CASE STUDY REPORT //

HERIWELL – Cultural Heritage as a Source of Societal Well-being in European Regions

Village Design Statement and Collaborative Town Centre Health Check programmes (Ireland)

Annex VII // June 2022

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Table of contents

List of boxes, figures, maps and tables

List of figures

List of tables

Abbreviations

VDS	Village Design Statement
CTCHC	Collaborative Town Centre Health Check
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNECE	The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
SEA	Strategic Evaluation Assessment
BID	Business Improvement District
DG GROW	Directorate General for Industry, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs
RGDATA	The Retail Grocery Dairy & Allied Trades Association
TCF	Town Centre First
DHLGH	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
IPI	Irish Planning Institute
RIAI	The Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland
UCD	University College Dublin
DIT	Dublin Institute of Technology
QUB	Queen's University Belfast
NDP	National Development Plan
AEC	Atlantic Economic Corridor
CPG	Cross Party Group
NPF	National Planning Framework
EIA	Environment Impact Assessment
AA	Appropriate Assessment
ELC	European Landscape Convention
NSS	National Spatial Strategy
CDP	County Development Plan
LAP	Local Area Plan
LEADER	Links between actions for the development of the rural economy
HAP	Heritage Action Plan

Executive summary

The Community-led Village Design Statements programme began in 2000 in Ireland and has since evolved into the Collaborative Town Centre Health Check programme was launched in 2016. Village Design Statements (VDS) aimed to raise public awareness of heritage assets and to provide design guidelines to enhance and protect local distinctiveness and local heritage features. The VDS programme was welcomed by communities. It was a direct response to the challenges presented to the culture and heritage of Ireland's villages and towns presented by the 'tiger economy' years in Ireland. Interest and take-up exceeded expectations with 40 villages from across Ireland participating in the first phase. However, there were flaws in the initial VDS approach that led to community enthusiasm falling away. Key issues identified in the programme's evaluation report included lack of capacity and expertise within some participating communities, and the extended time needed to secure outcomes leading to a drop in confidence in the programme. Vancouver's community-led approach to local development is internationally recognised and had encountered similar issues. The Vancouver evaluation includes useful comparisons referenced in the case study. A Community-Led Village Design Statement Toolkit was published in 2012 to support an improved programme. The team that had driven the VDS approach in Heritage Ireland took the learning from the initiative into the development of Ireland's Collaborative Town Centre Health Check (CTCHC) Programme, evolving the community-led approach to historic towns and villages. The new programme was based on the premise that changing demographics and living/travel to work patterns, along with changing consumer preferences and trends, all impact on the vitality and viability of historic town centres. The CTCHC approach is very similar to that taken in Scotland and the key officers regularly liaise with their Scottish peers. A brief examination of the Scottish programme is included as it demonstrates what the CTCHC programme in Ireland is working towards, and the structures that will be employed.

The current Collaborative Town Centre Health Check Programme was created by The Heritage Council and its partners in 2016 and included in the recent Irish Government Programme for Government – Our Shared Future (June 2020). Materials relating to the CTCHC have been provided to the European Commission in relation to a European-wide study into good/best practice in town centre entrepreneurship and management. The approach is informed by the Aarhus Convention, (The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters) and particularly the right to participate in environmental decision-making. Over 70 organisations and 15 towns are involved in the CTCHC programme, including: government departments and agencies; regional assemblies and local authorities; third-level organisations and institutes; business representative organisations; and civic society/local groups.

The VDS statement is expected to consider a range of heritage characteristics such as the historic village form and settlement pattern, the historic streetscape, landmarks and protected structures, natural heritage and national monuments. The subsequent implementation was taken forward with a range of partners, including LEADER and Fáilte Ireland. The 'pilot' CTCHC process aimed to develop an innovative town centre-led retail, cultural heritage and tourism baseline, which will be recognised internationally as a best practice collaborative development model for regeneration. The aim was to raise awareness, understanding and appreciation of the critical role that historic town centres play and the wide-ranging impacts that their vitality and viability have on overall socio-economic, environmental and cultural growth and development, and on quality of life for citizens and visitors.

The combination of the VDS and CTCHC programmes represent a continuity of progress in community-led planning and development in Ireland's historic towns and villages that brings together cultural, heritage, wellbeing and economic priorities in locally formulated plans. The work has been increasingly recognised by local and national government, and recently by the EU. However, continuity of funding support is now needed to support the further embedding of the programmes, their systems, capacity and evaluation.

Introduction

The case study examines the development of Village Design Statements (VDS) and related Collaborative Town Centre Health Check (CTCHC) Programme in Ireland from 2000 to the present time. Village Design Statements (VDS) aimed to raise public awareness of heritage assets and to provide design guidelines to enhance and protect local distinctiveness and local heritage features. The VDS programme was evaluated in 2008. The initiative had been welcomed and valued in most communities. However, a number of shortcomings were identified.

The case study cross-references the evaluation conclusions with a similar evaluation in Vancouver, Canada to demonstrate and clarify challenges arising from community-led approaches to culture, heritage and place. The team that had driven the VDS approach in Heritage Ireland took the learning from the initiative into the development of Ireland's Collaborative Town Centre Health Check (CTCHC) Programme, evolving the community-led approach to historic towns and villages based on the premise that changing demographics and living/travel to work patterns, along with changing consumer preferences and trends, all impact on the vitality and viability of historic town centres (1 Harvey.A 2021).

Interviews with the actors that have driven the development of the VDS and CTCHC programmes revealed regular collaboration with their peers in Scotland and an aspiration to develop along similar lines to Scottish comparator programmes. A comparator analysis of developments in Scotland with an emphasis on cultural heritage is consequently included in the case study.

1   The context features

1.1   Territorial context

The population of Ireland is 4,964,440 (2020) of which 716,214 are over 65 years old, and with a working age population of 3,242,161 and relatively high employment rates.

Of particular relevance to the case study is a relatively high volunteering rate of 44.9 (EU27 average 34.1). The VDS and CTCHC programmes are designed to tackle systemic problems in Ireland, including urban/rural imbalance, the depopulation or rural areas and skills deficits outside of major urban centres. Rural areas cover 77% of the land area of Ireland and over the period 2006-2016 the population increased just over half a million people (552,017) or 12% nationally, but the average in rural areas was half that at 6%, with declining numbers in the 20-39 year-old cohort. During the Celtic Tiger years demand for housing and levels of construction meant countryside encroachment and rural areas, thought to be too distant in the past for commuting, became a part of new commuter zones. In the post-2008 period, rural areas that were reliant on construction employment and commuters collapsed economically and socially. Following the financial crisis in 2008, there has been a renewed political focus on regenerating rural places that addressed sustainable development. Since then, bottom-up place-based approaches have attempted to deal more broadly with socio-economic processes; with the natural environment gaining in significance more recently. At the same time Ireland is projected to see the highest rate in annual urbanisation of 1.3%, across the EU (2).

The recently published 'Our Rural Future' strategy responds to the pandemic impact on urban / rural issues. It includes creating a network of more than 400 remote working hubs, tax breaks for individuals and for companies which support homeworking, and financial support to encourage people to live in rural towns and accelerated broadband rollout (3). The lack of a Green Book evaluation system in Ireland was a major driver for the development of the CTCHC approach. The Green Book approach provides an evaluation and planning framework that includes a place-based analysis to appraise work that has an objective specific to a particular place and/or implications that vary with location (4). At the European level the EU Strategic Evaluation Assessment (5) is not entirely appropriate for use in Ireland with its focus on biodiversity and landscape rather than cultural diversity and towns. The existing planning system in Ireland has shortcomings in terms of community involvement and in some cases the value of buildings to communities has been lost.

