

Monaghan Town

TOWN CENTRE HEALTH CHECK 2024



Lár Bailte ar dTús
Town Centre First



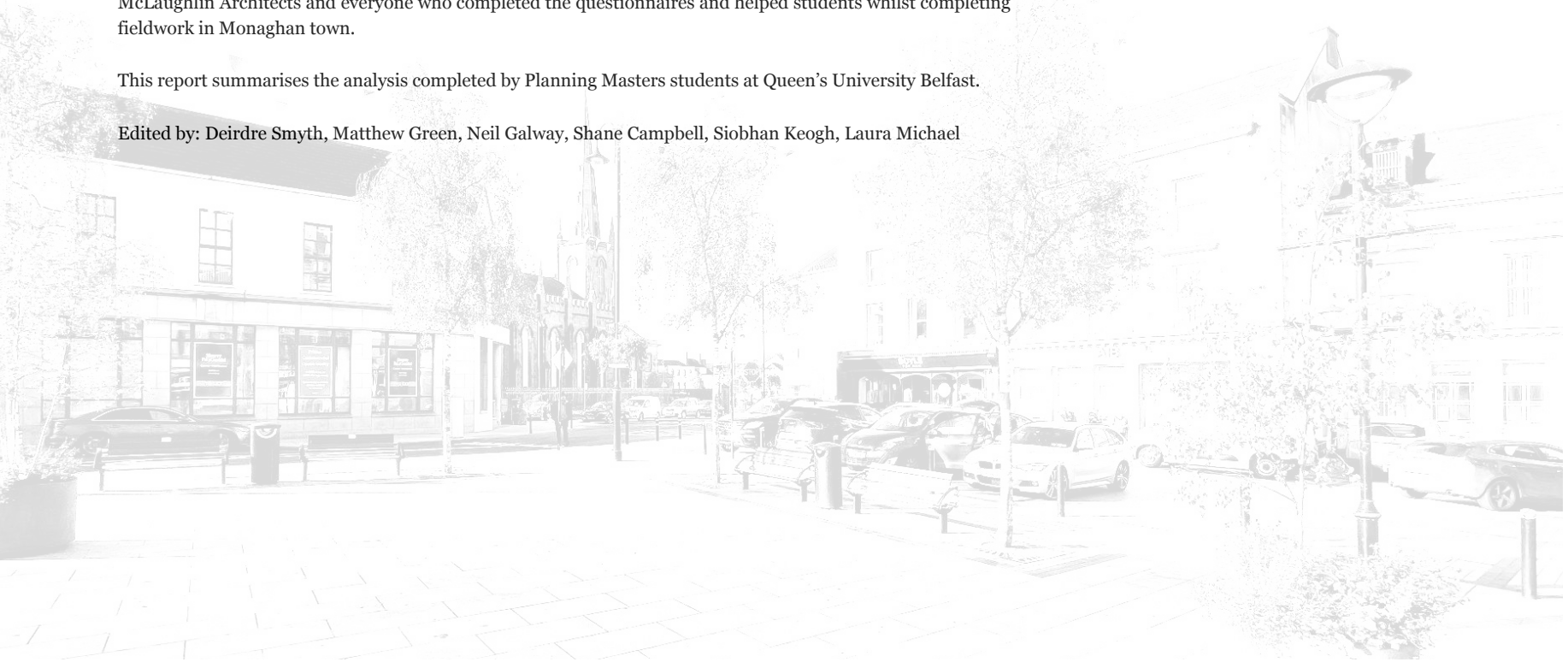
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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the individuals and organisations who assisted in the completion of this town centre health check for Monaghan Town, with special thanks to the staff from Monaghan County Council, John McLaughlin Architects and everyone who completed the questionnaires and helped students whilst completing fieldwork in Monaghan town.

This report summarises the analysis completed by Planning Masters students at Queen's University Belfast.

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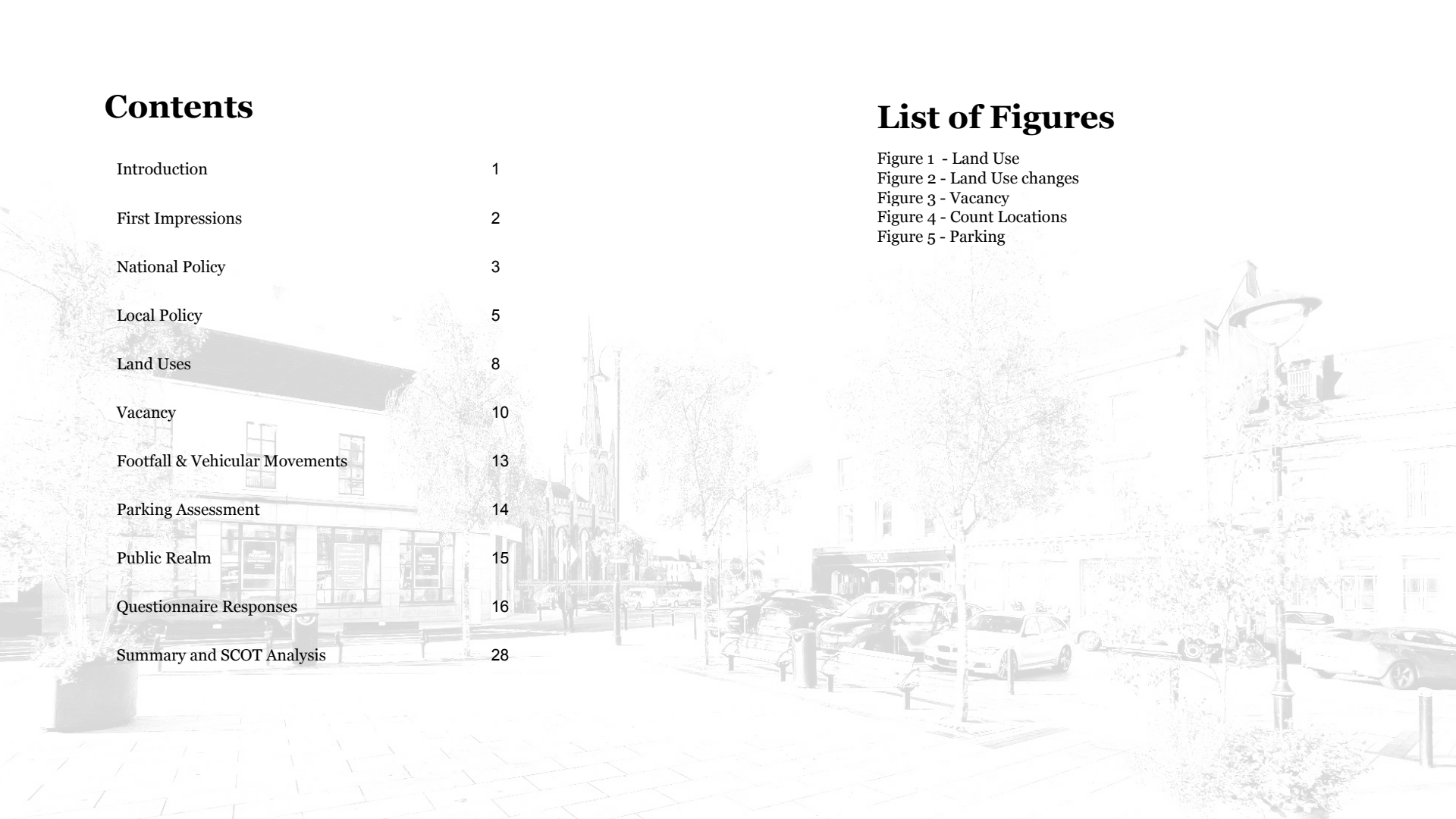


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Introduction

This report represents a comprehensive town centre health check for Monaghan Town, County Monaghan, conducted by students from Queen's University Belfast on Wednesday 11th September and Friday 20th September 2024. The report provides a detailed analysis of the physical characteristics of the town, statistics gathered during the health check, and the perceptions of local residents.

The health check is grounded in the context of national, regional, and local planning policy, as well as ongoing plans for public developments, and it is against this contextual backdrop that our findings have been assessed and conclusions reached. The main content of the health check is the collection of quantitative data, which paints a picture of Monaghan town's land uses, vacancy, parking, footfall, and vehicular traffic. This data is complemented by qualitative analyses of the town's public realm and its accessibility, as well as maps and figures which clearly detail and give spatial context to the data and analysis.

Further qualitative insight has been provided by questionnaires, compiled by John McLaughlin Architects and completed by residents, workers, and visitors to the town. The feedback and discussions, which emerged from these written responses were vital in highlighting the local community's needs and aspirations for Monaghan. This collaborative effort emphasises the importance of community engagement in shaping the future of Monaghan into an attractive place to work, live, and visit.

The health check concludes with a detailed SCOT (Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis, with the intention of summarising the study findings and highlighting the needs of Monaghan's residents and workers, whilst showing its key strengths and a pathway towards interventions which can help revitalise the town.



First Impressions

Monaghan Town is characterised by an impressively high number of independent shops along its high streets. The town is well served by a range of restaurants, cafés, clothing shops, pubs and more. The town is further strengthened by the number of supermarkets offering excellent choices to locals. Tesco, Lidl, Dunnes Stores, SuperValu, and a forthcoming Aldi, all make Monaghan Town an attractive place for residents and potential shoppers from peripheral towns and villages. These supermarkets are supplemented by a large shopping centre and Flemings, an independent department store, all helping to solidify Monaghan as a prime shopping destination.

