

A Masterplan for Strabane Town Centre

September 2010



Department for
**Social
Development**
www.dsdni.gov.uk

TRIBAL

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1 Introduction

In February 2009, the Department for Social Development (DSD), and Strabane District Council (SDC), with DoE Planning Service acting as a statutory partner, commissioned Tribal Group, supported by Colliers CRE and Oxford Economics, to prepare a Regeneration Masterplan for Strabane Town Centre. This non-statutory document will provide the basis, and justification, for decision making on the promotion, implementation and timing of urban regeneration initiatives in the town centre for the period up to 2020.

The Masterplan study area reflects the town centre boundary, as shown in the West Tyrone Area Plan 1986-2001, and illustrated on the following page. Although this is the defined study area, the Masterplan recognises the importance of the broader context of the town centre's hinterland, and this is reflected in the document, where appropriate.

1.1 Purpose of this Document

The purpose of the Masterplan is to provide strategic guidance for the regeneration of Strabane Town Centre, to protect its existing physical, social and economic capital and to enhance the quality of the offer, presented by the Town Centre, as a place to live, work and visit.

This purpose is best defined by the following regeneration objectives, in which the aim of the Masterplan is to:

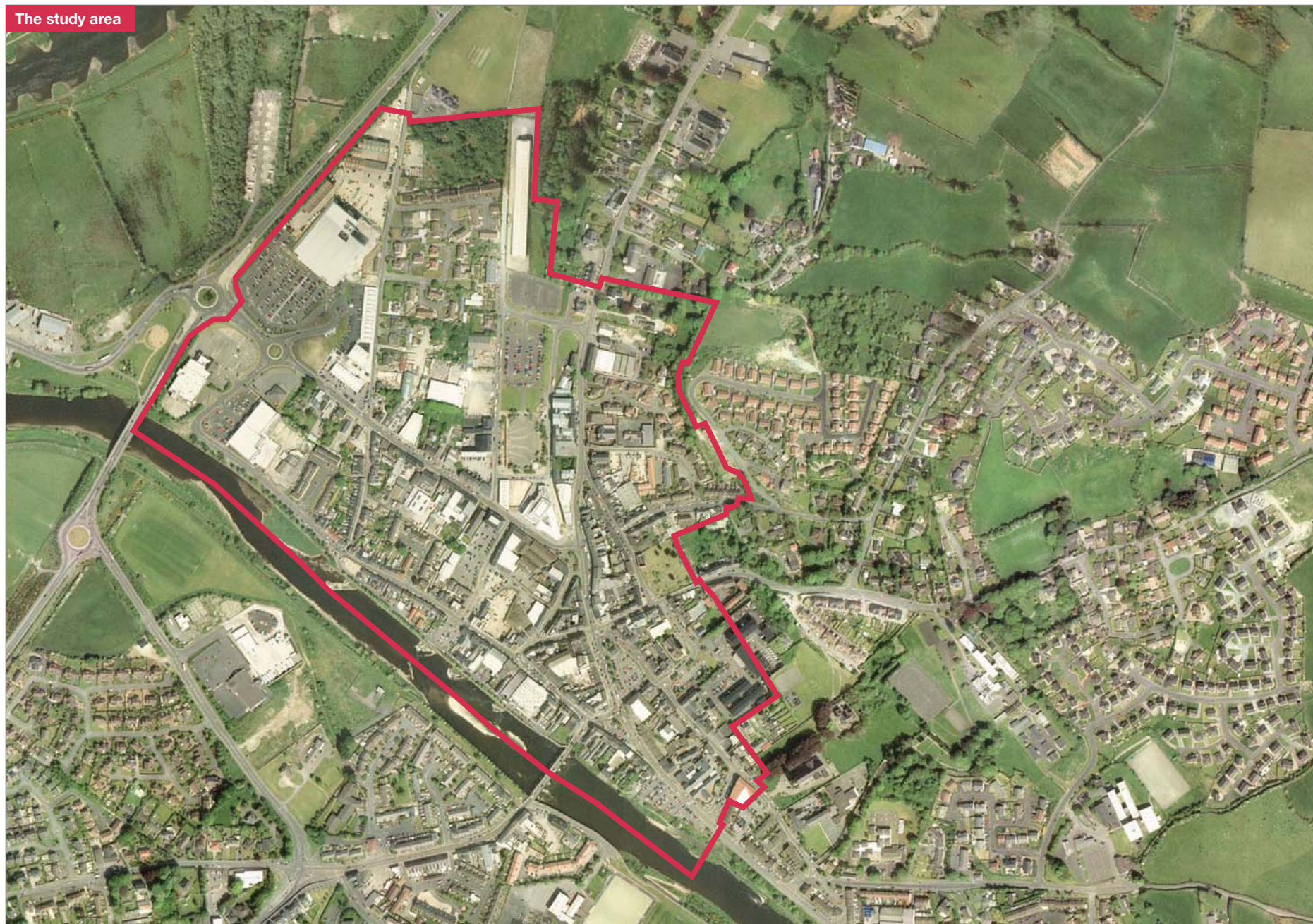
- Rank and prioritise potential development opportunity sites.
- Advise on the nature, scale and timing of work to restructure and redevelop the opportunity sites.
- Make realistic and deliverable recommendations for the period to 2020.
- Advise on appropriate transportation, access and parking interventions which might be required to achieve the successful development of the opportunity sites.
- Advise on appropriate public realm enhancements to support the regeneration of Strabane Town Centre.
- Support the proposed physical interventions with a framework of short, medium, and long-term actions, delivery mechanisms with implementation agencies identified.

These objectives have been prepared with reference to the regeneration goals identified in the original Client Brief for this commission. These regeneration goals have been modified and refined, as the commission has progressed, with input from stakeholders such as local business, politicians, council officers and residents, whose views were canvassed as part of the consultation exercise carried out simultaneously with the design development.

1.2 Structure of the Masterplan Document

The Masterplan document is structured as follows.

- 1 Introduction
- 2 The context for regeneration
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Vision for Strabane
- 5 Strategic design principles
- 6 Development proposals
- 7 Delivery of the Masterplan
- 8 Action Plan
- 9 Conclusion



2 The context for regeneration

2.1 Introduction

This Masterplan has been prepared in the context of a very real need for a robust, deliverable action plan that will facilitate the regeneration of Strabane Town Centre over the next 10 – 15 years. Understanding the regeneration context is fundamental if the Masterplan is to provide the various agencies – Strabane District Council, DSD and others – with the means to undertake a realistic and achievable programme of interventions that will protect and enhance the quality of Strabane Town Centre as a place to live, work and visit, now and in the future.

This context has 4 major components:

- Policy Context.
- Economic Context.
- Social Context; and
- Physical Context.

This section should be read in conjunction with the Baseline Report, prepared by Tribal in May 2009. In that Report, each of these components was considered in great detail, the aim being to arrive at a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the town centre, in its current form, as well as identifying the opportunities for regeneration interventions, their locations, scale, nature and potential impact on the quality of the town centre and its economic performance. Rather than regurgitate all of the material that was contained in the Baseline Report, we have extracted the key messages as they relate to the policy, economic, social and place quality context for regeneration of Strabane Town Centre. For those interested in the minutiae of our research, we would refer you to the Baseline Report.

2.2 Policy Context for Regeneration

There are several key documents that provide policy and guidance which are of direct relevance to any regeneration proposals for Strabane Town Centre. Those documents and policies of greatest relevance are listed below, together with a short explanation as to why they are relevant and their potential effect on the Masterplan and Strabane Town Centre.

Regional Development Strategy (RDS) Policy SPG – ECON 1

- Strabane's service sector must be strengthened to encourage economic spill-over from Derry/Londonderry City as the major attractor in the region.

Sub-Regional Transport Plan

- The A5 Strabane By-Pass will have implications for the development of adjacent land and the management of the future growth of the town centre. Consideration should be given to the location of new gateway developments which encourage passing trade to stop and enter the town via these enhanced pathways such as Railway Street.

PPS3 - Access & Movement

- A disjointed town centre cannot function effectively; a unified and accessible centre must emerge, which encourages the visitor to explore with ease and not to cherry-pick destinations. Railway Street must be developed as a conduit between ASDA and the retail core.

- Customer car parking and delivery arrangements in the retail core should be wholly re-evaluated particularly along Main Street to increase access and decrease congestion.
- Public transport provision between taxis and buses must be better co-ordinated to reduce congestion in the town. Better designated taxi parking and better access to the bus centre should be considered as a priority.

PPS5 – Retailing & Town Centres

- Existing businesses within the town centre must be further supported to foster a vital business environment which can in turn attract new business. This broad objective can be realised by addressing the following:
 - Consideration could be given to the possibility of targeting potential new retailers, who can demonstrate a realistic business plan and who have the vision and creativity to offer something currently unavailable in Strabane which will appeal to a wide range of customers. Support could be given in the form of a subsidised initial rental package, together with business training or support from Invest NI.
 - The performance of existing small businesses should be considered to assess their potential to improve performance by adopting modern or more efficient practices.

RDS - Western corridor



Public transport



Town centre retail



Town centre retail



- A review of the role and capacity of the weekly open-market should be undertaken to ascertain whether it is capable of improvement and better integration with the wider retail offer of the town.
- Better definition of the retail core can be achieved by providing gateway features at all of the main entrances to the town.

PPS8 – Open Space

- Open Space provision in the town centre is critical to encourage a stop and shop culture and to develop a town centre living strategy which will give residents a quality of life comparable with suburban living. All new developments should build in as much green space as possible to foster the image of the town centre as a place to reside and not to shop and leave.

PPS15 – Planning & Flood Risk

- The development of land adjacent to the river is important for the cultivation of an image of the town centre as a liveable space which utilises its natural assets. Developments must however remain conscious of the flood risk posed by the river and consider innovative designs which minimise risk to occupants and improve the appearance of the existing waterside development.

Tourism and Leisure Activities

- Strabane must promote and develop its natural and heritage-based assets as other towns such as Donegal have in the past. The quality of the town's restaurants and hotels is currently limited and the North West Passage marketing strategy has had limited success, but the town needs a quality hotel and resort underpinned by a small number of well-defined saleable attractions, such as fishing or outdoor activities.



2.3 Economic Context for Regeneration

The Economic Context for the regeneration of Strabane Town Centre can be split into two parts:

- The general economic context; and
- Strabane's local economic profile, particularly its retail, office, leisure and tourism market performance and prospects.

The General Economic Context

A full economic analysis can be found in the Strabane Masterplan Baseline Report.

The key economic implications for the development of the Masterplan are outlined below.

- The effect of the current recession in the short-term will have a negative impact on investment, development and employment in Strabane. The Masterplan will seek to look beyond the current economic conditions, identifying short, medium and long term investment goals.
- Strabane will need to widen its employment base, currently dominated by agriculture and manufacturing.
- The majority of additional jobs which Strabane needs to compete for in the medium to long term are in the business services, retail, distribution, hotel and construction services.

- The concentration of construction employment, which is currently deeply embroiled in the recession. The recovery of this sector is likely to be long-term.
- Retail and distribution have some (limited) further scope to expand post-recession.
- The underdeveloped hotel sector offers future potential growth.
- Possible public sector led growth, such as development coming forward to regenerate areas and attract private sector investment.
- Masterplan should help to create the space and environment to enable business / office market to grow in the future. Currently there is limited availability of office space which may be deflecting investors.
- Improvements to the physical environment to improve Strabane's competitiveness as a place to live, work, shop, visit and play.
- Greater exploitation of growing markets such as Derry and the cross border market.
- Address the skills and qualifications mismatch. Businesses will be attracted by high skill levels. Development of specialisms not serviced by surrounding areas to tackle the high levels of unemployment.

Strabane's Local Economic Profile

Colliers CRE undertook an analysis of how Strabane performs in terms of its retail, office, leisure and tourism market sectors. The following key

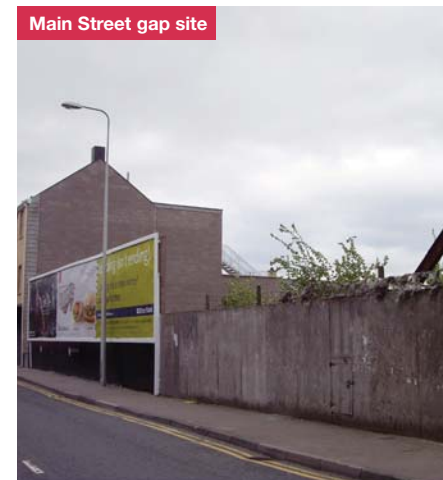
Empty properties



Empty properties



Main Street gap site



SCORE site



points were identified with respect to the potential of the Town Centre core to recover its position as an economic generator, one that complements, and is complemented by, the Branch Road retail developments rather than the two being in competition.

- Sites such as the SCORE site and the vacant land on Main St can be utilised to develop adequately sized units attractive to national multiples. Improvements to the physical environment would provide a clean, well presented environment in the town centre. This should involve improved public realm, landscaping, street furniture, lighting etc.
- Connections, in particular the connections down Railway Street from the edge of town centre shopping to Abercorn Sq. and Main Street, should be improved by environmental improvements, widened footpaths and directional signage (throughout the town centre).
- Bringing retail on Branch Road/Railway Street closer to the town centre should be possible by developing new units on Railway St.
- One identified problem in the town centre and in particular on Main St is the traffic congestion. Rather than total pedestrianisation of an area or a street we advocate shared surfaces (pedestrian priority).
- In terms of the leisure market Strabane is in an ideal location to

act as a gateway to Donegal and capitalise on cross border trade and tourism.

- There are many locations and towns close by that are of interest to tourists and day trippers and properly marketed and branded Strabane can capture the tourist market for trade in retail, catering, commercial leisure and hotels.
- What is required are properly designed tourist facilities coupled with commercial and community leisure uses that will provide a critical mass that will then subsequently act as a catalyst for private investment.
- There is really no office market as such in Strabane and this is not unique to the town and reflects the dominance of Belfast and to a lesser degree in the North West, Derry/Londonderry. The office market in Strabane is dominated by local business. The town centre office users, as in most provincial towns tend to be local professional firms such as accountants and solicitors. To attract offices into the town in the future would add a degree of vibrancy to the centre.



2.4 Social Context for Regeneration

The social context for the regeneration of Strabane Town Centre can be summarised briefly as follows.

Population and Settlement

The Strabane Area Plan 2001 estimated the population of the town would grow to 15,300 by 2001 and zoned over 100 hectares for housing. Population growth was not as high as predicted and as a result, 36 hectares of zoned housing land remained undeveloped.

These zonings will be re-assessed within the West Tyrone Area Plan (WTAP) 2019, together with the potential to develop other land in keeping with the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) objective of locating 60% of new housing within the existing urban area. As a main hub, Strabane will have a leading role in accommodating the need for urban housing at district level.

The need for social housing is also highlighted and is supported by NIHE. There are 1079 social housing units within the Strabane District. Strabane is currently experiencing negative demand for social housing largely due to out-migration from the town and also the surplus of accommodation derived from the private rental market.

In 2008, 93.3% of the town centre population were from a Catholic background and 6.1% from a Protestant background. The district population was 66.2% Catholic and 33.3% Protestant.

The town's population is now over 17,000 with a district population of 38,248.

Social Infrastructure

The RDS recognises that the availability of quality housing in appropriate locations makes a vital contribution to the key policy objectives of government. It is a vital consideration in promoting economic well-being and social progress.

Additional social infrastructure and services in the right locations are also key to delivering a good quality of life for residents. The WTAP identifies a need for a community health and treatment centre in the town, a new building for the Ballycolman Community Association and an extension of facilities at Lisnafin.

A Shared Future (OFMDFM)

This strategic framework for community relations in Northern Ireland advocates a commitment to provision of "safe and shared space for meeting, sharing, playing, working and living," in addition to support for cross sectoral working.

Those actions most relevant to community service provision are as follows:

- DSD will implement development schemes to improve the physical, social and economic well-being of towns and cities and to promote shared and neutral space.

- OFMDFM will ensure that A Shared Future is a central strand of the proposed 10 year strategy for children and young people.
- NIHE will through the Community Cohesion Unit support relationship building at neighbourhood level.

Implications for the Masterplan

The main implications for the development of the Masterplan as a result of the social context can be summarised as follows:

- The plan should promote sustainable social and economic development, equality issues as well as shared future objectives.
- The town has experienced out migration due a lack of employment. Proposals should seek to reverse this trend, bringing jobs to the local population.
- Strabane was badly affected during the troubles and sectarian division remains. The Masterplan should seek to develop a shared future where all sides of the community are happy to live, work and spend time.



Creating Shared Space



Strabane Fair

2.5 Physical Context for Regeneration

The Physical Context for regeneration can also be divided into two key areas:

- Place Quality; and
- Access and Movement.

These are explained below.

Place Quality

Place Quality encompasses a number of different elements of the physical structure and fabric of the Town Centre. These are the physical elements of the place: what it looks like (and the historic elements that shape its character), how it is arranged, the relationship between the buildings and the open space and how it fits into its landscape.

