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Monksland

Town Centre First Plan: Urban Design Analysis & Appraisal



Comhairle Contae
Ros Comáin
Roscommon
County Council



STUDIO MYCO

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01 Introduction

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Overview of this Study

Monksland has a strong life sciences industrial base and significant mixed-use development potential as part of the wider Athlone regional growth centre, which should be directed towards consolidating the central area as an active, accessible and attractive place for people to live, work, and be at leisure.

Roscommon County Council appointed Studio Myco to deliver an urban design analysis and appraisal for Monksland, in accordance with the Town Centre First Policy.

A range of information, documentation and surveys have already been compiled into a Town Centre Health Check, which forms the basis of the Town Centre First Plan analysis. This study synthesises and complements that information with a focus on the urban design analysis required as an intrinsic part of the Town Centre First Plan process.

This report is structured as follows:

The Monksland Story: An overview of Monksland's context and its heritage.

Engagement Insights: A summary of the key insights emerging from community surveys undertaken by Roscommon County Council.

Urban Design Analysis: Using the guidance and framework set by the Town Centre First Policy, this chapter assesses the key issues and opportunities of the urban environment of Monksland under the five themes of:

- Movement & Connections
- Nature, Landscape & Public Realm
- Land Uses & Economy
- Social, Community & Culture
- Built Form

Monksland Reimagined: Based on the issues and opportunities identified, proposals for key projects and supporting actions are set out, with the aim of creating a more viable, vibrant and attractive place for residents, businesses and visitors. Potential funding sources and recommended next steps are identified to help set the projects on the path to implementation.



Town Centre First Policy Context

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.

Town Centre First represents a new approach to the development of our towns where local communities and local businesses can be central to reimagining their own towns and planning their own futures. The policy recognises that each town is unique and thus requires unique solutions to address the challenges and opportunities they face. It acknowledges that a “one size fits all” approach will not deliver the outcomes we all want for our towns.

The policy sets out 4 key elements for the development of the Town Centre First Plan:

- 1. Collaboration and Communication** - Identifying and engaging key stakeholders, from statutory bodies to local interest groups and citizens, to understand local needs and aspirations.
- 2. Understanding the Place** - Understand the context of the town and its heritage - including physical, demographic, social, economic, political, topographical and built environment, architectural data, along with historical and cultural stories and traditions.
- 3. Defining the Place** - Develop clear opportunity areas from the issues identified through the research and engagement that form the bedrock of an inspiring vision and deliverable goals with short, medium and long term interventions. These will be co-designed with stakeholders to build buy-in and civic ownership of the vision and proposed interventions.
- 4. Enabling the Place** - Identify opportunities for quick-wins and longer term implementation, management and monitoring, linking back to key strategic priorities, to ensure the plan is actionable, well supported and that social, economic and environmental benefits to the town and wider region are maximised.

The focus of this study is within Stage 2 Understanding the Place, specifically an urban design analysis, to provide a basis for high level recommendations for Defining and Enabling the Place.

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 and 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.

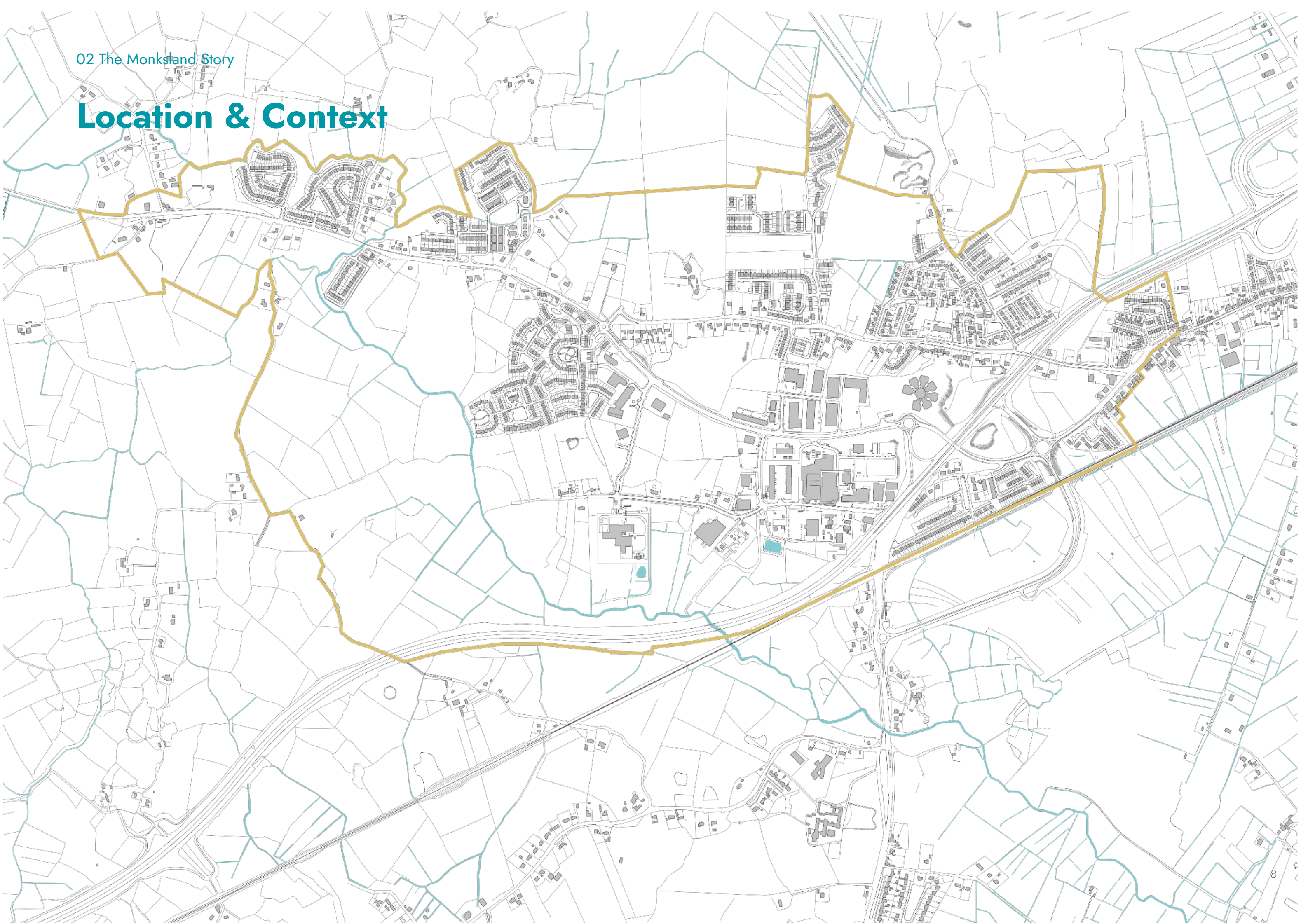
02 The Monksland Story

- 2.1 Location & Context
- 2.2 Character & History
- 2.3 Urban Morphology
- 2.4 Natural Heritage
- 2.5 Regeneration Context

Historical map of Athlone/Monksland
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Location & Context



Location & Context

The Monksland/Bealnamulla (Athlone West) area is situated west of the River Shannon, in the south of County Roscommon. It is bordered by the development boundary of the wider settlement area of Athlone in County Westmeath. The Monksland / Bealnamulla area has developed as a strong industrial base and a key employment centre in County Roscommon. In addition, significant levels of new residential development occurred in the early 2000's.

The area is notable as being one of the few urban locations in County Roscommon to record a marked increase in population in the 2016 census. Between 2016 and 2022, the population of Monksland increased by 5.2% or 248 people, to a population of just under 5,000 people. Athlone West Rural ED, which encompasses Monksland, is considered marginally below average (-7.44) in terms of relative deprivation, more deprived than the County at -1.97 (Pobal 2022).

The area effectively functions as part of the larger urban area of Athlone, but has a range of facilities and services which help sustain the local population (though potential population growth will outstrip current infrastructure). Monksland is located to the immediate north of the M6 Motorway, which provides good transport connectivity to Galway and Dublin, and at the N6 National Primary Route between Athlone and Boyle. While it is two miles from Athlone, for which it functions as a dormitory/commuter hub, the adjacent motorway creates a physical barrier and provides a tangible edge to Monksland. Monksland is served by Bus Éireann town services and Locallink services to destinations including Moate, Roscrea, Shannonbridge, Pollagh and Kilcormac. The nearest train station is Athlone, which is serviced by 2 no. rail services including: Dublin Heuston to / from Galway and Dublin Heuston to / from Westport and Ballina.

The wider Athlone area has been designated as a Regional Growth Centre in Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework (NPF) and the Roscommon County Development Plan 2022-2028. This means that it has a high level of self-sustaining employment and services that act as regional economic drivers and it plays a significant role for a wide catchment area.



Character & History

Image Source: Westmeath Independent
'The Three Monks' is a wood carving created by Richie Clarke, commissioned by Monksland Town Team

Though its name goes back to 1150, the development of Monksland as an urban centre is relatively recent. The character of the area was predominantly rural, with some limited industrial activity, for most of the 20th century. Despite the motorway forming a physical boundary, Monksland now functions as part of the wider Athlone area. This Regional Growth Centre has a high level of employment and services that act as regional economic drivers and play a significant role for a wide catchment area.

Character & History

12th Century - Land of the Monks

Monksland (*Fearann na Manach*) is the name given to land granted in c.1150 by Turlough O'Connor, King of Connacht, to the Monks of Cluny. The Monks were based at Excise Street, Athlone and due to the strategic importance of the River Shannon as a crossing point, part of their land was required to build Athlone Castle. The main Priory, albeit reduced in size, remained in Excise Street. It is likely that Cloonakilla (*Cluain na Cilla* 'Church Meadow') in Bealnamulla was the location of the Monks' chapel in this area.

The Abbey of Cluny, in Burgundy, France, claimed to be the largest church in Christendom until St. Peter's in Rome was built centuries later. Athlone was the site of the only Cluniac Priory in Ireland. These monks predated the Cistercians who soon were to become widespread in Ireland and the rest of Europe. The Cluny Priory in Athlone was to become one of the richest monasteries in Connacht, with fifteen rectories in South Roscommon assigned to it. Other monasteries nearby include Clonown, Drum and the University City of Clonmacnois dating from 545 (pictured to the right).

17th Century - Siege of Athlone

The Monksland/Bealnamulla area is linked to the famous Siege of Athlone in 1691. In 1690 the town was attacked by a Williamite force estimated at 10,000 men but Athlone was staunchly defended by the Governor of Athlone, Col Richard Grace who refused to surrender.

However, the Williamites returned in June 1691 under the command of a Dutch general, Godard van Reede, baron de Ginkel, with a full-strength Williamite army of some 25,000 men. In preparation for this second siege the French general the Marquis de St. Ruth had mustered 20,000 men at Ballinasloe.



Note: the history of Monksland presented here is sourced partly from heritage boards located around the town and surrounding areas, an initiative of the Monksland Town Team and Roscommon County Council. Images from heritageireland.ie

Character & History

By June 20th two Jacobite regiments had been sent to reinforce the garrison at Athlone while the remaining eight regiments were camped on the high ground in Monksland in view, but out of range, of the Williamite army. St Ruth is said to have enjoyed a night of revelry in a house, later known as “St. Ruth’s Castle” nearby.

Once Athlone was captured the next theatre of war was at Aughim near Ballinasloe, where in what was one of the bloodiest battles in Irish history the brave Marquis de St Ruth was killed.

18th Century - Horse Racing in Monksland

Thanks to the research of Dr Harman Murtagh the history of horseracing in Georgian Athlone has been very well documented. One of the earliest recorded events took place in Monksland in August 1731 when a four-day racing festival was held. Two races, in several heats, were held each day on the flat. The distances varied from two to four miles and the spectators watched from the higher ground. It was a week of general merriment with boat trips and balls held in the evenings. On the Friday there was a ten-mile race for “running footmen” with a silver watch for the winner. In 1731 the watch was won by Loughlin Prassagh, a servant in the employment of Lord Netterville.

