



NEW ROSS

TOWN CENTRE

HEALTH CHECK

2023

NEW ROSS

TOWN

CENTRE

FIRST

PLAN



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1. INTRODUCTION

Wexford County Council have appointed the Design Team of Cunnane Stratton Reynolds, Optimize, Howley Hayes Cooney, Tobin and A Playful City in May 2023 to prepare a Town Centre First Plan for New Ross. This urban regeneration plan for the town will be the first of its kind to bundle various strands of future development in a collaborative and holistic approach.

A critical component of the Town Centre First Plan is Town Centre Health Check - a survey-based town appraisal which outlines the town's physical centre, its land-use, vacancy and dereliction, its social and economic performance and transport mobility. The design team have conducted this Town Centre Health Check in the ambit of the national *Collaborative Town Centre Health Check* programme set up by The Heritage Council in 2010.

The objective of physical surveys in New Ross is to collect data and observations that will help to form a better understanding of the town's status, constraints and opportunities for socio-economic development.

We have collected valuable information through observational surveys and counts, questionnaires with locals and visitors and interviews with stakeholders that are illustrated and recorded in this report. Very helpful in the process have been the 15 Steps prescribed by The Heritage Council to conduct a *Collaborative Town Centre Health Check* (depicted on the following page).

Each town is different, in its topography, history and heritage, and in its socio-economic health today. With this comes a tailored-approach for each individual town. New Ross is strongly defined by its rich heritage and its historic importance of the port and Norman settlement. They deserve specific consideration in the Town Centre First Plan and have therefore been covered in this Town Centre Health Check report.

A basic street questionnaire has provided very useful data about the values and status of New Ross while our design team has conducted individual business and community surveys that are presenting more detailed information and are included in this document.



View from Mary Street down Quay Street across O'Hanrahan Bridge

2. POLICY GUIDANCE

The *Collaborative Town Centre Health Check (CTCHC)* Programme is a trans-disciplinary initiative that The Heritage Council started in 2016 and works in conjunction with participating towns across Ireland.

The *CTCHC* programme has been developed by The Heritage Council, RGDATA and the Retail Consortium, in collaboration with the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, the IPI, ILI, RIAI, UCD, LIT Thurles, DIT and QUB.

The objective of *CTCHC* is to raise awareness, understanding and appreciation of the critical role that historic town centres play. The vitality and viability of town centres have wide-ranging impacts on overall socio-economic, environmental and cultural growth and development, and on quality of life for citizens and visitors alike. The pilot checks that have been conducted aim to develop an innovative town centre-led retail, cultural heritage and tourism baseline to develop a best practice collaborative development model for urban regeneration.

Essentially, *CTCHC* help to build an innovative national capacity-building programme which is designed by, and for, Local Authorities, town centre businesses and local citizens / community groups. Mentoring support from professional practitioners with urban regeneration, urban design and planning experience will complement the programme while the health check results feed directly into the reviews of County Development Plans and Local Area Plans.

Input from members of the public and business owners are encouraged. They are asked to participate and give their views on their experiences in the town centre. It is an opportunity to shape town centres and strengthen them into the future, and to make Irish towns an attractive place to work, live and visit.

This town centre appraisal has been produced in the ambit of a **Collaborative Town Centre Health Check**, an Initiative of The Heritage Council.

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



Advisory 15 Step CTCHC Process (The Heritage Council, 2020)

3. SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The design team have applied several survey methods to obtain all available and necessary data for the Town Centre Health Check. The guiding question was:

What essential and new information do we require to develop and to form a successful Town Centre First Plan for New Ross?

With this objective in mind and considering the reduced length of the TCF Plan programme, we devised a very compact survey session and obtained very valuable data, on land-use and landownership, on vacancy and dereliction, on heritage, on transport mobility and accessibility, on business, tourism and commerce, and on the physical public realm.

The survey methods followed the general principle applied by previous CTCHC projects. As an agreed standard, the land-use survey is restricted to the ground floor and to buildings along public street and paths because these are the areas that can be freely accessed and surveyed.

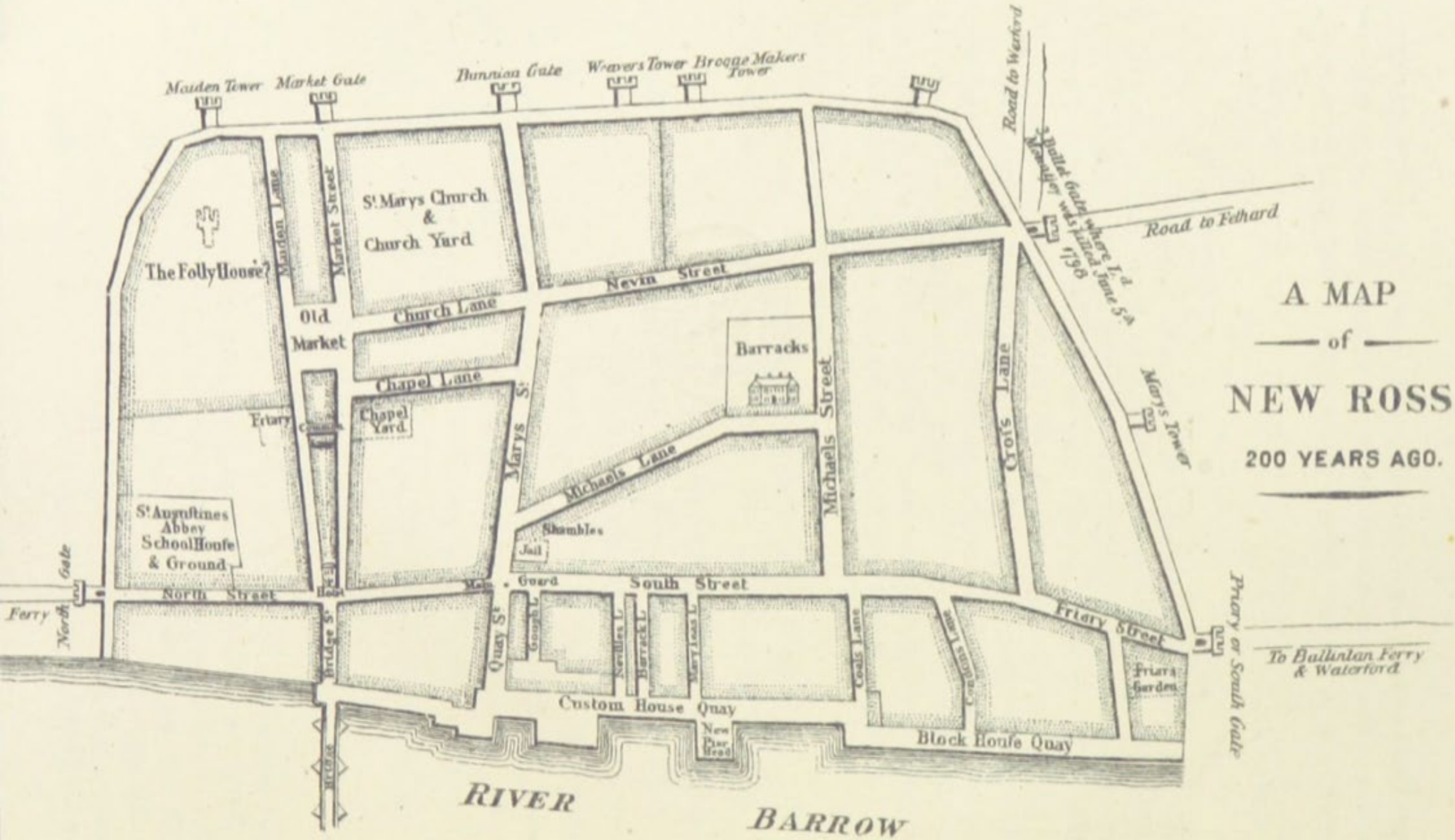
It was essential to define the survey area to a compact town centre core which would deliver the most valuable data. We assessed with the Town Team that the majority of New Ross' commercial and social activities is concentrated to an area along the Quays, North and South Street, the laneways in between and to an extent to Irish Town and Rosbercon.

Our surveys are a combination of street surveys and desk surveys. We ran an on-street fact-finding questionnaire while our stakeholder engagement team ran a community-focussed survey, and our socio-economic team developed a specific business survey. The fact-finding questionnaire has been included in this report. The community and socio-economic surveys are issued separately.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the design team depended on a comparably small survey team, without the support of larger student / academic groups as has been the case for previous health checks.

- *Fact Finding Questionnaire*
- *Land-use Survey*
- *Development Potential*
- *Vacancy & Dereliction Survey*
- *Heritage Survey*
- *Traffic Counts*
- *Car Parking Survey*
- *Accessibility Audits*
- *Business Survey & Questionnaire*
- *Community Survey & Questionnaire*
- *Public Realm Survey*

4. HISTORY & HERITAGE



4. HISTORY & HERITAGE

New Ross History

New Ross's elevated topography and strategic siting on the tidal and deep River Barrow, is a defining part of the town's character and New Ross's history is intimately bound up with its fortunes;

The town originated from the founding of the monastery and church by Saint Abban and Saint Evin on the eastern banks of the Barrow in the 6th Century. It was founded by the Earl of Pembroke, William Marshal, a leader of the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland, and his wife Isabella de Clare, between 1192 and 1207.

A rarity for the time, the fine stone bridge constructed by 1210 led to it becoming known as *Ros Ponte* or *Pons Novus*. By century's end the town had become the busiest port in Ireland and enjoyed huge trading advantages.

New Ross was without defences until the late-thirteenth century. The fosse and stone medieval town was a D-shaped enclosure of the walls with a grid pattern of streets.

New Ross' tax-exempt trading position was the source of a bitter dispute between it and the King's port of Waterford, and soon trade restrictions were introduced to limit its success. This, combined with political unrest, led to a slow decline of New Ross's fortunes from the fourteenth century onwards.

The quayside was the principal locus of economic activity in the town and the line of the fortifications / first quay would have begun behind the line of South Street today.

From the 17th century, the fortunes of New Ross were synonymous with a few large landholding families, most notably the Tottenhams, who bought most of the town from the Earl of Anglesey and held high public office for centuries.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the overlaying of what became the modern town on the existing narrow, essentially medieval, street pattern and subsequent extra-mural development.

The town's history is intimately linked to the 1798 Rebellion as the site of one of its most notorious battles, fought between the Society of the United Irishmen rebels and government forces garrisoning the town.

In the early-19th century the milling industry flourished, and the town boasted over thirty flour and textile mills. Trade in grain, flour, livestock, bacon and butter was the life blood of the town and there was also considerable export of porter, ale, beer and stout.

During and in the aftermath of the Great Famine (1845-7), New Ross was the point of embarkation for many seeking to escape to Canada or America. The present harbour and quay walls were completed in 1852.

In common with the rest of the country, New Ross experienced an economic downturn in the 1980s and '90s, prompting Failte Ireland to make it their designated 'Destination Town' in Wexford as a spur to growth. It has struggled to entirely recover, and progressive vacancy and dereliction have become a by-product of this economic decline.



6" Historic Map of New Ross 1841

4. HISTORY & HERITAGE

New Ross Heritage

Wealth of historic buildings, monuments, artefacts, places and streetscapes of all periods and types, formal and vernacular. Some are obvious and declaratory, and generally recognised by a heritage designation (RMP, RPS, NIAH, ACA) and generally sit within the former historic town walls. Some are individual, others are ensembles or streetscapes.

There are also quieter, less obvious or appreciated features, both within the town, Irish Town and Rosbercorn, which contribute positively to its sense of depth in time.

There are 189 no. heritage features included on the Record of Protected Structures, 165 no. of which are also recorded by the NIAH. RPS mapping only gives the approximate location of a Protected Structure, but not its address and nor does it show the extent of its curtilage or boundary, the subject of many disputes, and nor does it provide a description of a building / feature and why it is protected.

It seems probable that the interiors of many protected structures have been considerably altered since they were added to the record. As the NIAH survey of New Ross was undertaken in 2005 there have been numerous changes to the condition of the heritage features surveyed. It seems that some property owners 'sit' on property and dereliction and vacancy – the highest in the country - blights the town with protected structures sometimes lying vacant and in poor condition;

There are 16 no. sites officially on the derelict sites register but it would appear that there are in fact many more and there appears to be something of a grey area between vacancy and dereliction. There are a number of CPO processes of derelict sites, but it is unclear whether there is much enforcement / prosecution of property owners.

There is one Heritage Officer covering all heritage within the County and no dedicated, technically qualified Conservation Officers to handle the large volume of protected structures and to provide advice and guidance. Large landowners have signaled they would like more guidance / clarity regarding works to protected structures.

Historic mapping, street surveys, drone footage and Google Streetview suggest that there are a considerable number of structures, of variable condition, but of probable interest to the rear of buildings fronting onto main and other streets.

All features in the town are given 'Regional' rating by the NIAH, including the surviving upstanding sections of the Norman town wall. The walls are, however, collectively protected under the National Policy on Town Defences (2008). The town defences are also scheduled for inclusion in the next revision of the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) and should be considered as such. The largest number of RMP are clustered around the former medieval upstanding remains of St Mary's Church, the historic religious epicentre of the Norman town, with others scattered throughout the town.

It is notable that the remnants of the former bridge over the river are on the RPS and NIAH, but that the broader historic quay wall, such a central part of the former life of the town, is not. This is anomalous considering most other quay walls in the country are RMP and protected structures.



Berth of Ships in New Ross Port c.1920

4. HISTORY & HERITAGE

A significant opportunity exists to explore the possibility of affording greater understanding and appreciation of the historic quay wall. Usually there would be limestone and granite setts, possibly former crane tracks, mooring rings, railings, steps and material associated with its function as a hugely significant inland port historically. Archaeological testing relating to the probable line of the Norman quay wall, was undertaken in scheduled for inclusion in the next revision of the RMP.

There are currently two separate designated Architectural Conservation Areas (ACA) in the town. It is unclear why the two almost contiguous ACA boundaries are not combined to make one, with the boundary further extended to take in other designated features and the broader Quay area, the former port and economic *raison d'être* of the town. ACA as an instrument for the protection and enhancement of the character and appearance of streetscapes and their settings are rather toothless.

Elements of Norman history are evocatively alive in the street pattern and surviving sections of the medieval town wall, former gates and place names. The ruined tower of St Mary's has been the subject of much work under the auspices of the IWTN.

New Ross has a variety of building types; formal and vernacular, institutional, civic, domestic and port-related industrial and commercial of a variety of ages and scales.

There is a simple palette of construction materials consisting primarily of exposed local limestone, some granite and also stucco covered limestone as the most commonly used local materials, with some brick evident. More recent structures are often brick or concrete rendered and painted in a pastiche style to mimic historic styles, forms and detailing.

With ten churches or former churches, three convents, a former Friary, a former monastery and a number of parochial houses, ecclesiastical structures - ancient and nineteenth century – form a significant element of New Ross's character from various religious traditions.

