



An Roinn Ealaíon, Oidhreachta,  
Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta

Department of Arts, Heritage,  
Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs



# REIMAGINE MOUNTRATH

## Interim Presentation 2022



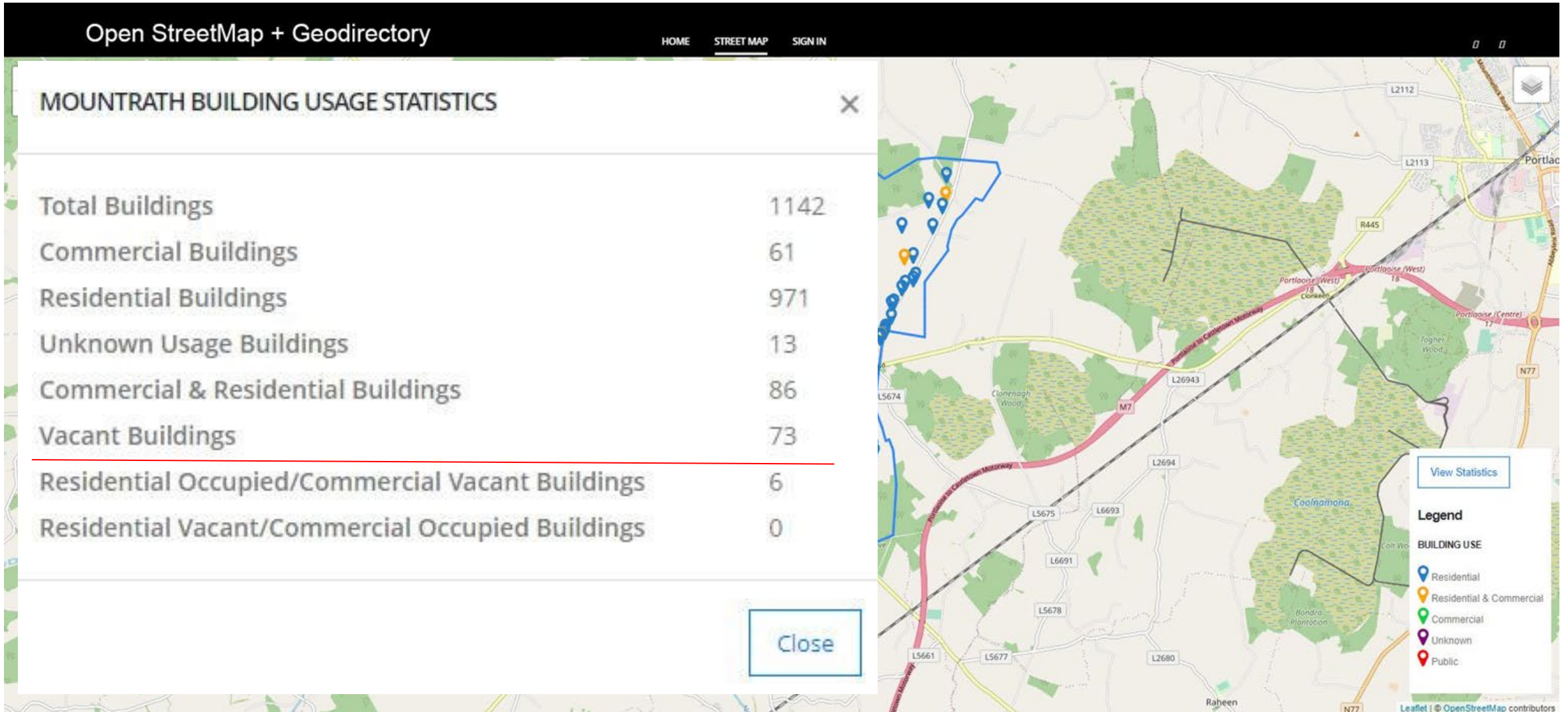
# Mapping Mountrath - Present Day

From Bluesky  
and OSi



# Mountrath Online Map

<https://mountrath.realsim.ie/Map>



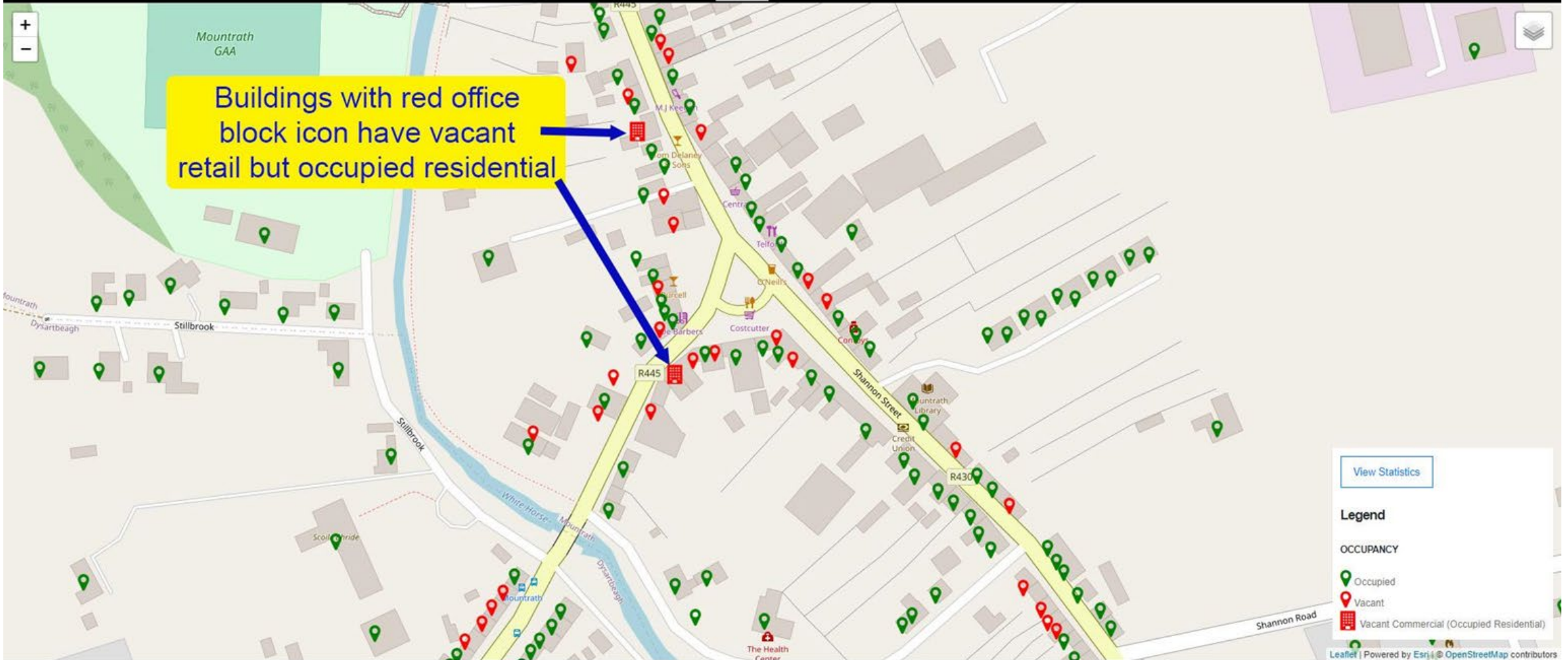
# Mountrath Online Map

<https://mountrath.realsim.ie/Map>



## Building Occupancy Map

HOME STREET MAP SIGN IN



# Mountrath Digital Twin

<https://online3d.realsim.ie/webgl/Mountrath/>



A platform to *Re-Imagine* what Mountrath could be like



# Stakeholder Consultation By Connect the Dots (CtD)



## Community Outreach

- Stakeholder mapping | Posters & E-leaflets | Email Outreach

## Youth & Adult Surveys

- 116 adult surveys | 26 youth surveys

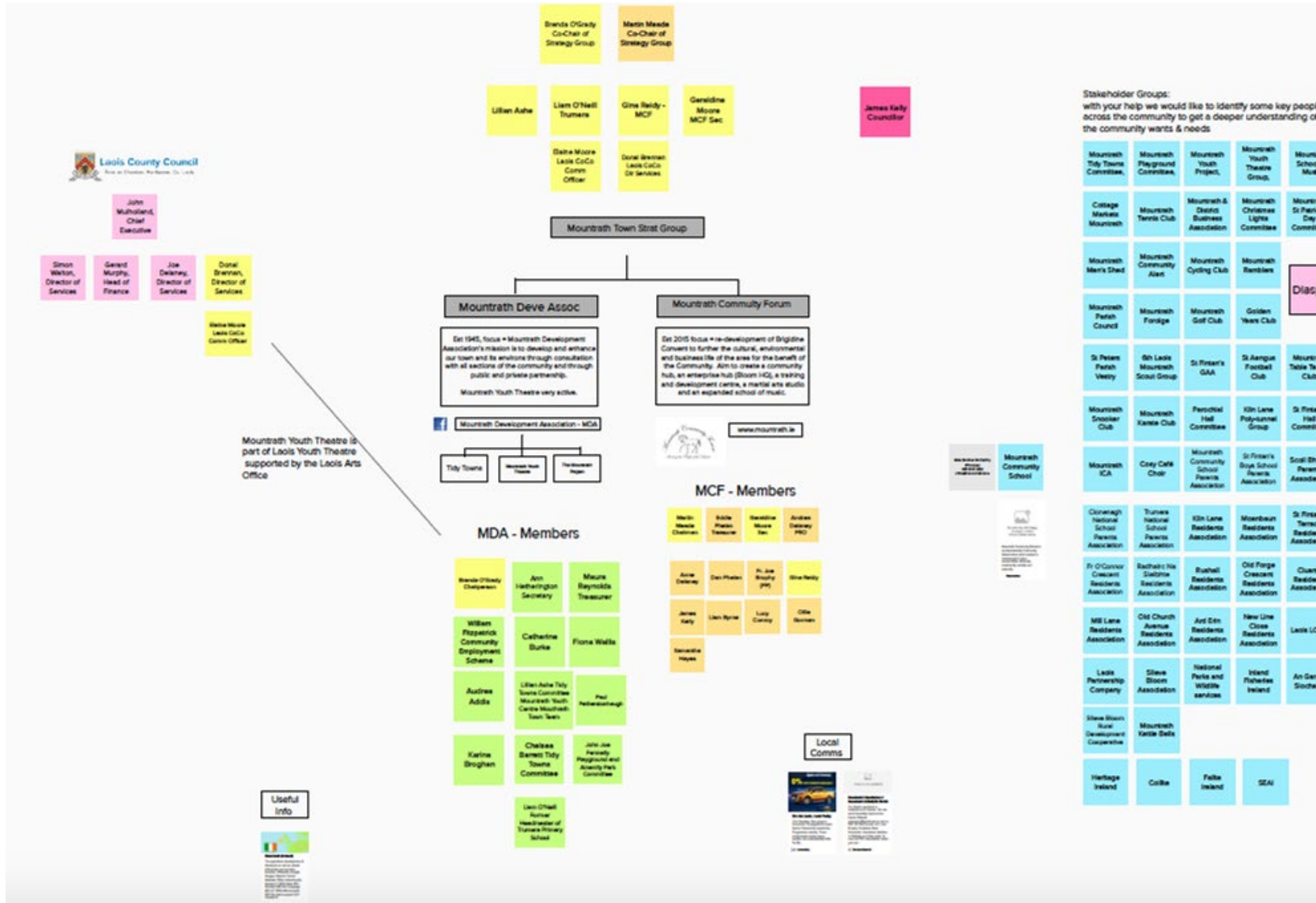
## Drop In Sessions

- Date: 17th August 2021
- Time: 12pm-5pm
- Location: Vacant shop (formerly Medals and Trophies 4 U), Market Square, Mountrath

## In person Workshops

- Date: 17th August 2021
- Time: 5:30pm-7pm (Youth workshop) | 7pm-8:30pm (Adult workshop)
- Location: Amenity Park, Mountrath

# Stakeholder Mapping



# Survey Results



142 surveys in total (online, harcopy, youth & adult)

## Organisations & Businesses

Mountrath Development Association	Laois Handball	Mountrath Rambler Walking Group
Mountrath Tidy Towns	St Fintans GAA	Síol Foundation
Mountrath Youth Theatre	Mountrath Scout Group	Mountrath Community Forum
Mountrath Youth Creative Space	St Aengus FC	Kilnlane Residents Association
Bloom HQ	Arthritis Ireland Laois	Ballyfin Parish
Local businesses (incl. Phelan's Catering, pubs, barber shop)	Mountrath Community Alert	St Fintans BNS
Mountrath Community School	Castletown School	Paddock School



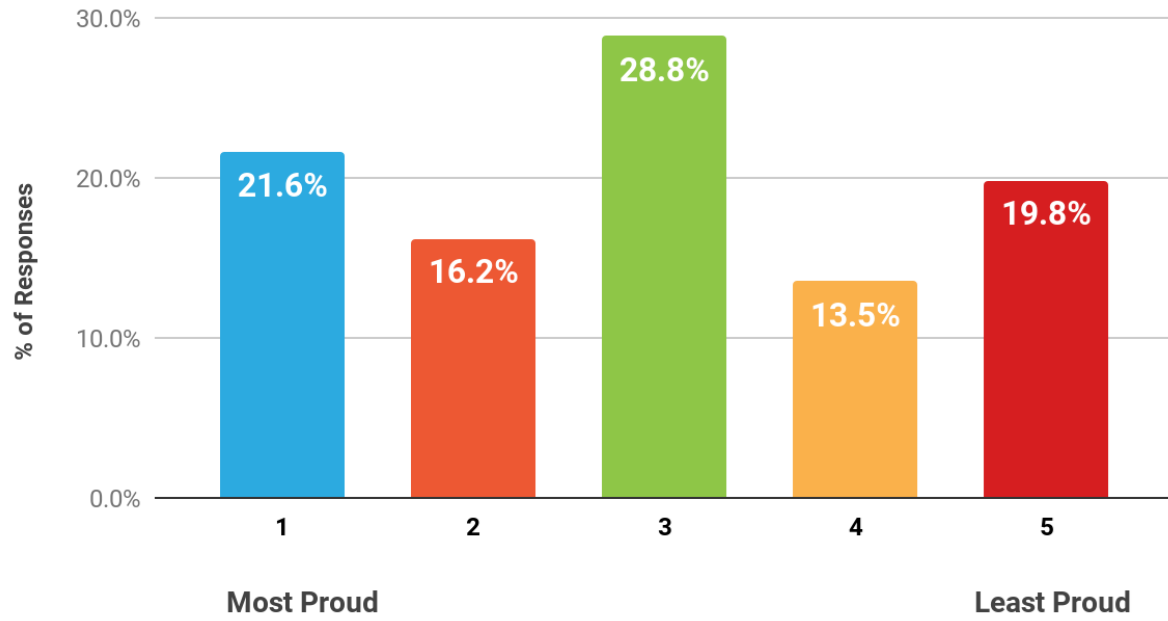
# Survey Results

## 1. Pride & Stories

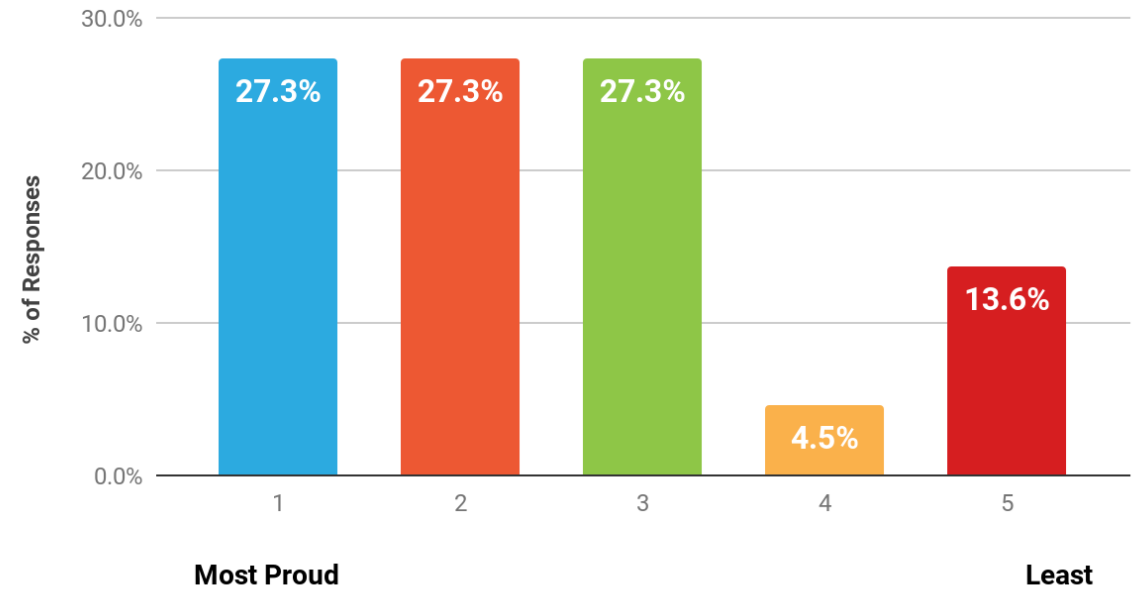


### Mountrath Pride

How proud are you to live in Mountrath? (Adults)



How proud are you to live in Mountrath? (Youth)



# Survey Results

## 1. Pride & Stories



### What makes Mountrath famous? (Adults)

Category	Common Topics
Nature	Gateway to Slieve Bloom Mountains <sup>**</sup> ; Whitehorse River; Amenity Park <sup>**</sup> and River Walk
Sport	Handball (Phil Casey); Pride in Sport; Sport Facilities (St Fintan's GAA Grounds)
Economy	History of brewing & distilling (Whitehorse Whiskey); Sawmills; History as a market town; Modern economy / shops --> Bloom HQ, Sawmill; Eddie Phelan's <sup>**</sup> , Bennett's Bar, others
