



Cullohill Community Plan 2018



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Project Promoters: Cullohill Community Council

Project Consultants: Tom O'Leary, O'Leary & Associates Training & Consultancy

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We would also like to thank the individuals within the local community who participated in the consultation process and public meetings.

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

The development of the Cullohill Community Plan was commissioned by Cullohill Community Council Ltd. and was funded by Laois Partnership under the LEADER Rural Development Programme. The plan has been developed by O'Leary & Associates Training & Consultancy Ltd.

This Community plan is to provide a blue print for the future development of Cullohill with a focus on priority initiatives and actions that will shape the future of the community as a place to work, live and visit over the coming years and into the future.

The development of the plan was not a statutory requirement and is not meant to replace or devalue existing and future local area plans. The plan however has not been produced in isolation and reference is made to relevant local, regional and national plans that have a relevant strategic context for the development of the Community Plan.

1.2 Plan Development

The development of the plan consisted of the following stages:

Stage 1	Preliminary Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree Brief and Parameters with Steering Group • Gather all relevant and existing research and data • Site visits • Review of existing Strategies
Stage 2	Profiling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile • Infrastructure analysis • Strengths, Issues, Opportunities Analysis
Stage 3	Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online Public Survey • Public Meeting
Stage 4	Develop Strategic Themes, recommendations and action plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop overarching strategic themes • Provide recommendations for initiatives under each theme • Formulate an action under each theme.
Stage 5	Implementation and monitoring Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree local implementation structures and monitoring and reporting mechanisms
Stage 6	Finalise the plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft plan put forward for consultation to stakeholders – Laois Partnership and Laois County Council • Final Plan adopted by the community and Cullohill Community Council
Stage 7	Monitor and Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor and review progress of the plan against measurable targets

This document should be a living document that will be flexible and be able to respond to changes in support structures, availability of funding, funding cuts, market demand, social and economic challenges. The action plan therefore needs to be reviewed, monitored and adjusted annually.

1.3 Strategic Themes – Priority Areas

The purpose of this plan is to set out the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the sustainable development of the Community of Cullohill. These action and objectives centre around key strategic themes or priority areas that have been identified through the community consultation process.

These strategic themes include:

- Infrastructure & Tidy Towns
- Community Facilities
- Tourism Opportunities
- Enterprise Opportunities
- Implementation and Marketing

Objectives have been developed under each theme and the plan is action focused with responsibilities, indicative budgets (where identified) and timeframes provided in an action plan.

1.4 Key Recommendations

The following are the priority actions recommended within the plan:

Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply for funding for renovation and expansion works on the community hall. • Fit out the first floor of the hall as a small co-working space for start-ups, remote workers and home-based small businesses. • Consult with Laois County Council re roads, signage and street-lighting improvements in and around the village. • Consult with Laois County Council and Broadband providers re the development of improved broadband services. • Carry out a feasibility study into the redevelopment of the vacant property in the village as a multi-purpose community enterprise space. • Expand on the success of the Tidy Towns and expand the volunteer base. • Develop a planting and landscaping plan for the village core and entrances. • Develop a sensory garden and playground.
Enterprise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lobby to ensure Eir Fibre rollout is completed by the end 2018 as targeted. • Investigate options for the development of vacant property in the village as co-working space. • Investigate opportunities to promote the tradition of food businesses by developing food incubation units. • Develop a business network amongst local businesses and develop information sharing, support networks and training opportunities.

Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote Cullohill as a destination for walks, targeting families and the active market. • Develop the existing walking trails and promote to a wider market. • Develop self-guided apps focusing on heritage and bio-diversity. • Develop cycle trails. • Improve tourist information signage. • Develop a 'basecamp' for walkers in the village – parking, information, toilets, small cafe. • Develop a café in the village. • Develop sports activity weekends such as sportif, running, triathlons etc. • Develop a series of festivals and events throughout the year. • Develop a tourism marketing plan and work closely with existing tourism groups, in Laois • Develop tourism initiatives in partnership with Durrow (as Durrow has an accommodation base) • Identify opportunities to expand the proposed Blueway in Durrow to Cullohill
Community Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress the renovation of the community hall as a sports and community facility. • Support the development of a Children's Playground in the village. • Develop a dedicated youth space within the redeveloped hall. • Carry out a study on the development of an astro-turf pitch on the school property. • Apply for Sports Capital funding for the development of the astro-turf pitch • Investigate the option of developing a multi-sports facility on a potential green field site near the village. • Support the development of the GAA pitch – levelling and re-surfacing, hurling wall and astro-turf skills area • Support and expand the Active Retired Group. • Develop a community gym.

1.5 Implementation

It is recommended that Cullohill Community Council, spearhead the implementation of the actions within this plan. Partnership and collaboration are key to the successful future of the Community, and the various groups and organisations outlined in the strategy, should work together in implementing the strategy.

It is crucial also that the Cullohill Community Council and other organisations are supported in the implementation of these actions where appropriate and possible, by Laois County Council, Government Departments and Laois Partnership.

Potential Funding Sources have been identified and outlined within this plan. It should be noted that many of the initiatives put forward in this plan do not require funding or at least substantial funding, but do require investment in time and support by people within the community. Other projects that do require funding will be subject to such funding being available. There should be real 'buy-in' and investment from the local community and businesses however, and the Community cannot rely on external funding or subsidies to sustain the overall promotion of the Community.

This plan outlines how the Community can be developed and sustained over time. The Community is coming from a good starting position and the positives and opportunities for the Community outweigh the negatives.

2. Introduction & Planning Process

2.1 Introduction

The following Community Plan was commissioned by Cullohill Community Council. The consultation process and the preparation of the plan was carried out by the lead consultant Tom O'Leary of O'Leary & Associates Training & Consultancy, a Tralee based company which provides consultancy to non-profit community-based organisations.

The plan was part funded by Laois Partnership under the Rural Development LEADER Programme 2014-2020

2.2 The Proposing Group

Cullohill Community Council is a voluntary community group which was established in 2016 to act as an umbrella organisation for all local clubs and groups which operate within the area. The role of the Council is to assist and support other groups to access funding and grants from local government and other state agencies to improve and enhance the local area, club facilities etc.

2.3 Purpose of the Plan

This Plan has been commissioned by Cullohill Community Council to provide an outlet for the local community to express their vision of how they would like their Community to develop. In so doing, the community will set in motion the steps necessary to attain this vision for the future.

The underlying purpose of this plan is to promote community involvement in the development of the Community and to allow community members to feel ownership of the subsequent implementation process.

The following objectives were agreed with the Community Council:

- Assess the development potential of the area in the context of Local and National Policy.
- Carry out an analysis of the Strengths, Issues and Opportunities in the area.
- Assess the existing built environment and identify areas/buildings in need of renewal.
- Identify potential sites for amenity and commercial development based on the principles of sustainable development and review existing planning guidelines and necessary infrastructure provision.
- Highlight areas for improved road infrastructure, footpaths, lighting, and landscaping.
- Undertake a public consultation process and consult with all relevant stakeholders.
- Identify sources of funding for new initiatives and recommend financial strategies for the sustainability of existing and new facilities, services and actions outlined in the plan.

2.4 The Process

A key element of the success of any development plan for a community in either a rural or urban area is 'buy in' from the local community i.e. people living in the community and businesses based within the community.

Another key element is the support to the plan from the outset by Local Development Companies, Local Authorities and relevant local, regional and where applicable national agencies.

Desk Research provided the baseline data and information to make assumptions and influenced the strategies developed based on feedback from the consultation process.

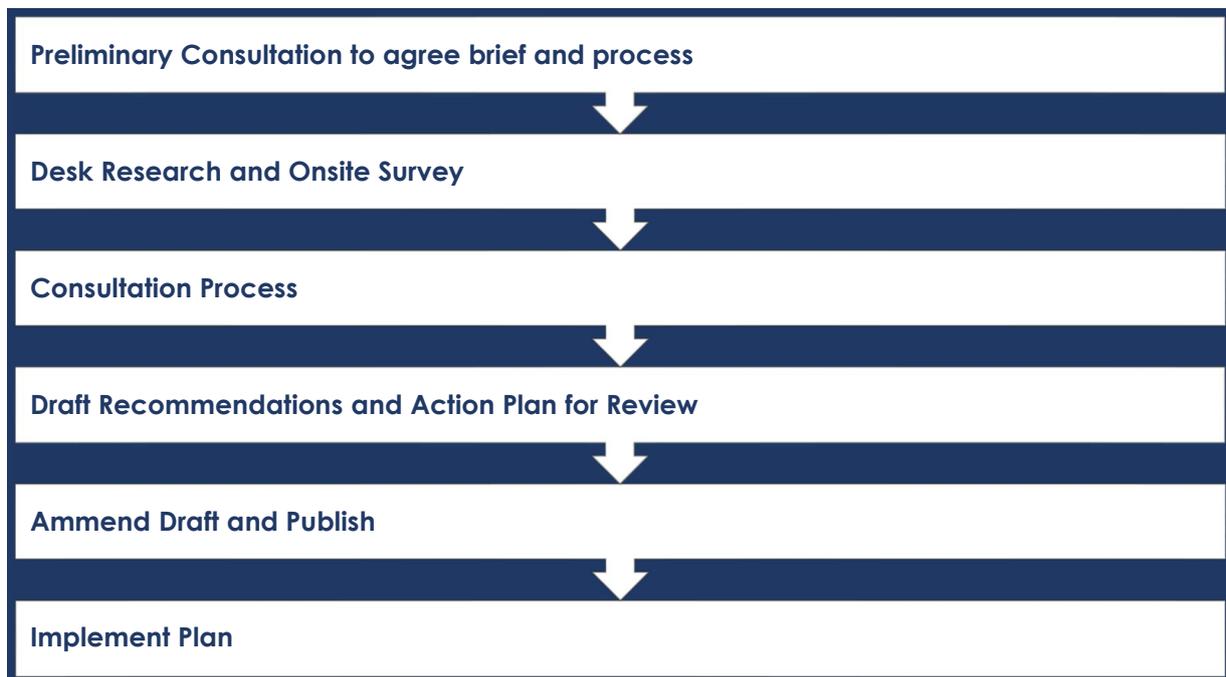


Fig 2.1: Research & Consultation Process

3. Area Profile

3.1 Historical Context

The name Cullohill, signifies the Hill or (Hill-Back) Wood, and evidently had its origin in a forest that in ancient times covered Cullohill Mountain and extended along the base, as far as Cullohill Castle and village.

Cullohill has a number of elements which are important from a historical point of view and are important visually with regard to the physical form of the village – these are the ruins of the old church, the castle, the limekiln and the areas beside them.

A priory of Augustine canons was founded in Cullohill in 550 by O' Dempsey, under the invocation of St. Tighernach who is now the patron saint of the area. The village is home to an impressive early 15th century tower house, once the principal stronghold of the MacGillapatricks (or Fitzpatrick) of Upper Ossory.

Under their patronage, a medical school flourished at Aghmacart townland, about a mile from the castle from before 1500 to c.1610. It was conducted by the Ó Conchubhair family. Its physicians included Donnchadh Óg Ó Conchubhair (fl. 1581-1611), Risteard Ó Conchubhair (1561–1625), Donnchadh Albanach Ó Conchubhair (1571–1647) and Cathal Ó Duinnshléibhe (fl. 1592-1611).

According to 1837 records Cullohill was listed as a village in the parish of Aghmacart. Aghmacart is now a townland of Cullahill and contains an old church and graveyard which are still in use. It is now part of Durrow parish and is in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Ossory.

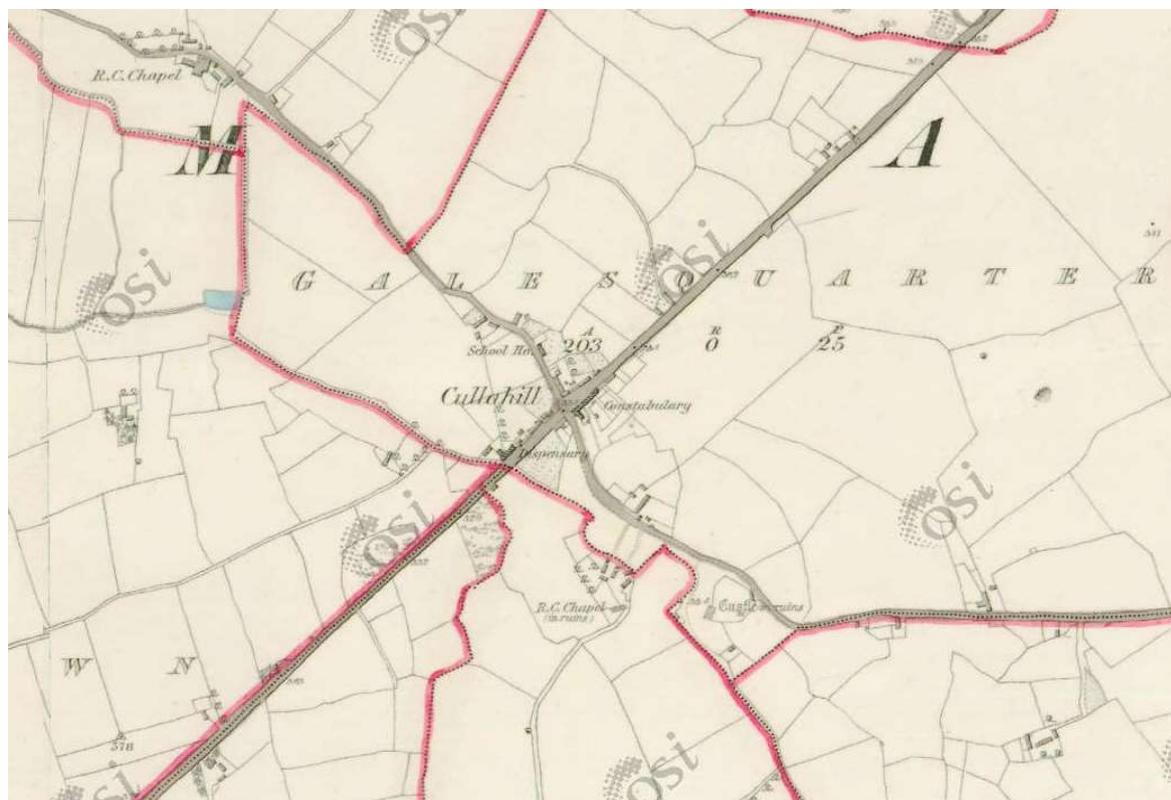


Fig 3.1: Historical 6-inch map of the Community (1837-1842) Source: www.osi.ie

3.2 Development Strategy and Planning Policy

Under the Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023, Cullohill, is classified as a Village of less than 400 population. *“These areas have a limited service base and are to a large extent founded on the local primary school catchment area. These villages provide opportunities for future expansion/provision of services such as community centres, local shop, pub, petrol stations and have the potential to attract a population on seeking to live in a rural environment. Development growth should be low density relative to the scale of the settlement located as near as practical to the core area.”*

Laois County Council’s rural development strategy is based on promoting sustainable rural development aimed at maintaining vibrant and viable rural communities while also seeking to protect the amenity, recreational and heritage value of the rural landscapes and countryside of the County.

The designation of settlements for development enables the Council to promote the strengthening of villages and settlements and to provide for the development of rural communities.

3.2.1 Development Policies and Objectives

Encourage appropriate levels of residential development in smaller settlements particularly where there is a basic nucleus of community facilities and services.

CS37 - Conserve and enhance and strengthen villages < 400 population

CS38 - Direct population growth in line with settlement strategy;

CS39 - Encourage social and community uses within villages <400 population that sustain the population

CS40 - Promote densities relative to the scale of the settlement, located as near as is practicable to the village centre area having regard to Sustainable Residential Developments in Urban Areas and ensure that any plan or project associated with the provision of new housing is subject to appropriate assessment screening.

Under the Laois Local Economic Community Plan 2016-2021 it is a stated objective to “Support the development of 6 communities with a history of low engagement with public funding programmes - Mountrath, Borris in Ossory, Ballinakill, Cullahill, Errill and Doonane/Crettyyard.”

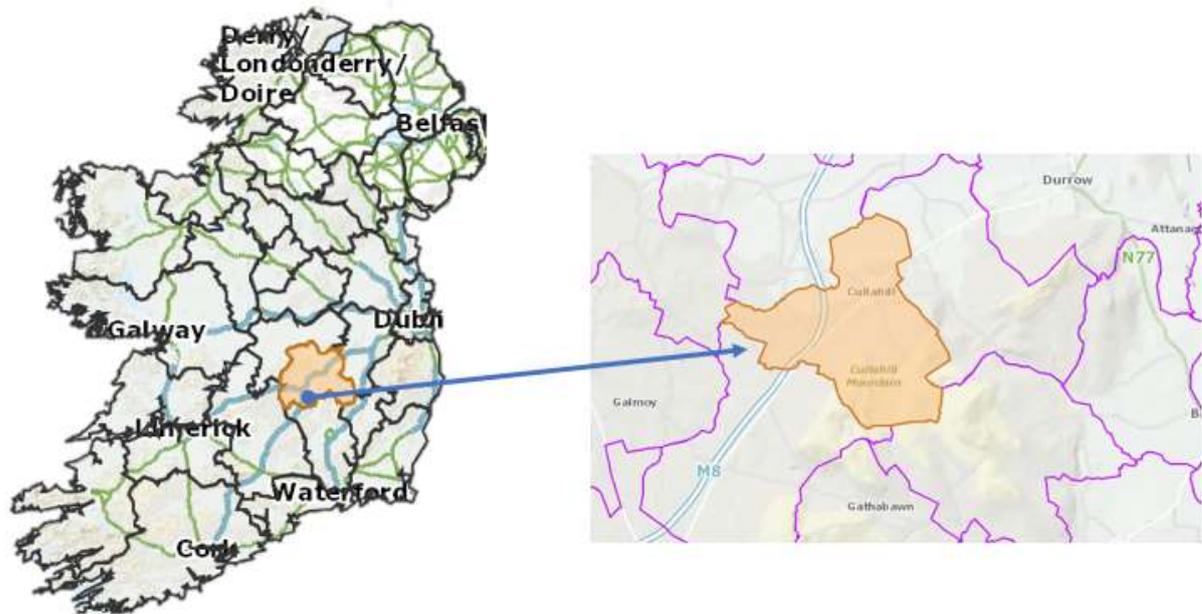


Fig 3.2 Location Map outlining Cullohill Electoral Division



Fig 3.3: Location Overview

3.3 Demographic Profile

All data is based on the published 2016 Census figures for the Cullohill Electoral Division¹.

