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# The Plan and its Background INTRODUCTION

Mohill has traditionally acted as a business, service, residential, educational and social hub for its wider rural catchment in south Leitrim and across into Longford and Roscommon. Most of these roles have diminished over recent decades and Mohill has exhibited all the classic features of 'Irish small rural town decline' – static/falling/ageing population, business closures, growing vacancy rates, shifts to the larger towns and a dangerous loss of community confidence/feelgood. As elsewhere, economic difficulties run in parallel with social difficulties and internally, Mohill faces exclusion, substance abuse and social breakdown issues.

The town hit a low some years ago, with huge negativity regarding a perceived lack of any future for it. These difficulties have not been allowed to go by default and the Mohill community has taken forward several vibrant initiatives to address them. The initiatives are all part of evolving and implementing a 'Smart, Green Mohill' branding:

- Smart in how the town looks/appears, in how it looks after its residents and in how it adapts new technology
- Green in how it creates and uses its energy, in how it provides amenities, in how it grows its own produce

Among the actions taken forward to achieve this are:

- Mohill's designation as A Sustainable Energy Community (SEC): an SEC is a community in which everyone works together to develop a sustainable energy system, through being energy efficient, using renewable energy where feasible and developing decentralised energy supplies
- Designation as an Age Friendly Town, where older people are actively involved in social, economic and cultural life and in creating a better local environment, to everybody's benefit
- Projects funded through the Town and Village Renewal Scheme
- A 'Live Local Work Smart' project which is developing flexible workspace which will accommodate and encourage remote working, thereby reducing employers' costs, employees' commuting and society's carbon footprint whilst increasing local spend, human capacity and the potential for clustering

This **Economic Development Plan** is another building block in that process





## OUR PLANNING PROCESS

The Mohill planning process ran for six months, from April to October 2018. It involved:

- Three 'open invitation' structured planning workshops
- Direct one-to-one consultations with over 20 groups, individuals and organisations
- An E-based community questionnaire survey attracting 64 responses
- Desk research and analysis

## **What Someone Said: Community Survey Feedback**

"Well done to all involved in getting this community project off the ground. I'm sure at times it may feel like a thankless task you have taken on however each small step is getting us closer to the town we used to be. Thank you for all your work and commitment to date."





## MOHILL:

### The Place and its People

### WHERE WE ARE

Mohill lies in south Leitrim, in the rolling countryside that's part of the great Drumlin belt running across south Ulster and north Connacht. It sits about 8km east of the River Shannon and 2km north of Lough Rynn, is surrounded by grass-based farmland and is about 80m above sea-level.

The N4 Dublin/Sligo national route and the Dublin/Sligo railway are about 8 km to the west of the town which is central to a wider catchment of over 6,000 people.

Mohill is a compact and well-defined settlement, largely sloping upwards to the south from the Rynn River and essentially developed around a central north/south/east/west cruciform shape. Growth has followed the four main roads which run out from the central cruciform though significant back-lands within these roads remain to be developed. There are 521 houses in Mohill, 115 (22%) of which are vacant.





### **Mohill ... A Century-and-a-Half Ago**

"(Mohill, a 'neatly built' town) derives its chief trade from its situation on a public thoroughfare." (Lewis Topographical Survey of Ireland, 1837)

"(Main Street) contains several good shops wellstocked with the various articles of fashion and of local requisites. Great progress is manifest in its general appearance and of its size is considered one of the most stirring and is certainly the most thriving town of any in the surrounding counties." (Slater's Directory describes Mohill in 1856)



### WHERE WE'VE COME FROM

Mohill's story as a formal settlement seems to have started around 500 AD when St Manachan founded a monastery around where St Mary's Church now stands, leading it to become the ecclesiastical capital of Munitir Eolais (south Leitirim).

Whilst Mohill remained a monastic site for the next thousand years, its fortunes ebbed and flowed with the political, social and economic tides of the times. In the 13th century the dominant MacRagnaill/Reynolds clann built their stronghold at nearby Lough Rynn and the next major change came with the English 'shiring' and de facto planation of Leitrim in the late 1500s.

By the early 1800s Mohill was a thriving town of 1,600 people, similar in size to Carrick-on-Shannon. Its story for the rest of the century was characterized by the indelible influences of The Great Famine and the development of several civic buildings.

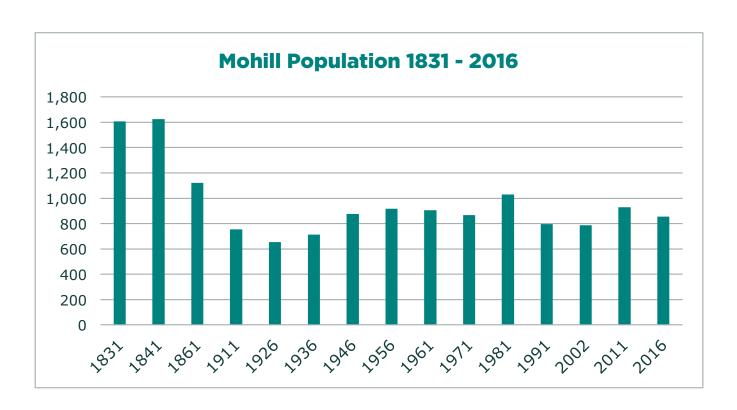
The Famine cut the town's population by a third, taking it to below the 1,000-mark, where it has remained ever

since. This of course was part of a devastation of Leitrim overall that would see the County's population fall by 130,000, or nearly 85% between 1841 and 1991.

