

LETTERKENNY

PLANNING FOR GROWTH

Report on the Consultation Events of May and June 2018

'What is your ambition for Letterkenny and what do we need to do to get there?'



Comhairle Contae
Dhún na nGall
Donegal County Council

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1.0 Introduction

We engaged with around 700 people through a range of different events during May and June 2018. We made a strategic proposition about planning for the growth of Letterkenny:



Then we asked the public:



What
is *your* ambition
for the town
and **what do we**
need to do to get there?

2.0 Consultation- What We Did and What People Said

We held a range of events so people could take part in different ways:

- 2 workshops with the business community.
- A workshop with the community, social and cultural sector.
- Urban Design project prepared by students from Queens University of Belfast, MSc Planning.
- Business gathering through the Local Enterprise Office.
- Local consultation meeting with a group of Main Street businesses.
- Local consultation meeting with LYIT Executive Board.
- Local consultation meeting with a grouping of larger employers.
- Local consultation meeting with the Cathedral Quarter Initiative.
- Promotion of an online questionnaire about the town centre.
- We brought an interactive map to all the events so people could show where they thought certain development should be located.
- Individual submissions could be made by email or post.

We published some information to try help people to get thinking



2.1 Workshops with the Business Community

In partnership with Letterkenny Chamber we talked to the business community across two workshops, engaging with 60 people. The first workshop on 22nd May 2018 was more general in relation to the future vision of Letterkenny and the second workshop on 29th May was focussed on the town centre.



Groups talked about their vision for Letterkenny & mapped town centre opportunities



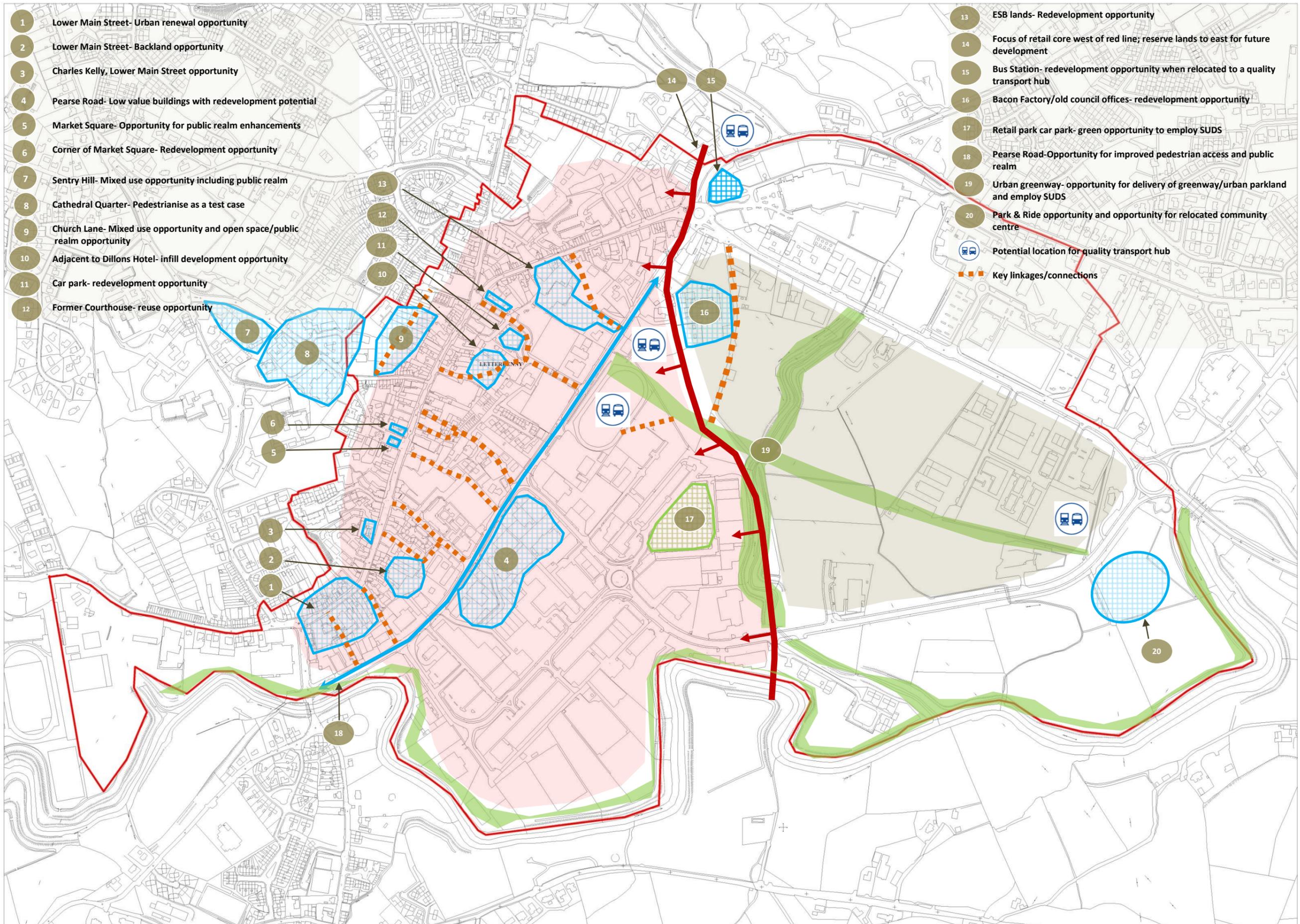
An ambitious vision emerged:

'Letterkenny will be an attractive place with a sense of community. A small city with a heart, an ambition and an entrepreneurial feel and space. A connected place that celebrates heritage, health and community. A place where young people want to stay, to set up their lives, where they can grow their business safe in the knowledge that they can access skilled labour'.

