

SKIBBEREEN



Aerial photo courtesy of Garry Minihane



HINCKS CENTRE



Ireland's European Structural and
Investment Funds Programmes
2014-2020
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Department of Rural and
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Project Ireland
2040

SECAD 

LEADER 2014-2020 is funded through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development – Europe Investing in Rural Areas



My Town, My Plan *Community Training Programme*

September 2019 - May 2020

Participants of the **My Town, My Plan** Community Training Programme have developed this Ideas document, with the support of the programme Facilitators and Trainers during the twelve session programme. This Ideas Document is intended as a means to further develop a strategy/plan for the area, seek funding and/or prioritise actions.

The objective of the community training programme was to provide an innovative approach to support future planning and development of community resources in towns and their hinterlands. Training workshops were used to provide information, stimulate discussions, link resources and develop ideas for each of the areas in conjunction with the community.

Hincks Centre for Entrepreneurship Excellence, part of the School of Business at Cork Institute of Technology delivered the **My Town, My Plan** Community Training Programme in collaboration with **SECAD Partnership CLG** (SECAD). SECAD is a Local Development Company that delivers a range of rural development and social inclusion programmes including LEADER 2014-2020, the Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme, the Rural Social Scheme, Tus, PEIL 2014-2020 and others.

The programme was delivered as part of the LEADER Programme in South and West Cork, which SECAD manages as an Implementing Partner on behalf of the South and West Cork Local Community Development Committee and Cork County Council.



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1. Introduction

Welcome to the Skibbereen strategic plan drafted by community members and business representatives under the guidance of SECAD Partnership CLG and the Hincks Centre, CIT, during the autumn/winter of 2019/2020. This process is part of a community effort to support Skibbereen to adapt to the needs of both present and future. It focuses on the ‘unity’ aspect of ‘community’ by encouraging the integration of the excellent work, including voluntary input, being carried out on a number of levels across the town and beyond.



Photo courtesy of Kornel Photography

2. Town Profile

2.1. Location and Context

Skibbereen is the most southerly town in Ireland, located 340km from Dublin and 75km from Cork Airport. A 16km radius takes in a variety of villages including, but not limited to, Ballydehob, Baltimore, Glandore, Leap and Union Hall, depicted in Appendix B, Map 1.



Mardyke pollinator corridor

2.2. Demographic Profile

Skibbereen is a market town with a population of almost 3,000 people in the urban area (CSO, 2016). It is served by 4 primary schools, since 2017 a new community school following the amalgamation of 3 secondary schools, along with two further education facilities with the Education and Training Board at the Sutherland Centre and the West Cork Campus of the College of Commerce at Rossa College.

2.3. Economic Profile

Skibbereen serves a hinterland of about 10,000 within a 16km radius. It has a busy cattle mart along with the NCT and driving licence centres for West Cork. From a town that was devastated in the 1980s following the closure of the Erin Foods co-op and

mass emigration of school leavers from the town, it is heartening to see its rebirth through the 2000s right through to today. Examples of key employers today include Fields of Skibbereen, O'Donnell Furniture Makers, West Cork Distillers, Spearline, The Ludgate Hub and the Fresh Fish Deli. See Appendix a for a brief profile of each.

One of Skibbereen's better-known residents, David Puttnam, has said of Skibbereen: 'it is a wonderful, wonderful place to live'. Anyone who lives here will undoubtedly agree and we want to make the experience even better and extend it beyond the town. Already, the Taste of West Cork food festival extends far beyond Skibbereen - its central hub. Similarly, the West Cork Arts Centre, based in the Uillinn in Skibbereen, has programme participants from across the southwest region. See Appendix B for contextual maps.

3. Consultation Process

Approximately 50 people attended the Skibbereen launch of the SECAD 'My Town, My Plan' community training programme in May 2019. It was an interactive session where all attendees were given red stickers to identify projects of interest that might be pursued as part of the programme in the autumn / winter months to follow. Attendees were invited to share their email addresses and 21 addresses were collected by the SECAD organisers. When the training sessions were launched in autumn, the attendance changed from session to session but contact details were gathered throughout. This became an integral part of the consultation process enabling regular contact and sharing of information amongst what would become a core group.

