

Castlecomer Collaborative Town Centre Health Check (CTCHC) Report

2024



Rialtas
na hÉireann
Government
of Ireland

Tionscadal Éireann
Project Ireland
2040



An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
Community Development



Lár Bailte ar dTús
Town Centre First

Ár dTodhchaí
Tuaithe
Our Rural
Future



Comhairle Chontae Chill Chainnigh
Kilkenny County Council

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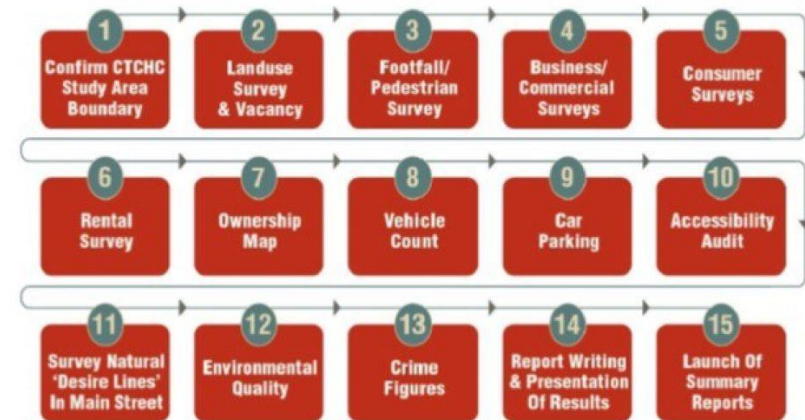
1. Aims of the CTCHC Report

The 15 step Collaborative Town Centre Health Check (CTCHC) Programme was established by the Heritage Council in 2010 and is a critical component of the Town Centre First Plan. This report describes the findings that were gathered in Castlecomer as part of the CTCHC process. The findings of the CTCHC Programme will inform plans and strategies in relation to the following:

- Arts, Heritage and Culture;
- Climate Change Adaptation;
- Community Health and Well-being;
- Public Realm, e.g. historic streetscapes, parks, greenways and public spaces;
- Cultural Tourism;
- Heritage-led regeneration;
- Living in the Town Centre; and
- Strategic Planning and Place-making.

This CTCHC report was completed in November 2024.

Ireland's Collaborative Town Centre Health Check (CTCHC) Programme The 15-Step CTCHC Process



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2. Survey Methodology

The CTCHC research and surveys for the Castlecomer Collaborative Town Centre Health Check (CTCHC) were undertaken between July and October 2024 by the Town Regeneration Team of Kilkenny County Council in collaboration with the Town Team and various departments of the Local Authority. A public engagement meeting was held on 23rd July 2024. A Town User survey ran for a four week period. A Business Owner survey ran subsequently. Additional surveys carried out are set out below.

Land Use & Vacancy Survey

The Town Regeneration Office of Kilkenny County Council carried out a land use survey of the town centre in October 2024. Land uses were recorded using ArcGIS Online and the accompanying Field Maps app. Vacant property surveys have been previously carried out by the Town Regeneration Team which assisted in the collation of vacant units. The land use survey in October 2024 verified vacant units and recorded additional units.

The land use and vacancy survey noted the ground floor uses of the properties. Each building use was selected in accordance with the GOAD Classification of Land Use to ensure consistency with other CTCHC surveys.

Footfall/Pedestrian Survey

In October 2024, members of the Town Team and Kilkenny County Council carried out a pedestrian / cyclist count at five different locations in Castlecomer. The count was carried out at three different times across two days. The data was inputted to a table showing the locations and times, in which pedestrian footfall and cyclist traffic was at its highest and lowest.

Business Owner Survey Questionnaire

A Business Owners survey was issued to businesses in Castlecomer which accepted submissions from 27th September 2024 to 13th October 2024. 9 no. responses were received.

Car Parking

A Mobility Management Plan was previously prepared by Atkins on behalf of Kilkenny County Council which illustrated car parking locations and approximate numbers. Throughout October 2024, car parking areas were surveyed for occupancy at various days and times.

Natural Desire Lines

'Desire Lines' are informal paths / ways / crossings used by pedestrians to enable a direct route. Desire lines, i.e. areas where pedestrians attempted to cross the road, were observed in the Town Centre by the Town Regeneration Team.

