CLUAINÍN MANORHAMILTON

Leitrim County Council
Comhairle Chontae Liatroma

Lár Bailte ar dTús
Town Centre First

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST
ESTD 1845

Manorhamilton

Collaborative Town Centre Health Check Report (CTCHC)

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the individuals and organisations who assisted in the completion of this project by generously offering their time and expertise with special thanks to the members of the Manorhamilton Town Team and staff from Leitrim County Council for their support for this study. Particular thanks are extended to the Town Team for their generous provision of accommodation across the town. This report summarises the ideas created by students from a number of planning courses from Queen's University Belfast.
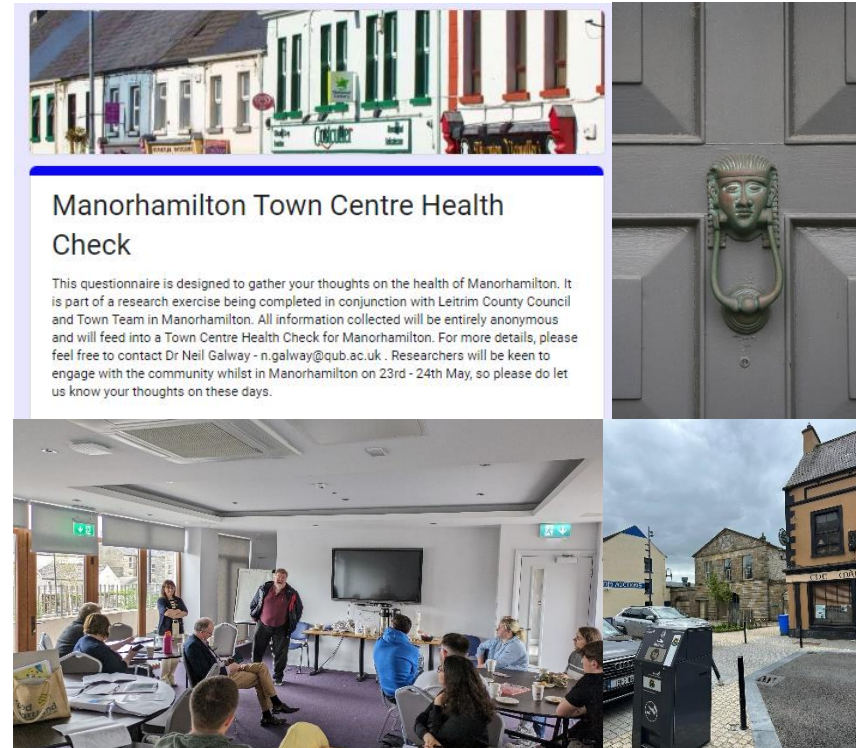
Edited by: Saidbh O'Grady, Neil Galway, Ross Blackbourne, Shizza Khalid and Sam Freeman.

Other student participants: Mane Grigoryan, David Martin, Shervin Dcunha, Cameron Holmes, Danny Farragher, Jenna McCance, Katherine Stevenson, Matthew Green, Shane Campbell and Eoin Fegan.

Introduction

This Collaborative Town Centre Health Check was completed in partnership with Leitrim Council and the Manorhamilton Town Team by Planning students from Queen's University Belfast on 23rd and 24th May 2024. Prior to the trip, students were advised of the Town Centre First programme and on arrival we were met by a delegation from the Town Team in W8. This meeting was an excellent opportunity for students to understand fully the extent of community involvement in the Town Centres First process.

The students completed a detailed land use survey of the town centre, footfall- and vehicular traffic- counts, parking and desire line surveys and public realm analysis. These steps were complemented by an online questionnaire, which was disseminated by Leitrim County Council and members of the Manorhamilton Town Team in advance of the field visit. Hard copies of the questionnaires were completed by residents during the study visit and a drop-in consultation session in W8 was held on 23rd May.

First Impressions

Manorhamilton is a small town in the heart of Leitrim with a rich heritage and strong architectural character, it is located 23km from Sligo Town and 48km from Carrick-on-Shannon. The local community that we engaged with were very passionate about Manorhamilton and concerned about the future of their town. The group were able to learn vital local knowledge from their engagements with residents who openly shared their thoughts on the public realm improvements and their ideas for the future of the town.

The public realm works that have been introduced in the town have enhanced the attractiveness and appearance of the Main Street and the junction with the R280. The majority of residents were also very fond of the W8 and Osta Café, as it is a great addition to the town with a lively café and community space for locals to enjoy.

There are some clusters of vacant and derelict buildings in the town centre with the largest concentration at crossroads between Main Street, Sligo Road and New Line. These buildings, some of which are long-term derelict, detract significantly from this busy approach to the Northern end of Main Street. These properties offer potential for reuse to facilitate the provision of additional commercial, community and residential spaces in the town. The lack of tourist and short-term rental accommodation in the town was one of the first impressions and an improvement in this offer could enhance the liveability and broader attraction of the town.

Policy Context

## Leitrim County Development Plan 2023-2029

Leitrim County Council developed this plan as an overall strategy for planning and sustainable development in the county until 2029. This plan aims to ensure there is sustainable physical and social development throughout the county and seeks to develop a thriving rural community, protect the natural environment and conserve heritage in all towns and villages across the county. Manorhamilton is designated as a self-sustaining growth town in this plan, which is described as being a town with a moderate level of population and provides important employment and services to the surrounding areas.

Tourism

Leitrim has a rich heritage and is part of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands which are a group of counties with a beautiful and unspoiled nature where life moves at its own pace, this can be seen from the council's plan to develop slow adventure tourism within the county. Slow adventure tourism aims to give tourists an opportunity to see the county through slow and immersive journeys, with the opportunity to allow visitors to experience all Leitrim has to offer in terms of wild places, natural spaces, wildlife and food, allowing visitors to embrace and develop their connection with the environment. Along with developing tourism in Manorhamilton, there is also a need to provide more tourist accommodation in the town to be able to supply the demand. There is a lack of hotel and bed & breakfast provision, which is hindering the development of the tourism potential of the town as a base for exploring the wider area.

Below are some of the core policies relating to the development of tourism and tourist infrastructure for Leitrim.

1) To support the development of new strategic tourism attractions that can create '*experiences*' as motivational '*must do'* signature experiences to draw visitors to the county, in a manner consistent with Leitrim's own brand identity.
2) To develop opportunities for '*Slow Tourism'* or '*Regenerative Tourism'* clusters to be established within the county.
3) To seek to sustainably manage any increase in visitor numbers in order to avoid significant effects including loss of habitat and disturbance, including ensuring that any new projects, such as blueways and greenways, are a suitable distance from ecological sensitivities, such as riparian zones.
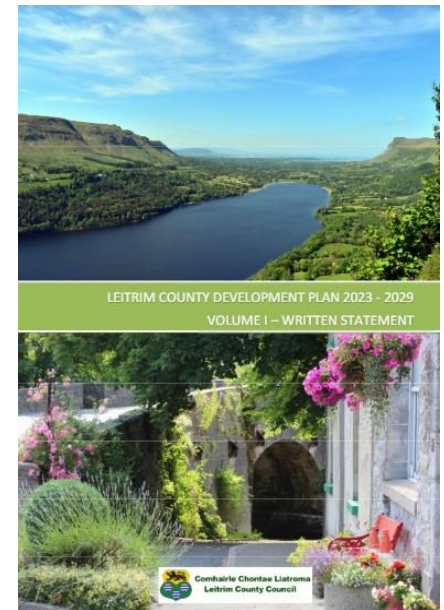
4) To facilitate the sustainable development of a variety of quality tourist accommodation including hotels, guesthouses, hostels, B&Bs, holiday homes, glamping/camping/caravan and campervans at suitable locations, throughout the county.

Architectural Conservation Areas

An Architectural Conservation Area or ACA is a place, area or group of structures, that are of architectural, historical, artistic, archaeological, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest or that contribute to the appreciation of a Protected Structure, and whose character it is an objective of a Development Plan to preserve. The objective of designating an area as an ACA is to ensure control over the development in the area and reduce the likelihood of inappropriate development or demolition. Manorhamilton town centre is designated as an ACA and there are a number of policies and guidelines that need to be followed when developing inside an ACA these include but are not limited to:

1) To ensure there is specific design control with regard to building scale, proportions, historical plot sizes, building lines, height, general land use, fenestration, signage, and other appendages.
2) To ensure the retention, repair and regular maintenance of features which contribute to the character of the ACAs such as chimney stacks, roof coverings, roof profiles, external wall treatments, doors and windows, shop fronts and pub fronts.
3) To ensure that inappropriate materials for windows, doors and rainwater goods constructed in aluminium or uPVC are not introduced to buildings within the ACA.
4) To encourage high quality, contemporary design and materials where appropriate when introducing new buildings into an ACA and the retention of the historic scale and plot size. These buildings should visually enhance the area and respect the character of the ACA.
5) To ensure the embodied energy of the current building stock within an ACA are acknowledged when considering proposed developments, and to encourage the reuse of these buildings over demolition.

The purpose of designating an area as an ACA is to ensure there is a high standard of amenity and design, to ensure the preservation and protection of the area, to control and improve the area in terms of design, density, colours and uses and to promote the redevelopment of vacant sites.