Beyond these characteristics, which help contribute to a sense of vibrancy to the town, there are also a number of public services and more social enterprises which serve the town. The new Peace Campus for example, a new landmark building within the town, provides a library, café, community space, and museum. Local hotels, such as the Westendra Arms, and ones slightly beyond the retail core, such as the Four Seasons and the Hillgrove Hotel, open the door for tourism within the town, and again add to the town's vitality.

Monaghan is a town which embraces nature in its way of life. Not only is the town within close proximity to Rossmore Forest Park, but Peter's Lake provides a nice change of scenery from within the town centre boundaries, and wildflower growth is supported throughout the town.

Nevertheless, the town does struggle with areas of vacancy. Some recently vacant landmark buildings, such as the former Ulster Bank on The Diamond, hold great potential for a use which could enhance either the retail or community landscape of the town. Due to a reliance on cars as the dominant form of transport, as is the case across a majority of towns in Ireland, the town is sprawled out, which increases the impact of a vacant property on the vitality of the high street. Large areas of prime land within the town are used as surface level car parking. Whilst this provides ample access to the respective shopping centres and Monaghan's high street, a more efficient use of this space could unlock a huge amount of square footage for future development. All in all, Monaghan Town is a town with strong foundations with potential for improvement.



National Policy

Monaghan town is the County town of County Monaghan. Current and future development should follow the adopted Monaghan County Development Plan 2019-2025, and the general planning strategies, guidelines and principles set out by the Irish state in national institutions and at a national planning policy level such as the three Irish regional assemblies and the Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework (NPF). Ireland is a European Union member and is eligible for EU funding mechanisms.

European Union (EU) Funding

County Monaghan is in the border region of Ireland and has been the setting of many conflicts throughout the decades, throughout the duration of ‘The Troubles’. Since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, peace has thankfully lasted on both sides of the Irish border and much funding has been allocated to promote peace, reconciliation and the celebration of different and common identities across the border. Ireland, the UK and EU are strongly committed to funding projects in the region, and the PEACE PLUS Programme has provided millions of euros in funding to Monaghan County and Monaghan town. The Peace Campus in Monaghan Town is an example of a project funded under this scheme.

Regional Assembly & Irish Governmental Supports

County Monaghan is a part of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly and the border region, making it an eligible candidate for funding for cross border- projects and reconciliation initiatives. In addition the overarching strategies for regional and spatial planning, Monaghan and Monaghan County Council are eligible for state funds, loans and grants, such as the Rural Regeneration and Development fund, the Town Centre First scheme and Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) for projects such as housing developments.



National Policy

Project Ireland 2040

Project Ireland 2040, launched in 2018, is the Irish Government's masterplan for managing the current and future opportunities and challenges that Ireland will face up to 2040. Project Ireland 2040 has had many revisions since inception due to the vast uncertainty over recent years since its publication.

National Planning Framework (NPF)

The NPF is a national document that provides guidance for Ireland for over the coming decades. The NPF factors in sustainable growth within strategic planning and development, with more compact growth in Ireland's towns and cities. In July 2024, the Draft First Revision to NPF was published and was out for public consultation between 10th July 2024 and 12th September 2024.

National Development Plan (NDP) 2021 - 2030

The NDP 2021-2030 sets out the Irish Government's plan to transform Ireland's infrastructure and public services over the course of the 2020s. The NDP plans to invest a total of €165 billion of public money over the period to reach these goals. This document outlines plans such as public transport investments, the planned waste, water and electrical infrastructural expansions and for increased access to childcare, healthcare and education for residents.

The NPF, in tandem with the NDP, lay out a comprehensive plan for infrastructural investment and sustainable strategic development from a national perspective. The NPF and the NDP provide a framework for local authorities and regional assemblies to base their strategic and economic plans such as local development plans (LDPs) and Spatial & Economic Strategies, respectively.



Local Policy

Monaghan County Development Plan 2019 - 2025

According to the Monaghan County Development Plan 2019 - 2025, Monaghan town is the county's 'Tier 1 - Principal Town', for which the 'Principal Town Objective' is *"To facilitate the development of Monaghan to maintain its position as the principal town in the County at the top of the settlement hierarchy and to ensure that its expansion takes place in an orderly and sustainable fashion that will not detract from the vitality and viability of the town centre"*, (Policy SHO 1).

Monaghan is a primarily rural county with some smaller urban centres. No town in the county has a population over 10,000 people, making spatial planning policy inherently regional and rural for the vast majority of the county. In this document, there is a renewed focus on providing better transportation routes, increased investment in rural amenity and service provision and enhanced environmental protections.

Increasing tourism is mentioned in the document as another avenue of economic growth for the county. Interestingly, the document outlines the three types of tourists Monaghan is seeking to attract. These types of tourists include; 'Social Energisers', which refer to young couples and adult groups looking for new experiences; the 'Culturally Curious', who are interested in the culture, history and landscape of County Monaghan; and the 'Great Escapers', couples in their thirties who may have small children, who need a detox in nature from busy lives. (Section 4.7.1)



Local Policy

Monaghan County Development Plan 2019 - 2025

Monaghan town is in a strategic position along the Dublin to Letterkenny/Derry corridor, the Belfast to Galway/Midlands gateway and is an important hub and growth centre along the Border Region. Monaghan town therefore is in an advantageous geographical position with untapped potential for sustainable growth. The town is primed for housing development, for which some are taking shape, and is seen as an optimum place for gentle densification and compact growth in the county.

Monaghan town has a wealth of historic buildings. The town has the characteristics of an Ulster Plantation town, containing a central market square, known as the 'Diamond', with a centralisation of the administrative, religious and commercial buildings. Outside of its Plantation core, Monaghan sprawled as a result of industrialisation in the 20th century, where local agri-food, furniture and engineering industries began to operate. Today, Monaghan County Council seeks to harbour the heritage of the town and to redevelop the town centre. Strategic Policy Plans such as the Dublin Street Regeneration Plan seek to increase the vitality and vibrancy of Dublin Street and its backlands. (MPO 1-5)



Station House Remote Working Pods, Monaghan Town



Old Civil Defence building, Monaghan Town



Current Housing Development, in the Northern parts of Monaghan Town

The Peace Campus

In May 2024, Monaghan County Council opened the four-storey Peace Campus in Monaghan Town. It took four years to build and was built with the vision to provide a space for the celebration of the multiple cultures and histories of Monaghan, Ulster and all of Ireland, and to provide a cross-community space for young people. The project costed roughly €22 million and from which around €14.4 million was funded by the EU's Peace IV programme.

The Peace Campus is a mixed-use facility that includes a café, library, indoor and outdoor performance space, community rooms and community halls and a museum, which explores the identities of Irish and Ulster-Scots people in Ulster and life on the border during the Troubles. The museum also hosts exhibitions on some of Monaghan's most famous people such as Ardal O'Hanlon, Caitriona Balfe and Barry McGuigan.

As per ambitions of Monaghan County Council to increase tourism in the county, this state-of-the-art facility will surely provide a boost to Monaghan's attractiveness as a destination in the mind of potential visitors, particularly the 'Culturally Curious' tourist demographic.



Northern Ireland - Ireland

European Regional Development Fund



Land Uses

Land uses of the ground floor have been recorded according to the Goods, Opportunities, Amenities, and Development (GOAD) classification.

Figure 1 shows land use as recorded in September 2024.

Residential is the single largest land use at 32.5%. This is followed closely by combined retail uses (comparison, convenience, retail services and other retail) at 30.9%. Leisure services, including pubs, restaurants, fast food takeaways, gyms etc. is the third largest land use group, with 10.4% of the overall total.

From the map opposite we can see that residential land use is predominantly on the periphery of the town centre.

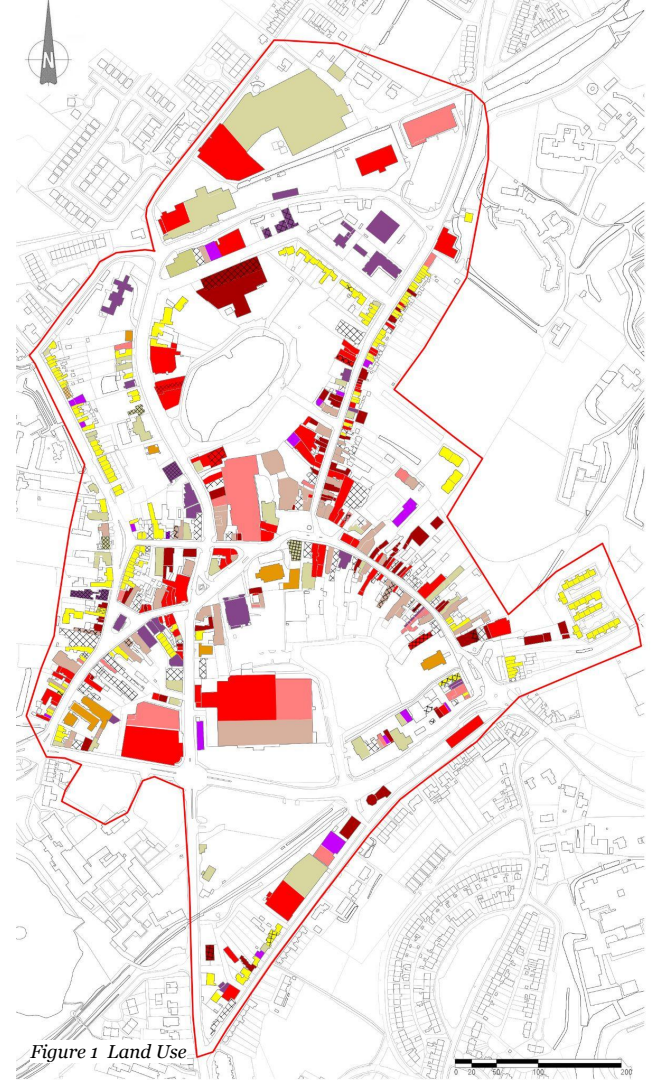
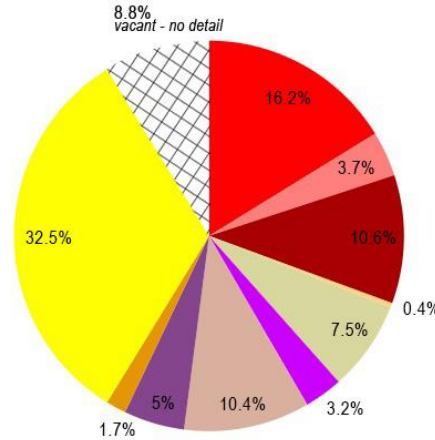


Figure 1 Land Use

Land Uses

The Figure 2 indicates buildings that have changed status since the last land use survey was conducted in 2023.

