

# Ballynahinch town centre MASTERPLAN



# Ballynahinch Town Centre Masterplan

October 2014



Northern Ireland  
Executive  
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the **paulhogarth** company

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# 1 Introduction

Nestled within an attractive drumlin landscape, in the heart of County Down, Ballynahinch dates back to the mid 17th Century. At this time Sir George Rawdon established the town and market square, repaired the parish church and built two mills. Today, the population of Ballynahinch exceeds five and a half thousand (2008 mid-year population estimates) and the town functions as an important service centre, commuter settlement, manufacturing and market town.

Like many towns and villages across Northern Ireland, Ballynahinch faces certain challenges such as difficult town centre trading, a lack of high quality public open space and town centre vehicular congestion. On the other hand, the strong sense of community, rich history, attractive main streets and wonderful surrounding landscape presents significant opportunities for this historic town.

The Masterplan for Ballynahinch Town Centre was commissioned to help address these challenges and identify opportunities. It provides the format for taking a fresh look at the town in a holistic manner so that key aspects of its social, physical and economic character can be understood and appreciated. The Masterplan provides a platform upon which Ballynahinch's residents, business community and elected representatives can develop a shared vision on how they wish to see the town develop over the next fifteen to twenty years. In doing so, the Masterplan identifies a series of strategic objectives for the town and in turn, outlines proposals to bring about the realisation of these objectives.

## 1.2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

The role of the Masterplan is to inform regeneration and development decisions relating to Ballynahinch Town Centre. It will therefore be a key reference to all those with an interest in the future of the town, including local and central government departments, private businesses including developers, the community and voluntary sectors and members of the public.

The Masterplan does not replace statutory planning policy for the area and will be used as a material consideration in planning decisions and to inform future policy.

The Masterplan was prepared concurrently with the Reform of Local Government (LGR), during which comprehensive changes to the administration of Northern Ireland, including the reduction in the number of local councils from twenty-six to eleven and the transfer of planning powers to the new local councils.

## 1.3 CLIENT AND CONSULTANT TEAM

Commissioned in June 2013, by the Department for Social Development (DSD) in partnership with Down District Council (DDC), the Masterplan demonstrates the commitment of DSD towards delivering physical, social and economic regeneration across Northern Ireland.

The Masterplan was developed by a multidisciplinary consultant team, led by urban designers and landscape architects, The Paul Hogarth Company. The team also comprised of specialist organisations, all with extensive experience in town centre regeneration in Northern Ireland and further afield.



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Team member details are outline below:

Organisation	Role
The Paul Hogarth Company	Team Leader, Urban Design, Masterplanning, Landscape Architecture
JMP Consulting	Transport Planning & Engineering
BDO	Economics
CB Richard Ellis	Property
White Young Green	Costs
Strategic Planning	Retail
Place Solutions	Town Centre Management

## 1.4 MASTERPLAN PROCESS

The Masterplan was produced over a thirteen-month period, commencing in June 2013, and began with an in depth process of desktop research, site appraisal and stakeholder consultation. A Town Centre Health Check was also undertaken which involved a shopper survey and a comprehensive review of the existing retail, residential, leisure, commercial and tourism sectors.

The findings of this process led to the development of a shared vision for the town and an accompanying set of project aims and objectives. The subsequent Concept Proposals stage developed the foundation of design thinking for the emerging draft Masterplan.

Using the Concept Plan as a basis, the Draft Masterplan was prepared, which incorporated a range of deliverable initiatives that include mixed use development, transportation proposals and public realm improvements.

The draft was widely published in February 2014 during a fourteen week public consultation period which included workshops with local residents and the three local secondary schools. Feedback from this process was then used to finalise the Masterplan report and the accompanying action plan table detailing each proposal along with its priority, timeframe, delivery agent and associated stakeholders.

Finally, the Masterplan was launched at a public event in October 2014, marking completion of the report and the beginning of the delivery process.

Key to the Masterplan process was the establishment of an Advisory Group who met at each key stage of the process to monitor progress and shape development of the Masterplan. The Group comprised of elected representatives, council and government officials, town centre retailers, community representatives and local residents.









# 2 Analysis of Ballynahinch

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Before we can successfully intervene at a townwide scale, it is crucial to understand the complexity of the town and identify key elements within it that may be positives upon which to build, or negatives that must be addressed. Another important role of the analysis process is to identify the distinctive elements that make Ballynahinch unique, so that the town's identity can be strengthened as it develops into the future.

This section summarises the findings of the analysis process undertaken to inform the Masterplan.



## 2.2 LOCATION

The Masterplan includes, but is not limited to, Ballynahinch Town Centre. To assess the town centre it is important to consider Ballynahinch as a whole and its surrounding environs including the residential areas on the outskirts of the town.

Centrally positioned in County Down, Ballynahinch is located 15 miles south of Belfast, 10 miles south-east of Lisburn, 10 miles north-west of Downpatrick and 15 miles north of Newcastle. Smaller settlements in the vicinity include Crossgar, Saintfield, Dromara, Annahilt and Spa.

The A24 runs through the heart of Ballynahinch and is one of the main arterial routes connecting North Down with Down. The A24 provides the main access to Ballynahinch and provides linkage with Belfast and Carryduff to the north and Dundrum and Newcastle to the south.

Ballynahinch is an important gateway for people from the Belfast Metropolitan Area to the Mournes.

## 2.3 HISTORY

### 2.3.1 Montalto Estate

Montalto Estate was purchased by the Rawdon Family in 1660 and the House was built in the 1760's. In the early 19th century the Estate was sold to the Ker family and they constructed a third storey to the house which included a large ballroom. During the Second World War, US soldiers were stationed in Montalto while in 1985 a devastating fire considerably damaged the East Wing but this was later rebuilt. Today, the Wilson family own the Estate and the House is available to hire for weddings, and business functions.



## 2.3 HISTORY (continued)

### 2.3.2 The Battle of Ballynahinch

Founded in 1791, the Society of United Irishmen sought to promote the unity of 'Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter' in Ireland and to create a more equal society. By 1796 thousands of people across County Down had converted to the principles of United Irishmen and subsequently an armed revolt against the Government was planned. After defeating government forces at Saintfield on 9th June 1798, they moved on to capture the town of Ballynahinch.

The battle took place over the 12th and 13th June 1798, with intense fighting focussed at Windmill Hill, the Montalto Hills and town centre streets. The United Irishmen were overturned at Ballynahinch and government forces spread across the countryside, crushing all those suspected of being participants. Ballynahinch was left in ruins with almost half of the houses destroyed. In recent years a number of murals have been erected in the town depicting the famous battle.

### 2.3.3 The Market

For over three centuries, Ballynahinch has been an important market town in County Down. Established in 1683, the market was set up to encourage local commerce and to provide a meeting place where people could seek employment and employers could hire labour.



### 2.3.4 The Market House

Constructed in 1795, the Market House provided a large market hall on the ground floor while on the first floor there was an assembly room for public meetings as well as a small jury room where courts were held.