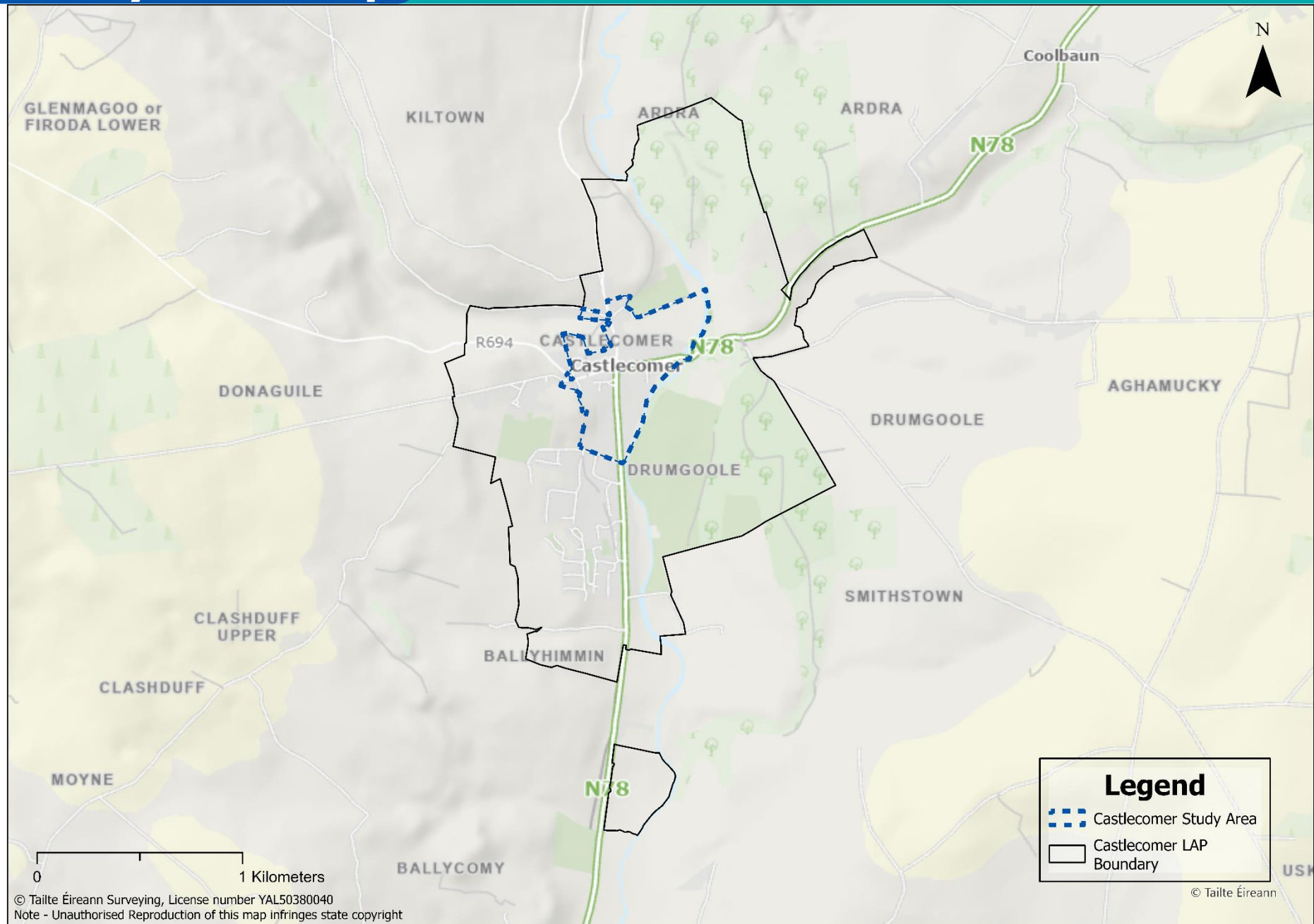
Public Engagement Meeting

The public engagement meeting was conducted on Tuesday 23rd July 2024 as part of consultation process for the Castlecomer Settlement Plan, which is being carried out by the Planning Department. The aim of this meeting was to hear the views of the community in relation to the positive and negative aspects of Castlecomer as a place to live and work.

Public Survey / Questionnaire

An online survey questionnaire based on best practice Town Centre Health Check research in Ireland and abroad was available for a 4-week period for town users (residents; business owners; employers; visitors and people passing through) to complete between 19th July 2024 to 23rd August 2024. 123 no. respondents completed the survey. The survey questions were based on the environment and people's experience of Castlecomer, public realm, transport, car parking and accessibility, activities and uses, and work and the local economy in Castlecomer.

3. Study Area Map



4. Introduction to Castlecomer

The earliest record of Castlecomer dates from 1200 when a Motte and Norman Castle were erected east of the existing bridge. In 1635, Sir Christopher Wandesforde began the construction of the present town near the site of the old castle. In 1635, Sir Christopher also began the construction of a new church. From the start, the town was planned. The bridge over the Dinín dates from 1764 and the town grew in the 18th century under the patronage of the Wandesforde's until it was burned in 1798. Therefore, little remains of the town prior to 1800. The fire however provided opportunity to redesign the town. Castlecomer slowly rose from the ashes and the Wandesforde house was built after 1800 (although subsequently burnt in the 1950). A number of houses were also built to provide for workers in their coal mining and iron smelting enterprises. These houses have consistency in character, all having been built around the same time after 1800. As the Wandesforde's wished to develop their land acquisitions commercially, the emphasis of the town was on commerce. The central axis of the town was to be based on a large marketplace, which corresponds to the present square.



SOURCE: ORDNANCE SURVEY, 6 INCH MAPPING 1839-1840

The formal layout of the town remains, with the main commercial areas centred on a cross roads development comprising a broad tree lined High Street and public space at Market Square. The River Dinín runs through the town and is met by a tributary close to the ruins of the Norman Castle. Historically, development of the town was also restricted to the west by the railway line. However, since its abandonment development has now spread beyond this along the town's main arterial routes and in some cases in upland areas.

At present, Castlecomer is one of the four district towns in Co. Kilkenny, located 16km from Kilkenny City, 20km from Carlow on Suir, 25km from Portlaoise and 12km from Durrow. Castlecomer is well connected by road, with the N78 entering the town from the east and exiting from the south of the town centre, making it accessible to Kilkenny City. The town had a population of 1,496 according to the 2022 Census.

5. The Built Heritage of Castlecomer

The town centre of Castlecomer is designated as an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA). There is a distinct cross pattern to the street layout in the centre of Castlecomer, with the four most significant streets converging on one central point offering a focal point to the townscape. In the mid-17th century the lands on which Castlecomer are now located were given to Sir Christopher Wandesforde who laid out the town to his own specifications. Due to the carefully planned proportions of the town a strong sense of formality can be observed in the urban environment. Several significant vistas can be observed within the designated areas, with notable viewpoints looking east from Barrack Street down High Street and looking south down Kilkenny Street.

Castlecomer has a significant number (100 no.) of structures included in the Record of Protected Structures (RPS), which lists the structures that are given statutory protection through the County Development Plan. The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) has also recorded a number of structures within Castlecomer. The purpose of the inventory is to identify, record and evaluate the post-1700 architectural heritage of Ireland, uniformly and consistently as an aid in the protection and conservation of the built heritage.



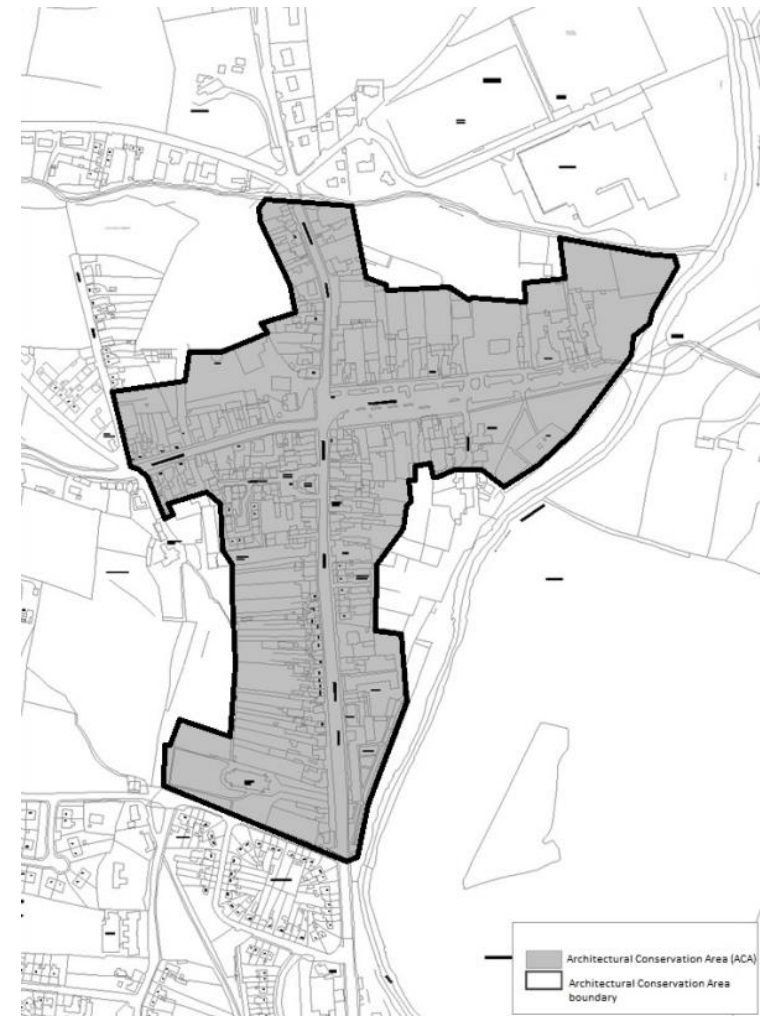
RPS Ref. C60



RPS Ref. C50



RPS Ref. C61



SOURCE: CASTLECOMER LOCAL AREA PLAN 2018

6. Industrial Heritage of Castlecomer

Castlecomer town had 3 mills which are all now closed. There was a bleach mill located in Ballyhimmin, built circa 1825, and later converted to a corn mill pre-1947. A flour mill, circa 1800 was located at Mill Lane which subsequently became a saw mill and the third mill with kiln was located at Kiltown Castlecomer.

