

2040

- And Beyond



A VISION FOR PORTLAOISE

A STRATEGY FOR A BETTER TOWN CENTRE

May 2017



2040 and Beyond: A VISION FOR PORTLAOISE
A STRATEGY FOR A BETTER TOWN CENTRE

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Laois County Council

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01 / Foreword

When early Christian settlers and later, Normans, cast their eyes to the rocky outcrop at Park, Co. Laois, it is possible their first thoughts were 'location, location, location'. And though the mighty Fort and Castle of Dunamaise came to a premature demise in the 14th century, it is likely that Tudor planters formed the same impression in the 1500's when choosing a site nearby to establish the early pattern of what is now Portlaoise.

Throughout its 500 year history, Portlaoise Town, in general, has witnessed population increases from decade to decade and has currently the highest percentage of people under 18 years in the State. In common with many other towns and large urban centres, not alone in Ireland but across the western world, the traditional town centre, the colloquial 'High Street', is under stress and in significant danger of being left behind in a new order of urbanism. The threats of core city/town centre depopulation run true, the influence on traditional trade from on-line purchasing is ubiquitous and the attractions of car-borne shopping to retail multiples in peri-urban areas are problematic for many rural towns in Ireland.

But Portlaoise has many positive attributes:-

- *It is central and very accessible,*
- *It has a great quality of life,*
- *It maintains a very progressive business culture,*
- *It has a young and talented population.*

Therefore, it is right and it is timely that Portlaoise would take some time to examine and determine its future direction. Faced with the challenges of climate change and energy efficient planning, the requirement for ensuring that workplaces are in close proximity to residential areas, the requirements for good place making and revitalising town centres, this vision for Portlaoise attempts to look around the corner over a horizon of 20 to 40 years and to set out a sense of how the town can develop in a truly sustainable way to cater for a population of up to 30,000. It is appropriate also that soon after the publication of a draft National Planning Framework, "Our Plan 2040", that Portlaoise, representative of so many pivotal and strategic towns, would seek to set out its own direction within a national context. Laois County Council believes the Vision Statement achieves this aim and that in so doing strives to provide a way forward for today's young population, for today's and tomorrow's business people while taking full account of national and global trends and opportunities.

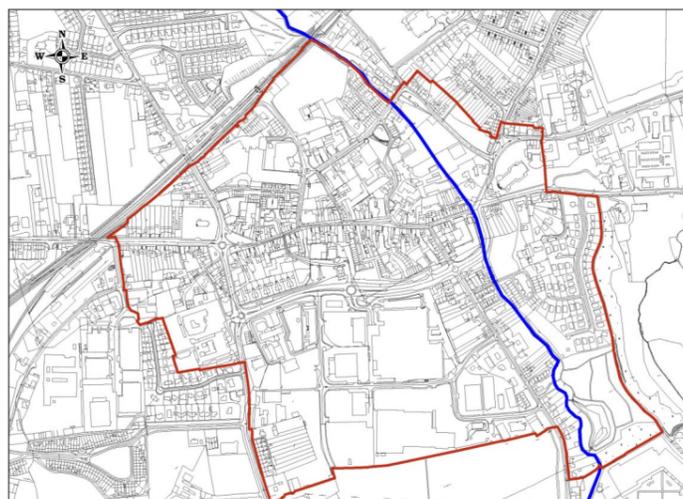
The Purpose of the Strategy

'2040 and Beyond: A Vision for Portlaoise' is a strategy that re-examines and re-purposes the Town Centre of Portlaoise. The overarching aim is to formalise a shared vision to focus on public spaces, buildings and walkways in a way that acknowledges the unique characteristics and heritage assets that the Town possesses, but also provides the foundation for the future development of a thriving town centre. This will be achieved through a number of interventions including:

- The designation of key urban spaces for enhancement and specific urban design proposals;
- The prioritisation of pedestrian linkages between the old and new town areas that will allow the Town to become a connected place;
- The 'greening' of the Town Centre to improve the environment and aid in promoting health and well-being of residents and visitors;
- The utilisation of the River Triogue as a key environmental and amenity asset;
- Realisation of the potential of key heritage assets that will not only showcase the Town's history for its residents, but also provide the foundation for an expanded tourism offer for this unique place;
- The rebranding of the Town Centre as a place for people, where residents, shoppers and visitors alike can spend time enjoying its buildings and spaces.

The Strategy will deliver:

- A Vision Statement for the future development of Portlaoise Town Centre;
- The heightened awareness of Portlaoise's evolution and fabric, making use of interactive and passive 3D simulations of the Town which will inform the urban planning context through historical environment re-construction and future projection of opportunities to guide and prompt public and private investment;
- Strategic policies for a new Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2018 – 2024.



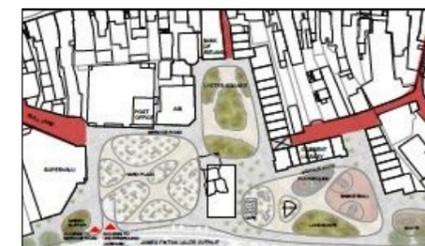
The People's Town

Urban Design / Smart Design

A Future for our Heritage

The Connected Place

Sustainability Indicators



The Creation of a **Low Carbon** Town Centre

The Delivery of a **Walkable** Town Centre

The **Greening** of Portlaoise Town Centre

Exposure of the **Cultural Heritage**

Exposure of the **River Triogue**

The **Reconnection** of the **Old and New** Town Centre

Accommodating **Living in Portlaoise** Town Centre

Accommodating **Working in Portlaoise** Town Centre

02 / The Shared Vision

Portlaoise Town Centre will become a place for its people, where residents, workers and visitors alike will come to enjoy a place that is inclusive, accessible and truly sustainable from a social, economic and environmental perspective. It will be an exemplar town centre where businesses thrive and the pride of the population is reflected in public spaces.

Portlaoise 2040 and Beyond: The Shared Vision

In order to deliver on this shared Vision for Portlaoise Town Centre a number of key actions will be required to support the following outcomes;

- The Creation of a Low Carbon Town Centre
- The Delivery of a Walkable Town Centre
- The Greening of Portlaoise Town Centre
- Exposure of Cultural Heritage within Portlaoise Town Centre
- Exposure of the River Triogue as a Pedestrian / Cycling Route
- The Reconnection of the Old and New Town
- Accommodating Living in Portlaoise Town Centre
- Provision for Working in Portlaoise Town Centre

Outcomes

The Creation of a Low Carbon Town Centre

- AMBITIONS**
- Significant reduction in carbon emissions driven by interventions at James Fintan Lalor / Lyster Square.
 - Re-balance the existing circa 3,600 car parking spaces.
 - Target 10% of all journeys by bicycle by 2020.
 - 300-500 trees planted in the Town Centre.

The Vision for Portlaoise presents a unique opportunity to become Ireland's first Low Carbon Town Centre. Reducing the impacts of car use on the public realm, promoting walking and cycling and improving the mix of uses within the Town Centre will aid in changing from a 'typical' to an 'exemplar' Town. This aim is particularly relevant with the population of Portlaoise likely to continue growing at a rate above the national average (28% from 1996 to 2002, 52% from 2002 to 2006 and 38% from 2006 to 2011).

This aim will be supported by removing large volumes of traffic from the Town Centre via delivery of the Portlaoise Southern Circular Road; aided by reconfiguration of traffic flows through the Town Centre this will deliver a less trafficked and contested place. By directing traffic towards parking areas adjacent to the Town Centre and away from the pedestrian priority areas of James Fintan Lalor Avenue, Lyster Square, Market Square, Main Street and other key public areas, priority will be given to the pedestrian rather than the car.

Making a genuine shift to a more pedestrian-friendly and low carbon place requires rebalancing the amount of car parking provided and replacing a significant area of what is currently tarmacadam with green, planted areas and trees. This will reduce the amount of carbon emitted in these key public spaces, delivering significant health benefits. This can be achieved while facilitating a significant reduction in car use in the central public spaces of James Fintan Lalor and Lyster Square.

The clear opportunity to reduce carbon emissions in a Town Centre defined by James Fintan Lalor Avenue, Lyster Square, Market Square and Main Street will improve overall air and environmental quality; support more active travel through walking and cycling; and provide a better quality environment for leisure and social uses.

The introduction of green spaces threaded through the Town Centre by way of the Triogue Blueway, James Fintan Lalor Avenue and Lyster Square will support the reduction in carbon emissions through increased cycling and walking and a reduction in car use. Other opportunities include the potential for renewable-powered public lighting and adopting more sustainable energy sources in County Hall, County Library and other public buildings.

The creation of green spaces within James Fintan Lalor Avenue and Lyster Square will complement the existing open space within Portlaoise. The linkages between the existing open space at People's Park and Triogue Linear Park will foster a greater use of the existing and new amenity spaces while providing increased provision of open space to cater for continued population increase within the greater Portlaoise Town area.

The Delivery of a Walkable Town Centre

- AMBITIONS**
- Reduce barriers to pedestrian flows through the Laneways and Lyster Square.
 - Introduce clear, direct pedestrian routes between the Old and New Town Areas, and provide pedestrian access across James Fintan Lalor Avenue and Lyster Square.

James Fintan Lalor Avenue effectively severs the direct pedestrian linkages between the old and new town areas and this is identified as a key issue for the Strategy. International practice and national guidance has brought a shift in thinking away from a car-centred to a pedestrian and cyclist-centred approach in relation to traffic management in our towns and cities. The interventions in this Strategy will facilitate implementation of a truly pedestrian-friendly town centre in Portlaoise.

'Smarter Travel – A Sustainable Transport Future: A New Transport Policy for Ireland' (2009) seeks to accommodate more sustainable means of travel, in particular walking and cycling and public transport. The Vision for Portlaoise seeks to accommodate a shift toward walking and cycling journeys, in support of national policy as well as the Draft Laois County Development Plan 2017–2023.

Giving priority to both pedestrians and cyclists will encourage greater adoption of sustainable means of travel in the future. By improving walking and cycling infrastructure and providing a safer and more user-friendly environment, the public will be encouraged to walk and cycle more in the future.

The opportunity to make a direct link from the People's Park to the Southern Circular Road at the south of the Town Centre will facilitate more walking and cycling by parents and children to and from school, noting the campus cluster of Gaelscoil Phortlaoise, Maryborough National School and the Portlaoise Educate Together National School at this location. A green area in private ownership between the Portlaoise Retail Park and the Gaelscoil site is identified as potentially facilitating a secure fenced and paved access to and through the People's Park to the north of the adjacent roundabout.

02 / The Shared Vision

The Greening of Portlaoise Town Centre

AMBITIONS

- Increased social spaces and facilities for exercise, play and relaxation to improve community health and well-being.
- Habitat, pollination and ecosystem services benefits.
- Make the Town Centre a more attractive place in which to live, work and visit, including visual enhancements.

Creating linkages from the farmland beyond the Town into the Town Centre is a central part of the Portlaoise Vision. This strategic aim will provide for the restoration of this linkage which was severed by the construction of James Fintan Lalor Avenue in the early 1980's. The provision of corridors for birds and pollinators will also provide a healthier linkage between the parks and green areas on the outskirts of Portlaoise through the Town Centre.

The Strategy proposes the delivery of a contiguous pedestrian-friendly green spine running east-west along the line of James Fintan Lalor Avenue through the centre of Portlaoise. This new, connected public space will contain green infrastructure for its length and link an extended Civic Plaza at County Hall to the west with the River Triogue Blueway which runs north-south. The Blueway links the People's Park to the south-east of the Town Centre with the Triogue Linear Park at the north of the Town Centre; it then runs under the railway line at the boundary of the Town Centre providing access through the Triogue Linear Park to the adjacent residential areas.

The Triogue River runs through the Convent lands to the east of the Town Centre. These lands are at risk of flooding and a Site Specific Flood Risk Assessment (SSFRA) will be required for any future development proposals. The Draft Laois County Development Plan 2017—2023 requires a 15m Riparian Buffer Zone from the water's edge. This is intended to accommodate a continuous ecological corridor but can also provide for both pedestrian and cycle access through the Town Centre.

One of the key aims of the Strategy is to create an aesthetic that is unique to Portlaoise; that reflects its history as a rural market town; fits with a progressive and dynamic urban core; and offers an amenity to the growing population of Portlaoise Town and Town Centre. The Strategy will deliver improved public space to the growing population of Portlaoise, which will benefit the community in terms of health and well-being, visual amenity and environmental benefits for habitats, pollination and healthy ecosystem services.

Implementing the Strategy will result in the following benefits:

- Improved community health and well-being.
- Increased social spaces and facilities for exercise, play and relaxation.
- Visual enhancement within the Town Centre.
- Environmental benefits for habitat, pollination and healthy ecosystem services.
- Making the Town a more attractive place in which to live.

Exposure of Portlaoise's Cultural Heritage

AMBITIONS

- Improve the exposure and interpretation of Portlaoise's extensive cultural heritage.
- Prioritise exposure of the Fort Protector, Ridge Cemetery, St Peter's Old Church and Cemetery and other heritage assets in Portlaoise Town Centre.

Portlaoise retains a series of buildings related to the Town's 16th century foundation. These include the Fort Protector, a military fort built in 1548 as part of the conquest of the area; the Old St Peter's Church; the 'Store House' embedded in the later Presentation convent; the River Triogue; and the Ridge Burial Ground. These early 'foundation sites' influenced the development of the historic town which grew around them, with Portlaoise finding its current form in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The historic centre is a designated Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) and comprises:

- The foundation sites in the north of the Town Centre (above), around which a Catholic ecclesiastical quarter developed in the 19th century;
- Main Street, which began as a market place at the Lower Square, later extending to the east and to the west;
- Market Square at the western end of Main Street, with Coote Street, Grattan Street and later the Abbeyleix Road emanating outwards;
- Historic lanes extending south from Main Street, likely marking entrances to the early Town and now connecting to the modern area around James Fintan Lalor Avenue;
- Towards the eastern end of the Town Centre, the Ridge Burial Ground and the converging roads from Dublin and Stradbally, now dominated by the church of SS Peter and Paul.

The cultural heritage embodied in the ACA is a significant resource for the Town. The varied streetscape, punctuated by imposing buildings creates a distinctive architectural character. However, the qualities of the public realm have become degraded and cluttered, and design in the urban landscape has lost sight of the inherent spatial qualities and significance of the streetscape.

Informed conservation of historic buildings which define the public realm of Portlaoise can recover a sense of the historic Town. Linking the Town's built environment with local historical figures and families and presenting and interpreting its social and industrial heritage can further deepen this sense. Landmark buildings such as the Courthouse, Portleix House or the former Munster and Leinster Bank, or architectural terraces such as on Church Street, can benefit the public realm by improving their setting or creating spaces and routes that enhance their context. The oldest sites in the town, the Fort Protector, the Presentation Convent building, the churchyard and ruin of Old St Peter's Church, and the Ridge Burial Ground have potential to reveal and evoke the depth of history embedded in the fabric of the Town. Linking these related sites to present the story of the Town can transform the standing of Portlaoise as a place of cultural and architectural heritage.



The Convent Building on Church Avenue



Old Fort Quarter Festival launch



Contested Space



Lower Square

02 / The Shared Vision

Exposure of the River Triogue

AMBITIONS

- Open up visual and physical access to the River Triogue.
- Provide access via the River Triogue from People's Park as a continuous pedestrian and cycle link through the Town Centre and potentially through the Convent Lands.
- Reconnect the Triogue Linear Park and the residential areas to the north of the Town Centre.

The River Triogue runs south to north skirting the eastern edge of Portlaoise Town Centre and through the People's Park to the south east. It incorporates a continuous pedestrian pathway which runs to a pedestrian gate at the eastern end of James Fintan Lalor Avenue. The River Triogue is canalised and fenced-off from public access along the section parallel to the end of James Fintan Lalor Avenue, where it continues to the bridge at Bridge Street. The River then traverses the Convent Lands, however with no public access. It continues canalised alongside the Church Street Car Park where it passes under Church Street to emerge at the pathway access to the Triogue Linear Park; it then continues north to a stone bridge under the railway tracks, and then northwards to Greenmill Lane.

The Strategy supports creating a continuous pedestrian and cycle link following the River Triogue across the Convent Lands. The Draft Laois County Development Plan 2017—2023 requires a 15m riparian buffer zone from the water's edge, and in this way providing a wide ecological corridor along the River. This presents an opportunity to provide an amenity corridor to facilitate both pedestrians and cyclists.

Providing a pedestrian and cycle route from the People's Park through Portlaoise Town Centre, along the Triogue Linear Park to connect with the residential areas to the north of the Town Centre is a priority. The separation of pedestrian and cyclist traffic from vehicular traffic is also an important principle of green infrastructural development in the Strategy.

Providing new amenity spaces will enhance the quality of life in the Town, making it more liveable and visually attractive. By enhancing the spaces along the River, coupled with decreased pollution, there will be ecosystem improvements which will further benefit the local environment and bring a sense of the country into the Town.

Key to the success of the Linear Park will be cross-connections to the Town Centre and other routes along the way. This will have the effect of making the park safer to use, more animated and usable space, creating a virtuous circle leading to a more popular and functional route.

The Reconnection of the Old and New Town Centre

AMBITIONS

- Improve pedestrian links, based on desire lines, from Main Street through the Laneways and between the Old and New Town Centre.
- Pedestrianise Lyster Square to connect with the retail areas south of James Fintan Lalor Avenue.
- Improve the pedestrian experience by reducing car dominance on James Fintan Lalor Avenue.

Portlaoise enjoys excellent connectivity within the County and the Country as a whole, however the perception has been that it is a place that is passed through rather than a destination in its own right. This view is being challenged by local people with a growing sense of pride in a place that provides a good quality of life while enjoying the opportunities of a central location nationally.

In recent years the 'centre of gravity' of the Town has moved to the south of James Fintan Lalor Avenue toward the Laois Shopping Centre, Kyle Centre, Shaws Department Store and the cluster of other large retailers in that area. This has resulted in a decline in the traditional retail core of Market Square, Main Street and Lower Square. The creation of a consolidated Portlaoise Town Centre capable of catering for its growing population and providing a unique mix of attractions for visitors to the Town and County is a primary aim of the Strategy.

The opportunity to create a modern, attractive gateway to the wider area is crucial. There are a number of positive attributes in both the Old and New areas that need can be embedded in the marketing strategy for Portlaoise Town Centre to attract local visitors and those from the wider region.

There is a significant opportunity to enhance the offer of the traditional Town Centre from Market Square to Lower Square including Main Street. These areas are an alternative to the larger 'multiple' operators and bring a genuine local independent, distinctive and eclectic retail and food mix. The added attractions of the cultural (Dunamais Theatre and the proposed new library) and unique heritage attractions, including the Fort Protector and the Old St Perter's Church as part of a cultural quarter, make for a genuine complementary offer for residents, local people and visitors alike.



Railway Station, Railway Street



Main Street



Bank Place, Railway Street

02 / The Shared Vision

Accommodating Living in Portlaoise Town Centre

AMBITIONS

- Increase the residential population of Portlaoise Town Centre from c.600 to a minimum of 2,500 by 2040.
- Promote the reoccupation of vacant residential stock within Portlaoise Town Centre, including 'Living Above the Shop'.
- Promote the efficient use of the Convent, CBS and Parish Lands for residential and other uses.

There is currently a small resident population within the Town Centre (c.600 people) which is concentrated in clusters. There are also a number of above ground floor residences in certain locations across the Town Centre which have remained vacant for some years. Conversely there are a significant and growing number of nightclubs and public bars.

The number of residential properties falling into long-term dereliction is notable. A detailed survey of the condition and constraints to reuse all vacant residential units is important in light of increasing housing demand and the need to enliven the Town Centre. In many cases these properties may require substantial upgrading and renovation works, in particular to comply with fuel and energy conservation requirements, as well fire safety requirements.

The Strategy promotes efficient densities and residential typologies in all opportunity sites throughout the Town Centre in the Portlaoise Local Area Plan review.

A comprehensive 'Toolkit for Reoccupation' including the offering of advice in relation to Planning, Building Control, Fire Safety, Security and other relevant statutory issues to owners, tenants and potential investors, as well as providing information in relation to any currently available funding (e.g the Town Centre renewal schemes) should be provided by the local authority. (See Appendix A—Thematic Design and Activity Manual).

Provision for Working in Portlaoise Town Centre

AMBITIONS

- Provide opportunities for an IT Ecosystem centred on the SIRO high speed broadband capacity.
- Develop a creative cluster / employment hub.
- Accommodate small units of office accommodation at first floor level on Main Street, as well as existing retail.

Portlaoise Town Centre historically provided a wide range of employment including Kelly's Foundry, Odlum's Mills, the Railway Station and many schools and small businesses. However, many of these institutions have gone out of business or in the case of the schools have been replaced with modern consolidated facilities on the outskirts of the Town. The existing employment base includes the Department of Agriculture amongst others while the predominant employment within the Town Centre is retail and hospitality. The area south of James Fintan Lalor Avenue, including the Laois Shopping Centre and the Kyle Centre is at the centre of a cluster of largely national 'multiples', whereas Main Square, Main Street and Lower Square are predominantly local independent retailers and hospitality outlets, including The Heritage Hotel and O'Loughlin's Hotel.

The Town Centre offers significant potential to facilitate small and medium-sized enterprises at street level and above existing ground floor retail uses. There are already a number of professional services being accommodated across the Town Centre, however there is still significant capacity available at competitive rents.

The opportunity to develop a creative cluster / employment hub near Bank Place or other locations within the Town Centre could build on national exemplars in this sphere. An example is the Fumbally Exchange in Dublin City Centre, a successful not-for-profit hub of co-working spaces for small businesses, sole-trades and start-ups.

The possibility of creating a SIRO-enabled high speed internet IT creative cluster at this and other locations will also be considered. Ludgate Exchange in Skibbereen could provide a model as an innovative enterprise and creative co-working environment; it has a long term objective to create up to 500 direct jobs via a sustainable digital economy for Skibbereen and the wider West Cork area.

Portlaoise enjoys the advantage of access to fast, efficient rail and bus services for employees, employers and customers moving to and from the centre of Dublin, of Cork or of Limerick. Given the advantages of the imminent SIRO broadband rollout, this opportunity and the related IT start-up or outsourcing potential is supported by the Strategy. The relatively low cost of living; affordable residential and commercial rents; and available vacant properties would be attractive to potential service providers to set up in Portlaoise Town Centre. There are a significant number of derelict and vacant properties within the Town Centre that can provide for both residential and workspace uses.



