

# HEADFORD

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## Town Centre Health Check



Ár dTodhchaí  
Tuaithé  
Our Rural  
Future



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland







Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe  
Galway County Council

HUB  
Planning  
People Centred Planning



Lár Bailte ar dTús  
Town Centre First

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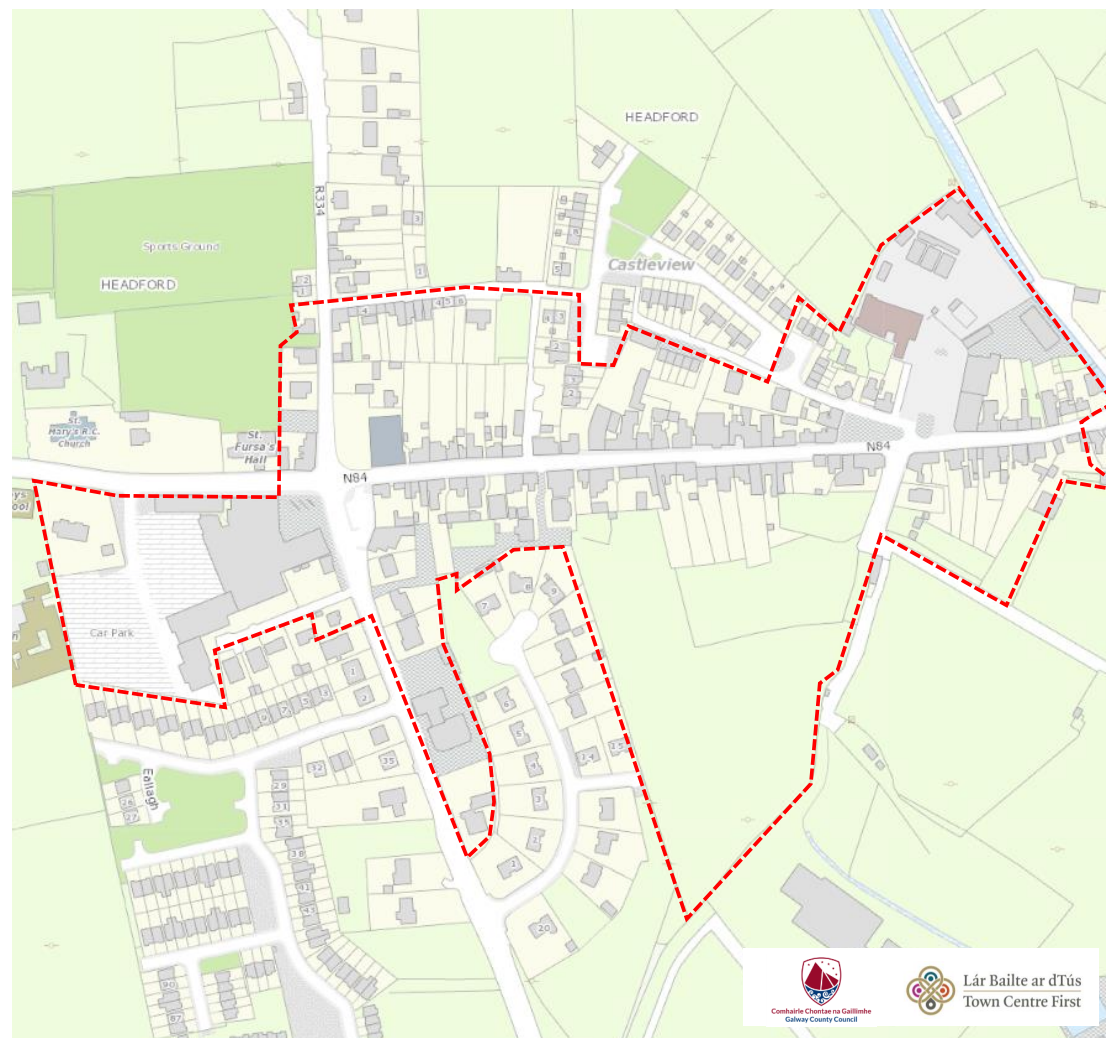
# 1.0 INTRODUCTION & APPROACH

This Town Centre Health Check (TCHC) for Headford was prepared by Hub Planning on behalf of Galway County Council, with support from the Headford Town Team. Underpinned by the 'Town Centre First' (TCF) policy, which aims to foster the development of vibrant and sustainable town centres, this report summarises the key findings from data collected through the 15-step process developed by the Heritage Council and its partners. It highlights specific challenges and strengths of Headford, utilising a place-based placemaking approach that reflects the town's unique characteristics.

## 1.1 Study Area

The main focus area for this study is Headford Town Centre, as designated in the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028. However, the boundary was slightly extended to include the school and community services for the purpose of the auditing phase. For the demographic analysis and desktop research phases, the town boundary as defined by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) was used.

**Map:** Headford Town Centre First Health Check Boundary



## 1.2 Methodology

The methodology follows the Heritage Council's 15-step Collaborative Town Centre Health Check process, which includes traffic and pedestrian counts, public consultation, business consultation and land use audits. The process ensured a structured and inclusive approach, capturing a detailed snapshot of Headford's town centre. Key elements of the study are listed below:



Disclaimer: Please note that the audits and consultations referenced in this report were conducted in November 2024. This timing may have influenced the observations and outcomes noted, as visitor numbers and activity levels are typically higher in summer months.



### Consumer & Business Survey

Two surveys were widely distributed, one aimed at gathering public perspectives from residents and visitors and another targeted at local businesses.



### Land Use Classification

A land use survey was conducted to assess the town's land use patterns and vacancy rates, using the GOAD classification system for a colour-coded analysis of land use types and their proportions.



### Traffic and Pedestrian Flow Analysis

Traffic and pedestrian counts were conducted to assess movement within and around the town at various times over two days.



### Accessibility Audits

Car parking audits, accessibility audits, desire line analysis and walkability audits were undertaken to provide an understanding of movement and connectivity in the area.



### Socio-Economic & Environmental Profiling

A desktop analysis was conducted to examine key social, economic, and environmental data. This was developed in accordance with the CSO Town boundary.



### SCOT

A Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, and Threats (SCOT) analysis was undertaken for Headford Town.

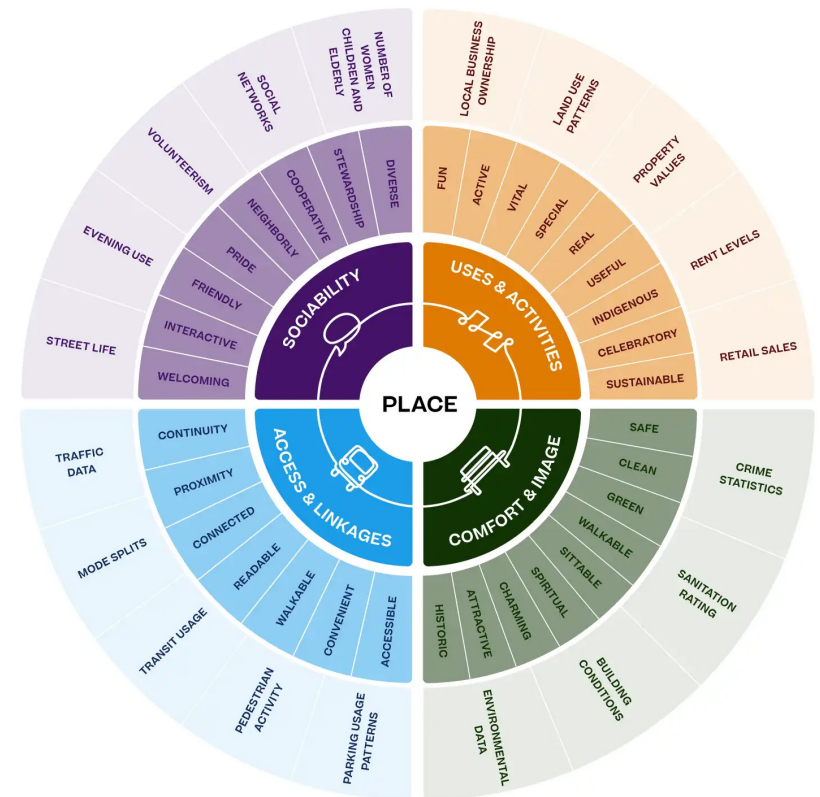
# 1.3 Report Structure

The report begins with a comprehensive overview of Headford Town Centre, starting with 'Introduction and Approach', followed by 'History and Context', 'Community Snapshot' and 'Consultation Snapshot'. These sections provide essential background and an overview of the Health Check approach. The body of the report progresses through thematic chapters in accordance with the 'Place Diagram' framework developed by the Project for Public Spaces (PPS) (detailed below). Health Check key findings are organised into four distinct sections that align with the main categories of the framework: Sociability, Uses and Activities, Comfort and Image, and Access and Linkages. It concludes with a 'SCOT Analysis' that synthesises key findings from consultations, audits, and research, summarising the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Finally, the report concludes with recommendations for possible next steps.