In order to develop the ideas into strategic goals, a variety of communication channels was central to soliciting feedback on the ideas from the initial group of interested stakeholders. This was supplemented by a carefully designed survey distributed through social and print media channels. The survey aimed to gather feedback from a wide, age-based demographic who live within a 16km radius of Skibbereen, who work in the Skibbereen area or have visited the town. As such, it was an important element of the consultation process and, with 415 respondents, was considered a representative sample of the target population. Given that the survey did not target the under-18 age group in the survey results, a separate survey was issued to staff and students of Skibbereen Community School yielding a further 112 responses.

4. SWOT/C and PESTLE Analyses

4.1. SWOT/C Analysis

Strengths (internal) on which we can build:	Weaknesses (internal) which we must strive to eliminate:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local representation in Dáil Eireann with new TD Holly Cairns; • Remote working opportunities for businesses through Ludgate; • Increased employment opportunities with Spearline and West Cork Distillers as just two examples; • West Cork Arts Centre is based in Skibbereen; • Good schools and education resources including Cork ETB at the Sutherland Centre and West Cork Campus of Cork College of Commerce; • Safe town; • Heritage Centre; • Good natural resources; • Welcoming town; • Farmers Market; • Variety of festivals; • Successful SOS campaign against the planned plastics factory; • Wide variety of community voluntary groups; • Wide variety of sports clubs; • Active sports and fitness centre; • Good shops; • Good hinterland; • An attractive countryside, including coastline and lakes; • Clean air and a benign climate; • Regional focus of professional services; • Holiday / tourist infrastructure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of short and long-term housing; • Public transport; • Not enough taxis; • Lack of events and entertainment after 6pm and on Sundays; • No usable community space or hall • Lack of youth facilities; • Poorly maintained streetscape and buildings; • No leisure attractions e.g. swimming pool, cinema, bowling alley, etc.; • Limited disability access; • Lack of inclusivity for new people coming to Skibbereen; • Inadequate communications channels with Cork County Council; • Expensive business rates; • Traffic congestion; • Access dependent on sub-standard road system; • Inadequate public pedestrian space in centre; • Inadequate public open green space; • Lack of access to riverbanks; • Vacant commercial premises; • No town council/local democratic forum; • No community council linking community organisations.

Opportunities (external) which we can exploit:	Threats/ challenges (external) which we must mitigate:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the River Ilan – Blueway; • Utilising the empty buildings, particularly historical, including soup kitchen, leading to new business; opportunities and employment in town; • Possible greenways; • ‘The Bridge to nowhere’; • Development of the Marsh area for commercial and biodiversity purposes; • Consolidate the community groups to support a common goal for the town; • Welcoming people back to Skibbereen; • Welcoming new families; • Convent building now derelict; • Remote working; • Apply to become a Cork County Age Friendly Town; • Unused / underused buildings suitable for refurbishing; • Unused / underused sites in town centre; • Adapt new flood-protection structures for use / river access; • Cater for changing visitor / tourism patterns; • Agricultural specialisation / diversification; • Revisit 2011 traffic study proposals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clonakilty is the Municipal District HQ for West Cork; • Lack of investment from Cork County Council; • Lack of support for initiatives by individual community groups; • Public Realm not delivered to spec; • Effects of Brexit on tourism and agriculture; • Effects of climate change; • Increasing traffic congestion; • Vulnerability of narrow agricultural base.

Note: The definition of SWOT/C for the purposes of this exercise considers strengths and weaknesses as internal and opportunities and threats / challenges as external.

4.2. PESTLE Analysis

POLITICAL	ECONOMICAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with all 3 West Cork TD's, particularly Holly Cairns as the first ever elected TD from Skibbereen, the others being Michael Collins and Christopher O'Sullivan; TDs and local county councillors to be kept appraised of their constituents' needs; Local government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully support expansion of Ludgate/Spearline/West Cork Distillery; Support of businesses which: Invest in the environment - low carbon, low waste in their own operation and in their products, use principles of the circular economy; Give opportunities to train young people for specific roles including environmental responsibility of that role; Drop the rates/ rents as it is leaving shops in Skibbereen unoccupied; Local industries; Employment opportunities.
SOCIAL	TECHNOLOGICAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of Community Centre; Work on expanding and properly publicising daytime and evening activities; Support local affordable rent only schemes (not to buy) to open the housing stock to low income families; As an intermediate step towards a Community Centre, draw up an inventory of available spaces, availability, cost and what they could be used for; The Arts; Housing; Access to services; Public transport. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage similar businesses to Ludgate/Spearline/West Cork Distillers to invest; Communications; Affordable internet for rural/remote areas.