Education & Religion	History of education - Bishop Delaney & the Brigidine Convent; Long history of border students
Quality of People	Friendliness <sup>**</sup> ; Pride of place; Community spirit <sup>**</sup>
Location	Halfway point between Dublin & Limerick <sup>**</sup> ; Motorway toll bypass route
Famous People	News Anchor Claire Byrne; Handball World Champion Philip Casey
Modern Challenges	Lorries & Toll Bypassing; Dereliction

<sup>\*\*</sup>Also highlighted in Youth responses

# Survey Results

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# Survey Results

## 1. Pride & Stories



### **Do you have any stories you'd like to share about Mountrath, the community that lives there or its history? (Youth)**

*"I don't really have stories. I have lots of friends in Mountrath. I love going to the tennis and basketball courts in Bloom HQ. I do karate and exercise classes sometimes."*

*"Everyone knows each other. It's a lovely place but there are not a lot of things to do for the youth community. The most popular place to loiter is the Park and the only thing they do is sit on the swings, so it would be nice to have more places to be."*

*"Being a part of Mountrath Youth Theatre is fun."*

# Survey Results

## 1. Pride & Stories



### Do you have any stories you'd like to share about Mountrath, the community that lives there or its history? (Adult)

*"I moved to Mountrath 12 years ago as a Dubliner and we raised a family here. I have to say that it is the most open and welcoming area having lived in other counties in Ireland before. The people are very friendly and proud. It is such a beautiful area for a newcomer with close access to rivers, mountains and nature."*

*"I lately was informed that Pat Farrell of Patrick Street used to keep a horse in his yard and hay on the loft and every morning at 2am he would take the horse and cart to Kilbricken Railway Station to meet the mail train he had to put Nets out along the line as the train didn't stop instead it threw the mail off the side of the moving train. Thanks to Pat the town got its post up to Mountrath each day for delivery. To think what's now Mary McGraths beautiful home stored animals, reared a family and kept the community going."*

*"The stories of my childhood and that formed the person I have become are all about Mountrath and the Slieve Blooms. I was lucky enough to be born into a family with a deep seated love and history for the area. We are losing the amazing history, crafts, skills and stories of this beautiful place."*