In total, our estimates indicate that 43 buildings have changed use since the previous survey in 2023 representing 8% of the total. However, this also reflects corrections of inaccuracies identified in the 2023 report.

Of these 43 buildings, we estimate that 23 (or 60%) are now vacant. This is contributing to the increasing vacancy rates recorded in the town centre, as discussed in the following pages.

The changes were distributed across the classifications.

Some public services, such as the library have relocated to the Peace Campus, leaving these buildings vacant and posing a positive development opportunity.

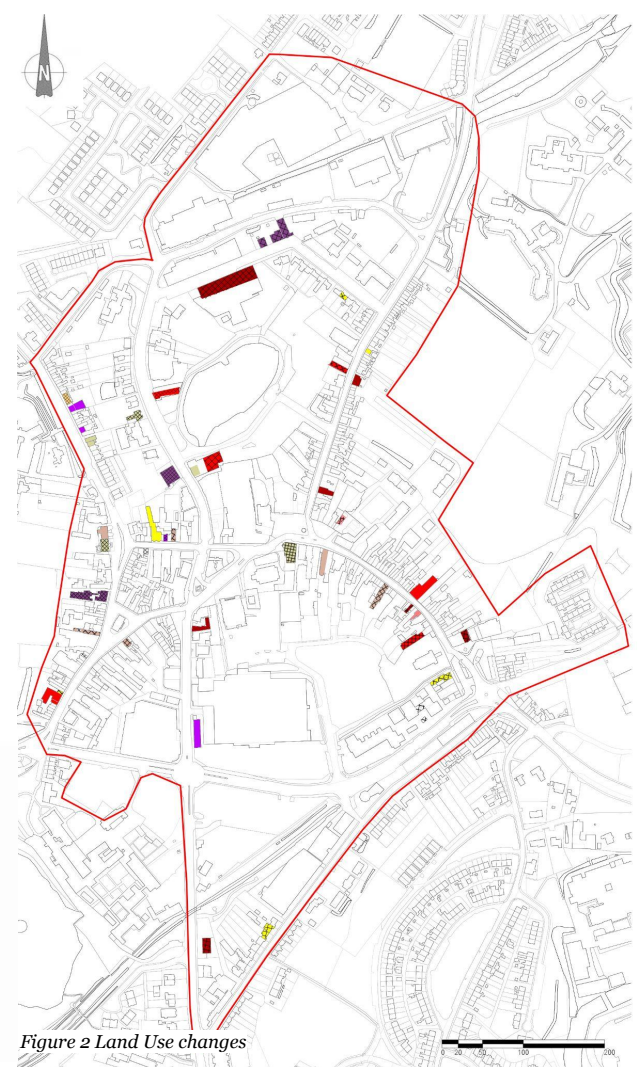


Figure 2 Land Use changes

Vacancy

Overall vacancy 2024: 14%
Residential vacancy 2024: 3.4%
Non residential vacancy 2024: 19%

Overall vacancy 2023: 8%
Residential vacancy 2023: 9%
Non residential vacancy 2023: 14.6%

Overall vacancy is an over 50% increase on the previous survey in 2023.

Our estimates indicate that commercial vacancy rates have reached approximately 19%, surpassing the national average of 14.4% (GeoDirectory, Q2 2024). While this figure may seem to represent a significant year-on-year increase, it is essential to understand the context behind these numbers. The rise in the vacancy rate is not indicative of a decline solely in occupational performance, this new rate also reflects corrections of inaccuracies identified in the 2023 report.

Based on our survey, vacancy is a significant issue experienced throughout the town, particularly on Park Street and Dublin Street (see Figure 3). These areas have been highlighted by residents as locations they wish to see improved, as indicated in the responses collected from the questionnaire.

When further analysing the data The Diamond, the town's original retail centre, stands out with a notable 29% vacancy rate, highlighted by the presence of five prominent vacant buildings.

In addition there are currently four vacant units in Monaghan Shopping Centre, equating to a vacancy rate of 14.81% for the centre itself.

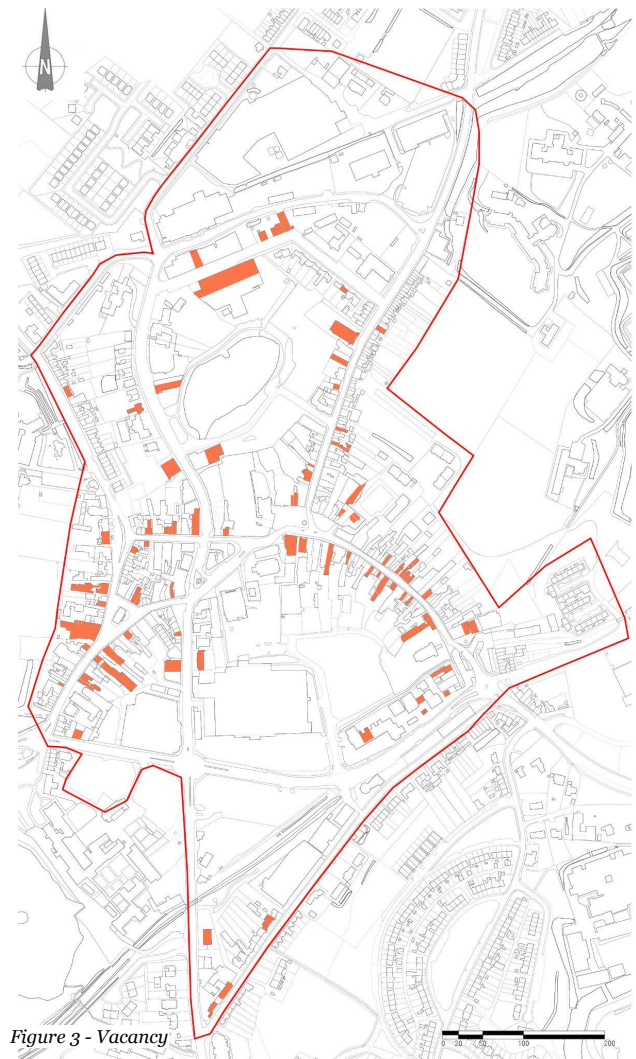


Figure 3 - Vacancy

Derelict and Vacant Buildings

The following images represent a selection of vacant buildings recorded during the site survey in September 2024. Vacancy was recorded across a multiple of land uses including financial and business, retail - convenience, residential, and leisure.



Derelict and Vacant Buildings



Footfall & Vehicular Movements

Footfall and vehicle counts were undertaken at four designated town centre locations (see Figure 4). These counts were carried out at various intervals on the 11th and 20th of September. It is important to note that the weather during both counting days was favourable, with sunny conditions prevailing, which may have positively influenced the volume of foot traffic and vehicle counts.

The highest level of vehicular traffic was recorded at Location 4, Park Street, where a significant number of cars appeared to be using Park Street as a bypass to the town centre, as opposed to Park St or Market St being the chosen destination. Overall, the total average number of all journeys that was made by vehicle was 72.1%.

The greatest number of pedestrians was recorded at Location 3, where people were traversing along the street southwest / northeast, and also in high volumes coming and going from the entrance to the car park directly to the east of the courthouse. An increase in activity was recorded on the 20th of September, which may have been particularly influenced by the Farmers Market trading on the Courthouse plaza/Church Square in the morning time and the official launch of the newly renovated performance space in the afternoon.

Vehicle numbers were significantly lower at location 2, Dublin Street, than at all other locations, suggesting traffic is generally moving between the north and south of the town centre, and not across the town centre, as vehicles looking to travel between east and west most likely use the Broad Road and avoid the town centre.