Mohill however continued to play a significant role in this diminished and diminishing Leitrim. A decade after The Famine it still hosted three hotels and posting houses and its shops included two apothecaries, haberdashers, bakers, nail-maker, two leather shops, a feather dealer and five drapers. By the end of the century new schools and a Catholic Church had been built and the narrowgauge Cavan and Leitrim Railway was in place.

Mohill's 20th century story has effectively been one of stasis, its population hovering around the 800/900-mark and the town, unlike most others in rural Ireland, including Leitrim's Carrick-on-Shannon, Manorhamilton and Ballinamore, failing to grow.

Nonetheless, after 1,500 years Mohill remains a place of substance, surviving as the oldest confirmed population centre in South Letrim.





### **WHO LIVES HERE**

In 2016 Mohill was home to 855 people, 409 men and 446 women. The vast majority of these (84%) were Irish-born, the remainder largely comprising small UK-born and Polish communities. The community is static in mobility terms, 93% having lived at the same address a year previously. In terms of stated religion, it is 90% Catholic.

Mohill's population is ageing with 25% aged over 65 compared with a Leitrim average of 17% and an Ireland average of 13%.

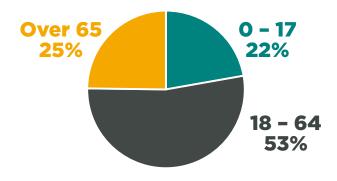
Mohill's population is spread across 377 households, 154 (41%) of which are Single-Person households and a further 114 (30%) are Two-Person households. Just over half (55%) of the households are owner-occupiers whilst 25% rent from the Council and 15% rent privately. Thirty-three people live in the town's one communal establishment.

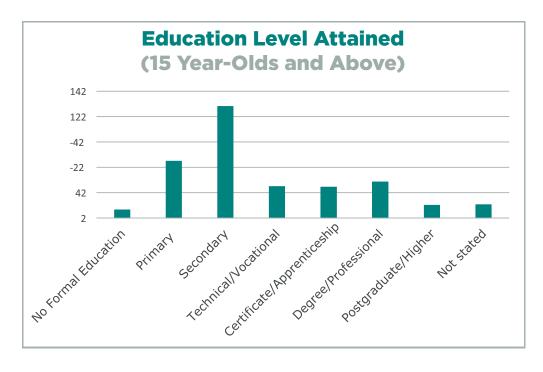
One-person-in-five (184 people) has some sort of a disability.

Educational achievement levels in Mohill are low, with most people's education not moving beyond Secondary level: 16% have gone to Degree-level or above compared with 28% nationally.



#### **Mohill's Age Structure**







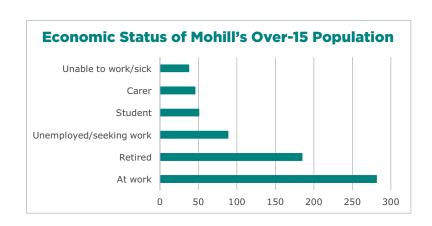
## WHAT WE DO

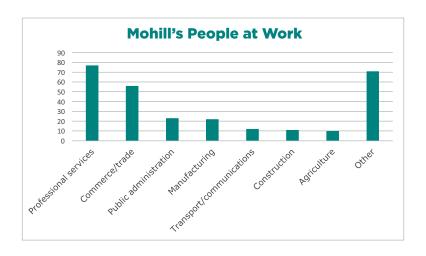
Mohill now acts as a business, service, residential, educational and social hub for its wider south Leitrim rural catchment, though several of those roles have diminished in recent decades.

Just 40% of Mohill's Over 15 population is at work, compared with 53% nationally. This reflects the town's age-profile and its significant retired population.

The provision of Professional Services and Commerce/Trade dominate the town's economy. Almost two-thirds of people (64%) travel to work/school by car or van whilst a further quarter do so on foot. Public transport plays a minimal role re people's travel-to-work.

More than a third of households (37%) do not have Broadband and just over a quarter (27%) do not have a car.









## A MOHILL TIME-LINE

| 500   | St Manachan founds a monastery here   |
|-------|---|
| 538   | St Manachan dies  |
| c1200 | Lough Rynn becomes the MacRagnaill/Reynolds main seat   |
| 1583  | Leitrim is shired by Sir John Perrot  |
| 1621  | Mohill monastery is dissolved   |
| 1720  | Turlough O'Carolan marries Mary Maguire in Mohill   |
| 1815  | St Mary's Church of Ireland Church is built   |
| 1833  | Lough Rynn House is built   |
| 1837  | Mohill is a town of 305 houses  |
| 1842  | Mohill Workhouse is built for 700 people: by 1850 it holds 1,810  |
| 1885  | St Patrick's Catholic Church is built   |
| 1887  | Cavan and Leitrim Railway opens   |
| 1890  | Mohill wins Leitrim's first GAA football Championship, the Sisters of Mercy found St. Anne's Convent, St Joseph's National School opens and the Hunt Hall is built. |
| 1927  | First Agricultural Show is held   |
| 1932  | Vocational School starts in the old workhouse   |
| 1949  | St Anne's Convent Secondary and St Michael's Boys National Schools open   |
| 1951  | The Vocational School opens on the Cloone Road  |
| 1959  | Railway closes  |
| 1971  | Mohill Credit Union opens   |
| 1973  | Mohill Mart opens   |
| 1975  | The Arus Carolan old people's home is built   |
| 1985  | Mohill Community Development Association is founded   |
| 1986  | President Hillery unveils Oisín Kelly's statue of O'Carolan   |
| 1999  | St Anne's Convent is sold   |
| 2003  | The town's 'New Ground/Talamh Nua' urban framework is published   |
| 2006  | Lough Rynn Castle Estate opens as a hotel and leisure facility and Mohill wins a first Leitrim SFC in 31 years  |
| 2014  | Mohill is designated an 'Age Friendly' town   |
| 2018  | Mohill's plans for the 21st century multiply  |