There are remarkably few 18th century buildings in New Ross. Notable among them are the largely overlooked but charming Trinity Hospital in South Street.

Rebuilt in 1805, the stone Georgian Tholsel remains the civic heart of the town, with the principal spine of the historic core – John Street, North Street, South Street, Bridge Street, Mary Street, The Quay and Priory Street, dating largely from the rebuilding in the period after the Napoleonic Wars.

Outside the town walls are many older residential areas, the most notable of which are Irishtown and Rosbercorn, the latter of which has some individual Georgian houses, Victorian Cottages and early-twentieth century detached houses and, notably, the former Franciscan Abbey.

The principal historic spine and streets off it are characterised by a 19th century stucco and painted houses (a 20th century fashion) and commercial buildings of various grains in a loose Classical style – some three storeys over a shop, some two. Where they survive, these shops are very characterful. The main landowners and custodians in the town have had a considerable bearing on the evolution and development of the town's character.



Main Street (now South Street) late 19th century

4. HISTORY & HERITAGE

The River Barrow is the reason New Ross and Rosbercorn developed where they did, and its dramatic expanse is one of its most significant, picturesque and characterful features.

Heritage wayfinding comes in a number of different forms; more recent shield-like signs affixed to cast iron posts that demarcate where the town wall or gates in the town walls would have been sited; and eighteen blue plaques explaining key facets of the town's history and lore. There are also explanatory panels in St Mary's and on the High Hill. However, a profusion of street signage, bins etc. that in some instances create visual clutter and detract from the setting of designated heritage and the wider streetscape .

There are key views such as St Mary's, St Augustines, St Mary & St Michael's, the High Hill, Library Park and streetscape views along Priory Street, South Street, North Street, John Street and up and down Mary Street towards Quay Street and the bridge. Views from the bridge to and from Rosbercorn are important. Less obvious but nonetheless pleasing glimpses afforded through narrow, passages, lanes or streets framed by historic buildings.

Factors that detract from the character and appearance of protected structures, their setting and the wider townscape include:

- uPVC windows and doors replacing historic timber sash windows and doors; Poor quality or inappropriate alterations or extensions to historic buildings. These include applying inappropriate renders, smoothing off historic features, ad hoc extensions are evident to the rear of many historic structures within the town;
- where cement rich mortar has been used to repoint brickwork or boundary walls; where natural slate tiles have been replaced with cement or plastic;
- the use of garish or inappropriately scaled plastic signage and lighting to historic shopfronts;

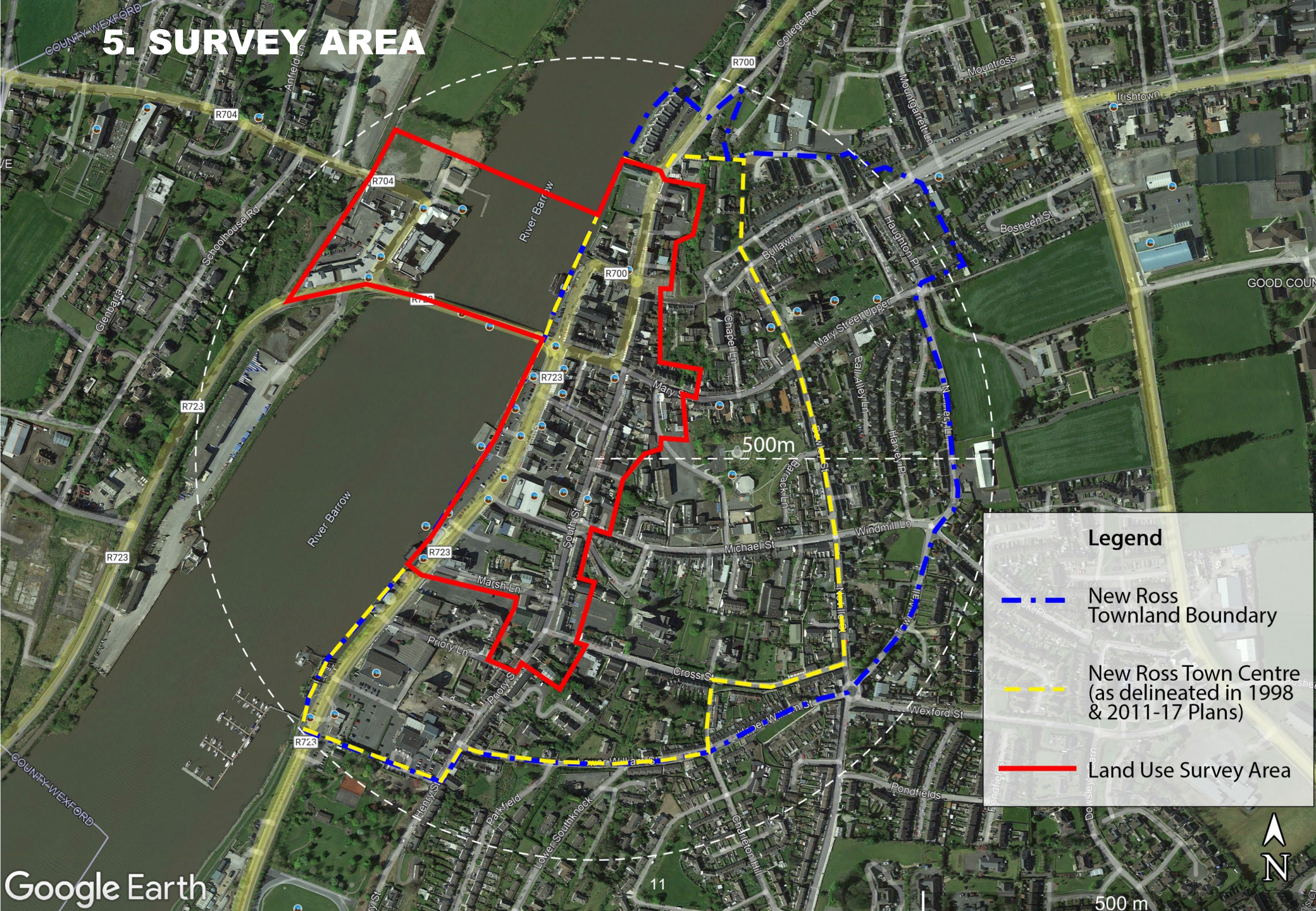
- car parking dominating narrow streets and detracting from the setting of heritage features and streetscapes and principal open spaces;
- where new development dominates the historic character and appearance of the finer grained historic buildings in terms of scale, height massing and materiality, or impacts negatively on views within or across the town.

There are therefore many opportunities for simple improvements to the interpretation, appreciation and settings of historic buildings, heritage and public realm, along with the informed repair, imaginative adaptation and the reuse of buildings currently unused or boarded up.



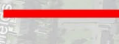


Old Bridge looking west (demolished 1968) late 19th century

5. SURVEY AREA



Legend

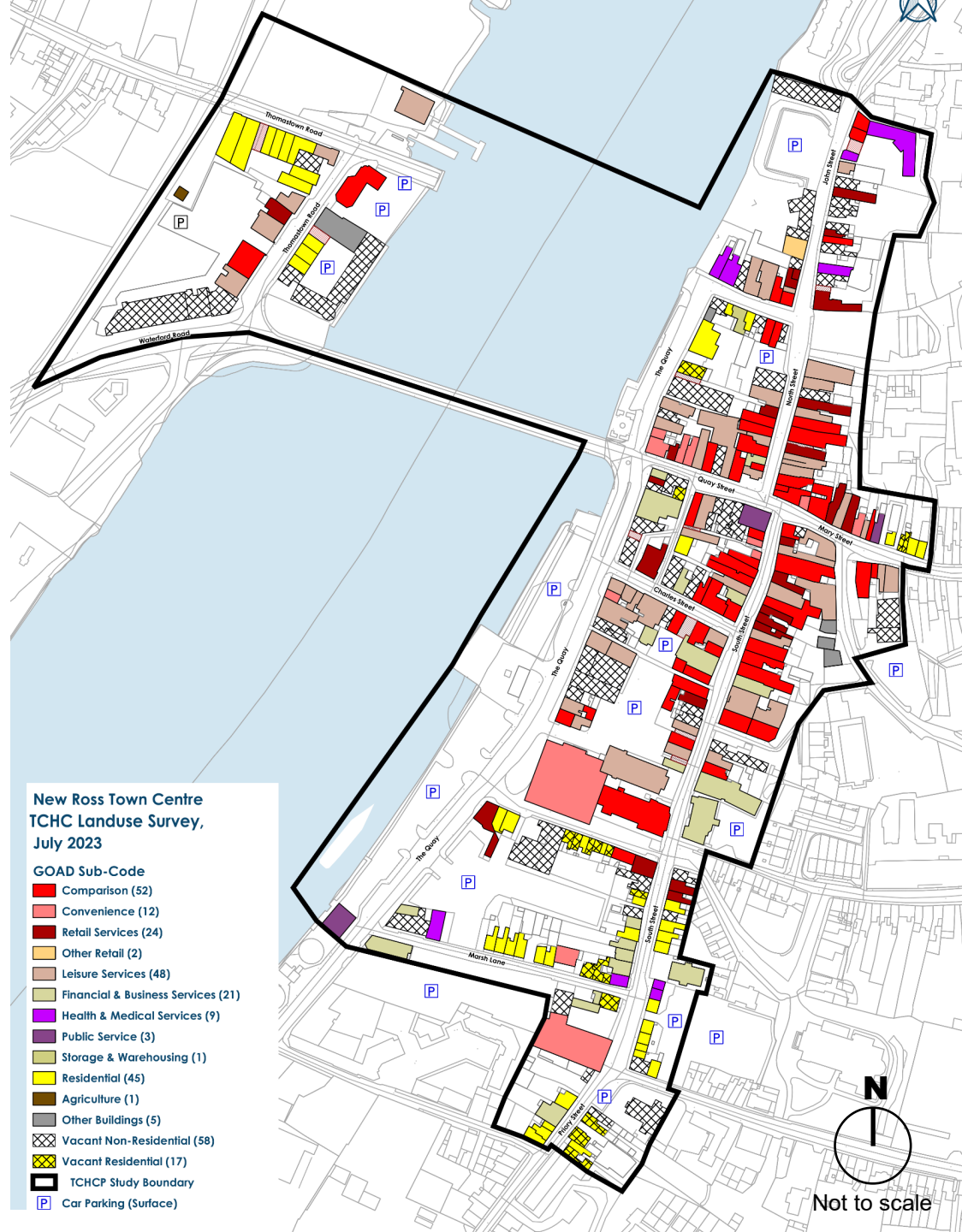
-  New Ross Townland Boundary
-  New Ross Town Centre (as delineated in 1998 & 2011-17 Plans)
-  Land Use Survey Area



6. LAND-USE

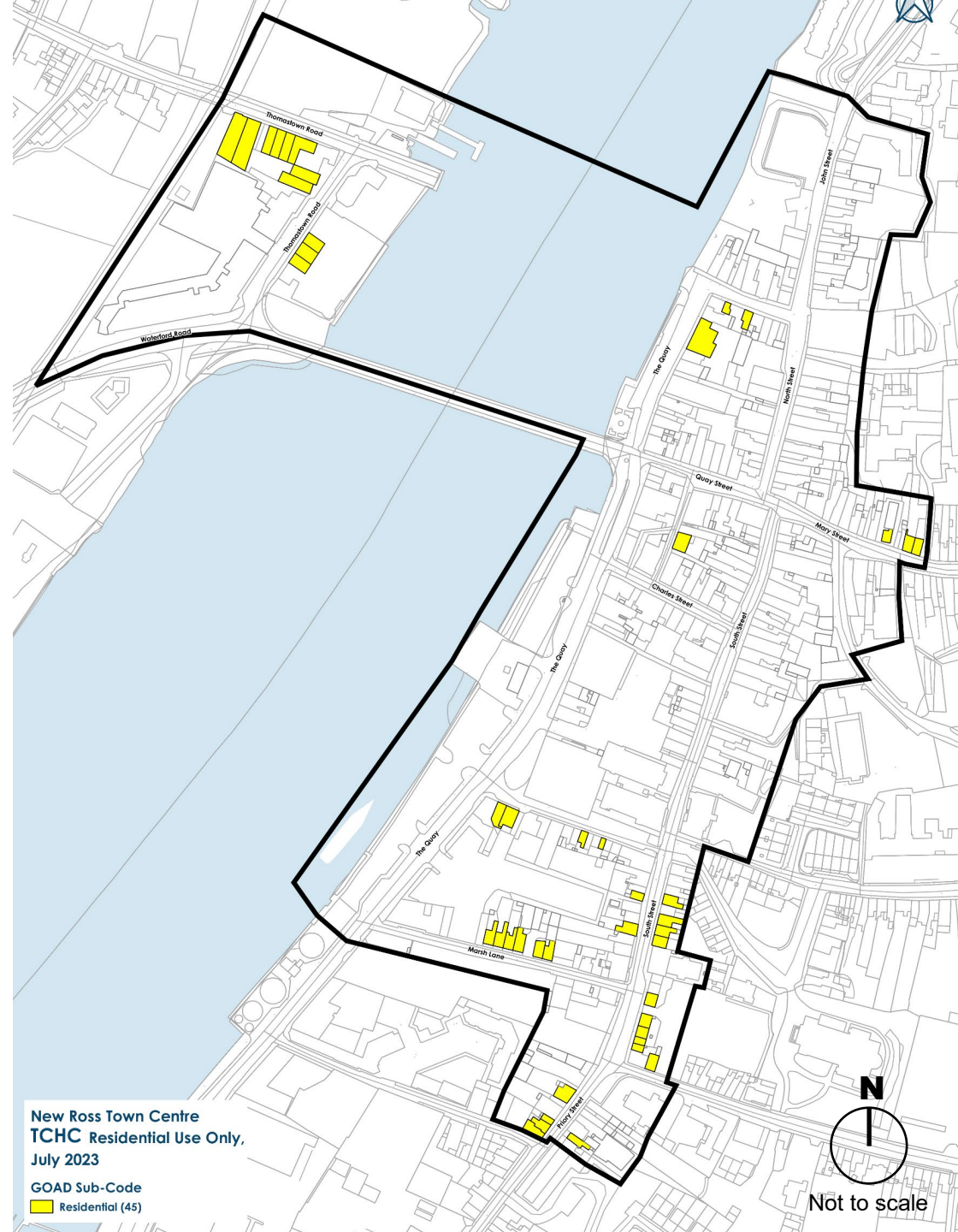
The design Team has conducted a comprehensive land-use survey of ground floor use in the defined town centre survey area as illustrated to the right. The illustrated survey area lies within the established New Ross Townlands area and within the area of the 2011-2017 Town Centre and Environs plan. In addition to these, the design team have agreed with the Town Team to include the area of Rosbercon across from O’Hanrahan Bridge in the western section of New Ross in the land-use survey.

