Thurles' unique GAA offer.

Background

The main objective is to showcase the town's sporting heritage and capitalise on Thurles' unique GAA offering, in combination with the regular influx of GAA fans on match days. The proposals are targeted at existing GAA fans, encouraging them to visit the Town Centre and stay longer during match days, as well as tourists looking for a 'true Irish experience.'

Project Proposals

There are numerous opportunities linked to this project:

- A GAA walking trail linking all of Thurles' GAA assets, and supported by an online app and map, helping to guide people along the trail. The interpretation will provide visitors information on the history and key stories related to the GAA. Guided tours could link with match days and during school holidays;
- The introduction of additional, iconic GAA murals and artwork to help add a sense of place and capitalise on those 'Instagram' moments around the town. This should include prominent 'gateway' locations into the town;
- The revival of the Lár na Páirce GAA Museum;
- The introduction of brown tourist destination signage, on surrounding motorways and other main roads to help introduce Thurles as a place of interest with regards to the GAA; and
- Co-ordinate tourist packages for match weekends. This could include a match ticket, an overnight stay at the Hayes Hotel, and a walking guided tour of the town's features, with packages available through Fáilte Ireland.

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | Building on existing assets |
| NSO7 Enhanced Amenities and Heritage | Enhancing attractiveness from a cultural, tourism and promotional perspective |



Few areas better demonstrate the transformation of an area through sport than East Manchester. Manchester City Football Club's Etihad Stadium has acted, and still acts, as the beacon of the economic transformation of East Manchester, a symbol of change and improvement in the fortunes of the area. Source: Manchester Evening News



Cutting Room Square, an attractive public realm space and part of the overall regeneration within East Manchester. Source: VisitManchester.com



Illustration showing GAA heritage features within the Town Centre, and how they could potentially be linked by a walking trail - starting at the train station.

Delivering the Vision Thurles as a Destination Town

The tourism potential in Thurles has yet to be fully uncovered. Its location and ease of access paired with its hotel offering makes it an ideal base for tourists to dwell whilst exploring all that Tipperary has to offer.

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | Building on existing assets |
| NSO7 Enhanced Amenities and Heritage | Enhancing attractiveness from a cultural, tourism and promotional perspective |

Background

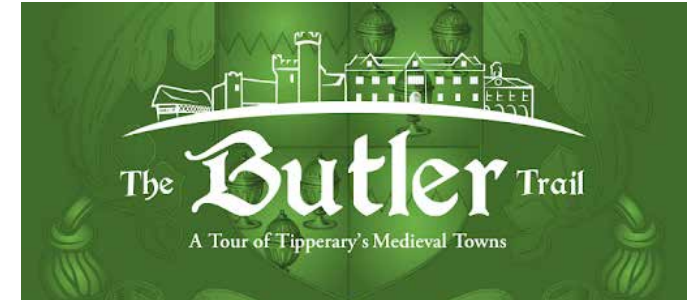
Thurles has the potential to capitalise on existing tourism destinations within Tipperary by creating linkages to existing attractions and marketing tourism packages that incorporate Thurles; an example of this is the already established Butler Trail that traces the aristocratic Butler family's journey through Tipperary for five centuries. The trail currently links Cahir, Clonmel, Carrick-on-Suir and Roscrea but can be further developed to include Thurles.

The Rock of Cashel, which is approximately 20km from Thurles, welcomes c. 400,000 visitors yearly. Thurles could take opportunity from this attraction by encouraging tourists to travel to Thurles by rail, stay in one of the hotels or B&Bs and provide a shuttle bus to the Rock of Cashel. There is opportunity also to examine linkages between the two towns by Blue and Greenway.

This proposal seeks to form links with other towns and tourism assets within Tipperary so that a comprehensive tourism offering can be provided within the County.

Project Proposals

- Expand upon the Butler Trail to include Thurles;
- Explore options for a development of blue and green infrastructure and outdoor activities;
- Explore options for development of 'hero' sport tourism experiences; and
- Marketing of tourist packages that allow for Thurles as a base to explore Tipperary.



The Butler Trail: a journey through time around Cahir, Clonmel and Carrick-on-Suir in the south-east of Tipperary. It reveals the influence and impact the Butler family dynasty had on the physical, social and economic fabric of these Tipperary towns and communities, and the legacy they left behind. Source: Tipperary.com



Delivering the Vision Thurles Marketing - The Heart of Our Town

The Heart of Our Town is a campaign promoting local business in Thurles, and proving that our town is very much on the map and open for business. Keeping the heart of a town pumping is what Thurles does best!

Background

Thurles Municipal District have been working with the local Town Forum to develop a “shop local” campaign to try to assist local businesses to get back on track post COVID-19.

The campaign is aimed at encouraging consumers to shop local and is taking a new approach to the usual ‘shop local’ theme - one that is specific to the town, known as “Heart of our Town”.

Project Proposals

The campaign will be rolled out in the coming weeks/months and will inform consumers that local businesses in Thurles are very much “open for business”. A targeted social media campaign will promote the initiative on existing social media platforms.

