

# Rathdrum

TOWN CENTRE HEALTH CHECK 2025



**Wicklow County Council**  
Comhairle Contae Chill Mhantáin



**Lár Bailte ar dTús**  
Town Centre First



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## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the individuals and organisations who assisted in the completion of this report by generously offering their time and expertise with special thanks to the staff from Wicklow County Council for the support for this study. This report summarises the analysis completed by students from a number of planning courses from Queen's University Belfast under the supervision of Dr Neil Galway MRTPI.

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# Introduction

This Collaborative Town Centre Health Check report was completed in partnership with Wicklow County Council by planning students from Queen's University Belfast in Spring 2025.

The report begins with an overview of relevant national, regional and local planning policies, as well as ongoing plans for public development. It then moves to the analysis of quantitative data, which was gathered during survey visits to Rathdrum on 14th & 15th April 2025. During these visits, detailed land uses of the town centre, footfall and vehicular traffic counts, car parking assessment and public realm analysis were completed. These steps were complemented by an online and hard copy questionnaire and community consultation on the 14th April.

The report concludes with a strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats (SCOT) analysis, which aims to summarise the key findings of this study. By highlighting the town's strengths and opportunities and also overviewing the identified challenges and threats, it is hoped that this report could help inform any future decisions for Rathdrum.



## First Impressions

Rathdrum, County Wicklow, makes a charming first impression as a small, characterful town nestled in the Avonmore River valley. Surrounded by lush woodland and rolling hills with red kite flying over the town centre, it offers a picturesque setting that reflects the natural beauty of the Wicklow countryside. The town's historical roots are visible in its traditional shopfronts, attractive painted stucco and stone buildings, and compact layout, while its peaceful atmosphere and friendly local spirit immediately convey a strong sense of community.

Rathdrum's Main Street, though full of charm with its traditional buildings and small-town character, is notably narrow, often leading to significant traffic congestion, especially during peak hours when traffic can only move in one direction at a time. The street's limited width and on-street parking contribute to bottlenecks that can make navigation difficult for both residents and visitors. Delivery vehicles and buses frequently add to the delays, highlighting the need for improved traffic management and alternative parking solutions.

The town has expanded in recent years with significant housing developments completed and under construction. This growth has been accompanied by the addition of some significant public services with a new library and primary health care centre opening in 2021.



# Introduction to Policy Context

## National Policy

Rathdrum is a small town in the south east of County Wicklow, situated c. 60km south of Dublin City Centre and approximately 15km west of Wicklow town and the coast, and forming part of the Arklow Municipal District. Development should follow the Wicklow County Development Plan and the general planning strategies, guidelines and principles set out by the Irish state in national institutions and at a national planning policy level such as the three Irish regional assemblies and the Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework (NPF). Ireland is a European Union member and is eligible for EU funding mechanisms.

### Project Ireland 2040

Project Ireland 2040, launched in 2018, is the Irish Government's masterplan for managing the current and future opportunities and challenges that Ireland will face up to 2040. By 2040, there will be approximately one million additional people living here in Ireland. This population growth will require hundreds of thousands of new jobs, new homes, heightened cultural, and social amenities, enhanced regional connectivity and improved environmental sustainability.

### Regional Assembly & Irish Governmental Supports

County Wicklow is part of the Eastern & Midland Region and falls under the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031 (RSES). In addition to the overarching strategies for regional and spatial planning, Rathdrum and Wicklow County Council is eligible for state funds, loans and grants, such as the Rural Regeneration and Development fund, Town centre first scheme and Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) for projects such as housing developments.



# Introduction to Policy Context

National Policy

## National Planning Framework (NPF)

Regarding the NPF is a national document that provides guidance for Ireland for the coming decades. The NPF factors in sustainable growth within strategic planning and development, with more compact growth in Ireland's towns and cities. The First Revision of the NPF was published in April 2025. It recognises that the Mid-East of Ireland including County Wicklow has experienced high levels of population growth in recent decades, at more than twice the national growth rate and advocates for more balanced and sustainable pattern of development, with a greater focus on addressing employment creation, local infrastructure needs, including in particular social and community infrastructure in areas such as education and amenity, and addressing the legacy of rapid growth, must be prioritised.

## National Development Plan (NDP) 2021 - 2030

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

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

## Overarching Irish Planning Policy as of August 2024



Ríocht na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

Project Ireland 2040  
National Planning  
Framework

Ríocht na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland  
Tábhachtachais  
2040

National Development  
Plan 2021-2030



Ríocht na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland  
National  
Planning  
Framework

Project Ireland 2040  
Draft First Revision  
to the National  
Planning Framework  
July 2024



# Introduction to Policy Context

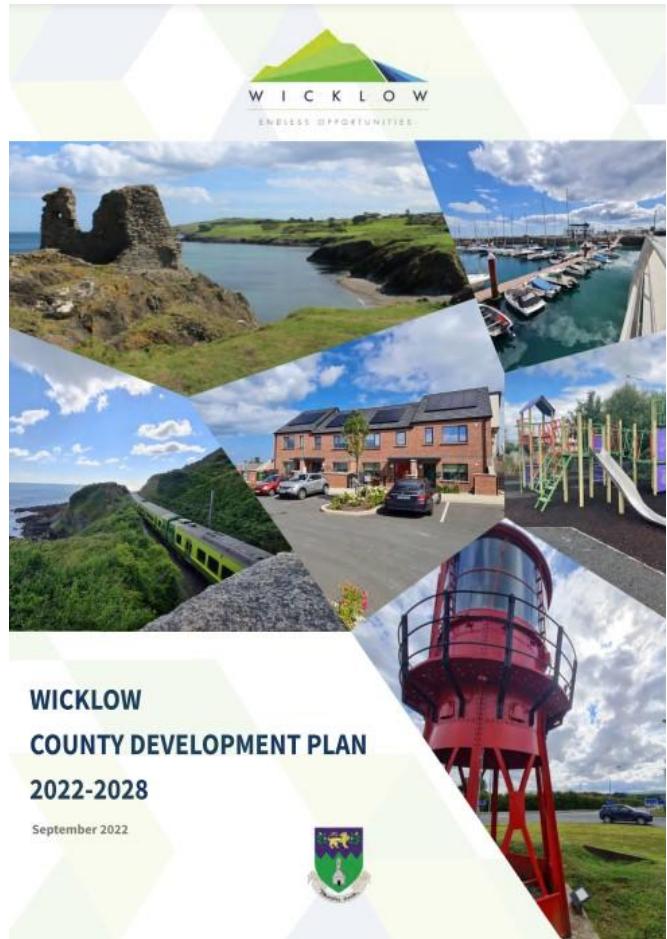
## Local Policy

### Wicklow County Development Plan 2022 - 2028

In the Wicklow County Development Plan (WCDP) 2022 - 2028 Vol. 1 Written Statement, Rathdrum is regarded as a 'Tier 4 - Core Region / Self Sustaining Town'. The WCDP defines a self-sustaining town as one '*that requires contained growth, focusing on driving investment in services, employment growth and infrastructure whilst balancing housing delivery.*' According to the WCDP, Rathdrum had a population of 1,716 in 2016 and a population target for Q2 of 2028 of 2,339.

The WCDP sets out the Town and Village Regeneration & Rejuvenation Priorities for Rathdrum as

- Encourage residential usage at appropriate town centre densities, including the concept of 'living over the shop'.
- Reusing existing buildings and maximizing the potential of infill and brownfield sites.
- Encourage the redevelopment of vacant, underutilized, and derelict sites.
- Promote healthy placemaking and prioritising walking and cycling.
- Improve linkages between core town centres and existing community infrastructure.
- Use public realm improvements to stimulate investment and economic confidence.
- Embrace the historic character and heritage attributes of the town centre.



# Introduction to Policy Context

## Local Policy

### Rathdrum - Level 4 | Self Sustaining Town Plan 2022 - 2028

For the first time, towns with a population of less than 5,000 have been eligible for individual Development Plans as part of the WCDP 2022-2028. Two Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs) are designated within the town: the main town centre and the Low Town area, these are shown in purple in the map opposite, fig. 1. These ACAs are integral to maintaining Rathdrum's historical character amidst development. The ACAs are at the core of the Town Plan, and the key points are summarised below.

