

### **Appendix C: Town Centre First Approach**

As outlined in Section 4.2 of the KCDP the Council is committed to a 'Town Centre First' policy approach in order to ensure that our towns and villages become vibrant places for living and working in by bringing vacant and urban building stock back into use while recognising town/village centre's role at the core of a vibrant community. This plan prioritises an integrated and collaborative approach between the Council and community led involvement.

The purpose of this section of the Plan is to act as a planning tool to assist all stakeholders/Town Team to initiate debate and to tackle the challenges identified in the settlements through a range of regeneration projects, programmes and activities. The management and implementation of the Town Plans will be administrated by the Town Team/town regeneration officer with support from KCC.

#### Town Team

The role of a Town Team is to facilitate positive change in a settlement by playing a leading role in the implementation of the vision and objectives of this plan, which have been established in partnership with the community during the plan-making process. Local Authorities no longer have the funding or the resources to ensure the appropriate development and regeneration of each town and village. Therefore, the responsibility for meeting the community's needs has become the joint responsibility of both local communities and the Council. In that regard, the key to achieving vibrant and successful towns is through cooperation and partnership of local Town and Village Teams with the Council who can provide a vital role in enabling and supporting the local community in managing their own town or village. To this end a core group of key stakeholders should be brought together to form the Town Team (for each settlement) to oversee the implementation of the Town Plan.

Getting the community involved in the development and implementation of projects is essential. Setting achievable objectives with quick and easy wins will generate momentum, give the community a sense of pride and ownership, and empower them to contribute more.

#### Cross Cutting Themes

This section provides a starting point for the Town Team that will help focus it on the vision for each settlement and implementation of the Town Plans. The KCDP promotes the development of sustainable communities and settlements, these can be achieved under the 5 no. following themes:

1. Active Travel and Outdoor Recreation
2. Historic and Vacant Buildings
3. Improved Access to Services
4. Social interaction
5. Youth Facilities

#### Active Travel and Outdoor Recreation

Given the compact size of many settlements, they are ideal for the promotion and encouragement of active travel. Facilitating active forms of travel, such as walking and cycling, can significantly improve a person's health and well-being while also reducing car dependency for the betterment of the town streetscape and the environment. High-quality public realm and well-connected places that are accessible for all empower and enable communities to thrive.

The council will act as the main advocates for the delivery of active travel and outdoor recreation infrastructure in the main towns and settlements and will ensure its on-going maintenance and development.

The projects will also benefit from the involvement of local business, schools and sports group. Bringing all stakeholders and groups

together will ensure that the infrastructure being implemented will deliver social, economic and environmental benefits for all.

To facilitate or control movement and accessibility in and around settlements, the council encourages movement patterns by.

- Promoting walking and cycling as the primary means of travel for shorter trips.
- Encouraging behavioural change with regards to car dependency.
- Improving pathways / trails that are accessible for all (suitable surfaces, etc.)
- Improving cycling infrastructure (road markings, segregated paths etc.)
- Installing street furniture and lighting & traffic calming measures.
- Engaging with business owners and tourist groups to see where collaborative ideas could be achieved.

#### Historic and Vacant Buildings

The built environment plays a significant role in the identity of a town or village and expresses its character thereby, creating a sense of place.

Strengthening the identity of a town empowers and enables the community to get involved in its continued upkeep and development. Subsequently, this leads to benefits such as an increased tourism and business investment which in turn funds the works conducted within the town.

Vacancy rates within a town/village can lead to social and economic issues, the relocation of residents and business and visual deterioration of the public realm and streetscapes.

Notwithstanding, rural towns should also be considerate of their historic and natural setting. A town's unique character and assets

can be used to attract new residents, businesses, tourism and investment to the area.

To facilitate the enhancement of the built environment, the council encourages regeneration by.

- Mapping existing vacant and derelict buildings and highlight them to the Council.
- Identifying vacant and derelict that could be re-purposed for community use
- Facilitating temporary uses in vacant buildings such as pop-up shops, cafés and galleries
- Encouraging vibrancy – painting initiatives, window displays, planting / window boxes, outdoor seating etc
- Promoting the historical character of the area
- Refurbishing and re-purposing historical properties; and
- Encourage property owners to lease or sell their properties if they are vacant and derelict.
- Painting and decorating initiatives for building frontages currently in disrepair.
- Finding alternative uses for existing derelict / under-utilised buildings for the creation of an IT / remote working hub

#### Improved Access to Services

Towns and villages are centres of amenities, facilities and services; and offer many advantages with regards to local services; being compact, walkable and friendly. Successful towns provide a wide range of amenities and services that cater for the different needs and requirements of the wider community.