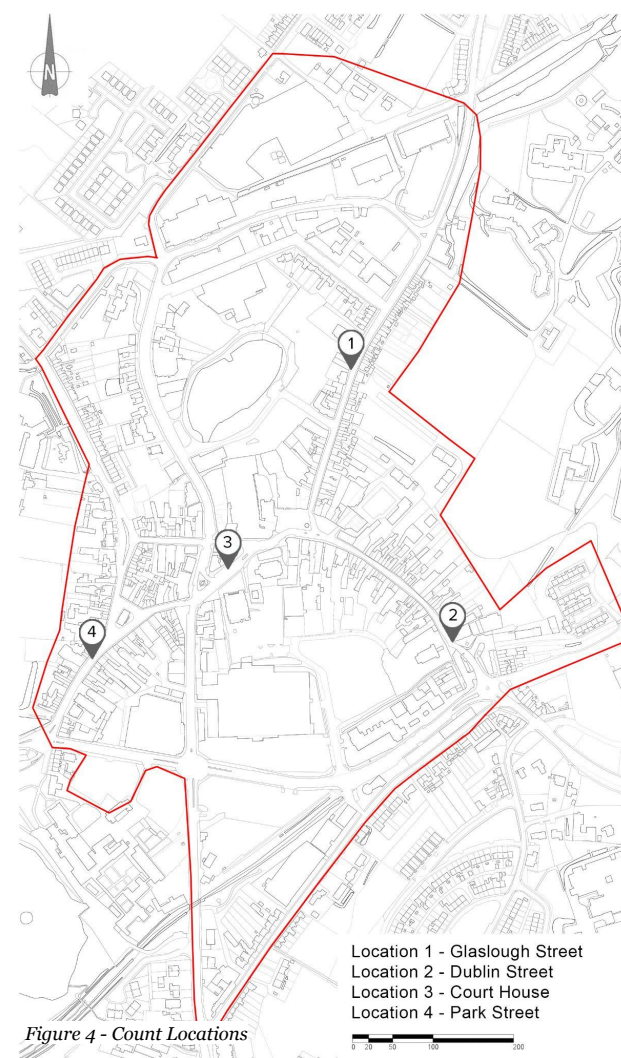


Figure 4 - Count Locations

Monaghan Town													
Day / date	Time Interval	Location 1 (Glaslough St)			Location 2 (Dublin St)			Location 3 (Court House)			Location 4 (Park St)		
		Vehicles	Pedestrians	Cyclists	Vehicles	Pedestrians	Cyclists	Vehicles	Pedestrians	Cyclists	Vehicles	Pedestrians	Cyclists
Wednesday 11/09/2024	11.20 - 11.35	196	41		74	21		140	70		229	53	
	13.00 - 13.15	279	47		106	33		132	127		231	32	2
	15.00 - 15.15	162	52	1	73	40		124	121		225	40	
Friday 20/09/2024	11.05 - 11.20	151	42	1	81	37		266	116	6	190	86	
	14.40 - 14.55	174	54		113	55		302	133		155	130	
Overall average		192.4	47.2		89.4	37.2		192.8	113.4		206.0	68.2	
Overall % travelled by vehicle				80.2			70.6			62.7			75

Parking Assessment

Figure 5 indicates public car parking spaces within the study boundary of Monaghan town.

Our estimates indicate there are a total of 1,130 spaces in public car parks. There is also extensive on street parking in the town centre. On the periphery of the town centre there is parking on both sides of North Road, Upper Glaslough Street and High Street. There is single sided parking on Glaslough Street, Dublin Street and Park Street.

During the site survey, car parks at Peter's Lake, Broad Road car park and the car park to the rear of the courthouse were almost at capacity. The car park at Market Road to the south west of the town centre remained at less than 30% capacity throughout the duration of the survey.

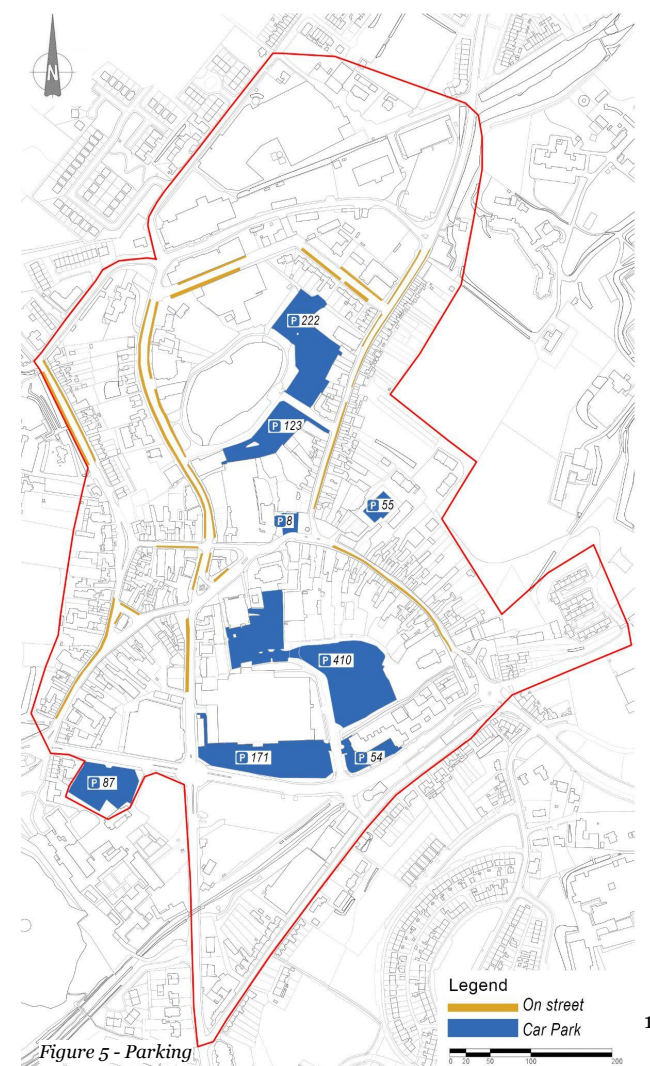


Figure 5 - Parking

Public Realm

While notable efforts have been made in recent years to improve the quality of the public realm in Monaghan Town, it still suffers from vehicular domination of public space and high vacancy rates. On street parking dominates much of the town centre streetscape, particularly along Glaslough Street and Dublin Street

Three key public realm projects which have scope for further improvement are highlighted below.

The Diamond

The Diamond is Monaghan's original town centre and provides an important historical and cultural focal point to the town. Defined by the historic Rossmore Memorial in the centre, with interconnecting squares complemented by planting and seating helps to enhance the 'plaza' character of the area. However, despite this the square is characterised by high vacancy, with three units being long term vacant. With traffic going in three directions around the square, this could be detrimental to sustained occupancy in the surrounding units, and some pedestrian friendly enhancements could be beneficial.

Peter's Lake

Peter's Lake is a beautiful natural asset in the town, which is currently underutilised and could be easily enhanced with more seating, covered spaces as well as more child friendly elements and opportunities for play.

Church Square

This newly renovated performance space hosts events and a weekly farmers market. Although there has been significant investment in the public realm here with the public seating, the survey has highlighted that it is problematic in terms of accessibility for those with disabilities and nursing mothers. This area may benefit from some backed seating, as well as some softer elements to complement these new additions.



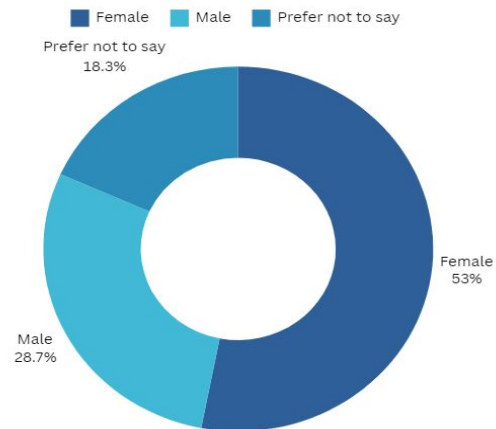
Questionnaire Responses

As part of a broader research initiative by John McLaughlin Architects, commissioned by Monaghan County Council, an online survey titled "Reimagining Monaghan" was conducted to gather public insights on the future development of Monaghan town. This online survey was made accessible to the community and concluded on the 28th of August, receiving a total of 115 responses.

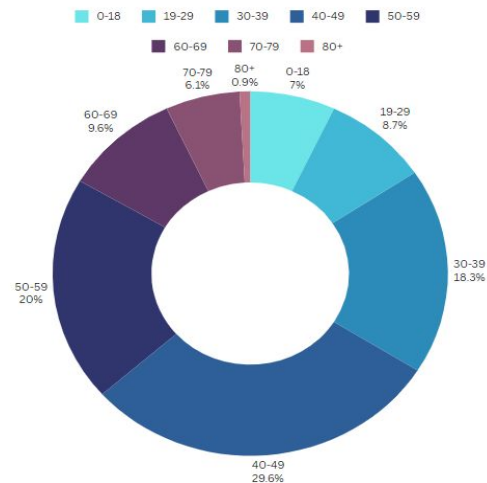
The purpose of the survey was to engage the community in discussions surrounding their perspectives on the town's heritage, recreation, community, green spaces, climate resilience and potential St Louis Lands regeneration strategies. It aimed to capture the views of a diverse range of stakeholders, including residents and business owners, thereby ensuring that the forthcoming strategies reflect the community's needs and aspirations. This initiative is part of a larger commitment by Monaghan County Council to foster community engagement and transparency, with feedback from this survey expected to play a significant role in shaping future projects and actions within the town.

The results of the survey have been thoroughly analysed and are presented in this report. The demographics of participants who completed the questionnaire, categorised by gender and age, are illustrated in the pie charts below. The largest segment of respondents falls within the 40-49 age group. Female respondents represent a significant majority of the total responses.

Gender



Age



What three things do you like most about Monaghan Town Centre?

