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**Ards and
North Down**
Borough Council

1



Newtownards
Masterplan Review
Draft - August 2023

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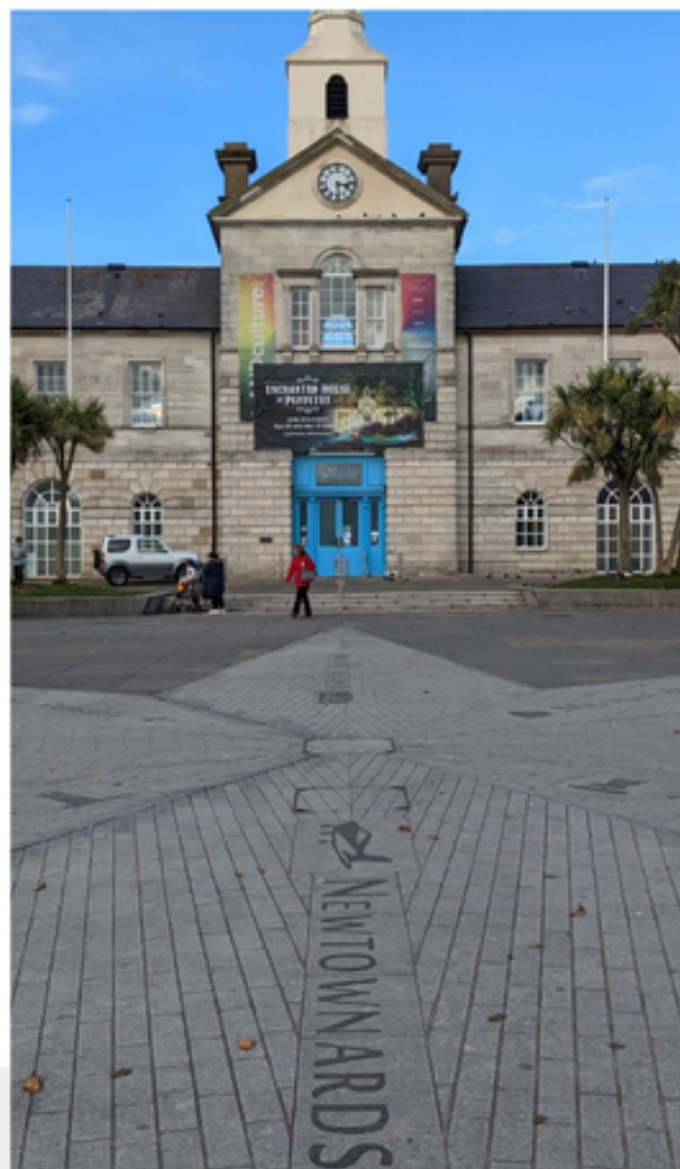
Introduction

This report has been prepared to summarise the findings of a review of the Newtownards Town Centre Masterplan (2010). It has been researched and prepared by The Paul Hogarth Company, with McGarry Consulting and informed by a public engagement exercise undertaken by Ards and North Down Borough Council.

Written originally for Ards Borough Council, much has changed since the masterplan was produced in 2010, both locally within the study area and more widely in terms of the social, economic, policy and environmental landscape.

The following section sets out an understanding of current projects, initiatives, an overview of conversations with stakeholders as well as a fresh analysis of Newtownards.

It is followed by revised priorities and actions for Newtownards Town Centre to be delivered over the next 8 years.



Analysis - Review - Recommendations



2010
Newtownards Town
Centre Regeneration
Masterplan Produced



Nov 2022
Masterplan Review
Commences



Public
Engagement 1



Public
Engagement 2



Masterplan
Review
Completed



What has happened since the masterplan was written?

Since the Newtownards Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan was produced in 2010 the role of the town centre has changed somewhat. This may be linked to a post pandemic shift in patterns of work, commuting and domestic tourism. Newtownards and its independent retail offer have navigated through the changing role of the town centre by providing a unique experience, contributing to its success.

A summary of projects delivered since 2010 is provided in the following section.

i. Masterplan Delivery

Newtownards Masterplan - Projects	Progress			
	Uncompleted	On-going	Completed	Notes / Comments
The Town Centre				
Conway Square Improvements			✓	
Market Cross Civic Space			✓	Streetscape (paving) completed, restoration work to Market Cross completed
Court Square Enhancements	✓			
Major Public Realm Interventions			✓	Public realm completed
Secondary Public Realm Interventions			✓	Artworks on buildings -Meetinghouse Lane
Queen's Hall Public Space		✓		
Public Art Strategy	✓			
Development Opportunity Sites				
Flagship Court Street/ High Street Scheme	✓			
Queen's Hall Redevelopment		✓		OBC approved
Refurbished Bus Station		✓		Plans underway for new Park & Ride
Movilla Car Park Mixed Use/Commercial	✓			
2a Castle Place – Mixed Use	✓			
Mill Street – Mixed Use	✓			
South Street Retail/Hotel	✓			Section of shop fronts have been refurbished
Pound Street Residential	✓			
Potential Gateway Improvements	✓			

ii. Other Delivery/Success





How is Newtownards today?

Overview

Newtownards is a sprawling town, with origins back to the 6th Century. It has a population of 29,677 (2021 Census) and lies 10 miles east of Belfast on the northern tip of Strangford Lough. The town serves a wide hinterland (from the peninsula to East Belfast) and benefitted from major recent investments in the town's leisure facilities. It has a historic town centre square and many independent shops, with a large shopping centre a short walk from the town centre. NI's main ports and airports are within 45mins, and 1 million people live within an hour's drive (e.g. Ballymena, Newry and Armagh all lie within an hour's drive).



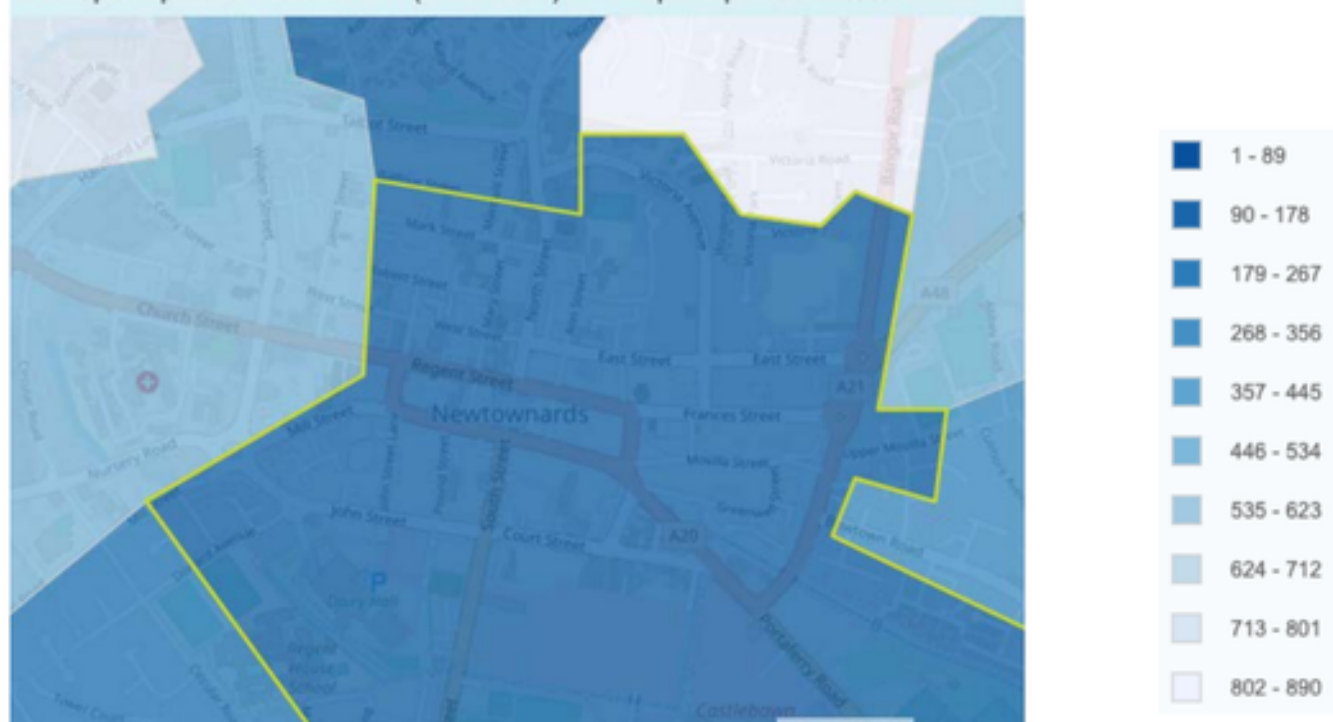
a. Socio-Economic Profile

Town & Town Centre Profile

(Newtownards J & R Super Data Zones)

The town centre has a population of 4,375 and grew by 3.1% between 2010 and 2020, which was below the NI average of 5.0%. Newtownards town centre has a slightly older population (53-57% over 40, v NI average 49%), leading to smaller households (79-85% 1-2 person households v NI 61%). In many parts of the town centre, flats make up between 36-48% accommodation (v ANDBC average 11%) and roughly 2 in 5 have no access to a car or van (v ANDBC 15%). Two-thirds have good or very good health (v NI 79%). Town centre residents have low levels of qualifications (21-22% at Level 4 or above, v NI 34%) and low unemployment (4-5%) with half economically inactive. Over half travel to work by car, with 18-20% walking or cycling (v ANDBC 6%) and between 3-6% using the bus or train (v ANDBC 3%). Between 30-38% commute beyond 5km for work (v ANDBC 21%). Two in five walk or cycle when travelling to study (v ANDBC 20%), with one in five getting the bus or train (v ANDBC 23%). Only one in seven work from home (v NI 19%, ANDBC 23%). 'Central Ards' is considered among the 12% most deprived areas (Super Output Areas) in NI, and amongst the 7% most deprived areas in NI in terms of 'Income' and 'Crime and Disorder'.

