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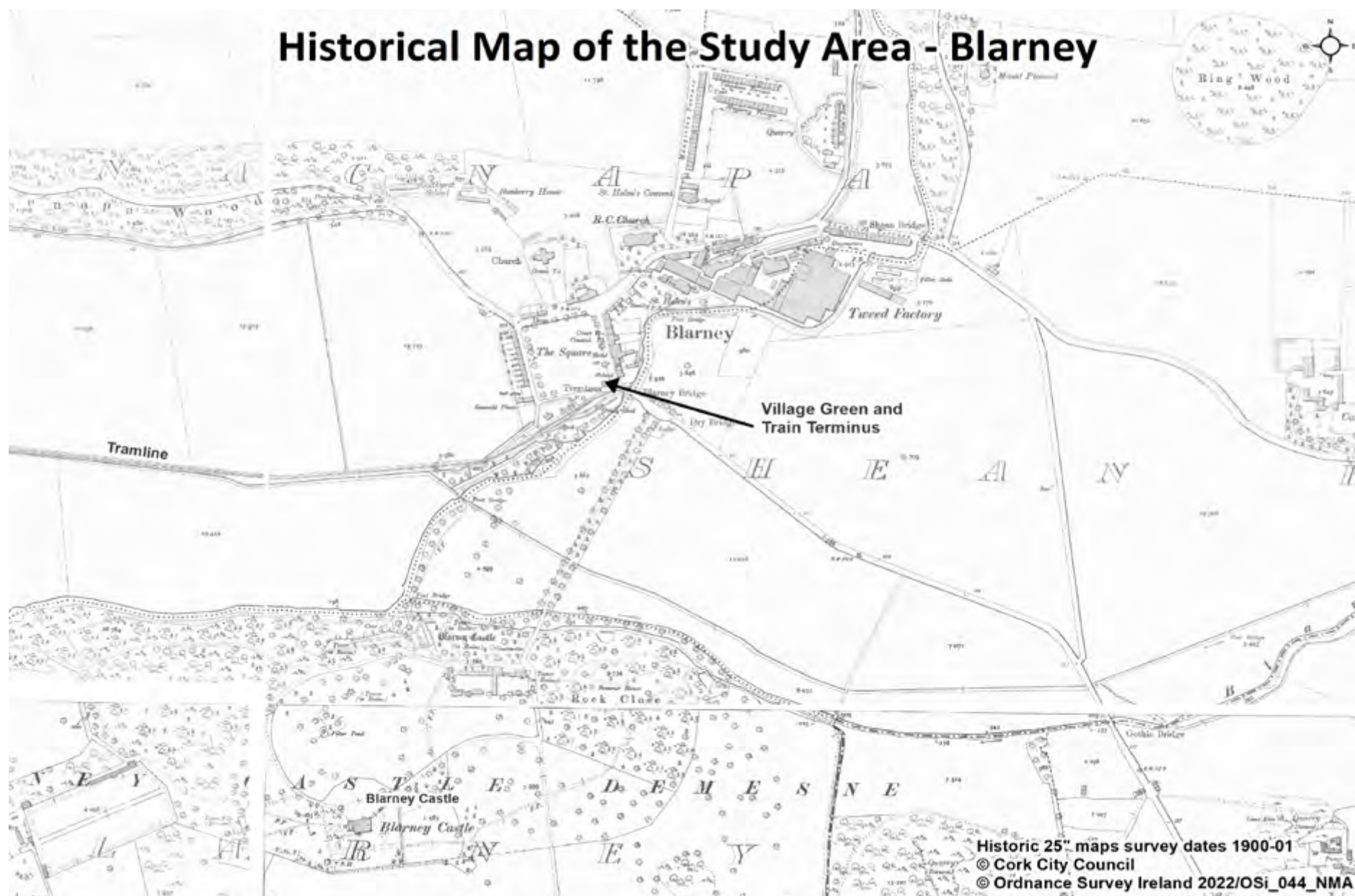
Blarney

Collaborative Town Centre Health Check (CTCHC) Report

2023



Historical Map of Blarney



Aims of the Study

This report describes the findings that were gathered in Blarney as part of the 15 step Collaborative Town Centre Health Check (CTCHC) Programme. The CTCHC Programme is being funded under Project Ireland 2040 and it is being conducted by the Heritage Council along with a variety of partners.

The data collected will be used to inform future decisions for the area and it will also be used to deliver policies and plans from the Cork City Development Plan 2022-28. The findings of the CTCHC Programme will inform plans and strategies in relation to the following:

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

List of Blarney Stakeholders

Blarney & District Chamber of Commerce, Blarney Community Council, Blarney Tidy Towns,

Brand Blarney, Cork City Local Enterprise Office, Local Elected representatives, Muskerry News, Waterloo Renewal Group & Local residents



Survey Methodology



The CTCHC research for Blarney took place in 2021 and it was conducted by Masters in Planning and Sustainable Development students from University College Cork. Due to Covid restrictions at the time, the research focused extensively on four steps of the CTCHC Programme: Landuse Survey & Vacancy, Footfall/Pedestrian Survey, Car Parking and Survey of Natural Desire Lines in the town centre. Business surveys were undertaken in October 2021. Prior to site visit, the students virtually met with Alison Harvey co-ordinator of the CTCHC project in the Heritage Council and steering group members from Cork City Council for an overview of the project, process and place.

Land Use Survey & Vacancy

A survey of building uses and vacancy was conducted by UCC Planning students using ArcGIS Online. The students noted whether each building was vacant or in active use, and if it was active, they noted its ground floor use only. Each building use was selected in accordance with the GOAD Classification of Land Use to ensure consistency with other CTCHC surveys. Using smartphones or tablets, this data was then inputted into the ArcGIS programme. These findings were peer reviewed in March 2022.

Footfall/Pedestrian Survey

Students counted pedestrians at four different locations in Blarney. This was repeated at three different times across two days, including the morning and the afternoon. The data was inputted to a table showing the locations and times, in which pedestrian footfall was at its highest and lowest.

Car Parking

The students walked around Blarney and annotated printed maps to mark the location and number of public car parking spaces.

Survey Natural Desire Lines

Students observed areas in Blarney, in which pedestrian crossings were absent and large numbers of pedestrians were attempting to cross the road. These are known as 'desire lines'.



Public Engagement Meeting

The virtual public engagement meeting was conducted on Thursday 17th June 2021. The aim of this meeting was to hear the views of the community in relation to the positive and negative aspects of Blarney as a place to live and work. The Place Standard Tool was used as a tool to facilitate the conversation. Attendees were invited to submit further thoughts by email afterwards.

Introduction to Blarney

Blarney (An Bhlárna) is a town located 8km northwest of Cork City on the River Martin. A population of 2,539 people was recorded for the area in the 2016 census. Blarney has long been a significant economic driver for the national and regional tourism industry, owing to its internationally renowned built and industrial heritage. The village and its environs are now within the jurisdiction of Cork City Council since the city's boundary extension in May 2019. Blarney has a vibrant mix of community groups and stakeholders invested in the future of the town.