## WHAT OTHERS HAVE IN MIND FOR US

The Leitrim County Development Plan 2015-2021 designates Mohill as one of Leitrim's four Tier 2B Centres (the others are Dromahair, Drumshanbo and Kinlough) and as the Support Town to Carrick-on-Shannon within its Municipal District, explaining its role as follows:

'Mohill has been identified as a 'Support Town' for the development of the Carrick on Shannon Area and in this regard the role of the Carrick/Mohill area in conjunction with the urban belt along the Shannon Corridor, is of particular importance in the overall development of the County.'

In a wider sense the County Development Plan wants to encourage the renewal of rural areas, the development and delivery of community services, better town centre traffic management/parking, increased cycling/walking, enterprise and employment growth, management of our heritages and sustainable tourism.

The Plan also designates a Mohill Architectural Conservation Area and its Development Management Standards prioritise prior community engagement, enhancing access/improved accessibility, reflecting the vernacular, concept proposals, town centre infill/backland development, commercial development, use of renewable energy, shop front design, parking, and urban regeneration and renewal.



The Leitrim Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2015-2021 joins up the County's approaches to Economic and Community development at the local level and is heavily informed by some 50 related plans, strategies and analyses at the national, regional and Leitrim levels. The LECP's Economic Theme 4, 'Towns and Villages' has particular relevance for Mohill, especially its analysis that:

- Towns are not capitalising enough on nearby attractions and need to be accessible to their surrounding catchment areas and have good local linkages between car parks, public transport stops and the various attractions in the town centre
- Shop-front dereliction is a problem in parts of the towns
- More events for children will help bring parents into the town/village centres
- Town centres tend to have too many of one type of shop whilst being lacking in others: there is a need for greater variety and/or new retailing to maintain the viability of many towns and villages
- Town/village centres need to be attractive places, i.e. safe, environmentally friendly with good design and distinctive identity and image: co-ordinated town centre management is a way of achieving this

Community Theme 1 of the LECP, 'Living and Well-Being', meanwhile highlights the need for new community-led energy projects to be put in place and for the learning from Mohill's 'green initiatives' to be rolled out across the County.

The County Council's **Leitrim Economic Strategy 2015-2021** includes Sections on Energy Supply and Green Economy and on Retail, Town Centres and Services. The Actions put forward in the Strategy will be progressed by this Plan.

Other plans and strategies which have influenced the development of this Plan include the Report of the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) 2014, Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), Border Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022, ICBAN Regional Strategic Framework, Upper Shannon Erne Future Economy Initiative (USEFE), Leitrim, Explore Experience Enjoy: A Growth Strategy for Tourism in Leitrim 2015-2021 and Leitrim Arts Strategy.



## RE-VISITING 'NEW GROUND TALAMH NUA'

In 2003 a Mohill Urban Framework Plan 'New Ground Talamh Nua' was prepared by the County Council. It was informed by previous plans/feasibility studies carried out in 1994, 1995, 1997 and 1999 but based on up-to-date research and consultations. Among the Weaknesses it listed for Mohill were:

- Sharp decline as a centre and sharp decline of its underpinning agriculture sector
- Low incomes
- Social segregation in housing
- Significant town centre parking, vacancy and streetscape issues
- Limited facilities for young people
- Low levels of confidence and high out-migration

What Someone Said: Community Survey Feedback

"As someone who has only recently moved to Mohill, I really appreciate the community vibe. Everyone is so friendly and kind however it would be good if there were more community activities to get to know more people."

The strategic responses then put forward included:

- Good quality town centre residential accommodation
- Improved town circulation, pedestrian safety, streetscape appearance, maintenance of landmark buildings, planting and community facilities

Some progress has been made (for instance in the refurbishment of the Canon Donohue Hall and the building of the new Community College) but much remains to be done.





# EMERGING ISSUES THE MOHILL PLAN THEMES

Using the work that had been taken forward earlier, from the outset the planning process was scoped around the following six Themes:

Theme 1: Mohill at Work

Theme 2: Social,
Community, Heritage, Play
and Leisure Mohill

Theme 3: Well-Being,
Education and Learning
and Mohill

Theme 4: Mohill's Town Fabric

Theme 5: Mohill as a Place Attracting/Bringing in Others

**Theme 6: Energy and Mohill** 

## WHAT WAS SAID AT OUR PLANNING WORKSHOPS

#### Theme 1: Mohill at Work

Briefing/context-setting: What are the key issues facing us in terms of the world of work, the types of jobs we have now and the types we'd like to have in the future? Is our local economy strong enough and what could be done to make it better? What jobs could/should our 400 Community College pupils have in 10 years' time and where could/should they be? What's needed to make that happen? Can we learn from elsewhere?

