

# Rathkeale, the Rising Rural Town

*Rathkeale's proud, skilled, and active community is enthusiastically working to rejuvenate their town and is seeing some early signs of success.*

There is a spirited community in West Limerick working on their town's rejuvenation. They are in Rathkeale which is perfectly located on the N21 between Limerick City and near Newcastle West on the main route to Kerry. It will soon be at the elbow of the new Foynes to Limerick motorway (Adare Bypass), reducing travel time to about 20 minutes for many of the 94,000 people in Limerick City. The new road also links Limerick to Clare and the town to the Wild Atlantic Way.

Rathkeale's workforce is highly skilled with 34% engaged in professional managerial, technical, or non-manual work. 43% work in Commerce, Trade and Professional Services and 7% in Agriculture. The unemployed might join the professionally managed Community Employment Project training programme for work experience and upskilling. The town also has 3 national schools, a secondary school, a crèche, the only Youth Centre outside Limerick City, and sheltered housing catering to some of the older residents.

Rathkeale also has an industrial estate that houses [DesignPro](#), a respected provider of precision automation and machine build services. [ABP](#), [Daly Tyres](#), and [Plassey Food](#) also have facilities in the town.

And, like its larger neighbour Newcastle West, Rathkeale has significant retail and service businesses. These include banks, a post office, large supermarket, pubs, restaurants, hotel, newsagents, beauty salons, ironworks, tyre and auto, pharmacies, medical centre, veterinary, solicitors, financial services, clothing, hardware, furniture and electrical supply stores among others.

Twenty Rathkeale businesses have **recently upgraded**. €2.5 million was invested in the reopening and renovation of the [Rathkeale House Hotel](#). The [Rathkeale Community Council](#) opened a Welcome Centre with a Failte Ireland Tourist Point at the Community Centre. [Sean Hennessy Electrical](#) relocated from a small shop to a giant superstore just off the N21. [Downes Eurospar](#) integrated the famous Deel Bakery into the supermarket keeping White family talent and equipment in the town.

[Deelside Veterinary](#) also moved to a purpose built best in class clinic with easy access from the N21. [Tadhg O'Connor](#) added a Euronics electrical section in their reorganised furniture store. [White's Foodstore and Filling Station](#) opened a new easy access Fuel Depot. [O'Sullivan's Bar](#) added a new outdoor beer garden creating a comfortable safe social experience for patrons, even in winter. [Bloomers Catering](#) started to bring the best of Rathkeale to other towns with its new food truck. The Rathkeale Community Council opened a new [Community Charity Shop](#) with bargains on clothes, housewares, books, DVDs, and bric-a-brac. [Glow Sarah Jane](#) redecorated and upgraded creating an even friendlier and safer beauty salon. [Bobby's Hair Salon](#) moved to a recently renovated shop across from the Eurospar. [Giltenane's](#) helpful, friendly, pharmacy repainted their shop front and added a weather friendly awning. Triona Doody Kennedy upskilled at the American Beauty Academy in Cork adding Microneedling and Microdermabrasion to her extensive list of facial treatments at the [Beauty Bliss Clinic](#). [Patsy's Fashions](#) painted and revamped, adding room to make customers more comfortable. [Ó Gairbhí Newsagents](#) repainted and added an online catalogue of toys using Facebook with a call and collect service. The [Beehive Play Learn Grow](#) crèche was revamped, and the policies and procedures updated to ensure a continued safe, warm, caring, and nurturing environment for young children. [Layna's Beauty Rooms](#) is getting a facelift enhancing the ambiance of Main Street. [John Dinnage Menswear](#) is launching a new website offering their products to customers nationwide. And, the [Tyrestop](#) added space to make customers more comfortable while waiting for the work on their vehicles to be completed.

*"Rathkeale business owners are making enhancements to let shoppers know that their custom is always appreciated and is never taken for granted,"* said Derek Downes, Chairperson of Team Rathkeale, the business group formed by 52 businesses in September to strengthen the town's economy.