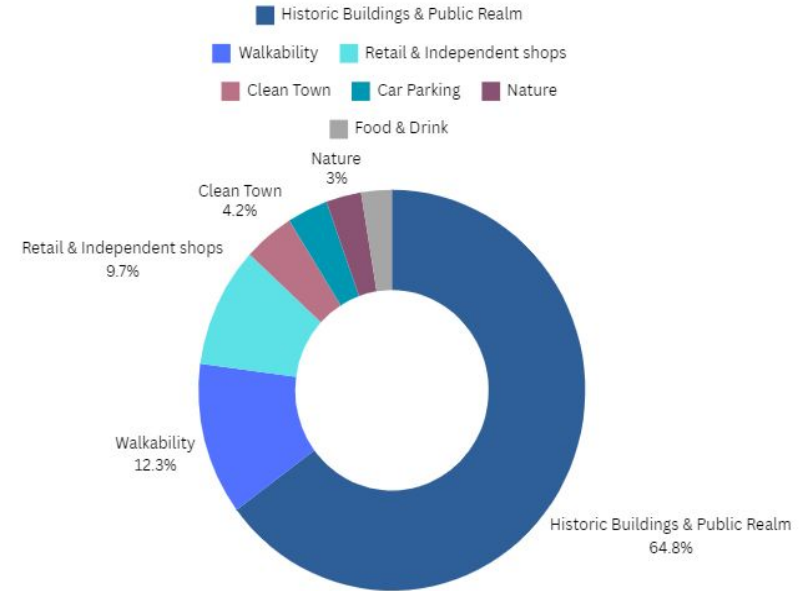
The survey commenced with a question inviting respondents to identify their top three favourite aspects of the town.

A prominent theme emerged from the responses to this question: the quality of the town's historic buildings, architecture, and public realm consistently received the highest ratings across all three responses.

Particularly the newly renovated Courthouse plaza (Church Square), The Diamond, Peter's Lake and the Greenway. These locations were frequently mentioned by respondents, indicating their importance to the community.

The second highest-rated feedback emphasised the town's walkability and compact layout, which was closely followed by the diverse range of independent retailers and the overall retail offering available in the town.

Respondents also highlighted several positive aspects of the town including cleanliness, ample parking, beautiful natural surroundings, and a diverse selection of restaurants, bars, and coffee shops.



What three things would you most like to improve about Monaghan Town Centre?

The second question inquired about three areas for improvement in the town centre. The most prominent response highlighted the need to address the issues related to vacant and derelict properties. This response is closely aligned with the value that respondents attributed to the historic buildings and the quality of the public realm as indicated in Question One.

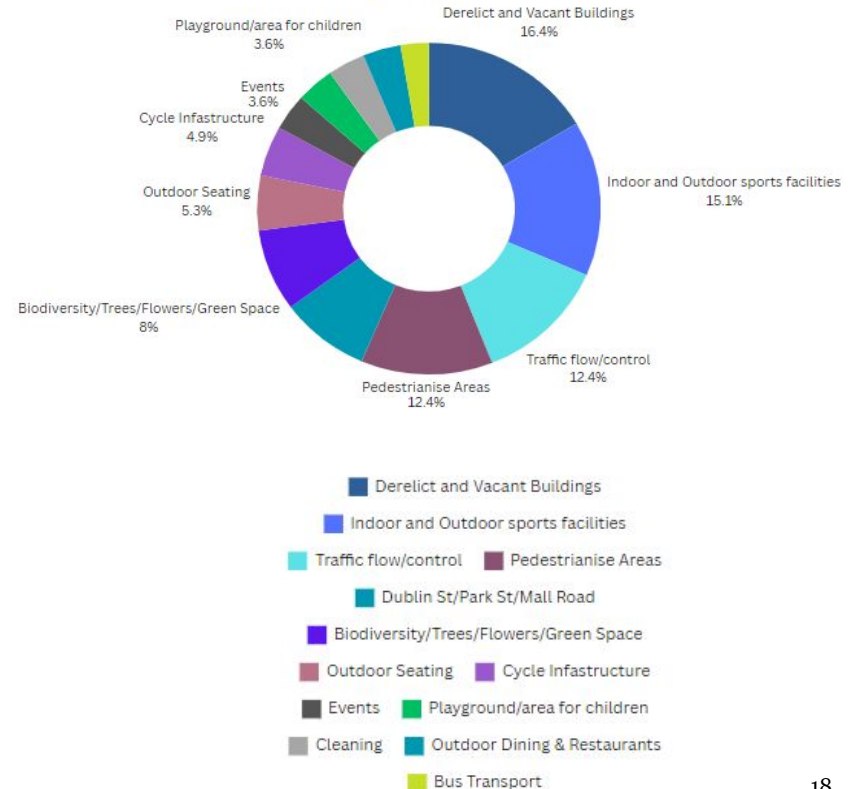
The second most prevalent response highlighted the necessity to enhance both indoor and outdoor sporting and recreational facilities for children and their families. With playgrounds also receiving 3.6% of the votes.

Issues relating to traffic flow, jams, and congestion have been identified as significant challenges within the town. These concerns were rated highly by respondents, indicating a strong desire for improvements in this area. Additionally, there is a growing appetite among the community for the establishment of more pedestrian zones.

Dublin Street and Park Street have been highlighted as areas that require enhancement that residents believe would greatly benefit the town centre, with the Mall Road also being noted as another area that needs improvements.

Enhancing biodiversity and increasing the number of trees, flowers, and green spaces have been considered key areas for improvement, followed closely by the need for more outdoor seating, with disability-friendly options.

The survey indicated comparable levels of support for enhancing cycling infrastructure and bus transportation, increasing the availability of events and outdoor dining options, and improving the overall cleanliness of the town.

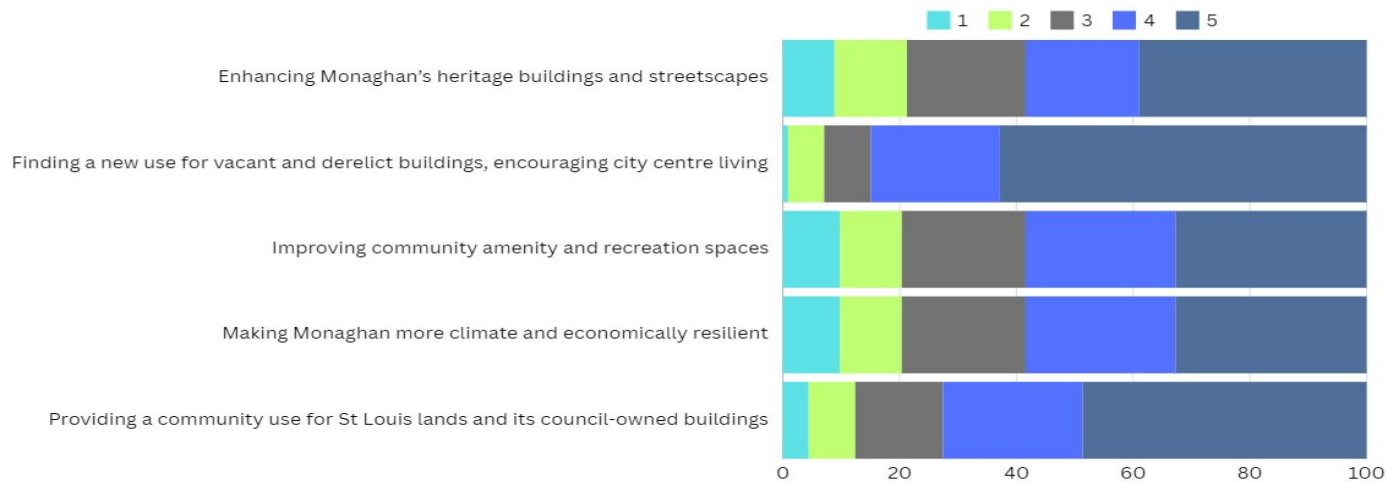


What are your priorities for Monaghan Town Centre?

Respondents were asked to evaluate five key areas of improvement within the town using a ranking system from 1 to 5. In this system, 1 represents the lowest priority, while 5 indicates the highest priority.

Respondents provided their rankings for various urban development areas, highlighting their perceptions of importance. The area that received the highest priority was “Finding a new use for vacant and derelict buildings, encouraging city centre living,” indicating a strong desire to revitalise the town centre. Following closely was “Providing a community use for St. Louis lands,” which reflects a need for multifunctional spaces that serve local populations. Lastly, “Enhancing Monaghan’s heritage buildings and streetscape” was also prioritised, showcasing an appreciation for historical preservation and aesthetic improvements in Monaghan town.

These findings highlight the significance of addressing vacancy and dereliction for the benefit of the community.



What community amenities do you think are most needed in Monaghan?

Question 4 sought respondents' input on the community amenities they deemed most necessary for the town, allowing for multiple selections. The findings revealed that the top three selected amenities were: Outdoor and Indoor Spaces for Children and Teenagers and Sporting Facilities, receiving a combined 37.5% of the total votes.

This data highlights a significant theme emerging from the responses: a strong desire for enhanced recreational spaces tailored to the needs of younger residents. The emphasis on both outdoor and indoor environments suggests a community prioritisation of safe, engaging areas that foster social interaction and physical activity among children and teenagers.

