Kells

Solving our own problems!

A two day workshop identifying
issues and coming up with **solutions**

Summary Report

Kells Local Heroes KLH Working together for Kells

comhairle chontae na mi meath county council

IRISH WALLED TOWNS NETWORK
An Chomhairle Oidhreachta The Heritage Council

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This report details the findings of a two-day participative town health check seminar called Solving Our Own Problems! The event was held in Kells, Co. Meath on 24th and 25th November 2017. Solving our own problems is a format devised by Irish Walled Towns Network (IWTN) to support member towns in a democratic process of asking questions, finding out what is important to the community and creating realistic actions to overcome challenges.

Like many towns, Kells is being confronted by changing demographics and lifestyles, the increase in commuting for work, greater automation of traditional sources of employment, climate breakdown and biodiversity loss. The people of Kells recognise these challenges and are determined to adapt to create a town that is both socially and economically robust. The Solving Our Own Problems event and this report are part of an ongoing community effort of renewal, led by the various community groups and Meath County Council.

As part of the Solving Our Own Problems process, five expert mentors facilitated special interest groups in a two-day workshop, with the outcomes and actions realised into this plan. The event format recognised the value in pairing mentors who are experts in their field and who also have nationwide experience, with the local knowledge and experience of residents.

The five mentors were:

- Cornelia McCarthy, Independent Arts and Festivals Professional – Topic: Working with the arts
- David Fitzsimons, CEO, Retail Excellence Ireland – Topic: Retail
- Margaret Egan, Managing Director, Áit Urbanism + Landscape – Topic: Greening the public realm
- Jason Taylor, Town Planner and Urban Designer – Topic: Parking and traffic management
- Mary King, Policy and Planning Officer Fáilte Ireland – Topic: Tourism

The two-day schedule began with a series of presentations and talks in St Columba's Church on Friday evening (November 24th). The event was opened by Minister Helen McEntee. On the Saturday (November 25th), Kells residents undertook a walking tour of the town with their chosen workshop mentor. Discussions were then held in the Headfort Arms Hotel to reflect on the tour of the town and turn ideas into an overall action plan. These workshops form the basis of this report.

The Friday evening presentations are available to watch on the Heritage Council's YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/watch?v=iMZK4kX_PRc&list=PLIKz_D-MJSUmoVD9OabKnRwmo3-1djwsD).

The Solving Our Own Problems event in Kells was part of a wider scheme called the Town Kick-Start. The Town Kick-Start was a pilot programme of the IWTN. Selected through the IWTN grants process, Kells won the right to be the host town due to strong community leadership and robust cooperation with Meath County Council. The programme includes several activities that 'kick-start' the town into undergoing heritage-led regeneration. The main action was the conservation works carried out on buildings in the historic core of the town. These were co-funded by Meath County

Council and building owners. This was also accompanied by retailer training, conservation training for building owners and mentoring throughout the process by the IWTN project managers.

1.2 Site location and context

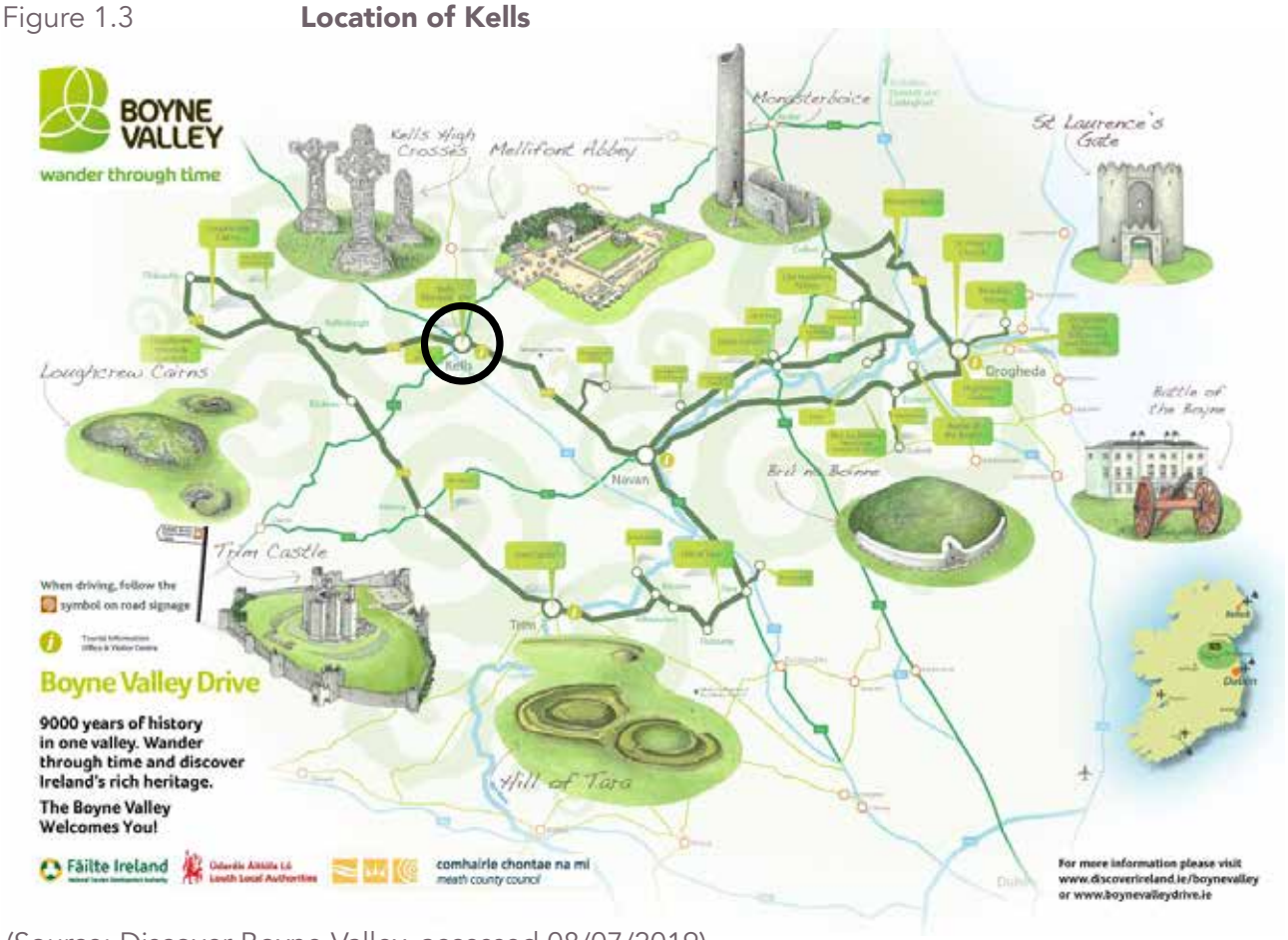
Kells, Co. Meath is most well-known for its connection to the Book of Kells, named after the local abbey. Although Kells was a sizable monastic settlement in the early medieval period, its development into a town was only realised after the area was conquered and settled by the Anglo-Normans. The town was walled in the 14th century. Unfortunately, little remains of the walls today. Much of the current street pattern is early medieval and later medieval in origin. Kells is one of the six constituent places across the country that make up the government's Early Medieval Monastic Sites on Ireland's Tentative World Heritage List submitted to UNESCO in 2010 (Figures 1.1 & 1.2).