Portlaoise Railway Station



Existing Residences at Church Street



Lyster Square



Laneway

03 / Portlaoise Today

The history of Portlaoise from the plantation of Laois and Offaly in the 16th century, the establishment of Fort Protector and the evolution of the town of Maryborough through to the County town of Portlaoise today.

The Story of Portlaoise

Origins in the sixteenth century

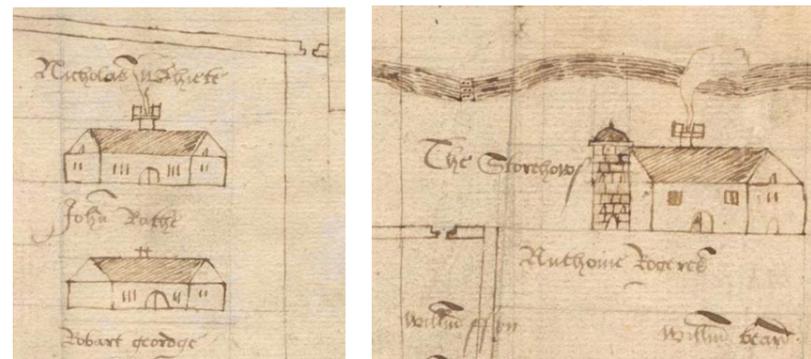
Known until 1920 as 'Maryborough', Portlaoise owes its current name to the 16th century 'Fort Protector' - one of two Crown Forts built by English forces in 1548 as military outposts after the defeat of the O'Moore and O'Connor clans and occupation of their territories. Eight years later, two new counties were created, Queen's County and King's County, named respectively after Mary I and her Spanish consort Philip II of Spain.

Plans of the town and fort from c. 1560 show a small settlement of seventeen buildings within an enclosure surrounding the fort. The fort is shown having a circular bastion on the north-east corner and a rectangular tower, the Castle of Maryborough, in the south-west corner and inside the fort a timber-framed two-storey barrack building with a thatched roof. The Town flourished briefly but was plundered and burnt on several occasions after 1580 before the territory was finally pacified in 1607.

There is a lack of documentary evidence of the town from the 17th century, but urban historians suggest that the laneways to the south of Main Street, in particular Lyster Lane and Pepper Lane, may have acted as entrances to the walled settlement.

Eighteenth century developments

The urban core emerged in the early 18th century, with the growth of the Town around the fort, and extending out to the east and west. A map of 1721 indicates the extent of this urban growth, including a former mill stream to the east which dictates the curving form of Church Avenue today. The Lower Square was at that time bounded to the north by the fort wall and to the south by the widening of Main Street. It served as the town's central market place until the establishment, in the early nineteenth century, of the Market Square south of Maryborough Commons. The form of the Town in the mid-eighteenth century is shown on a map of 1766, including small depictions of the Old St Peter's Church and the original Courthouse. The eighteenth-century saw the building of fine Georgian terraces, a good example of which survives today on Church Street.



Nineteenth century expansion

The Town's greatest thrust of development occurred during the early 19th century, which generated the central Town plan as we know today, in addition to varied streetscapes created with a mix of archetypal pattern-book designs and vernacular terraced dwellings. The first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1839 reveals much about the Town's urban fabric and

public architecture and illustrates clearly the form generated by the early historic core of development surrounding the fort and the outward expansion along routes out of the Town.

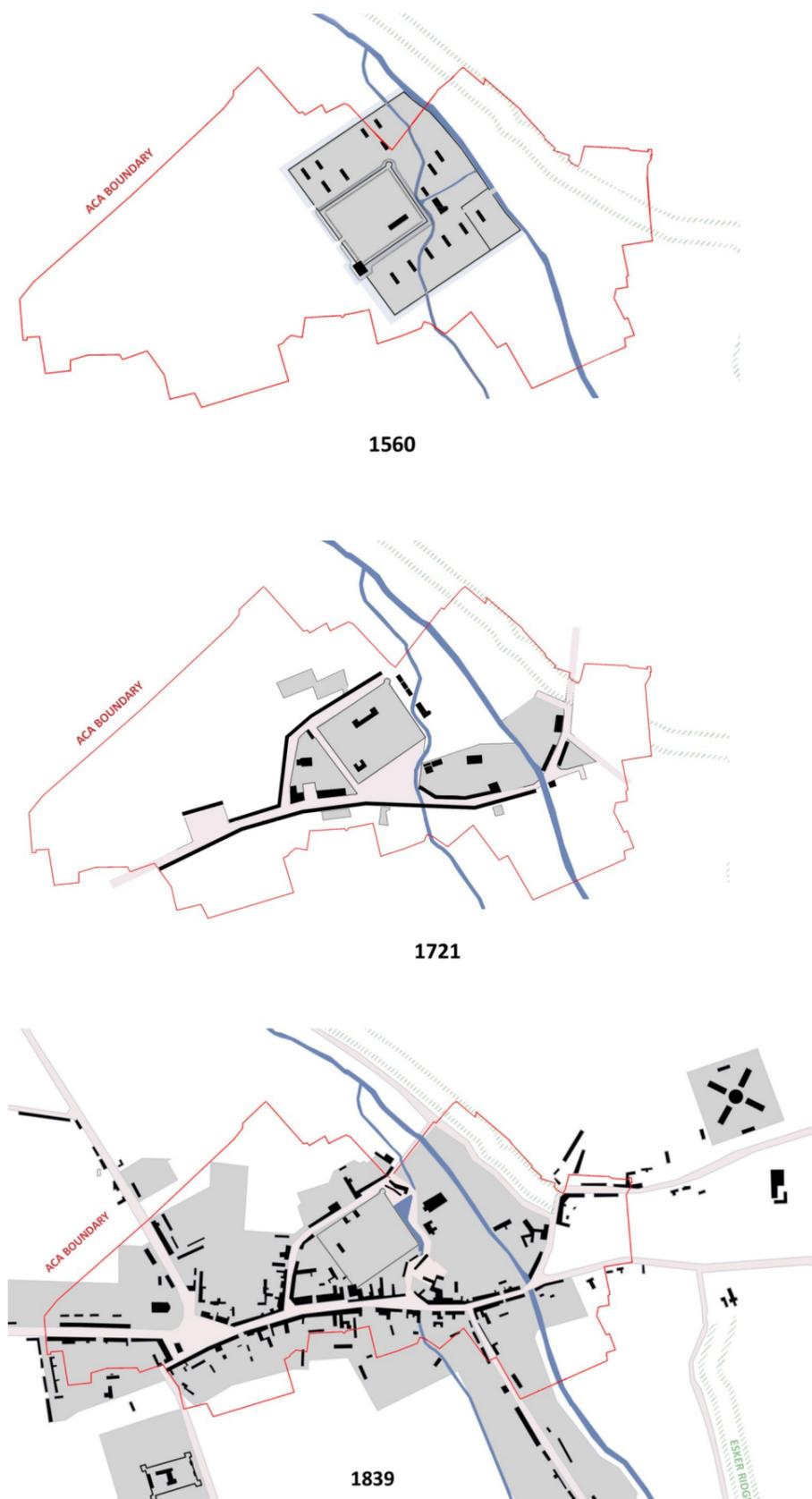
A number of significant buildings were built in the opening years of the century, notably a Market House; the County Infirmary; the Protestant Church; the Courthouse and the New Barracks, now the Garda station, the last three replacing earlier structures. An institutional quarter developed on the Dublin Road in the 1830s, with the building of the prison and St. Fintan's Hospital. A Catholic ecclesiastical quarter developed to the north and east of the old fort with the church of SS Peter & Paul and the Presentation Convent forming a significant architectural set-piece.

The arrival of the railway in Portlaoise between 1844 and 1846 provided access for new local development including the laying out of Railway Street. The second edition six-inch Ordnance Survey map of 1889 shows the diversion of the Abbeyleix Road directly into the Market Square to line up with Coote Street, resulting in a major alteration to the architectural space.

Twentieth century

The 20th century saw the addition of new housing schemes and some new public architecture. Some fine 20th century structures were added to Main Street, including banking institutions, two good hotels, and an elaborately decorated Medical Hall & Pharmacy, reflecting the Town's prosperity and enhancing the already vibrant streetscape. Significant losses were the destruction of the Town Hall in a fire in 1945 removing the focal point of the Market Square, and the demolition of the church of SS Peter & Paul in the 1960s, to be replaced with the present church as a new focal point combining traditional church form with non-traditional details.

In 1935 the Modernist Midland Regional Hospital was built by Michael Scott, one of Ireland's most illustrious architects. The main thrust of speculative and social housing came during the mid-20th century when some well-considered housing estates, such as O'Moore Place, were built on the periphery of the Town. The laying out of James Fintan Lalor Avenue in the 1970s as an inner relief road changed the face of Portlaoise and facilitated new commercial and industrial development in its vicinity, as well as the building of the new County Hall in 1982.



1500	1600	1700	1800	1900	2000
<p>1548 Fort Protector and 'Store House'</p> <p>1556 'Maryborough' founded</p> <p>1560 Old St. Peter's</p> <p>1567 Market granted</p> <p>1570 Charter granted by Queen Elizabeth</p>	<p>1635 Fairs granted by Charles 1</p> <p>1650 Fort demolished by Cromwellian forces</p>	<p>1712 Birth in Maryborough of Bartholomew Mosse, founder of Rotunda Hospital, Dublin</p> <p>1789 Old Gaol</p>	<p>1800 Old Market House</p> <p>1804 St. Peter's C of I Church by James Gandon</p> <p>1804 New Barracks</p> <p>1805 Courthouse by Richard Morrison</p> <p>1808 County Infirmary</p> <p>1830 New gaol by William Deane Butler</p> <p>1832 St. Fintan's Asylum</p> <p>1835 Castle demolished</p> <p>1837 Catholic SS Peter and Paul</p> <p>1844 Great Southern and Western Railway</p> <p>1847 Railway Station by Sanction Wood</p> <p>1872 Presentation Convent enlarged</p> <p>1883 Methodist Church</p> <p>1885 Competition for new Townhall</p> <p>1891 Munster and Leinster Bank by J.J. O'Callaghan</p>	<p>1911 Kellyville Park Houses</p> <p>1920 Maryborough renamed Portlaoise</p> <p>1931 Scoil Christ Ri by Vincent Kelly</p> <p>1935 County Hospital by Michael Scott</p> <p>1945 Market House destroyed by fire</p> <p>1965 New SS Peter and Paul</p> <p>1972 ESB by Robinson Keefe Devane</p> <p>1975 James Fintan Lalor Avenue</p> <p>1982 County Hall</p> <p>1991 Closure of Odum's Mill</p>	

03 / Portlaoise Today

Portlaoise continues to experience above-average population expansion of up to 38% (2006—2011) at 20,145 and is fast emerging as a main service hub for the Midlands, continuing to increase its ranking within Leinster. Taking the population growth projections conservatively, it would be possible to assume a population of up to 28,000 - 30,000 within the 2040 horizon of the Strategy.

The Town enjoys a number of key assets that characterise a consolidated and compact Town Centre. Many of the key assets that make up a traditional Town Centre are located within the traditional core including churches, leisure and community facilities. The Town Centre also has a consolidated business and retail cluster which has seen a major expansion to the commercial heart, south of James Fintan Lalor Avenue. The Avenue bisects the modern Town Centre to the south from the traditional business core around Market Square, Main Street and the Lower Square. The Town has become centred around Lyster Square, a transitional commercial space and car park linking the modern day and historical Town Centre areas.

Experiencing Portlaoise Today:

As part of the in-depth urban analysis process the project team convened a number of Public Consultation Workshops attended by the public, advisory agencies, businesses, key community stakeholders and young peoples' representatives. The outcomes of this process can be thematically linked and presented in the following sections:

- Perceptions
- Living
- Working
- Movement
- Sports & the Arts
- Heritage

It is under these headings that experiences of the Town as it exists today can be defined and used to understand how it may be improved into the future.

What People Said:

Perceptions



The perception of Portlaoise both internally and externally must be addressed. While common perceptions of the Town include some negative views, many strengths were identified including Portlaoise Tidy Towns, the attractive Main Street, a strong community spirit, and many unique assets such as People's Park and the Town's tourism potential. Key points raised during the Consultation include:

- Portlaoise has 'Pride of Place' and a friendly, small town feel, as well as a young population.
- Concern of losing Portlaoise's sense of identity due to rapid growth.
- Poor presentation and limited attractions in the Town Centre.
- Lack of a defined town centre— *'Not a place for people, a place for cars'*.
- Lack of green space within the Town Centre. River Triogue is an asset not yet exploited.
- Street clutter / excess signage.
- Relocate the Courthouse within the Town Centre, and reuse the existing building.
- Security and anti-social behaviour, and the perception of same in the Town.
- Personal safety at night, including for young people, due to the number of public houses, particularly on Main Street.
- Lighting in the Town Centre was considered inadequate, in particular the laneways off Main Street, and Lyster Square.
- Linked issue with residential occupancy and the potential for passive surveillance.

Working



The Town Centre has a large number of employers including the Laois and Kyle Shopping Centres and the Department of Agriculture, however over the years Portlaoise has seen a decline in heavy industry in the Town Centre. The opportunity to accommodate SME's is facilitated by a large stock of available property at affordable rents which can accommodate start-ups in the area of Technology and IT, with a significant interest on the part of the stakeholders and the community.

The main shopping area has shifted from the traditional core of the Market and Lower Squares and Main Street toward Laois Shopping Centre and surrounding stores to the south of James Fintan Lalor Avenue at Kylekiproe. Market Square, Main Street, Lower Square and Lyster Square provide a wide selection of predominantly independent retailers and hospitality which complement the new Town Centre area. Concerns identified in relation to the historic core were balanced by a note that the Town Centre is consolidated.

The relocation and closure of several schools has had the dual impact of reducing the employment base while leaving significant vacant properties within the Town Centre. While this is a short term problem, in removing both vibrancy and activity it also represents an opportunity to reuse these Key Town Centre sites. There are also many vacant street buildings which provide the opportunity for renewal and re-use within the Town Centre. Key points raised during the Consultation include:

- Vacant and derelict buildings in the Town Centre should be brought forward as priority development opportunities, potentially to include pop-up shops.
- Properties are available and suitable for business start-ups.
- There are a number of opportunity sites within Town Centre, e.g. former institutional lands.
- The potential of Main Street needs to be a priority, including opportunities in crafts and fashion, but also the lack of convenience retail.
- The loss of access to closed school sites, the Convent garden in particular, is a negative. However, key sites could be accessed again as part of a mix of compatible future uses.
- Imminent high speed (1,000Mbps) broadband rollout by SIRO.
- Large employers and FDI are lacking and SME's need to be facilitated by incentives.
- Poor after-hours economy—lack of night time dining on Main Street.
- A hostel, apartments, and a Portlaoise / Laois museum were suggested.
- Concern that the 'wrong' commercial development might occur on certain strategic Town Centre lands.

Sports & the Arts:



Portlaoise Town Centre has a major cultural asset in the Dunamais Arts Centre & Theatre. O'Moore Park is a key national, regional and local sports asset, with many key GAA fixtures held there year-round alongside many established music and comedy venues in the Town Centre. The proposed moving of the library to Lower Square is considered a very positive development and the re-use of the Courthouse building as a possible combined cultural heritage facility offers significant potential. Key points raised during the Consultation include:

- Opportunity to plan a calendar of festivals and events within the Town Centre.
- A Busking Festival, a Street Festival and other opportunities were proposed.
- There is potential to display art and photography on the street.
- The potential of Crafts should be considered for retail units.
- There is potential to establish a museum / cultural facility within the Courthouse.
- Old Fort Quarter Festival is being run in 2017. Other events should also be supported.

Living



In order for a balance of daytime and night time vibrancy and vitality, and to develop a thriving Town Centre, a resident population is essential. Over the recent past, residential occupancy levels have dropped significantly in Portlaoise, as in many of our County and Market Towns. The last available Census figure for 2011 indicates a resident population of approximately 600 persons within Portlaoise Town Centre.

The existing residential occupancy is predominantly located in a tight cluster around the perimeter of the Town Centre. There are a significant number of Town Centre residential units that are currently vacant and in certain instances abandoned. These units could be in many cases remodelled to accommodate modern living requirements within the well-serviced Town Centre. Key points raised during the Consultation include:

- The Town Centre can facilitate new residential communities.
- There are opportunities for 'Living over the Shop'.
- There is a need for local affordable housing provision.
- There is a need for a mix of private, social and affordable new housing.
- There is a significant residential potential in the Convent, CBS and Parish lands.
- Potential intensification of uses, to include residential, at Lyster Square.
- Potential to increase passive surveillance.

Movement



The size and general accessibility of the Town Centre makes it pedestrian friendly. Pedestrian linkages between the historic core around Main Street and the modern shopping areas south of James Fintan Lalor Avenue through Lyster Square and across James Fintan Lalor Avenue are considered poor. There is also a low level of cycling activity in Portlaoise.

Vehicular access and parking for shopping, businesses and visitors must be balanced with traffic dominance and congestion, and the need for attractive and safe pedestrian environments. In particular, James Fintan Lalor Avenue, the roundabout adjacent to Lyster Square and Lyster Square itself were identified as areas of particular concern. Changes to reduce the location and volume of traffic is central to the delivery of a people-focused town instead of one dominated by cars.

Portlaoise has excellent rail, bus and car connectivity nationally, including directly to Dublin, Cork and Limerick. The proximity of the station to Main Street (4 minutes walk) is notably closer than most other towns in the Region. Despite this, much of the movement passes through rather than stopping in Portlaoise. Local bus services provide links to towns and villages in the County from James Fintan Lalor Avenue, Portlaoise Rail Station and the Midlands Hospital, and serve both the old and new shopping areas in the Town Centre. Key points raised during the Consultation include:

- Lyster Square is not pedestrian friendly. Suggest pedestrianising or covering Main Street.
- Links from Town Centre to the Peoples Park and the Triogue Linear Park for cycling and pedestrians need improvement.
- Improved accessibility and pedestrian wayfinding within the Town Centre, including linking Fitzmaurice Place to the Triogue Linear Park.
- Contested space between traffic and pedestrians. Re-prioritise for pedestrians.
- Promote and accommodate cycling and walking. Improved walking and cycling provision is an opportunity within the Town Centre and beyond.
- Rail commuters perceived as not visiting the Town Centre.
- Young people expressed concerns with regard to road safety and identified it as a barrier to cycling.
- Free parking was seen as a positive, whereas parking in general was seen as a weakness and a threat by some. There were conflicts between pay parking and free parking. Parking enforcement requires close attention.
- Circa. 3,600 available car parking spaces within the Town Centre—opportunity to rebalance existing car parking provision.
- Perception that car parking is required close to shops. Lack of multi-storey car parking. Also opportunity for underground car parking.
- The Orbital Route (incl. the Southern Circular Road) would reduce traffic through James Fintan Lalor Avenue and the Town Centre.
- Reduced car use promotes a cleaner environment and improves health and well-being.

Heritage



The history of Portlaoise, with the establishment of Fort Protector and the town of Maryborough in the 16th century, is central to the very distinct sense of place in Portlaoise. Added to that, the Old St Peter's Church and graveyard at Church Street, along with the many other important heritage assets, fortify the identity of the place. Yet many of these assets remain hidden and their exposure, as well as the storytelling around these assets, is essential to be revealed. It is notable that some studies and works have already begun for both the Fort Protector and the Old St Peter's Church. Key points raised during the Consultation include:

- There is potential for the exposure of the Fort Protector and Fitzmaurice Place as heritage assets.
- St Peter's Church ruin and the attended cemetery should be opened up.
- Many buildings on Main Street could be better presented.
- Potential to have a Portlaoise / Laois Museum in the Town Centre.
- Potential for the Old Convent Building to be a Museum.
- The original street pattern within the historic Town Centre is largely intact.

Young Adults and Children's Views

Our young people are our future, and their collaboration and involvement in the visioning process was crucial to defining Portlaoise in the future. They provide a unique perspective on how places work and how people interact with their immediate and wider environment. A workshop was facilitated at the Portlaoise Youth Café on James Fintan Lalor Avenue to gather the views of Comhairle na nÓg. The engagement and issues discussed were particular to teenage persons' experience of Portlaoise Town Centre. Additionally, a further meeting was held with a group aged between 7 and 12 years of age.

The wide number and diversity of issues raised is illustrative of the potential and importance of engagement with this important cohort of citizens.

Key points to note:

- Portlaoise Town Centre should be a 'Place to Remember'.
- Lack of cycling facilities and promotion of cycling safety.
- More car parking enforcement.
- There is an unused taxi rank at the Kyle Centre.
- Promotion of the use of electric cars.
- Anti-Social Behaviour and the concentration of public houses in the Town Centre.
- A lack of supervision in the Town's parks.
- No places to gather or meet.
- Lack of awareness of the existing youth facilities.
- Possibility of a 'No Name Bar' for meeting, relaxing, socialising was raised.
- Possible re-use as either a hotel or a museum for the Old Convent building.
- The Triogue River and the issue of rubbish and pollution.
- Opportunities to place art in public places.

What Has Been Achieved

Laois Garden of Remembrance - County Hall

The Laois County Garden of Remembrance was opened at Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise in May 2016 to mark the centenary of the Easter Rising. The garden, designed by landscape architects Austen Associates, contains 7 oak trees to represent the signatories of the Proclamation; a copy of the Proclamation; paving; raised planters and seating to create a restful civic space. The garden deliberately links the statue of James Fintan Lalor which stands outside County Hall, with the Proclamation – representing the important influence that the writings and legacy of 19th century patriot Lalor had on the thinking of the leaders of 1916, and in particular Pádraig Pearse.

Broadband Rollout Portlaoise

The imminent launch of a high speed broadband service in Portlaoise as part of the strategy is welcomed. Using the existing ESB network, the SIRO service is delivered by fibre optic cables all the way to buildings. This technology, known as ‘fibre-to-the-building’, has no copper connections at any point to slow down the network, and it delivers 1 Gigabit download and upload speeds. SIRO’s 100% fibre-to-the-building network is three times faster than the best service available in Dublin and 14 times more powerful than the fastest average internet speed in Ireland.