NI Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017 (NIMDM 2017) >> Multiple Deprivation Measure Rank



b. Sectoral Profile

Property Profile

Newtownards has 540 properties within the town centre (up from 494 in 2016), of which 107 are vacant (19.8%). This is in line with its 2016-2022 average and is lower than the NI average (24.0%). Traders state the large number of independent shops and shop owners contribute to lower vacancy rates. There is 20,801m² of office space in the town centre across 119 properties, with an average size (174.8m²) significantly above the borough average but below the Belfast skewed NI average of 247.6m². However, 'Shops, Supermarkets and Showrooms' dominate accounting for over three-fifths (62.6%, 44,188m²) of the town-centre floorspace.

Business Profile

In 2021, there were 270 businesses in the town centre, which is fewer than previous years (2015-2019 ranged from 345 to 305 businesses). 90 are in 'Wholesale & Retail', with 40 in 'Accommodation & Food' services.

Employee numbers are down 9.3% (206 jobs) between 2013 and 2021, with steady declines in 'Human Health & Social Work' (down 47.1%), 'Financial & Insurance,' (down 43.8%) and 'Professional, Scientific and Technical' (jobs down 26.8% but total revenue rising from £6.7m to £15.4m). The top two sectors are 'Wholesale & Retail' (513 jobs) and 'Accommodation & Food Services' (473 jobs up 29.2% from 2013). Total town centre business revenue is up 26.0% between 2015 (£99.2m) and 2018 (£124.91m).

Tourism

As of June 2023, there is 1 hotel offering 72 bedspaces/36 rooms and 2 self catering units offering a total of 6 bedspaces/3 rooms. The wider area within 3 miles of the town centre would include 1 Guesthouse offering 2 bedspaces/1 room and a B&B property offering 4 bedspaces/2 rooms. In addition, 3 self-catering properties offering a total of 28 bedspaces/6 rooms.



c. Policy Context

National and Regional

The Regional Development Strategy 2035 (RDS)

The RDS puts in place spatial planning, transport and housing priorities that will support and enable the aspirations of the Region to be met.

Within the RDS, Newtownards is recognised as a key commuter town to Belfast due to its proximity and accessibility to the city and its growing role in the functioning of the Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area by attracting commuters, tourists and businesses.

Strategic Planning Policy Statement 2015 (SPPS)

The SPPS supports positive place making as a people centred approach with the key to successful place-making set out through identifying the assets of a particular place as well as developing a vision for its future potential. Successful place making promotes accessibility and inclusivity for all, acknowledges the importance of creating hospitable and safe places, and emphasises the contribution of vibrancy, adaptability, and diversity of use and how it plays a role in contributing to vitality of place and how it will endure into the future.

Living Places - An Urban Stewardship and Design Guide for Northern Ireland 2014

The Urban Stewardship Design Guide establishes the key principles behind good place making and recognises the wider economic, cultural and community benefits of achieving excellence in the stewardship and design in these places, be they existing or proposed

Local Context

Local Development Plan

The Council is now preparing the Local Development Plan. Until the LDP is adopted, planning decisions are made in the context of the following existing plans:

- **Ards and Down Area Plan 2015**

- **North Down and Ards Area Plan 1984-1995**

Due to the adoption of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) being deemed unlawful and subsequently quashed the North Down and Ards Area Plan 1984-1995 is the statutory development plan for the legacy North Down area.

The Big Plan for Ards and North Down 2017 - 2032

The Big Plan sets out the vision for the next 15 years for Ards and North Down to be a vibrant, connected, healthy, safe and prosperous place to be. The Plan sets out 5 outcomes to achieve the vision:

Outcome 1:

All people in Ards and North Down fulfil their lifelong potential

Outcome 2:

All people in Ards and North Down enjoy good health and wellbeing

Outcome 3:

All people in Ards and North Down live in communities where they are respected, area safe and feel secure

Outcome 4:

All people in Ards and North Down benefit from a prosperous economy

Outcome 5:

All people in Ards and North Down feel pride from having access to a well-managed sustainable environment

Integrated Strategy for Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development 2018 - 2030

The Strategy presents a coherent vision for the pursuit of prosperity for Ards and North Down. It responds to the vision and outcomes of the Big Plan and is used as a common point of reference for the growth of the economy, the welcoming of visitors and the improvement of both urban and rural places.

d. Newtownards Today - Conversations & Perceptions

A series of conversations have taken place through the public engagement exercise the Council carried out as well as targeted workshops with the Town Advisory Group, council officers and elected members.

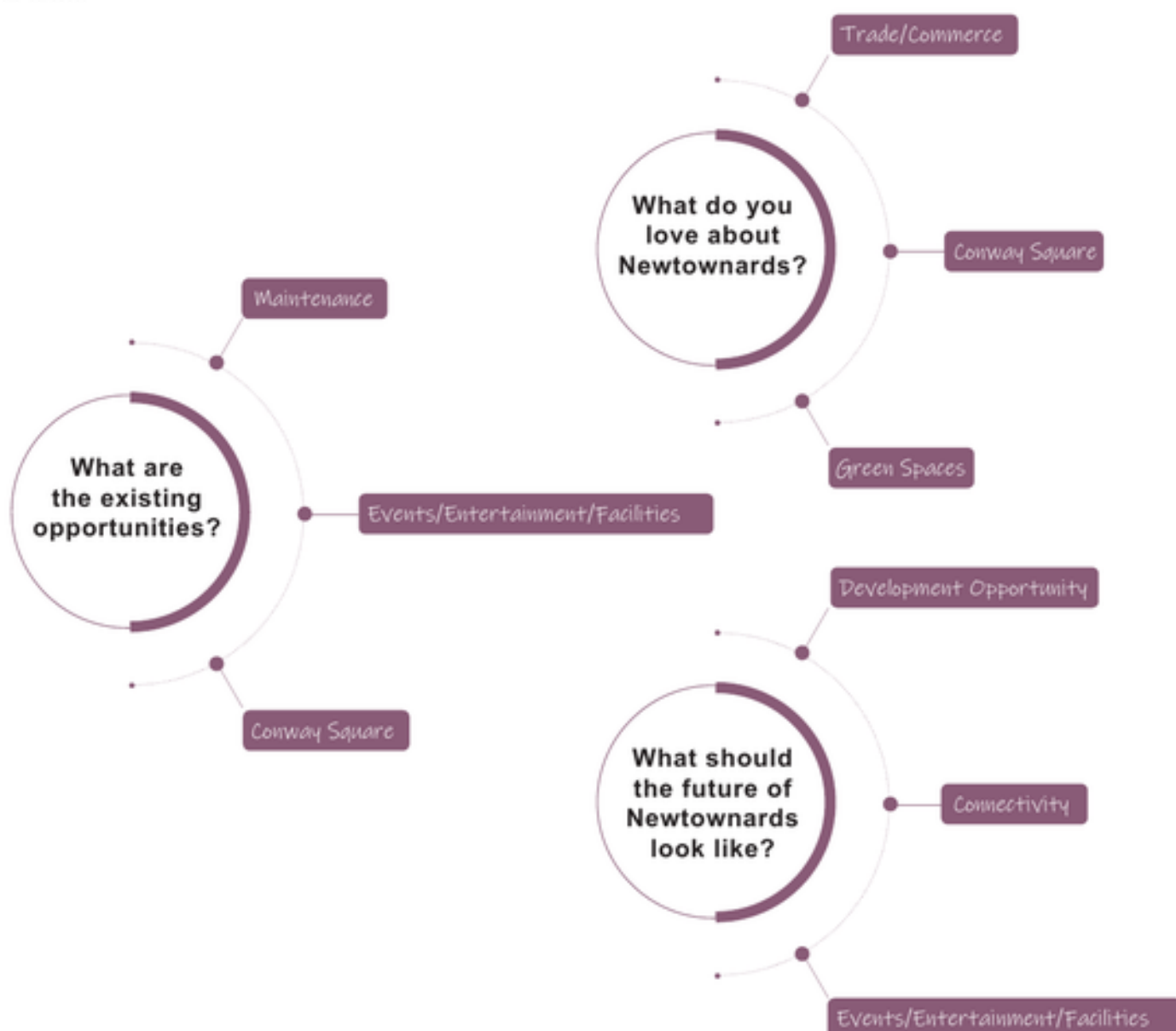
The Council organised a drop-in event and on-line survey providing the opportunity for the community to engage with council officers and representatives from the Newtownards Town Advisory Group and provide their views and aspirations for the future of the town.