Kells has a population of 6,135 (CSO, 2016) but it serves a much wider hinterland. It is located just off the M3, about 16km from Navan, and 65km northwest of Dublin (Figure 1.3). The town centre has experienced a similar decline to most Irish towns in the last fifteen years (Figure 1.4). Nonetheless, the current town centre dereliction belies an engaged and active local community. The 2016 Pobal deprivation index indicated that Kells is below average in the county. However, given the large hinterland of the town, this may not accurately reflect deprivation levels at the historic core.

Figures 1.1 & 1.2 **Remains of Early Medieval Monastery**

(Source: Fáilte Ireland, 2014)

Figure 1.3 **Location of Kells**



(Source: Discover Boyne Valley, accessed 08/07/2019)

Figure 1.4 **Kells Town Centre**

(Source: Fáilte Ireland, 2014)

The town punches above its weight with arts festivals, heritage sites and cultural venues which are under construction or in planning phases. It has three arts festivals; Hinterland Festival of Literature and Arts (formerly Hay Festival), Guth Gafa International Documentary Film Festival and Kells Type Trail, as well as new art/heritage spaces. These include the planned Printworks at the former sawmills which will be the location for an exemplary 19th century printing press and the conversion of the former courthouse into a visitor centre and cultural hub.

1.3 Methodology

This document comprises short summaries of the discussions from the handwritten notes of the five Saturday working groups. There were 62 participants, comprising representatives from the public, private and community sectors. The 'Policies' and 'Actions' throughout the report have been determined by these working groups. They are written as per the groups notes, with some minor editing through the 'review' process. The groups focused on one of the following topics: tourism, retail, working with the arts, greening the public realm and traffic management and parking.

1.4 Implementation

Implementing the actions included in this report will be led by the people of Kells. Once the report is published, a follow-up meeting should be held between relevant community and business stakeholders, local authority and national government bodies/agencies. This will help to improve communication and co-operation between all town stakeholders. Follow up meetings can be arranged as deemed necessary by a new town forum/team.

1.5 Relevant local documentation

It would be advisable for the people of Kells, to use this report in submissions to local statutory planning processes. As part of the review of the County Development Plan 2013-2019, Meath County Council intends to put forward an objective to prepare a Public Realm Strategy for Kells. Post adoption of the County Development Plan 2020-2026, Meath County Council is required to prepare a Local Area Plan for Kells.

1.6 Author identification

The summaries were prepared by a representative of each working group. The authors are Hollie Kearns, Mary McCarthy, Kate Flood, Liam Mannix, Mark Smith and the attendees of the event. The report was edited by Hollie Kearns and Liam Mannix, Project Managers of the IWTN. It was reviewed by Meath County Council.

1.7 Acknowledgements

The IWTN acknowledges the help of Meath County Council in making the event happen. We would like to thank the people of Kells, who, through the Kells Local Heroes, ensured a huge turnout at the events. Thanks to all the local people who gave voluntarily of their time on a cold November weekend to share their thoughts on the future of their town. Thanks also go to Minister Helen McEntee for launching the event on a busy November weekend. Finally, thank you to the five mentors who gave generously of their time and knowledge: Mary King, David Fitzsimons, Cornelia McCarthy, Margaret Egan and Jason Taylor. Photos on cover courtesy of Fáilte Ireland and Kells Local Heroes.

WORKSHOP GROUP SUMMARIES

2.0 Tourism

Mentor: Mary King, Fáilte Ireland
Author: Workshops notes from the group

Issue Identified: What is the story of Kells? Branding and local support.

