



Strabane Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan

Tribal in association with Colliers CRE and Oxford Economics

Department For Social Development & Strabane District Council

Baseline Report

March 2009

T R I B A L

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1 Introduction

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This is the Baseline Report of the Strabane Town Centre Masterplan. The masterplan was commissioned in February 2009 by the Department for Social Development (DSD) working in partnership with Strabane District Council and is being prepared by a consultant team led by Tribal.

The study area for the commission is the Town Centre limit, as shown on the Strabane Town Centre Plan contained within the West Tyrone Area Plan 1986-2001. Although this is the defined study area it is recognised that the town must be looked at in its broader context where relevant to the study.

The collection of baseline information is with a view to answering the objectives of the study. The objectives are; to rank and prioritise potential development sites in line with regeneration principles; advise on the nature, scale and timing of work to restructure and redevelop the opportunity sites; make realistic and deliverable recommendations within a 10 year timeframe; advise on appropriate transportation, access and parking changes which might be required; advise on appropriate public realm enhancements to support regeneration and develop the masterplan with a hierarchy of priority and short, medium and long term actions with implementation agencies identified.

The Baseline Report is a background document and sets out the information collated during the initial phase of the project based on a review of existing materials and consultations with key stakeholders. While the programme of consultations is on-going, the baseline report summarises the consultant team's emerging understanding of the key issues affecting the town centre. On the basis of this understanding future stages of the project will generate options and proposals for the regeneration of the town centre.

The baseline report is structured as follows:

- Section two reviews the relevant policy documents and identifies any significant planning applications and approvals within the town centre.
- Section three provides an overview of Strabane's recent socio-economic performance and an insight into possible future trends based on the earlier analysis carried out by Oxford Economics.
- Section four looks at current market conditions with respect to the retail, office, leisure and residential markets drawing on the market knowledge and insights of Colliers CRE.
- Section five focuses on the built environment, specifically looking at the heritage and townscape assets of the town centre.
- Section six examines transport and movement in the town identifying issues which must be addressed and touching on what the solutions might be.

At the time of writing there are outstanding consultations which are important to the development of the masterplan. Information on these consultations will be added as they take place.

Context for regeneration

2 Review of current policy and projects

2 Review of current policy and projects

2.1 Introduction

The regeneration of Strabane's town centre will be guided by European, national and regional planning guidance and other relevant policy guidance, strategies, design guidelines and technical reports. In addition this section of the report will consider the prevailing planning consents around the town centre which may compliment or conflict with the vision for the regeneration of Strabane's town centre. In considering each of the relevant policy documents and projects it has been possible to extract a series of key policy directions and issues which will have implications for the regeneration of the town. In each of the policy heading below the town has largely failed to meet the expectations of the policy and a response to each issue has been considered. A more detailed consideration of the policies and related performance is contained throughout this section.

Key Policy Directions and Issues for Strabane Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan:

RDS Policy SPG – ECON 1:

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

Sub-Regional Transport Strategy:

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

PPS3 - Access & Movement:

- A disjointed town centre cannot function effectively; a unified and accessible centre must emerge, which encourages the visitor to explore with ease and not to cherry-pick destinations.

Railway Street must be developed as a conduit between ASDA and the retail core.

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

PPS5 – Retailing & Town Centres:

- Existing businesses within the town centre must be further supported to foster a vital business environment which can in turn attract new business
- Consideration could be given to the possibility of targeting potential new retailers, who can demonstrate a realistic business plan and who have the vision and creativity to offer something currently unavailable in Strabane which will appeal to a wide range of customers. Support could be given in the form of a subsidised initial rental package, together with business training or support from Invest NI.
- The performance of existing small businesses should be considered to assess their potential to improve performance by adopting modern or more efficient practices.
- A review of the role and capacity of the weekly open-market should be undertaken to ascertain whether it is capable of improvement and better integration with the wider retail offer of the town.

- Better definition of the retail core can be achieved by providing gateway features at all of the main entrances to the town.

PPS8 – Open Space:

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

PPS15 – Planning & Flood Risk:

- The development of land adjacent to the river is important for the cultivation of an image of the town centre as a liveable space which utilises its natural assets. Developments must however remain conscience of the flood risk posed by the river and consider innovative designs which minimise risk to risk to occupants and improve the appearance of the existing waterside development.
- Public transport provision between taxi's and buses must be better co-ordinated to reduce congestion in the town. Better designated taxi parking and better access to the bus centre should be considered as a priority.

Tourism and Leisure Activities:

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

2.2 Strategic Policy Context

- Regional Development Strategy (NI) 2025
- Regional Strategic Transport Network Plan 2015
- Irish National Spatial Strategy

2.2.1 The Regional Development Strategy (NI) 2025

The RDS recognises Strabane as an important market town and satellite conurbation to Derry City. Derry as the largest city in the North West is envisaged to expand greatly over the lifetime of the strategy thus enhancing its major service role in relation to its catchment area and extending into County Donegal and strengthening its position as the focal point and major business centre of a north-west development corridor taking in Limavady, Strabane and Letterkenny. Derry will remain the administrative centre in the North West with Strabane acting as link from the border region through Derry and onto Dublin and Belfast. From an economic perspective Strabane is acknowledged as having a natural catchment area which includes the Republic of Ireland given its proximity to the border.

At a strategic level, policy SPG-LNW1 is focused on developing a stronger North West centred on Derry as the regional city and transport hub of the North West, offering key infrastructure and services in administration, education, health, energy, industry, commerce, shopping, cultural and tourism amenities; and reinforcing the complementary employment and services roles of Limavady and Strabane. Londonderry is the dominant centre, the focal point of a hinterland of up to 300,000 people and a regional gateway to three key transport corridors. Outside the BMA, it is the largest urban entity with a population approaching 90,000 and an estimated housing growth of nearly 13,000 dwellings by 2015 when the City is expected to exceed 100,000. The degree to which Strabane has been able to act in a complementary fashion to Derry is questionable given the composition of the town's retail and industrial sectors.

Policy SPG – ECON 1 promotes a balanced spread of economic development opportunities across the Region focused on the BMA, Londonderry, Craigavon and the urban hubs/clusters, as the main centres for employment and services. Within this framework, both Omagh and Strabane are defined as main hubs. The proximity of Strabane to Derry is significant for the outflow of jobs and residential accommodation as the smaller town can potentially act as a satellite feeding the larger city.

Policy SPG-ECON 2 aims to facilitate the exploitation of economic development opportunities of the key transport corridors including phase 3 of the A5 upgrade. Within this context the main component of the Regional Strategic Transport Network pertaining to Strabane is the A5 Key Transport Corridor facilitating links between Londonderry, Donegal, Monaghan and Dublin. This Corridor is further considered below.

Policy SPG-RNI 3 supports the network of service centres based on main towns, small towns, and villages in Rural Northern Ireland by:

- Developing a network of strong main towns as the major locations providing employment, services and a range of cultural and leisure amenities for both urban and rural communities (RNI 3.1);
- Promoting the viability and vitality of town centres including fostering clusters of economic activities in and around the heart of towns (RNI3.2); and
- Sustaining and consolidating the role of small towns and villages as rural service centres (RNI 3.3).

These policies reinforce the Planning Policy Statements 4 and 5 which are focused on encouraging industrial development within small towns and retail development within the town centre.

Policy SRC 2.1 is intended to encourage cross-border networks of economic co-operation and enterprise, by utilising demand on both sides of the border and creating opportunities for the mutually beneficial linking of commercial opportunities.

The Irish National Spatial Strategy echoes this policy agenda in its own consideration of the future of spatial planning on the island as a whole in section 3.2 of the INSS. The border represents a significant opportunity for Strabane to draw in trade from the RoI and also to act as a gateway town from NI into the RoI.

Strabane is located on the Derry - Monaghan - Dublin Corridor (Western Corridor) and therefore is positioned to benefit from future upgrades of the road networks west of Lough Neagh supporting this corridor. Policy LNW1.1 aims to develop Derry as the key strategic employment location of the North West and central focus of the Western development corridor extending into Donegal towards Letterkenny, and support the continuing economic development of the main hubs of Limavady and Strabane.

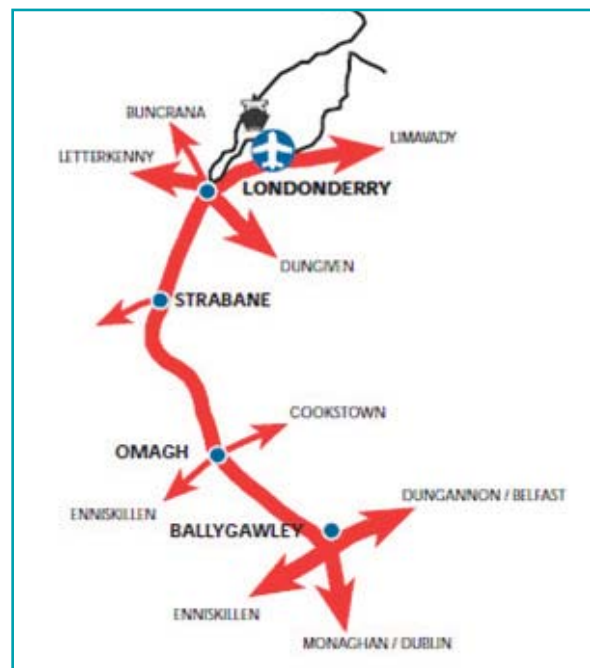


Fig.1 RDS - The Western Corridor

2.2.2 The Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan

The RSTN-TP confirms the individual schemes and projects to be implemented to support the RDS and RTS objectives. The RDS promotes Strabane as a gateway to Donegal with cross border communications being crucial to urban and rural economies. The RSTN-TP suggests that the A5/ N14 Strabane Bypass - Lifford Link which is now in its final stage will have a direct benefit on the cross border links and/or upgrade access to gateways. The Strabane / Lifford Link will provide a new cross border link between the A5 and the N14. The RSTN-TP indicates that there have been two previous stages to the development and expansion of the A5 Strabane Bypass. Currently the third phase of the A5 Bypass is at option stage with a decision on the final path of the road expected in early summer 2009 and commencement of the building work likely in 2012. In addition RSTN-TP confirms that Strabane's bus station/depot has recently been relocated and upgraded significantly. However the location and degree of service provision has been criticised by local people and retailers, who suggest that a more central location in the town centre would be preferable.

2.2.3 The National Spatial Strategy for Ireland

The NSS recognises the significance of the border for its North Western counties. Derry has been identified in the NSS as a Regional City for the North West, including Donegal. The strategy indicates that in economic terms the border cannot be a barrier to trade and that cross border trade will be a significant source of employment for people in the North West. In addition the development of effective transport corridors throughout the North West will ensure that one of Ireland's most remote locations can remain a productive business environment. The significance of the Western corridor must be understood in the context of the Dublin – Belfast corridor which currently accommodates the bulk of all movement of goods and services on the Island. The improvement of the Western corridor to a high standard is critical if trade and services are to flow easily from the south of the island to the north. However both the RDS and NSS have both failed to deliver on their respective policies and goals in respect of facilitating hubs and gateways via the North West region. Derry as the largest settlement in the region has seen its economic status grow as its population increases, drawing in people from the smaller towns in the region. However those small settlements including Strabane have not benefitted by nearly as much, in relative terms Strabane has experienced a decrease in the size of both its economy and its population.

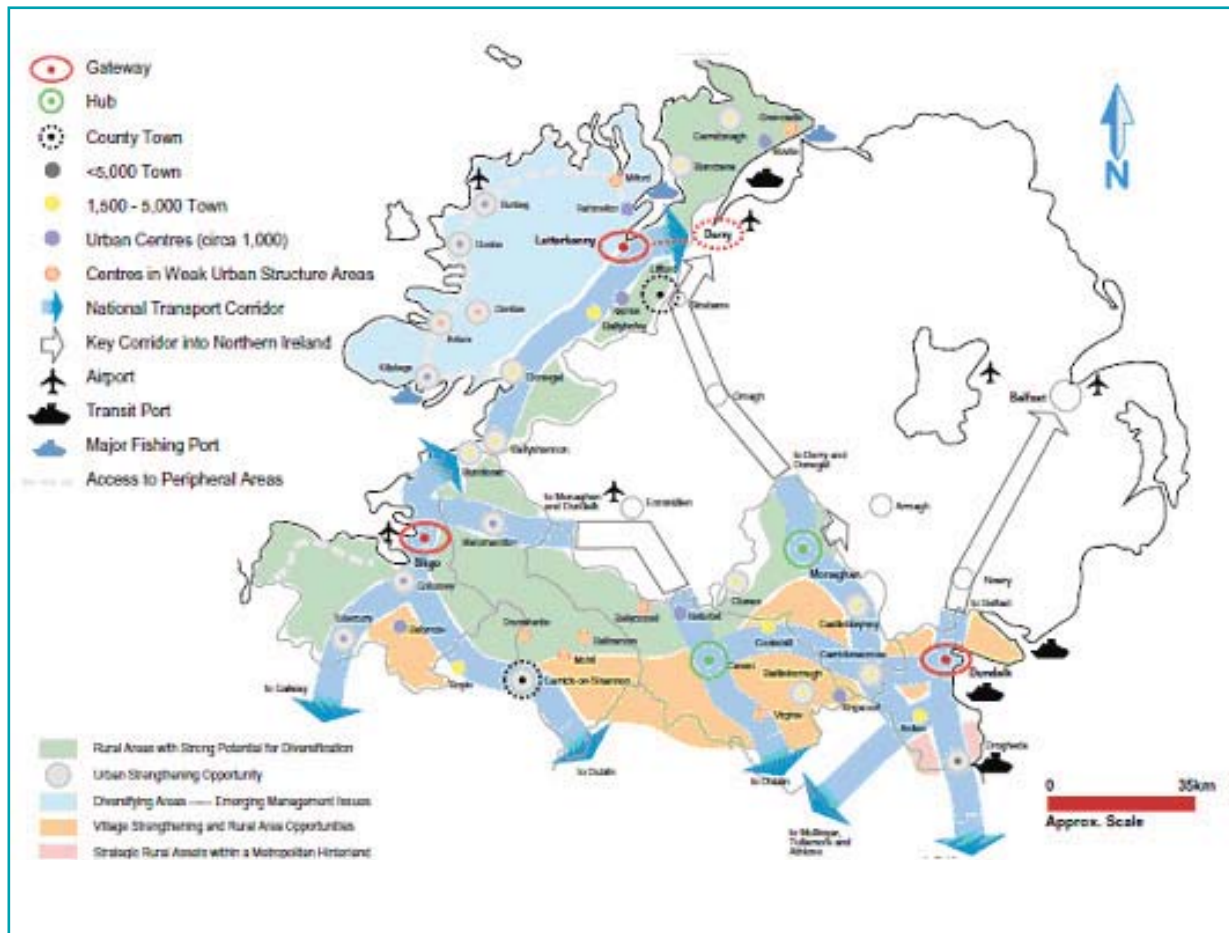


Fig 2. The Irish National Spatial Strategy: Derry – Dublin Corridor

2.3 Planning Policy Statements (PPS)

Below the European and Regional strategic guidance is the national planning policy guidance (PPS) which includes a suite of documents intended to supersede a series of localised policies and policies contained within the Rural Strategy for Northern Ireland.

2.3.1 Planning Policy Statement 1: General Principles

This Statement sets out the general principles that the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, (the Department), observes in carrying out its planning functions, namely formulating planning policies, making development plans and exercising control of development. It stipulates the requirements for environmental assessment where appropriate and the framework for securing developer contributions and creating planning agreement. PPS1 also indicates that development plans should be used to identify sites for high quality, mixed use developments built on large sites, within existing urban areas, which should contain the following attributes/characteristics to make the development function correctly:

- Compactness;
- A mixture of uses and dwelling types;
- A range of employment, leisure and community facilities;
- Appropriate infrastructure and services;
- High standards of urban design;
- Access to public open space and green spaces;
- Ready access to public transport; and
- Facilitation of walking and cycling.

These characteristics are applicable to the larger sites in the Strabane study area such as the SCORE site and adjacent car park and former mill building.

2.3.2 Planning Policy Statement 3: Access, Movement and Parking and PPS3 (Clarification)

PPS 3 and its accompanying clarification document promote greater integration of transportation and land use planning by:

- promoting more sustainable transport choices;
- promoting greater accessibility for all; and
- reducing the need to travel, especially by the private car.

Accordingly new developments within Strabane Town Centre should be planned to take account of accessibility by all transport modes and the need to mitigate adverse transport impacts and promote road safety. Key site requirements for each site within the development plan will set out the main transport infrastructure which developers will be expected to provide for land allocations and specific zoned sites. Where appropriate, development plans, in conjunction with DRD, will identify existing and proposed town centre car parks and may bring forward local policies as part of an overall parking strategy. The following PPS3 policies are particularly relevant to this study:

Policy AMP 2 Access to Public Roads,

Policy AMP 4 Protection for New Transport Schemes; and

Policy AMP 7 Car Parking and Servicing Arrangements.

Multi-storey car parks are considered in the context of their design and impact on townscape, with active frontages encouraged and the scale of the development appropriate to context.

2.3.3 Planning Policy Statement 4: Industrial Development

There are several industrial parks within and on the outskirts of Strabane which accommodate small to large scale industrial units. As a result there may not be a significant demand for such accommodation in the town centre however there are a series of restrictions which apply to such development.

- Development must be compatible with the character of the surrounding area and with adjacent land uses, especially housing.
- Development must not be likely to cause detriment to valuable areas or features of nature conservation interest or result in a significant increase in traffic congestion.
- Development must not be likely to cause or exacerbate flooding and must be capable of dealing satisfactorily with any emission or effluent.

2.3.4 Planning Policy Statement 5: Retailing and Town Centres

PPS5 echoes the principles of town centre vitality which are considered by the RDS and these policies will be particularly important in the continuing development of Strabane's Development Opportunity Sites following the conclusion of this study. The momentum which the study will produce in identifying needs in the economy of the town can be carried forward with a co-ordinated approach to development which does not replicate the existing provision but compliments and fosters a varied range of services informed by local identity. Although there have been several prominent legal challenges to PPS5 including the recent judicial review into the out of town John Lewis development at Sprucefield, Lisburn.