## Placemaking approach

Placemaking is a central theme in the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028, aligned with broader strategies outlined in the National Planning Framework (NPF) and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) to enhance livability through quality design and strategic public space management. This collaborative process involves the community in creating vibrant, inclusive, and functional public spaces that reflect local identity and cater to specific needs.

Placemaking enhances the vitality of town centres and villages, promoting a sense of belonging and active community engagement. It supports compact growth and enhances well-being by providing diverse and accessible spaces, focusing on elements such as urban design, sustainable travel, and accessibility. This report integrates the 'Place Diagram' framework developed by the Project for Public Spaces (PPS), following best practices that foster sustainable and vibrant community-focused urban development.



**Figure:** Place Diagram framework by Project for Public Spaces

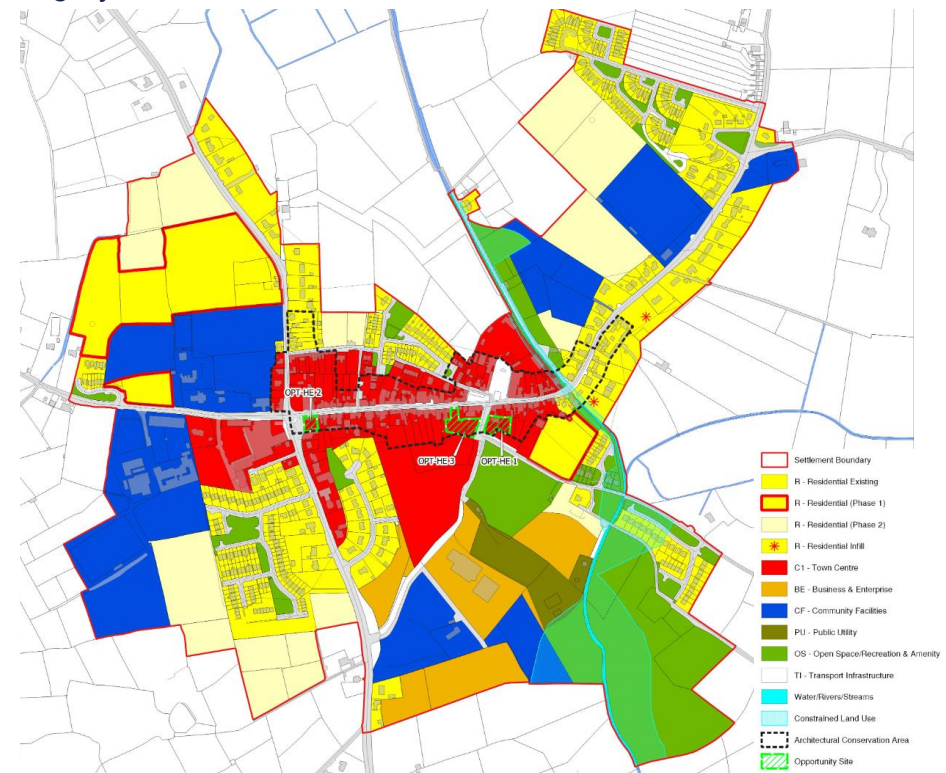
# 2.0 HISTORY & CONTEXT

Headford is a strategically located Small Growth Town (SGT) in County Galway, approximately 26 km from Galway City and 20 km from Tuam, straddling the county boundary with Mayo. Its position along the N84 provides strong transport links between Galway and Mayo, while regional roads and limited bus services connect it to surrounding areas. Its historic town centre, a planned 19th-century settlement influenced by Headford Castle and its demesne, serves as the focal point for the town's administrative, commercial, cultural, and residential activities. The core, stretching from St. George's Square to St. Mary's Church, features a mix of traditional vernacular buildings and neoclassical public architecture, designated as an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) to preserve its unique character.

Headford is a commuter town with local employment in retail, services, and small-scale enterprises. Tourism offerings include proximity to the area's natural, archaeological, and architectural heritage, especially around Lough Corrib and sites like Ross Errily. Efforts to revitalise the town centre to date have focused on promoting sustainable, well-designed retail and mixed-use developments while preserving Headford's distinctive streetscape.

The Galway County Development Plan (CDP) 2022-2028 identifies several opportunity sites within the town centre which aim to enhance the towns functionality and vibrancy. The CPD also encourages the

reuse of vacant and derelict buildings to support economic vitality, improve amenities, and create a robust base for employment. With its heritage, strategic location, and surrounding natural amenities, Headford's town centre is positioned to grow as a hub of tourism and economic activity while maintaining its historical and architectural integrity.



**Map:** Headford Land Use Zoning Map Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028

# 3.0 COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

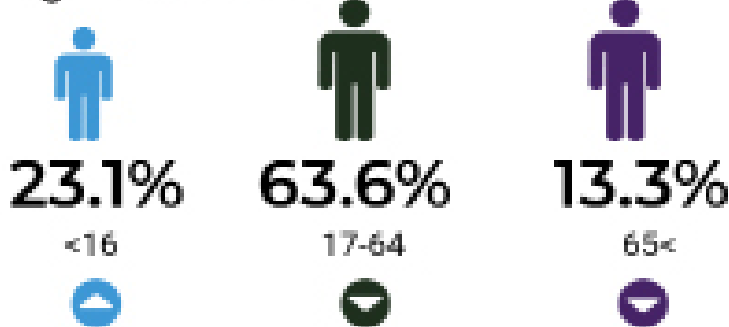
 Higher than State    Lower than State    Same as State

Population 2022  
**1,235**

**+26.9%**   
Population  
Change  
2016-2022

Nationality   
  
1 in 10 people are Non-Irish nationals

## Age Structure



## Health



## Disability

**21.9%**  
...of the population had a  
disability of any extent.

## Ethnicity





## Economic Status



## Education Level



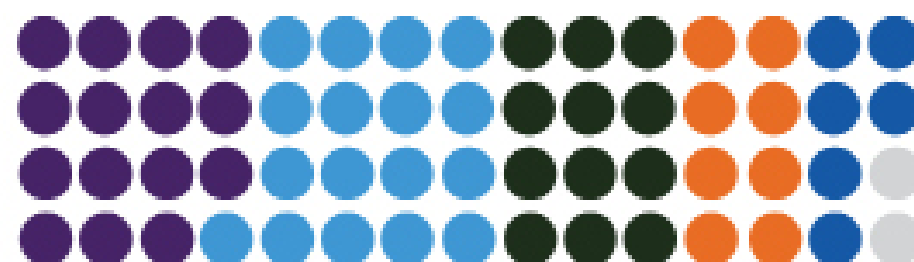
## Housing Stock

472

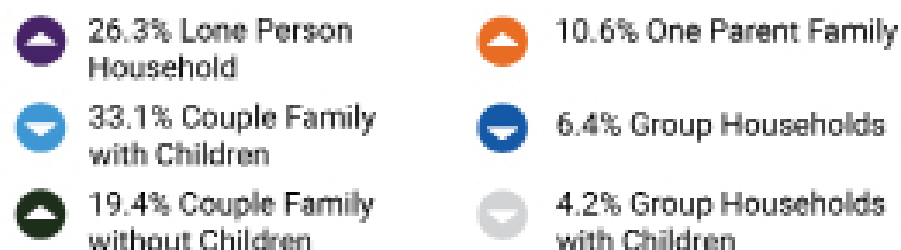
2.6  
Persons in private  
households

20.1%  
Housing growth  
from 2016-2022

## Household Structure



## Tenure Type





# 4.0 CONSULTATION SNAPSHOT

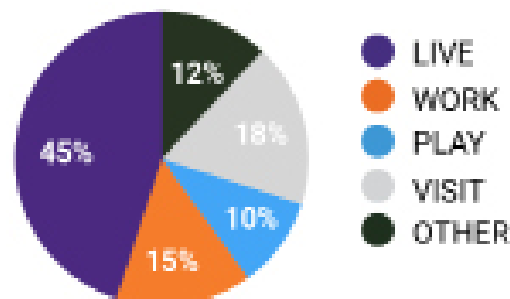
455

PUBLIC SURVEY  
RESPONDENTS

Gender



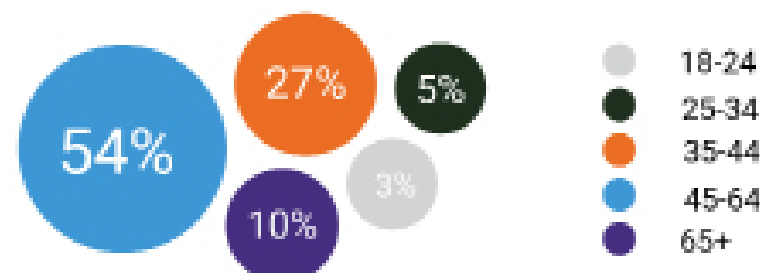
Headford is where I...