Racing was again held at Monksland in 1732 and an added attraction that year was a £20 plate presented on behalf of the Corporation of Athlone by Councillor William Harwood. By 1733 the venue for racing locally was changed to the Leinster side of Athlone, but it seems that local races may have continued at Monksland as Faulkner’s Dublin Journal of 11 July 1776 reported that the races at Monksland were held with the usual “good ordinances and public breakfasts each day and balls by night”. There were races held here for the following two years – in 1777 we are told the £100 purse attracted a field of ten for the main event. However, racing in Monksland seems to have lapsed shortly after that.



Note: the history of Monksland presented here is sourced from an article titled ‘Athlone Miscellany’ by Gearoid O’Brien, part of the ‘Streetwise Athlone’ collection published in the Westmeath Independent. Images from The National Library of Ireland on the Commons.

Character & History

20th & 21st Centuries - Growth & Development

The development of Monksland as an urban centre is relatively recent. The character of the area was predominantly rural, with some limited industrial activity, for most of the twentieth century.

A number of housing estates – Cedarwood, Beechlawn and Cushla – were constructed from the 1970's onwards, to the north of the present-day geographical centre. This residential development was accompanied by some local retail and community services – small-scale retail and community facilities (including a soccer pitch and a playground). A number of large pharmaceutical factories were established to the south during the 1990's, close to an existing bacon and meat processing factory (Oliver Carty Pork & Bacon).

This industrial development was accompanied by warehouse and retail development, centred along the R362, an important and busy arterial route which connects the rural hinterland of South County Roscommon to the M6 Motorway interchange and to Athlone Town.

The first decades of the twenty-first century saw the development of a new residential community on the west side of Monksland (River Village and Corran Riada), together with the construction of a large Supervalu supermarket and associated retail, and the Athlone Springs Hotel complex. A primary care medical centre and associated local retail (such as a pharmacy, coffee shop, and hairdresser) was also constructed on the north side of the R362.

These two clusters of retail and commercial developments on either side of the R362 essentially function as the town centre for Monksland, though they are separated by the busy arterial route.



Historical map of Athlone/Monksland
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Urban Morphology



1888

Historical maps and surveys from the 19th century show very sparse population and building density in the Monksland area, reflecting its rural character at the time. However, the transport infrastructure has already begun to form a familiar pattern, including the Great Western Railway cutting across the southeastern corner of the map, Bealnamulla Road running across east-west on the northern side, and another road running east-west between the two.

Today

The dramatic difference in building density and form reflects the relatively recent development of Monksland as an urban centre, with largely suburban residential development to the west, north and south-east. The central area of the town comprises predominantly industrial, business and retail development, with large building footprints. The M6/N6 and R362 arterial routes and associated traffic roundabouts reflect an urban grain that prioritises motor vehicles and regional connectivity rather than local and pedestrian connections.

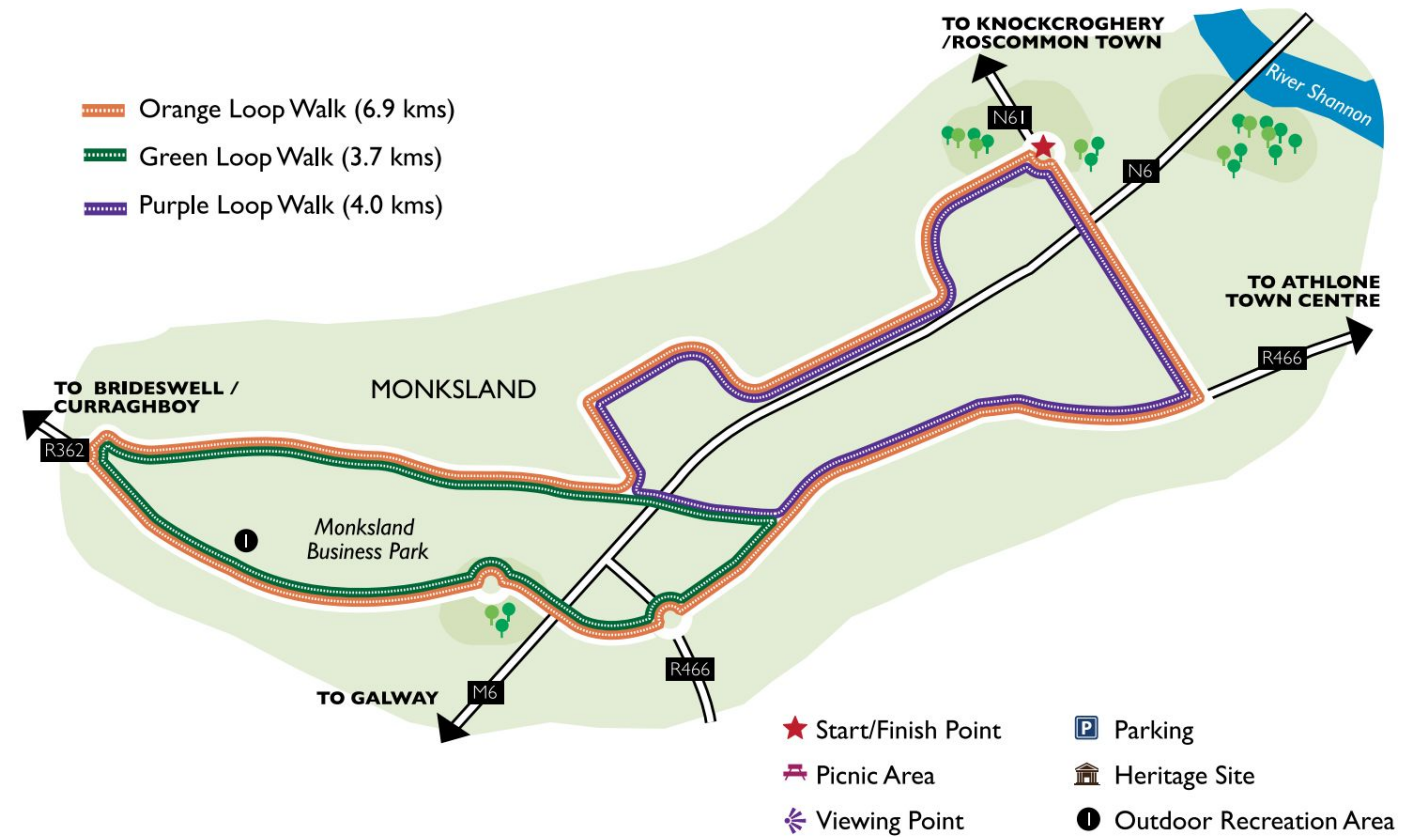
Natural Heritage

As set out in the Roscommon County Development Plan 2022-2028, Monksland is situated in **The Lower Lough Ree and Athlone Environs** character area. The area is of **Very High Value** reflecting the presence of the River Shannon corridor, including Lough Ree (north of Monksland), which is a Natura 2000 designated area (**Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC)**). These are part of a European-wide network of sites that are given legal protection for their habitats and species.

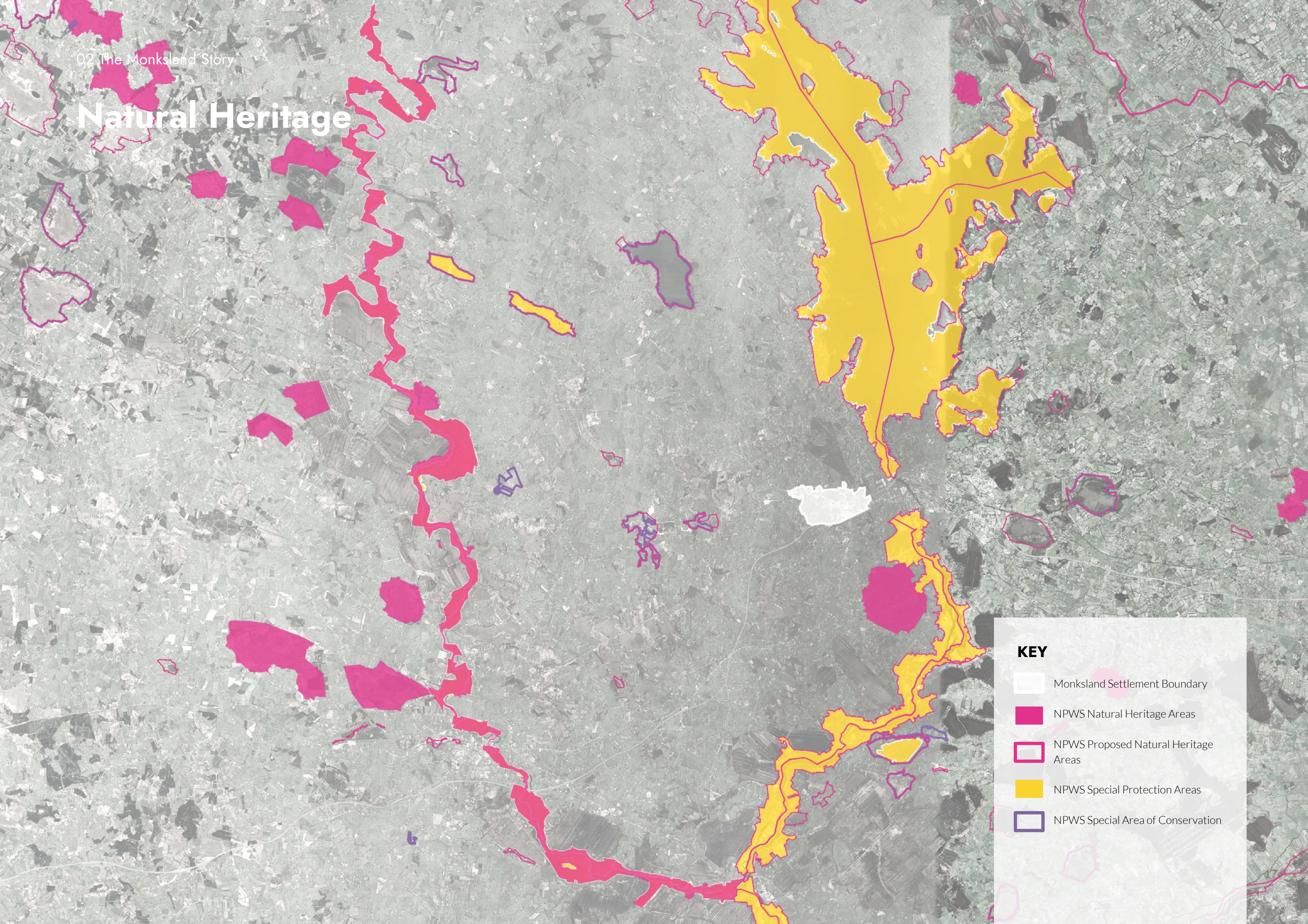
Key natural heritage features within the wider area include the **River Shannon**, which is designated in part as the Middle Shannon Callows SPA (south of Athlone town core); local waterways such as the **Athlone Canal, River AI and the Cross River**; parklands including **Wansboro Field and Burgess Park**; and a rich hinterland encompassing **Lough Ree / Hodson Bay** and natural peatlands such as Crosswood Bog SAC.

As the Athlone / Monksland area continues to grow, it will be crucial to ensure the protection and enhancement of this natural heritage through appropriate land use policies and compact growth. Natural heritage assets not only enrich biodiversity but also support a wide range of natural systems, and provide many benefits for people and settlements. Nature lovers can enjoy the wide variety of bird life on the local wetlands, including large flocks of Whooper Swans that arrive from Iceland to spend the Winter foraging on the banks of Lough Ree and Lough Funshinagh. Other species include the Reed Warbler, Stonechat, Long Tailed Tit, Curlew, Godwit and Lapwing. The local woodlands and wetlands also boast a wide variety of wild animal life including rabbits, foxes, badgers, otters and pine martens. Hedgerow animals like hedgehogs and shrews are also in abundance.