**Heritage Protection and Enhancement:** The plan aims to protect and enhance the character, setting, and environmental quality of Rathdrum's architectural and archaeological heritage. This includes safeguarding features that contribute to the town's special interest.

**Development Control:** Within the ACAs, any works that may impact the exterior of structures—such as changes to roofing materials, windows, or boundary walls—generally require planning permission. This ensures that alterations do not detract from the area's architectural integrity.

**Integration with Town Centre Objectives:** The ACAs are central to the plan's vision of revitalising Rathdrum's town centre. Objectives include enhancing the town's visual appearance, encouraging development that supports its vitality, and improving connectivity between the town core and surrounding areas.

**Support for Regeneration:** The plan supports the regeneration of underutilised areas within the ACAs, aiming to reduce dereliction and enhance the architectural character, particularly in the Low Town area.

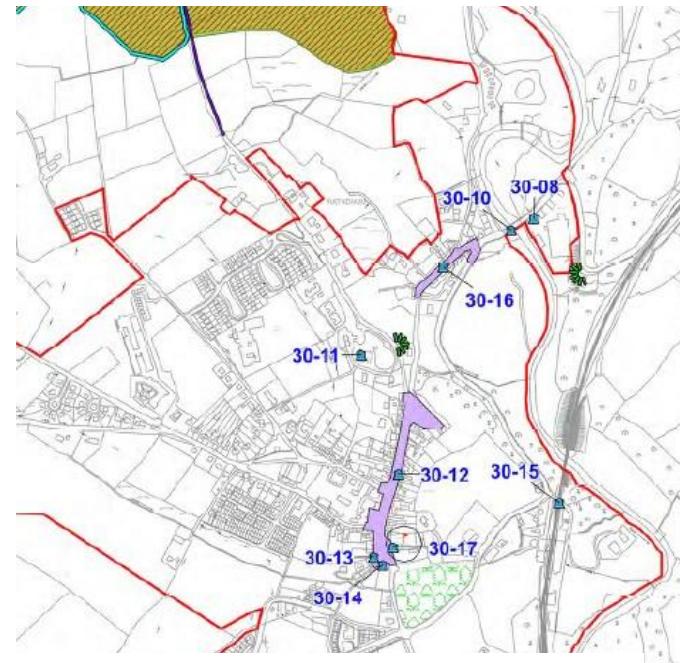


Figure 1 - Map showing ACAs, amended from WCDP 2022-2028



- RATHDRUM**
- LEVEL 4 | Self Sustaining Town Plans
- Wicklow County Development Plan 2022 – 2028
- Legend**
- Settlement Boundary
  - Protected Structure
  - National Monuments
  - Prospects
  - View
  - SAC-Special Area of Conservation
  - pNHA-Proposed Natural Heritage Area
  - Nature Reserves
  - Architectural Conservation Areas
  - Trees and Woodland with Existing Preservation Orders

# Land Use

## Analysis

The land-use survey was completed as part of the town centre health check. Land-uses were indicated as the main or prevailing use of the building. Land uses of the ground floors of the units found in Rathdrum town centre have been recorded according to the goods, opportunities, amenities and development (GOAD) classification (detail in appendices). The land use as recorded is shown on the map opposite.

The predominant land use classification was *Residential*, accounting for 53.9% of the total building use in the town centre. Combined *Retail* uses (comparison, convenience, services & other) was the second most prolific land use at 9%, with *Leisure* being the third most common land use with 7.9%. Detailed breakdown of land use is shown in the pie chart below, fig. 2 Vacant units accounted for a significant percentage of the overall land use and is detailed in the following pages.

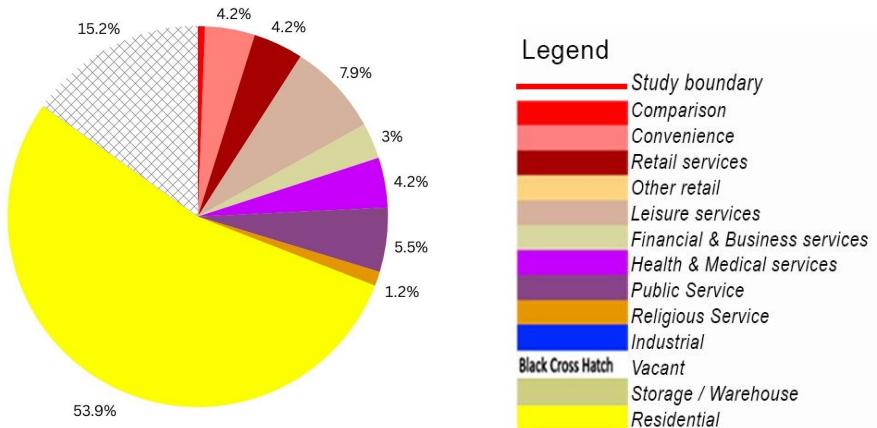


Figure 3- Chart showing breakdown of land use data

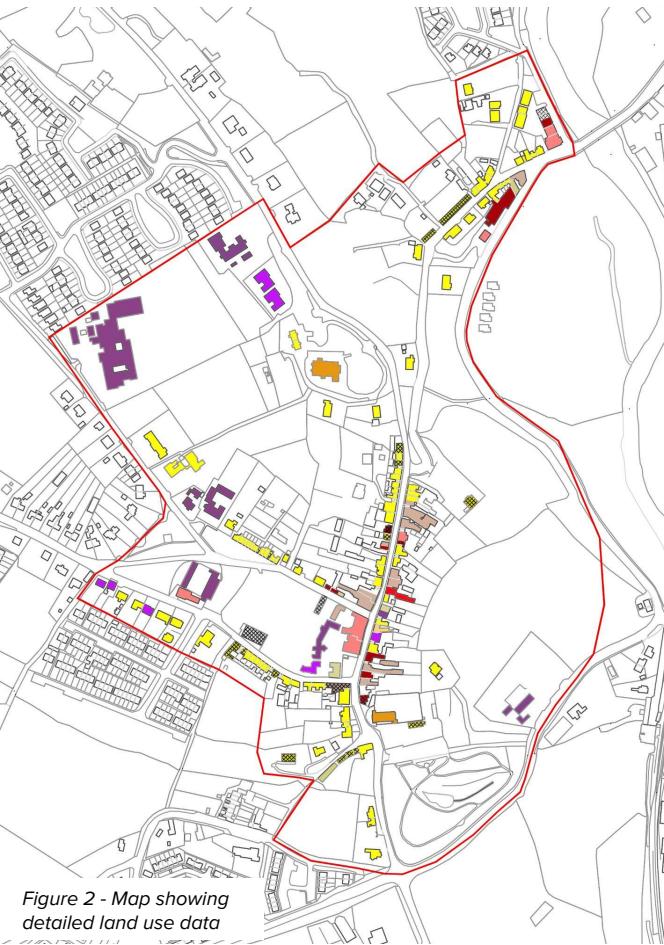


Figure 2 - Map showing detailed land use data

# Vacancy

## Analysis

Vacancy was noted during the completion of the land-use surveys, based on on-site observation. Only units that could be determined beyond reasonable doubt as vacant were noted. A visual inspection survey of ground floor vacancy was conducted. There may be additional vacancy in upper storeys of units that have been classified as occupied.

Vacancy rates across various land uses are summarised as follows:

**Overall vacancy:** 15%

**Residential Vacancy:** 19%

**Non-residential Vacancy:** 10.5%

Overall levels of vacancy in the study area of Rathdrum town centre is relatively high. The residential vacancy rate is significantly higher than the average for County Wicklow of 3.1% as per the GeoDirectory Residential Buildings Report for Q4 of 2024. The non-residential vacancy is slightly below the average commercial vacancy rate for County Wicklow at 12%, and also below the national average of 14.5%, according to the GeoDirectory Commercial Vacancy Rates Report for Q4 2024. A map of vacant units is shown opposite in figure 4.