Key ideas from the business community

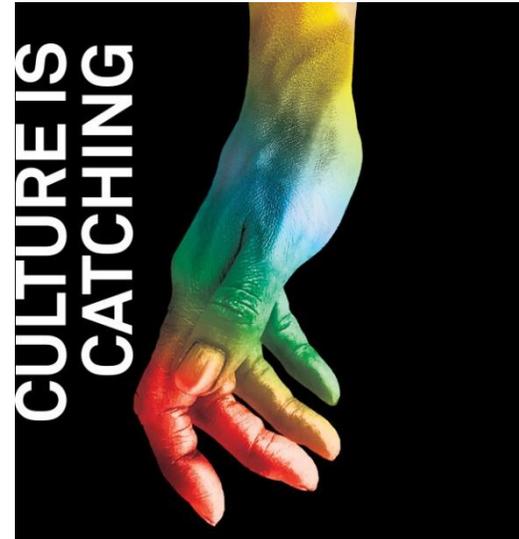
- Focus on activating house building through:
 - Public sector-led housing construction.
 - Increase housing density and quality in the town centre.
 - Reuse vacant houses, regenerate existing buildings and infill and brownfield sites, encourage living above the shop.
 - Plan for neighbourhoods in areas like the town centre, creameries site, ESB site, Glebe, Golf Course Road, Woodlands, Glencar, Leck Road, Kirkstown.
- Economic sectors for growth include: Fintech, IT, tourism, night-time economy, culture, SME clusters, indigenous business development, 2nd site FDI destination and prioritise securing at least one additional large employer in short term.
- Sustain business supports and implement fiscal incentives.
- Make the town centre more attractive as a place to live and invest in through:
 - Animating it through events.
 - Enhanced green infrastructure, recreational amenities and public realm.
 - Improved accessibility including public transport.
 - Develop 'Quarters'- Cathedral Quarter and a Social Quarter.
 - Regenerate heritage buildings.
- Brexit can be an economic opportunity.
- Build local capacity in the community and strengthen local governance.
- Infrastructural investment is essential in the areas of: traffic and transportation networks including public transport; accessibility, walking and cycling infrastructure; waste water; green infrastructure; broadband and; electricity.

The Business Community mapped their ideas:



2.2 Workshop with the Community/Cultural/Social Sector

On 6th June 2018, we talked to a wide cross-section of the community, social and cultural interests operating in Letterkenny, engaging with approximately 30 attendees in a workshop setting in order to allow for collaborative input.

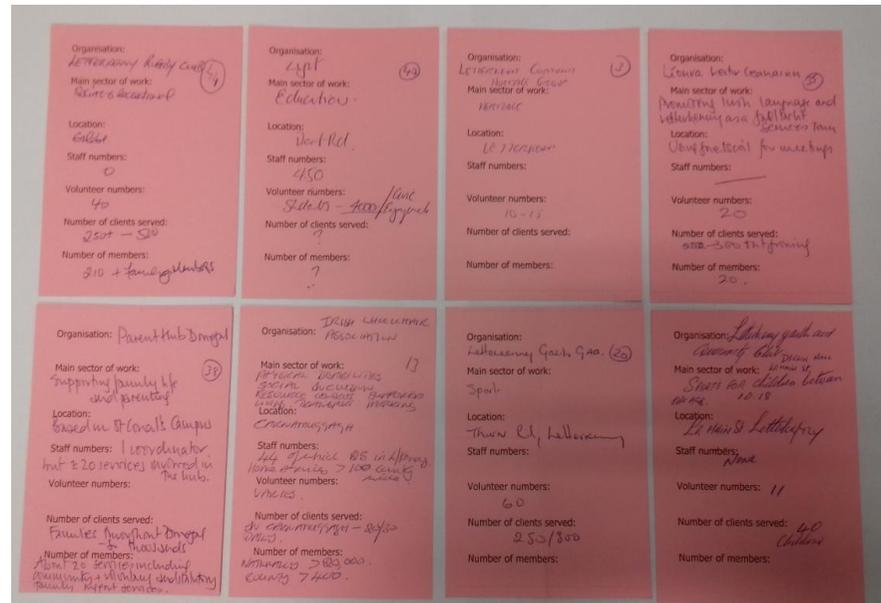


Groups discussed issues of concern in relation to housing, economic development, social and physical infrastructure

Key ideas from the Community, Cultural and Social Sectors

- Address housing issues by:
 - Constructing/providing more Council housing
 - Considering whether the size and quality of units currently being provided are fit for purpose
 - Providing more student accommodation
 - Focusing on the refurbishment and adaptation of existing housing stock
 - Resolving current infrastructural deficits
 - Implementing measures to lower the cost of building
- Economic sectors for growth include: SME sector, Technology sector
- Need to provide quality housing for workers in the town
- Aid LYIT to achieve University status
- Redevelop large derelict sites for economic purposes.
- Make Letterkenny a WIFI town
- Facilitate indigenous industry
- Make Letterkenny a hub for health services
- There is a need to address the perception of peripherality in order to attract workers and employers to Letterkenny
- There is a need to focus on open space in the town – greenways, walks etc.
- Create a town bike scheme
- Provide a parking area for campervans opposite the Council offices
- Explore opportunities for the existing pitch at Oldtown
- Employ a Community Development Officer

The participants thought about their organisation in a spatial context and how their service contributes to building sustainable neighbourhoods



Some of the existing community/cultural and social organisations



At the workshop, 20 community/cultural and social organisations gave us some additional information about where their groups operate from, the type of service their organisation provides, the number of clients served, the number of staff, the number of volunteers and the number of members.