Vitality, Diversity and Major Retail Development

The health of the town centre in regard to its offer across various sectors can be measured and the results used to identify additional capacity or vulnerability. The development of performance indicators for town centres has enabled comprehensive measurement of the health of town centres across Northern Ireland. The need to 'sustain and enhance the vitality and

viability of town centres' in manner which ensures that the health of local business and employment opportunities are optimised is emphasised in all of the policies contained within PPS5. In Strabane town centre there are existing planning approvals for small scale retail units on the majority of streets in the town centre, however there are no major applications currently under consideration to dramatically increase the towns total retail floorspace and the town has not yet been able to distinguish itself and present a distinctive brand for the town. The diversity of the town centres offer of services and products is limited and without a distinctive presence on the region the town could become vulnerable to the impact of other smaller towns with a more distinctive draw and out of town shopping centres. The ASDA development has already demonstrated that unless a major retailer is located at the core of the existing shopping district, two competing centres can quickly emerge. Connectivity between the two centres must then be improved to avoid continued competition. PPS5 also contains guidance on the quality of the physical environment, access to town centre and major retail development all of which are relevant to Strabane.

Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage (incl. Addendum to PPS6 ATC)

Although there are no conservation areas within Strabane Town Centre there are buildings of exceptional quality dotted around the town and PPS 6 acts to ensure that new development respects its context in regard to built heritage and archaeological sensitivity. Industrial heritage is significant for Strabane and the mill building adjacent to the SCORE site is an example of the legacy of the early industrial era. Although this particular building does not appear to have significant architectural or heritage value its proximity to a key development site illustrates the need to consider heritage in the context of new development.

2.3.5 Planning Policy Statement 7: Quality Residential Environments

PPS 7 provides guidance as to the appropriate building design, scale and layout of new residential accommodation, both in rural and urban settings. At present Strabane does have some limited town centre residential accommodation which is located in areas such as Railway Street but the prospect of living in the town centre is not attractive due to the poor condition of many buildings and the volume of traffic which currently uses the narrow streets. This may be improved with mixed use sites offering combinations of residential, commercial and leisure uses.

Policy QD1 suggests that residential developments should 'be based on an overall design concept that draws upon the positive aspects of the character and appearance of the surrounding area'. In many ways PPS7 draws together the other PPS documents and relates their policies to residential development. Consequently all proposals for residential development will be expected to respect the scale and character of the surrounding area including built heritage and ensure that adequate good quality open space is provided for residents. In addition, it is expected that adequate provision should be made for necessary local neighbourhood facilities, to be provided by the developer as an integral part of the development. New residential developments must also provide a movement pattern which supports walking and cycling, meets the needs of people whose mobility is impaired and provides adequate and convenient access to public transport. The majority of the development opportunity sites within the study boundary would have good access to public transport and be within a convenient distance of bus stops etc. New development must also endeavour to 'design out crime' by considering the possible consequences of anti-social behaviour for the residents and the impact on the new buildings. The SCORE site has previously attracted anti-social behaviour and its regeneration (if incorporating a residential use) will need to consider this issue carefully.

2.3.6 Planning Policy Statement 8: Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation

At present Strabane does have a good deal of open space in the form of sports pitches and lands at Melmount, however it does not have any significant open space within the town centre which is sufficient to meet the needs of the current population. The Draft West Tyrone Area Plan 2019 zones open space which PPS8 acts to preserve and restrict development which results in the loss of the existing level of provision. Policy OS1 protects open space unless the development can demonstrate that the loss of space will not have a detrimental effect on the population. For this reason it may be necessary to consider new developments which will provide leisure facilities and open space as well as other uses. Similarly new residential developments are expected to provide minimal levels of open space as indicated in PPS7 above. Policy OS4 relates to 'Intensive Sports Facilities' and such developments are limited to urban centres which would be acceptable in principle within the entire study area. Policy OS6 relates to the development of facilities ancillary to water sports, however initial consultations have indicated that the Mourne River is not suitable for water sports activities (other than fishing) within the bounds of the study area due to fast moving current.

2.3.7 Planning Policy Statement 12: Housing in Settlements

The RDS recognises that the availability of quality housing in appropriate locations makes a vital contribution to the key policy objectives of government. It is a vital consideration in promoting economic well-being and social progress. New housing development can also stimulate urban and rural renewal. Planning Control Principle 1 – advocates 'increased housing density without town cramming', this concept ensures that a minimum living space is allocated to an individual with access to open space and in an environment which has been considered with their interests in mind. In regenerating Strabane's town centre it

will be necessary to achieve a critical mass in the numbers of visitors to the core of the town and to achieve this town centre living can be encouraged. Planning Control Principle 3 – ‘Sustainable forms of development’ encourages the utilisation of brownfield land for new developments rather than the use of Greenfield sites. Given that the development opportunity sites within the study area are in the main brownfield sites this policy would endorse the objectives of the study. Policy HS1 – Living over the Shop could be a key consideration in reinvigorating the town centre and the evening economy in Strabane. At present the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has indicated that there has been little interest in the LOTS Initiative aimed at retailers. However purpose built developments which include ground floor retail and residential accommodation above may be appropriate on certain sites in the town centre.

2.3.8 Planning Policy Statement 13: Transportation and Land Use

PPS13 provides the context for the balancing of transportation modes and the reduction in the dominance of car travel against other modes of transport; particularly public transport. The need to reduce the dominance of the physical infrastructure by the car is vital however in locations such as Strabane where the need to travel to other conurbations for employment, service and products is critical, a balanced and measured reduction is necessary. As previously mentioned, the lands included within the study boundary are relatively well connected by public transport (although there are still physical barriers to be resolved) and this provides an opportunity for new development to maximise its use of public transport options. PPS13 recommends the development of lands in sequence starting with those which can most easily be linked to public transport networks. The policy also recommends that higher density and mixed use developments should be focused in locations benefitting from high accessibility to public transport facilities.

2.3.9 PPS 15: Planning and Flood Risk

With the River Mourne's history of flooding and the devastation caused to Strabane's town centre, PPS15 will be critical in determining the future expansion of the town and for any developments which are located along the river's edge. A great deal of land adjacent to the study boundary is located within the flood plain and the banks of the river along Main Street are also within the flood plain. This will have implications for the form and type of development which can be undertaken. Planning approvals have been granted for developments backing onto Main Street however they have not featured accommodation at ground floor level and opted for parking instead in case of flood. Policy FLD1 indicates that development in flood plains will not be permitted unless they are of overriding regional significance. Policy FLD2 stipulates that development should not compromise existing flood defences. Strabane's water walls therefore could not be subject to any modification in the development process and indeed developments which do not allow a significant buffer between the edge of the wall and the site are unlikely to be permitted. Policy FLD3 reinforces this policy and suggests that development which is located in a non-coastal or river flood plain will also be subject to conditions which require a high level of flood mitigation works to be undertaken prior to development. Developments which will result in the canalisation of the river will only be permitted where there is no practical alternative to culverting and where the river is affected over a short stretch of land.

2.4 Sub-Regional Policy

2.4.1 Sub-Regional Transport Plan 2015

The SRTTP 2015 is the transport planning policy document which for 29 districts which are not within the Belfast Metropolitan Area. The document analyses the transport modes for each district and considers the requirements for the development of transport options up until 2015. The SRTTP highlights the relatively high percentage of households in Strabane without access to a car, approximately 34% against the NI average of 53%. Consequently Strabane does have a high percentage of people who travel to work on foot or by bicycle (21.7% against NI average 12.4%). Strabane's relatively high rate of unemployment is considered to be the key factor in the limited mobility of many residents in the town and the high numbers of taxi's based in Strabane is indicative of the lack of car ownership. The SRTTP also highlights the limited provision of cycling paths in the town, congestion in the town at peak hours and the limited availability of public transport options to residents.

2.5 Local Area Plans

2.5.1 Strabane Area Plan (SAP) 2001

The SAP 2001 is the current statutory plan and is the determining policy document in the development control process. The SAP was adopted in 1986 and was envisaged to be replaced in 2001, however it is now due to be superseded by the West Tyrone Area Plan 2019 which is part of a new revised approach to the area plan framework which aims to replace the current suite of localised plans with district wide plans often considering conurbations within a single plan. The SAP 2001 zoned land for industrial purposes throughout the town and the amounts of land allocated were deemed adequate to meet demand over the plan period. In addition some scope for industrial

development on white land was also anticipated with further opportunities for employment provided by mixed business zonings and the restructuring and sub-division of existing or underused industrial premises. In 2005 the NI Planning Service carried out a survey and found that surplus industrial land remained in the town.

2.6 The West Tyrone Area Plan (WTAP) 2019 – Issue Paper

The WTAP 2019 is currently at issue paper stage and therefore there is no published draft plan. In line with the RDS 2025 the Plan considers Strabane's future pattern of development in each of the following areas:

- Settlement
- Housing
- Industry and Business
- Retailing and Related Activities
- Health, Education and Community Facilities
- Public Utilities
- Transportation
- Recreation, Leisure and Tourism
- Conservation
- Minerals
- The Countryside
- This is finished with an evaluation of Strabane's strengths and weaknesses.

2.6.2 Settlement

The Strabane Area Plan 1986-2001 estimated the population of the town would grow to 15,300 by 2001 and zoned over 100 hectares for housing. Population growth has not been as high as predicted and as a result, 36 hectares of zoned

housing land remain undeveloped. These zonings will be re-assessed together with the potential to develop other land in keeping with the RDS objective of locating 60% of new housing within the existing urban area. As a main hub, Strabane will have a leading role in accommodating the need for urban housing at district level. The community consultation has highlighted a need for social housing. This is supported by NIHE.

2.6.3 Industry

The Plan zones 24 hectares of industrial land of which 9 hectares remain undeveloped. Changes in the economy have resulted in growth for hi-tech, knowledge-based industries. In contrast, there has been a decline in traditional industries such as textiles which has resulted in premises becoming vacant. Some 15 hectares of land was zoned for industrial use of which less than 4 hectares remain undeveloped. Invest NI has identified a need to increase its landbank to over 12 hectares. Further land will be needed to offer choice and flexibility in terms of location. The District Council supports the use of Green Belt land towards Lifford for such use. However, it is Planning Service emerging policy to avoid development in the flood plain, and land to the south west of the town may be a more appropriate option.

2.6.4 Retail

The WTAP envisages the growth in Strabane's financial and professional services base as the structure of the economy changes in favour of service based employment. Cafes, restaurants and pubs also have an important economic and employment role and they add to the attractiveness of a centre. Restaurants and public houses are particularly important to the evening economy in Strabane. If uncontrolled however, they can lead to a reduction in the number of ground floor shop units to the detriment of provision in a town or village centre and can act as a nuisance to neighbouring residents.

2.6.5 Leisure and Recreation Provision

As required by PPS 8: Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation, the WTAP assesses existing

open space provision and identifies suitable locations for future open space development. Strabane Council considers that there is a need for a town park with more zoned recreational land in the town. The Council has endorsed improvements to the network of local parks and the development of playing fields to the north of the town.

2.6.6 Education and Healthcare

There is a commitment to amalgamate the Convent Grammar with Our Lady of Mercy High School and St Colman's High School on a new site in the town, and to provide a new school for Gaelscoil Ui Dhocartaigh. The WTAP identifies a need for a community health and treatment centre in the town, a new building for the Ballycolman Community Association and an extension of facilities at Lisnafin.

2.7 West Tyrone Area Plan 2019 – Strabane Town Centre Health Check

2.7.1

The WTAP Strabane Town Centre Health Check provides a comprehensive evaluation of the economy in Strabane by sector with a consideration of the future of the town given the current rate of growth. The main heading of the report are broadly divided into:

- Retail Profile
- Rents
- Shopper's views
- Pedestrian flows Accessibility
- Perception of Safety and Occurrence of Crime
- Environmental Quality
- SWOT Analysis

The report concludes that Strabane town centres performance is generally poor with an over reliance on independent retailers and investors wary to

invest in the town. Dereliction and high levels of vacancy are particularly off-putting to visitors and investors alike. The regeneration of the both the building stock and public realm are identified as key to the attraction of new trade which in turn can revitalise the town centre. The ASDA store can be linked to the town more clearly which could draw in secondary trade from the store.

2.8 Strabane 2000 - Town Centre Regeneration Document

This document sets out the broad agenda of Strabane 2000 in regenerating the town in relation to physical and social capital. It stresses the need for interconnection between the various sectors and communities in the town in order to achieve a unified approach to regeneration. This appears to be succeeding as there is evidence of a common desire for regeneration amongst all stakeholders. Strabane 2000's public consultation identified strong support for two new pedestrian bridges across the River Mourne to provide better community access - from John Wesley Street and from Meeting House Street. These projects are currently in the process of identifying funding opportunities. There are further regeneration initiatives aimed at redeveloping the waterfront and improving the public realm around the town including the appearance of the water walls.

2.9 Northern Ireland Housing Executive – Town Centre Living Initiative

TCLI aims to encourage people to live in properties over shops in certain areas of Strabane town centre regeneration. This grant scheme covers any work carried out in order to make properties over shops fit to live in and, in the case of most flats, fit for the number of people who live there. Landlords can be given a grant of up to 75% of the cost of eligible expenses up to a maximum of £25,000 where one flat or house is created or £30,000 where there is more than one flat. Uptake of this grant in Strabane has been stubbornly low with fewer than 10 applications received by the local NIHE office. However the initiative remains active and with the outcome of this study it hoped that

town centre living can be made more attractive.

2.10 Planning History

At the core of this study is the need to identify a series of town centre development opportunity sites which will act as drivers of the local economy and the regeneration of the built environment. To this end the following section relates the history of extant planning approvals on key sites within the study area. In general planning approvals have been confined to modest residential, retail and industrial developments with notable exceptions such as the ASDA supermarket and two hotel approvals. Having considered a series of town centre development opportunity sites with the NI Planning Service, planning histories for the past three years for the selected sites are detailed below. A wider planning history search will be undertaken to inform the project team regarding extant approvals which could conflict with the vision for Strabane:

Main Street - Main Street has absorbed the highest proportion of town centre residential approvals with a total of 25 apartments approved within the past five years. In addition it has a history of renovation of existing retail units and approval of three new build retail units.

- Market Street Car Park - The Market Street Car Park has not been the subject of a planning application.
- The Bowling Green - No applications lodged in respect of this site.
- Church Street - Two separate applications have been approved for residential accommodation on Church Street totalling 8 apartments.
- Newtown Lane, Derry Road - No applications lodged in respect of this site.

- Rear of Manse, 19 Derry Road - This site has been the subject of four separate applications in the past 5 years, which generally relate to residential and commercial use. There is a current approval for 6 apartments on the site and 2 commercial units.
- Rear of 13-15 Derry Road - There is a current approval on this site for 5 apartments and 1 commercial unit.
- Land South of Indoor Market Car Park - No applications lodged in respect of this site.
- East of Dock Street Indoor Market - This site has had only one extant approval - An approval for a light engineering unit for electrical sales/repairs.
- Land between Canal Street and Derry Road - The most significant application for this site is the approval for a 3 or 4 storey hotel. Previously there was an approval for a mixed-use development consisting of a hotel and residential and retail uses.
- The SCORE Site - No applications lodged in respect of this site.
- DRD Car Park to North of SCORE Site - No applications lodged in respect of this site.
- Land West of Dock Street - This site is currently occupied by Linton & Robinson and used as their showroom. There are not other approvals on this site.
- Land to the Rear of Dock Street and Railway Street - There is an extant approval for a hotel on this site and approval for the demolition of the existing retail/office units and replacement with units of the same size.
- Land to the rear of 1-7 Park Road - There is a pending application on this site for the retention of a DIY yard and approval for the conversion of residential units to retail.
- Lands 29-33 Railway Street - No applications lodged in respect of this site.
- Corner of Railway Street and Park Road - No applications lodged in respect of this site.
- 70 Railway Street - Application for a new veterinary surgery and residential accommodation.
- 37-39 Railway Street - No applications lodged in respect of this site.
- ASDA Mezzanine - Planning consent has been granted for the erection of a mezzanine within the existing ASDA supermarket and this is expected to increase the retail offer of the business substantially increasing the sale of goods such as electrical equipment and clothing.

The Planning approvals highlighted above relate to specific sites around the town and are not exhaustive, however they do reflect the general form of planning approvals in the town centre. Generally the demand for town centre residential accommodation has been limited and the abundance of vacant retail units has led to fewer applications for new units than would be expected in more economically active towns. The two planning approvals for hotels in the town do indicate that there is a belief that Strabane can dramatically improve its performance in the leisure sector with its linkages to Donegal and Derry. The West Tyrone Area Plan 2019 indicates that over the period 1994 – 2004 there were 27 applications for change of use/redevelopment in Strabane Town Centre. All applications were approved.

While Railway Street had the highest number of applications, many of the approvals have not been implemented. Significantly most of these subject properties are now vacant. This indicates that this area is no longer viewed as the core of the town centre and that this focus has now shifted towards the Main Street direction where most approvals have been implemented.

Context for Regeneration

3 Economic Context

3 Economic Context

3.1 Introduction

This economic analysis of Strabane is based upon two reports produced by Oxford Economics for Strabane District Council:

- Strabane: Developing for Tomorrow (March 2007); and
- De-constructing growth – impacts on the construction industry of the economic slowdown (August 2008)

The key economic implications for the development of the master plan include;

- The effect of the current recession in the short term will have a negative impact on investment, development and employment in Strabane. The master plan will seek to look beyond the current economic conditions, identifying short, medium and long term investment goals.
- Strabane will need to widen its employment base, currently dominated by agriculture and manufacturing.
- The majority of additional jobs which Strabane needs to compete for in the medium to long term are in the business services, retail, distribution, hotel and construction services.
- The concentration of construction employment, which is currently deeply embroiled in the recession. The recovery of this sector is likely to be long term.
- Retail and distribution have some (limited) further scope to expand post-recession.

- The underdeveloped hotel sector offers future potential growth.
- Possible public sector led growth, such as development coming forward to regenerate areas and attract private sector investment.
- Master plan should help to create the space and environment to enable business / office market to grow in the town. Currently there is limited availability which may be deflecting investors.
- Improvements to the physical environment to improve Strabane's competitiveness as a place to live, work, shop, visit and play.
- Greater exploitation of growing markets such as Derry and the cross border market.
- Address the skills and qualifications mismatch. Businesses will be attracted by high skill levels. Development of specialisms not serviced by surrounding areas to tackle the high levels of unemployment.