MANORHAMILTON

Architectural Conservation Area
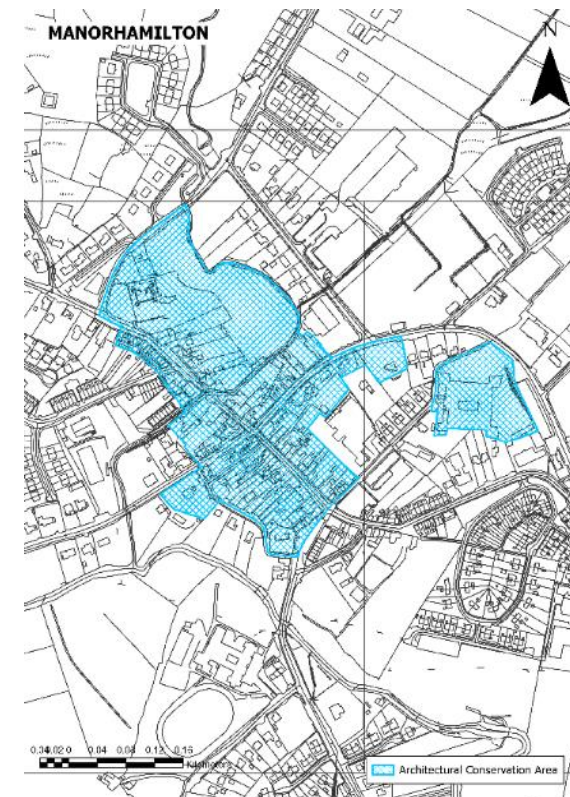
Healthy Placemaking

The development plan sets out the council's objectives to make settlements attractive and healthy places for residents to live. In recent years Manorhamilton has had significant public realm improvements and the development of recreational services and facilities. These improvements aim to support the revitalisation of Manorhamilton by encouraging town centre living and reducing the number of vacant units within towns.

National Planning Framework 2040

This is the overarching policy which aims to shape the future growth and development of Ireland through to 2040, this document is to guide public and private investment, promote and create opportunities for people and protect and enhance the natural environment across the country. The National Planning Framework's key focuses are on climate change, sustainable mobility and low-carbon societies with the strategic objective to 'Regenerate rural Ireland by promoting environmentally sustainable growth patterns'.

Northern and Western Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2020 - 2032

This strategy supports the implementation of the National Planning Framework and all relevant government policies and objectives. This strategy aims to deliver effective regional development to the Northern and Western Region for the counties in Connacht and Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal in Ulster. This document sets out the aims to:

1) Grow the economy and employment levels in the region, creating opportunities for individuals, businesses and the community to develop.
2) Outlines how all areas in the region should plan for population and employment growth.
3) To focus on connectivity and plan to manage transport and digital infrastructure improvements over the next 20 years.
4) To strengthen local economies and meeting people's needs in order to improve people's quality of life.
5) To deliver and manage infrastructure to support the region and respond to the changing environment.
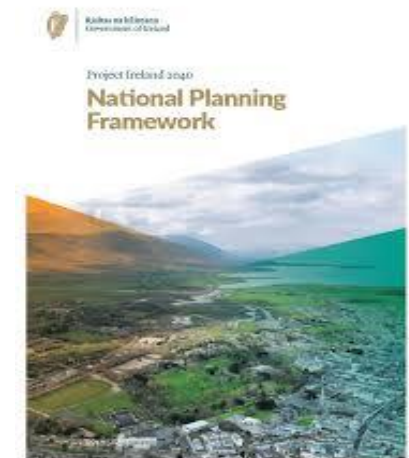
Land Use Map
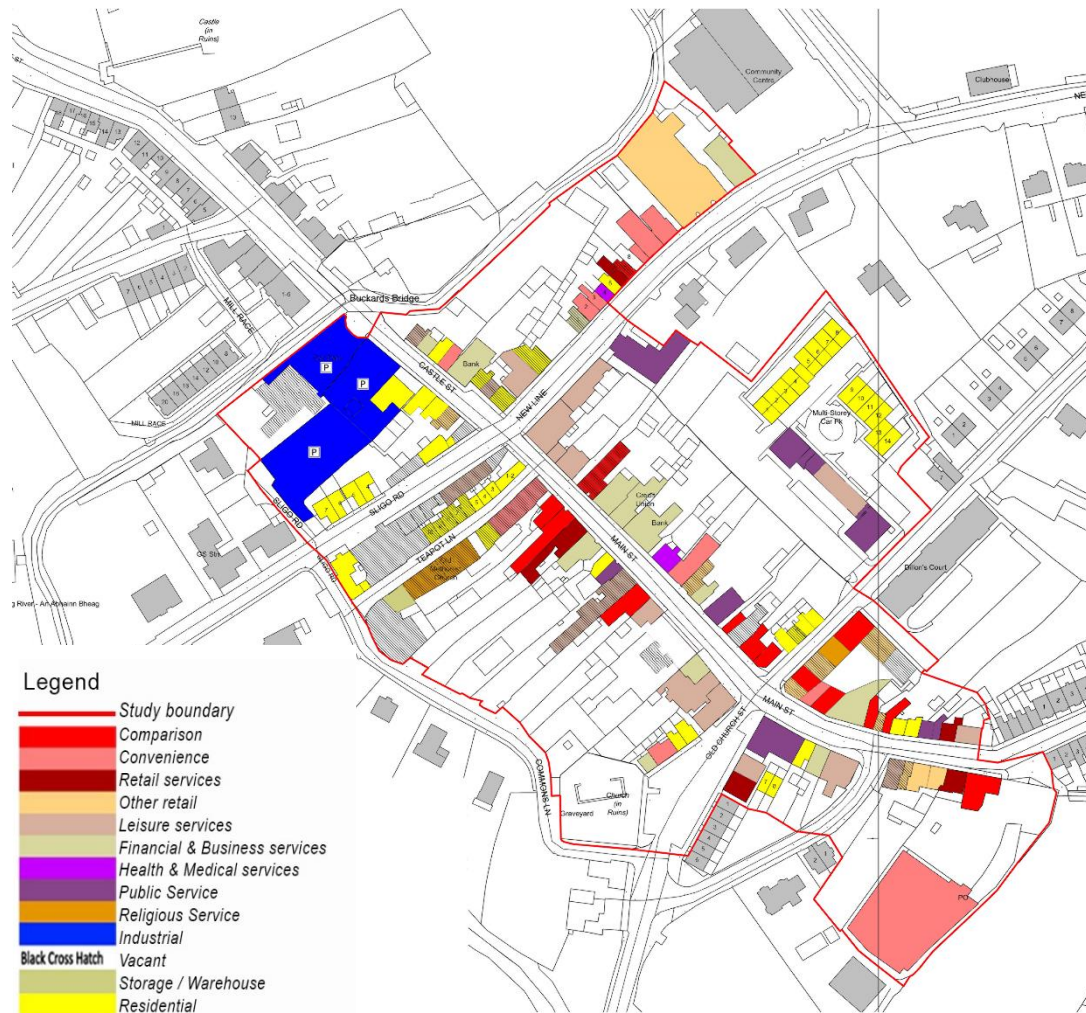
A land use survey was completed for Manorhamilton during the study visit on the 23rd and 24th of May 2024. This map classifies different building uses throughout the town and allows the reader to clearly see how buildings in the town are being used. In total 35 out of the 144 (or 24.3%) buildings in Manorhamilton town centre were vacant. Manorhamilton is a small rural town which is located between Sligo Town and Enniskillen. Sligo reported a vacancy rate of 17% in their CTCHC report and Enniskillen had a vacancy rate of 14% in 2022.

Legend

- Study boundary
- Comparison
- Convenience
- Retail services
- Other retail
- Leisure services
- Financial & Business services
- Health & Medical services
- Public Service
- Religious Service
- Industrial
- Black Cross Hatch — Vacant
- Storage / Warehouse
- Residential

Vacancy Map for Manorhamilton

This map shows all the vacant ground floor units within the study area. The visual representation of this information on the map allows the reader to clearly identify the clusters of vacancy in the town. There is ample scope and opportunity to redevelop these vacant and derelict properties making use of both the ground floor and upper floors to provide the people of Manorhamilton with more active frontages and services in their town. Key vacant properties include the Courthouse, Market House. Jak's Casino and many buildings on Teapot Lane.

