


# Newtownards

## Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan

June 2010





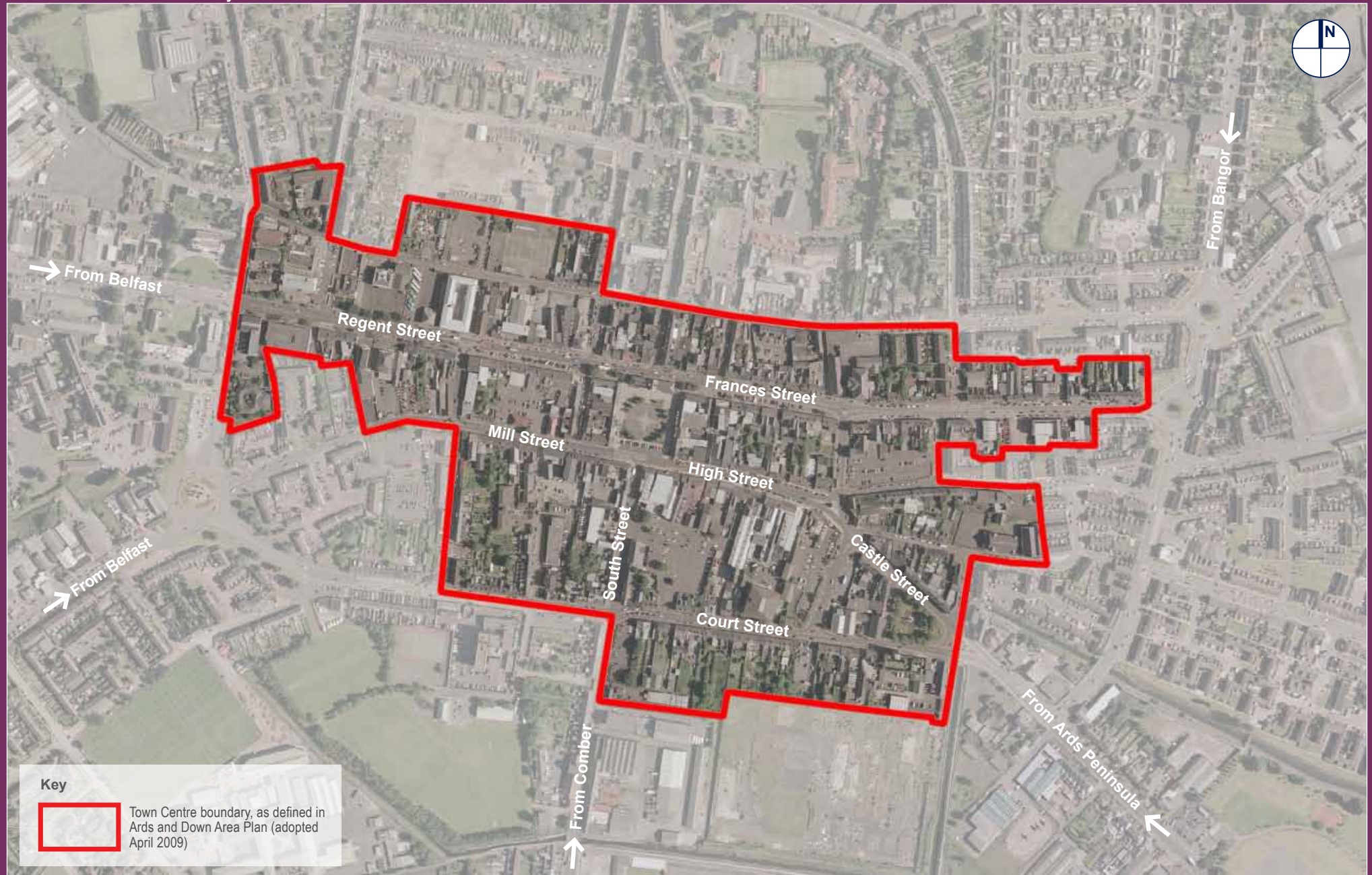
“Unlocking the future by developing the present - a contemporary, vibrant Newtownards for local people and visitors alike”




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Key

-  Town Centre boundary, as defined in Ards and Down Area Plan (adopted April 2009)

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background to the Commission

In May 2009, the Department for Social Development (DSD), in partnership with Ards Borough Council, commissioned Tribal, supported by Roderick Mclean Associates Ltd. and Colliers CRE, to prepare a Regeneration Masterplan for Newtownards Town Centre. This dynamic development document provides guidance on the location and form of development in the Town Centre for the period up to 2025. It will provide the basis, and justification, for decision making on the promotion, implementation and timing of urban regeneration initiatives in the Town Centre, helping to direct public and private sector investment to those areas that will most benefit local people, support local businesses and contribute to the long-term vitality and viability of the Town Centre.

The Masterplan study area reflects the Town Centre boundary, as designated in the Ards Down Area Plan 2015 and illustrated in Figure 1.1. 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.

## 1.2 Purpose of this Report

The purpose of the Masterplan is to provide strategic guidance for the regeneration of Newtownards 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.

The proposals seek to improve the physical environment of Newtownards by realising development opportunities and public realm improvements. The Masterplan also aims to ensure that the viability and vitality of the retail component of the town centre core is enhanced and that the Town Centre remains a highly accessible, vibrant destination that is a pleasant space for people to spend time.

This purpose is best defined as getting to the heart of what is attractive and successful in Newtownards Town Centre, then taking these essential characteristics as the basis for a long-term, sustainable, regeneration strategy. In practice, the master planning process has sought to:

- Identify, rank and prioritise any development opportunity sites with potential to transform Newtownards Town Centre;

- Assess the retail offer in Newtownards Town Centre and make recommendations on how to improve the range and quality of shops, improve the shopping environment and attract more visitors;
- Assess the current commercial leisure and hospitality offer in Newtownards Town Centre, including the evening economy, and to build on identified strengths;
- Advise on appropriate transport, access and parking interventions to better improve accessibility to the Town Centre;
- Develop a series of design quality Indicators for the public realm that reflect the Town's aspirations and built heritage;
- Incorporate public art throughout the strategy, in consultation with Ards Arts;
- Advise on the phasing and timing of interventions, ensuring actions are realistic account of realistic lead-in times for the scale of improvements proposed; and
- Galvanise local opinion, generating enthusiasm and gaining the support of key stakeholders and the local community.

These objectives reflect those identified in the original Client Brief for this commission prepared by the Department for Social Development and Ards Borough Council. These goals have been modified and refined, as the commission has progressed, in response to views expressed by key stakeholders – such as local businesses, politicians, Council officers and residents – whose views were canvassed as part of the consultation exercise carried out throughout the design development.

### **1.3 Structure of the Masterplan**

This Masterplan is structured as follows:

- Introduction;
- The Context for Regeneration;
- Consultation;
- Vision for Newtownards;
- Development Proposals;
- Delivery of the Masterplan;
- Delivery and implementation; and
- 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 Newtownards Town Centre over the next 15 years. Understanding the context is fundamental to formulating Masterplan proposals that are realistic and achievable. The context will provide the various delivery partners – Ards Borough Council, DSD, the Chamber of Trade and other stakeholders – with justification for the programme of actions required and set a benchmark against which the future success of the Masterplan can be measured.

As part of the evidence base used to inform the development of Masterplan options, Tribal, alongside Colliers CRE and Roderick MacLean Associates, prepared the following documents:

- **Town Centre Health Check (September 2009):** Uses a range of indicators – such as footfall, residents’ interviews, land use surveys, etc. – to assess the vitality and viability of the town centre;
- **Retail Capacity Study (November 2009):** Establishes the catchment area for the Town Centre and indicates the broad extent of new convenience and comparison retail floor space that can be supported in the future; and

- **Baseline Report (September 2009):** Summarises the policy context, considers accessibility, transport and movement issues, provides an overview of the current market context and analyses the physical qualities and character of Newtownards Town Centre, as well as drawing together the outcomes from the Town Centre Health Check and Retail Capacity Study.

Within these three reports, each of the components outlined within this chapter were considered in detail. This enabled us to arrive at a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the town centre, in its current form, as well as identifying the key 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 these baseline studies, we have extracted the key messages as they relate to the policy, socio-economic profile and place quality context for regeneration of Newtownards Town Centre. For those interested in the detail of our research, we would refer you to full reports contained within the appendices.

The context outlined within this Masterplan has four major components:

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

## 2.2 Planning Policy Context for Regeneration

Several key documents provide policy and guidance of direct relevance to any regeneration proposals for Newtownards Town Centre. Those documents and policies of greatest relevance are listed below, together with short explanations of the most relevant points and their potential effect on the Masterplan.

### Shaping our Future, the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025

- Newtownards is a Main Town within the Belfast Metropolitan Area (BMA) and its ‘travel to work’ hinterland. It should develop as a counter-magnet to the BMA in terms of the commercial, economic, retail and residential provision.

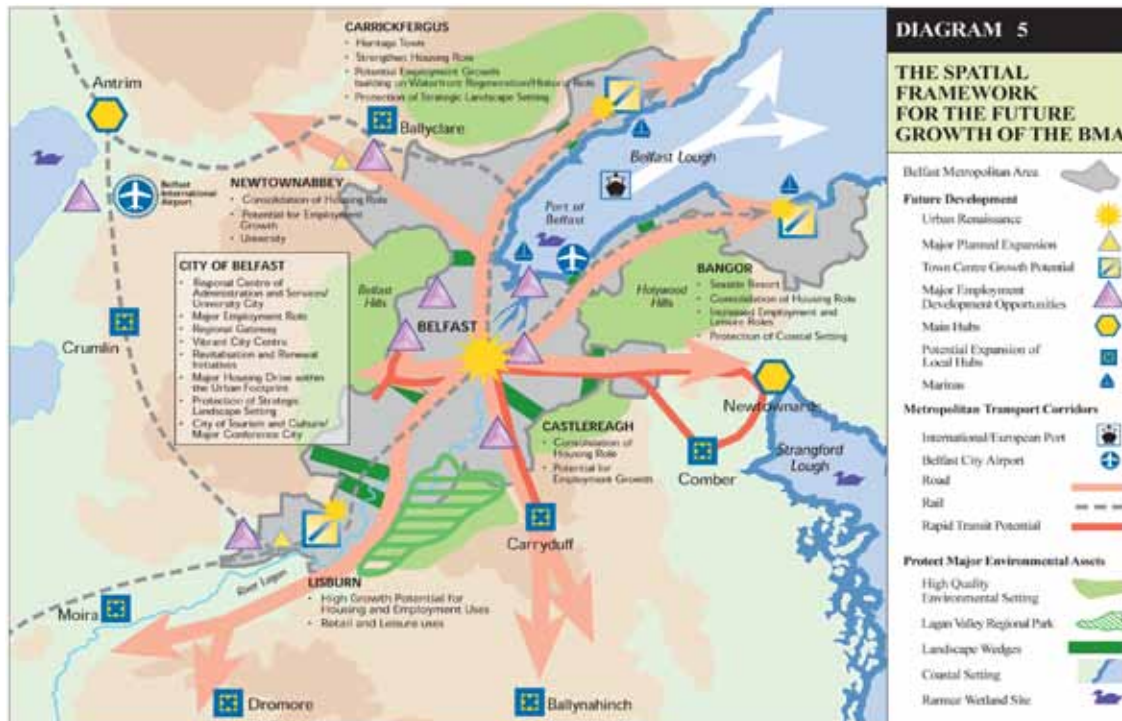
- Maintain compact urban areas and reduce the physical separation of key land uses through mixed-use developments.
- Supports car parking policies to discourage long-stay parking in urban areas where public transport is a realistic alternative, whilst ensuring an appropriate level of good quality, short-stay parking.

### The Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan 2015

- The A20 Southern Distributor Road opened in Spring 2009, reducing traffic pressure and congestion in Newtownards Town Centre.

### Planning Policy Statements (PPSs)

- Secure economy and efficiency as well as amenity in the use of land (PPS1).
- Mixed-use developments should exemplify compactness; a range of employment, leisure and community facilities; appropriate infrastructure and services; high standards of design; access to public open space; access to public transport; and facilitate walking and cycling (PPS1).
- Sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of town centres to ensure the health of local business and optimise employment opportunities (PPS5), particularly in the context of strong out-of-centre competition.
- Primary retail core to be the first choice location for comparison shopping and mixed retailing (PPS5), such as the High Street/Court Street proposals.
- New development in an Area of Townscape Character only permitted where it maintains or enhances the area's overall character and respects the built form. Retain buildings that make a positive contribution to the character of an area (PPS6).
- Attractive environments for living in the town centre are created with mixed-use sites offering combinations of residential, commercial and leisure uses (PPS7).



Newtownards Context within the Belfast Metropolitan Area

- Public open space, such as Conway Square, plays an important role in enhancing the character of civic buildings, as well as helping to attract business and tourism to a locality. Improvements to Civic Spaces could help to enhance the quality and amenity of the Town Centre (PPS8).
- Living Over the Shops (LOTS) could reinvigorate the town centre and evening economy in Newtownards. Purpose built developments including ground floor retail and residential accommodation above may be appropriate on certain sites, such as the Court Street/High Street area (PPS12).

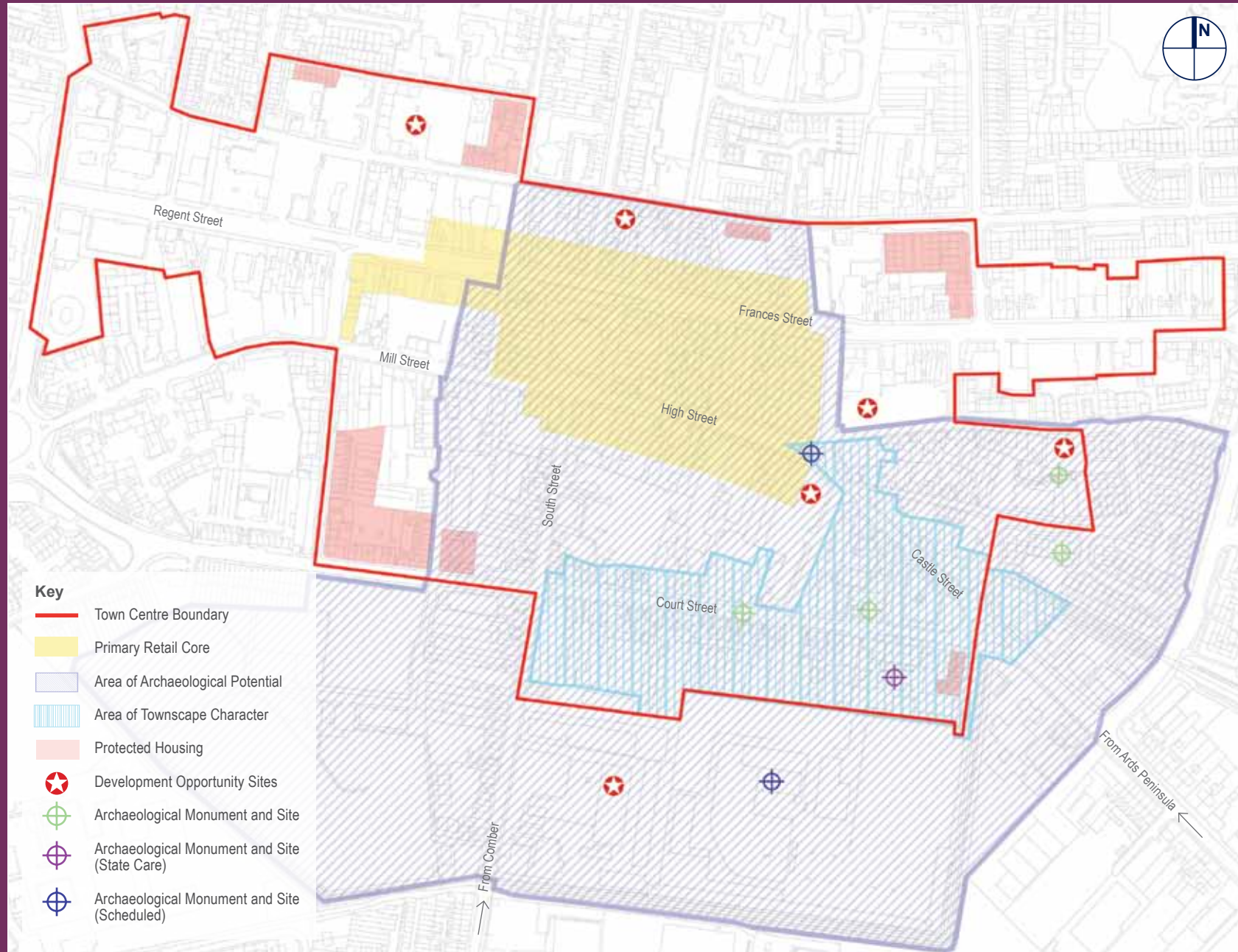


*Primary Retail Core: High Street*



*Public Open Space: Conway Square*





### Ards Down Area Plan 2015

- Designates an Area of Townscape Character, an Area of Archaeological Potential and a number of Archaeological Sites and Scheduled Monuments. These are a key asset to Newtownards and must be protected and enhanced.
- Lands at Castlebawn currently have planning approval for a mixed-use development including retail warehousing, leisure and a business park. Good pedestrian links between any new development and the Town Centre will be essential.
- Junction of Castle Street and Old Cross Street is a key entry/ exit point and a focal point at the end of the main shopping frontage in the Town Centre. The Market Cross is a landmark feature. Development of this site, along with the public car parks on either side of Old



*Potential: Mid-19th Century terrace houses in Court Street.*

Cross Street would significantly enhance the appearance of this key Town Centre location and could provide additional retail floor space in the Primary Retail Core.

- With minimal loss of space in the Movilla Street car park, the built frontage could be completed to the corner of Movilla Street to provide additional retail floor space in the Primary Retail Core.



*The Medieval Priory*

- Anglo-Norman heritage, 6th and 13th Century monastic origins, the location at the head of Strangford Lough and close proximity to the BMA mean Newtownards is well located to provide, accommodation and facilities to benefit the growth of the tourism industry throughout the Ards Peninsular and St. Patrick's County.



*17th Century Old Cross*



## 2.3 Economic Context for Regeneration

The economic context for the regeneration of Newtownards Town Centre can be split into two parts:

- The general economic context; and
- The economic profile of key sectors.

These can be summarised as follows.

### General Economic Context

- The worst economic recession since the 1930s has taken its toll on the retail sector throughout the UK. The Masterplan will need to look beyond the current market conditions to identify short, medium and long-term investment goals to support the recovery in Newtownards.
- Newtownards' dominance as a retail town is well established. This is reflected in the strength of retail offer in the Town Centre. However, there is considerable potential for leakage from Newtownards to nearby competing retail centres such as Bangor and Belfast.
- The Ards Shopping Centre and proposed Castlebawn development within Newtownards are likely to draw shoppers away from the Town Centre.

- There are a large number of smaller offices and warehouse units in the town supporting a buoyant level of local business.
- The Leisure and Tourism market in Northern Ireland is undergoing significant expansion. Newtownards is ideally positioned to capitalise on its excellent location as "Gateway to the Ards Peninsula". The Masterplan must seek to develop and enhance the tourism and leisure offer.



