



Oldcastle

Public Realm Plan

July 2021



comhairle chontae na mí
meath county council

BDP.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Executive Summary

1.2 Context and the Need for a Public Realm Plan

1.3 The value of the Public Realm

1.4 Existing Situation: Where is Oldcastle now?

1.1 Executive Summary

The Oldcastle Public Realm Plan sets out the future approach to the streets and spaces of the town.

The aim of the vision statement is to:

Improve the public realm in Oldcastle through reorganising the heart of the town with the addition of new public spaces, pedestrian crossings and reorganised parking. Links to open amenity areas, heritage and tourism opportunities should be enhanced and celebrated.”

Oldcastle is a vibrant town with a strong sense of community. It is very much self-sustaining with a variety of shops and businesses located in the town. However, the streetscape and open spaces throughout do not match the requirements of the town.

Over a number of chapters, this plan includes an understanding of the existing influencing factors; a series of objectives; feedback received through engagement with stakeholders; and a proposed intervention to achieve the vision for Oldcastle.

Chapter 4 explores an intervention to achieve the rejuvenation of Oldcastle Town Square. Site specific design considerations have been established to bring Oldcastle in line with the needs of modern living. These include issues such as accessibility and pedestrian movement which are in accordance with current building regulations and best practice. The plan's objectives also seek to be sustainable and promote measures to combat climate change.

Oldcastle Town Square has potential to become the open public space that it once was and not the vehicular dominated space that it has become.

Project Ireland, which was launched on the 16th February 2018, is a high-level document which provides the framework for future development and investment in Ireland. It includes a detailed capital investment plan for the next ten years, the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2027, and the National

Planning Framework (NPF) which outlines the broader policy principles and priorities in planning for future population and economic growth to 2040. Public Realm Improvements, place making and brownfield development are central tenants of the National Planning Framework (NPF). The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) which forms part of Project Ireland supports ambitious and strategic projects which contribute to sustainable rural regeneration and development. The proposals put forward in this Plan adhere to and strive to implement the principles of the National Planning Framework.

Consultation

A public consultation event for this plan took place with invited stakeholders at Oldcastle Library on the 19th of March 2019. A summary of the event and points raised can be found in the Appendix in Chapter 6. The objectives that were developed are as follows:

1. **Improve footpaths and connections to all parts of the town.**
2. **Create more regular safe crossing points especially in the main square.**
3. **Create a pedestrian space / square as a focus to the town centre.**
4. **Introduce traffic calming measures but do not create traffic jams.**
5. **Introduce time restrictions for parking in the town centre.**
6. **Bring back into use derelict sites and buildings.**
7. **Improve links to north and setting of playground.**
8. **Enhance the setting and interpretation of the heritage, linked to tourism.**
9. **Rationalise the street furniture.**
10. **Set up a strategy to have underground wires.**
11. **Preserve and enhance trees and vegetation in appropriate positions in the town centre.**
12. **Improve street lighting throughout the town.**

Meath County Council placed the Draft Oldcastle Public Realm Plan on public display online at consult.meath.ie. The draft plan was on display between the 5th of February 2020 and March 4th 2020. Four submissions were received and reviewed by the council before completing the plan in May 2021.

The recent global health crisis has influenced how we think about outdoor public space. The Resilience and Recovery 2020-21: Plan for Living with COVID-19 highlights that outdoor spaces are safer than indoor spaces, in terms of being less susceptible to high transmission rates of Covid-19. The vision and objectives of this plan remain applicable in how the public realm of Oldcastle should be treated and where enhancement should be pursued. The interventions of this plan include enhancements to outdoor public spaces and amenities. They will better accommodate the recent changes to our behaviour in how we use our streets and towns and enjoy open space.

An Appropriate Assessment (Habitats Directive) Screening of the proposals has been undertaken by Meath County Council. The conclusion of this process are included in Section 5 of this plan.



Shopfront in Oldcastle

1.2 Context

Oldcastle, in north west-county Meath, is a characterful town with lots of potential. Situated within a large rural catchment, the town is a local centre for shoppers, workers and increasingly tourists alike.

Location

Oldcastle is located in the north-west corner of Meath close to the Cavan border. It is positioned at the crossing of two regional roads, namely the R195 running from north to south between Virginia and Castlepollard, and the R154 running west to east between Killashandra and Kells. Nestled into the rolling hills of north-west Meath, Oldcastle is just west of Loughcrew with its megalithic monuments and Slieve Gullion located close by to the south.

The population of Oldcastle remained relatively static in the last inter census period. 1,384 persons were recorded in 2011 and 1,383 persons in 2016. The town has developed and concentrates around the traditional 'Town Square' defined by the intersection of two locally important roads which form the commercial town-centre. The central square, of an irregular triangular form, is on an elevated site particularly evident from the southern and eastern approach roads. The town's streetscape extends along four of the five roads which radiate from the market square, with the southern approach road from Castlepollard giving the most prominent view of the centre.

The town is very much a self-sustaining town with people living, working and going about their daily lives within the town. This is a positive contrast to other towns of a similar scale and geographical location which would usually have a large proportion of their population commuting to bigger centres for work and school. The result is a town full of life during the day.

Although the market function of the Square and the town has declined, there is a healthy and varied mix of uses within the commercial core, including residential, commercial and ecclesiastical. With no out-of-town shopping area, the town has managed to sustain the business of a traditional group of shops and services one would expect to find in a town of its scale.

New Aspirations

While Oldcastle has an active community, it has been questioned if the public realm is working as hard as it can to attract people passing through to stop off and use the town. For the existing everyday users, is the town user-friendly enough to modern day Ireland and all walks of life? This plan seeks to challenge the status-quo and suggests improvements for the betterment of Oldcastle in different ways whilst remaining sympathetic to the setting.

What is the 'Public Realm'?

Public Realm is commonly defined as all areas between buildings, including streets, laneways and open squares that are accessible to the public. From the earliest times, public spaces have played an important role in the cultural, political, commercial, social and recreational development of communities. Extensively studied and written about, public spaces are simply places where people can meet, mix, engage and exchange. Well designed and planned public spaces enhance the physical environment and improve the 'liveability' and sustainability of urban or town centres. They provide a geographical focal point for the community and a place where residents and visitors alike can congregate for a variety of purposes.

The public realm in Oldcastle is largely confined to the built fabric that forms it. This is essentially the Square and its arterial streets.

The Need for a Public Realm Plan

Meath County Council has committed to producing a town centre public realm plan which describes the benefits which enhancements can bring. There are a number of funding avenues available including Town and Village Funding, Rural Regeneration Development Funding, Heritage funding and tourism related funding such as Fáilte Ireland.

It is hoped that this document will demonstrate a clear vision for the future of Oldcastle and the various ways such funding can be put to a use that benefits the town.



Aerial View of Oldcastle



Oldcastle Monument

1.3 The Value of Public Realm in Oldcastle

Oldcastle remains an anchor to surrounding areas with a wide catchment area. With users of all ages and abilities experiencing the town on a daily basis, there are important benefits to be gained when the public realm is both functional and of good quality.

Socio-Economic

Public realm can provide places for people to meet and interact. It is important that these are quality spaces so that people want to spend time within them. In making spaces more accessible for physically impaired people and older adults, a heightened satisfaction for users is created. Doing so can attract investment and development from businesses. People will therefore stay longer and help the vitality of the town making Oldcastle a destination rather than a town to pass through.

Environmental

With increasing pressure to make our towns and cities greener, it is important to bring nature and biodiversity into our central spaces. This can be achieved while protecting, conserving and enhancing the existing heritage. There is also potential to use planting creatively to both help reduce air pollution and improve rain water management, enhancing the image and perception of the town.

Functional

The public realm must be functional in order to achieve the foregoing. This means that walking and cycling are encouraged through better links and provision, improving orientation through wayfinding and signage and making Oldcastle inclusive for all users. It is also important to rationalise movement and transport as doing so can lead to more outdoor space associated with amenity, retail and leisure.