3.2 Recent years

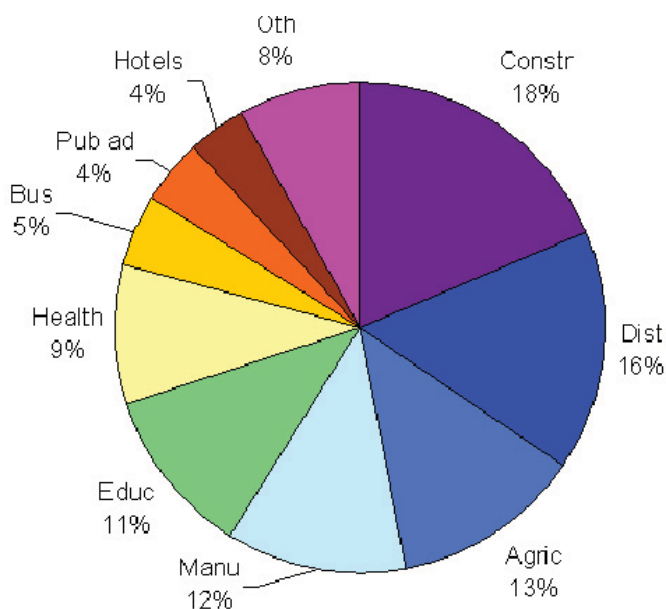
In 2008 41,680 people lived in the district (4,210 more than a decade ago) and there were 12,380 jobs in the district (330 more than a decade ago). Over the last decade to 2007 average house prices rose from around £40,000 in 1997 to nearly £184,000 in 2007.

This expansion of the local economy and high house prices have been the primary driving factors in the growth of sectors of the economy such as the construction and retail sectors.

There has however been overall stagnation in the labour market in Strabane District in recent years (since 2000). Although within that market there have been movements and shifts. Notably:

- Major decline in employment in the manufacturing sector – particularly in the first half of this decade where employee numbers halved from c.3,000 to 1,500.
- Some decline in agriculture and public administration sectors
- The above job loss has been offset by growth in other sectors. Growth has been most significant in construction and distribution, with reasonably significant growth in business services and hotels

The following chart indicates the structure of employment in Strabane 2008. It illustrates the particular importance of the construction and the distribution and retail sectors; that agriculture and manufacturing are significant; and the low level of representation in public administration and private sector business employment.

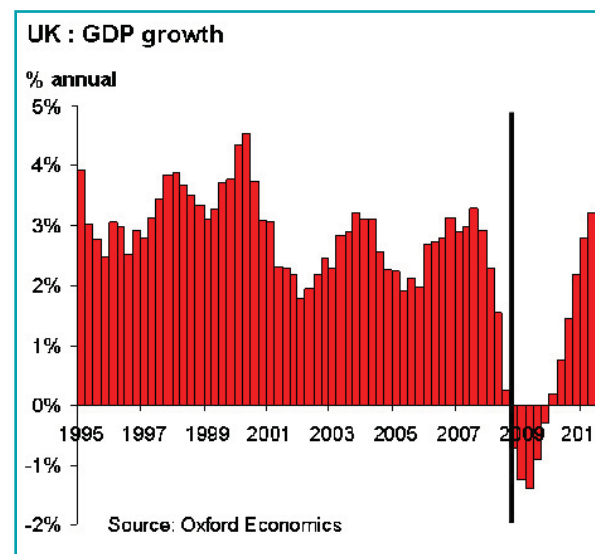


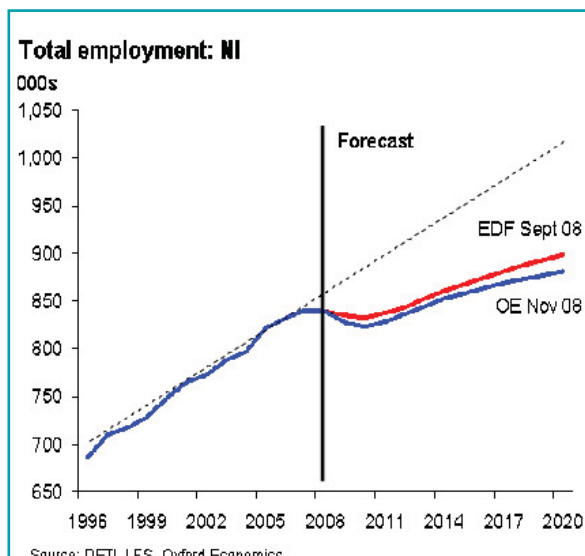
1.2.5 Fig 2 illustrates how the concentrations in those sectors in Strabane relate to the concentrations in NI in general (i.e. those below zero are less concentrated in Strabane than in NI).

In 2007 Strabane had an average wage of under £300 per week (£15,600 per annum) and average house prices were over 8.5 times that amount. Around 1,200 people were unemployed.

3.3 Forecast

After two decades of strong employment growth, Northern Ireland now faces challenging economic conditions in the short term future. The construction, finance and retailing sectors are amongst the most vulnerable to difficulties in the housing market, difficult credit conditions and lower levels of consumer spending. These sectors have been a key source of job growth within NI in recent years. With the UK and Irish economies entering into a recession, unemployment is likely to grow significantly in the short term.





Growth in NI is forecast to be more modest than in the previous decade and in some cases in different sectors.

	Job change		
	1998-2008	2008-2010	2008-2018
Agriculture	-4.2	0.6	0.3
Extraction	0.2	-0.1	-0.3
Manufacturing	-18.4	-2.8	-8.9
Utilities	-0.8	0.0	0.2
Construction	13.8	-4.9	-3.0
Distribution	27.4	-5.1	3.2
Hotels & catering	7.9	-1.1	2.8
Transport & comms	6.4	-0.7	1.4
Financial intermediation	4.5	-0.1	4.0
Business services	35.7	-3.0	18.1
Public admin	-0.1	0.1	-0.8
Education	8.3	0.2	2.2
Health & social	22.5	2.6	12.1
Other personal serv.	6.1	0.6	2.2

Similarly growth in Strabane is also forecast to be more modest than in the previous decade.

	Job change		
	1998-2008	2008-2010	2008-2018
Agriculture	-150	30	30
Extraction	0	0	-10
Manufacturing	-1660	-100	-340
Utilities	-10	0	0
Construction	650	-150	-130
Distribution	350	-70	50
Hotels & catering	190	0	90
Transport & comms	60	-10	10
Financial intermediation	20	0	30
Business services	350	-30	80
Public admin	-130	0	0
Education	-80	-10	-30
Health & social	230	20	90
Other personal serv.	100	10	40

In terms of the forecast future of the different sectors in the medium to longer term:

- The manufacturing sector is forecast to continue to decline, although not quite as sharply as in recent years.
- The decline in agriculture is a feature throughout NI and some forecasting expects this to continue, although some suggests it may improve slightly (especially longer term).
- As a result of the current recession construction employment has been forecast to decline significantly in the short term within NI, with a loss of 7,000 to 15,000 jobs (between 2008 and 2012) forecast. Applied to Strabane this forecast could equate to around 250 to 550 jobs lost in the sector. Employment in the sector is forecast to begin to recover again around 2013/14. However whilst it is expected to recover, the strength of growth experienced over the last decade in this sector is not expected to re-occur in the long term as demand is likely to be more modest due to more limited job opportunities attracting people to the area.
- The finance and business sector took a sharp upturn in recent years with the arrival of Northbrook. The recession is impacting on this, and the finance sector has particularly been hit. The medium to longer term outlook though is for continued growth in this sector though at a relatively muted level.

- Growth in hotels and transport and communications is forecast to be steady, if unspectacular.
- The public sector has not been the source of job creation in Strabane as it has been elsewhere in NI. This is accounted for by the lack of major hospitals, no FE or HE establishments, and no headquarter functions in public administration in the district. Health has

enjoyed some growth, mostly in the childcare sector but public administration employees have fallen as have education employees (albeit very slowly). Health is forecast to grow steadily, if unspectacularly, whilst education and public administration are forecast to continue at around their current levels.

- Recent years has seen significant retail growth across NI. In Strabane this is evidenced in the expansion of the Asda store. Recently this has been boosted by the exchange rate bringing increased cross-border custom. Much of the retail sector is currently feeling the impact of the recession. However it is likely that the medium to longer term will bring some limited retail growth (potentially recapturing leakage?), but will not match the growth of recent years.

House price rises have in recent years fuelled a feeling of growing wealth and supported borrowing and expenditure. However in recent years and months the housing market has seen significant price falls. In terms of the housing market the following chart shows changes average house prices in NI over the last decade and those forecast for the next decade. This forecasts 3 years of falling prices, followed by a levelling out with growth returning around 2012. It may be at least 10 years before house prices return to the levels they were at their peak in 2007.

With house price decline followed by more steady growth, affordability will be less of an issue than in recent years but will still need to be addressed.

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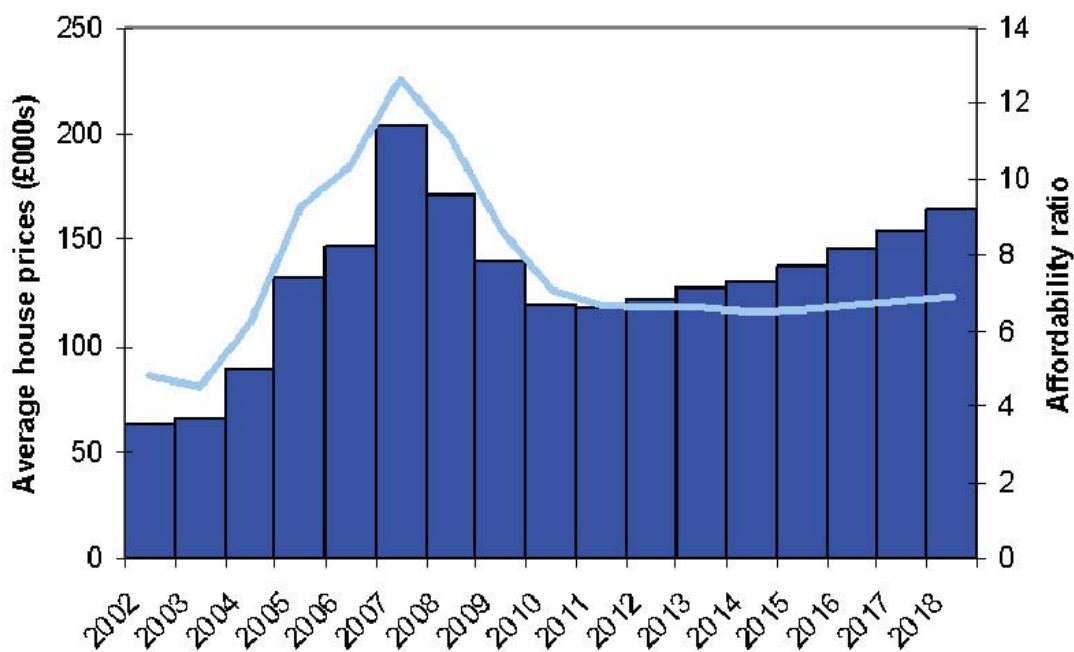
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With house price decline followed by more steady growth, affordability will be less of an issue than in recent years but will still need to be addressed.

The following chart shows the changes average house prices and the forecast for Strabane. As with the NI wide forecasts, this forecasts 3 years of falling prices, followed by a levelling out with growth returning around 2012. However this subsequent grow is estimated to be less than that for NI as a whole.



3.4 Conclusions / Implications for the masterplan

The economy is currently in recession and in the short term this will have a negative impact on investment, development and employment in Strabane. When the recession will end and an upturn begin is impossible to predict, but the estimates we have available is that recovery may begin somewhere between 2010 and 2012.

Strabane needs to put itself in a strong position to make the most of the economic recovery when the economy eventually comes out of recession and starts to grow again. To do this it needs to identify opportunities to capture future growth in the medium to longer term and how to increase its competitiveness as a place for that growth to locate.

Currently Strabane remains concentrated on the employment sectors which have a less buoyant longer term outlook, namely agriculture and manufacturing.

Whilst a number of niche sectors within these less buoyant and declining sectors will offer growth potential, the bulk of net additional jobs which Strabane needs to 'compete for' in the medium to long term are in the business services, retailing, distribution, hotel and construction sectors:

- Strabane is underrepresented in the private services sectors (business in particular). In the medium to long term projections for wider NI show clearly how the economy is moving rapidly towards the service sector. Much of Northern Ireland is underdeveloped in the area of private services so there is a more 'level playing' field in terms of competing for new jobs in these sectors. Technology has reduced the need for physical proximity to markets and there are many elements of the private services market that could easily be serviced from Strabane. There will be significant expansion in sectors such as consultancy, advertising, legal services and supporting services in Northern Ireland over the next decade, which Strabane should be able to compete for. The growth in private services is already underway and areas such as Belfast, Newry and to some extent Derry are

attracting significant levels of growth in these key sectors. If an area gets left behind and is not perceived as attractive for these types of businesses it risks being left behind in the new wave of growth and this presents a stark warning to Strabane.

- Strabane has a high concentration of construction employment, which is a positive sectoral concentration with respect to longer term growth prospects, however it is currently being badly hit by the recession and its recovery is likely to be long term and relatively slow compared to recent growth.
- Both retailing and distribution have some (limited) further scope to expand post-recession.
- The hotels sector looks very underdeveloped within the Council boundaries and may offer potential. However a recently published report (UK Hotels Forecast 2009) suggests hotel occupancy rates in NI are due to fall in 2009 (by over 5%) after a decade which has seen significant year on year growth (around 5% to 10% pa).

The level of difficulty in getting into the housing market in recent years is obvious. Even with falling house prices the need for affordable housing exists in the short term and with projected future steadier growth, that need is likely to continue.

It is important to consider how the public sector can help support and accommodate future economic growth in these areas. Options may include:

- Bringing forward public development to regenerate an area and attract new private sector investors.
- Put in place a framework for guiding and attracting development and investment

- Support and enable a pipeline provision of office, living and recreation space. Help create the space and the environment to enable the business / office market to grow in the town. There is currently limited suitable space, which could result in rises in rental costs, or investors being unable to source appropriate property.
- Support additional affordable housing provision in the short term.
- Improve the physical environment to increase Strabane's competitiveness as a place to live, work, shop, visit and play.
- Exploit future growing markets such as Derry and the cross-border markets. With development in the North West the additional funding from both NI and RoI governments could provide a significant opportunity for Strabane if it materialises. Future growth in the region and improving transport links all provide opportunities for Strabane.
- Address skills and qualifications mismatch. Businesses require quality labour and are hard to attract without this. Up-skilling of the resident population and young people should remain a priority. Needs to focus on existing employers and future employers and also developing specialisms that are not serviced by surrounding areas.
- Focus both on bringing in high wealth individuals, with significant spending power and perhaps high levels of entrepreneurial activity, to stimulate growth in the Strabane economy as well as addressing the high level of level of non-employment in the area.

Context for regeneration

4 Property Market Review

4 Property Market Review

4.1 Strabane Retail Market

The Colliers CRE Retail Study for the West Tyrone Area Plan 2019 (DOE) identified available retail expenditure in Strabane as £ 91 m. The significant statistic was, that of this available expenditure, £ 58 m was leaving the district to shop elsewhere. (compared to only 3ml out of £ 71ml in Omagh)

Since that study there have been significant changes (which have not been quantified) including the change in the exchange rate, leading to significant trade from the Republic of Ireland and significant retail development including a new ASDA which we estimate to turnover £ 40ml per annum. This has no doubt stemmed some of the outflow.

Further new developments include Strabane Shopping Park, a development of units of a size not available in the town centre, which has introduced Argos, Peacocks and New Look to the town (with an upsized and relocated Menarys) and The Pavilions Retail Park, a development of similar sized units to the town centre.

Strabane's retail provision is now dominated by Strabane Shopping Park, Pavilions Shopping Park, the town centre core and the new 65,000 sq ft ASDA Supermarket on Branch Road.

In recent years there has been strong demand from retailers for modern well configured retail units in Strabane. This demand is demonstrated through the fully let Strabane Shopping Park which is detailed below along with other retail parks on the edge of Strabane Town Centre.

Up to 2007 there was latent demand for retail space in Strabane from national multiples and since there were no comparable size units in Strabane's main shopping core capable of accommodating these retailers the demand was satisfied at the edge of town locations.

As part of the masterplanning process it would be prudent to look at how large box retail from 2,500 sq ft to 10,000 sq ft can be accommodated closer to the main shopping core.

4.2 Strabane Shopping Park

Strabane Shopping Park enjoys a prominent position within Strabane Town Centre opposite the relocated ASDA Supermarket and Pavilions Retail Park and is also immediately accessible to the major road infrastructure connections for Londonderry, Omagh and Co.Donegal.

The Scheme which is accessed off Branch Road was completed at the end of 2006 and comprises c. 28,000 sq ft of Open Class 1 retail split over four units and centrally arranged around a customer car park. The scheme is fully let with occupiers including Argos, New Look, Menarys and Peacocks. The most recent letting was to Menarys at a headline rent of £15 psf.

4.3 Pavilions Retail Park

Pavilions Retail Park is situated immediately adjacent to ASDA and provides a natural extension to the ASDA development. It provides a complementary retail mix benefiting from excellent accessibility, car parking and convenience to its shoppers.

The park comprises 11 no units extending to 16,102 sq ft. The units are Open Class 1 and range in size from 1,000 sq ft to 5,500 sq ft.

The scheme is anchored by Cliento Fashion where brands include Tommy, Gant, DKNY, Guess, Fenn Wright Manson, Betty Barclay, Ted Baker, Miss Sixty and French Connection. Other occupiers include Patterson Interiors, Cafe Fresco and Sean Graham Bookmakers.

The letting agents are in advanced discussions with a fashion retailer for 1,000 sq ft. The remaining units are being marketed at a rate of £23.50 psf.

4.4 Proposed Lesley Retail Park

Lesley Retail Park which occupies a highly prominent location fronting the A5 Ring Road at its junction with the Lifford Road (A38) and Railway Street is the former ASDA site. The site abuts the Branch Road and also sits opposite the new ASDA and Strabane Shopping Park.

The site extends to 2.75 acres and currently comprises the former 2 storey former ASDA foodstore. The landlord is progressing with plans to redevelop the site to create an Open Class One Retail Park.

Planning has been submitted for 31,000 sq ft of retail split over 4 units with units ranging in size from 5,000 sq ft to 12,000 sq ft. The landlord has had expressions of interest from a fashion operator and a large National Department Store.

4.5 Town Centre

Main Street and Castle Street in Strabane Town Centre is seen as the prime retail pitch with major occupiers including Harry Corry and Boots. Recent transactions in this area have been fairly limited. This is partially due to the difficult market conditions which we are currently experiencing and also the fact that new retail provision, including multiple fashion retailers, are increasingly concentrating on the edge of the town centre in developments such as Pavilions and Strabane Shopping Park.

The movement to the edge of town has been precipitated by a lack of adequately sized units in the town centre.

