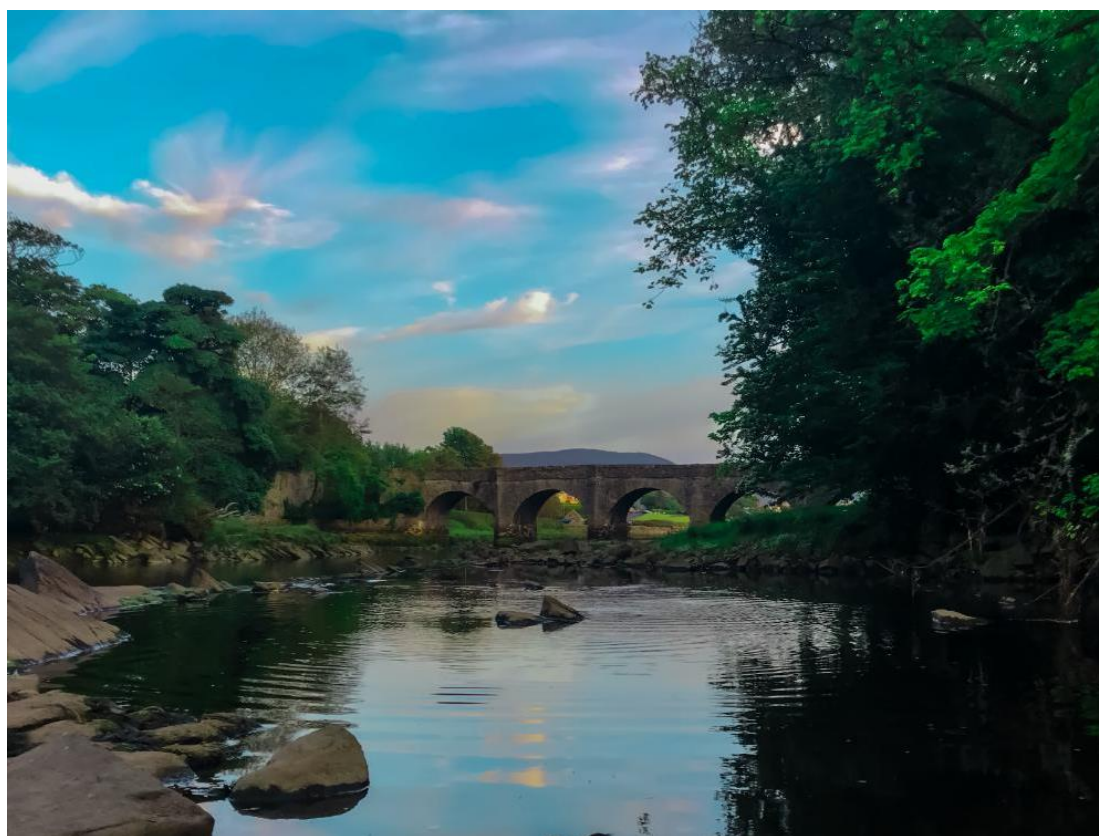




**Comhairle Contae  
Dhún na nGall**  
Donegal County Council

## **Strategic Strengths and Future Strategic Direction of Buncrana, County Donegal**



**A Donegal County Council Commissioned Study**

**August 2020**

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# Table of Contents

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1.1 Purpose of this Report .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1.2 The North West City Region: Positioning Buncrana.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1.3 Report Methodology.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.4 This Report.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: BUNCRANA - THROUGH THE LENS OF POLICY ANALYSIS AND LITERATURE REVIEW ....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2.1 Overcoming Peripherality and Maximising Potential .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2.2 City Regions: Strengthening Functional Relations .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>2.3 Adopting a Place-Based Approach to Development.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>2.4 Promoting Resilience and Vibrancy.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>2.5 Harnessing the Local Geography – Place-based Development in Coastal Towns.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>2.6 The Policy Context – Supranational Influences and Frameworks .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>2.7 National and Regional Policy .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>2.8 County and Sub-County Policies, Plans and Initiatives .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>2.9 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3: UNDERSTANDING BUNCRANA - SETTING THE BASELINE .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>3.1 Population Change .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>3.2 Age Profile .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>3.3 Diversity.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>3.4 Household Composition.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>3.5 Fuel Consumption .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>3.6 Composition of the Labour Force and Occupations.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>3.7 Modes of Travel to Work .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>3.8 Conclusion.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4: BUNCRANA – PLACE STANDARD PERCEPTIONS.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>4.1 Perceptions of Local Stakeholders.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>4.1.1 Change over Time.....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>4.1.2 Cluster Analysis .....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>4.2 Business Community Perspectives .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>4.3 Perceptions of the Buncrana Diaspora .....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5: BUNCRANA - A TOWN IN TRANSITION.....</b>	<b>52</b>

5.1	Mobility and Accessibility .....	54
5.1.1	<i>Current Situation/the baseline</i> .....	55
5.1.2	<i>Current Issues - including opportunities and challenges</i> .....	59
5.1.3	<i>Stakeholder Perspectives</i> .....	60
5.1.4	<i>The Potential</i> .....	63
5.2	Economy .....	67
5.2.1	<i>Current Situation/the Baseline</i> .....	69
5.2.2	<i>Current Issues – including opportunities and challenges</i> .....	72
5.2.3	<i>Stakeholder Perspectives</i> .....	73
5.2.4	<i>The Potential</i> .....	77
5.3	Community Well-being .....	83
5.3.1	<i>Current Situation/the Baseline</i> .....	83
5.3.2	<i>Current Issues - including opportunities and challenges</i> .....	84
5.3.3	<i>Stakeholder Perspectives</i> .....	85
5.3.4	<i>The Potential</i> .....	89
5.4	Environment .....	92
5.4.1	<i>Current Situation/the Baseline</i> .....	92
5.4.2	<i>Current Issues - including opportunities and challenges</i> .....	99
5.4.3	<i>Stakeholder Perspectives</i> .....	100
5.4.4	<i>The Potential</i> .....	102
5.5	Governance (Community Engagement and Participation) .....	104
5.5.1	<i>Current Situation/the Baseline</i> .....	104
5.5.2	<i>Current Issues - including opportunities and challenges</i> .....	105
5.5.3	<i>Stakeholder Perspectives</i> .....	106
5.5.4	<i>The Potential</i> .....	109
CHAPTER 6:	A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS .....	111
6.1	CASE 1: YOUGHAL, Co. Cork.....	111
6.1.1	<i>A historic town: cycles of growth and decline</i> .....	111
6.1.2	<i>Heritage: the emergence of a new industry</i> .....	112
6.1.3	<i>Contemporary Plan: staying on the heritage path</i> .....	116
6.1.4	<i>Future Visions and Projects</i> .....	117
6.1.5	<i>Remaining Challenges</i> .....	117
6.2	CASE 2: NEWCASTLE, Co. Down .....	117
6.2.1	<i>A Victorian Resort</i> .....	117
6.2.2	<i>Enhancing Newcastle’s Public Realm</i> .....	118
6.2.3	<i>The Role of Public Art and Culture</i> .....	120

6.2.4 Seaside Sculptures .....	123
6.2.5 Future Visions for Newcastle .....	123
6.2.6 Remaining Challenges .....	124
6.3 Key Lessons .....	124
CHAPTER 7: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS .....	126
7.1 Place Standard Priorities - Integrated Town Development .....	128
7.2 Key Spatial Recommendations .....	129
7.2.1 A Transition Town .....	129
7.2.2 Maritime / Marine .....	130
7.2.3 Connectivity .....	131
7.2.4 Green Corridor .....	133
7.2.5 Tourism & Heritage .....	133
7.2.6 Living Lab for Increased Building Standards .....	136
7.3 Engagement with the Community .....	136
CHAPTER 8: CONSIDERATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS .....	138
REFERENCES .....	145
APPENDIX 1: THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT .....	150
APPENDIX 2: THE PLACE STANDARD .....	152
A2.1 The Place Standard in Buncrana .....	153
APPENDIX 3: LISTING OF SUPPORT DOCUMENTS .....	155
APPENDIX 4: THE PLACE STANDARD - DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES ACROSS ALL INDICATORS...	156
ENDNOTES .....	158

## LIST OF FIGURES

	<b>Page</b>
Figure 1.1: The North West City Region	9
Figure 2.1: The UN Sustainable Development Goals	18
Figure 2.2: The Principles of Place-Making, Smart Growth and Healthy Places	24
Figure 3.1: Buncrana's resident population 1911 to 2016	25
Figure 3.2: Inter-censual population change in Buncrana 1911 to 2016	26
Figure 3.3: Relative population change 1911 to 2016 in Buncrana and comparative geographies	27
Figure 3.4: Percentage population change for selected periods since 1966	27
Figure 3.5: Total resident population in Inishowen (including Buncrana) and Buncrana's population as a percentage of Inishowen	28
Figure 3.6: Population in Buncrana's town core and suburbs (absolute numbers), 1911 to 2016	29
Figure 3.7: Percentage of the total Buncrana population residing in the town's constituent EDs, 1911 to 2016	29
Figure. 3.8: Percentage of the Population by age cohort, 2016	30
Figure 3.9: Population by place of birth, 2016	31
Figure 3.10: Percentage of the population born in Northern Ireland, 2011	32
Figure 3.11: Population by nationality, 2016	32
Figure 3.12: Percentage of families by family stage, 2016	33
Figure 3.13: Percentage of dwellings by period of construction	34
Figure 3.14: Main sources of home heating, 2016	35
Figure 3.15: Composition of the labour force, 2016	36
Figure 3.16: Sectoral composition of the workforce, 2016	37
Figure 3.17: Sectoral composition of the workforce, 2016 (Buncrana) and 1996	38
Figure 3.18: Modes of travel to work, 2016	39



Figure 4.1: Gender of Respondents	40
Figure 4.2: Age Cohorts of Survey Respondents	40
Figure 4.3: How survey respondents describe themselves	41
Figure 4.4: Mean values on the Place Standard, as recorded in Buncrana, spring 2020	42
Figure 4.5: Mean values on the Place Standard, in descending order, as recorded in Buncrana, spring 2020 (all respondents)	43
Figure 4.6: Mean values, by age cohort (under / over 18) on the Place Standard, as recorded in Buncrana, spring 2020	43
Figure 4.7: Perceived changes, over five years, on each dimension of the Place Standard in Buncrana	45
Figure 4.8: Mean scores awarded on the Place Standard – based on ICRD cluster analysis	46
Figure 4.9: Mean scores awarded on the Place Standard – business community responses, June 2020	47
Figure 4.10: Business community perspectives of change over the past five years	48
Figure 4.11: Mean values on the Place Standard, as recorded in Buncrana, by members of the diaspora and local residents, spring 2020	49
Figure 4.12: Perceived changes, over five years, on each dimension of the Place Standard in Buncrana – as rated by members of the diaspora	50
Figure 5.1.1: The Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway	55
Figure 5.1.2: Locations of car parks in Buncrana Town Centre	57
Figure 5.2.1: Fáilte Ireland’s Classification of Tourists	76
Figure 5.2.2 Components of a 20-minute neighbourhood	82
Figure 5.4.1: Buncrana Town Section of the proposed North-West Greenway Network	94
Figure 5.4.2: Buncrana and Westport – respective scores in the 2019 National Tidy Towns Competition	95
Figure 5.4.3: Water Quality in Buncrana and its environs	96
Figure 5.4.4: Main types of land cover on the Inishowen Peninsula (based on the	

Corine classification).	97
Figure 5.4.5: Land projected to be below annual flood level in 2050	98
Figure 5.4.6: Visualising Buncrana’s Assets	101
Figure 6.1: Comparative Case Study Area in Relation to Buncrana	111
Figure 7.1: Project Kelvin in Ireland	132

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1: Schedule of Focus Groups	12
Table 3.1: Average age of the population in Buncrana, Co. Donegal and Ireland 2011 and 2016	30
Table. 3.2: Religious composition of the resident population, 2016	33
Table 3.3: Percentage of households by type of dwelling, 2016	34
Table 3.4: Profile of inbound and outbound commuters (to and from Buncrana) on selected variables, 2016	38
Table 4.1: Sequencing, based on mean values of the elements on the Place Standard, as assigned by those aged under 18 and those aged 18 and over	44
Table 4.2: Median values on the Place Standard, as recorded in Buncrana, spring 2020	44
Table 4.3: The fourteen dimensions of the Place Standard clustered into five key themes	46
Table 6.1 Summary of Key Strategic Actions Informing Youghal’s Regeneration	114
Table 8.1: Guidance on the implementation of recommendations made the ICLRD	141

## ABBREVIATIONS

ACE	Adverse Childhood Experiences
ASIST	Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CDDP	County Donegal Development Plan 2018-2024
CLLD	Community-Led Local Development
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CTA	Common Travel Area
CYPSC	Children and Young People’s Services Committee
DCC	Donegal County Council
DCCAE	Department for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment
DCSDC	Derry City and Strabane District Council
DSD	Department for Social Development
DSN	Diabetes Specialist Nurse
ED	Electoral Division
EIP	Environmental Improvement Programme
ENRD	European Network for Rural Development
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESDP	European Spatial Development Perspective
ESF	European Social Fund
ETB	Education and Training Board
EU	European Union
FEIs	Further Education Institutes
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GI	Green Infrastructure
GP	General Practitioner
GMIT	Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology
HEIs	Higher Education Institutes
HSE	Health Service Executive

HTI	Historic Towns Initiative
ICLRD	International Centre for Local and Regional Development
ICT	Information Communications Technology
IDP	Inishowen Development Partnership
IT Tralee	Institute of Technology Tralee
LAP	Local Area Plan
LCDC	Local Community Development Committee
LDP	Local Development Plan
LDS	Local Development Strategy
LEADER	Liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale (Links between actions for the development of the rural economy)
LECP	Local Economic and Community Plan
LEO	Local Enterprise Office
LYIT	Letterkenny Institute of Technology
MaREI	Marine and Renewable Energy
MY	Midleton to Youghal
NDP	National Development Plan
NHAs	Natural Heritage Areas
NI	Northern Ireland
NPF	National Planning Framework – also known as <i>Ireland 2040</i>
NSOs	National Strategic Objectives
NSS	National Spatial Strategy
NWCR	North West City Region
NWRA	Northern and Western Regional Assembly
NWRDG	North West Region Development Group
NWSGP	North West Strategic Growth Partnership
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPW	Office of Public Works
ORED	Offshore Renewables Energy Development Plan
POWCAR	Place of Work or College Anonymised Records
POWSCAR	Place of Work, School or College - Census of Anonymised Records

R&D	Research and Development
RAPID	Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development
RDS	Regional Development Strategy
RoI	Republic of Ireland
RPA	Review of Public Administration
RSES	Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy
SA	Small Area
SACs	Special Areas of Conservation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEAI	Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SPCs	Strategic Policy Committees
UCC	University College Cork
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNSDGs	United National Sustainable Development Goals
UU	Ulster University
WAW	Wild Atlantic Way
WHO	World Health Organisation
YSEDG	Youghal Socio-Economic Development Group

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Buncrana is the second-largest town in County Donegal. It is one of four nodes in the North-West City Region (NWCR), along with Derry, Letterkenny and Strabane. Buncrana is of strategic importance to the North West Region and specifically to the Inishowen Peninsula. The town's seaside location, its natural and heritage resources and its proximity to, and connections with, Derry are among its strategic assets. Buncrana is renowned as a holiday destination, and has been welcoming visitors for generations. The town and its environs have a distinctive industrial heritage, but the textile industry, which was once the mainstay of the town's economy, has ceased. The loss of industrial jobs has adversely affected the local economy, and necessitated new approaches to job creation and economic development. Like many towns of its size, Buncrana has had to adjust in the face of the social and economic restructuring of the past decade, and the recent advent of COVID-19 has posed significant challenges for its tourism industry. In mapping out its development trajectory for the coming decades, Buncrana is, through this document, taking stock of its asset base and examining how the town can harness its assets – be they recognised, latent and/or potential. At the same time, stakeholders are cognisant of the challenges, and they recognise the importance of collaboration – working with other places and across all sectors – in promoting place-making.

This scoping document provides a socio-economic and geospatial study of Buncrana. It was commissioned by Donegal County Council (DCC) and undertaken by the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD). **Chapter One** presents the outline terms of reference and the document's scope and structure. This research serves to inform the forthcoming Buncrana Local Area Plan (LAP), which DCC is preparing, and apprise future investment decisions of the Local Authority and other state agencies. In addition, it defines the role of Buncrana in the North West City Region (NWCR) while also considering its status and functionality as a potential growth centre. The range of issues and the depth of analysis presented here provide a whole-of-place stocktake of assets and opportunities, and they set out pointers, principles and recommendations that are relevant to a wide range of stakeholders, including regional and local government, civil society, local development, economic interests, social and community service providers and heritage and environmental groups among many others. Thus, the attainment of the sustainable development trajectory advocated in this report is contingent on stakeholder collaboration – spatially and sectorally – and on the pursuit of integrated approaches.

While Buncrana is a very distinctive place, it shares many features and experiences with other geographies. **Chapter Two** and the accompanying literature and policy review seek to identify lessons and best practices from national and international experiences that may inform Buncrana's strategic development over the coming decades. International literature charts how many towns, cities and regions have recovered from de-industrialisation (the loss of industrial employment) through the application of collaborative, place-based strategies that emphasised the potential of place and which harnessed the strengths and contributions of all spaces, sectors and actors. New approaches to regional development have emerged over recent decades that emphasise the roles and contributions of bottom-up actors, promote partnership approaches to decision making and are governed by a commitment to sustainable development principles. Their application frequently requires policy makers and statutory bodies to make leaps of faith and to engage more systematically with other stakeholders. Inter-agency and cross-sectoral working need to be accompanied by collaboration between places, and in Buncrana's case, this implies deepening collaboration with Derry, the wider NWCR and communities across the Inishowen Peninsula.

City regions are dynamic and strategic engines in driving regional and territorial development, and second-tier cities (those outside of the capital city or main metropolitan zone) have come to play a significant role in lifting regional economies and in providing important counterbalances to primate cities and other dominant nodes. Thus, the assertion and reinvigoration of Buncrana's role in the NWCR will be important for the town's development and that of its wider functional area. The promotion of city-regions is reflective of a place-based approach to development, in which actors work to identify, harness and invest in places' distinctive features, thereby enabling them to develop more sustainably in their own right and to contribute to summative growth.

International literature and experiences from other regions point to the merits of enabling places to be vibrant and resilient. Vibrancy implies being economically diverse, socially inclusive and participatory and environmentally conscious, while resilience refers to places' abilities to withstand and/or avoid shocks or disruptions to development, which, in the current context, include climate change, rising sea levels and the Corona virus. Promoting vibrant and resilient communities and regions entails embracing and applying the principles of sustainable development – ensuring ecological conservation and social inclusion in tandem with economic progress. There are many successful examples of towns, notably small and medium-sized towns that are actively promoting their vibrancy, resilience and sustainability, and the Transition Town Movement, which is reflective of these, offers particular pointers for Buncrana. Across the island of Ireland, many of the most vibrant towns are in coastal locations, and these may well become potential collaborators, with Buncrana, in sharing experiences and undertaking joint initiatives.

Policy frameworks increasingly strive to give effect to the principles and best practices that emerge from international literature and experiences. At the global level, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals represent a set of seventeen overarching principles that are increasingly reflected in EU and national policy frameworks and ought to guide decisions and actions at all tiers. Furthermore, the EU has stipulated that member states devise marine spatial plans, and for coastal communities, such as Buncrana, Ireland's plan is likely to present notable opportunities.

*Project Ireland 2040*, which encompasses the *National Planning Framework (NPF)* and *National Development Plan (NDP)*, commits to enhancing regional competitiveness, social progress and environmental sustainability. It articulates principles and approaches to spatial planning that are reflected in regional and county-level frameworks. These include promoting compact growth and sequential development (from town cores), enabling healthy communities and investing in quality of life. In the context of *Project Ireland 2040*, the State has several sectoral policies, programmes and initiatives that are of direct relevance to Buncrana. These relate, *inter alia*, to the marine sector, offshore energy generation, seafood, climate resilience, green infrastructure and tourism. Ireland's Regional Assemblies have recently published regional, spatial and economic strategies (RSEs) that operationalise the NPF at the regional tier, and offer local authorities frameworks for the formulation and delivery of county and local area plans. The RSE for the Northern and Western Regional Assembly Area dovetails with the NPF with respect to the emphasis on place-making, quality-of-life, well-being and the importance of ameliorating and preventing climate disruption. Its advocacy of compact growth and sustainable communities is reflected in Donegal County Council's county development and local area plans. Planning at all tiers – local area, county, region and State is - increasingly cognisant of sustainability imperatives and of promoting place-making, whereby, as noted earlier, approaches harness distinctive spatial features and enable sets of actors to coalesce to achieve shared goals.

Regional and territorial development requires investment, and policy makers and agencies are charged with and challenged to, make decisions regarding strategic investments. Investments need to focus on enabling

places and sectors to realise their potential, and to avoid dependencies or a reliance on subsidies. Thus, there is a need for a strong evidence base, and in this document, the authors have provided considerable information – in their analysis of qualitative, quantitative and spatial data – to enable evidence based decision making locally. Stakeholders need to commit to the ongoing collection, collation and sharing of data and to the monitoring of processes and outputs, in order to ensure consistent information flows.

**Chapter Three** and the accompanying demographic and socio-economic profile provide a considerable chunk of the evidence required to set baselines and inform decision making relating to Buncrana. Buncrana and its immediate environs have a population of just over 7,200 (based on the most recent Census of Population data i.e., 2016). Buncrana's population has grown consistently since the mid-1960s, and its rate of growth exceeds that of Inishowen, County Donegal and the State, over the same period. Buncrana now accounts for one-fifth of Inishowen's population – up from ten percent in 1926. A spatial analysis of the headline demographic data reveals that Buncrana's population growth has been uneven; it has mostly occurred in the suburbs, while the town core has actually contracted. Although the scale of suburbanisation and hollowing-out of the town centre are not as extensive or as serious as in other similar-sized towns, they need to be arrested, in line with the principles and best practices presented in Chapter Two. The spatial analysis presented here also illustrates that Buncrana's urban core has an older age profile and is structurally weaker than its outskirts, thus pointing to a clear need for town centre investment, rejuvenation and consolidation. Relative to the county and the State, Buncrana has a low level of participation in the labour force and a traditional employment profile. Migration from Northern Ireland is significant, and Buncrana has strong social and familial ties to Derry. In terms of commuting, the number of inbound commuters (n=961) outnumbers the number of outbound commuters (n=801) by 160; with, interestingly, only 27% of the outbound commuters travelling to Derry. The data presented in Chapter Three identify imperatives in respect of ensuring that Buncrana reduce its dependence on imported fossil fuels.

In order to engage local stakeholders in the planning process and to strengthen evidence based decision making, the ICLRD applied the Place Standard tool in Buncrana. Widely used in Scotland, and recognised by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Place Standard offers a structured mechanism to set baselines and identify planning and development priorities. Over 250 people, including a cohort of senior-cycle students from Crana College, completed a Place Standard questionnaire. Bespoke versions were circulated to members of the diaspora and local businesses. **Chapter Four** presents the findings. These reveal that the dimensions of place that are most favourably perceived are 'feeling safe', 'care and maintenance', 'natural space' and 'community engagement/participation'. These are considered to be among Buncrana's main strengths, and they represent assets on which future development can be built and promoted. The survey findings also reveal the dimensions of place that are least-favourably perceived, and which are, therefore, in most need of attention. These are 'public transport', 'traffic and parking', 'streets and spaces' and 'facilities and amenities'. The majority of survey respondents stated that most dimensions of place have 'not changed' over the past five years, but they report that the dimensions that experienced the most positive changes were 'public transport', 'care and maintenance' and 'work and the local economy'. The aspects that are perceived to have experienced the greatest dis-improvements are 'social contact/amenities', 'traffic and parking' and 'streets and spaces'.

The Place Standard survey also provided local stakeholders with an opportunity to put forward proposals and recommendations. Those most frequently cited were: the provision of a new building for Crana College; improved leisure and recreation facilities; the reopening of Swan Park; enhanced access to the foreshore and the expansion of walking and cycling routes; youth amenities; better public transport connectivity (especially to Carndonagh and Letterkenny); economic diversification; and the rehabilitation/re-purposing of the former 'Fruit of the Loom' factories. A large number of respondents recommended reinstating the Town Council –



thus, pointing to the importance of civic leadership and local decision making in driving and delivering sustainable development.

The Place Standard survey results were complemented by a series of one-to-one and small group interviews with representatives from Donegal County Council, other public bodies, Inishowen Development Partnership (IDP), local businesses and civil society. These provided important sectoral insights that inform this report's recommendations. In addition, the ICLRD facilitated cross-sectoral multi-stakeholder workshops, at which participants discussed Buncrana's main assets/strengths, challenges, priorities and ways forward in respect of the fourteen dimensions of place that are embodied in the Place Standard. In the interest of effective organisation, and recognising the complementarities between the various dimensions of place, the ICLRD themed the fourteen place standard aspects as follows: mobility and accessibility; economy; community well-being; environment; and governance. **Chapter Five** synthesises stakeholders' deliberations in respect of these five themes and provides a systematic analysis thereof.

As regards **mobility and accessibility**, stakeholders welcome the recent improvements in public transport – specifically the more frequent bus connections to Derry City. They note that traffic congestion can be problematic, particularly at peak times and in certain locations, and they recommend investments in infrastructure that would ease congestion and improve walkability and the circulation of bicycles. Members of the general public and business representatives underscore the importance of town centre car parks and the free flow of traffic in retail areas. Stakeholders note the importance of connectivity to other locations, particularly to Letterkenny, which is the primary service node for County Donegal. They also refer to connectivity to the wider Inishowen Peninsula and of enhancing Buncrana's standing as the gateway to Inishowen. The impending greenway featured prominently in deliberations. There is universal welcome for this initiative and an overwhelming desire to ensure it connects with Buncrana Town Centre and onwards to Fort Dunree, Carndonagh and other points across Inishowen.

The emerging signposts in respect of Buncrana's **economic development** dovetail with those that relate to 'mobility and accessibility', among other dimensions of place. These complementary sets of recommendations emphasise the importance of 'facing the Swilly' – capitalising on Buncrana's coastal location and harnessing Lough Swilly's ecological, heritage and economic assets. Lough Swilly and the associated seascapes and landscapes represent fundamental elements of place-making in Buncrana. Their renewed valorisation can consolidate and strengthen the locality's tourist offering, and complement other natural and heritage resources, including Fort Dunree, An Grianán Aileach, Malin Head and Inishowen's views of the Northern Lights, among several others. Harnessing Buncrana's natural and heritage amenities, in collaboration with other communities, can enable the town and Inishowen to build on its tourism tradition and sustain more year-round visitors. Buncrana can also build on and reimagine its industrial tradition and heritage and reconfigure industrial spaces so that they support the development of the creative industries and knowledge economy. Thus, investing in the re-development of brownfield sites and in-fill locations and enhancing broadband connectivity are integral to economic diversification. Spatially, these developments need to happen sequentially – from the town core, in line with the best practices and policies referenced earlier. There are opportunities in these regards outlined in the North West Strategic Growth Plan (2016). The development of Buncrana's town centre also necessitates improving the town's retail offering, increasing the supply of office space and enhancing public realm. While gaming arcades and bingo halls are part of the economy of many seaside towns, the more resilient and vibrant locations among them tend to have a greater presence of artisan food and craft retailers, cafés and indoor leisure amenities than is the case in Buncrana.

**Community well-being** has emerged internationally as a significant determinant of vibrancy and resilience, and investment in so-called ‘soft infrastructure’ and the promotion of healthy places serve to enable communities to be more attractive for young families and to attract and retain investment and skilled workers. Investing in community development and amenities dovetails with the aforementioned harnessing of Bunrana’s natural and heritage resources, the greening of the locality and the diversification of its economic base. Bunrana Tidy Towns Committee is among the many local organisations that actively strengthens community well-being and generates social capital. Support for its objectives and the advancement of its environmental goals will stand the town in good stead. Community-based service providers and IDP represent significant drivers of community well-being and social inclusion. They reach out to, and engage with, many vulnerable groups, and they need to be fully enabled to do so. The consultations that informed this document identified deficits in the services provided to a number of population cohorts, including those with mental health issues and victims of domestic violence, and such deficits ought to be addressed. Social economy approaches emerged as offering appropriate mechanisms through which to enhance community service provision in Bunrana.

Bunrana’s **environment** and stock of natural resources are among its strongest assets. Conserving, protecting and celebrating Bunrana’s environment and bringing ecological principles to bear strongly on all aspects of place-making will contribute to economic development and community well-being. Yet, data indicate that some of Bunrana’s ecological resources are vulnerable. Water quality in the south of Lough Swilly and in the local feeder rivers has been declining, and areas of coastline are susceptible to sea level rises. While engineering solutions may ameliorate immediate threats, there is a need to address the underlying causes and to promote practices and behaviours that are more ecologically sound and aligned with public health and healthy community goals. Investing in the National Tidy Towns’ Adjudicator’s recommendations, ensuring the impending greenway connects fully into the town and promoting greater use of Lough Swilly – for maritime and recreational activities – represent strategic steps to harness ecological resources for economic and social gain. Any divergence by the UK from EU environmental standards, following the Brexit transition phase, is a source of concern locally, and underscores the importance of ongoing and enhanced cross-border collaboration.

**Governance** (community engagement and participation) emerges as an area of considerable strength. Donegal County Council, IDP and several civil society organisations play their respective parts in enabling citizens to participate in local development and decision making. Moreover dialogue and collaboration between these entities and with neighbouring communities and agencies benefits the town and the Inishowen Peninsula and, as noted in the review of international best practices, partnership governance is integral to sustaining Bunrana’s development, including the delivery and mainstreaming of the principles and recommendations advanced in this document.

Building on chapters one to five (i.e. highlighting best practices, a synthesis of relevant policies, a demographic and socio-economic profile and a survey of, and consultations with local stakeholders), **Chapter 6** adds to the toolkit the ICLRD is providing to Bunrana. It outlines how the coastal/seaside towns of Newcastle (County Down) and Youghal (County Cork), both of which have many similarities with Bunrana, have promoted and enhanced their vibrancy through investing in, and harnessing, local resources. In both cases, they availed of their coastal locations and maritime resources. Newcastle invested in public realm – enhanced by art and cultural expressions that draw attention to, and are in concert with, the surrounding natural environment – specifically the coast, the sea and the adjoining Mountains of Mourne. Youghal’s rejuvenation has been underpinned by a strategic focus on its heritage resources, including its medieval walls, early industrial buildings and its seafaring tradition. Both towns are on a continuous journey of

renewal and reinvigoration, and their experiences offer insights that ought to resonate with stakeholders in Buncrana.

**Chapter Seven** draws together the report's various strands and it synthesises the overarching strategic issues and approaches. This chapter notes that Buncrana is a town in transition, and that it has the capacity and resolve to build on and project its distinctive identity as 'a seaside town with an industrial heritage'. Buncrana's location and associated strategic roles as a node of the NWCR and Gateway to Inishowen require ongoing and resolute spatial collaboration – inter-community and cross-border. Capitalising on the locality's assets and overcoming its challenges necessitate the pursuit of an integrated approach to development – the avoidance of mono-sectoral approaches or silos, but building instead on Buncrana's strong social and cultural capital, through information-sharing, collaboration and partnership. As noted throughout this document, the various dimensions of the Place Standard are integrated and mutually-reinforcing. In Buncrana's case, these converge around inter-related core strategies, as follows:

- Facing the Swilly;
- Developing the greenway and blueway networks;
- Enabling economic diversification;
- Enhancing quality of life and liveability;
- Increasing capacity and promoting community-led local development (CLLD); and
- Strengthening governance and collaboration.

These strategic foci sit alongside, and interface with, a number of specific recommendations, as follows:

- Becoming a transition town;
- Hosting a maritime/marine base (for recreation and training purposes) of all-island /international scale;
- Enhancing connectivity, particularly to Project Kelvin (broadband), and the opportunities associated with the NWCR;
- Investing in green infrastructure and creating and preserving green corridors – locally and connecting to other communities;
- Developing a sustainable model of tourism and heritage – based on local resources and applying a whole-of-peninsula approach; and
- Becoming a 'living lab' for improved building standards.

**Chapter Eight** reiterates the merits of collaborative approaches to place-making and to enabling all stakeholders in Buncrana/Inishowen to play active and constructive roles in advancing the strategic approaches that have emerged from this study. As noted at the outset, while the study was commissioned by Donegal County Council, the ICLRD's observations and recommendations are pertinent to a wide range of stakeholders. Thus, collaborative governance and partnership-working – sectorally and spatially – are integral to Buncrana's successes and sustained vitality.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

With a population of 6,785 persons, Buncrana is the second largest town in County Donegal (CSO, 2016). It is a seaside town, a key coastal destination and gateway within a necklace of destinations along Lough Swilly. It is a settlement with an historically strong industrial base, which has seen industrial decline and resulting challenges in skills replacement/adaptation/re-employment. Buncrana is a centre for education for young people of school age and beyond from across the Inishowen/Buncrana educational catchment. As a key border settlement, anecdotal evidence suggests that Buncrana has a high cross border commuting population with strong family, social and economic ties to Derry and other border settlements within the NWCR. Buncrana is the fourth largest settlement within the defined spatial influence of the Metropolitan Area of Letterkenny, Derry and Strabane – defined as the North West City Region (NWCR) within the National Planning Framework (NPF), *Ireland 2040* (Government of Ireland 2018). As such, the town enjoys a number of key strategic strengths, particularly:

- a) Its location within the North West City Region (NWCR) and its relationship with the designated regional centre of the Metropolitan Area of Letterkenny inclusive of its proximity to Derry City (15km);
- b) Its coastal location on the ‘Wild Atlantic Way’ (WAW), and the associated tourism and leisure opportunities;
- c) Its strong manufacturing and engineering heritage; and
- d) Its function(s) as the main service town for the Inishowen Peninsula, and as the gateway to North Inishowen.

Notwithstanding these core strategic advantages, the town has not developed to its full potential due to a number of key factors, notably the closure of the large multinational ‘Fruit of the Loom’ textiles manufacturing plant in 2006, followed soon after by the economic crash in 2008. Brexit has created further uncertainty for the area, given its dependency on freedom of movement for social, cultural and economic vitality. In addition, the town faces some key infrastructural challenges including the need for a consolidated multi-school campus, provision of an outer relief road, and the enhancement of indoor leisure facilities.

It is in this context that Donegal County Council commissioned a high-level, strategic analysis of the inherent strengths and weaknesses of the town to inform decisions around the future positioning and direction(s) of Buncrana.

### 1.1 Purpose of this Report

In December 2019, the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD) were appointed to undertake this socio-economic and geo-spatial analysis of Buncrana (See Appendix 1 for further information on the ICLR). As per the tender document, the purpose of this study is to:

- Demonstrate an appreciation of the strategic context in which this study shall be prepared, with reference to the North-West Strategic Growth Partnership, the National Planning Framework (NPF), *Ireland 2040*, and the Northern and Western Regional Assembly’s (NWRA) *Regional spatial and Economic Strategy* (RSES);

- Document a thorough understanding of the key strategic sectors including those identified above and the inter-relationships between them, as appropriate;
- For each of these sectors, quantify the respective significance in economic and other terms of their importance at present to the local economy and quality of life (it is acknowledged that there are overlaps in this regard);
- For each of these sectors, identify any weaknesses in the respective sectors' offerings, and the strategic feasibility of enhancing these offerings having regard to: the implications of Brexit; positive factors such as Buncrana's strategic and coastal location; and also potentially-limiting physical constraints including the coastal setting, topography and current strategic road connections; and
- In light of the findings at 1, 2 3 and 4, make recommendations in relation to the optimum strategic direction(s) for the sustainable development and growth of Buncrana.

## 1.2 The North West City Region: Positioning Buncrana

The North West Region of the Island of Ireland is the fourth largest urban agglomeration on the island of Ireland and experiences a national (and now external) jurisdictional border. It is well recognised across the island of Ireland that while the North West Region of the Island of Ireland faces many challenges - not least because of its peripherality from Dublin and Belfast and associated lack of investment over many decades - this region is an untapped source of great potential, economically, socially and environmentally. It is widely accepted that the challenges can only be met, and the opportunities pursued, with a consistent and long-term approach to coordination of the development of the region.

Following considerable efforts by both Donegal County Council (DCC) and Derry City and Strabane District Council (DCSDC) over the period 2014-2016, new operational structures were endorsed by both Governments on the island, via a North South Ministerial Council Plenary Meeting in July 2016, that would ultimately lead to the designation of the North West City Region (NWCR) in the Irish Government's National Planning Framework, *Ireland 2040*. The NWCR is a metropolitan area with a population in excess of 212,000 people and centred on three key settlements, namely Letterkenny-Derry-Strabane.

Within the cross border context, and with Government support from both jurisdictions, the development and advancement of the North-West Strategic Growth Partnership (NWSGP) has been a key driver for the growth of the region on an all-island basis. Through the establishment of the NWSGP, the two Councils have established strong, collaborative working arrangements with Government, North and South, to drive economic, environmental and social regeneration across three pillars: economic development; physical development; and social and community planning in recognition of the realities of life in this region whereby it effectively operates as a single functional area regardless of geographical and political boundaries.

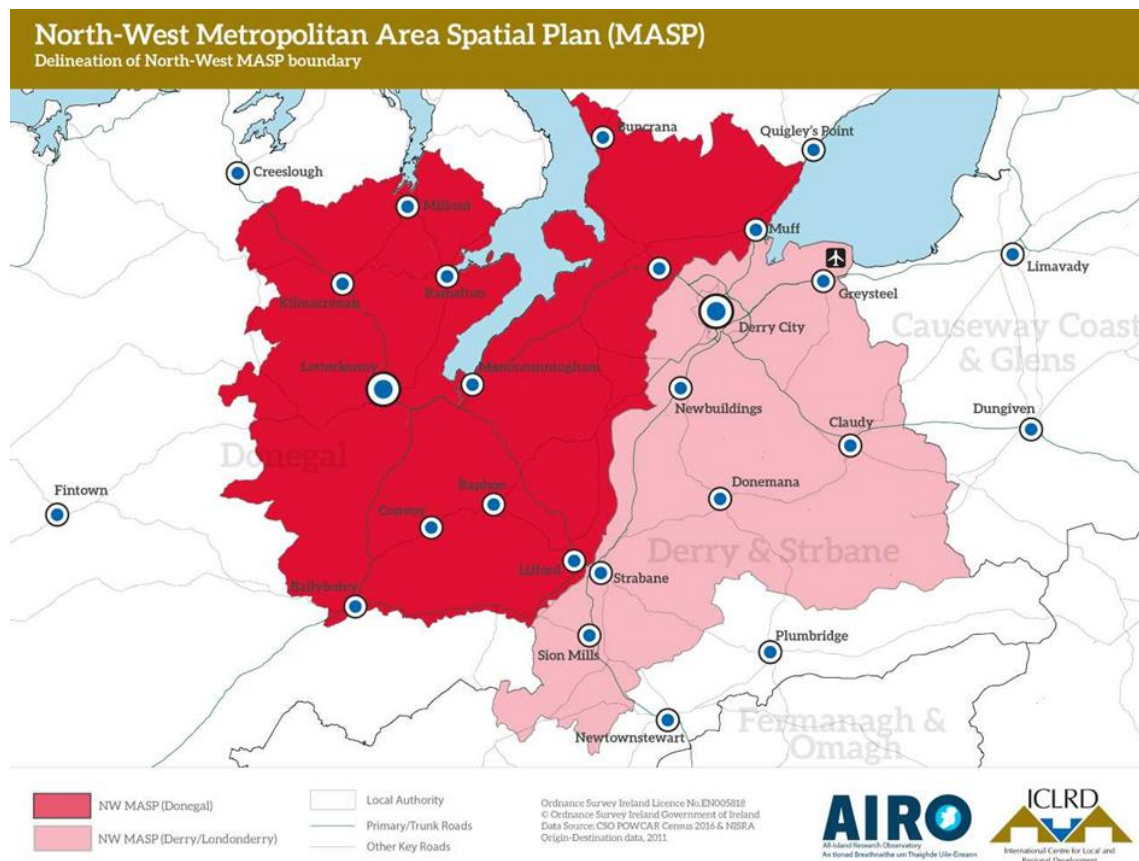
Consistent with the NPF, the recently adopted *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)* by the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) (2020) further supports the strategy and work of the NWSGP. In addition to the urban core, the NWCR includes a number of smaller settlements which perform an important regional and/or administrative function. This more detailed focus on the structure of the City Region provides further indication of the potential of Buncrana – as the fourth largest settlement within the North-West Metropolitan Area (See Figure 1.1) and as a gateway to North Inishowen. The location and critical mass of Buncrana, as part of the North West Metropolitan Area, will enable the town to benefit from the growth and development agenda being pursued through the NWSGP and indeed other initiatives.

The *County Donegal Development Plan 2018-2024* (CDDP) further refines the concept of the cross-border NWCR and indeed contains a chapter solely dedicated to the border dimension setting out the important and unique relationship with the county's adjoining jurisdiction.

With particular regard to Buncrana, the CDDP describes the town as a 'Strategic Town' with special functions such as:

*An important tourism function, located on the WAW; Importance as a service provider in terms of retail, community, education and employment activity; and having significant potential for inward investment and economic development opportunities.*

**Figure 1.1: The North West City Region**



(Source: ICLRD & AIRO, 2019).

The Derry City and Strabane District Council draft *Local Development Plan (LDP) 2032* recognises the strong relationships and everyday interactions between both Council areas; with populations moving across the border daily for employment, shopping, health, education and other everyday services. It acknowledges the strategic association between Derry and Letterkenny, not least given their functional linkages as highlighted in the Northern Ireland *Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035* (2001) and Ireland's National Planning Framework (NPF), *Ireland 2040*, (2018), but also in terms of their shared natural assets and strong family

ties. The District's strong interactions with Buncrana and the Inishowen Peninsula generally – given their proximity – is reflective of the strong ties that bind, and the need for continued strengthening of cross-border links and opportunities.

Both the LDP and CDDP note the importance of the North West Strategic Growth Partnership (NWSGP) in enabling both Councils to formally work collaboratively on the sustainable development of the NWCR. Both plans also acknowledge that Brexit will give rise to both challenges and opportunities, and that an aligned planning framework across both jurisdictions will be critical to ensuring a flexibility of approach to opportunities in a planned and coordinated manner.

### 1.3 Report Methodology

The ICLRD employed a four-phase methodology to this study; placing a strong emphasis on both qualitative and quantitative data analysis, and using the Place Standard Tool (see Appendix 2) to give insights to Buncrana's current positioning, its contemporary challenges and would-be opportunities – should the right conditions be present.

#### Methodology Strand 1: Strategic policy analysis and literature review

Place-shaping has become a key objective of collaborative working between local governments, particularly since the reform of local government in both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland, in 2014, which resulted in greater alignment of functions between local councils, North and South. In Ireland, the National Planning Framework (NPF), *Ireland 2040*, places a heavy emphasis on the importance of place-shaping, place-making and quality of life in this strategic agenda.

As part of the process of embedding the NWCR in local and regional policy, Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council are jointly committed to not only leading and delivering on economic, environmental and social well-being and regeneration in their respective areas, but for the NWCR as a whole. To achieve this an emphasis is being placed on job creation, up/reskilling and training, regional connectivity through better transport links and growth of the digital economy, supporting low carbon/green infrastructure investment, promoting healthy ageing and improved quality of life and innovation in on-shore/off-shore renewables. The socio-economic and geo-spatial analysis of Buncrana for this study has been undertaken in this context. To this end, the analysis is considered in the context of the principles and objectives of smart growth, place-making, healthy places and well-being; all of which recognise the value added from mixed land use, compact building design, age-friendly neighbourhoods, active travel, collaborative engagement and a strong sense of place.

*Policy Analysis:* In the short- to medium-term, economic instability (e.g. decline of manufacturing industry), social change (e.g. declining population), shifting environmental parameters (e.g. increased storm intensity) and evolving governance structures and priorities (e.g. the rise of 'Blue Growth' and 'Brexit') have implications for the planning, management and regeneration of coastal communities such as Buncrana. In response, there is a need to develop place-tailored and sensitive interventions which respect existing cultures and traditions, and foster a positive place image and identity. While the future direction of (policy) development is guided by a complex hierarchy of plans and policies, the 'essence' of place must also be to the fore. In this context, the ICLRD examined key policies relevant to Buncrana's spatial and economic functionality, growth and development at a national, regional and local level.

*Literature Review and Comparative Research:* The ICLRD conducted a desk review of academic research relevant to the spatial profiling and development of Buncrana as a town in its specific place-based location. This included a critical examination of city-region literature, including the role of settlements within the metropolitan area, and relevant coastal planning and sustainable development literature. As part of this review, comparative research into similar settlements on the island of Ireland was conducted, namely Youghal, County Cork (Ireland) and Newcastle, County Down (Northern Ireland) (see Chapter 5).

A summary of this analysis can be found in Chapter 2; while a more detailed profile has been provided in a supporting document to Donegal County Council.

#### *Methodology Strand 2: Statistical/population data and maps.*

Buncrana is the second most populated settlement in Donegal with a population of 6,785 recorded in Census 2016. However, the overall economic performance of the settlement is not reflective of its status within the county (in terms of population size) with results from POWCAR 2016 detailing that Buncrana has a total of 1,988 jobs located in the settlement - only 17% of the total number of jobs located in Letterkenny (11,395). Buncrana also has one of the lowest jobs ratios (local jobs:resident workers) in the county with Donegal town, Ballybofey-Stranorlar, Carndonagh, Ballyshannon, Lifford and Killybegs all with much higher ratios. While it is well documented that Buncrana residents commute to employment locations in Letterkenny and across the border to Derry, the overall unemployment level in the town was still recorded at 21.4% in Census 2016. As such, it was of vital importance that this study undertook a geo-spatial analysis to fully understand the socio-economic dynamics at play within the settlement.

This strand of the methodology resulted in the collation and subsequent presentation of a series of data visualisations (maps and graphics) on key population, census and place-based statistical data relevant to illustrating a detailed background socio-economic profile of Buncrana. The following indicators are a sample of those that will form the basis of the summary socio-economic profile of Buncrana:

- 1) Population Demographics (age cohorts, dependency rates);
- 2) Employment Profile (Principal Economic Status, Live Register);
- 3) Household Income;
- 4) Housing Tenure;
- 5) Education Levels; and
- 6) Travel to work.

A summary of this analysis can be found in Chapter 3; while a more detailed profile has been provided in a supporting document to Donegal County Council.

#### *Methodology Strand 3: Stakeholder Engagement.*

Under this phase of the study, the ICLRD conducted targeted stakeholder engagement across a number of sectors via a series of focus groups, with the purpose of identifying key knowledge and eliciting a full and holistic understanding of the significance, in economic and other terms, of key strategic sectors for Buncrana (see Table 1.1). This approach, supported by semi-structured and walking interviews and an on-line questionnaire (generating over 270 responses), ensured a comprehensive body of evidence was collated to



assist the ICLRD in identifying key considerations impacting on/influencing the inter-relationships between these stakeholder groupings.

**Table 1.1: Schedule of Focus Groups**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Focus Group</b>
21 January 2020	Inishowen Municipal District Members
12 <sup>th</sup> February 2020	Economy & Industry
13 <sup>th</sup> February 2020	Youth
13 <sup>th</sup> February 2020	Sustainable Community Development
13 <sup>th</sup> February 2020	Foróige Club
14 <sup>th</sup> February 2020	Health and Well-being
15 <sup>th</sup> February 2020	Tidy Towns Committee
17 <sup>th</sup> February 2020	Donegal County Council Staff (with responsibility for Buncrana)

The perspectives gathered are key to informing the future development and potential growth of Buncrana, and are summarised in Chapter 4.

*Methodology Strand 4: Final Report, Analysis and Recommendations*

The final phase involved the synthesise of the findings from phases 1, 2, and 3, as outlined above, and the formulation of recommendations in terms of defining the role of Buncrana within the NWCR and presenting the optimum strategic direction(s) for the sustainable development and growth of Buncrana over the short to medium term.

## **1.4 This Report**

The following report informs the preparation of a new Local Area Plan for Buncrana and defines its role within the NWCR. It considers Buncrana’s status and functionality as a potential growth centre within the NWCR, whilst acknowledging its current role as a gateway to Inishowen. It contemplates its current and future symbiotic relationships to other towns and villages to the South and East. It investigates Buncrana’s wider functional role, with the objective of informing future investment decisions of the Local Authority and other state agencies. This report will also support other complementary initiatives for Buncrana, such as potential funding applications and public interventions.



*Looking southwards towards Buncrana's Shoreline – the former Fruit of the Loom factory occupies a prominent coastal site*

## CHAPTER 2: BUNCRANA - THROUGH THE LENS OF POLICY ANALYSIS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a summary of relevant academic and international literature. As a summative literature review, it seeks to ground and inform best practices in respect of Buncrana's sustainable and strategic development. The chapter also outlines the policy context that governs, shapes and influences the town's profile, and which is likely to impact on its development trajectory. Both elements – literature and policy – are further elaborated in a standalone document that has been submitted to Donegal County Council (DCC) to inform its strategic thinking and planning in respect of Buncrana and other similar towns. A number of pertinent themes emerge in the international literature, including:

- Overcoming peripherality and maximising potential
- Regional development and new regionalism;
- City Regions: Strengthening Functional Relations;
- Area-based development;
- Promoting resilience and vibrancy; and
- Harnessing the local geography – place-based development in coastal towns.