Just outside of the town, in Deerpark, the coalmines, a significant employer, operated from the 1700's up to 1969. Castlecomer's mining industry commenced following the accidental discovery of iron ore by Christopher Wandesford in the mid-1700s. Castlecomer's mine operators made significant technological contributions to the mining industry including the invention of the world's first coal cutting machine. Florence Terrace was built by Captain Wandesford in the early 20th century to house workers of the nearby Coalmines.

Following the closure of the coalmines in 1969, Ormonde Brick (now closed) was established which provided work for the now out of work miners.



7. Land Use and Vacancy

Study Area Context

A survey of the land uses and vacancy rates of buildings within the Castlecomer Town Centre area was carried out in October 2024. The survey included the core areas of The Square, Barrack Street, Chatsworth Street and Kilkenny Street.

A total of 288no. buildings within the town centre were surveyed with 63% comprising residential buildings and the remainder comprising services or commercial activities. Retail services (i.e. hairdressers, post offices, salons) and leisure services (i.e. bars, restaurants, take-aways) were the most prominent commercial land uses, comprising a combined 32% of the commercial mix in the study area.

Comparison and convenience retail land uses comprise c. 25% of the commercial mix in the town centre which exceeds the national rate of 22%.

The town centre study area contains a variety of other land uses across financial and business services, public services and education, and health and medical activities.

Total Buildings Surveyed 288

Residential Use 63%

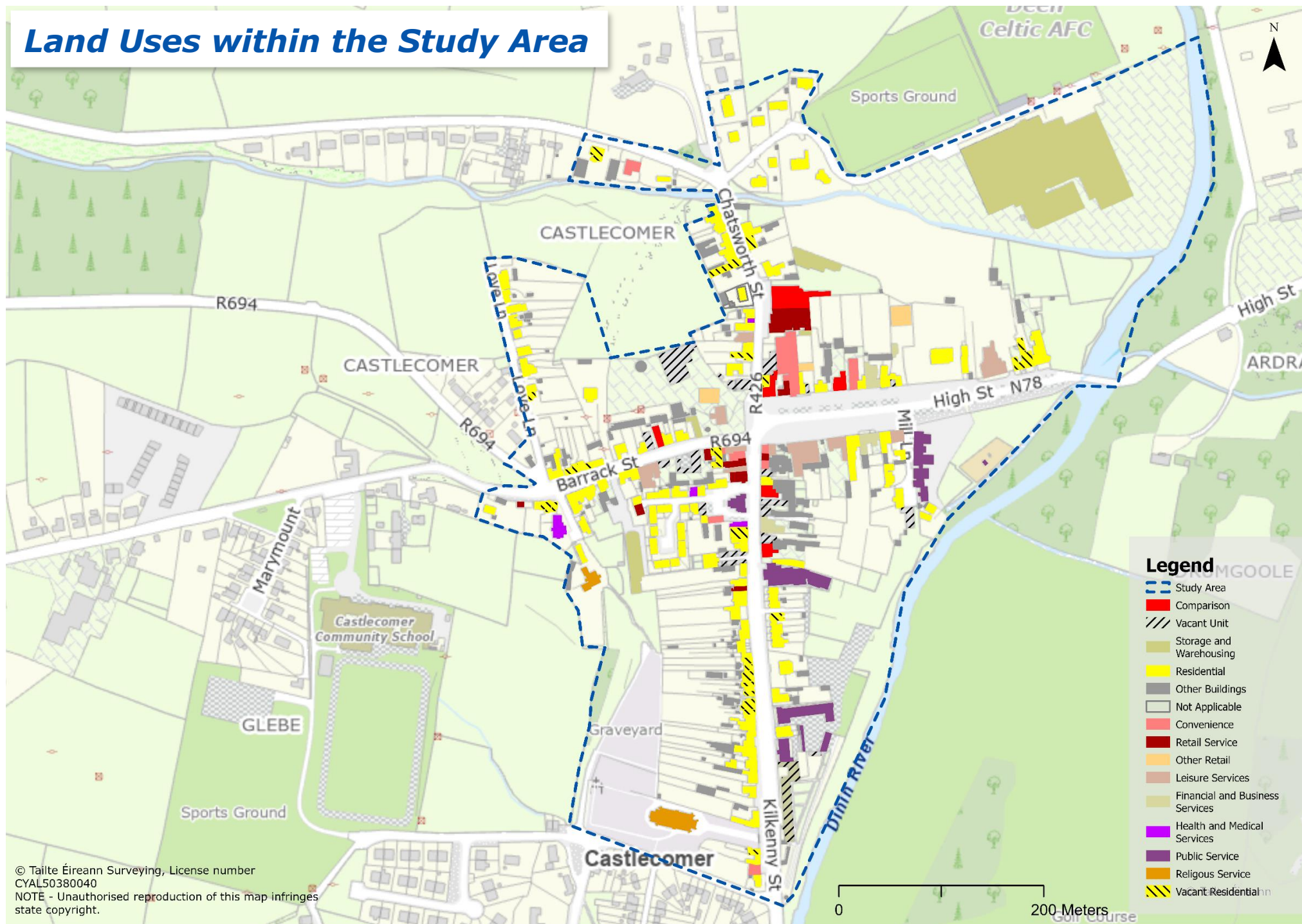
Non-Residential Use 37%



Castlecomer Town Centre Land Uses

53%	Residential
10%	Vacant Residential
9%	Vacant Non-Residential
5%	Leisure Services
5%	Retail Services
4%	Comparison
3%	Convenience
3%	Storage and Warehousing
3%	Public Service
2%	Financial and Business Services
1.5%	Health and Medical Services
1%	Other Retail
1%	Religious Service

Land Uses within the Study Area



Vacancy within the Study Area

The survey indicates that at time of surveying, i.e. October 2024, vacancy was an issue in the Castlecomer Town Centre.