- Lack of adequate employment is leading to emigration and poverty: an ageing population does not offer a great workforce and we need to follow good IT/ICT training with good IT/ICT jobs
- Poor Broadband/fibre connection restricts the development of 'smart' business

- Limited opportunities/choice/activities for young people
- Lack of overnight accommodation and restaurants in the town
- Need to promote and integrate with Lough Rynn/other facilities, walkways etc
- Too many vacant town centre premises: retail business has not adapted
- Red tape stops enterprise and Rates are a burden
- We look back too much to 'how-Mohill-used-to-be' but not enough to the future
- All-in-all though, there are still plenty of local Mohill positives to build on



## WHAT WAS SAID AT OUR PLANNING WORKSHOPS

## Theme 2: Social, Community, Heritage, Play and Leisure Mohill

Briefing/context-setting: This concerns the key aspects of the 'glue that holds Mohill together', the heritage and culture that have been handed on to us and the various local groups and activities that add such value to local life. What do we prize most and what must be done to retain/develop it? Equally, what are the gaps locally and how might they be filled?

- There's a lot of good work going on in Mohill, we lack integration, cooperation and joined-up thinking
- Existing facilities such as the Schools, Sports Centre and GAA complex aren't used enough
- Town centre doesn't have a multi-purpose social space nor has Mohill a focal point such as an hotel
- Need to showcase Mohill's special heritage, possibly through a project at the old Railway Station, and grow community/heritage tourism locally
- Red tape is placing growing burdens on volunteers

### Theme 3: Well-Being, Education and Learning and Mohill

Briefing/context-setting: Mohill is currently an education hub with nearly 600 children attending school in the town. How do we retain and develop that role? What more could we add to our 'offer' here? Are there gaps/deficits? What are the lifelong learning issues and/or adult education issues we face? Good individual and community health and well-being are central to any community. Are there things we need to do/make happen under this heading in Mohill?

- Mohill has an excellent schools' infrastructure but also faces competition from neighbouring towns and schools: it loses all its Third Level students to somewhere else and most never return to live here
- Much more is needed re life-long learning, from added childcare places through to helping address local qualifications deficits
- Personal and community well-being, loneliness, stress and mental health are growing concerns as is the ageing population and there are not enough social activity choices for young people, who can sometimes lack drive and motivation













#### Theme 4: Mohill's Town Fabric

Briefing/context-setting: This concerns the physical make-up of Mohill, its buildings, streets and infrastructure. It's home for nearly 900 people and a key place for a few thousand more. Does it 'work' for us all and if not, how could it be made to 'work better'? What about the town's appearance, its public realm and its traffic arrangements? Do we have housing-related issues here? What might we do to make Mohill 'stand out from the crowd'?

- Growing town centre vacancy rates are eating at the heart of Mohill in business, activity and appearance terms: it is no longer the commercial hub that it was
- Good work is being done re the painting scheme, Tidy Towns, etc
- The centre lacks social spaces and an evening/ night-time economy
- Traffic and parking need to be addressed so that they 'feed' rather than 'clog up' the town centre, alongside a focus on walking and cycling and the needs of pedestrians: Mohill's built fabric needs to be 'flaunted' more

## Theme 5: Mohill as a Place Attracting/Bringing in Others

Briefing/context-setting: Mohill already brings people in to shop, go to school, work, socialise and do business. That footfall is very important but how can we grow it? And if we want to capitalise on local tourism potential in South Leitrim and beyond, how can we best do that? Lough Rynn, the GAA Centre at Annaduff, The Shannon, the Dublin/Sligo rail-link and the N4 national route are all close by: how can we draw added value from them and contribute to them?

- Mohill isn't capitalizing enough on its closeness to the N4 and railway connections and it lacks restaurants, cafes, accommodation etc to bring people in and hold them: its evening/night-time offer is minimal
- The town has no unique selling point or 'wow factor' but has several physical/built assets that could be used to differentiate it as a place
- A key task is to stop outflows as much as to attract inflows





## OUR CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

The direct one-to-one consultations carried out with groups, individuals and organisations produced the feedback summarised below:

## The Positives About Life in Mohill

- Mohill is a good, content, secure and diverse community
- Its setting is stunning, with nearby assets such as The Shannon and Lough Rynn, and it hosts many vibrant community-based events
- The local community infrastructure is strong, healthy and committed
- The schools' infrastructure is very strong

#### **The Challenges Facing Mohill**

- Lack of local jobs and a sense that the town is dying, with reducing business and commercial activity, especially in the evenings/night-time: its days as a traditional retail centre are probably gone
- Mohill could develop as a commuter town for people who work elsewhere: housing is cheap and the basic community infrastructure (especially the schools) is good
- Need to do something to address town centre vacancy/ dereliction, to bring the sports centre more into use, to reflect the needs of 'car-less' people
- Mohill has to 'be' or 'stand for' something different from the crowd





### **What Someone Said: Community Survey Feedback**

"Okay here's the deal. Carrick on Shannon is the Boating Capital of Leitrim, Drumshanbo is The Food Hub, Dromod the Tidy Town and Boating. Make Mohill The Garden Capital ... it has loads of land and has already has bus-loads coming to Lough Rynn Gardens ... Garden Tourism!"



## WHAT PEOPLE TOLD US: OUR SURVEY FEEDBACK

During the summer of 2018 an E-based questionnaire survey of local people was carried out. It attracted 64 responses, 61% women and 39% men. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of those responding were aged 31-50 and most of the others (28% of the total) were aged 51-64. Four-out-of-ten respondents were from the town itself, 45% meanwhile were from the surrounding rural area and the remaining 15% were from elsewhere.

#### What People Like Best About Mohill

By far and away the most popular response here was the local people, who are seen to be friendly, kind and welcoming. Other core 'likes' included:

- Mohill's community spirit, homeliness, wholesomeness and sense of safety
- Its setting in rural south Leitrim
- Its avoidance of the ravages of 'Tiger Ireland'

#### What People Like Least About Mohill

The dominant response here concerned the perceived 'deadness' of the town centre and its declining number/ range of shops and businesses.