Key Built Form Issues

- The strong, historic street layout and settlement structure is a major influence on the built form and character of the area.
- Plot widths of 8-12 metres are a distinctive feature of the town centre particularly around Market Street, Main Street and Abercorn Square.
- The historic grain remains largely intact although various sites have been redeveloped with sometimes inappropriate and poor quality developments.
- The town centre has a general consistency in terms of block heights, with subtle variation in block height and roofscape providing interest.

- Continuity of built form is a distinctive and important feature of the town centre although there are a number of gap sites (e.g. on John Wesley Street) and surface car parks (Market Street / Butchers Street) which erode this continuity.
- There are a number of gap sites throughout the town where there are opportunities to re-establish built form. Visitors' impression of the town is undermined by vacant sites and poor quality buildings in prominent positions.
- A number of properties have fallen into various states of disrepair and are in need of investment and sensitive renovation to bring them back into life.
- The underlying historic fabric and qualities of the town is largely intact and waiting to be rediscovered. The town has considerable potential to become an attractive place if appropriate investment and uses can be encouraged.

Key Townscape Issues

- A number of gateways into Strabane Town centre fail to define a positive sense of place or establish a quality arrival experience.
- There are a limited number of linear views within the town centre although the historic layout creates positive views of Market Street and Derry Road.
- There are relatively few quality landmark buildings which terminate key views other than the Alley Arts Complex. However, there are a

number of structures and buildings, such as the Mourne Bridge, the Church of the Immaculate Conception, the Church of Ireland at Bowling Green, the O2 shop building at Castle Street and the North West Regional College, for example, that provide distinctive and attractive landmarks within the town centre study area, and in areas immediately adjacent.

Key Heritage Issues

- Many attractive historic properties throughout the town.
- Historic properties underplayed by general condition and inappropriate alterations. These include several of the properties surrounding the Bowling Green, for example, as well as some of the properties on Main Street and Castle Street.
- Some historic properties such as those on Bowling Green, and surrounding area, have been refurbished and brought back into use to great effect.
- Rich historic and cultural heritage that is not immediately obvious or clearly celebrated in the town or in its promotion and marketing.
- Opportunity to convert historic properties and bring back vacant buildings into use.
- Architectural quality of historic properties should set the benchmark in terms of quality for future development. This does not imply pastiche design solutions rather design quality in overall articulation of new developments irrespective of style.



Access and Movement

The ease with which people can access and move, is central to the long-term viability of Strabane Town Centre. Our analysis of the movement network identified a number of issues that need to be addressed to make the Town Centre more accessible and pedestrian-friendly.

- Given the new high degree of competition from out-of-centre retail, the traditional centre can only compete with other destinations by developing specialist retail and cultural attractions. The quality of its historic environment will be crucial if visitors are to be attracted to visit, and to stay longer. Quality is currently undermined by the negative impact of traffic and parking and the associated street design.
- The out-of-centre retail is poorly linked to the traditional centre, both in terms of perception and physically.
- Designation of the town centre to include the recent out-of-centre retail sites does not in any way address the issue of connection between the two. The potential to enhance integration and linkage is a key issue for the future vitality of the town centre.
- Parking in the town centre is important for access, especially by people living in areas outside the town with no alternative to the car. A key issue is how to provide parking without taking land needed for development and without spoiling the town's environment.
- Access to the town by car is predominantly from the west, from the A5. Options for the proposed new A5 include an eastern option, which could lead to more traffic passing through the town centre.
- Some junctions in the town centre in places have excessive carriageway width by current standards, which makes walking unnecessarily unpleasant and hazardous.
- Walking to and from the town centre is provided on routes of variable quality. Improvements could encourage visits to the town centre.
- There is considerable potential in and around the town for walking for pleasure, especially across and alongside the river. This potential is limited by the single, narrow bridge, which prevents walking a circuit. The riverside paths are also of variable attractiveness.
- The town buses currently handle a small proportion of visits to the town centre, and are inadequately routed to serve the new retail areas or the bus centre.
- The bus centre is sited away from the town centre making access difficult and taking potential trade away from the town centre. There is no reasonable interchange with the town buses, and it is reportedly unpleasant to use especially at night. Re-siting the bus station in the town centre is a key issue.
- There is little evidence of cycling in the town, or of cycling infrastructure. The potential to encourage cycling should be considered.



2.6 The Case for Regeneration in Strabane

From this assessment of the context for regeneration in Strabane, it is clear that there are many and varied reasons for preparing a framework within which development proposals might be delivered.

The subtle interplay between each of the key themes - the planning, economic and physical components of the town - is one of the principal reasons why an integrated, over-arching and strategic document is required, to ensure that development proposals are prepared such that they address 'the bigger picture' rather than simply having a limited geographical or thematic focus.

Strabane, like many Northern Irish provincial towns, is very much a product of its recent history. The extent to which the physical fabric is affected by social factors, and the degree to which both of these components are, in their turn, influenced by economic considerations, is magnified by events over the last two generations.

The Regeneration Masterplan for Strabane Town Centre is a mechanism for reconciling the varying effects of the three components, as well as providing the structure to re-present the town centre as a neutral, shared space, for all the people of Strabane and its hinterlands.

2.7 Review of Public Administration

In considering the delivery of the Masterplan it is important to consider the impact of the Review of Public Administration (RPA). This exercise was the first major examination in over thirty years of how public services in Northern Ireland are organised and delivered. Formally launched in June 2002, the Northern Ireland Executive decided to review Northern Ireland's system of public administration with a view to putting in place modern, accountable and effective arrangements for public service delivery.

With regards to local government, it is anticipated that the number of councils will reduce from 26 to 11.

Community planning will be at the heart of local government and a range of functions will transfer to local government including: aspects of planning, rural development, the public realm aspects of local roads functions, urban regeneration and community development, a range of housing related functions, local economic development and tourism.

Under RPA the Council responsible for Strabane will change. It will increase in size and cover a wider geographical area. This new Council will therefore have a far greater ability to effect change in the town centre, together with a greater responsibility for delivering that change.

2.8 How the Contextual Analysis Influences the Masterplan

The issues identified by the analysis of the town - its history, economy, physical structure and social fabric - provide the basis upon which the subsequent stages of the Masterplan process can be undertaken.

Meaningful consultation with the people of Strabane demands an understanding of the place, otherwise the dialogue is hopelessly one-sided. Similarly, the framing of a Vision for Strabane requires an appreciation of the key assets presented by the town and the degree to which the potential of each of these might be realised.

Finally, the Masterplan proposals are a direct response to the issues identified at this stage of the project, albeit modified and shaped further by the subsequent discussions with the people of Strabane, during the consultation and the emerging priorities identified in the Vision exercise.

3 Consultation

3.1 One to one consultations

In-depth consultation was undertaken across the community and business sectors and with all necessary government agencies including regeneration organisations such as Strabane 2000 being engaged. The information gleaned from these discussions formed an integral part of the draft Masterplan.

Below is a full list of all parties and individuals consulted throughout the development of the Masterplan.

- Heather Torrens (Strabane 2000).
- Strabane 2000 board.
- Phillip Faithful, SDC.
- Geraldine Stafford, SDC.
- Karen McFarland, SDC.
- Malcolm Scott, SDC.
- John Stewart, SDC.
- Gerard McFadden, SDC.
- Joe Barber, Chamber of Commerce.
- Michael Cunningham, Melmount Community Forum.
- Aodhan Harkin, Melmount Community Forum.
- Malcolm Mutch, Strabane Farmers Market.
- Dr Chris Boomer, Planning Service.
- Hilda Clements, Planning Service.
- Proinsias McCaughey, Planning Service.
- Cathy Hughes, Planning Service.
- Brendan Adams, NIHE.

- Jarlath McNulty, Councillor, SDC.
- Strabane Youth Initiative.
- Pupils from Strabane Grammar School.
- Pupils from Holy Cross College.
- Pupils from St Mary's Girls Primary School.
- Pupils from St Mary's Boys Primary School.
- Pupils from St Anne's Girls Primary School.
- Pupils from Strabane Primary School.
- Harry Gallagher, Road Service.
- Translink.
- Noel Barr, Strabane Music School.
- Martin McBrearty, Super Valu.
- McGarrigles Shoes.
- Mitchell Meats.
- Modern Man, Main Street.
- Fudge, Main Street.
- PSNI.
- Olivia Gallen, Donegal County Council.
- Elected representatives, Strabane District Council.
- Paul Laughlin, DSD.
- Declan O'Hare, DSD.

3.2 Consultation Event, June 2009

In June 2009, Tribal undertook an extensive public consultation exercise, the aim of which was to present the emerging proposals to the people of Strabane.

A series of publicity boards were prepared for presentation to the public, to explain the context for regeneration, the opportunities and constraints affecting the potential for change in Strabane and an overview of some of the very early proposals for some of the key development sites, such as SCORE and John Wesley Street.

As a precursor to the main consultation, a series of events were held in local schools, to canvass their thoughts as to how Strabane might change in the years to come. These events were very successful, with many useful insights presented by the young people of Strabane.

Thereafter, the publicity boards were installed in the foyer of Strabane Library, where they remained over a six week period. Comments sheets were provided to allow local people to record their views. A number of insightful and helpful comments from local people helped move forward the thinking on the Masterplan proposals, and these were gathered together in a Consultation Report, provided to the client after the 6 week consultation period had finished.

Strabane Regeneration Draft Masterplan 01 Introduction

Background to this Information Exchange Event

In January 2009, the Department for Social Development in partnership with Strabane District Council appointed Tribal to prepare a masterplan for the regeneration of Strabane Town Centre. The purpose of the masterplan is to help identify, locate and schedule development opportunities in the Town Centre. The masterplan will look at retail, leisure, employment, transport and open space development opportunities, some of which might happen soon, while others may still have to wait until funding is available.

Tribal has now received the main planning Strabane Town Centre, identified the development opportunities and proposed draft proposals for some of the opportunity sites. These draft proposals are presented today for your comment.



Strabane Town Centre Study Area

Purpose of this Information Exchange Event

We are keen to hear your thoughts on how Strabane Town Centre could be improved. This information exchange event is your opportunity to comment upon the proposals, and provide us with your understanding of the key issues that affect the quality of the Town Centre, as well as the opportunities that exist to make it a better place in which to live, work, shop and visit.

Our teams is here to meet you, discuss the proposals and answer any questions you might have, so don't hesitate to come up and talk to us!



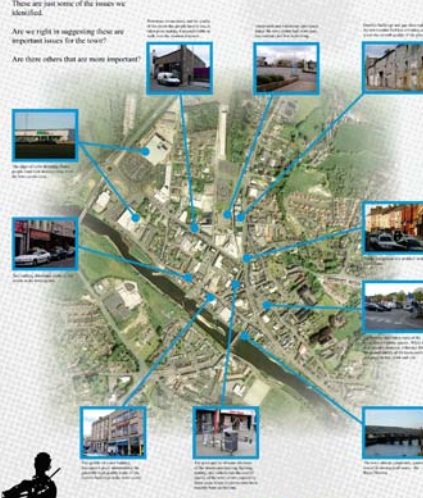
Strabane Regeneration Draft Masterplan 02 Key Issues

Key Issues

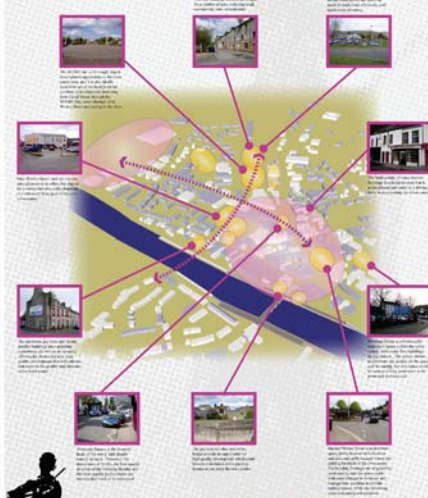
These are just some of the issues we identified.

Are we right in suggesting these are important issues for the town?

Are there others that are more important?



Strabane Regeneration Draft Masterplan 03 Opportunities



Strabane Regeneration Draft Masterplan 04 The Masterplan



Concept Masterplan

The Concept Masterplan
The plan above provides a summary indication as to where the main opportunity sites are located and how they might be developed.

Development can take many forms: it could mean new buildings replacing old or vacant buildings; it can be buildings on vacant or under-used open space; and it can also mean simply improvements to existing buildings or spaces, with new management procedures to help them become more efficient and attractive.

The Key Development Sites
The following key sites have been identified as having the capacity to support development with the potential to assist in the regeneration of Strabane Town Centre:

1. The SCORE Site
2. The Mill Buildings
3. John Wesley Street
4. Abercrombie Square
5. Railway Street
6. Butcher/Market Street; and
7. Bowling Green.

Detailed Exploration of Some Sites
The final two boards explore the potential for these key sites to accommodate development, in different forms.

SCORE Site - we look at the potential for a new leisure centre, plus other, under-used sites on this important, but under-used site, in the heart of the town centre.

John Wesley Street - we consider how a large block of land, in different ownerships, might be comprehensively redeveloped with new uses and high development.

Butcher/Market Street - we show how this important civic space can continue to accommodate parking, but also provide a better quality of experience for pedestrians and those who wish to use the amenities located on the Square.

Strabane Regeneration Draft Masterplan 05 The SCORE Site

The SCORE Site

The SCORE Site is the principal development opportunity site in Strabane Town Centre.

While the masterplan currently proposes a leisure use on the site, there may be other uses which you feel could be equally or more beneficial to your town centre. For example, you may wish to see a large food store/retail development, a residential development or a multi-story car park on the site. We would encourage you to share your thoughts with us.

To the rear of the leisure centre, the existing parking space is retained and, indeed, enlarged and reconfigured to provide better parking for the leisure centre, the Alley Arts Centre and the whole of the Town Centre.



A New Public Space
Located between the leisure centre and the Alley Arts Centre, a new public space is all provided a civic focus for the cultural core of Strabane.

Development, potentially in the form of offices, with shops or food outlets, or ground floor, would help to enliven the space and provide a frontage onto Railway Street.

The new civic space would be large enough to accommodate a number of uses, e.g. a play area, external seating for cafes, and disabled parking, as well as general seating areas, public art and access.

To the east of the square, a new toilet would open out onto the space, its main entrance providing additional life and activity, creating a complementary use in keeping with the other uses in the cultural quarter.



Strabane Regeneration Draft Masterplan 06 Development Opportunities

John Wesley Street

The key intervention proposed for John Wesley Street is the creation of new shopping and retail use development to complement the existing retail core. A connected pedestrian route between John Wesley Street and Castle Street provides access to existing and new parking provision.



John Wesley Street

Butcher/Market Street

The proposals retain car parking provision in Butcher/Market Street, but introduce measures to make the space more accessible and enjoyable for pedestrians. Market Street is re-configured to make it less dominant, with street trees, pedestrian crossings and on-street parking. As well as improvements to street surface materials and furniture, the building facades would be refurbished to create a more attractive space.

Development opportunities to the south of the square would introduce new, high quality buildings providing accommodation for a mix of uses, including retail, food and drink, office space and, potentially, residential.



4 Vision for Strabane

4.1 The Need for a Vision

It is important that the Masterplan has a clear and simple purpose, one that can be easily communicated and which the people of Strabane can readily support. There needs to be a point of reference that those responsible for delivering the regeneration of Strabane Town Centre can consult to ensure that the overarching objectives of the Masterplan are adhered to during its lifetime.

The Vision for Strabane Town Centre should capture the aspirations of the people of Strabane, providing them with a measure against which the success of the various regeneration initiatives can be measured. The Vision is not designed to be a dry, abstract concept. It is a living representation of the aspirations of the people of Strabane and their hopes for their town.

4.2 The Vision Workshop

As part of the consultation exercise (described above), a Vision Workshop was convened, bringing together people with an interest in the future of Strabane Town Centre. This group included Council Officers, local business interests and representatives from central government departments.

The aim of the Vision Workshop was to arrive at a set of objectives that clearly and succinctly captured the essence of the town and provided a framework within which the regeneration proposals in the Masterplan could be delivered.

To assist this process, Tribal composed a series of Regeneration Objectives that were presented to the group for their consideration. The group was asked to prioritise the Objectives, and to generate some ideas for actions that would be required to help deliver them.

These objectives, together with the actions proposed by the group, are listed in the following table.

- A place where people choose to live, work and invest.
- A hospitable space where everyone (from near and far) feels welcome.
- A thriving cultural location based around drama, dance and music with a regular programme of festivals and events.
- A bustling centre providing a distinct offering of quality shops, produce and local services.
- A well managed place with high quality streets and public realm.
- A place which supports healthy and active lifestyles through the provision of high quality opportunities for sport and leisure.
- A convenient and accessible place to visit by all means of transport.
- A memorable and distinct place that makes the most of its superb setting and townscape heritage.
- A convivial place with a growing range of hotels, restaurants, bars and cafes.
- A focus for community building, empowerment and social development.