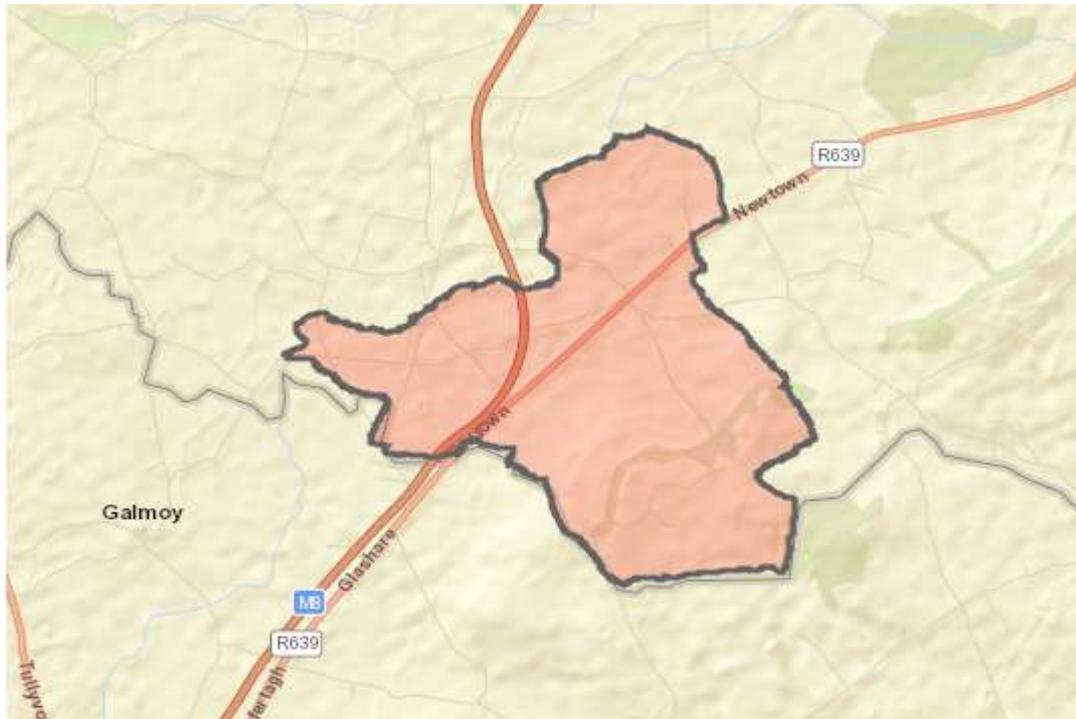


Fig 3.4 Electoral Area Map

3.3.1 Population

Total	Male	Female
359	184	175

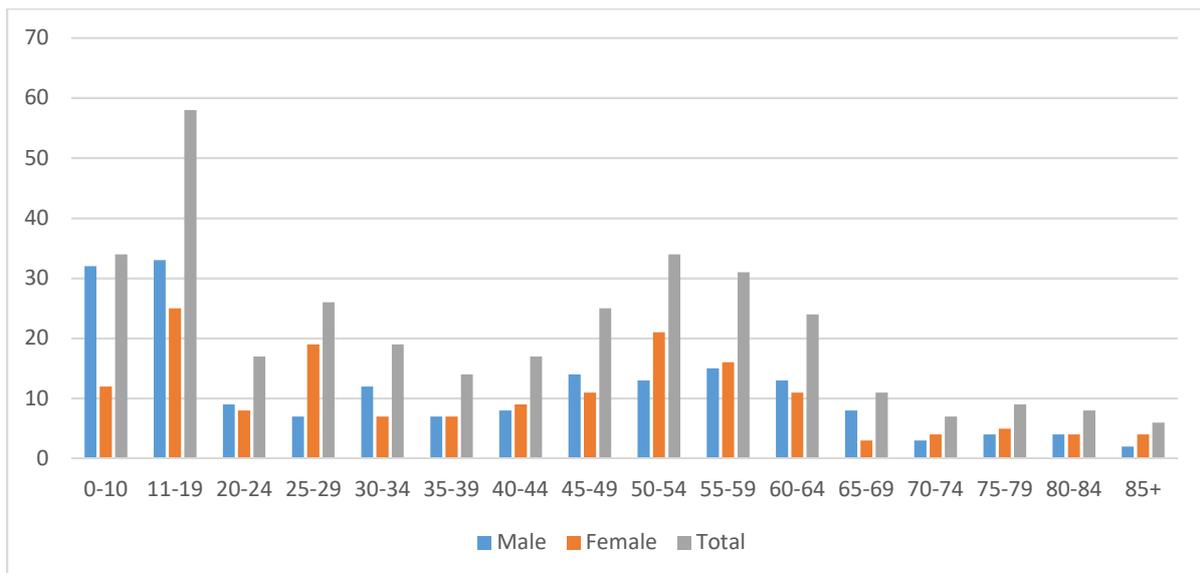


Fig 3.5 Age Profile 2016

¹ <http://www.cso.ie>

The graph shows the highest age category in the area is between 11 and 19. The age profile for the area is good with a lower aging population compared to other rural areas across the Country.

3.3.2 Family Unit Profile

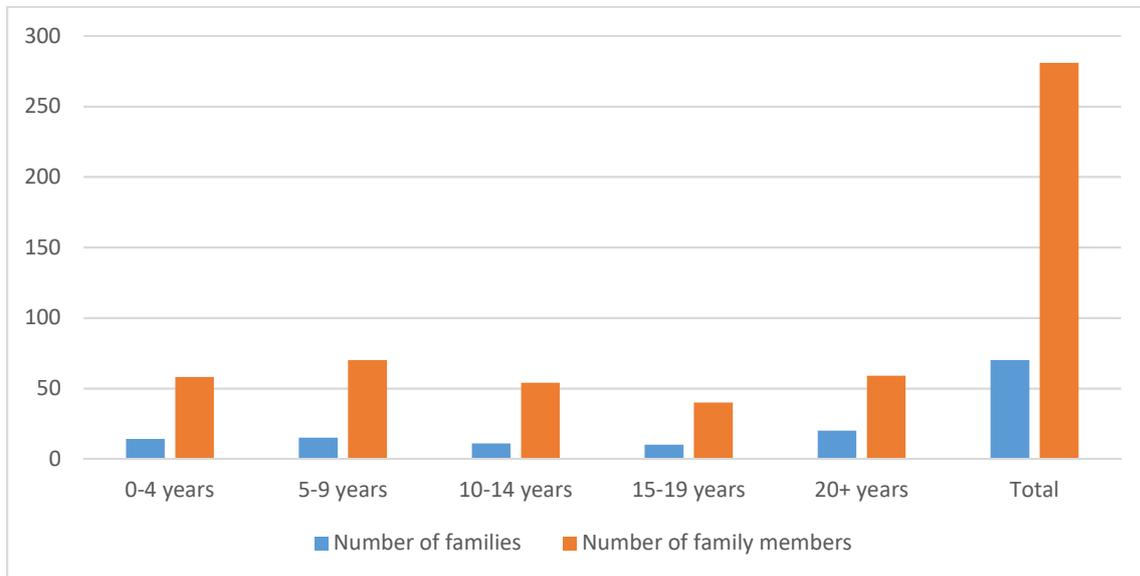


Fig 3.6 Families by age of youngest child 2016

3.3.3 Property Ownership

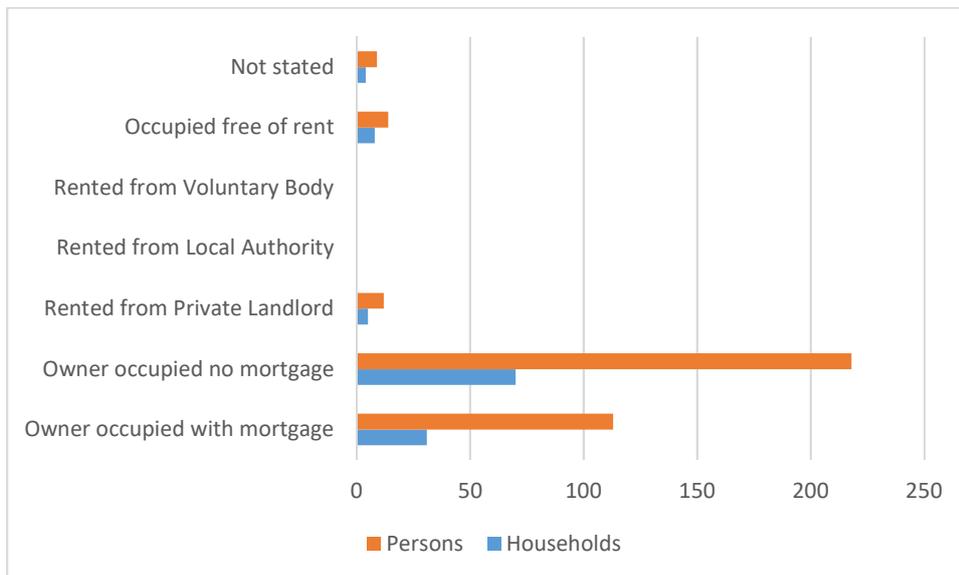


Fig 3.7 Property ownership by property type

3.4 Socio-Economic Profile

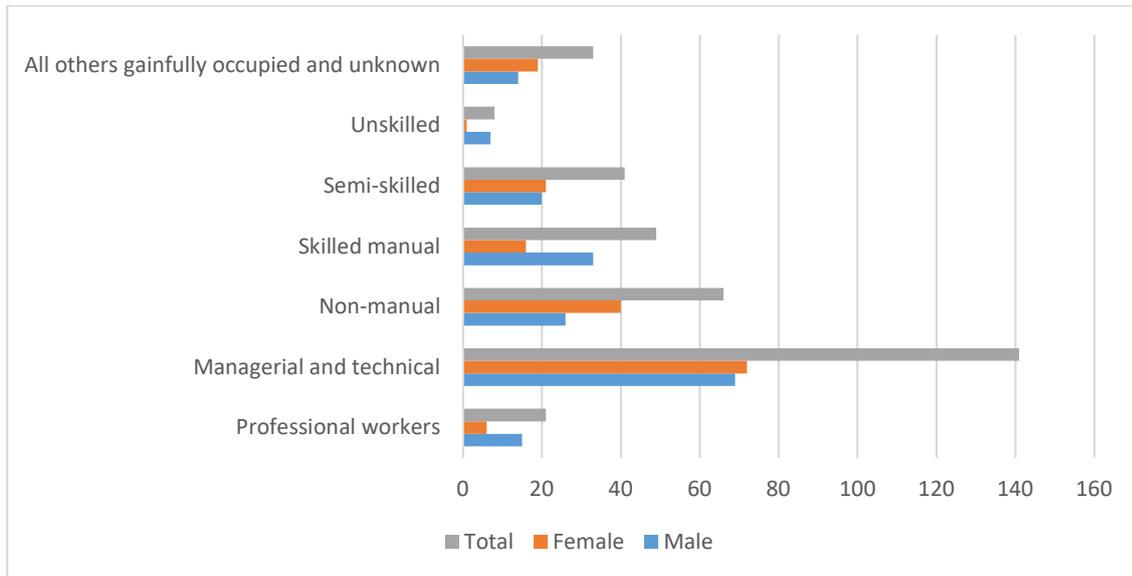


Fig 3.8 Population by Social Class

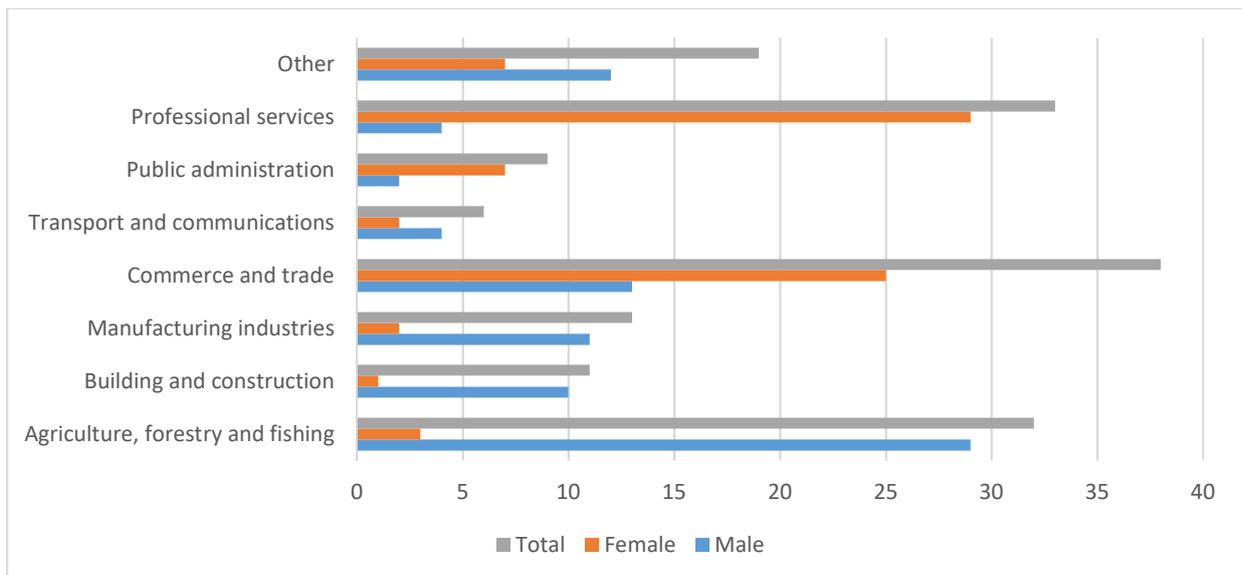


Fig 3.9 Persons at Work by Industry Type

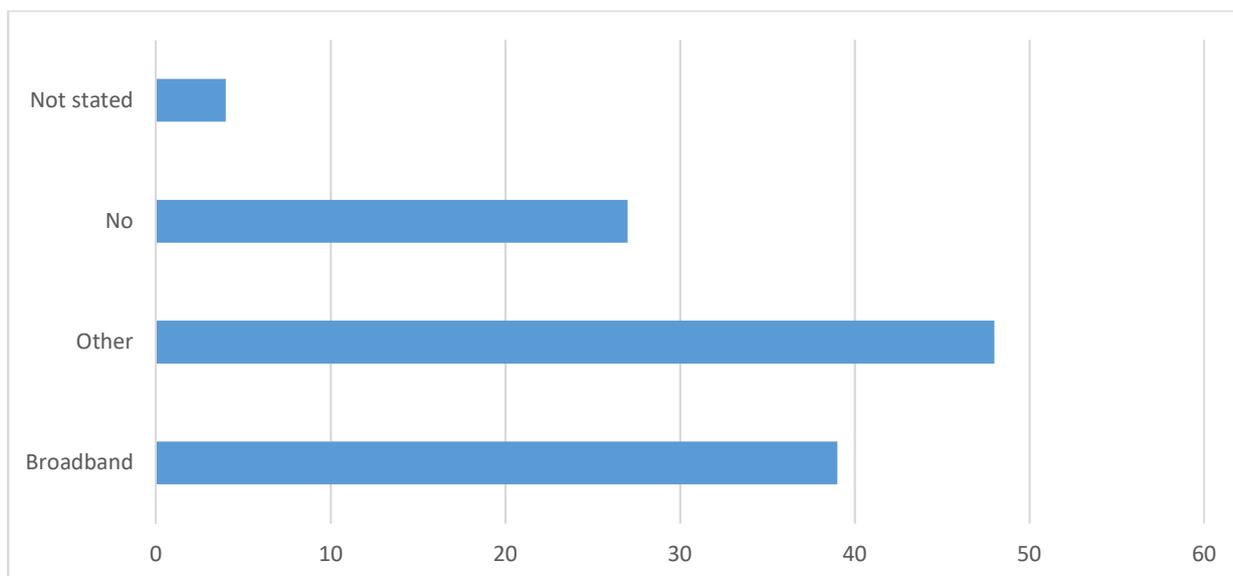


Fig 3.10 Number of Households with internet access

The graph shows a high percentage of households without broadband.

3.4.1 Deprivation and Age Dependency²

The Deprivation Index provides a method of measuring the relative affluence or disadvantage of a particular geographical area using data compiled from various censuses. A score is given to the area based on a national average of zero and ranging from approximately -40 (being the most disadvantaged) to +40 (being the most affluent).

Dependents are defined for statistical purposes as people outside the normal working age of 15-64. Dependency ratios are used to give a useful indication of the age structure of a population with young (0-14) and old (65+) shown as a percentage of the population of working age (15-64).

Electoral Division	Cullohill
ED ID	801200
Pobal HP Index 2016	4.63
Pobal HP Description 2016	marginally above average
Population 2016	359.00
Population change % (2011-16)	0.00
Age Dependency Ratio (%)	34.26
Lone parent ratio (%)	8.00
Prop. primary education only (%)	14.00
Prop. third level education (%)	30.88
Prop. local authority rented (%)	0.00
Unemployment rate - male (%)	4.49
Unemployment rate - female (%)	8.43

Fig 3.10 Summary of Deprivation Analysis for Cullohill 2016

² <https://maps.pobal.ie/>

3.5 Conclusions

- The unemployment rate for the Community based on 2016 Census Data was lower than the average rate of around 7.8% in 2016.
- The Community has an average age dependency ratio. Higher age dependency would have an impact on regenerating the Community, participation levels in National Schools, local clubs and will also require more social and community services, health, care and sheltered housing for the ageing population.
- Based on the employment by industry break down, there is a good spread across different industries with a concentration on Agriculture. The public consultation process and consultation with local businesses suggest that many people are commuting out of the Community to work, due to the proximity to urban centres.
- Access to quality broadband is poor in the Community.
- The deprivation index for the Community is marginally above the National average.

3.6 Services

The village is typical of many rural villages with populations of less than 400 people.

Facilities and Services in the Community

- 1 National School
- One grocery shop and 1 public house
- Post Office
- GAA Pitch
- Church
- Community Hall
- Creche and Pre-school
- Established walking Trails
- Strong Tidy Towns Group and Community Council

Facilities Missing

The following facilities/services are not currently available in the Community

- Enterprise and Industrial Space
- Multi-use outdoor sports facility
- Day Care and Social Care facility for older people
- Adequate Youth Space
- Fibre Broadband
- Café
- Playground
- Gym

4. Consultation Process

4.1 Public Consultation

A key element of any local led development planning process is the input of ideas and suggestions from the local community. The purpose of the plan, as already stated, is to provide a blue print for the community going forward to make the Community of Cullohill a better place in which to grow up, live, work and visit. In order to capture the views of local people the consultant undertook a public consultation process by means of survey and public meeting.

An online survey (using SurveyMonkey.com) was distributed via local social media pages and through an email database. The survey was also made available to people in hard copy format.

A public meeting was held in the Community Centre in February 2018. Approximately 70 people attended the public meeting. This was a great response to a call to a public meeting and is an acknowledgement of the people's desire to see change and development in their area.

The public meeting and the wider consultation process was promoted in local press, in local newsletters and through the various social media channels. Everyone contributed greatly to the public meeting and presented their views and opinions. These views and opinions have shaped and influenced the recommendations outlined within this plan.

4.2 Issues and Opportunities

The feedback provided an opportunity for the consultants to determine what are the key strengths the community can build on, what are the key issues to be addressed and where there are opportunities to improve the Community.

The following summarises the key strengths, issues and opportunities identified during the consultation process (feedback from surveys and public meeting).