The campaign will:

- ‘Personalise’ our retailers - telling their stories - the aim being to get local consumers to think of them and their business before shopping elsewhere;
- Educate- why shop local?
- Give background history of the businesses, many of whom have been trading in the towns for many years & helped to shape & develop the towns as they are today.
- Encourage loyalty to retailers that have supported local schools, clubs etc over the years.

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | Building on existing assets |
| NSO7 Enhanced Amenities and Heritage | Enhancing attractiveness from a cultural, tourism and promotional perspective |



'The Heart of Our TOWN' marketing brochure visuals

Delivering the Vision Community Growing Scheme

Community growing schemes can enable social cohesion and encourage neighbourhood interactions, improving people’s mental health and their sense of belonging. Furthermore, growing food can encourage healthy, sustainable eating practices whilst generating civic pride in an area.

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | Enhancing the attractiveness, viability and vibrancy of smaller towns |
| NSO7 Enhanced Amenities and Heritage | Supporting transformational public realm initiatives to give Town Centre areas back to citizens Enhancing recreational spaces and attractiveness |

Background

Growing food can also encourage healthy, sustainable eating practices and encourage engagement with the natural environment. Furthermore, social prescribing or ‘green prescribing’, centred around food growing, is being routinely used by the health and social care services as a way of promoting health and wellbeing.

Community growing schemes are spatially flexible and can take many forms. Vegetables, fruiting trees, and pollinator-friendly herbs can all be grown - in pots, raised wooden planters, or directly into the earth. Temporary, or meanwhile, planters within a residential neighbourhood are a good way to begin a community growing initiative, if a permanent space is not immediately available. This is also a good way to help connect with other people in the area, by establishing a doorstep opportunity for residents. Disused strips of land at the edges of public parks, school playing fields, or rail lines, and run-down or underused spaces are other commonly utilised, more permanent locations.

Project Proposals

An initial call-out for interested individuals keen to initiate a group should be the starting point.

The identification of suitable areas for the community growing scheme, for example disused strips of land around green spaces, the river, and building curtilages, should then be identified and permission discussed with the landowners.



Formerly a commercial plant nursery, the Woodbank Community Food Hub is an urban garden that joins up inclusive community gardening with commercial organic food production.



The Edible Landscape Project (ELP), is a grassroots movement based in Westport and has developed a bottom-up approach to climate change and specifically how it relates to food. The project supports greening and gardening in urban spaces and enhances opportunities for community food growing. Source: The ELP



Delivering the Vision Parklets

Efforts should be made to reclaim the streets using pockets of greenery, through the creation of parklets. Existing underused street corners where hard paving dominates are prime examples of where this concept could make a significant difference to the street scene.

Background

The value of green infrastructure within the public realm is extensive: a high-quality public environment can have a significant impact on the economic life of urban centres big or small, and is therefore an essential part of any successful regeneration strategy.

The baseline review identified many opportunities to either enhance existing green infrastructure features or create new features at different scales of ambition and cost.

Parklets can take many forms. Many of the streets within the Town Centre are dominated by on-street parking, which could be given over to greening. Single parking spaces should be used to create usable pockets along streets where the spill out area from shops, cafes and restaurants could be improved. These can be both temporary or more permanent,

Project Proposals

A pilot, transforming a single parking bay to a temporary parklet with raised planters and seating, should form the first project.

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | Enhancing the attractiveness, viability and vibrancy of smaller towns |
| NSO7 Enhanced Amenities and Heritage | Supporting transformational public realm initiatives to give Town Centre areas back to citizens Enhancing recreational spaces and attractiveness |



The People's Parklet is the first long term, purpose built in Ireland and is a space for people to sit, relax and linger. As an amenity combining elements of seating, planting and bike parking, it offers an alternative experience of the city and the street. Source: Bench Space Cork



The parklet was built in 2017 to form part of the Shoreditch Low Emission Neighbourhood scheme. The space provides raised wooden planters with lush perennial planting and small multistem birches, as well as climbers which take advantage of the metal railings. The parklet is still in place and functioning today, primarily being used as a spill-out space for the adjacent cafes. Source: Meristem Design

Delivering the Vision Urban Tree Network

The extension of the green setting surrounding Thurles into the Town Centre through GI corridors would contribute towards establishing a high quality public realm environment, that is resilient to climate change.

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | Enhancing the attractiveness, viability and vibrancy of smaller towns |
| NSO7 Enhanced Amenities and Heritage | Supporting transformational public realm initiatives to give Town Centre areas back to citizens Enhancing recreational spaces and attractiveness |

Background

The Green & Blue Infrastructure Masterplan Roadmap for Tipperary Waterways identified the following short-term project for the Thurles: *Undertake a GI Audit and development of a GI strategy for Thurles to identify and enhance GI corridor connections within the town.*

Tree cover is important within any GI strategy. An urban tree network would improve air quality, reduce the heat island effect, provide flood mitigation by slowing the filtration of rainwater, and improve the town centre visual amenity.