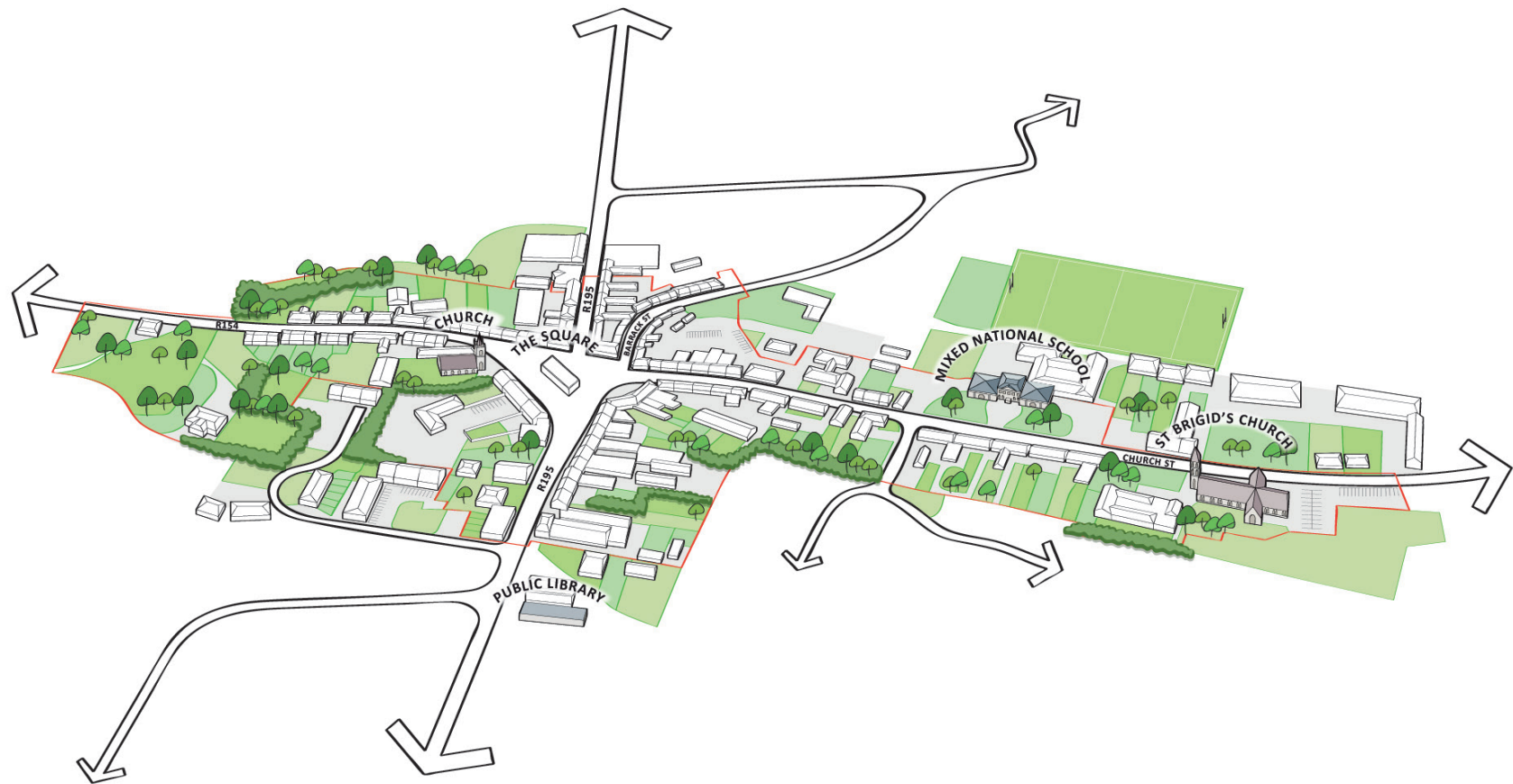
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A busy Oldcastle Town in the 1960's

1.3 The Existing Situation



Bird's-eye sketch of Oldcastle, Co. Meath



1.4 The Existing Situation - Site Photos

The town is dominated by vehicles - both parked and moving through the town at higher than acceptable speeds. The existing public realm is tired and in need of enhancement to help promote the richness of the town's buildings and heritage as an Architectural Conservation Area.

Vehicular Dominated

The layout of Oldcastle presents a much vehicular - dominated town. The road network through and around the town allows for HGVs and agricultural traffic to move through at speed. Car parking also takes up a lot of space in the town.

Poor Pedestrian Links and Public Open Space

Pedestrian movement through the town is unclear with limited open public space and no identified pedestrian crossings. From a universal access point of view, many improvements could be made to bring Oldcastle in line with current guidance.

The Wrong Trees in the Wrong Places

Greenery in Oldcastle is lacking. Most existing trees are tall and columnar which do little to enhance experience of the town. Oldcastle would benefit from a review of both the location and specification of its street trees- 'The right trees in the right places'.

Clutter

Existing components in the town such as an abundance of signage, overhead cabling and overuse of bollards all sporadically laid out, contribute towards a negative appearance of the town. The removal of overhead cables should be explored with a review of street furniture and signage locations to de-clutter the town - less is more.



1.4 The Existing Situation - The Square

The Square is a significant space in Oldcastle. The current layout of the Square is focused on vehicular movements and on the provision of car parking. It offers little opportunities for pedestrians to move around and doesn't emphasise the cultural and historical heritage.

- ① Carriageway.
- ② Secondary one way access roads to parking pocket.
- ③ Existing 78 parking bays, including 5 disabled bays.
- ④ Pedestrian space.
- ⑤ Monument (Celtic cross).
- ⑥ Existing trees.



2.0

Strategic Public Realm Plan to Achieve the Vision

- 2.1** A Shared Vision for Oldcastle
- 2.2** Street Hierarchy, Key Spaces and Gateways
- 2.3** Movement, Access, Parking and Circulation

2.1 A Shared Vision for Oldcastle

The layout of the streets and central square offers a great potential for enhancement through a coordinated approach to the public realm.

Objectives

The below points are the key objectives identified for the future of public realm in Oldcastle.

The Vision Statement

“To improve the public realm in Oldcastle through reorganising the heart of the town with the addition of new public spaces, pedestrian crossings and reorganised parking. Links to open amenity areas, heritage and tourism opportunities should be enhanced and celebrated.”

1

Improve footpaths and connections to all parts of the town

2

Create more regular safe crossing points, especially in the main square

3

Create a pedestrian space / square as a focus to the town centre

4

Introduce traffic calming measures but do not create traffic jams

5

Introduce timed restrictions for parking in town centre

6

Bring back into use derelict sites and buildings

7

Improve links to north and setting of playground

8

Enhance the setting and interpretation of the heritage, linked to tourism

9

Rationalise street furniture

10

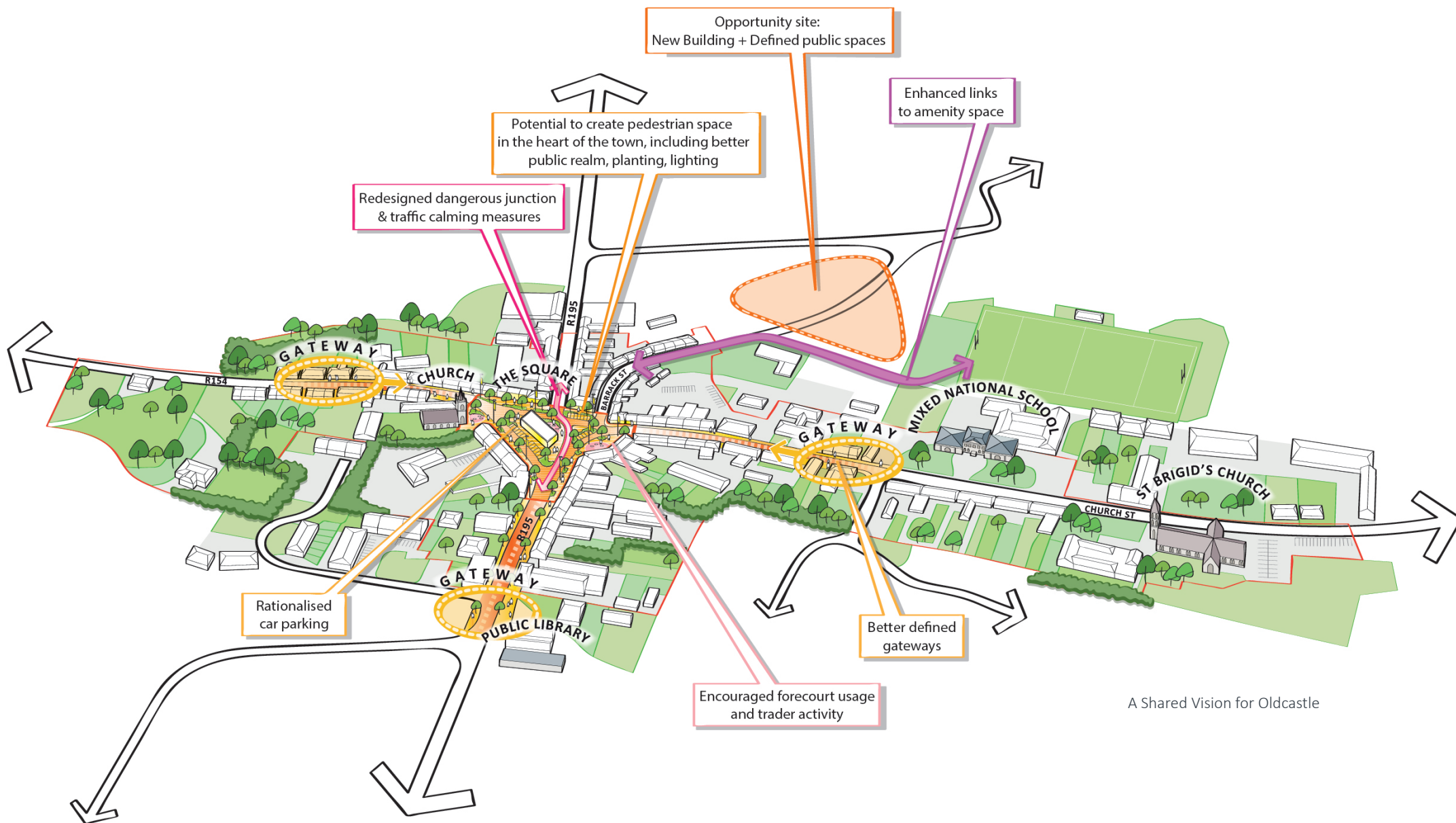
Set up a strategy to have underground wires

11

Preserve and enhance trees and vegetation in appropriate positions in the town centre

12

Improve street lighting throughout the town centre



2.2 Street Hierarchy, Key Spaces and Gateways

Gateways

With long, straight approach routes to the town, clearly defined gateways are proposed. The sense of arrival in Oldcastle will be enhanced through a change of materials, the calming of traffic speeds and more frequent pedestrian crossings.