The **Monksland Way** is one of a series of trails within the county identified by Roscommon County Council (see map opposite). The trail around Monksland generally follows busy arterial roads, and is bisected by the N6 at various points. Part of this trail includes the **Cushla Greenway** walking route, which connects the Cushla residential area in the north east of Monksland to Ganlys hardware shop to the east. This route is potentially part of a larger plan to link into Athlone town to the east and to Bealnamulla to the west as part of the Galway to Athlone Castle National Cycleway Project.



Natural Heritage



KEY

-  Monksland Settlement Boundary
-  NPWS Natural Heritage Areas
-  NPWS Proposed Natural Heritage Areas
-  NPWS Special Protection Areas
-  NPWS Special Area of Conservation

Regeneration Context

The Monksland / Bealnamulla (Athlone West) area of County Roscommon functions as part of the wider Athlone area, with the town of Athlone within Westmeath County Council. Athlone has been designated as a **Regional Growth Centre** in Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework (NPF). In accordance with the requirements of the NPF and the respective Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) prepared by the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly and the Northern and Western Regional Assembly, a **Joint Urban Area Plan for Athlone** is being prepared collaboratively by the two constituent Local Authorities – Westmeath County Council and Roscommon County Council. The plan making process will review and build on the progress made under the Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020 and Monksland/Bealnamulla Local Area Plan 2016-2022, and in collaboration with local communities and individuals, will set a direction and vision for the future growth of the wider Athlone area.

Monksland has an active Town Team that includes business owners, individuals and residents working collaboratively with local government to improve the town. Examples of recent projects delivered by the **Monksland Town Team** include a series of Heritage Boards highlighting the built, cultural and natural heritage of the area, and ‘The Three Monks’, a wood carving created by Richie Clarke, and funded by local company Jazz Pharmaceuticals. The sculpture brings new life to a cedar tree which was cut down, while animating the surrounding area and highlighting the interesting origins of the name ‘ Monksland’. Other recent / planned regeneration initiatives in Monksland include:

	Project	Status
1	Monksland Innovation Hub: Refurbish an existing disused building into a Life Sciences Innovation Hub adjacent to the M6 Motorway/N6 Primary National Route to provide a co-working space, training facilities and a soft landing space for companies starting out in this recognised Life Sciences nucleus.	Complete
2	Monksland Park: Creation of a community park, incorporating multi-use, multi-generational area, tiered seating, performance area, walking trails, biodiversity area, and skatepark. Public art is also being commissioned here.	Complete (Public art planned)
3	Monksland Community Facilities: Design of a new community hub in the heart of the community next to the new public park, potentially including performance space, café, multi-use studios and meeting rooms.	Design Stage
4	Traffic management scheme to the western edge of Monksland.	In Progress



Regeneration Context

The vision for Monksland has already been clearly set out by the community, Town Team and key stakeholders through strategic and planning policy processes, including the 2024-2028 Community and Economic Plan for Monksland, the Roscommon County Development Plan 2022-2028, the Local Community and Economic Plan for the County, and the emerging Joint Urban Area Plan for Athlone.

Through the **Monksland Community and Economic Plan 2024-2028** Monksland’s business, community and civic stakeholders have collectively developed and agreed a vision statement and supporting outcome statements, which establish the type of settlement and community that is envisaged over the medium to long term.

The vision is highlighted opposite and the supporting outcome statements are:

- Strong communities united and working towards a shared vision
- A culturally diverse community where difference is respected and celebrated
- A settlement which people come to not only for work....but also for services, entertainment and experiences
- Recognised as a great place for businesses to start, grow and innovate
- A connected community via active travel routes and effective public transport
- Provides a great start to life for its youngest citizens and supports them to develop in a safe, secure and encouraging community
- A town with high quality civic and community spaces and facilities
- Monksland has a high quality central focal point for the Town and its people; multi-functional outdoor and indoor spaces
- Arts, culture, festivals, events and diversity define and represent Monksland
- Individuals and families have access to quality outdoor and indoor recreational, sports, arts, civic and social spaces
- There is a strong sense of pride in place and community which people use their skills and time to deliver for Monksland

To help deliver this vision, an action plan is then set out, structured around four themes (Theme 1: Community Identity, Theme 2: Business and Innovation, Theme 3: Sports and recreation, Theme 4: Culture, Art, Music and Dance). These aspirations, themes and actions have helped shape the proposals within this report, ensuring that the vision and priorities of local stakeholders are reflected and that there is a coordinated approach.

“Monksland: An inclusive community and town with a strong economy and identity... where people are proud to be from, contribute to, invest in and want to visit or move to.”

Monksland Community and Economic Plan 2024-2028 Vision

The **Roscommon County Development Plan for the 2022-2028** timeframe establishes the strategic vision for the County and a number of strategic aims for future development, with the following seven of particular significance to Monksland:

- Direct a significant proportion of the County’s assigned population growth to the West area of Athlone and to Roscommon town thereby enabling the creation of a critical mass in those areas for the provision of increased services, facilities, and employment opportunities
- Promote the highest quality living environment possible, in both urban and rural areas, for all inhabitants of County Roscommon to enjoy
- Promote the regeneration and renewal of towns and villages throughout County Roscommon and create healthy place-making by improving the attractiveness, quality, design, viability and vibrancy of towns and villages. This will be achieved in part through a focus on the redevelopment/development of/infill/brownfield lands within the existing built settlement footprints, in accordance with the principle of compact growth as set out in the National Planning Framework
- Promote the development of the town and villages throughout County Roscommon to their full economic and social potential in order to support and enhance both the resident/hinterland community and economic and employment base and to enable towns and villages to become self-sustaining, sustainable and balanced
- Develop and promote the towns and villages of the county as attractive residential alternatives to single dwellings in the open countryside
- Foster the creation of an attractive and competitive business environment by supporting economic development, job creation, tourism and prosperity for all
- Ensure that the county is served by adequate community facilities and amenities which add to the quality of life of residents of the county

The analysis and proposals within this study seek to support delivery on these aims.

03 Engagement Insights

- 3.1** Overview
- 3.2** Movement & Connections
- 3.3** Nature, Landscape & Public Realm
- 3.4** Land Uses & Economy
- 3.5** Social Community & Culture
- 3.6** Built Form

Overview

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. The Policy recognises that successful places will:

- Optimise connectivity and accessibility to promote sustainable mobility.
- Manage traffic to reduce the impact of private vehicles on public spaces and living environments.
- Enhance public spaces to create attractive, accessible streets for all, including those with disabilities.
- Encourage a mix of uses to generate activity, supporting both daytime and nighttime economies.
- Promote diverse housing options and opportunities for rightsizing over time.
- Explore climate action opportunities in urban development.
- Embrace digital transformation and new ways of working post-pandemic.
- Maximise the potential of cultural and heritage assets.
- Refurbish or repurpose vacant and derelict buildings for reuse.

The Policy also outlines **five key themes**, or assessment criteria, for exploration during the development of a Town Centre First Plan to better understand the challenges facing the town, and the subsequent opportunities for change. The themes and a brief description of each is provided opposite.

The following pages summarise the key needs and aspirations of the local community in Monksland, gathered through surveys conducted online and on the streets within the town in late 2024, structured into the five themes.



Movement and Connections

The accessibility of the town and ease of movement to, from and within the town centre, including the impact of traffic and parking provision on the pedestrian experience.



Nature, Landscape and Public Realm

The quality and extent of public spaces and street furniture within the town centre, including green infrastructure, landscaping and green spaces for people and nature.



Land Uses and Economy

The type and level of activity within the town centre, including the mix of uses, variety of shops/services and levels of vacancy/dereliction.



Social, Community and Culture

How the town celebrates its unique identity and caters to both the local community and visitors through facilities, attractions and events.



Built Form

The quality of streetscapes, buildings and features that contribute to the unique identity and character of the town centre.



Movement and Connections

Assessment Criteria:

The accessibility of the town and ease of movement to, from and within the town centre, including the impact of traffic and parking provision on the pedestrian experience.

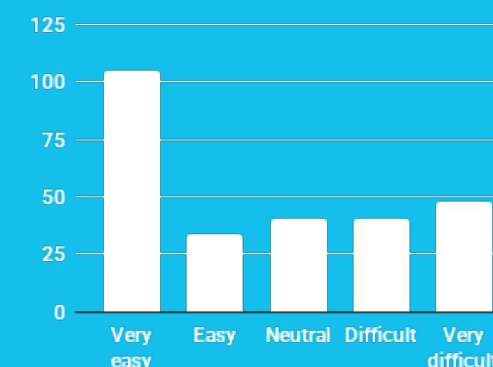
Engagement Insights Summary:

- **Travel modes:** Most people (81%) travelled to the town centre by private car, followed by walking (9%), public transport (4%) and cycling (2%).
- **Parking:** Parking is not a key issue, with most respondents (37%) agreeing that parking is readily available and in good locations (and another 35% were neutral) and parked cars were not generally felt to screen out shopfronts. . There were mixed views on whether parked cars impede walking (with 22% disagreeing, 21% neutral, and 19% agreeing) perhaps reflecting the nature of large surface parking lots, which can be convenient for some but also create a poor pedestrian environment.
- **Last mile:** After parking, 94% of respondents who drive get to their destination on foot, and less than 2% by bike.
- **Connectivity:** There were mixed views on whether it is easy to reach the centre of the town from the neighbourhoods (26% agree, 20% disagree).
- **Shortcuts:** 49% of people take a route for ease rather than a structured pathway (e.g. a short cut).
- **Footpaths:** 58% of respondents agree the footpaths are maintained, e.g. suitable for buggies/ wheelchairs/mobility scooters.
- **Accessibility:** According to respondents, the easiest way to get around Monksland is by car, followed by on foot. It is more difficult for those using a wheelchair, mobility scooter or pram/buggy, or with other mobility impairments.

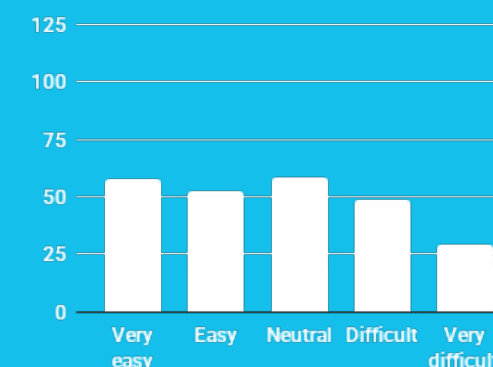
Accessibility & Inclusivity

How easy is it to get around Monksland?