Drop-In Event:

70+ comments

On-line Survey:

8 responses



Why live in Newtownards?

- Commerce / Trade
- Blue / Green Spaces
- Heritage

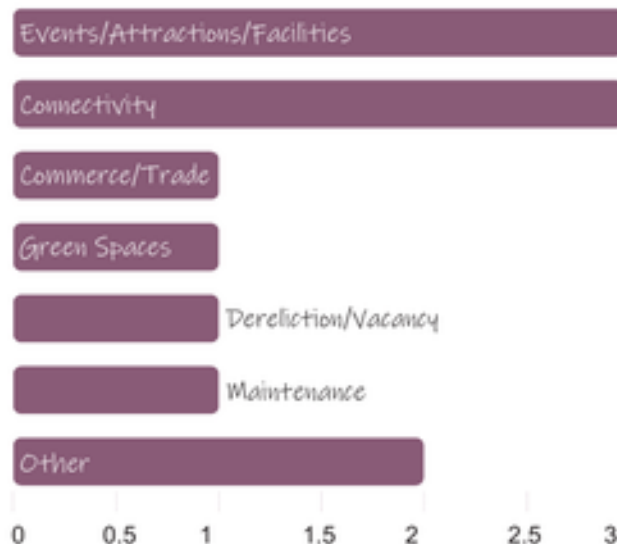
What are the undesirables about Newtownards?

- Maintenance
- Connectivity

What is a disadvantage for businesses in Newtownards?

- Connectivity Issues
- Investment

Areas for Improvement



The Future of Newtownards?



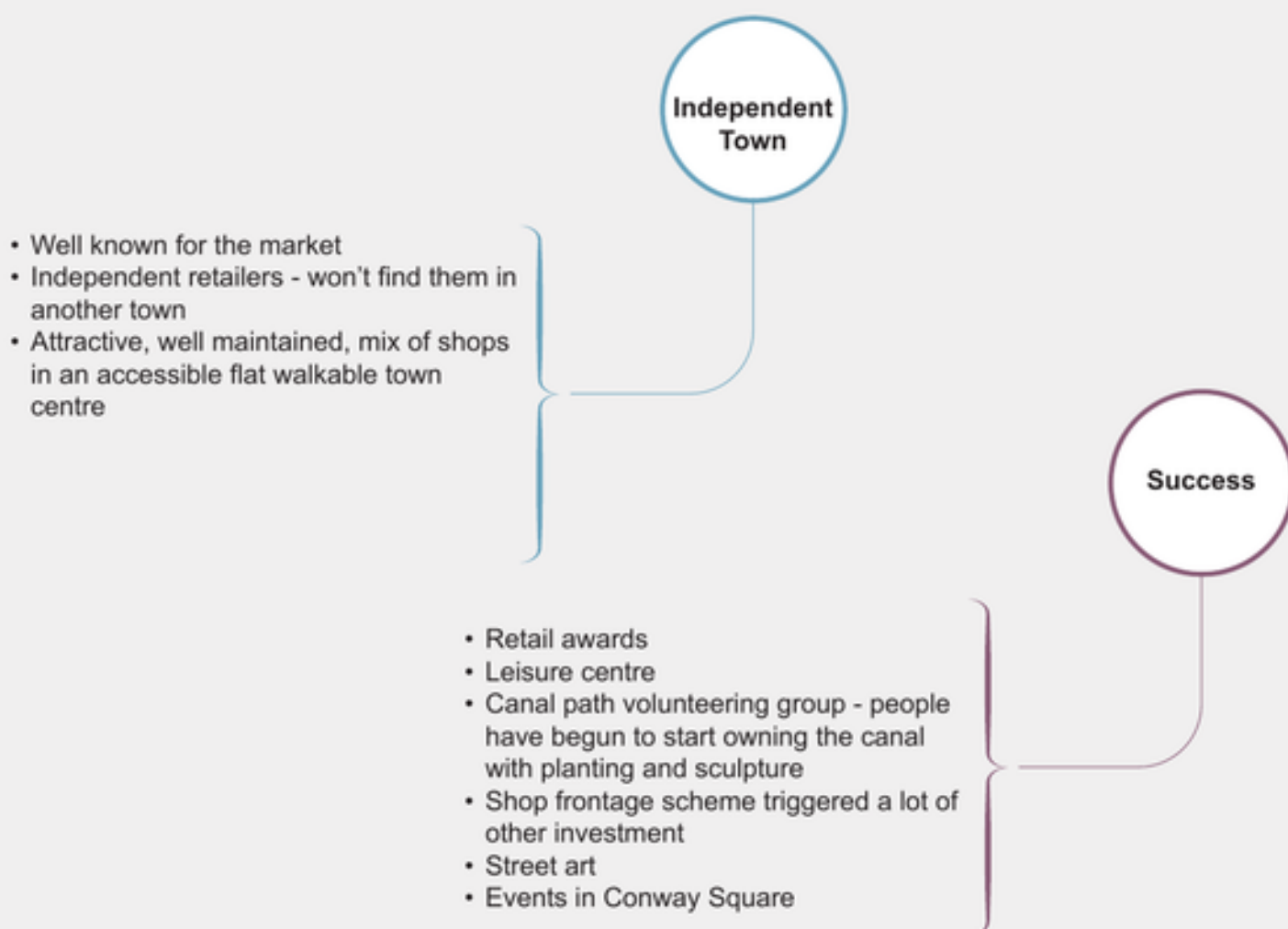
d. Newtownards Today - Conversations & Perceptions

Through targeted workshops with the Town Advisory Group, council officers and elected members further conversations have taken place.

The success of Newtownards was highlighted in conversations, particularly the number of independent retailers and the town's reputation for providing a unique retail experience that is not available in the other towns within the Borough.

The number of independent businesses were also identified in the issue of evening economy with owners often playing a predominant role in day-to-day activities making it difficult to extend business hours into the evening.

The accessibility, topography and flat nature of the town was regarded as an opportunity to capitalise on improved pedestrian and cycle connections between the town centre, housing estates and the greenway. Parking was also discussed and that through the masterplan aspirations for the town should be addressed and built in for a future that moves away from a car focused town centre, working with statutory partners in this regard.