St Peter’s Church and Graveyard

A Conservation and Management Plan was prepared for the (Old) St Peter’s Church and Graveyard on Railway Street by an archaeologist in February 2016. This comprehensive Management Plan is currently being implemented on a 2/3 year programme of remedial works to both the historic fabric, trees and vegetation within the site. The long term aim is to make this key historical site open to the public as a contemplative space during daylight hours.

Fort Protector Study

The Fort Protector is a large rectangular fortress, measuring 105m x 127m, which is embedded in the urban fabric of the town of Portlaoise. It was built in 1547-48 as part of the suppression of the Gaelic Irish territories of the O’More and O’Connor clans. The plantation of Laois and Offaly followed shortly thereafter and was formalised in the creation of King’s County and Queen’s County in 1556. The Fort marks the foundation of the town of Portlaoise.

In 2015 and 2016 Lotts Architecture completed the first two phases of a Conservation Plan for the Fort Protector for Laois Heritage Society. The Plan is to be completed in 2017. Its aim is to create a policy framework to guide all future decisions on the development of the Fort to enable its eventual restoration as a heritage site. It is felt that a properly presented Fort site would promote the regeneration of the Town Centre and could become an important place for the interpretation of the history of the Midlands. The design team have reported to a steering committee consisting of the Laois Heritage Society and the Heritage Officer of Laois County Council.

Phase I of the Conservation Plan was completed in 2015. It involved an historical chronology drawn from secondary sources, charting the context in which the Fort was built, the hundred years of its existence, and its decline into the Town; a site-by-site visual description of the fabric which survives today, covering 14 properties inside the wall and 10 around its perimeter; a preliminary interpretation of the features identified in the documentary analysis and physical survey, and a preliminary assessment of significance. Phase II of the Conservation Plan was undertaken in consultation with archaeologist Dr Eoin Sullivan and included a review of primary historical sources to gain more reliable understanding of the foundation and history of the Fort; an archaeological assessment by Dr Eoin Sullivan; an electronic laser survey carried out by Apex Surveys and the formulation of a Statement of Significance including an exploration of some ideas for its future development.

A third Phase is intended for 2017 which will develop a set of management policies which eliminate or mitigate threats, and which bring about the informed conservation of all aspects of significance, especially where these may be competing interests.

Southern Circular Road

The delivery of a southern relief road running east-west to the south of Portlaoise Town Centre has been identified as a strategic objective for many years. The recent Part 8 process to acquire and deliver the road has been undertaken by Laois County Council with a clear intent to deliver the project and seek to divert the N80 around Portlaoise Town Centre and thereby reduce the current high volumes of local and regional traffic which is passing through Portlaoise, while facilitating access for local traffic to the new schools along the N80 towards the Stradbally Road.

Portlaoise Library

The former Shaw’s Department Store at Lower Square on the eastern end of Main Street was purchased by Laois County Council as a site for the new Portlaoise and County Library. The appointment of architects in late 2016 paves the way for the design, public consultation and ultimately the delivery of a state of the art library facility at the heart of Portlaoise Town Centre. The library facility will provide a strong focal point and a meeting place accessed from a key high quality and vibrant public space at Lower Square.

Moving from today towards a sustainable future:

Consultation and Research

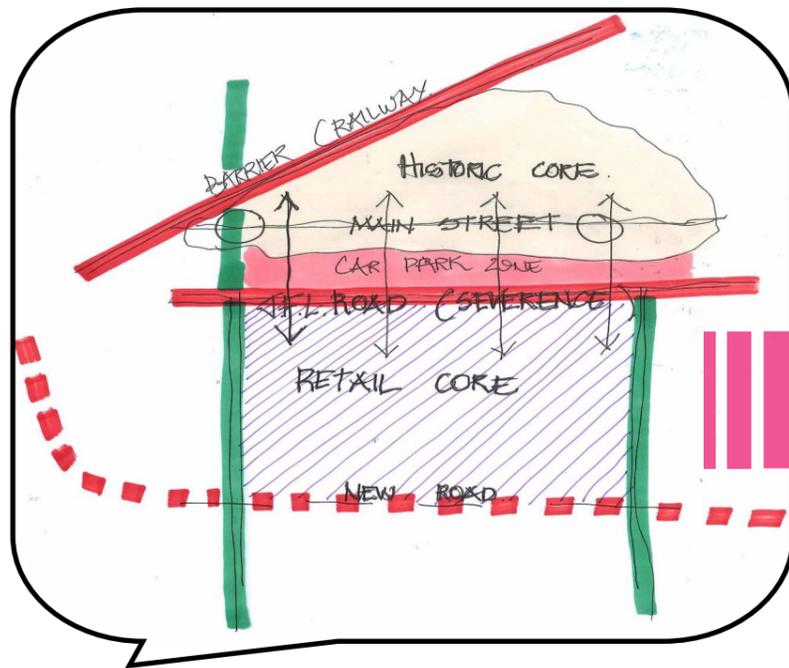
The comprehensive consultation undertaken, including public workshops, formed the basis for this Strategy. A clear linear flow can be traced from the issues raised by stakeholders, through the research phase to emerging specific interventions, policies and objectives.

Emerging Strategy and Interventions

Each of the comments and observations can be traced through the process to specific proposals.

Iteration and Design

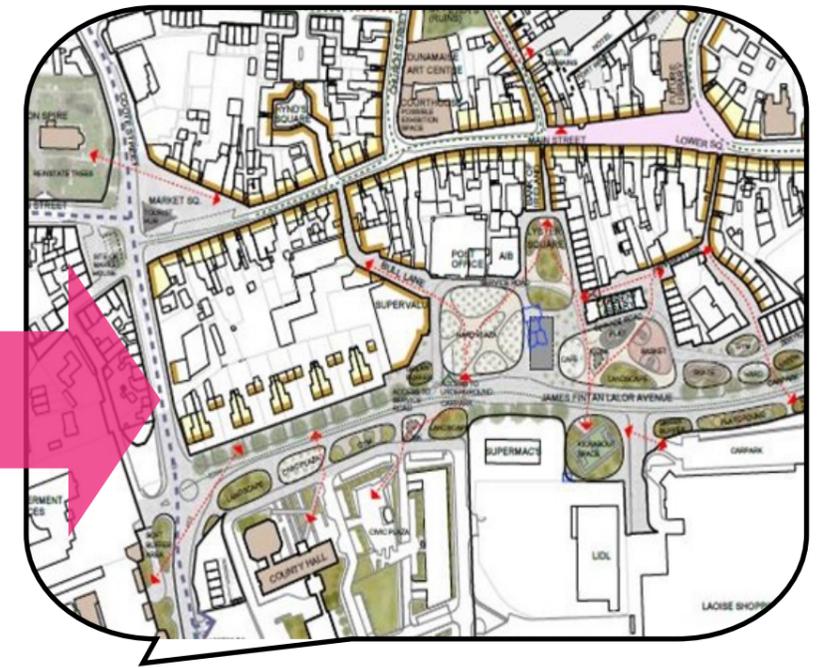
The workflow illustration is intended to convey the process of consultation, analysis and design development in arriving at a Strategy that takes the intermediate steps from the initial familiarisation and immersion of the project team in the place through the various consultation workshops and meetings and finally in the design iteration of particular actions / interventions.



Initial Sketch



Public Workshop Sketch



The Strategy

04 / Guiding Principles

The Public Realm Strategy is arranged and described under five Guiding Principles, which address the key facets of the urban environment and public realm - community, urban design, heritage and sustainability.

- **The People's Town**

A vibrant Town Centre and public realm that meets the needs and aspirations of those who live and work in it and those who visit, wherever they come from and however long they stay.

- **Urban Design—Smart Design**

A public realm based on urban design principles that are distinctive and authentic.

- **A Future for Our Heritage**

A public realm that not only embraces its unique heritage but promotes this heritage as a tourism asset.

- **The Connected Place**

A Town Centre and public realm that is accessible, pedestrian friendly and 'wired'.

- **Sustainability**

The assessment of the social, economic and environmental impacts of any intervention is essential as a guiding principle.

The People's Town

The People's Town is a Town Centre and public realm where people choose to live, shop and spend their leisure time. It is a place that residents are proud of and that others are interested in and drawn to. It is a Town Centre with a high quality public realm, a range of shopping facilities, quality housing, local amenities and a 'liveliness' that attracts people to it.

Community Focus

The community were consulted widely in making this Strategy and consequently the community theme is central to the Vision Statement. The Strategy seeks to benefit the community by creating a liveable and socially cohesive public realm that has a mix of quality facilities. Key streets will be treated less as thoroughfares and more as attractive, multi-purpose pedestrian friendly spaces, with improved links to public transport and walking and cycling infrastructure, as well as the enhanced presentation and interpretation of the Town's heritage offer.

Living in the Town Centre

The Strategy will enhance the quality of life of residents and the ability of the Town Centre to attract occupiers and investment. There is a need to create a high quality public realm environment that connects to a network of open spaces, parks and squares and makes the Town Centre an attractive place to live. Suitable locations for housing must offer a critical mass of development capable of creating the capacity to provide the improvement in amenity and setting that will make Town Centre living more attractive to young and old alike.

Improving the Retail Environment

Compared to the traditional shopping heart of the Town, the new retail area offers a different experience in terms of shopping environment. Whilst there is un-met retail capacity up to 2018, the historic Town Centre presents the opportunity to create diversity and distinctiveness in Portlaoise's retail offer, as well as to provide attractive, pedestrian friendly connections between it and the new retail areas. Improvements in the Town Centre public realm, specifically accessibility and integration, offer opportunities to create stronger nodes that provide a better experience and diversity of retail, as well as high quality food and drink and other complementary uses.

Urban Design—Smart Design

Successful urban design can deliver sustainable communities and a high quality built environment that attract people to live, work and visit an area. The delivery on the ground of the Public Realm Strategy will need to be focused around culture, public spaces, destinations, linkages, community opinions, building on existing assets, accessibility, marketing, phasing and partnerships. The outcome will be a distinct and authentic public realm based on the following urban design principles:

Activity - Create a physical environment that encourages year-round use, day and night activity and smart design to deal with our changing climate.

Focal Buildings - This is not about dominance through height or mass but about the public realm engaging subtly through use, layout and materials that allow for users to gravitate to particular locations within the Town Centre as part of a movement and activity strategy.

Buildings & Space - Surrounding buildings need to engage with public spaces through ground floor uses and design that reaches out (physically and/or perceptively) into the public realm.

Access - Reducing the dominance of the car and improving ease of access to car parking will make the public realm feel more comfortable, safe, aesthetically pleasing and better connected.

Identity - The best public spaces ensure that they orientate and engage with surrounding land uses and distinct features. Portlaoise's local assets such as heritage, culture and food allow for the creation of such a distinct identity.

Heritage - The Town's heritage is a central feature and allows for activities to be promoted; specific functions to be embraced to create identity; organised tours and informal trails to be promoted around key sites (e.g. Fort Protector and Dunamais Theatre) and themed arts and cultural events to be held in those locations.

Focal Buildings - This is not about dominance through height or mass but about the public realm engaging subtly through use, layout and materials that allow for users to gravitate to particular locations within the Town Centre as part of a movement and activity strategy.

Curating the Place - It is important that there is a sense of ownership and clear responsibility which ensures the implementation of initiatives (for example the Library as a key opportunity) that will benefit the public realm, the Town, its business and communities, and that may lead to an increase in revenue. The community should consider themselves 'keepers' of the Town Centre.

Flexibility/adaptability - There is a need for public spaces and key buildings to be able to refocus their purpose from an operational perspective to allow for different events and experiences.

Residential use - New residential development in the Town Centre must be well-integrated, and must enhance future key components of the public realm and fully support the Vision Statement's implementation.

A Future for Our Heritage



Enhanced Heritage & Character

The architectural heritage of Portlaoise will be uncovered and revealed to become a principal identifying attribute of a redesigned public realm. Its conservation is therefore a key guiding principle of the proposed Strategy.

The Fort Protector possesses the power to transform the image of Portlaoise and its standing as a place of history and heritage. The Conservation Plan for the Fort Protector, currently in preparation by the Laois Heritage Society, has informed this Strategy. Similarly the proposal of an 'Old Fort Quarter', pioneered by businesspeople in the Town, has the potential to promote the understanding of the Fort and its historical significance, and make it accessible to local people and visitors.

Linking the Fort site physically to the Old St Peter's Churchyard and to the Ridge Burial Ground, alongside conservation of these open spaces, will present the history of the Town and add a valuable amenity for townspeople and tourists.

The conservation and reconfiguration of the Town Centre will be undertaken in accordance with best conservation practice. Portlaoise historic Town Centre has been designated as an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA). The designation is a driver for sustainable and sensitive development, the aim of which is not 'preservation' but managed development that enhances the character and heritage of the area.



Design

Contemporary design should reinforce the historic character of the ACA, and in terms of scale and design should take its cues from the historic setting. High quality architectural design will add to the built heritage and complement the receiving historic environment.

Streamlining design in the public realm to eliminate clutter and to design street surfaces, landscape features and traffic management interventions that are not in isolation from the surrounding built environment, but in deference to it, will present the historic architecture of the Town to best effect.

Improved design in the public realm will emphasise the historical form of the Town. Historic routes such as Pepper Lane and Lyster Lane will be interpreted as entrances into the Town; emphasising these narrow lanes will upgrade their importance and enrich the hierarchy of spaces in the Town Centre, as well as strengthening the connection between the old and new. These routes connect into Lower Square, notable as the original market place of the Town, and will reinforce its primary importance in the public realm. The Market Square, as a large market place, will reclaim its role as the principal open space and public venue in the Town.

The Connected Place



Infrastructure for Movement

New and improved infrastructure plays an essential role in the overall Public Realm Strategy. A connected Town Centre which is accessible, with a high quality public realm, good pedestrian permeability and a network of open and civic spaces can catalyse urban growth and attract inward investment. This will assist in growing and supporting the Town Centre's residential, retail and employment base.



The Public Realm

Improvements to the public realm through a programme of infrastructural works will help change perceptions of Portlaoise Town Centre, so that people consider it a safe, attractive, and comfortable place to live, work and visit. Infrastructural improvements will prioritise pedestrians through measures such as traffic calming, street maintenance and traffic management in the historic Town Centre. Measures would also support the creation of a Town Centre that is more easily navigable by those with mobility impairments through the provision of wider footways and the removal of unnecessary street furniture.



Managing Vehicles in the Town Centre

Vehicles dominate many of the streets in Portlaoise Town Centre and largely unrestricted vehicle movement is detrimental to a vibrant and liveable environment. This impacts negatively on the quality and type of activities that can be accommodated in the Town Centre and the attractiveness and safety of the Town for pedestrians and cyclists. Limiting and/or removing vehicles at certain locations would benefit the public realm in terms of air quality and noise, and make the Town Centre a more attractive place to work, live and visit.

A vehicle strategy will be an important enabling mechanism of the Public Realm Strategy. The aim of the strategy is to reduce traffic in the town core where possible; create a safe environment; and serve pedestrian desire lines to and from key nodes, particularly the historic Town Centre, the new shopping area at Kylekiproe, as well as open and civic spaces. Consideration has been given to the removal of on-street parking and the appropriateness of one-way systems to provide the safest possible environment for all users including the most vulnerable, e.g. families, older people and young children.



Robust Utilities Infrastructure

The Town's utilities infrastructure must keep pace with modern demands, particularly the need to continue to enhance the recently upgraded broadband network. The high speed network that is being implemented by SIRO will give significant economic and social advantage to Portlaoise as a place to set up internet-based businesses in the heart of Ireland.

Sustainability



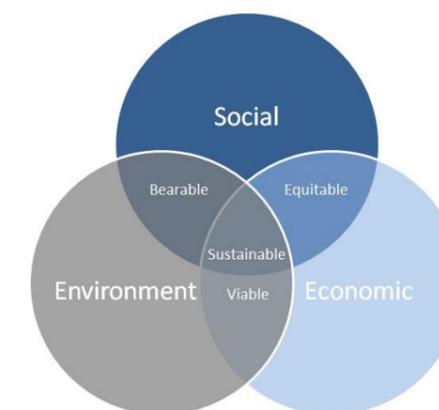
Sustainability Indicators

Sustainability is defined as meeting the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. There are three main pillars: economic, environmental and social, and every action or proposed intervention must be considered in context to all three.

The importance of assessing proposed interventions in the context of these pillars is essential to informing whether particular proposals are genuinely sustainable, and whether on balance they will have positive or detrimental impacts on Portlaoise Town Centre, its economy, its community and its environment.



At each stage of the process the sustainability indicators are assessed as regards the potential benefits or impacts on the three pillars of sustainability. The interventions are required to be considered carefully in each case. While the overall Vision is focussed on the potential for improved environmental and social sustainability, the economic case must be justified in the case of seeking funding from European, National, Regional and Local funding agencies including Laois County Council.



05 / The Interventions

Overview

- The Integrated Strategy

Placemaking / Greening / Mobility Interventions

- James Fintan Lalor Avenue
- Lyster Square
- The Main Street and Lower Square Traffic Cells
- Market Square
- The Laneways
- Street Improvements

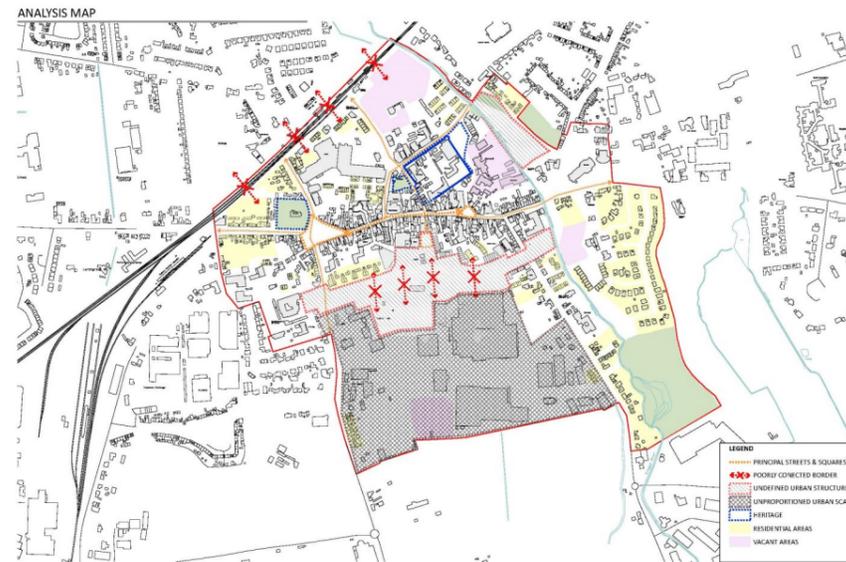
Heritage Interventions

- The Fort Protector
- Other Heritage Assets Exposed
- The Parish, CBS and Convent Lands

Environmental Interventions

- The River Triogue Blueway

The Integrated Strategy



Analysis Map

The overall Strategy that has emerged is a capture of all of the various proposed interventions that are listed. The Strategy shows that if the shared vision for Portlaoise Town Centre is realised, the combined interventions would result in a very different place than Portlaoise is today. The need for Portlaoise Town Centre to provide for a growing population is essential. The fact that the Town has continued to grow while other similar sized towns have stagnated suggests that there is a need for a sustainable, fit-for-purpose town centre to emerge. Key to the delivery of this Vision is the foresight to see what the future place should be like and then setting out the steps to its delivery by 2040.

The following sheets set out the individual interventions that have emerged from the public consultation and the design team's proposals to address the place and its analysis through application of the guiding principles to frame the Shared Vision.

Urban Analysis

The various maps address the main components of the existing place through a series of urban strategies that set out the principles informing the interventions that have emerged. The following issues were observed and are intended to be addressed in the individual interventions:

- Lack of connection within the Town Centre—Severance by James Fintan Lalor Avenue
- Lack of green space
- Urban clutter / Poor presentation
- Car parking/ Poor road junctions
- Poor pedestrian experience / Unfriendly routes—the Laneways
- Hidden heritage

The Green Place—Landscape

Bringing the countryside into the Town is one of the key themes of the Public Realm Strategy. This is not a simple aesthetic question, but relates to the wider environment, supporting the physical and mental health of the townspeople, and all of the benefits that can be delivered by green infrastructure.

The proposed provision of green space is generous and would provide facilities and amenities to the Town which would be unrivalled for any town of its size in Ireland. Indeed, it would be setting a new precedent for open space provision in a town centre.

The main elements of the landscape strategy are the linear parks and green/blue-ways proposed along the River Triogue and James Fintan Lalor Avenue. These projects will create a cross-axis of high quality urban green space which will connect into the heart of Portlaoise and provide space for a variety of facilities which can enhance the quality of life in the Town. These spaces will accommodate a wide variety of landscape spaces - parks and plazas, and play and recreation facilities.

The open spaces and street tree planting will also enhance the ecology of the Town, creating a 'green lung' which will have benefits for flora and fauna, which in turn benefits the human population.

Security and visibility are key concerns so planting and hard landscape measures should be designed to minimise 'dead' spaces and areas that are not passively overlooked by buildings or roadways. Interventions and detailed design should ensure that there are sightlines, adequate lighting and animation in each of the spaces.

Detailed planting design should reflect the bringing of the countryside into the Town. To this end, we suggest the use of native trees and hedging in the appropriate context, with selected ornamental species where design requires. Appropriate planting typologies would include long grasses that reference crops in the field, (ornamental species such as *Calamagrostis*, *Pennisetum*, *Carex*), meadow flowers and perennials. Use of evergreen groundcover shrubs should be limited as much as possible to ensure that the spaces do not have a suburban or institutional appearance.

Appropriate native trees would include Birch (*Betula* species), Alder (*Alnus*), Whitebeam and Rowan (*Sorbus* species) and Oak (*Quercus* species), among others, subject to detailed design. Hard landscape materials should be varied to ensure that the spaces are defined and recognisable.