*Local Independents: Menarys and Knotts*

### Economic Profile of Key Sectors

- Newtownards Town Centre houses a number of independent retailers that are, in themselves, a significant draw. They provide a 'unique selling point' for Newtownards to build upon, however many independents have a requirement for larger, more modern retail floor space.
- To reduce leakage to competitors, the Masterplan will need to deliver suitable accommodation for modern retailing needs to attract complementary national multiples only present in competing centres at present. This will include larger, regular shaped building footprints and improved servicing/delivery arrangements.
- The Primary Retail Core needs to be supported and enhanced, particularly given strong out-of-centre competition from Castlebawn and the Ards Centre. This area will continue to stagnate unless new retailers can be attracted to the town centre.
- The office market in Newtownards is weak at present, notwithstanding a number of public sector offices. However, the Bain Report encourages the decentralisation of public sector bodies across Northern Ireland, which may in time increase demand for new office accommodation in the town.

- Newtownards is yet to capitalise on the strong tourism and leisure market opportunities. Attracting good cafes, bars and restaurants to a rejuvenated town centre should be a principal aim of the Masterplan, to maximise any available “tourist spend” by making the Town Centre an attractive place to visit.
- Improvements to Conway Square would enhance the existing events programme. This would lead to an increase in footfall throughout the town centre.



*Public Sector Offices*



*Offices above the shops*



*Under-utilised: Conway Square*

## 2.4 Social Context for Regeneration

The current social baseline in Newtownards can be summarised as follows. In addition, DSD have produced several policy documents of particular relevance to the Newtownards Masterplan.

### Newtownards Social Baseline

- Located close to the outer edge of the BMA, 16 kilometres east of Belfast and 6 kilometres south of Bangor.
- Newtownards is the largest settlement in Ards and Down area, with a population that has grown rapidly in recent years to an estimated 27,795 in 2001. This equates to around 38% of the total population of the Ards Borough living in Newtownards.
- By 2015, the population in the Ards Borough is expected to increase to 80,700, with a significant proportion in Newtownards. The Town Centre will need to expand to provide a wide range of services, facilities and functions to the catchment population.
- Primary catchment area for the town centre has a population of nearly 78,600. The secondary catchment has a population of over 112,400.





## Building Heights



- Structured around two main east-west axis roads, with north-south side roads connecting between these axes and into the outlying areas.
- Has a fine urban grain, with mostly small plot sizes found throughout the centre. The older plots within the Town Centre have been almost completely developed out, creating a very dense urban form.
- Newer blocks of development are often less dense, with parking and service space designed in.
- Buildings tend to be two to three stories in height, often in terraces with a uniform roofscape.
- There are a number of taller public buildings (e.g. Town Hall and Churches). Such landmark buildings and monuments serve to better connect different parts of the centre.
- Larger scale, stand-alone buildings tend to stand out and break the general run of built development within the rest of the area. A number of single storey buildings within some two-storey terraces also break continuity.
- There are a number of unique architectural features that contribute to the identifiable character and quality of Newtownards Town Centre, including:

- Strong vertical emphasis on windows;
- Continuous rooflines, with few projections;
- Coloured and painted render on building frontages;
- Arches providing access to rear yards;
- Common building lines to the rear of footpaths;
- Use of local (Scrabo) stone for civic buildings; and
- Use of finer detailing on even the simplest domestic buildings.

- The public realm within the town is now tired looking due to the fact there has been little investment within the past 30 years.
- Footways are often too narrow in places.
- A variety of materials and street furniture has no coherent or consistent style.
- Vehicle use and car parking dominates much of the public realm and detracts from the quality of the environment.



*Windows have a strong vertical emphasis*



*Continuous rooflines, with few projections*



*Coloured and painted render on building frontages*



*Use of local (Scrabo) stone for civic buildings*



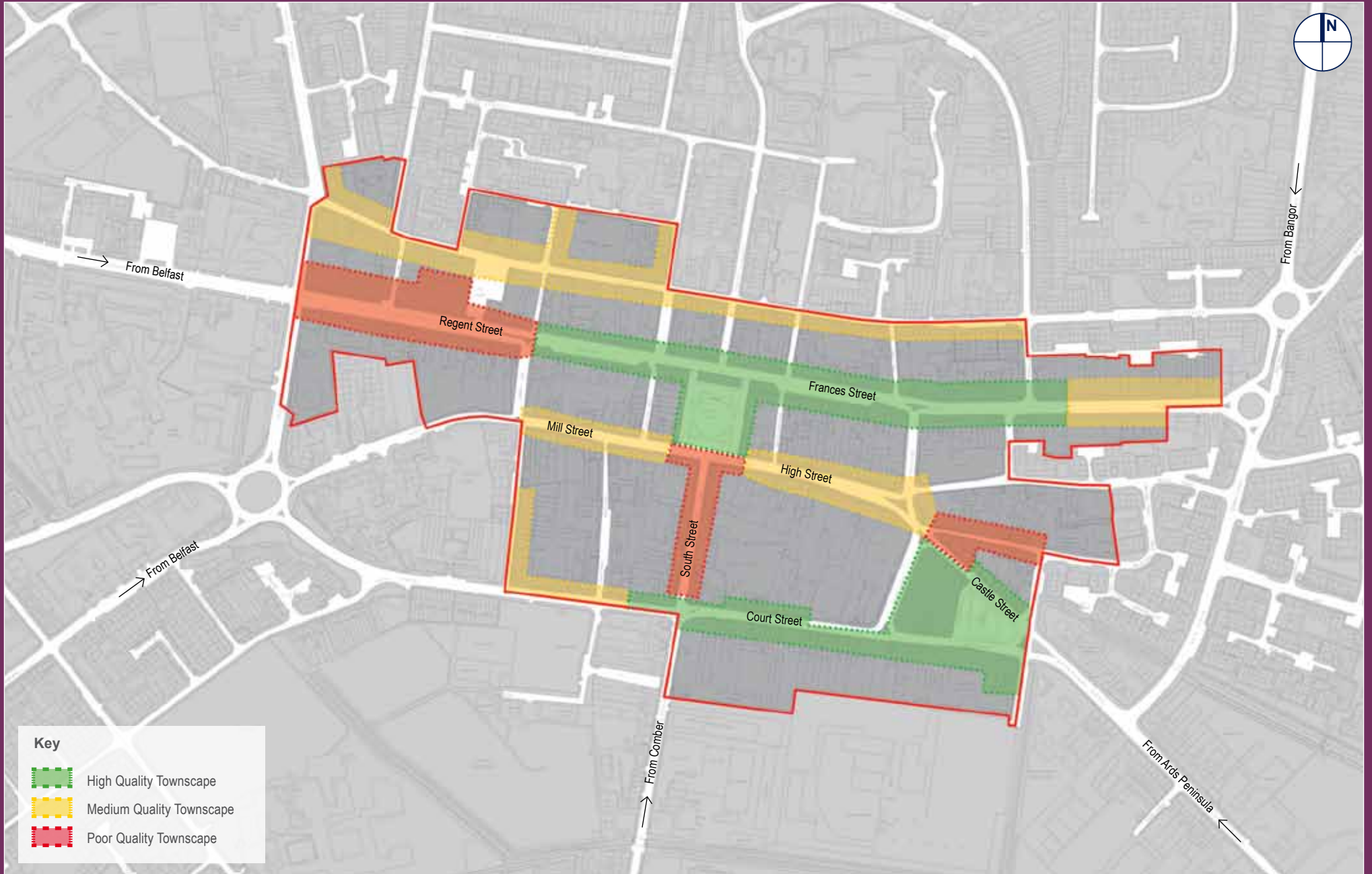
*Arches providing access to rear yards*



*Use of finer detailing on even the simplest domestic building*



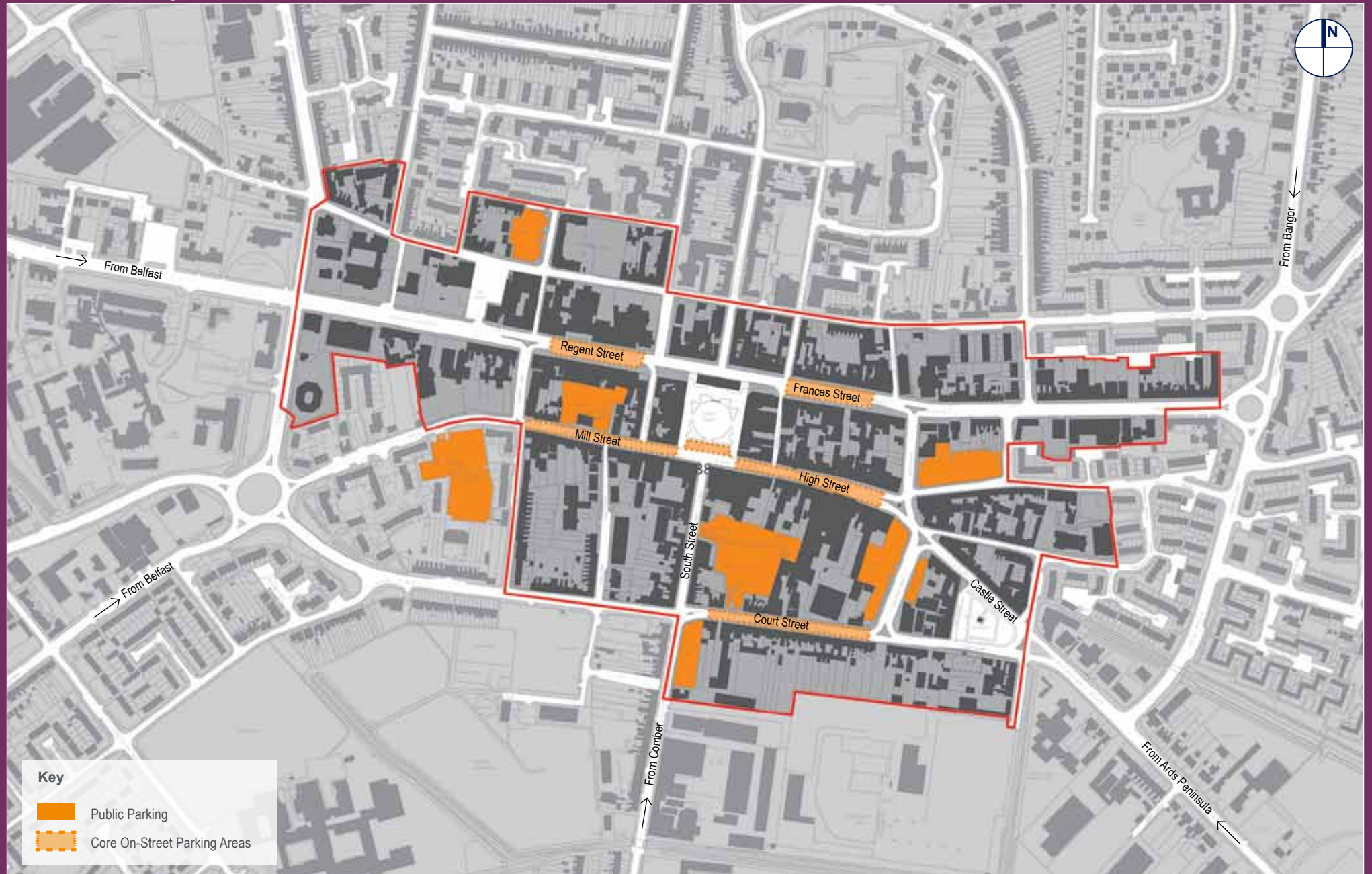
# Townscape Character Areas



**Key**

- High Quality Townscape
- Medium Quality Townscape
- Poor Quality Townscape

# Town Centre Car Parking





- A number of locations within the Town Centre are of a relatively poor environmental quality, including South Street, the eastern end of Regent Street and the area around Movilla Street.
- Buildings and groups of buildings of architectural and/or historic interest are major assets of the centre, as can the historic grid pattern focussed on Conway Square.
- The overall quality of Newtownards is generally good, but there is clear potential to make it better.

### **Access and Movement**

- Newtownards is generally considered highly accessible via private car.
- However, traffic congestion is regularly experienced during the peak hours, as a high proportion of through traffic is generated in addition to that within the town.
- Vehicle movement is generally given priority within the Town Centre, often at the expense of pedestrians. This causes conflicts with pedestrians, degrades the environment and contributing to the loss of attractiveness of the Town Centre as a shopping destination.

- The amount of car parking spaces is adequate, although there is often an amount of circulatory traffic in the town centre looking for convenient parking, further exacerbating congestion and environmental problems.
- There are regular connections to Belfast City Centre and a central, convenient bus interchange.

## **2.6 Key Issues and Opportunities**

From the analysis of the context for regeneration outlined briefly above, we have discerned the following key issues facing Newtownards Town Centre, as well as a number of opportunities to improve the future prospects of the Town.

### **Key Issues**

The Masterplan intends to develop many aspects of Newtownards Town Centre. They are both positive and negative features and include the following:

- Good mix of independent retail cafes and other activities serving locals and visitors alike.
- A strong built heritage, with many fine buildings and attractive townscapes.
- Significant potential for evening activities, with opportunities for restaurants and cafes catering for residents and visitors.

- Competition from shops, services and other attractions (existing and proposed) located outside the town centre and other, competing towns.
- Vacant/derelict buildings and sites with surface parking; these can be eyesores, but also present opportunities for new development.
- Congestion in the town centre, particularly at peak times, due to on-street parking and the limited capacity of the main junctions in the town to deal with traffic.
- A strong partnership approach exists and the desire to make the right decisions for the town, both of which are essential for the long-term success of the town centre.
- The public realm and streetscape, while functional, needs refurbishment, providing the opportunity to improve existing space and create new ones.
- A lack of diversity in the town centre, despite the town having an excellent independent retailing offer it lacks any significant multi-national retailing, office or leisure offer.
- A greater number of town centre businesses need to involve themselves in the management and promotion of their local environment.



*Newtownards Town Hall facing Conway Square*



*St Mark's Church*



*The Market Cross*



*War Memorial*



*Bus station*



*Frances Street (looking west)*



*New apartments on Frances Street*



*High Street (looking west)*



*Court Street*



*Top end of South Street*



*Mill Street car park*



*Queen's Hall*

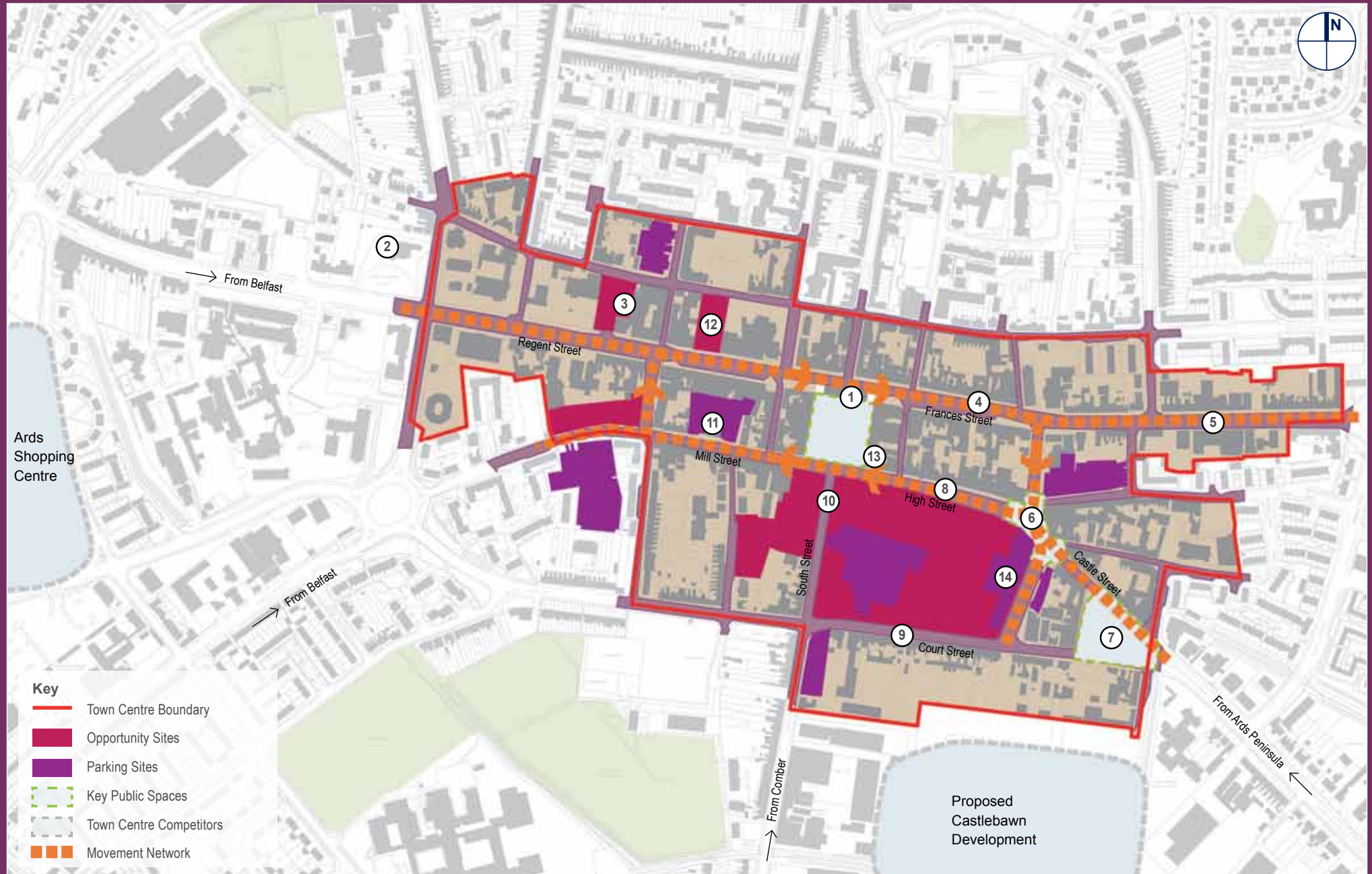


*Award winning local retailing on Conway Square*



*Old Cross Car Parks*





- Key**
- Town Centre Boundary
  - Opportunity Sites
  - Parking Sites
  - Key Public Spaces
  - Town Centre Competitors
  - Movement Network



## Key Opportunities

Newtownards has an attractive town centre with a strong base of independent retailers. The foundations of the Masterplan are, therefore, already in place and the plan will seek to build on the town's considerable strengths. The Masterplan will develop these strengths to create a town that can compete for investment long into the future.

The main opportunities available to Newtownards Town Centre include:

- **Retail Development:** A new town centre, retail led, mixed-use development opportunity has been identified in the Court Street, High Street area. The benefits of such a scheme to Newtownards would be highly significant. Not only would it reinvigorate the town centre with new shops suited to modern retailing needs, but it would also be an opportunity to provide new office space and apartments, bringing more life into the town centre. A new town centre development would also benefit Newtownards by drawing customers back from out-of-town-centre retail developments;
- **Public Realm:** Newtownards has an excellent opportunity to create an attractive, pedestrian friendly town centre. An improved public realm would improve the environment in the town centre and create a destination where people will want to come and spend time; and
- **An Improved Evening Economy:** The Masterplan will seek to create distinct quarters in the town. One of these will provide for leisure and the evening economy. A cluster of family friendly restaurants, cafés and bars will help animate the town centre and complement the offer provided by local shops.

