

An aerial photograph of Ballymena town, showing a dense network of streets and buildings. The town is situated on a peninsula, with the sea visible to the west. The map is oriented with North at the top.

BALLYMENA TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN

DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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DTZ Consulting
JMP Consulting
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Alastair Coey Architects
Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork
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for the
Department for Social Development
April 2009

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1.0

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Ballymena Town Centre Masterplan was commissioned by the Department for Social Development in February 2008, in close cooperation with Ballymena Borough Council and Ballymena Town Centre Partnership.

The Department required a comprehensive masterplan for the Town Centre to target the renewal and revitalisation of run down areas whilst giving context to several previously identified development opportunities. Its aim was to identify how the full regeneration potential of the Town Centre area could be realised and provide a basis on which DSD could use its regeneration powers, if necessary, to ensure the best possible delivery of this potential. The Masterplan was required to cover all physical, social and economic aspects of Town Centre regeneration.

The study area is broadly defined as the Town Centre land bounded by the Braid River to the East and South and by the Link Roads to the West and North. However, the need for a masterplan that adequately considered contextual relationships required this boundary to be viewed as fluid.

1.2 Masterplan Team

The masterplan team was led by Urban Designers and Landscape Architects, The Paul Hogarth Company. The team comprehensively brought together a range of disciplines to appropriately address the complexity of issues relevant to Ballymena. The team members and their areas of expertise are detailed below.

Masterplan Consultant Team

The Paul Hogarth Company	Team Leader, Masterplanning, Urban Design, Landscape Architecture
DTZ Consulting	Planning, Retail, Tourism, Leisure
JMP Consulting	Transport Planning, Transport Engineering
CB Richard Ellis	Property
Cleaver Fulton Rankin	Legal
White Young Green	Cost Consultant
Alastair Coey Architects	Conservation
Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork	Archaeology
Pricewaterhouse Coopers	Economics

1.3 Methodology

The process of producing this Masterplan was carried out via a number of phases. First, desktop research was undertaken to establish an understanding of the history and geography, existing planning policy, transport policy, economic trends and property markets in Ballymena. Then, site survey work was undertaken to study the physical conditions in Ballymena. Site survey work is a crucial part of masterplanning as it generates a great deal of valuable information on the physical conditions of the town. From this survey, a variety of analysis drawings were prepared which illustrate the built form, land use, opportunity and development sites, landmarks and key features, circulation and open green spaces in Ballymena. Alongside this, key stakeholders were consulted to gain a fuller understanding of issues in Ballymena (see Appendix A “List of Consultees”).

After the analysis work, a Vision and set of Aims and Objectives for Ballymena were formulated. These take the issues highlighted during the analysis phase and develop them into goals that should be achieved by the Masterplan. To form a basis for design, an over-arching Concept Plan was established to spatially articulate the goals.

Having the specific goals in mind, design work was undertaken as a two-way, iterative process between the consultant team, the client, and stakeholders.

Finally, the Masterplan underwent a period of public consultation before this document was completed.



Shoppers on Ballymoney Street



The Courthouse on Ballymoney Road



Memorial Park on Galgorm Road

The following section outlines the findings of the analysis process undertaken to inform the development of a Masterplan for Ballymena Town Centre. It is vital that an accurate picture of how the Town Centre both looks and functions is developed to enable the identification of issues and opportunities.

2.1 History and Geography

The “City of Seven Towers”, as Ballymena has come to be known, has been inhabited since prehistoric times. However, most archaeological evidence in the area dates from the early Christian/ early Medieval period (c. 400-1200 A.D.) The name Ballymena derives from the Gaelic meaning “townland in the middle of the ford”, as the town was settled on a gentle slope from the north bank of the Braid River. In 1630, Sir Robert Adair, the owner of the Ballymena estate, was appointed High Sheriff of County Antrim. He built a castle on the hill at the east end of Castle Street, since demolished.

Before the 19th century, little was recorded about the village of Ballymena in the Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland. However, industrialisation soon spurred Ballymena’s growth in population and status. During this period, the town accumulated seven towers that led to its nickname. These were the Old Town Hall, the Braidwater Mill, St. Patrick’s church, Ballymena Castle, First Ballymena Presbyterian Church, Old Parish Church, and All Saint’s Catholic Church. Only two towers remain, Church Tower (of the Old Parish Church) and St. Patrick’s Church tower.

Forty-seven Industrial Heritage Record sites exist within a 4km radius of the Town Centre. Some are associated with the defunct Ballymena-Larne narrow-gauge track and road bridges, though most are related to textile production: flax mills, scotching mills, beetling mills, and weaving/spinning mills. Some of this textile production was also carried out in people’s homes.

Today, Ballymena is most well known as a regional shopping destination. This reputation started perhaps as early as the 1800’s when the Ordnance Survey Memoirs stated, “the shops are very numerous, the main streets being crowded with them, many of them are very good and afford all the necessities and most of the luxuries of life.” Even today, people travel significant distances to shop in Ballymena. Ballymena has grown in regional importance as a public sector and manufacturing hub that employs a significant part of the local population. Due to Ballymena’s regional importance, a variety of studies and policies have been undertaken in order to ensure the success of its Town Centre.

See Appendix C: “Conservation Assessment” and Appendix D: “Archaeological Consultative Report” for more information.



Historic photograph of Bridge Street.



Braidwater Mill in the 1950s.

2.2 Policy & Planning

Ballymena's growth and progress is guided by several key planning policy documents. The aim of these documents is to inform and guide development to the most appropriate locations in the Town Centre. They also provide a framework to direct investment by public and private sectors and help harness additional resources through collaboration in tackling problems.

Key regional and local planning documents affecting Ballymena are summarised below.

Regional Development Strategy (RDS) for Northern Ireland 2025: The RDS identifies Ballymena as a Main Hub on a key transport corridor with a well-established sub-regional role. Towns such as Ballymena are predicted to experience greater future growth than others within their sub-regions. This is a reflection on their roles as driving engines of economic activity. The RDS also identifies the need for 5,900 new dwellings within the Ballymena sub-region until 2015. Further revisions have highlighted increasing housing demands across the province.

Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland (DOE, 1993): The Strategy establishes the objectives and policies for land use and development appropriate to the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland and which need to be considered on a scale wider than the individual District Council Area.

Draft Planning Policy Statement 5 Retailing and Town Centres (July, 2006): Recognising Town Centres as the best location for retail, office, leisure and related uses, this document seeks to maintain healthy Town Centres. Its goals are to enhance the vitality and viability of Town Centres, focus development in areas that maximise the benefits for all consumers, and enhance the opportunity to use sustainable transport.

Ballymena Area Local Plan 1996-2001: The Plan recognises the need to encourage growth in compact forms and encourages closer integration of land use and transport in order to reduce the need to travel.

Moreover, the Plan promotes a physical review of the Town Centre, the opportunity to redevelop Alexander Street, and a proposal for a major peripheral route to bypass the town. Another important aspect of this Plan is its emphasis on promoting Ballymena's status as a Main Hub (as per the RDS), a designation that has implications in several areas including transport.

Antrim, Ballymena & Larne Area Plan 2016 (Issues Paper): The Area Plan is currently at pre-draft publication stage. It will play a major role in guiding future development over the Plan period. The Area Plan, when adopted, will supersede the current Ballymena Area Local Plan, which was adopted in 1989. The Plan identifies an Area of Townscape Character at Galgorm Road/ Old Galgorm Road. Ballymena Town Centre is recognised as an important retail, housing, office, general service, and tourism centre. It is expected that the Area Plan will allocate the Ballymena Borough Housing Growth Indicator (5900 units) between the District Town, villages, small settlements and open countryside of the Borough according to the concentration of major housing developments in sustainable locations. The Plan is likely to encourage mixed-use developments including more housing in Town Centres to maximise links with existing infrastructure and maintain compact centres.

Ballymena District Housing Plan 2007-08: This Plan is a strategic document identifying the principles by which future housing in the district should develop. Affordability of homes in Ballymena is identified as a significant problem, especially for first-time buyers. The Plan also notes a surging demand for Northern Ireland Housing Executive operated housing.

As part of the masterplan consultation process Planning Service noted the recent influx of multi-national retailers in Ballymena which is affecting the diversity of retailing in the town. A crucial part of the town's attraction is its retail diversity and efforts should be made to retain and protect this.

See Appendix E: "Planning Policy Position" for more information.

2.0 ANALYSIS: BALLYMENA TODAY

2.3 Transportation

Ballymena's status as a Main Hub reflects the important role the town provides relating to employment and services for the wider area. Households in Ballymena have car ownership characteristics broadly comparable with the average Northern Ireland ownership levels. In Ballymena, a significantly higher percentage of people than average travel less than 5km to work throughout Northern Ireland. This shows the importance of Ballymena as the focus of employment and services and the opportunity to ensure that shorter distance trips are undertaken by modes other than car. However, it should be noted that a significant percentage of people also travel 10km or more to work, which is at the limit where cycling could be considered a viable alternative.

Walking

Pedestrian movements within the Town Centre are high and are particularly concentrated within the retail core area which includes Church Street and Wellington Street. School pupils also form a significant pedestrian presence in the vicinity of North Road after the end of a school day. While the majority of the existing residential areas located on the periphery of the Town Centre are well within an acceptable 1km walk distance of the Town Centre and its associated amenities, the existing pedestrian links between the residential areas and the Town Centre and within the Town Centre itself vary in standard, convenience and environmental quality. In addition, signage for pedestrians to and from existing Town Centre attractions is relatively poor and confusing in some locations, while Town Centre footways suffer from obstructions such as advertising signage. All of these factors provide barriers to walking. Therefore, it is right that the Sub-Regional Transport Plan (SRTP) Walking Blueprint recognises the need to improve the overall quality of the key pedestrian links into and around the Town Centre.

Pedestrian crossing facilities are currently provided on the main links around the Town Centre and within the Town Centre on certain streets.

However, on the busier Town Centre streets such as Church Street and Wellington Street where pedestrian concentrations are highest, pedestrians cross at undesignated areas. It is therefore important that any new facilities to serve potential development opportunities in Ballymena reflect pedestrian desire lines linking all trip attractions.

Cycling

Ballymena has a limited number of cycle paths. Currently, the National Cycle Network supports a short route to the north of the town while a further route passes through the northeast of the town between Broughshane Road and the Larne Road Link. A shared pedestrian cycle route has also been provided along a section of the A26 Larne Road along with the provision of a Toucan crossing.

However, the above routes do not provide direct linkage to the Town Centre and local centres of employment while the provision of cycling facilities within the Town Centre, such as cycle parking, is poor.

The majority of the resident population of Ballymena is located within an acceptable 4km cycle distance of the Town Centre, its associated amenities and employment opportunities. However, the lack of good quality cycle links to the Town Centre and lack of facilities within the Town Centre is reflected by only 1% of commuter based trips currently being made by cycling.

The SRTP Cycle Blueprint recognises the need to extend the existing cycle network to the northeast of the town. However, better cycle linkage into the Town Centre to local amenities and potential development opportunities, along with the provision of better Town Centre cycle facilities, will also be required if cycling is to be promoted as a viable alternative mode of travel to the private car.

Public Transport

Ballymena is currently served by a combined bus and rail station with an associated Park & Ride facility. The bus and rail station is accessed directly from Galgorm Road while the Park & Ride facility is accessed via Princes Street.

Ballymena bus and rail station is located around 500m to the southwest of the Town Centre boundary and provides access to local and strategic bus services. The Park & Ride facility at this station is very successful.

There are currently four local bus routes in operation in Ballymena with a 30 minute frequency providing reasonably good public transport access to the Town Centre from the outlying residential areas along with linkage to local health, education and leisure based amenities. While these routes connect with the main bus and rail station, additional bus stop facilities are focussed in the Town Centre at the Pentagon and Wellington Street.

Despite the availability of local and strategic bus services, mode share figures for Ballymena would indicate that only 3% of commuter based trips are currently made by bus compared to 6% for Northern Ireland as a whole. It is right, therefore, that the SRTP recognises the need to improve local bus services and improve walk and cycle links to existing public transport facilities. In this regard, improvements have been implemented such as a full bus boarder with raised kerbs on Wellington Street and improved facilities on George Street. Similarly, potential development opportunities must be accessible by public transport while public transport remains a key function of areas such as the Pentagon.

Car

Ballymena is currently served by a network of local roads which connect to the Parkway and North Road traffic distributor route that circulates the Town Centre to the west. This traffic distributor route links Ballymena, via the Larne Road Link, to the wider strategic road network in the form of the M2 motorway. Some key junctions on the local road network such as North Road/Galgorm Road and Bridge Street/Larne Road Link are known to experience congestion related problems during the commuter peak periods when around 76% of commuter based trips are made by car.

Parkway and North Road are designed to a significantly higher standard than the rest of the local road network. However, one traffic issue is the amount of traffic routing from the north that uses Church Street in preference to using the Parkway/North Road route. Consequently, Church Street experiences traffic flows of around 9,000 vehicles per day. In turn, this puts significant pressure on the Town Centre circulatory system and creates a less attractive Town Centre environment for more vulnerable road users.

Due to the complexity and inflexibility of the Town Centre circulatory system, particularly the North Road, the Pentagon junction and Linenhall Street, potential traffic management measures will require a detailed traffic study and modeling exercise for this potentially traffic sensitive and key area of the Town Centre. While North Road currently acts as a barrier between the Town Centre and adjacent neighborhoods, a detailed traffic study would help to identify measures aimed at providing better connections and a more pleasant environment for the North Road.

2.0 ANALYSIS: BALLYMENA TODAY

The SRTP Highway Blueprint reflects the committed M2 Link Ballee Road East to Ballymena Bypass Dualling Scheme as detailed in the Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan (RSTN) and envisaged to commence in 2009/10. The SRTP Highway Blueprint also identifies a proposed south-west distributor road between Ballee Road West and Parkway at the Greenmount Roundabout. However, there would appear to be no timescale currently set in relation to this particular scheme. It is envisaged that these schemes will provide some relief to the more congested key areas of the Town Centre including North Road, contributing towards a more pleasant environment in this area.

There is currently a lack of fixed signage when entering Ballymena on key routes that would help drivers to take the most appropriate route into the Town Centre. Car parks are significant attractors of cars. While a VMS signing strategy is partially in place on North Road, VMS signing is not provided on all of the key traffic routes into Ballymena at locations where drivers are required to make a route choice in relation to finding available parking opportunities. Additional fixed and VMS signing at appropriate locations would, in the short term, help to better manage the movement of traffic within the Town Centre and potentially help to create a more pleasant Town Centre environment.

Vehicles coming into the Town Centre park either on street or use one of the centrally located off-street car parks. While on-street parking is free, it is subject to time restrictions that are stringently enforced through a high presence of traffic attendants operating in the Town Centre and edge of centre. This provides a clear message to drivers in terms of appropriate locations for short and longer term parking.

See Appendix F: “Transport Policy and Context” for more information.

2.4 Economics

Ballymena and the regional economy are likely to face slower growth in the short term, given the status of the global economy. However, over the medium to long term, there are a number of sectors that are likely to experience growth. Meanwhile, more traditional sectors such as Agriculture and Manufacturing are expected to continue in a downward trend in terms of employment. Current and potential future economic trends have a number of implications for Ballymena:

- Ballymena has traditionally been the primary retail centre in County Antrim, and this is likely to be maintained. However, consideration must be given to the increased investment being made in other nearby centres such as Belfast, Antrim, Coleraine and Larne, which is likely to result in a competitive effect on Ballymena Town Centre.
- Although underrepresented in public sector employment in relation to the Northern Ireland average, there is a significant concentration of public sector jobs in Ballymena’s County Hall. These traditionally high paid jobs are important for the economy and the health of the town centre.
- There is a need for office space to capitalise on the knowledge economy and growth sectors of finance and business.
- These growth sectors require a highly skilled pool of labour.
- There is a need for entertainment facilities and a sophisticated retail offering to retain local activity and encourage shoppers from further afield.
- Given the focus on tourism at a regional level, and growth in visitors at a local level, Ballymena needs to ensure its tourism offer is adequate to attract visitors and encourage them to stay in the centre. Development of the hotels and restaurant sector can help achieve this and further strengthen the evening economy.

Ballymena, like every town, is subject to local, national, and global economic trends that affect its physical character. Economic factors have effects that are felt in a variety of direct and indirect ways.

See Appendix G: “Economic Context: Ballymena” for more information.

2.5 Property

Market demands for property are closely tied to economic factors such as those described earlier. Demands for retail, office, and hotel space vary according to current local and regional pressures.

Relative to other provincial towns of comparable population, Ballymena has a strong retail sector, a larger supply of retail space, more multi-national retailers, and strong rents. The town boasts 2 shopping centres and c. 0.7 miles of prime and secondary high street retail. Nevertheless, there is also a strong developer/ investor market in Ballymena which could, if not controlled, lead to an over supply of retail space. There is currently an excess of 50,000 sq. ft. (4,645 sq. m.) of retail space immediately available in the Town Centre. The Masterplan has highlighted the need for a full retail capacity study to be undertaken in order to make accurately informed decisions on the extent and timing of future retail development.