Primary Roads

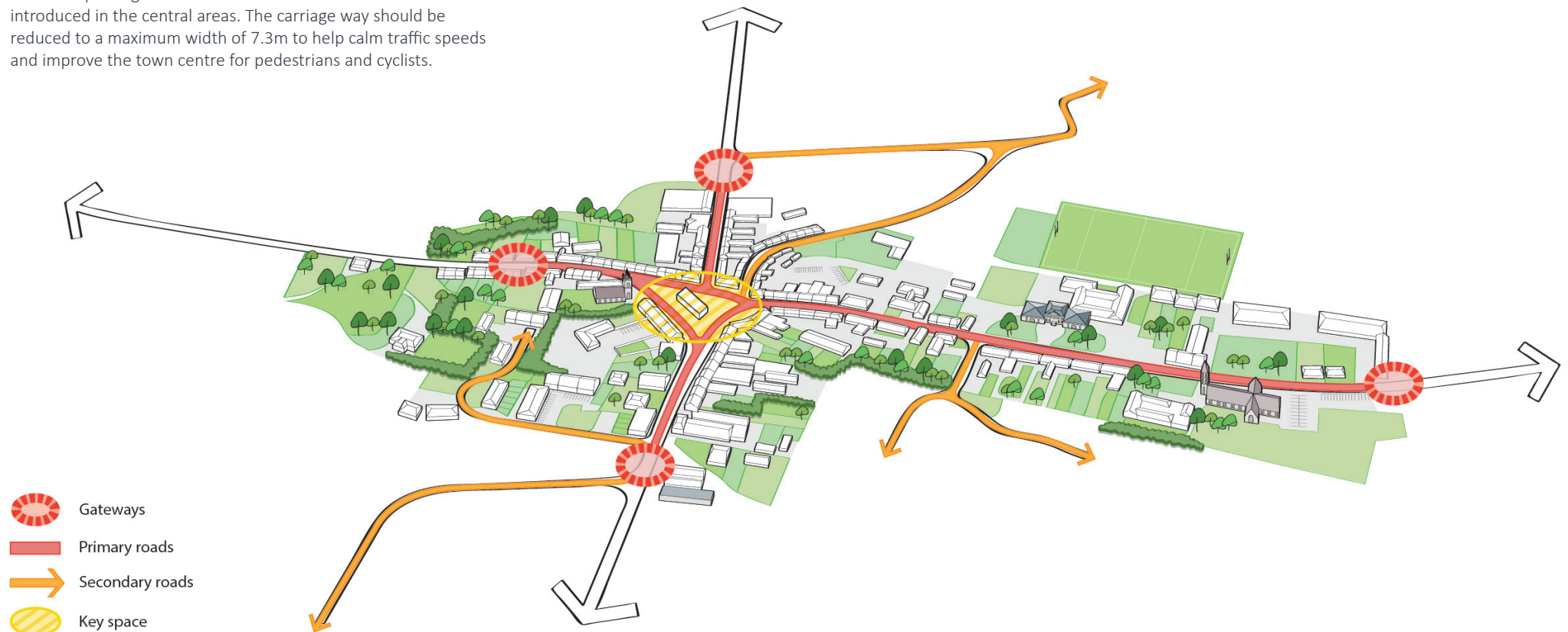
Reduced speeds, regular crossing points and better pedestrian connections will enhance the primary routes of Oldcastle. On-street parking should be reviewed and time restrictions introduced in the central areas. The carriage way should be reduced to a maximum width of 7.3m to help calm traffic speeds and improve the town centre for pedestrians and cyclists.

Secondary Routes

Secondary routes should continue to accommodate pedestrian movement with improved pedestrian crossings. A consistent palette of materials should be used along with wayfinding and information of the local points of interest.

Key Spaces

The key space for Oldcastle will be the Square. As it is the centre for employment and daily use of the town, it should remain the focal point. Enhancement of the town and sense of place can be achieved in establishing a consistent palette of materials and components which relate to the existing heritage and Architectural Conservation Area. Timed or restricted parking would also increase customer turnover for the traders with staff parking accommodated away from the square.



2.3 Movement, Access, Parking and Circulation

Priority Vehicle Flow

The north-south route should be retained as the priority flow for vehicular traffic. The reviewed road layout and junction will provide definition of vehicle movements in the square.

Give Way Flow

East west traffic will move via give way signs on the square. The junction can therefore work harder to self-regulate while slowing traffic down in the centre.

Secondary Routes

Secondary routes remain unchanged. However, improvements can be made to make their appearance more consistent.

Time Restricted Parking to Square

With many cars parked in the square for long periods of time, time restricted parking would open the town up to more users per day, help local businesses and potentially increase trading in the town centre.

Unrestricted Parking

Unrestricted timed parking will still be provided in adjoining streets where physically appropriate for those who need longer durations of parking. These should be clearly marked out to promote their use.

Private Parking

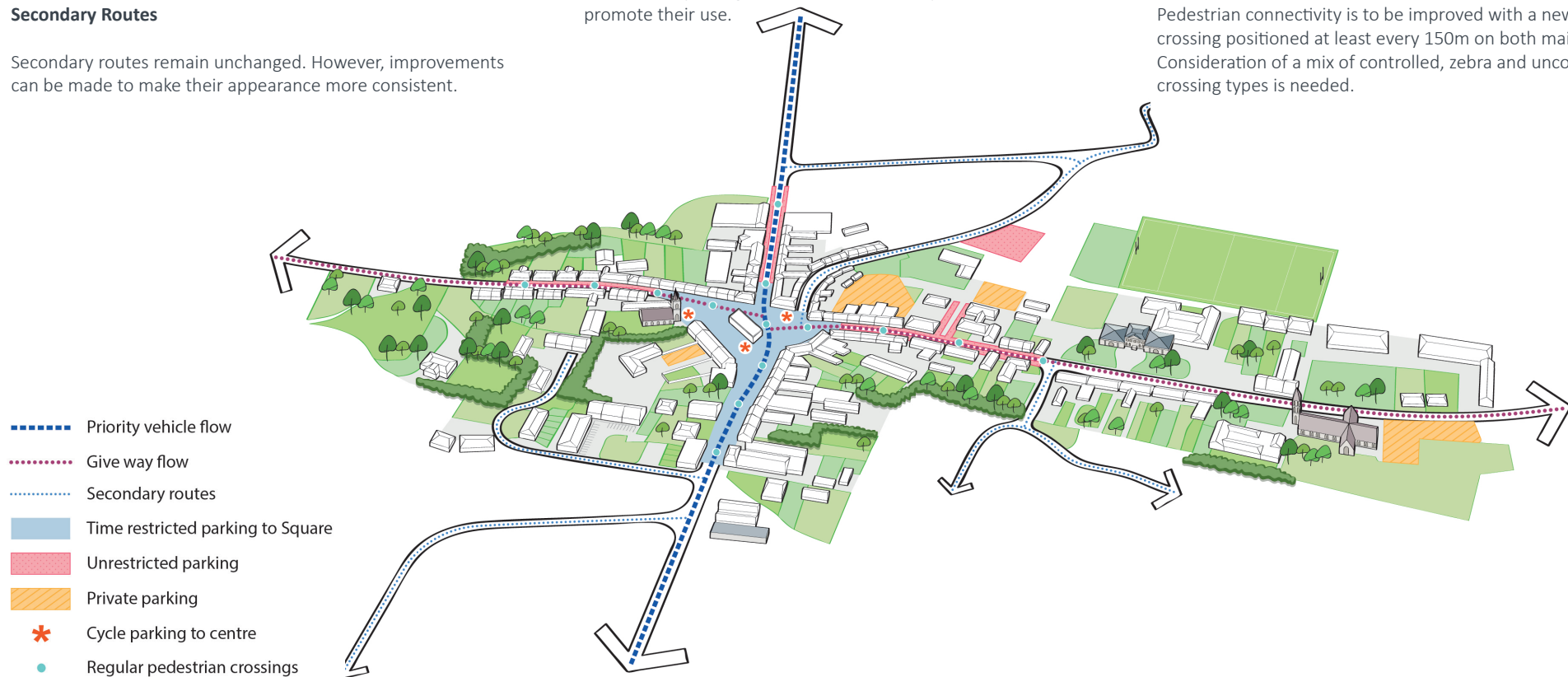
Private parking areas are as per existing and should continue to be used as they currently are.

Cycle Parking to Centre

Cycle parking will be a welcome addition and encourage a sustainable option for transport in Oldcastle.

Regular Pedestrian Crossings

Pedestrian connectivity is to be improved with a new pedestrian crossing positioned at least every 150m on both main axes. Consideration of a mix of controlled, zebra and uncontrolled crossing types is needed.



3.0 Approach to Components

3.1 Paving

3.2 Street Furniture

3.3 Lighting

3.4 Wayfinding and Signage

3.5 Vegetation

3.1 Paving

All paving should be of high quality and suitable to withstand the function of the area. Durability, lifespan and visual appreciation should all be considered when specifications are being determined.

In response to the existing built character of Oldcastle, an offset of two metres should be taken from each building line. This two-metre band will be natural stone, granite or similar, laid on a rigid concrete base with mortar bedding and joints. Small unit slabs are suggested for ease of use, weight and cost for such areas, nominally 60mm thick. Where natural stone is being used in near driveways, thicker setts should be used.

The choice of natural stone is made for the following reasons:

- Appropriate to the heritage of the area.
- Durability - when laid on a concrete base, it will achieve a long lifespan with minimal maintenance.
- Stone products appreciate in value with natural weathering.
- Depending on colour and source, the material cost difference to concrete products is minimal.