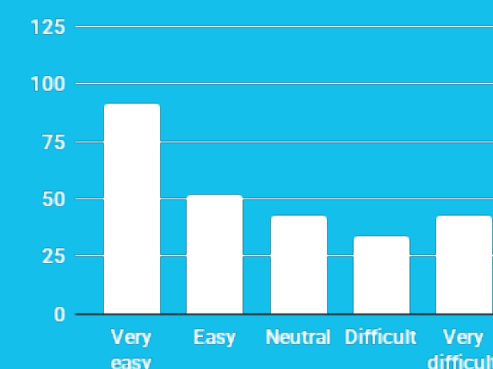
By Car:



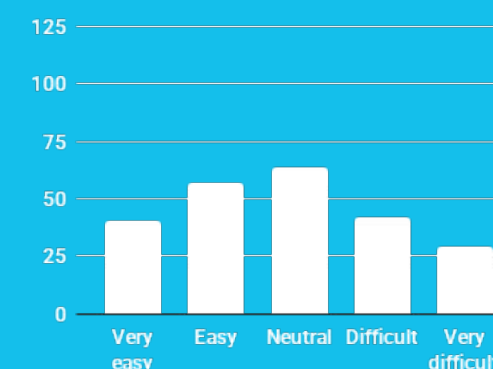
By Bike:



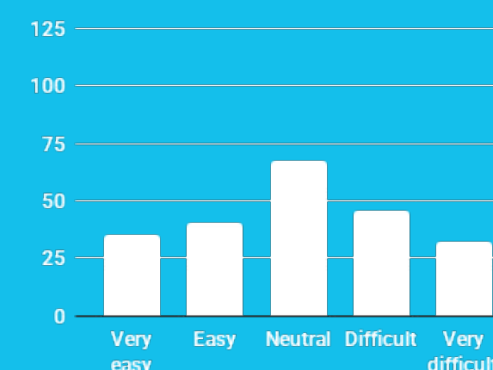
On Foot:



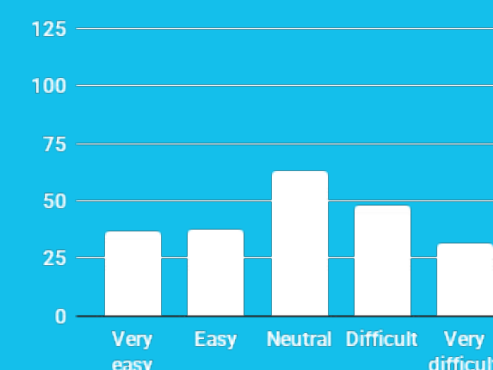
Wheeling a pram/buggy:



Wheelchair/mobility scooter user:



Other mobility impaired user:





Nature, Landscape and Public Realm

Assessment Criteria:

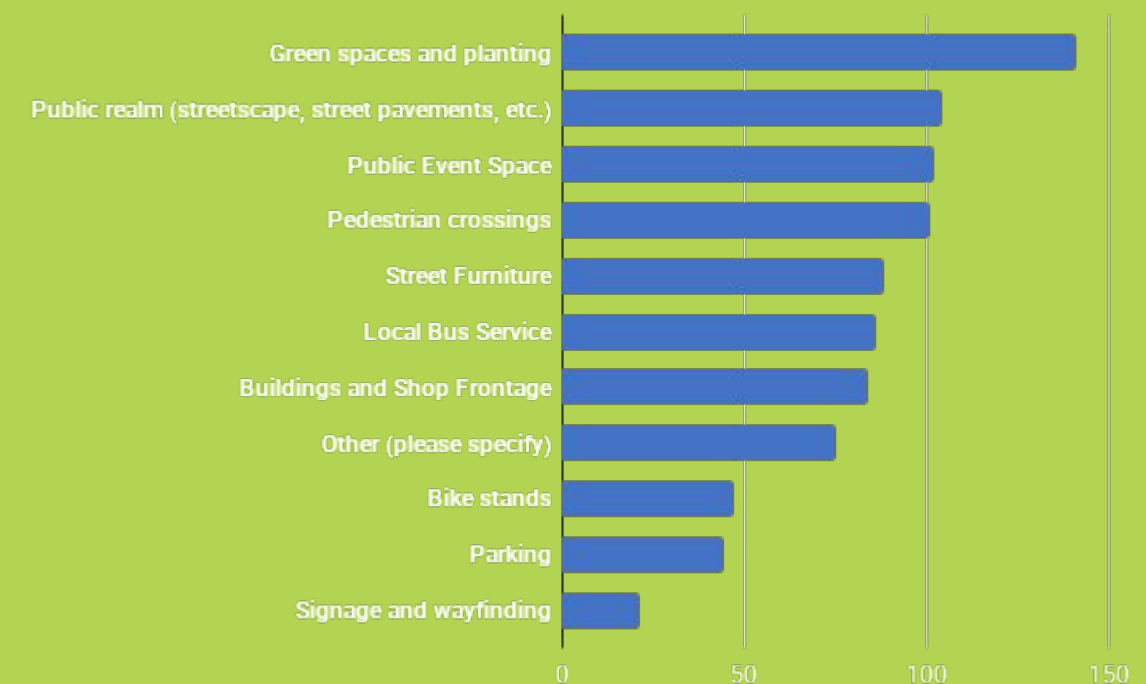
The quality and extent of public spaces and street furniture within the town centre, including green infrastructure, landscaping and green spaces for people and nature.

Engagement Insights Summary:

- **Public Green Spaces:** The majority of respondents (69%) think that Monksland is inadequately served by Public Green Spaces (parklets/parks/walks/places to sit). Green spaces and planting is the most popular way to improve the way Monksland functions.
- **Condition of Green Spaces:** 26% of respondents strongly disagree that green spaces are in good condition, another 20% disagree, and 26% neither agree nor disagree.
- **Public Grey Spaces:** 66% of people feel that Monksland is inadequately served by Public 'Grey' Spaces (performance/ community spaces).
- **Seating:** The majority disagree that there is sufficient public seating for people to rest/relax/socialise with others (41% strongly disagree and 28% disagree, while only 6% agree and 6% strongly agree).
- **Signage:** There was mixed sentiment about the levels of signage, with 36% neither agreeing nor disagreeing that it is sufficient, 20% disagreeing and 17% agreeing.
- **Noise:** Similarly, noise levels were a relatively neutral issue, with 36% neither agreeing or disagreeing that the town is noisy, a further 21% disagreeing and 18% strongly disagreeing.
- **Climate Action:** The most popular climate actions were increased public transport services, charging points and retrofitting of buildings.

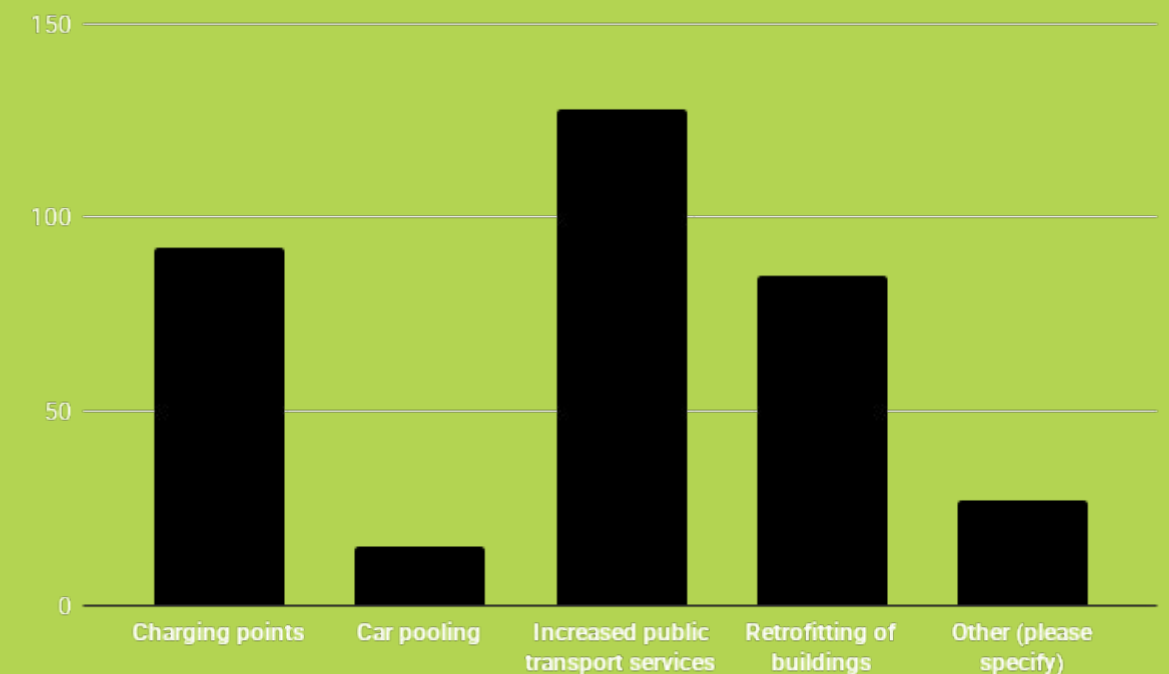
Improving the Public Realm

What would improve the way Monksland functions?



Climate Action

How can Monksland help to combat climate change and adapt to a changing climate?





The type and level of activity within the town centre, including the mix of uses, variety of shops/services and levels of vacancy/dereliction.

- **Youth Services:** The majority of respondents (63%) think Monksland is inadequately served by Youth Services (schools, other educational facilities, sports facilities, other recreational facilities).
- **Family Facilities:** 75% of people surveyed said that Monksland is inadequately served by Family Facilities (schools, childcare, community meeting places, dining out, playgrounds, public toilets/baby changing).
- **Older Persons Facilities:** The vast majority (71%) also felt that Monksland is inadequately served by Older Persons Facilities (easily accessible meeting places, public seating indoor and outdoor, community meeting places).
- **Shopping and Retail:** 76% of respondents think that Monksland is inadequately served by Shopping and Retail (supermarkets, butchers, chemist, hairdressers).
- **Improvements as a place to live and work:** The most popular suggestion for improvements to Monksland as a place to live and work was a food market (indoor/outdoor), followed by more leisure and sports facilities, more cafes, and more green spaces and planting. A public event space, public realm improvements, more frequent local bus service, and more supermarkets and shops were also popular ideas.
- **Addressing dereliction and vacancy** was seen as fairly important.

What would improve Monksland as a place to live and work?





How the town celebrates its unique identity and caters to both the local community and visitors through facilities, attractions and events.

- **Reason for Visiting:** Aside from living in the town (83%), the most common reason for visiting is shopping (18%), followed by services (9%) and work (8%).
- **Attraction:** Only 6% of respondents travelled more than 10km to get there. People tend to visit frequently for a short time (most commonly an hour or less) with 83% of people visiting Monksland every day, and another 11% 2 to 3 times per week.
- **Sense of Safety and Security:** Most people feel either neutral (42%) or disagree (22%) that streets are safe.
- **Friendliness:** 32% of respondents disagree that people are friendly, while a further 21% strongly disagree, and 24% are neutral.
- **Youth Facilities and Services:** Most people (54%) feel there are inadequate free spaces for young people to hang out, with a further 34% saying these are non-existent. Similarly, paid activities for youth (youth clubs/activities that are fee based) are seen by the majority (50%) as inadequate, though 22% feel these are somewhat adequate. Overall, the level of youth services in the town is seen as inadequate (48%) or non-existent (21%). The most common places where young people are seen congregating is in the playground, park, and outside shops.

Where do you see young people congregating?





Assessment Criteria:

The quality of streetscapes, buildings and features that contribute to the unique identity and character of the town centre.

Engagement Insights Summary:

- **Building Design:** Most people were neutral or agree somewhat that buildings are well designed.
- **Streetscape:** Most respondents agree that streets are wide enough to be easily navigated by all users, and are clean and well-kept.
- **Neighbourhoods:** Overall sentiment about whether residential neighbourhoods are well planned and designed was somewhat negative, highlighting the need for future neighbourhoods to have an appropriate density, mix of uses and typologies, high quality design, and good connectivity to amenities and green spaces.
- **Most common favourite places** in Monksland include the Supervalu, Cushla Walk, Savoury Fare, Athlone Springs Hotel, playground, football pitch, gym, The Mill Bar and Kelly's Cafe. Top reasons for selecting these places include being close to shopping and the centre of activity (27%), and spaces with necessary amenities nearby (24%).
- **Top suggestions for places that could be improved** include parks, playgrounds, more choice of supermarkets and shops, more sheltered bus stops, improved roads, footpaths, cycle routes and cycle parking, traffic calming, more lighting and bins, move/improve bottle bank, more places to sit, meet and relax, and more places for children to enjoy. The top reasons for selecting these are that places are dirty and unkempt, poorly designed, there is nowhere to sit, and too much traffic.

Places to Celebrate & Improve

Name your 3 favourite places in Monksland:



Name up to 3 places that could be improved:



04 Urban Design Analysis

- 4.1** Overview
- 4.2** Movement & Connections
- 4.3** Nature, Landscape & Public Realm
- 4.4** Land Uses & Economy
- 4.5** Social Community & Culture
- 4.6** Built Form
- 4.7** Urban Design Analysis Summary

Overview

Building on the insights gathered through community engagement, further urban design analysis was conducted through site walks, observations, and desktop research. The following pages explore the key issues and opportunities facing Monksland town centre in further detail, using the five assessment criteria set out below. Each assessment includes a summary of key findings and accompanying site observation photos, which should be read in conjunction with the analysis map on the following page.