The Triogue Blueway

01_TRAFFIC CELLS



02_JAMES FINTAN LALOR ROAD



03_MAIN STREET



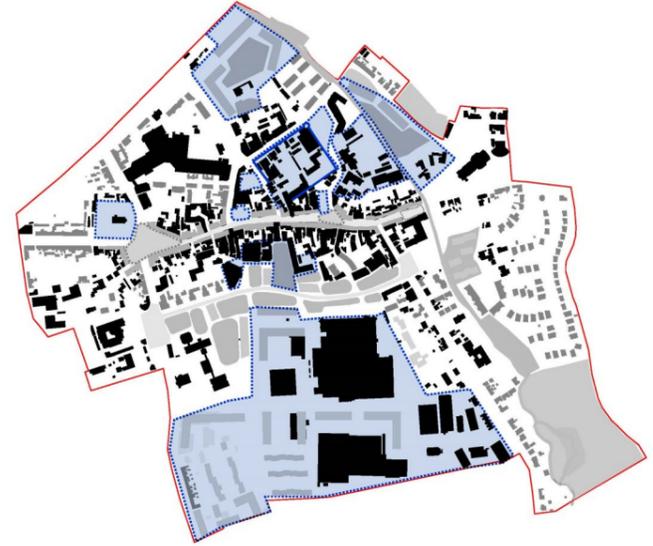
05_LINEAR PARK



04_RESIDENTIAL INTENSIFICATION

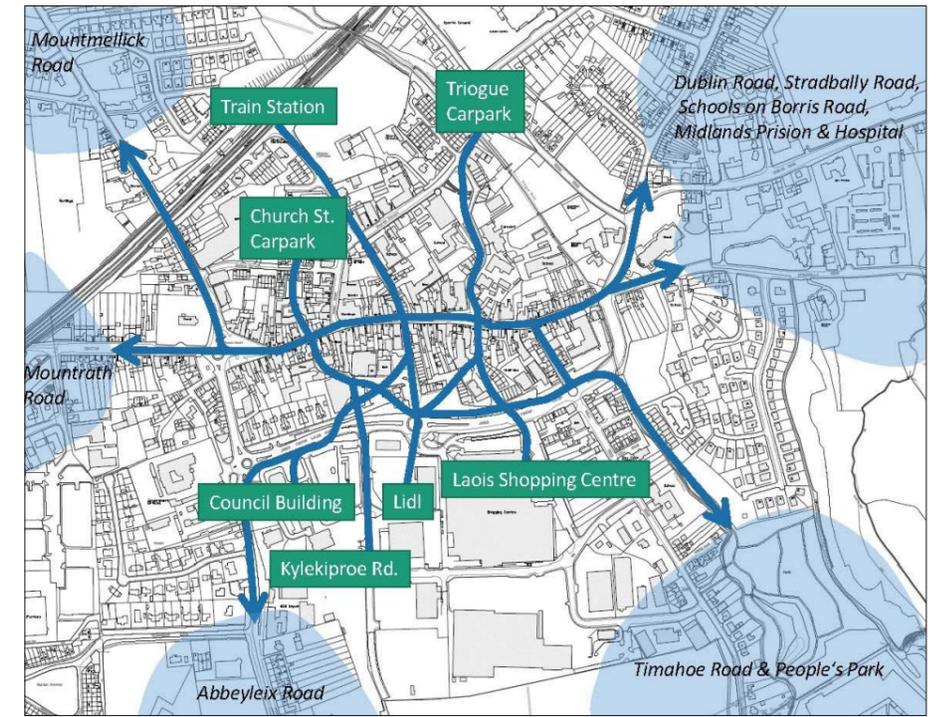
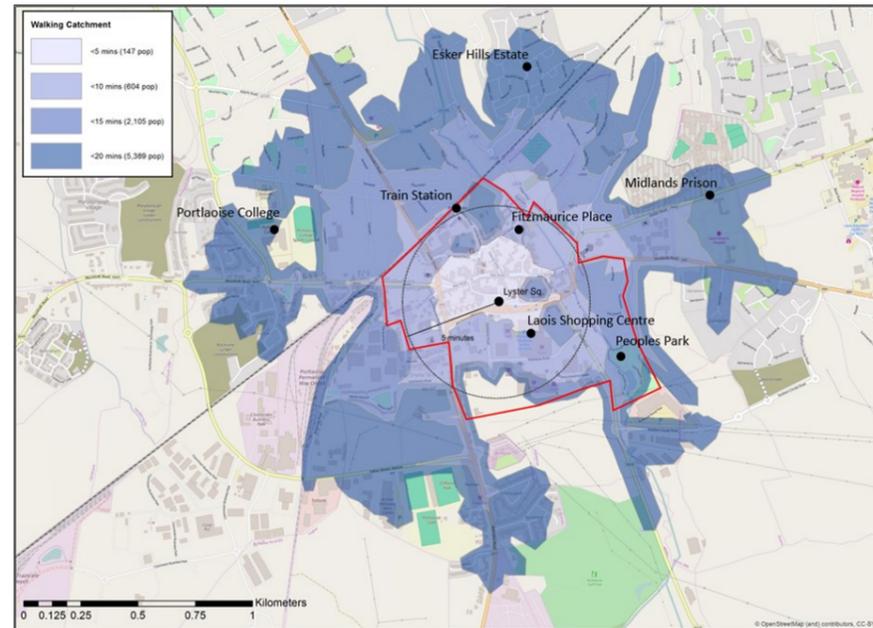
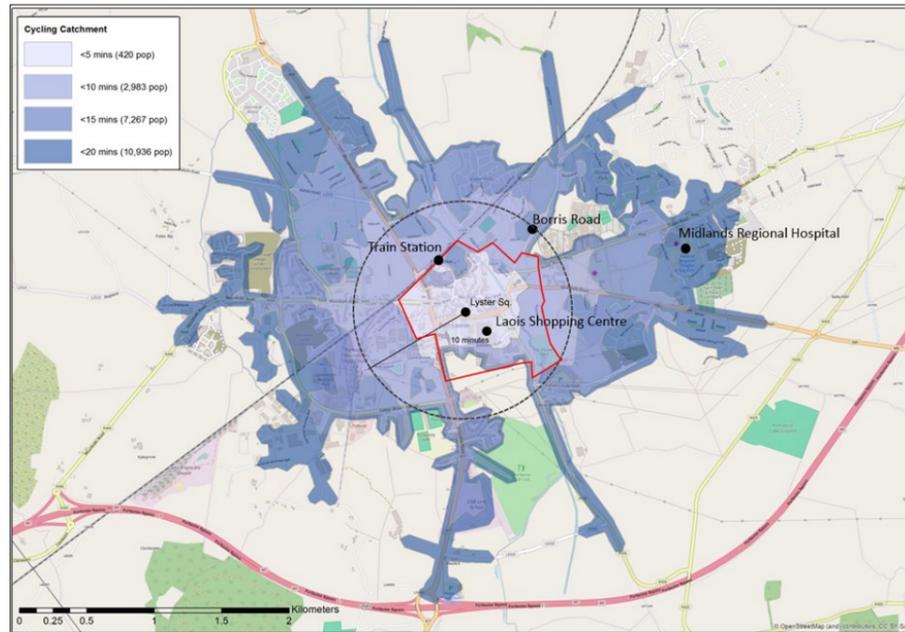


06_KEY PROJECTS



05 / The Interventions

The Integrated Strategy



Cycling Issues

Proposed Network

The National Cycle Network Scoping Study identifies Portlaoise as a Key Town on the Athlone to Carlow Corridor. This Strategy supports improvement of the pedestrian and cycling linkages between:

- Portlaoise Railway Station;
- Lyster Square / Main Street / Kylekiproe Road;
- Portlaoise Leisure Centre;
- Portlaoise College & running track;
- Borris Road Schools;
- Cyclist Issues.

The level of cycle lane provision or shared space, and lack of formalised bicycle parking within the Town Centre needs to be addressed. Throughout, and outside the Town Centre there are a number of poorly addressed cyclist desire lines. These include:

- Links between the train station and the residential areas outside the Town Centre;
- Links to key amenities such as the People's Park and Portlaoise GAA and Rugby Club grounds which is outside the Town Centre; and
- Consideration should be given to the new cyclist desire line from Portlaoise Town Centre to the schools located along Borris Road and off Timahoe Road, and to ensure that this link is safe and attractive to students.

Pedestrian Network Issues

The map above sets out the main attractors and pedestrian routes to and through Portlaoise Town Centre and the various attractors within the Town Centre. The roundabouts at Market Square, Dublin Road and James Fintan Lalor Avenue / Lyster Square all have poor pedestrian provision. The laneways in particular are considered to be a barrier, particularly at night from a personal safety perspective. The main points that were noted in relation to pedestrian issues include;

- James Fintan Lalor Avenue considered to be a barrier;
- The Laneways;
- Market Square Roundabout;
- Dublin Road Roundabout;
- Kylekiproe Road—Pedestrian crossing between Laois and Kyle Shopping Centres;
- Laneway between Kylekiproe Road and Abbeyleix Road;
- General permeability issues.

Walking Attractors



Convent, CBS and Parish Lands
refer to page 48

Market Square and Lower Square
refer to page 32

The Ridge Cemetery
refer to page 42

River Triogue Blueway
refer to page 50

Fort Protector—A Heritage Quarter
refer to page 40

Old St Peters Church
refer to page 42

The Laneways
refer to page 36

Lyster Square
refer to page 28

James Fintan Lalor Avenue
refer to page 24

05 / The Interventions

Permeability Analysis

The original street pattern within the Historic Town Centre is acknowledged as being largely intact and is considered a strength.

The scale and urban grain of the Town Centre is pedestrian friendly. However, the pedestrian linkages between the historic core centred on Main Street and the modern shopping areas south of James Fintan Lalor Avenue are considered poor.

Additionally, the roundabouts to both ends of the east and west of the Main Street have poor pedestrian permeability.

Key points to note:

- Scale of Town Centre is pedestrian friendly;
- Lack of pedestrian permeability across James Fintan Lalor Avenue (connecting old and new town centre);
- Lyster Square is not a pedestrian friendly space; and
- Market Square and Dublin Road roundabouts are barriers to permeability.



The Integrated Strategy

Sustainable Transport Analysis

The low level of cycling activity in Portlaoise and County Laois as set out in the Laois Cycle and Walking Strategy was reinforced by comments received in the public consultation workshops. The young people who attended the Comhairle na N'Óg workshop expressed concerns with regard to road safety being a barrier to cycling.

The laneways are perceived as unsafe, particularly at night. This deters pedestrians from using them.

Key points to note:

- Portlaoise is well served by a high quality, regular and reliable train service. However links between the train station, the Town Centre and the residential areas are generally poor;
- Poor connections from the Town Centre to the town parks at Peoples Park and the Triogue Linear Park;
- Information relating to bus services are poor, both in terms of routes and timetables;
- Poor adoption of sustainable modes of transport.



Car and Traffic Analysis

Vehicular traffic is important in terms of access to the Town Centre and its management is key to a successful, well-used and attractive place. Access to businesses by customers and staff must be balanced against traffic dominance and congestion. The road network surrounding the Town Centre has been designed with a focus on vehicular movements rather than on pedestrians. This hinders the movement of pedestrians which impacts upon the attractiveness of the Town Centre.

Key points to note:

- There are circa 3,600 available car parking spaces within the Town Centre, mostly to the south of James Fintan Lalor Avenue;
- Conflict between pay parking and free car parking;
- Lack of multi-storey car parking;
- There is contested space between traffic and pedestrians throughout the Town; and
- Perception that car parking is required close to shops.



Transport and Mobility Proposals

The proposals presented below aim to mitigate the points identified in the analysis section in order to improve permeability, sustainable transport as well as car and traffic movement within Portlaoise Town. All proposals aim to reduce car trips, create improved public spaces, and promote a cleaner environment with the added advantages of improved health and well-being for the Town's population. The Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS) is the reference to re-prioritise the pedestrian over the car in public spaces.

Improved links - Pedestrian wayfinding throughout the Town Centre will be improved including linking Fitzmaurice Place to Triogue Linear Park.

Bus Stop / Terminus - Bus stops on James Fintan Lalor Avenue are proposed to be relocated to a more accessible location at the intersection of key pedestrian desire lines in the Town Centre. A dedicated bus information point will also be provided.

Laneway Improvements – Interventions including improved lighting and materials in the lane-ways will improve the level of perceived safety, thus encouraging movement throughout the Town.

James Fintan Lalor Avenue - The strategy proposes to reduce James Fintan Lalor Avenue to a single lane in each direction with right turn pockets provided to Laois Shopping Centre and Lyster Square. This will reduce the dominance of the road and help to create a human scale environment.

Lyster Square - The proposed intervention includes creating a pedestrian square while accommodating the existing car parking in an underground car park. The access and egress to this car park would be from the re-configured James Fintan Lalor Avenue. The Square is proposed to be designed to accommodate all necessary vehicular movements, including those of service and emergency vehicles.

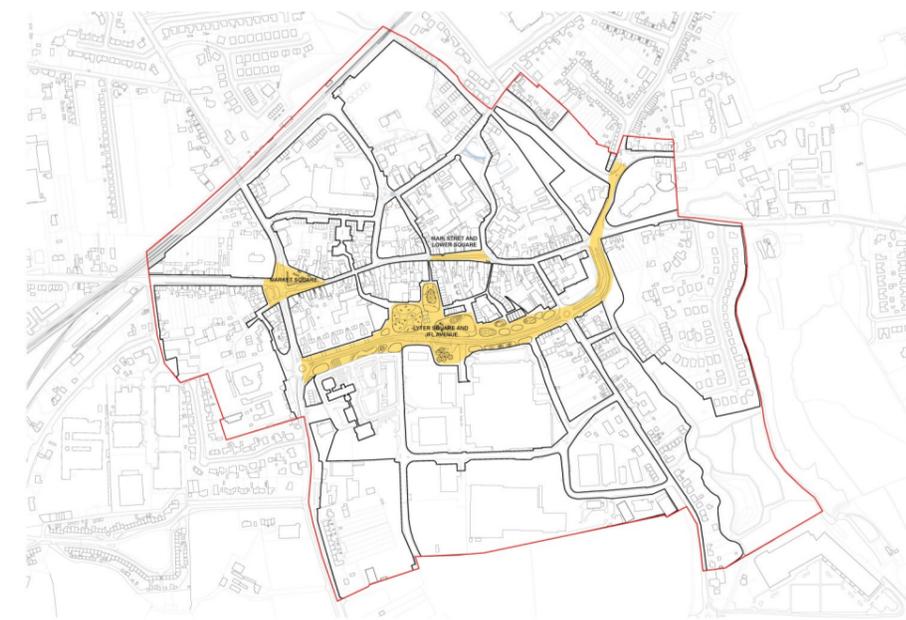
Market Square - The Strategy proposes to reconfigure the existing roundabout into a staggered junction. This will increase the usable space provided to pedestrians while still providing turning movements required for vehicles. This scheme will include the reconfiguration of the taxi rank.

Traffic Cells – A system of traffic cells is proposed in order to address the issue of through-traffic on Main Street, which is also intended to improve pedestrian comfort along Main Street. The Strategy proposes to prevent vehicular traffic between the junctions with Railway Street and Church Avenue during peak hours. This will create a pedestrian-only section during parts of the day.

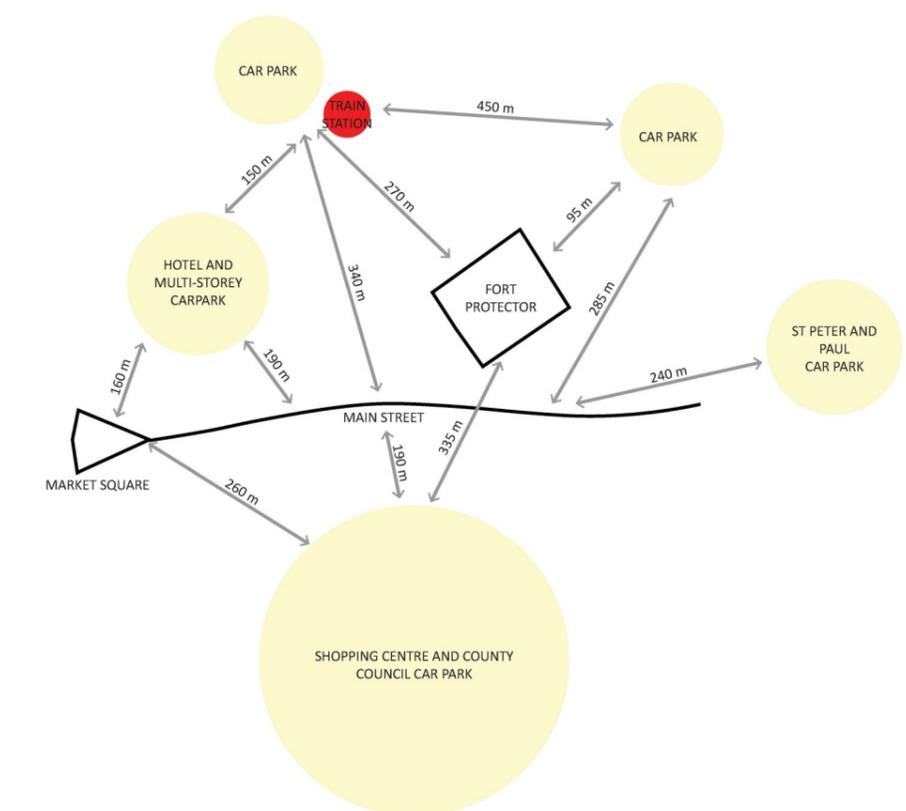
Train Station Car parking – It is proposed that the CBS lands near the train station will be used for 250 car parking and electric car charging spaces, as well as bicycle parking.

Council Offices – It is proposed that the existing Kylekiproe Road / James Fintan Lalor Avenue junction could be closed and a new entrance to the Laois County Council car park will be provided on Abbeyleix Road. The connecting road in front of the Council buildings will be redesigned to accommodate occasional traffic and to facilitate the extension of the memorial garden landscaping.

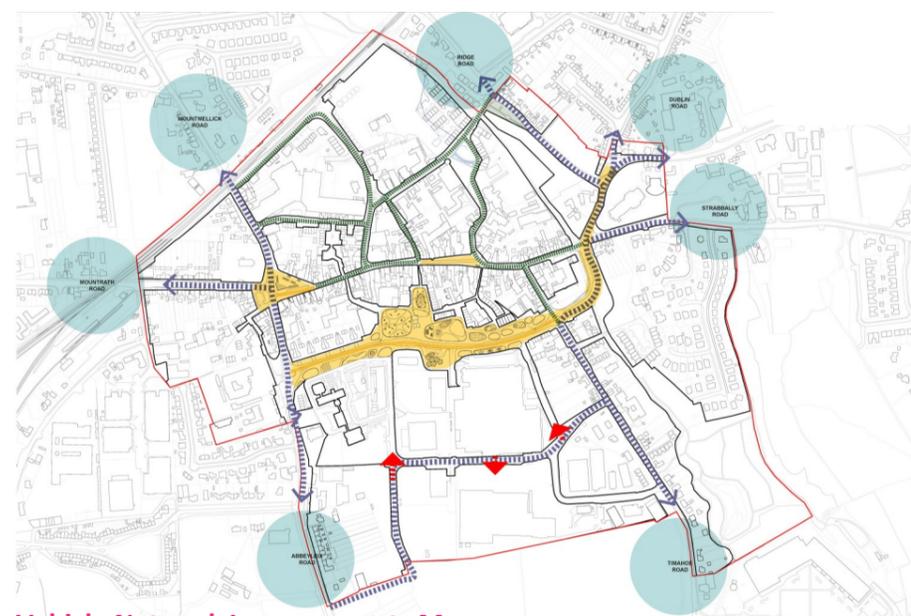
Bicycle Parking – The Strategy seeks to improve cycling infrastructure and related facilities at key transport nodes and education, retail, employment and leisure locations. A key intervention in this regard is to provide clusters of high-quality bicycle parking in close proximity to key destinations, such as Market Square, Lower Square, the Train Station, the new school campus, the Council Offices, and Lyster Square. To facilitate these interventions some existing footpaths may require works such as widening and pass gates. These interventions seek to accommodate, enable and enhance the user-friendliness of cycling by providing dedicated facilities focused on the cycle routes from Peoples Park through the Town Centre along Triogue Linear Park.



Car Parking Changes



Pedestrian Walking Distances within Portlaoise Town Centre



Vehicle Network Improvements Map

LEGEND

- ▬▬▬ DISTRIBUTOR VEHICLE NETWORK
- ▬▬▬ TOWN CENTRE VEHICLE NETWORK
- ▬ AREAS TARGETED FOR PEDESTRIAN IMPROVEMENTS
- ▲ POTENTIAL FUTURE ACCESS TO RETAIL
- ATTRACTOR AND GENERATOR OF TRIPS OUTSIDE STUDY AREA

05 / The Interventions

James Fintan Lalor Avenue

James Fintan Lalor Avenue presents the opportunity to introduce a green landscaped and programmed activity space through the central spine of Portlaoise Town Centre. The opportunity to divert the N80 via the Southern Circular Road facilitates the reduction of the 4-lane dual carriageway to a two-lane road. The Strategy shows the new road running to the line of Kellyville Park to the north and allowing for a programmed and landscaped activity amenity space along the line of the current James Fintan Lalor Avenue. Lyster Square is proposed as a pedestrian focussed plaza while a new potential multi-storey, mixed-use landmark building will allow for basement car parking to replace existing surface car parking.

The Purpose of the Intervention

The purpose of the proposed intervention at James Fintan Lalor Avenue is to enable the creation of Ireland's first **Low Carbon Town Centre**.

Key Features of the Intervention

- Re-connect the 'Old' and 'New' Town Centres
- **Remove car dominance**
- The **greening** of the space
- **Introduce activity** to the space
- **Town Centre living** encouraged
- Encourage **building enhancement**
- Facilitate **pedestrian** movement
- Provide for **improved bus stops**

James Fintan Lalor Avenue

The proposed intervention extends from the Abbyleix Road roundabout to the west across to the Dublin Road roundabout to the east of Portlaoise Town Centre. It is made up of a linear interlinking landscaped area alongside a realigned James Fintan Lalor Avenue that is reduced to a 2-way road without a central median. This will facilitate pedestrian crossings at many locations, following desire lines, to facilitate a strong connection between the Old and the New Town Centre areas, including through a reimagined Lyster Square as a plaza with a new landmark building and an underground car park that replicates the existing surface level car park.

Starting from the Abbyleix Road Roundabout, the access to Áras an Chontae is proposed from the Abbyleix Road and the existing Civic Plaza and Garden of Remembrance will extend to the newly realigned road at Kellyville Park. The access to the existing road that serves Áras an Chontae and the retail areas will be closed off as the access to the south of the James Fintan Lalor Avenue, once the Southern Circular Road, provides alternative access. The James Fintan Lalor Avenue roundabout will be removed and a new bus stand will be located on the south side of the road in front of the Lidl store. Access to Laois Shopping Centre will be maintained off James Fintan Lalor Avenue, however drivers will be encouraged to use the Southern Circular Road and access from Kylekiproe Road.