Surveys of the upper floors have not been conducted at this point. In cases, land use on upper floors might differ from the surveyed land-use on ground floor. Furthermore, from observation, it can be assumed that upper floors of premises that are occupied on ground floor are vacant on upper floors. This ‘concealed vacancy’ will need to be considered in a more detailed analysis of the socio-economic performance of the town centre, and its desirable occupancy and density.



6. LAND-USE (Residential)

The depicted information of residential use within the survey area is identical to the map on the previous page. Illustrating residential use in isolation is helpful in the Town Centre First Plan process, particularly with regards to enhancing residential use in the town centre, in the form of terraced houses, apartments, and retrofitted commercial buildings where live-work units (living above the shop) could be re-established as a historically successful urban model. The design team envisage to use the depicted information in the context of the Town Centre Living Initiative and other town centre revitalisation schemes.



6. LAND-USE (Vacancy)

The design team have decided to illustrate **Ground Floor Vacancy** (as per land-use survey information) in isolation from active land-use.

The vacancy rate is a clear indicator of the town's health, economically as much as socially. Measures to reverse vacancy will be assessed in more detail in the Town Centre First Plan.

Furthermore, we consider the connection between vacant and derelict premises very relevant insofar as, in our experience, vacant buildings often become derelict over time. Therefore, vacant buildings are potentially in danger of becoming derelict, should no further action be taken to prevent decay. This sensitivity becomes obvious on the map to the right and is described and illustrated on the following page.

Total Ground Floor Units / Buildings surveyed: 300

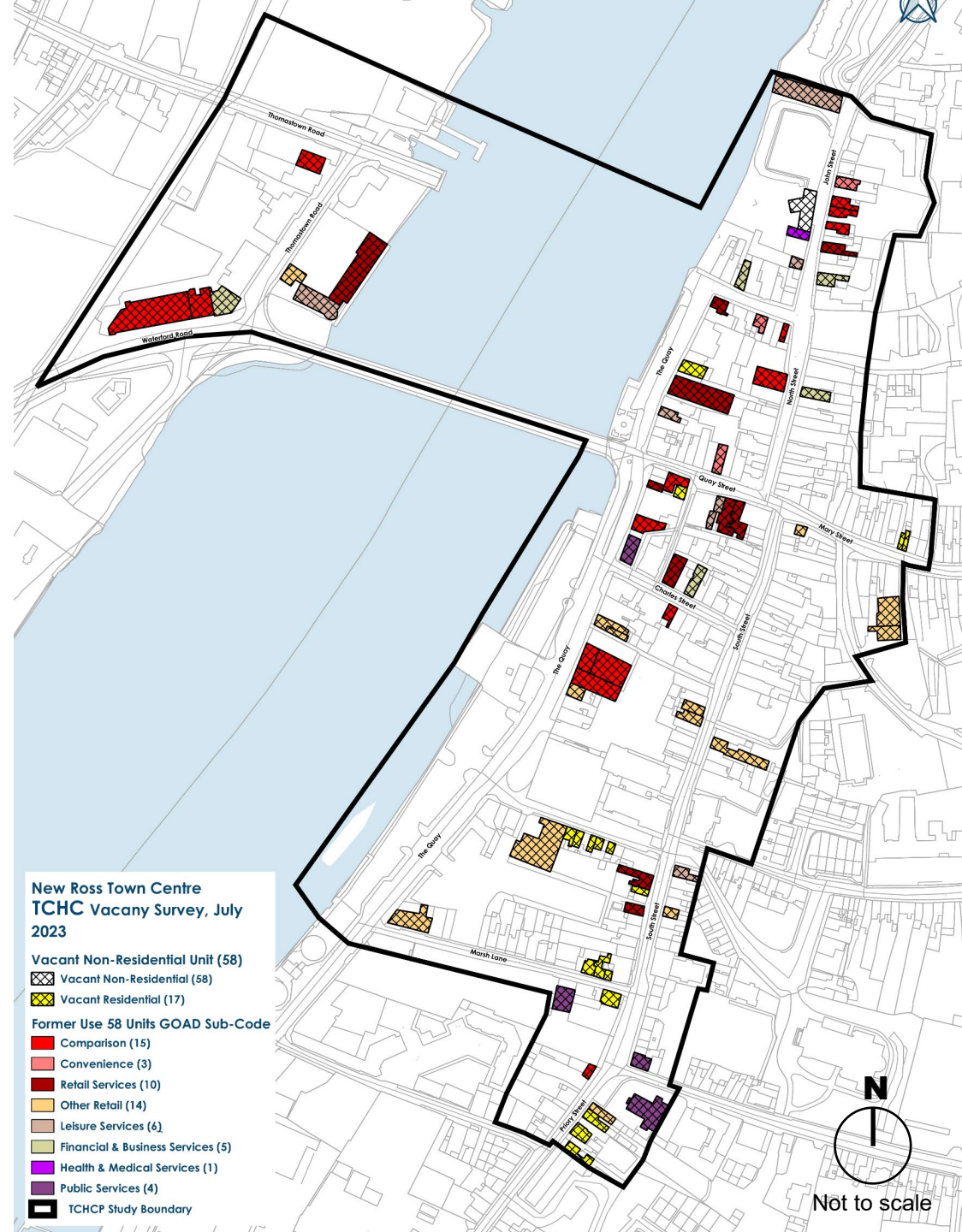
Total Occupancy: **75%**

Total Vacancy: **25%**

Retail Vacancy: **32%**

Residential Vacancy: **27%**

(all percentages are approximate)



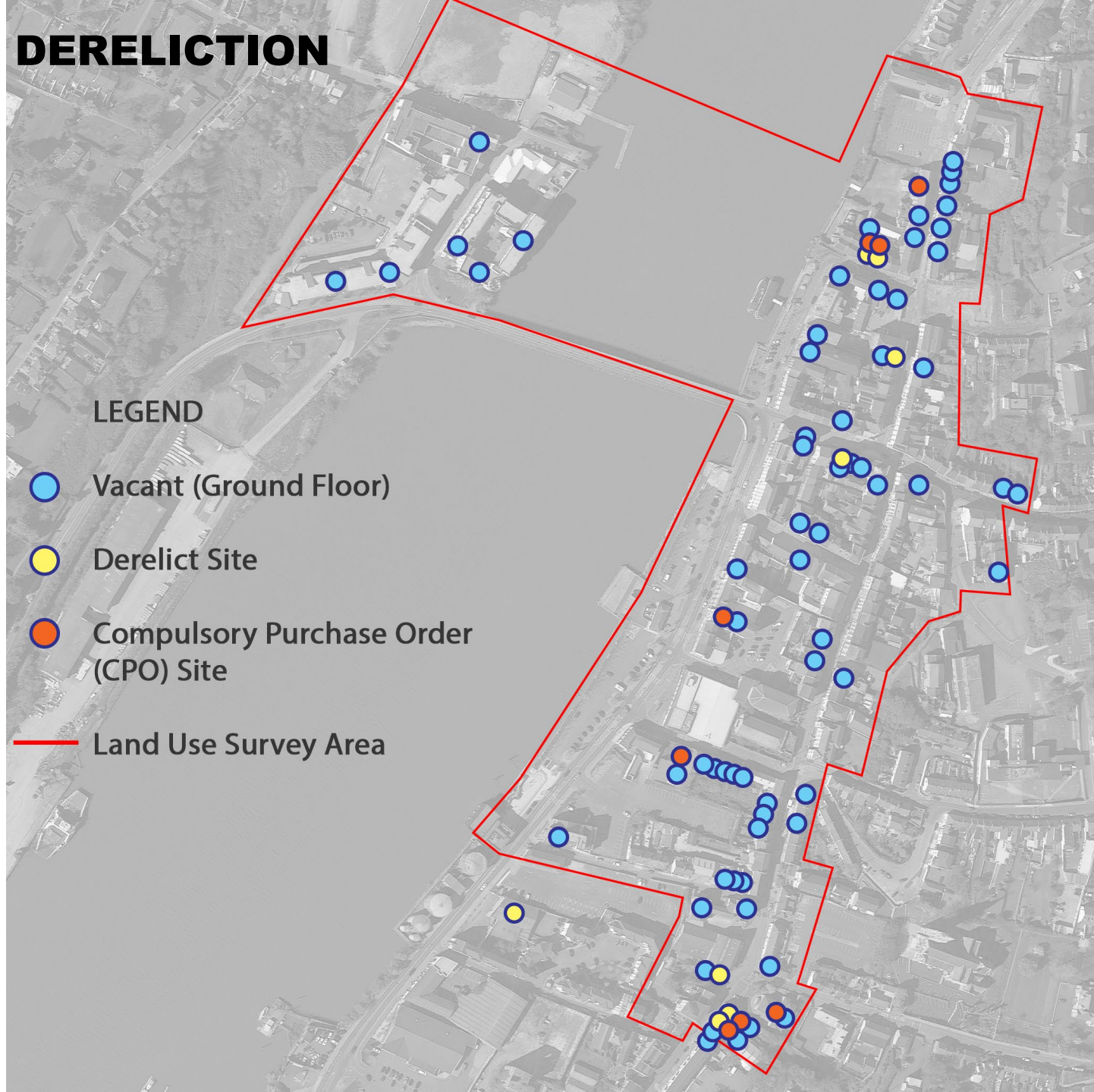
7. VACANCY & DERELICTION

A considerably high figure of vacant ground floor premises were counted during our 'Town Centre Health Check' for New Ross (25%).

It can be assumed that not only the ground floors, but the entire buildings are vacant. It can also be assumed that numerous upper floors of premises with ground floor occupancy are vacant. Street observations during our surveys confirm this assumption.

Many of the premises we surveyed as being vacant are in poor to very poor physical condition. The design team concludes that these buildings are in danger of dereliction if no action to protect them is taken soon. Furthermore, we assume that the real (hidden) number of Derelict Sites is higher than currently registered with Wexford County Council.

The design team stresses the need to protect vacant buildings from dereliction, for two main reasons: a) to protect material assets, and b) to protect historic & heritage values. We understand that many vacant buildings are part of larger vacant sites in landholdings of absentee land-owners. The Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) process that Wexford County Council apply for repossessing vacant or derelict premises supports to protect the built urban fabric and should be extended to more sites in New Ross.

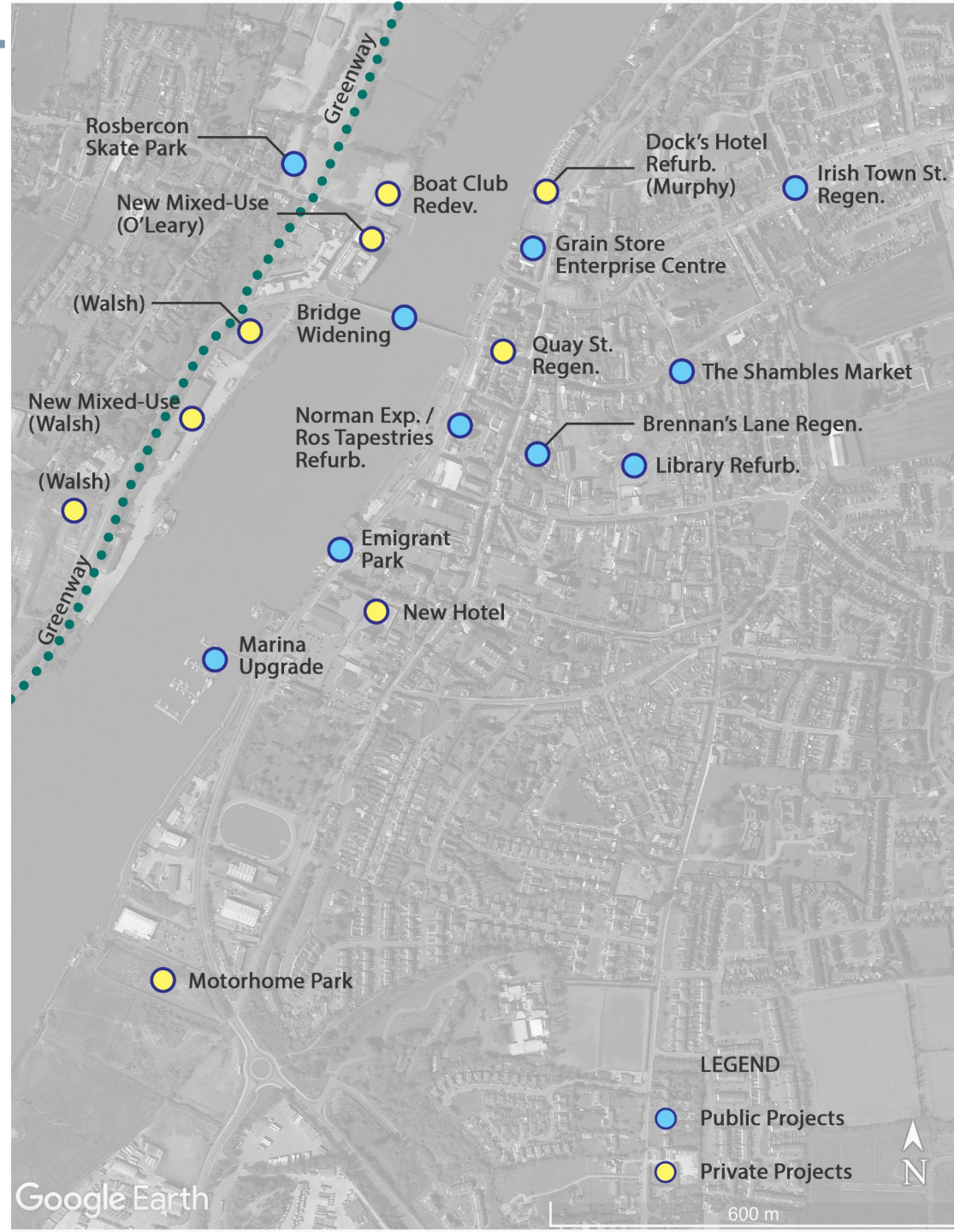


8. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Wexford County Council have identified a variety of projects that are proposed and envisaged as future development for New Ross.

They are a combination of public and private projects. Some of them such as the South-East Greenway and the Emigrant Park are already well progressed and are nearing completion.

Among others such as the Norman Experience, The pedestrianisation of Quay Street, the Grain Store Enterprise Centre, The Shambles Market, The Marina upgrade and Brennan's Lane regeneration are in different design stages and will hopefully be realised in the foreseeable future.



9. DEMOGRAPHICS & ECONOMY

Demographics / Business / Tourism

While it is agreed that New Ross needs economic growth and greater social sustainability, these needs are not in any way unusual in contemporary rural Ireland. There has clearly been a low and static population in the town centre of New Ross. There is also a high number of vacant properties, many of which are ex-retail, as well as derelict properties. However, these patterns are not unusual in that much recent population growth in rural towns across Ireland has occurred in the suburban environs and rural hinterland. Much economic and retail development has been on the edge of towns in industrial estates and shopping centres which are convenient to reach by road.