Do you think vacancy rates in Manorhamilton are:
197 responses

- Very low compared with other nearby towns
- Low compared with other nearby towns
- Similar to other nearby towns
- High compared with other nearby towns
- Very high compared with other nearby towns
- Unsure

27.4%
12.2%
37.1%
11.7%
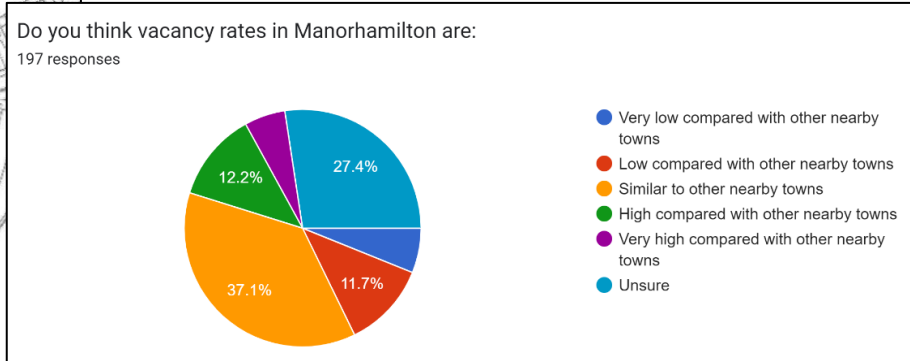
Footfall & Vehicle Counts

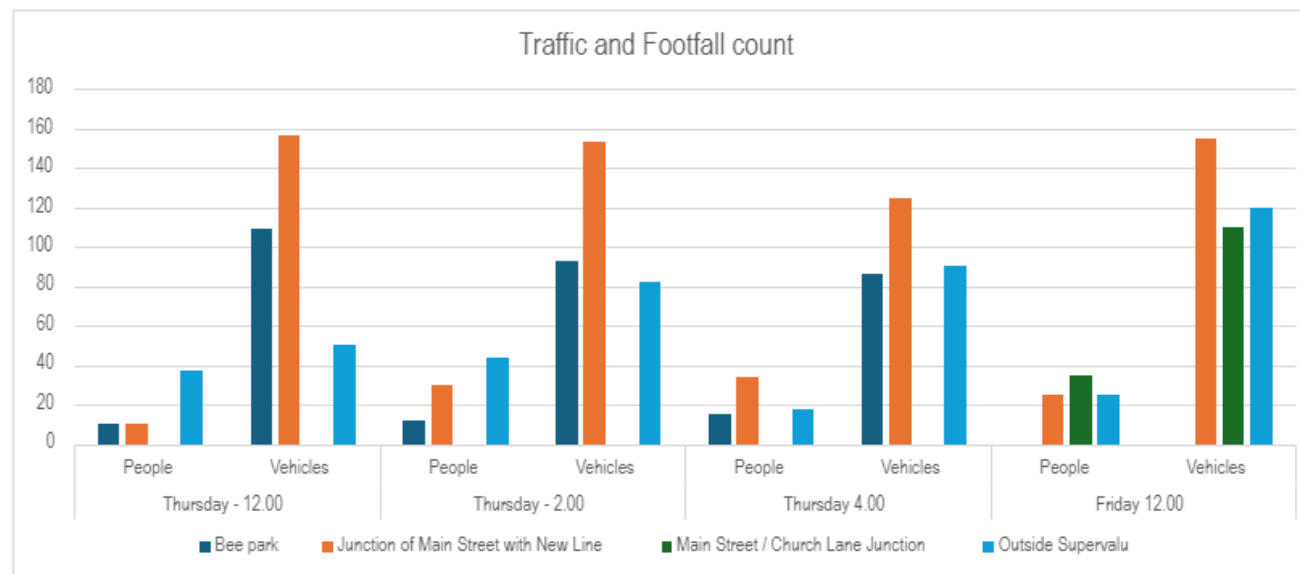This map displays where the footfall counts were taken throughout the town centre.

Key-

1- Outside Supervalu

2- Main St/Church lane junction

3- Junction with Main St and New line

4- Bee Park

Stats-

A total of 1625 cars and pedestrians accounted for across these 4 locations at varying times across the 2 days, with the number on Friday (470) being the largest contributor (28%).

The largest spot to contribute overall was spot numbered 4 on the map, equating to over 42% of the total pedestrians and vehicles accounted for.

Of the overall number, pedestrians only accounted for 18% (295) of the total. Thus, meaning that 82% of the footfall data we acquired over the two days was of vehicular movement demonstrating the car dominance present in the town.

The counts were carried out at 4 different locations across the town collecting data at 3 different times on Thursday the 23rd of May to ensure we gathered a full and fair assessment of the entire town. Another count was carried out on Friday the 24th at 12 pm, each count lasted 15 minutes, and there were 2 separate counts carried out, one for the footfall of persons at each stop and the other for the number of vehicles passing through. The dominance of vehicular traffic is the overarching finding from conducting this research, with the junction of Main Street by the new line having the highest number of vehicles peaking at a very high 157 at 12 pm. The average number of vehicles accounted for on this day at this spot was 145, this stop leads to the arterial route of the Sligo Road. This shows that the highest number of vehicular movements is through the town, simply seen as a place where most just drive through opposed to stop and experience or even an end destination. A point reinforced by the lowest number of vehicle movements was on the Main Street of the town outside the old market area, meaning that most people don't see the few local businesses which still operate on this street.

Whereas the highest number of pedestrians accounted for were outside Supervalu, whereby there were 44 persons accounted for at 2pm on the Thursday. Despite it being located just a short distance from the heart of what remains in operation in the town centre, there are very few who travel any further than the Supervalu car park as seen by the fact that a number as high as this isn't seen anywhere else. The lowest footfall numbers were recorded at Bee Park, which illustrates that whilst this is a very active facility that the vast majority of users drive to use this community facility.

Desire Lines

Desire lines are informal paths or short-cuts used by walkers which are located away from designated footpaths, sometimes evident by worn trails through grassy areas.

In the town centre, vehicles appear to take priority over the pedestrians, and during the health check study, individuals were observed making dangerous crossings due to the lack of adequate crossing infrastructure. Whilst there is a consistent and adequate level of crossing infrastructure on the Main Street, we see inconsistent crossing infrastructure throughout the town. Likewise with desire lines, as seen overleaf we see excellent footpaths facilitating ease of pedestrian movement between the Main Street and Church Lane area through the laneways, this is not consistent with all of these linkages in the town.

Most desire lines were found adjacent to popular commercial units such as Supervalu and where the pedestrian infrastructure encourages crossings such as in this image on the top right where there is only a footpath on one side of the bridge. Issues such as pavement parking and narrow footpaths also created temporary forced crossings as walkers avoided barriers.

Car Parking

Manorhamilton currently offers a total of 8 designated car parks, highlighted in red and yellow. In Figure 1, car parks highlighted in red show spaces available to the public while the car parks marked in yellow show the commercial car park for Supervalu customers. Parking usage and capacity varied throughout the day, typically reaching a high point occupancy rate of 75% to 85%. The existing car parks are operating with capacity. The ongoing construction of an underground car park beneath W8 could assist in parking provision in a non-visually dominant manner. Recognising the town's high dependency on private vehicles as the dominant mode of transport, it is vital to explore active travel options within the town centre. Efforts to promote and improve active travel, such as walking and cycling, will be essential for addressing the town's transportation needs sustainably.
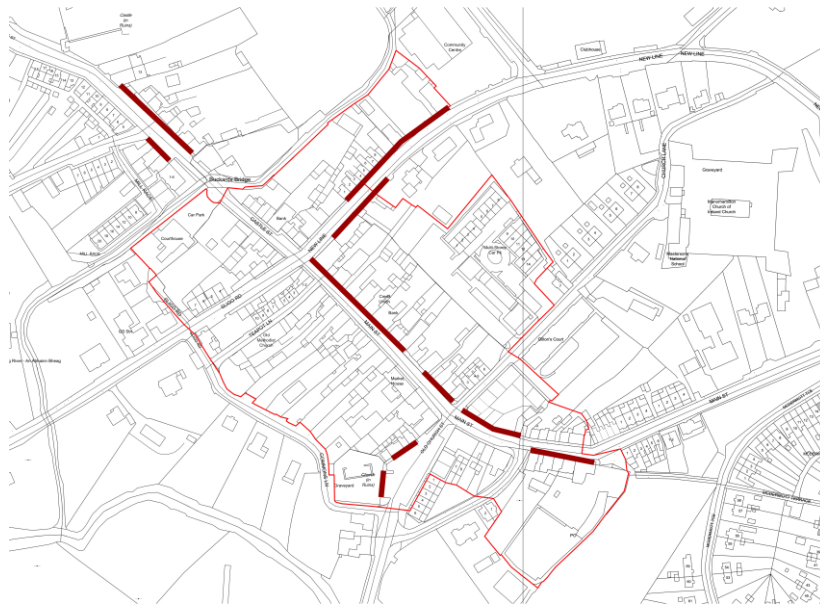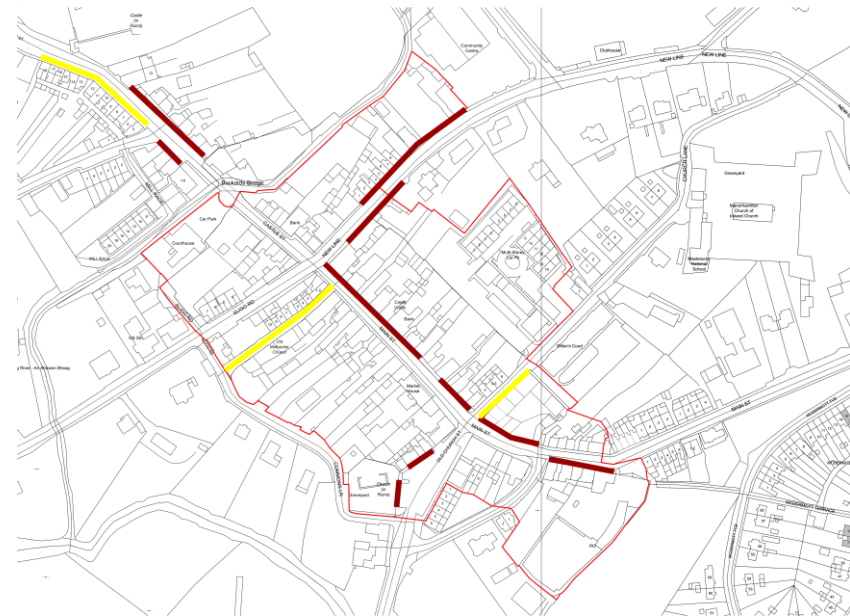

Figure 1 - Car Parking

Figure 2 - Underground Car Park

In accordance with prior discourse, Manorhamilton manifests characteristics of a car-dependent settlement, leading to a noticeable surge in on-street car parking. The mapped streets shown in Figure 3 have been duly highlighted to indicate the specific areas where on-street car parking is prevalent. The prominent designated streets are Castle Street, New Line, Main Street, R280, Upper Main Street and Church Street. Figure 4 shows the undesignated streets highlighted in yellow. These harbour streets car parking throughout the day.