A linear soft and hard landscaped strip will continue to follow the James Fintan Lalor Avenue. It will incorporate a series of amenity and planted areas, as well as pedestrian crossings which align with desire lines and provide direct access to and from the old and new Town Centre areas through a pedestrian plaza at Lyster Square.

The linear landscaped strip along James Fintan Lalor Avenue meets the proposed River Triogue Blueway at the eastern end of the roadway.

Key Physical Changes

The key components of the plan include the following:

- Significant reduction in roadspace allocation;
- The removal of the roundabout opposite Lyster Square;
- Access to County Hall from Abbyleix Road;
- No access off James Fintan Lalor Avenue, except to the Laois Shopping Centre and Lyster Square.



05 / The Interventions

James Fintan Lalor Avenue (continued)



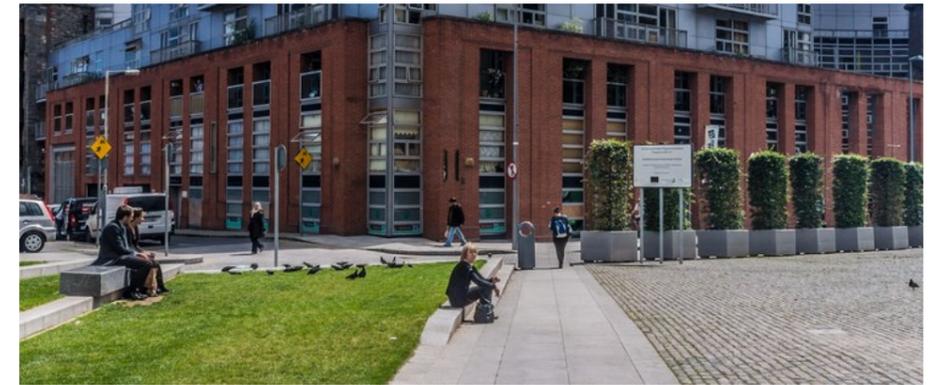
Existing Aerial

Outcomes

- Improved health and well-being
- Aesthetically better than current situation
- Direct pedestrian routes
- Increased visual interest
- Greater activity promoted
- Better social opportunities
- Improved vibrancy
- Greater competitiveness and commercial activity
- Improved bus stop / waiting facility
- High quality, durable and well maintained materials

Contribution to the Guiding Principles

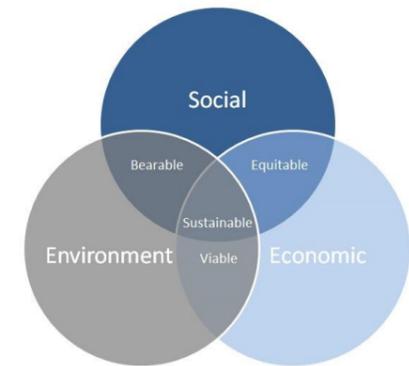
- James Fintan Lalor provides the largest Town Centre public space in Ireland
- Provides for a high quality urban designed environment
- Delivers a strong pedestrian connected place to link the New Town Centre with the traditional town core
- Extensive landscape provides for greening the Town Centre
- A truly sustainable intervention which provides balance between economic, social and environmental considerations



Smithfield Reference



Newbridge Reference



Sustainability Indicators

Environment:	Positive Impact
Social:	High Social Value
Economic:	High Spend Cost / High Impact



James Fintan Lalor Avenue View

05 / The Interventions

Lyster Square

Lyster Square is currently the de-facto Town Centre of Portlaoise for many visitors. The public square is characterised as a car park with retail units at its perimeter and is 'sandwiched' by James Fintan Lalor Avenue to the south. The square is accessed by vehicular traffic from the James Fintan Lalor roundabout which provides shared access to the Laois Shopping Centre opposite.

Lyster Square has become car dominated and is a contested space where the pedestrian is secondary to the car. The proposal seeks to create a linked landscaped space with James Fintan Lalor as the centrepiece for a new Portlaoise Town Centre. A significant development opportunity for a multi-storey, mixed-use building with a basement car park that would see the car removed from the public plaza and open up opportunities for other buildings to be redeveloped as a cluster overlooking a key public space.

The Purpose of the Intervention

The purpose of the proposed intervention at James Fintan Lalor Avenue is to enable the creation of Ireland's first **Low Carbon Town Centre**.

Key Features of the Intervention

- **Remove car dominance**
- The 'greening' of the space
- **Introduce activity** to the space
- **Town Centre living** encouraged
- Encourage **building enhancement**
- Facilitate **pedestrian** movement
- Re-connect the 'Old' and 'New' town centres
- Provide for **improved bus stops**
- **Development potential** of a large mixed-use building with basement car parking
- Possible development cluster adjacent to new building
- Kiosk opportunity within the Square
- Covered area at centre could facilitate a café



Market Square Dundalk



Landscaping reference

Key Physical Changes

The key components of the plan include the following;

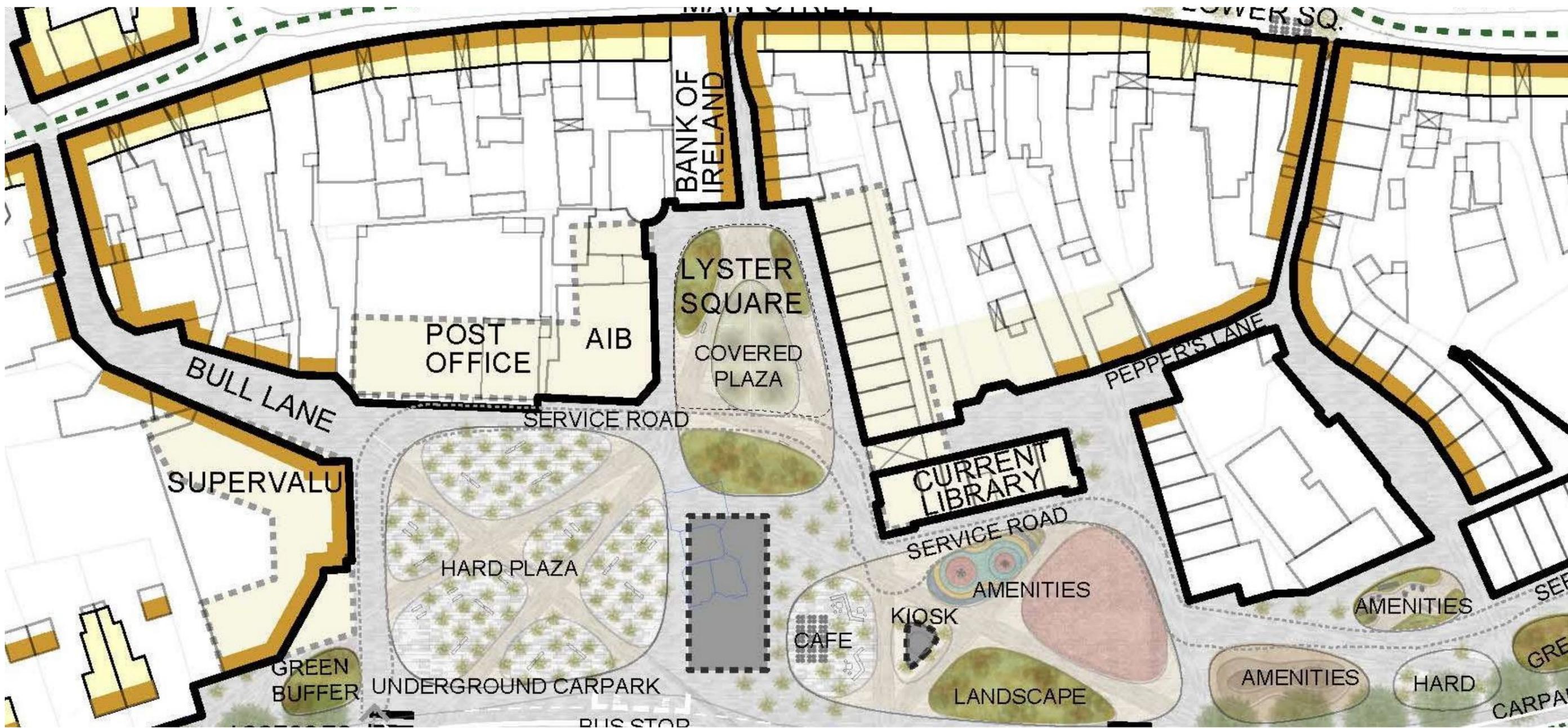
- Significant reduction in roadspace allocation,
- The removal of the roundabout opposite Lyster Square,
- Introduce a kiosk to Lyster Square,
- Integrated hard and soft landscaping proposals.



Landscaping reference



Landscaping reference



Lyster Square



Newbridge reference



Newmarket Square reference



Canopy reference

05 / The Interventions

Lyster Square (Continued)

Outcomes

- Improved health & well-being
- Aesthetically better than current situation
- Direct pedestrian routes
- Increased visual interest
- Greater activity promoted
- Better social opportunities
- Improved vibrancy
- Greater competitiveness and commercial activity
- Improved bus stop / waiting facility
- High quality, durable and well maintained materials
- Maintained service access route around the perimeter of the Square
- Bull Lane pedestrianised with access for service vehicles only from Main Street



Smithfield reference



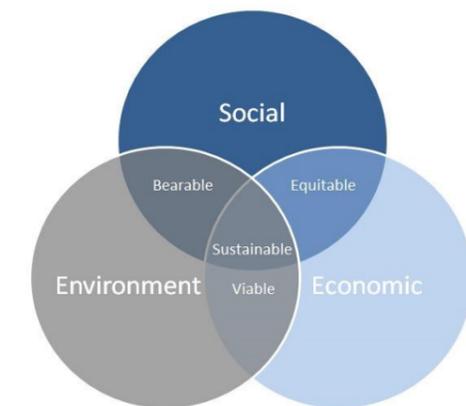
Clonakilty reference

Development Opportunity

- Opportunity for a mixed-use building in the heart of Portlaoise Town Centre.
- Possible uses include retail at ground floor, office or residential apartments over.
- Retail units could accommodate either a flexible single or multi-let occupant.
- Underground car parking could accommodate the entire existing surface level provision as well as the new building, and could link to other adjacent development opportunities around the existing buildings fronting onto Lyster Square.
- A kiosk unit can be provided in Lyster Square as well as along James Fintan Lalor Avenue.

Contribution to the Guiding Principles

- Lyster Square and James Fintan Lalor Avenue provide the largest Town Centre public space in Ireland.
- Provides for a high quality urban designed environment.
- Delivers a strong pedestrian connected place to link the new Town Centre with the traditional town core.
- Extensive landscape provides for 'greening' the Town Centre.
- A truly sustainable intervention which provides balance between economic, social and environmental considerations.



Sustainability Indicators

- | | |
|--------------|-------------------------------|
| Environment: | Positive Impact |
| Social: | High Social Value |
| Economic: | High Spend Cost / High Impact |



Lyster Square 3D View

05 / The Interventions

Market Square and Lower Square

The Market Square and Lower Square have lost their place in the hierarchy of public spaces in Portlaoise Town Centre in recent years. There is now a huge opportunity to re-establish their prominence as people-friendly spaces that local residents, shoppers and visitors will come and stay for the distinctive independent retail mix as well as the range of high quality food establishments. Added to this, the new library, the repurposed courthouse, and Fort Protector will deliver a central shopping district, re-establishing this area for a truly sustainable future.

The Purpose of the Intervention

The purpose of the proposed intervention at Market Square and Lower Square is to enable the creation of high quality public spaces bookending Main Street. The main purpose of this intervention is to **reclaim the street from the road**.

Key Features of the Intervention

- **Remove car dominance.**
- **Introduce activity opportunity** to the spaces.
- Encourage **building enhancement**.
- Facilitate **pedestrian** movement.
- Facilitate the creation of a **sense of place**.
- Provide for **markets, fairs, festivals and events**.
- Possibility to introduce **street art**.
- Promote **vibrancy and vitality** in Market and Lower Squares as well as Main Street.

Market Square

Market Square represents an opportunity space that can be changed fundamentally as a pedestrian friendly space which will be multi-functional accommodating markets, fairs, festivals and events year-round. The strategy intervention harks back to the historical use of the Market Square as the main market in Queen's County (County Laois) which would have also served as a place for large meetings and rallies. The maintenance of the market use is essential to maintain a link to the past. The potential to serve as a public space for cultural and entertainment events ties in well with the flourishing musical and arts community in Portlaoise.

By reconfiguring the road from a roundabout to a staggered signalised junction the additional space will be given back to the people of Portlaoise. After the completion of the Southern Circular Road the N80 will be re-routed to avoid the Town Centre and allow for delivery of a signalised junction to replace the roundabout which currently dominates the space.

Main Street

Main Street was improved in recent times and therefore there is no requirement for a major works package there, except perhaps to declutter and remove some bollards and pedestrian barriers which would improve the pedestrian experience. However, the opportunity to improve the individual street properties is dealt with in a separate intervention.

Lower Square

At Lower Square there is another opportunity to create a vibrant public space in front of the proposed new library which is south facing and therefore attractive for the public to use. This could also provide for cafés and restaurants to spill out onto the street, making an attractive street which is more active and vibrant.

The Lower Square is smaller and of human scale and has a real opportunity to become the focal hub for a new Cultural Quarter adjacent to the Fort Protector and the Courthouse, which may come back into community or cultural use if the Court Service were to develop a purpose-built court facility elsewhere within the Town Centre. The cluster of the Dunamais Theatre and the cinema on Church Street would complete the setting for the Cultural Quarter. It is proposed to reutilise the existing materials and remove barriers and unwanted clutter.

Contribution to the Guiding Principles

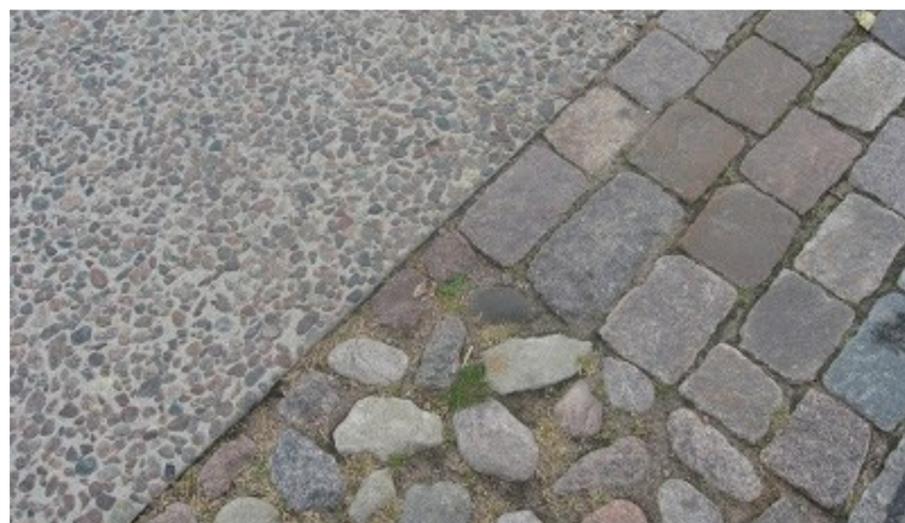
- Provides for a high quality urban designed environment.
- Delivers a strong pedestrian connected place to link the Market Square as a key public space with Main Street and the new Town Centre via Bull Lane / Lyster Square.
- Provides a key event space for markets, fairs and festivals.
- A truly sustainable intervention which provides balance between economic, social and environmental considerations.
- Provides for the creation at Lower Square of a Heritage Quarter which centres around the Fort Protector, the new proposed County Library, St Peter's Old Church, and Dunamais Theatre.



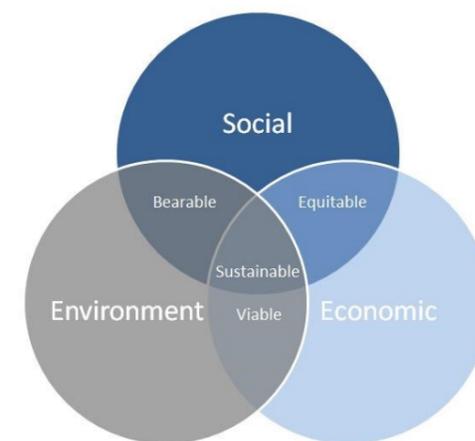
Mallow reference



Market Square / Main Street / Lower Square



Landscape Material reference



Sustainability Indicators

- Environment: Positive Impact
- Social: High Social Value
- Economic: High Spend Cost / High Impact

05 / The Interventions

Market Square and Lower Square (Continued)

Outcomes

- Improved Health and Well-being
- Aesthetically better than current situation
- Direct pedestrian routes
- Increased visual interest
- Greater activity promoted
- Better social opportunities
- Improved Vibrancy
- Greater competitiveness and commercial activity
- Improved bus stop / waiting facility
- High quality, durable, and well-maintained materials



Clonakilty reference

Key Physical Changes

The key components of the plan include the following:

- Significant reduction in through traffic;
- The removal of the roundabout in Market Square;
- Creation of a large public space usable for markets, festivals, and events year-round at Market Square;
- Minimal reconfiguration of existing materials at Lower Square to facilitate pedestrianisation at peak hours;
- Goods access facilitated to businesses throughout the Market Square and Lower Square up to mid-morning;
- Integrated hard and soft landscaping proposals.



Historical image of Market Square



Historical image of Market Square and Grattan Street



Market Square 3D View

05 / The Interventions

The Laneways (Pepper's Lane, Lyster's Lane and Bull Lane)

A series of lanes, Pepper's Lane, Lyster's Lane and Bull Lane all provide direct access from Main Street and Lower Square to Lyster Square. While Pepper's and Lyster's Lanes are both pedestrian only, Bull Lane provides a shared vehicular and pedestrian link from the historical core to the linking space at Lyster Square.

The general standard of finish and visual clutter in these laneways was raised by the project team as an issue that needed to be addressed. Also the poor lighting was highlighted in the consultation workshops as being of concern, in particular at night. Pepper's Lane - linking Lower Square to Lyster Square and Meehan Court—is in particularly poor condition.

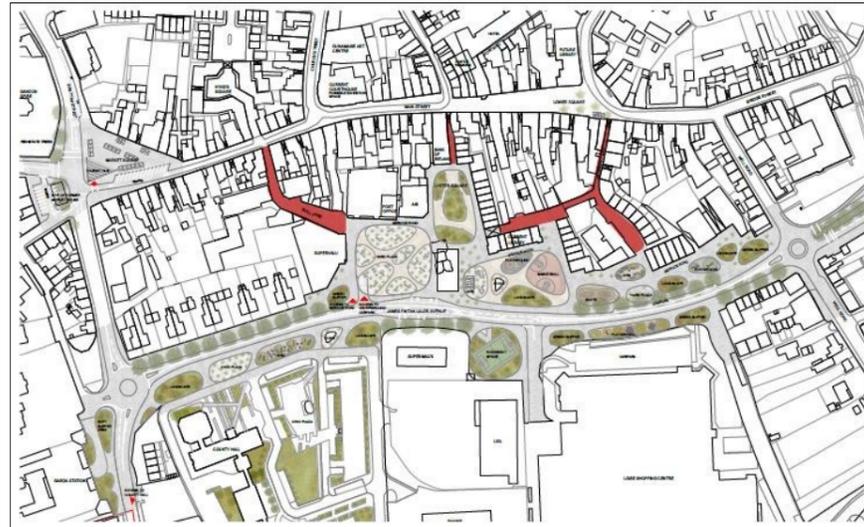
While Bull Lane functions as a street and is wider and relatively well lit, the narrow and dark alley, Lyster Lane, will require a major upgrade to improve the pedestrian experience as well as increase the sense of a safe transition between the large public spaces at Market Square and Lyster Square.

The Purpose of the Intervention

The purpose of the proposed intervention at James Fintan Lalor Avenue is to enable the creation of the **Walkable Town Centre** as well as facilitating the **Reconnection of the Old and New Town**.

Key Features of the Intervention

- **Address anti-social** issues and increase sense of security.
- **Introduce activity** to the space.
- Encourage **building enhancement**.
- Facilitate **pedestrian** movement.
- **Re-connect the 'Old' and 'New' Town**.
- Provide for **increased commercial viability**.
- **Increased levels of lighting** and **surface materials quality**.