Indeed, **Table 1** shows that the population of New Ross as a whole has been increasing steadily since 1996 with the exception of 2011-2016 when growth rates slowed for many rural towns. The Electoral Division of New Ross Urban includes the Town Centre and much of the rest of town including the urban part of Rosbercon. The population of this ED was falling steadily since 1996, but for an increase between 2016 and 2022. A significant increase in population has been experienced since 1996 in the outskirts of the town in the ED) of New Ross Rural to the east, albeit initially from a relatively low base. Some of this increase in the urban part of New Ross would appear to have been due to new migrants, particularly from Poland. Poles account for 6.6% of the population of the urban ED, although they do constitute a greater proportion of the rural ED at 12.4%.

Electoral Division	2002	2006	2011	2016	2022
New Ross Urban	4402	4034	3907	3768	3938
Percent change	-4.9%	-8.4%	-3.1%	-3.6%	4.5%
New Ross Rural	2052	3367	4014	3942	4178
Percent change	44.6%	64.1%	19.2%	-1.8%	6.0%
Total	6454	7401	7961	7710	8116
Percent change	6.9%	14.7%	7.6%	-3.2%	5.3%

Table 1: New Ross Population (CSO 2022)

Table 2 shows the figures for age and confirm an outward movement of the population to the suburbs where there is a much higher proportion of children below the age of 14 and higher proportions of other age classes below 50 years, especially of people between 30 and 40. These data on the age profile are supported by those for family cycle. These Family Cycle figures in **Table 3** show a much higher proportion of households in New Ross Rural belonging to the 'early school', 'pre-adolescent' and 'adolescent' categories than for New Ross Urban. The proportion of people over 65 years is much higher in New Ross Urban at 20.6% than for New Ross Rural at 13.9% and this corresponds to a higher proportion of 'retired' people at 10.3% compared with 6.7%.

	New Ross Urban		New Ross Rural		All New Ross	
Age 0-15	607	16.1%	1032	26.2%	1639	21.3%
Age 16-29	632	16.8%	675	17.1%	1307	17.0%
Age 30-39	499	13.2%	685	17.4%	1184	15.4%
Age 40-49	492	13.1%	578	14.7%	1070	13.9%
Age 50-64	533	20.6%	145	13.9%	390	17.2%
Age 64 +	760	20.0%	424	10.0%	1184	15.4%

Table 2: New Ross Population by Age (CSO 2016)

	New Ross Urban		New Ross Rural		All New Ross	
	families	persons	families	persons	Total families	Total percent
Pre-Family	6.1%	4.3%	7.5%	5.3%	136	6.5%
Empty Nest	14.6%	10.3%	10.8%	7.6%	254	12.1%
Retired	14.6%	10.3%	9.6%	6.7%	242	11.5%
Pre-school	9.2%	9.3%	11.9%	12.5%	211	10.0%
Early school	7.9%	9.5%	16.9%	21.2%	248	11.8%
Pre-adolescent	9.5%	12.3%	15.5%	21.5%	250	11.9%
Adolescent	13.5%	17.2%	16.7%	22.7%	302	14.4%
Adult	24.6%	27.0%	21.4%	26.0%	460	21.9%

Table 3: Family Cycle (CSO 2016)

9. DEMOGRAPHICS & ECONOMY

Figure 1 provides an illustration of occupations in all New Ross (Urban and Rural). It indicates a high number of people working in “Processing, Plant and Machinery” (17.5%) and “Skilled Trades” (15.7%). These figures are for the previous Census in 2016. New figures are due to be published in September from the 2022 Census, but it is likely that the proportions will not have changed very much since this time.

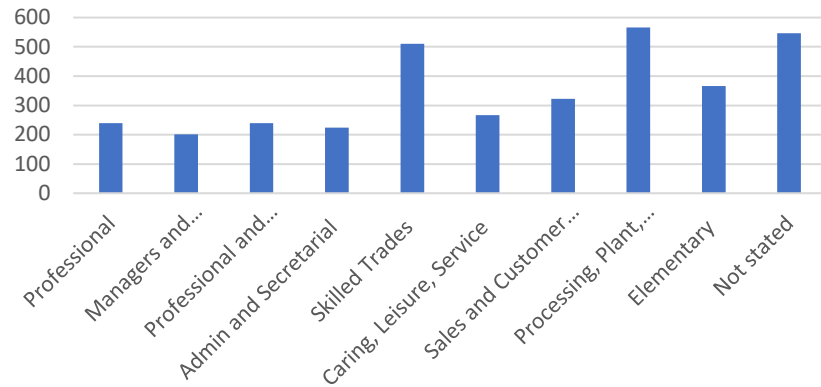


Figure 1: Occupations (CSO 2016)

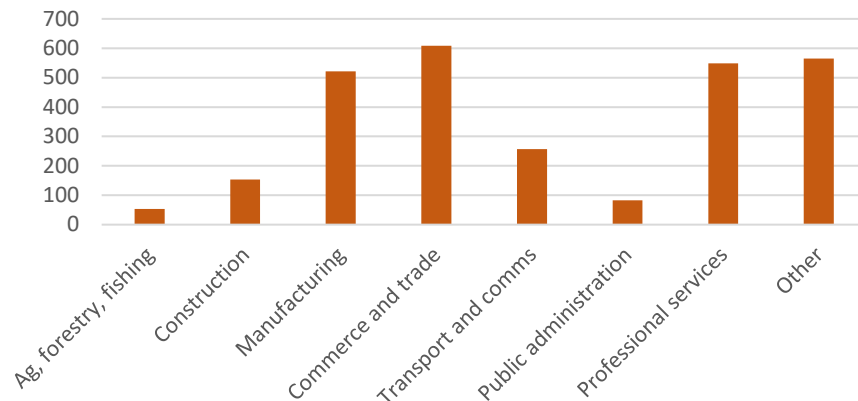


Figure 2: Industries (CSO 2016)

Figure 2 provides a similar picture for industries, with the highest number of people shown to be engaged in “Commerce and Trade” (21.8%), followed by “Professional Services” (19.7%) and “Manufacturing” (18.7%). A very small proportion are involved in “Agriculture, Forestry or Fishing” (1.9%) despite New Ross being at the centre of a large rural area.

At the time of preparation of this Town Centre Health Check, the regional demographics CSO data was not available. This was made available in September 2023. See APPENDIX B – Demographics, Business Survey, Vacancy and Dereliction, Tourism Opportunity and the South East Greenway for updated data and figures.

At this stage, for the purpose of providing a better understanding of the above figures, it is useful to make a comparison with other rural Irish towns.

Gorey is a town which is often compared with New Ross, largely because it is of a similar size, but is perceived to have had more recent success economically. A comparison between the two towns indicates that Gorey has a similar profile, but a more even population structure with a higher proportion of inhabitants in their 30s and 40s. This more even age structure is also apparent for the Gorey Urban ED. The pattern for Family Cycle is similar, but there are fewer families with early school or pre-adolescent children (11.8% and 11.9%) than in Gorey (15.1% and 13.8%) and more households of retired people (11.5% compared with 8.9%).

Social class indicates a higher proportion of people in Gorey belong to the “Managerial and Technical class” (22.4% in Gorey as compared with 17.8% in New Ross). Patterns of Educational Achievement are very similar between the two towns, although there are higher proportions with more advanced qualifications, e.g. Honours Degree at 9.0%, in Gorey compared with 6.4% in New Ross. Occupational patterns indicate a higher proportion of Professional workers at 11.6% in Gorey compared with 7.4% in New Ross, but also a slightly lower level of Managers and Directors at 5.7% compared with 6.2%. There are relatively more people employed in Commerce and Trade in Gorey at 24.8% compared with 21.8%, and a smaller proportion working in Manufacturing at 15.5% compared with 18.7%.

9. DEMOGRAPHICS & ECONOMY

Relevance of Demographics to Town Plan

An analysis of the demographics indicate that New Ross is not so different from many other rural towns with evidence of a rather skewed population in the centre and some deprivation, being balanced by relative prosperity on the outskirts of the town.

It does indicate that New Ross is missing some of the younger demographics, including people of an age with young families, which suggests that people may have left (or not moved in) due to employment opportunities elsewhere.

New Ross also lacks a third level college, and this is demonstrated by the fact that only a modest segment of the population falls within the 18-25 age range, potentially compounding the problem of there being rather little for young people to do as reported by many of the project meeting participants and survey respondents. However, the comparison with Gorey shows no extreme differences.

At the time of preparation of this Town Centre Health Check, the regional demographics CSO data was not available. This was made available in September 2023. See APPENDIX B – Demographics, Business Survey, Vacancy and Dereliction, Tourism Opportunity and the South East Greenway for updated data and figures

The relatively low level of younger population segments does present an issue in that young people often have more disposable income, or at least are willing to spend this on consumerables and nights out. Young families typically engage in higher spending activity too. What money is spent on nightlife occurs largely in Irishtown which is located outside of the town centre. However, the location is still relatively peaceful with nightspots elsewhere, only more active than the centre of town where most of the very limited activity occurs around John Street and Mary Street. The low level of activity means that the problem of on-street drinking, a problem found in every town, is more evident in New Ross because of the quiet surroundings.

The Role of Retail

An argument given for Gorey's apparent success relates to the presence of the retail multiples being located close to the centre of town. The preferred location of major retailers is a difficult issue for town planners to deal with given that the investment decision is ultimately in the hands of the retailers themselves and their preference is strongly aligned with accessibility rather than sustainability. New Ross is not unfavourably positioned in that three of the major retailers are located on the R723 Ring Road. The road is significantly less trafficked than it was prior to the construction of outer bypass. Therefore, there is some opportunity to persuade people to cross the ring road into the centre of town. This is challenging as weekend shoppers are often single minded in their needs to stock up with groceries for the week ahead and are not necessary in leisure mode. However, the Council has done much to improve the road crossing facilities. Much investment has gone into improving the environment of the quays, with the Dunbrody Famine Ship experience and in the high quality of the local parks. If people do make it across the main road to South Street where other retail outlets are located, they find an attractive environment with a small, but varied selection of small shops.



Traditional New Ross Shopfront

9. DEMOGRAPHICS & ECONOMY

Visitors and Tourism

This environment of South Street is also an appealing one for tourists, including the many American tourists for whom the Dunbrody Experience is a stage on their coach trip. New Ross has many interesting heritage features whose novelty cannot be underestimated for visitors from North America. However, coach passengers are allowed rather little time to explore the towns in which they arrive and much of their spending remains within the Visitor Centre which is open all year with an annual turnover of around €1.6 million. Similarly, passing motorists, including tourist traffic, are likely to take advantage of the good parking provided beside the river, or to purchase some groceries at one of the three supermarkets or at the service station. Opportunistic visitors may also stop at the Dunbrody Experience café for lunch. In both cases, there is the imperative of letting people know what is to be found in the town centre and of getting them across the main road. To arrive in South Street visitors must pass through the rather derelict-looking backlands around Marsh Lane or Sugarhouse Lane. Good signage is essential in this respect as has been noted by many of survey and project meeting participants. Indeed, the town has already invested in signage, including some good heritage signage, but further interventions would certainly be welcome. The town must also be commended for having invested in lighting, street art and litter bins to make this area less intimidating. This continued maintenance of the area, including discouragement of anti-social behaviour and littering, remains a priority.

Once it has opened, the Norman Heritage Centre, including the housing of the Ros Tapestry, will be an important draw. So too, will be the proposed farmers' market. Attracting more visitors to the town centre will be highly beneficial in keeping the small businesses here viable, including the cafes and numerous specialist shops such as gift shops (Hogans, Brooks), bakers (The Bakehouse, Bridget's Sweet Boutique), the bookshop (Nolans), and art shop (J.Baile). Most of these shops have attractive traditional facades. The planned pedestrianisation of Quay Street is likely to limit the pedestrian severance created by vehicles heading too quickly from the bridge into town and make access easier for pedestrians so long as excessive traffic is not diverted onto South Street.



Mural opposite Dunbrody Famine Ship Experience and Emigrant Flame

9. DEMOGRAPHICS & ECONOMY

The steep hill to the rear of South Street and North Street is part of the aesthetic attraction of New Ross when seen from across the River Barrow. However, it severely restricts pedestrian and cyclist movement. Once again, the Council has done much to draw visitors up the slope including through the use of heritage signage and most especially the recent construction of the High Hill Norman Garden. The Garden itself, although very visible from across the river, needs good signage from the Visitor Centre because it facilitates visitors in climbing the hill from which they can then gradually descend taking in Chapel Street and Mary Street.

New Ross' links to America are, of course, a major asset for the town. Connected to this is the Annual Kennedy Summer School which helps to maintain the connection and is, along with the annual Piano Festival, a significant cultural resource. However, there is a strong need to attract other foreign and domestic visitors. Everybody agrees that the Brandon House Hotel and Spa is of considerable benefit to the town. Although situated in self-contained private grounds, it is still located reasonably close to the town centre. However, an observation made by many people is the absence of much hotel accommodation or a hostel in the town. This, indeed, is an obvious and serious deterrent to visitors spending time in the town and contributing to its nighttime economy. The proposal to establish a campervan / motorhome park near to the town centre is an inspired one as it will attract more people, including especially couples, to stay overnight and hopefully spend money in town during both the daytime and evening.

The South East Greenway

The design team are of the opinion that the new South East Greenway will have a profound and positive impact on the economy of New Ross. The existing Waterford Greenway has proven to be extremely popular, attracting both mostly domestic users and tourists and is a welcome resource for the health and wellbeing of the people of Waterford.

New Ross itself will be an attraction for the South East Greenway, but the Red Bridge and Mount Elliot Tunnel will be very distinctive major draws for cyclists and walkers on the Greenway. The wider area includes attractions such as Inistioge, the River Nore and Barrow and the Barrow Way, and Enniscorthy and Vinegar Hill. Another prospective unique draw of the South East Greenway would be the potential for users to return by boat via an extension of the service already offered by the Barrow Princess.

The design team estimate that, when eventually complete, the Greenway could attract 225,000 users which would result in expenditure of €3.7 million per year. New Ross could claim €1.74 million of this total expenditure. Economic multiplier effects could raise the local contribution of this expenditure to over €3 million per year.

Rosbercon is certain to benefit from this expenditure. For the town as a whole to realise the economic benefits, it will be necessary to do as much as necessary to attract visitors across the river, including through the addition of cycle lanes to O'Hanrahan's Bridge and a cycle path from Mount Elliot, from where visitors will also be able to stop at Mannion's Farm Shop and Pub or at Woodville House and Gardens. Further recommendations in this respect are contained in the Greenway Report.



Recreational rowing on the River Barrow

9. DEMOGRAPHICS & ECONOMY

Business Survey

In addition to the Community Survey, the team have also prepared a business survey. The findings of this survey are in APPENDIX B Demographics Business Tourism Data.