LEGAL	ENVIRONMENTAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisiting the gaps left by the disbandment of Town Councils nationally; • Local Countryside Advocate drawn from NPWS, Irish Wildlife Trust, Birdwatch Ireland responsible for ensuring the environment is properly protected in any works locally. With legal backing (e.g. being able to bring charges of ecocide). This would have to be part of a national strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of Marsh/creating woodlands/ areas of biodiversity; • Increase biodiversity by developing and using an area Biodiversity Action Plan, All Ireland Pollinator Plan; • Environmental education schemes linked to the above for the local community to garner support for the local environment and spread ideas of how to look after it for maximum biodiversity; • Land use; • Pollution; • Sustainability.



Skibbereen Schools Cycle Bus

5. Key Themes

This section provides a table of four key themes supported by details of objectives, stakeholders and proposed actions for each theme.

Key Themes	Programme / Project Objectives	Actions	Stakeholders / Owners
1. Traffic Management	<p>Revisit the 2011 Skibbereen Traffic and Transportation Study - Final Report with specific consideration to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Alternative to the completion of the eastern relief road incorporating the new Community School; b) Implementation of a one-way system to relieve congestion on North and Bridge Streets; c) Improvement of parking situation in the town centre e.g. development of the Marsh area to include car parking area and bus stops. 	<p>Gain support for and prepare a submission for the county development plan.</p> <p>Gain support from West Cork Municipal District elected members.</p>	<p>Core SECAD Skibbereen team;</p> <p>People of Skibbereen;</p> <p>Cork County Council West Cork Municipal District officers;</p> <p>Cork County Council elected members from West Cork MD.</p>
2. Pedestrianisation and Cycle Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> d) Pedestrian access over the bridge from Levis' Quay, pedestrianisation of Main Street and user accessibility along all streets. e) Implementation of cycle corridors at peak school times. 	<p>Gain support for and prepare a submission for the county development plan.</p> <p>Gain support from West Cork Municipal District elected members.</p>	<p>Core SECAD Skibbereen team;</p> <p>People of Skibbereen;</p> <p>Cork County Council West Cork Municipal District officers;</p> <p>Cork County Council elected members from West Cork MD.</p>

Key Themes	Programme / Project Objectives	Actions	Stakeholders / Owners
3. Age Friendly Town	f) Apply for Age Friendly town status from Cork County Council and be accepted into the programme for 2020/2021.	<p>f) Solicit support from key stakeholders for an application.</p> <p>Conduct research into the benefits this programme could bring to Skibbereen.</p> <p>Submit application to Cork County Council Age Friendly Programme.</p>	<p>People of Skibbereen;</p> <p>Community groups in Skibbereen providing services to our senior citizens;</p> <p>Age Friendly Alliance;</p> <p>Older Person's Council;</p> <p>An Garda Síochána;</p> <p>Cork County Council West Cork Municipal District officers.</p>

Key Themes	Programme / Project Objectives	Actions	Stakeholders / Owners
4. Community Facilities for All Ages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g) Secure a permanent home for the Community and Family Resource Centre. h) Consider options for Emmet Hall (scout hall) space subject to lease agreement by Cork County Council and Skibbereen Tidy Towns. i) Host an annual community open day for clubs and groups to share details of their activities. j) Develop a directory with contact details for all voluntary groups in the area. k) Develop greenway alongside the Ilen River from Chapel Quay to Kennedy Bridge. l) Investigate potential to develop a commercial venture for a cinema. 	Consult with a variety of business and community interests to determine the feasibility of any / all of these objectives.	<p>Core SECAD Skibbereen team;</p> <p>People of Skibbereen;</p> <p>Cork County Council West Cork Municipal District officers;</p> <p>Cork County Council elected members from West Cork MD;</p> <p>Business sponsorship for annual community open day.</p>

Note: Costs and timeline have not been included at this stage of the process.