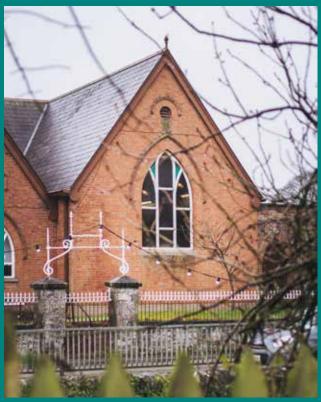


## Mohill's Key Opportunity Sites

The Railway Station was easily the most popular choice here, followed by the GAA grounds, the former Hotel, the Bank and the various former school/educational buildings. Lough Rynn is also consistently seen as something Mohill can and should further capitalize on, the river should be a centre-piece for the town and more use needs to be made of the sports centre.

## Who Needs Support in Mohill?

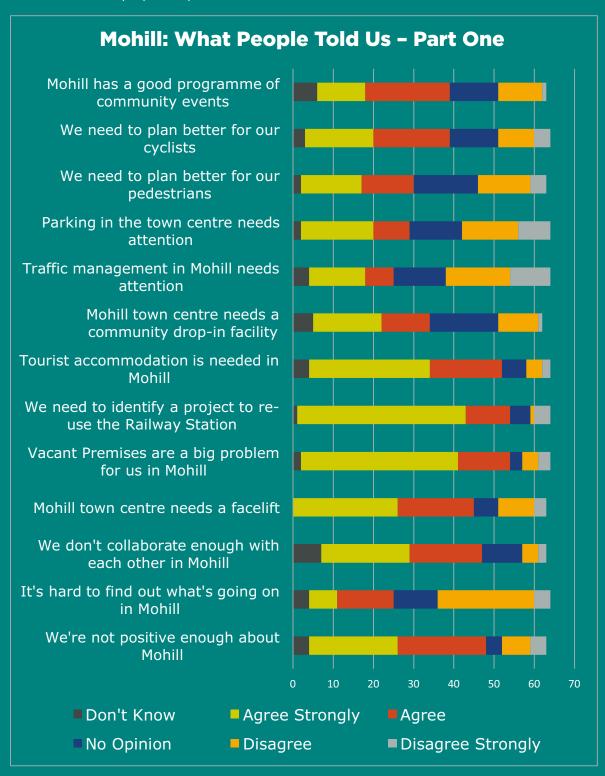
Whilst Mohill may be an ageing town in population terms, young people/teenagers were the sector most often put forward as needing further support and help locally, followed by older people and those who are walkers/pedestrians.



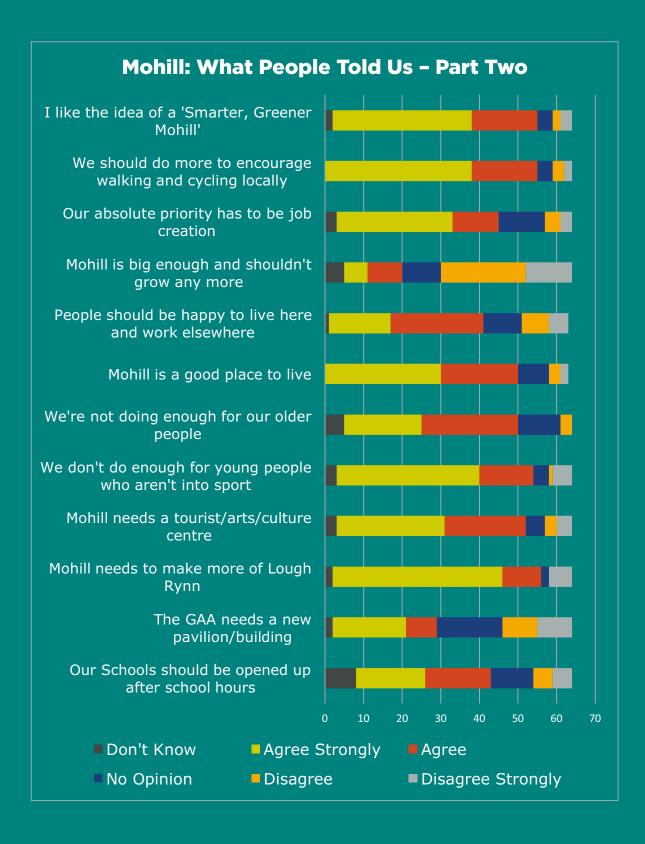


### 'What I Think of Mohill'

Within the survey people were asked to respond to a list of statements made about Mohill. The statements, and people's responses to them, are set out below:









The survey findings summarised above are fully consistent with the other consultation feedback and suggest a strong consensus that:

- Mohill is a good place to live and has potential to grow further
- The bringing back into positive use of the Railway Station should be a development priority: there is a parallel need for a central area drop-in/arts/culture/tourism centre
- A town centre facelift/plan to tackle vacancy, possibly including the provision of badly-needed tourist accommodation, is essential
- The 'Smart Green Mohill' initiative has a resonance locally
- More needs to be offered to younger people, to older people and to those who are not into direct/active sports participation
- Increased walking and cycling should be encouraged
- Central to Mohill's success will be greater community positivity and collaboration







