

# SAINTFIELD PUBLIC REALM COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

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**Virtual consultation by ZOOM**

**26 May 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. **Saintfield**
2. Killyleagh
3. Castlewellan
4. Bessbrook
5. Rostrevor

### **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 rural areas 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 for final consideration. These organisations are a local enterprise partnership whose sole aim 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 Saintfield to learn their views on what public realm works should be prioritised in Saintfield 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.

## **Saintfield Overview**

The population of Saintfield Ward in 2010 was estimated at 3,586, of which 19.7% were children, 26.7% were young working age adults; 33.8% were older working age adults; and 19.7% were older people. Young working age adults are defined as 16-39 years old, and older working age adults as adults 40-64. 22% of residents defined themselves as being from a Catholic community background and 73% from a 'Protestant or other Christian community background, 25% of persons aged 16 and over were single (never married), 35.8 years was the average age of the population and the population density was 2.2 persons per hectare.

Saintfield is an historic village, with 33 listed buildings. That and its conservation area status is regarded by its elected representatives as one of its greatest assets.

Previous studies of the area include an in-depth **Saintfield Integrated Development Plan (2012)** prepared by URS Infrastructure & Environment UK Limited on behalf of Saintfield Town Regeneration Committee and an updated review carried out in 2017/2018.

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

The Saintfield stakeholder consultation was carried out using the Zoom video-conferencing platform on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> May 2020. The attendees were as follows:

### **Facilitator**

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

### **Newry Mourne & Down Council representatives**

Margaret Quinn (Project Development Manager)

Amanda Smyth (Head of Regeneration and Business Development)

Ellen Brennan (DEA Co-ordinator for Rowallane)

### **Down Business Centre**

Janice McDonald

Joe McCoubrey

### **Rowallane Councillors**

Robert Burgess

Terry Andrews

Patrick Brown

### **Saintfield Development Association**

Martyn Todd (Chairman)

Paul McGeown

Brian Gamble

Kevin Young

David Greer

### **Other attendees**

Linda Beers (Business Owner)

Lisa Curran (Health Development worker East Down Rural Community Network)

Bill Perceval Price

Ellen Brennan

Moirá George (retail shop owner)

### **Apologies (with written email contributions)**

Grainne McHugh (SureStart)

Bill McKelvey

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

Participants expressed wide-ranging views on many aspects of Saintfield's infrastructure, often referencing detailed ideas which were incorporated in various reports, most noticeably those published in 2012 and 2018. The consensus was that Saintfield had been experiencing issues of inadequate or deteriorating public realm and the vacancy of former shop, office and licensed premises for some time, although acknowledgement was made of prior works carried out by Down District Council, Newry Mourne and Down Council and the Roads Service.

The focus of the Saintfield stakeholders on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020 was on Main Street (particularly Upper Main Street and the Fair Green Roundabout area), and on parts of the Lower Main Street (leading onto the Belfast to Downpatrick main carriageway).

Recurring themes within the discussion were issues involving:

- Upgrading shop fronts
- New pavings/footpaths
- Main Street road surface
- The treatment of derelict buildings
- Shared indoor community drop-in/meeting space
- Pelican crossing between High Street and Community Centre
- Additional open public spaces
- Upgrade main car park and provide additional parking spaces
- Upgrade and relocation of public toilets
- Surface water flooding from Fair Green to Main Street.
- The need for a "spend local" campaign, which could include the development of a mobile phone app which would allow shoppers to upload a personal spending balance which could then attract discounts when purchases were made in Saintfield shops.

### **3.1 SHORT/MEDIUM TERM**

1. **Shop frontage scheme** (including repainting new signage and replacement of gutters). A previous study (2017/2018) generated 40 firm expressions of interest from shop owners in a shop front improvement scheme. The Saintfield stakeholders in 2020 said that there was anecdotal evidence that interest in such a scheme has strong and indeed that uptake could reach 50 participating premises.



