

**Ennis 2020**

**People, Place, Potential**

**Report on the Community Visioning  
Exercise**

**Department of Politics and Public Administration / UL  
Practicum  
University of Limerick,  
June 2011**



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## Introduction

### Background

The main objective of this project was to support the development of a participatory plan for Ennis as a hub town in line with the National Spatial Strategy. As such, the project endeavoured to facilitate residents and other users of Ennis to contribute their thinking on the future of the town and its hinterland.

In supporting the project as part of its Practicum Programme, UL also sought to support learning amongst a range of UL students in relation to public policy; active citizenship; public consultation, using participatory methods; uses of new media and technology as platforms for participation and enhancing curriculum development.

During the initial planning for this initiative it was anticipated that the project could have a number of distinct components. The first of these, addressed in this report, was to support the initial process of consultation with residents and users of Ennis on their broader vision for the development of the town. Beyond this it was suggested that a second phase might be necessary in order to take this broader vision and drill down into a number of more concentrated themes. This is referred to further in section 5 on next steps. Finally, it was considered possible that at a later stage a third phase of engagement with residents of the broader Ennis hinterland might be considered.

### Partners

The partners in the project included:

- Ennis Town Council, both elected representatives and officials;
- University of Limerick (including students from the Politics and Public Administration Department and the Department of Languages, Literature, Culture and Communication, particularly the MA in Technical Communication and E-Learning).

The project was also supported by the Clare Active Citizenship Network.

### Facilitating participation

To achieve the objective of involving Ennis residents and other town users in the development of the Hub Plan, the project undertook a number of participatory exercises / interactions, designed to access perspectives in a number of different ways and in a manner that provided opportunities for a variety of population groups to participate. These are described below:

Public Meetings – These were designed as general sessions for members of the public to discuss their vision and ambition for the town's future development up to 2020. They were facilitated using a World Café methodology (see [www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com)) which combines a small number of inputs with conversations on 'questions that matter'. Attendance at these sessions was less than anticipated, with approximately 60 people participating. However, while the numbers were less than anticipated, the volume and depth of feedback was of a very high quality.

Targeted interactions – Two types of targeted interaction took place

- i. Decision makers – These sessions, again using the World Café methodology, were designed to secure the views / perspectives of those who currently occupy decision making roles, in particular, elected representatives and public officials. These sessions provided a space for these groups to engage in a discussion on their vision for the development of the town. Approximately, 15 people participated in session for elected representatives and 20 in a separate session for officials.
- ii. Engaging with younger people – This element of the project was designed to engage more directly with another group who are often absent from broader public meetings. In this case, by providing support to the Clare Youth Services, one very successful World Café session was organised, involving over 30 young people. In addition, one targeted focus group was held with 11 participants on the Leaving Cert Applied programme at the Ennis Youth Centre.

Public Space Interactions – These sessions took place in the Dunnes Stores Shopping Centre on a Thursday evening and a Saturday morning and were designed to access the views of those who may be reluctant or unable to attend public meetings. These proved to be very successful and approximately 180 public space conversations took place, recorded by the facilitators or directly by participants themselves. While these engagements were inevitably time limited they did provide very valuable opportunities to solicit a wider range of views and opinions. These sessions were supported by a number of Ennis Town Councillors, by members of the Clare Active Citizens Network and by staff and students from UL.

Virtual Space Interaction – The use of this final interaction space was designed to enable virtual participation for those who do not wish to participate in face to face discussions and was facilitated by the creation of a Facebook site and a capacity for Twitter comments. However, take up on this option was very limited.

The partners involved in the process also developed a set of “rules of engagement to guide the process”. These are outlined in appendix 1.

Thus, from these various sessions the opinions of over 300 people were accessed. These opinions, as expressed in each of the different participatory fora, have been meticulously harvested and recorded and will be made available on a website dedicated to the initiative in the coming weeks. This report draws heavily from this harvesting process and presents perspectives on:

- A vision for Ennis, essentially what Ennis will look and feel like in 2020. As part of this the future image of the town is envisaged as are the facilities that are likely to be available to its residents and other users (section 1).
- Strengths and assets, upon which this vision can be built (section 2)
- Enhancing Ennis, setting out a range of areas in which the town might be further improved (section 3) and
- Inclusive Ennis, outlining how Ennis might be further developed as an inclusive town with an emphasis on quality of life (section 4).

To facilitate easier absorption of a large volume of information these perspectives are presented in mindmap format with a short accompanying narrative.

A final section addresses the next steps to be taken including the dissemination of the findings from this exercise as well as identifying options to take the process further towards the completion of a strategy for Ennis as a hub town.

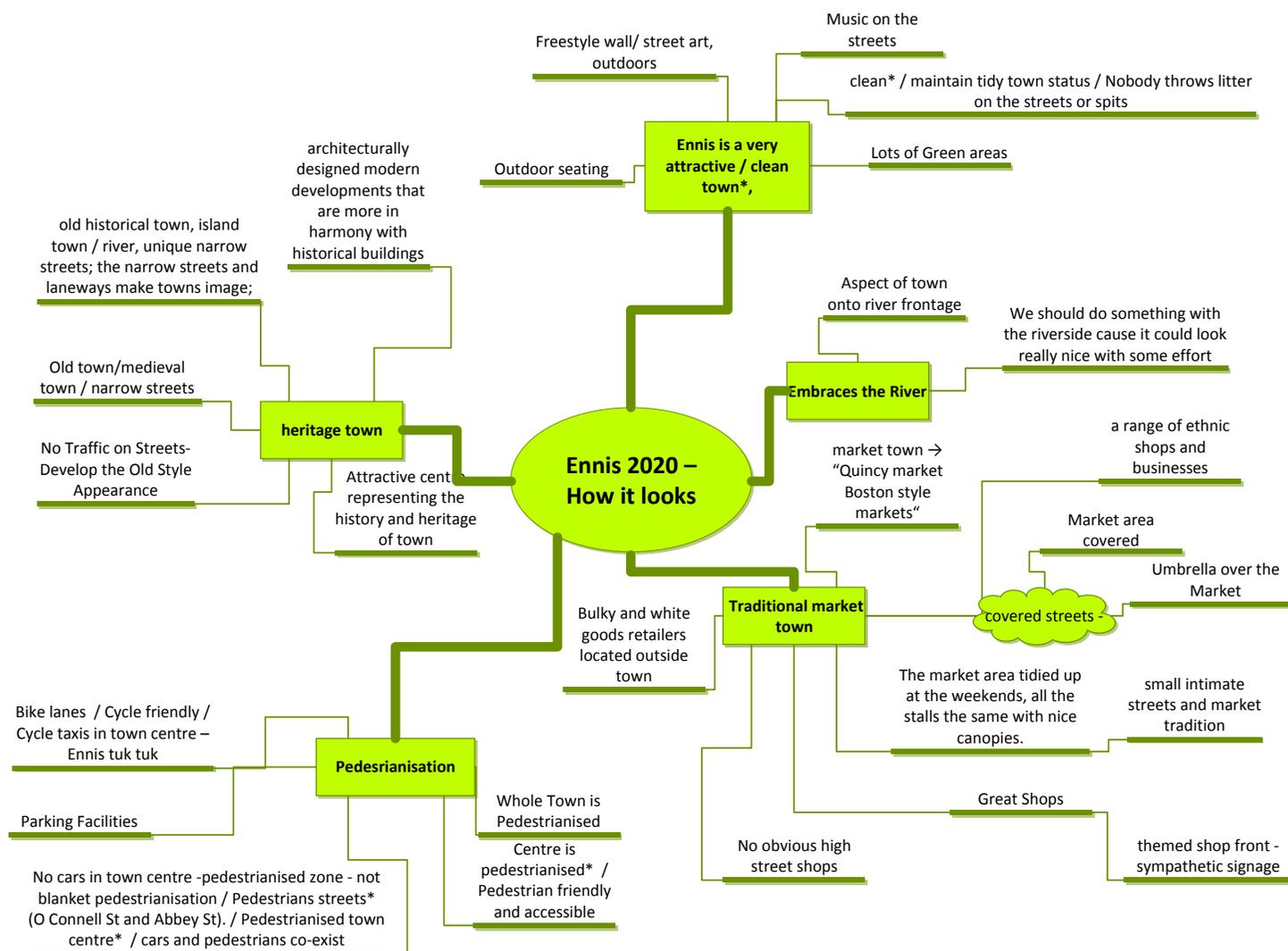
# 1. The Vision for the Future

## Ennis in 2020

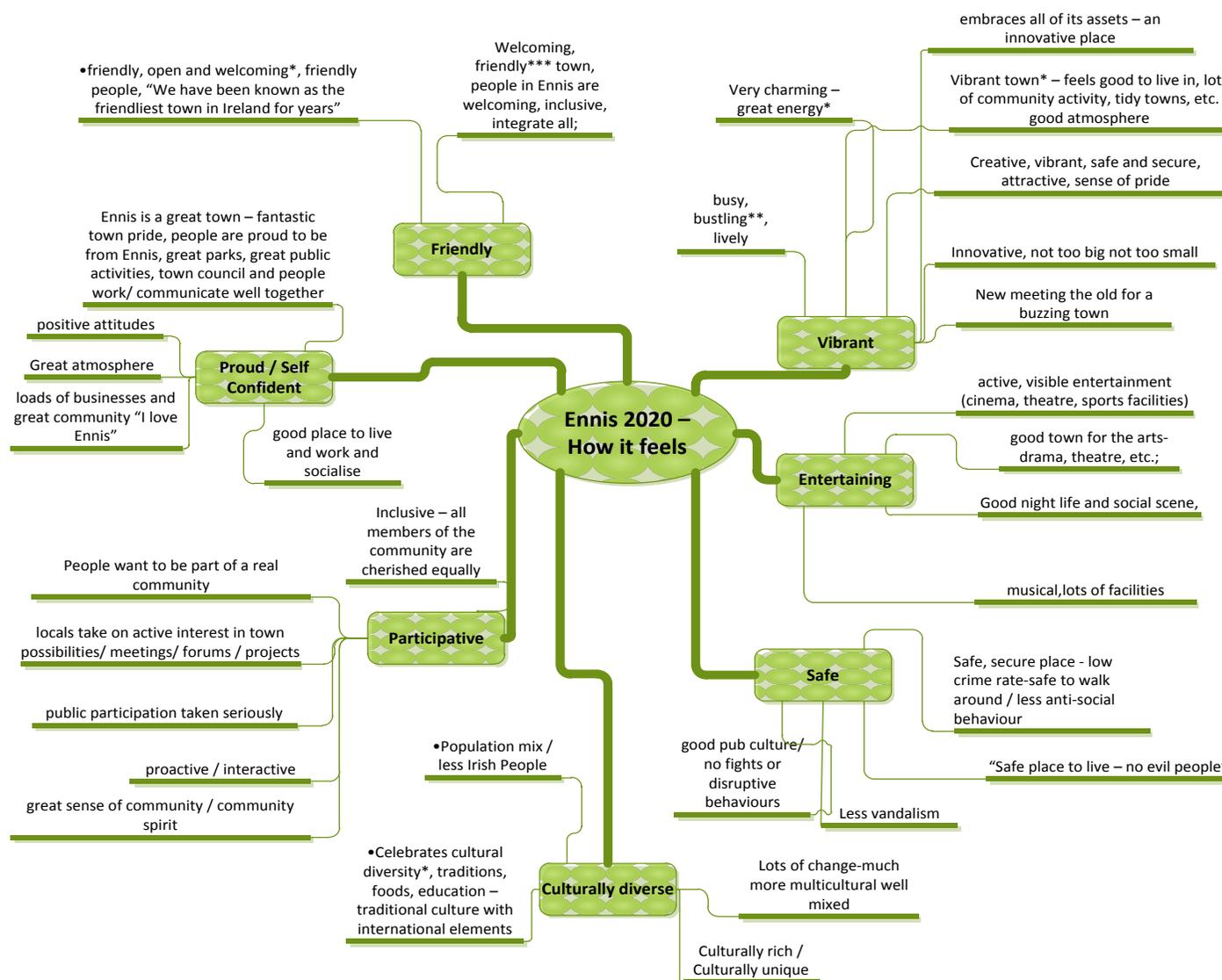
The section of the report records how people imagined Ennis could be in 2020. It describes:

- what they think the town could look like
- what it would feel like
- what its image would be
- what facilities it would have.

**Ennis 2020 – How it looks**



From the responses on how Ennis would look in 2020 five key themes emerge. Firstly, the historical / heritage dimension features prominently as does the town's profile as a traditional market town. Related to this is a strong emphasis on pedestrianisation, a theme that recurs in the later section on enhancing Ennis. There is also an emphasis on cleanliness and attractiveness, thereby providing a platform for outdoor leisure / entertainment. Finally, an enhanced relationship between the town and the River Fergus is envisaged, a theme that again is repeated throughout the report.