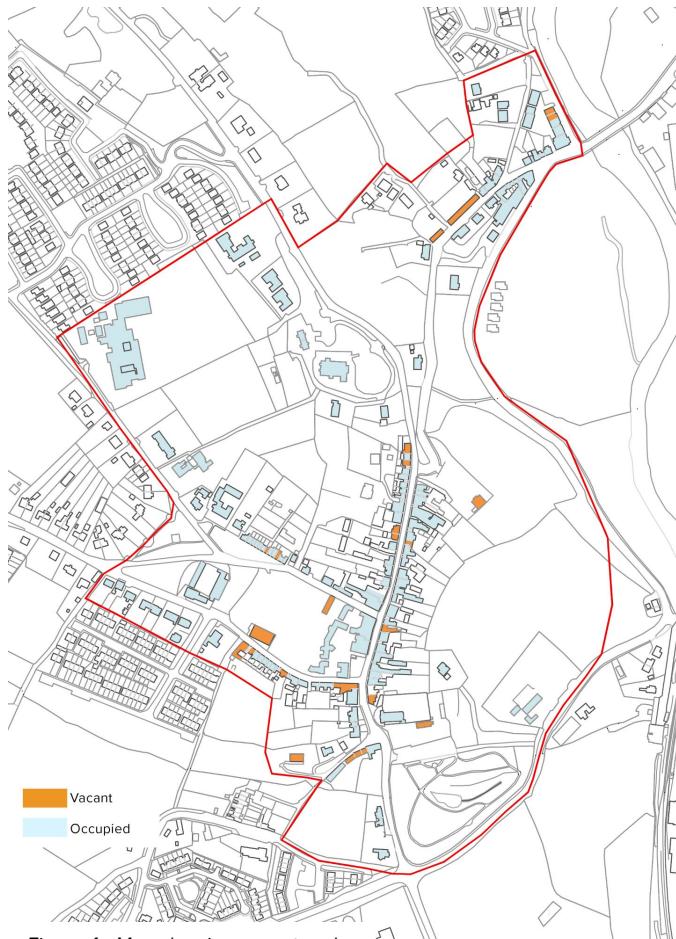


Figure 4 - Map showing vacant and occupied units

# Vacancy

## Photo survey

Vacancy was observed across multiple land use classifications. The following images represent a selection of very prominent units in the town centre along with typical smaller vacant retail and residential units.



# Footfall & Vehicular Movements

## Analysis

Footfall and vehicular counts were undertaken at four locations as shown on the map opposite, figure 5 during the site visit on April 14th & 15th 2025, it should be noted that this was during the Easter holiday period and this may have impacted data due to school closures. Detailed data is recorded in the table below, table 1.

Location 1 - Main St. (St. Saviours)

Location 2 - Brewery Lane

Location 3 - Back Lane

Location 4 - Main St. (Jacob's Well)

The heaviest vehicular traffic was recorded at location 1, Main St. (St. Saviours), followed by location 3, Back Lane. Average vehicle numbers are significantly lower at location 4, Main St. (Jacob's Well). This would suggest that a significant number of vehicular journeys were travelling to the town centre and not carrying on through. Overall, the total average number of all journeys that were made by vehicle was 83.9%.

Town name: Rathdrum													
Location		Location 1			Location 2			Location 3			Location 4		
Day / date	Time Interval	Vehicles	Pedestrians	Cyclists									
14-Apr-25	10.30 - 10.45	60	3		48	3		64	4	1	42	6	
	12.30 - 12.45	69	4		39	3		58	13		54	13	
	2.30 - 2.45	84	17		47	8		65	6		53	15	
15-Apr-25	10.30 - 10.45	78	15		43	12		55	7		55	3	
	12.30 - 12.45	90	20		44	7	1	57	19		64	10	
	2.10 - 2.25	95	29		54	24		38	4	1	62	22	1
Overall average		79.0	14.7		45.8	9.5	1.0	56.2	8.8	1.0	55.0	11.5	1.0
Overall % travelled by vehicle		84.3			82.6			86			82.5		

Table 1 - Showing detailed breakdown of footfall and vehicular count data

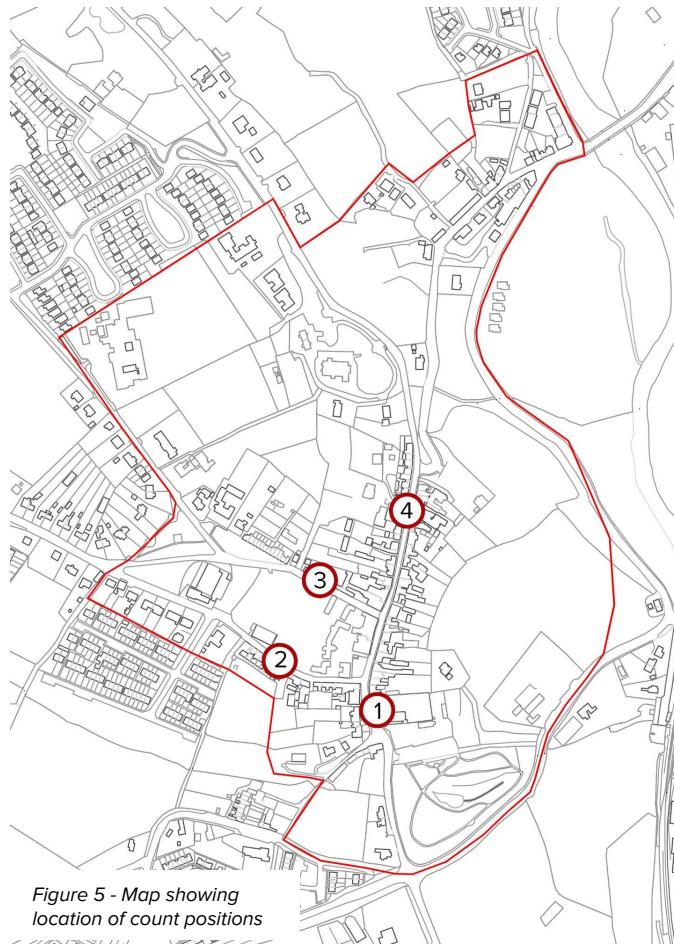


Figure 5 - Map showing location of count positions

## Desire Lines

Desire lines show the natural paths that people take when crossing roads, highlighting areas where pedestrians cross the road. In the map of Rathdrum shown in figure 6, the desire lines are marked in green, while existing pedestrian crossings are shown in orange.

The existing crossings are generally to the periphery of Rathdrum town centre, with a crossing at the southern end of Memorial Park and the only other designated pedestrian crossings being on Back Lane and Brewery Lane. A number of desire lines were identified during the study, all of which were on Main Street. One was identified at the southern end of Main Street to connect to the northwest entrance to Memorial Park. A second desire line was identified at the car park on Main Street at Centra / Credit Union, where there is often traffic congestion and difficulty crossing. There is a need for a pedestrian crossing at the northern end of Main Street, at the junction with Lower Street. With the congestion and on-street parking, it is challenging to cross Main Street in general, a need was identified for a further, more central pedestrian crossing point. While not in the immediate study area, a final desire line was identified on Lower Street at the junction with the entrance to Rathdrum train station.

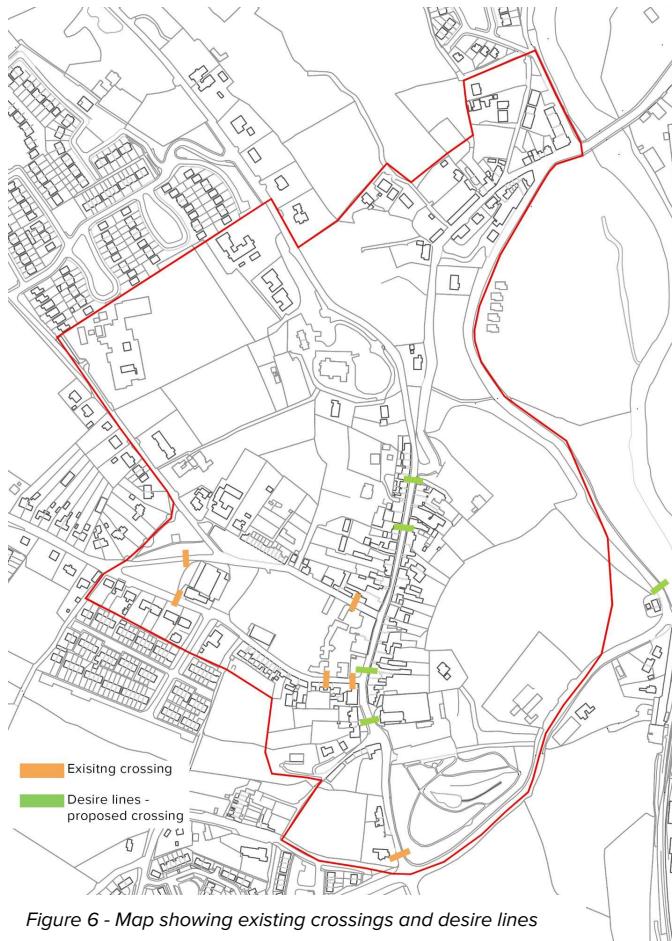


Figure 6 - Map showing existing crossings and desire lines

# Parking Assessment

An assessment of car parking facilities and usage was undertaken during the site visits. It should be noted that this was during the Easter holidays and this may effect data due to school closures.