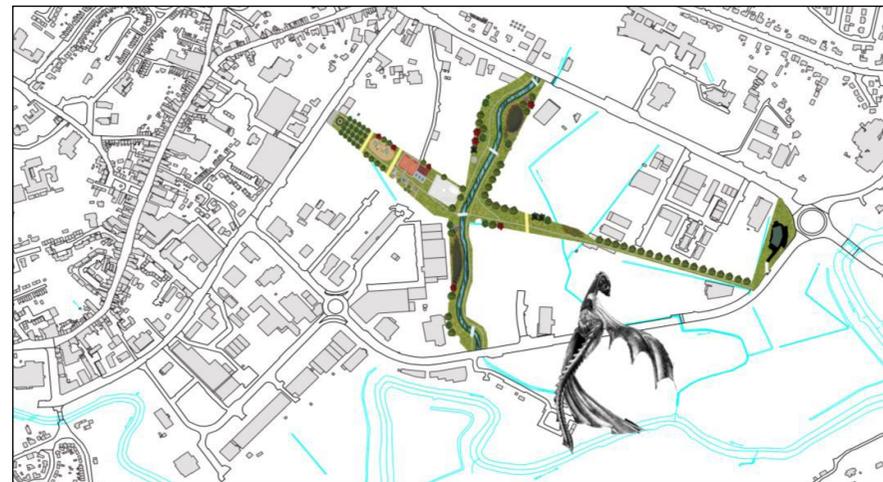
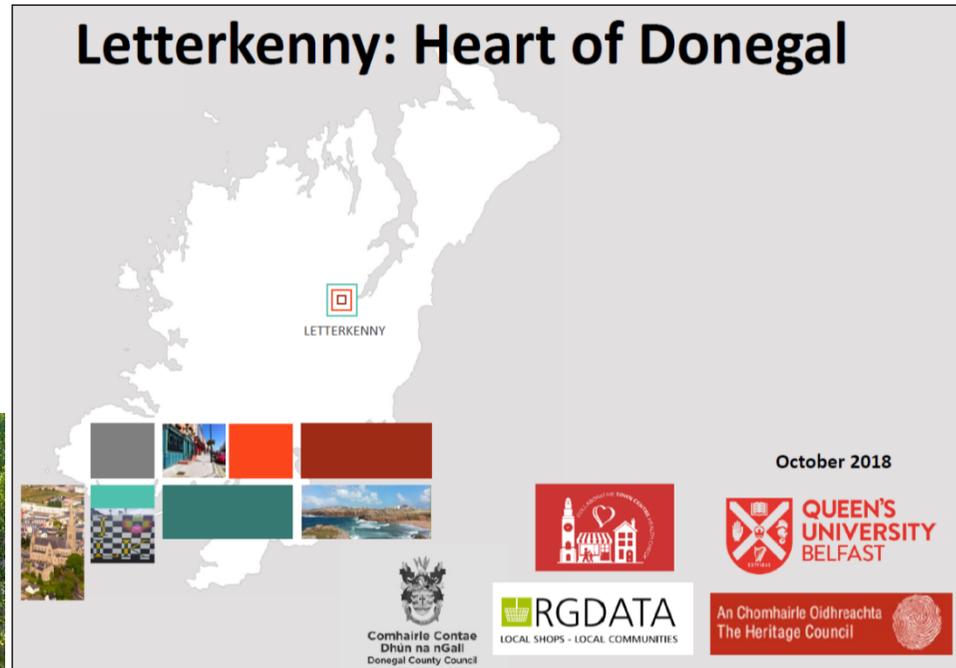
2.3 Queen's University of Belfast: Urban Design Project

As part of their MSc in Planning and Development, students from Queen's University Belfast were tasked with creating an Urban Design Strategy and Thematic Town Centre Plans for Letterkenny. Their efforts culminated with the launch of a document entitled 'Letterkenny: Heart of Donegal' in October 2018.



Above: Conceptual image detailing potential redevelopment along Church Lane

Right: Conceptual 'Suilleach Greenway' linking the tourist office with the town centre, LYIT and the river to the south



Key Recommendations Emerging from the Letterkenny: Heart of Donegal Study by QUB

- To realise the ambitious growth targets for Letterkenny it will be necessary to focus new development within the large town centre boundary rather than continue with suburban and rural sprawl.
- There is a need to utilise vacant built assets, regenerate underperforming spaces and create high quality urban infrastructure to stimulate private sector commercial and residential development. Investment in public spaces would demonstrate a leadership that prioritises quality of life for existing and future residents

Potential Projects for Implementation

Short Term

- Living above the shop incentives.
- Pop-up shops
- Re-use of old Charles Kelly building on Lower Main St. as a multifunctional cultural, arts and education centre
- Car park 'greening' initiative, whereby green roofs would be provided over under-used multi-storey car parks, e.g. Pearse Road car park
- Provision of 'parklets' in areas currently used for on-street parking. This could be implemented in an incremental manner and is easily reversible.
- Undertake a building condition survey of historic buildings to identify historic properties that can be restored and adapted.

Medium Term

- Regeneration of Market Square. Requires active stewardship including a programme of events to animate the area.
- Promote retail development in vacant units along routes such as Justice Walsh Road and Rosemount lane, in order to address the 'disconnect' in the town centre.

Long Term

- Mixed-use development between Pearse Road, Port Road and Neil T. Blaney Road.
- Riverside housing.
- Redevelopment of Church Lane 'gap site'.
- Development of a transport hub opposite LYIT.
- Development of the 'Suilleach Greenway'.

2.4 Business Gathering in the Local Enterprise Office

We held round-table discussions with staff from the Local Enterprise Office and a number of private business owners on 12th June 2018 in order to get an insight into issues affecting business development in Letterkenny on a day-to-day basis. The session highlighted several key issues for consideration when planning for the future development of Letterkenny and the thoughts of the participants in this regard are set out below.