6. Delivery Structure

The timing of this initiative coincided with the pre-draft public consultation period of the County Development Plan 2022-2028. It was agreed that this document would be used as the basis for a submission by the parties to this initiative. As such, we plan to circulate this document to all the West Cork Municipal District Councillors for their consideration and support. The list of sitting councillors is available from this link: <https://www.corkcoco.ie/en/your-county-council/electedmembers>

Furthermore, on 11 May, 2020, Cork County Council advised its elected members of a draft plan to reactivate local economies and communities following the COVID-19 crisis (Project ACT). We believe that many of the principles outlined in the draft plan are aligned with the key themes included in this document. Community groups who contributed to this document and expressed interest in contributing to the initiative for Skibbereen Town are as follows in no particular order:

- Skibbereen Tidy Towns
- Skibbereen & District Chamber of Commerce
- Skibbereen Community & Family Resource Centre
- Cycle Sense Skibbereen
- Sustainable Skibbereen
- West Cork Environmental Group

Appendix A: Company Profile Selection

Fields of Skibbereen has been run by the Field family since 1935. It currently employs 180 people and 'is one of those places that couldn't exist anywhere other than in the quizzical, poetical mystery that is West Cork. Relationships in West Cork work differently than in the rest of Ireland, and John Field personifies this with his support for local producers, his championing of their work, his knowledge that they give his shop a uniqueness that matches the area.' - John McKenna (source: www.fieldsofskibbereen.ie/aboutus).

O'Donnell Furniture Makers have roots steeped in West Cork history, back as far as 1902 when 'John Reen, great grandfather of the present day Managing Director, Aodh O'Donnell, made a chair from a local ash tree' (source: www.odonnellfurniture.com/about/).

West Cork Distillers, established in 2003 by 'three lifelong friends who set about establishing a distillery to produce the highest quality spirits and provide sustainable employment in this beautiful and remote part of Ireland' (source: <https://www.westcork-distillers.com/>). In 2013, West Cork Distillers leased the 10,000 sq. ft. West Cork Bottling plant to start producing fine spirits. This was followed in 2016 with the purchase of the former Erin Foods factory where a new visitor centre is due to be opened imminently.

Spearline, 'a market leading network intelligence company' (source: www.spearline.com/team) was 'founded in 2003 by CEO Kevin Buckley and CTO Matthew Lawlor. It has a global presence in 60 countries and works with an impressive roster of high-profile clients such as Google, Microsoft, Airbnb and Skype' (source: www.siliconrepublic.com/jobs/spearlinecork-skibbereen). Kevin is on video record referring to a vision of Skibbereen as 'the digital capital of the world.'