Figure 1.1. Urban Centres by Settlement Size - 2016
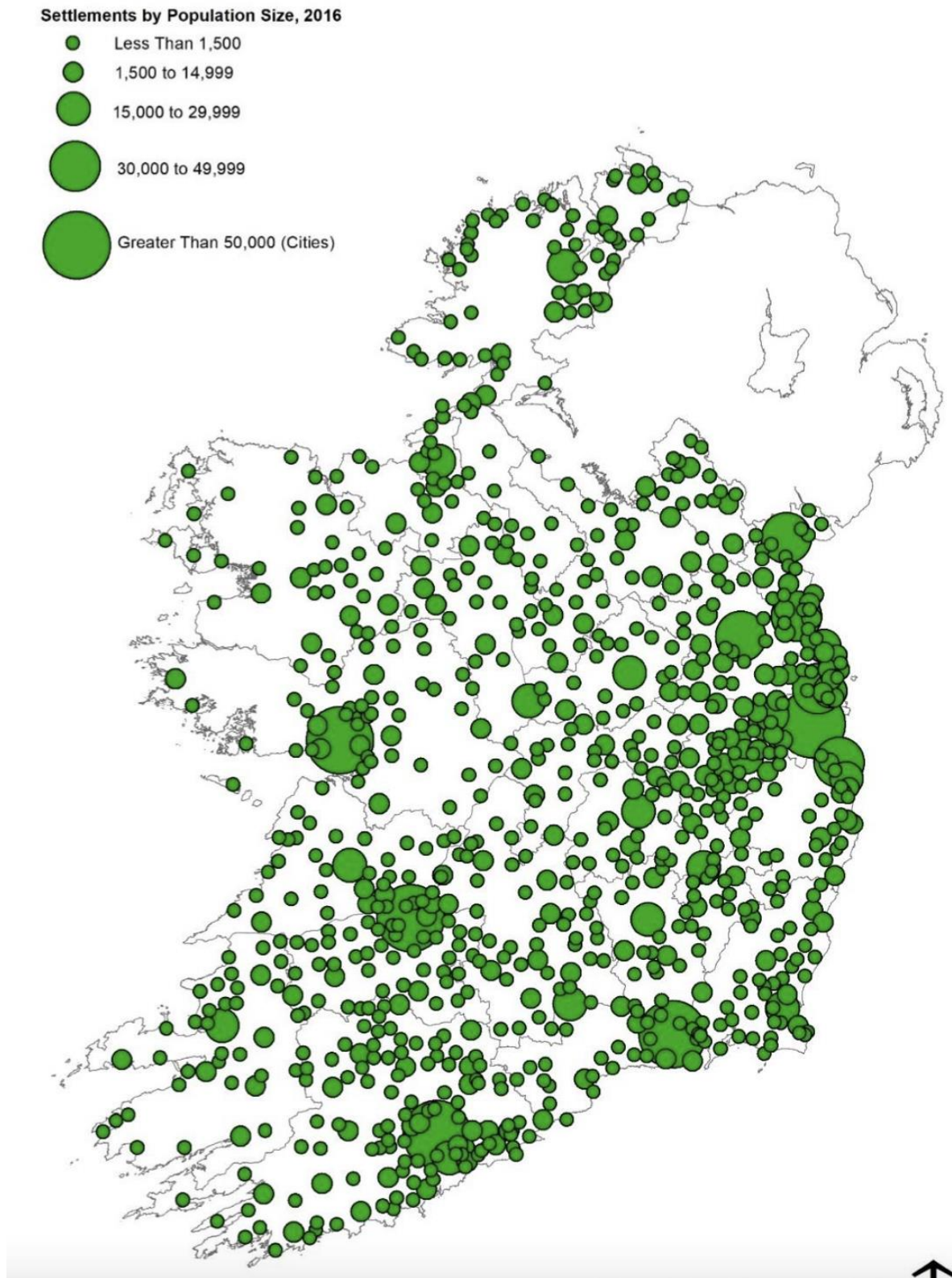
Source: The Heritage Council of Ireland

1.2   Cultural heritage context

Around a third of Ireland's population lives in towns. Another third lives in cities and remaining third in rural areas. Towns are "…experiencing rapid change. Many of our main streets are losing their historic urban character, their cultural and social value and their economic vitality through both under-use and over-development" (6). Town's main streets are declining both in terms of retail and residential usage. A trend that is exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic. These reasons are why the Heritage Council recommends that the social and economic functioning of Irish towns should be considered as a form of 'intangible heritage'. Environmental concerns mean that town regeneration can be most effectively achieved by making use of the existing building stock: 'the most environmentally benign building is the one that does not have to be built, because it already exists' (Grammenos and Russell, 1997).

A set of policy proposals were prepared by the Heritage Council in 2015, underpinned with market research that identified that streetscape, parks and community action are integral parts of the heritage value of towns for most people. It included calls for a national policy for Irish towns supported with a systemic evidence base, and a heritage-led approach to urban revitalisation that includes tax incentives. A special emphasis is placed on community engagement in plan-making to protect the qualities of places. Heritage-led Urban Renewal should be extended to include the historic core areas of all Irish towns where these are protected as Architectural Conservation Areas. The National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020 (NSS) at the time paid limited attention to towns. The Heritage Council also calls for funds to establish a Rural Towns and Villages Network, to support community initiatives to revitalize towns and protect their heritage values.

The Historic Towns Initiative is a joint initiative of The Heritage Council, Fáilte Ireland and the Department of Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The scheme involves the three historic towns of Westport in Co. Mayo, Listowel in Co. Kerry, and Youghal in Co. Cork and is related to both the VDS and CTCHC programmes, looking to build the potential of Ireland's historic towns. The method involved audit, vision and action plan, similar in structure to VDS and CTCHC. Other relevant initiatives include the Irish Walled Towns Network (IWTN), focused on a largely invisible aspect of Ireland's Urban Heritage.

The report of submissions underpinning the new Heritage Ireland 2030 plan devoted a section to communities and heritage that included the concept of local communities becoming involved in the conservation and management of local heritage sites within an 'expert-fed', rather than an 'expert-led' framework (7).

1.3   Societal well-being context

The Healthy Ireland Framework is the overarching policy for health and wellbeing. One of its four central goals is to create an environment where every individual and sector of society can play their part in achieving a healthy Ireland. Delivery is mapped out in the Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan 2021-2025. An annual survey is commissioned by the Department of Health to feed into the outcomes framework which incorporates health status, health outcomes and determinants of health and wellbeing across the life. The latest survey reported that over 80% of respondents reported lower levels of social connectedness and 30% report worsening mental health since the start of the pandemic.

Ireland has the third highest percentage of population in the EU in 2014 at risk of poverty, before pensions and social transfers, at 48.8%. The at risk of poverty rate in Ireland, as calculated by Eurostat, declined from 18.5% in 2006 to 15% by 2009 before rising to 15.7% in 2012. In 2013 the rate dropped to 14.1% before increasing to 15.6% in 2014. The at risk of poverty rate in Ireland was 16.9% in 2015, with just over one in six of the population at risk of poverty. Net official development assistance in Ireland increased from 0.5% of GNI in 2006 to 0.57% in 2008 before falling to 0.32% in 2015.

In relation to cultural heritage and wellbeing the Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) regulations in Ireland superseded a non-statutory system of heritage appraisals of development plans in 2004. The Heritage Council has been tracking and monitoring vacancy rates in historic town centres for several years through the CTCHC Programme and considers that the SEA monitoring system is not working in relation to historic town centres and historic landscapes/townscapes. The Irish Government reviewed this system in 2021.

The Heritage Council submission to the review considered that the review offered an opportunity to refresh the SEA approach and incorporate the UN Sustainable Development Goals as a platform for retrofitting policy as has been done in Scotland. This would be supported with baseline data collection to create public

value through better-informed decisions around development, particularly in relation to addressing environmental challenges. A definition of Ireland's historic environment was recommended and a data protocol that is open to data produced locally, such as CTCHC Programme datasets was recommended. The submission highlighted the land-use survey work of the CTCHC Programme as contributing important geospatial data that is currently missing from local authority datasets. Guidance on public participation would also be informed by the collaborative CTCHC Programme approach.

However, the Irish Government recently published its Town Centre First policy that has not responded meaningfully to the CTCHC collaborative and independent approach, and instead provides for the appointment of local authority regeneration officers under the umbrella of the Local Government Management Association. This is supported with funds for 26 towns to develop a Town Centre First Plan, leading to the CTCHC team being contacted by local authorities for advice on how to set about it. However, the new system does not follow the participative progression route of carrying out a town health check prior to devising a plan, and there it is likely that in some cases consultants will be appointed to carry out work that CTCHC supported communities to undertake themselves.