*"First world Handball Champion Phil Casey came from Mountrath."*

*"There are tunnels under the town which the IRA used during the war for independence. Mrs Tobin was carrying two two pales of milk and the black and tan shot them and spilt the milk on the road."*

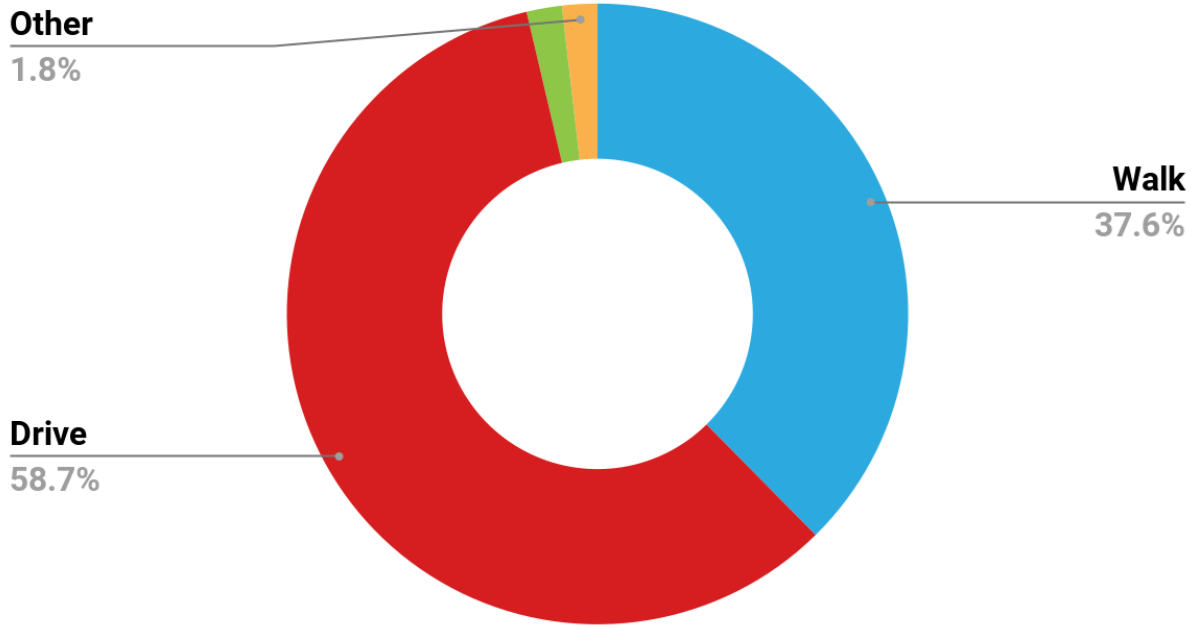
# Survey Results

## 2. Mobility, Active Transport & Travel

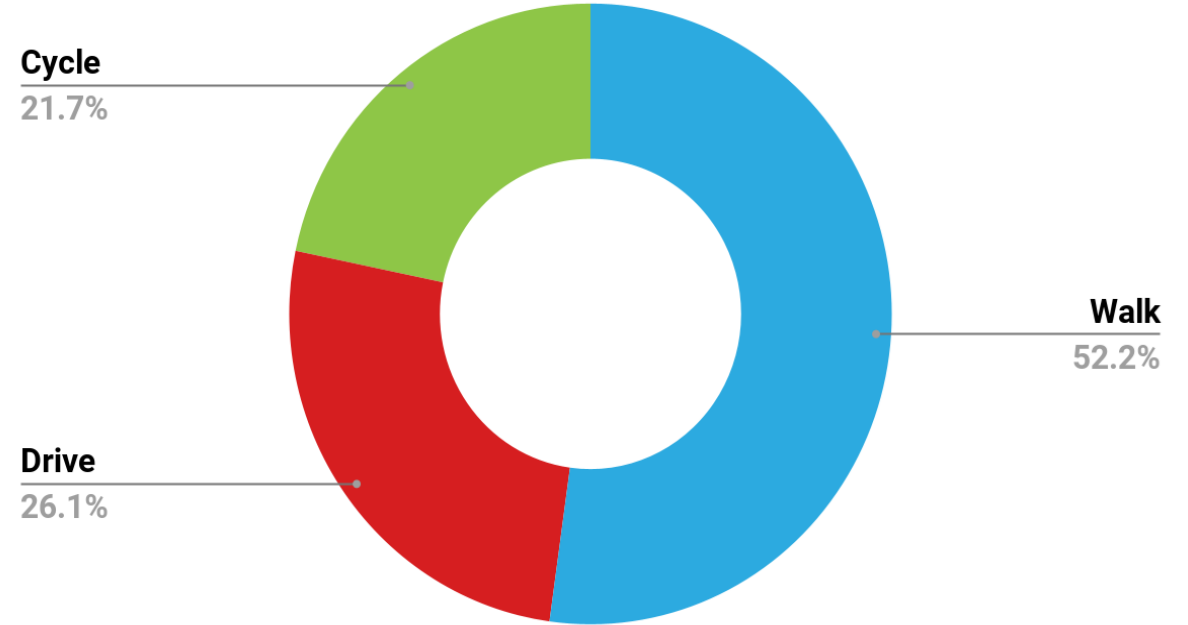


### Moving around Mountrath

How do you move around Mountrath? (Adult)



How do you move around Mountrath? (Youth)



# Survey Results

## 2. Mobility, Active Transport & Travel



### What might help you walk or cycle more in your area?

#### *Key themes:*

- Infrastructure (ie. Walkways, Footpaths)
- Vehicle Traffic Reductions
- Improvements in Town Centre for a better place to walk

### Views about number of lorries & cars going through Mountrath:

#### *Key themes:*

- Fundamental problem that needs to be banned
  - Concern for road quality, noise, pollution and safety of children, pedestrians & cyclists
- VS.**
- Necessary evil/Benefit for town's economy
  - Local businesses rely on visitors
  - Supported infrastructure should at least be put in

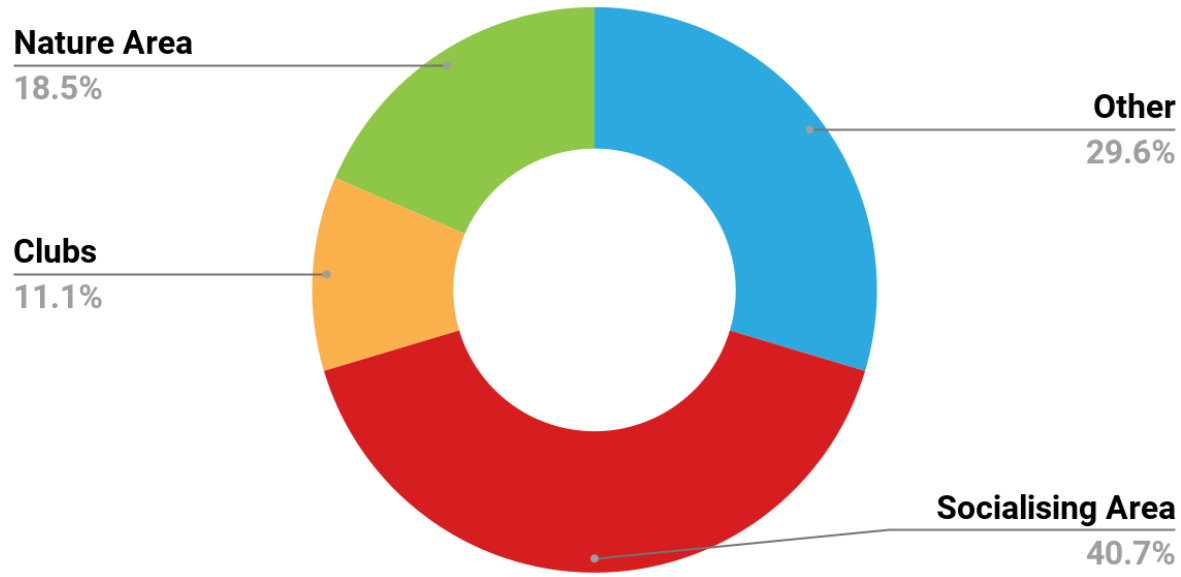
# Survey Results

## 3. Amenities & Ideas for Growth

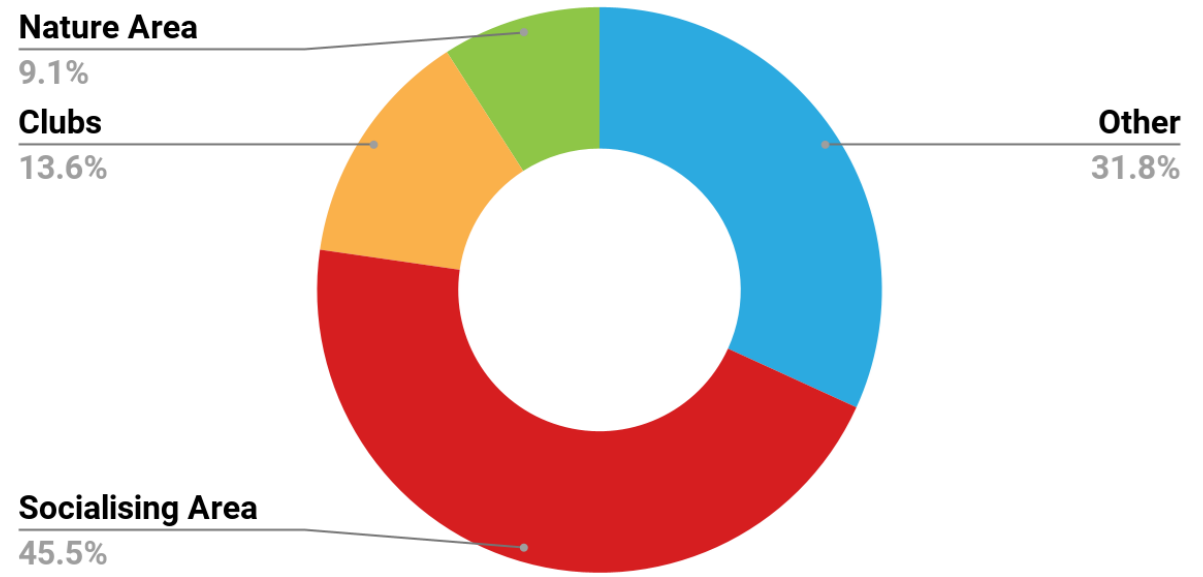


### Amenities & Facilities not in Mountrath:

What amenities / facilities do you like to use that are not in Mountrath? (Adult)



