NEW ROSS

DEMOGRAPHICS
BUSINESS
& TOURISM DATA
2023

NEW ROSS
TOWN
CENTRE
FIRST
PLAN

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Department of Rural and Community Development

Wexford County Council

New Ross Town Centre First Plan

APPENDIX B –

Demographics,

Business Survey,

Vacancy and Dereliction,

Tourism Opportunity and the South East Greenway

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For

Wexford County Council

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1.1 Demographics

Introduction

While it is agreed that New Ross needs a combination of both population and economic growth, these needs are not in any way unusual amongst towns in contemporary rural Ireland. There has clearly been a low growth in the population in the town centre of New Ross. This is evident also in the high number of vacant residential properties, although many other properties are ex-retail or derelict commercial premises. These patterns are not, however, unfamiliar in that much recent population growth in rural towns across Ireland has occurred in the suburban environs and the rural hinterland. Much economic and retail development has also been on the edge of towns in industrial estates and shopping centres which are convenient to reach by road, leaving town centres often hollowed out with footfall or retail and social activity.

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 (ED) of New Ross Urban, which includes much of the town, including the town centre and the built area of Rosbercon, has declined in population, but for a modest increase reported in the latest Census. By comparison, a significant increase in population was experienced between 2002-2006 in the outskirts of the town in the ED of New Ross Rural, albeit from a relatively low base. The ED of New Ross Rural surrounds that of the Urban ED to the east of the river and includes a large rural hinterland as well as some of the town's suburbs. Rosbercon ED is located to the west and is predominantly rural.

The CSO also provides population data for the "settlement" of New Ross which, as of the latest Census data for 2022, consisted of 8,610 persons. The settlement boundary includes Rosbercon. However, the CSO changed the definition of the town at this time so that the 2016 figure of 8,040 is not directly comparable.

The population of the rural environs has therefore continued to increase since 2002, while that of the urban centre has declined. Some of the recent increase in the more urban part of New Ross would appear to have been due to new migrants, particularly from Poland. People of Polish origin account for 3.9% of the population of the urban ED while other EU citizens constitute 5.7%, although Poles do constitute a greater proportion of the rural ED at 12.4%.

Table 1: Population: New Ross

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%*

Source: CSO

Table 2 shows the figures for *age* and confirms an outward movement of the population to the suburbs where there is a much higher proportion of children below the age of 15 and higher proportions of age classes between 30 and 50 years. These data on the age profile are supported by those for *family cycle* in **Table 3** which show a higher proportion of households in New Ross Rural belonging to the 'early school', 'pre-adolescent' and 'adolescent' categories than for New Ross Urban, although there has been a recent reversal of this position for families with pre-school children. The proportion of people over 65 years is much higher in New Ross Urban at 21.9% than for New Ross Rural at 12.4% and this corresponds to a higher proportion of 'retired' people at 11.6% compared with 6.3%.

Table 2: Age 2022

	New Ross Urban		New Ross Rural		New Ross Town	
Age 0-14	598	15.1%	932	22.4%	1620	21.3%
Age 15-29	652	20.6%	749	18.0%	1513	17.0%
Age 30-39	514	13.0%	591	14.2%	1244	15.4%
Age 40-49	537	13.6%	666	16.0%	1317	13.9%
Age 50-64	794	20.0%	710	17.1%	1554	17.2%
Age 65 +	866	21.9%	516	12.4%	1362	15.4%

Source: CSO

Table 3: Family Cycle 2022

	New Ross Urban		New Ross Rural		New Ross Town	
	families	***persons***	***families***	***persons***	***families***	***percent***
Pre-Family	8.4%	6.0%	7.4%	4.7%	9.1%	6.1%
Empty Nest	10.9%	7.8%	10.2%	9.0%	10.2%	6.9%
Retired	16.4%	11.6%	10.0%	6.3%	12.8%	8.6%

Pre-school	8.2%	8.3%	6.8%	6.7%	7.8%	7.8%
Early school	8.4%	10.5%	9.8%	10.6%	9.4%	10.9%
Pre-adolescent	9.2%	11.6%	15.1%	18.2%	12.1%	14.8%
Adolescent	11.4%	14.4%	17.0%	21.3%	14.3%	18.2%
Adult	27.3%	29.8%	23.7%	25.7%	24.4%	26.7%

Source: CSO

In terms of education, the figures in **Table 4** indicate a good proportion of people with an “Upper secondary” qualification **within the town as a whole** at 23.4%. A Lower secondary education was attained by 17.1% of the population while 14.4% have either no education or a “Primary education” only. The level of education attainment has been increasing gradually over time.

