

Athlone Urban Design and Regeneration Framework

Volume I: Written Statement

Glossary of terms

Acronym / Abbreviations	Full Title
State Bodies / Organisations	
ABP / The Board	An Bord Pleanála
EMRA	Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly
NWRA	Northern and Western Regional Assembly
RCC	Roscommon County Council
WCC / The Council	Westmeath County Council
IBEC	Irish Business and Employers Confederation
IDA	Industrial Development Authority / IDA Ireland
BID	Business Improvement District
NTA	National Transport Authority
OPW	Office of Public Works
OSI	Ordnance Survey Ireland
TUS	Technological University of the Shannon
Documentation	
Athlone ABTA	Athlone Area Based Transport Assessment
Athlone Development Plan	Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020
DMURS	Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets
Framework	Athlone Urban Design and Regeneration Framework
NDP	Project Ireland 2040: National Development Plan 2021-2030
NPF	Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework
SIA	Social Infrastructure Audit
RSES	Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies
TCHC	Town Centre Health Check
Westmeath Development Plan	Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027

Acronym / Abbreviations	Full Title
Terminology	
NCN	National Cycle Network
SHD	Strategic Housing Development
SuDS	Sustainable Drainage System
SCOT	Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Threats
General	
c.	Circa / Approximately
e.g.	for example
i.e.	that is
inter alia	among other things
m	Metres
No.	Number – e.g., House No. 24
no.	Number of – e.g., 24 no. houses
sq.m.	Square Metres
Ref.	Reference

Imagery Sources

Imagery used in this Framework is for illustration purposes only and does not represent the actual development proposals. The Framework also includes images / visualisations created by Third-Parties, which are included for illustrative purposes only. Sources include: WCC; Turley; Arrow; DFLA; Fáilte Ireland; OSI; Google; Getty Images; Athlone Croí na hÉireann; Connaught Street and Environs Community Group; and Athlone No 1 Gun Battery Heritage Group.

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Volume I: Written Statement

Introduction

The Introduction sets out the Framework's structure and purpose, defines the Framework Area and provides details on the Design Team and their contribution to the project.

This chapter also provides a concise overview and summary of the subsequent chapters within the Framework. It acts as a roadmap, providing a glimpse into the structured progression of ideas, insights and initiatives proposed in this Framework.

Study Area

This chapter outlines the background analysis undertaken to inform the Framework including consideration of the historical context and drivers which shaped the town coupled with Athlone's geographical context. Specific technical assessments and audits have been undertaken including a Town Centre Health Check, Social Infrastructure Audit, Land Use Assessments, and a review of the relevant planning context within which any future development proposals would be considered. This chapter concludes by providing a SCOT analysis which assisted the formulation of the project Vision and Objectives.

Vision and Objectives

The Framework's Vision has been formulated based on the findings of the analysis, consultation with stakeholders, and the professional judgement of the Design Team and Council. The Vision will be implemented through the delivery of four key objectives that seek: to rebalance the town; to optimise spaces and create places; to support and facilitate active and cultural tourism; and to regenerate underutilised sites.

Public Realm and Placemaking Strategy

This chapter sets out the nature and extent of public realm and streetscape improvements, both publicly-funded and as part of new development within the Framework Area. It builds on recent planned and realised public realm improvements to propose a clear, consistent and legible framework for future development. The Chapter consists of: a Public Realm and Placemaking Toolbox; a Streets Manual; a Manual for Key Public Spaces; and an Activity Manual.

Urban Design Principles

This chapter discusses key urban design principles which should influence and inform future development proposals cognisant of the intrinsic value of Athlone's natural and built environment, in particular the significance of the Architectural Conservation Area to the setting and character of the town centre.

Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking

Focus Area: Connaught Street Area

In this chapter, the Framework details how supporting arts and culture, facilitating active tourism and collaborating with the community will help create vibrant, resilient, and culturally rich urban spaces in Athlone. The significance of the Connaught Street Area as a potential nucleus and catalyst for a thriving Tourism and Cultural Quarter is explored. Guidance is provided on the potential measures which could be delivered by way of public realm improvements and other interventions to unlock the potential of this area.

Opportunity Sites

Informed by the Brownfield Site Audit (Volume II) this chapter outlines and explores the development potential of 14 brownfield sites. Each site has the capacity to support and facilitate the delivery of sustainable, compact urban regeneration. Urban design principles are identified for each site which is supported by a conceptual layout to provide an understanding of the development potential to guide prospective developers.

Regenerative Pipeline Projects

In this chapter, the Framework sets out actionable Regenerative Pipeline Projects of varying types and scale which enable the transformational regeneration of Athlone. The delivery of these projects will reaffirm Athlone's designations as a 'Regional Growth Centre' and Failte Ireland 'Destination Town' in the heart of the 'Hidden Heartlands', and will facilitate the delivery of resilient compact growth in accordance with the vision conceived as part of Project Ireland 2040.

01

Introduction

The Study and its Purpose

Turley, in association with a multi-disciplinary team and in collaboration with Westmeath County Council's (WCC) and Athlone's community and stakeholders, have prepared this Urban Design and Regeneration Framework (Framework).

WCC's principal objective was for Turley and the wider multi-disciplinary team to produce an urban design and regeneration led Framework underpinned by dialogue with the community, stakeholders and to prioritise and plan for pipeline projects which support a compact and smart growth-based approach to Athlone's future development in accordance with the vision conceived as part of Project Ireland 2040.

The aim of this project was to provide an ambitious and integrated Urban Design and Regeneration Framework for Athlone through the creation of qualitative public realm and place-making, compact urban growth, climate resilient investment and targeted urban renewal / regeneration projects that are reflective of national and regional strategic objectives.

The Framework is visionary, ambitious, and creative in the design of new propositions for Athlone. It is supported and underpinned by an evidence base which consists of a suite of technical assessments as well as the results from surveys and feedback from the community and stakeholders.

This information is enclosed within the report appendices (separate document).

The Framework has embraced the power of urban design and regeneration in re-imagining Athlone by identifying a range of interventions to support the town in realising its potential as a designated 'Regional Growth Centre' in the Midlands region and a Failte Ireland 'Destination Town' in the heart of the 'Hidden Heartlands'. Key to the success of the Framework has been the formulation of a range of interventions – public realm improvements; the identification of Opportunity Sites, and pipeline projects. Each intervention will deliver change by regenerating a specific area of the town, collectively these interventions will support the delivery of the project vision and underpin transformational change.

The Framework was developed with a clear understanding of the national, regional and local policy context, with a particular focus on the National Planning Framework: Ireland 2040 (NPF), Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES), Town Centre First: A Policy Approach for Irish Towns, Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES), The Shannon Tourism Masterplan, Westmeath Development Plan 2021-2027 (Development Plan) and Westmeath Tourism Strategy 2021-2027.

Importantly, it forms only part of an integrated process alongside the adopted joint Athlone Economic Strategy and the Athlone Transport Strategy, all of which will inform and underpin the Joint Athlone Urban Area Plan which is currently being prepared by WCC in collaboration with Roscommon County Council.



Athlone Basketball Club and Academy



St Patrick's Day Parade on Castle Street



The Galway to Dublin National Cycle Bridge spanning the River Shannon

The Team

Design Team

Turley was appointed by Westmeath County Council to prepare this Framework Document. Turley worked with WCC to lead a multi-disciplinary Design Team with a breadth of experience, working in partnership to deliver this ambitious development brief.

Client / Design Team

Westmeath County Council
Aras An Chontae
Mount Street
Mullingar
Co. Westmeath
N91 FH4N

Design Team Leads

Turley
4 Pembroke Street Upper
Dublin 2
D02 VN24

Turley provided services including Planning, Urban Design, Economics, Heritage, Strategic Communications, and Sustainability.

ARROW Architects
2 Dublin Landings
North Wall Quay
Dublin 1
D01 V4A3

Arrow provided Architectural Services.

Design Team Members

Tandem
Rollo House, 6 High Street
Holywood
Co. Down
BT18 9AZ

Dermot Foley Landscape Architects
Argus House
Blackpitts
Dublin 8
D08 DD56

Hegsons
Pembroke Hall
38 / 39 Fitzwilliam Square
Dublin 2
D02 NX53

RSK
Bluebell Business Centre
Old Naas Rd, Inchicore
Dublin 12
D12 TN30

IAC Archaeology
Unit G1, Network Enterprise Park
Kilcoole
Co. Wicklow
A63 KT32

DCON Safety Consultants
Suite 5
Fitzwilliam Squ E
Dublin
D02 R744

Framework Area

The Framework Area comprises Athlone Town Centre and its immediate environs, including the Castle Quarter and the associated Architectural Conservation Area together adjacent residential areas.

The boundary of the framework extends to Ranelagh at its northern point. The eastern boundary is defined by the railway line from where the boundary travels in a southernly direction terminating west of Loughandonning

The southern boundary is defined by existing development within the town centre including the Golden Island Shopping Centre, Burgess Park and the River Shannon travelling west towards the Big Meadow to the south of the Castle. The western boundary is defined by the Canal.

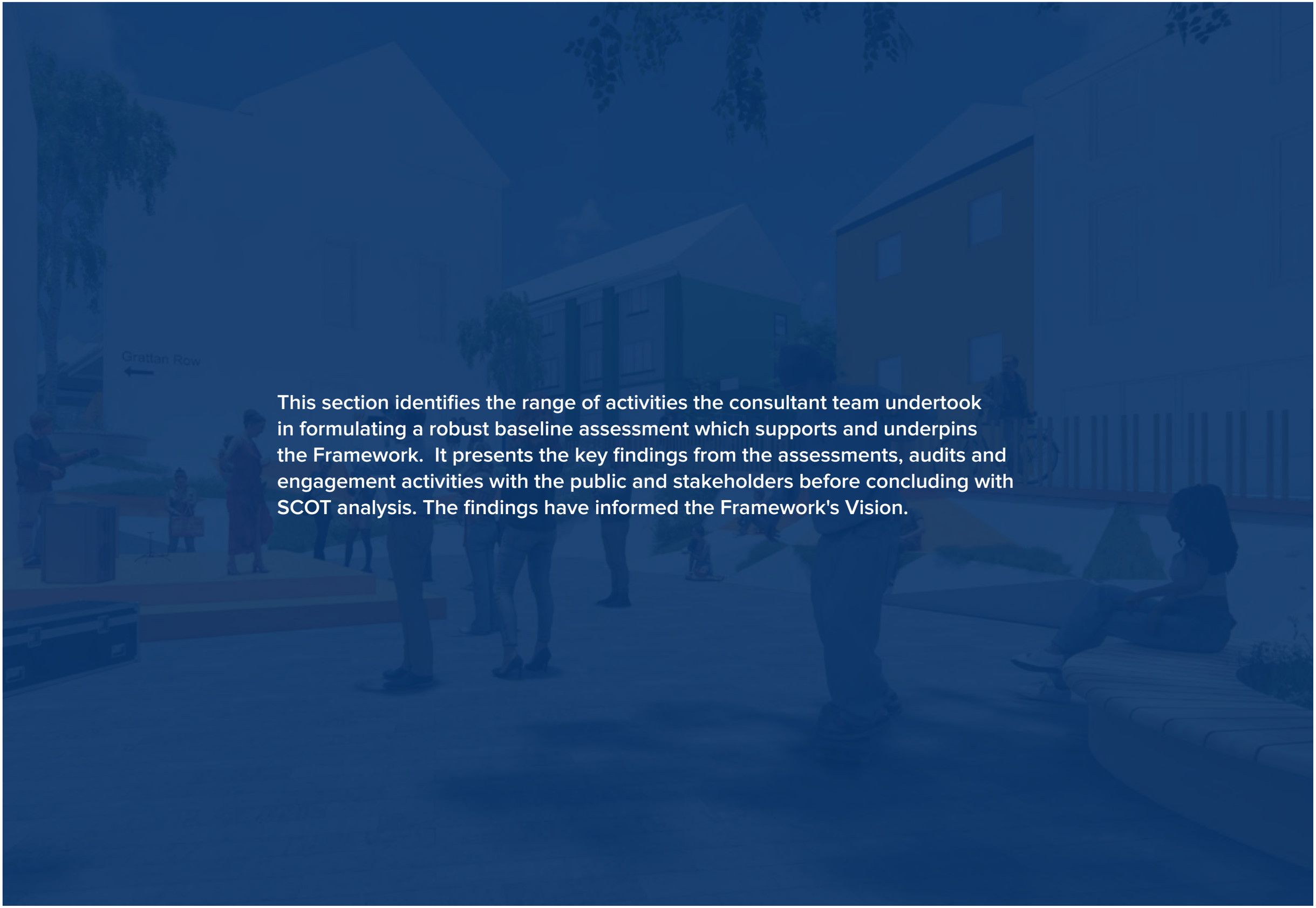
Key

- Framework Area Boundary
- Existing Greenway
- Bus and Railway Station



02

Study Area



This section identifies the range of activities the consultant team undertook in formulating a robust baseline assessment which supports and underpins the Framework. It presents the key findings from the assessments, audits and engagement activities with the public and stakeholders before concluding with SCOT analysis. The findings have informed the Framework's Vision.

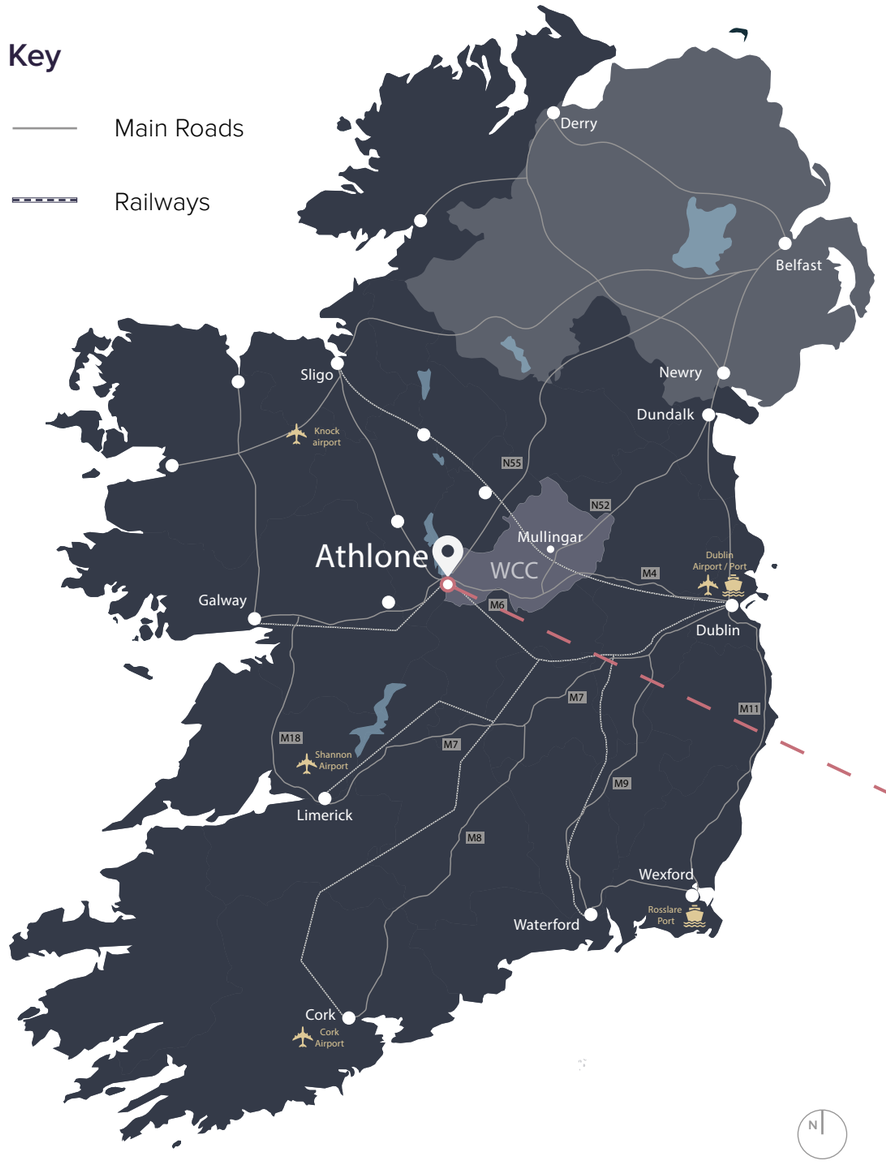
Analysis

Athlone

The designation of Athlone as a ‘Regional Growth Centre’ in the National Planning Framework has elevated Athlone’s status, and Co. Westmeath’s position in the midlands region. In turn, this has created a significant opportunity for growth with a focus on improving local economies and quality of life to attract investment and tourism supported by sustainable communities.

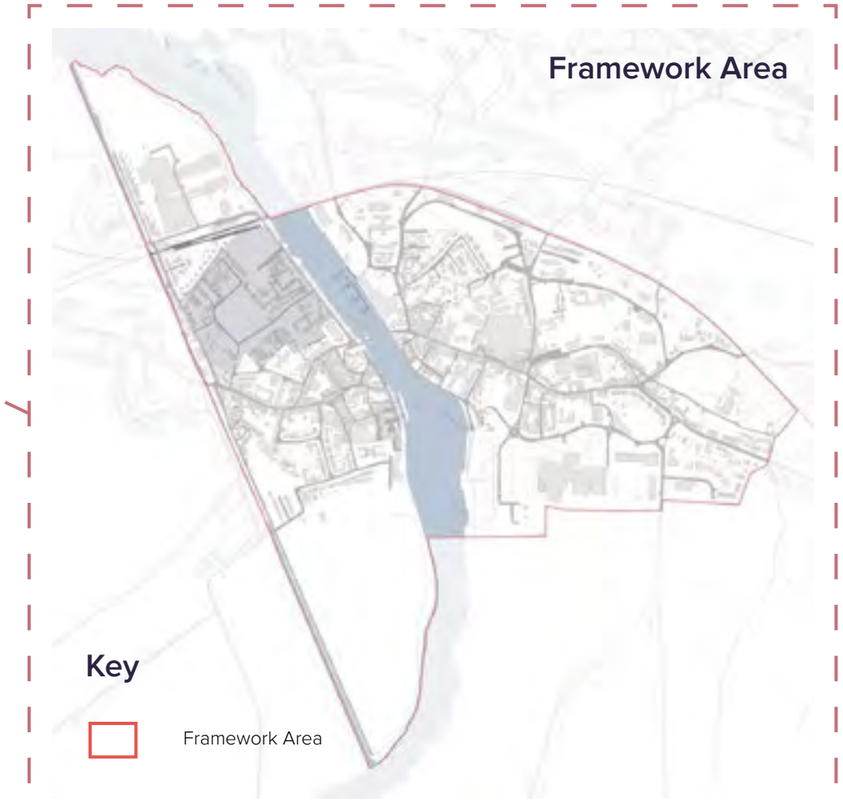
Athlone Town is located in a pivotal location nationally — at the centre of Ireland — with unrivalled connectivity. The town provides an excellent quality of life, providing a range of amenities including the River Shannon (c.215km navigation system), community facilities, retail, arts and culture and services. Athlone has also established itself as an emerging hub for Life Sciences, Technology and Global Business Service providers.

The M4 / M6 road network which traverses Westmeath, offers Athlone ease of access to the greater Dublin area, with Dublin Airport and Dublin Port just over one hour’s drive from Athlone. Athlone is benefited by significant rail infrastructure and national cycle infrastructure, including the Galway to Dublin Greenway (c.270km route), which further enhances its connectivity and sustainability credentials.



National Context

Athlone is well connected and is strategically linked to Ireland’s capital city, Dublin and four cities (>50,000 people) – Galway, Limerick Waterford and Cork, thanks to quality infrastructure via road and rail.



Athlone benefits from its...

Pivotal Location

Regional Growth Centre

Targeted compact growth through the regeneration of underused, vacant / derelict sites and buildings.

Hidden Heartlands

Offering a unique experience at the heart of Discover Ireland's Hidden Heartlands.

Destination Town

Fáilte Ireland Destination Town offering natural and built heritage, and tourism and shopping experiences.

Greenway / Blueway

Uniquely located at the only junction in Ireland where a Greenway and Blueway meet.

Exceptional connectivity

Walk

Walkable Framework Area c. 1.4km east / west and c. 2.3km north / south

Cycle

Forms part of the c.270km Galway to Dublin Greenway (including the Old Rail Greenway)

Rail

Located on the Dublin-Galway (c. 1 hr 20 mins to Dublin - c. 1 hr to Galway) and Ballina-Westport Lines

National Road Network

N6/M6, N62, N61 and N55 (c. 1 hr 15 mins to Dublin - c. 1 hr to Galway - c. 1 hr 40 mins to Limerick

Attractive Town Offering

Quality of Life

Athlone offers investors and residents more than most other Towns can aspire to.

Workforce

Athlone provides a 235,996 skilled workforce within c.60 mins.

TUS University

Accommodates c. 7,000 students and provides c. 2,000 graduates per year.

Business Location

There are almost 1,115 active businesses within 5km of Athlone, employing over 13,000 people.

Analysis

Historic Context

Origins

The town of Athlone originally developed at the location of a fording point of the River Shannon; the Irish place name Áth Luain, meaning the ford of Luain.

1100 & 1200

Historically the town appears to have developed around Athlone Castle, built in the early 13th Century but thought to occupy the same location as the late 12th Century motte which may in turn have been preceded by Ua Conchobhar's wooden castle.



Extract from the Down Survey (c. 1655)

1600

By the 17th Century, Athlone was comprised of an 'English town' on the east bank of the River Shannon and an 'Irish town' on the west bank.

Defences on the eastern side of the river were completed in c.1636, with defences on the western side of the town being constructed slightly later in c.1654.

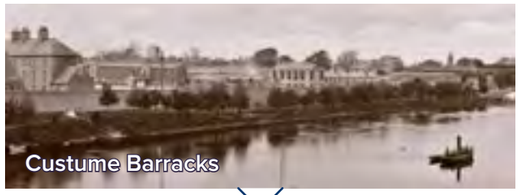

Athlone Castle and Bridge

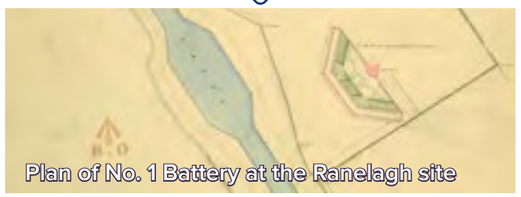
1700

In c.1700, Custume Barracks was constructed in the western part of the town, following two sieges which took place in 1690 and 1691, which had caused damage to both the town and castle.

An area of artillery batteries was located to the west of the barracks. No. 1 battery, situated at the northern end of the town on the western side of the River Shannon, is the only remaining part of this set of defences.

In c.1757, Athlone Canal was cut on the west side of the River Shannon, this allowed river traffic to pass through the town (prior to the canal, the bridge prevented navigation through Athlone, and boats had to halt at harbours to the north and south of the town).


Custume Barracks

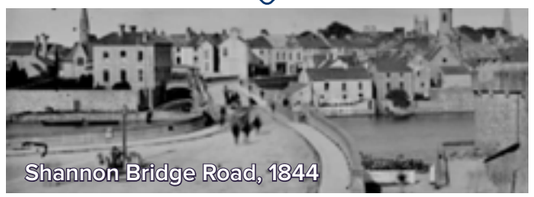

Plan of No. 1 Battery at the Ranelagh site

1800

Substantial investment in the improvement of the navigation of the River Shannon occurred during the 1830s and 1840s. The Shannon Road Bridge was built between 1841-1844. The crescent plan weir across the River Shannon was built in c.1845, and a series of sections of quay and jetty were constructed, and a number of warehouses were constructed close to the river so that they could use it for transport purposes. Athlone Canal was later abandoned.

By 1851 the Midland Great Western's railway extension from Mullingar to Galway reached the town. Further railway connections were added including a junction with the Great Southern and Western Railway line from Tullamore in 1859, and a junction with the Mayo line.


Athlone Market Square


Shannon Bridge Road, 1844

1900

In the early 20th Century the town gradually expanded, extending along the Galway Road, and a series of new residential terraces constructed on the eastern side of the river.

During the later 20th Century, increasing car ownership encouraged the development of large new estates on the periphery of the town, primarily on the eastern side of the River Shannon.

New landmark buildings were added to the town in the early 20th Century, notably including St. Peter and Pauls Church which was constructed between 1932 and 1939.

2000

The 21st Century signified the commercial development of Athlone, with the opening of the Athlone Towncentre in 2007 (with the Golden Island shopping centre opening in 1997), the retail and office development of Bastion Court in 2003, and the Raddison Blu and Sheraton hotels in 2004 in 2007 respectively.

The Athlone Civic Centre on Church Street officially opened its doors in 2000.

The Athlone Town Centre Enhancement works funded under the URDF finding programme were completed in 2024 providing for pedestrianisation of Sean Costello Street and traffic calming measures along Marydyke Street resulting in the successful expansion of the Church Street public realm enhancement works in the town centre. 2024 also celebrated the opening of the Galway to Dublin Cycle Bridge spanning the River.

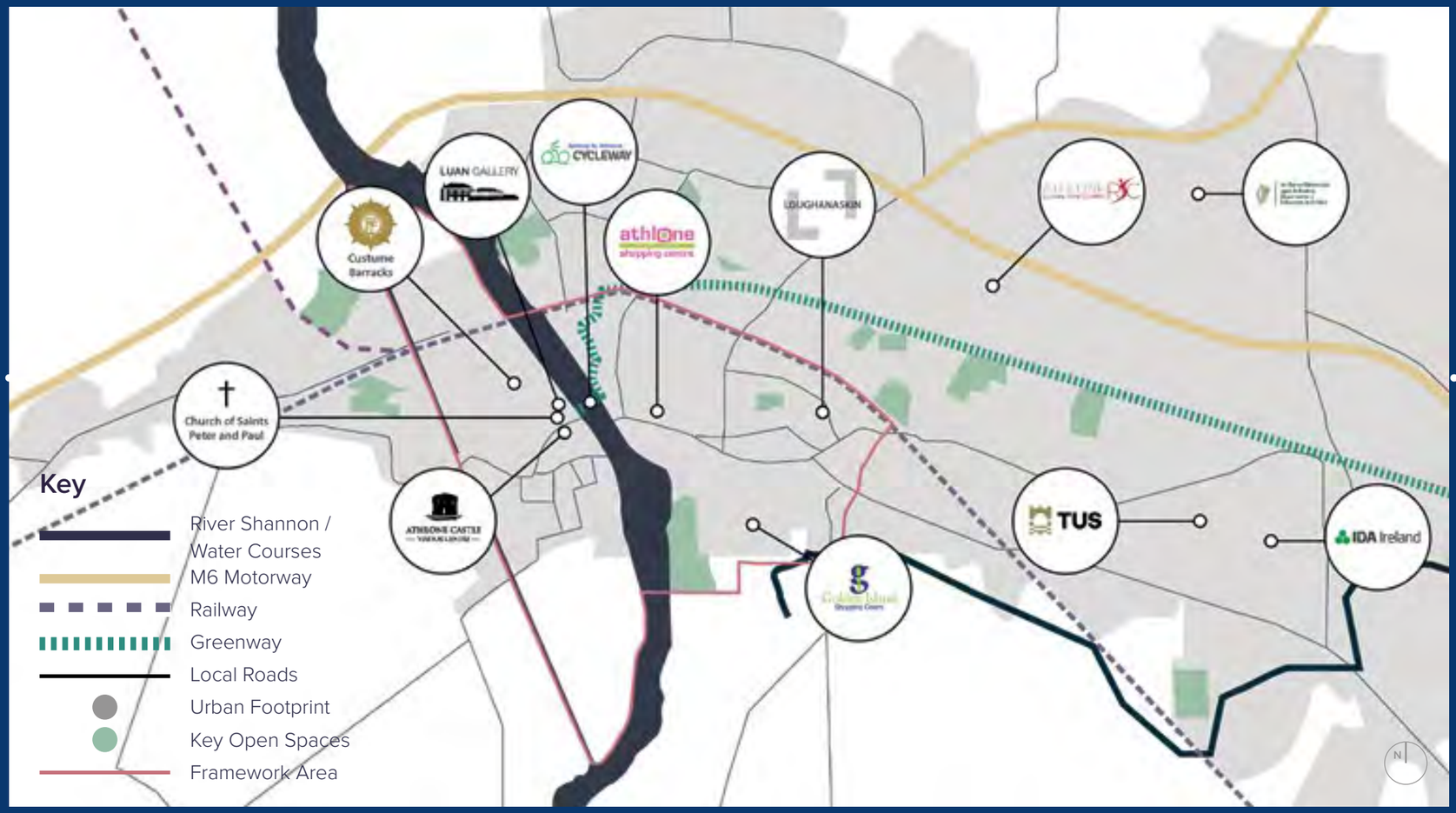

Athlone Town Centre

Analysis

Now

Athlone offers a diverse range of high quality services, amenities, facilities and infrastructure which are of local, regional and national importance. A Social Infrastructure Audit (SIA) was undertaken as part of the Frameworks analysis (see Volume II). A total of 221 no. social infrastructure facilities and amenities were identified within the Audit Area (radius of c.3km from Custume Bridge), of which 127 no. (57.5%) are located within the Framework Area. Notable examples include inter alia: Athlone Castle; St Peter and Pauls Church; The Luan Gallery; St Vincent's Hospital; Athlone Train Station and Bus Depot; Athlone Civic Centre; Athlone Towncentre and Golden Island Shopping Centres; Technological University of the Shannon (TUS); Athlone IDA Business and Technology Park; Athlone Regional Sports Centre; the River Shannon; Burgess Park; The Big Meadow; and Galway to Dublin National Cycle Network.

While Athlone boasts several strengths and positives, there are a number of areas that would benefit from additional services or improvements including inter alia: youth and elderly amenities; arts and cultural facilities; and improved mobility and accessibility. The town has experienced sustained growth over the past 8 years, a trend which aligns with its strategic growth ambition. In supporting the continued growth of the town, the social infrastructure and amenities need to be commensurate with the level of growth to cater for the needs of existing and future residents.



14 Places of Worship

5 Parks / Playgrounds

5 Community Centres

3 Enterprise Zones

10 Primary Schools

4 Secondary Schools

1 University TUS Athlone

7 Learning Centres

Analysis

Policy Context

Effective policy plays a pivotal role in fostering sustainable development, protecting the environment and preserving the built and natural heritage.

A policy appraisal was developed at the outset of the Framework in order to identify the key issues and development parameters associated with the Framework Area (see Volume II). The findings of the appraisal provided key guidance for the development of the Framework.



Planning Policy

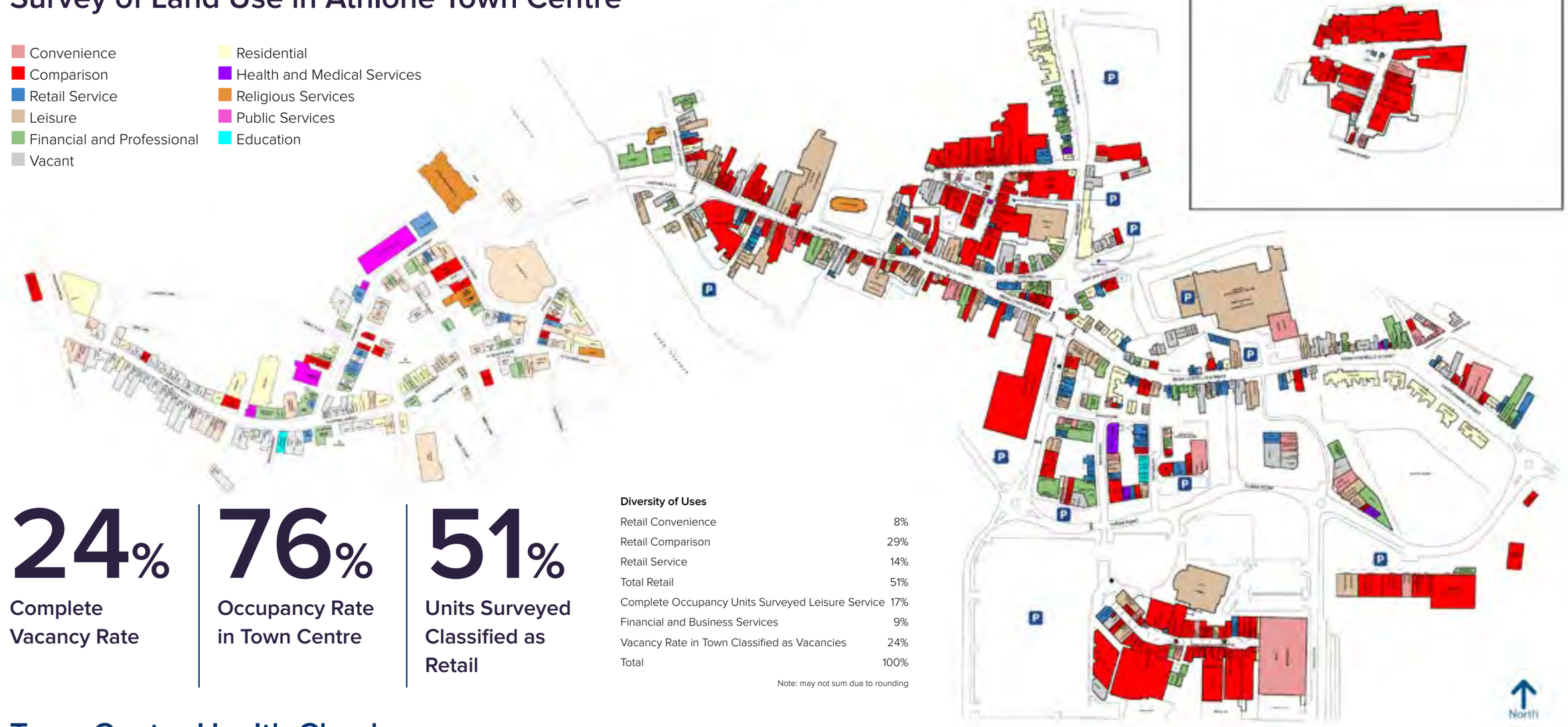
The 'National Planning Framework' (NPF) articulates a long-term vision for balanced national development, with the 'Eastern & Midlands Regional Assembly', and 'Northern and Western Regional Assembly' Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031' (RSES) serving as the basis for coordinating actions among local authorities within the region, and the 'Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027' (Westmeath CDP) providing policies and objectives at a local level. Supporting these plans are the Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines, which include inter alia the 'Development Management Guidelines', 'Urban Development and Building Height Guidelines', and the 'Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Growth Guidelines.' This hierarchical approach ensures a coordinated and strategic approach to planning, addressing national, regional, and local needs for sustainable, compact and well-balanced development across the country.

Within the planning context, Athlone is designated as a 'Regional Growth Centre', signifying its role as a key driver for regional growth, with a focus on improving local economies and quality of life to attract investment. Given its designation, an Urban Area Plan, i.e., the 'Athlone Joint Urban Area Plan 2024-2030', is currently being prepared by WCC, in collaboration with RCC. This plan-making process will evaluate and build upon the achievements of the 'Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020' and 'Monksland / Bellanamullia Local Area Plan 2016-2022', while aligning with the policies and objectives of the Westmeath CDP. It will also be informed by the 'Economic Strategy for the Regional Centre of Athlone,' the 'Athlone ABTA,' and this Framework. In consultation with local communities and individuals, the plan will establish a direction and vision for the future growth of Athlone.



Survey of Land Use in Athlone Town Centre

- Convenience
- Comparison
- Retail Service
- Leisure
- Financial and Professional
- Vacant
- Residential
- Health and Medical Services
- Religious Services
- Public Services
- Education



Athlone Towncentre Shopping Centre First Floor

24%
Complete Vacancy Rate

76%
Occupancy Rate in Town Centre

51%
Units Surveyed Classified as Retail

Diversity of Uses	
Retail Convenience	8%
Retail Comparison	29%
Retail Service	14%
Total Retail	51%
Complete Occupancy Units Surveyed Leisure Service	17%
Financial and Business Services	9%
Vacancy Rate in Town Classified as Vacancies	24%
Total	100%

Note: may not sum dua to rounding

Town Centre Health Check

A Town Centre Health Check (TCHC (2022)) was undertaken as part of this Framework to establish the baseline health and performance of Athlone Town Centre to provide an overview of how the town is performing and to inform the future objectives of the Framework. (see Volume II). The TCHC confirms that Athlone is a vital and viable regional centre that is continuing to benefit from both private and public investment. Notwithstanding, the TCHC indicates that Athlone's vacancy rate as a whole, as being above the national average, particularly in Connaught Street, O'Connell Street, and the Left Bank Mall in the west of the town. Analysing the results from the TCHC highlights the need to consider a range of interventions to support improvements within the urban environment to improve the quality of the streetscape and wider public realm whilst also exploring measures to reduce dereliction by repurposing vacant units into flexible workspaces, creative studios, community hubs, or pop-up retail establishments. One key component of the TCHC focuses on an analysis of the diversity of uses within the town centre, of which retailing accounts for just over 50%. Broadening the mix of uses to include residential which would reduce the level of vacant/derelict properties while also supporting the evening and night time economy are opportunities to be explored.

The town boasts a rich historic fabric together with a wider tourism and arts offer which provides a basis for new initiatives and interventions to be explored in expanding the mix of uses and dwell time of residents and tourists within the town centre - properties along Connaught Street and side streets, in accordance with NPF and Town Centre First policies.

Character Areas, Land use and key attractions within Athlone

Key

- Athlone Train Station
- Athlone Bus Depot
- 1 The Golden Mile
- 2 No. 1 Battery
- 3 Corpus Christi Church
- 4 The Big Meadow
- 5 Dean Crowe Theatre
- 6 St. Peter and Paul's Church
- 7 Athlone Castle
- 8 The Luan Gallery
- 9 River Shannon Boat Tours
- 10 Athlone Marina
- 11 Greenway Bridge
- 12 Custume Bridge
- Key View
- Historic View to the River Shannon
- 13 Radisson Blue Hotel
- 14 Abbey Graveyard
- 15 Old Rail Trail Greenway
- 16 The Prince of Wales Hotel
- 17 St Mary's Church of Ireland
- 18 Athlone Civic Centre / Library
- 19 Athlone Towncentre
- 20 Sheraton Hotel
- 21 St Mary's Catholic Church
- 22 Burgess Park
- 23 Golden Island Shopping Centre
- 24 Athlone Canal

Type

- Activity
- Heritage
- Culture
- On-water
- Community
- Hotel
- Shopping Centre

Character Area

- Athlone Town Centre
- Wider Athlone Town Centre
- Castle Quarter
- Tourism and Cultural Quarter
- Waterfront
- Parklands and Meadows
- Athlone Barracks
- Wider Surrounding Area
- Greenway

Character of Athlone

The following images of Athlone offer a diverse visual narrative, capturing aspects such as architecture, landscape, culture, economy, community spaces, infrastructure and history, to provide a comprehensive glimpse into the community's character, lifestyle, and environment.























Analysis

Public / Stakeholder Consultation

As part of the preliminary engagement and consultation phase of the Framework, key stakeholders and members of the community were engaged with in order to understand their needs and aspirations for Athlone.

The primary engagement tool was a baseline survey, designed to capture the views of local people, businesses, community groups and other stakeholders, alongside those who visited the town for work or leisure. To ensure accessibility, prospective respondents were offered the opportunity complete the survey online or to receive a hard-copy version, which could be returned by post.

Consultations were also held with a mix of statutory bodies, government departments and local government agencies, to test and discuss the design strategies, principles and projects proposed by the Framework. Subsequent workshops and meetings were also held on specific topics relating to certain stakeholders that have local and / or specialist knowledge.

Further details on all stakeholders who contributed to the Framework are enclosed within the project Appendices.

Our consultation reached:

www.athloneframework.ie

1,400 no. unique users

2,200 no. page views

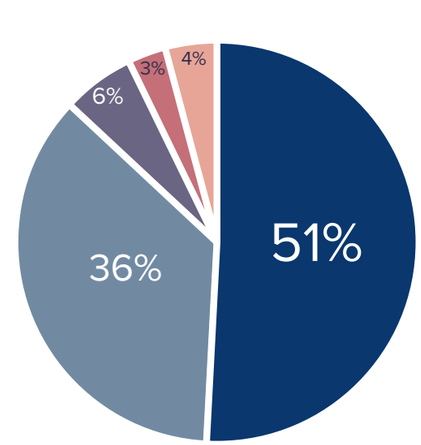
Workshops

28 no. people engaged via a webinar / workshops

(Subsequent workshops held with specialist stakeholder)

Consultation Responses

330 no. survey responses received



51% - Residents of Athlone

36% - Live and Work in Athlone

6% - General Members of the Public

3% - Work in Athlone

4% - Other (Study / Own a Business / Community representative)

To raise awareness of our survey, we issued:

Consultation Leaflets

2,820 leaflets were delivered to homes and businesses within Athlone, to ensure awareness of and engagement with the early consultation process.

Stakeholder Letters

310 no. letters issued to stakeholders across the community, political and enterprise sectors, as well as members of the local community.

Social Media Ads

Our Facebook adverts reached 28,228 no. accounts and attracted 1,117 no. click-throughs to the survey website.

Summary of Survey Data

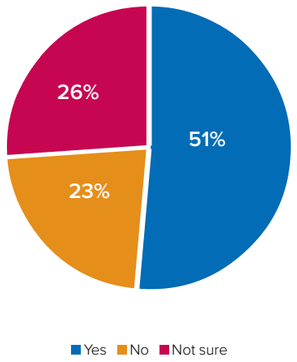
The survey revealed positive sentiments regarding amenities, particularly the well-rated variety of shops and dining options.

Respondents identified the River Shannon, its heritage and cultural assets and its central location as Athlone's special attributes. There was a call for realising the River Shannon's full potential, with support for an open, accessible waterfront. Respondents expressed a need for better public realm and more amenities along the river.

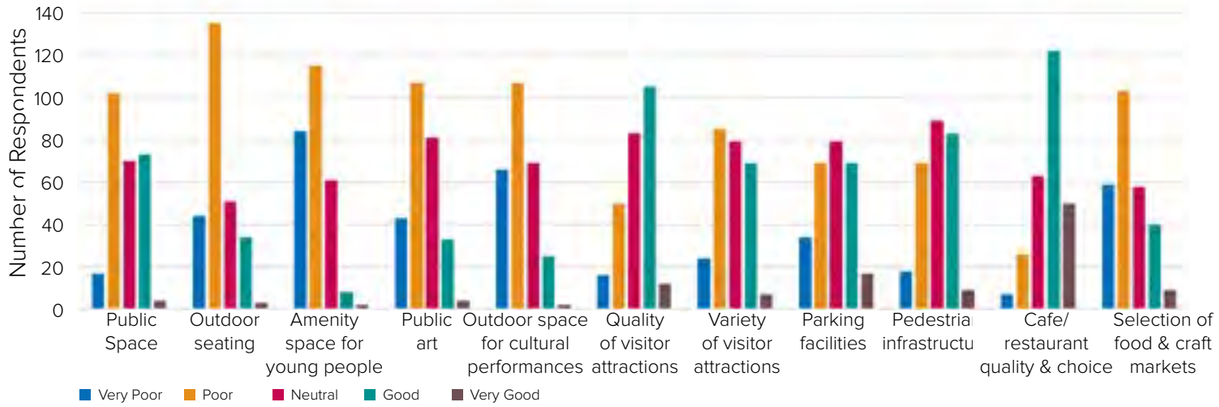
The Tourism and Cultural Quarter had positive reviews for cafe / restaurant quality but faced criticism for insufficient amenity space for young people, artists and creatives; with a preference for developing brownfield sites for community spaces, studios and biodiversity. Over 2/3 of those who responded were supportive of the public realm enhancements delivered within the town to improve the historic setting of the town.

Similarly, over 50% of respondents felt that the public realm improvements on the eastern side of the town had enhanced the quality of the space. However, connectivity issues with the Greenway were noted, and anti-social behaviour deterred its usage. Despite 50% of the respondents using cars for travel, there was a notable preference for active travel, emphasising the need for improved pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure and addressing traffic concerns. Respondents identified cheaper and more frequent buses, along with better cycle infrastructure, as potential solution to car dependency.

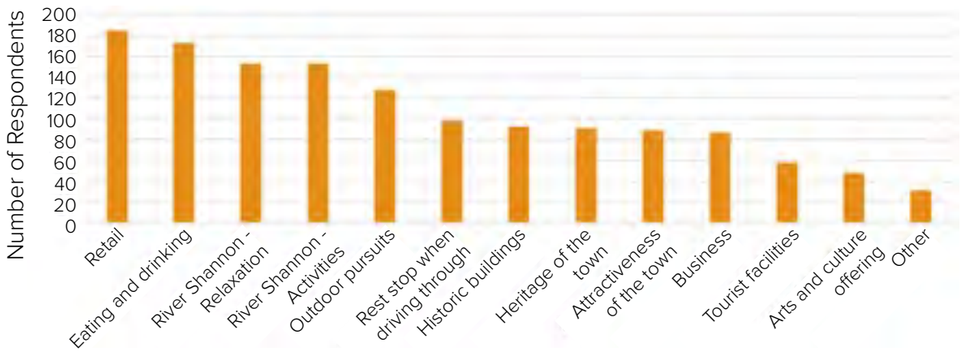
Analysis



Response to: *"Do you think the town centre / Church Street Improvements were successful?"*



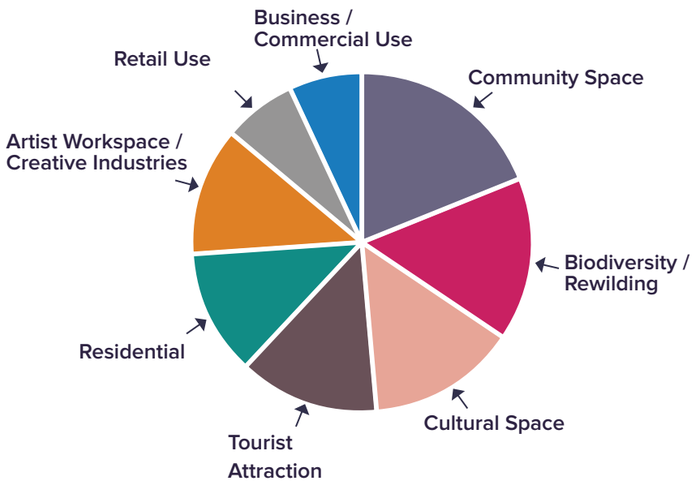
Response to: *"Please rate the following aspects of the Tourism and Cultural Quarter."*



Response to: *"What do you think attracts visitors to Athlone?"*



Response to: *"How easy is it to navigate the town by..."*



Response to: *"I would prioritise the development of brownfield sites for..."*

Summary of Workshop Data

Following a review of the analysis data (TCHC, land use audit) and initial feedback from surveys design concepts were prepared and shared at a stakeholder workshop on 26 July 2022. 50 stakeholders were invited, with over just half of respondents attending. A summary of the discussion is captured and presented in Volume 2 of the Framework.