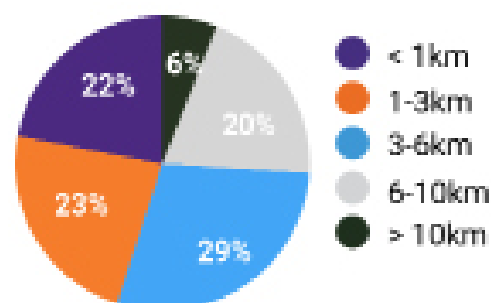
6

BUSINESS SURVEY  
RESPONDENTS

Age



How far do you live from  
Headford Town Centre?



6

WALKABILITY  
AUDITS

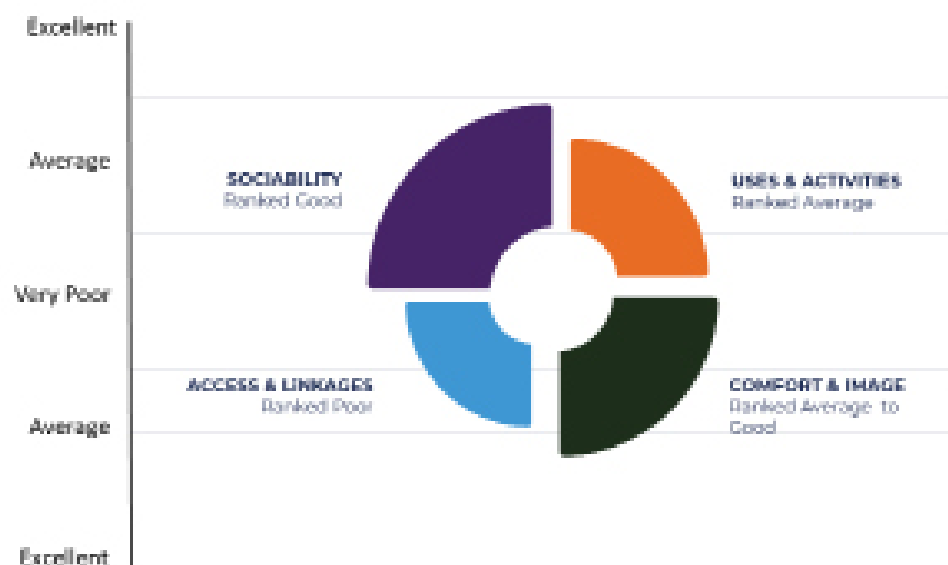
Respondents identified as...



## 4.1 Key Findings Consultation

The figures below outline some of the high-level consultation findings in accordance with the four placemaking themes. Further consultation analysis is provided throughout the report.

Public and business survey participants were asked to rate the four placemaking categories from Very Poor to Excellent.



WE NEED MORE....

Disability parking  
Green Space  
Buses  
Restaurants  
Cafés  
Shops  
Taxis  
public amenities  
Parking

TOP 5 - HIGHEST RANKING ▲

1. Community groups/organisations
2. Feeling of safety
3. Sense of community
4. Community events and festivals
5. Recreation and sports facilities

TOP 5 - LOWEST RANKING ▼

1. Cycle infrastructure
2. Traffic
3. Vacancy and dereliction
4. Access for people with additional needs
5. Tourist amenities

WE NEED LESS....

Traffic lights  
Pollution  
Pubs  
Parking on Main Street  
Vacant buildings  
illegal parking  
Cars  
Traffic

# 5.0 POLICY CONTEXT

The diagram below outlines the multi-level planning frameworks that guide our approach, ranging from EU and national strategies to regional and local development plans.



# 6.0 USES AND ACTIVITIES

This section of the report explores Uses and Activities, which refer to how people engage with a place and the opportunities it offers, such as dining, shopping, recreation, cultural events, public spaces, job opportunities, and housing, all of which contribute to economic development, social interaction and community life.

## 6.1 Key Consultation Insights

### Working well

#### Sport and recreation

Aspects under this pillar were generally rated highly, having the second-highest average score of the four pillars. Recreation and sports facilities were seen as the strongest aspect with 62% of respondents rating them as good or excellent, and high proportion of people saying it was their favourite thing about the town. However, there were still repeated calls for more sport and recreation facilities in the town, particularly a swimming pool.

#### Active and vibrant town centre

Survey respondents described Headford town as active, vibrant and 'up and coming', with significant proportions of respondents rating

### Consultation Findings

How locals rated the 'Uses and Activities' aspects of Headford.





quality and range of cafes, pubs and restaurants (38%) and supports, services and amenities (28%) positively. Backing this up, all business survey respondents said that they have seen improved trade over the last 12 months, and the majority of public respondents said that they often purchased groceries (96%) and hardware/DIY (90%) in Headford.

## Areas for improvement

### Tourism

Tourist amenities ranked the lowest in this category, with 69% rating them as poor or very poor. Consultation identified tourism as an important sector with significant growth potential—both as a driver of the local economy and as a means to preserve and enhance local heritage. There was a clear local desire for Headford to build on its natural, archaeological, and architectural heritage and to further develop its tourism potential.

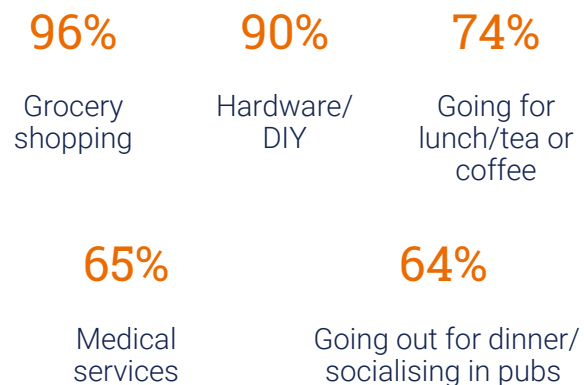
### Employment and retail opportunities

Consultation identified limited job opportunities as a key concern, with 60% rating them as poor or very poor. There was strong support for encouraging appropriately scaled commercial and retail development, particularly on brownfield and underused sites in the town centre, to create local jobs, reduce retail vacancy, and strengthen overall vitality. A significant number of respondents (54%)

also expressed a need for more diverse retail options, especially clothing shops and a budget supermarket. Due to these gaps, almost all respondents (90%) reported travelling to Galway City to access these amenities. Other frequently mentioned needs included restaurants or cafés (26%) and leisure facilities (25%).

### Consultation Findings

Do you go to Headford to purchase any of the following goods or services?



## 6.2 Land Use Audit

A land use audit for Headford was undertaken on the 7th of November 2024. It involved a team walking the town centre, carrying out a visual inspection from street level and recording the various uses of the ground floors of buildings. These uses were then recorded on a map using the GOAD classification system to ascertain the various ratios of different land use types within the Town Centre.

### Most and least common land use types

The analysis revealed that the most common type of land use in the Town Centre was residential, accounting for 9,609m<sup>2</sup> of the ground floor space in the study area, or 28.8% of the total. The least common type of land use in the Town Centre was Health and Medical services, accounting for 414m<sup>2</sup> of the ground floor space in the study area, or 1.2% of the total.

### Vacancy rates

Vacant or unoccupied buildings (including those unoccupied due to renovations) accounted for 5,670m<sup>2</sup> of the building footprints in the Town Centre or 17.0% of the overall total. These were relatively evenly spaced along Main Street, with a high proportion of commercial vacancies.

### Leisure and retail services

Leisure services within the Town, including cafes, restaurants, pubs and hotels accounted for 1,999m<sup>2</sup> of the ground floor land use or 6.0% of the total. Retail services such as hair and beauty salons, car

services and funeral directors accounted for 2,378m<sup>2</sup> of the ground floor land use or 7.1% of the total. There were 15 premises classified as financial services including banks, credit unions, accountant and auctioneers accounting for 1,603m<sup>2</sup> or 4.8%.

### Convenience and comparison retail

Convenience retail such as supermarkets represented a large percentage of the overall Town Centre land use at 6,326m<sup>2</sup> or 19.3% of the total, despite there only being three premises recorded under this use. This is attributed to the large Aldi and Tesco supermarkets on Castle Road. Conversely, comparison retail, such as clothing and homeware shops, accounted for a much lower overall area at 857m<sup>2</sup>, or 2.6%, despite eight premises being recorded.

