

Public Consultation on the Former Reformed Presbyterian Church Building



MILFORD & DISTRICT RESOURCE CENTRE

IONAD ACMHAINNÍ CHEANTAR BHAILE NA NGALLÓGLACH



Introduction

In November 2022 the Milford Reformed Presbyterian Church congregation completed the signing over of their former building on the Kilmacrennan Road to Milford & District Resource CLG. This was gifted to the community and entrusted to the ownership of MDRC, a community development and rural regeneration organisation based in Milford, Co. Donegal.

In February 2023, MDRC secured funding from the Heritage Council to conduct a conservation plan and feasibility study on the building. The conservation plan will outline works needed to preserve the built heritage of the former church, while the feasibility study will explore ways in which the building can be adapted to make it suitable for community use. These two pieces of work are set to conclude by October 2023 and will be instrumental to attracting grant funding for the building over the coming years.

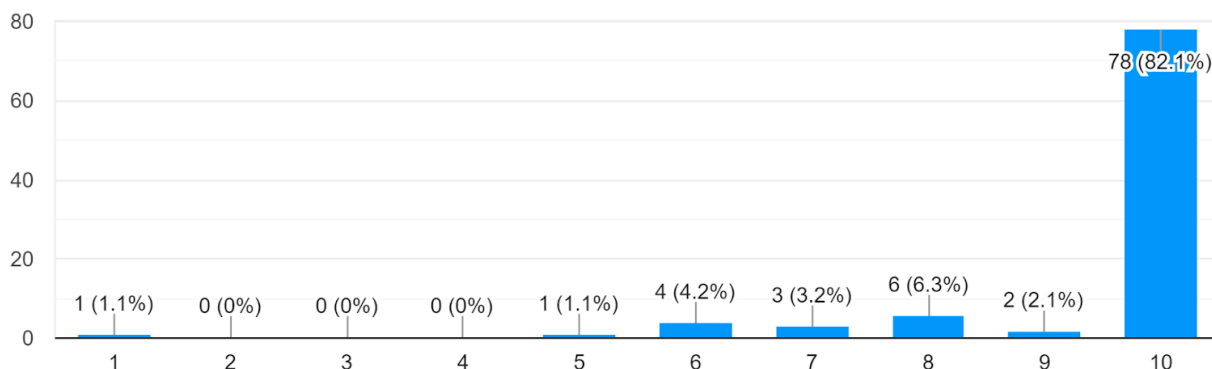
Milford & District Resource CLG (MDRC) held a public consultation on the former Reformed Presbyterian Church building between August 28th and September 8th 2023. The consultation was available for anyone to fill in online and paper forms were also available from the office. The consultation was advertised on MDRC's social media and in the local newspaper, The Tirconail Tribune. 95 submissions were received in total.

Participants were asked in the survey various questions which related to the development, use and name of the building going forward.

Development of Community Space in Milford

On a scale of 1-10 (1 being not important at all, 10 being extremely important) how important to you is the development of additional community space in Milford?

95 responses



Participants were asked to rank how important they believe the development of additional community space was in Milford. 82.1% rated it as 10 on a scale of 1-10, denoting that it was extremely important.

Given that community space in Milford is very limited, and that any existing community space is at capacity, this is to be expected. It shows that the development of the church building is ranked as a high priority by people in the Milford community.

In terms of community space owned by Milford & District Resource CLG, the existing board room in the offices on Market Square is a very small space and limits massively what the organisation can offer the community in terms of activities, classes and programmes.

The response to this question shows that MDRC's planned development of the building as a community hub is in line with the wishes and needs that exist in the community. It is also a response to the direct need of the organisation itself in relation to planned community development activities.