At the workshops and meetings, stakeholders expressed support for the scale of the ambition and opportunity the Framework sought to capture by maximising the town's assets - waterfront location; cultural destination; and its strategic location. Stakeholders acknowledged that additional interventions would be required in order to fully unlock the regeneration potential of the town and the importance of capitalising on recent investments within the town.

The Framework's benefits, including river front activation, tourism attraction, community strengthening, and synergy with the regeneration of Monksland, were well-received.

Stakeholders provided feedback on draft concept regenerative pipeline projects, including the Athlone Outdoor Swimming Pool, Market Square and Greenway / Blueway Junction projects.

Practical considerations for active travel, flood relief, social regeneration, River Shannon developments, and integration with the National Cycle Network were raised.

Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Threats

Overview

To understand the study area and gain an appreciation of the baseline context, a range of assessments, audits, and engagement activities were undertaken with members of the public and stakeholders.

In view of the wide range of information collated, a SCOT analysis was considered the most appropriate way to synthesise and process the baseline data in order to help inform the framework by categorising the analysis under four headings - strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats.

SCOT Analysis

The adjacent SCOT provides an overview of Athlone's current state and potential areas for improvement or development across various sectors.

Having categorised the analysis this output was then used to inform the vision and objectives of the Framework discussed in Chapter 3.

Strengths

- 'Regional Growth Centre' and 'Destination Town' Designations
- Strategic central location
- Tourism - Rich historic assets, scenic landscapes and natural greenway/ waterways
- University town as result of TUS
- Strong sense of community and cultural diversity
- Arts and cultural scene
- Recent public realm enhancements and flood defence works
- Strong sectoral clusters in Manufacturing, ICT, Lifesciences, Distribution

Challenges

- High levels of vacancy / dereliction
- Imbalanced town- divided by the river rather then connected by it
- Town centre vitality (especially the evening economy).
- Tourism: asset rich but experiences are not well developed.
- Housing shortages.
- Lack of studios / spaces for arts, cultural and youth groups
- Migration of young talent
- Regional roads and associated infrastructure - poor north / south links

Opportunities

- Regional growth status of town - need to capitalise on the ambition and unlock spin off effects specifically arising from a planned increase in the population. Opportunity to create critical mass to support further investment in economy, social infrastructure and environment
- Town is a University Town - opportunities to maximise student presence, Research & Development linkages and growing educational attainment
- Retain knowledge base - opportunities through research & Development linkages and growing educational attainment
- Town's waterfront location - opportunity to explore new uses and developments to animate waterfront
- Develop niche tourism experiences - active, cultural and eco tourism
- Opportunity to broaden mix of uses within town centre through brownfield development, conversion and reuse of existing building stock
- Capitalise on public realm enhancements to improve linkages through town centre
- Harness the 'Hidden Heartlands' tourism brand and maximise the Shannon Masterplan
- Develop tourism capacity with respect to meetings, incentives, Conferences and Events.

Threats

- Development disparities on either side of the River Shannon
- Infrastructure for growth reaching capacity
- Consumer trends towards online retail are a constraint on town centre vitality
- Losing local traditions / heritage due to modernisation / insufficient support for local artists and cultural groups
- Impacts of climate change - lack of sustainable practices

Opportunities for Athlone

The SCOT analysis identifies opportunities and challenges which when considered holistically point to several concepts which should be explored in creating balanced, sustainable growth of the local economy, supporting society, and caring for environment.

Regional Growth Centre Status & Compact Urban Form

Key priorities are to promote the continued sustainable and compact growth of Athlone as a regional driver, with a target population of 30,000 up to 2031. Future development required to facilitate population growth include the regeneration of underused, vacant, or derelict sites with high levels of land available for redevelopment. Focussed compact growth provides an opportunity to deliver new development within the footprint of the existing town. There are a series of 'Opportunity Sites' within the town with the potential to accommodate the positive delivery of sustainable and compact growth.

Developing & Retaining Talent

The new Technological University of the Shannon (TUS) presents a significant opportunity to support the development of a knowledge-based economy. Athlone is a university town which can attract and retain students as a destination of choice for third level education. Critical factors to achieving this ambition include the delivery of quality student accommodation together with associated social infrastructure to forge 'town and gown' links and enhance the evening economy. Attracting and importantly, retaining students and young professionals, will allow Athlone to balance grow as a vibrant regional centre and an attractive destination for residents, businesses, and investors.

Arts & Cultural Promotion

The town has a rich culture which attracts tourists and locals and can be used as a platform to grow the evening and night town economy.

Fostering creative expression through the enhancement of public places and spaces can help to facilitate festivals and events, while providing a platform for artists to showcase their work and foster a sense of community identity and creative expression showcasing local talent. Such interventions have the potential to not only enrich the cultural landscape but to also attract and enhance the liveability of the town.

Regenerative Tourism & Positioning

Capitalising on Athlone's landmark assets such as Athlone Castle, the Luan Gallery, and the 'Galway to Dublin Greenway', provides for new place-based experiences to attract visitors. Leveraging the natural beauty of the River Shannon and Athlone Canal for recreational activities can also boost the tourism offering and profile of the town while Cultural events, food festivals, and the promotion local talent and crafts contribute to a vibrant tourist experience and assist in reinforcing an animated attractive town centre destination.

Regional Attractiveness

The town enjoys a strategic central location which coupled with its positioning on the River Shannon and its rich cultural heritage provides a warm and welcoming atmosphere for business travellers providing the right ingredients for the town to develop as destination for business networking and conferencing.

Public Realm & Active Travel

Creating an attractive, versatile, and welcoming public realm can assist in setting the scene for future development initiatives and promoting investor confidence. The inclusion of active travel linkages will also support greater connectivity and facilitate a more attractive and user friendly town centre. .

Vibrant & Attractive Mixed Use Town Centre

By repurposing existing buildings and through the identification of Opportunity Sites, space can be provided within the town centre to support a mix of uses; business and enterprise, retail and service provision, and new housing which addresses societal needs. Broadening the range of uses can help to promote vibrancy and vitality within the town centre – 2 key ingredients in growing footfall. The town centre uses should be complemented with an attractive public realm which seeks to capitalise on the pedestrianisation of the historic quarter linked to the retail core of the town while also embracing the opportunity to explore new uses and developments along the River Shannon.

Climate Resilience

Opportunity exists to provide to future proof development through the consideration of climate mitigation and adaptation measures. The application of nature-based solutions and sustainable infrastructure networks for example can assist in building resilience to climate change. Integrating green practices into future development proposals, such green roofs or rain gardens, can help manage stormwater and promote biodiversity in urban areas. Reserving natural habitats, whether through conservation areas or rewilding initiatives, helps protect biodiversity and offer positive nature based recreational spaces.

03

Vision and Objectives

This section of the Framework sets out the Vision and Objectives having carefully considered the information obtained from the baseline assessments, and in consultation with the Council and the Design Team.

The Vision is the keystone of the Framework. It provides a strategic context to guide decision making and influence investment from the public, private and voluntary sectors based on key four objectives.

Vision Statement

‘The **Framework’s Vision** is to promote high quality distinctive Urban Design in **Athlone** as a driver for **positive place based** and **people focused** regeneration as a foundation for future investment decisions.’

To support the delivery of the Vision, 12 Strategic Principles have been formulated, drawing on the results from baseline assessment, feedback from the engagement sessions, planning policy and core strategy documents.

This Framework, based on these Strategic Principles provides a reference to inform the design and delivery of future regenerative development, in the core of Athlone Town, as a stimulus for wider growth and investment in the area.



1. People Focused

Prioritising user needs, desires and abilities by exploring people focused outcomes as a core consideration of future development proposals.



2. Regenerative Development

Actively supporting regeneration and sustainable development through the refurbishment, reuse and repurposing of vacant or derelict properties as a stimulus for town centre revitalisation.



3. Compact and Sustainable Growth

A focus on developing brownfield and infill sites at an appropriate density to achieve sustainable, compact, sequential growth and urban regeneration.



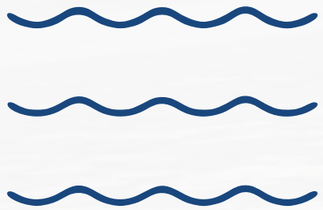
4. Liveable Town

Creating a vibrant town based on the principles of ‘Healthy Placemaking’ which provides ease of access for all to the services, amenities and facilities that support day and night economies.



5. University Town

Capitalising on the Athlone’s university status by sustaining a student friendly destination of choice for study and future related employment.



6. River Shannon

Embracing the identity of the Shannon at the core of the town and unlocking the potential of the river to attract high quality development and as a key recreational, amenity and environmental resource.



7. Celebrating Heritage

Preserving and enhancing the unique heritage that defines the special character of Athlone through developments that celebrate and showcase the town’s heritage and cultural assets.



8. Tourism Branding and Experience

Strengthening the brand of Athlone as a ‘Destination Town’ in Failte Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands and as a visitor destination of choice.



9. Town Centre Living

Support town centre living as a viable, vibrant and attractive option through holistic development approaches that consider buildings, amenities, public realm, infrastructure and services.



10. Economy and Enterprise

Supporting the local economy and attracting inward investment.



11. Active Travel

Promoting pedestrian and cycle friendly, well connected environments that encourage physical activity, safety and healthy lifestyle choices.



12. Future-proofing

Seamlessly integrating green assets into the built form, open space and streets of the town. Demonstrating environmental resilience and reducing carbon emissions.

27

04

Public Realm and Placemaking Strategy

This chapter sets out the vision and principles which underpin the public realm and placemaking strategy. The chapter provides practical advice and guidance on the range of soft and hard landscaping materials to be used across the framework area; design principles for Athlone's street typologies; and identifies specific interventions for key public spaces and activities.

Overview

This Chapter is intended to be used as a guide for future public realm proposals and to assist in delivering a consistent and cohesive approach across the Framework Area. This chapter also identifies both publicly funded projects and those that are likely to be delivered in conjunction with the development of the Opportunity Sites and Pipeline Projects, capitalising on planned and delivered improvements to propose a clear, consistent and legible framework for future development.

While both the east and west sides of Athlone have been developed, the west side is recognised as the town's historic Castle Quarter. The public realm of the west side can be further enhanced via interventions and improvements, at varying scales and through a phased delivery. At the same time, heritage on the east side of Athlone can be better celebrated and linked to the west across the River Shannon.

This unique setting on the River Shannon also gives opportunities to strengthen Athlone's relationship with its natural environment. There is a wide range of public realm interventions that will showcase the opportunities that the waterfront and its associated heritage has to offer, e.g. the existing waterfront zones that include The Meadows in the south and Ranelagh to the north, as well as the Canal and Burgess Park.

These spaces provide opportunities to bring people closer to the water and in turn can generate even more water-based activities, both passive and active. Additional opportunities exist for development along the banks and quays of the River Shannon: for example, Strand Street and Strand Street car park have direct access to the waterfront and are within walking distance of Main Street. Burgess Park has the space to accommodate an exciting and innovative new open space design, including extensive play areas and event spaces, and all with flood management at its core.

The introduction of pockets of green in existing urban spaces will also provide more opportunities for resting which encourages interaction, passive surveillance and also lengthens visit times. Planted areas visually enhance the built environment as well as creating a greener and more biodiverse Athlone.

The Purpose of the Public Realm & Placemaking Chapter:

1. Provide a vision and principles for public realm and placemaking in the Athlone Framework Area.
2. To provide a Public Realm and Placemaking Toolkit which provides guidance on the palette of materials, furniture, planting, lighting and wayfinding elements (as primarily informed by the Athlone Wayfinding System).
3. Establish the typology of each subject site. Assess its current condition by identifying its constraints and opportunities.
4. Provide design guidance for future enhancements that covers the hierarchy of streets across Athlone and demonstrate the application of the Toolkit, describing the methodology of how the outlined design principles and elements should be applied across the various public realm typologies, in a site-specific way.
5. Provide guidance in line with the relevant national, regional, and town-wide policies, standards, and guidance.
6. Consider the long-term maintenance and management of each subject site.

Vision and Principles

Vision

- To provide guidance for public realm design in order to deliver a holistic approach to public spaces and to provide high quality space that will help to realise Athlone's full potential as a regional destination.
- To provide guidance for enhancing the public realm for streets and spaces within the context of the Shannon to enhance these spaces and to provide clear and attractive routes toward the Shannon while also building on the extensive positive qualities of the town and its identity.
- Promote material and design quality, avoiding clutter, develop a cohesive palette of materials and site-specific interventions that are sensitive to the town's historic heritage. Create legible and durable public spaces with a sense of unity.
- Provide a biodiverse environment with increased areas of soft landscape, including trees and planting. Incorporate low maintenance sustainable urban drainage solutions where possible.
- To promote the quality of the public realm in order to encourage active travel and utilising transport modes that provide a realistic alternative to the private car, in line with the Athlone Area-Based Transport Assessment (ABTA) goals (2023).

Principles

Distinctive

Design proposals within the public realm should reference local context and build on the character and identity of place. This includes areas around the castle and Athlone's historic churches, which have unique qualities to celebrate and highlight. Material and aesthetic quality should be promoted while clutter should be avoided. In addition, tree planting and public realm design can help to maximise valuable views and experiences along the waterfront and also from Athlone's newest bridge.

Access and Linkages

Connections should be simple and both visual and physical. Public realm spaces should be easy to discover and get to, as well as travel through, and must be visible from a distance and up close. Public transport and walking/cycling routes should allow comfortable and safe access for multiple users.

Uses and Activities

Activities, for example weekly or seasonal markets, or more permanent coffee stalls, are often the reason why people visit a place and continue to return. Activities help to make a place special or unique. Urban space interventions should have the flexibility and resilience to cater to a diverse range of users with a varied amenity offering according to scale.

Comfort and Image

Consideration should be given to the perception of comfort and safety and should be included as part of all design proposals with the provision and placement of seating a priority e.g., sheltered options or vistas and views should be considered as well as a choice of seats or resting spots for all. Spaces should be accessible for maintenance which leads to ease of day-to-day cleaning - in turn making the spaces more attractive and inviting.

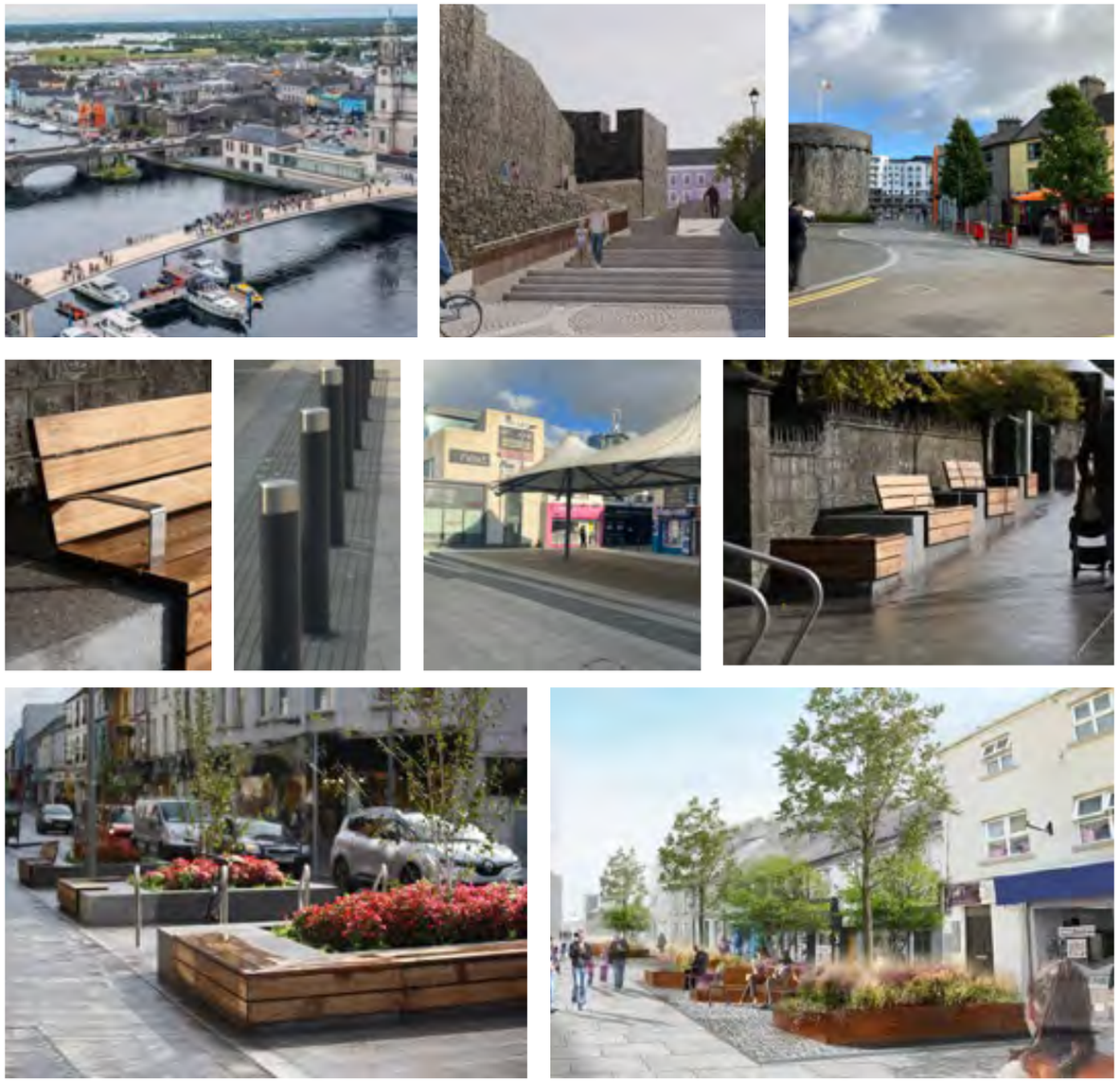

Grattan Row

Public Realm and Placemaking Toolkit

This Design Toolkit details a cohesive palette for Athlone, with specific treatments, elements and materials suggested for distinct public realm areas.

The Toolkit considers the recent planned and completed public realm improvements, including Church Street, Dublin Gate Street, Custume Place, Mardyke Street and Sean Costello Street (currently under construction). The palette of materials and details as shown (right) provides the starting point for the proposed toolkit.

By referring to the existing context of public realm design, and proposing a more comprehensive details that covers surface materials, furniture, lighting, wayfinding and, soft landscaping, this has generated a cohesive, joined up approach to future public realm design across the Framework Area.



Series of Images Representing the Existing Palette of Materials and Details for Athlone

Surface Materials

The Town Centre and its primary street network, which extends west from Church Street across the River Shannon to Connaught Street and the Canal, create a distinct, linear and accessible connection between the east and the west of the town.

The use of limestone and granite paving as a continuation of the town centre should be considered, with the opportunity to create a recognizable spine through the town. This largely mirrors Athlone's Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) and capitalises on key character areas. With recent improvements along Mardyke Street and Sean Costello Street, there is also potential to extend this central spine further east along St. Mary's Square. Some interventions across this area have been included as Pipeline Projects included in Chapter 8. This will link the town centre with the Old Rail Trail through the Loughanaskin Urban Regeneration Masterplan 2023.

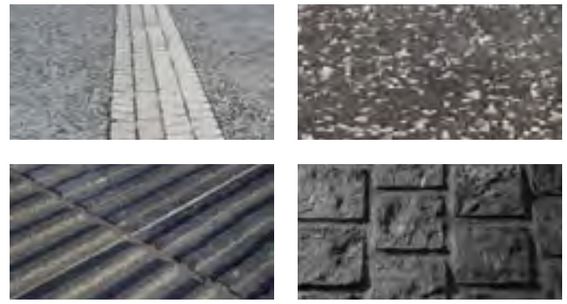
Streets that connect to the main spine should make use of a similar palette of materials with varied application, such as different paving formats or layout. As an example, asphalt is recommended for the carriageway on secondary streets and link roads, although some elements of natural stone details, such as Irish could be incorporated in the footpaths, where suitable. Detailed palette recommendations are made in the Streets Manual for the primary and secondary streets, laneways and link roads that make up Athlone's town centre.

The historic laneways of Athlone exhibit a particularly distinct grain and scale that is reminiscent of the town's medieval settlement pattern. They present an immense opportunity for further capitalising on Athlone's historic setting, as well as increasing the quality of the connection between the waterfront and town centre. Upgrades to existing building façades as well as to surface materials utilising a simple but high-quality materials palette will help to frame vistas of the River Shannon and improve wayfinding.

The waterfront walking experience could be improved further to connect some of the most notable key public realm sites in Athlone. This includes Ranelagh and the Meadow. In line with the Athlone Waterfront Study, the waterfront walkway can be activated via quality paving materials, and resting areas. The study recommends the use of granite or concrete block paving for pedestrian routes and granite or concrete block setts in accent strips, for example. This can be seen as an extension of the Streets Manual palette and also reflects what is known of the waterfront's historical paving treatment from early photographs.

Hardwoods sourced sustainably would be appropriate for boardwalks and footpaths adjacent to the Shannon. As the pedestrian routes move away from the urban core and become part of the parkland setting, such as along the canal, an informal design with loose, permeable material is recommended alongside tree and ground-cover planting.

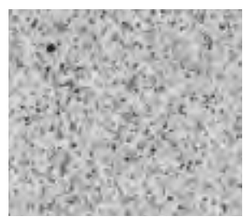
All surfaces should be universally accessible and be designed with Part M 2022 principles in mind.













Illustrative Surface Materials Palette for the Framework Area as identified in the adjacent table

Carriageway	Footpath	Demarcation	Public Spaces and Waterfront
IRISH GRANITE CUBES Size: 100x100x100mm Colour: Mid grey/Dark grey Finish: Rough hewn	IRISH GRANITE SLABS Size: 600/800/1200x400x80mm Colour: Mid grey/ Buff Finish: Bush hammered	IRISH LIMESTONE KERB Size: 250x900x100mm Colour: Dark grey Finish: Bush hammered	IRISH GRANITE SLABS Size: 600/800/1200x400x80mm Finish: Bush hammered
IRISH LIMESTONE CUBES Size: 75x75x75mm Colour: Dark grey Finish: Rough hewn	IRISH GRANITE SETTS Size: 200x100x80mm Colour: Mid grey/ Buff/ Red Finish: Rough hewn or flamed finish	IRISH LIMESTONE CHANNEL DRAIN Size: 200x900x100mm Finish: Bush hammered	IRISH GRANITE SETTS Size: 200x100x80mm Finish: Rough hewn or flamed finish
TARMACADAM Finish: With coloured chip	CONCRETE SLAB PAVING Size: 600x400x80mm Colour: Silver Finish: With natural aggregate	IRISH LIMESTONE SETTS Size: 200x100x80mm Finish: Rough hewn or flamed finish	IN-SITU CONCRETE PAVING Finish: Exposed aggregate finish
	IN-SITU CONCRETE PAVING Finish: Brushed	IRISH LIMESTONE TACTILE PAVING Type: Blister and Corduroy Size: 400x400x80mm Finish: Bush hammered	RESIN BONDED AGGREGATE Colour: Buff
		STAINLESS STEEL GUIDING STRIPS Type: Wayfinding Size: 200x50x10mm	SELF-COMPACTING GRAVEL Colour: Buff
		STAINLESS STEEL INDICATOR PINS Type: Hazard warning Size: 100x50mm	HARDWOOD TIMBER DECK Size: 145x45mm Type: Durability class 1, with cross grooves and anti-slip inserts

Furniture

As with the surface materials palette, street furniture can be guided by the recent built and planned public realm improvements in the town. They make use of quality materials such as hardwood timber, corten, galvanised and powder-coated steel and ensure cohesion throughout the streetscape and public realm of Athlone. These designed pieces complement more utilitarian street furniture, such as stainless steel bollards, bins and bicycle stands.

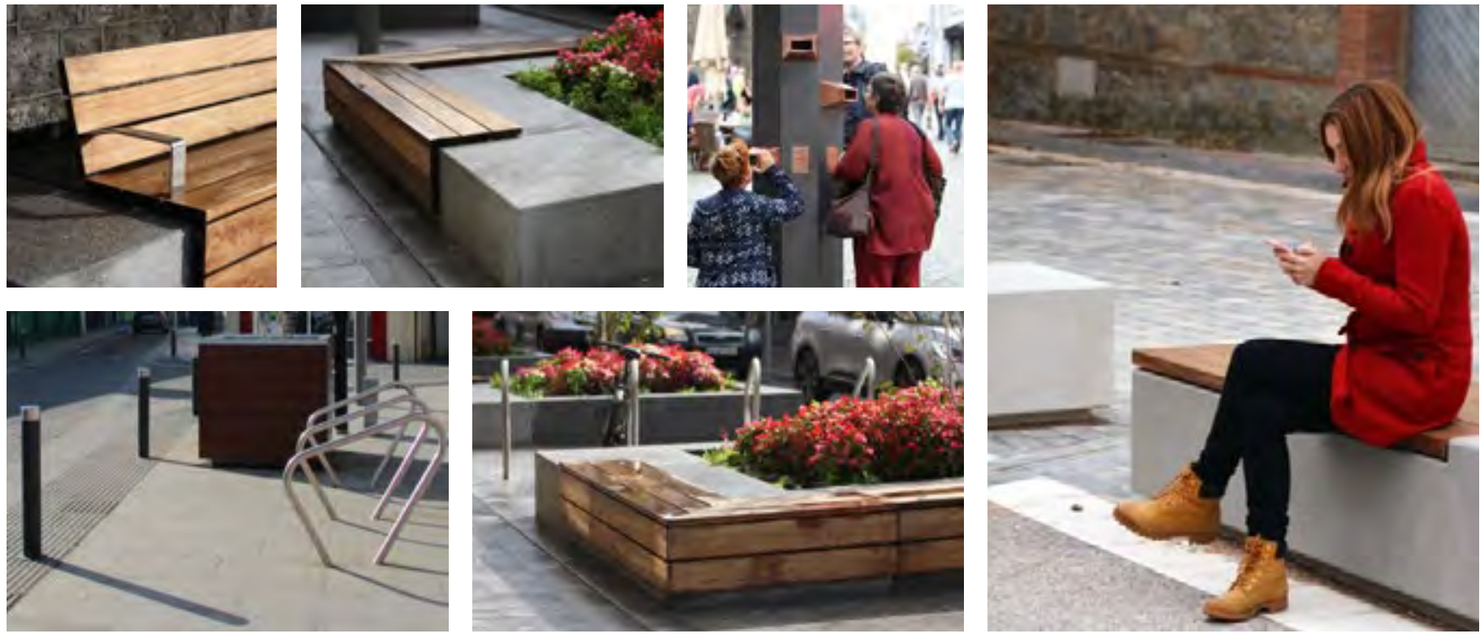
Where space permits, generous seating and planting should be incorporated, including designated benches as well as dual-use built edges, such as low walls or planters. These dual-use spaces encourage casual seating, make room for events, performances and other small gatherings, and promote passive surveillance. Interventions such as integrated steps and seating walls should also be designed with this in mind.

The furniture along the waterfront and in larger public open spaces of parkland character have the opportunity to be unique and site-specific pieces, different to those of the streetscape. Large loungers or terraced hardwood decks may be incorporated as features along the waterfront to create generous seating edges that invite visitors to linger and enjoy Athlone's waterfront on the River Shannon.

This cohesive furniture palette, if implemented across the Framework Area, can become a unique addition to Athlone's distinct character.

Seating elements should include a mixture of types, including those that incorporate arm and backrests and configurations that accommodate wheelchair users. Where appropriate, interactive play features for all ages and abilities, including sensory elements, should be incorporated into the public realm.





Furniture Palette for the Framework Area

Streets	Public Spaces	Waterfront
BENCH Material: Hardwood timber slats and corten steel frame Size: Typically 3000x500x450mm Features: Armrests and backrest, built-in ambient lighting, configurations that allow wheelchair users to join	BENCH Material: Hardwood timber slats and galvanised and powder-coated steel frame Size: Typically 3000x500x450mm Features: Armrests and backrest, built-in ambient lighting, configurations that allow wheelchair users to join	BENCH Material: Galvanised and powder-coated steel frame Size: Typically 3000x500x450mm Features: Armrests and backrest, built-in ambient lighting, configurations that allow wheelchair users to join
PLANTER Material: Corten steel/Irish granite Size: Varies Features: Integrated seating	SEAT Material: Stainless steel/galvanised and powdercoated steel Size: 450x450x450mm	SEAT Material: Stainless steel/galvanised and powdercoated steel Size: 450x450x450mm
CYCLE STAND Size: 875x950x48mm Finish: Stainless steel	PICNIC TABLE Material: Galvanised and powder-coated steel Size: Typically 3000x800x740mm Features: Tabletop overhang to enable use by wheelchair users	PICNIC TABLE Material: Galvanised and powder-coated steel Size: Typically 3000x800x740mm Features: Tabletop overhang to enable use by wheelchair users
LITTER BIN Size: 1070x530x400mm Finish: Stainless steel with satin finish	RECYCLING BIN Size: 1102x800x390mm Finish: Galvanised and powder-coated steel Features: 2 compartments	LOUNGER Material: Hardwood timber slats and galvanised and powder-coated/corten steel frame Size: Varies Features: Built-in ambient lighting
BOLLARD Size: 114x1200mm Finish: Stainless steel radially polished cap top section on painted galvanized steel lower section	BOLLARD Size: 114x1200mm Finish: Galvanised and powder-coated steel	RECYCLING BIN Size: 1102x800x390mm Finish: Galvanised and powder-coated steel Features: 2 compartments

Lighting and Wayfinding

Signage, information posts and wayfinding at key orientation and movement points should be installed in line with the Athlone Wayfinding Strategy. To support the Strategy, street clutter should be minimised or omitted altogether. Subtle variations in the format and finish of ground materials, carefully considered position of tree planting, bicycle parking, bollards and other guiding elements, consistent with the palette outlined in the Toolkit, can be used in place of additional features.

Consideration should be given to the users' journey and the relevant information provided to them, including distance and time. Any designed elements should take note of the Athlone Wayfinding Strategy's defined palette, including colours and typography.

Lighting also requires a consistent approach across the Framework Area. Lighting should take into account practical considerations, including safety, maintenance and cost, and also enhance the character of Athlone's key areas. In particular, attention should be paid to lighting along Athlone's primary road network as well as waterfront spaces and the Greenway and Custume bridges. This will help to create a safe east-west connection and encourage activity into the evening, providing for a welcoming setting around the Castle quarter.

Lighting can also complement the illumination of historic and tourism locations, such as Athlone Castle. In-ground lighting should be avoided, with existing façades or street furniture leveraged instead. Where appropriate, feature lighting can be incorporated into seating and can light pedestrian routes along the waterfront and canal. Ambient lighting in soft landscape areas can also be used to beautify the public realm at night.

Critically, all lighting installations must consider appropriate lux levels for public safety. Ecological considerations must also be taken into account in lit parkland areas.

Lighting should not detract from the context and setting of the Framework Area and should generally be designed to be integral to the public realm. In some special instances, particularly in the context of areas or buildings of significant heritage context, bespoke feature lighting may be appropriate, in order to respond positively to the this setting.

Streets

STREET LIGHTING

Type: Column with WCC approved fitting

FOOTPATH LIGHTING

Type: Sharing street lighting column where possible and WCC approved fitting

Public Spaces and Waterfront

FEATURE LIGHTING

Type: Pole lighting with multiple projector-type fittings or suspended catinery-style lighting

AMBIENT LIGHTING

Type: Integrated into street furniture or within areas of soft landscape









Lighting Examples for the Framework Area

Soft Landscape

There are currently few mature trees in Athlone's town centre, with some new trees recently introduced. Within the Athlone urban area, street tree planting occurs in:

- Above-ground planters of varying sizes and styles, including multiple planters introduced during recent improvement works;
- In-ground with a variety of protective tree grilles or root protection systems.

Within the Framework Area, trees are to be:

- planted directly into the ground, with planters or raised beds only used where underground services present a challenge;
- single stem in streetscape areas, with multi-stem trees more appropriate for larger planted areas or raised planters;
- native Irish species, where possible, or appropriate non-native species.

Mature tree planting exists along sections of the waterfront and is a positive addition to the town centre adding to the vista as seen from the opposite bank. These areas should be enhanced. Most of the canal also has mature tree planting along one or both sides. Mixed vegetation occurs in the understorey. The northern section of the canal includes cherry trees and grass verges that contribute to a garden-like character, while canal sections further south are made inaccessible by hedge planting and fencing.

Planting should consider the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan as well as Westmeath County Council's Biodiversity Action Plan. Tree species should be selected for longevity and biodiversity value, as well as local soil conditions and micro-climate. Compatibility with streetscapes and proximity to buildings must also be considered. A range of tree species and sizes should be selected, including semi-mature specimen trees and multi-stems.









Tree Species for the Framework Area, including examples which should be native or appropriate to the area and should contain positive properties such as pollution absorption and shading.

Tree Planting

STREET TREES

Type: Tree pit in hard landscape

Size: 20-25cm girth

Features: Tree grille, structural tree soil, root management, irrigation and aeration, below-ground guying

LARGE SPECIMEN TREES

Type: Tree pit in hard landscape and in soft landscape at selected key locations

Size: 25-30cm girth

Features: Tree grille, structural tree soil, root management (if required), irrigation and aeration, belo w-ground guying.

TREE GROUPS / CLUSTERS

Type: In large areas of soft landscape

Size: 14-16cm to 16-18cm girth

Features: Irrigation and aeration, above-ground staking, root management (if required)

WATER-TOLERANT TREES

Type: In swales or raingardens

Size: 14-16cm girth

Features: Irrigation and aeration, above-ground staking, root management (if required)

ORNAMENTAL / MULTI-STEM TREES

Type: In planters and in selected locations of soft landscape

Size: Multistem trees with min. 3 stems or 14-16cm girth single-stem

Features: Irrigation and aeration, above-ground staking, root management (if required)



Examples of Appropriate Street Trees

Small trees – 5 to 10m in height ($10m^3$ soil)	**Medium trees – 12 to 17m in height** (20m3 soil, 2m allowance for growth)	**Large trees – more than 17m in height** ($30m^3$ soil, 3m allowance for growth)
Royal Burgundy (Prunus e.g. Royal Burgundy)	Honey locust (Gleditsia tricanthos, e.g. var Sunburst)	Beech (Fagus sylvatica)
Field Maple (Acer campestre, e.g. var Elegant)	Field Maple (Acer campestre, e.g. var Elegant)	Ginkgo (Ginkgo biloba)
Hazel (Acer campestre, e.g. Corylus, e.g. Colurna)	Pride of India (Koelreuteria paniculata)	Small-leaved Lime (Tilia cordata)
Crab Apple (Malus sylvestris)	Ornamental Pear (Pyrus calleryana chanticleer)	Common Alder (Alnus glutinosa)
Common Whitebeam (Sorbus aria)	Wild Cherry (Prunus avium)	Large-leaved Lime (Tilia platyphyllos)
Maple (Acer, e.g. Rubrum)	Hornbeam (Carpinus betulus)	Common/European Lime (Tilia x europaea)
Bird Cherry (Prunus padus)	Norway Maple (Acer platanoides)	
	Japanese Pagoda Tree (Sophora japonica)	
	Broad-leaved Whitebeam (Sorbus latifolia)	
	Chinese Red Birch (Betula albosinensis)	
	European Nettle Tree (Celtis australis)	
	Caucasian Lime (Tilia x euchlora)	
	Elm - resistant (Ulmus vada)	

Streets Manual

Overview

The existing street layout of Athlone closely reflects its historical form: tight knit around built landmarks and local topography.

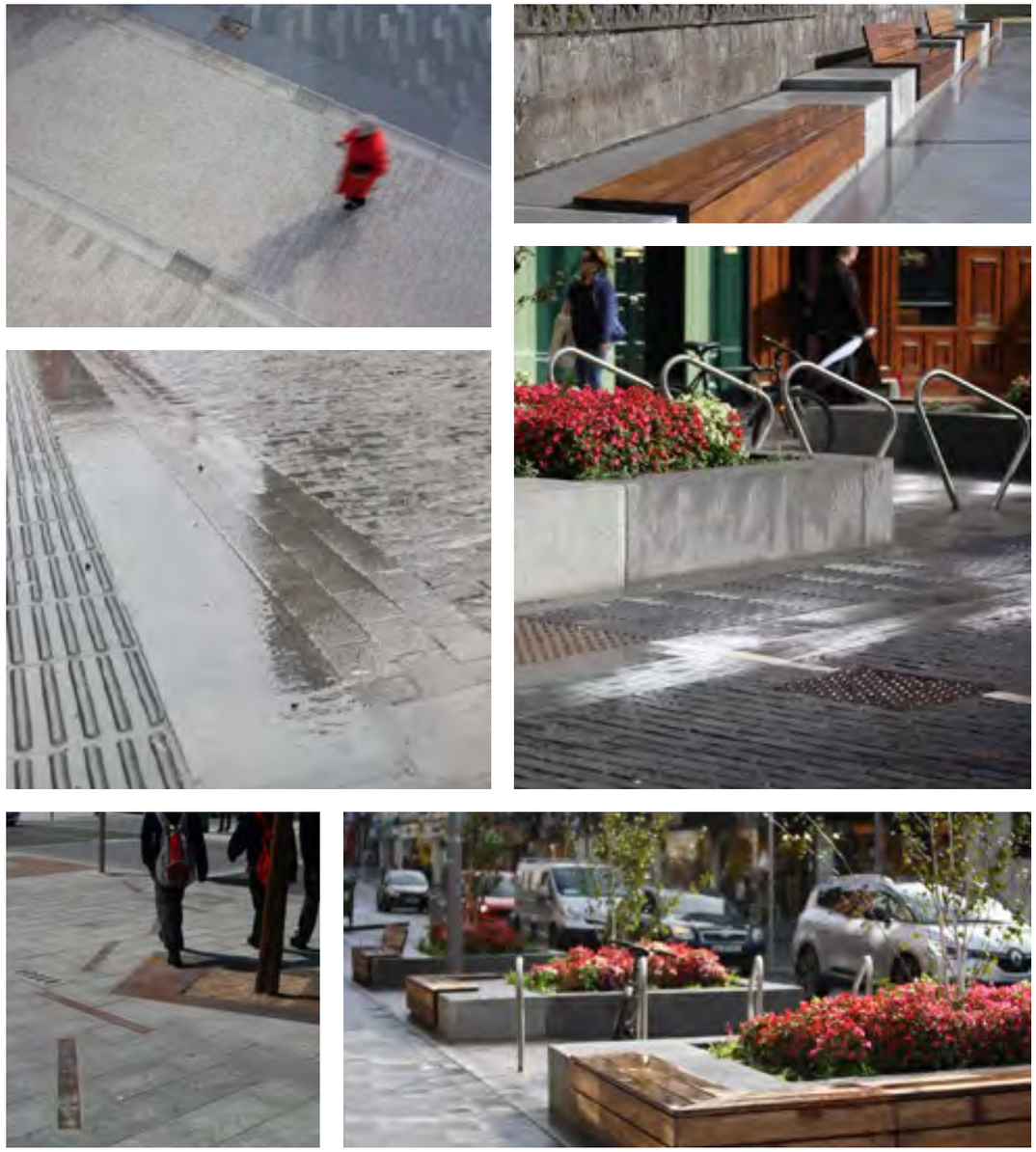
Recent public realm improvements, employing the use of natural stone and quality street furniture, have contributed to an enhanced pedestrian experience and should be used to inform future proposals for street and public realm improvements.

Streets within the Framework Area vary in width, materiality and amenities offered, which collectively contribute to the character of each street and lane. A defined hierarchy helps to mindfully use materials throughout the Framework Area and avoid clutter and visual distraction. Through application of a street hierarchy, a visually cohesive landscape strategy can be employed. A hierarchical approach with subtle palette changes assists with spatial definition while also providing functional information and wayfinding.

This approach aligns with best practices from the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS) and contributes towards the implementation of the ABTA strategy for sustainable transport and smarter travel.

The provision of safe and accessible links to existing and proposed greenways and cycleways will contribute to a reduced dependence on car-based commuting. By reducing the demand for cars at the local movement level, such as streets and lanes, more space becomes available for positive alternatives such as cycle lanes and greening interventions. The streetscape environment should be mapped for pedestrians, cyclists, and people with special mobility needs, and facilities to enhance safety and convenience should form part of future design proposals. Accessibility audits should be carried out to inform any detailed design.

Active frontages should be encouraged where possible to improve the aesthetic value of the street. In areas where building façades have deteriorated, the character of the street is affected. Incentives should be offered for enhancements and improvements, and can be carried out as part of a ‘street’ or ‘community’ scheme. Due to the narrow nature of many of the streets, creative interventions should be trialled initially on a temporary basis and with community involvement. If successful, more permanent interventions should form part of the overall town improvement strategy.



Precedent Street Design Principles including Athlone’s Recent Public Realm Enhancement Works

Street Hierarchy within Framework Area

Key: Street Types

- Historic East-West Street
- Secondary Street
- Local and Historic Lane
- Link Road
- Pedestrianised Street
- Existing Greenway NCN
- Bus and Railway Station

Historic East-West Street

INCLUDES THE HISTORIC STREET THROUGH ATHLONE, WEST TO EAST: CONNAUGHT ST, PEARSE ST TO BARRACK ST, CHURCH ST TO DUBLIN GATE ST, MARDYKE ST, ST MARY'S SQUARE.

It is the intention of this Framework to enable the continued expansion of the successful Church Street streetscape enhancement to create a unified finish spanning the east to west spine through the town core.

Primary roads and streets predominantly have a busy commercial and civic character with much pedestrian and vehicle activity.

For the most part, building edges within the town centre are contiguous with footpaths creating limited opportunities for further intervention. However, in places where the streets widen or open up to facilitate local frontages or direction changes, there is scope to intervene.

These locations, where appropriate, should be considered as part of a greening strategy and include planting in the form of single trees and/or mixed herbaceous schemes. As space is typically limited in these areas it is proposed that appropriate below ground investigation and preparation be carried out to maximise the planting opportunities, e.g. constructed tree pits where services may be a challenge, and, herbaceous planting into existing ground where roots won't interfere with services.

The inclusion of seating or resting spots should also be considered in areas which have the space to accommodate such improvements.



Existing Character to be Leveraged (top) and Proposed Character (bottom)

PRIMARY STREET PRINCIPLES

- Improve balance of pedestrian and vehicular space, with shared surfaces and wider footpaths
- Strengthen connectivity
- Use level surfaces, with flush kerbs and crossings at junctions including hazard warning
- Install high quality finishes, with material and texture variations to delineate between vehicular and pedestrian zones

Materials

- Cohesive, durable material palette that will withstand public use, weather well and ensure consistency across public realm, including natural stone features to enhance more standard elements of the street design
- Alignment with existing public realm improvement schemes

Street furniture

- Emphasis on cost-effective, easy to maintain and replaceable items
- Sufficient cycle parking, installed perpendicular to kerb on wider primary streets

Lighting

- A hierarchy of lighting, with standalone and building-mounted luminaires as well as feature lights and spotlights as appropriate
- To reduce street clutter in the town centre, lighting should be combined with other street furniture elements where possible

Utilities

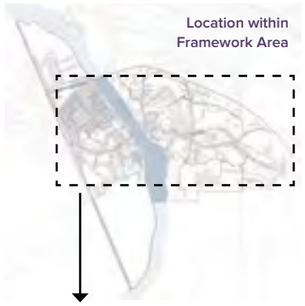
- Recessed manhole covers to align with paving
- In-ground power and water for occasional events

Planting

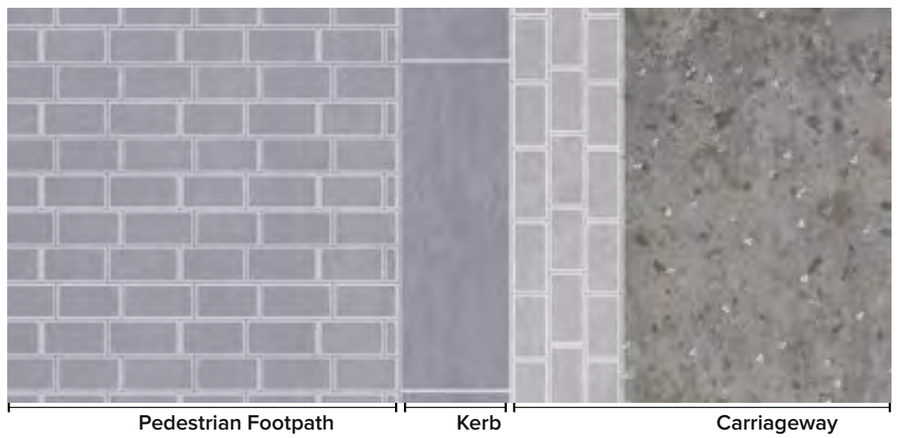
- Prioritise long-term street tree planting, using specimen or landmark trees and 'micro-spaces' over formal axes of trees (particularly given Athlone's non-linear layout)
- Create permanent planted areas in place of above-ground bulky street planters

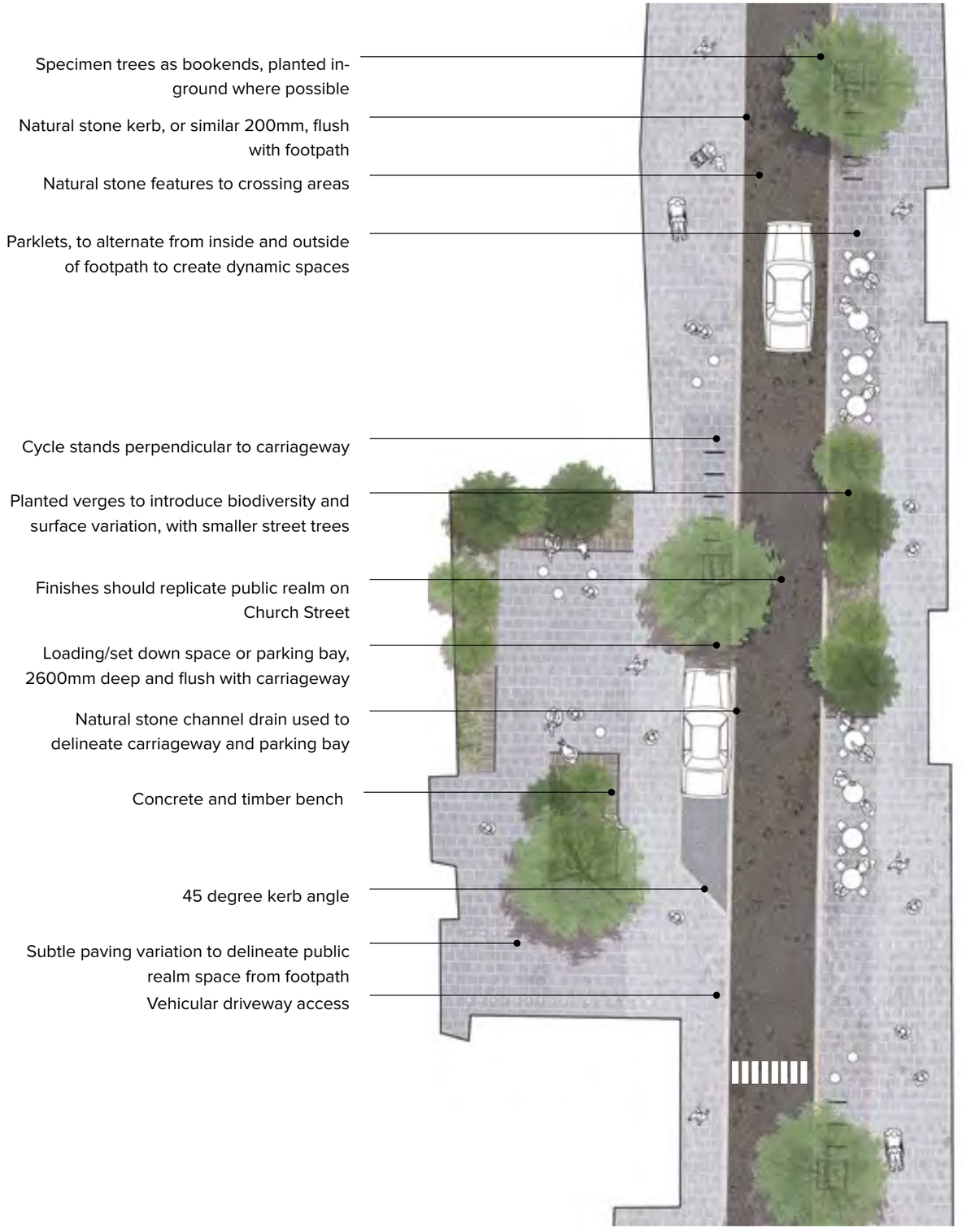
Primary Streets

Example: Pearse Street









Illustrative Primary Street Layout: Pearse Street

Secondary Streets

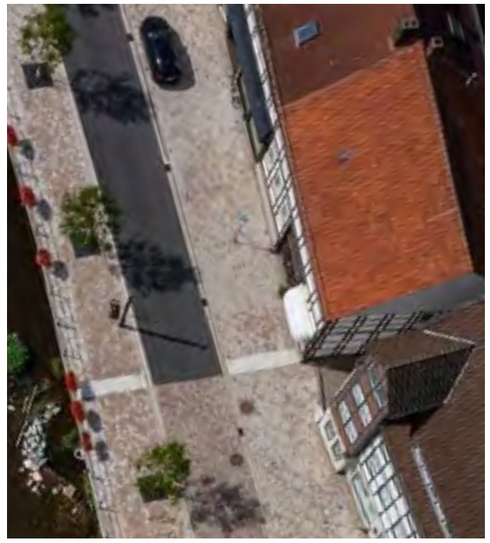
INCLUDES: PATRICK ST, O'CONNELL ST, BASTION ST AND HIGH ST, CASTLE ST, GRIFFITH ST, JOHN BRODERICK ST AND GLEESON ST, RANELAGH, NORTHGATE ST, IRISHTOWN

Secondary streets are comprised of a mix of residential and commercial properties with pedestrian and vehicles actively using these routes regularly. Secondary streets are often used as convenient links and should be enhanced to make these connections more green.