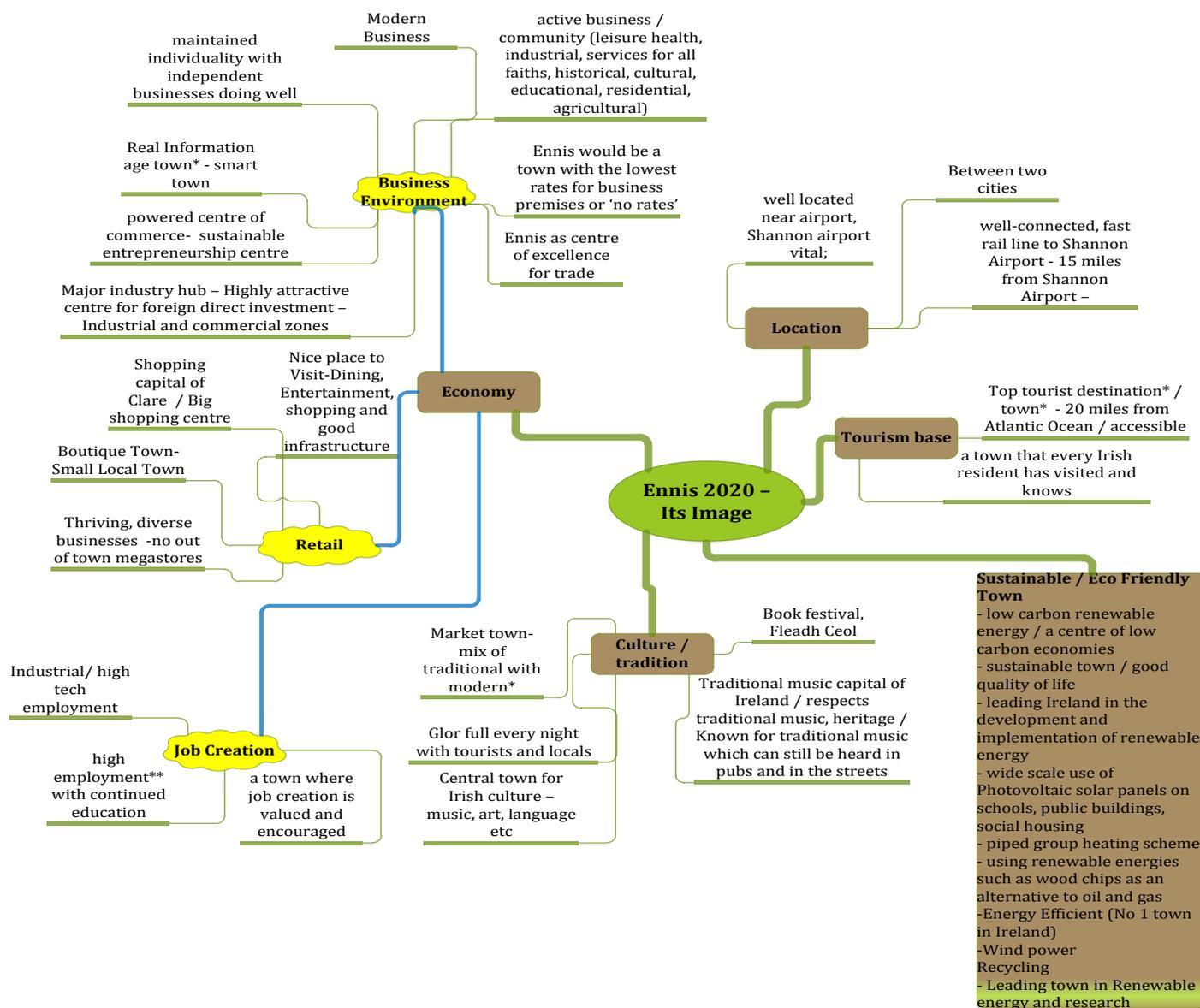


**Ennis 2020 – How it feels**

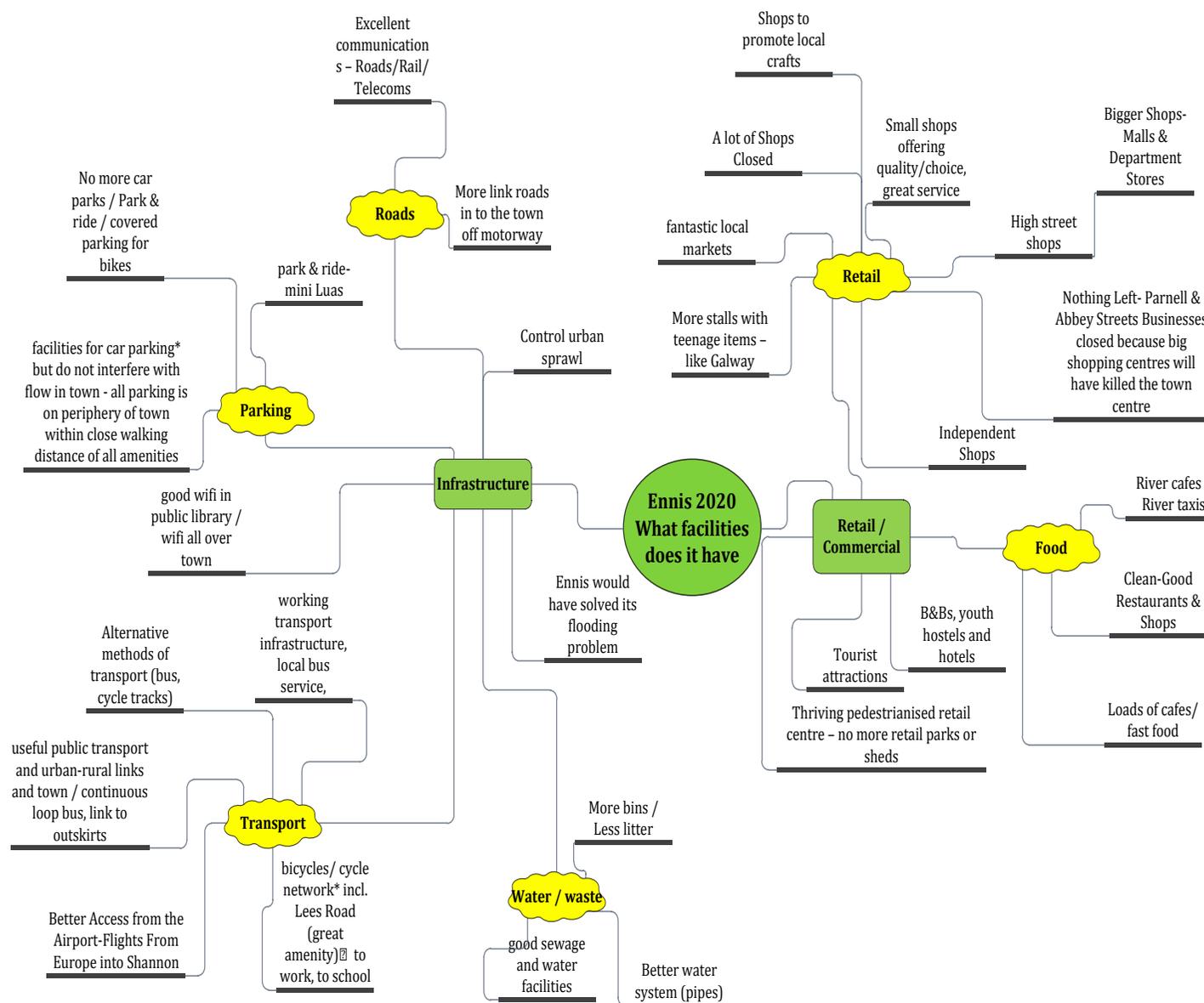
In terms of how the town will feel in 2020 there is a strong emphasis on achieving a vision of a town that is vibrant and self confident, a town that is busy, bustling, but one that is recognisable by its positive attitudes and its innovation. Allied to this is a sense of the town being friendly, open and inclusive and being willing to integrate all. It is suggested that the town would communicate its ease with cultural diversity, celebrating its richness and the contribution of different cultural traditions.

Finally, Ennis is envisaged as a town that provides good quality entertainment options in an atmosphere that is safe and secure.

## Ennis 2020 - Its Image



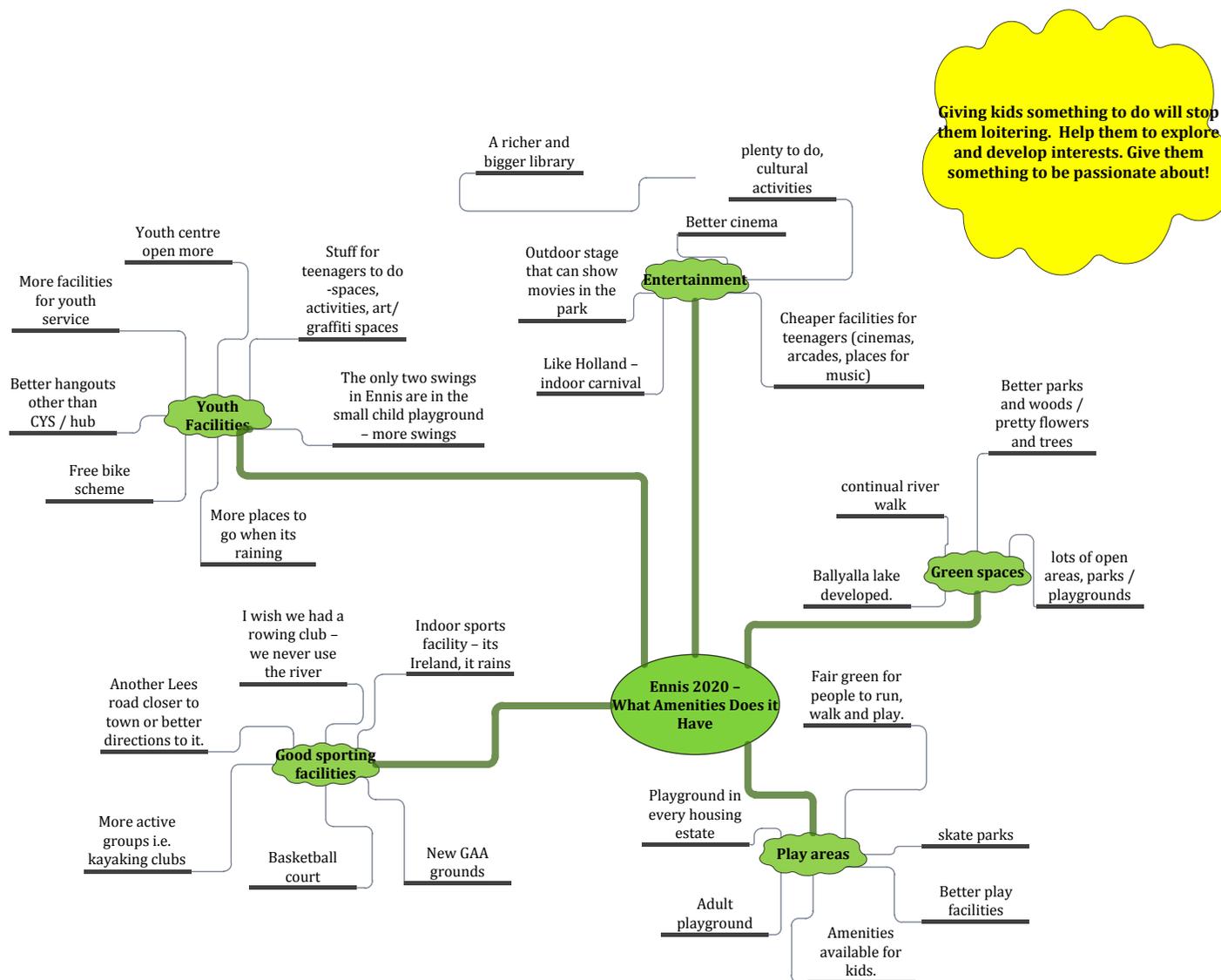
Along with the physical images described above, the external image of Ennis in 2020 is further defined by a number of particular elements. A strong economic foundation is perhaps the most prominent of these, comprising a positive business environment, a range of retail outlets, (though there is a difference in emphasis between local, independently owned shops vs larger scale high street retailers) and a strong job creation performance. Alongside the economy, the town's image is closely associated with culture and tradition, not least its location at the country's traditional music capital and with its strategic location and prominence as a tourism base / hub. Finally, by 2020, it is envisaged that Ennis would be recognised for its emphasis on energy sustainability.



**Ennis 2020  
What facilities  
does it have**

The picture of the facilities that will be available in the town can be broken down between retail / commercial facilities and infrastructure described on this page, alongside amenities, education services, culture and heritage, described in the pages that follow.

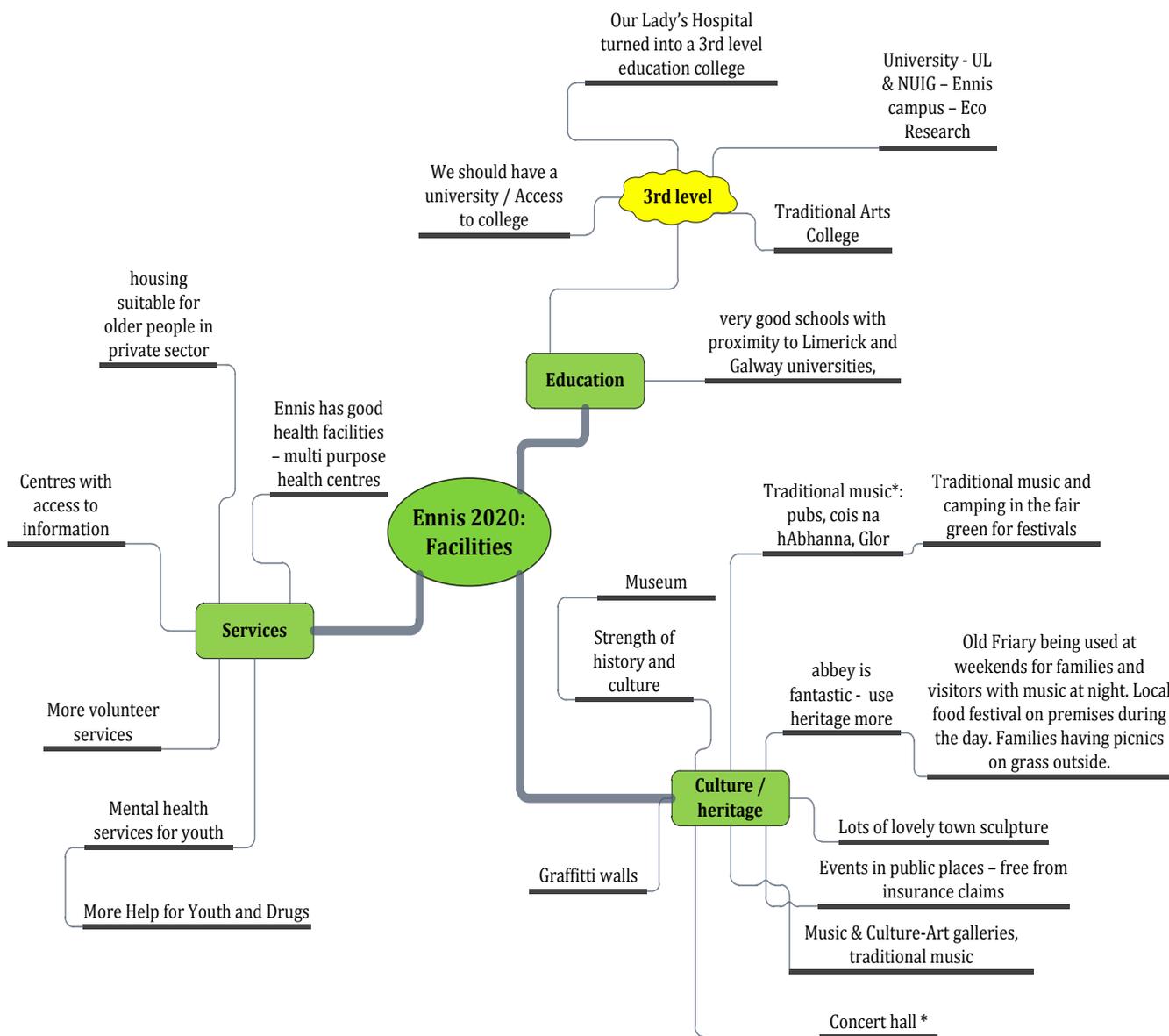
In terms of infrastructure, four elements dominate: parking, transport (including within the town and its hinterland); roads and water / waste facilities. The retail / commercial outlook emphasises the availability of good quality food outlets and a vibrant retail performance, albeit the means of delivering this is not uniformly agreed.



**Ennis 2020 - What Amenities Does it Have**

Alongside infrastructure and commercial facilities, it is envisaged that Ennis would have a range of high quality amenities on offer including attractive green spaces and a variety of play areas, catering for children, teenagers and older people alike. Good quality sports facilities would also be available, including indoor facilities. Ennis would also stand out as a town that provides good quality facilities for young people. Finally, the town would be served by a range of accessible and innovative entertainment options, serving locals and visitors alike.

**Ennis 2020:  
Facilities**



Finally, in terms of facilities, Ennis in 2020 would be served by a good quality education system and the availability of some form of third level provision, both in the town and through enhanced access to colleges in the region.

The town would also be enhanced by a renewed emphasis on culture and heritage, utilising facilities such as the Abbey and the town's renown as a centre for traditional music.