We have carried out a search with local agents and are aware of the following transactions in the Town Centre:

- A retail unit located at 5 John Wesley Street was let in November 2006 at an annual rent of £28,000. The unit extended to approximately 2,220 sq.ft, which equates to £12.61 psf.
- Rents on Castle Street reflect c. £28.00 - £30.00 Zone A for tenants including Savers, Menarys and Stylo Barrett.
- The Woolworths unit on Castle Street was passing at £49,000 per annum which reflects c. £6.66 per sq.ft on the retail element.

Colliers CRE are retained by Menary's who have recently relocated from Castle Street to a larger unit in Strabane Shopping Park. Colliers have had very little interest in the former unit and are finding it difficult to dispose of it further highlighting the problems which the Town Centre currently faces.

In order to strengthen the town centre a number of factors could be looked at;

- 1) Develop adequately sized units. - National retailers generally want units ranging from 2,500 sq ft to 7,500 sq ft ideally grouped in adjacent units.
- 2) Improvement the environment - Our view would be that the physical environment should be improved to provide a clean, well presented environment. This may involve improved public realm, landscaping, street furniture, lighting etc.
- 3) Improve connections - In particular the connections down Railway Street from the edge of town centre shopping to Abercorn Sq and Main Street.

Physically with environmental improvements,

Widened footpaths etc with signage – Directional (throughout the town centre and 'Welcome to Strabane town centre' etc.,

More retail activity by the way of New Units perhaps on the Pat Kirk Motors site and on down Railway St.

- 4) Shared Surfaces - One identified problem in

the town centre and in particular on Main St seems to be the traffic congestion. In part this seems to be exacerbated by the taxi rank on Main St. Moving this to a more amenable area e.g. Castle Street (this may assist in extra footfall on Castle Street)

Rather than total pedestrianisation of an area or a street we would be advocates of shared surfaces (pedestrian priority). Some cars and ability to park outside units does provide activity and footfall.

4.6 Office Market in Strabane

The provincial office market has historically been dominated by local government requirements with a limited demand arising from local professional occupiers for leasehold accommodation.

The local office market in Strabane is dominated by local business. The town centre office users as in most provincial towns would tend to be local professional firms such as accountants and solicitors.

From our recent experience in the wider provincial market place demand for new build offices while limited is focused on small pavilion style own door office units of 2,000 – 4,000 sq ft.

Take-up of this type of scheme has been particularly good but generally only from a freehold perspective where local companies have been able to acquire buildings for placement within their own pension funds.

The masterplanning exercise can identify suitable sites in which to accommodate long term central or local government office requirements should they arise..

Generally speaking it is important to have planning permissions in place in order to provide a speedy response to any enquiries, therefore we would recommend pursuing planning applications on certain key identified sites.

There is no clearly defined office sector within Strabane Town Centre and any office provision would tend to be either owner occupied or rental space in small office buildings or above retail or commercial space.

Office/call centre rents should, in our opinion, be pitched dependent upon the level of specification at between £10.00 - £12.00 per sq ft.

4.7 Strabane Leisure and Tourism Market

Strabane is in an ideal location to act as a gateway to Donegal and capitalise on cross border trade and tourism. There is a significant market in tourists tracing their family heritage and Strabane is a well known town on the heritage trail. There is also the fishing and outward pursuits that are increasingly popular.

There are many locations and towns close by that are of interest to tourist and day trippers and

properly marketed and branded Strabane can capture the tourist market for trade in Shopping, catering, commercial leisure and hotels.

What is required is a properly designed tourist facilities coupled with commercial and community leisure uses that will provide a critical mass that will then subsequently act as a catalyst for private investment.

The mix of uses that can be grouped together include;

- Hotel,

Whilst there are no active requirements in the town at present from the national hotel chains We do believe as part of a properly designed leisure destination a significant hotel chain in the 3 + star to 4 star range could be attracted to the town.

The Whitbread chain did have a requirement for Strabane until recently, however due to the recent economic downturn, this interest (as well as their interest in other towns across the UK) has, for the time being, diminished.

- Leisure facilities (gym, pool, sports hall),

We believe this is an excellent location for a relocated Council run Leisure centre which could act as an anchor.

- Cinema

As part of a larger well marketed scheme we think a medium sized cinema operator (5/6 screens) could be attracted to Strabane and serve the wider hinterland including into Donegal.

- Bingo

Bingo is a good footfall generator and there are a number of chains as well as local operators that could be attracted to a well designed scheme. This could perhaps be a relocation of the existing Bingo Hall.

- Restaurant / café

A good mix of local operators and national multiples (who are now represented in Belfast) would provide the catering offer. Examples of the national chains include;

Pizza Express

Frankie and Bennys

TGI Fridays

Nandos

Spur

Pizza Hut

Supermacs

- Retail – Local and speciality e.g. local designers, local heritage and gifts, delicatessen etc.

An example where this works very well is The Linen Green, Moygashel in Dungannon, which is an attraction in its own right.

- This should all be designed around significant public realm.

The ideal site for such a mix of uses is the SCORE site.

This site has the benefit of the adjoining theatre and library facilities and if designed properly it could bridge the gap between the edge of town centre retail and the town centre and would provide an unrivalled leisure hub in any provincial town.

Once life is injected back in the town centre it would be possible to envisage town centre residential units.

5 Urban Design and Heritage Analysis

Chapter 5 Urban Design and Heritage Appraisal

5.1 Built Form

5.1.1 Urban Morphology

The centre of the town is focussed on the northern side of the River around Main Street, Market Street, Castle Street, Castle Place and Abercorn Square. The town centre is relatively compact and constrained to the south by the River Mourne which is also a key physical feature of town. However the town centre is not well integrated with the river with the properties on Main Street backing onto the the river wall and few direct connections other than Strabane Bridge which connects with the western side of the town.

5.1.2 Topography and Landscape Setting

To the north and east the topography slopes upwards. The study area itself is relatively flat adjacent to the banks of the River Mourne. In terms of the wider landscape setting the town is surrounded by the Sperrin Mountains which are visible from the study area.



The town is surrounded by attractive countryside and the Sperrin Mountains



River Mourne an important physical feature



Strabane 1905



Strabane 2008

5.1.3 Urban Grain

The town has a fine grain of development which has evolved over the years. The figure ground plans opposite show how the general block structure remains largely intact although the finer grain of development that characterised the old town has been gradually eroded.



Terrace of properties on Bowling Green



Abercorn Square \ Market Street - Terrace of three storey properties.

Key Built Form Issues

- The historic street layout and settlement structure is a major influence on the built form and character of the area.
- Plot widths of 8-12 metres are a distinctive feature of the town centre particularly around Market Street, Main Street and Abercorn Square.
- The historic grain remains largely intact although various sites have been redeveloped with sometimes inappropriate and poor quality developments.
- The town centre has a consistency in terms of block heights although the subtle variation in block height and roofscape provides interest.
- Continuity of built form is a distinctive and important feature of the town centre although there are a number of gap sites (e.g. on John Wesley Street) and surface car parks (Market Street / Butchers Street) which erode this continuity.
- There are a number of gap sites throughout the town where there is an opportunity to re-establish built form. Visitor's impression of the town is undermined by vacant sites and poor quality buildings in prominent positions.
- A number of properties have fallen into various states of disrepair and are in need of investment and sensitive renovation to bring them back into life.
- The underlying historic fabric and qualities of the town is largely intact and waiting to be rediscovered. The town has considerable potential to become an attractive place if appropriate investment and uses can be encouraged.

5.2 Mix of Uses

5.2.1 Retail core

The main retailing core of the town centre is focussed around Main Street, Castle Street and Castle Place. Main Street contains the highest concentration of retailers including a large 'Super Valu' store and a Boots. Environmental improvements have been undertaken along Main Street with new paving and street furniture. Some attempt has been made to pedestrianise Castle Street although vehicular traffic is still able to access Main Street via Abercorn Square. The quality of the overall retail environment is variable. Other than the improvements to Upper Main Street, the general retailing experience is poor with a number of vacant and empty retail units particularly on Castle Street (vacant Post Office), Castle Place and Railway Street.



Main Street is the main retail focus of the town centre

5.2.2 Edge of Town

A new ASDA store has recently been built on the edge of the town centre adjacent to the A5 and Railway Street. On the opposite side is a small retail park including an Argos and various other retailers. To the south, Main Street and Townsend Street follow the River Mourne. Further east are a series of small housing estates overlooking the town. There are a number of sports pitches at Melvin Park on the western side of the River outside the study area. The bus depot is located on Bradley Way west of the town centre. On the road out of Strabane towards Derry there are a number of important buildings including the Court House, N.W.I.F.H.E college campus and Strabane District Council offices. There is a cluster of schools to the south of the town centre next to Barrack Street including a Grammar, Secondary and Primary School.



New ASDA store on the edge of the study area

5.2.3 Residential

Strabane was designated as a Town Centre Living Initiative Area however there seems to be little evidence of this leading to a significant increase in the number of residents within the town centre. There is evidence of some recent town centre residential schemes including the new development on the corner of Patrick Street and Church Street and the new three storey residential block on Meeting House Street.

There are 1079 social housing units within Strabane District. Strabane is currently experiencing negative demand for social housing largely due to out-migration from the town and also the surplus of accommodation derived from the private rental market. As a result there is limited opportunity for town centre living from the social housing sector on Development Opportunity Sites such as the SCORE Site; instead the private rental market is more likely to drive residential development in the town centre. Uptake of the LOTS Initiative has been minimal with less than ten enquiries. As well as the NIHE there are several housing associations which have stock in the town centre.

5.2.4 Leisure

There are few A3 uses, that is bars, restaurants, cafes and takeaways throughout the town centre. There are a number of public houses dispersed throughout the town centre and the Alley Arts centre and Library provides the town centres primary cultural attraction.



New residential development on Patrick Street which provides important opportunities for town centre living.



The Alley Arts complex provides a range of leisure and cultural uses including a theatre, library, gallery space and cafe / bar.



The 'Osyters' restaurant on Abercorn Square

Key Issues

- Leakage of trade to other centre such as Derry, Omagh and Enskillen is an inevitable result of the town close proximity to other towns of a similar size providing a more attractive and stronger shopping offer
- The recent opening of the ASDA superstore has a significant and detrimental impact on the town centre. In addition the other retail units on the edge of the town have almost certainly had a detrimental impact town centre retailers.
- Few people appear to live in the town centre and there is not a prevailing sense of a residential community so that much of the area is unpopulated outside business hours.
- The Alley Arts Centre provides a significant cultural attraction in the heart of the town centre and a café / bar
- There are few restaurants, bars and cafes throughout the town. There is scope to encourage additional evening economy uses.



North West Institute of Further Education - Falls outside the study area but is an important facility in the town.

5.3 Townscape

5.3.1 Character

A defining characteristic of the town and indeed many towns in Northern Ireland is the modest scale and restrained architecture. The quality and contribution of new developments to the towns overall townscape varies considerably. The Alley Arts complex provides an interesting and high quality contemporary development that forms an important landmark located on the corner of Abercorn Square and Railway Street. Other developments such as the retail unit on the corner of Main Street and Market Street, an equally prominent site, are less successful in terms of overall design response. Historic Georgian and Victorian properties are dispersed throughout the town some of which have retained their original historic features while others have been significantly altered. Many properties throughout the town display symmetry and simplicity in terms of architectural expression.



Dilapidated properties on Lower Main Street



Painted properties add colour and interest to the streetscene



Abercorn Square / Market Street - Common form of development found in many Northern Irish towns.

5.3.2 Scale and Massing

The town centre has a varied block height although the majority of properties are no higher than three or four storeys in height. Where the original block structure remains intact there tends to be a fine grain of development with individual plots having narrow plot widths (generally between 8-12 metres). Considerable townscape interest is added with varying roof heights and pitches which add a sense of architectural diversity particularly on Market Street and Upper Main Street.



The majority of properties are 2 or 3 storeys in height with pitched roofs arranged to form a terrace of properties fronting the street.



One of the more architecturally distinctive buildings on the corner of Castle Street and Castle Place



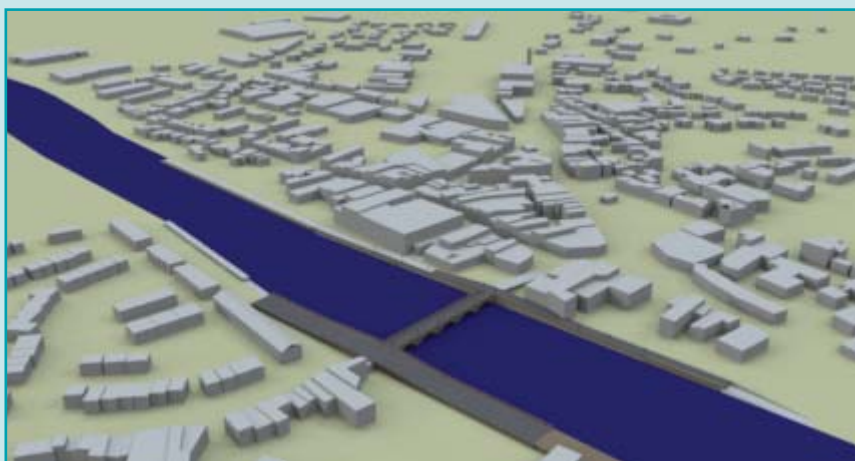
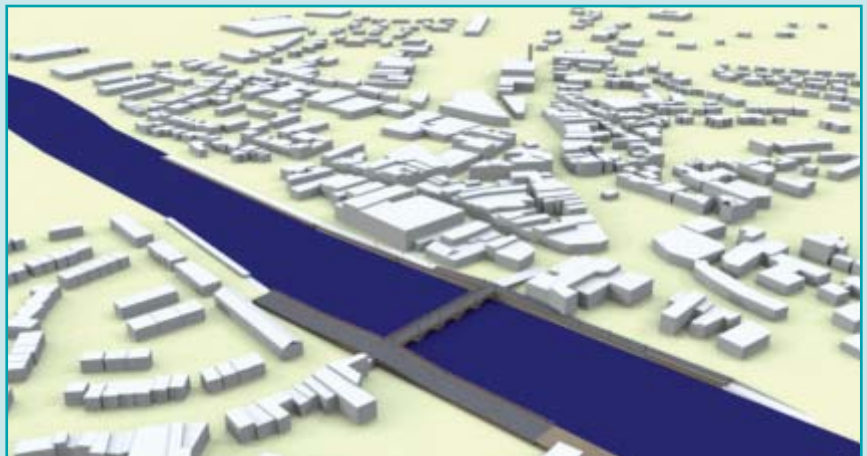
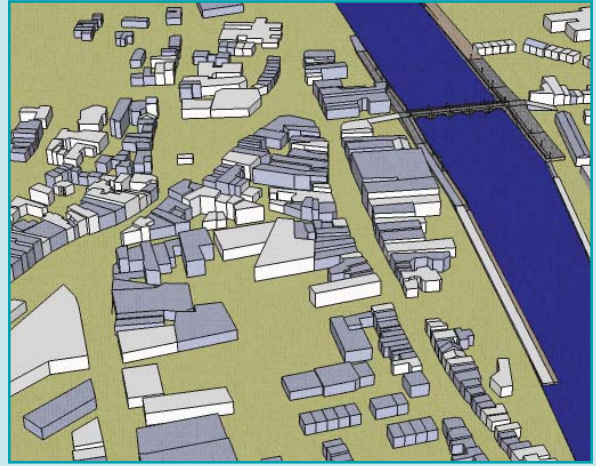
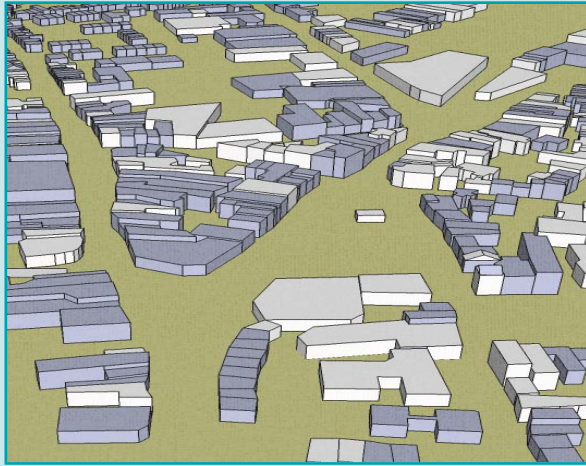
A number of older properties have distinctive architectural features such as a symmetrical arrangement of fenestration, architectural detailing and general form of development that significantly adds to the overall appearance of the town.



Some of the more recent developments such as the retail park and properties backing onto the river (Lower Main Street / Water Wall) create large inward looking blocks with blank frontages that are generally unsightly



Images below - 3 dimensional model representation of Strabane Town Centre which shows the relatively uniform block height throughout the town



5.3.3 Building Quality

A number of factors contribute to the quality of individual buildings. These include physical condition, townscape value, architectural quality and adaptability. Building quality varies considerably throughout the town centre. Particular buildings of note include the historic properties around Bowling Green, the Alley Arts Centre, Linton and Robinson Department Store, historic properties on Main Street and the former Post Office on Castle Street. Buildings of negative townscape value include No 43 Main Street, the former mill buildings opposite the SCORE site, the garage / workshop adjacent to the Alley Art Centre and the properties fronting onto the river in particular those around Bridge St. Gap sites, including No 89-95 Main Street and the site next to Strabane Bridge, reduce enclosure and detract from the general appearance of the town. The Church of the Immaculate Conception is a high quality attractive building.



The First Trust Bank building on Main Street is a good example of the historically important and attractive buildings dispersed throughout the town.



Throughout the town are examples of unsightly, empty and semi derelict properties at key locations which need to be redeveloped to improve the appearance of the town centre such as the examples above and below.