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2. **New pavings/footpaths:** Particularly needed in Main Street (and more specifically in Upper Main Street). Residents were concerned about the dangerous state of large sections of footpaths and the problems this caused those with mobility difficulties.



3. **Road Surfacing:** Main Street suffers from uneven surfaces, which are not only visually distracting but are also dangerous for motorists.
4. **Additional car parking:** There is a lack of town centre car parking in Saintfield. The main car park requires upgrading to improve traffic circulation and create additional spaces.



*The Village's Main Car Park is in urgent need of maintenance*

5. **Upgrade and relocation of public toilets:** It was suggested that public toilets should be relocated within the main car park (these works could be carried out simultaneously with the reconfiguration of parking).



*Public toilet block which should be demolished. A new block could be located at the village's main car park site.*

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6. **Derelict Buildings (remedial):** work should be carried out to clean up, make safe, and repaint vacant buildings in the centre of Saintfield to visually enhance the village's streetscape.



7. **Pelican Crossing:** Urgent need for crossing between High School and the Community Centre on the Belfast Road.



## 3.2 LONGER TERM

1. **Re-use of Derelict Buildings:** Several buildings were highlighted in Main Street and Downpatrick Road as having been vacant for a substantial time. Some will require urgent structural safety work (notably on roofs) while others need to be brought back into commercial usage. These include:

- Two-storey building at No xxx Main Street (now under the ownership of the Catholic Church)
- The former Mace shop in Main Street
- The former Rowallane Inn (Downpatrick Street and Todd's Hill)
- Derelict buildings Downpatrick Street.
- Derelict Buildings at Fair Green

- 1.1 One potential project was highlighted in particular - a small block of buildings close to the Fair Green Roundabout. It was said that a planning application to demolish these buildings and use the space for 9 x townhouses appeared to have stalled. A number of consultees said that the site could be brought under public ownership to allow the buildings to be demolished and the space converted into a small public park and/or a drop-in centre/meeting space for local groups, such as those engaged with mental health awareness.



*A small block of buildings at close to the roundabout at Fair Green could be the site for new community amenities.*

4. **Additional open public spaces:** In addition to the small public park proposed at Fair Green, residents proposed a scheme to provide a more substantial public park adjacent to the new community centre (Belfast Road).
5. **Surface Water Flooding:** The problem of flooding from the Fair Green area running down into Main Street was highlighted. The issue had been raised with the Department of Infrastructure and predecessor agencies. While they had carried out surveys they had not thus far prioritised any remedial works. The concern of consultees was that without a flood prevention project in this area some of the surface level public realm improvements which might be completed in Fair Green and Main Street (e.g. pavements, road upgrades) could be damaged or undermined.

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6. **Spend Local App:** Traders and elected representatives said that an opportunity existed to improve the commercial prospects of retailers in Saintfield especially in the post-Covid recovery period by introducing a loyalty campaign (delivered through a phone app) to encourage people in the Saintfield area to use local traders. Councillors said that this was an idea that could also be taken up by other villages and towns in the District.

## **4. WHY ARE THEY NEEDED?**

### **Excerpt from Saintfield Integrated Development Plan (2012:**

*“Saintfield has a strong base from which to develop. The Village Plan seeks to improve and regenerate the assets which are already in place. This is illustrated by the selected proposals for a shop front improvement scheme and Environmental Improvement scheme on Main Street. The assets of the buildings and the street structure are already there, they simply require more care and preservation to help realise Saintfield’s potential.”*

The projects highlighted in this May 2020 Saintfield Public Realm Community Consultation mirror, to a large extent, the views and aspirations expressed consistently by the community over the course of the past 10 years. Stakeholders see these proposals as representing the minimum level of intervention required to enhance the village’s appearance and appeal. They contend that this package of support is needed because continued deterioration during the last decade has had (and is continuing to have) a significant adverse effect on the area’s physical infrastructure and on community morale.