Other suggestions made outside of the selected answers included:

'Roofed areas at The Courthouse Plaza and The Diamond so people can sit outside'

'Linking cycle / pedestrian paths together away from cars'

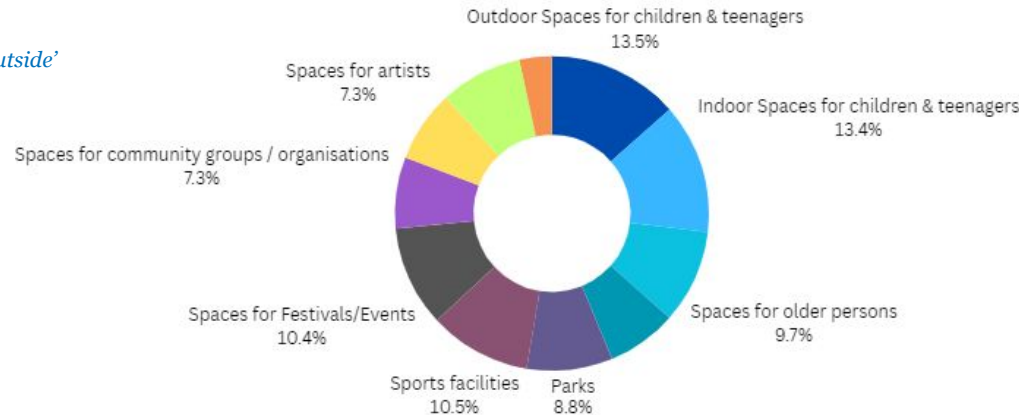
'Hotels and more restaurants'

'Can we have spaces in the open but also sheltered from the bad weather!'

'A creative artists hub that could also run workshops for all groups'

'Make the town centre a more walking cycling friendly area.'

'This improves it for everyone'



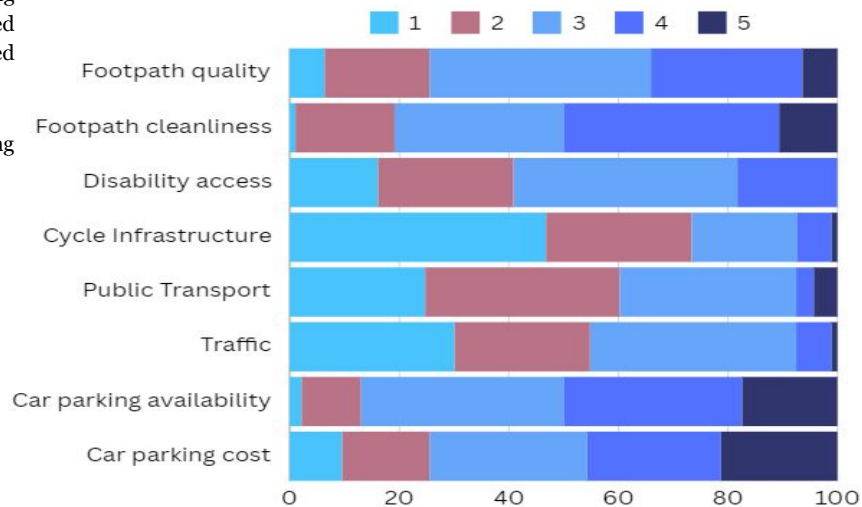
How good is the following infrastructure in Monaghan town Centre for movement and accessibility?

Respondents were asked to evaluate eight areas of infrastructure within the town using a ranking system from 1 to 5. In this system, 1 represents very poor, while 5 indicates very good. There was a notable deficiency in the number of high-quality votes cast across all options.

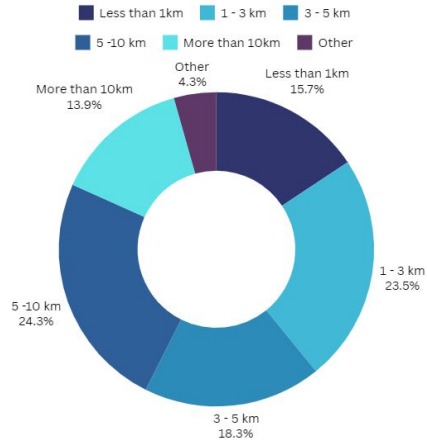
Among the feedback received, the highest ratings were attributed to the costs and availability of car parking.

Conversely, the town's cycling infrastructure received the lowest ratings, highlighting a considerable level of dissatisfaction in this area. This concern was closely followed by issues related to traffic and public transport, indicating ongoing challenges faced by residents in these domains.

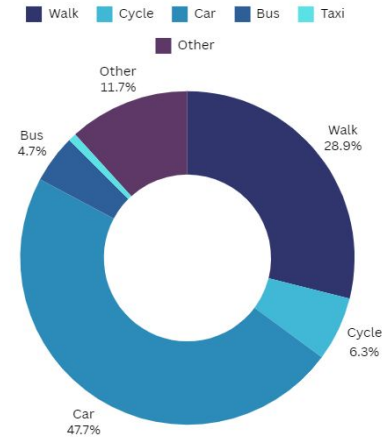
Overall, this feedback highlights the need for targeted improvements in cycling infrastructure and public transport services to enhance community satisfaction.



How far do you live from Monaghan Town Centre?



Do you walk or cycle to Monaghan Town Centre?



The survey results indicate a balanced distribution of respondents residing within a 10 km radius of the town. Notably, the majority of participants live between 5 to 10 km from the town centre, closely followed by those residing within 1 to 3 km of the centre. This distribution suggests a diverse representation of opinions from both near and slightly more distant residents, providing valuable insights into community perspectives. Travel by car to Monaghan Town was the predominant mode of transport, with 48% of respondents indicating they travelled by car.

Are you a current/past student or teacher of St Louis Secondary School?

62.6% of respondents confirmed their affiliation as either a student or teacher at St. Louis Secondary School.

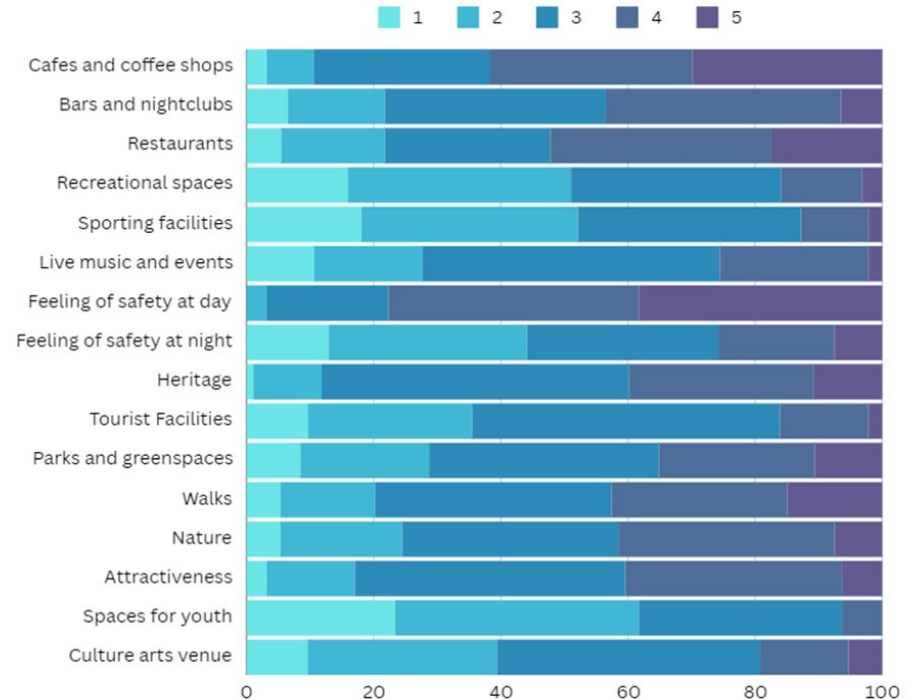
How would you rate Monaghan for the following facilities/amenities?

Respondents were invited to assess sixteen distinct areas of facilities and amenities within the town, utilising a ranking system that ranges from 1 to 5. In this scale, a score of 1 signifies "very poor," while a score of 5 denotes "very good."

This structured approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of community perceptions regarding the quality of various services and amenities available in the town.

The 'feeling of safety during the day' received the highest number of 'very good' ratings, closely followed by 'cafes and coffee shops' and 'restaurants'. Outside of these, the top ratings were quite limited.

The three areas that received the lowest ratings, in order of priority, were youth spaces, sporting facilities, and recreational areas. This aligns with the overall findings of the survey.



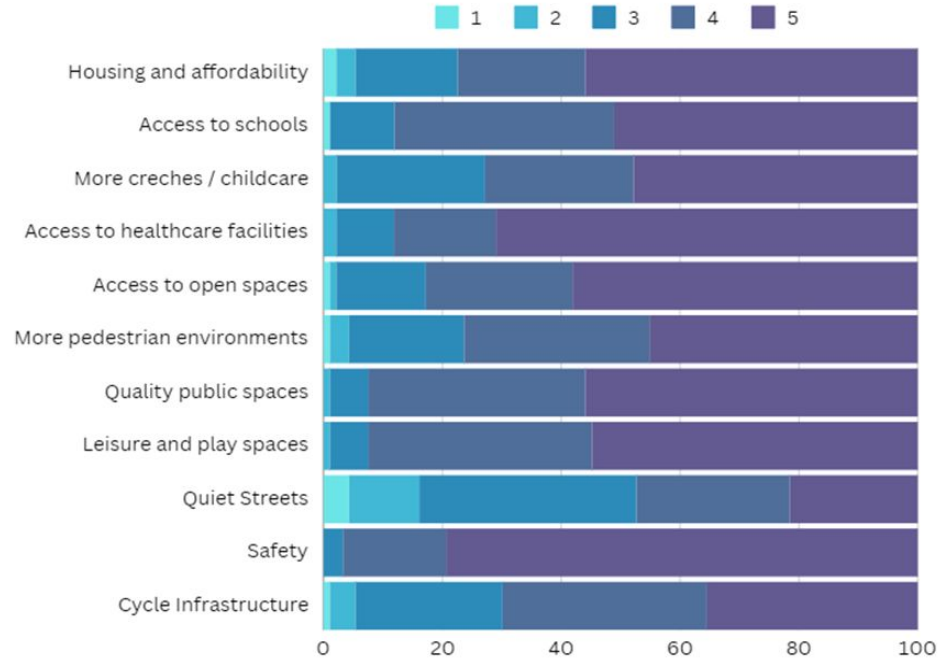
How important do you think the following factors are to making Monaghan Town Centre a better living environment?