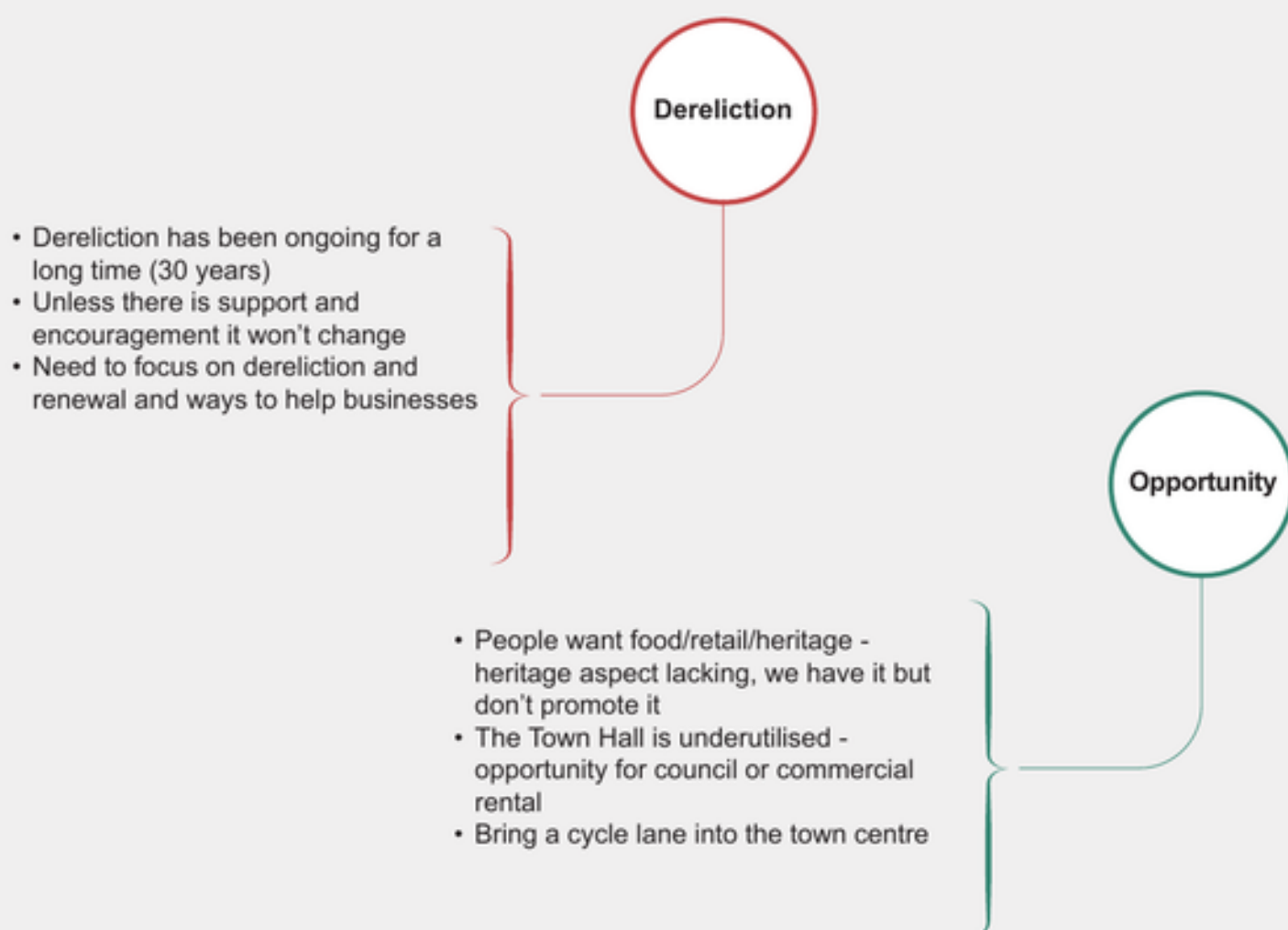


It was discussed that dereliction is a complex and historic issue with properties tied up amongst multiple family members resulting in difficulties in addressing redevelopment. Unless there is support in place there is little encouragement in addressing dereliction.

The effects of the pandemic have changed the town centre and Conway Square, with behaviours changing, accelerating people's desire to sit outside. People working from home and retired residents enjoy the café culture and spending time sitting within the square.

It was felt that there is room to strengthen the tourism offer by promoting the heritage of Newtownards. A mix of food, retail and heritage was identified as an attractive offer and it was highlighted that the town does not currently maximise the promotion of its heritage. The lack of tourism accommodation was also identified as an issue in the town's current role as a tourism destination.

In regard to community groups it was highlighted that there is a strong involvement within the housing estates but this does not trickle into the town centre, perhaps as a result of the centre being too big for one group to take ownership.



e. Newtownards Today - Urban Design Analysis

The second largest settlement in the Ards and North Down district, Newtownards, the gateway to the Ards Peninsula, sits at the head of Strangford Lough with the town's skyline dominated by Scrabo Tower sitting prominently above.

The former railway line connecting Newtownards with Comber and Donaghadee swept around the west of the town before connecting into the station on the northern edge.

The town has expanded out from the traditional grid street network that characterises the historic core of the town centre, with a large amount of growth to the east of the town centre.

There is little evidence of the town's proximity to Strangford Lough, with the road and airport acting as a barrier and preventing both visual and physical connections between the two.



Newtownards - Urban Growth





OS County Series 5th Edition 1919-1963



Town Wide Context

Street Pattern & Grain

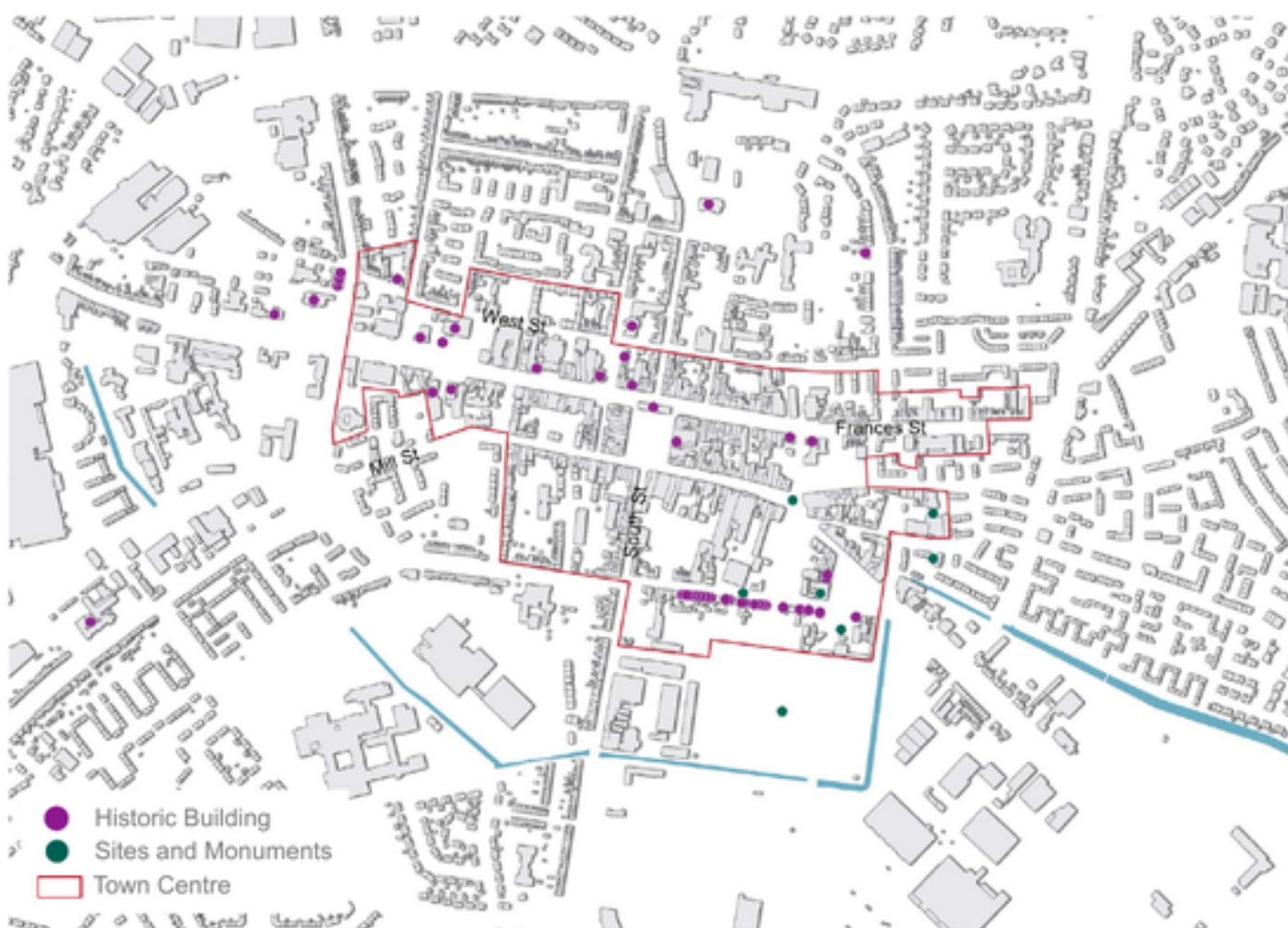
The grid network of streets running east to west and north to south forms a clear ordered pattern complemented by a generally consistent scale of 2 and 3 storey buildings making it easily navigable and of a comfortable human-scale.

The east to west streets provide the main thoroughfares with north to south routes being secondary in nature and scale.

The contrast in urban grain differentiates between the traditional core and newer areas of the town, with larger building footprints beginning to appear around the peripheries.



Town Hall and Conway Square





Court Street

Historically Conway Square has been the town's meeting and gathering space and it still plays an important civic role today. It is a fantastic space that provides a focus and heart to the town centre from daily interactions to markets and events, evidenced by footfall and uptake in units.

The position of the Town Hall, sitting forward of the building line on Frances Street reinforces its historic importance and provides an important wayfinding cue within the town centre.

Regent Street and Frances Street both have generous widths in contrast to High Street. Although footpath widths along these streets are sizable, focus and space has been given to vehicle movement and parking with the one way system emphasising the priority of vehicles. The generous proportions presents good scope for a redesign that shifts the focus to pedestrians and cyclists.

Dereliction

The prominence of dereliction along Court Street significantly detracts from the overall quality of the town centre. The fact that a full row of terraced buildings are in poor condition magnifies the issue when much of the town centre is of good townscape quality and condition.