Residential vacancy is evident along each of the main streets within the study area, however there are ongoing renovation works of several vacant properties, particularly along Kilkenny Street.

Commercial vacancy within the study is high. Some previous commercial units appear to have been converted to residential use.

Key Findings

Residential Vacancy (29 no.) 16%

(Calculated using 'residential' and 'vacant residential' values)

Vacancy Non-Residential (27 no.) 25%

(Calculated using all GOAD land uses surveyed excluding 'residential' and 'vacant residential')

Total Vacancy (56no.) 19%

(Calculated using all GOAD land uses surveyed in town)

Dereliction within the Study Area

There are no properties in Castlecomer listed on Kilkenny County Council's Derelict Sites Register at time of writing.

The process revealed properties at risk of dereliction.



8. Public Survey / Questionnaire

Overview

An online survey questionnaire based on best practice Town Centre Health Check research in Ireland and abroad was available for a 4-week period for town users (residents; business owners; employers; visitors and people passing through) to complete between 19th July 2024 to 23rd August 2024. 123 no. respondents completed the survey. The survey questions were based on the environment and people's experience of Castlecomer, public realm, transport, car parking and accessibility, activities and uses, and work and the local economy in Castlecomer. The survey received 123 no. respondents.

The results of the public survey were analysed using the Place Standard Tool, focussing on 14 no. topics: Moving Around; Public Transport; Traffic and Parking; Streets and Spaces; Natural Space; Play and Recreation; Facilities and Services; Work and Local Economy; Housing and Community; Social Interaction; Identity and Belonging; Feeling Safe; Care and Maintenance; and Influence and Sense of Control.

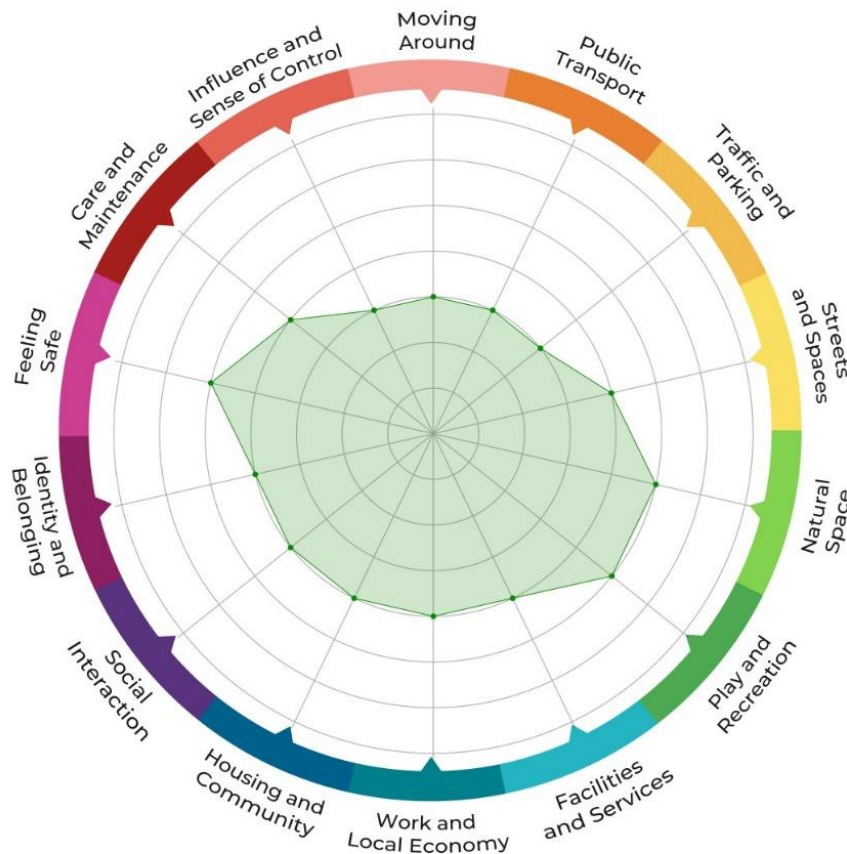
The topic which scored the highest was Natural Space (4.88) and the topic that scored the lowest was Traffic and Parking (2.52).

The results indicate that Castlecomer is doing reasonably well, however, there are some areas that need attention.

- 7 **Doing very well**
- 6 **Doing quite well – a few things to be worked on**
- 5 **Doing well – but some actions needed**
- 4 **Doing ok – but it could slip back without attention**
- 3 **Weak - but can improve if worked on**
- 2 **Quite weak – many actions needed**
- 1 **Very weak – a lot of improvements needed**

Topic	Average Rating
Moving Around	3.48
Public Transport	2.60
Traffic and Parking	2.52
Streets and Spaces	3.88
Natural Space	4.88
Play and Recreation	4.51
Facilities and Services	4.08
Work and Local Economy	3.51
Housing and Community	3.57
Social Interaction	3.87
Identity and Belonging	4.24
Feeling Safe	4.91
Care and Maintenance	3.92
Influence and Sense of Control	3.16

Place Standard Tool



Moving Around Score: 3.48

This question was answered by 121 respondents. The respondents provided a variety of suggested improvements for linkages with the most prevalent including cycle ways; bus connectivity; footpaths / walkways. The results indicate an interest in improving active travel both within the town centre and to the wider area by way of new and/or improved measures. Enhanced links to nearby tourist features such as the Rock of Foyle and to Kilkenny and Dublin were

also suggested including a greenway and additional buses catering to working professionals.

Public Transport Score: 2.60

This question was answered by 118 respondents. 35% of respondents rated Public Transport as '1'. Suggested connections include increased bus connectivity to Kilkenny City Centre; Clogh and Ballyragget. As above, respondents expressed interest in more regular bus services for working professionals and students to commute.

Traffic and Parking Score: 2.52

This question was answered by 120 respondents. 38% of respondents rated Traffic and Parking as '1'. The predominant concern raised by respondents is traffic management and parking along The Square and Barrack Street. Suggested improvements include specific car parking provision (e.g. EV / age-friendly etc.); alternative long-term car parking arrangements e.g. fees or off-street; a revised parking layout; and traffic lights.

Streets and Spaces Score: 3.88

This question was answered by 121 respondents. 24% of respondents rated Streets and Spaces as '4'. Suggested improvements include decluttering of main streets; removal of overhead power lines; signage design agreement; additional planting; increased maintenance of public spaces; provision of public toilets.

Natural Space Score: 4.88

This question was answered by 121 respondents with the most popular responses being '5' (24%) and '6' (21%).

Play and Recreation Score: 4.51

This question was answered by 122 respondents with the most popular responses being '5' (27%). Suggested improvements included additional/improved recreational areas for both adults and

younger people; additional community initiatives; a swimming pool; and seating areas for picnics.

Facilities and Services Score: 4.08

This question was answered by 120 respondents with the most popular responses being '5' (28%) and '4' (27%). The most common suggested facilities included additional retailers; childcare; and dentist/health related facilities. Suggested services included broadband within the town; improved water services; public toilets.