The Built and Industrial Heritage of Blarney

Since the 18th century, Blarney has attracted visitors due to its setting within a picturesque and historic landscape. Blarney is most well-known for two iconic landmarks: Blarney Castle and the Blarney Woollen Mills. These have been instrumental in attracting more than 460,000 visitors to Blarney every year. The COVID-19 pandemic greatly reduced these visitor numbers in 2020 with only 10,000 people visiting Blarney Castle during the month of August that year. This is a significantly lower number than the 65,000 people who normally visit the castle during this month.

During medieval times, Blarney was in the possession of the MacCarthys of Muskerry. In the 15th century, Cormac Láidir MacCarthy was the chief of the MacCarthy clan, and he was responsible for building Blarney Castle in 1446. Within the castle, there is the Blarney Stone and legend states that those who kiss it will obtain the 'gift of the gab'. This feature has been central to attracting visitors to Blarney Castle since the 19th century as people are given the opportunity to kiss the stone. The origin of this tradition varies depending on the source but its practice has undoubtedly become a fundamental piece of Blarney's folk heritage.



Above: Plan of Blarney Village, David Aher 1801.



Right: Kissing the Blarney Stone 1897.
Source: Southgate Associates & Rynne, C. Historic Landscape Characterisation Blarney Castle, Estate and Village, p.39.

The Built and Industrial Heritage of Blarney

Visitors are also attracted to the gardens of Blarney Castle whose original design dates to St John Jeffreyes' management of the estate at the beginning of the 18th Century. Surviving elements include the Rock Close, The Keeper's Watchtower and the Lookout Tower along with many of the demesne's ancient trees.



Left: Blarney Castle, The Lawrence Photograph Collection [between ca. 1865-1914]. Source: <https://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtls000324268>.

Blarney has also enjoyed a long-lasting textile industry, which has been fundamental to the identity and prosperity of the village for centuries. Between 1765 and 1782, St John Jeffreyes created a planned village settlement laid out around a village green (known as The Square today) near Blarney castle. He also established more than a dozen water-powered mills in the village. These were primarily responsible for producing cotton and linen. However, shortly after the Napoleonic war and the onset of a recession the mills went into decline. In 1823 the textile industry was revived when Timothy Mahony opened a woollen mill in Blarney, later known as the Blarney Woollen Mills.



Right: Blarney Woollen Mills.

By 1880, the mill was employing over 800 people. It became the most important industry in the village and the largest woollen mills in Ireland for the greater part of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The mills closed for a short period in 1973 before being reopened as a gift shop and visitor centre in 1975 by Christy Kelleher. It has since operated as one of the main attractions of the village.



Left: Blarney Mills. The Lawrence Photograph Collection [between ca. 1865-1914]. Source: <https://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtls000322423>

The Cork and Muskerry Light Railway

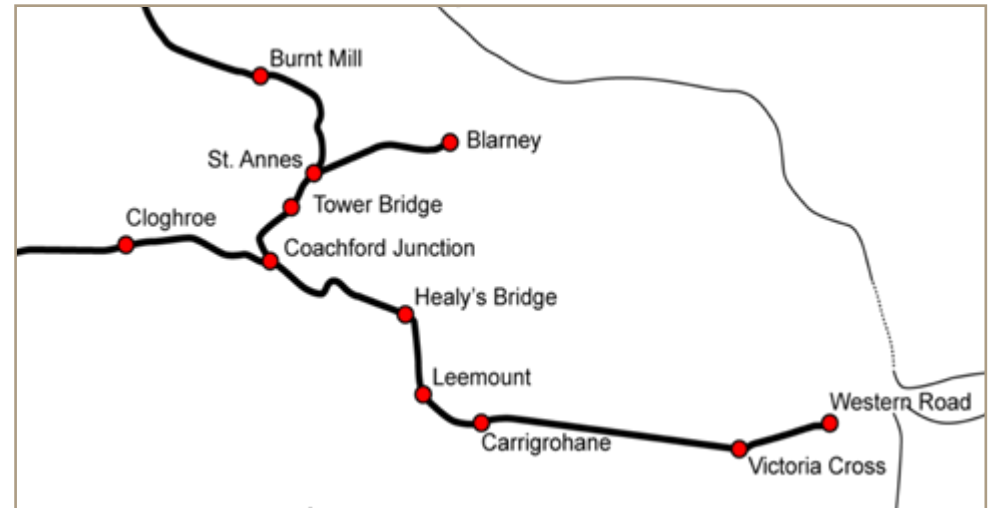
In 1887 the Cork and Muskerry Light Railway Line, or the 'Muskerry Tram', was established allowing for greater accessibility to Blarney from Cork City. It was a narrow-gauge, steam locomotive that traversed a number of terrains including along the side of roadways, through fields and across streams and rivers. Although it was originally intended to increase tourism in Blarney it also served a function in transporting farm produce, livestock and passengers along its line.



Left: Muskerry Tram No.4, Iniscarra Historical Society
Source: http://www.inniscarra.org/gallery/gallery/muskerry_tram.html

Right: There were six locomotives in operation on the line, each with their own name. The photo above shows the 'Blarney' tram.

Source: http://www.inniscarra.org/gallery/gallery/muskerry_tram_files/page6-1020-full.htm



Above: A section of railway line showing the route from Cork City to Tower and Blarney. Source: Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cork_and_muskerry_light_railway.png

The extension of the line, first to Coachford and later to Donoughmore in 1893, shows the success of the railway in its early days. However, the introduction of the motor vehicle in Ireland changed the trajectory of rail services in the country and in 1934 the Cork and Muskerry Light Railway Line closed.

Remnants of the railway line are still visible within Blarney, Cork City and its hinterland and the historic route connecting the villages of Tower and Blarney could be significant for the future sustainable development of the region through the provision of walking or cycling routes.

Blarney's Built Heritage



Source: Cork City Development Plan 2022-28 Volume 3 p.31

Blarney's Architecture Conservation Area

An Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) is a place, area, group of structures or townscape which is either of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest in its own right, or which contributes to the appreciation of protected structures. The designation of an ACA is within the local development plan. Its purpose is to help retain the character of an area.

The current ACA for Blarney (above) is from the Cork City Development Plan 2022-28. The boundary is shown with the purple line.

The main features of the Blarney ACA include Blarney Castle and Estate, Blarney Woollen Mills, 18th century village design centred on a village green, workers' cottages and churches.

Blarney's Protected Structures

The Protected Structures listed in the Cork City Development Plan 2022-28 each contain a protected structure number (PSXXXX), these include:

Within Blarney Castle estate: Bridge (PS1215), Ornamental Tower, Tower House and Bawn (PS1218), Icehouse (PS1219).

There are other Protected Structures and NIAH listed buildings in Blarney, including, at Blarney Woollen Mills, a bridge and two local churches.



Blarney House (PS1217).
(image source: buildingsofireland.ie)



Blarney Woollen Mills (PS1219).