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Workshop at the LEO Office – Emerging Issues

- **The dominance of the private car in Letterkenny is a big issue and is likely to continue to be so unless appropriate actions are undertaken to facilitate alternative forms of movement through the town.**
- **At the current time, the perceived lack of car parking in the town contributes towards traffic management issues. However, there are circa 5,000 spaces in the town overall and these are rarely used to full capacity. Communication in relation to parking availability is therefore key.**
- **Should parking be removed from the Main Street?**
- **The 'Bonagee Link' would aid with traffic movement around the town.**
- **A town bus serving the main focal points in the town is needed. In addition, we should be thinking bigger and designing for cycle lanes, bus lanes and possibly rail.**
- **Enterprise centre is needed to stimulate the growth aspirations of smaller business.**
- **Letterkenny should be turned into a 'Smart' town, using technology to capture data in relation to traffic, pedestrian movement etc.**

- The key challenge to growth is poor infrastructure.
- 'Social re-engineering' of the town centre is required. Connections are key.
- Accessible and affordable space within the town centre is crucial for the SME sector. The 'Building Block' enterprise centre in Sligo is cited as an example of good practice.
- Concerns were raised that certain tenants/uses in the town centre, particularly those that occupy a large area, in effect limit evening activity in certain circumstances.
- Noted that the Council in Tralee are trialling the daytime (10.30am-6.00pm) pedestrianisation of the Mall in the town.
- Noted that renovation of existing building stock in the town is very important.
- 'Ghettoisation' is a possible issue in the town centre – quality of buildings and housing is a priority. Also, urban spaces should be designed using appropriate materials that reflect the architectural heritage of the town.
- May be opportunity for themed plaza areas in the town centre.
- Existing tourist office is in a very poor location.
- It would be important to tidy up sites at points of entry to the town in order to present a good first impression.

2.5 Main Street Business Grouping

We talked to a small group of people who run businesses along Main Street. They discussed key actions and measures that they think would strengthen the town centre for business.

The mixed uses along Main Street in 2018 include retail comparison, retail services (e.g. hairdressers), leisure services (e.g. restaurants) and offices. Vacant properties punctuate the Main Street in 2018.



- KEY ACTIONS -



2.6 Letterkenny Institute of Technology Executive Board

Letterkenny Institute of Technology engaged in all the workshop forums and also talked to us directly.



Over 4,000 students

Growing to 5,000 with future planned expansion

'A community within the town's community.'

LYIT generally supported the growth proposition



Strong regional collaborations



Some key areas emerged from the discussion:

- The need for a strong, multi-functional, diverse town centre with a strong sense of place and character.
- The need for housing to encourage students to live closer to the campus.
- The importance of key infrastructure projects including the Ten-T Network and Southern Relief Road as part of phased approach to a more effective town centre.
- The need to implement sustainable transport options including delivery of an effective transport hub as an essential measure.
- The continued implementation of the LYIT masterplan on campus lands along Port Road and at Knocknamona.

2.7 Workshop with Larger Employers

On 20th June 2018, we talked to representatives of three of the larger employers in Letterkenny; namely Pramerica, Zeus and Optum, in order to discuss the attributes that make the town an attractive place to do business and to see what actions could be taken to improve Letterkenny from an employer's perspective.



Key ideas from emerging from discussions with group of larger employers

- **Marketing** of the town is vitally important.
- Interconnection of Letterkenny with the north is a unique selling point.
- **Accessibility** - If the town was more accessible nationally then that should result in increased inward investment.
- **Key Agencies** – IDA, LYIT, Second level education, HSE.
- **Amenities** - The river must be integrated into the townscape.
- Perception of the place is very important to prospective employers. Areas with poorly maintained footpaths, verges etc. give a poor impression of the town.
- Are there incentives that could be offered to improve townscape, e.g. cut in rates if you carry out improvements to your building.
- **Employment** - Is there a critical mass of employers to attract prospective residents from outside the region.
- People need opportunities for employment mobility and this requires a diverse base of employers.
- **Education** – prospective employees will be thinking about where their kids will go to college. Need to strengthen LYIT and the college needs to specialise in particular fields to make it distinctive.
- Student experience must be good to attract students.

Discussions focussed on the ambitious growth plans for Letterkenny as part of the North West City Region

“What is Letterkenny’s Unique Selling Point – how are we marketing this place?”

The group discussed IDA's model of the key ingredients needed to attract investment:



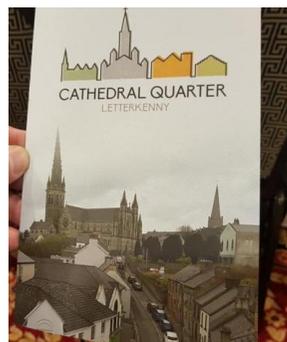
What will attract & win investments

- ✓ Regional infrastructure, road & energy access critical
- ✓ Talent – Ability to attract and develop partners in Education
- ✓ Critical mass of population and urban centres
Existing clusters – specific sectors/activities
- ✓ Property solutions, zoned lands and residential solutions
- ✓ Marketing access, improved marketing profile

2.8 Letterkenny Cathedral Quarter Initiative

Letterkenny Cathedral Quarter Initiative engaged in all the workshop forums and also talked to us directly.

The Cathedral Quarter aim to regenerate and revitalise the historical core of Letterkenny, starting with Church Lane



During the direct discussions, the potential of the Cathedral Quarter emerged:

- As Letterkenny's future Cultural Quarter emphasising heritage-led regeneration.
- As an area for business and homes.
- As an urban centre for teaching and learning traditional building skills as well as local history.
- As an area for a farmer's market, craft shops, artists studios, live work units, workspaces and galleries.
- As an area that uses its backlands.
- As an area of character and public realm.
- As an area with potential for the development of lands known as 'Grieve's field' for a public park with amphitheatre, seating and walking paths creating accessibility to Speers Lane and Main Street.