A resin bound surface can be used to compliment the natural stone paving through its colour selection.

The vehicular carriageway should be a high quality asphalt laid between granite kerbs. Kerbs should be a maximum of 100mm high, lowering to a minimum 50mm where a shared environment is more appropriate. It is essential to use radius sections, quadrants and dropped kerbs within the design.

The small unit slabs / setts allow ease of laying and achieve levels tying in to both thresholds and crossing points without the need for triangular cuts, which should be avoided. All paving falls are to be compliant with Building Regulations and universal design standards.

Natural Stone Offset from Buildings



Ground Plane Appropriate to the Heritage of the Area



Drainage units, manhole covers and other components in the paving should be flush with surrounding areas. They should be integrated within the design to avoid trip hazards.

Paving infill covers are not required. However, there should be a maximum 10mm gap between the frame and outer paving.

Natural Stone Feature Paving Areas



Resin Bound Surface



3.2 Street Furniture

All elements of street furniture in Oldcastle should be designed into the public realm and not as an afterthought. Coordination and combination between elements should be considered, to avoid visual clutter. Contemporary materials such as stainless steel should be avoided with timber and neutral colours preferred to maintain a harmony with the existing character and heritage.

Generally all items of street furniture should be from a standard palette and neutral in design – the exception being when singular items of street furniture are considered as art and are site-specific. Sockets should be used where possible to allow for ease of maintenance and replacement if required.

Seating: A variety of seating options should be incorporated, including benches with armrests and backs, benches as seating platforms, ledges and steps. Seating must not impede natural movement, while seating arrangements should encourage social interaction.

Bins: Should be located at key junctions and spaced at regular intervals along the streets. They should be neutral in design and part of a coordinated street furniture palette.

Bollards: The use of bollards should be avoided wherever possible. Where necessary, they should be 1.1m high, slender and coordinated with other pieces of street furniture.

Cycle racks: These should be located in small clusters, in places where cyclists enter the pedestrian zones, in visible locations, not impeding circulation.

Feature Seating



Litter Bins



Organisation in Layout of Street Furniture

3.3 Lighting

Lighting will be an integral part of the Oldcastle public realm. It will enhance spaces, increase their time of use and provide a feeling of safety. Any change to the status-quo should be sympathetic to the character found in Oldcastle with contemporary features avoided.

In order to create this changing experience along the streets and into the town centre, several types of light treatment are proposed. Consideration should be given to the following:

- A standard palette should be agreed to provide ambient light to prescribed lighting levels. This being a column or wall mounted fitting where appropriate which is neutral in design so that it complements the range of architectural styles within the Architectural Conservation Area of Oldcastle.
- Subtle character changes along streets and within spaces should be incorporated within an overall masterplan. This can emphasise focal points in the main square, pedestrian open spaces, gateways and provide interest while moving through the town.

Lighting the streets

High-level building mounted luminaires where appropriate; these provide ambient light levels and should be discreetly positioned on buildings with respect to the architecture and only used where appropriate.

Columns; these will need to be carefully positioned and blend into the street scene. They will add interest and scale in appropriate locations whilst ensuring that they do not impede pedestrian movement or block key views. A neutral style of column and luminaire is proposed appropriate to the setting and context.

Uplighters to Trees



Unobtrusive Luminaires



Architectural lighting of selected buildings

Oldcastle has a number of buildings with interesting façades worthy of lighting. This can either be with integrated fitting on the façade itself where appropriate or from nearby columns.

Feature lighting

Feature lighting can help define the public realm at night. The value of this needs to be considered on a case by case basis in line with the Council's Energy Action Plan. Provision for festive lights should also be made throughout the town centre.

Standard Light Columns of Neutral Design



3.4 Wayfinding and Signage

The rich heritage of Oldcastle presents an opportunity for a range of signs providing direction, interpretation and information.

Directional Signage

To maintain a minimal theme that is in keeping with the wider strategy for the town, directional signage should be minimal with a careful choice of materials that do not compete with items of historical significance in the area such as the church and other buildings of significance. It is important to identify starting points from which pedestrian visitors are most likely to begin walking through the town and then where the main routes for pedestrians will be. Directional signage can then be placed at points that meet or where there is a change in direction. Starting points or destinations might include:

- Tourist information points
- Bus stop
- Public car parks
- Town Squares
- Historic buildings - i.e. St. Brigid's Church
- Probable pedestrian walkways or pedestrianised areas.
- Interpretation Points
- Tourist attractions - i.e. Loughcrew Cairns

Unauthorised signs should not be allowed on any directional sign posts. Directional signage in general should be kept to a minimum to avoid clutter.

Historically Appropriate Fingerpost Sign



Interpretation Signage

Signage used for interpretation should be from one coherent family. Like directional signage, it should be minimal in appearance and consistent throughout the town. A variety of installation types include installing interpretation signage in-ground, on buildings or on posts where necessary.

All interpretation signs should be kept simple and clear. Clutter and over-use of interpretation signage should be avoided.

Meath County Council Policy on Shopfronts

When considering shop fronts, traders should be encouraged to reference policies outlined in the 'Shopfront and Signage Guidelines' document produced by Meath County Council.

This document encourages shop-owners and traders to use hand-painted fascia lettering and logos in a style and colour that harmonises with the shop. Such signage should also help to portray its use. The installation of roller shutters located behind the line of glazing in shopfronts is also suggested by the guidelines.

Commemorative In-Ground Signage



Wayfinding Signage



3.5 Vegetation

The visual appearance and user experience of Oldcastle will be significantly enhanced through the introduction of street trees and planting which provides seasonal variation and greenery. A potential increase in public open space creates more opportunity for more biodiversity enhancements.

Vegetation within Oldcastle is lacking. The proposed vegetation for the Public Realm of Oldcastle could include the following, with the right selection of street trees in the right locations being a priority:

- Street Trees - these are to be introduced in order to 'green' the town centre and provide vitality to spaces that is currently lacking. An appraisal of existing trees should be undertaken to determine feasibility for retention or the possible need for removal and replacement.
- Rain Gardens - by planting an attractive, low maintenance, wildlife friendly selection of plants, rain gardens give an opportunity to manage rainwater runoff from hard surfaces after downpours while also injecting some much needed greenery to the Town Centre.
- Planted ledges / boxes - these must be integrated with building façades and only used where they will further enhance both the building and street scene.
- Shrubs and flowers in appropriate contained areas can provide seasonal interest and variety throughout the year.

Consideration is needed for locating trees

- Where possible plant trees, of an appropriate species, in ground on both sides of the road in suitable created tree pits and ground conditions.
- Utilise trees to aid in wayfinding and creating identity to spaces, by selecting different species for each type of space;

Street Trees



Appropriate Window Boxes

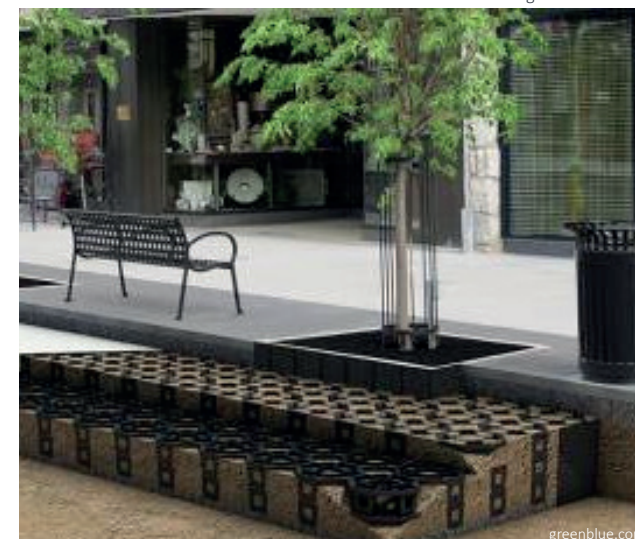


- pedestrian street, vehicular street, nodes and green spaces.
- Tree locations should be carefully considered in order to complement adjacent buildings and spaces, and so as not to block or hinder views, or obstruct CCTV.
- Trees should have a clear stem of 2.2m and reach a mature height of 10-15m with a uniform canopy.
- Trees should be planted in tree pits specifically detailed to accommodate street trees and to better tolerate town centre conditions with root barriers to protect underground utilities.
- Trees should be in groups of the same species.

Suitable Suggested Street Tree Species

- *Tilia cordata* 'Streetwise' / 'Greenspire'.
- *Carpinus betulus* 'Streetwise' / 'Fastigiata Frans Fontaine'.
- *Pyrus calleryana* 'Chanticleer'.
- *Gleditsia triacanthos*.
- *Prunus avium* 'Plena'.
- *Acer campestre* 'Elsrijk'.
- *Sorbus aucuparia* 'Asplenifolia'.

Below-ground Soil Cells



In most urban areas, impervious surfaces such as asphalt and concrete walkways are dominant and prevent water from percolating through the ground. This severely impacts waterways and wildlife, causes pollutants to spread, endangers ecosystems and increases the pressure on water networks.

What are rain gardens?

A rain garden is a planted depression that allows rainwater and runoff from impervious areas such as roads, parking and walkways to be filtered, stored on site, and then percolate through the natural ground.

Rain gardens act as living sponges, they are a key element of sustainable drainage systems (SuDs) which can play a large part in shaping new sustainable urban landscapes. Rain gardens are an effective, attractive and economically accessible way to fight back the negative effects of over development of hardscapes in urban areas.