Figure 3 – On street car parking

Figure 4 - Undesignated car parking

The visual evidence presented in Figure 5 below substantiates the observation that these streets harbour an abundance of parking spaces for vehicles.
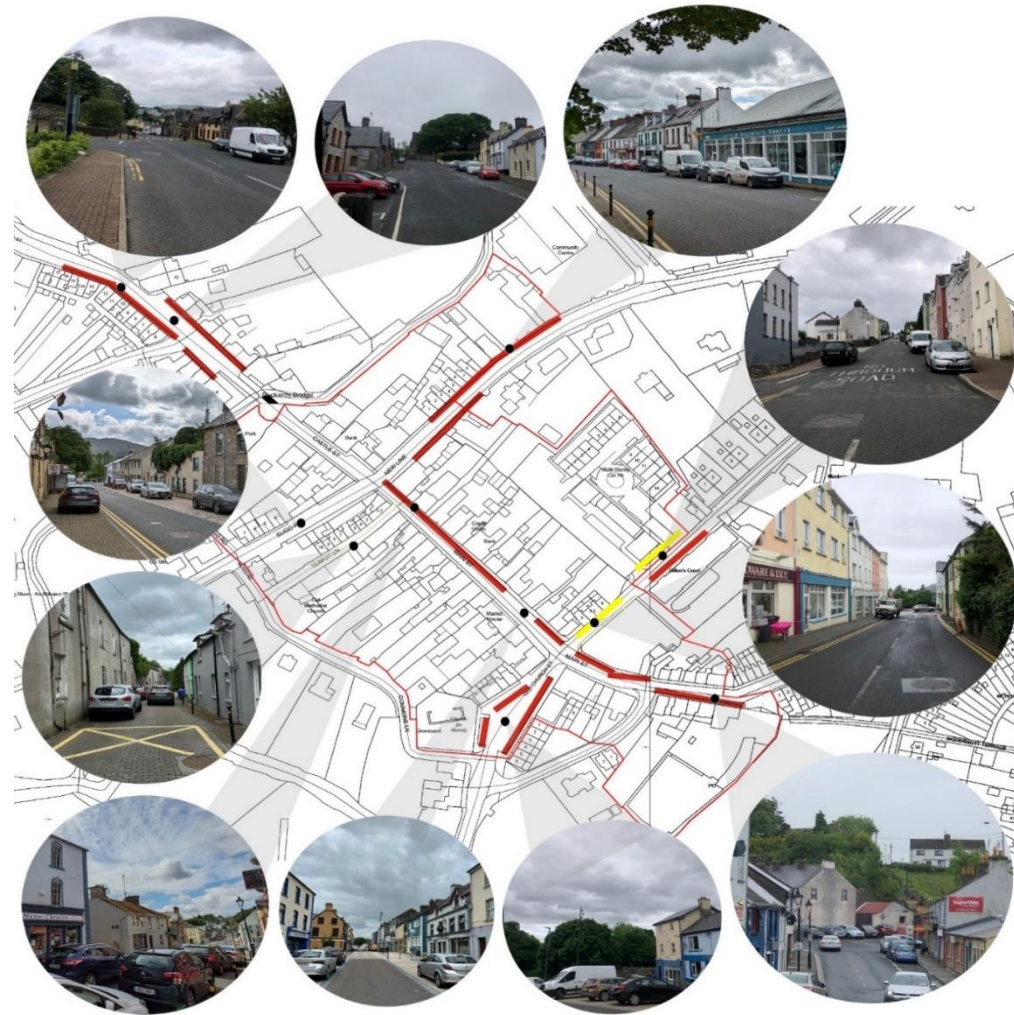

Figure 5

Public Realm

In Manorhamilton, recent public realm work has been carried out as part of Project Ireland 2040. The Main Street has been rejuvenated through resurfacing and introduction of rain gardens and Market Square has been resurfaced in front of the vacant Market House. Additionally, interventions have been made at the crossing between Sligo Road, Main Street, New Line, and Castle Street, as well as at the junction between Old Church Street and Main Street. The third intervention is situated on Sligo Road, as depicted in Figure 6. These developments have contributed to an uplifting atmosphere in the town centre and enhanced the streets' visual appeal. However, it has been observed that the Market Square on Main Street experiences limited footfall and lacks significant attraction beyond passersby. Further, there is a noticeable absence of outdoor seating in this area and the resurfacing work appears to have had a traffic-calming effect, slowing down the flow of vehicles.
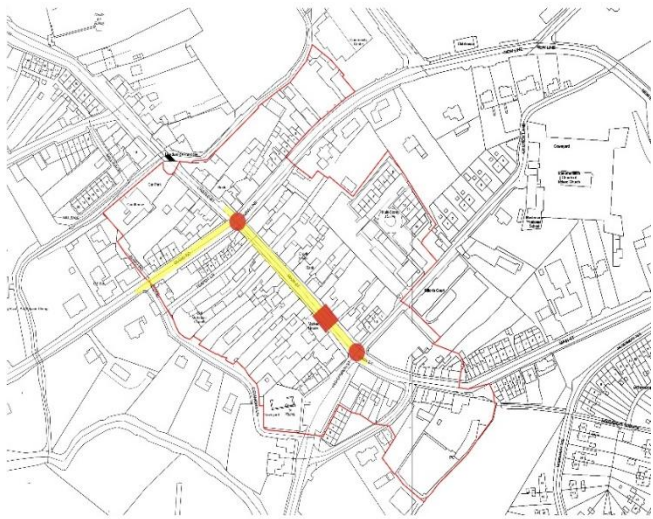

Figure 6 - Recent Public Realm Projects
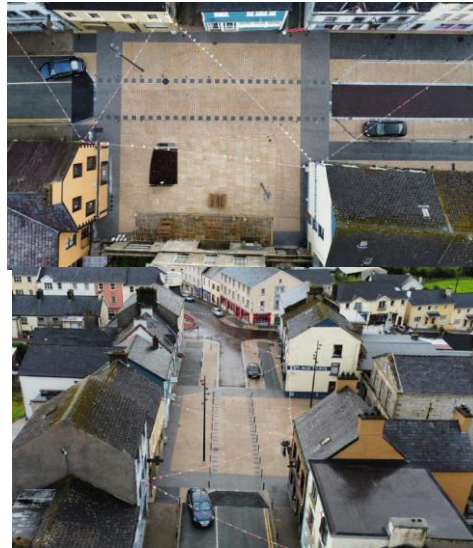
Figure 7 – Aerial view of Market Square

Figure 8 - Market Square

The public realm intervention on Sligo Road prioritises on-street parking, while the active engagement of shop frontages and provision of public seating spaces require attention, as seen in Figure 8 (overleaf). This presents an opportunity for a proactive and strategic approach to enhance the area's vitality and create a more inviting and inclusive streetscape.

Figure 8 – R280 Road

Figure 9 - Bridge

Figure 10 - Playpark

Figure 9, shows the bridge on Castle street, which presents a notable vehicular dominance, leading to potential safety concerns for pedestrian passage, as evidenced by the absence of footpaths on either side. It is apparent that the infrastructure fails to provide a safe and accommodating environment for pedestrians, and this issue requires immediate attention to ensure public safety. Furthermore, the children's park illustrated in Figure 10 is notably well-designed and appears to provide an enjoyable recreational space; however, a noteworthy issue arises in the form of the lack of a discernible crossing from the surrounding area, particularly from across the nearby castle. This deficiency in the park's access infrastructure raises concerns regarding the ease of access for visitors, particularly those travelling from the adjacent areas. Addressing this issue is crucial to enhancing the usability and accessibility of the park for the community.

In conclusion, the recent public realm work in Manorhamilton has positively impacted the town centre, contributing to an improved visual appeal and atmosphere. However, some areas require attention, such as enhancing the Market Square's animation and addressing the lack of outdoor seating. The prioritisation of on-street parking on Sligo Road and the safety concerns around pedestrian passage by the bridge also need immediate action. Additionally, improving access to the children's park is crucial to enhance its usability and accessibility for the community. By addressing these issues, Manorhamilton can further develop into a more inviting and inclusive town centre.