## TYING IT ALL TOGETHER: THE MOHILL STRATEGIC SWOT GRID

| Chuore suble s   | VA/o alves a sa sa   |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| Strengths  | Weaknesses   |  |  |
| Things over which Mohill has control/can do something about  |  |  |  |
| Welcoming, content, secure and diverse community   | <ul> <li>A static and ageing population</li> </ul>   |  |  |
| ■ Vibrant community infrastructure   | <ul> <li>Low educational achievement</li> </ul>  |  |  |
| <ul><li>Local pace and quality of life</li></ul>   | <ul><li>Declining town centre</li></ul>  |  |  |
| <ul><li>Thriving education hub</li></ul>   | <ul> <li>Diminishing commercial activity</li> </ul>  |  |  |
| <ul> <li>Range of business, community, health/care, leisure<br/>and sports facilities</li> </ul>   | ■ Lack of jobs   |  |  |
|  | ■ Limited joined-up thinking/working   |  |  |
| <ul><li>Strong local heritage</li><li>Attractive townscape</li></ul>   | <ul> <li>No 'wow factor' about the town nothing to<br/>differentiate it</li> </ul>   |  |  |
| ■ 'Smart Green Mohill' initiative  | <ul><li>No evening economy</li></ul>   |  |  |
|  | ■ Tendency to hanker after a past that won't return  |  |  |
| <b>Opportunities</b>   | Threats  |  |  |
| Things over which Mohill doesn't have control but needs to react to  |  |  |  |
| Things over which Mohill doesn't   | have control but needs to react to   |  |  |
| Things over which Mohill doesn't  Location in Leitrim/Ireland  | have control but needs to react to  Poor Broadband provision   |  |  |
| <ul> <li>Location in Leitrim/Ireland</li> <li>Tier 2B centre designation in the County</li> </ul>  |  |  |  |
| <ul> <li>Location in Leitrim/Ireland</li> <li>Tier 2B centre designation in the County<br/>Development Plan</li> </ul>   | ■ Poor Broadband provision   |  |  |
| <ul> <li>Location in Leitrim/Ireland</li> <li>Tier 2B centre designation in the County</li> </ul>  | <ul><li>Poor Broadband provision</li><li>Ageing population</li></ul>   |  |  |
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# THE MOHILL PLAN INTRODUCTION VISION

The brief for this process was to develop a Plan for Mohill which:

- Is based on true partnership working and a strong community engagement, in terms of both the planning and delivery/implementation elements
- Reflects/complements existing relevant plans, vet is innovative
- Creates a shared and widely-owned vision for Mohill which, whilst involving a degree of 'stretch', is practical, pragmatic and manages expectations
- Doesn't hide behind a long 'shopping list' of actions but rather sets out a limited number of SMART actions which will retain a focus and commitment and some of which can deliver 'quick wins': the aim is for 'quality and impact' rather than 'quantity but insignificance'
- Allocates those actions to lead and partner delivery groups/agencies

The vision set for Mohill is:

A busy, prosperous, good-looking town of 1,000-plus people that's people-friendly, business-savvy, visitor-appealing and energy-efficient, that cherishes its strong past and that works to secure an even stronger future.



### TAKING THINGS FORWARD: OUR PRIORITIES

#### Theme 1: Mohill at Work

Mohill has several good businesses but as a retail/ commercial centre it is only a shadow of what it once was, with its central area increasingly blighted by vacant properties. Key work-job-related priorities for the town are to:

- Build on the 'Smart Mohill' branding and develop people's knowledge and skills capacities, particularly through the resources of the Enterprise Centre and Community College
- Capitalise on Lough Rynn and its footfall by simultaneously getting footfall back into the town centre, in the day-time, in the evenings and at weekends and thereby helping sustain existing and new businesses

All the while Mohill should also be promoted as a 'place where people live whilst working elsewhere'.





## TAKING THINGS FORWARD: OUR PRIORITIES

## Theme 2: Social, Community, Heritage, Play and Leisure Mohill

The local community infrastructure, heritage and culture, the 'glue that holds Mohill together' and which add such value to local life are very strong and vibrant. This is the case across the board though there are deficits re young people who aren't into sport. Emerging priorities include:

- Putting in place a 'community governance model' that will promote an understanding that 'everybody is in this together' and will facilitate joined-up thinking and joint-working locally
- Educating local people about their place, Mohill, to develop/grow a pride in it
- Providing a fit-for-purpose GAA pavilion and a town centre community hub
- More local communication re `what's-on/who's-doingwhat'
- Making better use of what's there and using the urban fabric as a resource

## Theme 3: Well-Being, Education and Learning and Mohill

Mohill is a strong education hub with nearly 600 children attending very good Schools in the town. But there is a sense that a greater town/school integration could be achieved. Beyond School, everyone going on to Third Level is lost at least temporarily to Mohill and the area shares the classic Irish rural dilemma of 'educating young people to leave'. Key priorities include:

- Expanding education/training opportunities beyond the formal school/curriculum setting and increasing childcare provision
- Developing a central social hub facility in the town
- Improving young people's motivation and their 'pride in/commitment to place'
- Using music, drama, sports and a 'non-alcohol culture' to support local community development





#### **Theme 4: Mohill's Town Fabric**

Mohill town centre is firmly founded on tradition and longevity and is attractive and pleasing to the eye, with very good work ongoing via the Tidy Towns group and the central area painting scheme. But growing vacancy-trending-to-dereliction rates and an increasing 'at risk' status for many of its significant buildings are debilitating the town and its ongoing priorities therefore include:

- Bringing life, footfall and town centre living back into the central area
- Capitalising on the town's landmark buildings
- Addressing car-parking, traffic management and the needs of pedestrians, safely and pleasantly



## Theme 5: Mohill as a Place Attracting/Bringing in Others

Mohill already attracts/brings people in to shop (though limited and declining), go to school, work, socialize and do business. But equally much business flows out of the town to other places. And much other traffic/footfall passed the town by. The priorities for driving the town forward are:

- Differentiate Mohilll as a destination of choice for people
- Ensure this differentiated Mohill presents visiting people with offers, opportunities and a clear sense of added value
- Develop a strong corporate/community focus on attracting people into Mohill and then leave it to individual projects, groups and businesses to exploit that added footfall to best effect

#### **Theme 6: Energy and Mohill**

Through the Mohill Sustainable Energy Community initiative, Global Green Sustainability drew up an Energy Master Plan (EMP) for Mohill which identified energy-saving opportunities for local businesses, community projects and public buildings. A Renewable Energy Feasibility Study was also completed for the town. Over €1m in energy savings have been identified as a result.