There are opportunities to plant trees along the perimeters of the many existing green spaces within the town centre. This includes school grounds, sports fields, church yards, grass verges, the River Suir and the Town Park. There is also scope to retrofit trees along the town centre streets, in planted build-outs where footpath space is limited.

Project Proposals

- A GI Audit, identifying locations for urban tree planting.
- A town-wide campaign aimed at educating the community on the benefits of urban green infrastructure, and allaying fears of untidiness and slip hazards associated with fallen leaves should be the starting point for this project. This could involve a tree planting activity in the Town Park, followed by a talk, lead by a tree expert from, for example, The Tree Council Ireland or Crann Trees for Ireland. The whole community should be invited, with targeted invites sent to local schools and community groups.



Large hardscape areas and roads means that drainage infrastructure is often at or above capacity. Heavy downpours result in the system being overwhelmed resulting in flooding and associated pollution and damage. Greener Grangetown in Cardiff is a very interesting example of the successful retro installation of sustainable urban drainage system features into an existing urban streetscape. Retrofitting street trees, and, within an existing residential neighbourhood road. Source: GreenBlue Urban



As part of a strategy to improve the gateways into London, tree planting was required at points along the main roads into the capital. Due to the narrow footpaths and difficult nature of the established town environment, trees were planting along the centre of the road. Source: GreenBlue Urban



Illustration showing the introduction of street trees, and other public realm enhancements, to Slievenamon Road as part of the proposed Urban Tree Network project



Delivering the Vision Architectural Research & Conservation Strategy

A detailed understanding of the Town Centre fabric, built, and social environment will help to inform future regeneration proposals and stimulate investment in the built environment.

Background

Thurles historical development is visible throughout the town; it contributes to its unique character and provides opportunities for tourism, cultural and commercial regeneration.

This project is based on the recommendations included within the report contained in Appendix 2 'Assessment of Architectural Heritage: Historical Development ACA Appraisal'. This project will first seek to gain a full understanding of the built environment, including the existing Architectural Conservation Areas (ACA), and outline the significances of the town – historic; architectural; archaeological and scientific; social and economic. The project will then build on this through the delivery of a Conservation Strategy.

Project Proposals

- Prepare a Historical Study of the Town to provide a detailed understanding of landmark properties, architectural history etc;
- Review the ACA as part of the County Development Plan Process to consider areas of ecclesiastical heritage importance to the town;
- Prepare Architectural Character Statements for the ACA to provide a detailed understanding of the historical streetscape and features to assist property owners in the maintenance of properties;
- Seek funding opportunities to support the up-keep and re-purposing of heritage properties; and
- Promote the built heritage by running training events, talks etc.

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | Building on existing assets |
| NSO7 Enhanced Amenities and Heritage | Conserving, managing and presenting our heritage |



Liberty Square - the focus of ACA 1: Liberty Square / Westgate / Friar Street, as outlined within the Thurles and Environs Development Plan 2009–2015. Source: Tipperary County Council



Black Castle. Source: Premier Properties



Delivering the Vision Archaeological Heritage Research Framework

A more comprehensive understanding of the archaeological heritage of Thurles is required in order to inform subsequent actions. This includes the development of archaeological assets within the town, such as the Black Castle, and appropriate interpretation and wayfinding.

Background

Permitted developments within the Historic Town core of Thurles generally require archaeological investigation under National Monuments legislation, the various Planning and Development Acts, and Tipperary County Council planning policies and objectives. Archaeological investigations can reveal this information best if strategically planned. Further detail relating to this explanation is included in Appendix 3.

The aim is to design and draft an archaeological research strategy and framework to inform all subsequent archaeological excavations and investigations in the town.

The key aim, and benefit, is an enhanced understanding of the town's past and heritage which will contribute to a better sense of place/identity, which in turn has the potential to contribute to urban renewal and tourism potential etc. Additional aims include the following:

- Identify the major archaeological and historical research questions for Thurles town;
- Pinpoint significant sites and locations where these questions can be addressed;
- Identify site-specific strategies which would maximise the information potential at key sites;
- Allow for the systematic collation and synthesis of the results from all archaeological investigations to date through the implementation of the strategy and the work of a Research Strategy Steering Group; and
- Create a database where results from future investigations can be added.

Project Proposals

This project has three proposed phases:

Phase 1:

- Create a GIS database mapping significant sites and areas;
- Identify priorities and potential;
- Synopsis and overview of Thurles through analysis of previous archaeological works etc.; and
- Development of research strategy

Phase 2:

- Publication of heritage environment database;
- Implementation of research strategy; and
- Creation of dedicated Project Steering Group to oversee

Phase 3:

- Publication of progress reports and re-evaluation of data.

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | Building on existing assets |
| NSO7 Enhanced Amenities and Heritage | Conserving, managing and presenting our heritage Opening up our heritage estates to public access |



Heritage-led regeneration - Youghal Medieval Festival. Source: Ring of Cork



Delivering the Vision Town and River Walks

The development of a connected network of walking trails would act as a tourism feature, as well as a recreational facility for local people, and contribute towards establishing Thurles as a healthy and sustainable place to live.