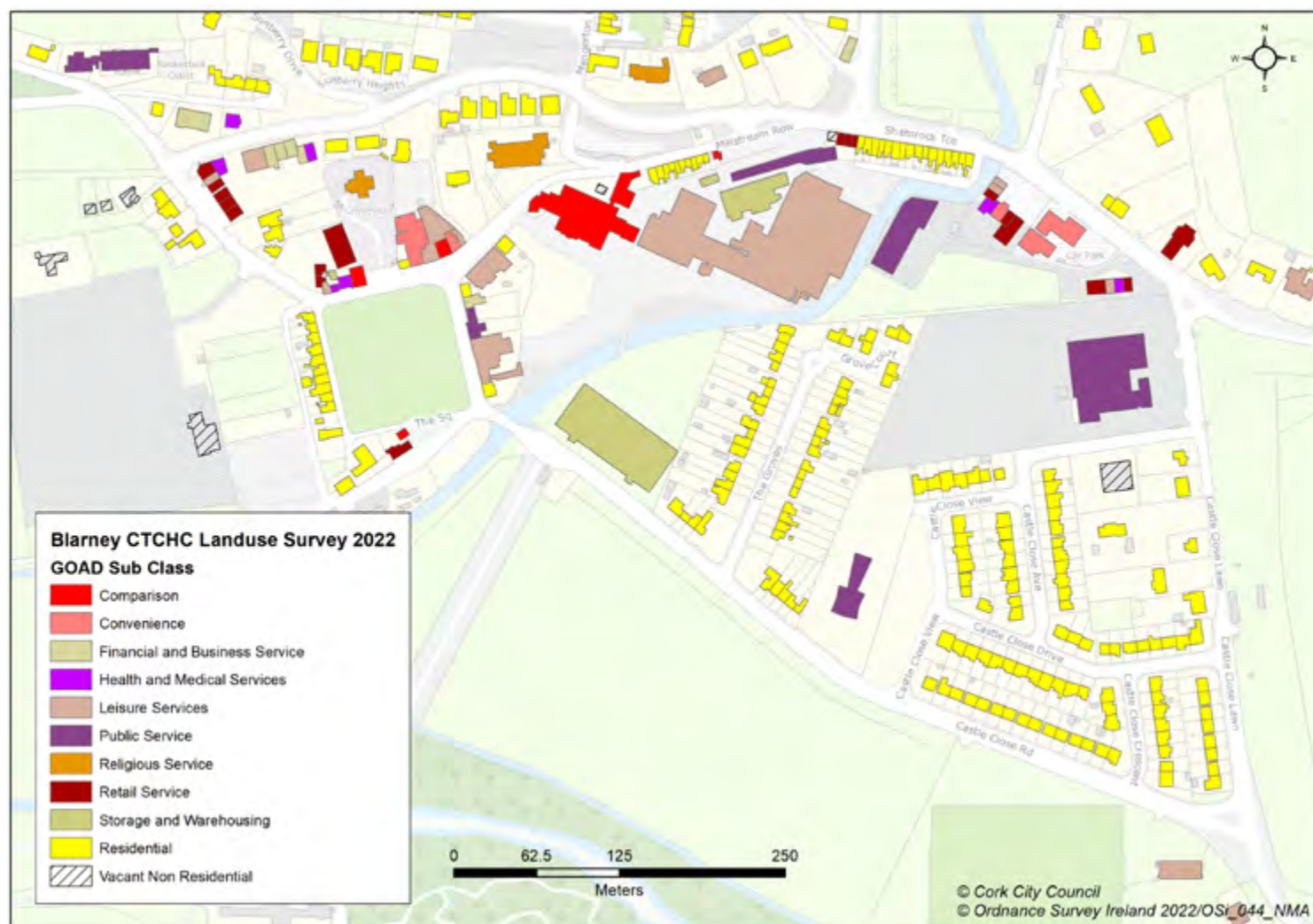


Blarney Roman Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception (PS1214). (image source: buildingsofireland.ie)



Blarney Church of Ireland Church of the Resurrection (PS1220).

Blarney Town Centre CTCHC Survey of Land Use



Comparison 8	Health & Medical Services 6	Religious Service 3	Vacant Non Residential 8
Convenience 4	Leisure Services 19	Retail Service 16	Residential 1015
Financial & Business Services 7	Public Service 8	Storage & Warehousing 11	

Blarney town core

(surveyed in May 2021, findings updated to reflect peer review in March 2022)

Mix of land uses including Centra supermarkets, Woollen Mills, hotels, restaurants, pharmacies, shops, financial services and schools. A new larger secondary school is under construction on the grounds of the current school.

The data below excludes the Blarney Business Park.

Vacancy Non Residential

9.5%

(Calculated using all GAO landuses surveyed excluding residential)

Vacancy including Residential

0.73%

(Calculated using all GAO land uses surveyed in town)