2.9 Online Town Centre Questionnaire Survey – Emerging Issues

The Planning Authority carried out an online questionnaire in relation to the town centre. This survey proved to be very successful in terms of uptake, with 543 completed surveys submitted to the Council by the closing date of 4th July 2018



Placemaking



Key Emerging Themes:

- Traffic Management
- Public Realm
- Retailing and Commercial Activity
- Town Centre Living

Extending Participatory Opportunities

The online questionnaire provided a participation opportunity for persons that perhaps were not in a position to attend any of the 'drop-in' consultation events. The survey yielded a broad cross-section of opinions and suggestions that will be examined in tandem with other findings emerging from the overall consultation exercise to inform the preparation of the Local Area Plan for Letterkenny.

Themes and Issues Emerging from the Online Town Centre Questionnaire

Traffic Management

- Focus on traffic management via a number of suggested measures:
 - Enhance public transport.
 - Provide free parking / additional parking within the town centre.
 - Construct ring roads to move traffic away from the centre.
 - Provide cycleways/greenways.
 - Provide additional bridge crossings over the River Swilly.



Public Realm

- Improve the public realm by:
 - Rejuvenating the Main Street.
 - Improving connectivity throughout the town centre.
 - Improving public spaces, walkways and footpaths.
 - Promoting a cultural quarter within the town centre.
 - Relocating existing town centre uses that might be deemed inappropriate.
 - Developing the river as an amenity.
 - Providing better signposting in the town centre
 - Providing additional public toilets.



Retailing and Commercial Activity

- Improve the town centre visitor experience by:
 - Reducing the town centre boundary in order to consolidate retail and commercial activity.
 - Developing the evening economy.
 - Diversifying the overall shopping experience in the town.



Town Centre Living

- Improve the desirability of the town centre as a place to live by:
 - Improving traffic flow.
 - Providing better quality housing, inclusive of 'family sized' housing.
 - Provide reasonably priced accommodation.
 - Improving the appearance of buildings and the public realm.
 - Rejuvenating Lower Main Street.
 - Providing cycle paths.
 - Improving permeability.
 - Putting shops back on the Main Street.
 - Address perceived safety issues / address crime.
 - Making the town centre family-friendly.



2.10 Interactive Map

At each of the consultation events, a large map was displayed (see photo 1 below) in order to allow participants to demarcate areas where they felt that certain developments or uses might be appropriate, e.g. housing, economic development, location for a transport hub or sites that should be prioritised for 'landmark' developments. Participants were also requested to indicate where it might be appropriate to prioritise pedestrian movement over vehicular and/or where the provision of greenways might be a good idea. The maps below display the outputs of this exercise.



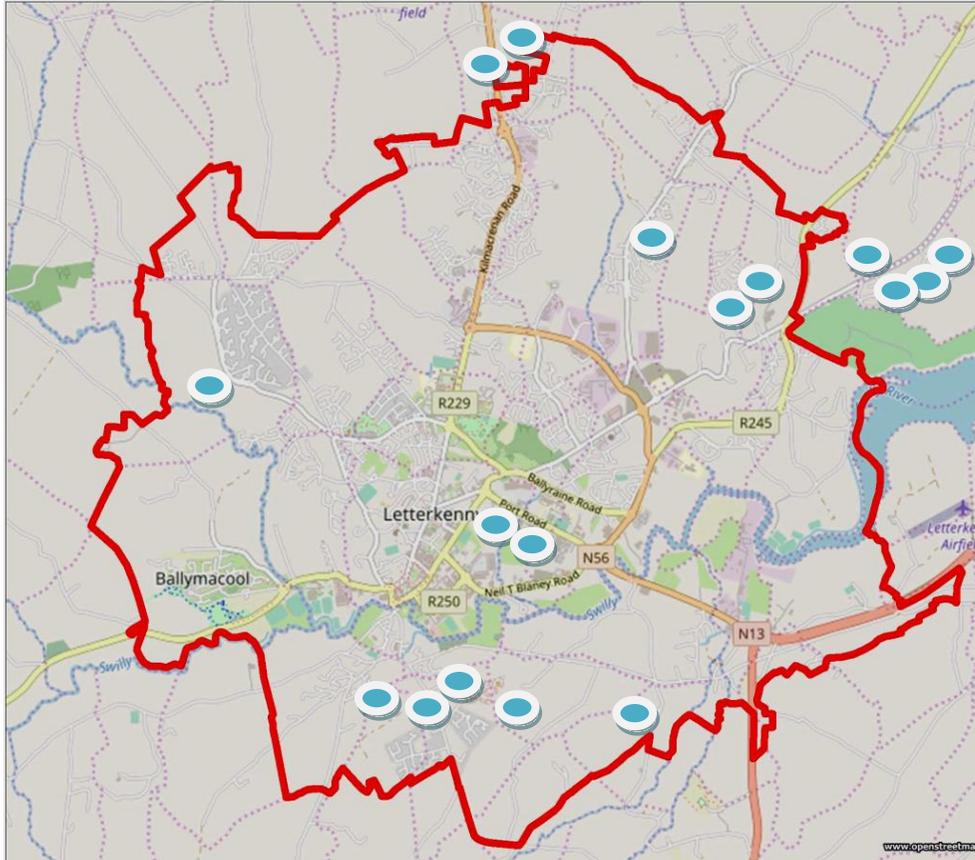
Be creative! Your ideas are important!
Think about how you would like to see Letterkenny grow in the future and mark it on the map.