Table 4: Education 2022: New Ross town (where stated by respondent)

	None or primary	**Lower 2nd**	**Upper 2nd**	**Tech or vocation**	**Advanced or Higher**	**Degree**	**Honours degree**	**Postgraduate**
Number	754	894	1225	614	652	336	486	269
percent	*14.4%*	*17.1%*	*23.4%*	*11.7%*	*12.5%*	*6.4%*	*9.3%*	*5.1%*

Source: CSO

Table 5 provides the latest information on economic status and shows a slightly higher proportion of the population at work in 2022 at 49.3% compared with 46.4% in 2016. The number of people unemployed has correspondingly fallen to 8.4% from 13.5% with the 2022 figures now providing a break-down between short and long-term unemployment. A slightly higher proportion of people have entered the workforce from former family-based responsibilities, although a slightly higher number of people are also now classified as retired.

Table 5: Economic Status 2016 & 2022: New Ross town

	2016		2022	
At work	2936	46.4%	3449	49.3%
Looking for first job	121	1.9%	97	1.4%
Short-term unemployed	857	13.5%	186	2.7%
Long-term unemployed			397	5.7%
Student	525	8.3%	622	8.9%
Looking after home/family	559	8.8%	500	7.2%
Retired	964	15.2%	1203	17.2%
Unable to work due to sickness or disability	354	5.6%	479	6.9%
Other	354	0.2%	57	0.8%
Total	6329		6990	

Figure 1 provides an illustration of occupations in all New Ross town. It indicates a high number of people working in “Processing, Plant and Machinery” at 14.3% and “Skilled Trades” at 13.1%, although both figures are slightly reduced on those of 16.3% and 14.6% for 2016. By comparison, the proportions of people working in either a professional or technical capacity has increased to 9.6% and 7.8% respectively, from 6.9% and 6.9%, while the proportion in elementary occupations has increased to 11.6% from 10.5%.

Figure 1: Occupations 2022: New Ross town (Source: CSO)

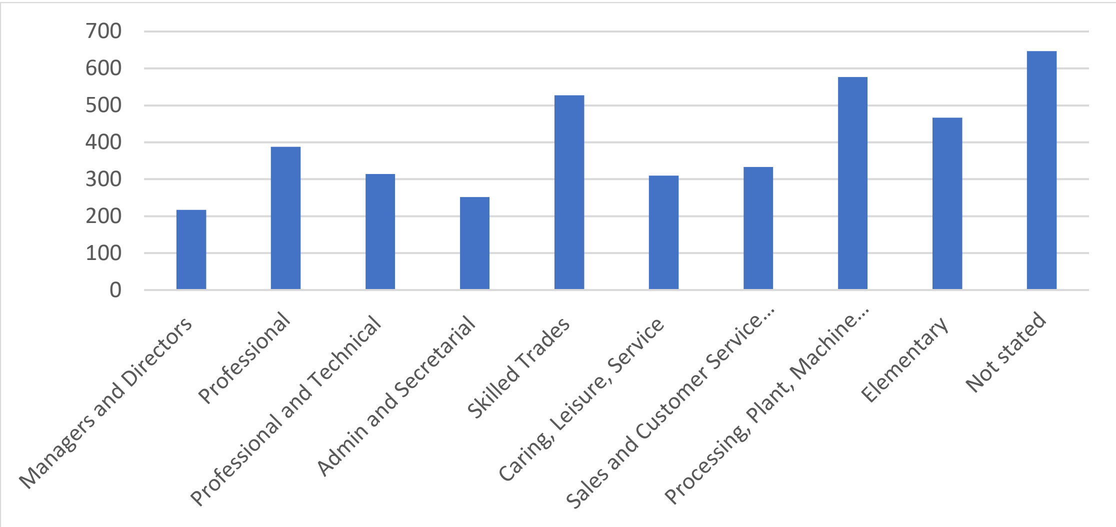
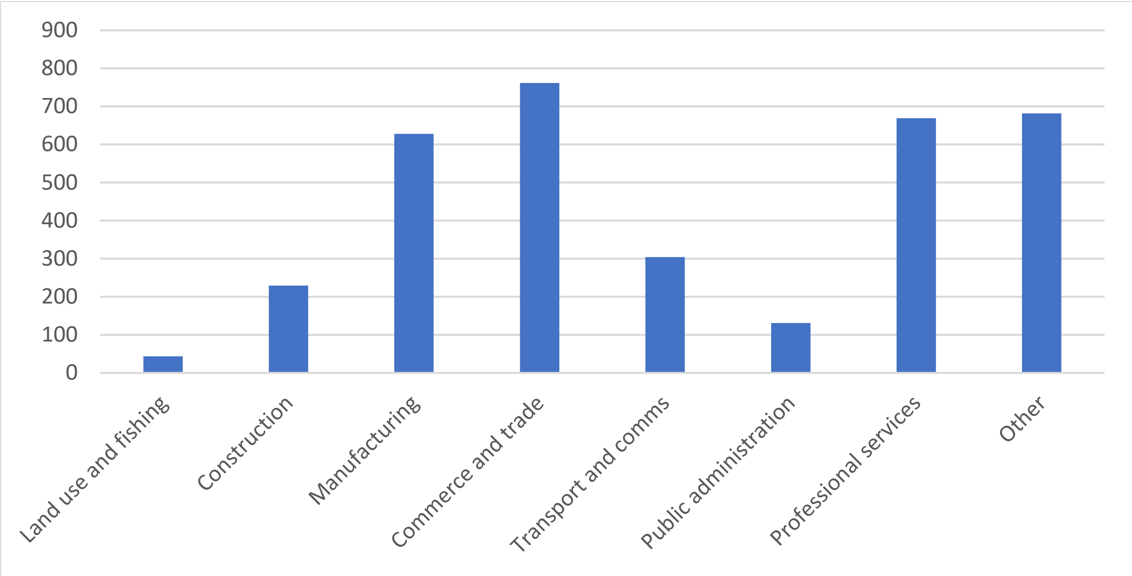