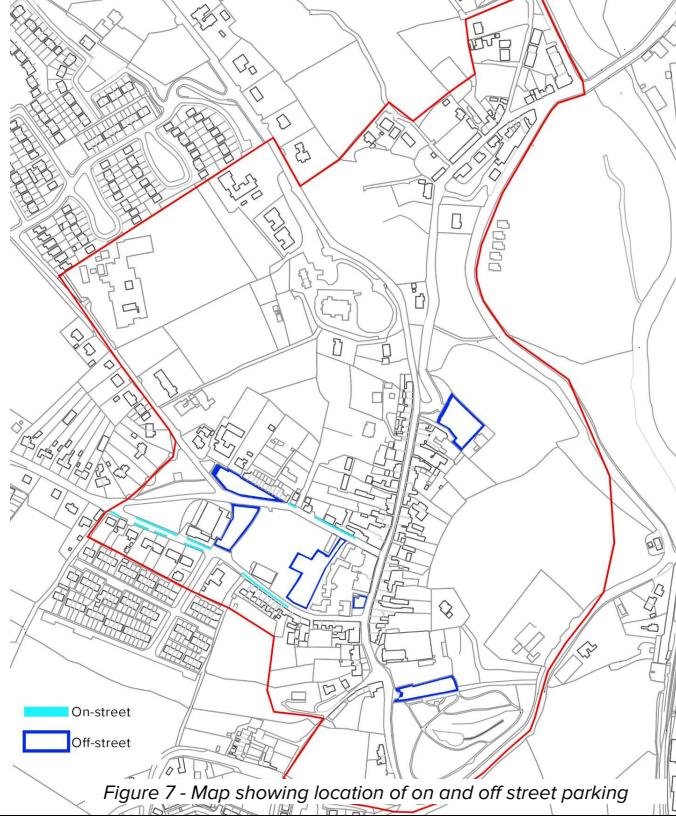
Rathdrum offers a mix of on-street and off-street parking options to accommodate residents, commuters, and visitors. Designated on-street parking is available on Back Lane and Brewery Lane. While on-street parking is not marked on Main Street, cars park predominantly on the east side of the street, primarily belonging to residents. There was significant congestion on Main St. noted during the study trip.

Off street parking was identified in 6 car park locations as highlighted in the map opposite, figure 7. It was noted during the survey that there was a maximum capacity for on-street parking of 154 cars and off-street parking of 249 spaces available. As detailed below, the busiest car park was that at Centra on Main Street.

Usage was surveyed at two points during the day and the data is detailed in the table below, table 2.

Table 2 - Showing detailed breakdown of car parking data

Town name:		Rathdrum																				
Location		On Street			Car Park 1 (Memorial Park)			Car Park 2 (Lower Street)			Car Park 3 (Centra)			Car Park 4 (Library)			Car Park 5 (Council car park)			Car Park 6 (Rathdrum BNS)		
Day / date	Time Interval	Available	Occupied	% use	Available	Occupied	% use	Available	Occupied	% use	Available	Occupied	% use	Available	Occupied	% use	Available	Occupied	% use	Available	Occupied	% use
	10.30 - 11.30	154	44	29	48	15	31	25	14	56	13	13	100	65	24	36	35	2	6	40	4	10
	14.30 - 15.30	154	44	29	48	16	33	25	18	72	13	12	92	65	47	72	35	2	6	40	4	10



## Public Realm

Rathdrum's public realm reflects its historic village character, with a blend of traditional elements and some areas in need of improvement. The Main Street, while narrow and often congested due to on-street parking, showcases a mix of historic and contemporary shopfronts, contributing to the town's unique charm; however, the limited width of footpaths along Main Street, Back Lane, and Brewery Lane poses challenges for pedestrians, especially those with mobility issues. The narrowness of Main Street with its related traffic problems has led to the use of on-street planters to limit parking. These narrow pathways, some of which have stepped access into buildings, hinder opportunities for urban enhancements such as seating, planting, or street art.

The Rathdrum Placemaking project, part of the Creative Ireland Programme, aims to address these challenges by focusing on reimagining public spaces through activities that promote social inclusion, healthy lifestyles, and intergenerational engagement. These efforts signify a commitment to revitalising Rathdrum's public realm, balancing its historical essence with modern needs. Market Square serves as the historic and geographic heart of Rathdrum, offering the potential to be a vibrant civic space for community gatherings, markets, and cultural events. However, its current use as a car park significantly limits this potential.



## Public Realm

The 2006–2016 Rathdrum Local Area Plan acknowledged this dual role, recommending that while parking be maintained, the square should be resurfaced to facilitate occasional civic use . Despite this, the square continues to function primarily as a parking area, constraining opportunities for public realm enhancements. The 2017–2023 Local Area Plan further highlights the challenges posed by unregulated on-street parking, noting that it contributes to congestion and diminishes the pedestrian experience along Main Street . Reimagining Market Square as a pedestrian-friendly civic space could enhance Rathdrum's town centre, fostering community engagement and supporting local businesses.

The connecting ‘mass paths’ and woodland walks are an important part of the character and charm of Rathdrum but issues of littering and dog fouling limit the amenity of these spaces. The public realm and floorscape is of variable quality throughout the town centre and efforts to connect the main town centre with the village centre at the mill and Hidden Valley resort on the Avonmore river will require careful consideration of the potential to provide more seating on the steep-sloping connecting Lower Street.



# Questionnaires

A total of 104 individuals took part in the Town Centre Health Check survey in Rathdrum, offering insights into their views on the town, travel habits, and suggested improvements. Of those surveyed, 100 were local residents, while the remaining four were a tourist, a shopper, a student, and a worker.

One of the key questions explored participants' immediate associations with Rathdrum. Responses were divided, with roughly half expressing positive associations such as "home," "green/trees," "community," and "peacefulness." The other half reflected negative perceptions, including concerns about traffic and congestion, a rundown appearance, and a feeling that the town has been neglected or forgotten. Some perceptions also revealed internal contradictions, for instance, while some described the town as "lively" and "busy," others used terms like "mayhem" and "chaotic," indicating a wide range of experiences and views.

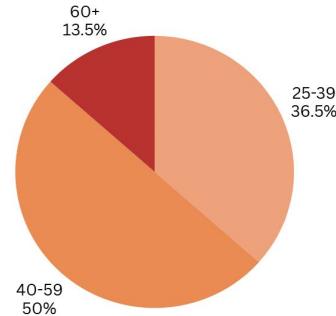
## About the respondents

 104 respondents

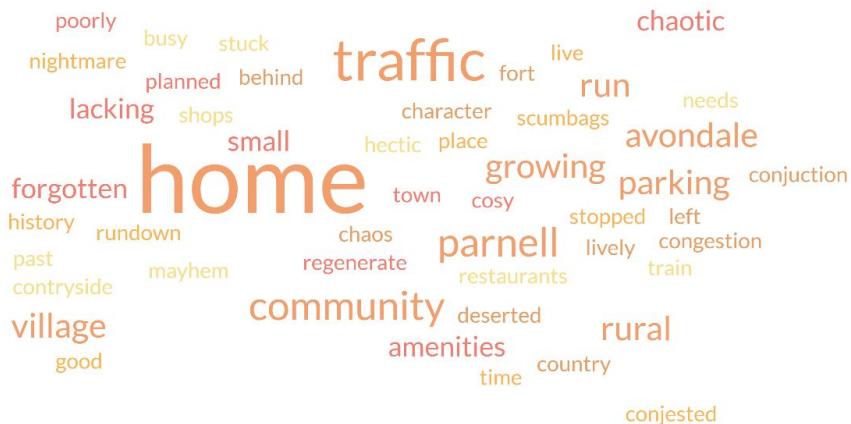
 96% live in Rathdrum

 71 female  32 male

## Age



*Word Cloud: What is the first word you associate with Rathdrum?*



# Questionnaires

## Existing Infrastructure & Service Provision

### Positive

**Avondale** - Proximity to the Avondale is clearly a positive aspect of the town. 64 of the 104 respondents listed Avondale as a good place in Rathdrum.

