

Occupancy Brief

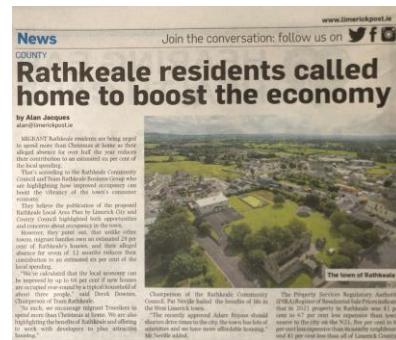
Impact of Low Occupancy on the Rathkeale Economy
by David Lamont | 31/12/23

Rathkeale is unique insofar as it houses a large migrant Traveller population that results in absent shoppers for 7 of 12 months. This significantly reduces the town's occupancy, disadvantaging its economy. For this and other reasons, Rathkeale loses about 4 businesses per year and has already lost anchors such as the banks and the weekly mart.

It is estimated that full-time residents, including 5% of Travellers, account for 88% of consumer spending while the 25% migrant¹ population accounts for just 12%. Accepting local observations and assuming a 45% migrant population, they contribute a below par 25%. However, retailers report that when the town is full of migrants, many in the settled populations shop elsewhere so anecdotally a 50% increase in population results in a 20% increase in business.

The 25% migrant population only shops locally for 5 of 12 months contributing an under par 12% to the local economy

A 7 of 12-month absence by a large percentage of property owners results in substantially under par contribution to the local economy, regardless of population size.



[Online version](#) of the same story in the Limerick Leader.

Limerick Post (September 2022)

Figure 1: Headlines highlighting the impact of low occupancy on the local economy, Rathkeale encouraged migrants to stay longer.

The same model can be used to estimate an extreme scenario where migrants own 75% of the town, with a 55% contribution to the economy. However, in such a scenario the vast majority of businesses which are run by the Settled, would likely fail.

Bottom Line: Rathkeale's vibrancy depends on a stronger consumer economy, which can be boosted if more full-time households move to the town and/or migrants spend more than 5 months there. A rebalancing of the population is possible if full-time residents (including settled Travellers) occupy new houses. The Rathkeale Local Area Plan has zoning for 184 new houses and the finishing of the derelict Ballywilliam estate adds a further 33.

A copy of the occupation model spreadsheet is available by emailing: david.lamont@rathkeale.com

¹ Using 2022 Census data indicated that 30% of Rathkeale's population is Irish Traveller. It is assumed 5% live in the town all year and the rest are migrants.