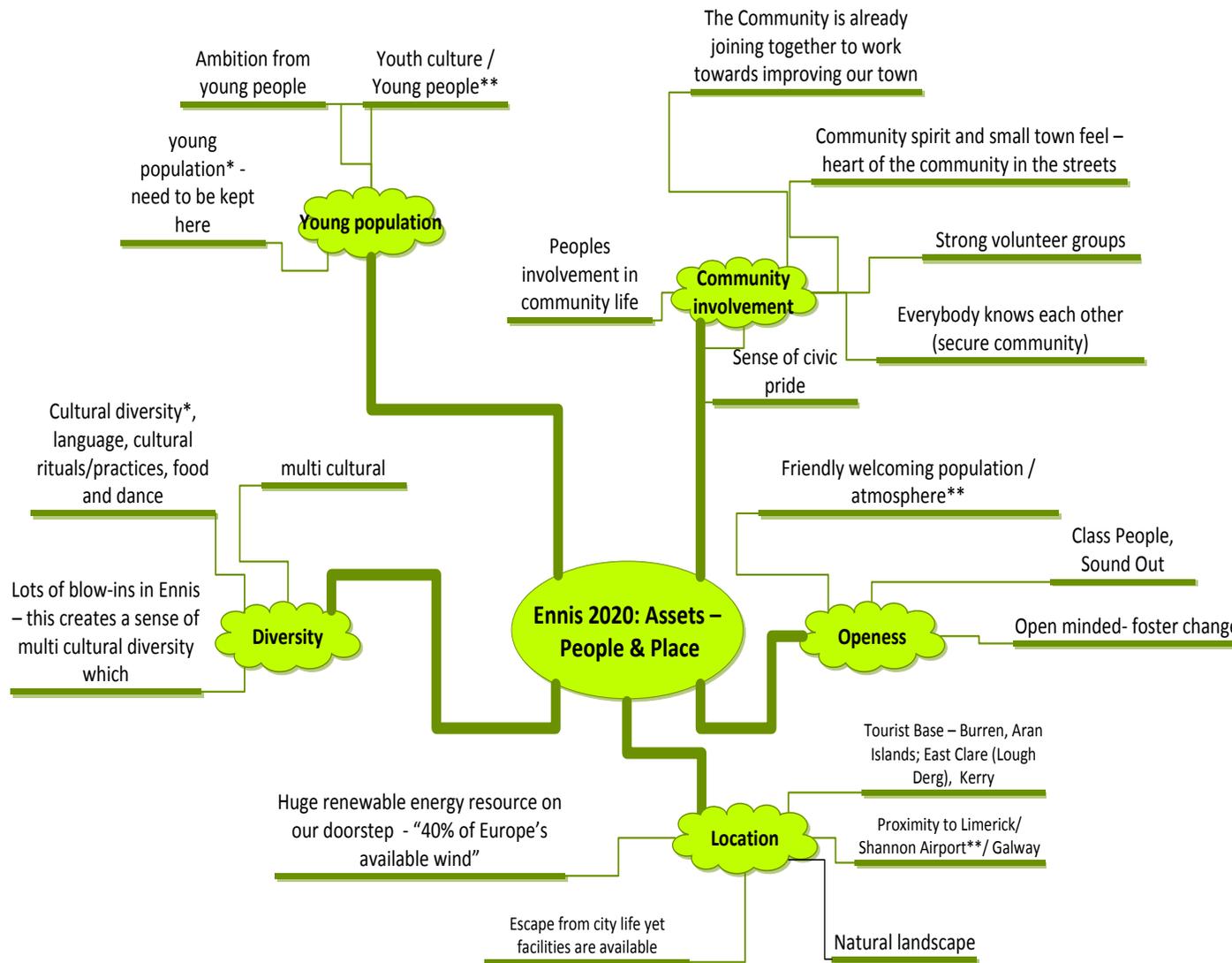
Finally, as will be evidenced later, quality of life in the town would be enhanced by the provision of a good quality health service, including mental health supports.

## 2. Ennis 2020

### Building on Strengths and Assets

In this section, participants' perceptions of the strengths and assets of the town are described under a number of headings:

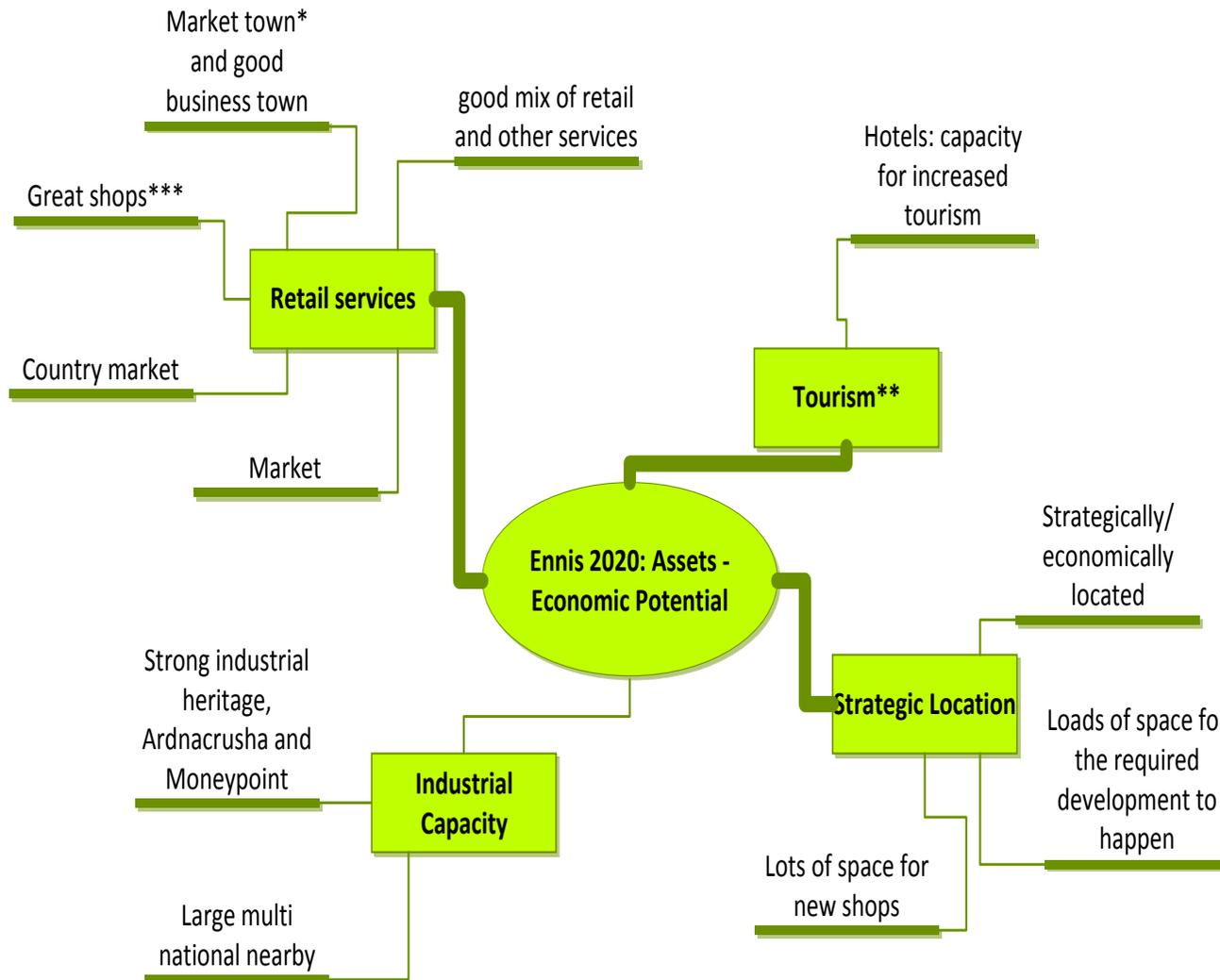
- People and place
- Economic potential
- Infrastructure
- Heritage / culture and
- Facilities and recreation



**Ennis 2020: Assets – People & Place**

The achievement of a vision for the future starts with a recognition of existing strengths (and weaknesses). One of the main strengths identified at the various participatory sessions is a valuing of people and place. Thus, Ennis is seen as benefiting from a young population and a progressive youth culture. There is also a sense of a strong community spirit and a willingness to work together. Diversity and openness emerge as strengths, though as will be observed later, this view is not shared by all.

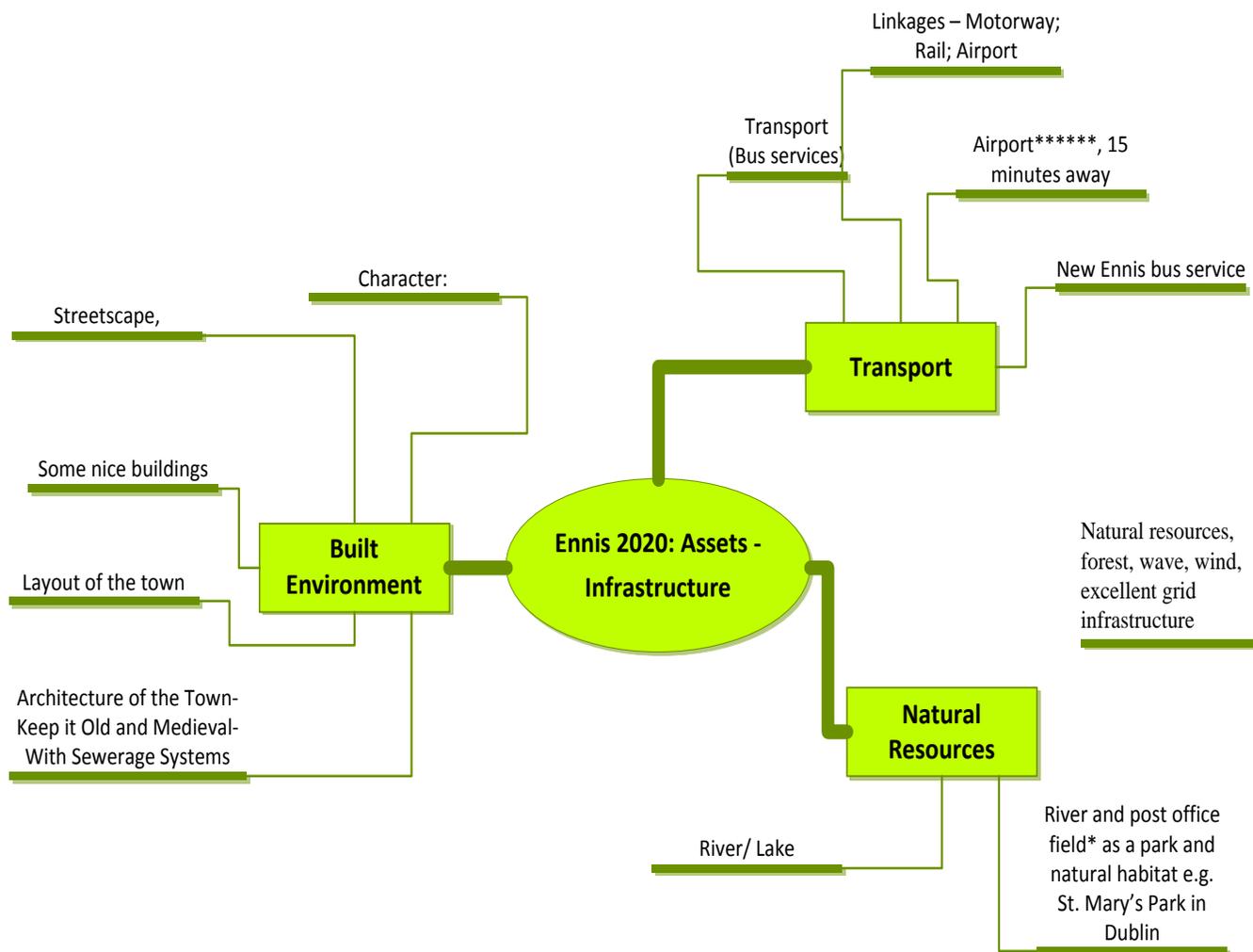
Finally, it is suggested that the place itself, that is, Ennis' location and proximity to a mix of a larger urban settlements and natural landscapes is a unique and important asset.



**Ennis 2020: Assets - Economic Potential**

As well as its people and its location, participants identified a number of economic strengths. Ennis' existing business profile is seen as offering a good mix of retail and other services. It is also suggested that the town has considerable additional capacity to service a tourism market.

A certain level of pre existing industrial capacity is also suggested as an asset, with potential to strengthen this further as a result of the town's strategic location and the availability of ample space to enable development to take place.

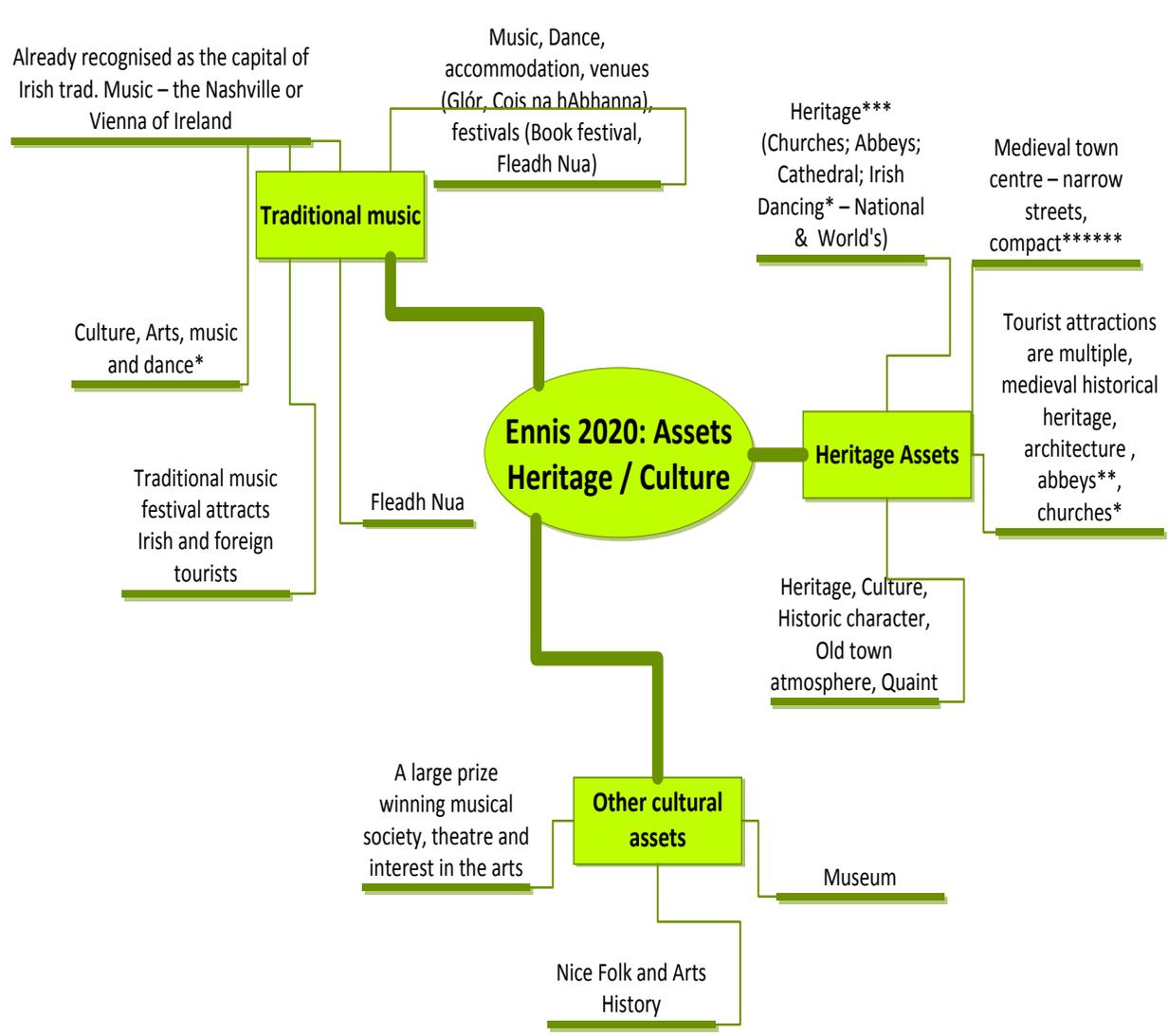


**Ennis 2020: Assets - Infrastructure**

Underpinning the economic potential of Ennis, a number of infrastructural assets were identified. These include the availability of a good transport service, although it is clear that improvements to this are envisaged by many participants.

