

Chapter 14: Urban Design, Placemaking and Regeneration

14.5 Policy Responses

We note the following:

In refocusing on town and village centres with high quality urban design interventions, the Council established a new strategic projects and public realm unit to apply for funding and manage regeneration and renewal projects across the county. As of late 2021, this multidisciplinary unit is progressing 65 different projects worth a combined total of €45 million, all with the aim of delivering high-quality places that will be attractive locations to live, work, visit and invest in.

Town and Village Renewal

Policy

We note objective UK O11 below:

UD O11 - *Investigate the feasibility of a pilot scheme for a Kildare town to reduce vacancy levels, in conjunction with all relevant stakeholders.*

Comment:

Our understanding from reading the earlier part of this chapter is that a pilot has already been carried out successfully in Athy (see below):

*Through the efforts of the Vacant Housing Officer numerous vacant dwellings in town centres have been identified and brought back into use as social housing through both the Buy and Renew Scheme and the Repair and Lease Scheme. Furthermore, **as part of a pilot initiative in Athy**, the Council has over the past number of years, engaged with private landowners in the town centre with the aim of reducing instances of vacancy and dereliction. **This targeted and sustained effort has yielded very positive results and assisted in reducing the level of residential vacancy in the town.***

If such a scheme yielded very positive results in reducing the level of residential vacancy in the town, why is there a necessity to “investigate a feasibility” of another pilot scheme?

And what exactly does investigating a feasibility mean? Another report on the feasibility of a pilot scheme?

Please amend this objective to be more specific and time-bound, along the lines of what we suggest here:

Revised UD O11 - *Review the Athy pilot scheme and implement same or amended scheme in all towns across the county aiming to complete 3 towns each year in order to reduce vacancy levels in conjunction with all relevant stakeholders.*

We note action **UD A1** and suggest the following amendment:

UD A1 - *Continue to seek funding from relevant agencies and Government sources including the Rural and Urban Regeneration and Development Funds (RRDF/URDF) to secure financial*

support for all town and village renewal projects in the county and to explore possibilities for community-led and social financing opportunities

Comment:

These funds are important to support regeneration but the development plan **should also recognise and support the importance of community-led and social financing opportunities** in this area, for example:

- Community shares are a way to raise money by offering communities a chance to own shares in a local organisation. They are usually about more than just profit and work best for people who want to get involved and support a cause or a project that they really care about. They are particularly useful in rural areas, and are to support the community to take over a vacant building or ensure a local pub is not closed.
 - <https://communitysharesscotland.org.uk/>
- In 2017, South Dublin County Council launched a Participatory Budget initiative (EUR 300,000). Citizens took part in facilitated workshops to generate ideas, identify community needs, and develop supportive networks. Citizens then voted for projects designed and submitted by citizens. Details here:
 - <http://www.sdublincoco.ie/Media/Item/41961>
- This Development Plan should support new and innovative social finance initiatives to give power to local communities and shift the balance of power away from central sources of finance and towards citizen-led action. For example:
 - The community right to buy abandoned, neglected or detrimental land came into force in Scotland on 27 June 2018. It gives community bodies a right to compulsorily purchase land (i.e., land, bridges and other structures built on or over land, inland waters, canals and the foreshore) which is wholly or mainly, abandoned or neglected or the use or management of the land is causing harm to the environmental wellbeing of the community.
 - In 2020, this act was updated to provide the opportunity for communities across Scotland to apply for a compulsory right to buy at market value for the purpose of sustainable development.

While it is recognised that this is a complex process that goes beyond the remit of KCC and the current development plan, it is included in this feedback to highlight the depth of change that will be necessary to achieve whole-scale sustainable development.

Relying solely on external funding from central government can delay regeneration and placemaking efforts across the county. Taking a citizen-led and proactive approach to financing and public participation can open up new opportunities and actively involve citizens in the process of building communities.