Work and Local Economy Score: 3.51

This question was answered by 116 respondents with the most popular response being '3' (28%). The lack of jobs in the town centre was a common answer.

Housing and Community Score: 3.57

This question was answered by 118 respondents with the most popular response being '4' (26%) and '2' (25%). Respondents raised concerns regarding the lack of affordable housing and rental accommodation.

Social Interaction Score: 3.87

This question was answered by 121 respondents with the most popular response being '4' (29%). A common theme of the responses suggested a lack of opportunities outside of GAA. Additional opportunities for adults was also suggested.

Identity and Belonging Score: 4.24

This question was answered by 119 respondents with the most popular response being '5' (22%) and 6 (19%). Suggested improvements include additional events and groups for all members of the community.

Feeling Safe Score: 4.91

This question was answered by 121 respondents with the most popular responses being '6' (22%); '5' (24%) and '7' (17%) which indicates that the respondents feel safe within their community.

Suggested improvements relate to increased garda presence and tackling anti-social behaviour.

Care and Maintenance Score: 3.92

This question was answered by 120 respondents with the most popular responses being '5' (28%); and '3' (23%). The community highlighted the high *quality of the main streets of Castlecomer, however, additional maintenance of footpaths and planting was suggested. The care and maintenance of derelict properties was also raised as an issue by a number of respondents.*

Influence and Sense of Control Score: 3.16

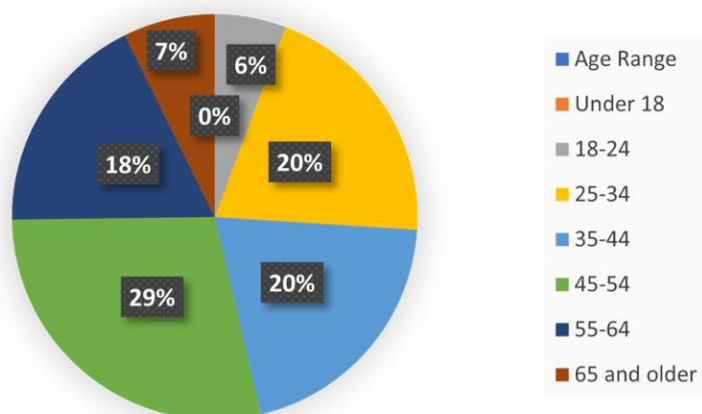
This question was answered by 117 respondents. The most answer was '4' (26%). The second-most popular response, however, was '1' (23%) which indicates that the respondents consider to have a low level of influence in the decision-making process.

Public Survey Questionnaire – Summary of Responses

Respondent Profiles



Respondent Age Profile



Are there any linkages that could be improved? / Have you any specific suggestions for improvements?

The public indicated the following suggested linkages and improvements:

Increased public transport

A greenway / walkway along the river.

Car parking at the Square requires alterations

Improved road safety measures to reduce speeds.

Improved footpaths within the town; on the approach to the town and near schools; and to surrounding towns

Connectivity to Prince Grounds, Discovery Park and Clohogue Bridge and to tourist attractions

Additional signage, historic linkages (blue plaques) and lighting

Cycle infrastructure (lanes and parking facilities) both locally and to surrounding towns / Kilkenny City

Reuse of railway line

Is there anything specific that is needed in Castlecomer to serve the population?



What are the main issues and priorities for change in Castlecomer?



Can you list your top 3 priorities for Castlecomer here?



What actions could be taken to deal with these?

Fix the Water
Supply

Reuse the Old
Barracks as an IT
Hub

Invest in Traffic
Improvements

Bottom-up
Community
Engagement

CPO Derelict
Properties

Incentives and
grants for reusing
properties

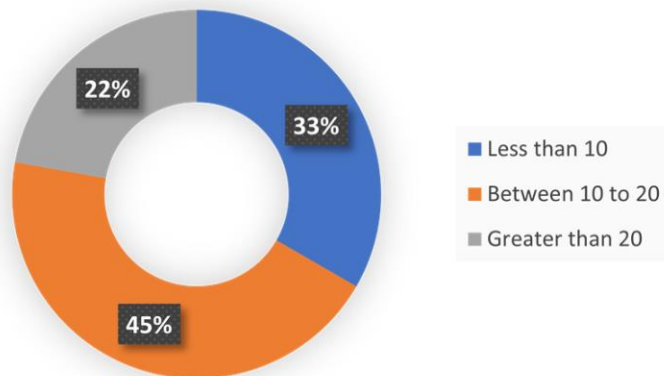
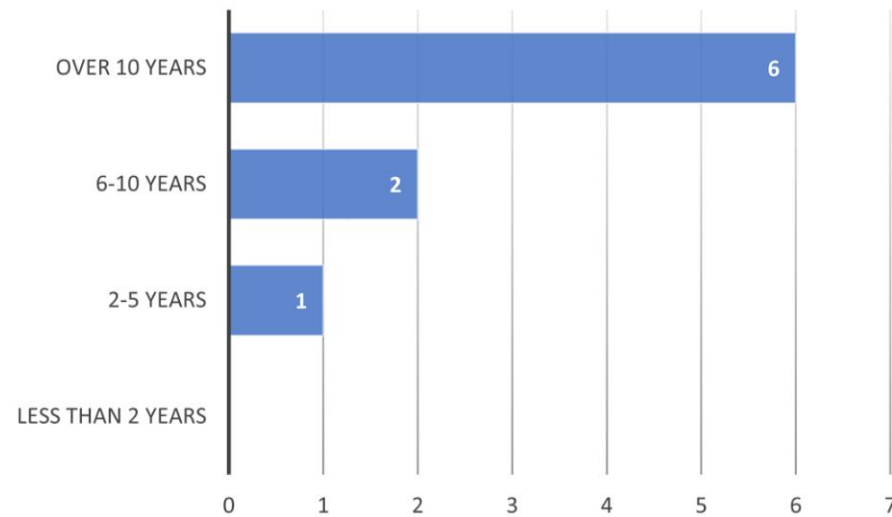
Install EV
Chargers

Stakeholder
Collaboration

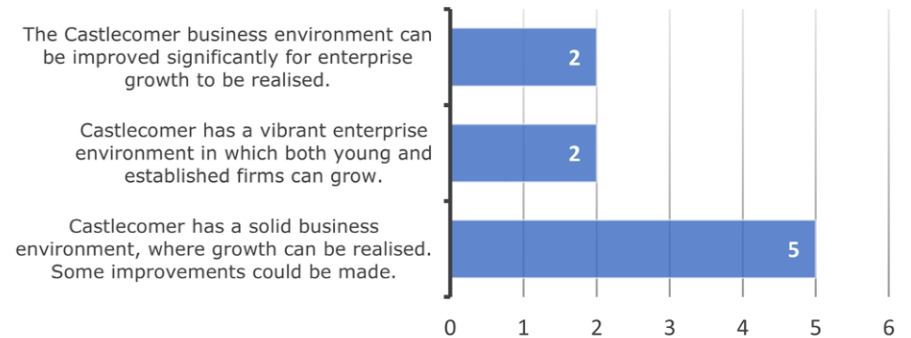
9. Business Owner Survey

Respondent Profiles

How many years have you been operating at your current location?