There is an opportunity to create parklets within footpath widenings or other available sized pockets of space, could be proposed. As parklets becomes successful and is seen as a positive contribution to the character of the street, it could then be retained as a permanent intervention and be developed more permanently in accordance with this Toolkit.

If space allows, and to assist in the slowing down of vehicle traffic, one-way systems with a meandering alignment should be considered. These spaces enable enhanced planting and people-centric spaces. The Athlone Area-Based Transport Assessment 2023 details areas where this is possible.





Existing Character to be Leveraged (top) and Proposed Character (bottom)

SECONDARY STREET PRINCIPLES

- Carry the essence of Athlone's urban area beyond the main spine through materials and furniture
- Allow for narrower footpaths than on primary streets
- Transition of threshold space to footpath so to maximise pedestrian experience

Materials

- Natural stone materials continued from Primary Streets, but with a transition to a tarmac road surface with exposed aggregate details

Street furniture

- Continuity of use of street furniture elements as used on the Historic East-West Street
- Increased formal and informal seating throughout and provision of resting spaces in well-used pedestrianised areas

Lighting

- Building-mounted luminaries, except in areas of wider footpath
- Multi-head and lower luminaires in pedestrian areas, fitted on existing columns or buildings where possible

Utilities

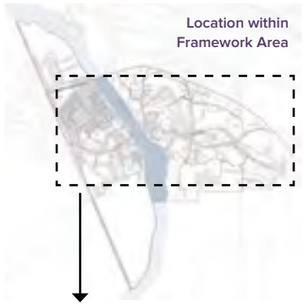
- Recessed manhole covers to align with paving

Planting

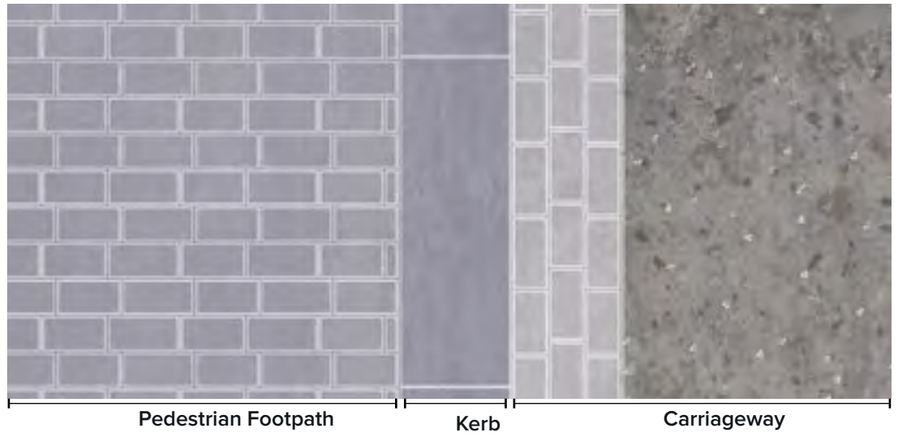
- Mirror strategies for Primary Streets; narrower footpaths may necessitate use of planters over planting in free-draining ground

Secondary Streets

Example: High Street









Indicative Secondary Street Layout: High Street

Local and Historic Lanes

INCLUDES: CONNAUGHT GARDENS, HARRY'S LANE, CONNOLLY ST, GRATTAN ROW, BALL ALLEY LN, CHAPEL ST, GOLDSMITH TERRACE, GRATTAN ROW, ABBEY LN, EXCISE ST, ST. PETER'S PORT, THE SHAMBLES, BARNETT ST, STRAND ST, LLOYDS LN, FRIARY LN, CHURCH ST, WOLFE TONE TERRACE, COURT DEVENISH

These laneways predominantly comprise of private dwellings. Footfall is regular but not constant, and primarily from residents and locals. Most lanes do not have pathways.

On the east side, streets which fall away from primary streets provide access to and glimpse views of the River Shannon. These act as important links to the waterfront, which improved signage and visual enhancements can encourage pedestrians and cyclists towards. On the west side, streets are a mix of curved and straight alignments. The narrow widths create an intimate and neighbourly character which is inviting at a human scale. The use of colour can be useful in these streets and lanes as there is typically limited space for additional planting or structures.

Small streets and lanes should be considered as pedestrian priority zones to encourage active travel and create green and healthy spaces in the town. Areas where pedestrianisation is also possible are detailed in the Athlone ABTA.





Existing view along Friary Lane towards the River Shannon (top) and proposed interventions (bottom)

LOCAL AND HISTORIC LANE PRINCIPLES

- Narrow footpaths, or no footpaths in areas
- Upgrade the quality of façades along historic laneways, including shopfronts and visually impermeable walls
- Visually declutter, including by reducing overhead wires and signage

Materials

- Quality natural stone materials to complement the historical nature of Athlone's laneways

Lighting

- As outlined in DMURS, lighting should be installed at heights no greater than six metres
- On lanes without pathways, luminaries are to be building-mounted to help reduce clutter

Signage and Wayfinding

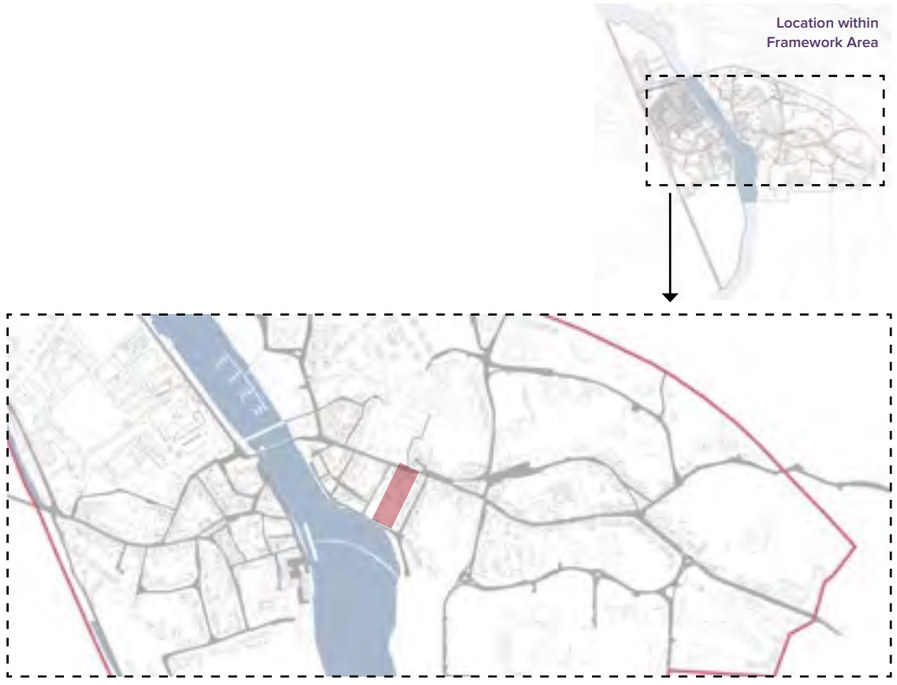
- Use paving creatively to guide pedestrians towards historical areas and key views

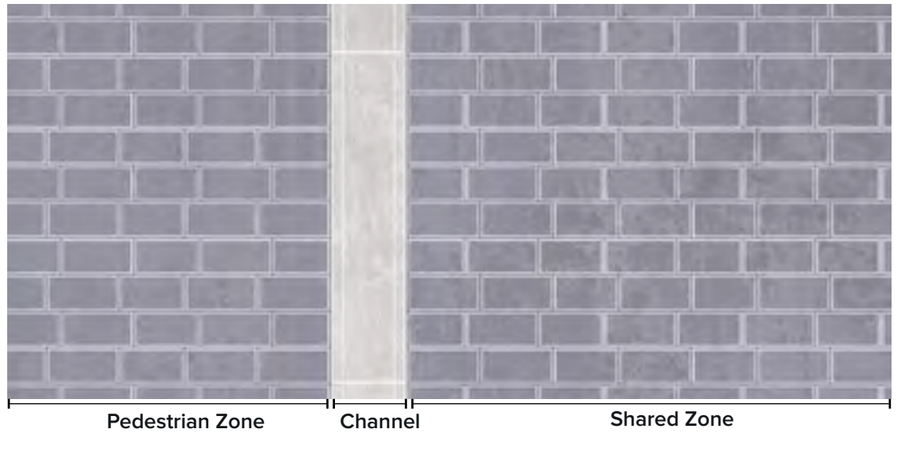
Planting

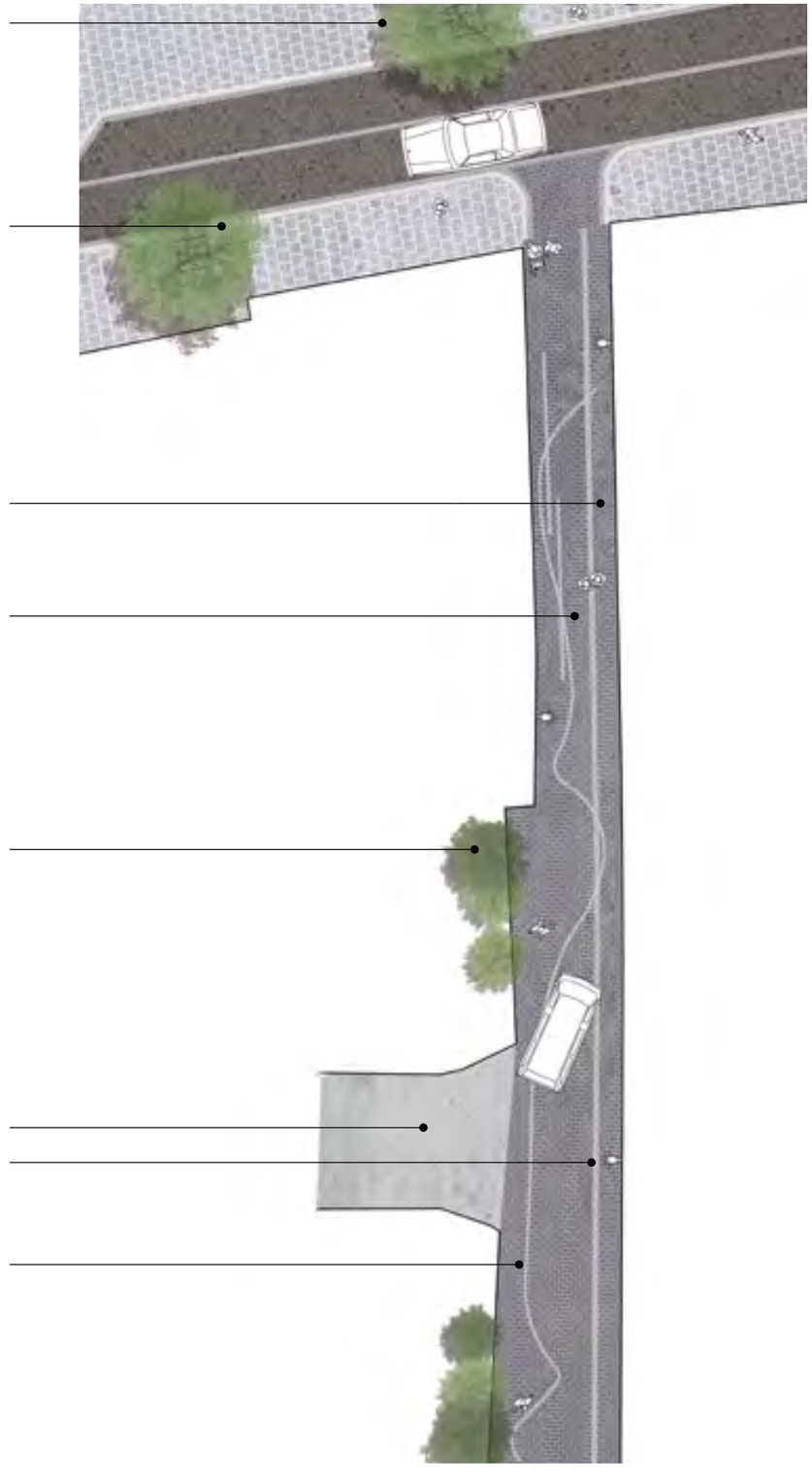
- Given limited space, contiguous areas such as car parks may be explored for tree planting
- Where footpaths are present, smaller street tree species may be appropriate
- Climbing species may be appropriate in some areas, both to soften the laneway but also to help enhance certain façades (non-decorative walls, for example)
- Care to be taken that any planting complements and does not block views

Local and Historic Lanes

Example: Friary Lane







Indicative Local and Historic Lane Layout: Friary Street

Link Roads

INCLUDES: MAGAZINE RD, CANAL BANKS, DEERPARK RD, LYSTER ST, PARNELL SQ, DUBLIN RD R446, GOLDEN ISLAND, BRIDESWELL ST, CASTLEMAINE ST, LOWER RD, GRACE PARK RD, THE CRESCENT, SOUTHERN STATION RD, BALLYMAHON RD, ABBEY RD

These streets are dominated by private residential properties or mixed use areas and are typically thoroughfares or connections. Link roads can also facilitate access to backlands to enable new and sustainable development opportunities. The strategy is to continue elements from the town core, particularly with planting and wayfinding, but within a simplified materials palette. This hints at what is to come for those arriving and serves as a wayfinding tool towards the town centre. Materials are durable and cost effective, reflecting the larger surface areas and traffic volume on these roads. There is also ample room for pedestrians, while wide carriageways can facilitate future cycle lane development. A good example of this strategy are the proposals for Grace Park Road as part of the Loughanaskin Urban Regeneration Masterplan 2023, wherein it is proposed to realign the current road and junction of Grace Park Road and lower road to facilitate safe cycle links. Planting is used to separate pedestrians from the carriageway, with verges, street trees and low hedges employed. Where there is space and is appropriate, SuDS may also be employed. However, the use of SuDS should complement and not replace permanent tree pits along the footpath.





Existing Character (top) and Precedent image (bottom)

LINK ROAD PRINCIPLES

- Appropriate footpaths in durable materials, with safe line of sight and space, as well as wayfinding, for pedestrians
- Room for cyclists, with potential to develop cycle lanes where space permits

Materials

- Concrete paving and kerbs, with transition areas on to Primary and Secondary Streets or Local and Historic Lanes to use natural stone kerbs

Street furniture

- Limited street furniture except at main nodes

Lighting and Utilities

- Where possible, positioned on the verge between pedestrians and the carriageway

Signage and Wayfinding

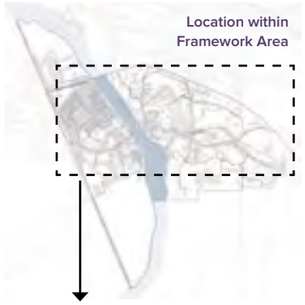
- Increase permeability by opening up boundaries and introducing pedestrian links along Link Roads, including along open green spaces

Planting

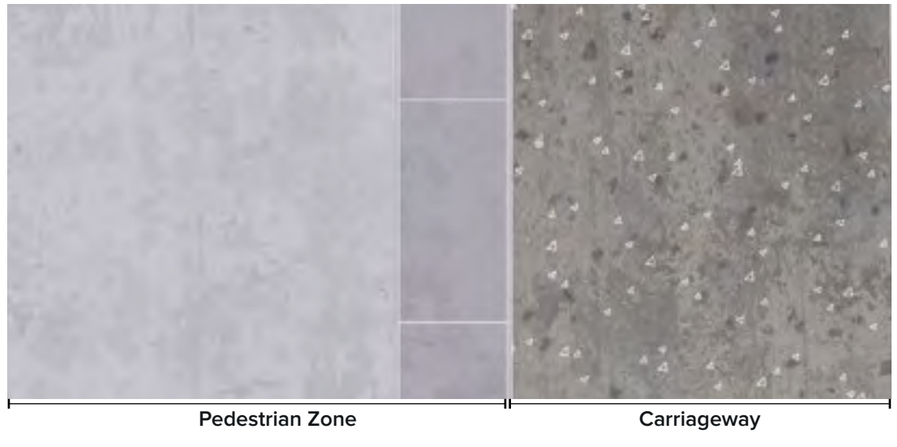
- Wider streetscapes permit larger street trees and specimen trees with spreads of greater than 6m, which should be planted in permanent tree pits in free-draining ground
- Low hedging and planted verges can separate the carriageway from pedestrians, and also provide opportunity for smaller street trees

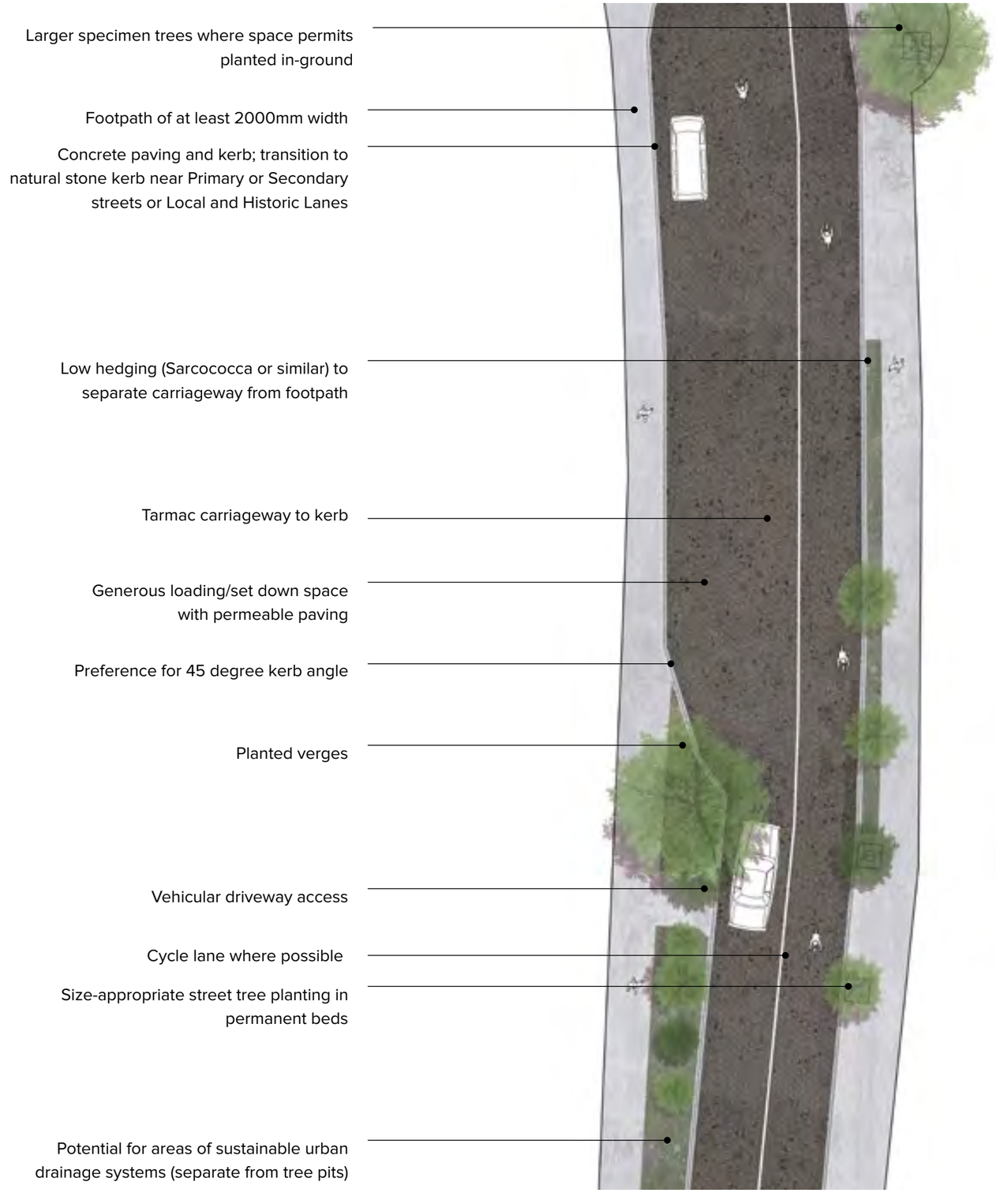
Link Roads

Example: Ballymahon Road









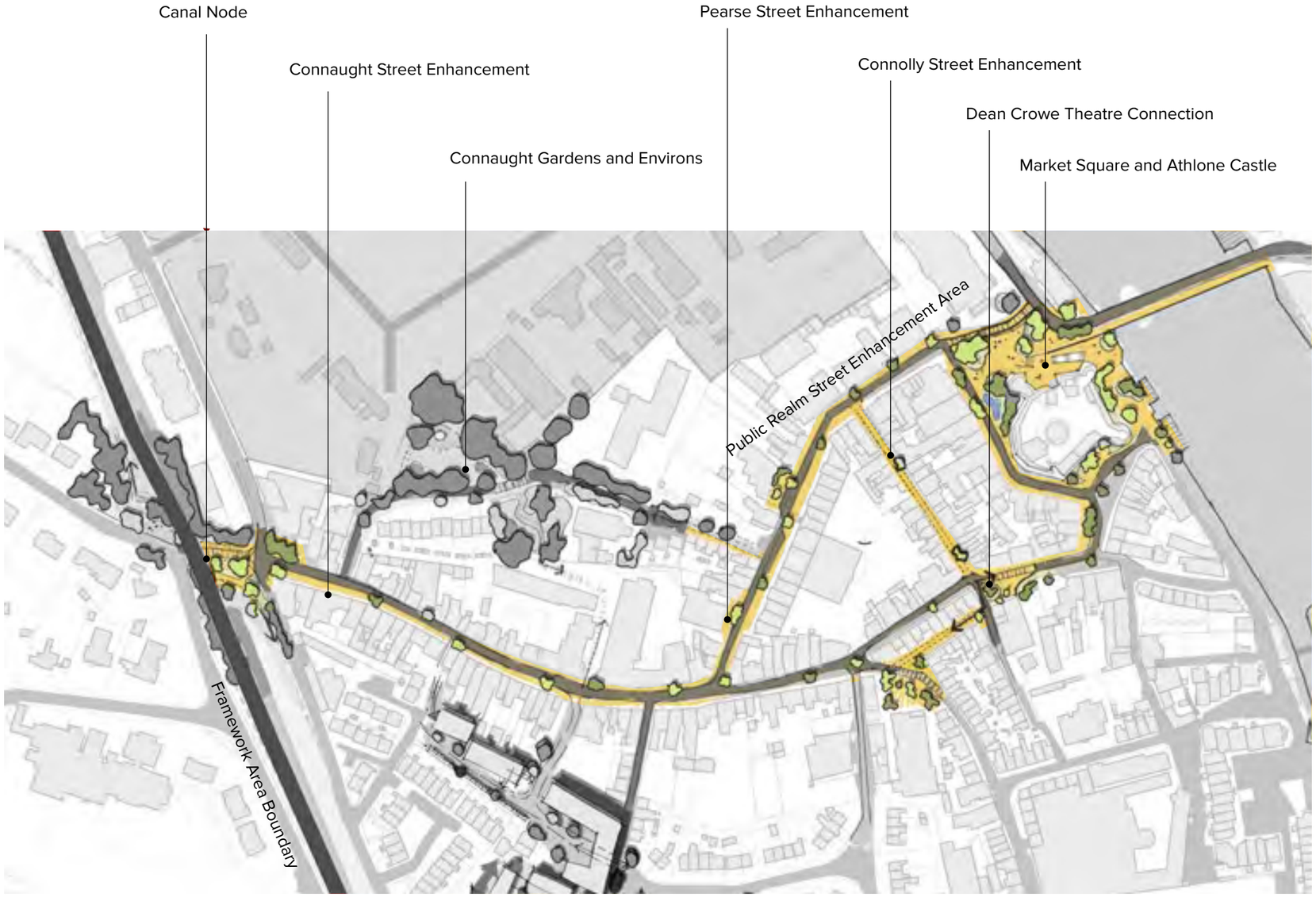
Indicative Link Road Layout: Grace Park Road

Key Public Realm Spaces Manual

There is potential to enhance a number of identified key public realm spaces in the future. The following design principles have been developed for key public realm spaces within Athlone's Framework Area. For these spaces, the Manual provides ideas for further enhancing these spaces ('Enhanced Spaces') and tying them in to the broader strategy for the Framework Area.

New public realm projects are also proposed to the defined "Tourism and Cultural Quarter" including the expansion of the public realm street enhancement works extending from Church Street in the town centre to the west along the east-west spine travelling along Pearse Street, Connaught Street and the adjoining street network, to rebalance the town and create a unified finish within the central framework area. In these areas, the Manual highlights features to be retained as well as broader plans for public realm intervention that will contribute to regeneration. Many form part of the Pipeline Projects as part of the Framework.

The future development of each area should have regard to the guiding principles outlined on the following pages. A diagram has been provided for each key public space to show how these design principles may be interpreted into a site-specific design. These designs are indicative only. The design of the public spaces and the hard and soft landscape elements shown will have to be carefully considered at a later stage.



Connaught Street and environs with key public realm spaces and street enhancement

Public Spaces

Map illustrating the Key Public Spaces within the Framework Area.

Key

- Proposed Public Realm Space
- Enhanced Public Realm Space
- Recent Public Realm Street Enhancement Works
- Proposed Public Realm Street Enhancement Works

Proposed Spaces

Market Square and Athlone Castle

There is an opportunity to reclaim Athlone's Market Square and its historical use - as a market place - through positive placemaking. Its framing by Athlone Castle, the Luan Gallery and the Church of Saints Peter & Paul create a lively cultural centre.

The following design principles can guide the enhancement of this central open space:

- Design for flexible public use and events, with large open areas retained.
- In line with the Athlone Area-Based Transport Assessment 2023, create priority spaces for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Integrate public realm works to the entrance of Athlone Castle and those planned along the waterfront, including a cohesive lighting strategy for the Castle and surrounds enhancing the night-time visitor experience.
- Introduce high-quality planting to frame Market Square and its surrounds, including Athlone Castle, the Luan Gallery and the Church.
- Take advantage of the proximity to the River Shannon and create open views as well as wayfinding to and from waterfront experiences.



Existing Intersection at Market Square

Existing Space





Market Day in Athlone - end of 19th Century



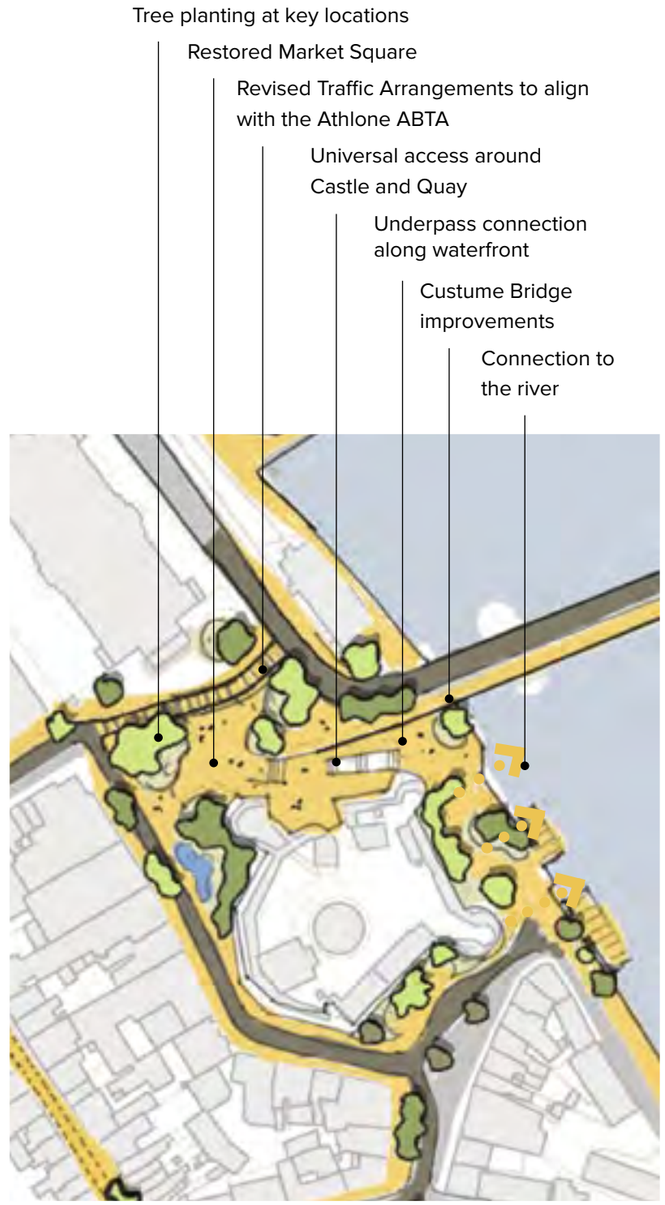
Pipeline Project: Market Square



Approved Public Realm Enhancement at Athlone Castle Entrance



Precedent image depicting proposals



Proposed Space (Indicative Only)

Proposed Spaces

Dean Crowe Theatre / High Street Link

The following outline design principles can guide the design of this space:

- Enhance connections to the Dean Crowe Theatre via Market Square, Main Street, High Street and Grattan Row.
- Implement a series of interactive public realm spaces (opportunity for a multifunctional, activity-focused space along High Street) to enhance the visitor experience and increase dwell time and a cohesive colour palette for building façades. Enhanced funding through Per Cent for Art scheme should be considered. This will enhance and widen the offering in the Tourism and Cultural Quarter, creating a connected chain of heritage, arts, cultural and event spaces in the town centre.
- Explore opportunities to open up the forecourt of the Dean Crowe Theatre as part of enhanced public realm works to facilitate indoor and outdoor theatre events and activities (in collaboration with the Dean Crowe Theatre)
- Use a cohesive palette of materials and furniture and embrace the vibrant colours and art in the area to create a unique sense of place and destination synonymous Arts and Culture.
- Introduce tree planting at key locations to book-end streets, close off poor vistas and emphasise positive ones.



Dean Crowe Theatre



Existing space to be transformed to cultural square / link



Existing character of Grattan Row

Existing Space





Pipeline Project: Cultural Square / Link



Precedent image depicting proposals



Proposed Space (Indicative Only)

Proposed Spaces

Ranelagh Way / Big Meadow Loop

The natural assets of Ranelagh to the north and the Big Meadow to the south connected by Athlone Canal to west and River Shannon to the east presents an opportunity to create a connected network of ecologically rich green and blue corridors. The creation of a looped walk can be delivered in a series of sections, each responding to the environment and offering a diverse range of attractions and activities.

- Extend Ranelagh Way along the length of Athlone Canal, Big Meadow and River Shannon Frontage to Ranelagh to create a looped trail through a series of treks, paths, and boardwalks.
- Enhances public access to the proposed canal node, No.1 Gun Battery and the lands immediately south which have been identified as an Opportunity Site (refer to Chapter 6) and enhance the existing recreational routes along the waterfront, creating an eco / heritage loop which combines Viking heritage, active outdoor recreation and enhanced biodiversity.
- Wayfinding to introduce blueway tourists along the River Shannon to Athlone's natural features along the Loop path, with Athlone as the focal point of the Shannon's Discovery Zone 2 as per the Shannon Tourism Masterplan.
- Build on the existing unique character of the site and ensure the preservation and enhancement of this ecologically rich natural environment applying the 'leave no trace' principal to visitors
- Provide play and sports facilities within the existing brown-field area to the south-east of the Ranelagh green space area.
- Introduce waterfront interventions, such as planting, planters or public art of similar scale and character to Talbot Avenue.
- Create destination points along the looped walk aimed at preserving and celebrating the ecological rich biodiversity in the area.
- Create raised boardwalk areas to allow access to areas prone to flooding.
- Facilitate angling bays along the southern section of the Athlone Canal.

Existing Space





Existing wetland at the Meadows



Pipeline Project: Ranelagh Way / Big Meadow



Existing woodland at Ranelagh Way



Precedent image depicting proposals



Diagram of Proposed Loop Path (indicative only) connecting waterfront experiences at 1) Ranelagh Way, 2) the Canal Node and 3) the Meadows

Proposed Spaces

Canal Node

The Canal Node is a significant point where Connaught Street, Monksland and access to the West converge. The following outline design principles can guide the design of this open space, along with input from the Athlone Canal Heritage Committee and community as well as guidance from the Athlone Canal Study:

- Narrow and realign the carriageway and roundabouts to give greater priority to pedestrians and cyclists.
- Improve both east-west and north-south pedestrian and cyclist connections in this area, including wayfinding and consider the introduction of a Public Art installation associated with the Canal Heritage
- Open boundaries and views to the north and south of the bridge.
- Leverage the existing level change to create a key node at the bridge which acts as a link to the canal and the town centre.
- Incorporate low-terraced walls on either side as retaining edges as well as opportunities for sitting and resting.
- Incorporate additional planting to enhance biodiversity and create a garden-like character at the nodes to the north and south of the bridge.
- Replace and enhance existing play facilities.
- Subject to a feasibility study, consider daylighting and/or re-watering of sections of the Canal.



Existing space at the Canal Node



Existing path along the Canal



Precedent image depicting proposals

Existing Space

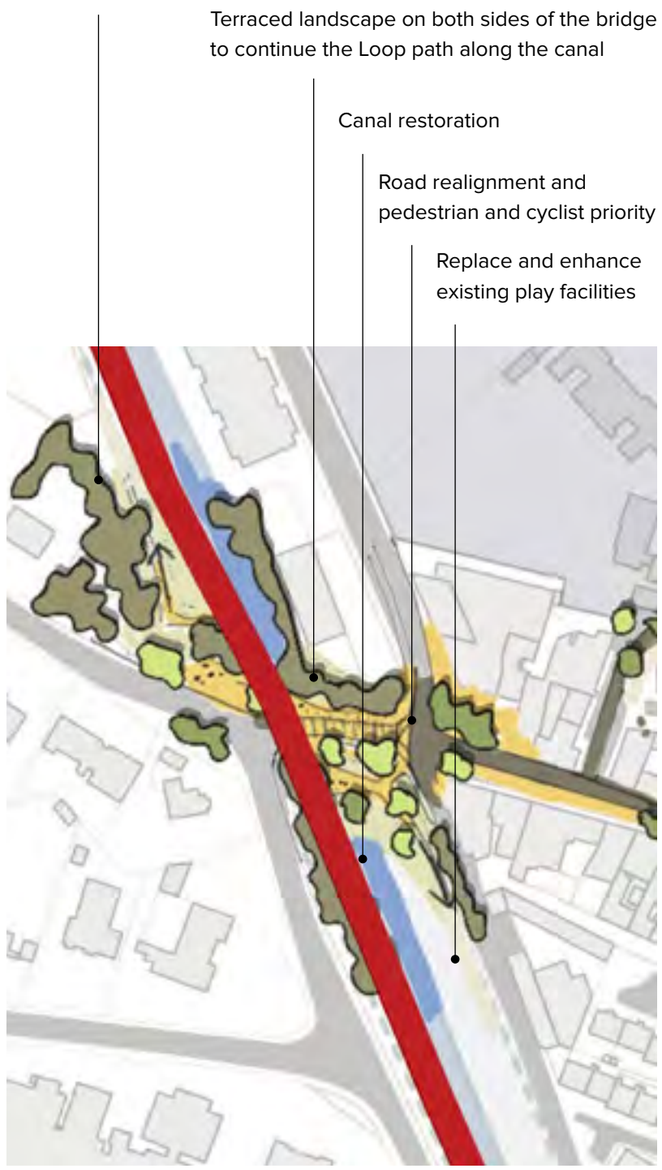




Precedent image depicting proposals



Precedent image depicting proposals



Proposed Space (Indicative Only)

Enhanced Spaces

Connaught Gardens and Environs

The following outline design principles can assist by informing the design of this open space and associated links:

- Enhance the biodiversity and potential of an underutilised green space within the urban landscape.
- Work with the existing attractive character of the site, to create a neighbourhood garden for both locals and visitors.
- Enhance the quality and character of the connections to Connaught Street and Pearse Street via Ganly Place through wayfinding and material changes at thresholds to make them more inviting and attractive.
- Develop the tourism potential of the area by way of enabling the heritage and diaspora tourism offering through the recording and display of historic headstones.
- Explore the opportunity to open the grounds of the Corpus Christi Catholic Church to Connaught Gardens.
- Incorporate sustainable urban drainage features, where possible, in existing open space and introduce more trees, shrubs and hedges to increase biodiversity on site and create an intimate and sheltered, garden-like setting.



Existing green space at Connaught Gardens



Existing link to Pearse Street via Ganly Place



Existing established trees to be retained within Connaught Gardens



Pipeline Project: Connaught Gardens



Existing cottages on Ganly Place.

Existing Space





Proposed Space (Indicative Only)

Enhanced Spaces

Civic Space

The following outline design principles can guide the design of this open space:

- Consider the provision of enhanced public realm onto Church Street through shared surface treatment and on street planting and planters.
- Explore the opportunity to open the grounds of St. Mary's Church and improve its entrance for better accessibility and visual permeability. Adjoining burial grounds should be protected.
- Retain and enhance the area in the vicinity of the existing mature trees along Church Street.
- Break up existing large areas of hard landscape by adding tree and ground-cover planting in selected locations.
- Improve the legibility of the north-south link to Athlone Bus and Train Station, located to the north of the site, improving the connections with the town centre. Introduce improved lighting to make a safer and more accessible environment at night.



Existing space at the Civic Square



Statue of John McCormack within the Civic Space



Precedent image depicting proposals

Existing Space





Precedent image depicting proposals



Precedent image depicting proposals



Proposed Space (Indicative Only)

Enhanced Spaces

St. Mary's Square/ Loughanaskin

The following outline design principles can guide the design of this open space:

- Extend the Town Centre Public Realm Street Enhancement works east of Mardyke Street through St Mary's Square to define the east west historic route through the town core.
- Create a sequence of public spaces along the street to act as nodes within the wider network of Athlone.
- Use similar materials and furniture to create a cohesive character between the existing, planned, and future interventions.
- Incorporate large street trees at selected locations to book-end the street and end vistas.
- Realign the carriageway to provide a designated, clear pedestrian and cyclist priority along the street in accordance with the Athlone ABTA.
- Connect the town centre with the sites identified for regeneration within the Loughanaskin Regeneration Masterplan 2023.
- The proposed works and palette of materials should compliment the ACA and St. Mary's Church, a Protected Structure.



St. Mary's Square and Scotch Parade aerial



Public Realm Street Enhancement at Sean Costello Street (under construction)



Pipeline Project: St. Mary's Square / Loughanaskin



Precedent image depicting proposals

Existing Space



Key space for public realm improvements along St. Mary's Square.

Pedestrian and cyclist connection through opportunity site to the south

Tree planting at key locations

Key space for public realm improvements at Scotch Parade

Green link from Loughanaskin Urban Regeneration Masterplan 2023



Proposed Space (Indicative Only)

Enhanced Spaces

Burgess Park

The following outline design principles can guide the design of this open space:

- Enhance the interface between the park and the River Shannon by introducing decks and walkways along the river banks which complement other pipeline projects in this area such as the new connection along the weir and the outdoor pool and boardwalk.
- Adopt a child oriented play-led approach to create a playful public space for children and teenagers. Improve the existing play facilities and include informal nature play within the zone of existing trees.
- Explore the possibilities of used and unused spaces as sites for play, social interaction and recreational use including artistic installations to promote an intergenerational public space and sharing between old and young. Provide places of interest including interactive play expressions and/or a sculpture through the Per Cent for Art scheme.
- Improve entrance nodes to the park and introduce topography at the boundaries to screen from cars. Introduce a multi-layered planting palette to enhance biodiversity and improve the proportion of native Irish species in the park.
- Improve the existing park facilities to promote larger events and festivals.



Existing space at Burgess Park



Existing playground at Burgess Park



Precedent image depicting skate park



Pipeline Project: Weir Walkway

Existing Space



East-west connection along the weir

Outdoor pool and boardwalk

Enhanced connection to the river

New natural playground

Upgrades to existing play area

Enhanced entrances and eastern boundary

Existing vegetation retained



Proposed Space (Indicative Only)

Activity Manual

Overview

There are three types of activities that can occur within an urban settlement. These include:

- necessary, day to day activities that take place regardless of the quality of the surrounding environment;
- optional activities that are sensitive to the quality of the physical setting and occur only when ambient conditions are inviting, attractive and comfortable;
- social activities that are encouraged by specific spaces.

Examples of necessary activities include walking to and from work and school, grocery shopping and running errands. Optional and social activities include sitting outside, watching, listening, playing and spending time together. These can contribute to the local community and its needs, while also creating experiences for visitors to Athlone.

A public space needs to be inviting, social, safe, diverse and accessible to all in order to be successful. Location is also a critical factor to be considered. Activation should occur at key nodes within the town and should be supported by sufficient footfall, adequate connections and appropriate scale. Cafés and shops, landmark buildings, public art, and events such as markets and concerts and play spaces help to animate the public realm.

This Activity Manual demonstrates ways to further enhance and activate Athlone's public realm through programmed activities such as these. The following pages consider appropriate spaces to accommodate events, markets, public art and day-to-day activities such as play, rest and exploration in the town.

An emphasis is placed on connectivity along Athlone's main spine, waterfront, and green spaces, as well as opportunities to further highlight Athlone's built and natural heritage. Activation of these spaces also has the potential to positively contribute to a sustainable local economy.

Together with other sections of the Public Realm and Placemaking Strategy, a cohesive and intentional vision for Athlone is formed.



Precedents Depicting Public Space Design Principles

Play, Rest, Explore

It is recommended that play provision is improved across the Framework Area having regard to the findings of the Social Infrastructure Audit. Opportunities for interactive play as part of public realm improvements could also be considered in order to create a child-friendly town. A play-led approach to creating a child-friendly and playful town providing for the development of child oriented space in the public realm interventions could be adopted through the introduction of playful and interactive sculptures and art expressions in parks and public spaces that can be delivered through the Per Cent for Art scheme.

A hierarchy of play should be implemented in the Framework Area as follows:

- Young Children's Play
- Local Play
- Destination Play

The proposed facilities would be tailored to the location, size and amenities of the public spaces and take into account projected population changes.

Play areas should be in line with the national children's play policy 'Ready Steady Play' published in 2019 by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Spaces. This means including elements that are appropriate for different age groups, as well as formal and informal facilities that incorporate natural elements.

Destination play, situated within strategic open space, should cater for a wide age range from young children to older children and teenagers. In addition to natural play features and equipment suitable for toddlers and young children, the spaces should incorporate sensory play and larger combination play equipment and dynamic play.

Equipment suitable for teenagers should also be provided such as basketball 'half' courts with hoops, games walls and areas for sitting, watching and talking with friends.

Local play areas should cater for children up to 8 years of age who live within a 5 minute walking distance from the play area. They provide a mix of natural play equipment and sensory play, incorporating seating as part of the play area. In addition to those, smaller informal natural play areas should be provided for young children, catering for toddlers and young children up to 6 years of age.