Figure 2 provides a similar picture for industries, with the highest number of people shown to be engaged in “Commerce and Trade” at 22.1%, followed by “Professional Services” at 19.4% and “Manufacturing” at 18.2% (a slight decline on 2016). A very small proportion are involved in “Agriculture, Forestry or Fishing” at 1.3% despite New Ross being at the centre of a large rural area.

Figure 2: Industries 2022: New Ross town (Source: CSO)



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 also because it is perceived to have had more recent success economically. However, a comparison between the two towns indicates that Gorey has a similar age profile. The same is true of the more central areas of both towns. The relative patterns for Family Cycle are similar, but there are fewer families with early school or pre-adolescent children (9.4% and 12.1%) than in Gorey (12.0% and 16.9%) and more households of retired people (12.8% compared with just 5.9%).

Figure 3a: Age class New Ross (Source: CSO)

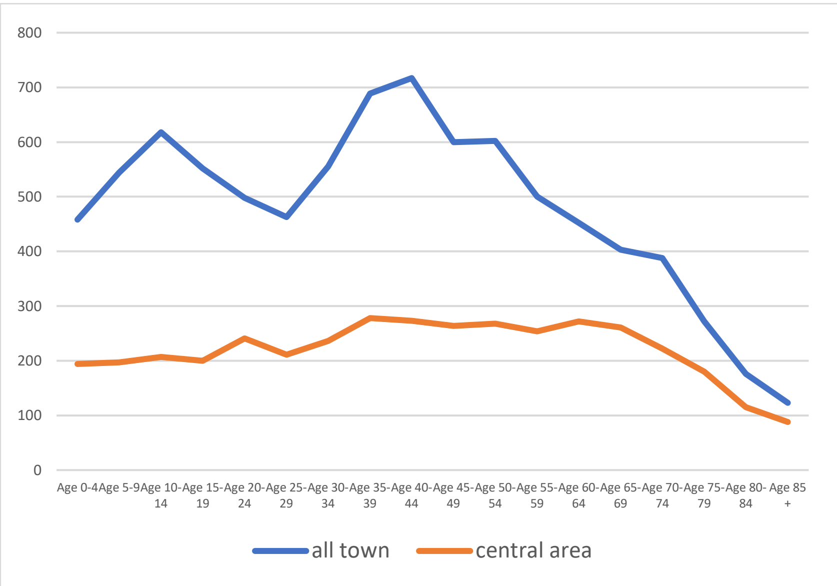
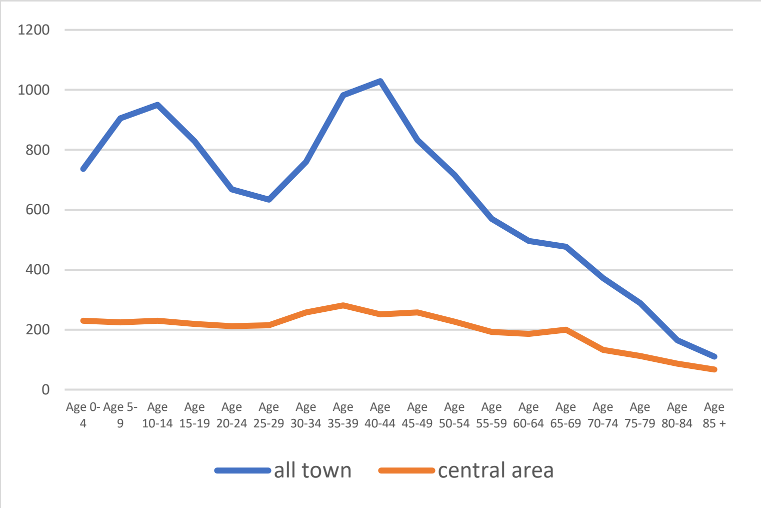