This chapter presents overarching remarks in respect of each of these themes. It then outlines the policy context - from the global (United Nations), supranational (EU), national, regional and local, and it identifies the frameworks and provisions that relate most directly to Buncrana's sustainable development.

### 2.1 Overcoming Peripherality and Maximising Potential

Buncrana and Inishowen are located on the edge of an emerging and strengthening city region (NWCR), and they are influenced by, and are part of, its wider metropolitan development. At the same time, they exhibit features of peripherality associated with their location on Europe's Atlantic fringe, connectivity deficits, and the effects of the Ireland-Northern Ireland border. Furthermore, Buncrana's seaside location and industrial heritage distinguish it from most similar sized Irish towns. Thus, while the literature on urban development and the functionality of small and medium-sized towns is relevant, so too is the literature on deindustrialisation<sup>i</sup> (Popescu, 2016). Albeit on a smaller scale, Buncrana shares deindustrialisation experiences with places such as the Welsh Valleys and the North of England (affected by the closure of coalmines), parts of the Mid-West of the USA (the rustbelt) (affected by the rationalisation and relocation of automotive industries) and parts of Europe that have been adversely affected by the migration of the textile industry. In many of Europe's former industrial heartlands, such as Wallonia (Southern Belgium) and the northeast of France, the decline of the textile sector since the 1960s provides a clear illustration of deindustrialisation processes that led to marginalisation and social exclusion in urban communities and left rural areas with severe environmental and demographic challenges. Today, however, this particular cross border region (around the city of Lille) has transformed itself from a post-industrial wasteland into an economic powerhouse (*Syndicat Mixte du SCOT De Lille Métropole*, 2016). In this particular case, as in many transformative experiences in regional development, cross border collaboration has been integral to regional renaissance (Durand and Perrin, 2017).

Regional revitalisation, across OECD countries, is associated with factors linked to local geographies, whereby stakeholders, from all governance tiers, harness local resources and invest in enabling places to realise their development potential (Vodden *et al.*, 2015; Steinführer *et al.*, 2016: 2). Revitalisation is

associated with capacity-building, collaborative governance and place-based approaches that focus on local assets and potentiality. In practice, this implies promoting approaches that are not spatially under-bounded, but are instead cognisant and embracing of the totality of relationships between towns and countryside and which promote collaboration over competition – including inter-urban collaboration (Pike *et al.*, 2013; Noguera and Freshwater, 2016; OECD, 2018). In Buncrana’s case, collaborative relationships with the entire Inishowen Peninsula and with the North West Gateway (Derry-Letterkenny) are therefore essential.

Collaborative approaches – spatially and in respect of governance – are hallmarks of what has been termed ‘new regionalism’ (Daniels *et al.*, 2019). The evolution of regional development approaches over recent decades is marked, to varying degrees, by:

- An increased emphasis on potential (rather than deficits), soft (as well as hard) infrastructure and quality-of-life factors;
- The application of sustainable development principles (as articulated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals);
- Increased territorial differentiation (avoidance of a one-size-fits-all approach);
- Greater participation by local actors;
- Investments (rather than subsidies);
- More systematic institutional collaboration – including on a cross border/inter-jurisdictional basis; and
- Partnership and decentralised governance.

## 2.2 City Regions: Strengthening Functional Relations

Buncrana’s proximity to Derry-Letterkenny and its functions and potential as the northern node in the NWCR imply that the literature on city regions is relevant to its development. The concept of the ‘city-region’ has a strong basis in both economic development and urban and regional planning (Jones *et al.*, 2015; Axinte *et al.*, 2019). The embedding of the notion of a cluster of settlements being an effective city-region requires “enormous faith” to be “placed in local, endogenous growth factors that contrast with the more traditional neo-classical emphasis on economy-wide factors that are exogenous to regions” (Shields, 2015: 56). In other words, the notion of the city-region is deeply entrenched in a region’s sense of itself, its identity and ‘place’. It embodies and reflects the aforementioned principles of new regionalism.

The city-region is viewed as bridging “local geographies, economies, and communities with global networks of knowledge, capital and culture” (Jones *et al.*, 2015: 6). It is about “creating economically vibrant, environmentally sustainable and just urban cities and regions...[through] locally rooted approaches to planning and governance, supported by strong and engaged civic networks” (Jones *et al.*, 2015: 17). For the stakeholders involved, there must be a strong level of trust. The city-region is centred on the “interaction between an urban core and its semi-urban and rural hinterland” (Rodríguez-Pose, 2008: 1026) and, therefore, a strong characteristic of any such region is its functional ties. Thus, Buncrana’s participation in the ongoing development of the NWCR would represent a reflection of best international practice and emerging trends.

## 2.3 Adopting a Place-Based Approach to Development

As highlighted across four key reports in 2009 and 2010 (Barca, 2009; OECD, 2009a; OECD, 2009b, CAF, 2010), space matters, with places significantly influencing and shaping the development that occurs within their territories. Barca contends that development is “place-based and highly contingent on context” (Barca *et al.*, 2012: 139) – social, cultural and institutional. Successful place-making centres on utilising local

knowledge to identify need, opportunity and assets in creating liveable places (Arefi, 2014) and contributing to economic competitiveness and sustainability (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010). It is a process that acknowledges the history of place – its past – in building a future. A central essence of placemaking is its ties to experiential and local knowledge, its sense of attachment to place and identity (Parkinson *et al*, 2016; Stephenson 2010; Markusen and Gadwa, 2010). As noted by Arefi (2014), local governments are increasingly undertaking place-making to build liveable places that are valued by communities, businesses, and visitors alike. As such, place-making is a collective undertaking (Friedmann, 2010), with planning (planners) and citizens at the centre.

Placed-based approaches to development tend to offer an holistic and bottom-up approach “to reveal, utilize and enhance the unique natural, physical and/or human capacity endowments present within a particular location for the development of the in situ community and/or its biophysical environment” (Markey, 2010; Quoted in Daniels *et al*, 2015 :33). Place-making offers both developers and planners the opportunity to move away from “cookie-cutter or mass-produced designs”, “the sameness of suburbs”, and “appalling blandness” (Leyden and Collins, 2015). To be effective, place-making strategies and activities must demonstrate foresight while also being adaptable. They must also be robust – even resilient (Coaffee, 2013).

## 2.4 Promoting Resilience and Vibrancy

The contemporary language of regional development, as articulated by academics, policy makers and practitioners, reflects an increased emphasis on ‘resilience’. Among the characteristics of resilient places are a diversified economic base, healthy demographic, low dependence on externalities (especially subsidies), multifunctionality, high quality of life, strong social capital, good public services, biodiversity and a pristine natural environment (Couch, 2016; Crabtree, 2016; Kevany *et al.*, 2017; Peters, 2019).

On-going research (monitoring and evaluation), including the application of indicators that capture the capacity of local organisations and levels of service provision, is an important component in territorial development, as clearly illustrated by the systematic approach pursued by Westport (County Mayo) (MacGréil, 2013). Westport’s experiences, and those of other coastal and small/medium-sized towns such as Kinsale (County Cork) and Totnes (Devon) – the UK’s first ‘transition town’ – provide lessons for other communities in ensuring a just transition to a zero-carbon society (Hamer, 2007; Smith, 2011; Pike *et al.*, 2013). The Transition Town Movement represents a bottom-up and coordinated approach to reducing dependency on fossil fuels and enabling communities to become more resilient and vibrant; “Transition towns, as resilient settlements, present a place-based perspective to the capacity for learning (preparedness), being robust (persistence), being innovative (transformability) and being flexible (adaptability) in the face of a crisis or change both immediately and in the long term” (Mehmood, 2016: 416).

The promotion of resilience and vibrancy require commitments, investments and strategic interventions from both the bottom-up and top-down – preferably through collaborative governance and participatory planning. Bottom-up efforts enable the harnessing of local assets and resources, particularly knowledge capital and social capital. Top-down actors bring technical expertise to planning and development, and are charged with ensuring a conducive set of contextual conditions and an enabling resource environment. For Bunrana, and other border towns and coastal communities, the significance of proactive policy interventions has come into sharp focus over recent months and will become increasingly significant in the context of meeting the on-going challenges arising from Brexit and COVID-19. The persistent uncertainties caused by Brexit and the prospect of a limited, delayed or restricted trade deal between the EU and UK, or indeed the absence of a deal, undermine economic confidence, particularly in border communities and in

sectors that rely heavily on cross border trade. Buncrana is particularly vulnerable in these regards, and the full implementation of the EU Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland<sup>ii</sup> (as part of the UK Withdrawal Agreement) is essential.

The post-COVID economic stimulus package focuses on sectors that have been most adversely affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19), and while this offers a welcome boost to the tourism and hospitality sector, it is clear that in the longer-term a more strategic approach is required. Enhanced collaboration at EU and other inter-governmental levels is essential in enabling societies and economies to better prepare for and manage any future pandemics and/or restrictions on the four freedoms<sup>iii</sup>.

## 2.5 Harnessing the Local Geography – Place-based Development in Coastal Towns

At EU level, there are supportive legislative frameworks (European Union 2013; 2014) that provide for participatory approaches to planning for climate adaptations, rural development policy and initiatives that focus on land-sea interactions. Case study research on the implications of these legislative frameworks recommends that in order to foster better decision making and close knowledge gaps, regional and local governments need to “support capacity building, participatory processes, trans- and interdisciplinary cooperation and cross-border collaborations” (Karrasch and Klenke, 2016: 308).

The promotion of place- and people-based approaches implies valorising and harnessing of Buncrana’s physical and human geography resources. Actors need to place particular focus on cross-border contexts and strategies (environmental, economic and socio-cultural), cross border flows and the impacts of migration – seasonal, temporary and long-term. The OECD (2013) review of cross-border innovations notes that policy instruments are more successful when they support linkages between firms and knowledge institutions across borders, cluster related efforts to support competencies in common areas, and provide for shared access to facilities. The fuzziness of inter-jurisdictional borders and the merits of mobilising actors around shared assets, particularly environmental resources, are well documented (Haughton, 2010).

While many of Ireland’s small and medium-sized towns have been adversely affected by rural restructuring and by the economic downturn post-2008, several others – mainly coastal communities – have become among the most attractive and vibrant places in Ireland. Examples include Westport, Skerries, Clonakilty, Clifden, Barna, and Daingean Uí Chúis/Dingle (O’Donoghue, 2019). Place-based and people-based approaches that harness and protect ecological resources are pertinent in coastal and rural communities with a tourism industry – actual or potential (Espiner and Becken, 2013; Salvia and Quaranta, 2017). A UK House of Lords report on the future of seaside towns (2019) articulates ten principles for partnership and regeneration that give effect to the aforementioned principles of place-making.

The economic and social restructuring experienced by seaside towns since their Victorian heydays, upscaling of the fishing industry and processes of deindustrialisation, can combine to create a shortage of opportunity in coastal communities. The practices and processes outlined in this chapter provide signposts towards sustainable development trajectories. In addition, if social and spatial inequalities persist, “improving the quality of outcomes *via* targeted interventions may be necessary” (O’Donoghue, 2019: 35). Seaside towns in Ireland and Britain are communities with a proud and successful past (Gray, 2006; Foley, 2010; House of Lords, 2019). Today, they face challenges associated with socio-economic restructuring and environmental vulnerability. At the same time, they have growing opportunities associated with quality-of-life factors, well-being and ecological resources. Coupled with these sets of assets, “the creative industries have a clear role in supporting seaside towns to diversify their economies and enhance their local cultural assets” (House of

Lords, 2019: 107), and, as noted already in this chapter, investment in connectivity and the promotion of place-based and people-based approaches offer grounded development trajectories.

## 2.6 The Policy Context – Supranational Influences and Frameworks

The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – which encapsulate the principles of place-making, smart growth and healthy places – are increasingly informing national, regional and local policies. Ireland has been a signatory to the UN SDGs since 2015 (see Figure 2.1). It is notable that there is significant alignment between the SDGs and national policies (including Ireland’s NPF); this is particularly evident in areas such as climate action, clean energy, sustainable cities and communities, economic growth, reduced inequalities and innovation and infrastructure, as well as education and health.

**Figure 2.1: The UN Sustainable Development Goals**



The decade 2021-2030 has been declared the ‘United Nations (UN) Decade on Ocean Science’. The European Union (EU) is already actively involved in associated initiatives, including the expansion of protected areas and making investments in science-based management of marine resources. The EU’s framework document *Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030*<sup>iv</sup> operationalises the UNSDGs, and outlines supports, actions and proposals at the levels of the EU, member states, regions and civil society. Specifically, the EU commits to nurturing marine health, and it notes the significance of the blue economy.

The *EU Urban Agenda* (launched in 2016) is highly relevant to the development of the NWCR as a polycentric urban network that promotes liveability, the circular economy, social inclusion and a just ecological transition. The *EU Smart Cities Initiative* is already resonating with actors involved in the NWCR, while the evolving *EU Action for Smart Villages* (launched in 2017) affords opportunities for Buncrana and rural communities across Inishowen to consolidate community-led local development and to further embrace digital connectivity and information communications technology (ICT) in advancing local economic development. The EU commitment on rural development (2020-2027) indicates on-going support for community-led local development and the LEADER methodology, as implemented locally by Inishowen Development Partnership (IDP).

The strategic direction of Buncrana, and the wider Inishowen Peninsula, must also be cognisant of the investment priorities of the EU Regional Development and Cohesion Policy 2021-2027, namely:

- **A Smarter Europe**, through innovation, digitisation, economic transformation and support to small and medium-sized businesses;
- **A Greener, Carbon Free Europe**, implementing the Paris Agreement and investing in energy transition, renewables and the fight against climate change;
- **A More Connected Europe**, with strategic transport and digital networks;
- **A More Social Europe**, delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights and supporting quality employment, education, skills, social inclusion and equal access to healthcare; and
- **A Europe Closer to Citizens**, by supporting locally-led development strategies and sustainable urban development across the EU.

These priorities lie at the heart of the new EU cross border programme: PEACE PLUS, that will be available to all of Northern Ireland and the six border counties in the Republic of Ireland, as well as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF) programmes under which the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) area will be recategorised as a 'Transition Region'.

## 2.7 National and Regional Policy

Ireland's National Planning Framework (NPF) – or *Ireland 2040* - is the government's long-term overarching strategy to make Ireland a better country. It embraces and promotes place-making and it emphasises the linkages between planning and well-being/quality of life. The Framework is committed to enhancing regional connectivity and competitiveness, improving environmental sustainability and building a fairer, more equal Ireland, all the while acknowledging that this must be done in a way that nurtures well-being and quality of life. Ten National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) are listed in the NPF and these in turn are embedded in the *National Development Plan (NDP)* – the funding arm of *Ireland 2040*. Thus, Ireland has put in place an integrated set of arrangements whereby government expenditure is linked to spatial planning.

Throughout the NPF, health is recognised as a key element supporting quality of life and a growing economy. This builds on the *Healthy Ireland Framework for Improved Health and Well-being 2013-2025* (Department of Health, 2013) which centred on promotive and preventive approaches to public health, emphasises well-being and advocates healthy environments. The delivery of a healthy places/quality of life agenda as advocated in the NPF requires a whole system approach, involving cross-departmental collaboration and active engagement with sectors such as planning, environmental protection, housing, transport, energy, education, sports and agri-food among others. In the case of the NWCR, the Framework notes the cross border dependencies in this region as they relate to employment, education, healthcare and retail activity (p.39); and earmark health services as a key area where social inclusion can be improved upon. Across the NWCR, consideration needs to be given to opportunities for e-health; walking/cycling; blueways and greenways; and community-based healthcare.

The NPF is also strongly committed to delivery of Age Friendly Planning policy and practices that support independent living, thus allowing people to live in their own homes and communities. This is an agenda already embraced by local authorities across Ireland, including Donegal County Council (see <https://agefriendlyireland.ie/>).



Central to the delivery of the compact growth, quality of life, healthy places and strengthened urban and rural settlement agendas is ease of access to services. Service provision, relative to the scale of a region, city, town or village is “a defining characteristic of attractive, successful and competitive places” (Government of Ireland, 2018: 15) and of sustainable communities. Ease of access equates with better coordination of public services such as health and education facilities; and for larger centres such as the NWCR this raises questions around the potential for co-location facilities/shared services models.

The Irish *Programme for Government* (2020) commits to supporting and fostering ‘a shared island’, and it articulates clear commitments to deepening cross-border collaboration, including supporting an all-island approach to national planning frameworks. The Programme acknowledges the significance of enhancing cross-border connectivity and the strengthening of the all-island economy. With specific reference to the North West, the Programme commits the government to working with the NI Executive and UK Government to invest in, and develop, “third-level opportunities for young people from across the region at University of Ulster Magee Campus in Derry” (page 121). Of potential significance for Buncrana, given its asset base, is the Programme’s commitment to “work with the Northern Ireland Executive to build on plans to deliver a Youth Development Sail Training project to provide opportunities for interaction and engagement for young people north and south” (ibid.).

Other sectoral plans that relate to Buncrana and its environs include those in respect of the marine economy, climate change mitigation, and environmental conservation and resource management. Forty per cent of Ireland’s population lives within 5km of the coast. As noted in *Harnessing our Ocean Wealth: An Integrated Marine Plan for Ireland* (Government of Ireland, 2012), the “ocean is a national asset, supporting a diverse marine economy, with vast potential to tap into a €1,200 billion global marine market for seafood, tourism, oil and gas, marine renewable energy, and new applications for health, medicine and technology” (2012: i). In addition, marine resources also provide essential non-commercial benefits such as amenity, biodiversity and a mild climate. Similar to the Government’s approach to a Healthy Ireland agenda, a whole system approach is proposed for realising the potential of the marine economy while, at the same time, protecting the marine environment (Government of Ireland, 2012).

In line with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment’s 2014 *Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan* (OREDPA), the NPF commits to reducing Ireland’s greenhouse gas emissions, creating jobs in the green economy and exploring the potential of technological advancements to accelerate commercial application, development and deployment of the marine renewable energy sector. According to the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, *A Study of the Current and Future Skills Requirements of the Marine/Maritime Economy to 2020* (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 2015), the emergence and rapid growth in the Marine Renewable Energy sector will , be driven by European targets for generating renewable energy.

There is an increasingly appreciated need to more effectively manage our marine areas and land-sea interface to double the economic value we gain from our ocean wealth by 2030 (Government of Ireland, 2018). As such, implementation of the NPF, a principally land-based plan, will evolve in parallel with the 2014 EU Directive requirement to develop a national marine spatial plan by 2021<sup>vi</sup>. The *National Marine Planning Framework – Consultation Draft* was published in November 2019 (Government of Ireland) with the public consultation period ending on the 30<sup>th</sup> of April, 2020.

Climate disruption is already having diverse and wide-ranging impacts on Ireland’s environment, society, economic and natural resources. Ireland’s *Climate Action Plan* is “committed to achieving a net zero carbon energy systems objective for Irish society and in the process, create a resilient, vibrant and sustainable

country” (Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, 2019: 8). The Plan is governed, and heavily influenced, by our international obligations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and aligns with the UNSDGs. Furthermore, it builds on the *National Adaptation Framework: Planning for a Climate Resilient Ireland* (Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, 2018), one element of which requires local authorities to prepare local adaptation strategies.

In terms of the inter-relationship between climate adaptation and planning, the NPF records key issues for planning/planners including appropriate land-use and land-sea interface management, sea level rise and patterns of accretion and erosion, flood risk (as reflected in National Policy Objective 41b) (Government of Ireland, 2018: 103), and supporting the transition to a low carbon economy. The latter requires a greater shift towards renewable sources of energy, which is an integral part of Ireland’s aforementioned *Climate Action Plan* (Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, 2019).

Other environmental challenges facing Ireland in the immediate- to long-term, as noted in the NPF, include air pollution which can have negative implications for the health of our citizens and the attractiveness of cities and towns, the transition from fossil fuels to alternative renewable energies), and reducing our greenhouse gas emissions (Government of Ireland; 2018). Under the NPF, National Policy Objective 56 argues for relevant stakeholders and monitoring bodies to "Sustainably manage waste generation, invest in different types of waste treatment and support circular economy principles, prioritising prevention, reuse, recycling and recovery, to support a healthy environment, economy and society" (*Ibid*, 122). There is a growing recognition of the role of Green infrastructure (GI) – that is, green adaptation which seeks to use ecological properties to enhance the resilience of human and natural systems in the face of environmental challenges and pressures such as climate change. GI involves the creation of green spaces and parks to enable better management of urban micro-climates (*Ibid*, 120). This is an agenda that Derry City and Strabane District Council is leading on across the island of Ireland, and which will become a strong component of the NWCR ‘clean and green’ agenda.

At the regional level, the NPF recognises that "Donegal is spatially unique within the island of Ireland, due to its extensive coastline and proximate relationship to Northern Ireland" (Government of Ireland, 2018: 39). The NPF makes a commitment to building on the North West Gateway Initiative – as promoted under the *National Spatial Strategy (NSS)* – by “delivering a wide range of economic, infrastructural, community and public service functions in the wider northwest" (*Ibid*, 41). In Northern Ireland, the *Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035* also gives recognition to the North West Region, highlighting opportunities for cross-border networks of economic cooperation and enterprise, in the protection and management of the shared environment, and in developing a cohesive grid of cross border and trans-regional infrastructures (Department for Regional Development, 2001). With these common objectives, the Irish Government commits, in co-operation with relevant Departments in Northern Ireland (through National Policy Objective 45), to "support and promote the development of the North West City Region as interlinked areas of strategic importance in the North-West of Ireland, through collaborative structures and a joined-up approach to spatial planning" (*Ibid*, 110).

The Northern and Western RSES represents the regional-level operationalisation of the NPF. The RSES envisages developing the region on the basis of high-quality transport, jobs, and social and environmental infrastructure to make this growth sustainable and fit for purpose. Within the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) region, compact growth will be pursued to ensure the “sustainable growth of more compact urban and rural settlements, supported by jobs, houses, services and amenities, rather than continued sprawl and unplanned, uneconomic growth" (Northern and Western Regional Assembly, 2020: 23). The RSES dovetails with the NPF with respect to the emphasis on place-making, quality-of-life, well-

being and the importance of ameliorating and preventing climate disruption. The RSES clearly states the need for a strong focus to be placed on the creation of a vibrant, diversified economy that creates permanent, sustainable jobs. This, it contends, is best achieved by building a competitive and productive economy through policies that focus on scale, and investing in connectivity and people while, at the same time, pursuing a low-carbon agenda.

## 2.8 County and Sub-County Policies, Plans and Initiatives

Buncrana's development – current and future – is shaped, influenced, and governed by a nested set of policy documents and statutory frameworks that are in place at county level. These include the current County Donegal Development Plan (CDDP), Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) and Local Development Strategy (LDS), which are closely aligned and their delivery gives effect to several complementary objectives:

- Maintaining and furthering cross-border linkages and collaboration;
- Harnessing the opportunities associated with the NWCR and the linked metropolitan area;
- Promoting attractive, accessible and liveable towns, based on sequential development and focusing on town cores;
- Fostering local economic development and entrepreneurship;
- Investing in green transport and active travel (walking and cycling), associated with environmental and public health gains;
- Supporting the provision of greenway infrastructure, associated with economic diversification (tourism), enhanced connectivity and the promotion of active travel;
- Improving public transport provision, particularly in rural areas;
- Protecting biodiversity and harnessing natural resources, including the marine;
- Emphasising quality-of-life, stemming from investments in enhanced community amenities and infrastructure, particularly those associated with outdoor activities and accessing the natural environment;
- Building stakeholder capacity and providing training for organisations/agencies, including civil society;
- Increasing citizen participation in local decision making, with particular foci on youth and the third age;
- Addressing mental health needs and concerns; and
- Ensuring that the public realm and built environment are conducive to social well-being, community health, social inclusion and vibrant places.

The aforementioned policy documents were formulated and are being given effect by stakeholder coalitions at county and sub-county levels. While they have formal statutory underpinnings, these strategies reflect and embody local input, flexibility and place-based approaches. Some, such as the CDDP overlap – in terms of their timeframes – with the forthcoming strategic plan for Buncrana, while others, such as the LDS (which runs up to 2020) provide foundations on which to build and from which stakeholders can draw lessons and forge stronger partnerships.

Many of these key themes are also evident in the current draft *Local Development Plan (LDP) 2032* for Derry City and Strabane District Council. The LDP places a strong emphasis on the proximity of Derry to Buncrana/Inishowen, and the opportunities for mutual benefits, not least economic, stemming from this. The upgrade of the A2 Buncrana Road is regarded as key to the economic revitalisation of Derry City and the wider NWCR; as is the ongoing investment in the cross border transport hub in Derry and the North West Greenway Network<sup>vii</sup>. The LDP is committed to delivering on strong investment in, and the sustainable

growth of, the NWCR and to achieving this in a balanced way while also promoting the growth of a healthy, fair and equal society that fosters well-being, quality of life and age-friendly development.

In addition to the main cross-sectoral frameworks, County Donegal has a number of more sectoral and cohort-specific strategies, plans and frameworks in place that relate to Buncrana's development. The Age Friendly and Children and Young People's Services Committee's (CYPSC) strategies reflect similar and complementary aims and objectives, including:

- Furthering citizen and stakeholder participation in decision making and local development;
- Promoting active and healthy communities, in which citizens and visitors have opportunities to access sporting and recreational facilities, particularly in the outdoors;
- Strengthening the capacity of community and voluntary organisations and enabling them to network more effectively;
- Ensuring mental health and well-being for all; and
- Promoting a built environment, including the provision of housing, that enhances quality-of-life at all stages of life.

## 2.9 Conclusion

Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council acknowledge the growing rationale for policies with an emphasis on mobilising assets and fostering a regional perspective on growth and competitiveness (through collaboration) that is centred on 'outcomes'. To this end, the Councils are jointly committed to not only leading and delivering on economic, environmental and social well-being and regeneration in their respective areas but for the NWCR as a whole. This will, in part, be achieved through their respective additional expanded statutory responsibilities of socio-economic planning and community planning as well as enhanced inter-jurisdictional, local and regional/central government relationships, and through the application of the principles and best international practices that have been referenced in this chapter.

In practice, this implies:

- Reflecting and operationalising the UNSDGs;
- Furthering and deepening cross-border collaboration,
- Leveraging the opportunities associated with EU regional policy, Ireland's NPF and the Northern and Western RSES;
- Pursuing collaborative engagements with all regional and sub-regional stakeholders; and
- Supporting, facilitating and enabling bottom-up action that drives integrated and holistic approaches to place-based development – particularly locally in Buncrana and its environs – through the application of the principles set out in Figure 2.2 above.

**Figure 2.2: The Principles of Place-Making, Smart Growth and Healthy Places**

Principles of Place-Making	Principles of Smart Growth	Principles of Healthy Places
The Community Knows Best	Mix Land Uses	Put people first – design spaces around peoples needs
Places, Not Designs – understanding the different relationships between spaces and functions	Take Advantage of Compact Building Design	Recognise the economic value of walkable, mixed-use, transit-rich communities
Placemaking is a Group Effort	Create a Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices	Empower champions for health – having a shared vision of healthy communities
Make and Act on Observations – spaces can evolve	Create Walkable Neighbourhoods	Energise shared spaces – the role of public realm and open spaces
Agree a Vision	Foster Distinctive, Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place	Make healthy choices easy – planning and design are key to an active lifestyle
Have patience – place-making does not happen overnight	Preserve Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty and Critical Environmental Areas	Ensure equitable access – designing for a variety of ages and abilities
Triangulate – consider the strategic placement of activities	Strengthen and Direct Development Towards Existing Communities	Mix it up – balancing economic, physical and social activities
Ignore Naysayers – just because it hasn’t been done before.....	Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices	Embrace unique character – places are different
Form Supports Function	Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair and Cost Effective	Promote access to healthy food
Place-making is an Ongoing Process – place-making is never done!	Encourage Community and Stakeholder Collaboration in Development Decisions	Make it active.

(Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Placemaking>; <https://smartgrowth.org/smart-growth-principles/>; & <http://buildabetterburb.org/ten-principles-building-healthy-places/>)

## CHAPTER 3: UNDERSTANDING BUNCRANA - SETTING THE BASELINE

This chapter presents a summary demographic and socio-economic profile of Buncrana. A more extensive profile and spatial analysis exists as a support document to this main report (see Appendix 3 for listing). Together, these provide a quantitative (numerical) understanding of Buncrana's current/baseline demographic and socio-economic features, including population change; age profile; nationality and ethnicity; household composition; fuel consumption; composition of the labour force; occupations and modes of travel to work. This chapter also presents headline figures in respect of commuter inflows and outflows and the number of jobs that are based in the town. The data presented here are mainly drawn from the Census of Population, as undertaken and published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO). The most recent census took place in April 2016. The next census is due in April 2021, and local-level data should be available in mid-2022.

Historically, sub-county census data are published at the level of Electoral Divisions (EDs), of which there are over 3,400 in Ireland and 149 in County Donegal. Two of these EDs correspond to Buncrana's current urban footprint. They are Buncrana Urban (ED id. 33001) and Buncrana Rural (ED id. 33069). Since 2006, the CSO has made data available for smaller units within EDs. These are known as Small Areas (SAs), and they are the geographical basis on which neighbourhood-level data are presented in the supporting statistical profile (See Appendix 3). To provide an overview and understanding of the micro-level data presented in the statistical profile, this chapter uses ED-level data. As the CSO has been using EDs for many decades, many of the 2016 census figures can be reliably compared with figures from previous censuses.

### 3.1 Population Change

Buncrana's population has been growing steadily and consistently over the past century. Today, the town's population (delineated by the combined values for the Buncrana Urban and Buncrana Rural EDs) stands at 7,232. This is almost twice the population of the town in 1966. Thus, in fifty years, Buncrana's population has almost doubled (it increased by 94%).

**Figure 3.1: Buncrana's resident population 1911 to 2016**

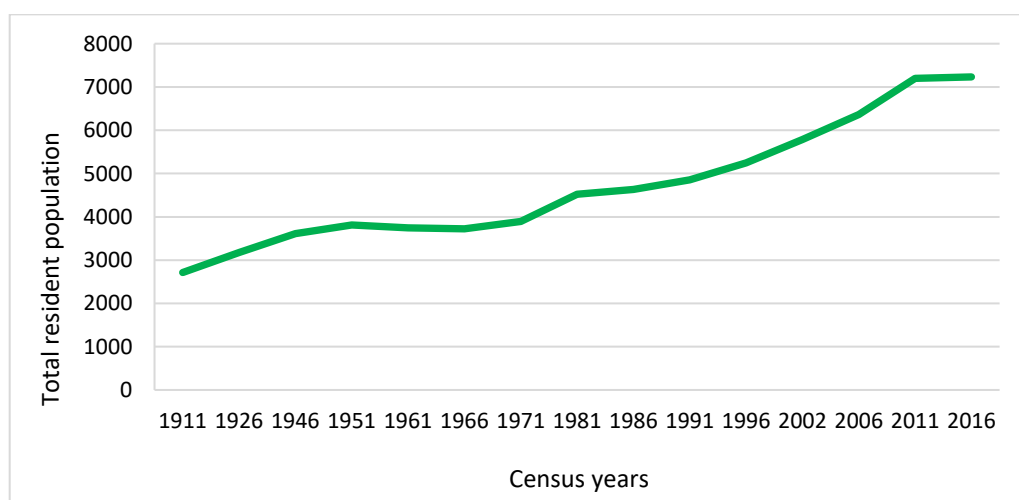
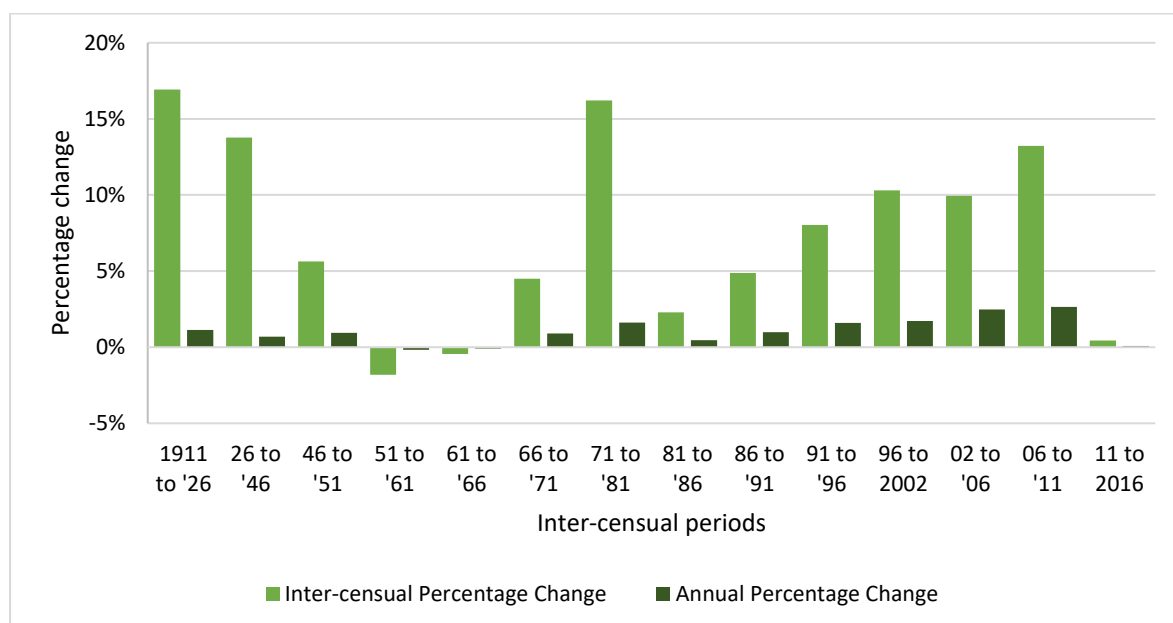


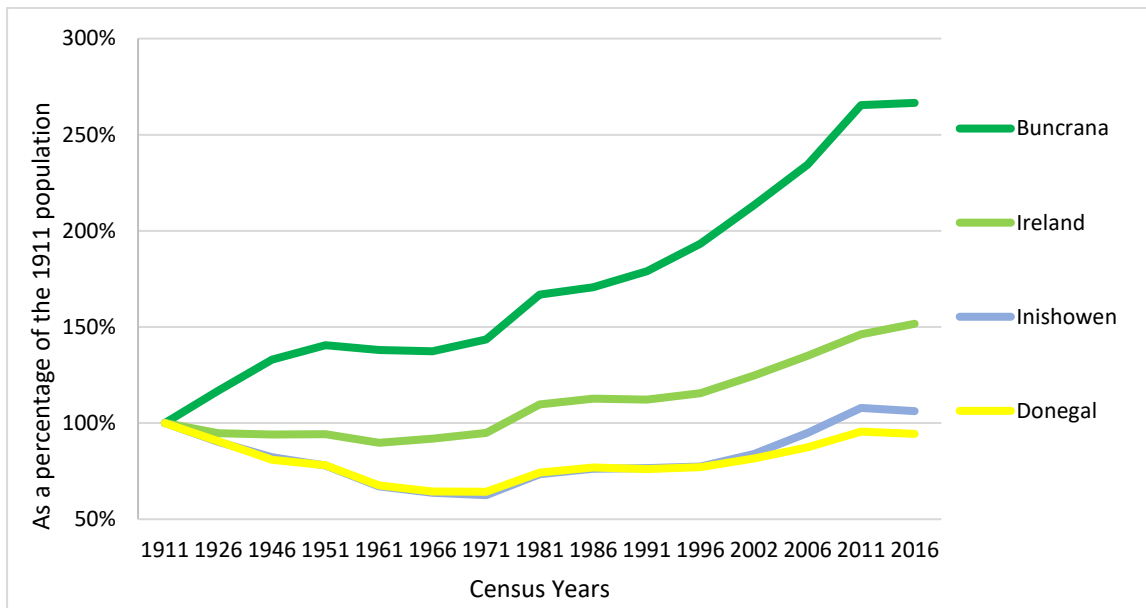
Figure 3.1 shows the town’s total population at each census since 1911. Buncrana’s population has increased during every inter-censal period since 1911. It grew from 2,713 in 1911 to 3,609 in 1946 (+33%, n=896), but was stagnant between 1946 and 1966. Indeed, as Figure 3.2, which illustrates inter-censal percentage population changes in Buncrana, shows the town experienced a slight decline in population between 1951 and 1966. . Industrialisation since the mid-1960s has been a driver of population growth. Between 1966 and 1971, the town’s population grew by almost one percent (0.9%) per annum, while it increased by 1.6% per annum during the 1970s. Over the past twenty years Buncrana has experienced deindustrialisation and the service sector has overtaken manufacturing as the main source of employment. As Figure 3.2 shows, the inter-censal periods 2002 to 2006 and 2006 to 2011 represent the periods in which Buncrana experienced the fastest annual population increase; the values were 2.5% per annum (2002 to 2006) and 2.6% per annum (2006 to 2011). Between 2011 and 2016, the population grew by just thirty-one (31 persons) – the lowest growth rate since the 1960s.

**Figure 3.2: Inter-censal population change in Buncrana 1911 to 2016**



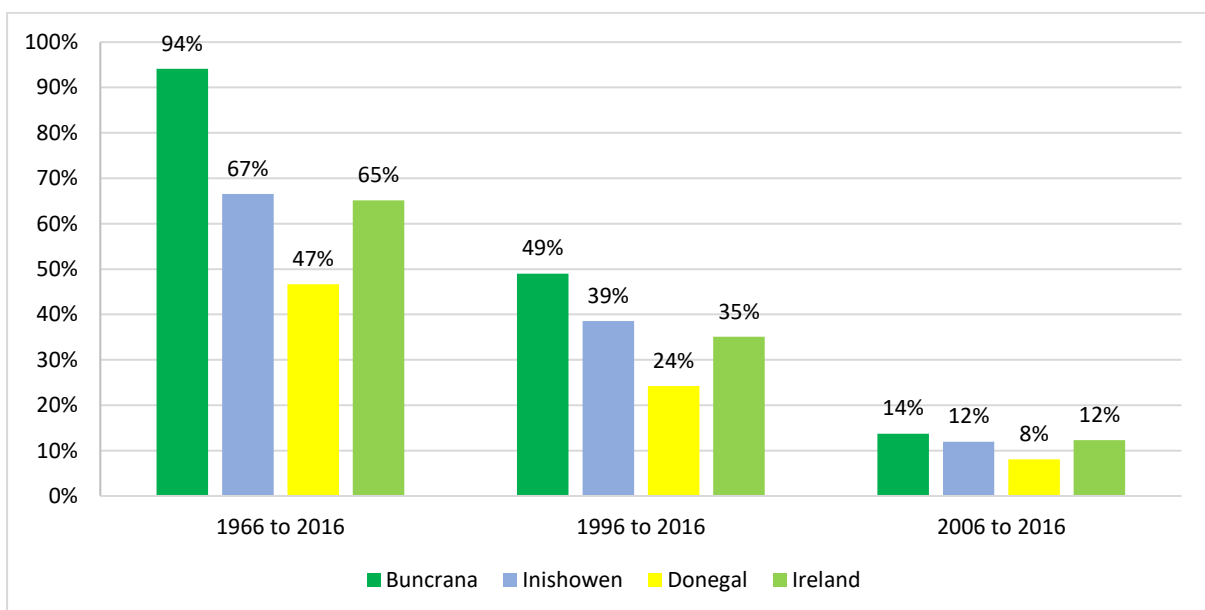
Buncrana’s population growth since the mid-1960s, and in particular between 1966 and 2011, exceeds the corresponding rates for the Inishowen Peninsula<sup>viii</sup> and County Donegal. In 2016, the total population of the Inishowen Peninsula stood at 35,934. This is only six percent higher (+2,097 persons) than the corresponding value in 1911. Indeed, when Buncrana and Carndonagh are excluded, most EDs in Inishowen record population losses over the past century. County Donegal’s overall demographic performance over the past hundred years has been weak relative to other Irish counties. In 2016, the county’s population stood at 159,192. This is over nine thousand (n=9,345) lower than in 1911. Within County Donegal, there are considerable spatial variations in respect of population change. Letterkenny and its environs have experienced substantial growth over recent decades, while much of West Donegal is demographically weak. Figure 3.3 illustrates the comparative population change over the past century.

**Figure 3.3: Relative population change 1911 to 2016 in Buncrana and comparative geographies**



In 2016, Buncrana’s population was 267% of what it was in 1911. Ireland’s (the State) population was 152% of its 1911 value. As Figure 3.3 shows, Buncrana’s rate of population growth has been consistently greater than that of the State since 1911. Indeed, between the mid-1920s and 1960s, Ireland’s population contracted. In Inishowen (including Buncrana) and County Donegal (as a whole), population declined consistently between 1911 and 1971. The association between Ireland’s accession to the EU and the country’s demographic recovery is well documented and is evidenced in the figures presented here. By 2011, the Inishowen Peninsula had returned to the population level it had in 1911.

**Figure 3.4: Percentage population change for selected periods since 1966**

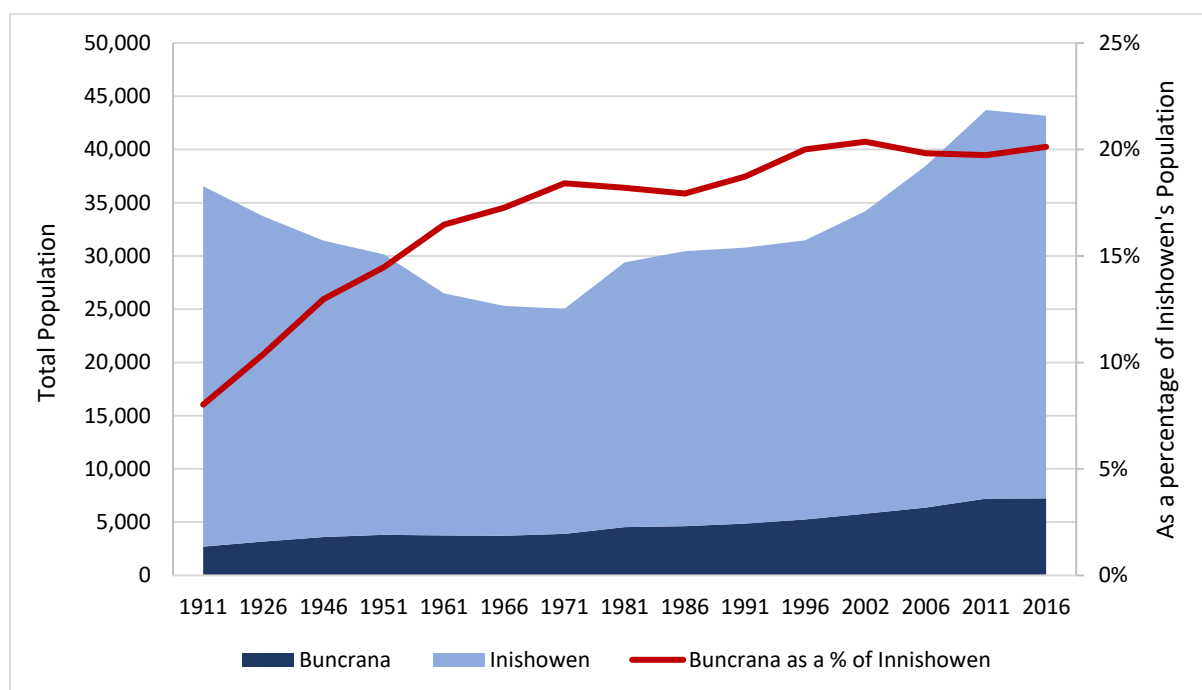




While County Donegal’s population grew consistently between 1966 and 2011, the rate of growth was slower than in Inishowen, and in 2016, the County’s population stood at 94% of what it was in 1911. Figure 3.4 illustrates the respective inter-censal population changes in Buncrana, Inishowen, County Donegal and Ireland for selected periods since 1966.

This chapter has noted the contrasting demographic performances of Buncrana and rural areas in Inishowen. In 1911, Buncrana’s population (n=2,713) represented eight percent of the population of the Inishowen Peninsula (n=33,837). In 2016, Buncrana accounted for twenty percent of Inishowen’s population. Figure 3.5 shows (the blue block) the total resident population of the Inishowen Peninsula and (red line) the percentage of that population residing in Buncrana. As a component of Inishowen, Buncrana’s population is included here.

**Figure 3.5: Total resident population in Inishowen (including Buncrana) and Buncrana’s population as a percentage of Inishowen**

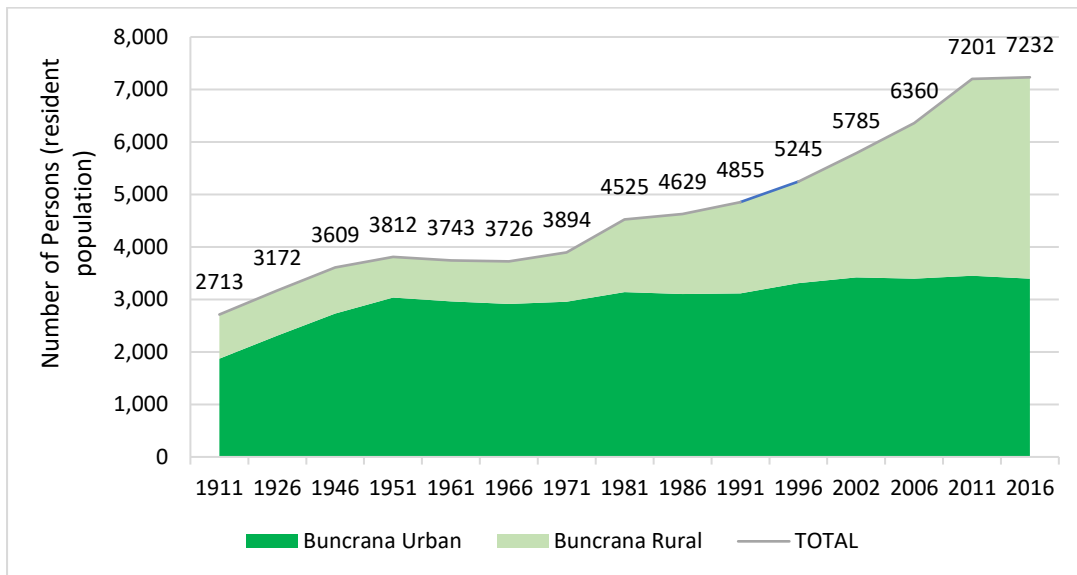


While Buncrana has experienced overall population growth, this does not have an even geography locally. As the SA-level maps presented in the supporting statistical profile document illustrate, most of the population growth, particularly over recent decades, has occurred in the suburbs. Buncrana has experienced considerable suburbanisation, and there has been some hollowing out of the town core. Figure 3.6 shows the respective demographic performances of Buncrana’s town core and its surrounding areas. The values for the town core are based on the Buncrana Urban ED, while the values for the suburbs are based on the Buncrana Rural ED.

As Figure 3.6 illustrates, the town and its suburbs grew at similar paces between 1911 and 1946. Both experienced little overall change between 1946 and 1966. Since then, however, the population of the town core has remained relatively unchanged, while most of the population growth has taken place in the

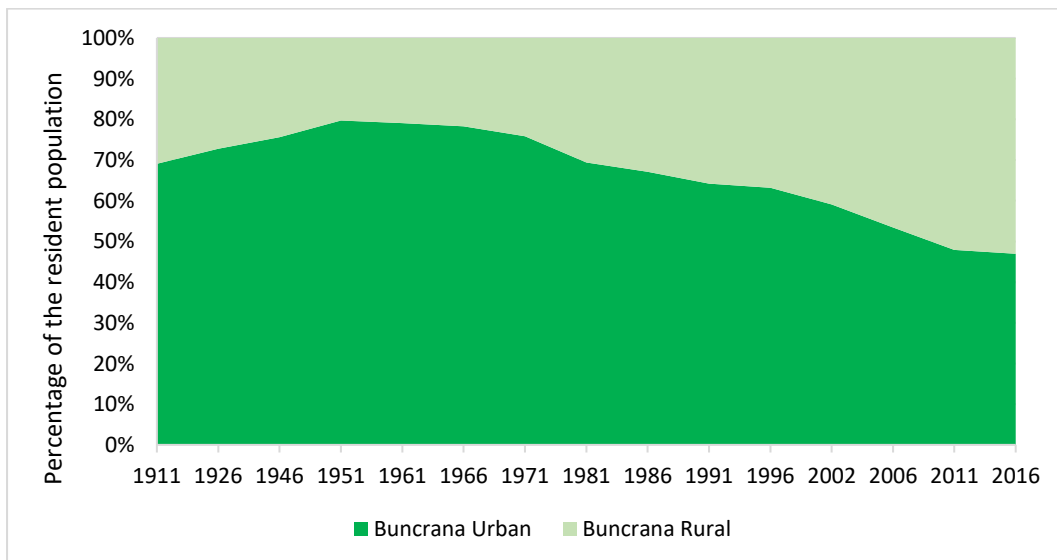
suburbs. Between 1966 and 2016, the population of the town core increased from 2,916 to 3,396; this represents a growth rate of 16%. During the same period, the population of the suburbs grew from 810 to 3,836; a growth rate of 374%.