Movement & Connections

The accessibility of the town and ease of movement to, from and within the town centre, including the impact of traffic and parking provision on the pedestrian experience.



Nature, Landscape & Public Realm

The quality and extent of public spaces and street furniture within the town centre, including green infrastructure, landscaping and green spaces for people and nature.



Land Uses & Economy

The type and level of activity within the town centre, including the mix of uses, variety of shops/services and levels of vacancy/dereliction.



Social, Community & Culture

How the town celebrates its unique identity and caters to both the local community and visitors through facilities, attractions and events.



Built Form

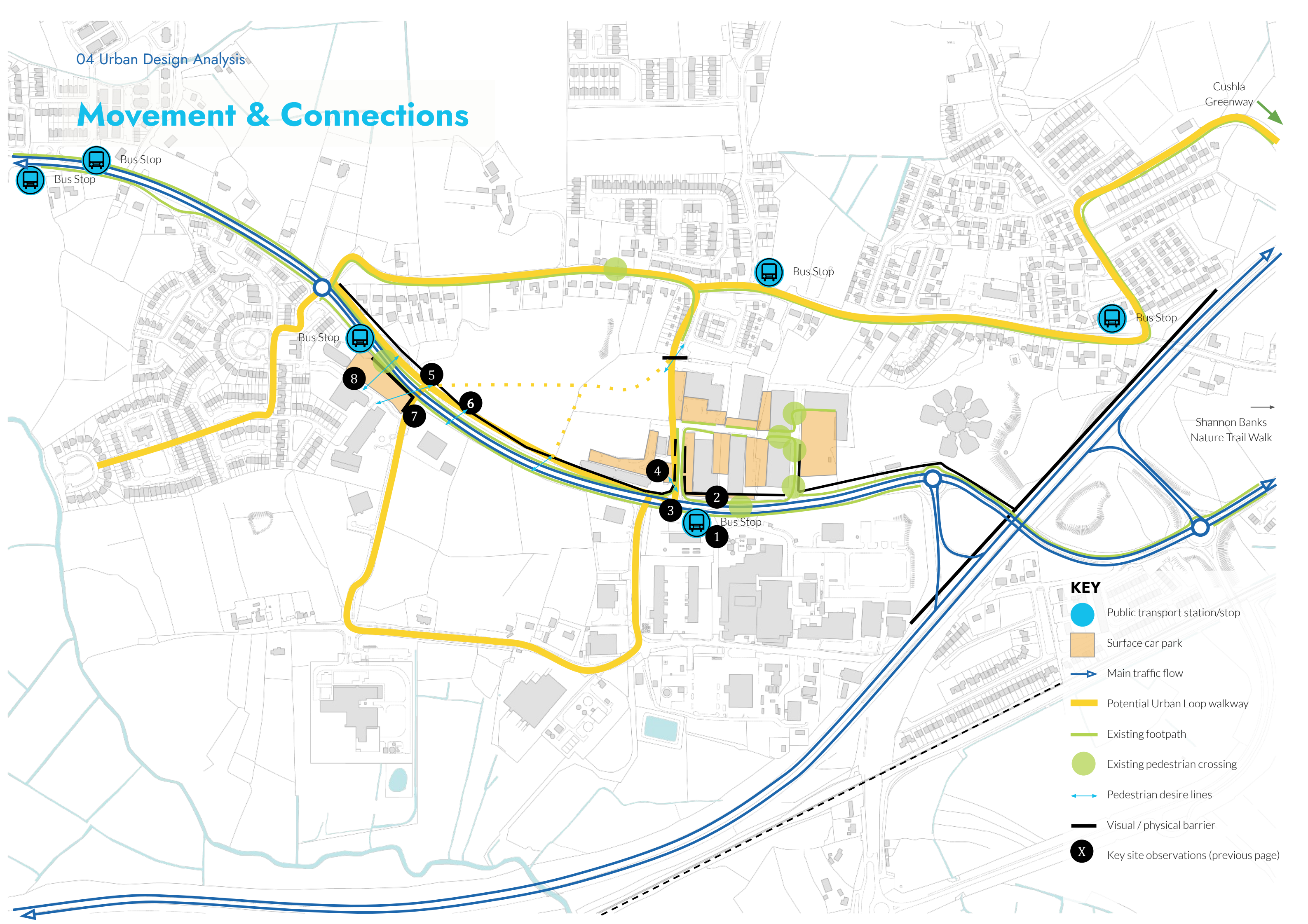
The quality of streetscapes, buildings and features that contribute to the unique identity and character of the town centre.

Movement & Connections

- **Good regional connectivity:** Monksland is located in close proximity to the N6/M6 & N61 junctions, providing good vehicle connectivity to Athlone and beyond. However, local connectivity is poor.
- **Lack of walkable, mixed use town centre:** The study area includes distinct areas of residential, commercial, industrial and other single uses, segregated by busy roads, meaning there is a lack of a compact, walkable, mixed use town centre.
- **Poor permeability:** Large plots and busy arterial roads create strong boundaries and barriers to pedestrian and cross movement. The M6/N6 creates a strong eastern edge to the town, despite it being functionally connected to Athlone on the other side, while the R362 (photos 2 and 5) bisects the town of Monksland, separating the west / south from the east / north, creating islands of activity.
- **Physical / visual barriers:** In addition, property boundaries along the R362 and other roads are largely impermeable with physical barriers such as fences, walls and hedges (photos 1, 2, 5 and 7) restricting pedestrian movement to move along busy roads, and take longer, less direct routes. There is a lack of permeability / access between the residential areas in the north and the Monksland / Daneswell Business Park area, the new park and other amenities to the south.
- **Vehicle domination:** Heavy and fast traffic flow, wide and busy thoroughfares and roundabouts create a feeling of vehicle dominance and an unfriendly / unsafe environment for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as users of wheelchairs, mobility scooters, and prams / buggies. Large parking areas outside the commercial and retail buildings exacerbate this feeling of vehicle dominance. This includes the entrance to Monksland / Daneswell Business Park (photos 3 and 4) as well as the Athlone Springs / Supervalu retail area (photos 7 and 8). Parking availability and congestion around the Primary Care Centre is a growing issue with increased use.
- **Footpaths and pedestrian crossings:** These are available, however footpaths run directly alongside the R362, which is not a pleasant environment for walking, and those within the commercial parks are interrupted by streets / parking entrances.
- **Active travel infrastructure:** The Cushla Greenway route connects the Cushla residential area in the north east of Monksland to Ganlys hardware shop to the east. This short route is potentially part of a long-term plan to link into Athlone town to the east and to Bealnamulla to the west. There are some cycle stands along the R362 (photo 6), but no segregated cycle route along this road.
- **Public transport:** The railway passes to the south of the town, but the closest train station is at Athlone. Monksland is relatively well served by bus stops (photo 1), though more frequent bus service is fairly high in terms of community priorities.
- **Accessibility issues:** Some pavements lack dropped kerbs along key pedestrian desire lines, limiting accessibility for all, and there is limited age-friendly seating.



Movement & Connections

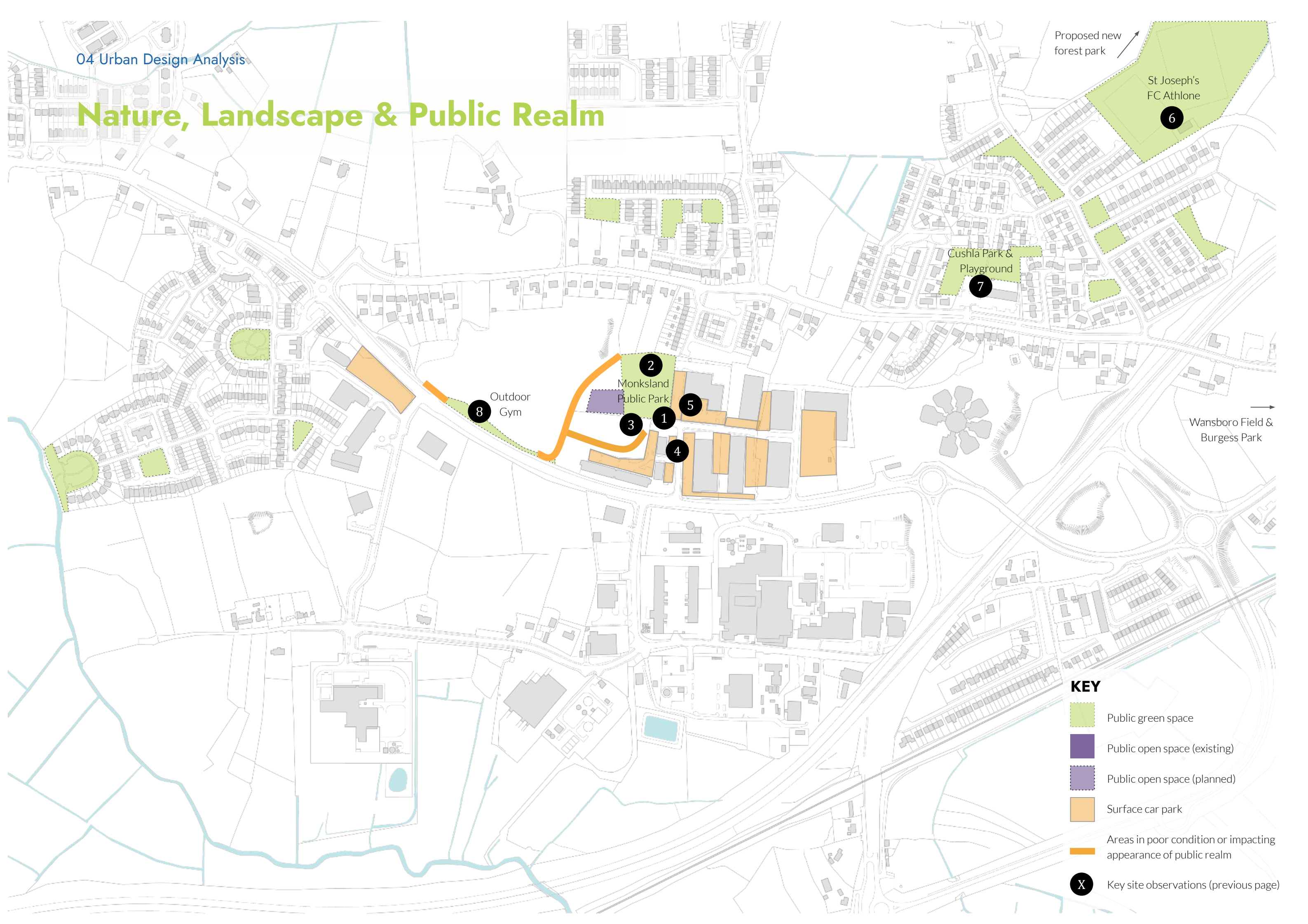


Nature, Landscape & Public Realm

- **Green spaces:** Existing green spaces include the new Monksland Park (photos 1, 2 and 3), the Cushla park and playground (photo 7) and playing fields at St Joseph's FC Athlone (photo 6) and at Bealnamulla Ladies FC (to the west of the map), outdoor gym along the R362 (photo 8) and various small lawns within residential areas. The new public park provides much needed additional green space and park facilities, including a skatepark, play equipment, table tennis, seating, performance area, cycle parking, and lighting.
- **Planting:** Though public green spaces are limited, there are good examples of street trees and hedges which help to soften the appearance of roads, empty plots and car parks somewhat (photo 8). There is a local Tidy Towns group which provides an opportunity for community-led flower planting and litter picking.
- **Lack of human scale street enclosure impacting experience of public realm:** the scale and typology of commercial developments, including retail outlets, business parks and hotels, is of an industrial scale with large boulevards and parking areas between 'big box' buildings, which do not relate to each other and fail to create an enclosed / human scale streetscape that is more typical of traditional town centres (photos 2, 4, and 5). The residential areas around Bealnamulla Road, Cushla and River Village are suburban in character, with primarily detached and semi-detached housing. Bealnamulla Road in particular has a relatively green and leafy character.
- **Need for functional town square:** The recent and planned improvements to the public realm and community facilities around Monksland Park will create a much needed substantial public space and focus area for people to meet, dwell, and relax, and possibly for events (photos 1, 2 and 3). Currently there is no functional town square, with the parking lots around the Business Park and Retail Park / Hotel acting as the main public 'grey' spaces, which are not attractive spaces for sitting, meeting or cafe spill-out (photos 4 and 5). This lack of a physical focal point negatively impacts the sense of place and community within Monksland. This is being addressed by masterplanning for the vacant site adjacent the new park.
- **Car-dominated streetscape:** The streetscape of the town is heavily dominated by motor vehicles, busy roads and large surface car parking areas (photos 4 and 5), particularly around the R362 and retail / business parks.
- **Limited age friendly public seating / rest points:** Despite long footpaths along key routes, there is a lack of regular rest points / public seating, which impacts the accessibility and enjoyment of these routes for those who are older or less abled. Age friendly seating is provided within Monksland Park.
- **Lack of identity:** A consistent public realm materials palette across the town or "Design Guide" for paving, street furniture, and signage could help foster a more cohesive identity and create a more welcoming public realm.