Background

In 2018, Thurles Lions Club commissioned the, “*River Suir Walkway Thurles: Feasibility Study on the Potential to Upgrade and Extend the River Suir Walkway at Thurles,*” produced by Future Analytics. Future Analytics undertook a feasibility study for the River Suir Walkway upgrade and extension in order to realise the potential of the River Suir as an amenity and tourism resource for both the town of Thurles and for nearby communities, providing residents and visitors with the experience of walking next to the river. The report identified a three-phase walking trail along the River Suir, and prioritised the ‘Thurles Town Loop Walk’ as the first phase to be completed, with the starting point of the trail located within the existing Thurles Town Park. ‘Thurles to Holycross’ was identified as phase 2, and ‘Thurles to Loughmore’ as phase 3.

There was also strong support for the development of such recreational routes at the community workshop, and a number of potential new routes locations (along existing field boundaries, playing fields, and other green spaces) were tabled.

Project Proposals

The River Suir Walkway report included a phasing and implementation plan. Regardless of which walking trail is prioritised for implementation first, engagement with landowners would be required initially in order to determine the feasibility and routing of the walking trails. For the Thurles Town Loop Walk, this would also determine which side of the river the trail could run on. While a recommendation was made as to the optimum route, this would very much depend on landowner agreement.



Demonstrating the transformative effect of a walking and cycling route - the Waterford Greenway is routed along the former Dungarvan to Waterford railway line and is a hugely popular tourist destination. The route is part of EuroVelo, the European cycle route network, as well as featuring as one of the highlights of the tourism area branded ‘Ireland’s Ancient East’. Source: IAE.com

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|---|---|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | Building on existing assets Ensure transition to more sustainable modes of travel (walking, cycling) |
| NSO3 Strengthened Rural Economies & Communities | Invest in greenways, blueways and peatways as part of a nationally coordinated strategy |
| NSO5 Enhanced Amenities and Heritage | Focus on improving walking and cycling routes, including continuous greenway networks and targeted measures to enhance permeability and connectivity. |



Delivering the Vision A Riverside Destination

The provision of new riverside activities will help to activate the River Suir corridor.

Background

The development of Thurles Town Park has highlighted the potential of the river for recreational activities and as a tourism resource. The provision of new riverside activities will activate the spaces adjacent to the River, turn the town back towards the waterfront, and encourage appreciation and recreational enjoyment.

This project also builds on the recommendations within This proposal links the, “River Suir Walkway Thurles: Feasibility Study on the Potential to Upgrade and Extend the River Suir Walkway at Thurles (2018, Future Analytics).”

Project Proposals

- **Introduce seating opportunities** alongside the river in the Town Park and further along the River banks. This will enhance connectivity between the both visitors and the community with the River;
- **Provide timber platforms**, for fishing and informal seating and gathering;
- **Provide facilities for kayak access and egress** in the Town Park;
- **Complete an ecological assessment** of the river to enhance management and optimise the provision of habitat;
- **Introduce natural play opportunities** close to the riverside and encourage further integration between the River and the Town Park; and,
- Linking with the proposed wayfinding project, **introduce interpretation panels**, explaining the natural and historical heritage of the river.

| National Strategic Outcome Links | Alignment |
|---|---|
| NSO1 Compact Growth | Building on existing assets |
| NSO3 Strengthened Rural Economies & Communities | Invest in greenways, blueways and peatways as part of a nationally coordinated strategy |
| NSO5 Enhanced Amenities and Heritage | Focus on improving walking and cycling routes, including continuous greenway networks and targeted measures to enhance permeability and connectivity. |



Riverside seating opportunities, on the banks of the Saône River, France. Source: Landezine.



Riverside timber platforms, to provide connectivity and interaction with the river for activities such as fishing. Source: Landezine.



Appendix 1
Consultation Findings

Appendix 1: Consultation Findings First Round of Consultation

Local Elected Members Workshop

On 18th February 2020, Local Elected Members were briefed on the project and invited to provide initial feedback during a round-table discussion session. The briefing session included the initial feedback received to date from the ongoing online survey (which was in progress at the time, and had been online for 3 weeks).

Comments received from the Elected Members are summarised as follows:

- *“There is a negative attitude towards Thurles from the local community. This project should look to change this.*
- *There are issues on dereliction, and town centre new-uses are required. Retail needs to be promoted but new-uses are also required. Ways to get people back into the town are needed, to create a sense of vibrancy.*
- *The strategy outcomes need to focus on both short and long term; what can be done this year, as well as next year, as well as over the next 10 years.*
- *Thurles is extremely historic, has a very strong offering in terms of GAA and education. This should be capitalised on.*
- *If a masterplan is being created, it is important to ensure there are available funding streams.*
- *There is a severe lack of town centre office space. Retail units could be converted to office space, if the process was easier.*
- *GAA is a huge tourism opportunity. Recommend contacting the GAA. We should refer to Kilkenny as an example.*
- *Thurles was historically the European Town of Sport. This needs to be advertised and capitalised on.*

- *The River Suir and the two castles in the town centre are both underutilised. Fishing platforms and wheelchair-accessible areas could be developed along the River banks.*
- *Thurles is less than 2 hours from Dublin airport so a borderline commuter town, and also has excellent railway links. This should be capitalised on.”*

Online Survey

Built and natural environment

Representative comments raised within the online questionnaire include:

“The new Town Park is great but the ‘green space’ needs development. Could do with extra lighting near the exercise machines. It could also be expanded to include a walking track

Liberty Square needs more options for biodiversity enhancement and amenity use. More attractive trees planted in the town area with more well maintained park benches.