What amenities / facilities do you like to use that are not in Mountrath? (Youth)





# Survey Results

## 3. Amenities & Ideas for Growth



### What is missing for the community in Mountrath? (Adults)

Services or Amenities	Childcare (creche & after school); health / fitness provision; proper community centre; swimming pool; increased Garda presence; improved parking provision
Shop Type	Clothes shop; bank; small hotel; tourist office; grocery (lidl/aldi); museum; cafe/restaurant options
Youth Activities	Local clubs / sport (beyond GAA); skate park; cinema; music lessons; graffiti wall
Elderly Services / Activities	Health services and social activities, like a 'silver surfer cafe' and dance hall
Events	Festival; art exhibitions
Economy	Industry; employment opportunities; housing retrofit / improvements
Transport	Direct bus to dublin/cork/portlaoise; cycleways (in town / to Slieve Bloom Mts / to Portlaoise)
Attitude	Pride of place; community cohesiveness; spirit; get over 'bypassed-mentality'; shared identity; united approach
Redevelopment	Coordination / one voice / unity; anti-dereliction; a proper town redevelopment plan; high street upgrades; more active Council intervention in town centre; painting of buildings; positive brand to build town identity around; tourism plan
Built / Natural Environment	Community gardens; public space improvements; public realm; cycleways (as above)

# Engagement Events Results

## - Strengths, Weaknesses & Opportunities



### Strengths

#### *Key themes:*

- The **Slieve Bloom Mountains** and **River Mountrath**: provide attractive views, recreational opportunities, and local identity. Opportunity to expand walking paths and cycling.
- The **Mountrath Amenity Park**: positive foliage and playground. Challenges with anti-social behaviour and vandalism in the park.
- Community institutions (**St Fintan's GAA | St Aengus FC | Youth Theatre Group**): Strengths of the area, contributing to activities for youth and maintaining local community spirit.
- The **former Brigidine convent**: Emerging business and community spaces. Home to youth activities, Bloom HQ co-working spaces, and regular public markets. Examples of positive developments in the town.
- General **friendly and communal nature of people** in the area: Many residents committed to local voluntary work. Prevalence of interest in and ideas for improving the town among community members.
- Youth focus: **local drama group**, certain shops, like **Aidan Byrne's**, as positive features of the town.

# Engagement Events Results

## - Strengths, Weaknesses & Opportunities



### Weaknesses

#### *Key themes:*

- **Heavy traffic of HGVs** and other vehicles through the town: Dangerous speeds and pollution making walking and cycling less safe given lack of cycle lanes and limited or non-existent pedestrian paths.
- **Difficulty of limited parking provision:** A problem both in the market square and at the schools for pick up and drop off times. Individuals leaving their cars all day limiting the convenience of finding parking to visit shops. Electric vehicle charging points are also non-existent in the town.
- **Infrequent public transport:** Especially on the weekends. Local destinations like the Slieve Bloom mountains completely inaccessible without a lift. The town has no bus shelters, making infrequent timetables a more difficult issue in bad weather.
- **Dereliction in the town centre:** Negative impact on the overall sense of life and colour. Particular site in the heart of the Market Square vacant for decades draws the ire. Youth participants particularly perceptive of a dullness feeling resulting from closed businesses and derelict sites in town. The need for a 'lick of paint'.
- A **shortage of activities for local youth and teenagers:** For those uninterested in sport. Hang out venues safely accessible by foot and bicycle appear limited. No local cinema or skate park. Fear that a lack of activity had led some teenagers toward vandalism and anti-social behaviour, in the Amenity Park.

# Engagement Events Results

## - Strengths, Weaknesses & Opportunities



### Weaknesses

#### *Key themes:*

- **Deficient facilities and activities for the local elderly:** Mountrath lacking a local day centre, nursing home, primary care centre and a decline in activities catering to older people (such as Bingo clubs).
- **River Mountrath not maintained:** Broadly seen as a strength of the town but overgrowth along the river, need for dredging and risk of flooding
- **Relatively high number of Mountrath residents living in poverty or with a disability:** Lack of disadvantaged families involved in community organisations and activities. Inability or lack of confidence to advocate and voice opinions among community members without literacy skills.
- **Lacking tourism infrastructure:** No small scale hotel / accommodation and information point. A limitation on the ability of tourism to grow in Mountrath.
- **Certain shop types unavailable:** Affordable supermarkets, clothing stores and (in the near future) a bank are missing from Mountrath, but considered important amenities.

# Engagement Events Results

## - Strengths, Weaknesses & Opportunities



### Opportunities

#### *Key themes:*

- **Mobility and recreation improvements:** Establishing walking trails along older country roads, cycle lanes and paths connecting amenities within the town and between the town and nearby attractions. Improving links to the Slieve Bloom Mountains and cleaning up and extending the walking area by the river.
- **Potential use and transformation of specific derelict & strategic sites:** Most notably the Market Square Site as a potential for a public plaza or parking area, while the Bank of Ireland building was identified for its potential for accommodation. Also desires to renew the large plot previously known as the Cattle Mart.
- **Developing a brand identity to represent Mountrath and its vision:** Potential to provide a catalyst and platform for improving internal and external communications. Local communication channels such as a 'What's on in Mountrath' social media page are opportunity with potential.
- **Public realm improvements for public social spaces:** Improvements including street furniture for outdoor socialising, rain coverings and shelters to eliminate weather restrictions, landscaping and general visual enhancements of shop fronts with paint & colour.

# Engagement Events Results

## - Strengths, Weaknesses & Opportunities



### Opportunities

#### *Key themes:*

- **Potential for improved social and care infrastructure for specific segments of the community:** Including young families, young people and elderly members. Suggestions of a creche, more after school activities and elderly day centres.
- **Many opportunities and ideas suggested for students and youths in the town:** Especially activity based. Youth Activities and facilities including a possible youth cafe, a handball court (in relation to the history of Phil Casey), a public square hang out space, and a hang out space made from a semi-derelict site. Other opportunities include an arcade, a cinema and pool amenities.
- **Better utilising and telling of the story of Mountrath's rich history:** Potential for commemorations, history walks & history museums, connection to Slieve Bloom.

# Engagement Events Results

- Photos



**Youth Workshop | Adult Workshop | Drop in Session**



# Separate Submissions



**Input from those including: a Laois County Council officer, the Office of Senator Pippa Hackett (Minister of State for Land Use and Biodiversity) & participants of Mountrath Amalgamated CEP CLG.**

## ***Suggestions Examples:***

- Pursue a Town Centre First planning approach;
- Incorporate biodiversity conservation in planning;
- Place a Christmas tree outside of Purcells;
- Develop the cycle path along the riverbank -- utilise 3 unutilised bridges;
- Clean and dredge the river;
- Update and open public toilets;
- Celebrate creative opportunities for youth in addition to athletics;
- Improve relations and communication between the County Council and community groups around topics of community development;
- Establish a dedicated building that older people feel comfortable in;
- Create a women's shed or hen house;
- Encourage a collaborative and not divisive ethos to local community development.



# Summary



- **Mobility and recreation improvements**  
e.g walking trails, cycle lanes and paths connecting amenities.
- **Use and transformation of several specific derelict & strategic sites**  
e.g town centre first, Market Square, old movie theatre, previous Cattle Mart.
- **Public realm improvements**  
e.g street furniture, rain coverings, shop fronts with paint & colour.
- **Improved social and care infrastructure**  
e.g creche for young families, after school activities for young people and day centres for the elderly.
- **Student & youth opportunities**  
e.g youth cafe, a handball court, a public square hang out space, and a hang out space made from a semi-derelict site.
- **Tourism opportunities - Better utilising and telling of the story of Mountrath's rich history**  
e.g commemorations, history walks & history museums.
- **A brand identity to represent Mountrath and its vision**

# High Level Vision



- A response to traffic through the town centre
- A response to dereliction in the town centre
- A response to transportation & accessibility challenges
- Improving activities and facilities for youth and the elderly
- An identity for Mountrath and plan for increased tourism

# Things to Consider



## Next steps and conclusions based on consultation findings

- How will this community plan be taken forward and applied for funding? Can the Council support in facilitating a further conversation with the broader community on the outcomes of this report?
  - Create a quick wins list with the community reps that have the capacity to start something and find funding - with Council support → Settling on priority projects. An idea would be to put it to a vote within the larger community representative body or wider community.
- Reviewing conflicting ideas around increased car parking versus more accessible design encouraging more walking, cycling, and better public transport options.

# Consultation Feedback

## The Philip Casey Handball Alley



# Consultation Feedback

Old Cinema Youth Centre Conversion



# Consultation Feedback

Putting the Market  
back into Market Square



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# Mountrath - Planning Context



David Mulcahy

- The current Laois County Development Plan 2017-23 is about to be replaced by the new Laois County Development Plan 2021-27.
- Under the new plan Mountrath is identified as a Self-Sustaining Town, 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Settlement Strategy behind Portlaoise and Portarlinton (along with 3 other towns).
- The Plan seeks to grow the population of the town to 2,024 by 2027.
- Mountrath is designated as a Level 4 town in the retail hierarchy for the county, behind Portlaoise, Portarlinton and Graigecullen.