The task here is to complement but not duplicate the ongoing Energy Masterplan which will make Mohill 'Smarter' and 'Greener' in terms of working, learning and living. Priorities include:

- Making walking and cycling easier for local people
- Making Mohill 'look green'
- Looking at how more green energy might be generated locally







## 'THE MOHILL PACKAGE'

Six specific Projects, the 'Mohill Package', have been identified to bring practical and meaningful life to the various priorities set out above.

## **Project 1: Mohill's Community Governance**

Mohill has many vibrant groups, organisations and initiatives in place but a need for more joined-up thinking, better co-ordination, improved communication and increased joint-working between them has been a consistent thread emerging from the 'Meitheal Mohill' consultation process.

Mohill needs a structure which will bring all its stakeholders together and work to these principles:

- A practice of 'one place and one vote' for all participating groups/organisations, regardless of their size or scale, yet a parallel acceptance that principle that not every partner can make the same contribution, provide the same inputs and/or deliver the same things to the project
- Openness and transparency
- Direct reporting of group representatives back to their full 'home groups'
- Consensus decision-making and a recognition that everyone can gain but that not everyone can gain everything they might need/want
- That this is a process rather than an event
- Group-by-group sign-off of plans, proposals, initiatives
- A sharing of running costs
- Regular check-in meetings with the wider community
- Agreement of and working to an annual calendar of Mohill events, a marketing/promotion plan for those events and an annual community engagement plan
- Linking in, collaborating and sharing ideas/experiences/ learning with our 'brother/sister' similar-sized towns in Leitrim, Ballinamore and Manorhamilton







## **Project 2: Mohill's Designed Framework for Living**

In September 2018 Leitrim County Council successfully applied to government's Rural Regeneration and Development Fund for support to prepare an innovative 'designed framework for living' for Mohill. The application was very heavily informed by this planning process and its underpinning consultations.

Mohill's proposed 'designed framework for living' will range well beyond the traditional focus of many urban regeneration plans on public realm and the physical refurbishment of 'tired' spaces/facilities. Instead it aims to integrate urban design with other local initiatives, not so much to change Mohill's appearance/urban fabric as to change lifestyles and patterns of living/behaviour within the town.

It is based on the belief that a successful urban Mohill will be about HOW people live as much as about WHERE they live, building meticulously on its 'Smart, Green Mohill' branding.

The framework will aim to develop Mohill's disparate assets, activities and flows in ways that will help address the difficulties and deficits it experiences. The brief for the 'designed framework for living' plan is likely to include requirements to address/progress the following:

#### **Connectivity**

- Pedestrian and cycle linkages to/from the town's 'anchors' (things/places such as the Canon Donohue Hall/Childcare Centre, Churches, Community College, GAA pitch, Mart and Schools which attract huge footfall, but which lie around the town centre periphery on opposing sites from each other)
- Possible linkages between the Dromod road walkway, Treanmore and Lough Rynn
- Better traffic management and parking which serves/ facilitates a working town
- A digital web which addresses many of the 'tyranny of distance' issues that have traditionally bedevilled rural Ireland





## 'THE MOHILL PACKAGE'

#### **Sustainability**

- Making Mohill a town that's 'high-vibrancy but low-energy'
- Bringing residential living to down-town Mohill
- Setting out how, for example, The Mart complex can become multi-use and contribute to the town's life, e.g. by providing parking, periodic civic space, energy generation and waste management possibilities
- Developing the town as a 'digital exemplar' for small rural town Ireland

### The 'designed framework for living' plan will bring together in an innovative combination:

- Traditional urban master-planning but with a focus on pedestrian/cycle connectivity, trail-making and signage and on creating a public realm that's unique to Mohill
- Design guidance for developers, for example re how to use/maximize solar panels, how to harvest rainwater, etc
- Practical, hands-on ways of applying digital technologies so they improve the quality of local living
- Plans and advice re LED street lighting, shop frontage development and design, age-friendly (including both children and older people) lay-outs
- Specific proposals by the Council/others re service developments/outreach
- 'Practical attention-grabbers' such as heated public seating for older people powered by alternative energies
- The marketing of Mohill as the 'place to live in whilst working somewhere else'
- Full engagement with the local private and community sectors

#### Liveliness

- Creating a life-long living residential ethos in the town centre (for example by opening back-lands, re-using existing buildings and/or 'living over the shop' initiatives) so it becomes an attractive, affordable and practical place to live for people/ households at all stages of the life-cycle
- Developing a 'non-raucous' evening/night-time/ weekend economy
- Differentiating Mohill away from 'sameness' with many similar small rural Irish towns

In the meantime there are several ongoing, day-to-day actions that can and should be continued or introduced to restore vigour to the town centre. These include sustaining the painting scheme, encouraging 'popup' uses in vacant premises, hosting more festivals/ street activities, developing a Mohill Town Centre Gift Card scheme, putting displays/art pieces into vacant shop windows, more people getting directly involved in the Tidy Towns work, maintaining and promoting Mohill town centre as a safe place and everybody championing Mohill.