	Young Children's Play	**Local Play**	**Destination Play**
AGE GROUP	Up to 6 years	2-8 years	All age groups, incl. teenagers
LOCATION	2 minute walk. Close proximity to residences, within local parks or communal open space	5 minute walk. Within local parks or neighbourhood play areas	10 minute walk. Within local parks
TYPES OF PLAY	Low-key natural play features, with seating available	Low-key natural play features, as well as sensory play, with seating available	Mix of equipment, with larger combination play equipment and areas for socialising

Table Showing Play Provision Hierarchy

In addition to play areas, sports facilities should also be provided, taking into account Athlone's growing population. There is good provision of sports facilities on the periphery of the Framework area. If new designated sports areas are considered in the future, their location should be proximate to residential areas and also maximise value for schools and other organisations. Opportunities for additional or more varied sports facilities should be considered on a case by case basis.

Generally, public seating should be provided along the waterfront, the main town spine and routes leading to public transport links, as well as pedestrian and cycle links. Seating should also be incorporated within play areas to allow for adult supervision.

Private outdoor dining is a good way to activate spaces and create a vibrant atmosphere in the town core. Outdoor dining should not restrict or deter pedestrian movement and the flow of circulation. Main movement routes should be considered first, and the areas of outdoor dining designated, if possible. It is best practice to locate seating immediately adjacent to associated commercial premises, to prevent servers crossing the main flow of pedestrian traffic. Delineation of the outdoor dining areas is recommended, with differential surfacing and other subtle cues to signify these to people with visual impairment.

An inclusive public realm that is accessible to all is a successful public realm, and activity and movement through all spaces should be an integral underlying principle of design proposals. Solutions should ensure that spaces are accessible to all members of the community, including people with mobility and other sensory issues, the elderly and people with young children. Where existing conditions such as steps and changes in level present a challenge to the mobility impaired, slopes and ramps should be considered as an alternative where space and context allows. Where the intervention of a slope or ramp cannot be realistically achieved, appropriate signage, in line with the wayfinding strategy for Athlone, should be implemented which directs users to an alternative route.

Universal design solutions should also be considered as part of any new design proposal, for example where a ramp or slope is required, it should become part of the proposed new streetscape or parklet. The choice of material should be considered in line with the Design Toolkit but should also be considerate of universal access guidelines.

Decluttering the existing signage in the public realm and replacing with a clear, legible and simple wayfinding suite, will assist those who have other sensory challenges to navigate and enjoy the public realm. Sensory-friendly designs provide for a highly functional environment while also creating interesting spaces. The use of alternative communication and interpretive tools should be considered, such as tactile information boards.













Precedents Depicting Activation Principles

Play Infrastructure within Framework Area

Map illustrating the Play, Rest, Explore locations within the Framework Area.

Key

- Play: Sports Pitch / Facilities
- Play: Improved Existing Destination Play
- Play: New Destination Play
- Play: New Local Play
- Rest / Explore: East-west Spine
- Rest: Key Public Realm / Open Space
- Explore: Existing Greenway
- Explore: Proposed Pedestrian and Cyclist Connections

Waterfront Activity

The character of Athlone is experienced strongly through its relationship with the River Shannon and its surrounding natural environment. Although some improvements have been made to the town centre in recent years, the town has its back to its assets and the waterfront is generally underutilised.

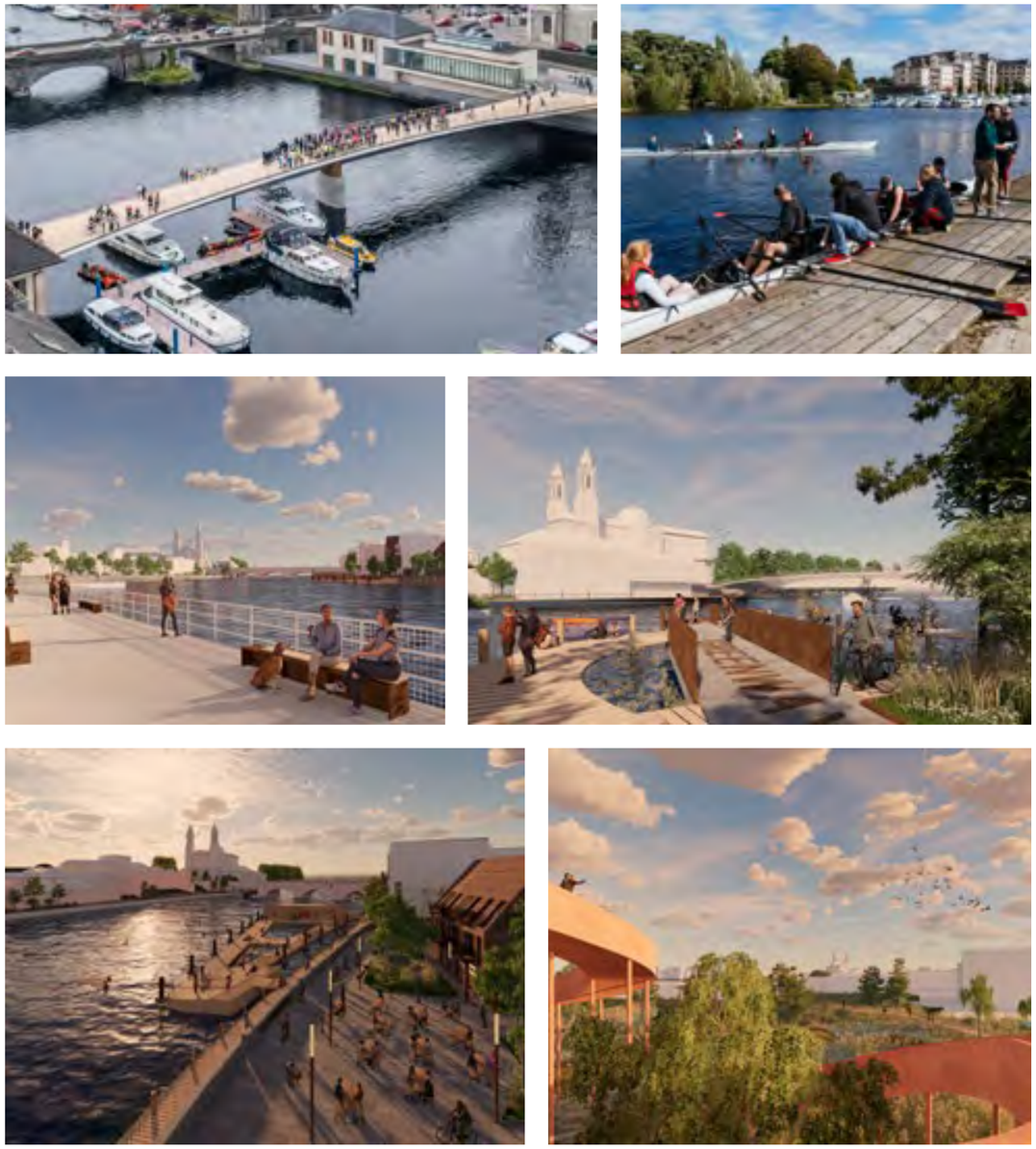
Waterfront areas, including the River Shannon and Canal, and the green spaces at Ranelagh, the Meadows and Burgess Park create a network that is interlinked and spans the greater extent of the Framework Area.

The activation strategy for the waterfront should be centred around these high value landscapes, which have the potential to provide locals with a variety of formal and informal recreational opportunities such boating and fishing, bird-watching, walking and resting. A balance should be struck between the enhancement and activation of these spaces and conservation and protection of their existing high value ecological features. For example, formal, designated recreational activities should be avoided at the Meadow due to its ecological sensitivity and high biodiversity value.

Recreation activities have the potential to be accommodated at the Ranelagh site and Burgess Park instead. Within the urban core, there is also potential to introduce seating and enhance interaction with the water through the introduction of new built-edges including decks and terraces. These interventions would bring people closer to the water and encourage further waterfront activation. With these principles in mind, the Framework Area's pipeline projects highlight a number of waterfront areas. They are depicted on the diagram on the facing page.

In summary, waterfront opportunities include:

- ensuring connectivity along waterfront paths, with the Blueway and Greenway linking in Athlone and highlighting the town's key location;
- creating new connections across Athlone's bridges and iconic weir;
- creating and maximising views and wayfinding towards the waterfront, particularly along scenic routes;
- creating spaces for different Blueway users to stop and spend time in Athlone, as well as connect to other experiences (including the Greenway junction at the base of Custume Bridge);
- spaces for passive enjoyment of the waterfront and its ecological features;
- development of new water-based experiences, such as an outdoor pool and riverside boardwalk;
- underutilised brownfield sites such asthe Strand and former Hanley's site fronting the River Shannon.



Proposed and Existing Examples from Athlone Depicting Waterfront Activation Principles

Water Based Activity

Map illustrating the Waterfront Activities locations within the Framework Area.

Key

- Waterfront Activation Zone
- Unique Waterfront Experience
- Loop Path Connecting Waterfront Experience
- Waterfront Seating
- Framework Area with Waterfront Connection
- East-west Spine, Primary and Secondary Streets

Events, Markets and Art

As Athlone grows and its demographic expands, so will the demand for public realm spaces that can accommodate larger events and gatherings. It is recommended that a standalone strategy is produced to detail the location, commission and management of events, markets and art within the Framework Area.

Event spaces should consider the following:

- space of adequate scale and location with flexible use, to accommodate day-to-day activity as well as special events and gatherings;
- robust materiality and construction to take occasional vehicular and structural loads;
- universal accessibility;
- provision of seating edges with an adequate proportion of seating to include back and armrests;
- supporting nearby facilities such as storage, toilets, in-ground power and water and we-designed drainage.

Some examples of approaches to specific spaces of different scales are described in more detail below.

Burgess Park (Large scale)

Burgess Park can accommodate crowds for events such as outdoor performances, concerts, parades and outdoor cinema viewings. The park is conveniently within walking distance of Athlone's town centre, close to parking at Golden Island Shopping Centre and has easy access for all users.

Athlone's main events should continue to be held at Burgess Park. Any new design proposals for the park should ensure its capacity for large numbers of people is retained. The park also serves as a general amenity area to the town as well as contributing to biodiversity and greening due to the extensive area of mature trees that frame waterfront vistas.

Market Square (Medium scale)

Centrally located and close to the castle and Luan Gallery, this space is suitable for market activities and outdoor performances and public art installations. By replacing the current carpark with a vibrant market space which has the flexibility to host a diverse range of outdoor events, the connection to the east side of Athlone is strengthened. There is potential to knit together the two sides of Athlone and create a vibrant public space that addresses two landmark buildings (castle and church) as well as the bridges and River Shannon.

Luan Gallery (Small scale)

Generally, smaller public realm spaces are well-suited to accommodate informal events such as street performances or public art exhibits. For example, the area around the gallery could be used as an outdoor extension of the building, with temporary outdoor art exhibitions extending along the waterfront.

Similarly, the waterfront is a great place for events of a more linear nature, such as markets for food or hand-crafted goods. The linear spaces along the waterfront could also be used for plein air painting events, outdoor art fairs and seasonal markets, including extensions to Athlone's existing Christmas market. The new Cultural Square on High Street also represents an opportunity for small-scale events.

Other art opportunities

Smaller public spaces along the central spine of the town could accommodate informal street performances and both temporary and permanent works of art, including sculpture. The gable ends along Connaught Street, for example, present an opportunity for mural art. There are also opportunities for public art along the laneways that extend from Athlone's main spine, as well as light installations along the waterfront and on Athlone's landmarks. Utility boxes and other fixtures also present an opportunity for site-specific public art by local artists.







Activation Principles Depicted at Cultural Events in Athlone

Areas for Social Interactions & Related Activities

Map illustrating the Events, Markets and Art locations within the Framework Area.

Key

- Primary and Secondary Streets
- Events, Markets and Art Gathering Spaces

05

Urban Design Principles

Purpose

This chapter provides guidance on the Urban Design Principles which should be considered in formulating detailed design proposals for new development within the Framework Area including the Opportunity Sites Presented in Chapter 7.

It describes the elements that contribute to Athlone's townscape, urban character, layout, form, and scale how these elements are intrinsically linked. These topics should be read and referred to as an overarching section.

Introduction

Athlone has a rich historic and cultural heritage. It is also forward looking and will seek to deliver a significant number of new homes, support enterprise and new commercial development in an innovative way. Renewal and new development should seek to learn lessons from the historic context to deliver a successful and thriving town. It will be critical to ensure the that new development will contribute to the enhancement of the town as a whole.

This chapter will work with the Public Realm and Place making Strategy to provide guidance that will support high quality design.

New development should embrace the future, consider people and place, while respecting its rich and historic cultural heritage.

The cues for future development can be found in the existing street pattern; urban grain and built form and; streetscape and townscape. New development can be innovative and modern, while learning from and respecting the past.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide guidance to planning practitioners, designers and developers on urban design considerations, that specifically respond to the Framework Area.

Within each section, the context and character of Athlone Framework Area is described to identify good examples and considerations for proposed new development.

Urban Design Considerations

Cultural and Heritage Setting
Utilise the rich historic context of Athlone to inform the urban design of new development.

Waterfront Development
Optimise the strategic position of Athlone on the banks of the River Shannon as one of Athlone's strongest characteristics and biggest urban renewal opportunities

Townscape, Vistas and Views
Enhance, enrich and protect the unique views, vistas and townscape in Athlone's built urban form.

Layout and Morphology
The historic urban grain of the east-west street through Athlone provides good examples of sequence of space, vistas and enclosed urban nodes and these cues should inform new development.

Built Form, Urban Grain and Density
Deliver new development in a way that will make best use of land available while not negatively affecting the existing urban grain of the town.

Scale, Height and Massing
Promote design that is appropriate to the existing scale of Athlone, retaining the setting of the townscape and enabling an innovative approach to new development.

Guidance for Building Heights
By describing the existing context of buildings, their heights and setting, consider approaches to building heights that will enable high quality compact growth without negatively impacting on the existing townscape and setting.

Shopfronts and Street Character
As a historic market town and a meeting place across the Shannon, the treatment of existing and proposed streets and how shopfronts are designed will be integral to successful future place-making in Athlone.

Social Infrastructure
Understand the potential for existing social initiatives to be integral to the regeneration of Athlone through providing local art initiatives, schools and community centres a space within new development.

Flooding and Surface Water Management
To promote consideration of surface water management at each stage of design and to implement measures as a positive aspect to building and public realm design as well as enhancing biodiversity.

Context and Character of Athlone

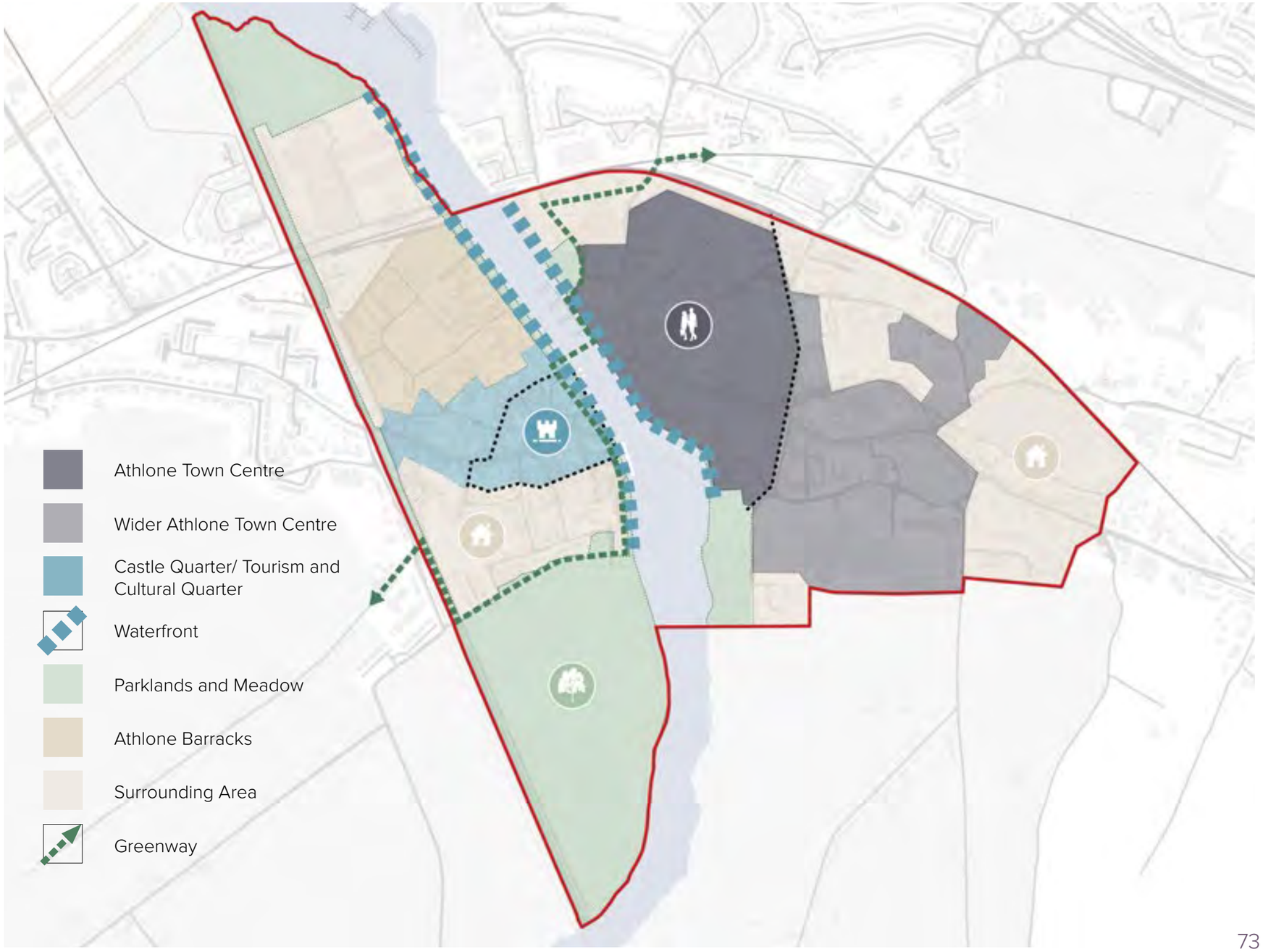
The town comprises specific Character Areas.

The Castle Quarter and the Town Centre have distinct and historic attributes including building form, road structure and urban morphology. These characteristics should be enhanced through any new design and development.

Key connections to destinations such as the train and bus stations, Burgess Park in the south east and the Big Meadow in the south west, the Shannon, as well as other significant facilities located across the town, should be highlighted as clear and safe routes with priority to pedestrians and cyclists.

The river and its waterfront represent a significant natural resource and public amenity that should provide leisure and recreational opportunities as well as providing safe and convenient non-vehicular routes across Athlone.

Historic assets including Athlone Castle, Custom Bridge, the Church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul and St Mary's Church, provide visual and cultural context to enhance legibility of the town and a unique townscape that should inform strategic and detailed design decisions.



Cultural and Heritage Setting

Athlone has very successful examples which demonstrate how the setting of a heritage asset can be sensitively incorporated into new proposals, permitting that both the existing and new elements of the proposal can be easily read and understood. The historic east-west street generally continues to reflect the built form, urban grain of the historic aspects of the town. Its townscape provides continuity and enclosure of streets and spaces.

The historic streets and buildings generate a distinctive and legible route from the east of the town centre (St Mary's Square) to Market Square. The distinctive cues provided in the historic street form are lost where new development (the new Garda station) has been designed in contrast to the historic urban grain and architectural rhythm. This means that the urban cues that would have led westward have now been lost.

New development should seek to ensure the conservation and sympathetic enhancement of archaeological heritage. This could be implemented by marking archaeological context of sites if possible, through use of public art, murals and insets into surfaces.

Any new development adjacent to an archaeological monument or site should never be detrimental to the character of the archaeological site, or its setting

New development should be subservient to the heritage context, but support uses, particularly associated with culture and tourism. New buildings should be fit for purpose and seek to enhance the character and vibrant setting of Castle Quarter and Athlone Town Centre.

Landscape and townscape assessments undertaken will inform where and how development is proposed within the context of the Castle and the Culture and Tourism Quarter and surrounding the Shannon.

Taller buildings, if proposed, should not adversely affect the setting of Athlone Castle, Athlone Bridge and the steeples of St Peter and St Paul and the general setting of Athlone's townscape.

New development, alteration and additions should complement the old while considering the context of exiting historical buildings, should also be of high quality design and should reflect the technology and time that the development is designed and built.

New development should not compete with historic development and should not mimic the original or pretend to be historic. New development should respond to contemporary requirements by respecting historic development form and context.

Guidance Notes:

- Demonstrate how the development proposals have responded to archaeology and heritage context as appropriate.
- Ensure that new development with a heritage context is sensitively and appropriately designed demonstrably employing best conservation practice. Embrace opportunities to reveal heritage as part of new designs.
- The layout and built form, the development proposal will need to demonstrate that they are integrated within its heritage context. Use of Computer Generated Imagery (CGIs), or contextual street elevations should be used to effectively demonstrate this.
- Materials and building technologies used in construction should be representative of the time at which they have been built and be identifiable as of that time.
- The scale, height and massing of new development within Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs), adjacent to historic development and Protected Structures - should respect, respond and be subservient to this setting.
- Proposals for new development in ACAs should demonstrate that the special character of the area has been understood. A Design Statement outlining how the new development refers to the existing streetscape, context, built form and finishes of the area to ensure that it does not compromise the integrity and character of the architectural conservation. This should not necessarily be done by means of pastiche or imitation.
- High quality contemporary designs to infill plots can contribute to the character of a streetscape and area if designed sensitively to a standard that complements and integrates with the existing character of the area. New design should also interpret and reflect the inherent qualities that make up the architectural conservation area and positively contribute and protect the character of the streetscape.





Luan Gallery and visitor centre associated with Athlone Castle are high quality examples of how contemporary design can respond positively with historic buildings and setting.

Retaining and referring to the historic and archaeological context within new development will enhance spaces and ensure that the history of Athlone is retained for future generations. Where it is not possible to reveal the historic fabric, reference such as art within the public realm or inclusion of a plaque could enhance or create a new space that is focused on it's history.

Examples include the retention of the town wall within the context Athlone Civic Centre, plaques on Sean's Bar's exterior wall, retention of stone seats along Station Road, or art carved into footpaths.









Waterfront Development

Athlone's built form developed in an east to west axis synoymous with the historical crossing point over the River Shannon. The activation of Athlone's waterfront presents an opportunity to develop a vibrant waterfront , supporting the town centre by capitalizing on the natural amenity asset of the Shannon and canal through positive placemaking.

The Shannon and Athlone Canal provide a unique context and setting, with a rich history that is both visible and implied. They present a significant opportunity to generate attractive and active spaces for leisure and amenity benefiting both residents and visitors to Athlone.

Innovative proposals, for example, an outdoor swimming pool or riverside boardwalk, can complement key strategegic infrastructure such as the Galway to Dublin NCN Bridge - the geographical midpoint - Ireland's first coast to coast Greenway enhancing connections along the waterfront creating a catalyst for waterfront regeneration.

Proposed public realm and urban design schemes focused on the Waterfront should seek to be exemplary and nationally ambitious. New development fronting the River Shannon should present as a positive precedent for the future regeneration of Athlone's waterfront presenting a positive balance between the existing built heritage and new innovative design proposals.

Pedestrian routes along sections of the River and canal are generally disjointed. The creation of a permeable network of active travel waterfront links connecting green spaces and future public realm areas would be a key civic resource that would be of benefit to all. Walkways and pathways also provide an opportunity for ecology and biodiversity enhancement. The Shannon, the Canal and their waterfronts provide amenity both in respect of new water based businesses, as well as for any development proposals. This would assist in facilitating a positive modal shift for both leisure and active travel pursuits and create a connected public realm across Athlone that will promote the town as an attractive destination.

New waterfront development should aim to provide aspect onto adjoining streets and spaces supported with foot and cycle ways to ensure the activation of spaces and promote high levels of connectivity.

Guidance Notes:

- New development fronting the River Shannon should present as a positive precedent for the future regeneration of Athlone's waterfront presenting a positive balance between the existing built heritage and new innovative design proposals.
- New development, including public realm proposals should be exemplary, imaginative, and exceptional in their design approach.
- Where the opportunity arises pedestrian links should be maximised, and provision made for routes to be future proofed to allow for expansion.
- Buildings and associated public realm along the waterfront should create spaces that are active, attractive and safe places to visit and rest.
- Utilise these corridors to implement planted greenways to promote and enhance their ecology and biodiversity. Demonstrate how landscape, sustainable drainage and ecological spaces will be managed throughout the life of the development. Refer to Chapter 4 for further guidance.
- Where temporary or seasonal development is proposed, demonstrate how these uses will benefit the area through appropriate activity and use. Where temporary or seasonal development is proposed, show how this will be managed in an appropriate manner in and out of season.









The new Greenway Bridge sets a high quality precedent for providing safe and convenient connections for leisure and sustainable movement across the Framework Area. Where possible provide good quality paths and public realm next to and over the water to encourage active travel and provide safe and convenient routes alternative to roads.

Ensure that there are opportunities for interface between the waterside and proposed development to allow for cultural and tourism uses, for business associated with the water, based activities and ancillary services.

The waterfront should provide an active frontage to facilitate activity and create an attractive safe destination to enhance its character.







Townscape, Vistas and Views

Athlone has a distinctive townscape that is informed by the town's topography, the steeples of historic churches, and the distinctive bridges across the Shannon.

When considering the historic townscape on a smaller scale, the streets and spaces provide a serial vision that presents Athlone's strong cultural character.

The historic core of Athlone (town centre and Castle Quarter) provides opportunities to enhance the character of new development by referring to the context of the town's strong cultural heritage.

Athlone is reasonably level and low lying, and consequently is visually enclosed. Long views are generally associated with the Shannon, and views to the Castle and Bridge.

Ensuring that historic building lines of high streets are maintained and the massing of new development is proportional to existing buildings is critical to managing new development and views within this historic core. Refer to precedents for infill development that can be of a similar scale as historic municipal buildings but do not distract from this context, e.g. Donegall Street, Belfast provides a good example of this.

Reference and utilise views of significant heritage assets, such as church spires and other significant landmarks to inform layout of new development where possible, e.g. the layout of Bastion Court utilises the tower of Corpus Christi church as a vista stop to the development.

Consider the setting of Athlone Castle, Athlone Town Bridge and church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, to ensure that any new development ensures the protection and sympathetic enhancement of this heritage context and ensure that proposed development can settle into and respond to this context.

Consider significant natural landscape features including large tree groups such as surrounding Ranelagh, along the Shannon waterfront, Burgess Park and the Big Meadow. Ensure that the impact of any proposed development that is situated within the context of these features is demonstrated to have limited impact, and that, where necessary, appropriate mitigation such as legacy tree planting is implemented.

Retain the views to the Shannon, and where possible implement visual connections to key spaces and the waterfront within new development.

Consider the impact of proposed development to the setting and context of existing landmark buildings and avoid disrupting their impact.



Guidance Notes:

- Athlone's skyline includes a number of distinctive steeples and towers and their setting should be considered where development risks impacting on the setting and context.
- Seek to retain and enhance the context of the topography and townscape apparent along the historic east-west street where it forms a series of spaces leading from one space to another.
- Retain, where possible, the traditional form of the street section along the historic east-west street, and provide pitched roof to building fronts
- Retain and replicate the rhythm and variation in roof form along the street scape.
- Provide, retain and enhance cues (e.g. key buildings, curves in the street form) to create a sequence of key and distinctive spaces along proposed routes, key buildings and vista stops and make reference to historic urban form.
- Retain the distinctive and framed views from Church Street and Sean Costello Street to the waterfront. Refurbish connecting streets, and implement this character within new development areas where possible. Ensure sensitive treatment of shopfronts, avoidance of projecting signage, lighting, utility services and other unnecessary street clutter that may impinge on framed views.





Views to the Shannon from the main east-west route through Athlone - particularly those from Church Street and Sean Costello Street - are a distinctive characteristic that is further characterised by the sloping streets. These views should be retained and opportunities for new development to replicate this character should be taken.

Framed views to waterside should be enhanced attractive public realm interventions, high quality facade treatments as well as decluttering of overhead lines, utilities and projected signage.

Athlone is a town of steeples and these distinctive buildings, combined with other features such as Athlone Town Bridge and the Weir create a townscape that is unique to Athlone.

Any development proposal should consider the context of this townscape and frame views and open up vistas within scheme designs, where this opportunity is available.





Layout and Morphology

The historic morphology of the town core is very close grain, and strong and continuous, where the building line is situated to the back of the pavement.

The predominant building forms are generally 2 to 3 storeys with front to back eaves and de-marked with chimneys. Building heights vary, but generally within a maximum of one storey between each unit.

Parapets occur occasionally and are generally associated with 3 storey buildings 19th century narrow fronted buildings. The parapet usually sits no more than 1m over the lintel of the windows of the top floor. This proportionality provides a balance to these taller, narrower buildings and are of “classical” proportions associated with Georgian housing design.

Taller buildings are generally more common within the centre of the town and subtly reduce in height as you travel outwards towards the eastern and western edges of the town.

The historic streets are very distinctive, especially when viewed in section. These streets should be retained where possible. New development should sensitively respond to this context, clearly demonstrating how new elements of urban form are appropriate to the scale, massing, and context of the streetscape.

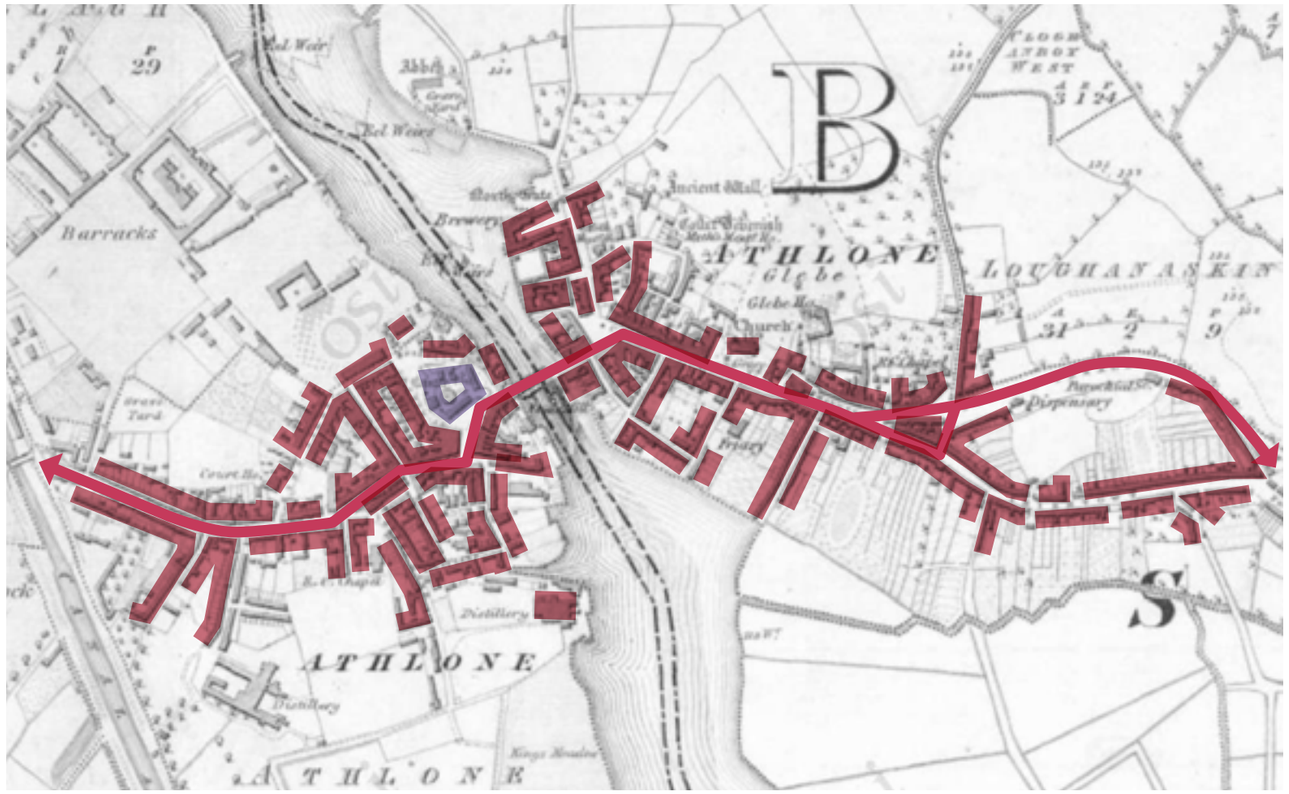
Many of these historic streets sit at a higher topography which provides an opportunity to sensitively introduce buildings of height, on adjacent sites situated at lower levels, without negatively impacting on the streetscape. This may provide an opportunity to intensify development within the town centre, delivering sustainable compact growth without negatively impacting the historic character, particularly of the historic east-west street.

There may be an opportunity to introduce residential uses within the Town Centre, within buildings that have previously been used as retail or other high street businesses. If this is undertaken the character of the shopfront should be retained within the building’s façade and the potential for this use to be reinstated should be allowed in perpetuity.

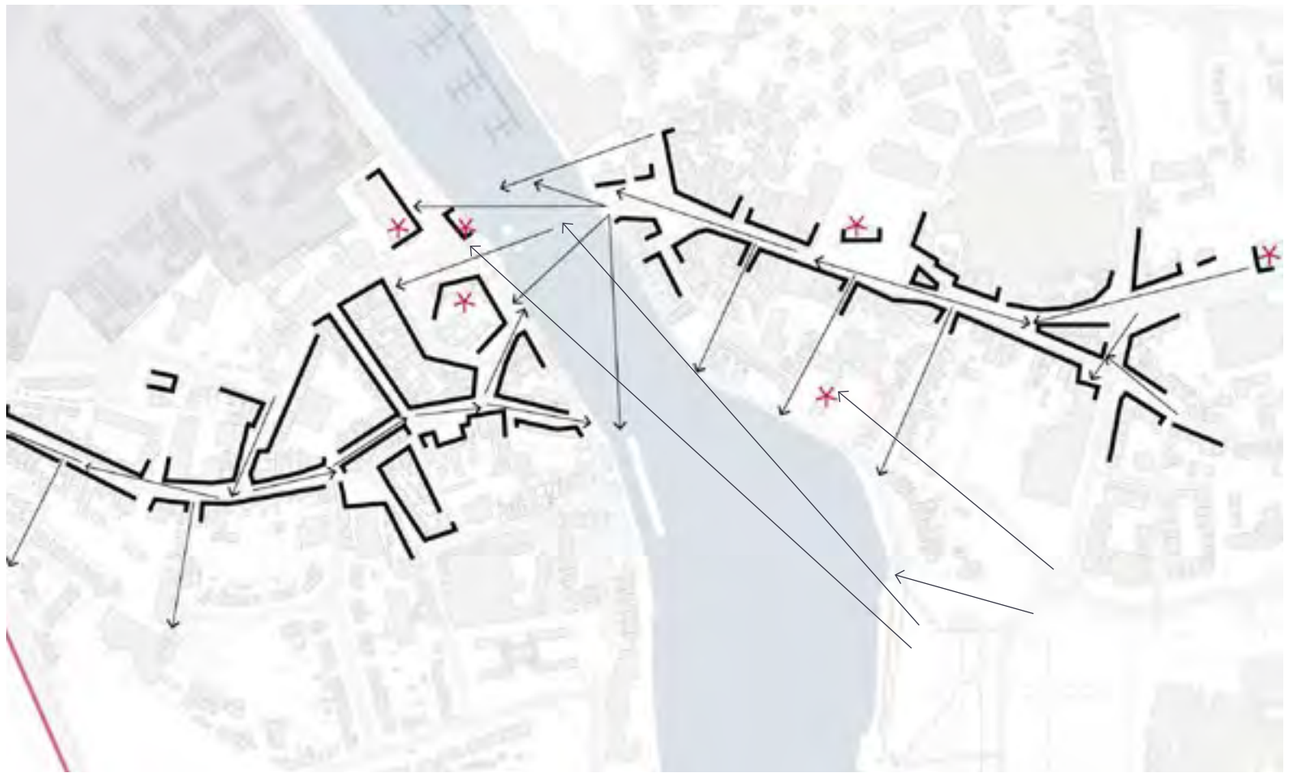
Many modern buildings have rendered façades in beige, many of which finished in render that is badly stained from pollution and algae. Utilising rough cast renders, or colours that can prevent stains caused pollution could avoid buildings becoming dirty and needing continual maintenance.

Guidance Notes:

- New development should refer to the historic development form to inform the proposed design of new development.
- Consider how the historic urban form connects existing streets and spaces. Connect new development along logical, safe and convenient routes to facilitate permeable links connecting to existing adjoining existing development.
- Seek to maximise opportunities to incorporate key views and vistas. This will help to foster view points and vista stops within the proposed layout to provide a sense of place and create clear and identifiable routes through the development.
- Ensure that key spaces (where routes meet) are enhanced and identifiable through use of material or colour changes of the buildings and street surfaces, or through the design of the public realm.
- Enclose key spaces and ensure that the associated building front onto and overlook these spaces.
- Implement vista stops where roads change direction where possible.
- Where appropriate implement views to the river, reflecting historic street form.
- Ensure that public and private realm is clearly and consistently delineated.



19th Century map demonstrating the urban morphology of Athlone



Views, vistas and movement through Athlone

The historic high street, enclosure and urban form

The historic built form of Athlone, particularly associated with the east-west high street, is apparent within the 19th century map of the area.

This plan shows the strong and continuous alignment of the built form and the associated plots, many extending towards the Shannon. This also shows the historic lanes that transition from Church Street to the Strand and the waterfront.

The urban form shows how the building line utilises elements such as vista stops (where a building is situated so that it encloses the end of a street), enclosure of nodes and the setting of key buildings such as Athlone Castle and the St Mary's Church.

The continuity of the structure of the east-west street has needed to be adapted to accommodate an alternative location of the bridge crossing the Shannon. This has had an impact on the continuity of the historic street, which is particularly notable to the north of the Castle, where the bridge meets the church of St Peters and St Paul and the development to the south of the Barracks.

These characteristics could be utilised within proposed new masterplans and development, to implement vista stops, strong and continuous building lines and enclosure of nodes, where possible and for larger development masterplans frame medium views and implement a sequence of key spaces along new streets, providing areas of character at each point of crossing to provide legibility across these spaces.

- Historic east-west route
- Historic urban grain
- Key building frontage
- Views and vistas
- Key buildings

Built Form & Urban Grain

New development should generally reflect height and massing of adjacent existing development, particularly in the context of historic buildings. There is an opportunity to increase the capacity of the footprint, so long as it can be demonstrated that it sits appropriately within its context.

Where increased building heights are proposed, the development should be proportionate to the adjacent built form.

Where new development cannot draw reference to historic urban grain, it should relate positively to and have aspect onto existing (or proposed) streets and spaces.

There is an opportunity to implement creative threshold spaces where building lines are not precisely followed. Positive and active interface between public and private space could create interesting and attractive streets and enhance their character.

Strong and continuous building frontages are encouraged, particularly within the historic core of Athlone, however there is potential to implement an innovative approach to floors above ground level and allow divergence from the building line. This could be led and informed by views and vistas, with reference made to historic building form and urban grain.

Where possible opportunities to generate built form that allows for optimal orientation for solar renewable energy systems, i.e. implementing south orientated roof profiles to locate solar panels.

Density is intrinsically connected to built form and urban grain. Examples of densities across Athlone include that of older residential development within town, e.g. development adjacent to Castle Quarter which is usually found to be higher than 60 dwellings per hectare. Residential development from the early to mid 20th century is generally around 45 dwellings per hectare and suburban development is approximately 25 to 30 dwellings per hectare.

All of these example are generally two storeys in height, with three storeys more usual within higher density areas, such as Castle Quarter and the Town Centre.

The Government's Guidelines for Sustainable and Compact Settlements describes the types of housing typologies and densities that are appropriate for each settlement type. Athlone has been classified as a Regional Growth Centre, and proposed development form should be reflective of this type of settlement, while fundamentally responding to Athlone's character and scale.

Guidance Notes:

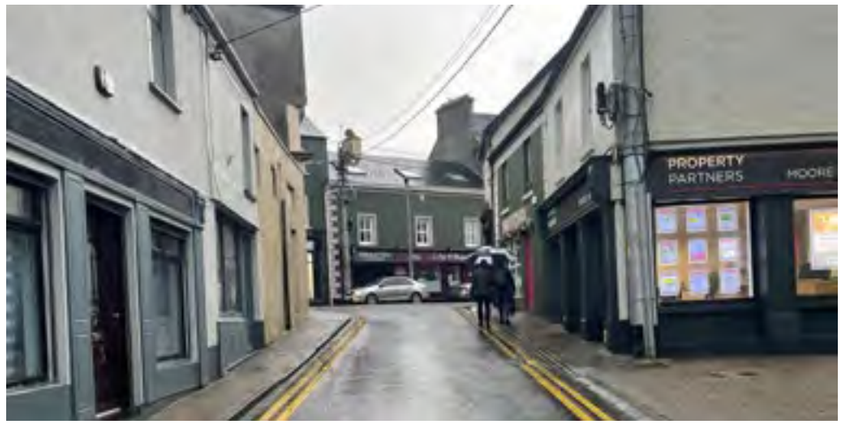
- Prioritise delivery of new development on brownfield land with the ambition to achieve 30% on previously developed land in accordance with RSES policy and County Development Plan.
- Identify extent of development and propose suggested massing to establish the three-dimensional build envelope, this will establish the extent of what is appropriate for development and the density will be delivered as a consequence of this.
- In lower density areas across the Framework Area consider the opportunity to "infill" to implement intensification of development appropriately and to encourage compact growth appropriate to the scale of Athlone. Proposals should demonstrate that it is sensitive to the context.
- Reflect on the context of the adjacent built form, context and character when implementing a new development.
- Close grain development and medium density development is prevalent and this should be a minimum standard in respect of what is expected for new development.
- Higher densities and intensification of development within existing built form, e.g. where a singe house is converted to apartments, should be considered within the centre of Athlone as appropriate to the specific scale of Athlone as a Regional Growth Centre
- The design, scale, urban form and density should be appropriate to Architectural Conservation Areas.
- Demonstrate that parking standards can be delivered in a way that is not detrimental to the character of streets and spaces.
- Building forms should refer to good examples of streetscape found in the centre of Athlone.



neat and consistent 19thC cottages



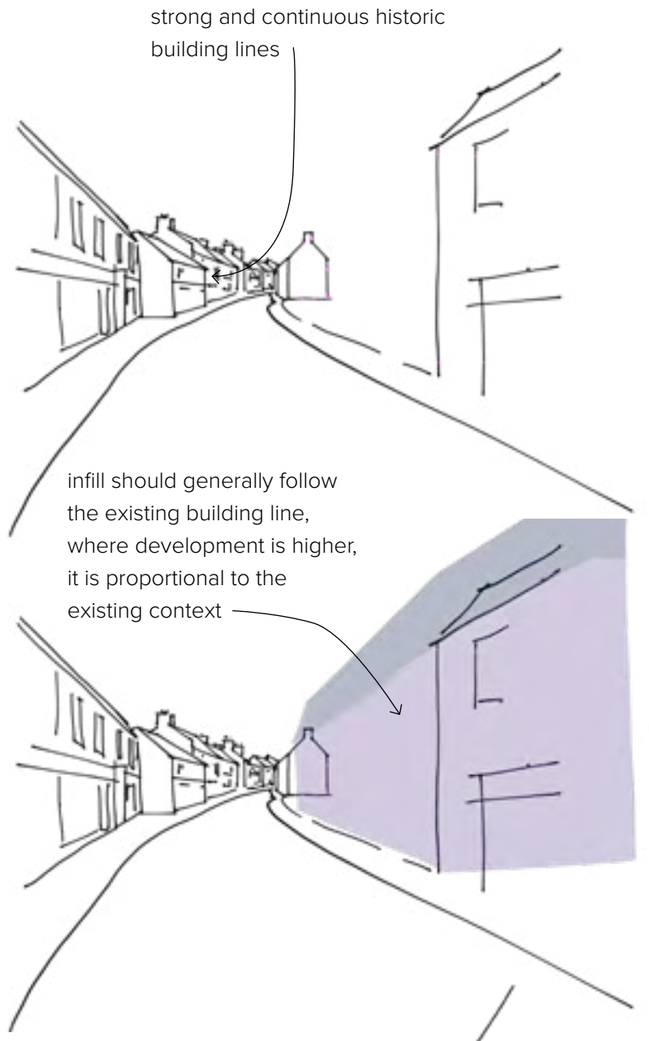
variation in roof heights



vista stop from Pearse Street to Connaught Street



varied roof scape and consistent building frontage along street scape







25-30 dwellings per hectare



45 dwellings per hectare



65+ dwellings per hectare

Scale: Height and Massing

The scale of any proposed development should enhance and respond positively to the existing setting and prevailing scale of Athlone.

Athlone's scale has been established over the course of its development and is influenced by topography, landmarks and land use.

Predominately, buildings within the town are between two to three storeys. There are some single storey buildings either associated with lower density areas along the periphery of the town centre, as well as some short runs of terraces running towards the river.

In general the tallest structures within the Framework Area are associated with religious buildings, notably St Mary's situated on the St Mary's Square in the west of the Framework Area, leading to St Mary's within the centre of the town, to the distinctive twin steeples of the Church of St Peter and St Paul that sit adjacent to Athlone Castle.

A contemporary example of a taller building is the Sheraton Hotel. This building, located within the Town Centre, breaks the skyline as a result of its scale and massing and acts as a wayfinding node within the town.

Taller buildings can be one way to deliver higher density, providing they are proportionate to their context, respect sensitive assets and receptors, and if possible, enhance the overall townscape character of the area.

There are opportunities to bring forward a larger number of new dwellings and supporting uses, which may provide scope for buildings of height i.e. Ranelagh, St Aloyisus and the comprehensive masterplan for Golden Island and Diskin Centre sites.

Both height and scale of buildings should demonstrate a positive relationship with its associated public and private open spaces and be of a "human scale", i.e. designed around people and their immediate sensory interaction with that space.





Images of buildings associated with Ulster University which show how taller buildings can be designed to provide scale without negatively impacting on an existing heritage setting.