**Figure 3.6: Population in Buncrana’s town core and suburbs (absolute numbers), 1911 to 2016**



As a result of their respective demographic performances, there has been a shift in the relative proportion of the population residing in the town core and the suburbs. Figure 3.7 demonstrates that as of 2016, the majority (53%) of Buncrana’s population resides in the suburbs. This contrasts with a value of 24% in 1971.

**Figure 3.7: Percentage of the total Buncrana population residing in the town’s constituent EDs, 1911 to 2016**



### 3.2 Age Profile

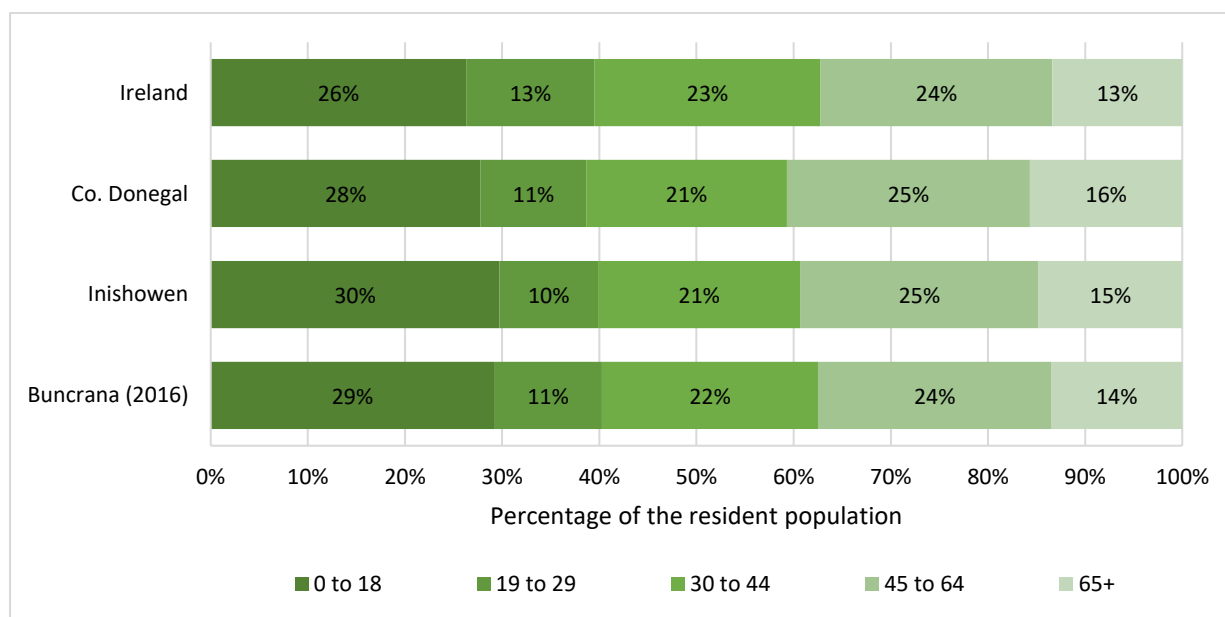
As is the case across Ireland and most of Europe, Buncrana has been experiencing an ageing of the population. Table 3.1 presents the mean (average) age of the population in 2011 and 2016. It shows that locally in Buncrana, in County Donegal and across Ireland (as a whole), there has been an increase in the average age of the population. The figures presented here in respect of the two EDs that comprise Buncrana further underscore the contrasting demographic strengths of the town core and its suburbs as detailed in the separate *Buncrana Socio-Economic and Geo-Spatial Study* (AIRO and ICLRD, 2020) (see Appendix 3).

**Table 3.1: Average age of the population in Buncrana, Co. Donegal and Ireland 2011 and 2016**

Geography	2011	2016
Buncrana Urban ED	38.5	40.1
Buncrana Rural ED	31.6	33.9
County Donegal	36.7	38.5
Ireland	36.1	37.4

While Buncrana’s population is ageing, it has a higher proportion of children and teenagers than is the case in County Donegal and the State. As illustrated in Figure 3.8, relative to the State, the proportion of children in the resident population is 3% higher in Buncrana and 4% higher in Inishowen. Persons aged 19 to 29 and those aged 30 to 44 are, in relative terms, under-represented locally in Buncrana and Inishowen.

**Figure. 3.8: Percentage of the Population by age cohort, 2016**

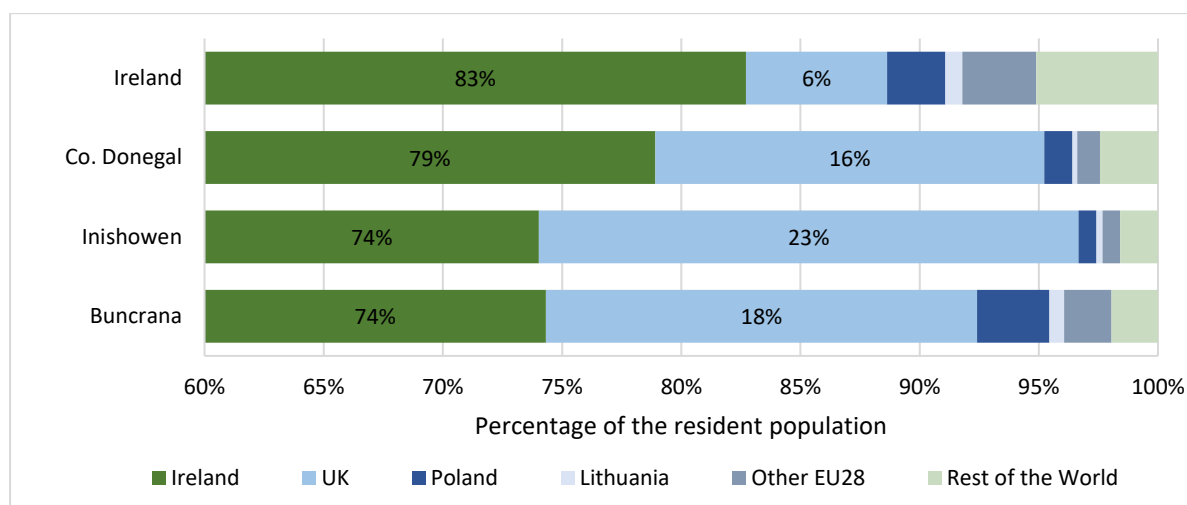


Across Ireland’s thirty-one local authority areas, County Donegal has the tenth-oldest mean age and the eighth-highest proportion of persons aged 65+. Relative to the county as a whole, Buncrana and Inishowen have smaller proportions of the population aged over 65, but have relatively more older persons than the State (Figure 3.8).

### 3.3 Diversity

Over the past two decades, Buncrana, like Ireland, has experienced an increase in the diversity of its population in respect of nationality and ethnicity. Today, almost 5% of the resident population was born in Poland and the Baltic States. Twenty years ago, the proportion of Buncrana’s resident population born outside Ireland and the UK was under 2%. Figure 3.9 shows the percentage of the population born in the State, the UK, Poland, Lithuania, elsewhere in the EU, and the rest of the world. It illustrates that, in Inishowen and Buncrana, persons born in the UK represent a sizeable proportion of the population – almost a quarter in Inishowen and almost a fifth in Buncrana.

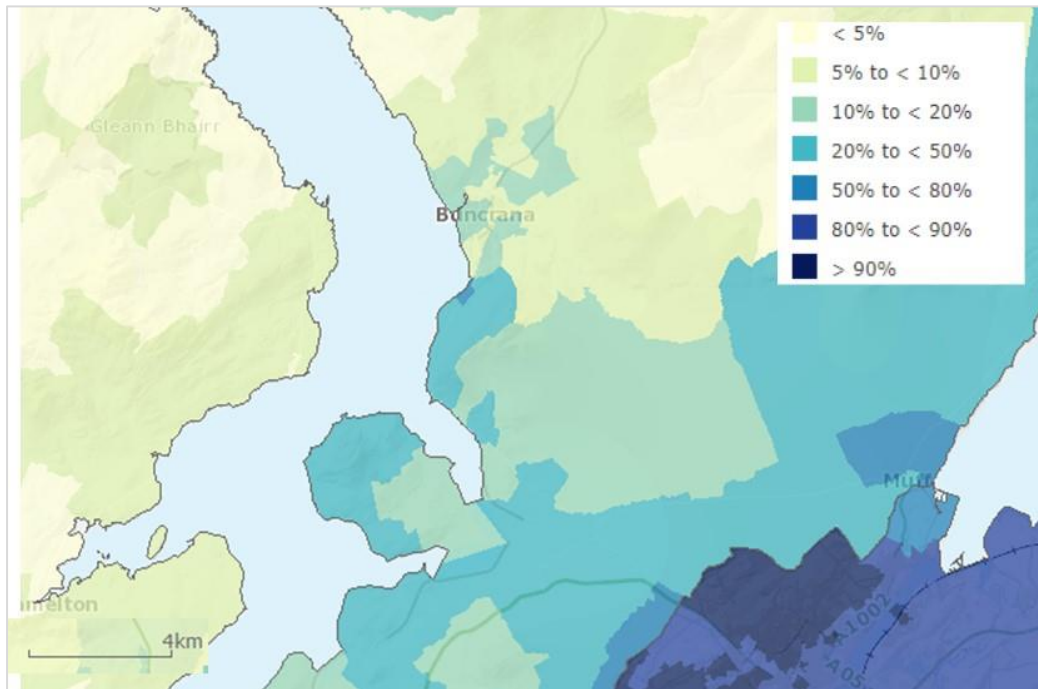
**Figure 3.9: Population by place of birth, 2016**



The majority of the resident population in Inishowen and Buncrana who were born in the UK, come from Northern Ireland (rather than Great Britain). Census returns (2011) show that eleven percent of Buncrana’s resident population was born in NI. As the following map illustrates (Figure 3.10), persons born in Northern Ireland constitute over ten percent the population in several neighbourhoods in Buncrana, while they represent over one-fifth of the population in the Lisfannon area (south of the town).

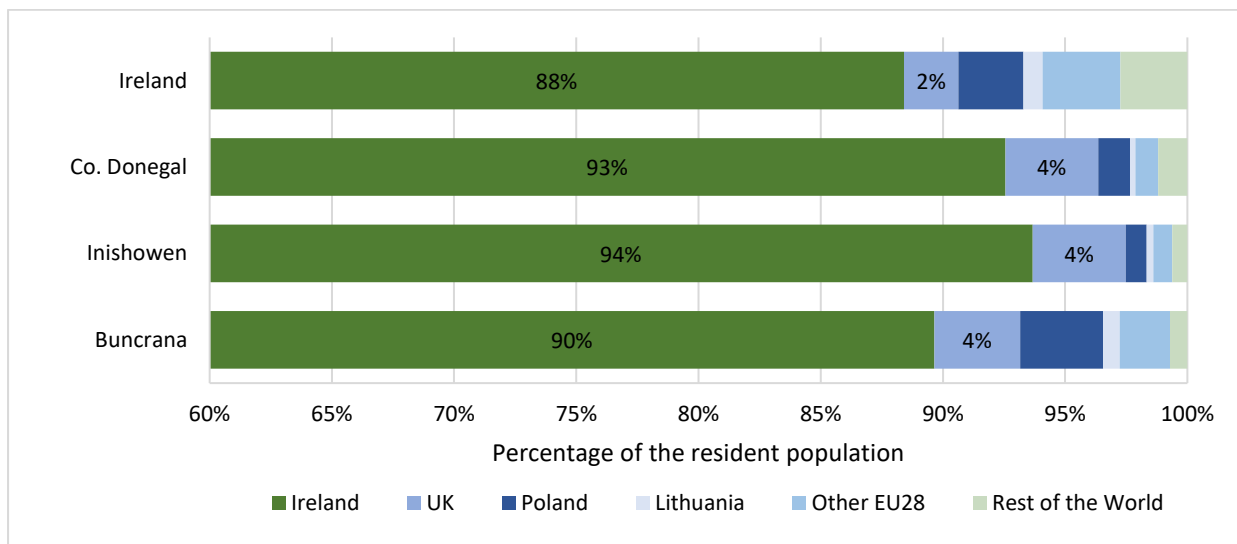
While three quarters (74%) of Buncrana’s population was born in Ireland, 90% are Irish nationals (Figure 3.11). Buncrana’s proximity to Derry and strong cross border familial and social ties shape its diversity.

Figure 3.10: Percentage of the population born in Northern Ireland, 2011<sup>ix</sup>



(Source: Adapted from the All-island Research Observatory (AIRO, 2015) *The Atlas of the Island of Ireland* <http://airomaps.nuim.ie/id/AI Atlas/?mobileBreakPoint=400/>).

Figure 3.11: Population by nationality, 2016



The 2016 Census of Population data also indicate that there are 140 persons resident in Buncrana who cannot speak English either ‘well’ or ‘at all’. Across Ireland (as a whole), 40% of the population (aged 3+) can speak Irish. The corresponding figure for County Donegal is slightly lower at 38%. In Inishowen and Buncrana, the proportions of the population who can speak Irish are 28% and 30% respectively.

There are thirty-five persons resident in Buncrana who classify themselves as an 'Irish Traveller'. These represent 0.5% of the population.

Among Ireland's twenty-six counties, County Donegal has, in proportional terms, the largest Protestant population. Buncrana exhibits less religious diversity than the county, as shown in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2: Religious composition of the resident population, 2016**

	Catholic	Other religion	No religion	Not stated
Buncrana	87.6%	4.8%	5.5%	2.1%
Inishowen	87.0%	6.0%	4.6%	2.4%
Co. Donegal	81.9%	10.9%	5.1%	2.1%
Ireland	78.3%	9.2%	9.8%	2.6%

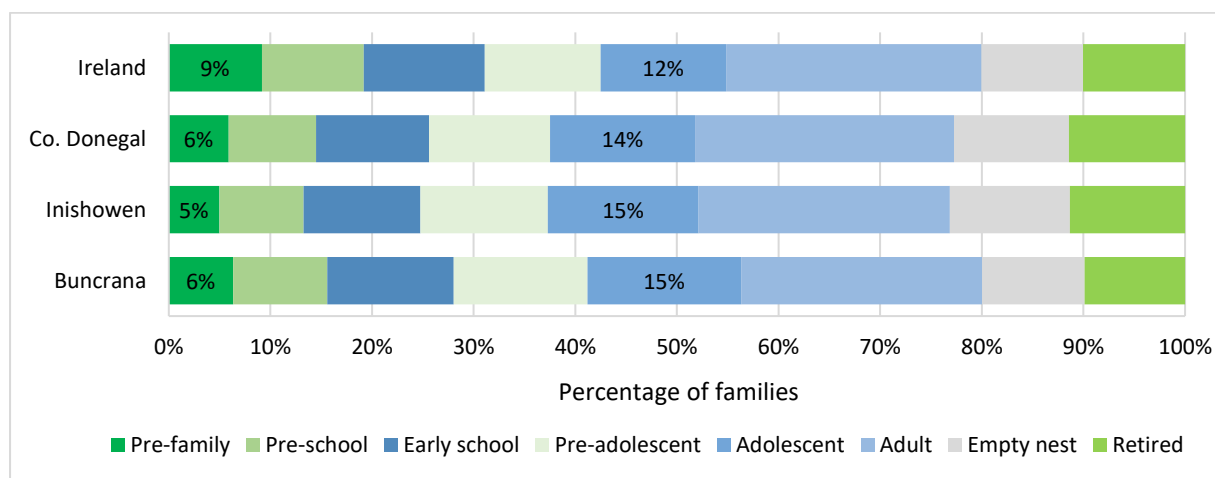
### 3.4 Household Composition

There are 1,395 resident families in Buncrana. Of these, just over one quarter (27%) are headed by lone parents. This proportion is 2% higher than the State. There are 2,743 children in Buncrana's resident population of whom 605 (22%) live in families that are headed by a lone parent.

As Figure 3.12 shows, Buncrana, Inishowen and County Donegal have a lower proportion of families in the pre-family (i.e., pre-children) stage of the family cycle than is the case across Ireland. Buncrana, Inishowen and County Donegal have a higher proportion of families with adolescent children than Ireland. For all other stages in the family cycle, Buncrana's value is within 2% of the State value.

Of the 2,668 households in Buncrana, over a quarter (27%) are one-person households (n=725). These are concentrated in the town core and are associated with an older age profile, as the maps in the separate statistical profile for Buncrana reveal (see Appendix 3). The corresponding value for Ireland is 23%.

**Figure 3.12: Percentage of families by family stage, 2016**



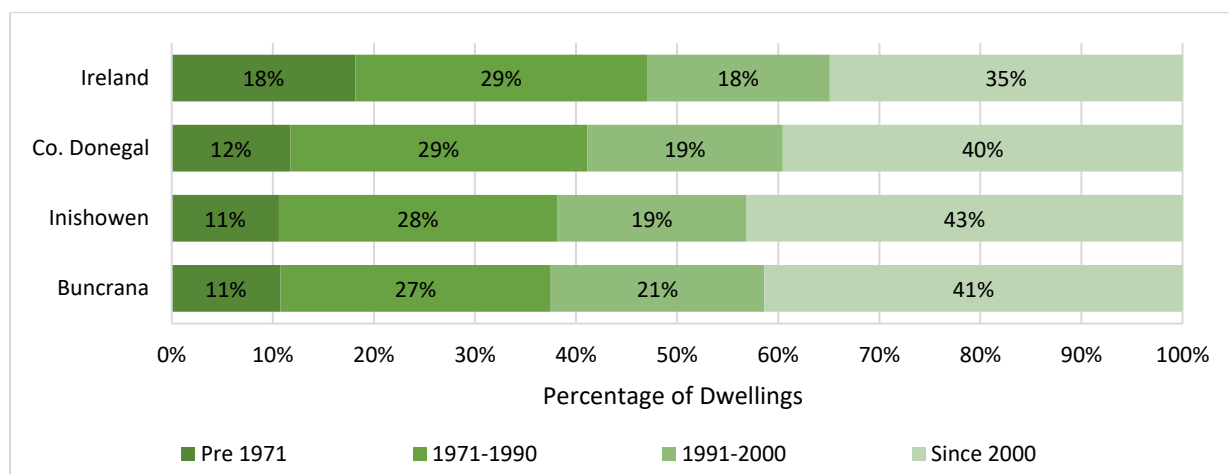
As is the case across Ireland, most households reside in a house/bungalow. Table 3.3 presents the respective percentages by type of dwelling.

**Table 3.3: Percentage of households by type of dwelling, 2016**

	House/Bungalow	Flat/Apartment	Bed-Sit	Caravan/ Mobile home	Other / Not stated
<b>Buncrana</b>	92.9%	5.5%	0.0%	0.0%	1.6%
<b>Inishowen</b>	95.3%	3.1%	0.0%	0.2%	1.3%
<b>Co. Donegal</b>	94.7%	3.6%	0.0%	0.3%	1.3%
<b>Ireland</b>	86.5%	11.8%	0.2%	0.3%	1.3%

Associated with its relatively high level of population growth over the past two decades, as well as growth in visitor numbers, Buncrana has a newer housing stock than County Donegal and Ireland (see Figure 3.13).

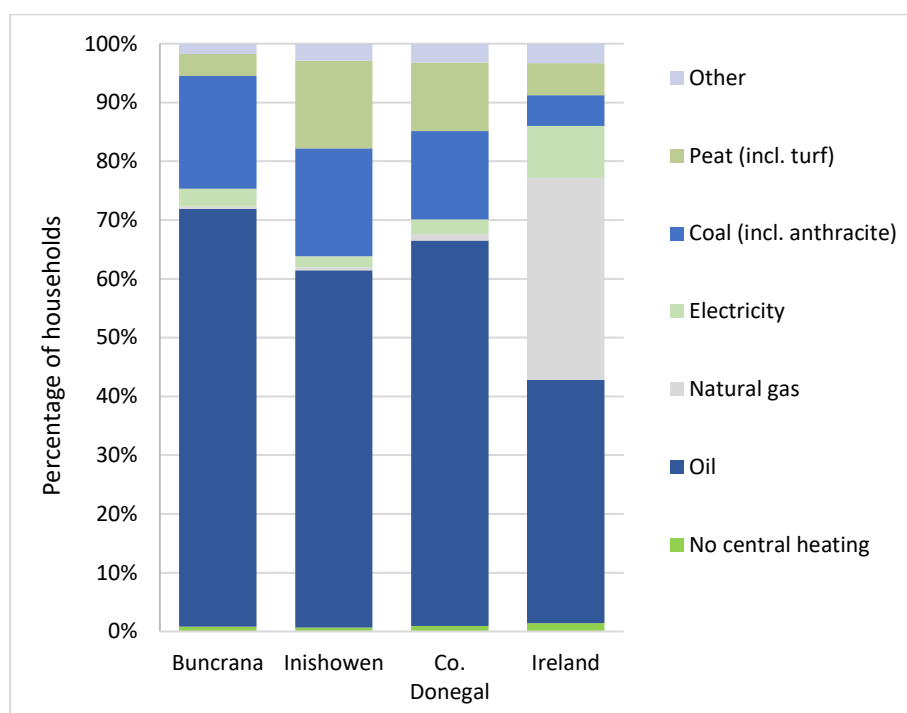
**Figure 3.13: Percentage of dwellings by period of construction**



### 3.5 Fuel Consumption

Despite its relatively new housing stock, Buncrana has a high level of reliance on fossil fuels (see Figure 3.14). Over 70% of homes are heated using oil; making the area's energy security susceptible to geopolitics and global market forces. Oil and other fossil fuels are among the main emitters of greenhouse gases, which are leading to climate disruption. The proportion of homes that are heated by coal (19%) is almost five times the proportion across Ireland. The burning of coal has negative implications for the natural environment and public health.

**Figure 3.14: Main sources of home heating, 2016**



### 3.6 Composition of the Labour Force and Occupations

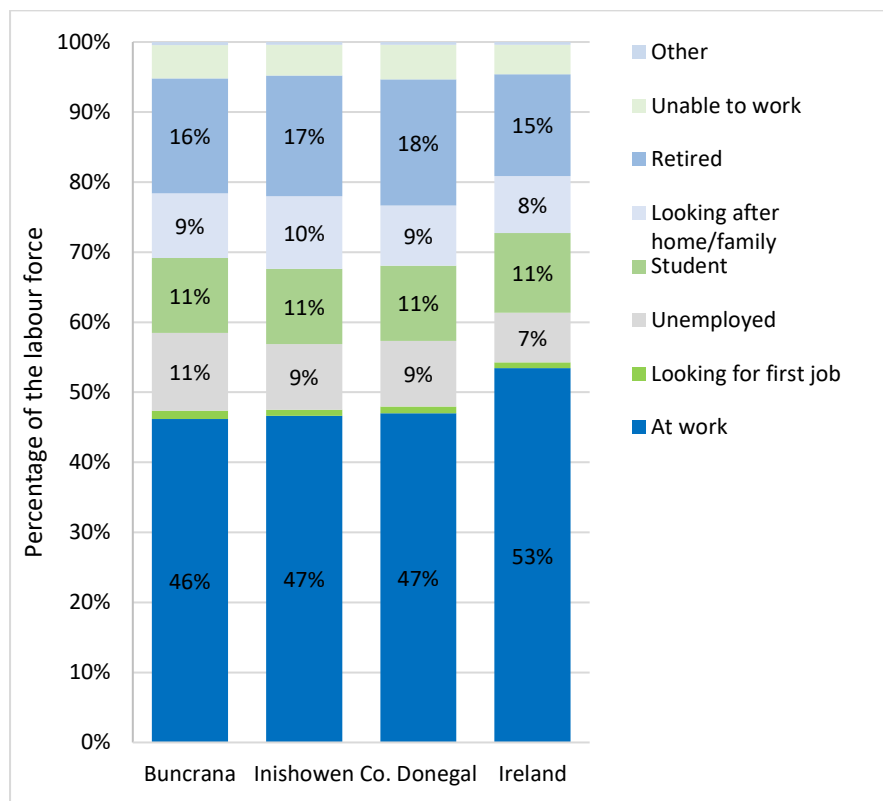
County Donegal records the lowest level of labour force participation and the highest level of unemployment among Ireland’s twenty-six counties. This has consistently been the case for several decades. Donegal also records the highest aggregate level of deprivation of any Irish county and is second to Limerick City among the (current and former) local authority areas in respect of the level of deprivation, as recorded by the Pobal HP Index of Affluence and Deprivation. The Index, which is a composite measure, is based on multiple variables, including labour force participation, social class, educational attainment, lone parent ratio and housing tenure. Since the Index was first applied in the early 1990s, Donegal has consistently recorded a negative (minus) score on the Pobal HP Index.

Labour force participation is associated with the structure of the economy and the skill levels of the population, among other factors. The promotion and stimulation of labour force participation are integral to breaking the cycle of inter-generational deprivation and social exclusion. As Figure 3.15 indicates, these are notable challenges in Buncrana, Inishowen and County Donegal.

These three geographies have lower levels of labour force participation and higher levels of unemployment than is the case in Ireland as a whole. The data in the separate statistical analysis report, which show the contemporaneous declines in the number of persons on the live register, locally and nationally, ought to be considered in the context of the figures presented here.



Figure 3.15: Composition of the labour force, 2016\*

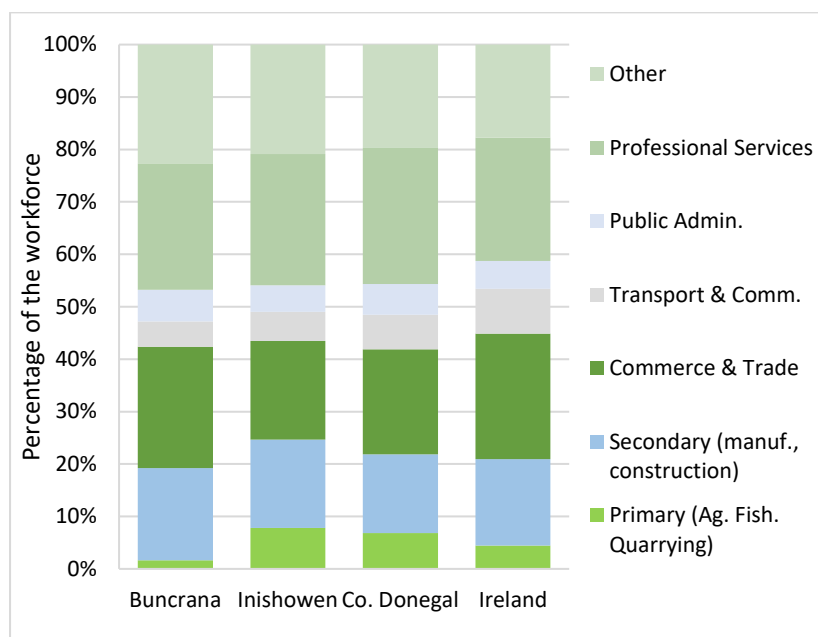


Among those who are classified as ‘at work’ and resident in Buncrana, the largest cohorts – with respect to employment sectors - are ‘professional services’ (24%), ‘commerce and trade’ (23%) and ‘other’ (23%) (Figure 3.16). The level of employment in ‘professional services’ and ‘commerce and trade’ in Buncrana is consistent with that in other similar-sized towns across Ireland. The proportion of persons employed in these two sectors, who are resident in Buncrana, is within 1% of the corresponding figures for the State. The proportion employed in ‘public administration’ is almost on a par; it stands at 6% in Buncrana and 5% in Ireland.

Those whose occupations are classified as ‘other’ include persons with variable, seasonal and mixed (sectoral and temporal) employment. This cohort is generally most prevalent in peripheral and coastal rural communities and on offshore islands, where workers combine a number of roles, such as farming, fishing and tourism, in order to generate their household income. Its significance in Buncrana is associated with seasonal and part-time employment in tourist-related activities.

The data presented here indicate the relative significance of agricultural employment in Inishowen and across County Donegal as a whole; the respective values are 8% and 7%. In both these geographies, ‘professional services’ account for the single most significant source of employment – accounting for a quarter of all occupations.

**Figure 3.16: Sectoral composition of the workforce, 2016**

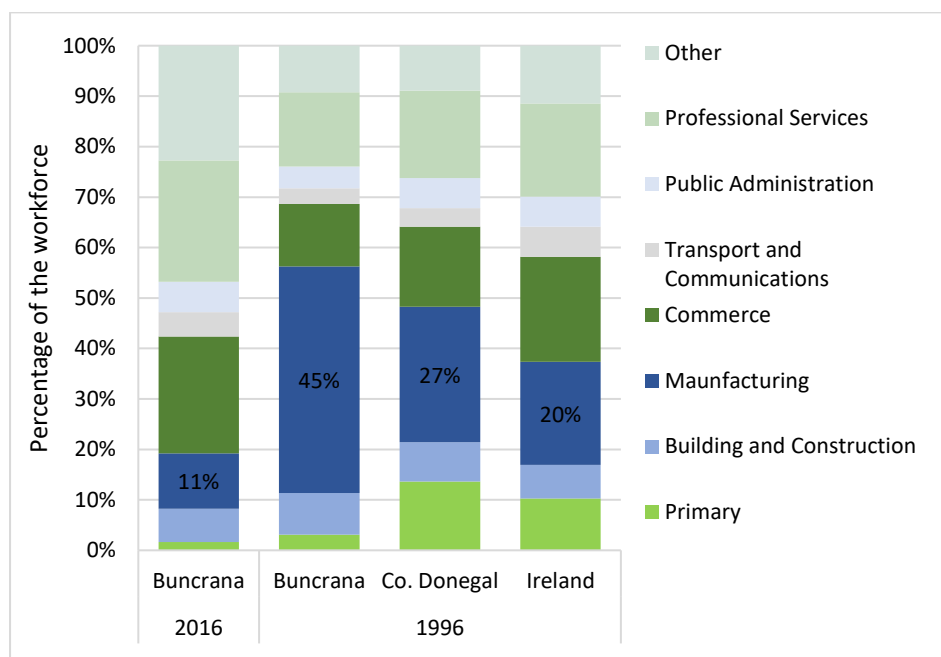


The data presented in Figure 3.16 show that the proportion of the resident workforce employed in ‘manufacturing and construction’ (the secondary sector) is broadly the same across all four geographies. The range in values is just three percent – from 15% in County Donegal to 18% in Buncrana. The values in respect of the proportion of the workforce employed in manufacturing (alone) are as follows: Buncrana 11%; Inishowen 9%; County Donegal 9%; and Ireland 11%. This occupational profile differs considerably from that which pertained twenty years earlier, in 1996, when textile plants were still operational in Buncrana, as Figure 3.17 shows. At that point in time, 45% of Buncrana’s resident workforce was employed in manufacturing; this was more than twice the level across Ireland, and Buncrana-based firms were a significant source of employment for people across Inishowen and further afield.

The data presented thus far in respect of employment relate to Buncrana’s residents and are taken from the same Census of Population dataset as the other variables presented here and in the detailed statistical profile report. In addition, the CSO computes a separate database (POWSCAR<sup>xi</sup>) relating to the location of jobs and associated travel to work patterns. The POWSCAR database reveals that:

- There are 1,988 jobs based in Buncrana. Of these:
  - 1,027 (52%) are held by persons who reside in Buncrana; and
  - 961 (48%) are held by persons who live outside Buncrana and travel to the town to work.
- There are 2,327 resident workers in Buncrana. Of these:
  - 1,027 (44%) work locally (in Buncrana);
  - 801 (34.5%) commute to work outside Buncrana; and
  - 499 (21.5%) commute to unknown and variable locations (may be inside / outside Buncrana<sup>xii</sup>).

**Figure 3.17: Sectoral composition of the workforce, 2016 (Buncrana) and 1996**



Thus, Buncrana has a ‘jobs to residents’ deficit; the ratio is 1:1.17. The number of inbound commuters (n=961) outnumbers the number of outbound commuters (n=801) by 160. Among the 801 outbound commuters, the numbers commuting to defined destinations are:

- 532 elsewhere in County Donegal;
- 214 in Derry;
- 20 elsewhere in Northern Ireland; and
- 35 other locations.

The POWSCAR database also reveals that 99.5% of Buncrana-based jobs are held by persons who reside in County Donegal. Thus, the level of cross border commuting (for work purposes) into Buncrana is negligible.

**Table 3.4: Profile of inbound and outbound commuters (to and from Buncrana) on selected variables, 2016**

Characteristic	Local Jobs	Outbound commuters
Aged 20 to 44	60%	63%
With a third-level qualification	47%	55%
Employers, managers or professionals (ABC social classes)	35%	42%
Employed in retail and accommodation	31%	21%
Employed in ICT	12%	20%
Employed in public services	37%	35%

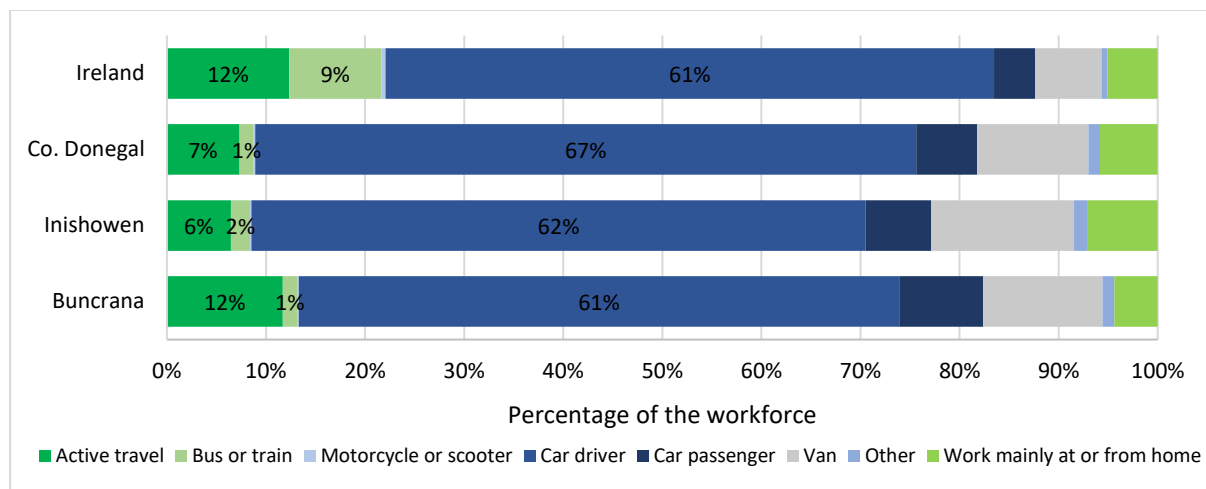
Table 3.4 presents the respective profiles of those who hold Buncrana-based jobs and outbound commuters. The figures reveal that outbound commuters have a younger age profile, are better educated, occupy higher social class occupations and are more likely to work in newer industries. Therefore, while Buncrana has a

surplus as regards residents to jobs, the POWSCAR data suggest that these are more traditional and lower quality jobs than those held by persons who travel out of town to work.

### 3.7 Modes of Travel to Work

As Figure 3.18 shows, almost 70% of commuters travel to work by car (61% as drivers and 8% as passengers). This poses environmental and quality-of-life challenges. The proportion of commuters using public transport (1%) is low and is associated with the absence of an in-town bus service. One-in-eight persons walk or cycle to work. This is low considering the town’s size and the aforementioned positive ‘jobs to residents’ ratio.

**Figure 3.18: Modes of travel to work, 2016**



### 3.8 Conclusion

This chapter reveals that:

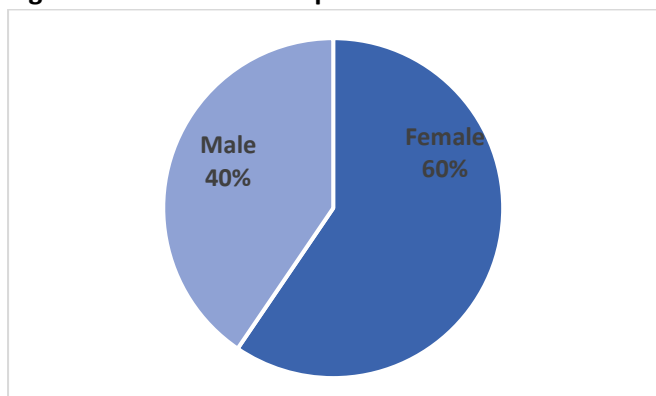
- Buncrana has experienced more rapid population growth than Ireland as a whole;
- Population growth has been more pronounced in Buncrana’s suburbs than in the town core;
- Buncrana has a relatively high proportion of children and teenagers in its resident population;
- The proportion of the population aged 65 and over is above the national value;
- The population is ageing, particularly in the town centre;
- In-migration of persons from Northern Ireland is significant;
- Migration from Eastern Europe is a small but notable feature of the town’s demographic makeup;
- While Buncrana has a relatively new housing stock, households have a high level of reliance on traditional fossil fuels;
- Participation in the labour force is laggard;
- Buncrana’s economic base is more traditional than is the case across Ireland as a whole;
- Residents commute out of Buncrana to access higher-value jobs than those that are available in the town; and
- Commuters exhibit a high level of dependence on the private car.

## CHAPTER 4: BUNCRANA – PLACE STANDARD PERCEPTIONS

This chapter presents the findings (mainly quantitative data) from a survey of local stakeholders that was administered in Buncrana between February and June 2020. The survey questionnaire was based on the Place Standard template (see Appendix 2). The survey provided a mechanism to reach out to young people, particularly those aged under 18, thereby making the consultation process more inclusive and contributing to a future-proofing of the recommendations put forward in this report. Crana College facilitated the senior-cycle students to complete the questionnaire on-line, and the ICLRD team wishes to acknowledge the school's contributions to this report. Other civil society organisations locally also promoted the questionnaire within their membership, and their contributions are gratefully acknowledged. The support of Donegal County Council and other local networks in facilitating engagement with the diaspora and resident businesses is also appreciated.

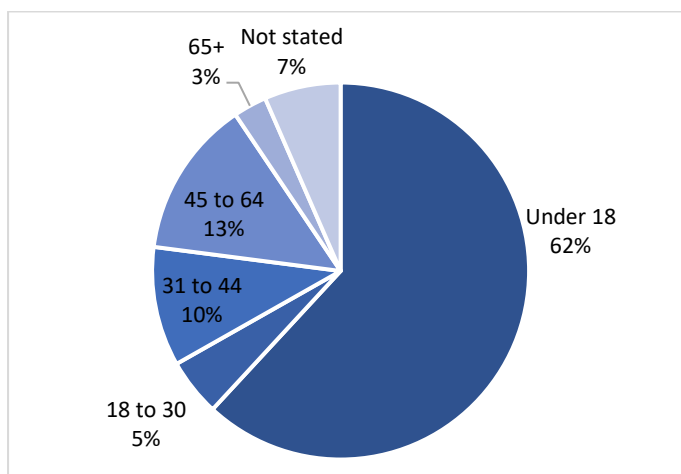
A total of 277 completed questionnaires were returned<sup>xiii</sup>. As Figure 4.1 shows, the majority of respondents were female.

**Figure 4.1: Gender of Respondents**



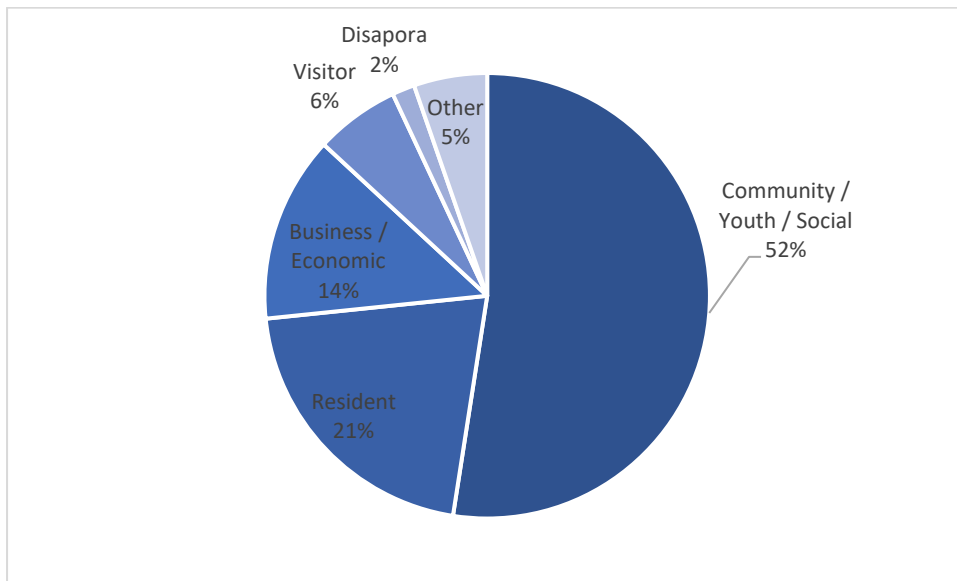
The work of Crana College in promoting the survey questionnaire is evident in the age profile of respondents, as Figure 4.2 illustrates with 62% of respondents aged under 18.

**Figure 4.2: Age Cohorts of Survey Respondents**



Respondents were asked to identify with one cohort/sector, which best describes their role in the local community. As Figure 4.3 shows, over half (52%) associate with 'community/youth/social' organisations, including students and community organisations. Over one-in-five respondents describe themselves as a 'resident'. One-in-seven (14%) is an economic stakeholder. A number of visitors to Buncrana, including those with holiday homes, also completed the questionnaire, accounting for 6% of all respondents.

**Figure 4.3: How survey respondents describe themselves**



#### 4.1 Perceptions of Local Stakeholders

The following spider-diagram (Figure 4.4) presents the mean values – on a scale from 1 to 7 – in respect of the fourteen indicators on the Place Standard. High scores are associated with areas of strength – assets on which the town can build. Low scores point to the challenges and the areas/aspects requiring particular attention and/or investment.

The diagram shows that the most highly rated dimension of place is 'feeling safe', with a mean score of 4.9. The survey records mean scores of 4.5 or higher in respect of 'care and maintenance', 'natural space' and 'community engagement/participation'. Scores ranging from 4.0 to 4.5 are recorded in respect of 'play and recreation', 'moving around', 'identity and belonging', 'housing' and 'social contact/amenities'. The remaining dimensions record scores that are below 4.0. These are, in descending order: 'work and the local economy', 'facilities and amenities', 'streets and space', 'traffic and parking' and 'public transport'.

**Figure 4.4: Mean values on the Place Standard, as recorded in Buncrana, spring 2020**

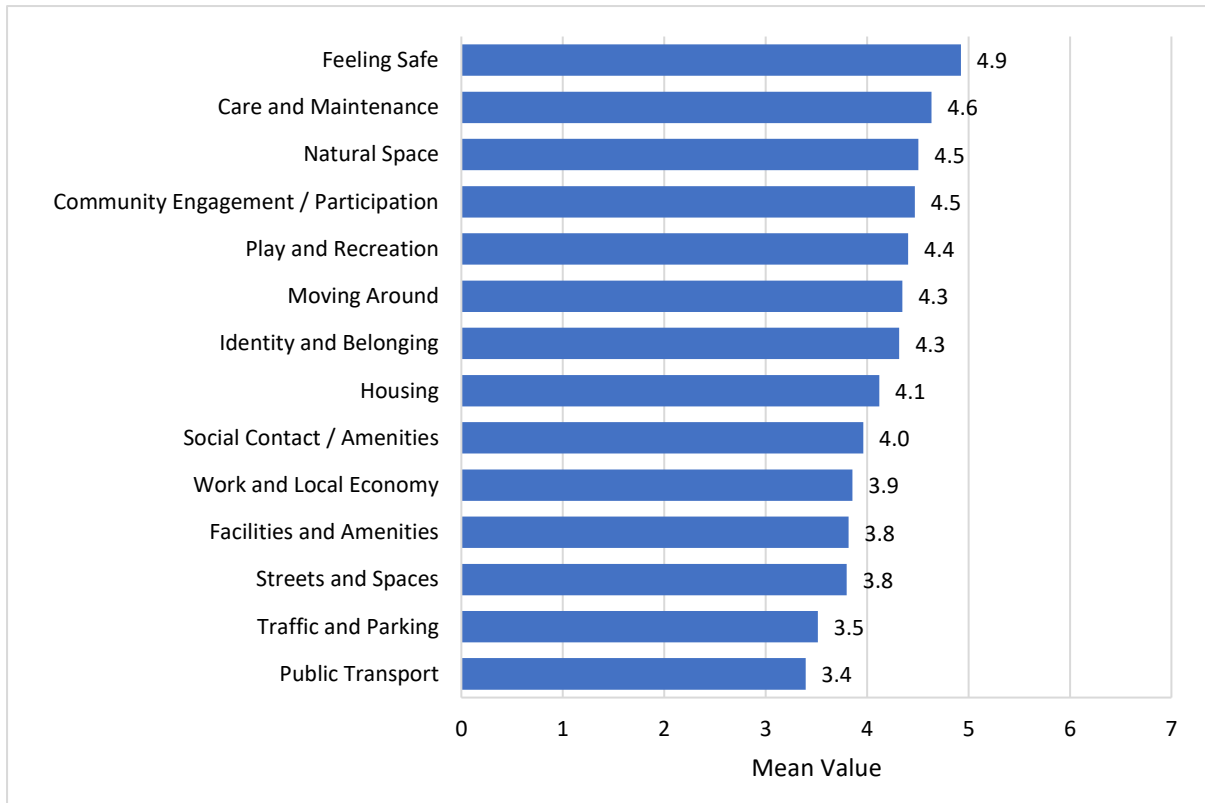


Appendix 4 presents a series of histograms (with trendlines) showing the distribution of responses on each dimension of the Place Standard.

The following bar-graphs (Figure 4.5 and 4.6) present the mean values for all fourteen dimensions in descending order. Figure 4.5 presents the data for the entire survey cohort. Figure 4.6 presents the data (mean values) for two broad age cohorts, namely those under 18 and those over 18.

As Figure 4.6 indicates, there are value differences and variances in respect of the sequencing of elements of the Place Standard based on age cohort.

**Figure 4.5: Mean values on the Place Standard, in descending order, as recorded in Buncrana, spring 2020 (all respondents)**



**Figure 4.6: Mean values, by age cohort (under / over 18) on the Place Standard, as recorded in Buncrana, spring 2020**

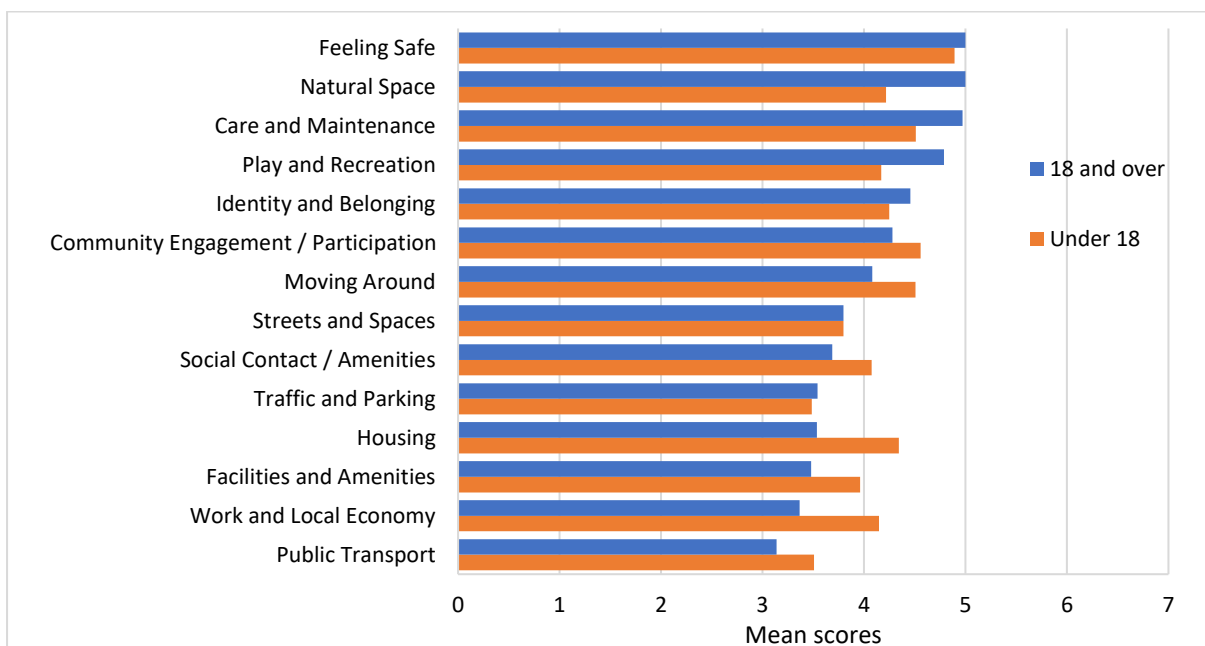




Table 4.1 lists the elements in sequence, based on the mean values assigned by both age cohorts.

