

# Town Team Support Document



# Introduction

Balla is a town with a proven track record when it comes to delivering community plans with an estimated 95% of the Community Futures Plan that was developed in 2017 delivered. Other plans including the Balla Tidy Towns 5 Year Plan and Balla Community Action Biodiversity Plan, show an ambition to improving the town with an eye on provision of services and infrastructure of the community, social integration, sustainable development and caring for nature.

ACT and Rhatigan Architects were commissioned to develop this Town Team Support Document. The scope here was to:

- carry out a (desk-top) review of all plans and merge these into a short coherent strategy document to focus energy.
- identify skills needed to augment the Town Team.
- articulate an overall vision including identity and public realm.
- Identify gaps and update the Town Centre Health Check.

Informed by the principles of Town Centre First, that route through which the funding for this project was delivered, this document combines local knowledge around the needs of the community with best practice in urban regeneration.

We hope this document acts as the main guide for Balla as it delivers new plans and projects to realise its potential as an excellent place to visit, live, work, play.

# The Town Centre First

The Town Centre First Policy, is a major cross-government policy that aims to tackle vacancy, combat dereliction and breathe new life into our town centres. It advocates for a holistic, place-based approach to sustainable rural development. Irish towns are facing significant challenges and opportunities that require a coordinated and comprehensive response.



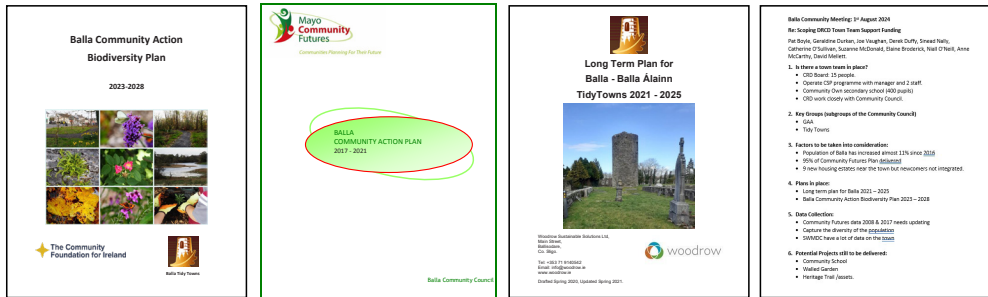
## The Town Centre First policy recognises that successful places:

- Are characterised by an attractive public realm (streets, spaces and parks) that is designed to invite people to meet, mingle and dwell;
- Contain a variety of services/shops that provide employment opportunities, enable people to shop locally and meet the needs of the local community;
- Provide a range of cultural, recreational and community spaces (that includes scope for periodic events and festivals) that bring together community members and attract visitors/tourists;
- Contain a well maintained building stock that creates visual interest and animates streets and spaces;
- Conserve, adapt and highlight historical buildings and streetscapes that provide the town with a unique identity;
- Are attractive vibrant places for enterprises to grow and develop;
- Are well connected and accessible to sustainable modes of transport, enabling a high proportion of journeys to be made by foot and/or bicycle from the immediate hinterland (e.g. the '10 minute town' concept);
- Manage traffic within central areas so that streets prioritise vulnerable users (pedestrians and cyclists), enabling them to move about safely and in comfort;
- Provide a mix of housing typologies and tenures to cater for diverse communities in terms of age, income and mobility;
- Utilise digital technology to enhance the experience of living and working in towns, enabling greater choices in terms of location and lifestyle;
- Provide opportunities for the amenity, health and well-being of residents, workers and visitors.

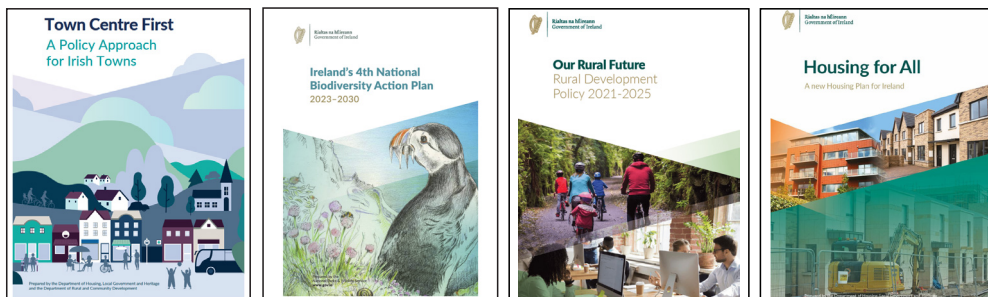
# The Approach

This Town Team support document has been informed by the existing Balla community plans and national plans to arrive at a cohesive approach to the towns development. The proposals set out here are have mostly come directly from the existing plans with additional proposals from ACT with responding to Balla’s Challenges and Opportunities.

## Existing Plans & Input



## + National Policy



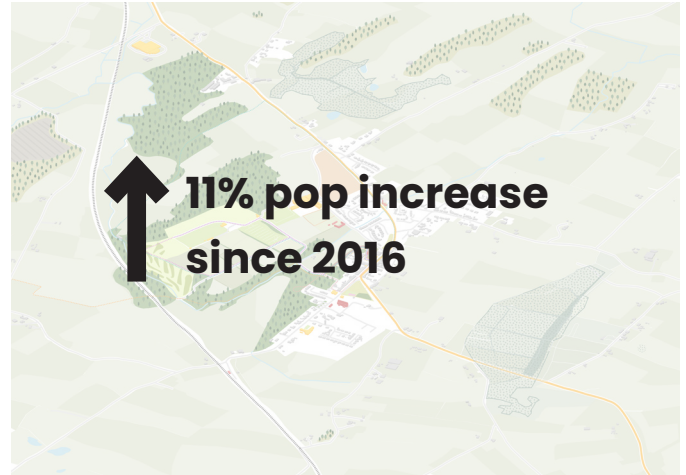
## Cohesive Vision

# Challenges and Opportunities Overview

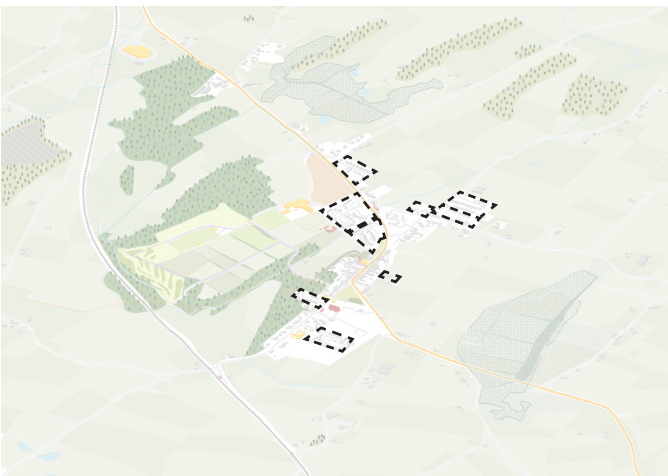
The key challenges and opportunities listed below that face Balla are collated from the Balla Scoping Meeting Notes 01-08-24 document and observations from ACT. We have intentionally not specified what is a challenge or what is an opportunity because depending on how they are approached, all can be challenges and all can be opportunities.



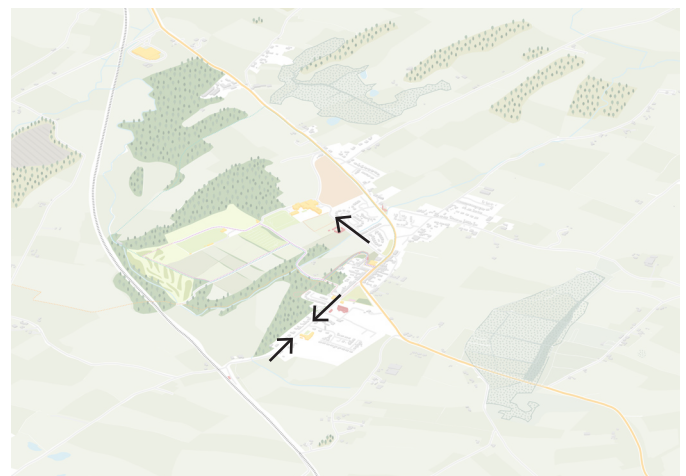
**Town Park**



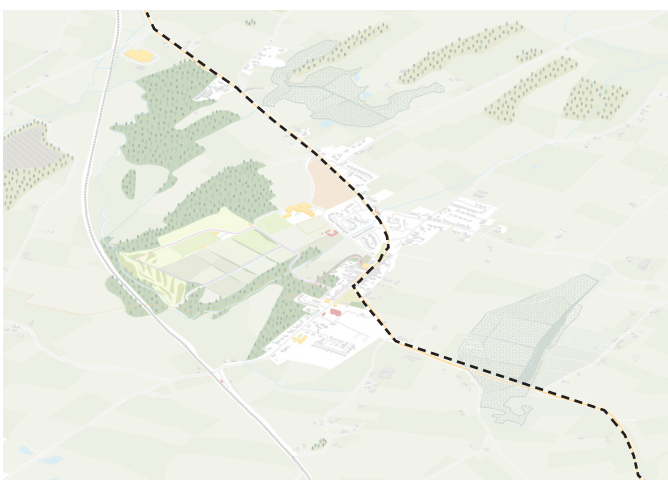
**Population Increase**



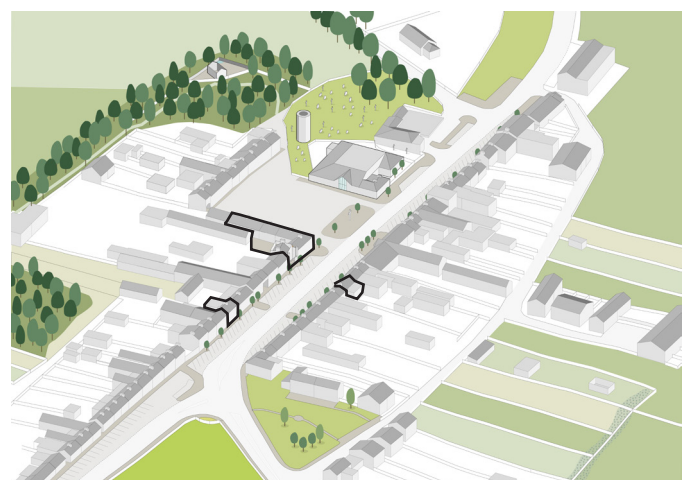
**9 new housing estates not integrating**



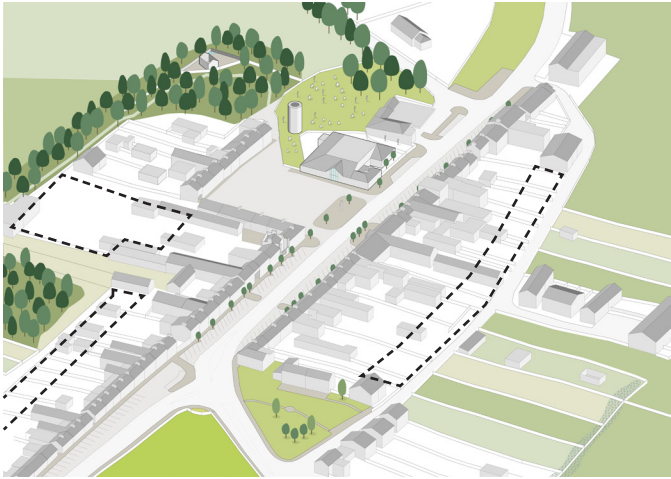
**Lacking Safe routes to school**



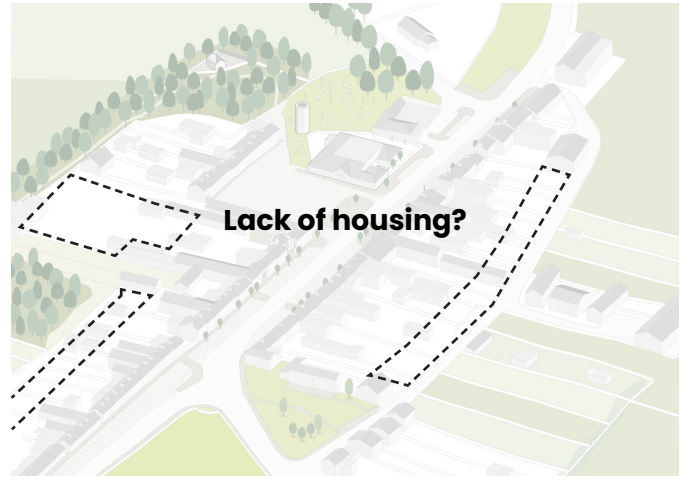
**7000 + Traffic through town**



**Vacancy and Dereliction**

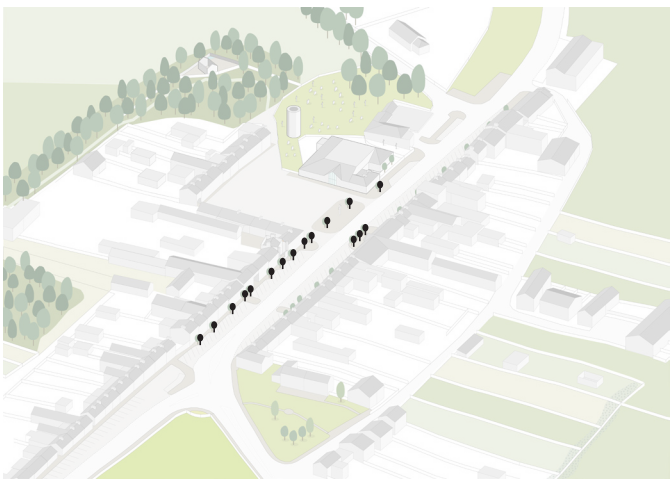


**Backlands potential**



**Lack of housing?**

**Lack of housing?**



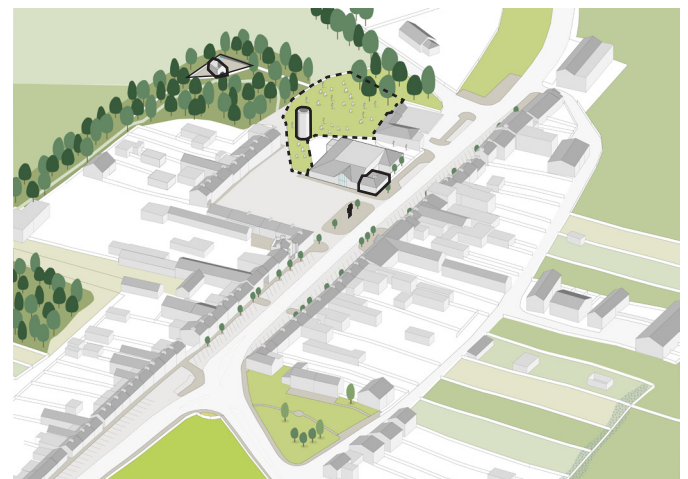
**Trees - Noted Dangerous  
Pedestrians/cyclists**



**Square**



**Road Width**



**Ruins + Historic Structures**

# Urban Development

Originally developed around the monastery founded by Mo Chua, Balla is a market town primarily organised along its main street. The town remained consistent in its footprint from the mid 1800's to the same until the 1990's. During the 2000's new housing estates were built mostly beyond the historic core. Since the 2008 crisis, Balla hasn't seen any substantial housing development though some new projects are underway.