Manorhamilton

During the study, there were 197 survey responses gathered and analysed. 52% of respondents were female and interestingly 106 out 198 (53.5%) were 16 or under. It was imperative for this report that these surveys reached the majority of the population of Manorhamilton, therefore the surveys were posted on local Facebook pages and collected by students on the study visit to Manorhamilton. These surveys allowed the residents of Manorhamilton to give an insight into how people live, work, travel, and exist in the town. The below word cloud illustrates replies to the question: "What is the first word you associate with Manorhamilton?" The larger the word the more often it was mentioned in the responses. The responses were mixed between positive and negative words with some responses saying the town was welcoming, cultural and nice and others saying the first word they thought of when they thought of Manorhamilton as being scruffy, derelict and congested. The high frequency for 'school' as a response relates to the high number of youth participants.

Gender

Questionnaire Responses

Below are the responses to people's main reasons for visiting Manorhamilton. As is evident from the chart, the most prevalent reason why people travel to Manorhamilton is because they live there with education and work being the second and third most popular responses. These three factors count for 68% of the responses. The other responses relate to people visiting family and friends. The orange and yellow sections of the pie at the top are people visiting for tourism and food and drink respectively. The least common response was people visiting for professional services with 0 people listing this as their reason for visiting Manorhamilton.

What is your main reason for visiting Manorhamilton?

Sports 3.1%
Work 11.3%
Education 23.7%
Other 2.1%
Events and Culture 5.2%
Shopping 8.8%
Live here 44.3%
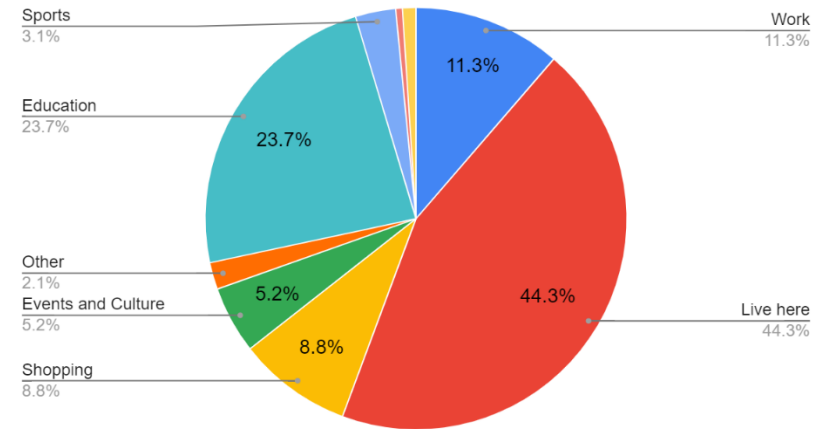
Of the 134 responses to the question "Are there any services or facilities that you feel are missing from Manorhamilton?" 30 respondents stated that they felt the introduction of a swimming pool would be a good addition to the town. In Leitrim there are only swimming pools in Carrick-on-Shannon and Drumshanbo, the introduction of a public swimming pool/leisure facilities in Manorhamilton would be an asset to the people of Manorhamilton and surrounding areas. Swim Ireland has introduced a project called the pop-up pool which is a temporary swimming pool which stays in a destination for 6 months before travelling to its next destination. This could be a temporary solution for Manorhamilton and would encourage people of all ages to learn to swim and become more active.

Travel Responses

How often do you travel to Manorhamilton by the following methods?
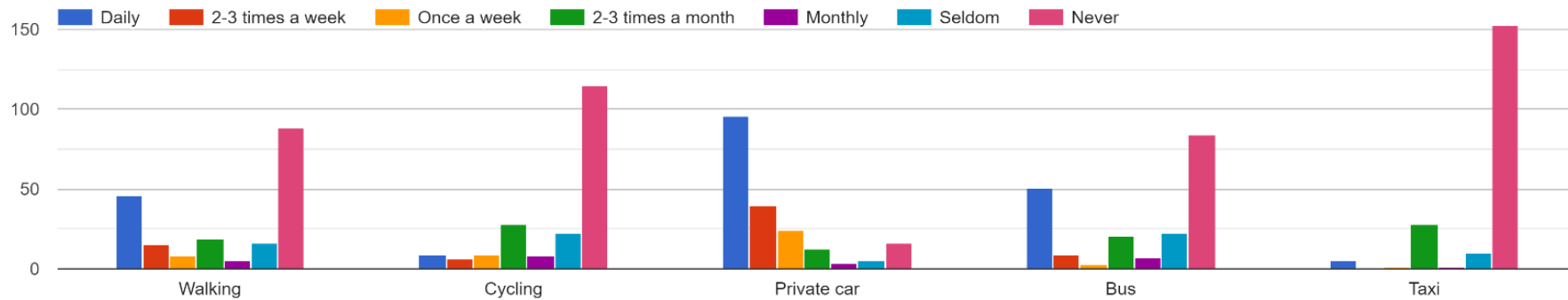
The most common method of transport into Manorhamilton is by private car. Many of the respondents stated that they would never walk, cycle or use a taxi to travel to the town. A surprising number of respondents, 51 said they would travel by bus daily to Manorhamilton. There are two local link buses which service the town, the first one runs from Manorhamilton to Drumshanbo and runs three times a day, and the second is from Manorhamilton to Ballyshannon and operates twice a day. From the graph opposite, by assessing the number of people who travel more than 10km to reach Manorhamilton, it is evident why the use of private car is the most popular. This can be because while the use of the local link bus is popular the routes and times are not convenient for many people and therefore the choice to travel by car is favoured.
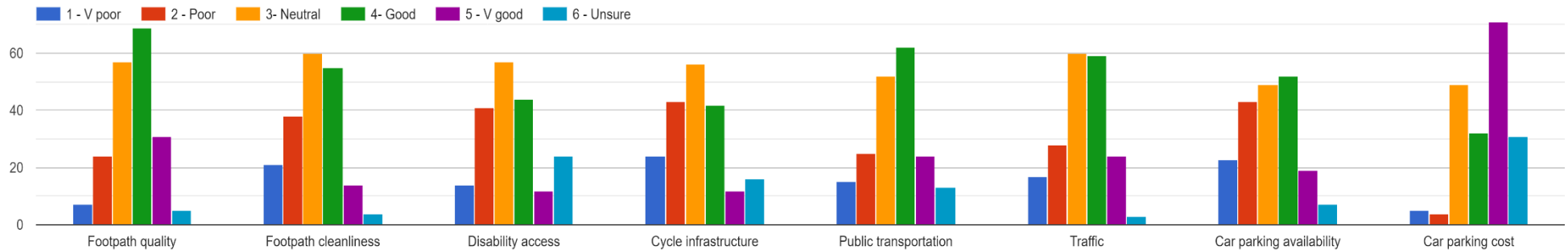
How far do you have to travel to get to Manorhamilton?
198 responses
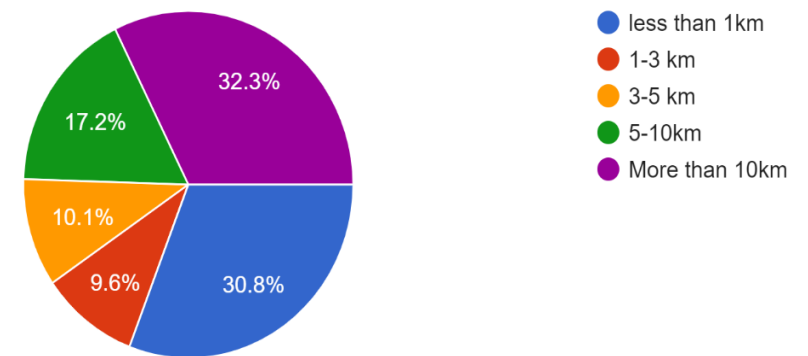
Movement and Accessibility

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


This question was asked to gauge respondents' attitudes to movement and accessibility in Manorhamilton. The graph above depicts people's perceptions across all areas of movement and accessibility in the town with many people responding to all the questions as being neutral or good. It is interesting to look at car parking costs where 71 people responded saying this was very good, this could be because there are no car parking charges in Manorhamilton. Interestingly people's perception of disability access in the town, 57 people said neutral and 24 said they were unsure, this could be perhaps that people are unaware of the issues that people with disabilities face daily. There is tactile paving and dropped kerbs on all street corners however the introduction of bollards along the streets may cause difficulties to wheelchair users and people with visual impairments.
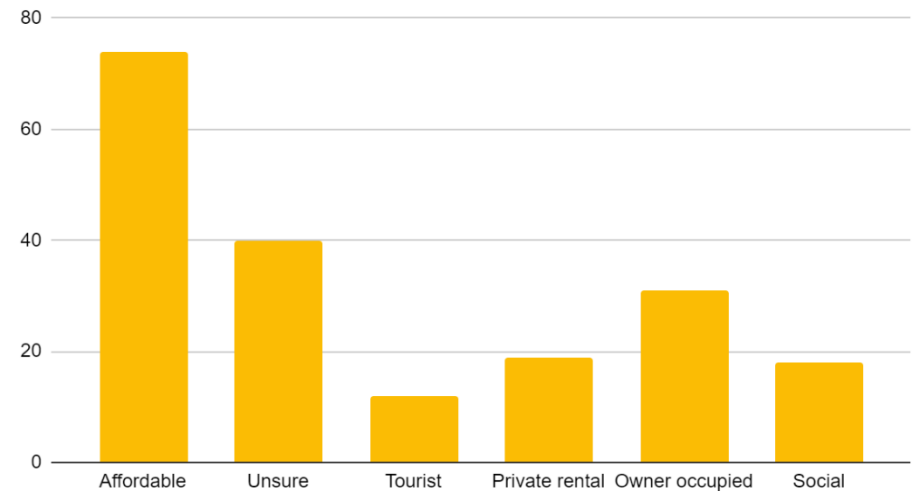
Town Centre Living

Do you live in Manorhamilton town centre?