4.2.1 Theme – Environment

Strengths	Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very good community spirit • Cullohill Mountain • Idyllic rural location • Local River • Fishing on Goul/Erkina • Castle and environs • Scenic area, nature trails • Millennium Garden • History of Aghmacart medical school first in Ireland • Tidy Towns Awards – pride in the community. • Good quality water scheme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to get planning permission in the area • Flooding around the environs of the area • Poor recognition • Intensively farmed area (hard on roads) • Parking • River needs to be cleaned • Annual painting of all buildings • Develop community garden

Opportunities

- Win Tidy Towns
- Develop Walks outside area of the mountain
- Walking Trail – story of the area
- Heritage Trail – signage
- Community garden or park
- Develop a “Story” / make the Castle and grounds something that can keep visitors occupied
- Development of Erkina/Goul River (Blueway)
- Historic Buildings
- Make the area a tourist attraction
- Develop Branding for Cullohill
- Develop App for Cullohill
- Develop information for local brochure
- Drone footage of Cullohill; showcase video of the area – why people should visit.
- Cullohill be known as a destination rather than a “drive through”
- Put wires underground in the Village
- Repair derelict buildings
- Community Centre needs improvement on the outside

4.2.2 Theme - Infrastructure

Strengths	Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main roads are safer due to Motorway • Central location close to Portlaoise, Kilkenny, Thurles • Access to the Motorway reduces travel times to main urban centres • Bus service 4 times a day from Cashel to Portlaoise – will stop anywhere along the route • Historical background – Castle, old Church etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resurface roads and widen where possible • Speed of Traffic • Poor quality of local roads • No designated parking/pull in spot/layby • Poor road margins • ESB Cables need to go underground • Footpath from Village to Castle • Need a wastewater treatment plant big enough to cover expanding population • Need broadband • No available housing and difficult to build • Public transport • More street lighting required on side roads to Church and Castle • Public Seating • Confusion on the spelling of Cullohill/Cullahill • Cycle ways • Signage – local roads and local points of interest • Derelict properties • Footpath from school to Church • No encouragement to stop for 30mins in the Village i.e. coffee shop, restaurant

Opportunities

- Expand the group water scheme further
- Bus Service could be improved
- Make use of derelict premises
- Re-open exit to motorway at county bounds
- Continue cycleway to Cullohill from Abbeyleix
- Derelict housing purchased by the Community for community needs
- Men's Shed
- Fibre Broadband

4.2.3 Theme – Community Facilities/Services

Strengths

- GAA Pitch locally
- Excellent Community Centre
- Strong handball Club
- Local Pub
- Local Equestrian Centre
- Local Petrol Station/Shop
- New local farm shop
- Good local childcare
- Creche, preschool, national school and study hub
- Mountain walks
- Lots of clubs and societies
- Strong Tidy Towns
- Community Council
- Millennium Garden
- Church
- Defibrillator
- Flower Club
- Bridge Club
- Connection between school and community

Issues

- No playground
- No all-weather sports surface
- No youth/older person group/facility
- Hurling pitch, changing facilities, lighting – all need investment
- Community centre and school and pitch not integrated
- No facilities for walkers to relax pre/post walk
- There is a need for an Active Retirement Group/Mens Shed
- No advertising of walks
- No facilities for youth to "hang out"
- No area for night walking/running
- Long way from third level facility
- Funding for Camogie Club
- Improve walks in mountain

Opportunities

- Gym for community use and outdoor exercise equip
- Development of multi-purpose amenity for education etc
- Development of derelict buildings
- Development of castle area i.e. lighting
- Allotment for gardening/organic areas
- 60 x 30 Handball alley
- Men's Shed
- Computer classes / night classes in the Centre
- Community Cafe
- Cycle Trail
- Active Retirement Group
- Park for community
- Establish community festival

4.2.4 Theme – Tourism & Enterprise

Strengths

- Tourism – Castle and other historical sites
- Walks / Walking Trails
- Yoga retreats
- Oldtown Construction
- Millennium Garden
- Local Businesses in operation
- Local small businesses
- Links to Ballymalloe Cookery School

Issues

- Poor services – cafe, food, accommodation
- Poor broadband
- Castle inaccessible and poorly signed
- River is inaccessible and dirty and overgrown
- No branding
- Lack of retail units - rates are too high
- Nothing to make you want to stop in village
- Not enough parking
- Poor Heritage Signage
- Road access on Mountain Road
- No incubation spaces / Start-up Units

Opportunities

- Development of community kitchen
- Local serviced offices
- River walks
- Development of castle i.e. lighting, signage etc
- Redevelopment of hall into a venue
- Better signage
- Annual festival
- Artefacts that were found locally should be displayed locally
- Potential for more walks, development of river
- Setup local small service offices for small home-based businesses
- Farmers market
- Development of Hall – venue for conferences etc
- Brown heritage signs – Heritage Trail
- Snack Shack for walkers etc
- Better Broadband needed
- Enterprise Centre
- Cookery School
- Fishing
- Develop vacant commercial units
- Create website for Cullohill to showcase everything the village has to offer and make the community aware of what is around

4.3 Strategy Development

The overall aim of this plan is to provide a blueprint through which future projects, facilities and services can be planned for, funded, implemented, managed and sustained within the community.

The overall plan is broken into specific strategic themes. The objectives and actions under each theme are based on an analysis of the feedback from the public consultation process, an analysis of existing and strategies and policy impacting on the area and an analysis of the current funding environment to develop projects.

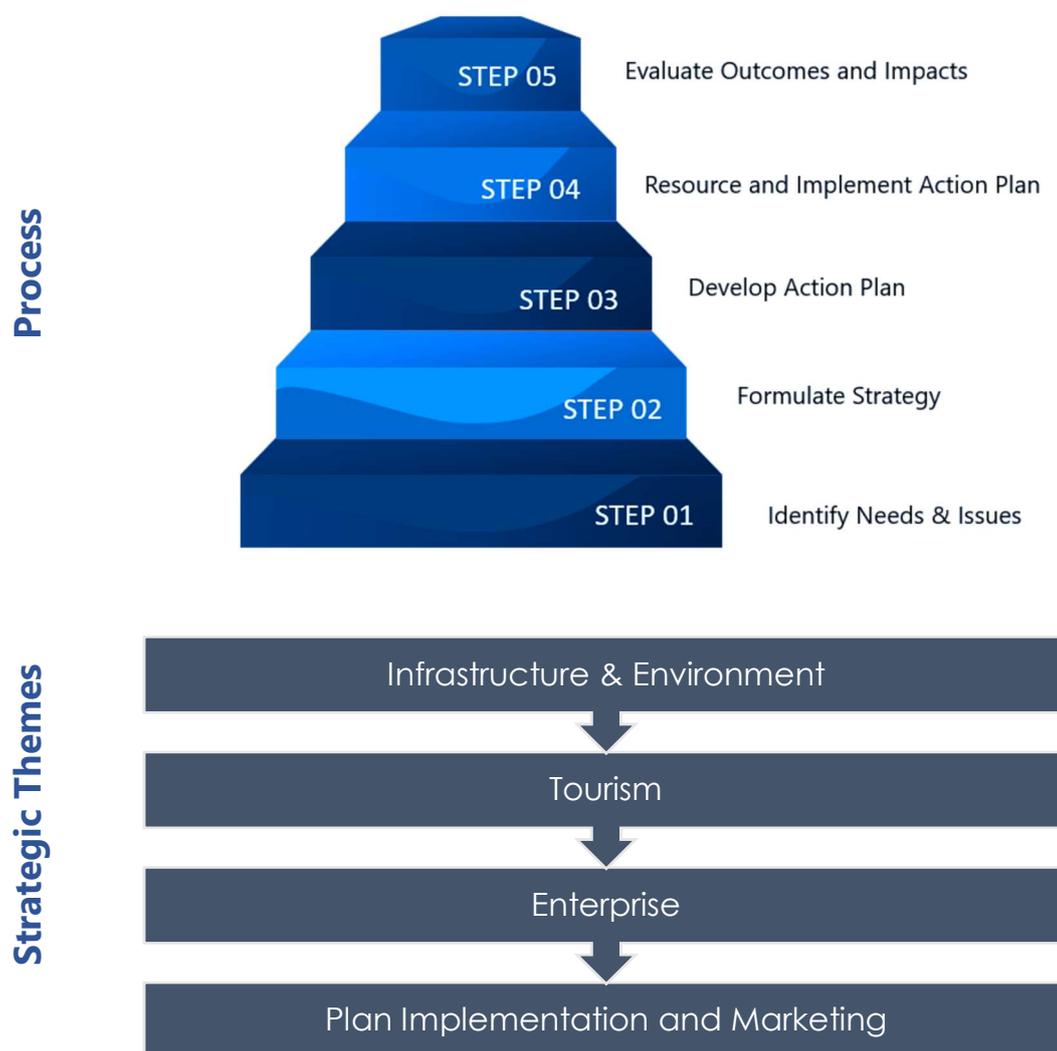


Fig 4.1: Strategy Development Process

5. Theme: Infrastructure

5.1 Water and Waste Water

There is a group water scheme in the area and some properties have private water sources. The village is not serviced by a public waste water treatment facility and dwellings are served by individual septic tanks. The lack of a public water supply and waste water treatment facility will see limited residential property development in the future thus prohibiting the potential growth of the area. This will also have an impact on commercial development in the area.

5.2 Roads & Signage

Poor signage has been raised continuously throughout the consultation process. The following issues need to be addressed.

- Speed limit boundaries and speed warning signs should be extended further outside the village core.
- Improved signage at village entrances. Attractive signage serves the purpose of distinguishing the village boundaries but also signage can be used in promoting what is in the area for visitors. (e.g. Cullohill Castle and Walking Trails)



Fig 5.1 Sample village/town entrance signs

- Dangerous stretches of road on Cullohill Mountain need to be addressed. There are some areas where steep roadside margins are not protected. The issues of the roads 'scaling' due to flooding must also be addressed.



Fig 5.2 Dangerous steep unprotected margins on Cullohill Mountain



Fig 5.3 Sample roadside markings and barriers

- The hedgerows on rural approach roads and lands should be maintained and protected through appropriate management.

5.2.1 Pedestrian Access

Pedestrian access outside of the village core is limited. There is a need to extend footpaths from the village centre to the church via the school. Where the road is not wide enough to construct a footpath, roadside margins should be cleared to make way for a designated pedestrian lane (marked on the road).

A pedestrian crossing would be required at the school to link the proposed footpath and pedestrian lane. A pedestrian crossing is also required at the village centre to allow the school children have safer access to the community centre.

Pedestrian access to the Castle from the village centre should also be provided.

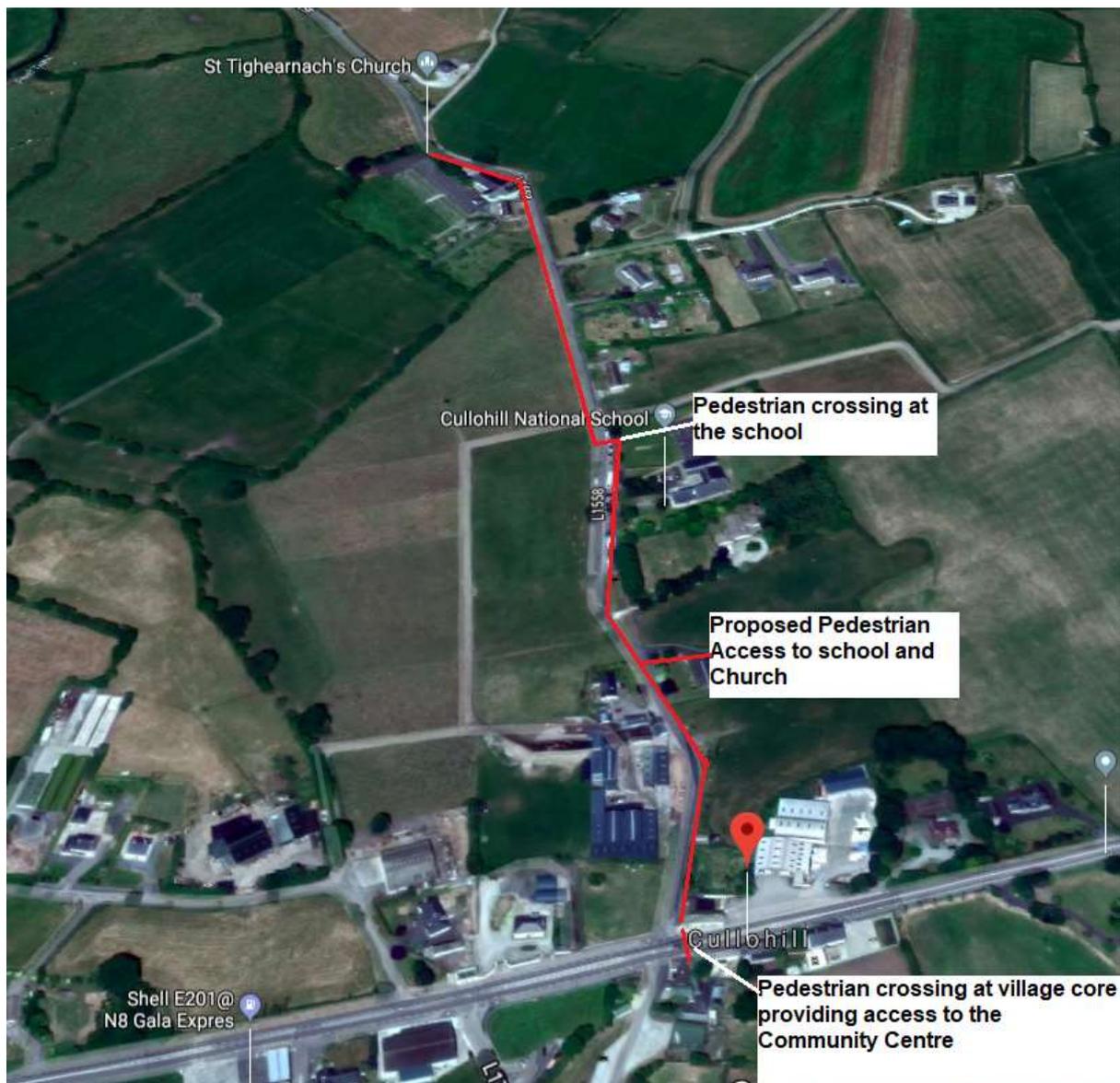


Fig 5.4 Proposed Pedestrian Linkages



Fig 5.5 Sample of marked pedestrian lane replacing existing grass margins.

5.3 Street-Scape

5.3.1 Landscaping

A planting scheme should be developed for the village focusing on native plants. Any walls that are in a state of disrepair should be repaired or rebuilt. Home owners and land owners should be encouraged to plant native plants and also maintain roadside properties. Some Tidy Towns groups run awards programmes for residential and commercial properties.

There is an ideal location for a sensory garden opposite the Castle. This would also link in with the nature walk and the old church and lime kiln. A good example of a sensory garden incorporating cultural and heritage elements is the Sneem Sculpture Park and Garden of the Senses in Co. Kerry. Sensory gardens do not require much capital investment but can add value to the village as it provides an outdoor space for locals and visitors.

The development of a community allotment could also be investigated in this area. It would be important to involve the local school in developing the gardens as a project.



Fig 5.6 Sample of a simple sensory garden



Fig 5.7 Sculpture Park and Garden of the Senses in Sneem, Co. Kerry



Fig 5.8 Example of a Wildflower Maze

5.3.2 Lighting & Furniture

The replacement of the existing street lights with traditional street lights as shown below would complement other streetscape and landscaping improvements to the villages. Overhead power cables should also be laid underground.



Fig 5.9 Sample traditional lighting in rural villages

Street furniture includes items such as litter bins, benches, bollards, railings, lighting, signposts etc., found within the public realm of streets and roads



Fig 5.10 Sample seating design

Seating such as that shown in Fig 5.10 should be installed in the proposed Sensory Garden.

5.3.3 Car-Parking

Designated Car Parking and Coach Parking Spaces should be marked clearly outside of the Community Centre. The car park opposite the centre should also be clearly marked. A set down area for drop offs should also be included. As services and use of the centre expands the requirement for increased car parking needs to be monitored.

5.4 Playground

The need for a community playground was highlighted in the surveys and feedback from the public meeting. Community playgrounds are an important asset in every community as they are used by local families but also will attract families from outside the area if they are of good standard and if they are part of a wider experience. E.g. Picnic areas, nature trails, fairy trails, walks etc.

The site opposite the community centre would be of sufficient size and is enclosed to be suitable for a playground. Natural materials and landscaping such as that shown in Fig 5.11 should be used.



Fig 5.11 Parish Park Playground, Loghill, Co. Limerick

5.5 Tidy Towns

Cullohill has a strong Tidy Towns Committee and team of volunteers who have put in huge effort into maintaining and improving the village. The hard work has been awarded in 2018 with a high mark of 298 awarded. The Tidy Towns judges praised the work of the volunteers in their report.

"The committee have worked tirelessly over the past number of years and it's great that the fruits of the labour are being acknowledged. An additional 11 points were scored this year, bringing Cullohill into 3rd place for small villages in Co. Laois."

Tidy Towns Competition 2018

Adjudication Report

Centre: Cullohill	Ref: 821
County: Laois	Mark: 298
Category: A	Date(s): 19/06/2018

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2017	Mark Awarded 2018
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	60	32	34
Streetscape & Public Places	50	35	36
Green Spaces and Landscaping	50	42	43
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	50	33	34
Sustainability – Doing more with less	50	17	19
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	57	59
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	33	34
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	38	39
TOTAL MARK	450	287	298

Fig 5.12 2018 Cullohill Tidy Towns Report

Going forward it is recommended that an annual budget is set aside for ongoing maintenance and new projects. Where practical local businesses and residents (through a fundraising campaign) should contribute to a central fund to cover the costs for maintaining the village and contributing to the overall appearance for both locals and visitors.

Where possible specific projects could be sponsored such as planting programmes, information signage etc., biodiversity projects.

Sponsorship should be sought to provide funding for paint, materials, plants etc. Recognition of their support would be through naming and branding. Some examples are provided below.



Fig 5.13 Example of sponsored planting schemes

Research should be undertaken on all possible sources of grant aid and funding supports (awards etc.) and a planner with key dates such as opening dates for applications and deadlines should be recorded.

Under the Tidy Town Plan, a focus should be made on renovating the exterior of old and derelict buildings, repairing old stone walls, focus on painting schemes and planting of native flowers and hedging. Support from employment schemes such as TÚS and RSS should be sought.



Fig. 5.14 Old Forge Painted with Mural and information provided on the history of ploughing in the area (Abbeydorney Village, Co. Kerry)

5.6 Broadband

The lack of high-speed broadband is an issue that was very predominant in the feedback from the consultation process. The lack of broadband is seen as a huge barrier to development in the area. It is also an obstacle in promoting job creation and business start-up opportunities in the area. With many urban areas achieving up to 1GB broadband, locations with limited Broadband will struggle to attract investment.

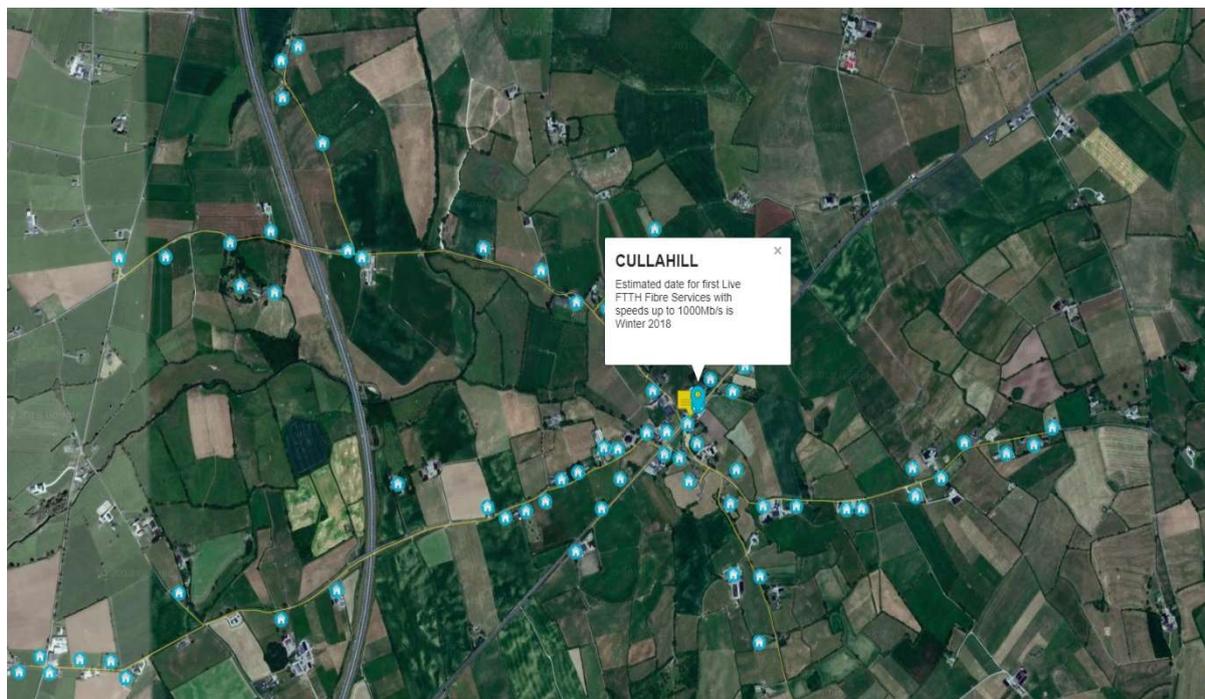


Fig 5.15 Eir Fibre Roll Out Map 2018

The estimated date for roll out of 1000mbs broadband in Cullohill is winter 2018 according to the Eir Roll Out Map.

If there are further delays in the fibre broadband roll out, options for wireless broadband should be investigated with any suitable providers in the County. There are a number of providers offering wireless broadband with speeds of up to 50mb in the area. A higher speed connection could possibly be negotiated with the providers as part of a community partnership arrangement.

5.7 Community Centre

A key element of the Cullohill Community Plan was to investigate options for developing new and existing buildings in the village for the purposes of:

- Community Meeting Space
- Enterprise Space
- Sports & Recreation
- Youth Space
- Active Retired Space

Two properties were investigated as part of the study. One was the existing community centre and hall and the second was the vacant retail and residential property in the village centre. The budget for the study did not include a detailed structural report on the vacant property so simple concepts for the redevelopment of the property are provided here.