Regeneration Theme	Suggested actions to achieve themes
1 A memorable and distinct place that makes the most of its superb setting and townscape heritage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify key buildings that contribute to the 'sense of place' to help preserve the townscape character. ■ Ensure the marketing strategy promotes Strabane's unique character. ■ Improve the town centre's relationship with the river. ■ Improve the appearance of the flood defence walls. ■ Make the most of Strabane's key assets and heritage to enhance the townscape character.
2 A well managed place with high quality streets and public realm.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Complete a programme of public realm enhancements to deliver high quality streets and public spaces. ■ Establish effective town centre management arrangements to ensure good maintenance. ■ Improve the organisation of taxis in the town centre. ■ Publicise clear contact points for addressing town centre issues.
3 A bustling centre providing a distinct offering of quality shops, produce and local services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Publicise this improved image / identity through the promotion / marketing strategy. ■ Focus energy on promoting Strabane in the largely untapped market to the south. ■ Provide improved support to traders to improve the quality and range of their products / services. ■ Establish effective town centre management arrangements to help co-ordinate improvements / marketing. ■ Reinvigorate the street market. ■ Complete public realm improvements to help support the improved retail environment.

Regeneration Theme	Suggested actions to achieve themes	Regeneration Theme	Suggested actions to achieve themes
<p>4 A thriving cultural location based around drama, dance and music with a regular programme of festivals and events.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Help to establish a stronger network of community groups and organisations to contribute to the festival and events programme. ■ Introduce of range of events to celebrate cultural diversity. ■ Extend the programme of town centre events to appeal to a wider audience. ■ Extend public involvement and activity in public spaces through, for example, street performers / exhibitions. ■ Increase the number of festivals held in the town centre. ■ Enable and encourage cultural uses to spill out onto the streets / public spaces - e.g. cafes. 	<p>7 A place which supports healthy and active lifestyles through the provision of high quality opportunities for sport and leisure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Enhance the range of leisure facilities in the town centre. ■ Consider potential to provide public open space / children's play facilities. ■ Promote healthy eating as part of a healthy and active lifestyle. ■ Enhancing river walk ways to encourage more walking in this area, contributing to a healthy lifestyle choice. ■ Deliver neutral outdoor public places.
<p>5 A convivial place with a growing range of hotels, restaurants, bars and cafes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Establish effective town centre management arrangements to help create the best environment for investment. ■ Work with Police Service to improve safety in the town centre. ■ Provide suitable locations within the town centre for entertainment related business to help extend the range of offer. 	<p>8 A convenient and accessible place to visit by all means of transport.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop a parking strategy to ensure adequate parking in convenient locations. ■ Improve the organisation, control and management of taxis in the town centre. ■ Develop a wayfinding / signage strategy to ensure easy navigation of the town centre, both in vehicles and on foot. ■ Provide a friendly, convenient and reliable bus service to the town centre.
<p>6 A hospitable space where everyone (from near and far) feels welcome.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Establish effective town centre management to help plan and manage the evening economy. ■ Support the 'Shared Future' agenda and encourage community events / initiatives. ■ Work with community groups to addressing sectarian paraphernalia, e.g. through the removal of flags and graffiti. ■ Develop plan to increase accessibility to the town centre parking spaces. 	<p>9 A focus for community building, empowerment and social development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Link regeneration of the town centre, where possible, with existing social enterprises. ■ Involve existing community groups in the regeneration.
		<p>10 A place where people choose to live, work and invest.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Promote Strabane as a place to live, work and invest. ■ Change perceptions of the town through the marketing strategy. ■ Co-ordinated regeneration of the town centre will help achieve this objective.

4.3 Presenting the Vision

While it is important to set objectives that will help deliver meaningful regeneration in Strabane, it is also important that the message of the Vision is not lost. It is vital that the Vision can be presented, and understood, in the clearest of terms, thus reinforcing the message and generating the necessary level of support that the Masterplan will require to deliver a healthy, balanced and attractive Strabane Town Centre.

A Vision Statement for Strabane

It is clear that there is potential for Strabane to become a more attractive destination to people from outside the town, changing from a district centre meeting the needs of its own residents, to a town with a much broader catchment population that would, in turn, support high end facilities and services. A series of vision statements were prepared, with the aim of capturing the essence of this potential:

- Rediscovered jewel of the North West.
- The heart and soul of the community.
- The heart and soul of West Tyrone.
- A stronger magnet for the North West.
- Historic riverside town.
- Where two rivers meet.

These statements are intended to relate to the culture of the town and refer to the geography of West Tyrone, the desire being to link the town to a wider hinterland/catchment. The preferred Vision Statement was an amalgamation of several of these ideas:

“Welcome to Strabane, the heart and soul of West Tyrone”

A Logo for Strabane

Very often a logo, by itself or with a few, simple words, has the capacity to capture the essence of a place, delivering a message about that place, being instantly recognisable and a source of civic pride. As part of the Vision Workshop, Tribal proposed that a logo might be commissioned, to be used to generate interest and support for the Masterplan. The task of the logo is to capture the essence of the Masterplan, without going into unnecessary detail, and to support a branding/marketing campaign for the town. By way of an example, Tribal prepared a logo (below), to illustrate the points raised above.

The logo presented by Tribal comprises a stylised image of the town silhouetted against that Sperrin Mountains with a bridge leading into the town. The logo picks up on the theme of welcome and one of the key objectives of making more of the town's superb setting and townscape.

While the logo proposed by Tribal is intended to serve only as a discussion piece, it is intended to demonstrate the importance of presenting an attractive, accessible image. A well crafted logo can raise the profile of a town, generate interest among those who might want to visit the town, and engender civic pride among its residents.



5 Strategic design principles

5.1 Introduction

If places are to be used and cherished they must be safe, comfortable, varied and attractive. They need to be distinctive and offer variety, choice and fun. It is therefore essential that any new development in Strabane is of the highest architectural and design standard which builds on the town's strengths. There is an important interdependency between buildings and the lives of people. Good quality, well designed, buildings and spaces enhance and enrich their occupants, activities and lives and promote their well being and health; they make a positive contribution to the urban fabric; they sustain and protect the environment and provide an opportunity for sound investment.

Strategic design principles for Strabane Town Centre are structured around a series of key design themes:

- Town Centre Core.
- Enrich the existing built heritage.
- Arrival, movement, connections and parking.
- Mix of uses.
- Strong built form of the highest architectural and design standards.
- Quality materials and robust detailing.
- Public Realm.
- Management and maintenance; and
- Environmental sustainability.

5.2 Opportunities

- Connecting the town centre with the river and animating the riverside with appropriate uses.
- Building on recent developments such as the Alley Arts complex.
- Providing modern and attractive retail space.
- Attracting a greater mix of uses to the town centre and higher levels of trade.
- Establishing a town centre population.
- Addressing traffic congestion issues within the town centre particularly around Bridge Street and Market Street.
- Improving the quality of bus service with a new bus interchange facility within the town centre to provide direct public transport access to the centre.
- Introducing a town centre management body which could help to rationalise and manage the parking provision.

5.3 Challenges

- To create a legible and comprehensive town centre.
- To develop modern premises which respects the existing character of the town.
- To remodel the flood defences whilst ensuring adequate protection
- To ensure any new retail provision reinforces the existing offer and doesn't compete, killing the town centre.
- To increase journeys made by public transport.

Principle 1

Enhance and promote the Town Centre core

The aim is to enhance the fortunes of the Town Centre Core in the face of competition from recent and continuing out-of-centre developments. Allied to this, the core should be promoted as a destination focusing on the quality of place, together with a complementary

commercial offer comprising local, independent retail, leisure and tourism.

The Town Centre, and the original core, in particular, is the heart of Strabane. While the out-of-centre retail to the west provides economic benefits for the town,

it does little for the social or physical fabric of the town; indeed it is unable to, as the layout and rationale for that type of development premised on a totally different model of development to that which informs the traditional town centre.

The Town Centre Core is indicated in the photograph, below, and encompasses the following areas:

- Lower to Upper Main Street.
- Abercorn Square and Market Street.
- Castle Street.
- The roundabout adjacent to ASDA, Railway Street to Abercorn Square.
- John Wesley Street.
- Bridge Street; and;
- Butcher Street.

Some of these streets are identified in the Strabane Town Centre Plan as primary shopping frontages. Consideration should be given to extending the primary shopping frontage areas to other streets such as Dock Street and Canal Street. This may assist in the redevelopment of the SCORE site, encouraging a mixed use approach. New development on the SCORE site will need to respond to the character, grain and layout of the surrounding town centre built form to accommodate more intensive and mixed use development. All development within the Town Centre core will need to demonstrate how it respects and contributes to the character of the area.

Appropriate uses, within the Town Centre Core, might include:

- Small to medium sized retail.
- Cafes/restaurants.
- Some offices and business uses; and
- Education/learning facilities (possibly on the SCORE site).



Principle 2

Enrich the existing built heritage

Preserve and enhance the best qualities of Strabane's townscape, landscape and character and ensure that new developments make a positive response and reinforce these qualities.

The baseline report identifies a significant number of historic assets in the town centre, however, these are underplayed and often neglected and some of the more recent development detracts from the overall beneficial effect of these assets. There are a number of listed buildings and structures which are dispersed throughout the town which are protected by law however there is no conservation area designation within the town. For example, the area around Bowling Green contains a number of listed properties, but the adjacent police station complex undermines the overall quality and character.

The established scale, form of development and street pattern of the town contribute significantly to the character and identity of the town. In order to ensure that the essential character of the town's heritage and townscape is maintained, it should play an integral part of the design process. Future development proposals should be required to be in keeping with and complement Strabane's historic makeup.

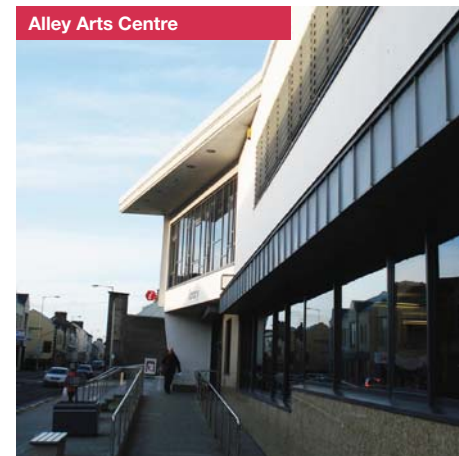
Key qualities of the built heritage include:

- Fine urban grain, which uses the topography and location adjacent to the River Mourne to good effect.
- Attractive assemblages of buildings, where building line, roof lines, façade treatments and geometries combine to create an attractive townscape.
- A number of fine civic buildings in key locations; and
- The relationship between the built and natural environment.

This principle could be applied in the following ways:

- Designate a conservation area to cover those parts of the Town Centre that possess a higher quality townscape/streetscape.
- Commission town centre design guidance, to provide developers with advice on how they might respond to the built heritage issues when preparing development proposals - such a document would:
 - Require that new developments respond to their context including any distinctive townscape and streetscape features, buildings and landscape planting;

- Ensure new buildings should respect the prevailing scale, form, plot size, block structure and urban grain of the vicinity ensuring that the integrity and setting of key historic buildings and areas of historic townscape value are preserved;
- Devise a heritage trail linking the main areas or buildings of historical interest - this could include using artwork integrated within hard landscaping to provide a visual trail; and
- Investigate the potential for securing grants for improving buildings of historic/heritage interest.



Principle 3

Create an accessible, legible and welcoming Town Centre

Strabane town should be easy to get to and move around on foot and by public transport, cycle and car. Key movement routes in and around the town centre should provide a clear structure for navigation between major attractions, public transport nodes and car parks.

The town has a strong structure of streets, however, the urban design analysis has identified a number of issues including poor quality routes and gateways, unattractive points of arrival and poor quality links between places and attractions.

Although some parts of the town centre have benefited from environmental improvements (e.g. Main Street and the area around the Alley Arts Centre), the general quality of streets and spaces is poor, and limits their attractiveness to pedestrians because of poorly specified and maintained surfaces in places, indirect crossing points and narrow pavements.

Movement through and around the town centre must seek to increase 'walkability' and maximise opportunities for walking and cycling which are the most sustainable forms of transport.

Key issues which need to be addressed include:

- Ensure that the relationship between vehicular traffic, pedestrians, and cyclists maximises accessibility for all users.

- Design streets and walks to ensure that people can easily and conveniently get to where they need to be.
- Provide attractive and convenient pedestrian and cycle links to adjoining areas enhancing the overall accessibility of the central area; and
- Enhancing key gateways and ensuring development in the vicinity of gateway locations is of the highest design standard and makes a positive contribution to the arrival experience.

At the same time, people still need to travel into the Town Centre from the surrounding residential neighbourhoods and the wider, rural hinterland. Parking is one of the key issues, when considering the effect of the private car on Strabane Town Centre. There is a need to implement a town centre parking strategy to manage all parking provision within the town centre. This should include cycle parking provision which is convenient, safe and secure.

The parking strategy should seek to achieve the following:

- Parking located on the edge of the town centre to reduce vehicle movement within the centre while still providing convenient and proximate parking.
- Parking contained within sites, behind the building frontages on the main town centre streets of Market Street, Railway Street, Abercorn Square and Main Street.

- Multi-storey car parking, if possible, to encourage efficient use of land (site next to the SCORE site).
- Devise a management strategy using restricted times, charging, etc. to encourage use of more sustainable transport methods particularly for employees within the town centre; and
- Ensure safe, direct and attractive pedestrian connections from car parks to adjoining areas of the town centre.



Principle 4

Provide a safe, attractive and animated public realm

The public realm comprises the streets, footpaths and open spaces within Strabane. These, in turn, are defined and constrained by buildings and other elements and structures. The relationship between buildings and the public realm should ensure that streets and spaces are busy, overlooked by the public fronts of buildings, and perceived to be safe throughout the day and evening.

In order to ensure Strabane has a high quality public realm, eight key objectives have been identified:

- Restore character and identity through the design of the public realm.
- Ensure a people focused pedestrian friendly environment.
- Provide pedestrian routes and crossing points which reflect desire lines.
- Simplify and eliminate street clutter.
- Specify high quality materials with simple detailing.
- Introduce tree planting.
- Animate the public realm; and
- Enrich the public realm with artistic intervention and imaginative lighting.

Each objective is underpinned by specific guidance against which proposals for development should be assessed.

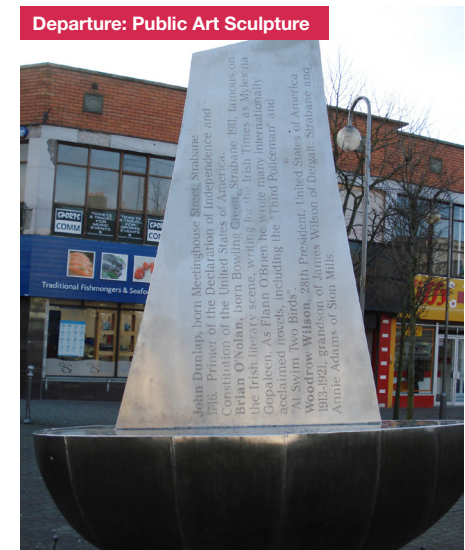
The character of the streets, squares and spaces plays a large part in people's understanding of, and identification with, a particular place. Where streets have been neglected or been negatively affected by insensitive development and poor surface materials, people tend to feel less comfortable and will start to use alternative spaces or routes.

Activity is one of the key generators of a sense of vitality in streets, squares and open spaces or within buildings and covered places. Where there is an interface between the two an active edge is formed by such simple means as a café, bar or restaurant, a busy doorway or entrance point, or a shop window.

Well designed streets and spaces should be busy and attractive places, used as backdrop for informal activities, as meeting places for friends, as a stage for special events and festivals, as places for trade and for debate, and as places to relax and observe the world around.

Enhancing and extending the range of uses increases the amount of activity and the hours during which it takes place. This ensures that the environment is perceived to be safer, increasing surveillance and deterring anti-social behaviour. It will also be important to identify other opportunities

to animate the public realm at various times of the day and night. This could include markets, festivals and open air performances, actively programming streets and spaces particularly around Market Street/Butcher Street and Railway Street. It will be important to ensure that the design and layout of spaces takes account of programming for events, markets and festivals to allow adequate level surfacing, power points and functional lighting, for example.





The edge-of-town shopping draws people (and their money) away from the town centre core.



Pedestrian connections, and the quality of the routes that people have to use, is often poor.



Under-used and windswept open space makes the town centre feel more open, less compact and less welcoming.



Derelict buildings and gap sites make the town centre feel less complete and lower the overall quality of the place.



Traffic congestion is a problem in the town centre.



Car parking dominates the town centre. It detracts from the overall quality of the town centre as a place to live, work and visit.



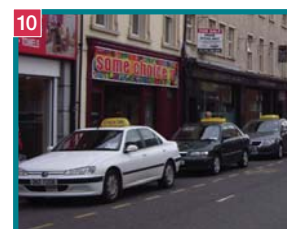
The town almost completely ignores one of its most prized assets - the River Mourne.