### Public services

Public services accounted for 1,714m<sup>2</sup> or 5.1% of the overall land use of the Town Centre. The four recorded premises with this use were Headford Library, Solas Resource Centre, Ability West and the Area Office for the Office of Public Works (OPW) beside St. George's Square.

# 28%

Residential

# 17%

Vacant properties

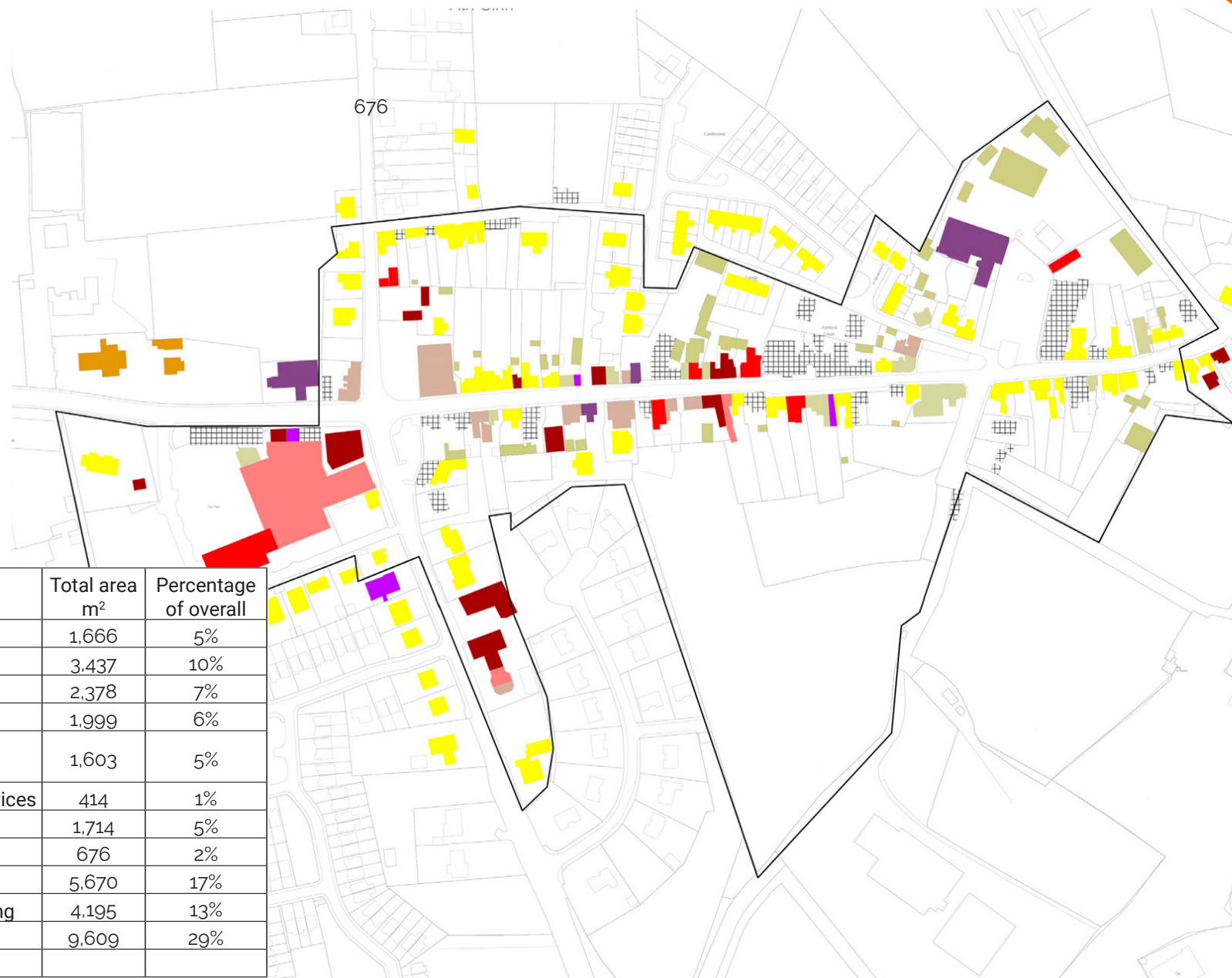
# 17%

Convenience and  
Retail

# 6%

Leisure services

Colour Code	Classification	Total area m <sup>2</sup>	Percentage of overall
	Comparison	1,666	5%
	Convenience	3,437	10%
	Retail Service	2,378	7%
	Leisure Services	1,999	6%
	Financial and business services	1,603	5%
	Health and Medical services	414	1%
	Public Service	1,714	5%
	Religious Service	676	2%
	Vacant	5,670	17%
	Storage and Warehousing	4,195	13%
	Residential	9,609	29%
	Town Centre Boundary		



## 6.3 Key Socio-Economic Insights

### **Significant growth in housing and population**

- The total dwelling stock in Headford Town rose by 20.1% between, amounting to a total of 472 dwellings in 2022. This growth was substantially higher than in Galway County, which saw a 9.1% growth in dwelling stock, and the State's growth rate of 9.6%. However, this housing stock growth was still below the significant population growth seen in Headford across the same period (26.9%).

### **Active rental market**

- In 2022, housing tenure in Headford Town presented a distinctive pattern. Owner-occupied dwellings constituted 67.9% of the housing stock, which is less than the proportion found in Galway County (78.8%) but aligns closely with the State average (68.9%). Private rentals accounted for 22.9%, a figure notably higher than the averages for both Galway County (14.2%) and the State (18.8%). Social housing made up 6.9% of dwellings, exceeding the county's proportion (4.6%) but falling short compared to the State (10.4%).

### **Lower average monthly rent prices**

- The average monthly rent in Headford (€1,094) which was low compared to the average for Galway County (€1,390). The rental price was relatively stable in Headford with a marginal increase (4.7%) between 2018 and 2023, much lower when compared to Galway (36.9%).

### **High commercial vacancy**

- In 2020, Headford recorded 19.7% commercial vacancy rate, which was substantially higher than the Galway County and State figures (13.4% and 11.4% respectively).

### **Relatively small household size**

- In 2022, Headford Town's average household size was 2.60 people, which is smaller compared to both Galway County (2.83 people) and the State (2.79 people). The most prevalent household size was two-person households, constituting 29.9% of all households.



# 7.0 ACCESS AND LINKAGES

This section of the report examines the vital role of accessibility and connectivity in public spaces. Placemaking emphasises creating engaging, easily accessible areas that encourage frequent visits. Accessibility depends on integration with the surrounding environment, with effective public spaces designed for easy entry and navigation.

## 7.1 Key Consultation Insights

### Working well

#### Convenience and location

While the overall rating for access and connectivity was relatively low, certain aspects demonstrated moderate strengths. The convenience of getting to and around the town received the highest score within this pillar, with 15% of respondents rating it as excellent or good. Similarly, safe and accessible footpaths were rated positively by 16% of respondents, indicating some appreciation for walkable infrastructure despite wider concerns. These ratings were supported by behavioural evidence: 27% of respondents reported that they always or often walked into town, suggesting that proximity and compactness offer a foundation for more sustainable mobility.

#### Consultation Findings

How locals rated the 'Access and Linkages' aspects of Headford.



### **Digital connectivity**

Consultation identified digital connectivity as a local strength, particularly for businesses. 40% of business respondents indicated that online and digital trading supports were beneficial in Headford, highlighting a valuable opportunity to strengthen local economic resilience and remote accessibility alongside improvements to physical infrastructure.

## **Areas for improvement**

### **Active transport**

While Headford benefits from a compact and walkable layout, the town currently lacks a dedicated walking and cycling network. Cycle infrastructure, in particular, received lower ratings, with 85% of respondents indicating it could be improved. This presents a strong opportunity to develop new and upgraded pedestrian and cycling routes, especially those linking residential areas with the town centre. Respondents suggested measures such as widening footpaths, installing additional pedestrian crossings, and introducing safe, dedicated cycleways to encourage more active travel choices.

### **Car traffic and parking**

A high proportion of respondents (90%) reported regularly driving into town, reflecting a strong reliance on private vehicles. Traffic was rated poorly by 75% of respondents, and concerns were raised about congestion and road safety. Proposed solutions included a bypass, one-

way systems, and revised traffic flows. The most frequently suggested improvement was better management of on-street parking along the main street, which was seen as a practical way to reduce congestion and improve safety. Additional measures such as enhanced lighting, more pedestrian crossings, and targeted traffic calming were also highlighted.

### **Public transport**

More than half of respondents (54%) rated public transport provision as poor, citing infrequent service and overcrowded buses. While Headford benefits from regional connections to Galway, Ballinrobe, and Ballina, these services were often described as insufficient, especially during peak times. A total of 23% of respondents suggested improvements such as increased service frequency, route expansion, and upgraded facilities, including bus shelters.