Figure 3b: Age class Gorey (Source: CSO)



Social class indicates a higher proportion of people in Gorey belong to the "Managerial and Technical class" (25.1% in Gorey as compared with 17.8% in New Ross). Patterns of Educational Achievement are very similar between the two towns, and the proportion of people with more advanced qualifications, e.g. Honours Degree, has increased in New Ross from 6.4% to 9.3% to approach the level of 10.2% in Gorey. Occupational patterns indicate a higher proportion of Professional workers at 14.2% in Gorey compared with 9.6% in New Ross, and also a higher level of Managers and Directors at 7.5% compared with 5.4%. There are relatively more people employed in Commerce and Trade in Gorey at 26.1% compared with 22.1%, and a smaller proportion working in Manufacturing at 14.4% compared with 18.2%.

A more distinct difference can be noted when comparing the proportion of people in the urban centre who are in deprivation (i.e. compared with Ireland as a whole) as defined by the Relative and Absolute Deprivation Indices used by Pobal. Here, figures are only available at present of 2016. At this time, Gorey scored better on both counts at -11.5 and -7.1 in 2016, compared with New Ross at -18.6 and -14.4 (the national average is zero), with Gorey also having realised a greater improvement in reduced absolute deprivation since 2011. Some improvement is likely since this time in line with growth in the national economy. Levels of Disability are similar for both Gorey and New Ross, although both reveal much higher levels in the Urban EDs at 21.7% and 20.5% respectively compared with figures for the Rural EDs of 12.5% and 12.6%, a factor partly influenced by relative age differences.

Relevance of Demographics to Town Plan

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.

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 quiet compared with nightspots elsewhere, being 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 perhaps more evident in New Ross because of the quiet surroundings.

2.1 Frontline results from New Ross Business Survey

A total of 71 businesses responded to the business survey. Of this number, 72% are located in the town centre, 20% on the outskirts, 3% in Rosbercon and 6% out of town. Of these, 45% are retail businesses, 33% are services, and 18% are café's, restaurants or hospitality. Small numbers were recorded for Commerce/Trade/Warehousing, Transport/Communications, Construction/Building supplies, Food/Agricultural, and Industrial/Manufacturing.

Dependence on customers or clients visiting premises

Of the businesses, 73% believe themselves to be *highly dependent* on customers or clients visiting their premises, while 13% are *moderately dependent*. Of the total, 41% are *very dependent* on pedestrian footfall and 24% describe their business as being *moderately dependent*. In addition, 27% stated that their business was dependent on nearby car parking.

Impact of bypass and the effect of traffic

The largest proportion of responses at 39% stated that their business is *positively affected* by traffic movement in the town, but 20% considered this factor to have a *negative* impact, while for 27% this was considered *neither positive or negative*, and for 14% not applicable. Several respondents added that they believe that traffic flows make their business more visible, while others suggested that parking was the greater issue, including paid parking, with one arguing that parking on Mary Street is “deplorable”. When asked about the impact of the bypass on their business, 33% thought there had been *no change*, while 27% believed there had been a *small improvement* and 20% *a large improvement*. Only 13% believed there had been a *reduction* in business, with one thinking this had caused a large reduction. As trading patterns have changed post-pandemic, some respondents found it difficult to judge and thought also that other factors could be responsible of the changes in the business environment. Three respondents believed that the bypass had made it easier for customers to come into town, including from Rosbercon, Counties Waterford and Kilkenny. It is worth noting here that, in some other towns, bypasses have had a negative effect on passing trade and businesses, whereas in New Ross the improved environment and reduced congestion has been welcomed.

Source of customers and clients

For 24% of businesses, most customers were believed to be *located in* New Ross, but a *larger proportion* at 47% stated that most of their customers were from Counties Wexford and Kilkenny including from within 10km of the town. (Note proportions do not add up to 100%).

Figure 2.1: Source of customers

Answer Choices		**Response Percent**	**Response Total**
In New Ross		24.29%	17
Within 10km of the town		47.14%	33
In Counties Wexford or Kilkenny		52.86%	37
Elsewhere in Ireland		21.43%	15
Outside of Ireland		12.86%	9
		answered	70
		skipped	1

Dependence on visitors to tourists

Half of the businesses surveyed had *no dependence* on visitors, but for 14% the dependence is *high* while for 38% it is *slight*. These outcome indicates that, while New Ross is in the process of promoting itself as a tourism Destination Town, the current level of dependence is modest, although it could, of course, be advantageously increased. Some respondents noted that tourists tend to arrive by coach and not have time to shop in town or otherwise do not have many options to overnight.