## 1829 - 1834



## 1897 - 1913



## 1996



## 2006



## 2023





MAIN ST. WEST.

# CSO Analysis

Recent and historic CSO data has been analysed to understand trends and evaluate the needs of the town.

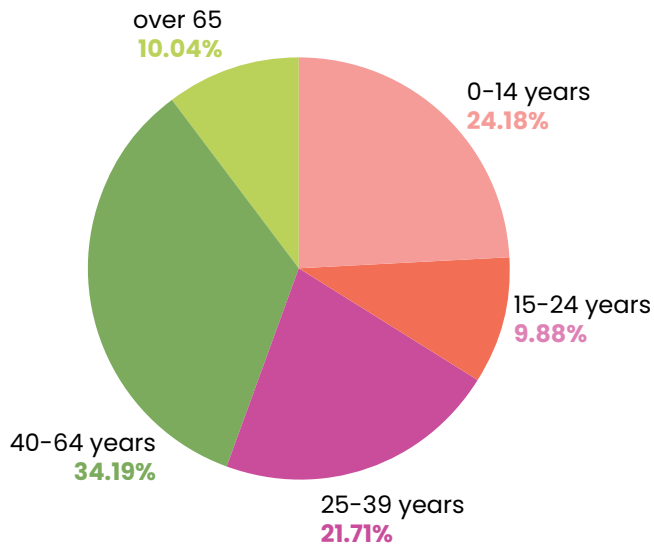
According to CSO data, Balla’s population increased substantially between the late 90s and early 2000s, doubling in just 10 years. Today, over 800 people live in Balla. A lack of available and new housing has the potential to stagnate the towns growth. It is also noted that the population as a percentage is aging.

Most of the trips are made by private means. In light of this dependency, some projects have been foreseen by the Long-Term Plan for Balla, such as the creation of cycle-pedestrian connections between residential neighbourhoods. The high car dependency also points towards the reopening of the train station that may then ease the traffic pressure of commuters to Castlebar and Claremorris.

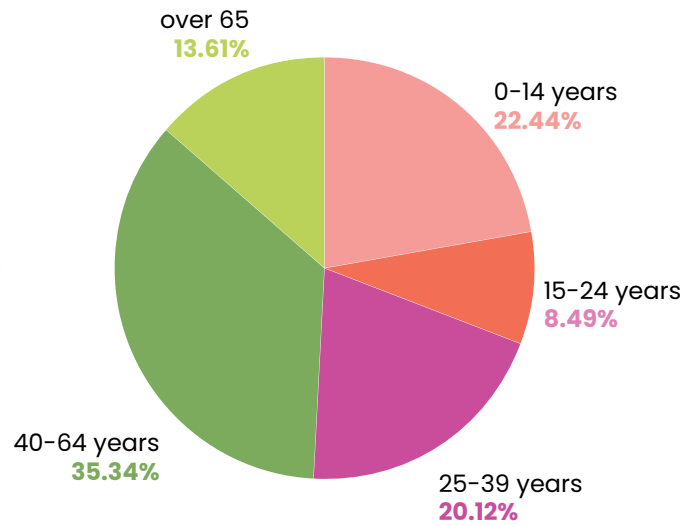
It was noted that car pooling is a common way to commute. While in principle this is possible, it also results in cars being parked in the square and main street for the day which puts pressure on the space available.

Name	Status	County	Population	Population	Population	Population	Population	Population	Population
			Census 1991-04-21	Census 1996-04-28	Census 2002-04-28	Census 2006-04-23	Census 2011-04-10	Census 2016-04-24	Census 2022-04-03
Castlebar	Agglomeration	Mayo	7,648	8,532	11,371	11,891	12,318	12,068	13,054
Ballina	Agglomeration	Mayo	8,167	8,762	9,647	10,409	11,086	10,171	10,556
Westport	Agglomeration	Mayo	3,688	4,520	5,634	5,475	6,063	6,198	6,872
Claremorris	Census Town	Mayo	1,907	1,914	2,101	2,595	3,412	3,687	3,857
Ballinrobe	Census Town	Mayo	1,229	1,309	1,626	2,098	2,704	2,786	3,148
Ballyhaunis	Census Town	Mayo	1,282	1,287	1,381	1,708	2,312	2,366	2,773
Swinford	Census Town	Mayo	1,216	1,386	1,497	1,502	1,435	1,394	1,459
Foxford	Census Town	Mayo	974	944	878	1,058	1,326	1,315	1,452
Kiltimagh	Census Town	Mayo	952	917	1,000	1,096	1,127	1,069	1,232
Charlestown - Bellahy	Census Town	Mayo / Sligo	712	675	753	859	914	1,033	1,172
Crossmolina	Census Town	Mayo	1,202	1,103	935	930	1,061	1,044	1,134
Béal an Mhuirthead (Belmullet)	Census Town	Mayo	986	954	952	1,074	1,089	1,019	1,042
Knock	Census Town	Mayo	440	575	595	745	811	972	1,029
Balla	Census Town	Mayo	337	316	443	586	671	769	860
Newport	Census Town	Mayo	521	567	527	590	616	626	815
Killala	Census Town	Mayo	713	657	650	569	574	562	587
Keel - Dooagh	Census Town	Mayo	557	518	541	561	582	541	567
Ballindine	Census Town	Mayo	232	233	297	249	350	349	468
Kilkelly	Census Town	Mayo	263	258	230	389	372	373	429

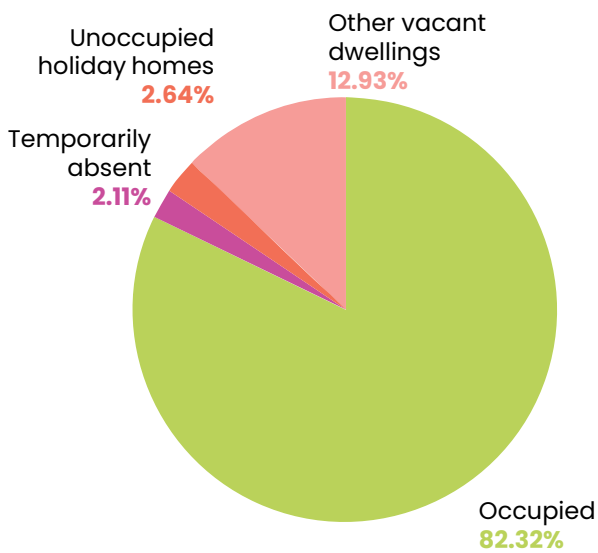
## Population by age 2016



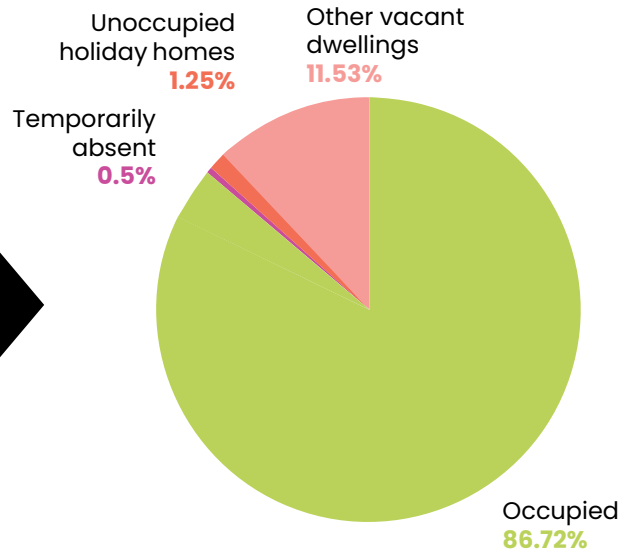
## Population by age 2022



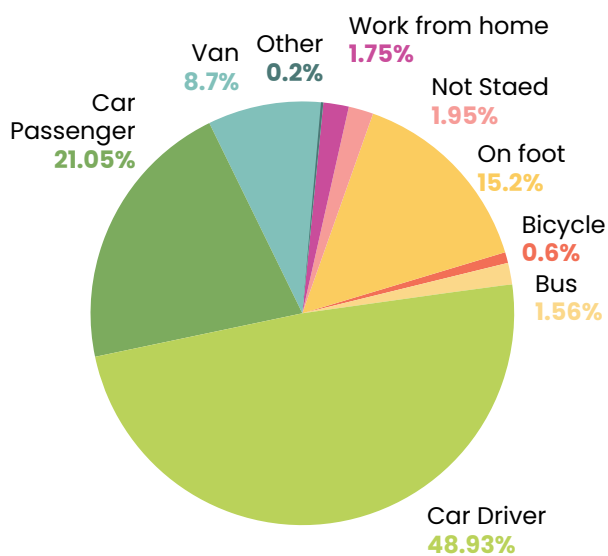
## Occupancy status of permanent dwellings on Census Night



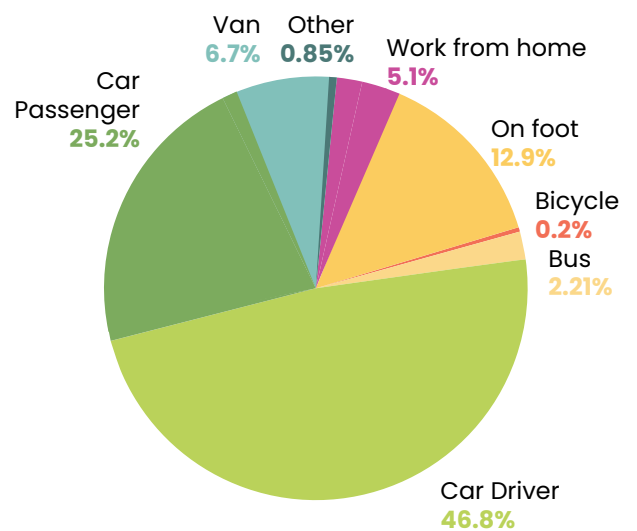
## Occupancy status of permanent dwellings on Census Night