# 3 Consultation

## 3.1 Introduction

The draft proposals for Newtownards Town Centre were prepared over a period of twelve months. This section of the Masterplan briefly summarises the process and findings of the formal public consultation process conducted for the draft Masterplan from 5 January until 5 March 2010.

Alongside this formal consultation, the preparation of the baseline research outlined in the previous chapter involved in depth surveying and analysis. This included 550 surveys with householders in the Ards, East Belfast and wider County Down area as well as 97 surveys with retailers in the town centre. There have also been a series of one-on-one consultations with key stakeholders in Newtownards throughout the course of the project.

The development of the Masterplan was also monitored through regular meetings with an advisory group made up of local councillors, representatives from the Newtownards Chamber of Trade, Ards Borough Council officers and DSD representatives.

## 3.2 Public Consultation Process and Methodology

As outside consultants, we recognise that the greatest source of knowledge on Newtownards Town Centre is the people who live, work, shop and spend time in the town. It was therefore vital that the community consultation gave people an opportunity to give us their views on the future of their town.

The consultation period began with the launch of the draft Masterplan by Minister Ritchie on the 7th January 2010 in Newtownards Town Hall. Eight draft Masterplan presentation boards were prominently displayed in the Town Hall for the public to view and comment on (see below). They introduced the project and set out the key components of the draft Masterplan, which included as public realm improvements, a new retail-led development proposal, investment in Conway Square and a transport and movement plan.

This presentation material remained on formal display for 8 weeks until 5th March 2010, accompanied by comments sheets for the public to make their views on the proposals known to the team. The Town Hall has an average throughput in excess of 1,000 people per week and has relatively long opening hours. This ensured that the proposals were available to the maximum number of people in a convenient and accessible location.

Digital PDF copies of the boards were also available to download on the DSD website and Ards Borough Council website, as well as [www.shopnewtownards.com](http://www.shopnewtownards.com), with 97 people downloading copies of the draft plans. The draft plans were downloaded by 2,083 people from the Council's website and the DSD website was visited by 116 people during the consultation period. The ministerial launch event also received coverage in the Newtownards Chronicle, helping to further raise awareness of the proposals among the public.

The public consultation process including sending over 100 letters to a range of statutory bodies and equality-related interest groups to ensure the final proposals help promote equality for all.

# The Consultation boards

## 1 Newtownards Town Centre Master Plan The Study Area

**Background to this Consultation**

The Newtownards Town Centre Master Plan is a key document for the town. It sets out the vision for the town centre and provides a framework for future development. The plan is being developed in consultation with the community to ensure it reflects their views and needs.

**Purpose of this Public Consultation**

The purpose of this public consultation is to gather your views on the proposals for the Newtownards Town Centre Master Plan. Your feedback is crucial to ensuring the plan meets the needs of the community and is sustainable for the future.

**Your Feedback is Crucial**

Your views on the proposals are most welcome - so please let us have your feedback.



## 2 Newtownards Town Centre Master Plan Issues and Opportunities

**Key Issues**

- Transportation and parking issues
- Public realm and pedestrian access
- Building quality and heritage
- Green spaces and landscaping
- Public realm and pedestrian access

**Key Opportunities**

- Improving the quality of the public realm
- Enhancing the town's character and identity
- Creating a vibrant and sustainable town centre
- Improving the quality of the public realm

**Public Realm**

The public realm is the outdoor space that we share. It includes streets, squares, parks, and public buildings. A good public realm is essential for a vibrant and sustainable town centre.

**Regeneration Themes**

- Improving the quality of the public realm
- Enhancing the town's character and identity
- Creating a vibrant and sustainable town centre

Your views on the proposals are most welcome - so please let us have your feedback.

## 3 Newtownards Town Centre Master Plan Vision and Concept

**Why have a Vision?**

A vision provides a clear and inspiring picture of what we want to achieve. It helps us to focus our efforts and make decisions that are in line with our long-term goals.

**Key Words**

Active, Vibrant, Sustainable, Inclusive, High Quality, Regeneration, Public Realm, Pedestrian Access, Green Spaces, Landscaping, Public Buildings, Town Character, Identity, Sustainable, Vibrant, Active, Inclusive, High Quality, Regeneration, Public Realm, Pedestrian Access, Green Spaces, Landscaping, Public Buildings, Town Character, Identity.

**Regeneration Themes**

- Improving the quality of the public realm
- Enhancing the town's character and identity
- Creating a vibrant and sustainable town centre

Your views on the proposals are most welcome - so please let us have your feedback.

## 4 Newtownards Town Centre Master Plan The Draft Master Plan

**Draft Master Plan for Newtownards Town**

The Draft Master Plan sets out the vision for the town centre and provides a framework for future development. It includes proposals for the public realm, transportation, and building quality.

**High Quality Public Realm**

A high quality public realm is essential for a vibrant and sustainable town centre. It includes streets, squares, parks, and public buildings.

Your views on the proposals are most welcome - so please let us have your feedback.

## 5 Newtownards Town Centre Master Plan The Public Realm

**The Importance of the Public Realm**

The public realm is the outdoor space that we share. It includes streets, squares, parks, and public buildings. A good public realm is essential for a vibrant and sustainable town centre.

**Conway Square**

Conway Square is a key public realm space in the town centre. It is a place where people can meet, relax, and enjoy the outdoors. The plan proposes improvements to the square to make it a more attractive and usable space.

**The Existing Public Realm**

Issue	Priority	Current Status	Proposed Action
Public Realm Quality	High	Low	Improve
Pedestrian Access	High	Low	Improve
Green Spaces	Medium	Low	Improve
Public Buildings	Medium	Low	Improve
Town Character	Medium	Low	Improve
Sustainable	Medium	Low	Improve
Vibrant	Medium	Low	Improve
Active	Medium	Low	Improve
Inclusive	Medium	Low	Improve
High Quality	Medium	Low	Improve
Regeneration	Medium	Low	Improve
Public Realm	Medium	Low	Improve
Pedestrian Access	Medium	Low	Improve
Green Spaces	Medium	Low	Improve
Public Buildings	Medium	Low	Improve
Town Character	Medium	Low	Improve
Sustainable	Medium	Low	Improve
Vibrant	Medium	Low	Improve
Active	Medium	Low	Improve
Inclusive	Medium	Low	Improve
High Quality	Medium	Low	Improve
Regeneration	Medium	Low	Improve

Your views on the proposals are most welcome - so please let us have your feedback.

## 6 Newtownards Town Centre Master Plan The Public Realm: Conway Square

**The Civic Heart**

Conway Square is the civic heart of the town. It is a place where people can meet, relax, and enjoy the outdoors. The plan proposes improvements to the square to make it a more attractive and usable space.

**A Market Square**

Conway Square is a key public realm space in the town centre. It is a place where people can meet, relax, and enjoy the outdoors. The plan proposes improvements to the square to make it a more attractive and usable space.

**A Tourist and Testing Area**

Conway Square is a key public realm space in the town centre. It is a place where people can meet, relax, and enjoy the outdoors. The plan proposes improvements to the square to make it a more attractive and usable space.

**Design Concept for Conway Square**

The design concept for Conway Square is to create a vibrant and sustainable public realm space. It includes proposals for pedestrian access, green spaces, and public buildings.

Your views on the proposals are most welcome - so please let us have your feedback.

## 7 Newtownards Town Centre Master Plan High St/Court St Development Opportunity Site

**High St/Court St**

The High St/Court St site is a key development opportunity in the town centre. It is a place where people can meet, relax, and enjoy the outdoors. The plan proposes improvements to the site to make it a more attractive and usable space.

**Design Concept for High St/Court St**

The design concept for the High St/Court St site is to create a vibrant and sustainable development opportunity. It includes proposals for pedestrian access, green spaces, and public buildings.

Your views on the proposals are most welcome - so please let us have your feedback.

## 8 Newtownards Town Centre Master Plan Draft Movement Strategy

**The Road Network**

The road network is a key element of the town's infrastructure. It provides a means of transport for people and goods. The plan proposes improvements to the road network to make it a more attractive and usable space.

**Existing Public Realm**

The existing public realm is the outdoor space that we share. It includes streets, squares, parks, and public buildings. The plan proposes improvements to the public realm to make it a more attractive and usable space.

**Existing and New Parking Potential**

The plan proposes improvements to the existing and new parking potential in the town centre. It includes proposals for pedestrian access, green spaces, and public buildings.

Your views on the proposals are most welcome - so please let us have your feedback.

### 3.3 Feedback Received

Respondents were invited to post their feedback forms in boxes provided at the Town Hall, to email comments directly to Tribal or post their response to Ards Borough Council. In addition to the feedback forms, letters were also accepted as part of the process. All responses received were collated and analysed by Tribal to help inform the final Masterplan proposals.

The total number of formal responses to the consultation was 24. This was supplemented by a series of meetings and informal, verbal responses. The responses received were submitted by a diverse range of organisations and individuals. Most respondents covered several issues within the same submission, leading to in excess of 100 separate issues being covered.

Nine group or organisation responses were received from the following:

- Newtownards Chamber of Trade;
- Castlebawn project team;
- Warden Brothers Ltd;
- Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ);
- Libraries NI;
- Ards Development Bureau and Community Network;

- Ards Art Committee;
- Ards Tourism; and
- Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People.

### 3.4 Impact of the Consultation

The key issues raised in response to the consultation were divided into eight broad categories. We have provided a brief overview of these issues below along with an explanation of the impact the consultation process has had on the final Masterplan.

- **Masterplan proposals:** In general terms, the full array of Masterplan proposals were well received. In particular, the new library and cultural centre on the Queen's Hall site was given strong support by Libraries NI. It will help improve the cultural diversity in Newtownards Town Centre. Similarly, recognition of the importance of conserving the built heritage was welcomed, as were the Masterplan's intentions to promote equality and good relations. Support was also evident for the introduction of art into the public realm.
- **Public Realm:** The proposed alterations to Conway Square were broadly supported. Such investment will seek to build upon the current strengths of the public realm to deliver a versatile contemporary heart in the town.
- **Proposed Town Centre retail-led development:** A number of concerns were raised regarding the proposed Town Centre retail-led development at Court Street/High Street. The proposals are in accordance with the identified need for modern retail floorspace in the Town Centre. The site is selected over other Town Centre locations due to the presence of two publicly owned car parks, which will help enable public sector delivery. The loss of car parking will be mitigated through re-provision underground. Residential or commercial uses on the upper floors will further enhance the vibrancy of the Town Centre and will support the evening economy.
- **Traffic movement and parking:** Comments received covered parking provision and concern over the proposed two-way system. The Masterplan does not propose a reduction in the number of parking spaces – in fact, there may be a slight increase required alongside new development. In response to comments, we have deferred any plans to adjust circulation and leave the one-way system.



- **Branding and promotion:** Comments highlighted the need for strong branding and a co-ordinated marketing strategy to support any physical interventions. The Masterplan recognises the importance of branding and marketing, as well as a varied events programme, in revitalising Newtownards Town Centre. It seeks to maximise the potential offered by the key assets of the town and will build on the existing good work in these areas.
- **Improved Communication:** A number of respondents highlighted the importance of good communication between Town Centre stakeholders in delivering the Masterplan. Communication continues to improve in Newtownards. Now that the Masterplan is complete, the Council will determine the appropriate partnership structures to deliver the Masterplan interventions.
- **Practical and financial implications:** Several respondents sought to underline the centrality of ensuring the Masterplan's proposals are realistic. We believe the Masterplan proposals are deliverable. The collective support from DSD, the Council, the Chamber of Trade and other stakeholders means that any difficulties

arising in terms of delivery can be easily addressed. A new form of partnership will be established to implement the proposals set out.

- **Masterplan boundary:** A number of comments raised concerns regarding the Masterplan boundary. For clarity, the Masterplan covers the Town Centre as defined in the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015. It is based on robust evidence of Newtownards' special needs and fully acknowledges the potential impact of development proposals on the surrounding area.

A detailed breakdown of the comments received and the Masterplan team's responses are contained in the Report on Consultation, prepared by Tribal in April 2010. This is contained within the appendices.

# 4 Vision for Newtownards

## 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 Newtownards can identify with. There needs to be a strong point of reference that those responsible for delivering the regeneration of Newtownards Town Centre can consult to ensure that the over-arching objectives of the Masterplan are being pursued at each stage.

The Vision for Newtownards Town Centre therefore sets out the basic objective of the Regeneration Masterplan. It allows the many and complex components of the Masterplan to be expressed in a simple form of words that captures the key aspirations of the people of Newtownards. It is the measure by which the future success of the Masterplan will be assessed.

The Vision is not designed to be a dry, abstract concept. It is a living representation of the aspirations of the people of Newtownards and their hopes for their town.

## 4.2 The Vision Workshop

As part of the consultation process outlined in the previous chapter, a Vision Workshop was convened, bringing together people with an interest in the future of Newtownards Town Centre. It was held on 3 September 2009 in Newtownards Town Hall and was attended by the following members of the project's advisory group:

- Councillor David Smyth (Deputy Mayor);
- Councillor Angus Carson (Chair of the Development Committee);
- Councillor Michelle McIlveen MLA;
- Councillor Simon Hamilton MLA;
- Andrew Getty (Newtownards Chamber of Trade; Knotts);
- David Birch (Ards Borough Council Regeneration Officer);
- Derek McCallan (Ards Borough Council Director of Development);
- Ken McGavock (Ards Shopping Centre);
- Richard Heasley (Tribal); and
- Martyn Smithson (Tribal).

The aim was to present the group with a summary of the initial baseline findings that underpin the development of the Masterplan and to gain feedback as to what are considered the relative strengths and weaknesses of the Town Centre. The

discussion then sought to identify the threats to the future success of the centre and the opportunities available for the strategy to build upon.

Through the advisory group it was possible to develop a Vision statement for Newtownards Town Centre, supported by a series of 'Regeneration Themes' that will work to deliver this vision.

## 4.3 The Vision

Newtownards Town Centre has a strong base from which to begin its rejuvenation. Therefore, despite a number of weaknesses, there are several opportunities available to build upon this base and enable the Town Centre to respond to the external threats, most notably the current economic recession and growing out-of-centre competition.

The Town Centre has a strong retail offer, particularly through a number of good quality independent retailers that are linked solely with Newtownards. It has a large catchment population and a high degree of loyalty from shoppers. Its people are a major asset, with friendly, well-trained staff and a strong community spirit and sense of pride. The retail core is compact and easily defined, with a good layout and some distinctive architectural features. It is clear that the removal of blight and simple

improvements to the public realm will greatly increase the attractiveness of the centre.

Newtownards is highly accessible and in a prime location to capitalise on the growing tourism economy in Northern Ireland. Its close proximity to Belfast and location at the head of the Ards Peninsular are all major strengths. A possible National Park designation for the Strangford Lough could offer significant tourism potential, including funding to improve the area and provide improved leisure services. Coupled with the significant growth in a 'café culture' across Northern Ireland, means Newtownards could support a vibrant evening economy.

Alongside this, the culture and leisure scene could also be expanded further. Building upon the key assets of the Town Hall Arts Centre, Queen's Hall Library, traditional market Square and historic environment, additional arts and crafts facilities and services could also be provided to capitalise on the vibrant art community living in the Ards Borough.

In short, we can summarise the potential in the succinct vision statement:

*“Unlocking the future by developing the present - a contemporary, vibrant Newtownards for local people and visitors alike”*

In practice, this means that Newtownards Town Centre will aspire to fulfil the following Vision statement over the next 15-20 years:

*“A vibrant and distinctive market town, Newtownards is a destination of choice complementing the wider tourism offer in the Borough. The local people are proud of their town and regularly visit the centre to enjoy the wide range of shops, services, cafés, restaurants and leisure facilities provided in a high quality, attractive and user-friendly environment. In particular, the Town Centre is well known for its selection of local and independent retailers, many of which are found only in Newtownards. It has a reputation for being a welcoming and friendly town, providing customers with a retail-leisure experience that is second to none.”*

#### 4.4 Achieving the Vision: Regeneration Themes

In order to achieve this strategic vision, we have identified a number of regeneration themes. In practice, these themes form a series of objectives that will work together to ensure that the vision outlined above will be achieved. All of the Masterplan proposals considered for the regeneration of Newtownards Town Centre were assessed in terms of their ability to contribute to one or more of these objectives.

- **Create a diverse Town Centre** with a rich mix of uses and a balanced provision of activities and opportunities.
- **Produce a thriving tourist economy**, making Newtownards a destination in its own right, from which the attractions of the wider Borough, and beyond, can be explored.
- **Expand the evening economy sensitively**, bringing life to Newtownards throughout the day, and into the night.
- **Improve the ‘Quality of Place’** by making the most of Newtownards' built heritage and high quality townscape.
- **Ensure accessibility**, making Newtownards Town Centre pedestrian and cyclist friendly, reduce congestion, with good public transport links and adequate, accessible parking provision.
- **Present a friendly face** with a strong community spirit that is welcoming to visitors.
- **Over-arching branding and promotions**, providing Newtownards Town Centre with effective promotion and marketing, and an exciting programme of events throughout the year, managed in a partnership approach.

## 4.5 The Concept Masterplan

We were then able to develop an overall concept for the regeneration of Newtownards Town Centre that would help to deliver the Vision and Regeneration Themes established. This can be illustrated through the following Concept Masterplan drawing.

The concept is based on the town's existing layout and form, recognising the importance of Conway Square as a focal point at the heart of the town. It will deliver a diverse mix of uses across the centre, building on existing strengths, including a retained retail focus within the primary retail core, a leisure focus to the south, cultural and heritage quarters centred on the town's historic features and a civic quarter to the west. The remaining areas will contain several uses including commercial and retail facilities, residential accommodation and leisure facilities.

This approach will ensure that the town becomes diverse and vibrant, with a strengthened tourism offer and evening economy. Allied to this, the Masterplan will recognise the importance of each of the 'Gateway' locations; those streetscapes that mark the key entrance points into the Town Centre. Improved public realm throughout the centre, including the removal of dereliction,

particularly in these key locations, will help improve the 'Quality of Place', ensure a more pedestrian friendly, accessible Town Centre and will improve the overall image project of the town.

To help deliver this overall concept, we have drawn upon several precedent examples from around the UK. For example, the Masterplan reflects the need to ensure that the historic features and character of the town centre is preserved and revitalised. Armagh and Penryn

are just two examples of where this has been successfully achieved. Likewise, Downham Market in Norfolk provides an excellent example of a well-designed civic space at the heart of the town to which Conway Square could aspire. Furthermore, in making recommendations for improvements to the public realm and for making the town centre more accessible we have drawn upon our breadth and depth of experience, as well as several examples of best practice.



*Make the most of Newtownards' heritage (this example: Armagh)*



*Create a more attractive and integrated public realm (this example: Belleek)*



*Reinforce Newtownards as a retail centre with a wide range of independent shops and services (this example: Enniskillen)*



*Provide a focus for civic pride (this example: Downham Market, Norfolk)*



*Make pedestrian friendly spaces that are attractive, robust and safe (this example: Keswick, Cumbria)*



*Celebrate Newtownards built heritage and make the most of its townscape character and quality (this example: Penryn, Cornwall)*



Concept for Newtownards Town Centre



# 5 Development Proposals Overview

## 5.1 Introduction

This section of the Newtownards Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan details the projects and schemes that will contribute to delivering the Vision detailed in the previous chapter. It provides the rationale for a series of interventions that have emerged from the baseline research, visioning exercise and public consultation, each of which is intended to sustain and enhance the economic and social function of the town centre.