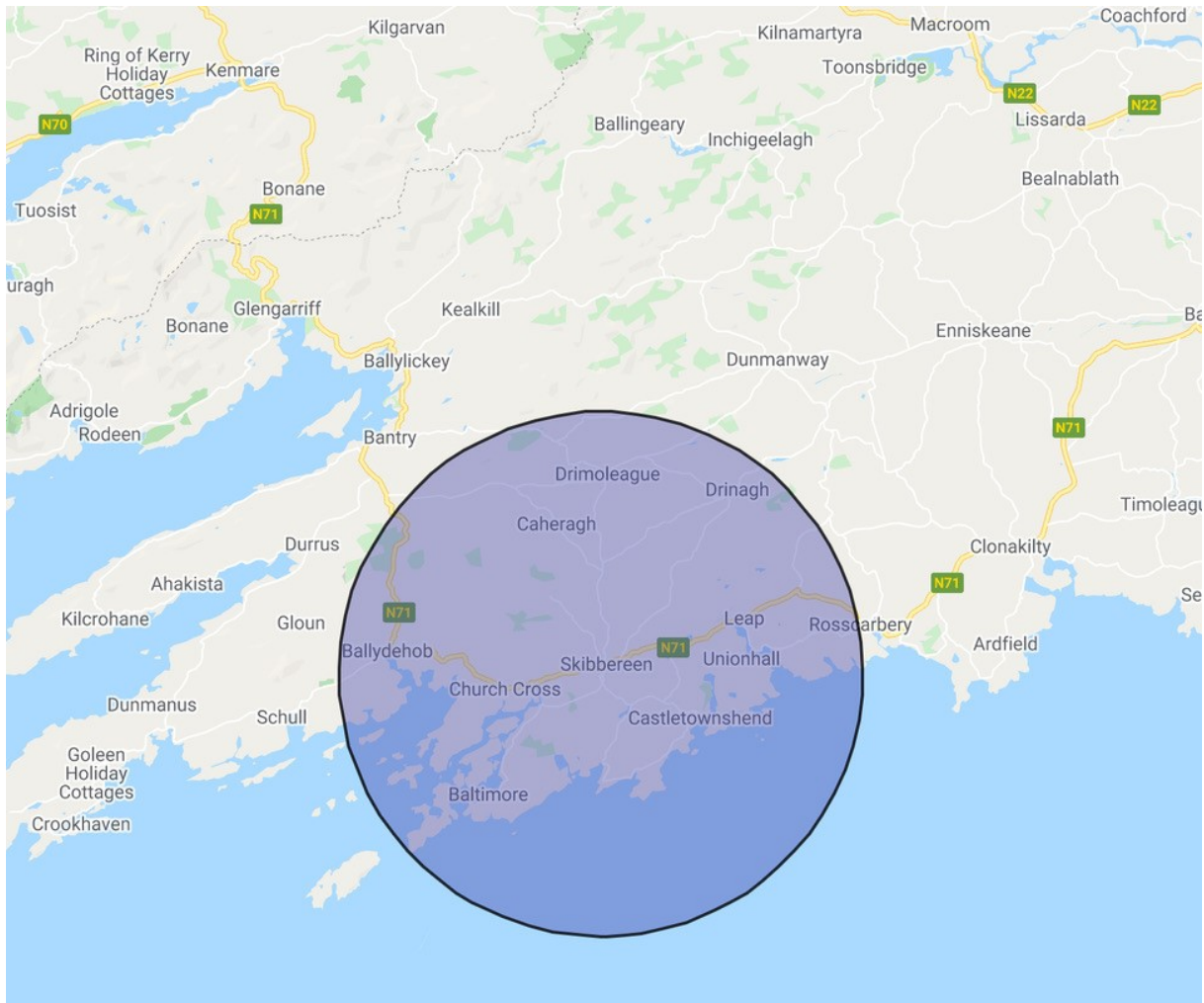
Between the two organisations, Spearline and West Cork Distillers currently employ in excess of 120 in Skibbereen excluding indirect employment through their respective buildings' redevelopment and refurbishment.

The Ludgate Hub, with its 1Gb connectivity supporting the town, has turned Skibbereen into a 'connected community' (source: www.ludgate.ie) supporting global business in a wonderful location on the Wild Atlantic Way. 'The Ludgate Hub in Skibbereen is leading the way as a demonstration of what is possible if a rural community is given access to high speed broadband' (source: www.ludgate.ie/the-1-gig-society). Its development has brought considerable business to the town with 100 new jobs to date and no sign of slowing down.