By contrast to the healthy day time retail activity, the town has a limited evening economy with no significant multiple restaurateurs and few successful independent establishments. The limited Town Centre public houses that exist currently tend to serve the same market segment, leaving very few Town Centre attractions of relevance to others. Opportunities exist to capitalise on the activities of the Braid Arts Centre, with cafes and restaurants, thus diversifying the evening economy. Operators within this market generally prefer to trade in close proximity of competitors and other leisure uses as this creates a more sustainable evening economy, consequently development or refurbishment of several premises may be required to attract such uses.

The hotel market is emerging after 30 years of stagnation and consequently there is a large amount of unmet demand in Belfast city centre. For this reason, there are no active hotel requirements for Ballymena as major hoteliers focus on acquiring Belfast city centre property.

Nevertheless, consultation and market analysis suggests there is consumer demand for further hotel facilities, namely competitively priced hotel rooms, function and conference rooms. Furthermore, additional hotel accommodation in Ballymena could help expose the economic benefits of tourism that may otherwise not be experienced.

Demand for office space would be primarily a localised market with few large space requirements the majority of demand would come from local professional firms and service providers. In consultation meetings, small business owners in Ballymena have pointed out a lack of small office units. The Workplace 2010 scheme is also changing office space demands. There are significant buildings involved in the Workplace 2010 scheme such as Ballymena County Hall, Freehold, and Ballymena SSO Twickenham House.

See Appendix H: “Brief Market Summary” for more information.



Shoppers on Greenvale Street

2.0

ANALYSIS: BALLYMENA TODAY

2.6 Physical Characteristics

History, policy, transport, economics, and the property market have all impacted the physical form of Ballymena. The Ballymena we see and enjoy today has been shaped by these factors and other issues. The following analysis drawings and descriptions consolidate the site survey work and articulate the present physical conditions of Ballymena Town Centre.

2.6.1 Built Form

Ballymena has a compact Town Centre and this should be recognised as an important asset for the town as a whole. Its tightly knit streetscape, characterised by continuous active street frontages, helps to make the Town Centre easily traversed on foot and therefore well suited to pedestrian based retail activity.

However, large floor-plate buildings nearby, such as those along the Braid River that are designed for car based retail activity, contrast radically in style and character to the historic Town Centre. The result is a poorer quality urban environment less suited to pedestrians.

A less positive aspect of such compact built form is the lack of civic or open spaces, with little opportunity for events and informal gathering in the Town Centre.

Large open spaces in Ballymena's built form occur mostly around the ECOS Centre and the floodplains associated with the Braid River, as well as school grounds. Ballymena's suburbs extend outwards from the centre, along major roads.



Entrance to Lower Centre on Wellington Street which houses multi-national shops



View of smaller independent shops on Wellington Street showing a densely built streetscape



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BUILT FORM

2.0

ANALYSIS: BALLYMENA TODAY

2.6.2 Land Use

Undoubtedly, the single most prevalent land use in the Town Centre is retail. The type of retail units is diverse, providing a healthy mix of multi-national stores and independent shops. Retail extends to the Braid River with large multi-national stores and their car parks. However, this development has limited the capacity to create potentially valuable river frontage.

Other uses are sprinkled throughout the Town Centre, though some sectors are under-represented, especially residential but also offices, recreation, leisure, and community uses. The main cluster of community uses exists southeast of the Town Centre around Trostan Avenue. In this area, there are several churches (including the landmark St. Patrick's Church), the North East Institute of Higher Education, the County Library, Seven Towers Leisure Centre, and a Nursery School. There is a potential for this community area to link to the new Braid Arts Centre nearby.



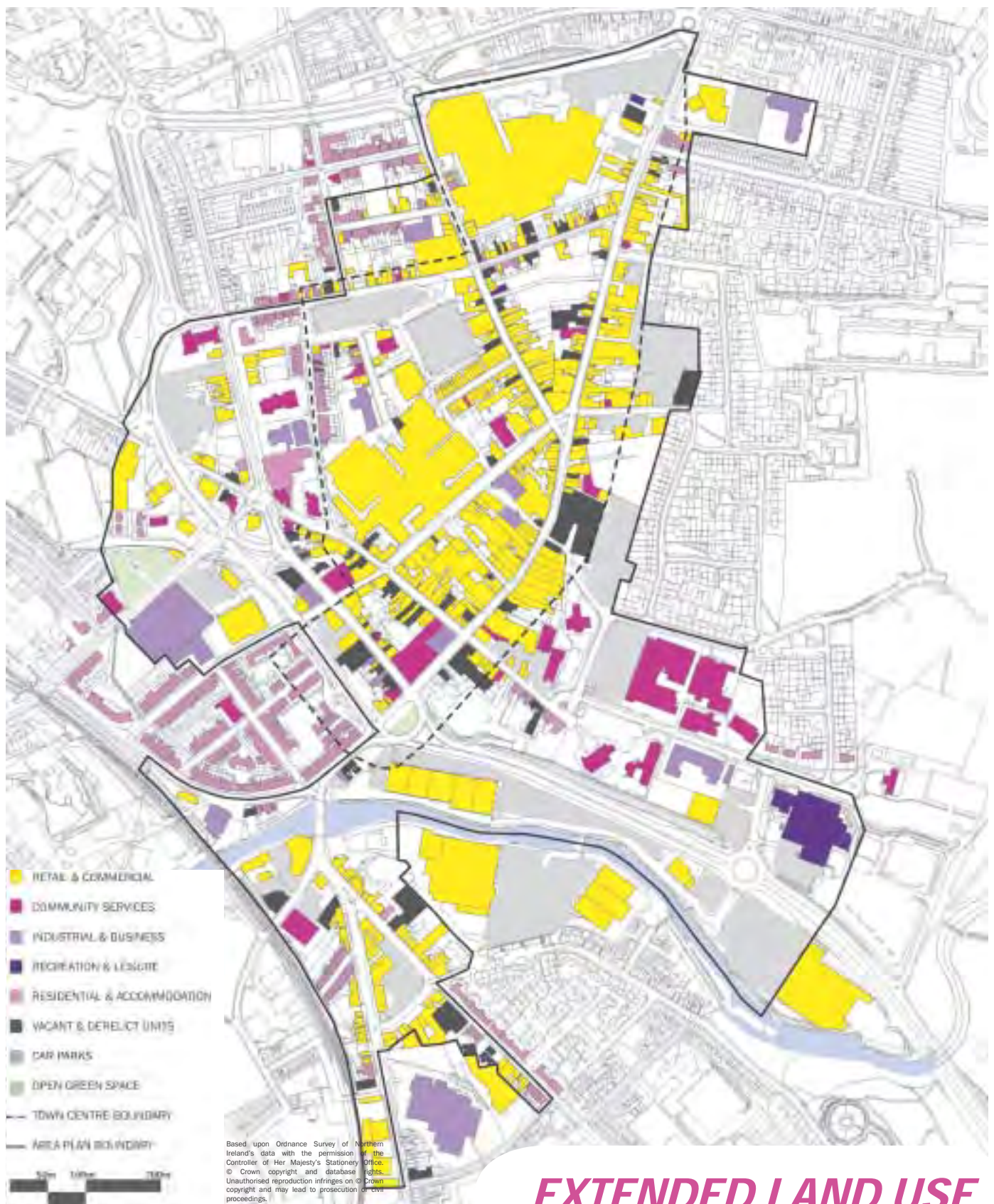
Independent shops on Greenvale Street



Offices on Ballymoney Road



Residential uses just off Town Centre



2.0

ANALYSIS: BALLYMENA TODAY



Shops on Ballymoney Street



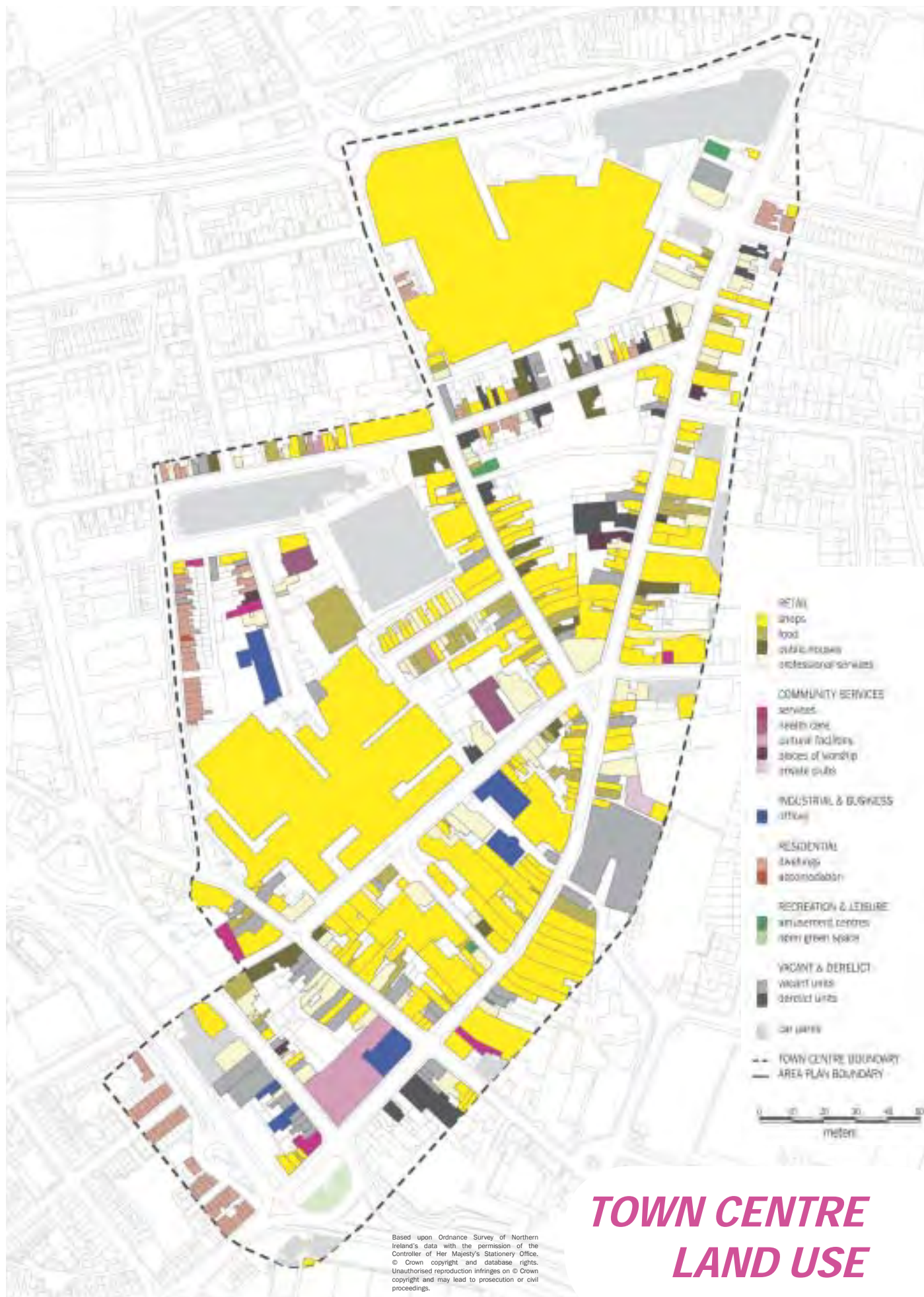
Independent shop on Lower Mill Street



Large multi-national retail at Fairhill Shopping Centre



Public house on Broughshane Street



2.0

ANALYSIS: BALLYMENA TODAY

2.6.3 Opportunity & Development Sites

The Town Centre contains several sizable sites with potential for development, specifically the Alexander Street site, the area around the Wellington Street Presbyterian Church, the former Tesco store and car park south of Church Tower, the derelict properties and adjacent car park in front of the Braid Arts Centre, the Northern Regional College Trostan Avenue Building site, the PSNI site, the Fire Station and St. Patrick's Barracks.

To underpin economic activity and the distinctiveness of the town, there is an urgency to develop better streetscapes and public realm within the Town Centre. Additionally, there is a potential to develop riverside frontage, as the Braid River is currently an unexploited, if not neglected, asset to Ballymena.

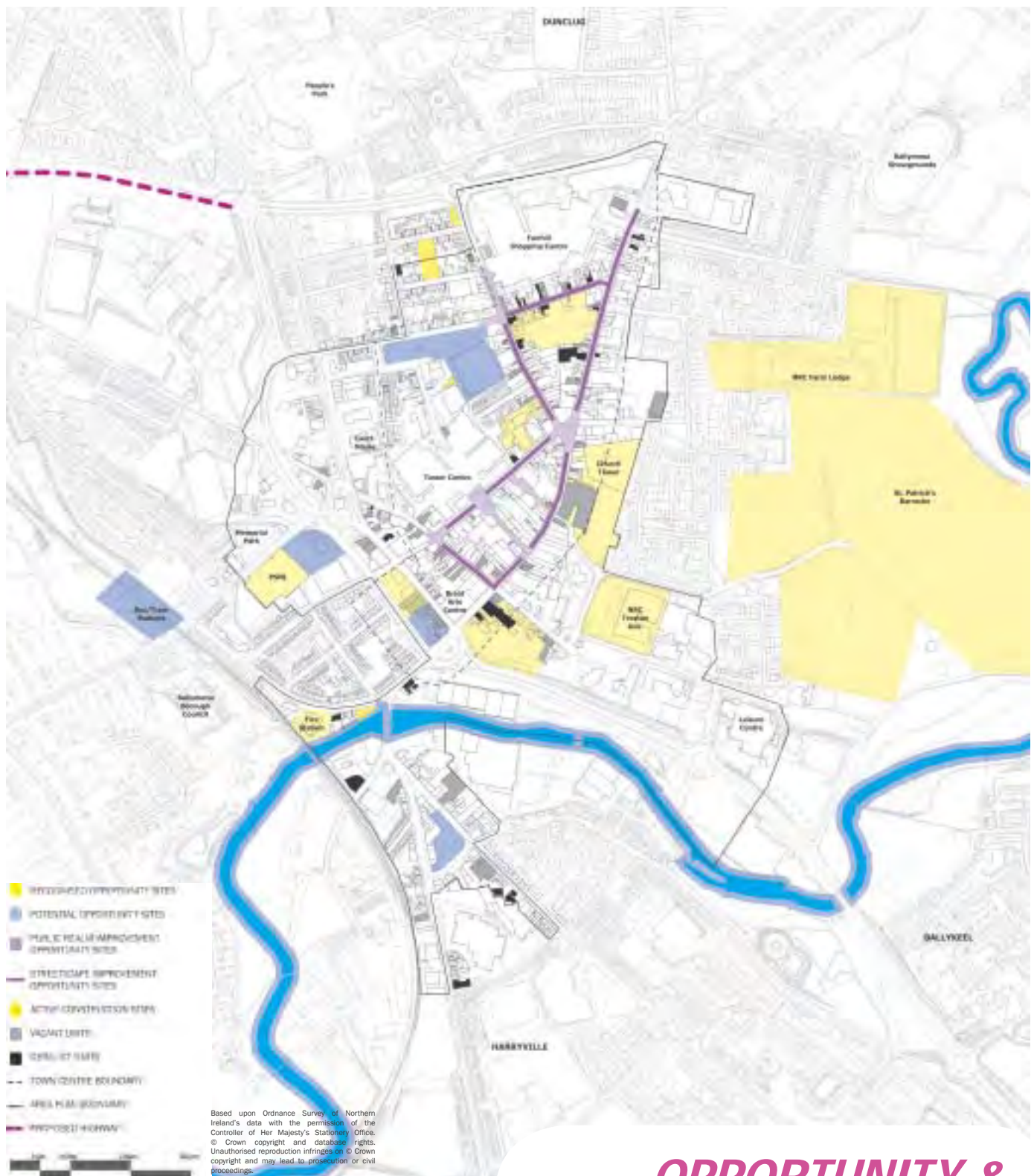
Although the Town Centre is a well-known retail hub with many shops, there are a surprising number of vacant and derelict properties. Generally, these properties are scattered throughout the Town Centre, though the highest concentrations of vacant or derelict properties occur around the Alexander Street site in the north and Linenhall Street in the south. Not surprisingly, these are two areas in the Town Centre are considered by some to be problematic. Alexander Street has been blighted for many years, while Linenhall Street experiences high levels of traffic congestion that has effectively severed the street from the Town Centre.