Respondents were invited to evaluate sixteen areas of facilities and amenities within the town using a ranking system that ranges from 1 to 5. In this scale, a score of 1 indicates "not very important," while a score of 5 signifies "very important."

The majority of votes were concentrated on scores 4 and 5, indicating a strong preference in these facilities.

Notably, very few responses were recorded for the "not very important" category.

Safety emerged as the leading response, with respondents overwhelmingly voting it as 'very important', access to healthcare was identified as the second priority. Access to Open Space and Housing Affordability followed closely behind.



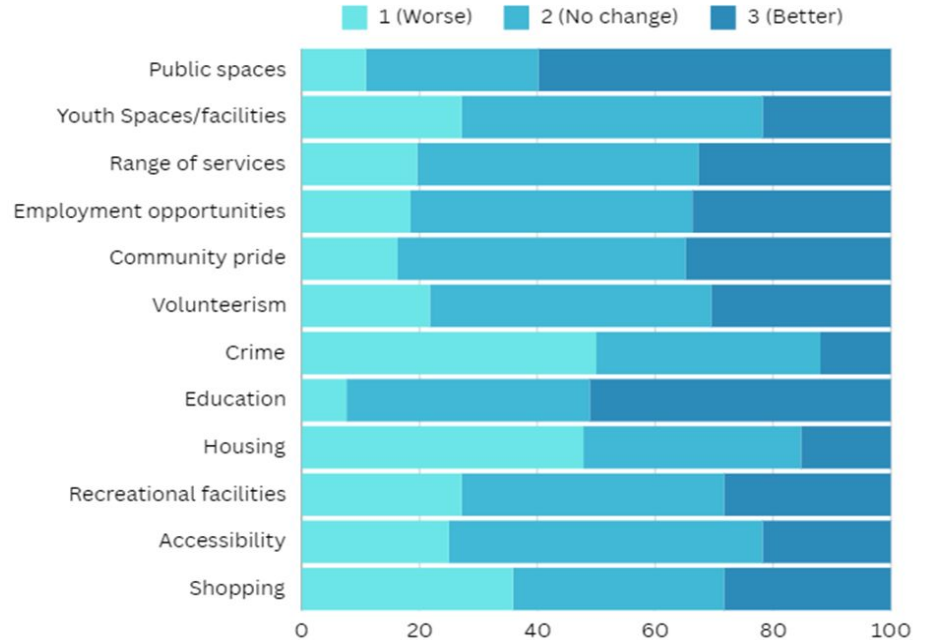
Over the past 20 years, how do you feel the following has changed in Monaghan?

This question aimed to gauge respondents' perceptions of various aspects of their town across twelve categories. Participants were asked to evaluate whether they believed conditions had worsened (1), remained unchanged (2) or improved (3) over the last 20 years.

The area that respondents identified as having shown the most significant improvement was the public space. This category received the highest number of votes across all surveyed categories, indicating a strong consensus on the positive changes to the public realm within Monaghan town.

The survey results indicate that two categories, crime and housing, garnered the highest number of votes as areas perceived to have worsened compared to the past.

In contrast, the remaining categories experienced similar voting patterns, with most respondents indicating that they observed no change in those areas.

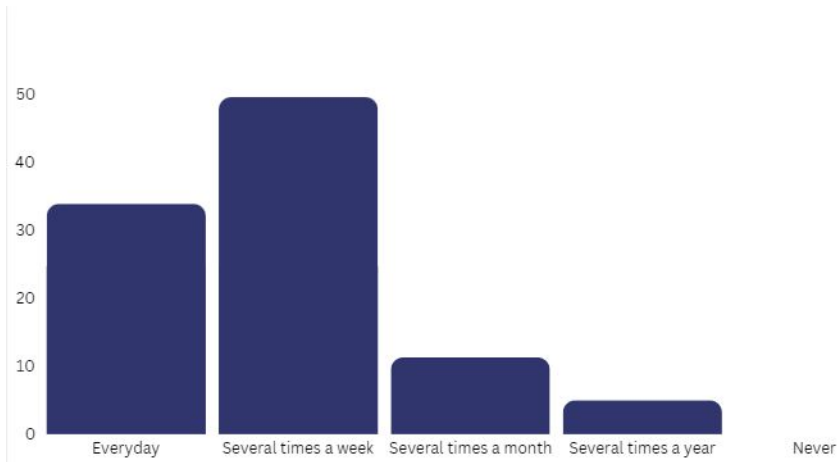


How often do you visit Monaghan Town Centre?

The survey aimed to assess the frequency of respondents' visits to the town by offering five options for selection.

The results revealed that nearly 50% of participants indicated they visit the town several times per week, while 34% reported visiting daily.

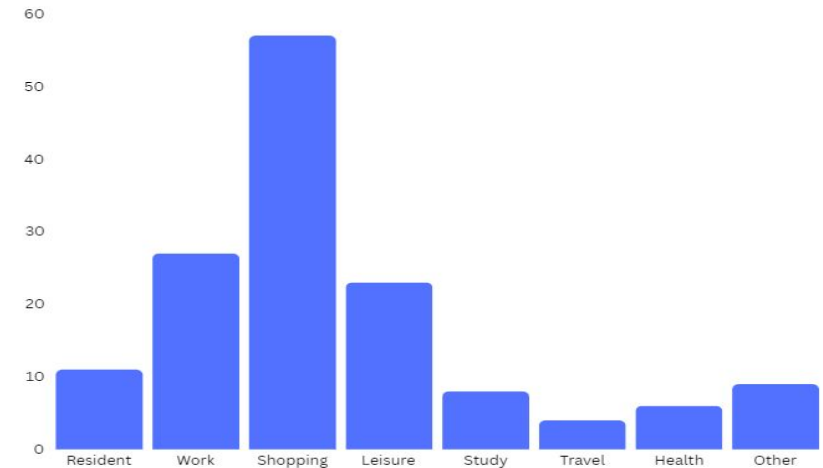
This data highlights a significant level of engagement with the town among respondents.



What are your main reasons for visiting the town centre?

The survey explored the motivations behind respondents' visits to the town, offering eight options for participants to choose from. Nearly 50% of respondents indicated that their primary reason for visiting the town is shopping. 23.5% of participants reported that they visit the town for work-related purposes. 20% of respondents stated that they come to the town for leisure activities.

These results provide valuable insights into the primary motivations and patterns of visitation in the town, emphasising shopping as the dominant reason for visits.

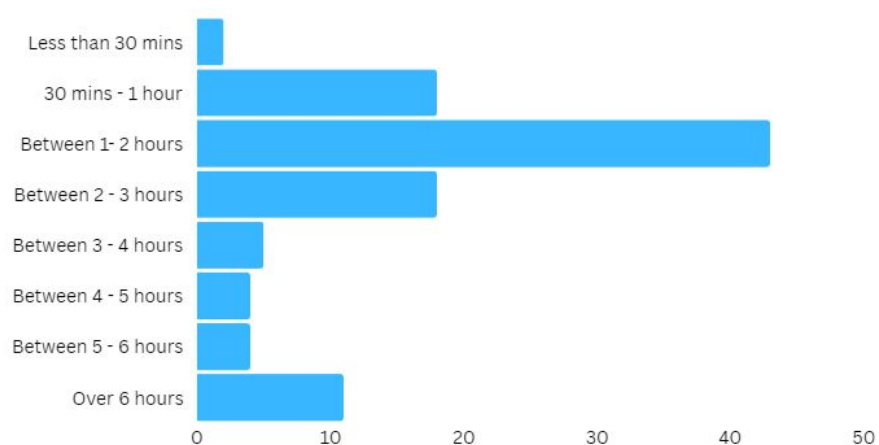


How long would you spend in Monaghan Town?

When respondents were asked about the duration of their time spent in town, they were presented with eight time slots, ranging from 30 minutes to over 6 hours.

The most common response was for the time slot of 1 to 2 hours, receiving 45% of the vote, indicating a significant portion of individuals prefer to spend this amount of time in town. The time slots of 30 minutes to 1 hour and 2 to 3 hours each received 19% of the total votes, demonstrating an equal interest in these durations among respondents.

The data suggests that while a majority favour spending 1 to 2 hours in town, there is also a notable interest in shorter (30 minutes to 1 hour) and longer (2 to 3 hours) visits. This information can be valuable for local businesses and event planners aiming to cater to the preferences of town residents and visitors.



SCOT Analysis

This SCOT Analysis was compiled based on the perceived Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Threats to Monaghan town. It has been compiled to summarise the findings of this study and is based on both the physical survey work and public consultation data.

Strengths and challenges in Monaghan Town can be analysed on a micro level, where strengths highlight the town's unique characteristics that distinguish it from other areas, creating a unique selling point (USP). Conversely, challenges refer to the negative aspects that place Monaghan at a relative disadvantage compared to similar locations.

Opportunities and Threats however, look towards the exterior; the external impacts which could alter the town such as the economy at large, the context of the wider region, Irish state or the world. The bottom half of the SCOT analysis investigates Monaghan town's integrities and vulnerabilities to outside socio-economic, geographic and political context or contexts.