The poor quality of some elements of the streetscape (paving, lighting, seating, etc) undermines the overall quality of the town centre.

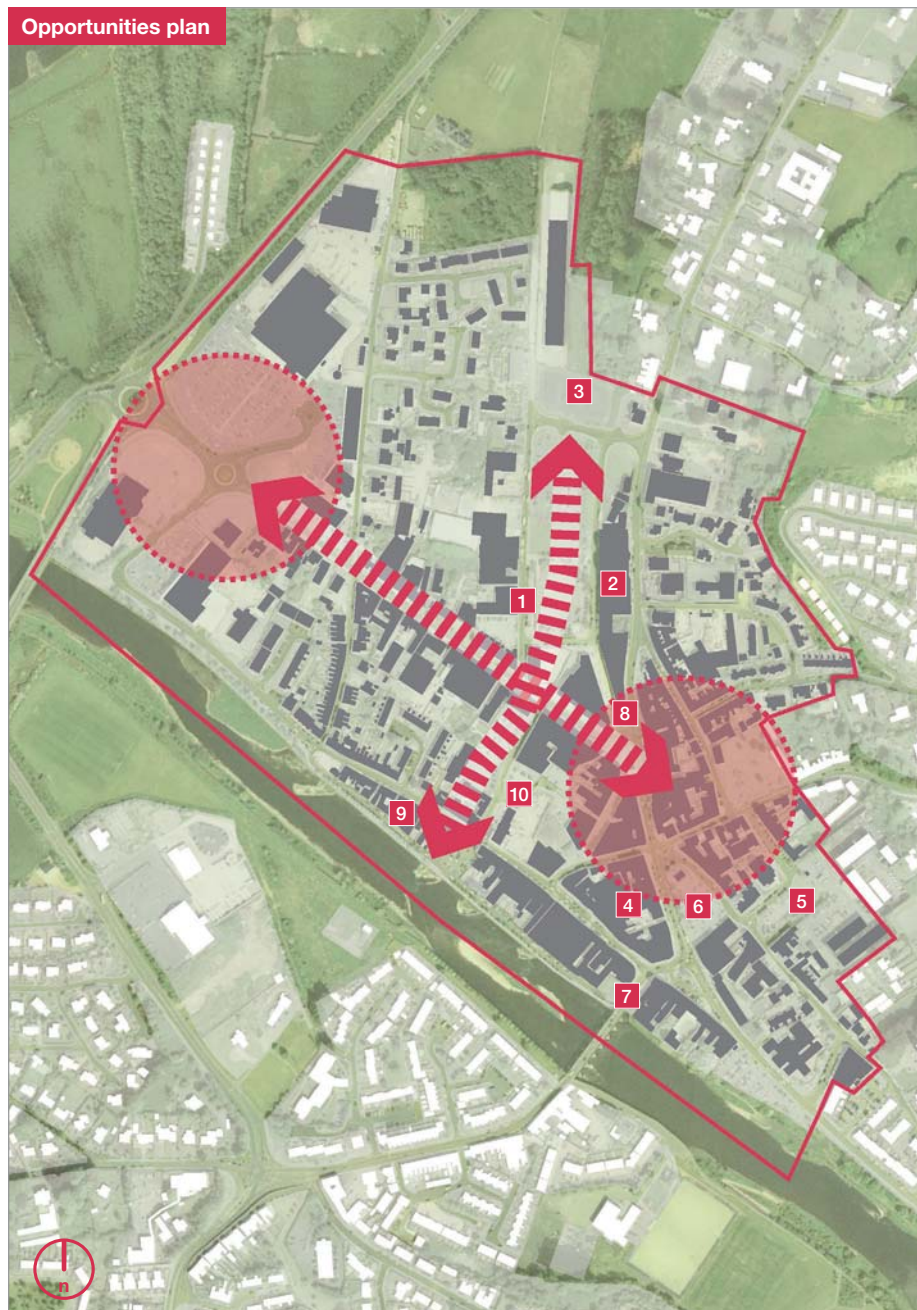


The quality of many building frontages is poor, undermining the generally high quality of the many historic buildings in the town centre.



Taxi parking dominates many of the streets in the town centre.

Opportunities plan



The SCORE site is the single largest development opportunity in the town centre core.



The Mill buildings could be developed for a number of uses, including retail, commercial, hotel or residential.



The Canal Street car parking is vital for the town centre, but could be made to work more efficiently, and made more attractive.



The built quality of many historic buildings is a fantastic asset that is under-played and could be a driving force in rejuvenating the town centre.



Bowling Green is a historically important space within the town centre, with many fine buildings facing onto it. Although the police station undermines the quality of the space.



Butcher/Market Street is an important space, because of its location and size, and because it provides parking for much of the town centre. This space could continue to provide parking spaces, while also becoming more welcoming and attractive.



The gap sites to either side of the bridge provide an opportunity for high quality development which could become a landmark and a gateway feature.



Abercorn Square is the historic heart of the town, however, the dominance of traffic, the low quality of some of the building façades and the poor quality public realm are matters that need to be addressed.



The numerous gap sites and vacant/derelict buildings are a potential opportunity offering the chance for new, high quality development.



John Wesley Street, and the various sites adjacent to it, offers the chance for a comprehensive redevelopment of a relatively large part of the core town centre.

6 Development proposals

6.1 Introduction

The Strabane Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan provides the rationale for a series of interventions, each of which is intended to revitalise the economic and social heart of the town. These interventions vary in their form: they can be physical interventions, creating new built development or improvements to the quality of the public realm, or they can take the form of economic and institutional interventions designed to provide the favourable context within which the physical development can be delivered.

This section of the document addresses the location, nature and form of the physical interventions that will help to provide Strabane with a more vibrant, attractive and successful town centre. It provides not only for the needs of its own residents, but also for a wider population drawn from its rural hinterland, as well as those who might choose to visit the town. The following information is provided, to help explain the intent of the physical interventions and place them within the context of a regeneration plan that seeks to change the profile of Strabane Town Centre over the next 10 to 15 years.

- A summary drawing – the Masterplan – which sets out the location, nature and extent of the proposed physical interventions.
- Additional detail on the potential form and appearance of the interventions.
- Explanation of the access and movement proposals that will be required to achieve the objectives of the Masterplan; and
- More detailed development descriptions, addressing matters such as costs, funding sources and time frames for delivery.

6.2 The Scope of the Masterplan

The Masterplan is illustrative, and strategic in its detail, created to provide a framework within which more detailed proposals for specific sites might be prepared, subject to the principles inherent to both the Masterplan and the Vision for Strabane Town Centre. The Masterplan reflects the need to ensure that the historic core of the town centre, located to the eastern edge of the study area, is preserved and revitalised.

The Town Centre comprises of two very different components, each of which has the capacity to provide a very different range of economic opportunity and physical experience, the one complementing the other to create a more balanced and successful place. Currently the imbalance created by the 'out-of-town' retail offer on the western edge of the town centre undermines the economic function of the original core. To that end, the Masterplan seeks to maximise the benefits of the original core's existing assets, namely its place quality, in addition to improving its economic performance. Allied to the place quality function, the social

function is also promoted – the notion of the Town Centre as a neutral space, a place where the entire community can meet, interact and integrate on equal terms.

The Masterplan

The Masterplan is the summary drawing that expresses the sum total of the physical changes that might be delivered as part of the regeneration strategy for Strabane Town Centre.



6.3 The Components of the Masterplan

There are three elements of the Masterplan that are worth highlighting, in general terms, before we consider the individual proposals in more detail.

The Arc of Opportunity

The sequence of development opportunities running from Canal Street, through the SCORE site, to John Wesley Street and thence to the proposed location of a new footbridge across the River Mourne, is the principal focus of the built development component of the Masterplan.

Although there are a number of smaller gap sites, there are few large development sites within the town centre core. This sequence of opportunity runs north to south, with a notional 'fulcrum' focused on the recently developed Alley Arts Centre on Railway Street. The development of all, or even some, of these sites would create the potential for a mix of uses (retail, cultural, commercial and residential) to attract more people to the town centre. These people, in their turn, would generate more economic activity, create the need and the potential for new and improved attractions and services and enhance the overall 'offer' of the town centre core as a place to live, work and visit.

The Public Realm

The role of the public realm, as the forum for those activities that are fundamental to the vitality of the town centre, needs to be addressed by the Masterplan if it is to succeed in delivering meaningful, sustainable regeneration. Currently much of the public realm is dominated by vehicles, typically private cars, either moving or at rest. The importance of the car cannot be denied, and the Masterplan does not seek to hinder access or remove parking provision. However, the degree to which traffic affects other activities or the quality of the public realm is a principal concern of the Masterplan and the proposals reflect the desire to create a network of spaces that are multi-functional, with priority given to people, and their needs (rather than people in their cars). Quality of place is a direct function of the quality of the experience of those who live and work in Strabane – it is not an abstract concept, but a real, vital and tangible thing. By making spaces that are attractive and safe for pedestrians, the Masterplan seeks to create the quality of place that will form the basis upon which other initiatives relating to the economic and social functions of the Town Centre.

Access and Movement

Access and movement is, beside land value, the key factor determining the success of town centre regeneration. The Masterplan, therefore, sets out a range of measures to radically improve the Town Centre, as a destination, and the means of getting there.

Improvements to the access and movement network in Strabane are not an end in themselves, but must serve identified and agreed purposes. This involves a shift away from identifying and implementing transport proposals without reference to social, environmental or other outcomes. The main aims of the Masterplan, in relation to access and movement, are to:

- Enhance the fortunes of the traditional town centre in the face of competition from recent and continuing out-of-town developments.
- Achieve a high quality of public space throughout the town centre as a key means of achieving the first objective, and as valuable objective in its own right; and
- Achieve greater use of the inclusive modes of travel, namely walking, cycling and public transport.

The masterplan



KEY

- Site boundary
- New buildings
- Car parking
- Town Centre buildings
- Public realm
- - - Long term developments
- Street tree planting
- Proposed Bridges

1. SCORE site - leisure based development
2. Boutique hotel (Smyth's Mill)
3. Arts focused development
4. John Wesley Street - mixed use/commercial development
5. Bridgehead development linking to proposed pedestrian bridge
6. Market Square - public realm and mixed use development
7. Bowling Green public realm improvements
8. Strabane bridgehead - mixed use development
9. Castle Street public realm improvements
10. Railways Street public realm improvements
11. Abercorn Square public realm improvements



0 50 100 250m

An Alternative Masterplan

Retail uses on the SCORE site

The possibility exists that the leisure use proposed for the SCORE site might not be deliverable, in which case a mixed use scenario, with a substantial element of retail, could be considered. This change in emphasis on the SCORE site is shown, opposite.

The mixed use/retail solution for the SCORE site may encompass a larger site area than the leisure solution shown on the Masterplan, overleaf. The Smyth's Mill site, together with the parking area to the north of the SCORE site, could be contained within a wider 'SCORE plus' land assembly.

The main component of this development comprises a large supermarket (with a gross floor area of 4,000 - 6,000 sq m), with multi-storey parking to the rear. This parking would be available for shoppers using the retail facilities immediately adjacent and those visiting the wider town centre area.

The Smyth's Mill building could be replaced to provide the opportunity to create more flexible development with commercial, retail and residential uses spread across three storeys facing onto the new supermarket, and two storeys facing onto Derry Road. Active frontages facing onto both sides are essential to achieving integration of the new development into the wider town centre. It should be noted that a retail led scheme could be developed without the Smyth's Mill site.

Similarly, the design of the new supermarket would have to ensure integration with the townscape, and a positive relationship with the public realm. The appearance of the building would require careful consideration, as the supermarket would be the single largest building in the town centre core, with the potential to negatively impact on the quality of the surrounding area, unless the design quality of the proposals is carefully controlled.

A development brief would be required, to provide developers with a clear understanding of the standards and quality required by the local planning authority. The development brief would provide the local authority with the tools to achieve a quality of development that not only provided a benefit for the economic profile of the town, but also assisted in the physical and social regeneration of the town centre.

Key elements of the retail led solution:

1. 4,000 - 6,000 sq m supermarket.
2. Multi-storey parking.
3. New mixed-use development on the Smyth's Mill site.
4. New leisure/arts focused building adjacent to the Alley Arts Centre.



A phased Masterplan

Delivering a long-term vision

The Masterplan has been prepared on the basis that there are a number of development opportunities that might be realised in the shorter term, while other parts of the town centre will not be available for many years, if at all.

Notwithstanding the possibility that these sites might not be available for development within the active lifetime of the Masterplan, it is important to illustrate the relationship between the early opportunity sites and those sites that form part of a longer-term vision.

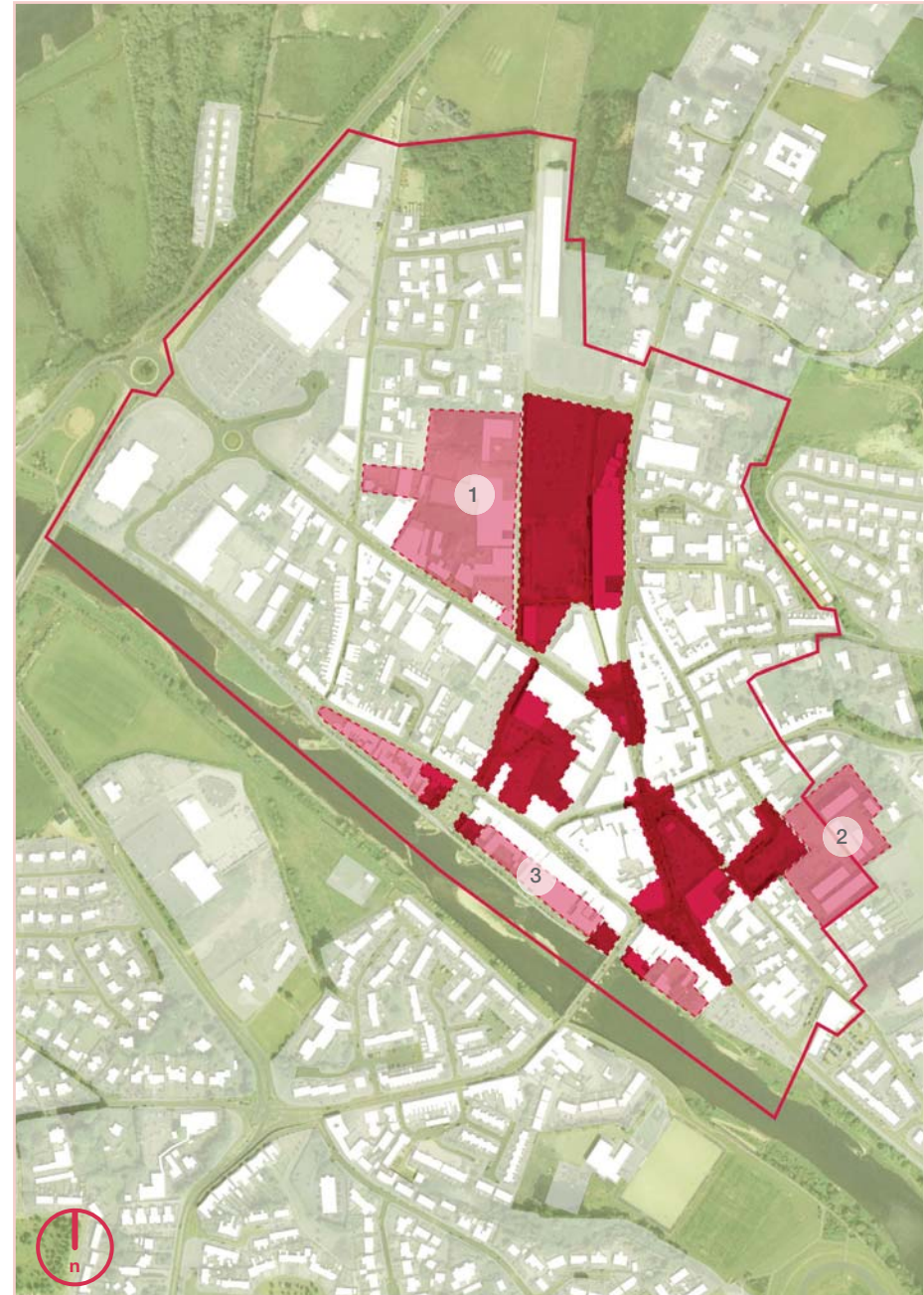
The early opportunity sites are located in a cluster around the original town centre core (focused on Abercorn Square and the Alley Arts Centre). The development sites are linked by a network of public realm improvements, creating a framework within which built development improvements can be integrated with the wider townscape.

The longer term sites are located on the edges of this core opportunity area. Part of the reason for their being considered longer term is that they are not deemed, for the purposes of this Masterplan, immediately essential to the successful delivery of the Masterplan objectives, especially the enhancement of the quality of the place and economic performance of the original town centre core, relative to the out-of-town retail.