Frances Street



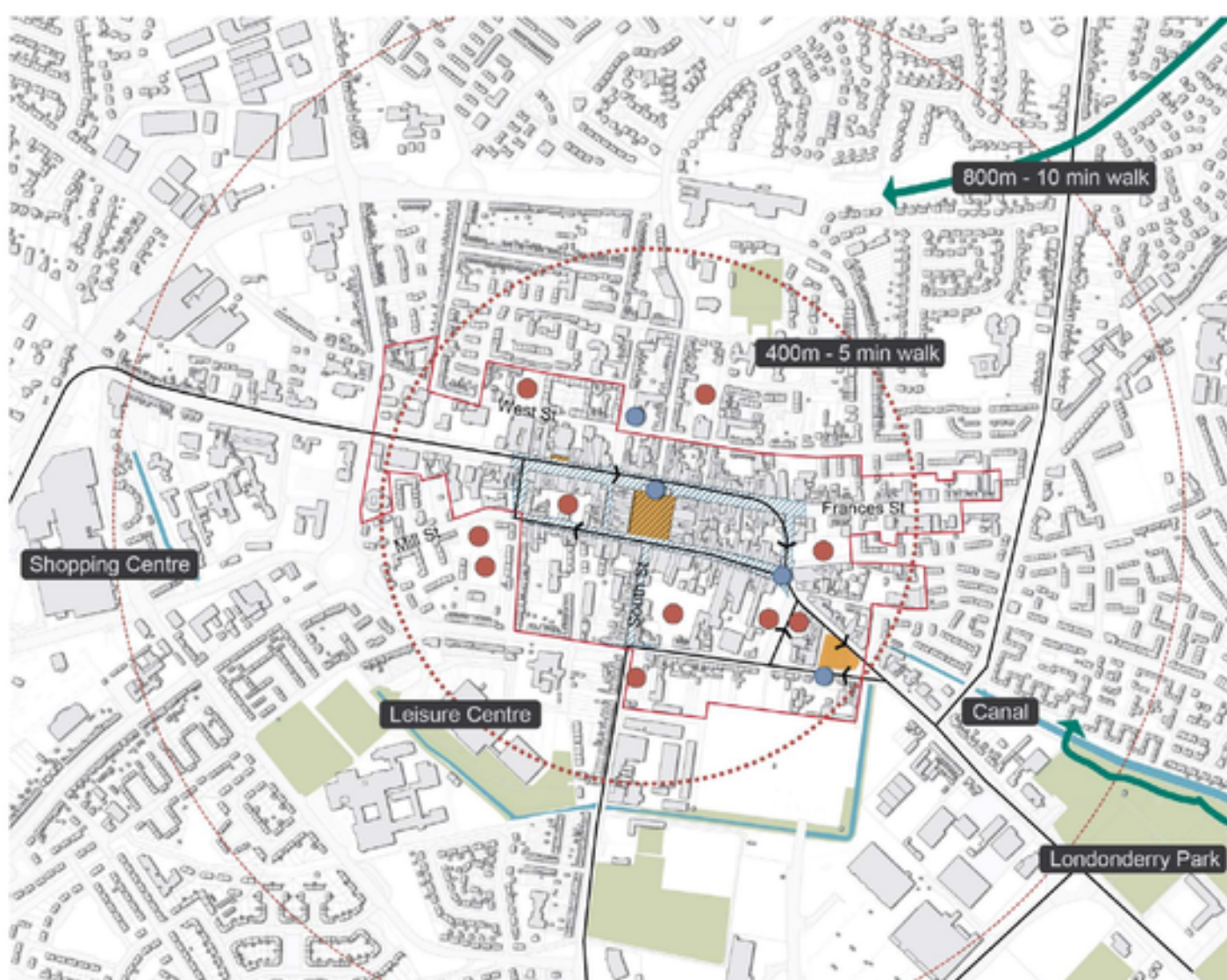
Market Cross

Large areas of under developed land south of the town centre is in need of clarity, vision and excellent masterplanning to ensure it makes a positive contribution to the town centre. Identifying viable delivery routes will be vital to its success.

Movement

The town's location at the head of Strangford Lough has resulted in the centre being relatively flat and easily accessed on foot.

- Vehicle Movement
- Proposed Greenway
- Car Parking
- Landmarks
- Public Realm Areas
- Public Realm Improvements
- Town Centre





John Street



Conway Square

The scale of the town centre is compact, with the majority within a 400 metre radius from Conway Square, including the leisure centre, an important success within the town providing facilities for both recreation and social interaction.

Public realm enhancements within the town centre have created an attractive pedestrian environment encouraging people to spend time within Conway Square. Out with these areas there is a stark contrast in quality of the public realm, such as John Street.

As with many town centres traffic is an issue with congestion building up at peak times. The Regent Street, Frances Street, High Street one way gyratory that loops around the town centre gives priority to vehicle movement over pedestrians.

There is an significant amount of car parking available within the town centre, both on street and within surface level car parking facilities, all within close proximity of one another.



Newtownards Priory



'Derek the Squirrel' public realm artwork



The Way Forward

Analysis Summary:

Historic grid iron street pattern to the town centre	✓
Consistent 2 and 3 storey built form and massing	✓
Independent and successful retail offer within the town centre	✓
Car dominated town centre	✗
Conway Square is a fantastic space evidenced by footfall and uptake in units	✓
More ways are needed to activate and animate both the town centre and square, driving footfall	!
Strangford Lough is disconnected from the town with the road and airport acting as a barrier	✗
Underdeveloped land south of town centre - masterplanning needed for its future	!
Town centre is flat, very accessible with a walkable compact form	✓



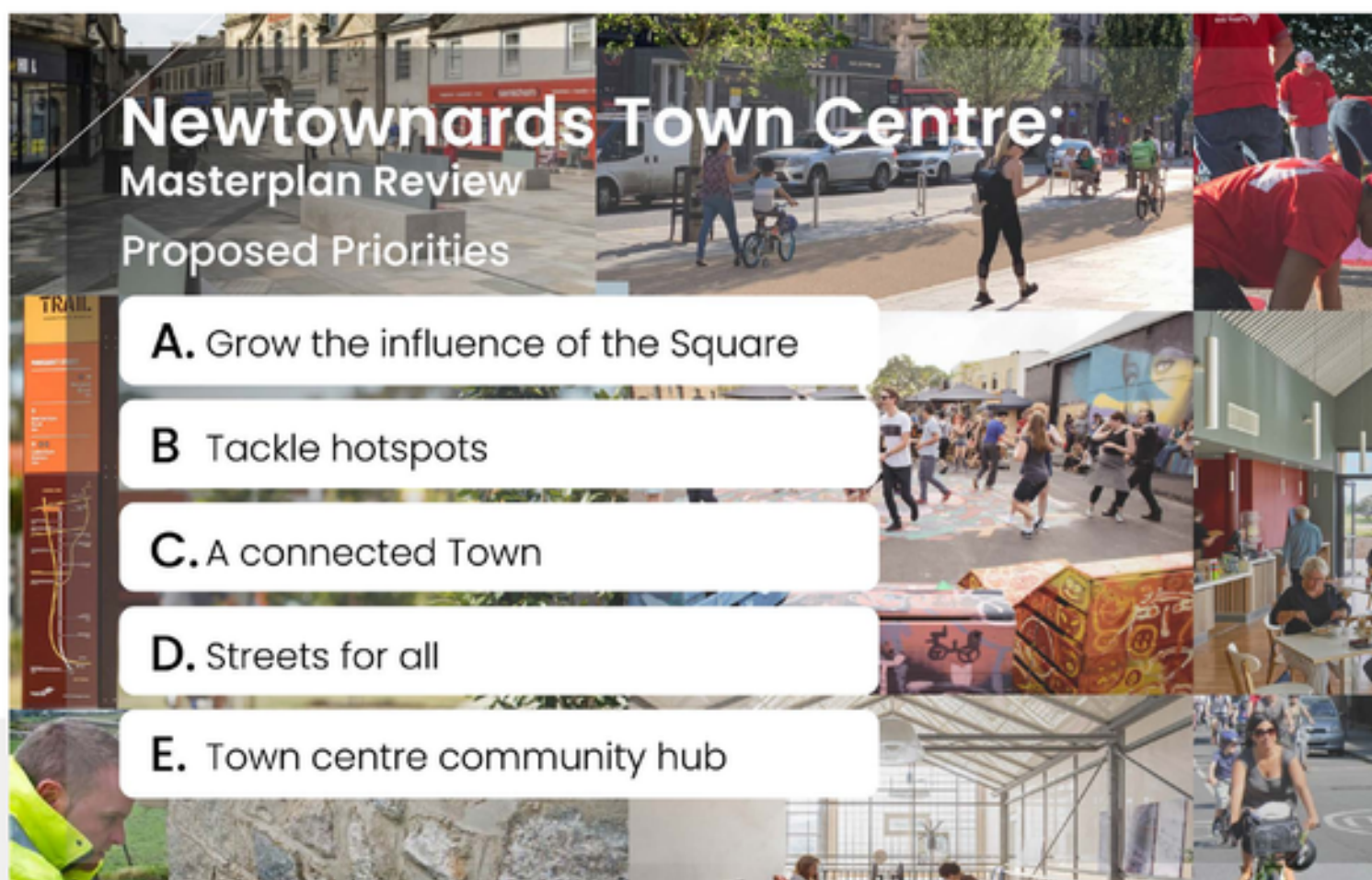
Masterplan Vision (2010):

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

Regeneration Themes:

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

In light of conversations the masterplan vision could be interpreted as a description of today's town centre. Yet the themes still represent priorities for Newtownards, which accompanied by a refreshed vision, provide the opportunity for a new level of ambition and focus for the future.