Rathkeale residents also **organise and partici-**

**pate.** The Rathkeale Pre-Social Cohesion Group, that includes Travellers and settled people, was a winner in the [2020 Pride of Place awards](#), an all-island competition about people coming together to shape, change and improve daily lives in their communities. In another show of community participation, Rathkeale had its say in how the now closed St. Anne's Convent might be reused in the future to benefit the town. The high-participation survey resulted in 638 ideas that included using the facility as a heritage/arts centre; classrooms for learning new skills; services to improve physical and mental health; as well as accommodation for residents and visitors.



O'Sullivan's Bar added a street scape of old Rathkeale to a new outdoor beer garden creating a comfortable social experience for patrons, even in winter.

Limerick City and County Council is upgrading the Great Southern Greenway, which starts in Rathkeale. They will soon upgrade the town's River Walk and have begun the process of acquiring 37 derelict properties. This includes the compulsory acquisition of the 33 house Ballywilliam estate which was started, but not completed, and 4 additional properties on Main Street. If these were all completed as houses, they have the potential to increase the number of Rathkeale households by 6% and potentially accommodate an additional 110 people living, working, and/or attending school in the town.

61% of residents are homeowners and 34% are renters in this low crime town. By mid-November in 2020 Rathkeale has **the lowest crime** in the Newcastle West Garda District with most categories falling below the threshold for statistical reporting. At the end of 2019, the last year for which reports are published, crime reports to the Rathkeale Garda station had fallen dramatically since 2010.

For a town of just 1,700 people there are an amazing number of **regional, national, and international sports heroes** that proudly call Rathkeale their home. Rathkeale's athletic heroes and clubs include: The [2020 Epsom Derby winning jockey](#) Emmet McNamara; The Rathkeale Boxing Club, [Irish Boxing Club of the Year](#) with Nell Fox (Irish boxing champion), Kate Geary (Junior All Ireland glory) and Jason Harty who turned professional; The [Manx GP motorcycle race winner](#), James Chawke; The [Irish Championship Olympic trap and World Junior Champion clay pigeon shooter](#), Ian O'Sullivan; Anna Marie Shiels who



Rathkeale has the lowest crime in the Newcastle West Garda District of 31 towns.\*

captained the Irish Ladies International Clay Pigeon Shooting team and won the [Donald Mackintosh International trophy](#); Seamus Cawley who has completed [40 marathons](#); [Special Olympian soccer player](#) Brian O'Sullivan who helped Ireland win Bronze in 2019; Fiona Lamont blocker on both the indoor [Irish National Volleyball and Beach Volleyball](#) squads; [Rathkeale AFC](#), kings of Desmond soccer league, that swept the boards over the last number of years and this year came within a whisker of the Munster Champions cup; and The [GAA Club](#), with its numerous underage titles, that continues to supply a huge chain of talent

in hurling and football. There are more sports heroes and many up and comers too numerous to mention.

Not all Rathkeale heroes are athletic. Others are quick to lend a hand or raise money for worthy causes such as The [Butterfly Club](#), [Crisis Emergency Response Team](#), Church repairs, and upgraded Christmas lights for 2020. The Rathkeale Community Council and local business sponsors have recognised those individuals who make Rathkeale a better place to be through the Rathkeale Champions programme, the first in Ireland to use Challenge Coin rewards.

*"This is Rathkeale's time to show everyone that tough times don't define us, they refine us,"* said David Lamont, a champion for Rathkeale's rejuvenation and member of the Rathkeale Community Council.

The Rathkeale **rejuvenation objectives** are about attracting business, residents and visitors to the town creating a positive economic cycle that is self-sustaining. They include the completion of the Limerick to Foynes motorway, adding high speed broadband, the reuse of the convent facility, 100 extra houses for permanent residents, the location of a national or county department in the town and the extension of the Great Southern Greenway with a connection to the existing Dohyle Lough marina.

Rathkeale may well be an investor's diamond in the rough, a town with great qualities and potential that is undergoing the refinement and polish needed to succeed in rural Ireland.

\*Source: Gardai for 2020 through mid-November