The town's built environment was also seen as an important asset.

Finally, a number of natural resources were identified, including the Post Office field in the middle of the town, the river and nearby lakes and proximity to high quality renewable energy resources.



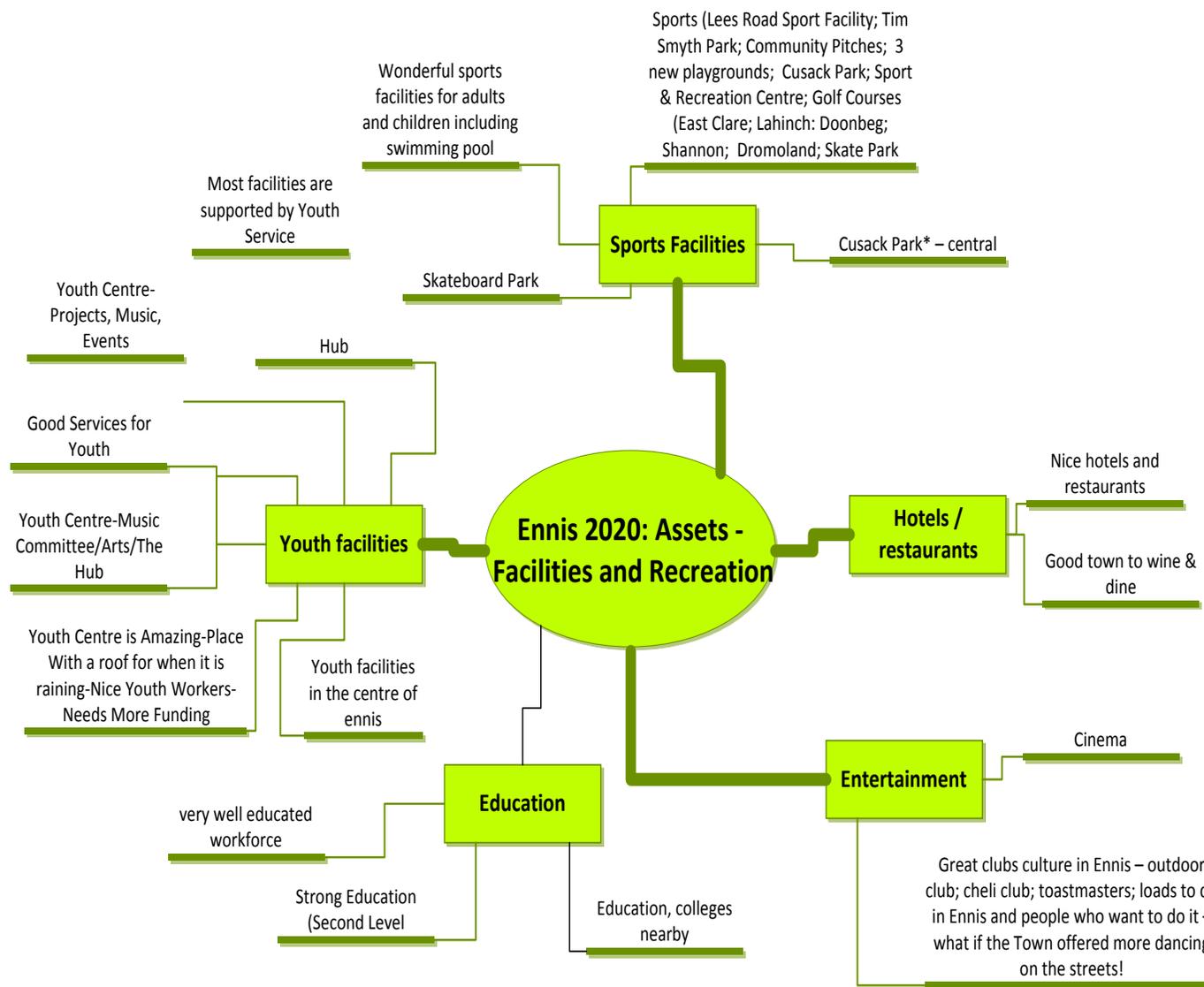
**Ennis 2020: Assets Heritage / Culture**

The recognition of heritage and cultural assets and their potential for development features prominently throughout this report.

In terms of heritage, the historical built environment offers numerous resources including abbeys, churches and the narrow, compact streets, producing an old town atmosphere and character.

Reinforcing this is the town's recognised traditional music pedigree, enhanced in more recent years by the provision of Glór as a high quality performance venue.

However, other cultural assets are also identified, including the town museum and the Ennis Musical Society.



**Ennis 2020: Assets - Facilities and Recreation**

While the vision for 2020 envisages the availability of good quality amenities and facilities, there is an acknowledgement from most participants of the quality of existing facilities. In particular, it is recognised that much progress has been made in the provision of sports facilities, especially since the opening of the Lees Rd. facility.

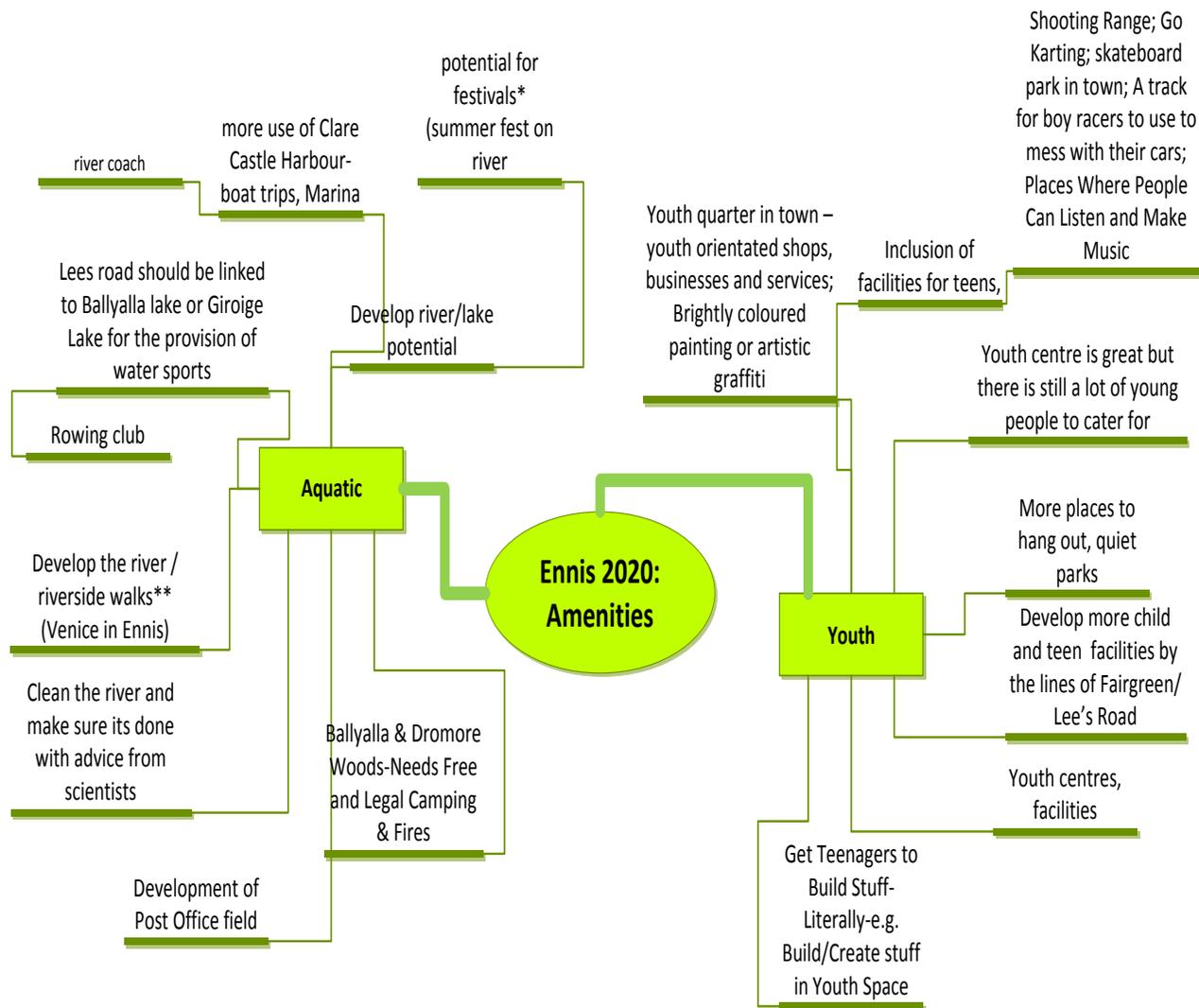
The contribution of existing youth facilities is also acknowledged, though the need for more funding is stressed. Alongside this the availability of good schools and proximity to third level colleges offers a distinct advantage to the town.

Finally, Ennis is seen as good town for food and entertainment provision, provided commercially and by a range of clubs and organisations.

### 3. Enhancing Ennis 2020

In this section of the report, a variety of suggestions are recorded on how Ennis could be enhanced as a town in which to live, work, visit or invest. These suggestions are classified under the headings of:

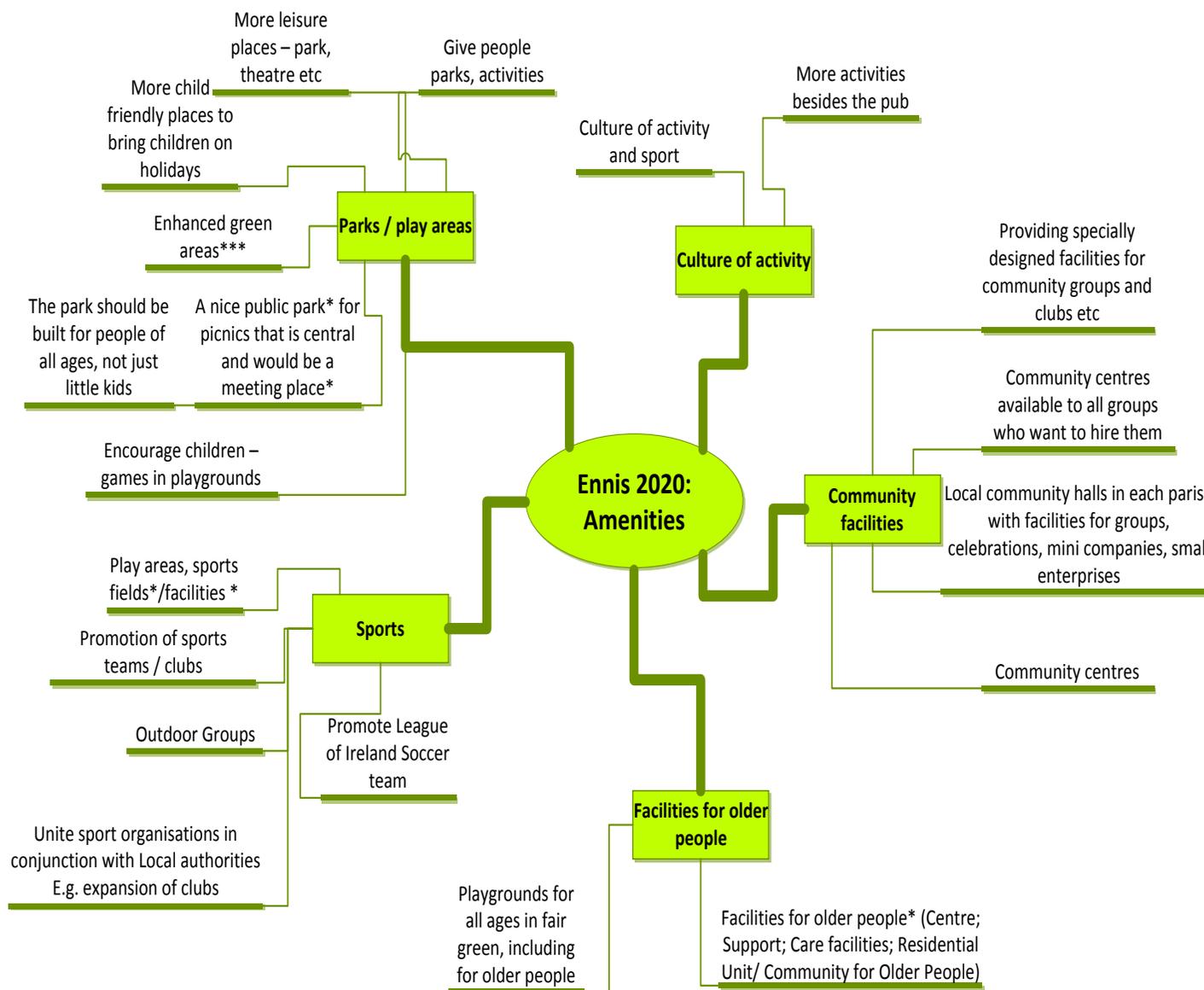
- Amenities
- Infrastructure
- Transport Infrastructure
- Leisure / Entertainment
- Arts / Culture
- General Economic Development
- Retail Development
- Tourism Development
- Education
- Services and
- Image / Brand



**Ennis 2020: Amenities**

Enhancing Ennis by the provision of a wider range of amenities featured prominently in the suggestions by all groups, most especially with members of the public. Amongst these, the development of aquatic amenities was a recurring theme, the primary emphasis being on the development of the River Fergus and of Ballyalla Lake as amenity resources.

In addition, the provision of a wider range of facilities for young people was prioritised, not just by the youth participants but also by other participants in the broader public meetings.



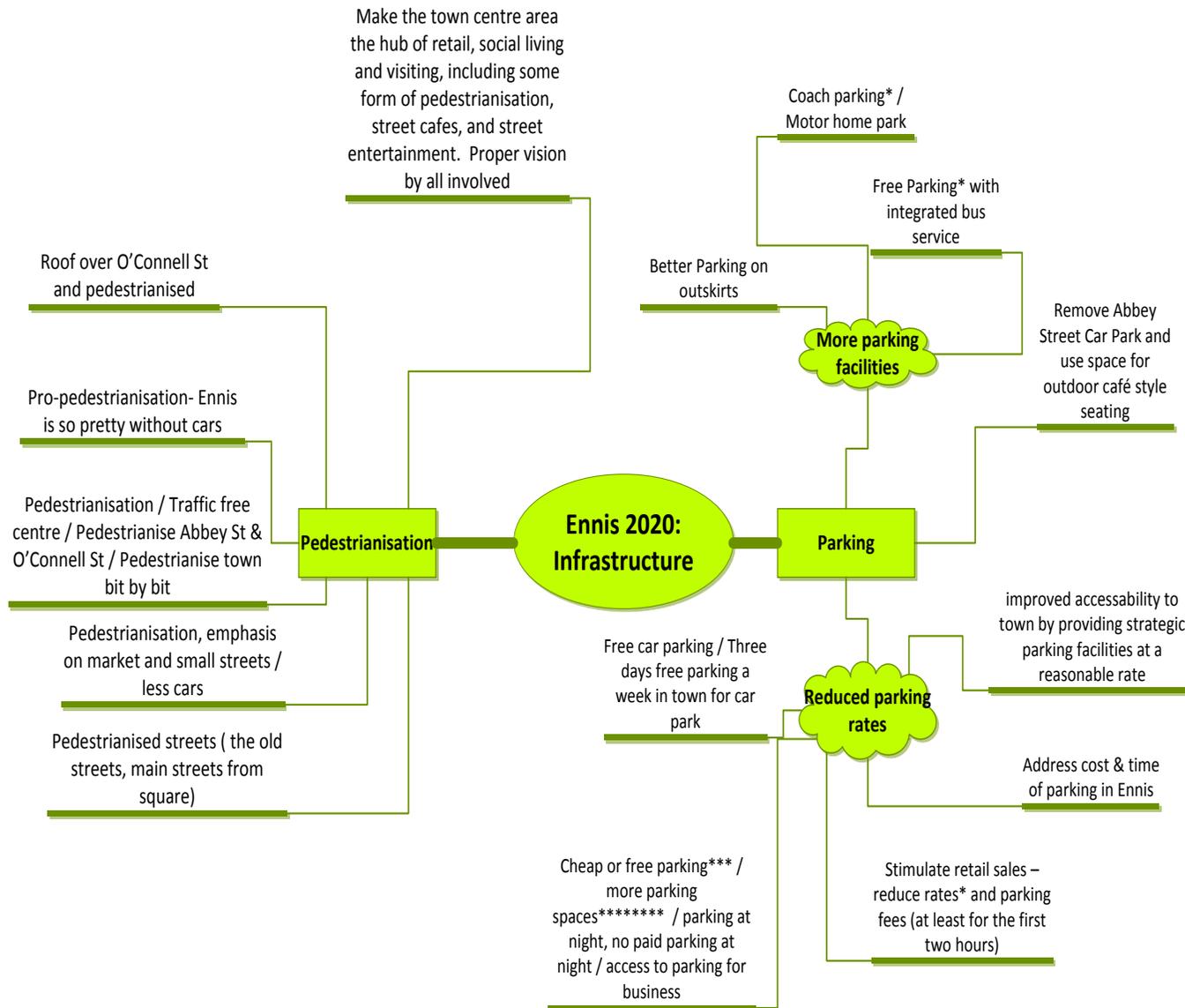
**Ennis 2020: Amenities**

As well as the focus on youth and aquatic amenities, the provision of green areas and play areas was seen as important, though it was suggested that the needs of a mix of different age groups be considered within this.