A full design plan was prepared for the community centre and it is proposed to secure planning and apply for funding to develop this space. This section provides an overview of the potential uses of the redeveloped community centre. The section on Enterprise covers the potential opportunities to develop enterprise space within the community centre and also within the vacant property in the village.

5.7.1 *Services to be developed/expanded*

Hall

- Range of indoor sports
- Fitness classes
- Concerts and Shows
- Fundraising Events
- Birthday Parties
- Social Events

Meeting Rooms

- Active Retired Group
- Classrooms for grinds, community education programmes
- IT Training
- Youth Space

Co-working Space

- Renovate First Floor area as a small co-working space

Youth Club

There are limited activities for young people in the community. This is particularly true in winter months or in bad weather during the summer months. It has been suggested in the surveys that a proper youth centre be developed.

The demand for a youth club would need to be determined. Space within the redeveloped community centre should be provided for a youth club. In order to develop and sustain a youth club, it is recommended to develop a fundraising strategy that would be based around sponsors, youth activity grants, targeted annual fundraisers and fees for services and sales.

The following activities could be developed within the youth club:

- Gaming nights
- Movie Nights
- Workshops
- Coffee Bar
- Using the hall as a venue for parties

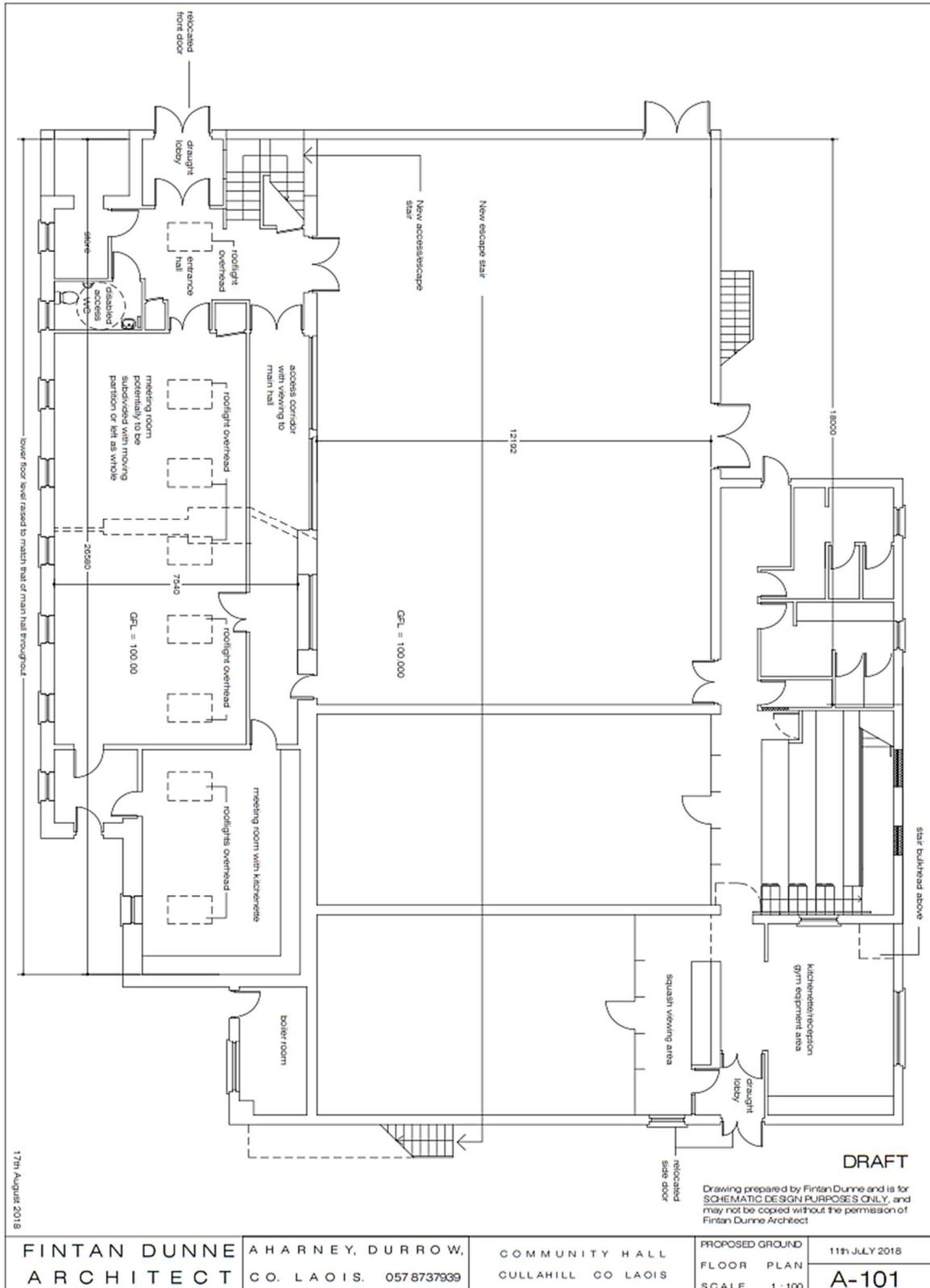


Fig 5.16 Proposed Ground Floor Renovations

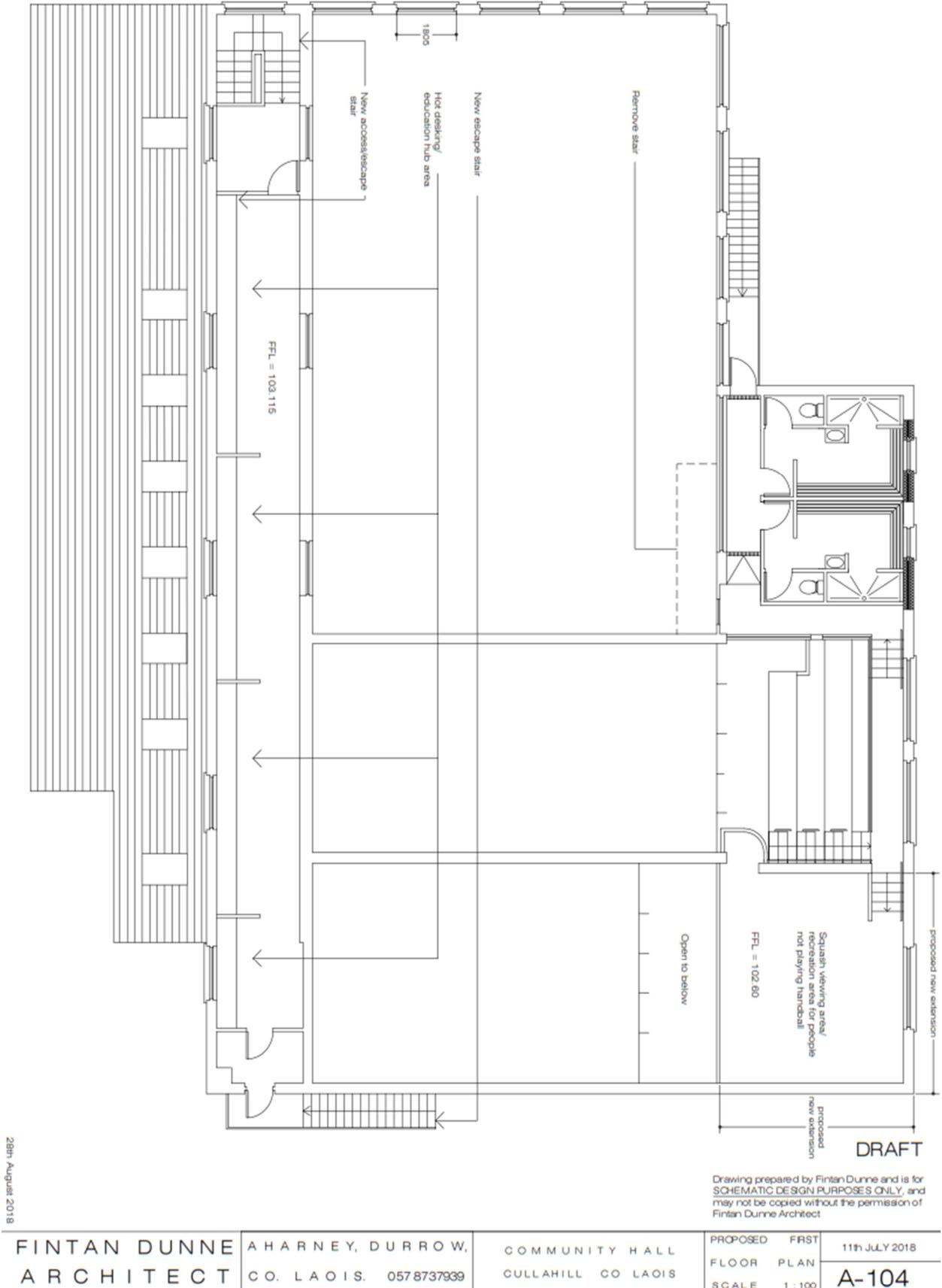


Fig 5.17 Proposed First Floor Renovations

5.7.2 Proposed works and costs

There are 2 options being proposed. One option is to remodel the front of the building/the old school and the narrow space upstairs. This will provide additional space by removing the stage and creating an additional room. This work will also involve upgrading the insulation for the part of the building. It will include rising the floor and moving the front door as well as constructing a new internal corridor.

Option B is costing 215,000 incl. VAT

The second option is a two-storey extension to the handball court end of the building. This will provide additional space for the handball club including reception area and viewing area on first floor. This area can also be used as a youth space.

Option C is costing 113,500 incl. VAT

Additional items that have indicative costs have been provided for include:

- The replacement of the high external windows in the main hall would cost 7,500 + VAT
- The insulation of the main ceiling to the main hall would cost 3,000 + VAT
- Glass wall to the Squash Court would cost circa 20,000 + VAT

All prices include a contingency.

5.8 Sports Facilities

5.8.1 GAA Club

Cullohill is part of the Harps GAA Club covering the Durrow Parish. The club has its main grounds in Durrow and has a less developed facility in Cullohill. Considerable investment has been made on the facilities in Durrow. The pitch and facilities in Cullohill are in poor condition and require investment. The pitch needs to be levelled and probably drained and resurfaced. The dressing rooms would also need an upgrade and new lighting needs to be installed. A hurling wall and all-weather skills area could also be included as part of the redevelopment.



Fig 5.18 Current GAA Pitch and Dressing Rooms



Fig 5.18 Example of a 34mX20m hurling wall and astro-turf skills area at Killeedy GAA, Co. Limerick

5.8.2 All-weather Pitch

The community consultation process has identified the need for an all-weather playing pitch to accommodate sports and recreation by the school, clubs and the wider community.

For the purposes of this plan, the option of developing an astro-turf pitch on the school grounds was investigated. The rationale of the school grounds was based on the fact that there is sufficient space within the existing site to develop an adequate size pitch. Also, the school would benefit from having the facility on its property as the current grass 'pitch' is not playable during winter months.

There is also existing car parking space on site. Under the Sports Capital Programme funded by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport a school can apply for funding once it has a legal agreement in place with at least one club providing a minimum of 30 hours per week access to clubs. There are numerous examples of these projects between clubs and schools all across the country.



Fig 5.19 Potential location for Astro Turf Pitch



Fig 5.20 Site layout for a 70m X 35m pitch



Fig 5.21 Example of 30m X 75m pitch at the Green CBS, Tralee.



Fig 5.22 Sample 1800m² pitch

Indicative Costs without grounds work and drainage for a 30m X 75m pitch would be circa €200,000 including fencing, nets and lighting.

5.8.3 Handball Club

Cullohill Handball Club is a very active and successful club. The club has one 40x20 court and a one wall court in the community centre. It also has shared use of the dressing rooms. There is also a viewing gallery. The club are seeking to develop the space to provide a reception area and an extended first floor viewing gallery.

5.8.4 Multi-purpose Sports Facility

A need for a multi-purpose sports facility accommodating a range of field sports was identified from the consultation process. There are a number of large green field sites close to the village core that could accommodate a multi-purpose facility. An example of a facility being developed by another Community on Local Authority owned property is shown below.

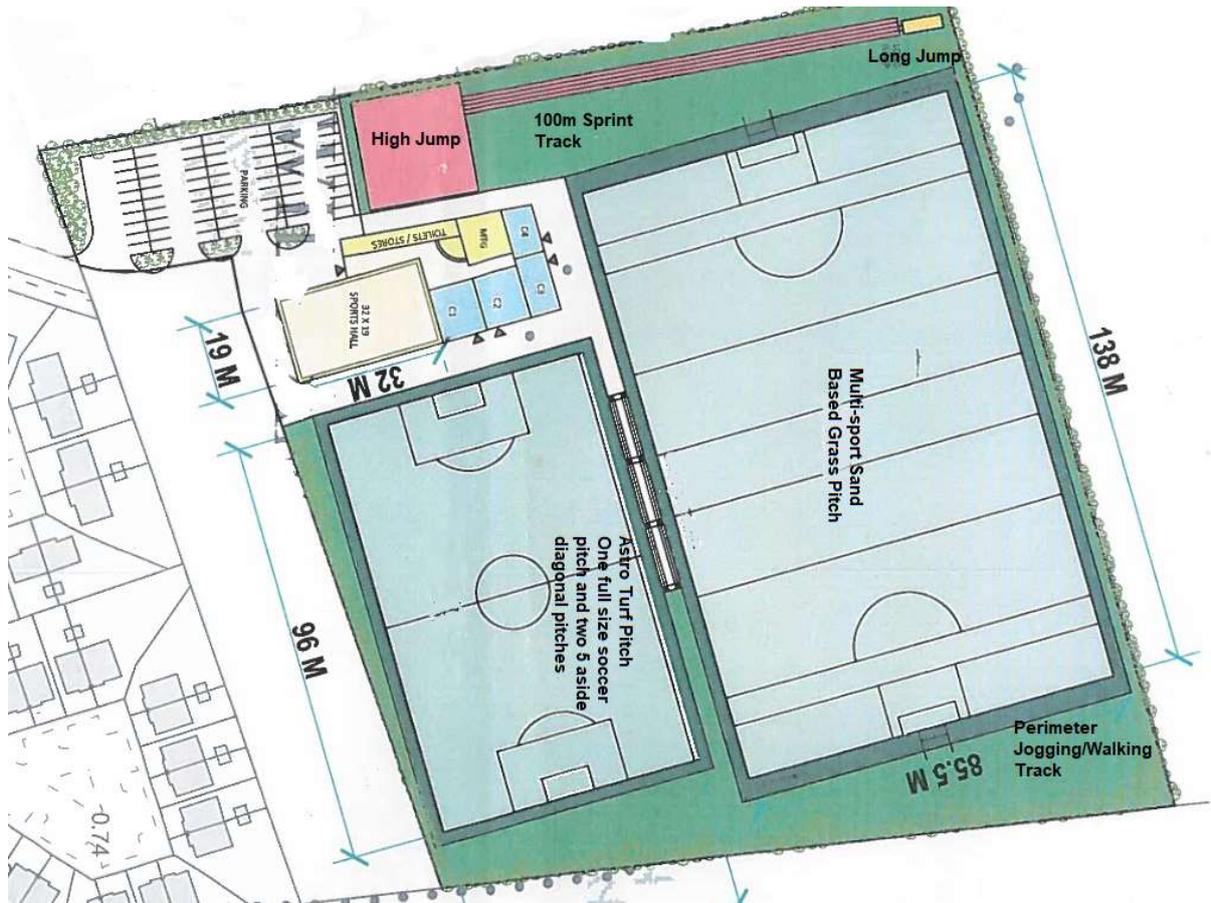


Fig 5.23 Sample of Master Plan for Proposed Community Sports Facility in North Kerry

The following is a conceptual layout of a smaller scale facility



Indicative investment in the sports facility i.e. full-size Pitch to accommodate Rugby, Soccer and Gaelic Games, circa 500m walking/jogging, 100m sprint track and excluding the dressing rooms and car park, would be around €260,000. This is based on indicative costs provided for similar pitch and running tracks.

5.9 Summary Recommendations

- ✓ Secure funding for the redevelopment of the Community Centre.
- ✓ Engage with Laois County Council, Laois Partnership, and Broadband providers re high speed air fibre broadband solutions in the Community.
- ✓ Upgrade and extend footpaths in from the village centre to the Church via the school. At a minimum have a designated pedestrian lane where the construction of a footpath is not possible.
- ✓ Upgrade street lighting to traditional style street lights in the village centre. Lobby to have Power Lines placed underground.
- ✓ Build on the success of the tidy towns and increase number of volunteers on the tidy towns team.
- ✓ Install a pedestrian crossing at the School and the Village Centre.
- ✓ Review car-parking layout at the Community Centre.
- ✓ Carry out site assessment at the school grounds to determine the potential cost of constructing a 35m X 70m astro turf pitch including fencing and lights for school and community use.
- ✓ Develop a masterplan for the improvement of the GAA Pitch and expansion of the site to incorporate a running track, hurling skills area, upgrading dressing rooms and extending car park.
- ✓ Upgrade directional and informational signage in the village centre (highlighting the castle, mountain trails and millennium garden
- ✓ Install sensory garden and outdoor seating.
- ✓ Install Roadside barriers where required on the mountain road. Address issues of scaling where necessary.
- ✓ Develop landscaping and planting plan within village core and at the entrances to the village.
- ✓ Determine the demand for setting up a men's shed
- ✓ Identify potential community education courses to be run from the Enterprise Centre.



1. Potential development of GAA Pitch and site for athletics, walking and jogging
2. Pedestrian access from Church to the village centre via the school
3. Potential site within the school for community astro-turf pitch
4. Pedestrian crossing linking proposed pedestrian surface to existing school footpath
5. Pedestrian crossing in village centre
6. Opportunity site (vacant retail and residential premises)
7. Potential site for playground
8. Potential site for sensory garden

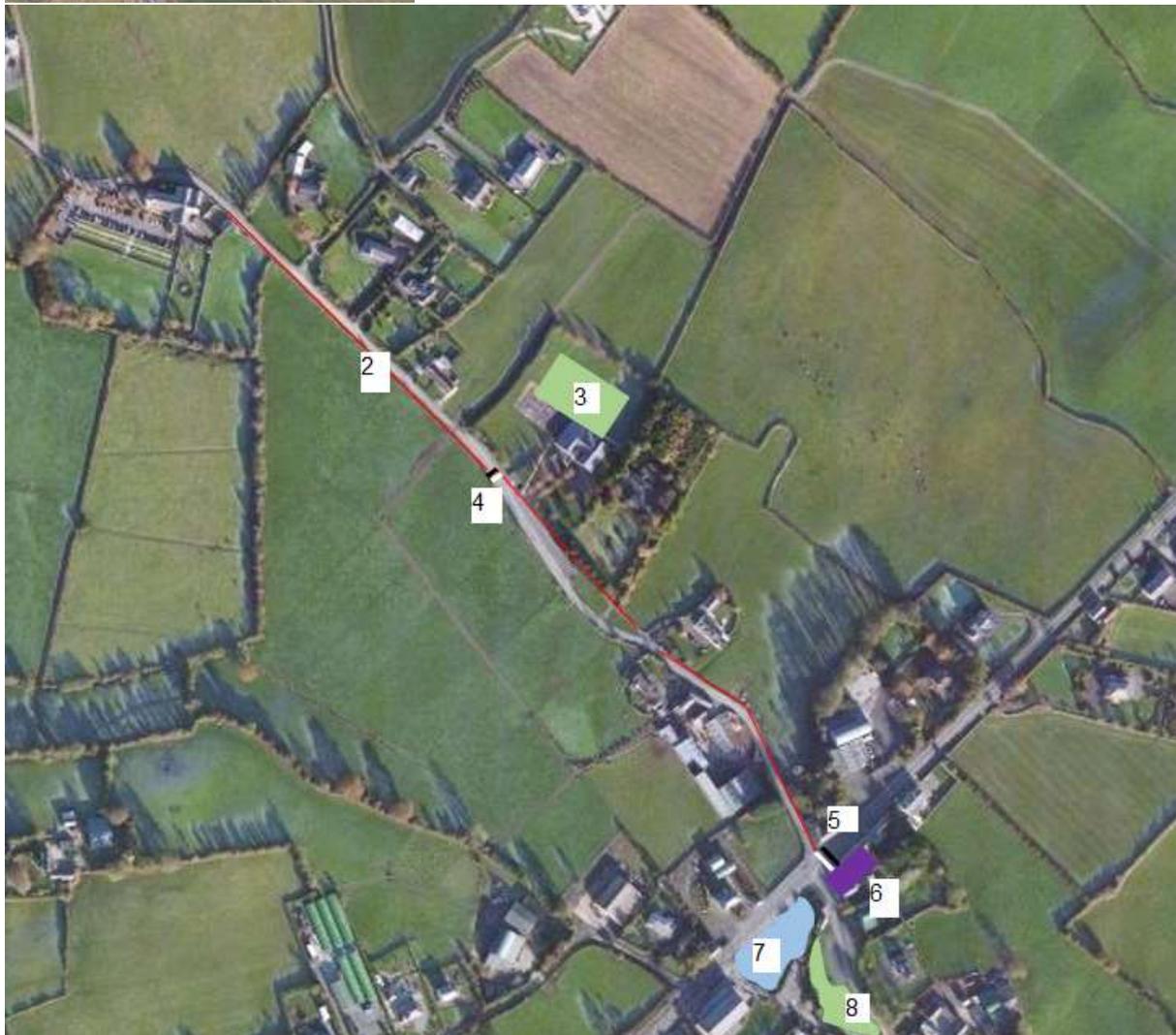


Fig 5.23 Proposed Infrastructure development in the Village

6. Strategic Theme: Tourism

6.1 Strategic Context



The following data was provided in the Tourism Strategy 2018-2023³

Visitor numbers and revenue to Laois have grown steadily since 2013 reflecting the national pattern.