## 2.4 POLICY AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

### 2.4.1 Regional Development Strategy 2035

The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 'Building a Better Future' seeks to guide the future development of NI and meet the needs of the region up until 2035. Comprising a series of strategic guidelines the Strategy provides long-term policy direction within a spatial perspective. The vision is to create an outward-looking, dynamic and liveable region and to sustain a high quality of life for all.

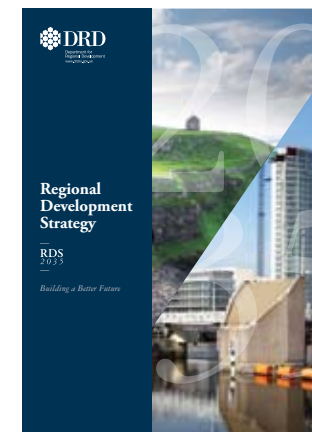
The RDS recognises the important contribution that cities, towns and villages make to the long-term development of NI. Not only in their uniqueness as a location for residents and as tourist destinations, but their potential to attract small scale direct investment. It is therefore crucial that proposals contained within the Plan do their utmost to make Ballynahinch a better place in which to live, visit and conduct business, while promoting opportunities to create and sustain diverse enterprises.

The RDS defines Ballynahinch as a local hub while Downpatrick is identified as the main town in Down District. Local hubs are towns strategically located on the Regional Strategic Transport Network, which have the capacity to accommodate and provide a wide range of complementary services.

Ballynahinch is identified within the RDS as one of seven small towns in the Belfast Metropolitan Area hinterland which, by reason of their scale, existing facilities and proximity to key transport corridors, are to accommodate significant expansion to meet a growing housing need. The housing proposed in Ballynahinch is allocated from the housing growth indicator for Down District in conformity with specific guidelines outlined in the RDS.

Comprising a range of strategic planning guidelines, the RDS seeks to improve the quality of both the urban and rural environment throughout Northern Ireland. The following objectives, taken from the RDS are directly relevant to Ballynahinch;

- Connect rural and urban areas.
- Revitalise small towns and villages.
- Facilitate the development of rural industries, businesses and enterprises in appropriate locations.

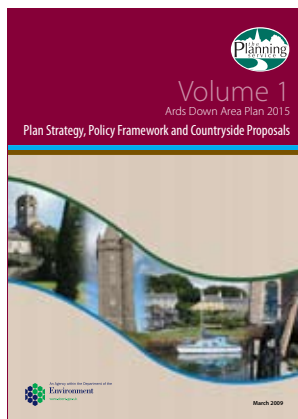


## 2.4 POLICY AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT (continued)

### 2.4.2 Ards and Down Area Plan

Incorporating the administrative districts of Ards Borough and Down District, The Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 was adopted on 30 March 2009 and outlines the following principal aim;

*"To provide a planning framework which is in broad conformity with the RDS in facilitating sustainable growth and a high quality of development in Ards Borough and Down District throughout the Plan period, whilst protecting and where appropriate, enhancing the natural and man-made environment of the Plan area."*



In order to fulfil its role as a local hub, as described in the RDS, the Area Plan indicates that an additional 1700 housing units will be required and as a result, approximately 68 hectares of land have been zoned for housing. To ensure the appropriate development of these lands, key design considerations should be provided for each site, in accordance with Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS 7): Quality Residential Environments.

Development of a number of these key sites will be influenced by the proposed bypass, the line of which is protected, in the Area Plan, against any development proposals that would prejudice its implementation.

In order to safeguard the attractive landscape setting of Ballynahinch, thirteen Local Landscape Policy Areas (LLPAs) have been designated, covering the Ballynahinch River Corridor, Montalto Estate, Lough Park and the surrounding drumlins.

### 2.4.3 Local Government Reform

Under the Reform of Local Government (LGR), it is proposed that urban regeneration and planning powers, which currently sit within the DSD and Department of the Environment (DOE) respectively, will devolve to eleven local councils in April 2015. As part of this reform, Down District Council will amalgamate with Newry and Mourne District Council, forming a new Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.

One of the most important new functions for local government, as a result of LGR, is community planning. The aim of community planning is to make sure that people and communities are genuinely engaged in decisions made about the public services which affect them and the public spaces and places that they use. However, in Northern Ireland there is currently no legislative requirement for local government to consult with organisations and communities to prepare a community plan.



## 2.4 POLICY AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT (continued)

### 2.4.4 Local Government Reform (continued)

In addressing this issue the Ballynahinch Town Centre Masterplan, which has been prepared in conjunction with considerable community and stakeholder engagement, will play a key role in shaping Community Planning throughout the new Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Area and informing the Landuse Plan which the new Council will be tasked with producing.



### 2.4.5 Review into the Future of our High Streets

The impact of technology and changes in consumer needs have changed the function of town centres and their role in the wider economy. The Mary Portas report “Review into the Future of our High Streets” (Dec. 2011) sets out the following ambitious vision to ‘re-imagine’ our high streets;

*“To put the heart back into the centre of our high streets, re-imagined as destinations for socialising, culture, health, wellbeing, creativity and learning. The new high streets won’t just be about selling goods. The mix will include shops, but will also include housing, offices, sport, schools or other social, commercial and cultural enterprises or meeting places. They should become places where we go to engage with other people in our communities, where shopping is just one small part of the rich mix of activities...they need to be spaces and places that people want to be in. High streets of the future must be the hub of the community that people are proud of and want to protect.”*

### 2.4.6 High Street Taskforce Report

The DSD has recognised the need to find a more holistic response to town centre regeneration and published the High Street Taskforce Report in March 2013 to address the issues raised by the Portas Review in a Northern Ireland context.

A core issue to be addressed is the need to find a mechanism to effectively integrate the work of the government departments so they can respond to the multi-faceted nature of our High streets.

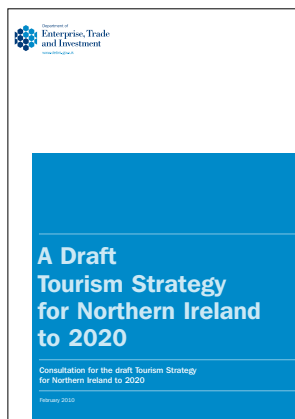


## 2.4 POLICY AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT (continued)

### 2.4.7 Draft Tourism Strategy for NI

The Draft Tourism Strategy sets out a number of key growth targets up to 2020, including increasing visitor numbers from 3.2million to 4.5million and increasing earnings from tourism by £520million to £1billion.

Delivery of the Strategy will be coordinated through nine Key Tourism Areas, with Ballynahinch falling under the Mourne Mountains Destination. Representatives of Banbridge, Down, and Newry and Mourne District Councils will be responsible for the development and delivery of this Key Tourism Area.



### 2.4.8 Destination Mourne Mountains 2013 – 2018

Developed following consultation with key stakeholders, the local tourism industry and Local Authorities, this Tourism Management Plan provides the framework to guide stakeholders and the tourism trade in a shared effort to grow tourism in the Mourne Mountains region.