These sites are also considered to be part of a longer term strategy by reason of the difficulties envisaged in land assembly (the area to the north of Railway Street) and the likelihood that the land might not be available for development for many years to come (the Strabane Police Station complex).

The longer term opportunity sites are shown opposite and listed below:

1. Land to the north of Railway Street, comprising a mix of ownerships and plot size.
2. Strabane Police Station.
3. Main Street (south). Riverside development.



The Public Realm

Safe, attractive and animated

The public realm is the glue that binds the Masterplan together. A series of interventions, from the design of large public squares to small changes in management will help to create a new public realm for Strabane.

The public realm proposals are focused, primarily, on the original Town Centre core, to the west of the study area.

The list of interventions, by type and scale, is quite varied. On the one hand, the space left by the historic loss of the built development along Market and Butcher Streets provides an opportunity to create a new public square for Strabane. The surrounding built development is, generally of a good quality, and the space is sufficiently large for it to be re-designed to continue to accommodate parking (as it currently does) while also accommodating a wider range of uses throughout the day. These uses would provide for people, rather than cars, and would help make the space into a social hub for the town.

The area between the Alley Arts Centre and the SCORE site is another opportunity to create an important piece of public realm, this time focused on new development with a mix of uses around the space to provide interest and activity throughout the day. Similarly, development along John Wesley Street, connecting back to Castle Street, would provide another piece of new public realm, this time underpinned by new retail and leisure development that would help promote the Town Centre core as a destination offering an alternative, yet

complementary offer to the out-of-centre retail to the west.

Linking these spaces (and others) are a series of streetscape improvement schemes, all of which are designed to provide a more pleasant, safer and convenient way for pedestrians to walk between the different attractions that the Town Centre offers.

The nature of these streetscape improvements would vary depending on their location and their place status (i.e. their position in a hierarchy of different spaces). Across all the schemes, however, the same rules would apply, as set out in Principle 4. The following sites have been identified as being important:

1. Market Square.
2. Alley Arts Centre/SCORE.
3. John Wesley Street.
4. Castle Street.
5. Bowling Green.
6. Abercorn Square.
7. Railway Street.



Townscape

Enriching the existing built heritage

The quality of the townscape in parts of Strabane Town Centre is of sufficiently high quality that some consideration should be given to agreeing a mechanism for its protection.

The quality of the townscape is not limited to a few set-piece buildings, but is more the product of discrete assemblages of buildings, on the one hand, and the general urban form (i.e. the layout of the streets), on the other. The buildings are, typically, domestic rather than institutional or commercial/industrial, often with retail below and other uses above. There is a consistency of façade, elevation, building line, materials and height/massing that creates a sense of place and character that is memorable, despite the occasional, unfortunate modern insertion.

Taken together with the town's setting, on the banks of the River Mourne, there is much in the townscape to be admired and protected.

Protection of the townscape quality and character could be achieved either by designating part of the Town Centre as a Conservation Area or, alternatively, as an Area of Townscape Character.

While the aim of such designations should not be to stifle development potential or interest, it would allow for some control over the quality of the proposed development, the objective being to ensure that proposals are in keeping with their setting and that

they contribute to the existing quality and character. This is not to say that development proposals should be 'traditional' - there are many examples of modern development that are well integrated with, and sympathetic to, traditional built form.

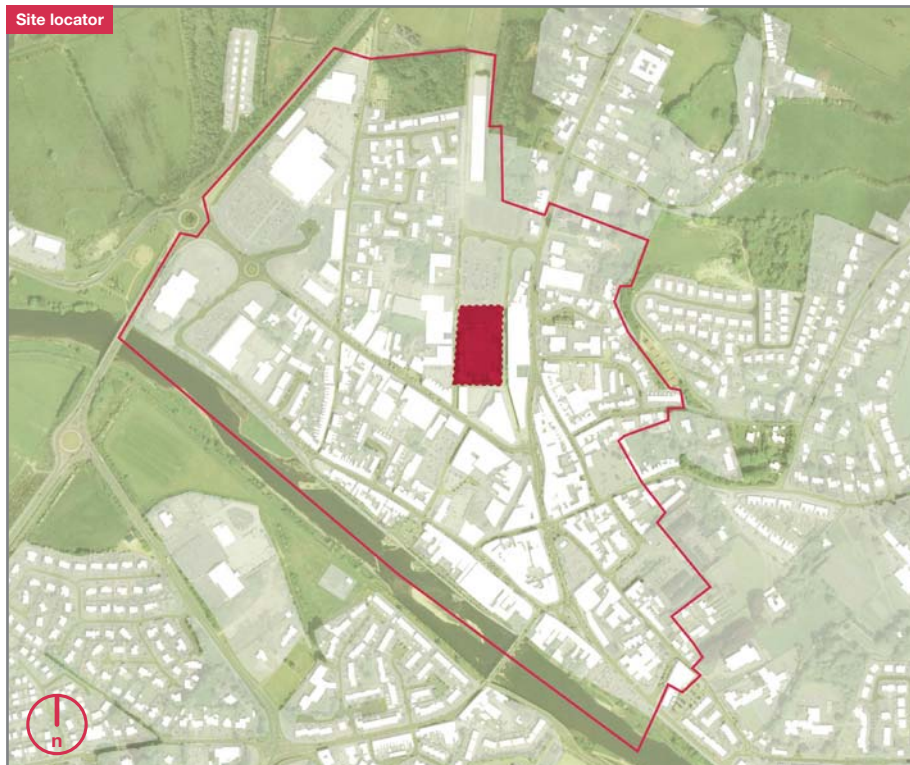
Given the emphasis in the Masterplan on the place quality of the original town centre core, as a counterpoint to the economic attractions of the out-of-town retail, any measures intended to celebrate the existing quality and promote improvements to that quality should be given careful consideration.

Allied to the designation of a Conservation Area or Area of Townscape Character, other initiatives, such as frontage improvement schemes, public realm works and shop front grants would also help to raise the quality of the townscape and add to the overall attraction of the Town Centre.



SCORE (option 1 leisure use)

The SCORE site forms a large hard landscaped area of public open space, 0.38 hectares in size. The space was once the canal head which was subsequently filled in. Adjacent to the site is the Alley Arts Centre and the vacant Smyth's Mill Building. The site offers the greatest regeneration opportunity in the town centre due to its size, central location and single ownership.



It is vital that the end use developed on the SCORE site offers the maximum regeneration benefits to Strabane. There is only one opportunity to make the right decision on its end use. As a result, two possible options for the site have been developed with a rationale for each.

The SCORE site could accommodate a new leisure centre for Strabane and its hinterland, replacing the Riversdale centre. Alternatively, there is public support for a private sector led leisure scheme such as ten pin bowling. The Masterplan recommends that Strabane District Council should have the first option to acquire the site from DSD for a public leisure centre. Should this not be deliverable, a development brief should be issued to the market for a privately led leisure or retail proposal.

Rationale

Social & Community Benefits

- New facility would add to the leisure offer in the town centre, especially for children.
- Create a facility for children, youths and adults to use in a safe and neutral environment.
- Support council led healthy lifestyles initiatives.
- Available for community and educational use. Youth clubs, dance groups, indoor bowls etc. could all find a home in the new facility.
- Complementary to the new bridge project.
- Strong public support for leisure via public consultation.

- Promotes government's Shared Future agenda, providing a shared space in the heart of the town centre.

Economic Benefits

- New jobs created in the town centre.
- Diversify Strabane's offer, decreasing reliance on the retail sector.
- Leisure use would help to present a diverse and distinctive offering in the North West - A town built around a hub for the people. Building an identity for Strabane based around having community and people at its heart.
- Will not take existing trade from town centre retailers.
- Create increased footfall in the town, attracting people in to spend time.
- Would serve a wider catchment area including cross border.
- With tourism viewed as a potential source of future growth in Northern Ireland and especially in the Western corridor, leisure could be a valuable asset in tandem with hotel provision. Providing a source of entertainment in bad weather for tourists.

Cultural, Leisure and Tourism Benefits

- Would create and benefit a cultural, leisure quarter alongside the Alley Arts Centre.
- Opportunity to create a further flagship development in the town.
- Opportunity to develop the evening economy around a leisure facility.

- A leisure facility would complement a town centre hotel either at the Smyth's Mill or Classic Bar site as well as acting as a catalyst for the regeneration of the surrounding area.
- Increase potential to attract new visitors to the town.

Practical Delivery issues

- SCORE site is currently public open space. A change of use to leisure would therefore be more acceptable in planning terms.
- Riversdale is currently 35 years old and needs refurbishment / replacement.
- Existing Leisure Centre land can be sold off for Council revenue.
- Increase potential income to Council through rates and income.
- DSD, SDC and Planning Service can work in partnership to deliver.

Difficulties

- Finance and delivery requires a partnership approach and will take time to deliver. It is unlikely to be privately driven as local incomes mean a private members club is likely to be unsustainable.
- Lack of rates income to the Council. There could be a net annual loss if not adequately funded and specified.
- As incomes weaken post boom, will people be able to afford leisure spend?

- A leisure development would force retailers to go to an out of town location if they continue to perceive Strabane as a viable location.

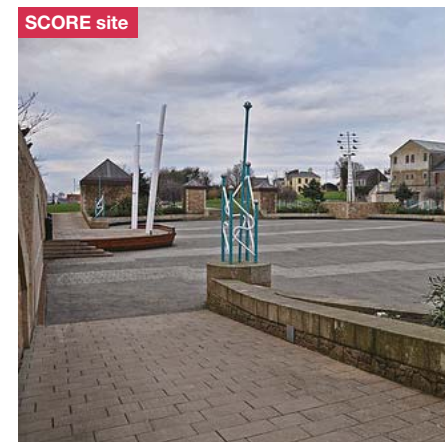
Public sector interventions to help bring project forward

There are a number of specific actions that public sector could undertake in order to help to bring forward a leisure use on the site:

- Sale of land – the site is public sector owned and they can control who it is sold to and for what use. Currently its ownership sits with DSD.
- Transfer of land - It may be necessary to include the grassed area to the north between the SCORE site and the existing DRD car park to provide a sufficient footprint for a new leisure centre.
- Planning – the form and nature of development on the site will require planning permission. There is the opportunity to guide that through the development control process, and potentially more actively through the issuing of development guidance by the production of a development brief.
- There may be the possibility of using public sector funding to support the creation of public space.
- The development of a Leisure Centre is likely to be public sector led.

Funding Sources

- DSD- Income from the sale of land currently goes into central pot, rather than being ring-fenced and recycled. Post RPA when land is passed into council ownership, there may be greater opportunities to ring-fence and recycle land receipts for the benefit of the town centre.
- SDC's, and DRD's mainstream budget.
- Leisure centre funded via SDC could be offset to a limited degree by sale of existing site for residential use.



Sainsburys with apartments above, St John Street, London



Some impressions of the SCORE leisure focused solution

Delivery

The site is wholly in public ownership through DSD. There is therefore public control over when it is released and for what uses. There are unlikely to be any major vehicular access issues into the site as access from the Derry Road is good. The planning designation of the site is currently public open space, therefore it should be relatively easy to change it to leisure use.

Strabane District Council or the new council under RPA will be required to develop a strategy for leisure provision. It will also be necessary to develop a funding strategy, identifying possible financial sources for the relocation of the leisure centre. There will also be a need to achieve a level of public and political agreement on the location for the leisure centre. This will have an impact on timescales (town centre is a more neutral location).

The leisure centre providers SDC need to take the lead in partnership with the landowners DSD to take development forward.

SDC need to:

- Establish availability of funding.
- Identify appropriateness of location.

DSD need to:

- Agree value or transfer land to SDC.

Priority and timescales

High priority as it is the key opportunity site in the town centre. It is crucial as a potential significant footfall generator to bring life, activity and customers into the town centre.

Likely timescales are 3-5 years due to funding availability for leisure centre:

Yr 1 Produce guidance.

Yrs 1-2 Resolve ownership, parking and planning.

Yrs 2-5 Development brought forward in an improved market.

SCORE site leisure proposal



View towards the rear of the Alley Arts Centre



New public space to rear of the Alley Arts Centre



View from Ambrose the Pig



Rear of the Leisure centre from DRD car park



SCORE (option 2 mixed use development)

The score site forms a large hard landscaped area of public open space. The space was once the canal head which was subsequently filled in. Adjacent to the site is the Alley Arts Complex and the vacant Smyth's Mill Building and adjoining buildings.



The alternative development of the SCORE site could deliver a mixed use development including office, retail leisure and recreation within a shared social space. Developers coming forward in response to such an opportunity would be encouraged to be creative and adventurous in their proposals.

A supermarket or small mall could be delivered on the SCORE site, although operators may wish to acquire adjoining lands to increase the development size.

Rationale Benefits

- A retail anchor in the town centre may counter-balance the current trend for edge of town retailing.
- Footfall into the town centre may be increased.
- Car parking needs may require a multi-storey as part of the retail development.
- Surrounding shops may benefit from the increased footfall.
- Would be a major new investment into Strabane town centre creating a potentially significant number of new jobs.
- Given the perceived demand, this would be responding to the 'market' thereby reducing the likely need for public money.

Difficulties

- Economic data suggests that Northern Ireland's provision of retail is closer to income levels and thus additional supply would increase the level of potential displacement.
- Retailing, much like construction, is a secondary activity, dependant on economic growth to deliver spending power. With a Northern Irish public sector squeeze on the horizon and possible tax rises, real income will fall. This places downward pressure on retail sales potential.
- A major food retailer will want to sell a wide range of goods such as clothing and stationery, which may have a negative impact on existing traders.
- Major store is likely to have an adverse impact on town centre retailers, resulting in closures, especially among independents.
- Is likely to draw retailers out of Main Street creating a higher vacancy rate and dereliction.
- Likely to add to congestion in the town centre.
- Will create a large retail box which may not integrate into the current town centre structure. The design of a retail development is unlikely to complement the existing award-winning Arts & Culture Centre.
- Would not add anything new to Strabane, merely adding to existing range of retail provision. Moving into tougher economic times means diverse offerings could help to distinguish places and insulate against sector specific challenges.

The site is wholly in public ownership through DSD. There is, therefore, public control over when it is released and for what uses. However, a larger scale retail development may require inclusion of the adjacent mill building. This would bring additional ownership complications. There are unlikely to be any major vehicular access issues into the site as access from the Derry Road is good, although the issue of car parking required would have to be fully addressed as part of any development. The planning designation of the site is currently public open space, therefore it would require a change to retail use. However, this is likely to be achievable in the town centre, although there may be a requirement to carry out a retail impact assessment as part of a planning application.

Sainsburys, Greenwich



Tesco, Ludlow



- The sale of the site for retail development in preference to a leisure centre may result in bad publicity and a hostile response from the general public.
- The exchange rate is currently favourable for cross border shopping - forecasts from organisations such as Oxford Economics suggest that Sterling may appreciate in the post recession recovery thus eroding the advantage of cross border trade flows.
- If retailing responds swiftly to market shifts, the possibility of a future vacant site in the town centre is strong.

Public sector interventions to help bring project forward

Retail development on the site would be private sector led. However, there are a number of specific actions that public sector could undertake in order to help to bring forward a retail development on the site:

- Sale of land - the site is public sector owned and they can control who it is sold to and for what use. Currently its ownership sits with DSD.
- Planning - the form and nature of development on the site will require planning permission. There is the opportunity to guide that through the development control process, and potentially more actively through the issuing of development guidance by the production of a development brief. This will be more appropriate in the case of a private sector led development. A retail impact assessment is also likely as part of the application in order to ascertain the capacity for a new retail scheme and the impact it may have on the existing retailers in the town.
- There may be the possibility of using public sector funding to support the creation of public space.

Funding Sources

- DSD - Income from sale of land currently goes into central pot, rather than being ring-fenced and recycled. Post RPA when land is transferred to SDC, there may be greater opportunities to ring-fence and recycle land receipts for the benefit of the town centre.
- SDC's, Planning Service and DRD mainstream budget.
- Private developer - open space funding directly or through planning gain.

Sainsburys, Dartmouth



Some impressions of the SCORE retail focused solution

Delivery

There will be a need to achieve a level of public and political agreement on the location of a leisure centre. This will have an impact on timescales (town centre is a more neutral location).

Private sector developers would need to take the lead in partnership with the landowners DSD, to take development forward. There is a need to:

- Establish availability of funding.
- Identify appropriateness of location.

DSD need to:

- Agree value.
- Appropriate development.

Priority and timescales

High priority as it is the key opportunity site in the town centre. It is crucial as a potential significant footfall generator to bring life, activity and customers into the town centre.

Likely timescales are 3-5 years:

Yr 1 Produce guidance.
Yrs 1-2 Resolve ownership, parking and planning.
Yrs 2-5 Development brought forward in an improved market.



View from the rear of Alley Arts Centre



View from Railway Street to Smyth's Mill



New public space to rear of Alley Arts Centre



Rear of new retail scheme from existing DRD car park



Smyth's Mill and adjoining buildings, Canal Street / Derry Road

Former Mill buildings located between the Canal Street and Derry Road. The buildings are now mostly derelict and offer a major redevelopment opportunity as a mixed use retail and residential scheme. A large town centre hotel would also be appropriate.