Facilities & Amenities

Participants in the survey were asked which facilities and amenities they would like to see included in the development of the building. The format for answering was open-ended with no multiple choice or tick box options. This was to ensure that answers were not led by how the question was asked or formatted. The answers received are listed below:

Facility/Amenity	No. of Responses	% of Responses
Kitchen	64	67%
Activity/Multi-Purpose Room	49	52%
Meeting Room	45	47%
Stage	33	35%
Youth Space	29	31%
Meals on Wheels	28	29%
Accessible Toilets	27	28%

Storage	17	18%
Art/Crafts Area	15	16%
Outdoor Space for Events	15	16%
Exhibition Space	14	15%
Baby Changing Room	13	14%
Changing Places	8	8%
Sports Equipment	7	7%
Digital Hub/Hot Desk Space	7	7%
Kids Play Area	4	4%
Games Room	3	3%
Sports Area	3	3%
Remote Working	2	2%
Sensory Room	2	2%
Pool Table	2	2%
Prayer/Meditation Room	2	2%
Coffee Shop/Café Space	2	2%
Community Allotments	1	1%
Study Rooms	1	1%



Providing community space and the opportunity for a variety of activities and programmes for people of all ages should be a priority, as Milford is a town which suffers from a lack of community space available to everyone.

Anything would be an improvement, but the more separate spaces for multiple activities to take place at once would be great.

A kitchen would be excellent as it would provide a much-needed amenity in the community for initiatives like Meals on Wheels or a day centre for the elderly. Also, a kitchen would be key for kids parties to take place in an affordable venue.

Milford does not have a social and cultural venue and I think this building could address that need.



A kitchen was, by far, the most popular facility that people want to see in the building. There is an existing kitchen in the building which might require upgrading if it was to serve the various other activities listed further on in the consultation.

A multi-purpose activity room was the second most popular facility and would probably be best suited to the larger room in the building, which was the former church part of the building. This room is currently in a bad state of repair and will require substantial funding to convert into a multi-purpose hall or activity room.

Meeting rooms were also a popular answer with almost half of all respondents stating that they were needed. The existing small hall at the end of the building is already suitable as a large meeting room. In order to create additional rooms significant work would be needed on this part of the building, such as installing an additional floor.

Over a third of all respondents stated that there should be a stage within the building and this is reflected in responses to further questions about the types of activities people want to see in the building, e.g. concerts, plays, etc. There is an existing small stage in the small hall at the end of the building and this area would be suitable for performances or shows with a small audience. If a larger area was sought for a stage then the large room would be suitable.

31% of respondents highlighted the need for a youth space in the building. This included suggestions for a youth club space, room for teenagers' activities, etc.

29% of respondents suggested that Meals on Wheels should be provided for within the building. This links back to the need for a kitchen which would be fit for purpose for this service provision.

Accessible toilets were highlighted as a priority by 28% of survey respondents. There are currently

two toilets in the building, next to the existing kitchen - one of which is accessible for wheelchair users and/or those with additional mobility needs. Additional toilets may be needed in the building, particularly at the other end near the existing small hall.

18% of respondents identified storage space as a desired facility within the building. This would be necessary for unused equipment, seating, etc. At present there is very little storage space in the building.

An arts and crafts area was suggested by 16% of respondents to the survey. A dedicated space for this might not be practical, but allowing for space - either in meeting rooms or the existing small hall, or in the proposed multi-purpose room - would be necessary.

The tenth most popular facility or amenity listed is outdoor space for events or similar at 16%. The outdoor space available to the building is limited but there would be space alongside the building on the roadside and gable wall for outdoor seating or similar. Some thought would have to be given to sheltered outdoor space which would not interfere with the appearance or architectural features of the exterior of the building.

Regular Activities & Classes

Regarding the future use of the building, respondents were asked in the survey which regular or weekly activities and classes they would like to see take place. The format for answering was open-ended with no multiple choice or tick box options. This was to ensure that answers were not led by how the question was asked or formatted. 64 different activities were listed with varying degrees of popularity. The answers received are listed below:

Activity/Class	No. of Responses	% of Responses
Fitness/Exercise	41	43%
Adult Education Classes	36	38%
Arts & Crafts Classes	27	28%
Yoga	24	25%
Day Centre for Elderly	24	25%
Youth Group	23	24%
Pilates	21	22%