Nature, Landscape & Public Realm

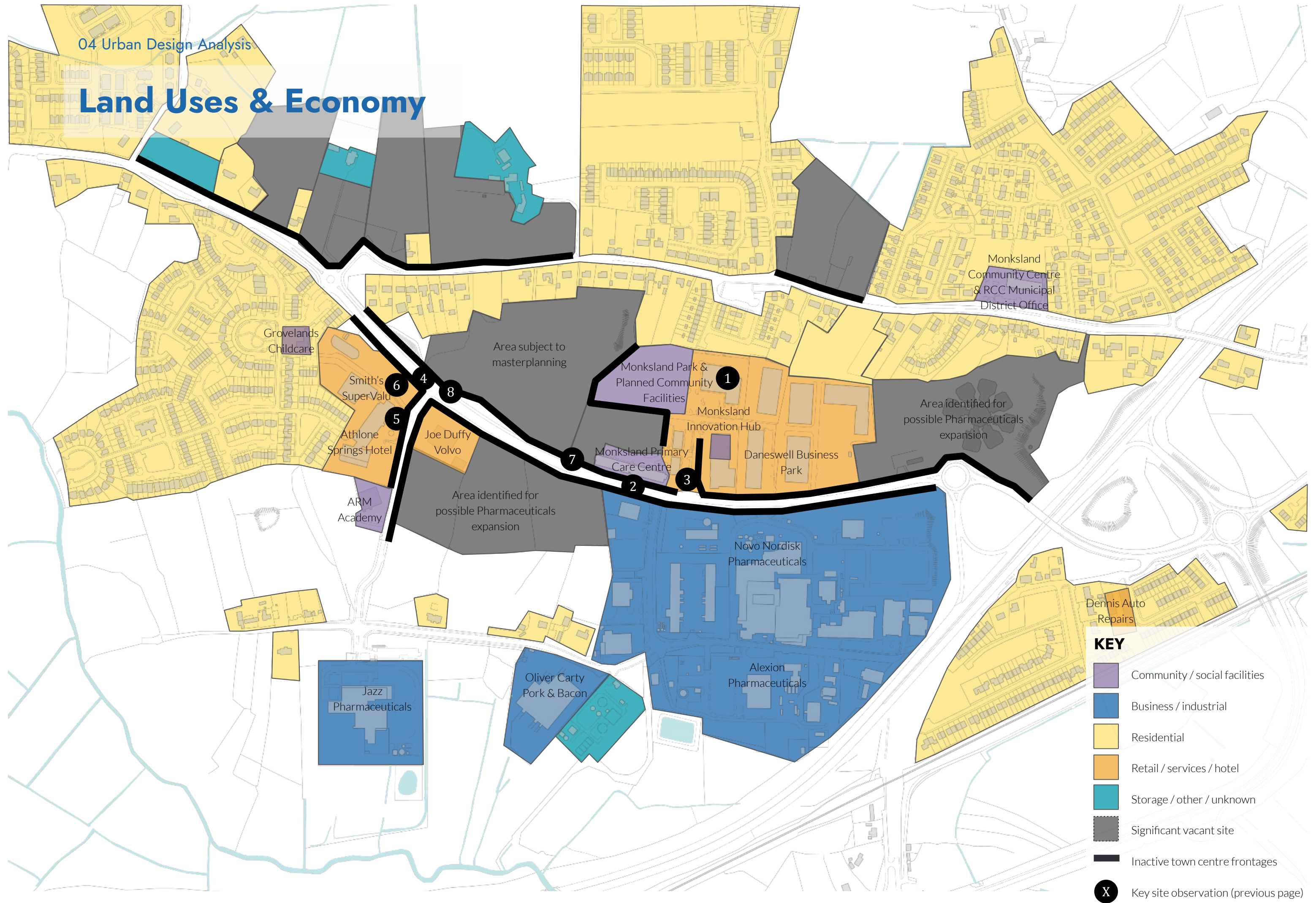


Land Uses & Economy

- **Vacancy:** Monksland survey data from December 2020 identified a total of 52 retail units, of which 10 were vacant, giving a vacancy rate of 19.2%. This accounts for approximately 4,483 sq.m of vacant retail space (varying in size from 69 sq.m. to 939 sq.m). More recent vacancy data at a county level, in Q2 2024, shows Roscommon County had the 6th highest commercial vacancy rate in the country (17.4% compared to the national average of 14.4%) and an annual increase of 0.5% (which reflects a continued rise in vacancies across the country). There are large vacant sites (photos 7 and 8) along the R362 and Bealnamulla Road.
- **Retail and services presence:** In terms of convenience retailing, Monksland is primarily served by the River Village Centre (photos 4 and 6), which is anchored by a large national supermarket brand (Supervalu) and also accommodates a number of smaller traders including a pharmacy, barber, hair and beauty, takeaway, credit union and a coffee shop. The River Village area also accommodates the Athlone Springs Hotel and Leisure Complex (photo 5). Various other retail / services are available at Monksland and Daneswell Business Parks (photos 1, 2 and 3), including a cafe, pharmacy, hair salon, yoga studio, and various comparison retail outlets such as furniture, homeware, hardware and electronics. Amenities such as banks, post office and dentists are only available in Athlone town.
- **Food and drink / evening economy:** Dining options are limited, with two cafes and a takeaway, as well as a restaurant at the hotel. The Mill Bar is located nearby in Bellanamullia. There is a lack of evening economy/activity and no food market.
- **Inactive frontages:** create a lack of vibrancy in key areas of the town particularly around the vacant plots, large areas of surface parking, long boundary fences and large scale commercial/industrial buildings along the R362 (photos 2, 4, 7 and 8).
- **Suburban living:** There is a significant opportunity to encourage higher density town centre living (on key central sites) to increase activity levels and provide an alternative housing typology to the lower density suburban housing on the peripheries of the town.
- **Lack of vibrancy around bus stops:** Due to the low density and inactive frontages described above, there is a lack of activity around bus stops, which may impact the sense of safety and appeal, and therefore limit bus use in favour of private cars.
- **Life Sciences cluster:** There is a firmly established life sciences focus in the area, with three large pharmaceutical companies located to the south of the R362, providing significant employment and economic opportunities for the region.
- **Monksland Innovation Hub:** provides valuable co-working and meeting space within modern facilities for local entrepreneurs and small businesses.



Land Uses & Economy



Social, Community & Culture

- **Outdoor recreational spaces:** include playing fields at St Josephs FC Athlone and at Bealnamulla Ladies FC (to the west of the map), Cushla park playground and fields, the outdoor gym along the R362, and the new Monksland Park in the centre (photo 1), which includes a range of facilities such as a skatepark, performance area and outdoor table tennis table.
- **Healthcare facilities:** include the Monksland Primary Care Centre (photo 2) and a range of physical and mental health services located in Monksland Business Park.
- **Community and enterprise facilities:** The planned new community facilities adjacent to the new Monksland Public Park (photo 1) will provide further valuable space with a community focus, to complement the existing Monksland Community Centre located within the residential area to the north east. The new community centre will potentially include a performance space, café, multi-use studios and meeting rooms. This cluster of central facilities is complemented by the new Monksland Innovation Hub (photos 3 and 4), which provides valuable co-working and meeting space, and enterprise support, within modern facilities for local entrepreneurs and small businesses.
- **Lack of facilities for young people:** Aside from the parks and playground and the Jump 4 Joy Adventure Centre, there are very limited facilities for children and young people within Monksland, particularly for teenagers.
- **Range of indoor fitness and leisure facilities:** There is a good range of indoor fitness and leisure facilities, including the Athlone Springs Zen Fitness & Leisure Club (photo 6), Athlone Gymnastics Club, Fusion Training Centre (which includes CrossFit Cú Chulainn, the Midland's largest CrossFit facility), Hot Yoga Athlone, Athlone Taekwondo. However, these appear to be private / fee-based facilities, so are perhaps not accessible to all, and the community have expressed a strong desire for more sports and leisure facilities in Monksland.
- **Social infrastructure:** There is a need for additional social facilities to support potential population growth, such as schools (primary and secondary), a multi-denominational worship space, cemetery/crematorium, and supermarkets.
- **Heritage sites, attractions and events:** Athlone Springs Hotel acts as a key facility for visitors, though there are limited tourist attractions within Monksland itself.
- **Signage, wayfinding and heritage interpretation:** There are a few local heritage boards located around the town and surrounding areas (photos 7 and 8).
- **Public art and town gateways:** 'The Three Monks' (photo 5) is a wood carving created by Richie Clarke and commissioned by Monksland Town Team at the eastern edge of town. A mural artist has been engaged to paint the skatepark and boundary wall in Monksland Park and hold workshops with students. Otherwise, there is limited public art and a lack of defined, welcoming gateways into the town.



Social, Community & Culture



Built Form

- **Lack of traditional settlement form and street pattern:** Because Monksland's growth has been dominated initially by industrial activity, and later by suburban residential development and commercial activity, it does not exhibit a traditional settlement form, lacking in a typical street pattern for a town centre.
- **Segregated uses and lack of cohesive character:** The current spread of different uses in distinct 'islands' across the town creates a patchwork of very different character areas, from low density suburban homes to industrial estates and large scale retail and commercial developments (photos 1, 2, 3 and 4), encouraging car use between them.
- **Lack of human-scale urban blocks and streetscape:** The typology, scale, detailing and set-back of modern commercial development has tended to include detached and semi-detached buildings, often with large setbacks, monolithic form and lack of detailing, which fail to define urban blocks and streets typical of a traditional town centre environment. This lack of enclosure and interest creates an environment which suits faster vehicle movement but is uncomfortable and unsafe for pedestrians, and lacks vibrancy (photos 1, 2, 3, 4, 8).
- **Lack of distinctive town centre and communal public realm:** Aside from the new public park in the centre (photo 5), communal open spaces generally only occur within individual housing developments. There is a need for further density, a better mix of uses, and more human scale streetscape and public realm to create a clear, attractive town centre environment. The area also needs a clear identity and defined gateways to identify the town centre, for example through a consistent public realm materials palette, consistent signage and wayfinding, and colourful planting.
- **Car-dominated public realm and large expanses of surface car parking:** The predominance of industrial and commercial activity has given rise to large expanses of surface car parking (photos 2, 3, 4, and 7). This creates a public realm that is dominated by motor vehicles, which detracts from the general amenity value of the area. There is a lack of attractive public spaces for people to meet, dwell, sit, eat, drink and relax.
- **Suburban nature of residential development:** The predominant residential typology is suburban, with relatively low density, detached or semi-detached buildings set back from the street edge, creating a lack of street definition in these areas. However, some of these areas have a pleasant, leafy character, particularly around Bealnamulla Road.
- **Inactive, undefined urban blocks:** While there is relatively limited degradation of the built fabric, the existence of several large vacant plots creates inactive and poorly defined edges to large parts of the town (photo 5 and 6). The large setbacks and predominance of surface car parking around buildings (photos 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8) adds to this lack of street enclosure, which further detracts from the pedestrian experience of the area.