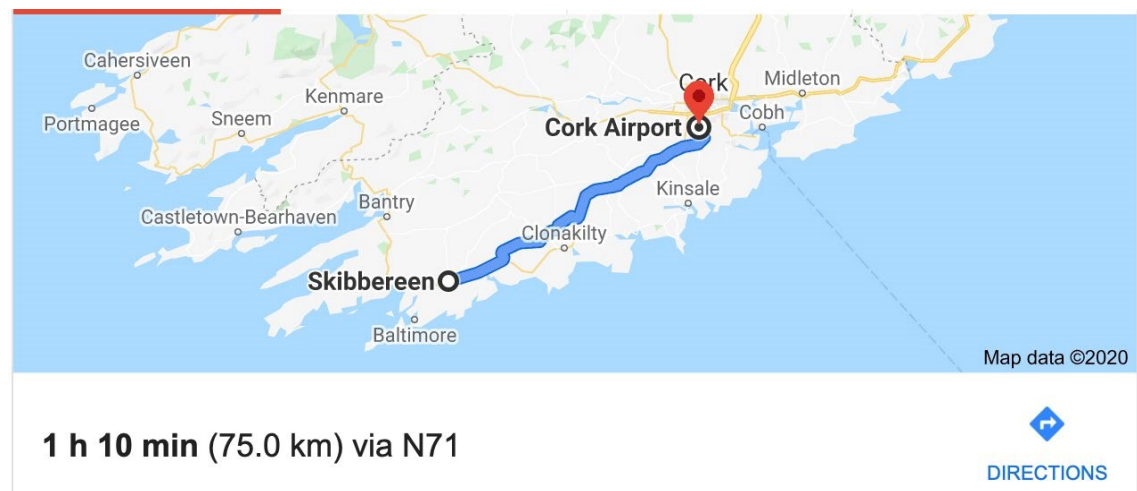
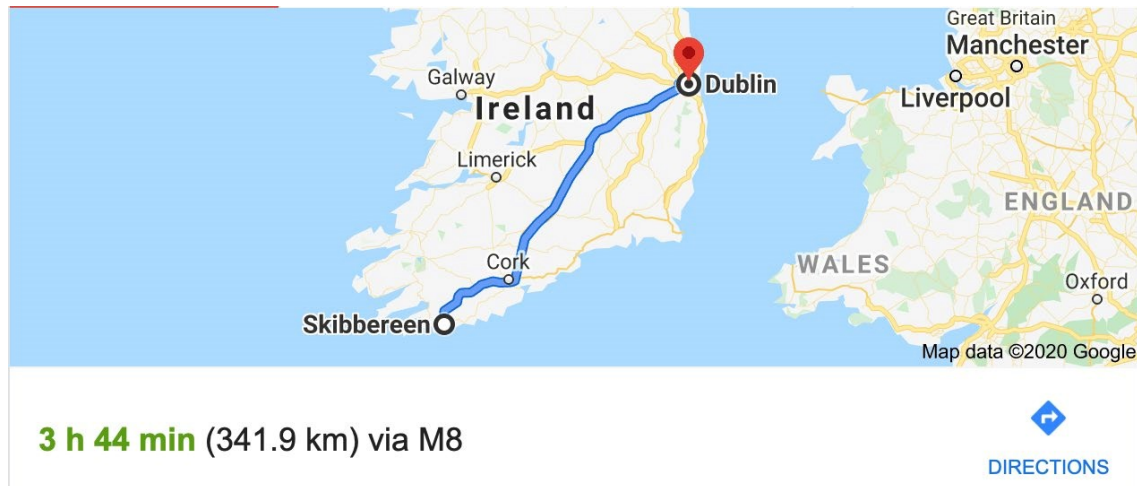
The Fresh Fish Deli has its origins in Union Hall and Rosscarbery but now employs 25 people operating out of its Skibbereen base at the Carbery Enterprise Park (source: www.thefreshfishdeli.com). It is heartening to see a food production facility operating once more in Skibbereen, using sustainably sourced raw materials i.e. fish for their fish cakes and pies.

Appendix B: Contextual Maps (September 2019)