Public sector interventions to help bring project forward

Development on the site is likely to be brought forward by the private sector. Interventions from the public sector to assist with bringing it forward could include:

- Planning – As well as working with developers and landowners through the development control process to guide development, active development guidance (redevelopment/refurbishment and scale, height and massing) could also be produced.
- Land sale/lease for parking – There is limited opportunity to provide sufficient parking on the Mill site itself to serve a redevelopment. DRD could potentially lease part of its adjacent site for use as car parking by a redeveloped Mill site.
- Undertaking or requiring public realm improvements around the site will enhance the attractiveness of the Mill site for redevelopment.
- Assisting and enabling delivery of redevelopment of the SCORE site will enhance the attractiveness of the Mill site for development.

Cost and Funding

Redevelopment is likely to be undertaken by the private sector at their own cost.

Additional potential sources of funding include:

- Income from lease of parking.
- Planning gain / direct development as part of Mill redevelopment.

The site is privately owned, which means that the public sector has limited control over when and for what it is brought forward. Delivery may be further complicated if the site is in multiple ownership – it is understood that there are currently 2 owners.

Delivery

The provision of parking may be an issue. The possibility of using part of the SCORE site may need to be considered, or dual use of spaces in evenings.

The Mill building is almost vacant. It is likely that a redevelopment rather than a refurbishment will be appropriate. The building is not listed and it is considered that planning permission should not be an impediment.

Delivery will be private sector led – probably led by either the owner or developer.

Other partners with a role will include:

- Planning Service – produce guidance in partnership with SDC.
- SDC – may need to work with owners/developer to help resolve ownership and parking.

Priority and timescales

High/Medium priority as bringing this high profile site back into use with a quality development can significantly contribute to improving the image of Strabane.

Yr 1 Produce guidance.

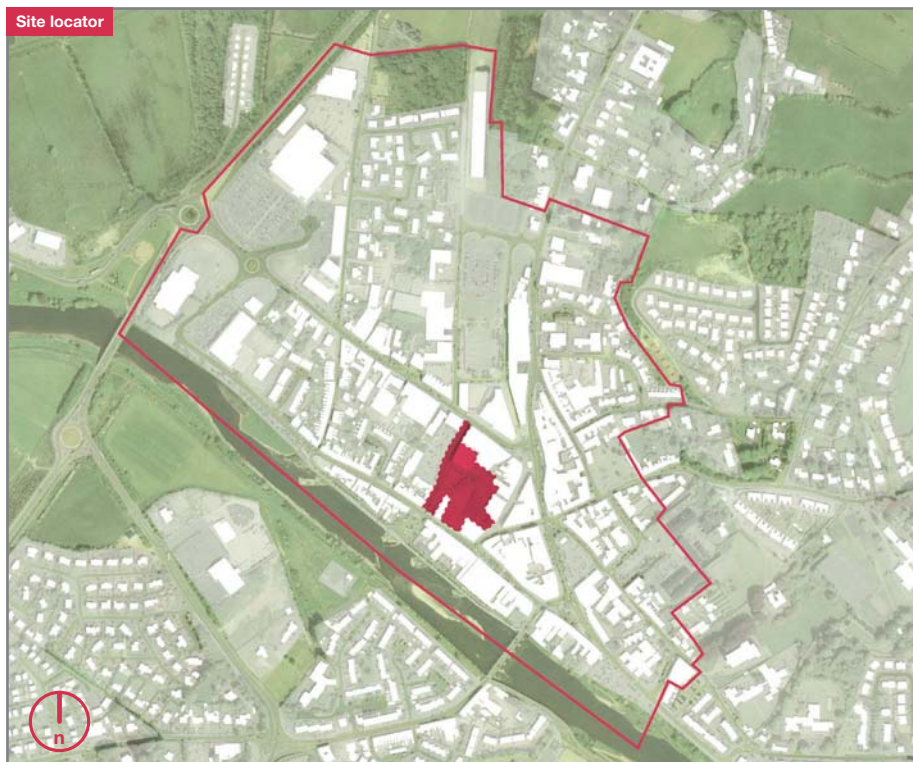
Yrs 1-2 Resolve ownership, parking and planning.

Yrs 2-5 Development brought forward in an improved market.



John Wesley Street

Located within the town centre retail core, this vacant site fronts onto John Wesley Street as well as linking through to Main Street and Castle Street. The site is currently used as informal car parking, however it offers an opportunity to develop new retail units which meet modern requirements in the town centre. Living Over The Shops is also a viable option at this location.



Public sector interventions to help bring project forward

As it is privately owned development on the site is likely to be brought forward by the private sector. Interventions from the public sector to assist with bringing it forward could include:

- Planning – as well as working with developers and landowners through the development control process to guide development, active development guidance (redevelopment/refurbishment and scale, height and massing) could also be produced.
- Construction of the footbridge which would land close to the site could increase footfall along John Wesley Street – particularly if there was a car park to serve the town centre provided on the other side of the bridge.
- Public realm improvements along John Wesley Street, could help to increase the attractiveness and use of the street and encourage investment in adjacent property.

Cost and Funding

Redevelopment of the site is likely to be undertaken by the private sector at their own cost.

Potential sources of funding include:

- Mainstream funding of guidance.
- No funding secured yet for the footbridge. DRD and DSD may fund it, but this has not been agreed.

If the two footbridges are not delivered at the same time, this will be the second of the two.

- There may be the possibility of some planning gain/direct development as part of the site redevelopment, however this should focus on improving the link to Castle Street.
- DSD, DRD and SDC funding of public realm improvements.

The site is privately owned, which means that the public sector has limited control over when and for what it is brought forward. However it is in single ownership which makes delivery potentially less complicated.

Also most of the site is cleared and potentially ready to be developed.

New retail development, John Wesley Street



Planning permission for a mixed use retail and leisure redevelopment should be relatively straightforward given the sites location in the town centre. The proposed footbridge at the end of John Wesley Street does not currently have planning permission.

Market demand will be the key issue, as it is understood that market interest has been limited in the past. Previous Strabane 2000 project on the site did not happen. Competition from edge of town sites with lower development costs will impact on the level of interest. Current owners do not appear to be getting an income from the car parking that is taking place on their land, which means that redevelopment will not lead to a loss of parking income.

Delivery will be private sector led – probably led by either the site owner or a developer.

Other partners with a role will include: Planning Service – produce development guidance in partnership with SDC. SDC, DSD and DRD – bring forward public realm works and the footbridge to support and enable the site redevelopment.

Priority and timescales

Medium – It is probably the most significant standalone private development opportunity site in the town centre. It provides the opportunity to get a larger floorplate retail / leisure scheme into the centre, and improve the mix/offer.

Yr 1 Produce guidance.

Yrs 2-4 Bring forward public realm improvements to John Wesley Street and construction of the footbridge.

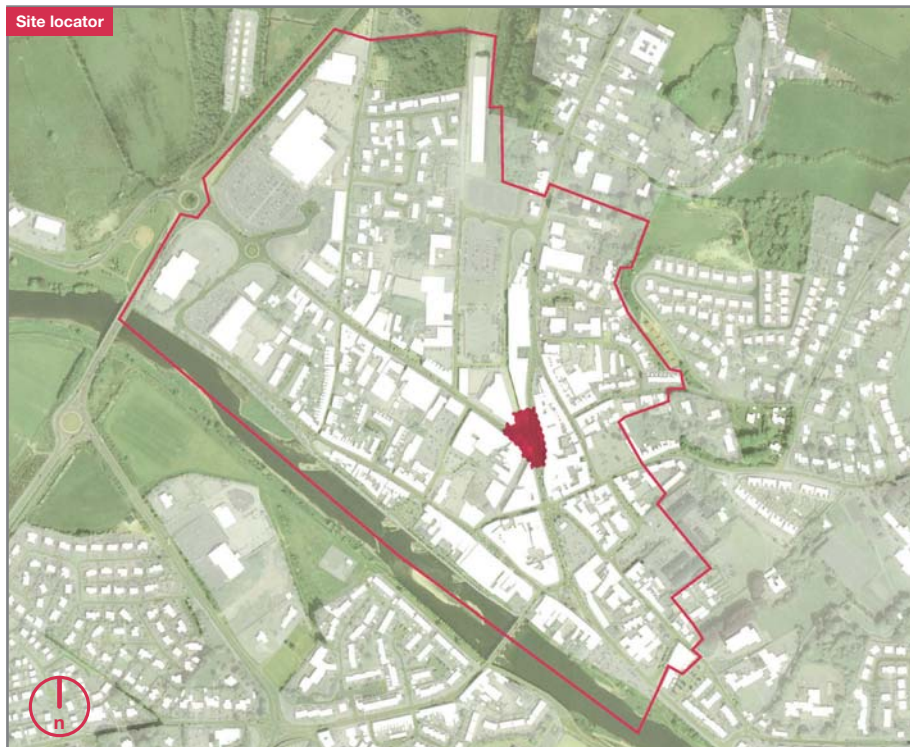
Yrs 4-7 Development brought forward in an improved market.



Abercorn Square Improvements

The square is currently a major traffic junction in the town where congestion regularly occurs. Buses and taxis use the Square as a pick up and drop off point.

The public space in the square includes a Pagoda and a piece of public art. The area offers an opportunity to improve the public realm, making it less traffic dominated and a pleasant space to spend time.



Public sector interventions to help bring project forward

- Production of scheme plan/design.
- Predominantly hard landscaping and highways works to the pavements.
- Façade and signage improvements.
- Shop front design guidance (plus nominal sum to encourage compliance).

Funding Sources

- Potentially some vesting of land required to ensure continuous pedestrian access.
- Likely to need to be public sector funded. Potential sources may include DSD, DRD, PEACE III, SDC.
- Private sector may subsequently invest in the appearance of adjacent properties as a result. Should be guidelines put in place to guide that investment.

Deliverability

- Highway alterations.
- Publicly owned space.
- Funding.
- Project readiness.
- Buildings in private ownership.
- Planning and highways approvals.

Priority and timescales

Medium - as the fulcrum connecting Railway Street, the SCORE/Alley Arts Centre sites and Market Square, this is an important linking space. However, Market Square and SCORE/Alley sites take precedence for future funding.



Railway Street Improvements

Railway Street is a vital link between the town centre and the major retail developments at the Lifford roundabout. Currently, the pedestrian links are extremely poor and incomplete in places. Major investment is required to improve this link road and invite shoppers up into the town centre along this route.



Public sector interventions to help bring project forward

- Production of scheme plan/design.
- Predominantly hard landscaping and highways works to the pavements.
- Façade and signage improvements.
- Shop front design guidance (plus nominal sum to encourage compliance).

Funding Sources

- Likely to need to be public sector funded. Potential sources may include DSD, DRD, PEACE III, SDC as well as Interreg/European funding.

Deliverability

- Project readiness.
- Ownership.
- Approvals.

Priority and timescales

Medium/high priority as there are opportunities to secure funding in the short term. Improvements to this site would act as a statement of intent, and would also allow for the development of public realm standards that could be applied elsewhere in the town centre.

Yr 1 Secure funding.
Resolve ownership, parking and planning.
Prepare development proposals.
Yr 2 Implementation.

Break in footpath



Railway Street



Butcher/Market Street Improvements

Currently a DRD car park, sitting between Butcher Street and Market Street, this space offers an excellent opportunity to create a centrally located public space for the Strabane. Creating a dual use space, for car parking, as well as a space for events and the farmers market, in a highly visible location, would offer major benefits to the town.



Public sector interventions to help bring project forward

- Production of scheme plan/design.
- Predominantly hard landscaping and highways works to the car park and pavements.
- Façade and signage improvements.
- Shop front design guidance (plus nominal sum to encourage compliance).
- Development sites to south west and south east corners to be acquired, proposals prepared and implemented.

Funding Sources

- Likely to need to be public sector funded. Potential sources may include DSD, DRD, PEACE III, SDC.
- Private sector may subsequently invest in the appearance of adjacent properties as a result. Should be guidelines put in place to guide that investment.

Deliverability

- Project readiness.
- Ownership.
- Approvals.

Priority and timescales

Medium/high priority as this site, comprising the open space and the adjacent built development opportunity site, has the potential to become the principal public space in Strabane.

Yr 1 Prepare design guidance.

Yrs 1-2 Resolve ownership, parking and planning

Yr 2 Secure funding.

Yrs 2-5 Development brought forward in an improved market.

Butcher Street junction



Market Street



Bowling Green Improvements

Currently a car park, Bowling Green is bounded by high quality built heritage. The square could act as the centre point for a newly designated conservation area for Strabane.

An environmental improvement scheme was completed in March 1995, however the square is in much need of investment into public realm and building frontage improvements.



Public sector interventions to help bring project forward

- Production of scheme plan/design.
- Predominantly hard landscaping and highways works to the car park and pavements.
- Façade and signage improvements.
- Shop front design guidance (plus nominal sum to encourage compliance).

Cost and Funding

Key costs

- Public realm works, mix of hard and soft landscape.

Funding sources

- Heritage funding NI/NI Environment Agency funding of historic buildings – Listed Building Grant Aid Scheme. DoE Environment & Heritage Service, Historic Buildings Grant for repair and restoration of listed buildings.
- DSD Environmental Improvement Scheme.

Deliverability

- Project readiness.
- Ownership of car park.
- Approvals.

Priority and timescales

Medium priority as this site is dependent on the Market Square proposals coming forward. Also, presence of Police Station is an issue that needs resolving.



Castle Street

Despite being the only semi-pedestrianised street in Strabane, Castle Street has failed to become a lively place and businesses are struggling. For this reason, it is proposed that traffic is reintroduced. However, there is no certainty that the decline in the street is due to its closure to vehicle traffic.



Four possible alternatives are suggested:

1. Reintroduce traffic and on-street parking one-way from Abercorn Square with the carriageway defined by street furniture and parking bay.
2. As 1, but rebuild as a conventional street.
3. Keep the present arrangement, and rely on the regeneration of the rest of centre to deliver more footfall and customers.
4. Keep the street design broadly intact, but organise the street for use as a permanent taxi rank.

Use of the street as a taxi rank would bring people to the street. It would also enable taxis to be cleared from where they currently cause obstruction to buses and other users.

Public sector interventions to help bring project forward

- Production of scheme plan/design, using a preferred option drawn from the solutions described above (amended, as appropriate).
- Predominantly hard landscaping and highways works to the car park and pavements.
- Façade and signage improvements.
- Shop front design guidance (plus nominal sum to encourage compliance).

Funding Sources

- Likely to need to be public sector funded. Potential sources may include DSD, DRD, PEACE III, SDC.
- Private sector may subsequently invest in the appearance of adjacent properties as a result. Should be guidelines put in place to guide that investment.

Deliverability

- Project readiness.
- Ownership.
- Approvals.

Priority and timescales

Medium priority as interventions on this site are linked to works on John Wesley Street. If funding sources could be identified, this might change the relative priority.



Bridge Heads

Approaching the town centre across the bridges (existing and proposed) from the South, these sites are highly visible. The sites are in private ownership and currently vacant/under-used land.

These sites offer the opportunity for landmark buildings acting as gateways into the town. Residential development overlooking the River Mourne would offer spectacular views.



Public sector interventions to help bring project forward

Development on the site is likely to be brought forward by the private sector. Interventions from the public sector to assist with bringing it forward could include:

- Planning – as well as working with developers and landowners through the development control process to guide development, active development guidance (redevelopment/refurbishment and scale, height and massing) could also be produced.

Cost and Funding

Redevelopment is likely to be undertaken by the private sector at their own cost.

Delivery

These sites are vacant/under-used. It is likely that a redevelopment rather than a refurbishment will be appropriate. Where buildings exist, they are not listed and it is considered that planning permission should not be an impediment.

Delivery will be private sector led – probably led by either the owner or developer.

Other partners with a role will include:

- Planning Service – produce guidance in partnership with SDC.
- SDC – may need to work with owners/developer to help resolve ownership and parking.

Priority and timescales

High/Medium priority as bringing these high profile sites back into use with a quality development can significantly contribute to improving the image of Strabane, as well as being a 'quick win'.

Yr 1- Produce guidance.

Yrs 1-2 - Resolve ownership, parking and planning.

Yrs 2-5 - Development brought forward in an improved market.

Strabane Bridge Head site



6.4 Key Access and Movement Proposals

The following measures are designed to help meet the development objectives. The identified main transport and accessibility issues are dealt with in turn.

Town centre public realm trade off with space for traffic and parking

The strong and growing competition from the large-scale out-of-centre retail facilities in Strabane has led to a decline in the importance and attraction of the traditional town centre. This was inevitable, and is a classic example of why attempts have been made elsewhere in Britain to limit the spread of out-of-centre retail. As a result, supporting counter measures will be required if the traditional centre is to survive as a credible retail and business centre.

