

Stradbally Community Development Association

This submission has been prepared by Stradbally Community Development Association (SCDA) in response to the invitation from Laois Co. Co. seeking inputs into the preparation of the new Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027. The content of this submission relates to SCDA's views of the proper planning and sustainable development of Stradbally.

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Stradbally: Context

Stradbally has a formal setting indicating its origin as a planned estate village. The town is surrounded by undulating land with much of it used for tillage farming (see Figure 1). Stradbally continues to provide retail and community services to the inhabitants of the town, but also to the wider rural and agricultural community within its hinterland.



Figure 1: Stradbally in Context

Stradbally Community Development Association

SCDA is a voluntary led community based development group. It was established in 2017 to support the economic and community development of the area. Membership of the group is drawn from individuals who have significant experience of supporting community and social activities in the areas.

In 2018/2019, SCDA with the support of a Community Planner commenced the process of preparing a “Stradbally Sustainable Community Plan 2020-2024” for the town. The aim of the plan is to produce a comprehensive set of objectives and related actions to enhance the social, economic and environmental development of the town. Figure 2 & Figure 3 sets out the ED of Stradbally & areas of scientific designation. The key objective of this project was the establishment of a “shared vision” for the future of Stradbally.

Community development plays an essential role in the economic development of small town. The process of developing the plan has helped bring the community together to agree on priorities for the town. The final community plan will specifically set out the community structures required to deliver on the plan objectives. This plan is due to be completed shortly.