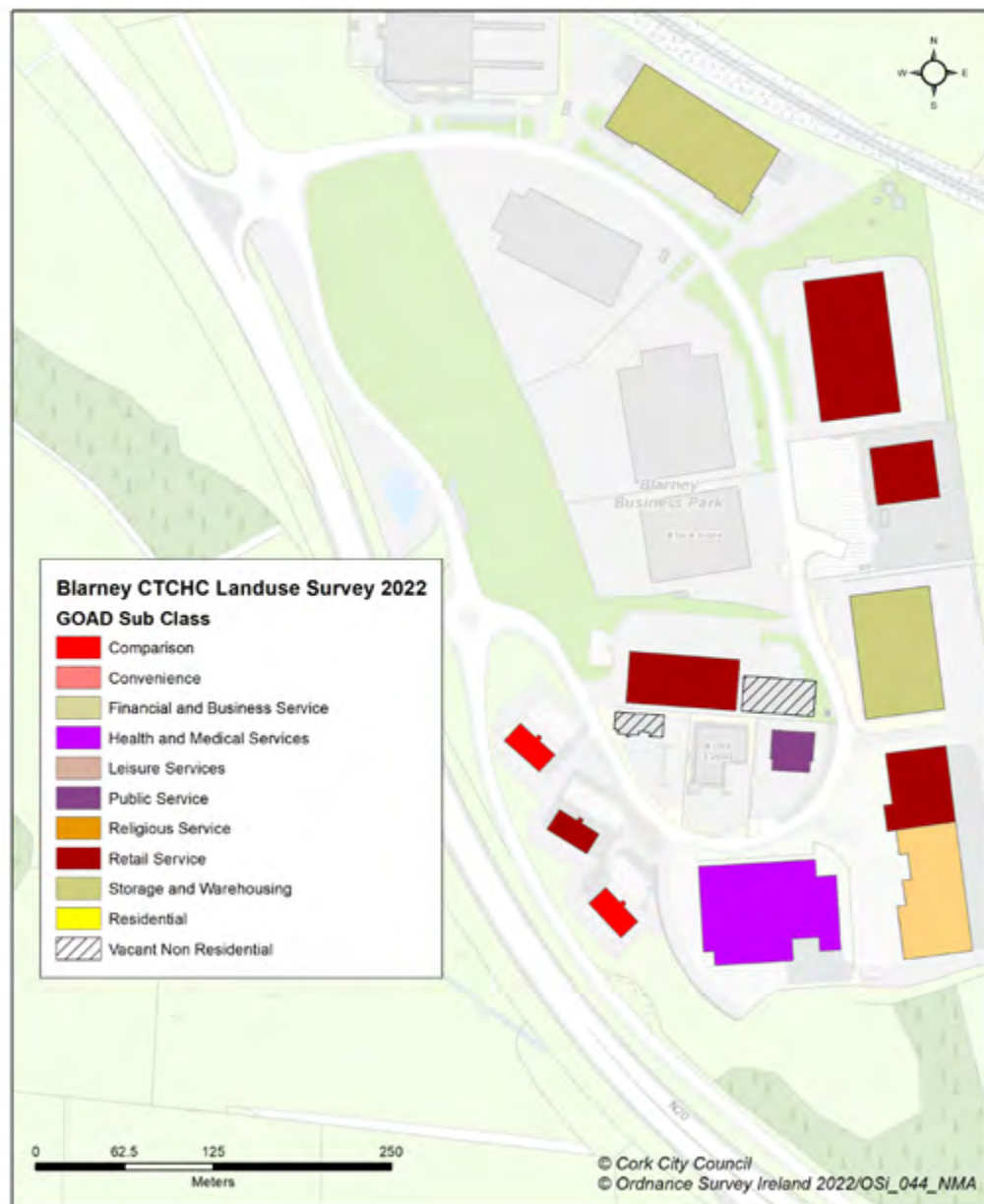
Residential in the Town

92.4%

Non Residential

7.6%

Blarney Business Park CTCHC Survey of Land Use



Comparison	2
Convenience	0
Financial & Business Services	7
Health & Medical Services	1
Leisure Services	0
Public Service	0
Religious Service	0
Retail Service	1
Storage & Warehousing	6
Vacant Non Residential	5
Residential	0



Blarney Business Park

Originally surveyed in May 2021, figures below updated to reflect changes between when peer reviewed in March 2022.

Land uses include NCT Centre, logistics, car sales, warehousing, comparison retail. The construction of the vacant units shown was completed shortly before the peer review and many of these units are now in use.

Vacancy Non Residential at time of peer review

23%

(Calculated using all GOAD landuses surveyed excluding residential)



Blarney Business Profile

Retail can be found in different areas around the town centre. Most historic shops are found along the north and east side of the Square, and the route through Blarney from the Blarney Filling Station at the entrance of the town, via the popular tourist destination of the Blarney Woollen Mills, along by the Square and circling up to St Ann's Road with local services such as the post office. The area around the filling station has some convenience shops, services and some take-away food options.

Geographically disconnected to the town centre is the Blarney Business Park, which offers services for the wider region such as the NCT, car dealerships or logistics.

St. Ann's Road - Blarney Shopping Centre

- Local shops and services (post office, pharmacy, car repairs, beauty)
- Professional services (physiotherapist, credit union, auctioneers)

Blarney Business Park

- Located on the N20
- Mix of uses: Warehousing, & Distribution, Commercial, Supply Chain
- Opened in 2018

Blarney Filling Station and local shops

- Located on the R617
- Filling station and group of retail: services (dry cleaning, vet)
- Take-away food retail

The Square – Historic Town Centre

- Local services (convenience stores, food shops, charity shop, pub)
- Food retail (restaurants, cafés, pub)
- Shops and services for visitors (gift shops, hotel, restaurants)

Blarney Woollen Mills

- Tourist destination, all encompassing: hotel, restaurants, cafés, shop, pub.
- Parking
- Food retail also used by locals



Blarney Business Survey – Current Status

Respondent Profiles



- 14 Businesses located in the Town centre
- 1 online-based business
- 1 Business park respondent
- 6 retail businesses, 4 retail service businesses, 4 professional services
- 7 located around the Square

Respondents (not including Blarney Castle) have been **trading on average for 20 years** so are well established in the area. The longest trading business has been around for 62 years.

At the time of the surveys the newest shop on the Square is three months old, indicating **new shop owners are hopeful for the future of the town centre.**

Average employee number: **8 full-time** and **5 part-time.**

Strengths of Blarney Town Centre



"Blarney is a more vibrant town than when I grew up, the schools are coming down and using the greenspace in the Square a lot more now"



Overall view of Blarney is positive. Comments: Clean, Pretty – Magical town with world famous Castle and gardens – Good except parking – beautiful village – cute traditional village – friendly, relaxed – little green village – welcoming.

Quality of people and shops are celebrated. Rating of the town centre was high for quality of shops and services in the town centre, as well as for the feeling of safety. People and sense of community was the most mentioned in strengths.

Feeling that Blarney is a special village. Many references to the landscape and beauty of the built heritage (Castle, Square and village).

Challenges of Blarney Town Centre



"Blarney is like a Doughnut, services are on the outside"

"The Woollen Mills have become the village centre, the Square isn't the centre anymore, decisions are made in favour of the big businesses"

"Parking is a Huge problem"

Parking was identified as the main challenge.

Town centre is seen as moving away. Town centre is seen as been relocated between the Woollen Mills (main tourist destinations) and the area around the filling station (local services and take-away food). Some retailers feel the tax rates don't reflect this.

Room for improvement. The variety both of shops and goods did not score so well. There are also concerns about the low levels of events in the town centre and the general feeling of vibrancy which doesn't reach the score of 4 (=good). There's also room for improvement in areas to sit and congregate.

Blarney Business Survey – Opportunities and Suggestions

What Businesses would do well?

As future business opportunities, retailers mention the need for a new/bigger hotel with facilities or more leisure places (leisure centre/ cinema/swimming pool/water park). One person mentioned independent retailers. Some answers seem to target more tourists (hotels, water park) whereas some answers would cater more for locals or close-by visitors (bank, swimming pool, food truck, cinema).

6 businesses were looking at future investments in the next 5 years.

Improvements to Town Centre

- **Parking:** Most common improvements mentioned: 6 people mention the need for more parking and two people talk about the issue of traffic, including buses that get stuck regularly.
- **Parks and greens:** two people mention the need for more greens for children or the creation of a regional park. Two people spoke about the central green square, saying it should be opened up and used more.

Attracting more customers and visitors

Typology of customers: the survey highlighted the divide between the tourist trade connected to the Castle and Woollen mills and the local customers that use the town centre for shopping and services. The Business Park plays a different role again by attracting regional visitors, rather than locals. The respondent there indicated clients coming from all over the County for business deals advertised online.

"The elderly population is the lifeblood of the village"

Parking and Traffic Management

12 respondents answered that traffic management should be improved.

Suggested improvements for traffic managements:

- One-way system around the Square (4)
- Traffic plan for the schools (2)
- Traffic warden checking that people respect the 2 hour-parking time (1)
- New Ring Road (1)
- Roundabout (1)

Parking

A main issue for the town centre, around the Square. Parking is very limited. Staff would usually park outside the village or walk to avoid taking up parking spaces. Concerns over spaces removed to make place for outdoor seating given the already limited availability. Outdoor seating removed since this survey. Parking spaces are also taken up by vans and trucks that obstruct shop fronts, which can detract from efforts to improve shop fronts.