Policy:
What is the story of Kells? Do local people know it? Is there only one? It is important to have a clear story to tell tourists to entice them to visit and yet it must be one that local people recognise and can support. Local people must also be committed to the changes needed to encourage tourism and to get behind the idea.

Actions:

a. Decide and define the story. The story of Kells has to fit into the wider tourist offering of Discover Boyne Valley and Ireland's Ancient East. Identify who the story is for (i.e. who is the audience? Is it certain Irish people, culturally curious, social energisers, great escapers?).

b. Create a distinct brand for Kells from the Discover Boyne Valley brand (similar to Slane) that complements the town's story. Ensure all graphic design used on print and online is of high quality. Encourage relevant businesses and organisations in the town to embrace both the story and the brand.

c. Create a tourist friendly book on the history of Kells and copyright this story.

d. Create an information leaflet and distribute through the residents associations so everyone in Kells knows the town's story. Leaflet to be available in French, German and other languages for tourists.

e. Create a branded tour of Kells that the community can buy into. For inspiration, look at the Epic tour of the Viking Triangle in Waterford (www.waterfordtreasures.com/medieval-museum/the-experience/innovative-guided-walking-tours).

f. Identify local storytellers to create personal and authentic tourist experiences.

g. Create a local ambassadors project similar to the one in the Little Museum of Dublin (www.littlemuseum.ie/visit-the-museum/city-of-a-thousand-welcomes/).

h. Ensure that Kells Courthouse is a dynamic community space, where locals and visitors feel welcome. The Brú na Bóinne visitor site provides a good example of a tourist hub acting as a key community asset (www.youtube.com/watch?v=-hGywrDRA0o). Lismore Heritage Centre is a strong model of a visitor centre acting as a hub of activities in a town.

Issue Identified: Information and activities.

Policy:

There is very little tourism information in the town and little to orientate the visitor. The main interpretation/orientation point should be at Kells Courthouse (Figure 2.1). When tourists are in Kells, what is here to make them stay? Interpretation and signage throughout the town should be complemented by activities that encourage people to stay longer in Kells.

Figure 2.1 **Kells Courthouse with Market Cross**

(Source: The Heritage Council, 2017)

Actions:

a. Develop a comprehensive orientation and interpretation plan for the town. This plan will also include an audit of existing interpretation.

b. Improve orientation and interpretation signage around the town. Orientation signage should be located at all main carparks and at the bus stops (Figures 2.2 & 2.3).

c. Clearly identify Kells Courthouse as the visitor centre in the town's orientation signage. Make sure there is clear, tastefully designed exterior signage outside the Courthouse describing it as a visitor centre.

d. Develop a clear A3 tourist map of the town and distribute to all attractions and tourism businesses. Youghal already have a map of this type which is widely used (http://youghal.ie/top-10-things-to-do/guided-tour-youghal-heritage-town/map/).

e. Create a programme of large and small-scale events that will appeal to the various target audiences. These events should be listed online. Support is to be given so that all festivals can adopt green principles.

f. Begin a regular farmer's market. Good examples of vibrant farmer's markets exist in Kilkenny, Bandon and Clonakilty.

g. A taste of Kells! Encourage greater use of local food by food outlets.

h. Encourage 'personality shops'.

i. Create a self-guided tour which starts at Kells Courthouse and ends at Sawmills Studios. Tour to be available in French, German and other languages for tourists.

j. Create tourist itineraries for Kells; half day and full day.

k. Create themed tours of the town, e.g. the medieval town wall gates of Kells, daily life for children through the centuries (Figure 2.4).

l. Encourage continuity between retail and tourism experience in terms of quality of the experience, interest and use of 'the Kells story'.

m. Connect to the Book of Kells experience in Trinity College to offer a combined ticket that sees their visitors travel to Kells. The combination ticket could include a tour of the town and access to St Colmcille's House (Figure 2.5).

n. Create a closer tie to Trinity College by creating an outreach Summer School in Kells. Possible subject matters include the history, archaeology and calligraphy of early medieval Ireland.

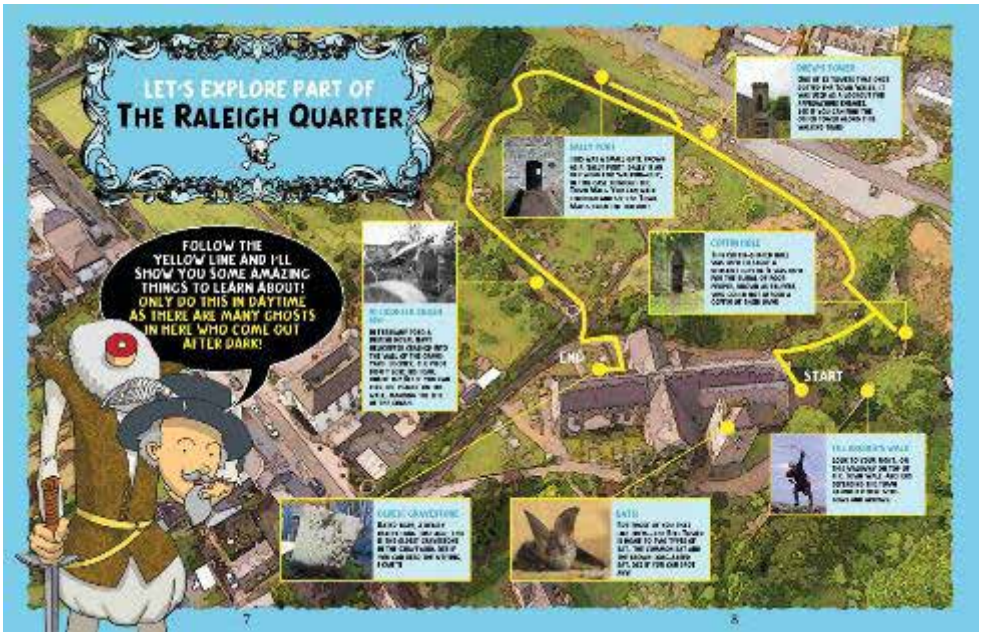
o. Undertake an accessibility audit of historic sites in the town and work towards enhancing safe access (e.g. St Colmcille's House and St John's Graveyard).

p. In order to keep tourists in the county cooperate with neighbouring communities in the development of itineraries and marketing. Look at the Loop Head tourism model.