Table 1.1. Societal well-being indicators (table filled in by the HERIWELL coordination team)

	Local (if available)		Regional		National		European	
	2021 (or if not available 2020)	Δ% 2014	2021 (or if not available 2020)	Δ% 2014	2021 (or if not available 2020)	Δ% 2014	2021 (or if not available 2020)	Δ% 2014
Total Population					4,964,440	7.0	513,093,556	1.2
Population over 65					716,214	22.6	102,655,668	9.2
Upper-secondary enrolment rate (age 14-18)					232,250	45.0	19,425,829	-11.6
Early leavers from education and training					5	-1.7	10.3	-0.7
Tertiary educational enrolment					232,512	14.0	18,438,720	n.a
Adult participation in learning					11.0	4.0	11.3	0.5
Net migration					6.5	6.1	3.2	1.1
Real GDP per capita					72,300	72.6	31,200 (EU27)	17.3
Working age population					3,242,161	6.1	330,714,969	-1.0
Employment rate					67.7	4.6	69.2	4.4
Unemployment rate					5.8	-6.3	6.4	-4.0
Young people neither in employment nor in education and training					14.2	-3.6	12.5	-2.9
Gender employment gap					10.8	0.4	10.3	-0.2
People at risk of poverty or social exclusion					20.6	-7.7	21.4	-3.0
Severely materially deprived people					5.4	-3.8	5.5	-3.4
Life expectancy					82.8	+1.4y	81.0	+0.1y
Subjective health status					84.0	1.3	69.3	1.8
Volunteering					44.9	n.a	34.1 (EU27)	n.a
Satisfaction with water quality					0.83	n.a	0.8 (EU27)	n.a
Burdensome cost of housing					23.7	-16.3	28.2	-8.5
Overcrowding					3.2	-1.0	15.6	-1.1
Crime level					8.8	-2.1	12.5	-1.5
Internet at home					92	10	90	9
Internet access					0.88	n.a	0.86 (EU27)	n.a
Broadband at home					92	12	89	11
Online interaction with public authorities					62	11	55	8
Trust in the national government					0.57	n.a	0.43 (EU27)	n.a
Institution quality index					0.69	n.a	-0.01 (EU27)	n.a
Freedom over life choices					0.89	n.a	0.82 (EU27)	n.a
Tolerance towards immigrants, minorities, homosexuals					0.87	n.a	0.61 (EU27)	n.a

Source: HERIWELL Consortium

2 The analysed case: characteristics and policy features

2.1 Characteristics and history of the analysed case

The antecedents of the Community-led Village Design Statements programme began in 2000 with the first Village Design Statements (VDS) that aimed to raise public awareness of heritage assets and to provide design guidelines to enhance and protect local distinctiveness and local heritage features. The programme involved 40 villages over a 7-year period. The Community-Led Village Design Statement Toolkit was first published in 2012. Two pilot projects in Julianstown (rural village) and Sandymount (urban village) began the new phase with a collaborative and participative approach that produced the learning to inform subsequent support materials for the programme. Members of local communities in Julianstown (County Meath) and Sandymount (Dublin City), collaborated with Meath County Council and Dublin City Council and other stakeholders to prepare a Community-led Village Design Statement document (VDS).

The programme began in its current form in 2009 as a collaborative approach to village planning and design developed in partnership with the local communities and the local authorities and intended to give local communities a real voice in deciding how their villages are planned and shaped for the future. The scheme's aims and objectives were prepared to address the impact on local heritage resulting from new housing developments in some small towns and villages, and outward population migration with a parallel decline and decay of the historic built heritage in others. The intention was to raise public awareness of heritage assets in particular and to provide design guidelines to enhance and protect local distinctiveness and local heritage features.

In 2016 the Heritage Council, RGDATA and the Retail Consortium, in collaboration with the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, the IPI, ILI, RIAI, UCD, LIT Thurles, DIT and QUB, developed a trans-disciplinary National Town Centre Health Check Programme in conjunction with participating towns across the country. The programme supports the creation of Collaborative Town Centre Health Checks for Irish towns, which are linked to the statutory planning system, through the review of county development plans and Local Area Plans. Over 70 organisations and 15 towns are involved in the CTCHC programme, including: government departments and agencies; regional assemblies and local authorities; third-level organisations and institutes; business representative organisations; and civic society/local groups. A number of towns are on a waiting list for participants.

2.2 Policy features: policy strategies under analysis

Irish small towns and villages are a central element of the country's character and culture, based on the natural, built and cultural heritage. Each village is unique. Physical layouts may be focused around a central green space or be linear in pattern and layout. Contemporary street patterns may reflect the layout of early medieval monastic settlements, the planned estate village layouts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, or framing around long gone industries. They are important market and social centres for the surrounding rural catchment areas and a village's cultural heritage links directly to a community's sense of identity. A flourishing village environment can enhance people's overall sense of being and belonging and quality of life.

The approach of the VDS and CTCHC programmes is informed by the Aarhus Convention, (The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters) and particularly the right to participate in environmental decision-making. The CSO Forum (Civil Society Organisations) now sponsors the programme on its contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals and future reporting on progress. The THCH programme delivers to the 4 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 3, 11, and 13:

• No poverty

• Good health and wellbeing

• Sustainable cities and communities

- Climate action.

The policy context for the programme is:

- European level - EIA - Environmental Impact Assessment; SEA - Strategic Environmental Assessment; AA - Appropriate Assessment; ELC - European Landscape Convention.

- National level - Planning & Development Acts; Heritage Act (1995); National Spatial Strategy (NSS); Section 28 Planning Guidelines; and LAP Guidelines. The VDS and CTCHC agenda straddles different government departments with different elements considered as the responsibility of one or the other. For example, the policy measure to provide investment for spaces in the community is led by the Department of Rural and Community Development. Whereas the night-time economy in rural towns is led by the Department for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, and 'meanwhile use' falls under the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. However, the Irish Government's current rural development policy framework also aligns policy priorities with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, providing a clearer picture of the synergies between the priorities as they are understood in the local VDS and CTCHC work.

- Regional level - Regional Planning Guidelines.

- Local level - County Development Plan (CDP); Local Area Plan (LAP).

- This process is supported with a Community-Led Village Design Statement Toolkit that was first published in 2012 (10). This provides a step guide and aligns with the UNECE Aarhus Convention and in accordance with Articles 5C, 6B and 6C of the European Landscape Convention. The intention was that the toolkit would support both local VDS projects and also other local community-led heritage and planning projects. The resulting toolkit is intended to produce recommended outputs:

- The community's shared environmental, cultural and socio-economic vision for their village for the next 15-20 years.

- Agreed design principles that relate specifically to the village. These are to be used by the local community, the local authority and other stakeholders to guide in-fill or new local development in order to ensure that the existing character and distinctiveness identified through the VDS process is conserved, celebrated and enhanced.

- An agreed VDS action plan setting out specific and phased projects that should be delivered by the local community and its partners to ensure the effective planning, management and enhancement of its unique features.

- An Illustrated Poster (double-sided) for local schools and children explaining the overall community-led Village Design Statement process and project.

The VDS statement is expected to consider a range of heritage characteristics such as the historic village form and settlement pattern, the historic streetscape, landmarks and protected structures, natural heritage and national monuments. The subsequent implementation was taken forward with a range of partners, including LEADER and Fáilte Ireland.

The costs of a VDS is estimated at between €14,000 and €16,000, mostly related to procuring expert input, but also for a formal launch and participative activities. An estimated 1,000-1,200 hours of community investment is needed to develop the Statement, and up to 2 years is needed to complete the process. At the time of the toolkit launch there were 28 Local Authority Heritage Officers in Ireland who were prepared to support communities in developing a VDS. In addition to this the Heritage Council developed a Multi-Sectoral VDS Training Workshop for village communities, local authorities, statutory agencies and consultants. This included areas like stakeholder mapping, partnership development, project management, building vision and managing expectations, participative planning methods, mentoring and community-led evaluation.