Events

Many referred to events of the past (Patrick's day parade, equestrian events, cycling events, Vintage car display). Other events proposed: music festival, village festival, farmers' market. Most events used to be organised by various community groups.

8 respondents were willing to participate in organising events.

Blarney Town Centre Survey

Business owners were asked to rate aspects of Blarney Town Centre on a scale from 1 to 5

1 - Very Poor

2 - Poor

3 - Neither Good nor Bad

4 - Good

5 - Very Good



Feeling of safety and security during the day in town centre	4.83
Café/Restaurant quality in the town centre	4.50
Feeling of safety and security at night in the town centre	4.33
Café/Restaurant choice in the town centre	4.33
Standard of service in shops in the town centre	4.33
Pavement cleanliness	4.25
Quality of shops in the town centre	4.17
Attractiveness of Blarney Town Centre	4.00
Parks and green space in the town centre	4.00
Pavement quality	3.92
Attractions in the town other than shopping	3.83
General ease of getting around Blarney	3.83
Value for money of shops in the town centre	3.67
Variety of goods available in shops in the town centre	3.67
General feeling of vibrancy in Blarney Town Centre	3.64
Seating and areas to congregate	3.58
Range of events in Blarney Town Centre	3.25
Variety/Range of shops in the town centre	3.00
Traffic flow in the town centre	2.75
Parking in the town centre	2.42
Cycling facilities – cycle parking	2.00
Cycling facilities – cycle lanes	1.50

Footfall Count in Blarney Town Centre

A CTCHC footfall survey was undertaken by students at different locations on Friday 28 May and Saturday 29 May 2021 as per the CTCHC methodology. Three time slots were recorded on Friday and two time slots on Saturday. Pedestrians were recorded at both sides of the road at each site. Each location is shown on the map and described below.

Survey Point 1 was the busiest location, with the highest pedestrian count of 65 people recorded between 2:15pm and 2:30pm. This rise in footfall may relate to the hometime for the nearby primary school. It is assumed that the secondary school closing time increased the Friday 4:15–4:30pm results.

Day	Time	1A	1B	2A	2B	3A	3B	4A	4B
Fri 28 May 2021	12.15–12.30pm	18	15	8	9	1	0	9	22
	2.15–2.30pm	65	61	1	37	4	12	15	32
	4.15–4.30pm	12	8	15	43	16	20	6	16
Sat 29 May 2021	10.15–10.30am	12	7	3	8	3	4	4	16
	12.15–12.30pm	3	4	16	11	7	4	12	12
Total		110	95	43	108	31	40	46	95



Survey Point 1: This survey point was at the pedestrian lights close to the junction of St Ann's Road and R617. The busiest time was school collections from Scoil Chroí Íosa an Bhlárna.



Survey Point 2: This point on the R617 close to the petrol station and Ashdale House Shopping Centre. Friday afternoon was the busiest time which may co-incide with the nearby secondary school finishing time.



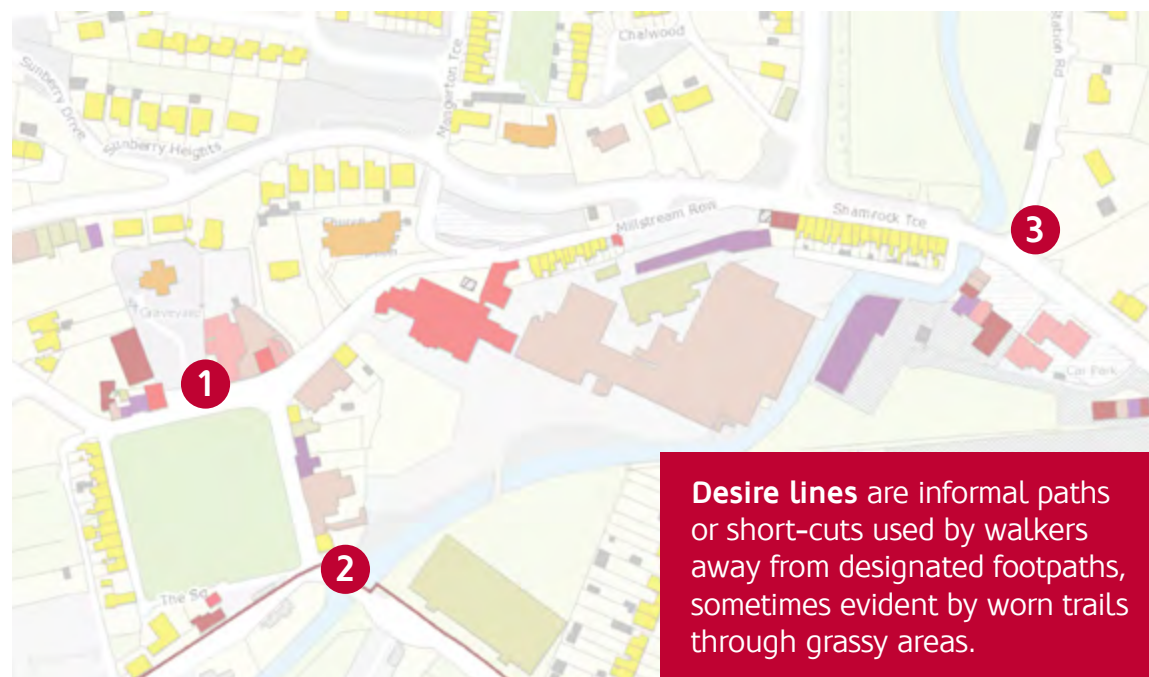
Survey Point 3: This survey point close to Castle Close Lawn, the children's playground, the GAA club and the Clogheenmilcon walkway was the quietest surveypoint, except for Friday evening at secondary and primary school finishing times.



Survey Point 4: This survey point close to the Square is a pedestrian walkway which links the Woollen Mills and Blarney Castle. Surveyers noted it is a tricky place to cross the road.

Desire Line Observations Blarney Town Centre

Desire lines in Blarney were mostly observed in relation to traffic flow. In the town centre, vehicles appear to take priority over the pedestrian, and during the survey individuals were observed making dangerous crossings due to the lack of adequate crossing infrastructure. Desire Line 3 was noted as a particularly dangerous area, with traffic coming at speed from the direction of Waterloo Road and Shamrock Terrace. Desire line 2 was also noted as being dangerous due to the lack of an adequate pedestrian path. Even though it was still frequently used by pedestrians, the narrow road over the bridge at this location proved to be unsafe for those on foot. This crossing appears to be a short cut between Woollen Mills and Castle which bypasses the traditional town centre.



It was observed that due to the lack of wide and continuous footpaths there are a number of points in Blarney that a crossing or inclusion of footpaths would improve the walking environment. Some of these shown in the photos.

Cycling on paths also observed, an indication that those cyclists may feel the road was unsafe to cycle on.



Desire Line 1: Difficult to cross from the Square to the footpath outside the church and Centra.



Desire Line 2: Uneven footpaths and no pedestrian priority at this point.