Alexander Street car park, an opportunity site



Closed entrance to Church Tower



OPPORTUNITY & DEVELOPMENT SITES

2.0

ANALYSIS: BALLYMENA TODAY

2.6.4 Landmarks & Key Features

Ballymena has a number of listed buildings in the Town Centre, some of which are a good visual amenity to the townscape, such as St. Patrick's Church, the Church Tower, the Northern Bank building and the Courthouse. The density and topography of the Town Centre largely limits views, though there are a few prominent ones. One is the view of St. Patrick's Church along Castle Street. Another is the view of Church Tower off Church Street. Further north, there is a view of All Saints Church from Broughshane Street. And to the south, there are views east and west of the Braid River from the Harryville bridge. As a result of the town's density and topography, there are few truly landmark buildings in the town besides St. Patrick's Church. But there is potential to create new landmarks, though creating them will require precision in choosing sites with clear visibility.

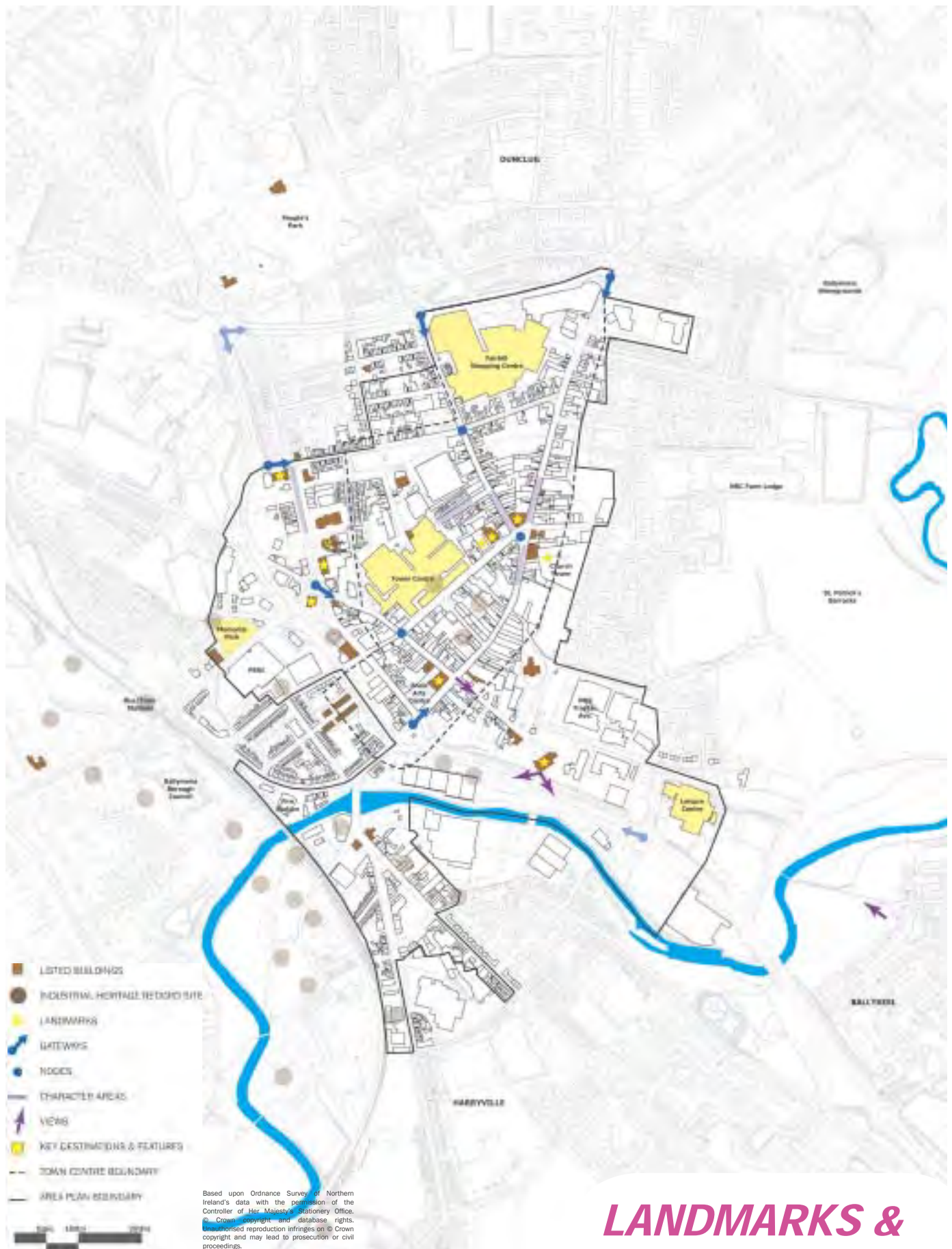
There are short stretches of streets with distinct character such as Greenvale Street, the portion of Ballymoney Road from Fountain Place to Mill Street, part of Albert Place, and sections of streets around the bandstand. These streets have charming older buildings that give a lot of character to Ballymena. There are also numerous industrial heritage record sites around Ballymena that are associated with its history in the textile, manufacturing, and railroad industries.



St. Patrick's Church



Ballymena Town Hall



LANDMARKS & KEY FEATURES

2.0

ANALYSIS: BALLYMENA TODAY

2.6.5 Circulation & Pedestrian Movement

There is a common perception that Ballymena has a high car-dependency and that traffic is a problem within the Town Centre. Among the causes of this perception are poor legibility to advise drivers of key destinations, including car parks and traffic circulation, particularly the conflict between through traffic, parking and non-car users in Town Centre streets. On-street parking brings a lot of traffic into the Town Centre and gives vehicles direct access to shops. However, the benefits of the existing car parks located on the edge of the Town Centre are not fully realised because drivers currently route via the busier Town Centre streets.

The highways constructed in the past to deal with traffic have now physically bounded the Town Centre on three sides. These highways act as barriers between the Town Centre and surrounding areas that were previously more integrated.

The character of these roads and adjacent lands also impact upon the quality of the arrival experience to Ballymena Town Centre. First impressions are in many places relatively poor due to the dominance of road infrastructure and the physical relationship of these areas with adjacent development.

Due to the compact nature of the Town Centre, pedestrians can traverse it easily. However, the streetscapes are not well equipped for pedestrians. Pavement widths are narrow, causing congestion in busy areas. Cars frequently park on the street, causing visual clutter and further reducing the space and freedom of pedestrians to walk and cross from one side to the other. Because of the amount of traffic in the Town Centre, pedestrians face a hazardous environment where vehicles have priority.

See Appendix F: “Transport Policy and Context” for more information.



North Road slicing through the Town Centre



Traffic signage at the Pentagon



CIRCULATION

2.0

ANALYSIS: BALLYMENA TODAY

2.6.6 Green Open Space

Publicly accessible green open space is virtually nonexistent within the Town Centre. However, there are diverse types of large open green spaces nearby including People's Park, a formal landscaped park, and the ECOS Centre's surroundings, which is a more natural environment. Although these areas are close to the Town Centre, the links between them are poor. These spaces would have a stronger role as public spaces in relation to the Town Centre if better links could be forged.

Also, the Braid River presents an opportunity to play a role in providing open green space near the Town Centre. Overall, safety and security of these parks needs to be addressed in order to ensure their success as healthy public spaces.



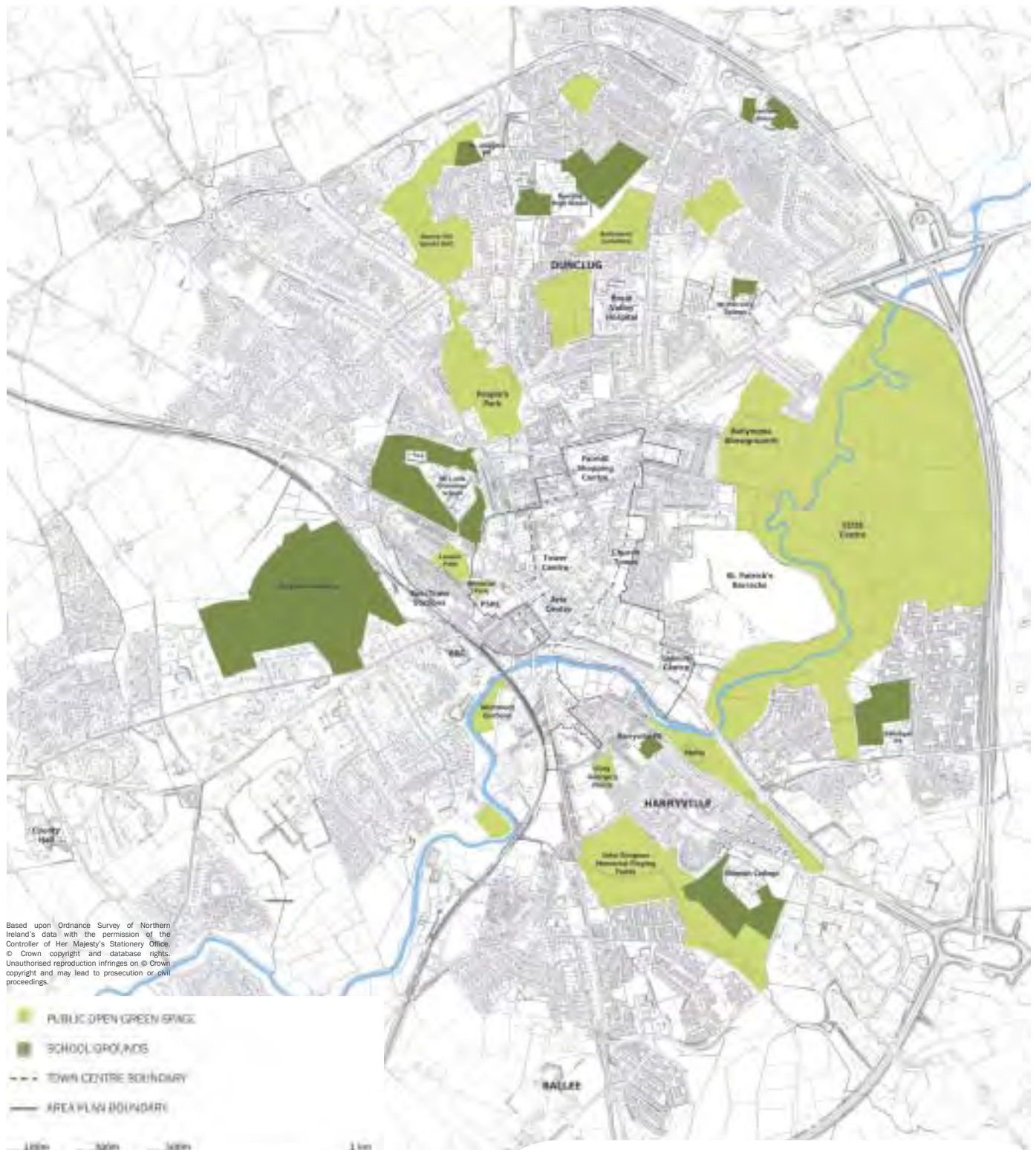
Playground at People's Park



Wildlife at People's Park



The lake at People's Park



GREEN OPEN SPACE

2.6.7 Environmental Quality

As identified through the analysis, Ballymena Town Centre has a number of buildings, landmarks and spaces that make a positive contribution to its environmental quality and must therefore be safeguarded and improved through the masterplan.

However, there are also a number of factors that contribute negatively to the overall environmental quality of the Town Centre. Therefore, it is important that these are identified in a systematic manner so that solutions can be found to address them.

The vacant properties identified in section 2.6.3 have a detrimental effect on the overall character and feel of the Town Centre. Poorly maintained or vandalised windows, shuttering and other elements send out a negative message, blighting adjacent properties and streets.

The design of some occupied shop fronts, such as those that use garish signage, colouring and lighting, detract from the overall quality of the street in which they are located. Whilst the commercial need for high visibility is recognised, it is advocated that a balance is required that takes into account the collective visual impact of shop fronts on the Town Centre as a whole.

Pavement space in Ballymena Town Centre is often limited due to the shared usage of narrow streets by cars and pedestrians. Therefore, objects situated on narrow pavements have a tendency to create visual clutter and obstructions to movement. Such objects include lampposts, roads signs, street furniture and advertising boards. This is particularly problematic for users who have mobility or visual impairments, as well as those who use wheelchairs or prams.

The type and quality of pavement surfacing in Ballymena Town Centre is varied, contributing in places to a cluttered and disjointed look. Whilst various Environmental Improvement Schemes have had positive impacts in certain locations, there are areas that have had little or no improvements made in recent years.

The environmental quality of Ballymena Town Centre at night is an important consideration, particularly in the context of an under performing evening economy and a widespread perception of crime and antisocial behaviour.

The principle factor affecting such a perception is the lack of people frequenting the centre in the evenings, due to the limited supply of places to eat, drink or be entertained in the Town Centre. However, a number of physical design elements also contribute to poorly perceived safety levels.

Lighting in certain areas of the Town Centre is relatively dim, making facial recognition difficult. Such psychological factors influence the extent to which individuals and groups feel safe walking through the centre.

Many Town Centre properties use heavy security shutters to protect windows and doors against vandalism or forced entry. Whilst such security precautions are understandable, the heavy nature of their design creates a hostile environment to pedestrians.

Like many Town Centres, Ballymena suffers from isolated cases of graffiti, vandalism and other signs of antisocial behaviour. Whilst as not as extensive as other comparable towns, these elements add to a negative perception of the town at night.



Artistic paving at Greenvale Street



Scenic views at People's Park



Graffiti at the multi-storey car park



Pedestrian crossing at Galgorm Street and North Road

2.7 Analysis Conclusions

From the analysis, several key issues have emerged:

- Ballymena has a strong retail centre with a good mix of multi-national and independent retailers.
- Ballymena faces a changing retail and economic context and increased competition from nearby commercial centres.
- Potential opportunity sites are numerous.
- First impressions of the town need to be addressed.
- Environmental quality needs improvement in several aspects including streetscapes, lighting, planting, public art and temporary improvements to derelict buildings and development sites.
- Town Centre streets are dominated by vehicles.
- Finding car parking can be difficult and confusing, especially for visitors, primarily due to poor directional signage
- Safety and security and perceptions of safety need to be addressed.
- The economy of the Town Centre is heavily dependent on retail. Diversification of uses in the Town Centre will be important to provide a base for future growth.

Ballymena is undeniably a strong retail centre with a good mix of retailers. However, with increasing competition and a changing retail and economic context, Ballymena must work hard to maintain its role as a major retail centre. Maintaining Ballymena's retail renown will require varied efforts, some of which are already outlined in Ballymena Borough Council's Economic Development Strategy 2007-2013 & Action Plan 2007-2010. The Council's strategic objectives include supporting and developing new and existing businesses, developing and enhancing tourism, helping people fulfill their potential and promoting Ballymena as a premier location. Nonetheless, there are other initiatives proposed by this Masterplan that can help maintain Ballymena's position as a major retail centre. Additionally, Ballymena would also benefit from regular health checks and benchmarking. Other ways of monitoring and studying Ballymena, such as measuring footfall and comparing it to similar locations, would also be useful in understanding the state of Ballymena's economy.

Ballymena has numerous opportunity sites within its Town Centre with potential for development. Besides individual derelict properties scattered throughout the Town Centre, there are also large sites, notably Alexander Street, which would have a significant positive impact in the Town Centre if successfully developed. As a result, focus should be placed on developing sites with substantial beneficial effects for the Town Centre.

In helping to maintain its standing as a retail destination, Ballymena should seek to improve the arrival experience into the Town Centre. Improving first impressions can have a significant impact on people's experience be they shoppers, tourists or potential investors. Therefore, the arrival experience into Ballymena should be as easy and pleasant as possible, helping to maintain Ballymena's position as a great retail destination whilst encouraging further business growth.

Low environmental quality is an issue around Ballymena Town Centre. Improvements would help strengthen the image of Ballymena as a high-quality retail destination thereby increasing competitiveness with other similar places. Related to environmental quality, pedestrians' experience of Ballymena Town Centre is hampered by the dominant presence of vehicles on the streets. Not only does heavy vehicle traffic pose a hazard to pedestrians, the noise, pollution and visual clutter created by traffic is detrimental to people's enjoyment of the streets.

Finding car parking can be difficult and confusing, especially for visitors who do not know the town. This issue not only degrades first impressions of the town, it can also add to traffic problems.

Safety and people's perceptions of safety around the Town Centre need to be addressed. In doing so, people's experience of the Town Centre can be positively impacted, bolstering the evening economy and countering negative perceptions of Ballymena Town Centre at night. Changing safety and perceptions of safety require both physical and social initiatives to make a difference.

While Ballymena is a strong retail centre, diversifying Town Centre uses is important for a sustainable and healthy local economy. There is potential to expand Town Centre uses to include housing, office space, and more food and entertainment uses. Schemes like Living Over the Shops (LOTS), which have been successful in many places, could not only provide valuable housing but also help safety and perceptions of safety in the Town Centre with an around-the-clock presence of people. Also, having a larger population living in the Town Centre would contribute to the retail economy. Relocation of the Council offices to Town Centre would also help diversification, as well as bring more footfall. The "Independent Review of Policy on Location of Public Sector Jobs" report by Professor Sir George Bain recommends a relocation of more public sector jobs to Ballymena. The Town Centre's numerous opportunity sites can make it ideally suited to accommodate new office space in support of an increase of jobs.