# Mountrath - Planning Context



David Mulcahy

## The policies for the town include:

- Create a new civic space within Market Square
- Reinforce the centre of Mountrath as the priority location for new commercial and retail development
- Encourage redevelopment or restoration of derelict, vacant or underused buildings and improve public realm within the town
- Support the preparation and implementation of an Urban Regeneration Framework for Mountrath town centre over the plan period
- Enhance the visual amenity of approach roads into Mountrath

# Mountrath - Planning Context



David Mulcahy

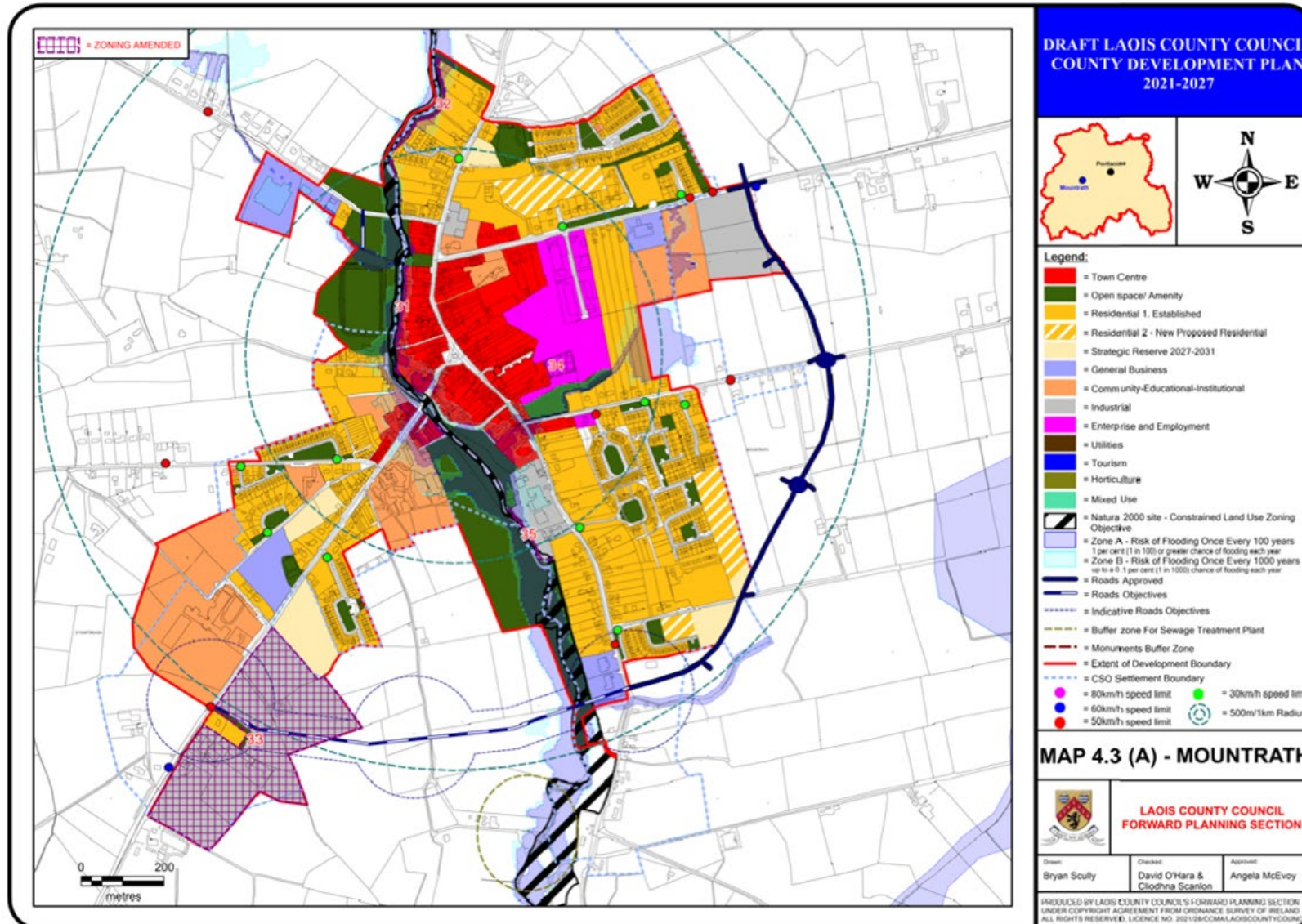
## The policies for the town include:

- Encourage the use of upper floors within the town centre
- Encourage the further development of retail and commercial services in the town core
- Support developments that will establish Mountrath as a cycling and outdoor recreation hub for the Slieve Bloom Mountains
- Support tourism-related uses, activities and amenities that will contribute to the Slieve Bloom Mountains tourism product
- Support and facilitate the development of Bloom HQ as a community enterprise hub within the town