The lovely river walk could be made far more beautiful with very little effort.

There is a lack of seating town centre.

The ugly ESB poles are distracting.

It should be made easier and more affordable for business owners to be able to upkeep this business fronts properly. Sponsorship from paint suppliers, agreements with other local businesses paint suppliers, painters, people to power hose

green moss etc off shop fronts twice annually. This fee could be built into the rates paid so that shops fronts are cleaned properly twice annually.

It would be good to see the Square buildings painted, it’s a lovely town to walk around.

A covered pedestrian/outdoor area/seating would rejuvenate the town centre..

Landlords need to accountable for the state of their empty premises.”

Accessibility and travel

Representative comments raised within the onlinequestionnaire include::

“The public transport system is a mixed bag. Although the train station is very active and a great amenity for the town, the public transport system to/from other towns close to Thurles makes it is impossible to use public transport to get to work in Nenagh or Roscrea. This in turn affects the traffic situation.”

As a walker, Thurles has no place to walk except the busy streets. Could the river walk not be continued as far as the golf club.

Traffic at school time is unbearable.

The town needs a ring road.

Parking on Parnell Street is an issue for motorists trying to travel in both directions.

The town has poorly laid out pedestrian crossings.

Traffic in Liberty Square is dangerous particularly when HGV’s

pass through.

Cycle lanes in the busier more vehicle congested areas would be a huge help and encourage more people, especially the older generations, to get back on their bikes.

There are no designated safe and secure areas to lock bicycles in the town area to the best of my knowledge. With the advent of electric bicycles there should be a huge effort made to encourage people back onto two wheel transport, which has many benefits.

A number of local bus routes in the town would be very handy for the older generation servicing the town centre and shopping centre.

The location of the existing bus stop is very limiting (can really only take one bus at a time, therefore not allowing for interchange journeys) and makes it very difficult for buses to use. There should be a second bus stop at the top end of the square.”

Economy and Re-purposing Vacant Buildings

Representative comments raised within the online questionnaire include:

“Could empty buildings be used for pop up shops?

The reality is that we will never have a return to the number of businesses that were in the town. I believe that people should be encouraged to change business premises to living accommodation. If there’s a population in the town centre then business will follow.

Any buildings vacant in the town for more than 5 years should be purchased by local authority and demolished and

cleared. If there were clean sites it could create interest from developers even at a small scale.

Town Square units need to provide goods and services not offered by the multinational chains in the Shopping Centre. The following are but a few ideas: artisan bread shops, chocolatier, bicycle shops, PROPER coffee shops, craft butchers, wood turning, cheesemongers, delicatessen supplying local produce (see Tipperary food producers), shared units for cobblers and seamstress.

Regarding job opportunities, it is no secret that IT is the future. A state of the art business park close to the town centre would be ideal.

Turn empty shops into office space and online hubs.

When I come home from my work commute i.e. 6 or 7 in the evening there is no place I can go to get coffee or relax. There is very little business in the town. Not enough to do in the evenings or the weekend.

Bring a market such as farmers market to the centre and people would be more likely to walk and browse on a Saturday.

Turn an empty premises into a craft centre, like in Wexford Town - for craft people to work and sell their produce.”

Tourism and Heritage

Representative comments raised within the online questionnaire include:

“The town location, the wide hinterland and the historical connection in the town such as GAA and Irish history should be exploited more to attract tourism. Nearby cashel has done

great work in this regard. Getting some of those tourists to continue the 13 miles to Thurles would / could provide a much needed boost to the local economy.

Semple Stadium should be exploited much more.

We should have a lot more murals/statues/experiences for families/tourists to enjoy when they visit Thurles for a game.

The square needs to be more inviting for people.

We need to celebrate our history. It is flanked at either end by two castles. A river runs through it. It is a setting that needs to be explored.

Thurles has never tapped its tourism opportunities with the exception of Feile. There are so many opportunities here for example water sports on the river sure (rowing, canoeing, paddle boarding, fishing, nature walks). A proper museum which could be changed annually and cover famous Thurles people, the famine times, war of independence, the GAA, etc . Both towers in the town could be developed as a tourist attraction. With the square regenerated a craft beer festival, gin festival etc could be developed perhaps around Tipperary food producers similar to the Galway Oyster Festival.

Castle and castle walls not exploited for tourism. Sheela -na-gig is only gaining popularity thanks to Lyons Tyres personal interest.

We need to get our accommodation availability up to scratch, the Munster Hotel needs to be levelled or redeveloped, we need rooms if we are going to bring tourists into the town.