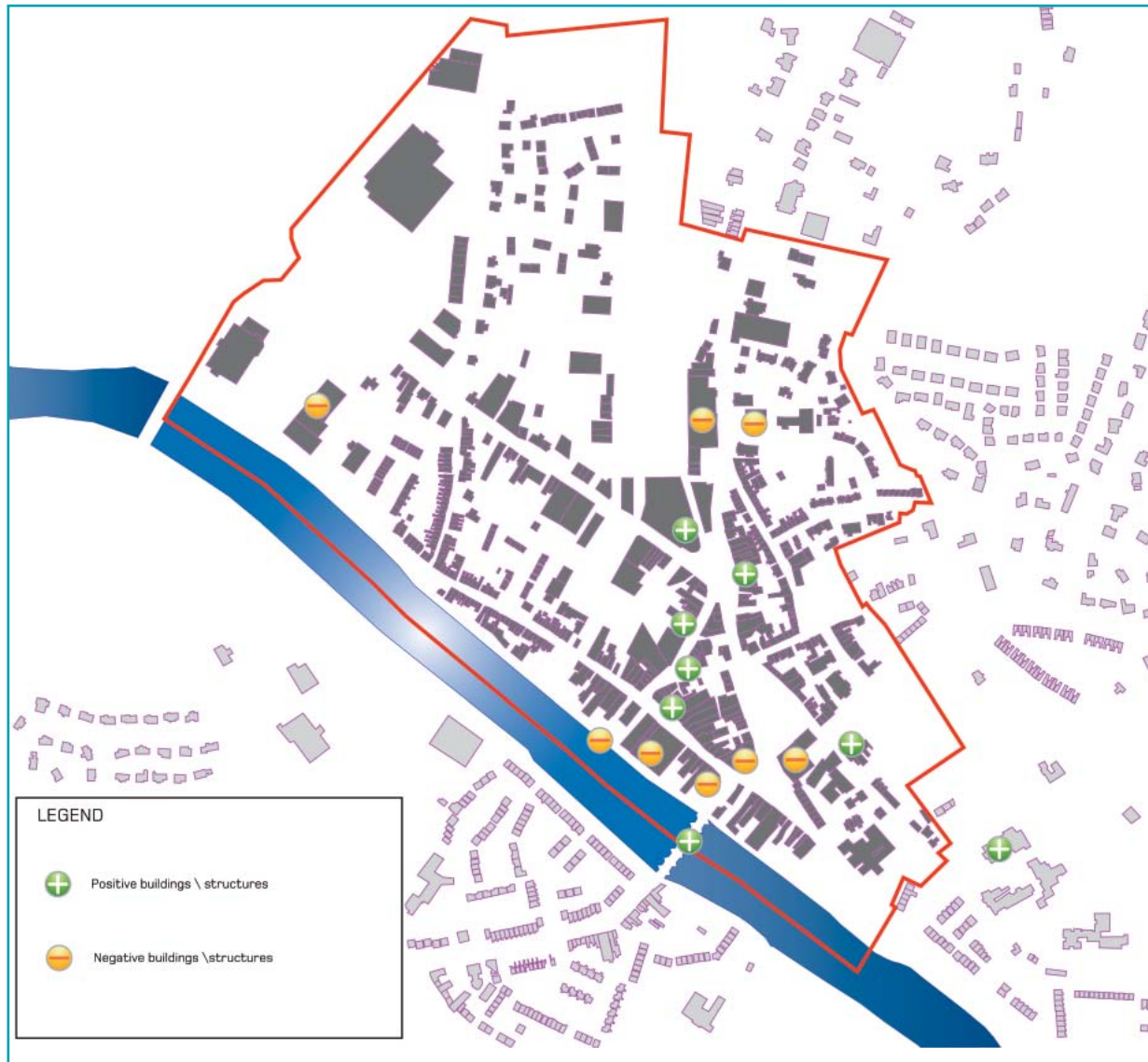


Former Mill Buildings on Canal Street are semi derelict and provide a redevelopment opportunity.



The flood defence wall is an unsympathetic and brutal design solution.

Plan 1 Building Quality



Vacant site and unsightly gable elevation at key gateway on Bridge Street



The Alley Arts complex is a positive piece of townscape.

5.3.4 Streetscene

The painted properties fronting Upper Main Street, Market Street and Abercorn Square add colour to the overall streetscene and are typical of many towns across Northern Ireland. The town has grown along the main arterial routes into the town including Derry Road, Liskey Road and Melmount Road to the south of the River. The town centre is a relatively compact area and includes the following streets:

- Castle Street – A short pedestrianised street linking Main Street to Abercorn Square. The former Post Office is a particularly distinctive and attractive building. There is also a three storey property on the corner of Castle Street and Castle Place which provides an attractive piece of townscape and corner feature;
- Lower Main Street – A narrow street with a number of independent retailers. The 'Super Valu' is a two storey modern building which does not complement some of the more notable historic buildings including the First Trust Bank which is a fine three storey Georgian stone building;
- Railway Street – Generally two storey properties flank either side of the street a number of more recent buildings have been inserted at various points along the street;



Castle Street / Castle Place



Lower Main Street



Railway Street

- Abercorn Square / Market Street / Upper Main Street – A wider street which acts a main north south thoroughfare between Derry and Omagh. The sense of built enclosure is eroded by the large surface car park fronting Market Street. A mix of two and predominantly three storey properties front onto these streets. The taxi rank on Abercorn Square is well used by local taxis companies. Adjacent to the taxi rank is the main town centre bus stop;
- Patrick Street, Bowling Green, Butcher Street – A number of largely intact historic properties characterise this area together with narrow streets. Some properties are presently being renovated and the recent new build residential scheme on Patrick Street is an appropriate and sensitive design. The police station is an obvious architectural carbuncle which visually detracts from the area. A number of the properties feature attractive sash windows. Panelled large front doors, with columns and decoration either side and fanlights above are typical of the Georgian townhouses in this part of town. Various solicitors offices are located in some of these properties;
- John Wesley Street – There is a lack of built frontage along this street and surface car parks combined with clear sites do little to improve its appearance. This route is a key link to the river, with the proposed pedestrian bridge landing connecting Railway Street and the Alley Arts Complex with Main Street. There is considerable development potential on the cleared sites which could assist in reinforcing this link to the river.



Abercorn Square



Bowling Green



John Wesley Street

5.3.5 Active Frontages

‘Active frontages’ result where windows and doors face the street allowing, direct interaction with the public realm and a good degree of natural surveillance. They are a good indicator of the nature of the built fabric and the level of economic activity, and are one of the most important components in stimulating busy streets. Active frontages are evident throughout the town centre although the level of economic activity is not as widespread as one might expect. The quality of ground floor frontages, rather than the upper floors, appears to be a widespread problem throughout the town centre.

Few properties present an active frontage to the river; indeed the majority of properties fronting Main Street present their back to the river. Given that the river is such a positive natural asset it is critical that the town centre properly interacts with it and development is orientated and designed to take advantage of this setting.

Key Issues

- Active frontages are a common feature throughout the town centre although a number of retail units are boarded up.
- The quality of shop frontages throughout the town is generally poor. External roller shutter boxes detract from the appearance of many buildings.



The quality of shopfront can have a significant impact on the appearance of a property and street.

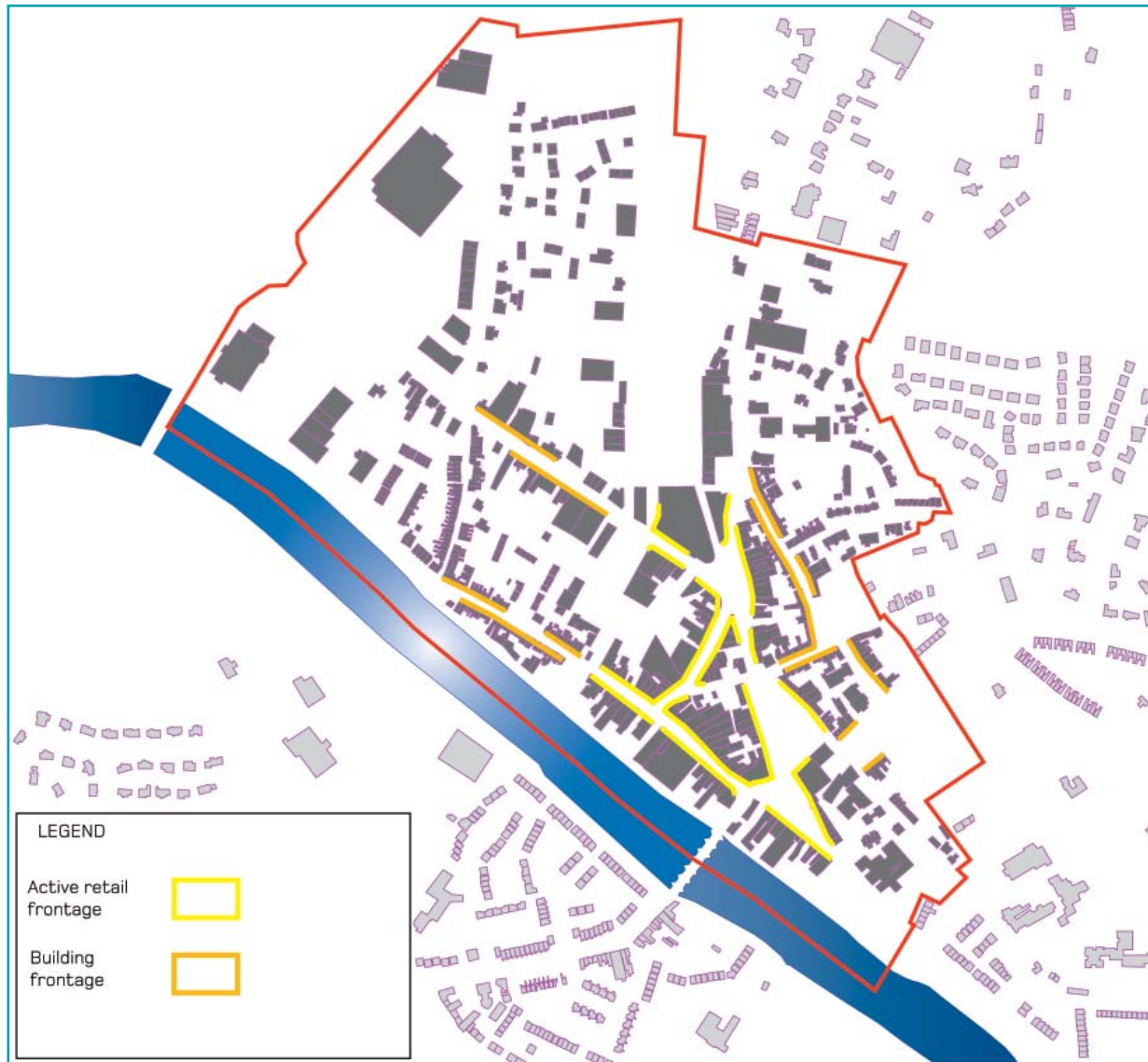


Some older properties have incorporate shopfronts more succesfully than others



Gap sites erode the sense of enclosure to the street

Plan 2 Active Frontages



More recent developments such as the Housing Executive Office and Library provide contemporary glazed design solutions.



Roller shutters diminish the overall appearance of properties.

5.3.6 Gateways, landmarks views and vistas

The principal approaches to Strabane are marked by a series of 'gateways' the quality of the public realm as well as the townscape and architectural quality of buildings in the immediate vicinity defines the character of a gateway. The quality of gateways into Strabane varies considerably. From the north and south the experience is reasonably positive although the back of the Mill Buildings (Canal Street) are not particularly attractive. The Alley Arts complex provides a positive gateway development and the core of the town centre around Abercorn Square provides a positive sense of arrival with attractive views of Market Street. From the west the sense of arrival and area around the bridge head provides a particularly poor gateway to the town centre. The dilapidated properties and lack of any frontage combined with the cleared site next to Water Wall do little to convey a positive image of the town. From the south the approach is variable in quality. The three storey residential block and properties on one side of Upper Main Street including the health centre are of limited architectural quality.

The 'Let the Dance' begin artwork provides an attractive public art feature on the roundabout next to the ASDA. Two other notable public art works including the pig sculpture at the Alley Arts Centre and boat sculpture on Abercorn Square are attractive but are not particularly prominent or visible.

The arrival experience from the south across Strabane Bridge is particularly poor with a series of dilapidated buildings flanking either side of Bridge Street and an exposed gable to a property fronting Main Street which has been vandalised.

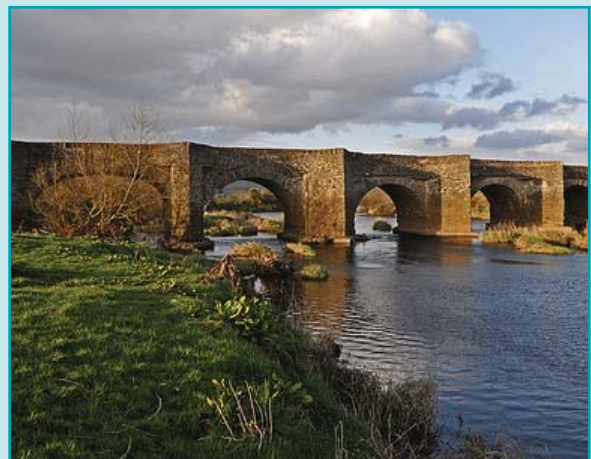
5.3.7 Nodes

A 'node' can be defined as a focal point where key routes intersect within a defined area. Abercorn Square is a major node at the junction of several streets including Railway Street, Canal Street, Market Street and Castle Street. The quality of the public realm and townscape, as well as ease of pedestrian movement, are key to the success of each node throughout the town centre. The junction of Upper Main Street, Bridge Street and Market Street is another important node of limited

quality due to poor quality architecture and the volume of vehicular traffic.

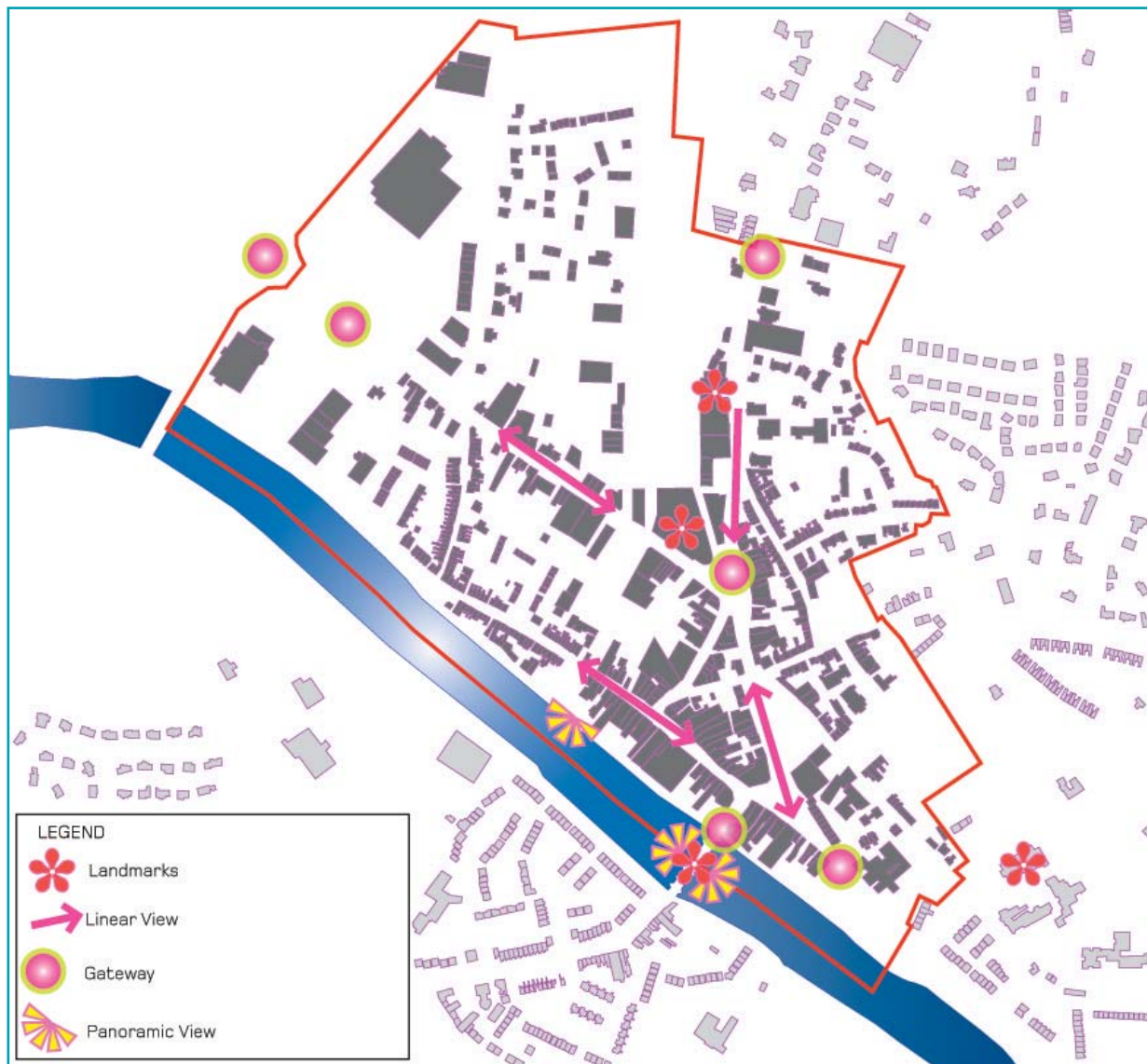
5.3.8 Views and Vistas

The best views of the town are on a north south axis particularly when approaching the town centre from Derry Road and Meeting House Street. Views open up along this route to reveal the main town centre and high street. There are linear views along Lower Main Street and Railway Street. In townscape terms the termination of linear views is important. The Alley Arts complex is a good example of a positive landmark terminating a view. In contrast the property on the corner of Main Street / Bridge Street is a poor example. There are a series of panoramic views from the Water Wall westwards and of the River Mourne. Views of Strabane Bridge are particularly impressive. The flood defence walls significantly detract from these riverside views.



Strabane Bridge

Plan 3 Gateways, Landmarks, Views and Vistas



Retail unit on the corner of Market Street \ Main Street is a poor design response which fails to maximise the potential of this prominent site.



The Linton & Robinson Department Store successfully turns the corner and addresses the street.

5.3.9 Landmarks

Landmark buildings and structure can assist legibility, establish a focal point or help terminate a view. Landmark buildings or structures that make a positive townscape contribution including the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Strabane Bridge, The former Post Office building, the Alley Arts Complex and Linton and Robinson Department Store and the former Mill Chimney at the old Corn Mill Buildings. A number of buildings have a negative impact on the overall character and appearance of the area in particular the flood defence walls, the retail unit on the corner of Bridge Street and Main Street, the 'Supervalu' building on Main Street and the police station at bowling green. The Courthouse is an attractive building but the surrounding fortifications do little to complement or enhance its setting.

Key Issues

- A number of gateways into Strabane Town centre fail to define a positive sense of place or establish a quality arrival experience
- There are a limited number of linear views within the town centre although the historic layout creates positive views of Market Street and Derry Road.
- There are relatively few quality landmark buildings which terminate key views other than the Alley Arts Complex. However there are a number of structures and buildings e.g. the bridge and Immaculate Conception Church that provide distinctive and attractive landmarks which fall outside the town centre study area.