Figure 2.2: Dependence on visitors and tourist visitors

Answer Choices		**Response Percent**	**Response Total**
Yes (slight dependence)		38.03%	27
Yes (high dependence)		14.08%	10
No		50.70%	36
		answered	71
		skipped	0

Availability of business services in New Ross

46% of respondents acknowledged that there are *services* which the business needs which *cannot be found* in New Ross, although for 19% of businesses the question was not applicable. An absence of printing services, a phone shop, cloud-based services and couriers was noted by one business while another mentioned a lack of informal meeting places such as suitable cafes. The absence of sufficient numbers of businesses catering for tourists was mentioned by one respondent, namely restaurants, accommodation, campsites, river activities, bike hire and water points.

Availability of qualified employees

While 13% of businesses reported having *no difficulties* finding suitable employees, 35% acknowledged that it *can be difficult* and the largest proportion at 44% replied that they found it *very difficult*. Of course, what is meant by suitability varies from business to business. It could mean technically qualified or just responsible and hard working. Some feedback on this was provided by a follow-up question in which 48% of businesses referred to *specific skills* and 50% to *insufficient qualifications or capability*. Others referred to a lack of affordable accommodation, a shortage of young people and a lack of transport. One business reported having few applications in response to vacancies. As respondents were allowed to tick more than one box the figures do not amount to 100%.

Figure 2.3: Reasons why if it difficult to find suitable employees

Answer Choices		**Response Percent**	**Response Total**
Affordable accommodation		21.67%	13
Lack of public transport		16.67%	10
Specific skills needed		48.33%	29
Insufficient qualified or capable employees		50.00%	30
Not enough young people in the town		20.00%	12
Other (please specify):		13.33%	8
		answered	60
		skipped	11

Owning or renting business premises

The largest proportion, 62%, of respondents *own their premises*. 39% rent their premises. Small numbers work from home or the business hub. Of those renting their premises, half (50%) agreed that the rental situation *did impact on their willingness to invest* in the business while 39% stated that it *did not*. For the remainder, the question is not applicable. One respondent said that he/she was not prepared pay for improvements to the exterior, while another referred to the short length of the lease. One respondent replied that the high rent did not leave sufficient funds to make investment while another said their business was ready to expend, but was unable to find suitable properties to either rent or purchase.

Can anything practically be done to improve the town's attractiveness for business?

Most respondents (81%) thought that things could be done to improve the town's attractiveness for business. 10% did not and 9% did not know. There were numerous responses to this question. These cannot be categorised exclusively. Among the responses relevant to the urban realm were the need to reduce *vacancy and dereliction* (7), *pedestrianisation* (3), a *covered entertainment area*, more *events/festivals*, a *crafts hub/market, better lighting*, more *street art*, *clean shop fronts*, a *meeting space*, *signage* and *maps* (2), *public toilets* (2), *litter* and improved *footpath maintenance* (3), *cycle paths* and *legible road markings*. Parking, including *free parking* (5) (including for short stops) or a *lack of parking* (2) was mentioned by several respondents. A need for *overnight accommodation* (2), more large *retail chains* in centre (2), more *tenancies, cafes* and *restaurants* (5), and *nighttime activities* (2), including a food market, (2). Other suggestions included *direct bus services* to Dublin, *tourism promotion*, a *business incubation centre*, and more *business collaboration* and cross-promotion. Many respondents referred to the need to tackle *anti-social behaviour* (7), including on-street drinking, with CCTV or a higher Garda presence.

Can anything be done to increase the number of people coming into the town centre?

Again, there were numerous responses to this question. The responses provide more evidence of agreement across the sample than the individual suggestions to the preceding question. Respondents gave their highest overall ranking to vacancy and dereliction (75%), followed by more diversity of food/eating options (65%), accommodation options (53%), retail diversity (50%) and town centre appearance (50%).

Figure 2.4: What can be done to increase the number of people coming into the town centre.