The primary objective of the Management Plan is to maximise the potential of the Mourne Mountains to attract and encourage visitors to stay longer and spend more, by strengthening tourism performance and appeal across the whole of the Mourne Mountains destination.



### 2.4.9 Enabling the Future 2008 – 2011

Down District Council's Draft Economic Development Strategy, Enabling the Future 2008 – 2011, sets out a series of strategic objectives under the following five thematic areas:

- Tourism
- Business Growth
- People & Place
- Attracting New Investment
- Public Sector Jobs





## 2.5 NATURAL LANDSCAPE

Set within a series of attractive drumlins, several of which are of significant historical merit given their direct historical connection with the Battle of Ballynahinch, the town possesses an attractive and historically rich landscape setting.

However, while these drumlins are located within the settlement extents of the town and a short walk from the town centre, public use of these large areas of open space is limited and as a result few health benefits are realised. In addition, only a short stretch of the Ballynahinch River, which runs right through the centre of the Town, has been opened up for walking and public recreation.

Clear potential therefore exists to enhance pedestrian links to these key features and open them up for greater levels of public use.

## 2.6 BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The urban form of Ballynahinch Town Centre, while generally orientated around Market Square, is made up of three main streets, namely High Street, Main Street and Windmill Street. Buildings along these streets typically feature pitched roofs and are generally two storey with some three storey buildings fronting onto Market Square. The quality of Ballynahinch's built heritage is reflected in this cohesive and attractive street layout and the architectural quality of several key buildings, such as the Market House and the Northern Bank building.



However, this cohesive and attractive street layout is compromised by a number of prominent backland areas within the built form (illustrated on the plan below). Used largely for off street car parking, these large backland areas, coupled with closed pedestrian access routes, significantly undermine the built environment and quality of pedestrian connectivity throughout the town centre.

Through the masterplan, it is important to conserve the built heritage and enhance Ballynahinch's character



## 2.7 MOVEMENT

Given the compact nature of Ballynahinch, a large number of residents are within easy walking distance of town centre facilities including retail, employment and schools. However, the environment for walking and cycling throughout the town is compromised by high volumes of through traffic movements, creating significant traffic congestion in the town centre core.

Furthermore, while there is a significant quantity of off-street car parking spaces in the town centre, they are currently under-utilised and the clear preference for on-street parking results in traffic circulating the Town Centre and adding to the congestion.

It is the position of the Masterplan that this town centre congestion can only be addressed through the provision of a town by-pass. While, the timescale for delivery of the bypass is uncertain, the Stage One - Environmental Statement is expected to be published by the end of Summer 2014.

There is reasonable public transport linkage from Ballynahinch to both Belfast and Newcastle however connections to Downpatrick and Lisburn are limited, particularly during the evenings and at weekends. In addition, there are currently no park and ride facilities in Ballynahinch for commuters accessing Belfast or Lisburn.

Despite the town being of an appropriate scale to encourage walking and cycling, there are no formal cycling facilities and signage is limited, therefore not supporting short distance trips within the town.

Scope exists to enhance facilities and create additional low traffic zones, such as parks and greenways, to encourage greater levels of walking and cycling.

At the time of writing, delivery of an environmental improvement scheme throughout the town centre is underway. This scheme seeks to provide a higher quality public realm for local residents and visitors to the market town.



## 2.8 COMMUNITY

Ballynahinch has a vibrant community demonstrated by the number of high quality schools, successful sporting bodies and active church and community groups. Throughout the course of the analysis and stakeholder consultation period, this community spirit and collaboration was evident, however, there are opportunities to strengthen these relationships further.

Enhancing pedestrian connections between the town centre and outlying residential areas will strengthen physical relationships while re-establishing a Chamber of Commerce will strengthen collaboration among the business community.

While a number of active community groups exist, the use of town centre facilities for indoor and outdoor community use is limited, with most community activities concentrated in purpose built facilities located throughout the wider town. Scope therefore exists to make greater use of the town centre for community events and activities

## 2.9 ECONOMY

This Masterplan has been compiled during a challenging economic period, as the UK and Ireland are still recovering from an economic downturn. This has invariably led to a reduction in public and private sector spending resulting in a challenging town centre trading environment in Ballynahinch.

However, with a number of well established local traders and recent public sector investment in the town centre public realm, Ballynahinch must look to build on its current strengths to forge a sustainable vision for its economic development.

Opportunities for economic growth could come from the growth of local small to medium sized businesses within the town centre. The buoyant creative industries sector could provide an opportunity for commercial growth, particularly given the close proximity to Belfast and the attractive living environment and quality of life which the area offers.

There could also be opportunities in the tourism and food sector to build upon and enhance the historic market, however, realising the full potential of this sector will require a partnership approach with a number of key agencies and the private sector.

The expansion of the professional services sector will require provision within the masterplan for be-spoke high quality office space within the town centre itself.







# 3 Consultation Process

## 3.1 CONSULTATION PROCESS

The Ballynahinch Town Centre Masterplan has been heavily informed by the views of local people who live and work in Ballynahinch and know the town best. Consultation took the following forms:

### 3.1.1 Masterplan Advisory Group Meetings

The Masterplan Advisory Group, comprising of elected representatives, council and government officials, town centre retailers, community representatives and local residents, was set up to review and inform each stage of the masterplan development.



### 3.1.2 Town Centre Health Check

A Town Centre Health Check was undertaken to provide a comprehensive summary of the vitality and viability of Ballynahinch town centre. This involved a survey of 150 shoppers in Ballynahinch and 68 businesses in the town centre area.

### 3.1.3 Stakeholder Engagement Meetings

Fourteen stakeholder engagement meetings were set up with representatives from the public, private and community sectors as well as elected representatives.

The purpose of these meetings was to directly inform local stakeholders of the Masterplan and identify development opportunities and emerging issues that could be addressed through the process.

### 3.1.4 Public Open Forums

Two public open forums were coordinated during the preparation of the Masterplan to gather information during the analysis stage and to test the draft masterplan proposals. The first of these open forums was held on the evening of 20th November 2013 at the Market House, Ballynahinch and provided a strong steer on the strengths of Ballynahinch and issues to address. The second event was held on the evening of 13th March 2014, during the twelve-week consultation stage. This event was arranged to test the draft proposals and helped to refine the final masterplan. Considerable enthusiasm, from local people towards the regeneration of their town, was evident at both of these events.





### 3.1 CONSULTATION PROCESS (continued)



#### 3.1.5 School Workshops

Two workshops were held with sixth form pupils from each of the three local secondary schools, namely, The High School Ballynahinch, Assumption Grammar School and St. Colman's High & Sixth Form College.

The first workshop was held during the early stages of the Masterplan process to gather information on what young people liked and disliked about the town and to discuss ideas on how they would like to see Ballynahinch developed in the future.