## 7.2 Vehicle Counts

Vehicle counts were carried out in Headford Town Centre to assess traffic levels by type, direction, and time. Conducted alongside pedestrian counts, they took place on Friday 22nd and Saturday 23rd November during three 30-minute slots (13:00, 15:00, and 17:00) at three locations: beside the Angler's Rest Hotel, outside the Solas Resource Centre, and at St. George's Square—all on the N84.

The total number of vehicles recorded over the two days was 5,355, with 3,207 on the 22nd and 2,148 on the 23rd.

### Busiest and quietest locations and times

The busiest location was the Solas Resource Centre, with 1,851 vehicles over two days (1,152 on the 22nd, 699 on the 23rd). The busiest session was at St. George's Square on the 22nd from 13:00–13:30, recording 496 vehicles (192 towards, 304 away from the Town Centre).

St. George's Square had the lowest total count, with 1,694 vehicles (990 on the 22nd, 704 on the 23rd). The quietest sessions were at St. George's Square (22nd, 17:00–17:30) and the Solas Resource Centre (23rd, 17:00–17:30), both with 198 vehicles. The busiest overall time was 13:00–13:30 on the 22nd, with 1,243 vehicles (646 towards, 597 away). The quietest was 17:00–17:30 on the 23rd, with 664 vehicles (346 towards, 318 away).

	TIME	Location			DIRECTION	HOURLY TOTAL
		St. George's Square	Angler's Rest Hotel	Solas Resource Centre		
22nd NOVEMBER	13.00-13.30	192	238	216	TOWARDS	646
		304	141	152	AWAY	597
	15.00-15.30	145	161	204	TOWARDS	510
		151	165	245	AWAY	469
	17.00-17.30	95	196	245	TOWARDS	536
		103	164	182	AWAY	449
	DAILY TOTAL	990	1065	1152		3207
23rd NOVEMBER	13.00-13.30	119	118	129	TOWARDS	366
		121	149	140	AWAY	410
	15.00-15.30	107	133	128	TOWARDS	368
		135	101	104	AWAY	340
	17.00-17.30	128	126	92	TOWARDS	346
		94	118	106	AWAY	318
	DAILY TOTAL	704	745	699		2148

Figure: Vehicle Counts

## 7.3 Pedestrian Footfall

Pedestrian counts were conducted to gauge footfall levels in Headford Town Centre at key times and locations. Surveys took place on Friday 22nd and Saturday 23rd November during three 30-minute periods (13:00, 15:00, and 17:00) at three points along the N84: beside the Angler's Rest Hotel, outside the Solas Resource Centre, and at St. George's Square.

A total of 832 pedestrians were recorded over two days with 561 on the 22nd and 271 on the 23rd.

### Busiest and quietest locations and times

The busiest location was the Angler's Rest Hotel with 310 pedestrians over two days (217 on the 22nd, 93 on the 23rd). The busiest session occurred outside the Resource Centre on the 22nd from 13:00–13:30, with 120 pedestrians (89 towards and 31 away from the Town Centre).

The quietest location was St. George's Square, with 216 pedestrians (151 on the 22nd, 65 on the 23rd). The quietest session was at the Angler's Rest on the 23rd from 17:00–17:30, with just 14 pedestrians.

The busiest overall time was 13:00–13:30 on the 22nd, with 253 pedestrians (153 towards, 100 away). The quietest was 15:00–15:30 on the 23rd, with 74 pedestrians (31 towards, 43 away).

		Main Street	Dublin Road	Castle Road	Bridge		HOURLY TOTAL
22nd NOVEMBER	TIME					DIRECTION	
	13.00-13.30	53	135	43	29	TOWARDS	183
		88	202	65	29	AWAY	219
	15.00-15.30	115	131	47	28	TOWARDS	245
		147	200	48	21	AWAY	256
	17.00-17.30	55	109	35	22	TOWARDS	170
		44	182	44	24	AWAY	186
	DAILY TOTAL	502	959	282	153		1259
23rd NOVEMBER	TIME					DIRECTION	
	13.00-13.30	85	37	26	30	TOWARDS	178
		99	42	39	16	AWAY	196
	15.00-15.30	95	42	36	35	TOWARDS	208
		95	35	37	35	AWAY	202
	17.00-17.30	47	45	19	29	TOWARDS	140
		39	28	29	7	AWAY	103
	DAILY TOTAL	460	229	186	152		1027

Figure: Pedestrian Counts

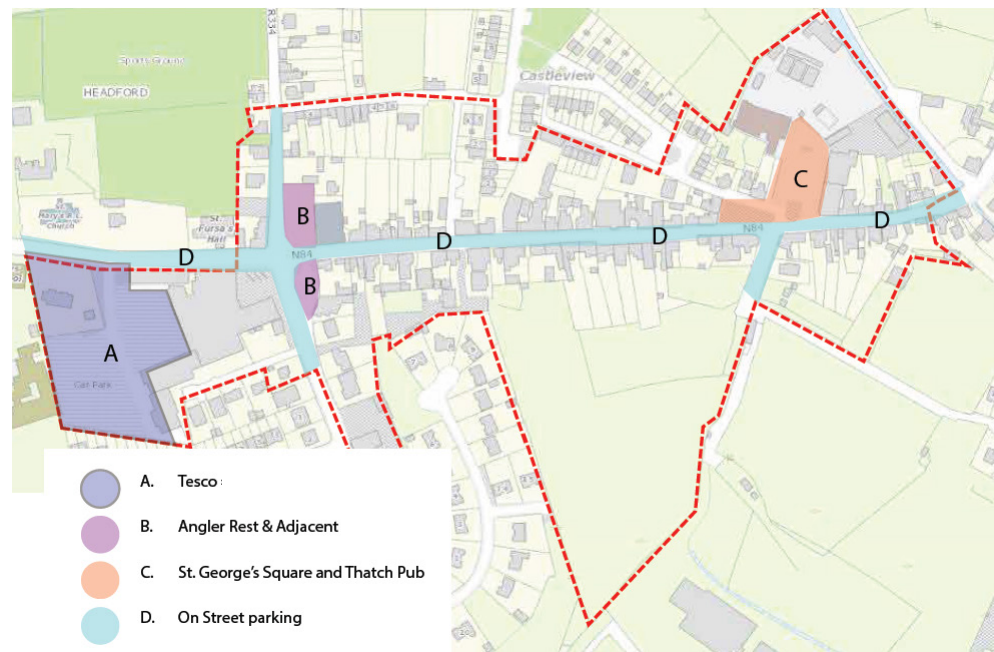


## 7.4 Parking Spaces

A car parking audit was undertaken on the 23rd of November. This was done to assess the overall car parking capacity of the Town Centre. The audit involved counting and recording the number and type of car parking spaces available in Headford Town Centre. The parking audit was separated into the four zones:

- Zone A: This covers the large Tesco car park on the west of town. This area totalled 191 standard and 10 accessible parking spaces
- Zone B: This zone consists of the parking outside of the Anglers Rest Hotel as well as the adjacent car park on the other side of High Street. Between these zones, there were 44 standard and 2 accessible parking spaces.

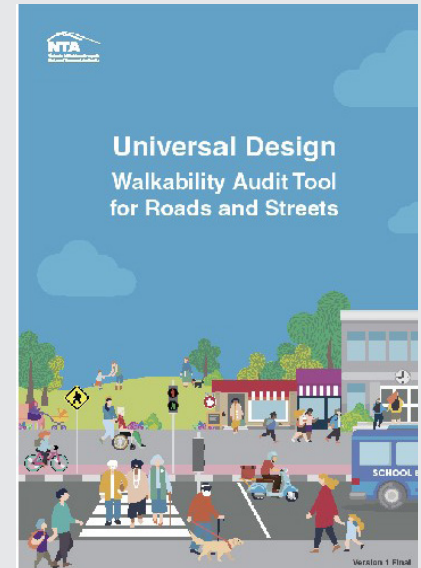
- Zone C: This zone comprises the parking available in St George's Square in the centre of town and totalled to 56 standard and 2 accessible parking spaces.
- Zone D: The final zone covered the parking along the main roads through Headford. In total there were only 23 standard spaces marked within zone D, however, there were a large number (25+) cars parked along the curbs.
- EV Charging: There is very limited EV charging infrastructure near Headford. South of town, at Joyce's Hardware & Home, there is one CCS charger and one CHAdeMO.