## Means of commuting



## Means of commuting

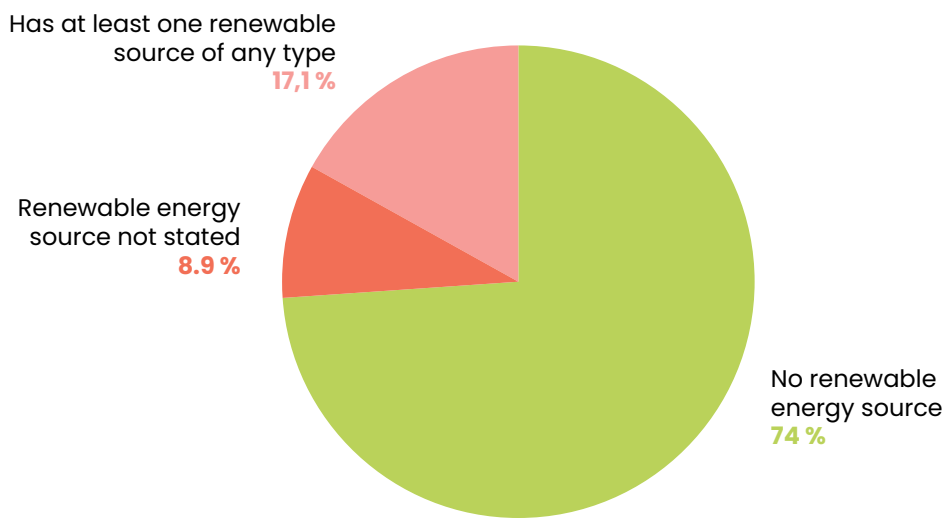


## Households with Renewable Energy Source

2022

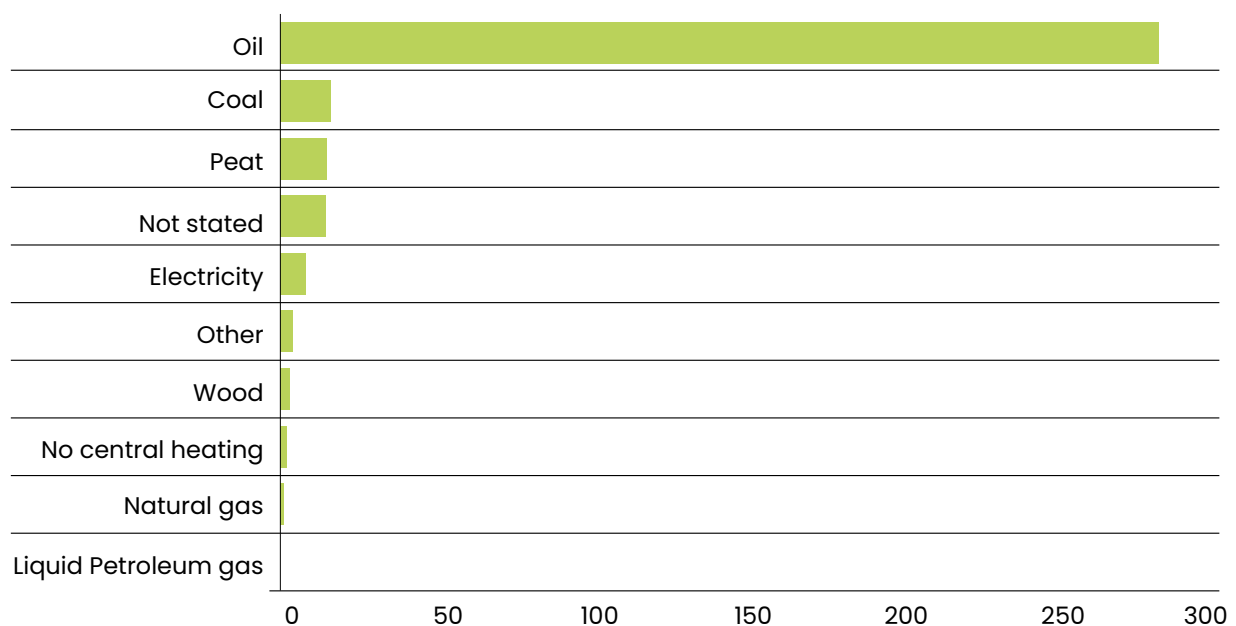
Fossil fuel energy still makes up the majority of Ballas heating requirement with only 17% of households accessing sustainable sources.

The community has recently applied to form a Sustainable Energy Community with the aim of developing an energy masterplan and seeking funding to start the process of creating a renewable energy.



## Permanent private households by central heating

2022





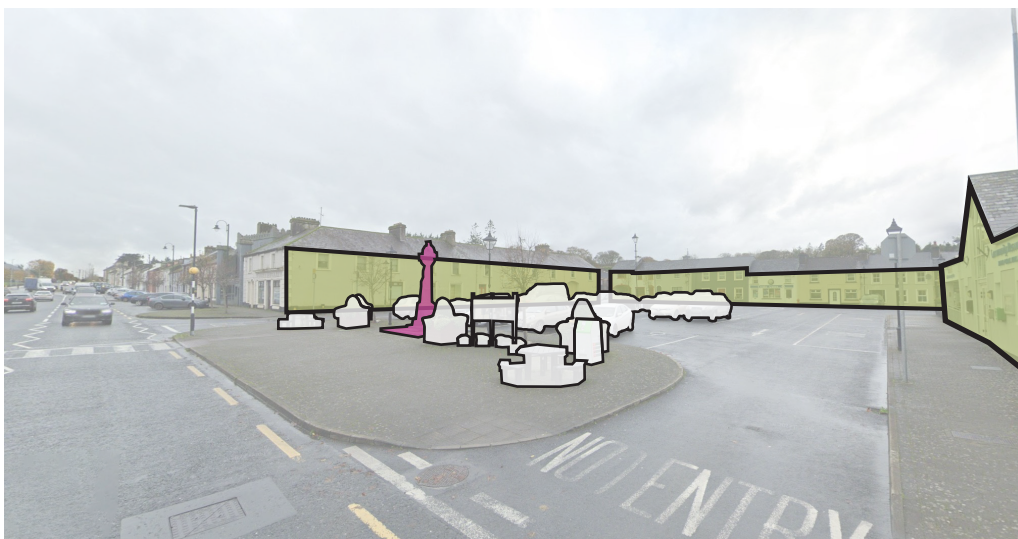
# Spatial Analysis



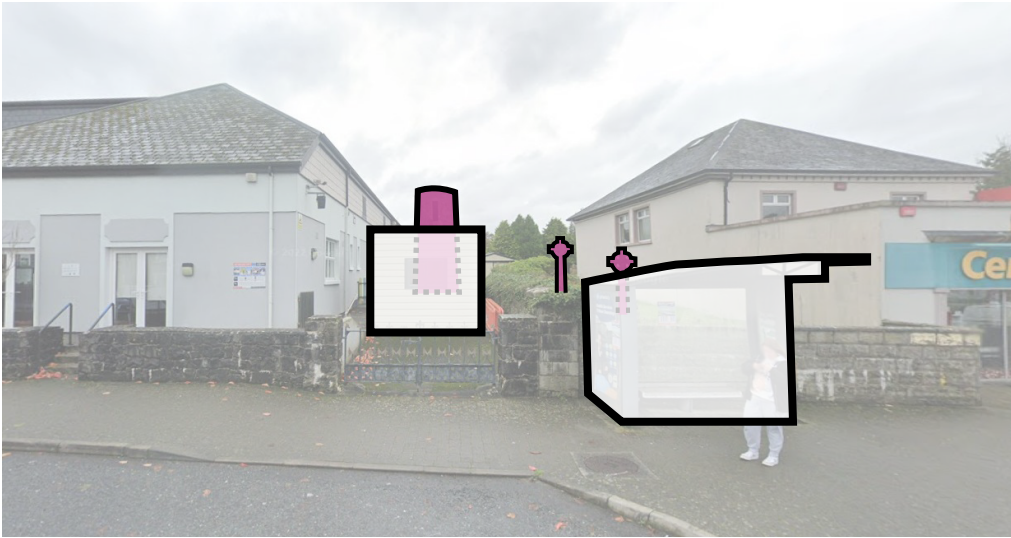
Balla when entered from the Castlebar side is defined by an attractive tree lined green entrance. This is reinforced by not having fragmented ribbon development on the town approach.



The petrol station on the main streets is a dominant feature that masks the round tower behind.



While the towns square is well defined on the edges, a lack of structure in the layout of street objects results in it appearing cluttered.



The placement of street objects in certain areas impedes visual connections to important historic elements.



Key corner units that should act as anchors for the town are vacant which results in a lack of urban activation.



By reinforcing the shape of the square, its importance and use as a space to facilitate street vitality can be re-established.



While the street is distinctly wide at 25m, little of this space is given over to the public realm.



The area for vehicle lane traffic on the approach to the town is less than that within the town.



An opportunity exists to better utilise some of the space provided for road.



The Fair Green and adjacent park space help to frame the entrance and exit of the town however this is partially compromised by the traffic island the separates the continuation of Main Street.



The community centre, while a key building in a prominent location, compromises some of the heritage assets of town. The visual connection from the round tower to the Main Street is blocked and the historic courthouse blends with the community centre to the extent



Similar to the entrance from the Castlebar side, the exit that side is well defined by a terrace of buildings and tree lined road.

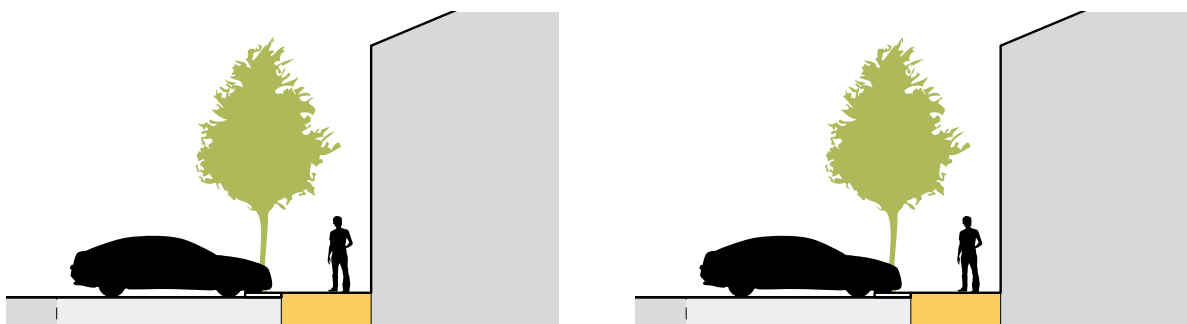
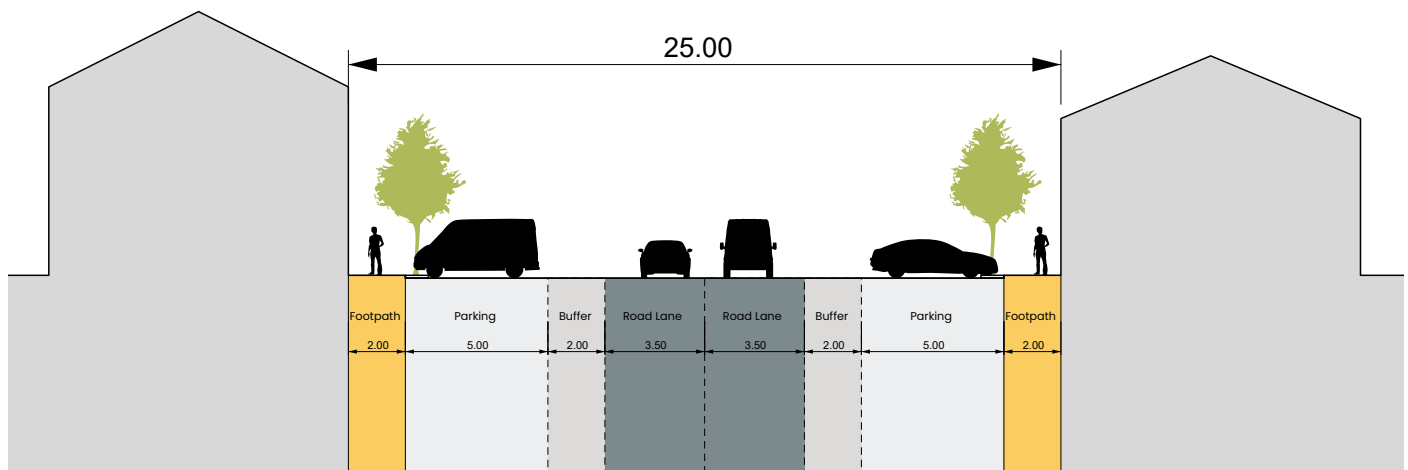
# Street Section

The town is located on the N60, a road that links Castlebar to Claremorris. Over 9,000 cars pass through Balla daily, more than 10 times more vehicles than the population. This provides an opportunity to invite visitors to stop in the town.

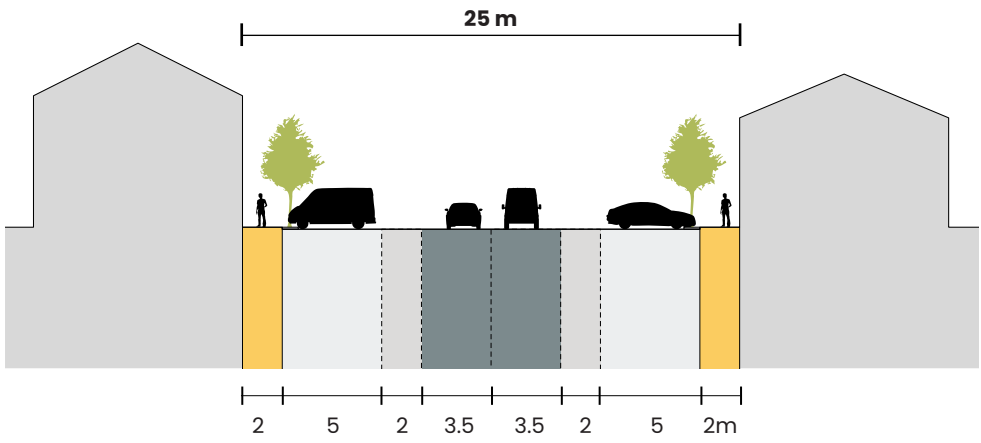
The road section which is 25m wide shows that over 84% of the space is given over to cars, with pedestrian space being minimized. Drivers who perceive the road as wide are inclined to drive faster through the town with limited pedestrian space making the town less attractive to stop.

To ensure the safety of cyclists and pedestrians and make the town more attractive to stop, the width of the roadway should be reduced, and the pedestrian space increased. More efficient road design can also result in space being allocated for greenery with will help reintroduce nature and reduce storm water run-off.