New Priorities for Newtownards Town Centre

Five new priorities are proposed for Newtownards Town Centre, drawing upon the findings of the research and engagement process.



A. Grow the influence of the Square

The success of Conway Square needs to filter out to the wider public realm, creating welcoming streets and spaces where people want to spend time.

B. Tackle hotspots

Much concern has been aired regarding hotspots of dereliction in Newtownards. This requires a concerted and multifaceted effort to address this issue.

C. A connected Town

Like many town centres, Newtownards must work to readdress the balance between people and vehicles. A range of short and long-term interventions are therefore required, working in partnership with statutory agencies.

D. Streets for all

The time is now for communities to reclaim town centre streets, creating a shift in focus to the people who are the real heart of the town.

E. Town centre community hub

A community focus is needed within the town centre with the opportunity to provide a space and facility for the people in Newtownards to come together.



Engagement

A second round of conversations have taken place through a public engagement exercise. By listening to the people of Newtownards during the first round of conversations the proposed priorities have developed. The public were invited to view information both online and also at a drop-in event before providing their feedback through a short online survey. Members of the team, council officers and representatives from the Newtownards Town Advisory Group facilitated public engagement.

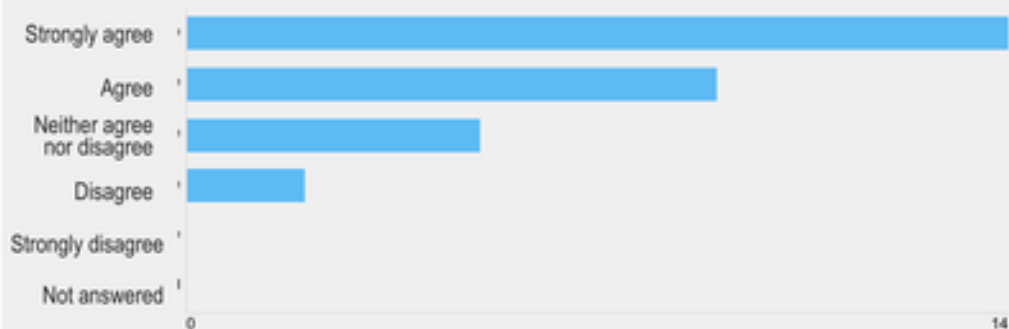
At this stage there were a total of **30 responses** to the survey with the results set out in the following section.



Engagement Results

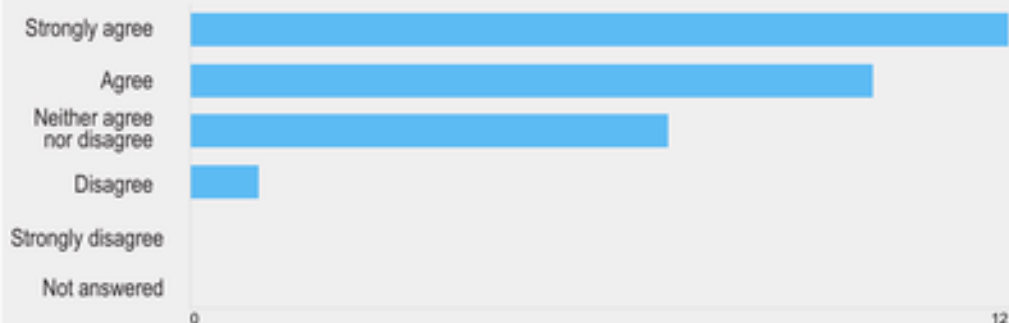
A. Grow the influence of the Square

To what extent do you agree with the priority: Grow the influence of the square?



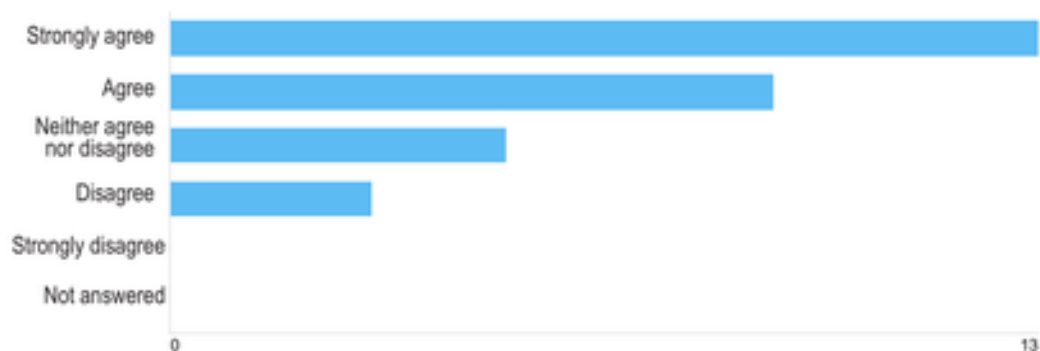
B. Tackle hotspots

To what extent do you agree with the priority: Tackle hotspots?



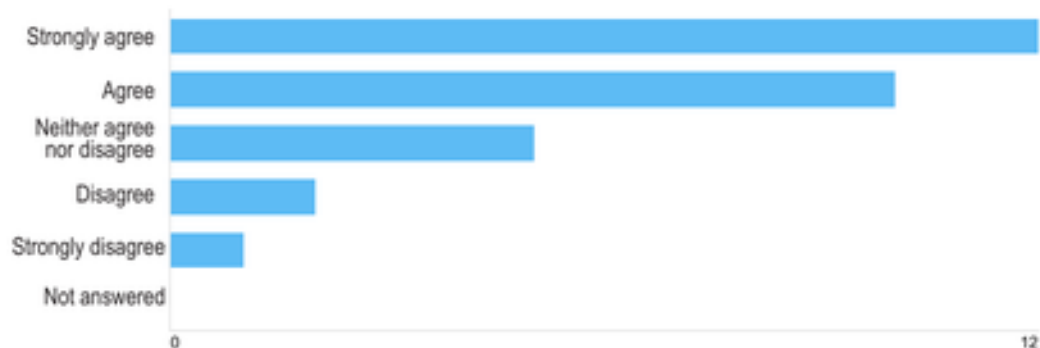
C. A connected Town

To what extent do you agree with the priority: A connected Town?



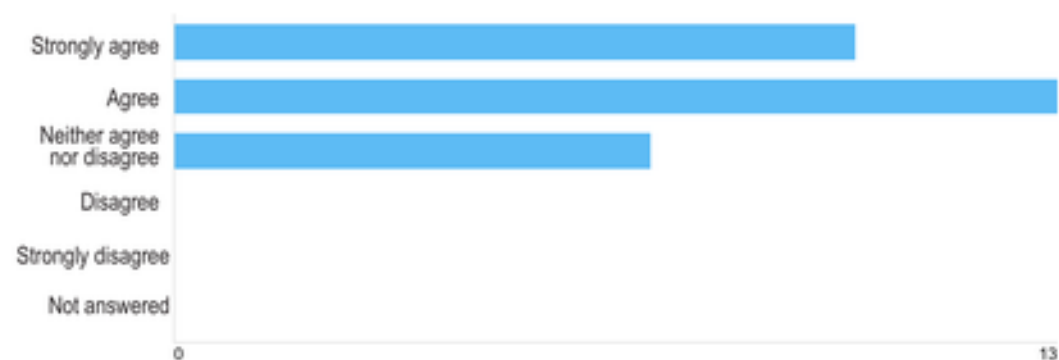
D. Streets for all

To what extent do you agree with the priority: Streets for all?