The key benefits of rain gardens include:



Water storage

Providing long & short term storage of water during storm event



Infiltration

Allowing water to soak into the ground



Pollutant treatment

Effective treatment of polluted water



Biodiversity

Increasing the variety of plants & wildlife



Enhanced management

Reduction of pressure on 'classic' water networks



Visual amenity

Providing attractive, useable and pleasing features



Education

Learning opportunities with wildlife and water management



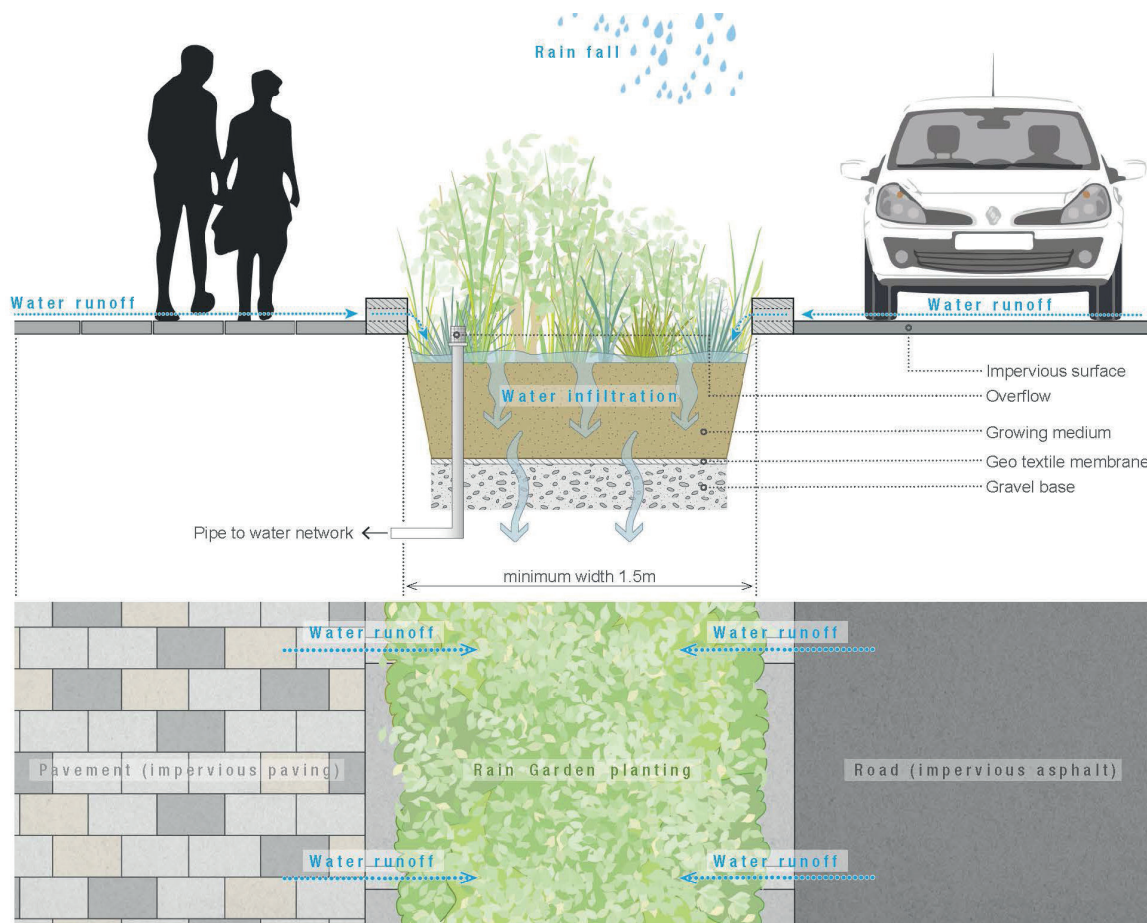
Adaptability

Easily changed for additional future capacity



Resilience

Mitigation of current & future negative impacts of climate change



Typical Raingarden Layout and Section

Raingarden with Street Trees



Raingarden During Storm Event



Raingarden Precedents

There are many ways in which rain gardens can be implemented in the urban environment: on narrow streets, in commercial and residential environments, on sloppy terrain, etc. Additionally, rain gardens can display playful features, colourful planting and become positive features in any urban regeneration scheme.

Raingarden in Summer



4.0

Intervention: Oldcastle Town Square Rejuvenation

4.1 The Issues

4.2 What Makes a Good Town Square?

4.3 New Town Square

4.4 Pedestrian Movement and Public Open Space

4.5 Surfacing and Spaces Hierarchy

4.6 Vegetation

4.7 Trees and Planting

4.1 The Issues

The square is the primary opportunity for improving the public realm in Oldcastle. An understanding of the issues allows the future proposals to provide a greatly enhanced town centre.

There are a number of factors that contribute to the lack of attractiveness of the public realm of the Square. Below are listed some of the issues.

Picture 1:

- Narrow pavements, uneasy pedestrian circulation
- Lack of shop forecourt opportunity

Picture 2:

- Narrow pavements, uneasy pedestrian circulation
- Poor and uneven surfacing
- Lack of visibility to the other side of the street due to continuous car parking

Picture 3:

- Extensive areas of asphalt
- Lack of safe pedestrian crossing points
- Poor tree specimen

Picture 4:

- Poor and uneven public lighting
- Lack of lighting emphasis on the monuments and key buildings

Picture 5:

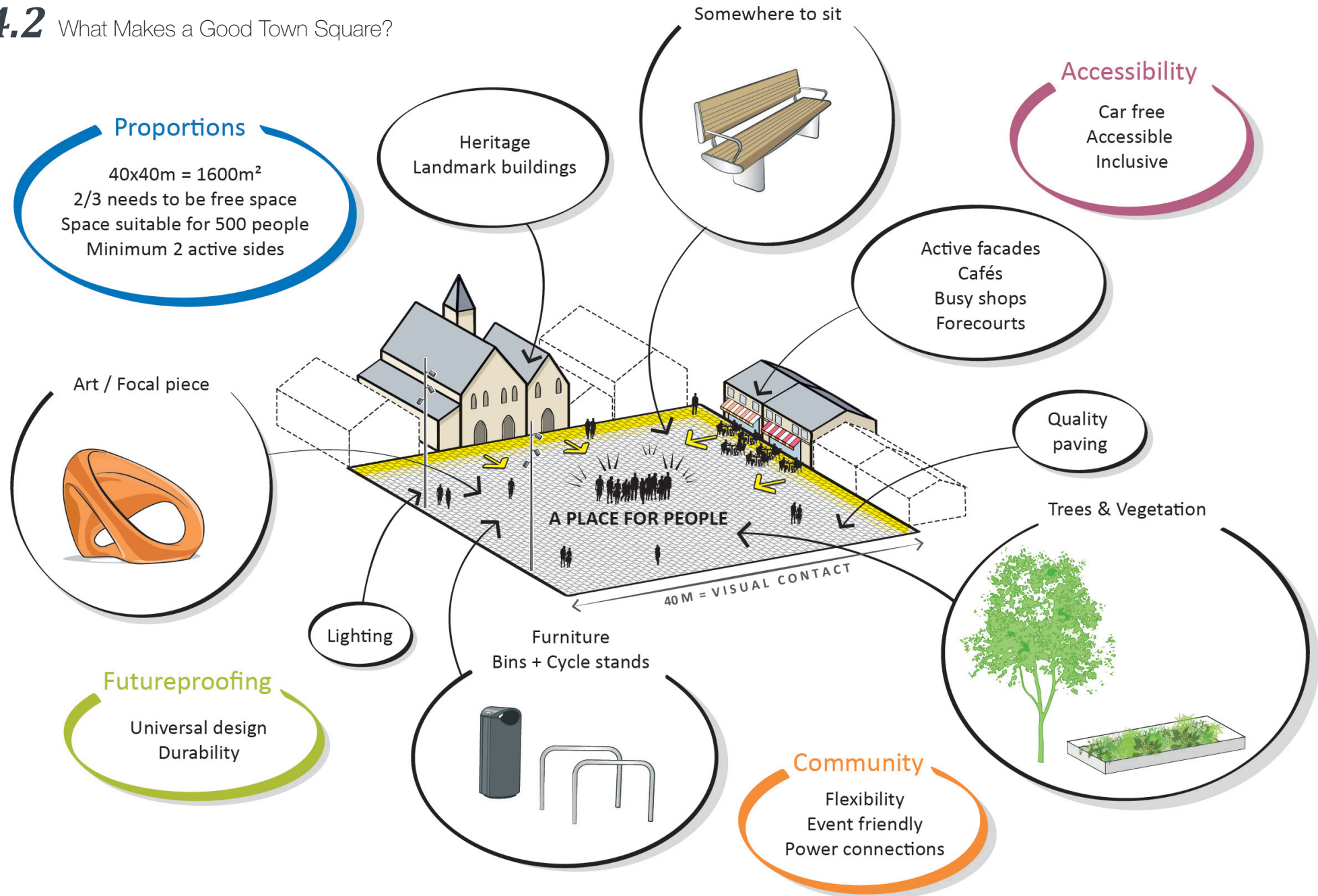
- Dominance of car parking
- Lack of safe and irregular pedestrian crossing points
- Overground utility cables

Picture 6:

- Confusing road layout for all users
- Wide roads with no crossing points
- Poor quality of lighting columns



4.2 What Makes a Good Town Square?



4.3 New Town Square

The proposal for the Square aims to create a legible, pedestrian friendly environment, whilst allowing a calmed traffic to run through the Square and accommodating car parking.