These analysis conclusions form the basis for the Masterplan's Aims and Objectives. Having outlined the key strengths and weaknesses of the Town Centre in the analysis, the Aims and Objectives reflect the information gathered to formulate a set of goals specific to Ballymena. The Masterplan proposals that later follow are then cross-referenced to the Aims and Objectives, ensuring that proposed projects contribute towards fulfilling goals.

3.1 Vision

Having understood the complexity of issues associated with Ballymena Town Centre, it is important to articulate a Vision to guide and inform the rest of the masterplanning process. The following Vision creates a picture of what Ballymena can achieve, acting as a guide for the Masterplan's proposals.

To build on the existing strengths of Ballymena in order to maintain the vitality and viability of the Town Centre while fostering a positive identity and a rich and sustainable variety of offerings for both residents and visitors alike.

3.2 Aims & Objectives

Corresponding to the Vision is a set of Aims and Objectives that have defined the most important goals for the Masterplan. These Aims and Objectives have been informed by the analysis work, consultation meetings, and general principles.

A. Maintain Ballymena's role as a major retail centre

- A1. Upgrade environmental quality
- A2. Retain and improve mix of retailers
- A3. Explore opportunities to enhance retail
- A4. Add complementary services
- A5. Create a welcoming arrival experience

B. Capitalise on Ballymena's role as a regional centre

- B1. Diversify range of Town Centre uses
- B2. Promote a positive civic identity
- B3. Strengthen regional links
- B4. Boost tourism offer
- B5. Support needs of major employers

C. Ensure a safe and shared Town Centre

- C1. Distribute activity to include weekends and evenings
- C2. Work together to improve policing
- C3. Support and extend youth related services
- C4. Extend range of neutral spaces

D. Develop a sustainable transport network

- D1. Improve facilities for public transport
- D2. Enhance pedestrian and cycle linkages
- D3. Expand disabled access within Town Centre
- D4. Improve legibility to and within Town Centre

3.3 Concept

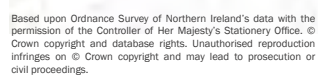
Following the Vision and Aims & Objectives, a Concept Plan has been developed to form the basis of the masterplan.

Ballymena has several key buildings and features throughout the town, including places like the Bus and Train Station, Ballymena Central Library, Braid Arts Centre, Seven Towers Leisure Centre, Ballymena Showgrounds, ECOS Centre, Braid River, Braid Valley Hospital and People's Park. The Concept Plan capitalises on these buildings and features to create zones based on particular activities and uses. Yet the focus is on creating mixed-use developments, while each zone would emphasise one specific use it would maintain a healthy mix of other uses as well.

The most important area is the retail core, which is both physically and metaphorically the centre of Ballymena. The other zones depend on the high levels of activity generated by the retail core and seek to lengthen and expand this activity. To the west, the commerce zone would be an area with a greater prominence of office uses. Correctly phased according to demand, this area would have development and uses catering to office needs. The commerce zone also takes advantage of its location between the bus and train station and Town Centre.

The cultural zone south of the retail core would capitalise on the new Braid Arts Centre and nearby Library adding other cultural and complementary uses. Related to this cultural zone is the leisure zone, which contains the Seven Towers Leisure Centre, a cinema, the Ballymena Showgrounds, and the Braid River. The education and recreation zone focuses on the Braid River and the ECOS Centre to provide educational and recreational activities. Similarly on the north-west side, the education and recreation zone focuses on People's Park and its connections to the Town Centre. Also, the Braid Valley Hospital anchors the health zone in the north.

Ballymena's radial structure gives it well-defined approach roads. From these approach roads, future parking provision would be located at the periphery of the Town Centre. This parking strategy would help decrease the amount of traffic in the Town Centre (see transportation analysis) and help improve the pedestrian environment.



CONCEPT PLAN

3.0

CONCEPT: A VISION OF BALLYMENA TOWN CENTRE

3.4 Lost Street Connections

To move from the concept towards a masterplan it is necessary to identify the main structural elements that make up Ballymena Town Centre. Akin to a skeletal framework upon which development is supported, opportunities should be sought to strengthen this underlying street structure. This maximises the efficiency of movement through the area, provides access to and between new development opportunities and improves the way in which one can naturally navigate the Town Centre, a quality known as legibility.

Looking back to historic maps of Ballymena, one finds that there are some street connections which have been severed in the course of time. One lost street connection is the link between People's Park to Church Street, via Greenmount Place, Duke Street, High Street, and Bryan Street. Today, this connection is severed first by the surface car park at Springwell Street, then by the Tower Centre.

Another severed street is Galgorm Street, which used to continue into Town Centre uninterrupted and turn into Wellington Street. Today, Galgorm Street is severed by the North Road. Because North Road is raised above street level, there is an awkward, offset pedestrian crossing at this location.

While Clonavon Terrace was never actually severed, there once existed a view from Clonavon Terrace to Memorial Park. Today, the formidable PSNI station blocks this view.

Reconnecting these severed streets can help the Town Centre become a more cohesive whole through better pedestrian linkage. Reconnecting streets does not have to mean leveling of buildings; it can be achieved by other means as explained later.

The Masterplan that follows builds on these ideas from the Concept Plan to underpin the design of specific areas.



Historic map of Ballymena



Historic photograph of High Street.

Image courtesy of Jack Adams and Ballymena Central Library, Local Studies Service

4.1 Introduction

The Ballymena Town Centre Masterplan was developed using the foundation of knowledge formed by the analysis following the Vision, Aims and Objectives and the Concept Plan.

The Masterplan focuses on creating a more connected Town Centre by strengthening existing links and creating new ones. It also proposes development on key opportunity sites which would enhance and diversify Town Centre uses. The Masterplan also takes advantage of existing assets, such as the Braid River, by linking them with the Town Centre and establishing appropriate development. In addition, general projects are identified to be implemented throughout the Town Centre.

The Masterplan complements the separate layout being prepared for St. Patrick's Barracks to the east of the Town Centre.

The Masterplan proposals contained within this report are divided into two categories. The first are the General Town Centre Initiatives relating to Ballymena Town Centre in its entirety. These are followed by a series of site specific proposals contained within "focus areas" located around the Town Centre.



BALLYMENA TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN

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4.2 General Town Centre Initiatives

1. Environmental Improvements

A series of comprehensive environmental improvements focussing on the main streets of Ballymena Town Centre would bring considerable benefits. Such works would help improve the way streets function for all users, including pedestrians, drivers and cyclists, whilst also transforming the visual quality of the Town Centre. Proposed Environmental Improvements are categorised into the following sub sections:

Streetscapes

Streetscape improvement should include the design and implementation of high quality surfacing to all pedestrian areas and vehicular areas where appropriate. High quality materials and workmanship, combined with commitment to maintenance regimes, will ensure the sustainability of works over the long term. Street furniture and signage should also be rationalised to reduce clutter and ensure consistency in design.

Lighting

Lighting schemes should include upgrades of street lighting where required, ensuring good visibility at night through methods such as the use of white light that improves facial recognition. In addition, prominent landmarks within the Town Centre should be the subject of a feature lighting programme to reinforce their visual presence during hours of darkness.

Planting

Areas of existing planting should be replenished and managed as necessary, whilst opportunities for new planting should be identified. This should include the introduction of semi mature street trees, as well as focussed areas of floral planting where appropriate.

Public Art

Public art pieces should be commissioned in appropriate Town Centre locations. Public art would make culture more publicly accessible, strengthen Ballymena's identity and provide visual appeal.

Temporary Improvements

Areas such as vacant or derelict buildings and development sites should be considered for temporary improvements until redevelopment occurs. This could include painting of highly visible surfaces, removal of graffiti, replacement of fencing and installation of public art.

All Environmental Improvements should be developed and coordinated through a Public Realm Plan for the Town Centre. This Public Realm Plan should also be closely connected to other Town Centre initiatives such as the Signage and Interpretation Strategy and the Accessibility Strategy, as these three efforts should inform each other.

2. Signage and Interpretation

A coordinated signage and interpretation strategy would enhance the directional and informational legibility of Ballymena. This strategy should focus on ensuring that the Town Centre is easy to navigate, with a suite of well designed and located signs for all users including pedestrians and drivers. Accompanying maps of the Town Centre should also be located at key positions. The "Legible London" walking strategy provides a good model for Ballymena as a walking strategy developed around landmarks and geographic zones to guide pedestrians, rather than using strictly street names. The history and folklore of Ballymena could also be communicated through a series of interpretive panels located near buildings and features of historical importance. Subsequently, this could be supported by other interpretative initiatives including printed literatures, tours, dramatisations and events.

3. Accessibility Strategy

This strategy would ensure improved accessibility of the Town Centre, based on an Access Audit and delivery of an associated action plan. To be most effective, the strategy should apply to both publicly and privately owned areas, including pavements, car parks, shops and restaurants.

4. Cycle Provision Programme

This would continue efforts to realise a cohesive cycle network through Ballymena Town Centre and link to adjacent neighbourhoods and open spaces. In addition to cycle paths, adequate cycle storage facilities must be provided at key locations.

5. Town Centre Branding and Marketing

Town Centre Branding and Marketing would establish an easily identifiable brand for Ballymena Town Centre. This must be a genuine and engaging process that captures the identity of the Town Centre in a positive and dynamic manner, based upon the Vision set out by the Town Centre Masterplan. The branding exercise must directly target perceptions and confidence in the Town Centre amongst residents, shoppers, businesses and visitors. The process should include the development of key messages and include graphic styling and logos to be used in a wide, consistent and comprehensive way. Such work must be followed by an appropriately resourced and energetic programme of marketing to promote Ballymena Town Centre across Northern Ireland and beyond. The Marketing Strategy should be delivered by the Town Centre Partnership and funded partly by the Department for Social Development.

6. Festivals, Events and Activities

A varied programme should be developed to have high quality events taking place in and around the Town Centre. Focus should be given on a yearlong programme that promotes inclusivity of the Town Centre to as wide a section of the community as possible. This should include both genders, all age groups and Ballymena's different religious, ethnic and racial groupings. Particular efforts should be made to address sectarian divisions in the Town Centre with events that transcend socio-political views and positively engage young people.

7. Transport Assessment

A transport assessment of the Town Centre, including transport modelling, would be a useful in understanding how the current traffic system works in Ballymena. Additionally, an assessment would be a useful tool in determining the transport effects of existing and new projects and developments in the Town Centre.

8. Town Centre Frontage Improvements

Coordinated programme of improvement to the frontages of buildings in the Town Centre, including shops, restaurants, offices and public buildings. A detailed survey of frontages would form the basis for proposals and will include works to surface treatments, architectural details and signage. This scheme would ideally be linked with public realm improvements in order to bring maximum benefit to the town. Derelict or vacant properties would also be addressed through this approach, with temporary improvements made to alleviate blight caused by such properties in high profile locations.

9. Town Centre Safety Initiative

An all-encompassing strategy should be developed to address safety and the perception of safety in Ballymena Town Centre. Below is a list of measures that would require implementation by a number of stakeholders, including statutory bodies, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and private businesses.

Measures to address the Perception of Town Centre Safety:

Activity generators
Improved evening economy
Festivals, events and activities
Town Centre Residential development
Lighting Improvements
Environmental Improvements
Shop Windows and Shuttering
Boundary treatments
Rapid reaction maintenance (graffiti and vandalism)
CCTV
Community policing, focussed on foot and cycle patrolling
Coordination of private security provision
Inter Community Relations initiatives
Crime Prevention Campaigns
Town Centre Branding and Marketing strategy
Youth focused events

10. Evening Economy Initiative

This initiative would be a proactive approach to improving and diversifying the evening economy of Ballymena Town Centre. This should focus on supporting existing businesses in their evening operations, encourage extension of activity and complement this with new uses that add to the evening economy of the Town Centre. This work should be linked to other initiatives, such as improved public transport provision, lighting and events and activities.

11. Link Road Landscape Improvements

A number of physical improvements to the environmental quality of the link roads (Larne Link Road, North Road and Parkway) around Ballymena Town Centre would improve the aesthetic qualities of the roads without comprising their function as major transportation routes. Such proposals could include the introduction of semi-mature street trees, improved boundary treatments (fences and walls), lighting and public art. Particular attention should be given to gateway locations such as roundabouts and junctions. Improvements should also include upgrading pedestrian crossing points, particularly along Parkway.

12. Braid River Greenway

The Town Centre Masterplan has identified an opportunity to implement a greenway along the Braid River. This would entail the establishment of continuous foot and cycle path connections along its length, connecting outlying settlements such as Broughshane and Tullaghgarley with the Town Centre. The project would create opportunities for improved flood mitigation measures, wildlife habitat and riverfront development where appropriate.

13. Braid River Cleanup and Management

In order to ensure the viability of waterfront developments and the success of the Braid River Greenway, cleanup and management of the Braid River would have to be undertaken. This effort would include cleaning of the water and riverside areas, potentially building weirs where necessary, and ensuring long-term maintenance and management of the Braid River. Potentially, voluntary organisations could also be involved in regular cleanup activities of the river, fostering dedicated community interest in keeping the Braid clean.

14. Retail Capacity Study

The need for a Retail Capacity Study was highlighted in the analysis phase. A Retail Capacity Study would examine the state of retailing in the Town Centre in conjunction with economic trends to determine the Town Centre's capacity to take new retail development. This Study would aid in making accurately informed decisions on the extent and timing of future retail development.

15. Living over the Shop (LOTS) Scheme

A mix of uses in the Town Centre would help ensure its healthy and viability in the future. Residential uses are an important part of the mix. Also, a resident population in the Town Centre would help contribute to safety and surveillance as well as the development of an evening economy. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Living over the Shop (LOTS) Scheme allows landowners to apply for grants to convert or upgrade living accommodation in town centres. The aim of the scheme is to encourage town centre living. While currently not in place in Ballymena, efforts should be undertaken to implement this scheme in Ballymena Town Centre.

16. Ballymena Primary & Community Care Infrastructure (PCCI)

The Northern Health Trust are currently undergoing work to replace medical facilities at the site of the existing Braid Valley Hospital. A health and care centre will be developed as a base for community services, including out-of-hours services, community nursing clinics, acute outpatients and diagnostics clinics, rapid response team, mental health unit and a children's wing. This is an opportunity to enhance the architectural and environmental quality of Ballymena's health care facilities.

4.0

MASTERPLAN: BALLYMENA TOMORROW

MASTERPLAN INITIATIVES	MASTERPLAN AIMS & OBJECTIVES			
	A. Maintain Ballymena's role as a major retail centre	B. Capitalise on Ballymena's role as a regional centre	C. Ensure a safe and shared Town Centre	D. Develop a sustainable transport network
1. Environmental Improvements	•	•	•	•
2. Signage & Interpretation	•	•	•	•
3. Accessibility Strategy	•	•	•	•
4. Cycle Provision Programme	•	•	•	•
5. Town Centre Branding & Marketing	•	•	•	
6. Festivals, Events & Activities	•	•	•	
7. Transport Assessment	•	•		•
8. Town Centre Frontage Improvements	•	•	•	
9. Town Centre Safety Initiative	•	•	•	•
10. Evening Economy Initiative	•	•	•	•
11. Link Road Landscape Improvements	•	•		•
12. Braid River Greenway		•	•	•
13. Braid River Cleanup & Management		•		
14. Retail Capacity Study	•			
15. Living Over the Shops (LOTS) Scheme			•	
16. Ballymena Primary & Community Care Infrastructure		•		



Street performers



Colorful street parade (Notting Hill, London)

EXEMPLAR IMAGES



High-quality paving



A river greenway (Lagan Towpath)



Feature lighting



Example of interpretive boards (Londonderry)

4.0

MASTERPLAN: BALLYMENA TOMORROW



FOCUS AREAS

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	Alexander & Springwell Streets Focus Area
	St. Patrick's Barracks Focus Area
	Galgorm Road Focus Area
	Bridge Street & Braid River Focus Area

4.3 Focus Areas

Arising from the site analysis and concept were specific areas in Ballymena's Town Centre that needed particular attention. While there are improvement projects that apply to the Town Centre generally, the Masterplan proposes four focus areas that need specific projects in order to revitalise that area and the Town Centre as a whole.

The first focus area is the Bridge Street and Braid River area. The main objectives for this area are to enliven and revitalise Bridge Street by creating a high quality public space, improving the pedestrian environment around the Bridge Street traffic island and reconnecting Ballymena's underused asset- the Braid River- with the Town Centre by establishing riverfront development and associated public realm.

The second focus area is the Galgorm Road. The Masterplan proposals for the Galgorm Road focus area address two main issues: the lack of connectivity between the bus & train station and Town Centre and the severance caused by the North Road. As illustrated by the Concept Plan, this area also promotes office uses.