#### **Project 3:**

#### 'The Greening of Mohill'

The planning process has identified a clear and stronglyheld view that Mohill needs to differentiate itself, to 'stand out from the crowd' and to give people a reason for coming here, if only in the first instance to visit.

With the 'Smart, Green Mohill' platform already in place, the physical 'greening' of Mohill is a logical way of combining differentiation with an offer/invitation/reason to visit. This project will involve the development and implementation of a comprehensive and spectacular planting scheme for Mohill which will:

- Run throughout the entire central area of the town (north/south from the Sports Centre to St Patrick's Church and east/west from the GAA grounds to the Mart), creating an unmissable and undeniable 'wow factor' for the town
- Not just be limited to public realm spaces but will flow into adjacent community and private areas
- Look at successful practice elsewhere in similar settings
- Include all sizes of flora, from individual plants in hanging baskets to large trees
- Deliver year-round colour and variety and be designed to complement/add value to seasonal activities/ events such as St Patrick's Day and Christmas Lights
- Use planting patterns to 'map out/signpost' the central area, to help tell the story of Mohill and to add to the interpretation of the town
- Highlight and celebrate local native flora
- Involve local groups, individuals/families, businesses and Leitrim County Council in its planning, implementation and maintenance/upkeep
- Be substantive and deliver longevity but at a low cost

## **Project 4:**Developing a Mohill Hub

Much of the planning feedback focused on how Mohill lacks a central 'multi-use + informal drop-in community facility', a place which can provide a series of offers to people whose interests lie beyond sports and other organized activities. That place needs to act as a community hub, a place which can provide the central area buzz, energy and dynamic that can underpin its regeneration. The old Railway Station offers good scope here and its potential as a community hub – one that could link into the possible development of the former VEC building (see Project 5: 'Learning Mohill' below) – needs to be appraised.



A key task for 2019 is to scope out the nature of this hub and draw up a short-list of options for its delivery.





### 'THE MOHILL PACKAGE'

#### **Project 5: 'Learning Mohill'**

If Mohill is to properly develop as a 'Smart town' it needs to increase its learning capacity. There are needs here to meet current childcare deficits, focus on Post-Leaving Cert opportunities, develop vocational training/supports that will help drive the 'Smart Green Mohill' agenda and grow the capacity of the town's adult and older populations, many of whom lack formal qualifications. The Enterprise Centre in particular will maintain and grow its work in the areas of Youth Reach, Back to Education and LTI Computer Applications.

But it is now time to take 'Learning Mohill' to a new level. Work is therefore progressing on scoping out an innovative reinvigoration of the town's former VEC building. The aim is to develop it in a two-pronged way:

- Create a training facility/resource in the 'back half' of the building that will link into the Sports Centre and deliver structured, accredited training (to QQI Level 5) in, along with other possibilities, Sports, Recreation and Exercise
- Re-focus the 'front half' as a 25/30-place hostel accommodation

In doing this, Mohill will tackle many of the issues identified through this planning process. A vacant building will be brought back into productive use, a synergy will be created between two town centre resources/assets, town centre footfall will be increased, strong links and partnerships with Lough Rynn and the GAA Centre at Annaduff will be developed, overnight stays locally (for example by sports teams on 'bonding' projects) will be dramatically increased, jobs will be created and the town will offer and be seen to offer 'something different.'





### **Project 6: 'Energising Mohill'**

Mohill has a growing presence and status as a Sustainable Energy Community but now needs to complement that with a growing capacity to generate its own energy. Apart from contributing to the 'Smart Green Mohill' agenda, this will help differentiate the town and make it 'stand out from the crowd'.

This Plan is not about repeating or re-presenting the Sustainable Energy Community initiative. The Designed Framework for Living project will however ensure that the sustainability agenda becomes woven into the fabric of Mohill. Beyond all that, but totally complementing it, a local partnership is working on setting up the delivery within Mohill of a QQI Level 5 Certificate in Control Technology covering topics such as Renewable Energy Systems, Renewable Energy, Production Systems, Communications, Computer Aided Design, Building Construction, Word Processing, Control Systems, Electronics, Maths for Engineering and Safety and Health at Work and providing some work experience.

This will increase Mohill's footfall, bring its Sustainable Energy ethos to a new level, build local capacity and, crucially, differentiate Mohill and 'set it out from the crowd'.



### **HELPING TAKE FORWARD MOHILL**

### **Groups involved in the Mohill planning process include:**

- Active Age
- Aurivo/Mohill Mart
- Churches
- Credit Union
- Eivers Lane Childcare
- Greenway
- IFA.
- Leitrim Association of People with Disabilities
- Leitrim County Council
- Lough Rynn Castle Hotel
- Mohill Business Association
- Mohill Community Network
- Mohill Enterprise Centre
- Mohill Family Support Centre
- Mohill Athletics, Basketball, GAA and LGFA
- Mohill Historical Society
- Mohill Show
- Mohill Youth Group
- Schools (Community College, Hunt NS, St Manchan's NS)
- Sligo IT (via the Sustainable Energy Communities Programme)
- Tidy Towns

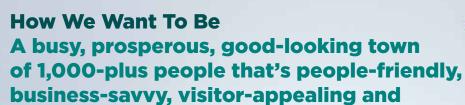












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