The key principles of the proposal are the following:

- **A pedestrian friendly environment:** widen pavements, safe crossing points and creation of defined pedestrian spaces;
- **Rationalisation of vehicular movement:** tightening of junctions where possible, reorganisation and rationalisation of car parking, raised tables to the central portion of the carriageway;
- **A green and sustainable square:** introduction of rain gardens and tree planting.

- ① Reorganised road layout
- ② New pedestrian crossings
- ③ Raised tables (traffic calming measure)
- ④ Resurfaced access roads to reorganised parking areas
- ⑤ New & resurfaced pedestrian spaces
- ⑥ Widened pavements for pedestrian movement
- ⑦ Rain gardens
- ⑧ New tree planting
- ⑨ Potential relocated monument (Celtic cross)
- ⑩ Introduction of public art



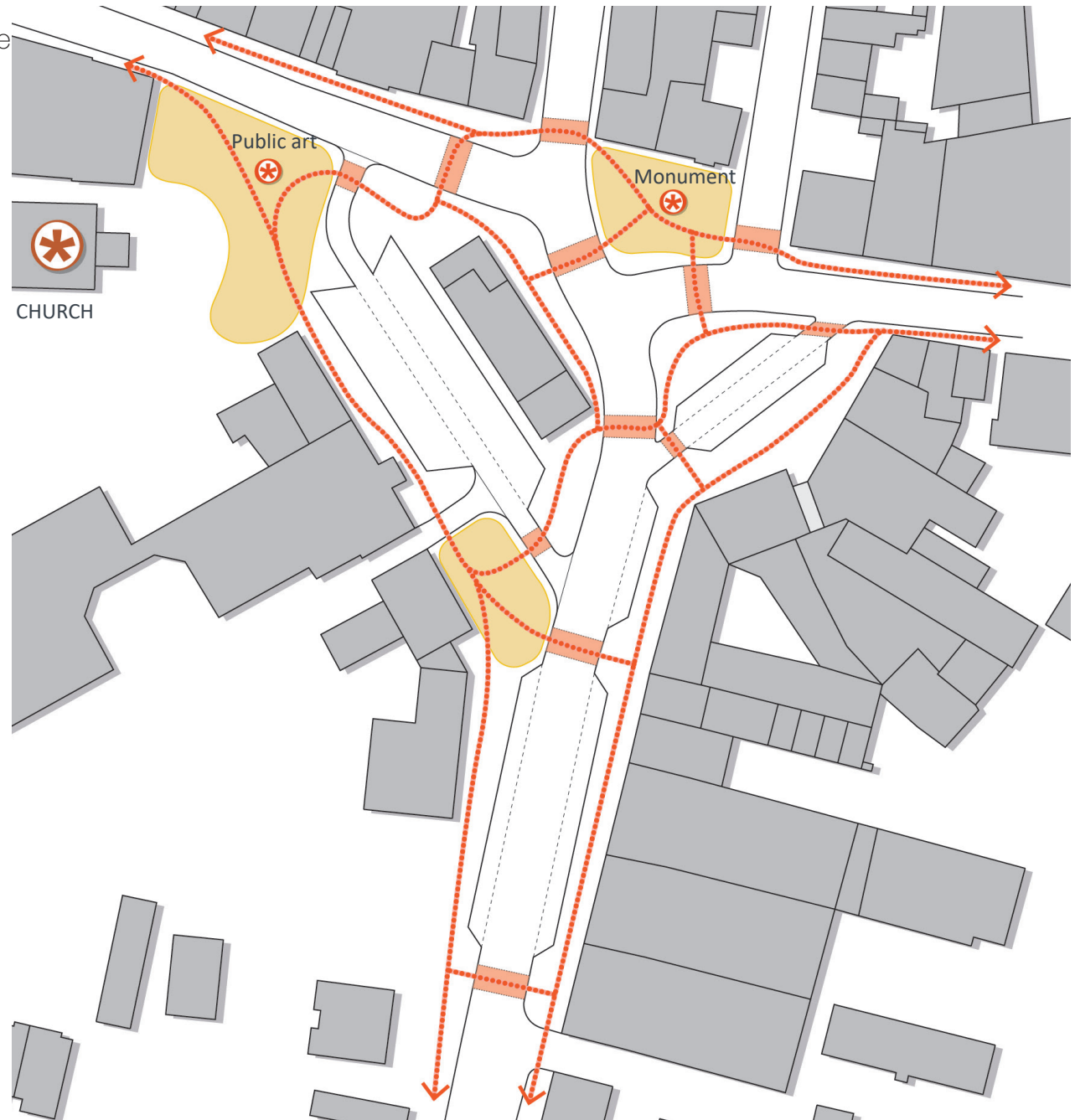
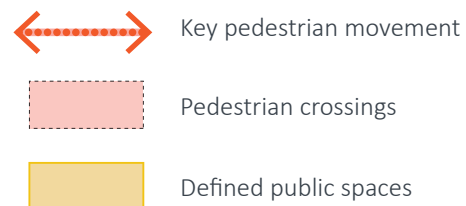
4.4 Pedestrian Movement and Public Open Space

The ease of pedestrian movement is key to the success of the town centre, regular crossing points will also reduce vehicular speeds

The adjacent diagram shows how the new layout responds to circulation patterns around the core town centre.

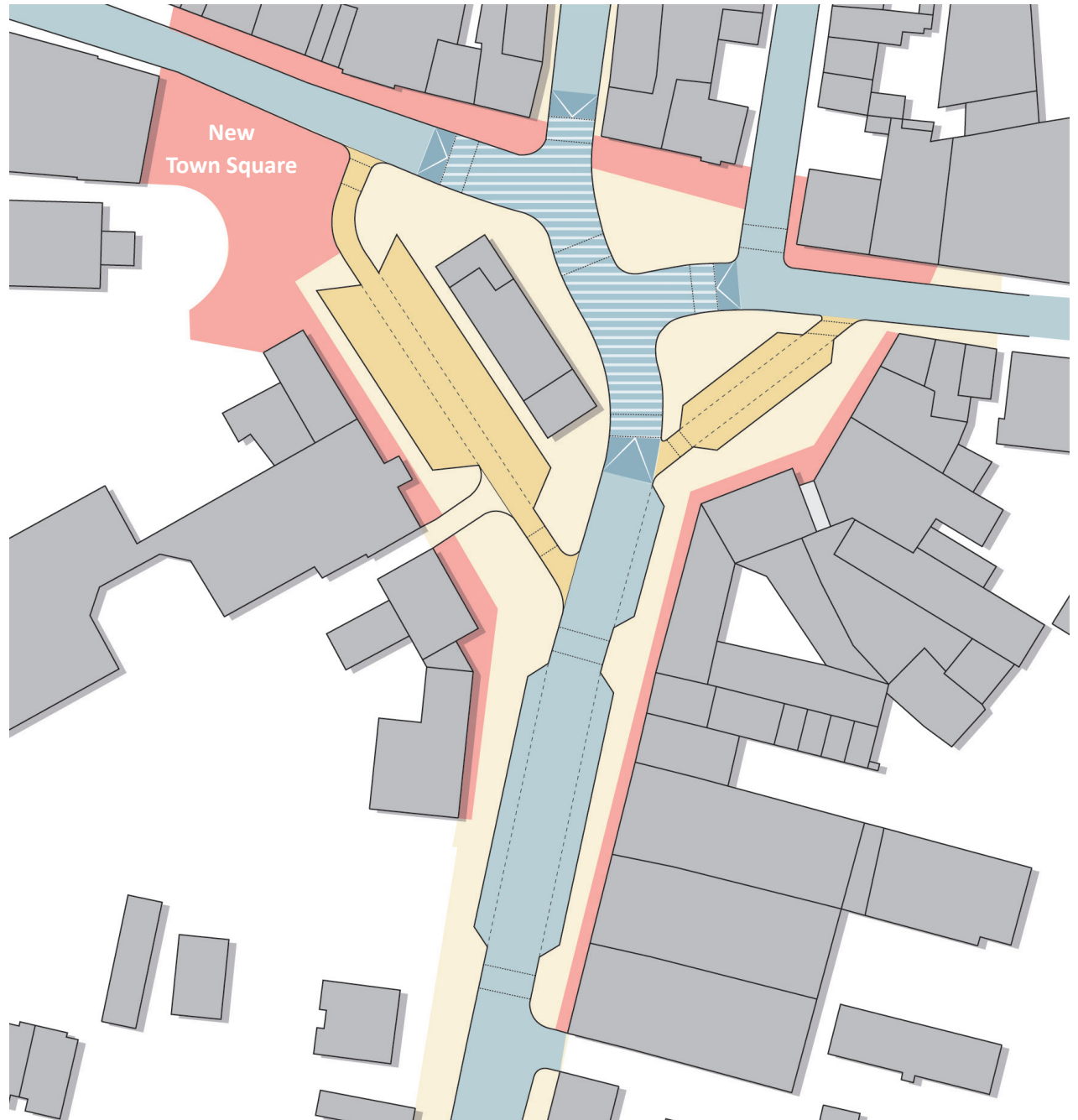
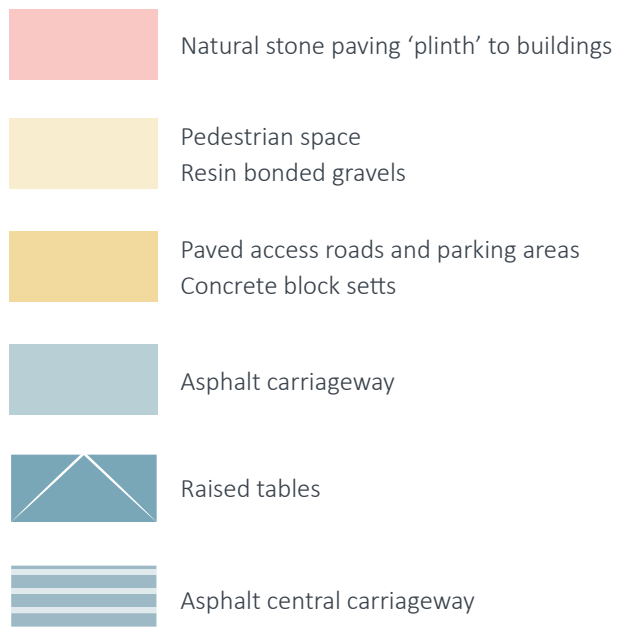
- The carriageway width has been narrowed to 7.3m to redefine the balance between vehicles and pedestrians
- Regular crossing points introduced to enhance circulation
- Some car parking spaces have been removed to ensure safe crossing points
- New public spaces have been defined to enhance identity and allow a more social town centre