The toolkit provides a comprehensive breakdown of the steps needed to create a VDS and this is illuminated with examples throughout. The question of whether the proposal has a good policy fit at local and regional level is emphasised and alignments with Meath's policy framework around economic development, and around cultural and natural assets is provided as an example. There is a checklist to evaluate the strength of community infrastructure against what is needed to successfully complete the VDS process. Definitions of local heritage and links to Local Authority Heritage Officers are provided to help the preparation of the

heritage survey element of the process. A framework is included for assessing 'the character' of an area, that includes categories related to physical infrastructure as well as image, usage, and sensory elements like sounds and smells.

Figure 2.1. The following figure demonstrates how the VDS programme was situated in Ireland's strategic framework.
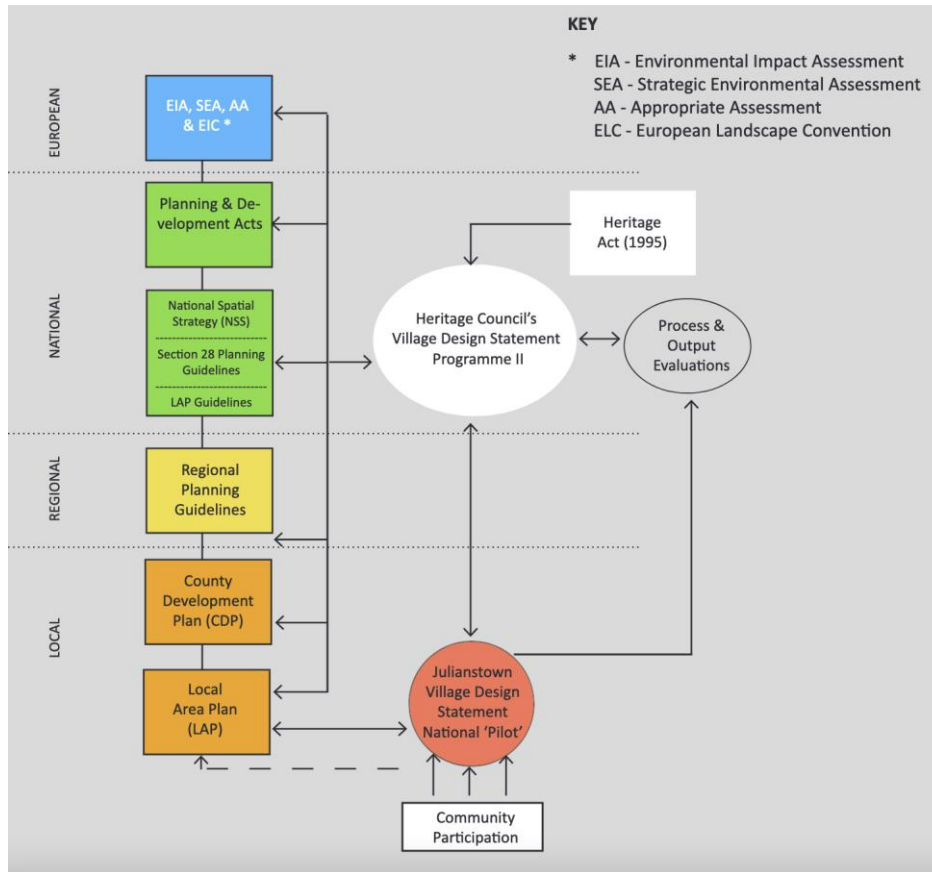
Source: The Heritage Council of Ireland

The VDS management process is organised in two layers. A VDS inter-agency group is made up of partner groups and the local authority. The VDS local working group is comprised of members from the local community. The labour-intensive nature of the process led the pilot schemes to use government-sponsored internship schemes and programmes, which provide work experience through placements for graduate interns. Project partners have complementary responsibilities. The Heritage Council is responsible for the toolkit and training. Local village communities deliver the collaboration and engagement of local people in the process and undertake training and community capacity building support. They prepare and deliver the VDS. Local Authorities support village communities with administrative, funding and project management functions, including profile raising and public procurement. LEADER (rural areas) provides administrative, funding and project management support. Civic Trust work to preserve built heritage in urban areas and support community-led and education processes for VDS initiatives in their area.

A template for a communications plan that covers both the external and internal needs of the project is in the toolkit and provides practical steps for every communications element. A similarly detailed approach to events, including the launch event, is taken. There is also a detailed time-plan and description of associated work packages that provides a clear overview of tackling the VDS process and use of SMART objectives. An example of the structure for the resulting VDS is include organised under the headings of: background, collaborative process, context, landscape setting, the village, shared vision, aims, concept, action plan, moving forward, and appendices. Once implementation is underway the toolkit provides a suite of sustainability and output indicators that stakeholders can use to assess progress. These range from, but are not confined to, the raising of awareness, knowledge and understanding of the village landscape, to quality of the public realm, to the numbers of community groups active in the village, to the creation of social enterprises.

The 'pilot' CTCHC process aimed to develop an innovative town centre-led retail, cultural heritage and tourism baseline, that would also be recognised internationally as a best practice collaborative development model for regeneration. The aim was to raise awareness, understanding and appreciation of the critical role that historic town centres play and the wide-ranging impacts that their vitality and viability have on overall socio-economic, environmental and cultural growth and development, and on quality of life for citizens and visitors. The pilot built upon previous Collaborative Town Centre Health Check (CTCHC) projects delivered with Fingal County Council/Balbriggan Chamber of Commerce in Balbriggan in 2010; and Clare County Council/Kilrush Tidy Towns, in Kilrush in 2012.

The pilot method included:

- Land Use surveys to establish the overall vacancy rates in the town.

- Retailer surveys to establish current levels of commercial activity and outlook.

- Pedestrian counts to establish actual town centre visitor numbers.

- Shoppers surveys to rate visitor experience and satisfaction.

The participative and community led aspects of the methodology provided for heritage issues and concerns to be included in the process. The focus on living / lived heritage means that the connection between the tangible and intangible heritage of towns and the way people use town centres is brought to the fore.

A methodology for a second phase of the CTCHC programme was developed using a stepped methodology to keep everyone on path. The CTCHC programme now consists of 15 steps:

1. Confirm CTCHC Study Area Boundary

2. Landuse Survey and Vacancy

3. Footfall/Pedestrian Survey

4. Business/commercial Surveys

5. Consumer Surveys

6. Rental Survey

7. Ownership Map

8. Vehicle Count

9. Car Parking

10. Accessibility Audit

11. Survey Natural 'Desire Lines' in Main Street

12. Environmental Quality

13. Crime Figures

14. Report Writing & Presentation of Results

15. Launch of Summary Reports

Heritage and wellbeing issues and concerns, as was the case with the VDS programme, are brought to the fore through the consultative and engagement processes. Issues to do with the built heritage also emerge through surveys and audits.

The following figure describes to overall intended trajectory of the CTCHC programme.

Figure 2.2. Overall intended trajectory of the CTCHC programme
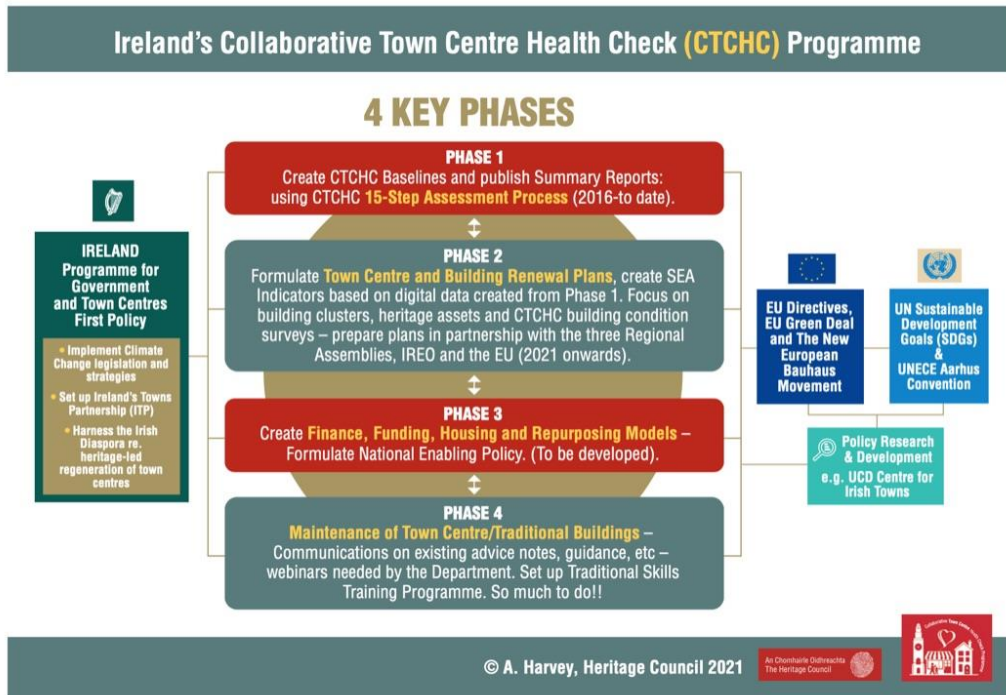
Source: The Heritage Council of Ireland

The following figure demonstrates the reach of the CTCHC programme.