## 5.2 Understanding the Masterplan

The actions proposed vary in their form and include both physical and non-physical interventions. The proposals therefore include new built development and improvements to the quality of the public realm, as well as a range of economic and institutional interventions designed to provide the favourable context within which the physical development can be delivered.

This document first addresses the location, nature and form of the capital schemes that will help to provide Newtownards with a more vibrant, attractive and successful town centre. The accompanying non-physical interventions are then outlined in the Delivery and Implementation Section, which outlines the institutional structures,

funding options and operational issues associated with delivering integrated economic, social and physical regeneration.

The capital schemes outlined within the Masterplan are illustrative and strategic in their detail. Rather than representing definitive design proposals for individual sites within Newtownards Town Centre, the Masterplan is intended to provide a framework within which detailed proposals for specific sites might be prepared. The Masterplan therefore outlines an over-arching strategy for Newtownards Town Centre and the inherent principles that detailed developments should seek to conform with to ensure that the regeneration objectives are met and that the over-riding vision for Newtownards Town Centre is achieved.

The following information is provided, to help explain the intent of the physical interventions:

- A summary drawing – the Masterplan – which sets out the location, nature and extent of the proposed capital schemes;
- A hierarchy of public realm interventions, including key design principles to help direct future investment in the built environment;
- Additional design detail on the potential form and appearance of the priority interventions;

- Explanation of the transport 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 timing of delivery.

## 5.3 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 Newtownards Town Centre. It illustrates the main opportunity sites identified and gives an indication as to how they might be developed for the benefit of the town as a whole.

The three main components of the Masterplan that are worth highlighting are Improvements to the public realm, key development opportunities and transport and movement proposals.

### Improvements to 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. The Masterplan not only identifies public realm

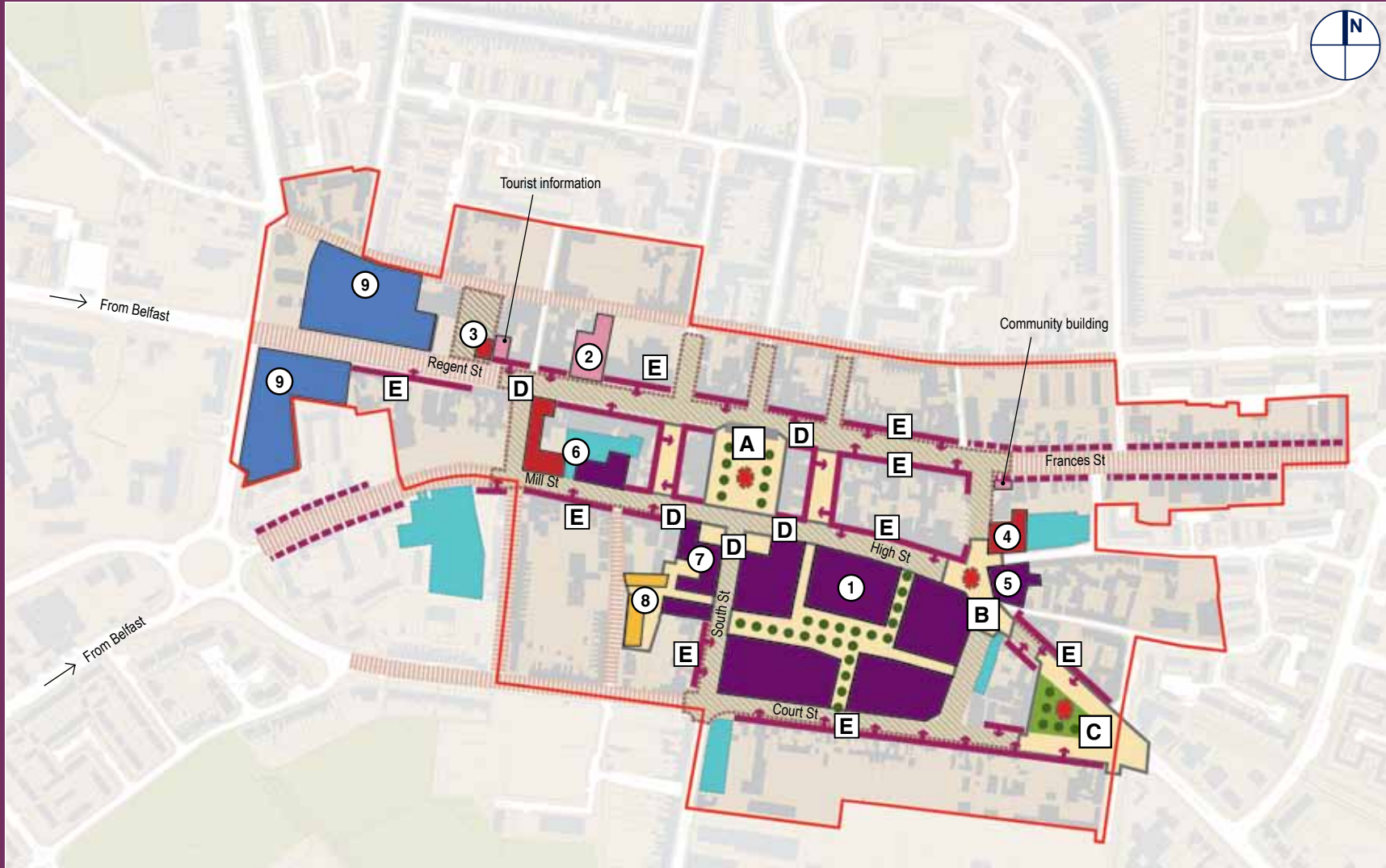
improvements, but also improvements to the existing building frontages and refurbishment of key facilities. This focuses on preserving and enhancing the town's unique character, historic assets and improving the 'Quality of Place', as well as ensuring that the Town Centre is pedestrian friendly and accessible. 'Quality of Place' is a direct function of the quality of the experience of those who live and work in Newtownards – 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 an environment that will enable the myriad of other initiatives relating to the economic and social functions of the Town Centre to take place.

As part of the public realm improvements, the Masterplan identifies Conway Square as a priority intervention. It provides an excellent focal point for Newtownards, but would benefit from updating and redesign. The new space would reinvigorate the town, acting as a location for events, festivals and the weekly market, as well as a becoming a well-known and pleasant space for people to meet and spend time.

Masterplan - Public Realm Improvements	Regeneration Themes						
	Create a Diverse Town Centre	Produce a Thriving Tourist Economy	Expand the Evening Economy Sensitive	Improve the 'Quality of Place'	Ensure Accessibility	Present a Friendly Face	Over-arching Branding and Promotions
Conway Square Improvements	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Market Cross Civic Space		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Court Square Enhancements		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Major Public Realm Interventions				✓	✓	✓	✓
Secondary Public Realm Interventions				✓	✓	✓	✓
Queen's Hall Public Space	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓



Masterplan for Newtownards Town Centre



- Key**
- 1** Flagship High Street/Court Street retail/commercial/residential/basement parking development
  - 2** Queen's Hall: New library and cultural resource centre
  - 3** Refurbished Bus Station and tourist coach parking
  - 4** Movilla Street Car Park mixed use/commercial development
  - 5** 2a Castle Place development, linked to new open space as a setting for Market Cross
  - 6** Mill Street Car Park mixed use/retail/commercial development
  - 7** South Street retail/hotel development
  - 8** Pound Street residential development
  - 9** Potential gateway improvements/long-term development opportunity (civic uses)
- A** Conway Square: The heart and social hub of the town centre
  - B** Market Cross: Entrance to the core of the town centre
  - C** Court Square: Enhanced as an accessible public space that respects the war memorial
  - D** Principal streetscape and public realm enhancements
  - E** Principal frontage improvements

Masterplan boundary	Civic	Green open space	Public realm improvements
New retail development	Residential	Library / community use	Car parking areas
Library / community use	Flexible blocks for commercial / residential use (3 to 4 storeys)	Principal frontage improvements	Streetscape/parking/road management improvement
Residential	Car parking areas	Secondary frontage improvements	Secondary streetscape improvements



## Key Development Opportunities

There are a number of development opportunities presented within Newtownards Town Centre. These include existing buildings, whether coming to the end of their lifespan or already derelict, vacant 'gap sites', particularly within the continuous street frontage, and currently underutilised land, including a number of existing surface car parks.

The development of all, or even some, of these sites would deliver a rich mix of uses (retail, cultural, commercial and residential) and a balanced provision of activities that would attract more people to the Town Centre. These people, in 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, bringing life at all times. The improved range of retail, cultural and leisure facilities will therefore help expand the evening economy and strengthen Newtownards' tourist offer.

We consider the following two development interventions priorities in delivering the Masterplan's objectives:

Masterplan – Key Development Opportunities	Regeneration Themes						
	Create a Diverse Town Centre	Produce a Thriving Tourist Economy	Expand the Evening Economy Sensitive	Improve the 'Quality of Place'	Ensure Accessibility	Present a Friendly Face	Over-arching Branding and Promotions
Flagship Court St./High St. Scheme	↙	↙	↙	↙	↙	↙	↙
Queen's Hall Redevelopment	↙	↙	↙	↙	↙	↙	↙
Refurbished Bus Station	↙	↙			↙	↙	
Movilla Street Car Park, Mixed-use/ Commercial	↙			↙			
2a Castle Place, Mixed use	↙			↙			
Mill Street, Mixed- use	↙		↙	↙			
South St. Retail/Hotel	↙	↙	↙	↙			
Pound St. Residential	↙			↙			

- High Street/Court Street Redevelopment: A new purpose built retail-led development within the retail core will take Newtownards forward as a town catering for the needs of modern retailers. The scheme could also provide new office space and living accommodation, helping bring life and vitality to the heart of the town centre.
- Redevelopment of Queen’s Hall: A new flagship library and cultural centre is proposed on the site of the former Queen’s Hall Library. This will provide an iconic town centre building with facilities and services to complement and enhance existing arts and cultural provision, serving the wider Ards Borough Council Area.

### Transport and Movement

Transport and movement is one of the key factors in 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.

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, particularly given the growing strength of

Masterplan – Transport and Movement Strategies	Regeneration Themes						
	Create a Diverse Town Centre	Produce a Thriving Tourist Economy	Expand the Evening Economy Sensitive	Improve the ‘Quality of Place’	Ensure Accessibility	Present a Friendly Face	Over-arching Branding and Promotions
Parking Strategy		↙		↙	↙	↙	↙
Pedestrian Movement				↙	↙		
Promoting Sustainable Transport		↙	↙	↙	↙	↙	

out-of-centre competition with seemingly unlimited free parking and easy access. The Masterplan does not seek to hinder access or remove parking provision, but rather seeks to manage the degree to which traffic negatively affects other activities. A number of transport and movement interventions are therefore proposed as part of the Masterplan, reflecting the desire to create a network of spaces that are multifunctional, with priority given to people, and their needs (rather than people in their cars). The Masterplan will

seek to coordinate and drive comprehensive parking, pedestrian and transport work plans. This will of course require Roads Service support and investment.



# 6 Public Realm Interventions

## 6.1 Introduction

The Public Realm consists of the streets, squares and parks that give Newtownards its character and make it an attractive place to live, work and visit.

In many ways, the public realm in Newtownards Town Centre is one of the most important elements to be considered by the Masterplan. We believe there is significant merit in further enhancing the public realm within Newtownards Town Centre, building upon the hierarchy of streets and spaces already present. The public realm network will therefore continue to provide a high quality backdrop, alongside the attractive streetscape and buildings already present, to make Newtownards one of the most popular destinations for shopping and tourism.

The list of public realm interventions, by type and scale, is quite varied. Our Strategy can, broadly speaking, be divided into four main categories:

- Primary Civic Space Improvements;
- Secondary Civic Space Enhancements;
- Major Public Realm Interventions; and
- Streetscape Interventions.

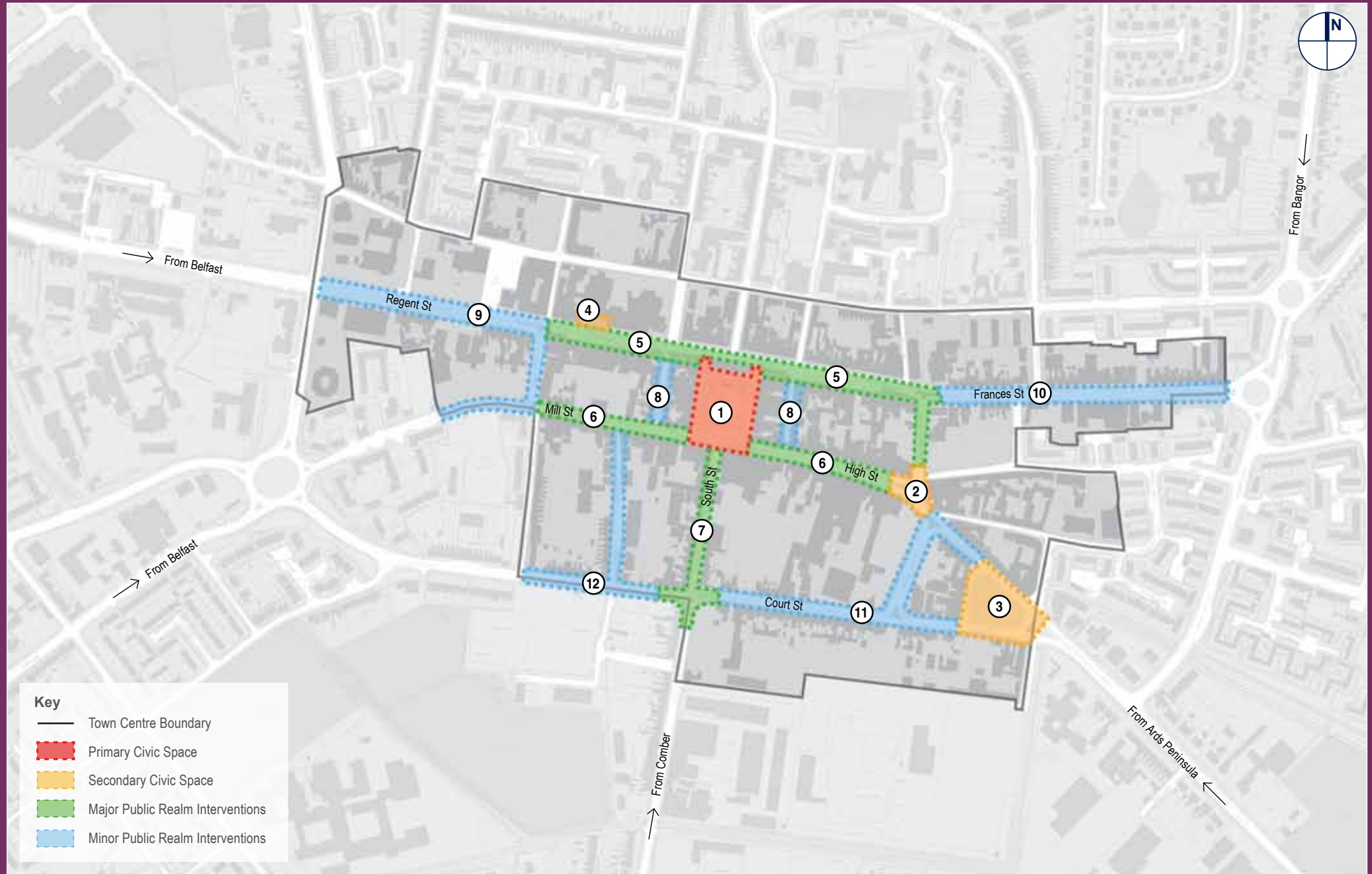
## 6.2 Public Realm Design Principles

Although the public realm in Newtownards Town Centre is tired and long overdue substantial investment, there are a number of potential improvements that could be made. The proposed improvements are based on a series of design principles, each of which is intended to make the public realm safer, more attractive and more accessible for pedestrians wishing to come to Newtownards Town Centre to shop, work, or simply to visit.

### **Design Principle 1: Provide a Safe, Attractive and Animated Public Realm**

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. The public realm requires high quality materials with simple detailing, as people tend to feel less comfortable where streets have been neglected or been negatively affected by insensitive development and poor surface materials. Interest in the public realm should be enhanced through a selection of tree planting, artistic interventions and imaginative lighting.





**Key**

- Town Centre Boundary
- ▭ Primary Civic Space
- ▭ Secondary Civic Space
- ▭ Major Public Realm Interventions
- ▭ Minor Public Realm Interventions

A Public Realm Hierarchy			Types of potential intervention						
	Location	Objectives	New Paving Materials	Pavement Widening	Street Trees	New Street Furniture & Signage	Public Art	Pedestrian Priority Space	New Parking Arrangements
①	Conway Square	To create a civic space that is the heart of the town centre and the setting for public events and activities that define the character and community spirit of the town	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
②	Market Cross	To provide a sensitive and sympathetic setting for one of the most important landmarks within the town centre	✓	✓		✓			
③	Court Square	To emphasise the importance of this space as a gateway to the town centre and as the setting for the Priory, one of its most important heritage assets	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
④	Regent Street/ Frances Street	To create a suitable setting for the many fine civic and commercial buildings along this important route, and to provide a more attractive pedestrian experience	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
⑤	Mill Street/ High Street	To provide an attractive, safe and accessible public space, complementing and supporting the principal retail core	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
⑥	South Street	To provide a public space to complement potential new development and support a new leisure quarter	✓	✓	✓	✓			
⑦	Meeting House Lane/Lower Mary Street	To create a pedestrian friendly environment, with the potential for secondary retail and service activities	✓			✓		✓	
⑧	Regent Street/ Gibson Lane/Mill Street	To upgrade the quality of these main routes into the town from the west, and provide a higher quality setting for potential new development	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
⑨	Frances Street	To provide a safe, attractive pedestrian environment that will complement service and leisure activities and emphasise this route as a gateway to the town centre, from the east	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
⑩	Court Street/Old Cross	To provide a public realm that helps integrate new development opportunities with the town centre core	✓		✓	✓	✓		
⑪	Upper Court Street/ John Street/ Pound Street	To reinforce the gateway function of these routes, and provide an attractive setting for town centre residential development, both new and existing	✓		✓				✓

**Design Principle 2: Create an Accessible Town Centre, open to all**

Newtownards Town centre 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. We will aim to provide a people focused, pedestrian friendly environment, which means providing pedestrian routes and crossing points that reflect desire lines. 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.



*Use robust, attractive materials*



*The public realm is for both vehicles and people*



*Lighting can be beautiful as well as practical*



*Provide clear and attractive, signs and information*



*Place great works of art in public spaces*



*Make spaces for people, first and foremost*



*The public realm should be welcoming and safe*



*Use street trees to 'soften' the public realm*

### Design Principle 3: Enrich the Existing Built Heritage

The Masterplan should preserve and enhance the best qualities of Newtownard's townscape and character. We will ensure that new developments make a positive response and reinforce the unique qualities that make Newtownards special and will enhance the town's character and identity throughout the public realm. Key characteristics of the built heritage include windows with a strong vertical emphasis, continuous rooflines with few projections, coloured and painted render on frontages, common building lines to the rear of footpaths and wide main streets.