### **4.1 What would be the benefits of making these improvements?**

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

- Immediate and significant visual uplift to the village’s streetscape
- Improvement in access to all shops and services, particularly for the elderly and those with mobility issues
- Increase in public safety
- Uplift to economic activity resulting from increased shopping footfall
- Boost to community morale
- Encouragement of additional ‘village pride’ initiatives by individuals and groups.

### **4.2 What would be the negative effects of doing nothing?**

#### **Footpaths**

It is difficult not to foresee a continuing and rapid deterioration of surfaces, most likely leading to vital sections of pedestrian paths becoming highly unstable and unusable. As a result, these areas would require to be closed, thereby denying public access to the natural flow of a safe and reliable thoroughfare. Circumventing closed sections of public pathways will force pedestrians onto a busy street, a situation likely to be exacerbated by cars parked close to kerbsides.

Consideration must also be given to pedestrians with mobility problems. The current state of footpaths is already causing considerable stress and safety concerns. Sections of the Main Street path infrastructure are already barely navigable for those using walking sticks and rollators or those with general balance issues. Continued surface deterioration will impact greater on this section of the community, including residents and visitors, and will cause them to be further excluded.

The potential economic and social costs of environmental damage are likely to be substantial. Threats include an increased loss of work suffered by the village's retail and commercial sectors.

## **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 require to be worked up to take account of all expenditure items, including:

- Appointment of design team (Architect, Quantity Surveyor, Structural Engineer etc)
- Preparation and costing of final designs
- Pre-tender and post-tender collaboration
- 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
Shop frontage scheme (involving, where necessary, repainting and replacement of gutters). Allow for uptake of 50 x properties.
Estimated Cost: £60,000 to £100,000

Priority Identified
New pavings/footpaths. It is envisaged this will involve both sides of Main Street and other areas adjoining Main Street.
Estimated Cost: £120,000 to £180,000

Priority Identified
Upgrade to existing central car park, plus the creation of additional parking spaces. Note: This work also involves the establishment of new public toilets in the central car park area.
Estimated Cost: £80,000 to £120,000

Priority Identified
Derelict Buildings (remedial): Initial work required to clean up, make safe, and repaint derelict buildings. Estimated for up to 20 x buildings.
Estimated Cost: £40,000 to £60,000

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## LONGER TERM PROJECTS

### Priority Identified

Derelict Buildings (detailed): Some will require urgent structural safety work (notably on roofs).

Estimated Cost: £75,000 to £90,000

### Priority Identified

Bring derelict buildings at Fair Green under public ownership to. Demolished and convert space into a small public park and/or a drop-in centre/meeting space.

Estimated Cost: £1m - £1.5m

## 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.

## 5.2 Other issues

Several other issues arose from this consultation. Although not covered by the terms of public realm interventions they were viewed as urgent actions requiring immediate follow up. They are highlighted here to draw the attention of Newry Mourne and Down District Council to significant local concerns which need to be addressed. These are:

1	<p><b>Spend Local App:</b> Improve current town shopping trends by introducing a loyalty campaign (delivered through a phone app) to encourage shoppers to use local traders and benefit from discounts available to participants.</p> <p><b>Action Required:</b> Consideration by the Council for separate funding, either as a standalone project, or a project shared with other villages.</p>
2	<p><b>Surface Water Flooding</b> from the Fair Green area down Main Street. Scheme needed to remedy current deficiencies.</p> <p><b>Action Required:</b> Refer to NI Water.</p>
3	<p><b>Road Surfacing:</b> Main Street suffers from uneven surfaces, which are not only visually distracting but are also dangerous for motorists.</p> <p><b>Action Required:</b> Refer to Roads Service.</p>
4	<p><b>Pelican Crossing:</b> between High School and the Community Centre on the Belfast Road.</p> <p><b>Action Required:</b> Refer to Roads Service.</p>

**Note:** Members of the Saintfield Development Association expressed a strong preference for the development of a comprehensive report detailing all aspects of the needs of the village. This would entail putting together a master plan based on the two previous village development plans of 2013 and 2017, adding in new issues and aspirations that have arisen since then.

## 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