Guidance Notes:

- Taller buildings may be appropriate providing they positively respond to the context of their immediate and surrounding environs. Careful consideration must be given to how the development and design solution responds to heritage and cultural assets and the impact on vistas and views.
- Where taller buildings are proposed their orientation, height, massing and arrangement should be designed to minimise the effects of overshadowing and overlooking especially within predominately residential areas and avoid the effects of wind turbulence and other adverse microclimate impact.
- A Design Statement Statement should accompany any development over four storeys within an ACA to clearly set out the justification for the taller building and explain the contribution the building will make to the town's skyline. The Design Statement should be supplemented with visuals illustrating how building would sit within the urban fabric.
- Demonstrate compliance with The Urban Development and Building Height Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2018 as appropriate.
- Buildings situated within Castle Quarter and the Town Centre ACAs should generally be up to 3 storeys, additional storeys will be considered providing the additional height is carefully assessed and justified.
- A number of areas - Ranelagh, Golden island, Diskin and South of Athlone Station - have been identified as having the potential for delivering taller buildings.

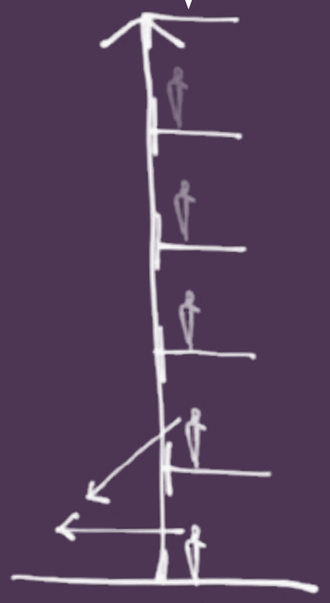


Athlone's scale is generally formed of buildings that are two and three storeys high, where buildings are of a larger scale, these have traditionally been municipal or religious uses. Consider how taller potential buildings sit within Athlone's scale, as appropriate to the town, to avoid development that is incongruous in its form and massing to ensure that it relates positively to this context and the people with it.

Taller buildings may have an impact on the surrounding microclimate, overshadowing and wind gusts, e.g. the form of a taller building may create wind eddying as winds can be caught by taller façades and be forced downwards to street level. New development should demonstrate how any potential environmental change can be managed or mitigated so that the adjacent public realm is a nice place for people to be.



Interaction between dwellings, windows or balconies and the adjacent public realm will diminish the higher it is and the further away it is from the street front, which will impact on the activity of that space. Any building, and taller buildings in particular, will need to consider how the threshold between the public and private realm will work on street level. There may be an opportunity to consider how the associate uses can cross over this threshold.



Parking situated at building fronts, or blank façades should consider how these uses are arranged to create a more attractive place for people



Uses such as shops and bars could cross the threshold of public private spaces to interact with the street. Offices could provide large windows to provide overlooking on these spaces.



Residential uses should allow for front gardens that are associated with the adjacent dwelling to create an active space between the public and private realm



Guidance for Taller Buildings

Building heights in the west of the Framework Area are predominantly 2 storeys, with heights increasing to 3 storeys within the Cultural Quarter along the historic east-west route towards the Athlone Castle. Existing building heights in the east of the town range from 2 to 3 storeys associated with the historic east-west street and a larger number of 4 and 5 storey buildings associated with more recent development. This context needs to be carefully considered in formulating proposals for taller buildings.

A number of Opportunity Sites have been identified as having the potential for increased building heights. This is primarily due to the extent of the development site and its positioning within the town. These sites have sufficient depth which permits a stepped approach to the design solution. This arrangement provides space to allow a more considered relationship between new taller buildings, the existing context and prevailing heights of Athlone. Sites including Ranelagh, Golden Island are sufficiently large in area and within the setting of the Shannon, yet far enough away from the historic core, that they may be able to support taller buildings.

The topography of Athlone could also provide an opportunity for development to implement taller buildings. It may be possible to use this topographical context to implement taller buildings in sites adjacent to the historic east-west route, without impacting on its distinctive setting. Sites including Connaught Street Car Park and the Site South of Athlone Train Station and Loughanaskin are examples of where changes in topography could be utilised to implement taller buildings in a way that may not have an impact on their setting.

Implementing taller buildings could be a way of identifying a new landmark, and could be a tool for regeneration through a building's exemplar design which may create a reason for people to visit, or seek to live in it. A tall building may be used as a beacon, or provide access to views that would make it more attractive. St Aloysius could provide an opportunity for such a building and provide an additional focus for tourism. Uses such as a hotel, Private Rented Sector or student accommodation, or a mixture of these, could become a viable reason for the delivery of a taller building within this opportunity site.

However, it will be critical for design proposals to demonstrate that such tall buildings are of exemplary design and that the associated public realm is equally attractive and fit for purpose. Furthermore, it will be imperative for these types of proposals to demonstrate that they are appropriate to the context and setting of Athlone, in terms of it's scale and as a Regional Centre.

Individual taller buildings should be unique and exemplary in their design and should be representative of the importance of that building, reflecting the historic context of taller buildings in Athlone, i.e. taller buildings are associated with significant uses and are generally, and at least partially, publicly accessible.

Guidance Notes:

- Buildings situated within Castle Quarter and Town Centre ACAs should generally be up to 3 storeys in height, with the potential for additional storeys where the topography allows buildings to settle appropriately into their context.
- Proposed development generally should follow the prevailing Athlone building scale, in respect of height and massing
- Demonstrate that the height of proposed buildings is justified and appropriate to the receiving environment, context and setting.
- Where taller buildings are proposed, demonstrate that they have a considered relationship to the context of the site
- Consider sites that are larger in area and within the context of open space and the river to provide an appropriate setting to allow for taller buildings to be implemented.
- Design solutions to consider the use of a stepped approach to progressing from lower scale to taller buildings. This approach also supports sustainable and compact developments initiatives.
- Consider opportunities to utilise the topographical context of the sites to implement taller buildings and avoid impacting on adjacent context, particularly the ACA and other historical context.

Existing building heights



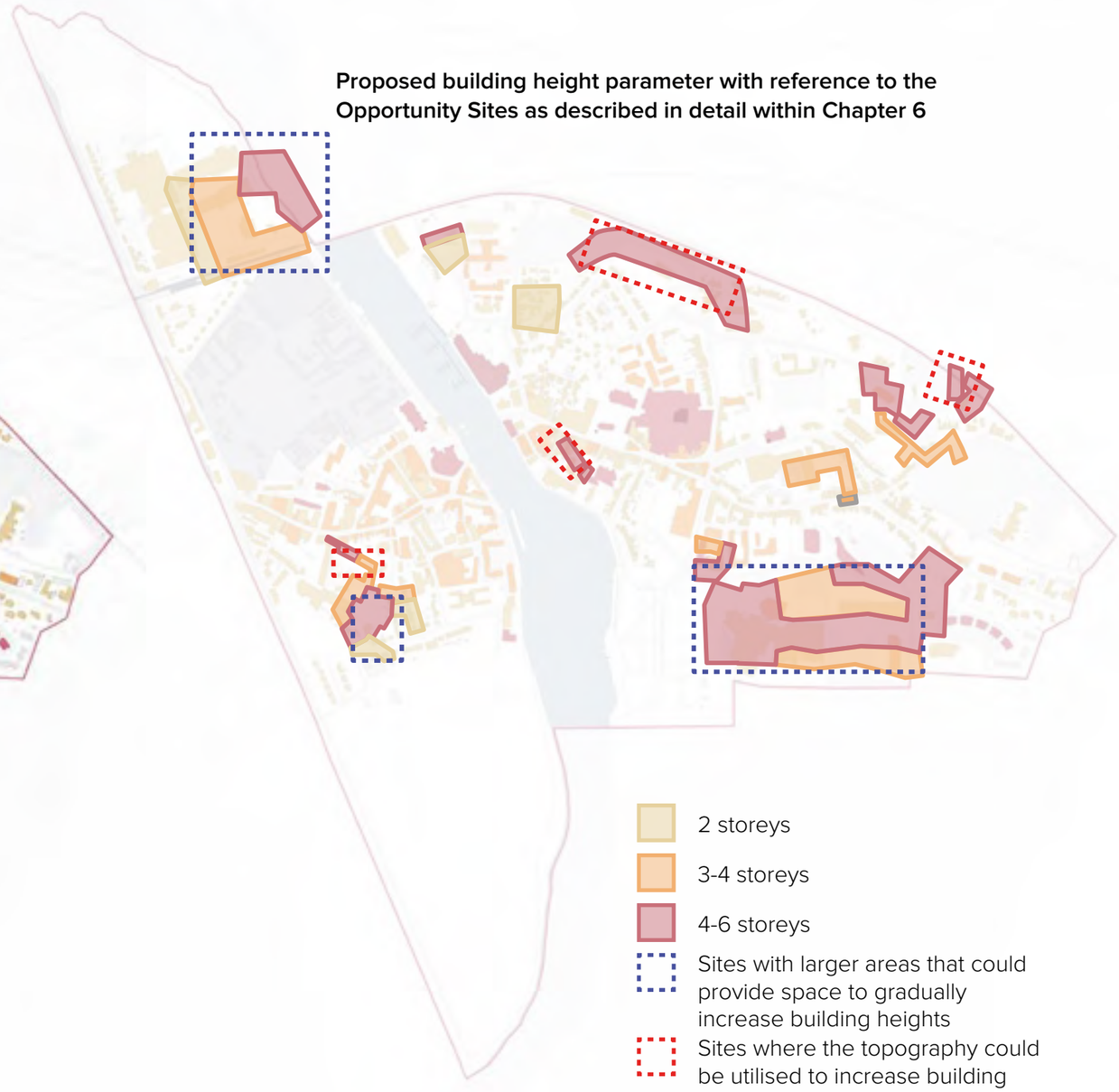
2 storeys

3-4 storeys

4-6 storeys

Existing landmark townscape features taller than 6 storeys

Proposed building height parameter with reference to the Opportunity Sites as described in detail within Chapter 6



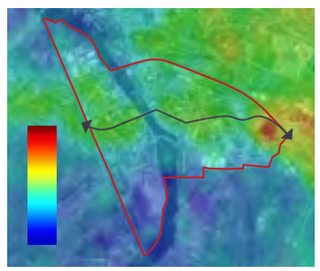
2 storeys

3-4 storeys

4-6 storeys

Sites with larger areas that could provide space to gradually increase building heights

Sites where the topography could be utilised to increase building heights and minimise impact on the adjacent townscape



LiDAR Map of the Framework Area

This plan shows the topography of the Framework Area, where blue indicates land at sea level and green to red indicates increasing topographical heights. (Refer to Volume 2 - Framework Appendices for a larger version)

Shopfronts and Street Character

Athlone was established as a market town at an important crossing point on the Shannon. Much of the existing character of the town is derived from its status as a regional economic hub.

While shops as a building typology represent what has traditionally occurred along these streets and spaces the context of current economic trends may make it difficult to continue trading in the way that Athlone has done and as such the use of these spaces may need to be adapted to ensure that the town can thrive as a cultural and economic centre.

Colour is an integral part of the character of the west of Athlone - particularly within the context of the Castle - and the colour of shopfronts, buildings and terraces should be a material consideration in development proposals.

By contrast, the buildings and shop frontages to the east of the Shannon are more generally faced in cream render. Where bright colours are used these are frequently associated with plastic and lit signage which can appear incongruous within the wider character of the street.

All city and town centres are experiencing challenges by way of dereliction, short term leases which result in a high turnover of shop units, and rising business costs. The combination of these factors has resulted in changes to shop frontages often by way of non traditional and unsympathetic shopfronts.

Successful shopfronts - within the context and setting of Athlone - consider and respond to the streetscape, building as a whole in respect of the proportionality of the shopfront, and the wider rhythm it contributes to the street.

There are many successful traditional shopfronts and displays, where historic fascias, surrounds and signage approaches are utilised or referenced.

More contemporary shopfronts integrate well within the street scape where they have similar proportionality to the traditional shopfront, implementing façade elements that are reflective of historic shops but in more contemporary materials. Corporate branding of shops and elevations may be contrary to the context of the street scene, material to describe proposed elevations should demonstrate that they respond positively to their host building and into the context of the street.

Lighting throughout should respect the context of the streetscape and should provide information regarding the name of the unit, additional advertising should be kept to a minimum.

Athlone's historic morphology has evolved over centuries as an economic centre that gravitated around a shopping street; this is intrinsic to its character. It is recommended that a further, more detailed assessment, development brief and a specific design guidance is formulated to protect and enhance the character of Athlone town centre.

Guidance Notes:

- The Framework Document forms a basis to guide decisions on a best practice approach for the Framework Area, and in this instance for Shopfront Design. It may be appropriate to provide further, more detailed site-specific guidance within the plan area to manage and guide shopfront design, particularly within designated Architectural Conservation Areas such as the historic Town Centre / Church Street area and the Castle and Tourism and Cultural Quarter.
- Shops and shopfronts contribute to the street scape's character as a whole. Utilise the proportionality of the typical shopfront within buildings along the historic high street where possible. If a change of use results in no requirement for a shopfront, consider retaining the character and form.
- The form of shop units generally implements a facade that takes up the ground floor as a whole, and if uses other than residential occur above, this is less prominent.
- Consider the traditional proportionality of the shopfront and implement new building façades with a similar annotation and rhythm.
- Traditional shopfronts are generally simple in form with wooden fascias and surrounds, and boards that fit above the shopfront and below the line of the first floor. Contemporary shopfronts generally should generally follow a similar proportionality and simplicity as traditional shop units and should demonstrate that they respond positively to their host building as well as the wider street scene.
- Where glazing extends beyond the extent of traditional façades these should be framed simply with transoms that are proportionate to shopfront and street scape.
- Shopfronts within the Town Centre ACA should apply a conservative design approach with muted tones and to settle into the street scape to complement neighbouring building façades, and the high quality public realm works undertaken.
- Vibrant colours in the Castle Quarter and west side of town complement thecharacter area as a Tourism and Cultural Quarter. New proposals should enrich the unique character while respecting the ACA desgination of the area through the careful selection of material, colour and finishes.
- Illumination should provide sufficient lighting to notify of use, but should not glare or over extent onto the street scape.







There is a range of good examples of shopfronts - both on historic and contemporary façades - within Athlone. Where these are most successful they are simple in form and layout with limited clutter and simple detailing. Shopfronts themselves rely on the window presentation rather than additional signage to present the business offer.

Street clutter has built up over many years of use and includes wiring from utilities, street signage and lighting. This clutter can be exacerbated by a busy and cluttered shopfronts and use of overly bright colours and inappropriate materials. Simple palette of materials, details and colours should be implemented.

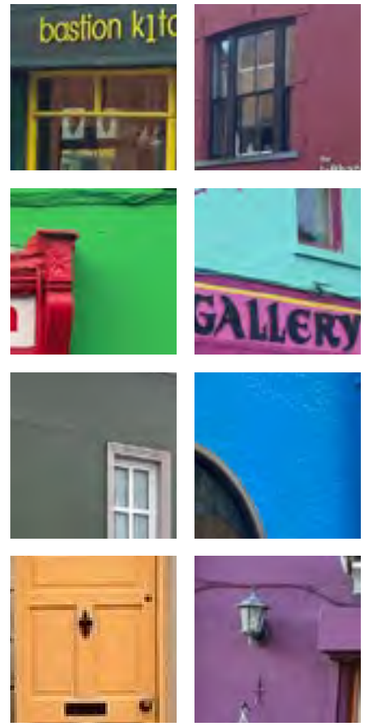
Façade colours are integral to the street scene and proposed elevations should show how the elevation and colour settles within the context vibrant colours suit the creative character of the Castle Quarter whereas more muted simple tones complement the street enhancement works within the Town Centre ACA.











06

Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking

Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking

Tourism is Ireland’s largest indigenous industry bringing direct expenditure and a catalyst for economic and social opportunities and job creation. The potential for tourism development and growth is significant having regard to Athlone’s unique heritage and cultural assets, scenic and rich natural environment, and accessible location in the heart of the ‘Hidden Heartlands’.

The Framework presents a series of Regenerative Pipeline Projects underpinned by Public Realm and Placemaking proposals (Chapter 4) designed to enhance and improve the attractiveness, diversity, and accessibility of Athlone’s existing natural and built assets and importantly, act as a catalyst for urban regeneration and transformation in the plan area. Collectively these projects can improve the image and liveability of Athlone showcasing its history, identity and innovation through the creation of attractive, engaging and memorable spaces that reflect the local culture and identity, enhancing the tourist experience resulting in economic growth and a sustainable and resilient tourism industry.

Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking is a mechanism by which regeneration can be delivered. Four specific objectives have been formulated to assist in the delivery of this aspect of the Vision supported by a strategy and initiatives designed to leverage and enhance Athlone's natural and built environment: enhancing the town's attractiveness for residents, visitors, and businesses alike:

- *To Optimise Spaces and Create Places*
- *To Regenerate Underutilised Sites*
- *To Support Active and Cultural Tourism*
- *To Rebalance the Town*

Innovation in strategic and creative placemaking can have a transformative impact on the tourism industry. By creating attractive, engaging and memorable spaces that reflect the local culture and identity, places and destination can differentiate themselves, enhance the tourist experience, drive economic growth, and foster community engagement, ultimately leading to a more sustainable and resilient tourism industry and a vehicle for urban regeneration and growth.

The success of transformative urban regeneration land placemaking lies in the balance of delivering new development that enhances and complements the historic built fabric and character of Athlone.

Careful consideration has been given to the significance of the Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) that defines much of the town centre in the design development of public realm and placemaking projects and in the identification of Regenerative Pipeline Projects detailed in Chapter 8 which support placemaking. These projects not only bolster the town's functionality and growth but also prioritise environmental stewardship and community wellbeing, aligning seamlessly with the overarching vision and objectives outlined in this Framework.

Tourism Led Regeneration - Policy Context

Typically, regeneration initiatives are focused on the delivery of specific land uses, or site specific features to kick start development.

Cognisant of the existing Culture and Arts quarter within the town, the Framework seeks to capitalise on Athlone's key tourism and cultural assets.

Cultural regeneration can be an effective tool in rejuvenating places which have an intrinsic value or significance by delivering economic and community benefit through conservation that facilitates the productive use of built heritage assets and opportunities for investment, whilst safeguarding their historic or architectural integrity.

Arts and cultural heritage is a key in highlighting distinctiveness of place, with significant potential for creative industries, cultural tourism, and heritage led regeneration.

A Regional Tourism Development Strategy for Ireland's Hidden Heartlands was launched by Fáilte Ireland in 2023, with a vision that the Midlands region will 'become one of Europe's leading regenerative tourism destinations, where tourism works to create flourishing places and thriving communities.' A core objective of the strategy is to 'establish the region as one of the leading regenerative tourism destinations in Europe in which tourism results in net positive outcomes for communities and nature'.

The branding and marketing message of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands is centred on an 'active in nature' experience connecting with the unique natural and built cultural heritage of the region. The delivery of 'regenerative tourism' in this strategy for Athlone accrues positive benefits that ensures the needs of the environment and of the local community is prioritised.

To stimulate the realisation of this vision, a €68 million Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking Scheme was launched by Fáilte Ireland in 2023, under the EU Just Transition Fund.

The proposals outlined in this section have been formulated against the backdrop of national, regional and local level plans and strategies which pertain to tourism in Westmeath. Key tourism policy documents: Fáilte Ireland's 'Ireland's Hidden Heartlands' Regional Tourism Development Strategy 2023-2029; Waterway's Ireland 'The Shannon Might River of Ireland' Masterplan; and WCC's 'County Westmeath Tourism Strategy 2023-2027'.







Tourism Led Regeneration - Local Context

Due to its geographical location and history, Athlone's tourism offer benefits from its natural and built heritage.

Athlone is a Fáilte Ireland ‘Destination Town’ at the heart of the ‘Hidden Heartlands’. The River Shannon, Ireland’s longest river, facilitates water-based activities and views along it the riverbanks. Athlone Castle and St. Peter and Paul’s Church and the Luan Gallery present landmark structures rich in cultural heritage overlooking the river, and serve as tributes to the town's historical legacy.

For nature enthusiasts, the River Shannon, Athlone Canal, Burgress Park, Ranelagh and the Big Meadow provide visitors with access to nature trails, fishing, boating, river tours (including Viking Tours Ireland) and leisurely cruises. The surrounding countryside also provides visitors with opportunities for hiking, cycling, and exploring the diverse flora and fauna that characterises the region.

Athlone is uniquely positioned as the only junction in Ireland where a Greenway and Blueway meet. The Athlone Greenway Bridge, spanning the River Shannon connecting Connaught to Leinster, forms a strategic link in the emerging coast to coast national 'Galway to Dublin Greenway'. Water-based activities add a further choice to the tourism offer in Athlone, including the navigation of the River Shannon or angling at Athlone Canal / The Big Meadow. A key element of the Framework is to maximise recreational and tourism benefits of the River Shannon and Athlone Canal for locals and tourists through the development of boardswalks and cafés / restaurants, and the facilitation of additional water-based activities, including kayaking, paddle-boarding and swimming, which will complement and extend Athlone’s active tourism offer, further strengthen it’s appeal as a ‘Destination Town’.

Throughout the year, Athlone town hosts various events and festivals that celebrate music, arts and culture, and local traditions. This Framework includes objectives and recommendations to facilitate such events, including creative spaces and studios / venues for creative expression will further strengthen the arts and cultural presence within Athlone. It is also highlighted that Athlone benefits from The Luan Gallery, a publicly owned art gallery, and the Dean Crowe Theatre in the west of the town.

There is also a strong hospitality scene in Athlone, with a wide variety of restaurants, cafés, eateries and pubs being located throughout the town; including Sean’s Bar, Ireland’s oldest pub. A new group of artisan food producers and restaurateurs, Athlone Food Circle have taken steps to tell the food story of the Athlone area, with further ambitions to promote Athlone as a distinctive food destination promoting the range of high-quality food and drink offerings available in the region. Further activities could focus on specific sectors, including artisan food, art and craft countywide. The proposals in this section seek to explore this potential.

The hospitality and retail sector are significant employers that also play a key role in creating attractive liveable places. The Framework provides guidance on urban design and placemaking initiatives to promote town centre renewal while supporting the existing strong retail offering provided in the Athlone Town centre and Golden Island shopping centre.

Hotel accommodation within the town is focused on primarily 4 and 5 star hotels concentrated to the east of the river. Expanding the range of accommodation options within the town from apartments, lodges to budget and high end boutique hotels would assist in growing the socio economic demographic of future tourists. Notably, there is a distinct lack of tourism accommodation in the west of the town within the 'Tourism and Cultural Quarter'. A shortfall of bedspaces in Athlone was identified in Fáilte Ireland market research, thus presenting a further opportunity through regenerative tourism. This Framework recommends potential locations for such amenities in Chapter 7 - ‘Opportunity Sites’.

athlone.ie
at the heart of it



Historical Experiences - Athlone Castle



Arts and Cultural Experience - Viking Tours



Food and Drink - Sean’s Bar



Athlone’s Heritage / Cultural / Active Tourism

Regenerative Tourism & Placemaking Objectives

To Optimise Spaces and Create Places

Optimising spaces involves a considered blend of functionality and aesthetics, transforming left-over and underperforming spaces into inviting and purposeful places.

Strategic design, versatility and smart use of space play pivotal roles. By integrating light, adaptable layouts and multi-purpose areas, spaces can be moulded into multifaceted environments that cater to various needs. Ultimately, optimising spaces isn't just about the physical dimensions but also about crafting atmosphere that resonates with the community who inhabit it and visit it, creating meaningful places where character meets functionality, fostering a sense of connection and well-being.

The Framework seeks to optimise Athlone's existing spaces and create new places for the community and visitors to gather, entertain and do business, while also being accessible and inclusive to all. Due to this, it will create a cohesive series of spaces and places that will enliven Athlone in its entirety. Creating more destination points will help reinvigorate the neglected streets of Athlone. It is envisaged that the proposed new / enhanced spaces and places will facilitate tourism, foster creativity, improve safety and accessibility, and support businesses and local groups. Proposals for development should contribute to the creation of a distinct sense of place and identity, that not only facilitates, but encourages and creates opportunities for activity and interaction, from simple day to day activity to social, seasonal and planned events.



Pipeline Project: Cultural Square / Link

Proposed Interventions

- Enhance the built and natural environment by considering the use of informal public art interventions which reflect the cultural and heritage context of the location e.g. dressed shop façades on derelict buildings along Connaught Street or the insert a meanwhile use within a vacant property as a means of increasing footfall and diversifying the mix of uses and vitality of the street.
- Reclaim /enhance/ create flexible and accessible public spaces for temporary uses as venue for a market space, temporary event, festival or local community event which has the potential to include dwell time within this quarter.
- Improve connectivity through enhanced/ new links - routes between key visitor attractions should be designed based on shared spaces and, where appropriate, pedestrianised. Routes should create a safe, attractive and convenient route and seek to maximise opportunities to implement street furniture, planting and other public realm along these connections.
- Optimise the river frontage through on-water activities supported by land based temporary food kiosks and changing facilities. Consideration should be given to linking these locations in the cycling network and walking routes through Athlone.
- Improve the Wayfinding within the town in accordance with the Athlone Wayfinding Strategy.

To Regenerate Under-utilised Sites

Urban regeneration can benefit the local economy, environment and community. Regeneration brings back underutilised assets, including brownfield, backland and infill sites, and redistributes opportunities throughout the town. In turn, this will increase urban prosperity and quality of life.

For regeneration to be successful, sustainability, viability and an understanding of the market are essential. To facilitate population growth, a significant proportion of urban development will need to be accommodated on infill/brownfield sites through the redevelopment and regeneration of underused, vacant or derelict town centre and urban lands to maximise the efficient use of existing infrastructure and services and promote a positive modal shift towards sustainable transport use. It is an objective of the Framework to facilitate the continuous regeneration and redevelopment of existing built up areas as equally attractive and as viable as greenfield development to create more desirable places in which people can live and work.

Where larger sites are proposed for development, consideration should be given to masterplanning the site in order to support its integration into the wider context and leverage the catalytic effect arising from it. The preservation and appreciation for Athlone's rich natural and built heritage assets are also a key consideration and opportunity in the regeneration of the town. For instance, Ranelagh, the Shannon, Athlone Canal and the Big Meadow have the potential to provide a circular route around the west of Athlone.

The enhancement and regeneration of these assets has the potential to enhance their ecological value and support eco tourism initiatives/projects. The 'Public Realm and Placemaking Strategy' (see Chapter 4) and 'Urban Design Principles and Opportunity Sites' (see Chapter 7) and set out in this Framework provide the knowledge and tools to tackle issues of urban decline in an effective and innovative manner. These tools will principally appeal to WCC, and developers / investors who wish to activate / broaden their portfolio through urban regeneration.



Pipeline Project: The Strand

Proposed Interventions

- Deliver compact and sustainable growth on brownfield, backland and infill sites.
- Optimise and enhance greenfield sites as recreational areas and enhanced biodiversity spaces.
- Repurpose / reconfigure underutilised spaces including public spaces and left-over spaces
- Utilise existing assets, amenities and services as a catalyst for regeneration and investment.

To Support Active and Cultural Tourism

The strategic vision of the County Westmeath Tourism Strategy 2023-2027 is underpinned by principles of sustainable tourism development, and a series of priority initiatives categorised under the following Strategic Pillars: Industry Support, Collaboration and Marketing; Immersive Tourism Experience; Destination Towns and Visitor Services.

Athlone is situated in the centre of Ireland, at the heart of the Hidden Heartlands. The Framework seeks to optimise this strategic location and utilise its natural and built heritage for active and cultural tourism. The town also boosts a successful arts sector, ranging from film theatre, fine art, and cultural festivals showcasing Athlone's rich artistic context, and has the potential to present new art innovation as a regional, national, and potentially international reason to visit Athlone.

Athlone hosts a range of festivals and cultural events such as the Athlone Film Festival, the Viking River Fest, the RTE All Ireland Drama Festival and Féile na Sionainne. Retaining existing festivals, and attracting new events is a core component of growing the town's arts and culture sector. Creating new event and gallery space within larger developments can assist in creating further capacity and enhance the towns offer and ability to host additional events and festivals. Newly created spaces should complement the offer provided by existing venues and seek to identify ways in which dwell time at events can be increased. New spaces could be facilitated through flexible public realm which are adaptable for a range of events, including temporary/pop up outdoor cinemas, to temporary event space alongside an annual event, such as food and craft markets. Adopting this approach could be particularly relevant for the regeneration of Market Square. Luan Gallery and Athlone Art Gallery already provide gallery space for national and local artists as well as shops selling associated products. New art enterprise should be supportive of these existing establishments.

A critical component to underpinning active and cultural tourism is the provision of sufficient high-quality visitor accommodation and other hospitality services. Consideration should be given to additional hotel provision as a driver for regeneration and a point of attraction. Hotel, hostel, and other alternative types of tourist accommodation could support tourism growth within the town complemented by hospitality uses which can also service the wider population.

The River Shannon and Athlone Canal provide valuable leisure and water based activity opportunities. Other key recreational and activity-based resources include the Ranelagh to the Big Meadow, (Shannon Banks Nature Trail), a looped walking route alongside the Shannon and historic old canal, fishing stands located at intervals along the Shannon Banks, the Shannon Marina and other boat mooring locations, Burgess Park, and the newly developed Athlone Boat Club facility. The Old Rail Trail, a 43km greenway linking the River Shannon in Athlone to the Royal Canal in Mullingar is a strategic piece of recreational infrastructure with enormous tourism potential, that forms a strategic link in the emerging Galway to Dublin Cycleway, part of the National Cycle Network (NCN) and Ireland's first coast-to-coast greenway. These resources support active travel, recreational tourism, the promotion of local culture and heritage and economic opportunities related to the development of complementary and supporting facilities, such as food outlets, equipment hire hospitality services, enhanced signage and amenities and changing facilities.



Pipeline Project: Greenway/Blueway Junction

Proposed Interventions

- Connect Athlone's cultural and historic assets through the use of public realm improvements and way finding.
- Engage with local arts and culture establishment to establish how new spaces and enterprises could complement the existing offer within Athlone.
- New outdoor spaces should be flexible, adaptable, and designed to support temporary/ seasonal uses.
- Create waterfront / on-water experiences.
- Develop and enhance cultural trails / eco trails.
- Carefully consider the location of new tourism infrastructure to maximise its catalytic effect on the town and links to other attractions and connections.

To Rebalance the Town

Reviving a town core demands a holistic approach; entwining economic stimulation, infrastructure refinement, cultural vibrancy and community involvement. Economic growth can be stimulated through grants, incentives and targeted revitalisation programs.

The Framework seeks to reactivate the town's core by creating an inviting, friendly, and accessible place for the community and tourists to visit, enjoy and do business. Visually and physically connecting cultural and heritage assets through accessible connected public realm enhancements enables a greater visitor flow attracting visitors to venture beyond the main tourist destinations, increases 'dwell time' and visitor spend. This is particularly relevant for Athlone where an incremental imbalance east and west of the River Shannon has occurred with retail growth in the east and increased vacancies to the west. The implementation of the Frameworks guidance notes, interventions and pipeline projects will have a positive impact on the local economy and rebalance the town of Athlone with complementary uses focusing on Tourism and Cultural growth to the west while reinforcing the town core to the east. The activation of the River Shannon through planned interventions will further serve to unify and the town and rebalance economic growth and prosperity.

Athlone successfully hosts cultural and sporting events, activities and festivals that breathe life into the heart of the town, fostering a vibrant atmosphere and a welcomed boost to the local economy. Through planned interventions, these aspects shall be improved by ‘optimising’ and regenerating spaces across the plan area and enable development and growth in this sector.

In addition to the guidance and planned proposals presented in the Framework, recognition of Athlone’s wealth of active and engaged community groups, including The Athlone Canal Heritage Committee, Athlone No.1 Battery Heritage Group and Connaught Street (and environs) Community Group is key to assisting rebalance and growth. These groups have a track record of successful project delivery and future projects earmarked, e.g. the opening up of the culverted stretch of Athlone Canal. Their experience and expertise should be engaged with and supported to achieve the objectives of the Framework.

New development opportunity sites may provide space for cultural and historic land use, with a focus on tourism, education and heritage skills while infrastructural and public realm enhancements improve the attractiveness and accessibility of the town. The enhancement and regeneration of existing natural assets, for instance, Ranelagh, the Shannon, Athlone Canal and the Big Meadow have the potential to enhance not only the ecological value of these sites but the ability to facilitate and support eco-tourism initiatives/projects. Preservation of built assets is central to retaining Athlone’s historical charm and preservation of the town's identify. Blending these elements in a tailored strategy nurtures a thriving town core, drawing residents and visitors alike to enjoy its unique character and offering.



Pipeline Project: Market Square

Proposed Interventions

- Deliver public realm enhancement works in the 'Tourism and Cultural Quarter' by extending the successful town centre enhancement works.
- Activate the River Shannon waterfronts - reconnect the town to the river.
- Support initiative to tackle vacancy / dereliction, particularly in the ‘Tourism and Cultural Quarter’.
- Develop and capitalise on the complementary offerings defined in the character areas of Athlone as an holistic and balanced destination of choice
- Engage with stakeholders and landowners in developing new proposals

The growing profile of tourism and culture in the 'Tourism and Cultural Quarter' is complemented by the vibrant and active retail core in 'Athlone Town Centre' in the east of the town. The Framework focuses on the balancing and integration of these positive qualities in a Fáilte Ireland designated ‘Destination Town’.

Through the Framework, the 'Athlone Town Centre' / 'Tourism and Cultural Quarter' is envisioned as a pedestrian prioritised environment that will be delivered by the implementation of traffic control interventions, the reclaiming of public spaces, the activation of the waterfront and through public realm enhancement works. The implementation of the Framework’s 'Public Realm and Placemaking Strategy' (Chapter 04) and 'Urban Design Principles' (Chapter 05) will unlock the latent economic potential of the area, particularly in the 'Tourism and Cultural Quarter', by accommodating adaptable street elements, event / community spaces and alfresco dining areas that will establish a day / night economy.

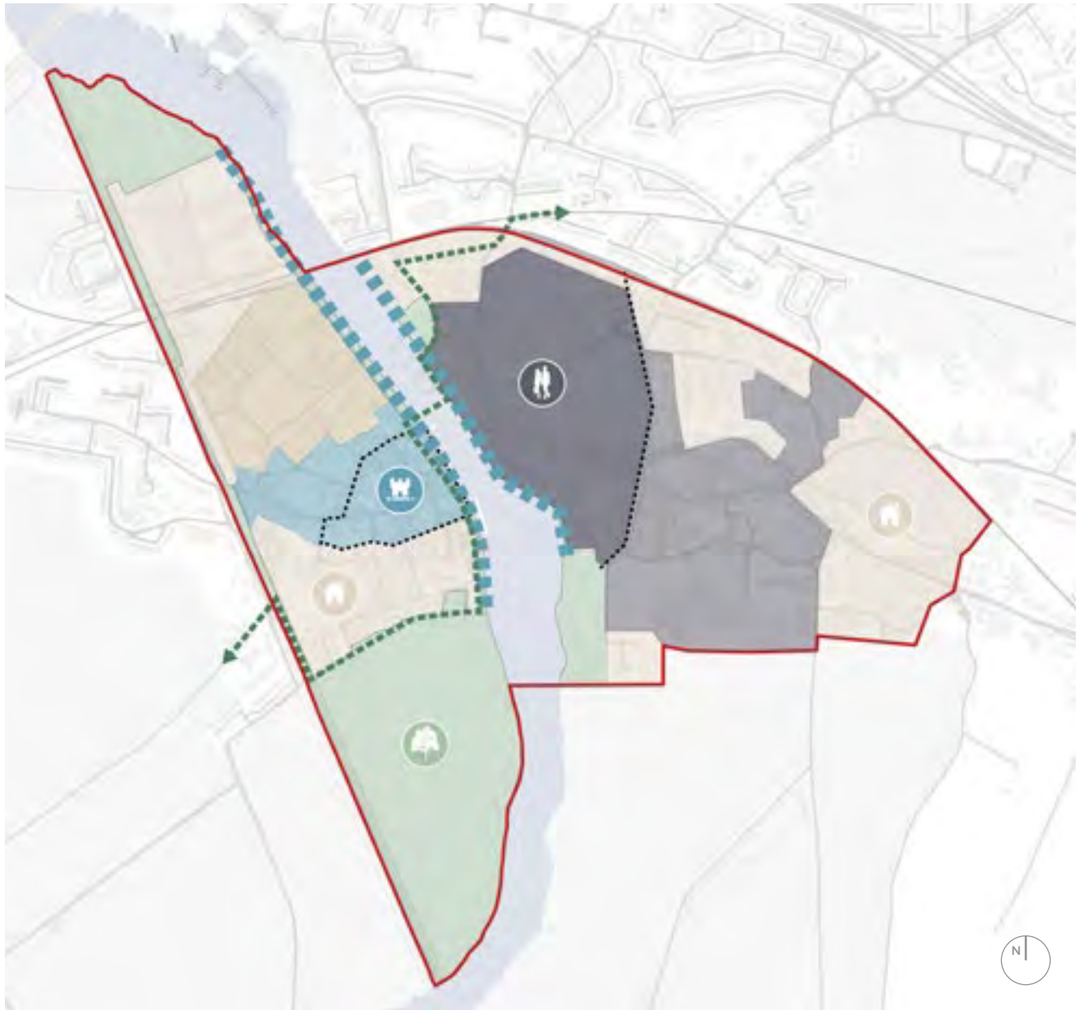
A key central focal point within the area is the Market Square, a historic public space that currently presents as an on-street car park. Located on the Pearse Street / Castle Street / Dublin Road (R446) junction, this multifunctional public space is defined by the heritage and cultural assets of Athlone Castle, the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, the Luan Gallery and Custume Bridge. The reclaiming of this area back as a public space will act as a catalyst for the further enhancement of the surrounds. The reclaimed square will provide a platform for markets and other cultural gatherings and provide a link into a wider cultural and tourism program based around artist and designers working with local individuals, organisations and businesses to develop a series of art, craft and design led projects that will strengthen Athlone’s unique identity.

Further public enhancement works in the 'Tourism and Cultural Quarter' (along Connaught Street, Pearse Street, Castle Street, Main Street, High Street, Bastion Street, Connolly Street and Custume Bridge) will link up to the recently implemented and successful public enhancement works in the 'Athlone Town Centre' area (at Church Street, Mardyke Street and Sean Costello Street) to create a balanced and legible connection across the River Shannon.

Underpinning the 'Athlone Town Centre' / 'Tourism and Cultural Quarter's future is its role as an environmentally conscious area that positively contributes to WCC climate change and biodiversity agenda. Through the delivery of varying street tree species and a biodiverse rich palette of plants, the Framework can create an urban habitat for wildlife and establish a more attractive street environment for locals and visitors (see Chapter 04 and Chapter 05). The greening of the area will be complemented by the enhancement of the existing green spaces, the inclusion of pocket parks, integrated planters / benches, cycle parking, and the optimisation of the waterfront.

Character Areas within Framework

Aligning with the Athlone Wayfinding Strategy



Key

- Athlone Town Centre
- Wider Athlone Town Centre
- Castle Quarter
- Tourism and Cultural Quarter
- Parklands and Meadows
- Athlone Barracks
- Wider Surrounding Area
- Waterfront
- Greenway



Plan illustrating the location of Regenerative Pipeline Projects within the Framework Area



A - Market Square



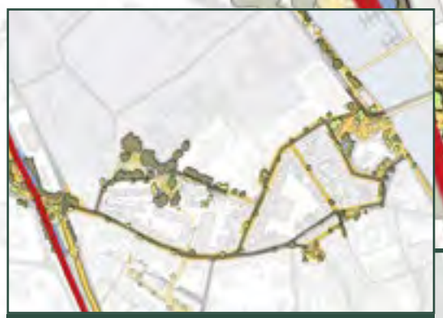
I - Greenway / Blueway Junction and Boardwalk



D - Connolly Street



E - Connaught Gardens



F - 'Tourism and Cultural Quarter' Public Realm Works



G - Ranelagh / Big Meadow Loop



C - Cultural Square and Dean Crowe Link



B - Castle Gardens

Key

- Regenerative Pipeline Project
- Public Realm and Placemaking Projects
- Existing Streetscape
- Framework Area



K - The Strand

H - Athlone Outdoor Swimming Pool and Boardwalk





J - Weir Walkway



L - St. Mary's Square / Loughanaskin Link

Focus:
Connaught Street Area

Through tourism and cultural led urban regeneration, the Framework seeks to revitalise the Connaught Street Area.

The Framework reflects on the challenges and opportunities facing the Connaught Street Area today; Formerly a thriving shopping street, the Connaught Street area has endured repeated cycles of vacancy and dereliction, in part due to changing shopping habits and patterns. To create a balanced holistic town, the Connaught St area needs to refocus and capitalise on the unique tourism and cultural offerings as a vehicle for regenerative growth and development. Investment in Athlone Castle, the Luan Gallery and the Galway to Dublin Greenway has benefited the area with a strengthened tourism offering building on the natural and built heritage offerings creating a strong platform for a thriving Tourism & Cultural Quarter, from uneven and narrow paving, neglected façades and vacant properties to potential regeneration sites, along with cultural and natural assets. Through this Framework the Connaught Street Area could be reinvigorated in a way that reflects the ambitious vision of an active, proud and supportive local community.

The delivery of public realm enhancement works would assist in pump-priming the area and has the potential to act as a catalyst for wider regeneration. It is hoped that once these enhancements have been implemented the next phase of interventions would focus on the regeneration of key sites and the refurbishment of existing buildings.

Given the geographical location of Connaught Street Area, as a central point in the west side of the town, the development of the area can follow the idea of a 15-minute town, with tactical urbanism and the well-being of local residents and business being at the forefront. It is recommended that a mix of uses, both horizontally and vertically, be incorporated along the street to foster activity throughout the day and evening.

Where new development comes forward, this process could create the opportunity for the removal of adjacent street clutter and superfluous wires, contributing to tidying the street scene. The neglected façades along Connaught Street, and its ancillary streets, could be renovated and restored to improve the walking experience of the area and attract tourist, businesses and investment. Moreover, creative expression should be encouraged and supported in the area, expanding upon the Castle Quarter's arts and cultural tourism. This could be explored in conjunction with local community and arts groups.

Through the implementation of the Framework's Urban Design Principles, Opportunity Sites and the Public Realm and Placemaking Strategy the necessary ingredients would be in place to enable the Connaught Street Area to grow and develop into a thriving extension of the Castle Quarter, i.e., the Tourism and Cultural Quarter. The recommended works to the Connaught Street Area should improve the overall experience for residents, business owners and visitors, and encourage them to frequent the area for longer and more purposeful periods of time to soak up the vibrant cultural and hospitality the street has to offer.



Character of Connaught Street Area

Connaught Street has a strong and consistent urban fabric, reflecting its historic importance as a local shopping street. The street has suffered more recently from vacancy and dereliction, with a few successful examples of regeneration.







Bastion Court, a recent example of urban regeneration within the Connaught Street environs





Contemporary images showing the strong historic urban fabric and successful regeneration of Connaught Street, and the challenges of vacancy and dereliction







Historic images showing a thriving Connaught Street

Regenerating the Urban Fabric

The Connaught Street Area's distinct urban and built form should inform new development and any development proposals should be subservient and positively respond to this context. Through site assessment the conditions of buildings have been identified and are described as follows:

- **Category 1:** General upkeep and maintenance.
- **Category 2:** Re-vamp of façade / shop front to make it more attractive and inviting. Focus on quick wins rather than in depth improvements. Art interventions on façades or gables, which could be considered as part of a wider public art strategy.
- **Category 3:** Medium to large scale refurbishment or redevelopment works to signify change across the street and / or provide respectful, contrasting styles, massing and scales.
- **Category 4:** Restoration of façade / shop front to ensure typology retains its historic presence within the street. A higher level of aesthetic and functional improvement works may be required. These works should conserve the building fabric now and for future generations.



accurate at time of assessment



Connaught Street - Existing Streetscape



Connaught Street - Residential Units - Post-Rejuvenation



Connaught Street - Existing Streetscape



Connaught Street - Commercial Units - Post-Rejuvenation



Council Building to be Refurbished with Residential Use above Commercial Ground Floor



List of Historic and Vacant Properties Along Connaught Street



Vacant Site with Development Potential



Vacant Site with Development Potential

Tackling Dereliction / Vacancy Rates

Tackling the issue of vacancy and dereliction in the Connaught Street Area will improve its overall perception and attractiveness and make it more appealing to residents, local businesses and tourists. To tackle these issues, the Framework proposes the following:

- Define the Connaught Street Area's image and identify as an attractive area that is an extension of the Castle Quarter.
- Support, identify, adapt, restore and reuse vacant buildings for the benefit of the community, local groups and businesses. This will help create an attractive town centre experience, restoring the original function of the area.
- New uses should consider adaptive reuse / refurbishment of existing shop fronts.
- Encourage residential units above commercial premises back into use to reactivate and reanimate the street.
- Facilitate the delivery of compact growth on backland / infill sites while protecting the existing character of the area.



accurate at time of assessment







Vacancy and dereliction apparent on Connaught Street







Draw on the success of the vibrant shops and businesses located on Castle Street to the east.



Artist impression of the potential for regeneration
Source: Connaught Street & Environs Community Group

Example of a positive precedent for town centre living with approved residential dwelling on Connaught St.