	Answer Choices		**Response Percent**	**Response Total**
1	Improve footpaths, seating, etc.		19.12%	13
2	Provide cycle lanes and cycle parking		14.71%	10
3	Improved walking and cycle facilities on the bridge		25.00%	17
4	Change or improve car parking		30.88%	21
5	Improve signage		16.18%	11
6	Improve appearance of town centre		50.00%	34
7	Improve visitor/heritage information		13.24%	9
8	Address problems of vacancies and dereliction		75.00%	51

9	More retail diversity		50.00%	34
10	More diversity of food/eating options		64.71%	44
11	More accommodation choice		52.94%	36
12	Evening or Sunday opening hours		29.41%	20
13	More events (e.g. music, arts, food, heritage, etc)		30.88%	21
14	Improve sense of daytime safety		30.88%	21
15	Improve nighttime safety		33.82%	23
			answered	68
			skipped	3

2.2 Proposed strategies in response to the results of results of the Business Survey

Filling the vacuum created by the N25 Bypass

The RSES for the Southern Region has identified transport connectivity as being very important for economic growth. The town is not served by a motorway or by Irish Rail. However, an opportunity has been provided by the opening of the N25 Bypass, prior to which the town suffered from considerable congestion. When asked in the Business Survey about the impact of the bypass on their business, the largest proportion of respondents thought that it had a positive effect on business. These results are interesting. In some other towns, bypasses have had a distinct negative effect on passing trade and businesses. However, in New Ross, the improved environment provided an opportunity to develop new facilities in the vicinity of the road. The investment in the riverfront, together with the crossing facilities, have had a significant positive impact and better linked the town to the river. This positive impact can be built upon through the siting of new attractions such as the Norman Centre and Emigrant Park or through the provision of new facilities for users of the prospective greenway.

Reverse vacancy and repair dereliction

Vacancy and dereliction were the problems that respondents rated highest in the Business Survey. Vacant and derelict buildings are very visible. They affect the attractiveness of the town and present an impression of decay and decline. However, these twin scourges are not unique to New Ross, but affect very many Irish towns. Despite the much publicised Housing Crisis, the vacancy rate in Ireland in 2022 was 7.8%.

There are numerous vacant and derelict properties in New Ross as outlined earlier in this report. Many vacant buildings are represented by former commercial buildings and shops, including rooms above shops. It would be difficult to fill all these buildings given the expectations of floor space and accessibility that businesses and prospective residents now have. Demand for commercial sites is understood to be low, but there is apparent demand for residential. Government has recently increased the number of grants and initiatives available for urban regeneration, including for the conversion of vacant properties into rental accommodation.

Dereliction is more serious and refers to properties in too poor structural condition for use or habitation. The level of dereliction is understood to be higher in New Ross than that of other towns in the county, although this is partly due to the historic legacy of mercantile buildings from when the town was a prosperous port. David McWilliams of the *Irish Times* has described dereliction as being a feature of affluence rather than poverty. Only wealthy people, he argues, can allow such prospective assets to fall into disrepair. Indeed, owners have to pay a penalty of 7% per year for buildings listed on the Dereliction Register. In New Ross the situation is not helped by the rather few absentee landowners who own much of the town. Some owners have taken initiatives to put derelict buildings to use, but others are waiting for assurance that the property market will cover their costs. At present, the commercial market in New Ross is not strong.

It is widely agreed that local authorities have few options in providing local incentives or penalties to disincentivise dereliction. Rather, it is government which is best placed to introduce meaningful penalties for hoarding land rather than putting it to use. Once buildings are added to the Derelict Sites Register, annual levies are applied by local authorities, but these are modest given the frequent low value of properties. Buildings are added to the Register once they have been inspected and found to be in a poor or dangerous condition. The Council first checks the Land Registry to locate the owner, although the register is not comprehensive and owners can often be difficult to identify. Councils prefer to work with owners where they can be identified and are willing to cooperate in returning the building to a stable state. Supports are available, including under the Historic Towns Initiative and the

Repair and Leasing Scheme whereby Local Authorities can support owners in transforming buildings into residential units. Where there is no positive response from the owners, compulsory purchase may be considered with the sale value being net of any levies accumulated.

For vacant properties, the new Croí Cónaithe Vacant Properties Refurbishment Grant has been made available for the renovation. As the take-up of grants to date had been modest due to the need to demonstrate restoration plans for buildings of low commercial, maximum grant levels have recently been increased from €50,000 to €70,000.

The Town Centre Living Project (DRDD, 2020) has found that new build is actually slightly more costly than refurbishment, but that renovation is still more expensive than constructing a purpose designed building. As the respective differences in cost are not great, this suggests that positive initiatives can make a difference in encouraging investment. However, important practical issues include a lack of guidance and information, low land values and returns, structural integrity, uncertain costs linked to building condition, inaccessibility, parking, difficulty of finding retail tenants, rights of way, legal issues and building regulations (e.g. energy efficiency, H&S, fire). Planning permission can be a barrier in some cases, but this requirement has been waived until 2025 for the vacant properties being put to residential use. In some cases, dispensations are also possible, for example in relation to disabled access or insulation, when it comes to hard-to-covert older buildings or first floor premises. A disincentive for many potential landlords has been the fear of problem tenants (of which there is much awareness on the New Ross grapevine). For prospective buyers there is the challenge of obtaining a mortgage, especially for above shop premises. This may require the services of a broker, which is another hurdle, if not necessarily an insurmountable one. Nevertheless, the myriad of possible constraints can appear overwhelming. Local Authorities have Vacant Homes Officers, but there is value in providing more one-stop shop advice and support with grant applications.