The most obvious way of starting to redress the balance would be to call a halt to further out-of-centre expansion, and to refocus development in the traditional town centre. Aside from this, the most likely way of reinvigorating the centre is to improve its environment and accessibility for trading and community activities. Another aspect of town centre reinvigoration will be to reposition its offer from being the main retail centre of Strabane to being a more broadly-based centre with leisure, community, cultural and other activities. The aim will be to make it a destination to choose rather than avoid.

All of the specific measures set out below are consistent with this approach and are designed to enhance the appeal of the town centre as a place to visit and spend time. These include making the centre more accessible, reducing intrusive elements such as parking and traffic, improving paving and landscape and other aspects of the public realm, and maintenance and cleaning.

Providing greater priority to movement on foot, cycle and bus is one way in which Strabane can capitalise on the traffic relief that has been gained from the by-pass. Most European towns that invested in by-passes have taken the opportunity to reduce traffic space and increase pedestrian space in the town centre. Strabane needs to follow this example.

Linking the traditional and new retail areas

The expectation that the new retail facilities in the western part of the town would help to revive the traditional centre was not based on any evidence, and can now be shown to have been unrealistic. In order to address this issue, better connectivity is required between the two areas.

The first and foremost requirement is to provide a continuous public footway on both sides of Railway Street. We have been unable to find any other UK example of a town whose main approach street lacks a footway. Issues of land ownership that have prevented implementation to date must be overcome.

The provision of a footway is a priority, but Railway Street should also be designed as an attractive boulevard that will attract business and footfall.

The other main mechanism for linking the two areas is to provide frequent bus services along Railway Street. Extending or overlapping the town services in a re-configured route pattern can achieve this.

Increasing access on foot, cycle and by bus

Footways and other pedestrian routes into the town need to be improved by detailed street design and landscaping schemes. Key examples have been identified in this study at:

- Derry Road/Patrick Street
- Abercorn Square
- Main Street/Barrack Street/Church Street
- The whole of Railway Street

Other examples are the proposed new pedestrian bridges over the river. Further improvements could be identified on the approach routes to the centre.

Cycling is sparse in Strabane at present, but it has the scope for this activity to increase. Reviewing the street layouts and junction designs from a cyclist perspective could result in a number of relatively small scale improvements to make cycling safer and more pleasant. As pointed out in the earlier Atkins report, the gradients on parts of the Strabane road system need be no more of a deterrent than

they are in other towns. The cycling habit could be inculcated amongst the town's student population, and reinforced by "bike buddy" and cycle training schemes.

There is also considerable potential to reduce car use within the town by improving the bus services. While the current services were a step forward when they were introduced, they need to be revamped not just to cater for demand but to generate demand. Only in this way can their future viability be achieved. This is discussed further in the next section.

Overall, meeting the identified transport objectives will require a shift of investment and planning effort away from roads and parking and towards walking, cycling and bus. The effectiveness of this strategy should be measured in terms of the objectives set. As this can be complex to quantify, a more simple single measure may be preferred, namely the proportion of people arriving in the centre by non-car modes. This would require a simple periodic street interview survey. Such a survey could also be used to monitor the trend in footfall at key locations, as part of a standard town centre health check.

The following is a suggested target mode split for town centre arrivals.

The change in mode share, and in particular the target reduction in car driver mode share is not a measure of how many cars will be used. An increased number of visitors may result

Mode	Currently	2015	2019
Walk all the way	not known	18	20
Cycle		10	10
Bus		7	20
Car Passenger		15	15
Car Driver		45	30
Taxi		5	5
		100	100

in an increase in the number of cars, despite a fall in the car mode share.

A similar exercise could be used to monitor travel trends to the out-of-centre retail areas.

Bus service improvements and integration to promote use

Although a small town, Strabane now has a local bus service that links the main residential areas with the town centre. This service has reportedly not achieved the passenger numbers hoped for. The difficulty is that in order to attract passengers, there needs to be convenient and direct routes and high frequencies. This is particularly so in a small town where distances are not great and can be walked. Providing the necessary routes and high frequencies requires sufficient vehicles and drivers, and these of course cost money. Quality services can only be viable if the quality is sufficiently good to attract enough passengers and revenue to cover the cost. In most countries with good public transport, a portion of the

revenue is met out of public taxation, and the public payback is through lower investment in roads and parking, more socially inclusive transport, less traffic and a better environment. This approach, however, is not currently accepted in the UK.

The pursuit of financial viability in bus operation can promote efficiency, but without a longer term perspective it stifles the ability to develop a customer base by offering quality services in advance of the demand appearing at the bus stop.

It is recommended that a business model be developed for Strabane bus services that is based on offering quality services to achieve target passenger numbers, and which aims at viability in the long run while being supported in the short run from sources other than the fare revenue. Developer contributions could form part of this support. So far developers of retail and other schemes in Strabane have not been asked to make such contributions,

and provision for the car is all that has been required of them.

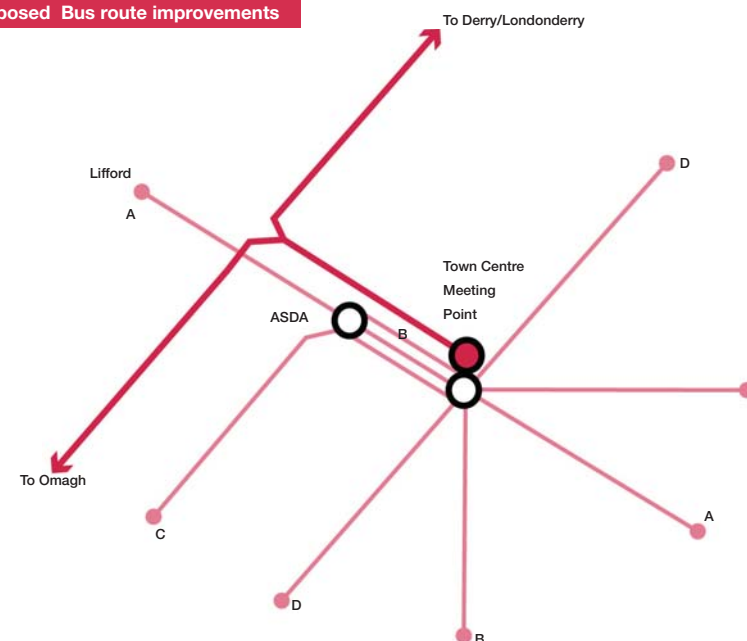
A number of restructuring measures are put forward here that would help towards better patronage, better town centre accessibility, and fewer journeys by car, and lower parking demand.

- Align parking charges with bus fares such that it is cheaper for two people to travel to the town centre by bus than it is to park the car for an hour. Charges should also be retrospectively applied to the out-

of-centre retail car parks in order to open up the bus as a realistic alternative mode of access for these car-oriented developments.

- Mount a marketing and promotion programme aimed at developing an image of bus use that appeals to all sections of the community.
- Re-configure Canal Street to provide a meeting point for town and regional buses. Improved journey times following the A5 construction will allow regional bus services to access the town centre without unreasonable time penalties.

Proposed Bus route improvements



- Re-configure Strabane town bus services as through routes, and serving the western retail areas.
- Create a bus interchange at Abercorn Square / Canal Street, enabling people to change easily between town and regional services. Integration of ticketing should also be developed, for example by including a town bus journey in all regional tickets to and from Strabane. Canal Street/Railway Street/Abercorn Square will become the central transport focus for Strabane. Attempts should be made to integrate the timing of local and regional services.
- It is not considered necessary at present to introduce bus priority measures. If traffic conditions worsened to the point that bus schedules could not be reliably kept, then such measures should be introduced. The most likely area for such consideration is Bridge Street, where it may be possible to provide buses with advanced access to the bridge itself.

The relocation of the regional bus stopping place to the proposed town centre “meeting point” is considered important for the following reasons:

- Encouraging access to the regional buses by local bus, foot and cycle rather than by car and taxi.
- Providing regional bus travellers with immediate access to the town centre, and thus increasing incidental spending at town centre shops.

- Enabling regional bus users to reach any part of Strabane using the town bus services, and vice versa.
- Raising awareness of Strabane town centre amongst regional bus travellers.

The frequency and operating hours of the town services should be improved to enable them to serve a wider range of trips. For example, if the town centre is to have a more diverse offer of activities including leisure, the bus services should operate in the evenings and on Sundays.

Key features of the bus improvement and integration concept for Strabane include:

- Meeting point at Canal Street/ Abercorn Square for all bus services, regional and town.
- Cross town routes, with no terminating buses in the town centre, offering a range of destinations without the need to change.
- No long loops through residential areas.
- Three routes overlap between the town centre and ASDA to provide frequent linking services along Railway Street.
- Full operating day, enabling commuter and college use.

Parking supply, management and competition for trade

The availability and price of parking is the main accessibility factor affecting the competitiveness of retail, especially in a town like Strabane with heavy reliance on the private car for both internal and external movement. The development of major retail facilities away from the traditional centre with plentiful and free parking inevitably makes these facilities more attractive to use than the traditional centre for car users. In all towns where such large-scale out-of-centre facilities have been allowed, the economy of the traditional centre has suffered. It is inevitable and logical – people cannot shop in two places at the same time.

In order to compete and to maintain viability, the traditional centre needs support and countermeasures. Some countermeasures have been taken in Strabane, notably the move to diversify from just retail by the provision of the theatre. However, the developers of the competing out-of-centre facilities have not been required to contribute in any way to the provision of measures to support the traditional centre. It is recommended that any further out-of-centre expansion is required to contribute, for example by introducing parking charges, or by providing or subsidising parking in the traditional centre, or by contributing to the cost of bus services to the centre.

To compete in parking terms with the newer out-of-centre retail, the traditional centre requires more and free parking to be provided. The dilemma is that such provision would tend, firstly, to destroy the quality of place that is the main competitive asset of the old centre, secondly to take land that is needed to increase the town centre retail and leisure offer, and thirdly to reduce the potential for bus, walk and cycle access to the centre.

This illustrates the dilemma opened up when out-of-centre car-based developments go ahead. There is no real solution once this has happened, so the parking strategy can merely attempt to mitigate the problem.

As a first step, parking data for Strabane should in future be collected to include the recent retail areas, and not be confined to the traditional centre.

The core principle should be that parking provision (and any associated access roads) should not undermine the townscape and historic integrity of the traditional town centre. To the extent that new or relocated parking is provided, this should be carefully integrated with the built fabric, for example in “wrapped” multi-level parking, or placed underground.

To mitigate traffic generated by parking areas, signing should be devised to direct drivers to the car park at their first point of arrival at the centre, and to discourage them from driving through

the town centre streets. This can also be encouraged by (as at present) ensuring that parking within the centre is charged at a higher rate. For access to off-street car parks, the aim should be to avoid north-south movement along Market Street and Main Street. Thus drivers approaching from Derry Road or Railway Street directions would be provided with parking to the north of the Score site. Drivers approaching from Bridge Street or Barrack Street would find parking at Market Square or locations further south. A new pedestrian bridge linking Water Wall with Waterside would open the possibility of town centre parking on the south side of the river.

Possible approaches to parking supply and demand include:

- Limit demand for town centre parking by pricing and controls, while maintaining total accessibility by boosting access by non-car modes (as described in this plan);
- Limit the demand for parking at competing facilities out-of-centre by pricing/controls, while maintaining total accessibility by improving links to the old centre by foot, cycle and bus; and
- Increase parking in the old centre (with structured parking in a context-sensitive way) but not out-of-centre.

These possibilities are not mutually exclusive. Achieving a reasonable balance will depend on the type and quantity of development in the town

centre. For example, employment provision will generate demand for parking at the same times as retail, whereas leisure development will generate demand at other times, thus allowing for shared use of parking used by shoppers.

On-street parking in the centre is popular and convenient for shoppers. The strategy should be to continue to provide for this, but to limit the length of stay (to maximise the economic benefit) and to charge more than at off-street parking.

Servicing

Provision for vehicles servicing town centre shops and other premises is vital for the economic success of the town. Most of this activity can take place on-street without causing major problems, but the on-street space must be managed to allow such activity. Time controls in the main shopping streets can be an effective way of managing limited space. This can take the form of waiting period limitations and/or limiting servicing to outside the peak shopping hours.

Residents' parking

Currently there is no legislative possibility for residents' parking bays in Northern Ireland. Initial schemes are to be introduced in Belfast, however, and other towns may then follow suit. If regeneration of Strabane town centre is successful, there will be greater pressure than at present on street parking, and this could cause

inconvenience for town centre residents who wish to park on the street near their homes. Pressure will also increase if on-street parking restrictions and charges and/or controls are extended. It is therefore important to include on-street residents-only controls when demand requires it. The timing of such measures should be decided with full involvement of residents and businesses in and around the town centre.

Taxi management to reduce impacts on other users of street space

Taxis are an important part of the public transport system in Strabane. Their presence does, however, cause problems for other users, especially by obstructing buses and taking kerb space that might be more beneficial as short term parking bays. The number of taxis perhaps reflects inadequacies of the bus service, and the need for employment, rather than a bedrock demand for them. Even so, as the attraction of the centre increases, the demand for taxis is not likely to fall dramatically.

Measures must therefore be taken to reduce the negative impact of taxi activity. The first step is to identify a suitable "stacking" location for taxis serving the centre that does not interfere with bus operation or the convenience of pedestrian movement. Part of this may be to attempt again to introduce a "call forward" system. This is difficult with four independent operators in the town,

but such systems operate successfully elsewhere, for example Newtownards.

The next step will be to rigorously enforce taxi parking or stacking elsewhere. In many towns, local custom and practice can easily lead to lax enforcement out of sympathy for taxi drivers. However, if proper designated locations are provided, then strict enforcement will not lead to operational difficulties.

If there is no call forward system, the stacking location must have a single entry point (to avoid queue jumping). The taxi pick up stand must be clearly visible from the lead car in the stack.

7 Delivery of the Masterplan

7.1 Delivery mechanisms

It is of critical importance that this Masterplan does not become a well-intentioned document that ends up sitting on a shelf and never implemented. It is therefore essential to identify who will be responsible for overseeing delivery of the Masterplan, taking responsibility for its implementation.

The implementation of this plan is of course dependent on the availability of funding and this is an extremely difficult economic climate. It will be important therefore that there is a strong partnership approach across the public sector agencies and that the private sector is engaged from the outset.

The action plan identifies specific organisations that will have a role to play in the delivery of specific projects. However it will be important to have in place the over-arching structure and organisation/s who can take responsibility for driving forward and co-ordinating delivery of the plan, tracking its progress and, where necessary, updating (finding alternative priorities or delivery means where the originally envisaged approach may change).

There are already a number of organisations playing an important role in Strabane Town Centre. Key amongst these includes:

- Strabane District Council.
- Strabane 2000.

- The Strabane Chamber of Commerce and Industry; and
- The Department for Social Development.

There are a range of others involved including private businesses and landowners, and public agencies such as the Western Education & Library Board and the Department for Regional Development.

In looking at structures to take forward the Masterplan it will be important to consider the changing context. The Review of Public Administration (RPA) is not now expected to take place until 2015. However under this a range of functions will transfer to local government including: aspects of planning, rural development, the public realm aspects of local roads functions, urban regeneration and community development, a range of housing related functions, local economic development and tourism. The transfer of these powers will give councils a far greater role to play in the improvement of town centres. The Council will therefore have a greater ability to effect change in the town centre, together with a greater responsibility for delivering that change.

Under RPA the Council responsible for Strabane will change. It will increase in size and cover a wider geographical area. Therefore as well as increased responsibilities for a wider range of services, it will be responsible for a greater number of urban and rural areas. Of particular importance will be the role that the new Council will have in

delivering the regeneration of the City of Derry/Londonderry. There are some risks for Strabane attached to this, in terms of the potential for the City to attract a disproportionate level of regeneration focus and resources to the detriment of areas like Strabane. However, it could also present significant opportunities with the potential for example to share resources/expertise and take a wider more strategic approach to the town's regeneration.

With its additional powers, responsibilities and resources, the new Council will therefore have a leading role to play in taking forward and delivering the Strabane Masterplan.

Another vital piece of context is the current economic situation. The recession has brought an end to a lengthy period of property investment that has helped to regenerate many town centres across Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK over the last decade or so. Regeneration and property development is likely to be very different going forward, and local councils will need to step up and play a bigger role in regeneration. Public spending is also likely to experience downward pressure in the coming years as the Government attempts to reduce debt over the long term. Therefore as well as the additional powers and resources that RPA will bring, Council's may also need to consider additional financial tools, revenue raising options and delivery mechanisms to help them fulfil that bigger regeneration role. Across

the UK a range of innovative delivery approaches and financial mechanisms have been considered and developed in recent years (e.g. Urban Regeneration Companies, Business Improvement Districts, Local Asset Backed Vehicles), and new ones continue to emerge to respond to changing circumstances (e.g. Accelerated Development Zones).