If the GAA are not pursuing a museum, we should consider a Farming Agri Food visitor centre. A cross between agri college/museum and hands-on interaction. We are the Golden

Vale, why not be THE must visit farming town in Ireland. With investment going into Cashel, given our close proximity, would create a dual visit location strengthening the appeal."

Community Perception and Image

Representative comments raised within the online questionnaire include:

"Thurles is a beautiful town, everyone I know is so proud to be from a town with such rich history, we do not exploit this enough, we need to get the word out about this place!"

I love being from thurles, I play on local sports teams and have served on committees in town for years, I hate hearing people speak ill of the town but the lack of investment in the town is awful and so evident.

Excellent education and sporting facilities to attract families to live in Thurles. Council should encourage building of new homes.

More community ran projects are needed - food festivals, GAA mini league competitions.

Our teenagers need more things to do! Recreational facilities for the youth in our community

Kids are getting into trouble because there's nothing for young people to do. No hang out places, no clothes shop (Bar DV8), They get in trouble for hanging around but there's nothing for them.

Thurles has beautiful buildings and architecture but unfortunately many are empty.

There is much opportunity and space in the town centre.

Education

Representative comments raised within the online questionnaire include:

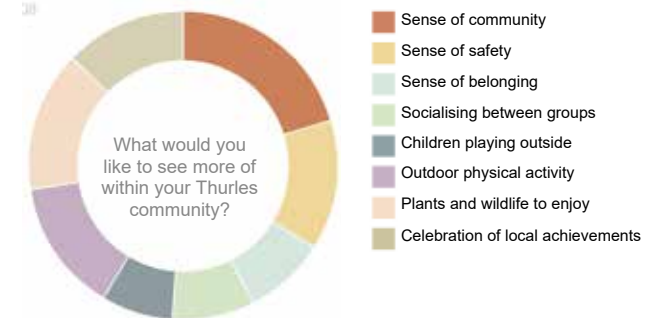
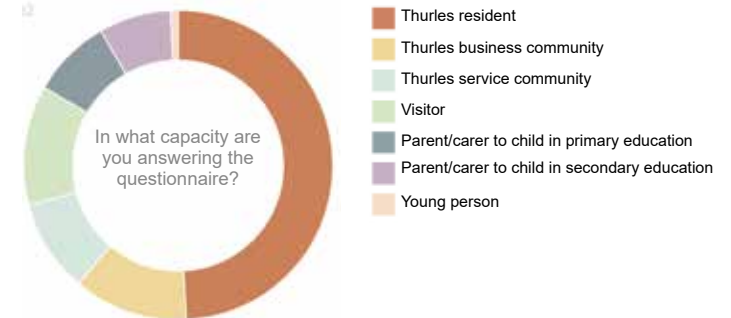
"Thurles is an education hub - more potential!"

Student accommodation needs to be addressed.

I see no reason why the majority of school children could not cycle to school as we did 20yr or more ago and I believe the schools could play a huge role here buy getting the pupils onboard to take ownership of it and get them involved in the planning (school bicycle sheds, cycle lanes safety, etc).

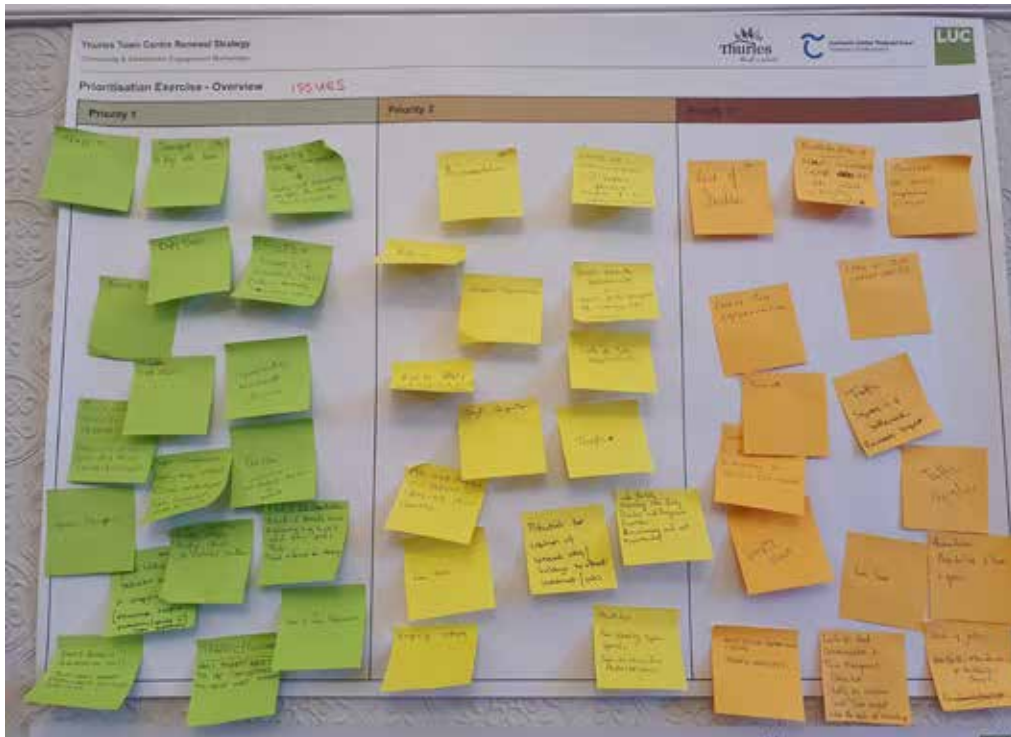
Thurles could also develop itself as a centre for learning English for overseas students while offering them a fun and safe environment to do so with a true cultural experience the facilities already exist in this regard.

