

Survey Results: Rathkeale Better with Business

In May and June of 2020 David Lamont conducted 3 online surveys to get peoples' opinions on how to make Rathkeale a better place to be. 42 individuals answered one or more questions. Most respondents (88% to 92% depending on the survey) lived in Rathkeale all year or in Limerick County.

All respondents believed that Rathkeale can, or should, be improved. 64% said they would help while 36% believed someone else should do it. No one believed Rathkeale was perfect as it is.

Most respondents believed that Rathkeale would be a better place to be with more businesses, more shops on Main Street and a new business/industrial park. They also favoured stricter planning regulation and law/traffic enforcement.

The top 5 businesses people would like to see in Rathkeale were a gym, dentist, florist, bakery (large) and a burger restaurant (diner.) A gift shop tied for 5th place. 3 of 10 comments advocated for swimming facilities.

Most believed that Rathkeale-run organisations are most likely to succeed at attracting and facilitating more businesses. 58% favoured a not-for-profit Rathkeale Chamber of Commerce with unpaid volunteers. 80% believed a Chamber of Commerce had the greatest chance of success. 35% favoured a for-profit corporation with compensated stakeholders. 84% believed that had the greatest chance of success.

If an organisation were established to bring more businesses to Rathkeale 41% of respondents said they would provide skills and time in exchange for shares. 21% said they would invest €100 to €999 in exchange for shares. 10% would not invest any money and the rest would invest varying amounts in exchange for shares.

Supposition

The survey responses are an interesting representation of opinions at a point in time but should not be taken as conclusive. A conclusive survey would require more respondents and opinions could change if arguments were made. For example, a not-for-profit Rathkeale Chamber of Commerce was the favoured approach to attracting more businesses to Rathkeale. However, such an organisation existed and was disbanded without notable success.

Anecdotally, the former Chamber struggled to attract local businesspeople, to keep volunteers and to raise funds. People expected instant results and when the Limerick City and County Council did not quickly act upon requests volunteers became disillusioned and disengaged.

David Lamont did not participate in his own survey but has considered the opinions expressed and other factors to determine:

- Rathkeale is a forgotten town and/or considered by authorities to be a useful location for Travellers who are unwelcome elsewhere.
- Rathkeale can be made a better place to be and most residents want that.
- Attracting businesses makes the town better by drawing visitors, revenue, jobs, and new homeowners.
- Rathkeale is easily accessed and with the Foynes to Limerick road (Adare Bypass) it will be easier for Limerick's 94,000 people to get to the town in 2025.
- Facilities and a business-friendly environment need to be readily available to attract entrepreneurs.
- A vibrant, well-kept, low crime and friendly location attracts while dereliction, vacant buildings and traffic congestion detracts.
- Limerick City and County Council, planning regulations, commercial rates, access roads and law enforcement are critical influencers on the positive or negative perception of Rathkeale as a place to be.
- The Limerick City and County Council and our politicians will respond to consistent positive demand for improvements in Rathkeale but will not do much without vocal encouragement from Rathkeale voters (the public, not just businesspeople.)
- Rathkeale's qualities need to be articulated and the town's problems need to be mitigated but without an "Ambassador" the perception of Rathkeale is largely determined by the mainstream media (often unbalanced stories suggesting a correlation between the town's Traveller community, crime and garda resources.)
- A Rathkeale Development Group with achievement-based rewards will succeed where volunteer-only Chambers of Commerce fail because it can attract and motivate the people with the skills and influence required over many years.
- While a few people may do the lion's share of the day-to-day work the entire community has a role to play. Our collective voices and votes encourage action. Those who cheer Rathkeale's problems need to be converted to champions and we need to keep our collective eyes on the prize as we overcome a setback or two on the way.