**Table 4.1: Sequencing, based on mean values of the elements on the Place Standard, as assigned by those aged under 18 and those aged 18 and over**

18 and over		Under 18	
Element	Mean Value	Element	Mean Value
Natural Space	5.00	Feeling Safe	4.89
Feeling Safe	5.00	Community Engagement / Participation	4.56
Care and Maintenance	4.97	Care and Maintenance	4.51
Play and Recreation	4.79	Moving Around	4.51
Identity and Belonging	4.46	Housing	4.34
Community Engagement / Participation	4.28	Identity and Belonging	4.25
Moving Around	4.08	Natural Space	4.22
Streets and Spaces	3.80	Play and Recreation	4.17
Social Contact / Amenities	3.69	Work and Local Economy	4.15
Traffic and Parking	3.54	Social Contact / Amenities	4.07
Housing	3.54	Facilities and Amenities	3.96
Facilities and Amenities	3.48	Streets and Spaces	3.80
Work and Local Economy	3.37	Public Transport	3.51
Public Transport	3.14	Traffic and Parking	3.49

Table 4.2 presents the median values (all respondents) in respect of each dimension on the Place Standard.

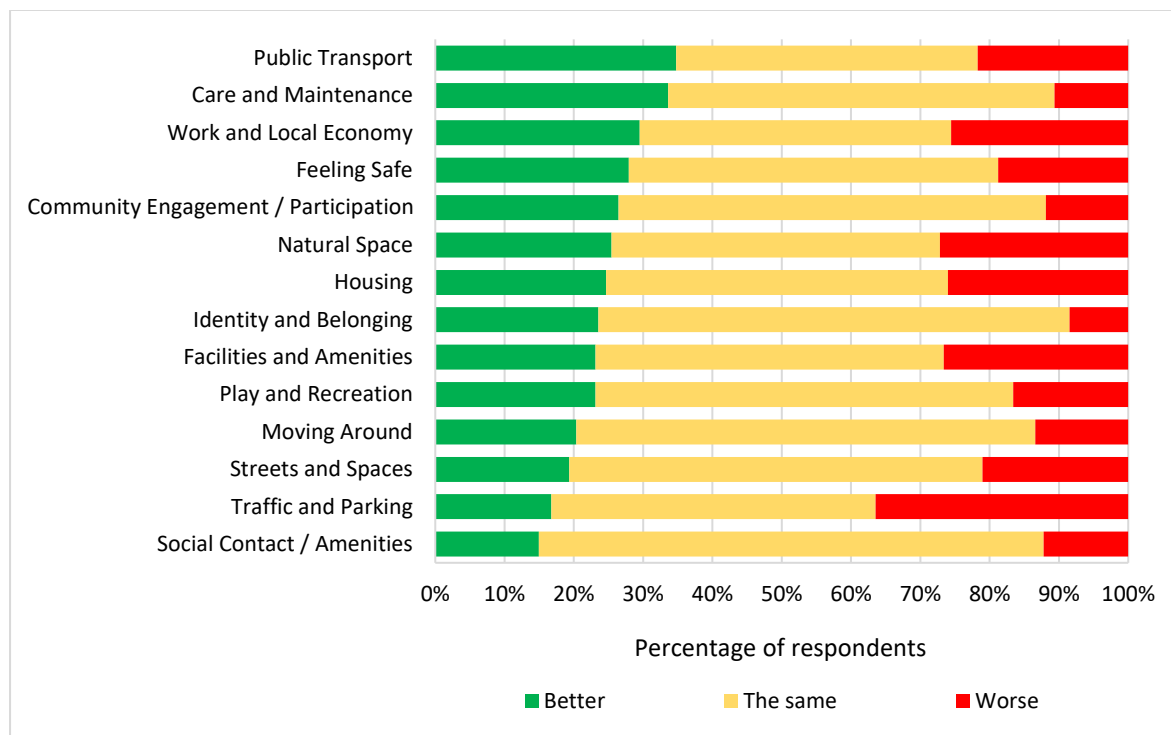
**Table 4.2: Median values on the Place Standard, as recorded in Buncrana, spring 2020**

Dimension	Median	Dimension	Median	Dimension	Median
Natural Space	5	Moving Around	4	Public Transport	3
Play and Recreation	5	Traffic and Parking	4		
Feeling Safe	5	Streets and Spaces	4		
Care and Maintenance	5	Facilities and Amenities	4		
Community Engagement / Participation	5	Work and Local Economy	4		
		Housing	4		
		Social Contact / Amenities	4		
		Identity and Belonging	4		

### 4.1.1 Change over Time

The survey questionnaire asked respondents to assess if each dimension has changed over the past five years – to indicate if it had improved, stayed the same or gotten worse. Figure 4.7 presents the data in descending order on the basis of the percentage of respondents indicating that the particular dimension has improved (gotten better).

**Figure 4.7: Perceived changes, over five years, on each dimension of the Place Standard in Buncrana**



As Figure 4.7 reveals, over 30% of respondents believe that the situation is ‘better’ in respect of ‘public transport’ and ‘care and maintenance’. It is noteworthy that ‘public transport’ received the lowest mean score on the place standard, thus indicating that despite its current low standing, the situation was considerably worse five years ago. ‘Care and maintenance’ recorded the second-highest score on the place standard. Over a quarter of respondents perceive that the situation has gotten ‘better’ in respect of ‘work and the local economy’, ‘feeling safe’ and ‘community engagement/participation’. A quarter (25%) of respondents believe that Buncrana has gotten better in respect of ‘natural spaces’ and ‘housing’. However, slightly higher proportions perceived that these two dimensions of place have gotten ‘worse’ over the past five years (27% and 26% respectively). Over two-thirds (68%) of respondents believe that things are ‘the same’ in respect of ‘identity and belonging’, with almost a quarter (24%) perceiving improvements in this regard over the past five years. While a similar proportion (23%) perceive that things have improved in respect of ‘facilities and amenities’, a larger percentage (27%) state that these have gotten ‘worse’. More people perceive that ‘play and recreation’ have gotten better than gotten worse (23% relative to 17%). One-fifth (20%) perceive that things have gotten better in respect of ‘moving around’, while 13% believe this aspect has gotten worse. According to the respondents, the aspects of the town that have improved least are ‘streets and spaces’, ‘traffic and parking’ and ‘social contact amenities’. Over one-third (36%) of people

perceive that ‘traffic and parking’ have gotten worse, while just 17% perceive that this aspect of the town has improved over the past five years.

#### 4.1.2 Cluster Analysis

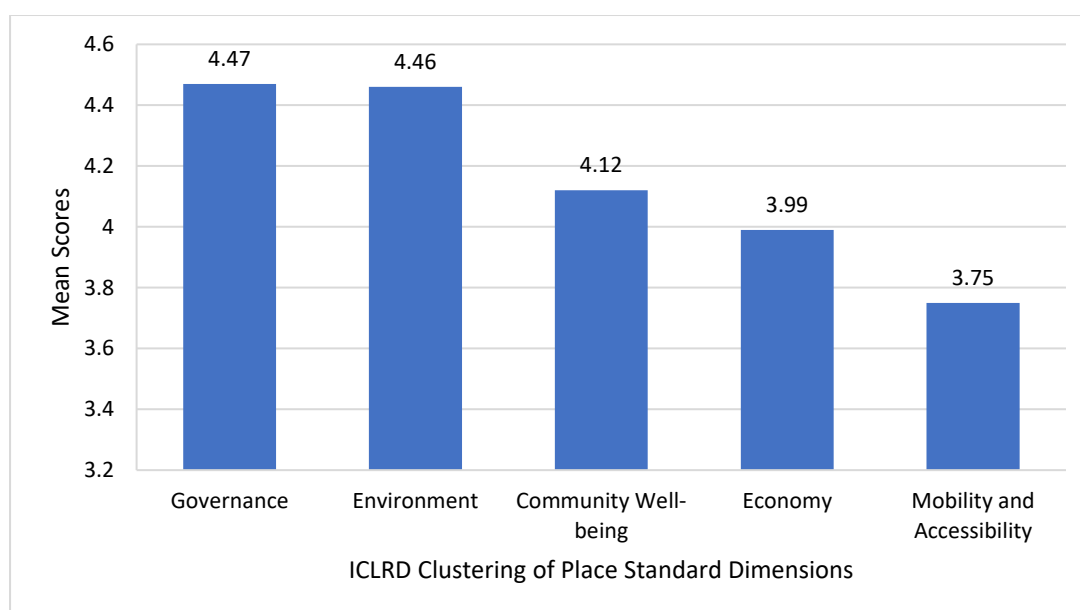
For the purposes of questionnaire and the focus groups (see Chapter 5), the fourteen dimensions on the Place Standard were clustered as follows:

**Table 4.3: The fourteen dimensions of the Place Standard clustered into five key themes**

Theme / Cluster	Dimensions included:
Mobility and Accessibility	Moving around; public transport; traffic and parking;
Economy	Work and local economy; housing and community
Community well-being	Social contact; identity and belonging; play and recreation; facilities and amenities;
Environment	Care and maintenance; natural space; feeling safe; streets and spaces; and
Governance	Influence and sense of control (community engagement and participation).

The ICLRD undertook this clustering of the Place Standard variables in consultation with Donegal County Council and Inishowen Development Partnership in advance of the stakeholder consultations. While the clustering is subjective, there were methodological imperatives; it enabled the research team to convene five, rather than fourteen, workshops, thereby giving stakeholders opportunities to comment on a wide range of themes/topics with greatest efficiency. Figure 4.8 records the mean scores in respect of the five clusters (based on the totality of responses to the corresponding dimensions).

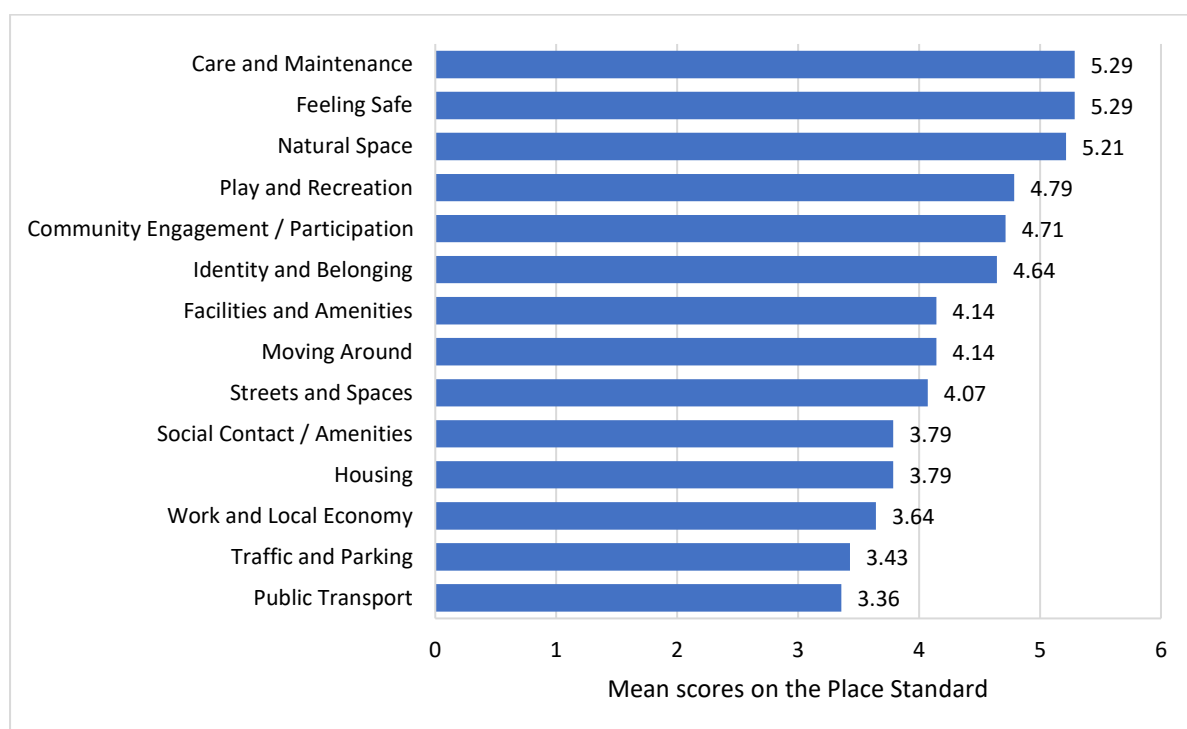
**Figure 4.8: Mean scores awarded on the Place Standard – based on ICRD cluster analysis**



## 4.2 Business Community Perspectives

During their time in Buncrana, members of the ICLRD research team, met on a one-to-one basis with several local business owners and, through a series of semi-structured interviews, garnered business community perspectives on development considerations, trajectories and opportunities (see Chapter 5). In light of the limitations regarding face-to-face meetings in the wake of COVID-19, it was not possible to convene a dedicated workshop for representatives of local businesses as had been desired. Thus, in lieu, Donegal County Council contacted all businesses on its database and invited them to complete the Place Standard Questionnaire. This invitation was issued in June, and the data generated represents an add-on to the results already presented in respect of the responses received from the general public (including some of those in the private sector) and the diaspora (see Section 4.3 below). The targeted issuing of the survey afforded business community representatives an opportunity to make observations about the impact of COVID-19. An additional fourteen local businesses availed of this opportunity to contribute to the Place Standard. Figure 4.9 presents the mean scores awarded to each dimension of place on the Place Standard tool.

**Figure 4.9: Mean scores awarded on the Place Standard – business community responses, June 2020**



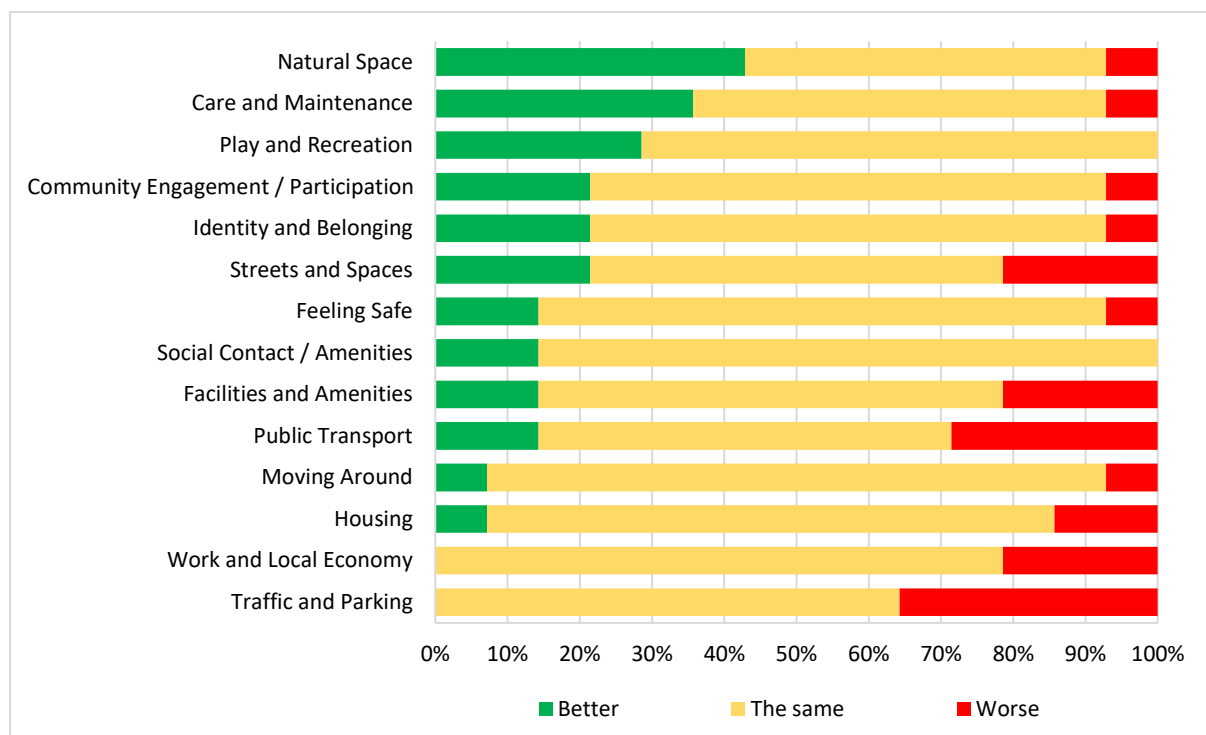
The responses indicate a large degree of consistency with those received from other cohorts (reference Figure 4.5). They reiterate that ‘care and maintenance’, ‘feeling safe’ and ‘natural space’ are the three dimensions of place that are most highly prized in Buncrana. The most problematic aspects of place, according to the survey results, are ‘public transport’ and ‘traffic and parking’. The score (3.64), which the business community awarded to ‘work and the local economy’ is broadly in line with that awarded by the adult population (among the general public) (i.e. 3.37). Both scores contrast with the more optimistic perspective of young people (those aged <18), who awarded ‘work and the local economy’ a mean score of 4.15.

The business community respondents perceive little change in most dimensions of place over the past five years, as illustrated in Figure 4.10. Their relatively positive perspective of changes in respect of ‘care and

maintenance' and 'natural spaces' are largely consistent with those of the general public. Perceptions are also consistent in respect of the less positive perceptions of 'traffic and parking' and 'moving around'. Business community respondents are, however, less positive in their assessments of changes to public transport and the local economy.

In identifying Buncrana's assets, the business community responses reflect those of the other cohorts in terms of referring to Buncrana's natural environment – specifically its coastline and beaches. When asked to identify the challenges facing Buncrana, business sector respondents referred to a mismatch between the supply of local jobs and the increasing educational qualifications among the population.

**Figure 4.10: Business community perspectives of change over the past five years**



They also referenced traffic congestion, especially at peak times and during the summer, and pointed toward the importance of supporting businesses in the town core. Development priorities identified by the business community respondents were: a new second-level school, a swimming pool/leisure centre and new job opportunities. As one respondent stated,

*“The priorities should be building up of our local businesses and amenities. Look at Strandhill in Sligo and all they have to offer as a seaside town. Buncrana should try to be more like that”.*

When asked about 'COVID-proofing' the town, respondents suggested:

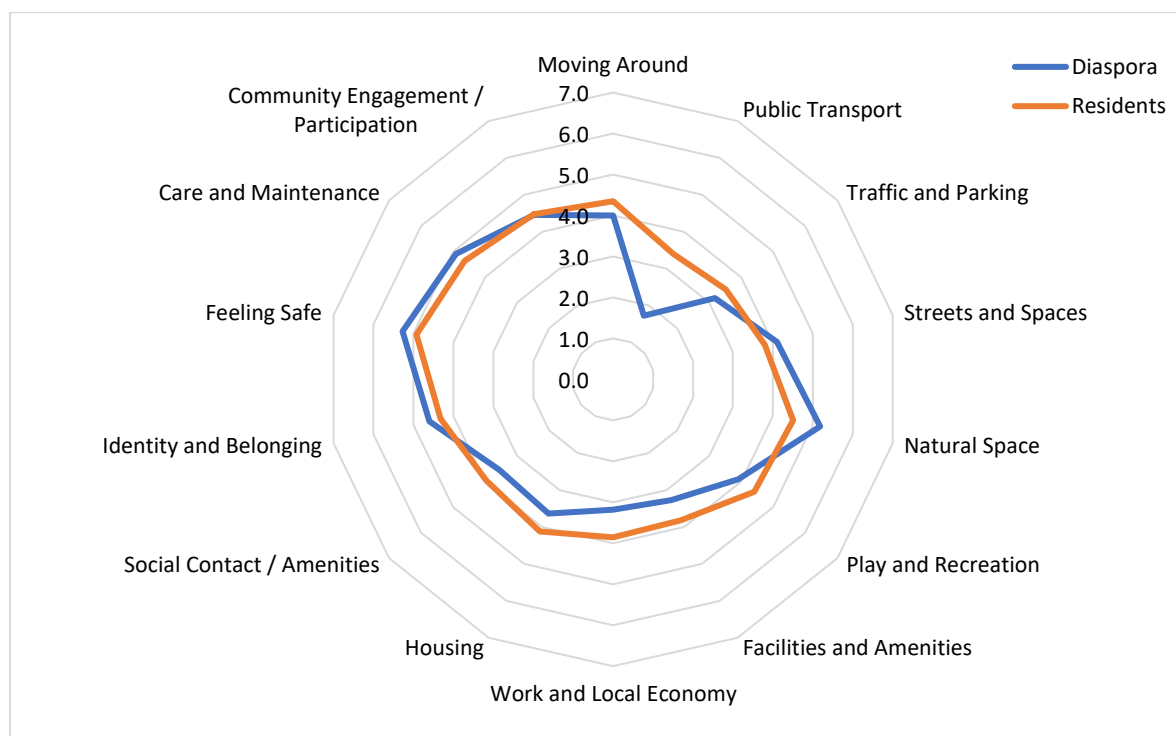
- Making more space available for pedestrians;
- Economic diversification to reduce the dependence on tourism; and
- Promoting opportunities for, and expansion of, remote working.

### 4.3 Perceptions of the Buncrana Diaspora

Thanks to the good offices of Joanne Kilmartin, Donegal County Council’s Diaspora Officer, members of Buncrana’s diaspora received an email circular with a link to the Place Standard questionnaire. As the timeframe for completion was shorter than the others, the sample size is small (n=11). However, the responses are important, and it is worthwhile presenting them here.

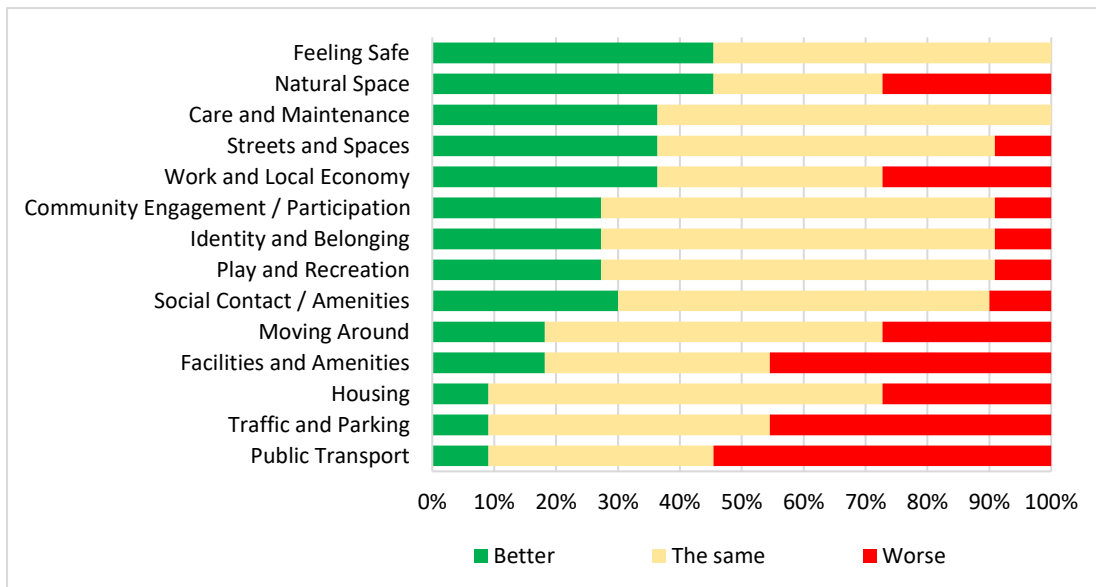
The following diagram (Figure 4.11) shows respondents’ perceptions of the fourteen dimensions of place that comprise the Place Standard. Among members of the diaspora, the dimensions that receive the highest scores are ‘Feeling Safe’ (5.3) and ‘Natural Space’ (5.2). The following dimensions of place record scores greater than four: ‘Care and Maintenance’ (4.91); ‘Identity and Belonging’ (4.60); ‘Community Engagement/ Participation’ (4.45); and ‘Streets and Spaces’ (4.10). ‘Moving Around’ receives a mean score of four (4). ‘Public Transport’ receives the lowest score (1.73)<sup>xiv</sup>, corresponding with the responses from residents. Indeed, Figure 4.11 shows, apart from public transport, there are few differences between the mean scores awarded by the residents and members of the diaspora; the greatest divergences (apart from public transport) is in respect of ‘Work and the Local Economy’ (>.67 among residents) and ‘Natural Spaces’ (>.68 among residents).

**Figure 4.11: Mean values on the Place Standard, as recorded in Buncrana, by members of the diaspora and local residents, spring 2020**



When members of the diaspora were asked about changes over the past five years, ‘the same’ was the modal response in respect of twelve of the fourteen dimensions of place (Figure 4.12). The most positive changes are observed in respect of ‘Feeling Safe’ and ‘Natural Space’. The most negative changes are observed in respect of ‘Public Transport’ and ‘Traffic & Parking’.

**Figure 4.12: Perceived changes, over five years, on each dimension of the Place Standard in Buncrana – as rated by members of the diaspora**



The following comments/statements/observations are emblematic of responses to open-ended survey questions from members of the diaspora. All are direct quotes.

Buncrana’s main assets are:

- ☺ People, pubs, the great outdoors and Lough Swilly;
- ☺ The coastal position, and potential for tourism;
- ☺ Shore walks, care & maintenance of the green areas, flowers, roundabouts;
- ☺ It's beside the sea;
- ☺ Lidl and Aldi;
- ☺ Tidy Towns keeping the area looking great; and
- ☺ The library.

The main challenges are:

- ☹ Always traffic to go up the main street, yet when you get there, there's nothing blocking it!;
- ☹ No public facilities i.e. bathrooms, not nearly enough garbage cans throughout the whole town and the ones that are there usually overflowing;
- ☹ Empty buildings owned by people whom choose not to sell;
- ☹ Lack of things to do - Swan Park destroyed, the Plaza burnt down etc.;
- ☹ Underutilised Main Street; People just drive to the supermarket and go home, and don't spend time and money in independent local businesses;
- ☹ Lack of public transport means folks from outside are reluctant to come to the town for a day, especially with a lack of parking; and
- ☹ There's not enough work for young people other than minimum wage, zero-hr-contract fast food/bar work. It's difficult to get apprenticeships unless you're in the know. Young people who weren't successful academically don't have the opportunity to thrive.

The priorities are:

- ✓ Improved infrastructure and transport links, to improve access and trade, and create jobs;
- ✓ Something for the youth of Buncrana to focus on and to feel a part of the Community;
- ✓ Better facilities at the shorefront;
- ✓ Maintain the local environment and prevent littering - more bins, better toilets;
- ✓ A public swimming pool so children can learn to swim; and
- ✓ Public transport across the board - both to Derry and to other parts of Donegal.

In order to tangibly move forward:

- Reopen the swimming pool;
- Make it cool to be a community volunteer!;
- Improve public transport;
- Buncrana would benefit greatly from a rail link to bring tourists up from the South, and across from the Belfast and City of Derry airports. It is heart-breaking to think that this infrastructure once existed, and was dismantled; and
- Listen to the public.



## CHAPTER 5: BUNCRANA - A TOWN IN TRANSITION

Prior to engaging with the analysis of the qualitative data gathered during focus groups and a series of semi-structured interviews in this chapter, the report would like to share **Buncrana Voices**. The following quotations are emblematic comments that people made in their responses to the Place Standard survey.

*I think there is huge potential in Buncrana, but I believe that to further the town's economic development it is about scoping out buildings and areas where amenities can be provided. Also, it doesn't help that Buncrana has lost its identity; at one point, it was a seaside town full of life and employment. It needs proper management, structure and attention.*

*Play and Recreation:  
Swimming pool closed,  
Public play park good.*

*Open spaces beautifully kept, but could be better used. Personal responsibility required.*

*Identity and Belonging: Very proud town but apathy/soreness feeling of neglect.*

*Tidy Towns do excellent work, as do the town gardener and team despite cutbacks on resources.*

*Somewhat disconnected from rest of Donegal services.*

*Too far 'north' for big employers*

*Not as connected as smaller communities*

*The leisure centre is still closed - almost 5 years. The children are missing out learning to swim and the social aspect.*

*All our public transport is private, although the Local Link bus service has gone some way in connecting places. We still live in a place where a woman can safely go running on her own in the dark. The Council gardener does fantastic work and but for the great work done each year by our local Tidy Town workers, the place would be knee deep in rubbish. Greater work needed in catching and prosecuting those who throw their rubbish and dump in our rivers and elsewhere. We need a park in the town with trees, hedges and water where nature can thrive and people can enjoy its tranquility, such as the field behind Hegarty's*

*Community is outstanding, Tidy Towns have helped well.*

*Great natural resources but Swan park needs to be fixed*

*For a disabled person (wheelchair bound) movement can be very difficult.*

*Loss of Swan Park because of flood damage. Loss of prime asset: still not fully restored for use.*

Limited opportunities for part-time work or future full-time work

Many teenagers express desire to spread their wings and get out of town after schooling. Sense of belonging but also limitation

Swan Park has still not been addressed since it was washed away in the floods. This park was a very big asset and was well used by the local community and drew visitors to the town.

New development need to focus on centre of town

Shop owners make effort to make nice environment

Still no leisure centre!

Need artisan market

Need to ensure new development enables walking

Landowners and business people stagnating by not developing key sites

Amazing work by Tidy Towns

Inclusive youth space needed for young people with a disability and/or autism

Public Transport: Very limited  
Streets and Spaces: Not enough pedestrian crossings on Main St. St. Oran's Road or Aldi's / Lidl  
Play and Recreation: No local hubs for people to meet

Our proximity to Northern Ireland and reliance on visitors from there are concerns in the post-Brexit transition. We also rely on Northern Ireland for third-level education and for alternatives such as FE courses that aren't similarly available for those who don't progress to university courses. Concerns that with LYIT seeking TU status that this will be further limiting lower level courses to progress to within the region.

Not mentioned in discussion about potential benefits in fitness/mental health socially in groups taking part in outdoor pursuits - kayaking, orienteering, climbing etc.

I am very appreciative of my town but would like to see some improvements in facilities such as swimming pools and parks.

My town has very unsafe roads and some parks are near dangerous roads. Multiple blind corners. No places for young people to go. Transport is awkward. Lots of things need done to our town and facilities to be put in place.

Few facilities specific to teens to make them accessible to them. Specialist teen health limited resources into town

## 5.1 Mobility and Accessibility

This section deals with issues of mobility and accessibility. These include the following dimensions of the Place Standard:

- Moving around;
- Public transport; and
- Traffic and parking.

The Place Standard survey results reveal that ‘mobility and accessibility’ are the dimensions of place that are viewed least-favourably among local citizens. These three dimensions received a combined mean score of 3.75, while the mean score across all variables is 4.15.

Whilst their cumulative score is low, based on the survey findings, citizens perceive that these dimensions of place have changed considerably over the past five years. ‘Public transport’ emerges as the dimension of place that people identify as having most improved; over one-third (35%) of survey respondents believe that bus services have been enhanced. Respondents are, however, more negative about the changes in respect of the related dimensions namely, ‘traffic and parking’ and ‘moving around’. One-fifth (20%) of respondents believe that ‘moving around’ has improved, while a lower proportion (17%) believe that the ‘traffic and parking’ situation has improved. Over twice as many survey respondents (36%) perceive that ‘traffic and parking’ have dis-improved over the past five years. In respect of all three dimensions, more people believe that there has been no change (rather than any improvement or dis-improvement): ‘moving around’ (66%); ‘public transport’ (47%); and ‘traffic and parking’ (47%).

In their comments, survey respondents reported that two private bus companies (both named McGonagle) provide regular and reliable services – connecting Buncrana and Derry. They noted that the introduction of a late-night service, from late 2019, has given Buncrana people greater access to social and entertainment events in Derry. Survey respondents reported that connections to the rest of the Inishowen Peninsula are more limited, although they are grateful for the LocalLink service. Several respondents, and those who participated in the various focus groups, referred to the dearth of direct connections between Buncrana and Letterkenny.

Survey respondents reported that traffic congestion could be problematic, particularly at school times and other busy periods. They identified the main bottlenecks as St Mary’s Road and the West End. Some noted that traffic congestion can deter people from travelling into the town centre, and they stated that this can adversely affect business there. A number of stakeholders referred to the importance of having a good supply of parking close to the town centre.

Several stakeholders noted Buncrana’s attractiveness for walkers – both residential and visitor. They place a considerable value on the town’s walkability and indicate that they would like to see improvements in that regard. They drew attention to a number of locations at which they would like to see enhanced safety measures, including near Super Valu and at the end of Upper Main Street to facilitate pedestrian access to the Theatre. Respondents also referred to the attractiveness of the area’s coastal walks, and they emphasised the importance of enhancing these, lengthening them and ensuring that they are well connected to residential and commercial areas.

### 5.1.1 Current Situation/the baseline

Buncrana is literally and figuratively the 'Gateway to Inishowen'. The town's location at the southern end of the Inishowen Peninsula makes Buncrana an important focal point and service centre for communities across the Peninsula. Carndonagh acts as the Peninsula's secondary service centre. Two kilometres north of Buncrana (at Hilltown) two secondary roads branch off the regional route R238, and these connect Buncrana with the east and west of the Peninsula. The main road (R238) continues northwards to Carndonagh (19.5km). The R238 (south) connects Buncrana with Bridgend (14km) on the N13 Derry-Letterkenny national primary road. Buncrana's road connection with Letterkenny (41km) is also via the R238 and N13 – via Burt (15km) rather than Bridgend. The town's railway service was severed in the 1950s. Since its opening in 1853, the Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway ran from Carndonagh – via Buncrana – to Derry and Letterkenny (see Figure 5.1.1). The railway was an important artery, and propelled Buncrana's development as a seaside resort.

**Figure 5.1.1: The Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway**

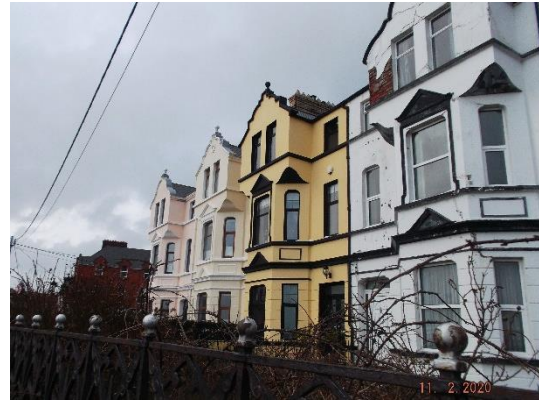


(Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Londonderry\\_and\\_Lough\\_Swilly\\_Railway](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Londonderry_and_Lough_Swilly_Railway))

Like many Irish seaside towns, Buncrana's tourism heritage has its origins in the Victorian period. Today, Buncrana continues to be an important seaside destination, most notably for Derry people; many come as day-trippers and many have holiday homes in and around the town. Although the road between Bridgend and Derry remained open during the Troubles, violence and security restrictions inhibited travel between both settlements, and the town of Buncrana has had to work hard to regain the ground that had been lost over thirty years.



*Buncrana's former railway station is now an award-winning pub*



*Victorian architecture*

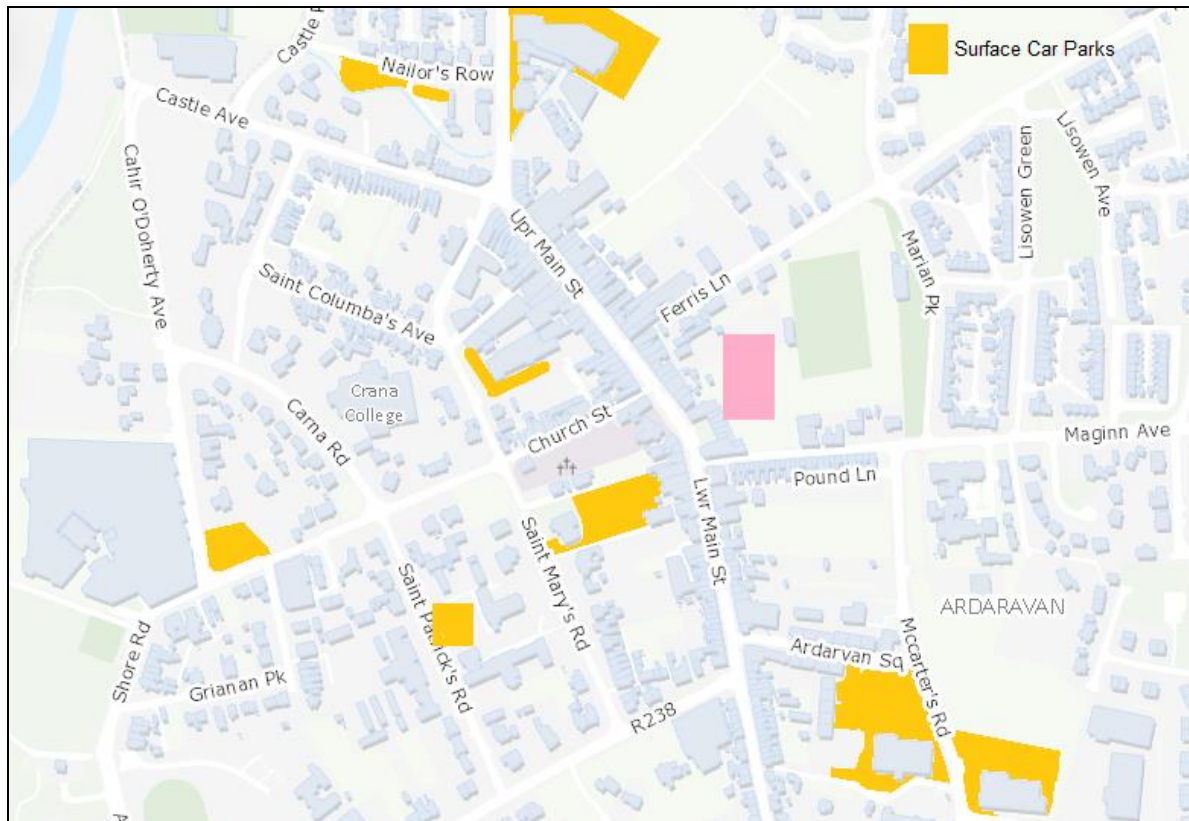
Buncrana represents the fourth largest settlement – and most northerly – of the NWCR; the other three representing the metropolitan core of Letterkenny-Derry-Strabane. The evolution of the City Region focused initially on the main urban centres namely Derry and Letterkenny. Physical and governance connections between them have been strengthened. The Review of Public Administration (RPA) in Northern Ireland has brought Strabane into the same local government area as Derry City. Strabane already has strong economic, cultural and social ties with Lifford, and there is a strong tradition of collaboration between those two towns (Creamer *et al.*, 2009). Buncrana has stronger economic, cultural and social ties with Derry than with the other parts of the City Region. Road and transport links with Derry are better than with Letterkenny, although the former is the main service and commercial centre in County Donegal. Thus, Buncrana is geographically within the NWCR, and is as fully integrated into it, as are Derry and Letterkenny, in terms of connectivity.

The flow of traffic through Buncrana is managed by a one-way system. Traffic from the south is directed northwards along St Mary's Road, while traffic coming from the north is directed via Main Street. While traffic generally moves well, it can be backed up at school times, during funerals and in the peak tourist season. The Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) follows these routes (St Mary's Road and Main Street), rather than the Shore Road. Therefore, the Atlantic (Lough Swilly) is largely invisible from the WAW as it traverses Buncrana. Some north-south traffic also takes McCarter's Road and the Old Road. Donegal County Council has plans in place to provide a relief road around the town, although its exact route is to be determined.

The recent (2018) construction of a [new bridge at Cockhill](#) has enhanced safety, and effectively bypassed the southern part of Cockhill, thus improving walkability and circulation in that area. The old Cockhill Bridge, which is part of the built heritage, has been retained and is used by walkers. It also enhances the area's attractiveness.

Buncrana has a number of surface car parks in the town centre – as highlighted in Figure 5.1.2.:

Figure 5.1.2: Locations of car parks in Buncrana Town Centre<sup>xv</sup>



Pay parking is available on two sites between Main Street and St Mary's Road, including at the back of the library. Car parks are connected to the main street via laneways, and there are several archways leading on to the main street. Free Parking is available in the Lidl car park, in Ardavan Square, which is <100 metres from Main Street. This car park tends to be busier than the pay parking locations.



*Alleyways connecting Main Street to surrounding car parks*

There are currently no pedestrian crossings on the main street, but the footpath surfaces are of a high quality. There are a number of benches along the main street, but the siting of some is not as ambient as it could be.

There are no cycle paths or bicycle lockers in the town, although surfaces are reasonably flat and there are several suitable locations that could be used for bicycle parking.



### *Buncrana's Main Street*

During the summer season, some visitor traffic – pedestrian, cyclist and vehicular – arrives via the Lough Swilly Ferry. This enters the town on the pier, which is located at the end of one of the narrowest roads in the town: Swilly Road. The Pier is in the ownership of Donegal County Council, and this gateway and public amenity has tremendous development potential.

Among the most attractive aspects of Buncrana, with respect to mobility, is the extensive coastal path from the Shore Road to Stragill Beach. This takes in stunning landscapes, as well as several iconic landmarks, including O'Doherty's Keep, Ned's Point and Father Hegarty's Rock.



*Buncrana's spectacular coastline is attractive – even in February. These images are all taken from sites along the coastal path that are within 20-minutes' walk of The Castle Bridge.*

Since the closure of the train station (in the 1950s), public transport has been provided by bus companies. At present, Buncrana has two buses per hour (at ten to and ten past the hour) during the day and a bus every two hours in the evening to Derry City. At the weekend, the last bus from Derry leaves the Guildhall at 2am. The bus route begins in Cockhill and serves the town centre. Apart from Cockhill and Main Street, there are no designated bus stops, but the bus can be flagged down along the route. These services are operated by private operators (both named McGonagle). Bus Éireann operates three buses per day, one in the morning and two in the afternoon, between Buncrana and Letterkenny. These connections are an important link between the two main towns in County Donegal. The timing and frequency of these connections are not sufficient, however, to suit most commuters (students and workers) travelling in either direction between the two towns.

### *5.1.2 Current Issues - including opportunities and challenges*

The main issues that emerged from the research/consultations are as follows:

- Promoting greater awareness of the NWCR and optimising connectivity with other nodes therein;
- Capitalising on the town's walking infrastructure, particularly along the shore;
- Providing the requisite infrastructure to better connect the town core and the shore – enabling visitors to better access the town (on foot) and to spend money locally and enabling the town's residents to avail more readily of the shorefront amenities;
- Readyng the town to capitalise on the impending construction of the Greenway by making the town friendlier towards cyclists and pedestrians;
- Extending the Greenway into the town centre on its journey northwards to Carndonagh/ Malin Head;
- Consolidating and strengthening the town core – its commercial and residential functions - thus improving walkability and mobility;
- Improving the flow of traffic through the town, and the alleviation of congestion, particularly at the West End and on St Mary's Road;
- Enhancing Buncrana's standing as County Donegal's second town and as a service centre for Inishowen; and



- Ensuring continuity of current public transport provision and improving connectivity to/from other parts of Inishowen and to/from Letterkenny.

### 5.1.3 Stakeholder Perspectives

Beyond the officials and elected members of Donegal County Council, stakeholders demonstrated little knowledge or awareness of the NWCR. There were no spontaneous references to it in the stakeholder workshops or consultations with young people, and none of the respondents to the Place Standard questionnaire mentioned it (in answering any of the open-ended questions). Thus, while there may be an awareness deficit in respect of the concept and entity of the City Region – in a formal sense, stakeholders demonstrated a strong commitment to working with other towns, most notably Derry. They noted the need for, and importance of, good connectivity between the region’s main towns. They also referred to Buncrana’s role as a gateway to Inishowen and as a service centre for the Peninsula.

Buncrana’s coastal walk represents a treasured resource that is highly valued among local people. The walk is well used, and all stakeholders are keen to see walking routes further enhanced and better integrated into the town’s infrastructure. Specifically, stakeholders would like to see the development of a walkway (where there is already a right-of-way) from the Castle Bridge to the intersection of Cockhill Road and Causeway Road. Enhanced pedestrian paths and the provision of cycling spaces (dedicated lanes) on St. Oran’s Road would also promote greater connectivity between the shore and the town.

For many people, the Swilly Road evokes fond memories of the former Lough Swilly Hotel, and stakeholders are keen to see this part of the town, including the Pier and its surrounds make a more definitive contribution to Buncrana’s attractiveness.



*The stately Lough Swilly Hotel commanded a prominent position near the port.*

(Source: <http://www.buncranahistory.com/wordpress/lough-swilly-hotel-in-old-photos/>)

They note that this part of Buncrana ought to be more welcoming to visitors who arrive by ferry. Stakeholders also mentioned the need for greater signage of the Aileach Road and Swilly Road (at the turnoff just north of Victoria Bridge) and of the pier/ferry terminal.

Stakeholders are warmly anticipating the arrival of the Greenway, which is due to enter the town from the south and come, initially at least, as far as Amazing Grace Park. Several stakeholders, particularly those in the business community, advocate 'bringing the Greenway right into town'. They recommend constructing a bridge (for pedestrians and cyclists) from Amazing Grace Park, over the Owenkillew River, to the Pier. They are keen to see the Greenway proceed northwards along the Shore Road and with connections to the town centre. Stakeholders believe that investing in an extension of the Greenway into the town will not only deliver economic benefits but will also promote active travel among local residents.

In terms of active travel, stakeholders noted that a walkability study has been undertaken in a number of County Donegal towns. There is a desire for such an audit to be carried out in Buncrana. This would then form the baseline for any active travel strategy (thus complimenting the North West Greenway Initiative).

Swan Park is an important ecological resource and a much-valued amenity among people of all ages. Other sections of this report deal directly with Swan Park's future contributions to Buncrana's development. In this section, it is important to record the strong desire among stakeholders to see the Park preserved – as a natural space - and to ensure better pedestrian connectivity between the Park and other parts of the town.



*Swan Park has suffered recent flood damage. Locals and visitors look forward to the reopening of this important amenity.*



*The Castle Bridge is one of Buncrana's most important heritage resources. It connects the town with the spectacular coastal path.*

While Buncrana has experienced suburbanisation, the town core is more intact than is the case in many similar-sized Irish towns. Local citizens note that Super Valu, the theatre, and the Credit Union are important drivers of footfall in the town centre at the West End. They also note that while Lidl and Aldi are not located

on the ‘high street’, they are much closer to the town centre than is the case in other towns. Stakeholders report favourably on the town-centre focus of the main retailers, and they want to see this pattern maintained. Indeed, stakeholders are keen to see greater commercial life in the town centre. Young people were very clear in articulating their desire to see more clothes and music shops in the urban core. Several stakeholders referred to the extent of fast food and gambling premises (arcades and bingo halls) in the town’s epicentre. These are perceived to be a bi-product of Buncrana’s seaside tourist trade; although several stakeholders report that they would prefer to see a different retail offering – with more arts and crafts premises, rather than arcades or bingo halls. Several made specific references to Westport (County Mayo), Killarney (County Kerry) and Clonakilty (County Cork) as successful tourist towns with a high-quality retail offering that focuses on Irish craft and design. Thus, the view from stakeholders is that Buncrana needs further town centre consolidation, and that an enhanced retail offering is key to ensuring this happens. Such consolidation and diversification, while promoting economic development, would also enhance mobility in the town centre and, as has happened in other seaside towns, pedestrians will be afforded more space. Some members of the local business community also stated that they would like to see greater enforcement of the current traffic code, to ensure a greater turnover of parking spaces. They also mentioned the need for more loading bays on Main Street.

People in Buncrana warmly welcome the fact that the town is due to have a primary care centre. They also welcome the fact this will be in the town centre (see Figure 5.1.2), adjacent to areas with an older age profile and within walking distance of the community hospital. However, some point out that the proposed location is on a one-way street that leads on to Main Street, which is also one-way. They caution against locating a vehicle-dependent facility in an area where walkability should be promoted. Others have raised concerns over traffic congestion, and potential delays to medical staff and ambulances on one-way streets.



*Proposed site of new primary care centre*

As noted earlier in this section, stakeholders value the McGonagle’s bus services (to and from Derry). They report that due to increased competition between two private providers, the service has recently increased from once per hour to twice per hour. They are hopeful that this level of frequency will continue, particularly outside the peak tourist season. During the consultations, several stakeholders welcomed the recent (since late 2019) introduction of an evening service. However, many workshop participants and survey

respondents did not seem to be aware of the evening service. This suggests that further advertising and promotion are required. Stakeholders note the importance of local people supporting this service, and some mentioned its particular relevance to achieving a speedy transition to a post-carbon society.

Stakeholders, particularly those in the tourism sector and family/social services, report that the LocalLink service offers welcome connectivity to other parts of the Inishowen Peninsula. However, routes are limited and services are not as frequent as they should be in order to enable the Peninsula to attract, and cater for, more 'independent travellers'. During the consultations, several participants reference the deficits with regard to public transport connectivity to Letterkenny. They stated that such connectivity is vital for those who need to access medical and social services, particularly since services have become more centralised. They also stated that a more frequent bus service to and from Letterkenny would be beneficial for third-level students (attending Letterkenny Institute of Technology) and for those who wish to avail of further and continuing education – particularly evening courses.