In this plan we have proposed to move the Celtic Cross to a more prominent position. If it was decided to retain its current position we would recommend the removal of the vegetation and two parking spaces to ensure it is more prominent in the town centre.



4.5 Surfacing and Spaces Hierarchy

All paving should be of high quality and suitable to withstand the function of the area. Durability, lifespan and visual appreciation should all be considered when specifications are being determined.



4.6 Trees and Planting

The visual appearance and user experience of Oldcastle would be improved through the introduction of street trees and planting which provides seasonal variation and greenery.

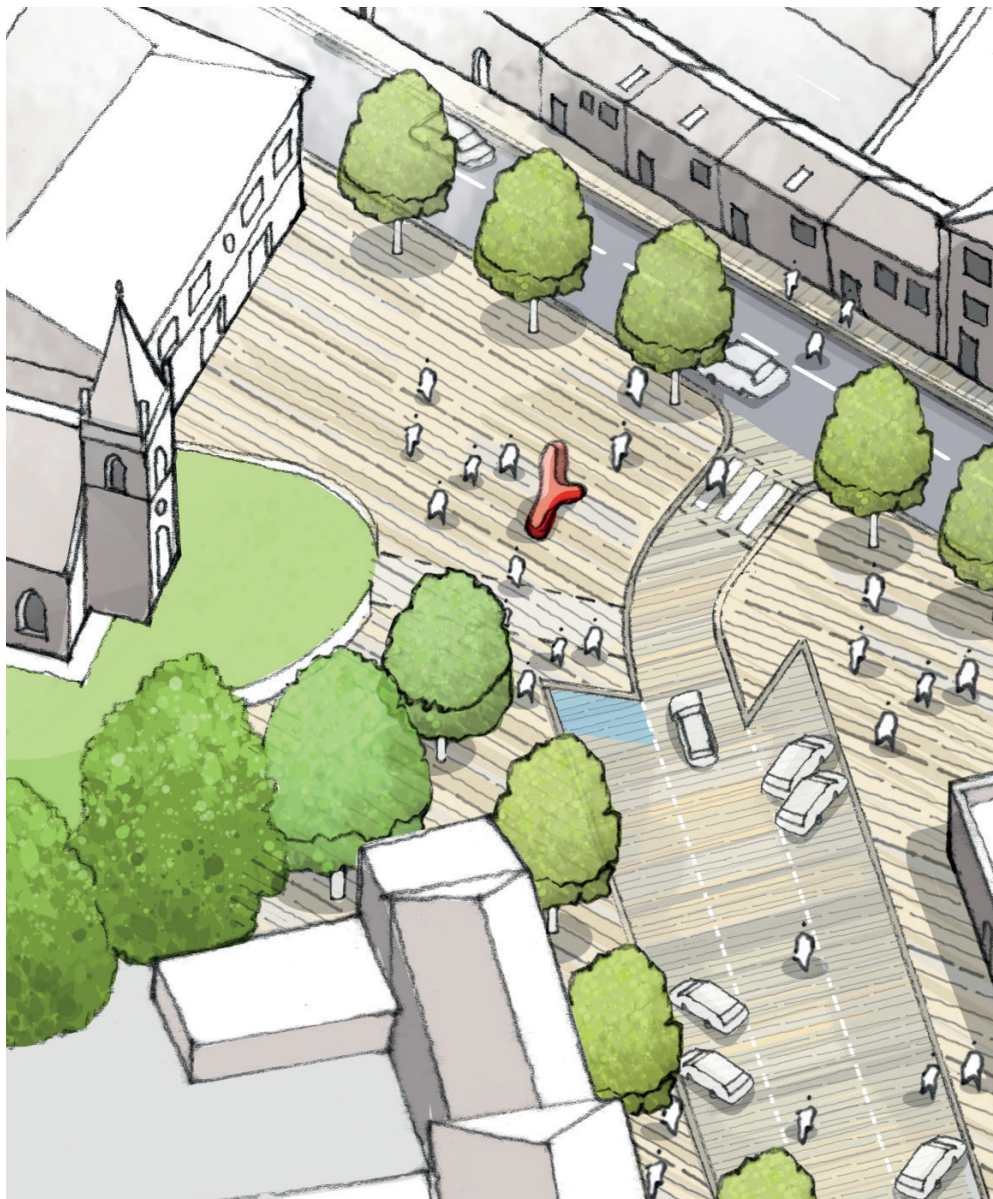
 Street trees



 Rain gardens



4.7 Bird's-eye View of Oldcastle





5.0

Appropriate Assessment

5.0 Appropriate Assessment

An Appropriate Assessment (Habitats Directive) Screening of the proposals has been undertaken by Meath County Council.

The report concludes:

'According to the guidance published by the NPWS (DoEHLG, 2009), Screening for Appropriate Assessment can either identify that a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) is not required where:

- 1. A project/proposal is directly related to the management of the site; or*
- 2. There is no potential for significant impacts affecting the Natura 2000 network*

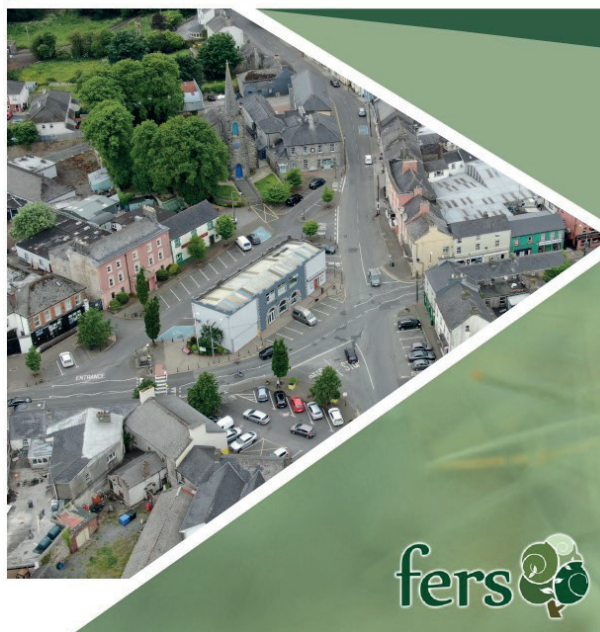
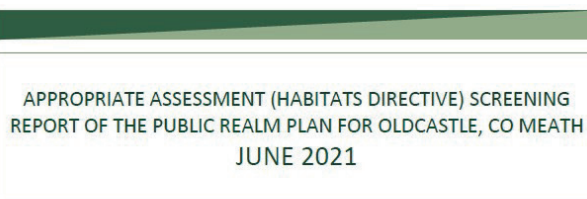
Where the screening process identifies that significant impacts are certain, likely or uncertain the project must either proceed to Stage II Appropriate Assessment or be rejected.

The potential impacts that will arise from the proposed Oldcastle Public Realm Plan have been examined in the context of a number of factors that could potentially impact upon the integrity of the Natura 2000 network. On the basis of the findings of this Screening for Appropriate Assessment, it is concluded that the proposed plan:

- 1. Is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a Natura 2000 site and*
- 2. Will not have any significant negative impacts on the Natura 2000 network.*

Following an examination, analysis and evaluation of the relevant information and the potential for significant effects on the conservation objectives of Natura 2000 sites, and applying the Precautionary Principle, it is, in the opinion of the author of this report, possible to exclude (on the basis of objective information and in the absence of specific prescribed precautionary/mitigation measures) that the proposed Oldcastle Public Realm Plan individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have any significant potential to have negative impacts on the Natura 2000 network.

Having identified no potential impacts of the proposed Oldcastle Public Realm Plan upon the Natura 2000 network, and in accordance with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is not required in this instance.



6.0

Conclusion and next steps

6.1 Conclusion and next steps

The process for every individual public realm project is complex and unique to each location. It is dependent on the site constraints, engagement, approvals and ease of change. These all need to be carefully considered with each and every proposed intervention.

This guide is a first step towards improving the public realm in Oldcastle, it needs to be embraced and followed to encourage positive change in the town centre.