## 7.5 Walkability Audit

A walkability audit was carried out in Headford Town Centre using the Universal Design Walkability Audit Tool which was developed as a collaboration between the National Transport Authority, Age Friendly Ireland, Green-Schools and the National Disability Authority's Centre for Excellence in Universal Design. Universal Design defines walkability as the extent to which the built environment is friendly to the presence of people walking, living, shopping, visiting, engaging or spending time in an area. The audit is intended to be carried out by a wide range of people of various ages and abilities including disability and older people's organisations, advocacy organisations, school travel planners, members of the public and Local Authority officers.

The walkability audits were undertaken over two days, the 22nd and 23rd of November with six participants, three female and three male, ranging in age from 26 to 79. The audits lasted approximately 45 minutes and covered a predetermined route around the Town Centre covering Main Street and Church Road. The facilitator questioned participant on various conditions and factors such as footpaths, facilities, road crossings, road-user behaviour, safety, look and feel, the local school and desire lines. A discussion was also held with all participants at the end to record observations and recommendations.



### Footpath presence and quality

Participants of the walkability audits were generally satisfied with the availability and location of footpaths in the Town Centre. However, participants raised concerns regarding the width of the footpaths along Main Street, many felt that they were too narrow which resulted in people having to step onto the road to pass each other at busier times and made access difficult for buggies and wheelchair users. These difficulties were compounded due to the presence of temporary signage, litter and wheelie bins and electricity poles on the footpaths. The surface conditions of the footpaths were raised as an area for improvement with many pointing to cracked or uneven surfaces, poor surface drainage and poorly defined curbs all posing risks to pedestrian safety.

## Pedestrian infrastructure, e.g. crossings

Headford Town Centre features several controlled pedestrian crossings, including a zebra crossing outside Headford Girls' National School, another on the N84 near the Bank of Ireland, and four traffic light crossings at the central crossroads, one on each approach road. Many of the walkability participants reported long waiting times for the green man. Participants felt that the pedestrian signals do not give adequate time to cross the road safely.

## Car parking/ road user behaviour

There were several issues highlighted with road user behaviour in Headford Town Centre. Participants stated that drivers frequently drive above the speed limit, fail to yield at zebra crossings, and fail to stop at stop signs or red lights. These practices were considered by some to be more common among young drivers.

Poor parking practices were also recorded as barriers to safe accessibility in the Town Centre. On-street parking along the west end of Main Street in undesignated parking spaces left the roadway very narrow in parts. This resulted in vehicles being unable to pass each other at times resulting in congestion. There were also many cases of cars parked on the curb, creating obstacles for pedestrians on the footpaths. Some participants highlighted an opportunity to further develop backland car parking to reduce the prevalence of on-street parking.

## Outside the schools

Participants noted that the pedestrian environment in Headford discouraged parents and students from walking or cycling to school. Many noted concerns about driver speed and a lack of cycling infrastructure. Additionally, poor parking practices and drivers leaving engines running while waiting were seen as barriers to safety in the school's vicinity.

## Desire Lines

Desire lines are informal paths created by pedestrians or cyclists as they take the most direct or convenient route between two points, often ignoring designated pathways. The most commonly recorded desire lines were from pedestrians crossing from one side of Main Street to the other. There is an approximately 350m section of Main Street without any pedestrian crossing infrastructure, running from the traffic lights at the crossroad to the zebra crossing outside Bank of Ireland. Consultation indicated a desire to install an additional crossing somewhere along this section to improve accessibility and pedestrian safety along this desire line.

## 7.6 Key Socio-Economic Insights

### High and growing rates of car ownership

- In 2022, the proportion of households with no motor car in Headford was 11.5%, higher than Galway County (7.9%) but lower than the State (14.4%). Between 2016 and 2022, there was a decrease in households with no motor car (-4.2%) and increases in households with one (1.0%), two (2.5%), three (0.5%), and four or more motor cars (0.3%).

### Relatively low usage of public transport

- According to the 2022 Census, in Headford, only 2.7% of commuters use public transport for work and 4.8% for school travel. These figures are substantially lower than both the Galway County averages (5.3% for work and 19.1% for school) and the State averages (8.5% for work and 18.8% for school).

### High proportion of early commute departure

- A significant 23.1% of Headford's commuters depart for work before 07:00, surpassing Galway County (18.0%) and the State (18.3%). There was a marked increase in pre-06:30 departures by 3.7%, highlighting a trend towards early commuting.

### Longer commute durations

- Headford exhibits a higher percentage of commutes lasting 30 to 60 minutes (42.1%) compared to the County (29.6%) and the State (25.9%).

### Significant broadband internet infrastructure

- In 2022, a notable 91.0% of households in Headford had internet access, exceeding the connectivity levels in both Galway County (87.8%) and the State (90.5%). Between 2016 and 2022, the growth rate of internet connectivity in Headford (13.5%) exceeded the county average (11.0%).

### Increase in remote work

- The rise in working from home is pronounced, with 14.6% of residents engaging in remote work, higher than both Galway County (11.8%) and the State (12.2%), reflecting a shift towards flexible working arrangements post-pandemic.

# 8.0 COMFORT AND IMAGE

This report section explores ‘Comfort and Image’ within placemaking. It focuses on enhancing public spaces through safety, cleanliness, and amenities like seating, which are crucial for fostering welcoming environments. Public furniture, lighting, and art play key roles in improving both aesthetics and functionality to create vibrant, people-centric spaces.

## 8.1 Key Consultation Insights

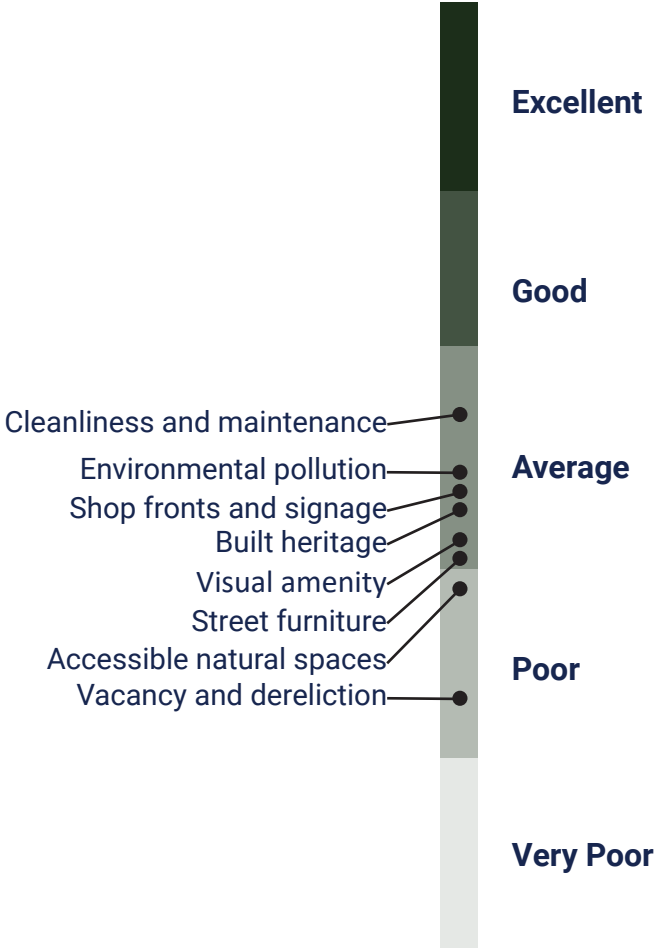
### Working well

#### Cleanliness and maintenance

‘Cleanliness and maintenance’ received the highest proportion of positive ratings under this theme, with 28% of public survey respondents rating it as good or very good. Respondents noted an appreciation for the presentation of the town and the efforts made to maintain the local character and identity. In the business survey, 80% of respondents reported investing in improvements to their premises in the last five years. These works included repainting, utility upgrades, and general façade enhancements, contributing positively to the overall appearance of the town centre.

#### Consultation Findings

How locals rated the ‘Comfort and Image’ aspects of Headford.



## Areas for improvement

### Vacancy

A total of 76% of respondents rated vacancy and dereliction as poor or very poor, making it one of the lowest-rated aspects of the town centre. In response to how the look and feel of the town could be improved, 37% identified addressing vacancy and dereliction as their top priority. While long-term regeneration and activation of buildings was viewed as important, many respondents suggested short-term public realm enhancements such as repainting façades and activating shopfronts to enhance the town's visual appeal.