Do You Consider Castlecomer an Attractive Place to do Business?



What are Castlecomer's three main strengths as a place to do business?

1. The geographic setting of Castlecomer and its connectivity to the wider areas.
2. The local business network and family-run businesses.
3. The Discovery Park

What are Castlecomer's three main weaknesses as a place to do business?

1. Availability of housing
2. Access to services
3. Cost of doing business and Public Transport

What would you regard as Castlecomer's unique selling point, or a factor that makes Castlecomer stand out from other towns of its size?

The most common responses are indicated below:



Please outline the ways in which you plan to scale-up or expand

Businesses intend to scale-up by expanding their product/services offering; reach new markets; and by additional marketing. Each of the businesses foreseeing expansion also foresee additional staffing requirements.

What are your expectations for trading over the next two years

Business owners expect their trading situation to improve or stay the same over the next two years. A small number of respondents expect trading to worsen.

Have you tried to source space in Castlecomer area in the past 3 years?

Two business owners tried to source space in the past 3 years, but were unable to source the space.

Considering your own firm if currently located in Castlecomer, what is your own position on scaling-up, expanding or relocating your operations in the future?

The majority of business owners foresee scaling up in the future, predominantly from their existing premises. Two business owners anticipate relocating to another premises in Castlecomer.

What changes or improvements would you suggest as part of the Castlecomer plan to help boost business in Castlecomer town centre?

Introduce parking charge with one or two hour free parking

Carparking in general

An outdoor seating area with pergola

Remove commercial rates and the penal 50% vacant levy on commercial property

More consideration for small businesses

Traffic management and parking

The main street parking is an accident waiting to happen, an improvement here, or additional parking will help.

Make the square more attractive

Are there other important issues or goals that should be given priority in the Castlecomer Plan?

The business owner respondents noted the following important issues and goals:

Water supply/ services require improvements

The need for a Town Regeneration Plan

More public bins around the town

Public transportation improvements

Lack of tourist accommodation

Creating the conditions to attract business into the town and customers / clients from outlying areas.

Improved cycling infrastructure e.g. a cycle track to Kilkenny

Encouraging industrial growth

What is your vision for Castlecomer moving forward?

Appoint a town manager with a budget to promote and develop Castlecomer.

Less cars;
more bicycles

It's definitely moving in the right direction, with the discovery park, the hotel possibly Aldi attracting people to the town.

A staffing pool, where staff can be shared across different social enterprises.

Introduce a town renewal scheme giving tax breaks to owners who renovate and rent out town centre properties.

More types of housing

To see a lot more development (both affordable and private) so that people and businesses can grow and prosper and enjoy our beautiful town and surrounding areas

Better use of Castlecomer Hospital and need for a nursing home locally.

Continued regeneration of Castlecomer where the local community have more opportunities to work locally.

More affordable housing to attract young professionals with young families would move the town forward.

Hopefully the big shopping chain coming to town will keep locals in the town to do their shopping, therefore helping smaller local businesses.

Castlecomer was considered for a major educational and training initiative, but failed due to factors. This initiative would have provided over 30 new jobs and would have driven revenue to a number of businesses in the town. This initiative is presently being considered for another town, but could be reconsidered for Castlecomer.

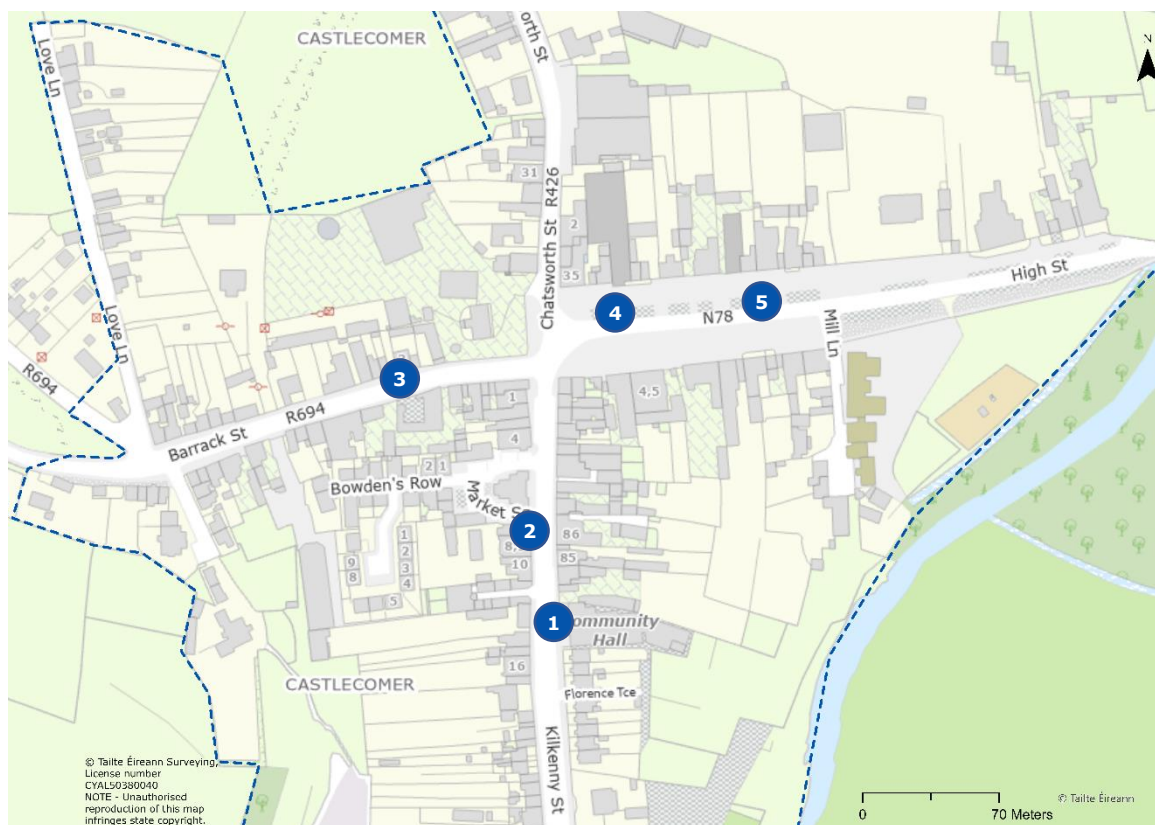
Building synergy between the various business sectors and the third sector

Encourage Aldi and Lidl to set up shop.