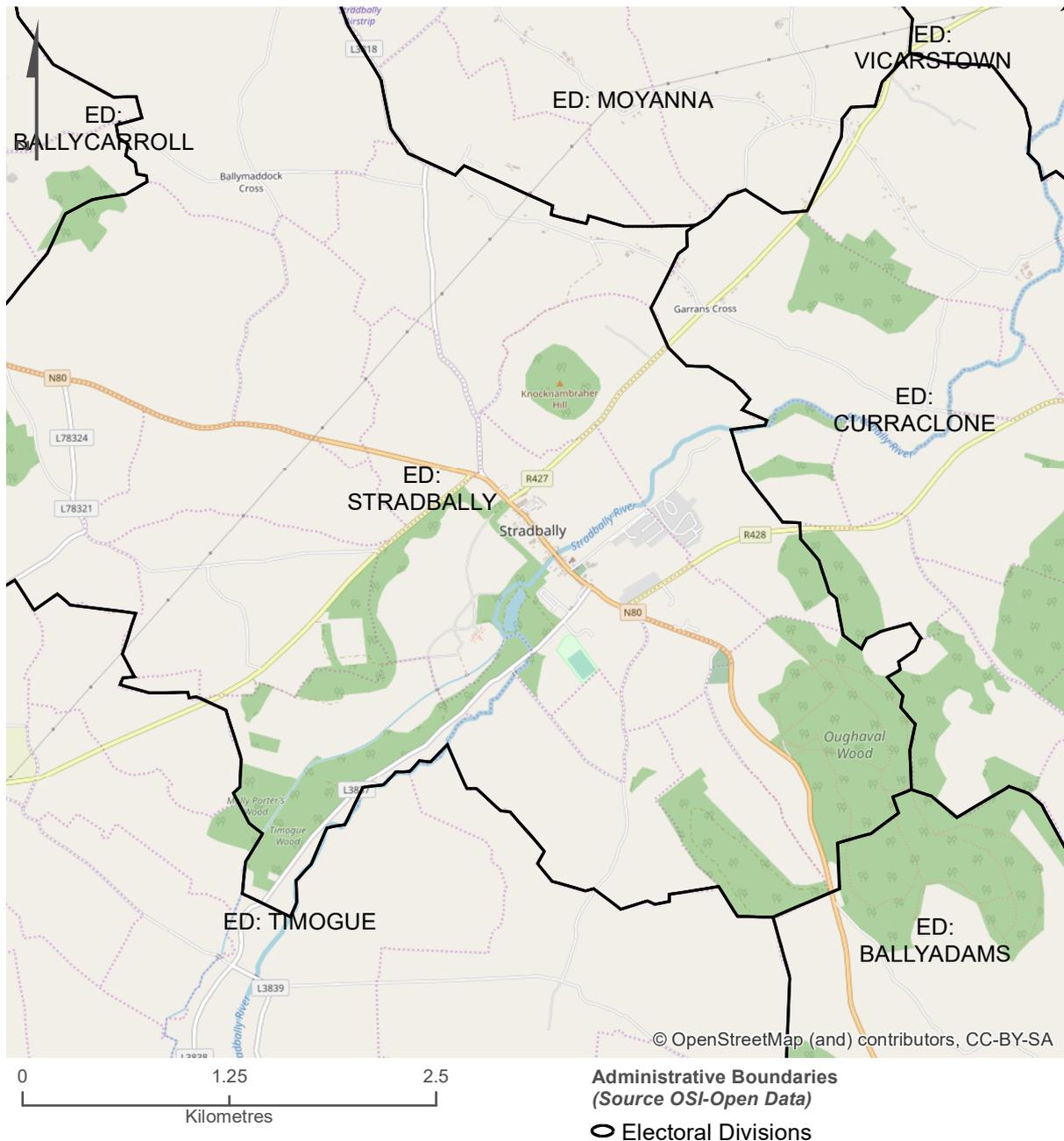


Figure 2: Stradbally Electoral Division

Stradbally Sustainable Community Plan 2020-2024

SCDA is now tasked with leading the implementation of key projects and initiatives for the area.

SCDA seeks to address three thematic areas over the lifetime of the five-year plan.

1. Community Participation & Community Infrastructure
2. Community Culture, Expression & Identity
3. Enterprise in the Community

The following sets out relevant actions to promote the proper planning and sustainable development of Stradbally.

Thematic Area 1: Community Participation & Community Infrastructure

Actions	
	<p>1. Development of a Community & Sports Centre</p> <p>2. Planned Programme of Community Facilities & Surface Structural Upgrades</p> <p>a. Develop a Masterplan to upgrade the public realm on Church Lane and associated upgrade of paths & road realignment so to facilitate the creation of a pedestrian path and cycleway</p> <p>b. Engage with an existing Housing Association to establish the feasibility of additional Older Persons Housing in the area</p> <p>c. Make Stradbally an Age Friendly town through the development of an appropriate seating plan and continue improvements/replacement of footpath to ensure universal access for all</p> <p>d. Enhancement of the linear park at Woodview Close</p> <p>e. Investigation/feasibility of developing a local approved loop walk (incorporating the above linear park and traversing other key features such as the lake)</p> <p>f. Develop an innovative high impact painting scheme for the village to incorporate railings which are a distinctive feature of the town</p> <p>g. The Bridge Project. This is a focal point of the town and merits close examination. Suggested plans here could extend to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - installing appropriate lighting - sandblasting of stone work - replacement of windows on the prominent downstream store - clean-up of Stradbally River in the vicinity of the bridge <p>h. Upgrade of fences and boundaries throughout the village using consistent materials and painting scheme</p> <p>i. Creation of a Community Park at the Rathmore Road</p> <p>j. Enhancement Plan for the Courthouse Square</p> <p>k. Replacement of stained glass heritage windows in the Old Convent and St Patricks Hall</p> <p>l. Creation/installation/commissioning of appropriate wall murals and signage through innovative ways such as hiring a reconstruction artist</p> <p>m. Ensure that the lifespan and aesthetic appearance of trees within the town are enhanced through the procurement of a specialist tree surgeon</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> n. Improved recycling facilities o. Improved Street Lighting & undergrounding of overhead cables p. Parish Hall upgrade
Objective of Action:	<p>Development of a Community & Sports Centre</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve community amenity facilities for all age groups with particular emphasis on spaces for teenagers & Older People <p>Planned Programme of Community Facilities & Surface Structural Upgrades</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Consolidate & Improve the appearance, public realm and recreational amenities of Stradbally 3. Establish the suitability of the town as a location for additional Older Person Housing & Services
Rationale / Need for the Project	<p>Development of a Community & Sports Centre</p> <p>The key project of the Community Planning process was to explore the need for a sports/community facility which can integrate all local sports and community organisations together. This was raised as the most significant need during public consultation meetings with the community. It is further noteworthy that there is no performance space for theatre or musical productions. Again, a new community centre could fill this role. A further need in the area is ‘hotdesking’ space which could be facilitated within the centre.</p> <p>The campus will need to incorporate a playing pitches/multisport area. Within the centre building, meeting rooms of varying sizes along with high quality IT & Broadband facilities are required to facilitate training, lifelong learning and community education programmes.</p> <p>The community are united in directing the annual proceeds of the local Electric Picnic community fund towards the development of the community centre. This is significant as many community based groups will forgo essential annual grant assistance. The progression of the project has now become greater due to the non-availability of meeting rooms at St Marys.</p> <p>Planned Programme of Community Facilities & Surface Structural Upgrades</p> <p>The strengthening of the county’s towns and villages is vital to the well-being of communities. Many have been faced with declining service in recent years while other such as Stradbally have not received the sustained investment in public realm upgrades in line the local population increase. Stradbally has a population of 1,350 according to census 2016 which is a 15% increase over the 14 years since the 2002 census. Comparing Stradbally’s population pyramid with the states pyramid, shows more people from 50 years old upwards living in Stradbally than in the national figures. Housing provision and services for this older population will need to be planned. SCDA should advocate for the needs of Older Persons by ensuring that universal design features prominently within these plans.</p> <p>It is essential that our towns are attractive places to live, work in and visit. While it is acknowledged that much improvements have taken place in the town over latter years, this progress must be sustained and consolidated.</p>