In 2015, Laois welcomed 57,000 overseas visitors bringing a revenue of €18 million to the county. It is estimated that 84,000 domestic visitors also travelled to Laois in 2015 and contributed €13 million in revenue to the county.

The per capita spend of an overseas visitor to Laois is €316, approximately double that of the domestic visitor at €155. In the context of the strategic development of tourism in Laois, a number of key points are highlighted as areas for strategic focus:

- Laois is currently one of Ireland's least visited counties.
- Laois' overseas revenue from tourism per 10,000 population is the third lowest in the country.
- Both domestic and overseas visitors have a lower average spend in Laois than in the rest of the country.
- A smaller percentage of the work population are employed in tourism in Laois than in the rest of Ireland.
- Laois has a relatively higher reliance on the British market now entering a period of uncertainty due to Brexit.
- Laois has the fifth lowest number of hotel beds in the country.

In developing this plan, the consultant has reviewed relevant strategic reports that outline the critical areas that should be addressed and developed in promoting tourism across the regions. These reports provide the blueprint for future tourism development. The strategies and recommendations provided in this plan reflect the recommendations outlined in some of these strategy reports.

³ A Strategic Plan for Tourism in Co. Laois, W2 Consulting (2018)

6.1.1 *A Strategic Plan for Tourism in Co. Laois*

The following key goal outlined in the strategy is relevant to Cullohill as the area has the potential to be developed as an outdoor activity destination.

Goal: Develop the portfolio of land and water-based assets in Laois to become key tourism attractors to the county with particular focus on the outdoor recreation potential of Slieve Bloom.

Rationale - The portfolio of outdoor assets throughout the county will be harnessed to create an outdoor recreation focussed destination. The accessibility of the land and water-based amenities to large urban areas provide an immediate competitive advantage. Further investment plans and building on existing facilities to target international and domestic visitors will have catalytic impact on the entire county. All future investment activity must recognise this potential and work towards the development of quality amenity provision that will mark Laois out as the quality outdoor destination.

Objectives:

1. Prioritise the continued development of the Mountain Bike (MTB) and walking trails for Slieve Bloom and associated support amenities that can cater for all outdoor pursuits.
2. Position Laois as an accessible cycling destination through the development a Laois cycling strategy that harnesses the potential of MTB, road cycling, local forest cycleways and vintage cycling.
3. Develop the potential of the Barrow Blueways project supported by the creation of a water-based activity county wide portfolio for visitors adopting existing activity on the rivers, lakes and canals.
4. Support the development of new tourism enterprise that will contribute to the provision of services and amenities to position Laois as a quality outdoor activity destination.
5. Adopt a green activities industry marketing approach to develop special interest tourism activity around the theme of eco-tourism supported by a sustained programme to establish Laois as a green outdoor pursuits destination.
6. Create and support a portfolio of land and water-based events aligned to the establishment of Laois as a leading outdoor activity destination.
7. Support and develop accessible waterways projects that communicate the level of accessible water resource experiences throughout Laois

6.1.2 *Ireland's Ancient East*

"Ireland's Ancient East" is the national brand relevant to Laois – the county is located in the very centre of the Ireland's Ancient East geography. Ireland's Ancient East is a brand concept created in 2014 that seeks to attract visitors to the east and south of the country, much of which has, like Laois, traditionally performed relatively poorly in tourism terms. The brand seeks to build on the wealth of historical and cultural assets in the east and south of Ireland with the following strategic intentions:

- To drive growth in international visitor numbers, tourism revenue and associated tourism employment in the regions which currently underperform in these areas.
- To move Ireland's east and south from a transit and day tripping zone to a destination which attracts international overnight visitors.
- To develop a world class visitor experience, which delivers fully on the brand promise.

6.1.3 National Tourism Policy

The Government's Tourism policy statement "People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025", published in 2015, recognises the importance of investing in the visitor experience to continue to grow tourism including investment in facilities for visitor activities such as greenways and other outdoor recreational activities.

The Government's recently published Action Plan for Rural Development "Realising our Rural Potential" highlights the potential of activity tourism to contribute to economic growth in rural areas. It states that "Outdoor adventure tourism is a key growth sector worldwide and has been identified as a priority for Irish tourism in future years. The development and promotion of this sector provides opportunities for growth, in rural areas, by facilitating businesses to leverage the tourism assets in their area in a sustainable way to support recreational activities such as canoeing, cycling, angling and hill walking".

Finally, the draft "National Planning Framework – Ireland 2040 Our Plan" talks about the need to create "an attractive environment to encourage businesses and inward investment; more places for people to access nature, outdoor recreation or social interaction or physical activity by providing quality, linked green or 'blue' (water-related) spaces for walking, cycling and other physical activity and creating a sense of place and local distinctiveness."

Fáilte Ireland undertook a very significant piece of research in 2013⁴ (15,000 interviews) that is still relevant today. This research identified that adventure tourists stay longer and spend more than regular tourists. The key findings relating to cycling routes were: - Beautiful scenery and landscape was the top priority for the overseas and domestic markets. - This was followed by requirements for traffic free and safe cycling routes, perhaps reflecting the large proportion of the market that travels with children. - Access to towns and villages and attractive cities and towns were also important, with a range of things to see and do also ranking in the top five with the domestic market. - As 41% of the potential domestic market and 38% of the potential overseas market for cycling in Ireland travel with children, the importance of delivering trails which meet the needs of this market segment cannot be overstated.

6.1.4 Fáilte Ireland Cultural Tourism Strategy

According to the cultural tourism strategy⁵ commissioned by Fáilte Ireland, it is clear that Cultural Tourism represents a major area of opportunity for Ireland. It states that broadly speaking, the 'building blocks' for success are there. Ireland has a lot to offer Cultural tourists – including a range and diversity of locations, sites and experiences that is considerably in excess of what visitors might expect. Those visitors who do come and experience what is on offer tend to leave satisfied.

In addition, tourists in major markets are well-disposed to visiting Ireland, viewing culture in its broadest sense as being a major element of 'what Ireland is about'. International trends towards 'softer culture' and more authentic 'experience-based tourism' play to our strengths in this regard.

The essence of the strategy as outlined in the report is that Cultural Tourism has a key role in delivering on the national tourism agenda, and the overlap between the Cultural Tourism product and our overall, national tourism product is significant.

4

<http://www.failteireland.ie/FailteIreland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/In%20Your%20Sector/Cycling-Market-Research-2013.pdf>

⁵ Cultural tourism making it work for you a new strategy for Cultural tourism in Ireland –Fáilte Ireland

It recommends that Fáilte Ireland must support other stakeholders and the industry by leading the development and promotion of Culture and Heritage related offerings that 'deliver on the promise' of Tourism Brand Ireland to mainstream and niche visitors in core geographical markets.

In Fáilte Ireland visitor surveys, distinguishing advantages spontaneously identified are our cultural and historical heritage, particularly significant for North American visitors.

Covering historic houses and castles, monuments and historic sites, gardens, heritage/interpretative centres and museums and art galleries, these constitute an important feature of the holiday, with over three in every five (62%) visiting any of these attractions.

Traditional Culture drew the next strongest level of interest, closely followed by Historic Ireland. Our Christian heritage was of strong interest to one in four, with three in five overall expressing some level of interest. Contemporary Culture, incorporating performing and visual arts, film, literature, architecture, etc. appeared to have the least appeal with two in five interested to some extent, but one in four uninterested.

Across the markets North Americans showed the keenest interest in these various aspects, with the possible exception of Contemporary Culture.

6.2 Tourist Infrastructure

6.2.1 Accommodation

One of the key strengths of Cullohill as a destination is its proximity to large urban centres and also to the motorway. It therefore is an accessible location for day trips. However, the impact on the local economy from day trippers is minimal unless they purchase goods in local shops, pubs and restaurants. There are not sufficient visitor numbers currently to encourage investment in tourist accommodation although there is a number of Air B and B properties listed. Therefore, visitors to Cullohill will be staying in other centres such as Durrow. The Cullohill area would be suited to independent travellers traveling by camper van or hikers who wish to camp. The development of a Camping Park in the area would create a demand for this market to overnight in the area and extend their stay.

In the absence of a sufficient accommodation base the focus on the tourism strategy is to target day trippers that are staying in other areas.

6.2.2 Tourist Information

As already stated, directional signage is very poor in the area but also information signage is also very poor. Information signage at various locations could be developed to promote the history, culture, and ecology of the area.



Fig 6.1 Sample Interpretative Signage and elevated viewing point

Using interpretative signage similar to that shown in this image, would provide the visitor with information as to what they are looking at from elevated points along the walking trail. Historical information can also be provided.

6.3 Adventure and Activity Tourism

Outdoor recreation falls under the definition of 'Countryside Recreation' found in the National Countryside Recreation Strategy as published by the Comhairle Na Tuaithe in 2006:

"Countryside recreation applies to sporting, recreational and holiday pursuits based on use of the resources of the countryside and which contribute to healthy active lifestyles. The term countryside includes land, water and air."

Given the huge increase in popularity of outdoor activities in recent years (particularly adventure sports), there is an opportunity to market the area prime '*Outdoor Recreation Destination*'

The National Trails Office⁶ identifies recreational trails as '*a very effective way of managing recreational activity in the outdoors and protecting the natural environment*'. Trails provide access for walking, wheelchair recreation, cycling, horse-riding, canoeing and kayaking, etc. and make it easier for people to be active in the outdoors. They make areas accessible in a safe manner and connect people to the natural environment and heritage in urban and rural areas. The NTO highlight the benefit of trail access

⁶

http://www.irishtrails.ie/National_Trails_Office/Publications/Trail_Development/Guide_to_Planning_and_Developing_Recreational_Trails_in_Ireland.pdf

for communities as they increase overall physical activity. Research from the United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK) found such activity increases significantly once the routes are developed and promoted.

6.3.1 Walking Trails

There is a well established walking trail on Cullohill Mountain. It is a way marked looped trail which takes about 3 hours with terrain suitable for all. The trail has amazing scenery and also has an historical interest.

The following extract from the Irish Times in 2012⁷ provides an excellent description of the trail

"Taking the left turn at the castle and passing a hedgerow that in season is hung down with wild plums, you will find a small carpark less than 500m further on. This is the start of a Fáilte Ireland Loop Walk. From the carpark, walk back downhill a short distance and then climb a rustic staircase up through a hazel wood and out onto the bracken-fragrant hill. Nearby is an ancient holy well, a pool of crystal water surrounded by limestone flags where in the old days local people sought cures for troubling ailments. The top of the hill is crowned by a ruined ringfort that may date back to the pre-Christian period.

From here the view of the Slieve Bloom mountains to the north and nearby Cullahill Castle are fabulous in clear weather. In an adjacent field a skirmish took place during which one of the local MacGiollapadraigs was killed by Cromwellian soldiers nearly 400 years ago. Originally a bush, protected by a stone surround, was planted to commemorate the spot, but today only the circular stone wall remains.

The route continues over the hill in a hilltop promenade through glorious meadows of natural grasses and herbs, full of butterflies in summertime. Soon, Keeper Hill in the Silvermines Mountains comes into view to the west, and further on there is evidence in the coppiced ash trees and box hedges of the good traditional husbandry that was practised in this old and well-established farmland.

As the route swings around the south of the hill Sliabh na mBan, the mountain of the women, the heathery Comeraghs and the regal slopes of the Galty Mountains are visible in clear weather. At the end of a long hedge-bordered side road, the route continues through fields as the county border is crossed.

We enter briefly into a corner of north Co Kilkenny and pass through a quiet, pine needle carpeted coniferous forest before coming out in the open again and re-entering Laois. The route crosses fields and continues along an ancient stone-walled breen called Boyle's Lane, from where conical Mount Leinster can be seen to the south east.

We continue through more woods as we circle the steep northern flanks of Cullahill Mountain. In autumn this is a good place for fungi: in particular look out for the white-spotted brilliant red flyagaric, the fairytale mushroom of the cartoons.

Through the trees, glimpse beautiful views of the colourful fields of Laois farmland, before reaching the public road by way of a comfortable grassy lane lined with blackthorn and whitethorn. The carpark from where you started is uphill to the left."

To further enhance the trail an app should be developed for people visiting the area. The App which would be by a hard-copy trail map and guide provides audio descriptions of the area, nature sounds, video, photography and an audio guide. An example of these maps can be found on www.activeme.ie

⁷ <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/travel/go-walk-cullahill-loop-co-laois-1.531825>

A simple cost-effective way of using technology is to provide QR Codes on interpretative signage and way markers. QR codes can be scanned by smart phones and tablets and are linked to websites containing information on the area (including audio guides, video, images etc.)

RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) Tags can also be used to transmit data/information. Virtual and Augmented Reality Technology is now also being used for interpretative purposes in museums and visitor attractions/destinations.



Fig 6.2: Sample Apps and QR Coded Interpretative Way Markers

6.3.2 Cycling and Hill Running

Coilte is the largest provider of outdoor recreation in Ireland and off-road cycling is one of the growing recreational activities catered for on its lands. It identifies the Slieve Bloom Mountains in Laois and Offaly as 1 of 4 potential off road cycling centres of National Scale. They ideally will have a high level of visitor facilities with car parking, toilet and shower blocks and with potential to add on café and bike hire facilities. To be capable of being promoted as an international tourism destination, the sites must be located within a 3-hour drive of a ferry port.

Cullohill Mountain was identified as a priority area to develop cycling trails.

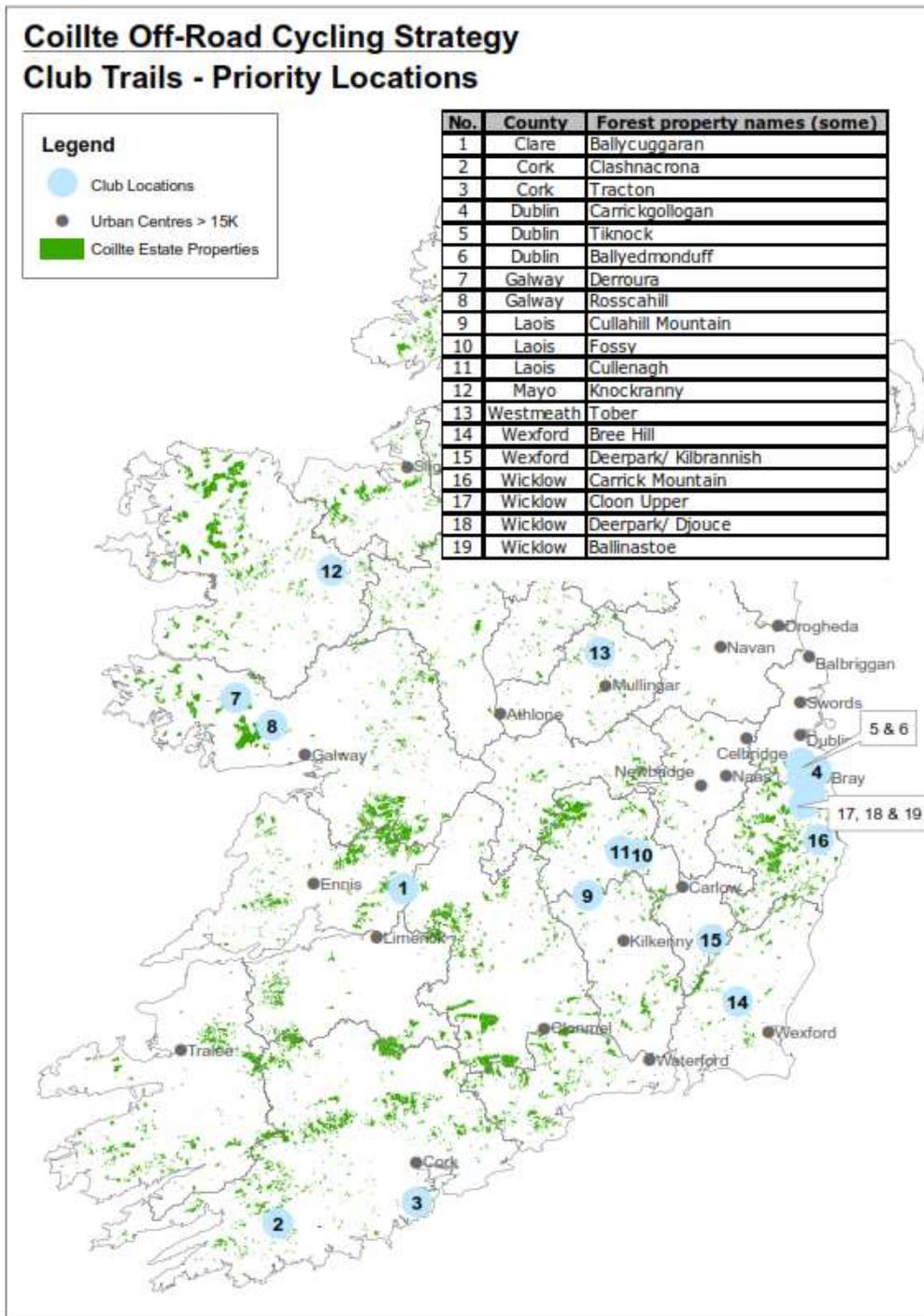


Fig 6.3 Coillte Off Road Trails Map

The area should be promoted as a cycling route with a number of potential trails which could be developed. There is also a growth in running, adventure running, and endurance events.

The hills around the area are perfect for mountain biking trails, running trails and cycling trails. These events attract an affluent market segment that will spend time in the area but also will be influencers (refer and promote the area on Social Media).

6.4 Heritage and Culture

The area has a number of historical and archaeological sites that would attract an interest from a number of tourism market segments.

6.4.1 Cullohill Castle

Cullohill Castle, built in 1425 by Finghin Mac Giolla Phádraig was the principal stronghold and residence of the Mac Giolla Phádraigs of Upper Ossory. It was cannoned and wrecked by the Cromwellians. In 1657 it was ruinous and uninhabited.

It is a tower-house rising to five storeys. Most of the northern portion, including the doorway, is missing. It is vaulted above the ground floor and has mural passages and chambers. A straight mural stairway rises to the upper levels. There are remains of mullioned windows at the higher floors of the castle.

The castle has an interesting Sheila-na-Gíg. There are 125 of these figures in various places in Ireland. Sheila-na-Gíg on Cullohill Castle is the only one visible in Laois.