#### 5.1.4 *The Potential*

As the most northerly node of the four main urban centres that comprise the NWCR, Buncrana has the potential to play a greater role in linking the Inishowen Peninsula (pop. 34,000) with the City Region. Enhanced connectivity to Letterkenny, strengthened ties with Derry and greater collaboration among stakeholders in the four main urban centres (Derry, Letterkenny, Strabane and Buncrana) are required to give fuller effect to the concept of polycentricity – the elimination of competition and the advancement of collaboration for mutual benefit – as espoused in the *European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP)* (see Chapter 2). Successive studies by the ICLRD, among others, point to the merits of inter-nodal collaboration, particularly on a cross-border/inter-jurisdictional basis. The evidenced garnered in the compilation of this report indicates that Buncrana has an important role to play in widening and consolidating the City Region's asset base. Furthermore, local stakeholders are open to collaboration. Thus, there is potential to further advance the vision cooperation on the island of Ireland as articulated in the *Framework for Co-operation via the North West* (Department of Regional Development and Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, 2013).

Enhancing accessibility to and from Buncrana and improving mobility within the town can represent significant contributions to place-making locally. Buncrana's existing asset base (in respect of accessibility and mobility), together with the issues and potential identified here point towards investing in infrastructural developments that harness the locality's significant natural resources and enhance connectivity between these physical features and residential and commercial areas. Buncrana's physical geography allows for the promotion of easier movement of people and goods in tandem with the creation of additional wildlife corridors and the expansion of green spaces.



*Buncrana's Green Spaces – Amazing Grace Park is a haven for wildlife and an important element of the town's green infrastructure.*

Capitalising on Buncrana's existing infrastructure should involve:

- Regular maintenance of the existing coastal walk (including upgrading to allow for any extended period of social distancing); and
- Enhancing connectivity between the town and the shore – to the existing coastal path and to the impending Greenway.

Buncrana is a coastal town with a strong seaside heritage. At present however, Buncrana's stunning coastline is not visible from the town centre. In many respects, parts of the town are looking inward, and can be said to 'have their backs to the sea'. Other coastal and riverside towns have successfully promoted their development by 'turning around to face the water'. Buncrana has the requisite natural assets and topography to allow it to better capture, utilise and interface with its physical geography – for economic and environmental gain.



Many of Bun crana’s heritage landmarks have already been signposted.

There is considerable scope for the development of walkways along natural corridors between the town centre and the suburbs. Examples include:

- Along the Owenkillew River – on both sides – from Victoria Bridge to the Old Mill with a spur to St Mary’s Road (via St Oran’s Drive);
- Along the Crana River – northwards from the Tullyarvan Mill - parallel to the Cockhill Road; and
- Extending Swan Park to the Castle Bridge (along the southern bank of the Crana River).

These green corridors will enable more pedestrian access to/from the town centre, thereby enhancing mobility and assisting town centre businesses. As several stakeholders stated during the consultation process, appropriate signage ought to be erected to direct visitors to the town’s commercial heart. Arresting and preventing suburbanisation implies ensuring that the Lisfannon Industrial Park is used for light industry, rather than for commercial, social, educational and/or recreational activities that ought to be located in the town centre. It also implies encouraging the provision of visitor accommodation, preferably hotels and guesthouses in the town, rather than in its outskirts. There are pedestrian safety imperatives for locating tourist accommodation in areas with lower traffic speeds, rather than adjacent to a regional route on which vehicles are permitted to travel at speeds of up to 80km per hour. In the interim, consideration ought to be given to constructing a pedestrian bridge or underpass on the Derry Road.

Sustainable town development is associated with connectivity to its wider functional area. In terms of active travel, this implies extending the coastal path for walking and cycling to Fort Dunree and completing the Greenway loop around Inishowen. Bun crana and Carndonagh stand to gain from polycentric (collaborative, inter-town) development, with enhanced connectivity and collaboration between both towns. This will require investing in local transport routes to enable more visitors to overnight in Inishowen and to enable local residents to access services locally. Sustaining current levels of bus connectivity with Derry and expanding services to and from Letterkenny will enable Inishowen people to access (county-town level) services more easily. It will also allow more workers and students to reside in Bun crana, regardless of where they work. As remote working is projected to increase over the coming few years, more people are likely to consider living in Bun crana, and would commute to Letterkenny a few days per week or month, if they had the option of an appropriate bus service.

Enhancing mobility within the town, particularly for pedestrians could be advanced by installing pedestrian crossings on the Main Street and at the West End (with the lights in the latter being on a timer). At present, motorists are inclined to stop informally to allow pedestrians to cross the street, which is not always conducive to pedestrian safety or the smooth movement of traffic through the town.

It is imperative that the relevant stakeholders identify a suitable site for the new Crana College. The site should be close enough to the town centre to avoid suburbanisation tendencies, but suitably spacious to cater for buses and other vehicles at peak times. Several stakeholders pointed to potential sites along the Old Road and on Cockhill Road. Stakeholders may also need to consider the optimum location for the proposed primary care centre, so that it is accessible by foot from town centre residences and the community hospital, while also offering ease of access for vehicular traffic.

Traffic management is always challenging in medium-sized towns, and such challenges can be compounded by physical geography limitations. In Buncrana's case, Donegal County Council (DCC) also need to manage traffic flows in a way that takes account of Buncrana's role as a sub-county/district service centre and gateway town. This implies catering for transit traffic, while simultaneously directing visitors into the town centre and encouraging footfall there. Thus, the proposed relief road will need to improve the current flow of traffic through the town and circulation within it. Optimising the existing road infrastructure appears to offer a more sustainable approach, than a new bypass route. While the possible relief road trajectories have not been published, consultations with DCC and other stakeholders indicate options east of the town, at some distance from the current WAW.

As in most towns, stakeholders in Buncrana are keen to see their town grow its population. They note that this will require the construction of additional private and social housing. Stakeholders are universally keen to avoid any proliferation of holiday homes or Airbnb premises. During the course of the consultations, stakeholders identified a number of potential sites for housing within walking distance of the town centre. In the interest of physical health – the promotion of outdoor recreation and the further greening of Buncrana, they recommended clustering the parcels of land from any housing developments to create designated spaces for nature and recreation.

Throughout this chapter, there are several references to Buncrana's shoreline – its natural, social and economic values. In this section – in respect of accessibility and mobility – it is important to stress the importance of a masterplan for the entire shorefront area. The area is of such strategic importance to the town, and the Inishowen Peninsula, that its development needs to be integrated, holistic and multi-functional. As noted in this section, it is important to ensure optimum connectivity between the shore and the town. In doing so, stakeholders need to take full cognisance of the area's natural beauty and to use vernacular materials and native species, and to give effect to the best ecological and conservation principles.

## 5.2 Economy

This section deals with issues of the economy – both as they relate to Bunrana but also in the context of Bunrana’s role within the NWCR. In discussing the economy, the following dimensions are considered:

- Work and local economy; and
- Housing and community.

The Place Standard survey results reveal that ‘work and local economy’, as a dimension of place, is one of the least-favourably viewed by local citizens, scoring only 3.9 (with the mean score across all variables being 4.15). ‘Housing and Community’ was rated in middle-ground, scoring 4.1. When the scoring of both variables is broken down by age profile, there is a notable difference in ratings for both ‘work and the local economy’ and ‘housing’ respectively by those aged 18 and over and those under 18 (3.4 relative to 4.2 for ‘work and the local economy’ and 3.5 relative to 4.3 for ‘housing’).

In terms of perceived changes over the past five years, more people believe that ‘work and the local economy’ have gotten better rather than gotten worse (30% relative to 26%). Exactly a quarter (25%) of respondents believe that Bunrana has gotten better in respect of ‘housing’. However, a slightly higher proportion (26%) perceive that ‘housing’ has gotten worse over the past five years. This was attributed, by many stakeholders, to the structural defects being experienced by a large number of properties in County Donegal, and Bunrana/Fahan in particular, as a result of mica.

A profile of Bunrana’s labour catchment highlights:

- The single largest employer is the ‘Wholesale, Retail and Commerce’ sector and accounts for 28.8% (849) which is higher than the State average (25.7%);
- The ‘Education, Human Health and Social Work’ (24.6% or 726) sector is also an important employment sector and has a higher proportional share than the State average (22.8%); and
- ‘ICT and Professional Services’ (14.4% or 424) is the third most important sector although much lower than the State average of 20.3% (Western Development Commission, 2019).

Whilst the traditional large-scale manufacturing operations are no longer present in the town, the skills and industrial tradition are still very evident in the local hinterland as evidenced by the presence of what can be described as an ‘Indigenous Engineering cluster’ in the North-West region inclusive of:

- E&I Engineering: based close to the border in Bridgend and approx. 10km from Bunrana, and
- Inishowen Engineering: located in Drumfries, around 10km north of Bunrana.

While it is estimated that almost 80% of E&I Staff come from the Derry City and Strabane District Council area, both employers offer significant opportunities in establishing the town and the wider North West as a cutting-edge engineering centre of excellence. The skills-needs of such a proposition, however, need to be further investigated.

In addition to this growing engineering cluster, respondents noted that Bunrana and its hinterlands have a traditional (and reputable) tourism capacity with untapped potential, and, given its position within the



NWCR, a population of over 210,000 people on its doorstep, as a largely unexploited market. Post COVID-19, this domestic tourism market becomes increasingly important.

Survey respondents commented on the seasonality of the tourism industry. They identified a number of key tourism resources which could be (are) year-round attractions and lead to greater footfall; with specific reference being made to assets such as Fort Dunree, O’Doherty’s Keep, Fr. Hegarty’s Rock, and Ned’s Point. The greenways and walking trails linked to Buncrana, such as the Stragill Coastal Path, were further acknowledged as year-round assets.

Several stakeholders noted the vibrancy of Main Street. They value the range of shops currently existing along Main Street and note the potential for further improvements with regard to enhancements to the aesthetics of the streetscape, infill developments, traffic management and upgrade of public realm design. It was noted, however, that with 27.4% of the population aged 18 years and under (Census of Population 2016), there is no significant retail experience aimed at this population cohort, thus (re)directing teenagers (and their families) to Derry. This issue emerged strongly in the youth focus group.



*Selection of retail stores in Buncrana*



*Gaming arcades and bingo halls are a feature of the local economy and built environment.*

In recent years, there has been a substantial increase in housing to the south of Buncrana – along the coast. This is reflective of, and a contributor to, a population increase within the town of 14.8% since 2006 (see Chapter 3). There is also a strong residential component to the side-streets off Main Street. There is a dearth of rental properties in Buncrana; a survey of local property websites on 10 June 2020 revealed only one property (an apartment) for rent in the town.



*Maginn Avenue is a residential street that runs perpendicular to Main Street*

### **5.2.1 Current Situation/the Baseline**

Buncrana’s location, in terms of proximity to Derry (23km), its stunning natural setting on the Atlantic coast and its rich cultural heritage, are among the town’s greatest assets. Yet, it also has its drawbacks in terms of the economic development of Buncrana – its situation vis-à-vis the Irish border brings challenges ranging from currency fluctuations to an over-reliance on the sterling economy and, more recently Brexit; while its location vis-à-vis Derry can impact on its place competitiveness.

Buncrana has a rich cultural and maritime heritage with links to many significant historical events, including:

- The Flight of the Earls from Lough Swilly in 1607;
- The inspiration for ‘Amazing Grace’ (following its author, John Newton, finding shelter in Buncrana after a near shipwreck in 1748);
- Wolfe Tone’s detention in O’Doherty’s Keep/Buncrana Castle after the 1798 Rebellion; and
- The sinking of the SS Laurentic at the mouth of Lough Swilly in 1917).

This rich heritage, together with its strong, well-established identity as a seaside town, are central to its continued economic growth and development. In this regard, there is much to be learned from the experience of other coastal towns on the island of Ireland (see Chapter 6).



*Amazing Grace Park, at the southern entrance to Buncrana, is an ecological and heritage attraction.*

In late January 2020, Fáilte Ireland hosted a number of workshops with local tourism businesses, tourism and community group members, as well as all other interested parties and individuals, to explore opportunities to boost tourism in the area. Under the banner of 'Play Your Part to Grow Tourism on the Inishowen Peninsula', the findings from the workshops will inform a Visitor Experience Development Plan. The aim of this plan, when launched, is to improve the range and quality of experiences available to visitors, extend the tourism season, facilitate continued growth in visitor numbers and contribute to the growth of the local economy, directly and indirectly.

Buncrana, however, is more than a tourism town. In addition to the aforementioned tourism assets and potential of the region, the town benefits from a diverse range of other economic drivers including an established industrial engineering cluster with scope for further growth, a strong creatives sector (art, music and film), and emerging opportunities in digitalisation via the digital innovation hub shortly coming on-line (closely linked to remote working and quality of life decisions).

Undoubtedly, Buncrana currently plays a much-understated role in the NWCR. A core function of this report is to challenge that, and to consider the potential role the town can play in the continued growth of the City Region. Key identified priorities for the City Region, as per the North West Strategic Growth Plan (2016), include:

- Growth of the regional economy in sectors such as advanced manufacturing, life/health sciences and the digital economy (incl. Fintech);
- Supporting low carbon/green infrastructure investment;
- Promoting healthy ageing and improved quality of life; and
- Innovation in on-shore/off-shore renewables.

Post COVID-19, this is being expanded to include on-shoring/near-shoring in med-tech and PPE/textiles provision.

The future economic direction of Buncrana, and the wider Inishowen Peninsula, must also take account of the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) initiative arising out of the NPF, *Ireland 2040*. This long-term programme is centred on (a) developing the business and innovation culture; (b) encouraging investment in infrastructure; (c) attracting foreign direct investment (FDI); and (d) supporting local Irish companies with global ambitions (<https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/657322-atlantic-economic-corridor/>).

The town itself is home to a wide range of local facilities and businesses, which are located in close proximity to each other. The compact nature of the urban core is regarded as an asset. There is broad consensus among citizens that there are opportunities to filter elements of this to the Shore Walk and Pier in terms of additional food businesses and restaurants.



Buncrana is characterised by a number of brownfield sites and vacant properties. These are a legacy of its traditional manufacturing past (Fruit of the Loom, Clubman Shirts), changed tourism patterns (Lough Swilly Hotel), and recent redevelopments (the old An Garda Síochána building). These brownfield sites are, for the most part, of significant scale and unsuitable for start-ups or small businesses. While the potential for FDI in smaller regional gateways such as Buncrana is limited (there is no national policy in support of this), there is a strong sense that their future is dependent on their dispersal in broken down lots or inward investment

via diaspora linkages. In June 2020 planning permission was granted by Donegal County Council for a call centre on the former Fruit of the Loom site at Ballymacarry Lower.



*The former Fruit of the Loom manufacturing plant occupies a prime location that ought to play an important role in Buncrana's future development – as an amenity and public space.*

There is a palpable frustration among residents regarding the lack of housing available locally – whether to rent or buy. The fall-out of mica in building bricks during the early 2000s has, in the opinion of locals,

effectively wiped out the housing stock 2000-2008. The water treatment plant at Amazing Grace Park has also outgrown its capacity, thus limiting what further development can take place. A review of property websites serving the Buncrana area highlighted only one new development scheme; Atlantic Way Apartments on McCarter Road.



*Consolidation of the town core represents best planning practice.*



*Buncrana's Shore Road and Swilly Road are important visitor destinations and focal points. These locations will play a significant role in the town's future development.*

### ***5.2.2 Current Issues – including opportunities and challenges***

The main issues that emerged from the research/consultations are as follows:

- Enhancing Buncrana's position, as County Donegal's second town and the NWCR's fourth largest settlement, as a nucleus of high skilled employment and service centre;
- Aligning the needs of businesses/industry with higher, further and vocational education offerings which would not only tackle emigration and local unemployment but also contribute to the retention of graduates and a young workforce in the area;
- Creating the optimum conditions for new job opportunities in the region. This requires collaboration across planning, housing, transport and enterprise supports (local and national). While the recent announcement of the establishment of a call centre in the town is broadly welcomed, there are reservations around the type of jobs this will generate and career progression opportunities.
- Enhancing the broadband infrastructure serving Buncrana, with specific questions raised as to why the town is not connected to a spur of Project Kelvin (a proposition first mooted in 2011 by the Town Council and the Baker-Tilly Report, 2011<sup>xvi</sup>);
- Facilitating remote working through the provision of start-up space in the Digital Innovation Hub catering to those who work either part-time and full-time, and supported by further hot desking spaces throughout the town;
- Consolidating the urban core as a place in which to live and do business;

- Placing an emphasis on infill development and promoting the re-use/re-purposing of vacant premises in the urban core thus addressing the sense of being a ‘rustbelt town’ while driving the vibrancy of the urban core and making it more attractive to future investors;
- Improving access to the urban core – both for suppliers to businesses, and shoppers/customers – with a particular emphasis being placed on location of/access to loading bays and mobility parking zone vis-à-vis the location of businesses, and improving the current mobility imbalance between the car and active travel modes such as cycling and walking;
- Supporting the metropolitan core of the NWCR including the upgrade of the A5 and growth of City of Derry Airport thus improving connectivity to the wider region and opening up Buncrana/Inishowen to international investment;
- Capitalising on the latent potential of the area’s cultural and built heritage, such as Fort Dunree which is recognised as a platform for economic growth;
- Addressing the shortfall in housing by investing in social, affordable and private housing with an emphasis on not only dealing with the current demand but catering to future projected need; and
- Completing the remedial works required on mica-infected properties.

Addressing these issues will take place in the context of Brexit and the new protocol arrangements for UK/EU trade (providing a deal can be reached within the current ‘transition period’). The decision of the UK to leave the EU was “a kick in the teeth to Inishowen”. With the Protocol due to come into effect at the beginning of 2021, there is still a lack of clarity on the customs, tariffs and regulatory checks required across various sectors/products. It is keenly recognised that businesses on both sides of the Irish border are experiencing ‘the very high level of anxiety’ over the scale, complexity and costs of putting the Protocol into practice in, at the time of writing, just six months-time, and that without clarification on the ‘small details’, businesses in the border region – or on the island of Ireland for that matter - cannot plan effectively for a post-Brexit future.

### *5.2.3 Stakeholder Perspectives*

While respondents broadly agree that the town offers a good range of ‘basic shops’, it is not regarded as a ‘yummy town’ in terms of its offering, overall aesthetic, or the quality of its public realm. There is a concerted push required to ensure shop owners look after their premises, placing an emphasis on use of colour and traditional shopfront signs – as done to great effect in Clonakilty and Kenmare. As regards retail, it was highlighted that shoppers from Inishowen travel to Derry to shop for clothes, electronics and household items. Buncrana is deemed to have a poorer retail offering than is possible (and there may be issues around poor marketing of the range of offering actually available). This potential loss of footfall has knock-on implications for businesses in the town. For a town of its size, there is a recognised need for a better retail offering. The town would benefit, in particular, from a high-quality retail offering focusing on teenagers and women, particularly in clothing (and in the words of the local teenagers - ‘modern clothes’) and accessories.

Many stakeholders highlighted the need for high-quality office space in Buncrana. The Digital Innovation Hub, when completed, will only hold seventy people at full capacity. The Hub is, therefore, not the total solution for the town’s need for a high quality, digitally-enabled workspace.

There is an obvious frustration that Buncrana is not linked to Project Kelvin, which directly connects Northern Ireland to North America and Europe, providing a high capacity, secure and reliable network through Hibernia’s industry leading fibre optic submarine cable. Having access to Kelvin would increase

Buncrana's attractiveness to local and global companies who require fast, low latency bandwidth – thus making the town a viable location for companies engaged in med-tech, high-tech, digital innovation (a strategic goal of the North West Strategic Growth Plan in terms of job creation and inward investment).



*Broadband connectivity is improving but Buncrana's proximity to Project Kelvin provides the town with enhanced opportunities in terms of economic diversification and digital innovation.*

For many people in Buncrana, E&I Engineering and Inishowen Engineering are the only major industrial employers currently having any impact on Buncrana in terms of jobs created and income spent locally. To what extent either company has facilitated any direct or in-direct spin-offs has not been ascertained. The construction trade, on the other hand, has assisted with some local diversification but this is not enough. The perception is that workers in these sectors do not have a lot of disposable income and, as such, there is a need for further diversification of the local business base. It was suggested that DCC needs to invest in buying land in Buncrana to facilitate industrial growth as the IDA has 'not proved useful to the town'. There is a very evident need for a skills audit to be carried out across local businesses and industry to understand the range of skills required and the quality of the current job offering.

The deindustrialisation of Buncrana's economy, with the demise of its traditional (textile) manufacturing base, is understood as having had a significant impact on rates income for the town. It was noted that Fruit of the Loom would have once accounted for 48% of the business rates for Buncrana. This loss of revenue has impacted negatively on what DCC has being able to invest in Buncrana, not least in public spaces.

People in Buncrana would warmly welcome the upgrade of existing public realm and the addition of further public/social spaces as part of the new LAP. The local community believes that there are many spaces within the town which could 'work better for them' and indeed for visitors too. Market Square is one such under-utilised public space, and while there are challenges around what the space can be effectively used for given its location and the business offering surrounding, one suggestion was that it be used as an events space (like 'Harmony Hub' in Ballymena). Well-designed public realm brings indirect economic benefits to the businesses surrounding it, especially those involved in hospitality, food and drink. In addition to Market Square, concerns were expressed regarding the parish-owned space at the back of the cinema, which, it has been suggested could be turned into a public-private operated carpark. The community's preference, and

indeed that of locally elected officials and County Council staff, is that this could be developed for far more interesting things in terms of public realm development, with the potential to tie its development to Market Square, thus book-ending Main Street.

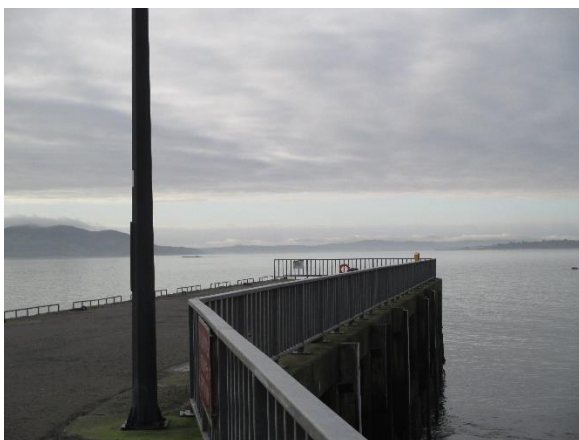
Buncrana Pier is seen as playing a key role in the economic regeneration of the town. For many people, a bridge linking Amazing Grace Park at the entrance of the town to the Pier (as envisaged as part of the Greenway Network) would open up the town further, improve connectivity and create a new harbour district which could be dedicated to local produce and active travel through its retail offering (café, food, fish market, bike hire/repair and ancillary activities). The proposed bridge would also create strategic linkages to the approved Greenway; with opportunities to connect onwards to Carndonagh – along or close to the old railway line.



*Market Square (on Main Street) would merit investment in public realm.*



*Buncrana's theatre and cinema are significant community assets.*



*Buncrana Harbour and Pier has a key role to play in the town's economic regeneration.*





Enhancing the tourism offering that surrounds Buncrana is recognised, by many people, as being key to future growth opportunities. Local stakeholders recognise that the components of a successful tourism proposition exist but that Buncrana is a '75% Town'; while the elements exist, they are disjointed. The various responsible bodies (private owners, OPW, Donegal County Council) are not sufficiently collaborating to create a substantive 'necklace of offerings' spanning the coastal, marine, environmental, creative, heritage, and leisure/recreational asset-base of the area, and recognising that there are different types of tourists with varying interests (see Figure 5.2.1).

**Figure 5.2.1: Fáilte Ireland's Classification of Tourists**



(Source: Fáilte Ireland)

Given its rich heritage, Buncrana has many stories to tell. In tourism terms, it has the potential to be a place of immersive experiences. In addition to the need for interpretative signage, any new public realm developments should be linked to this immersive experience where appropriate. Many stakeholders also noted the need for a destination management plan, which could complement the proposed visitor experience plan being developed by Fáilte Ireland.

To progress local employment opportunities, there is a need for inward investment which, in turn, requires the development of suitable commercial spaces that cater for both SMEs and larger companies. These spaces must be adaptable to the needs of various types of industry. While Lisfannon Industrial Estate is considered an asset, it is not performing as it should.

There is a sense, in terms of inward investment, that Buncrana is 'too far North' to be attractive to potential investors. Brexit, however, may provide opportunities for Buncrana should Northern Ireland-based companies desire a 'foothold' in the EU.

As the manufacturing base of the region is widened, with opportunities potentially in renewable energies – aligning with the green agenda of the NWCR, there is a recognised need for additional skilling. This could include, for example, apprenticeships linked to established and emerging local trades. There is a shortage of employment opportunities for young people in the town, especially young men.

Many people identified Fullerton Dam as a significant asset in Buncrana. The Dam has created an unlimited water supply for Buncrana that can effectively support industry, and future industrial growth. The presence

of the Dam should be used to actively promote that Buncrana is ‘open for business’ with industry that requires a stable water source.

People in Buncrana are anxious about the lack of housing in the area, and the quality of some of what exists, especially relatively new builds, as a result of mica. While some developments are under way, there have been no new completions in recent years. Stakeholders noted the need for a mixed housing model. They placed a particular emphasis on the need for social/local authority housing given low levels of disposable income. A strong emphasis was also placed on the need for sustainable housing; both in terms of its energy efficiencies and its adaptability to the needs of its residents as they age. Future housing should be located in or near the town centre – rather than on the edge of town – thus contributing to the walkability/ease of access agenda and the vivacity of the town centre, as already noted in this chapter in respect of mobility and accessibility (see Section 5.1).

#### *5.2.4 The Potential*

Enhancing Buncrana’s economic offering and development – and those of the wider NWCR – is central to the delivery of place-making locally. Growing the local economy must be considered in tandem with the promotion of the area’s mobility, accessibility (see Section 5.1) and connectivity, the current and future well-being of its citizens (see Section 5.3), its rich environmental asset-base (see Section 5.4), the quality of the local labour force, and the vision of local stakeholders, including local government (see Section 5.5). The economic future of Buncrana cannot be considered in isolation of its strategic location as a gateway to Inishowen and its key settlement status within the NWCR. When thinking strategically about the economic growth and development of Buncrana, the focus needs to consider the town’s future in the context of ‘From Malin to Manor...’ (Manorcunningham).

The overall ambition of Buncrana is, in the next generation, to become a sustainable economy that is low-carbon, connected, inclusive, age-friendly, and climate resilient. There is recognition that local produce needs greater promotion; and that there is an onus on the town to ‘Champion Green’; an initiative already underway nationwide as a response to COVID-19. Retail and industry across the island of Ireland have, as a result of COVID-19, experienced a “decade of change in a couple of months”. Post COVID-19, social distancing requirements will pose a challenge for many businesses, and the country will be in recession. This raises the importance of ‘value for money’ offerings over the coming years. Technology (ICT) – and data – will become increasingly important, not only in the marketing of the region and its diverse business/tourism offering, but also in facilitating telesales. Linking in with agencies such as Retail Excellence and Fáilte Ireland will be important; the news that the local Chamber of Commerce is being rejuvenated is welcome as a medium to facilitate this engagement.

Future planning strategies for Buncrana and its hinterlands must place an equal emphasis on sustainable growth and well-being; with residents encouraging planners to envision Buncrana as a place of innovation that invests in both people and place while playing its part in the protection of the planet (see Section 5.3). The Green Agenda is seen as playing a vital role in any future scenario (see Section 5.4).

In retail terms, there is a need to diversify the offering on Main Street and to make the backlands more accessible through the various alleyways off Main Street. The Backlands provide opportunities for new retail routes via pop-up shops, for example, linked to local artists and artisan producers, high-quality office accommodation (of which there is a current under-supply), and urban manufacturing facilities. Connectivity within and across these new spaces will be critical to ensuring year-round footfall, with an emphasis placed on pedestrianisation and cycleways with bike parking. As noted by one respondent “The pedestrian is at the centre of the town”. The proposed Inner Relief Road will also be a priority in this context. A suite of ‘access

infrastructure' projects is needed to enable the future strategic development of the town centre and shorefront and to avoid further congestion with negative impacts on economic spend. In addition to the aforementioned Inner Relief Road, infrastructure requirements include pedestrian crossings on Main Street, construction of the Mill Bridge and the bridge linking Amazing Grace Park with the Pier ('Harbour Bridge'). The design element of all these projects must incorporate cycle paths/walkways; with consideration to be given to designating the 'Harbour Bridge' car-free.



*There are a number of strategic sites within walking distance of Main Street, and many have laneways that connect them to the main thoroughfare.*

Through nurturing partnerships between existing businesses (possibly through the Chamber) and education providers (both HEIs and FEIs), Buncrana will place an emphasis on stimulating and promoting innovation and entrepreneurship. There is considerable scope for further digital hubs, possibly specialised in terms of their set-up, to drive innovation. Opportunities exist within the Agri-Tech/Food Innovation, Med-Tech/Life Sciences, Marine Engineering, Engineering/GreenTech sectors for example. These hubs could be supported by a satellite centre/research node (focusing on the marine, bio-medics, engineering) of the existing third-level institutes in the NWCR. Such hubs could be housed in re-purposed vacant properties or infill development in the urban core. This will lead to the creation of higher-level jobs and opportunities for graduates. The success of such hubs is dependent on access to high-speed broadband (learning from the success of Arranmore), with a recommendation that Buncrana be linked to Project Kelvin. Links will be created with the existing secondary schools and the vocational education centre to raise awareness of employment opportunities locally, including high-skill roles. Local employers will be encouraged to adopt inclusive employment protocols – linking in with Buncrana's already excellent reputation in providing bespoke education for children with autism.

For larger developments, consideration should be given to developing a new Enterprise Centre in Ballymacarry Lower – incorporating the newly announced call centre. Through the NWCR, there are opportunities to link Buncrana's industrial vision with the emerging urban manufacturing agenda of Derry City and Strabane District Council (which is happening in partnership with Limerick City and thus 'fits' with the Atlantic Economic Corridor agenda). Urban manufacturing provides opportunities for smaller scale developments to be located in the urban core where there is a large footprint of brownfield and vacant sites; thus contributing to the vibrancy of the town centre (and is an acknowledgement of a global shift away from the traditional model of industrial parks being located at the entrance to a town).



*Vacant properties/infill opportunities in town centre*

There is concern amongst elected members about the narrowness of the current industrial base and the associated over-dependence on larger employers such as E&I Engineering. There is also a certain degree of worry about the overall ‘stickiness’ of industry to place – especially post-Brexit. As noted by Prof. John FitzGerald at the 2010 ICLR Annual conference, the attraction and retention of industry and skilled and talented people is dependent on the offering of a place; by its providing a mix of natural, community, social, leisure, creative and cultural activities for themselves and their families.

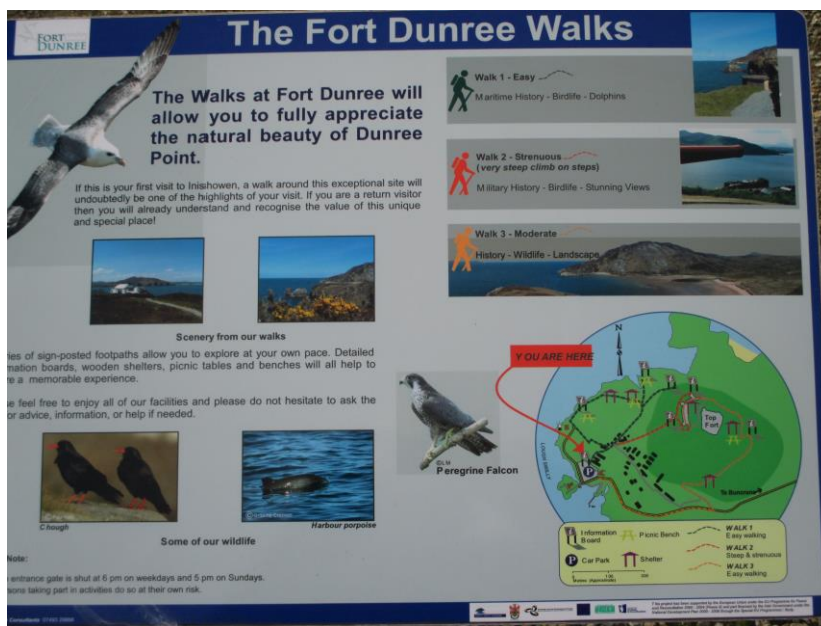
Buncrana offers opportunities for the melding of the innovation and green agendas. As the town considers its role in promoting the City Region’s urban/advanced manufacturing agenda, Buncrana can place an emphasis on attracting green manufacturing/clean tech as its USP; with increasing opportunities in this space linked to the social economy, renewable energies, and greening construction. Opportunities also exist in terms of the building development/energy standards applied (commercially and residentially) and wider urban management issues (through smart lighting, smart bins, generating renewable energies and feeding into the grid, green factoring for example). Local businesses, including retail, should be supported to ‘Go Green’. This could be incorporated into the workings of the local Tidy Towns Committee through greening the town by encouraging businesses to harvest rain water, facilitate bike parking, engage in ‘treeconomics’ and other ecological initiatives. With Translink now registered in the Republic of Ireland also, representations could be made around their establishment of a public transport service for North Inishowen, using electric vehicles or buses running on alternative fuels (thus contributing to Buncrana’s green plan while also enabling Translink to trial new technologies).

Given the industrial background of the town, and the importance of engineering (and other skills such as fabrication and welding ) to the existing industrial offering, there is an accepted need for vocational education to be better promoted in the town, with calls for a vocational education centre to be established catering for the wider Inishowen area. Such a centre should be partnered with industry, and tied into the existing MoU between higher and further education providers across the NWCR which places a strong emphasis on aligning training with industry needs and creating varying pathways for career progression that ultimately benefit the individual, the company and the region. Local firms (especially in engineering) are involved in R&D, but need to be better plugged into the offerings/funding in third-level institutes. There is a key role for the LEO in facilitating this. Stakeholders must nurture the ecosystem of innovation by connecting

businesses to researchers. More broadly, and as previously stipulated in this chapter, there is a need for a skills audit of Bunrana in the context of understanding current and future need.

Tourism is a key economic driver for Bunrana. There are issues with the seasonality of associated businesses, the lack of public transport options serving the town, and the current (lack of) packaging of the diverse tourism offerings. There are undoubtedly opportunities for the 'offering' to be broadened, including, for example:

- Bunrana to be the base for/gateway to West Donegal – extending the ferry service to Fanad;
- Designation of area as a Dark Sky Reserve and viewing point for the Northern Lights<sup>xvii</sup>;
- Coastal interpretative centre (which has previously been proposed);
- Orienteering breaks/training;
- Healthy living bootcamps;
- Walkway to Stragill beach;
- Cycling hub at Bunrana Harbour - with expansion of the regional greenway;
- Development of a creative hub space which would offer courses, cater for residentials, provide space for rent (to the Film Office for example), among other cohorts/interests; and
- Farm to Fork programme including food tourism linked to high-end, quality food products, with possibility of developing a cookery school specialising in marine foods.



*Fort Dunree is one of Inishowen's most significant natural and heritage resources.*

The development of assets such as Fort Dunree and the shorefront are regarded as key economic drivers for the future sustainability of the local tourism economy. The emphasis should be on year-round activities, thus generating sustainable jobs. Tourism needs to be more than a part-time job; but rather viewed as a career in the hospitality sector. There is a need for ongoing training and upskilling, with the suggestion that this could be delivered via the proposed vocational training centre in Bunrana (rather than having to commute to Letterkenny or Killybegs).

The Atlantic/Lough Swilly is one of Buncrana's greatest assets; and while much has been made of this resource to date, there are further opportunities. These include the development of baysports (as exists in Athlone (County Westmeath) and Roscarbery (County Cork)), and training in sailing and yachting (there is a yachting course coming to Scoil Mhuire) – with opportunities to expand this to professional athletes.

In response to COVID-19, which has decimated the international travel market and mass tourism, there is an immediate need for the NWCR to develop a strategy for adaptation, diversification and recovery of regional tourism over the next 1-5 years. A greater emphasis will need to be placed on adopting a smart and sustainable approach to tourism. This has implications for mobility/transport options (active travel, public transport, ferry), promoting 'local' (farm to fork, artisan produce), advancing the regional greenway/blueways network, and further development of attractions and experiences linked to the assets noted in this chapter. Consideration also needs to be given to broadening the current accommodation offering for tourists which, in comparison to other coastal resorts, is limited.

The quality of the public realm contributes significantly to the attractiveness of towns for business while also being a 'nod' to the culture of a place. In Buncrana, there is a desire to see more investment in public realm on Main Street (Market Square) and around the cinema, as well as art installations and the development of a cultural centre/venue on the shorefront. There is a desire for the public realm to be seen as a space for people of all abilities, and to be facilitative of pop-up events and activities that further encourage the social, cultural and economic vibrancy of the area and contribute to "sticky streets". On the shorefront, there is a need to provide showers/other facilities for cycle users at part of any public realm development.

The growth of the local economy is also dependent on the supply of good quality social, affordable and private housing. As noted in section 5.1, a number of potential sites have already been identified. The required increase in supply necessitates investment in the local water treatment plant. Their design must incorporate vernacular materials, achieve high-energy ratings, and adhere to the principles of creating healthy places – not least the concept of the 15/20-minute walkable neighbourhood<sup>xviii</sup> (see Figure 5.2.2).

Consideration needs to be given to a 'living over the shop' scheme for the town which would bring a new vibrancy to the urban core. Future housing provision, as well as being informed by future growth projections, must take account of the changing demographics of the region, and be adaptable to the life cycle of its residents. The need for a safe and secure centre of supported living/housing was highlighted, where older people can live independently and within walking distance of key services, which they need to access on a regular basis (healthcare, social supports, financial services, post office and food shopping). Mica-affected homes need to be repaired/rebuilt. In support of the town's green agenda, existing housing stock must be considered for retrofitting.

Through Inishowen Development Partnership (IDP), the town is currently engaged in the Sustainable Energy Communities programme run by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). The key objective of the programme is to support the local community to promote sustainable energy and energy efficiency, and to embed the UNSDGs into the actions of homeowners, community and sports groups and businesses in area.

**Figure 5.2.2 Components of a 20-minute neighbourhood**



(Source: <https://theconversation.com/people-love-the-idea-of-20-minute-neighbourhoods-so-why-isnt-it-top-of-the-agenda-131193> )

The global public health pandemic has brought about a sea-change in how people think about work, of the possibilities of remote working, and the value of achieving a work-life balance. COVID-19 has highlighted the necessity of being able to hot-desk (or work from home), of having access to high speed broadband, and the value and importance of both blue and open green spaces (see Section 5.4). As part of Buncrana’s green agenda, there is considerable scope for the further development of blue and green corridors throughout the town; this will not only support the local economy – but “create a happy place”.

### 5.3 Community Well-being

This section deals with the overall issue of Community Well-being. This includes the following dimensions of the Place Standard:

- Social contact/amenities;
- Identity and belonging;
- Play and recreation; and
- Facilities and amenities.

The Place Standard survey results reveal that Community Well-being, as represented by the dimensions listed above, received a combined mean score of 4.13. 'Play and Recreation' received the highest score in this cluster of dimensions (4.4); followed by 'Identity and Belonging' (4.3) and 'Social Contact/Amenities' (4.0). 'Facilities and Amenities' received the lowest mean score in this cluster (3.8).

Wider issues of community well-being, as examined in a more qualitative sense, also reflect the mean score attributed to 'feeling safe' (4.9) which, while not specifically examined here within the domain of Community Well-being (see Section 5.4), nevertheless suggests that an intrinsic consciousness of community well-being informs attitudes to the wider dimensions of the Place Standard.

In terms of perceived changes over the past five years, more people believe that 'Play and Recreation' have gotten better (23%) than gotten worse (17%). Almost a quarter of respondents (24%) believe 'Identity and Belonging' have gotten better, with only 8% recording dis-improvement. For 'Social Contact / Amenities', 15% of respondents believe it has gotten better; only slightly higher than those who believe it has gotten worse (12%). Respondents are more negative about the changes for 'Facilities and Amenities' with more people believing they have gotten worse over the past five years (27%) than better (23%). Across all four dimensions, the majority of respondents believe that there has been no change (rather than any improvement or dis-improvement). This is particularly the case for 'Social Contact/ Amenities and 'Identity and Belonging' where 73% and 68% of respondents respectively, believe there has been no change.

Whilst their cumulative score is average, based on the survey findings, citizens perceive that community well-being is linked to issues of social contact, identity and belonging, facilities for play and recreation, physical activity and economic opportunities. With regards to community well-being, survey respondents referred to the needs of specific groups: 'our young people' and children with autism are specific examples of this. In addition to physical infrastructure and buildings, community well-being 'infrastructure' relates to the physical environment as well as voluntary activities within the local community which tackle social isolation and, in some cases, provide key services. There is an awareness among stakeholders of the link between overall community well-being and economic opportunity (Section 5.2), good-quality and accessible built environment (Section 5.1), and access to the natural environment (Section 5.4).

#### *5.3.1 Current Situation/the Baseline*

Buncrana has a range of natural assets which have direct benefits for community well-being and population health. These include walks, open spaces, the sea, the shorefront and an attractive natural setting.





*Suggested stopping points – natural and heritage resources - along Buncrana's coastal walk.*

As mentioned previously, a new primary care centre is planned for Buncrana. In addition to the benefits for the local population, this was seen by stakeholders as an asset in the context of regional economic growth in the NWCR; providing an opportunity as a field base for linking with the proposed Ulster Medical School in Derry. The existence of a specialist older people's nursing unit is also an identified asset. So too is the presence of a specialist school providing educational services for children with Autism.

Beyond accessing GP care (and specialist nursing care for those patients who are placed in the Buncrana older people's nursing unit), local residents in Buncrana have to travel to Letterkenny for healthcare appointments in relation to physical and mental healthcare needs. This presents challenges for community well-being and the well-being of individuals. The HSE provides one diabetes specialist nurse for the whole of Inishowen and this service is based at Letterkenny, requiring people to travel for primary care specialist services which are essential to staying well in the community. Insight, providing suicide prevention interventions and an early intervention counselling service, is regarded as a vital local asset for mental health and community well-being. However, young people – in Buncrana and the wider Inishowen Peninsula generally - face particular barriers to accessing adequate location-based Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). With the exception of a helpline operated from Carndonagh, there are no Domestic Violence and Abuse support facilities in Inishowen.

### *5.3.2 Current Issues - including opportunities and challenges*

The main issues that emerged from the research/consultations are as follows:

- Buncrana has a natural asset base and emerging local infrastructure planning context (including natural heritage and the Greenway) which can greatly contribute to community well-being - provided the right methodologies and supports are available and used to develop this to its full potential, including safe off-road provision for non-motorised movement;
- Access to natural, archaeological and built heritage sites are community well-being issues which also can bring economic benefits to the locality, as year-round tourist attractions;
- The lack of local access to adequately resourced physical and mental healthcare support (beyond GP care) - especially for young people - is an issue for Buncrana and the wider population of Inishowen. The siting of a primary care centre at Buncrana needs engagement by the HSE (with community stakeholders) to ensure that, when operational, it becomes a best practice model in integrated service delivery (physical and mental health, and primary care specialist services);

- Any new housing planned for Buncrana should take account of community well-being needs and the requirements of specific groups now and in the future. Provision for victims of domestic violence should also be taken into account in the context of future housing provision;
- A social enterprise approach should be explored for social supports (including youth resources, home care and carer support); and
- Buncrana has made a significant contribution to the national and international arts and cultural sectors for many years through the production of world-class artists in the music, literary and visual arts spheres. Recognising the crucial role access to arts and culture plays in health and well-being, as well as economic growth; it is a major shortcoming that there is no high-quality arts and cultural interactive space/facility in Buncrana, which includes a professional-standard performance venue. This would create major economic benefits for the area and wider Inishowen peninsula. Such developments should, where appropriate, utilise available vacant or brownspace in the urban core and/or facing the shorefront. IDP, in conjunction with local stakeholders, will have a key role to play in such an approach.

### 5.3.3 Stakeholder Perspectives

The natural assets of the town and surrounds were repeatedly identified by stakeholders as an indicator of a (actual and potential) high quality of life. Stakeholders indicate a strong awareness of environmental assets, amenities (beaches, walks, sports clubs) and activities (including those run through volunteering) to combat social isolation as assets within the community which promoted community well-being including Feelgood Fortnight, community Christmas dinner, the Darkness into Light initiative, the local Park Run, and the Swilly Swimmers. There was a feeling that whilst green spaces exist, these need to be more joined up. The strength of the Buncrana Tidy Towns organisation and organisations such as Insight and iCare were also referenced in terms of the community well-being benefits such groups provide. Similarly, the Exchange is seen as a community asset. The existence of a community-based model for Refugee resettlement in Inishowen, which includes Buncrana, was seen by participants as a good practice example in the context of a national approach to promoting community-based refugee and asylum seeker supports as an alternative to Direct Provision. Further investment is needed in supports for Refugees and Asylum seekers, some of which is currently provided by IDP.



*The Owenkillew River has an environment that lends itself to the development of walkways and green corridors.*



*Swan Park is a treasured element of Buncrana's green infrastructure.*

Specific assets identified in respect of older people's well-being in Buncrana included Go Active Buncrana, Alone, the Irish Countrywomen's Association, the Women's Shed, and fitness classes. It was acknowledged that the specialist older people's nursing unit in Buncrana was a key resource which contributes, not only to the well-being of individual patients, but also to that of their families in terms of reducing the need to travel to visit and support family members receiving nursing care. Social supports for older men were cited as a priority need. Donegal Sports Partnership was also identified as an asset, as it focuses on inclusion and increasing involvement in sporting activities by groups within the community who have a lower rate of participation. While the Partnership does not get involved in infrastructural issues, it was noted that there is a clear need for an audit of spaces vis-à-vis the changing demographics of the area and the activities currently available/not available in support.

Identified challenges to community well-being include attitudes to newcomers; both returned Irish people and people from elsewhere. Support is needed to connect newcomers (including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers) to existing services and supports. A lack of public transport was further cited as a key barrier. The need for the physical built environment and public realm to be disability and autism friendly was also highlighted.

The Troubles was acknowledged as having a very real, albeit not oft-talked about, psychological impact on Buncrana. Due to familial relationships and geographical ties, Buncrana was arguably more affected by this period of sustained conflict than many other Irish towns. For example, stakeholders reported that many children were sent from Derry during the Troubles to stay with relatives in Buncrana.

A need for more concerted investment in family support in the context of poor mental health was raised. Local citizens identified inadequate access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) locally and to Mental Health crisis support services more generally. In the context of accessing CAMHS, children in Inishowen have to travel to Letterkenny to the CAMHS Hub potentially placing them at further risk and isolation. It was noted that the HSE does not provide transport to patients to appointments. Stakeholders reported that the HSE operates a 'Did Not Attend' practice of removing children and young people from waiting lists if they fail to attend successive appointments. This, combined with a reported limited number of

CAMHS slots available on only two days a week for Buncrana patients, creates longer waiting lists locally and places young people from Inishowen at a considerable disadvantage.



*The existing Buncrana Medical Centre*

Stakeholders view the proposed primary care centre as a priority and as a significant and positive addition to assets supporting community well-being. How the primary care centre will connect with and provide additional service connectivity for those with long-term conditions, emerged as a concern for some. There is a strong sense from local citizens that the primary care centre should focus on mental health as well as physical health and diagnostics. In particular, questions were raised as to what focus there will be on suicide, mental health, supporting social care at home, supporting people with diabetes and supporting people who require coronary care in the community. There was general consensus among stakeholders that there should be dialogue with the HSE as regards service design and planning in the context of the proposed primary care centre to reflect local priorities and needs as raised during the research. Stakeholders also pointed to the benefits of more social prescribing (where health professionals refer patients to support in the community in order to improve their health and well-being) and a community-led approach to health improvement. The Healthy Living Centre models<sup>xix</sup> operating in Derry and throughout Northern Ireland was cited as an example of how a neighbourhood-based, community-led approach to health improvement can link with primary care to improve individual and population health outcomes. Additional investment priorities for community well-being identified included further investment in Youth Counselling, Early Intervention Family Support, Safetalk (suicide prevention training), ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training), First Aid, Conflict Resolution, and community information (e.g. Newsletter).

Stakeholders felt that a connected approach to the development of any public infrastructure required an awareness of 'voices and the voiceless'.

The absence of adequate childcare facilities was also seen as a key barrier to enhanced community well-being. It was suggested that there needs to be an up-to-date and comprehensive Childcare Needs Survey undertaken for Buncrana and more investment in pre-school childcare as an economic/employment and education enabler for parents.

Traffic congestion was identified by stakeholders as a negative factor on health and well-being. There is a need to encourage and develop better capacity in terms of off-road green infrastructure (walking and cycling

routes) to enable children to walk or cycle to school safely, with the appropriate infrastructure to be off-road and clearly segregated, and not simply along a main road.

In addition to The Exchange (referenced above), a further example of positive practice in the provision and servicing of space and amenities for community well-being is the youth and community centre with sports hall and training pitches. There is a strong desire locally to see this resource more systematically utilised – similar to the Attic House in Longford Town. Stakeholders identified the need for more dedicated youth space to promote social well-being amongst young people – with one possible option being to operate this to a social enterprise model.