Alexander and Springwell Streets are the third focus area. Design proposals here focus on alleviating the lack of activity and high number of derelict properties by developing the Alexander Street site in a way that keeps activity on the adjacent streets. Also, the design proposals seek to develop the area in front of Springwell Street into a new public space.

The fourth focus area is St. Patrick's Barracks. While another masterplan is currently underway for this area, site issues and design objectives are briefly discussed in relation to Ballymena Town Centre.

Planning Policy and Focus Areas

The Masterplan design proposals for the Town Centre have a strong relationship with planning policy. The vitality and viability of Town Centres is a key aspect of current Government policy. This policy focus derives from a number of factors:

- The intrinsic merit of thriving Town Centres
- A concern to check decline in some centres
- The view that a broad mix of activities should take place in Town Centres
- A growing emphasis on sustainability

The focus areas comprise a number of brownfield opportunity sites. The development potential of these sites is supported by planning policy, which seeks to direct new development to appropriate locations by prioritising the reuse of previously developed land. Moreover, Town Centres are considered the best location for retail, office and related uses.

The areas currently adjoin other retail, commercial and community uses. The development of alternative uses on these sites will add to the vitality and viability of the existing centre, whilst bringing quantitative and qualitative improvements to retail, commercial, residential provision in the Town Centre.

Diversification and improvement of the retailing offering within the Town Centre will play a crucial role in attracting visitors and thereby contributing to the overall health of the location. In turn, this will maintain Ballymena's position as a key retail destination, provide employment and retail services for local residents.

Equally the introduction of further office accommodation will act as a catalyst to development in the Town Centre. Office uses perform an important role in any Town Centre by attracting workers on a daily basis which contributes to higher footfall levels to the various functions within the Town Centre.

Leisure and tourism in Ballymena Town Centre will also contribute strongly to its vitality, and visitors can make a significant contribution to bolstering the local economy. There is a growing element of convergence between retailing, leisure and tourism. Both retailing and leisure have a developing synergy so that the shopping trip is now increasingly seen as a day trip rather than a regular routine.

Residential development within the Town Centre will bring positive benefits and contribute to its vitality and viability as it

- Encourages a more vibrant Town Centre which people use at all times
- Provides a number of smaller households
- Reduces the need to travel
- Revitalises city centres

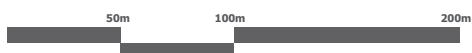
4.3.1 Bridge Street & Braid River



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EXISTING PLAN



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MASTERPLAN: BALLYMENA TOMORROW



Under-realised potential of the Braid River



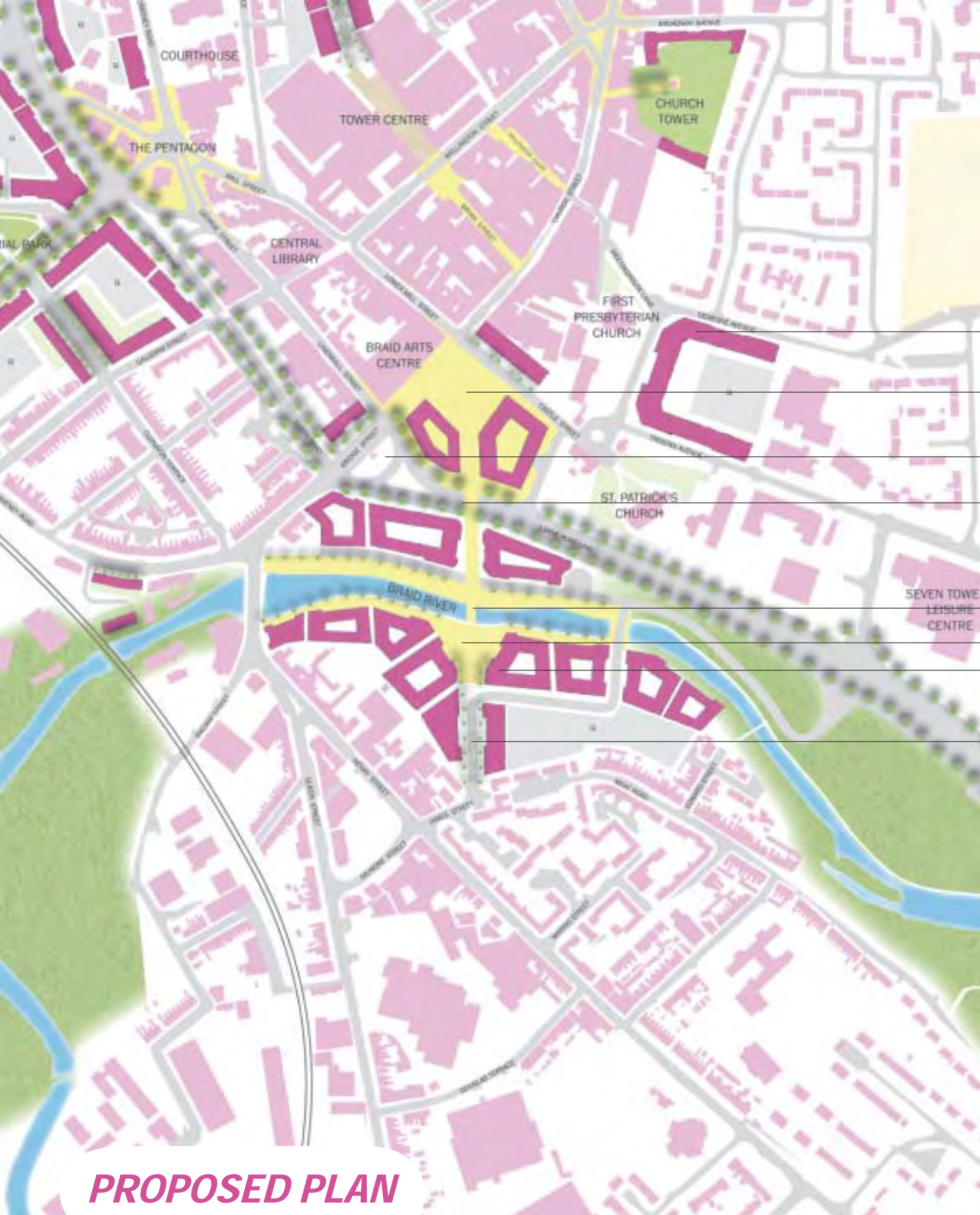
Bridge Street traffic island is difficult for both drivers and pedestrians



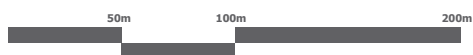
Larne Road Link divides the Town Centre

The Bridge Street & Braid River focus area loosely encompasses the southeast corner of the Town Centre, north to south from Castle Street to Harryville, and stretching east to west from the Braidwater Roundabout to Bridge Street. In the past, Church Street was the main shopping street in Ballymena and the traditional location of independent retailers. While many independent retailers still operate here, the southern end of Church Street, Bridge Street and Castle Street suffer from a high level of vacant or derelict properties. Nearby, the Larne Road Link and North Road slice through the Town Centre, undermining the pedestrian environment around the Bridge Street traffic island. The negative impact of traffic can also be seen on adjacent roads such as Linenhall Street, which suffers due to congestion and derelict buildings.

Nevertheless, the Bridge Street & Braid River focus area has some notable assets. One is St. Patrick's Church, which is a local landmark whose tower is highly visible. The new Braid Arts Centre and the Town Hall are other assets for Ballymena as cultural venues and landmark buildings. Yet one of the most important and most undervalued assets is the Braid River. The Braid River has the potential to have engaging riverfront development bringing people and activity to its banks. It can also serve as a connection route for pedestrians and cyclists coming from adjacent neighborhoods into the Town Centre. Ballymena has much to benefit from capitalising on this natural asset.



PROPOSED PLAN



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- 17. Trostan Avenue Housing & Mixed- Use Development
- 18. Bridge Street Development & Public Square (with underground parking)
- 19. Bridge Street Gateway
- 20. Landmark Bridge
- 22. Braid River Bridge Upgrades
- 23. Riverfront Public Realm
- 21. Riverfront Developments
- 24. Henry Street Linkage

As noted earlier, the Bridge Street traffic island presents a poor quality pedestrian environment and a confusing junction for drivers. Due to physical constraints and lack of space, it is not possible to make major changes to the traffic circulation arrangements in this area. However, environmental improvements could be undertaken in this area to create a pleasant and welcoming gateway space, potentially featuring public art. One important aspect of this design proposal is the creation of a high-quality public realm space at Bridge Street, framed by new mixed-use developments.

Other than the Broadway bandstand, Ballymena's Town Centre lacks significant public spaces. Adding a high-quality public square at Bridge Street would give residents, shoppers and visitors a place to meet, enjoy the town, as well as host events.

The square, perhaps more formal in nature, would complement and be enhanced by the grandeur of the new Braid Arts Centre and the Town Hall. The square would also capitalise on the stunning view along Castle Street to St. Patrick's Church. Surrounding the square would be mixed-use developments, offering ground-floor retail and food, as well as office space above. In order to ensure the highest environmental quality, it is proposed that Bridge Street should be closed to traffic between Mill Street and Linenhall Street to eliminate vehicles intersecting the space. As a result, a new street connecting Castle Street and Larne Road Link would need to be created. Car parking could be located underground, accessed from Larne Road Link and the newly created street.

From this square at Bridge Street, there would be a landmark bridge to connect pedestrians from the Town Centre to the new riverfront development. The landmark bridge, which would be of the highest design quality, would also serve as a gateway to the Town Centre by providing a visual landmark to drivers entering from Larne Road Link. Memorable and welcoming arrival experiences are important to secure great first impressions of Ballymena in people's minds.

The landmark bridge would lead people to new and engaging riverfront development. The riverfront development would be mixed-use, with an intensity of cultural uses as illustrated by the Concept Plan. High-quality public realm would surround the Braid River in this area. A new pedestrian bridge would cross the Braid, while the existing Harryville bridge, Braidwater vehicular bridge and the Edward Street pedestrian bridge would be upgraded. In this way, the riverfront would be activated by a variety of exciting new uses, bringing residents and visitors to enjoy the river while revitalising the surrounding area in the process.

A coach drop-off/ pick up space and coach parking has been highlighted as a need in Ballymena Town Centre. Due to the constrained geometry and size of Town Centre streets, it is proposed that coaches use the existing road into the Braidwater area from the Larne Road Link and drop off passengers at the Landmark Bridge, where they can then cross into Town Centre.

4.0

MASTERPLAN: BALLYMENA TOMORROW



BRIDGE STREET SQUARE CONCEPT PLAN



High-quality public space (Southwark Garden, Greater London)



Public realm with a water feature (Birmingham, UK)



Public realm featuring ground lighting



Prominent public realm (Lyon, France)

EXEMPLAR IMAGES

4.0 MASTERPLAN: BALLYMENA TOMORROW

MASTERPLAN INITIATIVES	MASTERPLAN AIMS & OBJECTIVES				
		A. Maintain Ballymena's role as a major retail centre	B. Capitalise on Ballymena's role as a regional centre	C. Ensure a safe and shared Town Centre	D. Develop a sustainable transport network
17. Trostan Avenue Housing & Mixed-Use Development		•	•	•	
18. Bridge Street Development & Public Realm		•	•	•	•
19. Bridge Street Gateway		•	•	•	•
20. Landmark Bridge		•	•	•	
21. Riverfront Development		•	•	•	•
22. Braid River Bridge Upgrades		•		•	•
23. Riverfront Public Realm		•	•	•	•
24. Henry Street Linkage					



River frontage at night (Amsterdam)

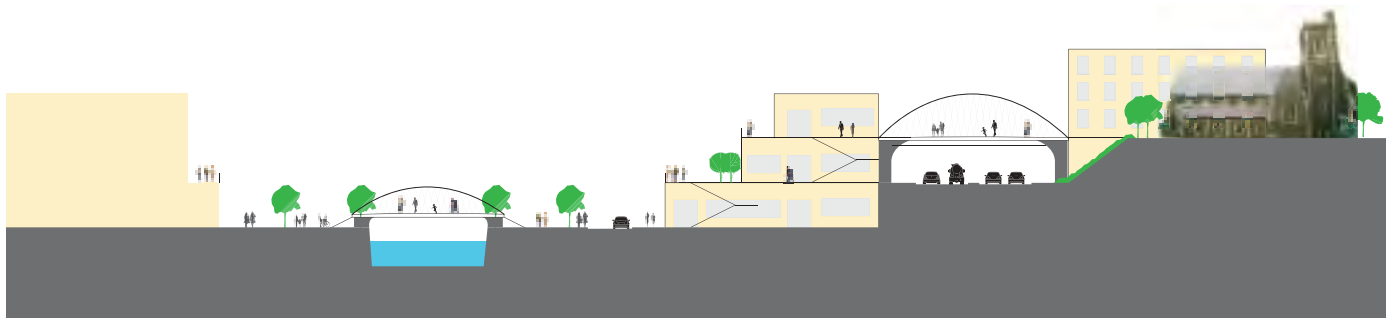


Active river frontage (Manchester)



Example of prominent public art

EXEMPLAR IMAGES



Cross-section of Braid River and Larne Road Link looking west, showing Landmark Bridge, riverfront development and new Braid River bridge



Iconic pedestrian bridge (Bilbao, Spain)



Active river frontage (Lancaster)



Iconic pedestrian bridge (Venice, Italy)

Planning Policy

Development in this area will help strengthen links between the land south of the river and the main function of the Town Centre. At present, the independent retailers located in Harryville area are trading relatively well. Enhanced linkages to the Town Centre will help to boost this. The introduction of mixed use schemes will act as a catalyst to the wider regeneration of this area.

The area south of the river is appropriate for cultural and mixed use development compatible with surrounding land uses. At present, there is little provision for evening activity in Ballymena with few restaurants or other such social facilities in the Town Centre. The improvement of this offering would extend the life of the Town Centre beyond traditional trading hours.

Property Markets

The traditional prime retail pitch trails off at this end of Church Street, resulting in a necessity to underpin the levels of activity in this area. Opportunities exist to establish a complementary range of cultural-based retail uses (galleries, workshops, craft shops, etc), benefitting from a riverside location. Planning would have to be tightly monitored to ensure developers are targeting the appropriate uses as inviting in high street fashion retailers could push-up rents making it financially prohibitive to operators who are more complementary to the Braid Arts Centre.

Given the aesthetic potential of the site (due to view over the river) and its central location with good road networks this could be a very attractive location for a hotel. Consultation and market analysis has shown there is consumer demand for further hotel facilities in Ballymena, even though there is little evidence of hotel operators actively seeking sites in the town. This would be a speculative development with the onus on the developer to secure an end-user. However, the hotel market is a growing industry in Northern Ireland and we would expect operators to be moving into provincial towns in the near future as, like Belfast, these towns can capitalise the growth in tourism.

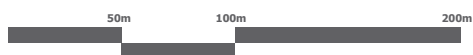
4.3.2 Galgorm Road



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EXISTING PLAN



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4.0

MASTERPLAN: BALLYMENA TOMORROW



View of bus & train station

The Galgorm Road focus area spans from the bus & train station eastward to the Pentagon (the intersection of Ballymoney Road, Lower Mill Street, George Street, Galgorm Road and Cullybackey Road). This focus area contains two important traffic arteries, Galgorm Road and North Road, plus the Pentagon, a significant traffic node. The Pentagon is also where several of the Town Centre's bus stops are currently located. Galgorm Road features many large Victorian era homes and mature trees. However, North Road acts as a barrier slicing through the Town Centre. Besides the amount of traffic and width of the road, the North Road is undermined by a lack of frontage onto it. Not only are there walls running along portions of the road, mostly backs of buildings overlook it.

This area's most important asset is the bus and train station located off the Galgorm Road. In a time where sustainability is becoming a priority, having these two sustainable transport methods is very important for Ballymena. The bus and train station should provide a welcoming gateway for Ballymena's residents and visitors. Links to the Town Centre are also crucial, especially since the station is at the Town Centre's periphery.

Another asset is the eight listed buildings on the Pentagon and Ballymoney Road. These include the West Church, Courthouse, Adair Arms Hotel and others. These buildings contribute to a strong civic identity for Ballymena and character of these streets. Memorial Park and Lamont Playing Fields are also assets as they are some of the few public open green spaces close to Town Centre.



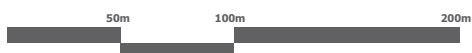
View east of Galgorm Road



Historic photography of "Pentagon Lamp", once a landmark and popular meeting place.



PROPOSED PLAN



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25. Development fronting Ballymoney Road

26. Housing at Lamont Playing Fields

27. Public Realm Upgrades to the Pentagon

28. Bus Stop Facility Upgrade

30. Developments fronting North Road

29. Developments on PSNI Site

31. North Road Pedestrian Crossing Improvement

33. Galgorm Road Public Realm

32. Bus & Train Station Upgrade & Gateway Space

34. Redevelopment of the Council Office Site

35. Riverfront Housing Development

As discussed earlier, the bus and train station is a key asset to Ballymena. Accordingly, the design proposals provide a high-quality gateway space at the station to welcome people into town. While the physical distance between the Town Centre and the station cannot be changed, decreasing the psychological distance between the two is realistic and important. Achieving this can be done by a series of environmental improvements along the Galgorm Road, creating a more pleasant journey. New developments fronting the Galgorm Road would also reinforce the road's visual appeal and coherency. Additionally, a shuttle bus service could be implemented to better link the station with Town Centre and to encourage people to use public transport.