The Castle is on private property and is not under the management of the OPW. Access to the Castle is not possible but the Castle can be easily viewed from the road. It would be recommended to install an interpretative sign outside of the grounds for visitors to the area. Spotlights illuminating the Castle at night time should be installed in the green opposite the castle.

The development of an Augmented Reality App that would be used to describe the Castle to the visitor would be an innovative experience to be promoted to potential visitors. Augmented Reality (AR) layers digital information onto a physical environment, typically when viewed through a device such as a smart phone. An increasing number of museums are using this technology. E.g. Street Museum of London



Fig 6.6 Cullohill Castle

6.4.2 Chapel Ruins

Opposite the Castle are the ruins of an old chapel which was the private chapel of the Catholic lords of Upper Ossory.



Fig 6.5 Chapel Ruins with Castle in Foreground

6.4.3 Limestone Kiln

There is a fine example of a lime kiln on the green opposite Cullohill Castle. Lime kilns were once in common use: Limestone rock was burnt in the kiln to provide a fertilizer for spreading on the land.



Fig 6.6 Limestone Kiln

6.4.4 Medical School

One of the first Medical schools in Ireland was founded near Cullohill. The Ó Conchobhairs were physicians to the Mac Giolla Padraig chiefs, who were rulers of Upper Ossory until the early 17th Century. The Ó Conchobhairs maintained a medical school at Aghmacart, near Cullahill. The medical school at Aghmacart was in existence in 1500 until circa 1611.

6.4.5 Heritage Trails

A Heritage Trail should be developed and promoted in partnership with Durrow and supported by Laois Partnership.

Heritage Trails can be developed further through developing networks of local guides, producing way finding maps and utilising technology.

An example would be North Kerry Heritage Trails (www.northkerryheritagetrails.ie) The trails are based around 4 types of tours:

- Castles and Historic Buildings and Forts,
- Abbeys, Churches and Holy Wells,
- Culture and Heritage Museums,
- Civil War and War of Independence sites and monuments.

A brochure with trail information, a website and an app were developed as part of the project.



Fig 6.7: Screen Shot of North Kerry Heritage Trails Website

6.5 Blueways

A Blueway is a recreational water activity trail that is developed for use by non-motorised water activity enthusiasts. It is defined by trail heads, access & egress points and readily available trail information. Blueways can be developed on canals, rivers, lakes or along the coast and can incorporate other associated land-based trails adjacent to the water trail⁸.

In addition to the variety of land-based sports which can take place alongside the Blueway water trails, the wider Blueway experience also extends to marine dining, festivals and heritage.

At a national level work is being done to develop guidelines for Blueway Development.

- Work has been completed by consultants Outdoor Recreation NI to look at international best practice in this area, propose a framework for development and accreditation and develop criteria and a new guide for Blueway development and management.
- A number of national partners in ROI and NI are to establish a Blueway Steering Group by the end of the year.
- The new *"Guideline for Blueway Development"* will be available to everyone online (estimated availability is November 2018)
- The Blueway Steering Group have agreed to establish a Blueway Accreditation Scheme based on the criteria set for Blueways in the new Guideline.
- The Blueway Steering group also plan to retain the services of a Blueway Advisor to provide support to the Steering group and Blueway developers by undertaking accreditation assessment on Blueways. It is hoped this person will be in place early in 2019.

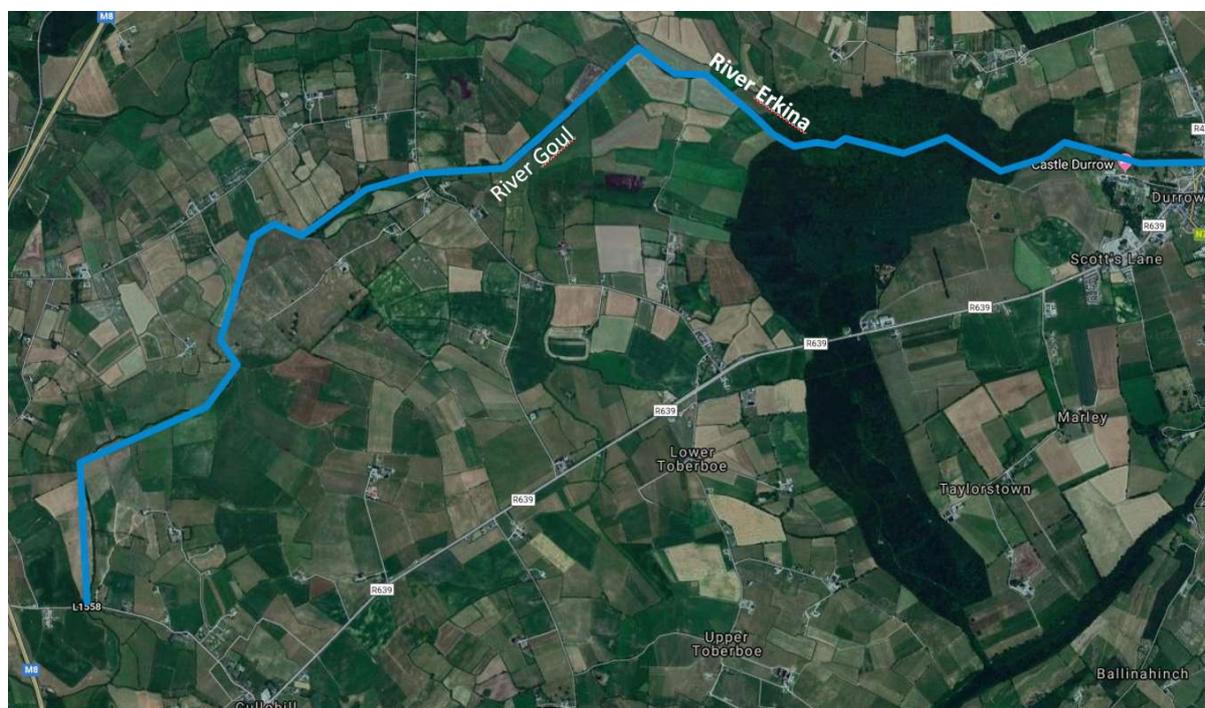


Fig 6.8 Potential 8.9km trail to be assessed for suitability based on new National Blueway Guidelines

⁸ Blueway/Water Trail Development Standards Ireland – National Trails Office June 2015

6.6 Other Tourism Initiatives

6.6.1 Health & Wellness

The Health & Wellness market has exploded in recent years – the industry is reported to be worth £1.2 trillion globally, the result of a wider move towards healthy lifestyles. In Britain people are spending over £5.2 billion a year on spa breaks and treatments.

A full wellness programme including healthy eating, relaxation, meditation and walks could be packaged to include accommodation. Programmes such as those available at the Burren Yoga Retreat (www.burrenyoga.com) could be developed.

Weekend and week-long packages could be developed. This would be an ideal business opportunity to develop such programmes utilising the accommodation base in hotels within 15 mins drive.

6.6.2 Festivals and Events

A calendar of events and festivals should be developed each year. Other areas around the Country have developed very successful events and festivals around sectors such as food, heritage, music, craft, literature, wellness and activities (marathons, challenges, sportif etc.)

Festivals and events require much time, resources and voluntary effort; however, they are an excellent way of attracting visitors to an area and they also can be good fundraisers if managed correctly. They are also a great way of bringing communities and the diaspora together. Sometimes a simple idea for an event can turn into something very popular and becomes an annual event.

In July this year the Community Council organised the inaugural "Folly Music, Comedy and Culture Festival." The two-day event was the first 'Equal Opportunity' festival in Ireland with equal numbers of male and female performers. The festival also included the first All-Ireland Porridge Making Championship.

Given the connections with Cullohill of the renowned chefs Darina Allen and Rory O Connell, a food festival should be developed similar to successful food festivals in other parts of the Country.

At other times of the year heritage weekends could be developed which would include walks, lectures and site visits.

Family friendly festivals focused on children's themes are also very successful. An example is the Fairy Festival in the village of Kilfynn in North Kerry. Kilfynn Enchanted Fairy Festival is a 2-day festival of magic and fun for all the family. Over 7,000 adults & children came in 2017 and participated in the activities over the 2 days.

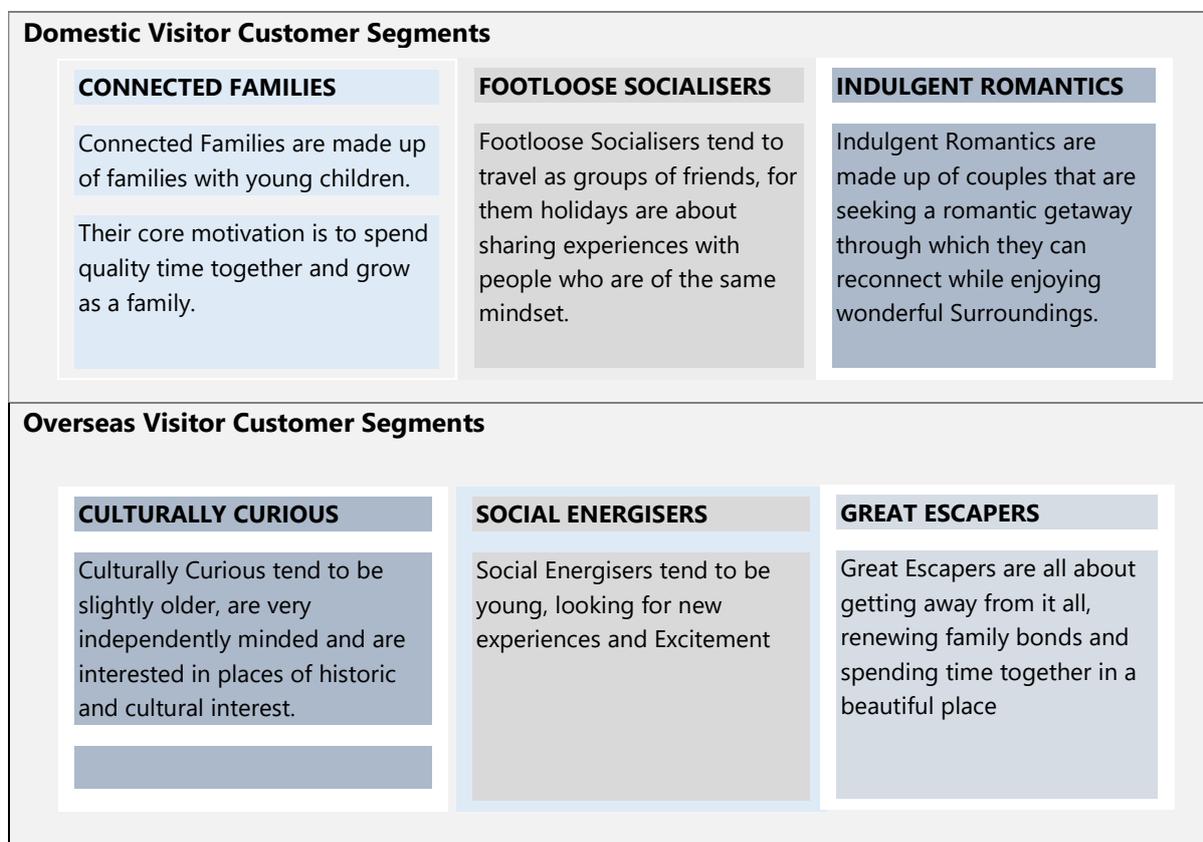
6.7 Tourism Marketing

6.7.1 Market Segments

Market segmentation is the process of dividing an entire market up into different customer segments. Customers are grouped based on similar characteristics such as needs, likes/dislikes, motivation, income, profession etc. It allows for more efficient and effective promotions and helps tailor products and service to suit the target market.

Failte Ireland and Tourism Ireland have developed a market segmentation model that provides unique insights about each customer segments; their needs, their preferences, likes/dislikes, experiences sought, purchasing behaviour, influencers, where they get their information and how they book.

Failte Ireland and Tourism Ireland have prioritised three segments in the four main markets of Great Britain, Unites States, Germany and France. They have also prioritised 3 segments for the domestic visitor market.



6.7.2 Tourism Customer Segment Profiles

Failte Ireland has produced some very useful reports on the priority segments for Tourism. Further and more detailed information on the profile of each segment can be found in these reports.⁹ The following provides a summary overview of the profiles of each segment as identified by Failte Ireland.

⁹ Driving Growth through Segmentation – An introduction to best prospect Global and Domestic Customer Segments.
 Growing international sales - Global segmentation toolkit Using segmentation to win international sales
www.failteireland.ie

Connected Families	Culturally Curious	Great Escapers
<p>Profile</p> <p>This segment makes up 23% of the domestic market. Typically, the profile is relatively young families with children under the age of 10.</p> <p>What they want</p> <p>Family holidays are important, and they typically research the areas they are travelling to in order to maximise what the destination has to offer.</p> <p>They want lots of things to do nearby that they can do as a family. Accommodation and facilities must suit their needs.</p> <p>Typical Duration of Holiday Four and Seven Days.</p> <p>Typical Accommodation Hotels or Holiday Homes</p> <p>How to target Online, review websites, targeted media (travel articles), social media (referrals/word of mouth)</p> <p>Relevance of this segment. The area is ideal for families as it provides a range of activities all the family can enjoy. The location is also a good base to explore the wider region.</p> <p>Note: According to Failte Ireland, the domestic market will continue to be an important source of business. By 2021, the population of under 14s in Ireland will reach 1.1million, a considerable market for those who provide family-friendly experiences</p>	<p>Profile</p> <p>They travel as couples or on their own. If they have children, they are grown up or are left home. Most Culturally Curious are around 40 or over. They are generally made up of a higher proportion of single adults and couples, fewer family groups and are slightly biased towards females.</p> <p>What they want</p> <p>They want to expand their experience by exploring new landscapes, history and culture. They are looking for authentic experiences. They want to learn and are interested in connecting with locals and guides.</p> <p>Typical Duration of Stay Varies from short breaks to longer breaks</p> <p>Typical Accommodation Hotels, Self-Catering and B&Bs within access to scenic locations and walks.</p> <p>How to target Targeted media (print and broadcast). SEO and AdWords on search engines</p> <p>Relevance of this segment. This segment is relevant to the area due to the number of historical and heritage sites, local culture, etc.</p>	<p>Profile</p> <p>Often couples, approximately 30 years old, some with babies or quite young children. Most are in serious need of time out from busy lives and careers.</p> <p>What they want</p> <p>They are specifically interested in rural holidays and travel very much as a couple or family. Great Escapers are on holiday for a break, to get physical with nature, and to reconnect with their partner. They are more likely to take part in slightly more strenuous, but not extreme, exploration and are more interested than other segments in getting connected to nature especially the more remote and exciting places.</p> <p>But it's important that getting away from it all is easy enough – they want the 'wow' factor without too much effort.</p> <p>Typical Duration of Holiday Shorter Breaks</p> <p>Typical Accommodation Hotel, Self-Catering</p> <p>How to target Online, Social Media, Referrals, Targeted Media (articles/ads)</p> <p>Relevance of this segment. The location is ideal for those Great Escapers who want to get away to a remote and exciting places where they can connect with nature. Walking, trekking, cycling, and horse riding etc. provide outdoor experiences that are active but not extreme.</p>

Relevance for Laois Tourism Strategy:

- The natural and cultural heritage resources of Co. Laois resonate strongly with the Culturally Curious and Great Escaper segments.
- New or enhanced visitor experiences for Laois must respond to the specific motivations and needs of these two segments.
- Future support for capital investment in tourism will be reserved for projects that fit not only the Ireland's Ancient East brand architecture but also this consumer segmentation framework.

6.7.3 *Additional Market Segments*

The above profiles relate to tourist visitors that will be targeted. However, as seasonality is a huge factor with tourism, other markets outside of the traditional domestic and overseas visitor markets must be targeted specifically in the shoulder season. The two issues that must be addressed is what type of visitor/groups can be attracted to the area in the shoulder season and will the providers be open for business. The area can attract independent travellers all year-round subject to weather.

Other markets to be targeted for the shoulder season for activities, tours and walks include:

- Schools – tours, bio-diversity, nature walks
- Universities - activities
- Societies – activities and walks
- Youth Groups
- Active Retired Groups
- Artists and Creatives
- Wellness and mindfulness market
- Corporates (Team building)

6.8 *Marketing Strategy*

6.8.1 *Vision and Brand Identity*

The development of Tourism in the area should promote tourism and encourage tourists to spend time in the area while conserving and protecting the natural resources of the area.

It is important that Cullohill develops a brand identity for the area. The product is there, it just needs to be packaged. Signage promoting what is in the area should be installed at entrance roads.

6.8.2 *Marketing Plan*

In order to effectively promote the area, the following 'product' must be focused on:

- Hidden gems
- Scenic viewing points
- Walking Trails,
- Cycling Trails
- Historical and archaeological sites
- Community Family Friendly Festivals and Events

Online Marketing

Web	<p>Develop a good quality well designed image focused Website</p> <p>Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)</p> <p>Ad Words</p> <p>Online billboards and banners</p> <p>Promotion on websites such as:</p> <p>www.discoverireland.ie</p> <p>www.ireland.com</p> <p>www.activeme.ie</p> <p>www.schooldays.ie</p> <p>www.fundays.ie</p> <p>www.mykidstime.com</p> <p>Banner ads and promotions also on individual tourism businesses sites and social media pages</p>
Facebook & Google +	<p>High level of engagement and concentrates on showcasing beautiful and unique images from the area. Focusing on user-generated content, which encourages fans to continue sharing their own stories and experiences on an ongoing basis. Have a fan photo album gallery and encourage likes, shares and comments. Run competitions along similar themes.</p>
Twitter	<p>Start a dialogue with existing, past visitors about their experience. Provide updates on what is happening in the region.</p>
Instagram	<p>Showcases the best shots from around the region on a regular basis, which are chosen from followers who upload and tag their photos.</p>
Youtube	<p>Set up a channel on Youtube and Vimeo and encourage visitors to upload their videos. Provide some gopro cameras to some trail users on guided trails</p>
Facebook live	<p>Using periscope trail users can broadcast their experiences live</p>
Travelshake	<p>Travelshake.com, is a social media platform for the travel, tourism and hospitality industry, creates microsites and Facebook apps for businesses.</p>
Foursquare	<p>Get the trails listed on Foursquare and other similar apps.</p>

The digital marketing strategy will focus on authentic content and being highly active on social media. The aim is to promote the story and experience on platforms where people are present using high quality images and video and promoting authentic user content and sharing through hash-tag campaigns.

6.8.3 Offline Marketing

Direct Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tour Operators • Online Travel Agents (OTA) • Travel Agents • Ground Handlers • Tourism Sector • Targeted Groups (schools, clubs, societies, international students) • Diaspora Networks
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, Local Tourism Organisations, ▪ Local Tourism Industry providers – familiarisation trips and information workshops/packs ▪ Tour operators, travel agents, ▪ Destination management companies ▪ Corporate and incentive planners ▪ Travel media, influencers and bloggers
Trade and Consumer Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tourism Ireland Events ▪ Emerging market events and initiatives ▪ Irish Festivals
Media Advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Targeted magazines ▪ Targeted Newspapers ▪ Guidebooks
Public Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Targeted Articles and Reviews ▪ Travel Media events – previews, press releases, familiarisation events ▪ Publicity Campaigns at events (Sporting Events, Festivals, and Heritage Week etc.) ▪ Radio and TV Interviews, publicity opportunities ▪ Sponsorship (in-kind i.e. use of venue, free passes, free programmes etc.)

