

CLARE COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2017 – 2023

LOVE SHANNON DRAFT SUBMISSION



We are 'Love Shannon CLG' a group of individuals who are not affiliated with any political party, religious order, or commercial organisation. Our main purpose is to help Shannon achieve its full potential as a living town by collaborating with appropriate bodies, lobbying, and informing, as well as challenging the relevant authorities.

Herein we have prepared a submission to the County Development Plan 2022 – 2028. Love Shannon represents broad profile ranges in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, and personal experiences of living and, or working in the several areas that make up the town. Below we have outlined, that in our opinion, are key areas that need to be addressed within Clare's County Development Plan 2022-2028 in the context of Shannon Town and its hinterland.

It is widely recognised by both residents, and visitors, that Shannon is a very desirable place to live, socialise, and to work. It is a town that is rich in community engagement with several positive amenities. It is strategically located, with an excellent road network, and it is easily accessible to other parts of the region and Country. Shannon is already classified as a "Linked Gateway" in the National Spatial Strategy, and as highlighted in Clare County Development Plan 2017–2023, 'Shannon Municipal District Written Statement' "a national and international centre of importance for employment, connectivity, international trade, and foreign direct investment."

It is also widely accepted that Shannon town centre lacks an identity, and the central core fails to cohere all the surrounding amenities, industry, business, and neighbourhoods/estates/parks together. Many of these amenities are currently disconnected, inaccessible, underutilised, and some are of poor quality. It is also acknowledged that Shannon lacks the vibrancy that would attract outside investment, visitors, and tourists to the town.

LoveShannon sees Shannon as a town of contradictions. A settlement with beautiful amenity walks along the estuary, an extensive network of green pedestrian links throughout, all of which are in contrast with some parts of the town where there is a low-quality urban environment with traffic taking precedence over a sense of identity streetscape. There are affluent estates beside social housing with little or no integration. There are excellent primary and secondary educational facilities but with limited supports for our young people. A strong

community spirit exists, along with an abundance of sporting clubs, which is in contrast to a total lack of retail, hospitality, and leisure offerings.

Collectively, LoveShannon seeks the enhancement of the identity of Shannon Town Centre, building on its several existing strengths. We believe the potential to create a new vision for our town that is fit for this century, and that would give County Clare a leading edge in terms of innovation exists. Many elements are already here, and if built upon, Shannon could be the pilot town for future living in Ireland. Shannon previously benefited from a similar initiative in the 1960s. Since that time, the town has largely been forgotten, with a lack of provision, supports, and funding. This new vision could consist of a town, which is carbon neutral, both enterprise, and community rich, with the provision of housing for all generations that is inclusive and forward-thinking. A community that cares for its elderly in an integrated fashion, that enables young people to live independently, and that supports young families to become established. All of whom will live side by side in a social infrastructure that is distinctive of an urban town centre in rural County Clare. This vision would see Shannon become a vibrant town, with a high standard of urban design, smarter public transport, a range of community, social, and local retail facilities, along with a wider variety of accommodation, that would have strong integration with the Airport and Industrial estates. Further details of our submission are outlined below under each of the proposed development plan headings.

Population and Housing

Thriving communities include a mix of household types and sizes to cater to an array of people from cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. A variety of housing and people is something that Shannon has historically managed successfully in its relatively short lifetime, with numerous Nationalities settling here and integrating into the community. However, in recent years Shannon has lost many of its young indigenous population due to a lack of housing and amenities, and, in tandem, we have people migrating and immigrating here with little integration. There has been little private housing built in Shannon for over a decade. Our young people have had to buy homes in adjacent villages such as Newmarket-on-Fergus, Sixmilebridge, Quinn, and Clarecastle due to a shortage of suitable housing availability in Shannon. A result of which is a stagnant population within the environs of Shannon, a comparison of census shows that we have barely grown in size, without suitable housing we cannot grow.

Previously, during the 1990s and 2000s, there was extensive private housing concentrated in Ballycasey, and latterly in Hurlers Cross, which catered predominantly to young families. While this was an option to buy quality homes in Shannon at that time, they were located on the outskirts of the town, away from all amenities. Residents have to depend on cars to do daily tasks. Shannon is a compact town with a series of green corridors, where, if they were

enhanced (better quality surfacing, lighting, increased connectivity, etc.,) citizens could be less car-dependent.

LoveShannon sees opportunities within the town for greater supports for retirement age, senior living, including assisted living options for people with disabilities. Again, something Shannon provided for in its heyday but in later years has dwindled with lack of support and funding.