Social Events	21	22%
Parent & Toddler	21	22%
Kids Parties	21	22%
Active Age	21	22%
Country Market	20	21%
Support Groups	19	20%
Irish Language	19	20%
Language Classes	17	18%
Kids Activities	15	16%
Games Night	11	12%
Film Nights	11	12%
Drama	10	11%
Dance	9	9%
Music Classes	8	8%
IT/Computer Classes	7	7%
Cooking Classes	7	7%
Flower Arrangement	7	7%
English Classes	7	7%
Slimming World	6	6%
Book Club	6	6%
Knitting	6	6%
Coffee Mornings	4	4%
Mental Health Classes	4	4%

Baby Groups/Activities	4	4%
Crochet	4	4%
First Aid	4	4%
Photography	4	4%
After School Space for Kids	4	4%
Nutrition	3	3%
Men's/Women's Shed	3	3%
Meditation	3	3%
Community Choir	3	3%
Exercise for Disabled People	3	3%
DIY Classes	3	3%
Wellness	2	2%
Step Aerobics	2	2%
Sewing	2	2%
Prayer	2	2%
Creative Writing	2	2%
Traditional Music	2	2%
Gardening Club/Classes	2	2%
History	2	2%
Messy Play	1	1%
Sensory Activities	1	1%
Jujitsu	1	1%

Employment Supports	1	1%
Weaving	1	1%
Quilting	1	1%
Cake Decoration	1	1%
Ceili Classes	1	1%
Mindfulness	1	1%
Baking Classes	1	1%
Ancestry/Genealogy	1	1%
Band: Youth	1	1%
Homework Club	1	1%
Grinds	1	1%
Political Education	1	1%

Most of the activities and classes listed above could be held in meeting rooms or a multi-purpose hall/activity room. There are some proposals from responses which would not be suitable for this building, e.g. Garden Classes/Club and Community Garden/Allotment. This is due to a lack of outdoor space at the building. Regarding Men's/Women's Sheds a dedicated area would be needed for this, which may or may not be possible to accommodate within the existing building.

Events

Regarding the future use of the building, respondents were asked in the survey which events they would like to see take place. This differs from regular classes and activities where these events may take place more irregularly. The format for answering was open-ended with no multiple choice or tick box options. This was to ensure that answers were not led by how the question was asked or formatted. 31 different activities were listed with varying degrees of popularity. The answers received are listed below:

Events	No. of Responses	% of Responses
Plays/Drama	50	53%

Concerts	49	52%
Country Market	28	29%
Kids Parties	28	29%
Christmas Market	23	24%
Film Showings	20	21%
Charity Events/Fundraisers	20	21%
Information Evenings	19	20%
Public Meetings	18	19%
Exhibitions	18	19%
Lectures/Talks	16	17%
Seasonal Events	16	17%
Traditional Music	14	15%
Talks/Info for Parents	12	13%
School Plays	8	8%
Panto	7	7%
Kids/Youth Events	7	7%
Heritage Events	6	6%
Dances	5	5%
Funeral Receptions	5	5%
Bingo	4	4%
Poetry Readings	4	4%
Recitals	3	3%
Sports Event Screenings	3	3%

Quizzes	2	2%
Creative Writing Workshops	2	2%
Civil Wedding Ceremonies	2	2%
Events with Religious Focus	1	1%
Alzheimer's Cafe	1	1%
Story Telling	1	1%
Comedy	1	1%

A high number of the events listed above would necessitate the inclusion of a stage and seating area for audiences. There is high demand for cultural events such as concerts, plays, performances, etc. Country markets and Christmas markets were also popular answers, as were seasonal events for families such as Christmas parties/concerts, Halloween and Easter events, etc.