The key steps are as follows:

- **Programme:** It is suggested that a five-year programme is put in place to ensure momentum and achieve the overall goal of making improvements to the public realm in the town centre. This should identify the process and identify tasks against target dates.
- **Identify sources of funding:** Project Ireland is a clear source of funding which supports ambitious and strategic projects which contribute to sustainable rural regeneration and development. Other sources will include Failte Ireland and The Heritage Council.
- **Ongoing review of change in line with the Public Realm Plan:** The public realm plan provides a guide to all interventions within the public realm for both the Council and 3rd parties. All changes should be reviewed to ensure they are in line with the aspirations.
- **Design:** It is fundamental that all public realm schemes are design-led with integrated engineering, not the reverse. Design quality must be paramount and suitable consultants must be procured from inception.
- **Delivery:** The process of delivering public realm is complex and involves many stakeholders. Schemes need to be budgeted properly, resourced by an experienced team and delivered to specification.



7.0 Appendix

7.1 What People Have Told Us

7.1 What People Have Told Us - Stakeholder Consultation - 19th March 2019

Attendees

Local Traders
Local Community Representatives
Local Councillors
Local Residents

Who uses the town?

Tourists

- Oldcastle is a megalithic centre
- Tourists coming and going from Loughcrew Megalithic Site
- International Tourists

Families

- More families should be using the town
- There can be a race between the primary and secondary schools during rush hour.
- Buses should pull into schools to avoid accidents – this would avoid the risk of kids running out in traffic

Businesses

- Long term parking is an issue in the town. Paid parking is not the answer “ruins towns”.
- Make spaces available
- Restrictions should be brought in – for example 2hr max stays
- Long term parking needs to be addressed
- Spaces should be made available for users and not staff
- There is a lack of off-street parking
- Avoid having people move cars during the day (no to 2hr restrictions?)
- Parking 5 mins away from town centre raises the issue of security for the car owners. Vandalism is a big problem where some people may park at the playground / GAA club.
- There is a lot of anti-social behaviour at recycling centre – CCTV needed here
- People drive in the town even when they don't need to
- People want to park as close as possible to where they need to be
- Options for parking are needed
- Are there other places where this has worked?
- Heavy traffic flow through the town is a big issue
- Employees should park on the edge of town
- Turnover would increase with parking restrictions

Gap Analysis Discussion and Additional Comments

Quality of footpaths –

Pedestrian crossings –

- Very poor
- BDP should influence where they go in future
- How roads meet in the centre of the town and pedestrian crossings should be addressed – the junction is “madness”. Visibility is poor when travelling west to east. There has been a couple of crashes here in the past.
- Crossing options for main cross roads:
 1. Keeps as is with wide carriageway
 2. Signalised
 3. Roundabout
- Need to slow traffic without it stopping in the centre
- Crossroad with traffic lights is another option
- Keep movement and slow traffic at crossings
- Cavan St. back logs may happen
 - o Shifts and schools finish at the same time
 - o Issues with speeding in the town are prevalent
- Last Traffic Management Plan was carried out 20 years ago
 - o Stop signs still on east west axis
 - o Cavan Street approach is like a “race track”
- The slowing of traffic needs to happen further outside the town

Street furniture –

- Problems with bins
 - o There is a lack of collection
 - o Attracting household rubbish
 - o There should be no bins in the town
- Benches – existing are in need of maintenance
- An official town square is needed

Trees and green –

- Cavan Street lacking in trees
- There could be more trees overall throughout the town
- Trees and greenery is very important
- If the location is correct, the number of trees should be increased
- Tidy towns are active with planting
- Broken glass can be an issue in the town, particularly outside pubs

- Overgrown vegetation can lead to issues with light

Play provision –

- Playground is in the wrong location, needs to be more central
- The playground is not used as it is out of the way
- GAA club should be given lease, needs life

Ecology and diversity

- Good
- Room for improvement
- Parish Gardens and Primrose Walk are good examples.

Ease of finding a parking space

- Overall difficult to find a space in Oldcastle
- Can more spots be created?
- Can we add more outside auctioneers?

Cycling

- No kids cycle to school
- Cycle stands should be introduced / more places to park bikes
- There is a low provision for cycling currently

Public Transport

- The bus route is ‘ridiculous’ – 3hrs to Dublin
- A better service is needed
- Shuttle service to Kells should be brought back
- When the bus stops it holds people up on the square. The bus stop should be better located
- A new bus route is needed on the way to Kells
- There should be a Castlepollard shuttle bus

Off-street Parking

- More needed

Traffic

- Pedestrians will ease traffic

Disabled Bays

- Well provided for
- Not enforced enough – indiscriminate use of disabled bays
- Drop kerbs are needed

Importance to Reuse derelict sites

- Cavan St. (right hand side) side should be looked at
- Site near the playground (now burnt out)
- Derelict sites should be reused as car parking

Heritage and Interpretation

- Plans for new cultural heritage centre
- Heritage signs needed
- Access to Loughcrew Cairns should be highlighted for tourists – this is lacking generally
- Rich in heritage
- Not enough maps of the area

Tourism

- The town is stunning
- Accessible for tourists from Dublin
- There is a need to get outsiders in

Events

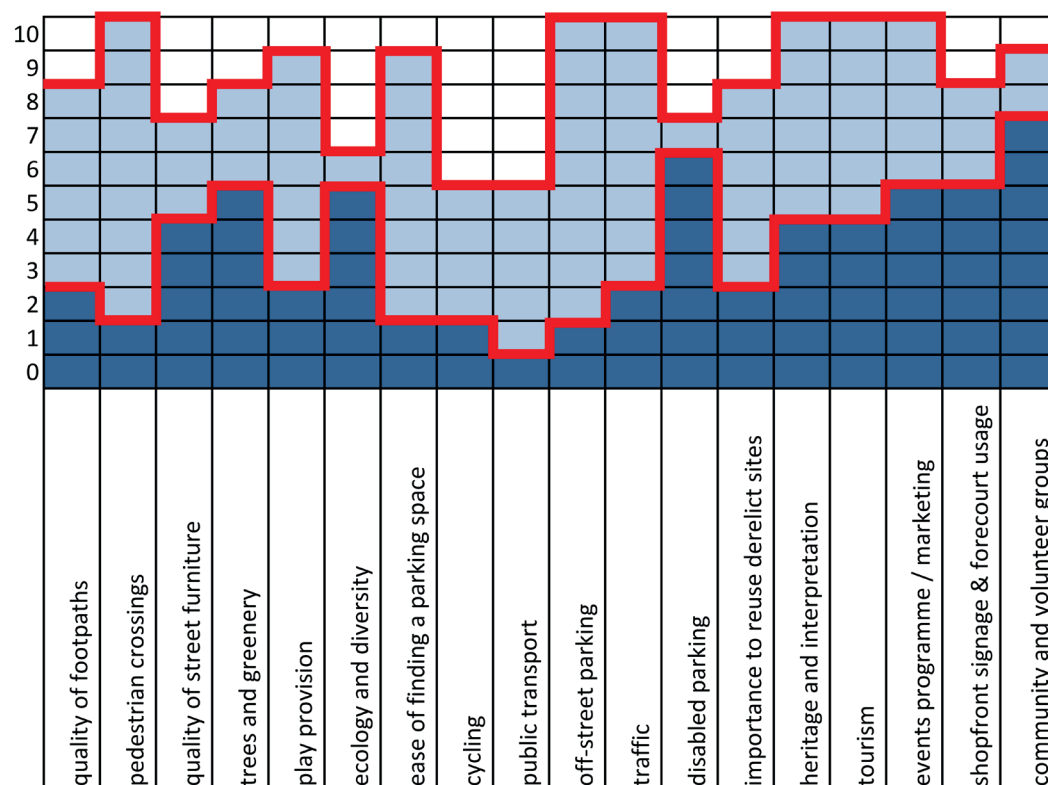
- Local cycling club – Oldcastle is a cycling destination with great surrounding roads and scenery. Oldcastle can be a base for cycling events
- Sportive community
- GAA Club, Soccer Club
- Coordination should be bigger and better
- 50 mile walk
- Everyone who comes for the vents enjoys and comments on the scenery
- There should be more events

Shopfront signage / forecourt usage

- Nice shopfronts on show
- Building in the middle
 - Privately owned
 - Used to be market house and old school
 - Should explore possibility to go back to original
- Forecourts – cafés turned off this due to licensing

Community and Volunteer Groups

- Without these there would be nothing in Oldcastle
- 14-18yo age group has nothing to do.
 - Street lighting
- More needed
- Overhead wires – cabling should be ran underground
 - Information points are needed
 - The town could benefit from a market
 - Outdoor gym equipment should be considered



Gap Analysis Results

Vision Statement

- Visitor centre should be added to boost tourism
- The town should be a base for tourists – they should come to walk and shop
- Explore opportunity for a walkway to Loughcrew
- Is it possible to get to the mountain when walking from Oldcastle

Objectives

- Footpaths should be improved
- Parking should be addressed
- Forecourt usage should not be a primary objective
- A line should be added on heritage and tourism

7.1 What People Have Told Us - Draft Display of Plan - 11th March to 29th of May 2020

Meath County Council placed the Draft Laytown and Bettystown Public Realm Plan on public display online at consult.meath.ie. The draft plan was on display between the 5th of February 2020 and 4th of March 2020. Four submissions were received and reviewed by the council before completing the plan in May 2021.

For more about this event and to view the submissions received, visit:
<https://consult.meath.ie/en/consultation/draft-oldcastle-public-realm-plan-2020>

BDP.

Blackhall Green,
Stoneybatter,
Dublin,
D07 V0RF,
Ireland