Figures 2.2 & 2.3 **Orientation signage in Waterford City Centre**

(Source: The Heritage Council, 2015)

Figure 2.4 **Treasure hunt for children in Youghal**



(Image courtesy of Youghal Socio-Economic Development Group and Cork County Council)

Figure 2.5 **St Colmcille's House**

(Source: The Heritage Council, 2017)

Issue Identified: Location of Market Cross

Policy:

The Market Cross was relocated for safety reasons to outside Kells Courthouse (Figure 2.6). This has been controversial in the town with varied opinions on whether it should stay where it is or relocated back to its previous location on Cross Street.

Figure 2.6 **Market Cross looking towards the town centre**

(Source: The Heritage Council, 2017)

Actions:

a. A comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan should be created for the Cross in consultation with Meath County Council's Architectural Conservation Officer and the OPW. As part of this process, the long-term positioning of the Cross is to be analysed. However, any possible repositioning of the Cross is contingent on appropriate traffic management actions being implemented.

b. There is a short term need to conserve the round stone cap on the Cross.

c. The current shelter needs to be regularly cleaned.

d. Create a temporary exhibition which highlights the significance of the Cross and its original location.

Issue Identified: Parking and Public Realm

Policy:

Improvements to public realm works makes the town more hospitable to tourists. There is also a distinct lack of coach parking for busloads of visitors.

Actions:

a. Create a new plaza in front of the Credit Union (Figure 2.7).

b. Create outdoor seating throughout the town.

c. Create coach parking near Kells Courthouse. Consult with Meath County Council's Transportation Section.

Figure 2.7 **Area in front of Credit Union**

(Source: The Heritage Council, 2017)

Issues Identified: Securing funding for tourism projects and lowering costs for providers

Policy:

Use this report in submissions to relevant master plan documents and funding applications.

Action:

a. Discuss with Fáilte Ireland opportunities for funding using this report.

b. Provide training for accomodation and restaurant providers on lowering their waste, energy and water costs. Information on grant support should be provided.

3.0 Retail

Mentor: David Fitzsimons, Retail Excellence Ireland
Author: Hollie Kearns

The retail workshop began with the introduction of three key principles to keep in mind:

a. Improve the offer
Make the offer measurable and achievable. For example, in attracting new businesses aim for a franchise of the 'big shop' from Navan, not the international high street franchise like Zara which will be unachievable for a town the size of Kells. Shoppers like mid-week convenience – to get in and out of the shops quickly to buy what they need, and weekend experience – to enjoy food, hospitality, activities for kids, retail and a feeling of being relaxed.

b. Beautification
Create a beautiful centre of town spaces where people can relax and breathe. Introduce street furniture, allow people to congregate, make the streets easy and accessible to navigate. Shops and businesses should work with their neighbours to introduce trees, flower boxes, awnings and lighting to benefit from the attractiveness of a cluster of well-presented buildings.

c. Citizen engagement
Shoppers need to feel invested in not just the retail, but the whole of town experience. Retailers and businesses need to work with the local community to ensure there are activities in the centre of town and that these are well promoted.

Issue Identified: Communication between businesses

Policy:
There needs to be clear communication between businesses so that any proposed developments, improvements or branding ideas can be supported by as many businesses as possible, who can pool their energy and ensure success.

Actions:

a. Nominate a street ambassador for every street. Ambassadors to communicate with each other on larger scale projects.

b. Street ambassadors can bring all the businesses along in new plans for the town.

c. Ambassadors can also help businesses to market their offering together, so that branding and advertising looks at the whole town offering, as well as individual businesses.

Issue: Presentation of buildings

Policy:
Shoppers are more likely to spend time in the centre of town, and shop in businesses that are well presented. The buildings near to each other impact on how the others appear, and a critical mass of building improvements together can make a big impression.

Actions:

a. Create a statute of behaviour for the presentation of shops and buildings in the town. Use Meath County Council's Shopfront and Signage Guidelines where appropriate (www.meath.ie/media/Media,65461,en.pdf).

b. Encourage regular painting.

c. Encourage businesses to invest in colourful and tasteful awnings.

d. Put out planters and window boxes on the street.

e. Address facia signage if it is in disrepair or unattractive. Consistency in signage will benefit the overall look of the street. Reference the Meath County Council Shopfront and Signage Guidelines document for best practice (www.meath.ie/media/Media,65461,en.pdf).

f. Agree a standard of shuttering. Preferably there should be no shutters. However, if shutters are deemed necessary then they should be located behind the glass and be perforated.

g. Standards need to be informally enforced by street ambassadors and business development groups.

Issue Identified: Dereliction

Policy:

Buildings that are derelict are an eyesore, create a negative feeling of a street and are a waste of commercial space. It is in the benefit of all to act on dereliction.