Additional Important Information

Respondents were asked what they believed MDRC should keep in mind while developing the building, or in organising events and activities in the building. The answers are listed below and have been grouped into themed headings:

Accessibility	26	27%
Community Involvement: Governance/Management	25	26%
Space for Young People/Teenagers	21	22%
Ensuring there is Adequate Storage	21	22%
Preservation of Architecture/Heritage	20	21%
Providing Space for Markets - Seasonal & Regular	19	20%
Sustainability & Energy Efficiency	18	19%

Catering for All Age Groups	17	18%
Provision of Activities that aren't Sport	17	18%
Recognising Gift from RP Church	16	17%
Car Park Development	15	16%
Inclusive & Welcoming to Everyone	14	15%
Rooms Should be Available to Hire	13	14%
Community Involvement: Communication	11	12%
Providing a Town Hall Space for Public Meetings	9	9%
Having Activities Aimed at Integration of New Communities	7	7%
Having Activities/Events on at all Times of Day	3	3%
Providing Many Individual Spaces for Multiple Activities	3	3%
Inclusion of Prayer Space	2	2%
Regular Space for Older People	2	2%
Use of Notice Board	1	1%
Toilets	1	1%
Horse Riding Club	1	1%
Security	1	1%
Noise	1	1%

Neighbours	1	1%
Transport	1	1%

“ It is important that the building is developed in a way that creates a practical contemporary space with sensitivity to any remaining features that are worth preserving.

Ensuring that every part of the building is accessible to those with disabilities. Also, ensuring there is sufficient storage is crucial - you need a lot of storage space in a community centre!

Recognising the gift of the Reformed Presbyterians to the community. Such a generous gift that will have such a profound impact on the community ought to be remembered.

The ethos of inclusivity for all to be core to the redevelopment of the building and activities.

Involving the community in its running as much as possible.

This building should be open to everyone to use. No one should be told no when they are seeking to organise an event or activity. Milford really needs this! ”

The Name of the Building

Lastly, respondents to the survey were asked to either choose from three suggested names for the building, or to suggest their own. Three options were presented:

1. Milford Community Hub
2. The Gallowglass Community Centre
3. The MDRC Hall

Additional names were suggested, each with one vote:

An t-Ionad Fáilte (The Welcome Centre)
An Teach Ban
Gallóg Hub
Milford Community Arts Centre
Milford Community Hall
The Meeting Place
The Milford Peoples Hall
Teach na nAontacht
The M-Unity Center
Milford Village Hall

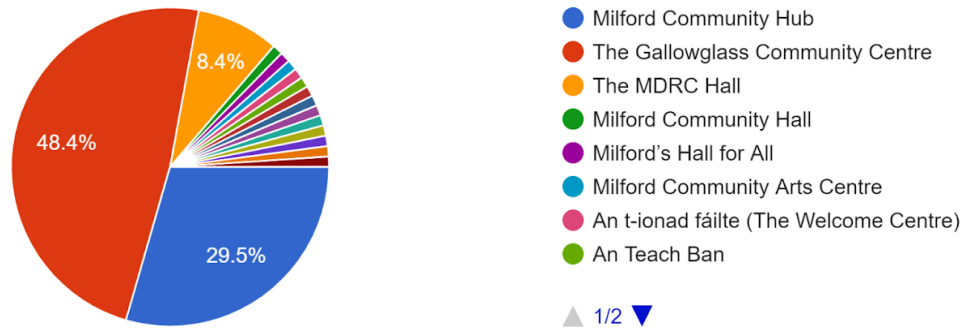
Milford's Hall for All

The Forum

The Gallowglass

We will need a new name for the building. What would you like the building to be called, going forward?

95 responses



48.4% selected 'The Gallowglass Community Centre' as their preferred option for a name for the building. This was followed by 29.5% who chose 'Milford Community Hub' and 8.4% who chose 'The MDRC Hall'. 13 other names received one vote each (1.05%).

Based on this consultation the building will, going forward, be called The Gallowglass Community Centre.

Next Steps

The Gallowglass Community Centre is in need of a lot of work - and funding - to achieve its full potential in line with this public consultation. The building will be partially opened in September 2023 and this will present great opportunities for the wider community for activities, classes, events and programmes which should be of great benefit to everyone.

The Conservation Plan and Feasibility Study will both be completed by October 2023. The ongoing process of securing funding to develop, preserve and advance the building will continue into 2024 where large-scale capital funding grants will be identified and pursued.