Church of the Immaculate Conception - Church spire is visible from many parts of the town



Upper Main Street - New residential development at a key gateway



North West Institute of Further Education located next to a key approach to the Town Centre.



Corner property on Castle Street / Castle Place is an attractive landmark.

5.4 Public Space

5.4.1 Open Space

Open space within Strabane town centre is limited to the SCORE site and Abercorn Square. The SCORE site is the largest public space within the town centre however it is isolated from the town centre located behind the Alley Arts complex and is an empty underused site which appears to serve no practical or positive function. The SCORE site was where the canal basin and head were located until the canal was filled in. This has been identified as potential development site. Given the lack of activity and natural surveillance of the space it will be important to consider what future use this site may have.

Abercorn Square forms a small hard landscaped space at the northern end of Castle Street and includes a small kiosk gift shop and canopy. A public art work next to the kiosk celebrates the birth of John Dunlap, Brian O’Nolan and James Wilson grandfather of Woodrow Wilson. Other than these there are few public spaces within the town. Along Water Wall is a narrow raised walkway which provides views of the river and the historic bridge. The flood defence walls are particularly unattractive and a major blot on the town and it’s setting next to the river. More undoubtedly could be made of the town’s riverside setting.

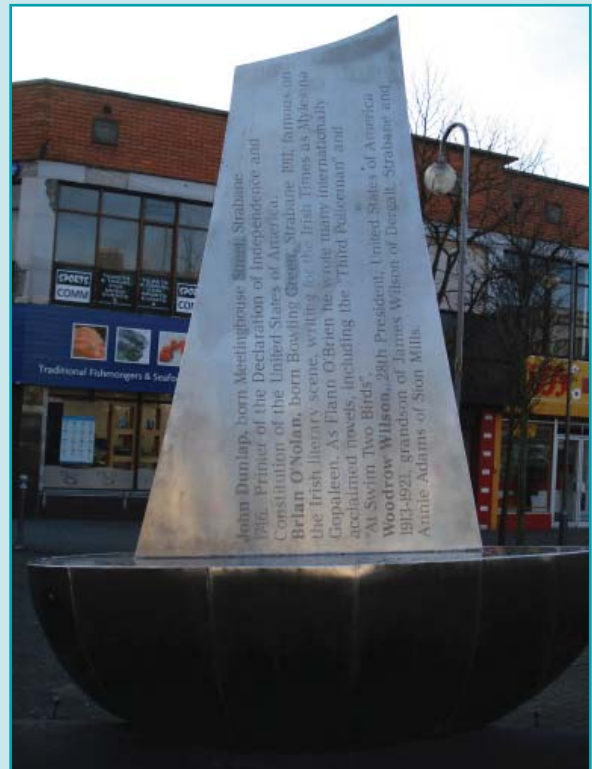
Environmental improvements have been undertaken around Bowling Green however this has involved creating a large surface car park and there is little in the way of soft landscaping to reduce the impact of parked cars. The town’s green spaces fall outside the study area boundary with the Town Parks located to the north and Ballycolman Golf Course to the south.

Adjacent to the Alley Arts Centre and Theatre is a small public space with an impressive sculpture of a pig reflecting the previous use of the site as a market. The palette of materials and street furniture surrounding the Alley complex are particularly impressive although the paved space

does not benefit significant from active frontages other than the café. The large expanse of blank wall fronting this space is unfortunate. Access to the space is restricted at night presumably to prevent anti social behaviour.

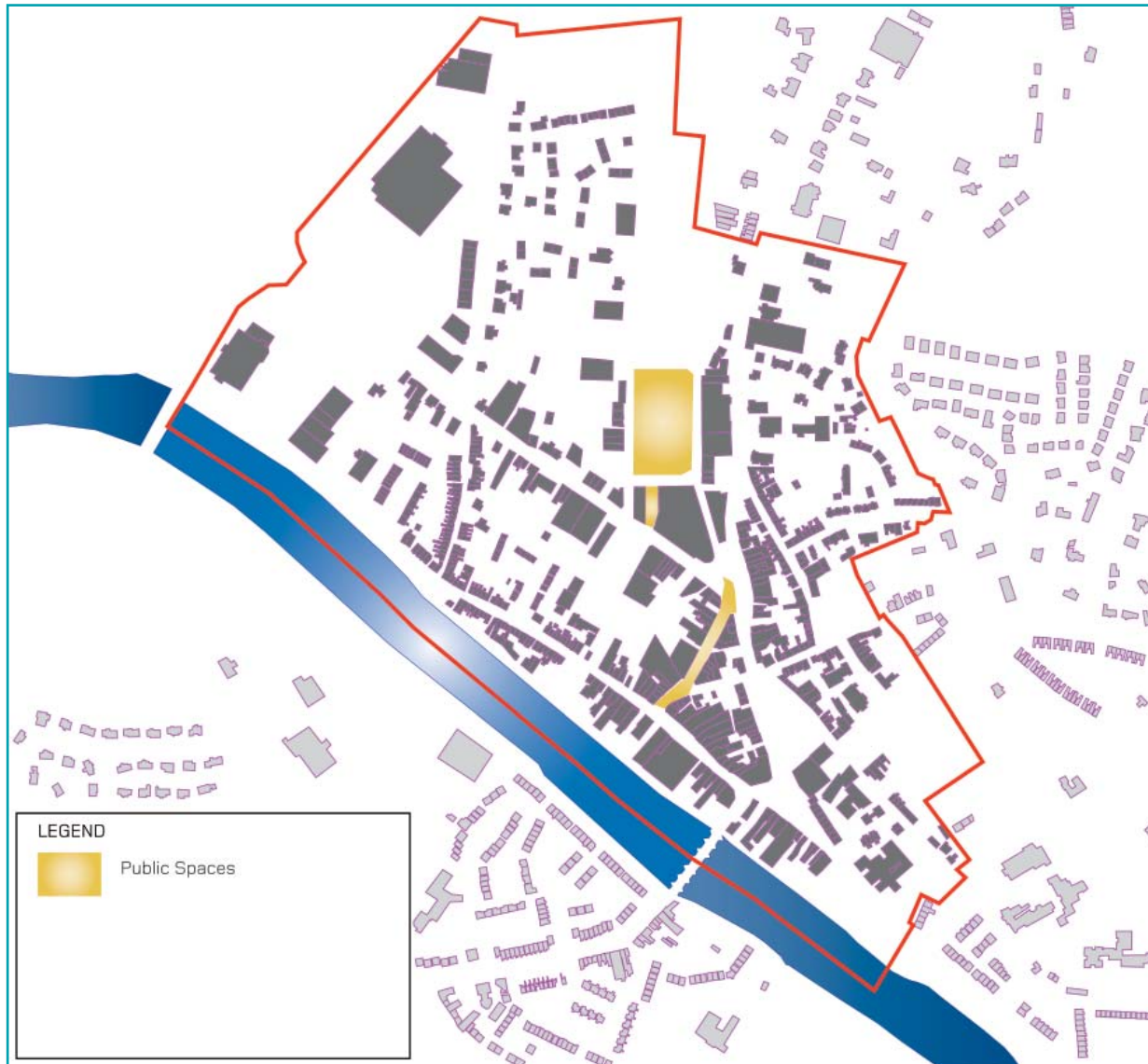


The SCORE site is an underused large public space.



Public art has been introduced within the town centre to good effect.

Plan 4 Public Realm



Lack of pedestrian activity on Castle Street



Unnecessary street clutter which serves no useful purpose.

5.4.2 Streetscape

The public realm is made up of the parts of Strabane which are freely available for use by everyone. Streetscape can be defined as the individual components of a street such as the pavements, highways street furniture, signage and lighting columns – all of these influence the appearance of a town. Many streetscape issues tend to be the common to the entire study area other than Main Street and around the Alley arts centre where public realm improvements have been completed and had a significant impact on the quality of streetscape. Hard wearing granite paving has been selected as a paving material in areas where improvements have been completed. This provides a robust durable and aesthetically attractive material which complements the buildings within the town.

Castle Street, Castle Place and Abercorn Square – The quality of streetscape is particularly poor with bollards and railings that serve no purpose. It is unclear whether Castle Street is intended to function as a fully pedestrianised street as vehicles still have access through the street onto Main Street.

Lower Main Street, Canal Street, Railway Street – The recent environmental improvements to Lower Main Street have had a positive impact on the street and the addition of artwork and celebration of place / street names adds interest. The rationalisation and regularisation of parking has also assisted. A similar palette of materials has been used for paving around the Alley Arts Centre.

Market Street, Upper Main Street and Meetinghouse Street – Poor quality surface materials and street clutter combined with various different styles of lighting columns and CCTV columns do not convey a high quality streetscape.



Public space adjacent to the Alley Arts centre and cafe.



Public realm improvements have been completed on Lower Main Street.

Patrick Street, Bowling Green, Butcher Street
 – The surface car parking and environmental improvements at Bowling green are not of a high standard. The paintwork on the railings has deteriorated and the majority of pavements have been tarmaced. Some street trees have been planted around the car park and are relatively well established.

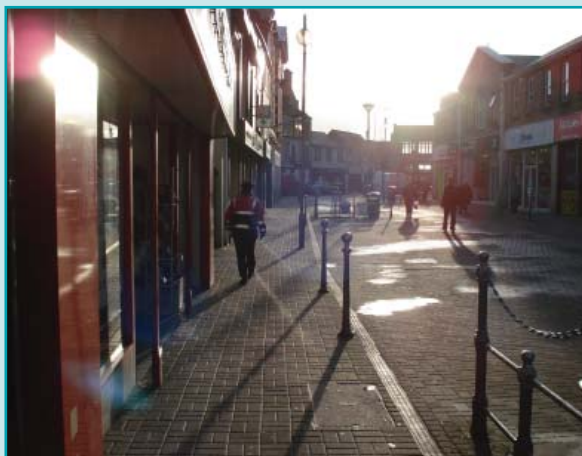
Water Wall – The raised walkway next to the flood defence wall is narrow and does not encourage pedestrian use. Access is via steps from Main Street although level access can be gained from Strabane Bridge. The general appearance of Water Wall and flood defences does little to encourage people to walk along the raised walkway.



Bowling Green



Poor quality pedestrian environment along river walkway.



Poor quality streetscape on Castle Street.

Key Issues

- The high level of vehicles in certain parts of the town particularly around the bridge head is detrimental to the visual amenity of the town.
- Block paving, bollards and lighting columns on Market Street, Abercorn Square and Market Place are particularly dated.
- Lack of clear co-ordinated palette of paving materials and street furniture.
- Opportunity to use recent environmental improvements to Lower Main Street as benchmark for future public realm improvements.
- Key nodes are dominated by traffic lights and other street furniture.
- Excessive street furniture creates an impression of visual clutter.
- Footways are generally low quality and present an unattractive appearance, with the exception of Lower Main Street and those surrounding the Alley Arts complex
- Utilitarian lighting columns and lanterns can be found throughout the area.
- Poor maintenance of public realm throughout the study area. New signage which has been installed has been damaged and does not appear to be robust or durable.
- Chewing gum on pavements is particularly unsightly and detracts from recent improvements to Castle Street.

5.5 Historic Environment and Heritage

5.5.1 Historic Development

Strabane's historic development can be traced back to the 18th century. The construction of a canal in 1793, connecting the Foyle four miles away, helped the textile industry to develop, as raw materials could be brought from Derry. These were followed by the great Northern Railway to Derry and Belfast, and the narrow gauge Donegal Railway. The Canal brought considerable prosperity to Strabane (and to Lifford) in the first quarter of the 19th century and the towns became flourishing markets for agricultural produce. The canal fell into disuse in 1962. A major factory was herdsman's flax mill at Sion Mills, a few miles to the South of Strabane other industrial activities included saw mill and corn mill within the town. Strabane's main prosperity was related to its role as a trading town and the tolls from its markets were the principal revenue streams. The creation of the Border had a devastating effect cutting off the Donegal trade and cutting municipal income by half.

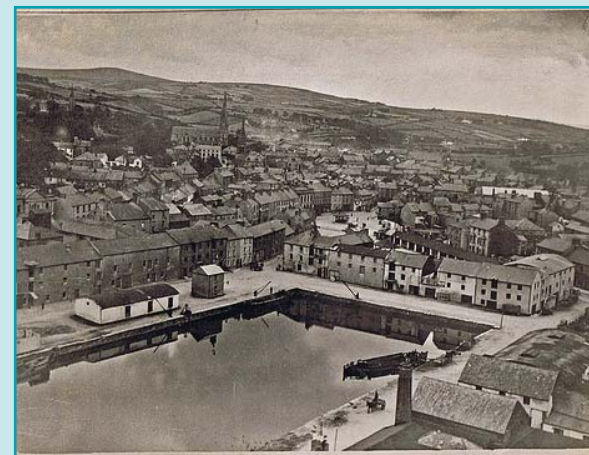
More recently Strabane was heavily scarred by the Troubles, beginning in the early 1970s and continuing throughout much of the 1990s. with bombings commonplace and Irish Republican paramilitary groups, mainly the Provisional Irish Republican Army, regularly attacking the bases of both the Army and the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) located in the town. This led to a number of buildings being destroyed in particular a number fronting onto Market Street. Strabane was once the most bombed town in Europe per size and was the most bombed town in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless there remain a number of attractive properties dispersed throughout the town. The area around Bowling Green contains a cluster of attractive three storey Victorian properties



Historic photograph of Strabane looking north.



Historic photograph of Castle Street / Castle Place.



Canal head which has now been filled in and forms the SCORE site.

5.5.2 Heritage

John Dunlap, printer of the American Declaration of Independence and founder of America's first daily newspaper, was born in Meetinghouse Street, and James Wilson, grandfather of Woodrow Wilson, learnt his printing trade at Gray Printers in Main Street. The beauty of Strabane's situation beneath the hills is reflected in the hymns "All things Bright and beautiful" and "There is a Green Hill Far Away", which were written by Mrs Alexander while she lived in Strabane in Milton House.

Brian O'Nolan better known in literary and media circles as Flann O'Brien and Myles Na Gopaleen was born in Strabane in 1911 and lived both in the bowling green and at Ballycolman.

The town's considerable historic and heritage is celebrated with various plaques and artworks which refers to some of the towns famous residents. However the town's heritage and interesting history is not readily apparent when visiting or passing through. In terms of marketing the town is not as well known as other similar sized places such as



Above and below - Strabane has a rich heritage which is celebrated with a number of blue plaque's. Famous residents include John Dunlap and Brian O'Nolan.

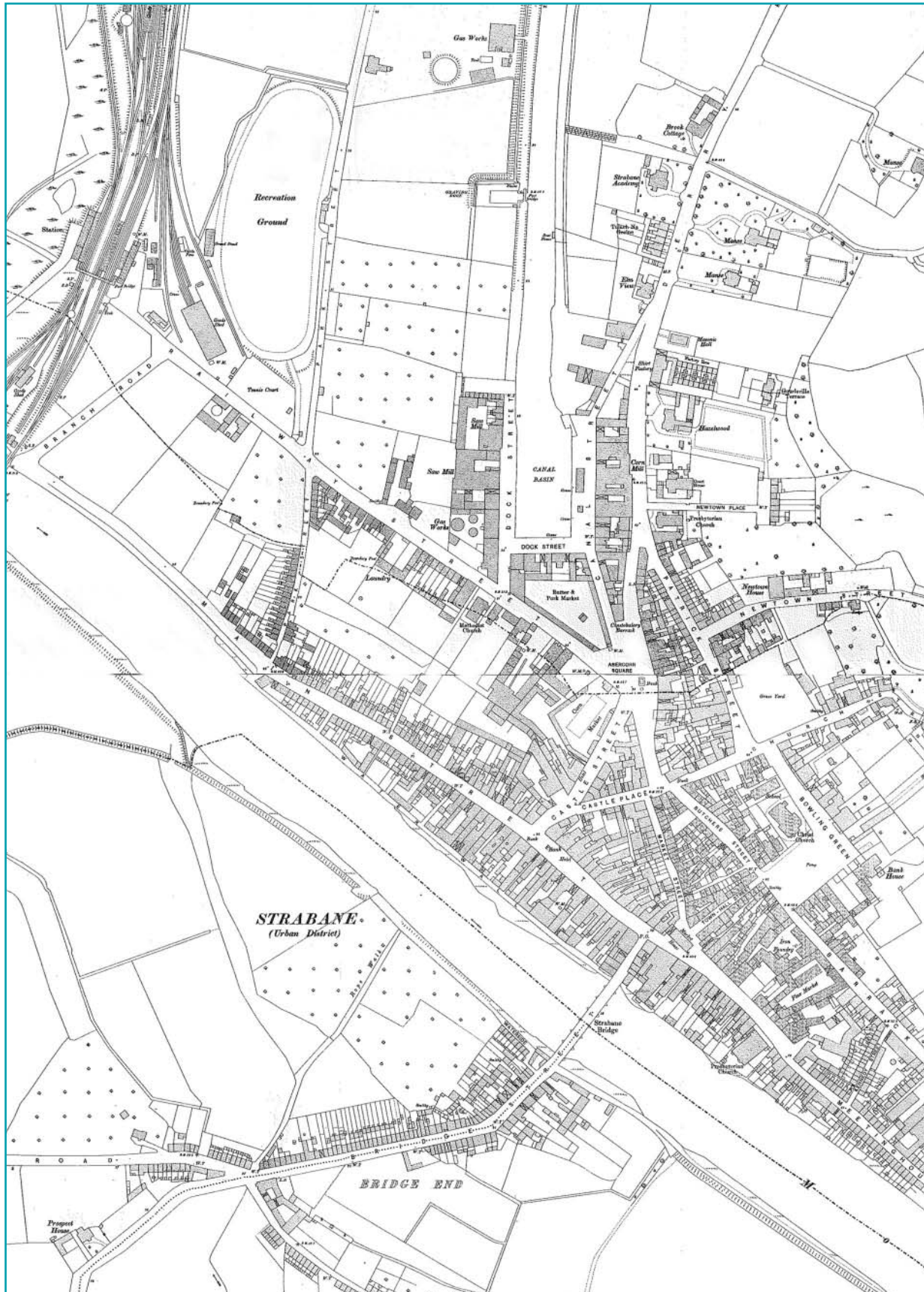


Former Smith's Mill Building.



Gray Printers, Main Street.