Actions:

a. Explore the creation of a local policy on dereliction. Work with local government to achieve the aims of the policy.

b. Tie this policy to local commercial business rates and fines where possible and ensure all business owners are advised of potential policies.

Issue Identified: Citizen engagement

Policy:

Shoppers like to get 'weekend experience' and 'weekday convenience' from their towns. Keep these phrases in mind for any planned developments, public realm works and when promoting community activities.

Actions:

a. Create a year-round programme of activities in the centre of town for residents and visitors. Connect to existing activities, festivals etc, but create new ones where gaps exist.

b. Set up a 'My Kells' database of contact details.

c. Bulk text and send ezine with notifications of great things to do at the weekend.

d. Look out for opportunities to create an 'English Market' or Limerick 'Milk Market'. Larger buildings which are currently derelict could be repurposed to support the start-up of smaller businesses in town, especially those focused on food and craft. This diversifies the retail offering for shoppers. Shoppers are interested in innovation, not just classical or traditional shop presentations.

e. In marketing to your community, work with your strengths!

Issue Identified: Better street presentation

Policy:

The overall presentation of the street will contribute to the 'weekend experience' that shoppers desire. Well-presented streets will encourage shoppers to relax, stroll and generally spend more time in the centre of town, which is good for retail.

Actions:

As part of any proposed public realm strategy:

a. Create tree-lined streets.

b. Introduce way-finding signage (especially useful for the out-of-town shopper). It is currently unclear where the centre of town is.

c. Invest in street furniture, creating pockets of recreational space in the middle of the shopping area (Figure 3.1).

d. Ensure better standards of street paving which are both attractive and accessible. Where possible, natural stone should be used.

Figure 3.1 **Seating on Main Street, Clonakilty**

(Source: The Heritage Council, 2016)

4.0 Working with the arts

Mentor: Cornelia McCarthy, Independent Arts and Festivals Professional
Author: Mary McCarthy

Issue Identified: Create a branded art trail; Colmcille's Quill

Policy:

There is a line of venues and points of interest between the monastic sites around St Columba's Church and Kells Courthouse (Figure 4.1). This can be extended in the shape of a quill. This concept can reinforce the image of Kells as a town of high artistic and heritage value. It also supports the concept of Kells as the home of type.

Actions:

a. Commission an artist's rendering of the Kells map, incorporating all artistic venues, as the 'Quill of Colmcille'.

b. The spine is not inclusive of everything in Kells, but can build on what is already working.

c. This could be accompanied by a series of self-guided walking trails of varying lengths, 30 minutes up to 4 hours.

d. The feathers of the quill could lead to a circle of artistic venues around the central spine.

e. The quill would integrate the historic core of the town. This will attract visitors and boost tourism.

f. The quill would also inform public realm works and create spaces for the whole community to enjoy.

Figure 4.1 **St Columba's Church**

(Source: Fáilte Ireland, 2014)

Issue Identified: Share the story of Kells as the home of type

Policy:

Kells is a rich canvas for artists to work in and to share their work in. This is based on a heritage of over eleven centuries of connection to art through the Book of Kells. Recently, the Kells TypeTrail has been reconnecting to this heritage and there is potential to grow this into more permanent activities and thus attracting more visitors.

Actions:

a. A plan needs to be made to make the TypeTrail permanent. The plan should include; funding, maintenance, administrative support and heritage interpretation. It is envisaged that the trail could be made permanent with very little resources. Type is a modern artform that is nationally and internationally renowned. This will give a contemporary edge to the connection with the Book of Kells.

b. Bigger and more ambitious permanent pieces will attract an international audience. Year-round visitors can access the rich heritage and contemporary culture of Kells, making the town a year-round visitor attraction.

c. A permanent TypeTrail will connect to the new print works at the Sawmills Studios and strengthen the connection and image for both locals and visitors.

d. The TypeTrail will encourage a higher standard of signage and shop front design across the whole town.

Issue Identified: Project management

Policy:

Pooling the resources of the current festivals and arts groups will support everyone. A rising tide lifts all boats!

Actions:

a. The volunteer force in Kells is excellent! Keep up that base by looking after the volunteers and giving people opportunities to engage, to contribute and to have access to great events.

b. There is an ambition to enhance all of the existing festivals. This will have a knock-on effect on some of the other actions, including venue actions.

c. Shared administrative support for all festivals and groups would be very useful and help everyone to concentrate on what they do best. Is there a way that shared administrative support could be funded and managed either collectively or with the help of the local authority, Creative Ireland or the Arts Council?

d. The festivals and art groups teams need to work together but to always acknowledge and retain what is unique about each.

Issue Identified: Supporting a community of artists

Policy:

The Kells artistic community would like to create, support and sustain a community of arts and artists in the town. How do we market to artists? How do we attract artists in?