Vacancy and Dereliction

Vacancy and dereliction are the twin scourges of Irish rural towns and are present in New Ross too. Indeed, the level of vacancy is understood to be higher than that of other towns in the county, and higher than the national average. Part of the reason for this high level of vacancy is due to history, namely earlier times when New Ross was a prosperous port. It would be difficult to fill all these buildings, especially given the expectations of floor space and accessibility that businesses, and prospective residents now have. Nevertheless, local people are understandably frustrated by the visibility of dereliction and the image that this presents of the town. New Ross is characterised by large landholdings, in the hands of a small group of mostly absent landowners. Some of these landowners have taken initiatives to put vacant buildings back into use, but their more active support for strategic actions would be welcome.

Government has recently increased the number of initiatives available for urban regeneration and the grants that are available for the conversion of rental properties. The new Croí Cónaithe Vacant Properties Refurbishment Grant is available to restore derelict buildings. At present, New Ross has rather few properties available for rent and this discourages migration into the town by young people and others who can provide a local workforce.

The Town Centre Living Initiative (DRDD, 2020) found that it is cheaper to refurbish than to build new, but that renovation is more expensive than a purpose designed building. The respective differences in cost were not great which suggests that positive local initiatives or circumstances can make a difference in encouraging investment. However, cost is far from being the only factor. Other important issues are lack of guidance and information, low land values and returns, planning permission, inaccessibility, parking, structural integrity, difficult of finding retail tenants, rights of way, legal issues, building regulations (energy efficiency, H&S, fire), and the risk of making an investment in an environment of decline and dereliction. Given so many potential issues, a major factor is the lack of confidence that landowners have to make an investment in properties which have an inherently low market value.

The design team believe that the above-mentioned initiatives could be successful to mitigate vacancy and dereliction. We will be combining these proposals with the outputs of the urban design, heritage study and community consultation in our final report and recommendations.



Normandy Food Tour visiting New Ross 2023

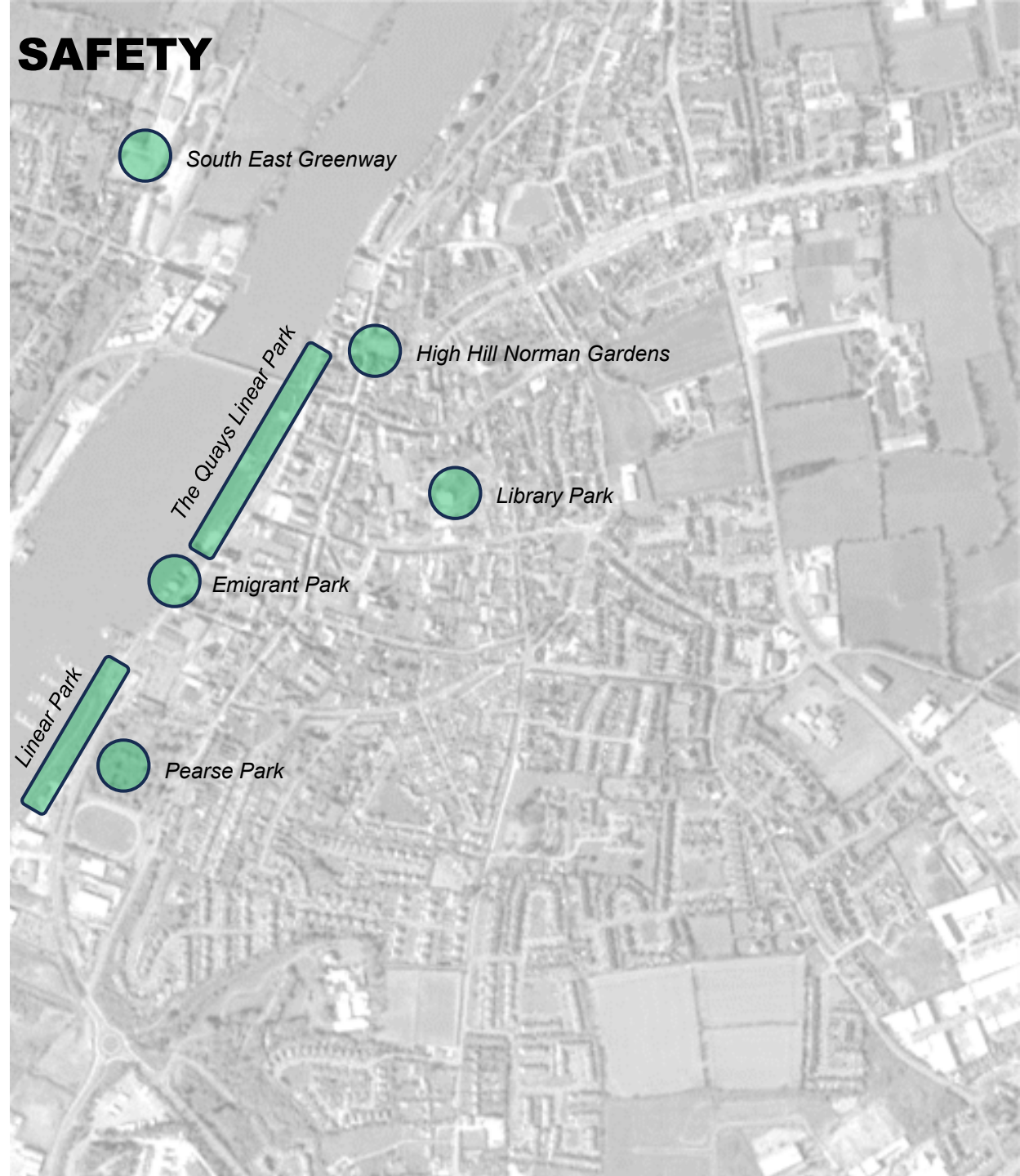
10. PUBLIC REALM & SAFETY

New Ross is rich in large scale and high-quality public spaces that contribute to the very good standard of the town's public realm. Particularly outstanding examples are:

- High Hill Norman Gardens
- Library Park
- Pearse Park
- The Quays Linear Park
- Emigrant Park (under construction)
- South East Greenway (under construction)

Interview feedback from local An Garda Síochána are summarised as follows:

- Generally low crime rates with CSO statistics showing details
- Few crimes that occur are vandalism / shop lifting / drug dealing
- Graffiti most common along laneways and in Pearse Park, mostly by teenager groups
- Regular drug dealing from premises on North Street (eastside, visible from the Tholsel)
- Occasional drug dealing around bus stop on the Quays
- Occasional money collecting visible on dole pay days
- The younger generation seek entertainment in Wexford and Waterford because New Ross has comparably little night life. As a result, the town is relatively quiet at night and weekends
- The Red Bridge & Mount Elliot Tunnel are safety priority for the Greenway. The tunnel will be lit 24/7 and it is assumed tha the tunnel is too remote to become an attractive black spot



11. ACCESSIBILITY ASSESSMENT

The Accessibility Assessment we conducted has regard to best practice guidance. The objective of unrestricted accessibility is to provide access to our built environment for everyone, regardless of age or ability. For practical reasons, this accessibility audit has been based on personal observations and photographic records during our town surveys and has focussed on quality and conditions of footpaths, street crossings, ramps, stairs, guardrails and general access to premises.

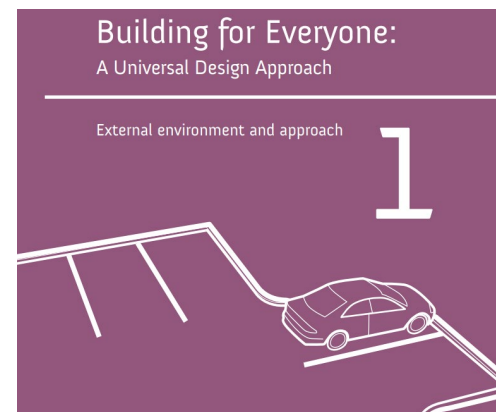
The following is a non-exhaustive list of best practice guidance:

- Building Regulations Technical Guidance Document M - Access and Use:
[31b7614c-7df1-439c-abc-b0f16fb3e93a7.pdf \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie/public/31b7614c-7df1-439c-abc-b0f16fb3e93a7.pdf)
- National Disability Agency – Centre for Excellence in Universal Design:
[Built Environment | Centre for Excellence in Universal Design](https://www.centreforuniversaldesign.com/)
- Universal Access – Driving Global Inclusion:
[Universal Design | Universal Access](https://www.universalaccess.ie/)
- Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS):
[f378bf_583444499f9f4095aaa4d5e05c3cf4b2.pdf \(dmurs.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie/public/f378bf-583444499f9f4095aaa4d5e05c3cf4b2.pdf)
- Best Practice Urban Design Manual:
[07213 UrbanDesignGuide_14May09.indd - 020c668c-4c56-40a5-9b60-41615cf2853e.pdf \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie/public/07213_UrbanDesignGuide_14May09.indd-020c668c-4c56-40a5-9b60-41615cf2853e.pdf)
- National Design Guide UK:
[National design guide.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/281222/national-design-guide.pdf)
- 8 – 80 – Cities:
[8 80 Cities | Creating cities for all](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/8-80-cities-creating-cities-for-all)

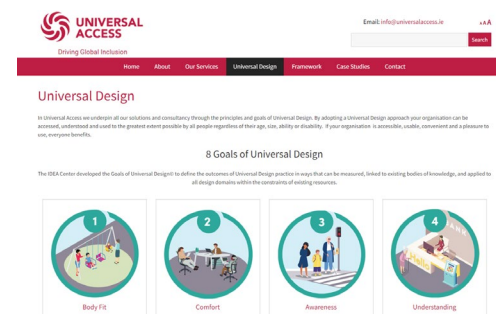
Building Regulations
**Technical Guidance Document M
2022**
Access and Use