SCDA Requirement	<p>Development of a Community & Sports Centre</p> <p>SCDA have progressed this key project with the support of external technical expertise and have held discussion with senior staff of the local authority. A site at Carrig Glas, owned by the local authority, has been identified which meets some of the needs of the project but not the full suite of required services such as grass playing fields. Access to adjoining lands in private ownership will be required to facilitate the latter requirements. Further feasibility and design work is required to ensure this priority project is realised for the community of Stradbally.</p> <p>Planned Programme of Community Facilities & Surface Structural Upgrades</p> <p>In order to avoid an uncoordinated and unplanned approach to the delivery of town enhancement projects, the preparation of a landscape plan is required. This will be carried out by experienced third party consultants who will be engaged to ensure that a bespoke plan is prepared.</p> <p>SCDA will require a combination of funding, community commitment and technical expertise such as Landscape Architects, Planners and Architects to design and implement the above mentioned high quality regeneration projects. This project will require interagency approach to ensure the successful delivery of the above projects.</p>
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Thematic Area 2: Community Culture, Expression & Identity, Planned Actions

Actions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure long term access to local outdoor amenities by enhancing marketing/theming & upgrading of new and existing walks 2. Restoration of the Old Weir 3. Develop comprehensive Community Information Sharing Platform through e.g. Social Media 4. Develop a Christmas Lights Initiative
Objective of Action:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To promote awareness of local heritage 2. Celebrate local creativity & uniqueness 3. Consolidate & Develop New Community Information Sharing Forums
Rationale / Need for the Project	<p>Cultural Heritage is the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and preserved for the benefit of future generations. Cultural heritage includes tangible culture, intangible culture and natural heritage.</p>
SCDA Requirement	<p>SCDA will require a combination of funding, community commitment and technical expertise such as Heritage and Arts Officers to design and implement the above mentioned high quality cultural heritage projects. This project will require interagency approach to ensure the successful delivery of the above projects.</p>



Figure 2: Special Areas of Conservation in Stradbally

Thematic Area 3: Enterprise in the Community, Proposed Actions

<p>Actions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish a Community Energy Team 2. Establish a task force for supporting preparation of key funding proposals 3. Consider establishment of a Business Association 4. Develop a Town Prospectus to attract businesses & events to Stradbally 5. With the support of national and local elected representatives, advocate for: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Improved broadband b. Increased public bus transport c. Greater Traffic Calming measures d. Address Dereliction by developing proposals to local & central government and / or private developers e.g. the old convent
<p>Objective of Actions:</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To increase tourism activity 2. To develop social enterprise
<p>Rationale / Need for the Project</p>	<p>Climate mitigation can be addressed at a local level initially by establishing a Town Energy Team to review and plan for locally based measures to assist with the transition to a low carbon economy. This for example could be through taking clustered based approach to implementing a building retrofit scheme.</p>

	Festivals and events are the fabric of both community development and tourism, essential to creating community identity as well as enhancing income generation. The town has gained national and international prominence through the hugely popular Electric Picnic music festival which started in 2004. This has attracted thousands to the event every September, however outside of this event and the nationally renowned Stradbally Steam Rally, there are few smaller festivals and events taking place during the calendar year. It is also noteworthy that there is limited and accommodation provision in the area. Much work remains to be completed to increase bed capacity in the area.
SCDA Requirement	SCDA will require a combination of funding, community commitment and technical expertise such as Community Energy Specialists, Business Advisers and Tourism Experts to implement the above mentioned high quality projects. This project will require an interagency approach to ensure the successful delivery of the above projects.

Conclusion

Each planned initiative listed in the above tables are in response to the community consultation and several follow up committee and interagency meetings. It must be recognised that a number of the actions can be delivered by the development association, however extensive collaboration with partner entities will be required to make progress on others.

There are other planned activities that will be the responsibility of statutory and non-statutory agencies to implement. However the members of the new umbrella group have a vital role to play by participating in county decision making structures and in partnership with elected representatives, to advocate for resources and supports so as to ensure the proper planning and development of Stradbally.

The whole community approach is undoubtedly the best way forward for Stradbally. Social Inclusion, social enterprise and business development are all essential ingredients for renewal.

