



GORT: TOWN CENTRE FIRST

NEED AND PROJECT
IDENTIFICATION AND
JUSTIFICATION PROCESS
September 2023

GORT

County Galway

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	2
2. POLICY CONTEXT	3
UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS 2015	3
THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021-2030	3
PROJECT IRELAND 2040 [INCLUDING THE NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021-2030]	5
OUR RURAL FUTURE: RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY 2021-2025	8
<i>Vision</i>	8
<i>Objectives</i>	8
<i>Delivery</i>	9
<i>Key Deliverables are thematically focussed in the following areas:</i>	9
<i>Summary of High Level Outcomes</i>	9
MAKING REMOTE WORK: NATIONAL REMOTE WORK STRATEGY	10
NORTHERN AND WESTERN REGIONAL ASSEMBLY: REGIONAL SPATIAL AND ECONOMIC STRATEGY 2020-2032	11
<i>Vision</i>	12
PEOPLE PLACE AND POLICY [GROWING TOURISM TO 2025]	12
GOVERNMENT OF IRELAND, OUR RURAL FUTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY 2021-2025	13
TOWN CENTRE FIRST PRINCIPLE	13
<i>National Framework</i>	14
SUPPORTING TOWN CENTRE LIVING	16
CEDRA [COMMISSION FOR THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS]: ENERGISING IRELAND’S RURAL ECONOMY	17
<i>Vision</i>	17
GALWAY COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2022-2028	17
GORT LOCAL AREA PLAN 2013-2023	18
<i>Summary of the preferred development option</i>	19
GORT: LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2030 [APRIL 2022, QUB]	19
GORT: CURRENT POSITION [TOWN CENTRE FIRST]	21
3. PROFILE: SOCIO ECONOMIC CONTEXT	22
POPULATION [CENSUS 2022]	22
<i>Population by Gender</i>	23
<i>Population Age Distribution: Gort v. Galway County</i>	24
<i>Employment in Industry Sectors</i>	25
<i>Citizenship & Diversity</i>	25
<i>Religion</i>	26
INTERESTS AND ASSETS	26
NORTHERN & WESTERN REGIONAL ASSEMBLY: REGIONAL VACANCY AND DERELICTION ANALYSIS [JANUARY 2022]	27
RESIDENTIAL VACANCY AND DERELICTION RATE FOR NORTHERN & WESTERN REGION VERSUS THE STATE AVERAGE [SEPTEMBER 2020]	28
COMMERCIAL VACANCY RATE FOR NORTHERN & WESTERN REGION VERSUS THE STATE AVERAGE [SEPTEMBER 2020]	30
VACANT COMMERCIAL STOCK IN GALWAY [SEPTEMBER 2015 & 2020 COMPARISON]	24
4. PUBLIC CONSULTATION FACT FINDING	26
5. PRIORITIES [SUMMARY, ANALYSIS AND PROJECT PRIORITIES]	28
POLICY DIRECTIVES SUMMARY ANALYSIS	28
SOCIO ECONOMIC DATA EVIDENCE SUMMARY ANALYSIS	28
PUBLIC CONSULTATION FINDINGS SUMMARY ANALYSIS	29
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT	29
6. THEMATIC ANALYSIS	38

1. Introduction

This report has been prepared as part of the Town Centre First planning process led by BDP and supported by Venture International Limited (Venture). It seeks to establish the justification and rationale for investment projects which combined will:

- Seek to address issues identified through analysis of existing information
- Address needs and opportunities identified via meaningful engagement with people and organisations from Gort
- Identify potential investment themes and projects which build on opportunities identified through Town Centre First public engagement processes

The justification process leans heavily on a range of information sources including:

- A review of the wider strategic context within which a town such as Gort operates and functions; this includes the National Policy context and particularly the local context at both County Council wide (Galway County Council area) and Gort Town levels
- Review of the available socio-economic data to identify the characteristics and dynamics of Gort as a town and how it compares at County, Regional and National levels (depending on data availability); this can help to identify issues which physical investment through a Town Centre First Plan might seek to address
- Through direct engagement with the population in Gort (surveys and public participation events)
- Through semi-structured engagement with a range of local community leaders and organisations who have a deep understanding of the town, knowledge of its people and their requirements and which might also have (at some stage of development) potential projects to address these requirements which should be included in the Gort Town Centre First Plan

2. Policy Context

All settlements have a range of constraints and opportunities which can be addressed via investment in projects and programmes. The development of a Town Centre First Plan sets out a planned series of investments working towards a common and shared vision. Typically investment will be sourced from a range of competitive public funding schemes (e.g. RRDF, TVR, Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme, CCIF and Clar). If the local authority or local community based organisations are to successfully bid for funding to deliver projects set out in the Gort Town Centre First Plan, the plan and project must be aligned with National and County wide strategies and policies. This section of the Report examines the fit with strategy and policy at both levels.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2015

The United Nations' [UN] Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] were adopted in 2015 by the UN member states and call for economic growth, innovation, circular economies and upgraded infrastructure, as well as providing a path to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and protect the planet.



The National Development Plan 2021-2030

The National Development Plan sets out the investment priorities that will underpin the successful implementation of the National Planning Framework.

A summary of the rational, investment benefits, funding and delivery of the plan is set out, as follows:



1. Overview

- The major public investment approved by Government and detailed in the new NDP will play a significant role in addressing the opportunities and challenges faced by Ireland over the coming years from issues such as Covid-19, Brexit, housing, health, climate action and a population projected to grow by one million people between 2016 and 2040.
- The NDP was drafted following a review conducted over two phases which commenced in October 2020 and included extensive engagement, public consultation and analysis led by the National Investment Office and available on Project Ireland 2040 webpage (gov.ie/2040).



2. Benefits of Investment

- It is estimated that an annual average of up to approximately 47,000 direct and 33,000 indirect construction jobs will be sustained by the investment over the course of the NDP.
- Economic modelling indicates that the investment planned under the NDP will result in increased GDP, employment and wages out to 2030.



3. Climate Action and the Environment

- Extensive efforts have been made to ensure that the NDP will support the Government's climate ambitions. For the first time in Ireland, climate and environmental assessment of the NDP measures has been undertaken, along with an assessment of the alignment of the plan as a whole with the ideals of a green recovery plan.
- Commitments are made to further reforms of the Public Spending Code and to the treatment of Energy Performance Contracts.
- Most significantly, €5 billion in additional carbon tax receipts over the period of the NDP have been allocated to increase capital investment levels in energy efficiency.



4. Funding

- The NDP sets out Departmental allocations to 2025 and a total public investment of €165 billion over the period 2021-2030. This will bring public investment to 5 per cent of GNI*, well above the recent EU average of 3 per cent of GDP.



5. Investment Framework

- The NDP is not intended to be a comprehensive list of all the public investment projects that will take place over the next ten years. However, where sufficient planning and evaluation has already taken place, the NDP contains a range of expenditure commitments.
- The plan is underpinned by an updated Public Spending Code which came into effect on the 1st January 2020 and sets out the value for money requirements for the evaluation, planning and management of public investment projects in Ireland.
- The launch of the NDP document has been accompanied by publication of an updated Investment Tracker and MyProjectIreland mapping tool which provides details on specific projects (see gov.ie/2040).

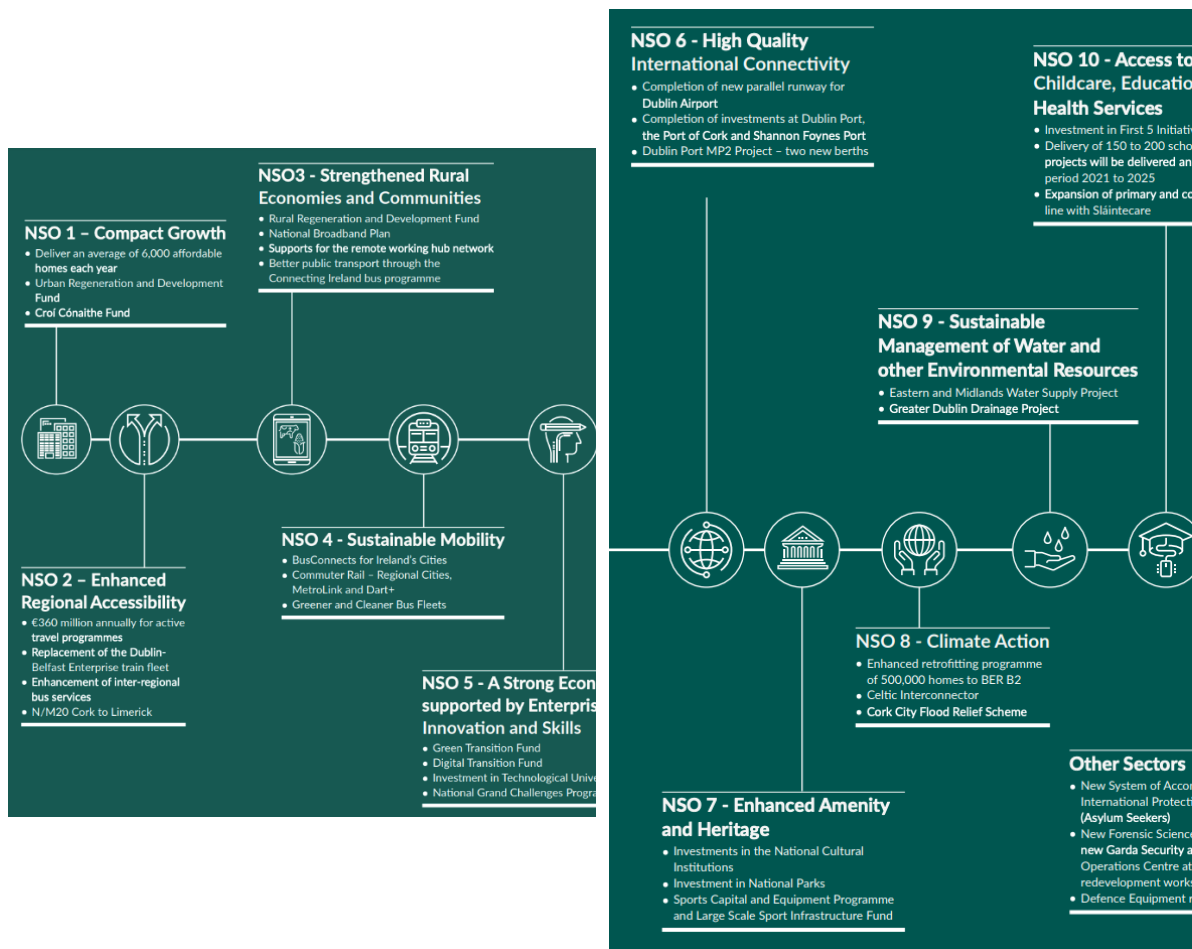


6. Improving Delivery

- A range of initiatives and reforms which are underway and planned to help develop the capacity of public sector bodies to effectively deliver public investment are detailed in the plan. This is alongside some key reforms to governance which are being implemented by the National Investment Office in order to improve project appraisal and reduce the risk of project overspends.
- Finally, the Government's policy approach to supporting the Irish construction sector is detailed along with the actions being taken to drive innovation and digital adoption.

The NDP will be the largest and greenest ever delivered in Ireland.