Supporting a Day / Night Economy

Enhance public realm to realise the potential for arts and cultural uses within Connaught Street and environs and the potential for new development could promote a day and night economy. Consideration of hospitality uses that encourage longer term trading, rather than take-away or quick turn-around trading could contribute to enhancing the space. The Tourism and Cultural Quarter and existing community art groups could encourage uses with a cultural focus. The Framework identifies the following economic initiatives:

- Consolidate the active day / night ground floor uses such cafés, restaurants, public houses and retail to the centre of the street to activate its core.
- Support community uses, creative groups and a range of small to medium enterprises to encourage a wide variety of different users at varying times of the day.
- Allow for flexible uses that can change function to operate both day and night.
- Facilitate high quality outdoor seating at appropriate locations, to facilitate alfresco dining and create animation along the street. The re-purposing of existing on-street parking as planted spaces as outdoor dining areas could be considered.
- Ensure the street is accessible and safe to all both day and night, with strategic lighting and natural surveillance from active adjacent street frontages.



accurate at time of assessment



Historic image showing Connaught Street thriving with activity



Festival creating activity for local businesses and activating streets



Day night activity Athlone. Source: Athlone.ie



The Luan Gallery is an example of the successful regeneration of a previously derelict building to a thriving cultural space

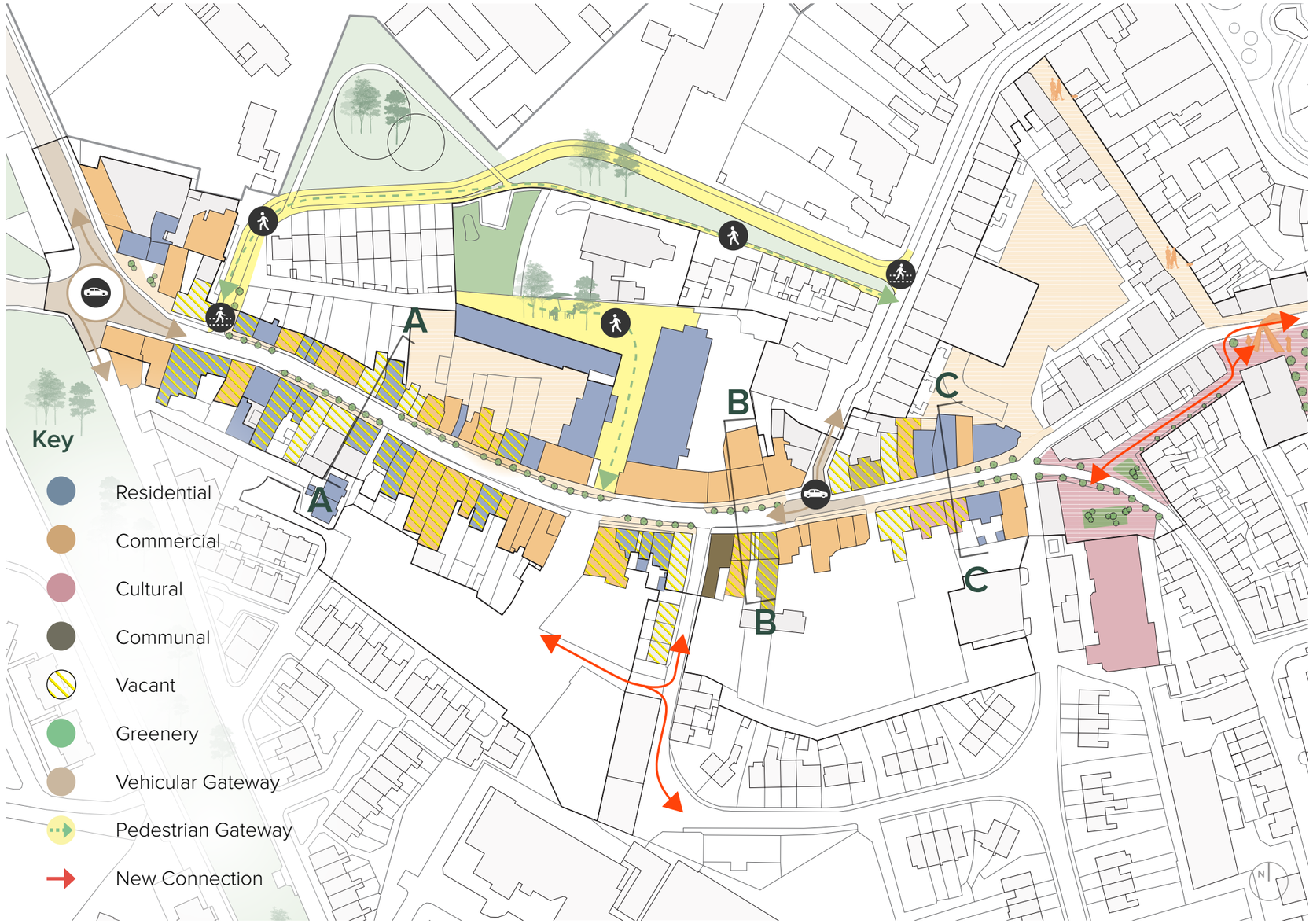


Poster for heritage week (Connaught Street and Environs Community Group)

Improving Mobility and Accessibility

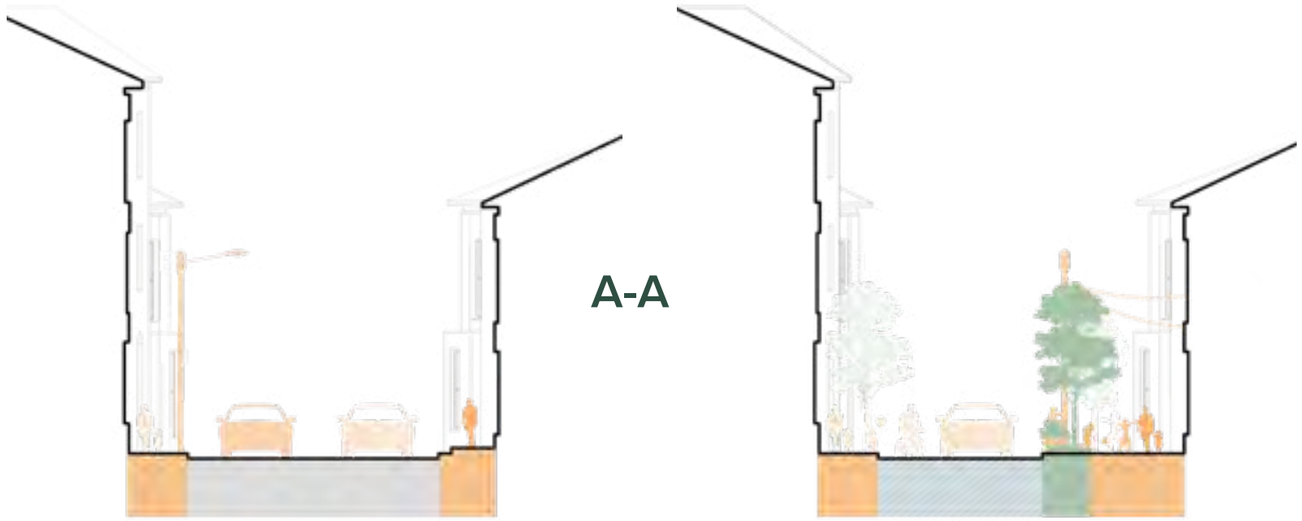
The Framework's analysis and engagement highlighted access and mobility as a critical challenge within Connaught Street Area. In response to this the following interventions have been identified in accordance with the Public Realm and Placemaking Principles (see Chapter 04) and the Athlone ABTA:

- **Improved Connectivity:** Physical Links - Enhanced Connaught Street / Pearse Street link via Connaught Gardens, and proposed new link between Patrick's Street / Harry's Lane; Visual Link - Dean Crowe / Cultural Square / Athlone Castle link via Grattan Row and High Street
- **Creation of Gateways:** Vehicle Gateways - Canal roundabout, and Connaught Street / Pearse Street / O'Connell Street junction; Pedestrian Priority Gateways - junctions of Connaught Street / Connaught Gardens and Pearse Street / Connaught Gardens. The gateways should be distinctly identifiable through hard and soft landscaping and way-finding.
- **Safety and Accessibility for All:** Ensure movement network supports convenient, safe and appropriate access for all users including varying ages, those with mobility requirements, and individuals who are visually or hearing impaired. Adequate access should also be provided for accessibility and emergency services.

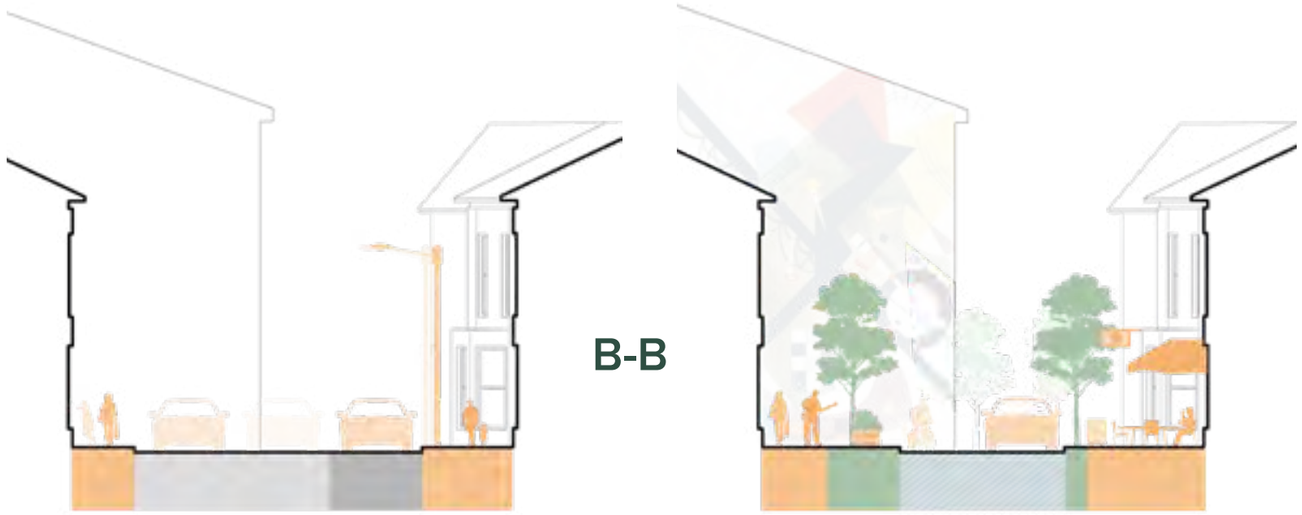


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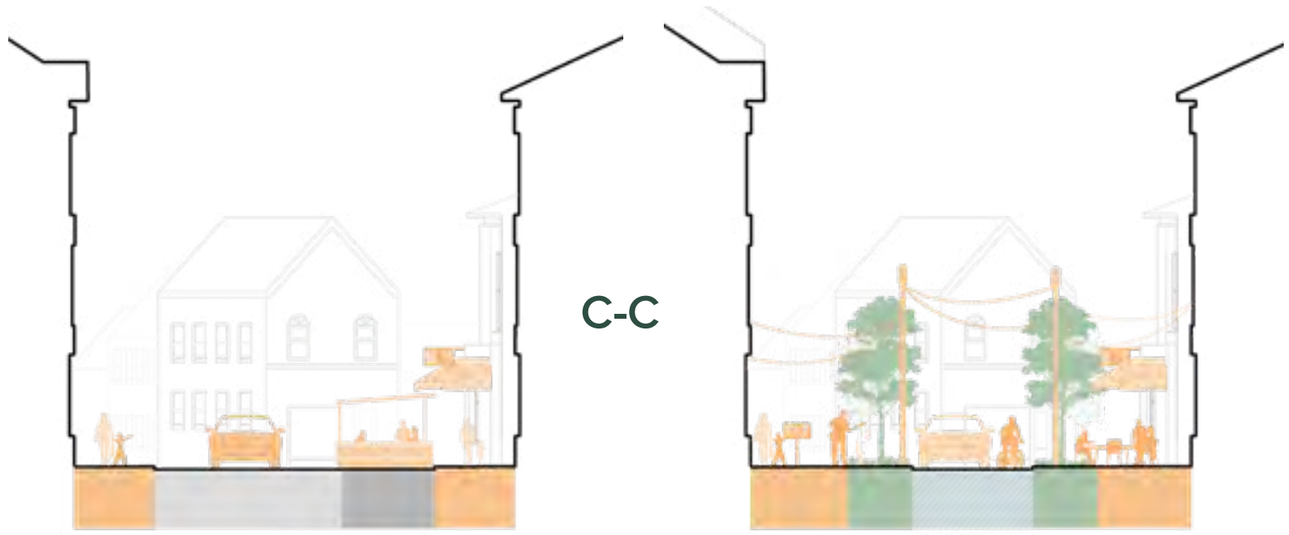
Potential to reduce the highway width and re-purpose selected on-street parking and landscaping to create a more inviting, usable and safe space for pedestrians and businesses. The road should become a shared space for cars and bicycles.



At the wider sections of the street, trees and planting should be implemented on both sides of the highway as well as outdoor seating. There is potential to integrate the seating into planters. Plain rendered façades and gables could be used for street art and creative expression.



The eastern portion of the street could become a pedestrian priority area, with the potential to reduce vehicle movement to one-way. Raised and shared surface treatments could be utilised and areas that are currently in use as on-street parking could be reclaimed as extended public realm that could facilitate on-street activity associated with adjacent cafés, bars and restaurants.



Note: Any proposed traffic interventions should be designed with consideration for the Athlone ABTA.



Public Realm Works in Athlone including Planters and Integrated Seating



Pedestrianisation of Sean Costello Street



Athlone's Bicycle Share Scheme



Existing scheme on Church Street Providing Safe and Accessible Crossing and Tactile Paving

Encouraging Creative Intervention

Culturally led enhancement works provide an opportunity to punctuate a streetscape, delivering a vibrant, independent and distinct identity for the area. The Framework proposes the following key initiatives:

- Selected building façades and gables could be identified for art intervention by curated local artists.
- Coloured paving, street art and lighting installations be installed at the thresholds into the area to provide way-finding and identify the street's creative character.
- Vacant buildings could be re-purposed as community facilities, pop-up and independent shops, event spaces or arts and culture studios.
- Public realm elements such as street furniture, lighting, awnings, signage and utility boxes can integrate public art, establishing a distinctly unique Connaught Street character.
- A network of communal spaces, including Dean Crowe / Cultural Square / Castle Garden / Market Square / Connaught Gardens, that encourages collective interaction among users. These spaces will also serve to reflect a vibrant and inviting environment for residents, businesses, cultural groups and visitors.



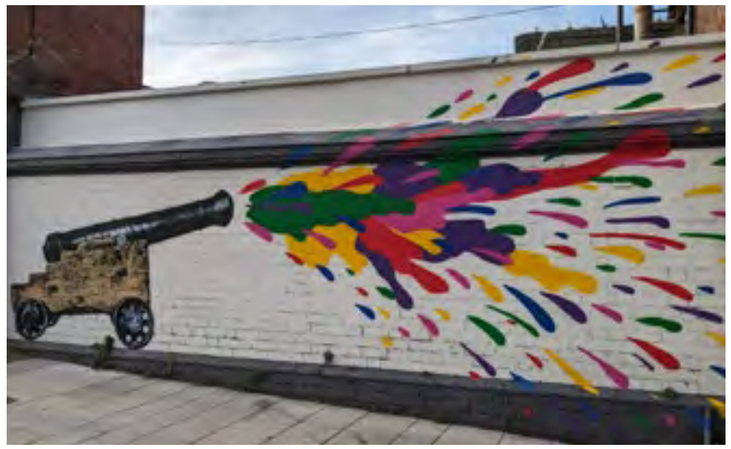
accurate at time of assessment



Art Installation
Brightening up a Lane



Utility Boxes Providing
a Canvas for Artist



Explosion of Artistic and Cultural Expression



Colourful Advertisement on
High Street, Athlone



Artist and Cultural Light Show Illuminating
Athlone Castle



Pipeline Project: Cultural Square, High Street, Athlone (Concept Image Only)



Playful Surface Treatment to
Denote a Pedestrian Priority Area



History Illustration on Connaught Street

Recommendations

To assist in the regeneration and enhancement of the Tourism and Cultural Quarter, a series of recommendations have been identified. Based on the Frameworks analysis and stakeholder engagement data, the proposed recommendations presented in this chapter and in the form of Opportunity Sites, Public Realm and Placemaking Interventions and Regenerative Pipeline Projects present solutions that will help achieve a future for the Tourism and Cultural Quarter to emerge as a first-choice destination, not only to visit, but to live and invest in.

Connaught Street and its environs must take advantage of its unique assets such as its natural heritage, historic built character and identity, cultural vibe, and vibrant restaurant and social scene within walking distance of the town centre and waterfront. These attributes and assets can be improved through public realm and façade treatments as an initial step in providing a platform for the local and visiting community to prosper from.



Community and Stakeholders

- Engage with the local community and stakeholders to support the delivery of regenerative interventions and planned proposals.



Urban Form

- Prepare a Shopfront Enhancement Strategy which provides guidance on new shop frontages within the Tourism and Cultural Quarter.
- Ensure new development proposals are considerate of the character of the area.



Public Realm and Amenities

- Support the delivery of public realm works that strengthen the link between the Town Centre and the Tourism and Cultural Quarter.
- Reduce street clutter, develop a lighting strategy and implement consistent way-finding.



Environment and Ecology

- Investigate Connaught Street's capacity to support tree planting along the street.
- Create a biodiversity corridor between Athlone Canal and the River Shannon with planters in the Castle Quarter and along Connaught Street.
- Ensure sustainable building practices are incorporated into new / refurbish developments.



Tourism, Arts and Culture

- Reinforce the link between the Tourism and Cultural Quarter to extend the tourism offer.
- Identify vacant buildings for facilitating conversion into art studios, event spaces, and independent shops.
- Continue to support the installation of public art along Connaught Street that is designed by Artist in Residence.



Access and Mobility

- Mirror the success of the recent public realm works in the east of Athlone on the west side in the Tourism and Cultural Quarter.
- Support more pedestrian priority areas and emphasize the Connaught Street / Pearse Street connection with improved way-finding.



Governance and Implementation

- Identify appropriate funding mechanisms to deliver the Tourism and Cultural Quarter interventions and pipeline projects.
- Develop preliminary proposals to detailed design and secure planning permission.



Economic Activity

- Support the conversion and regeneration of vacant and derelict properties and sites into temporary 'pop up' shops and events spaces to activate the street.
- Enable opportunities to re-purpose incidental spaces left over as park-lets / alfresco spaces for adjacent cafés, bars or restaurants.



Pipeline Project: Enhanced Connaught Gardens

Concept Image Only

07

Opportunity Sites

The Framework identifies 14 Opportunity Sites that are largely Brownfield in nature and have been selected as part of a Brownfield Site Audit (Volume 2 Appendices) undertaken with respect to existing underutilised serviced lands in the Framework Area.

The selected sites comprise illustrative “design concepts” as examples of their development potential accommodating their site specific challenges.

Where Chapter 5 has reviewed the context of Athlone and its character and provides a series of Urban Design Principles to guide and help future development, this chapter demonstrates how the principles could be applied on a site-specific basis. It is intended that the guidance will inform future design proposals for each site and provide a precedent for the regeneration of similar brownfield and infill sites across the Framework Area.

When considering a specific proposal on an Opportunity Site, detailed design proposals will be required and may necessitate additional environment and technical surveys, such as topographical surveys, environmental and flood risk assessments in accordance with all relevant Guidelines.

The focus will be on the positive regenerative impact of proposed development and the ability of the development proposals to maximise the efficient sustainable use of serviced lands and the ability to create the impetus for positive urban regeneration and rejuvenation within the town.

All plans included within this Chapter are illustrative only and based on the deskbased information available at the time of publication. The identification of these sites should not preclude the delivery of other additional site that become ready and available for development.

Opportunity Sites

Key

Site 1 - Ranelagh
Site 2 - Connaught Street Car Park
Site 3 - St Aloysius
Site 4 - Hanleys site, Abbey Road
Site 5 - Former Workhouse, Northgate Street
Site 6 - Land South of Athlone Station
Site 7 - Loughanaskin
Site 8 - The Strand and Strand Car Park
Site 9 - St Mary's Square Car Park
Site 10 - Dunnes Stores Car Park
Site 11 - Irishtown
Site 12 - Land south of St Patrick's Terrace
Site 13 - Diskin Centre
Site 14 - Golden Island Shopping Centre

Opportunity Sites

Key

- Potential Development Blocks
- Active Frontage
- Key Space Frontage
- Green Frontage
- Proposed Courtyard / Shared Space
- Green space
- Sites with larger areas that could provide space to gradually increase building heights
- Sites where the topography could be utilised to increase building heights and minimise impact on the adjacent townscape

N

Site 1 - Ranelagh

Site Area: 6.76 ha

Land ownership: Mix of public and private land owner.

Site Description: The site comprises an area of open space and woodland in the north, which is relatively flat and forms part of the floodplain for the River Shannon. A second area to the south comprises a collection of industrial buildings, including Athlone Extrusions, which are accessed off Galway Road. The River Shannon defines the eastern and northern boundary with Athlone canal to the west. Existing residential development of up to 2 storeys situated on Talbot Avenue. There is significant tree and shrub planting located within the northern part of the site and there is an area that is used for sports/ soccer. The ruins of a Napoleonic No.1 The Battery are situated within the green space and this feature should be retained and enhanced and marked as part of any development proposals.

The site is situated to the north of the town and within the setting of a large green space and the river and this could allow for an appropriate and gradual transition from the existing context of 2 storeys to taller buildings along the north-eastern boundary subject to demonstrating that such an approach is appropriate .

Ranelagh Way footpath loops around from the southeast corner along the river's edge as far as the canal, and then south along the canal connecting eventually to the Big Meadow. This is a significant public realm opportunity which will be delivered as part of the Ranelagh / Big Meadow Loop Pipeline Project (see Chapter 8).

- Extent of Opportunity Site
- Existing buildings
- River Shannon/Canal
- CFRAM River Flood Extents
- Building, site or monument included in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage - No.1 The Battery
- Architectural Conservation Area (ACA)
- Railway
- Green space
- Existing trees and hedges



- Potential Development Blocks
- Active Frontage
- Key Space Frontage
- Green Frontage
- Proposed Courtyard / Shared Space
- Green space
- Key Route



Urban Design Principles

The zoning of the site will be determined under the Joint Urban Area Plan for Athlone and accomplished by a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment of the lands.

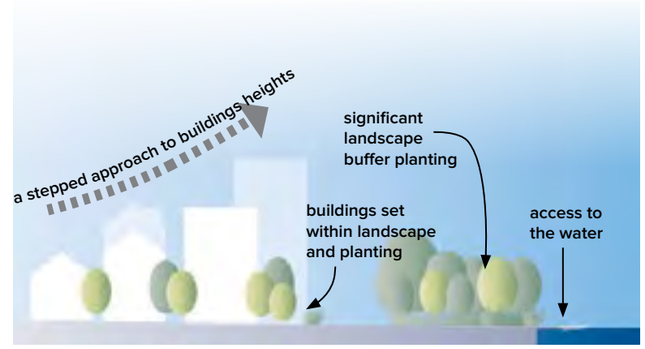
Proposed land uses could include the retention and enhancement of existing industrial uses (including Athlone Extrusion) and associated public realm should create an attractive transition between industrial and residential or other uses.

Any future development proposal should be informed and accompanied by a site specific Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) carried out in accordance with the methodology set out in 'The Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2009' .

Ensure that proposed development provides a high quality and positive aspect on public realm and create a series of green spaces providing areas of play, sports and for walking and running within the large are of green to the north. Retain and refurbish the existing soccer pitches. Enhance Ranelagh Way walking route and provide meandering walking route through the green space.

Potential to provide a mixed use cultural, tourism and educational facility, within close proximity to the riverside, to support cultural and educational tours. Provide clear and convenient access between the water and associated buildings and public realm to enable cultural tourism activities.

Opportunity to implement land mark buildings along the northern boundary and onto the waterfront, which could include taller buildings. Any such development proposal would need to demonstrate an appropriate transition from the existing lower scale buildings situated along the western and southern boundaries.



See Chapter 8 for further detail related to Ranelagh / Big Meadow Pipeline Project

Ensure that aspect is provided onto green spaces. This boundary provides an opportunity for buildings with aspect and of form that will positively address the green space.

Consider the adjacent existing residential development situated on Talbot Avenue and ensure that development of appropriate use and scale is provided within adjoining plots.

The entrance space character should create a sense of arrival; a clear identifying a gateway into the new development..

The natural assets of Ranelagh to the north, the Big Meadow to the south connected by Athlone Canal to west and River Shannon to the east, provide an opportunity to create a connected network of ecologically rich green and blue corridors. The creation of a looped walk as described in Chapters 4 and 8

Deliver high quality landmark development overlooking the green space, creating a distinctive outlook over the Shannon and consider views to the water, as illustrated in the diagram above.

Provide a dual aspect - both onto the central square and on to the Ranelagh Way walking route, with the potential to move through the building as well as having aspect onto both spaces.

Enable access onto the water for leisure, tourism and education uses and enable businesses such as tour boats and other water based businesses and activities to have interface between the buildings and the Shannon.

Site 2 - Connaught Street Car Park

Site Area: 0.51

Land ownership: Mix of public and private land owner.

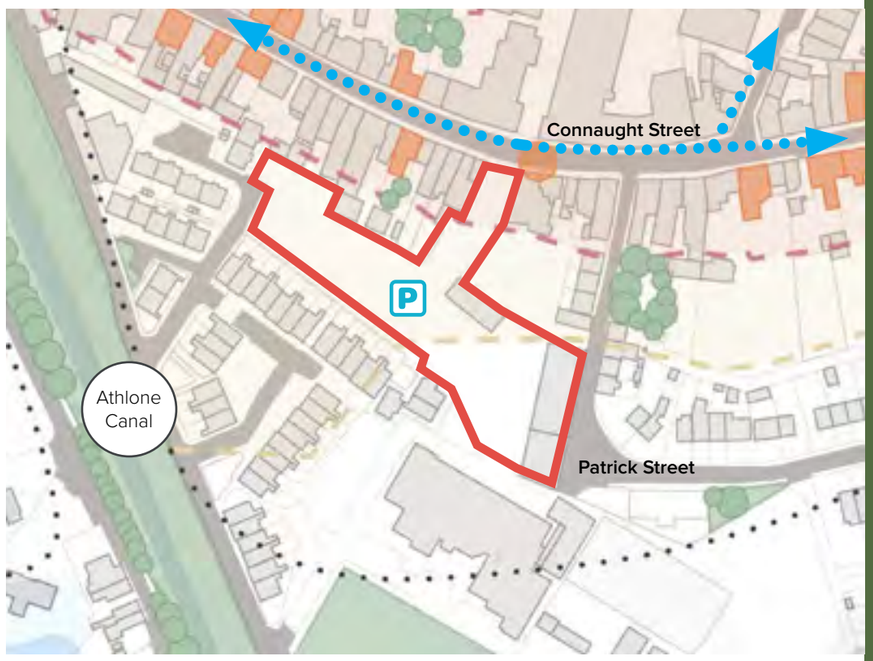
Site Description: The site, an operational car park is a brownfield site, identified as a backland site, situated to the south of existing buildings along Connaught Street.

Accessed via an existing access from Connaught Street which falls within the ACA, and from the south via Harry's Lane accessed from Canal Banks. It presents the opportunity to create permeable links and connections to other adjoining backland sites. The site is bound to the east by existing by single storey disused industrial buildings that form a continuous building line along Patrick Street. There is currently no through route between the car park and Patrick Street.

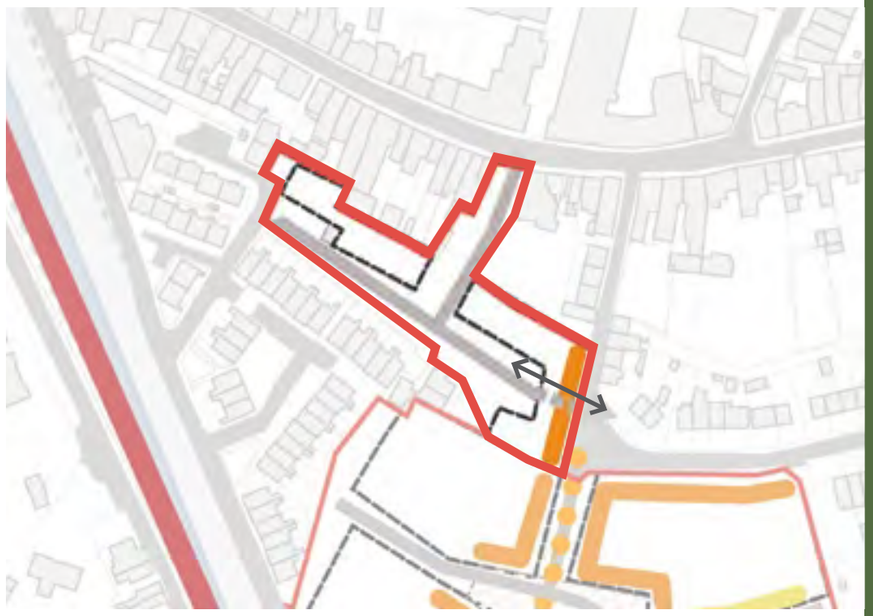
The site is reasonably steeply sloping, falling towards the south and towards the canal, where the highpoints are situated along the northern edge. There ish an approximate level difference of 3m from the lowest point in the south-eastern corner to the highest in the north-west.

The site lies within the zone of archaeological potential, is partly within the ACA, and a Protected Structure is adjacent to the site entrance. Reference and clear understanding of the historic built form and character of Connaught Street should be considered and reflected in the any design proposals.

- Extent of Opportunity Site
- Existing buildings
- Building, site or monument included in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage
- Architectural Conservation Area (ACA)
- Zone of archaeological importance
- Primary Road
- Green space
- Existing trees and hedges
- Existing parking
- Area subject to flood alleviation



- Proposed Development Blocks
- Active Frontage
- Proposed Courtyard / Shared Space
- Green space
- Proposed Pedestrian Route



Urban Design Principles

The site presents an opportunity to deliver sustainable backland development to facilitate compact growth whilst preserving the built heritage and character of Connaught Street.

Create an outward facing development where possible, generally locating development backing on to adjacent sites.

Create a courtyard space within the centre of the site, and enhance this through the use of textured surfaces, street trees and on-street planting. Implement a very slow car speed environment.

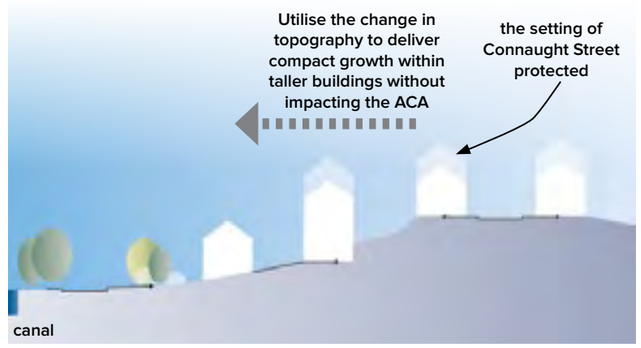
Create an active connection with a gateway from Patrick Street to enhance permeable backland connections.

Retain private access and create a landscaped buffer to protect the residential amenity of existing housing in College Park.

Provide car parking in the form of 'undercroft' style buildings while ensuring the creation of attractive ground floor façades to the street.

Potential to create a through-way (coach-house) between the central courtyard onto the adjacent Patrick Street, to create a distinct and characterful space and reflecting local context.

The topography of the site provides an opportunity to implement buildings that could be up to a storey/storey and a half taller, utilising the 3m site level difference, setting development proposals lower than those buildings situated on Connaught Street, but these should not be visible or overbear the built form and character of Connaught Street and any proposed development should demonstrate that there is no risk of impact on the setting of the ACA.



Utilise level change to implement taller buildings without the risk of impacting the context of Connaught Street as illustrated in the diagram above.

Ensure that the entrance building interacts with the adjacent street and creates a vista stop as it is perceived from Canal Banks.

Retain private access and create a landscaped buffer to protect the residential amenity of existing housing in College Park.



Create an entrance space through good quality public realm, street tree planting and landscaping - there is the potential to implement sustainable drainage features within the street space.

Protect residential amenity and maintain access to the rear of adjoining residential properties backing on to Connaught St Car park.

Potential to create vehicular access through the building to provide a link to Patrick's Street to ensure that a strong and continuous building line is retained and to reflect similar built form typologies within Athlone.

Site 3 - St Aloysius

Site Area: 2.49 ha

Land ownership: Private

Site Description: The site, a former school complex is situated on a gently sloping site with the northern portion forming the most elevated area.

Much of the southern part of the site is located within an area identified as being at risk of flooding.

The zoning of the site will be determined under the Joint Urban Area Plan for Athlone which will be accomplished by a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment of the lands.

Any development proposal within the this zone should be informed and accompanied by a site specific Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) carried out in accordance with the methodology set out in 'The Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2009'

Lyster House, situated within the eastern part of the site is included in Westmeath's Record of Protected Structures as being Regionally significant. This should inform the layout of the area within the context of this building.

The site may be accessed from Patrick Street/Parnell Square, from the southeast via Deerpark Road. The site is bound to the west by Canal Banks. The site is within immediate proximity of the Big Meadow and the canal and the relationship and connectivity to these spaces should be considered within development proposals.

The site is relatively large in area which may allow for transition to taller buildings from the adjacent 2 storey development. The site's area and location also provides an opportunity for a mix of uses that could provide an new anchor of activity for the western side of the Framework Area, which could align with new uses such as a hotel, student accommodation and private rented sector, to drive regeneration.

- Extent of Opportunity Site
- Existing buildings
- Canal
- CFRAM River Flood Extents
- Area subject to flood alleviation
- Building, site or monument included in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage
- Primary Road
- Green space
- Existing trees and hedges



- Potential Development Blocks
- Active Frontage
- Key Space Frontage
- Proposed Courtyard / Shared Space
- Green space
- Key Entrance Space
- Key Route
- Retained Heritage Building



Urban Design Principles

Potential to Create a new active street frontage onto Parnell Square / Patrick Street by extending the existing building line along Patrick Street/Parnell Square.

Potential to provide a new access route and thoroughfare through the development site connecting Patrick Street (and O'Connell Street / Connaught Street) to Canal Banks.

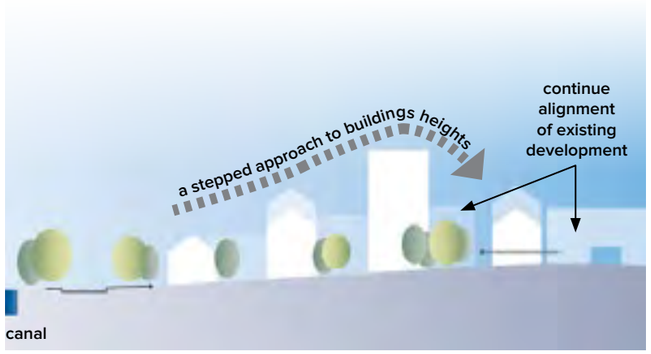
Retain Lyster House as a key building and provide appropriate green space ensuring surrounding development fronts onto this space.

Consider the inclusion of a landmark building to provide a focus to the redevelopment of the site and positive placemaking. Any development proposal should be underpinned by active travel measures.

The site is sufficiently large to provide a transition from the adjacent 2 storey development to taller buildings of up to 4, 5 and 6 storeys high. There may be an opportunity for a taller landmark building at the centre of the site and that could create a focus for the development, availing of views towards Big Meadow and Athlone Canal, subject to demonstrating that it would be appropriate

Create connections from the primary route through to Deerpark Road.

Create a cohesive street design across the new route that will connect Canal Bank to Patrick Street and on to Connaught Street.



Enclose spaces and ensure that buildings have aspect onto key areas of public realm. Ensure these spaces are designed as a space for pedestrians over car use, potential to implement shared surfaces and planting

New landmark building and key space to create a distinctive heart to the new development. This could include a building of height, providing it responds appropriately and sensitively to its immediate and wider context, as illustrated in the diagram above.

Implement a gateway feature to create a new entrance into the site from Canal Banks. Ensure that these buildings address both the new street and have aspect on to Canal Banks.

Respond positively to the Canal, with the potential to open up the culvert to increase the amenity of the space and provide a connected ecological corridor.



Implement an urban form that continues the alignment of existing development form and enclosure to St Patrick's Street and Parnell Square.

Lyster House should be retained as a key feature within the new masterplan. Ensure that the surrounding public realm and landscaping provide a setting for the context of this historic building.

Provide connectivity through the site to Deerpark Road but ensure that all proposed new roads prioritise pedestrians and cyclists and encourage slow speeds for vehicles.

Implement play spaces across the site within pedestrian prioritised streets and spaces as well as providing new play space within new green space.

Site 4 - Hanleys

Site Area: 0.53 ha

Land ownership: Mix of public and privately owned lands.

Site Description: This waterfront site, accessed from Abbey Road comprises disused warehouse buildings and their associated hardstandings on a brownfield site.

The site lies partly within the zone of archaeological potential and within the 100 year projected flood zone but subject mitigation through the Athlone Flood Alleviation Scheme.

The zoning of the site will be determined under the Joint Urban Area Plan for Athlone which will be accomplished by a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment of the lands.

Any development proposal within the this zone should be informed and accompanied by a site specific Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) carried out in accordance with the methodology set out in 'The Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2009'

The site is bound to the north by the railway line, by Abbey Road to the east, to the south by established trees and hedges which form the northern boundary of the Franciscan abbey and graveyard, and to the west by the Shannon. There are existing two storey houses situated to north of the railway line, the roofs of which are visible from the site.

The railway to the north is the main Dublin to Galway/ Westport line, and there will be noise associated with this which may require design requirements to proposed buildings. It may be possible to implement a terrace of buildings along the northern boundary, e.g. up to 3 or 4 storeys in height, to act as a noise attenuating barrier.

Athlone Marina is situated to the south of the Franciscan abbey and graveyard, and there may be an opportunity to propose some waterside connection between the site, the Marina and ultimately the Greenway bridge.

- Extent of Opportunity Site
- Existing buildings
- River Shannon/Canal
- CFRAM River Flood Extents
- Area subject to flood alleviation
- Building, site or monument included in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage
- Zone of archaeological importance
- Primary Road
- Railway
- Greenway – national cycle-path
- Green space
- Existing trees and hedges
- Potential Development Blocks
- Active Frontage
- Proposed Courtyard / Shared Space
- Green space
- Proposed Access





Urban Design Principles

Opportunity to optimise the architectural potential of this prime waterfront site. High quality architecture should respond to its setting, fronting the River Shannon.

Primary access will need to be taken from Abbey Road. There is the potential to implement a drive through access and implement a strong and continuous frontage on this edge.

Opportunity to optimise the architectural potential of this prime waterfront site. High quality architecture should respond to its setting, fronting the River Shannon.

Potential to use the building structure along the northern boundary to attenuate noise from the railway in to the site. If a structure taller than the prevailing 2 storey context it needs to demonstrate that is appropriate in the context of the lower scale and lower density of Abbey Road.

The site can be viewed from the west site of the river and new proposals should integrate well within this setting.

Potential to implement a courtyard building form with views onto the river.

Potential to implement some waterside moorings, leisure area or walkway along the western boundary within the Shannon.



Consider implementing along the boundary with the railway in order to attenuate the noise from trains. This will also need to respond positively to the dwellings and gardens to the north to avoid overshadowing

Create a courtyard space with an outlook over the Shannon to maximise the sites prime waterfront location.

Implement buildings at a lower level to allow sun to access central courtyard. Potential to implement dwellings with integral garages or studio spaces on the ground floor.

Implement a strong and continuous alignment along Abbey Road, with the potential to implement a small landscaped area and street tree planting to the front of buildings looking on to road.

Potential to implement a drive through into the courtyard space beyond, reflecting similar built form typologies within Athlone

Potential to implement surface water attenuation features within the courtyard space including tanking, rain gardens and planted attenuation basins to enhance biodiversity as well as manage surface water runoff.

Site 5 - Former Workhouse Site

Site Area: 0.98 ha

Land ownership: Mix of public and privately owned lands.

Site Description: The site is situated to the north of the town centre. It is bound to the west and south by Abbey Road, and to the east by Northgate Street.

The site is within the setting of Abbey Road, and the Franciscan Abbey ruin. Adjacent to the site is an extensive area of archaeological potential within the Abbey graveyard.

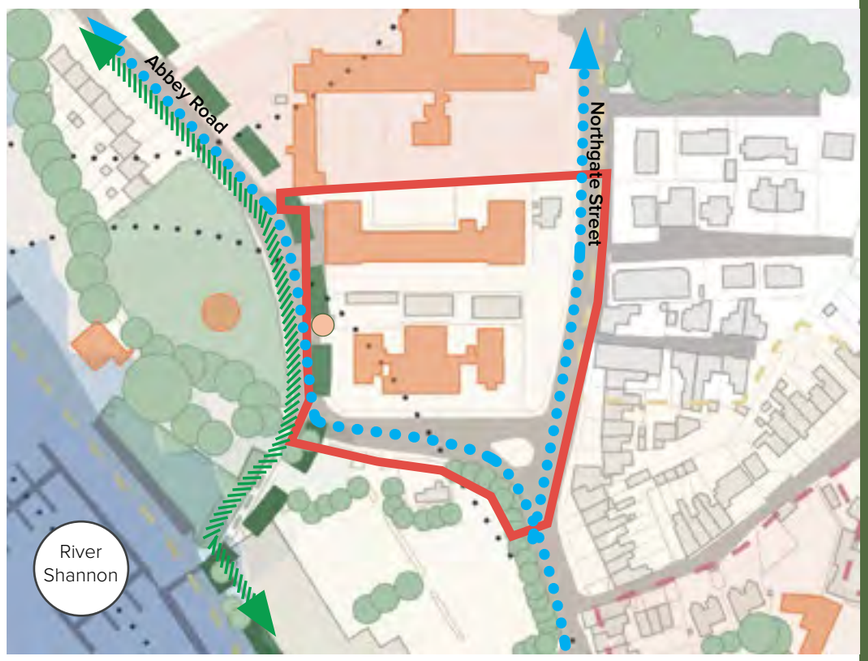
The site is bisected by an access route which is often used as a short cut by vehicles avoiding traffic lights on Northgate Street.

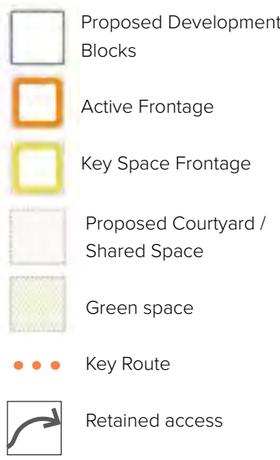
The site includes a number of protected buildings, including Saint Mary's Hall and the workhouse building. There are also additional existing buildings within the site that have been constructed recently, but are in poor repair.

It's within immediate walking distance of the Galway to Dublin Greenway and Abbey graveyard with good connectivity to Athlone Marina and the centre of the town.

The site is generally flat in nature and has limited existing trees or hedges within the site.









Urban Design Principles

Opportunity to retain and refurbish an historic building while sensitively introducing new development founded on sustainable development principles of delivering compact growth.

Potential to implement shared street within the centre of the site with pedestrian priority.

Any new building structures should be responsive to and reflective of the scale and setting of the existing protected buildings within the site.

There is potential to implement new street-tree planting and other landscaping within the site and to provide sustainable drainage as well as good quality public realm.

Explore the opportunity to create a shared garden/courtyard area within the setting of the workhouse.

Potential to introduce new crossings or shared surface treatment across Abbey Road and Northgate Street to promote safe and convenient connectivity towards the town centre, the Marina and the train station.

Retain and refurbish stone building. Provide a pedestrian priority shared street to act as public realm and a space for people over cars.

Create a courtyard spaces around former Workhouse building, with opportunities to open out onto space from ground floor of associated buildings.

Consider the context of the existing stone building associated with the Former Workhouse, on the western boundary and how it could be incorporated within any development proposals.

Potential for shared surfaces to enhance movement for pedestrians and cycles



Create a threshold space which could be identified through change in surface material and landscape treatment, street trees or public art.

Potential to implement flexible units, which would provide space for small commercial ventures - business start ups and/or meanwhile uses. Refer to strategy for Athlone Digital Hub project.

Potential to remove existing boundary and to implement a more permeable approach to promote activity and connect into and out of the site.

Site 6 - Land South of Athlone Station

Site Area: 4.32 ha

Land ownership: Privately owned lands.

Site Description: The site, a parcel of underutilised lands which has become overgrown with grass and shrubbery is bound by Southern Station Road. The topography of the site falls from Southern Station Road to the rear of properties St Francis Terrace.

There is an opportunity to utilise this height difference through split level buildings that can be accessed from both Southern Station Road and from a new access along the south boundary.

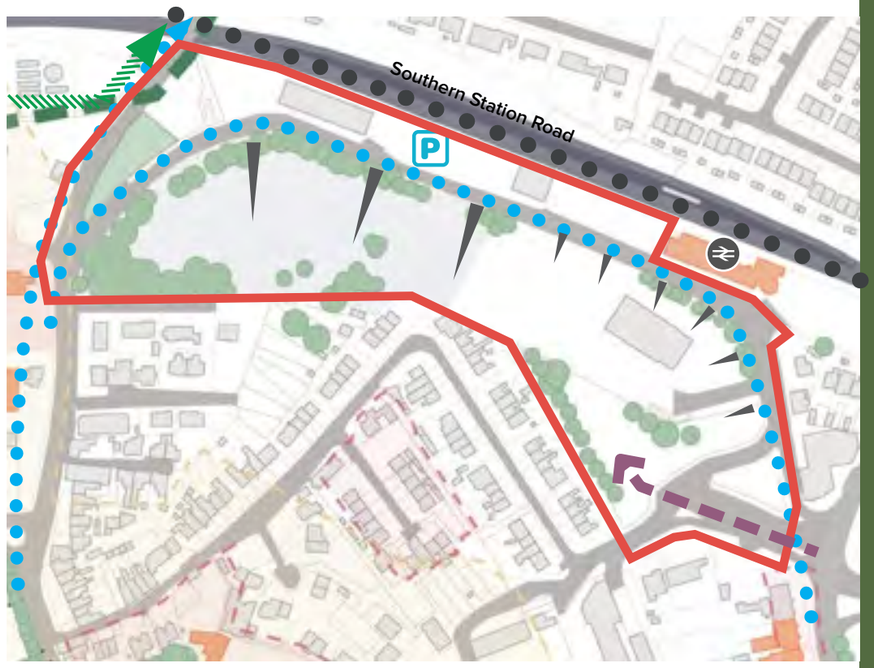
Public realm associated with this slope will need to respond appropriately to the change in levels.

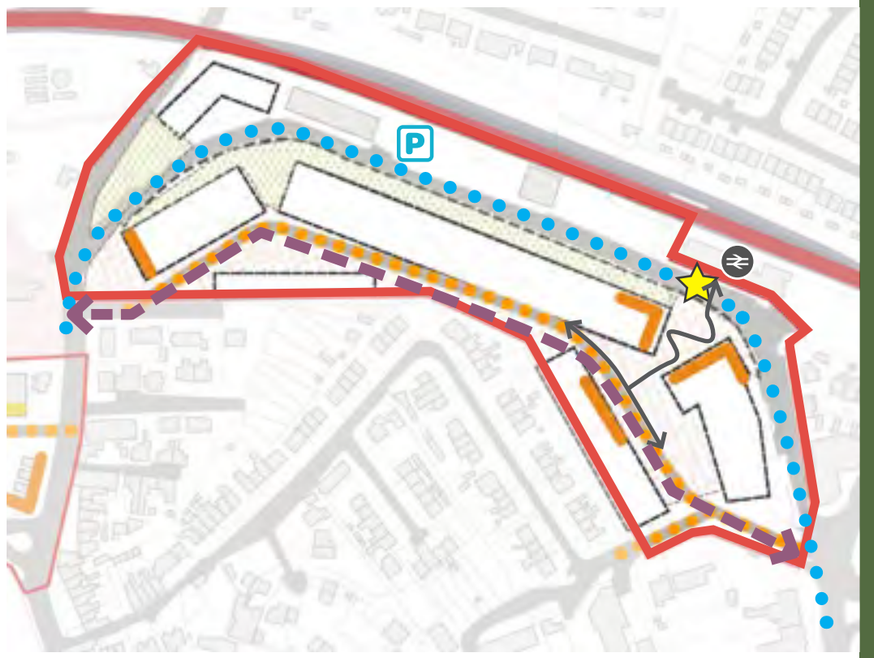
An existing stone wall runs along the northern boundary of the opportunity site, along the Southern Station Road. This should be retained, and any development set back sufficiently to allow space to access new buildings and provide public realm to proposed buildings.