A second workshop was held during the twelve-week public consultation stage and this involved a 'town centre walkabout' with the young people to discuss the draft proposals at various locations throughout the town centre.

This aspect of the consultation process proved extremely successful with the pupils, at both workshops, providing valuable information for the Masterplan to consider.



#### 3.1.6 Town Wide Leaflet Drop

A leaflet, promoting the draft Masterplan and the Public open Forum was distributed to every household throughout Ballynahinch. This was undertaken to raise the profile of the draft Masterplan and to encourage as much feedback as possible.

A copy of this leaflet can be found in the Appendix Document





## 3.1 CONSULTATION PROCESS (continued)

### 3.1.7 Twelve-Week Consultation Period

In order to test the draft masterplan proposals, a twelve-week public consultation period extended from 17th February to 11th May 2014. Exhibition board were erected at both the Market House, Ballynahinch and the Ballynahinch Centre. In addition, digital copies of the exhibition boards were available to view online at the following websites:

[www.dsdni.gov.uk](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk)

[www.downdc.gov.uk](http://www.downdc.gov.uk)

[www.paulhogarth.com](http://www.paulhogarth.com)

[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)



The findings generated during the twelve-week public consultation period are summarised below, while a detailed breakdown of the feedback responses can be found in the Appendix Document.

In total eighty-eight feedback responses on the draft Ballynahinch Town Centre Masterplan were received and can be broken up as follows:

57 Completed questionnaires

5 Written submissions

1 Telephone response

25 Facebook 'likes'

Feedback suggests that the most popular features of Ballynahinch amongst local residents include the convenience of local shops, the strong sense of community and the heritage value of key buildings.

Amongst critical public feedback on the town, the most commonly raised was traffic and car parking. Genuine concerns exist amongst elected representatives, business owners and the general public regarding the extent of congestion in the town centre and the impact this has on investment and visitor numbers.

Findings from the completed surveys indicated the following top ten priorities for the masterplan to address:

1. Develop Bypass / Address Congestion (27)
2. Develop Lough Park (11)
3. Better Shops (clothes) (10)
4. Facilities for Young People (8)
5. Improved Eateries (7)
6. Town Centre Frontage Improvements (7)
7. Destination for Quality Local Food (7)
8. Establish an Event's Programme (6)
9. More On-Street Car Parking (4)
10. Safeguard & Restore Historic Buildings (4)

## BALLYNAHINCH: A FRESH APPROACH

Through fresh thinking and fresh partnership working, Ballynahinch will be strengthened as a thriving and vibrant place in which to live, work and visit. By repopulating the town centre and reconfiguring the transport network, an attractive, healthy, people-orientated town centre will emerge, free from the pressures of vehicular dominance. Furthermore, its status as a historic market town will be refreshed through rediscovered connections with the rural economy of County Down, putting Ballynahinch on the map as a premier food destination on the island.



# 4 Visioning, Objectives & Concept Plan

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The findings of the extensive research and analysis process give a clear indication of qualities to be maintained and capitalised upon, as well as issues to be addressed through this Masterplan. Like many other town centres, Ballynahinch faces challenges such as the survival of independent retail alongside high street chains, the successful accommodation of vehicles while maintaining environmental quality and the means by which to prevent its older buildings falling into disrepair. Yet its regional connectivity, physical attributes and community collaboration provide strong foundations upon which to develop a vision for the future.

This section sets out the overarching vision for the future of Ballynahinch Town Centre. Arriving at a degree of consensus across the town is a key first step in the masterplan process. The adjacent vision statement was compiled through a collaborative stakeholder workshop and consulted upon in draft with the public.

## 4.2 SHARED VISION STATEMENT

The vision statement across the page presents a shared aspiration for the future development of Ballynahinch over the next 15-20 years. The vision statement was developed through a collaborative visioning exercise involving statutory agencies, elected representatives, local school children and residents of Ballynahinch.

## 4.3 PROJECT AIMS & OBJECTIVES

To accompany the vision statement, a series of Aims and Objectives have been identified. Also developed through consultation and based on the positives identified through analysis, these will hold the key to realising the Shared Vision, setting in place ambitious targets for the town centre to attain.

## 1. FRESH START

### GETTING BALLYNAHINCH READY FOR ACTION

- ESTABLISH EFFECTIVE INFORMATION SHARING
- ESTABLISH STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS
- ESTABLISH ACTIVE PARTICIPATION
- ESTABLISH ACTIVE PROMOTION

## 2. FRESH CONNECTIONS

### JOINING PEOPLE AND PLACES WITHIN BALLYNAHINCH AND BEYOND

- STRENGTHEN REGIONAL LINKAGES
- STRENGTHEN TOWN LINKAGES
- STRENGTHEN TOWN CENTRE LINKAGES
- TACKLE TOWN CENTRE CONGESTION AND PARKING

## 3. FRESH LOOK

### ENHANCING THE AESTHETIC QUALITY OF BALLYNAHINCH

- ENHANCE THE WELCOME AND ARRIVAL EXPERIENCE
- ENHANCE THE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY OF THE TOWN CENTRE
- ENHANCE AND ADDRESS PROMINENT BACKLAND AREAS