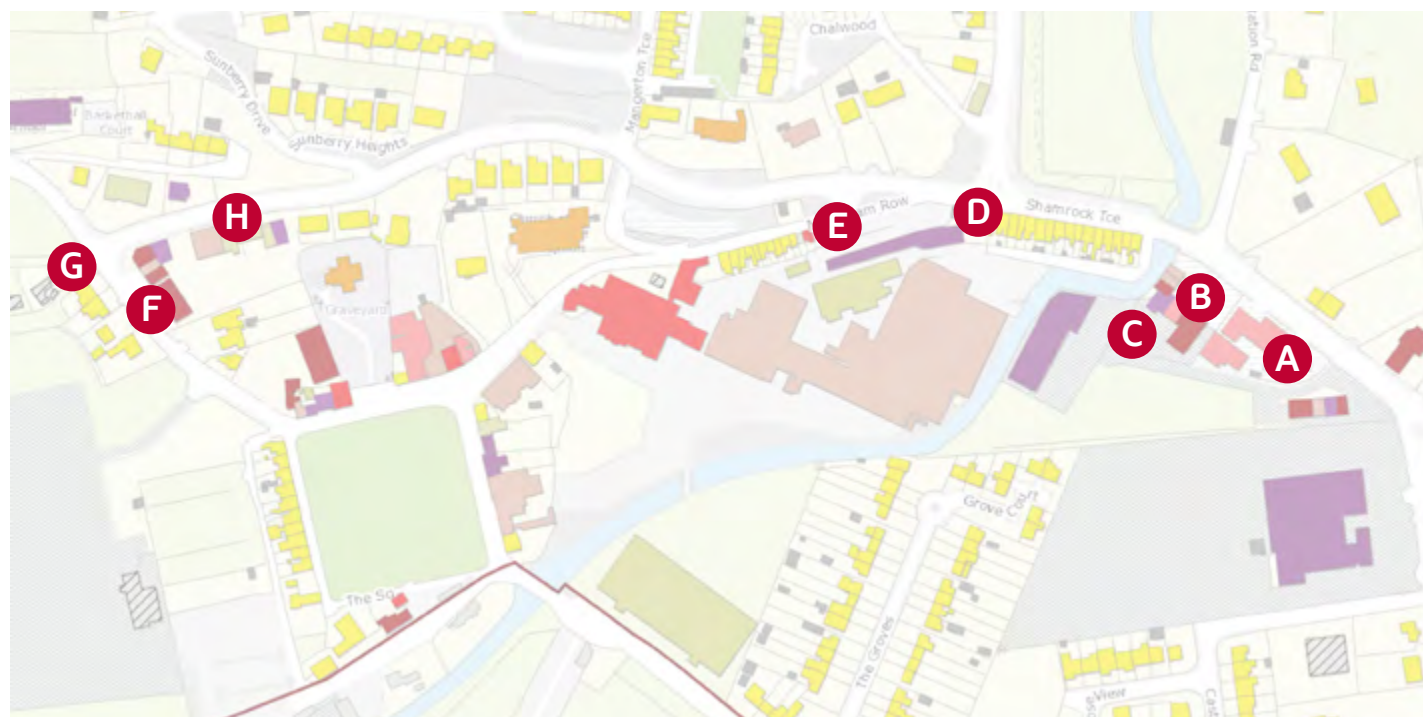
Desire Line 3: Difficult to cross station road.

Blarney Town Centre Parking Survey

The parking survey showed demand for parking opportunities within the Blarney study area. It was noted that a significant proportion of the parking opportunities appeared to be attached to businesses. It was therefore unclear whether the parking was solely for customers or for public use. There is parking in the village square. At the time of the survey there was two-hour free parking here.



On street parking beside the Square



Parking Point	Location	Total car spaces	Spaces occupied	Occupancy (%)
A	Petrol station / Centra	26	21	81%
B	Ashdale overflow	15	15	100%
C	Ashdale shopping centre	24	18	75%
D	Blarney community centre to Ashdale	17	13	76%
E	Blarney community centre and youth club	18	18	100%
F	St Ann's Road	16	16	100%
G	Corner of St Ann's Road and R617	16	16	100%
H	R617	40	30	75%



Full capacity along St. Ann's Road (point F)

Blarney Public Engagement Summary

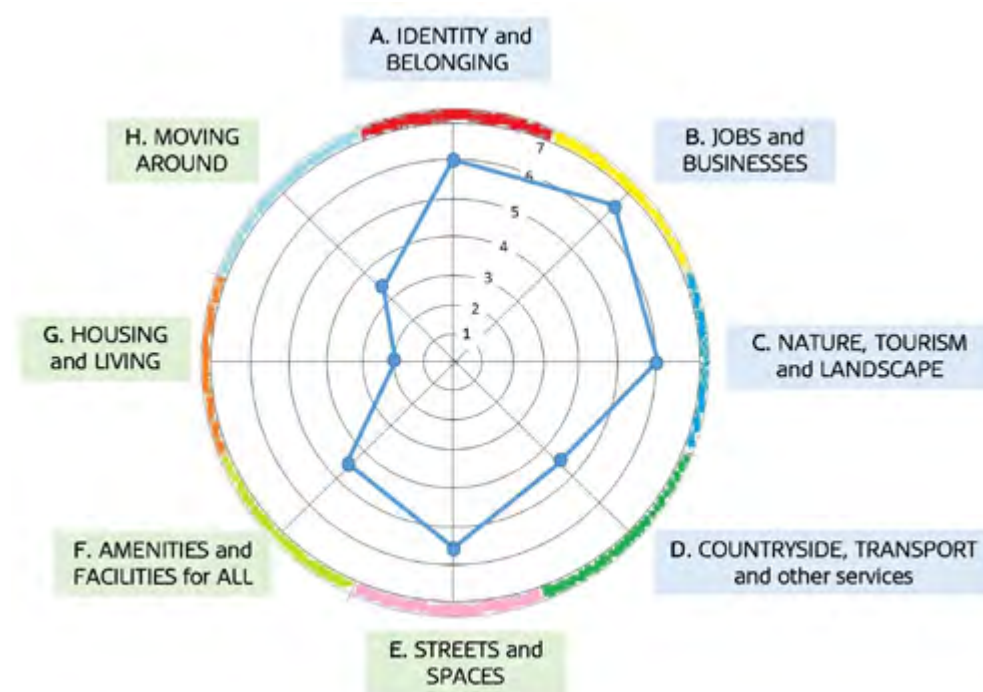
Using the Place Standard Tool the online community engagement had focused discussions on eight topics: Identity and Belonging, Jobs and Businesses, Nature Tourism and Landscape, Countryside, Transport and other services, Streets and Spaces, Amenities and facilities for all, Housing and Living and Moving Around. Each topic was introduced by a student with some prompt questions.

The attendees from the community spent 5 minutes discussing each topic, before giving it an overall rating on a scale of 1 – 7, where a score of 1 denotes a weak performance and lots of improvement is needed, and 7 implies that it is performing well and little improvement is needed. The results are shown on the wheel and chart.

The topic which scored the highest was Jobs and Businesses (6.6) and the topic that scored the lowest was Housing and Living (2). The average score per topic was approximately 4.8. Therefore, this shows that Blarney is doing reasonably okay, however there are some areas that need attention. A summary of the discussion is included on the following pages. A report on the consultation was submitted to the Cork City Draft Development Plan review in 2022.