There are further opportunities to bring vacant housing into use through initiatives and incentives, but these need to be linked to legislation. Another aspect to this could be a scheme to support people as they move up or down in home size to suit their needs at various stages of their life. A scheme that would support people in 'rightsizing' their home, freeing up housing stock in a safe and controlled way.

In the last decade, housing stock in Shannon has consisted of affordable housing schemes, and social housing estates (section 179). All of these developments are located in the same part of the town, in Tullyvarraga. LoveShannon has serious concerns about this concentration of socio-economic housing located on the periphery of the town, with no adjacent amenities. We have additional concerns about the future quality of the neighbourhood environment in these areas and how it will impact the rest of the town.

Shannon needs a stable and sustainable supply of good quality housing for all of our society that is inclusive and integrated, and that will enable our citizens to have a good quality of life and flourish. It is imperative that future residential schemes seek to cater to a more diverse mix of dwelling types, sizes and tenures and that these new developments be serviced in such a way as not to take from the Town centre.

Economic, Enterprise, Tourism and Retail Development

In the 'Shannon Municipal District Written Statement' of the Clare County Development Plan 2017–2023, it states that "significant opportunities exist to grow Shannon town as a centre of economic importance through further indigenous business development and foreign direct investment, expansion of services at Shannon International Airport, the development of the International Aviation Services Centre (IASC) and the planned enhancement of the green infrastructure network and public realm improvements in the town and its environs." LoveShannon agrees with this statement whole heartily. With the wide impacts of Covid-19, however, we have an entirely new perspective on living, working, and leisure. As we emerge from this pandemic, there will be an added need for re-growing employment and creating new opportunities. This re-growth is something that could feed into an innovative pilot scheme that earmarks new housing and industry building typology. A new vision that can go

hand in hand with Shannon being the Irish leader in autonomous vehicles through JLR and supporting FMCI Future Mobility Campus Ireland. All these various methods of new ways of living and working could enable Shannon to become a centre of excellence that would include incubation centres for SME's and start-up's, and training through innovative apprenticeship programmes. Industry, educational, and community partnerships are already established, along with the facilities and infrastructure being in place to start a new and fresh innovation fitting for this century.

As it stands, Shannon town is currently lacking many retail and leisure amenities and too many empty units in its “centre” (Skycourt). The urban fabric of the core of the town centre needs to be expanded on in order to attract enterprise, tourism, and retail. While Shannon is in close proximity to other urban centres, namely Ennis, and Limerick, there are opportunities for Shannon to have a unique offering in terms of retail and leisure. However, for this to happen the physical attributes of the existing town need to be upgraded, and a sense of place, and identity created. The existing town centre, which comprises predominantly of the shopping centre, ‘SkyCourt’, has one owner and landlord. This, in itself, naturally has issues as there is no variety of tenure for business owners who wish to be located in the centre of the town. SkyCourt has a hard-edge exterior with an eyesore of a multi-story car park. This image, against the backdrop of the dated Shannon Development building, and neighbouring Kincora Flats, are what visitors to the town first see and ultimately identify with when they picture Shannon Town. The town centre needs to grow to incorporate additional units and spaces that focus on creating a strong commercial centre. This growth needs to be co-ordinated, and of high-quality urban design that softens the town, bringing features and landmarks, giving Shannon a heart and soul that can be promoted, and most importantly connected with the existing community, hinterland, industrial estates, and Airport.

Another key aspect in the eco-system of Shannon’s enterprise and tourism is our International Airport, which must return to growth from pre-2020 levels. This is a state-of-the-art facility that has been grossly underutilised for a long time. Shannon Airport has failed to reach success in more recent years, which has been widely publicised. Shannon Airport is currently seeking voluntary redundancies, and with over a 70% drop in air traffic, more redundancies will surely follow, having a detrimental effect on the Region. We cannot let this facility fall into decline. While the global aviation industry has been hit hard with the effects of Covid-19 it is essential that this asset is minded and protected for the future. We need to be also innovative here and look to new ways of using this facility and increasing its connection with the local community.

Other possibilities for economic and enterprise growth for Shannon might include the decentralisation of government departments, which in turn will promote IDA and Enterprise

Ireland's efforts to attract investments, such as Foreign Direct Investment, for instance. In turn, new investments will increase support and spin-off businesses.

