

3.3 District Towns: Sneem & Waterville

3.3.1 Sneem

3.3.1.1 Context

The picturesque town of Sneem (An tSnaidhm – The Knot) is located on the N70 on the Iveragh Peninsula, the Ring of Kerry and WAW tourist routes. Sneem is located approximately 25km to the west of Kenmare and 30km to the east of Waterville. The R568 to the northeast connects the town with Molls Gap and the N71 to Killarney which is 45km away. Sneem has the benefit of being a nucleus of a community with numerous core facilities and amenities. It has a well-defined visual identity and the objective for future development is to respect this character.

The Sneem River flows through the town which forms part of the designated Kenmare River SAC. The town is attractively located against a backdrop of mountains and is also a popular stop on the Kerry Way long distance walking route.

The town's setting and streetscape is the focus of its attractiveness as an international visitor destination and popular stop on the Ring of Kerry and WAW driving routes.

3.3.1.2 Vision and Strategy

The long-term vision for Sneem is to sustainably develop the town as a place to live, work and visit. It is acknowledged that there is strong built heritage within the town and that it acts as a tourist destination within South Kerry. Given that it has an existing residential community and adequate services and infrastructure in place it is envisaged that Sneem will accommodate new residential development within the development boundary. This coupled with investment in public realm improvements, leisure and amenity areas will strengthen the town's sense of place and identity.

Some physical constraints exist, which clearly influence the direction of growth of the town including the Sneem River and existing flood risks. These are also the natural features that have contributed to its success.

3.3.1.3 Planning Considerations and Proposals

Sneem will be the primary focus for development for the surrounding rural area. This Plan facilitates an increase in the population appropriate to its status as a District Town. The consolidation of the settlement, retention and improvement of local services & facilities to serve the town and surrounding rural area is encouraged. Unused buildings and sites in the town provide opportunities for appropriate development which would assist in the further enhancement of the streetscape. The importance of the tourism market to the town is recognised however further development in the quality and range of the tourism product is vital to securing the long-term economy of the town and the wider region. The natural and built heritage of Sneem and the surrounding area must be safeguarded.