Yes
19.2%

No
80.8%
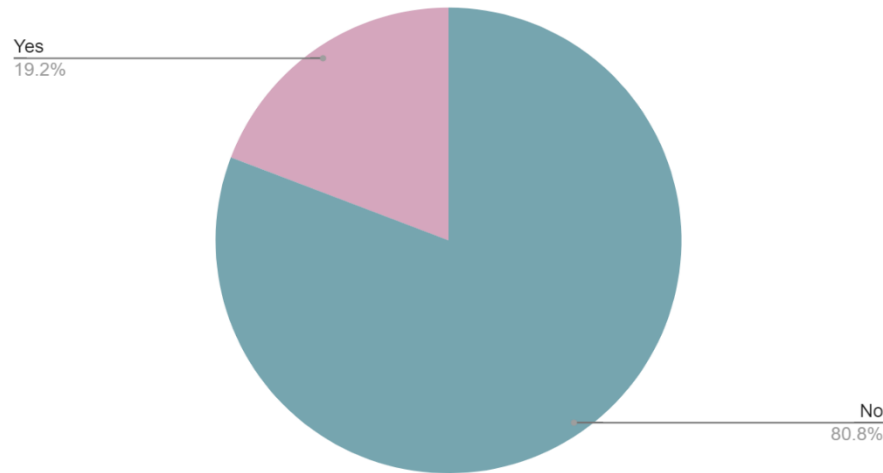
Which housing tenures are most needed in Manorhamilton?

| Affordable | Unsure | Tourist | Private rental | Owner occupied | Social |

The need for more affordable housing within the town centre boundary has been an issue that was raised multiple times throughout this study. Of all respondents, only 19.2% live in the town centre, by introducing more affordable housing units within Manorhamilton town centre it could increase the population of the town. Many first-floor units are vacant and encouraging the reuse and redevelopment of these spaces would attract young people and families into the town centre and increase the vibrancy of the town.

By encouraging more people to live in the town centre it would promote safety in the town with 47.94% of respondents viewing safety as being very important in the town. This question also asked how important people view access to schools, childcare and healthcare facilities in which people stated these facilities are very important to making Manorhamilton a better living environment. These are all important factors to encourage and promote town centre living in Manorhamilton.

Utilisation of Stores in Manorhamilton

Would you purchase the following goods and services primarily in Manorhamilton?
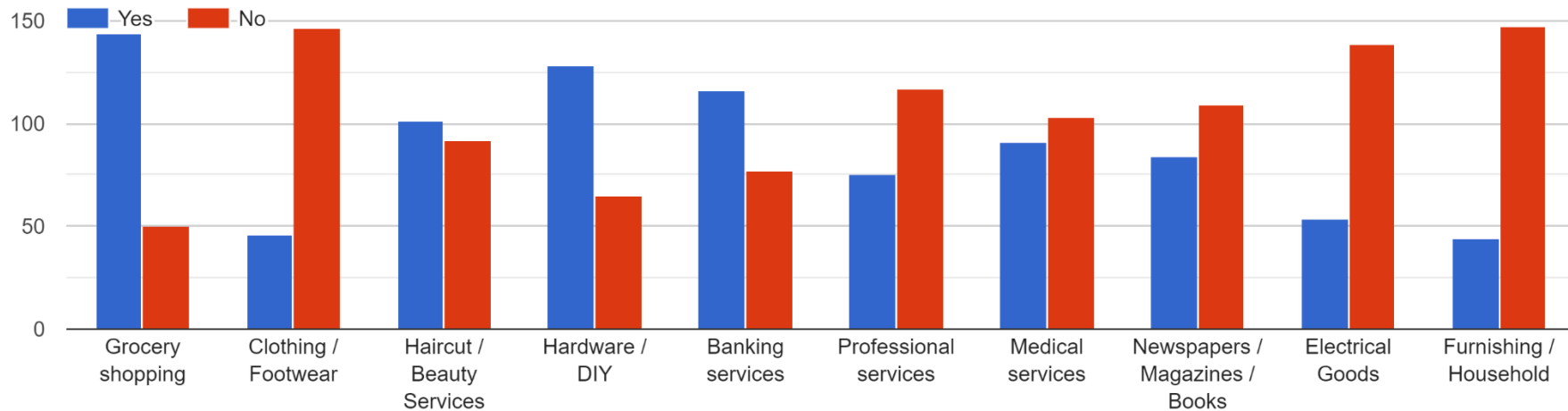
By looking at the graph above the reader can clearly see the goods and services that are available in Manorhamilton. 144 people would do their weekly food shop in Manorhamilton, this might be in the local SuperValu, Costcutter, corner stores and butchers in the town. Goods like clothing and footwear, electrical goods and home furnishing are predominantly bought outside the town, most respondents stated that they would buy any of these goods in Sligo Town, Enniskillen or online. The similarities between yes and no votes for some services such as hairdressers, and medical services, might allude to the fact that while these services are available in the town they cannot meet the demand of the population in Manorhamilton.

Tourist Attractions

How would you rate Manorhamilton for the following facilities / amenities?
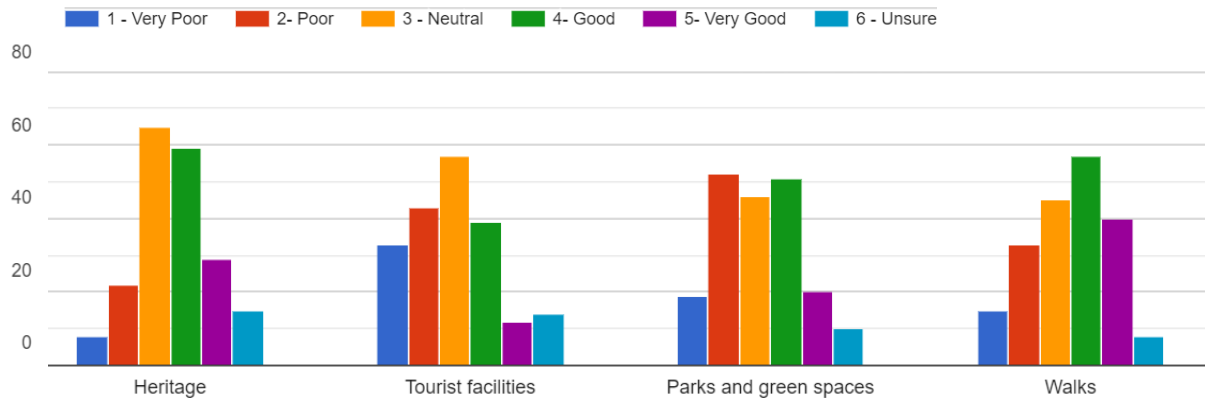
Above the graph indicates the population of Manorhamilton's opinions on the heritage of the town and the tourist facilities. 59 people said that Heritage in the town was good and 29 said it was very good, however only 39 people said tourist facilities were good and 12 said very good. Manorhamilton is a town located in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and has tourist attractions like the castle and Leitrim Sculpture Centre however there are no facilities designated for tourist use which will impede the utilisation of these attractions.

In a separate question, people were asked "Add any comments on the areas that you feel could be improved in Manorhamilton" to this question many people responded stating that the addition of a hotel in the town would improve Manorhamilton and would increase tourism in the town. Other responses included dealing with vacancy, additional spaces for young people, urban greening and improving the evening economy.

Proposal 1: Town Centre Living

In the past, town centre living was the norm for all towns across Ireland, this guaranteed town centres remained vibrant and dynamic places to live and work, however in the past 40 years there has been a significant decrease in the number of people living in town centres. There are many reasons for this decline, including the appeal of housing developments on the outskirts of towns and the demand for bigger houses with private gardens. With the growing population, the changes in the commercial environment and the effect these vacant and derelict properties are having on the vitality and attractiveness of town centres there is a movement to reintroduce and encourage town centre and first floor living, which can have a range of benefits and boost the economic, social and environmental perspective of the town. However, due to the condition of many of these old and derelict buildings, significant investment is needed to bring the existing building stock back to a liveable condition. The Town Centre First Policy places significant emphasis on first floor living above shops and the benefits this will bring back to town centres, including bringing the building stock back up to a liveable standard, helping to manage urban sprawl, being environmentally friendly and reducing car dependency within urban settlements.