We have two third level institutions in Thurles and I feel these students should be our ambassadors - look after them while they are present and then they have positive vibe towards Thurles.

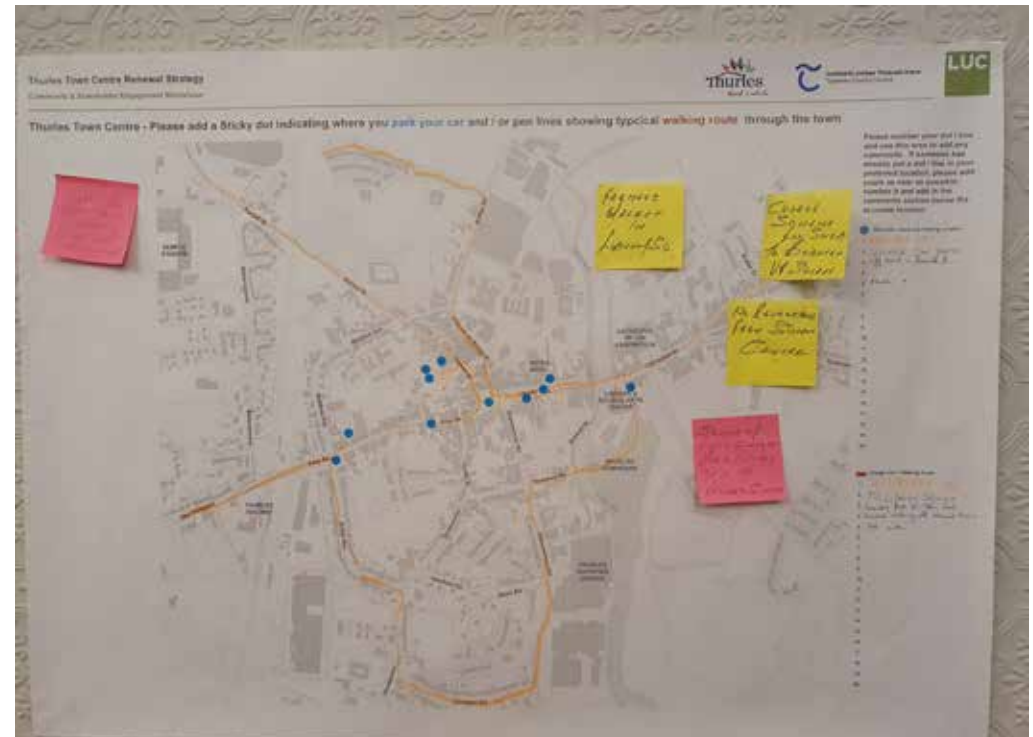
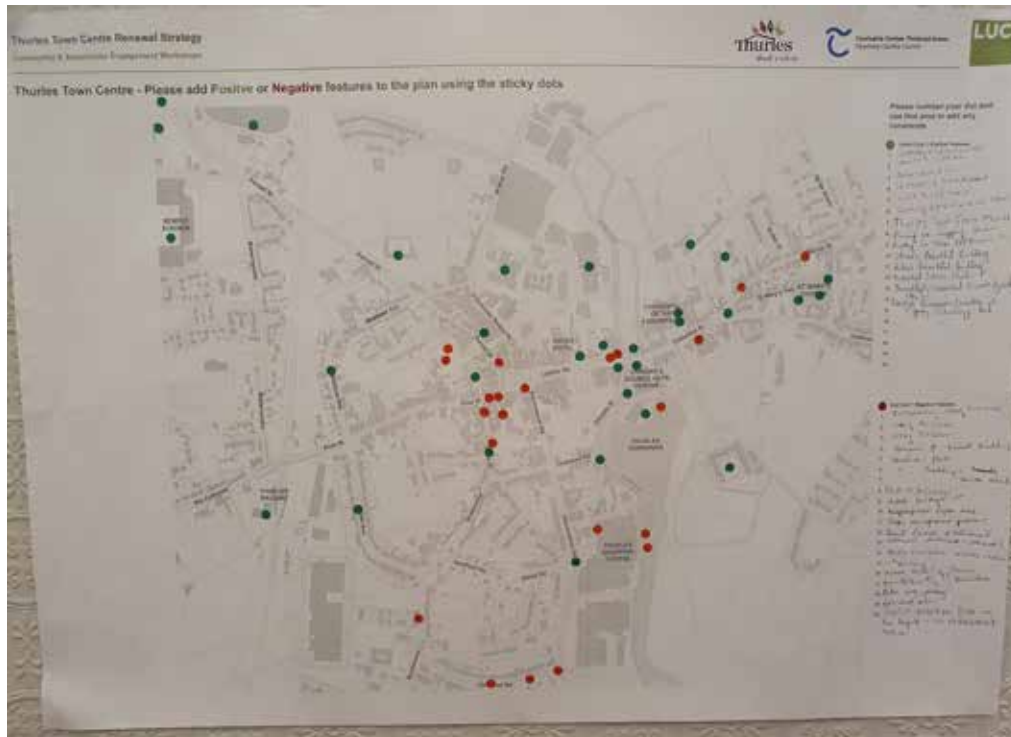