*Buncrana Youth and Community Centre provides important educational, sporting and recreational services.*



*The Exchange is a thriving community, voluntary and social enterprise hub for creativity and innovation.*

Other priorities for development identified by stakeholders were a Multisensory Play Trail, similar to the Play Trail in Derry. This was highlighted as a particular priority given the number of children in Buncrana who have complex needs and learning disabilities; and who potentially moved to the area to avail of high quality education provided at Scoil Iosagáin; a specialist school supporting children with Autism and learning needs. It was acknowledged that this same cohort of children will continue to need particular supports for well-being as they grow older and into adulthood; this also relates to future housing provision.

#### **Attic House, Longford**

The Attic House is a purpose built youth centre which encapsulates the needs of young people aged 10 – 18 years of age through the various programmes, activities and events that are organised by dedicated, trained and committed volunteers on a daily basis. Based in Longford Town and established in 2015, the Attic House has a computer suite, meeting rooms, a Youth Café, kitchen, offices and reception area. In a future phase of development, it is intended to expand this to include outdoor sports area, demonstration kitchen, sound studio, and a workshop room for projects.



(Source: <http://attichouse.ie/>)

In terms of housing, and in specific relation to health and community well-being, reducing social isolation was identified as a priority. It was highlighted that at present there is no sheltered housing in Buncrana. The need for sheltered accommodation will continue to increase as the local population continues to age and as the generation of children with learning disabilities transition into adulthood. The potential for housing development in Buncrana to be tailored to local needs was regarded as a priority support for the well-being of specific vulnerable groups.

Chapter Three noted the high levels of fossil fuel consumption in Buncrana for heating and transportation purposes. Whilst dealt with in more detail in Section 5.2, a transition to green and clean energy was also identified by stakeholders as being an overall community well-being priority.

Stakeholders remarked that the COVID-19 crisis has revealed problems with home care on a profit-driven model, and that future development and provision should follow a community-based social enterprise approach. Such an approach would provide employment opportunities, increase overall community well-being, and meet the specific needs of vulnerable older people and others with homecare support needs, as well as providing support for carers themselves.

Access to heritage and culture was acknowledged as important for community well-being and it was suggested a new National Heritage Strategy could inform new initiatives. Specific ideas put forward in this context were a Dark Skies Reserve north of Buncrana (see Section 5.2.4) and further development of the archaeological and built heritage of Inishowen, focusing on Buncrana as a hub. Access to environmental heritage was also deemed a priority by stakeholders particularly in terms of embracing Lough Swilly more fully as a feature of local life in the same way Dingle Bay and Galway Bay have been developed for (marine and terrestrial) for recreational use. In particular, stakeholders emphasised the importance of access to the Lough for swimming and that this should be taken into consideration in any future (re)development of the public realm along the shorefront.

The lack of an adequate arts and culture performance space is regularly cited as a gap in Buncrana. Stakeholders acknowledged that lack of access to culture is a key indicator of poverty and that the town's overall economy would benefit from a community-run cultural facility. In this respect, the redevelopment of the disused factory on the shorefront as a facility to, access arts and culture for locals and visitors, and provision of a performance space was noted as a priority by the stakeholders. Utilising such a building would provide a link with the economic and industrial history of Buncrana while opening-up this part of the shorefront again for community benefit. It was even suggested that such a social enterprise initiative could be named 'The Factory'; in acknowledgement of the site's historic past and importance.

#### *5.3.4 The Potential*

There is significant latent potential for enhanced community well-being and community health outcomes within the configuration of infrastructure and assets currently provided in, or planned for, Buncrana. These assets include the provision of green infrastructure, public realm development, interest in social enterprise as a vehicle to meet local needs, and the anticipated primary care hub.

In approaching enhanced community well-being - in the context of the socio-economic growth and development of Buncrana as a key settlement within the wider NWCR - civic and community stakeholders working together can simultaneously take account of the challenging structural health inequalities of a border area and deliver significant outcomes with both well-being and economic benefits. Health and well-being carry tangible value for economic performance as well as holding an intrinsic value from a

humanitarian perspective. Populations which have experienced higher levels of poverty, socio-economic deprivation and the intergenerational aspects of this, suffer from higher levels of ill-health, both mental and physical (OECD/WHO, 2003); this includes long term conditions and non-communicable conditions such as diabetes. Children living in poverty and social deprivation are more vulnerable to adverse childhood experiences, which have been proven to be direct factors in lifelong health outcomes<sup>xx</sup>. The World Health Organisation (WHO) *Review of Social Determinants and the Health Divide in the WHO Europe Region* (2014) acknowledges that planning and spatial development have a key role to play in determining the health of populations and the potential of economies: “Spatial quality – how places and spaces are planned, designed, constructed and managed – affects the distribution of environmental burdens and benefits affecting health and inequities” (2014: 29). The report further states that “social injustice kills...tackling inequities in the social determinants of health also brings other improvements in societal well-being, such as greater social cohesion, greater efforts for climate change mitigation and better education” (WHO Europe, 2014: 17).

The significance of including community well-being, via the Place Standard, and of having this dimension considered in the context of this study of Buncrana, is that it affords all agencies and local stakeholders an opportunity to co-locate the issues of planning and development, and community well-being, within a continuum of policy and future practice which is based on international best practice. The WHO emphasises the use of partnership working and local knowledge, resources and key community and agency assets as a basis for joint working to tackle the social determinants of health, not just for the wider population but also for the well-being of specific vulnerable groups such as the elderly and refugees (*Ibid*, 29).



*Participants at one of the stakeholder workshops – hosted by IDP*

The WHO further highlights that the role of Local Authorities is key to driving these processes and that this needs to be more widespread in Europe than it has been. The approach taken by Donegal County Council in commissioning this study to inform future spatial planning in support of Buncrana, already demonstrates a desire to implement international best practice, and actively implementing the recommendations on community well-being would place Donegal County Council ahead of the curve. Regardless of challenges arising from national resourcing of centrally-managed ‘curative’ models of health service delivery, local government has a role in delivering a more sustainable social model of health in a way that health service providers cannot (WHO Europe, 2014).

Key spatial and community-based development needs, in relation to community well-being, have emerged from the study. These should form considerations not only in terms of a physical and community local area plan, but also in terms of the alignment to Buncrana's needs, on an interagency basis, of strategic investments made under national initiatives such as the *National Development Plan 2018-2027*, and devolved local resources with a view to align best practice use of resources for added future value. These should include the following:

- Design-led public realm development and expansion of the North West Greenways network to ensure optimal community benefit; shorefront development (including Lough Swilly) which promotes access to physical well-being activities, support cultural engagement and access ('The Factory') and caters for the specific needs of vulnerable groups including people with autism;
- Support for the development of place-based social enterprise models, in line with the *National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022* (Government of Ireland, 2019), to address local economic and social needs and opportunities relating to the provision, servicing and management of community space, youth space, cultural and arts performance amenities, digital workspace (to complement the digital hub), social supports (carers supports, homecare provision), built environment maintenance and servicing;
- Advocacy for, and facilitation at, an interagency level for a 'spatially-proofed' approach to the development and planning of services offered by the HSE at a Primary Care Hub in Buncrana;
- Exploration of new models of future housing provision which take into account population health needs (including dementia supported living models which support the entire dementia journey), supported living for adults with learning disability, and the benefits of being able to connect on foot, by bike or wheelchair, to the fabric of the town and its public realm amenities as well as essential services; and
- Facilitation of the local community and voluntary sector as key partners for the future development and sustainability of Buncrana, through endorsement of strategic capital applications which relate to actions recommended in the findings of this study, and through active facilitation of interagency relationships which activate the potential of community-based partnership for balanced spatial development.



## 5.4 Environment

This section deals with issues relating to Buncrana’s natural and built environment. This includes the following dimensions of the Place Standard:

- Care and Maintenance;
- Natural Space;
- Feeling Safe; and
- Streets and Spaces.

The Place Standard survey results reveal that ‘environment’ is the dimension of place that records the second-most favourable perception among local citizens. These four dimensions received a combined mean score of 4.46, while the mean score across all variables stood at 4.14. Only ‘governance’ (community engagement/participation) records a higher score at 4.47. Of the fourteen dimensions that comprise the Place Standard, three environmental variables receive the highest scores in Buncrana:

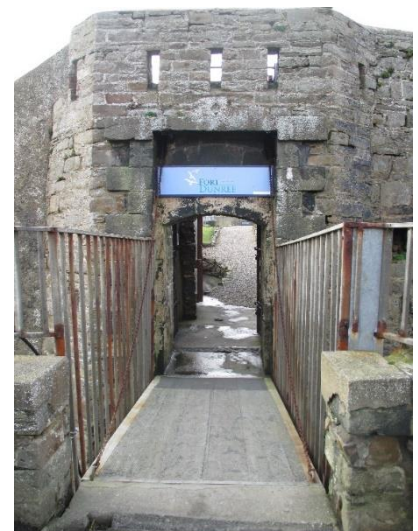
- Feeling Safe: 4.9;
- Care and Maintenance: 4.6; and
- Natural Space: 4.5

Of the fourteen variables, ‘streets and spaces’ records the third-lowest score at 3.8.

The survey findings reveal that the environmental aspect people perceive to have most improved is that of ‘care and maintenance’. In their comments about this aspect of place, respondents were particularly complementary of the Tidy Towns Committee, and they referred to Buncrana’s achievements in the National Tidy Towns Competition. As noted in Chapter Four, they also mentioned the town gardener and spoke about his dedication and commitment. The data also reveal that over a quarter (27%) of respondents perceive that Buncrana has experienced a dis-improvement in respect of ‘natural space’. In their comments, they referred to the flooding of Swan Park, litter on the beaches and shortcomings in respect of fully realising Buncrana’s potential as a place to attract and keep visitors.

### 5.4.1 Current Situation/the Baseline

Buncrana’s seaside location on Ireland’s most northerly peninsula confers a unique set of environmental resources on the town. The area is one of the most scenic on the island of Ireland. The powerful forces of the North Atlantic Ocean have shaped Buncrana’s seascapes and landscapes, but the area has a more tranquil character than the wild and rugged beauty of West Donegal. Lough Swilly separates Inishowen from the majestic Fanad Peninsula. Thus, Buncrana benefits from its own beauty as well as the panoramas across the Lough. The Lough, which is 45 km long, is calm relative to the North Atlantic, but is no less dramatic. Along with Carlingford Lough and Killary Harbour, it is one of three glacial fjords in Ireland. Lough Swilly was a significant British navy base up to 1938, and the abandoned garrison at Fort Dunree, 10 km north of Buncrana, occupies one of the most dramatic and spectacular



settings on Ireland's coastline. The Fort, which is in the ownership of Donegal County Council, is a tremendous asset and popular visitor attraction, but its development will require considerable investment and careful planning. At present, Fort Dunree is only accessible from Bunrana by road, and many of its buildings are in a state of disrepair.



*Fort Dunree offered strategic vantage points over Lough Swilly and out into the North Atlantic. Today, their value is scenic, rather than military, with the potential for this circa 70 acre site to be redeveloped as an Immersive heritage and cultural attraction.*

Bunrana's beauty and strong suite of natural resources, particularly its beaches, have been attracting visitors for many decades. Several public spaces in Bunrana, including the foyer of the County Council Offices are adorned with black-and-white images of people enjoying 'a day at the seaside' during the town's heyday as a seaside destination from the late-1800s to the mid-1900s. These photographs depict many happy faces, and they convey a sense of 'the good old days' that today find nostalgic expression as stakeholders strive to re-create and re-imagine some of Bunrana's former glory.

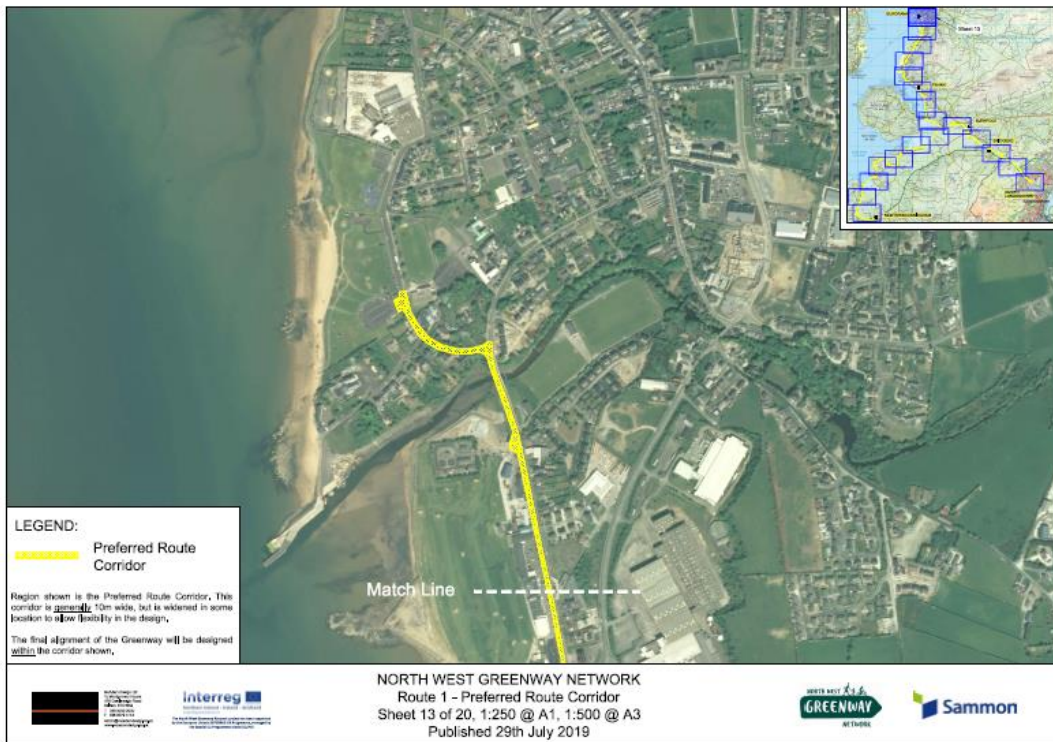
Bunrana's built heritage includes several national monuments and many of its most prized features, such as O'Doherty's Keep and the Castle Bridge, complement the locality's natural resources in terms of enabling the town to develop an enhanced tourism offering.



*The Castle Bridge and O'Doherty's Keep demonstrate Bunclara's long-standing transport and administrative importance.*

During the course of compiling this report, the statutory planning process for the first phase of the North-West Greenway Network commenced. The second stage will, hopefully, connect Bunclara with Derry. The following map (Figure 5.4.1) shows the proposed route.

**Figure 5.4.1: Bunclara Town Section of the proposed North-West Greenway Network**



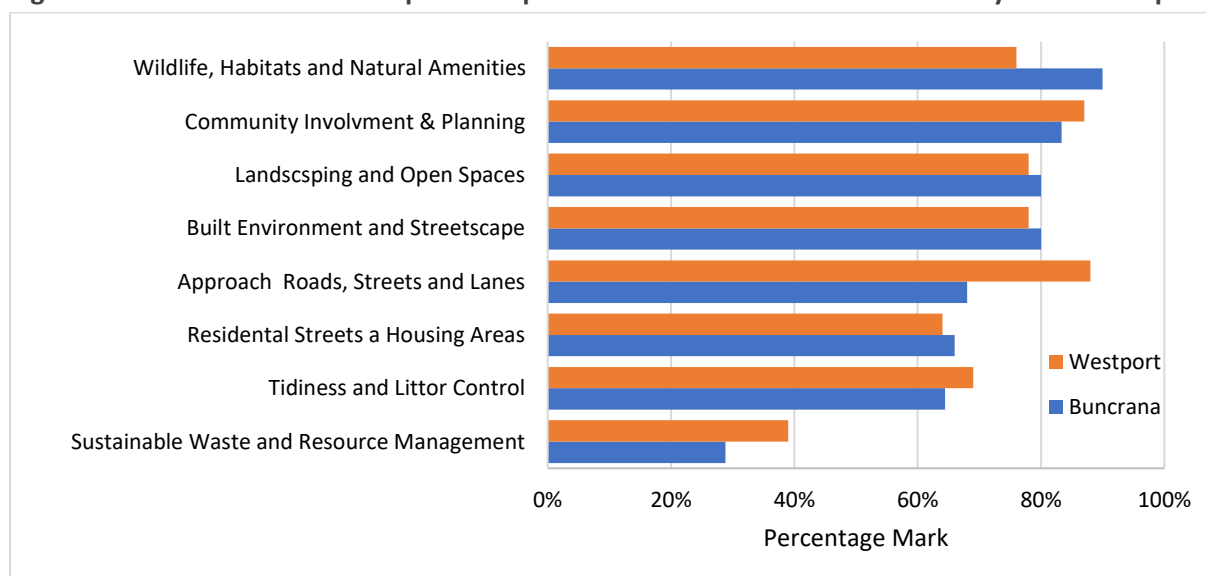
(Source: Ronan Gallagher, Communications Officer, NW Greenway Network)

The greenway will enter Buncrana from the south, cross the Owenkillew River and proceed to Shore Road – thus opening up prospects for onwards connections into Buncrana Town Centre and Carndonagh. Section 5.1 of this report (mobility and accessibility) deals, at length, with the greenway. In addition to being of strategic importance in terms of connectivity and Buncrana’s tourism offering, the Greenway Network is a significant environmental project. Projects that enable citizens – residents and visitors – to access the natural environment (but do not interfere with wilderness and natural habitats) serve to increase people’s awareness of, and respect for, ecology and biodiversity. Thus, this project is likely to bring economic, quality-of-life and environmental benefits to Buncrana, Inishowen and the wider Derry areas.

Buncrana Tidy Towns Committee is one of the town’s greatest assets in terms of protecting and harnessing local natural resources. Buncrana is one of County Donegal’s strongest performers in the National Tidy Towns Competition and has won several awards and achieved considerable national recognition. Indeed, as the following graph (Figure 5.4.2) shows, on a number of tidy towns indicators, Buncrana outperforms Westport, which has won the competition on a number of occasions. Buncrana achieves a higher score than Westport in respect of ‘wildlife, habitats and natural amenities’.

Successive reports from those adjudicating the National Tidy Towns Competition point to the need for more concerted action in Buncrana in respect of ‘sustainable waste and resource management’. The adjudicators’ recommendations in respect of waste minimisation and the elimination of plastics provide useful signposts that ought to inform the implementation of this strategic plan.

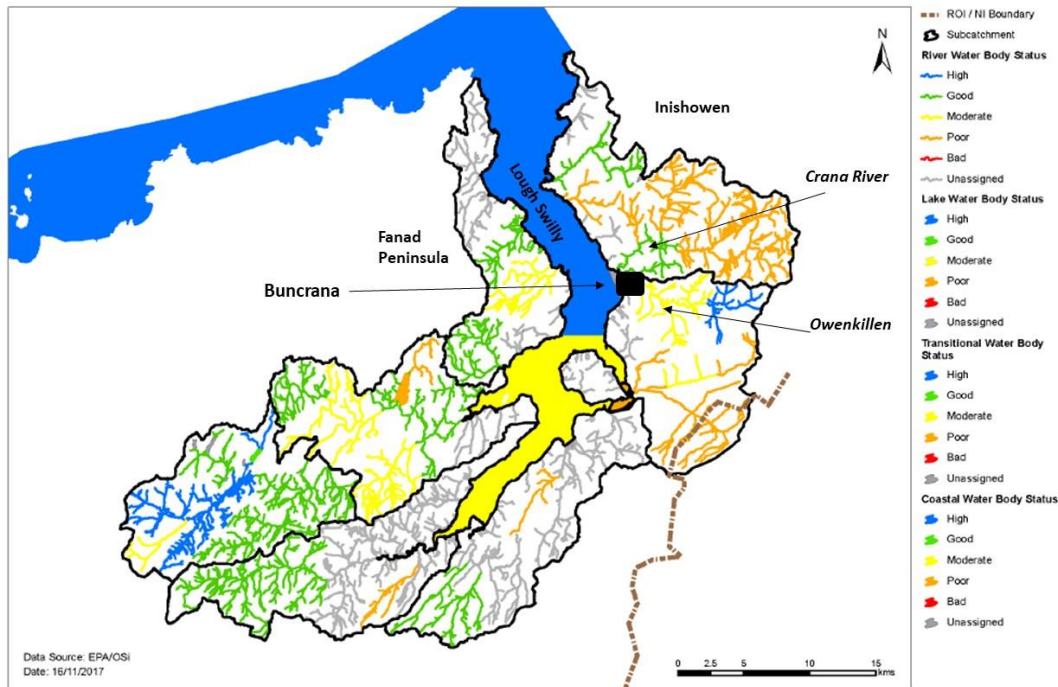
**Figure 5.4.2: Buncrana and Westport – respective scores in the 2019 National Tidy Towns Competition**



Water quality data published by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA, 2018) records that the northern half of Lough Swilly, including Buncrana’s shoreline, is of ‘high quality’. The waters in the south of the Lough are classified as ‘moderate’ in quality. Of the two main rivers that enter Lough Swilly at Buncrana, the Crana records the better water quality. Its waters are classified as ‘good’, although several of its tributaries are classified as ‘poor’. The Owenkillew is classified as being of ‘moderate’ quality. Only one set of tributaries in the two sub-catchments, in Buncrana’s environs, achieves ‘high’ quality status. The EPA assessments also reveal that over one-third of river systems in the Swilly Catchment are ‘at risk’ of not meeting water quality

standards. It recommends that measures be taken to improve their water quality. Figure 5.4.3 illustrates water quality in Buncrana.

**Figure 5.4.3: Water Quality in Buncrana and its environs**

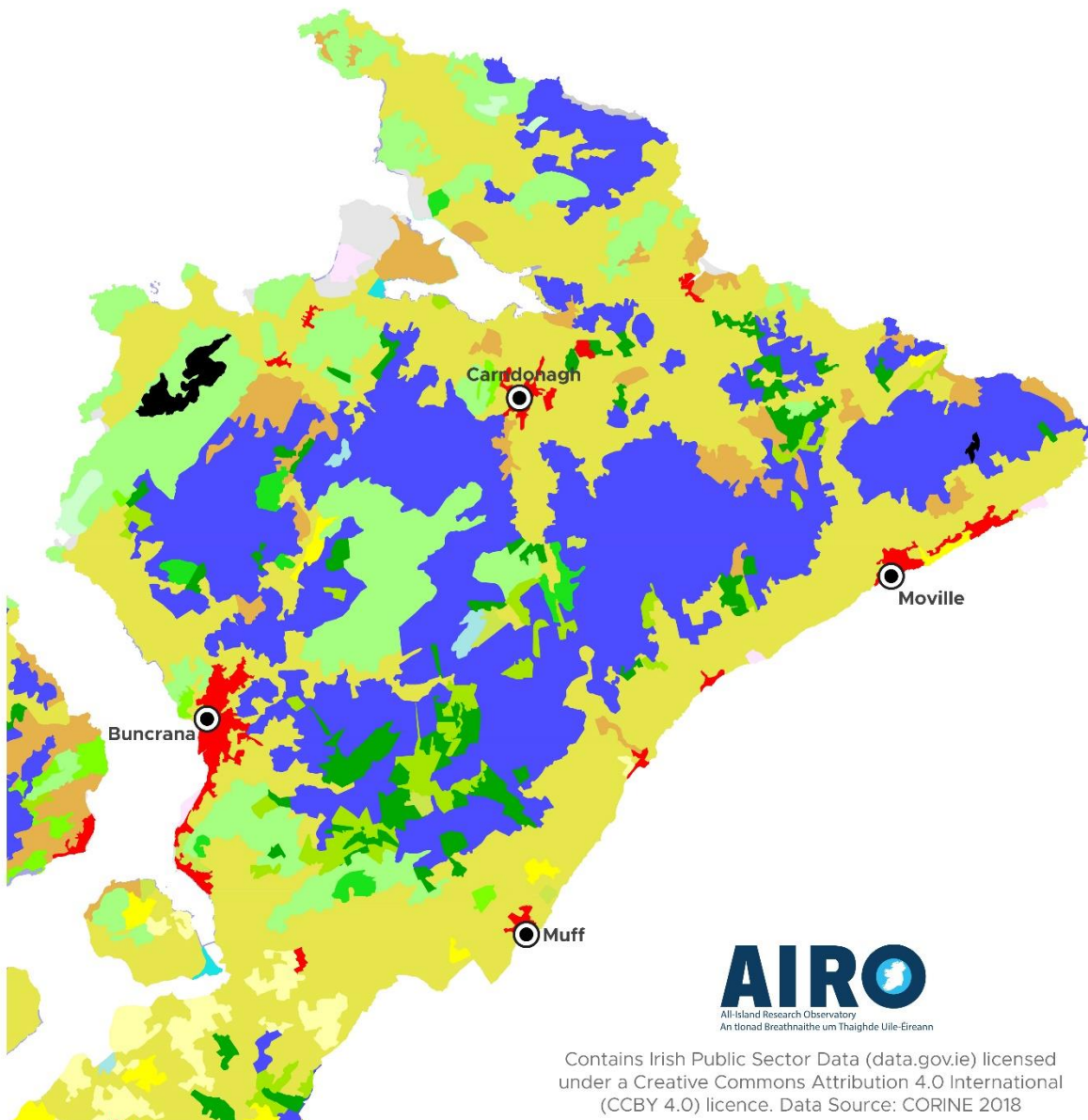


(Source: Lough Swilly Catchment Assessment 2010-2015 (HA 39). Catchment Science & Management Unit. Environmental Protection Agency, September 2018, Version no. 3.)

Figure 5.4.4 shows the main types of land cover on the Inishowen Peninsula (based on the Corine classification). Peat bogs predominate in the uplands, while the lowlands, particularly those along the shores of Lough Foyle, are dominated by pastures. The western side of the Peninsula also contains extensive areas of moors and heath, with the largest contiguous areas being north of Fort Dunree and between Buncrana and Carndonagh.

Chapter Three, which presented a demographic and socio-economic profile of Buncrana, noted the high levels of fossil fuel consumption locally for heating and transportation. Computations undertaken by the Centre for Marine and Renewable Energy (MaREI) in University College Cork (UCC) suggest that, based on their electricity consumption, home heating and transportation, the average household in Buncrana consumes 32,842 kWh energy, emits 5.87 tonnes of carbon dioxide and spends €3,937 per annum. It is evident, from these figures alone, that current approaches to energy production and consumption are placing considerable burdens on the natural environment and on households' finances.

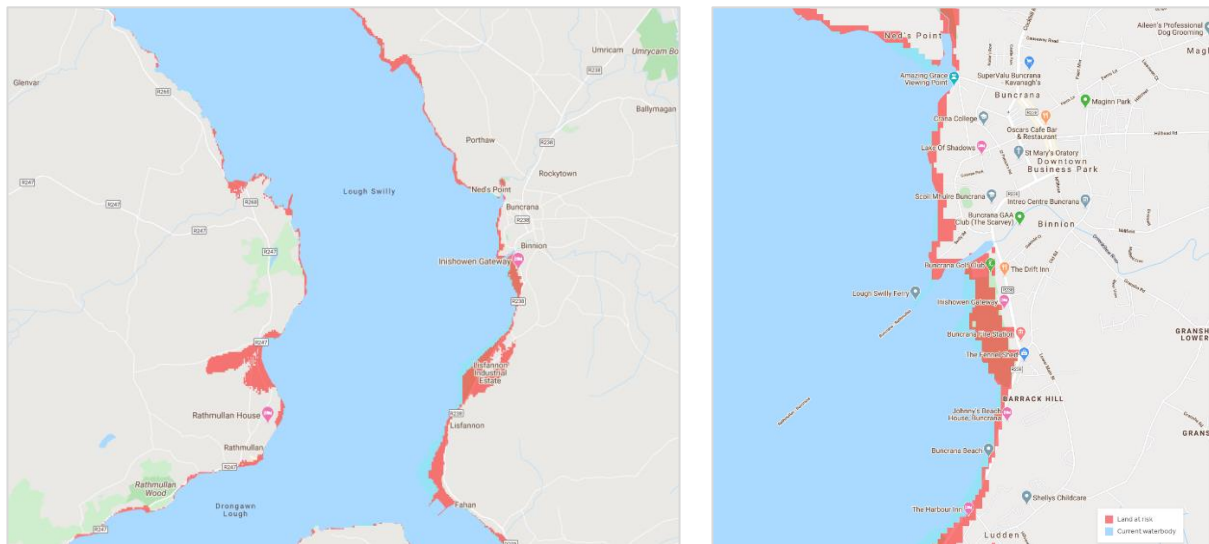
Figure 5.4.4: Main types of land cover on the Inishowen Peninsula (based on the Corine classification).



- |                                    |  |                      |
|------------------------------------|--|----------------------|
| 111 Continuous urban fabric        | 231 Pastures                                 | 334 Burnt areas      |
| 112 Discontinuous urban fabric     | 242 Complex cultivation patterns             | 411 Inland marshes   |
| 121 Industrial or commercial units | 243 Land principally occupied by agriculture | 412 Peat bogs        |
| 122 Road and rail networks         | 311 Broad-leaved forest                      | 421 Salt Marshes     |
| 123 Sea ports                      | 312 Coniferous forest                        | 423 Intertidal flats |
| 124 Airports                       | 313 Mixed forest                             | 511 Stream courses   |
| 131 Mineral extraction sites       | 321 Natural grassland                        | 512 Water bodies     |
| 132 Dump                           | 322 Moors and heaths                         | 521 Coastal lagoons  |
| 133 Construction sites             | 324 Transitional woodland scrub              | 522 Estuaries        |
| 141 Green urban sites              | 331 Beaches dunes sand                       |                      |
| 142 Sport and leisure facilities   | 332 Bare rocks                               |                      |
| 211 Non-irrigated land             | 333 Sparsely vegetated areas                 |                      |

Coastal communities, such as Buncrana are particularly vulnerable in the face of climate disruption and sea level rise. The following maps (Figure 5.4.5), which were supplied by MaREI, clearly illustrate Buncrana’s susceptibility to inundation. Buncrana’s soft coastline makes it more vulnerable than other parts of Inishowen, and the south of the town – from the mouth of Owenkillew and along the southern beaches – is likely to endure the greatest impacts.

**Figure 5.4.5: Land projected to be below annual flood level in 2050**



(Source: MaREI, 2020<sup>xxi</sup>)

Upon arriving in Buncrana, one is immediately captivated by the area’s outstanding scenic beauty and strong suite of natural resources. Buncrana’s environment is its most significant and constant asset. The environment is the single greatest draw in terms of enticing visitors and keeping them. Indeed, many families from Derry have been coming to Buncrana for generations – motivated by a desire to spend time in a high-quality environment. The further protection, celebration and harnessing of its natural resources – locally and in collaboration with communities across Inishowen – will allow Buncrana to progress the recommendations proffered in the literature review (see Chapter 2 and supporting ‘Literature Review’ paper) in relation to embracing new regionalism and place making.





*Above left: Lower Main Street leads downhill to Swan’s Corn Mill – one of Buncrana’s iconic buildings and an integral part of its industrial heritage*

*Above right: The Inishowen Uplands provide a stunning backdrop to the town*

*Below: Its scenic inlands and coastline enhance Buncrana’s beauty*

#### **5.4.2 Current Issues - including opportunities and challenges**

The main issues that emerged from the research/consultations are as follows:

- Buncrana has tremendous natural resources, including scenic landscapes, an attractive and accessible coastline, proximity to uplands and a healthy biodiversity. These resources need to be better protected as they represent important environmental goods and have the potential to make further contributions to local economic development;
- While the shoreline is a popular recreational space, there is considerable scope for Buncrana to capitalise further on its coastal location. As noted in the literature and policy review (Chapter 2), many coastal communities are successfully advancing their development by providing enhanced open access to natural resources, and by developing attractive public spaces that ensure they project themselves towards, and fully connect with, their waterfronts;
- Lough Swilly represents a focal point and distinctive natural asset, which Buncrana shares with several other coastal communities. Inter-community initiatives, focusing on the Lough, will enable Buncrana to better collaborate with communities in both the Inishowen and Fanad Peninsulas, thus giving effect to the recommendations in Chapter 2 in respect of asset-based and collaborative approaches to development;
- The Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) is bringing increased numbers of visitors to Inishowen, but there are concerns locally that it is generating traffic rather than local economic development, as many motorists are not stopping to experience Buncrana’s offerings;
- Holiday homes comprise a significant, but not a disproportionate, percentage of Buncrana’s housing stock. Given their scenic value, the areas to the northwest of the town have the highest concentration of holiday homes. Any further development of holiday homes in this area would lead to development pressures and exacerbate ribbon development;
- Despite being a significant tourist destination, Buncrana has a small number of hotel and guesthouse beds relative to similar-sized towns such as Westport. Instead, the town’s accommodation base is



more typical of that found in seaside resorts in the south east of Ireland. Thus, in some respects, Bunrana is to Derry what Courtown (County Wexford) is to Dublin;

- Bunrana’s focus on beach-based tourism, without sufficiently embracing its wider suite of natural resources, means that the tourist season is shorter than is the case in other areas with similar environmental assets and transport infrastructure, such as West Cork and West Clare;
- While Bunrana has several significant heritage assets, including An Grianán Aileach, stakeholders did not spontaneously refer to them, when asked about the town’s strengths. Further research may be needed to explore this, but possible factors could be over-familiarity or that attitudes have been introverted and have focused on the town, rather than on shared local resources and potentiality;
- The EPA observations in respect of water quality are cause for concern, particularly given the symbiotic relationship between environment and economy in Bunrana and Inishowen;
- Bunrana’s performance in the national Tidy Towns Competition and the resolve and vision of the Bunrana Tidy Towns Committee represent very significant assets on which further progress can be made;
- Apart from the youth (school surveys and consultations with the Foróige group) and Tidy Towns’ Committee, stakeholders did not spontaneously refer to the need for citizens, public bodies and industry to make the changes that are required to ameliorate the effects of climate disruption, despite Bunrana’s vulnerability to sea-level rise; and
- Brexit is a source of great anxiety to all stakeholders, and while the primary concerns are economic and social, there is a general recognition that the North West’s natural resources transcend any administrative or political boundaries and require shared conservation approaches.

### 5.4.3 Stakeholder Perspectives

The natural environment features very strongly among stakeholders’ perceptions of the assets and factors that can be better harnessed in promoting Bunrana’s sustainable development (see Figure 5.4.6).

Cataloguing, acknowledging, marketing and celebrating ecological and heritage resources will deliver environmental dividends, but the primary motivation, among stakeholders, is the further development of Bunrana’s tourism industry. Stakeholders perceive a symbiotic relationship between Bunrana’s sustainable economic development – with an increased emphasis on more year-round tourism – and the conservation of ecological and heritage resources and protection of the natural environment.

Today, many stakeholders point to the aforementioned photographs of Bunrana’s zenith in the 1920s, and they lament that much of the seaside-holiday infrastructure, such as changing rooms, diving boards and ice-cream parlours, has been dismantled or fallen into disrepair. Victorian and post-Victorian infrastructure has given way to bingo halls and gaming arcades, and while these bring a level of business into the town, they can give Bunrana a scruffy image and unattractive reputation, thus driving away or turning off potential visitors. Some stakeholders raised concerns regarding gambling addiction, particularly among women. There is a strong local desire to see a greater mix of tourist-related infrastructure and amenities. As one stakeholder remarked,

*“We need to be more like Westport and Clonakilty and less like Blackpool”.*

Figure 5.4.6: Visualising Buncrana's Assets



Over the course of the local consultations, several contributors spontaneously made comparisons between Buncrana and other tourist towns in Ireland, most notably Westport, Killarney, Kenmare (County Kerry), Clonakilty and Kinsale (County Cork). Almost all had visited these towns, especially Westport, and they contended that Buncrana compares unfavourably to them. They note that relative to other 'successful' seaside towns, Buncrana has a stronger suite of natural resources. In addition, Buncrana has a metropolitan population on its doorstep. Yet, the town has only two hotels, while Westport, which has a similar population, has over twenty and Killarney has over forty. Other towns have a longer tourist season, and there is a strong sense, in Buncrana, that the town needs to engage more effectively with the totality of its natural and heritage resources – not just its beaches – and with the entire Inishowen Peninsula in working towards a more sustainable tourism model.

Stakeholders universally welcome the impending Greenway, which, they believe, will foster a greater appreciation of the natural environment. There are mixed views, however, regarding the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW). Locals acknowledge that it has successfully marketed the west coast – thus serving to counterbalance the attention previously focused on Dublin. At the same time, many stakeholders complain that the WAW is generating more traffic but not increasing revenue, as motorists stay outside the town and drive through without stopping. They make similar observations regarding 'day-trippers' from Derry and argue that greater efforts need to be made to entice visitors from Lisfannon (beach area) into Buncrana Town Centre. Some young people remarked that the WAW is promoting car travel, which, they point out, has adverse environmental consequences.

Over recent years, members of the public have become increasingly aware of ecology and of the importance of biodiversity. Young people have been at the fore of promoting and highlighting the need to safeguard natural resources. They advocate more long-term and sustained approaches to addressing some of Buncrana's environmental challenges. Thus, while older people were more likely to suggest engineering solutions to the problem of coastal erosion, students advocated addressing the causes thereof and they

recommended taking further steps to alter human behaviour in order to prevent the impacts of sea level rise and climate disruption.



*The Owenkillew River enters Lough Swilly just south of Buncrana Pier.*

Over the course of the consultations, several stakeholders lamented the loss of Buncrana’s Town Council. They stated that the Town Council had provided civic leadership and acted as a focal point and coordinating body for local initiatives, particularly in respect of economic development, but also in respect of environmental matters. Stakeholders pointed to the achievements of the Town Council – its members and its staff - in championing conservation and in developing amenities that enabled residents and citizens to enjoy, and avail of, the natural environment. Specifically, they mentioned the Town Council maintenance staff who helped ensure that Buncrana looked well and who took initiatives to engage the public in conservation activities. They stated that the loss of the Town Council has perpetuated the depletion of personnel and has led to a reduction in the number of environmental initiatives and a decline in the levels of awareness and application of environmental principles. Several stakeholders stated that they want to see more proactive approaches to environmental resource management.

Brexit was a recurring theme in conversations with stakeholders, and there are concerns locally that if the UK were to adopt or pursue lower environmental standards than those that apply here in the EU, County Donegal, and in particular Inishowen, could experience a resultant decline in its environmental quality due to the transboundary nature of ecological systems.

#### ***5.4.4 The Potential***

The research undertaken in compiling this report records a high degree of convergence among local stakeholders in respect of the importance of natural amenities. Stakeholders’ perceptions of their value tally with many of the recommendations that have emerged from international best practices, as noted in the literature review (Chapter 2). There is considerable scope, however, for more concerted efforts in this regard, so that Buncrana can better protect and harness its strong suite of natural and heritage resources. The characteristics of natural systems – their dynamism, fluidity, interconnectedness and complexities – require that all stakeholders pursue evidence based, scientific and collaborative approaches to projects and initiatives that have an environmental dimension or are likely to have an environmental impact. Alterations

to one part of an ecological system will have consequences for other parts of the system and for all species, including people.

National and international best practices in respect of place-making and new regionalism encourage stakeholders to embrace, rather than seek to manage, their local natural resources. The application of best practices implies two over-arching recommendations for Buncrana:

- i. Face the water; and
- ii. Embrace Inishowen.

These six words are not a simple slogan; they imply putting in place a series of concerted and agreed strategic actions to better enable Buncrana to optimise its distinctive location and to better collaborate with communities across the Inishowen Peninsula. ‘Facing the water’ will imply infrastructural, engineering, spatial and attitudinal changes that ought to be progressed through partnership modes of engagement, as recommended in the international literature. ‘Embracing Inishowen’ does not imply subordinating rural communities to the development of a ‘honey pot’ in Buncrana. Instead, it implies shared, collaborative, mutual and sustained – formal and informal – inter-community and multi-stakeholder collaborations, in line with the principles of new regionalism. Trickle-down economics from urban centres does not work, although it still has some advocates. Instead, as the literature review (Chapter Two) notes, Buncrana and Inishowen stand to gain from a mutual valorisation of the totality of local assets, particularly environment and heritage.

The secondary research and primary data that inform this report note the connections between a high-quality natural environment, quality-of-life and local economic development. The symbiotic and mutually reinforcing relationships between these dimensions of place are more evident and more widely appreciated in Buncrana than in many other locations. The breadth and depth of natural resources are striking and, with some modest investments particularly in the promotion of walking and cycling and the development of waterfront public realm, Buncrana people and visitors can more fully enjoy their natural environment. Buncrana’s natural features dovetail with its wealth of heritage amenities and artefacts, and integrated approaches to environment and heritage ought to ensure more sustained benefits – environmentally, socially and economically. Specifically, the upgrading of visitor facilities at Fort Dunree and connecting it, via dedicated walking and cycling routes, to Buncrana and Carndonagh will yield economic and environmental gains. The impending development of the North-West Greenway Network represents another strategic economic and environmental investment that will generate multiple benefits as already demonstrated by experiences in County Mayo (Great Western Greenway) and in County Waterford (Waterford – Dungarvan Greenway).

Buncrana’s natural resources – locally in the town and shared with Inishowen - stand it in good stead to avail of contemporary and emerging trends in respect of tourist patterns, particularly ‘great escapers’. The further development of a coordinated tourism offering, in collaboration with stakeholders across Inishowen, that harnesses natural and heritage resources, including stargazing (viewing the Northern Lights) and visiting attractions such as An Grianán Aileach, will complement Buncrana’s current offering as a seaside destination and lengthen the tourist season.



*An Grianán Aileach and the landscape of Inishowen are parts of Buncrana’s suite of resources – shared with communities across the Peninsula*

Stakeholders, including Donegal County Council, landowners and businesses need to pay heed to the water quality data produced by the EPA and take steps to ensure it is enhanced and safeguarded. Stakeholders can avail of, and leverage, other statutory monitoring and regulatory frameworks, such as those associated with Natura 2000 (natural heritage areas (NHAs) and special areas of conservation (SACs)) to ensure that habitats such as the woodlands between Fr Hegarty’s Rock and Ned’s Point and the Crana Estuary are fully protected. These formal instruments ought to be complemented by bottom-up approaches that build on local goodwill and infuse citizens’ consciousness regarding environmental matters.

## 5.5 Governance (Community Engagement and Participation)

This section deals with issues of governance. This includes the following dimension of the Place Standard: Community Engagement/Participation

The Place Standard survey results reveal that ‘Community Engagement / Participation’, as a dimension of place, has a scoring of 4.5 (with the mean score across all variables being 4.15). This score equals that of ‘Natural Spaces’, and is the third highest mean score within the overall framework. When the scoring is broken down by age profile, there is a difference in ratings by those aged 18 and over (4.28) and those under 18 (4.56). As a cluster, Governance received the highest mean score of the five themes which were used to group dimensions of the Place Standard for the purpose of this study.

In terms of perceived changes over the past five years, more respondents perceive that ‘Community Engagement/Participation’ has gotten ‘better’ (26%) than gotten worse (12%), with 62% believing the situation has remained the same.

### *5.5.1 Current Situation/the Baseline*

Currently community engagement and participation as regards local development in Buncrana exists through various channels:

- Members of Donegal County Council (DCC) who represent the Buncrana area and surrounds;
- The Inishowen Municipal District structure of Donegal County Council;

- The stakeholder groups organised by IDP under thematic strategic pillars for the purpose of informing the Partnership’s work in the coming period. These thematic pillars are: Employment, Economy and Skills; Youth Development; Sustainable and Resilient Communities; and Health, Well-being and Family Support; and
- Engagement with local stakeholders by individual departments and officers of DCC within different service remits on specific projects e.g. North West Greenways Project; Fort Dunree development; Local Area Planning; and Roads Division.

Additional governance linkages exist through membership of local councillors on various strategic policy committees of DCC (for example, the Strategic Policy Committees or SPCs), and specific linkages to governance structures for the NWCR (North West Regional Development Group and North West Strategic Growth Partnership).

Within the current baseline there is no single coordination mechanism focused at the specific level of Buncrana which can fulfil the need for community engagement and participation on a more structured basis or which is specifically linked to the implementation of a development vision for Buncrana. Stakeholder engagement for this study revealed an awareness of a gap in governance and identified the potential and explicit need for a place-based structure or model which could drive and implement a transformation process for Buncrana and support the wider spatial implementation of economic and social development opportunities.



*Creative expression in Buncrana*

Despite the absence of structure and formal place-based engagement, there is both an appetite for, and a clear understanding of, the level of local commitment which will be required to drive any comprehensive future development of Buncrana so that it can achieve its full potential.

### ***5.5.2 Current Issues - including opportunities and challenges***

The main issues that emerged from the research/consultations are as follows:

- There is a sense of isolation from decision making processes at local and national level - this is heightened by a sense that the town’s development needs have been deprioritised in favour of other locations;

- The development of Buncrana will have a positive impact on the Inishowen Peninsula as a whole, and contribute to Donegal's economic development as well as enhancing the NWCR model as its fourth largest settlement;
- To address the issues of community engagement and participation as essentials of local governance, Buncrana needs a place-based development driver which connects with local community interests, has local participation, is driven by a shared vision of the town's future development and which combines place-based governance with innovative operational responses to local development support needs;
- Any community engagement and participation has to be 'live' at any given time, rather than settling into a structured 'representative' format which can, in itself, create a governance gap over time. The idea of Townhall Meetings as a device for enhanced community engagement and participation, to complement more structured place-based approaches, was raised in a number of different stakeholder conversations;
- While the presence of a Town Council in itself would not guarantee the required type of place-based development approach Buncrana requires, it was clear from stakeholder consultations that the functions which were carried out by the Town Council went some way to providing governance for locally-focused development and growth.
- The role of IDP in Buncrana is seen as an asset and opportunity to further explore social enterprise as a driver of local development;
- Greater levels of community involvement will help ensure that gaps in services and needs can be identified and addressed on an ongoing basis, leading to greater social cohesion in the context of future economic and physical development of the town; and
- Resourcing a model of local development and partnership for Buncrana will be crucial. While Buncrana has a strong community/civic sector, represented by a diverse range of organisations, the existing configuration of these bodies is not sufficient. There is a need – and identified willingness – for greater collaboration between existing agencies, and this needs to be harnessed over the short-term.

### 5.5.3 Stakeholder Perspectives

Stakeholders identified the need for some thought to be given as to how Buncrana could capitalise and maximise the impact of any outcomes from this strategic study. It was acknowledged that driving potential must come from within Buncrana, and be effectively harnessed with good processes and structures. It was also acknowledged that many of the important components of successful local development exist and that what is needed is a means of co-ordinating these to address "the challenge of development rather than just maintenance". The example of Westport as a town which has thrived through a community-driven model of participative development was cited a number of times in different stakeholder conversations.

General comments from stakeholders in various workshop discussions displayed a consciousness of the governance challenges to be overcome including a perceived place-based leadership gap and the role of Government in supporting the future social, cultural and environmental - not just economic - development of Buncrana.

The decentralisation of development drivers from Dublin was noted as desirable in terms of balanced regional development: "Dublin is bursting at the seams". At county level, there was a view that the current emphasis on Letterkenny, as a settlement and locus for investment and development, would result, over time, in Letterkenny becoming congested. While stakeholders did agree with the rationale of the linked development of Letterkenny and Derry, there was also a feeling this could have the effect of taking the focus off the needs of other places in County Donegal, including Buncrana, and that balance was required: "it's starving the rest of the county". It was remarked that Buncrana is supplying water for other

settlements, including Letterkenny, and that there should be outreach services and branches of public services at Buncrana, where local people can access them.

Place-based governance was referred to repeatedly throughout the consultations, with the loss of Buncrana Town Council viewed as detrimental to the momentum for the development of Buncrana. An awareness of Buncrana's commonality of experience with similar towns throughout the country was expressed:

*"Rural towns all over Ireland are struggling and the so-called experts are wondering why. Sure if a town can't make decisions, how can it prosper?"*

*"We could get things done before. Now, Buncrana can't sneeze without asking Lifford, and Lifford can't sneeze without asking Dublin. It's a total waste of resources – layers and layers".*

Yet, it was also suggested that while having a place-based structure (like the Town Council) in Buncrana would be beneficial, this in itself is insufficient and that a coherent vision for the future development of the town is needed. Aspects of how the Town Council executive functioned in a local development context were viewed positively as something which can be learned from. These included how the Town Council provided a focus and engine for development in the town, a mechanism for bringing in funding and a focal point for local community groups. Removing these mechanisms is believed to have been a retrograde step; with the resulting (perceived) lack of a coherent, over-arching community group/structure noted by local citizens.

In development terms, the consultation responses indicate a need to see a move away from 'vanity projects' to a more systematic model of local development, involving effective investment and coordination at town level. It was further contended that, increasingly, initiatives being delivered through DCC tend to focus on smaller-scale projects, sometimes in partnership with IDP and the local community. Such projects range from the Amazing Grace Park to the Tipp O'Neill Awards.