It was also considered that the provision of additional sports facilities / capacity would also enhance the town, including the potential to develop a League of Ireland soccer team.

Finally, the creation of and support for community infrastructure to support community based activities was included by a number of participants.

**Ennis 2020: Infrastructure**



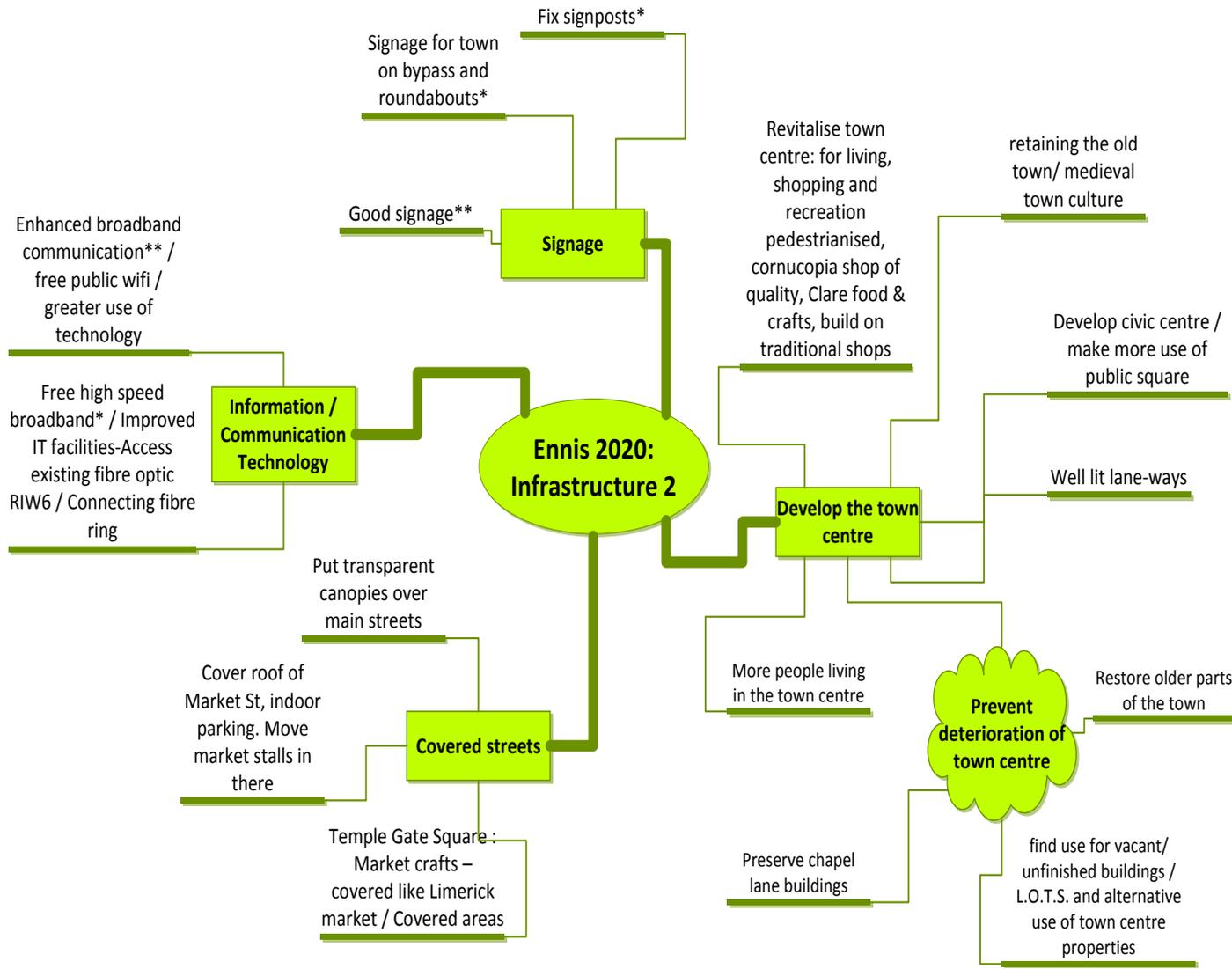
As was evident in the Vision section, the provision or upgrading of the town's infrastructure is seen as an important element in the enhancement of Ennis.

Two of the most frequent elements raised by participants were pedestrianisation and parking.

Taking parking first, the suggestions ranged from reducing parking charges to designating certain days for free parking to help to stimulate retail sales.

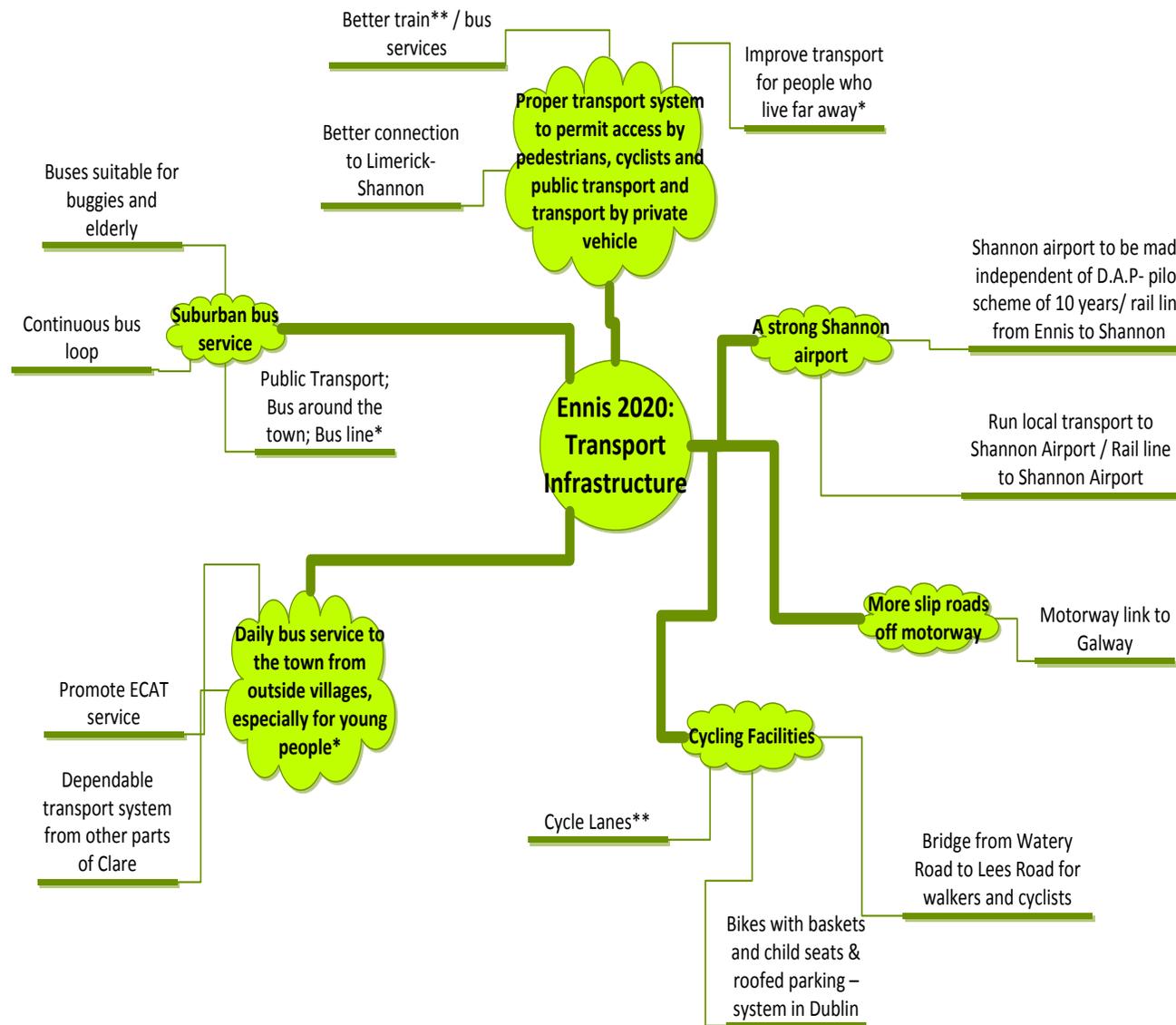
The related theme of pedestrianisation was undoubtedly one of the most prominent issues to be raised, with all of those who mentioned it advocating pedestrianisation of some sort or other, ranging from a gradual or partial pedestrianisation to an all out approach taking in all of the town centre.

**Ennis 2020: Infrastructure**



Under the infrastructure heading participants also suggested that greater attention be paid to the development of the town centre, with particular emphasis being placed on the prevention of any further deterioration of the older parts of the town. A distinct element of the development of the town centre was the number of suggestions to provide a cover (s) over some of the main streets.

The final element recorded under this heading of general infrastructure was the suggestion to upgrade the provision of broadband to the town.



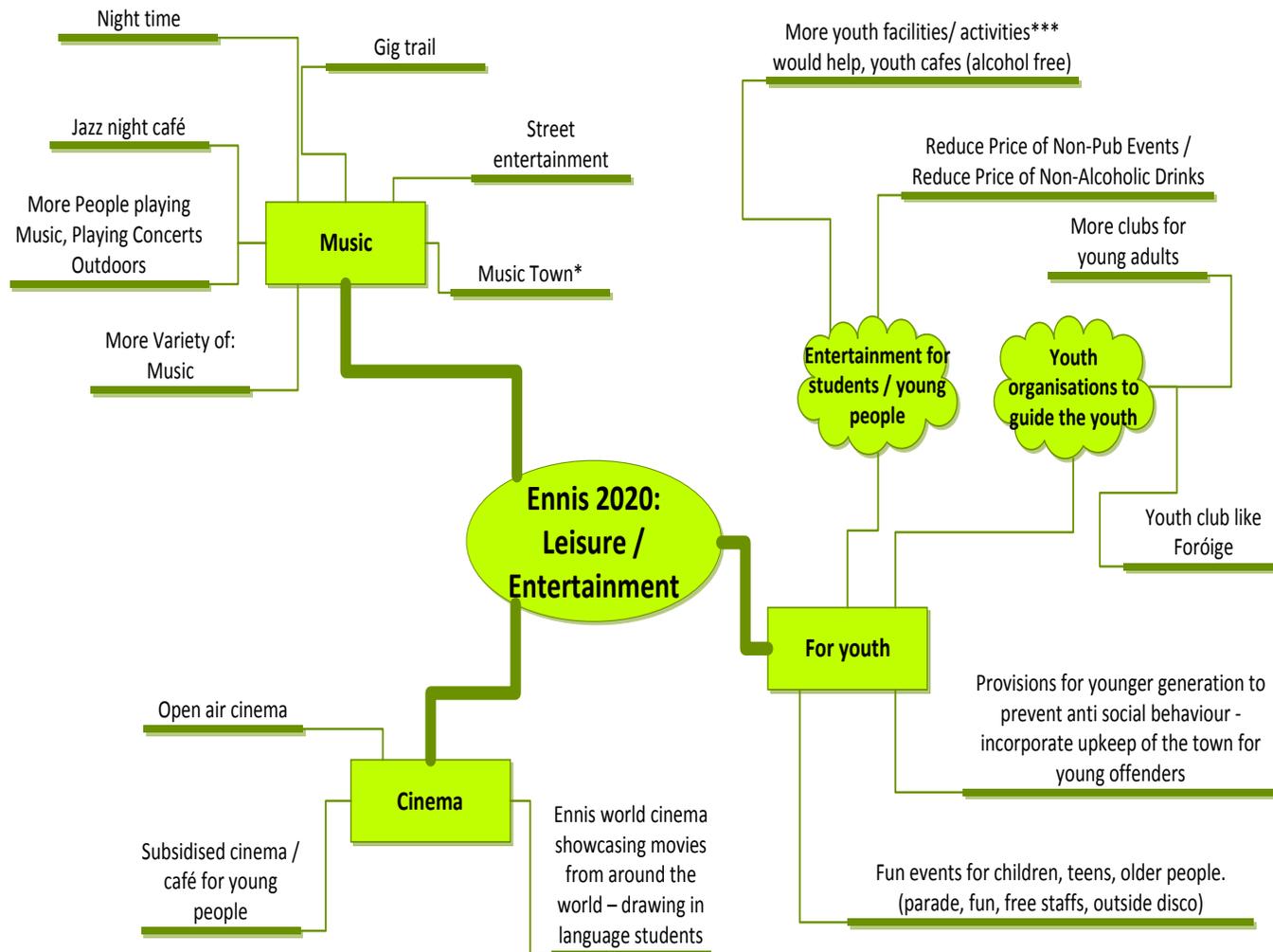
**Ennis 2020: Transport Infrastructure**

While the last section signalled recognition that much of the existing transport infrastructure was of a high quality it was clear further improvement were possible.

In particular, the provision of a bus service to link areas on the outskirts of Ennis as well as outlying villages with the town centre was seen as important, particularly for young people.

Within the town additional cycling facilities were advocated while around the town the provision of additional slip roads off the motorway was proposed.

Finally, in keeping with the frequent reference to the role of Shannon Airport in economic development, the creation of a strong Shannon airport was seen as a prerequisite to development and growth.