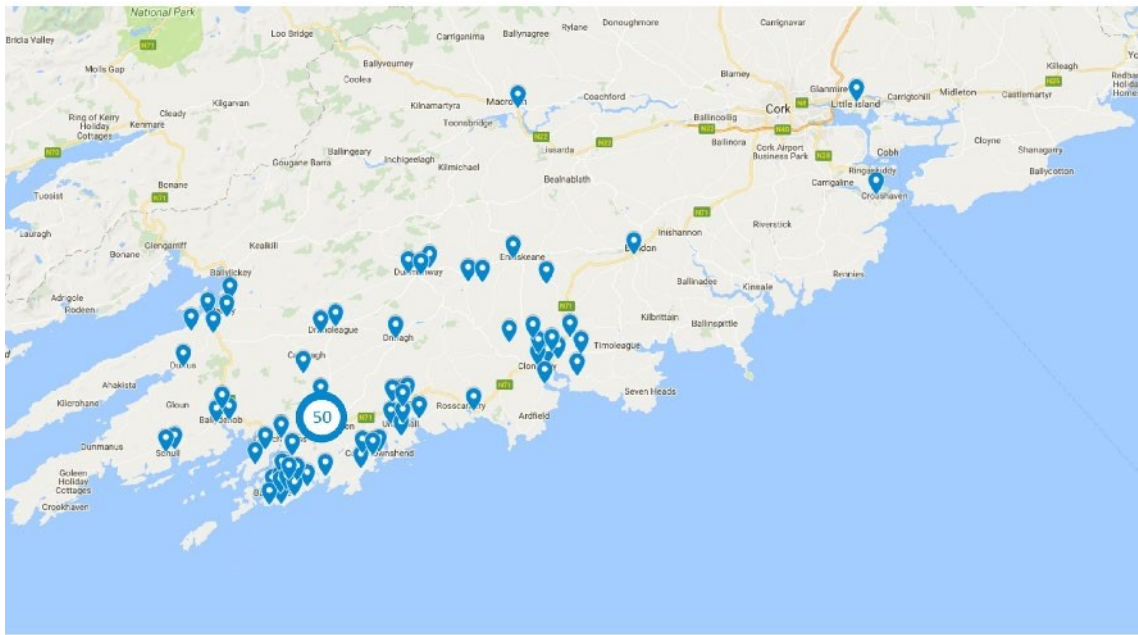
Map 1: 16km radius of Skibbereen



Map 2 a and b: Where is Skibbereen?



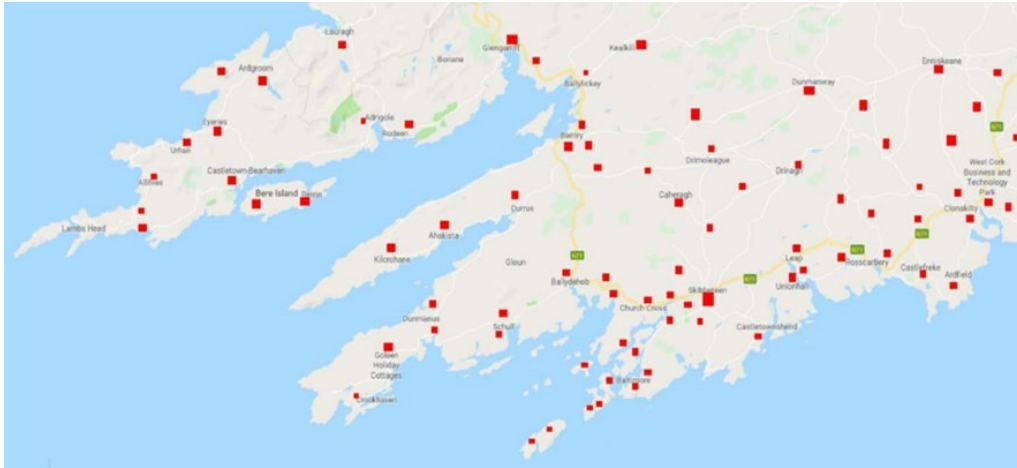
Map 3: Ludgate hub members' residential locations



Map 4: A Taste of West Cork festival locations



Map 5: Uilinn Programme participants' residential locations



Appendix C: Survey Data Requirements Table

Q1	Demographic data, live in/work in/visit Skibbereen and age range
Q2	Options needed to support transport and traffic management in Skibbereen
Q3	Agreement with statements regarding pedestrian accessibility, cultural diversity, social opportunities, work opportunities
Q4	Agreement with statement that Skibbereen is well served on an educational basis
Q5	Agreement with statement that there are adequate social or community supports in Skibbereen (CFRC requested question)
Q6	Agreement with statements regarding future preparedness of Skibbereen in terms of the environment, sustainability, climate change, nature and biodiversity
Q7	Options for utilisation of the Ilen River – sport, leisure, tourism, river taxi, wildlife conservation
Q8	Open-ended question asking respondents the one thing they like most about Skibbereen
Q9	Open-ended question asking respondents for their top three suggestions to improve Skibbereen in the future