

BALLINASLOE

Town Benchmarking Action Plan



**TOGETHER
WE'RE
BETTER**

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CHANGING PERCEPTIONS, BUILDING ON STRENGTHS

Residents, businesses and visitors to Ballinasloe want to feel better about the town and its future prospects and how it serves the wider area. In an online survey of local people conducted in summer 2014, only 18% of respondents had confidence that the town had a bright future. That's not good enough for our town!

This action plan is about building on the town's many strengths, changing these perceptions and bringing about measurable improvements in the town centre economy and its wider social value.

WHO IS INVOLVED?

The action plan is led and coordinated by Ballinasloe Town Team which is a partnership of local people and groups coordinated by BACD (Ballinasloe Area Community Development Ltd) and supported by Galway County Council and Ballinasloe Credit Union. We want involvement and influence to extend well beyond these core partners by working on projects that pull people together and communicating local knowledge to help shape wider strategies.

We are guided in this work by experienced input from the People and Places Partnership Ltd. They have a good knowledge of the 'how and what' that will work well for us.

BALLINASLOE TOWN TEAM SHARED MISSION

As the Town Team we have a comprehensive mission statement that we'd like to share with other groups to keep us all focused and provide clarity about what we are seeking to do and how.

"Our vision is to revitalize the town and its hinterland, enabling it to achieve its true potential, by creating awareness of all the positive assets we currently have in the townland and identifying new initiatives that will enhance and expand on what we already have.

To encourage positive suggestions and interaction from all local sporting, cultural, voluntary, agricultural, educational and retail groups, along with local, regional and national agencies by progressing ideas and actions together and working in co-operation with one another.

We will prioritise attainable objectives that will rejuvenate our town and help it achieve its true potential, making Ballinasloe a better place in which we live and rear our children - and foster a friendly competitive sustainable town to do business in and visit"

WHO ARE WE AS A TOWN? WHAT IS OUR MARKET?

We are still grappling with what is the (emerging) brand/identity of the town and who it should be pitched at. We need to respect but move on from the image captured in the benchmarking survey responses. The existing town centre users summed-up Ballinasloe by the words local (56%), friendly (51%), quiet (44%) and accessible (34%). In particular, we maybe need to challenge the perception that it is quiet!

The current emerging identities markets for the town and our work are:

- A livelier and surprising local town that draws in people to socialise and spend more often, including distinctive comparison retail offer. **Year 1 priority.**
- An activity town - ready to achieve now if activities are organised as market has cash but is less discerning for food and drink. **Year 1-3 priority.**
- A heritage town - dependent on town and building enhancements, more heritage attractions open in town and surrounding area and greater variety of higher quality hospitality. Distinctive comparison retail part of offer too. **Year 3-5 priority.**

We believe that our immediate priority is to make Ballinasloe into a "good local town" again including widening its appeal to families and young people - the town's future customers who are readily drawn elsewhere. This involves improving the town centre experience, retail offer, local services and events. Our belief is that if we get this right, the benefits in terms of spend, jobs and wider wellbeing will follow.

WHAT'S INNOVATIVE ABOUT THIS APPROACH?

We believe that there are several aspects of the approach that we are taking here that are innovative and increase the chances of success:

- **Evidence-based:** Our work isn't just based on perceptions or pet projects. We have invested in gathering evidence about the issues that matter to businesses and town users along with facts about current performance. Our projects are designed to address these issues.
- **Coordinated partners:** We believe we are part of a genuine commitment for different individuals and organisations to pull together for the common good of the town. A big part of our role in this is to help capture inspirational ideas, bring together the right blend of groups to deliver project success and to generate clear communications about the changing fortunes of the town and its wider appeal. This is made easier by the enthusiasm of local people.
- **Integrated actions:** There is a great deal of talent and expertise already active in running successful businesses and services in the town. There is a lot already happening. We want to add to this by ensuring all identified needs are addressed and increase the cross-over of benefits between initiatives.
- **Measurable monitoring and change:** We will continue to review the performance of the town and wider perceptions to monitor the impact that we are having, what is working and what could be done differently. We know the major changes will need to come over the long-term and we don't expect to get everything right first time. We will though be able to monitor and review when we get it right.
- **Transferable techniques:** This approach seeks to pilot and extend the application of established benchmarking and action planning process managed by People and Places. Not only is Ballinasloe the first town in Ireland to adopt the process but in addition the survey work and delivery is being extended to take account of the wider economic and social value of the town.

TAKING A TWO-SPEED APPROACH

We understand that turning around the fortunes of a town is a long term job that requires vision, tenacity, coordination and consistency. We also know that people need to be inspired by early successes that capture the imagination. That is why our action plan is divided into both short term goals or 'quick wins' and long-term ambitions. It also recognises the importance of both local delivery and strategic influence. In its extremes this two-speed approach might be symbolised by a breathtaking tree as the showpiece for the town's 2015 Christmas and enterprising ideas recognised in Galway County Local Economy and Community Development Plan.

WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

As a single image, success will be symbolised by busier streets on a mid-week morning. Behind this image, we have a suite of key performance indicators (KPIs) that we will measure to see how the town centre's performance is improving.

These include:

- Footfall at different times,
- Business vacancy rates,
- Business confidence
- Public perceptions.

We are able to compare these over time and with other towns to gauge our relative progress. We will also build feedback and monitoring in to the roll-out of all projects. Where we get it right we will be quick to celebrate success with our many partners. Where progress seems unnecessarily slow, we can review our approach. In all this we will be honest and open with our partners and stakeholders so that we can all learn together and improve.