Athlone Integrated Bus & Train Station opens onto the eastern end of Southern Station Road. Development proposals should front onto this space, providing a positive threshold to the town and providing clear and easy access into the town centre for visitors and commuters.

The delivery of the Railway Link Road is a key infrastructural intervention to facilitate primary linkages through the town and to alleviate traffic congestion in the town centre. The Urban Design proposals reflect this strategy.

- Extent of Opportunity Site
- Existing buildings
- Building, site or monument included in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage
- Architectural Conservation Area (ACA)
- Zone of archaeological importance
- Existing Road
- Railway
- Greenway – national cycle-path
- Green space
- Existing trees and hedges
- Slope
- Existing parking
- Athlone Integrated Bus & Train Station
- Railway Link Road
- Potential Development Blocks
- Active Frontage
- Proposed Courtyard / Shared Space
- Green space
- Key Entrance Space
- Key Route
- Proposed Pedestrian Route





Urban Design Principles

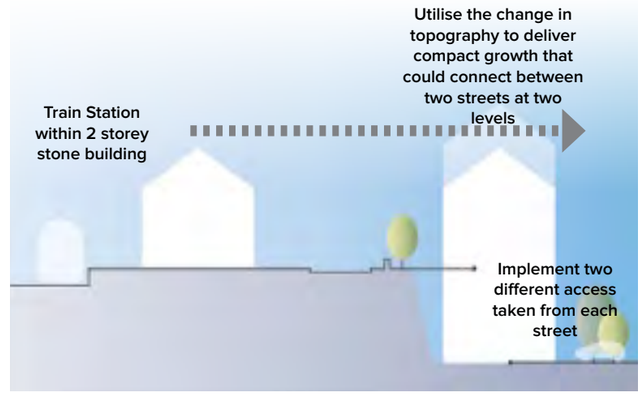
Provide active frontage onto the junction of Northgate Street and Southern Station Road. There is an opportunity to provide an area of public realm with the potential for an active frontage that will interact with this space.

The dimensions of the site provide sufficient space for dual aspect buildings that will address both Southern Station Road and the new road running along the southern boundary.

The topography of the site provides an opportunity to implement buildings that may be of a similar scale to Athlone train station fronting out to Southern Station Road and taller where they front onto the south.

Southern Station Road will need to continue to provide access to the railway station. A new southern road should be designed at slow speeds and implement shared surfaces and enhanced public realm that is pedestrian and cycle prioritised.

The creation of a key link road along the south of the site connecting the ‘Crescent’ and Grace Park Road will be required as a strategic link in the wider town network.





Potential to utilise the site's topography to deliver development with access taken from the Southern Station Road and from a new 'Railway Link Road' which should be designed as an urban street, and over different levels, as indicated by the diagram above.

Create an active space at the junction of Southern Station Road and Northgate Street to create an entrance into this Station Quarter

Create an attractive threshold space to the entrance of the train station

Town houses could provide higher density development within a slow traffic zone and new street space.

Buildings to have dual aspect on to Southern Station Road, and proposed Railway Link Road and on to the new street space within the development.

Central to the development is the Railway Link Road, a key infrastructural intervention to facilitate primary linkages through the town and to alleviate traffic congestion in the town centre.

Site 7 - Loughanaskin

Site Area: 4.31 ha

Land ownership: Mix of public and privately owned lands.

Site Description: The topography of the site varies and comprises two main areas separated by Grace Park Road, There are significant differences in levels between the main body of the site and Saint Mary's Square; approximately 5 metres. The undeveloped lands (lands previously occupied by housing which have now been cleared) to the east of Grace Park Road, these lands rise to the railway line.

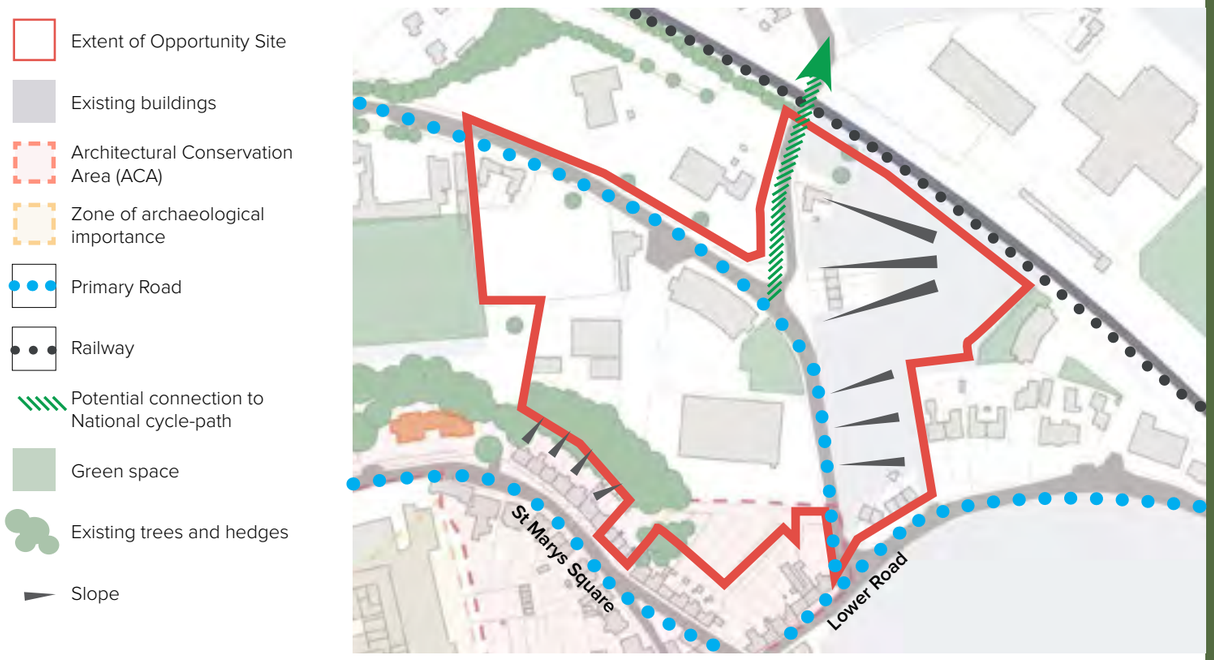
Grace Park Road runs diagonally through the site, leading from Lower Road in the east and towards Athlone centre in the west.

Saint Hilda's Special School and Melville football club are located to the west of the site to either side of Grace Park Road.

There is an immediate connection to the to the Greenway, which runs north of the site via a route between Saint Hilda's and the site.

The site is bound to the north east by the railway.

There are a number of existing buildings within the site including a number of existing industrial buildings within the side boundary. A recently developed three story office building associated with the Intreo Centre and this building will be retained within the site.





Urban Design Principles

The site is now subject to the Loughanaskin Regeneration Masterplan 2023 that sets out the Vision for Loughanaskin. Development proposals should align with this document.

The Master Plan proposes a high-quality design to have an integrated and accessible space and in particular to respond to the level differences between Saint Mary's Square and main body of the site and to integrate connectivity to the Greenway through the site.

The Intreo Centre will be retained and has been integrated into the scheme design as a key building within the development proposals.

The site is proposed to be a mixed use, high density development comprising residential, commercial, educational and business uses as well as a significant amount of high-quality public realm with a focus on creating a new pedestrian and cycle connection between Saint Mary Square and Greenway.

Implement an outward facing development that creates shared streets with a priority for pedestrians and cyclists and creates high quality public realm design.

Utilise the level difference between St Mary's Square and the site to implement a new public cycle and walk way that will enhance connectivity between Athlone Town Centre and the Greenway integral to the site, as shown in the image above.



Create high quality residential led mixed use development with aspect and interface onto streets and spaces. Consider uses that will encourage active surveillance onto public realm, in particular the Greenway

Create a series of high quality areas of open space ranging in character including a formal central space and less formal green spaces that provide semi-private green spaces for use by residents.

Site 8 - The Strand and the Strand Car park

Site Area: 0.34 ha

Land ownership: Mix of public and privately owned lands.

Site Description: This prime waterfront site, located within the historic core has the potential to unlock major development at this location.

This is a highly visible site, particularly from key cultural protected structures such as Athlone Castle and Athlone Town Bridge as well as from Burgess Park and the Weir.

Parts of the site will form part of glimpsed views to the water from Church Street.

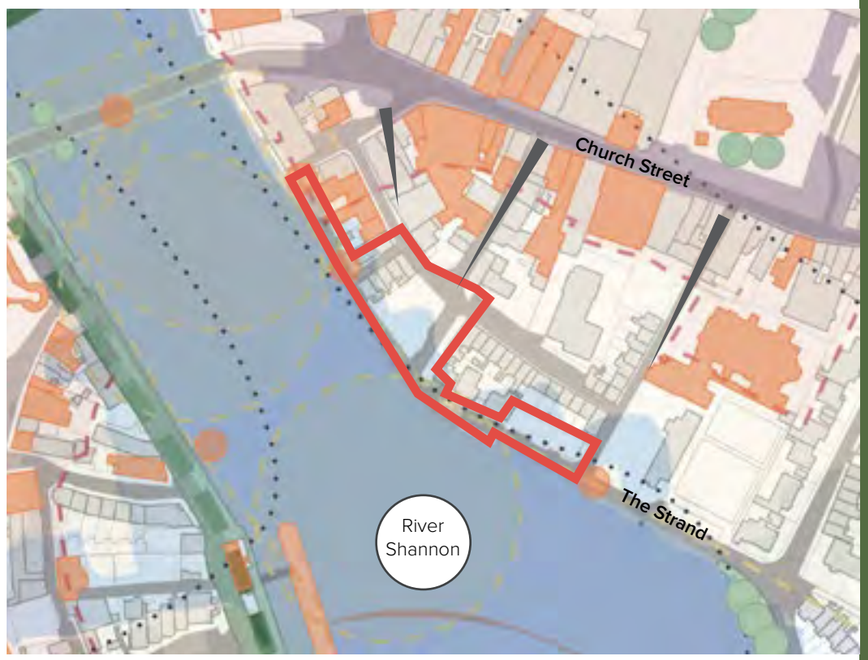
The whole of the site is located within the floodplain, but subject mitigation through the Athlone Flood Alleviation Scheme.

The zoning of the site will be determined under the Joint Urban Area Plan for Athlone which will be accomplished by a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment of the lands.

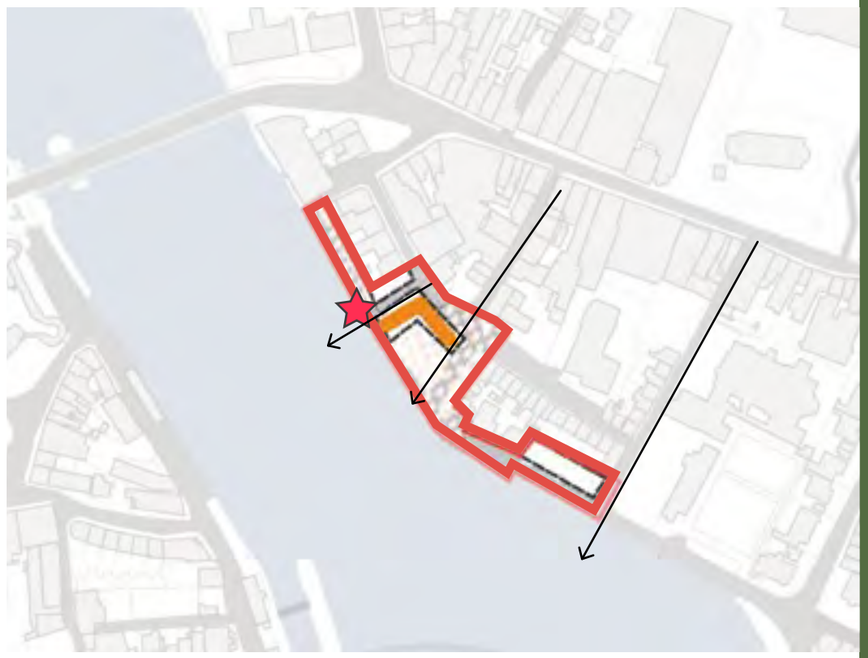
Any development proposal within the this zone should be informed and accompanied by a site specific Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) carried out in accordance with the methodology set out in 'The Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2009'

The site comprises the Strand Car Park occupying a prime waterfront location and spans north-west beyond Barnett Street encompassing lands to the rear of Strand Street fronting the River Shannon. The site extends south east along the water front to a covering a small surface car park to the rear of dwellings fronting on to Strand Street.

- Extent of Opportunity Site
- Existing buildings
- River Shannon
- CFRAM River Flood Extents
- Area subject to flood alleviation
- Building, site or monument included in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage
- Architectural Conservation Area (ACA)
- Zone of archaeological importance
- Existing trees and hedges
- Slopes from Church Street towards the river



- Potential Development Blocks
- Active Frontage
- Proposed Courtyard / Shared Space
- Green space
- Historic crossing point marker retained and enhanced.
- Key vistas retained



Urban Design Principles

Development potential exists to activate the waterfront at this location in a phased approach beginning with the development of the Str and carpark.

Potential to incorporate a flexible public space surrounded by built form.

Limited space provided may require innovation in respect of proposed building form, including patio or town housing with integrated private amenity space. A similar approach should be implemented within the eastern parking space.

Retain vista from Church Street towards the water. Retain and frame vista from Lloyds Lane to the River Shannon.

Any development proposal on the subject site must demonstrate that due consideration has been given to key views of the site from the surrounding area particularly from the western banks of the river, in order to ensure that the historic context and anything associated with protected views and ensure that setting of the site is maintained.

The topography of the site provides an opportunity to implement buildings that may be taller in height, any such development proposals would need to demonstrate the appropriateness of this approach.

Explore whether it dual frontage properties could be developed along Barnett Street.

Long term potential to redevelop Barnett Street as part of wider regeneration to activate Athlone's waterfront.



The potential for proposed or refurbished development onto Barnett to have aspect onto the Strand as well.

Opportunity to implement a flexible event space that could accommodate an outdoor screening area, theatre etc. as well as markets and other temporary events throughout the year.

Retain the view toward the Shannon from Church Street to retain this distinctive Athlone characteristic - potential to frame the view with a strong and continuous building line.

Historic bridge crossing marker retained. Potential to implement public art along this corridor delivered through art schemes associated with development.

Limited space for development will require an innovative approach to development. Potential to implement town house or patio house typologies where private amenity space is provided within the building footprint.

A similar approach could be implemented within the eastern car park area, where space is limited. Private amenity and/or car-parking on the ground floor.

Site 9 - St Mary's Car Park

Site Area: 0.34ha

Land ownership: Privately owned.

Site Description: This existing car park site experiences a significant change in topography; ranging up to 5 metres between St Mary's Square and Irishtown. The former building line along Sean Costello Street has largely been eradicated as a result of existing development.

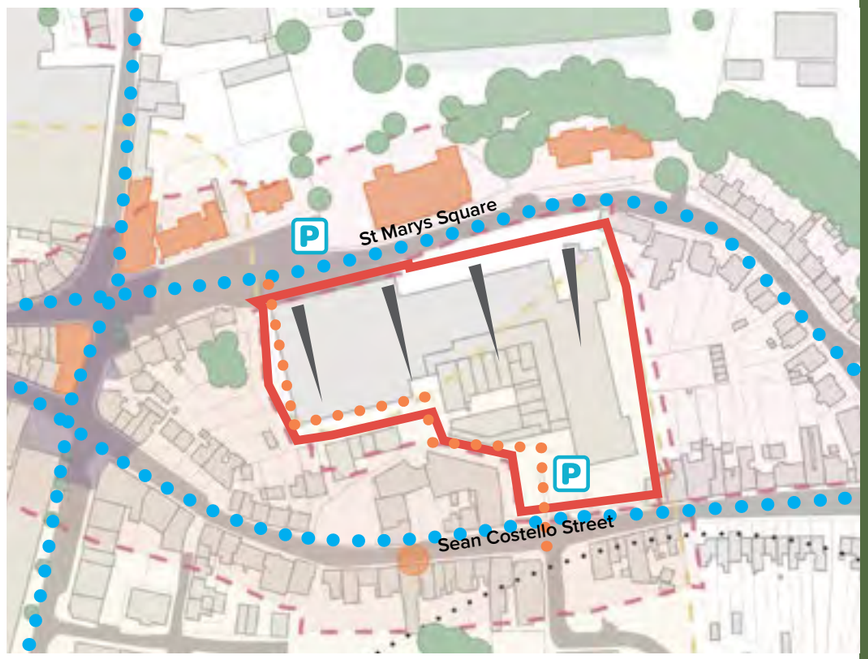
There are a number of buildings situated along St Mary's Square that are included in Westmeath's Record of Protected Structures as being Regionally significant and the aspect, scale and massing of any development proposed along the southern boundary of this road should respond sensitively to this context.

The site surrounded to the east, south and west by an Architectural Conservation Area and partly within a Zone of Archaeological Importance.

The existing residential apartments located to the north of Sean Costello Street are served by an access roadway that runs to St. Mary's Car Park.

The existing car park and former Texas site has a significant massing, rising to two storeys on the north, and up to five storeys along the south and between 50m and 70m depth.

- Extent of Opportunity Site
- Existing buildings
- Building, site or monument included in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage
- Architectural Conservation Area (ACA)
- Zone of archaeological importance
- Primary road
- Secondary road
- Green space
- Existing trees and hedges
- Slope
- Existing parking



- Potential Development Blocks
- Active Frontage
- Key Space Frontage
- Proposed Courtyard / Shared Space
- Green space



Urban Design Principles

Implement a strong, positive and continuous frontage of a high quality and appropriate scale and massing along St Mary's Square to respond and contribute to the surrounding Architectural Conservation Area (ACA).

Reintroduce continuous building line which will be sympathetic to both the ACA and Protected Structures (PS).

Provide a gateway or threshold space into the site from Seán Costello Street.

Continued access to the existing apartments and businesses located on the southern boundary and provide good quality public realm as an interface between future and existing development.

Potential to implement a courtyard space within the centre of the site that will respond to the site's topography.

Implement development proposals that will provide aspect onto central space and to the adjacent primary streets, i.e. St Mary's Square and Seán Costello Street whilst positively responding to the ACA.

Implement a strong, positive and continuous building line onto St Mary's Square, with a building height of up to 2/2.5 storeys high, reflective of the adjacent building and provide enclosure to the context of the historic space.

Consider and potentially utilise the significant difference in topography across the site. There is the potential to implement a series of courtyard spaces either within the core or on roof level.

Accommodate the accesses into the adjacent buildings that are situated along the alley way to the rear of Irishtown. Implement landscaping and shared street spaces to create a sense of place.



Significant plot depth could allow for a series of internal shared amenity spaces within the proposed development core. Potential to provide a mix of uses at lower ground level to break out into this space.

Reinstate the building form along Irishtown and generate a gateway space into the development site and provide connectivity up to St Mary's Square along traffic calmed street.

Site 10 - Dunnes Stores Car Park

Site Area: 1.77ha

Land ownership: Privately owned.

Site Description: The site comprises an existing car park off John Broderick Street close to Dunnes Stores, north of the Golden Island shopping centre.

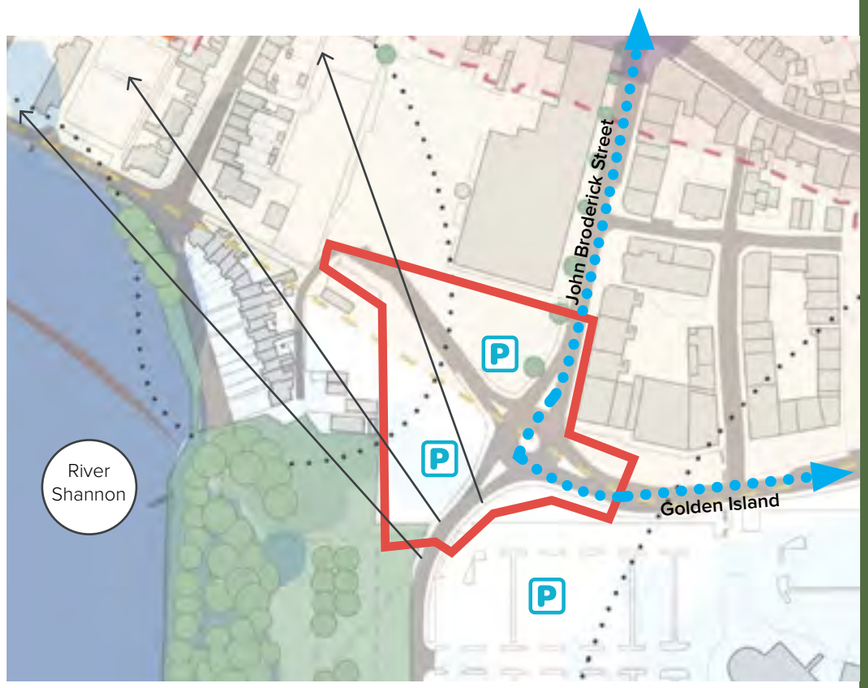
The northern boundary is formed by the rear entrance to Dunnes Stores, a building of approximately three storeys in height, that reduces to two storeys where it meets Seán Costello Street.

The site is bound to the south by the car park of the Golden Island shopping centre, and the southeast by Burgess Park. The western boundary is formed of a four storey recent mixed use development of business units on the ground floor with residential above.

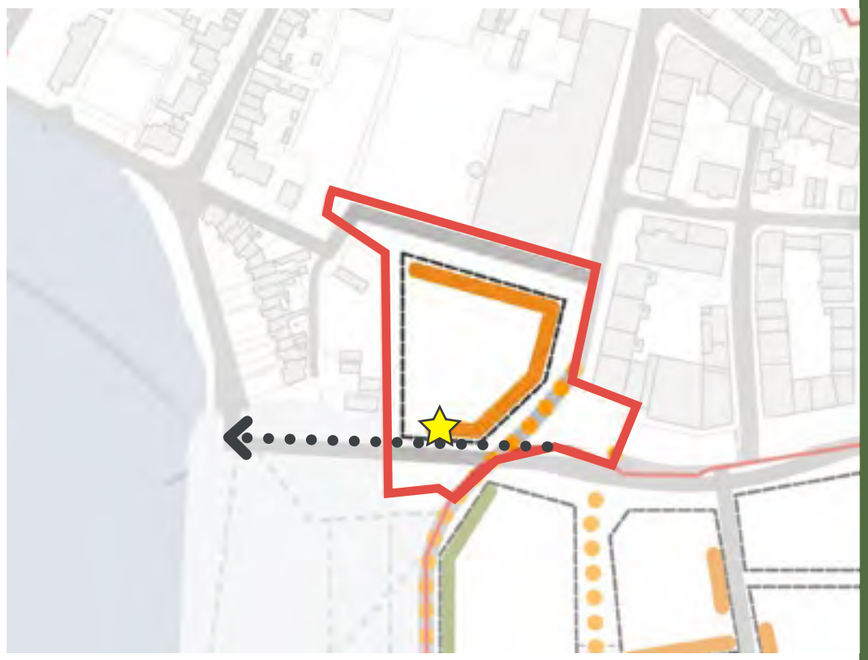
Views are available above the roof line of adjacent development of key buildings including the steeple of St Peter and St Paul's church and St Mary's Church of Ireland and the Franciscan Friary Hall to the north-west of the site.

There are limited views to the Shannon from the site, which are glimpsed through Burgess Park. Views west from within site capture spires / steeples of Church St Peter & Paul, Church of Ireland and the Friary.

- Extent of Opportunity Site
- Existing buildings
- River Shannon
- CFRAM River Flood Extents
- Area subject to flood alleviation
- Architectural Conservation Area (ACA)
- Zone of archaeological importance
- Primary Road
- Green space
- Existing trees and hedges
- Existing parking
- Key views to landmarks



- Potential Development Blocks
- Active Frontage
- Green Frontage
- Proposed Courtyard / Shared Space
- Green space
- Key Route
- Potential pedestrian route
- Key building to respond to Burgess Park



Urban Design Principles

Proposed development form should respond and have aspect onto adjacent existing development including buildings along John Broderick Street and Dunnes Stores.

The height of any new development should be informed by a critical analysis of the site's context and surrounding area mindful of the key views within the immediate context of cultural assets.

Vehicular access should be retained into a reduced car parking area to the west of Dunnes Stores.

Potential to implement new pedestrian-cycle access along the south of the development site, providing connectivity to the Shannon. This may provide some limited vehicular access.

There is the potential to reduce the engineering of southern part of John Broderick Street and provide additional good quality public realm.

Ensure that the site will provide positive aspect and appropriate height and massing to any proposed development associated with the Golden Island site and Burgess Park to the southeast.

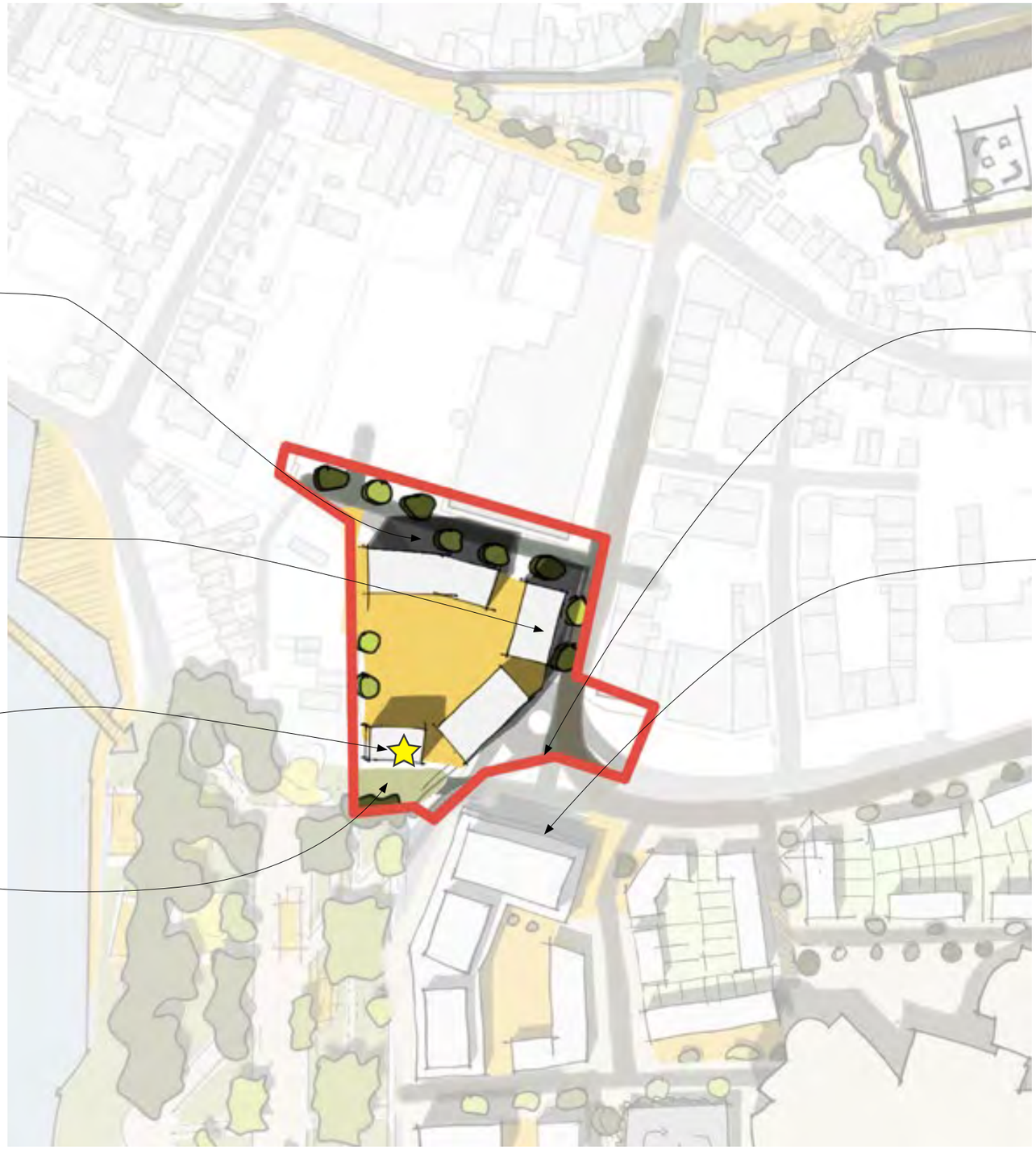
Potential exists for car parking in the form of 'undercroft' style development while ensuring the creation of attractive ground floor façades to the street.

Create an avenue space between the development site and the southern boundary of Dunnes Stores while continuing to provide access to the car park in the west and potential future development

Development should respond in scale to the context of the existing development that runs to the east of John Broderick Street.

Key building to respond to Burgess Park

Potential to open up a foot/ cycle connection to the strand.



Consider the public realm within at the south of John Broderick Street to provide a positive area of public realm in the context of a key building situated to the west end of the Golden Island access road.

Consider the interface of the proposed development with the adjacent Opportunity sites, ensure that the development is outward facing and responds positively to the context of other key buildings and public realm.

Site 11 - Irishtown

Site Area: 1.06ha

Land ownership: Privately owned.

Site Description: The site is bound to the south, and accessed via, the Golden Island access road. The site is bound to the east and west by existing mixed use development and consists of an area of overgrown trees and shrubs.

The development located to the east is five storeys in height with windows fronting onto this site.

The development to the west of the site is three storeys and has some secondary windows with aspect onto the site.

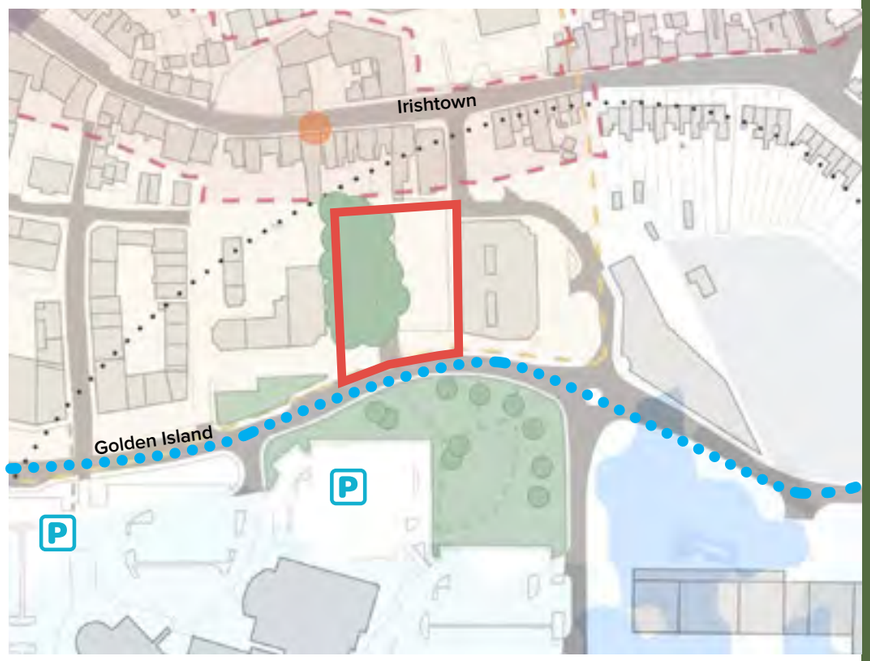
The northern boundary is formed of service yard access providing access to the adjacent businesses.

There is the potential to connect to Inis Carraig from the northern boundary.

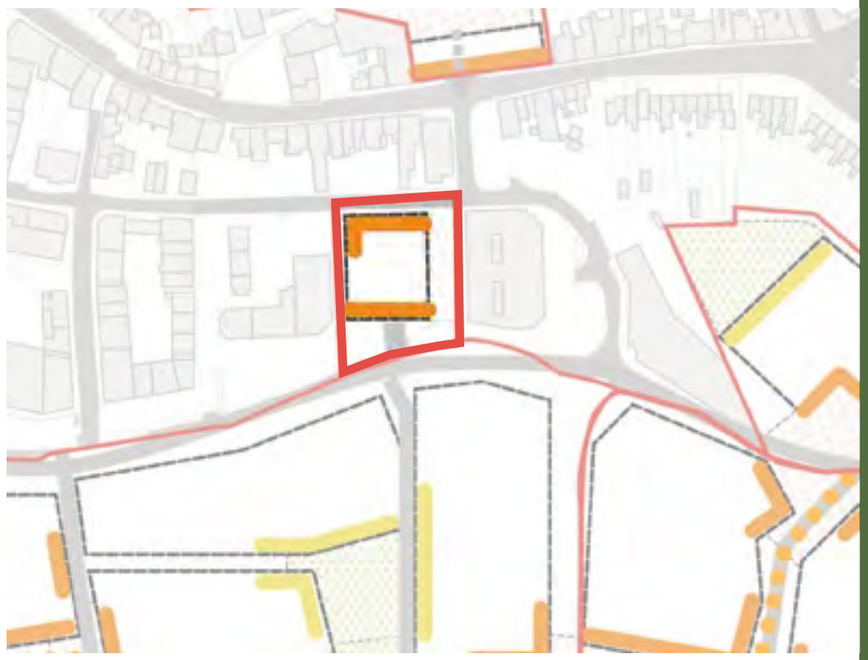
There is no parking area currently associated with the site. Adjacent development provides an area of parking to the south, alongside Golden Island.

There is an existing but disused access point both taken from Golden Island and from the access road along the northern boundary.

- Extent of Opportunity Site
- Existing buildings
- CFRAM River Flood Extents
- Area subject to flood alleviation
- Building, site or monument included in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage
- Architectural Conservation Area (ACA)
- Zone of archaeological importance
- Primary Road
- Green space
- Existing trees and hedges
- Existing parking



- Proposed Development Blocks
- Active Frontage
- Key Space Frontage
- Proposed Courtyard / Shared Space
- Green space



Urban Design Principles

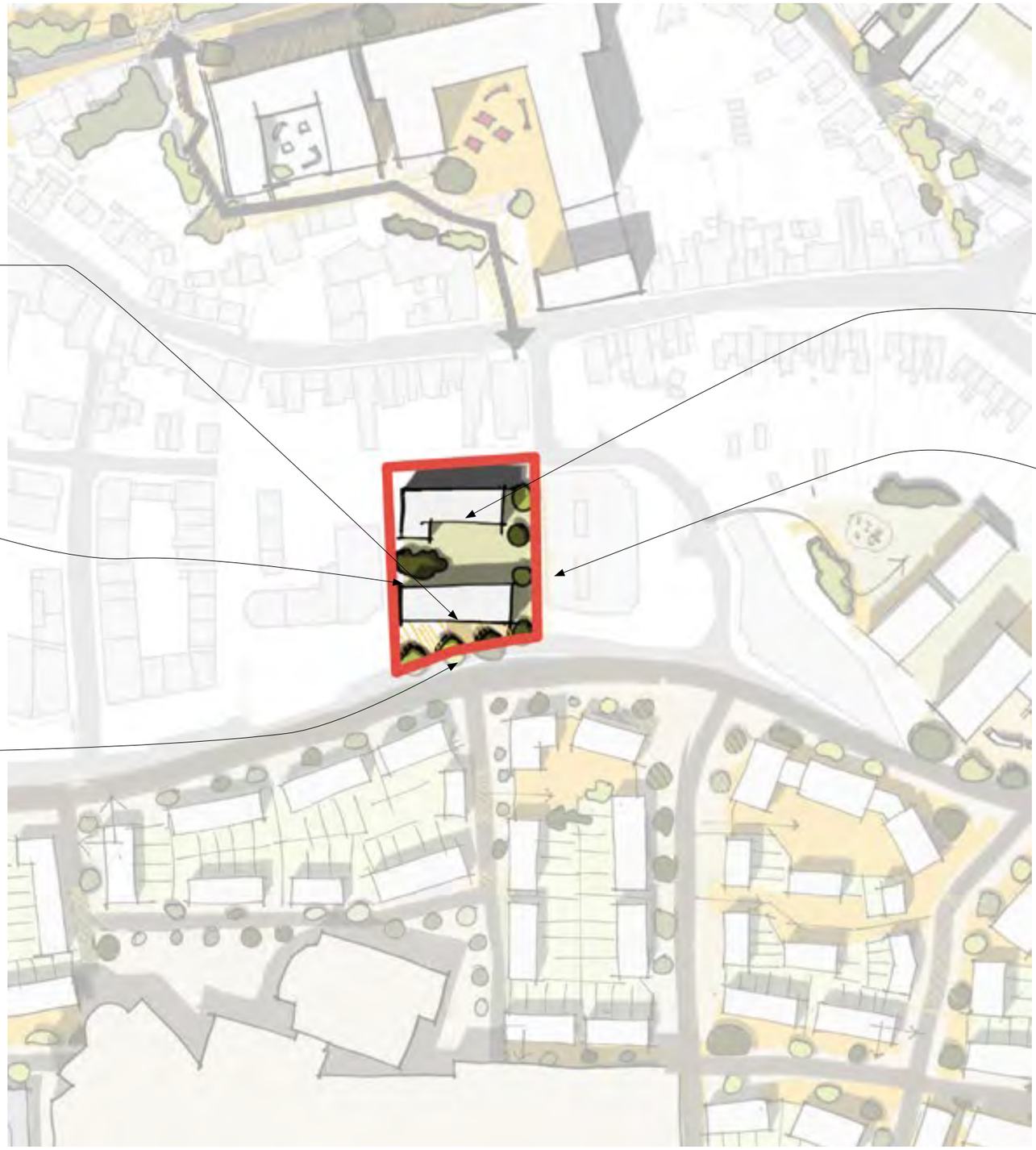
The development form should follow the building line of the adjacent development along the Golden Island access road.

Potential to implement a strong building alignment along the northern boundary and to provide a road that connects to Inis Carraig.

Proposed building heights to a similar height to the adjacent development subject to high quality architectural design.

Future development should ensure that sufficient light and amenity is provided to windows with primary aspect for residential properties on the adjacent buildings.

If the existing trees and shrubs are required to be removed, replacement good quality trees and green spaces should be introduced to street frontages and to internal shared amenity spaces.



Provide development parcel that generally follows the alignment of the adjacent development along the Golden Island access road. Development should be of a similar scale to adjacent buildings

Manage, consolidate or replant the trees and shrub planting within the development with the potential to implement a high quality landscape scheme within a shared amenity space within the centre of the site.

Implement street tree planting and other landscaping to the southern elevation and consider implementing a wider landscape strategy for this road.

Consider implementing a development parcel to the north of the site within access that could be opened up from Inis Carraig to the east.

Development proposals to ensure suitable separation distances are maintained to allow for adequate light and appropriate aspect to and from liveable rooms between the adjacent development.

Site 12 -South of St Patrick's Terrace

Site Area: 1.17ha

Land ownership: Privately and publicly owned.

Site Description: The site comprises an undeveloped area of green space to the south of St Patrick's Terrace. The site is general flat in nature and is used as an informal playing pitch.

The northern boundary is formed of the rear gardens to mid 20th century terraces that are accessed from Castlemaine Street.

The west of the site is bound by a four storey mixed use building that forms a triangular edge where it meets the site.

The south and south-eastern boundaries are formed by the Golden Island access road and the Diskin trading centre beyond this.

The site is located within the floodplain, but subject mitigation through the Athlone Flood Alleviation Scheme.

The zoning of the site will be determined under the Joint Urban Area Plan for Athlone which will be accomplished by a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment of the lands.

Any development proposal within the this zone should be informed and accompanied by a site specific Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) carried out in accordance with the methodology set out in 'The Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2009'

- Extent of Opportunity Site
- Existing buildings
- CFRAM River Flood Extents
- Area subject to flood alleviation
- Architectural Conservation Area (ACA)
- Zone of archaeological importance
- Primary Road
- Green space
- Existing trees and hedges
- Existing parking



- Proposed Development Blocks
- Active Frontage
- Key Space Frontage
- Proposed Courtyard / Shared Space
- Green space
- Key Entrance Space
- Key Route



Urban Design Principles

Provide primary frontage along Golden Island boundaries with the potential to implement an enclosed space that responds to the triangular building to the west.

Provide a secondary frontage to the rear of this block that could have aspect onto a new smaller green space to the north.

Building heights should be similar to the building to the west of the site, i.e. 4 storeys.

If a change in storey heights is proposed across the site, either lower or taller, this should be done progressively, limiting the change to 1 storey between each transition.

Any development proposal should accommodate a key area of public realm where the development meets the Diskin Centre Site.

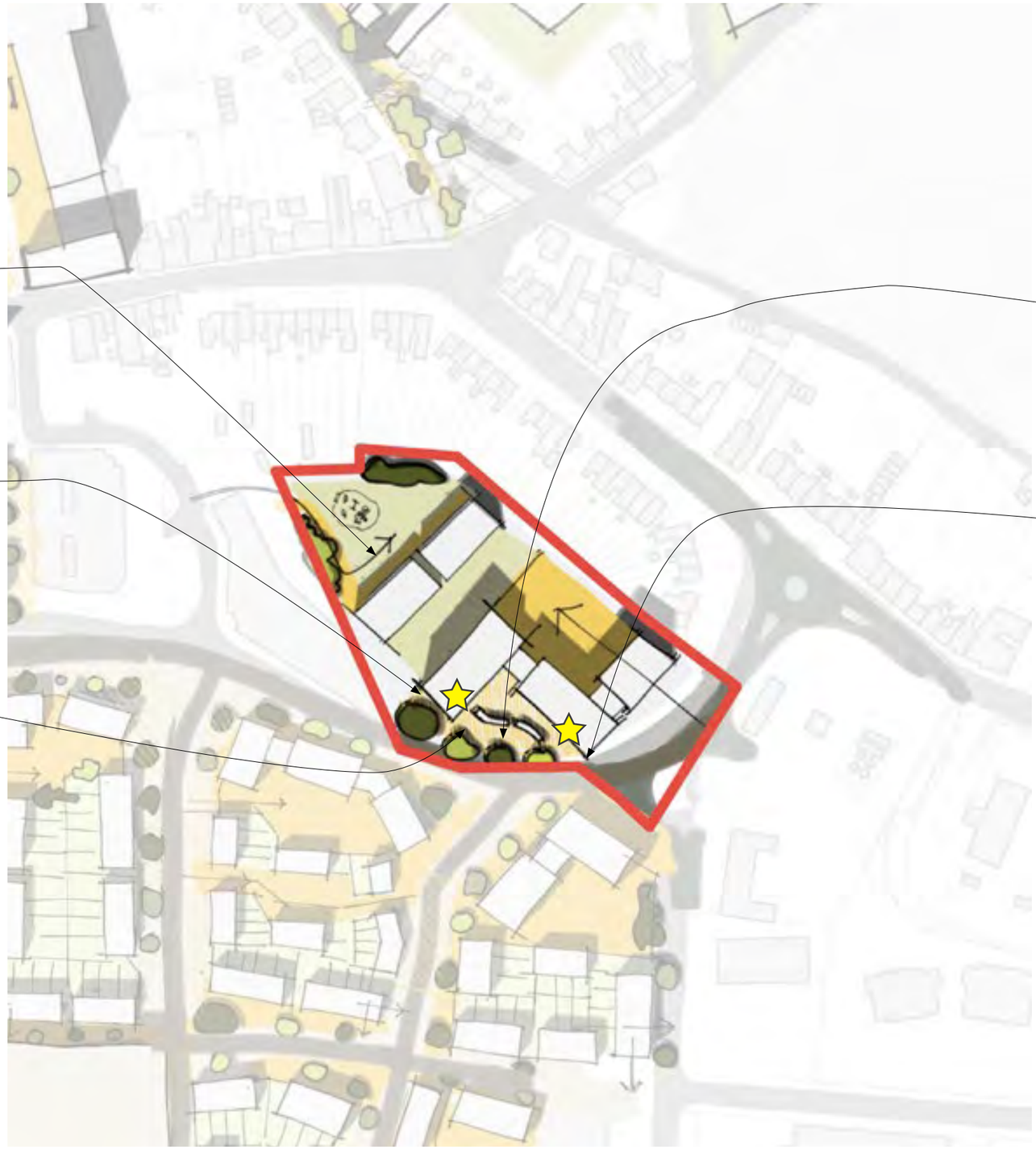
Proposed development surrounding this key space associated with the entrance to Diskin Centre Site, should provide enclosure to the space and the building(s) should provide a vista stop to the new access route.

The design, form and massing of the proposed site frontage should positively respond and complement the development of the Diskin Centre Opportunity Site to the south implementing a shared approach to public realm fronting Golden Island Road.

Implement smaller area of green space and enable limited access to residential development overlooking this space. Ensure that there is aspect and overlooking onto the semi private garden.

Ensure alignment of new building relates positively to triangular neighbouring building.

Enclosed space to create entrance place into Diskin Opportunity site and Golden Island access road.



Implement public realm to new entrance space with seating, planting and street tree, planting and enhanced public realm design.

Potential for taller buildings in this location, particularly along the north of the entrance space. Ensure that any proposed development should relate positively to adjacent building heights.

Site 13 - Diskin Centre

Site Area: 2.91ha

Land ownership: Privately owned.

Site Description : The Diskin site is currently in use as a commercial and trading estate and constitutes a large run of industrial and commercial units of up to two storeys in height and a large area of car-parking, forecourts and hard standing.

The northern boundary is formed by the Golden Island access road, to the east by Golden Island Road, which connects to the open countryside and farmland.

The site is bound to the west by the Golden Island shopping centre and to the south by the open countryside, other than a small corner in the southeast where the boundary runs around a more modern light industrial complex that includes a car and tyre repair business of up to 4 storeys in height, which itself is situated along the boundary to the open countryside.