Town centre living will also have significant benefits for older people and people with mobility issues. Encouraging these people to live in town centres, allows them to enjoy a more active and social life surrounded by services which will enhance their quality of life and independence. First floor living over shops is also attractive to young people as it will allow many to purchase their first homes and allow them to step onto the property ladder in a market where it is becoming increasingly difficult for first time buyers. With the move to remote working in recent years, young people and professionals spend more time at home and less time commuting. Encouraging these young and professional people, who may struggle to buy larger properties, to live in town centres may, in turn, bring more disposable income into town centres to support local businesses.

There is a vacant feel to parts of Manorhamilton, this could be due to the fact that many of the first-floor units along Main Street, Teapot Lane, Old Church Street and New Line appear to be vacant and / or derelict. Many of these properties are prime sites that can be redeveloped and renovated into new modern and attractive apartments for people of all ages to live in. The development of these properties and the encouragement of the town centre and first floor living above shops would revitalise and revive Manorhamilton.

There are a number of schemes available to help regenerate, repopulate and develop the current building stock within rural towns and villages across the country. As part of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, there is a focus on designating funding to support town centre living with €93 million being invested across 1,300 projects since 2016. The *Croí Cónaithe* Fund under the Housing for All Scheme invests money into both new homes and refurbishing vacant homes to support the sale of these homes to owner occupiers and first-time buyers.

There has been a lot of public realm works and improvements done along Old Church Street which is evident in some of the dwellings along the road. In this image we can see three buildings which have all been split into 2, these properties look very modern and tie in with the works and improvements which have been done along the Street. With these properties being inhabited, modern and painted it improves the vitality and viability of Old Church Street. By having this standard of housing in other areas of the town it will help to regenerate and improve the appearance of Manorhamilton.

Proposal 2: Short-Term Rental Accommodation

There is a lack of tourist or short-term rental accommodation in Manorhamilton. Promoting short-term rental accommodation would see an increase in tourist accommodation within the town centre. Providing tourist or short-term rental accommodation would increase the economic advantage of local tourist sites like Leitrim Sculpture Centre, as well as encourage tourists to visit Manorhamilton's historic sites such as the Castle. This would encourage people to stay longer within Manorhamilton using it as a base to explore the nearby natural, cultural and built heritage of the county.

Local property owners in Manorhamilton could work together to preserve the historic built environment, enhance attractiveness and in turn promote tourist potential in the town. By redeveloping and giving vacant and derelict buildings a new purpose within Manorhamilton Town Centre it would help to make the town more attractive and bring more tourists into the town.

1 New Line Road Vacant Property

Sligo Road Vacant Property

Proposal 3: Redeveloping Jak's Casino

The building where Jak's Casino now stands was built in 1846, and at the time the land was leased from Lord Leitrim to be used as the Commercial and Posting House Hotel. In the past, the building held a very important role for the residents of Manorhamilton however the building has been closed for many years and is now in a derelict state.

Since Covid-19 there has been a shift to remote working, with many towns developing co-working spaces as many remote locations outside town centres do not have the internet infrastructure needed to facilitate online working. The location, size and setting of Jak's Casino is an ideal location to develop a remote working hub, which could offer local people as well as visitors a vibrant workspace in the heart of Manorhamilton town centre. This facility could offer hot desks, offices, boardroom facilities, an exhibition space and a tea and coffee dock. The addition of this facility in Manorhamilton town centre would see many local businesses benefitting from a greater footfall in the town centre on a daily basis.

The old Royal Hotel premises in Boyle Roscommon is a precedent for this development. This building was refurbished and converted into an enterprise centre and remote working hub, funding for this project came from the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF).

Before

After

## Proposal 4: Redeveloping Vacant Sites

There are many vacant sites in the town which have potential for redevelopment including the Market House, the Courthouse, and empty sites between the Main Street and W8 and on Teapot Lane.

The footfall around Supervalu was the largest and considering its proximity to the Main Street of the town, particularly to the old marketplace, there is high potential for the site. To maximise the footfall and encourage people to stop in the town as opposed to just driving through it, a reduction of vacant sites and the introduction of local retailers is an avenue for achieving this. For instance, what the footfall count fails to demonstrate is the number of people generated by the pop-up functions in the car park of the Bee Park site such as the market on a Friday, however, if this was located in the heart of the town centre beside other local businesses opposed to the periphery, then maybe we would see more positive knock-on effects in the town. Therefore, a proposal for the restoration of the old Marketplace and a much more large-scale implementation of a collection of restaurants / food places or maybe even something as simple as moving the food market from outside the Bee Park community centre to this old marketplace. This would free parking spaces in the car park of the Bee Park community centre and provide adequate infrastructure for the local retailers to thrive and have a permanent high quality public space which would immensely benefit the town and enhance the town's identity. The public realm and pavements and walkability around this old marketplace is in great condition (around this area) and this space needs to be reanimated to act as a magnet to bring the busy traffic on the Sligo Road into the town core. There could even be a pop-up intermediary use for the space out the front of the old marketplace whilst the restoration works were being carried out. A pop-up use as simple as a coffee/ice cream/food truck present in that small square where there are picnic facilities etc., would really change the whole dynamic of the town.

The former bar vacant site lies adjacent to this old marketplace site and so if two new developments came in here to serve the community it would ignite a chain reaction of regeneration throughout the centre. These proposals must serve and benefit the local community whilst also inviting those who drive through the town to stop. The proposal for a visitor information service or a place all about the castle and its history to fuel the fire around the cultural identity of the town. A place which offers tours of the castle and the area, celebrating what makes it unique. This is an avenue to approach or even the opportunity to invite a local retailer to take up the site to add diversity to the street and feed off the other proposal of the reinstated marketplace.

Proposal 5: Regeneration of Back alleys opening on main street

The regeneration of the lanes / alleyways leading from the Main Street to W8, including the alley that connects to the parking area in front of Osta W8, presents a unique and multifaceted opportunity to enhance resident integration with the town centre. These alleys, which serve as crucial connectors between different parts of the town, are currently underutilised and lack the aesthetic and functional elements necessary to make them safe and welcoming. By introducing additional lighting, these alleys can be transformed into well-illuminated pathways that enhance security and visibility, thereby encouraging use at all times of the day and night. The introduction of greenery, such as trees, shrubs, and flowering plants, can further enhance these spaces, providing a more pleasant and inviting environment that promotes relaxation and community interaction. Moreover, promoting local creativity through community-led artistic and creative wall designs can significantly contribute to the beautification of these spaces. Murals, graffiti art, and other forms of creative expression can reflect the town's unique cultural identity and history, turning these alleys into open-air galleries that attract both residents and visitors. This not only beautifies the space but also fosters a sense of local pride and community engagement, as residents take part in the creation and appreciation of public art.
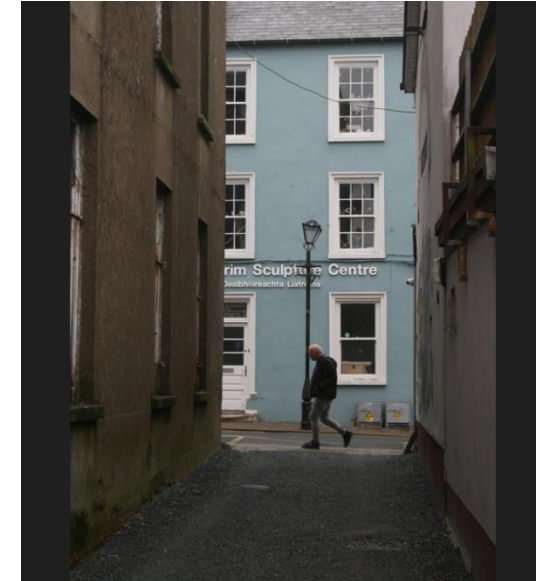
The proposed improvements are not solely about aesthetic enhancement; they also aim to create a safer and more accessible environment for all. Increased lighting will deter criminal activity and improve safety, while the addition of greenery can help reduce noise pollution and improve air quality. These changes will make the alleys more pedestrian-friendly, encouraging walking and cycling, which in turn can reduce traffic congestion and promote a healthier lifestyle among residents. Additionally, the community-led approach to artistic enhancements ensures that the transformations are reflective of local tastes and values, making the spaces more meaningful to those who use them. Engaging the community in these projects can also provide educational opportunities, especially for young people, who can learn about art, urban planning, and environmental stewardship.