*Building Regulations
TGD Part M*



*Centre for Excellence
in Universal Design*

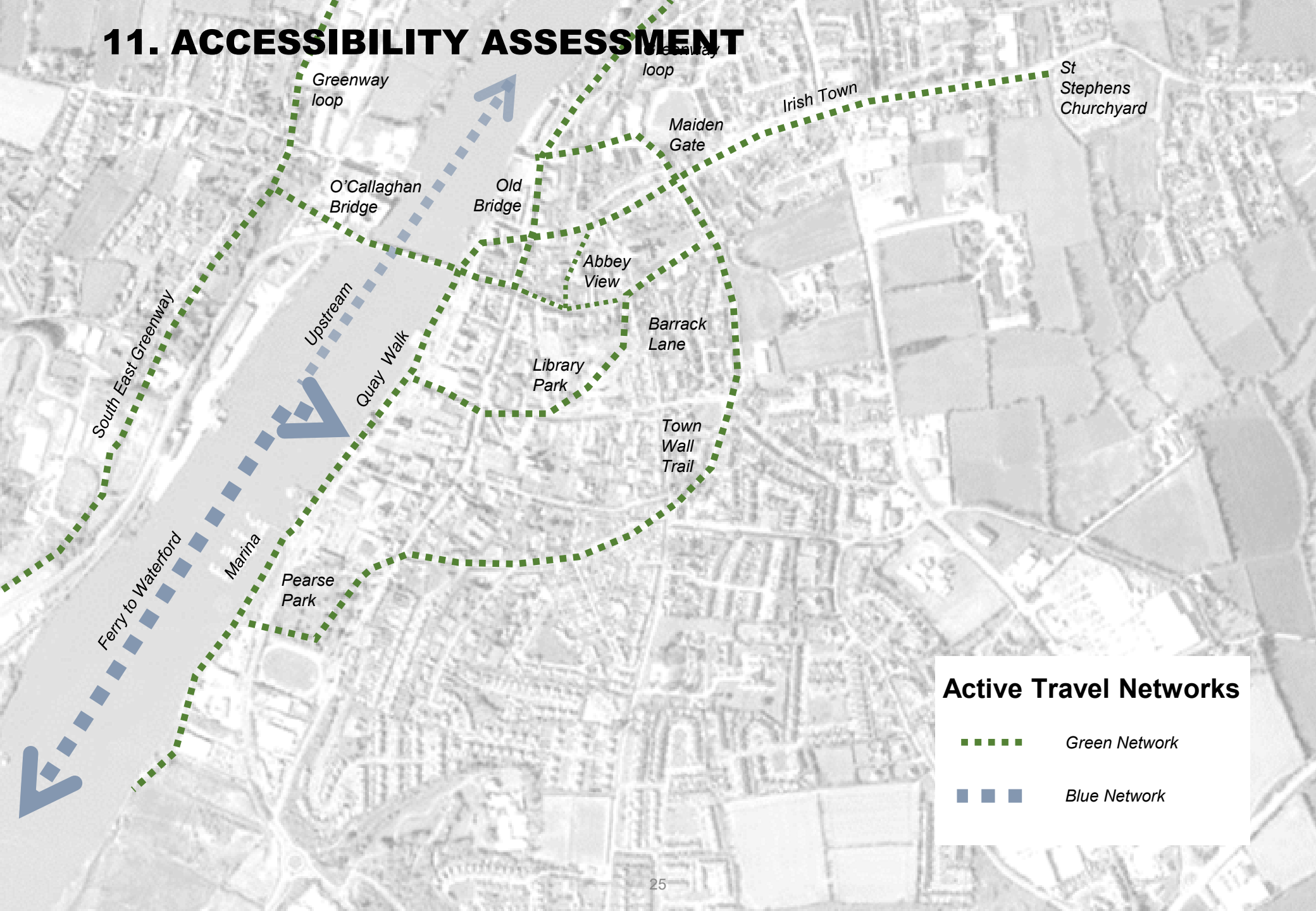


*Universal Access
Driving Global Inclusion*



*Design Manual for
Urban Roads and Streets*

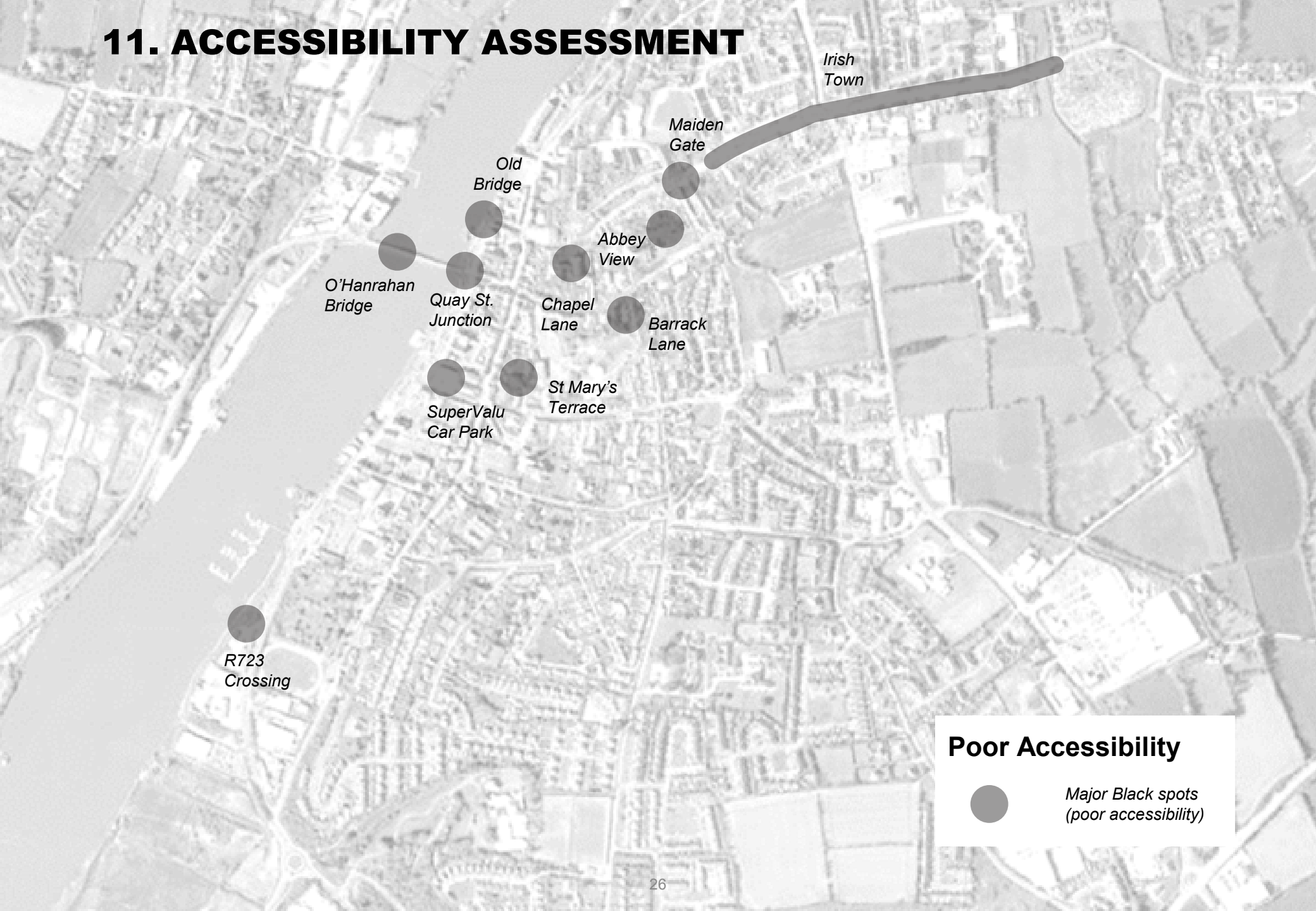
11. ACCESSIBILITY ASSESSMENT



Active Travel Networks

- Green Network
- Blue Network

11. ACCESSIBILITY ASSESSMENT



Irish
Town

Maiden
Gate

Old
Bridge

Abbey
View

O'Hanrahan
Bridge

Quay St.
Junction

Chapel
Lane

Barrack
Lane

SuperValu
Car Park

St Mary's
Terrace

R723
Crossing

Poor Accessibility

● Major Black spots
(poor accessibility)

11. ACCESSIBILITY ASSESSMENT



Barrow View Heights steps



Conduit Lane pedestrian network



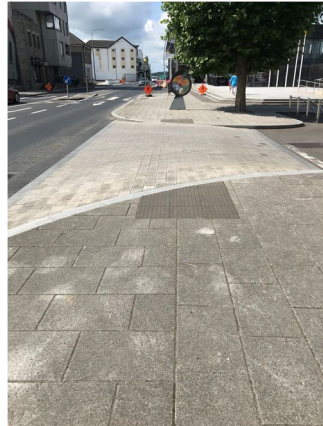
Norman Trail from St. Mary's



Well-marked, positioned accessible parking



Numerous pedestrians along Quays



Car crossing safe for pedestrians



Generous, safe access to Quay walk



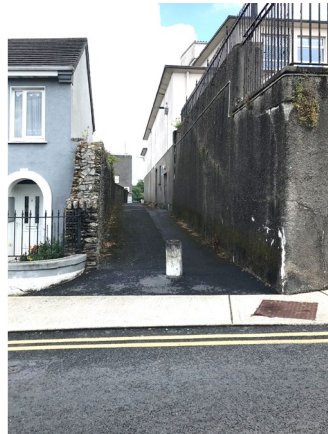
Good signage and way-finding

Positive Examples in New Ross

11. ACCESSIBILITY ASSESSMENT



Stepped access not open



Poorly designed sloped route



Dominant guardrail



Unattractive connection



Hidden away access route



Steep street, no ped. refuge



Narrow footpath – wide road



Flood protection blocks access



Poor access to retail



No footpath along prime heritage

Negative Examples in New Ross

11. ACCESSIBILITY ASSESSMENT



Narrow and discontinued footpaths, often without dished kerbs and hardly any tactile paving for universal access while bin refuge blocks access in many locations



Cars parked on footpaths despite plenty of parking spaces. Parked cars / vans blocking laneways and interfering with pedestrian flow.

Unsafe, undefined crossing in the heart of the town

Negative Examples in New Ross

12. TRAFFIC COUNTS

Pedestrian Counts were undertaken in New Ross Town on 20th June 2023 for 15-minute intervals in the morning, afternoon and evening at:

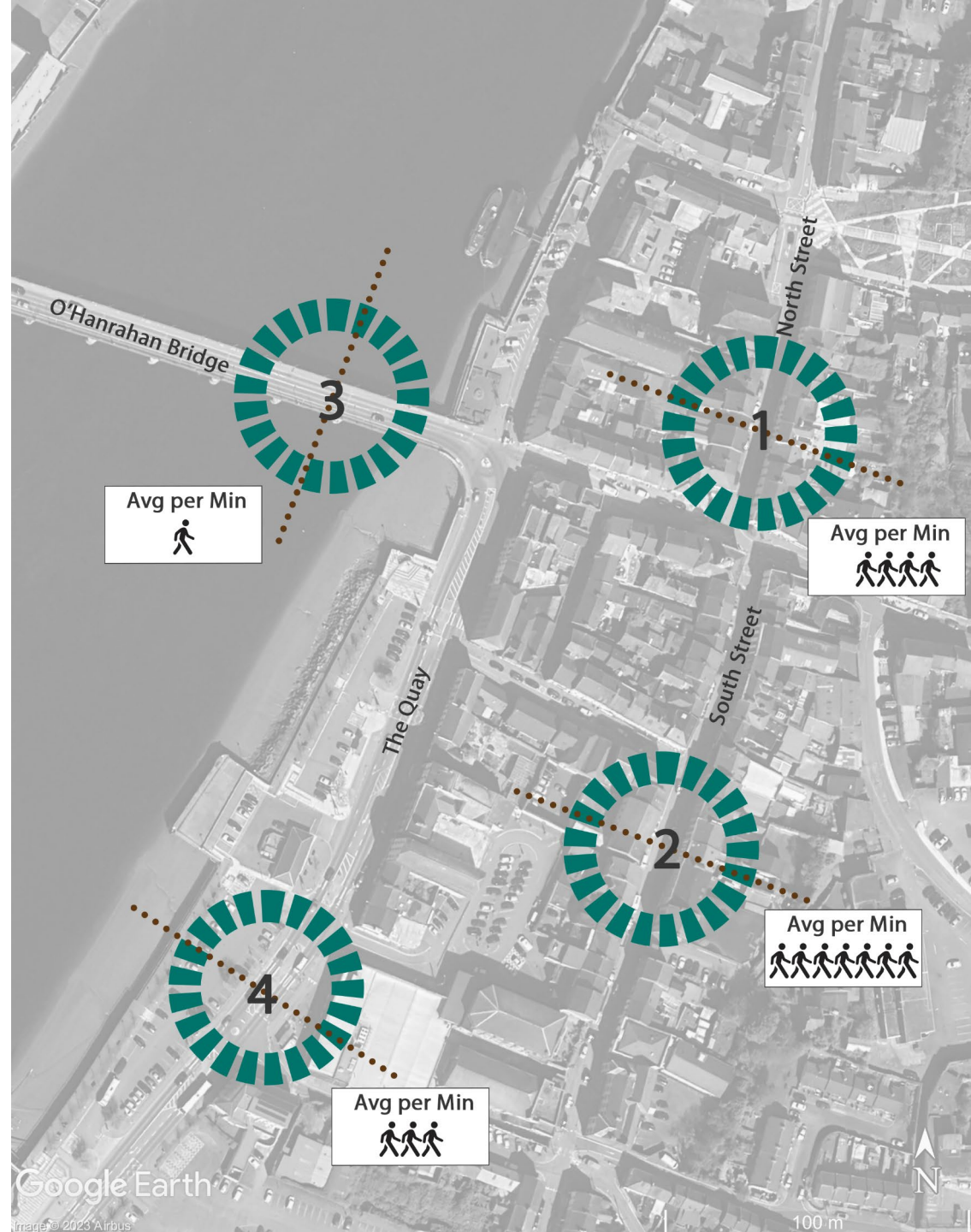
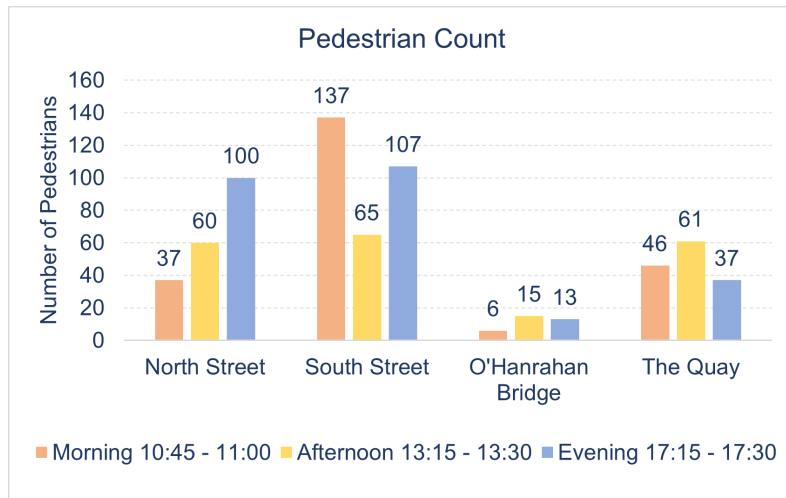
- North Main Street close to Discount Store
- South Main Street close to O'Brien's café
- O'Hanrahan Bridge
- The Quay close to the Supervalu

Procedure

The procedure to be carried out is as follows; standing at these locations, facing across the street, drawing an 'imaginary line' or 'gate' across the street and counting the number of people crossing the line in both directions for exactly 15 minutes.

Observations

The highest average and peak footfall counts were recorded on South Street with the busiest (peak) time recorded being 137 in the morning.



12. TRAFFIC COUNTS

Vehicular Counts were undertaken in New Ross Town on 20th June 2023 for 15-minute intervals in the morning, afternoon and evening at:

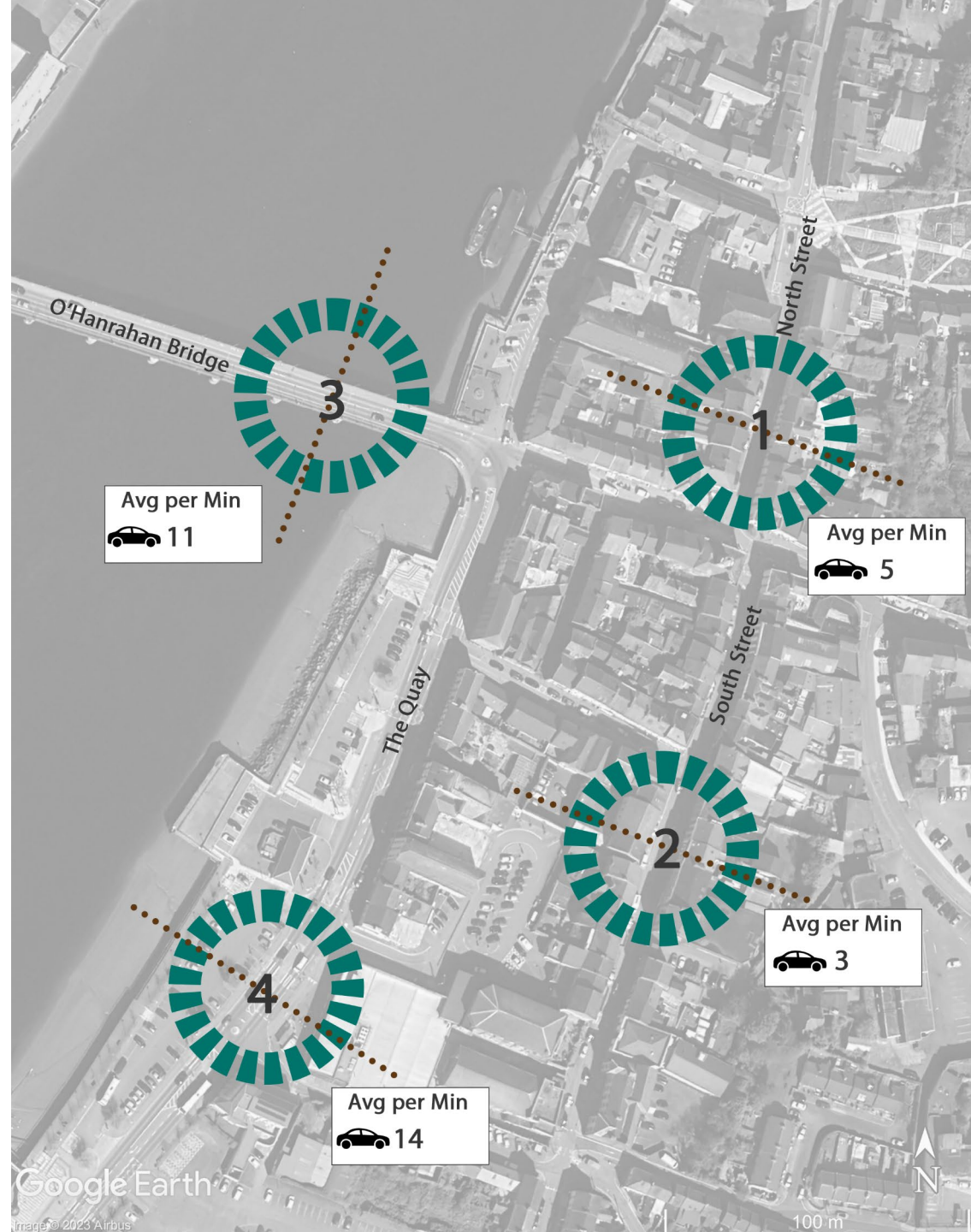
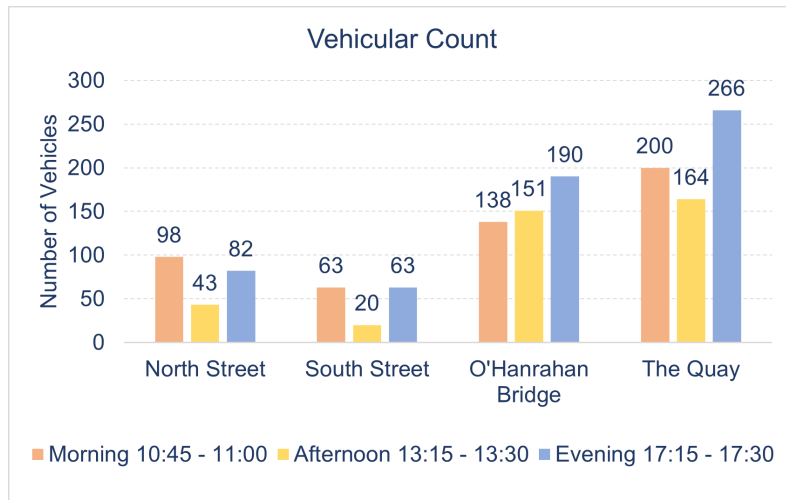
1. North Main Street close to Discount Store
2. South Main Street close to O'Brien's café
3. O'Hanrahan Bridge
4. The Quay close to the Supervalu

Procedure

The procedure to be carried out is as follows; standing at these locations, facing across the street, drawing an 'imaginary line' or 'gate' across the street and counting the number of vehicles crossing the line in both directions for exactly 15 minutes.