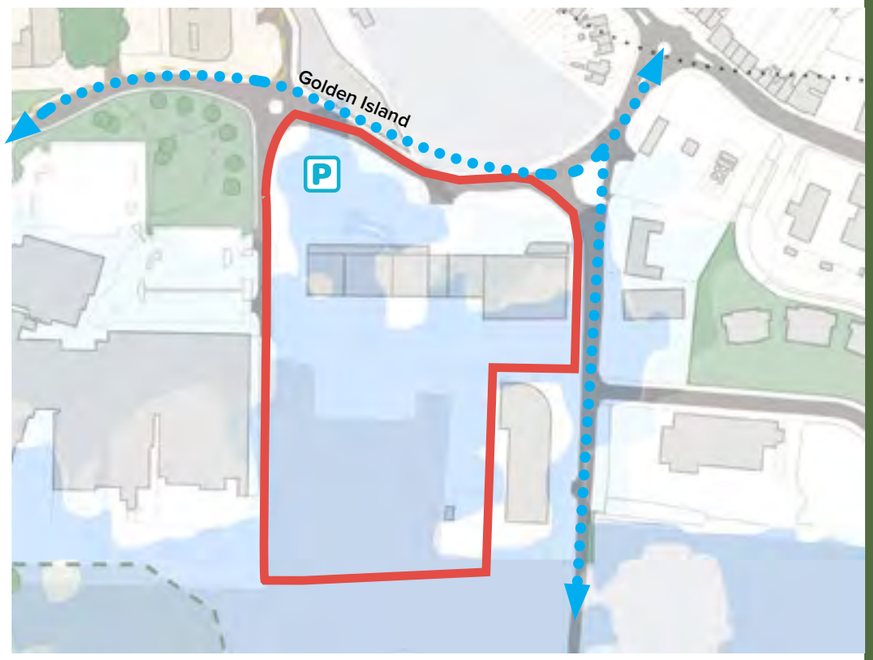
The site's primary access should be taken from the north and adjacent to the Site to the South of St Patrick's Terrace Opportunity Site and will meet the proposed Golden Island site.

The site is located within the floodplain, but subject mitigation through the Athlone Flood Alleviation Scheme.

The zoning of the site will be determined under the Joint Urban Area Plan for Athlone which will be accomplished by a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment of the lands.

Any development proposal within the this zone should be informed and accompanied by a site specific Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) carried out in accordance with the methodology set out in 'The Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2009'

- Extent of Opportunity Site
- Existing buildings
- CFRAM River Flood Extents
- Area subject to flood alleviation
- Primary Road
- Green space
- Existing trees and hedges
- Existing parking



- Proposed Development Blocks
- Active Frontage
- Key Space Frontage
- Proposed Courtyard / Shared Space
- Green space
- Key Entrance Space
- Key Route
- Vista stop building
- Key View



Urban Design Principles

The site's northern access will need to respond to the proposals for the adjacent Opportunity sites.

It's access point should be designed as a significant entrance space and enclose the public realm.

The access should be designed to prioritise pedestrians and cyclists and ensure slow vehicular speeds.

There is an opportunity to deliver development that has a prevailing height of up to four or five storeys in height to relate positively to the adjacent development.

It may be appropriate to step development down to the south of the site, where it meets the open countryside.

Submission material will need to demonstrate how the development proposals responds appropriately to its context.

Provide glimpsed views into and out of this new masterplanned street to the south to the open countryside.

Sufficient space should provide a significant green space and allow for landscaping that will provide a soft edge to the development proposals.

Potential to implement key buildings at the northern entrance space to ensure enclosure and create a distinctive area of public realm. These could potentially be taller given the context of the adjacent open space.

Implement primary through route that is reflective of historic built form consistent with the historic street typology found in Athlone and connects logically with the Golden Island Site.

Ensure that the proposed development relates positively to the interface, built form and alignment of the adjacent Opportunity Sites.



Ensure that gateway from Golden Island access road is strong and distinctive and relates to the adjacent urban design principles of the Site to the south of St Patrick's Terrace, to form a comprehensive entrance space.

Consider providing glimpsed views through the development onto the open countryside to the south.

Create sequence of key spaces, where buildings identify small areas of public realm and building façades are utilised as street enclosure and vista stops.

Site 14 - Golden Island Shopping Centre

Site Area: 6.92ha

Land ownership: Privately owned.

Site Description: This large site is currently in use as a large shopping mall including a Tesco Superstore, fast food outlets and a range of retailers. The existing building covers a large area but is relatively low lying, of up to two storey in height. A significant part of the site is formed of associated open car-parking.

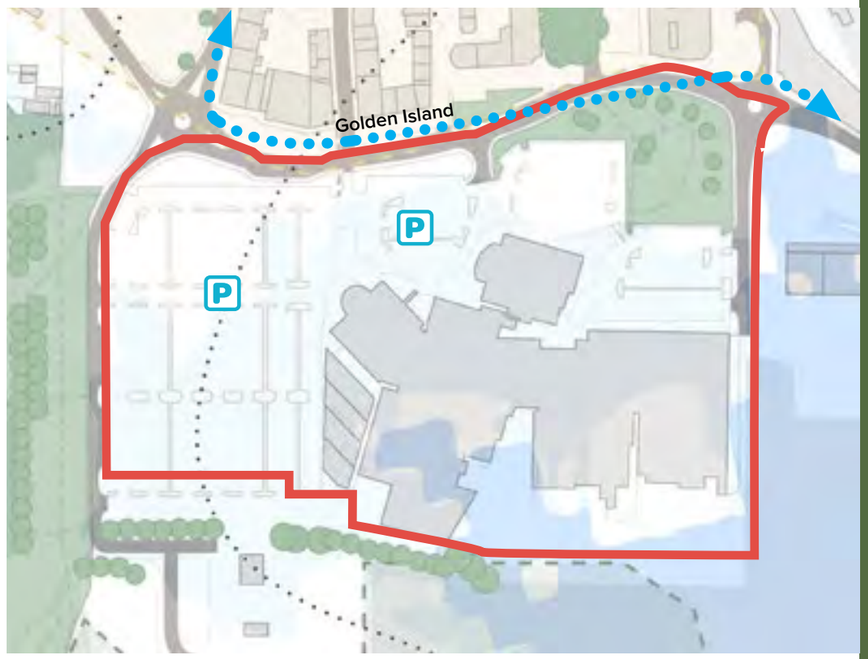
The north of the site is bound by mixed use development of between three and five storeys in height. Golden Island access road, which runs along this boundary, is an engineered route that is bookended by two large roundabouts. These heights should provide a starting precedent for development height, and where heights are changed this should done through a gradual transition.

The western boundary is bound by Burgess Park. Athlone Civic Amenity Site (waste management and recycling centre) is located to the south (to the west) and further to the east this boundary fronts onto the open countryside.

The Diskin trading estate is situated along the eastern boundary.

The site is situated to the south of the town and within the setting of the large green area of Burgess Park as well as the river which could allow taller landmark buildings to settle within the landscape context of the western boundary.

- Extent of Opportunity Site
- Existing buildings
- CFRAM River Flood Extents
- Area subject to flood alleviation
- Primary Road
- Green space
- Existing trees and hedges
- Existing parking



- Proposed Development Blocks
- Active Frontage
- Key Space Frontage
- Green Frontage
- Proposed Courtyard / Shared Space
- Green space
- Key Entrance Space and/or building
- Vista Stop building
- Key Route
- Key view



Urban Design Principles

This site provides an opportunity for a significant comprehensive mixed use development, particularly if masterplanned in conjunction with the adjacent Opportunity sites.

Burgess Park to the west provides a significant leisure and green amenity and new development should provide access and aspect onto this space. There may be a potential to implement key buildings along this space.

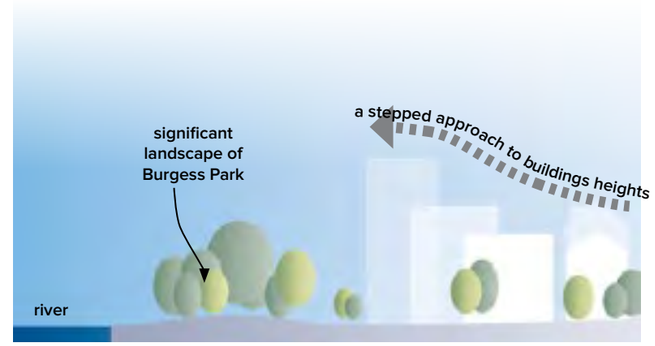
The size and scale of the site provides an opportunity to implement a new street form. Reference could be made to existing historical street form and streetscape typologies including enclosure, sequence of spaces and strong and continuous building lines, when designing these spaces.

The scale and location of the site could allow for suitable transition and setting for landmark buildings that are taller than a general 4 storeys but this should be viewed with consideration of the wider setting of Athlone's distinctive skyline.

Provide glimpsed views into and out of this new masterplanned street, particularly toward the south and open countryside and the to west towards Burgess Park and the Shannon.

Ensure that logical connections are made to adjacent Opportunity sites.

Sufficient space should provide a significant green space and allow for landscaping that will provide a soft edge to the development proposals.



Potential to implement key buildings along the boundary of Burgess Park. These could potentially be taller given the context of the adjacent open space, as indicated in the diagram above.

Implement primary through route that is reflective of historic built form consistent with the historic street typology found in Athlone

Create sequence of key spaces, where buildings identify small areas of public realm and building façades are utilised as street enclosure and vista stops.

Potential for multi-storey carpark to facilitate shoppers at Golden Island Shopping Centre.

Potential to integrate the new development and the existing Golden Island shopping centre to implement a phased approach to new development.

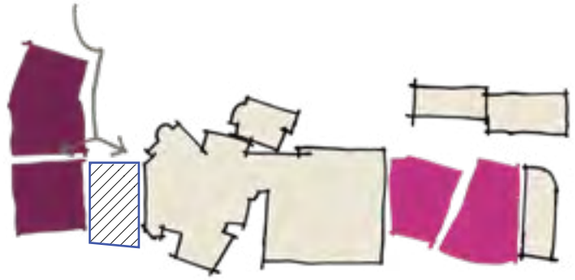
Consider providing glimpsed views through the development onto Burgess Park and beyond to the Shannon, as well as the open countryside to the south.

Ensure that the proposed development relates positively to the interface, built form and alignment of the adjacent Opportunity Sites, in particular with the Diskin Site to the east.

Illustrative Phasing of Golden Island and Diskin Centre



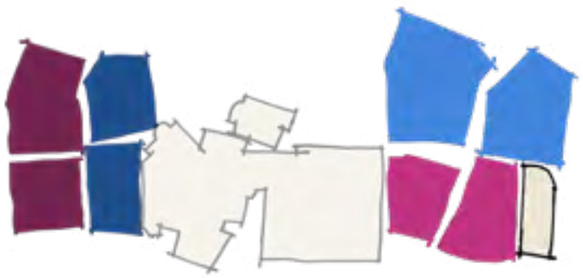
Phase 1
Building the western most parcels will allow Golden Island to continue service and retaining some associated car-parking, with the potential to introduce a multi-storey carpark to provide alternative parking for Golden Island.



Phase 2
If Diskin Centre is delivered concurrently it may be appropriate to begin work on the south-eastern parcels.



Phase 3
The next parcels in the west could be developed while Golden Island is de-constructed.



Phase 4
The northern parcels of the Disken Centre would complete this element of the masterplan



Phase 5
Developing the northern parcels would complete the street along the Golden Island access route.



Phase 6
The location of the de-constructed Golden Island Shopping centre would be the final element to complete this masterplan area.

Golden Island and Diskin Centre are working retail and commercial centres and their units are associated with a significant area of parking.

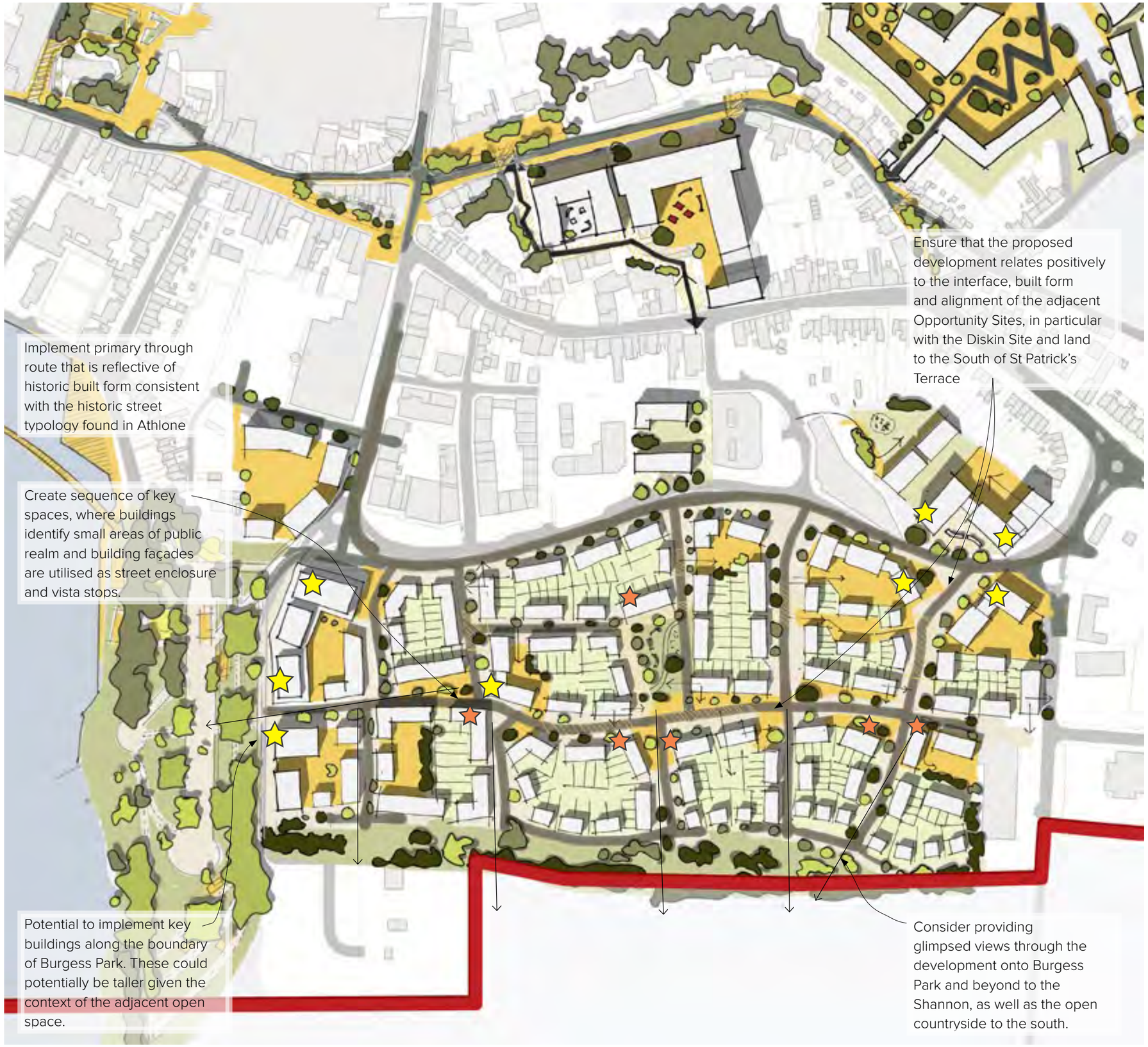
A phasing strategy will allow the shopping centre and business units to function for an extended period of time, while bringing forward new development in parcels that will contribute to the place making associated with new development.

This approach could include the implementation of a multi-storey carpark to provide interim parking spaces for Golden Island Shopping Centre.

The phasing strategy provides a suggested approach of identifying development parcels that can be independently brought forward for development while de-constructing the Golden Island site and the Diskin Centre.

Bookend these sites with development and progressively connect each of the plans.

This phased approach reflects the wider strategy for this Framework document, and shows how the comprehensive plan for public realm projects and opportunity sites. This shows how the Framework could deliver a joined up approach of infill and larger development sites to provide compact growth in a way that will deliver good quality development that responds positively to the existing context of Athlone, while allowing incremental development of each project that has been identified.



08

Regenerative Pipeline Projects

Plan Led Regeneration

The following chapter identifies a series of 'Regenerative Pipeline Projects' which are transformative interventions designed to reinvigorate and create a positive catalyst for regeneration and growth. The Regenerative Pipeline Projects go beyond physical interventions, encompassing comprehensive strategies that address social, economic, and environmental opportunities and challenges.

The Regenerative Pipeline Projects, provide an example of what can be delivered across the town and have been informed by public and stakeholder consultation together with analysis undertaken as part of the Stage 1, Brownfield Site Audit and the Social Infrastructure Assessment.

The design of the projects have developed through a multi-disciplinary design process presenting high level concept proposals that will be subject to detailed design and the statutory planning process involving public consultation.

The success of the Regenerative Pipeline Projects rely on effective partnerships and collaborations between public and private entities. These partnerships can unlock additional resources, expertise, and funding streams essential for executing large-scale transformations.

Regeneration is an iterative process where targeted pipeline projects and identification of opportunity sites can act as a catalyst for the strategic redevelopment of Athlone, to achieve a quality built environment, enhancing liveability, and creating a distinctive place - befitting of Athlone's status as a 'regional Growth Centre.'

Regenerative Pipeline Projects

The Framework presents a number of Regenerative Pipeline Projects that have the ability to facilitate the revitalisation of the Framework area.

The projects have been mapped throughout the Framework area to demonstrate, together with the opportunity sites and public realm enhancements, how they provide a network of interventions to enable wider holistic regeneration of Athlone.

Before describing each Regenerative Pipeline Project, an accompanying assessment details which Strategic Principles each can progress.

A project description and key principles are provided for each project supported by concept images depicting the look and feel of the area following completion of each transformational project.

At the close of this chapter next steps are outlined regarding the implementation and delivery stage of the projects.



Enhancing the Vibrancy and Vitality of Connolly Street



Reclaiming Market Square for its Historic Use



Reinventing and Revitalising The Strand

Plan illustrating the distribution of the 'Regenerative Pipeline Projects' within the Framework Area

Key

- **A** Market Square
- **B** Castle Gardens
- **C** Cultural Square and Link
- **D** Connolly Street
- **E** Connaught Gardens
- **F** 'Tourism and Cultural Quarter' Public Realm Works
- **G** St. Mary's Square / Loughanaskin Link
- **H** Ranelagh / Big Meadow Loop
- **I** Athlone Outdoor Swimming Pool and Boardwalk
- **J** The Strand
- **K** Weir Walkway
- **L** Greenway / Blueway Junction and Boardwalk

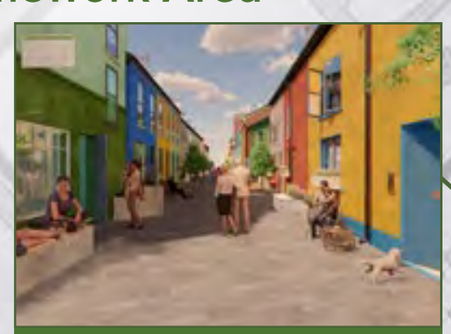
Plan illustrating the location of Regenerative Pipeline Projects within the Framework Area



A - **Market Square**



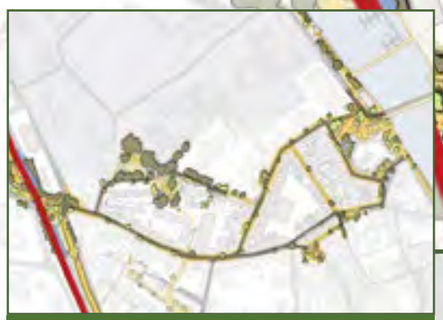
L - **Greenway / Blueway Junction and Boardwalk**



D - **Connolly Street**

E - **Connaught Gardens**





F - **'Tourism and Cultural Quarter' Public Realm Works**

B - **Castle Gardens**



C - **Cultural Square and Dean Crowe Link**



H - **Ranelagh / Big Meadow Loop**



Key

- Regenerative Pipeline Project
- Public Realm and Placemaking Projects
- Existing Streetscape
- Framework Area



J - The Strand

I - Athlone Outdoor Swimming Pool and Boardwalk





K - Weir Walkway



G - St. Mary's Square / Loughanaskin Link

Strategic Principles	Summary	Regenerative Pipeline Projects				
		Market Square	Castle Gardens	Cultural Square and Dean Crowe Link	Connolly Street	Connaught Gardens
	**1. People Focused**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	**2. Regenerative Development**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	**3. Compact and Sustainable Growth**				✓	
	**4. Liveable Town**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	**5. University Town**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	**6. River Shannon**	✓	✓			
	**7. Celebrating Heritage**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	**8. Tourism Branding and Experience**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	**9. Town Centre Living**		✓	✓	✓	✓
	**10. Economy and Enterprise**	✓				
	**11. Active Travel**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	**12. Future-proofing**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Regenerative Pipeline Projects						
‘Tourism and Cultural Quarter’ Public Realm Works	Ranelagh / Big Meadow Loop	Athlone Outdoor Swimming Pool and Boardwalk	Greenway / Blueway Junction and Boardwalk	Weir Walkway	The Strand	St. Mary’s Square / Loughanaskin Link
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
✓					✓	✓
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
✓	✓			✓		
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
✓					✓	✓
✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

A Market Square

Project Description

Market Square, which was historically in use as a central market space at the centre of the town, is now an underutilised strategic site in use as a car park - formed of a triangular parking area surrounded on three sides by roads.

The Market Square project presents an opportunity to enhance and celebrate the setting of Athlone's most distinctive built heritage and tourism destinations; framed by Athlone Castle, the Luan Gallery and the Church of Saints Peter & Paul.

Public realm interventions at this location have the potential to enrich Athlone's Market Square through positive placemaking and the creation of a flexible public space for events and as a destination 'threshold' to the Castle Quarter area.

Reinvigorating the Market Square will also enhance the visitor experience in this area, increasing dwell time and visually connecting the cluster of existing attractions in the vicinity while encouraging movement further west towards Connaught Street.

Taken together with planned public realm and placemaking works associated with Athlone Castle and waterfront, and the implementation of a cohesive wayfinding and lighting strategy for the area, the Market Square project will serve to enable the creation of an attractive, engaging, and memorable space that reflects local culture and identity, celebrating Athlone's built heritage.

Project Principles

- Optimising space by creating a people friendly destination.
- Public square to be provided as a large, flexible and accessible space that can facilitate public events including markets and arts / cultural performances, installations and festivals.
- Aligning with ABTA (REF), Market Square and Custume Bridge to enhance the public realm linking Athlone Castle, Church of Saints Peter & Paul and Luan Gallery providing pedestrian priority and enhanced public spaces including consideration of a bus gate.
- Soft landscaping and feature lighting to be incorporated.
- Improved wayfinding to be delivered in accordance with Athlone's Wayfinding and Interpretation Strategy.
- The Market Square will act as a gateway to Athlone's Tourism and Cultural Quarter.



Athlone's Market Square c.1900



Current View of the Market Square Site



Concept Image Viewpoint

Map Illustrating the location of the Market Square



Pipeline Project: Market Square

Concept Image Only

A Market Square

Project Description

The regeneration of Market Square forms part of a wider network of public realm enhancement works, extending from Church Street in the east, crossing Custume Bridge and into the Tourism and Cultural Quarter in the west.

The historic Custume Bridge is a Protected Structure, flanked with narrow footpaths, while the newly constructed NCN bridge provides ease of movement for cyclists and pedestrians. There is an opportunity to improve access by widening the footpath to create safe universal access.

The Framework proposes enhancement works along Custume Bridge that will link the Castle Quarter to the recently delivered public realm works along Church Street, Mardyke Street, Sean Costello Street, and the Civic Square in the Athlone Town Centre. In addition to being a vital link between Athlone's retail and cultural quarters, the bridge will become a space from which Athlone's natural and built environment can be viewed and enjoyed.

There is potential to enhance permeable links further, the Custume Bridge underpass could be transformed into a contemporary pedestrian / cyclist passage, through lighting, enhancement works and artist expression.



Current View of the Market Square Site



Map Illustrating the location of the Market Square



Artist Feature in the Custume Bridge's Underpass



Enhancement works on Custume Bridge

Concept Image Viewpoint



Pipeline Project: Market Square

Concept Image 01

B Castle Gardens

Project Description

Previous public realm works in the vicinity of the castle have created a people friendly destination, enabling al fresco dining options for local businesses. Opportunity exists through further public realm enhancement by optimising this space to create a unique visitor destination that supports cultural and tourism events.

This could be done with a focus on the enhancement of the ecology and through the implementation of landscape and planting schemes that increases biodiversity through appropriate soft landscaping, that also complements the built heritage setting.

Project Principles

- Optimise outdoor space around Athlone Castle, with public space that is framed by soft landscaping and feature lighting.
- Public space to be provided as a flexible and accessible space that can facilitate public events including markets and arts / cultural performances, installations and festivals - ancillary to Market Square.
- Potential for the inclusion of raised platform / pergola / bandstand structure to accessibility / safety on Castle Street.
- Space to be designed to be flexible to future-proof the integration of any future active travel/ pedestrian enhancements into the area.
- Public realm enhancement works to be delivered along Castle Street and Main Street (in accordance with Chapter 04).
- Improved wayfinding to be delivered in accordance with Athlone's Wayfinding and Interpretation Strategy.
- Public realm works will encourage both night-time and daytime activity creating a safe urban environment.



Current View of the Castle Gardens Site



Concept Image Viewpoint

Map Illustrating the location of Castle Gardens



St Patrick's Day Performance in Athlone Castle



View across the Castle Gardens Site towards the Shannon



Pipeline Project: Castle Gardens

Concept Image Only

C Cultural Square and Link

Project Description

Currently occupied as an on-street park with narrow connecting streets, access to the Dean Crowe Theatre, while a relatively short distance from the Castle and Sean Bar area, is circuitous. Flanked with the bright colourful façades and street art, there is an opportunity to enhance connectivity through creative and functional design solutions.

This Project aligns with the recommendations for the for the 'Dean Crowe Theatre / High Street Link' as a Key Public Realm Spaces in Chapter 4 Public Realm and Placemaking Strategy that principally seeks to enhance connections to the Dean Crowe Theatre via Market Square, Main Street, High Street and Grattan Row through the implementation of a series of interactive public realm spaces to enhance and widen the offering in the Tourism and Cultural Quarter and create a connected chain of heritage, arts, cultural and event spaces in the town centre.

The proposals seek to explore opportunities to open up the forecourt of the Dean Crowe Theatre as part of enhanced public realm works to facilitate indoor and outdoor theatre events and activities (in collaboration with the Dean Crowe Theatre)

Visually and physically connecting cultural and heritage assets through public realm enhancements enables a greater visitor flow attracting visitors to venture beyond the main tourist destinations.

Public realm interventions linking the Dean Crowe Theatre and High Street are identified to strategically link Athlone's cultural and heritage assets (the Dean Crowe Theatre to Athlone Castle, Luan Gallery and Church of Saints Peter & Paul). This project takes the form of an enhanced link between Grattan Row and High Street, including a new Cultural Square with an opportunity to create outdoor performance areas associated with the Dean Crowe Theatre.

Improved connectivity and legibility between attractions will assist in encouraging people to visit other attractions in the locality beyond the Castle, enhancing their dwell time in Athlone and the opportunity to capitalise on hospitality spending.

Project Principles

- Creation of flexible space on High Street to create new Cultural Square.
- Potential to enhance the entrance to the Dean Crowe Theatre to host events
- Cultural Square to be provided as a flexible and accessible space that can facilitate public events including arts / cultural / youth group performances, installations, markets and festivals - extension to Market Square and Castle Gardens / independent space and link to Dean Crowe.
- Gratton Row to be enhanced as a vibrant link between the Cultural Square and Dean Crowe Theatre through the use of coloured paving / façades and street art.
- Public realm enhancement works to be delivered along Main Street, High Street, Bastion Street and Grattan Row (in accordance with Chapter 04)
- Improved wayfinding to link Athlone Castle to the Dean Crowe Theatre to be delivered in accordance with Athlone's Wayfinding and Interpretation Strategy.



Current View of the Cultural Square Site



Concept Image Viewpoint
Cultural Link

Map illustrating the location of Cultural Square and Link



Pipeline Project: Cultural Square and Link

Concept Image Only

D Connolly Street

Project Description

Connolly Street is primarily a residential and pedestrianised Street located in the heart of Athlone's 'Castle Quarter' area. While car free, the street markings for vehicles remained with a central carriage way flanked with narrow footpaths. The streets lack soft landscaping and a coherent palette of facade colour and finishes.

The street plays an important role in maintaining town centre living to revitalise the traditional residential character.

Connolly Street has the potential to act as a key link thoroughfare within the Tourism and Cultural Quarter. To enhance the attractiveness of this link, opportunity presents to reinvigorate the street through public realm and streetscape enhancements. Such interventions include the provision of street furniture, lighting and planting to enhance the character of the street.

Project Principles

- Enhance Connolly Street's image and identify as an attractive area and link within the Tourism and Cultural Quarter.
- Reinvigorate the street through public realm and streetscape enhancements and a complementary palette of painted façades to match the vibrancy and vitality of the cultural quarter.
- Street furniture, lighting and planting to be installed to support the distinctly unique character of Connolly Street.
- Provide bin / bike stores for the local residents.
- Redirect / remove overhead wires and unnecessary street clutter.
- Vacant / derelict buildings to be refurbished / re-purposed as residential units to support compact growth.



Current View of Connolly Street



Vibrant and Inviting Street - Kinsale Co. Cork



Concept Image Viewpoint

Map illustrating the location of Connolly Street



Pipeline Project: Connolly Street

Concept Image Only

E Connaught Gardens

Project Description

A small park located in the context of the Corpus Cristi Church, is situated away from the primary streets. There are existing cottages that are in use, some of which overlook the larger green space, which itself consists of some existing established trees.

This project seeks to create an inviting and peaceful sanctuary within the urban landscape as part of wider enhancements by acting as a pedestrian/cyclist link and biodiversity corridor between Athlone Canal and the River Shannon.

Opportunity exists to enhance existing green areas at this location by way of the introduction of native trees, shrubs and native hedging which supports biodiversity.

To enhance the attractiveness of the space to pedestrians, gateways provided by way of hard and soft landscaping together with the inclusion of enhanced wayfinding have the potential to help create an area which is distinctly identifiable.

Project Principles

- Enhance green areas with native trees, shrubs and hedges to support biodiversity and create an intimate and sheltered, garden-like setting for locals and visitors.
- Incorporate nature-based SuDS features, where possible, in existing open space.
- Creation of pedestrian priority Gateways:
    1. Junctions of Connaught Street / Connaught Gardens
    2. Junction of Pearse Street / Ganly Place.
- Gateways to be distinctly identifiable through hard and soft landscaping and wayfinding.
- Public realm enhancement works, including inter alia improved surfaces, street furniture, planting, and lighting, to be delivered along Ganly Place between Connaught Street and Pearse Street (in accordance with **Chapter 02**).
- Opportunity to open the grounds of the Corpus Christi Catholic Church and highlight the historical headstones in soft landscaped areas.



Current View towards the Corpus Cristi Church in Connaught Garden



Concept Image Viewpoint

Map illustrating the location of Connaught Gardens



Existing cottages at Connaught Gardens



Wellbeing / Biodiversity Space - Dingle, Co. Kerry



F Tourism and Cultural Quarter

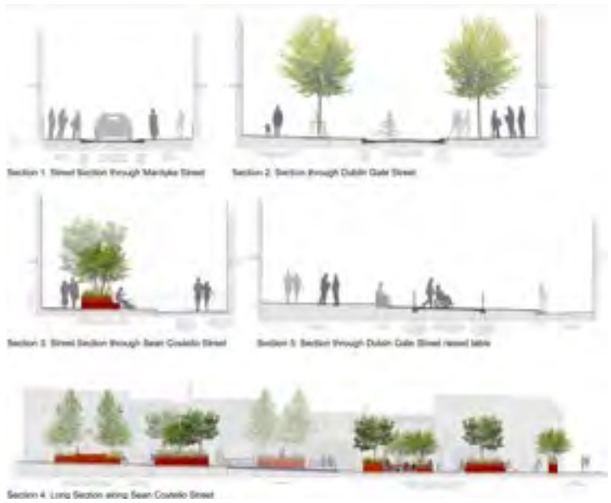
Project Description

This area includes the public realm spanning from the Shannon in the east to the Canal in the west, and encompassing Connaught Street and environs.

Building on the successful Athlone Town Centre public realm and street enhancement, it is proposed to extend these works to create a seamless connection through to the west of the town and into the Tourism and Culture Quarter. These works would provide for a unified finish to the central streetscape of Athlone extending east and west of the town centre providing an holistic extended town centre with an enhanced level of public realm including street furniture, lighting, incidental play equipment, cycle parking, trees and soft landscaping to enhance biodiversity. The proposals will also assist in improving connectivity and accessibility within this quarter, as well as fostering improved links to the retail core of the town centre.

Project Principles

- Provision of upgraded footpaths, removal of selected on-site parking and realignment of road, where required.
- Surface treatments to take account of the access needs of pedestrians, mobility impaired persons and service vehicles.
- Provision of an enhanced public realm, including street furniture, lighting incidental play equipment, cycle parking, trees, and soft landscaping to enhance biodiversity; focal point enhancements at the gateways to Connaught Gardens (i.e., at the Connaught Street and Ganly Place junctions) and the Athlone Canal Node.
- Provision of enhanced pedestrian facilities.
- Removal of overhead wires, redundant / blade signage and street clutter.
- Installation of signage in accordance with the Athlone Wayfinding Strategy
- All necessary accommodation works, including utility provision, drainage, signage, and other ancillary works.



Section Drawings of the Sean Costello Street / Mardkye Street Public Realm Enhancement Works





Public Realm Enhancement Works Delivered on Church Street in the 'Athlone Town Centre'



Public Realm Enhancement Works Being Delivered on Sean Costello Street / Mardkye Street in the 'Athlone Town Centre'



Pipeline Project: 'Tourism and Cultural Quarter' Public Realm Works

St Mary's Square / Loughanaskin Link

Project Description

The public realm enhancements strategically links two URDF funded projects, Athlone Street Enhancement and the Loughanaskin Regeneration Masterplan. The project aligns with the Athlone ABTA enabling the creation of a one way route, facilitating cyclists from the proposed greenway connection through the proposed Loughanaskin Masterplan lands to the Old Rail Trail Greenway. These works will be bookended by pedestrian priority Gateways.

Project Principles

- Create a platform to enhance the setting of the former Texas opportunity site.
- Enhance the setting and view towards St Marys Church.
- Gateways to be provided as accessible spaces that are distinctly identifiable through hard and soft landscaping and wayfinding.
- Public realm enhancement works, including inter alia improved surfaces, street furniture, planting, and lighting, to be delivered along St Mary's Square and Scotch Parade (in accordance with **Chapter 4 Public Realm and Placemaking Strategy**)
- Improved wayfinding, linking Athlone Town Centre to the Loughanaskin Regeneration Site and beyond to the Old Railway Greenway, to be delivered in accordance with Athlone's Wayfinding and Interpretation Strategy.



Current View of St. Mary's Square and the Future Entrance to the Loughanaskin Development



Concept Image Viewpoint
St Marys Square / Loughanaskin Link

Map illustrating the location of the St Mary's Square / Loughanaskin Link



View to St Mary's Church, Athlone



St Mary's Square ACA



Pipeline Project: St Mary's Square / Loughanaskin Link

Concept Image CI13

H Ranelagh / Big Meadow Loop

Extended Shannon banks and nature loop

Project Description

The provision of a looped walkway will connect green amenity zones to the west of the Framework Areas and extending from Ranelagh Way, along the length of Athlone Canal, south to the Big Meadow and River Shannon Frontage and back to Ranelagh to create a looped trail through a series of treks, paths, and boardwalks.

Project Principles

- A looped walk with hard and soft landscaping enhancements to be made along the River Shannon, Athlone Canal, Ranelagh site and Big Meadow to enhance the connectivity and accessibility of the Shannon Banks Nature Trail / Golden Mile loops. Native trees, shrubs and hedges to be planted (in the interest of aesthetics and biodiversity) and improved accessibility, lighting, and street furniture to be delivered.
- Functional and educational eco / heritage trail signage to be installed in accordance with Athlone's Wayfinding and Interpretation Strategy. The inclusion of artistic / cultural points of interest, including sculptures, to be considered.
- Accessibility to and refurbishment of the No. 1 Gun Battery in Ranelagh to be undertaken - improve awareness of asset.
- Raised walkways to be installed in The Big Meadow - raised viewing platform / sections to be considered. Incorporate the ability to close off area when flooded.
- Sections of Athlone Canal should be considered for re-watering in the interest of biodiversity and user experience.
- Water-based activities, such as inter alia angling and kayaking, to be facilitated.
- Athlone Canal node will act as a trail head for the looped walk.



Raised Walkway - Tyrrellspass, Co. Westmeath



Concept Image Viewpoint
Ranelagh / Big Meadow Loop
https://www.visitwestmeath.ie/westmeath-things-to-do/irelands-hidden-heartland/outdoor-adventure/shannon-banks-walk-nature-trail/

Map illustrating the location of the Ranelagh / Big Meadow Loop



Pipeline Project: Ranelagh / Big Meadow Loop

Concept Image Only

1 Athlone Outdoor Swimming Pool and Boardwalk

Project Description

The Strand area, taking advantage of the River Shannon which runs through the heart of Athlone, the provision of an outdoor swimming pool and boardwalk has the potential to provide a key amenity and attraction at a central location in the town.

This is an ambitious project that seeks to attract visitors to the waterfront to increase activity in this space and initiate regeneration in an area that presents opportunities for active tourism, waterfront housing and for high quality public realm.

The location of the pool will be subject to detailed design and site investigations. The intention remains that the project will present a flagship attraction that will facilitate a safe River swimming environment together with the creation of a universally accessible boardwalk providing access along the eastern bank of the River Shannon. The board walk will also provide links to the Galway to Dublin Greenway thereby further enhancing the tourism offering and appeal of Athlone.

Project Principles

- Public realm enhancements to include a board walk, providing safe and accessible walkways for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Boardwalk to form part of the waterfront connectivity providing access along the length of the waterfront along the eastern bank of the Shannon.
- Boardwalk to increase connectivity along the edge of the Shannon, providing connection to wider regeneration works at the strand.
- Outdoor swimming pool as a notable and unique attraction for Athlone, providing a facility for local residents, as well as potential for seasonal uses associated with festivals and other cultural events.
- The swimming pool to form part of the key view from Church Street, through Lloyd's Lane, reinforcing the important character of these streets.
- Uses to be integrated with the regenerated are of the Strand, that could provide space for community arts and culture activities.



Existing view of the Strand Area



Concept Image Viewpoint

Map illustrating the location for the Athlone Outdoor Swimming Pool



River Pool in - Banagher, Co. Offaly



Pipeline Project: Athlone Outdoor Swimming Pool and Boardwalk

Concept Image Only

1 Athlone Outdoor Swimming Pool and Boardwalk

Alternative Location

Given the complexity of this project, it is recommended that a detailed Site Selection Process is undertaken to determine the most suitable and feasible site for the development of a Athlone Outdoor Swimming Pool - including inter alia stakeholder engagement and investigations into the river flows and depths.

The Framework has identified two potential locations for the Athlone Outdoor Swimming Pool:

1. Adjacent to The Strand car park - concentrating regenerative tourism and peacemaking within the central core of the town, availing of the views of Athlone's heritage assets, and being located in close proximity to the Framework's Greenway / Blueway Junction and boardwalk.
2. Adjacent to The Strand / Wolfe Tone Terrace - extending regenerative tourism and peacemaking outside the central core and creating a recreational zone with Burgress Park and the Framework's Weir Walkway.



Current View of the alternative Athlone Outdoor Swimming Pool Site



Concept Image Viewpoint

Map illustrating an alternative location for the Athlone Outdoor Swimming Pool



Connecting the Town to the Water - Harbour Bath - Aarhus, Denmark



Pipeline Project: Athlone Outdoor Swimming Pool and Boardwalk (Alternative Location)

Concept Image Only

J The Strand

Project Description

This prime waterfront site, located within the historic core has the potential to unlock major development at this location.

The site comprises the strand car park occupying a prime water from location and spans north-west beyond Barnett Street encompassing lands to the rear of Strand street fronting the River Shannon. The site extends south east along the water front to a covering a small surface car park to the rear of dwellings fronting strand street.

Historically, Barnett Street is said to be in-line with the natural ancient ford which gave Athlone its name – Ath Luain- the ford of Luan. This ford was the principal catalyst for the development of the town.

The significance of this affords the opportunity for a ‘ per cent for Art’ scheme which would highlight the importance of this fording point as the ‘raison-d’etre’ for Athlone, or the significance of this fording place during the famous Siege of Athlone in 1691.

The new public space will be provided as an accessible hard and soft landscaped area that is flexible and can facilitate public events and active tourism facilities such as bike rentals.

Redevelopment of this site would be delivered on a phased basis, with Phase 1 focusing on the Public Open Space with the redevelopment of the balance of the site to be delivered in later phases creating opportunities to deliver compact sustainable growth and town centre living options.

Project Principles

Phase I

- Optimise use of prime site to facilitate an active waterfront. Public square to be provided as an accessible hard and soft landscaped area that is flexible and can facilitate public events and active tourism facilities such as bike rentals.
- Public realm enhancement works to be delivered along Lloyd’s Lane, Friary Lane, Griffith Street, The Strand and Wolfe Tone Terrace to optimise the vistas (in accordance with Chapter 04).

Phase II

- Potential regeneration delivery at Barnett Street with compact residential / mixed use development.
- Redevelopment to optimise the site’s waterfront location - buildings to be orientated accordingly, balconies to be included and vistas between buildings / from courtyards to be included (in accordance with Chapter 06 - Opportunity Sites).



View of the 'The Strand' from The Quay at Athlone Castle



Strand St Car Park and rear of Barnett Street



Concept Image Viewpoint

Map illustrating the location of the The Strand



Pipeline Project: The Strand

Concept Image Only

K Weir Walkway

Project Description

The weir crossing point connects Burgess Park to the west of Athlone.

This project seeks to further enhance connections across the River Shannon, connecting the ecological green spaces of the Big Meadow and Burgess Park, and contributing to the network of green links.

Project Principles

- The proposal is subject to detailed design in collaboration with Waterways Ireland.
- Bring added value to the tourism offering of Athlone.
- Design concept based on the successful delivery of Meelick, Offaly.



Weir Walkway on the River Shannon - Meelick, Offaly



Current View of the Weir Walkway Site



View of the Weir Walkway site, looking south



Concept Image Viewpoint

Map illustrating the location of the Weir Walkway



Pipeline Project: Weir Walkway

Concept Image Only

L Greenway / Blueway Junction and Boardwalk

Project Description

Situated at the crossing of the Shannon and the historic east-west street, this project represents a symbolic intersection of Ireland's national blueway, River Shannon with national greenway, Galway to Dublin NCN

This project seeks to symbolise Athlone's uniqueness on the junction of a Blueway and Greenway, while also providing a platform from which the town's cultural assets can be appreciated. A boardwalk will extend this experience south under Custume Bridge.

Once completed this project could be supported by a marketing campaign which highlights the uniqueness of this active tourism offer in connecting the Greenway to water based activities.

Project Principles

- Consideration to be given to the scale and style of the platform to be delivered, including inter alia building materials, feature lighting and street furniture.
- New boardwalk to be delivered under the east arch of Custume Bridge connecting the Greenway / Blueway Junction platform to The Strand.
- Designs to ensure that the project is delivered to the relevant safety standards and are accessible to all - buoyancy aids to be provided.
- Native soil and watercourse planting to be incorporated into the design in the interest of aesthetics and biodiversity.
- Functional and educational eco / heritage signage to be installed in accordance with Athlone's Wayfinding and Interpretation Strategy.
- Marketing campaign to be prepared for Athlone's active tourism offer - highlighting the connection between the Framework's water-based interventions and the complementing Greenway.



Current View of the Greenway / Blueway Junction Site



Concept Image Viewpoint

Map illustrating the location for the Greenway / Blueway Junction and Boardwalk



Raised Platform over water - Tønder, Denmark



Visualisation of the proposed Greenway / Blueway



Pipeline Project: Greenway / Blueway Junction and Boardwalk

Concept Image Only

Implementation & Delivery - Next Steps

The Athlone Urban Design and Regeneration Framework presents major opportunities for the Regional Growth Centre and Fáilte Ireland Destination Town of Athlone. The Framework sets out a strong and compelling blueprint for the regeneration of the town with particular emphasis on the interplay with architecture, planning, urban design, placemaking and tourism.

The plan provides a clear focus for the delivery of a number of tourism and placemaking interventions, identifies Opportunity Sites and Regenerative Pipeline projects which, if implemented, will transform the economic, social, cultural and tourism development of Athlone and its built environment and public realm.

A key role of the Framework is to build confidence in the process of urban design and placemaking over time, to foster investment and growth of the town as a whole. The Framework should not be read as a definitive design proposal, but rather, as a set of principles and strategies for Athlone's urban core, through which the overall objectives of national, regional and local policy and guidelines will be implemented. To fully deliver on the Framework, the sum of its parts need to be pulled together to maximise the momentum new interventions will create.

The Framework enables the local authority to leverage a range of funding opportunities at EU, national, and local level, including inter alia European Union's Just Transition Fund (EU JTF), Urban Regeneration Development Fund (URDF), and Active Travel Investment Programme. Critically, its successful implementation requires state agencies, WCC, Roscommon County Council, and other key stakeholders to align their policies and programme priorities and allocate the correct resources.

The Athlone Framework provides a strategic vision for the town over the next 10-15 years. The proposals are intentionally ambitious, whilst providing a range of projects which can be pursued in the short, medium, and longer term in partnership with a range of partners from the private and public sector; government departments and other statutory bodies; and the community and voluntary sector.

In its role as the local authority, the Council will actively champion and support the vision and its associated framework objectives. The physical interventions identified within the Framework: the public realm proposals; the redevelopment of the Opportunity Sites, and the Pipeline Projects all cascade from the vision.

Once the vision is realised, the proposals can deliver economic, social and environmental benefits which will enable Athlone to grow and develop as a progressive and confident place in which to invest, improving the quality of life for those who live there; and developing it as an attractive place to spend time and visit.

In carrying out its role as the local authority, the Council will seek to coordinate with each of the relevant stakeholders, including Government Departments and agencies responsible for the provision of infrastructure to ensure coordinated delivery and funding.

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ARROW

WESTMEATH COUNTY COUNCIL
Comhairle Chontae na hIarmhí

Tionscadal Éireann
Project Ireland
2040