The plan sets out a range of investments, as follows:



At a local level the Gort Town Centre First Plan can deliver projects in the town which lead to compact growth (NSO1), strengthen the rural economy and communities (NSO3) lead to enhanced amenity and heritage (NSO7)

Project Ireland 2040 [Including the National Planning Framework and National Development Plan 2021-2030]

Project Ireland 2040 is the government's long-term overarching strategy to make Ireland a better country for all and to build a more resilient and sustainable future. The strategy ensures the alignment of investment plans with the stated National Strategic Objectives for 2040 in a considered, cohesive and defined manner.

The National Planning Framework [NPF] is the Government's high-level strategic plan for shaping the future growth and development of the country to the year 2040. The NPF sets out ten National and Strategic Outcomes and 75 National Policy Objectives. The purpose of the NPF is to enable all parts of Ireland, whether rural or urban, to successfully accommodate growth and change, by facilitating a shift towards Ireland's regions and cities other than Dublin, while also recognising Dublin's ongoing key role.

The strategic investment priorities of the planning framework are, as follows:



The RSES is a strategic plan which identifies regional assets, opportunities and pressures and provides appropriate policy responses in the form of Regional Policy Objectives. At this strategic level it provides a framework for investment to better manage spatial planning and economic development to sustainably grow the Region to 2031 and beyond.

The RSES provides:

[1] Spatial Strategy – to manage future growth and ensure the creation of healthy and attractive places to live, work, study, visit and invest in.

[2] Economic Strategy – that builds on our strengths to sustain a strong economy and support the creation of quality jobs that ensure a good living standard for all.

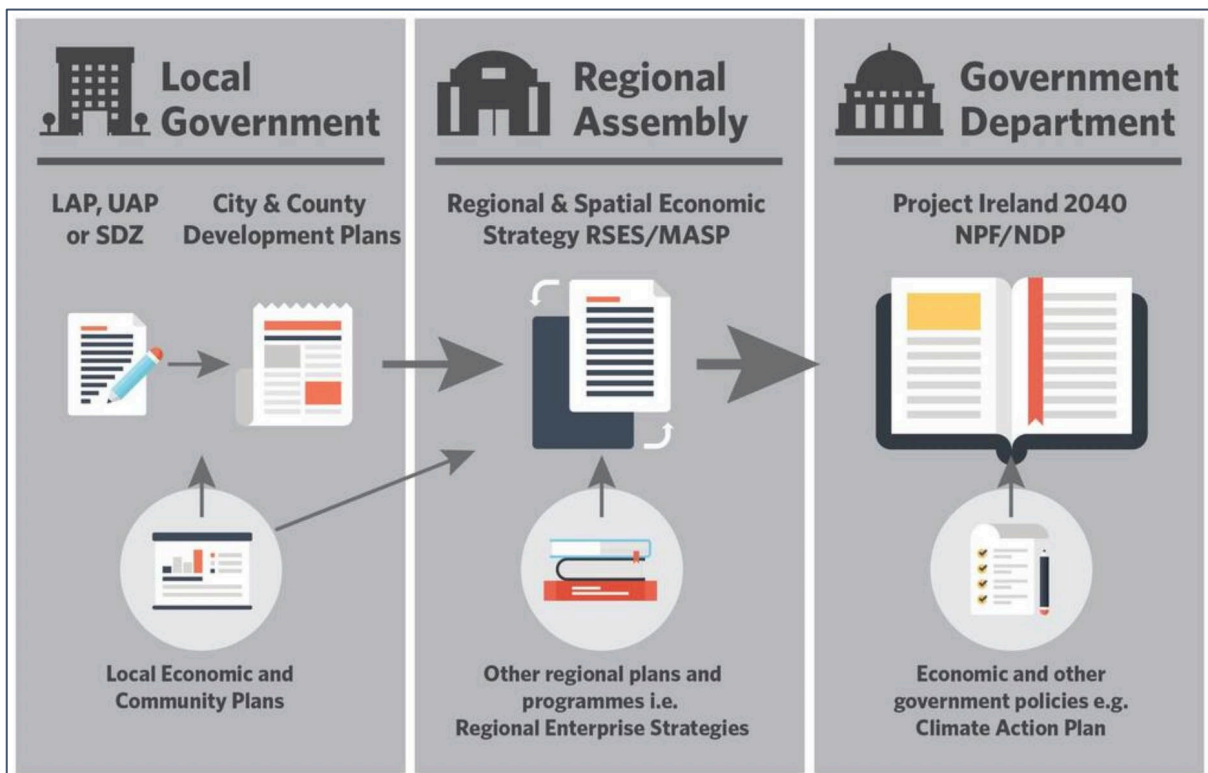
[3] Metropolitan Plan – to ensure a supply of strategic development areas for the sustainable growth and continued success and competitiveness of the Dublin Metropolitan Area.

[4] Investment Framework – to prioritise the delivery of key enabling infrastructure and services by government and state agencies.

[5] Climate Action Strategy – to accelerate climate action, ensure a clean and healthy environment and to promote sustainable transport and strategic green infrastructure.

The principal statutory purpose of the RSES is to support the implementation of Project Ireland 2040 – National Planning Framework and National Development Plan 2019-2027 and the economic policies of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the development of the Regions.

The RSES will be implemented by way of a review by local authorities of all development plans and Local Economic and Community Plans [LECPs]. Key state agencies and sectoral bodies will also consider their strategies and investment plans, post adoption of RSES, to support the achievement of National and Regional Strategic Outcomes set out in the NPF and RSES.



National Climate Action Plan 2023: Changing Ireland for the Better

The Climate Action Plan 2023 is an integral part of the National Development Plan 2021-2030. It sets out how Ireland is putting climate solutions at the centre of its Social and Economic Development activities.

It has identified six high impact sectors against which investments will be made and actions taken to transform how we currently 'do our business' in these sectors. The six high impact sectors are:

- Powering renewables
- Building better
- Transforming how we travel
- Making family farms more sustainable
- Greening businesses and enterprise
- Changing our land use

The National Climate Action Plan establishes that if we are to meet our climate action targets every sector, community and person has a role to play.

Gort Town Centre First Plan has the potential to develop proposals which help deliver on the National Climate Action Plan. These could include active travel solutions, better approach to land use (compact development), better approach to building and the impact of both the process of building and the energy used buildings and providing places for people to work remotely.

Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025

'Our Rural Future' provides a framework for the development of rural Ireland over the next five years. The policy is forward looking and ambitious and addresses both the challenges facing rural areas and the opportunities which rural economies and communities can benefit from in the coming years.

Vision

'...a thriving rural Ireland which is integral to our national economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing and development, which is built on the interdependence of urban and rural areas, and which recognises the centrality of people, the importance of vibrant and lived-in rural places, and the potential to create quality jobs and sustain our shared environment'.

Objectives

- Optimising the opportunities for rural communities from high speed broadband
- Supporting improved quality employment and career opportunities in rural areas
- Assisting the regeneration, repopulation and development of rural towns and villages
- Enhancing the participation, leadership and resilience of rural communities
- Enhancing public services in rural areas Supporting a Just Transition to a climate neutral economy
- Supporting the sustainability of Agriculture, the Marine and Forestry
- Supporting the sustainability of our island and coastal communities
- Nurturing our culture and heritage

Delivery

- Invest significantly in remote working infrastructure to provide an opportunity for people to continue to live in rural communities while following their career ambitions
- Invest in rural towns and villages as hubs of economic and social activity
- Transform the opportunity for the diversification of rural economies, including through the delivery of high speed broadband to every part of the country
- Adopt a place-based approach to rural development to meet the needs of different areas in a holistic way and maximise the impact of investment in those areas
- Invest in and empower rural communities to design and deliver responses that meet their local needs
- Actively involve young people in rural areas in decisions that affect them and their future

Key Deliverables are thematically focussed in the following areas:

- Remote working
- Revitalising Rural Towns and Villages
- Jobs for Rural Ireland
- Rural Living
- Rural Ireland's Unique Tourism, Culture & Heritage
- Supporting Communities to create their own future
- Agriculture, the Marine and Forestry
- Island and Coastal Communities
- Transitioning to a climate neutral economy

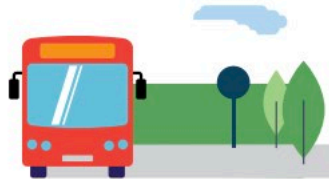
Summary of High Level Outcomes



Increase in no. of people living in rural areas (settlements of <10,000)



Increase in no. of people in rural areas in employment/self-employed



Increase in rural transport services/increase in passenger numbers



Number of town regeneration projects funded



Number of hubs in the national remote working hub network



Reduction in regional income disparity



Increase in broadband coverage in rural areas

Making Remote Work: National Remote Work Strategy

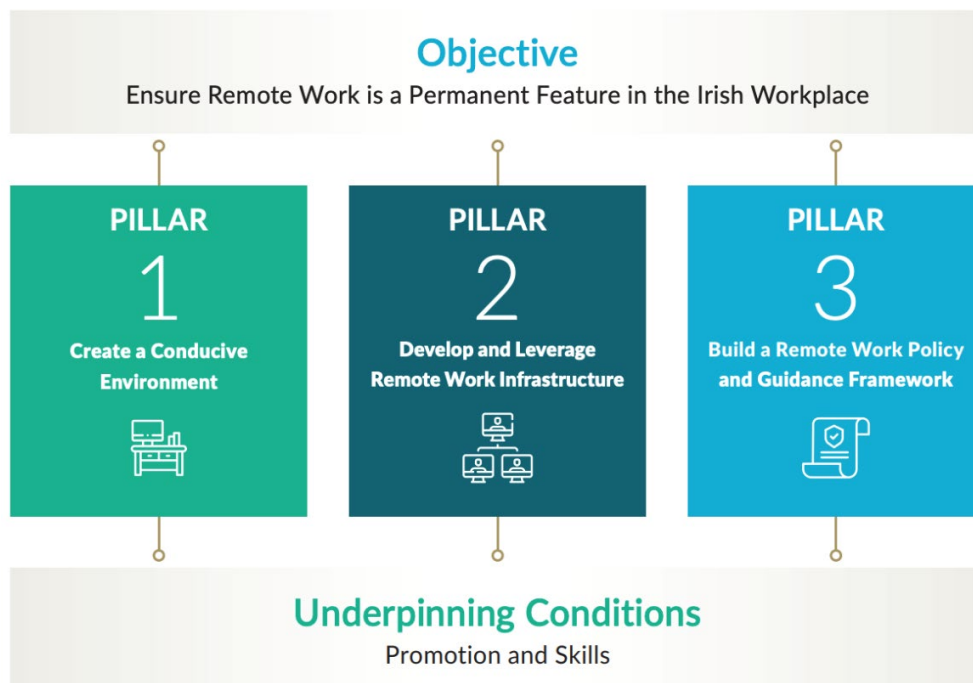
The increase in home working as a result of COVID-19 has brought remote working to the forefront of working life. Though the adoption of remote work was already increasing in Ireland, COVID-19 has greatly accelerated this trend making remote work a central part of the workplace today and into the future.

The Remote Work Strategy is built on three fundamental pillars which will be bolstered by underpinning conditions.

Pillar One is focussed on creating a conducive environment for the adoption of remote work. As remote working is a new way of working, it will need new and different measures in place to support it into the future. Changes to how and where people work will have impacts on a number of different areas such as the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees, health and safety legislation and tax arrangements. The actions in this pillar are centred on supporting employers and employees.