Concerning tourism, there is huge untapped potential along the Shannon Estuary for both domestic and international visitors. Currently, there is a beautiful river walk, which has been marginally developed with adjacent biodiversity and wetland areas. There are further opportunities that can be explored here, including a greenway that would facilitate visitors arriving at Shannon Airport to start their holiday by foot or bicycle; a wild bird sanctuary that has the potential to become a premier birding location; expanding the existing wetlands to include an eco and activity park, that would include proper parking and public toilet facilities, and perhaps eateries, with enhanced green route connectivity to the river and the towns existing and extensive network of pathways; possible exploration of access to the river for leisure activities, and even “the progression of marine-related industry developments, recreational uses, enhancement of biodiversity and natural heritage and a variety of employment-generating uses such as fishing, tourism, and recreational activities” as stated in the Clare County Development Plan 2017–2023, ‘Shannon Municipal District Written Statement. We see the Estuary as being an integral part of the town, which to date has largely been unconsidered, with even the design of the town turning its back on the river.

Towns and Villages

LoveShannon sees there is massive potential for the town of Shannon and neighbouring villages to work together in a coordinated effort to create economic growth, enterprise, and tourism. Clare County Council can offer the necessary framework to implement such a programme where a cluster of economic centres have a central management partnership established and a coordinated plan of events that enables the local population to engage, enjoy and support such activities.

There are also opportunities for Shannon Town and surrounding villages to benefit from the Crematorium. For people traveling long distances to and from Shannon Crematorium, there is nowhere obvious for mourning families and friends to congregate.

Rural Development

We fully support the four areas of strategic focus of the Clare Rural Development Strategy 2026, as outlined below, and we see Shannon Town as being able to play a significant role in supporting our surrounding rural villages and townlands:

1. Targeting specific geographical areas in order to maintain and grow their populations;
2. Providing special supports for combined towns and partnering parishes so that they can achieve sufficient scale of population and resources to attract public investment and justify private investment;

3. Developing innovative and community-based social enterprise centres where multiple agencies can deliver their services;
4. Increasing the quality of the physical, built, social and cultural environment of rural areas so that they are more attractive places in which to live both now and in the future.

Transport & Infrastructure

LoveShannon fully supports the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (LSMATS) and the seven guiding principles on which it is based. Shannon has a vast network of green route infrastructure in place that, with a small injection of investment, would encourage walking and cycling, removing a lot of unnecessary car journeys, which are predominantly local trips to school, the town centre, and the industrial estate for instance.

LoveShannon would be in favour of dedicated shuttle bus services between Sixmilebridge railway station, Bunratty, and Shannon Airport. We also see opportunities for other shuttle services to neighbouring villages. While the town is well connected in terms of public transport, there are opportunities to extend the existing bus services beyond 11 pm to support the night-time economy and cultural activities.

Presently Shannon has seen an increase in the volume of traffic with the Crematorium located on the fringes of town. Quiet neighbourhoods have been affected with a number of funeral processions passing through on their way to and from the Crematorium on a daily basis. Alternative access routes need to be opened so that this traffic can be directed away from neighbourhoods with young children.

Before Covid-19, the largest and fastest-growing tourism sector in Ireland was cycling and walking (projected annual growth of 4% p.a. to 2028 - Cycling Tourism in Ireland presentation, Orla Carroll Director of Product Development, Fáilte Ireland). Since the start of the pandemic in Ireland, in March 2020, the National Transport Authority has been encouraging commuters to consider cycling or walking as alternatives to using public transport. Therefore, enhancing infrastructure in this area would seem like a sensible investment for the future. It would seem, however, that the N19 Shannon Airport Access Road Improvement Scheme has failed to include a cycle lane as part of its enhancement works to and from Shannon Airport. The current road to the airport is too narrow for cyclists to cycle safely. It is our understanding that the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy may also be missing out on an opportunity to have a cycle and walking route starting at the airport. Currently, there is signage in place forbidding cycling on the pathway from Shannon Airport, not a very friendly Irish welcome to visitors arriving by bicycle or hoping to holiday by foot. LoveShannon feels

that the potential for a cycle and walkway emerging at the Airport with effective wayfinding is fundamental to increasing tourism in the town of Shannon and beyond. These green routes also need to be supported by cultural and social choices for visitors along with more accommodation options, including budget accommodation, which presently is not an option until a visitor reaches Ennis or Limerick. Currently, regardless of how a tourist begins their holiday (bicycle, bus, car, or foot), they would encounter great difficulty in finding Shannon Town Centre, along with finding much to keep them there. This needs to change.