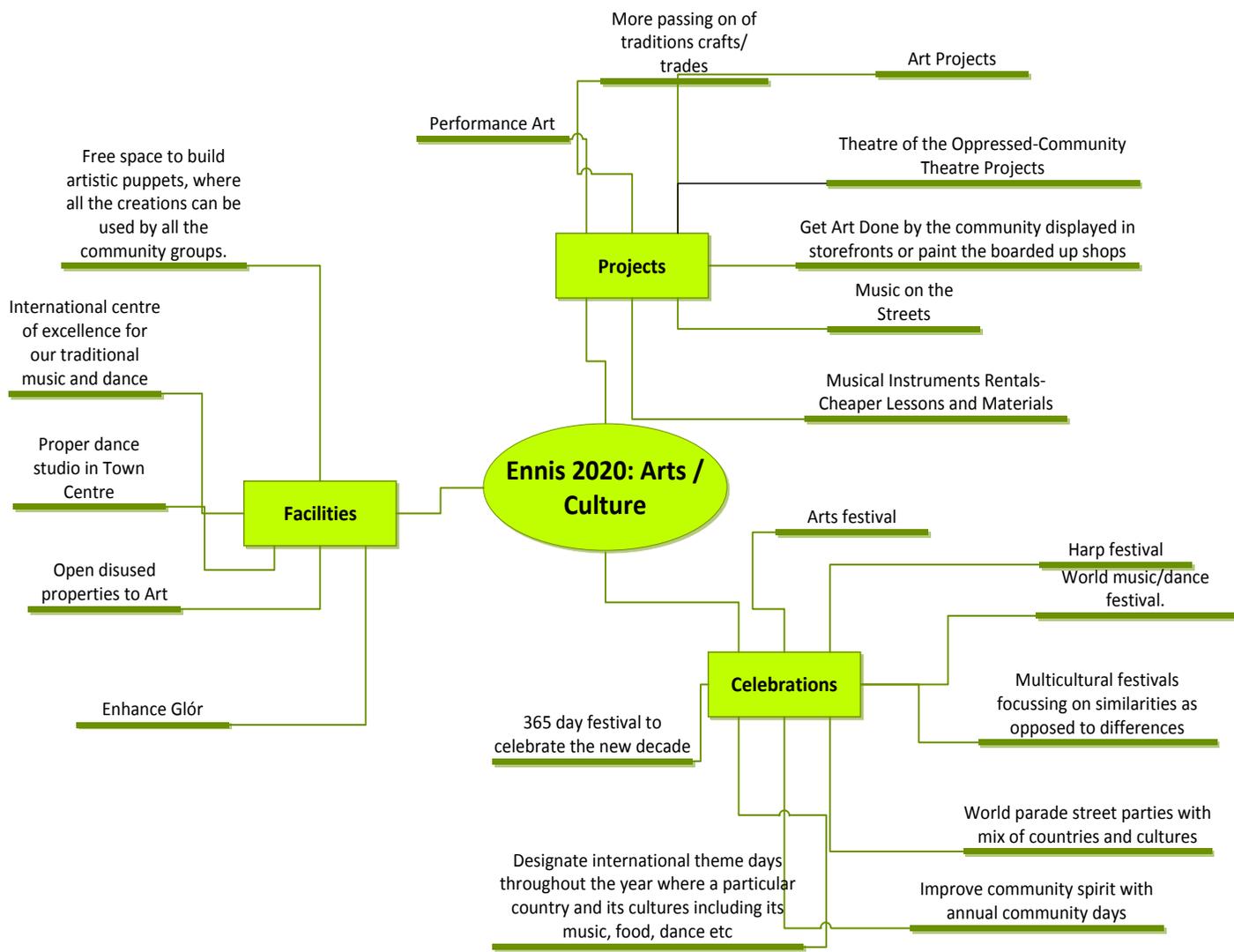
**Ennis 2020:  
Leisure /  
Entertainment**

Providing leisure and entertainment outlets was seen as an issue of importance, both to meet the needs of those who live in or around the town but also to attract visitors.

As might be expected, the enhancement of Ennis as a music town featured strongly, to include not just formal concerts but also a gig trail, jazz cafes and street entertainment.

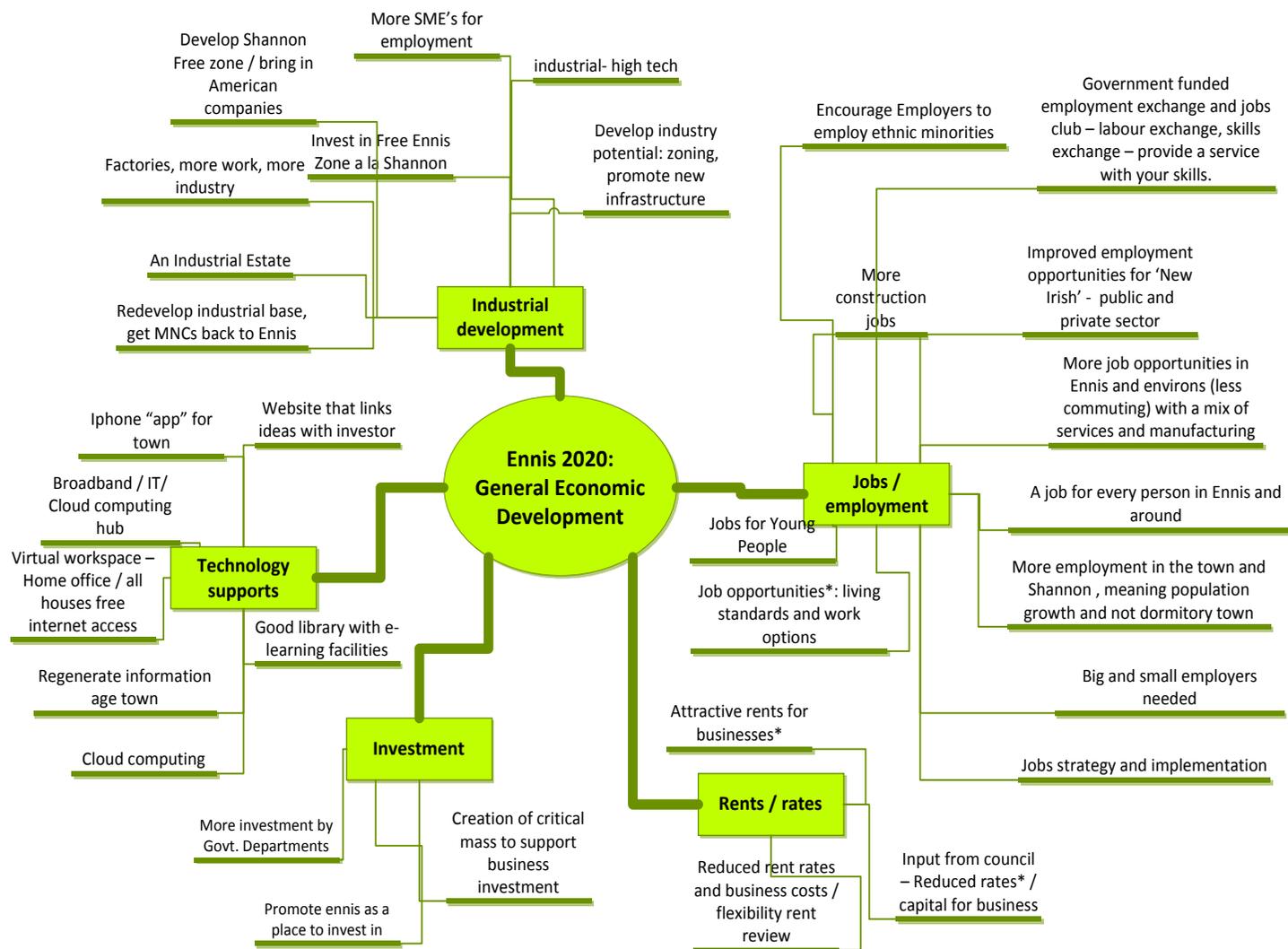
On a more specific note, the availability of affordable leisure / entertainment outlets for young people, including those in alcohol free environments, was identified. This was seen as crucial in efforts to reduce incidents of anti social behaviour.

**Ennis 2020: Arts / Culture**



Closely related to the last section, participants repeatedly highlighted the need to strengthen the capacity of the town to support and provide a rich variety of arts / cultural activities.

Amongst the main priorities were the provision of arts / culture facilities; support for a variety and diversity of arts / cultural projects and a range of specific suggestions to celebrate the town and its tradition and diversity.

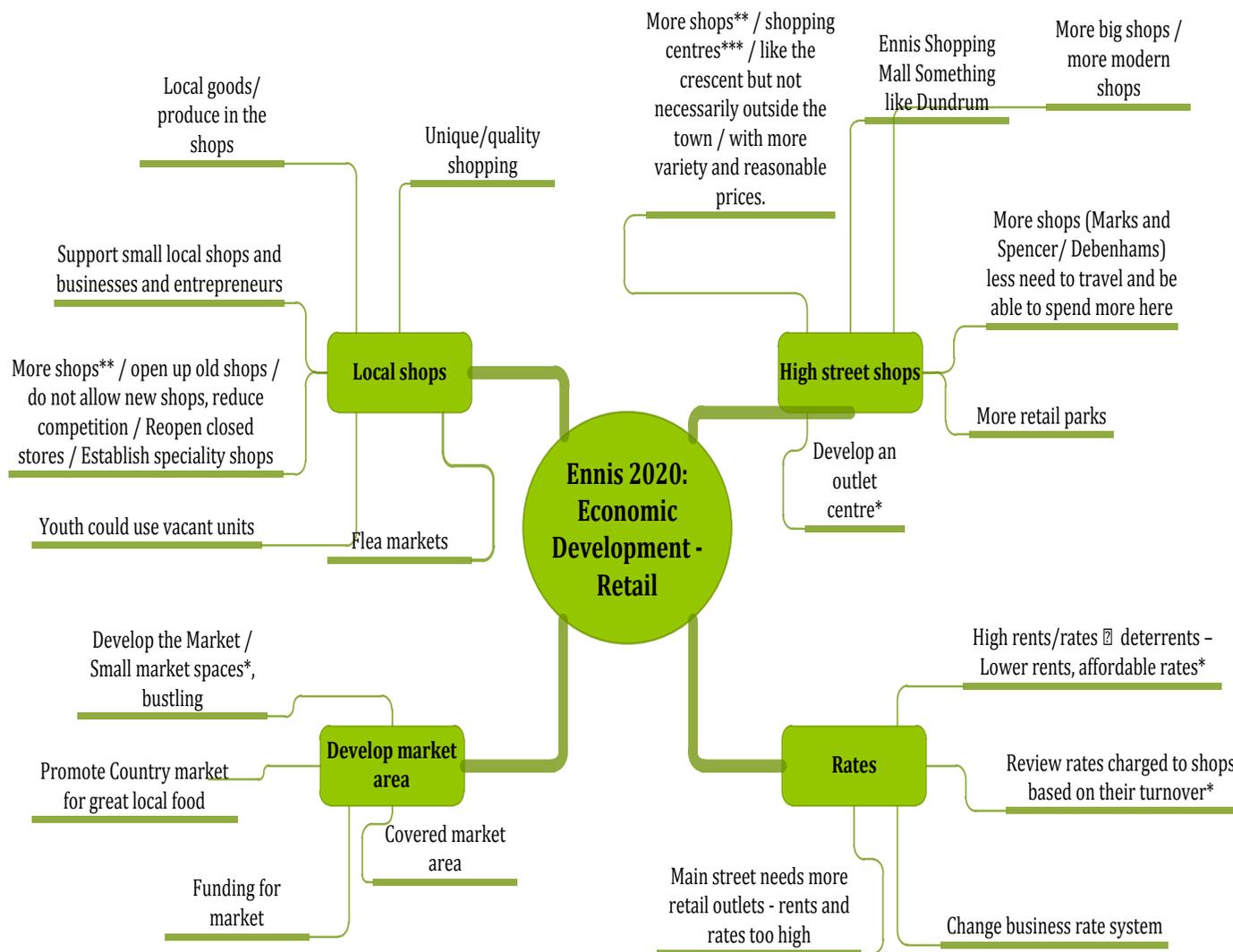


**Ennis 2020: General Economic Development**

As might be expected, economic development was a concern in virtually all of the different participatory exercises.

At a general level, the provision of jobs was highlighted, the goal being summed up as “a job for every person in Ennis and around”. Related to this, the drive for industrial development was seen as central, supported by the provision of national investment and by the upgrading of technology supports in the region.

As a more local level, reducing costs to business was also cited as an important factor in stimulating economic activity.

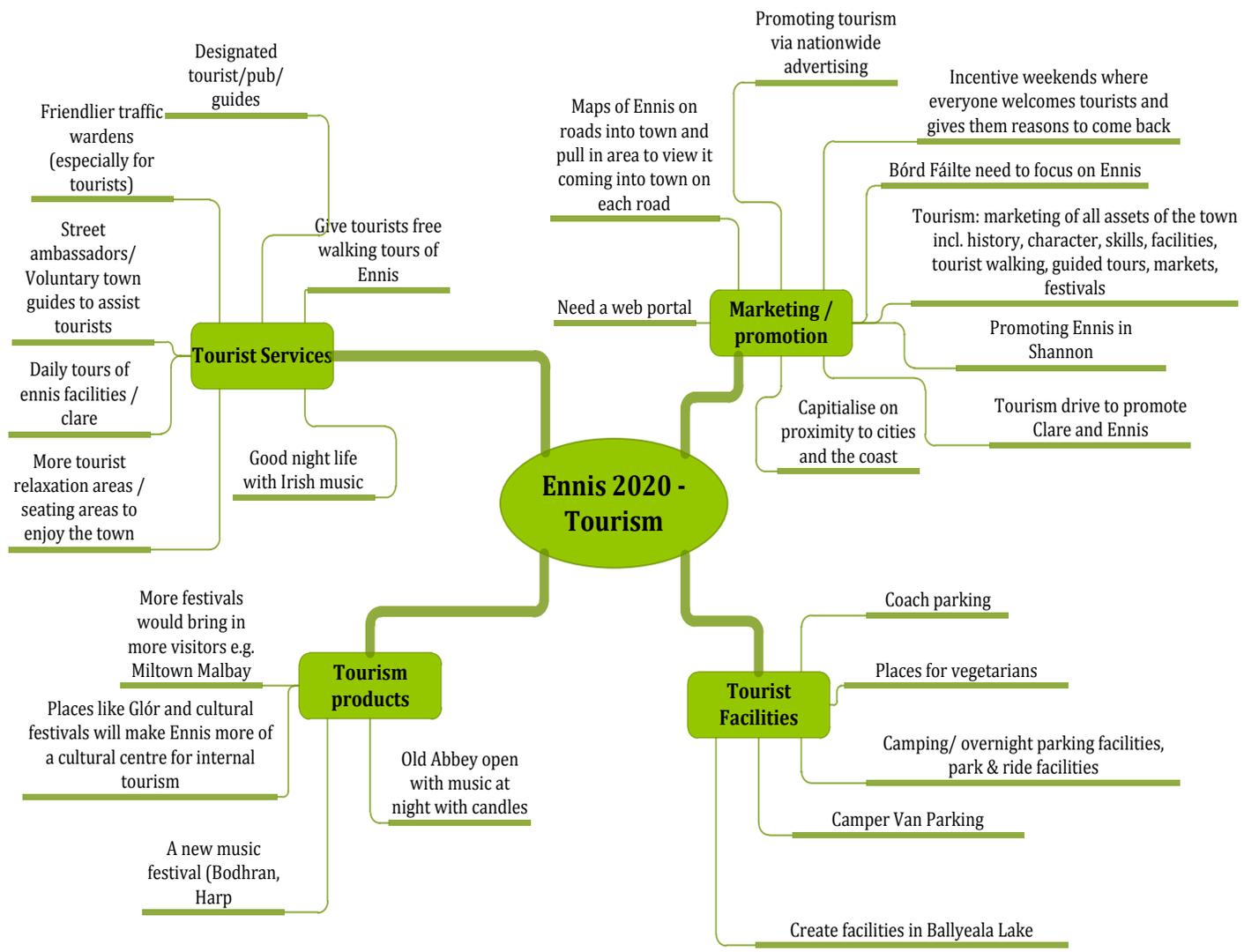


**Ennis 2020: Economic Development - Retail**

The issue reducing the costs of rates and rents for business also arose in the various inputs on enhancing retail development.