Pillar Two highlights the importance of the development and leveraging of remote work infrastructure to facilitate increased remote work adoption. Adequate infrastructure must be in place to allow employers and employees to avail of remote working opportunities both at home and in hubs. The actions in this pillar are focussed on development and investment in the national hub infrastructure and the national delivery of broadband, both of which will be significant drivers in facilitating people to work remotely.

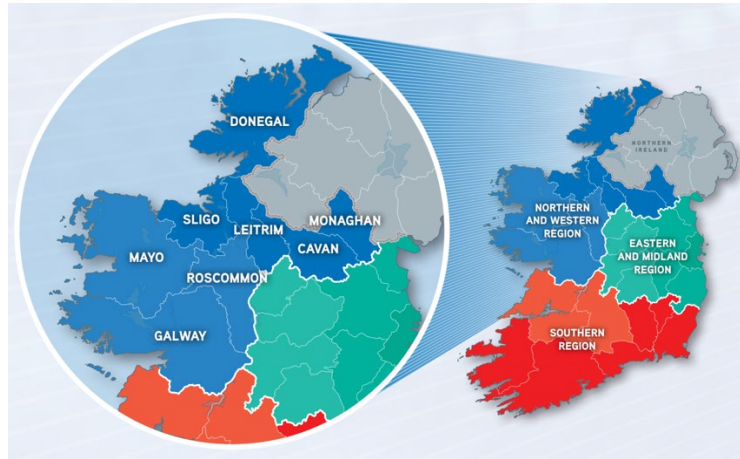
Pillar Three is centred on maximising the benefits of remote work to achieve public policy goals. To achieve this policymakers need to be aligned by a shared vision and supported by access to the most relevant data to inform evidence-based policy. The actions in this pillar will ensure that data and collaborative practices are used to best effect to achieve the State’s multiple policy goals.



Northern and Western regional Assembly: Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2020-2032

The RSES provides a high-level development framework for the Northern and Western Region that supports the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the relevant economic policies and objectives of Government. It provides a 12-year strategy to deliver the transformational change that is necessary to achieve the objectives and vision of the Assembly.

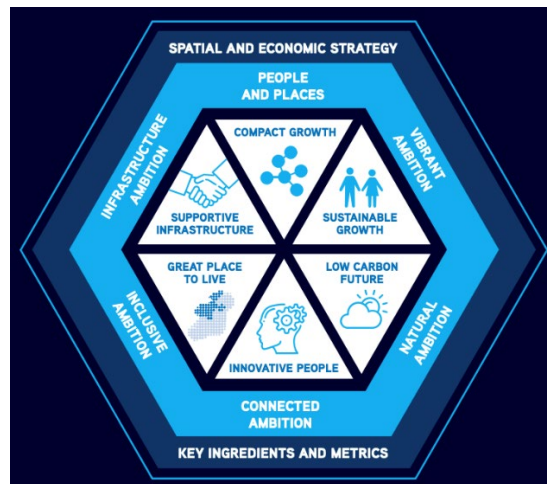
The strategy is about delivering effective regional development for the Northern and Western Region, encompassing Connacht and the Ulster Counties of Cavan, Donegal, and Monaghan.



Vision

‘To play a leading role in the transformation of this region into a vibrant, connected, natural, inclusive and smart place to work and live.’

Growth Ambitions



People Place and Policy [Growing Tourism to 2025]

Tourism is one of Ireland’s most important economic sectors and has significant potential to play a future role in Ireland’s economic renewal.

Overall Government-led tourism goals are as follows:

By 2025, revenue from overseas visitors, excluding carrier receipts, will increase to €5 billion in real terms² (i.e. excluding the effects of inflation).

Employment in the tourism sector will be 250,000 by 2025, compared with around 200,000 at present.

There will be 10 million visits to Ireland annually by 2025.

The Gort Town Centre First Plan has the potential to make Gort a more attractive settlement to visit and increase the range of experiences available to visitors. It can also connect Gort to regionally significant tourism infrastructure such as the Galway to Athlone Greenway.

Government of Ireland, Our Rural Future, Rural Development Policy 2021-2025

Our Rural Future provides a framework for the development of rural Ireland over the next five years. The policy is forward looking and ambitious and addresses both the challenges facing rural areas and the opportunities which rural economies and communities can benefit from in the coming years.

Chapter 5 of the policy identifies the priority of ‘Revitalising Rural Towns and Villages’, with an ambition to ‘support the regeneration, repopulation and development of rural towns and villages to contribute to local and national economic recovery, and to enable people to live and work in a high quality environment’. This will be achieved by ‘investing in projects which support economic activity and increased footfall in our towns and villages, improve the public realm, encourage town centre living, and provide the necessary services infrastructure to support town and village regeneration and sustainable growth’.

The development of a Gort TCF plan directly delivers on Chapter 5 of the 2021-2025 Rural Development Policy.

Town Centre First Principle

The Town Centre First policy aims to create town centres that function as viable, vibrant and attractive locations for people to live, work and visit, while also functioning as the service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community.

Irish towns are facing significant challenges and opportunities that require a coordinated and comprehensive response. This Town Centre First policy will facilitate that response by towns of all sizes across the country so that their centres can function as the sustainable and vibrant heart of the communities they serve, in ways that are adaptable and appropriate to 21st century needs.

A Town Centre First approach encourages Government Departments, Local Authorities, businesses and communities to put town centres at the heart of decision-making where appropriate. Locating services such as schools or medical services, for

example, in town centres rather on the outskirts can help to revitalise the town by increasing footfall and creating a sense of place.

The implementation of a strategic approach to town centre regeneration through utilising existing buildings and unused lands for new development, addressing vibrancy and future function while promoting residential occupancy, are all central elements to securing a sustainable future for rural towns and villages.

The development of a Gort TCF Plan creates a strategic framework for the development of Gort; it has been led and agreed by the people of and stakeholders in Gort and facilitated by the local community.

National Framework

The Town Centre First policy sets out a range of Actions which collectively will create the framework required to support our towns to achieve the desired outcomes and deliver on their own unique vision. These Actions are centred around improving our knowledge and understanding of our towns and what they need, enhancing the capacity of delivery agents to implement this ambitious policy, building new structures at national and local level, and ensuring that new and existing funds are co-ordinated and targeted towards the implementation of Town Centre First in each town. Key priorities in establishing and growing this framework include:

A network of Town Regeneration Officers to bring a co-ordinated approach to delivery across the country and to act as a forum for sharing best practice and informing the ongoing roll-out of the policy. The Town Regeneration Officers will lead the engagement of multi-disciplinary team within each Local Authority, while guiding and supporting Town Teams through the TCF process.

Capacity building programmes for Town Teams to increase the skills and capabilities of Town Teams and enable them to deliver effectively. This will be supplemented with National TCF Awards and national TCF themed events to recognise successful town initiatives.

A national, integrated and scaled-up Health Check Programme for towns which builds and expands on the success of the Heritage Council's Collaborative Town Centre Health Check model and results in a national database of towns.

A Town Centre First Toolkit to include a Web Portal which will provide access to all available TCF resources and funding. The Toolkit will provide a best practice model for developing TCF plans that is informed by existing models and include specific strands targeting key issues associated with the development of our towns such as climate action, digitalisation, enterprise development and social purpose.

A targeted investment programme to support towns in delivering the interventions identified in their bespoke Town Centre First Plans. This includes existing [Urban Regeneration and Development Fund; Rural Regeneration and Development Fund; Town & Village Renewal Scheme] and new [Croí Cónaithe (Towns) Fund; European Regional Development Fund] funding programmes which will prioritise the delivery of this Town Centre First policy.

Pathfinder towns that will be immediately assisted to act as initial demonstrators of the TCF policy approach. A key ongoing focus of the policy will also be to identify early-stage towns where local stakeholders require more support to collaborate as part of a Town Team and to access investment programmes.

Mechanisms to put town centres at the heart of decision making including a methodology to assess the impact of development on town centres for applicability within the statutory planning system and tools to aid Government Departments and their agencies to assess the impact of their investment decisions on town centres.

Better data which enhances our understanding of Ireland's towns and builds an evidence base for the ongoing evolution of the TCF policy. This will include a new research and evidence platform, agreed data measurement requirements in respect of key social and economic outcomes, and research aimed at establishing the social return from investment in our towns.

A new National Town Centre First Office established within existing structures to lead and drive the implementation of Town Centre First actions and co-ordinate stakeholder engagement at a national level and across the Local Government Sector.

Cross-Government focus and alignment through a National Oversight and Advisory Group that will monitor and guide the delivery of the policy, together with Annual Implementation Plans and a commitment to review the policy at three-year intervals. It will include new approaches to collaborating across the range of new and existing Government initiatives impacting on our town centres.

The Town Centre First Policy Recognises that successful places exhibit the following characteristics.

The Town Centre First policy recognises that successful places:

- Are characterised by an attractive public realm (streets, spaces and parks) that is designed to invite people to meet, mingle and dwell;
- Contain a variety of services/shops that provide employment opportunities, enable people to shop locally and meet the needs of the local community;
- Provide a range of cultural, recreational and community spaces (that includes scope for periodic events and festivals) that bring together community members and attract visitors/tourists;
- Contain a well maintained building stock that creates visual interest and animates streets and spaces;
- Conserve, adapt and highlight historical buildings and streetscapes that provide the town with a unique identity;
- Are attractive vibrant places for enterprises to grow and develop;
- Are well connected and accessible to sustainable modes of transport, enabling a high proportion of journeys to be made by foot and/or bicycle from the immediate hinterland (e.g. the '10 minute town' concept);
- Manage traffic within central areas so that streets prioritise vulnerable users (pedestrians and cyclists), enabling them to move about safely and in comfort;
- Provide a mix of housing typologies and tenures to cater for diverse communities in terms of age, income and mobility;
- Utilise digital technology to enhance the experience of living and working in towns, enabling greater choices in terms of location and lifestyle;
- Provide opportunities for the amenity, health and well-being of residents, workers and visitors.

Source: Town Centre First: A Policy Approach for Irish Towns

Supporting Town Centre Living

The Programme for Government commits to implementing a strategic approach to town centre regeneration and living, through a mix of new housing developments and by utilising existing buildings and unused lands for development. The scale, design and layout of housing in rural towns should be proportionate and tailored to ensure that development responds to the character, scale and density of a particular town. It is also important that a mixed supply of private and social housing is provided.

The Gort TCF should help create the conditions to provide a range of housing options and encourage more people to live in and around its town centre.

CEDRA [Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas]: Energising Ireland's Rural Economy

Vision

Rural Ireland will become a dynamic, adaptable and outward looking multi-sectoral economy supporting vibrant, resilient and diverse communities experiencing a high quality of life with an energised relationship between rural and urban Ireland which will contribute to its sustainability for the benefit of society as a whole.

The Gort TCF Plan will take a holistic approach to the development of Gort; it will seek to provide the range of spaces, places and facilities which are required to create a resilient community which provides a quality of life for its citizens and a positive experience for people who visit the area.

Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028

Vision

Promote the creation of an attractive county to live, work, visit and enable businesses to flourish in an environment that offers a range of housing options, robust and diverse range of employment opportunities, access to quality infrastructure and community facilities with a high quality sustainable environment for all.

The plan sets out a range of proposed policy objectives with supporting narrative for development up to 2028. In accordance with national policy, the plan is seeking to develop in a sustainable and environmentally sensitive manner. It promotes the climate change agenda and it sets out the housing and economic priorities.