Figure 3.68: View of Centre of Sneem

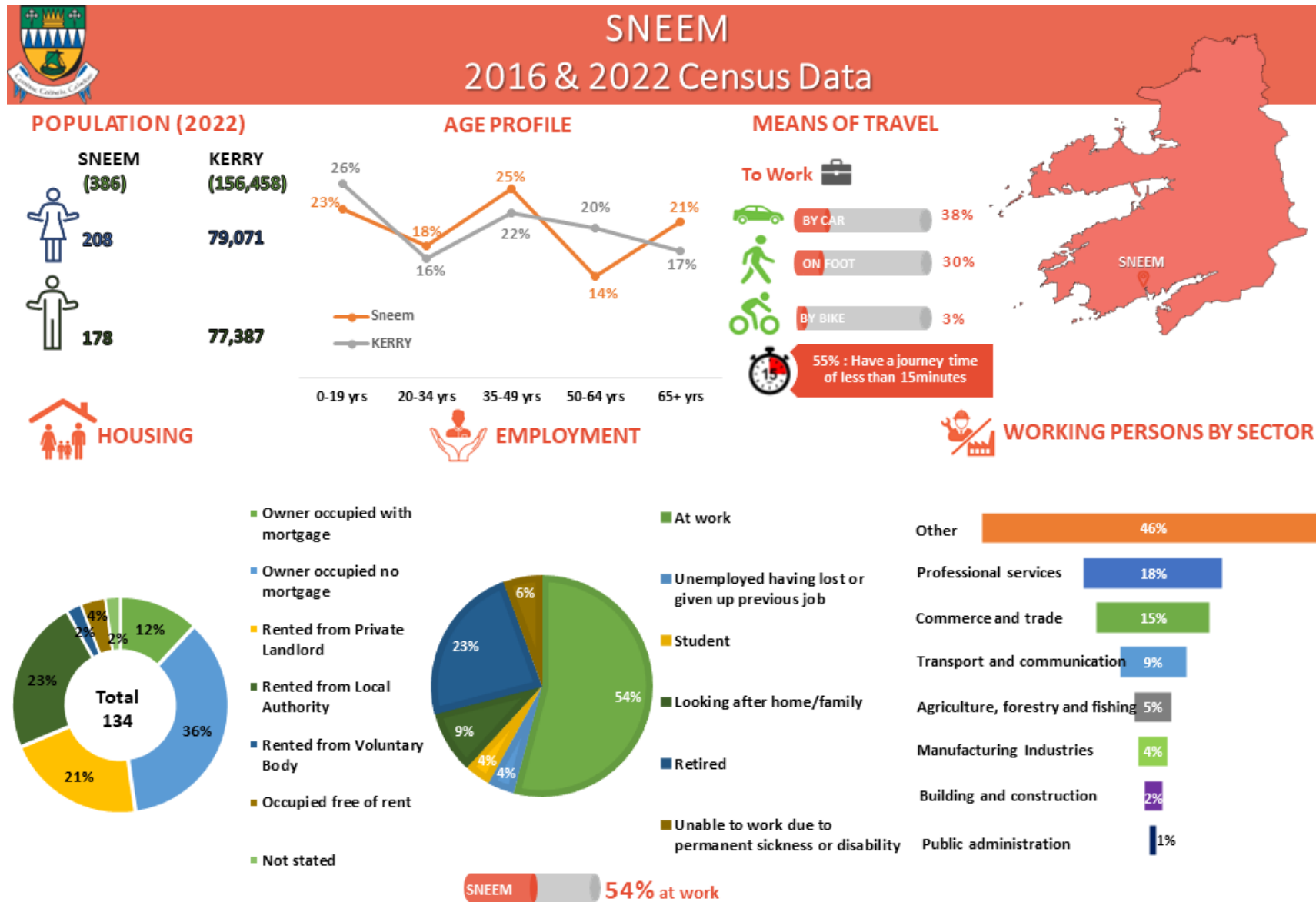


Figure 3.69: Sneem MD – Key Statistics (Census 2016 & 2022)

3.3.1.4 Population and Sustainable Land-Use Development

The population of Sneem increased by 12% between the 2011 and 2016, an increase from 258 to 288. Census 2022 recorded a population of 386 for the town. The population growth in 2016 mirrors the population recorded for the year 2002 (285). In the intervening years, the population had decreased by nearly 10% from 285 to 258 in the period between 2002 to 2011.

CSO figures show that up to 30% of the make-up of the population is non-national compared to 11.6% figure nationally and a figure of 10.7% for Kerry. Geo-directory figures for the period 2012-2022 illustrate a small growth in housing stock at 9 units. There has been some return to activity in terms of permission being sought for residential development within the town.

Census year	2006	2011	2016	2022
Sneem	279	258	288	386

Table 3.8: Population Change 2006-2022


3.3.1.4.1 Residential Development

Sneem is designated as a growth town under the Core Strategy of the KCDP, with a housing target of 21 units.

It is noted that the residential development known as Ard an Óir comprising 42 residential units, on the Kenmare Road, is now completed. It is very positive to see the completion of this development which had remained unfinished for years. In addition, 6 semi-detached houses have also been completed at the Páirc Ardshellhane development in recent years. Lands have been zoned to accommodate future residential development and population growth.

Opportunities exist with gap sites, brownfield and backland sites that are available for development in the settlement. These lands

are zoned M2 (Town Centre) or M4 (Built Up Area) and can facilitate additional residential development if necessary.

Overall Development Objectives	
Objective No.	It is an objective of the Council to:
KENMD-SM-1 	Ensure that new development reinforces the primacy of the town centre and contributes to the vibrancy and vitality of Sneem through the re-use and regeneration of key town centre sites and vacant properties.
KENMD-SM-2	Support the development of a community centre at an appropriate location in Sneem.
KENMD-SM-3	Seek to underground overhead wires where appropriate to improve the visual amenity of the streetscape.

It is also noted that a significant number of residential properties remain vacant in the town. CSO figures confirm that over 20% of properties are vacant within the settlement. In addition, there are several derelict properties also noted in the settlement. This Plan strongly supports the re-use and re-development where appropriate of vacant and derelict properties in Sneem. Notwithstanding the number of vacant and unfinished properties in Sneem it would appear that there is a shortage of housing available to rent for people wishing to reside there on a long-term basis.

Residential Development Objective	
Objective No.	It is an objective of the Council to:
KENMD-SM-4	Work with the relevant authorities and interest groups to resolve the issue of unfinished residential developments within Sneem.

3.3.1.5 Sustainable Communities

3.3.1.5.1 Community Facilities

The town is well served by community facilities including a national school, a community crèche, and a playground. A day centre and sheltered housing for older people are located within the settlement, together with a Garda station and fire station. Sneem is served by a mobile library and a resource centre, however a permanent location is being sought for a community hall/centre to serve the very active community groups. Under the Community Centres Investments Fund, the Sneem Community & Sports Centre received funding. There are also plans to develop a storytelling house, which would add to the diverse tourism product in the area. The compact form of the town promotes opportunities for walking and cycling. There are also opportunities to further improve links between different parts of the town through implementation of traffic calming measures at key locations and provision of improved pedestrian and cycling infrastructure.

3.3.1.6 Heritage

3.3.1.6.1 Built Environment and Heritage

Sneem has retained a compact urban form which has developed around the squares and natural features of the area. The town is focused on two squares, North Square and South Square, which are noted on the 1841 survey of the town. The Squares are separated by the River Sneem and a narrow stone bridge from which there are

attractive views of the River. Both squares are in fact triangular in form and are based around two fair greens which are very well maintained and contain a number of public art pieces and statues to local characters. The streetscapes which form both squares are attractive and highly coloured giving the town a distinct character.