## 4. REFRESH THE MEMORY

### REKINDLING THE RICH HERITAGE OF BALLYNAHINCH

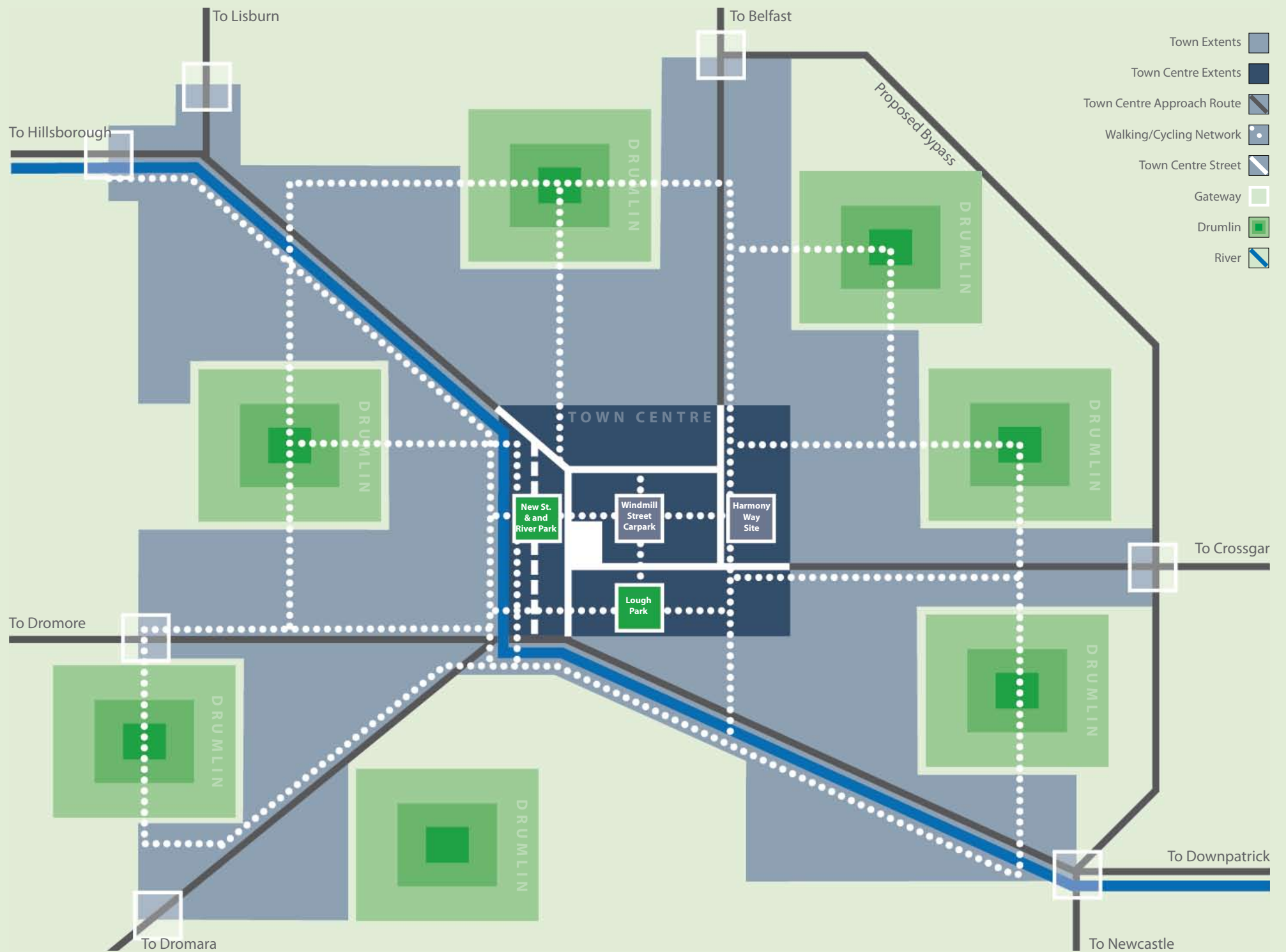
- SAFEGUARD THE TOWN'S RICH HERITAGE
- MAKE BETTER USE OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND MONUMENTS
- PROMOTE AND CELEBRATE HISTORIC EVENTS

## 5. FRESH IDEAS

### TRANSFORMING BALLYNAHINCH THROUGH CATALYTIC REGENERATION

- REALISE THE TOWN CENTRE'S POTENTIAL THROUGH IMPLEMENTATION OF BYPASS
- REPOPULATE THE TOWN CENTRE
- TRANSFORM BALLYNAHINCH AS A PREMIER FOOD DESTINATION





## 4.4 CONCEPT PLAN

In order to realise the goals set forth by the Shared Vision and Aims & Objectives, a Concept Plan for Ballynahinch has been developed. This forms the design foundation for the Masterplan's proposals and seeks to capitalise upon opportunities identified through the analysis process, whilst also addressing issues in a proactive manner.

The Concept Plan, across the page, illustrates the extent of the town, with its series of drumlins, key streets and open spaces. The central town centre core is also shown, broadly defined as High Street, Main Street and Windmill Street, and this area must be protected and enhanced as the Town develops whilst remaining the focus for continued commercial and retail activity. This will be underpinned by physical improvements, demonstrated by the environmental improvement works currently underway, and a proactive approach to support and enhance local retail.

The Concept also seeks to physically integrate the surrounding drumlins and river network with residential communities and the town centre via improved linkages. The development of a continuous riverside path following the line of the Ballynahinch River from the north west of the town to the south east would form a key walking and cycling route. This would help connect residential communities with schools, churches, community facilities and the town centre.

The Concept Plan also illustrates the line of the proposed bypass, skirting the eastern extents of the town. Gateway locations have been identified along arterial routes, at key arrival points into the town and will be the focus of improvements to positively influence the welcome experience into Ballynahinch.





# 5 The Masterplan

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The Masterplan details how the Aims and Objectives as set out by the Concept Plan can be developed into a series of proposals for the town. These proposals or projects vary in nature, scale and the timeframe associated with their delivery within an approximate period of 15 - 20 years. Proposals relate to land both in public and private ownership, therefore requiring a number of different stakeholders to be involved with their development. However, common to all proposals is a strategically founded rationale that will bring physical, social and economic benefits to Ballynahinch, contributing towards attainment of the Shared Vision.

This section of the document serves to summarise all proposals contained within the Masterplan.

- A. Rejuvenate the Towns Representative Groups
- B. Ballynahinch Town Team
- C. Local Information Hub
- D. Place Marketing Strategy
- E. Ballynahinch Bypass
- F. Sustainable Transport Strategy
- G. Arrival Point Enhancement
- H. Market Square Corner Building
- I. Premier Food Destination
- J. River Pathway
- K. Drumlin Parks
- L. Rejuvenate Historic Buildings And Monuments
- M. Events Programme
- N. Town Centre Frontage Improvements
- O. Temporary Interventions and Meanwhile Uses
- P. Town Centre Living
- Q. Public Realm (Future Phases)
- R. Laneways And Archways
- S. Conservation Area
- T. New Street And River Park
- U. Lough Park
- V. Harmony Way Site
- W. Windmill Street Car Park

## A. REJUVENATE THE TOWNS REPRESENTATIVE GROUPS

For this masterplan to be successful it needs to be taken forward by local people and supported by local and central government. Scope exists to build upon the already strong working relationships between local community groups in Ballynahinch, to drive regeneration of the town forward. This would involve supporting and building the capacity of existing groups, whilst also identifying 'gaps' where new or remodeled community organisations would be appropriate.

Furthermore, re-invigorating an active Chamber of Commerce is essential to coordinate the collective efforts of the business community in attracting investment.



## B. BALLYNAHINCH TOWN TEAM

A working group of individuals and key stakeholder groups, representing a broad cross section of community, commercial, educational, cultural and political interests within the town centre, should be established to oversee the coordinated delivery of projects forthcoming from the Masterplan.

The Town Team will be responsible for establishing timescales for delivery and evaluating performance against agreed targets. It is also recommended that a number of specialised subgroups are set up to focus on specific projects such as marketing.

## C. LOCAL INFORMATION HUB

A Local Information Hub will be established in Ballynahinch, operating out of The Market House. The principle aim of this 'Hub' is to provide local information on services and facilities within the context of the new, larger council area. This scheme will help forge stronger links and the sharing of information between statutory bodies and the local community.

The design of the Hub is an important consideration, with considerable scope to create a dynamic and contemporary space which welcomes residents and encourages them to avail of the information offer. This would also provide an opportunity to integrate user friendly digital technologies.