Masterplan - Public realm Improvements	Regeneration Themes						
	Create a Diverse Town Centre	Produce a Thriving Tourist Economy	Expand the Evening Economy Sensitive	Improve the 'Quality of Place'	Ensure Accessibility	Present a Friendly Face	Over-arching Branding and Promotions
Conway Square Improvements		⬇		⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
Market Cross Civic Space				⬇	⬇		
Court Square Enhancements		⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	
Major Public Realm Interventions							
Streetscape Interventions							
Queen's Hall Public Space							



Windows have a strong vertical emphasis



Coloured and painted render building frontages



Continuous rooflines, with few projections



Wide main streets, with parking either side



### 6.3 Primary Civic Space Improvements: Conway Square

Conway Square is the functional, as well as the historic, heart of Newtownards. It is at the very centre of the network of streets and spaces and is an important civic asset.

As the single most significant open space, it is important that the potential of the Square is maximised. There is an opportunity to make even more of the Square, allowing for more events and activities to be held in the space. A re-modelling of the Square is proposed, the aim being to reinforce its role as the civic heart of the town centre, one that is used all day, including evenings, every day, throughout the year.

The quality of Conway Square will be improved by a contemporary design, one that opens up the square, improving the present sub-division of the space and making it more accessible and capable of accommodating many and varied events throughout the course of the year. Investment is needed and will be prioritised for Conway Square.

#### Design Concept for Conway Square

The design concept for Conway Square, as set out in the drawing below, does not mean that



there is only one finished design solution for the space. The diagram below simply shows that the design elements (trees, seats, art, paving, lighting) and the activities in the Square (indicated by the green arrows) truly interact with the activities and design elements of the buildings (indicated by the orange arrows). This creates a space that is properly integrated into the fabric of the Town Centre.



## How might Conway Square be used?

Conway Square and its uses could be substantially enhanced, to reinforce its status as the civic heart of the Town Centre. Any number of uses and activities could be accommodated within the re-designed space, including:

- **Saturday Market:** The weekly market is recognised as a great asset to the town and something that should be improved and enhanced. A contemporary design for the square, improved layout and the provision of retractable power points will, alongside additional funding and promotion, help to improve the market, bring added vibrancy to the town centre;
- **Public Events:** Conway Square is already host to a number of public events throughout the year. As well as the weekly market, a number of one-off or annual events are also held, including: a Continental Market; the 'A Taste of the Peninsula' Festival; a Game Fair; Puppet Orchestra Session/Puppet Making Workshop; the Ards Town Centre Cycle Races; an annual 'Creative Peninsula' Event, a 'Craft in the Square' day; and the Newtownards Harvest Fair day. The Masterplan seeks to build upon this success by promoting and enhancing the Square, facilitating a varied and

vibrant events calendar. The Masterplan will make the Square more accessible, improving the sub-division of space and provide new infrastructure and services for the visiting public, thus enabling the Square to be better utilised for events throughout the year. The Creative Peninsula programme, run by Ards Borough Council, should also engage further with local artists and the local community, with a view to creating opportunities for additional

artistic events across the widest range of activities and interest, including the visual arts, music and local craft production;

- **Shopping:** Conway Square is at the heart of the primary retail core in Newtownards Town Centre. An attractive streetscape, in the form of quality buildings, paving materials, seating and artistic commissions can all help to create the best 'shopping experience', setting the



*A new, more vibrant market*



*Simply sitting out and watching the world go by*



*Public events - music, art, drama & local festivals*



*Eating and drinking*



*Public art*



*Retail therapy*

scene for stylish retail environments which customers want to visit. Improvements to Conway Square could help towards promoting a 'boutique' feel and will further help boost the retail economy;

- **Eating and Drinking:** Although part of the primary retail core, the area surrounding Conway Square is also home to a number of catering services. It is widely recognised that good coffee shops and restaurants are synonymous with fashionable retail areas. Conway Square has two coffee shops fronting onto its western side, with vacant units providing scope for growth in this location. The provision of a more attractive environment in Conway Square may enable growth in this sector, including the possibility of 'al fresco' dining during the summer months. Again, a contemporary design, a new lighting scheme, improved sub-division of space and an improved quality of materials will all help increase scope for this activity within Conway Square;
- **Public Art Strategy:** Our overall concept plan for the town centre also places Conway Square at the heart of the cultural and heritage offer of Newtownards. As well as the series of events, we would anticipate a reinvigorated Conway Square being a prime location for

high quality public art. The use of public art throughout the town centre will increase the sense of community ownership of the public spaces and give a positive facelift to many areas. This can take the form of stand alone artistic installations as well as fine detailing on street furniture or the ad hoc design of practical furniture itself; and

- **Tourist Information:** Conway Square also has an important role to play in helping to improve accessibility, marketing and the cultural and heritage attraction of Newtownards. The Masterplan would endorse the inclusion of a Tourist Information point within the heart of the Town Centre, as well as improved signage.

The overall aim, therefore, should be to provide a flexible, robust space, which can be used throughout the day.

#### **What might a redesigned square look like?**

Although we are proposing investment in improvements to Conway Square as a priority, it should be noted that its complete redevelopment is not required. As discussed above, this could cover things such as paving materials, street furniture, new lighting scheme, retractable power points for events and the weekly market, an information point and new public art.

The sketches on the following page show how Conway Square might be reinvigorated to create a more flexible, attractive and accessible space. While this can take many forms, it should aim to provide a contemporary appearance that removes car parking from the south and opens up the space, making it more accessible. It should create and enhance the unique character and 'sense of place', reflecting its importance as the principal civic space in Newtownards.





### **Public Sector actions to bring forward development**

The public sector (Ards Borough Council and DSD in particular) should undertake the following actions to bring forward the reinvigoration of Conway Square:

- Project plan existing and identify additional available funding;
- Develop a comprehensive Conway Square improvement scheme; and
- Directly procure and manage works.

### **Practical Delivery Issues**

The detailed design for improvements to Conway Square will need to be developed following discussions with DSD, Ards Borough Council, the Chamber of Trade and the Ards Arts Committee.

If sufficient funding is made available at the outset of any public realm works, there may be merit in developing a comprehensive public realm strategy covering the principal and secondary civic spaces, the major public realm interventions to tie these together and the lower priority, minor public realm interventions. This would ensure a

consistency of approach across the whole town centre would reinforce the public realm hierarchy and would deliver cost savings in terms of design, procurement of materials and completion of works.

This could be achieved through the adoption of an Urban Design Guide for Newtownards, which would set out key design principles, whilst allowing flexibility, identify a range of suitable materials and identify key elements of Newtownards' character to be preserved and enhanced. This would assist in the introduction of a more coordinated approach to Town Centre and streetscape design. Ideally, the Guide should be developed and agreed before design options for targeted public realm upgrades are developed.

### **Costs and Funding**

Significant funding will be required from DSD supported by Council to deliver public realm improvements throughout the Town Centre.

Potential additional funding may be available for public art as part of Ards' Arts Committee/ Creative Peninsula budgets.

It is, of course, recognised that private sector support and funding will be required for flagship capital schemes within the Masterplan.

### **Priority and Timescales**

The works to Conway Square of a high priority as it is the principal civic space within the Town Centre. Improvements are crucial to improve the image of the Town Centre and to enable a broader programme of events throughout the year. The likely timescales are 1-2 years, including:

- Yr 1 Develop an improvement scheme
- Yr 2 Procure and deliver public realm improvements

## 6.4 Secondary Civic Space Enhancements

Alongside Conway Square, there are a number of secondary civic spaces. Nevertheless, these are important pieces of the public realm, providing interest and a high quality environmental setting for the mix of activities on offer in the town centre. As with the principal civic space, improvements and enhancements to these civic spaces will help improve the character and 'sense of place' within Newtownards.

### Market Cross

The Market Cross is one of a number of monuments, both civic and institutional, that provide order and meaning to the structure of Newtownards Town Centre. It sits at one of the gateways to the Town Centre from the east, and although its setting is dominated by traffic, it is an object that is instantly recognisable to all, and a clear sign that one has entered the Town Centre. The junction of Castle Street and Old Cross Street is a key entry/exit point, and the Market Cross is a landmark feature that serves as a focal point at the end of the main shopping frontage in the Town Centre.

### Court Square

The second of these secondary civic spaces is Court Square, which is the only area of green space within the Town Centre. It lies at the junction of Castle Street and Court Street and is a simple civic green space, with ornamental planting and seating focusing on the war memorial, located in the centre of the space. Court Square also provides a setting for the Priory. The

space is therefore a key and sensitive asset for Newtownards Town Centre, which is at a human scale providing welcome relief for pedestrian users away from the busy traffic routes.

The Masterplan aims to emphasise the importance of Court Square as a gateway into the Town Centre and as the setting for the priory, one of Newtownards' most important heritage assets. Taking into account the public realm immediately



*Market Cross, landmark at a key entry point*



*Court Square*



*The Priory*



surrounding the existing park, we would anticipate public realm improvements focussing on pavement widths and paving materials, street trees and soft landscaping, new street furniture and signage, public art and new parking arrangements.

### Queen's Hall

A contemporary public space to the front of the re-developed Queen's Hall Library and Cultural Resource Centre will form the third portion of key civic space. Although an area of open space exists to the front of the existing Queen's Hall, the re-development of the library will enable the re-modelling and enlarging of this space to provide



Queen's Hall

a more flexible outdoor space to support an increased events calendar in the town centre.

The Masterplan's aim for this reinvigorated space is to provide an enhanced setting for a new iconic Queen's Hall building and a flexible space for community events and activities. We would anticipate public realm improvements focussing on new paving materials, street trees, new street furniture and signage. The inclusion of public art as part of the open space will also complement the cultural offer of the new community hub.

The vision for the use of the new space is to complement and enhance the improved arts and



cultural provision of Newtownards Town Centre. It is likely that a programme of events can be established both within the new library and in the flexible outdoor space to: promote literacy and the joy of reading; host civic events, concerts and music or drama festivals; and/or hold arts and craft sales and exhibitions. The library itself will remain a high footfall generator and will form part of the revitalised evening economy, ensuring that the space is vibrant and lively throughout the day and evening.

### Public Sector Actions to Bring Forward Development

The public sector (Ards Borough Council and DSD in particular) should undertake the following actions to bring forward the secondary civic space improvements:

- Project Plan and deliver on existing funding and identify available funding, including potential applications to the Heritage Lottery Fund;
- Develop three Environmental Improvement Schemes for Market Cross, Court Square and the Queen's Hall site; and
- Directly procure and manage works, either collectively or individually.



### **Practical Delivery Issues**

The detailed design for the secondary civic spaces will need to be developed following discussions with DSD, Ards Borough Council, the Chamber of Trade and the Ards Arts Committee.

This could be achieved through the adoption of an Urban Design Guide for the secondary civic spaces, which would set out key design principles, whilst allowing flexibility, identify a range of suitable materials and identify key elements of Newtownards' character to be preserved and enhanced. This would ensure a consistency of approach across the whole Town Centre, would reinforce the public realm importance and would deliver cost savings in terms of design, procurement of materials and completion of works.

### **Costs and Funding**

Apart from the realisation of DSD and Council support referred to earlier and mindful of the costs laid out in the Implementation Action Plan, potential additional funding may be available for public art as part of Ards Arts Committee/ Creative Peninsula budgets. Moreover, Libraries NI may have funding available as part of the wider Queen's Hall re-development; and the schemes at Market Cross and Court Square may also be eligible for Heritage Lottery Funding through

the Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI), which supports strategic action to address problems in historic areas. Grants are available, for example, for the authentic reinstatement of historic surfaces and other "public realm" townscape features.

### **Priority and Timescales**

The revitalised civic space as part of the Queen's Hall redevelopment should be a high priority as they will be crucial in setting the context for the iconic new building, will enable a broader programme of events throughout the year and will help improve the image of the Town Centre. The likely timescales are 1-2 years, including:

- Yr 1 Develop re-modelling scheme
- Yr 2 Procure and deliver public realm improvements

The remodelling works to the Market Cross junction and Court Square are of a high-to-medium priority, reflecting their positioning as secondary civic spaces. In essence, if insufficient funding is available for all the public realm works, Conway Square, Queen's Hall and major public realm interventions should take precedence. We would anticipate timescales of 1-2 years, involving the following actions:

- Yrs 1-2 Developing the re-modelling schemes
- Yrs 1-2 Identifying/securing necessary funding

## **6.5 Major Public Realm Interventions**

Linking these main civic spaces (and others) together are a series of public realm and streetscape improvements, all of which are designed to provide a more pleasant, safer and convenient way for pedestrians to walk between the different attractions that Newtownards offers. The nature of these streetscape improvements would vary depending on their location and function; however, across all the schemes the same rules would apply, as set out in the three Design Principles above.

We have identified three main areas that would provide the greatest benefit to the Town Centre from a focused and prioritised approach to public realm improvements. These include the two principal shopping streets – High Street/Mill Street and Regent Street/Frances Street – as well as the more secondary retail area along South Street. Each of these streets radiates from the central civic space – Conway Square – enabling key design principles adopted in the regeneration of the Square to be drawn along the primary retail frontages.

As well as a flagship new retail development between High Street and Court Street and a new library and cultural centre on the Queen's Hall site, the delivery of development on a number

of 'gap sites' and under-utilised plots of land will complete a continuous streetscape, supported by a series of primary shop frontage improvements.

For each of the three areas, the Masterplan proposes:

- **High Street / Mill Street:** New paving materials and possible pavement widening, street trees, new street furniture and public art. Potential alterations to the pavement widths in a number of locations will also necessitate adjustments to the parking arrangements. The scheme will need to tie into Principal Civic Space improvements made to Conway Square, as well as the setting for Market Cross to the east end of High Street. The overall scheme should aim to provide an attractive, safe and accessible environment to support the primary retail core.
- **Regent Street / Frances Street:** Similar to High Street/Mill Street, new paving materials and pavement widening, street trees, new street furniture and public art. As part of the pavement widening, we are also proposing adjustments to the parking arrangements to provide safer, parallel short-stay parking bays, rather than the perpendicular bays currently provided. Again, the scheme will need to tie into the public realm enhancements at

Conway Square and the new civic space at Queen's Hall, as well as continuing down Castle Place to tie into the improved setting for Market Cross. The proposals aim to create an improved setting for the fine civic and commercial buildings along Regent Street and Frances Street. Whilst recognising the importance of the route for traffic, public realm improvements will provide a more pleasant pedestrian experience.

- **South Street:** In conjunction with new development on either side of the Street, new paving materials, possible pavement widening, street trees and new street furniture. Again, it will tie into the Conway Square improvements to the north, as well as the public realm interventions along High Street and Mill Street. It is also hoped to provide a new civic space as part of the High Street/Court Street development. The works will aim to support the growth of a new leisure quarter in this area of the town.

#### **Public Sector Actions to Bring Forward Development**

The public sector (Ards Borough Council and DSD in particular) should undertake the following actions to bring forward the major public realm interventions:

- Project plan existing and identify additional available funding;
- Develop an Environmental Improvement Scheme to cover the core area of Regent Street/Frances Street, High Street/Mill Street, Castle Place and South Street;
- Directly procure and manage works; and
- Follow up with a shop frontage improvement campaign and manage this for and with participating traders.

#### **Practical Delivery Issues**

The detailed design for the secondary civic spaces will need to be developed following discussions with DSD, Ards Borough Council, the Chamber of Trade and the Ards Arts Committee.

If sufficient funding is made available at the outset of any public realm works, there may be merit in developing a comprehensive public realm design scheme and works plan for the Town Centre, through the adoption of an Urban Design Guide for Newtownards. This would ensure a consistency of approach across the whole Town Centre, would reinforce the public realm hierarchy and would deliver cost savings in terms of design, procurement of materials and completion of works.

## Costs and Funding

We would anticipate costs for major public realm interventions to include:

- £15,000 for the production of the detailed designs; and
- £1.0 - £1.5 million for public realm and frontage improvements.

Potential additional funding may be available for public art associated with the Council's tourism, arts and private sector sponsorship programmes.

## Priority and Timescales

The major public realm interventions and streetscape enhancements are a high priority. Improvements are crucial to improve the image of the Town Centre and to tie together the main civic spaces. The proposed timescales are 1-2 years, to include:

- Yr 1 Develop environmental improvement schemes and grant funding programme for frontage enhancements
- Yr 2 Procure and deliver public realm improvements, and administer shop front grant programme (as part of Council co-ordinated regeneration actions)

## 6.6 Streetscape Interventions

Finally, the Masterplan has identified a series of streetscape improvement schemes, which continue to provide a more pleasant, safer and convenient pedestrian environment in these more peripheral locations. The nature of these public realm improvements will vary depending on the location and function of the specific streets, although they will again be informed by the three overarching Design Principles outlined above.

The following streets have been identified as being important:

- **Meeting House Lane/Lower Mary Street:** Each of these streets provides an important link between the two main retail areas – High Street to Frances Street and Mill Street to Regent Street respectively. However, at present they have a high level of inactive frontage and give traffic priority. Furthermore, pavements are often narrow or non-existent, leading to a hostile pedestrian environment.

The Masterplan intends to provide pedestrian priority in these two locations, with new surfacing materials, street furniture and signage. This is most likely to take the form of 'shared-surfaces' to allow pedestrian movement as a priority, but maintaining limited

vehicular access for servicing. The overall strategy aims to develop the potential for secondary retail and service activities, in a more pedestrian friendly public realm.

- **Regent Street/Gibson's Lane/Mill Street:** Linking into the principal public realm interventions along Regent Street and Mill Street, minor improvements in this location aim to improve the quality of the main routes into the Town Centre from the west. The interventions should focus on giving greater priority to the movement of pedestrians, both in terms of crossing the main roads and in terms of movement east to west along the streets.

Improvements could include pavement widening and new paving materials, street trees, new street furniture and signage and improved parking arrangements. As part of the Masterplan's transport and movement strategy outlined below, alterations should be made to the junction between Regent Street and Gibson's Lane to allow for the preferred east-west pedestrian desire line on the south side of Regent Street. Pavement widening will also necessitate adjustments to the informal parking arrangements along Regent Street.

- **Frances Street:** To the east end of Frances Street, secondary public realm interventions are proposed to support the principal

schemes in the rest of Frances Street. This aims to provide a safe, attractive pedestrian environment that will complement service and leisure activities and emphasise the importance of the route as a gateway to the Town Centre from the east.

The secondary streetscape interventions should tie into the primary improvements made along the west end of Frances Street. Public realm improvements should focus on new paving materials, pavement widening and associated adjustments to the parking arrangements, street trees, new street furniture and signage. The interventions should also aim to give greater priority to pedestrian movement, both in terms of crossing the main roads and in terms of east to west movement along the streets. This should be supported by secondary frontage improvements.

- **Court Street/Castle Street/Old Cross Street:** This area is key in linking together the two secondary civic spaces at Market Cross and Court Square. In addition, the Masterplan suggests public realm enhancements focus on improving the integration of potential new development opportunities into the town centre. Suggested interventions include new paving materials, street trees, new street furniture and signage and public art. This

should also be supported by secondary street front improvements on the south side of Court Street and the north side of Castle Street.

- **Upper Court Street/John Street/Pound Street:** Public realm improvements in this area of the town should reinforce the secondary gateway function of this area and provide an attractive setting for town centre residential accommodation, both existing and new. Interventions should focus on paving materials, street trees and improved parking arrangements.