Use a sticker and place it where you think the best locations are for:

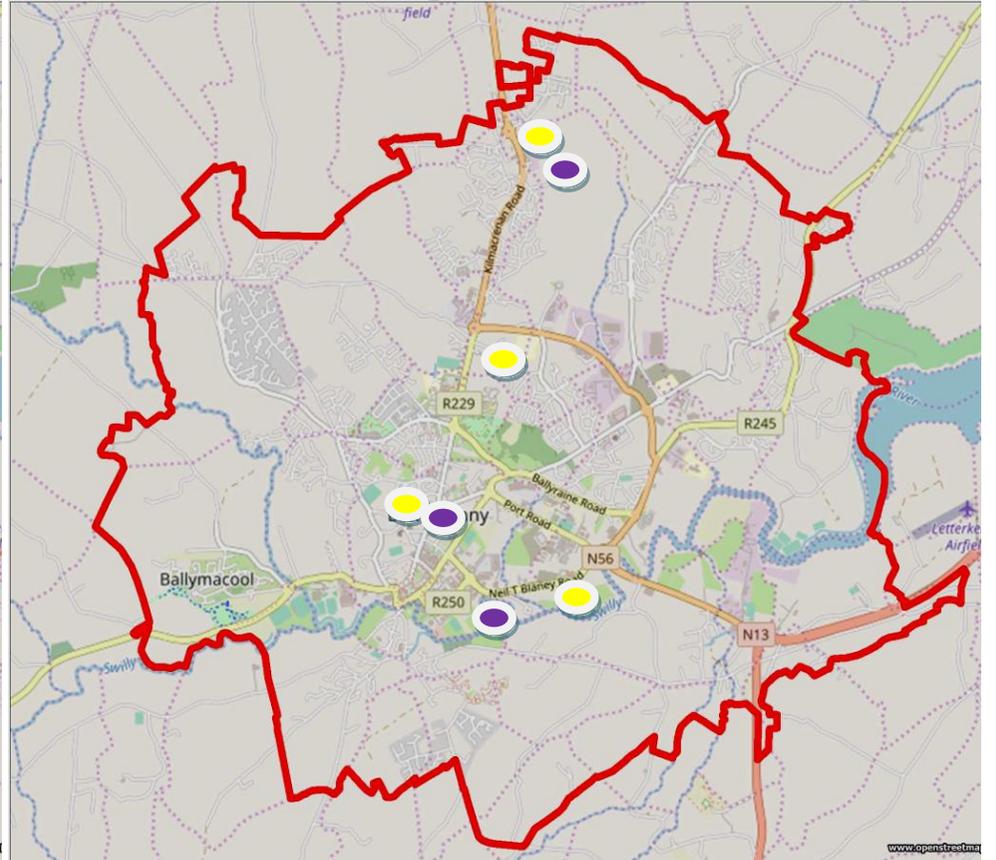
	A transport hub A meeting point for buses, taxis, future rail link, walking, cycling routes and supported by some commercial activity		Housing units
	Economic development		Landmark sites Parks, sites and buildings that have lots of potential
	Prioritising pedestrians Where should walking come before cars?		Walking/ cycling Pathways, networks, routes, desire lines for getting from one place to another
			Greenway/ Blueway

Photo 1 – Image of interactive map that was made available at all consultation events