The 'Core' strategy is summarised, as follows:

- Prioritise targeted population and economic growth to the MASP, Key Towns, Strategic Towns and Self-Sustaining Towns and promote their continued sustainable growth;
- Capitalise on the location of the settlements within the MASP, to drive linkages and synergies between Galway city and the wider MASP area;
- Support the Key Towns and Strategic Potential town which are important local drivers providing levels of jobs and services for the resident population and surrounding catchments;
- Support Self-Sustaining Towns requiring contained growth, focusing on investment in services employment and infrastructure whilst providing a viable alternative to single housing in the countryside;
- Support the Small Growth Towns and Small Growth Villages as areas for local services, residential and employment potential;
- Contribute to urban regeneration lands and the development of brownfield sites for the revitalisation of settlements;
- Management of urban generated growth in Rural Areas under urban influence, by ensuring single houses in the open countryside are based on the core consideration of demonstrable economic or social need to live in the rural area in

addition to compliance with statutory guidelines, plans and having regard to ensuring the viability of villages and towns;

- All lands identified for development are in accordance with the “Tiered Approach to Land Use Zoning” as set out in NPF

The Gort town Centre First Plan can/will help develop capital projects and proposals which can practically deliver on these elements of the core strategy.

Gort Local Area Plan 2013-2023

Vision

Gort will be a sustainable, self-sufficient, vibrant, socially inclusive and innovative growth centre within the County, protecting and enhancing its attractive medieval character and natural environment, supporting an educated workforce, providing a range of supporting services/facilities/ amenities and with a high quality of life for the local community. This will be delivered through a managed and phased development strategy on appropriately zoned and serviced lands in a manner that is balanced and sustainable for Gort and the immediate environs that it serves.

Gort Local Area Plan

The Gort Local Area Plan (LAP) is a Land Use Plan and overall Strategy for the development of Gort over the period 2013-2023. The focus of the Local Area Plan is to ensure that Gort, as a rural settlement, develops in a sustainable manner in line with both National Policy (Town Centre First) and the current Galway County Development Plan 2015-2021. Gort LAP sets out a strategic vision for Gort as follows:

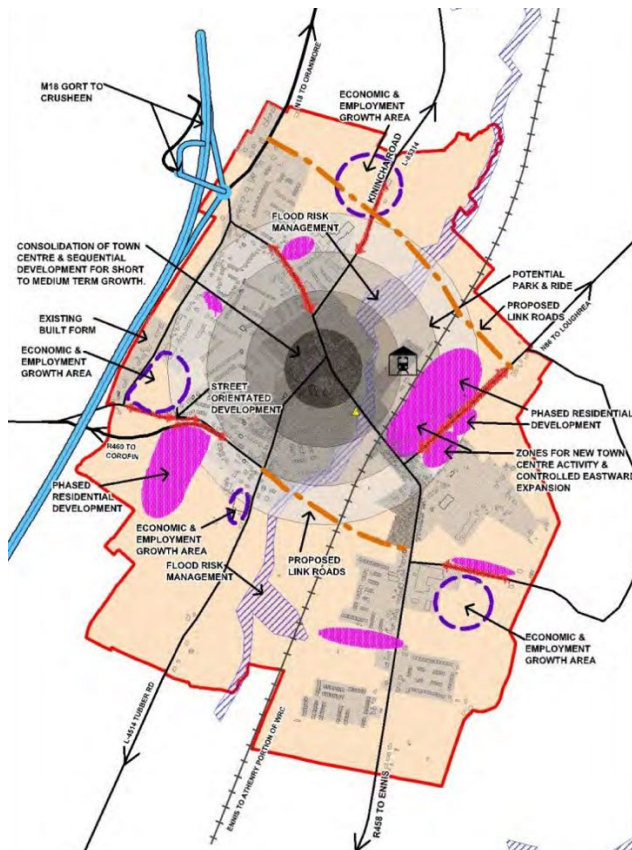
‘Gort will be a sustainable, self-sufficient, vibrant, socially inclusive and innovative Growth Centre within the County, protecting and enhancing its attractive medieval character and natural environment, supporting an educated workforce, providing a range of supporting services/facilities/amenities and with a high quality of life for the local community. This will be achieved through a managed and phased development strategy on appropriately zoned serviced lands in a manner that is balanced and sustainable for Gort and immediate environs that it serves’

Gort Town Centre First Plan has the potential to translate the strategic vision set out in the current Gort LAP in a practical manner through the development of the town and its assets. It can contribute directly to a number of the LAP guiding principles including:

- Realising the town’s potential
- Reflecting the needs and aspirations of local communities and businesses
- Promoting sustainable land use
- Maintaining a strong and vibrant Town Centre
- Facilitating the provision of a range of facilities, amenities and supporting services
- Fostering economic development and employment creation
- Supporting the delivery of support infrastructure

- Protecting and enhancing heritage and character of Gort

Summary of the preferred development option



Gort: Local Development Plan 2030 [April 2022, QUB]

Galway County Council Mission Statement:

'To deliver local authority services for County Galway which enhance the economic, social and cultural lives of its citizens'

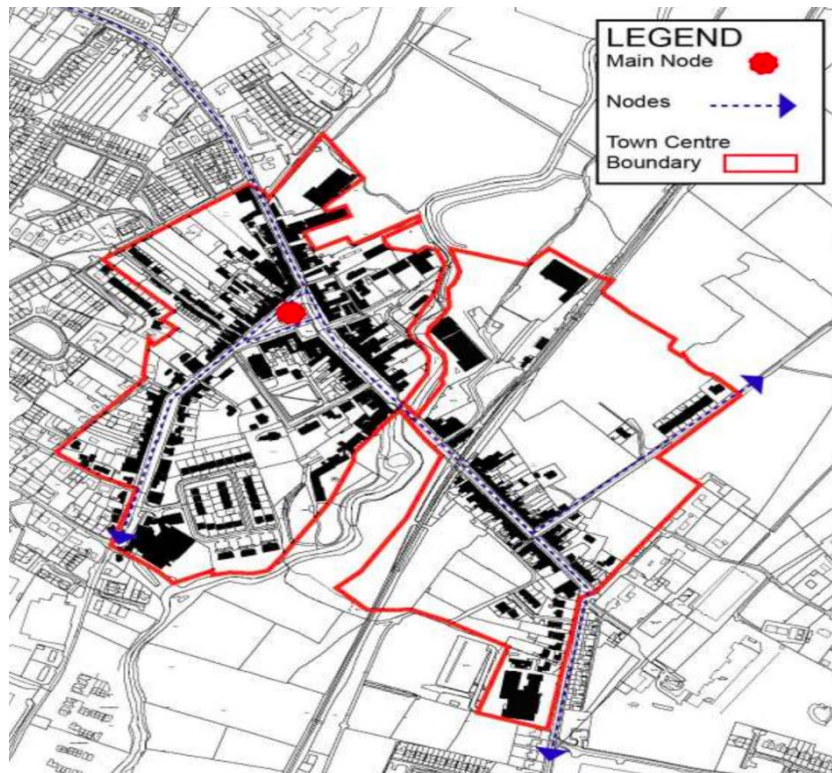
Source: Gort Local Development Plan 2030

The Gort Local Development Plan identifies the following key points:

1. The generic decline of town centres and high streets as commercial centres
2. Increased levels of town centre residential and commercial vacancy
3. Low employment opportunities
 - Gort has developed as a node between Limerick and Galway and was designated as a "Key Town" in the Galway County Development Plan 2009-2015 and a main town on the Galway- Limerick/Shannon Development Corridor
 - A steady increase in population [currently c.3,000]

- Gort’s built heritage includes a number of protected structures with architectural and historic significance including monastic and religious buildings
- Gort has 4 main routes travelling towards the motorway, Coole Park, Loughrea and surrounding towns

The emerging Gort TCF Plan creates a framework for the investment of public funding to deliver on these issues and opportunities.



The Local Development Plan identifies the following core objectives:



Given the holistic approach and focus of the Gort TCF Plan it will seek to create the conditions to address these objectives over time.

Gort: Current Position [Town Centre First]

Lands zoned for housing as R1 and R2 encompass most of the town itself. There are 5 main areas of zonings for housing sites located on the fringes of the town zoning. Houses on Georges Street is within the ACA included in the Town Centre Zoning. Some of these structures are derelict and in disrepair, but some are also in good condition, with potential for refurbishment. The vacant town buildings in Gort are poorly maintained. An older generation is evidenced to be living in the town centre. The vacant buildings within town centre give opportunities for residential purpose which would allow for brownfield development over greenfield development.

Only 13% of those surveyed lived in Gort Town Centre. From the survey 27% stated affordable housing was the most needed form of housing, with owner occupied next [24%], followed by private rental/ tourist [20%].

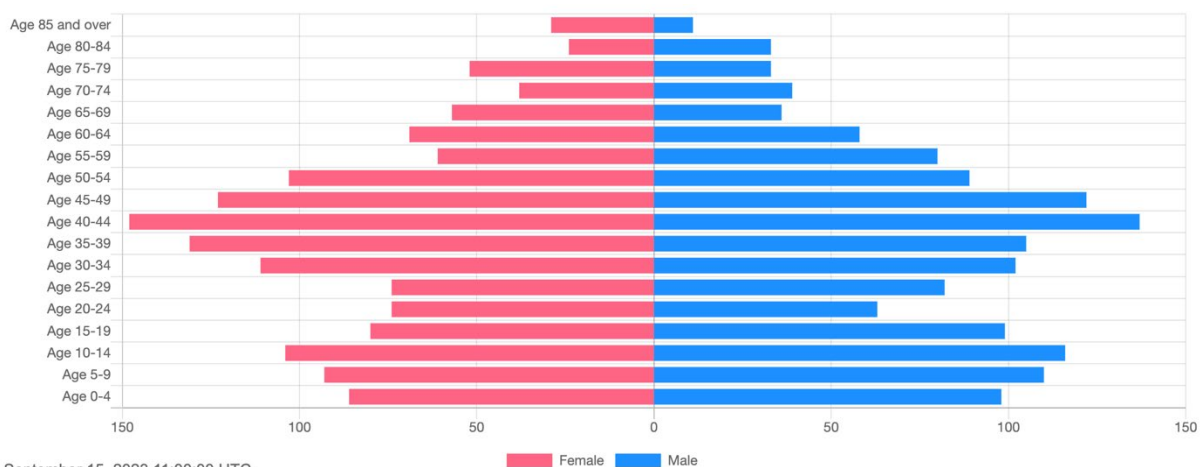
Improved safety, better footpaths and walkability, cleaner spaces and improved landscaping and lighting were some of the things stated from the survey that would incentivise town centre living in Gort.

3. Profile: Socio Economic Context

A review of the available socio-economic data provides an opportunity to analyse it against the position for both the County and Nationally. This can highlight both the characteristics of Gort as a settlement and dynamics within it which might benefit from or be addressed by investment through the Town Centre First Plan.

Population [Census 2022]

- Gort has a population of 2,870



Source: Central Statistics Office, Ireland, 2022 census

- As of the Census 2022, Gort has a population of 2,870 inhabitants and is one of the most diverse towns in Ireland, with over one third of the population being non-Irish citizens

It is noted that the geographic definition of Gort as a settlement has changed from the 2016 census to the 2022 census and therefore any comparison between the population figures for the settlement (2016 compared to 2022) can give a false impression. A new method of defining urban areas (Built Up Urban Areas or BUA) has been introduced by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) to bring greater consistency in the definition of urban areas across the country.