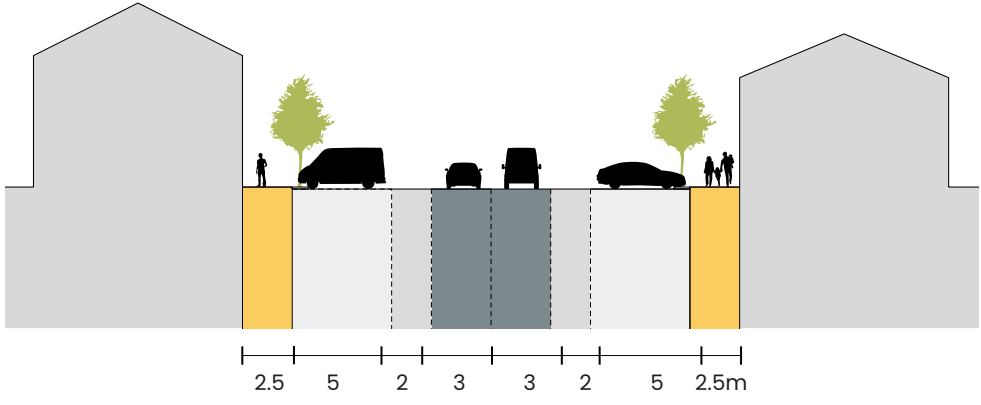
**Car Space: 84%**  
**Public Realm: 16%**



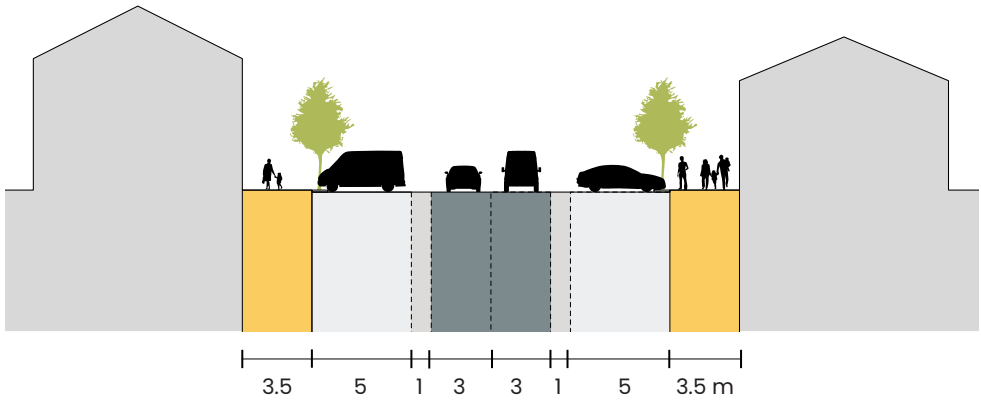
- Road Lane
- Footpath
- Buffer
- Cycle Lane
- Parking
- Verge



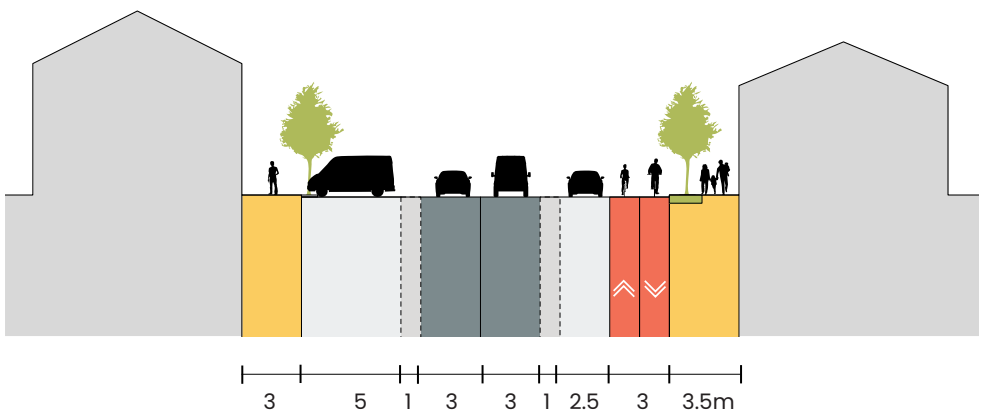
**Car Space: 84%**  
**Public Realm: 16%**



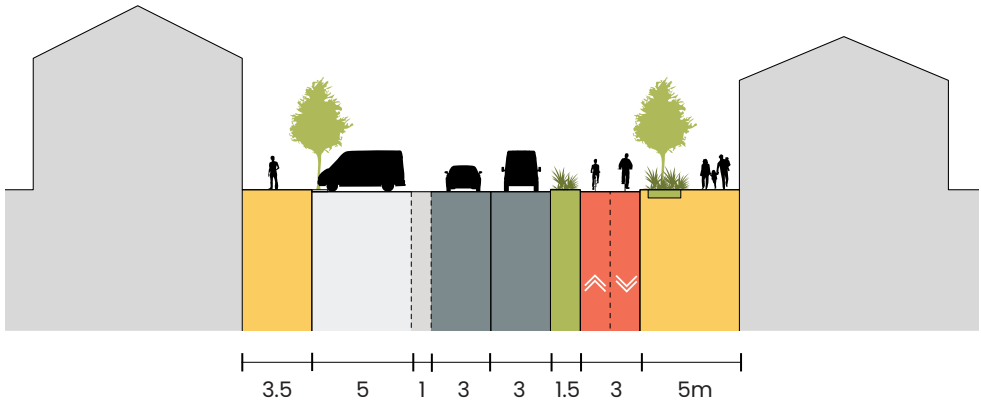
**Car Space: 80%**  
**Public Realm: 20%**



**Car Space: 72%**  
**Public Realm: 28%**  
**Car Parking spaces: 91**



**Car Space: 62%**  
**Public Realm: 38%**  
**Car Parking spaces: 72**



**Car Space: 48%**  
**Public Realm: 52%**  
**Car Parking spaces: 46**

## **Balla is...**

**historic, green, growing,  
needing housing, ageing,  
a commuter town,  
lacking local job spaces,  
car dependent, passing  
trade dependent, fossil  
fuel dependent, rich in  
recreational park space,  
poor in public realm space,  
generous in spatial layout**

**...full of potential!**

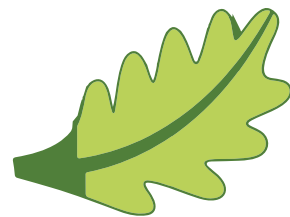
# How do we make Balla a place to... ...stop (**visit**) & stay (**live, work, play**)?

By emphasising the key assets of the town that are depicted in Balla Community Resources Development's logo, the town can build on the parts of its identity that are strongest.



**Round Tower**

**Built  
Town  
Hard  
Historic**



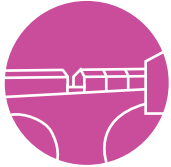
**Oak**

**Natural  
Park  
Soft  
Ever Changing**

# Town Team Objectives

Below are Town Team Objectives to deliver the sustainable community-led development in Balla. The objectives were proposed by ACT and subsequently workshopped, agreed and reviewed with the participation of the Town Team.

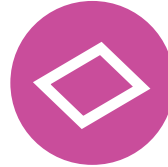
Community    Mobility    Tourism    Environment    Housing    Economy



Enhance Entrance Experience



Continue biodiversity actions



Better use the square



Re-establish the train



Create reasons to stop



Reverse vacancy & dereliction



Encourage public transport



Improve the public realm



Facilitate remote working



Facilitate active travel



Increase Climate resilience



Improve building performance



Unlock potential for community renewable energy



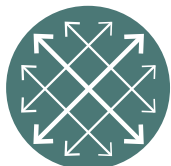
Provide for multi-generational living



Showcase Heritage



Showcase for decarbonization



Encourage sustainable housing & urban growth



Provide space for new economic activities



Limit Flooding



Croagh Patrick Heritage Trail



Traffic Calming



Connect Greenway



Implement Car Sharing



# Balla Area Overview

## Existing Situation





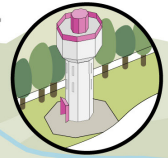
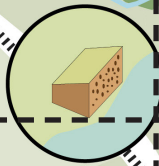
# General View Proposed Situation



Town Park

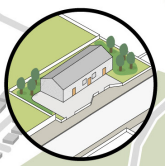
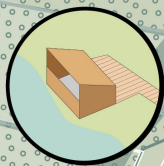
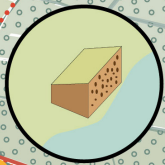
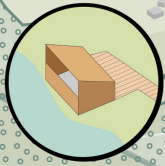
Housing Estates

Town





Turlough



# Town Park

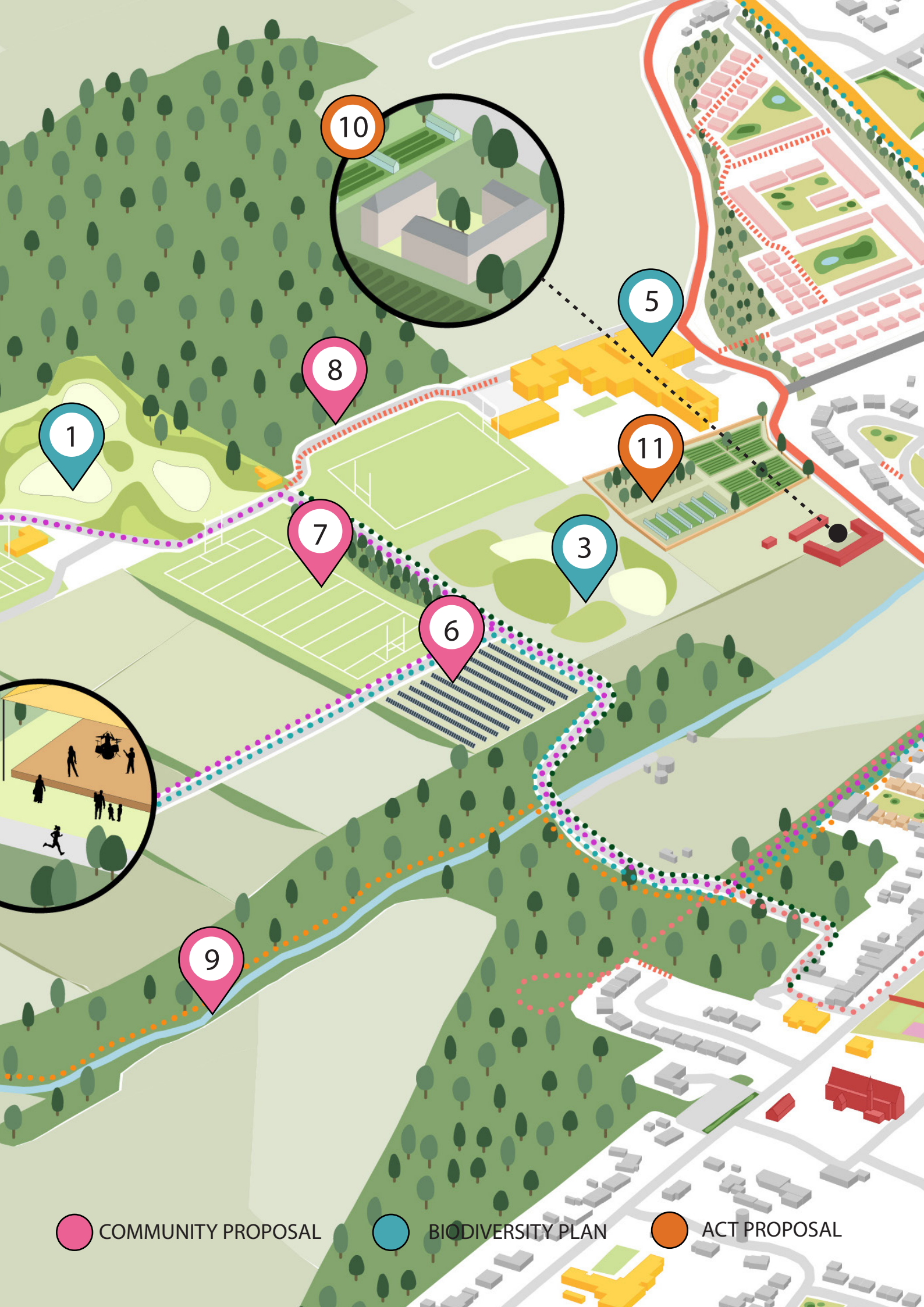
The town has many biodiversity resources, including Balla Woods, a 35-acre area left to the town. Today the park is the heart of many social activities and adds to the distinct character of Balla as a great place to live.



- Heritage Walk
- Dawn Oak Walk
- Town Park Walk
- Croagh Patrick heritage trail
- Greenway

- 1 Enhance golf course for biodiversity
- 2 Enhance GAA club for biodiversity
- 3 Creating new wildflower habitats
- 4 Nature walks and events
- 5 Enhance Schools for biodiversity
- 6 Renewable energy community

- 7 New GAA club pitch development
- 8 New Pedestrian connection
- 9 Open River View
- 10 Attraction Opportunity
- 11 Restore orchard



10

5

1

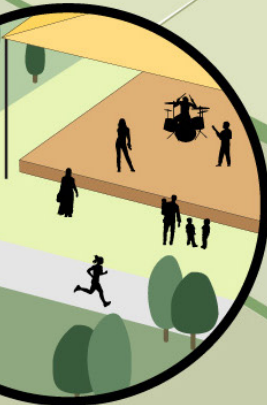
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9

COMMUNITY PROPOSAL

BIODIVERSITY PLAN

ACT PROPOSAL

# Housing Estates

Growth during the 2000's has resulted in the development of estates, much of them along the Castlebar approach of the N60. Opportunities exist to tie these back into the town's fabric with cycle and pedestrian connections, to add new housing in unfinished plots and to support biodiversity actions in these spaces.