The population of an area is a defining factor in determining the level of and investment in services provided. To attract people to the area, towns must strengthen their key assets. Towns need to identify themselves as a centre for cultural, commercial and social services. One way of doing this is to specialise in a certain niche market. Providing local people with the opportunities to develop their

interests and ideas can help create local distinctiveness that attracts income and investment. A diverse population of varying ages and backgrounds also help create a vibrant town full of a variety of services.

Furthermore, towns should be innovative and evolve with the times. In this age of technology, rural towns must seize the opportunity to prosper on the idea of remote working; facilitating those wishing to relocate to a rural setting and work from home.

To facilitate the improvement in accessibility to services, the council encourages this by.

- Engaging with the local community to identify what services do exist but are inaccessible and addressing this issue.
- Setting up support groups that can assist individuals if required
- Establishing / expanding upon existing community facilities and services.
- Encouraging additional services and facilities to establish within the town; and
- Creating a remote working hub.

#### Social interaction

Towns and villages represent the heart of the rural community. They are a social and economic hub; providing amenities and services to the community and surrounds. Rural villages offer a charming and intimate alternative to the large town. They promote a sense of community, a positive work-life balance and a connection with the natural environment.

To facilitate the improved social interaction, the Council encourages.

- Towns are social hubs; Existing amenities should be utilised, and opportunity sites identified.

- Inclusivity and diversity should be embraced; recognising that everyone has different interests and something to contribute.
- improved accessibility – Spaces and places should be accessible for all. Buildings, streets and public spaces should offer opportunities for while feeling safe and included.
- Safety – People focused towns significantly improve the safety of an area (reduce car dependency, introduce traffic calming measures, making active transport more attractive etc.).
- Motivation – The promotion of social interactions is vital for the health and happiness of a town and its community. Encouraging the community to get involved in the development of their town, empowers them to improve it and be proud of it.

#### Youth Facilities

Youth facilities are an invaluable resource within a community, offering safe and welcoming environments for young people to meet and socialise. They provide a wide range of indoor and outdoor amenities and services that cater for the different needs and requirements of the community. The key to the success of a facility is that they must be inclusive for all and cater for various social and cultural activities including performance and social spaces for sport, music, life skills, recreation and social interaction. In the age of technology, IT / remote working hubs should be set up in rural towns to support the development of their young adult; facilitating those wishing to study / work remotely.

To facilitate the improved access to facilities, the Council encourages

- Establish / expand upon existing youth facilities and services.
- Encourage additional youth services and facilities to establish within the town; and
- Create an IT / remote working hub.

### Funding

In order to ensure the sustainable development and management of the built environment within the town/villages, the council/stakeholders can avail of various funding streams to implement good development practices.

1. Active Travel Funds: The aim of this funding is to support the development of high- quality cycling and walking infrastructure
2. CLÁR; the CLÁR programme provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in rural areas.
3. Community Enhancement Programme (CEP): this provides small capital grants to community groups to allow them to enhance facilities in disadvantaged areas.
4. Connected Hubs Fund; this fund will expand existing hub facilities, providing additional hot desks, office spaces and meeting rooms for remote working.
5. Historic Structures Fund: This fund supports owners and custodians of historic and protected structures to safeguard and maintain their properties.
6. LEADER Programme: This programme accepts applications based on projects which improve: Rural tourism, Enterprise development, Broadband, Basic services targeted at hard-to-reach communities, youth, Local biodiversity and Renewable energy.
7. Outdoor Recreation and Infrastructure Scheme; The funding will support the key objectives of Our Rural Future – the Government's ambitious new policy for Rural Ireland
8. Rural Regeneration and Development Fund; The RRDF supports job creation in rural areas, address de-population of rural communities and support improvements in our towns and villages
9. Tidy Towns and Community Enhancement Funds; can fund projects including: Biodiversity planting; community clean-up & installation of bins
10. Town and Village Renewal Scheme; The central aim of the Scheme is to support the revitalisation of towns and villages, to improve the living and working environment of their communities and increase their potential to support increased economic activity into the future.