The development strategy of the Plan is designed to reinforce the town's heritage status and its role as a prime tourist destination within the region. The Plan reaffirms the critical role of the town centre and implements positive measures for its continued vibrancy, using its attractive built form as a positive factor while acknowledging the strong level of protection for buildings and structures necessary to maintain its character. There are a number of brownfield town centre sites available for redevelopment.

3.3.1.6.2 Architectural Conservation Areas (ACA)

The historic and architectural significance of Sneem's streetscape together with its impressive stock are currently protected by a large ACA which is focused on the two squares and essentially includes all the settlement's core area with the exclusion of the north-western side of the North Square and the northern side of the South Square. The ACA designation includes a number of protected structures. There are no recorded archaeological monuments within the Plan area.

3.3.1.7 Economic Development

Sneem's local economy is largely tourism based. The town has an international tourism reputation built around its streetscape and surrounding natural environment of mountains and sea and associated recreation and scenic characteristics.

The town centre is the principal location for local retail, limited specialised shopping, services and leisure, such as restaurants and cafes. The tourist industry through the presence of quality hotels (outside the development boundary) and guest accommodation

and accompanying services such as dining are significant employers in the area.

Sneem Digital Hub is located just outside the town boundary on the Killarney Road to the north-east of the town. It aims to attract people to Sneem as a place to reside through the provision of hub working facilities. The facility will support rural social enterprises and the wider community by providing flexible, affordable hot-desks, co-working, conference and training facilities for residents, visitors and entrepreneurs for a minimal fee. The need for this hub and other similar digital and multi-service centre hubs in Kerry is in recognition of the fact that entrepreneurs are the backbone of rural economies. The Council will continue to support and encourage such entrepreneurship and business investment.

In this Plan other established development/employment areas are zoned M4 (Built Up Area), or M2 (Town Centre). Future development will need to respect the historic town centre and the town's sensitive scenic and coastal setting.

3.3.1.8 Tourism & Outdoor Recreation

3.3.1.8.1 Tourism in Sneem

Sneem's historic and attractive streetscape and surrounding natural offer forms the foundations of the town's tourism market. It is a very popular stop on the Ring of Kerry driving route. The Kerry Way long distance walking trail passes through Sneem, bringing walkers into the settlement, many of whom stay overnight and enjoy the amenities on offer. The international storytelling and folklore festival is held annually in November and affords an opportunity to extend the tourist season. Sneem contains some very attractive amenity spaces within the town itself, however knowledge of this amenity space is not readily apparent to visitors.

The town is well served by two high-quality hotels, (both outside the LAP development boundary) some holiday homes, bed and

breakfasts, in addition to a motorhome campsite. The LAP supports the further expansion of a variety of overnight guest accommodation where they contribute positively to the historic environment and respect the sensitive environment in which they are located. Future development of holiday accommodation should focus on short-term lettings, rather than second homes because of the greater contribution to the local economy. The aim of this plan is to further enhance the existing tourism product to ensure that it develops in a sustainable manner and benefits not only the visitor but also the local population.

The area's surrounding landscape and scenery should be viewed as a key economic asset and as such it is vital that the quality of this asset is protected. The town's attractive setting and streetscape provides it with the opportunity to market Sneem as a destination itself rather than just a stop on the Ring of Kerry. To ensure Sneem continues to optimise its tourism market, investment, and action in a number of key areas/infrastructures is required. Consecutive LAPs have identified the need for improved bus parking and car parking facilities to serve the increasing numbers of visitors attracted to the town.

Unregulated parking, particularly of buses, is having a negative impact on the town's environment and consequently an impact on Sneem's potential as a tourist destination.

Further analysis is required to ascertain traffic management options for the town. It is therefore an objective of the LAP to undertake a traffic management study for Sneem to ascertain the optimum traffic management solutions for bus, car and pedestrian/cyclist traffic in the context of the future development of the town [See Transport & Movement Objectives].

3.3.1.8.2 Natural Environment & Recreational Amenity

Sneem's setting overlooking Sneem River with mountain ranges to its backdrop are its prime natural assets. The Sneem River, which is part of the Kenmare River SAC flows through the town, which adds immensely to the character of the town. Some lands surrounding the plan area have been designated as *visually sensitive* in the KCDP, which recognises areas of outstanding landscapes in the county.

Sneem is set in a high-quality natural environment which is reflected in the amount of public open space that has been developed in the town over the years. The community recognises the importance of their environment which is evident from the high quality to which the settlement and amenity areas are presented.