Built and Natural Heritage, Landscape and Green Infrastructure

LoveShannon recognises that the Shannon Municipal District has an abundance of built and natural heritage that is currently completely undervalued. Shannon's unique built heritage is largely forgotten. Having been the first town to be designed and built in almost 300 years, Shannon has a unique selling point that should be embraced, enhanced, and showcased. There are examples of mid-century architecture bungalows designed by Andrew Devane, who studied under Frank Lyold Wright, that ought to be protected, and restored to their former glory. There are the apartments in Drumgeely Hill, situated at the gateway to the Mid-West when coming from Shannon Airport. Currently, these are an eyesore, when in fact they should be a dynamic statement that supports Shannon's unique identity as a new industrial town. There are numerous buildings around the town from the mid-20th century that could be protected, restored, and developed into an Architectural trail that could form part of a wider trail for County Clare.

Shannon's natural heritage is something LoveShannon sees as not being maximised to its full potential. Shannon has a beautiful setting that is not realised. This is due to the fabric of the town camouflaging these hidden gems which are surrounded by numerous housing estates that lack character, and identity.

LoveShannon fully supports the objectives of the Strategic Integrated Framework Plan (SIFP) for the Shannon Estuary, however, we are disappointed that Shannon Town is not part of this strategy. Shannon Town has once again been overlooked. LoveShannon recognises the town as having untapped potential in this area and would like to maximise infrastructural resources along the Shannon Estuary to enhance the quality of life for the local community, and to attract investment, and tourism.

Climate Change, Renewable Energy and Environment

There is endless potential for the town of Shannon to become a low carbon community and a pioneer in modern sustainable living including, renewable energy, automated transport, and maximising the town's compact design to become a Green Town. It is not dissimilar to a Garden town, where self-contained communities are surrounded by greenbelts containing proportionate areas of residences, industry, and agriculture. As outlined previously in this

submission, Shannon has the necessary infrastructure in place to start something of that scale and vision.

Social, Community and Cultural Development

Access to education, health and community support services, amenities, and leisure services are areas that Shannon Town has, and is doing successfully. However, there are gaps that exist and for Shannon to mature into the town it should be these areas need to be addressed. The provision of accessible community-based facilities that can service and support the people of the town is one aspect to closing this gap. LoveShannon is currently involved in a proposal for Shannon Municipal District Recreational Sports Hub. While there are many sporting facilities already in the town, we see this new hub more as having a strong connection to the river, and as a community recreational centre with the potential for other services to spur off it. Such services might include a community crèche, and a centre for our special needs population, a dedicated youth café, a digital hub, all things the town does not currently have.

Areas that Shannon Town is fundamentally lacking in are good quality built environment, including an adequate town centre with a cultural amenity. While there are some areas of the town where there are successful examples of good quality built environment, they are recent developments. For the scale of the town, we need further investment in this area if Shannon is to become an appealing and sustainable community. The influx of social housing is a concern for many, and in particular, the social inclusion of these estates going forward. LoveShannon fears there will be barriers to participation, and we need to ensure that there are the necessary resources in our town for all the community to engage fully in economic, social, and cultural life.

Conclusion

LoveShannon is ardent about protecting the good aspects of the town and striving to make improvements for all of its community. We feel that as the second largest town in the County, and a substantial ratepayer to Clare County Council, we have been ignored for too long. We see Shannon, in all its guises continuing to be hugely significant to both Clare, and the wider region. While this is acknowledged in many public papers, it does not follow through in terms of funding and investment. Shannon needs to be recognised for all its wide attributes, and contributions to the Midwest. The town, its industrial estates, and the airport, accumulatively, account for more than 38 percent of Clare County Councils revenue. The lack of investment by the Council in the town has had an ongoing impact since they took ownership from Shannon Development in 2004. Shannon town has long suffered from this lack of investment and, as a direct result, has lost out on opportunities for its business and residential communities. It is long overdue that Clare County Council needs to feed the rates earned from the town back into Shannon, at the very least.

Throughout our submission we have mentioned plans, SIFP, LSMATS, National Spatial Strategy, Shannon Masterplan, Clare Rural Development Strategy, we at LoveShannonGroup ask that these reports / plans are looked at in tandem and the value of Shannon Town in all its parts is finally seen for what it is – the jewel in this regions crown with the Airport and Industrial Estates. However, for these areas to prosper, the adjacent town has to be improved upon. To bring top tier companies to the estate requires a top tier town and all that it entails to accommodate top tier employees by improving the housing stock, the amenities, retail, food & beverage, cultural and all that makes a quality town. LoveShannon is passionate about bringing this about for our town and we trust that you will give our submission due consideration.

On a final note LoveShannon in partnership with CLDC and funded by LEADER are conducting a community development plan, we intend on sharing the outcome with the Clare County Council and would ask that this too be considered when implementing the community development plan.