- 12 Mini Woodland
- 13 Housing estates grassland management
- 14 Community garden - Solitary bee soil bank
- 15 Cycle and Pedestrian Connections

- 16 Woodlands Park - Enhancement Scheme
- 17 New school road
- 18 Cycle and Pedestrian Priority
- 19 Town Development
- 20 New Crossing



12

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FUTURE TOWN DEVELOPMENT

ACT PROPOSED TOWN DEVELOPMENT

COMMUNITY PROPOSAL

BIODIVERSITY PLAN

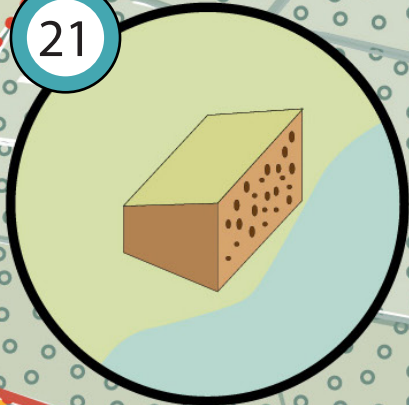
ACT PROPOSAL

# Balla Turlough

Balla Turlough is a Special Area of Conservation and acts as a unique gateway to the town from the Claremorris side. Protecting and supporting conservation actions in its area are paramount. Projects like a Sand Martin wall and Bird hide will help with both preservation and education of the importance of this area.



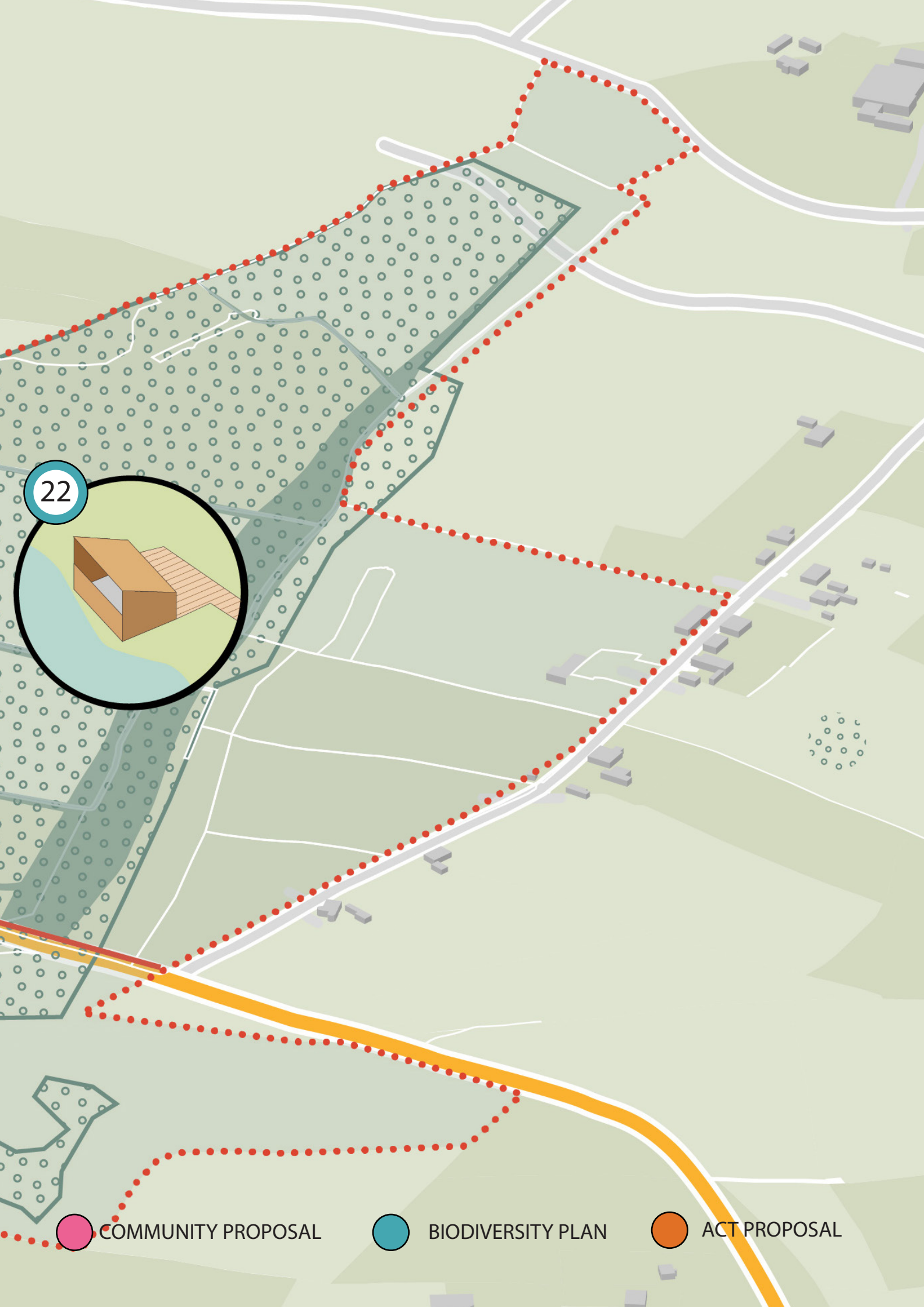
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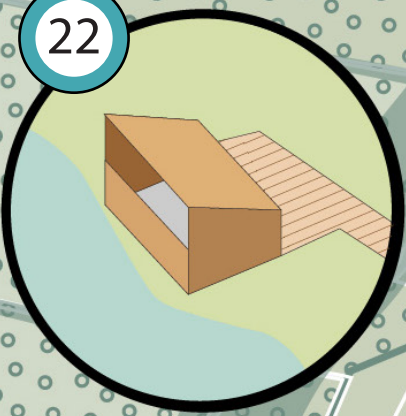
● ● ● Balla Turlough Special Area of Conservation

○ ○ ○ Turlough

21 Sand Martin wall  
22 Bird Hide

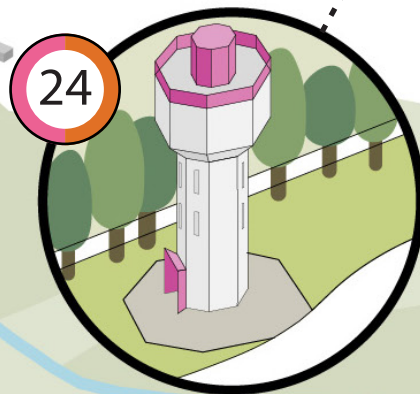
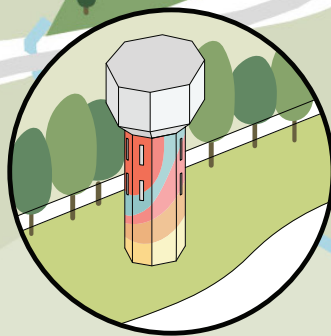
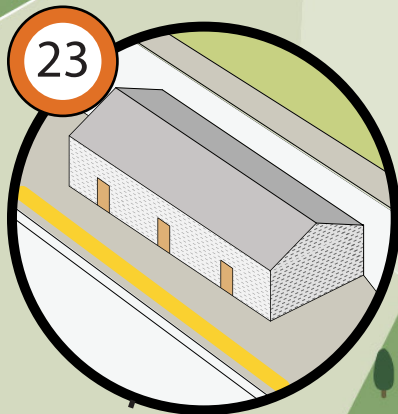
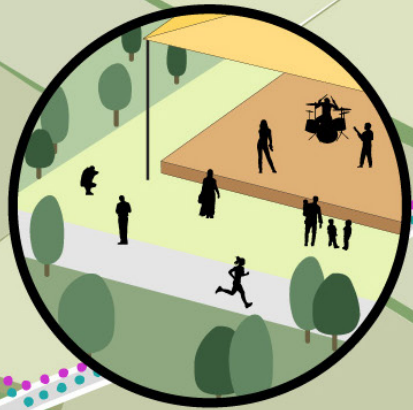


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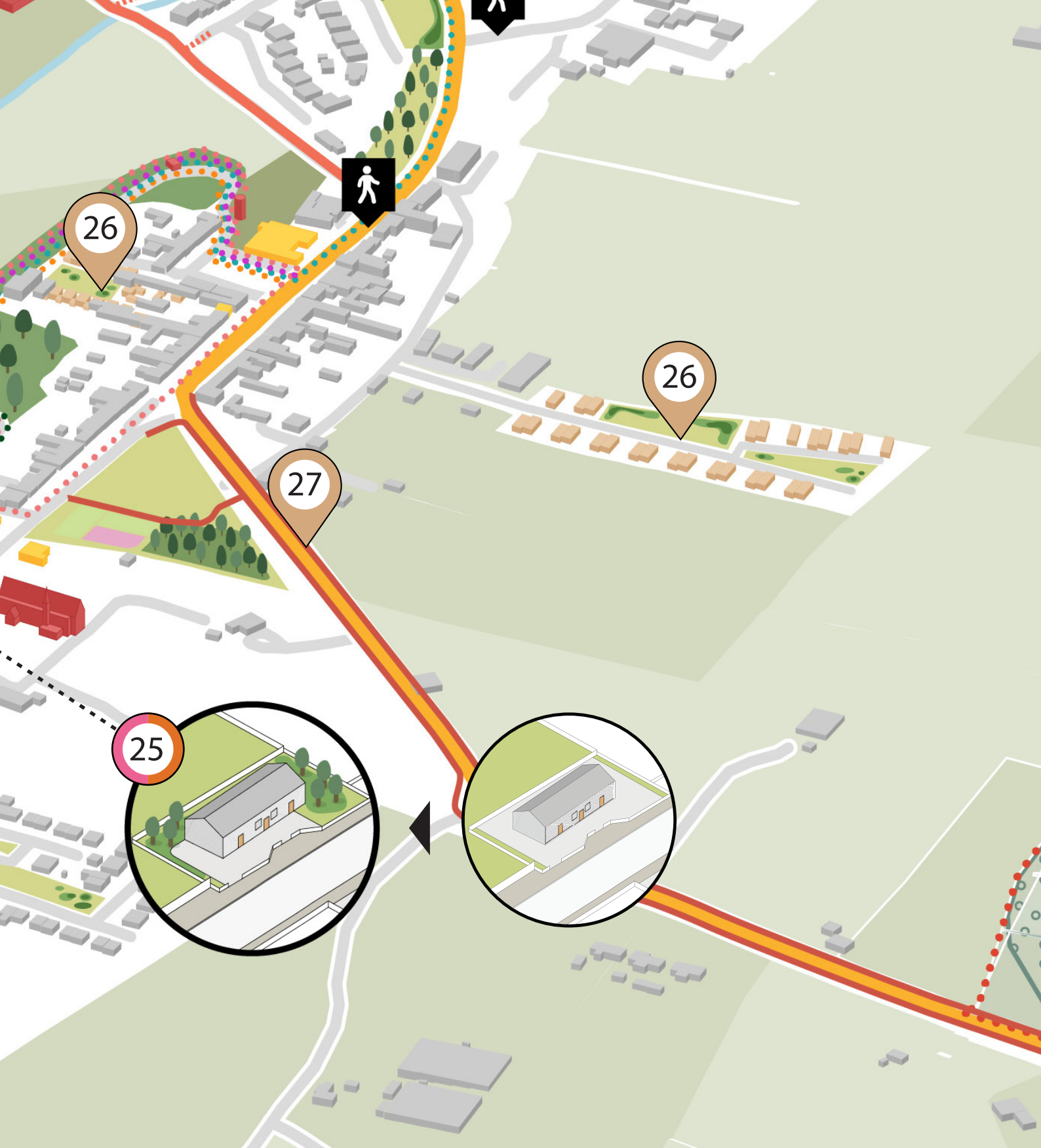
-  COMMUNITY PROPOSAL
-  BIODIVERSITY PLAN
-  ACT PROPOSAL

# Town Overview



23 Reuse Station  
24 Water Tower - View Point and new  
Landmark

25 Restore Funeral Home Facade  
26 New Housing Estate Development  
27 New Cycle Lanes



The reuse and re-imagining of key building assets in the town will allow for reinforcing the identity of the town making it a more attractive place to visit. Providing new housing close to the town core as is currently proposed is a positive approach to delivering more residential accommodation.