At the moment all the young educated people move away from Castlecomer as there is nothing to keep them here.

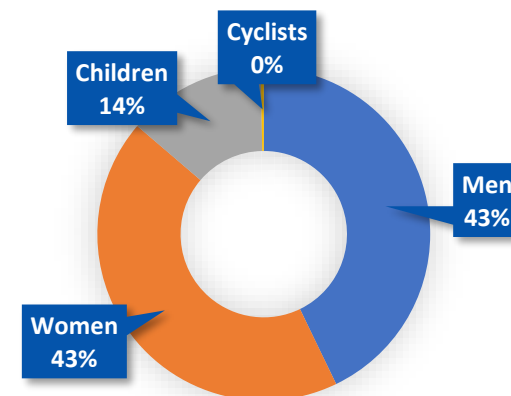
10. Town Centre Footfall Survey

A CTCHC footfall survey was undertaken by Kilkenny County Council and members of the Town Team at five different locations on Friday 11th October and Saturday 12th October 2024 as per the CTCHC methodology. Three time slots were recorded on both days. Pedestrians were recorded at both sides of the road at each survey point. Each location is shown on the map. The Square (Location 4) was the busiest location, with the highest pedestrian count of 119 people recorded between 4:15pm and 4:30pm.



Day	Time	1	2	3	4	5
Fri 11 Oct 2024	12.10pm-12.25pm	13	43	17	56	70
	2:15pm-2.30pm	20	40	33	85	71
	4:15pm-4.30pm	24	30	13	140	124
Sat 12 Oct 2024	10.15am-10.30am	23	29	12	84	76
	12:45pm-1.00pm	33	51	14	79	73
	4:15pm-4.30pm	19	35	13	119	24
Total		132	228	102	563	438

Profile of Pedestrians



11. Car Parking Survey

A survey of car parking spaces within the study area was carried out as part of the Collaborative Town Centre Health Check process. The survey included both formal and informal (including unmarked and/or unauthorised) parking spaces within the town centre and was carried out periodically throughout October 2024. The off-street parking spaces relate to locations available to the general public and do not include further off-street parking spaces within the study area that are exclusively for private domestic use. Car-parking within the town centre is predominantly located at The Square which is rich in retail and commercial land-uses. Parking on the southern side of The Square is off-street with several access points dividing the parking into smaller parking areas.

The survey found that there are c. 100 no. formal off-street car parking spaces and c. 170 no. formal on-street car parking spaces.

Informal car parking spaces in the town centre in regular use equates to c. 85 no. spaces. Informal spaces at the Square were located off the national road and were found to be longer term spaces.

All parking is free with no pay and display parking system in operation. It is also noted that there is an extant planning permission (PL20/112) for development at the Former Glanbia Site, Off High Street, which includes 202 no. off-street car parking spaces.

Location	Total Spaces	Occupied	Occupancy (%)
The Square (on-street)	35	29	83%
The Square (off-street)	40	33	83%
High St North (on-street)	7	5	71%
High St. South (on-street)	32	30	94%
Avalon House (Patrons Only)	75	75	100%
Chatsworth Street (on-street)	15	14	93%
Chatsworth Street (off-street)	28	14	50%
Barrack St. (on-street)	2	2	100%
Bollards Car Park (off-street)	10	6	60%
Kilkenny Street (on-street)	78	66	85%
Market Square (off-street)	19	18	95%

Table 1 – Formal Parking Spaces

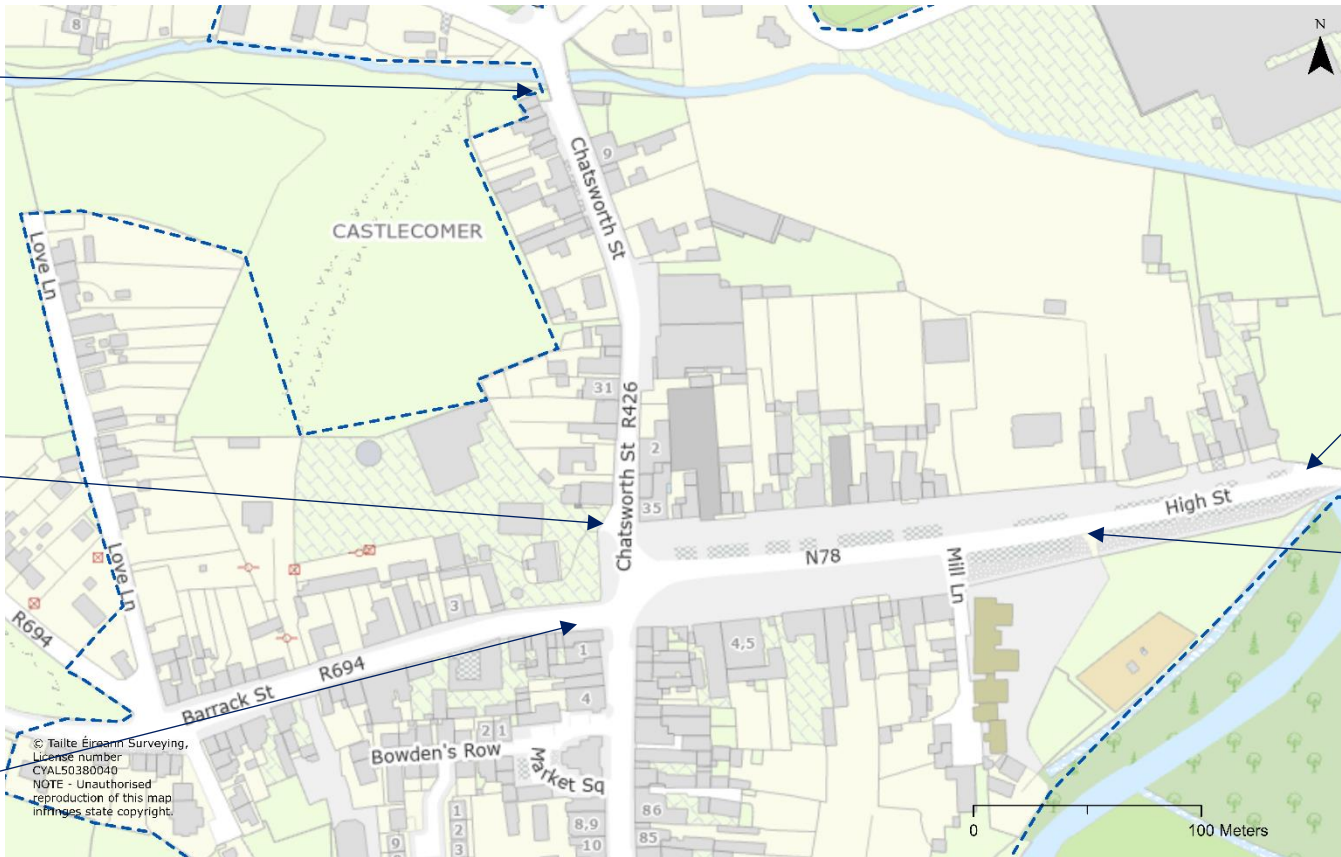
Location	Total Spaces	Occupied	Occupancy (%)
The Square North (on-street)	15	15	100%
Chatsworth Street (on-street)	28	14	50%
Former Post Office (off-street)	4	4	100%
Barrack St. (on-street)	33	21	64%
Market Square (on-street)	9	9	100%