The Laneways



Hynds Square / Jessop Street Lane



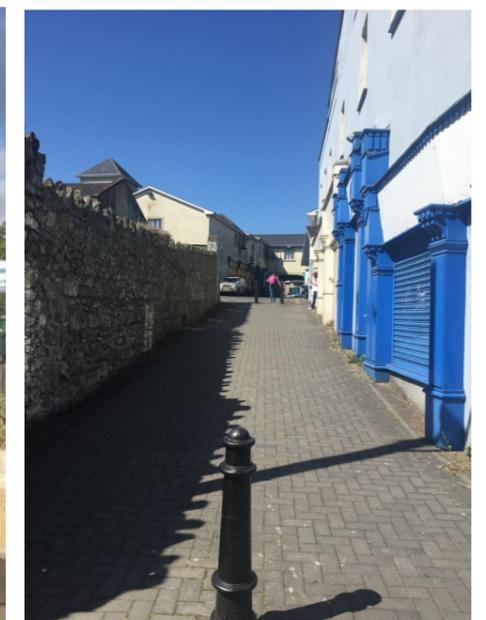
Pepper's Lane



Lyster's Lane



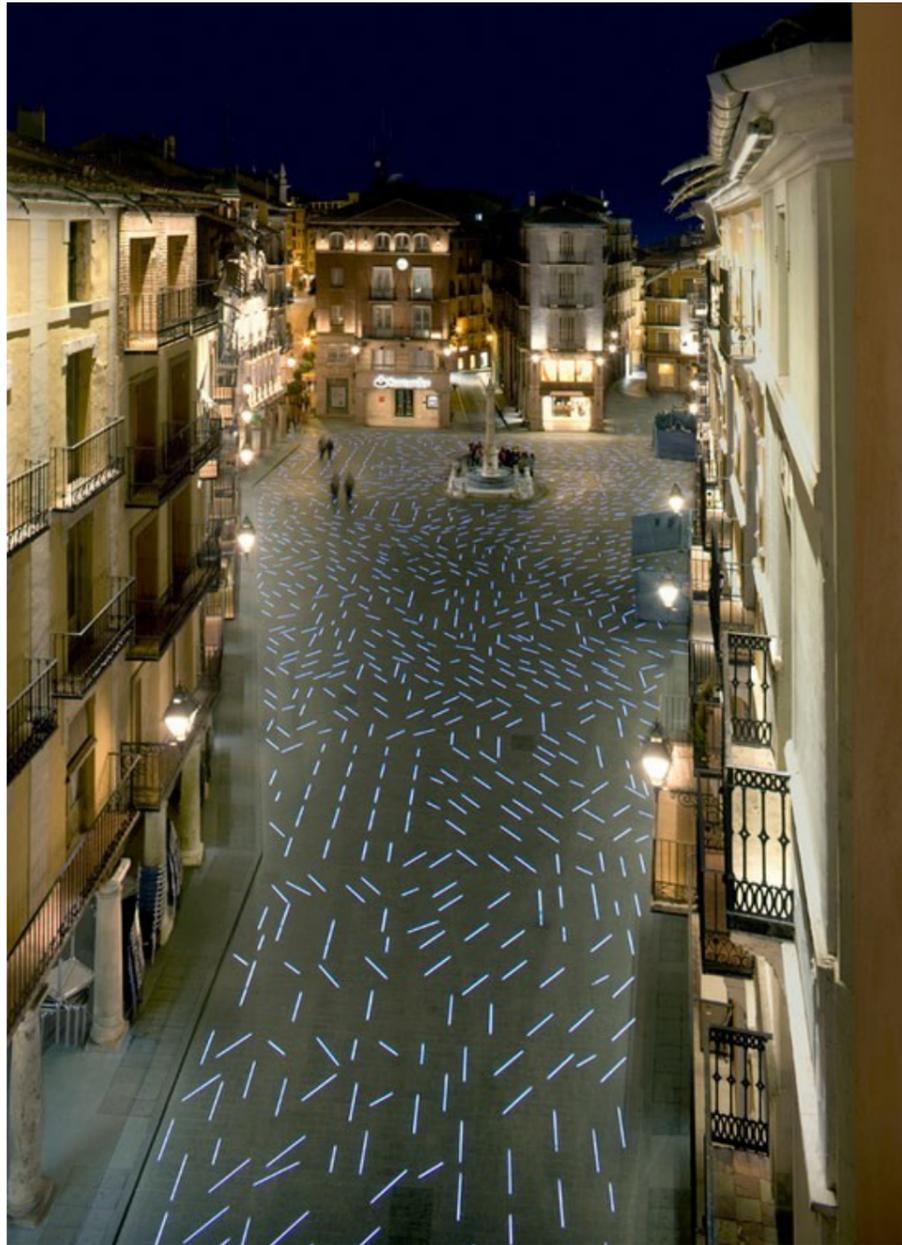
ESB / County Hall Lane



Pepper's Lane

Outcomes

- Aesthetically improved.
- Provides direct, attractive, safe, and user-friendly pedestrian routes.
- Increased visual interest.
- Greater activity promoted.
- Better social opportunities.
- High quality, durable and well maintained materials.



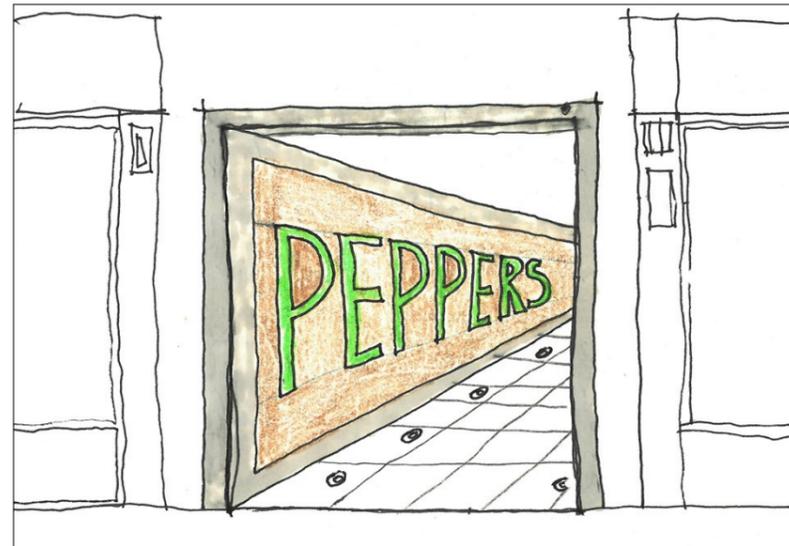
Potential lighting option



Trespa Panelling



Corten Steel Panel



Sketch Proposal— Pepper’s Lane entrance at Lower Square

Key Physical Changes

The key components of the plan include the following:

- Replace paving material where required with a lighter coloured and serviceable paving material;
- Remove all unnecessary signs and visual clutter;
- Increase lighting levels throughout;
- Replace blank wall sections through arched areas with wall linings in a highly durable material such as Corten steel or Trespa Panelling with sprayed soffits;
- Careful consideration required to pedestrian safety emerging onto Main Street and Lower Square;
- Possibility of engaging with local youth group(s) via a community arts project to design the panelling.
- Improved pedestrian provision on Bull Lane through removal of vehicular access except for service access;
- Improved pedestrian provision to Jessop Street via a link to Hynds Square with reduced car parking provision to central area and landscaping enhancements.

Contribution to the Guiding Principles

- Provides desirable pedestrian linkages between key public spaces within Portlaoise Town Centre.
- Creates visual interest.
- Restores awareness of historical place names.

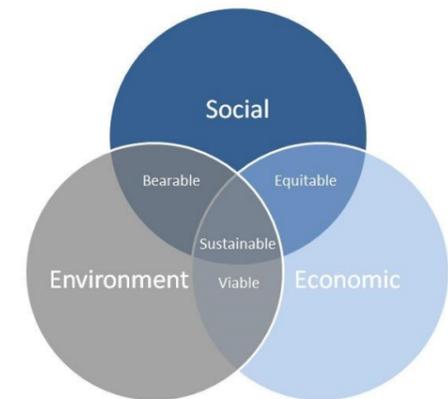
Notes

The laneway links between Main Street / Lower Square and Lyster Square represent an opportunity to introduce some colour and possibly street art. However, it would be imperative that whatever medium is employed on the walls will have to be carefully considered as there are ownership issues which may require that the artwork is independent to the buildings. The buildings may be Protected Structures and are, in each case, within an Architectural Conservation Area.

Another issue that will need careful consideration is in relation to ownership where the arch at Main Street may be entirely within private ownership with a Right of Way for access. In which case the installation of wall panels, light fittings and the replacement of paving materials may require permission from the property owners for any proposals.

Another issue that will require careful consideration is the durability of the material choice and the possible need to apply an anti-graffiti paint finish in order to avoid damage to any original artwork.

An example of a relatively low cost / high impact measure would be to utilise uplighters to wash onto the masonry wall in the image of Peppers Lane opposite. A thorough clean of the surface material in the area shown instead of replacement of all paving may be appropriate. The paving within the arched links and in those areas where the paving materials are loose and uneven should be replaced.



Sustainability Indicators

Environment:	Positive Impact
Social:	High Social Value
Economic:	Low / Moderate Cost / High Impact

05 / The Interventions

General Street Improvements

Many of the streets within Portlaoise Town Centre will require specific works to improve their general presentation within the Public Realm. The need to establish a higher overall standard of presentation for the individual buildings and streetscapes is identified as being essential in encouraging local people and visitors to visit more often and for longer. It is also intended to support greater linked trips for shoppers visiting the retail units to the south of James Fintan Lalor Avenue.

The need to deal with the following issues is important in setting the scene for a sustainable place to work, live and visit:

- Vacant units should be well presented, with high quality shopfronts and window displays, where possible, for adjacent units;
- Repairs and redecoration of external elements of street properties;
- Remove all redundant and unauthorised signage, abandoned window displays, and broken glass in windows;
- Consider the introduction of uplighting of upper parts of conservation buildings of note and heritage assets to create visual interest;
- Implement Planning Enforcement processes.

The Purpose of the Intervention

The purpose of the proposed intervention at Portlaoise Town Centre is to enable the creation of an **improved public realm**.

Key Features of the Intervention

- Encourage **building enhancement**.
- Provide for **increased commercial viability**.
- Address **anti-social** issues and increase a sense of security.
- Promote both **day and night-time activity**.



Lower Square

Outcomes

- Aesthetically improved.
- Increased visual interest.
- Greater activity promoted.
- Better social opportunities.
- High quality, durable, and well maintained materials.
- Appropriate designed shopfront replacement.
- Use of appropriate colour palette (see Thematic Design and Activity Manual).

Key Physical Changes

The key components of the plan include the following:

- Redecoration and improved presentation of existing buildings;
- Remove all unauthorised signs and visual clutter. All new signage to be backlit rather than internally illuminated, through application of relevant legislation;
- Increase lighting levels where required;
- Consider introducing uplighting to the upper facades of key buildings at night;
- Replacement of shopfronts with either appropriate contemporary designs, or traditional high quality units, where possible;
- Improve internal presentation of all buildings where possible, particularly those buildings unoccupied both at ground floor level and above.



Grattan Street



Church Street



Lower Square



Market Square

Notes

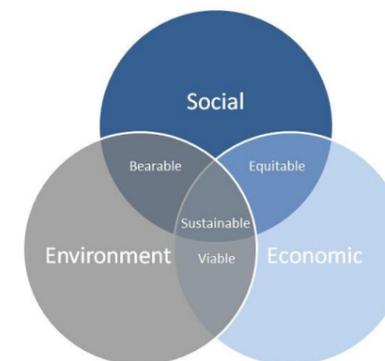
The poor presentation of many of the principle streets in Portlaoise including Grattan Street, Coote Street, Main Street, Bridge Street, and Church Avenue amongst others needs to be addressed in relation to the revitalisation of Portlaoise Town Centre. A number of properties that are in active use at ground floor for commercial retail uses are, in many cases, vacant above at first floor. These buildings would historically have provided family homes however in the past decades the residential community have moved away to the suburbs.

While it would be naïve to assume that all of these buildings could be returned to family occupation, in many cases if the accommodation was refurbished to a habitable level then it might be practical to see many returned to residential use for couples and indeed elderly people, either on a mix of social housing, rental tenancy or ownership basis. This prospect provides for the advantages of living adjacent to all of the facilities and services in Portlaoise Town Centre.

However, the overall quality of the Public Realm and the Town Centre would require to be improved in order to facilitate this re-occupation to happen. The general improvements proposed for Portlaoise Town Centre under this strategy will provide for a profound change in the general presentation and viability of the Town Centre. The proposed "Toolkit for Re-occupation" aims to facilitate the delivery of these street properties back to active residential use through pre-planning meetings system specifically intended to aid property owners, potential tenants, and agencies seeking to improve the opportunity for reoccupation of Portlaoise Town Centre. The pre-planning process could also include for the opportunity to allow building owners advise in terms of signage removal and replacement, repairs to external fabric, lighting facades, shopfront repair and replacement as well as choosing and applying appropriate colour palettes.

Contribution to the Guiding Principles

- Provides desirable pedestrian linkages between key public spaces within Portlaoise Town Centre.
- Creates visual interest.
- Restores awareness of the historical place names.



Sustainability Indicators

Environment:	Positive Impact
Social:	High Social Value
Economic:	Low / Moderate Spend Cost / High Impact

05 / The Interventions

The Fort Protector — A Heritage Quarter

In recent decades, cities and towns have come to recognise the importance of historic settings to their economic well-being. Well-presented urban spaces which have distinctive character add to the vibrancy of towns and generate economic activity, whether through tourism or spending by local people.

Development of the area vacated by the schools and religious foundations of the Presentation Sisters and the Irish Christian Brothers opens exciting possibilities for a development of architectural quality, enriched by well conserved historic buildings adapted for appropriate new uses. The development of the Fort Protector as a visitor attraction has the potential to imbue a cultural dimension on this much-needed redevelopment of the northern part of the Town Centre.

The location of the Railway Station adjacent to these developments would connect this part of the Town to the national rail network. This potential new cultural quarter would be the first part of the Town encountered by rail-based visitors, and it lies close to the principal hotels in the Town Centre.

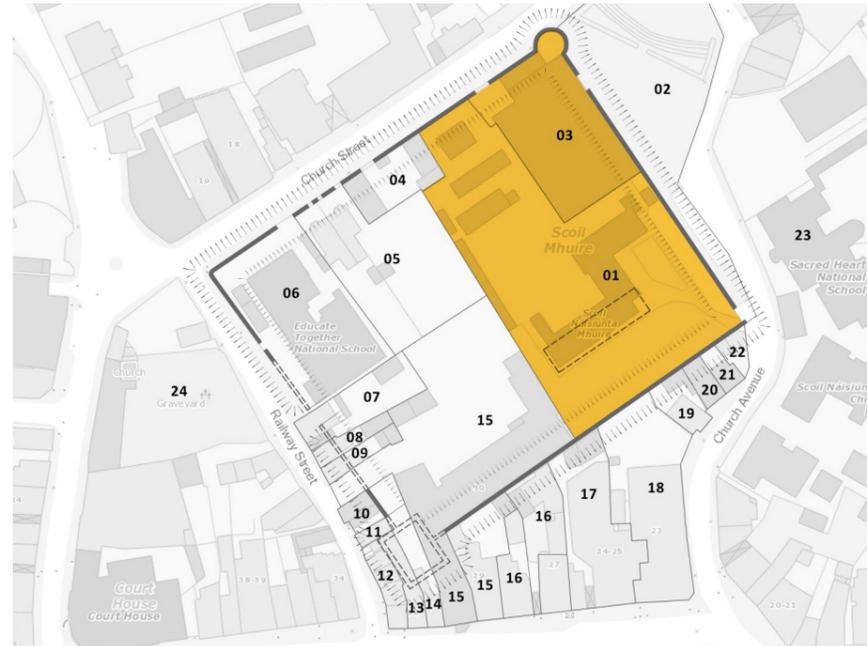
Potential of a Restored Fort

A well-conserved and appropriately presented Fort Protector would be a unique heritage site. Few towns in Ireland have a history so closely bound up with the Tudor conquest of this country. The development of a heritage site would create a direct link to that history. Currently there is only the vaguest awareness, at national or even local level, that the name 'Port Laoise' refers to an actual physical structure, and the association of the Town with the Laois-Offaly plantation is not usually made.

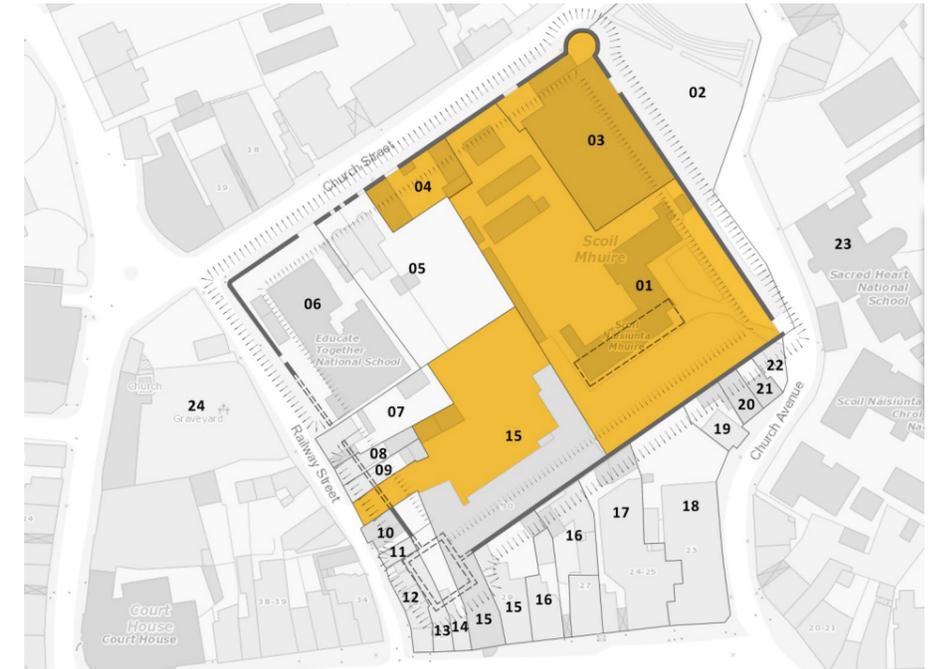
Restoration of the site could fundamentally change the perception of the Town. The restored site would give greater meaning to the name 'Port Laoise' and the Town could become synonymous with this momentous period in Irish history, as Kilkenny is synonymous with the medieval period, or as Dublin is associated with Viking or Georgian history.

Potential for Assembly of a Heritage Site within the Fort

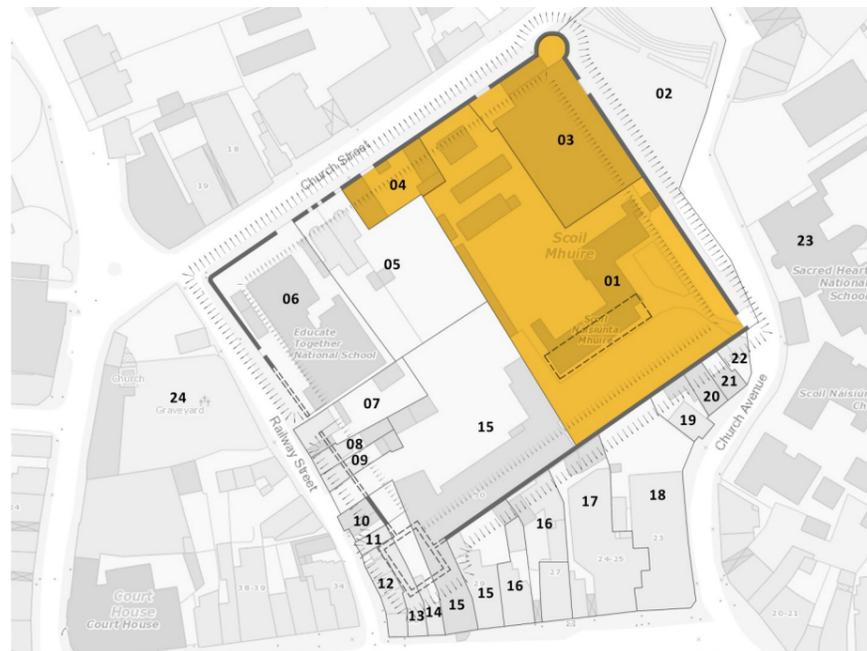
The development of the interior of the Fort as a visitor attraction and part of the public realm would necessitate a degree of amalgamation of sites. The following five options might be explored:



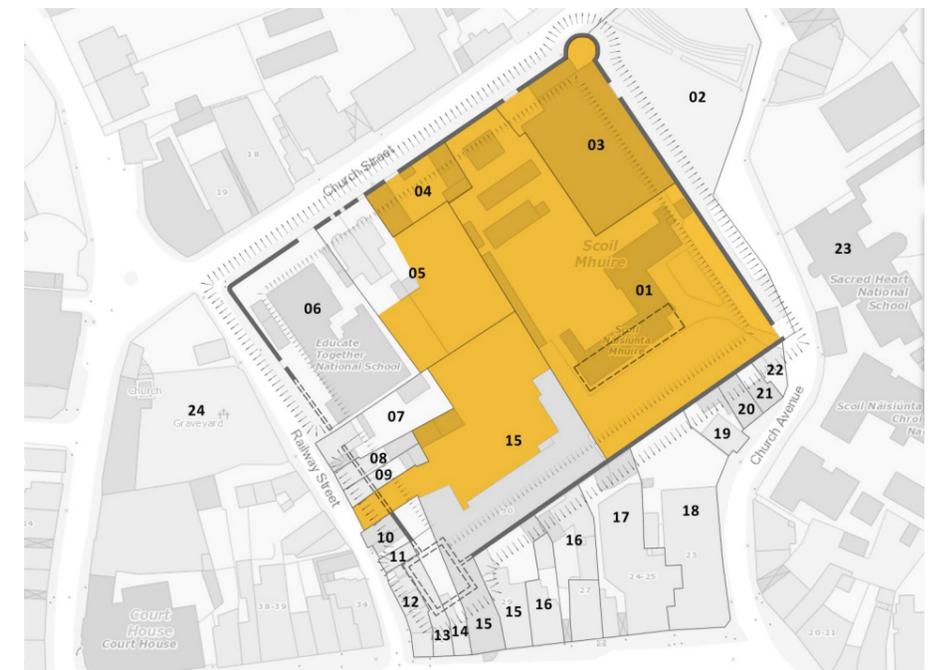
Option 1: Amalgamation of the former Odlum's and Scoil Mhuire sites (Sites 01 and 03) would reinstate an open space of almost half the extent of the historic fort.



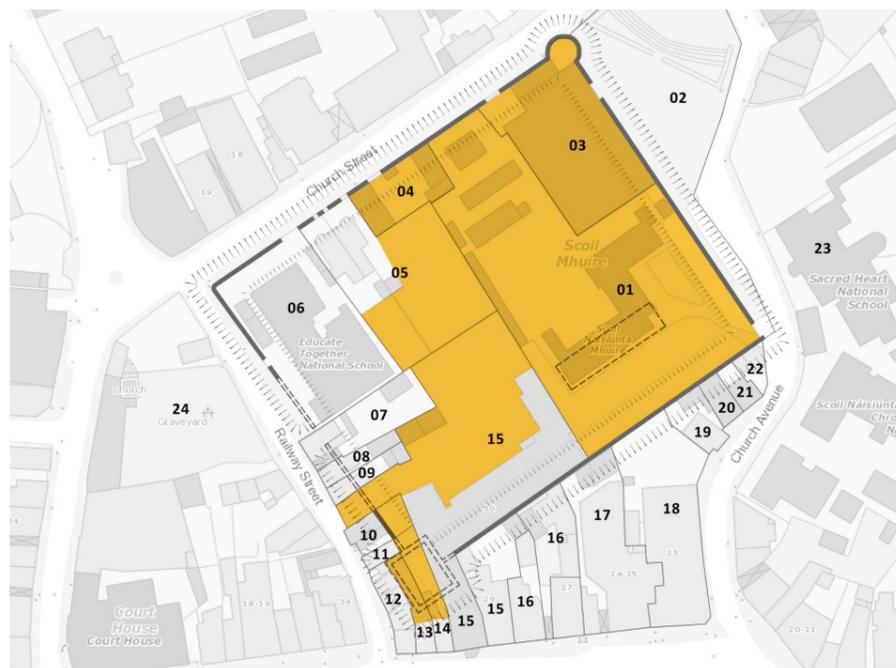
Option 3: With the agreement of O'Loughlin's Hotel, the hotel car park might be reconfigured to give access to the Fort interior from Railway Street. This entry point would enable a route connecting Old St Peter's churchyard into the experience, and would enhance the understanding of the scale and setting of the Fort.