As the town is on an important tourist route, it is vital that attractive views of the river from the bridge are maintained and that areas adjacent to the river are kept free from inappropriate development. The town centre is served by two formal central green spaces – the greens which are enclosed by the north and south squares. These greens provide a pleasant opportunity to sit, relax and picnic, however they are frequently obscured by the presence of large buses which block their view or the view from these green spaces.

Multiple attractive green recreational spaces are found along Quay Road and along the riverbank including the Garden of the Senses complete with community allotments and polytunnel and The Way the Fairies Went Park. Dedicated walking paths are found through these green areas creating a very pleasant environment for recreational activities. Barbeque and picnic areas are available for public use on Quay Road, together with free parking facilities. A tennis court is located on the western side of the river and a playground at Seaview. In addition, several walking routes are found around the settlement on local roads while there is scope to develop additional paths within the settlement to connect different

areas around Sneem. Additional signage is needed at appropriate locations to highlight the extensive green spaces that are available within a short walking distance of the hustle and bustle of the squares, together with associated free off-road car parking.

GAA grounds are found on the Sports field Road with an associated walking track that is well used. The development of a footpath with associated (bat friendly) lighting would be a great addition at this location. Sneem rowing club has a long-established active presence in the town.

Within the Plan area some lands have been identified as green spaces requiring conservation and protection in recognition of their contribution to the environment of Sneem.



Figure 3.70: View of Main Street, Sneem

Tourism Objectives	
Objective No.	It is an objective of the Council to:
KENMD-SM-5	Promote Sneem as a destination with unique history and architectural heritage.
KENMD-SM-6	Facilitate the sustainable extension and diversification of tourist facilities within the town boundary and the surrounding hinterland including improved signage and access to recreation/amenity areas.
KENMD-SM-7	Support the provision of a Storytelling House, at an appropriate location.

3.3.1.9 Water & Wastewater Management

Sneem is well served by a modern waste water treatment plant with adequate spare capacity with a population equivalent of 2,500. The town is served by public water and there is a sufficient supply, but may need additional treatment.

3.3.1.10 Flood Risk Management

The majority of the town of Sneem is not usually at risk of flooding. There may be some seasonal tidal/coastal flooding along the waterfront. These areas are not zoned for highly vulnerable development. Proposed development shall also have regard to Section 2.9.2 of this Plan - Flood Risk Assessment & Management and the accompanying SFRA.

3.3.1.11 Transport & Movement

Sneem is located on the National Secondary Route N70 and is one of the principal towns on the Ring of Kerry route. Sneem's tourism function attracts large numbers of visitors on a seasonal basis and

this can increase overall volumes significantly during peak summer months. The traffic volumes combined with the town's physical configuration can make access and movement to and through the town challenging at times.

Addressing traffic congestion is a key issue to retain the town's competitive advantage as a tourist destination and as an attractive location for business and as a place to live. An overall Traffic Management Plan is required to look at measures to provide dedicated parking provision (on and off street) for buses and overall improved parking management. A Traffic Management Plan will create greater permeability, connectivity and access between the amenity areas and the town centre and will enhance the overall image of Sneem and complement its urban form. The implementation of a Traffic Management Plan together with targeted public realm upgrades will help improve the conditions for the flow of cars but particularly for buses within the town and will deliver a safer pedestrian/cyclist environment. Improvements are needed at the junction of North Square with Seaview and the junction of South Square with Quay Road. Visibility for motorists trying to negotiate this junction is often obstructed due to parked vehicles. In addition, pedestrians are forced onto the road and onto on-coming traffic to try to negotiate a route around such vehicles.


Transport & Movement Objectives	
Objective No.	It is an objective of the Council to:
KENMD-SM-8	Carry out a Traffic Management Plan for the town to ascertain the optimum traffic management solutions to address the needs of residents, visitors and tour operators in Sneem.
KENMD-SM-9 	Promote a more pedestrian and cyclist friendly environment through the provision of traffic calming measures and improved pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure (including a footpath up to the GAA pitch), subject to environmental assessments.
KENMD-SM-10	Support the development of dedicated tour bus parking in the town, at an appropriate location.



Figure 3.71: View of Dwellings, Sneem

Sneem has low levels of walking/cycling (12.2%, CSO) as a means to travel to work and the Plan seeks to build on the opportunities to increase the level of green modes for school/local shopping trips. A greater emphasis is placed on developing infill and brownfield sites in this Plan which should improve the opportunity to increase green modes of travel. This can help contribute to easing congestion at peak times and promote a healthier lifestyle for the population. Public transport to and from the town is very limited and provided by Bus Éireann, connecting with Killarney once a week on Fridays. Local Link Kerry provides a weekly bus service linking Sneem to Kenmare and Killarney once a week. An additional bus circles the Ring of Kerry tourist route daily during the summer months only. Currently bus set down and pick up arrangements take place at the Square.