#### **Public Sector Actions to Bring Forward Development**

The public sector (Ards Borough Council and DSD in particular) should undertake the following actions to bring forward the minor public realm interventions:

- Identify available funding;
- Develop an Environmental Improvement Scheme to cover the identified areas;
- Directly procure and manage works; and
- Make funding available for secondary streetscape/frontage improvements and manage any grant scheme.

#### **Practical Delivery Issues**

The detailed design for the secondary civic spaces will need to be developed following discussions with DSD, Ards Borough Council, the Chamber of Trade and the Ards Arts Committee.

If sufficient funding is made available at the outset of any public realm works, there would be merit in developing a comprehensive public realm strategy for the Town Centre, through the adoption of an Urban Design Guide. This would ensure a consistency of approach across the whole Town Centre, would reinforce the public realm hierarchy and would deliver cost savings in terms of design, procurement of materials and completion of works.

#### **Costs and Funding**

We would anticipate costs for major public realm interventions to include:

- £15,000 for the production of the detailed designs; and
- £500,000 for secondary public realm and frontage improvements.



### **Difficulties**

As a public sector project, the main delay could occur in the identification of the necessary funding. Once a viable public realm scheme is agreed, available funding should ensure rapid delivery of works. These interventions also need to be closely related to the major public realm interventions and secondary civic space improvements.

### **Priority and Timescales**

The minor public realm interventions and streetscape enhancements are a longer-term or medium priority. They focus on improvements to the entry points into the town centre, so will inevitably improve the first impression and image of the Town Centre. The proposed timescales are 3-5 years, as follows:

- Yrs 1-2 Develop environmental improvement schemes and incentive funding programme for frontage enhancements
- Yrs 3-5 Procure and deliver public realm improvements, and administer retail frontage programme as above.

# 7 Development Opportunity Sites

## 7.1 Introduction

Alongside the public realm improvements, there are a number of Development Opportunities identified throughout Newtownards Town Centre. Although there are a number of smaller gap sites, there are also a number of larger development sites within the town centre core.

The town centre health check carried out by Tribal notes, "...a lack of fit for purpose retail units in the town centre in our view, largely accounts for why UK multinational fashion retailers have tended to choose the shopping centre over the town centre in recent years"

It is clear from the Retail Capacity Study, produced by Roderick MacLean Associates Ltd in August 2009 as part of the Masterplan process, that there is a need for increased comparison floor space in the town centre to reduce leakage from Newtownards.

The Retail Capacity Study, took into account approvals and applications for major edge of town developments before drawing conclusions on future retail capacity. It identified support for moderate additional convenience floor space of approximately 3,700 sq m gross and for new comparison floor space of between 8,300- 17,800 sq m gross up to 2019.

Critical to the public realm improvements is the shared and important imperative of creating new investment within the town centre core in order to create new products for residents, visitors and shoppers alike, investment which complements - and in some cases enables healthy competition for - activities proposed outside of the Town Centre.

## 7.2 High Street/Court Street

The site, bounded by High Street to the north and Court Street to the south, has the potential to be re-developed to provide a considerable uplift in the quality and range of the retail and leisure offer in Newtownards Town Centre. In addition, there is potential for redevelopment proposals to include other uses above the retail outlets at ground floor. This might include apartments, offices and other employment uses.

Redevelopment of this large site would be a complex process, as there are issues relating to land ownership and the existing uses, particularly the DRD owned car parks at South Street and Old Cross Street. However, there are mechanisms for addressing these issues, and there is the potential for the existing car parking spaces to be replaced within the new development.

## Design Concept

The design concept for the High Street/Court Street development, shown below, is only a notional example of how the site might be developed, and is for purely illustrative purposes only. The key principle to note is that the development is located within the existing town centre boundary and is connected to the surrounding network of streets and squares providing both new retail space and public open space.

## Proposed Configuration





## Architectura Response to Existing Townscape



Modern architectural designs can sit well with older buildings, if the design is sensitive and carefully detailed (this example: Liverpool One)



On the other hand, a more traditional approach, reflecting the materials, scale and geometry of the existing buildings, can sometimes create a more coherent piece of townscape (this example: Victoria Square, Belfast)



Internal Streets Within the Development

## Types of Retail



Local shops characterise the retail offer in Newtownards Town Centre, and offer many of the same goods as the high street chains



High street chains tend to be located in malls and out-of-town locations, but might prefer to be in the town centre, close to other uses, such as leisure and civic functions

## The Public Realm



The public realm, in many new retail developments, is not quite as 'public' as the surrounding streets, and can sometimes be lacking in activity and vitality when the shops are closed (this example: Princes Square, Glasgow)



Public spaces in private retail developments can often be of very high quality, which can help raise the bar, in terms of quality, for the surrounding streets and squares (this example: Spitalfields, London)



### **Public Sector actions to bring development forward**

The two DRD car parks within the overall site make up around 40% of the total area. The transfer of land from DRD to DSD for regeneration purposes would be a necessary step to allow the process of disposing of the lands to form a larger development to begin. The new development will be required to provide sufficient car parking to satisfy DRD requirements for the site.

There are a number of existing retail and service units currently on site and negotiations with a range of owners will be required. It may be necessary for DSD to consider the use of its vesting powers under Article 87 of the Planning Order 1991 in order to facilitate the development of the site. Should DSD control the complete site it would then be possible to go to the market seeking a comprehensive development scheme on the site.

Alternatively, DSD could go to the market with a development brief on the two car parks. This process would be less time and cost consuming, however may result in the site being developed in a piecemeal manner and not achieving the goals of the Masterplan. The stages involved in this process would include:

- Preparing a Development Brief for High Street/ Court Street;
- Identifying the procurement route and preparing all appropriate documentation;
- Carrying out a due diligence process on the selected developers.;
- Carrying out the public consultation; and
- Production of a Development Agreement.

The quality of development can also be controlled through the development control system. The site is within an area of townscape character, therefore any redevelopment would have to be sensitively done and be in keeping with Newtownards town centre without being pastiche.

### **Practical Delivery Issues**

There are a number of land ownerships within the complete site, which does complicate the process of assembling the land to deliver a comprehensive scheme.

In planning terms, the Area of Townscape Character will necessitate a high quality development using high quality materials. However, this is a positive rather than a negative situation.

The development of two town centre car parks, along with the additional floor space created will require a significant number of preferably underground car parking spaces. The cost of providing this will be high and road capacity and access points will have to be tested and approved in the planning process.

The management of the project would be undertaken jointly by DSD and Ards Borough Council, with external expertise utilised where necessary.

### **Costs and Funding**

- £20,000 for the preparation of a planning brief and advice on the disposal of the site.
- Potential developers should be encouraged to acquire the properties and generate the interest needed for the proposed development by agreement with the existing owners.
- The cost of vesting units on the site will be significant and dependant on market conditions and must be fully compliant with Article 87 of the Planning Order 1991.
- It may be necessary for DSD/ABC to achieve outline planning permission on the site to increase the viability of the scheme and reduce the risk to both the public and private sectors. Indicative cost could be in the region of £40,000.

### Difficulties

Finance and timescales to deliver this project are likely to be high, taking into account the multiple ownerships and size of the site. It may also be necessary to set up a partnership with relevant public agencies in order to deliver effectively. Again this will take time to set up.

The planning process and road capacity issues may not be straightforward. There may well be a requirement for some façade retentions, particularly on Main Street.

### Priority and Timescales

The High Street / Court Street development is a key priority for Newtownards town centre. The town currently has a good reputation for high quality independent retailing, however it faces competition from other towns and out of town development. It is essential that the town centre is not left behind and is capable of meeting the needs of modern retailers, generate additional footfall and add increased life and vitality to the town centre.

The likely timeframes are:

- The process of establishing a project delivery partnership should commence this year;

- The process of appointing a Preferred Developer and site assembly may take 5 years to complete. The planning process could run concurrently with this process and
- A completed development could be in place in circa 6 years.

### 7.3 Queen's Hall

Libraries NI are progressing the redevelopment of Queen's Hall in tandem with Ards Borough Council in order to provide a new library and cultural resource centre enabling conferencing, exhibitions and regular evening use. This development will provide a new flagship building for the Town Centre; it will assist the development of arts and culture and an evening economy in the town.

The current library is no longer fit for purpose to support the growing demands of its customers. The main reasons that justify the re-provision of a new library facility within Newtownards Town Centre include:

- The current Library is too small;
- It is only 166.74m<sup>2</sup> when standards suggest it should be 2,000 m<sup>2</sup> for the size of the population;

- It is unable to offer anything other than the most basic lending service;
- There are only 5 public access terminals but there should be 50;
- There is insufficient space for:
  - Activities for parents, toddlers, children and young people;
  - Events to promote literacy and the joy of reading ;
  - Programmes to support family and community learning;
  - Local studies and local history; or
  - Programmes to develop information literacy, ICT skills and life skills;
  - The present building is over 50 years old and suffered structural damage in the 1990's; and
  - In other words, the current library cannot provide a 21st century library service for the people of the Ards Borough Council area.

A new library on the site of the existing Queen's Hall Library will deliver the maximum benefit for the Town Centre. These include:

- The usage levels of the current library demonstrate that this is a good location for a library;

- It meets the two key criteria of location and access;
- The Regent Street site is in the central hub;
- Creation of an evening activity hub of interest to families and young and old alike which could also be a focal point for street events and entertainment;
- Close proximity to the bus station and car parking;
- Bounded on 4 sides by main thoroughfares; and
- A library and cultural centre will attract increased footfall to the location thereby benefiting the existing commercial/retail traders.

The 21st Century Queen's Hall Library and Cultural Resource Centre is a major opportunity to provide Newtownards with:

- An Iconic Flagship building of architectural interest, sited in the town centre;
- A building with two entrances to recreate current access but which also offers a pedestrian thoroughway to gather people in from Regent Street and West Street;

- Excellent neutral facilities for all the local communities;
- An enhanced night economy in the town centre as the facility would offer late night opening hours;
- A new approach to joined up service delivery; and
- Opportunities for efficiency through practical and innovative partnership working.
- Maximising access to shared resources including:
  - A state of the art performance and display area with staging and removable seating for civic events, concerts, music, drama, festivals;
  - Space for specialist conferences, meetings, presentations and training including on a commercial basis;
  - Facilities for exhibiting crafts and visual art;
  - Space for museum exhibits relating to the industrial and natural heritage of the Ards Peninsula and Strangford Lough;
  - Contemporary promotion of Ulster Scots – language, artefacts, books, newspapers etc; and
  - Computer suite for individual and group learning.

### **Public Sector actions to bring the Queen's Hall Library and Cultural Resource Centre forward**

Libraries NI in tandem with Ards Borough Council are progressing the redevelopment of Queen's Hall to provide the flagship scheme cited above. The Masterplan supports the redevelopment and recommends that DSD/ABC prioritises the investment in improved public realm works adjacent to the new capital development in order to reach out to the town and embed the new features into the fabric of Newtownards.

### **Practical Delivery Issues**

The current Queen's Hall is not fit for purpose and is not capable of providing a modern library facility. DSD and ABC should work in partnership with Libraries NI to bring the development forward and encourage swift planning gain for the betterment of the town.

### **Costs and Funding**

The cost to DSD/ABC to assist with creating a new public space on Regent Street could be in the region of £40,000.

What could the new Queen's Hall Library look like?





### **Difficulties**

Securing funding for this new building will be necessary as will achieving planning approval.

### **Priority and Timescales**

The redevelopment of Queen's Hall is a high priority for Newtownards. The existing facility is not fit for purpose and the New Library and Cultural Resource Centre would begin to develop the evening economy in the town centre as well as diversify the town's non retail products..

Planning approval should be achievable with 1 year and with funding in place, the redevelopment could commence with a new facility open within 2 – 2.5 years .

## **7.4 Bus Station Improvements**

The current bus station is situated on Regent Street within the town centre. The Masterplan recognises its location as positive for Newtownards town centre as people are arriving into the centre, rather than to an out of town depot. However a large part of the site is used to store the buses that are not in use and this is not an effective use of valuable town centre space. The bus station should be revamped to turn it into a “drop off and collect” station and buses could be stored at an out of town depot when not in use.

Obviously, this matter would primarily require buy-in from Translink, but positive relationships between the Council and a variety of public sector partners could be of assistance in delivering a fit for purpose scheme. Alternative, revenue raising alternative uses could then be countenanced for the “surplus” areas of this key site.

The Masterplan is also seeking to develop the tourism sector in the town, increasing its ability to capture tourists to the primary gateway to the Ards Peninsula. The Council, rightly, believes that Newtownards must also be branded and developed as a unique destination in its own right.

Currently, there is nowhere in the town for tourist coaches to park and the existing bus station is highlighted as a possible location for this. Although the plan advocates buses coming into the centre, an out of town storage depot may create space within the existing depot for short and medium term coach parking.

### **Public Sector actions to bring development forward**

DSD/ABC in partnership as the Masterplan implementation team should investigate this option with Translink. There may be potential out of town sites where buses could be stored when not in service to free up space in town. Again,

the Masterplan implementation team should investigate this possibility.

### **Practical Delivery Issues**

It will be necessary for DSD/ABC to work in partnership with Translink in order to investigate options and viability of proposal.

### **Costs and Funding**

Possible cost to purchase an out of town bus storage depot.

### **Difficulties**

It may be difficult to secure an out of town bus depot in a suitable location.

### **Priority and Timescales**

This project could be deemed as a high to medium priority for the town.

Timescales could range from 1 to 4 years depending on availability of an out of town site for bus storage and with Translink's agreement to the project.

## 7.5 Movilla Street Car Park

The DRD car park at Movilla Street significantly damages the quality of streetscape at an important entrance point into the town centre. It is regarded as the most significant 'gap site' in the whole of the town due to its central location and the number of streets it is visible from. The absence of a frontage on Castle Place destroys the sense of enclosure that characterises Newtownards. The setting of the Old Cross would benefit greatly from development along the Castle Place frontage.

### Public Sector actions to bring development forward

The transfer of the DRD car park to DSD would facilitate the regeneration of the site. Once transferred DSD could issue a development brief to the market for the car park. A solution, which maintains and increases current parking and develops the Castle Place frontage would be sought. The wording of the development brief as well as the development control process would ensure the quality of development brought forward.

### Practical Delivery Issues

The site is currently a DRD car park that operates at capacity. It is therefore not a surplus car park and it would be necessary to replace any spaces lost through developing as well as additional spaces applicable to the new scheme. Some spaces may be re-provided as part of the town centre, with the remainder being re-supplied elsewhere in the Town Centre.

A partnership between DSD and ABC would drive the disposal and appointment of a developer to deliver the development of the car park site. The design solution would form a crucial part of the selection process of a preferred developer.

### Costs and Funding

Cost to prepare a development brief, and advise on the disposal of the site would be in the region of £20,000.

It may be necessary to achieve a planning approval before disposing of the site to the private sector. The cost of this may be in the region of £5,000 to £10,000.

### Difficulties

In the current economic conditions, it may be difficult to attract interest in smaller development sites.

A design solution which re provides car parking spaces as well as any additional spaces required may prove difficult. A solution that involves providing replacement spaces as part of an overall parking strategy for the town should be explored. Alternatively it may be possible to give? over a portion of the site to provide these spaces.

### Priority and Timescales

This is a medium priority project, which can have a significant impact on the streetscape of Castle Place and the setting of the Old Cross. Likely timescale is 4 – 5 years due to the current market conditions.

## 7.6 2a Castle Place Redevelopment

The redevelopment or improvement of the 'Dales Carpets' site would improve the setting of the Old Cross and improve the streetscape of Castle Place considerably. This is an important and highly visible site within the town centre.

### **Public Sector actions to bring development forward**

The building is in private ownership and vesting is not considered necessary. Should there be funding available for streetscape improvements in the future this building should be considered.

### **Practical Delivery Issues**

As the site is in private ownership, the public sector cannot bring forward its redevelopment without vesting. The building is currently occupied which is positive, however its future redevelopment would be recommended as it is a highly visible building in the town. As a first option, present ownership and usage will be looked at to consider a way forward.

### **Costs and Funding**

Possible future frontage improvements - £20,000

### **Difficulties**

Not in public ownership. This is likely to be a long-term project for the town centre.

### **Priority and Timescales**

Medium priority. Timeframe could be 6-8 years before redevelopment takes place.

## **7.7 Mill Street Car Park Development**

The Mill Street DRD car park situated within the retail core of the town. If Newtownards is to diversify its offer and reverse the trend of leakage of spend from the town, Mill Street car park is an important and central site. The site includes the public toilet block to the front of the site as well as derelict units adjacent to Sheldon Gallery. The site could be redeveloped as a mixed-use development with retail on the ground floor and office or residential above.

### **Public Sector actions to bring development forward**

The majority of the site is currently a DRD car park with public toilets to the front. Transfer of land from DRD to DSD would be necessary to facilitate its disposal. The public toilets, in Council ownership could be added to the potential development site. A development brief can be issued to the market once it has been brought together.

### **Practical Delivery Issues**

Vesting of some additional units may be beneficial to deliver a comprehensive scheme and vastly improved street frontage on Mill Street. A preferred developer will be required to re-provide

car parking spaces lost and additional spaces required for the new development. Some spaces may be re-provided as part of the town centre, with the remainder being re-supplied elsewhere in the Town Centre. There may also be a requirement to re provide public toilets on site or in an alternative town centre location.

### **Costs and Funding**

Cost to prepare a development brief and disposal advice – circa £20,000  
Possible vesting of derelict units – circa £200,000

### **Difficulties**

Units in private ownership on Mill Street, which may require vesting will consume considerable, time and cost.

### **Priority and Timescales**

The site is seen as a low priority in the current market. Court Street/ High Street development will provide significant new retail to the town centre; therefore, there may not be an imminent need for town centre development space. Development should take place within 8 – 12 years.

## 7.8 South Street Redevelopment

South Street is currently in major need of investment. Many of the retail units are vacant or in a poor state of repair. There is also currently very little to draw shoppers and visitors into South Street and there is a risk that it will continue to degenerate. A number of units on the Street could be vested to form a new development opportunity site and breathe new life into the Street.

### Public Sector actions to bring development forward

It is likely that vesting along South Street may be necessary by DSD to facilitate redevelopment. And as such an ownership analysis will be completed in the first two years of the life of the Masterplan (see below).

A development brief could then be issued to the market for a retail led or potentially a hotel development for the town. South Street is in need of intervention within the town centre. The street should be vibrant and vital, such is its proximity to Conway Square. However, in reality footfall is very low and shop units are in a poor state of repair.

### Practical Delivery Issues

The probable need to vest units in different ownership will be a time consuming and an expensive process. Any uses such as a hotel would be reliant on improved market conditions to encourage the private sector to develop.

### Costs and Funding

Vesting of units on South Street may bring a considerable cost. The actual cost would be dependant on the number of units included in the site and the current market conditions.

### Difficulties

Numerous, small units in private sector ownership. Vesting would be a time consuming process. It is likely that the redevelopment of this site would not be viable in current market conditions and the current market for a hotel is questionable.

### Priority and Timescales

South Street is in need of regeneration and interventions should take place as soon as the market allows. As a result of current economic conditions, the site should be viewed as a medium priority. Vesting and the appointment could occur with 6 - 8 years dependant on market conditions.

## 7.9 Pound Street Development

The telephone exchange building on Pound Street is an eyesore and out of place in an otherwise residential street.