Actions:

a. Create opportunities for young artists who are studying/working in Dublin to either return to Kells, or come to Kells in the first instance and have space to make their work, to experiment, and to be supported.

b. Provide a properly resourced work/creative space for artists – such as the proposed Cultural Hub.

c. Create supportive systems for artists currently living and working in the area. Create a policy of hospitality and generosity to other artists. Create opportunities to make their work visible and to create legacy works for the town.

d. Create an artist's co-op to support each other's work and working conditions.

e. Create sustainable opportunities for local entrepreneurs to engage and support the arts.

f. Be conscious of including the next generation; connect to new technology, invite in artists and performers to attract younger people, and children.

g. Be consciously inclusive of new communities in Kells.

h. Make a town policy for paying artists. Make sure everyone working and volunteering in the arts in Kells understands that artists need to be paid for their professional work.

i. Encourage existing venues to create sustainable working spaces for artists. Could there be an artist's studio support structure, but with the studios spread out across all the venues where there is space?

j. Engage with other initiatives in the town, including food and hospitality, so that the artist community have nice places in the town to go to and work with (which attracts new artists to come live in Kells) and for anyone coming to visit the arts activities and festivals.

k. There is a need for a strong image of Kells as a town with a great arts scene to be communicated to artists from outside the town

Issue Identified: Information

Policy:

Information needs to be made available to the public to increase audience figures at art events, create buy in from the wider community and let people from outside Kells know how special the arts community and arts scene is in the town.

Action:

a. Create an integrated map with the Colmcille's Quill imagery, TypeTrail, venues, exhibition spaces and relevant facilities in the town, such as places to eat.

b. Highlight the number of artists living and working in Kells, and how to find further information, sales of work, etc.

Issue Identified: Making the best use of venues

Policy:
With a number of festivals and arts groups operating in the town, there is a need to make efficient use of venues by pooling resources, sharing insurance costs and maintenance duties.

Actions:

a. Undertake an audit of venues. The audit should answer: what type of venues are available? What is the capacity? What kinds of events can they hold? What facilities are on site? Include contact details and organise the list into small, medium and large. Audit of venues needs to identify appropriate venues for workshops, talks, lectures, music recitals, concerts, small scale theatre pieces, one-man shows, comedy performances, etc. Create an audit of the organisations, festivals and arts groups and the events they hold, so that it's easier to ascertain the venues needed for these events.

b. Undertake an audit of technical equipment in the town; who owns it, where it is stored etc and create a lending policy between groups. At the Solve Our Own Problems event, there was a 'flying technical crew'. Could Kells have an exchange system for supporting each other with mobile tech equipment and technicians?

c. Create a checklist for potential venues and the needs of the groups for the events they hold.

d. Make these audits available to all the arts groups so that everyone is clear of the events being organised and how to support each other.

e. Calculate costs (e.g. insurance costs) for using and running each venue and determine how to spread these out between all who use them. This would enable certain venues to be open all year.

f. Nominate one point of contact for all the venues. This person would have a schedule to make sure that there are no double bookings or overlap.

g. Advertise the opportunities available at the various venues.

Actions per venue: Vincent de Paul

a. Already in very active use but the stranger to the town might not find the venue easily. Create better signposting and external lighting. Signage should be in keeping with the TypeTrail and Meath County Council's Shopfront Guidelines.

b. Address the entrance space which needs a revamp.

c. Facilities for food and drink would keep people there.

Actions per venue: Old Convent Churches

a. During the Solve Our Own Problems event, owner Jackie O'Connell gave a tour of the building. The Courtyard could be used by local groups.

c. Brainstorming session needed on how to effectively use the building for the community's art requirements. Visit Fennelly's in Callan, Co. Kilkenny for inspiration.

Actions per venue: Headfort Place Tourist Office

a. The tourist office is in a council building but there is no signage or waymarking. This needs signage, street furniture and flag poles. This should be in keeping with the TypeTrail and Meath County Council Shopfront and Signage Guidelines document.

Actions per venue: Kells Courthouse

a. Is it a heritage space or an arts space? It needs a shared identity with distinct uses.

b. Through Ireland's Ancient East branding and support, it will need to service the visitor.

c. There is a proposal to also host a creative/cultural hub – and there are some rooms available in the plans that could become this. A survey is needed to determine the works needed.

d. The creative/cultural hub could include artist studios – short and long term, writers studio/ work place, and shared office space for the three main festivals.

e. It needs a flexible exhibition space for professional artists and curated shows of local, national and international significance and a distinct exhibition space for local community and amateur artists and arts groups.

f. Proposal for spaces for exhibition and art/craft sales at the creative hub – small batch work.

g. Inspiration includes Creative Spark in Dundalk. Suggestion to meet Sarah Daly from Creative Spark for ideas and maybe to mentor.

h. Guth Gafa could use a permanent studio in the upstairs and be an anchor tenant, but also make their space available for temporary use by other groups.

i. It needs to provide a venue for workshops, talks, lectures, music recitals, concerts, small scale theatre pieces, one-man shows, comedy performances, etc.

Actions for venue: Future venue needs

a. There is an identified need for properly resourced creative work, exhibition and performance space. The upstairs at the Courthouse Cultural Hub proposals would go some way to addressing this need.

b. A space with flexible exhibition spaces as well as education spaces for workshops, to make things and get hands dirty!

c. Hinterland finds that some venues in the town are too big and some are too small so there is a definite need for a medium size venue. The Old Convent churches could be a solution.

d. Meath needs a county museum – why not in Kells?

e. Kells needs a new indoor community venue for sporting events and social activities.

5.0 Greening the public realm

Mentor: Margaret Egan, Áit Urbanism + Landscape
Author: Kate Flood

Issue Identified: General cluttered feel

Policy:

Signage needs to be consistent throughout the town. There is a lot of temporary signage coming into the town which feels very cluttered. There are even signs blocking signs! There are also bollards, old petrol pumps and billboards creating clutter.