### Public realm and streetscapes

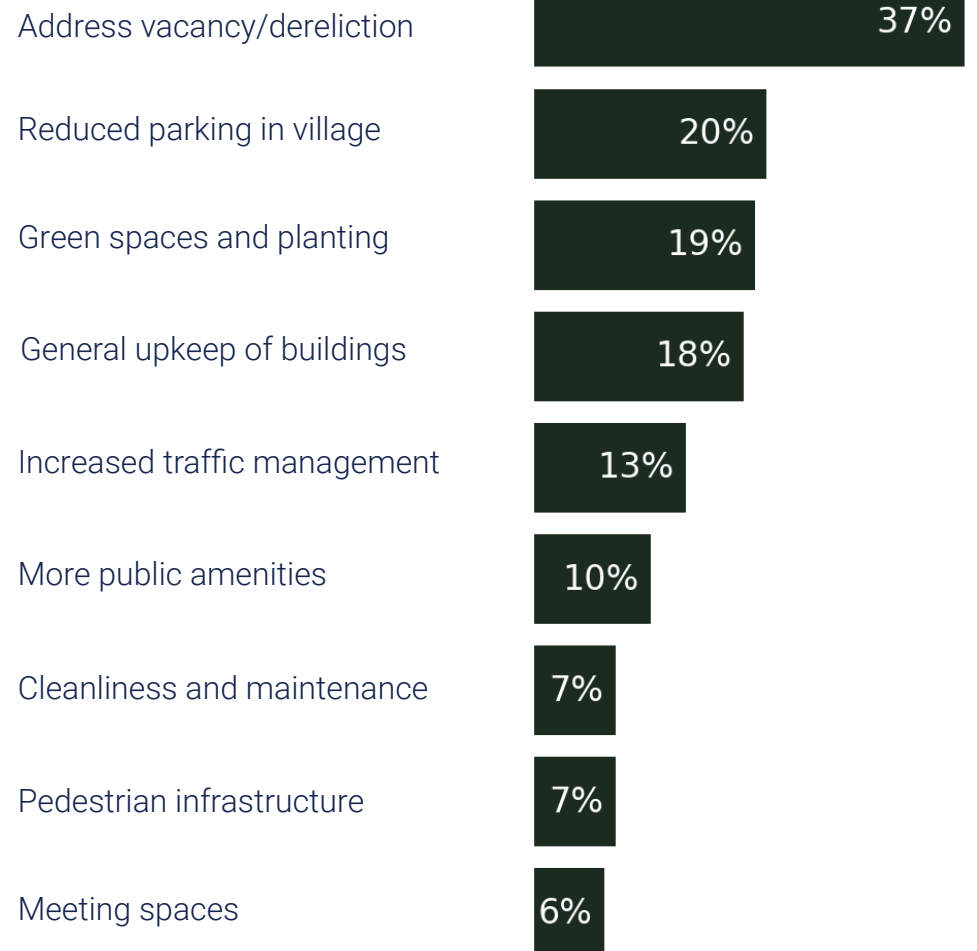
Consultation highlighted a need for improved pedestrian routes and enhanced streetscapes to support walkability and create a more attractive town centre environment. Respondents frequently noted that unmanaged car parking and excessive signage contributed to visual clutter and detracted from the usability and appearance of public spaces.

### Greenery and public planting

Improved greenery and planting were recurring themes in the consultation. A total of 19% of respondents called for more planting in the town centre, including flower boxes, hanging baskets, and trees. Others suggested the development of nearby green spaces and walking routes to improve visual amenity and provide opportunities for recreation and biodiversity enhancement.

### Consultation Findings

What would you like to see done to improve the look and feel of Headford?





## 8.2 Natural Heritage and Conservation

### Natural Heritage Areas (NHA)

This is an area considered important for the habitats present or which holds species of plants and animals whose habitat needs protection. Headford is nearby to 2 proposed NHAs, Lough Hacket and Rostaff Turlough.

### Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)

SACs are prime wildlife conservation areas in the country, considered to be important on a European as well as Irish level.

The Lough Corrib SAC extends up the Black River to areas just north of Headford.

### Special Protection Areas (SPA)

No Areas reported.

classifies Headford town and the surrounding as a high-radon areas, with approximately 1 in 5 homes likely to have elevated radon levels.

### Water

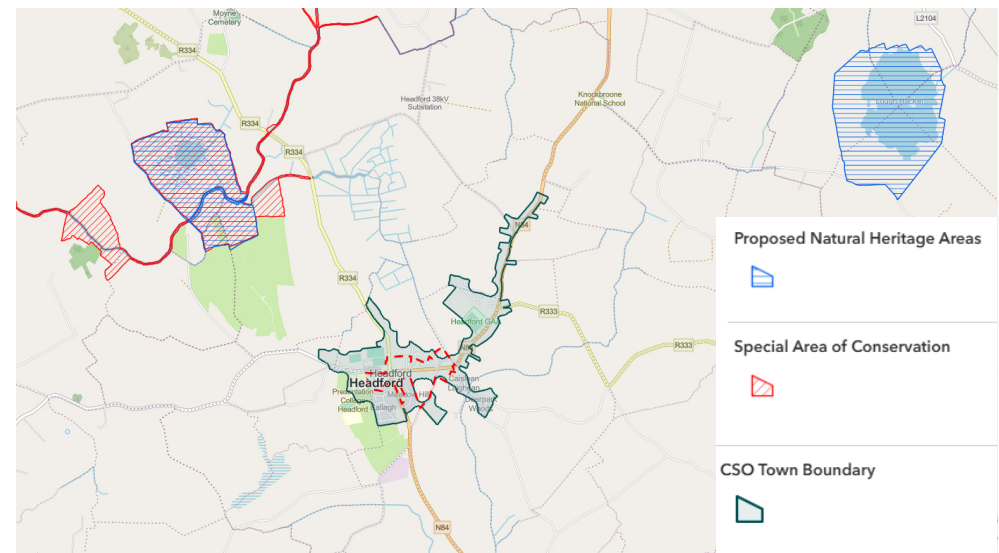
There are three river water monitoring stations. To the north, the Moyne Bridge station had an unpolluted status. However, stations to the east and south of town had slightly polluted and moderately polluted status.

## 8.3 Environmental Quality

Data from the EPA provides insights into the environmental quality and levels of air, water and noise pollution local to Headford.

### Air

The Air Quality Index for Health range from 1 (good air quality) to 10 (very poor air quality), Headford's nearest air monitoring stations, Briarhill and Claremorris, have ratings of 2 and 1 respectively meaning good air quality. However, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)



## 8.4 Key Socio-Economic Insights

### Increasing crime rate

- In 2023, Headford had the 12th highest number of crimes reported out of the 46 Garda Stations in the Galway Division. Within Headford, the most common crimes were theft and related offences (31), followed by damage to property and the environment (12) and burglary and related offences (11). Headford Garda Station showed a 74.5% increase in the number of crimes recorded between 2019 (55) and 2023 (96). Despite this increase, 'Feeling of Safety' still ranked highly with an overall rating of 'Good' within the community survey.

### Declining vacancy rate

- In 2022, Headford Town exhibited a vacancy rate of 10.8% in residential dwellings, slightly exceeding Galway County's rate of 10.7%, and markedly surpassing the State average of 7.7%. This statistic highlights a distinctive challenge for Headford. Yet, the area experienced a major reduction in vacancy rates, dropping by 7.7% between 2016 and 2022, a decline significantly more pronounced than Galway County's decrease of 1.6%.

### A healthy population

- In 2022, 89.8% of residents in Headford Town reported their health as good or very good, a slightly higher proportion than in Galway County (89.3%) and the State (88.9%). Between 2016 and 2022, there was an increase in the proportion of people in Headford Town who reported their health as good or very good (up by 0.8%), contrasting with a decrease in Galway County (-0.6%).

### Highly skilled and educated population

- In 2022, a significant proportion of Headford's residents held advanced qualifications, with 15.1% possessing an Honours Bachelor Degree or equivalent professional qualification, surpassing both Galway County (13.8%) and the State (14.2%). Additionally, 12.0% of the population had completed a postgraduate diploma or degree, matching the State and slightly exceeding the County's average.
- The workforce reflects this level of education, with a considerable 31.1% of the populace engaged in professional services, slightly higher than the County (30.7%) and the State (29.1%). Moreover, the managerial and technical sectors employed 37.4%, a figure on par with broader regional averages.

# 9.0 SOCIABILITY

This section focuses on sociability, a vital yet challenging quality to cultivate. Successful Towns should be places to gather, meet friends, interact with fellow community members, and visitors. Successful placemaking endeavours to create environments that foster these interactions, enhancing the communal and inclusive nature of public areas.

## 9.1 Key Consultation Insights

### Working well

#### Community cohesion and civic participation

The Sociability pillar received the highest overall rating across all four thematic areas, reflecting a strong sense of community identity and civic engagement in Headford. Community groups and organisations (64%), sense of community (60%), and community events and festivals (59%) were among the most positively rated aspects by survey respondents. When asked about their favourite aspects of the town, the most frequent responses referenced the people and the strength of community spirit, highlighting the value placed on social connection and shared identity.