- FUTURE TOWN DEVELOPMENT
- ACT PROPOSED TOWN DEVELOPMENT
- COMMUNITY PROPOSAL
- BIODIVERSITY PLAN
- ACT PROPOSAL

# Town Centre

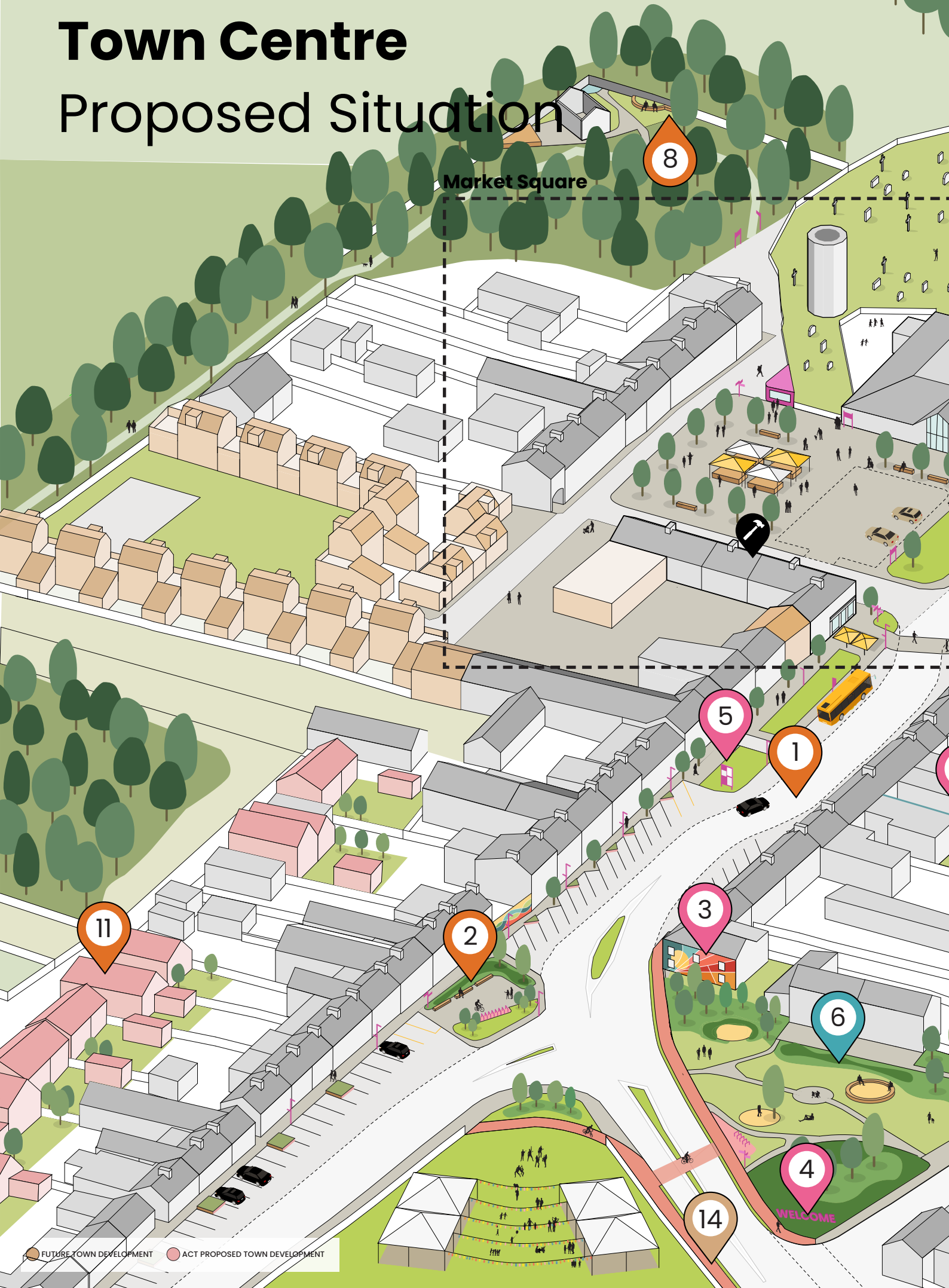
## Existing Situation

The existing fabric of the town centre provides a strong basis for the towns sustainable development. Providing a more generous public realm, showing off the towns heritage assets and providing housing within the town core will ensure a bright future for Balla.





# Town Centre Proposed Situation



Market Square

8

5

1

11

2

3

6

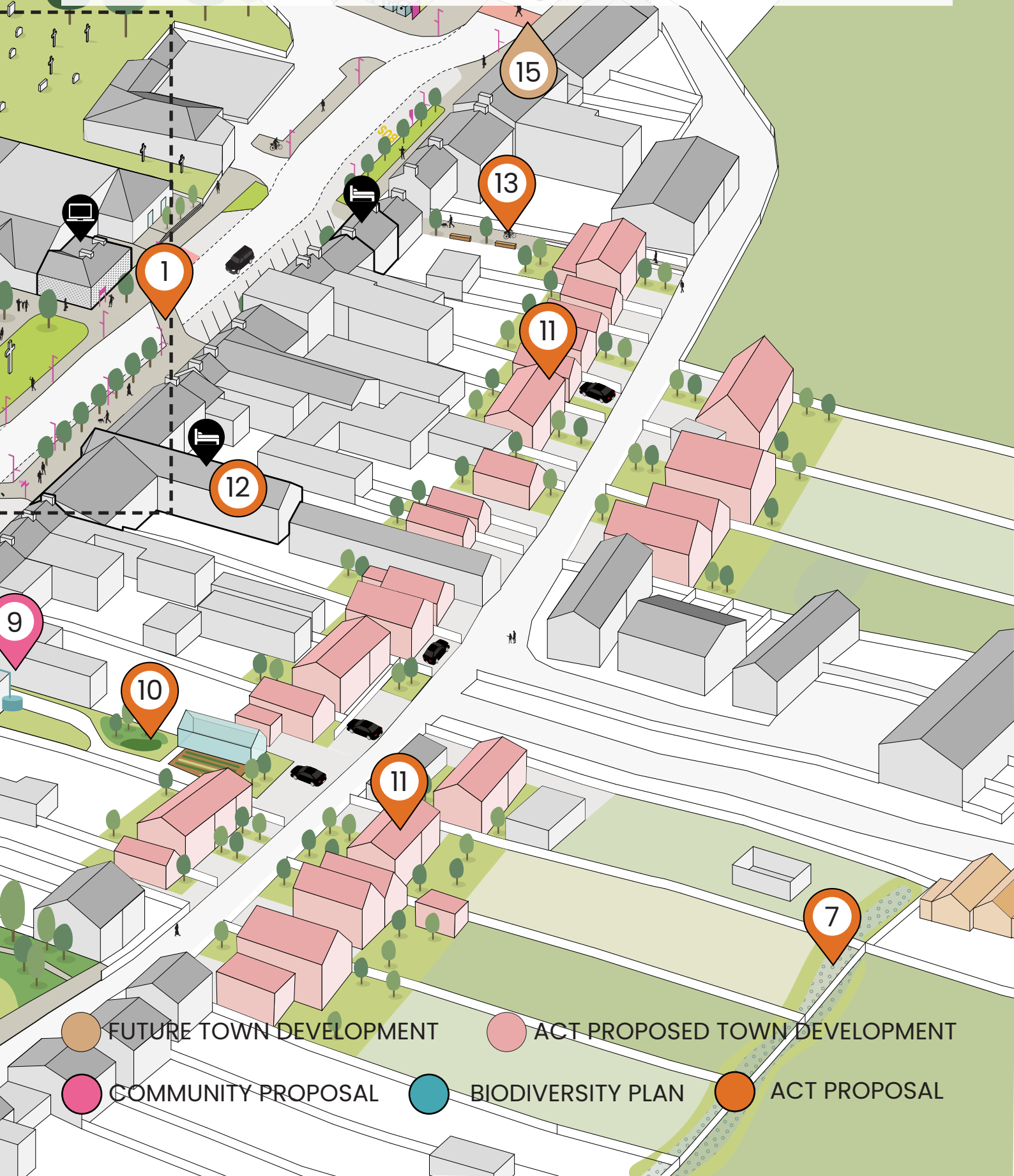
4

14

FUTURE TOWN DEVELOPMENT ACT PROPOSED TOWN DEVELOPMENT

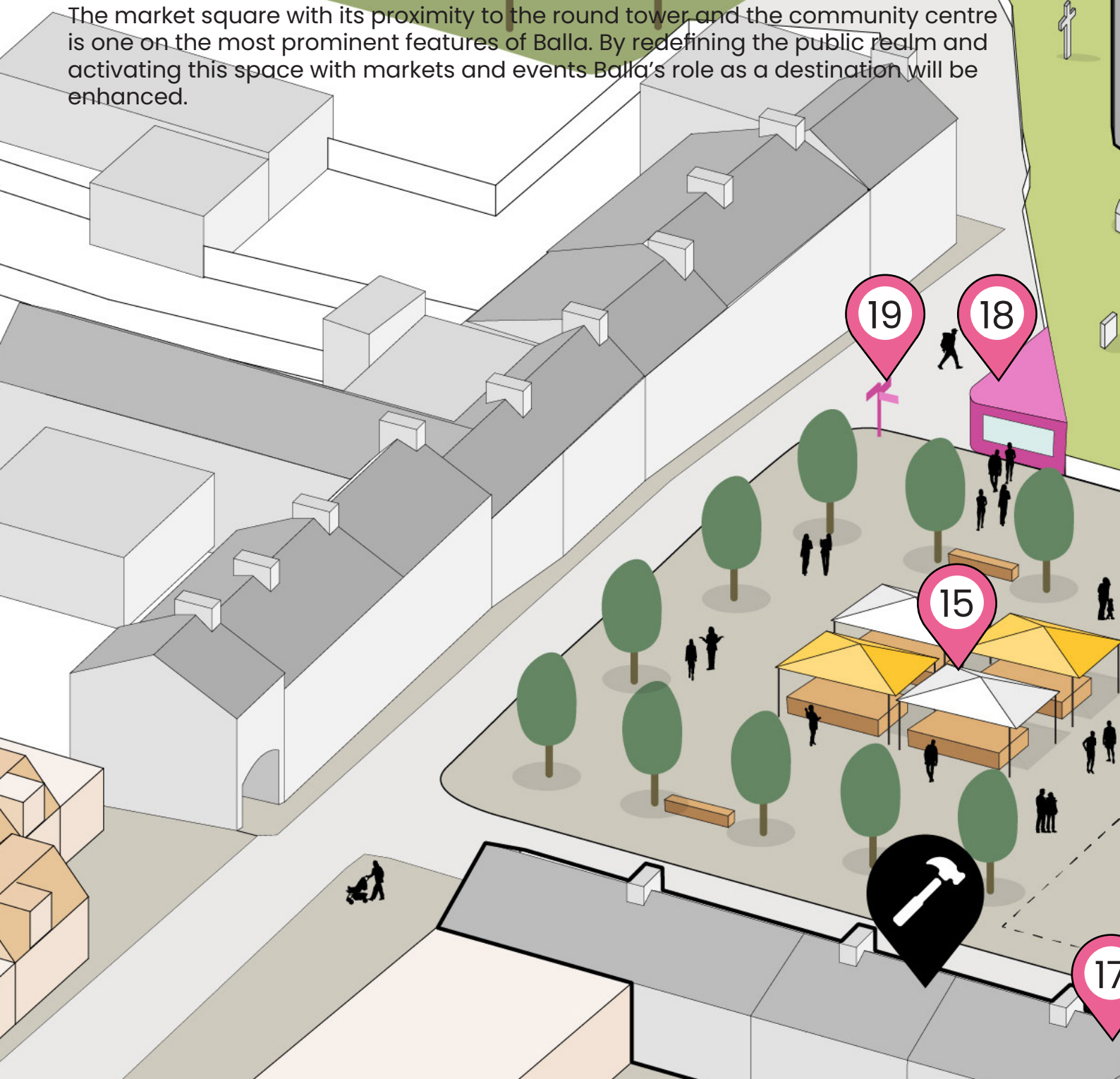
- 1 New Road Layout - Traffic calm
- 2 Junction Public Realm
- 3 Street murals - Welcoming
- 4 Welcoming
- 5 Town branding
- 6 Housing Estates Landscaping
- 7 Controlling flood risk
- 8 Chapel Landscaping Project

- 8 Chapel Landscaping Project
- 9 Rainwater Harvesting
- 10 Backyards Utilisation and Parking
- 11 Backlands town development
- 12 Pilgrims / tourists accommodations
- 13 New lane
- 14 New Cycleway
- 15 New Pedestrian Crossing



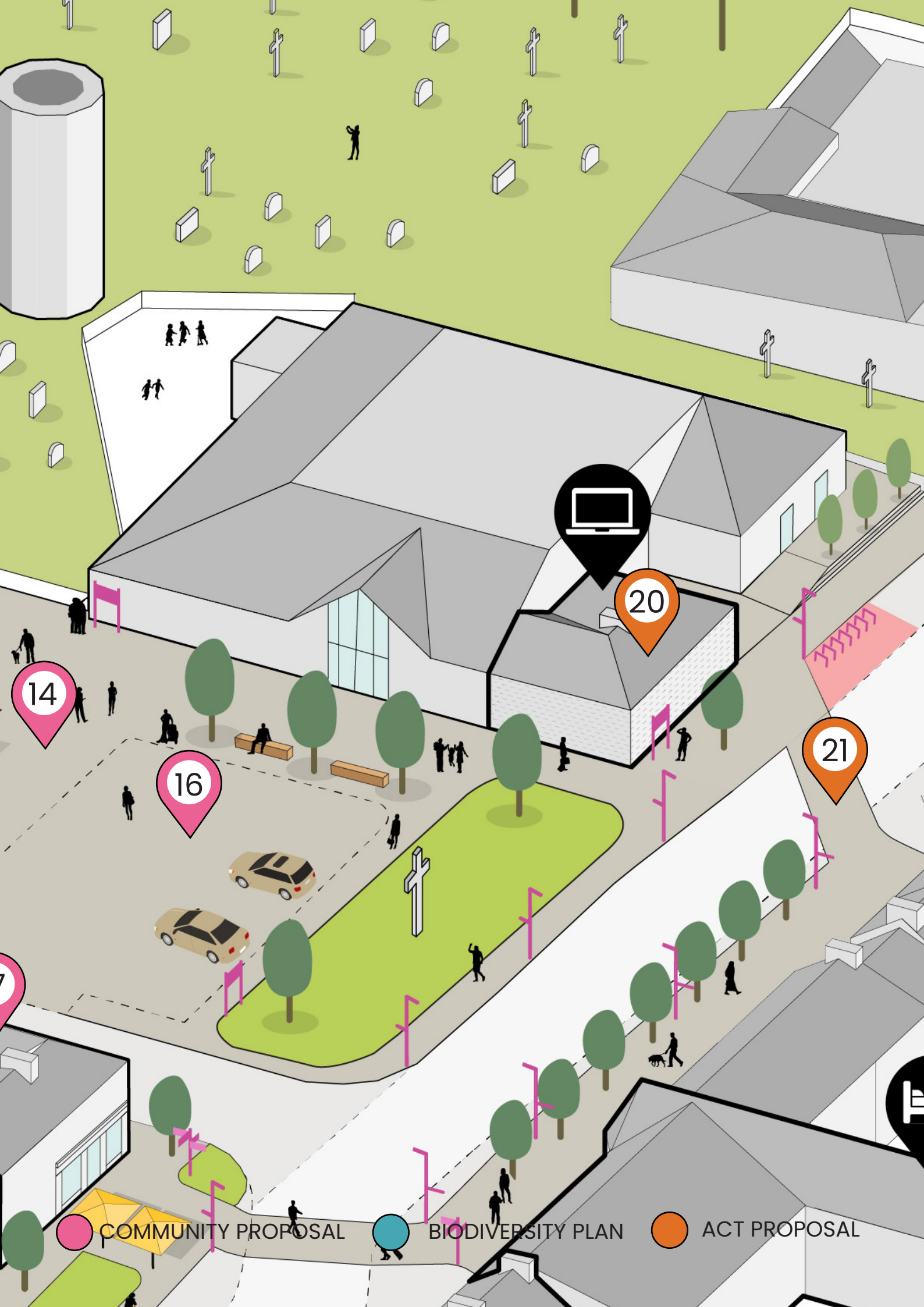
# Market Square

The market square with its proximity to the round tower and the community centre is one of the most prominent features of Balla. By redefining the public realm and activating this space with markets and events Balla's role as a destination will be enhanced.