Figure 2.3. Reach of the CTCHC programme

Source: The Heritage Council of Ireland

2.3   Results of the analysed case: the contribution to societal well-being

The VDS programme (11) built on the results of the two pilot projects in Julianstown (rural village) and Sandymount (urban village) began the new phase with a collaborative and participative approach that produced the learning to inform subsequent support materials for the programme. Members of local communities in Julianstown (County Meath) and Sandymount (Dublin City), collaborated with Meath County Council and Dublin City Council. and other stakeholders to prepare a Community-led Village Design Statement document (VDS). The pilots demonstrated a number of features relating to how communities can:

- Become actively involved and engaged in shaping their local environments and landscapes, both rural and urban.

- Play a pivotal role in heritage, environmental planning and sustainable development matters in their locality.

- Establish and develop useful collaborative partnerships and networks with local authorities and statutory bodies.

- Play an important role in the enhancement and promotion of the overall character and distinctiveness of Ireland's villages.

The range of VDS outcomes that the Heritage Council and its partners consider important and that are referred to in scheme documentation include:

- Build on existing community knowledge base – enhance community awareness, knowledge and understanding of the unique landscape, environment and heritage features within the historic core and surrounding area of their village.

- Provide a community with a valuable planning and management tool to ensure that changes to their village add to, and enhance, local distinctiveness and character, and contribute to the village's overall sense of place.

- Link communities to the formal planning system and decision-making processes thereby increasing the likelihood that community-led Village Design Statements will be used by local authorities and the private sector to improve local distinctiveness and character – helps build trust in the system.

- Assist the community, local authority planners and others by creating a Shared Vision, agreed Design Principles and an agreed VDS Action Plan that enhances a village's historic form and fabric, and sense of place.

- Foster overall community skills, confidence and capacity building in the short, medium and long term.

- Promote participative democracy at a local level – enhance the democratisation of the Irish Planning System.

- Stimulate socio-economic regeneration, wealth creation and growth in the local village economy, and act as a focus for investment.

- Generate social capital and revitalise local networks and partnerships within village communities – both rural and urban.

- Enhance the overall quality of life, health and well-being, and sense of belonging within communities living and working in Ireland's villages.

Heritage issues and initiatives appear in individual VDS in a number or guises. For example, in Newmarket and Hugginstown conservation of both the historic core of the town and the surrounding natural heritage of fenland are considered. In the Tullaroan's VDS improving streetscape and introducing a community festival are included. The Mullranny VDS a new promenade walkway is intended to link up amenities, including leisure and cultural amenity, and to attract new visitors to the town. In Staplestown VDS the lack of public green space and community facilities featured as key issues. The Tallow VDS includes a heritage map and a detailed appreciation of heritage buildings and proposes the creation of a heritage centre through the redevelopment of a local church.

The Heritage Council commissioned the Countryside and Community Research Unit and BDOR Ltd to undertake an evaluation study of the Village Design Statements in May 2008 (12). The study examined 35 VDS statements of villages ranging in size from 100 to 1,800 people. A range of challenges were identified, but they were considered resolvable and there was almost universal enthusiasm for the concept of Village Design Statements and their use in Ireland. It was found that the majority of VDSs considered some aspects of the whole village, but focused heavily on the 'historic' core, transposing these characteristics of the village as a model for new development elsewhere in the village and leading to a conservation emphasis in most of the VDSs. Few VDSs were directly developed by communities, with many initiated by local authorities with the support of the Heritage Council and consultants. Despite this, links to the statutory planning system were uneven. In depth research into VDS in three counties found major similarities in approach to VDS across the projects. Local Heritage Officers were involved, but local authority planners less so. About half of the funding for the VDSs came from the Heritage Council, topped up at County Council level. This was then passed directly to the appointed consultants. However, consultants found it difficult to engage a genuinely wider community. The work also placed demands on the time of county officers and required a large amount of time from small groups within each community. It was notable that the most successful VDS had a strong local authority champion and a distinctive heritage understood and valued by many in the community. Across the study, communities were enthusiastic at the outset but tended to fall away as the feeling that decisions were being made elsewhere grew. This dissipation of support was in part due to the slowness of the VDS process.

Overall, the evaluation found that VDSs are not an end in themselves, but contribute to more distinctive design in villages, more action on heritage issues and more community awareness of heritage. The majority of consultees agreed that there is a problem to solve concerning the loss of distinctiveness in Irish villages and that the VDS programme has created some positive experiences in raising awareness of heritage and distinctiveness issues amongst local communities. However, most VDSs have had limited influence on design processes and the delivery of practical heritage initiatives. There was concern, and occasional anger, within local communities about the time they have put into VDSs to no, or little, effect.

The first phase of VDS mirrors, to some extent, the experience of the early stages of one of the world's most respected community-led design and development processes in Vancouver (13). The approach to city planning in Vancouver was an early adoption of the idea of using a toolkit for local planning and development. The author led Vancouver's city plan process and the study describes the public engagement process. The first phase involved 100,000 people, the second phase continued the engagement process, and a third phase involved community visions and a neighbourhood centre plan. The public were asked to generate ideas and solutions and discuss them with City staff and consider choices around the resulting directions. Schools also participated with pupils drawing their desired neighbourhoods. An Ideas Book of the public's submissions was published in the first phase and an Ideas Fair attracted 10,000 participants. A thematic Making Choices Handbook was published to describe topics where consensus had not been reached and City Circle meetings considered the options. The emergent Draft Plan for the city was subject to public hearings and agreed, leading to a lengthy implementation programme that included nine area-based Community Visions with resident panels to monitor progress. This was a mixture of top-down and bottom-up planning, included a spill-over effect of the formation of 1000 community groups and resulted in 19 Neighbourhood Centres to focus future development. However, in subsequent years a lack of resources for implementation meant support for the approach eroded and a return to top-down planning returned. The study concludes that public engagement contributed to public support for plans, as did tangible progress on early implementation. A phased approach can decay public support. The learning from the programme suggests that a toolkit for involving the public in planning and development at local level needs to pay as much attention to implementation as it does to setting priorities and fixing plans.

The subsequent (CTCHC) programme was planned to tackle some of the challenges identified in the VDS process as outlined in scheme documentation (14). The relationship between VDSs and statutory plans within the planning system was not clear and there was a lack of experience of community development/involvement in planning issues. Existing community structures and experience were limited and did not always have the resources and skills needed for VDS preparation. The lack of role of locally elected members in preparing VDSs restricted local 'ownership' of the VDS initiative and of the outcomes. There was significant growth in demand for the 'pilot' programme during 2016/2017. For example, over 70 people attended the first workshop in Naas Town Hall (September 2016) and 130 people attended the second workshop in Dublin Castle (March 2017). This rapid expansion led to two key strands being developed in 2018: Border Towns and Atlantic Economic Corridor. Workshops were held in Monaghan for

Border Towns in June 2018 and in Dundalk in 2019. Government representatives presented the opportunities created by the National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan and the related Regeneration Funds. The 2018 Feedback report (Future Proof Your Historic Border Town) describes a workshop process focused on the CTCHC progress of four historic towns (Monaghan, Letterkenny, Dundalk and Tralee) and the Business Improvement Districts (BIDS) of Dundalk and Sligo. The options for the reuse of historic, civic buildings in town centres was discussed along with the need for NDP funding to support the reuse of this element of built heritage. The discussions concluded that a policy similar to Scotland's Town Centre First Policy was needed with the legislation for communities to acquire public-interest buildings. It was argued that a central database/portal should be created along with research on economic incentives to tackle vacancy, and that CTCHCs should be a mandatory part of the planning system. The Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) Towns' workshop was delivered on the 22nd November 2018 in Ballina in partnership with Mayo County Council and the partner government departments including the Department of Rural and Community Development. Over 60 people from various backgrounds attended from towns located all along the west coast. Participating towns at this stage were: Ballina, Ballyshannon, Bundoran, Carrick-on-Shannon, Dingle, Donegal Town, Ennis, Dundalk, Killarne, Listowel, Letterkenny, Monaghan, Sligo, Tipperary, and Tralee.