Option 2: Addition of the former 'Old Barracks' (Site 04) would add considerably to the experience of the site. These historic structures would provide an ideal historic setting for an exhibition and would reinforce the character of the site.



Option 4: Inclusion of the underused car park to the rear of the Victorian houses on Tower Hill would further add to the coherence and regularity of the space within the Fort.



Option 5: The site of the Castle of Maryborough lies within three plots on Main Street: Virgo (Site 13), Bergin's Jewellers (Site 14) and O'Loughlin's Hotel (Site 15). Acquisition of Sites 13 and 14 would enable below-ground remains to be uncovered and presented. Site 14 contains standing remains of the fort wall and would contribute a great deal to the understanding and interpretation of the historic fort. Site 13 is fronted by a modest two-storey building of good historic character, and could form an appropriate public access point to the Fort site from the Main Street. This entry point would demonstrate the key position of the Castle on high ground, as well as the story of how the Fort became enveloped in the Georgian fabric of the Town which grew up around it.



Presence within the Town

Since the demolition of Odlum's Mills and the creation of Fitzmaurice Place, the Fort Protector has re-asserted itself in a very modest way in the townscape of Portlaoise. However, the walls of the Fort are significantly eroded and the interior of the fort is inaccessible and widely unknown to the townspeople and people of the County. The 'Old Fort Quarter Festival' in 2016 was a very successful first step in changing this situation. The festival illustrates the power of the Fort to form a strong identity for the Town. The fact that two full sides of the fort are exposed to view within the Town shows how dramatic the impact would be if it were fully restored and conserved.

Use of the Fort interior

Clearance of the Fort interior would enable the scale and character of the Fort to be appreciated. The interior of the Fort could become a venue for outdoor events, such as the Old Fort Quarter Festival, and would be more suited and better located for this purpose than Fitzmaurice Place.

Exterior Walls and Fosse

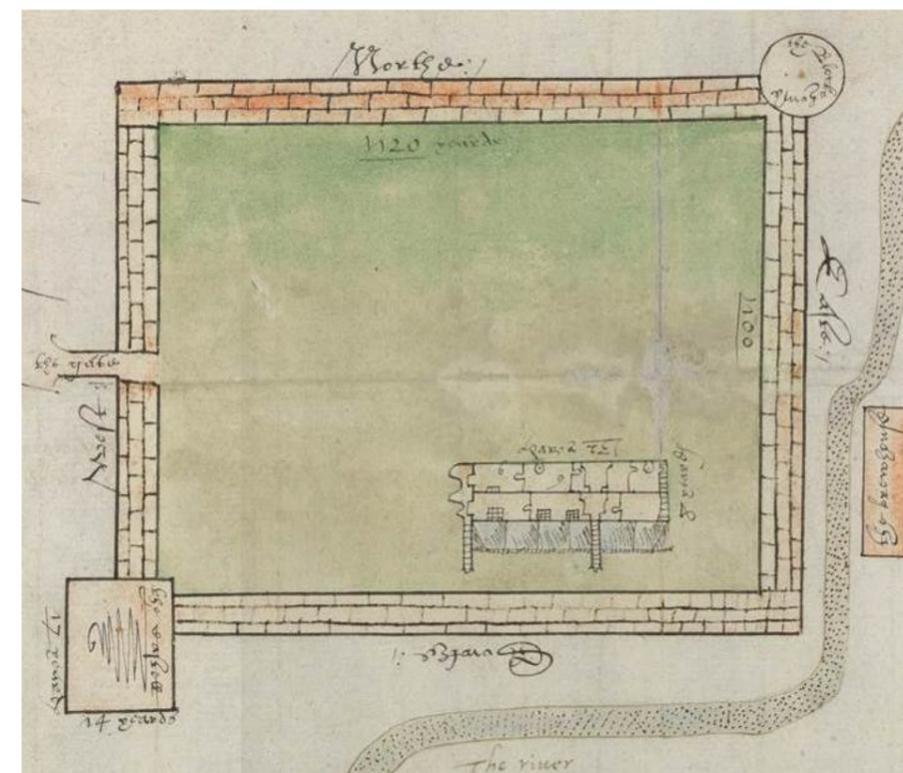
The long frontage at Fitzmaurice Place presents an opportunity to recreate the defensive ditch, which would enable the Fort wall to be presented in its original form as a military fortification. This would enhance the understanding of the Fort and appreciation of its significance.

The revived ditch or fosse could also contribute to the 'greening' of this side of the Fort, and would have potential as an attractive pedestrian route between the 'Lower Square' and the Railway Station. This route might cut through the former CBS lands to create a vista of the round bastion when approached through this route from the north.

Connectivity to the wider Town Centre

The development of the Fort Protector as a heritage attraction could form part of a 'chain' of heritage sites across the northern side of the Town Centre (see piece on Ridge graveyard, Chapter 5, page 43). This could consist of the following components:

- Connection between Church Street and Old St Peter's Churchyard: The tower of St Peter's Church stands directly behind a small building on Church Street, (constituency office of Brian Stanley TD). This site could form an appropriate access point to the churchyard. Alternatively, another access point could be created. The gate to the churchyard on Railway Street lies close to the entrance to the Fort Protector site at O'Loughlin's carpark.
- Connection to Presentation Convent: Archaeological excavations could determine the location of the subterranean passages referred to in historic records and in other reports. An underground connection of this nature would form an evocative way to experience an historical military site of this nature. An above-ground connection could also be made to the Presentation Convent, in many ways a sister site to the Fort Protector, encompassing the remains of the structure shown as the 'Store House' or 'Brewhouse' on early maps.
- Connection to the Ridge Burial Ground: This site on the natural esker to the east is integral to the defensive history of the Fort Protector. The former convent garden to the rear might form a direct connection to that site, or alternatively a route might be created past the small park at the War Memorial, with a new entrance to the Ridge from its northern side.



05 / The Interventions

The Exposure of Cultural Heritage

Character Areas

To better understand the architectural heritage character of the Town Centre, it has been divided into eleven units, each of which has its own distinctive qualities and development needs.

Character Area 1: Fort Protector

Character Area 2: Church Street and Old St Peter's

Character Area 3: Railway station and CBS lands

Character Area 4: Church Avenue and Fitzmaurice Place

Character Area 5: River Triogue and Ridge Graveyard

Character Area 6: Bridge Street and Well Road

Character Area 7: Main Street

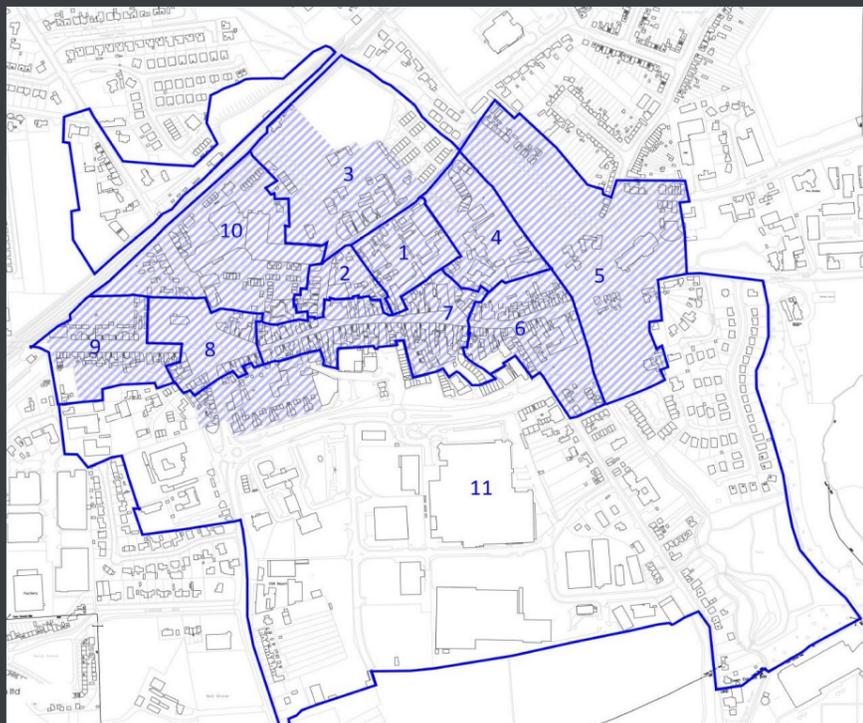
Character Area 8: Market Square

Character Area 9: Grattan Street

Character Area 10: Coote Street and Heritage Hotel

Character Area 11: Modern expansion to south

Areas 1 to 10 closely generally coincide with the Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) of Portlaoise Historic Centre.



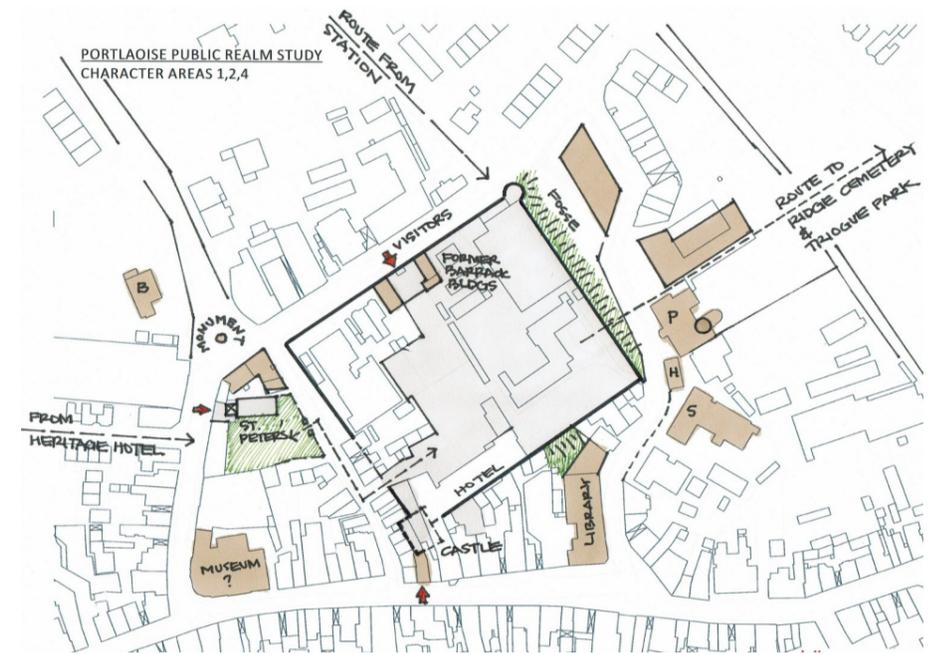
Interventions for Areas 1 and 2

Restoration of the Fort Protector

- Purpose: The building of the Fort Protector is the foundation story of Portlaoise, and it is from this site that the modern town derives its name. The intention would be to create a driver for redevelopment of the area to the north of Main Street.
- Key Features: Acquire and assemble sites in various ownerships; Create entrances at Tower Hill and through No. 32 Main Street, where underground remains of the 'Castle of Maryborough' can be exposed. Negotiate with O'Loughlin's Hotel to allow access over their property from Railway Street; Excavate defensive ditch on Fitzmaurice, possibly as a community archaeology project, and present as a 'greened' earthwork.
- Outcomes: Restoration of the Fort as part of the public realm would have the power to transform the image of the Town. Presentation and 'greening' of the defensive ditch would enhance the amenity value and setting of the Fort.

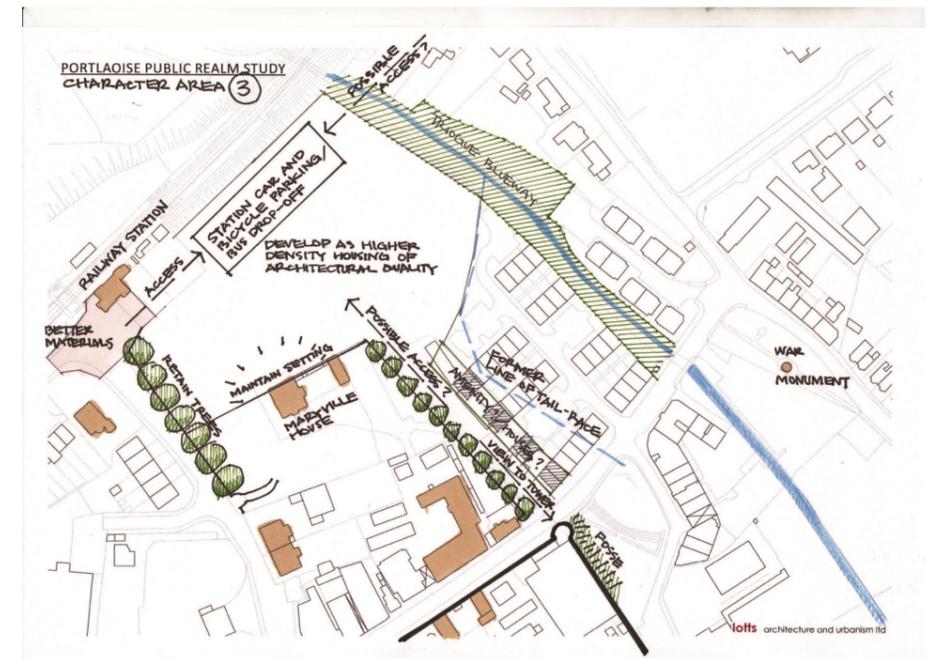
Link connecting the Old St Peter's Churchyard to Church Street and to Fort Protector:

- Purpose: To reinforce the historical link between two significant 16th century buildings, and to better anchor them in the wider urban landscape.
- Key Features: Consider the acquisition of a building on Church Street to enable a direct entrance to the Churchyard. This may be the building directly adjoining the church tower, or a narrow shop adjoining the Dunamaise Arts Centre; Restoration of the Churchyard and its monuments, including the church ruin and ironwork gates; Negotiate with O'Loughlin's Hotel to allow access over their property into the Fort.
- Outcomes: The churchyard would be a valuable leisure amenity of cultural interest. The linkage would form part of a longer 'chain' of heritage sites extending as far as the Ridge Burial Ground and beyond.



Interventions for Area 3

New route from Railway Station to Fitzmaurice Place through former CBS lands (pedestrian/cycle or vehicular).



- Purpose: To enable a more direct connection from the Railway Station to the development sites at the former Presentation Convent and to 'Lower Square', Pepper Lane and beyond.
- Key Features: Acquire the bungalow site at Tower Hill and lay out a new tree-lined route to a possible bicycle and car parking area on the former CBS lands and forming a vista to the round bastion of Fort Protector; Construct houses of architectural quality to face the new route at gables of adjoining housing.
- Outcomes: Greater connectivity and permeability of the 'heritage quarter' of the Town; Improved visibility and heightened presence of the Fort Protector in the townscape.

Improve the setting of the Railway Station building:

- Purpose: To maximise the impact on the public realm of this important historic building by Sancton Wood, architect of Heuston Station and other stations of the Great Southern and Western Railway line.
- Key Features: Upgrade ground surfaces; integrate mature trees and as far as possible historic stone walls in the design solution; Maintain setting of Protected Structure Maryville House in any attendant development.
- Outcomes: Strengthening of the good visual quality of Railway Street and Bank Place as the entry point to the Town for railway users.

Interventions for Areas 4 and 5

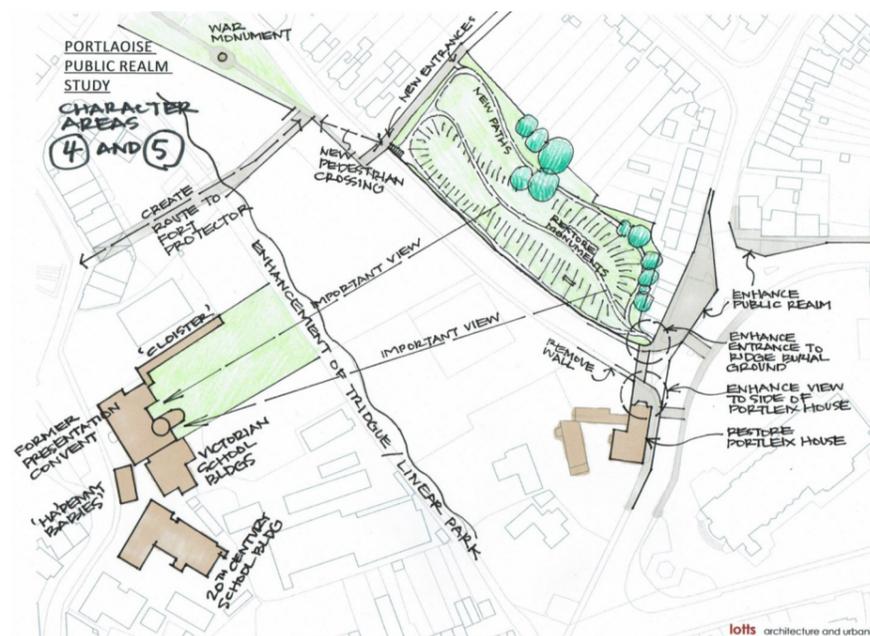
Pedestrian route between the Fort Protector, the River Triogue and the Ridge graveyard:

- Purpose: This route would be a part of a proposed 'chain' of heritage sites to the north of the Town Centre, creating a walking route which would link Church Street and the Old Gaol - the Old St Peter's Churchyard - the Fort Protector - the Presentation Convent - Triogue linear park - War Monument Park - Ridge Burial Ground - Portleix House - SS Peter and Paul Church.
- Key Features: The route would pass through the existing archway in the Fitzmaurice Place housing, cross the carpark to the rear and the Triogue into the proposed linear park, ramp up to the level of the Ridge Road, and open onto it at the eastern end of the war monument park;
 - A new pedestrian crossing that would be in alignment with the pedestrian route into St John's Square housing along the north-western edge of the Ridge, allowing a direct connection from the war monument park across the Ridge Road;
 - A new entrance into the Ridge Burial Ground at its western corner. This would involve a breach in the cemetery wall and a flight of steps inside the graveyard, which would require careful design and close archaeological monitoring.
- Outcomes: Physical linkage of three sites which are linked historically as part of the foundation story of the Town; Visual and physical connection between the war monument and the Ridge; Amenity of high quality for the town, which would strengthen the proposals for a Triogue linear park and the improvement of the Ridge Burial Ground.

Upgrade the graveyard as a green amenity space, following best conservation practice for conservation of burial grounds:

- Purpose: To take advantage of an historic site of great inherent potential, currently misused for anti-social behaviour.
- Key Features: New circuit path around the base of the ridge and upgrade the existing trodden path along crest of the esker;
 - New railing as adequate guarding above the retaining wall to the Ridge Road;
 - New entrance at the western corner (see above);
 - A second new entrance at northern corner to allow level access, and make a part of the graveyard accessible to elderly people and wheelchair users;
 - Conservation of grave markers following conservation best practice, based on a detailed inventory;
 - Conservation of the turnstile gate to maintain the historic character of the graveyard;
 - Clearance of self-seeding vegetation from overgrown area to the north and east of the graveyard and planting in a more suitable manner, with screening to the adjoining private gardens.
- Outcomes: An accessible and usable green amenity space with visible and attractive entrances, forming part of an interesting walking route of heritage interest, in what is currently perceived as a dangerous dead-end. The park would retain a 'wild' character as moving of the steep incline would not be feasible.

Note: Views to the former Presentation Convent building from the paths at the base and crest of the Ridge should be preserved in future development of the parish and Presentation Order lands which lie between.

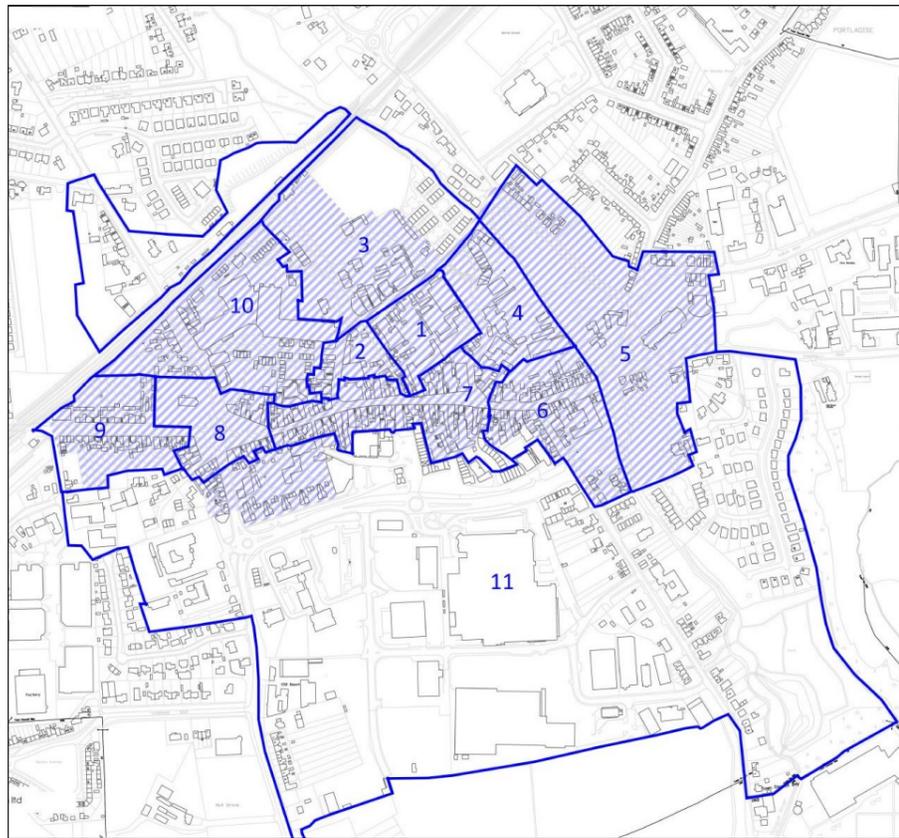


Upgrade Junction of Ridge Road and Dublin Road:

- Purpose: To maximise the potential of Portleix House and the entrance to the Ridge Burial Ground in relation to the public realm, and to enable pedestrian linkages across Dublin Road to the church of SS Peter and Paul.
- Key Features: Enhancement of the parking area and footpaths on the north and west side of Dublin Road from the Ridge Road and on either side of the Borris Road junction retaining car parking spaces with widened and improved footpath and possible planting elements; Enhancement of Portleix House, in particular the bay window to the gable end; Removal of the low-quality wall which obscures this architectural gable and suitable redesign of the private buffer space between the house and the public pavement; Replacement of signage clutter with better positioned and integrated fittings.
- Further study is needed to improve pedestrian experience at the crossings, linking Portleix House to the gateway of the Ridge Burial Ground, and to SS Peter and Paul Church would need further study and could include junction configuration.