Wexford County Council is taking a more proactive approach to dereliction by ramping up inspections and adding buildings in particular poor states of repair to the Derelict Sites Register. It is currently being supported in this endeavour by recently announced new funding under the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) of which €6.5 million has been allocated to Wexford. The fund is a revolving one which is intended to be reimbursed through levies and property sales until 2030.

Despite the many challenges, the principal disincentive for both vacant and derelict properties often boils down to owners' lack of confidence that neighbourhood regeneration will actually occur and that property prices will rise to a level that covers the costs of refurbishment. If the neighbourhood is one of apparent decline and dereliction, it is difficult to make the first move. One proven way to overcome this is for the authorities to focus their regeneration efforts on one place so that local property owners have the confidence that adjacent building will also be restored, be this with public money, private money or in response to a new investment. A sequential process can follow whereby new activity commences outwards or at nearby locations once the first location demonstrates success. This strategic spatial should be adopted in New Ross together with proposals for investment in the public realm and the built heritage of the town. The new URDF funding can support this in a more strategic approach whereby WCC can compulsory purchase more properties in targeted areas. This approach could favour locations such as North Street or Bridge Street by complementing the public investment which has been made in the Norman Hill Gardens, or that planned in the vicinity of Lady's Lane in line with the opening of the Norman Centre.

Revitalise the town centre

Many responses to both the consultation and business survey expressed a desire to see a greater diversity of shops and more nightlife in New Ross. In practice, decisions affecting greater economic activity are largely in the hands of private businesses and investors. Local Authorities and State Agencies can only provide some leverage. One area of intervention is with regard to vacancy and dereliction as discussed above, particularly where buildings can be made available for residential use, including lower income rentals. Another initiative has been the pedestrianisation of Bridge Street. This will help to reduce pedestrian severance between the Quay and North Quay and between South Street and North Street, but there are some concerns that it could displace traffic elsewhere. Places to sit and rest are important, but only really available at present at the riverside. In this respect, the Local Authority is supporting the opening of an open space in the former butcher's market at the Shambles. It has also attempted to persuade retail outlets to stay open longer or agree on late night opening. This proposal has had little momentum to date as it still requires footfall to be sufficient to cover shopkeepers' costs, noting also the difficulty of finding staff. An increase in visitors is only likely to follow at a sufficient level once the tourism developments of the Norman Centre and Greenway are open. For the latter, it is imperative that nearby car parking is available and that cyclists have the option of being able to take a loop from the end of the formal greenway to the north or be able to safely cross O'Hanranhan's Bridge. If these additional numbers of visitors are to spend time in the town, accommodation is vital. The Local Authority has identified a site for a prospective hotel and is now looking for private investors to take this forward.

The night-time economy

More nightlife can be stimulated through the supply of more accommodation for younger residents and a range of hotels, hostels and B&Bs for overnight visitors. What money is spent on nightlife at present occurs largely in Irishtown which is located outside of the town centre. There is very limited night-time activity in the centre of town. In a few years, though, many visitors will arrive from the Greenway. Families will be amongst these users and can be expected to look for places to relax and eat on the early evening. Young people will stay out until later supporting local pubs. Supporting infrastructure should include the provision of good lighting, nearby car parking, accessibility signage, security, campervan parking, and restoration of vacant properties for resident and visitor accommodation. At present, food options are limited, including within local pubs, some of which are not overtly welcoming to visitors. An expansion of the local taxi service would help too. Applications for Purple Flag accreditation can be made by towns which have succeeded in stimulating more nightlife or made efforts to manage the evening and night-time economy.

Increase hospitality

There is no tourism plan for New Ross. Rather tourism planning originates at county level. The Local Authority has a dedicated Tourism Officer and was instrumental in the successful application for New Ross to become a Destination Town with a target of 500,000 visitors per year. Fáilte Ireland is preparing a new tourism plan, the Wexford Experience Destination Plan, which will draw on the town's Norman heritage and forge links with similar nearby historic towns in Kilkenny and Waterford to develop a distinct identity allied to the *Ireland's Ancient East* brand. Tourism opportunities are emerging with the new development at Rosslare Europort. Work is also underway to link and develop the natural attractions of the River Barrow and Hook head.