In short, SCOT Analyses present many various internal factors and potential external impacts on the town's functions in a digestible format for readers.



SCOT Analysis for Monaghan Town - Strengths

Rich Culture and History - Monaghan town has a rich history that stretches back hundreds of years and has a story of Irish and Ulster Scots people, like many other towns in Ulster. The town has a wealth of cultural, natural and built heritage in its town core and surrounding area. These assets can be leveraged to improve the tourist offering and to improve the overall quality of life of residents through investment in community uses.

Well-positioned Geographically - Monaghan borders six counties: Louth, Meath, Armagh, Tyrone, Fermanagh and Cavan. Monaghan town is roughly a one-and-a-half hour drive from Dublin and from Belfast. This makes Monaghan attractive to potential residents and businesses looking to set up in an area that is convenient to do business in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland or both, without the higher cost base.

Lots of nature-based activities - Monaghan Town is located next to Ireland's most visited forests, Rossmore Forest Park. This park attracts over 350,000 annual visitors and is an asset to Monaghan Town's local tourist industry. Capitalising further on Monaghan's abundance of natural beauty could prove to be profitable for Monaghan Town and the county at large.

Relatively Diverse Town Economy - As confirmed in the Monaghan Socio-Economic Statement March 2023 document by Monaghan County Council, workers in Monaghan work in an array of industries, such as services, agriculture, manufacturing and healthcare. It is important for these advantages of Monaghan town to be harnessed by the council in the forward planning process.

Locals have a sense of safety in the town - As shown in Question 9 of the Questionnaire section, over three-quarters of respondents reported a 4 or a 5 out of 5 in safety during the day but at night time most people felt safety was a 2 or a 3 out of 5 at night time. Monaghan must build on this strength and enhance its safety infrastructure to sustain the community's perception of safety during the day and to ensure that residents feel more secure at night.

Vibrant and busy town - Despite having a population of under 10,000 people, Monaghan town has a plethora of commercial and retail, industrial and other service provision, making it an attractive place to visit, work in or to live in.

STRENGTHS

- Rich culture and history
- Well-positioned geographically
- Lots of nature-based activities
- Relatively diverse town economy
- Locals have a sense of safety in the town
- Vibrant and busy town



SCOT Analysis for Monaghan Town - Challenges

Vacancy and Dereliction - Vacancy and dereliction are a blight on townscapes. Like many rural towns in Ireland, Monaghan town suffers from its fair share of vacancy, for which it is estimated to be about 16% in 2024. Honing in on the most strategic vacant sites and redeveloping them should be at the forefront of policy making. Renovating and repurposing vacant properties is a more sustainable approach that typically lowers CO2 emissions compared to new builds, while also preserving the built heritage of the area. Additionally, these buildings are often located in desirable neighborhoods, making them essential for effective town development and redevelopment strategies.

No railway infrastructure and limited bus services - Not one village or town in County Monaghan has an active railway line. Rail services to Monaghan town last ran in the 1959. Bus connectivity to Monaghan town is much better as it has bus stations with routes that service surrounding towns and villages and onwards to places Dublin, Belfast, Derry and Dundalk. Furthermore, the Local Link bus service also provides a complementary service within the county and on into County Cavan.

Lower population growth than regional and state average - According to Census 2022, Monaghan had a lower growth rate than average. County Monaghan grew by 6% and Monaghan town grew by 2.8% in the period of 2016 to 2022, as laid out in the Monaghan Socio-Economic Statement March 2023 document.

Car-centric planning has made the town spaced out, hindering accessibility - Perhaps due to Monaghan town's diverse economy, the town has sprawled out beyond its original urban limits, with housing estates being built during the Celtic Tiger in particular, accounting for more spaced out, less dense growth for the town. This has led to a sprawl of the town limits taking it longer for residents to access goods and services, thereby increasing the reliance on the private car.

CHALLENGES

- Vacancy and Dereliction
- No railway infrastructure and limited bus services
- Lower population growth than regional and state average
- Car-centric planning has made the town spaced out, hindering accessibility



SCOT Analysis for Monaghan Town - Opportunities

Economic growth - According to the Central Statistics Office, Ireland's GNI (Gross National Income, a modified index to control for foreign multinational corporations), grew by about 6.7% in 2022, by about 5.0% in 2023. According to the Department of Finance, Ireland's GNI is expected to grow by at least 2.0% in 2024. The Irish economy is growing rapidly and it is important for Monaghan to take a bigger slice of the growing pie.

Heritage and nature-based tourism - The aforementioned Rossmore Forest Park is a testament to successful tourist infrastructure, branding and upkeep of Monaghan's natural environment. Monaghan County Council could further market and develop the Monaghan town Greenway. The development of destination hubs, improved wayfinding, and sustainable infrastructure, along with addressing accommodation gaps across all types, can significantly enhance the existing recreational and tourism offerings, including walking, cycling, hiking, angling, and water-based activities.

Lower housing costs than other parts of Ireland - According to Daft.ie's quarterly rental price report for Q2 2024, Monaghan ranked amongst the cheapest counties to rent a flat or house in in all of the 26 counties. It had the 3rd cheapest rent for 1-bed apartments and for 3-bedroom houses, on average. Furthermore in Daft.ie's Q1 2024 House price report, Monaghan was the 7th cheapest county in Ireland for buying a 1-bedroom apartment and for buying a 3-bedroom house, on average. Lower housing costs makes Monaghan attractive for both younger demographics such as young professionals and lower-to-middle-income earners and for older demographics like people looking to downsize and for pensioners.

Economic diversification - As mentioned in the conclusion of the Monaghan Socio-Economic Statement March 2023 document, the town needs to engage more with residential and business interests already existent in the town. Building on ideas such as The Station House coworking hub and establishing more innovation space for start-ups and scaleups in the town could prove to be elemental for economic diversification.

A plethora of brownfield sites to redevelop - While vacancy and dereliction has negative impacts on communities, these sites also present opportunities for local stakeholders to reinvent spaces. These buildings can be restored to their prior use or if that ship has sailed, these buildings could be redeveloped through adaptive reuse. In a time of unprecedented housing demand, population growth, economic growth and an increased demand for public services, these buildings are low-hanging fruit for councils to develop.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Economic growth
- Heritage and nature-based tourism
- Lower housing costs than other parts of Ireland
- Economic diversification
- A plethora of brownfield sites to redevelop



SCOT Analysis for Monaghan Town - Threats

Economic stagnation - While the Irish economy as a whole has been roaring, the wider European and Global Economy is having a slump, which could pose a threat to potential future foreign direct investment into Monaghan. As investors elsewhere become more prudent, this investment prudence could stimulate a lack of confidence in the wider economy.

Possible decreased interest in 'staycations' - According to Fáilte Ireland's Tourism Barometer - Strategic Research and Insight from May 2024, more businesses (located outside of Dublin), are reporting less domestic tourists and domestic tourist spend than last year. This increased pressure on businesses may become a bigger issue if this trend continues across Ireland.

Climate Change and biodiversity collapse - With the looming threat of Climate change and biodiversity collapse engulfing the world, it is important for policy-makers to factor in more sustainable practices when strategizing, planning and enacting new policies.

Lack of investment in infrastructure in the region - County Monaghan, a part of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA), has suffered from a lack of infrastructural investment, leading to the NWRA ranking r 218th out of 234 NUTS 2 Regions examined in the European Commission's Regional Competitiveness Index.

Geopolitical uncertainty - Geopolitical crises of the 21st century are becoming ever-present, with COVID-19, the various wars in Ukraine, the Middle-East, Africa and Asia impacting global connectivity and trade. Black swan events such as Brexit and its fallout have also been impactful, most acutely in the Irish border counties.

THREATS

- Economic stagnation
- Possible decreased interest in 'staycations'
- Climate Change and biodiversity collapse
- Lack of investment in infrastructure in the region
- Geopolitical uncertainty



Concluding Comments

Whilst Monaghan has witnessed some significant improvements in recent years, such as public realm enhancements and the more recent development of the Peace Campus, there are a few key areas to highlight in conclusion of this town centre health check.

Vacancy rates, while complex, continue to be a challenge within the town centre, with rates of vacancy increasing in strategic areas of the town. It is important to note the prominent buildings around the Diamond which are recently vacated and pose a unique opportunity for redevelopment in one of the areas of highest footfall in the town. While retail remains the main reason for visiting the town since the previous health check in 2023, there appears to be some appetite for town centre living, which is a viable means to tackle vacancy and deliver on other factors which would improve the vitality of the town centre overall.

There is more than adequate car parking in the town with some car parks operating well below capacity. This may present opportunities for the reallocation of parking space in some areas to enhance the public realm or increase infrastructure for other modes of travel such as dedicated cycle lanes. There may also be an opportunity to connect the various public realm assets of the town and integrate them more fully into town centre activity. It is noted that cycling infrastructure, walkability and accessibility were all rated relatively poorly in the local stakeholder surveys which also presents an opportunity for improvement. The apparent increase in those walking and cycling into the town centre compared to the previous health check in 2023 (19% in 2023 compared to 29% in 2024 for walking, and N/A to 6.3% for cycling in 2024) is interesting and demonstrates a potential positive shift to active travel modes which should be encouraged as an alternative to adding further congestion to the town centre through vehicular journeys.

Overall, Monaghan is a well-utilised and busy town, with 84% of its inhabitants visiting the town centre either daily or several times a week. It remains a well-serviced town which has many vital services and a population which is keen to see improvements to enhance their enjoyment of the town and increase their dwell-time in the centre.



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