6.9 Recommendations

- Set up a Tourism & Marketing Group with responsibility for implementing the Tourism Action Plan and Marketing Strategy.
- Set clear terms of reference for the Tourism Sub Committee as the main structure responsible for developing the Tourism product for the marketing of the area nationally and overseas.
- Undertake a feasibility study in consultation with Coillte on developing bike trails on CULLOHILL Mountain.
- Develop a heritage trail incorporating Historical and Archaeological sites. Identify options to combine these with sites in Durrow and in surrounding areas.
- Develop an app for the existing walking trails covering the history and bio-diversity of the areas.
- Develop a cluster of products that can be packaged e.g. Walking Trails, Biking, Water Activity, Zipline etc.
- Develop a brand for Cullohill as a destination for activity-based tourism for all age groups and levels.
- Produce interpretative signage boards at the Castle, Chapel and Kiln.
- Erect directional signage to the Castle from the main road.
- The Tourism and Marketing Team should liaise with and support the work of the Tidy Towns team in maintaining the area and encouraging initiatives such as 'Leave no Trace' for visitors.
- On farm accommodation opportunities should be explored and promoted.
- Develop an annual programme of festival and events focusing on the following themes:
 - Food
 - Heritage & Culture
 - Wellness
 - Sport & Adventure
- Carry out a comprehensive analysis of the potential tourism initiatives recommended in this plan and identify other initiatives.
- Recruit a marketing graduate and intern to assist with Market Research, Planning and administration of a marketing programme.
- Develop and manage a strong Social Media campaign alongside the development of a website.
- Develop an app with tourist information and investigate the development of AR Technology to enhance the visitor experience.

7. Strategic Theme: Enterprise & Employment

7.1 Strategic Context

A number of national policy documents have recommended that regeneration of rural areas is supporting the development and growth of indigenous industries and cultivating an entrepreneurial spirit in local communities. To facilitate this, it has been national policy to invest in the development of rural enterprise hubs through the Regional Enterprise Development Fund and the Town and Village Renewal Programme. The LEADER Programme and Local Enterprise Offices have also supported the development of community enterprise space and food incubation space.

The **Action Plan for Jobs 2017** states that the digital economy presents a unique opportunity to transform our enterprise potential in regions, smaller towns and rural areas, through the development of hubs for eWorking and collaboration facilitated by high capacity broadband connectivity.

The Action Plan “will promote the development of a network of eHubs throughout the regions to support eWorking, entrepreneurship and small business growth, developed through local enterprise initiatives, local authorities, LEOs and the enterprise development agencies.”

A number of funding initiatives will be delivered to support the development of rural communities and villages, including through the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the 2014-2020 EU LEADER and National Rural Development Schemes.

Other actions being taken in this Action Plan for Jobs – particularly in relation to agri-food and marine, tourism and entrepreneurship will also support jobs for people living in rural parts of Ireland.

Enterprise 2025 – Irelands National Enterprise Strategy 2015-2025 identified that there is a shift in emphasis from work as something an individual does rather than the place they go to offers new possibilities for regional and more remote communities.

The National Enterprise Strategy also recognises that there is a huge opportunity in the Internet of Things for Ireland. The Internet of Things is already delivering real benefits in almost every area.

Under the **Synopsis of areas for action – The National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship in Ireland** it highlights the importance of developing world class entrepreneurial hubs, facilitating the environment to stimulate networking and peer mentoring, including for example developing co-working spaces and accelerators, and leveraging the experience of successful entrepreneurs.

Successful, well-managed coworking spaces can help start-ups learn, connect and grow, bringing together talent and developing a professional community that helps foster business connections, investment opportunities, mentorship opportunities, collaborations and ‘professional serendipity’. It is because of these potential benefits outlined in the National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship in Ireland that has led to the growth and proliferation of coworking spaces across Ireland.

Project Ireland 2040 The National Planning Framework states that “Facilitating the development of enterprises and local economies to allow for the creation of a wider variety of employment opportunities will involve capitalising on local assets, including human, natural and cultural, through improved policy coherence to raise the potential of rural areas and contribute to local and regional growth. Opportunities

for upskilling, including through blended on-line, part-time or outreach courses, will be important to securing and accessing employment within rural areas.”

Project Ireland 2040 - National Planning Framework

Supporting the sustainable growth of rural communities, to include development in rural areas. Implementing a properly planned local authority led approach to identifying, meeting and managing the real housing needs arising in countryside areas. Improving local connectivity to principal communication (broadband), energy, transport and water networks. Promoting new economic opportunities arising from digital connectivity and indigenous innovation and enterprise as well as more traditional natural and resource assets (e.g. food, energy, tourism), underpinned by the quality of life offering.

Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023 and Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2016-2021

Many electoral divisions in Laois experience out of County commuting to work. The Laois County Development Plan states that the creation of additional higher skilled employment in the County may provide opportunities for Laois residents to work locally with economic, social and environmental benefits accruing as a result.

Harnessing the full potential of Laois’s rich pool of skills and talent is important to its future economic development.

Laois County Council Economic Objectives:

- ECN17 Seek to provide opportunities for highly skilled outbound commuters to work locally through local employment opportunities, tourism opportunities, the development of e-working spaces or working from home
- ECN22 Assist in site assembly and facilitate appropriate new development in town/village centres by way of alterations and extensions, infill development as well as demolition and redevelopment subject to planning considerations.
- ECN25 Support the hosting of markets (including farmers markets) events or festivals in town/village centre locations.
- ECN 28 Recognise and support the role of town/village-based community groups including trader groups that make a significant contribution to town/village centre management
- ECN 29 Encourage start-up businesses and tourism businesses to set-up in town and village centre locations.

7.2 Enterprise Development

7.2.1 Co-working and Remote Working Space

There are a significant number of other co-working spaces throughout Ireland. All established co-working / shared office spaces require some form of grant aid, sponsorship and operational cost assistance in the initial stages in order to setup their facilities.

A co-working space is an alternative to typical rented commercial office space where businesses have the option of working in shared open plan spaces or private offices with shared meeting rooms, coffee dock, lounge facilities etc. These spaces also encourage collaboration and networking as well as a social outlet for people that otherwise would be working from home or in an isolated office.

All Local Authorities have included the development of co-working spaces in their economic and enterprise strategies and the Action Plan for Rural Ireland focuses on the provision of enterprise space as a catalyst to regenerate rural communities.

More and more companies are looking at remote working as a realistic solution to expanding its workforce while at the same time reducing spend on high office rents in large urban areas. Many multi-national companies operating in Ireland such as Shopify have a 100% remote working policy. Many other international and national companies are recognising the benefits also. For highly skilled freelancers, working from home is a viable lifestyle choice. Given its location close to large urban centres of employment there are opportunities for villages such as Cullohill to provide dedicated remote co-working spaces.

There are two possible options to develop a small co-working space in Cullohill. The first and most cost-effective solution is to convert the first floor into an open plan co-working area with shared or dedicated desk space. This area is small and narrow and would not provide a long-term solution as there is no private office space available.

Below is an example of a small 6-person co-working area that is part of the HQ Tralee Co-Working Space

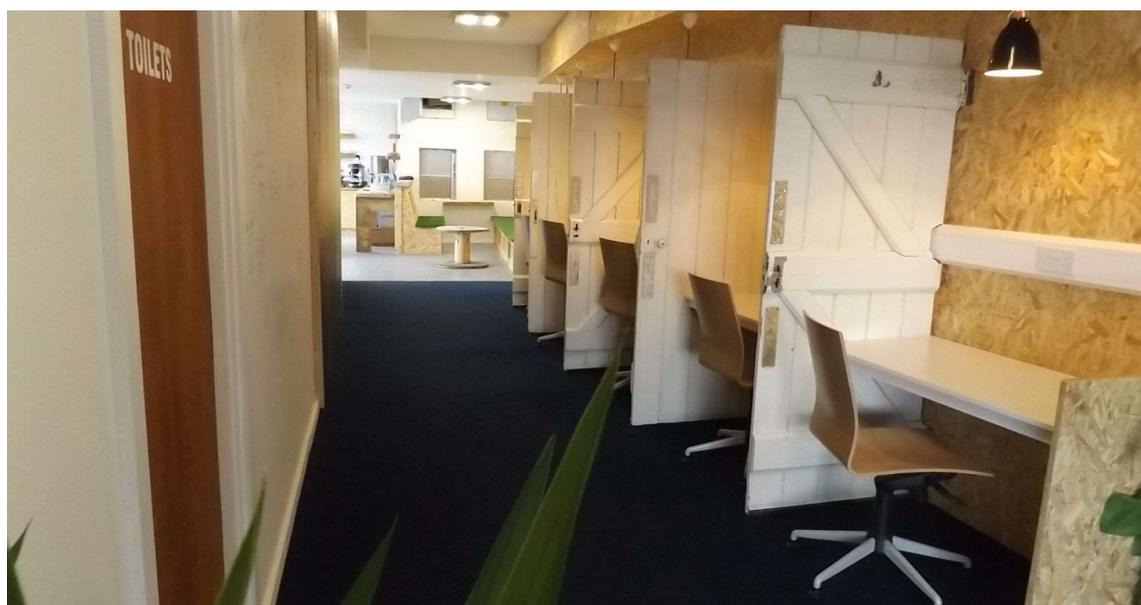


Fig 7.1 Coworking 'hot desks' at HQ Tralee

The second option is to include a co-working space into a proposed development on the vacant shop/residential property site. A key element of any successful co-working space is access to reliable 1GB broadband and 24/7 access to the premises. High speed broadband is the number one selling point to attract remote workers and home-based workers.

7.3 Opportunity Site



The property outlined on the map is currently available for sale. It comprises a ground floor retail unit with first floor accommodation with an adjoining 4 room house and shed. The property requires significant renovation and modernisation.

A small shed also comes with the property. This shed is located across from the property. Site boundaries, ownership, access and car-parking would need to be investigated further.

Fig 7.2 Opportunity Site Location



Fig 7.3 Existing buildings for sale

7.3.1 Renovation Options

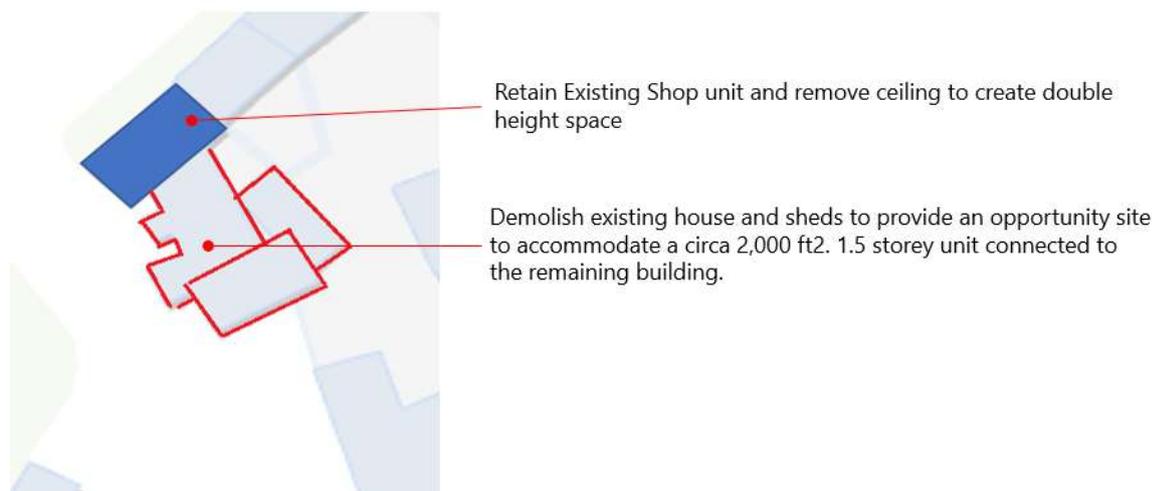


Fig 7.4 Development Options

Develop the existing shop unit as a small artisan café catering both local market and visitors.

Construct a new building to replace the existing house and sheds. This building would be linked to the newly developed café and would provide toilet facilities for the café. Utilise the shed across from the property as a potential information kiosk and bike hire for visitors taking part in the Mountain Trails.

The site footprint would accommodate a building of circa 200m². This building would provide a multi-purpose social enterprise space focusing on either a mix of enterprises or as a food incubation hub.

The construction costs would be dependent on the design and purpose, but similar community enterprise centres have been constructed and fitted out for about 1,800 per m². Therefore, an indicative capital investment of €360,000 to €400,000 would be required.

Renovation costs to the existing retail unit would need to be investigated based on a detailed structural report.

A more detailed analysis for the potential development of the site is required to determine the feasibility of developing the site for one or more purposes. This would include detailed market research and an estimation for the demand for different types of space in the area. It would also require a review of other similar available spaces elsewhere in nearby towns and villages and what displacement if any it would cause.

7.4 Development Options

7.4.1 Shared Office Space

Either the ground or first floor of the new building would accommodate a co-working space of approximately 960m²

An example of this space is shown below. This space accommodates up to 8 desks, 1 private phone booth for calls and 5 private individual offices (approx. 7m² each). This space has recently been developed for HQ Listowel.



Fig 7.5 Sample open plan and private offices in HQ Listowel

In theory this space would accommodate up to 13 businesses operating full time or many more if the desks were being used on a shared basis. This type of space is ideal for current home-based freelancers and remote workers. It also provides excellent incubation space for start-ups.

These spaces normally attract web/graphic design businesses, software developers, consultancy services and online traders. Meeting Rooms, toilet facilities could be accommodated on the ground floor. Access would also be available to the proposed café in the existing building.

7.4.2 Food Incubation Units

Food incubation units provide a cost-effective solution for start-up food businesses or established food businesses which require more space to meet production demands. The units are fully fitted and are rented at flexible rates and terms. An example of a small-scale food incubation hub is Firies, Co. Kerry. This was developed with support of Enterprise Ireland and Kerry LEO. The units are completely self-contained and comply with all food quality health and safety standards. Each 1000 ft² unit has a production space of 900 ft² approx.; an office; toilet and washroom; delivery and loading area; single and three-phase power; gas supply; ample parking and loading space.

Food units such as these can also benefit from shared resources, joint marketing initiatives, and centralised training.



Fig 7.6: Food Incubation Hub in Feries

The central location of Cullohill makes it ideal for a base for small scale food producers to get their product cost effectively to a wide urban market. For small operators who also do van sales and deliveries, this will reduce travel times and costs considerably.

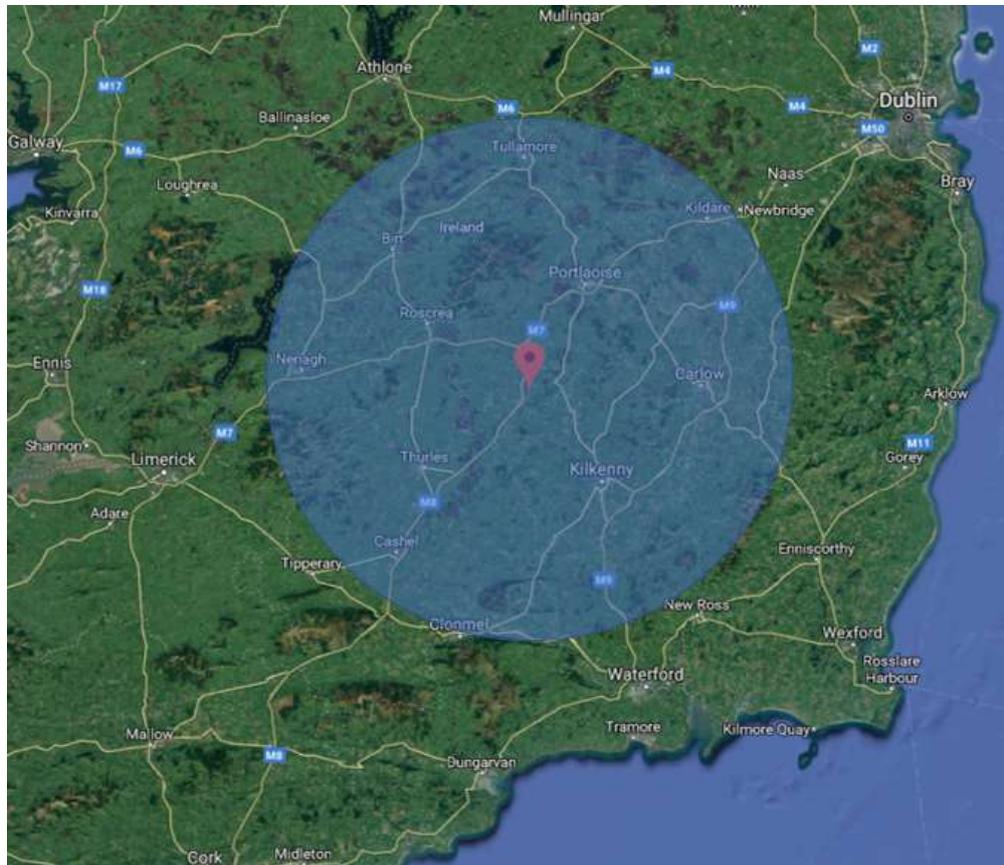


Fig 7.6 Map showing location of Cullohill within 60-mile radius of urban centres

7.4.3 Makers Space and Fab Lab

A makerspace is a collaborative work space for making, learning, exploring and sharing that uses high tech to no tech tools. These spaces are open to entrepreneurs and in some places, students, and have a variety of maker equipment including 3D printers, laser cutters, cnc machines and soldering irons. These spaces are also helping to prepare those who need the critical 21st century skills in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). They provide hands on learning and help with critical thinking skills. Some of the skills that are learned in a makerspace pertain to electronics, 3d printing, 3D modelling, coding and robotics.

The purpose of these spaces is to:

- Provide the space to stimulate new product and business ideas.
- Provide the technical expertise, support and technology/equipment to businesses to enable them to produce prototypes.
- Create research and product development programmes that will directly impact the industry sectors locally and which can be tested locally with the aim of scaling nationally and internationally.
- Provide learning, creating and making space where businesses can bring their ideas and creativity and turn them into innovative products and software solutions.

- Create new business opportunities for the manufacturing and creative sectors through proactive start up generation and support.
- Increase employment, skills and training opportunities.
- Increase accessibility and engagement with SMEs in digital technologies.
- Provide an innovative and engaging learning environment for graduates and students who want to use the facility.
- Provide students and graduates and start-up businesses with space and further training and commissioning opportunities with larger organisations.

A FabLab requires a core set of equipment to allow certain processes to take place. Equipment needs will evolve over time. The type of equipment required will depend on the needs identified and the investment required.

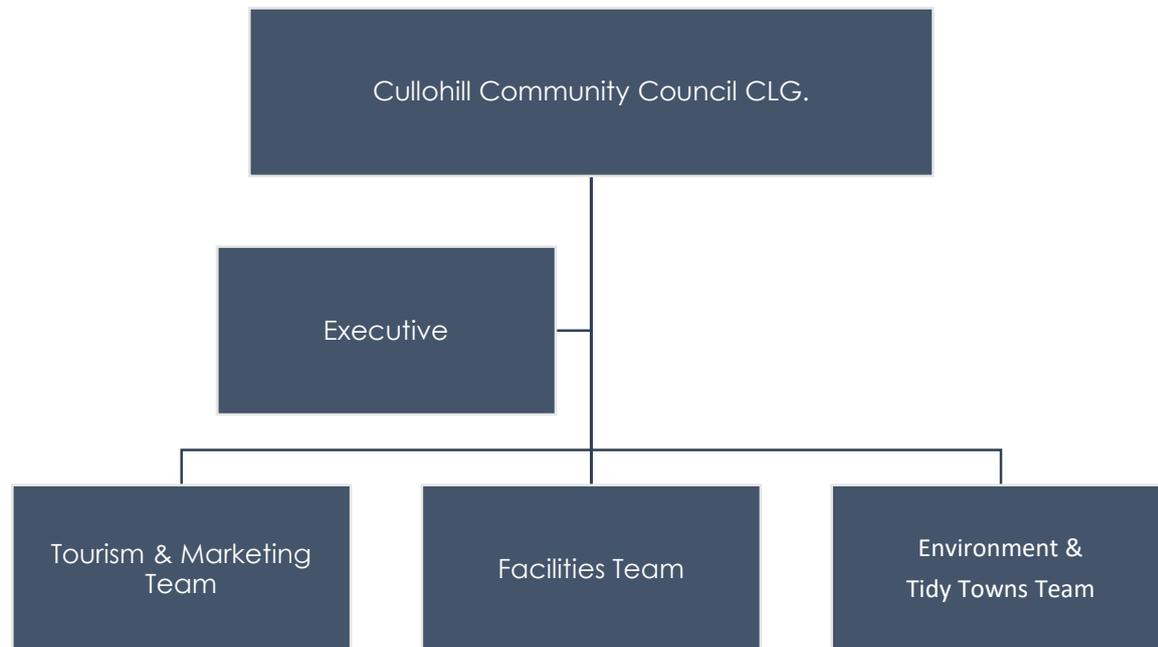
We Create (www.wecreate.ie) based in Limerick is a Fabrication Lab with 3d Printers and Laser cutting equipment for fabrication projects. Again, this provides affordable design and production facilities for start-ups.