Here too the divergence of views on the nature and type of that development emerged. On one hand, some participants favoured the introduction of large retail outlets as a means of preventing leakage of spending to Limerick and Galway. By contrast, other participants favoured the prioritisation of support for locally owned, speciality shops that would have a capacity to sell local produce, including the development of the town's market area.

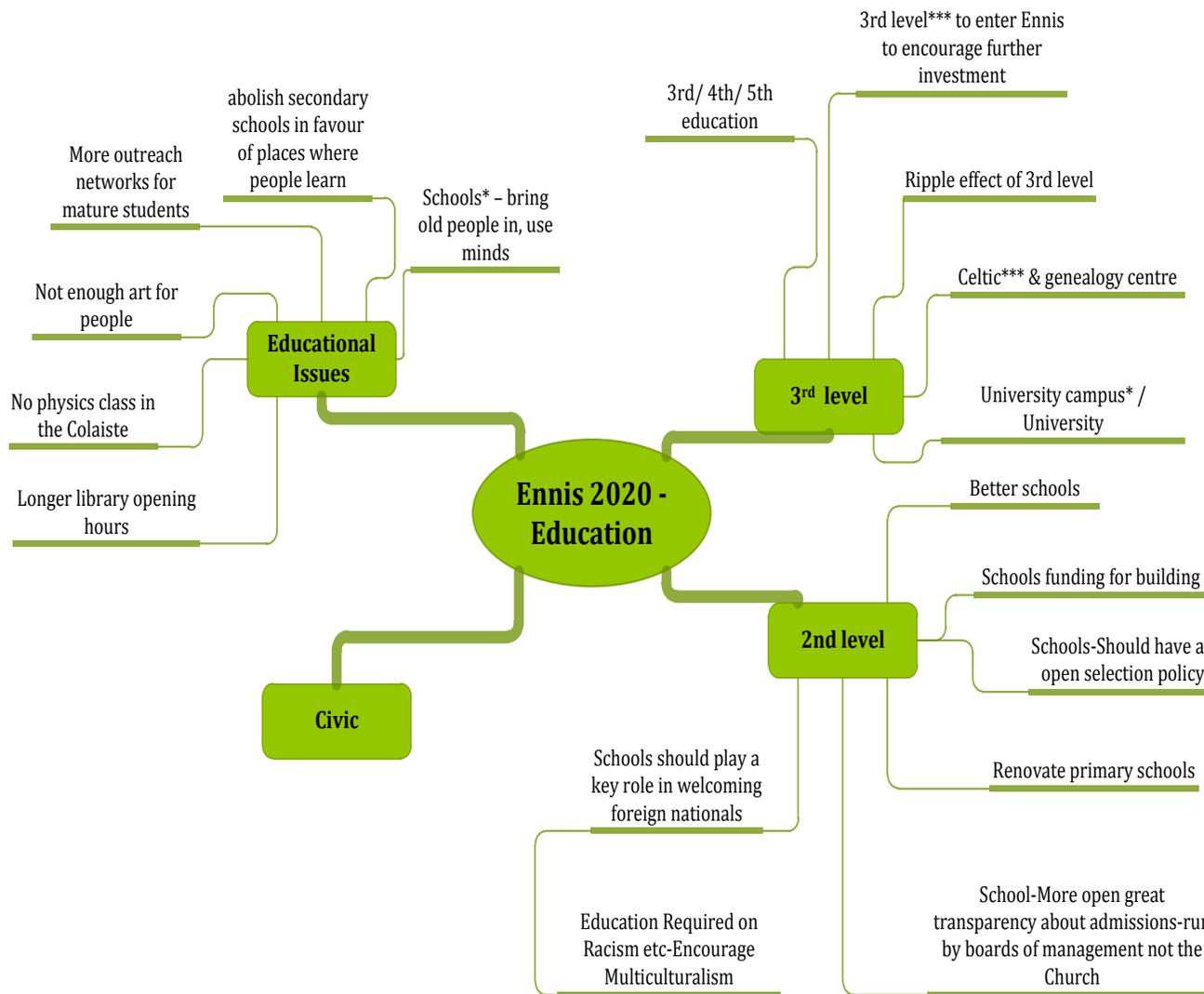
# Ennis 2020 - Tourism



Tourism was also seen as a key platform upon which to strengthen the local economy in Ennis and its environs.

To meet the widely suggested tourism potential that exists in Ennis and more broadly in Clare a number of key areas were identified for action. These were:

- marketing and promotion
- the development of specific, additional tourist facilities (e.g. camper van / bus parking)
- the creation of specific tourism products and
- enhancement of services for tourists (e.g. free walking tours, street ambassadors)



## Ennis 2020 - Education

In the education sphere, a number of participants highlighted ways to enhance the town through focusing on second and third level as well as civic education, though this later area was not elaborated upon.

Drawing from the earlier Vision section, the primary focus of inputs on 3<sup>rd</sup> level education was on the provision of some form of campus in Ennis, either focusing on a specific education / research area or providing an outreach service from a single or possibly a collection of institutions.

Meanwhile, the comments on the second level sector were primarily concerned with enhancing buildings, selection policy and the role of schools in challenging racism and promoting multiculturalism

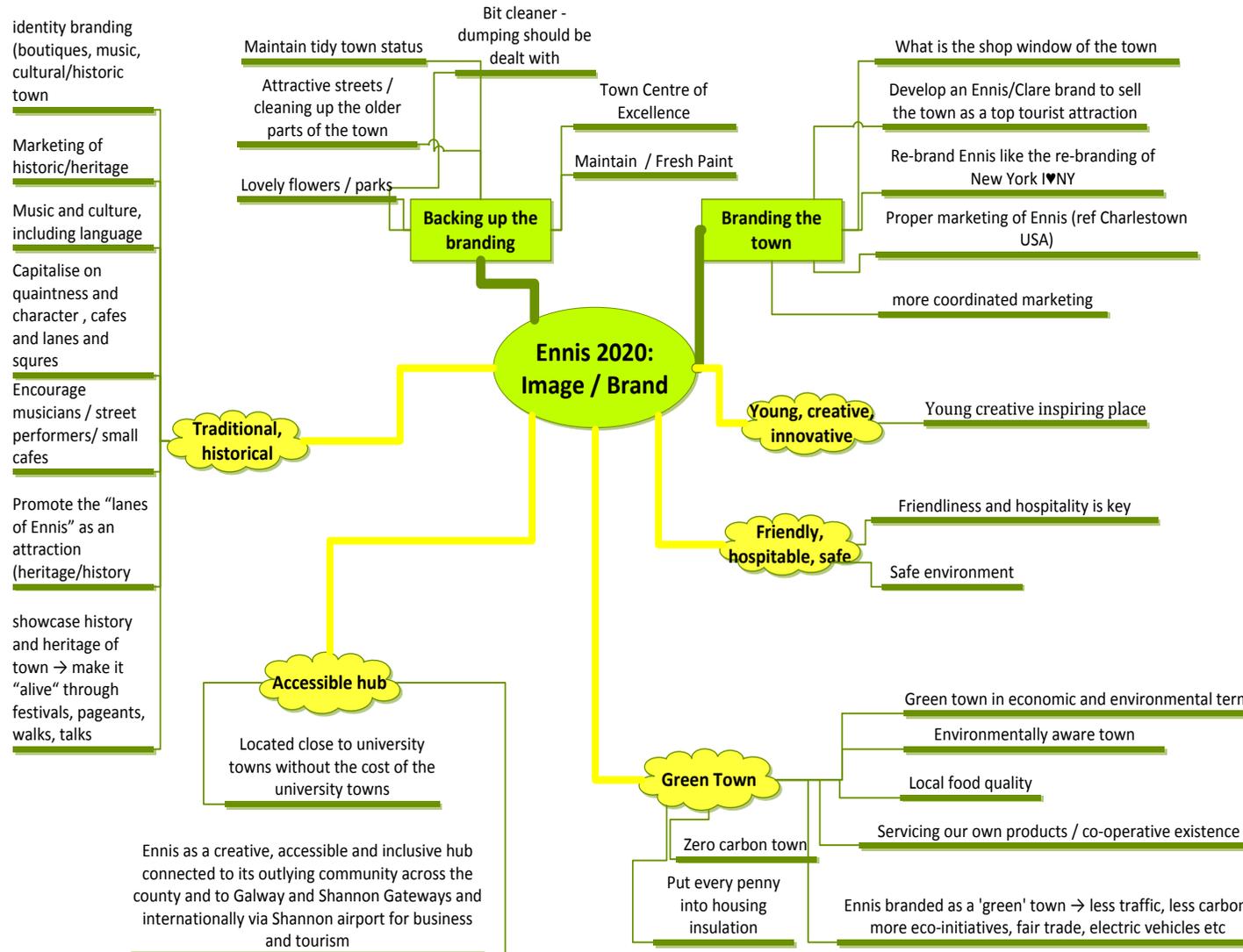
**Ennis 2020: Services**



While they did not feature to the same degree as other issues discussed earlier, the provision of services did arise on a number of occasions.

In particular, the provision of quality health care in the town and the maintenance of a 24 hour hospital service were named as important priorities.

Other service raised by a number of participants included support services for the unemployed; the homeless; for those dealing with alcohol and drug problems. The need for enhanced accommodation and childcare services were also mentioned.



**Ennis 2020: Image / Brand**

Responses around the issue of branding have been divided between how the brand can be created and supported and the nature of the actual brand itself. Thus, it is seen as important to undertake a concerted branding effort, backed up by greater attention being paid to the image the town projects to visitors and indeed those who live there.

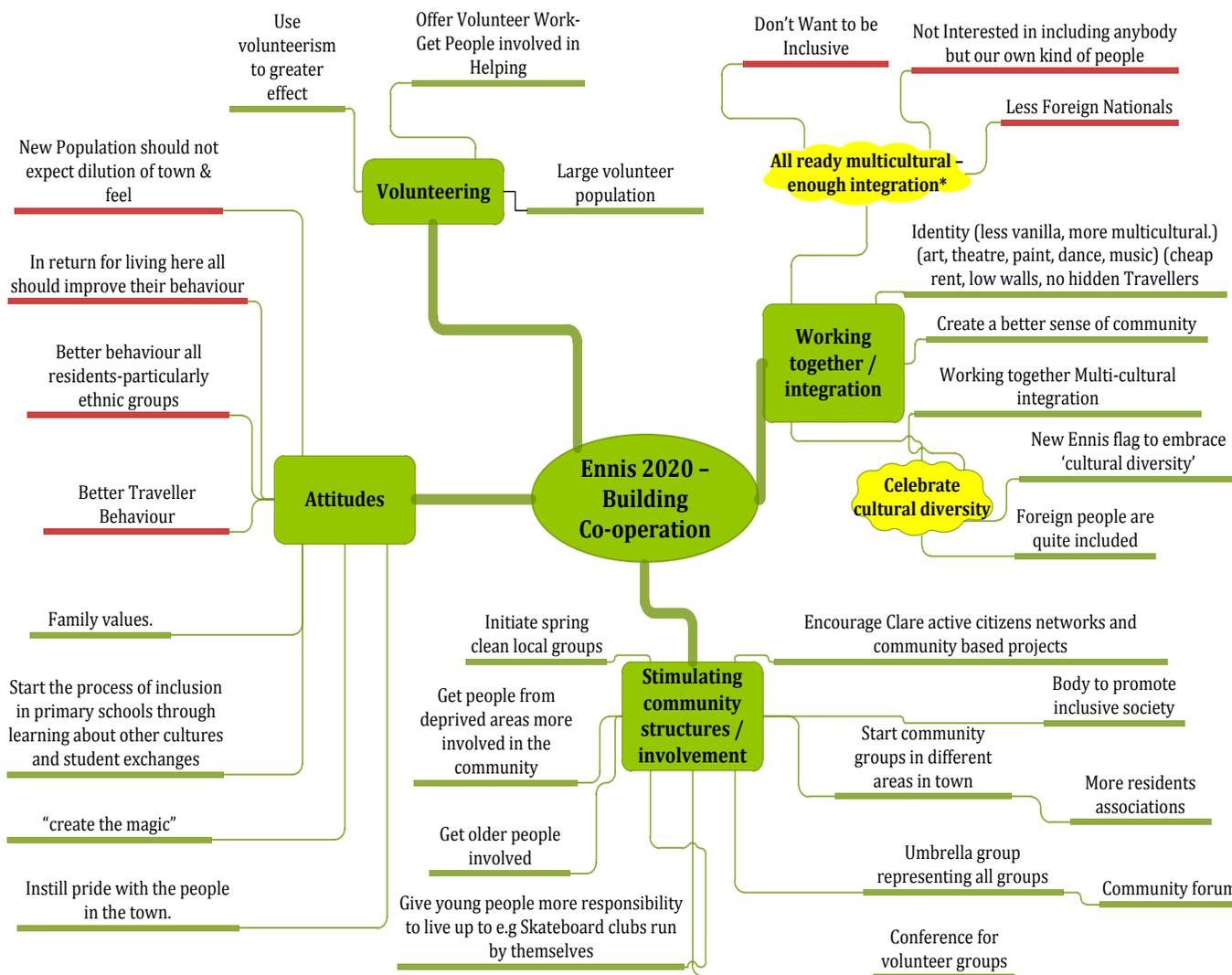
On the issue of actual brands, a number of potential brands have emerged including an emphasis on:

- the traditional / historical
- the accessible hub
- the green town
- the friendly, safe town and
- the young, creative and innovative town