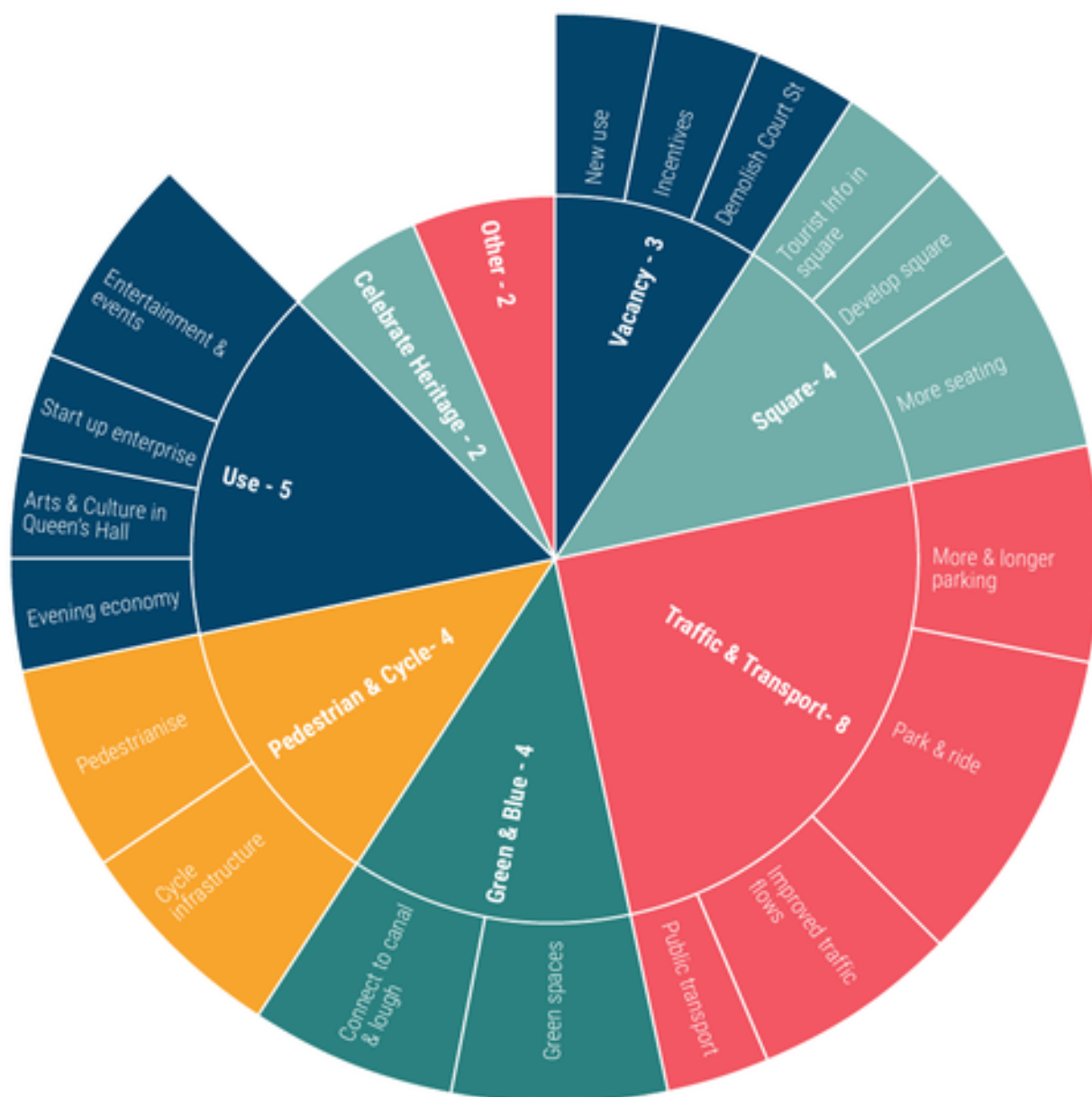


E. Town centre community hub

To what extent do you agree with the priority: Town centre community hub?



Other ideas for priorities for the Town Centre 19 Responses



PRIORITIES

A. Grow the influence of the Square

Use the success of the Square to influence the quality of the surrounding streets and their public realm. Further enhance the vibrancy of the town heart by growing it as a destination emanating from Conway Square.

Conway Square has developed into an area of high-quality public realm where people are prioritised with space to socialise, and activation provided by surrounding businesses spilling out onto the Square. It is a place in Newtownards where daily life can take place.

There is an opportunity now to use the success of the Square to influence the quality of the surrounding streets, growing the town centre as a place for people that provides an improved pedestrian experience and a series of complementary spaces to support events.

Identifying public realm improvements in the streets emanating from the Square has the potential to increase footfall and spending, ensuring the town centre continues to thrive as a place for independent businesses to flourish.

Growing the events programme for the Square and the surrounding streets will support the town centre, by increasing the number of people visiting the area and using the streets and spaces. A new model for delivering activation and events may be required to maximise the usage of the Square.



Saltcoats



Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow

It will be important to engage with stakeholders and local businesses in identifying public realm improvements.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- A.i Engage with stakeholders, local businesses and the community
- A.ii Identify public realm improvements
- A.iii Sustain and grow events programme by way of a new delivery model



Watford Parade



Croydon South End

PRIORITIES

B. Tackle hotspots

Short to medium term interventions to tackle dereliction including building on the success of public art within the town centre.

Within the town centre initiatives have already successfully begun to tackle areas of dereliction through the use of public art and murals, breathing new life and transforming public perceptions of vacant buildings.

Further short to medium term interventions need to be explored to tackle prominent areas of dereliction within the town centre. The impact of long term neglected buildings can be damaging through negatively affecting the local economy and the well being of the local community, potentially deterring future investment.

Key properties and sites for action need to be identified, raising awareness of the issues and a dialogue developed with property owners to establish appropriate interventions.

Developing solutions and testing ideas for new uses and functions will pave the way for reactivation and revitalisation in partnership with the Department for Communities, property owners and the local community.

Temporary projects can be transformational too. One of the best ways to protect a building is to keep it occupied, even if the use is on a temporary or partial basis.



Mural, Newtownards



Building restoration

An example of positive action can be seen in Dumfries, Scotland, where a section of the High Street has a large proportion of empty or disused properties as result of neglect by absentee owners. The community have started to take back control of buildings, through a community-led property development company to refurbish them as living, working and socialising spaces.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- B.i** Identify key properties within the Town Centre
- B.ii** Dialogue with property owners to identify appropriate interventions
- B.iii** Explore option for viable short and long-term buildings uses with owners, statutory bodies and the community



Dumfries - town centre buildings promoted for reuse

PRIORITIES

C. A connected Town

Go for it! Capitalise on the flat nature of the town and look at pedestrian and cycle infrastructure, wayfinding, pop-up cycle lanes, mapping, creating links to the canal and Lough.

Newtownards benefits from a relatively flat topography, generous street width and a unique canal network making it an ideal location to encourage more people to walk and cycle through infrastructure and other initiatives.

Town centre streets need to be assessed from a placemaking perspective with the potential to rebalance space, shifting the focus away from vehicles to pedestrians and cyclists. This will ensure people are able to get to the places they want to go within the town centre, and be able to enjoy them once they are there. This will require a partnership with Statutory partners to ensure effective delivery.

Town centre streets once were less places to park a car, and more centred on civic and community life. Newtownards must enable people to walk or cycle safely from their homes to the town centre. Encouraging short trips to be made by other methods than the car and improving perceptions that this can be more convenient brings with it significant physical and mental health benefits.

Opportunities to make streets more welcoming and attractive to walk and cycle, through cycle infrastructure, seating and planting will start to make it easier for people to choose active travel methods.



Mini Holland, London



Sentosa Island, Singapore wayfinding

Signage and wayfinding are essential and can be a useful tool in promoting walking and cycling, helping navigation, without cluttering the public realm.

The town centre has the fantastic benefit of having canals and Strangford Lough nearby. Both are currently hidden, with little pointing to the fact they are on the town's doorstep. These assets should be capitalised on, improving links and access, integrating the town centre to these valuable pieces of blue infrastructure. This too requires stakeholder engagement and Statutory Partnership.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- C.i** Undertake a town centre movement study, rebalancing hierarchies, shifting the focus to pedestrians and cyclists
- C.ii** Develop and promote a signage and wayfinding system to increase foot and cycle usage, in partnership with statutory bodies



Cycling wayfinding



Pop up cycle lanes, Berlin

PRIORITIES

D. Streets for all

Community led placemaking initiatives, creating open streets to temporarily change the town. Welcoming community groups that are active elsewhere in the town to take the opportunity to transform the streets ranging from play, recreation, food, culture and arts.

Placemaking initiatives can bring communities together, empowering local people, organisations and businesses to take control and temporarily change their town. Collaborative and inspiring projects can reimagine streets and spaces, connecting the people with each other and the town they live in, through play, recreation, food, culture and arts.

Temporary and low-cost interventions such as seating, play spaces and art are effective ways to inspire people, creating memorable experiences.

There is an opportunity to develop the evening economy around community led placemaking initiatives, boosting footfall, generating revenue and encouraging more people to spend time exploring the town centre.