# Mountrath - Planning Context



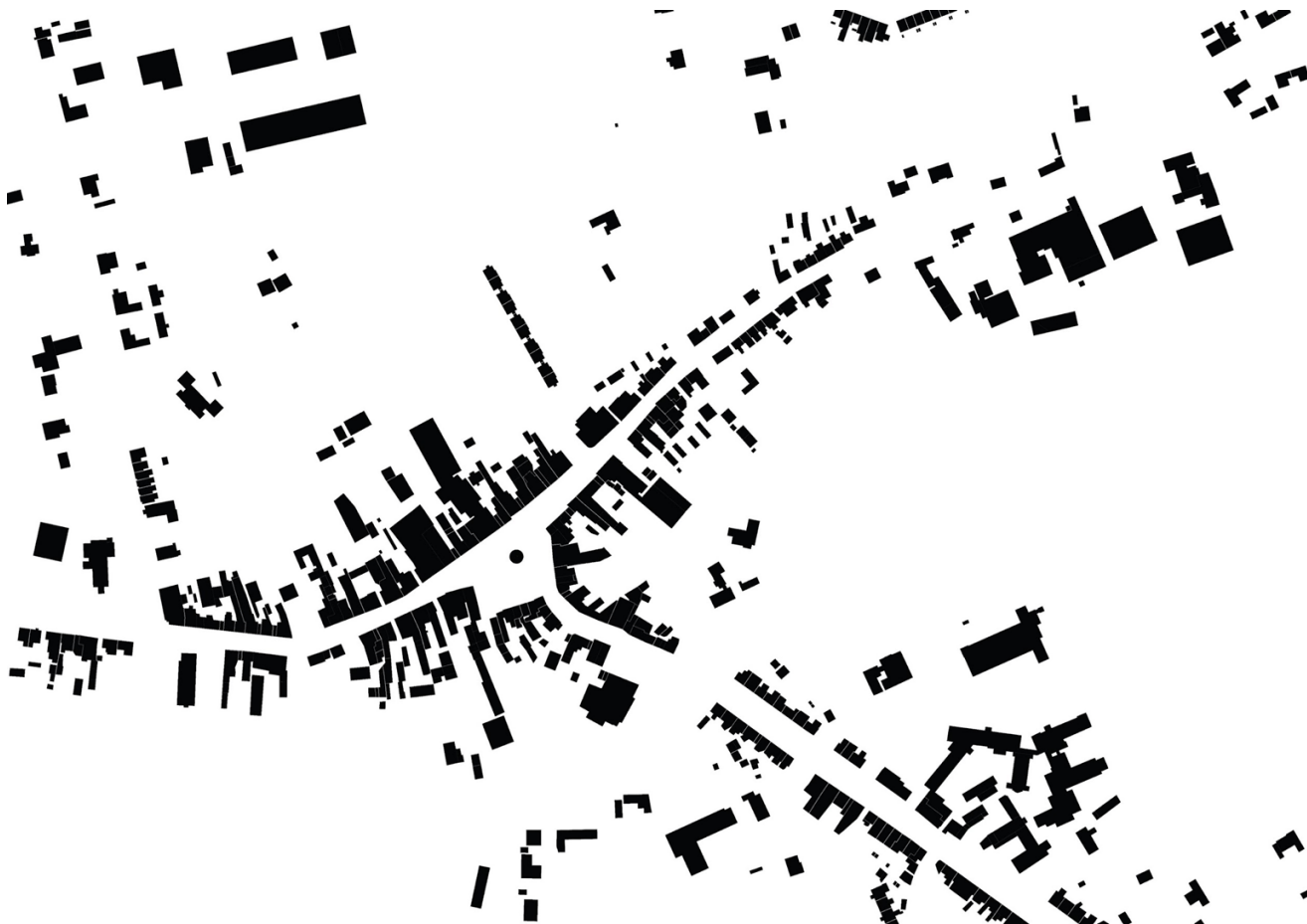
David Mulcahy







## Figure Ground Analysis

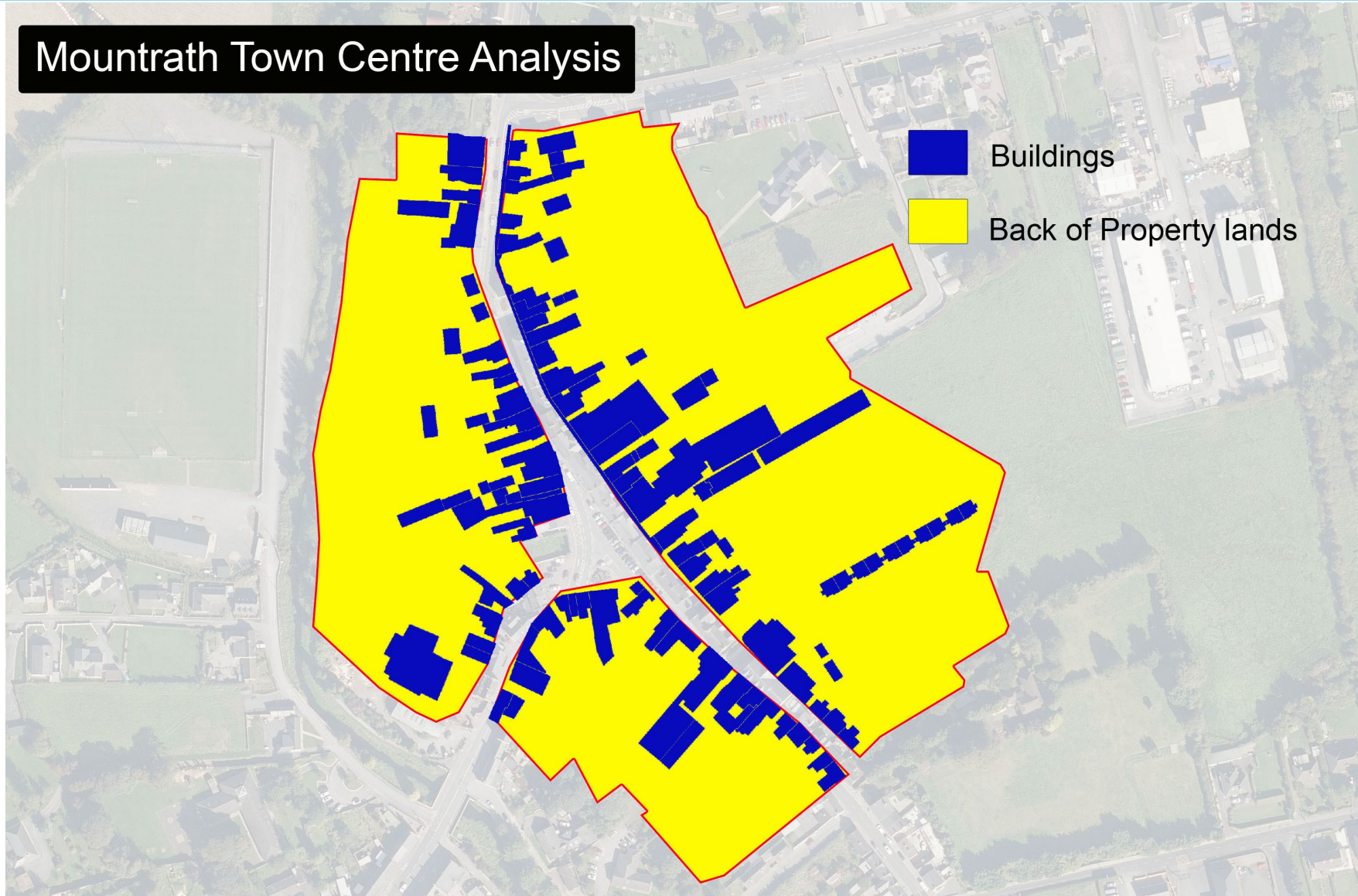


- Relationship between the built and vacant spaces.
- Existing Permeability and the opportunities this presents.
- Understanding the edge conditions .
- Understanding how the existing building fabric might interact with the new.

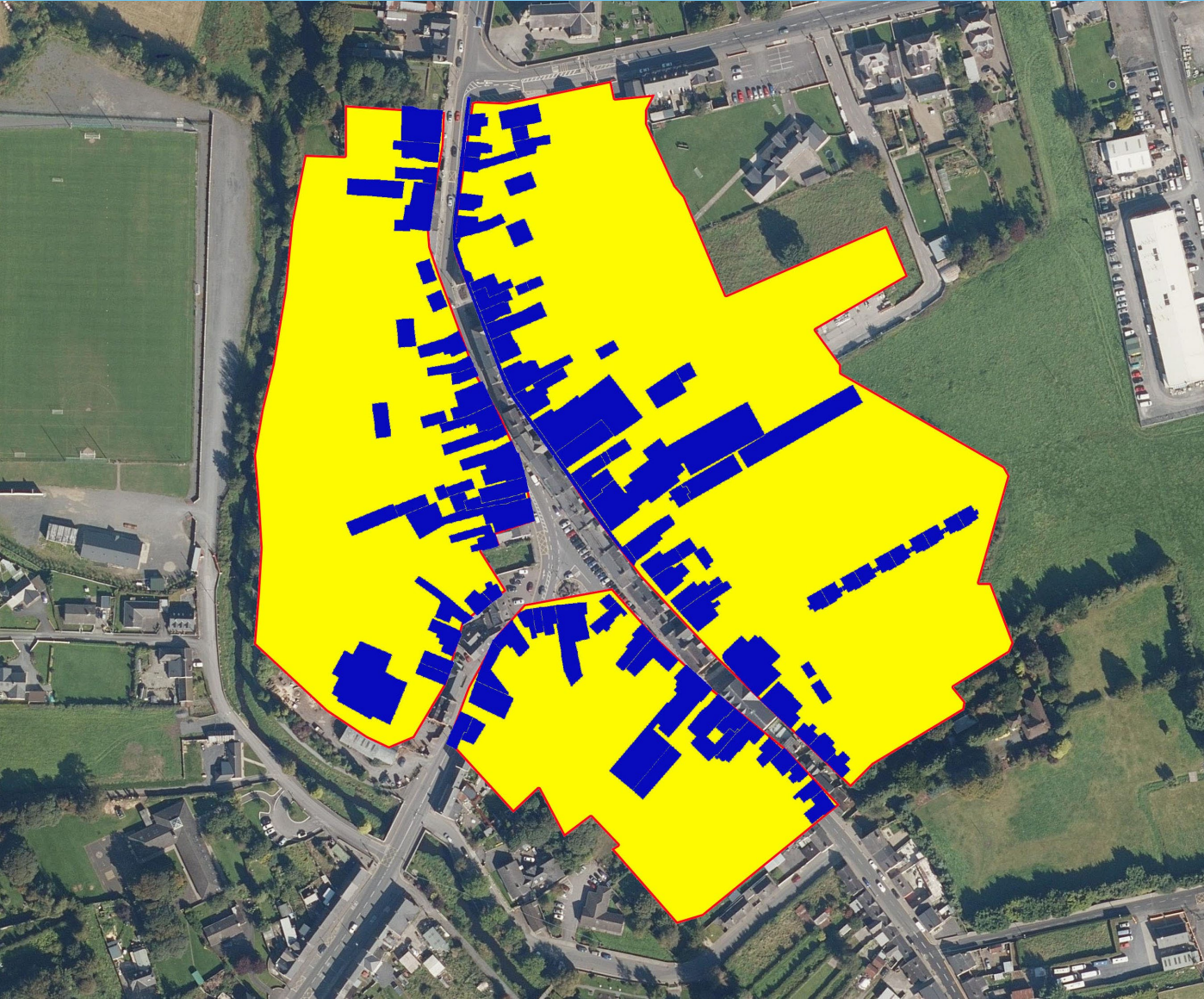
# Town Centre Analysis



## Mountrath Town Centre Analysis



# Town Centre Building Footprint & 'Backlands' analysis



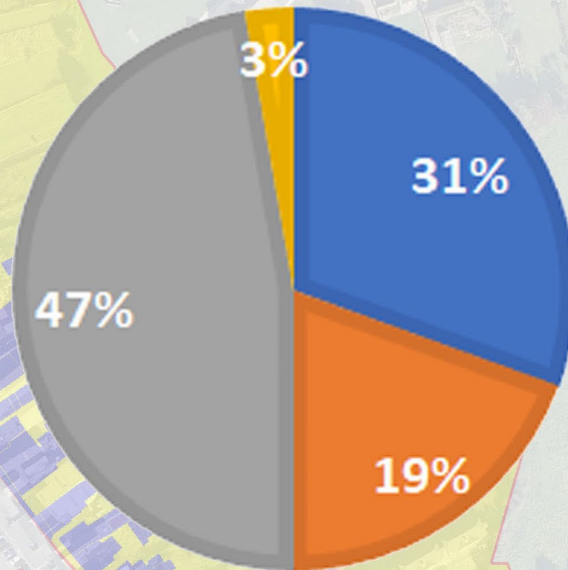
**9.22 Hectares** – Total Area  
**18%** - Building Footprint  
**7.5 Hectares** of 'Backlands'  
**91%** - Backlands accessible through  
Main St Property only

# Town Centre Health Check Analysis



## Building Function and Vacancy

- Residential
- Commercial
- Both (R & C)
- Public



108 Properties in Survey Area

**42%** Retail Vacancy Rate

**17%** Residential Vacancy Rate

# Comparative Town Centre Commercial Activity Analysis



Town Centre	Retail Vacancy Rate	
Tipperary Town	28%	from Heritage Council CTCHC programme
Letterkenny	27%	from Queens University Belfast CTCHC study
Carrick-on-Shannon	31%	from Queens University Belfast CTCHC study
<b>Mountrath</b>	<b>42%</b>	RealSim mapping analysis



# SWOT Analysis



- **Mandatory HGV redirection to reduce traffic.**
- **Proposal for a new distributor road to alleviate the traffic pressure zone around the square.**
- **Town expansion and development opportunities.**
- **Reinvigorate existing housing stock.**
- **Facilitate employment generation.**



## Strengths



- **Existence of good permeability.**
- **Active frontages to throughout.**
- **There is a balance of a mix of uses and commercial activities.**
- **Presence of existing infrastructure.**
- **Scale and the layout of the built environment supports pedestrian exploration and discovery.**