Actions:

a. Signage needs to be simplified throughout the town and be consistent in design. Create a signage section in any proposed public realm strategy. Look to Westport for inspiration on signage policy.

b. At 'Colmcille's House' signage is too high up and has condensation. Shows need for interpretation plan to be created for town and implemented. As part of any town heritage interpretation plan an existing interpretation audit will take place. The interpretation plan may be part of a future public realm strategy.

c. Remove unused petrol pumps and replace, if appropriate, with street furniture.

Issue Identified: Masterplan – overall vision for integrated approach

Policy:

The existing biodiversity plan needs to be fully implemented. The biodiversity plan should be complemented by a public realm stategy to bring together the biodiversity plan and the desire for pleasant spaces within the town. The town's architectural heritage should be highlighted and enhanced. The interpretation of the Kells' heritage should be a core part of the stategy. As part of the review of the County Development Plan 2013–2019, Meath County Council intends to put forward an objective to prepare a public realm strategy for Kells.

Actions:

a. Key spaces in the plan should be Courthouse/High Cross; Triangle of Headfort Hotel/Church/ Credit Union; and Cultural/Historic Quarter (historic core of streets up to the monastic site).

b. Outside the Courthouse needs to be enhanced and the Cross needs attention in its upkeep. It looks unkempt and needs to be preserved with the use of guidance from a conservation plan.

c. Public lighting needs to be consistent throughout the town. It should be sustainable and environmentally friendly. Certain buildings of high architectural quality may have bespoke external lighting schemes that subtlety highlight their key features.

d. At the 'Triangle' there is a big space for car parking but it could also be multi-functional. Could it be the location of a farmer's market?

e. There are too many bollards outside Headfort Arms Hotel which needs to be reduced.

f. Outside the Bank of Ireland is a key space for vistas through the town. This area needs to be enhanced with green infrastructure, street furniture and a space to gather.

g. Undertake an inclusive accessibility audit throughout the town. This will include repair of paths and consistent paving. Accessibility for all! Seek advice from diverse groups, e.g. Age Friendly Meath.

h. Need to extend shop-front scheme on John's St. across the town so there are consistent heritage quality street facades where appropriate. This could include; Back St./Kenlis Place, Farrell St., Castle/Cross St. junction and Church Lane. Make sure to follow the Meath County Council Shopfront and Signage Guidelines document.

i. Introduce an appropriate façade palette guidelines book to ensure consistency. Seek advice from Architectural Conservation Officer, Meath County Council.

j. A strong preference to keeping new development in the historic core of the town, reusing older and derelict buildings and the 'backlands'.

Issue Identified: Make way for people!

Policy:

Kells has several very wide streets, and a low ratio of green infrastructure in the historic core of the town. There has been a high priority for carparking and traffic which needs to be addressed, as it is disproportionate. The wide streets could be an opportunity, to carefully reverse the ratio of cars to people and bicycles (Figure 5.1).

Actions:

a. Tree pits are sometimes in the way of pedestrians. The trees need to be moved to the edge.

b. Widen paths and make room for pedestrians on the street.

c. Use wide streets to create a cycle friendly town. Introduce cycling lanes and bike parking.

d. Bit by bit, move car parking off the street, to behind the historic core.

e. Create green spaces in the centre of town; pocket parks, recreational areas, biodiversity favourable habitat, community growers.

f. Develop a maintenance plan for green spaces and upkeep of outdoor sculptures.

g. Introduce street furniture and spaces for people to gather in the town.

h. Potential for a Lloyd-Blackwater Riverwalk.

i. Potential for Community Support Agriculture scheme (CSA) or eco-village at backlands. Visit Cloughjordan eco-village for inspiration.

Figure 5.1 **One of the wide streets of Kells Town Centre**

(Source: The Heritage Council, 2017)

Issue Identified: Make the most of the outer ring road and approach roads

Policy:

Kells has been bypassed for a number of years, but the ring road does not eliminate all unnecessary traffic in the centre of town. It is also being used by pedestrians despite a lack of pedestrian facilities.

Actions:

a. Create green pedestrian infrastructure for schools, and introduce school buses to alleviate traffic in the town. Look to Westport and Kilmallock for inspiration (Figure 5.2).

b. The outer approaches have lovely hedgerows and green spaces, with a group dedicated to maintaining. Can this be extended into the town to encourage pedestrians to walk in the town instead?

c. Extend mature tree planting closer to the town, echoing the trees on the approach roads.

d. Roundabouts and verges could be replanted with indigenous wildflowers to set the tone for the town on the approach.

Figure 5.2 **The two town wall linear parks in Kilmallock provide safe pedestrian access to the primary and secondary schools. Wildflower meadows are allowed to develop.**

(Source: The Heritage Council, 2019)

6.0 Traffic management and parking

Mentor: Jason Taylor, Town Planner and Urban Designer
Author: Liam Mannix

Issue Identified: Better parking management/enforcement

Policy:

There are a lot of parking facilities in Kells, but the off-street parking is not being used. There is kerb mounting and parking on paths, and a low turnover rate of on-street parking. There is a lack of loading facilities for businesses.

Actions:

a. Introduce enhanced short stay on-street parking which will encourage shoppers.

b. Many business owners and employees are parking in front of their own businesses. Encourage property owners, business owners and employees to use off-street long stay parking with preferential rates. Share information about year-long parking rates that are already in place.

c. Introduce more loading facilities outside businesses.

d. Create better signage for parking and erect electronic parking signs noting number of available spaces.

e. Parking should be utilised to slow down traffic in the centre of town but not to slow down pedestrian footfall.

f. Create long stay and short stay options in the off-street car parks. All day, low cost or free parking should be provided on periphery of town core.

g. Ensure there is adequate parking specifically for the elderly.