A lack of connectivity between public bodies is believed to have detrimentally affected the town's development. In this context it was suggested that Buncrana needs an Integrated Community Building to facilitate agencies to combine resources and work with the local community and other sectors. It was felt that there are too much disparate solution-focused funding initiatives which further expands the gap between statutory and voluntary organisations. To bridge this gap, stakeholders indicate a need for additional co-operation. As a locus for a place-focused development mechanism, with a social and community focus, the Exchange was repeatedly referred to as being a model which people felt was valuable (see Section 5.3) but the current space in which the Exchange operates is regarded as too small to meet potential future needs and opportunities. Similarly, IDP was acknowledged as a key asset in progressing the local development agenda for the town and its surrounds:

*'IDP does great work, but they are way too modest. If a government body was doing a fraction of what they do, they would have their signs and logos all over the place. We need to strengthen IDP and give them more resources and flexibility. They are vital to the social services in this town and all across the peninsula.'*

IDP's operations are based in a privately rented building. An over-reliance – albeit by necessity - on private rented property is felt by stakeholders to be a key factor in creating a sense of insecurity. Subsequently, a



lack of publicly-owned buildings in Buncrana is regarded as something that needs to be addressed in the context of future development.

A range of priorities in relation to governance issues were identified by stakeholders. There is a strong community and voluntary sector in Buncrana, demonstrating a commitment to place. Questions are raised as to how this asset can be best harnessed as a driver for development, and how stakeholders can be pulled together in the context of a unified plan for the town. The alternative is an ongoing tendency towards duplication of, and competition for, resources. This creates a sense of isolation in local organisations who are forced to fight their corner. Yet there are initiatives which have succeeded through key drivers, for example through IDP, and previously by the Town Council. There is a desire amongst stakeholders to see a more collaborative approach being adopted to the development of the town; with such an approach drawing on the strengths and expertise of the respective agencies to deliver on place-shaping projects. Stakeholders questioned why such collaboration is not already taking place – debating as to whether it is due to a lack of resources or simply a ‘lack of vision’.

As regards to supporting the local voluntary and community sector stakeholders were clear that sectoral support for community groups should include support with governance, administration and insurance support. It was felt that post COVID-19 this will be even more important given the impact of the crisis on the charitable sector.

Stakeholders voiced a desire for a ‘community council’ type model, involving all groups in the area, to create coordination between development stakeholders on the ground and to ensure that local voices can inform the future development of the town as well as ensure that all organisations can work together on this vision in a co-ordinated way. It is suggested this could involve a two-tier local governance/participation forum (community council) and an operational development driver for the town.



*Tullyarvan Mill is part of Buncrana’s industrial heritage, and now serves as a hostel, meeting space and education facility.*

It is recommended that this report is formally shared with key agencies whose input will be essential for the full potential of some of the opportunities and priorities identified in this research to be realised. DCC and

those agencies which have assisted with and facilitated this study, including IDP, have shown considerable practice-based commitment to operationalising the links between planning and well-being for Buncrana in a way which can be replicated in other locations in Donegal and the wider NWCR. In raising the issues which it has, this study provides an evidence base for many additional interagency considerations which can and should be used to inform service planning and innovation in resource allocation in a way which aligns with the intentions and principles of *Ireland 2040*.

#### *5.5.4 The Potential*

Stakeholder consultations revealed a sophisticated level of local understanding and analysis not only of future needs, but of experience from the past which can be used to inform local development practice in the future. While the dissolution of the Town Council may have posed challenges for Buncrana, the reconfiguration of local government geography, particularly the establishment of municipal districts, strengthens Buncrana's connections – in respect of governance – with other communities across Inishowen. Thus, sub-county local government geographies give effect to what many stakeholders refer to as a whole of Inishowen approach – 'Malin to Manor' (Manorcunningham).

Stakeholders repeatedly referred to social enterprise models as a methodology for achieving inclusive place-based governance for development, while also responding to the core sectoral support needs of the voluntary and community sector, and in general responding innovatively to other local place-based needs. The loss of the Plaza building as a community space, particularly for music and dancing performances, is seen as a key issue. The suggestion arose as to whether provision of shared community assets and amenities could be progressed via a social enterprise model. The idea of community space which addresses the need for traded services to local organisations, new economic and social activities, and which could also address the need for arts and cultural access and amenities was put forward. Whilst these ideas require further exploration in terms of the appropriateness of different models, the stakeholder discussions highlighted the following:

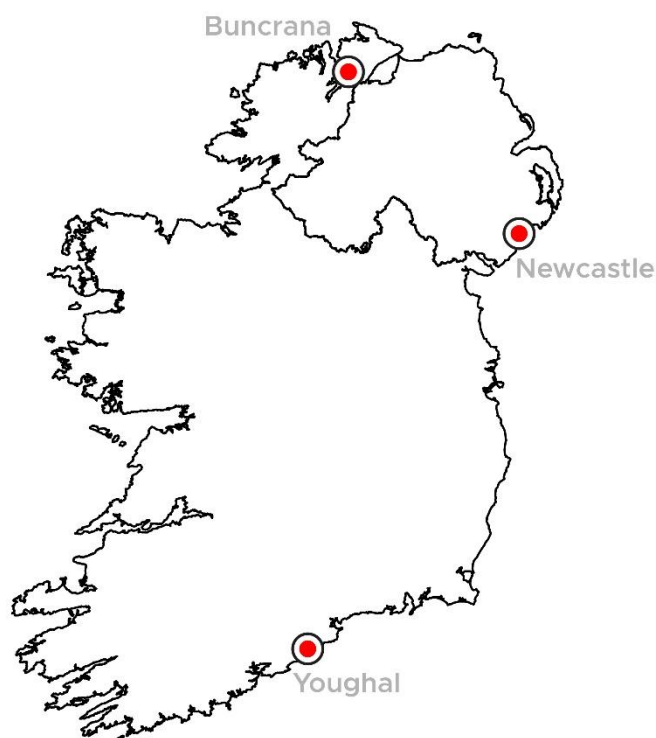
- Buncrana needs a place-based model of development governance which brings all sectoral stakeholders together and provides an umbrella for working towards a shared vision of the town's future economic, social, cultural, physical and geographical potential. It should draw on best practice to inform its structure – and overall remit (vis-à-vis existing local development bodies such as DCC, the LEO, IDP, Inishowen Co-op, etc.). There is potential for these stakeholders to work with the momentum and commitment of local organisations, such as The Exchange and the wider community and voluntary sector;
- Local stakeholders agree that any place-based development model should be dynamic, informed by different voices and community views, and be in a position to create direct solutions as well as leverage its influence on agencies to align their resources with a development vision;
- There is a commitment to build on the community spirit, which is so evident in Buncrana in order to develop approaches to inclusive development and implement a strong future vision. Good practice models of place-based development, combined with the creation of additional socio-economic activity, can be drawn upon; for example, PARTAS - previously 'Get Tallaght Working'. This organisation was set up in response to rapid de-industrialisation in a struggling local economy and is somewhat comparable to Buncrana in terms of its development potential being vis-à-vis its legacy of being a traditional industrial town. Other examples can be considered from a cultural amenities/arts perspective – including the Balor Arts Centre and Theatre (Ballybofey), the Culturlann models in Derry and Belfast, and the Playhouse in Derry; and

- If effectively mobilised, the community can harness the opportunities within the context of *Ireland 2040* and associated *National Development Plan* funds for innovative approaches, based on collaboration between DCC and Voluntary and Community Sector interests. Such an inclusive place-based model should be fit for purpose and reach beyond the scope of merely administering development resources. Rather, it should be an interactive and responsive exemplar which incorporates social enterprise as a vehicle for balanced spatial, geographic and socio-economic growth in Buncrana. For DCC, and in particular the Strategic Planning Unit, such an approach to place-based governance for future development should be seen as a core methodology for transformative actions. The next stage in implementing the recommendations for Buncrana should involve the activation of a model which will serve a range of sectors with community participation and engagement at its core.

## CHAPTER 6: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Coastal communities around the island of Ireland have been shaped by the way in which the sea and coast have provided jobs, wealth, and enjoyment. Their distinctive coastal character has continually adapted to change and been a source for their regeneration. The cases explored here illustrate how the natural, cultural and heritage assets of coastal towns can help create a stimulus for the rejuvenation of the local economy.

**Figure 6.1: Comparative Case Study Area in Relation to Buncrana**



(Source: AIRO, 2020).

### 6.1 CASE 1: YOUGHAL, Co. Cork

Historically an important military and commercial port, Youghal, Co. Cork, is capitalising on its considerable heritage and cultural assets to reconfigure itself for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

#### *6.1.1 A historic town: cycles of growth and decline*

*“Over the course of its history, Youghal has gone through a number of cycles of economic prosperity and decline and back again” (John Cronin & Associates, 2005: 2).*

Youghal was granted a charter of incorporation in the early 13<sup>th</sup> Century and soon attracted settlers from Britain. By the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Youghal had become a well-established town and traded timber and wool for spices, grain and wine with ports all over Europe (Gowan, 2008). Youghal’s importance as a

major port continued for at least 400 years and it became an important military base for the English during the Irish plantation era in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries (John Cronin and Associates, 2005). Walls were built around the town as a defensive measure and to physically define the limits of the town government (O'Brien, 1986). By the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Youghal had become Ireland's largest exporter of iron and wool.

During these centuries, Youghal enjoyed a considerable degree of prosperity. The population increased and the town expanded beyond the walls. During the Victorian era, the town's trade began to decrease as Cork asserted its increasingly dominant position and the transfer of the military garrison to Fermoy (County Cork) was a significant economic loss to the town. Emigration increased in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, particularly during and after the Irish Famine. The town also experienced some significant developments during this period: fishing, brickmaking and lacemaking became the dominant industries and provided considerable employment. Tourism also became an important industry, particularly towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This economic restructuring was facilitated by improved transportation infrastructure, including the arrival of the railway between Cork and Youghal in 1860. The increased accessibility of the town aided the growth of tourism and Youghal became a popular Victorian resort. In parallel with the growth in tourism, the town's growing carpet and weaving industries were creating thousands of jobs. Carpet manufacture became synonymous with Youghal in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, with Youghal Carpets Ltd. employing over 3,600 workers at its peak (YSEDG, 2014). Youghal continued to attract a relatively large manufacturing base and high-tech industries such as Kodak and Hi Tex during the following decades. It also remained a popular location for local holidaying during the 1950s and 1960s until the regular train service from Cork ceased in 1963.

The town experienced relatively significant industrial decline during the 1990s. The town's industries began to close, relocating to Asia and Eastern Europe for cheaper labour. Similar to Bunclara's experience of the decline in textile manufacturing, Couristan Carpets, for example, closed in Youghal in 2006: bringing an end to carpet manufacture in the town. The rationalisation of the manufacturing industry continued throughout the 2000s and by 2011 there was no industry, manufacturing or otherwise, carried out in the town. The resort experienced relatively significant socio-economic decline and physical deterioration and was designated a RAPID (Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development) area<sup>xxii</sup> in 2002.

The degeneration of the town has received national media attention with 'front page' reports depicting its demise. This negative media attention adversely affected the reputation of Youghal as an attractive destination for living, working, shopping and/or visiting; further fuelling the already declining tourism industry. The town was in need of regeneration.

### ***6.1.2 Heritage: the emergence of a new industry***

*"the backdrop to Youghal's history and its cyclical rise and fall in terms of economic prosperity has always been its buildings and urban fabric" (John Cronin & Associates, 2005: 2).*

As a result of its colourful past, Youghal has diverse and rich built heritage assets, many of which are now in State or local authority ownership. Many of these assets, however, were in decay, e.g. the town walls were not accessible to – or appreciated by - local citizens or visitors. Spear-headed by the Town Council at the time (now Cork County Council), Youghal embarked on a programme of works which sought to identify, enhance, maintain, and celebrate the built heritage of the town.

A series of heritage-led plans and strategies have been developed for the town since the 2005 'Investigating in Heritage' strategy (see Table 6.1). Many of the ambitions in these plans are related to enhancing public access and awareness of the importance and value of the heritage assets. The projects emerging from the strategies vary in scale from increased tourism signage, to the development of a bespoke Youghal heritage App, to public realm improvements. Local festivals including Youghal Medieval Festival have also helped increase public awareness and pride in place, and over time buy-in from local community and local businesses has been achieved.

In 2006, the Youghal Social- Economic Development Group (YSEDG) was set up by the Town Council with the intention of bringing key stakeholders together, from national to local level, and advancing with (re)development ambitions. The YSEDG works closely with Cork County Council and has been successful in bringing together different interests, accessing funding, rolling out projects contained in the Heritage Strategy, and promoting Youghal as a destination.

In 2013 the town was one of three selected for the pilot Historic Towns Initiative (HTI) (Heritage Council & Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht). The HTI sought to maintain the heritage integrity of, and improve the quality of life in, historic towns in Ireland. By the end of 2013 the Initiative had aided the re-launch of a heritage painting scheme, the marketing & branding of the 'Raleigh Quarter' and a 'facelift' in Nelson's Quay & Market Square.

A diverse range of projects have emerged from the heritage strategies and schemes listed in Table 6.1, supported by various funding streams and led by a range of bodies. Youghal's experience has demonstrated how a number of separate but complementary projects can feed off each other to create benefits greater than the sum of their individual parts, bringing wider regeneration benefits than a single focus scheme. Some examples of these projects are outlined below.

**Table 6.1 Summary of Key Strategic Actions Informing Youghal’s Regeneration**

STRATEGY	KEY AIMS	KEY OUTCOMES
<b><i>Investing in Heritage – A Heritage Led Regeneration Strategy for Youghal 2005-2012</i></b>		
<b>Commissioned by Youghal Town Council</b>	Key actions set out were: To address the physical, economic and social regeneration of Youghal through the conservation of its rich and diverse cultural heritage; To reverse the current decline of retail activity in the historic centre by increasing business & community confidence; To improve the conditions within which cultural and marine tourism will thrive; To improve the quality of the public realm.	Roadmap to regenerate the town through the conservation of its cultural heritage. Provided a vision for the future development of the town. Delivered public realm improvements & continued conservation of built heritage. However, private buy-in was lacking.
<b><i>Youghal Socio-Economic Development Group (YSEDG) Integrated Strategy 2007-2012</i></b>		
<b>YSEDG</b>	This strategy sought to create the YSEDG and provide an integrated strategy for Youghal based on a fresh approach to planning the town’s future. The objective of the group is that “Youghal become known for its significant international heritage, high quality and accessible natural amenities, its hosting of large scale cultural arts events and its warm and informed welcome in shops and hotels”.	Today, the YSEDG has become a multi-disciplinary body for Youghal with expertise in sourcing funding for major capital projects, events and festivals, heritage and the arts. YSEDG has built strong relationships with Government Agencies (incl. Failte Ireland and Enterprise Ireland). YSEDG has played leading and ongoing roles; these include the restoration and re-opening of the Youghal Clock Gate Tower, restoration of Youghal’s historic Town Walls, on-going and tourism promotion of restoration of St Mary’s Collegiate Church, Youghal’s eco-boardwalk together with the branding of the “Raleigh Quarter”. However, a lack of core funding has limited its ability to market the town as a place to live, visit and invest.
<b><i>Youghal Public Realm Plan 2008</i></b>		
<b>Youghal Town Council</b>	Key intention was to ensure the most effective presentation, management and development of Youghal’s Public Realm.	Brought about the almost complete enhancement and improvement to the public realm of the historic core and was the main driver for Youghal’s inclusion in the Historic Towns Initiative (HTI).
<b><i>Youghal Town Walls Conservation &amp; Management Plan 2008</i></b>		
<b>Youghal Town Council</b>	This Plan set out a clear vision, understanding and roadmap for Youghal’s Town Walls.	Delivered over €600,000 in funding from The Heritage Council of Ireland, which was match-funded by Cork County Council to undertake works to conserve and restore Youghal Town Walls.
<b><i>Historic Towns Initiative (HTI)</i></b>		
<b>Heritage Council &amp; Department of Art, Heritage &amp; the Gaeltacht 2013</b>	Youghal was selected as one of three pilot locations for the HTI. This Initiative sought to maintain the heritage integrity of, and improve the quality of life in, historic towns in Ireland.	By the end of 2013, the Initiative had aided the re-launch of the heritage painting scheme, the marketing & branding of the ‘Raleigh Quarter’ and a ‘facelift’ in Nelson’s Quay & Market Square.

### *St Mary's Collegiate Church*

The Council took over a 999 year lease on St. Mary's Collegiate Church, gardens and graveyard, essentially safeguarding it's future and securing public access to the site. Significant conservation works have been carried out in the church.



Photo by Glen Smith

### *Youghal Town Walls*

Youghal is one of only a few towns in Ireland where the medieval town walls still survive (others include, most notably, Derry). Therefore, the town walls are one of its unique assets. The restoration and upkeep of the walls is based on the dedicated management and conservation plan.





### *Youghal Clock Gate Tower*

One of Youghal's most defining features, and most complex project to date, has been the refurbishment of the Clock Gate Tower. Facilitated by various funding streams, the Clock Gate Tower has been repurposed as an interpretive visitor experience. It was officially opened to the public in 2016, coinciding with the launch of Failte Ireland's 'Ireland's Ancient East' tourism initiative. A guided tour over the four levels of the Tower tell the story of the tower and of Youghal. The Clock Tower is owned by Cork County Council and leased to YSEDG.



### *Eco-Boardwalk*

Youghal's Eco-Boardwalk is a hardwood panelled beach walk-way stretching for almost 400m. Opened in 2012, it is disability-access friendly with interspersed seating along the route and has delivered a significant economic and tourism boost for the town. In 2020, work commenced on the extension of the boardwalk to Redbarn. Once complete the route will span 1.9km and form part of the National Coastal Walking Route.



### **6.1.3 Contemporary Plan: staying on the heritage path**

The town's most recent plan, *YOUGHAL – A Heritage-led Vision for the Next Decade* consolidates much of what was in the previous plans and provides the most comprehensive plan to date. The plan represents a clear statement of intent to reinvigorate Youghal, restore its vibrancy, promote and protect local heritage and safeguard its future. Emphasis remains focused on improving accessibility and awareness, but there is also a focus on marketing the town as a destination. The plan has two key purposes:

- To provide a framework for the sustainable management and economic enhancement of the town with community participation; and
- To ensure the unique character of Youghal is sustained and preserved for future generations.

There are three strategic approaches/themes:

- 1) Town enhancement projects – addressing the presentation, awareness and accessibility to Youghal;
- 2) Heritage-based Tourism Development – projects to enhance the tourism offering within the town and access to these attractions; and
- 3) Destination Awareness – assessing and enhancing branding and marketing of the town in a targeted way.

Youghal remains firmly committed to heritage-led regeneration. Having spent the last number of years acquiring, conserving, renovating and providing access to heritage assets, the new strategy signifies a maturation of the approach taken and an enhanced focus on marketing the town as a destination.

#### *6.1.4 Future Visions and Projects*

Future infrastructure projects are aimed at connecting the town to the surrounding area. For example:

- Cork County Council were allocated €500,000 from the Department of Rural and Community Development under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme 2018 for the extension of Youghal’s Eco Boardwalk. This funding will enable Cork County Council to continue this coastal walking route from Youghal Town Centre to Redbarn; and
- The creation of the Midleton to Youghal (MY) Greenway using the disused railway corridor. The 23km route secured planning approval in 2019 and has been awarded funding of €8million by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

#### *6.1.5 Remaining Challenges*

Key challenges continue to face Youghal on its pathway to revitalising the town and its community via regeneration. These include:

- There remains a relatively substantial number of large brownfield sites including abandoned industrial sites, and vacancy rate remains high in the town centre;
- Any rise in sea level is likely to accentuate the existing vulnerability of Youghal to flooding and
- Legacy issue of protracted negative media attention and perceptions.

## **6.2 CASE 2: NEWCASTLE, Co. Down**

A popular seaside resort in Northern Ireland, Newcastle, Co. Down, has undergone a series of ambitious public realm improvement schemes which have variously sought to reconnect the town with the seafront and incorporate elements of the surrounding natural assets. Newcastle is known as the ‘Gateway to the Mourne’s’ and for the range of activities it has to offer.

### *6.2.1 A Victorian Resort*

Newcastle evolved from a small fishing village to a popular Victorian seaside resort during the 1800s. Modelled on the increasingly popular spa towns in Britain, by 1830s Newcastle had become one of the most fashionable resorts on the island of Ireland with a spa, lodging houses and a promenade. Similar to Youghal – and Bunclara - further growth of the resort was fuelled by the arrival of the railway (in 1869). The Belfast

and County Down Railway subsequently built the Slieve Donard Spa Hotel which opened in 1898, as an 'end of line' luxury holiday destination.

The Royal County Down Golf Club opened in March 1889 and is one of the oldest golf clubs on the island of Ireland. Newcastle remains synonymous with golf and Royal County Down frequently appears in the top 100 list of golf courses worldwide. The course has hosted many major tournaments including the Irish Open in 2015.

The train stopped in the 1950s, but Newcastle remained a popular destination for holidaymakers and day-trippers. By the early 2000s Newcastle faced a number of challenges including a proliferation of derelict and vacant sites, traffic congestion and poorly maintained roads and pavements. Such conditions meant that the town had diminished appeal as a seaside resort and lacked private sector confidence and investment.

### *6.2.2 Enhancing Newcastle's Public Realm*

From September 2006 to June 2008, Newcastle's Streetscape and Promenade was regenerated as part of a £5.5million Environmental Improvement Programme (funded jointly by *(the then)* Department for Social Development (DSD) and Department for Regional Development (DRD)). The project included:

- Improvements to the streetscape;
- Pedestrian friendly measures including traffic calming;
- Realignment of roads;
- Provision of amenity lighting;
- Widening of footpaths in certain areas;
- Delineation of car-parking spaces; and
- Provision of street furniture.

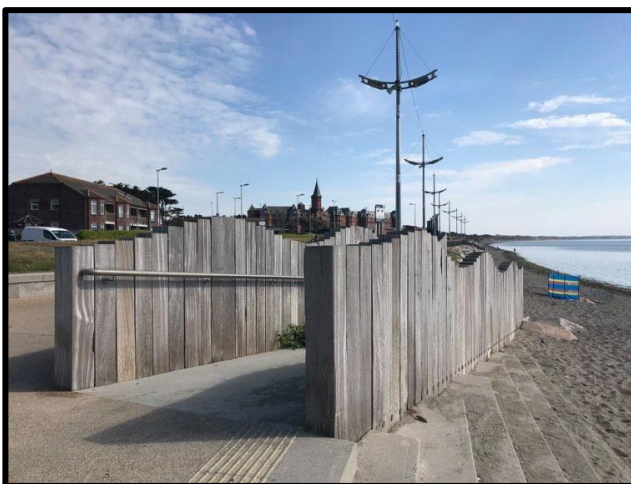
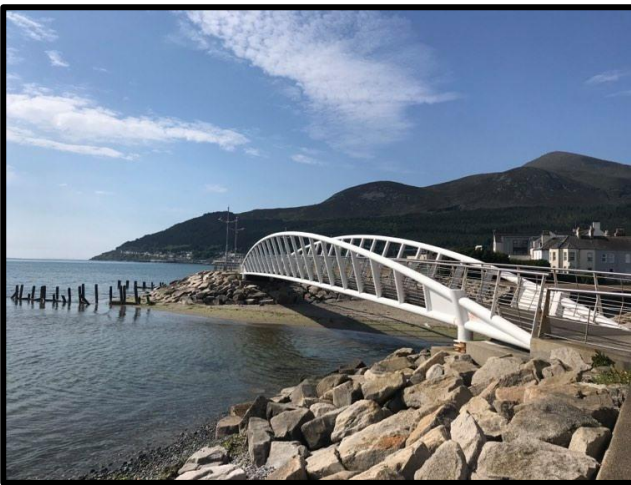
The ambition was to bring the traditional Victorian seaside destination back to its former glory and attract more visitors to the area by improving the overall environmental and aesthetic quality of the town centre and seafront – ambitions shared by Buncrana. The project sought to create a more cohesive appearance by reflecting and emulating the natural heritage of the area by incorporating these elements into the design e.g. seating and curved 'wave' stone steps. It also aimed to strengthen the connection between the town centre and the seafront and in doing so, improve coherency.

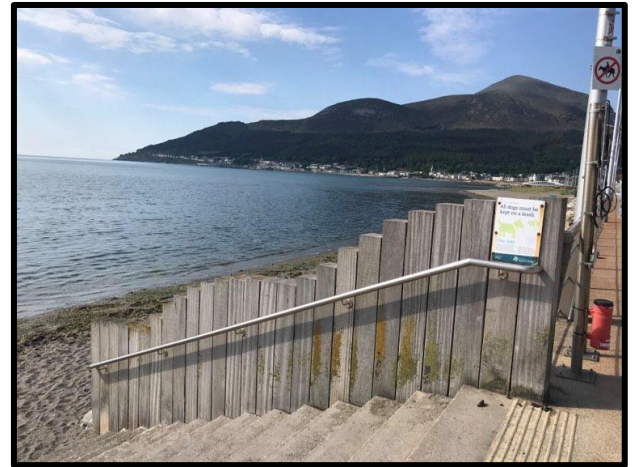
The scheme won several awards including The President's Award from the Irish Landscape Institute Awards, 2007; Northern Ireland Public Realm Award – Civic Trust 2007; and Public Sector – Highly Commended – Belfast Telegraph Property Awards Development of the Year Award 2006.

The Post Project Evaluation of the Scheme (completed by FGS McClure Watters on behalf of Down District Council, June 2011) reported the benefits realised by the project including the creation of new jobs, increased footfall and pedestrian activity, stimulation of private sector investment, improvement to the townscape, improved image of the town, extended tourism season, improved business confidence and improvement of the atmosphere in the town. A number of lessons for future development were also identified. These included the fact that traffic congestion remained an issue following project completion

and that the additional footfall and visitor numbers has increased the need for cleaning and maintenance in the town centre.

### Postcards from a Rejuvenated Newcastle





(Source: McElduff, 2020)

Numerous, relatively small scale, projects have been implemented to secure the sustainability and longevity of the benefits garnered by the Down District Council-led Environmental Improvement Programme. These include a shop frontage scheme funded by INTERREG IIIA – ‘Sharing a Vision for our Coastline’, and the Newcastle Gateway, completed in 2009, funded by DSD, Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Down District Council.

In 2013, the town embarked on another wave of regeneration in advance of the Irish Open 2015. The ‘Newcastle Revitalisation Scheme’ received £250,000 funding from DSD. Key objectives of the scheme were to promote economic activity, increase footfall and stimulate investment in the town. A partnership was established consisting of DSD, Down District Council (now Newry, Mourne and Down District Council) and Newcastle Chamber of Commerce. The Partnership was tasked with developing innovative projects such as the provision of outdoor space, iconic public art features and accompanying promotional campaigns.

### *6.2.3 The Role of Public Art and Culture*

Iconic public art installations have formed part of several regeneration schemes in Newcastle since 2005. Each installation celebrates the distinct cultural and natural heritage of Newcastle.

### *The Cone of Light*

Commissioned in 2005, the Cone of Light links Newcastle with the Mountains of Mourne. If you look directly through it and up, it is in perfect alignment with the top of Slieve Donard.



### *Global Journeys*

Commissioned in 2005, the large silver ball on Newcastle's Central Promenade reflects the land, sky and sea depicting the migratory return of the Atlantic Salmon to the area.



### *Percy French statue*

This statue celebrates the life of Percy French, who composed the song “The Mountains of Mourne”. The statue was designed in such a way that allows a view of the Mournes - linking the man, the scenery and the song.



### *Tails of flight*

This sculpture was inspired by Harry Ferguson who, in 1910, flew his small plane across Newcastle beach in one of the first engine powered flights by aircraft in Ireland, and won a £100 price offered by Newcastle Council.



### *Newcastle Festival of Flight*

Newcastle hosts a number of festivals and events celebrating certain aspects of local history and its coastal setting. For example, the Newcastle Festival of Flight celebrates the pioneering flight in Northern Ireland in 1910 by Harry Ferguson along Newcastle coastline and the seaside heritage of the town. The festival attracts thousands of visitors each year and features a range of air shows, family entertainment, music and food.



### *6.2.4 Seaside Sculptures*

In 2015 a series of sculptures were commissioned by the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council depicting a seaside theme (funded by the Department for Social Development through Newcastle Revitalisation). The sculptures form an interactive trail along Newcastle Promenade and are all based on everyday natural forms found in and around the local seashore. In this way the work is intended to encourage people to more fully appreciate what is underfoot as they play in the sand and rock pools. The sculptures were named by local school children from Newcastle.



(Source: McElduff, 2020)

### *6.2.5 Future Visions for Newcastle*

Future regeneration ambitions for Newcastle are aimed at overhauling the current tourist provision and significantly increasing the number of overnight visitors to the resort as part of the City Deal initiative<sup>xxiii</sup>. Newry, Mourne and Down District Council is part of the Belfast Region City Deal and is spearheading the Mournes Gateway project with a series of ambitious plans including a gondola ride into the heart of the



mountains. Plans for a £36m investment in a flagship tourism project in Newcastle received formal support from the Northern Ireland Executive in May 2020. The proposal has the potential to firmly cement Newcastle's place as a key visitor destination for the next generation.

#### *6.2.6 Remaining Challenges*

- Traffic congestion remains an issue in the town centre and is likely to increase due to proposed future tourism projects;
- There is a need for increased hotel provision in Newcastle to cater for a wider variety of visitors and encourage over night stays; and
- Some proposed tourism projects in and around the town have been locally contested.

### 6.3 Key Lessons

A number of lessons can be drawn from the experience of Youghal and Newcastle. These include:

- Heritage can be at the heart of a new identity and a driver for re-invention. It can deliver both social and economic benefits in terms of celebrating and recognising local distinctiveness, raising awareness and developing local 'pride of place', delivering inward investment, job creation and increased visitor numbers. However, securing structural economic change and local buy-in takes many years as well as significant investment and cultural change;
- Public art can be a key factor in improving the setting of an area, celebrating local historic and natural assets and in (re)establishing the identity of an area, at relatively low cost. To be successful they must draw on genuine character and authenticity and connect with local people as well as tourists;
- Wider benefits in terms of social cohesion and economic prosperity can follow investment in the 'public realm', whereby a better environment makes an area safer, more accessible, and better used and as a result more attractive to residents, visitors and businesses. In this regard, involving the community and stakeholders in the process to ensure community 'ownership' of the projects and pride in the area is critically important;
- Taking a holistic approach and addressing multiple issues at once (e.g. the upgrade of sea defences as part of a wider public realm scheme as in Newcastle, or promotional events in conjunction with physical improvements as in Youghal) provides a more efficient and effective use of limited resources and helps ensure a more sustainable approach to regeneration;
- Major investment through local (e.g. Youghal's Medieval Festival), national (e.g. Newcastle's Festival of Flight) and international events (e.g. major golf tournaments) can be a catalyst for regeneration and play an important role in terms of putting the town 'on the map'. Even where these events have global recognition and significance, there must be a connection to the local community and place to ensure authenticity and validity;
- Having a plan(s) to provide an informed and strategic approach to local heritage and natural assets is crucial. Such plans should acknowledge both their historic and economic value, and ensure that they are sensitively managed for a sustainable future. Tapping into national level programmes (e.g. Ireland's Ancient East) and the 'gateway' function of towns (E.g. Newcastle - Gateway to the Mourne) can act as a catalyst for funding opportunities and project inspiration, if embraced in a sustainable way; and
- The need for sustained leadership and funding support over time from the local authority, and other stakeholders, in order to maintain momentum and commitment given the long-term timescale involved in realising the benefits of complex heritage-led and public realm regeneration projects. In

this regard, alternative implementation models such as an arms length, locally based, development agency (e.g. YSEDG) can be an effective mechanism for the delivery of regeneration projects particularly where there is a clear and shared vision.

## CHAPTER 7: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This study of Buncrana focused on the DNA of the ‘place’. Through the fieldwork a plurality of views were collated from community groups, businesses, and local residents; all of whom highlighted the commitment of various local groupings to be part of, and drive forward, a sustainable vision for the town, in co-operation with Donegal County Council (DCC) and other local and regional stakeholders. There is a strongly held belief locally that Buncrana has the diversity of assets required to make ‘a great town’, a ‘resilient town’.

Buncrana has all the attributes of a strong place – heritage, streetscape, location and community. As well as being the foundations of a great town, how they are individually treated and inter-woven can also result in less inclusive and less accessible places. In recent decades, Irish towns across the country have become increasingly unattractive and less vibrant because of derelict and vacant sites, car-dominated spaces and public spaces that contribute little to street life or the public realm, and a propensity for new developments to focus on greenfield sites at the edge of towns thus changing the traditional face of the town. Buncrana has been challenged by these recent trends and other significant macro-economic trends in manufacturing, particularly textiles.

The town of Buncrana is in transition. As a seaside town with a rich manufacturing past, it has a fine-grained public realm, and is rich in heritage and history. But, as noted in Chapter 5, Buncrana is a ‘75% town’ that has yet to maximise the opportunities afforded by its significant asset-base. The consultations as part of this study highlighted the biggest concerns as being (in no particular order):

- Enterprise / Retail – need for greater diversity in both; with the location of Buncrana to be seen as a key advantage;
- Improvement of, and linkages between, green spaces;
- Upgrade of the public realm – linked to economic opportunities in vicinity of;
- Accessibility and parking;
- Connectivity – linked to enterprise diversity and growth in remote working opportunities;
- Tourism – deepening the breadth of offering through the creation of packages, linking for example, natural environment assets, heritage sites, etc.; all of which would better position Buncrana on the tourist map; and
- Better facilities for youth.

Addressing these concerns through the LAP will require Buncrana to not only consider its role and function as a local town but also as a regional town within the NWCR. In addition to informing the forthcoming LAP, it is intended by DCC that this report will, as outlined in Chapter 1, serve as a key evidential document that will, inter alia:

- Define Buncrana’s role within the NWCR;
- Inform future investment decisions of the Local Authority and other state agencies; and
- Support other complementary initiatives for Buncrana, such as potential funding applications and public interventions.

Consideration must be given to how Buncrana can support the objectives of the NWCR under each of the three main pillars defined in the North West Strategic Growth Plan (2016) - Economic Growth and Investment, Physical and Environmental Growth, and Social and Community Cohesion and Well-being. The

drivers of change, identified as part of this study, align closely with the regional pillars; with the drivers being:

- Connectivity/accessibility;
- Quality of life;
- Heritage and tourism;
- Enterprise development; and
- Natural and marine landscapes.

In the case of the regional priority of economic growth and investment and the local driver of enterprise development, for example, the future of industrial brownfield sites, both within and on the edge of town, should be linked to the marketing approach currently being pursued by the City-Region and its 'Gateway to Growth' initiative.

In the context of the regional priority of social and community cohesion and well-being and the local driver of quality of life, there is a pressing need for the LAP to engage with the age-inclusive and autism-friendly agendas. While DCC is active in the age-friendly/inclusive space, more attention is warranted on the autism-friendly agenda, particularly given the commitment of the town to the education of autistic children.

The sustainable future of Bunrana must be the core objective of any future local area plan. The recommendations as outlined below are framed in this context, organised into two inter-related sets of recommendations:

1. Place Standard Priorities – picking up on the key recommendations from the five sub-sections of Chapter 5 (mobility and accessibility, economy, community well-being, environment and governance); and
2. Key spatial recommendations linked to the future sustainable growth and development of Bunrana, as a coastal town in its own right, as the second largest town in Donegal, and as the fourth largest settlement contributing to the growth and vibrancy of the NWCR.

Recognising that a new LAP is due to be prepared for Bunrana in the near future, respondents noted their desire that this be a 'living document'; that can be updated at agreed intervals using local audits/surveys. This will ensure that the plan, and its policies, stay true to the needs of the place and its people.

Great towns thrive on shared knowledge and connections (both internal and external). Driving effective change needs rich data and local ways to harvest the data necessary to ensure decisions are made using the most-up-to-date data as is possible to collect and collate. The CSO data is in no doubt valuable but its validity in evidence-informed decision making wanes as the years pass, and the impacts of both macro-and national policies play out locally. As a case in point, if, as suspected, the country enters recession as a result of COVID-19, decisions using 2016 data will be made to inform a solution-based recovery plan. The time-lag in gathering quantitative data emphasises the importance of qualitative data and tapping into the local knowledge base of a 'place'. This study has made effective use of both qualitative and quantitative data in making recommendations on Bunrana's future potential.

## 7.1 Place Standard Priorities - Integrated Town Development

The literature and policy reviews presented in Chapter 2 outline the merits associated with new regionalism and with approaches to urban and territorial development that are participatory, place-based and networked. New regionalism implies collaboration – between sectors, between towns and between town and countryside – so that all geographies benefit from pooling their territorial assets and, thus, maximise their potential. New regionalism also implies focusing on strategic investments, rather than on expecting subsidies or creating dependencies. It advocates approaches to local economic development that capitalise on local assets and are strongly evidence based. Chapter 3, and the accompanying area profile, illustrate several elements of Bunrana’s asset base, while Chapter 4, which presents the findings from the Place Standard survey, adds to the evidence base that underpins this strategy.

The presentation of the main recommendations, in Chapter 5, further identifies and underlines Bunrana’s asset base and potential. It proffers several recommendations, organised under five thematic headings (mobility and accessibility; economy; community well-being; environment; and governance) that encompass the totality of the dimensions captured by the Place Standard. The discrete presentation of recommendations under these five headings serves to enable stakeholders to identify and extract the strategic actions that are most relevant to their respective and collective briefs. The elaboration of these recommendations is characterised by a notable level of complementarity; it is evident, throughout Chapter 5, that all fourteen dimensions of place on the Place Standard are mutually reinforcing, and that an integrated approach to development offers Bunrana the optimum development trajectory. Chapter 5 also illustrates the merits of the territorial approach – based on collaborative linkages, interfaces and modes of governance locally in Bunrana and with all communities in Inishowen. It also highlights the importance of connectivity to, and participation in, the NWCR and the need for renewed and on-going cross-border collaboration.

The recommendations advanced in Chapter 5, in respect of increasing Bunrana’s scores on all dimensions of the Place Standard, centre on a number of inter-related core strategies. These include:

- i. **Facing the Swilly** – capitalising on Bunrana’s strong suite of natural and heritage resources, particularly its coastline, ought to focus on environmental protection/conservation and the development of associated infrastructure that celebrates artistic endeavour and the creative economy. Such investments will add value to Bunrana’s environment and generate economic development that is complementary to the current tourism product and offers the potential to expend the tourist season. The development of ancillary facilities, particularly cycling and enhanced walking routes, will enhance liveability and quality of life, and will serve to make the town more attractive for visitors and residents alike;
- ii. **Greenway and Blueway Networks** – such developments further harness, and ought to protect, Bunrana’s natural resources. Walkable/cycle-able linkages to and from the town core and between communities/places are needed – thus physically and symbolically connecting people and place, promoting polycentricity and collaboration and generating spin-off economic development – in the town core and in centres throughout Inishowen;
- iii. **Enabling economic diversification** – building on Bunrana’s seaside and industrial heritages requires promoting new modes of innovation – through investing in broadband connectivity, enabling smart growth, complementing tourism development, creating future-proofed workspaces and deepening linkages/collaborations between local employers/entrepreneurs and education/training providers - thus enabling Bunrana to diversify its economic profile. The impacts of economic diversification are most likely to be sustained through an emphasis on asset-based development, and this needs to be

- complemented by infrastructural and housing provisions that focus on the town core and walkable neighbourhoods, and which create attractive public realm and sympathetic aesthetics;
- iv. **Quality of Life and Liveability** – investing in a new school site, enhancing community facilities, improving rural transport links, undertaking remedial works (in housing), constructing additional social & affordable housing, enhancing integrated healthcare and making Buncrana an autism-friendly town will represent inter-related essential strategic approaches to promoting social inclusion and community cohesion, and will ensure that more communities and individuals have opportunities and pathways for self-actualisation;
  - v. **Enhancing capacity and promoting community-led local development (CLLD)** – Buncrana’s strong social capital and civic leadership represent significant human resource assets on which the town can further draw. These merit support, investment and nurturing, so that the collaborative processes that informed this study continue to be the hallmark of its implementation and so that wider decision making and the promotion of creativity and innovation promote economic and social gain; and
  - vi. **Strengthening governance and collaboration** – Buncrana’s location, its standing as the northern node in the NWCR and its functional remit as the gateway to Inishowen stand the town in good stead to avail of the opportunities associated with polycentric metropolitan development. The town’s future development will benefit from greater connectivity – physically and virtually, and in terms of human capital – together with institutional and governance collaborations with stakeholders across the metropolitan region.

## 7.2 Key Spatial Recommendations

There are a number of strong coherent ‘zones’ within Buncrana; some of which are very clearly defined (e.g. the shorefront), while others wrap around the town (culture/heritage; green corridor). By way of key spatial recommendations, proposals include:

### 7.2.1 A Transition Town

The Place Standard survey findings and stakeholder consultations reveal that local citizens and organisations place considerable value on Buncrana’s natural resources and physical environment. Stakeholders recognise that Buncrana and its environs have a stock of natural capital that is almost unrivalled in Ireland. Protecting and harnessing natural capital are integral to the town’s economic growth and sustainable development, and such approaches ring through in the recommendations advanced in Chapter 5. The stakeholder consultations also revealed some concerns, most notably in respect of coastal erosion, while official data point to the need to improve water quality. Thus, while Buncrana has several natural assets, and natural resource development is a core plank of the town’s development trajectory, challenges exist.

Among the foremost challenges facing Buncrana is the high level of dependence on imported fossil fuel. This exposes the town, like many communities, to energy insecurity. Moreover, the current modes of energy consumption represent a significant drain on economic resources and they run counter to best practices and sustainability principles in respect of public health, environmental conservation and the amelioration of climate change. In recognising the economic and environmental imperatives associated with a just transition to a zero-carbon society, several towns, as noted in Chapter 2, beginning with Kinsale (County Cork, ROI) and Totnes (County Devon, UK), have embarked on a series of strategic actions under the concept of ‘Transition Towns’. These towns are embracing smart technologies, clean energy, local food circles and community transport, as part of a suite of initiatives to ensure energy security and reduced ecological footprints. Buncrana’s embrace and application of Transition Towns’ principles would complement this report’s

recommendations in respect of ecology and environment. In addition, securing and maintaining Fair Trade status would enhance the town’s sustainability criteria, and would further enhance social solidarity.

Buncrana’s Tidy Towns Committee is to the fore in ensuring the town emphasises its natural and physical attractiveness and offers aesthetic qualities that are appreciated by residents and visitors alike. Buncrana’s impressive scores in the national Tidy Towns Competition and the adjudicators’ reports provide strong bases on which to further advance the town’s assets. The adjudicators’ recommendations in respect of ‘sustainability – doing more with less’ dovetail with being a Transition Town, and this course of action is strongly recommended.

### *7.2.2 Maritime / Marine*

The current, and future, role and identity of Buncrana extends beyond the limits of the town. In particular, Buncrana is well positioned to capitalise on its maritime area which should be more fully embraced and utilised in any future plans and strategies.

Lough Swilly has great potential as a natural amphitheatre for marine-based activities and sports, including sailing, blueways, and scuba diving to the SS Laurentic. Adventure/outdoor activity tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism sector. Research from NUI Galway’s Socio-Economic Marine Research Unit (SEMRU) found that in 2018 an estimated 76% of overseas visitors to Ireland visited a coastal area (6.06 million persons) and an estimated 61% participated in a marine related activity (4.87 million persons). Individuals who actively engaged in marine based activities during their stay were found to have a statistically significant higher total expenditure per trip (€710) and they stayed on average 1.32 days more per trip (Norton *et al*, 2018).



*Buncrana’s coast offers opportunities in baysports and professional maritime training incl. offshore racing.*

In conjunction with marine-based activities and events, Buncrana is well positioned for the development of a maritime training centre. This aligns with the current *Programme for Government* which commits to “work with the Northern Ireland Executive to build on plans to deliver a Youth Development Sail Training project to provide opportunities for interaction and engagement for young people north and south” (Government of Ireland, 2020: 105). Marine-related training courses are currently provided in GMIT, IT Tralee, Kinsale, Bray, Drogheda and Dublin. Notwithstanding training opportunities delivered by the Lough Swilly Yacht Club, there is no comparable provision in the North West.

Opportunities to link any educational provision in Buncrana to Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT) and Ulster University (UU), where there is existing world-leading expertise in sports education, should be explored. In addition, good practice examples exist across Europe which can be drawn upon to inform and inspire the future development and management of the maritime area in Buncrana, in terms of its ecological, social and economic value and potential. These include:

***Example 1: Lorient, France***

Following the redevelopment of a formal naval base, Lorient's marina focuses on three activities: offshore racing, support for sailing business and refitting. Based upon this focused market strategy, a dedicated offshore racing area was created as well as a tourist centre and a business village devoted to maritime activities. The marina has since become well-renowned across Europe for offshore racing. The redevelopment fostered a new local industry and created approximately 1,300 local jobs and 80 companies profit from the new economic activity. In addition, it has helped reconnect the city with the port area. In the wider context, competitive sailing in the Bretagne Valley generates estimated sales of €56 million (Bourlon and Pincet, 2018). Lorient hosts various marine sporting events including the Yacht Racing Forum. Additionally, the Lorcel Interceltic Festival attracts around 700,000 people annually from all over the world.

***Example 2: Plymouth Sound National Marine Park***

As the UK's first national marine park, the aim of Plymouth Sound National Marine Park is to promote marine conservation, engineering and research, while protecting current industries in the area such as fishing and military. The key objectives are to enhance the specified areas' economic, environmental and social values; and promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of those areas by the public, in the way that they carry out their functions, and to liaise and co-ordinate with each other over those objectives. It is founded on collaborative working that will complement existing uses, enhance communication and work with successful and established frameworks already existing within Plymouth Sound.

Following learning from the experience of the examples given above, designating Lough Swilly as a National Marine Park, with Buncrana as the key urban centre, will help to:

- Develop local marine citizenship by increasing ownership, understanding and use of the marine environment to enhance local health, well-being and enjoyment;
- Create a greater sense of public and business engagement in the future development of Buncrana's land and marine environs, and celebrate local natural beauty and ecosystems; and
- Promote the sustainable growth of local economic opportunities balancing social, economic and environment needs.

### ***7.2.3 Connectivity***

A digital, more connected Europe is a key priority of Territorial Cohesion Policy 2021-27. In the context of Ireland and the NWCR this means systematically addressing obstacles to high speed digital connectivity as key barriers to equality of economic outcomes.



A key asset in the NWCR is the existence of Project Kelvin, a high speed link to the transatlantic cable which allows the City Region to promote the fact, in the context of joint international investment marketing, that it has the highest speed broadband in Ireland and the UK. Project Kelvin was achieved with the assistance of INTERREG Investment.

Within the NWCR, the infrastructure of Project Kelvin rests a few miles from Buncrana (see Figure 7.1) but the town, as a key settlement in the region, is not connected to Kelvin and currently cannot benefit from this, or form part of a digitally-enabled spatial offering which would boost the investment potential of the overall City Region. The specific location of Buncrana, a town with brownspace and considerable industrial potential, within the EU and within a few miles of Derry and the UK, should be taken account of as a potential investment asset within the context of the NWCR's shared approach to location-based investment marketing. This is particularly relevant in the context of Brexit, as the region responds with creative solutions to the various challenges which the economies of Ireland and the UK will face in the wake of any EU/UK trade agreement.

**Figure 7.1: Project Kelvin in Ireland**



(Source: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/northern\\_ireland/8111526.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/8111526.stm))

Buncrana also holds the potential to support a range of business and micro-business opportunities for existing and new residents through the availability of adequate digital connectivity in combination with effective and sufficient digitally-enabled workspace. The current Digital Hub project in Buncrana will provide a model of good practice for this, but will not be of sufficient scale in itself to meet the digital connectivity and enablement needs of Buncrana if the full potential of the town is to be released in economic terms. Additional solutions will be needed that can facilitate a range of workers, especially in the context of the retention of remote working as a practice post-COVID and, for example, the emphasis in the new Irish *Programme for Government* on the target of 20% of the public service working from home by the end of 2021 (Government of Ireland, 2020). The potential impact on emissions targets of taking a place-based approach to digital enablement does not need explaining. There are considerable opportunities in providing workers and businesses with a choice of place-based options - from hotdesking in a shared space to tackle the social isolation of working from home full-time, to location and attraction of businesses which are bandwidth dependent (including many creative industries such as graphics, animation and creative media

providers - remembering that Donegal already has a film office which is managed from the Inishowen Peninsula). The ICLRD recommends that a place-based approach be taken which includes, but is not defined by, the capacity of the existing Digital Hub initiative because both the needs and potential of Bunclrana are considerably more than this project's capacity could meet in its current format.

The ICLRD recommends that an ambitious approach be taken to the options of providing Bunclrana with a level of high-speed broadband connectivity which will allow it to form part of a competitive NWCR investment location offering, as well as providing enhanced opportunities for a 'digital' town - where the future nature of work is facilitated not only for small businesses but for current and future workers and the self-employed. This approach should include exploration – in the NWCR space - of potential for connectivity for Bunclrana to Project Kelvin as a means of delivering additional value and benefits realisation to original Government investment objectives associated with Project Kelvin.