## D. PLACE MARKETING STRATEGY

The Place Marketing Strategy will be a vital strategic tool in realising the vision of an attractive, healthy, people orientated town centre with an excellent reputation for local food and independent retail. Key objectives include retaining the unique identity, increasing customer dwell time and creating a real potential for economic growth through increased footfall and consumer spend. Building upon the heritage attractions and gateway role to wider destinations such as Newcastle and the Mournes, the Strategy will exploit the tourism potential for the town.

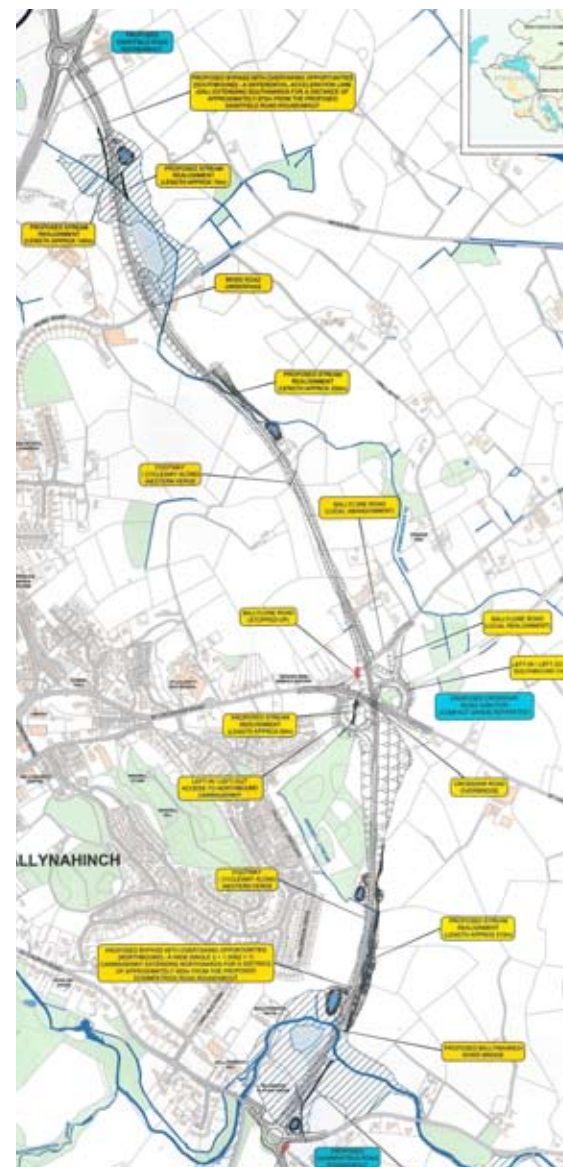
The Strategy will be delivered by the Ballynahinch Town Team, in partnership with the existing tourism and marketing structures within Down District Council (or those put in place by the new Newry, Mourne and Down District Council). Collectively, they will develop an agreed brand for the town which reflects the overarching Destination Brand for the Mournes Area and deliver an integrated marketing campaign to promote the town's distinctiveness and unique selling points.

## E. BALLYNAHINCH BYPASS

As identified through the analysis process, the current transport infrastructure arrangement in Ballynahinch has resulted in significant levels of town centre congestion.

A proposed bypass, identified in the Regional Transportation Strategy for NI (2002-12), will significantly relieve this congestion by reducing through traffic. In doing so, the impact of traffic and heavy goods vehicles in particular, on the town centre's narrow streets will be greatly reduced. Many of the masterplan proposals contained in this document demonstrate the significant opportunities afforded to the town centre by such a comprehensive improvement to the current transport arrangements and quality of the environment.

At the time of writing, an Environmental Impact Assessment was being conducted as well as ongoing consultation with landowners. It was anticipated that the final Stage One - Environmental Statement would be published in early Autumn 2014.





## F. SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT STRATEGY

A sustainable transport strategy will identify ways in which reliance on the private car in Ballynahinch can be reduced and walking, cycling and the use of public transport can be further encouraged. This will include exploring the potential of improving bus services from Ballynahinch to Downpatrick and Lisburn, and the provision of on and off road cycle paths throughout the town and beyond.

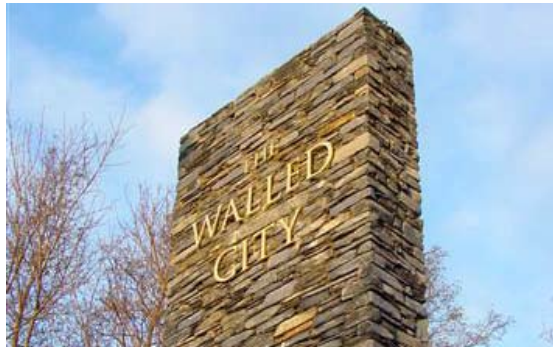
In the context of a proposed by-pass for Ballynahinch, a review of the town's one-way system should also be undertaken to determine its long term appropriateness for the town centre.



## G. ARRIVAL POINT ENHANCEMENT

Enhancement works are proposed at key gateway locations into the town. These will convey a positive and welcoming first impression to all those entering Ballynahinch, as well as attracting visitors who may otherwise pass by.

Enhancements should include gateway markers designed specifically for Ballynahinch, helping to define entrances in a style fitting to this market town. In addition, the landscape setting of the gateways should be comprehensively improved, which would be likely to include improved boundary treatments, tree planting, floral displays and lighting.



## H. MARKET SQUARE CORNER BUILDING

For several years the partially constructed building on Market Square has blighted this prominent town centre location. Measures are required to expedite the appropriate development of the building. Due to its prime location, this project has significant potential to further animate the Square, particularly at evenings and weekends.

Suitability of the site for public, private or community service provision should be explored, with potential uses including, Cafe, Library, Health and Youth services as well as PSNI frontline services, should the existing Station close. This could lend to the creation of an innovative mix of uses that further enhance the role of the town centre.





## I. PREMIER FOOD DESTINATION

Set within the heart of rural County Down and surrounded by a host of high quality local food producers, suppliers and eateries, huge scope exists for Ballynahinch to capitalise on this vibrant food scene and to establish itself as the regional focal point for quality local food.

A key element to this proposal is the historic market. Established in 1683, the Market long played an important role in the local economy as a base to buy and sell food produce and livestock. This proposal seeks to maximise the market's potential by reaffirming its role as a prime location to showcase quality local food.

Reinvesting in the market to improve its quality and frequency will act as a catalyst for generating more opportunities around the food industry in the town.

By gradually building the town's reputation for local produce through effective marketing and branding, a more fertile environment for food related business investment will emerge.

The Council, Chamber of Commerce and others should actively encourage investment into the town along this theme, forming links between existing and new businesses, from producers, sellers, caterers and consumers.

Furthermore, the recent public realm works undertaken to Market Square and surrounding streets, provide a high quality public space befitting this overall concept. Increased use of the square and, once the by-pass is in the place, surrounding streets, presents an opportunity for special markets and other outdoor food related events.





## J. RIVER PATHWAY

The masterplan proposes the extension of the riverside pathway along the entire length of the Ballynahinch River as it makes its way through the town. This will provide safe walking and cycling connections between residential communities and the town centre as well as encouraging healthy lifestyles.