The Western Development Commission (WDC) completed a comparative analysis of settlement size and population dynamics to allow for the change in BUA and therefore compare like with like.

The following table sets out its analysis and identifies that in real terms the population of Gort has increased by 5.4% from the previous 2016 census to the 2022 census:

WDC BUA Analysis of Population Dynamics from 2016 to 2022				
Town	Population 2022 old settlement boundaries	Population 2016 old settlement boundaries	Difference	Percentage Change
Gort ,Galway	3,155	2,994	161	5.4%

- The increase in population for Gort between the 2011 [2,644] and 2016 [2,994] census was 4.2%
- Between the 2016 and 2022 Census, the population has increased by 161 or 5.4%(when the CSO amended BUA is factored in)

Gort 's population has increased by 5.4% in the 2022 Census when the amended BUA is considered

Source: Venture analysis

Population by Gender



Source: Central Statistics Office, Ireland, 2022 Census

- 50.7% of the population of Gort is made up of females
- In Ireland the population is made up of 50.3% female
- In Galway the population is made up of 51% female

Gort has a comparable female population [%age] when compared to Galway and Ireland [2022 Census data]

Source: Venture analysis

Population Age Distribution: Gort v. Galway County

Age Group	Gort	%	Galway	%	% Variance
Age 0-4	184	6%	11,796	6%	0%
Age 5-9	203	7%	13,796	7%	0%
Age 10-14	220	8%	14,978	8%	0%
Age 15-19	179	6%	13,321	7%	-1%
Age 20-24	137	5%	9,055	5%	0%
Age 25-29	156	5%	7,840	4%	1%
Age 30-34	213	7%	10,016	5%	2%
Age 35-39	236	8%	13,214	7%	1%
Age 40-44	285	10%	15,488	8%	2%
Age 45-49	245	9%	14,807	8%	1%
Age 50-54	192	7%	13,599	7%	0%
Age 55-59	141	5%	12,196	6%	-1%
Age 60-64	127	4%	11,055	6%	-1%
Age 65-69	93	3%	9,953	5%	-2%
Age 70-74	77	3%	8,407	4%	-2%
Age 75-79	85	3%	6,133	3%	0%
Age 80-84	57	2%	4,040	2%	0%
Age 85 and over	40	1%	3,629	2%	0%
Total	2,870	100%	193,323	100%	0%

Source: Central Statistics Office, Ireland, 2022 Census

- Gort's population is dominated by the 25-50 age group and [in %age terms] is above the County in these age categories
- These are working adults likely to be engaged in the labour force; many will have families and this might indicate a need for a range of affordable family friendly facilities and services/activities
- Gort displays lower numbers of population in the 55-74 age categories and is below the County levels for the same age groups

This could/should indicate that investment through the TCF Plan for Gort should focus on facilities which meet the needs of a younger population. Typically, this is in the areas of sports, recreation and leisure, arts, culture and social activity.

Education

- 16% of the total population of Gort is in education
- 360 of Gort's residents have achieved Upper Secondary level education
- 146 of Gort's residents have achieved Honours Bachelor Degree level education

In Education >15 years old	School	% of total population	Other	% of total population
Gort	210	7.3%	253	8.8%
Galway County	16,686	8.6%	8,674	4.4%

- In comparison to the County levels, Gort has a lower %age of >15 year olds in school education
- Gort displays a higher %age of over 15 years olds in post school education

Employment in Industry Sectors

Persons at work by industry sector:

Sector	Gort	%	Galway	%
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	21	2%	4,930	6%
Building and construction	112	9%	5,844	7%
Manufacturing industries	228	17%	14,519	17%
Commerce and trade	224	17%	16,536	19%
Transport and communications	53	4%	5,669	7%
Public administration	34	3%	4,399	5%
Professional services	284	22%	22,962	27%
Other	342	26%	11,042	13%
Total	1,298	100%	85,901	100%

- In comparison to Galway, Gort has less people employed [in %age terms] in the majority of the key sectors, namely: Agriculture, Commerce, Communications, Public Administration and Professional Services sectors
- In the Building, Manufacturing & Other sectors, Gort displays higher levels of employment than the County
- The sectors of dominance in Gort are typically manual and offer lower levels of remuneration than the sectors more dominant in the County; generally these are cyclical sectors which can result in people and families experiencing poverty and financial exclusion

Citizenship & Diversity

- Gort displays a significant level of population diversity with over 1,000 of its residents having citizenship [and usual resident population] being from a Country outside of Ireland
- Significantly, the vast majority of these residents are from other EU countries
- 23% less of residents in Gort have Irish citizenship than compared to Galway
- There is a very significant number of international residents [from outside of the EU] in Gort – 15% - compared to 2% in the County; it is noted that Gort has an important Brazilian community

Country	Gort: Pop. By Citizenship	%	Galway: Pop. By Citizenship	%
Ireland	1,889	66%	170710	89%
UK	59	2%	3582	2%
Poland	63	2%	2910	2%
India	22	1%	937	0%
Other EU	137	5%	4240	2%
Rest of World	434	15%	4033	2%
Not Stated	240	8%	4936	3%
Total	2,842	100%	191,348	100%

Source: Central Statistics Office, Ireland, 2022 Census

Gort displays significantly lower evidence of Ireland being the country of birth of its residents

Gort displays a significantly lower 'white' population than Galway and Ireland

Religion

- Gort is dominated by the Catholic religion
- A significant and increasing number are indicating that they have 'no religion' – this is one of the most significant trends in Census information over the last two periods

Catholic	1607	56%	151,737	78%
Other religion	404	14%	10,503	5%
No religion	382	13%	21,696	11%
Not stated	477	17%	9,387	5%
Total	2,870	100%	193,323	100%

- In comparison to Galway County, Gort has a significantly lower level of Catholics
- Gort displays significantly higher levels of other religions than Galway
- 30% of the population of Gort stated they had 'no religion' or did not state their religion
- In religious terms, Gort displays as a religiously more diverse settlement compared to the County

Interests and Assets

Gort has a number of buildings of architectural interest, being a well preserved planned Georgian period market town.

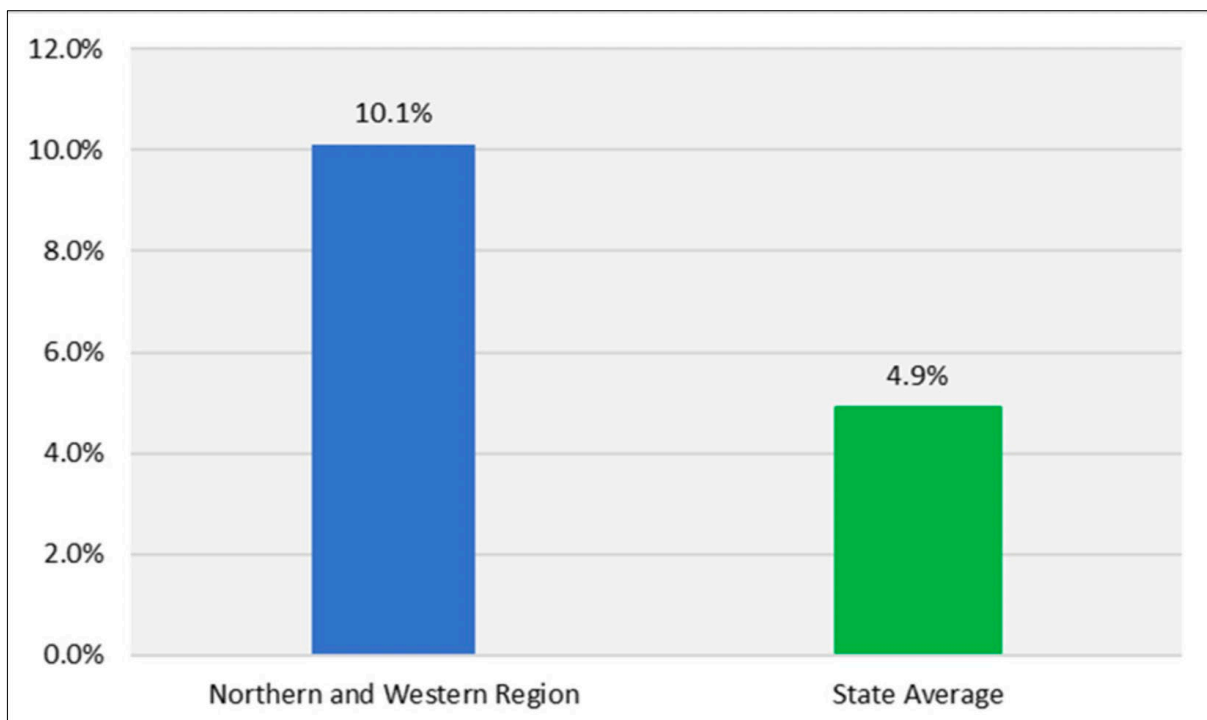
There is a mid-19th Century Weigh House in the centre of the old square, as well as a 1933 marble sculpture of 'Christ the King' by Irish sculptor Albert Power. The Town Hall is a former 19th century school which is now used for community theatre. There is a large Catholic church, St. Coleman's Church [built 1825], with a public park, Canon Quinn Park, behind. The old Church of Ireland church, built c. 1820, is now the public library. The Gort River Walk opened a 3 km looped walking trail along the Gort River with a new bridge in October 2022.

Next to the river and the original bridge [constructed in 1771] is Bridge House, the original residence of Lord Gort before the move to Lough Cultra Castle. This house, dated around 1770 and has since been added to and was a Sisters of Mercy convent from 1857 until 2022, with a primary school on the grounds. As of 2022 it houses Ukrainian refugees.

Northern & Western Regional Assembly: Regional Vacancy and Dereliction Analysis [January 2022]

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy [RSES] for the Northern and Western Region 2020-2032 identifies the regeneration of our towns and villages as a major priority action and that their future role needs to be re-imagined, addressing economic, physical and social decline and creating more liveable places that people want to live, work.

Residential vacancy and dereliction rate for Northern & Western Region versus the State average [September 2020]



Source: Northern and Western Regional Assembly calculations using the GeoDirectory residential database

Gort is located within the Northern and Western Regional Assembly region. Residential vacancy and dereliction rates in this region are double that at a state level. Any agreed Gort TCF Plan should seek to create the conditions to reverse this scenario. Apart from the loss of a much needed housing stock and vacancy and derelict properties detract significantly from the attractiveness and presentation of the settlement.