The existing Park & Ride facility at Princes Street is very successful. However, there is little scope to expand this facility at ground level and alternative sites for parking will have to be identified if this service is to be expanded. There may be potential for additional parking to be provided at the site of the Council offices, if the offices were to relocate to Town Centre.

The Galgorm Road ends at the Pentagon. As an important node, the Pentagon would be upgraded to a high-quality public space. Because traffic patterns cannot be changed at this junction, a series of environmental improvements would be made to improve the experience. Jack Adams notes in his book *Ballymena, My Own Native Town* (1989) that the Pentagon's gas lamp (now gone) was once a landmark and popular meeting place. Benefiting from the density of listed buildings nearby, the Pentagon has the potential to once again be a beautiful place for people to enjoy. In conjunction to the upgrade of the Pentagon, existing bus stops would also be improved.

Also along Galgorm Street, potential exists for new housing development tying into the existing residential area. Further housing can be developed on the site of the Council offices, once the Council relocates potentially to Bridge Street square. The planned relocation of the current PSNI station would enable Clonavon Terrace to be lengthened to connect to Galgorm Road at Memorial Park and Lamont Playing Field, with a new housing development fronting onto this extension. In this way, Clonavon Terrace would be able to connect from the riverside development to Lamont Park. The pedestrian crossing across the North Road at Galgorm Street would also be straightened to encourage pedestrian movement across the North Road.

It is also understood that the current Fire Station will also be relocated from this area due to considerable restrictions on space. This site would be well suited to housing that integrates into the existing residential area and takes advantage of river views.

As noted in the transport analysis, the North Road cannot be physically changed in the short term. However, there are environmental measures that can be carried out to reduce the impact of the North Road such as landscape treatments and street-tree planting. To further reconnect the Town Centre with the North Road, new frontage would be added to promote activity, surveillance, and visual appeal.

4.0 MASTERPLAN: BALLYMENA TOMORROW

INITIATIVES	AIMS				
	A. Maintain Ballymena's role as a major retail centre	B. Capitalise on Ballymena's role as a regional centre	C. Ensure a safe and shared Town Centre	D. Develop a sustainable transport network	
25. Developments fronting Ballymoney Road	•	•			
26. Housing at Lamont Playing Fields					
27. Public Realm Upgrades to the Pentagon	•	•		•	
28. Bus Stop Facility Upgrade				•	
29. Developments on PSNI Site	•	•	•		
30. Developments fronting North Road	•	•		•	
31. North Road Pedestrian Crossing Improvement					
32. Bus & Train Station Upgrade and Gateway Space	•	•	•	•	
33. Galgorm Road Public Realm				•	
34. Redevelopment of the Council Offices Site	•				
35. Riverfront Housing Development					



Quality paving and street trees



Example of a high-quality train station (Berlin, Germany)

EXEMPLAR IMAGES



Sketch showing potential gateway space as part of an upgraded bus & train station on Galgorm Road

Planning Policy

The Galgorm Road area is primarily residential, but also contains the bus and train station, the PSNI station and the Borough Council offices, thus lending itself to mixed use and residential functions. This is supported by the Area Plan which seeks to encourage mixed-use developments including more housing in the Town Centre.

The development sites within this area provide unique brownfield development opportunities to complement the surrounding Galgorm area whilst stimulating investment in the wider area. The location of the sites optimises its access to the Town Centre and adjacent neighbourhood centre facilities and surrounding amenities.

The Area Plan Options Paper identifies an Area of Townscape Character at Galgorm Road/Old Galgorm Road within Ballymena Town.

Property Markets

These proposed developments would be predominantly office and residential, however they would also have an element of retail in the form of convenience stores and service providers to complement the main uses. The demand for retail premises in this location will have a direct correlation on the number of office and residential units nearby as the population of these will form the majority of their customers.

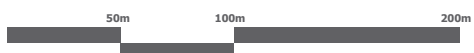
4.3.3 Alexander & Springwell Streets



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Alexander Street car park as seen from William Street

The Alexander and Springwell Street focus area examines the northern part of the retail core. This area has been greatly impacted by the lack of development on Alexander Street. Alexander Street, currently a car park, has remained undeveloped for many years. Adjacent William Street has a number of vacant or derelict properties.

West of William Street, Springwell Street and Fountain Place contain a mix of shops, homes or offices, with several vacant units evident. The south side of Springwell Street is a surface car park and adjacent multi-storey element. These car parks are essentially gateways to Ballymena. Since most people drive into town and park, it is important to present a welcoming and pleasant image of Ballymena at the first place where people step into town.



View north from High Street

Nearby High Street, in spite of what its name would suggest, has much less activity than nearby streets. There are offices, services, a church and a few vacant properties here. Undeveloped plots on High Street are either empty, private car parks, or service yards. While there is an entrance to Tower Centre from High Street, the street does not experience much pedestrian traffic. As noted earlier, High Street was once a street running from People's Park to Church Street. Today, it is severed by the surface car park and Tower Centre. However, there is scope to renew this connection.

The area also contains valuable assets. One of the most obvious is the listed buildings, creating a unique sense of place in Ballymena. Church Tower and its landscape, for example, is a green haven within a densely built Town Centre. Church Tower's history and charm can be used to create a special place within Ballymena. Other than Church Tower, Ballymena does not have open green spaces within the Town Centre. Thus, People's Park- another great asset- should be well connected to the Town Centre to compensate for its peripheral location. For this reason, a potential link between People's Park to Church Street via High Street would be an important enhancement to the Town Centre.

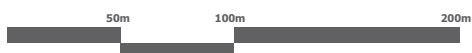


Tower Centre interior

Nevertheless, the single greatest asset of this focus area is the strong existing retail market of Ballymena's Town Centre, drawing great numbers of people to the town. Ballymena is well known regionally for its retail variety. This retail renown can be built and expanded upon with enhanced retail offer and complementary services.



PROPOSED PLAN



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36. Alexander Street Development

37. Springwell Street Developments

38. Springwell Street Public Square

39. High Street Developments

41. Broadway Bandstand Public Realm Upgrade

42. Church Tower Access & Restoration

43. Church Tower Landscape

40. Complementary Upgrade to Tower Centre
Through Route

44. Adjacent Church Tower Developments

The area at Alexander Street is perhaps the highest priority of all development opportunities in the Town Centre. Development of this site must contribute positively to adjacent streets such as Ballymoney, William and Broughshane Streets. These streets have suffered due to the lack of development at the Alexander Street site and should be improved in conjunction with the site. Development should be commercially viable and also contribute to the social and economic sustainability for Ballymena Town Centre. Social issues of territory, for example, have the potential to be addressed by this development. Finally, development should also be set in a realistic transport context which takes into account access, servicing and car parking issues.

West of Alexander Street, a new public square would be created at Springwell Street fronted by retail and food developments, potentially creating a new focus for a growing evening economy. Along the link between People's Park and Church Street, the Springwell public square would be an important nodal space. Potentially, Springwell Square could provide valuable play space in the Town Centre, benefitting from the proximity of housing in the north west corner of Town Centre. Continuing the link would be retail and mixed-used developments fronting High Street from the public square to the Tower Centre entrance. In conjunction, potential exists for an internal upgrade between the High Street and Wellington Street entrances in order to reinforce this link. This upgrade could create a kind of "covered street" facilitating continuity between inside and outside. There is also potential for the multi-storey car park adjacent to the Tower Centre to go to private ownership.

The Broadway bandstand, often described as the very centre of Ballymena, would be improved as a valuable public realm space. The Church Tower area could also be used and enjoyed as public space by the building of surrounding developments that would offer additional complementary uses to the existing retail nearby, as well as opportunities for visitors to discover the history of Church Tower and Ballymena. Church Tower itself should undergo an access and restoration effort as the adjacent landscape would receive maintenance and repair. Most importantly, development should be sensitive in nature, as Church Tower is still an active cemetery.

As part of the comprehensive environmental improvement scheme for the Town Centre mentioned earlier, there is also potential to undertake public realm improvements to Wellington Court and Bryan Street (which could potentially be pedestrianised). Improvement of Bryan Street should focus on continuing the connection through High Street and Tower Centre to Church Street.

4.0 MASTERPLAN: BALLYMENA TOMORROW

MASTERPLAN INITIATIVES	MASTERPLAN AIMS & OBJECTIVES				
		A. Maintain Ballymena's role as a major retail centre	B. Capitalise on Ballymena's role as a regional centre	C. Ensure a safe and shared Town Centre	D. Develop a sustainable transport network
36. Alexander Street Development		•	•		
37. Springwell Street Development		•	•	•	
38. Springwell Street Public Square		•	•	•	
39. High Street Developments		•	•	•	
40. Complementary Upgrade to Tower Centre		•			
41. Broadway Bandstand Public Realm		•			
42. Church Tower Access & Restoration					
43. Church Tower Landscape					
44. Adjacent Church Tower Developments		•			



Window shoppers



A busy shopping street (Carnaby St, London)



Cafe creating a vibrant and active streetscape (Brighton)

EXEMPLAR IMAGES



Sketch image looking south from Springwell Street, showing Springwell Square, High Street and entrance to Tower Centre

Planning Policy

Alexander Street and Springwell Street are appropriate for retail led schemes incorporating other commercial uses such as offices as well as residential and leisure developments. The redevelopment of these key sites will contribute to the overall regeneration of these streets and provide a means of bringing sites and buildings into beneficial use. Providing compatible mixed-use developments in these locations will attract workers and people socialising in the evening which in turn will contribute to higher footfall levels to the retailing functions within the Town Centre.

Property Markets

As a significant amount of time has passed since Alexander Street was initially ear-marked for re-development it is important that the framework for its development is established forthwith as the area has started to suffer from blighting. Given its location, fronting on to the towns prime retail high street (Ballymoney Street) and in immediate proximity to Fairhill Shopping Centre, the most appropriate and profitable development of this site would be for retail use. An outward looking scheme with frontages on to the current streetscapes of William Street, Broughshane Street and Ballymoney Street would be more beneficial as it would attract more retailers to the town and subsequently increase the footfall levels on these streets, having a positive effect on the current local economy. However it must be noted that in order to achieve this the scheme must provide flexible modern retail space capable of attracting multi-nationals. The ability to provide a variety of unit sizes would ensure the development is more lettable for the landlord.

At the time of writing, there are currently few large multi-national retailers advertising a requirement for Ballymena as such. However, multi-national retailers tend to consider taking stores in provincial towns as and when opportunities are put to them, i.e. it requires landlords/developers to be pro-active in attracting new names. For this reason any major retail development in provincial towns is speculative.

The current economic climate requires landlords to offer prospective tenants large incentive packages (such as rent-free periods and capital contributions) to take new stores as a way of reducing the tenant's costs and risk. The development of Alexander Street would not be as profitable to the private sector as it would have been 12-24 months before the time of writing.

Considering the number of vacant and derelict properties around Alexander Street and beyond and the forthcoming retail-led developments in Coleraine it is now more important than ever that Ballymena enhances its retail offer so as to retain its position as a district centre with a broad catchment. For these reasons, Alexander Street has to be a priority development.

The proposal for the regeneration of High Street provides a more uniform street with ground floor retail units and small office suites above or residential units depending on market demand at the time of development. The result would not only revive High Street but also add value to Tower Centre and encourage a more pedestrian shopping culture in the town. With features such as a pedestrian street and open area of public realm this location would be attractive to restaurateurs. Operators relying on an evening economy generally prefer to trade in close proximity to each other. The town does not currently have a significant evening economy; given its role as a Main Hub under the Regional Development Strategy and goal under PPS5 to "enhance the vitality and viability of Town Centres" a significant amount of square footage could be developed to accommodate this.

Ensuring the various proposed developments accommodate a mix of uses adds value to them in terms of making them more attractive to the occupier market (be that the retailers, office firms or residents), as well as spreading (and thus reducing) the developers risk across differing property sectors and making a more diverse urban environment.

4.3.4 St. Patrick's Barracks



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4.0

MASTERPLAN: BALLYMENA TOMORROW



ST. PATRICK'S BARRACKS



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Currently, there is a separate, independent masterplan underway for this area. Nonetheless, important issues and design objectives are briefly discussed here, focussing on the importance of this area to the Town Centre as a whole.

St. Patrick's Barracks is a former MoD site east of the Town Centre, bordered on the eastern side by the Braid River. The site has a number of issues and opportunities. One is its location amidst a dense area of housing close to Town Centre. This housing effectively creates a barrier limiting east-west permeability needed between Town Centre and the ECOS Centre, Braid River, Ballymena Showgrounds and the Northern Regional College. Due to its former use, the Barracks lacks a clear primary connection to the Town Centre and has a poor relationship with the Braid River. As a result, it is important that future development on St. Patrick's Barracks maximises linkage with the Town Centre and provides outward-facing development to front the river, capitalising on valuable river views and overlooking the riverside greenway.

45. Eastward Street Linkages

46. Eastward River Crossings



Redevelopment of the Barracks site must be integrated with the Town Centre, moving away from its currently isolated configuration. This will be achieved partly via appropriate urban form, including managing massing, scale and density of buildings to create an urban environment. Developing such a large site would also include designing a legible hierarchy of landmarks, views, and spaces to facilitate navigation and create a strong sense of place. Public and private spaces would need to be clearly defined with active frontages and overlooking of public spaces to ensure safety and surveillance. Vehicular connections should be realised through the use of streets, rather than roads. Also, ensuring high environmental quality is important in creating vibrant, useful and enduring places. However, this must be balanced by adequate parking and service arrangements.

Potential uses to be located in St. Patrick's Barracks are varied with mixed-use likely to benefit the Town Centre. Housing should form a significant part of development in this area, with a mix of private and social accommodation and eco-housing to promote sustainability. Given the site's proximity to the ECOS Centre and Braid River, there is great potential for development in St. Patrick's Barracks to engage with sustainable practices and environmental principles. Shed retail should be avoided in St. Patrick's Barracks, unless it can be successfully integrated with the urban form. Potential also exists for the relocation of key public services such as PSNI and Fire & Rescue Service to this location.

As mentioned earlier, St. Patrick's Barracks currently has poor accessibility from the Town Centre. Therefore, the strengthening of existing links and the creation of new links is important in taking forward development on this site. Strengthening of existing links will include upgrading or widening of footpaths, extending cycle lane provision and improving lighting. Good signage can also help improve accessibility. Upgrades to existing river crossings and potentially new crossing locations should also be considered. There is potential for several new links to St. Patrick's Barracks, as shown in the adjacent analysis drawing, both for vehicles and pedestrians. Existing streets which border the site can be extended into St. Patrick's Barracks to create clearer accessibility and to integrate the site into its surroundings. In the long term, the surrounding housing areas should be restructured to allow for greater permeability and accessibility between the Town Centre, St. Patrick's Barracks, Braid River and ECOS Centre.

5.0

ACTION PLAN FOR DELIVERY: BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE



5.1 Introduction

Turning vision into reality must be a key focus of any regeneration initiative for Ballymena Town Centre. This Action Plan section of the Masterplan focusses on delivery, how the positive change articulated through the Vision can be brought about in Ballymena Town Centre. Due to the extent and complexity of proposals contained within the Masterplan, this involves breaking them down into quantifiable projects that can be measured, prioritised and assigned to relevant stakeholders. Crucially, this section of the Masterplan should be viewed as a 'live document' that is continuously updated to align with current development opportunities, changing funding cycles and other unforeseen events, such as political and policy changes. The Action Plan should not only be seen as a tool for the Department for Social Development, but as an important source of reference for all stakeholders in the regeneration of Ballymena Town Centre, from public sector agencies to interested parties within the private sector.

A total of 46 regeneration initiatives are proposed by the Ballymena Town Centre Masterplan. These projects are listed on the following table, where they have been cross-referenced with the Masterplan Aims and Objectives, thus demonstrating their regeneration value to the Town Centre.

The subsequent Action Plan table sets out a proposal of stakeholders that should be involved with the delivery of each project, the prioritisation of each project in relation to its regeneration merit and an approximate indication of financial scale. It is important to emphasise speedy delivery of projects where nearby businesses are affected if extensive delays in project delivery occur.