## 4. Inclusive Ennis 2020

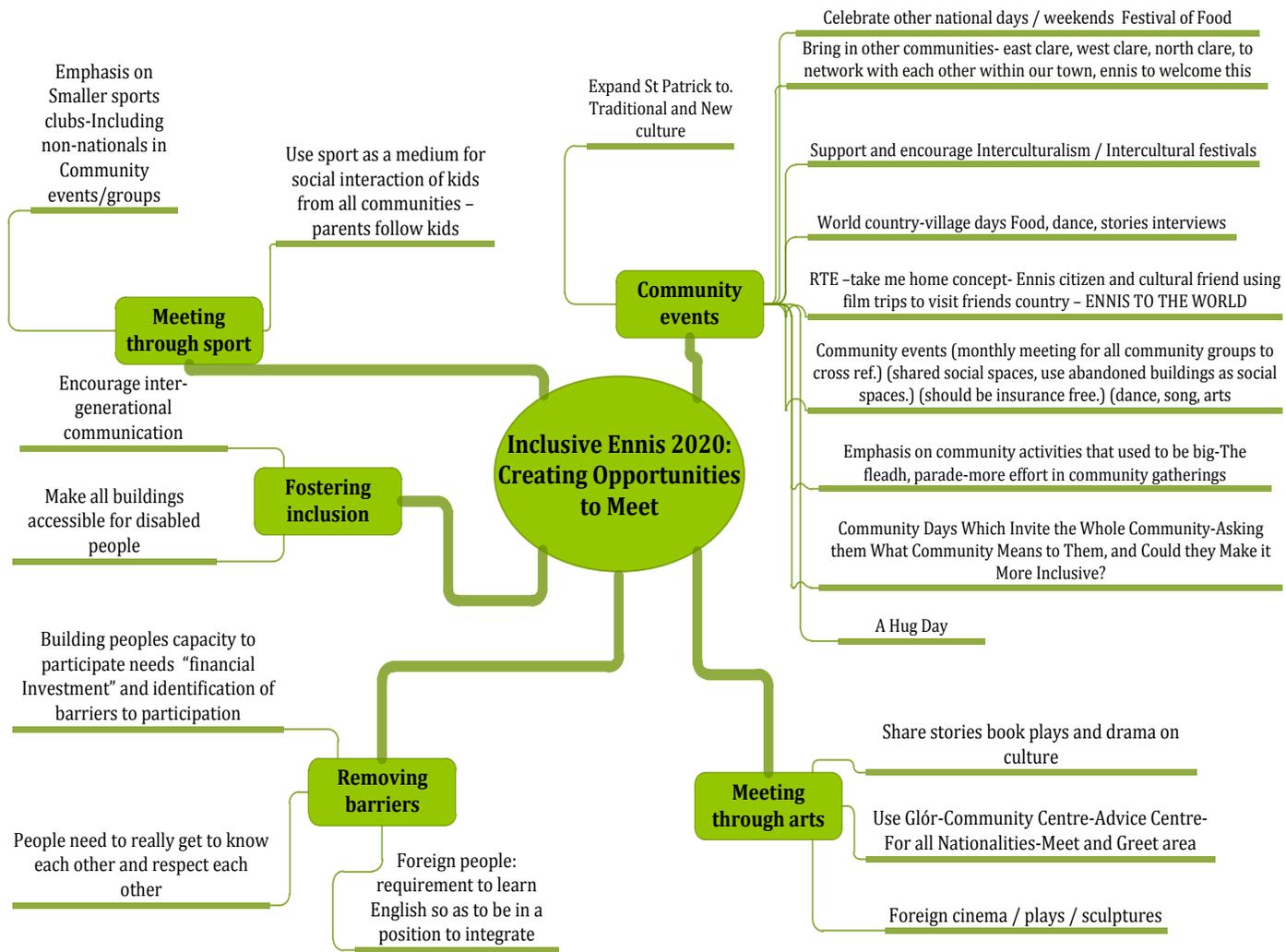
While many of the issues raised in section 3 have the potential to contribute to building a more inclusive community (ies) in Ennis, a number of specific, additional components have been identified. These include:

- Building co-operation and social capital
- Creating opportunities to meet
- Community Safety
- Political / Institutional engagement



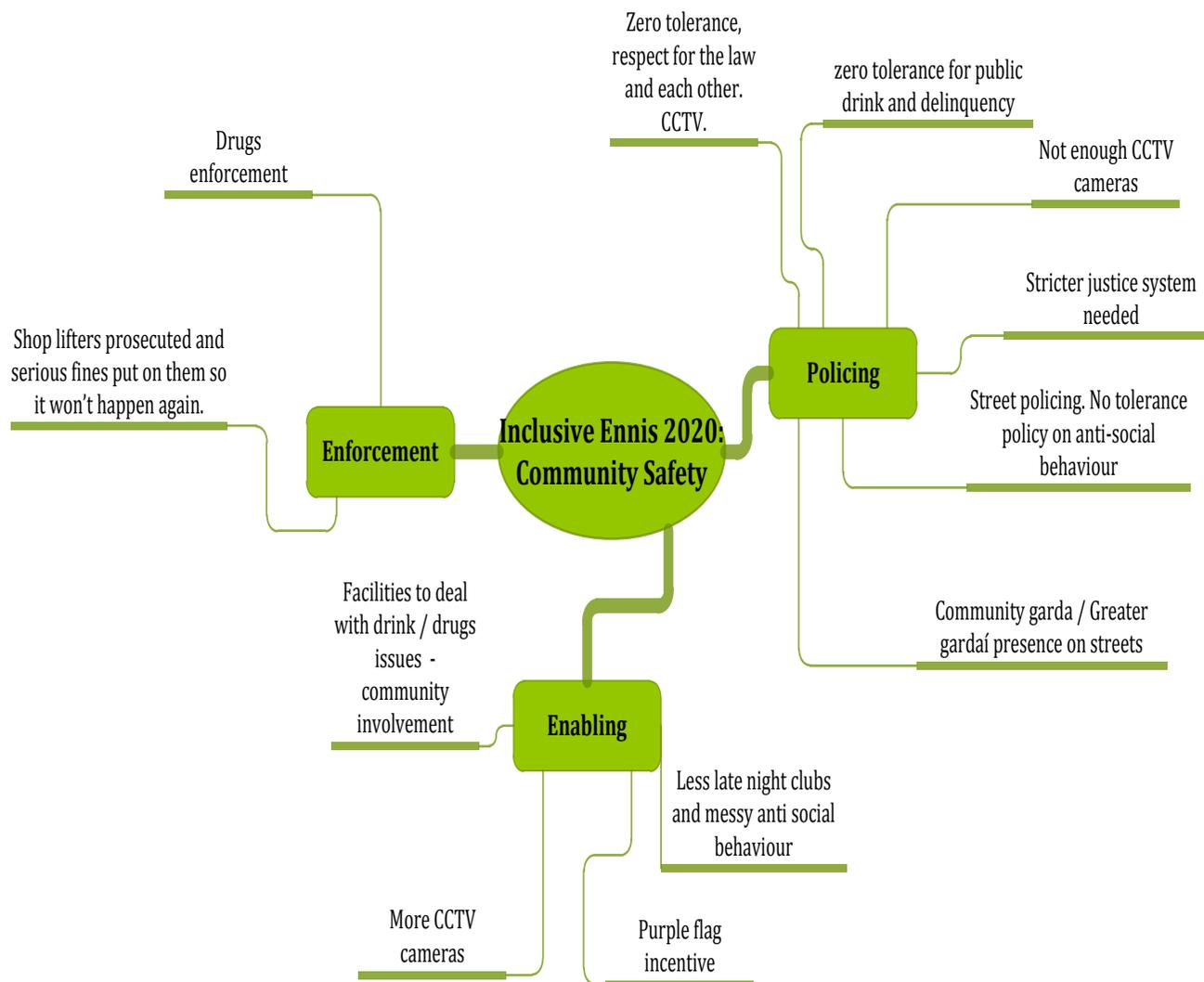
**Ennis 2020 - Building Co-operation**

The theme of co-operation building has been visible throughout the previous sections of this report. However, in response to the question of how to make Ennis more inclusive society a number of quite specific suggestions were made. These included suggestions on how to stimulate the creation of community structures and community involvement, not least through encouraging higher levels of volunteering. For some it also involved conscious efforts to support integration and to address attitudinal issues. However, for others, further integration was not a priority, emphasis being placed instead on adjusting / improving behaviour, both amongst newly arriving groups and amongst the town's Traveller population.



**Inclusive Ennis 2020: Meeting Opportunities**

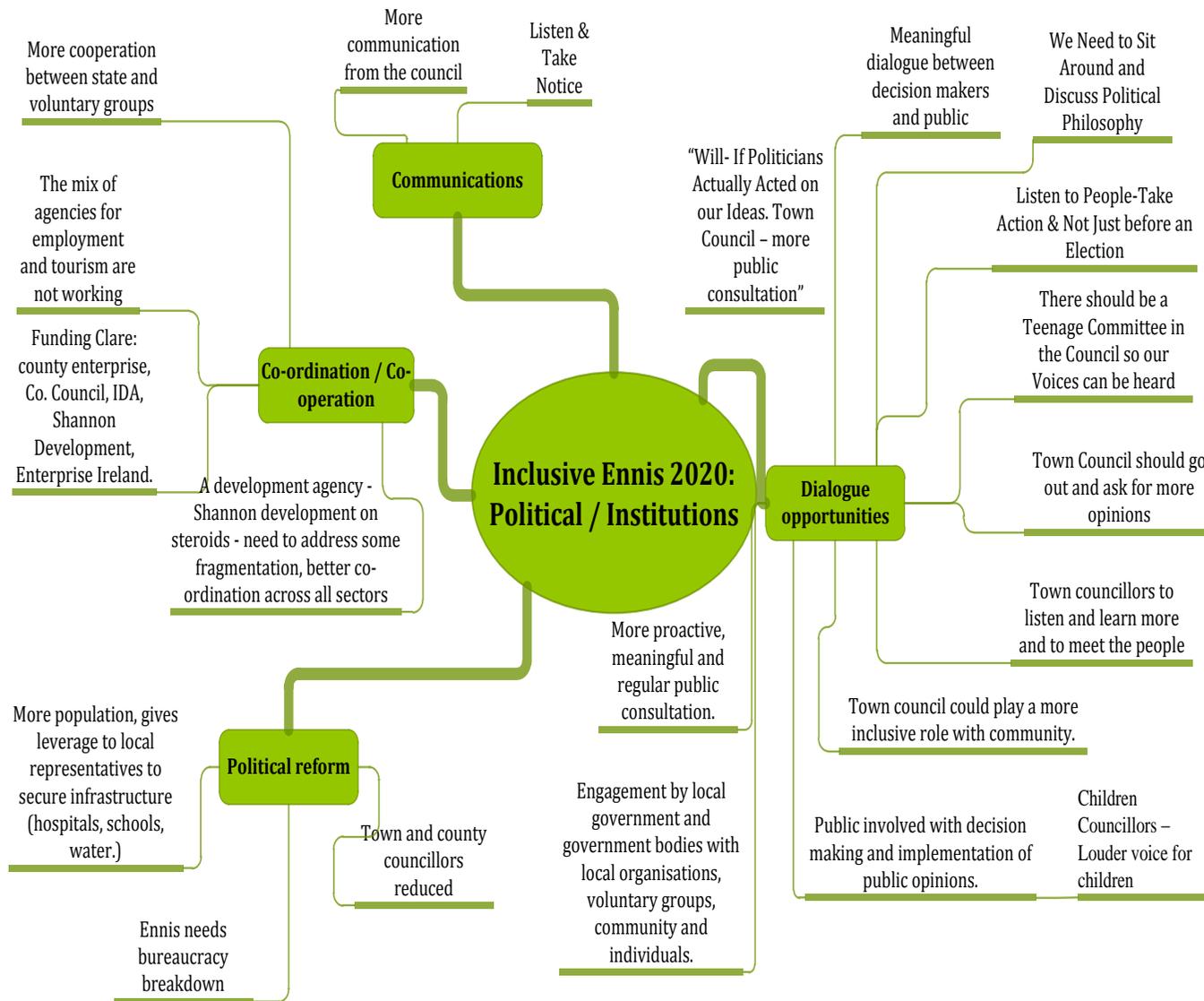
A key element of building an inclusive community (ies) is the creation of opportunities to meet and engage with other residents / users of the town. Numerous suggestions have been made on how such engagements could be facilitated including the organisation of community events ranging from food festivals to community days to a ‘Hug Day’. The potential for sports and the arts to support inclusion and interaction has also been highlighted. Finally, as well as the creation of meeting spaces, active efforts to remove barriers to participation and engagement were advocated.



**Inclusive Ennis 2020: Community Safety**

The vision of Ennis in 2020 as a safe and secure town arose within all of the conversations undertaken as part of the community visioning exercise – with elected representatives, young people, officials and in the public sessions. The key themes emerging from these discussions included:

- the need for higher and more visible levels of policing;
- stronger enforcement, particularly on drugs and shoplifting offences and
- enabling the creation of a safer town through initiative such as the ‘purple flag’ award and the provision of support services dealing with alcohol and other drug abuse.



**Inclusive Ennis 2020: Political / Institutions**

Finally, a number of suggestions were made to support the development of more inclusive town through political and institutional change. As is illustrated in the accompanying mindmap, the creation of dialogue opportunities between Ennis residents / users and the elected representatives emerges as a very prominent issue. Amongst the suggestions made was the development of a teenage committee to facilitate young voices to be heard more prominently. Meanwhile, an institutional level, the need for stronger inter agency co-operation is emphasised.

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## 5. Next Steps

### **Disseminating the results of the community visioning exercise**

The rule of engagement agreed at the outset of this process made a commitment to

- clearly and transparently document the consultation exercise
- provide this documentation to all of those involved who wish to receive it, directly via email, online or in hard copy format.
- provide ongoing information to Ennis residents at different stages of the planning process.

To meet these commitments, a number of strategies to disseminate the results of the community visioning exercise are being prepared. These include development of:

- an e-newsletter that can be widely circulated throughout Ennis and its surrounding areas.
- an e-comic, which provides an alternative platform for feedback and engagement.
- a website, on which the raw, unprocessed data produced by the different participatory sessions and this report can be accessed and which can provide a forum for further feedback and
- an E-learning presentation, which will present a more succinct and interactive version of the findings from the visioning exercise.

### **Developing the Ennis Hub Strategy**

This report marks the conclusion of the agreed first stage of the development of the Ennis Hub Strategy, the Community Visioning exercise. At this point it would appear that a number of options may be available to the MPC and the broader Town Council. These include:

Option 1: Proceed to develop a hub strategy directly from the information generated during the community visioning exercise. While this is attractive from a time perspective, there is a danger that this will generate a surface level strategy only and will, in any case, require more detailed planning by the Town Council at a later stage.

Option 2: Proceed to a second more detailed but time limited phase of community engagement. In this phase, the key priority would be to drill down more deeply into a number of the core areas to develop more comprehensive and strategic approaches. Focusing in particular on the suggestions on how to enhance Ennis as a place in which to live, work, visit and /or invest, a number of key thematic areas emerge:

- Amenities / facilities
- Leisure / entertainment / arts / culture
- Infrastructure (including transport)
- Economic Development (Including tourism and retail development)
- Image / Branding
- Quality of Life / Inclusion (including dialogue and political engagement)

In addition, given the number of suggestions around the provision of services / amenities for young people and given their active engagement with the visioning process consideration might also be given to creating a theme group on meeting the needs of young people.

One approach to this second option would be to assemble more focused task groups comprising people with direct experience / interest in the thematic area. These task groups should be time limited and should produce a more sharply defined set of priorities for their given area, using the findings of the community visioning exercise as the initial basis for their discussions.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Community Visioning - Rules of engagement**

It is important when inviting the public to participate in an exercise such as this that there is clarity about the conditions under which such participation takes place. Put another way, it is important that the rules of engagement in the processes outlined are clearly defined and visible.

#### **The conduct of interactions**

The planned interactions will:

- take place in a hospitable, enabling and empowering environment:
- be conducted in way that is mutually respectful of different experiences, perspectives and cultural backgrounds.
- not accord any added weight to the views of one group over another and will value the contribution of all, irrespective of education, technical knowledge etc.

#### **Recording of contributions**

The contributions made at the different participation sessions will all be noted and recorded. This will be done by:

- encouraging participants to write their own comments;
- facilitating the completion of mini questionnaires
- directly recording participants on HD video camera
- enabling on line comment

All such inputs will be collated and will be available in raw, unprocessed format.

In addition, and to ensure that the outcomes of the meetings can be utilised, this raw material will be processed and, where possible, categorised under appropriate headings.

#### **The outcomes of the interactions**

This is a consultative process and as such, while all views will be considered by the Ennis Town Council Municipal Policy Committee, inevitably it may not be possible to accommodate all perspectives. However, there is a commitment to:

- clearly and transparently document the consultation exercise
- provide this documentation to all of those involved who wish to receive it, directly via email, online or in hard copy format.
- provide ongoing information to Ennis residents at different stages of the planning process.

In the ongoing development of the Town Strategy it is possible that further consultation sessions will be held. Every effort to enable further, deeper participation in these will be made.

It is hoped that the Town Strategy will be completed by the end of 2011.