The Town Centre Health Check programme grew out of the Village Design Statements (VDS) as a new collaborative vehicle for inclusive development. It is very similar but operates on a larger scale. The same programme management delivers the programme and there has been a planned continuity in the transition from one programme to another. There was an early evaluation of the VDS programme in 2006, which led to a redesign.

The project leaders emphasised the importance of the EU context for their work, including the European Commission (EC) Enquiry re. Best/Good Practice – March 2017

In addition, the programme partners wished to highlight that the European Commission's DG for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurships and SMEs, requested all the 'Pilot' CTCHC documents that record and communicate the conception, design/setting up, delivery and journey from mid-2016 to date, in order to inform a European-wide study into good/best practice in town centre entrepreneurship and management. The following reports were forwarded to the European Commission:

- 'Pilot' CTCHC Training Workshop No.2 Training Pack, March 2017

- 'Pilot' CTCHC Workshop No.1 Feedback Report, November 2016

- 'Pilot' CTCHC Training Programme - Briefing Note for Minister Humphreys T.D., October 2016

- Pilot CTCHC Training Workshop No1. - Training Pack (including 15-Step TCHC

- Methodology), September 2016

- 'Pilot' CTCHC Fact Sheet No.1 - Web Resources for TCHCs, September 2016

- 'Pilot' CTCHC Factsheet No.2 - Example of Questionnaire for Shoppers, September 2016; and Pilot' CTCHC Training Programme - Agreed Project Charter, July 2016

The Town and Village Renewal 2021 Scheme Outline published by Project Ireland 2040 (Department of Rural and Community Development) considers the impact of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme introduced in 2016 and supporting around 1,300 projects across Ireland. Two categories of towns and villages are considered (under and over 5,000 population). The scheme priorities include: supporting town centre living and addresses vacancy and dereliction; supporting active and vibrant town and village centres; improving the aesthetic of town centres; and developing parks, green spaces and recreational amenities. Applicants must demonstrate community involvement. The scheme will fund and support the CTCHC programme. Healthy Ireland is a government-led initiative focused on physical and mental health (8). It includes an Active Living Programme and a Creativity and Mental Health & Wellbeing strand, both of which link to the objectives of the VDS and CTCHC programmes.

The current Collaborative Town Centre Health Check Programme was created by The Heritage Council and its partners in 2016 and included in the recent Irish Government Programme for Government – Our Shared Future (June 2020). It aims to establish a collaborative and robust approach to undertaking town centre health checks in Irish towns. The Programme strongly supports the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan 2018-2027 (Project Ireland 2040), particularly in relation to the stated National Strategic Outcomes, National Policy Objectives and Strategic Investment

Priorities. The NPF (section 1.2), entitled 'Making the Vision a Reality', states: "A major new policy emphasis on renewing and developing existing settlements will be required, rather than the continual expansion and sprawl of cities and towns out into the countryside, at the expense of town centres and small villages…" (9) REF https://npf.ie

The Programme Manager of the Collaborative Town Centre Health Check Programme considers the Scottish national planning framework and related definitions of heritage as a potential future benchmark (16). However, planners are now engaged with the programme in Ireland and CTCHC is tackling specific local issues. For example, in Sligo local development had become detached from a strong heritage estate, including a landmark Abbey. In Tipperary the CTCHC programme was adopted following public protests against the previous development approach.

In its first years the VDS programme had no dedicated budget. However, a Town Centre toolkit was published in 2012 and recognised with awards in 2014. This led to the Town Centre Health Check programme in 2016 and a recommendation that Village Design Statements should form part of local development plans. Recessionary periods and an associated housing crisis triggered a more community led approach to development in Ireland. This was a particularly positive step as there has been a culture of developer led plans and there are only 4 Business Improvement Districts (BIDS) in Ireland, in contrast to 40 in Scotland. BIDS are a mechanism that supports businesses to identify and pursue development priorities in a defined area. In Scotland this has paved the way for a national centre for Improvement Districts (17) (and evaluation of community led development (18). There is also no comparable system of planning aid in Ireland (19) to support communities to be directly involved in planning decisions.

The CTCHC programme has growing political support, largely from the Green Party, in Ireland, as well as interest from the European Commission's DG Grow. Comparable, but more mature, developments in Scotland have led to cooperation with Scotland's Towns Partnership, including a joint workshop (20). The workshop attracted large numbers and provided the platform to develop two strands of the TCHC programme, comprising the Border towns and Western seabord towns. However, the programme in Ireland is not yet institutionally embedded and is very dependent on the work of champions, particularly Alison Harvey within Ireland's Heritage Council. Local authorities were initially not keen on treating the initiative as a priority. However, they now cooperate as the initiative is in the Programme for Government (21).

"An online toolkit doesn't replace the agency of people meeting, providing them with a strong helping hand, and basing decisions on strong evidence and data. Community is the glue that holds towns together and the people that use a town's services are very invested in the place" (22)

The Retail Grocery Dairy & Allied Trades Association - RGDATA - is the representative association for the owners of over 4,000 independent family-owned grocery shops, convenience stores, forecourt stores and supermarkets in Ireland. The membership includes 13500 small shops and 3500 convenience stores and supermarkets. Family-owned town shops are at the heart of communities. RGDATA involvement began with the Village Design Statement initiative at a time with its membership was struggling to come together and organise. They realised that the future of their businesses in town centres needed more than just promotional campaigns and events. They needed to look at towns as an entity and deal with infrastructure issues like parking and the quality of the environment and there needed to be a planned approach to tackle this. The organisation was influenced by the research of National University of Ireland, Galway on the importance of shops for communities. RGDATA realised that keeping towns vibrant was also about culture, heritage, and sense of place. The DG met Alison Harvey through the VDS process and began to pursue a process that linked town centre development with mobilising community engagement. The subsequent work developed a 15-point health check plan and criteria for towns to participate in the programme. Towns needed to have an active business chamber and have progressed a local area development plan to the point that would allow the health check to be incorporated in it. There needed to be engagement with the local authority and positively engaged citizens groups. The town "needed to be ready to hit the ground running". Links to third level institutions mobilised students to support the process with activities like questionnaires, interviews and mapping. Different disciplines from different universities were involved, such as planning or marketing students, which brought fresh thinking and viewpoints to the work. Higher Education institutions found involvement was beneficial for their students, although they want their costs to be covered. Institutes of Technology and school pupils in their transition year were also involved along with active retirement groups. This approach led to a wealth of new ideas such as allotments on rooves, linking parts of towns, or opening-up river walkways, and making town squares better for all weather use.

The aspiration of the TCHC programme is to develop a Town Centre First policy in Ireland similar to the Town Centre First Principle operating in Scotland (23) supported with a mechanism similar to Scotland's Towns Partnership. Ireland has one of the highest dereliction rates in Europe with vacancy rates of around 29% when the target is 5%. Local Authorities have struggled to tackle this problem with the response varying by local authority and influenced by whether they employ a Heritage Officer. It is also difficult for local authorities to focus on towns with the most potential given their remit. However, where the TCHC is in use progress is being made. For example, in Tipperary vacancy rates have reduced from 31% to 29%. There is also a challenge at national level with towns' development the remit of different departments and cross-departmental work underdeveloped.

The pandemic revealed the importance of the community led approach of the CTCHC programme. Members came together to deliver local services, care for the vulnerable and create a safe environment. The RGDATA membership thinks that the community role of small retailers and civic organisations may have a lasting effect on their resilience in relation to large commercial retail offers. The ambition is to roll out the TCHC programme nationally so any town can do the 15-point process. Towns and villages are built and develop in similar ways so have similar problems. Good practice in one area can help another.