Development and prioritisation of specific regeneration delivery approaches will need to be considered in the context of the development of service delivery approaches across the new Council and the area it covers. Examples of possible approaches include: Mainstream Council delivery; informal partnerships; contractual partnerships and corporate partnerships (including Special Purpose Vehicles).

Looking at the most appropriate means of delivering regeneration services across the new local authority goes beyond the scope of this study, but there are certain principles which should apply to any structure overseeing the delivery of the Masterplan and the regeneration of Strabane town centre. The delivery structure that is chosen should be the one that best meets the following principles.

Build upon existing partnerships and successes

There is already an existing delivery organisation in place in Strabane. Strabane 2000 is a partnership initiative which was formed 12 years ago by the Council, the Chamber of Commerce and the DoE.

Its membership consists of 6 Councillors, 4 Chamber of Commerce representatives and 1 community representative. It has a Project Manager who is employed by the Council to manage, develop and implement the Strabane 2000 strategic plan. The aim of this initiative is to promote development, which will generate investment and employment for the benefit of both residents and investors in Strabane, through environmental and infrastructure improvements. An organisation set up to deliver this type of initiative should be well placed to deliver the type of proposals and recommendations that come out of this Masterplan.

It makes sense to build upon existing partnerships where they exist and have been delivering. Given the previous and ongoing role of the Strabane 2000 Initiative, it is felt particularly important that the successes of this Initiative are built upon.

Provide strong and accountable leadership

The focus and effectiveness of leadership is perhaps the key factor in the success of any delivery body. An organisation which is led with energy and clarity of vision is much more likely to succeed. Quality leadership at either executive or member/board level - and ideally at both - impacts particularly on delivery. The leadership must be able to motivate and influence others, across all sectors and the local community. As well as being strong, the leadership should also be as accountable as possible to

the range of groups, organisations and individuals that have an interest in the town centre.

A fundamental part of this strong and accountable leadership will be having in place effective management and approval structures that enable quick, clear and representative decision making. This can help to provide clarity and speed/responsiveness to attract potential investors. It will also assist the public procurement processes that will be necessary to fund and deliver many of the Masterplan projects.

Access the required staff and resources

It is essential that the delivery structure or organisation has access to experienced and high quality staff, as and when required, if the Masterplan is to be implemented effectively. These may sit within the organisation or be an external / partner resource that is available to them. Of particular relevance to the Strabane Masterplan would be extensive technical knowledge and experience – for example resource/ funding procurement, project management and a high level of property skills (to negotiate with private sector developers, whilst at the same time negotiating often complex and controversial transactions with local communities).

In a context of limited public and private funding and investment, the structure should look to maximise the level of funding that it can attract. The ability to access and hold funding can

influence the choice of delivery structure. Independent bodies can sometimes access funding that Councils cannot. Corporate entities can hold assets, capture value and potentially access third party funding and borrowing. The potential and required sources of funding to deliver the Masterplan should help to determine that structure.

In order to ensure that the staff and resources are available when required, the structure should have effective management and monitoring processes and systems in place.

Be inclusive

The delivery organisation/s that takes forward the Masterplan should look to include and engage as broad a range as possible of those with interests in the town centres. In particular key stakeholders they should look to engage include:

Private Sector

- Most of the Masterplan will need to be delivered by the private sector, and most of the organisations within the town centre are private businesses. It is therefore essential that the private sector has a central and influential role to play in any delivery structures or organisations. Private sector representation within specific delivery organisations can be a powerful tool. Specifically, it can, at times, act as a counterbalance to the political pressures that such organisations can – and often do – face. Moreover, depending on the strength and quality of the individuals concerned, the

private sector can be particularly helpful in keeping such organisations focused on tasks and outcomes, bringing particular skills and expertise from business or other backgrounds.

Public sector bodies

- Even with additional functions being transferred to the Council under RPA, there will still be many public services and functions that will remain with public bodies outside the Council. Many of these bodies will have a role to play in the regeneration of the town centre and therefore should be engaged in the delivery structures. As well as engaging these bodies in the structures, the Council and other public bodies should also seek to align their mainstream service delivery and policies with the objectives of the Masterplan.

The Community

- Community involvement has emerged as a key requirement of success in regeneration delivery structures. This is about more than consultation and instead reflects an organisational commitment to working with local people and businesses. In relation to Strabane it is important not just to engage the community within the town, but also those in its wider hinterland. It will be important that those within the wider surrounding area feel 'ownership' if the town centre is to maximise its potential.

Be sustainable

Any delivery organisation or structure that is either set up, or charged, with responsibility for delivering the Masterplan must be capable of sustaining itself and its role probably for at least the first 5-10 years of the Masterplan delivery period. In order to do so it will need to have identified funding and resources which are capable of supporting the leadership, staff, management and engagement required to deliver the plan.

The funding and resources required to support delivery may come from within mainstream services and budgets, which are 'ring-fenced', redirected or 'top-sliced', or it may require the procurement of additional resources. Whatever the source and approach, it will need to ideally be secured (and earmarked specifically for implementing the Masterplan) for as many of those initial years as possible, in order to generate sufficient momentum to deliver the plan.

If possible the delivery structure should be developed and enabled to generate and capture funding and value as a part of the process of delivering the Masterplan. Not only will this help to sustain the structure, but it can also act as an incentive to deliver.

Have a focus on Strabane

As mentioned above, there is a risk that a regeneration service in the new council may be focused on tackling the serious and significant regeneration issues in

Derry/Londonderry. It is important that the structure that is charged with delivery is capable of having a focus on Strabane.

Conclusion

The most appropriate structure for overseeing delivery of the Masterplan will need to be determined by the council and their partners, depending upon what approach can best meet the principles outlined above.

The main choices will be;

- Whether the plan can best be delivered internally through the new council (with its new powers), or through a new regeneration team? –Even with this structure the success of the partnership approach to regeneration has been established and therefore the council would need to work in partnership with local interests.
- Whether this approach would be sufficient to effectively achieve the principles outlined above or does it require a separate partnership entity to be created and to take the lead (or in the case of Strabane 2000, an existing entity)? If so what form should that entity take (informal, contractual, partnership)?

7.2 Public sector interventions

It is vital that going forward, a town centre manager/ council are able to make a strong business case for public sector interventions such as;

- Public realm and infrastructure improvements.
- Planning control and design guidance.
- Town centre management - including events and festivals.
- Direct business support - e.g. shop front improvement grants, Town Centre Living Initiatives, Heritage Lottery Funding.
- Land transactions - land sale, acquisition and assembly.

Public realm and infrastructure improvements

Towns compete for residents, businesses and visitors on the basis of the quality of life they can offer. A key determinant of this quality of life is the quality of the place and the public realm.

Currently, the condition and appearance of many of the public spaces, some buildings and shop fronts in Strabane Town Centre are poor. This contributes to the Strabane's present inability to attract people into the centre of town.

A variety of work has been done to investigate the impact of public realm works, including work carried out by Tribal on the impact of various public realm investments in Glasgow. Indeed CABI reports that high quality public realm has proved itself time and again to be the principal anchor in urban regeneration projects. Successful regeneration projects are often those that make great use of the streetscape

and existing buildings and introduce complimentary new development to fill gap sites.

If the scheme is delivered to a high enough standard, the benefits may be felt by the town as a whole, not just the subject street or square. In this way a strong piece of public realm or art work can produce an iconic image that becomes synonymous with the town and impact positively on its capacity as a shopping, business, tourism and residential location.

Planning control and design guidance

To develop an urban design guide, would assist in the introduction of a more coordinated approach to town centre and streetscape design. The design guide should be developed and agreed before design options for targeted public realm upgrades are developed.

Typically the design guide should;

- Set out the style for forthcoming public realm upgrades and ensure there is consistency between these and subsequent upgrades elsewhere in the town centre. The guide should allow for some flexibility in design between distinct areas, to help create a series of 'mini pitches' for different retailer categories by using the street pattern to help cluster similarly branded concepts.

- Identify simple but robust materials which are cheap to maintain and are easily available.
- Identify designs which reflect and enhance the local character of Strabane Town Centre, strongly influenced by its heritage and townscape quality, but to also be forward looking and contemporary rather than pastiche.

Town centre management

Strong town centre management is a key element of regenerating our town centres.

A town centre forum or partnership in Strabane could potentially lead to greater private sector leadership and investment over time in the management and promotion of the town centre.

The benefits of a town centre partnership or forum are that it would bring together local businesses, local authority, Police and other interested parties to create a fully functioning town centre. Developing a terms of reference for the partnership would give it a clear remit in the longer term beyond being a consultative body, and help to lay the foundation for productive work between businesses, local authority and other agencies.

The objectives of the Town Centre Partnership/ Forum could be as follows;

- To promote the interests of businesses and other stakeholders.

- Identify and attempt to address issues of concern for businesses and other stakeholders.
- Support the continuous improvement of the quality and management of town centre facilities and services.
- Liaise with other relevant agencies that may have influence upon relevant issues.
- Provide a focus and contact point for agencies engaged in town centre related activities.
- Support the promotion and marketing of Strabane Town Centre as a great place to live, work and visit.

Town Centre Manager

An expansion or development of the Strabane 2000 project manager role to that of a more typical town centre manager would be required to help develop business collaboration through the partnership/ forum. Event organisation and fund raising would also be key roles, including engaging businesses (particularly larger businesses) and persuading them to get involved with joint work and contribute towards initiatives.

Stronger management to create a more attractive town centre should be sought.

Consideration could be made to expanding resources for litter cleaning and sweeping. As consultations showed that the public felt Strabane was in need of cleaning up, a regular programme could be put in place for chewing gum litter removal, and prevention measures.

High use areas in most need of treatment would have to be identified as well as the best method of removal which minimises damage to the footway.

Efforts should be put in place to prevent chewing gum being dropped in the first place, such as through a litter campaign, providing greater means of disposal and enforcement.

Further more the cleaning up of sectarian graffiti and removal of flags would go a long way to making Strabane a much more welcoming place to visit and live. The making of a neutral town centre can only benefit the town's capacity to attract investment and visitors.

Clearly this will not happen over night, however engaging with community groups either through the town partnership or the PSNI to remove flags in the town should be encouraged.

Direct business support

Direct business support can be provided through a number of different funding streams, these can be delivered both through the public and private sector or a partnership between both. Some of the key funding streams are set out below.

DSD Neighbourhood Renewal Programme:

The Neighbourhood Renewal strategy seeks to target those communities throughout Northern Ireland who are suffering the highest levels of deprivation. It is also about bringing together the work of all Government departments in

partnership with local people to tackle disadvantage and deprivation in all aspects of everyday life. A total of 36 areas have been targeted for action. The areas include: 15 in Belfast, 4 in Derry/Londonderry and 15 in other towns and cities across Northern Ireland. In Strabane, the Neighbourhood Renewal area broadly covers the town centre, East Ward, Ballycolman and Lisnafin.

DSD Environmental Improvement Scheme:

Projects under the Environmental Improvement Scheme are generally used to improve the appearance of towns and cities and to regenerate areas by restoring confidence and attracting new investment. They are mainly used to improve the appearance of public open spaces in the centres of cities, towns and villages.

NIHE Town Centre Living Initiative (TCLI)

The initiative aims to promote private rented residential accommodation in town and city centres, as an added value contribution to town centre regeneration. It is targeted at the commercial core of a number of designated cities in Northern Ireland and seeks to provide housing in vacant or under-used upper floors above shops and other commercial premises.

Northern Ireland Department of the Environment

The Environment & Heritage Service (EHS) Historic Building Grant.

The Historic Building Grant is one of the grants available for the repair and restoration of listed Historic buildings

- both secular and ecclesiastical. The Historic Buildings Grant Scheme is currently under review, and final details might change.

Heritage Lottery Funding

Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) supports strategic action to address problems of disrepair, erosion of quality and under-use of buildings in historic areas. Single organisations such as local authorities, partnerships and less formally structured consortia are eligible. Grants available for major projects only. Proposed schemes should be large enough to have an impact on the historic area as a whole and may include the repair of the structure and external envelope of historic buildings and structures; bringing vacant floor space in historic buildings back into use, authentic reinstatement of historic surfaces and other “public realm” townscape features. THI does not apply to single buildings or groups of buildings in single ownership. Grants are available to cover 20% to 50% of costs - in exceptional cases 75%.

Land transactions

Public Sector / Private Sector
Development agreements, following the sale of a public sector land holding. An agreement can be put in place whereby the developer must make a contribution to the benefit of the town, such as for public realm improvements. The development may also be bound by design guidance or a development brief put in place prior to the sale of the land.

8 Action Plan

8.1 Implementation Action Plan

The following table provides a summary of the actions and interventions required to deliver

the proposals outlined in this Masterplan. It prioritises the initiatives and sets out broad timescales in accordance with the proposed phasing plan. Importantly, it also

gives recommendations as to those organisations responsible for each action and any interdependencies between the separate interventions.

Ref	Project	Key Delivery Role	Priority	Timeframe	Other Delivery Agencies	Related Projects	Actions
S1	SCORE, Leisure use	Public Sector	High	2- 5 years	DRD, PS, Priv, NIEA,	S2, S6	SDC given first opportunity to acquire site for leisure centre
S2	SCORE, retail led	Public Sector	High	2- 5 years	DRD, PS, Priv, NIEA	S1, S6	Development brief issued to market by DSD to ascertain level of interest.
S3	Railway Street improvements	Public Sector	Medium	2- 5 years	DRD, PS	S5	EI scheme for street to be drawn up. Investigate possible vesting of tyre depot
S4	Melvin Pedestrian Bridge	Public Sector	Medium	2-5 years	PS, RA	N/A	SDC will progress scheme
S5	Abercorn Square	Public Sector	Medium	5- 10 years	DRD, PS	S3, S10	EI scheme for area to be drawn up
S6	Smyth's Mill & adjoining buildings	Private Sector	Medium	2- 5 years	Priv, DRD, PS NIEA	S1, S2	Landowner will progress development and engage with public sector as appropriate
S7	John Wesley Street	Private Sector	Medium	4- 7 years	DRD, PS	S10, S12	SDC, DSD will work with landowner to bring forward development
S8	Butcher Street/ Market Street improvements	Public Sector	High/ Medium	2- 5 years	DRD, PS	S9	EI scheme to create a new public space in Strabane
S9	Bowling Green Improvements	Public Sector	Medium	2- 5 years	DRD, PS, NIEA	S8	Planning Service to make proposal for conservation area.
S10	Castle Street	Public Sector	High	1- 5 years	DRD, PS	S5, S7	EI scheme to reintroduce traffic to street
S11	The Bridge Heads	Public Sector	Low	8- 15 years	PS, DRD	S13	Investigate land ownerships and planning issues
S12	John Wesley Street pedestrian Bridge	Public Sector	Medium	3- 6 years	PS, RA	S7	DRD to submit planning application for bridge
S13	Riverside development	Public Sector	Low	10- 15 years	PS, DRD, RA	S11	Probable vesting of units required
S14	Railway Street development	Public Sector	Low	10- 20 years	PS, DRD	S1, S2, S3	Probable vesting required

Key to abbreviations: DRD: Department for Regional Development; DSD: Department for Social Development; PS: Planning Service; Priv: Private Sector; NIEA: Northern Ireland Environment Agency; RA: Rivers Agency

9 Conclusion

Strabane has suffered over the years due to both the Troubles but also from out of town and edge of town developments. Strabane faces significant challenges which the Masterplan seeks to address in order to breathe new life into the town centre, diversifying its offer and creating a shared centre where local residents and tourists alike feel safe and happy to spend time.

The plan has identified that there is scope for Strabane to develop, particularly benefitting from the quality of its hinterland. The town must position itself to capture tourist spending, providing them with a different offer from competing towns and cities based on leisure and culture.

Cross border trade has greatly benefitted Strabane's edge of town retail development but has not had the same impact on the town centre. Likely cuts in public spending are likely to make regeneration more difficult in the short term. However, Strabane is in need of investment and a strong case must be made for available funding to be directed to the town by the implementation team. It is vital that the Masterplan implementation team form close links with the private sector, forming a partnership to ensure that when money does become available it is targeted in the most effective areas to benefit the town and bring about its regeneration.

Clearly the SCORE site offers an obvious opportunity to attract investment into the town centre and this opportunity should not be lost. The Department for Social

Development as the land owners, working with Strabane District Council must ensure that the most appropriate and beneficial use is developed on the site.

Although Strabane must move forward to meet modern needs, the quality of the town's townscape has been highlighted within the plan and should be complemented by future development. Areas of the town such as the Bowling Green area should be protected and its quality reflected in future development within the town.

The Masterplan vision highlights the importance of building on the town's strengths, diversifying and strengthening the economy of the town. Key to this is creating a town centre which is a hospitable space where everyone (from near and far) feels welcome as well as a thriving cultural location based around drama, dance and music with a regular programme of festivals and events. Strabane now has a vision and a way forward, it is vital that the opportunity is not missed.

The Masterplan has a twenty year timeframe and will be judged on its ability to bring new investment into the town centre, rediscovering a place which has suffered from violence and under investment in recent history.



September 2010



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