Plan 4 Old Ordnance Survey Map - Strabane 1905



5.5.3 Buildings of architectural or historic interest

Strabane is rich in built heritage and has a history the pre dates the current built form (dating largely from the late Georgian and Victorian periods). The historic buildings dispersed throughout the town are varied and give the area a distinctive appearance and character. A number of properties are listed as being of special architectural or historic interest including the majority of properties on Bowling Green the former Post Office on Castle Street, Strabane Bridge and the Gray Printers building on Main Street.

However many historic properties have not been well maintained or altered in an inappropriate way with a number of properties falling into disrepair. The objective must be to sustain the richness and distinctiveness of the town whilst facilitating imaginative architectural solutions on appropriate development sites, taking inspiration from the best of the towns built heritage. It will also be important to encourage significant investment in the towns historic physical fabric which has become neglected over the years. It follows inevitably, the loss of a historic building, the destruction of its architectural features or other unsympathetic alteration, or introduction of inappropriately designed new development will serve only to degrade what remains of Strabane's historic interest and do harm to its character and appearance.



The Georgian properties around Bowling Green are architecturally impressive buildings.

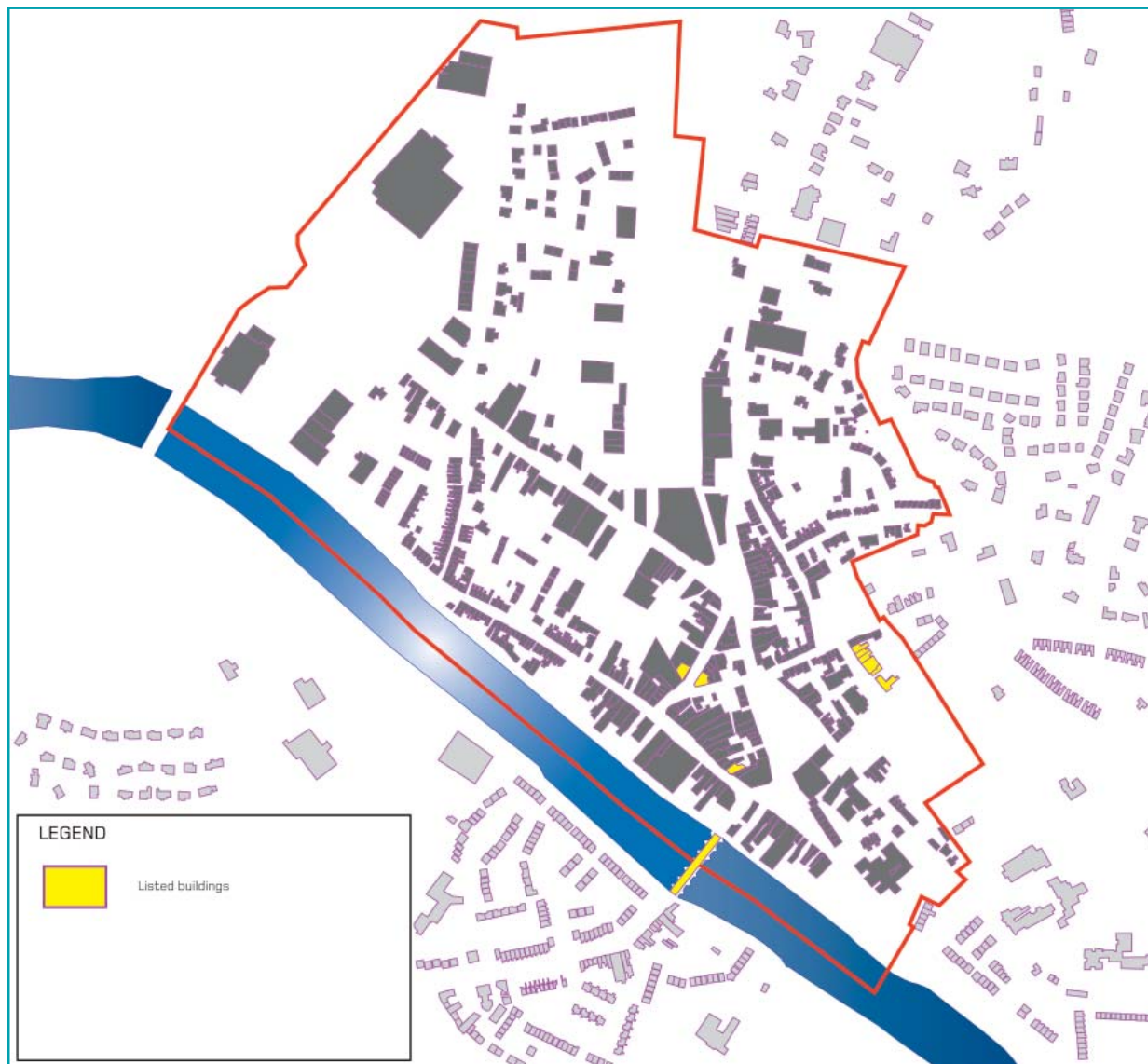


Former Post Office - Castle Street.

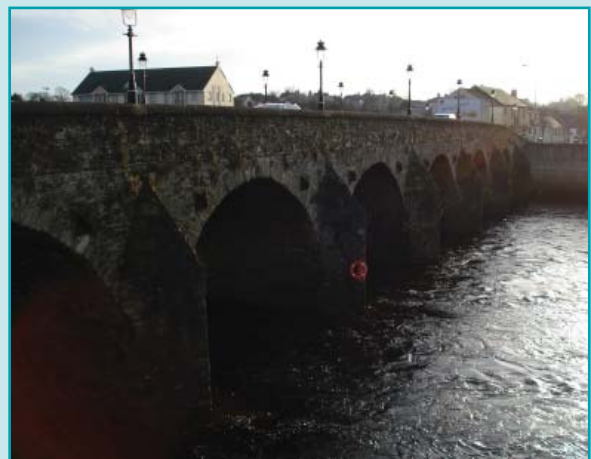


Attractive decorative door surround on historic property on Bowling Green.

Plan 6 Listed Buildings



Abercorn Factory



Strabane Bridge

Key Issues

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

6 Transport and Movement Appraisal

Chapter 6 Transport and Movement Appraisal

This chapter sets out the main transport and access issues regarding Strabane town centre. These have been identified through a process of review and analysis of existing data and documentation, discussions with members of Strabane Council, and the project steering group, and meetings and conversations with officers of Roads Service and Translink. Further meetings have been arranged with Translink and the consultants for the A5.

The main issues are summarised below. The following pages provide a distillation of data and information that relates to the issues being highlighted.



6.1 Transport and access key issues

- Given the new high degree of competition from out-of-centre retail, the traditional centre needs to attract people by virtue of the quality of its historic environment. People need to be attracted to visit, and to stay longer. Quality is currently undermined by the negative impact of traffic and parking and the associated street design.
- The out-of-centre retail is poorly linked to the traditional centre, both in terms of perception and physically.
- Designation of the town centre to include the recent out-of-centre retail sites does not in any way address the issue of connection between the two. The potential to enhance integration and linkage is a key issue for the future vitality of the town centre.
- Parking in the town centre is important for access, especially by people living in areas outside the town with no alternative to the car. A key issue is how to provide parking without taking land needed for development and without spoiling the town's environment.
- Access to the town by car is predominantly from the west, from the A5. Options for the proposed new A5 include an eastern option, which could lead to more traffic passing through the town centre
- Some junctions in the town centre in places have excessive carriageway width, which makes walking unnecessarily unpleasant and hazardous.

- Walking to and from the town centre is provided on routes of variable quality. Improvements could encourage visits to the town centre.
- There is considerable potential in and around the town for walking for pleasure, especially across and alongside the river. This potential is limited by the single, narrow bridge, which prevents walking a circuit. The riverside paths are also of variable attractiveness.
- The town buses currently handle a small proportion of visits to the town centre, and are inadequately routed to serve the new retail areas or the bus centre.
- The bus centre is sited away from the town centre making access difficult and taking potential trade away from the town centre. There is no reasonable interchange with the town buses, and it is reportedly unpleasant to use. Re-siting the bus station in the town centre is a key issue.
- There is little evidence of cycling in the town, or of cycling infrastructure. The potential to encourage cycling could be considered.

6.2 Walking and Cycling

Walking is a major mode of travel in Strabane. More than a quarter of trips to work are made on foot (28%). There may also be potential to increase this proportion since 46% of all journeys to work by Strabane residents are less than two kilometres in length (around 25 minutes walking time).

Pedestrian presence in the town centre is mainly focused in Main Street and Castle Place, where retail frontage appears to be strongest. Castle Street was part pedestrianised in the early 1990s but is nevertheless lightly used by pedestrians, and the retail offer appears weak. As a walking environment it is undermined by shuttered windows and the presence of indiscriminate parking and driving.

People in vehicles tend to take priority over people on foot, and this is at least in part associated with the design of the streets, and the provision of formal crossing facilities. Streets are generally not difficult to cross except at peak times, when vehicle flows mean fewer crossing opportunities except at the formal crossings.

Taking the town centre street network as a whole, the following rating is provided according to the “5Cs” as recommended in Government guidance (“Encouraging Walking”, DETR 2000).

Connected	Are routes continuous, integrated with public transport, with priority over traffic for crossing busy roads?	Fair, but Railway Street poor (see separate audit)
Comfortable	Are footways of good width, surfaces attractive and well maintained, level, free from obstructions?	Fair but variable
Convenient	Do routes and crossings follow desire lines, and are they raised to footway height at junctions and crossings, and do pedestrians have to wait at crossings (i.e. because of signals or excessive traffic)?	Fair to Poor
Convivial	Is the townscape, are the pedestrian routes interesting and lively, and are they free of graffiti, litter, and are they free from crime or fear of crime?	Mostly good in the town centre core
Conspicuous	Are routes clearly signposted, are there local maps, are street names and building numbers clearly labelled?	Fair

“5Cs” rating of pedestrian routes in central Strabane

Some junctions in the town centre in places have excessive carriageway width, which makes walking unnecessarily unpleasant and hazardous. Examples are on Patrick Street and Church Street, as shown below

A visual audit of the pedestrian route between Asda and Abercorn Square is provided in Annex A and highlights a number of problems in relation to the quality of the pedestrian environment along Railway Street.



*Patrick/Church junction (top)
Excessive width of carriageway makes pedestrian crossing more hazardous, increases vehicle turning speeds, and is unsightly.*



*Church/Main junction
The entrance to Church Street here is unnecessary and the pedestrian route is blocked by an anti walk island*



Patrick Street/Derry Road junction excessive carriageway width

A pedestrian audit was included in the 2005 Atkins report (see below).

6.2.1 Leisure and recreational walking

Strabane District Council has identified six “walk active” routes, of which two include Strabane town centre. Two of the routes include walking along the bypass, which makes them unattractive and potentially hazardous to health in view of the proximity to vehicle emissions.

There is an off-road walk/cycle path between the east and west parts of Lifford Road.

6.2.3 River crossings

At present virtually all pedestrian access to the town centre from the south west of the town (which is home to a large proportion of Strabane residents) is via Bridge Street and the historic bridge. This has narrow footways and is not pleasurable to use. Two new pedestrian bridge have been proposed, one opposite John Wesley Street, and another upstream from the existing bridge. Such provision would enable walking circuits to be created including upgraded riverside walks.

6.2.3 Cycling

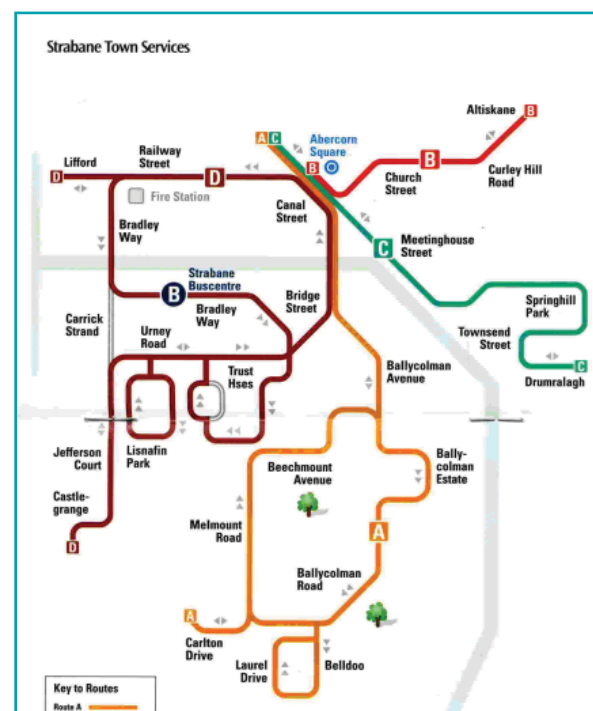
There is little evidence of cycling in Strabane, and (according to the Atkins report 2005) 1.1% of people cycled to work. (The 2001 census gives a figure of 0.6%.) Low levels of use may relate to the fact that the great majority of housing areas are on land that is at least 10 metres higher than Strabane town centre (Atkins Figure 7.1). However, over 5% of people cycle to work in towns that are hillier such as Street and Minehead (Somerset) (Atkins 2005 report). It is likely that, as in so many UK towns, the level of cycling is low because of a negative social image, and because of poor or absent provision of safe cycling and parking facilities.

A national cycle network route passes through the town alongside the river (east side), on road except from Main Street towards Lifford.

6.3 Public Transport

Public transport in Strabane consists of town services and inter-town and regional services.

The town services operate as four routes which come together at Abercorn Square. They are operated by Translink. The routes are shown diagrammatically below:



These services are the product of enhancements made in 2006 and reportedly led to a two thirds increase in bus passengers in the town. The presence of buses in the town is relatively high for a town of this size, and this may be explained in part by the relatively low level car ownership. It constitutes considerable progress since until the NI peace agreement there were no local buses in Strabane.

The two routes north of the river operate two-way end to end, and are relatively easy to understand. The two route south of the river operate as a complexity of one-way loops and figure of eight. Such routes configurations are out of line with public transport best practice, and tend to confine bus users to those who have no access to alternative transport.

The services mostly operate between 8am and 6pm.

398A - half hourly	(half hour round trip)
398B - hourly	(20 minute round trip)
398C - hourly	(15 minute round trip)
398D - hourly	(half hour return trip)

These services are operated with two vehicles

A summary audit of the services in relation to best practice is given in Table below.

Service criteria	Detail	Provisional rating of Strabane town services
Direct	Direct routes providing quick point to point journeys. No long loops	Service 398D is convoluted and slow
Comprehensive coverage	Providing service to all areas, with 90% of population within 300m of a stop Serving wide range of trips every day of the week	Northern part of the town not served No service evenings or Sundays
Frequent	With adequate capacity for the peaks	Adequate for existing demand, but not to attract growth
Simple	Easy to understand and remember times and routes, and well-integrated with other public transport	Poor
Reliable	Running to time	No data

The western part of the town centre including Asda and other retail units is served only by 398D operating in one direction only. These facilities are not shown on the bus diagram. To get from Asda to Abercorn Square by bus will take over 25 minutes, but it can be walked in less than 10 minutes.

The northern part of the town (i.e. areas off the Derry Road) is not served by bus.

The bus stop area at Abercorn Square is frequently obstructed by taxis and other vehicles, which leads to buses stopping away from the stop. This reinforces an image of the bus as a second class means of travel.



Bus 398D hemmed in by taxis and other traffic at Abercorn Square

The town buses are intended to turn by using Canal Street and Derry Road to access Abercorn square bus stop on the north side. Frequently buses turn instead in the “bellmouth” of Railway Street, to reduce distance.

Bus information is fairly scant, and services are likely to be used only by people who know and use the services on a regular basis. Bus shelters are not generally provided, except at Canal Street and Abercorn Square.

6.3.2 Other local services

Route 100 operates from the bus centre and Abercorn Square to Sion Mills and Castlederg. This is irregular in terms of routes, times, and days of operation, but generally offers a two-hourly service Mondays to Fridays.

The Strabane Council website in addition refers to services to:

- To Clady via Sion Mills, Glebe Park
- To Dunamanagh via Artigarvan

However, information on these services could not be found at Abercorn Square, Canal Street or at the bus centre.

6.3.3 School buses

The absence of rural bus services means that children from the rural areas around Strabane are bussed to school. There is a depot for the school buses on the Derry Road from which these services operate. They are the responsibility of the Education and Library Board. The Atkins 2005 report statement is still relevant: (6.9) “The majority of school travel in the Strabane area is undertaken using dedicated school bus services provided by Ulsterbus. The complex pattern of school journeys, exacerbated by the high level of rural dwellers, does place a considerable burden on the bus operator to ensure sufficient vehicles are available in peak periods. However, compared with other parts of the UK, significantly more school children travel by bus thereby limiting to an extent problems of school-run car trips.”

It is understood that children are entitled to bus transport to school if they live more than 2 miles from their primary school, or three miles from their secondary school.

6.3.4 Inter town and regional bus services

Although there is no railway service at or near Strabane, the town benefits from a range of longer distance Ulsterbus and Goldliner and Bus Éireann bus services linking, including direct routes to Belfast (via Omagh), Derry, and Dublin.

Cross-border services operated by Bus Éireann include local services via Lifford to Letterkenny and Donegal, and express coach services to Dublin via Omagh and Monaghan, and to Letterkenny.

These services stop at the bus centre in Bradley Way (opened in May 2007). The bus centre includes a heated waiting area with seating, parent and baby room, cycle racks and a 43-space Park and Ride car park. It is accessible for people with wheelchairs. Adjacent to the bus centre is an Ulsterbus depot for storage and maintenance of vehicles.

Consultations with stakeholders have revealed a widespread view that the bus centre location is inappropriate, being inaccessible from the town centre, and difficult to access from most part of the town except by car. Since most bus users do not have access to cars this means reliance on lifts or taxis to access the bus. However, a number of the services stop at Canal Street as well as the bus centre, and this helps to overcome this problem.

Two issues arise in relation to the location of the bus station. Firstly, how to serve the town centre by long distance bus/coach without such services being delayed by local traffic congestion. Secondly, how can people access the services from the town centre. At present the convenience of bus operation appears to have taken precedence over accessibility by passengers. There is virtually no integration with town services, no convenient or reasonable walking route between the town centre and the bus centre.

The proposed pedestrian bridge over the river

opposite John Wesley Street could help to create a more convenient walking route, but this would still involve a longish walk, and one that is not overlooked or safe at night.

6.4 Taxis

Taxis form an important part of the public transport offer in Strabane, providing as they do for routes not served by bus, and for journeys outside bus operating hours. They mostly wait in Main Street, where the number of taxis seeking to wait appears often to exceed the number of spaces available. Taxis wait at other locations, in particular the north side of Abercorn Square, where they occupy the town centre main bus stop. This problem was highlighted in the Atkins report of 2004, and still persists. Roads Service are considering separating bus and taxi bays with a pedestrian crossing.