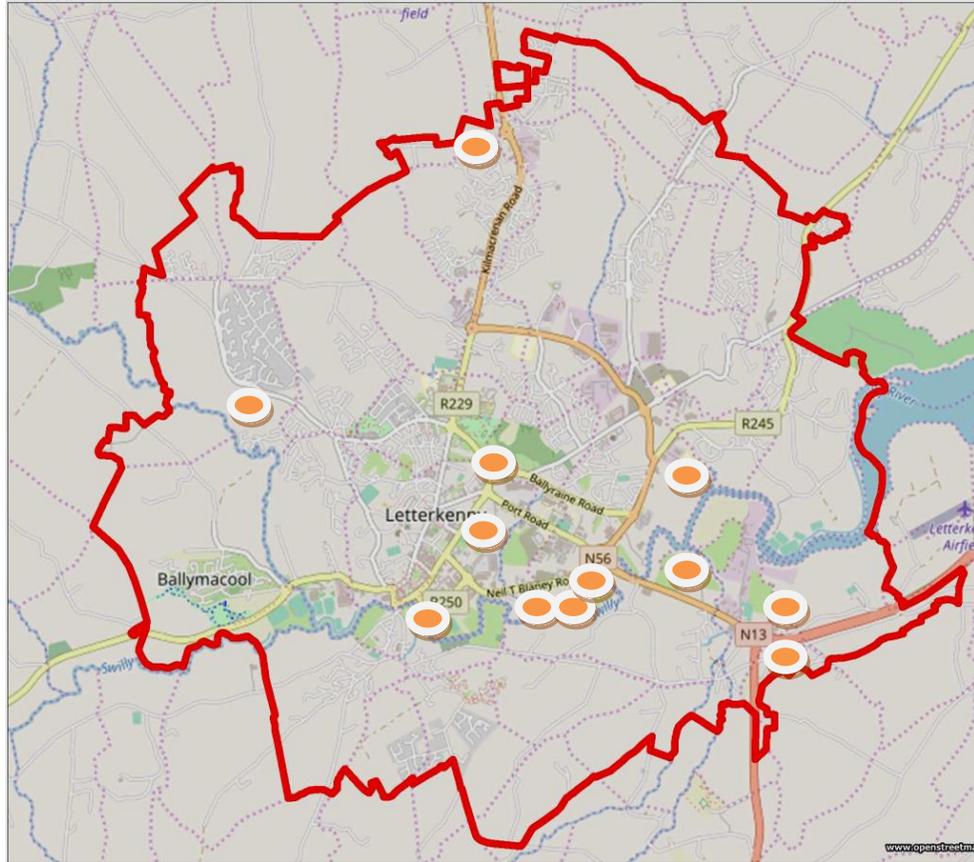
Housing 



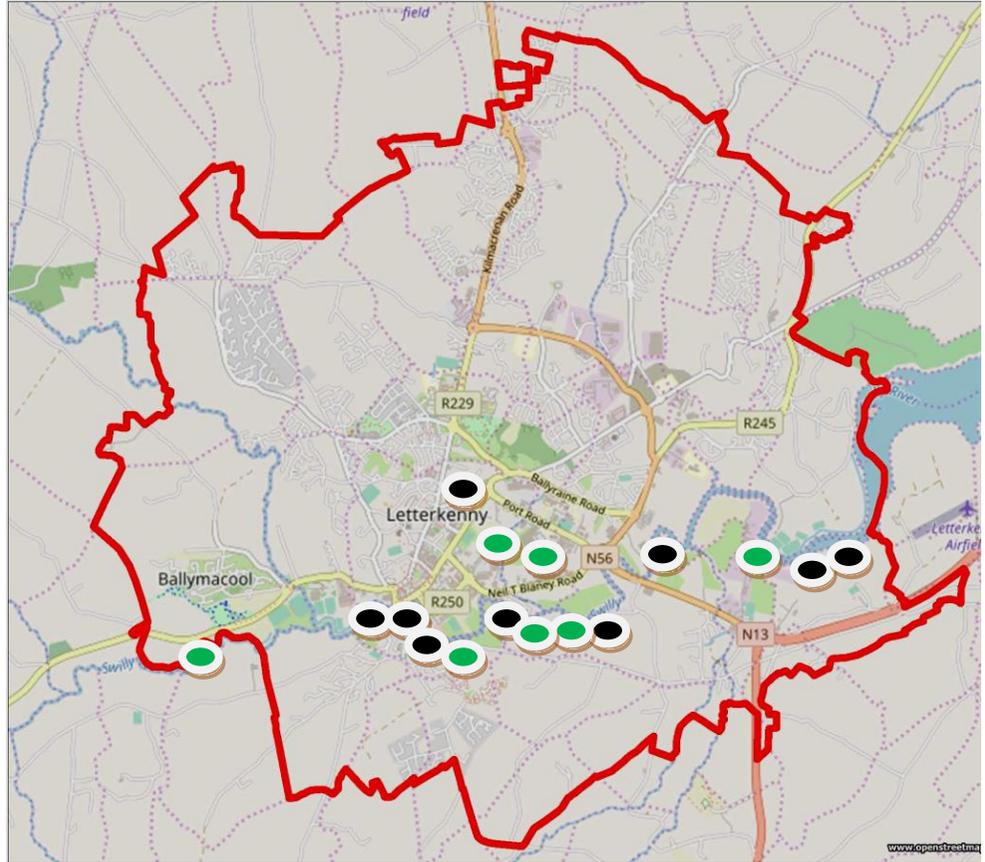
Jobs/Economic Dev.  **& Landmark Sites** 



Transport Hub 



Pedestrian Priority  **Greenway** 



2.11 Individual Submissions received by email and hard copy

In addition to carrying out face-to-face consultations, we invited written submissions from members of the public and from prescribed bodies between 21st May-29th June 2018. A total of 33 public submissions were received, whilst 3 prescribed bodies made a submission. The issues raised in each submission are summarised in Appendix A of this report.

23 of the public submissions were site specific, effectively requesting that particular zonings be applied to certain parcels of land. The remaining 10 public submissions were more general in nature and dealt with issues that perhaps could be supported by policy provisions in the plan. The themes emerging from the more generalised submissions include:

- **Support** for Council's ambition to **grow the town**.
- **Employment** There is significant potential for growth in the tourism sector. Town centre is large; needs to be a **focus on a smaller commercial centre** to incorporate traditional centre and retail parks.
- **Accessibility** Wider **link roads** should be considered on the northern and eastern sides of town. **Safe walking routes** must be provided between the Main Street and the retail parks. **Pedestrianisation** of parts of Main Street should be considered. **Improved linkages** through town centre needed.
- **Key infrastructure** needs to be upgraded to reduce congestion at **bottlenecks** such as Port Bridge and Polestar roundabout and to support new development generally.
- **Public Transport** – The development of a **central bus station and transport hub** is critical. Access to the hub must be prioritised and **bus lanes** should be provided within the town in this respect. A number of **potential rail corridors** are suggested for preservation. **Town bus service** is required.
- **Market square** area needs review. More **green space, squares** and **public spaces** needed generally.
- The plan should recognise the **Cathedral Quarter**. Special design guidance should be prepared for this area and a Masterplan should be prepared for the traditional town centre. Other quarters could also be defined within the town.
- **River Swilly** must be integrated into the town as a significant amenity. Provision must be made for **riverside walks, linear parks** and for safe walks and **cycling routes** within the town generally.
- **Unbalanced residential growth** to the north and west of the town, at significant distance from centre, must be addressed. Areas closer to town centre must be developed first.



2.11 Individual Submissions received by email and hard copy

- **Choice** of housing development opportunities must be provided to satisfy market demand, including **student accommodation** and **housing for families**.
- **Parking layouts**, design of **pedestrian crossings** and **traffic flows** in the town need to be reassessed.
- An up to date **derelict sites/building register** should be maintained for Letterkenny.
- A **shop front design policy** should be implemented, as should a **design guide for commercial buildings**.
- Consideration should be given to the creation of a **Gaeltacht Quarter**. Must be recognition of Letterkenny as a **Gaeltacht Service Centre**.
- Need for **public toilets** in town centre.
- Review compatibility of certain uses with the town centre, i.e. **some uses may be more appropriately located out of centre**.
- The plan should include **objectives for co-operation** between Donegal County Council and Derry City/Strabane District Council.