Table 2 – Informal Parking Spaces

12. Desire Lines

Desire lines in Castlecomer were observed relating to traffic flow, particularly at The Square. In the town centre, vehicles take priority over pedestrians. Informal crossing facilities are provided within the town centre. Pedestrians were routinely observed crossing the road at unmarked locations. Desire lines were also evidenced at Barrack Street and Chatsworth Street where there is an absence of any formal pedestrian crossings.

Some examples of the desire lines include:



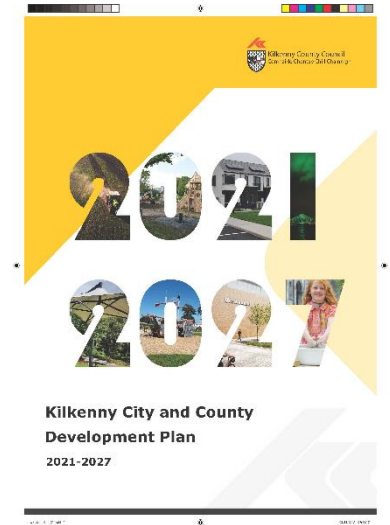
13. Planning Policy Context

Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021-2027

The Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021-2027 sets out policies and objectives for development until 2027. Castlecomer is identified as one of 4 'District Towns' within the settlement hierarchy of the Development Plan, along with Callan, Graiguenamanagh and Thomastown. The population of Castlecomer in 2022 was 1,496.

Castlecomer Settlement Plan

A Local Area Plan for Castlecomer was adopted in 2018. To replace this, a Settlement Plan is now being prepared, which will form part of the City and County Development Plan. The new Settlement Plan will set out the land use zoning and objectives for Castlecomer. This current Health Check is informing the preparation of the Settlement Plan, and the Settlement Plan will provide the physical planning context for the Town Centre First Plan.



14. Social Infrastructure Audit

An audit of social infrastructure (e.g. schools, library, health services, community, sports facilities and open space), was carried out by the Planning Department of Kilkenny County Council as part of the planning process. The study area used was the 2018 Castlecomer Local Area Plan boundary.

This audit comprised an examination of the existing situation with regards to social infrastructure provision, and highlighted any gaps. For example, one deficiency identified was the lack of after-school childcare. The Community School has recently lodged a planning application for permission for a two-storey extension, under 24/60515. There are numerous sporting and community organisations providing a range of activities and services, in various locations such as the Community Hall, the various sports grounds, and the Community School. The Discovery Park also offers a major recreational asset for the residents.

In general, the town is well served by a strong community, recreational and social infrastructural base.

The open space and recreational features of the central area are shown on adjacent figure.



15. SCOT Analysis

Following completion of the above research and surveys, an assessment of the Strengths, Constraints, Opportunities, and Threats (SCOT) of Castlecomer has been carried out. The SCOT can be defined as follows:

- Strengths – i.e. existing positives and advantages of Castlecomer town centre.
- Challenges – i.e. existing challenges facing Castlecomer town centre.
- Opportunities – i.e. areas that have been identified as being potential future strengths for Castlecomer town centre.
- Threats – i.e. potential future challenges facing Castlecomer town centre.

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategic location on a national road and good accessibility. - Service providers within the town centre catering to immediate needs of population. - Discovery Park – tourist and community amenity. - Active business community. - Family-run and independent businesses. - Large catchment area. - Active footfall within the town centre. - Attractive streetscape. - Built Heritage of the town. - Sense of community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Water supply preventing development. - A number of vacant units in the town centre. - No cycling infrastructure within the town centre. - Limited retail opportunities. - Management and operation of traffic and car parking - Limited opportunities to engage in decision-making. - Access to services including high-speed broadband. - Limited recreational activities for various age groups. - Lack of Town Identity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public Investment and funding to enable development, including projects to increase water supply. - Provision of formal crossings at identified desire lines. - Reuse of vacant or underutilised buildings. - Car Parking and Traffic Control measures. - Reduction of car-dependency via public transport and cycle infrastructure provision. - Potential Greenway. - Tourism strategy. - Public realm as a usable space. - Community hub building. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - External factors, including economic and legislative. - Further decline in younger population. - Anti-social behaviour. - Impact of increased population on existing services. - Impact of further vacancy and dereliction on streetscape. - Loss of commercial units on the Square. - Climate change and resilience.

16. Considerations and Opportunities

- **Sense of Community:** Due to the presence of local groups, family-run businesses and local sports teams, Castlecomer has a heightened sense of community spirit, however, there is an apparent opportunity for additional events to enhance opportunities for the wider community to become involved.
- **Recreation:** There are limited 'hangout' spaces and non-sports related activities for specific age-cohorts including the elderly, children and teenagers. This contributes to quality of living and may impact on mental health. Opportunities for additional recreational activities e.g. a greenway / walkway / outdoor swimming pool, may be considered.
- **Public Events and Spaces:** The surveys indicated that public areas have limited usability for public events. Opportunities to enhance the public areas for public uses may be considered including enhanced lighting, seating, covered areas.
- **Built Heritage:** There is a distinct sense of pride of place amongst the community with residents having interest in and knowledge of the local history. Opportunities arise to create a built heritage strategy to develop the marketing of the town's built heritage.
- **Car-Dependency:** Most town users rely on private cars for their mobility as the infrastructure is catered to motorised vehicles. There is an opportunity to enhance active travel and public transport opportunities. Residents have noted footpaths require improvement works.
- **Traffic Management:** Opportunities to enhance traffic management and car parking may be developed, including provision of safer pedestrian crossings and traffic calming measures.
- **Underutilised Buildings:** The survey revealed a large number of vacant properties in the study area. Additional properties, while occupied, have been stated by town users to be underutilised, both within private and public ownership. Opportunities may arise to review the uses of these buildings to meet the needs of the community. Possible uses raised by the community include shared working spaces and local / artisan markets. Tackling vacancy and dereliction is an ongoing process with the Local Authority.
- **Population Decline:** Castlecomer experienced a population decline between the 2016 Census and the 2022 Census. Whilst several factors may have contributed to this, including water and waste water infrastructure constraints, methods of encouraging the long-term population growth to the community should be explored, including increasing attractiveness of the town.