**Parks** - Memorial Park, Hidden Valley,

Other important services and infrastructure include **Centra**, the **GAA club**, the **library**, post office, the **pharmacy**, the **playground**.



Avondale. Source: Visit Wicklow

### Lacking or in need of improvement

**Main Street (44)** - A high number of comments related to the traffic congestion, parking problems and dereliction along Main Street with some suggesting a one-way system.

**Town Centre/Market Square** - Many would like to see better use of the Square as it lack vibrancy currently gives the town a feel of dereliction.

**Community Services** - Need for community centre, youth and sports facilities, park upgrades and public toilets

**Old Tech Building (14)** - This building was commonly cited as an underused space with potential if improved.

**Public Realm** - General sense that that town is untidy with poor footpath conditions and lack of maintenance

*"Beyond the trees Avondale is the only thing around here really! Lots of lovely walks but not many attractions"*

# Questionnaires

## Travel and Transport

The survey results highlighted a widespread frustration with traffic and travel conditions in Rathdrum. As shown in the chart, **80%** of respondents rated traffic as poor or very poor. In the open-ended responses, 19 participants suggested implementing a one-way system on Main Street, with several also proposing that parking be restricted to designated areas only or removed entirely from Main Street.

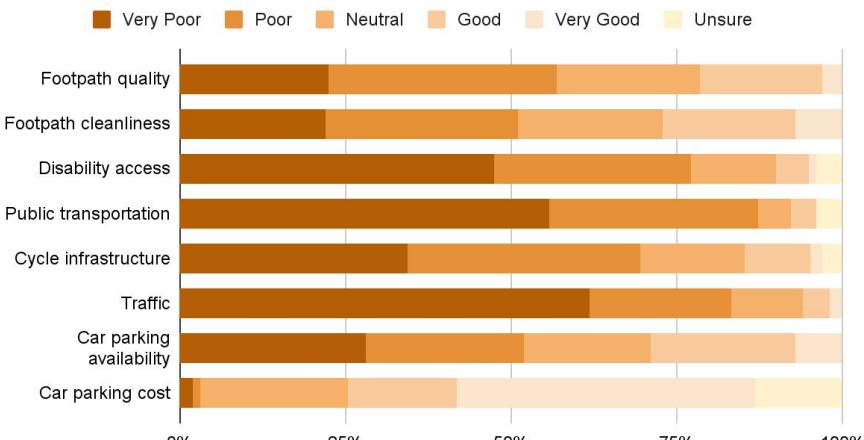
*"The town has had a wonderful boost in tourism in recent years but there has been no upgrade to traffic & parking. What was upgraded in terms of the Primary Health centre parking is now at full capacity. The main St is a joke and is regularly blocked/congested. It should be pedestrianized & a ring road built to avoid the town."*

Among residents living within 1 km of the town centre, **35 (47%)** reported walking daily, indicating a strong uptake of active travel on foot. However, **47 (64%)** of this group said they never cycle, though 18 local residents noted they cycle occasionally. This suggests there is some interest in cycling, and with targeted infrastructure improvements, the number of cyclists could potentially grow. Cycling uptake is also very low among the 19 respondents living 1–5 km from Rathdrum, highlighting a further opportunity for improvement in active travel options.

*"Traffic on the main street is horrendous. There's little to no enforcement of parking. The town has ample parking but people still park illegally constantly. The zebra crossing at the corner is positioned badly which makes it a blind spot for traffic coming up but they don't slow. There are too many trucks going through the down. An access road is desperately needed from the R752 to Greenane Road to reduce traffic through the town....Speed cameras at all entries to town my reduce some of the racing that takes place. The town is not well designed for those with disabilities. On street parking is prioritized and there is narrow footpaths for in most areas which require widening."*

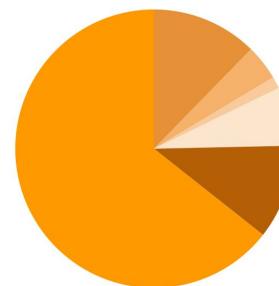
There is a general sense that footpath conditions are not satisfactory and that the town is not accessible for people with disabilities and older people.

## How good is the following infrastructure in Rathdrum?



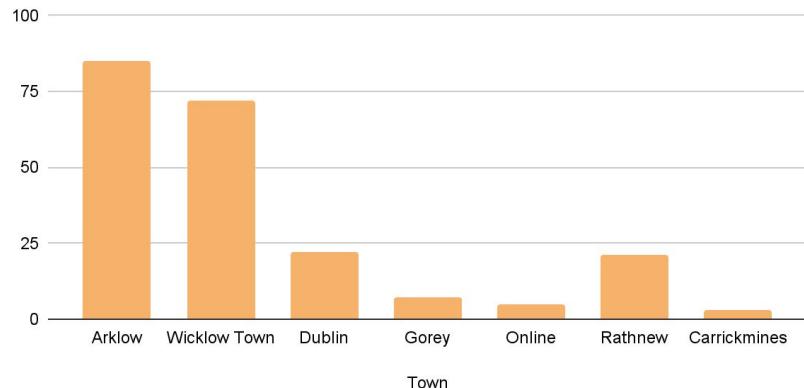
## Cycle 1km to Town

● 2-3 times a month ● 2-3 times a week ● Daily ● Once a week ● Seldom ● Never

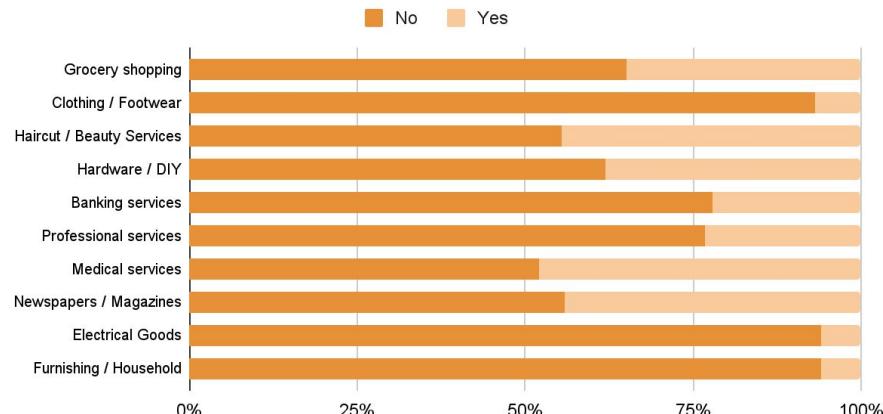


A large number of respondents (40%) highlighted the urgent need for a full-service **supermarket** such as Aldi, Lidl, Tesco, or Dunnes. Many feel the current Centra is overpriced and lacks the variety needed to serve the town's growing population. As a result, residents often travel to nearby towns for basic groceries, which is inconvenient, especially for those without cars. There were also calls for **more shops, cafés, restaurants, and specialist retailers** such as bakeries, florists, and clothing stores to support local shopping and reduce reliance on other towns.

Which other locations do you go to for services and goods not primarily purchased in Rathdrum?



Would you purchase the following goods and services primarily in Rathdrum?