- 14 Enhance Public Realm of Main Square
- 15 Square Activation
- 16 Car sharing parking
- 17 Existing building Renovation

- 18 Croagh Patrick heritage trail starting point and information
- 19 Indication of the urban heritage of the trails
- 20 Courthouse - Restore stone facade
- 21 Pedestrian crossing



14

16

20

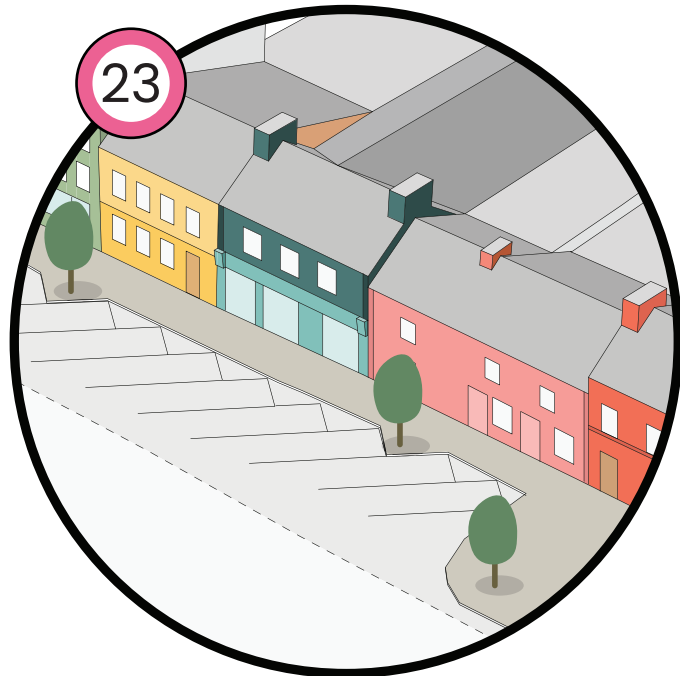
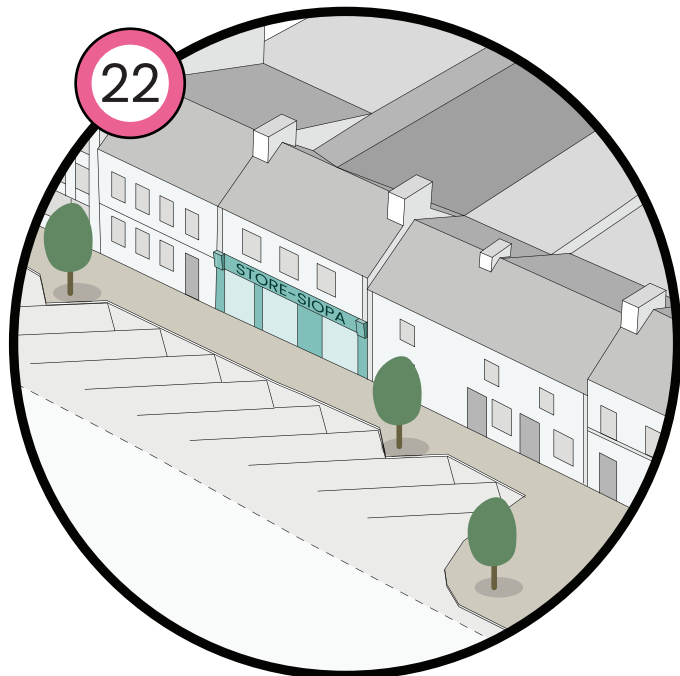
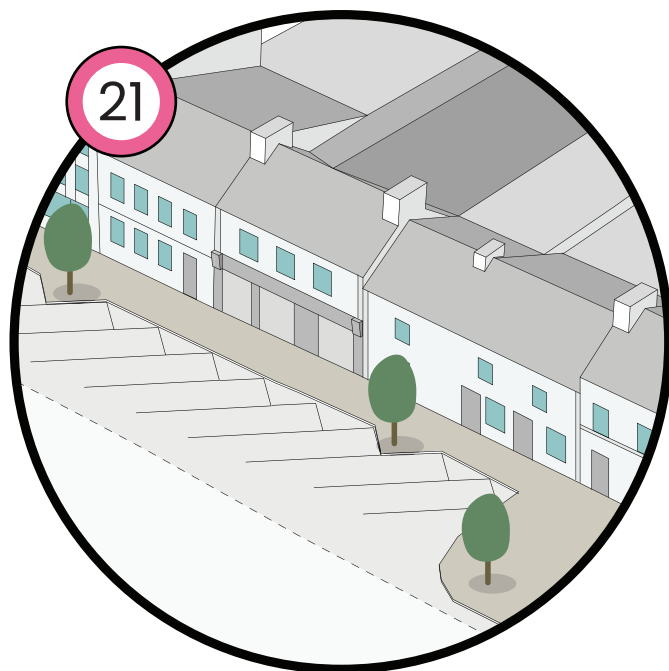
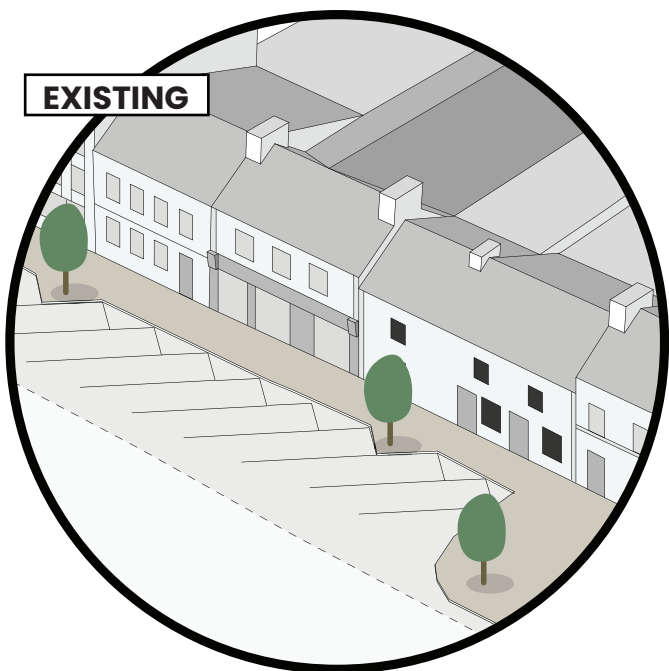
21

COMMUNITY PROPOSAL

BIODIVERSITY PLAN

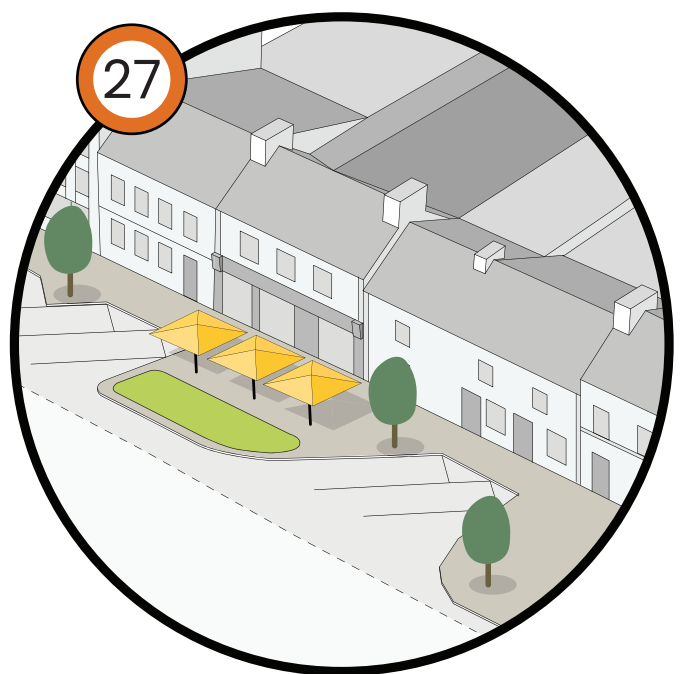
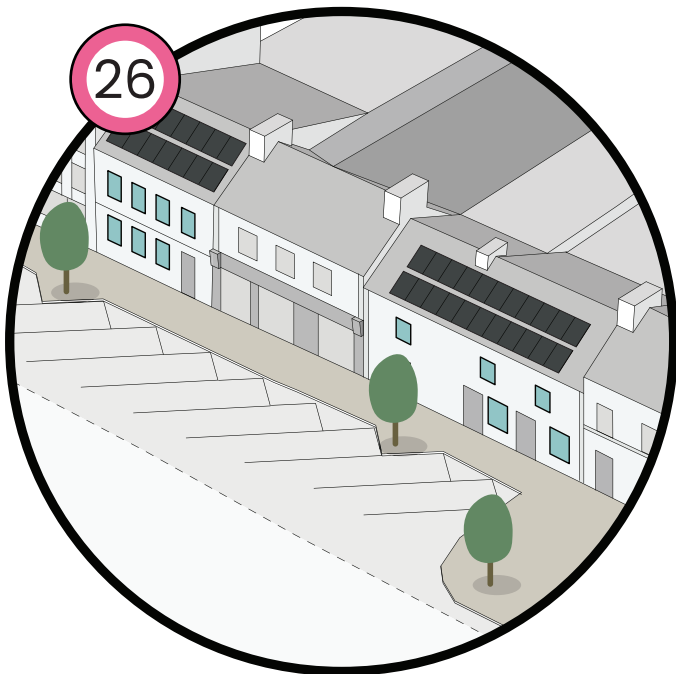
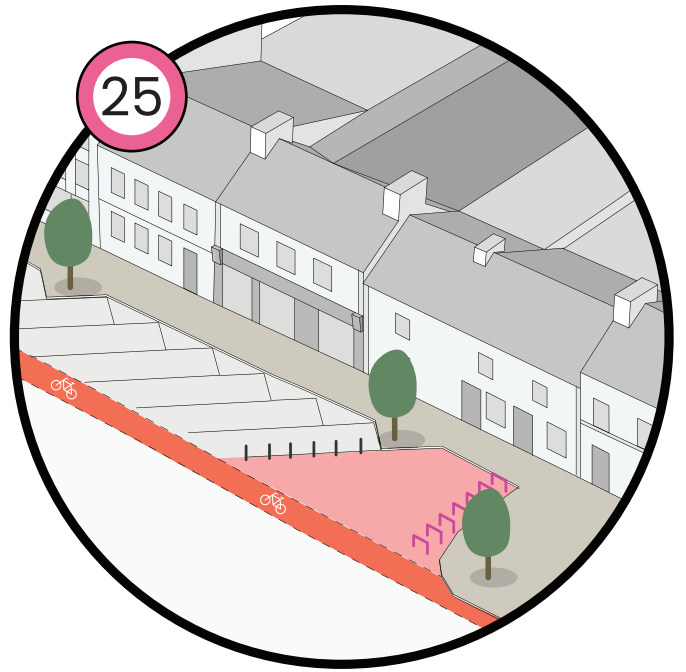
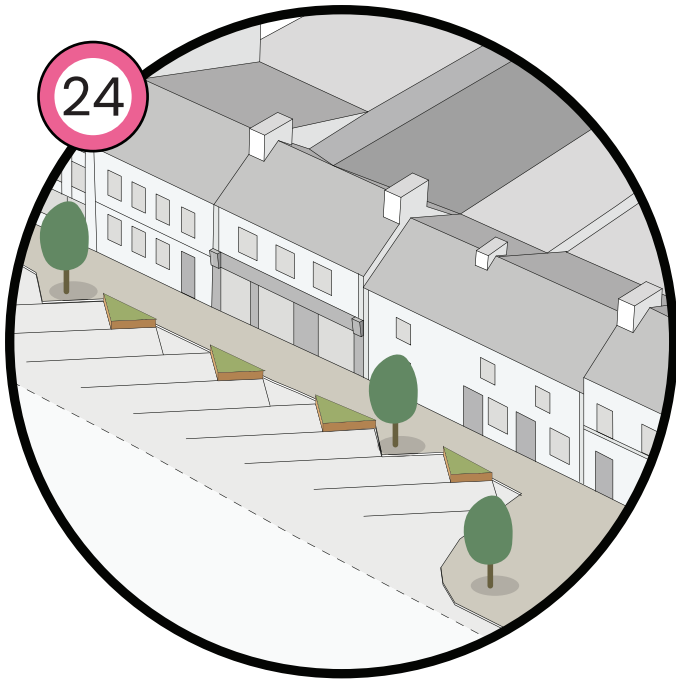
ACT PROPOSAL

# Street Improvements



- 21 Reuse Abandoned Buildings
- 22 Commercial signs
- 23 Streetscape - Paint Scheme

- 24 Energy Retrofit Buildings
- 25 Cycle Racks and Active Travel
- 26 Planters Strategy
- 27 Public Realm



 COMMUNITY PROPOSAL

 BIODIVERSITY PLAN

 ACT PROPOSAL

# Balla Tidy Towns Success and Next Steps

## Report Summary

The 2025 Tidy Towns report celebrates Balla as a vibrant, community-driven town that continues to strengthen its environmental and social fabric. The adjudicators praised its more than 50-year involvement in the competition, noting the strong volunteer base and visible pride that underpin its success.

