

CASTLEWELLAN PUBLIC REALM COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Virtual consultation by ZOOM

16th June 2020

Co-ordinated by:

Newry & Mourne Enterprise Agency and Down Business Centre

On behalf of:

Newry Mourne and Down District Council

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1. BACKGROUND

Historically, the Department for Communities (DFC) eligible areas for investing in public realm (PR)/environmental improvement (EI) was restricted to those urban areas with a population greater than 5,000. DFC are now widening the scope of their eligible areas, to include smaller towns with a population less than 5,000, but greater than 2,500.

In Newry Mourne and Down Council area, this now brings forward:

1. Bessbrook
2. **Castlewellan**
3. Killyleagh
4. Rostrevor
5. Saintfield

What can be funded

Eligible public realm/environmental improvement works can include upgrade works to pathways, street lightening, landscaping, and street furniture. Other works may be considered, subject to further discussion and approval with DFC, such as revitalisation works including upgrades to building facades and visual improvements to vacant or derelict properties. The eligible boundary will be within the town centre, i.e. within the 30-mph zone.

Requirement

Working with DFC, Newry Mourne and Down Council have in place a forward Capital plan that identifies over the next 5 years, which areas should be profiled for capital public realm investment. This enables the Council and the Department to better plan budgets, submit funding applications, commission early pre-development design works, and apply for statutory approvals – all of which, are required ahead of scheme implementation.

Council now needs to put in place a forward capital plan for the above 5 rural areas, which fall within the public realm remit of DFC. Implementation of the forward plan is subject to funding from DFC. Putting in place a forward plan will enable Council to take some early steps to work schemes up to a certain stage and have them “funding ready.” To inform this plan, some scoping work has been required to identify need for investment in public realm/environmental improvement.

Community Engagement

To include the 5 settlements on a forward work plan with DFC, and potentially in the future to develop proposals for some schemes, Newry Mourne and Down Council engaged **Newry & Mourne Enterprise Agency** and **Down Business Centre** to prepare a report on the priorities of stakeholders in each area. The two organisations have formed a local enterprise partnership whose non-profit mission is the furtherance of economic and business development within the Newry Mourne Down region. The partnership is assisted by Eamon Larkin, Managing Partner of **Milligan Reside & Larkin**, and uses the services of other professional advisors across a range of disciplines.

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The Brief

The brief was to consult with stakeholders in Castlewellan to learn their views on what public realm works should be prioritised in Castlewellan and to prepare a final consultation report for the District Council to consider.

Consultation – during Covid 19

All consultations were undertaken within the terms of the Government's 2020 Covid 19 public health guidance, remotely using email and video / telephone conferencing.

Castlewellan Overview

The estimated population of the village of Castlewellan is 2,400. The demographic characteristics of people living in Castlewellan based on census data is as follows: 30% are aged under 16 years; 14% are aged 60 and over; the average age is 32 years (NI average age 35.8 years); 49.4% of the population are male and 50.6% are female; 92% are from a Catholic Community Background; 6.6% are from a 'Protestant and Other Christian (including Christian related)' Community Background; 7% were born outside Northern Ireland; and 0.5% are from an ethnic group other than white.

There are an estimated 850 households in Castlewellan. Statistics relating to Castlewellan households show the following: average household size is 2.94 persons per household (NI level 2.65 persons per household); 68.3% of households are one family households and 10.1% are lone-parent households with dependent children.

Previous studies of the area include an in-depth **Castlewellan Village Plan (2012)** prepared on behalf of two groups - Castlewellan Regeneration Limited and Castlewellan Community Partnership, and an updated **Addendum and Action Plan** completed in 2017.

2. THE CONSULTATION: When did it take place? Who participated?

The Castlewellan stakeholder consultation was carried out using the Zoom video-conferencing platform on Tuesday 16th June 2020. The attendees were as follows:

Facilitator

Dr Conor Patterson (Newry & Mourne Co-operative & Enterprise Agency)

Newry Mourne & Down Council representative

Martin Patterson (Regeneration, Business Support and Development Officer)

Margaret Quinn (Project Development Manager)

Down Business Centre

Janice McDonald

Joe McCoubrey

Castlewellan participants

Priscilla McAlinden (Slieve Croob DEA Co-ordinator)

Margaret Cunningham (Castlewellan Regeneration)

Moirá Hawkins (St Malachy's GAC)

Ronan King (St Malachy's GAC)

Dr Sally Montgomery (Volunteer co-ordinator with Forest Park/Arboretum Lottery development)

Nicolas McCrickard (County Down Rural Community Network)

Josie McEvoy (Castlewellan Traders Association)

Leo King (Kilmegan and Maghera Heritage Group)

Michael Donnelly (Second Nature)

Monica Maginn (Castlewellan Traders Association)

Felix Blaney

John King (King's Inn)

Janine Connolly (County Down Rural Community Network)

Councillors

Hugh Gallagher

Roisin Howell

Andrew McMurray

3. WHAT PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS DO CONSULTEES THINK ARE NEEDED?

Participants focused on 6 key issues which were deemed to be important and urgent. These were:

- Informational signage
- Use of space around the Market House
- General landscaping (flower beds and tree replacement)
- Litter bins
- Use of vacant/derelict spaces
- Car parking and general traffic management

These items are highlighted in the report and grouped within this report as potential works which could be carried out under Public Realm in the short to medium terms.