Placemaking initiatives



PROPOSED ACTIONS

- D.i Partnership working to pilot street interventions, including pop-up cycle lanes and increased pedestrian space
- D.ii Engage local community groups around street-based events and animation programmes



Temporary public space, Brooklyn

PRIORITIES

E. Town centre citizen's hub

The development of a new citizen's hub in the heart of the town, providing space for community events, meetings and services.

Council has approved an Outline Business Case for a new Citizen's Hub in Newtownards town centre. The Newtownards Citizens Hub project emerged in conjunction with Libraries NI desire to develop a new library at its existing location at the Queens Hall on Regent Street, Newtownards. Alongside exploring potential future use for the Queens Hall, ANDBC also decided to review its Arts Service / Arts Centre (currently situated at Newtownards Town Hall) and Visitor Information Service (currently located in Regent Street) to create better synergy between Council led services and facilities.

The vision is to redevelop/rebuild Queen's Hall into a new multi-purpose venue for the arts, including the library and public spaces. To re-purpose the Town Hall into a Civic Centre to include Visitor Information Services, front desk services such as registration, public spaces and also to use the building to tell the history and heritage of the town and surrounding area.



Salisbury Community Hub



Ru Pare, Amsterdam

PROPOSED ACTIONS

Included in this option is the re-location of Newtownards Billiards Club to the existing VIC at Regent Street and with also the potential for some flexible working space.

- E.i Take forward the Outline Business Case for the Newtownards Citizen's Hub
- E.ii Engage with key partners, (Libraries NI), the business community and wider public



The Winch - community hub set up within a once derelict pub

Making it happen

PRIORITIES	PROPOSED ACTIONS	COMMENTS
A. Grow the influence of the Square	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Engage with stakeholders, local community and businesses ii. Identify public realm improvements iii. Sustain and grow events programme, by way of new delivery model 	<p>Includes consideration of opportunities to reallocate space for pedestrians.</p> <p>Opportunity to expand night-time economy with increased footfall.</p>
B. Tackle Hotspots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Identify key properties within the Town Centre ii. Dialogue with property owners to identify appropriate interventions iii. Explore option for viable short and long-term buildings uses with owners, statutory bodies and the community 	<p>Opportunity to build on the success of the public art within the town centre.</p>
C. A connected Town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Undertake a town centre movement study rebalancing hierarchies, shifting the focus to pedestrians and cyclists ii. Develop and promote a signage and wayfinding system to increase foot and cycle usage, in partnership with statutory bodies 	

PRIORITIES	PROPOSED ACTIONS	COMMENTS
D. Streets for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Partnership working to pilot street interventions, including pop-up cycle lanes and increased pedestrian space ii. Engage local community groups around street-based events and animation programmes 	<p>Opportunity to develop night-time economy around community led placemaking initiatives.</p> <p>Temporary and low-cost interventions such as, seating, play spaces and displays.</p>
E. Town centre citizen's hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Take forward the Outline Business Case for the new Newtownards Citizen's Hub ii. Engage with key partners, (Libraries NI), the business community and wider public 	



Delivery

Introduction

Central to the success of any masterplan is its ability to affect positive change on the ground. As documented in this review of the original town centre masterplans, the rate of project delivery has been varied to date when compared against the intentions set out in the published Action Plans. Reasons for this include the availability of funding, the buy-in of key stakeholders and changes in political context. It is therefore imperative that a clearer understanding is established on how the new regeneration priorities for each town can be taken forward in a manner which fulfils their potential, builds on public support, and actively contribute to the improvement of the settlement in question.



Action Plan Lifespan

Through this review process it has been agreed that the remaining lifespan of the updated town and city centre masterplans is 8 years. This will correlate with two terms of elected Ards and North Down Borough Councillors. Yet unlike the original town centre masterplans, it is not advised to produce a single action plan that will remain unchanged over that period. Rather, the Actions Plans must be considered 'live' documents that are subjected to regular reviews and updates, with a major review and update taking at the halfway stage, in 4 years' time. This will allow for delivery progress to be accurately recorded and for reprioritisation of actions to happen in response to inevitable changed circumstances. After the 8 year period in 2030 it is recommended that new 'place plans' are commissioned for each town centre, based on multidisciplinary research and extensive public engagement.

Monitoring of Progress

Every project takes time to deliver, and an effort has been made here to identify initiatives that can be brought forward relatively quickly, while other more complex actions will inevitably take longer. In recognition of this, all actions are broken down into 14 stages as shown here. This will enable a more accurate and transparent plotting of project progress to take place. A regularly updated masterplan 'dashboard' will show the current state of all projects, helping to inform decision making accordingly.

		Delivery Stages													
		A Project Definition				B Project Development				C Project Funding				D Project Delivery	
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Newtownards	A Grow the influence of the Square														
	B Tackle Hotspots														
	C A connected Town														
	D Streets for all														
	E Town centre citizen's hub														

(A) Project Definition

1. Identify Online Project idea & Scale (and ideally case study to help visualise)
2. Identify Project Lead
3. Identify Initial Community/Statutory Support
4. Identify Potential Funding (both to develop and deliver project)

(B) Project Development

5. Determine Land Issue (land ownership, options, access, ability to acquire, likelihood of planning)
6. Identify Potential Project Partners (who, why, how)
7. Outline Key Issues: Need/Demand, Objectives/Aims, Project Management, Financing, 'Net Zero' Impact and Sustainability
8. Detailed Investigation - Proportional Economic & Technical Feasibility Study

(C) Project Funding

9. Detailed Funding Case - Proportional Business Case, Designs, Costing
10. Land ownership/access confirmed, planning permission secured and working capital/project financing in place,
11. Funding Application(s) Submitted

(D) Project Delivery

12. Managing Funding - Letters of Offer, Procurement, Construction, Delivery
13. Post Funding Delivery - Adaptation, Delivery, Launch and Official Sign-Off
14. Project Evaluation Complete

Town and City Advisory Groups

The town centre masterplans identify the regeneration needs of each town centre and consequently do not neatly fall to the responsibilities of one organisation (public or private), council or government department. Furthermore, the process of developing viable projects requires the continued input of town centre stakeholders and the public. To reflect this complexity, Ards and North Down Borough Council constituted Town and City Advisory Groups in 2019. These groups, originally known as Town Steering Groups, comprise local representatives of business, community, youth and faith organisations, as well as councillors and officers of Ards and North Down Borough Council. The groups meet regularly through the year, convened by Council officers and led by an appointed chair.

The existence of such groups is to be commended and reflects current best practice being emulated elsewhere in the United Kingdom and Ireland. Yet the effectiveness of the groups requires review to ensure they play a fuller part of the delivery of masterplan priorities. A key area for review is examining how the groups can be given greater levels of responsibility in a manner that is compatible with the functions of both council and government departments. It is recommended that an independent review is undertaken by an external consultant to work with all the advisory groups to review governance and processes with the view to recommend changes and reference best practice models.

1. Strengthen – Make more representative by inviting more members and volunteers and ensure more regular representation from different council sections and relevant NI Executive departments (eg DfI).
2. Simplify – assign specific tasks to sub-groups, comprising members and invited parties.
3. Support and Signpost – provide training, secretarial support and professional advice when required.



Locally Based Organisations

There is a need to support strong and capable locally based organisations both existing and new, such as Donaghadee Community Development Association and Comber Regeneration Community Partnership. The success comes from dynamic, driven people coming together and making projects happen for their community. Often one project leads to another, and locally based organisations become crucial partners for the public and private sector, promoting a shared understanding of place and the need for a more integrated approach to delivery.

Potential Funding Streams

A range of funding sources are likely to be available for delivery of action plans. These include committed council budgets and DfC regeneration funding, although noting the challenging fiscal environment at present.

A key issue is the current use of NISRA Town Centre boundaries for the allocation of regeneration funding as those areas do not align accurately with the generally recognised town centre areas. It is advocated that this means of funding allocation is reviewed and ideally changed.

A range of other funding sources not restrained by these boundaries should be proactively explored as follows:

- Community Ownership Fund
- Levelling Up (future rounds)
- Shared Prosperity
- Peace Plus
- Shared Island Funding
- National Lottery (Heritage Fund)
- Ulster Garden Villages
- Groundworks
- Social Finance (e.g. Community Finance Ireland, NESTA)

Outcomes / Indicators

It is proposed that arrangements are made to measure the success of masterplan delivery through the measures of outcomes or key performance indicators. This will require the commissioning of baseline surveys where existing data is not available.

Potential indicators are:

- Town centre footfall
- Town centre cycle journeys
- Biodiversity of key sites
- Animation
- Purple Flag Accreditation
- Residential Accommodation/Housing units within Town Centre
- Population numbers
- House prices (and/or rate income)
- Jobs
- Civic Pride/Perception, Business Perception