Balla's historic character, defined by its church, water tower, round tower and traditional streetscape, was recognised as a key strength, complemented by thoughtful additions such as murals, picnic seating and the new Inclusive Hub and Sensory Room. Green spaces like the Community Nature Park and biodiversity garden were admired for their beauty, pollinator planting and accessibility, with only light maintenance improvements suggested.

The town's sustainability efforts, including the Digital Hub, Trade School and Refill Ireland participation, demonstrate a progressive outlook, while cleanliness and litter control were described as exemplary. Residential and approach areas were neat, well landscaped and welcoming, with encouragement for further tree planting and small signage or path enhancements.

Overall, the report depicts Balla as a well-organised, forward-thinking community that honours its heritage while embracing inclusion, biodiversity and sustainability, a model example of what the Tidy Towns movement seeks to inspire.

## Next Steps

### 1. Community – Planning and Involvement

- Update online presence: Refresh and regularly maintain the Balla.ie website and social media channels to reflect current activities and progress.
- Revise documentation: Replace older Tidy Towns documents (e.g. dated 2021) with up-to-date versions.
- Improve application clarity: Number projects (e.g. NI for new, MI for maintenance) and mark them on an updated map for future submissions.
- Assign responsibilities: Allocate committee leads to specific projects and list collaborators for shared initiatives.
- Separate plans and progress: Keep future projects in the 3-year plan and only include completed ones in the main application.

### 2. Streetscape and Public Places

- Maintain heritage details: Repaint water pumps and iron gates in uniform colours and control weed growth at their bases.
- Preserve character: Encourage property owners converting shops to residences to retain original shopfronts and signage.
- Enhance maintenance: Clean and cap stone walls in keeping with traditional methods.
- Landscape refinement: Keep vegetation trimmed around public art (e.g. Foróige wall) and historic structures.
- Increase usability: Explore additional public seating or outdoor café areas to enhance social life on Main Street.

### 3. Green Spaces and Landscaping

- Path and edge maintenance: Remove grass encroaching on paths and trim edges to clearly define wild and managed areas.
- Improve container planting: Add trailing plants to planters in the Square to soften hard edges.
- Expand pollinator planting: Continue using pollinator-friendly species and replicate successful GAA planting schemes elsewhere.
- Introduce art in nature: Consider more tree or wood sculptures in biodiversity gardens or parks.

#### **4. Nature and Biodiversity**

- Education and outreach: Partner with local schools for poster, essay, or field-based biodiversity activities linked to local habitats and the SAC.
- Habitat enhancement: Repair the willow hut in the sensory garden and consider replacing gravel with grass for improved biodiversity.
- Ongoing monitoring: Track use of bird and swift boxes and report outcomes annually.
- Visual care: Maintain narrow grass margins to signal intentional wild areas and avoid an untidy appearance.

#### **5. Sustainability – Doing More with Less**

- Local propagation: Grow pollinator-friendly plants locally, harvest seeds, and reduce reliance on shop-bought varieties.
- Infrastructure for growing: Establish a polytunnel or raised beds with support from Men's Shed or local groups.
- Community engagement: Organise foraging walks or sustainability awareness events to connect people with local natural resources.
- Education: Promote the Trade School courses and highlight any recognised qualifications achieved.

#### **6. Tidiness and Litter Control**

- Weed management: Use hoes and brushes to remove weeds along walls, cobbles, and gravel paths.
- Signage control: Group or remove excess signage, particularly at the Community Centre, to reduce clutter.
- Stone cleaning: Clean the Dawn Oak Park and Bothár an Stáisiúin stone signs; repaint lettering as needed.
- Ivy control: Remove ivy from stone walls to prevent structural damage while retaining it on plastered surfaces where beneficial.
- Utility improvements: Advocate for the undergrounding of overhead cables where feasible.

#### **7. Residential Streets and Housing Areas**

- Tree care: Remove suckers and check ties and stakes on young trees.
- New planting: Add trees in large communal areas and along estate entrances to enhance biodiversity and wellbeing.
- Boundary upkeep: Repair boundary walls and maintain shared green areas.
- Encourage greening: Promote window boxes and front garden planting among residents.

#### **8. Approach Roads, Streets, and Lanes**

- Visibility and safety: Cut back vegetation obscuring town name signs.
- Pathway maintenance: Trim hedgerows along the golf club and GAA pedestrian route.
- Public realm improvements: Introduce tree planting in buildouts or car parks to soften streetscapes.
- Road maintenance: Repaint worn road markings, especially disabled parking bays.
- Future redesign: Explore opportunities to widen footpaths and improve pedestrian environments as part of a town centre enhancement project.

#### **Summary of Priority Actions for 2026**

- 1.Modernise documentation and mapping for the next submission.
- 2.Enhance public realm presentation through repainting, planting, and maintenance.
- 3.Deepen biodiversity education and monitoring with local schools and youth groups.
- 4.Strengthen sustainability practices through local growing and community foraging initiatives.
- 5.Continue tidiness excellence while addressing signage, ivy, and weed management.
6. Plan for future infrastructure improvements, including streetscape redesign and additional tree planting.

# Town Team Skills Survey

Town Teams play a crucial role in revitalizing and sustaining the vibrancy of local town centers. To be effective, Town Teams need a mix of technical, managerial, and community engagement skills. Here's a breakdown of key skills needed and how they might be supported in acquiring them:

## **1. Strategic Planning and Visioning Skills**

**Skills Needed:** Ability to create and implement a strategic vision for the town, set long-term goals, and prioritize projects.

**Support:** Workshops on strategic planning, training in project management tools, and access to mentorship from planning experts or successful town leaders.

## **2. Project Management and Implementation**

**Skills Needed:** Competence in project management, budgeting, scheduling, and resource allocation.

**Support:** Accredited project management courses, grants for hiring project managers, and access to digital project management tools.

## **3. Community Engagement and Stakeholder Collaboration**

**Skills Needed:** Strong communication, negotiation, and facilitation skills to engage diverse stakeholders, from local businesses to residents.

**Support:** Training in facilitation and stakeholder management, access to community engagement platforms, and resources to conduct public consultations.

## **4. Data Collection and Analysis**

**Skills Needed:** Ability to collect and analyze data on footfall, local business activity, housing, and transport to inform decision-making.

**Support:** Training in data analysis, use of GIS and mapping tools, and support in accessing national and local datasets relevant to town planning.

## **5. Marketing and Promotion**

**Skills Needed:** Marketing expertise to promote the town's image, attract visitors, and support local businesses.

**Support:** Workshops on place branding, social media training, and resources for developing promotional materials.

## **6. Financial Management and Fundraising**

**Skills Needed:** Knowledge of budgeting, grant applications, and fundraising strategies.

**Support:** Training in financial management, information on available grants and funding programs, and guidance in developing public-private partnerships.

## **7. Urban Design and Environmental Sustainability**

Skills Needed: Understanding of sustainable urban design principles, familiarity with green infrastructure, and knowledge of planning regulations.

Support: Access to design experts for consultations, training in sustainable practices, and grants for implementing green projects.

## **8. Leadership and Team-Building Skills**

Skills Needed: Ability to lead, motivate, and build a cohesive team with a shared vision.

Support: Leadership development programs, team-building workshops, and peer learning networks with other Town Teams across Ireland.

## **Methods of Supporting Skill Acquisition**

Capacity-Building Programs: Tailored programs provided by government agencies or independent training bodies can address specific skills gaps for Town Teams.

Regional Networks and Peer Learning: Establishing regional networks of Town Teams encourages sharing of best practices and peer-to-peer mentorship.

Access to Toolkits and Online Resources: The government or partner organizations could provide online resources, toolkits, and guidelines tailored to the TCF objectives.

Consultancy Support and Expert Access: Government programs could allocate funding for Town Teams to access expert consultants, especially for complex urban planning and environmental sustainability projects.

Regular Funding and Grants: Direct financial support for training, workshops, and hiring of skilled personnel or experts when required.

By supporting Town Teams with these targeted resources, the Town Centre First program can build a skilled network of teams capable of achieving meaningful, sustainable change across Ireland's towns.

# Potential Funding Streams

ACT have compiled potential funding streams for the projects mapped out above. This list is comprehensive but not exhaustive and there may be additional funding opportunities for these projects through local or national streams.

## Town Centre and Built Heritage

### **RRDF**

The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) is a key capital investment scheme which supports projects that have the potential to revitalise rural towns and villages with a population below 10,000 in line with the Town Centre First Policy through planned and sustainable regeneration.

### **The Town and Village Renewal Scheme**

The Scheme is targeted at towns and villages with a population of 10,000 or less and all projects funded under the Scheme must be completed within a 12 to 18 month period.

### **The Built Heritage Capital Grant**

The Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS) is for the repair and conservation of structures that are protected under the Planning and Development Acts. Grants of between €2,500 and €50,000 are available.

### **Historic Towns Initiative Funds**

The Historic Towns Initiative (HTI) is a joint undertaking by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the Heritage Council which aims to promote the heritage-led regeneration of Ireland's historic towns.

### **Irish Architectural Foundation Reimagine Program**

Reimagine matches architects with local partners, enabling communities to play an active role in the development of their neighbourhoods, streetscapes, parks, villages and towns.

## Vacancy and Housing

### **Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant**

The Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant is a payment you can get if you are turning a vacant house or building into your permanent home or a rental property.

A grant of up to €50,000 is available. If the refurbishment costs exceed the standard grant of up to €50,000, a top-up grant amount of up to €20,000 is available.

### **Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS)**

Under the Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS), the local authority or an approved housing body, will provide funding to carry out repairs to a property that has been vacant for 12 months or longer to bring it up to rental standards.

# Climate and Energy

## **SEAI Home Grants**

Funding is available under three categories for the upgrade of homes through the SEAI. These are the One Stop Shop service, Individual Home Energy Upgrades and Fully Funded Energy Upgrades.

## **SEAI Business Grants**

Grant aid is available to business up upgrade the performance of their buildings. Following an energy audit, recommendations can be provided for access to Rapid Approval grant for small and medium sized projects and businesses or Tailored Supports aimed at larger projects.

# Workshop Feedback

The following captures the outputs from the in-person presentation and workshop held on 8 November 2025, delivered by ACT and Balla CRD with strong participation from the local community. The document formed part of the material presented at the event, which was attended by Minister for Social Protection, Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, Dara Calleary.

## **1. Are there any other project, ongoing or in planning, that could be included in the vision plan?**

- Murales - welcoming
- Housing estates. Landscaping project
- Backyards utilisation.
- Open train station
- Upgrade of back entrance to secondary school. Tarmac.
- Upgrade water tower. Not as a viewing point as that will attract anti social behaviour.
- Men's Shed?
- Roundabout at school entrance or alternative entrance.
- National School - Astro turf.
- Foroige - a dedicated youth space.
- Zebra crossing raised.
- Address derelict sites along the street
- Traffic measures boundary school.
- Merge proposed pathways from Pollavaddy to Ballina into the proposals for the fairgreen.
- Restore traditional market furniture in square.
- Projects Underway
- School Gaa pitch not funded
- GAA club 2nd pitch
- Phase II Balla GAA clubhouse

## **2. Are there any additional objectives, not yet in the vision document that could be included?**

- Resestablish the train station in Balla with links to all provinces.
- Bicycle Lanes for children going to both schools and also for adults.
- Pedestrian crossing going into secondary school.
- Re-establish the train station is important
- Mens/Womens Shed
- Youth Activities (Under Cover)
- No.5 More social enterprise. Re-use.
- Reverse vacancy and dereliction ties in with encourage sustainable housing and urban growth. Rush for change,
- Zebra crossing in the town to make it safe to cross the roads.
- Stacking lane at secondary school
- Railway Station: Back in use with ticket machine, unmanned as hop on and hop off

trains. Needs parking facilities.

- Information: What am I looking at? Virtual info - Graveyards, history, XX
- More affordable housing for local people, especially for people who have grown up in Balla.
- Interval outdoor exercise fixed stations through park walk.
- Traffic calming: essential. Pedestrian crossings.
- Croagh Patrick Heritage Trail: Signage Urgent. Also signage through woods.
- N6S Solutions needs attention for new housesnpanned.
- Water filtration upgrade essential for new housing.
- Parking for bus stops. Parking for busses.
- Provide for multi generational living: Right sizing - Accommodation for older people . No housing for young people.
- Showcase heritage: Tower. Walled garden.
- As a train station - re use.
- Community men's/women's sheds
- Youth club.

### **3. Number the top 5 objectives in order of importance starting with 1 and the most important.**

1. Traffic Calming
2. Reestablish the Train
3. Reverse Vacancy and Dereliction
4. Facilitate Active Travel
5. Limit Flooding

# BRAN



# PLA



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