Built Form

The Mill
Bar

Lough Ree /
Hodson Bay

The Three Monks
Tree Carving

Athlone
Springs Hotel

Monksland Heritage
Interpretation Board

KEY

- High levels of dereliction /
unattractive vacant sites
- Suburban residential development
- Poorly defined urban block / edge
- Key heritage assets / attractions
- X Key site observation (previous page)

Urban Design Analysis Summary

The key issues and opportunities facing Monksland town centre under each of the five assessment criteria can be summarised as follows:



- Good regional connectivity, particularly by road
- Poor permeability due to large plots, busy arterial roads, physical / visual barriers
- Lack of walkable, mixed use town centre
- Vehicle dominance and an unfriendly / unsafe environment for pedestrians and cyclists
- Large surface parking areas
- Limited cycling infrastructure and pedestrian crossings



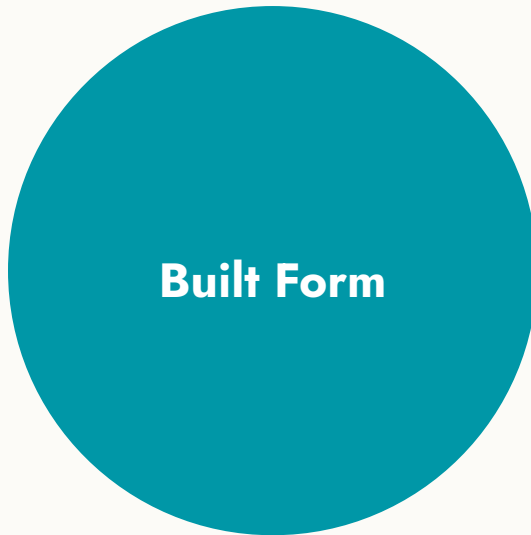
- Limited parks and green spaces, though new public park opened
- Lack of human scale street enclosure impacts the experience of the public realm
- Need for functional town square and attractive spaces for sitting, meeting and cafe spill-out
- Car-dominated streetscape
- Limited age friendly public seating / rest points
- Lack of consistent public realm identity / materials



- Significant vacancy including large vacant sites, though some are now subject to planning
- Limited retail offer with banks, post office and dentists only available in Athlone town
- Limited dining options, no market, and no evening economy
- Inactive frontages and lack of vibrancy around bus stops
- Opportunity to encourage higher density town centre living
- Existence of regionally important life sciences cluster



- Range of outdoor and indoor sports, fitness and leisure facilities, though strong desire for more sports pitches/facilities
- Range of physical and mental healthcare facilities available
- New and planned community and enterprise facilities, but need for additional social infrastructure
- Lack of facilities for young people
- Limited heritage / tourism attractions and events
- Limited public art / celebration of town gateways



- Lack of traditional settlement form and street pattern
- Segregated uses and lack of cohesive character
- Lack of human-scale urban blocks and streetscape
- Lack of distinctive town centre and communal public realm
- Car-dominated public realm and large expanses of surface car parking
- Inactive, undefined urban blocks

05 Monksland Reimagined

- 5.1 Key Opportunity Sites
- 5.2 Key Projects
- 5.3 Action Plan
- 5.4 Next Steps

Key Opportunity Sites

1. Mixed-use (residential-led) town centre neighbourhood

Crucial site to increase density, mix of uses, create a human-scale street pattern, pedestrian/cycle linkage between residential suburbs in north and other uses to the south and west. Urban design guidance for this new neighbourhood should include:

- A mix of uses, with active uses such as retail on ground floor and residential above, and basement parking to ensure streets are not cluttered with parking
- Finer urban grain of a town centre, with human-scale buildings (2-4 storeys, stepping down towards the northern boundary where it meets existing low rise homes) and comfortably enclosed streets that form pleasant pedestrian links between key destinations
- Include a generous public square lined with cafes / restaurant spill-out and retail
- Possibly provision for a food market (indoor/outdoor) / a public event space
- Street trees, green spaces and planting, and well-designed public realm / street furniture

2. Monksland Business Park extension

Extension of above mixed use neighbourhood to continue the street pattern and provide an attractive sense of enclosure to the public park, as well as passive surveillance through a mix of uses and activities throughout the day / evening (such as retail, food and drink and residential), which have the benefit of proximity and views to the new Monksland Park.

3, 4, and 5. Infill Development Opportunities

Potential direction for development of key town centre sites (reflecting the needs and aspirations identified from the community survey and urban design analysis) could include:

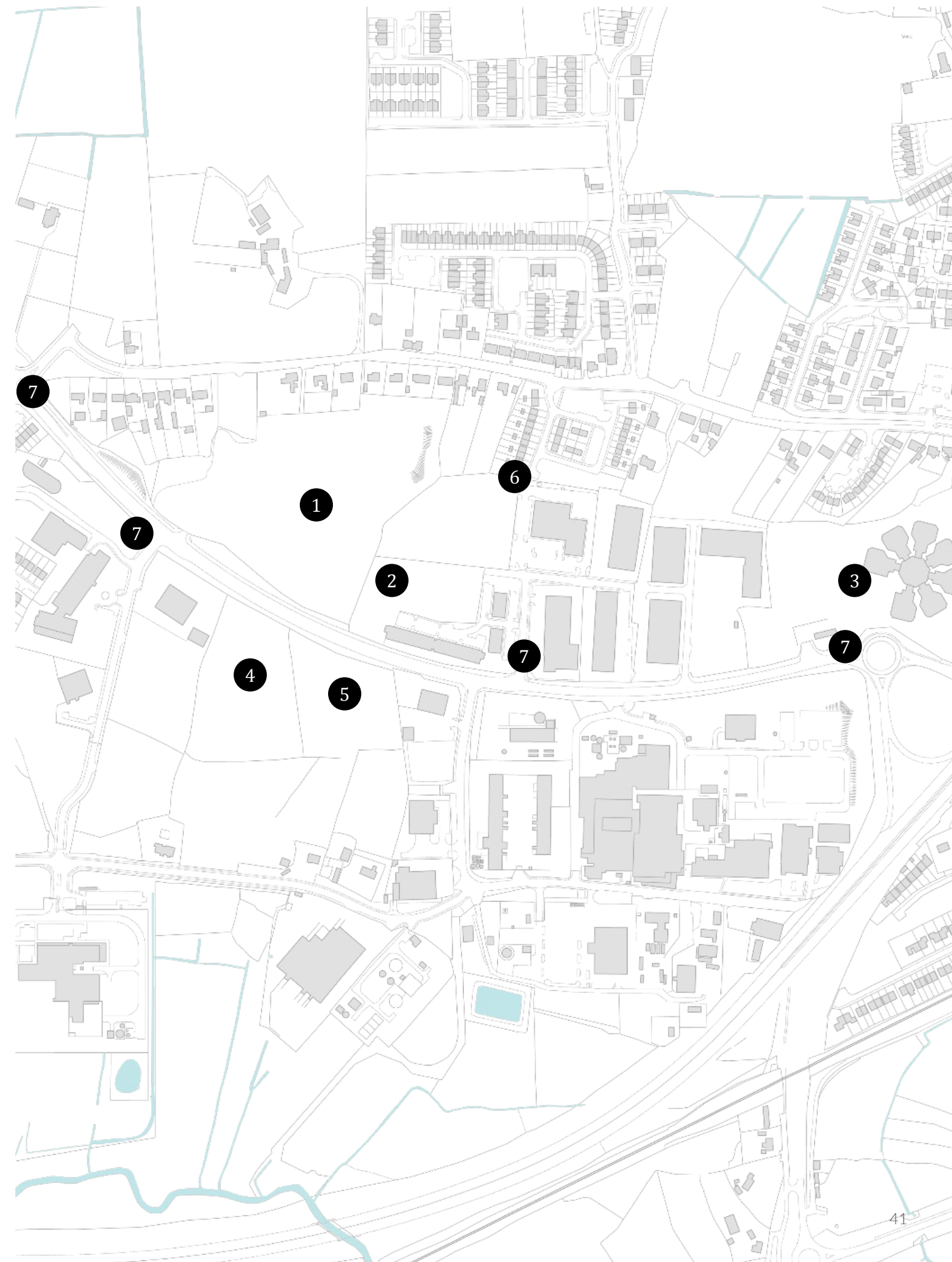
- Mixed-use development similar to 1. above or more commercial-led development
- More leisure and sports facilities, particularly catering to young people (outdoor pitches, indoor multi-activity sports recreation and leisure space, basketball, ball walls)
- Additional supermarket/shops/potentially an indoor/ outdoor food market destination

6. Active Travel Infrastructure / Urban Loop (townwide/wider region)

Improve townwide and regional walking and cycling infrastructure, including footpaths, cycle paths, lighting, pedestrian crossings, armed seating points, and associated landscaping and public art (focused on the potential Urban Loop identified on the Movement & Connections map earlier in this report). In particular, improve pedestrian/cycle linkages between residential suburbs in the north and other uses to the south and west (see No. 6 on this map for a key barrier/potential link).

7. Placemaking at Town Gateways, Active Travel Routes & Bus Stops (townwide)

Activate land around bus stops, active travel routes and key gateways into the town through improvements such as flower planting, signage, and public art, including more welcoming entrances to the retail areas at River Village and Monksland/Daneswell Business Parks.



Key Projects

Project Name

Mixed-use town centre neighbourhoods

Location

Key Opportunity Sites 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 (see map on previous page).

Project Overview

Potential direction for development of key town centre sites could include a mix of uses, with active uses such as retail on ground floor and residential above, basement parking to ensure streets are not cluttered with parking, and a finer urban grain of a town centre, with human-scale buildings and comfortably enclosed streets that form pleasant pedestrian links. Include key amenities desired by the community, such as more leisure and sports facilities, particularly catering to young people, additional shops and an indoor/ outdoor food market.

Reference Example

Brent Cross South, London

Key Challenges

- Private land ownership and significant development budgets / funding requirements

Key Opportunities

- Human-scale development of new blocks and streets on infill sites could help consolidate the town centre, and improve its attractiveness, function and walkability.
- Increased residential density could improve the commercial viability of amenities such as retail, dining, markets and leisure, which are strongly desired by existing residents, and activity throughout the day and evening to support a night time economy.

Themes Addressed



Key Projects

Project Name

Active Travel Infrastructure / Urban Loop

Location

Townwide (potential Urban Loop route identified in yellow in the map opposite)

Project Overview

Improve townwide and regional walking and cycling infrastructure, including footpaths, cycle paths, lighting, pedestrian crossings, armed seating points, and associated landscaping (focused on the potential Urban Loop identified opposite, but exploring potential for footpaths and cycle paths that are segregated from vehicles). Link active travel and public art (see placemaking initiative) to ensure creative activation of these key routes and a clear local identity. Ensure safe active travel connections to Athlone and Lough Ree/Hodson Bay.

Reference Example

Walk, Cycle, Live active travel corridors project, Stirling.

Key Challenges

- Ensuring a balance between accessibility and safety for pedestrians and cyclists, and ease of movement for vehicles to avoid traffic congestion along important routes.

Key Opportunities

- Encourage walking, cycling, and wheeling as healthy, active, low carbon modes of travel.
- Better connect residential areas with shops and other amenities, improving walkability, permeability and reducing dependence on cars.
- Explore opportunity to link to Galway to Athlone Castle National Cycleway Project.