Regardless of the means of connectivity, ICLRD also recommends that in addition to the connectivity to place, the digital enablement of all existing and potential workspaces in Bunclrana be actively pursued in the context of a LAP and in associated enterprise support plans impacting on the area. This should include the reanimation of vacant spaces within the existing built environment of the town and consider the ICT connectivity needs of potential businesses and micro-enterprise which could be accommodated or grown in Bunclrana. There is a danger in considering that the potential for business growth is solely defined either by existing business base in a place, or by existing targeted supports which may be provided by public sector agencies such as the LEO.

#### *7.2.4 Green Corridor*

Green corridors feature in three sets of recommendations presented in Chapter 5, namely 'mobility and accessibility', 'environment' and 'economy'. The commencement of the North West Greenway Network and its rollout across Inishowen represent significant investments in the local economy – with the potential to deliver economic benefits on a scale that is comparable with that of the Waterford Greenway. Greenway infrastructure tallies with our recommendations in respect of enhanced connectivity and improved mobility. Furthermore, it enables residents and visitors to further explore, enjoy and appreciate ecology and the wider natural environment, and to benefit from increased social and recreational activities. Thus, this project ought to deliver economic, social and ecological gains to Bunclrana and its environs. The current plans provide for connectivity to and from the town centre and with other communities across Inishowen, and the ICLRD strongly endorses this holistic and connected approach to greenway development. The rollout of the various stages of the Greenway, in tandem with enhanced walking and cycling routes – lined by native flora and incorporating the town's green spaces - will further benefit local citizens and Bunclrana's ecology.

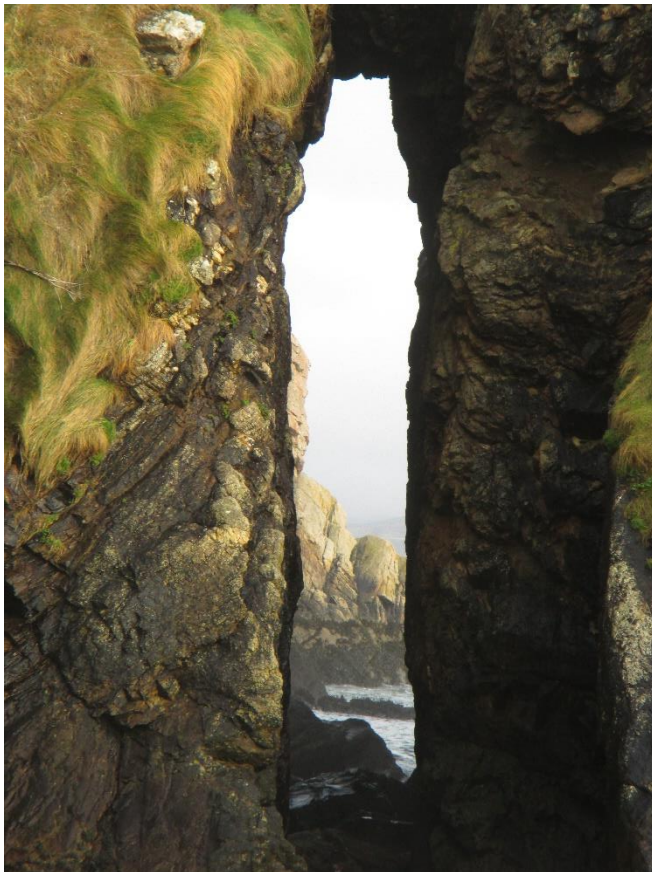
Increasing rainfall and flooding events, linked to climate change, requires cities, towns and villages across the island of Ireland to adapt the way we live and design our urban areas to accommodate these new weather patterns. Opportunities exist within Bunclrana to use nature-based solutions – or 'green infrastructure' – to alleviate flood risks through better absorption of surface waters. Such solutions include the planting of trees along streets, the creation of mini-parks in areas of hard infrastructure, and revising the type of materials used in surfacing pathways. In addition to mitigating the impacts of climate change, such greening measures also add to the aesthetic of place, and reduce both air and noise pollution.

#### *7.2.5 Tourism & Heritage*

The COVID-19 crisis has both changed the economic landscape for the tourism sector nationally, and has opened up the potential for development of new forms of tourism which are consistent with both well-being

and Green Growth principles. In the immediate term - and likely over a number of years until it is clear if and when international tourism aviation will return to its pre-COVID levels and patterns - it is expected that the mass tourism model which Ireland's industry has depended on for many years will need to be replaced and diversified into a model which takes account of the prospect of a much larger proportion of its activity coming from within the Common Travel Area (CTA). In this context, locations such as Bunrana (and wider Inishowen) have both the imperative and the potential to develop as competitive alternatives to locations such as Cornwall, West Cork, Kerry and areas of Scotland.

The implications of this changing tourism landscape are a difference in the nature of the tourism consumer, orientation to the needs of domestic/CTA tourism customers, potential diversification and increase of accommodation base in and around Bunrana, and the vital need for area-based tourism product value chains which reach into maritime, uplands/maritime activities, arts and culture, environmental, military and built/archaeological heritage, and the food and green/sustainability agenda. Quality and environmental impact will become marketing values for tourism offerings throughout these islands. Agri/marine food, and culture are key domains of high-value products.



*Fort Dunree's tourism offering includes a stunning coastal land- and seascape.*

The emerging development of a plan for a high-value iconic tourism offering at Fort Dunree, the existence of the offering at Malin Head, the presence of two Airports serving the NWCR, its location on Lough Swilly and on the WAW and its location close to the historical City of Derry present significant opportunity for Bunrana not just as a gateway to other attractions but as a tourism destination in its own right which includes the surrounding area and beaches. All of the above factors should be taken into account in the development of a signature place-based, multisectoral tourism offering which has sustainability at its core. Depth of product will be key and learning from other locations which have linked products such as food and place (e.g. Kinsale

and its 50 Mile Meal award) should inform a way forward. Lough Swilly itself and marine access to Bunrana should also be examined in terms of infrastructure development, particularly for access to, and activities on, the Lough and == including provision for small-craft berthing at Bunrana particularly in view of the difficulties presented by low-tide restrictions at the Fahan Marina.

### **Heritage**

A transition plan for Bunrana should be underpinned by a comprehensive heritage plan for the town and environs which includes investment in capital infrastructure and curatorial expertise. Bunrana has a significant physical asset base for an innovative heritage offering which combines its physical amenities and location (shorefront, lough, maritime culture) with its industrial heritage. Such an approach to heritage development in Bunrana also has the potential to develop new place-based linkages and relationships which will have value in terms of domestic and international tourism in the future. Following established good practice elsewhere (including Youghal, County Cork – Chapter 6), a heritage plan should take account of built, archaeological and social/industrial heritage, not only as a unique tourism offering but also as a driver for the local economy all year round and the enhancement of local quality of life to which a thriving heritage sector can contribute. Bunrana needs a coherent heritage offering which is grounded locally, which takes account of the specific heritage and socio-economic history of the area, which creates access to these, and which can simultaneously tap into something bigger while being grounded in the community. In addition, it must have international reach, with a focus on concrete and evidenced links while avoiding tenuous links which cannot be supported with evidence.

Industrial heritage and ‘people’s history’ present the most significant heritage potential for Bunrana. Narratives which connect people and place dominate successful international heritage offerings which double as major assets in a tourism economy. Bunrana’s industrial heritage, going back to milling in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and its textiles industry, connect it to a wider story of the NWCR. Architectural remnants of industrial heritage exist in the town. There is a narrative to be built which can create an international profile for Bunrana. An example of this ‘hidden’ narrative can be found in the number of pubs which have survived in Bunrana. While this in itself is often cited as a shortcoming in terms of the potential of the town centre, it should be remembered that this is a physical reminder that Bunrana once supported full employment.

As well as textiles, Bunrana’s fishing heritage is another area of industrial heritage which presents an opportunity. The herring industry in Bunrana was once the biggest in Western Europe and supplied the Russian Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. With its history as a global supplier of smoked herring, Bunrana has the potential to develop international links through its local heritage which needs to be fully examined in the context of its value for the future development and growth of the town.

There is a potential for cultural amenity and heritage development which references Bunrana’s past - such as the suggestion for a community/arts and cultural amenity to be developed at the shorefront and named ‘the Factory’.

The Swan Collection<sup>xxiv</sup> is currently housed in the National Museum of Ireland and the potential for its relocation to Bunrana should be explored in the context of appropriately-conditioned premises and appropriate curatorial expertise. The ICLRD recommends that consideration be given in the future to the development of an international-standard industrial heritage interpretive, archiving and exhibition facility at Bunrana which connects and acts as a focal point for the industrial heritage of Bunrana, Inishowen, Lough Swilly and the wider industrial heritage of the NWCR. In this way an anchor for heritage can be created in the wider NWCR which complements the heritage offering of Derry City.

### *7.2.6 Living Lab for Increased Building Standards*

In the context of a place-based approach to sustainable growth, and the capacity of DCC to respond to this agenda in terms of its statutory functions, the County Council should consider designating Bunrana as a living lab for improved building standards focusing on clean energy, sustainable materials, energy efficiency, and appropriate planning and ecological functionality of green space. This will have the potential not only to influence the development and demonstration of best practice in ‘green’ construction and retro-fitting, but will also stimulate opportunities for the local construction and engineering sector and offer opportunities for accelerating new business.

In the context of a LAP, the ICLRD recommends an emphasis on sustainable construction for all new build as a condition of planning permission, and a distinct but linked approach to the raising of requirements in existing Building Regulations to ensure energy efficiency and sustainability are taken into account for all local built fabric, whether domestic, civic, or industrial. For existing builds, retro-fitting should link to community-based work with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) on a sustainable energy community. Donegal County Council should consider working with SEAI in creating a retro-fit package for the housing and commercial building stock of the Bunrana area, as a place-based lab which could act as a demonstrator and be scaled up for implementation across wider DCC areas, including across the border.

The County Council should work with developers, and training and education providers locally and nationally to ensure that this approach can be activated and operationalised in the context of a new LAP. This has the potential to create stimulus for additional training/education opportunities in green building techniques and renewables engineering - both of which represent a diversification of existing skills bases in Bunrana and the wider Inishowen Peninsula. The presence of LYIT, Donegal Education and Training Services (ETB), North West Regional College, and UU as institutions co-operating on a NWCR model and providing R & D and sectoral training in construction and engineering is a key asset which should be linked into this approach.

The potential of a place-based sustainability lab for the built environment to form a national example of best practice can also be explored in the context of dissemination through the intergovernmental and interdepartmental representations at the North West Strategic Growth Partnership (NWSGP).

The preparation of a new LAP for Bunrana, in combination with macro-commitments to sustainable economic recovery and the EU Green Deal, as well as the NWCR commitment to place sustainability and Green Growth at the core of the regional development model, is a significant opportunity to develop and demonstrate ambitious and place-scaled approaches to the transformation of the built environment - past, current and future. Donegal County Council should strongly consider taking this opportunity in a planning-led model.

## **7.3 Engagement with the Community**

The ICLRD recommends that DCC consider implementing the key recommendations set out in relation to Governance and Community Engagement (Chapter 5.5, reiterated as follows):

- Based on the recommendations in this study, and key priorities emerging as part of the Local Area Planning process, the County Council should work with local stakeholders to develop a transformation plan for Bunrana which has input from all relevant public agencies and community stakeholders; and

- DCC should reconvene with local stakeholders to form a mechanism to look at and implement an appropriate model of response to the need for a place-based development coordination mechanism for Buncrana which connects the work of stakeholders and can drive activities aimed at a transformation of Buncrana.

This study has provided evidence of a need for a co-ordinated place-based approach to driving the future development of Buncrana. For such a model to work it needs to be capable of being informed through a dynamic process of community and stakeholder interaction and cannot be implemented as a purely area-administrative arrangement. Further community and stakeholder engagement by DCC and elected members, to determine the exact model of a place-based development coordination mechanism, should be undertaken with a view to agreement of an approach.

## CHAPTER 8: CONSIDERATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

This chapter is aimed at all readers of this report, either in its entirety or of any specific chapter or section. The ICLRD recommends that this study and its data be widely shared by Donegal County Council (DCC) - to all elected members, senior management and local area managers. In addition, it ought to be circulated to officers in all public agencies whose remits affect Buncrana in any of its spatial domains, or whose services are accessed by people in Buncrana - either 'on the ground' or at another location. These include business, enterprise support, health, social care, education, industry, tourism, community and voluntary sectors. Relevant stakeholders for dissemination of the report and acting on its recommendations also include policy makers and central Government Department representatives, who may be directly responsible for services, developments or capital projects in Buncrana. This report is a resource and evidence base for the future work of developing Buncrana. In addition to forming the basis for a Local Area Plan (LAP), it has the potential to influence a wider range of actors in aligning resources with the potential and vision set out in the study. As such, it should be considered a public, open-access, resource document and the evidence contained in the report should be drawn on to support the leverage of additional resources and investments from local, national or international sources to support delivery of the vision for Buncrana.

The recommendations of this study invite an interagency approach to their implementation; the study should nurture a wide and shared understanding of the evidence base that this report presents for a joined-up and ambitious approach to releasing the full potential of Buncrana within its location in the wider NWCR. The placing of Buncrana in the context of the City Region has the effect of immediately shifting perceptions of Buncrana as, in national terms, remote and peripheral, to becoming a vital centre of population and growth within a growing cross-border functional economic area, which will have significance for both the Irish and UK economies.

This study provides an evidence base for decision making and action to release the significant potential of a place - to be a living lab for best-practice demonstration of EU Cohesion principles and UN Sustainable Development Goals. In doing so, it offers a mechanism to stimulate and invigorate Buncrana's future fortunes, and to tell a new story for its people and for the people of the Inishowen Peninsula and the wider North West City Region (NWCR). This chapter has been included by way of a postscript to the key recommendations of the study, which are contained in Chapter 7 and are echoed in earlier chapters - detailing the issues arising during the extensive engagement and documentary analysis, which were key elements of ICLRD's methodology for the study. Table 8.1 provides guidance on the implementation of the report's key recommendations by Donegal County Council in animating a wider suite of actions which can help to realise the report's recommendations in full. A reading of the issues arising and the recommendations in the report, in their totality, is recommended. The reader may indeed discover new ideas for ways to create solutions to issues, which the ICLRD were able to identify but for which specific recommendations may not have been formulated as they lie outside of the scope of this study. In this sense, consideration of future possibilities need not be restricted to the specific recommendations contained in this report but should draw on the full body of evidence in the report.

An essential feature of this study and its recommendations was ICLRD's core methodology, using the Place Standard Tool. This enabled us to maintain a focus on the place that is Buncrana, and of the inherent and interconnected needs of its people. The social, cultural, economic and environmental development processes that can be overlaid on an effective place-based spatial planning model are the key to raising the standards of a place. They are also the key to enabling public resources, service planning and the ambitions and objectives of a range of community, public and private stakeholders to align in a way that enables the whole to be greater than the sum of the parts.

While this study has been led by Donegal County Council as the commissioning body, the ICLRD recommends that the County Council initially liaise with key agencies and stakeholders whose involvement will be relevant for the part- or full-implementation of the interventions, investments, strategic actions and solutions recommended in this report. We note however, that it should not be left to Donegal County Council to animate full implementation. Several of the key stakeholders, at county level, are represented on the Local and Community Development Committee (LCDC), and this may provide a vehicle for further stakeholder engagement in taking this document from strategy to implementation. This study provides the basis for action by a range of agencies to ensure that Buncrana's full potential can be realised. It demonstrates, in its complexity and in the degree to which the study exposes interdependencies, that a range and coalition of actors understanding and taking action on recommendations will be crucial. This is the spirit of *Ireland 2040* and the corresponding national capital planning commitments and funds.

A place-based, comprehensive, interagency reading of this resource is essential. It can, and should, be used to support business cases for new investments from the public purse. The ICLRD recommends that a series of round-table interagency meetings are facilitated to agree a mode of coordination in the context of a transition plan for Buncrana. The ICLRD encourages those stakeholders to examine how they can pro-actively contribute to the realisation of Buncrana's future.

Engagement of a range of agencies with a place-based coordination mechanism is something on which further details will emerge if Donegal County Council and relevant agencies can commit to working together. Defining the precise format and model of a place-based approach for the future development of Buncrana is beyond the scope of this study. As such, further work will be required to facilitate and determine how these processes should work, and agencies may need some support in identifying how best they can respond to the opportunities for best-value alignment of public resources that the recommendations in this study present. In addition, with a view to effective implementation, it will be worth considering some capacity building for a group of representatives from across different stakeholder organisations, interest groups and agencies, in order to animate the process for the future, and it is ICLRD's view that this should be considered as a way of underpinning investment in the initial scoping study.

This report recommends the development of a transition plan for Buncrana that incorporates the next stage of planning and implementation of complementary initiatives and strategic actions, which will be necessary, and to which stakeholders in the local community have strongly expressed a willingness to contribute. Additional further sectoral development research and business planning will be needed in order to bring specific actions to fruition but the next step is the translation of the recommendations in this study into a phased 'implementation framework' of what stakeholders can collectively ensure happens next, and which clarifies stakeholder roles and contributions.

While Donegal County Council, as one agency, can only guarantee implementation of the recommendations which fall within its statutory remit, there are a number of other agencies and service providers whose remits hold the key to full implementation of the recommendations. Neither is the County Council the only public agency whose decision making and resource alignment is essential for the future well-being of Buncrana in social, economic and geospatial terms. There is a role in implementing the recommendations for a range of other stakeholders, either as coordinators, resource-providers, or suppliers of the necessary governance for decisions and actions to be taken. While no structure or governance mechanism currently exists to hold to account those agencies whose work affects Buncrana specifically, it is hoped that the recommendations in this report will be embraced in a spirit of partnership, innovation, modernisation and inclusion, as an opportunity to contribute to best international practice in the development of a place. This shift in policy and practice towards place-based development has the potential to become a model of best practice nationally and internationally, and it is ICLRD's sincere hope that the effort put into the study, by its participants and survey respondents, will be reflected in a corresponding level of response from all agencies



and organisations, public, community/voluntary and private, whose efforts can help to make this vision a reality for future generations.

In closing, while many actions require explicit resourcing in order to be progressed, no joined-up development can happen without individual commitment to working in ways that are defined by collegiality, by the principles of codesign, and by communication across internal and external administrative, organisational, physical and disciplinary boundaries. Underpinning all this, there must be goodwill and an understanding that collective effort, combining resources and co-ordinating planning and service development processes on a place-based model which is centred on the needs of the people in a place, will deliver the best value for all. The ICLRD hopes that this study will signify the beginning of a change in Buncrana's story; a change that picks up the threads of the past and weaves them with connections to the future, to create a story that is rewarding for all who have a stake in it - personally, professionally, in organisational or community terms - now and in the future.

**Table 8.1: Guidance on the implementation of recommendations made the ICLRD**

<b>GUIDANCE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY ICLRD</b>			
<p><b>PLEASE NOTE</b> that ICLRD wishes to emphasise that the table below only features key areas of recommendations made in the conclusion of the report and should not be taken as an exclusion of more detailed recommendations made throughout the report. The table below is not to be read as a prioritisation of recommendations, since all recommendations have been made by ICLRD in a holistic framework which identifies all that is necessary, based on evidence, for Buncrana’s full potential to be released. The table below is therefore a guidance as to the urgency and sequential initiation of key strategic recommendations and ICLRD stresses that all actions taken in connection with the table below or sections of the report should be informed on an ongoing basis by the more detailed substance, spirit and evidence of the report, as relevant to the task or area of focus.</p>			
<b><i>Recommendation:</i></b>	<b><i>Immediate</i></b>	<b><i>Middle Term (within 24 months)</i></b>	<b><i>Longer Term (present to future)</i></b>
Ensure ICLRD Report’s <b>recommendations in full</b> are used to inform the emerging development of Buncrana.			
Share ICLRD Report with all relevant agency stakeholders including stakeholders who are members of the North West Strategic Growth Partnership (NWSGP) and convene/facilitate an interagency dialogue to discuss and explore how other agencies can assist with recommendations of the report and in helping Buncrana reach its full potential.			
Reconvene with local stakeholders to look at and implement an appropriate model of response to the need for a place-based development coordination mechanism for Buncrana which connects the work of stakeholders, and can drive activities underpinning this transformative agenda.			
Incorporate all recommendations from the ICLRD Report (particularly all recommendations arising from the Place			

Standard analysis) into the Local Area Plan (LAP) and iterations of any documentation relating to same. Include any additional recommendations made by ICLRD which relate to LAP.			
Work with stakeholders locally to develop a transformation plan for Buncrana which incorporates key principles for LAP but which goes beyond this, and identifies a roadmap of activities, identifies strategic sources of funding for key developments, and which becomes the workplan for a place-based coordination mechanism.			
Investigate and initiate pathway for Buncrana to access place-based quality assurance standards in relation to sustainability branding (Transition Towns, Fair Trade Towns, or others as appropriate)			
Initiate scoping for designation of Lough Swilly as a Marine National Park and development of a national marine training centre as recommended by the ICLRD Report			
Engage with NWSGP structures to initiate exploration of potential cross border linkages to Project Kelvin or alternative infrastructural solutions to digital resilience for Buncrana in context of North West City Region (NWCR).			
Ensure digital enablement of brownfield and existing workspace in Buncrana is a priority in LAP and related economic planning for SME sector. Ensure that this is based on potential identified in ICLRD report and not confined to current business base or SME support activities.			

<p>Roll out a 'Green Corridor' and incorporate all specific recommendations on greenway planning/access and location from the ICLRD report, into ongoing implementation of Greenways planning and development impacting on the Buncrana area and surrounds.</p>			
<p>Explore and develop quality branding for tourism products and clustering to support deepening of tourism offering in Buncrana and locale. Connect to sustainability quality branding initiative(s).</p>			
<p>Develop a Heritage Plan for Buncrana and surrounds which includes built, archaeological, social/industrial heritage, spatial/place linkages from its history; the Heritage plan should focus on both capital development, curatorial expertise and programming; which focuses on linking with the upcoming new Irish National Heritage Strategy and the Irish National Monuments Service as well as Heritage Council; which focuses on Buncrana's location within a wider region and cross-border functional economic area; and which highlights the value of heritage not only to the tourism economy but to the economic fabric of Buncrana all year round.</p>			
<p>Establish cross border relevant strategic stakeholder working group and initiate process towards feasibility and funding of a major industrial heritage/social history archiving, interpretive and exhibition facility at Buncrana serving the wider region and island.</p>			
<p>In context of LAP and all other relevant development policies relating to Buncrana's physical, economic or social development, <b>designate Buncrana as a living lab for Green transition standards</b> across all sectors of economy,</p>			

infrastructure development, built environment and industry partnerships. Align activities accordingly and immediately investigate housing/building stock retro-fit with sustainable/clean energy conservation/generation solutions; develop planning and building control standards which promote sustainability and clean energy usage.

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## APPENDIX 1: THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD) is Ireland's leading provider of development supports to government and cross-border agencies in the fields of place-making and place-shaping. It is a North-South-U.S. partnership involving Maynooth University, Ulster University and University of Maryland, which was formally established in 2006 to explore and expand the contribution that spatial planning and the development of the physical, social and economic infrastructure can make to peace and reconciliation on the island of Ireland, and elsewhere. A central objective of the ICLR D is to strengthen the policy and operational linkages between central, regional and local policy makers and among officials and practitioners involved in spatial planning and social and economic development across the island of Ireland. Most of our work is with regional and local government, with an emphasis on facilitating deeper collaboration and bridging the policy-praxis divide. In addition to the three core partners, the ICLR D cooperates with researchers from across the island of Ireland and Europe with similar interests (incl. University of Liverpool, University of Hamburg, Mary Immaculate College – University of Limerick, University College Dublin, and Limerick Institute of Technology) and cross border partnerships such as Co-operation Ireland.

Place-making and place-shaping lie at the heart of the ICLR D's work programmes. There is a growing argument that 'place' should play an increasingly prominent role in public policy making. As investment and people are now more mobile than ever before, considering the quality and potential of a place becomes ever more important, as quality places attract and retain skilled and talented people by providing a mix of natural, community, social, leisure, creative and cultural activities for themselves and their families. Determining on what a place-based strategy should focus starts with identifying what the location provides in terms of key assets, services and growth opportunities that shape day-to-day-life and economic opportunities. This key principle lies at the heart of ICLR D's analysis of Buncrana. For policy makers and practitioners, this raises questions around innovation and creativity in the spheres of socio-economic, cultural and environmental development and governance.

### **The Team**

For the purposes of this study, the ICLR D was:

**Ms. Caroline Creamer** is Director of the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD) and a Research Fellow with the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) at Maynooth University Social Sciences Institute. A qualified town planner, Caroline has for the past 20 years worked in a research and management capacity on a number of EU funded projects focusing on urban and rural regeneration, spatial planning, multi-level governance and community participation. Over the last decade, Caroline has been working with local government, regional authorities, communities and other key stakeholders in the Irish border region and Northern Ireland on policy-praxis in, for example, collaborative governance, resilience, place-shaping, rural revitalisation, and inter-territorial and cross-border development. Contact: [caroline.creamer@mu.ie](mailto:caroline.creamer@mu.ie)

**Dr. Brendan O’Keeffe** is a Senior Research Associate with the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD). He is an independent consultant working in the fields of social research, local development, community planning, evaluation, project management and organisational change. Brendan’s current work mainly involves the use of action-research methodologies, and he is working with a number of local authorities and civil society organisations. He is also engaged in a number of academic endeavours, and has compiled research reports on several issues including homelessness, community planning and rural development. Contact: [brendanok7@gmail.com](mailto:brendanok7@gmail.com)

**Ms. Caitriona Mullan** is a Senior Research Associate with the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD). She is a specialist in inter-jurisdictional/transboundary collaborative working in spatial development and strategic change. She has a significant track record in place-based economic and social development, which she gained over two decades working in Ireland and Northern Ireland and the Border Counties in particular. An expert in stakeholder relationship management for integrative spatial development and functional territories, Caitriona has successfully facilitated and supported diverse interests to work together within evidence based models to deliver change and progress across a range of sectors in Ireland, Northern Ireland and internationally. Most recently, she has been working with ICLRD/Donnegal County Council/Derry City & Strabane District Council to build and facilitate the North West Strategic Growth Partnership structures - an innovative intergovernmental partnership for growth on the Ireland/Northern Ireland Border. Caitriona is a native of the North West. Contact: [caitriona73@gmail.com](mailto:caitriona73@gmail.com)

**Dr. Linda McElduff** is a Research Associate with the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD). She graduated from Ulster University in 2011 with a MSc (distinction) in Planning and Property Development and completed her PhD in 2014. Her doctoral research investigated the regeneration and resilience of small coastal resorts on the island of Ireland. In 2014 she took up a lectureship at Ulster University and teaches on several programmes across the Belfast School of Architecture and the Built Environment and supervises both undergraduate and postgraduate research projects and dissertations. Linda is an associate Member of the Built Environment Research Institute. Her primary research interests focus on coastal resort regeneration; coastal planning and management; social-ecological and community resilience; governance; and property rights. Contact: [l.mcelduff@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:l.mcelduff@ulster.ac.uk)

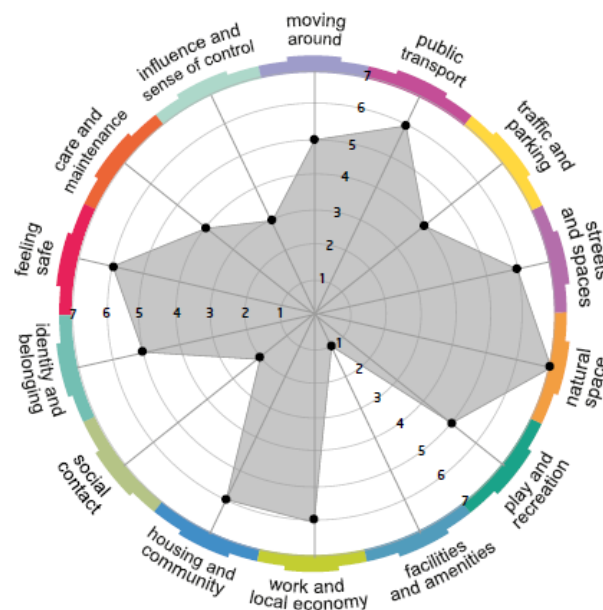
**Mr. Justin Gleeson** is recognised as one of the leading socio-demographic analysts in Ireland. Through his existing role as the Director of the All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO), he has previously delivered a number of socio-demographic profiles for regional and local authorities in Ireland (Kildare, Meath, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, South Dublin, Wicklow, Wexford and Cork City local authorities and both the Southern Regional Assembly and the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assemblies). Justin has also worked on numerous POWCAR projects to feed into the development of the new National Planning Framework, the Metropolitan Area Spatial Plans (MAPS) for the three Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies as well as analysis pieces on POWCAR for Clare, Tipperary, Cavan, Meath, Offaly, Kildare, Wexford, Leitrim and Cork local authorities. In particular, Justin has researched and developed both the 2009 and 2016 POWCAR reports for the Western Development Commission. Justin is also a registered Officer of Statistics, and has a very strong working relationship with the CSO. As such, Justin has in-depth knowledge of all of the background datasets listed in the tender specification and led the way in the development of a new level of detailed socio-demographic profile reports for local authorities in Ireland. Contact: [justin.gleeson@mu.ie](mailto:justin.gleeson@mu.ie)

## APPENDIX 2: THE PLACE STANDARD

Developed by Architecture and Design Scotland (ADS), NHS Scotland and the Scottish Government, the Place Standard tool is a way of assessing places (see <https://www.placestandard.scot/>). The Place Standard recognises “Our physical and social environment is the framework in which our lives take place and, depending on circumstances, it can provide us with opportunities or limit our potential” (Scottish Government *et al*, 2020: 5). It provides a simple framework to structure conversations about place. It enables communities, in their broadest sense, to think about the physical elements of a place (for example its buildings, spaces, and transport links) as well as the social aspects (for example whether people feel they have a say in decision making). The tool provides prompts for discussions, allowing communities to consider all the elements of a place in a methodical way.

The Place standard pinpoints the assets of a place as well as areas where a place could improve. The tool is a mechanism for ensuring that “the views, stories and real life experiences of people living in a particular place are captured, valued and integrated into the heart of decision making processes” (Scottish Government *et al*, 2020: 5).

Since its launch in December 2015, the Place Standard has been used extensively across Scotland and internationally and, as a tool, is recognised by the World Health Organisation (WHO). It supports a place-based approach to local and regional development. It has been designed to facilitate engagement with global issues at the local level; such as climate change. Acknowledging that “Inequalities can be experienced by people through their relationship with a place” (Scottish Government *et al*, 2020: 7), the Place Standard links with the aim of the UNSDGs to promote prosperity while also protecting the planet.



The Place Standard, which is simple and free to use, is based on “14 different themes that are important for delivering high quality places that support health and well-being. In asking a series of questions relating to each of the 14 themes, it allows participants to identify strengths and weaknesses and presents these in an engaging and illustrative way” (Health Scotland, 2017: 3).

### A2.1 The Place Standard in Buncrana

The Place Standard tool has been applied in many different contexts and a variety of ways; most commonly to facilitate community engagement to inform local planning or strategic planning. In Buncrana, the Place Standard was an integral conversation tool during all focus group sessions (see Table 1.1); its core objectives being:

- To consider how can we use the totality of resources in this place differently to create a better kind of place for people;
- To promote inclusive growth and well-being;
- To understand the context – putting ‘place’ at the heart of policy;
- To gain an understanding of people’s sense of place by identifying how services, assets and systems work, and how they don’t; and
- To ensure avoidance of structural limits – giving stakeholders the opportunity to be ambitious, creative, and innovative.

The fourteen key dimensions were, because of time limitations, condensed into five key themes - as outlined in Table 4.3 but repeated here for ease of access:

Theme	Inclusive of
Mobility and Accessibility	moving around; public transport; traffic and parking;
Economy	Work and local economy; housing and community
Community wellbeing	Social contact; identity and belonging; Play and recreation; facilities and amenities;
Environment	Care and maintenance; natural space; feeling safe; streets and spaces;
Governance	Influence and sense of control

Use of the tool enabled the research team to interrogate a number of key questions with stakeholders, namely:

- To consider what are Buncrana’s main assets (relating to this theme);
- To reflect on what are the challenges;
- To define what are the priorities; and

- How chart how the place can tangibly move forward.

Chapter 5 provides a detailed analysis of the focus group sessions, and associated semi-structured interviews; with recommendations on Buncrana's future development laid out in Chapter 7.

These key themes also informed the design and structure of the online survey completed by 277 people representing local community, diaspora and businesses – as outlined in Chapter 4.

## APPENDIX 3: LISTING OF SUPPORT DOCUMENTS

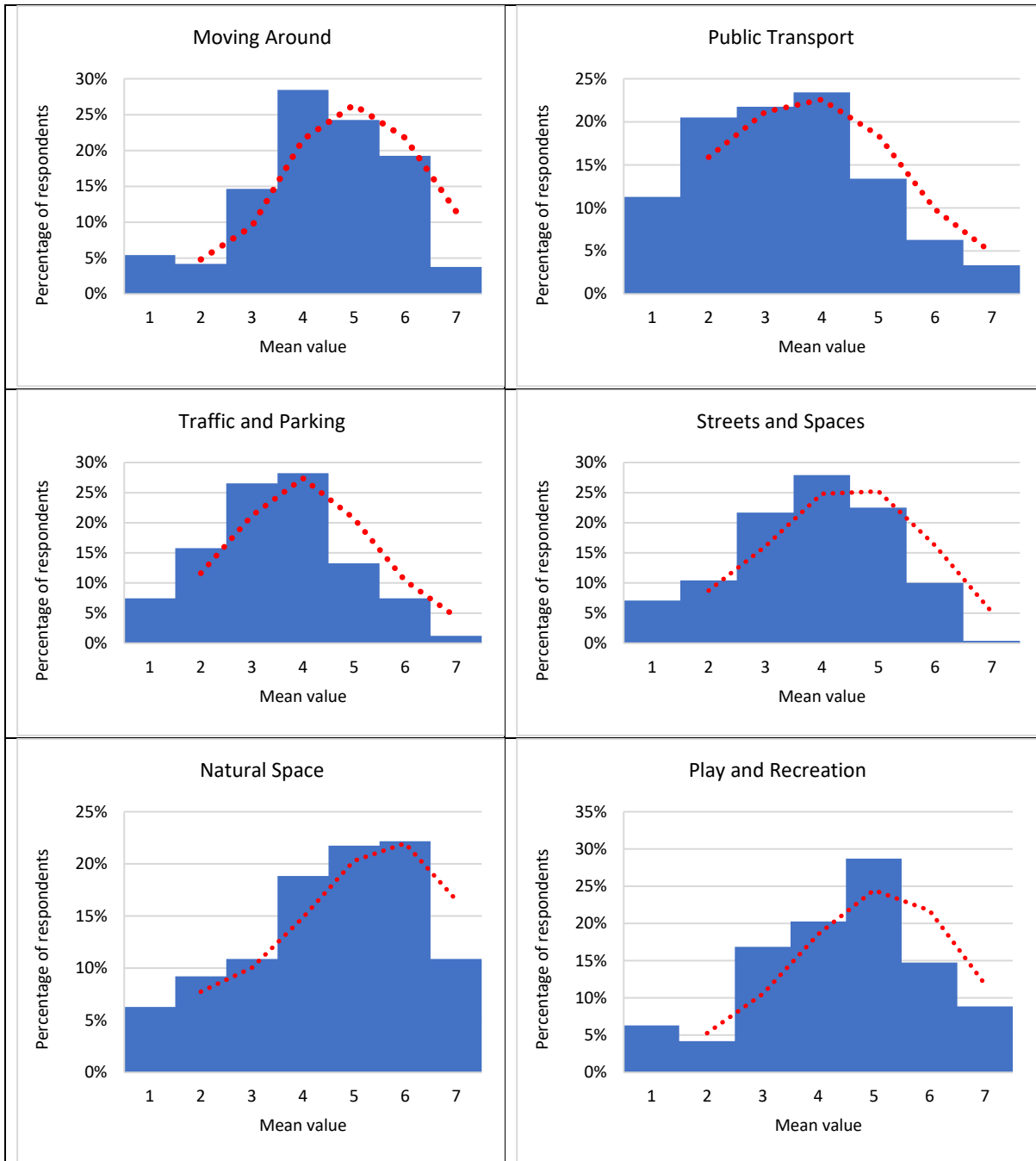
AIRO & ICLRD: *Strategic Strengths and Future Strategic Direction of Buncrana, County Donegal: A Socio-Economic and Geo-Spatial Study - Socio-Economic Profile* (June 2020)

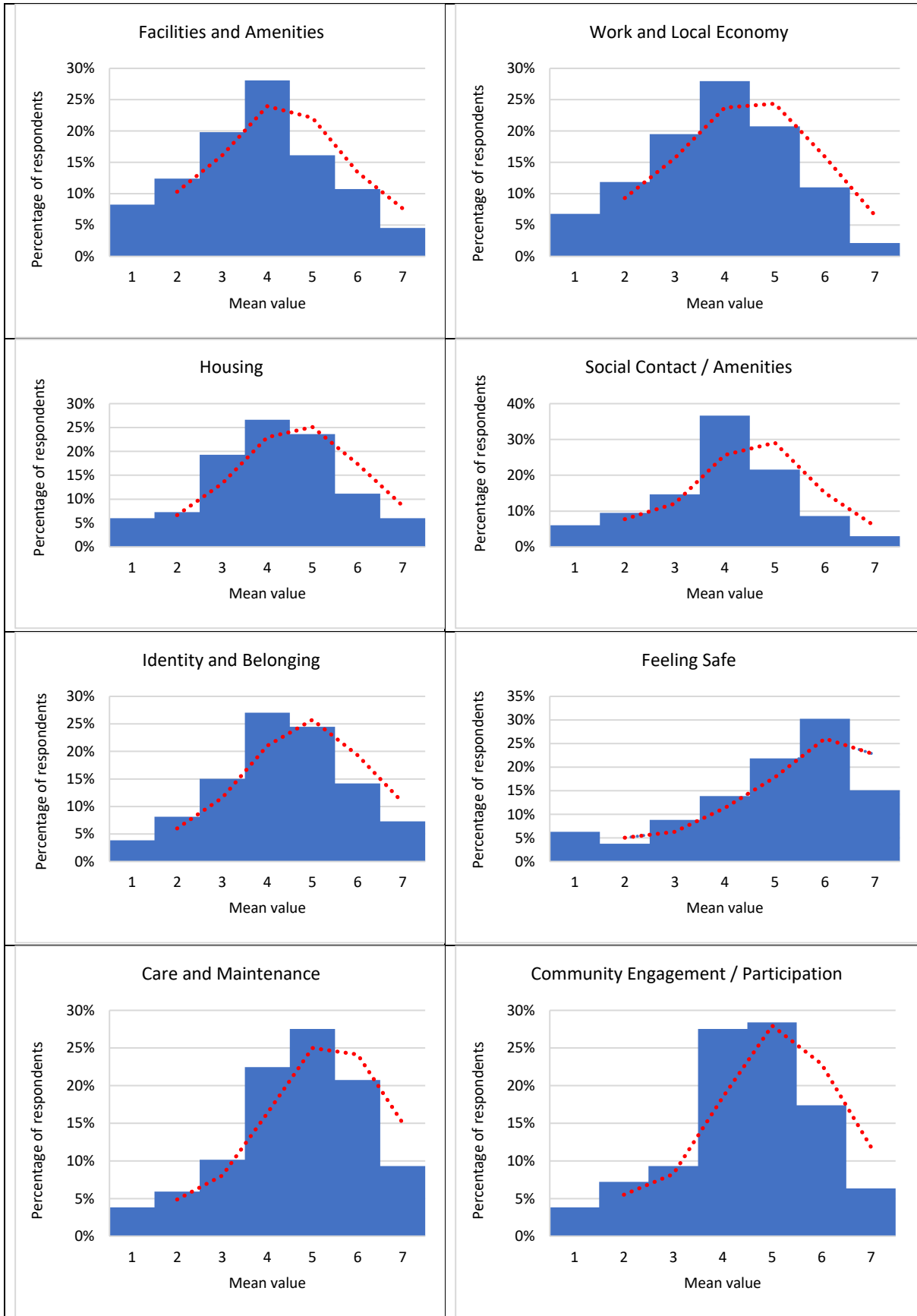
ICLRD: *Strategic Strengths and Future Strategic Direction of Buncrana, County Donegal: A Literature Review* (June 2020)

ICLRD: *Strategic Strengths and Future Strategic Direction of Buncrana, County Donegal: A Policy Analysis* (June 2020)



## APPENDIX 4: THE PLACE STANDARD - DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES ACROSS ALL INDICATORS





## ENDNOTES

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<sup>i</sup> The Dictionary of Economics (Black et al., 2009) defines deindustrialisation as follows: The tendency for the industrial sector to account for a decreasing proportion of gross domestic product and employment. In advanced countries large improvements in industrial productivity in the 20th century increased real incomes. Consumers and governments have largely chosen to spend these on services, including education, medical care, banking and insurance, entertainment, and tourism. An increasing proportion of economic activity in advanced economies thus consists of services.

<sup>ii</sup> See <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12020W/TXT&from=EN>

<sup>iii</sup> See <http://en.euabc.com/word/506> for further details.

<sup>iv</sup> For further information see: <file:///C:/Users/ccreamer/Downloads/NA0219035ENN.en.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> The eligibility for the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF) is calculated on the basis of regional GDP per inhabitant (in PPS and averaged over a three year period). The NUTS 2 regions are split into three groups for the programming period 2021–27:

- Less developed regions (where GDP per inhabitant was less than 75% of the EU average);
- Transition regions (where GDP per inhabitant was between 75% and 100% of the EU average); and
- More developed regions (where GDP per inhabitant was more than 100% of the EU average).

Funding for the 2021-2027 Cohesion Programme will adhere to the old NUTS 2 regions in Ireland - BMW and S&E - rather than the three new regions (i.e. Eastern and Midlands, Southern, and Northern and Western). Under the new programme, the BMW region will have 'Transition Region' status while the Southern and Eastern Region will be classified as a 'More Developed Region'.

<sup>vi</sup> The EU Directive is available to download here: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014L0089&from=EN>.

<sup>vii</sup> In December 2016 Derry and Strabane District Council, Donegal County Council, the Department for Infrastructure (NI) and Sustrans (the UK-based cycling and walking charity), were awarded €14.8 million funding from the EU's [INTERREG VA](#) programme, administered by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), to construct 46.5kms of cross-border greenway. Match-funding has been provided by the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport in Ireland. The routes being developed are:

- Derry to Buncrana via Bridgend;
- Muff to Derry via Culmore; and
- Lifford to Strabane.

Once completed, this will result in a greenway network of approximately 126.5km in the North West, of which 76.5km will be classified as high quality greenway. See <https://www.donegalcoco.ie/community/nwgreenway/> for further details.

<sup>viii</sup> The following 28 EDs are enumerated in respect of the Inishowen Peninsula: Buncrana Urban; Ardmalin; Ballyliffin; Birdstown; Buncrana Rural; Burt; Carndonagh; Carthage; Castlecary; Culdaff; Desertegny; Dunaff; Fahan; Glennagannon; Gleneely; Glentogher; Greencastle; Illies; Inch Island; Kilderry; Malin; Mintiaghs; Moville; Redcastle; Straid; Three Trees; Turmone; and Whitecastle.

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<sup>ix</sup> The data presented here are from 2011 – the most recent date for which local-level (ED / Ward) data are available on an all-island basis. These are published in the 2015 ICLRD/AIRO atlas, *The Atlas of the Island of Ireland* <https://airo.maynoothuniversity.ie/mapping-resources/airo-census-mapping/national-viewers/atlas-island-ireland>

<sup>x</sup> Unemployment, as recorded in the Census of Population is not necessarily equivalent to signing on the live register. It includes other cohorts of job seekers.

<sup>xi</sup> POWSCAR stands for Place of Work, School or College. Census of Anonymised Records.

<sup>xii</sup> These include construction workers, sales people and those who have no fixed work base.

<sup>xiii</sup> This can be broken down into:

- 252 – General Public
- 14 – Business sector
- 11 – Diaspora.

<sup>xiv</sup> ‘Moving Around’ refers to mobility within the town. Public transport refers to the bus connections to other locations.

<sup>xv</sup> The area shaded in pink indicates the proposed site for the primary care centre. This is referenced elsewhere in this chapter.

<sup>xvi</sup> The Baker Tilly Report provided an initial assessment of broadband services in Buncrana in 2011. Commissioned by Donegal County Council, with Buncrana Town Council, the report concluded that (a) in terms of availability, cost and diversity of broadband services, Buncrana was not disadvantaged, when compared with other Irish towns of similar size, (b) for commercial users, an adequate diversity of suppliers existed, though the price was higher due to higher backhaul transmission costs (this included the Kelvin network) and, possibly most importantly in the context of current discussions on broadband/Project Kelvin, (c) there was no firm business case in existence at that time for construction of extension to Kelvin – rather, potential access to Kelvin was being used as a marketing tool for the town of Buncrana to attract new investment.

<sup>xvii</sup> Ireland is home to two internationally recognised dark sky places; Kerry International Dark Sky Reserve and Mayo International Dark Sky Park. Both have been awarded a gold tier for the quality of their night skies, free from light pollution and are important assets of natural night sky heritage. There is a strong case to be made for such designation being sought in Inishowen – not least given its growing international reputation as a viewing point for the Northern Lights. For further information see <https://www.darksky.ie/>

<sup>xviii</sup> A 15-minute walkable neighbourhood is a spatial planning strategy that’s aimed at improving the quality of life for residents within the area. In short, the strategy leads to the design of neighbourhoods in such a way that residents have access to everything they could need within a 15-minute radius of their home – including, for example, workplaces, schools, healthcare, shops, restaurants, leisure facilities, and parks.

<sup>xix</sup> A Healthy Living Centre is a neighbourhood-based, community-led approach to health improvement providing services and support in communities experiencing disadvantage and health inequalities to:

- Identify and define the key health and well-being issues and needs impacting on local people;
- Design and implement a needs-led approach addressing inequalities in health and well-being, taking a holistic approach and recognising the wider determinants of health;
- Build Social Capital in terms of bonding within communities, bridging to create and support opportunities and linking to act as a conduit for better external connectedness; and
- Participate in and influence wider decision making processes that affect health and well-being.

<sup>xx</sup> The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACE Study) is a research study conducted by the U.S. health maintenance organisation Kaiser Permanente and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. It focuses on

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lifelong outcomes for a cohort in which adverse childhood experiences were identified. It has provided significant evidence of links between childhood adverse experiences (including those derived from socio-economic deprivation), and lifelong health outcomes; the ACE study provides an ongoing evidence base which has supported numerous publications in the areas of public health, child health, child development, clinical and social interventions.

<sup>xxi</sup> This map was supplied by University College Cork's SFI Research Centre for Energy, Climate and Marine (MaREI). An interactive tool is available at: [https://coastal.climatecentral.org/map/12/-73.9605/40.7101/?theme=sea\\_level\\_rise&map\\_type=year&contiguous=true&elevation\\_model=best\\_available&forecast\\_year=2050&pathway=rcp45&percentile=p50&return\\_level=return\\_level\\_1&slr\\_model=kopp\\_2014](https://coastal.climatecentral.org/map/12/-73.9605/40.7101/?theme=sea_level_rise&map_type=year&contiguous=true&elevation_model=best_available&forecast_year=2050&pathway=rcp45&percentile=p50&return_level=return_level_1&slr_model=kopp_2014)

<sup>xxii</sup> The RAPID (Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development) Programme was a central government focused initiative to tackle social inclusion and disadvantage by prioritising resources from agencies and Government Department. The Programme aimed to ensure that priority attention was given to the 51 designated areas by focusing available resources. Strand 1 was launched in 25 urban areas in February 2001 and Strand 2 was extended to 20 provincial towns in February 2002. The programme has been combined with a number of other community programmes in recent years to form the Community Enhancement Fund.

<sup>xxiii</sup> The Belfast Region City Deal will see the UK Government invest £350 million into the Belfast Region over the next 15 years. This figure will be matched by the Northern Ireland Executive, and will be further bolstered by co-investment of upwards of £150m from Belfast Region City Deal partners and investment by the private sector is anticipated to bring the total investment package to over £1 billion. Belfast Region City Deal incorporates six of the 11 councils in Northern Ireland:

- Antrim & Newtownabbey
- Ards & North Down
- Belfast
- Lisburn and Castlereagh
- Newry, Mourne & Down
- Mid & East Antrim.

<sup>xxiv</sup> The Harry Swan Collection contains some 3,500 valuable objects including Etruscan and Classical Greek vases, Chinese ivory figurines, Irish antiquities, silver, glass, time-pieces, ceramics, military weapons, coins and medals. Harry Percival Swan, a well known author, historian and collector from Bunrana, left the collection in his will to the Royal Irish Academy (RIA). Some 2,500 items were presented to the National Museum of Ireland in May 1971, the year after his death. A further 1,000 artefacts including a valuable collection of Greek and Etruscan vases, were bequeathed upon the death of Mr Swan's widow in the early 1980s. See <http://www.inishowennews.com/011HarrySwan389.htm> for further details.