### Public Sector actions to bring development forward

As the building is in the ownership of British Telecom DSD/ABC cannot control its redevelopment. Should the building become surplus in the future, a residential scheme would be appropriate.

### Practical Delivery Issues

Building is in the ownership of British Telecom. It is not felt that vesting is required on the site.



### **Costs and Funding**

Should the building become surplus it is likely that British Telecom would dispose of it. There would be no cost to DSD or Ards Borough Council on this site.

### **Difficulties**

Ownership is not controlled by DSD/ABC and vesting is not deemed necessary.

### **Priority and Timescales**

This is a medium to low priority for the town centre, 8-10 years. Should the building become surplus and be disposed of the market will dictate timeframes.

# 8 Transport and Movement Proposals

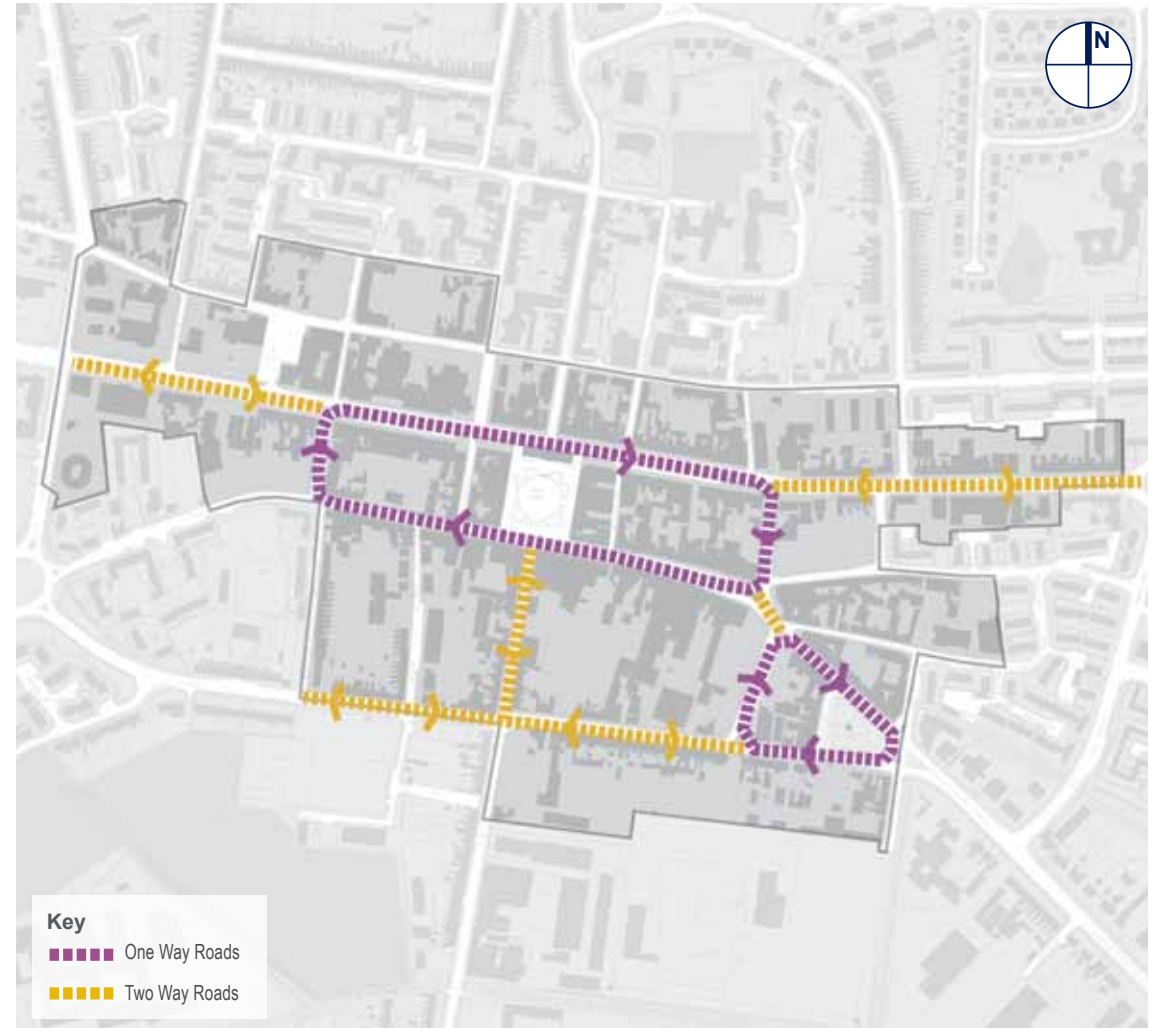
## 8.1 Overview

Transport is not an objective in itself, but must serve identified purposes.

The key objectives for transport change in Newtownards are to:

- Ensure Accessibility: Due to its location at the intersection of a number of routes into the Ards Peninsula, Newtownards is considered highly accessible via private car. However, the ease of driving to the Town Centre brings with it a number of challenges. Most notably the traffic congestion experienced during the peak hours, as a high proportion of through traffic passes through the town on its way to or from Belfast. The recently constructed southern distributor road now enables traffic to and from the Ards Peninsular to by-pass the Town Centre, which should, in time, help reduce congestion in the town centre;
- Provide adequate parking facilities: Roads Service has confirmed that the amount of car parking spaces seem to be adequate to serve the needs of the Town Centre. However, only a very small proportion would be considered convenient, short stay or free. The Town Centre Health Check showed that a lack of free parking provision is seen by visiting

Existing Roads Configuration



shoppers as reducing the accessibility of the town centre. It is notable that there is at peak times an amount of circulatory traffic in the town centre looking for convenient parking, which continues to further exacerbate congestion and environmental problems;

- Minimise the impact of traffic on Pedestrian Movement: Vehicle movement is generally given priority within the Town Centre, often at the expense of pedestrians. This causes conflicts with pedestrians, degrades the environment and contributes to the loss of attractiveness of the Town Centre as a shopping destination; and
- Promote more Sustainable Transport Patterns: Newtownards town centre is fortunate in having a substantial residential catchment close to the centre. The traditional street pattern means that walking to and from the centre is a viable option for many visitors and enhancements to the public realm could increase the number of people walking into the town centre as opposed to taking the car. Alongside this, public transport is largely under-utilised in Newtownards Town Centre, despite regular connections to Belfast City Centre and a central convenient bus interchange. Likewise, there is little evidence

of cycling in Newtownards, despite the relatively flat terrain that would be ideal for this mode of travel.

The Masterplan therefore contains a series of transport and movement related proposals designed to address these key aims and support the physical interventions outlined in the previous two sections.

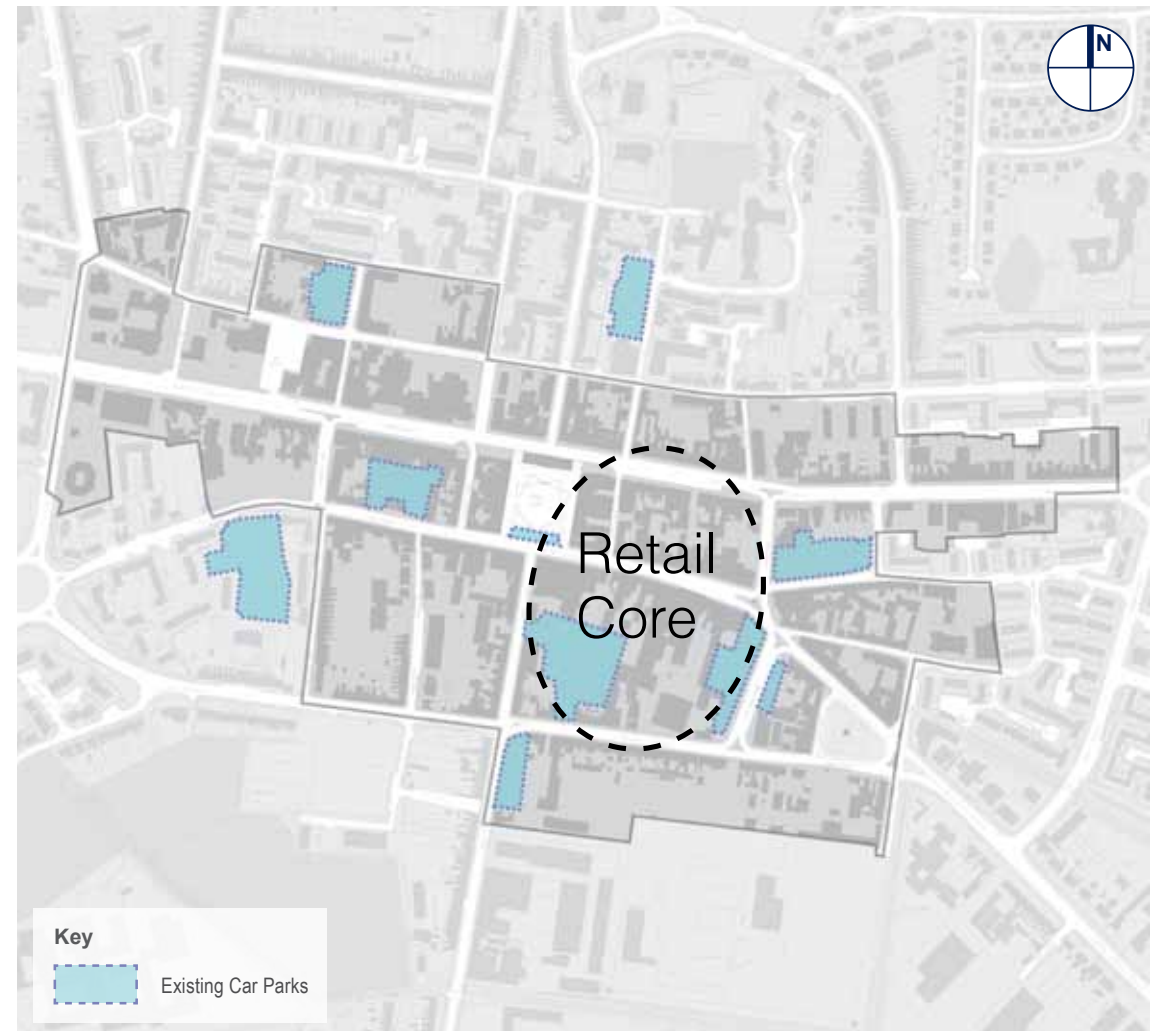
## 8.2 Parking Strategy

The strong and growing competition from the large-scale out-of-centre retail facilities has had an impact on Newtownards Town Centre. Such locations have an ample supply of accessible, free parking that the Town Centre will need to compete with, as well as a strong retail offer.

Parking is therefore vitally important for Newtownards Town Centre. There are approximately 800 parking spaces (in car parks and on street) in Newtownards. Monitoring data suggests that this is currently sufficient to meet demand. A survey completed by Count On Us in 2004 showed that the peak time was around midday, when approximately 57% of off-street parking spaces were occupied.

However, at this time, four out of the ten car parks were full, reflecting a preference for the more centrally located car parks. There is also an identified issue with the provision of on-street parking, which is frequently over-used. This leads to “searching” traffic around the Town Centre, which is damaging to the environment and contributes to congestion at peak times.

Existing Parking Provision





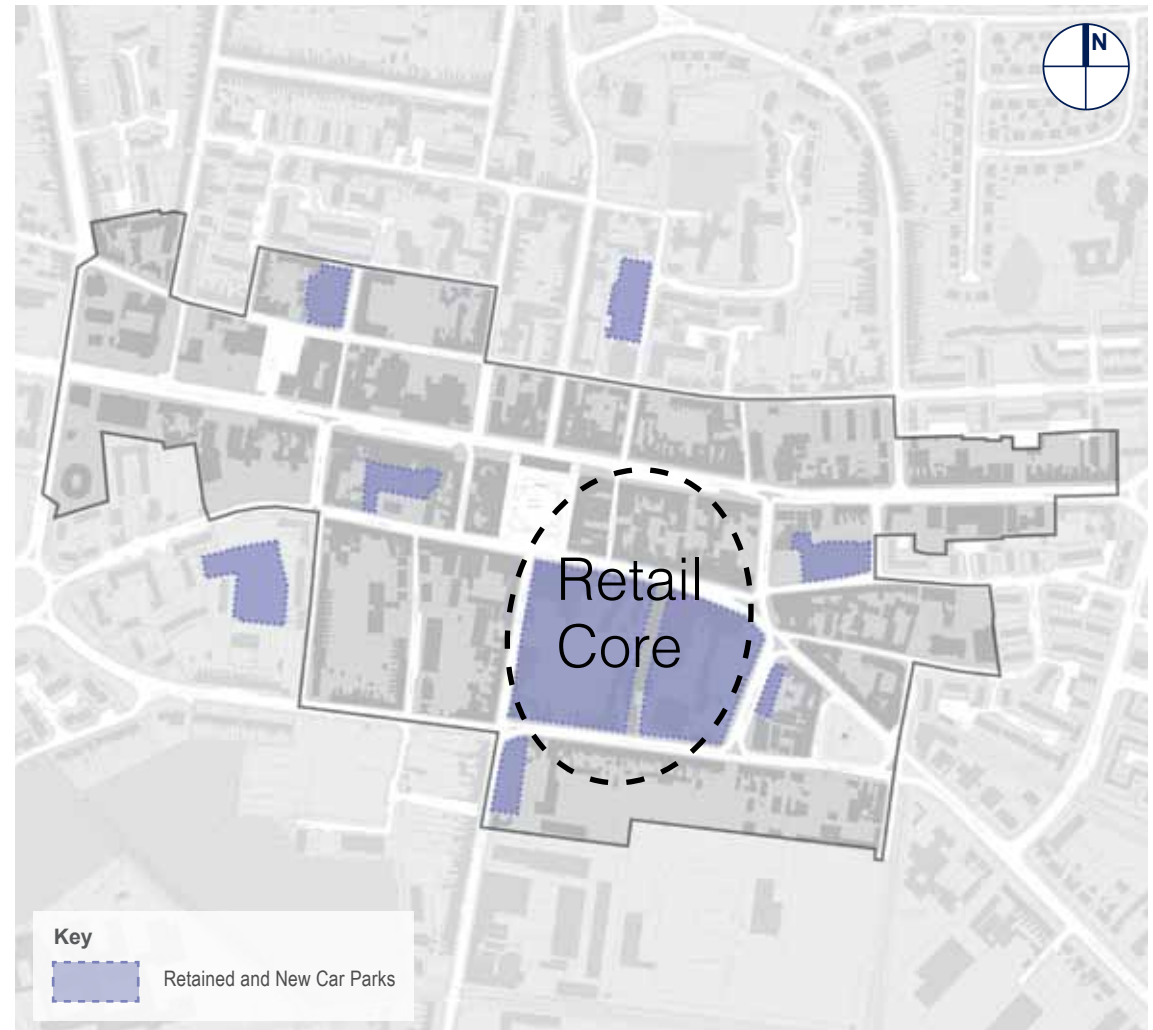
The existing number of parking spaces should therefore be retained as a starting point for a Town Centre parking strategy. The overall number of parking spaces may need to be increased in accordance with demand generated by any new development.

The Masterplan has recognised that some of the car parks are located in ideal places for development, particularly within the retail core. In a number of instances, it is considered more beneficial for the regeneration of the Town Centre as a whole to proceed with redevelopment, re-supplying any spaces that are lost as part of new development or elsewhere within the Town Centre. Therefore, as a general rule, all development proposals must retain parking in accessible locations.

The main changes in parking facilities, therefore, include:

- Retention of four of the existing car parks in their current state. Re-configuration could lead to an increase in the number of spaces available;
- A small reduction in off-street parking spaces at Movilla Street to enable a new mixed use/ commercial development. Some spaces may be re-provided as part of the parking capacity, with the remainder being re-supplied elsewhere in the town centre;

#### Existing and New Parking Provision (Proposed)



- A small number of spaces will be removed from the Mill Street car park to enable a new mixed use/retail/commercial development at Mill Street/Gibson's Lane. The remainder of the car park may need to be re-configured as a result of development. Any lost spaces will be re-provided elsewhere in the own entre;
- The small car park on the east of Old Cross Street will be made available for residential development. However, parking spaces will need to be re-provided as part of the development scheme;
- The larger car park on the west of Old Cross Street and the large car park at South Street will form part of the new flagship High Street/ Court Street retail/commercial/residential development. However, as part of this scheme, a new basement car park will be provided. This will help to re-supply the spaces lost from the two central car parks and elsewhere in the Town Centre, as well as providing sufficient spaces to cater for any increased demand;
- On-street parking at the south side of Conway Square will be removed. This will improve views of the Square and Town Hall from the south and will enable improved pedestrian movement east-west along the natural desire line of High Street/Mill Street; and

- Some of the on-street parking bays elsewhere in the Town Centre will need to be re-configured to suit new footpath alignments, pedestrian crossings and other interventions in the public realm.

To support these changes, the "Park and Walk" principle should be established, whereby drivers select a parking place on the approach to the Town Centre and walk to their destination. This should be supported by new "Parking Route" and "Highway to Health" signing, to direct visitors to the most appropriate car park on approach to the Town Centre. This could be supported through the addition of real-time information on the availability of spaces. Such changes will avoid unnecessary internal vehicle movement, helping to reduce congestion and improve the Town Centre's amenity and environment.

## 8.2 Pedestrian Movement

Newtownards Town Centre is fortunate in having a substantial residential catchment close to the centre. The traditional street pattern and the relative absence of large-scale road infrastructure mean that walking to and from the Town Centre is a viable alternative to the car for local residents. In addition, the links on foot to the traditional Town Centre are somewhat more attractive than

the equivalent links to the Ards Centre, which is currently the main competitor.

The one-way traffic system, the speed of vehicles, the width of the carriageways and the large amount of on street parking all combine to considerably reduce the quality of the environment in Newtownards Town Centre. A key issue is how to re-balance the traffic and pedestrian environment conflict in favour of the latter. The historic and potentially attractive streetscape and public realm could be a major competitive asset for the Town Centre. However, the quality of the place is undermined by the prominence and priority given to people in vehicles.