This breakdown of the ratings was shown to the community:

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



Topic discussed and rated	Community rating
Identity and Belonging	6
Jobs and Businesses	6.6
Nature, Tourism and Landscape	6
Countryside, Transport and other services	4.5
Streets and Spaces	5.6
Amenities and Facilities for all	4.5
Housing and Living	2
Moving Around	3.25

Summary of the Key Points Raised by the Community

A) Identity and Belonging (score: 6)



Blarney is a welcoming place with a strong sense of identity, partly due to groups, such as the Tidy Towns, Schools, Active Retirement, GAA and Scouting. These groups support one another and help to create an active sense of community.

A strong sense of history, local knowledge and heritage was considered a positive for Blarney and its identity. There are groups actively advocating for the history of the town. The history and heritage of Blarney invoked a strong feeling of pride of place and sense of identity.

B) Jobs and Business (score: 6.6)



The highest score reflects Blarney's thriving local economy. Attendees mentioned organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Brand Blarney and the Old Butter Road Group which promote businesses, employment and festivals in the area.

Tourism and weddings, both international and local, were identified as providing a significant amount of both full-time and part-time employment.

While the attractions of Blarney Castle and Grounds and Blarney Woollen Mills and Hotel, underpin tourism in the town, the scope and necessity to develop other natural amenities and activities to attract visitors, as well as locals, was identified. Participants mentioned promoting the Clogheenmilcon Fen walkway, the old Muskerry Tramline, The Old Butter Road, kayaking, enhancing biodiversity, promoting a wildlife festival and finding a site for the Old Butter Road food festival.

The former Blarney Park hotel site was identified as a site for a community hall, swimming pool or events location if sensitively developed. The need for a supermarket was discussed, however participants were keen it would be sensitively designed and located where scenic views would not be impaired.

C) Nature, Tourism and Landscape (score: 6)



The group agreed that nature, tourism, and landscape are Blarney's most significant assets. There are beautiful walks and parklands. The Waterloo walk should be linked to the town centre. The viewpoints and panoramas in Blarney are critical to the identity of the town. There was a strong desire to try and attract more Irish and day-trip tourists to Blarney.

'Brand Blarney' a community led initiative that aims to enhance Blarney's image as a global tourist brand. They undertook an ecological and tourism study of the Clogheenmilcon Fen and hope to continue to enhance the Fen as a tourist destination. There is a desire to promote biodiversity through the provision of trees and "insect friendly vegetation."

D) Countryside, Transport and other services (score: 4.5)



The group were satisfied with the half-hourly bus service between Blarney and Cork City, however its hinterlands are less well-served. In depth discussion about inadequacy of paths and cycle paths, for example, the footpath that links Blarney to the Business Park and to Tower was identified as too narrow, not continuous and unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists given the significant number of high speed HGVs.

Town centre footpaths were frequently too narrow and dangerous, forcing

Summary of the Key Points Raised by the Community

pedestrians onto the road and very hazardous especially for those with pushchairs and mobility aids. The routes mentioned for improvement include: the busy pedestrian link from the Blarney's Woollen Mills and Hotel to the Square, from the Square to the Church of the Resurrection, around the schools and on the Waterloo Road.

The group hoped that reopening of Blarney's railway station would further enhance Blarney's connectivity.

E) Streets and Spaces (score: 5.6)



The upgrade of Blarney's footpaths and the installation of raised pedestrian crossings to improve Blarney's walkability and slow traffic at specific points in the village was mentioned. It was also suggested by a business owner that creating a one way system or rerouting tour buses access to the town's core could reduce traffic congestion around the village Square at peak tourist periods.

The village Square was highlighted as an important social amenity that should continue to be preserved. As one resident put it: "The village square was created for all to enjoy and will remain for all to enjoy as long as there are children in Blarney to enjoy it".

F) Amenities and Facilities for all (score: 4.5)



The group identified the need for a community centre and health centre in the town of Blarney for local groups. There was a positive discussion about the plentiful supply of open spaces for people not involved with sport, and these are well maintained. However, it was considered that more can be done with these spaces.

It was felt that accessibility to amenities was poor, particularly for those

with restricted mobility. It was considered that developments such as the Clogheenmilcon Fen will provide greater levels of inclusive amenities. When on the site visit, one resident mentioned to the students about the possibility to make the Clogheenmilcon Fen walk a circular route. Other residents mentioned the need for public toilets and more seating, throughout the town. This was felt important to accommodate Blarney's ageing population as well as visitors to the town.

G) Housing and Living (score: 2)



The group noted that if local residents wished to downsize to a smaller home within their community there are limited affordable options.

The participants agreed that future housing development must respect the beautiful, rolling countryside, and views of such, especially from key historic, economic linchpins of the village such as Blarney Castle. For new developments, suitable screening and sensitive design and landscaping to reflect the industrial village heritage was suggested to reduce negative impacts.

H) Moving Around (score: 3.25)



Footpaths were discussed again, in particular, lack of lighting, narrowness, and lack of safe routes for pedestrians.

Traffic and parking in the village was also discussed. It was stated that the cars 'take precedence' over pedestrians and suggested that this needs to change. Widening the footpaths was suggested. The lack of safe and adequate cycling paths, coupled with narrow roads results in cyclists using footpaths instead of the road, which is dangerous for both the cyclist and the pedestrian. A greenway was mentioned as a future possibility for Blarney.

Overview of Community and Stakeholder Feedback

Summary of engagement evening, business surveys, submissions and other meetings with stakeholders

Community Amenities



A need for a community hall, swimming pool, public toilets, more seating and better pedestrian paths around the village. Some community members mentioned the need for an additional supermarket in the town.



Signage was highlighted by the businesses to help visitors find the amenities and to find smaller shops away from the main tourist destinations.



Need to further develop festivals for locals and visitors.

The students met a representative of Blarney Castle Estate, who could not attend the community meeting. They are open to future discussions about using the Square for future cultural events once the protected square was not structurally altered.

Sensitive setting of Blarney

At the community meeting, there was a discussion about the historical and cultural value of Blarney, the historic buildings and the surrounding landscape. The residents felt that future developments in Blarney should respect these.

The representative of Blarney Castle Estate also highlighted the importance of key linear views from the estate given its international historical importance.



Where is the town centre?

The businesses who responded to the survey highlighted that the town centre is moving towards the R617 road and away from the traditional area around the Square. Noted that some visitors bypass the town centre by using the path beside the River to go from Mills to Castle.

Moving Around

The community raised issues of footpaths and pedestrian safety and the businesses raised issues with parking and traffic on numerous occasions.



Footpaths in Blarney are frequently found to be too narrow and dangerous, or to disappear entirely, resulting in pedestrians moving onto the road and excluding safe accessibility for pushchairs and wheelchairs/mobility aids. Improvements such as a raised speed table and/or a zebra crossing were suggested by community members, in particular in the traditional town centre and around the schools. This would also aid children's independent, active patterns of mobility to and from school thus further reducing traffic congestion.