Local **walking routes** were one of the few amenities viewed positively in the survey. However, the vast majority of responses expressed a strong lack of community and recreational facilities. Key requests included a modern **community centre, swimming pool, youth spaces, a skate park, and enhanced sports infrastructure like running tracks and pitches.**

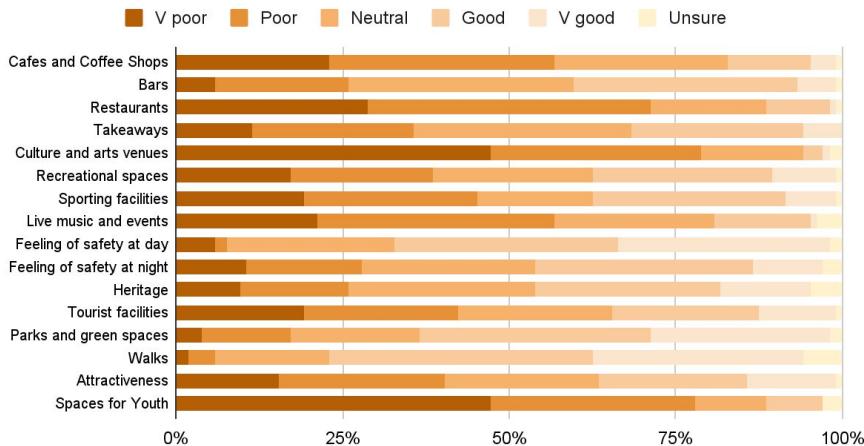
While Culture & Arts venues were rated poorly in the Likert scale, open-ended responses showed limited demand for formal cultural spaces. Instead, there was a clear desire for creative and social hubs, especially for **young people** not engaged in sports.

**Childcare** availability was another major concern, with calls for more crèches and afterschool options to support young families.

Healthcare access and Garda presence were also recurring issues. Respondents asked for more GPs, dentists, and full-time use of the Primary Care Centre, alongside a 24/7 Garda station and improved public safety measures.

Overall, there is a strong sense that while the town has grown rapidly in population, essential services and infrastructure have not kept pace.

### Rating of facilities and amenities

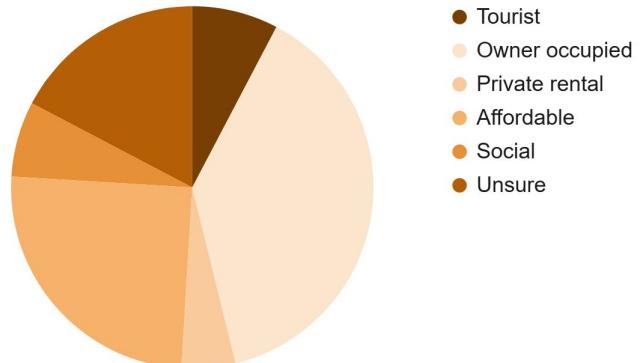


Access to schools, childcare, and healthcare, as well as a general sense of safety, were consistently highlighted as vital to the health of Rathdrum. Recent break-ins may have intensified calls for a stronger Garda presence and improved safety measures.

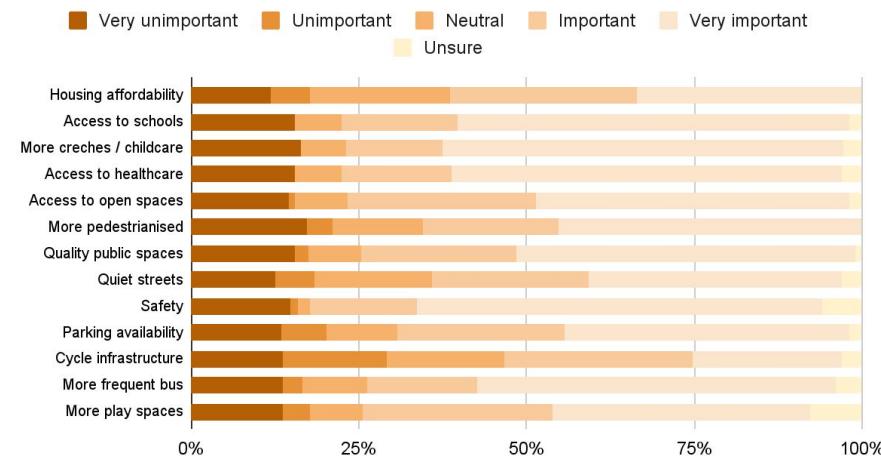
Views on cycling infrastructure and increased pedestrianisation were more mixed, with no clear consensus emerging. Similarly, opinions varied on the types of housing most needed in the town.

Reliable bus services and a well-maintained public realm were also seen as key components of a thriving, accessible community.

Which housing tenures are most needed in Rathdrum?



### What makes a better living environment?



*"Garda Presence/manned fulltime Garda station. In recent months, gangs have been travelling in the locality, breaking into cars and homes and there is still no Garda presence. People no longer feel safe in their homes."*

# Consultations

To complement the completion of online and hard copy questionnaires, a face-to-face consultation was held in Rathdrum Development Association Hall on the evening of 14th April. This allowed members of the public to drop in and discuss their concerns and hopes for Rathdrum in an open format with commentary captured. The event was well-attended with input from the business and community sectors, local volunteers, residents and elected representatives. Those who participated were very passionate about the future of their town.

The group highlighted some very positive community driven progress in their town.

- Numerous quality sports clubs
  - Church is leasing land to local community groups
  - Benches have been put in by Tidy Towns
  - Two church communities work together
  - New library and health care centre
  - Old persons hospital
  - Revival of the Cartoon Festival
  - Activities in the park - literary
  - New roof on the Mill
  - Park Run in Rathdrum

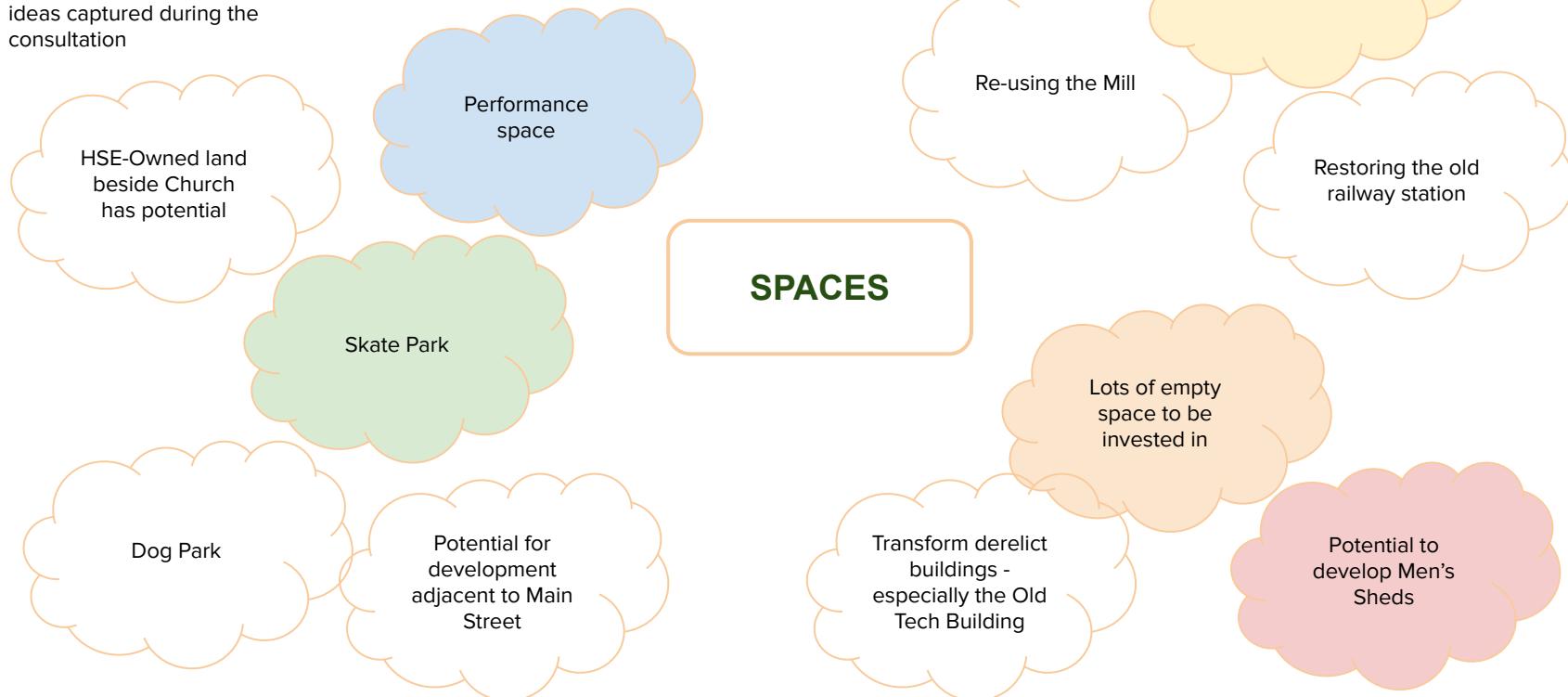
The consultation highlighted strong demand for improved facilities and services in Rathdrum, particularly a supermarket and community services, such as youth club (non-sport related), leisure facilities and public toilets. There was a noted shortage of childcare places and limited school capacity, with calls for more crèche options and co-educational schools. Concerns were raised about rapid housing development outpacing both transport and community infrastructure. The following pages summarise some of the issues raised.