Summary of submissions from Prescribed Bodies



Transport Infrastructure Ireland – Note that the LAP has potential implications for the N13, N14 and N56 and request that zoning decisions etc. be consistent with/not compromise roads schemes for these routes and otherwise request that the LAP be drafted in accordance with relevant national guidance.

Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht – Stress the need to protect archaeological heritage within the plan area and suggest specific policies in this regard. Recommend that a map detailing Recorded Monuments be included in the LAP.

Irish Water – Request that the Council work closely with Irish Water in identifying areas for development and ensure developments comply with relevant standards in terms of water supply and wastewater treatment. Ensure the protection of ground and surface water resources and minimise wastage. Promote water conservation and demand management.

3.0 Proposed Emerging Strategic Themes

Local Consensus on the Growth Proposition

Taking account of all of the feedback from the consultation events, it is clear that at a strategic level, there is consensus within the communities in Letterkenny that the growth proposition is the vision and direction for which we should plan.

The Letterkenny communities have collectively identified 9 key strategic themes that they consider as essential activity/measures/approaches to deliver on the vision.



Sustainable neighbourhoods



Rebalance the footprint



Regenerate and infill



Choice in housing location & type



A strong town centre



Improve liveability through our natural assets



Prioritise key physical infrastructure



Plan for public transport



Support economic development through placemaking

How can the plan have an effect?

1

Sustainable neighbourhoods

In moving towards a draft plan, explore:

- The location of housing developments that maximise access to and use of public transport, cycling and walking.
- Neighbourhoods that are well-connected, accessible and age friendly within the wider town, allowing for ease of access to services and neighbourhood centres including community, health, childcare, leisure, recreation and education services.
- The areas that perform effectively as neighbourhoods today and have land capacity (including reuse of redundant buildings) to grow more.
- The areas that have deficiencies in neighbourhood services and what the deficiencies are.
- Whether there are new growth areas that will require neighbourhood services.

2

Rebalance the footprint

In moving towards a draft plan, explore:

- The potential of lands south of the Swilly to provide for a new growth area in the town in close proximity to the town centre.
- The associated infrastructural requirements that would be necessary to facilitate a new growth area south of the Swilly, including phasing and potential cost.
- The opportunities for partnership in the delivery of necessary infrastructure.
- The level and type of neighbourhood facilities that would be associated with a new growth area south of the Swilly.

3

Regenerate and infill

In moving towards a draft plan, explore:

- The amount, type and location of redundant, vacant, derelict buildings (brownfield land) and infill/vacant lands that exist within the footprint of the town through land use survey.
- The potential of land identified through a survey to deliver regeneration and infill development.
- The identification of 30% of new housing within the existing built-up footprint of the town (NPF refers).
- The potential mechanisms available to activate development to bring brownfield and infill buildings and lands back into productive use.

4

Choice in housing location & type

In moving towards a draft plan, explore:

- An assessment of need and demand for particular house types and size in conjunction with the Housing section of the Council and house-building industry.
- The identification of a range of land supply options to cater for the range of housing need including higher densities and larger 'family' housing as well as student accommodation.
- The provision of appropriately sized homes and associated open space catering for growing families, life cycles and adaptability.
- The identification of key town centre regeneration sites that have the potential to deliver choice for homes located within the town centre.
- The potential for the reuse of brownfield land for the purposes of housing.

5

A strong town centre

In moving towards a draft plan, explore:

- A consolidated retail core.
- The capacity of brownfield and other vacant land in the town centre.
- Better accessibility options by foot, bicycle, car and public transport.
- Prioritisation and implementation of high quality urban design and placemaking measures.
- Measures to transition to sustainable transport options including identification of potential lands for the purposes of a high quality transport hub.
- Stronger connection between Main Street and the retail parks east of Pearse Road.
- An upgrade and deepening of the Urban Design Framework.

6

Improve liveability through our natural assets

In moving towards a draft plan, explore:

- Ways in which the river can provide the spine of a wider network of walkway/greenway/cycleway throughout Letterkenny.
- Ways in which the river corridor can become a visible feature in the town centre and form part of town centre civic space.
- How greenways, open space, leisure, recreation and play facilities can be aligned with existing natural assets.
- How areas of environmental vulnerability can be protected and restored.

7

Prioritise key physical infrastructure

In moving towards a draft plan, explore:

- Coordination of the land use strategy with identification of necessary associated physical infrastructure and options for the timely delivery of it.
- The prioritisation, costing and phasing of necessary key physical infrastructure.
- The inclusion of a physical infrastructure implementation plan as part of the Local Area Plan.
- Potential partnerships for the delivery of key infrastructure (including public and private).

8

Plan for public transport

In moving towards a draft plan, explore:

- Potential locations for the creation of a high quality transport hub.
- Connectivity linking to and from a potential future transport hub (in relation to walking, cycling and bus).
- Prioritisation of measures to deliver a transition to sustainable transport options.
- Potential partnerships to implement sustainable transport measures.

9

Support economic development through placemaking

In moving towards a draft plan, explore:

- What makes Letterkenny unique as a place and what our Unique Selling Point is.
- Options to develop 'Quarters'.
- Actions to enhance civic space and the physical character of Letterkenny town centre as a vibrant, entrepreneurial and diverse place in which to invest, visit and live.
- The availability of suitable land and supporting infrastructure (such as energy, an orbital route, water, wastewater) to accommodate economic development including SME's, start-up space, 2nd site landing space, innovation hubs and large scale FDI.