Pie charts illustrating some key responses to the online survey

Feedback posters from the stakeholder workshop



Feedback posters from the community workshop



Second Round of Consultation

Online and Paper Questionnaires

Response Results

Overview of the respondents:

- Online survey: 67 responses;
- Paper survey: 15 responses; and,
- Total: 82 responses.

- 66% of respondents were age 26-59;
- 28% of respondents were age 60+; and,
- 6% of respondents were age 19-25.

- 53% of respondents were answering the questionnaire as a Thurles Resident (the highest category); and
- 16% of respondents were answering the questionnaire as a member of the business community (the second highest category).

Questionnaire Feedback

Question 1 & 2

- 83% of respondents agree with the vision statement which forms / formed part of the Renewal Strategy. Those who did not agree with the statement, suggested the following elements for inclusion (n.b. this is summarised):
- More ambitious wording
- More targeted towards Thurles
- Include 'Accessibility'

- Include 'Conservation'
- Include 'River Suir'
- Include 'Creativity'
- Include 'Education'
- Clarify whether it's for the whole of Thurles or just the town centre
- Include wording such as living, working and socialising

Question 3

65% of respondents think we have included everything within the existing 5 objectives.

Those who thought we had missed something suggested the following for inclusion (n.b. this is summarised):

- Clarify whether it's for the whole of Thurles or just the town centre
- Include 'Community'
- Include 'Culture'
- Include 'Safe'
- Include something specific about economy, jobs, growth
- The creation of a sense of place
- Include timeframe a target

Question 4

50% of respondents think we haven't missed any potential projects.

Those who thought we had missed a potential project suggested the following (n.b. this is summarised):

- Age-friendly living and design

- A project related to sporting events generally, not just GAA
- A project which focuses on commercial / industrial space – what is needed and projections for future growth
- A community arts centre – not just a library
- Youth and child provision
- Art-focused projects
- Connect county towns / cities by way of strategic links – Greenway / Blueway
- Develop cultural / social offer – food, arts, theatre
- Accessibility / walkability / cycling project
- IT / broadband upgrading to ensure future resilience
- Further community engagement

Question 5

The most popular projects people would like to get involved in as an individual or group included (top 5):

1. Develop town and river walks (11%)
2. Create Thurles as a destination town (8%)
3. Create a riverside destination (7%)
4. Creation of a vacant property strategy (6%)
5. Joint at 5% each:
 - Development of a Masterplan for Friar Street / Castle Avenue
 - Thurles as a Sustainable Energy Community
 - Establish Homes on the High Street
 - Regeneration through Recreation, Education and Support for Local Producers
 - Create Parklets

Question 6

Suggested groups to get involved in projects:

- Successful Ageing Thurles
- Dementia Friendly Thurles
- Cabragh Wetland Development Trust
- Thurles Community Enterprise Projects
- LIT
- Town Centre Forum
- Cabragh Community Allotments
- Tipperary Greenway Project
- Local Link Tipperary
- Thurles Lions Club
- Thurles Mental Health Association
- Cathedral Choir
- Thurles Failte Club
- Scoil Angela Ursuline Primary School
- Lar na Pairce GAA Museum
- Tipperary Heartland Tourism Group
- Holycross Abbey
- Thurles Chamber of Commerce
- Peake Villa FC
- Croke Street Residents Association
- Thurles Musical Society.

Question 7

Overall comments on the Draft Renewal Strategy:

- Disappointed with lack of project proposals aimed at sustainability and quality of life for older people
- Job creation is vital
- Very impressed at the scale and breadth of the work

- Planning and Heritage constraints are still seen as major barriers to renewal
- Excellent strategy. The development of Thurles town centre as a living town is essential
- Businesses should be encouraged to help regenerate
- I can tell from the document that you have done a comprehensive listening exercise and have tried to reflect the preoccupation of residents, but the report is too long on description of the status quo and short on ideas and solutions.
- While there are aspects of great innovation I do fear there have been some opportunities lost – further masterplan areas and development of a greenway
- Main criticism is that it is not specific enough in the goals / objectives.

Question 8

When asked on completion of the questionnaire, how do you feel about the future of Thurles, the following responses were noted:

- 68% Positive;
- 28% Not sure;
- 4% Negative.