## Consultations

### Spaces

The below represent comments and ideas captured during the consultation



## Consultations

### Facilities and Services

The below represent comments and ideas captured during the consultation

## FACILITIES & SERVICES

Youth club  
(non-sports)

Community  
Centre

Intergenerational  
family homes

Swimming pool

Increase schools  
capacity & mix  
boys & girls  
school

More guards  
available 24/7

Public Toilets

More bins

Lack of large  
grocery store -  
demand for  
supermarket

A gym

A local museum

Too much housing  
development -  
evident sprawl

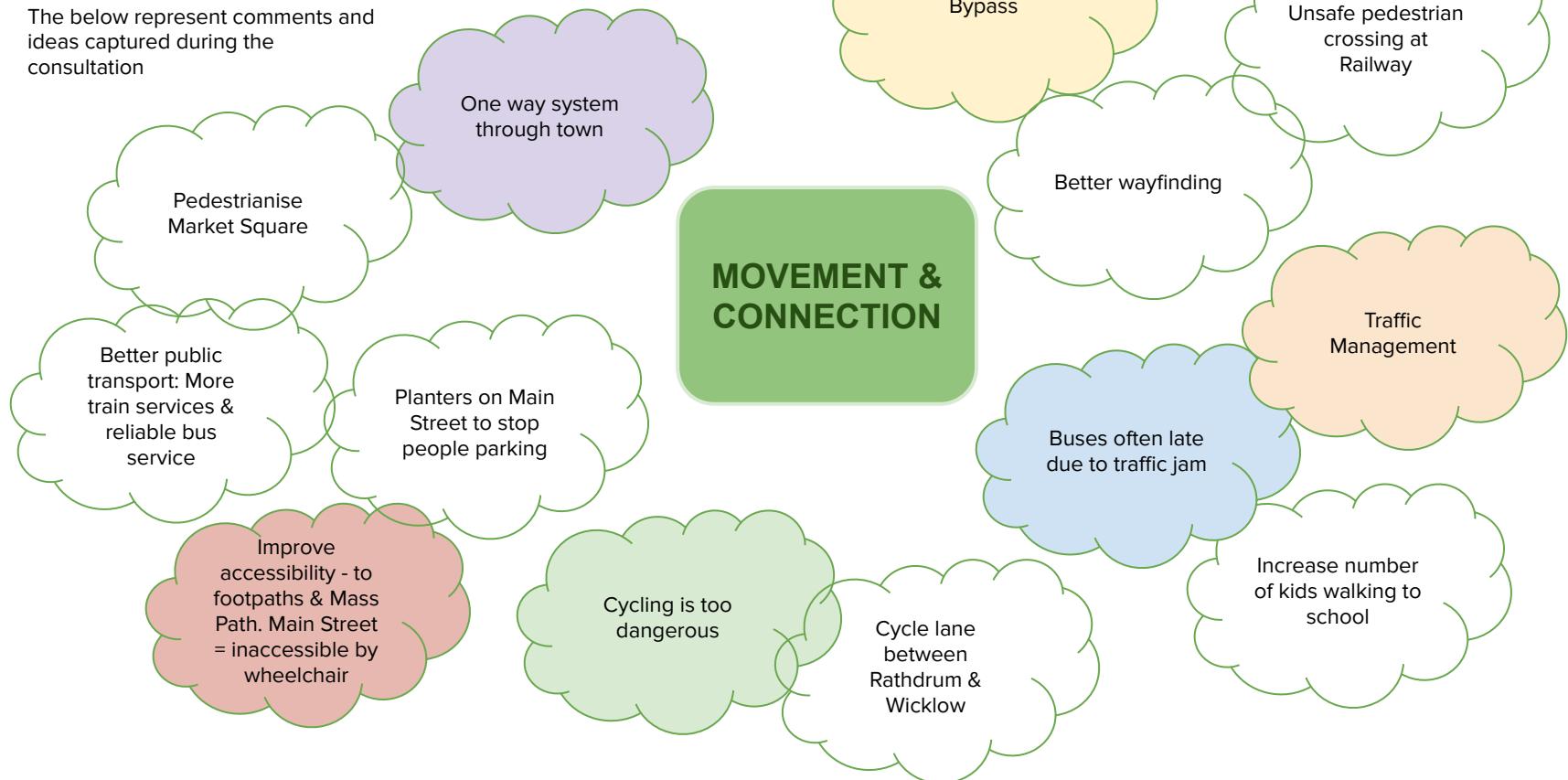
Huge shortage of  
crechés

## Consultations

### Movement and Connection

The below represent comments and ideas captured during the consultation

## MOVEMENT & CONNECTION



## Consultations

### Employment

The below represent comments and ideas captured during the consultation

## EMPLOYMENT /ECONOMY

Need for incubator units

Few business - people object to development

Very few people work in Rathdrum

Increase local employment opportunities

Building beside the library has the potential to be a café

Heritage - Ancient East = possibilities for tourism

Local education related to arboriculture

Co-working hub

Town as a gateway to the mountains - could be improved

Promote environmental tourism

Lots of arts - stories of Rathdrum are hidden

Better retail provision could provide employment

# SCOT Analysis

Based on the insights gathered from questionnaire responses, drop-in consultations, field surveys and other feedback, this report concludes with a detailed strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats (SCOT) analysis of Rathdrum.

The key observations for each category are summarised with a more detailed analysis provided in the following pages.

This comprehensive assessment aims to inform future plans and policies as an evidence-based dataset in the form of a Town Centre Health Check, fostering a proactive approach to addressing challenges and leverage opportunities.

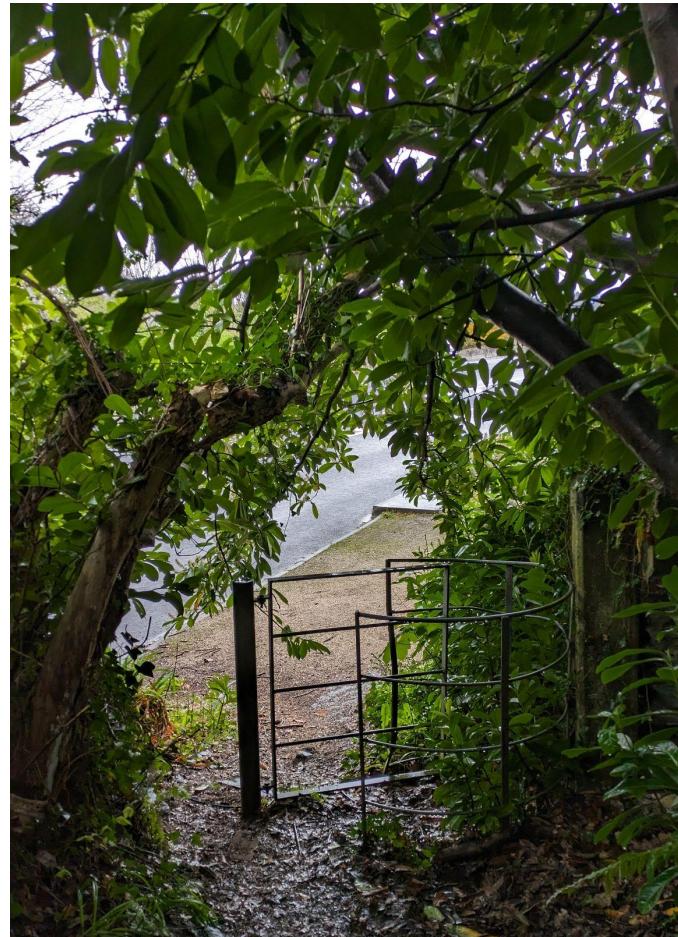
Strengths	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Rich Architectural Heritage</li><li>- Scenic Natural Setting</li><li>- Transport Connectivity</li><li>- Community and Local Identity</li><li>- Development Potential</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Limited Local Services and Employment</li><li>- Underutilised and Derelict Buildings</li><li>- Infrastructure Pressures</li><li>- Topographical Constraints</li></ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Tourism Development</li><li>- Sustainable Growth and Housing</li><li>- Town Centre Regeneration</li><li>- Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity</li><li>- Community-Led Development</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Commuter Town Risk</li><li>- Pressure from Inappropriate Development</li><li>- Climate Change Impacts</li><li>- Funding and Resource Limitations</li><li>- Demographic Shifts</li></ul>