The paths should be well designed and of adequate dimensions to facilitate all such users, without compromising the special environmental qualities of the river and its banks.

Longer term opportunities should be explored to extend the path network beyond Ballynahinch, connecting with other towns and regional walking and cycling routes.



## K. DRUMLIN PARKS

Ballynahinch is set within an attractive drumlin landscape. However at present, public access to these drumlins is limited. This proposal centres on transforming these spaces into community parks and developing a network of new walking and cycling links between them so that they can be enjoyed more widely by both residents and visitors.

The Drumlin Parks present an opportunity to provide high quality parkland for Ballynahinch, while also creating a unique visitor attraction. Furthermore, establishing the drumlins as public open space will help to further protect them from development, as important components of Ballynahinch's landscape setting.



## L. REJUVENATE HISTORIC BUILDINGS & MONUMENTS

Ballynahinch possesses a number of historic buildings and monuments, including the Old Mill on Newcastle Road, and the ruins of the old Windmill on Windmill Hill. This proposal seeks to bring the various heritage assets back into the life of the town with opportunities to fully refurbish these historic buildings and coordinate themed events to celebrate and promote them.

Any restoration of these buildings must be undertaken to a high standard and in close conjunction with the appropriate authorities, including Northern Ireland Environment Agency.





## M. EVENTS PROGRAMME

This proposal centres on promoting the history of Ballynahinch, which includes the famous Battle of Ballynahinch, the historic market and the old railway, through a coordinated events programme.

Ballynahinch currently hold a small number of events each year. By increasing, diversifying and promoting this programme, scope exists to attract more people to the town centre, increasing footfall and potential spend.

The organisation and running of such events should be led by the local community as much as possible, with support from Council and other organisations.



## N. TOWN CENTRE FRONTAGE IMPROVEMENTS

Building frontages in poor condition will be targeted through a frontage improvement scheme. This will be of direct benefit to owners and business operators, whilst also enhancing the town centre image. It will also compliment the recent public realm scheme and in this context frontages along Market Square are particularly important.

Historic photographs remind us of the many attractive shop fronts in Ballynahinch over the years. This resource should be fully harnessed to recreate traditional shop fronts where possible. Design guidelines will also help to ensure that shop front design, material choice, lettering and colours are well coordinated for the overall benefit of the town.



## O. TEMPORARY INTERVENTIONS AND MEANWHILE USES

Vacant or derelict buildings within the town centre will be targeted for short term remedial improvement works, until such time that more permanent solutions can be found.

In addition, opportunities will also be taken to introduce temporary development on vacant land, such as pocket parks or other socially beneficial uses.

Often relatively small amounts of funding can help to transform buildings and spaces, thereby reducing their negative impact on the overall look and feel of the town.



## P. TOWN CENTRE LIVING

Encouraging town centre living emerged as a key objective from the Masterplan Vision and was identified as an important means to create a vibrant town centre.

All new town centre development projects should seek to include an element of residential use. These should be primarily located on upper stories, thereby allowing for ground floor activation with commercial or community uses. Achieving a mix of type and tenure would also help maintain a diverse town centre population.

Where feasible efforts should also be made to convert upper floors of existing buildings, re-establishing the town centre tradition of 'Living over the Shops'.



## Q. PUBLIC REALM (FUTURE PHASES)

Building upon the high quality public realm scheme currently being delivered across the town centre, opportunity exists to extend this into other town centre streets and spaces in the future.

Areas such as Dromore Street, as well as linkages to town centre car parks are of particular importance.

As with the works to date, the needs of pedestrians and cyclists should be prioritised, thereby creating a high quality environment that will support town centre retail and tourism.



## R. LANEWAYS AND ARCHWAYS

Improving the public realm is also about creating better pedestrian connections. The reopening of laneways and archways will enhance the movement of people throughout the town centre, linking key streets, car parks, open spaces and residential neighbourhoods more effectively.

High quality public realm, lighting and appropriate signage would help to define these important new routes. Such investment would also help to act as a catalyst for commercial investment in these characterful spaces, with potential for small shops, cafes and restaurants.



## S. CONSERVATION AREA

As identified through the analysis process, Ballynahinch town centre possesses a cohesive street layout, complimented by a number of attractive buildings and spaces. In order to safeguard and promote this quality streetscape, the masterplan proposes that the merits of introducing a town centre conservation area explored.

Such a designation would afford greater control on how new development and redevelopment contributes to the character of the town.



## T. NEW STREET AND RIVER PARK

This proposal incorporates the development of a new street and linear park extending between Dromore Street and Lisburn Street. Running parallel to the Ballynahinch River, this proposal would not only help reduce traffic congestion in the town centre but also provide a high quality, town centre parkland environment.

New residential units fronting onto the proposed street also helps to achieve the vision of increasing town centre living in Ballynahinch.





## U. LOUGH PARK

This major environmental project is being progressed as a shared community initiative and will provide improved recreational facilities, including a full size 3G sports pitch, an exercise trail and a children's play area. Allotments and an enhanced network of pathways through the wetland habitat will also be developed as part of this scheme.

The masterplan also includes proposals to enhance pedestrian connectivity between Lough Park and the Town Centre. An upgraded pedestrian route, running adjacent to the Ballynahinch Centre, will provide a high quality pedestrian connection between the town centre and this important recreational area. New, appropriate development fronting onto the Park, at this location, would help to further strengthen the connection with the town centre whilst contributing to pedestrian safety by ensuring active frontages.



## V. HARMONY WAY SITE

This large town centre gateway site comprises the Library and Community Services building, the bus station and associated service yard and the Lidl supermarket. However, due to a lack of active frontages and pedestrian linkages, the arrival experience into the town centre, at this key location, is poor.

Proposals, centre on the establishment of new development, fronting Main Street and Harmony Way, and the reconfiguration of the current Lidl's supermarket to provide active frontage onto Harmony Way and Windmill Lane.

The existing buildings on the site could either be accommodated within the reconfigured layout or relocated throughout the town centre while any new residential development would add to the vision of increasing town centre living. Car parking in this area would be positioned to the rear of new development or provided underground.



Scope also exists to reconfigure the Translink depot yard by developing a contemporary, modestly-sized bus station and relocating the service yard activities to a more appropriate location on the edge of the town.

In conjunction with Proposal P (Town Centre Living), the masterplan proposes improvement works to the area of public realm in front of the Library and Community Services building. These improvement works would not only enhance the environmental quality at this town centre gateway location but also improve the setting of the War Memorial and adjacent buildings fronting onto this space.

Finally, the masterplan recommends the relocation of the existing British Legion Hall to a more fit-for-purpose facility in the Town Centre.

## W. WINDMILL STREET CAR PARK

Centrally located, Windmill Street car park is the primary off-street parking area in Ballynahinch and although well used, the poor design quality of this space compromises the attractiveness of the town centre.