Tracing property ownership is challenging in town centres and, particularly above street level. Dealing with a whole street is much easier, such as the case of Tralee (24) where a whole Georgian street had vacant floors. A seminar with owners was arranged and they applied for improvement funding as a group. Tralee also surveyed residents and visitors about their use of the town centre and what they thought was missing in the town. The results particularly influenced thinking about the evening economy. In the case of Monaghan (25) student accommodation was created from vacant properties. The Letterkenny Health Check involved students from Queens University and developed the idea of a Cathedral Quarter (26) based on a local stained-glass heritage that had largely become forgotten. Croom Development Association (27) is an example of a very small town that has focused on developing facilities for wellbeing, including a community centre, 11-acre town park and an enterprise hub. The association is now working on regenerating high street buildings. Tipperary (28) was very run down and need of regeneration with the CTCHC survey revealing local demand for tackling derelict buildings as well as use of music festivals and cultural events to attract tourism. The town is now a recognised tourism destination.

The repurposing of heritage buildings has characterised a number of CTCHC developments and fulfilling the green principle that revitalising existing buildings is the most sustainable approach. Skibbereen in West Cork tackled this through the social enterprise route, converting a local bakery, that had begun life as a cinema, into a wifi hub and then expanding the programme with the support of diaspora patrons and Board of eleven volunteers. This grew into the Ludgate Hub (29), subject of a case study on revitalising rural areas through digitisation. Outputs are impressive, including enterprise spin offs, permanent relocation of 15 members to the area, 11 new jobs, 1600 annual attendances at Ludgate Hub National Digital Week, 2,800 bed nights in the area, and 250 monthly users.

The CTCHC programme addresses the difficulty on doing collaborative town centre regeneration. It bring all stakeholders together on a progressive path to town centre regeneration. At local level the process can be led by different stakeholders, including Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), a Town Team or a business leader in active in the community. The use of a standard methodology means that the programme can be effectively coordinated and evaluated. The programme aligns with regeneration principles, is informed by relevant data, and aligns with local plans and structures. Two different examples of how this has impacted on heritage and wellbeing include Tipperary and the Museum of Childhood.

The Tipperary Town Centre Health Check exemplifies the point made in the consultation with Alison Harvery, that 'heritage is what we mean by town centre regeneration in Ireland'. The CTCHC team were approached following local dissatisfaction and a town centre march expressing concerns about approaches to regeneration and vacancy rates in Tipperary. Three workshops were carried out that provided the basis of a heritage action plan produced during the lockdown period. The workshops identified 19 heritage opportunities in Tipperary, including:

-Review the Architectural Conservation Area in light of the CTCHC boundary.

- Conservation and Management Plan for a range of landmark buildings and a Public Realm Plan.

- An 'origins of Tipperary Town' exercise to map and record heritage features.

- Promote links to ancient Kings, battle and burial sites. Develop historic gardens.

- Town Trail, military heritage tourism, and heritage links to diaspora.
- A creative and cultural events programme as part of National Heritage Week.

A second team meeting worked in small groups to assess the opportunities and reach a consensus on priorities:

- Commission innovative Conservation and Management Plan (with costed Action Plan) for Tipperary Courthouse, Bridewell Jail and Grounds – establish 'Statement of Significance' and cultural value of the historic buildings/grounds.
- Enhancement of the Historic Main Street in Tipperary Town Centre circa. 18th Century.
- Tipperary Town to take part in National Heritage Week.
- his was then translated into a detailed and costed Tipperary Town Heritage Action Plan. This is now being delivered as part of the LEADER programme and is seeking a further injection of funds to develop further.

The Museum of Childhood Ireland used the CTCHC methodology to introduce the voice of children and young people into the revitalisation of the historic town centre of Tralee Co. Kerry in line with UNCRC (Article12) commitments to children as active citizens with the right to participate in decision making. The project situated children and young people at the centre of the process of urban development in Tralee Town Centre, beginning with a creative consultation event that established a baseline for the process. A marquee was erected in the town centre for workshops with young people that were documented in detail as a basis for further consultation. An online Youth Voice Panel focused on perspectives of children and youth in their own locality. The 'Our Town our Future' event involved 60 children in model making and reimagining the town and a discussion of participation process. This was followed up with art packs in schools for children to reimagine the town. This resulted in both a physical and online exhibition in 2022. An event of under 5-year-old children involved a tree planting project as a focus for thinking about regeneration. Secondary school students were involved in a workshop debating the historic core of Tralee. This revealed a sense of exclusion from town centre planning and a number of key issues emerged, including safety, lack of social spaces, public space design, and introducing nature into the town centre.

Throughout the development of Ireland's CTCHC programme the lead officer has liaised with and been inspired by developments in Scotland. The process of community led town development is more mature in Scotland and is embedded in the governmental approach. Scotland's Towns Partnership is the secretariat of the CPG (Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group) on Towns and Town Centres. On Wednesday 8th December 2021, members of the Cross-Party Group on Towns met online for the group's meeting, held on the topic "Culture and Place". The introduction focused on the need for long term strategies for revitalising town centres and that the retail focus has changed because on the pandemic and online shopping. Phil Prentice of Scotland's Town Partnership emphasised the importance of culture and heritage for town centre recovery. There won't be a retail led recovery. Towns like Paisley and Ayr show how museums, culture and heritage are currently at the heart of town centre regeneration. Karen Dick of Creative Scotland talked about how cultural venues are often at the heart of a place. In the pandemic cultural venues are being temporarily repurposed for community use, such as vaccination or food parcels. Robert Livingston, Regional Screen Scotland talked about the A Cinema Near You programme. Each community has its own culture. A bedrock for strengthening cohesion. You must take local cultures into account when planning at national or regional level. Begin with strengths and what communities value, which is often a place's heritage. He talks about community hubs for Twenty Minute Neighbourhoods and ensuring venues are flexible and affordable. Local cultural activity is hugely under-recorded. This information is needed for it to be in place tools and inclusion in the Twenty Minute Neighbourhood agenda. Mobile facilities like Screen Machine or Mobile Libraries and digital distribution of national events and cultural activities are important. Event cinema still doesn't include Scottish content. Livingston stated that the need to understand cultural facility as community 'glue' is just as important in towns and villages as it is in cities.

Scotland's Town Toolkit (30) is a key tool for the Towns Partnership and provides a useful comparator to the work in Ireland. The toolkit is a free online resource and covers topics like arts and culture, buildings and property, clean and green, enterprise and business, and streets and spaces. There are three sections. The taking action element provides information to support the process of making change, including: collaboration, planning, resourcing, delivery and measuring success. Thematic elements provide supporting advice and resources such as case studies and videos. An inspiration case studies section demonstrates how the towns

of Dumfries, Huntly, Paisley and Stromness have successfully applied the components of the toolkit. The toolkit is organised around five topics: arts and culture; buildings and property; clean and green; enterprise and business; streets and spaces.

The rationale for the arts and culture section rests on how activity attracts people and life into town centres and involves local communities. Culture is considered as contributing to regeneration, including health, wellbeing, economic activity, and community empowerment. Direct outputs include skills development, economic growth, job creation and animating and reusing spaces. Six steps are described in the toolkit relating to arts and culture. The 'engage through art' strand outlines how engaging artists in the local community involves local people in a town centre. The example of The Stove in Dumfries (31) is used to show how a civic and community centre run by artists has influenced the thinking and delivery of town centre recovery. The network employs over 30, mostly young, local people. For the last 6 years the organisation has occupied a former shop in the main street, operating a cafe, music and events spaces. An annual events programme attracts people year round. More recently the organisation has developed the Midsteeple Project (32) as a community-led property development to bring derelict and underused historic buildings in the town centre back into use.

Another example is Deveron Projects (33) in the market town of Huntley in Aberdeenshire based on the concept of 'The Town is the Venue'. For the last 25 years the project has brought artists, thinkers and other creatives together with the Huntly community. Project themes have included gender and parenthood, current politics, and place-making through walking, traditional industries, food culture and climate change. The town has become a studio, gallery and stage for artists of all disciplines from all over the world. A recent long-term project is The Town is the Garden, looking at ways to encourage more community food growing, reducing waste, sharing skills and reconnecting with the natural ecosystems. Other case studies relating to the 'engage through art' theme include the social enterprise, Findhorn Bay Arts, the creative hub, Made in Stirling, and a community-led social enterprise theatre operation, Ayr Gaiety. The latter has built a training and education programme following refurbishing and reopening Scotland's oldest repertory theatre.