## Weakness

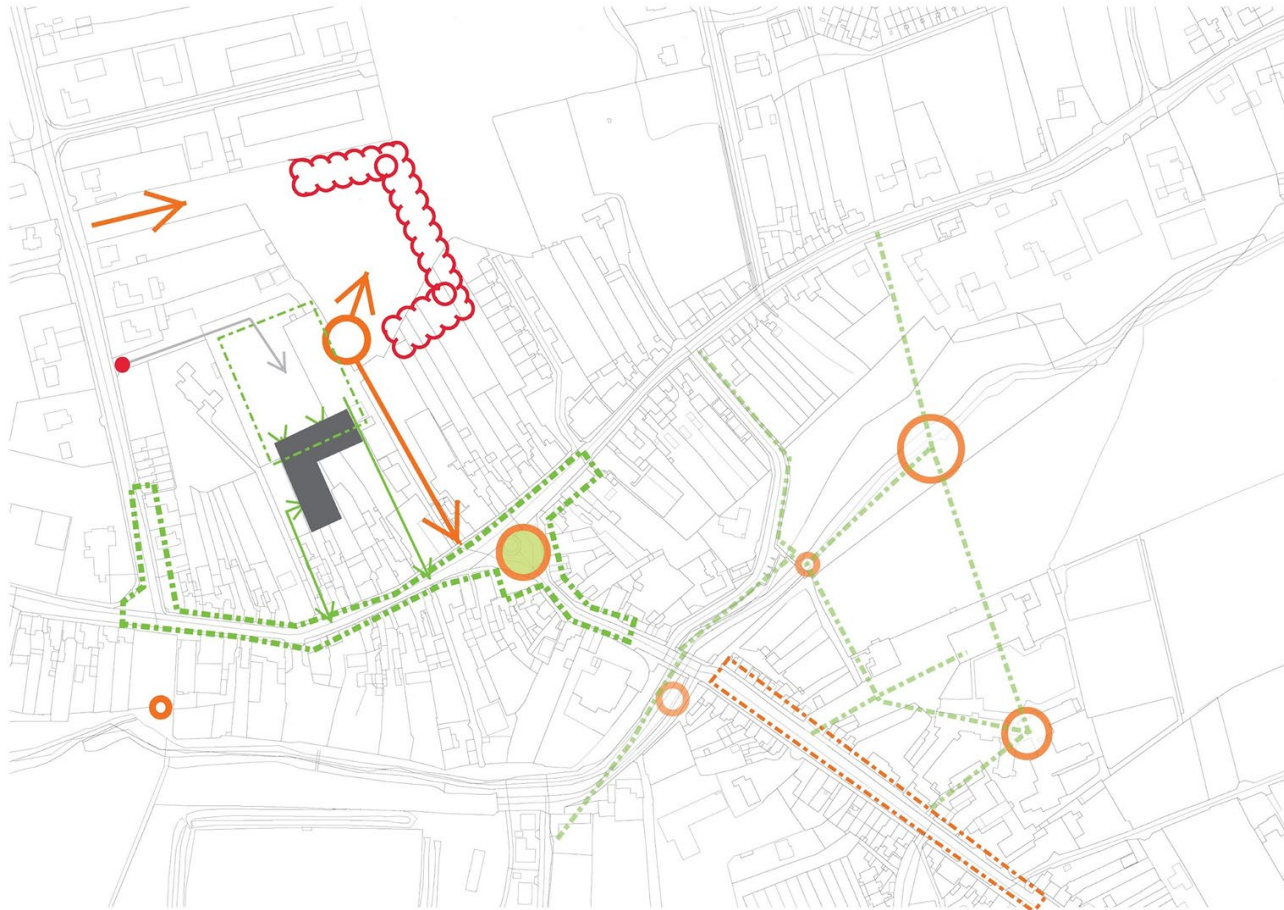


- **Traffic safety concerns especially at critical areas – road a priority over pedestrians and contributes to the reduced levels of footfall.**
- **Diminished active frontages to lane and passageway links and lack of surface legibility.**
- **Narrow non-users friendly footpaths contribute to the lack of external café seating areas.**
- **Business development curtailed by road dominant environment.**



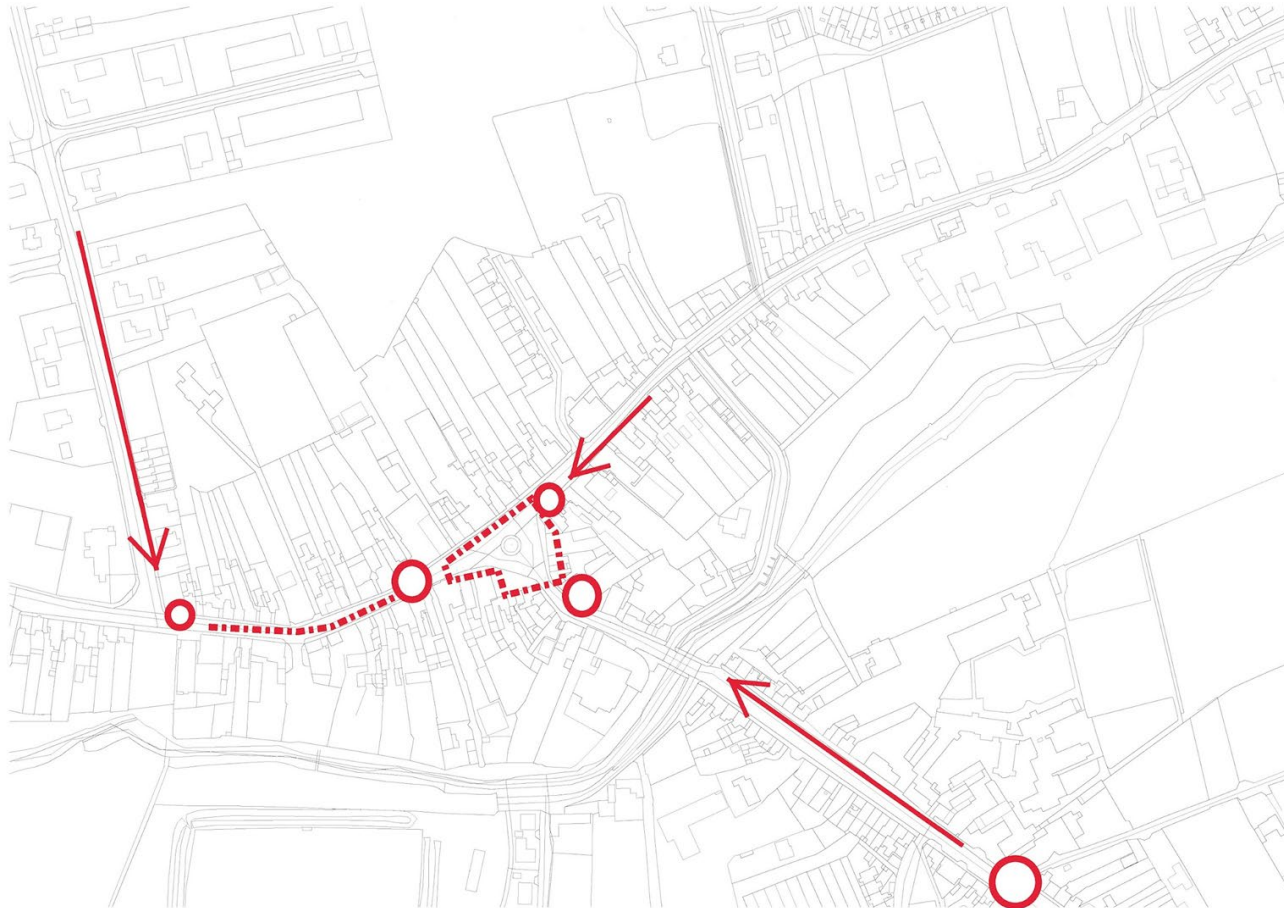


## Opportunities



- Introduction of shared surface treatments – Pedestrian Priority and managed development of external seating areas.
- Positive impact on business activities with the increase in footfall – reactive street frontages.
- Reconfiguration of parking to make the built environment more pedestrian friendly.
- Introduction of traffic calming measures and limits HGV's to reduce pedestrian intimidation.

## Threats



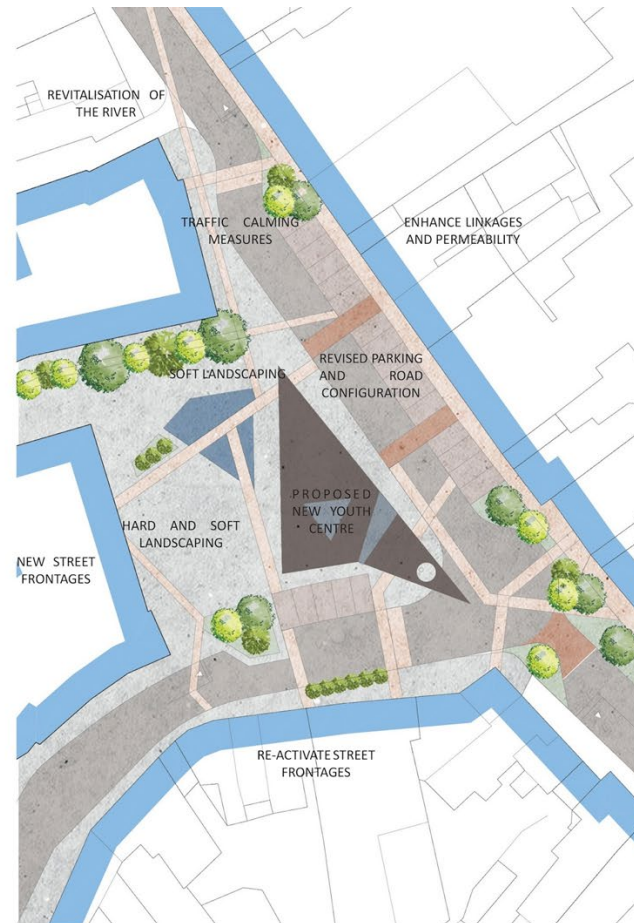
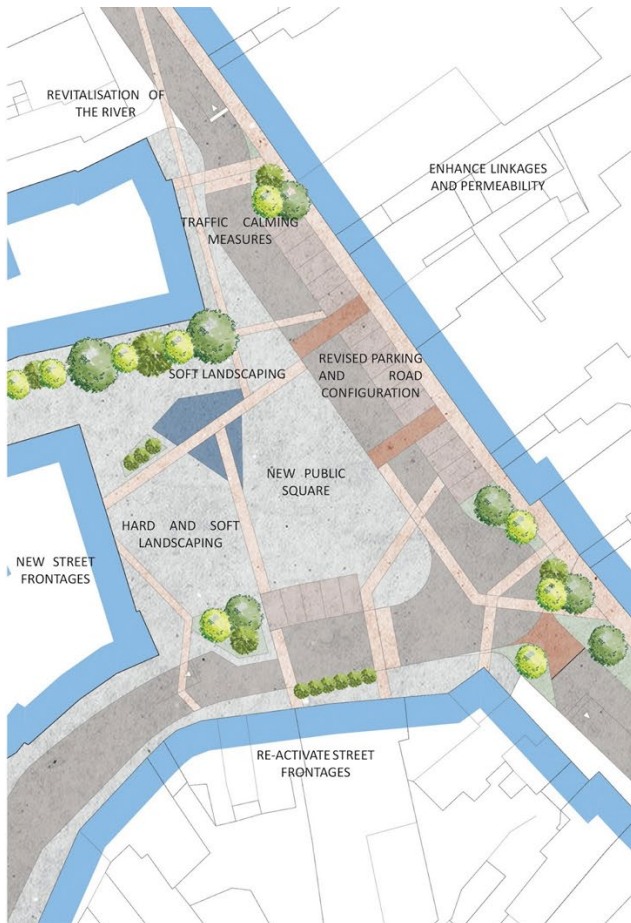
- **Do nothing – deterioration continues and reinforces the current image.**
- **Continued vehicular/pedestrian conflicts could lead to serious consequences.**
- **Continued poor universal access.**
- **Continued road dominance and pedestrian intimidation – further decline in footfall.**
- **Decline of businesses due to the continued lack of pedestrian activity.**