A visitor survey in 2019 informed local tourism thinking, identifying the importance of providing more attractions and activities. Families were identified as the largest segment at 23%, but also "Footloose Socialisers" a group motivated by shared experiences, curiosity, history and culinary experiences. Improving the public realm, including through signage, marked trails (of which three principal trails were devised) and a better connection between the Quayside and town were highlighted and remain valid. The report also highlighted the importance of the attractiveness and appeal of the town, well-maintained spaces, opportunities to explore on foot, opportunities linked to street entertainment, food, shopping, special interests and events, together with the town's ability to present a vision and a story of itself. Workshops have recently been held with local people and businesses to explore how a coordinated approach can be achieved that promotes activities, events, shopping and nightlife.

Tourism and the South East Greenway

The South East Greenway has the potential to be transformative in bringing a significant number of visitors to New Ross. Together with the Normal Heritage Centre, it will potentially be the catalyst for the footfall needed to regenerate the town centre and to attract the diversity of shops and services called for by previous town plans and by respondents to the surveys undertaken for the Town Centre First project.

Given the prestige of the Waterford Greenway, the new South East Greenway can be expected to attract around 225,000 users in its early years and to bring in expenditure of around €3.7 million based on the spending characteristics of users of the Waterford Greenway. Given that 45% of overnight users of the incumbent greenway stayed in Dungarvan rather than Waterford, New Ross would be able to attract a similar proportion. This is especially so given that the New Ross end of the Greenway will include the Mount Elliot Tunnel and the Red Bridge which are certain to be the strongest draws for visitors. Moreover, for those cycling the whole way to Waterford, there will be the opportunity to make the return journey by river boat, a unique attraction. At present, New Ross has very little budget accommodation and the number of hotels, guest houses, AirBnBs and hostels would need to increase if it were to attract overnight stays.

The Greenway will be of particular value to Rosbercon given its location. While this is a positive outcome for New Ross, a key objective must also be to ensure that visitors cross O'Hanrahan's Bridge into the town centre. This will require a widening of the bridge to allow for sufficiently wide and comfortable pedestrian and cycling paths. It could also mean strategically siting car parking so that it is not exclusively provided in Rosbercon. As important will be to provide a loop across the River Barrow back into New Ross. This will require cyclists to ascend the hill between the town and the river to the north, but this effort can be mitigated by good facilities. The route would also pass the attractions of Mannion's Farm Shop and Pub and be close to Woodville House and Gardens.

The likelihood that much expenditure will be attracted to Rosbercon is still a good outcome as it is part of the larger urban area and the same economy. It also has its own need for urban regeneration. Despite the width of the river, the attractions of New Ross should encourage many people to cross the bridge. The Dunbrody Famine Ship will be very visible from the west bank. In addition, the Barrow Princess will bring some greenway users directly into the town.

In summary,

- Dedicated car parking should be made available in New Ross. If car parking for the greenway is only promoted along the route itself or at end points, local daytime expenditure will be more attracted mostly to Rosbercon;
- Cycle lanes with good separation from traffic will be needed on O'Hanrahan's Bridge if expenditure is to be attracted into New Ross and not restricted to Rosbercon;
- A good cycle path along the R700 from Mount Elliot would attract expenditure in New Ross;
- Given the length of the greenway, it is likely that many return trips will be by the Barrow Princess boat to the marina.
- Measures to increase the attractiveness of the town and to draw people into the central area where most shops and cafes are located.

The River Barrow also has potential for tourism development and this is currently being investigated for its Blueway potential by a Masterplan. Waterways Ireland has also already published a five-year management plan for the river as of February 2023. New Ross already has a marina for private leisure boat traffic. The Barrow Princess ferry also provides a tourism service between Waterford and New Ross and it is likely that this will be expanded once the Greenway is in place. The river is already used by the local rowing club who are proposing to expand their jetty and use the river for regular trips and events. Riverhollow Wild Camping is a basic campsite set in natural wooded setting a few kilometres to the north of New Ross.

The river is tidal at New Ross and this restricts the range of water activities which can be proposed, particularly for younger people, but does not prevent more use by boaters, experienced kayakers or the development of the banks for footpaths. Blueways have been established on the River Shannon, Shannon-Erne and Lough Derg and are intended as networks of multi-activity recreational trails and sites requiring cooperation between service providers such as canoe trips, cycle hire and places to stay or eat. In County Kildare, the River Barrow Blueway has recently been opened and extends as far south as Athy following funding of €27,000 provided largely by LEADER in collaboration with a local action group. The river and canal are available for both cycling and walking. The Barrow Way is a popular long distance walking route which covers a distance of 114km as far south as St. Mullins. An extension of the route to the south would encounter some barriers in terms of private land, but this need not prevent County Wexford from developing the river's local potential.