Our Rolling Five - Year Action Plan

FIRST THOUGHTS ON ISSUES	SHORT TERM GOALS	LONG-TERM AMBITION
<p>RETAIL AND BUSINESS MIX Local awareness: Progress most likely to be achieved by promotion and cross-marketing of existing businesses. Potential for some gaps in provision to be met by new, independent retailers providing children's clothes for example. There was also a modest call for new cafes/restaurants. Pop-up-shops could be used to test market. Any new multiples should be accommodated within or close to town centre.</p> <p>Wider appeal: Quick win achievable through cross-marketing between existing specialist, comparison retailers and promoting suitable cafes/restaurant and pubs.</p>	<p>Ballinasloe Business Network involving young business people and as basis for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective marketing • Involvement in other ventures • Customer services/window dressing training linked to Christmas illuminations and other events. 	<p>Attracting <i>new businesses</i> through awareness of customer base, demand, refurbished premises and availability.</p> <p>Purchase and restoration of derelict building as family cafe and creative arts centre run as <i>community enterprise</i>.</p>
<p>PARKING Local need: Improve the perception that parking is a negative issue relative to seemingly positive reality. Likely to involve better matching of parking provision with customer needs including potential cost-neutral -promotions such as suggested 'second hour free' or cash-back promotions with local retailers. Potentially provides an opportunity for 'quick win' and boost in civic confidence.</p> <p>Wider appeal: Clear signage and orientation to meet visitors' requirements.</p>	<p>Signage proposals agreed in outline with GCC and now need plans with 'visitors' eye view'.</p> <p>Orientation boards and visitor welcome as first stage in wider identity and branding of town.</p>	<p>Potential for high tech <i>parking discount pilot</i> that could work cross-county.</p>
<p>APPEARANCE Local pride: Develop cost-effective approach to improving the attractiveness of the streetscene through a two-year enhancement programme assisting with cosmetic improvements to shopfronts such as repainting and window dressing including month-long themes such as Christmas advent calendar or Hallowe'en scenes. This can link in to wider involvement and understanding of proposed town enhancement scheme.</p> <p>Wider appeal: Can link to marketing and promotion at different times of year plus increase likelihood to linger or return more frequently.</p>	<p>Artwork created in sample of empty shops.</p> <p>Pilot <i>shopfront improvement</i> scheme to tie in with streetscape enhancements and train/upskill unemployed workers.</p>	<p>GCC-led <i>Town Enhancement Scheme</i> closely coordinated with local businesses.</p> <p>Ongoing <i>shopfront improvement</i> scheme to tie in with streetscape enhancements.</p> <p>Add new business categories to 'People of the Year Awards'.</p>
<p>CULTURAL FACILITIES AND SERVICES Local involvement: Approach needed to build on forthcoming Benchmarking+ report as part of wider use of town to increase frequency of visits and dwell times. There is great potential to link to great opportunities including community cinema, multi-purpose library, marina, sports pitches and existing greenspace.</p> <p>Wider appeal: Promotion can increase dwell times.</p>	<p>Opportunity to boost new cinema attendance and links to businesses through improved facilities, promotion and cross-marketing with local businesses.</p> <p>Pilot use of existing sports facilities as part of Sports Hub proposal.</p> <p>Research potential fit-out and use of community rooms in Library aimed at local or visitor market.</p> <p>Register and coordinated proposals for improving community assets to meet needs of target markets.</p>	<p>Potential refurbishment and use of <i>Emerald Ballroom</i> and old library as part of town heritage quarter.</p> <p>Roll-out of Sports Hub proposals to establish Ballinasloe as Ireland's activity town.</p> <p>Enhancement of sports facilities as part of <i>Sports Hub</i> proposal.</p>

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<p>ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS Local enjoyment: Track record in organising events and the town's strong sporting traditions provides opportunity to boost civic pride, appeal and footfall through events targeted at infrequent, local users and timed/located to boost spend in town centre businesses.</p> <p>Wider appeal: Adds to interest and may prompt new comparison shopping visits.</p>	<p><i>Hallowe'en Zombie Walk</i> linking to town businesses.</p> <p>Christmas festivities, tree and window dressing trail/training.</p> <p>People of the Year Awards.</p> <p>Feasibility work on new events and enhanced existing events targeted at quiet times and new visitors.</p>	<p>Annual "<i>Ballinasloe Days Out</i>" programme with new and existing events targeted at potential visitors.</p> <p>Branding and identity as Ireland's outdoor activity and sporting capital.</p>
<p>MARKETING AND PROMOTION Local awareness: Ballinasloe Life, the new town web site and active use of social media, provide great opportunities to raise awareness of existing and new businesses, services and activities. There is a need to begin to reverse local pessimism about the town's future fortunes. Collective branding could help link all these activities and create higher levels of optimism in the town.</p> <p>Wider appeal: Opportunity to link collective marketing of quality, independent businesses with the town as an enhanced destination as local improvements have an impact.</p>	<p>Interactive town web site launched and ongoing development.</p> <p>Business Network directory targeted at local people incl. hinterland.</p> <p>Development and promotion as a Sports Hub for adult and juvenile teams from across Ireland.</p>	<p>Ballinasloe branding and identity targeting markets such as families and activity breaks.</p>
<p>PLANNING AND STRATEGY Local engagement: It is vital to monitor and engage with local planning strategy such as the forthcoming Galway County Local Economy and Community Development Plan. This should be a specialist role within the Town Team and cut across other themes.</p> <p>Wider appeal: Engagement in planning strategy should show a good awareness of the role of Ballinasloe in relation to other towns.</p>	<p>Influencing <i>Galway County LE&CDP</i> to serve as <i>rural enterprise hub pilot</i>.</p>	<p>Clear role and development plan for town within wider Galway.</p>



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