Although there are only a few locations where the walking routes to the Town Centre are poor or severed with road infrastructure, the quality of pedestrian links to the centre could be improved. There are four main issues with regard to pedestrian accessibility to the centre:

- Roundabouts interrupt pedestrian desire lines and make crossing difficult, e.g. Mill Street, Frances Street, East Street roundabouts;
- Blank frontages, which create an unpleasant environment for walking, e.g. Parts of South Street, Gibson's Lane;

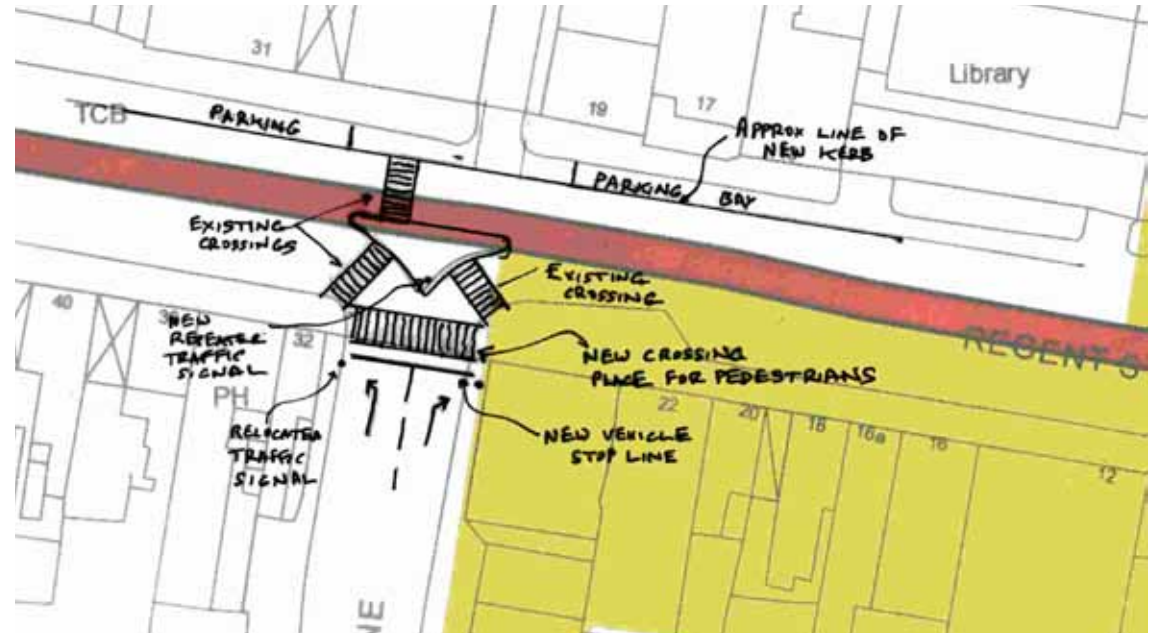
- Speed of vehicles, mainly as a result of the one-way system, which increases intimidation of pedestrians by vehicles; and
- Crossing opportunities, which currently are constrained by the width of the streets, the traffic management layout, and the speed of vehicles.

As part of a comprehensive movement strategy, the Masterplan therefore recommends a number of improvements to address these issues. Delivering a coherent set of changes will require DSD, Ards Borough Council and DRD Roads Service to work in close partnership.

### Junction Improvements

The Town Centre should enable pedestrians to cross road infrastructure on, or as close to as possible, the natural desire line, i.e. the most direct route pedestrians will seek to take to move between two points.

A specific example of such an improvement would be to provide desire-line pedestrian crossing across the mouth of Gibson's Lane, at the junction with Regent Street. At present, vehicle stop lines encroach on the desire line, and require pedestrians to cross Gibson's Lane in two stages. This is of minimal benefit to drivers, but considerable inconvenience to pedestrians.



Existing and New Parking Provision (Proposed)



Example of new junction Layout: Sloane Square, London



We would therefore propose the addition of a third 'straight-across' pedestrian crossing over the mouth of Gibson's Lane. This would better reflect pedestrian desire-lines by enabling pedestrians on the south side of Regent Street to continue east-to-west movement at the maximum convenience. Examples of such junction crossings are seen in many towns and cities across the UK, including this one from Sloane Square in London. This alteration does not require any changes to the geometry of the road, but can be completed through repositioned signalling and stop lines.

### Footpath Widening

As part of the major and minor improvements to the public realm outlined in Section 6, the Masterplan recommends footpath widening in a number of locations around the Town Centre. This will help create a more people friendly, safe and attractive place, which is welcoming to pedestrians while still allowing traffic to access the Town Centre.

By way of example, Drawing A below shows a typical section through Regent Street. The roadway (indicated by the red block) is capable of accommodating four lanes of traffic, although it is currently only set out with two lanes, and parking to either side. The footways are relatively tight, particularly on the right hand side.

Drawing B is a proposed re-configuration of the road with two lanes of traffic, plus parking to either side. The footways are wider, allowing street trees

and providing more space for people to walk. The wider pavements will also allow for activities in the buildings to spill out into the public realm.

**A - Existing Road/Footway Widths**



**B - Proposed Road/Footway Widths**





### 8.3 Promoting Sustainable Transport Options

Public transport in Newtownards consists of buses and taxis. Most people tend to drive, rather than use public transport, to access the shops and services. Apart from providing a less sustainable form of transport, this also leads to the domination of the car to the detriment of the quality of the place and the experience that people have in the Town Centre.

#### Buses

Bus services consist mainly of Goldliner regional services to Belfast and elsewhere, other inter-town services (such as to Comber, Bangor and Donaghadee) and local town services within Newtownards. Overall, there are around 1.7m passenger journeys per annum on bus services in the Ards Borough. If all of the journeys were made by residents, this would equate to around 6% of all journeys within the Borough being made by bus. If the town and other services were combined, the maximum share of trips by bus in Newtownards would be 6.7%. However, in practice, this figure is much lower, as many of the journeys will be made by non-residents.

The existing bus station is an asset for Newtownards due to its central location within the town centre, close to the retail core. However, this serves some but not all bus services. The bus stops within the bus station, like those elsewhere in the town, are not designed for level boarding, and ramps must be deployed for wheelchair users.

A broad appraisal of the bus services suggests that they are aimed primarily at people who do not have access to a car. It is also aimed primarily at shoppers rather than commuters, since buses do not start running until after 9am and have mostly finished by 5pm (except for incoming buses from Belfast). The bus routes and their presentation (information etc.) are unnecessarily complex – and quite bland, which serves to deter users, especially those with the option of using a car. The limited hours of operation are also a deterrent to reliance on public transport in the town, thus increasing the propensity for car usage and ownership.

The issue is therefore how to achieve a shift of journeys from car to bus (as called for in policy) within the limits of what can be justified financially. The network would benefit from an overall review to identify ways of addressing these problems. Such a review would need to be followed up with adequate funding to implement

the recommendations. Ards Borough Council and DSD therefore have an important role to play in working with Translink to improve Newtownards' bus services.

There are a number of specific improvements that could be made, including:

- Buses bound for Belfast currently leave from Gibson's Lane, which lacks frontage development and natural surveillance. It is also out of sight of the bus station and is thus not well integrated with the other bus services. This bus stop could be relocated opposite the bus station, creating a central location for all bus services;
- A further stop for Belfast bound buses should be provided closer to the primary retail core, for example on High Street near to Conway Square;
- Simplify the system in terms of routing, route numbering and timetabling; and
- Raised platforms could be considered within the bus station and at other bus stops around the Town Centre, to allow for level boarding. This could be delivered as part of the wider public realm interventions proposed.

Alongside this, the Ards and Down Area Plan includes a proposal for an “intermodal interchange” on the site of the former Scrabo Road High School. The main purpose of this appears to be to provide a Park and Ride facility to enable people to transfer from car to Goldliner coaches to Belfast. A car park with 100 spaces is proposed for this purpose. This is a good proposal however it is important that all the services should stop at a central bus location within the town centre to improve the attraction and benefits of the service, where possible.

Towns/cities where all the services stop at central bus stations or within the Town Centre, such as Lisburn, Bangor, Lurgan, and Portadown tend to receive more positive feedback, and perhaps more importantly enjoy a greater volume and variety of users.

### **Tourists and Coaches**

There are currently no dedicated spaces for coaches to park. We would recommend the inclusion of a formal coach set-down/pick-up point within the newly refurbished bus station. This would provide a central location adjacent

to the Tourist Information Centre that will help improve the attractiveness of Newtownards to tourists, thereby creating a shopping and specialist visitor destination.

### **Taxi**

There are four taxi companies operating in Newtownards and the system appears to operate effectively, and without any serious negative impacts on traffic or the environment. The call-forward system is an effective way of limiting the impact of waiting vehicles in key locations in the town centre, although obviously something of an inconvenience for taxi companies and their customers.

There are spaces designated for taxi ranks in Regent Street and Old Cross Street. The Masterplan recommends the retention of well laid out taxi ranks in these locations, both adjacent to the refurbished bus station in the north west of the Town Centre and close the primary retail core to the South East. Well-signed and clearly laid out taxi ranks can be delivered as part of the wider public realm interventions proposed.

### **Cycling**

There is little evidence of cycling in Newtownards, despite a relatively flat terrain that would be ideal for this mode of travel. However, as a method of reducing traffic congestion, improving the environmental quality and promoting more sustainable travel patterns, defining the potential for cycling is an important issue.

The current road infrastructure is not cycle-friendly, particularly on account of roundabouts and the one-way system. While a long distance cycle route has been implemented to Belfast on the old railway alignment, there are no plans for a cycle network in Newtownards.

In delivering public realm improvements, DSD and Ards Borough Council should seek to deliver better facilities for cyclists. Whilst dedicated cycling lanes may not be appropriate in all locations, improved cycle parking facilities in strategic locations and improved road layouts should help to improve the accessibility of the Town Centre for cyclists. This can be delivered as part of the major and minor public realm enhancements proposed.



# 9 Delivery and Implementation

## 9.1 Introduction

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 overarching 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 Newtownards Town Centre, including:

- Ards Borough Council;
- Newtownards Chamber of Trade;
- The Department for Social Development; and
- Ards Development Bureau.

There are also a range of others involved, including private businesses, landowners and public agencies, such as Libraries NI and the Department for Regional Development.

## 9.2 A Changing Delivery Context

### The Review of Public Administration

In looking at structures to take forward the Masterplan, it will be important to consider the changing context. Under the Review of Public Administration (RPA) a range of functions will transfer to local government although there is some uncertainty over the timescales:

- Some 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 (potentially to take place before or in 2015) 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 its town centres, together with a greater responsibility, power and resource base for delivering that change.

However, the regeneration of Newtownards cannot wait for RPA and the Council wishes to drive forward the regeneration proposals irrespective of RPA.

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

### A Challenging Economic Climate

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.

At the same time, 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 their 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).

A number of delivery options exist and include:

- Mainstream Council delivery;
- Informal partnerships;
- Contractual partnerships; and
- Corporate partnerships (including Special Purpose Vehicles).

### 9.3 Delivery Mechanisms

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

#### Build upon Existing Partnerships and Successes

The Regeneration Unit within the Council's Development Department is charged with Town Centre Development and will be charged with the delivery and implementation of this Masterplan. The Regeneration Officer and the Director of Development have been involved in every step of the Masterplan. The Regeneration Unit will be charged with determining a new Town Centre Partnership approach which will ensure maximum stakeholder buy in and engagement into the delivery process. Good work in recent years has ensured strong relationships with the Chamber of Trade, and the Private and Public sector stakeholders and this provides a platform for a future Town Centre Partnership. Council will establish an implementation team comprising representatives from Ards Borough Council, DSD, Town Centre Partnership, DRD Roads Service, DOE Planning Service, Strategic Investment Board to take forward the Implementation Action Plan.

#### Access the Required Resources

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

Key stakeholders the Partnership should look to engage include:

- **The 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 have 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 act at times 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;

- **A Range of Different Public Sector Bodies:** Even with additional functions being transferred to the Council under RPA, there will 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 should therefore 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; and
- **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 Newtownards, 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**

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, funding should ideally be secured (and earmarked specifically for implementing the Masterplan) for as many of the initial years as possible. This will help 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.

### **Conclusion**

In setting out a Masterplan for Newtownards, the DSD, Council and many additional stakeholders recognise the importance of realistic targets, a strategic and sustainable plan for Newtownards and delivering tangible changes regularly over a period of time which future proofs Newtownards.

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 include:

- Can the plan be best delivered internally through the existing Council, and current Chamber of Trade and Newtownards DEA Sub Committee? The success of the partnership approach to regeneration has already been established; and
- Delivery through a new Town Centre Development Partnership. The Council can determine an appropriate structure to deliver the Masterplan interventions.

### **9.4 Public Sector Interventions**

It is vital, going forward, that the Council and DSD make the case for public sector interventions, including:

- Public realm and infrastructure improvements;
- Planning control and design guidance;
- Town centre management – including events and festivals; and

- Direct business support - e.g. shop front improvement grants, Town Centre Living Initiatives, Heritage Lottery Funding and land transactions – land sale, acquisition and assembly.

### **Public Realm and Infrastructure Improvements**

Towns compete for residents, businesses and visitors based on 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 some of the public spaces in Newtownards is in need of improvement.

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, CABE reports that high quality public realm has proved itself repeatedly to be the principal anchor in urban regeneration projects. Successful regeneration projects are often those that make greatest use of the streetscape and existing buildings and introduce complementary 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 artwork 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. The Council's Public Art Strategy will progress this further.

### **Planning Control and Design Guidance**

An Urban Design Guide for Newtownards 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;
- 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. For example, there could be a different approach taken on High Street than Regent Street/Frances Street, reflecting the road widths;

- Identify simple but robust materials, which are cheap to maintain and are easily available; and
- Identify designs that reflect and enhance the local character of Newtownards Town Centre, strongly influenced by its heritage, hinterland and townscape quality. At the same time, it will need to be forward looking and contemporary rather than pastiche.

### **Town Centre Partnership**

Much good work has been done in recent years strengthening relationships with the Chamber of Trade, the PSNI and similar.

A town centre forum or partnership in Newtownards 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, the local authority, Police and other interested parties to create a fully functioning town centre. Developing terms of reference for the partnership would give it a clear remit in the longer term, beyond being a consultative body, and would help to lay the foundation for productive work between the different partners.

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

- 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; and
- Support the promotion and marketing of Newtownards Town Centre as a great place to live, work and visit.

ABC intends developing business collaboration through the partnership/ forum. Building on existing successful event organisation and fund raising will also be key roles, including engaging businesses (particularly larger businesses) and persuading them to get involved with joint work and contributions towards initiatives.

Successful implementation of the plan relies on stakeholder 'buy-in' and engagement.

Newtownards can build on its strengths as a pleasant and welcoming place to spend time with quality independent retailing. There could be a focus on improving the cleanliness of the town, adding colour, through planting or adding to the Christmas lights and festive programmes.

#### **Direct Business Support**

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

- **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):** This 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 towns and 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:** The 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 are 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; or
- 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;

- **Business Grants:**

- InvestNI – Innovation Project Grants – Up to £4,000 can be made available to new projects and businesses.
- DEL – Currently offers a number of programmes to advise businesses on management and business analysis, etc.
- HALO – A Business Angels Network, which can provide access to equity.
- Carbon Trust – Will prepare a report on business energy use and can provide grant funding up to £250,000 to convert to sustainable energy.

Ref	Project	Lead Delivery Agency / Agencies	Priority	Timeframe	Indicative Cost	Other Delivery Agencies	Related Projects	Public Sector Actions
<b>Public Realm Interventions</b>								
A	Conway Square Improvements	DSD, ABC	High	1-2 years	up to £500,000		D, G	Directly procure and manage works. Potential public art in conjunction with Ards Arts Committee/Creative Ards
B	Market Cross Civic Space	DSD, ABC	Medium/High	3-4 years	£50,000		D, E, G	Directly procure and manage works. Public Art funding
C	Court Square Enhancements	DSD, ABC	Medium/High	3-4 years	£75,000		E, G	Directly procure and manage works. Public art funding. Potential Heritage Lottery Fund Application
D	Major Public Realm Interventions	DSD, ABC	High	1-2 years	£1.5m	DRD, PS	A, B, E, 1, G	Directly procure and manage works. Public art and façade improvement funding made available
E	Secondary Public Realm Interventions	DSD, ABC	Medium	3-5 years	£500,000	DRD, PS	B, C, D, 1	Public art and façade improvement funding made available. Directly procure and manage works.
F	Queen's Hall Public Space	LNI	High	1-2 years	£75,000	PS, DSD, ABC	2, G	
G	Public Art Strategy	ABC	High	1-2 years	£10,000	DSD, CA	A, B, C, D, F	Public art to be incorporated into public realm works.

Ref	Project	Lead Delivery Agency / Agencies	Priority	Timeframe	Indicative Cost	Other Delivery Agencies	Related Projects	Public Sector Actions
<b>Development Opportunity Sites</b>								
1	Flagship Court St./High St. Scheme	DSD, ABC	High	2-5 years	£25,000 – Development brief	PS, NIEA, Priv, DRD	D, E	Probable vesting required prior to procuring development scheme
2	Queen's Hall Redevelopment	LNI	High	1-2 years	N/A	PS, DSD, ABC	F	Public realm improvements
3	Refurbished Bus Station	ABC, Trans	Medium	3- 5 years	N/A	DSD	D	Working with Translink to facilitate coach parking for tourists on-site
4	Movilla Car Park Mixed-use/ Commercial	DSD/ABC	Medium	4-6 years	£20,000	PS, Priv, DRD		Issue development brief to market for mixed use scheme
5	2a Castle Place – Mixed use	ABC, DSD, Priv	Low	8- 12 years	N/A	PS		Work with land owner to encourage redevelopment
6	Mill Street, Mixed- use	ABC, DSD	Low	8-12 years	£20,000	PS, DRD, Priv		Development brief issued on DRD car park Possible vesting required to facilitate development
7	South St. Retail/ Hotel	ABC, DSD	Medium	4- 6 years	£500,000	PS, Priv		Possible vesting required to facilitate development
8	Pound St. Residential	Priv.	Low		N/A	DSD, ABC		
9	Potential Gateway Improvements	ABC, DSD	Low	12-18 Years		HSCNI		

*Ards Borough Council (ABC)*

*Department for Social Development (DSD)*

*Planning Service (PS)*

*The private sector (Priv)*

*Health and Social Care, Northern Ireland (HSCNI)*

*Department for Regional Development (DRD)*

*Libraries Northern Ireland (LNI)*

*Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA)*

*Translink (Trans)*

*Creative Ards (CA)*

# 10 Conclusion

Newtownards currently has a reputation for high quality independent retailing and is a pleasant town centre to spend time in.

Although Newtownards must move forward to meet modern needs, the quality of the town's townscape and public space should be enhanced by future development.

Although the historic core of Newtownards has not changed significantly for many years, it is vital that Newtownards positions itself now as a modern Town Centre that will continue to develop and attract shoppers and visitors for the next 100 years.

It is clear that there is further scope for Newtownards to develop, not only as a high quality retail destination, but also as a place to work and live, and importantly as a tourist destination.

Current economic conditions and likely cuts in public spending will make regeneration more difficult in the short term. However, the strong base from which Newtownards is starting should ensure it is capable of attracting investment from the private sector. 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.

While Newtownards is already a vibrant Town Centre with a successful weekly market, it has further potential, not least, better utilisation of Conway Square as a hive of activity. There is no doubt that Newtownards will face increased competition from neighbouring towns and out of town developments and it is vital that change does happen and that the vision for Newtownards is realised.

The vision highlights the importance of building on the town's strengths, diversifying and strengthening the economy of the town. As a key part of this, building on the Ards Peninsular tourist offer will help gain Newtownards a reputation as a tourist destination in its own right and not simply the gateway to the Peninsular.

The Masterplan is designed as a strategy for the next twenty years and identifies short, medium and long-term projects. That said, the success of the Masterplan and those who are tasked with its implementation will be that in 10, 20, 50 and 100 years from now, Newtownards is still a town full of character, where people want to come to shop, work, live, visit and relax.

However, first and foremost, the development of a realistic, innovative, suite of capital development proposals to modernise and sustain the core

of Newtownards is a major and shared priority between 2011 and 2020. This Masterplan has sought to provide a framework and a series of achievable and costed recommendations to enhance and strengthen Newtownards. The authors are privileged to have played their part in this process, which must now be delivered efficiently and effectively for the future of Newtownards and all of the tens of thousands of people who live in, work in and visit the town.





**Ards Arts Centre**

Bringing  
ART to LIFE  
in Ards

**Drama**

**Dance**

**Art  
Festivals**

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