Proposed Regeneration Initiatives

General Town Centre Initiatives

1. Environmental Improvements
2. Signage and Interpretation
3. Accessibility Strategy
4. Cycle Provision Programme
5. Town Centre Branding and Marketing
6. Festivals, Events and Activities
7. Transport Assessment
8. Town Centre Frontage Improvements
9. Town Centre Safety Initiative
10. Evening Economy Initiative
11. Link Road Landscape Improvements
12. Braid River Greenway
13. Braid River Cleanup and Management
14. Retail Capacity Study
15. Living over the Shops (LOTS) Scheme
16. Ballymena Primary & Community Care Infrastructure

Bridge Street & Braid River Focus Area

17. Trostan Avenue Housing & Mixed-Use Development
18. Bridge Street Development & Public Square
19. Bridge Street Gateway
20. Landmark Bridge
21. Riverfront Developments
22. Braid River Bridge Upgrades
23. Riverfront Public Realm
24. Henry Street Linkage

Galgorm Road Focus Area

25. Development Fronting Ballymoney Road
26. Housing at Lamont Playing Fields
27. Public Realm Upgrades to the Pentagon
28. Bus Stop Facility Upgrade
29. Developments on PSNI Site
30. Developments Fronting North Road
31. North Road Pedestrian Crossing Improvement
32. Bus & Train Station Upgrade & Gateway Space
33. Galgorm Road Public Realm
34. Redevelopment of the Council Office Site
35. Riverfront Housing Development

Alexander & Springwell Streets Focus Area

36. Alexander Street Development
37. Springwell Street Development
38. Springwell Street Public Square
39. High Street Developments
40. Complementary Upgrade to Tower Centre Through Route
41. Broadway Bandstand Public Realm Upgrade
42. Church Tower Access & Restoration
43. Church Tower Landscape
44. Adjacent Church Tower Developments

St. Patrick's Barracks Focus Area

45. Eastward Street Linkages
46. Eastward River Crossings

5.2 Analysis of Projected Regeneration Benefits

GENERAL TOWN CENTRE INITIATIVES

MASTERPLAN AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	MASTERPLAN PROPOSALS								
		1. Environmental Improvements	2. Signage & Interpretation	3. Accessibility Strategy	4. Cycle Provision Programme	5. Town Centre Branding & Marketing	6. Festivals, Events & Activities	7. Transport Assessment	8. Town Centre Frontage Improvements
A. Maintain Ballymena's role as a major retail centre		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
A1. Upgrade environmental quality		●	●	●	●			●	●
A2. Retain and improve mix of retailers						●			●
A3. Explore opportunities to enhance retail				●		●	●		●
A4. Add complementary services			●	●	●	●	●		
A5. Create a welcoming arrival experience		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
B. Capitalise on Ballymena's role as a regional centre		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
B1. Diversify range of Town Centre uses			●			●	●		
B2. Promote a positive civic identity		●	●	●	●	●	●		●
B3. Strengthen regional links			●	●	●	●	●	●	
B4. Boost tourism offer		●	●	●	●	●	●		●
B5. Support needs of major employers				●	●	●		●	
C. Ensure a safe and shared Town Centre		●	●	●	●	●	●		●
C1. Distribute activity to include weekends and evenings		●	●	●	●	●	●		
C2. Work together to improve policing		●				●	●		
C3. Support and extend youth related services		●	●		●	●	●		
C4. Extend range of neutral spaces		●	●	●	●	●	●		●
D. Develop a sustainable transport network		●	●	●	●			●	
D1. Improve facilities for public transport		●	●	●				●	
D2. Enhance pedestrian linkages		●	●	●				●	●
D3. Expand disabled access within Town Centre		●	●	●				●	●
D4. Improve legibility to and within Town Centre		●	●	●	●	●		●	●

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•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	10. Evening Economy Initiative
•	•	•	•	•	•					•	•	•	•		•	•					•	11. Link Road Landscape Improvements
•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•						•	12. Braid River Greenway
•		•			•	•				•	•	•	•		•	•					•	13. Braid River Cleanup and Management
							•						•	•		•	•	•			•	14. Retail Capacity Study
					•		•	•	•				•	•	•							15. Living over the Shop Scheme
					•	•						•	•		•		•					16. Ballymena PCCI
•								•	•	•			•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	17. Trostan Avenue Housing & Mixed-Use Development
•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	18. Bridge Street Development & Public Square
•	•	•		•	•				•			•	•		•	•				•	•	19. Bridge Street Gateway
•	•	•			•				•		•	•	•		•	•		•		•	•	20. Landmark Bridge
•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•		•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	21. Riverfront Developments
•	•	•		•	•				•			•	•			•				•	•	22. Braid River Bridge Upgrades
•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	23. Riverfront Public Realm
•	•	•					•					•				•		•		•		24. Henry Street Linkage

GALGORM ROAD FOCUS AREA

MASTERPLAN AIMS & OBJECTIVES	MASTERPLAN PROPOSALS						
	25. Developments Fronting Ballymoney Road	26. Housing at Lamont Playing Fields	27. Public Realm Upgrades to the Pentagon	28. Bus Stop Facility Upgrade	29. Developments on PSNI Site	30. Developments fronting North Road	31. North Road Pedestrian Crossing
A. Maintain Ballymena's role as a major retail centre	•		•		•	•	
A1. Upgrade environmental quality	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
A2. Retain and improve mix of retailers	•		•		•	•	
A3. Explore opportunities to enhance retail	•		•		•	•	
A4. Add complementary services	•		•		•	•	
A5. Create a welcoming arrival experience	•		•	•	•	•	•
B. Capitalise on Ballymena's role as a regional centre	•		•		•	•	
B1. Diversify range of Town Centre uses	•	•	•		•	•	
B2. Promote a positive civic identity	•	•	•		•	•	•
B3. Strengthen regional links				•			
B4. Boost tourism offer							
B5. Support needs of major employers	•				•	•	
C. Ensure a safe and shared Town Centre					•		
C1. Distribute activity to include weekends and evenings		•		•			
C2. Work together to improve policing	•	•			•	•	
C3. Support and extend youth related services			•	•			•
C4. Extend range of neutral spaces	•		•	•	•	•	
D. Develop a sustainable transport network			•	•		•	
D1. Improve facilities for public transport	•		•	•	•		
D2. Enhance pedestrian linkages	•		•	•	•	•	•
D3. Expand disabled access within Town Centre			•	•			•
D4. Improve legibility to and within Town Centre	•		•	•	•	•	•

•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•			•	•	32. Bus & Train Station Upgrade and Gateway Space
•	•	•	•	•						•		•	•			•						33. Galgorm Road Public Realm
																		•		•		34. Redevelopment of the Council Offices Site
							•	•				•	•							•		35. Riverfront Housing Development
•	•	•			•		•	•		•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	36. Alexander Street Development
•		•			•		•	•	•		•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	37. Springwell Street Development
•		•			•		•	•	•		•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	38. Springwell Street Public Square
•		•			•		•	•	•		•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	39. High Street Developments
•	•	•			•	•	•	•				•				•	•	•		•		40. Complementary Upgrade to the Tower Centre
•		•			•					•		•	•		•		•	•	•	•	•	41. Broadway Bandstand Public Realm Upgrade
					•			•		•		•	•							•		42. Church Tower Access & Restoration
					•			•		•		•	•							•		43. Church Tower Landscape
					•			•		•							•	•	•	•	•	44. Adjacent Church Tower Developments
•	•	•			•					•	•									•		45. Eastward Street Linkages
•	•	•								•	•	•								•		46. Eastward River Crossings

ALEXANDER & SPRINGWELL STREETS
FOCUS AREA

ST. PATRICK'S
BARRACKS
FOCUS AREA

5.3 Action Plan for Delivery

General Town Centre Initiatives

Interconnected Projects

INITIATIVE	STAKEHOLDERS	PRIORITY	TIMEFRAME*	BUDGET**	ACTIONS
1. Environmental Improvements a. Streetscapes b. Lighting c. Planting d. Public Art e. Temporary Improvements	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Planning Service, Roads Service, Private Sector, Users	High	Short- Medium	a. £843,000 b. £1,368,000 c. £60,000 d. Variable e. Variable (dependent on extents)	Undertake access audit Develop a public realm policy for Ballymena to set design quality standards and identify areas to be improved
2. Signage & Interpretation Improving legibility and navigation for pedestrians and drivers throughout the Town Centre by providing a coherent signage scheme and communicating the history of Ballymena through interpretative panels, tours, etc	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Roads Service	High	Short- Medium	£200,000	Design new Town Centre signage Design public realm scheme for Ballymena Secure necessary funding and statutory approvals
3. Accessibility Strategy Ensuring improved accessibility of the Town Centre based on an Access Audit and delivery of associated action plan, ideally applying to both publicly and privately owned areas	Ballymena & District Disability Forum, Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Planning Service, Roads Service, Translink	High	Short- Medium	Variable	Implement public realm improvements
4. Cycle Provision Programme Continuing efforts to realise a cohesive cycle network through Ballymena Town Centre and linking adjacent neighborhoods and open spaces	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Roads Service, Sustrans	Medium	Short - Medium	Variable	Include cycling plan with transport proposals Consider including cycle links within Neighbourhood Renewal Programme
5. Town Centre Branding & Marketing Strategy for promoting Ballymena to potential visitors and investors, encouraging a positive civic identity, and changing perceptions about the Town Centre	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD	Very High	Immediate	Variable	Develop a plan to proactively promote development opportunities identified in the Masterplan Develop a plan to promote tourism and leisure, linked to the implementation of associated developments
6. Festivals, Events & Activities Development of a varied programme of high quality events to take place in and around Town Centre, focusing on promoting inclusivity	Arts Council, Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Northern Ireland Tourist Board	High	Immediate	Variable	Develop a programme of events linked to Town Centre Branding & Marketing strategy Roll out additional events as new spaces are created by the public realm improvements
7. Transport Assessment Undertake a transport assessment of the Town Centre, including transport modelling, which can be used to inform existing and future developments	Ballymena Borough Council, DSD, Road Service	High	Immediate-Short	Variable	Draw up Terms of Reference and secure funding Carry out Transport Assessment

INITIATIVE	STAKEHOLDERS	PRIORITY	TIMEFRAME*	BUDGET**	ACTIONS
8. Town Centre Frontage Improvements Coordinated improvement programme of building frontages including surface treatments, architectural details and signage	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Planning Service Retailers & Private Sector	Medium	Short- Medium	Variable	Identify priority areas Identify criteria for properties to be supported Identify design principles and eligibility for support Secure funding Implement scheme Run a competition for the most improved street
9. Town Centre Safety Initiative Strategy to address safety and perception of safety in Town Centre through a number of measures	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, PSNI Pub Landlords, Retailers & Private Sector	Very High	Immediate	Variable	Town Centre Partnership to produce policy/ guidelines on safety issues which can be related to other initiatives in the Town Centre
10. Evening Economy Initiative Proactive approach to improve and diversify evening economy in Town Centre, supporting existing business in their evening operations, encouraging the extension of activity, and complementing with new uses	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Invest Northern Ireland, Planning Service, PSNI Pub Landlords	High	Immediate	Variable	Town Centre Partnership to produce policy/ guidelines on the evening economy which can be related to other initiatives in the Town Centre
11. Link Road Landscape Improvements Improvements to the environmental quality of the link roads around Ballymena Town Centre, including Larne Road Link, North Road, and Parkway	Arts Council, Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Roads Service	Medium	Short- Medium	£2,407,000	Design and implement planting schemes on the link roads
12. Braid River Greenway Implementation of a greenway around Braid River with corresponding foot and cycle paths along its length, potentially building weirs where necessary, to create a greenway connecting outlying settlements with the Town Centre	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Rivers Agency, Sustrans, Ulster Wildlife Trust	Medium	Medium - Long	Variable	Identify problem areas along the Braid River Identify stakeholders and possible partners for delivery Draw up plan for cleanup and Greenway and agree ongoing management arrangements
13. Braid River Cleanup & Management This effort would include cleaning of the water and riverside areas and ensuring long-term maintenance and management of the Braid River	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Rivers Agency, Ulster Wildlife Trust	High	Short	Variable	Secure funding Implement cleanup and Greenway plans

* APPROXIMATE TIMEFRAMES
 Immediate 0 - 12 Months
 Short 1 - 3 Years
 Medium 4 - 10 Years
 Long 10 + Years

** All budget figures shown are approximate, for guidance only.

General Town Centre Initiatives (continued)

INITIATIVE	STAKEHOLDERS	PRIORITY	TIMEFRAME*	BUDGET**	ACTIONS
14. Retail Capacity Study This Study would aid in making accurately informed decisions on the extent and timing of future retail development.	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Chamber of Commerce, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD	High	Immediate	Variable	Draw up Terms of Reference and secure funding Carry out Retail Capacity Study
15. Living over the Shops (LOTS) Scheme LOTS Scheme would enable landowners to apply for grants to convert or upgrade living accommodation in the Town Centre.	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Northern Ireland Housing Executive	High	Medium	Variable	To be taken forward by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive
16. Ballymena Primary & Community Care Infrastructure Replacement and modernisation of health care facilities at Braid Valley Hospital.	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Northern Health & Social Care Trust	High	Medium	Variable	To be taken forward by Northern Health & Social Care Trust

Bridge Street & Braid River Focus Area

17. Trostan Avenue Housing & Mixed-Use Development A housing development wrapping a multi-storey car park with mixed uses on the ground floor	Ballymena Borough Council, DSD, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Planning Service, Roads Service, Private Sector, Housing Associations	Medium	Medium - Long	£12,679,000	Establish if/when Northern Regional College will relocate Establish requirements for replacement parking if the Church Street 2 car park were to be included in scheme for this area DSD/ Local Authority to assemble site Issue development brief Assess proposals and appoint preferred developer Secure planning permission and form Development Agreement Construct scheme
18. Bridge Street Development & Public Square Public square in front of Braid Arts Centre with surrounding mixed-use development, including two storeys of underground car parking	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Planning Service, Roads Service Private Sector	High	Short- Medium	£19,275,000	Consult with interested parties to clarify the objectives and requirements for the site Assemble site (assuming use of a Development Scheme and Vesting Order is required) Public enquiry into Development Scheme and Vesting Order Issue development brief Assess proposals and appoint preferred developer Secure planning permission and form Development Agreement Construct scheme

INITIATIVE	STAKEHOLDERS	PRIORITY	TIMEFRAME*	BUDGET**	ACTIONS
19. Bridge Street Gateway Improvement of Bridge Street traffic island featuring a gateway building, public art and better pedestrian environment, producing a welcoming space that acts as a gateway to Ballymena	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Roads Service Private Sector	High	Short- Medium	£2,465,000	Design scheme to improve pedestrian environment and traffic movements Secure funding Deliver scheme
20. Landmark Bridge Pedestrian bridge over the Larne Road Link connecting Church Street public square to riverfront development and public realm, also a gateway for drivers coming into Ballymena. Approximate budget includes platform structures.	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Planning Service, Roads Service Private Sector	Medium	Medium	£3,000,000	Site of bridge to be determined as part of Development Brief for Bridge Street Achieve agreement on funding Carry out a design competition Select design Construct bridge
21. Riverfront Developments Mixed-use development, including a multi-storey car park, with intensity of cultural uses taking advantage of valuable riverfront space	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Planning Service Private Sector	Medium	Medium - Long	£68,686,000	Area for redevelopment to be identified as a Development Opportunity Site in the draft Antrim, Ballymena and Larne Area Plan Private sector to take development forward
22. Braid River Bridge Upgrades Upgrade of existing bridges (Harryville Bridge, Braidwater vehicular bridge, and Edward Street pedestrian bridge) and building of new pedestrian bridge at riverfront public realm space	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Rivers Agency, Roads Service Private Sector	Medium	Medium	£3,300,000	To be undertaken as part of the comprehensive riverfront development on the Braidwater site
23. Riverfront Public Realm High-quality public realm space fronting the Braid River, creating pleasant places to enjoy riverside views and surrounding development	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Planning Service, Rivers Agency Private Sector	Medium	Medium - Long	£2,119,000	To be undertaken as part of the comprehensive riverfront development on the Braidwater site
24. Henry Street Linkage Pedestrian and vehicular link between riverfront public realm and Henry Street in Harryville	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, Department for Regional Development, DSD, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Roads Service Private Sector, Residents	Medium	Medium - Long	£71,000	To be undertaken as part of the comprehensive riverfront development on the Braidwater site

* APPROXIMATE TIMEFRAMES
 Immediate 0 - 12 Months
 Short 1 - 3 Years
 Medium 4 - 10 Years
 Long 10 + Years