3.1 SHORT/MEDIUM TERM

1. Informational Signage

1.1 Existing signage is considered to be inadequate. There is no consistent theme positively promoting the village to visitors and no clear or systematic directional guidance to the area's main attractions (most notably the Forest Park and the Maze) and other buildings/facilities of interest.



“Existing signage does not demonstrate a clear welcome message and does not provide early signposting for the villages’ main attractions”.

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1.2 New welcome/introductory signage is required at the three main approaches to the village (i.e. from Clough, Newry, and Newcastle). Additional signage is required at the top of Mill Hill (in both directions) and at the small roundabout at the entrance to the Newcastle Road; as well as at the junction of Upper Square and Main Street. These signs should point to facilities such as Castlewellan Forest Park, the Maze, the local library, the Bunkers Hill Trail, the Bunscoil, and St Malachy's GAC premises.



The Bunkers Hill Walk (Cycle and Play Trail) is a popular amenity for residents and visitors but is not signposted within the village or at the main approaches to the village.

2. Use of space around the Market House

The location of the Market House in the centre of the village provides unique opportunities for increased public usage and amenities. Open space is available on both sides and to the rear of this historic building, which has been used frequently for events such as music festivals and markets. The consensus among consultees was that the “openness” of these areas should be maintained, but that there may be opportunities for some imaginative small-scale schemes to enhance the surroundings and make them more functional (e.g. the installation of outdoor power points).



Open spaces shown around the sides and rear of the Market House.



The popularity of the rear of the Market House for outdoor events presents an opportunity to add to the physical infrastructure of the area by erecting, for example, support columns which would allow for the use of awnings/coverings for performance stages and public

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seating areas. These could be temporary structures, easily stored and erected, for individual events.

It is also thought the area containing the Celtic Cross could be utilised to greater effect by relocating the Cross and creating bicycle parking booths or car-charging ports. These ideas would equally apply to the vacant areas to both sides of the Market House.

All areas around the market house could also be enhanced by flower containers, modern waste disposal receptacles, and public seating areas.

3. General landscaping (flower beds and tree replacement)



Road islands at Mill Hill on one of the main approaches to Castlewellan

3.1 A major concern among consultees was the drabness of the traffic islands at the Mill Hill approach to the village centre. It was recognised that previous flower planting on these islands had been affected by salt-gritters, a situation which it was suggested could be easily resolved by the use of raised wooden flower containers to provide a colourful and vibrant welcome. It was further proposed that the use of flower containers should also be extended to other approach roads and areas within the town.

3.2 Consultees stressed the importance of replacing two fallen trees at Lower Square. These had been a prominent part of the streetscape for almost 150 years. It was suggested that the Mourne Heritage Trust had access to mature 8-year-old indigenous trees which could be used for this purpose.



Two areas at Lower Square where trees were uprooted in winter storms and have not been replaced.

3.3 Litter bins



Litter bins in the village were said to be in a poor state of repair, with many reported as being no longer functional. There was consensus that these should be replaced as a matter of urgency. Consultees said that modern, more practical receptacles would enhance the character of the village.

3.4 Car parking and general traffic management

Whilst consultees acknowledged that general car parking and traffic management would be the subject of a separate, ongoing consultation with Newry Mourne and Down Council and the Department for Infrastructure NI, they wanted to highlight the need for road and pavement level public realm improvements to accommodate the provision of loading/unloading bays along main street to improve traffic flow through the town. There is no current provision in Main Street which is often brought to a standstill because of large vehicle deliveries/collections.

3.5 Other issues

Several smaller issues were also raised and are worth noting here to complete the reporting of the Public Realm consultation. These included:

- The use of the village's remaining phone box
- Signage to identify that the Market House is the Library
- The use of a visitor app to tell the story of Castlewellan
- Landscaping of the area around the traffic lights in Main Street (opposite the Northern Bank building).