7.5 Recommendations

- Carry out a feasibility study on the development of the Vacant property in the village centre (if purchased) as a multi-purpose social enterprise space.
- Investigate the potential of converting the retail part of the building as an artisan café
- Lobby for the roll-out of the Eir Fibre before the end of 2018
- Subject to developing the vacant property, carry out a marketing plan targeting new business start-ups, remote workers and home-based businesses looking to relocate.
- Develop a business network for marketing, information sharing and training
- Identify and secure state investment for the development of Enterprise Facilities in the area.
- Liaise with Local Enterprise Office re the delivery of training and mentoring for businesses in the area.
- Start a monthly farmers market and seasonal markets in the Community Centre.

8. Plan Implementation and Management

8.1 Management Structure



In the structure outlined above the Cullohill Community Council would be structured similarly to a Business and Community Alliance with overall responsibility for strategic development of the Community and to plan and implement projects. The Group would act as the representative body in dealing with the local authority and other agencies and departments. It would also work closely with existing organisations such as the Tidy Towns, Hall Committee, Handball Club, School etc. in promoting and supporting their initiatives. The Executive of the Group should have cross community membership and one executive member should lead each of the sub groups or teams outlined above.

Community led initiatives are always reliant on volunteers and a volunteer recruitment and management plan needs to be put in place to support existing initiatives such as the Tidy Towns, fundraising activity and also to support the development of future initiatives such as events and tourism projects.

A community volunteering initiative supported by residents and businesses should be promoted. This would include monthly Community wide clean up days, planting initiatives, recycling projects, 'mind your space projects' where everyone commits to looking after their own property. The schools would be involved in this with young people working on recycling projects, planting and grow it yourself (GIY) projects.

8.2 Sub Committees/Teams

Committees would each operate from a term of reference and would be ideally represented by a cross section of the community. Each committee would appoint a Chairperson who would represent the committee on the Executive of the Community Council. The following responsibilities are guidelines only, the specific functions of each sub-committee will need to be agreed jointly so as to avoid duplication.

Tourism & Marketing Team:

- Overall responsibility for developing and implementing a tourism strategy and plan for the area.
- Overseeing the Marketing and Promoting the area through existing tourism channels.
- Liaising with individual festival and event promoters and developing new events specifically in the shoulder season.
- Developing a coordinated annual programme of activities in consultation with businesses, festival and event promoters and external agencies.
- Management of marketing materials, website, social media and apps.

Facilities Team

- Overall responsibility for the development of infrastructure projects such as the vacant property, proposed playground, sensory garden etc.
- Responsible for securing funding for these projects and for managing the projects from concept through design, planning and implementation.
- Responsible for management and operating of these projects once completed. (This could be direct management or subletting to third party companies or organisations)
- Liaise with Laois County Council re directional and interpretative signage as well as other infrastructure.

Tidy Towns Sub-Group:

- Liaise with Laois County Council re infrastructure improvements and upgrades.
- Maintenance of public areas.
- Work with Tourism Sub Group and Laois County Council re signage requirements, facilities, upgrade to walks and other infrastructure requirements resulting from future tourism plans.
- Implement annual Tidy Towns Plan.
- Coordinate community clean ups.
- Liaise with local business and property owners regarding building maintenance, painting and landscaping.
- Identify funding and sponsors to finance ongoing maintenance works, landscaping and planting.
- Liaise with National Tidy Towns re annual competition,
- Liaise with Laois County Council re Pride of Place and other community initiatives.

8.2.1 Volunteering

The success of any local community plan is dependent on the 'buy-in' and support from the local community. Successful towns and villages all over the Country have one major factor in common – people working together to improve their communities. People showing pride in their local communities. Success in tidy towns, tourism projects, developing facilities, fundraising etc. are all built on volunteerism at local level. People should be encouraged to volunteer in their local communities by following some basic principles:

- People should be identified that have particular skills and/or experience
- People should only be asked to do voluntary work where they feel they can contribute or in an area that is relevant to them (i.e. match projects to people's skills and interests)
- Volunteers need to be supported, encouraged and rewarded
- If and where appropriate, volunteers should be offered training
- Get external support in recruiting and managing volunteers e.g. Volunteer Centre

8.3 Governance

It is important for all community organisations to implement good governance policies within the organisation. The 5 key principles outlined in the Code are provided below for reference and should be adopted by the Community Council. The complete draft code and guidelines can be downloaded from <http://www.governancecode.ie/code.php>

1. *Providing leadership for our organisation*
2. *Exercising control over our organisation*
3. *Being transparent and accountable by*
4. *Working effectively by*
5. *Behaving with integrity by*

8.4 Finance

The strategic themes and actions previously outlined will require some level of finance. Within each action plan a source of possible funding has been identified.

It is a key role of community-based groups to only plan and develop initiatives that can be core funded and that will not require debt, only in circumstances where this debt can be sustained through some level of income generation.

Financial Planning should be undertaken annually to identify the operational costs of existing and planned future projects. Full financial analysis including cost-benefit analysis and value for money appraisals should be carried out on all new initiatives.

The ideal financial model for any community group is that each project should be self-sustaining through initial grant aid, specific fundraising or sponsorship for that project or in some cases income generated through the project.

A fundraising strategy and plan outlining timelines for various fundraising activities should be prepared annually. This plan and the income raised should be evaluated at year end to determine if targets were achieved and if fundraising could be improved.

8.4.1 *Grant Support*

The following guidelines in relation to grants are relevant for most grants. Always research the criteria relating to the grant and the conditions associated with the grant draw down before applying.

- Identify grants that are relevant and suitable to the work the organisation is currently or is planning to do.
- Research the grant criteria, guidelines and conditions.
- Consult with the relevant grant authority re application process, deadlines, requirements etc.
- Research other similar projects.
- Meet all necessary pre-application requirements:
- Needs analysis completed.
- Proposal and application form completed.
- Relevant number of quotations received.
- Matching finance must be in place.
- Other conditions met e.g. ownership/lease arrangement, insurance, tax clearance, planning permission etc.
- If successful review conditions and adhere to draw down requirements.
- Remember where grant aid is awarded all expenditure must be incurred first (after grant has been approved) and invoices, receipts and bank statements approved before the grant is released.
- Therefore, bridging finance may be required to cover the initial expenditure.
- Loan Finance
- When applying for loans the banks (commercial and social) will seek a business plan and financial projections outlining the repayment capacity on the loan.

The following website has useful information on all funding opportunities

https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/Factsheet_No8_Sources_of_Potential_Funding.pdf

8.4.2 *Potential Sources of Funding for projects recommended in the Community Plan*

Laois County Council

Laois County Council has a range of grant programmes relevant to this plan including:

- Tourism and Festivals Grants
- Local Agenda 21 Environmental Partnership Fund
- Community Facilities Grant Scheme
- Town and Village Renewal Scheme
- Social Enterprise Development Fund

- CLÁR Scheme
- Community Enhancement Programme
- Rural Recreational Programme

LEADER Funding – Laois Partnership

- The Rural Development Programmes (LEADER) is operational, subject to remaining budget availability, until 2020. LEADER funding of up to €200,000 is available for community-based projects at a rate of 75%. Depending on the specific conditions attached to this, the overall project or parts of it may be appropriate for funding under the LEADER programme

Fáilte Ireland Capital Funding

Fáilte Ireland launched a grants scheme for large capital projects in mid-2016 with a call for applications generating high levels of interest and resulting in a very large volume of grant applications being received. Given the current levels of investment activity, Fáilte Ireland estimates that the next call for applications for large capital projects will probably take place during 2019 at the earliest.

Under the scheme, capital grants in excess of €200k and up to a maximum of €5m was available and the scheme was open to applications from the public, private and voluntary sectors including community groups and support for commercial projects.

Regional Enterprise Development Fund 2017-2020

In February 2015, as part of an overarching strategy to support regional enterprise development, the Government announced a Regional Enterprise Development Fund (2017-2020), with the objective of supporting significant regional initiatives to build on sectoral strengths and/or to better leverage identified resources to improve enterprise capability. This is in line with the overall objectives of the *Action Plan for Jobs: Regional initiative and national enterprise policy*.

This regional competitive fund is designed to support the ambition, goals and implementation of the Regional Action Plans for Jobs. Enterprise Ireland, with the support of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI), is leading in the management of this Fund, of up to €60m. The funding is being delivered through two Scheme calls. The first call, launched in 2017, funded projects under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund of €30.5m in grant support. The balance of funding, available for the second call, is €29.045m. The Second Call was launched in March 2018.

Creative Ireland – Maker/Creative Space Renovation

Creative Ireland is the Government's legacy Programme for Ireland – a five-year initiative, from 2017 to 2022, which places creativity at the centre of public policy.

The overarching, long-term objective of this pillar is to elevate the creative industries, including media, architecture, design, digital technology, fashion, food and crafts, drawing together, on an all-of-Government basis, State agencies, industry partners and those engaged in fostering innovation in enterprise.

Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI)

SEAI has a number of [grant schemes](#) available for appropriate projects. Excellence in Energy Efficiency Design (EXEED) enables organisations establish a systematic approach to design, construction, and

commissioning processes for new investments and upgrades to existing assets. The EXEED Certified program aims to influence and deliver new best practices in energy efficient design management. EXEED designs, verifies, and manages optimum energy performance and management at the earliest stages of the lifecycle. SEAI also provides an EXEED grant scheme up to the value of €500,000 per year per project.

Energy Efficient Lighting Grants

The standard level of support available to organisations meeting the requirements is as follows:

- 30% of eligible approved cost for a standard like for like replacement upgrade in a single facility or grouped application
- 35% of eligible approved costs where the application comprises a grouped application and includes smart metering. It should also involve a simple photometric design or analysis, delivering the optimum lighting solution, in terms of lighting and controls upgrades.

Sports Capital Programme – Dept. Transport Tourism and Sport

Annual Sports Capital Programme for Sports Clubs, Not for Profit Organisations, Schools and Local Authorities. Up to 95% funding available up to a maximum of €150,000.

8.4.3 Debt Finance

There may be an element of bridging finance required in the form of short term or working capital loans to develop capital projects. Outside of commercial loans, Clann Credo and Community Finance Ireland provide social finance loans for bridging purposes to social enterprise capital projects.

8.4.4 Tax Incentives

It is recommended that tax advice is sought on opportunities to utilise potential tax incentive measures to raise private investment in projects e.g. Employment Incentive Investment Scheme. The structure of the company will need to allow for potential tax incentives, where investment is required.

8.4.5 EU Funding

Indirect funding

Indirect funding is managed by national and regional authorities and comprises nearly 80% of the EU budget, mainly through 5 big funds that come under the umbrella of the European Structural and Investment Funds.

The funds are:

- European Regional Development Fund – regional and urban development
- European Social Fund – social inclusion and good governance
- Cohesion Fund – economic convergence by less-developed regions
- European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
- European Maritime and Fisheries Fund

Horizon 2020

In 2014, the European Union's new research and innovation programme, Horizon 2020, came into force. It is designed to make it easier for researchers and businesses, (including SMEs) to collaborate on projects. A key element of Horizon 2020 is a proposal to join forces with the private sector and member states of the EU, to achieve results that one country or company is less likely to achieve alone.

Creative Europe Programme

The Creative Europe programme aims to support the European audio-visual, cultural and creative sector. The different funding schemes encourage the audio-visual, cultural and creative players to operate across Europe, to reach new audiences and to develop the skills needed in the digital age. By helping European cultural and audio-visual works to reach audiences in other countries, the programme will also contribute to safeguarding cultural and linguistic diversity.

COSME is the EU programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). It runs from 2014 to 2020 with a planned budget of €2.3bn.

COSME will support:

- better access to finance for SMEs
- access to markets for SMEs
- entrepreneurship
- more favourable conditions for business creation and growth

8.4.6 Philanthropy

There are numerous philanthropic sources of funding which should be investigated for future projects. Sponsorship and corporate donations plus tax incentivised donations should all be incorporated into future fundraising strategies.

8.4.7 Financial Procedures

Community Organisations with responsibility for financing projects must adhere to the contractual arrangements and conditions of all grant aid awarded. The lead organisation in future projects will need to carry out all reporting functions and financial returns as outlined by Funding Organisations and any Government Department.

All matters in relation to purchasing, procurement of services should be done in accordance with the public tendering procedures. All such procedures should be done in an open and transparent way.

Full guidelines on grant criteria, draw down procedures, tendering policies and dual funding restrictions (di-minimis funding) should be sought from all potential funding organisations.

Financial and tax advice should be sought from qualified accountants before making any financial decisions regarding capital projects and the purchasing of lands and buildings.

8.5 Project Evaluation

The implementation of the actions recommended in this plan should be managed and evaluated on an ongoing basis. Individual projects which are grant aided will require specific evaluation by the funding organisation.

By undertaking an evaluation, the organisations responsible can identify areas that need to be addressed, identify needs within the community, and respond accordingly.

By evaluating the work done organisations can measure results against its objectives and promote the achievements to the community and external stakeholders.

The aims of the ongoing evaluation will be to:

- Measure performance against stated objectives
- Identify needs within the community as they arise
- To maintain a high level of quality and service
- To communicate achievements to all stakeholders

Evaluation will be ongoing and will be quantitative and qualitative.

Evaluation Methodologies

- Reporting at relevant group committee meetings
- Financial reporting by relevant group finance committee
- Community Surveys
- Project Beneficiary/Participant Surveys
 - Postal Surveys and door to door surveys
 - Online Surveys
 - Focus Groups
- External Evaluation of projects
- Review of outcomes of projects by new association.

8.6 Future Project Planning

The following points refer to a set of generic guidelines to follow when planning, developing, financing and managing community-based projects. These are only to act as a general guide, all projects being developed should meet the necessary criteria and procedures laid out by the agency/organisation and/or department which will be financing the project.

- Needs analysis to identify the need for any project must be completed and all relevant groups/individuals must be consulted with.
- Identify at an early stage and agree the structure under which the project will be developed.
- Identify the costs of developing the project.
- Identify possible sources of funding for the project.
- Identify the costs of operating the project once started.
- Identify the operations and management requirement of the project long term.
- Is the project viable and can it be sustained (financially, resources and staffing/volunteers)

- In projects involving more than one group a clear set of terms of reference and a memorandum of understanding between groups should be prepared outlining the roles and responsibilities, and expectations of each group.

8.6.1 Project Management

- The necessary structures must be in place before a project can be successfully developed and managed.
- In some cases, external consultants are contracted to manage projects i.e. capital projects (construction management)
- For larger organisations a project management committee should be set up to manage the specific project.
- Annual budgets should be prepared based on the running costs of a project and an annual fundraising strategy and plan should be developed.
- All projects should be evaluated and, in all cases, where grant aid is provided to a project the funding organisation will request an evaluation under the grant conditions.
- It is important to identify at the planning stage the long-term commitment required in sustaining community projects.

9. Action Plan

9.1 Implementation Structure Action Plan

Ref.	Action	Responsibility	Supported By	Timeframe	Budget Required	Potential Funding
ST1	Develop terms of reference for recommended sub group structures of the Community Council.	Executive	Laois Partnership LEO Mentor	Short Term	Consultancy Mentor Programme	LEO Laois Partnership
ST2	Develop company annual budget and funding plan (fundraising, income from fees, grant aid etc.).	Executive	Company Accountant	Annual	-	-
ST3	Expand Tidy Towns Committee and develop Tidy Towns Plan.	Tidy Towns	Volunteer Centre FÁS	Short/Medium Term	Annual Budget	LCC Fundraising Sponsors
ST4	Develop Cullohill website and digital marketing content (photography, information, maps and video).	Executive Web Designer	Laois Partnership LEO Mentor	Short/Medium Term	TBI	Laois Partnership
ST5	Evaluate Project Progress.	Executive & Sub Groups	-	Quarterly and Annually	External Evaluator (if applicable)	Own resources

9.2 Infrastructure and Facilities Action Plan

Ref.	Action	Responsibility	Supported By	Timeframe	Budget Required	Potential Funding
IN1	Secure High-Speed Connectivity.	Eir Executive (lobbying)	LCC	Short Term	-	-
IN2	Submit a proposal to LCC re required infrastructure upgrades including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Signage ▪ Road Improvements ▪ Street Lighting ▪ Broadband 	Executive	LCC Roads Dept. Environment Dept. Local Area Engineer	Short/Medium Term	TBI	LCC
IN3	Install new interpretative signage at Heritage and Recreation sites	Executive Tourism Team	LCC Failte Ireland	Medium Term	TBI	LCC Laois Partnership
IN4	Secure financial support for the development of the Community Centre	Executive	Laois Partnership LCC	MediumTerm	Approx. €300K	Laois Partnership Fundraising Loan
IN5	Carry out a feasibility study on the future development potential of the Vacant Property (subject to availability)	Executive Engineer/Architect	Laois Partnership LCC	Subject to availability	TBI	Laois Partnership LCC

IN6	Develop Tidy Town Plan	Tidy Towns	RSS/TUS Scheme	Annually	TBI	LCC Laois Partnership Fundraising Sponsors
IN7	Carry out site assessment and design of an Astro Turf pitch at the school	School Board of Management	Executive	Short to Medium Term	TBI	If project is feasible Sports Capital Funding
IN7	Identify potential green field sites in and around the village core to develop a multi-purpose sports facility	Executive	LCC Laois Partnership	Medium/Long Term	TBI	Rural Recreation Fund Town and Village Renewal LEADER Sports Capital
IN8	Investigate the potential to improve and develop the GAA facilities (lights, hurling wall)	GAA	Co. Board	TBI	TBI	If project is feasible Sports Capital Funding
IN9	Develop Sensory Garden opposite Cullohill Castle	Executive	LCC	Medium Term	TBI	LCC Laois Partnership
IN10	Develop Playground	Executive	LCC	Medium/Long Term	TBI	LCC Laois Partnership

9.3 Tourism Action Plan

Ref.	Action	Responsibility	Supported By	Timeframe	Budget Required	Potential Funding
T1	Install interpretative signage and lighting outside Clophill Castle	Exec	LCC	Medium Term	TBI	LCC
T2	Develop artisan café in the vacant property	Exec		Subject to availability	TBI	Social Finance
T3	Develop a Trails App covering Ecology, Archaeology, Geography and Heritage Trails	Tourism Sub Group	LCC Failte Ireland National Trails Office	Medium Term	TBI	LAOIS PARTNERSHIP Sponsors Others TBI
T4	Develop a culture & heritage tourism development and marketing plan Focusing on promoting the Culture and Heritage of the area	Tourism Sub Group	Failte Ireland LCC Heritage Office Laois Partnership	Medium Term	Marketing	Grant Aid (TBI) Sponsors Local Business
T5	Develop an annual sustainable festival programme	Tourism Sub Group	Failte Ireland Arts Council LCC Event Promoters	Annual	Marketing Operational Costs	Grant Aid (TBI) Sponsors Fundraising Local Businesses
T6	Carry out feasibility study on developing bike trails	Tourism Sub Group	Coillte Failte Ireland LCC LAOIS PARTNERSHIP	Medium Term	TBI	Coillte Laois Partnership

9.4 Enterprise Action Plan

Ref.	Action	Responsibility	Supported By	Timeframe	Budget Required	Potential Funding
ENT1	Develop programme of supports (training and mentoring) to assist local people to identify business opportunities and develop new businesses	Executive	LEO Laois Partnership Skillnets	Short Term	Training Budget	LEO Laois Partnership Skillnets
ENT2	Develop short term co-working space on 1 st floor of the renovated community centre	Executive	Laois Partnership	Medium Term	TBI	Laois Partnership
ENT3	Carry out feasibility study on developing the vacant property as a social enterprise space focusing on co-working opportunities	Exec	LEO LAOIS PARTNERSHIP LCC EI	Medium/Long Term	TBI	TBI