Issue Identified: More off-street parking and better use of the streets

Policy:

There is much potential for further off-street parking at the St Colmcille's Church, the backlands and edge of town. This will enable streets to be better utilised for public domain improvements.

Actions:

a. Bring business onto the street (e.g. outdoor seating, display areas) (Figure 6.1).

b. Create more space for pedestrians with wider footpaths.

c. Create cycle lanes in the centre of town and connected to the outer ring road.

d. Headfort Place has a good car to public space ratio. Use this rational for addressing other streets.

e. Take a street by street approach, not a 'one-size fits all' policy across the town. For example, at Cross St., introduce one-way traffic with some on-street car parking. At Farrell St, lose every sixth and seventh space for trees and seating.

f. Investigate possibility of using the large car park at St Colmcille's Church for general parking. This could be a strong revenue creator for the parish.

g. Identify possible backland areas which would be suitable for parking.

Figure 6.1 **Businesses now using previous parking areas in Clonakilty**

(Source: The Heritage Council)

Issue Identified: Public realm improvements

Policy:

Public realm improvements have a direct impact on traffic calming and the use of public space. These prioritise pedestrians over cars. The care/reuse of heritage is a strong ally of people centred place management and enhancing the character of Kells. There needs to be a strong rational for creating on-street parking, while narrow footpaths should be widened, where possible.

Actions:

a. Kells needs to promote a strong identity. Utilise the town's unique heritage and built fabric as inspiration for public realm works (Figures 6.2, 6.3 & 6.4).

b. Widen footpaths and create walking trails through and around the historic core of the town.

c. Create a positive sense of arrival at main entry points to the town. This may involve public art, surface changes and landscaping.

d. Create visual connections to St Columba's Church and the Round Tower.

e. Ensure there is a high quality public realm all the way up Market Street.

f. Generally, there is a need to make Kells more pedestrian friendly. Create public spaces, spaces to sit, cycle lanes and facilities, and public art.

g. Develop pocket playgrounds in the core to encourage usage by families of the town centre (Figure 6.5).

h. Encourage public transport. Currently, the bus stop has broken glass. This takes away from its Georgian location. Better bus stop maintenance is needed. Investigate the possibility of moving bus stop location away from such a place of high architectural quality to elsewhere in the town core.

i. Promote greater awareness by locals and prospective visitors of the various public transport options to and from Kells (e.g. Bus Éireann, Local Link). Work to develop bus linkages with hinterland.

j. There is a need for a working taxi-rank to support the night time economy as well as in facilitating visitors, shoppers and residents in and out of the town.

Figure 6.2 **Location of Roman city wall gates marked in Carlisle, UK**

(Source: The Heritage Council, 2012)

Figure 6.3 **Inlay paving showing outline of Viking House beside Christchurch Cathedral, Dublin**

(Source: The Heritage Council, 2014)

Figure 6.4 **Artwork commemorating 14th century writer Geoffrey Chaucer in London, UK**

(Source: The Heritage Council, 2011)

Figure 6.5 **City Centre located playground, Bilbao, Spain**

(Source: The Heritage Council, 2012)

Issue Identified: Traffic calming

Policy:

Despite the HGV ban and the development of the ring road, it is still dangerous to cross several key streets. There are also an unknown number of people avoiding the toll by driving through the town. Most congestion is related to the school run and rush hour. The traffic is very fast moving and this is of no real benefit to the town. There is a need to calm traffic so as to improve the culture of walking and cycling to school and work.

Actions:

a. Look again at the one-way street proposals. Last time they were introduced very quickly, but could look to other towns such as Clonakilty and introduce the one-way system with a package of works including improved path widths, paved surfaces, traffic calming and parking, and loading bays.

b. Surface changes should be made to encourage a 'shared space' feel which will directly impact on car speed. Surface treatments should also consider noise control.

c. Create pinch points and narrow carriageways throughout the town.

d. Create more pedestrian crossings and relocate where needed the existing ones so that they follow desire lines of pedestrians.

e. Build on successful schemes such as at Headfort Place.

f. Create more cycling facilities – e.g. loop the Blackwater cycle route which would be especially useful for easing school traffic.

Issue Identified: Tighten junctions

Policy:

There are several junctions which don't make sense in terms of traffic management or calming. Some junctions are large with corner radii that encourage fast speeds and dangerous driving. There is a lack of pedestrian crossings, or they are poorly located (Figure 6.6).

Actions:

a. Public realm and traffic management plan needs to be created to reimagine junctions and crossings.

b. Reduce radii of junctions, use excess space for public realm improvements.

c. The Navan Rd. is still very broad at Headfort Place, despite a good car to public space ratio. This street could be narrowed and space used for pedestrians.

d. Kenlis Place/Headfort Place should be made into T-junctions. Corner bulges onto the statue could be made into a nice public space.

e. At Bective/Farrell St. there are inadequate or absent pedestrian crossings. Remove parking at the broader square and introduce more pedestrian friendly facilities.

f. Introduce 15 minute free parking marking at the Post Office.

g. The Supervalu junction needs particular attention. Tighten the junction and introduce shared space to make it safer for pedestrians.

Figure 6.6 **Fast flowing traffic in the middle of the town makes it difficult for pedestrians to cross**

(Source: The Heritage Council, 2017)

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IRISH
WALLED
TOWNS
NETWORK
An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council

Kells Local Heroes
KLH
Working together for Kells

comhairle chontae na mi
meath county council