A suggestion for locating a taxi rank in Castle Street has in the past been met with opposition from taxi drivers.

There are three taxi spaces in Abercorn Square, but there can be 10 taxis waiting there at a time, thus causing the obstruction referred to above. Concern about this issue was raised at Strabane Council in January 2009.

There are four independent taxi firms in Strabane with around 150 vehicles. They are public hire on-street, with no pre booking requirement. There is no market in or limitation of licences. Organisational innovations such as requiring integration with buses, or coordination of activity on street, such as a remote-parking and call-up system to reduce town centre congestion could be difficult to implement. A call up system has been tried in the past, but was unsuccessful.

6.5 Review of existing data on a number of issues

The paragraphs below review the data obtained from studies by Atkins for the Strabane local Transport Study in 2004/2005, together with updates and commentary from site visits and stakeholder discussions.

6.5.1 Casualties

The Atkins report Fig 5.10 shows casualties and is dated 2005. However, it does not state the data period, and thus is of limited value. It shows a concentration of casualties along the main traffic routes into the town centre, namely Melmount Road, Bridge Street and in Main Street. No fatal casualties are shown. The proportion of serious injuries is low, although the vicinity of the junctions shown in the right picture above shows as a hotspot. The largest number of casualties is recorded at the junction of the A5 and Railway Street.

6.5.2 Land Use

The Atkins Figure 3.1 shows that industrial areas are to the south of the town centre, close to Melmount Road. This concentration could be an asset in terms of serving employment by public transport.

The so-called CBD (Central Business District) includes recent car-based retail to the west of the traditional town centre.

Population density north of the river (on average) is shown (Figure 3.3) to be higher than south of the river. However, the unit of measurement is not given, so the drawing is of limited value.

The employment information (Figure 3.4) has no explanation or key and cannot be interpreted.

6.5.3 Deprivation

Areas to the north of the river apparently have a lower deprivation score than south of the river (Atkins Figure 3.5). This appears to be reflected in the distribution of bus routes, which are more prevalent in the southern half of the town where car ownership is likely to be lower. Also, initial

observation of pedestrian flows suggests that walking to the town centre is more prevalent from the south (across the bridge) than from the Derry Road direction.

6.5.4 Road access to the town

There are currently five access routes to the town from the A5 (Derry Road, Railway Street, Bradley Way, Urney Road and Melmount Road). Provision of a new dual carriageway route could reduce this number to three (Roads Service consultation), which could have implications for increased volumes on those roads. The three would probably be from the north (Derry Road), west (Railway Street) and the south (Melmount Road).

There are 4 main access routes to the town centre core by car, namely the B72 (Railway Street, Derry Road and Townsend Street) and the B85 Bridge Street. In addition the riverside Main Street provides an alternative to Railway Street for entry to the centre, while a number of smaller routes feed in traffic from the east and south of the town, including Curlyhill Road (via Patrick Street and Bowling Green), and Newtown Kennedy Street. Volumes on these latter routes are fairly light.

6.5.5 Road proposals

Atkins Figure 3.9 shows two further road proposals. First is to provide a “throughpass” to take A5 traffic away from the built areas of the Derry Road north of the town. The second is for a new crossing of the Mourne and the Foyle to provide a route to the Republic that by-passes Lifford. Both these proposals appear to be outdated, for example on account of the current consultation on a new A5 route.

Further information on current proposals is awaited**. A key issue for the town centre is whether and how the proposed new A5 dual carriageway and its access points will impact on vehicle access routes and volumes. For example, a route to the east could change the traffic patterns and the balance of vehicles entering the town be different routes, including loading more heavily

routes that currently carry light traffic volumes. Also, the new road could limit the number of access points into the town.

6.5.6 Traffic patterns and volumes

The Atkins data pre-date the opening of the major retail stores west of the town centre in 2007 and therefore will not give an accurate picture of current traffic patterns. In particular, it is known that a significant proportion of people coming by vehicle to the new Asda store are crossing the border from the Republic to take advantage of the weak Pound against the Euro. None of this trend is reflected in the 2004/2005 data.

The busiest vehicular routes in the town are Bridge Street (vehicles per day around 16,500), the A5 (between 11,000 and 14,000 VPD) and the link to Lifford (around 20,000 VPD) These figures apparently relate to 2004, and thus pre-date the new Asda store (June 2007).

The eastern and southeastern entry routes to the town centre (Curlyhill Road, and B72 Townsend Road with B576 Fountain Street) carried relatively low volumes at 3,500 and 2,500 VPD respectively. This raises the issue as to how this pattern could change if access to the town is provided from a new high capacity A5 route to the east of the town.

Railway Street is believed to currently carry around 14,000 VPD (Roads Service consultation), while the Derry Road into town carries around 7,000 VPD)

Atkins Figures 5.2 and 5.3 suggest that the distribution of traffic between the routes in both the am and pm peak hours is similar to that of the daily flows. The link flows, even on Bridge Street, are well below the link capacity. The junctions, however, cause queues to form especially into Main Street at peak times. On these data, it is perhaps surprising that the inbound and outbound peak flows are fairly evenly balanced. This could mean either that commuting to work is less concentrated in the peak hours, or that employment and school locations are evenly spread through the town.

Further details were given in the “Strabane Local Transport Study, Survey Report – Part A Traffic Surveys”, Atkins, December 2004. However, it is likely that traffic patterns have changed considerably since that time due to the shift of retail to the west of the traditional town centre.

6.5.7 Traffic management

The Atkins 2005 report proposed signalisation of three junctions in Strabane:

- Railway Street – Derry Road

(considered by Roads Service, but not regarded as necessary)

- Market Street - Bridge Street

(implemented briefly but removed due to delays caused on Bridge Street. Pelican crossing provided across Bridge Street at market Street junction)

- Bridge Street – Ballycolman Avenue (status?)

Recently, Roads Service have given to consideration to making Dock Street one-way around the score site to relieve congestion that is said to occur at certain times (e.g. during the variety Friday market). This will need to be reviewed, however, in relation to development proposals and associated parking and access arrangements on the Score site and other sites.

Lower Main Street is an alternative route for vehicles towards Main Street commercial area and Bridge Street. However, its function as a family housing area close to the town centre is a valued asset that could be undermined if traffic were diverted along this route.

Traffic speeds

Atkins Figure 5.6 shows, as would be expected, journey speeds by car being fastest on the A5, and slowest in the town centre core, where the presence of junctions, turning movements, signal controls, pedestrians and parking and loading manoeuvres keeps overall speeds well below 20 mph. However, the slow overall journey speeds within the town centre should not be regarded as

a problem, since greater priority to activities other than car movement is both expected and desirable. The overall figures tend to mask the problem of some drivers travelling at a speed that is too fast for the conditions, especially at off-peak times when traffic volumes are light.

Traffic calming measures have been taken in some locations, but not within the town centre core.

6.5.8 Delays

The vehicle delay hotspots were given in the Atkins 2004 report (Figure 10.1) as the Bradley Way/Bridge Street/Ballycoman Avenue junctions, the Bridge Street /Market Street mini roundabout junction, right turning traffic from Railway Street at Abercorn Square, and the Railway Street/Bypass roundabout. Also, local delays occur on Main Street (one way) for vehicles joining Bridge Street. Signal control has been tried at the latter junction, but was judged to cause further delays on Bridge Street itself. Main street carries mainly local access traffic in relation to parking or servicing along the retail frontage. The general pattern of vehicle queues as described by Atkins appears not to have changed. However, the cause of delays in Market Street was given by Atkins as illegal parking and yet delays still occur (see photo above) despite the removal of much of the illegal parking activity. Apart from Market Street, queuing appears to be limited outside peak times.

Atkins reported in 2005 that on the streets where traffic counts had been undertaken, peak flows occurred in the period 4-6pm. The morning peak hour generally had lower volumes.

6.5.9 Parking

Details of parking issues were provided in “Strabane Local Transport Study Survey Report – Part B Parking Surveys”, Atkins, March 2005. However, parking circumstances have changed and many of these data are now out of date.

On-street parking in the town centre amounted to 620 spaces in 2004.

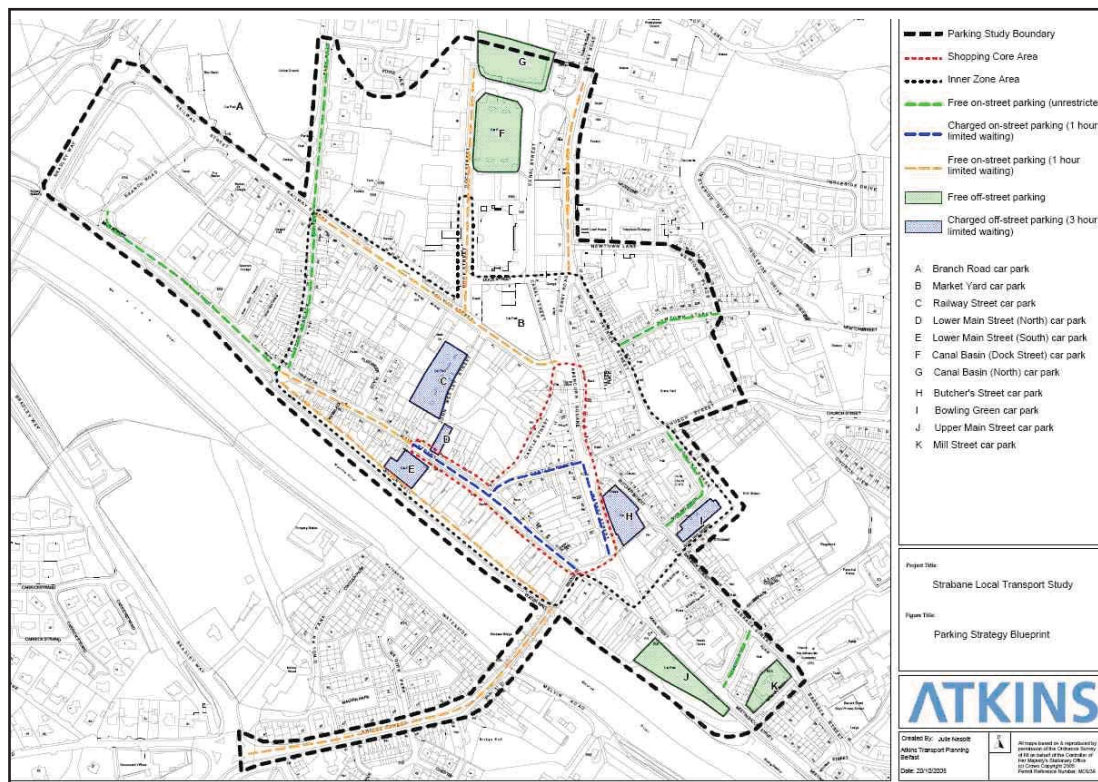
Atkins Figure 5.9 shows that in 2004 a high percentage of on-street parking in the town centre was “illegal”. Since then parking contraventions have been decriminalised, and the arrangements for parking on the street have been changed to provide legal short and medium stay parking bays. This has improved the turnover and availability of spaces on-street, to the benefit of traders and visitors. Longer stay parking is available also in off-street car parks. The problem of parking contraventions appears to have been greatly reduced by this change, in line with experience in other towns where the enforcement is by civil officers rather than the Police, and where contraventions are penalised with charges rather than fines.

Some specific problems remain, however. For example, taxis are seen to park in contravention of the regulations, and appear to regularly escape enforcement. It would clearly be preferable if proper provision could be made for taxis that avoided the temptation to park in places and at times that are restricted.

Atkins reported in 2004 that 5.41 “In a number of instances, it was also noted that the existing road markings are confusing for the motorists. An example is ... where the kerbside is marked with a parking space, yet the yellow line prohibits parking...”. In March 2009 there were still examples in place of this confusion, (e.g. Railway Street).

Off-street car parking available to the public was shown in the Atkins report as in the table and plan reproduced below.

Parking Zone	Off-Street Public Free	Off-Street Public Pay	Total Capacity
Branch Road	108	-	108
Butcher Street	-	72	72
Bowling Green	37	-	37
Canal Basin (Dock Street)	161	-	161
Canal Basin (north) 1	119	-	119
Lower Main Street north	-	-	11
Lower Main Street south	-	11	39
Market Yard	-	39	57
Mill Street	37	57	37
Railway Street	-	-	111
Upper Main Street	89	111	89
TOTALS	551	-	841



It is likely that car parking associated with the recent and approved out-of-centre retail developments alongside the by-pass have parking provision that will equal the off-street provision in the traditional town centre shown in the Atkins survey. This recent parking provision moreover is free. Easy and free parking close to the major road is a key factor in the strength of competition presented by the out-of-centre facilities.

Parking for people with mobility disabilities is provided at locations in the town centre.

6.5.10 Servicing

HGV movements in the town centre are only those associated with servicing, since the bypass carries most through movements. Compliance with yellow line parking restrictions appears now to avoid the need for delivery vehicles to double park, as was reported in the Atkins report.

There are no restrictions on hours for servicing. Commercial premises that are serviced from the street (the majority in central Strabane) must work within the parking restrictions, and this can cause inconvenience. For example, independent traders in particular need to have access to unload stock in the morning and to accept deliveries. At the end of the working day they often prefer to have their vehicle outside ready to take away cash securely. One way of accommodating this activity would be to limit the hours of parking restriction (or enforcement) to a more limited period of the day (say 10am to 4.30pm).

6.5.11 Pedestrian provision deficiencies

The Atkins 2005 report (chapter 8) provides some detailed information on inadequacies or faults in pedestrian provisions in the town. Many of the issues identified have not yet been tackled. The Atkins audit of facilities therefore provides a useful baseline of information for setting out a programme of improvements.

The Atkins report (“blueprint” diagram) proposed a new pedestrian/cycle bridge over the river close to the existing town bridge. Later suggestions have been to locate this in line with John Wesley Street.

6.5.13 Car ownership

In 2001 66% of households had access to a car and a similar proportion (68.5%) of employed people normally travelled to work by car (47% as car drivers). These are lower percentages than are found in the other Northern Ireland medium sized towns, where access to cars is over 70-76%.

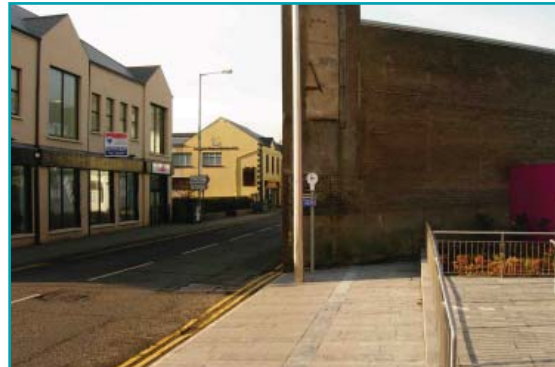
Annex A - Visual Audit of Railway Street Link

Abercorn Square to Asda

Looking toward Abercorn Square. The theatre steps make an interesting feature. The walking environment is good.



Immediately past the theatre, heading towards Asda the footway abruptly ends.



After Dock Street the footway begins again. It is of reasonable width, but this is reduced by the lamp posts that are located twice the required distance from the kerb.



Shortly after, the footway again ends, as a parking forecourt encroached up to the kerb line.

Note that there would be space to create a new footway in advance of the kerb line, occupying space that is currently taken up by parked vehicles.

There are ambiguous markings here with a partially painted single yellow line within a parking bay.



Immediately beyond the previous location, a pub forecourt is taken up entirely by parked cars, while a service vehicle is parked with two wheels on what remains of the narrow footway. Again, people cannot walk here except in the carriageway.

The parking also destroys the appearance and convenient entry to the pub.



Parking on the footway is clearly regarded as acceptable. This behaviour is encouraged by the fact that the footway on this road is discontinuous.

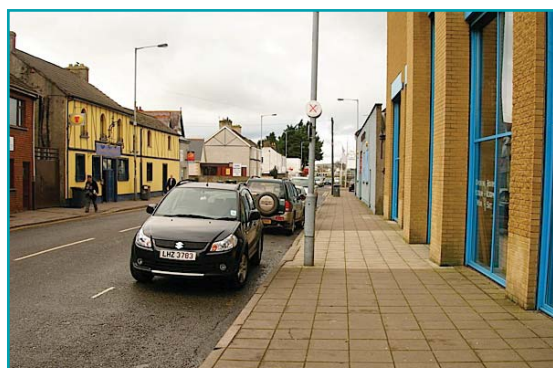


Once alongside a recent development, the footway is of a good standard and width.



Looking back towards the forecourt. parking obstruction. This is what would confront anyone walking from Asda towards the town centre.

It cannot be said that there would be no demand for secondary journeys to the town centre on foot, when these journeys are so poorly provided for.



Looking back towards the forecourt. parking obstruction. This is what would confront anyone walking from Asda towards the town centre.

It cannot be said that there would be no demand for secondary journeys to the town centre on foot, when these journeys are so poorly provided for.



Footway parking approaching the Mazda forecourt. The junction with Park Road is dangerous for pedestrians



The Mazda forecourt encroaches onto the footway.



Priority is given to people in vehicles. Footway width is sacrificed for the creation of a hatched area and right turn lane for the Mazda entrance.



The approach to Asda roundabout



Evidence of people taking a short cut across the grass to Asda. This arises because the Asda entrance is at the back of the car park instead of at the street frontage.



People visiting both Asda and the other retail units may choose to drive between the two sites. The walking environment here is unpleasant and traffic-dominated.



People visiting both Asda and the other retail units may choose to drive between the two sites. The walking environment here is unpleasant and traffic-dominated.



Asda to Abercorn Square - South Side

The vehicle entrance gives vehicles priority over pedestrians.



Railway Street is marked out as highway, which dominates its character. The building frontage is reasonable. The lamp post is set to the back of the footway, which maximises pedestrian space.



The footway is treated as a dumping ground for wheelie bins, reducing the width of the footway.



Junction with Eden Terrace is not pedestrian-friendly, and materials and markings are unsightly.



The ample width for vehicles is illustrated



The footway widens, creating some “breathing space” but this also interrupts the building line, and has led to the exposure of an unsightly gable end.



The blank return wall is pressed into service for a commercial sign.



“A” boards narrow the footway and can be unsightly. Together with the large refuse bin the footway all but disappears.



The wall obstruction on the north side is clearly seen. On the south side the footway is reasonable up to John Wesley Street.



The junction with John Wesley Street is inconvenient for pedestrians, who are forced round the corner by guardrailings to the point where their visibility of turning vehicles is obstructed.



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