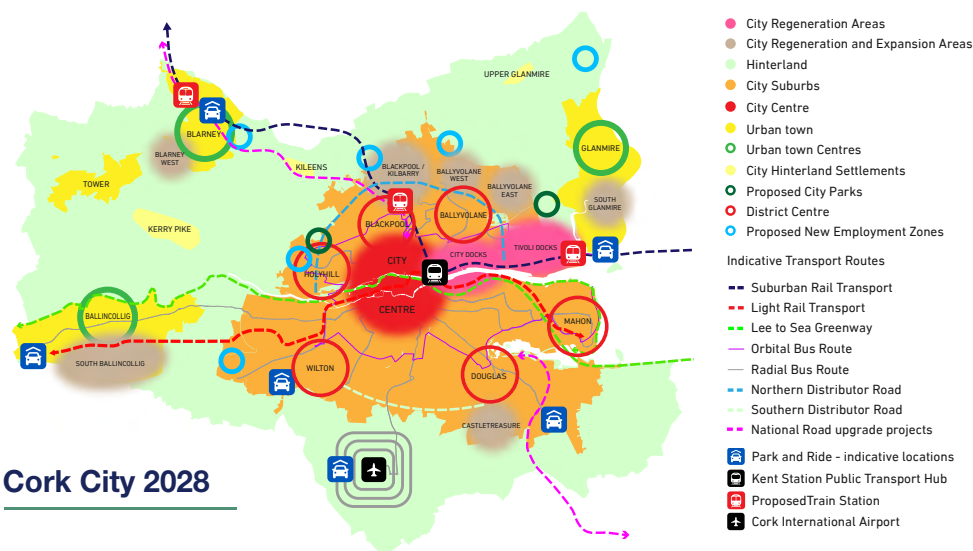
The potential for improved pedestrian linkages from the town centre to the Clogheenmilcon Fen, the Waterloo walkway, Inch's field, a continuous path to Tower and to the Blarney business park were mentioned, as well as potentially developing a greenway along the former Muskerry Tram line.



Planning Policy Context for Blarney

Regional Development and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

The Southern Regional Assembly's RSES identifies Blarney Castle as a cultural and heritage asset of the region. Blarney is identified as a Metropolitan town and significant regional tourist centre. The reopening of the Blarney rail station is identified and sustainable development of new housing close to rail stations is supported. Road improvements, upgrade to Waste Water and Water Supply infrastructure are identified for Blarney in the RSES, as is a Sustainable Urban Drainage Strategy. The RSES also supports the delivery of the UN Sustainable Development Goals SDGs along with the concept of 10-Minute Towns, Place-making and regeneration.



Cork City 2028

Cork City Council Development Plan 2022-2028: Blarney as a centre for growth

Cork City's Core Strategy in the Cork City Development Plan 2022-28 sets out a land use strategy for Compact Liveable Growth for the plan period and beyond. The National Planning Framework population targets, detailed

in chapter 2, are distributed to enhance and grow the existing network of neighbourhoods, towns and settlements in the city. Blarney is identified as an Urban Town centre and is earmarked for important growth in the plan lifetime, foreseeing a nearly tripling in population by 2028 with an expansion area and a Neighbourhood Development site. The Core Strategy also foresees Blarney as a long-term strategic growth area with lands identified for future residential growth up to 2040 with the creation of a new train station at Stoneview.

Cork City Council Development Plan 2022-2028: Blarney Town centre Framework Objective

It is an objective in the City Development Plan to develop a heritage-led framework plan for Blarney during the lifetime of the Plan that will contain measures and guidance to allow the village to meet its full development potential without comprising the heritage and tourism asset the town presents. (See Chapter 10, pp. 399-408)

Objective 10.64: Blarney Town Centre Framework Masterplan

During the lifetime of this Plan Cork City Council will seek to provide and implement a framework for heritage-led redevelopment and revitalisation of the town centre and the coordinated provision of services, infrastructure, land use, movement urban design and development.

AIRO Neighbourhood Profile: Blarney Socio-Demographic information

This study sets out a socio-economic profile of the network of neighbourhoods, towns, and communities in the city. It uses a series of indicators based on census data to provide individual profiles for neighbourhoods and towns. This study shows a socio-demographic profile of Blarney and will be useful to analyse in relation to the results of the Town Centre Healthcheck. This study is also due to be updated in the coming years with the new census results. The commuting flows are particularly interesting in this context and shows the net export of workers commuting from Blarney, as a residential area. It also shows the strong car-dependence, which is higher than the City average.

Considerations and Opportunities for Blarney



United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), Programme for Government, Town Centre First (TCF) and CTCHC Approach

The CTCHC Programme is included in the Programme for Government and is at the centre of the Town Centre First (TCF) Policy, i.e. the CTCHC Programme. is the key collaborative framework to gather and lead actions around the country. The new TCF policy presents significant opportunities and potential benefits for Blarney's historic core. In addition, the CTCHC Programme has been selected as one of five best practice case studies by EU ESPON, which seeks to promote Cultural Heritage and Societal Well-being throughout Europe. As Blarney is a member of the CTCHC Programme, it is envisaged that links with EU Member States will widen and deepen significantly in the future through ongoing programme operations, as part of the UN SDGs New European Movement (NEB) and the EU Green Deal.

Community Health and Well-being

The community feedback supported improvements to and widening of the footpaths in Blarney and the creation of safe crossing points throughout the town and for schoolchildren. The community highlighted creating biodiversity links that connect with the existing walkways, parks and green spaces. The potential for improved pedestrian linkages from the town centre to the Clogheenmilcon Fen, the Waterloo walkway, Inch's field, a continuous path to Tower and to the Blarney business park were mentioned, as well as potentially a greenway along the former Muskerry Tram line. They expressed desire for a new community centre and public toilets in Blarney. Funding for such projects could be sought and this report would support such applications. Any future plans could link with Cork City Age-friendly strategy.

Regeneration, Heritage and Tourism Funding

Blarney will also benefit from regeneration projects funded under the NDP, RSES, Rural Regeneration Development Fund (RRDF) and the Historic Towns Initiative (HTI). The historic town has enormous potential in terms of heritage-led tourism for more local and day visitors. Signage was highlighted by the businesses to help visitors find the amenities and to find smaller shops away from the main tourist destinations.

The potential to develop festivals for locals in addition to attracting domestic and international visitors was identified. The students met a representative of Blarney Castle Estate, who could not attend the community meeting, who was open to future discussions about using the village square for future cultural events once the Square was not structurally altered.

The findings of this report should inform the Blarney Town Centre Framework Masterplan which is an objective of the Cork City Development Plan 2022-28.

Built and Natural Heritage – Sensitive Setting

At the community meeting, there was a discussion about the historical and cultural value of Blarney, the historic buildings and the surrounding landscape. The residents felt that future developments in Blarney should respect this.

The representative of Blarney Castle Estate also highlighted the importance of key linear views from the estate given its international historical importance.



Blarney CTCHC Project Team and Contributors

Blarney CTCHC Project Team

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#datamatters
#heritagematters
#blarneytown

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