Observations

The highest average and peak traffic were recorded on The Quay with the busiest (peak) time recorded being 266 in the evening. The Quay was the busiest and South Street was the quietest through out the day.



13. QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

The following brief on-street questionnaire was conducted in June & July 2023, by the design team and by members of the Town Team.

WEXFORD COUNTY COUNCIL – NEW ROSS TOWN CENTRE FIRST PLAN 

On Street Questionnaire for Town Centre Health Check +

Your answers will help to make New Ross a better town – THANK YOU!

1 - TOWN VALUE -

What brought you to New Ross today?
Work / Shopping / Education / Tourism & Culture / Meeting Friends & Family / Live here

Where is the town centre (in your perception)?
The Quays / Quay St. / Bridge / North St. / South St. / Library / Dunbrody / Irishtown

What do you enjoy most about New Ross?
Please list:
...

What would you change tomorrow if you could?
Please list:
...

2 - TOWN TRANSPORT -

How did you travel today?
Walk / Cycle / Public Transport / Car

Where did you travel from?
From within New Ross / Nearby / Waterford / Wexford / Other


Does the town need more or less parking?
More / Keep as is / Less

Should car traffic be reduced and streets be pedestrianised?
No / Yes / In some areas, where?

Should speed limit be reduced to 30km/h in the town?
No / Yes / In some areas, where?

page 1 CUNNANE STRATTON REYNOLDS
LAND PLANNING & DESIGN

The results are illustrated on the following pages of this report.

WEXFORD COUNTY COUNCIL – NEW ROSS TOWN CENTRE FIRST PLAN 

3 - TOWN COMFORT -

How comfortable / inviting do you find the town centre?
Very / Average / Low

Does the town need more greenery?
More / Keep as is / Less

Does the town need more places to sit and meet?
More / Keep as is / Less

How attractive is the riverfront / quays for you?
Very / Average / Low

How often do you visit the other town side across the river?
Often / Average / Rarely

Do you find it easy to get to the other side of the river?
Very / Average / Low

Does the town need more shops?
More / Keep as is / Less

What shops or amenities do you miss?
Please list:
...

Would you like to work in New Ross?
Yes / No / I do

Does the town need more tourist attractions and cultural events?
More / Keep as is / Less

4 - TOWN SAFETY -

How safe do you find the streets during the day?
Very / Average / Low / Is there an area you feel uncomfortable in, where?

How safe do you find the streets at night?
Very / Average / Low / Is there an area you feel uncomfortable in, where?

THANK YOU!

page 2 CUNNANE STRATTON REYNOLDS
LAND PLANNING & DESIGN

13. QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Questionnaire Findings Summary

The design team, in collaboration with the TownTeam, collected valuable responses from 61 respondents for the questionnaire. Below is a summary of the findings:

1. Town Value

A majority of respondents travelled to New Ross from the immediate surroundings.

Half of the respondents perceive South Street to be the town centre of New Ross

2. Town Transport

Even though a majority of respondents are from New Ross and surrounding areas, most of them travelled to town by car.

One-third of respondents say they would like more parking while almost half of the respondents say they have enough car parking spaces in town.

Two-thirds of respondents would like traffic to be reduced in the town centre and would like some streets to be pedestrianised. Two-thirds say they would prefer a speed limit of 30km/h in the town centre.

3. Town Comfort

One-third of respondents consider the town very inviting, while almost two-thirds were neutral about it.

Most respondents answer that they would like more greenery in the town such as tree planting and soft landscaping.

The majority of respondents would like more places to sit and meet while more than half of the respondents say they enjoy the riverside and the quays.

When asked about the town on the other side (westside) of the river; more than half of the respondents rarely go there, and don't find it comfortable / easy to cross either.

Most respondents say that they would like more shops.

Many of the respondents already work in New Ross and about two-thirds confirm that they like to work in the town, while one-fifth said they would prefer not to work in the town.

Two-thirds of respondents would like to see more touristic attractions and cultural events in town.

4. Town Safety

Generally, our respondents say that they feel safe during the day.

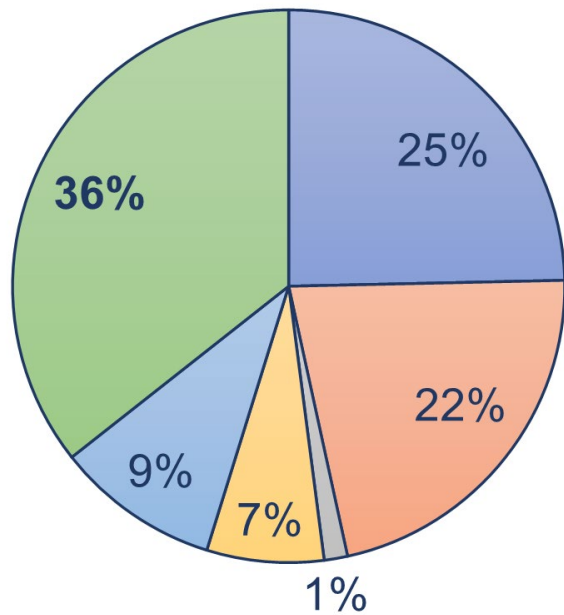
Approx. two-thirds say that they feel unsafe during the night versus approx. one-third who feel safe at night.

However, many respondents say they would not venture out at night as it was unsafe everywhere. But generally, respondents said the Quays, North Street and the laneways are particularly uncomfortable at night-time.

13. QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

1. Town Value

- Work
- Education
- Meeting Friends & Family
- Shopping
- Tourism & Culture
- I live here



What brought you to New Ross today?

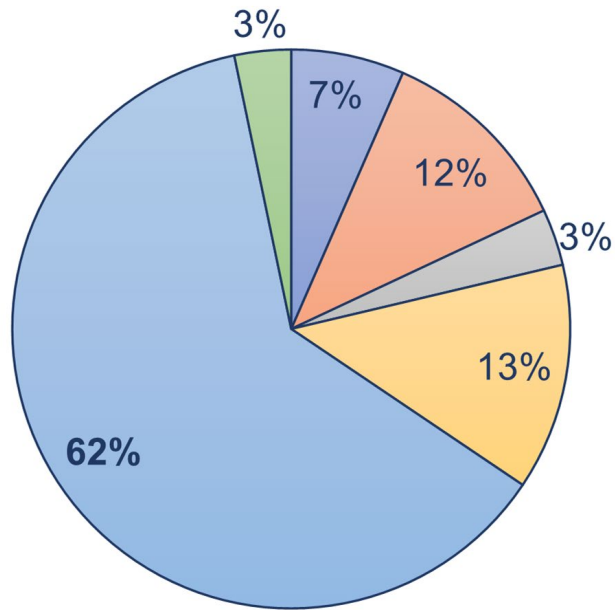


What do you enjoy most about New Ross?

13. QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

1. Town Value

- The Quays ■ Quay St. ■ Bridge
- North St ■ South St. ■ Other



Where is the town centre (in your perception)?

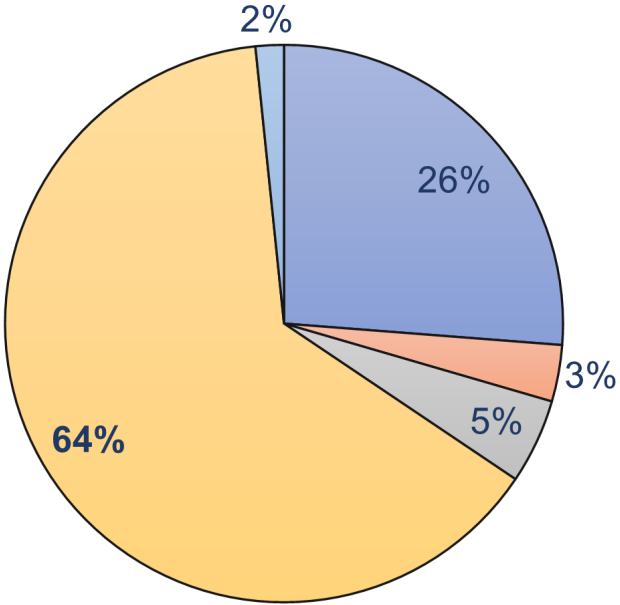


What would you change tomorrow if you could?

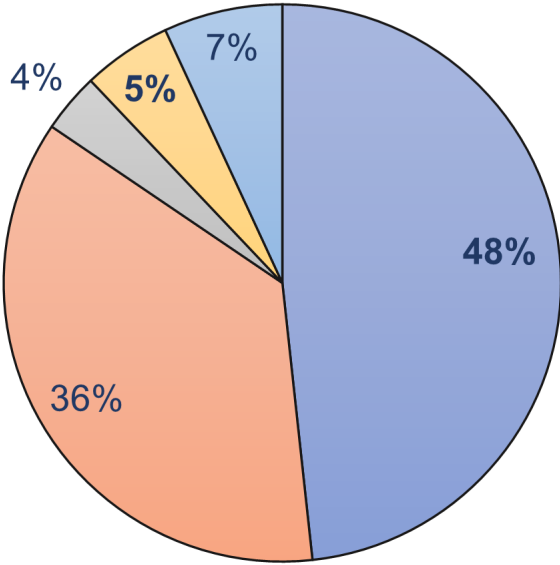
13. QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

2. Town Transport

■ Walk ■ Cycle ■ Public Transport ■ Car ■ Other ■ From within New Ross ■ Nearby ■ Waterford ■ Wexford ■ Other



How did you travel today?

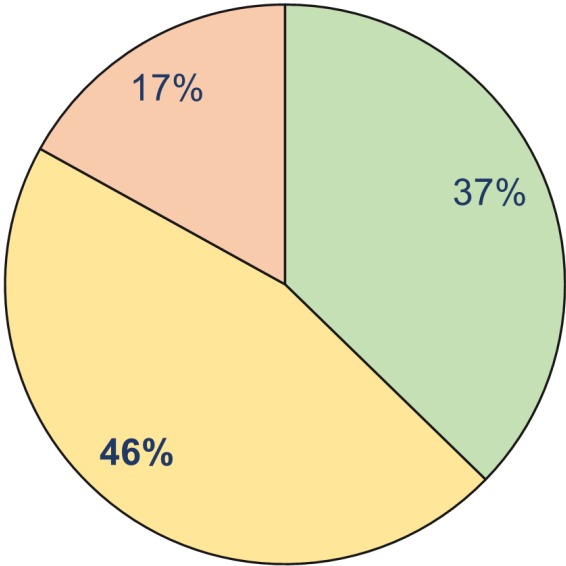


Where did you travel from?

13. QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

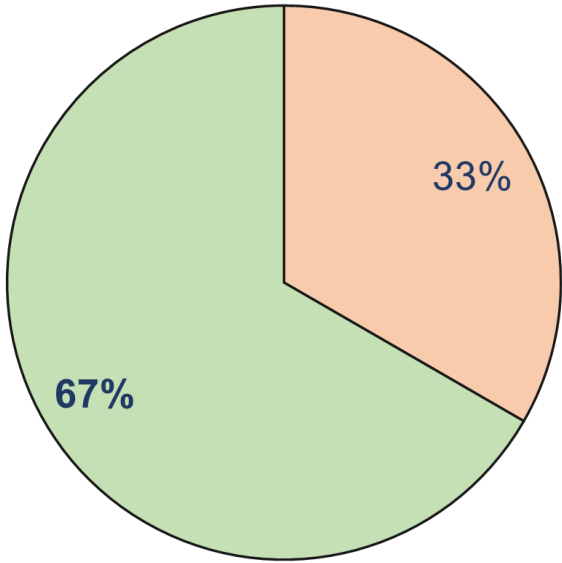
2. Town Transport

More Keep as is Less



Does the town need more or less parking?

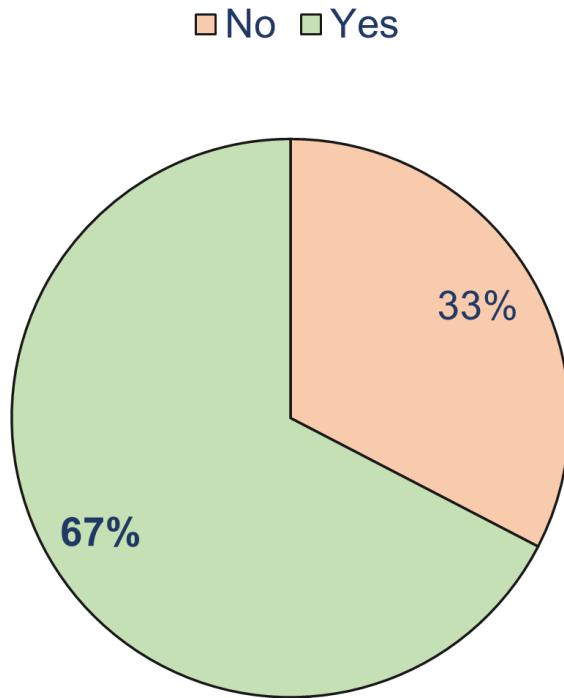
No Yes



Should car traffic be reduced, and streets be pedestrianised?

13. QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

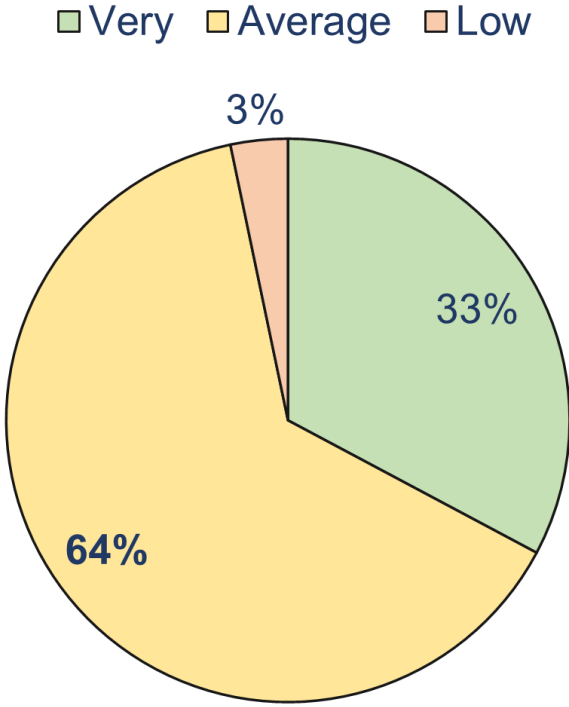
2. Town Transport



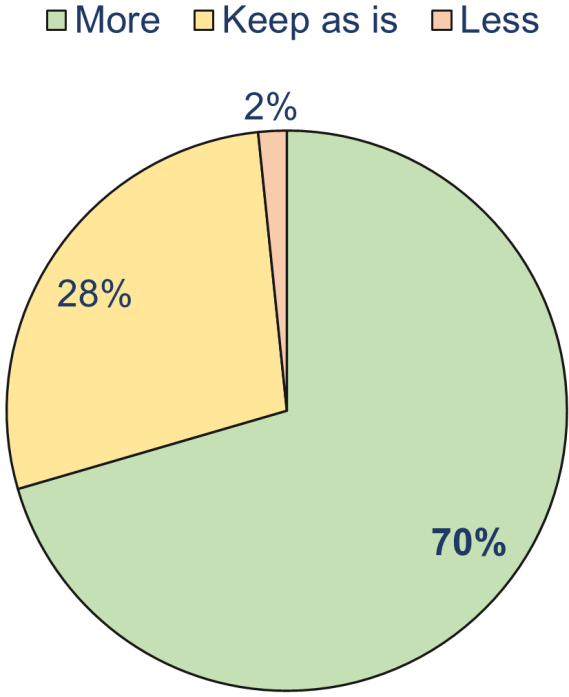
Should speed limit be reduced to 30km/h in the town?

13. QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

3. Town Comfort



How comfortable / inviting do you find the town centre?

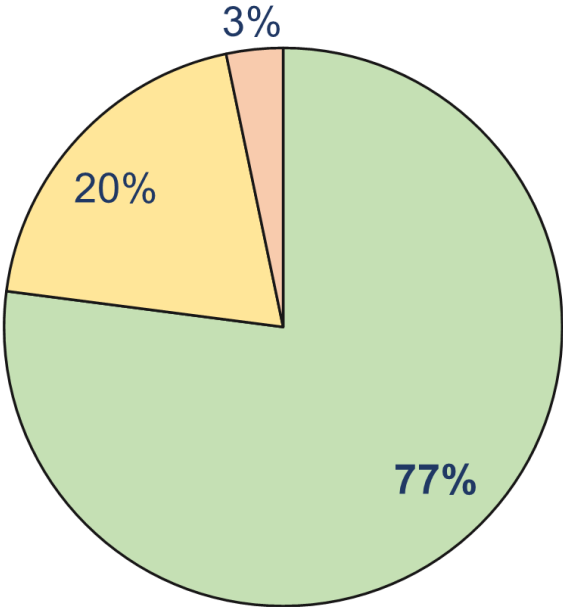


Does the town need more greenery?

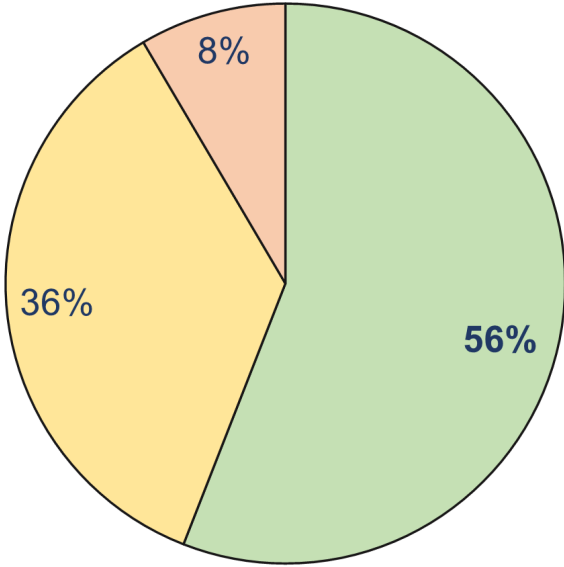
13. QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

3. Town Comfort

More Keep as is Less



Very Average Low



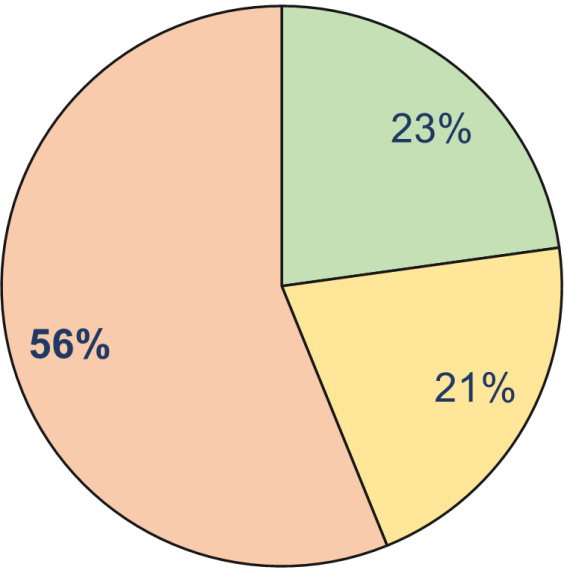
Does the town need more places to sit and meet?

How attractive is the riverfront / quays for you?

13. QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

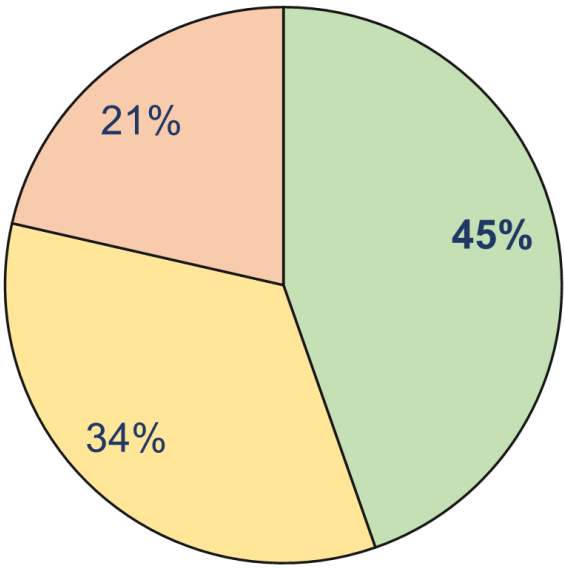
3. Town Comfort

Often Average Rarely



How often do you visit the other town side across the river?

Very Average Low

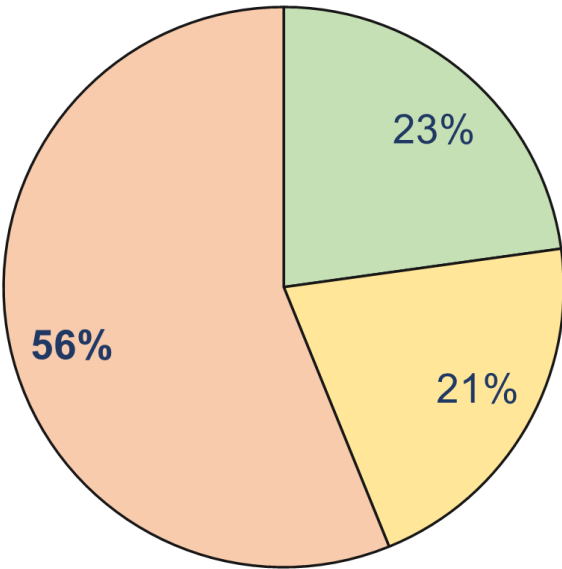


Do you find it easy to get to the other side of the river?

13. QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

3. Town Comfort

Often Average Rarely



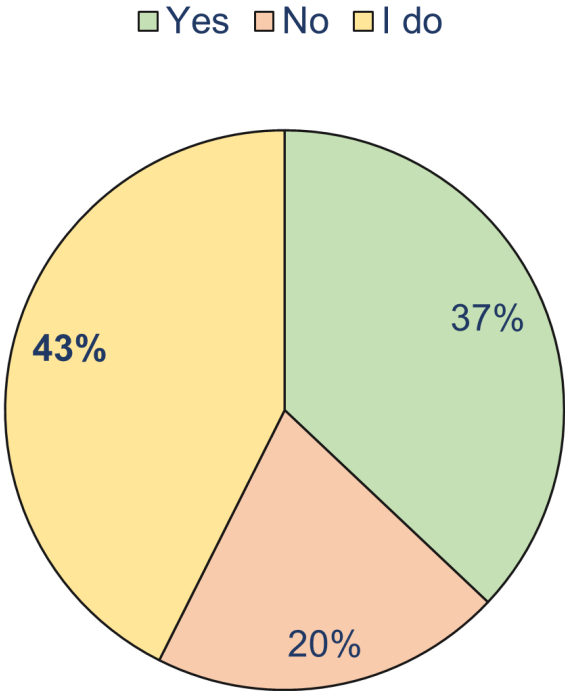
Does the town need more shops?



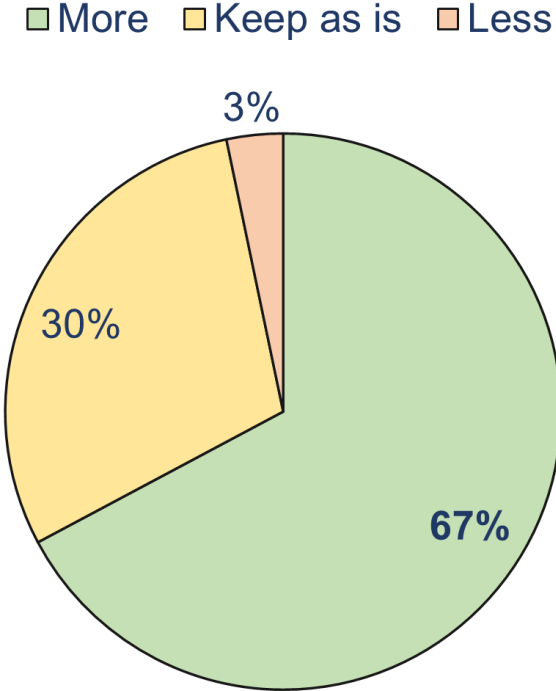
What shops or amenities do you miss?

13. QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

3. Town Comfort



Would you like to work in New Ross?

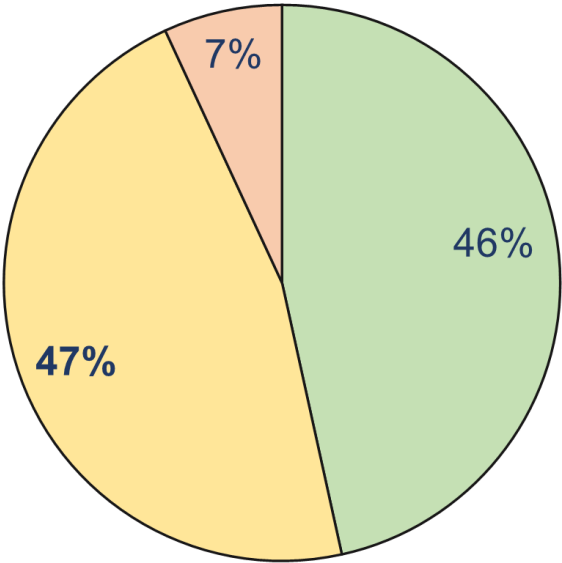


Does the town need more tourist attractions and cultural events?

13. QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

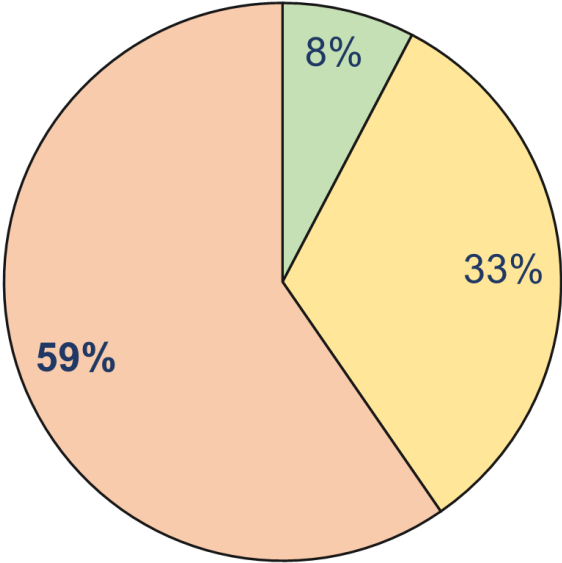
4. Town Safety

Very Average Low



How safe do you find the streets during the day?

Very Average Low



How safe do you find the streets at night?

14. SUMMARY & NEXT STEPS

In a collaborative exercise the design team conducted a Town Centre Health Check which produced very valuable data and revealed useful insights about New Ross. The information we compiled and distilled about land-use distribution, vacancy and dereliction rates, transport mobility, heritage, commerce and tourism will be used in the further process to prepare a Town Centre First Plan – a joint-up vision for New Ross and its social and economic future.

Wexford County council have realised many successful public realm projects in New Ross. These now need to be connected and gaps in between be filled for 'cross-fertilisation' while further individual private investment should be encouraged. The surveyed vacancy rate, for retail and residential is high and many vacant buildings appear derelict, an economic concern for revitalising these buildings, but also a concern for heritage loss.

Future urban development, public and private, will be set in context to its contribution to the urban regeneration strategy for the town. The Town Team, in collaboration with the design team will draft an Action Plan for short-term, medium-term and long-term projects. The management and coordination of individual projects is critical for the process of a holistic plan for New Ross – Dots need to be connected!

The quality of the town's built and cultural heritage, from the Norman past to the present is evident and undebated. It will clearly drive and define our vision and strategy for New Ross, to make the town centre more attractive for tourism, retail, employment, recreation, and certainly for residential use.

Our survey results show typical symptoms of weakened land-use and resulting poor social and economic activity in the town centre. Lack of investment, particularly in large, vacant landholdings have contributed to the erosion of the urban fabric. The town's transport mobility concept needs to be revised, for managed parking, permeability and safer, more comfortable streets. The N25 Bypass and proposed Greenway have started this process New Ross possesses highly valuable assets which are currently underused and underperforming. How these recent trends can be reversed will be assessed, through public consultation and stakeholder engagement, and through collaborative work of our design team.

- **Defining a joint-up Vision for New Ross**

- **Achieve Public Consultation Consensus**

- **Agreeing Objectives & Strategy**

- **Agreeing Pilot Projects**

- **Drafting Action Plan:**

Short / Medium / Long Term

- **Writing Heritage Appraisal:**

Norman History / Emigration

- **Refining Transport Mobility Concept:**

- **Filtered Permeability / Parking**

- **Defining Business & Tourism Opportunities**