## Urban Fabric Regeneration



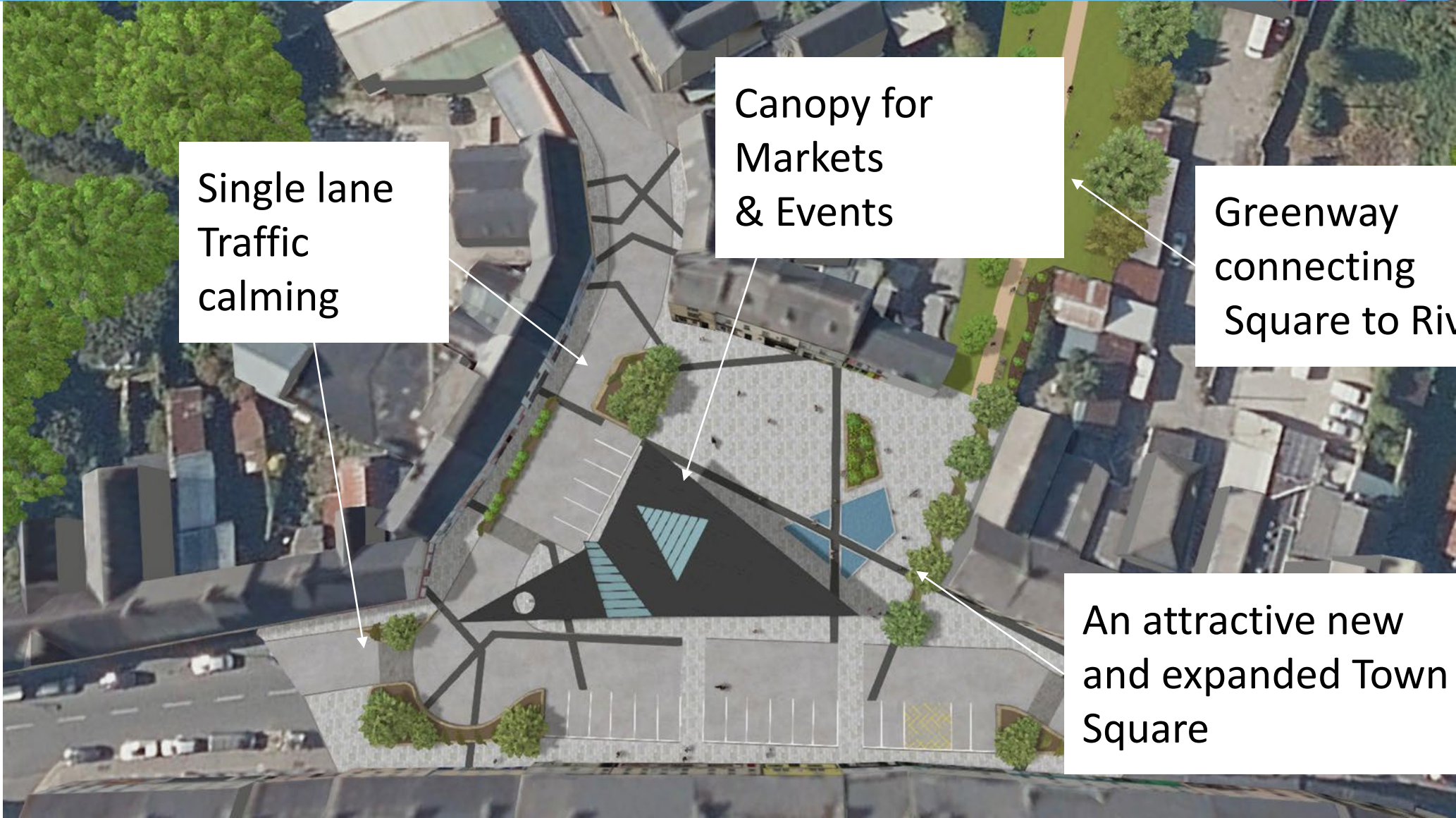
- Creation of new linkages to nodal points.
- Reactivate street frontages to encourage pedestrian footfall.
- Realisation of a new Public square for the community at large.
- Formation of new public enclosures.
- Enhance existing permeable links and the creation of new.

## Town Square Regeneration



- Traffic calming measure to encourage pedestrian movement and limit vehicular thoroughfare.
- Creation of a public square – potential to include the Youth Centre.
- Design of hard and soft landscaping to encourage footfall to the benefit of the community and surrounding businesses.
- Use of shared surfaces to reduce intimidation and soften the context.

# Re-Imagining Market Square



Single lane  
Traffic  
calming

Canopy for  
Markets  
& Events

Greenway  
connecting  
Square to River

An attractive new  
and expanded Town  
Square

# Re-Imagining Market Square



urban **ARQ**

architecture | urban design | project management

**realsim**  
REALTIME 3D SIMULATION



# Re-Imagining Market Square



urban **ARQ**

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# Re-Imagining Market Square



urban **ARQ**

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View as approached from  
Bridge St.



# Re-Imagining Market Square



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REALTIME 3D SIMULATION



# Re-Imagining Market Square



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REALTIME 3D SIMULATION



# Re-Imagining Market Square



architecture | urban design | project management



With a new Greenway connecting the town centre to the river

# Re-Imagining Market Square



urban **ARQ**

architecture | urban design | project management



Option to have a building for indoor events if

# Rejuvenating Town through 'Backlands' development



architecture | urban design | project management



New access to Main St property backlands

Developed 'backlands' connecting to new greenway through regenerated town centre



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New Town Square connecting to new street opening up 'backlands'



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**realsim**  
REALTIME 3D SIMULATION



New Street opening up commercial and residential potential of 'backlands'



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Developed 'backlands' - adding additional commercial, residential and parking to the town centre



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**real**sim  
REALTIME 3D SIMULATION



New Street opening up commercial and residential potential of 'backlands'



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REALTIME 3D SIMULATION



Opening up commercial and residential potential of 'backlands' and addressing parking challenge

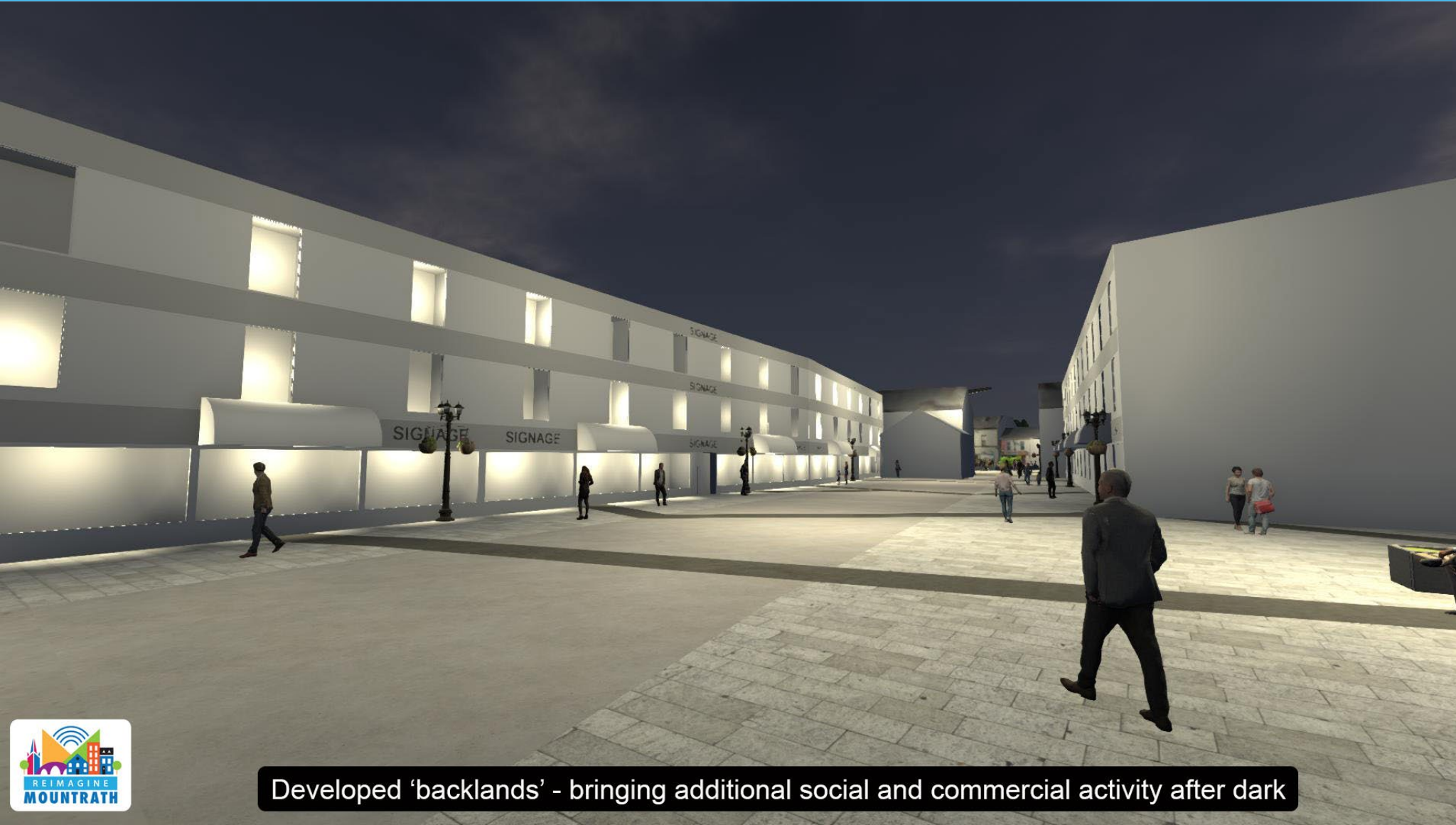
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Developed 'backlands' - bringing additional social and commercial activity after dark



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Re-Imagined Market Square Night View

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Re-Imagined Mountrath - A Sustainable town for a Prosperous and Healthy Future