Above average residential vacancy and dereliction rates were registered in Gort in comparison to the Northern and Western regional data

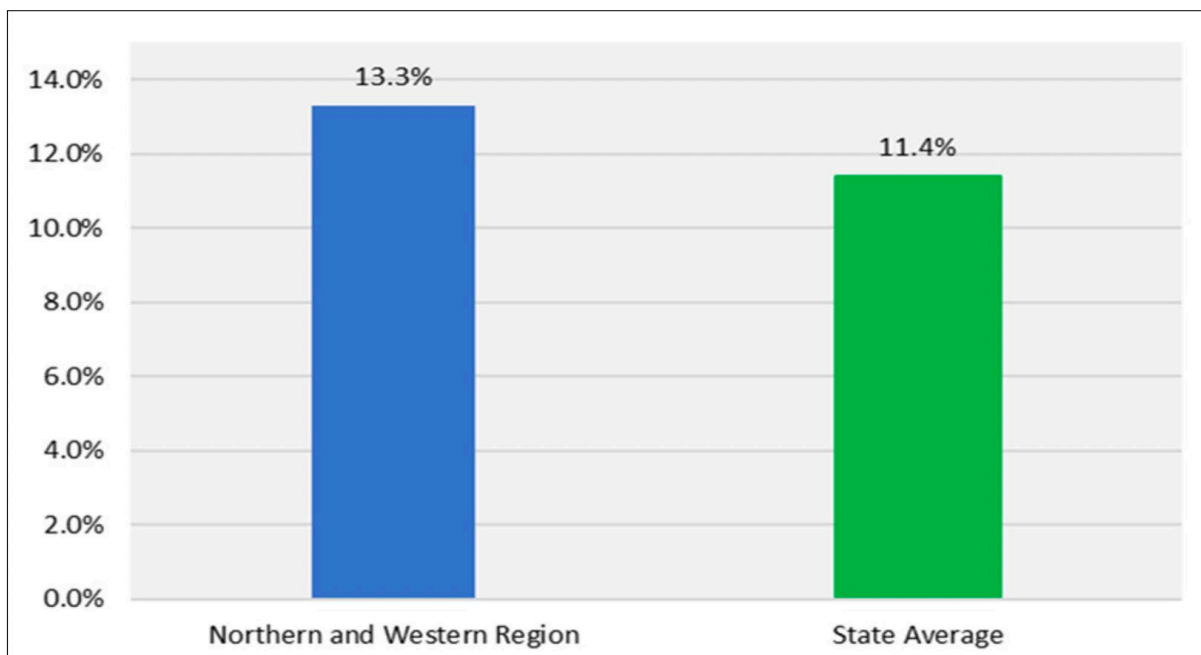
Source: Venture analysis

Geographical Area	Vacant & Derelict Residential Stock (2015)	Vacant & Derelict Residential Stock (2020)	Absolute Change (2015-2020)	% Change (2015-2020)	Residential Vacancy and Dereliction Rate (2020)
Galway (Total)	8,001	7,376	-625	-7.8%	6.8%
An Cheathrú Rua	27	28	1	3.7%	6.8%
An Spidéal	19	11	-8	-42.1%	7.7%
Athenry	61	49	-12	-19.7%	2.6%
Baile Chláir	31	7	-24	-77.4%	1.2%
Ballinasloe	189	103	-86	-45.5%	3.5%
Ballygar	27	25	-2	-7.4%	8.3%
Bearna	21	24	3	14.3%	2.9%
Clifden	41	41	0	0.0%	4.8%
Dunmore	40	35	-5	-12.5%	10.3%
Galway city and suburbs	422	444	22	5.2%	1.3%
Glenamaddy	32	21	-11	-34.4%	8.5%
Gort	88	79	-9	-10.2%	5.6%
Headford	76	59	-17	-22.4%	11.6%
Kinvara	16	16	0	0.0%	4.7%
Loughrea	192	115	-77	-40.1%	4.0%
Maigh Cuilinn	24	17	-7	-29.2%	2.1%
Moylough	18	15	-3	-16.7%	6.3%
Oranmore	24	31	7	29.2%	1.3%
Oughterard	35	30	-5	-14.3%	4.7%
Portumna	157	124	-33	-21.0%	14.5%
Tuam	313	150	-163	-52.1%	3.5%

Source: Northern and Western Regional Assembly calculations using the GeoDirectory residential database

Whilst the rate of vacancy and dereliction in the Northern and Western region is twice the state average, it is noted that it has reduced in County Galway across the 2015 to 2020 timeframe (by 625 units). At 6.8% it is less than the regional average (10.1%), but higher than the average for the state. Gort by comparison has reduced at a faster rate (-10.2% Gort compared to -7.8% in the County). At an average of 5.6% it is still above the state average but much less so than the County and Northern and Western Region averages.

Commercial vacancy rate for Northern & Western Region versus the State average [September 2020]



Source: Northern and Western Regional Assembly calculations using the GeoDirectory residential database

The economic vibrancy of towns and villages is – amongst other things – measured by the level of vacant commercial properties; with commercial vacancy representing a significant issue for many towns and villages across the Northern and Western Region. Reducing the level of vacant commercial properties within towns and villages will be a key component in revitalising our region’s economy and implementing the population and compact growth targets outlined in the NPF and the RSES of the Northern and Western Region, with such targets central to delivering sustainable settlement patterns in the coming years.

In 2020, above average commercial vacancy rates were registered in towns and villages such as – but not limited to – Ballinasloe, Tuam, Gort and Portumna.

Source: Venture analysis

The commercial vacancy rates for the Northern and Western Region are 13.3% compared to 11.4% at a National level. Galway marginally exceeds the regional scenario with a level of 13.4%. At 15.7% commercial vacancy the position in Gort is significantly more pronounced than that at National, Regional and County levels. It is recognised that it has reduced by 13% across the 2015-2020 timeframe. However, the data confirms that commercial vacancy is a major challenge in Gort and one which the Gort TCF plan should seek to address.

Vacant Commercial stock in Galway [September 2015 & 2020 comparison]

Geographical Area	Vacant Commercial Stock 2015	Vacant Commercial Stock 2020	Absolute Change (2015-2020)	% Change (2015-2020)	Commercial Vacancy Rate (2020)
Galway (Total)	1,447	1,621	174	12.0%	13.4%
An Cheathrú Rua	12	16	4	33.3%	18.4%
An Spidéal	8	6	-2	-25.0%	8.5%
Athenry	48	49	1	2.1%	18.1%
Baile Chláir	11	11	0	0.0%	14.1%
Ballinasloe	74	86	12	16.2%	19.0%
Ballygar	4	5	1	25.0%	8.8%
Bearna	10	14	4	40.0%	16.5%
Clifden	21	25	4	19.0%	10.0%
Dunmore	7	5	-2	-28.6%	8.1%
Galway city and suburbs ²⁵	602	690	88	14.6%	14.8%
Glenamaddy	12	12	0	0.0%	16.9%
Gort	46	40	-6	-13.0%	15.7%
Headford	13	23	10	76.9%	19.7%
Kinvara	6	10	4	66.7%	12.5%
Loughrea	58	45	-13	-22.4%	11.5%
Maigh Cuilinn	5	10	5	100.0%	8.7%
Moylough	5	5	0	0.0%	17.2%
Oranmore	33	26	-7	-21.2%	12.2%
Oughterard	16	18	2	12.5%	14.0%
Portumna	45	47	2	4.4%	26.4%
Tuam	85	92	7	8.2%	17.4%

Gort is identified as having a commercial vacancy rate of 15.7% versus state average of 11.4% [September 2020]

Socio-Economic Context

A review of the Selected Geographic Area Profile for Gort provides some additional context for the Gort TCF Plan. This includes:

- The 2023 CYPSC/GRETB stakeholder engagement identified that Gort has issues relating to early school leavers and young people not in employment, education or training
- Unemployment was 11% (2016) compared to a current national average of 4.1% (2023). The upcoming Census data will revise this figure but it is reasonable to assume it is still a challenge for Gort as a rural town

- A review of the POBAL Geoprofile and Deprivation indices for Gort identifies that deprivation is a feature of everyday life for some people living in Gort. One electoral division (Grove St) is ranked as very disadvantaged with two (Ard Guaire/Sycamore Grove and Church St/Garrabeg Rd) ranked as disadvantaged
- Within the six Small Areas of Gort that are contained within the plan boundary, the level of male unemployment varies between 10% and 29%.
- The level of female unemployment varies between 7% and 26% across the six Small Areas within the boundary
- Young people continue to present with mental health concerns/issues post Covid
- There is a cohort of LGBTQIA+ young people who require a safe space to socialise
- Almost 70 people from the travelling community live in Gort
- Gort has a higher level of absenteeism from school (at an average of 6 days per school year) compared to 3.9% across the County
- Feroige and Tusla identify the lack of extracurricular opportunities linked to both the limitation of public transport service and current provision; this create social isolation and an increased prevalence of emotional health challenge, stress and anxiety

4. Public Consultation Fact Finding

A public consultation process was carried out [during January and February 2023] by BDP to inform the design of the Gort Town Centre First and Public Realm Improvement Plan.

The process involved an open consultation day, local school consultation and workshops.

The following infographic establishes feedback from the citizens of Gort against the TCF policy objections:



Source: BDP consultation

Following consultation, the key focus for the Gort Town Centre First and Public Realm Improvement Plan was defined, as follows.

The following infographic sets out key direction provided by citizens of Gort via the BDP facilitated public engagement sessions:



Source: BDP consultation

5. Priorities [Summary, Analysis and Project Priorities]

This section of the report brings together the key direction/context provided by the analysis, information gathering and public/stakeholder engagement underpinning the emerging Gort TCP Plan:

Policy directives summary analysis

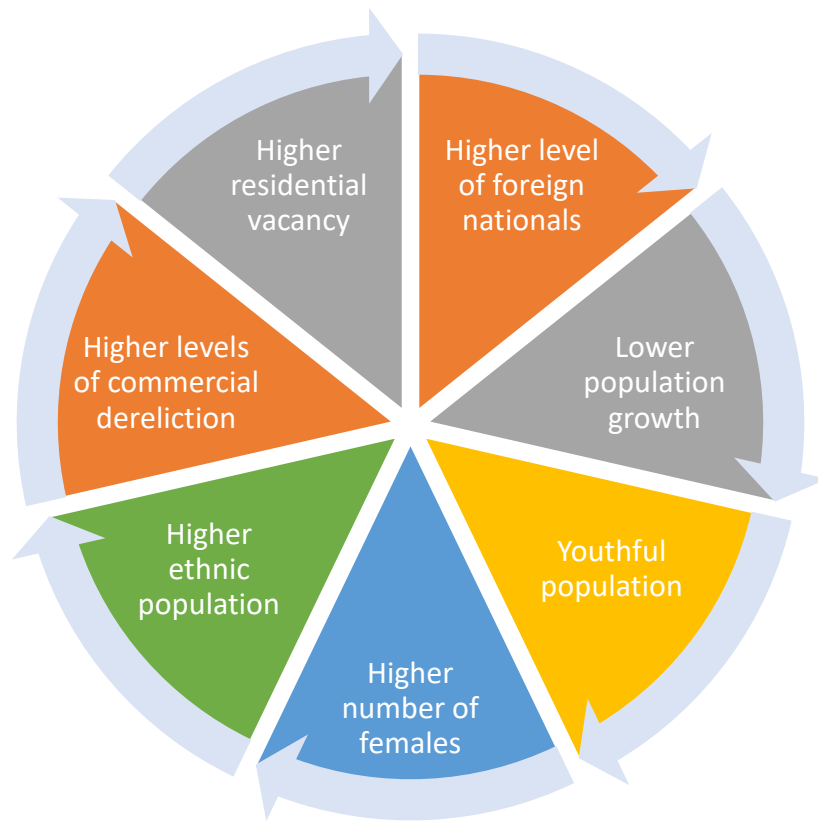
Policy directives identify the following core themes for project development specific to Town Centre First Planning:



Source: Venture analysis

Socio economic data evidence summary analysis

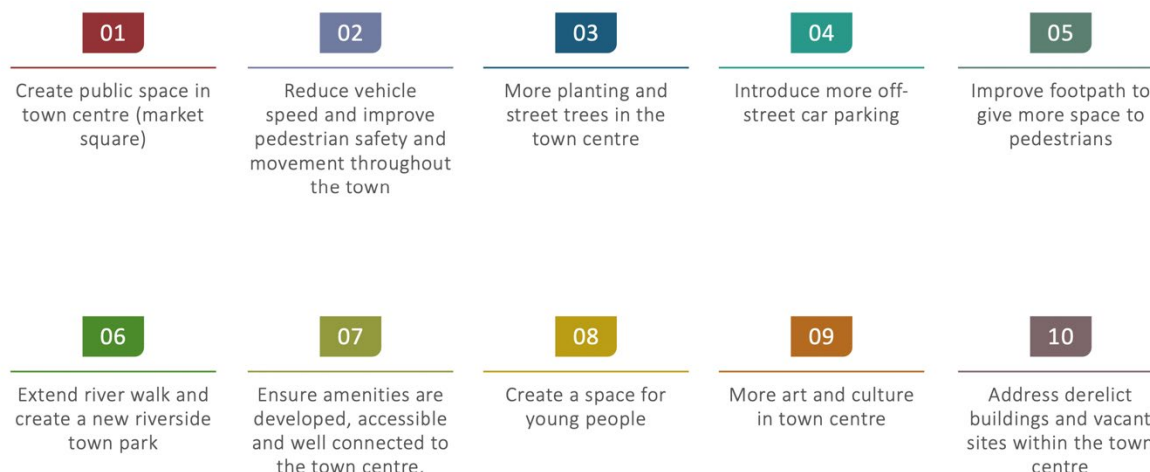
Within the context of the policy directives, socio economic data identifies Gort as having particular challenges and opportunities, as follows:



Source: Venture analysis

Public consultation findings summary analysis

The following infographic sets out prototypes for the Gort TCF Plan identified via the public engagement sessions:



Source: BDP consultation

Stakeholder Engagement

Semi-structured engagement was undertaken with representatives of a range of community based organisations which meet needs of people living in Gort. Appendix A contains a full list of the community organisations engaged as part of this process. An analysis of the feedback helps to identify perceptions of Gort, issues which require to be addressed (constraints), and opportunities which could be delivered upon subject to a shared common vision, direction (both of which can be articulated through the Town Centre First Plan for Gort) and projects which can be delivered subject to availability of resources. Feedback is summarised against a number of themes as follows:

Theme 1: Facilities for Young People

Summary of Feedback:

There is a clear recognition (borne out by a review of the demography data for Gort) that Gort has a young population. A number of issues are experienced by younger people which might be addressed through the Town Centre First Plan including:

- Educational attainment could be enhanced through access to appropriate facilities for afterschool working
- Affordability issues relating to progression through the education system especially to Third Level
- Lack of youth drop in facilities in the area

- With the exception of team sports, limited opportunities for informal recreation and leisure or engagement in a range of other sporting activities
- Lack of creativity and arts facilities or activities which could accommodate requirements of young people
- Evidence of early pregnancy which can have a limiting factor on the ability of young women to progress through education, employment and learning
- From an affordability perspective young people need a range of locally provided extra mural activities
- Public transport creates a barrier to accessing services and opportunities in larger towns or in Galway City; local facilities required for young people

Health and wellbeing support and advice to facilitate better life choices

Potential investment areas within the Town Centre First Plan

Potential to develop a Community Hub or include within a 'Community Hub' facility, which could support:

- After-schools Programme
- Formal and informal learning opportunities
- Arts, creativity programmes, music and drama for young people

Theme 2: Arts and Culture

Summary of Feedback:

There is consistent feedback that arts and culture has an important role to play in the development of Gort as a town. Feedback through the stakeholder engagement process identified the following:

- Arts and culture should be central to the Gort Town Centre First Plan; it has the potential to be a transformative tool and is relevant to all citizens (young and old) and as a means of integrating the new communities to Gort (recognising that Gort has a higher percentage of people born outside Ireland than any other settlement in County Galway)
- There are a number of important arts and cultural people (recognised at National and International levels) associated with the town. They should be central to the development of events and festivals and the promotion of Gort a destination
- There are a number of strong arts organisations in Gort who can work collaboratively with the local authority to deliver its pieces, events and to develop multi-functional arts and cultural spaces
- Gort has a number of professional artists in addition to many involved on a volunteer capacity
- Currently there is a lack of appropriate multi-functional community space to support the development of arts and cultural programmes which have the potential to engage the wider community; it also has the potential to provide a more diverse range of activities for young There is an opportunity to examine

space which could be used by professional artists to support the development of their practice but also to address vacancy and dereliction in the town

There is potential to examine the development of an enhanced annual arts and cultural programme which could include educational programmes and international festival for arts heritage and film

Potential investment areas within the Town Centre First Plan

- Potential investment proposals aligned with the arts and cultural theme include the development of a creative hub and multifunctional arts and culture space
- The development of studio space to support professional artist develop their practice
- Development of an annual arts and cultural programme including education and international events

Development of a number of key events (linked to some of the arts and cultural personalities associated with Gort) to attract visitors

Theme 3: Sports, Recreation and Leisure

Summary of Feedback:

Stakeholder engagement has identified that sports, recreation and leisure should be an important theme/consideration within the Gort TCF Plan. The rationale for this is as follows:

- The town has a young (very young) population in comparison to many other communities across the County. Access to sports, recreation and leisure facilities adds to the attractiveness of the settlement from a family perspective and also to the quality of life experience to these young people
- There needs to be alternatives to traditional team sports
- Indoor and outdoor facilities are required which are accessible and affordable
- Families and older people also require access to casual recreation space (outdoor parks, walks as an example)
- There is limited existing facilities which could be used by sport clubs and informal groups of people; potential to share multi use sports facilities/pitches/3G provision with the community school and the wider community

Recognition that some families/family units/individuals live in the margins of poverty and require access to 'free to use' leisure and recreation facilities; equally for many, public transport is their main means of accessing facilities and services but the current public transport provision acts as a real barrier to accessing sports, recreation and leisure activities in other settlements outside Gort

Potential investment areas within the Town Centre First Plan

- A multi-use/functional indoor sports and leisure hub
- Potential for an additional pitch/3G pitch adjacent to Gort community school used by the school during the school day and by the community in the evening

Provision of outdoor sports recreation and leisure space including a river walk (or walks, a new town park (possibly including a skate park), cycle routes (including bridges where appropriate)

Theme 4: Presentation of Gort

Summary of Feedback

There was consensus from the stakeholders that Gort could be better presented as a more visually appealing settlement/small town. Key issues identified as detracting from its current image are:

- High level of residential and commercial vacancy
- Poor condition of much of the public realm
- Lack of planting/trees in and around the main areas of the town
- Lack of civic/communal/plaza space to support people to come together
- Poor provision of car parking
- Over-dominance of the car, reducing the attractiveness of the town for pedestrians
- Lack of connection with the river

Lack of development of green space within the town boundaries

Potential investment areas within the Town Centre First Plan

- Development of the town public realm; particular in and around the Market Square/Barrick Street
- Introduction of trees and planting schemes
- Create conditions for off street car parking
- Painting scheme for buildings (residential and commercial)
- Introduce initiatives to encourage residential and commercial vacancy
- Introduce initiatives to better manage traffic flow

Theme 5: Heritage

Summary of Feedback

There is recognition that Gort does not use its heritage (build, natural and people) to enhance its image, attractiveness and appeal.

Feedback included:

- The ability to develop heritage buildings (for example the Convent) as multi use community facilities
- Potential to develop heritage trails which link with stories and people associated with Gort
- Potential to open connections with the river

Potential to use the heritage, people and stories of Gort to develop a more coordinated annual programme of events, activities and festivals which provide opportunities for the local community to come together and to attract external visitors. There is a recognition that the heritage of Gort must be treated sympathetically and with respect. Equally, there is a recognition that the current approach probably neglects that heritage and will lead to potential of heritage buildings/assets to become at risk

Potential investment areas within the Town Centre First Plan

Potential projects could include:

- Development of the Convent as a multi-use community space
- Development of a heritage trail complete with interpretation

Development of an annual festival linked to the people, stories and the history/heritage of Gort

Theme 6: Connectivity

Summary of Feedback

Feedback on connectivity related to both connectivity in and around Gort and connectivity for citizens of Gort to services and facilities external to it.

There is consensus that a core strategic approach should be taken to connectivity in and around the town; this would link the requirements for both pedestrians (including cycling) activity long with vehicular connectivity. There is a feeling that the main areas of the town should be made more pedestrian friendly and there should be a network of walkways connecting the town with the river and connecting main areas or facilities within the town. This would support access to services but also to support both active travel and more active lifestyles.

It's also recognised that the public transport network is limiting for people in Gort who depend on it to access employment, training, services and facilities external to Gort.

It is also noted that from a wider perspective, connections to the Galway Athlone Greenway would help to reposition Gort from a tourism perspective.

Potential investment areas within the Town Centre First Plan

Potential investment projects include:

- River walkway
- Heritage trail (incorporating walkways in the town)

Connection to the Galway Athlone Greenway

Theme 7: Tourism

Summary of Feedback

The stakeholders are of the view that Gort could benefit to a greater degree from expenditure by visitors to the County.

Implementation of investment projects in the TCF Plan would have the potential to create reasons for people to visit and stay longer and spend more.

The towns natural assets and history/heritage could /should be used to develop reasons to visit and stay.

The location of Gort in relation to the Galway to Athlone Greenway should also be maximised.

Potential investment areas within the Town Centre First Plan

- Connection to the Galway to Athlone Greenway
- Development of a heritage trail in the town
- Development of a river walk and access to the river for water-based activities

Development of a coordinated annual programme of events and festivals focused on the areas of arts, culture, people and natural assets

Gort 2023 Baseline Analysis (SCOT)

The analysis has been pulled together in the form of a SCOT Analysis (Strengths, Constraints, Opportunities and Threats). The Gort 2023 baseline position is set out in the following SCOT Analysis:

Strengths to be addressed:

- Well located and well connected; Gort is located in the Galway-Limerick/Shannon Development Corridor sitting on the 18 equidistant between Galway and Limerick and 40 minutes' drive time from Shannon Airport
- Gort has a growing population (5.4% growth between the 2016 and 2022 censuses)
 - The architecture of Gort and especially its heritage buildings, sites and spaces; Market Square, Canon Quinn Park, Bridge House sites of Mercy Convent, Iveigh House, the Christ the King Sculpture, Kilmacduagh Monastic Site, Kiltartan Gregory Museum, Thoor Castle Ballylee and Coole Park
 - The Square as a focal point within the settlement
 - Gort has wide streets and footpaths which make it an easy town to navigate from as a pedestrian
 - Strong sense of community with a wide range of community organisations involved in providing facilities, services, activities and experiences for people of Gort and potential visitors to it
 - The fact that Gort is built on a river and people can access the river via a river walk adds to its character
 - There is a wide range of cafes, eateries and hospitality businesses
 - Gort has a young population; significantly younger in the 0-17 age range than the norm across Galway City Council area and a marginally higher proportion of young people than the position nationally (25.4% in Gort v 19.7% across Co Galway)
 - Gort is a service town for circa 20,000 people in a catchment including both Counties Galway and Clare
 - Gort has a diverse population; it is one of the most diverse towns within Galway County Council area and nationally. This brings a strength, energy and cultural diversity which are considered key strengths
 - IDA managed business park in Gort

Constraints to be addressed:

- The presentation of the town does little to make the most of its architecture, heritage and natural assets
- There is a lack of accessible and affordable multi-functional community space to support provision of additional services, activities and experiences
- Whilst Gort has a young population there are barriers to them accessing opportunities (both financial and transport) and therefore not a sufficient range of spaces appropriate to and attractive for young people

- Gort has a higher level of residential vacancy than the average across Galway, the Northern Western Region and Nationally
- Gort has a higher level of commercial property vacancy than the County, Northern and Western Region and Nationally; of the 21 towns assessed for commercial vacancy in County Galway it ranks 10th
- Much of the employment for citizens in Gort is in lower paid manual or semi-skilled sectors such as construction and agriculture which are cyclical
- The current public transport network and timetable is a barrier for people in Gort accessing opportunities, activities and experiences outside the town
- There are a number of events and festivals organised annually; however, this could be developed into a more coordinated annual programme which would promote Gort and attract visitors to it
- Signage (both arrival and directional through the town) is poorly presented and ineffective
- There is a lack of multifunctional space in the community to support a range of activities, services and to support social connectivity
- There is a lack of appropriate, accessible and affordable indoor multifunctional sports and leisure facilities; this is important for the wider community and also specifically for Gort's younger citizens (given that it has a significantly higher 0-17 population than the county)
- Low state of digital readiness; score of 38 out of 100 in the Digital Blueprint Assessment
- Gort has a connection with significant literary, cultural and arts characters (GB Shaw, Yeats, Lady Gregory, Frank McCormick, Joe Cooney and Ciaran Collins) known Nationally and Internationally; it makes little use of these in the development of events or promotion of the town
- The town would benefit from additional sports pitch provision (perhaps 3G, 3/4G which could be used by both the community school and for sports clubs)
- Public realm dated and is in need of improvement
- Presentation of some/may buildings poor and could be enhanced
- Traffic flow puts off people accessing the town
- Parking is poor and acts as a deterrent to using the town
- Gort does not utilise its natural assets (river and green spaces) for community activity and to improve the look and feel of the town

Opportunities to be addressed:

- To develop buildings to provide multi-functional space for the community and in turn reduce the high level of vacancy and dereliction
- To use the river to provide a range of recreation and leisure opportunities including walks and on water activities
- Develop a town park
- Potential to connect Gort to the Galway to Athlone Greenway
- Build the number of visitors to attractions in Gort including Coole Park Estate, Kiltartan Gregory Museum and Thoor Balleylee
- Develop access to the river and green spaces as family friendly community, recreation and leisure space

- Need for development of indoor and outdoor spaces to support community activity and interaction
- Potential to improve the presentation of the public realm and introduce planting and street furniture, which would make it a more attractive town to visit and spend time in
- Opportunity to attract public funding to implement schemes (e.g. RRDF, Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme, TVR, Clar, CCIF)

Threats to be addressed:

- Lack of coordinated leadership and shared vision (the Gort TCF Plan has the potential to address this)
- Poor public transport connections

6. Thematic Analysis

The following matrix establishes the rationale and justification for a series of themes and investment proposals (projects and programmes) which could/should be included in the Gort TCF Plan.

The rationale and justification are based on the principles of the Public Spending Code Appraisal (PSCA) process. Each theme/investment proposal is based on:

- The strategic/policy case
- The socio-economic rationale
- The public need and identification (what the citizens and stakeholders in Gort think)

It is noted that some project proposals are included in more than one theme and others could/should contribute to one or more theme. This will be reflected in the Town Centre Plan.

It is noted that some of the investment options are included against one theme but have the potential to contribute positively to other themes. This will be reflected in the Town Centre Plan.

Theme	Investment Options	Potential to Address TCF Policy Directive	Socio-economic rationale(where available)	Public need and identification
Social Inclusion and Community Health and Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of the Convent building as a multi-purpose remote working,innovation,cultural and community centre Potential for an additional pitch/3G pitch adjacent to Gort community school used by the school during the school day and by the community in the evening Provision of outdoor sports recreation and leisure space including a river walk (or walks, a new town park (possibly including a skate park), cycle routes (including bridges where appropriate) Development of a Town Park After schools' provision Alternative activity and personal development opportunities via a multi-sport facility (not just traditional team/field sports) including a skate park,tennis,basketball 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social, Community and Culture Built Form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 56% of the population aged 20-59;many of these are people with younger and older dependents and require access to spaces and facilities to support their family unit to experience a high quality of life in Gort Higher level of foreign nationals; their younger family members have a range of sports, recreation, leisure, arts and cultural interests not normally met in smaller towns The POBAL Geoprofile identifies one electoral division in Gort(Grove St) as 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 70% of survey respondents identified public spaces and dereliction as their second priority 51% of survey respondents identified walking and cycling as their fifth Feedback from stakeholders engaged via the semi structured engagement process with community based organisations and sports clubs Feedback from BDP facilitated public engagement sessions

	boxing. This may include spaces for arts and creativity or complement such provision at another site/location in Gort		very disadvantaged and two(Ard Guaire/Sycamore Grove and Church St/Garrabeg Rd) as disadvantaged	
Revitalising Culture and the Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential investment proposals aligned with the arts and cultural theme include the development of a creative hub and multifunctional arts and culture space (including an auditorium and performance space) • The development of studio space to support professional artist develop their practice • Integrate public art pieces into the streetscape • Development of an annual arts and cultural programme including education and international events • Development of a number of key events (linked to some of the arts and cultural personalities associated with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social, Community and Culture • Built Form 	56% of the population aged 20-59;many of these are people with younger and older dependents and require access to spaces and facilities to support their family unit to experience a high quality of life in Gort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from stakeholders engaged via the semi structured engagement process with community based arts and cultural organisations • Feedback from BDP facilitated public engagement sessions

	<p>Gort e.g. Lady Gregory and Yeats) to attract visitors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town Hall redevelopment as quality arts and culture space/auditions/performance space 			
Re-imaging Public Spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of the town public realm; particular in and around the Market Square/Barrick Street • Incorporate a public performance space as part of the public realm • Improve access to and quality of Canon Quinn Park • Introduction of trees and planting schemes • Create conditions for off street car parking • Painting scheme for buildings (residential and commercial) • Introduce initiatives to encourage residential and commercial vacancy • Introduce initiatives to better manage traffic flow • Introduction of high quality public art(perhaps as part of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built Form • Land Uses and Economy 	<p>Higher levels of commercial vacancy that the levels for the County, Region or Nationally (Gort is identified as having a commercial vacancy rate of 15.7% versus state average of 11.4%)</p> <p>Higher levels of residential vacancy that the levels for the County, Region or Nationally(At 6.8% it is less than the regional average (10.1%), but higher than the average for the state. Gort by comparison has reduced at a faster rate (-10.2% Gort compared to -7.8% in the County). At an average of 5.6% it</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from BDP facilitated public engagement sessions • Feedback from stakeholders engaged via the semi structured engagement process with community based organisations and clubs • 81% of survey respondents identified addressing vacancy and dereliction as their top priority • 70% of survey respondents identified

	<p>a trail or along with a public walkway)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soft landscaping of the Lady Gregory Roundabout/Swan Sculpture; create a gateway feel 		<p>is still above the state average but much less so than the County and Northern and Western Region averages)</p>	<p>provision of quality public spaces as their top priority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 51% of survey respondents identified supporting commercial development as their number six priority
Reanimating Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of the Convent as a multi-use community space • Develop and adopt a Conservation Management Plan for Calvary Stables and Barracks • Development of a heritage trail complete with interpretation • Development of an annual festival linked to the people, stories and the history/heritage of Gort • Use the original name for Gort (Gort Inse Guaire) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nature and Landscape ▪ Built Form 	<p>Evidenced via stakeholders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from stakeholders engaged via the semi structured engagement process with community based organisations • 70% of survey respondents identified provision of quality public spaces as their top priority

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a Bio-diversity Scheme including cleaning and protection the river and management of invasive species • Develop the Town Hall as a modern Auditorium and Performance space 			
Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the Train station • Improve the Lady Gregory roundabout and swan sculpture • Create active travel options through the development of the Gort River walkway and heritage trails (incorporating walkways in the town) • Connection to the Galway Athlone Greenway(greenway readiness) • Improve connections to Coole Park • Improved interpretative and wayfinding signage (including QR codes and digital approaches) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movement & Connections 	Higher level of foreign nationals than the County and Regional norms(73% of people state that they are Irish citizens compared to 84.2% in the County and 82.7 nationally)more reliance of public transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from stakeholders engaged via the semi structured engagement process with community based organisations • Feedback from BDP facilitated public engagement sessions
Attracting Visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection to the Galway to Athlone Greenway • Development of a heritage trail in the town 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movement & Connections • Land Uses and Economy 	Build on the current visitor footfall to sites such as Coole Park Estate, Kiltartan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from stakeholders engaged via the semi structured

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a river walk and access to the river for water based activities • Development of a coordinated annual programme of events and festivals focused on the area's arts, culture, people and natural assets • Develop walking tours/linked to natural assets and heritage • Development of new cycle routes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature and Landscape 	Gregory Museum and Thoor Balleylee	<p>engagement process with community based organisations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from BDP facilitated public engagement sessions
Repurposing Vacant and Derelict Buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the use and presentation of vacant and derelict buildings • A multi-use/functional indoor sports and leisure hub • Community Hub with drop in youth space • The development of studio space to support professional artist develop their practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built Form 	Higher levels of residential vacancy that the levels for the County, Region or Nationally(At 6.8% it is less than the regional average (10.1%), but higher than the average for the state. Gort by comparison has reduced at a faster rate (-10.2% Gort compared to -7.8% in the County). At an average of 5.6% it is still above the state average but much less	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from stakeholders engaged via the semi structured engagement process with community based organisations • Feedback from BDP facilitated public engagement sessions

			so than the County and Northern and Western Region averages)	
Vibrant Local Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement Gort SMART Town • Building frontage improvement scheme • Development of the Convent as a multi-functional hub including remote working space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land Use and Economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within the six Small Areas of Gort that are contained within the plan boundary, the level of male unemployment varies between 10% and 29% • The POBAL Geoprofile identifies one electoral division in Gort(Grove St) as very disadvantaged and two(Ard Guaire/Sycamore Grove and Church St/Garrabeg Rd) as disadvantaged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from stakeholders engaged via the semi structured engagement process with community based organisations • Feedback from BDP facilitated public engagement sessions
Sustainable Urban Living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town Park and skate park • Introduce initiatives to encourage residential and commercial vacancy • Potential development of a number of sites including the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land Use and Economy 	56% of the population aged 20-59;many of these are people with younger and older dependents and require access to spaces and facilities to support their	Feedback from BDP facilitated public engagement sessions

	GCC site off Courtneys Lane, land beside the Station and the Town Centre backlands		family unit to experience a high quality of life in Gort	
Natural environment and Biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of outdoor sports recreation and leisure space including a river walk (or walks, a new town park (possibly including a skate park), cycle routes (including bridges where appropriate) Improve access to and quality of Canon Quinn Park Develop a Bio-diversity Scheme including cleaning and protection the river and management of invasive species Enhanced and extended Gort River walkway Heritage trail (incorporating walkways in the town) Development of a river walk and access to the river for water based activities Develop walking tours/linked to natural assets and heritage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nature and Landscape 	Evidenced stakeholders via	Feedback from stakeholders engaged via the semi structured engagement process with community based organisations