In conclusion, the regeneration of the back alleys leading to the facilities and parking at W8, as highlighted by the pathways marked in red in Figure 3, represents a comprehensive approach to urban improvement. By integrating additional lighting, greenery, and community-led artistic endeavours, these spaces can become safe, accessible, and vibrant parts of the town that enhance the overall quality of life for residents. This multifaceted strategy not only addresses practical concerns such as safety and accessibility but also enriches the cultural and aesthetic landscape of the town, creating environments that are both functional and inspiring.
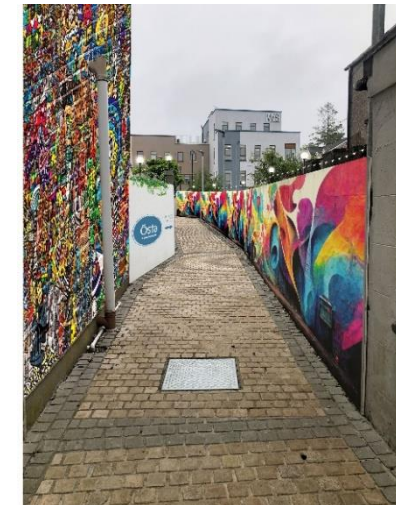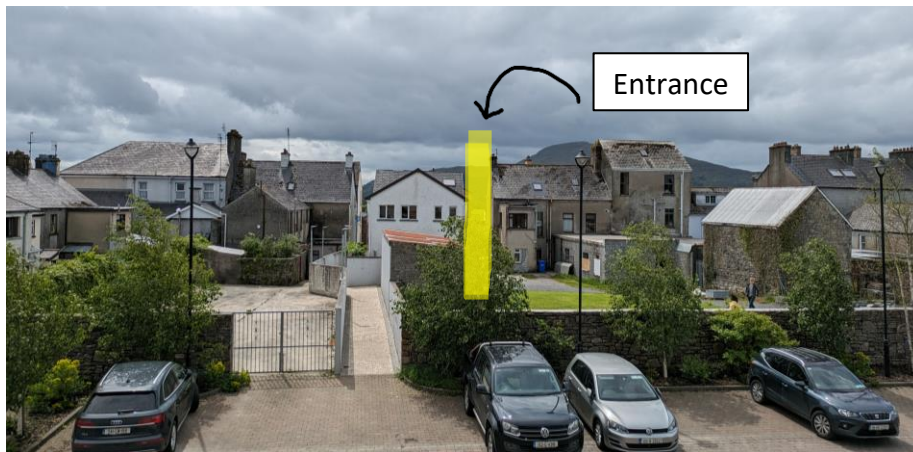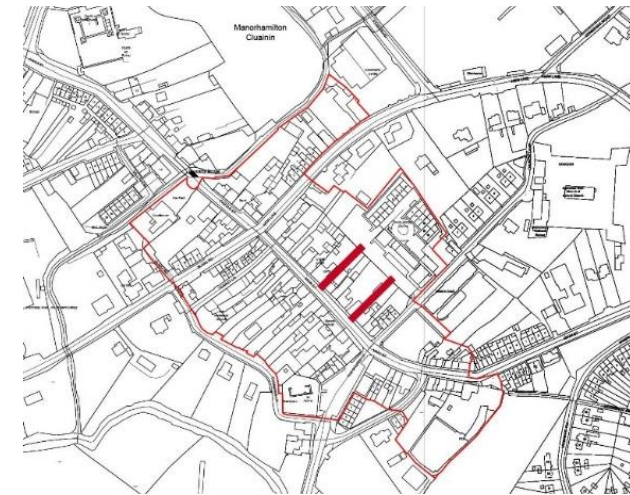

Figure 1 - Before

Figure 2 - After

Proposal 6: Castle Square. Regeneration of Manorhamilton Castle

Castle Opportunity Site
Town Centre Boundary

Manorhamilton Castle presents the greatest opportunity for local tourism in Manorhamilton. The castle, which gives the town its name, was constructed between 1634 and 1636, and could serve as the focal point for a vibrant town in the future. Currently, it serves solely as a monument to its past, only observable from behind its historic defensive walls.

The castle, as shown (left), in located outside of the town centre boundary, but it is only a short 3-4min walk from the town centre in an attractive residential area. Additionally, the short walk from the town centre is pleasant, with other historic buildings, including housing. The only issue is a narrow bridge, which is uncomfortable for pedestrians.
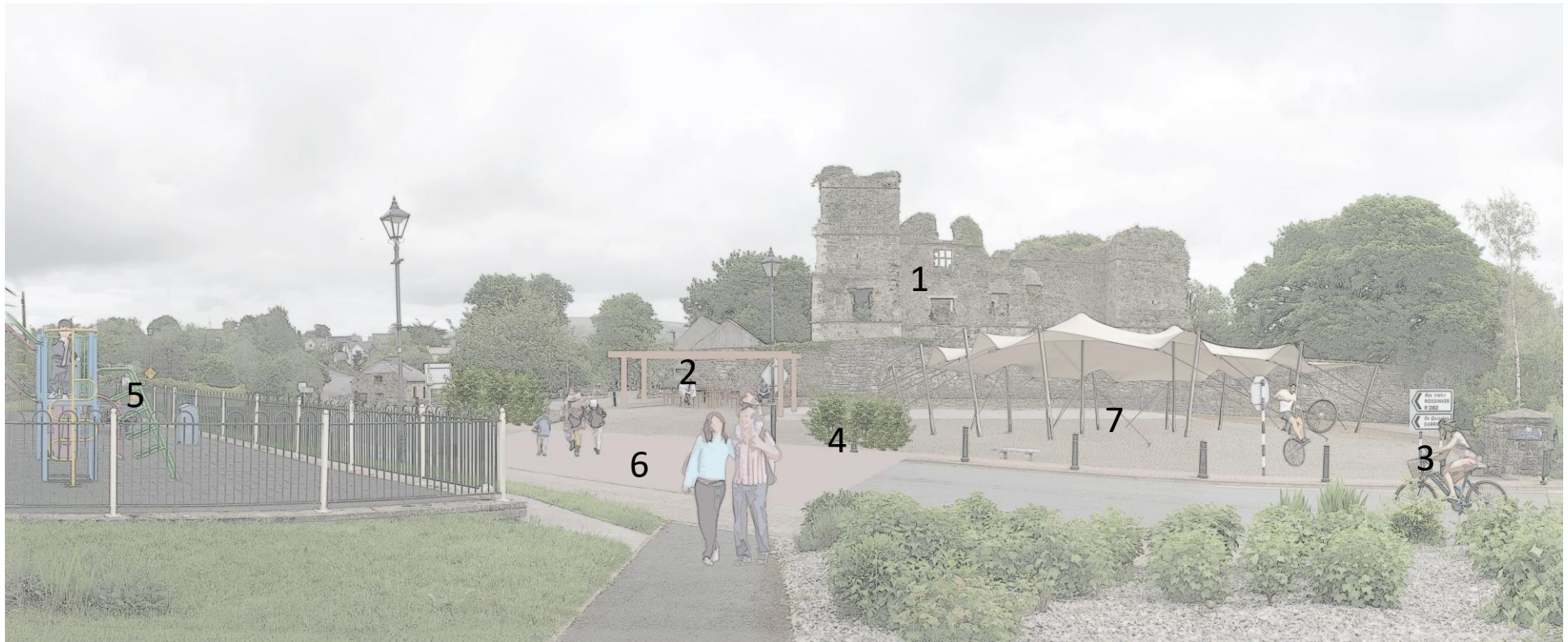
The proposal consists of small, temporary urban interventions, which bring life and footfall to the area. Designed with the locals in mind first, this new *Castle Square*, promotes local spending, active travel, and space for all generations, while attracting new visitors to the area.

Building upon the other 5 proposals, this design intervention seeks to put Manorhamilton on the map as an attractive place to live, visit, or spend the afternoon, combining temporary and permanent interventions over an adaptable timeline. Flexibility, staging and momentum are essential for a project like this, to ensure community support and financial security.

1. **The Castle**. This is the focal point of the intervention. The castle should be protected appropriately with the removal of shrubbery from the derelict walls and stabilisation of the existing stonework. With the creation of walkways and benches within the castle walls, the castle can become a centre for recreation, perfect for a Sunday stroll, or coffee stop. Additionally, it opens opportunities for education for local schools and community groups.

2. **The Café**. A temporary pop-up café, with outdoor sheltered seating can be trialled in the summer months initially. Inviting locals and visitors alike, the tranquil setting of the castle is the perfect place to stop by. With the new publicly open castle, the success of the café can be ensured, enabling it to become a permanent, year-round attraction, in 2-3years.

3. **Active Travel Connectivity**. Manorhamilton is the starting or focal point in many fantastic cycling routes in Leitrim. With the potential to attract visiting cyclists, the castle could become a favourite coffee-stop for local cycling groups, and families alike. With basic infrastructure, such as cycle stands and wayfinding signs, this intervention is highly cost-effective, building on the success of the other interventions.

4. **Planting Scheme.** The area adjoining the castle and road is sparse with greenery. This is an issue, making the space uncomfortable, trapped between the road and high castle walls. Mixed hedge planting in front of the café seating creates a more tranquil and beautiful setting to enjoy a coffee.

5. **Playpark.** The playpark across the street is another point of potential improvement. There is scope for play infrastructure improvements to the current playpark, with additional space for older children and teens, such as a small sports pitch.

6. **Pedestrian Crossing**. A new raised pedestrian crossing ensures easy access to the improved playpark facility. This enables parents to have more confidence in letting their children play in the park, while they enjoy a coffee. Moreover, the new crossing improves connectivity for the local people, who should have easy pedestrian access to the new public space.

7. **Events Space.** The large area, in front of the castle walls presents a great opportunity for the local town. Currently a steep slope, the area should be repaved at a consistent flat level, before dropping down steps to Castle Street. This allows the space to be used for a market, local celebrations or other events. Basic infrastructure, such as a power and water supply, can enable an efficient transition of the change of use of the space.