#### Consultation Findings

How locals rated 'Sociability' aspects of Headford.



**Perceptions of safety and social infrastructure**

High levels of perceived safety (61%) and the town’s welcoming atmosphere (56%) further reinforced the positive social environment. The consultation highlighted the importance of local social infrastructure in supporting inclusion and quality of life. Facilities such as the primary and secondary schools, Family Resource Centre, library, playground, churches, Garda station, sports pitch, walking route, and a broad network of community organisations were consistently identified as key assets contributing to Headford’s social fabric and sense of place.

**Areas for improvement**

**Access to social and community spaces**

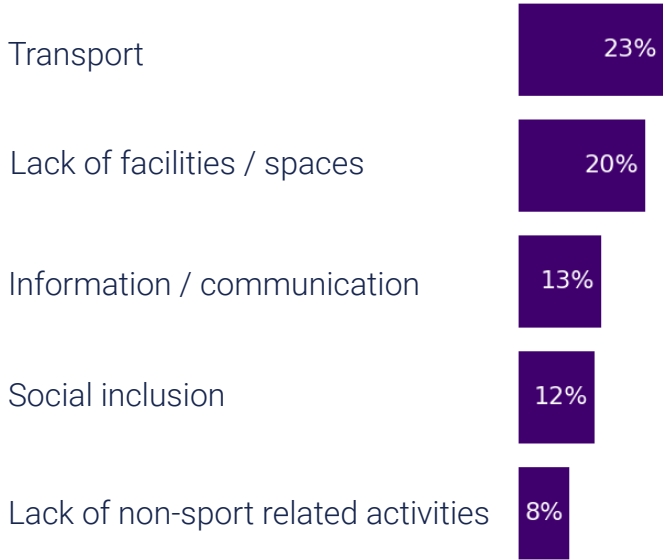
Although the sociability theme scored strongly overall, consultation responses highlighted limitations in the availability of informal, inclusive spaces for social interaction. One-fifth of respondents (20%) felt that there were insufficient venues for socialising beyond bars and restaurants. The further development of existing community spaces was frequently identified as a means to address this gap, particularly for younger people and older adults. Nearly one-quarter of respondents (23%) noted that the absence of a taxi service or limited public transport options posed a barrier to socialising, particularly during evenings or for those without access to a private vehicle

**Communication and civic engagement**

Many respondents (13%) suggested that increased advertisement and communication about community groups and events would be beneficial. Respondents (12%) also identified a need for increased social inclusion efforts, especially for new residents. Some felt that stronger connections between the community and local governance structures would allow residents to have a more meaningful role in shaping the town’s future.

**Consultation Findings**

Top 5 barriers to sociability in Headford.



## 9.2 Key Socio-Economic Insight

### Significant population growth

- According to the Census 2022 results, the population of Headford Town increased by 26.9% or 262 people during this period, resulting in a total population of 1,235 people. This growth was indeed higher than that recorded for Galway County (7.8%) and the State (8.1%). It is crucial for service providers in Headford Town to consider this substantial increase when planning resource allocation and service provision, as it indicates a heightened demand for housing, infrastructure, and various community services.

### Young population

- Headford Town exhibited a distinctly younger age profile relative to Galway County and the State, as evidenced by the proportion of babies and pre-schoolers comprising 8.1% of the population, which was higher than both Galway County (6.1%) and the State (5.7%). Additionally, the segment identified as the young workforce (ages 25-34) constituted 11.3% of Headford's population, surpassing Galway County's 9.2%. Furthermore, the parents and homebuilders cohort (ages 35-49) represented 28.1% of Headford's demographic, a marked increase over Galway County's 22.5% and the State's 22.7%.

### High ethnic diversity

- Headford's ethnic diversity was pronounced, with 20.8% of the population coming from backgrounds other than White Irish. Significantly greater than both Galway County (12.8%) and the State (18.4%). Between 2016 and 2022, Headford saw increases in the proportions of people who identified as Black or Black Irish (1.6%), Asian or Asian Irish (1.7%) and Other White (2.6%). Headford exhibited high proportions of both UK (2.8%) and Polish (2.7%) nationals. Higher than the proportions across Galway County (1.9% and 1.6% respectively) and the State (1.7% and 1.9% respectively).

### High linguistic diversity

- In Headford Town, 20.8% of the population speak a language other than English at home, surpassing the figures for Galway County (12.8%) and the State (18.4%). In 2022, 203 residents reported using a non-English language at home, with Polish being the most common, spoken by 24.6% of these individuals. This percentage exceeds that of Galway County (22.5%) and the State (16.5%), highlighting the significant linguistic diversity within Headford Town, and the prominence of the Polish language among its residents.

## Strengths

- Strategic location on the N84, offering direct access to Galway City, Tuam, and wider regional centres
- Fast-growing population, with a relatively young and highly educated demographic profile
- Relatively high ethnic and cultural diversity
- Strong community spirit, supported by active local groups and high rates of volunteerism
- Strong provision of education, family services, community facilities, and recreational amenities
- Diverse local business base, improving commercial performance, and low unemployment
- Significant housing stock growth, stable rent and high rates of owner-occupancy
- Rich built and natural heritage, including Headford Castle, protected structures, mature trees, and nearby Lough Corrib
- Distinctive 19th-century market village character, with a cohesive linear streetscape and strong visual identity
- Well-maintained public realm, contributing to cleanliness, safety, and town pride
- Sufficient water and wastewater infrastructure, with capacity to support further development

## Challenges

- High traffic volumes and street parking impact public realm quality
- The existing street layout and limited permeability between residential areas and the town centre restrict opportunities for active travel
- The prevalence of vacant or underutilised buildings in the town centre impacts vibrancy and amenity
- A high reliance on car-based travel, combined with visual clutter from on-street parking and signage
- Limited in local retail and personal services diversity results in a dependency on Galway City and Tuam
- The rate of housing delivery has not kept pace with population growth
- Environmental constraints, including localised flood risk and nearby areas of reduced water quality, may limit future development potential
- Limited tourism infrastructure restricts the town's ability to fully leverage its heritage and natural assets as drivers of local economic development
- Road layout, traffic volumes, and limited pedestrian crossing infrastructure contribute to road safety concerns

## Opportunities

- Leverage national and local funding schemes to address vacancy, public realm improvements and enhance accessibility, town identity, and visitor experience
- Support local enterprise to diversify, expand employment opportunities and strengthen the local economy
- Promote tourism by enhancing access to heritage sites and natural assets
- Implement a traffic management strategy to improve safety, circulation, and overall accessibility
- Enhance active travel infrastructure and public transport
- Continue improving environmental quality and manage flood risk through nature-based solutions
- Invest in inclusive community development and expand recreational and cultural amenities
- Activate underutilised and backland sites to improve connectivity and support compact growth
- Continue improving environmental quality and managing flood risk
- Continued investment in community development and recreational facilities that respond to population growth and support inclusion

## Threats

Local effects of climate change, geopolitical crisis, economic downturn



# 11.0 POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

This report summarises the key findings derived from the 15-step process developed as part of the Collaborative Town Centre Health Check Programme, initiated by the Heritage Council and its partners. The baseline data and findings from this Town Centre Health Check will serve as a vital resource to inform and guide plans, strategies, and interventions for the revitalisation and future development of town centres.

This Town Centre Health Check provides a evidence-based framework to build on strengths, address challenges, unlock funding opportunities, and guide sustainable development, opportunities may include:

- **Town Centre First Plan:** The data collected through the Health Check process provides a strong foundation for the development of Town Centre First Plan. These plans are created collaboratively by Local Authorities and Community Town Teams, offering tailored, evidence-based strategies. The plans establish a vision for the town, identify specific projects, and prioritise actions to address key issues highlighted in the Health Check findings.
- **Place based strategies:** The findings may guide strategies across traffic and transport, arts, heritage and cultural, climate action and biodiversity, economic development and tourism. Plans will prioritise enhancing the public realm, and promoting strategic planning and place-making to create vibrant, sustainable town centres.
- **Access to funding:** The evidence provided by the Health Checks strengthens applications for targeted funding streams such as the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) and Town and Village Renewal Scheme. These funds among others enable transformative projects, including building refurbishments, public realm improvements, and infrastructure upgrades, ensuring resources are directed to where they are needed most.
- **Implementation of projects:** The Health Check findings may enable the identification, design, and implementation of priority projects such as: repurposing vacant properties, public realm improvements, active transport network improvements, access and connectivity projects.
- **Monitoring and review:** The baseline data established by this Health Check allows for ongoing monitoring of progress against the goals outlined. Future Health Checks can be conducted to evaluate the impact of interventions, track changes, and refine plans to ensure continuous improvement and alignment with community needs.



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