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Galgorm Road Focus Area

INITIATIVE	STAKEHOLDERS	PRIORITY	TIMEFRAME*	BUDGET**	ACTIONS
25. Developments Fronting Ballymoney Road Mixed-use development with ground-floor retail and office space above, including surface car parking	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Planning Service Private Sector	Medium	Medium - Long	£549,000	To be taken forward by private sector If no progress is apparent after 5 years, public sector to consider intervention to assist development
26. Housing at Lamont Playing Fields Housing development fronting Lamont Playing Fields and Memorial Park	Ballymena Borough Council, Planning Service, NI housing Executive Private Sector, Housing Associations	Medium	Medium - Long	£1,577,000	To be taken forward by private sector
27. Public Realm Upgrades to the Pentagon Upgrade to enhance the pedestrian experience at the Pentagon intersection	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Roads Service, Translink	High	Short- Medium	£807,000	To be delivered as part of the public realm strategy (initiative 1)
28. Bus Stop Facility Upgrade Improvement of existing bus stops	Ballymena Borough Council, DSD, Translink, Roads Service	Medium	Short- Medium	£15,000	To be delivered as part of the public realm strategy (initiative 1)
29. Developments on PSNI Site On and around the site of the current PSNI Station, mixed-use development with ground-floor retail and office space above along with residential and surface car parking, creating a new vehicular link between Galgorm Road	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Planning Service Private Sector, Housing Associations	Medium	Medium - Long	£9,452,000	Establish when PSNI will relocate to new premises (connected to plans for St. Patrick's Barracks) DSD/ Local Authority to assemble site Issue development brief Assess proposals and appoint preferred developer Secure planning permission and form Development Agreement Construct scheme
30. Developments Fronting North Road Mixed-use development with ground-floor retail and office space above, including surface car parking	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Planning Service Private Sector	Medium	Medium - Long	£13,457,000	Consider taking forward with the PSNI station site to implement a comprehensive approach
31. North Road Pedestrian Crossing Improvement Improving existing pedestrian crossing to realign it with existing streets and views	Ballymena Borough Council, DSD, Planning Service, Roads Service	Medium	Medium- Long	£5,000	Roads Service to take forward in parallel with Development Fronting North Road

INITIATIVE	STAKEHOLDERS	PRIORITY	TIMEFRAME*	BUDGET**	ACTIONS
32. Bus & Train Station Upgrade and Gateway Space High-quality upgrade to existing facilities as well as a welcoming gateway public realm space to welcome people into Ballymena	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, Disability Forum, DSD, Translink, Transport Holdings Company	Medium	Short- Medium	£5,699,000	To be taken forward by Translink
33. Galgorm Road Public Realm Public realm upgrades to Galgorm Road creating a more pleasant link between bus & train station and Ballymena Town Centre	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Roads Service	High	Medium	£1,410,000	To be delivered as part of the public realm strategy (initiative 1) Timing to coincide with or follow Bus & Train Station Upgrade & Gateway Space
34. Redevelopment of the Council Offices Site Redevelopment of the site to housing, dependent on the relocation of the Council Offices, potentially to Bridge Street Square	Ballymena Borough Council, DSD, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Planning Service, Roads Service, Private Sector, Housing Associations	Medium	Medium	Variable	Review of Council estate following Review of Public Administrative (connected to opportunities for new office development at Bridge Street or the riverfront development) Issue development brief Assess proposals and appoint preferred developer Secure planning permission and form Development Agreement Construct scheme
35. Riverfront Housing Development Housing development fronting Waveney Road and Braid River, capitalising on valuable river views	Ballymena Borough Council, DSD, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Planning Service, Roads Service, Private Sector, Housing Associations	Medium	Medium	£1,218,000	Establish if/when Fire Service will relocate to new premises DSD/ Local Authority to assemble site Issue development brief Assess proposals and appoint preferred developer Secure planning permission and form Development Agreement Construct scheme

* APPROXIMATE TIMEFRAMES
Immediate 0 - 12 Months
Short 1 - 3 Years
Medium 4 - 10 Years
Long 10 + Years

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Alexander & Springwell Streets Focus Area

INITIATIVE	STAKEHOLDERS	PRIORITY	TIMEFRAME*	BUDGET**	ACTIONS
36. Alexander Street Development Mainly retail development fronting Ballymoney, William, and Broughshane Streets with servicing within, including a multi-storey car park	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Planning Service Private Sector	High	Short- Medium	£7,961,000	Engage with the preferred developer for this site to determine if public sector intervention continues to be required to develop the site Consult with interested parties to clarify the objectives and requirements for the site Assemble site (assuming use of Development Scheme and Vesting Order is required) Public enquiry into Development Scheme and Vesting Order Issue development brief Assess proposals Secure planning permission and form Development Agreement Construct scheme
37. Springwell Street Development Mainly retail and food development aiming to diversify and add complementary services to the Town Centre	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Planning Service, Roads Service Private Sector	Medium	Medium - Long	£4,949,000	Consult with interested parties to clarify the objectives and requirements for the site Assemble site (assuming use of Development Scheme and Vesting Order is required)
38. Springwell Street Public Square Valuable public realm space surrounded by development	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Roads Service Private Sector	Medium	Medium - Long	£1,181,000	Public enquiry into Development Scheme and Vesting Order Issue development brief Assess proposals
39. High Street Developments Mixed-use development and surface car parking with ground floor retail aiming to create an active and pleasant street, part of a longer connection between People's Park and Church Street	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Planning Service Private Sector	Medium	Long	£6,010,000	Secure planning permission and form Development Agreement Construct scheme
40. Complementary Upgrade to Tower Centre Through Route Potential interior upgrade of Tower Centre creating a 'covered street' linking High Street and Wellington Street	DSD Private Sector	Medium	Medium - Long	Variable	To be taken forward by private sector
41. Broadway Bandstand Public Realm Upgrade Improvements to existing public space	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Roads Service	High	Short- Medium	£720,000	To be delivered as part of the public realm strategy (initiative 1)

Interconnected Projects

INITIATIVE	STAKEHOLDERS	PRIORITY	TIMEFRAME*	BUDGET**	ACTIONS
42. Church Tower Access & Restoration Works to restore Tower and ensure safety and accessibility for all visitors	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, Churches Forum, DSD, Northern Ireland Environment Agency	Medium	Short- Medium	£359,000	Feasibility Study/ detailed design to be prepared for the site Management plan for the site to be worked out
43. Church Tower Landscape Landscape improvements and maintenance to graveyard	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, Churches Forum, DSD, Northern Ireland Environment Agency	Medium	Short- Medium	£32,000	Secure necessary funding and statutory approvals Implement the scheme
44. Adjacent Church Tower Developments Development offering complementary services and historical interpretation, drawing visitors to Church Tower site	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Planning Service Private Sector	Medium	Medium - Long	£2,548,000	Identify viable forms of development that would complement the restoration of the tower Secure planning permission Construct scheme

St. Patrick's Barracks Focus Area

45. Eastward Street Linkages Pedestrian and vehicular linkages to create appropriate connections between the Town Centre, adjacent housing, St. Patrick's Barracks and the ECOS Centre	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Roads Service	Medium	Short	£706,000	Relate to St. Patrick's Barracks Masterplan Coordinate with future development opportunities
46. Eastward River Crossings Corresponding to the above project, upgrades to existing pedestrian crossings over the Braid River and building of new crossings where appropriate	Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymena Town Centre Partnership, DSD, Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Rivers Agency, Roads Service, Sustrans	Medium	Medium	£1,000,000	Coordinate projects with Ballykeel Neighbourhood Action Plan Link projects with Braid River Greenway

* APPROXIMATE TIMEFRAMES
Immediate 0 - 12 Months
Short 1 - 3 Years
Medium 4 - 10 Years
Long 10 + Years

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5.0

ACTION PLAN FOR DELIVERY: BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE



5.4 The Delivery Process

The Department for Social Development plays a central role in developing and coordinating the implementation of urban regeneration programmes throughout Northern Ireland including Ballymena Town Centre.

This Masterplan sets out guidance on the proposed range, mix and location of uses, to maximise the regeneration of Ballymena Town Centre.

The Department may use its statutory powers, where appropriate, to deliver the regeneration of Ballymena Town Centre as set out in this Masterplan through:

- the formulation of strategy
- the preparation of development schemes
- issuing of development briefs and design guidance
- co-ordination of development partners
- appraisal of development proposals
- direct investment in public realm
- the use of its land assembly and roads extinguishment powers

The Department should, where possible, seek to deliver the Masterplan objectives through cooperation with local landowners, local businesses and the wider community.

This will require a partnership approach between the various public sector agencies outlined in the Action Plan table, including Ballymena Borough Council and Ballymena Town Centre Partnership. Partnership will also be required with the private sector, including Town Centre land owners and development organisations. Continued engagement with the people of Ballymena is also encouraged, allowing for a transparent process of regeneration that enables input from the community and a sense of ownership and pride in the transformations resulting from delivery of the Masterplan.

However, the land that may be required to deliver the Masterplan objectives is in multiple ownerships and it may not be possible to acquire such land by agreement or to have the existing owners redevelop their land in a comprehensive manner. The Department may therefore be required to exercise its statutory powers to deliver the objectives set out in this Masterplan. An account of these mechanisms is outlined in Appendix B “Use of DSD Statutory Powers”.

In May 2011, responsibility for the delivery of urban regeneration will transfer from DSD to the new Mid-Antrim local authority under the provisions of the Review of Public Administration. To ensure that the administrative re-organisation does not delay or inhibit the implementation of the Ballymena Town Centre Masterplan, it is recommended that DSD and Ballymena Borough Council work in close partnership to progress the Action Plan over the coming two years. All actions should be jointly agreed and implemented.

6.0

CONCLUSIONS



The Ballymena Town Centre Masterplan has established a bold vision for this important area that both underpins its existing strengths and capitalises upon its numerous assets. The four primary masterplan aims of supporting retail, developing its role as regional hub, improving the perception of safety and ensuring sustainable transport linkages have been mapped out as a route to the sustainable regeneration of Ballymena's Town Centre.

The Masterplan has found that the town's strong and varied retail sector requires a number of measures to ensure that Ballymena remains a leading shopping destination through an era of increased competition and economic challenges. Gateway interventions, improvements to parking and public transport and a dynamic marketing and branding strategy will establish a more positive external perception, arrival experience and first impressions of the Town Centre. Signage and interpretation initiatives will help visitors to the town orientate themselves and encourage them to explore all parts of the centre, including shops, leisure venues and tourist attractions. Comprehensively upgraded public realm, including principal streets and new civic spaces, will provide a high quality environment for shoppers and residents, improving the way in which people can move through the centre and encouraging them to spend more time there. Areas identified for the sustainable growth of Ballymena's retail offer, when developed in line with market conditions, will ensure the town maintains a competitive edge and further improved retail environment.

Ballymena's role as a Regional Hub also stands to be further capitalised upon, exploiting its strategic location, strong skill base and transport linkages. This would not only be established through retail development, but also a diverse range of complementary Town Centre uses such as office accommodation, hospitality and leisure, as well as increased residential provision. Established areas will be joined by newly developed parts of the town, such as Galgorm Road, Alexander Street, Springwell, Bridge Street and Ballymena's exciting new riverfront, providing a setting for contemporary Town Centre development. Diversifying the uses of Ballymena Town Centre will be a key component to its future prosperity.

The Ballymena Town Centre Masterplan also seeks to positively influence perceptions of the area's safety and security, considered another critical step in equipping the Town Centre for a positive and vibrant future. This will be achieved by encouraging a more diverse evening economy and by ensuring that the Town Centre is as positive and welcoming as possible to all members of the community. Scope exists for restaurants, bars and hotels (both old and new) to work together with commercial and cultural venues to extend the life of Ballymena Town Centre from the day into the evenings and weekends. Improved public realm and a series of new public squares will provide high quality and above all, safe environments for passive recreation and venues for events and activities. A reinvigorated programme of Town Centre festivals should also be actively pursued to encourage the introduction of positive community activity in the Town Centre at times of the day, week and year.

Improved sustainable transportation is another key measure proposed by the Masterplan that will improve the ways in which people access and navigate Ballymena Town Centre. Ballymena is fortunate to have an integrated rail and bus interchange and this should be underpinned and strengthened to play a greater role in sustainably servicing the Town Centre. Access and quality of car parks should be managed in a way that makes arriving in Ballymena Town Centre a straightforward and pleasurable exercise. And the quality of Ballymena's pedestrian experience must be improved through ensuring the balance of different transport modes is appropriate, connections are logical and easily made and that the quality of public spaces and streets is as high as possible.

Through the Masterplan, a framework has been put in place to guide and implement the regeneration of Ballymena Town Centre. The accompanying Action Plan highlights that such measures will require the involvement and teamwork of many stakeholders from both the public and private sectors. Delivery will be required to align with market conditions, availability of funding and opportunities for development that arise in the years to come. Whilst much hard work will be required to realise the Masterplan vision in full, it demonstrates that if followed, a considerable opportunity exists for Ballymena Town Centre to play a greatly enhanced and positive role in the life of all its citizens of today and tomorrow.

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- Street performers: Anaru
- Street parade: Yisris

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- Public art: Scazon

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- Pedestrian bridge (Bilbao): Daquella manera
- Pedestrian bridge (Venice): Seier+seier+seier

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- Berlin train station: Eliotc

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- Cafe: Dominic's Pics
- Window shoppers: Specialkrb
- Carnaby Street: Jig o'dance

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A. List of Consultees

The following organisations were an integral part of the stakeholder consultation process. DSD and the Masterplan consultant team are grateful to all the stakeholders for their time.

Road Service and Translink

19th March 2008

Jackson Minford

Sam Todd

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

14th March 2008

Christine Marks

Ballymena Town Centre Partnership

14th March 2008

Colin Neill

Tower Shopping Centre

12th March 2008

Fearghal Eastwood

North Eastern Education and Library Board

10th March 2008

George Wylie

Churches Forum & Translink User Group

10th March 2008

John Stuart

Alexander Property Holdings

10th March 2008

Norman Cahoon

Northern Regional College (NRC)

11th March 2008

Clare O'Neill

Catherine O'Mullan

Police Service Northern Ireland

2nd May 2008

Constable J.D. McAuley

Kenny McHugh

Disability Forum

11th March 2008

Martin McAvoy

Pub Landlords

14th April 2008

Stephen Reynolds

Wilson Crawford

Stephen Moore

Corbo Ltd/ SMV

18th March 2008

Sam Morrison

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

14th April 2008

Wesley Currie

Health Trust

14th April 2008

Lyn Hanvey

Colum McAuley Builders Ltd

18th March 2008

Francis McAuley

Planning Service

14th March 2008

Heather McSparran

Ballymena Borough Council

31st March 2008

Ronnie McBride

Maurice Watterson

Independent Retailers & Chamber of Commerce

12 June 2008

B. Use of DSD Statutory Powers

The Department's statutory regeneration authority derives primarily from Part VII of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (as amended) which provides the legislative basis for a number of regeneration initiatives including comprehensive redevelopment schemes, compulsory acquisition of land, disposal of land and the extinguishment of public rights of way. The Social Need (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 provides the statutory basis for providing funding for projects in areas of special social or economic need and for carrying out environmental improvement schemes.

Comprehensive Development Schemes

Where the Department considers it expedient that any area should be developed, redeveloped or improved as a whole the Department may, after consultation with the appropriate district council, in this case Ballymena, prepare a development scheme defining, by reference to a map, the area of the scheme and indicating in general terms the manner in which it is intended that the area should be laid out and the land therein used.

Before adopting such a scheme, the Department must publish, in two successive weeks, in one or more newspapers circulating in the locality to which the scheme relates a notice—

- (a) describing the area to which the scheme relates and referring to the preparation of the scheme;
- (b) specifying the place at which copies of the scheme may be inspected at reasonable times;
- (c) stating the time (not being less than 28 days from the last of the publications of the notice) during which objections to the scheme may be sent to the Department.

If after publishing the notice, no objections are made to the development scheme or all objections are withdrawn the Department may adopt the scheme with or without amendment.

If objections are made to the development scheme are not withdrawn the Department shall, unless it considers them to be solely of a frivolous or vexatious nature, cause a public local inquiry to be held by the planning appeals commission; and consider any objections not withdrawn and the report of that commission and may thereafter by order adopt the scheme with or without amendments.

A development scheme adopted or amended under the Planning Order must be in general conformity with the regional development strategy.

Once a development scheme is adopted, the Department may, by agreement or compulsorily, acquire any land where it is satisfied that the land is required in connection with the development scheme; or that it is expedient in the public interest that the land should be held together with land required in connection with the development scheme.

The Planning Order also grants the Department the power to acquire land compulsorily where that the land is required for development or redevelopment, or both, as a whole for the purpose of providing for the relocation of population or industry or the replacement of open space in the course of the redevelopment or improvement of another area as a whole.

In the alternative, the Department may acquire land where it is satisfied that it is expedient to acquire the land for a purpose which it is necessary to achieve in the interests of the proper planning of an area in which the land is situated.

The Department's powers must be exercised in accordance with the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act 1998. In exercising its powers the Department also has a duty to promote equality of opportunity as required by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and to give regard to Government's Targeting Social Need objectives in relation to combating unemployment and increasing employability.

In exercising its statutory powers to facilitate regeneration, DSD will have regard to relevant government policies, including the Regional Development Strategy, relevant planning policy statements, the local area plans, the views of Ballymena Borough Council, this Masterplan, consultation responses to the Masterplan and DSD's overall regeneration objectives for Ballymena.