# SCOT Analysis

## Strengths

Rathdrum is endowed with significant strengths that support its long-term development as a self-sustaining town. Chief among these is its rich architectural and cultural heritage, preserved through designated Architectural Conservation Areas that maintain the town's distinctive character. Its scenic setting in the Avonmore River valley enhances its appeal both for residents and visitors. Rathdrum also enjoys strong regional connectivity via rail and road, linking it efficiently to Dublin, Wicklow Town, and Rosslare. The community is closely knit, with a strong sense of local identity and civic pride. These factors, combined with available zoned lands and an aligned development framework, provide a solid foundation for sustainable growth.

- Rich Architectural Heritage**  
The town boasts two designated Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs), preserving historical and cultural identity.
- Scenic Natural Setting** - Located in the Avonmore River valley and surrounded by lush landscapes, Rathdrum is a gateway to natural attractions like Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains.
- Transport Connectivity** - Rathdrum benefits from a railway station with links to Dublin and Rosslare, as well as regional road access.
- Community and Local Identity** - Strong community cohesion and a sense of place support local initiatives and cultural heritage preservation.
- Development Potential** - Zoned lands are available for residential, commercial, and community use in line with sustainable development objectives.



Despite its many advantages, Rathdrum faces several internal challenges. The town currently lacks a broad range of local services, with many residents commuting for employment, education, and healthcare. Vacant and derelict buildings, particularly in the Lower Street area, detract from its visual appeal and economic vitality. Infrastructure such as wastewater and broadband capacity may require upgrading to accommodate projected growth. Furthermore, the town's hilly topography can limit development options and increase project costs. Addressing these challenges will be key to ensuring that Rathdrum can grow sustainably while meeting the needs of its population.

- **Limited Local Services and Employment** - Residents often rely on larger towns for employment, healthcare, and higher education, leading to commuting and economic leakage.
- **Underutilised and Derelict Buildings** - There are clusters of vacancy and dereliction in Rathdrum, which affect the overall town vibrancy. This is exacerbated by the prominent locations of some derelict buildings on the approaches to the town centre and on the corner of the Square.
- **Infrastructure Pressures** - existing water, wastewater, and digital infrastructure may not be sufficient to support rapid growth without upgrades.
- **Topographical Constraints**- the town's sloped landscape can limit development options and increase construction costs.



Rathdrum stands at a strategic moment where numerous opportunities can be leveraged to strengthen its role as a vibrant, self-sustaining town. Its proximity to natural and cultural tourism destinations opens up the potential for eco-tourism, heritage tourism, and outdoor recreation-based enterprise. There is strong potential for sustainable residential development and town centre regeneration, especially through adaptive reuse of vacant properties and public realm enhancements. Environmental goals, such as creating green corridors and improving access to the riverfront, align with broader climate and biodiversity strategies. Additionally, the engaged local community and supportive planning policy environment create fertile ground for participatory, locally driven development initiatives.

- **Tourism Development** - proximity to popular destinations and eco-tourism routes (like the Wicklow Way) provides scope for enhancing Rathdrum's tourism offerings.
- **Sustainable Growth and Housing** - with available zoned land and a focus on compact growth, Rathdrum can attract new residents while preserving its character.
- **Town Centre Regeneration** - revitalisation of the Low Town and town centre through infill development, public realm improvements, and support for local enterprise.
- **Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity** - opportunities to enhance green spaces, walking and cycling routes, and riverfront access in line with environmental goals.
- **Community-Led Development** - leveraging community groups and local knowledge for participatory planning and heritage protection.



While the outlook for Rathdrum is generally positive, there are several external threats that could undermine its strategic objectives. The risk of becoming a commuter-dependent town remains high if employment and services are not expanded locally. Inappropriate or poorly designed development, particularly within heritage-sensitive areas, could damage the town's unique character. Climate change poses environmental risks such as increased flooding and infrastructure strain. Additionally, limited funding or staffing at the local authority level could slow or prevent implementation of key plan objectives. Finally, demographic trends such as youth out-migration and population aging could impact the town's economic and social resilience if not proactively managed.

- **Commuter Town Risk** - without sufficient local jobs, Rathdrum risks becoming overly dependent on nearby urban centres, reducing daytime vitality.
- **Pressure from Inappropriate Development** - unmanaged growth could threaten Rathdrum's character, particularly in sensitive ACA zones. Additionally new housing developments with lack of cohesive active travel plan for the town will exacerbate traffic and congestions issues.
- **Climate Change Impacts** - Increased flood risk and extreme weather events may affect infrastructure and heritage assets, particularly those near the river.
- **Funding and Resource Limitations** - Implementation of strategic goals may be hindered by limited public funding or staff capacity at local government level.
- **Demographic Shifts** - An aging population and out-migration of younger people could impact the town's long-term sustainability.



## Closing Summary

Rathdrum demonstrates strong potential for sustainable growth, supported by its rich architectural heritage, scenic setting, community spirit, and regional transport links. However, its town centre currently faces several challenges, including a lack of essential services, vacant and derelict buildings and inadequate public transport. Community consultations revealed a strong desire for improved local amenities such as a full-service supermarket, youth and community spaces, a swimming pool, and better pedestrian infrastructure. There is also concern over safety, accessibility, and the need for more visible Garda presence. While Rathdrum benefits from development opportunities, risks such as commuter dependency, poorly managed growth, climate-related impacts, and demographic shifts must be addressed to ensure a resilient and thriving town centre.

We would like to thank Wicklow County Council for the opportunity to engage with the people of Rathdrum to create this baseline report for the town. It summarises the physical condition of Rathdrum in terms of land use, vacancy, building condition and public realm; records of how people use the town (through movement, parking and desire line analysis); and how it is perceived (through questionnaires and an in-person consultation).

The main findings of this town centre health check are summarised in the preceding SCOT diagram and we hope that this report will help to stimulate further discussions within the town team and wider community to further regenerate Rathdrum.



## Appendix 1

### GOAD Land Use

The below table clarifies the GOAD land use classifications utilised in this study based on those used in the Heritage Council's Collaborative Town Centre Health Check programme with definitional clarifications.

<b><i>GOAD Classification:</i></b>	<b><i>Description of use</i></b>
<i>Comparison</i>	Non-food/non-perishable items where customers compare prices e.g. Clothes, jewellery, footwear, furniture, etc.
<i>Convenience</i>	Food items (perishable) which people do not normally travel far to purchase e.g. Convenience stores, deli, bakers, CTN (confectionary, tobacconist, newsagent)
<i>Retail Service</i>	Services' including hairdressers, post offices, dry cleaner, clothes hire shops, beauty salon, etc.
<i>Other Retail</i>	None of the above retail uses
<i>Leisure Services</i>	Bars, restaurants, cinemas, fast food takeaways, cafes, hotels and guest houses, concert halls, theatres, etc.
<i>Financial and Business Services</i>	Building society, banks, legal services, legal services, financial services, etc.
<i>Health and Medical Services</i>	Dental surgery, health centre, nursing home, doctors surgery, veterinary surgery, etc.
<i>Public Service</i>	Council offices, advice centre, library, tourist information, community centre, emergency services, educational establishment
<i>Religious Service</i>	Place of workshop, churches, church halls, religious meeting rooms, etc.
<i>Industrial</i>	Light and Heavy Industrial Units
<b>Black Cross Hatch</b>	
<i>Vacant Unit</i>	Vacant and derelict premises not in use
<i>Storage and Warehousing</i>	Storage / Warehouse (excluding retail warehouse - see COM 4, 11, 12, etc.)
<i>Residential</i>	Residential Units excluding short-term lets