Whilst retaining the existing number of parking spaces, the masterplan proposes significant reconfiguration of this space, including the establishment of new development to provide active frontage over the car park and strengthen the building line along Windmill Street.



Upgrading existing and forging new pedestrian connections between the car park and adjacent town centre streets will enhance pedestrian movement throughout the town centre.

Furthermore, this proposal contributes to the overall project vision by providing additional development units suitable for town centre living.



## RELATED TOWN PROJECTS

The following projects are located outside the town centre but have significant bearing on Ballynahinch as a whole:

1. Former Library's NI Headquarters
2. Site of former Further Education College
3. Millbrook Lodge Hotel Expansion (Spa and Gardens)

MASTERPLAN PROPOSAL		TIMEFRAME FOR DELIVERY	LEAD DELIVERY AGENTS	STAKEHOLDERS / POTENTIAL FUNDERS
a.	Rejuvenate the Towns Representative Groups	S	Council	Community Groups, Private Sector
b.	Community Masterplanning Forum	S	DSD, Council	Community Groups, Private Sector
c.	Local Information Hub	S	Council	NIEA, Community Groups, Schools
d.	Place Marketing Strategy	S	Council	NITB, Private Sector, Community Groups
e.	Ballynahinch Bypass	S/M	DRD	Council, Community Groups, Private Sector, NIEA, DOE
f.	Sustainable Transport Strategy	S	DRD	Council, Community Groups, Private Sector, Translink, Sustrans, Schools
g.	Arrival Point Enhancement	M	Council	DRD, DCAL, Community Groups, Schools
h.	Market Square Corner Building	S	Council	DOE, NIEA, Private Sector, Community Groups
i.	Premier Food Destination	S/M	Council	Private Sector, Community Groups, NITB, Good Food NI, INI
j.	River Pathway	S	Council	DARD, NIEA, DOE, Sustrans, Community Groups, Schools, Private Sector, HTH
k.	Drumlin Parks	M	Council	Community Groups, Private Sector, DOE, NIEA
l.	Rejuvenate Historic Buildings And Monuments	S/M	NIEA	Council, DOE, Private Sector, Community Groups
m.	Events Programme	S	Council	Community Groups, Private Sector, NITB, Schools
n.	Town Centre Frontage Improvements	S	Council	Private Sector, DSD
o.	Temporary Interventions and Meanwhile Uses	S/M	Council	DOE, NIEA, Private Sector, Community Groups
p.	Town Centre Living	M/L	Council	NIHE, Private Sector, DOE, NIEA
q.	Public Realm (Future Phases)	M	Council	DOE, NIEA, DRD, Private Sector
r.	Laneways And Archways	M/L	Council	Private Sector, NIEA, DRD, NIHE
s.	Conservation Area	S	NIEA	Council, DOE
t.	New Street And River Park	M	Council	Private Sector, DARD, DOE, NIEA, Community Groups
u.	Lough Park	S	Council	Community Groups, NIEA, DCAL, DOE, DARD
v.	Harmony Way Site	M-L	Council	DRD, DOE, Private Sector, Community Groups, Translink, Royal British Legion, LNI, SEHSCT
w.	Windmill Street Car Park	M-L	Council	DRD, Private Sector, NIEA

**Timeframe:**

S= Short (1- 5 yrs)

M = Medium (5 - 10 yrs)

L = Long (10 - 15 yrs)

**Delivery Agents, Stakeholders  
& Potential Funders:**

DARD

DCAL

DRD

DSD

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Department for Regional Development

Department for Social Development

HTH

INI

LNI

NIEA

Highway to Health

Invest Northern Ireland

Libraries Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

NIHE

NITB

SEHSCT

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust



# 6 Masterplan Delivery

## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The Ballynahinch Town Centre Masterplan has illustrated the need for regeneration and the substantial opportunities that exist for comprehensive development. One of the most pressing challenges now facing Ballynahinch is how to deliver this transformation, so as to realise the social, economic and environmental benefits that it can bring.

This section outlines a strategy for that process, including a Place Marketing Strategy, Action Plan for the delivery of projects, proposed structures by which masterplan implementation should be coordinated and actions for short term prioritisation.

## 6.2 ACTION PLAN

One of the key roles of the Action Plan is to prioritise those projects contained within the Masterplan, based on demand and the likely impact that it will have. Each project has therefore been allotted a short, medium or long-term timeframe.

Here short-term projects refer to those projects that could be progressed within one to five calendar years. Medium-term priority refers to those projects which could be taken forward within ten years, while long-term aspirations would be delivered over the next ten to fifteen years.

While these timeframes indicate the agreed prioritisation of projects set out within the Action Plan, it will be essential to consider the time constraints associated with specific funding streams, particularly those with imminent deadlines.

The realisation of these proposals will require input from various organisations and individuals from across the public, private and voluntary sectors. The Action Plan table therefore identifies a range of stakeholders whose involvement in the relevant initiative would be necessary. The table also indicates the lead delivery agents who would champion and coordinate the delivery of the various initiatives.

It is important to note that the following Action Plan table should be used as a 'live' document to ensure progress is monitored regularly and updated accordingly. Invariably, new projects and opportunities will arise in future, and these should be assessed against the overarching aims identified and added to the Action Plan table where appropriate. It will be the responsibility of the Community Masterplanning Forum to regularly review the Action Plan in order to evaluate progress made and identify projects where future funding could be targeted.

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**14 POOL**



# 7 Next Steps

This Masterplan has been developed by the people of Ballynahinch and will help guide anyone with an interest in improving the Town.

The Plan establishes a bold vision for the future of Ballynahinch, but in order to realise this vision, the various groups within the town must work in collaboration and be committed to its delivery.

Delivery of the various initiatives contained within this Plan will make a discernible difference to the functioning of the town and realising a number of short-term projects, particularly those that can be achieved through forward thinking and on a modest budget, will quickly demonstrate to the people of Ballynahinch the physical, economic and social benefits that the Plan can bring to the town.

While it is understood that the successful progression of the Plan will require ongoing support from the Council and statutory agencies, it is recommended that a Town Team is established to focus on project delivery and ensure the Action Plan table is up-to-date. Furthermore, a number of sub-groups could be set up and tasked with taking particular projects forward.

The overarching role of the Town Team will be to encourage community participation, build on local capacity and ensure effective coordination in the delivery of the suite of projects.

Some initial tasks that the Town Team could take forward include:

- Identifying relevant funding sources;
- Realising selected 'short-term' projects;
- Capturing and addressing the priority needs of local community groups.

The Ballynahinch Town Centre Masterplan is for all those who live, visit and work in Ballynahinch. Its success over future years will rely on a continued process of dialogue and engagement with the various groups and stakeholders operating throughout the town and district. Through the realisation of those initiatives contained within the Plan, opportunities exist to improve the way the town looks and functions and the role that the local area plays in catering for a growing tourism base.





## Ballynahinch Town Centre Masterplan

the **paulhogarth** company