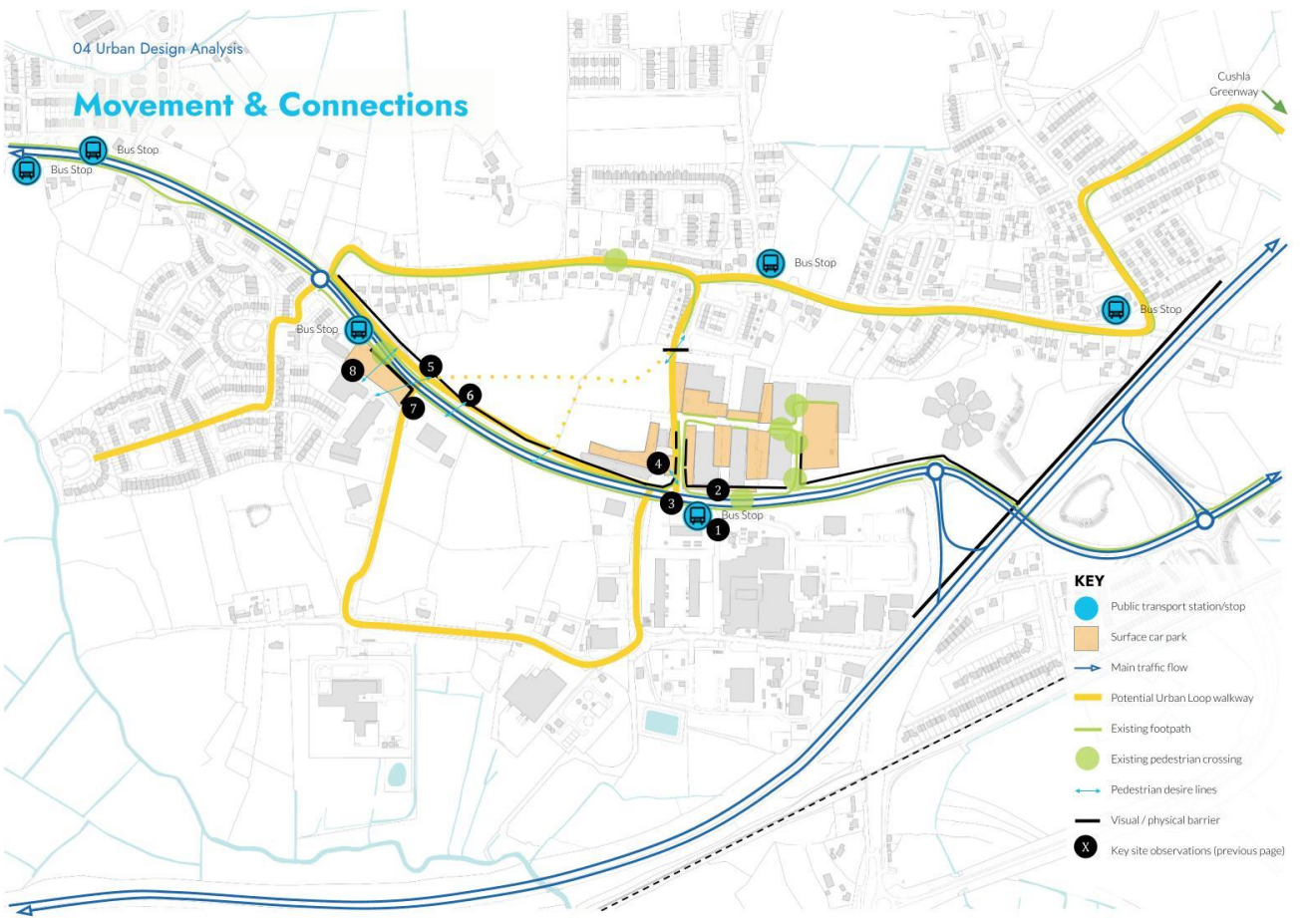
Themes Addressed

Movement & Connections

Nature, Landscape & Public Realm

Social, Community & Culture

Built Form



Key Projects

Project Name

Placemaking at Town Gateways, Active Travel Routes & Bus Stops

Location

Townwide (gateways, active travel routes and bus stops offer sensible focal points)

Project Overview

Activate land around bus stops, active travel routes and key gateways into the town through improvements such as flower planting, signage, and public art.

Reference Example

The Edible Bus Stop in Landor Road, London

Key Challenges

- Private land ownership and/or restricted open space around key sites such as bus stops and town gateways, which are primarily located on busy arterial routes.
- Maintenance of any planting and painting needs consideration.

Key Opportunities

- Working together with local artists, young people and other communities, create public art that helps strengthen the sense of local ownership, identity and pride in place.
- Create volunteering opportunities for flower planting, community design and painting.
- By making active travel routes and bus stops more attractive and interesting, encourage use of active and sustainable travel to reduce car dominance / dependence.

Themes Addressed



Action Plan

Initiative Name	Description	Timescale	Budget Range	Lead/Partners	Next Steps
Mixed-use (residential-led) town centre neighbourhood	Crucial site to increase density, mix of uses, create a human-scale street pattern, pedestrian/cycle linkage between residential suburbs in north and other uses to the south and west. Urban design guidance for this new neighbourhood should include: • A mix of uses, with active uses such as retail on ground floor and residential above, and basement parking to ensure streets are not cluttered with parking • Finer urban grain of a town centre, with human-scale buildings (2-4 storeys, stepping down towards the northern boundary where it meets existing low rise homes) and comfortably enclosed streets that form pleasant pedestrian links between key destinations • Include a generous public square lined with cafes / restaurant spill-out and retail • Possibly provision for a food market (indoor/outdoor) / a public event space that could host markets / social activity • Street trees, green spaces and planting, and well-designed public realm / street furniture • Other community amenities to cater for an increasing population should be explored on site or nearby, including schools (primary and secondary), supermarkets, leisure facilities, multi-denominational worship space, cemetery / crematorium,	Medium Term (within 5 years) / Long Term (5 years +)	High	Roscommon County Council	Roscommon County Council to progress with concept designs, including ample opportunity for community engagement and involvement to ensure the designs and mix of uses / provision of community amenities responds to the needs and aspirations of the local community (as well as potential new residents).
Monksland Business Park extension	Extension of above mixed use neighbourhood to continue the street pattern and provide an attractive sense of enclosure to the public park, as well as passive surveillance through a mix of uses and activities throughout the day / evening (such as retail, food and drink and residential), which have the benefit of proximity and views to the new Monksland Park.	Medium Term (within 5 years) / Long Term (5 years +)	High	Roscommon County Council, private landowners	Roscommon County Council to discuss with landowners and facilitate collaborative discussions around any proposals / planning applications to share the vision and aspirations within this plan / other local plans.

Action Plan

Initiative Name	Description	Timescale	Budget Range	Lead/Partners	Next Steps
Infill Development Opportunities	Potential direction for development of key town centre sites (reflecting the needs and aspirations identified from the community survey and urban design analysis) could include: • Mixed-use development similar to 1. above • More leisure and sports facilities, particularly catering to young people (outdoor pitches, indoor multi-activity sports recreation and leisure space, basketball, ball walls) • Additional supermarket/shops/potentially an indoor/ outdoor food market destination	Medium Term (within 5 years) / Long Term (5 years +)	High	Roscommon County Council, private landowners	Roscommon County Council to discuss with landowners and facilitate collaborative discussions around any proposals / planning applications to share the vision and aspirations within this plan / other local plans.
Active Travel Infrastructure / Urban Loop Walkway / Traffic Management	Improve townwide and regional walking and cycling infrastructure, including footpaths, cycle paths, lighting, pedestrian crossings, armed seating points, and associated traffic management, landscaping and public art (focused on the potential Urban Loop, but exploring potential for footpaths and cycle paths that are segregated from vehicles). In particular, improve pedestrian/cycle linkages between residential suburbs in the north and other uses to the south and west. Link active travel and public art (see initiative below) to ensure creative activation of these key routes and a clear local identity. Ensure safe active travel connections to the wider region, including Athlone, Roscommon Road, between the new city park and the old Tuam Road, Lough Ree/Hodson Bay, and the proposed new forest park.	Medium Term (within 5 years)	Medium	Roscommon County Council, Town Team, Westmeath County Council, Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) and the Department of Transport	Explore potential active travel corridor projects within the Joint Urban Area Plan for Athlone, and potential link into the Galway to Athlone Castle National Cycleway Project.
Placemaking at Town Gateways, Active Travel Routes & Bus Stops	Activate land around bus stops, and key gateways into the town / town centre through improvements such as flower planting, signage, and public art, including more welcoming entrances to the retail areas at River Village and Monksland/Daneswell Business Parks. Working together with local artists, young people and other communities, create public art that reflects local people, stories and aspirations and helps strengthen the sense of local ownership, identity and pride in place. A distinctive and consistent approach / design guide for placemaking, signage and public realm materials could be created across the town, linking with the initiative on active travel / Urban Loop Walkway.	Quick Win (within 1 year) / Medium Term (within 5 years)	Low / Medium	Town Team, Tidy Towns, Roscommon County Council, local artists and young people	

Action Plan

Initiative Name	Description	Timescale	Budget Range	Lead/Partners	Next Steps
Place Branding & Tourism Development	Develop additional amenities / attractions and a supporting vision / strategy that promotes tourism and a strong place identity for Monksland. This would include further research and development in response to local opportunities such as: • What is the unique selling point of Monksland? • Reasons to visit and to stay? • Strengthened regional / active travel connections to Athlone, the Roscommon Road, Lough Ree/ Hodson Bay, the proposed new forest park, and potentially the Galway to Athlone Castle National Cycleway Project.	Medium Term (within 5 years)	Low / Medium	Roscommon County Council, Town Team, Westmeath County Council, Fáilte Ireland	Explore the tourism potential of Monksland and the wider region, and Monksland’s role within this as part of the Joint Urban Area Plan for Athlone, Discuss any tourism-boosting funding opportunities and guidance for places such as Monksland with Fáilte Ireland. Consider appointing a specialist consultant to develop the place brand / narrative and tourism strategy for Monksland.

Next Steps

A collaborative approach to town centre regeneration is critical to success. Partners, stakeholders and the community must be kept informed, engaged and ideally involved in further co-design and delivery of interventions to embed a sense of collective pride and community in Monksland.

Strategic leadership on implementation will come from Roscommon County Council, including the further development and feasibility testing of the key transformative projects. However, many other local stakeholders have key roles to play in bringing to life of these projects, the supporting projects listed in the action plan and the collective vision to create the future Monksland.

The existing proactive and positive Town Team, and joint working between the Town Team and Roscommon County Council to deliver improvements to the town, provides an important foundation for further development and implementation of the proposals within this report.

- Potential Funding sources for delivery of the identified projects could include:
- Rural Regeneration and Development Fund
 - Housing for All Crói Cónaithe (Towns) Fund
 - European Regional Development Fund
 - Active Travel Grants Programme
 - Town and Village Renewal Scheme
 - Climate Adaptation/ Retrofitting Initiatives
 - Historic Towns Initiative

Some suggested key performance indicators are set out opposite to help guide design, delivery and monitoring of the identified actions.

Key Performance Indicators:

- ❑ The numbers of buildings and structures conserved, restored, refurbished and brought back into active use
- ❑ Amount of floor area brought back into use
- ❑ Areas of public realm enhanced
- ❑ Changes in visitor numbers
- ❑ Satisfaction of visitors and the likelihood of repeat visits
- ❑ Impact on tourism spend in the town
- ❑ Numbers of jobs created and the quality of those jobs
- ❑ Amount of investment from public or private sources
- ❑ The viability and competitiveness of businesses in the town
- ❑ The level of pride and ownership by the community of their local experience, history and culture
- ❑ The extent of engagement of the local community
- ❑ The strengthening of local economic and social structures
- ❑ The level of respect and appreciation for the heritage and authentic culture, traditions and distinctiveness of the community

This report (including any enclosures and attachments) has been prepared for the exclusive use and benefit of Roscommon County Council as the commissioning agent and solely for the purpose for which it is provided. We do not accept any liability if this report is used for an alternative purpose from which it is intended, nor to any third party in respect of this report. Our analysis has been undertaken based on information supplied to us by Roscommon County Council including previous reports and data prepared by third parties. Where we have relied on information provided by third parties we take no responsibility for the accuracy of that information.



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