3.2 LONGER TERM

Use of vacant/derelict spaces

One derelict unused space was singled out as an example of how the streetscape in the town could be transformed for the direct benefit of the community. Property beside the Oak Grill on Main Street is up for sale and it was suggested could be brought into public ownership and redeveloped for use as a small public garden or as an amenity building to service local groups and organisations. Left unattended, however, the site is a prominent eye sore.



Derelict space at Main Street could be utilised for new community facilities

4. WHY ARE THEY NEEDED?

Excerpt from Castlewellan Village Plan (2012)

"Castlewellan's townscape is run down and tired. The last major "facelift" for the town was over 15 years ago. The town is a "conservation" area and yet has dereliction, poor street furniture, poor signage — both on shops and for orientation. The major square in the town is dilapidated and adds to an air of neglect with broken furniture, degrading surfaces, vacant units, and some dereliction."

"It is apparent that the population in Castlewellan has grown considerably over the last decade and this has brought additional pressures to the town as the core resources have not been upgraded to cope with the rising population."

Local stakeholders, as represented by those who participated in the Public Realm Consultation, view the proposals contained within this report as representing the minimum level of intervention required to enhance the village's appearance and appeal.

4.1 What would be the benefits of making these improvements?

The improvements identified through this consultation would have wide-ranging impacts. These include:

- An immediate and significant visual uplift to the village's streetscape
- Providing a boost to community morale
- Increasing public awareness of what Castlewellan has to offer
- An uplift to economic activity resulting from increased visitor footfall
- Providing impetus to the private sector to invest in the infrastructure of the village.

4.2 What would be the negative effects of doing nothing?

Castlewellan enjoys high levels of tourist traffic. The local Forest Park and the Maze facility are two leading drivers of visitor numbers, as is the position of the village as a gateway to the Mourne and other attractions such as Spelga Dam. Castlewellan's strategic location makes it an intrinsic part of the Mourne visitor experience. It is for that reason imperative that the District Council and other statutory bodies ensure its appearance and the services which are on offer there are in keeping with the ambition of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the Department of the Economy to substantially grow the tourism sector in mid and south Down. A 'Do Nothing' approach would result in:

- A continued deterioration in services and amenities
- Reduced visitor experiences
- Reduced perception of the reputation of statutory bodies
- A continued loss of community morale
- Costs of remedial actions continuing to rise.
- The tourism sector in mid and south Down failing to fulfil its potential.

5. WHAT WOULD BE THE COSTS OF A SHORT/MEDIUM TERM SCHEME?

The projects identified through this consultation have been ranked in order of priority. Total costs involved in the implementation of each project will have to be worked up to take account of all expenditure items, including the:

- Appointment of a design team (Architect, Quantity Surveyor, Structural Engineer etc)
- Preparation and costing of final designs
- Pre-tender and post-tender procedure
- Planning submissions
- Final scheme costs.

This report does not include a full summary of these costs. It is sufficient at this stage to insert an overall estimated per-project cost (which takes account of the above).

SHORT/MEDIUM TERM PROJECTS

Priority Identified – Informational Signage

Informational signage to include welcome and general information signage at 3 key approaches to the village, plus a number of inner-village directional signs.

Estimated Cost: £20,000 to £30,000

Priority Identified – Use of spaces around Market House

There is a choice of options which will sit alongside a scheme to provide flexible cover space for open-air events.

Estimated Overall Cost: £100,000

Priority Identified - General landscaping (flower beds and tree replacement)

All required actions are calculated to be undertaken as part of an overall strategy to enact the specific proposals outlined in section 3.

Estimated Cost: £75,000

Priority Identified – Litter Bins

Costing for this includes provision for the replacement of at least 10 x litter bins (which includes the construction of new bases and boundaries).

Estimated Cost: £30,000

LONGER TERM PROJECTS

Priority Identified – Vacant/Derelict Space

One major project highlighted at Main Street. This will require property to be brought into public ownership and redeveloped as a community facility (garden and/or indoor facility)

Estimated Cost: £400,000 to £1m

5.1 Sources of Funding

The Department for Communities (DFC) will be the primary funding source, however efforts will be made to also investigate alternative sources of funding that may become available. Working in conjunction with identified funders, Newry Mourne and Down District Council will identify eligible projects that could be selected for securing funding to meet project costs.

6. Next Steps

This report has been submitted to Newry Mourne and Down Council for consideration and discussion at various levels. Opportunities for funding will be reviewed with DFC / DAERA and other potential funders. Where funding opportunities are identified, further consultation will be completed with communities to progress scheme design, with necessary agreement through Council obtained.

It will be for the Council, working closely with the Department for Communities / appropriate funder, to move forward as follows:

Action	Outcome
Step 1	Secure Funding
Step 2	Appoint a Design Team
Step 3	Secure Planning Permission
Step 4	Tender for a Contractor
Step 5	Complete Construction