The 'Open a Cinema' strand builds on the success of non-profit, community-led cinemas in boosting town centres (34). An example is The Birks Cinema (35), a 'state of the art' rural cinema that on the town square of Aberfeldy. A community group formed to reopen the cinema following a 30-year closure, and it now provides a full cinema programme as well as a range of community activities like yoga, music, arts activities, talks, upcycling workshops. Campbeltown Picture House is another example of a community led restoration of a derelict historic cinema which now offers two screens, café, exhibition and community space, and educational facilities. It is owned by Campbeltown Community Business Ltd (CCB), a social enterprise, and has created career opportunities and training in a town where new jobs are not always readily available.

The 'Start a Creative Hub' strand focuses on a variety of models of hubs where people can meet to be creative, to make things or perform. Made in Stirling (36) is a hub for the local arts sector, providing a showcase, shop and venue in a former empty shop unit in the heart of the town centre. It began as a pop-up project before moving to a permanent home that supports over 150 local artists, designers and makers. A more rural example is Ann Lanntair, a multi-purpose arts centre in Stornaway and other case studies include St Mary's Mill in Selkirk, repurposing a former textile mill. The latter initiative is also an example of the 'create artists' studios' strand that also includes the well-established Wasps Studios, a social enterprise working throughout Scotland, operating 20 spaces that provide artists, makers & creators with inspiring places to work from.

The 'Be Authentic' strand adopts an asset-based approach that builds on local interest, activities and assets. This includes theme-based towns (37) like West Kilbride, a coastal town with strong links to arts and crafts, particularly weaving and textiles, but where high street businesses had ceased trading due to a collapse in local demand. This was tackled by the community through the West Kilbride Community Initiative Limited regenerating the community by creating Scotland's only designated Craft and Design Town and in doing so, gained national and international recognition. The main ethos of the organisation was to use crafts in the social, economic, cultural and environmental regeneration of the community. Empty premises were turned into affordable working studios for artists and makers, allowing them to develop their skills, widen their network and evolve their craft business. This led to the creation of the Barony Centre (38) as a community focal point and showcase for the Craft Town Scotland initiative and housed in a 19th century grade-C listed church. The partnership with local, regional and national organisations, businesses and tourist boards has strengthened and sustained communities. Other examples of the 'Be Authentic' strand are the Castle Douglas Food Town initiative (38) and Wigtown Book Town, Scotland's National Book Town, building on an established annual festival to stimulate a range of culture-led regeneration, including repurposing civic buildings for a new museum.

The CTCHC programme has not adopted a theory of change model and is founded on community empowerment theory as found in the work of Etzioni, Friedman, Arnstein, and Healy. This approach reflects the founding principles of empowering communities to identify their own priorities and intended outcomes and ensuring they have a voices throughout the whole development or regeneration process. In Scotland a draft theory of change / logic model is published to support the process of town centre regeneration.

Figure 2.4. Theory of Change / Logic Model
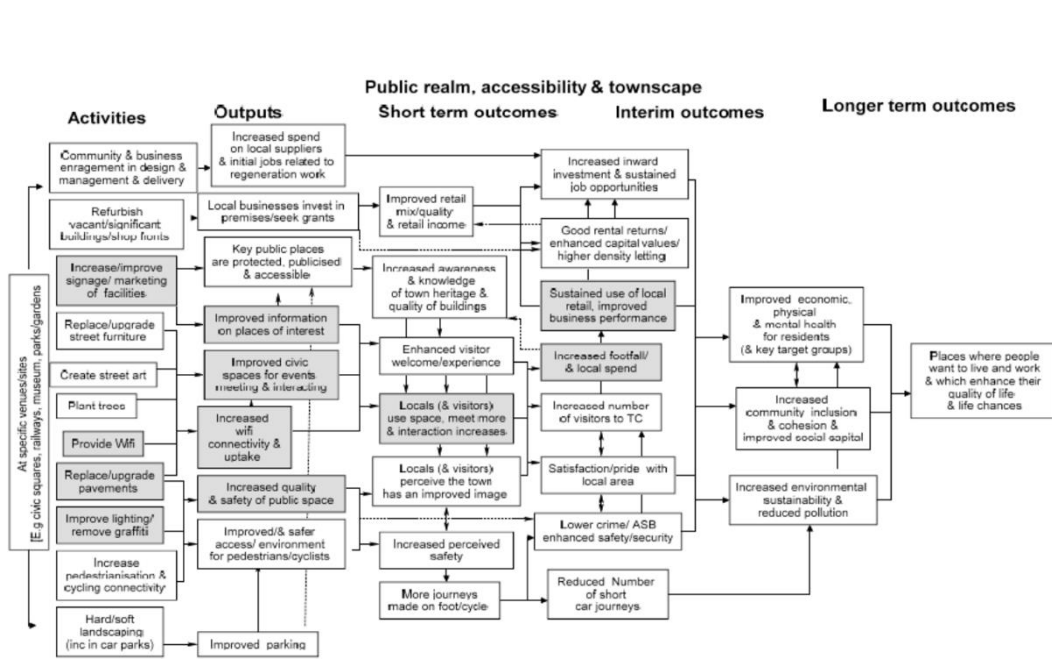
Source: The Scottish Government

3 Conclusions and lessons learnt

The development of community-led local development in Ireland's historic villages and towns over the last two decades has demonstrated how continuity in institutional support and key staffing can achieve results at the national level despite very limited resources. The learning from the VDS programme has been key in shaping a successful CTCHC programme. Heritage Ireland has ensured the process has had an institutional home to provide continuity and a platform for partnerships. At the same time by remaining at arms-length from government the lead officer has had the flexibility to tailor developments to the situation in which she works.

Development of projects is most effective when planned as part of a wider programme that can have national impact and influence the formulation and implementation of policy and strategy concerning heritage, community and place. The VDS and CTCHC programmes developed from pilot initiatives The expansion of the programme has led to an estimated need for 3 project managers, but it is currently supported by one officer leading to concerns about sustainability. There is a tradition in arts and heritage of fully exploiting the skills and dedication of individual officers without fully resourcing and future-proofing their work. Increasing capacity is clearly a priority for the future success of the programme.

When heritage and the historic environment are considered as part of the 'living heritage' of a place they contribute to overall wellbeing of local communities, providing a more sustainable and attractive environment, and better quality of life for local people. The aims of VDS and CTCHC are clear, but broadly defined. This allows for specific characteristics, priorities and outputs to be locally defined.

The embedding of community-led approaches in planning frameworks and processes remains challenging and better-resourced and organised communities are the usual beneficiaries of whatever support is available.

Community engagement and support is not unconditional. Community voices need to clearly discernible in the process and the impact of their involvement should not be drowned out or bypassed by statutory institutions.

Tangible results within a short period of time are needed for community buy-in. The first phase of VDS confirmed findings from Vancouver that if communities could not perceive tangible results from their work in a reasonable period of time then confidence in the process and programme were undermined.

The lack of evaluation and monitoring systems is a barrier to progress in that it is difficult to demonstrate and evidence impact and the achievement of outcomes. Systems are in place in other countries that can be adapted for the Irish context. However, there is a lack of resources to achieve this.

The benefits of transnational working are clear. Close collaboration with peers and learning from policy and strategic development in Scotland has encouraged the champions for community-led development and historic towns in Ireland. It has also provided a template or model that can be emulated and adapted. The interest of the EU is seen as vital by the team in creating the platform for embedding the programmes at national policy level and securing future investment.

LEADER has been an important stakeholder in resourcing successful CTCHC projects.

Recent developments and the publication of the new Irish Government Town Centre First policy demonstrate the challenges facing advocates for community led planning and development in persuading public bodies to amend their systems to consolidate the achievements of the CTCHC programme. The EU has a key role to play in encouraging and incentivising both national and local government to adopt the CTCHC methodology.

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