05 / The Interventions

The Exposure of Cultural Heritage (Continued)



The Character Areas

Interventions for Area 6

Promote residential use and conservation-led maintenance of frontages. No specific conservation interventions.

Interventions for Area 7

Reconfiguration and rebranding of the Lower Square as the 'Old Fort Quarter':

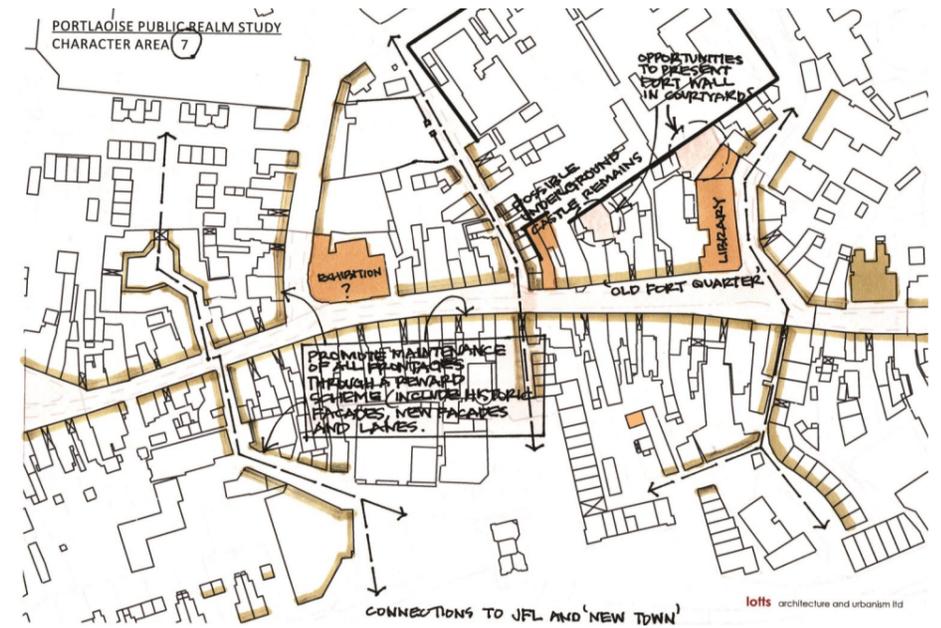
- Purpose: To create a vibrant urban space largely free of traffic in the historic core of the Town.
- Key Features: Pedestrianise Main Street between Church Avenue and Railway Street with improved lighting, planting, and signage; Upgrade facades, ground surfaces, and lighting in Pepper Lane and Lyster Lane to form an integrated pedestrian 'circuit'; Encourage business owners to create attractive rear courtyards presenting the wall of the Fort as a principal character feature.
- Outcomes: The 'Old Fort Quarter' can become a strong brand to benefit the perception of the historic town centre as a place of heritage interest and an attractive setting for town-centre business.

Improve existing cross-routes at Hynd's Square/Bull Lane, Railway Street/Lyster Lane and Church Avenue/Pepper Lane:

- Purpose: To encourage pedestrian connections across the Town Centre in daytime and evening, linked to routes across James Fintan Lalor Avenue to the south, and to the Heritage Hotel, Railway Station and Fort Protector to the north. The routes would cross the proposed heritage route through the Heritage Quarter to the north.
- Key Features: Remove pedestrian safety barriers in favour of traffic calming measures to reverse the priority in favour of the pedestrian.
- Outcomes: The cross-routes would bind the Main Street into a network of routes across the Town and reinforce its role as the real town centre.

Promote improved presentation of buildings in the public realm:

- Purpose: Enhancement of enclosing facades as a key determining factor in forming the character of the public realm.
- Key Features: Promote maintenance, conservation and enhancement of facades, shopfronts, roofs, chimneys and external site features, both historic and modern, to the front and rear through a reward scheme; Where possible prioritise grants under the DAHRRGA Structures at Risk Scheme (SRF) and Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS) to Protected Structures in the area and to buildings which contribute to the character of the ACA; Inspiration might be drawn from the 'Monumentenwacht' scheme in the Netherlands whereby a community building maintenance programme is provided on a membership basis with benefits such as reduced insurance premiums.
- Outcomes: Well-conserved buildings can have a transformative effect on the appearance and economic sustainability of the Town Centre.





Interventions for Area 8

Redesign of the Market Square:

- Purpose: To remake the Square as a place which is usable as a public amenity and event space.
- Key Features:
 - Realignment of the roadway along the south side of the Square to maximise space on the sunnier, northern part;
 - Removal of the roundabout and calming of traffic on the north-south road (now the N80) route, positioning traffic signalling at edges of the space as far as possible;
 - Strengthening the visual and physical connection to the Church of Ireland site and the architectural landmark of the James Gandon Spire;
 - Reduce the number of car parking spaces and move same to a peripheral location;
 - Consider a covered, modern, high quality designed structure on the site of the former Market House.
- Outcomes: An important civic event space within the historic town core as a venue for markets, small concerts, etc. and better integration of Grattan Street and the Church of Ireland site with the rest of the Town Centre.

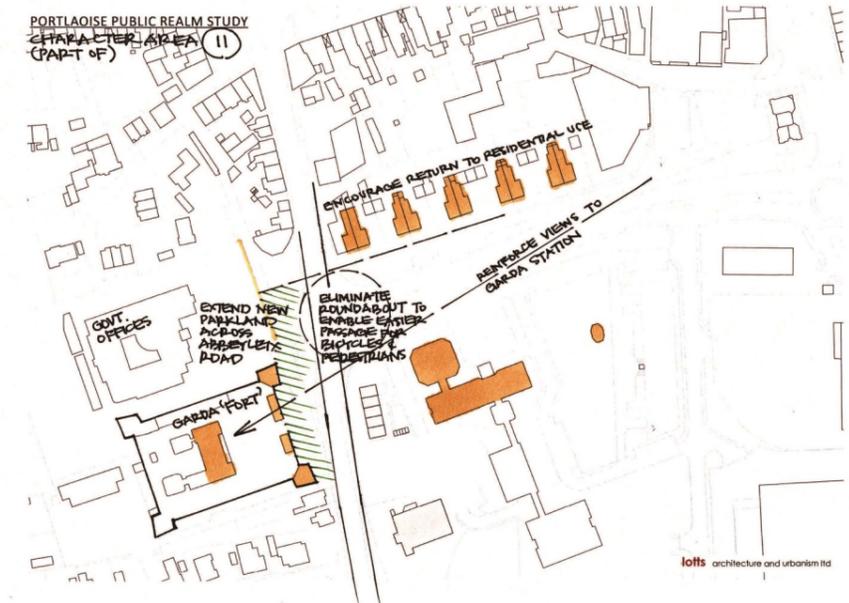
Interventions for Areas 9 and 10

Promote residential use and conservation-led maintenance of frontages. No specific conservation interventions.

Interventions for Area 11

Enhancement of the Setting of County Hall:

- Purpose: To maximise the impact of architectural heritage attributes on the setting of the administrative centre of the County.
- Key Features: Remove planting to reveal the fortified character of the Garda Station ('New Barracks' of 1805) emphasising its star-shaped bastions typical of defences constructed during the Napoleonic Wars. The building forms an interesting counterpoint to the Fort Protector, having carried on its military function, and holds special interest in the context of a town for which its military history is part of its foundation story;
- Encourage the return to residential use of the Victorian houses on Kellyville Park.
- Outcomes: Better presentation of the eastern end of James Fintan Lalor Avenue.



05 / The Interventions

Main Street / Lower Square Traffic Cells

A system of traffic cells is proposed in order to address the issue of through-traffic on Main Street, whilst also improving pedestrian comfort along Main Street.

The Strategy proposes to prevent vehicular traffic between the junctions with Railway Street and Church Avenue. Out-of-hours traffic movements are deemed positive (19:00-07:00), as they increase passive surveillance and safety, as well as allowing for Main Street's servicing requirements. Retractable bollards will allow service deliveries to shops.

The Purpose of the Intervention

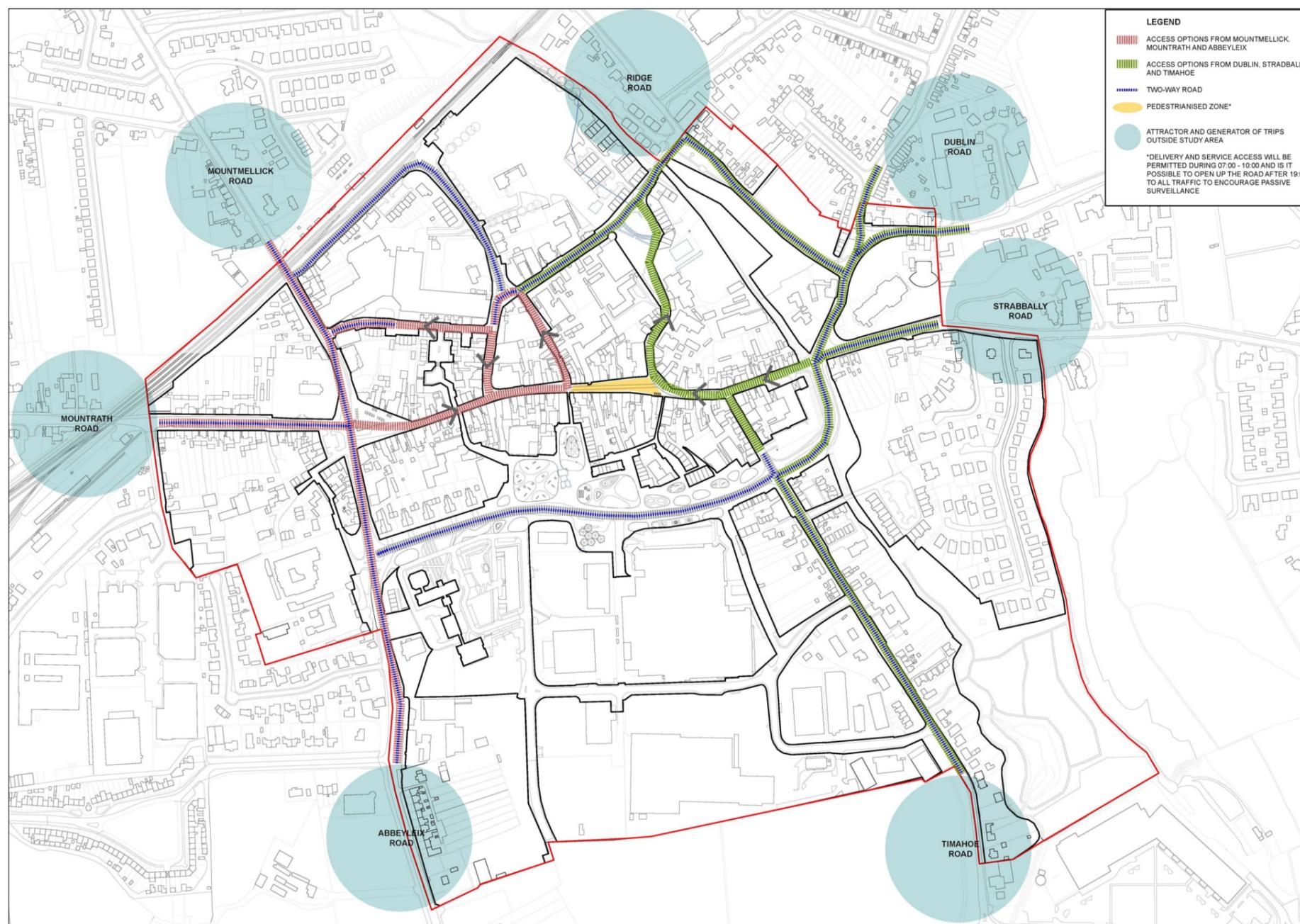
The purpose of the proposed intervention at Main Street and Lower Square is to enable a reduction in through-traffic and make Main Street a more pedestrian friendly place. This intervention provides a real opportunity to make Lower Square a space for people rather than a contested space.

Key Features of the Intervention

- **Remove car dominance** on Main Street.
- Remove the through-route from Market Square to Bridge Street.
- Promote greater **pedestrian activity** in the Town Centre.
- **Introduce increased activity** to the space.
- **Town Centre living** encouraged.
- Promote **vibrancy and vitality** to the traditional business core of Portlaoise.
- Increased **connectivity** through laneways to new town centre.
- Opportunity to define a **Cultural Quarter** centred around Lower Square with Fort Protector, Dunamaise Theatre, and the proposed new library adjacent.
- Service access to Lower Main Street / Lower Square between 07.00 and 10.00am.



The Existing Traffic Cells



The Proposed Traffic Cells

Contribution to the Guiding Principles

- Links to The People’s Town and Improving the Retail Involvement.
- Consistent with principles of the Connected Place.
- Links to the Future for Our Heritage.

Outcomes

- No through-route on Main Street.
- Opportunity to pedestrianise Main Street from Railway Street to Lower Square during the daytime while facilitating access for deliveries.
- Provide a setting for the new library as the centre of a new Cultural Quarter.

Key Physical Changes

The key components of the plan include the following;

- Lower Square will have no car parking.
- One-way traffic flow on Church Street, Railway Street and Church Avenue reversed.

Sustainability Indicators

Environment:	Neutral Impact
Social:	High Social Value
Economic:	Low Spend Cost / High Impact



05 / The Interventions

The Convent, CBS and Parish Lands

The Convent and Parish Lands in Portlaoise Town Centre represent a significant opportunity to deliver a number of key objectives. The opportunity to make provision within the Portlaoise Local Area Plan for fulfilling aspirations for uses which will aid in the growth of the Town Centre residential population will have to be balanced with providing for other key town centre uses.

The Purpose of the Intervention

The purpose of the proposed intervention at the Convent and Parish Lands is to enable the creation of a **residential community**.

Key Features of the Intervention

- Potential to address shortfall with a multi-storey car parking at Railway Station.
- Open up opportunity for appropriate uses for Maryville House.
- Potential to provide for medium—high density residential units.
- Potential uses noted in public consultation for the Convent Building include hotel, third-level educational facility and museum.
- Opening up of the River Triogue through lands to public access to deliver the Triogue Blueway objective while satisfying a public open space requirement.
- Possible introduction of a new mixed use building at Fitzmaurice Place.
- Possible elderly living residential cluster centred at the Old Convent building.
- Possibility of providing for opening up part of the historic Fort Protector site as a cultural heritage site with potential for part restoration as a cultural and tourist attraction.
- Provide for a green buffer to both the Old Convent building and Maryville House.
- Potential IT / Business Centre in former Prison Officer's Club at Bank Place.

The Convent, CBS and Parish Lands

The Opportunity

The Convent, CBS and Parish lands represent an opportunity to address the loss of vibrancy and vitality arising from the closure of schools within Portlaoise Town Centre. The importance of finding sustainable replacement uses and regenerating these key sites to provide for the continued growth of one of Ireland's fastest growing towns for future generations. The sites represent a significant opportunity to arrest the decline of the residential population while addressing other infrastructure deficiencies such as the railway station car parking.

The Strategy

The sites are well serviced with multiple access points and they offer a high degree of flexibility for comprehensive masterplanning as either combined or separate projects. The Strategy could set out high quality urban design and development objectives as well as setting out clear guidelines as regards mix of unit size and type, density, and height, as well as setting guiding principles for potential development of the sites.

Site Constraints

A number of constraints that exist can be turned into advantages in relation to the River Triogue in particular as well as the various Protected Structures within both sites. While the River Triogue presents challenges in relation to flood risk it also presents enormous environmental and amenity value which can aid in mitigation. The Protected Structures, which may potentially be challenging to find contemporary sustainable uses for, can, through sensitive restoration, be transformed into key heritage assets including one of the most important cultural heritage asset in the Fort Protector.

Exemplar

McCauley Place, Naas, Co Kildare was a community-driven initiative that developed an elderly living cluster and resource centre with 53 independent living apartments within the old Convent of Mercy in Naas town centre. The centre is a sustainable reuse of a former convent which also includes tea rooms, an arts and culture centre, a community centre, and a volunteer centre all combined in a single development. This model may be worthy of consideration for the old convent building (a Protected Structure) itself along with a combination of existing and new buildings.

Outcomes

- Efficient use of significant former institutional opportunity sites to rebalance housing provision in Portlaoise Town Centre.
- Creation of residential neighbourhood adjacent to transport and services.
- Provide extended amenity provision to both residents and the wider public.
- Provide for additional car parking at Portlaoise Railway Station.



The Old Presentation Convent, Church Avenue, Portlaoise



McCauley Place, Naas, Co Kildare



Maryville, Railway Street, Portlaoise

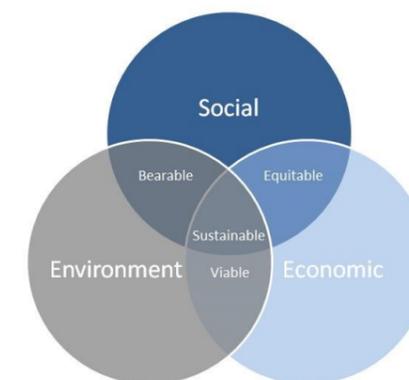


The Convent, CBS and Parish Lands at Portlaoise Town Centre

Note: This layout is intended to illustrate where new development might occur within the sites and is not intended to identify capacity as there are a number of Protected Structures and natural assets along with a flood risk issue along the River Triogue which will impact on site density and capacity.

Contribution to the Guiding Principles

- Consistent with principles of The People's Town.
- Contributes to A Future for Our Heritage.
- Links to The Connected Place.



Sustainability Indicators

Environment:	Positive Impact
Social:	High Social Value
Economic:	High Cost / High Impact

05 / The Interventions

The River Triogue Blueway

Opening up the Triogue as a linear park through the Town was raised in the public consultation workshops as a desirable outcome for the people of Portlaoise. While the River Triogue is currently accessible through People’s Park to the south east of the Town Centre and the Triogue Linear Park to the north east, part of the river runs through the private Convent Lands.

However, due to flood risk issues and the requirements within the Draft Laois County Development Plan 2011—2017 to provide riparian buffer strips, the riverside has significant opportunity as a continuous linear amenity strip which could accommodate some public access in the future.

The Purpose of the Intervention

Opening up the Triogue as a linear park through the Town will provide a host of practical benefits to the people of the Town by connecting the existing sections of the Peoples Park to James Fintan Lalor Avenue and Church Street to the railway. This will provide a useful pedestrian and cyclist corridor through the Town, connecting the southern and northern areas in a very direct manner. Separation of pedestrians and cyclists from vehicles is an important principle of green infrastructural development.

Apart from the practical benefits it will provide new amenity spaces that will enhance the quality of life in the Town, making it more liveable and visually attractive. Planning open space along the river corridor will also afford an opportunity to manage flooding of the River. Furthermore, by enhancing the spaces along the River, coupled with decreased pollution, there will be ecosystem improvements which will also benefit the local environment and bring a sense of the country into the Town.

Key Features of the Intervention

The key feature is the River itself. By exposing and enhancing the Triogue, the unique ambience and nature of the River corridor becomes a character area of the Town, a place with its own identity and *genius loci*.

Whilst much of the linear park is already in place, there is an opportunity to integrate the whole through lands that are currently privately owned and to create new spaces that can deliver green and blue infrastructure services to the Town. Such spaces will have public access with pedestrian paths and cycleways and give an opportunity to create incidental spaces for recreation and for enhanced habitat for native flora and fauna.

Key to the success of the linear park will be cross-connections to the Town Centre and other routes along the way. This will have the effect of making it safer to use, more animated and more useful to more people, creating a virtuous circle leading to a more popular and more functional route.

Development adjacent to the River should follow the guidance contained in Inland Fisheries Ireland publication *Planning for watercourses in the urban environment* to ensure that it is designed optimally for both environmental and amenity benefits. Spaces along the banks could be either hard or soft, as determined by the context and quality of design proposals. Civil engineering concerns, such as SuDS, should also be considered integrally with the design of these spaces.

Key Physical Changes

The key components of the Strategy include the following:

- The existing pedestrian footpaths may need some works to accommodate cyclists; some path widening and pass gates may assist in ensuring cyclists dismount at narrow sections and bridges.
- The section of the Triogue alongside the Bridge Street car park may need to have the pedestrian and cycle provision widened.
- Access may be possible alongside the River Triogue at Portlaoise Retail Park to the N80 link road.
- Control of development to Convent and CBS lands to allow the opening up of the River Triogue Blueway route for public access to facilitate walking and cycling through Town Centre.



The Triogue Blueway Route



Example of surface treatment



Example of riverside walks

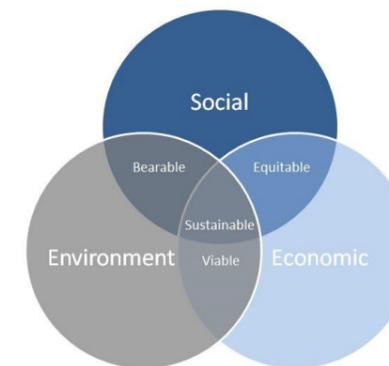
Outcomes

The principal outcomes will be as follows:

- Interventions will open up some of the areas and increase the potential for passive supervision from adjacent dwellings, including new buildings on plots that are released for development.
- Increased entrance points and connections to adjacent residential areas to allow for greater animation and more options for entry and exit.
- Introduce CCTV where no overlooking is possible to discourage anti-social behaviour.
- Create a central green space in the Town along the river, in parallel with increasing the level of accessibility to the river through the Town with development policies for sites along the river. Such spaces should be secure and overlooked with strong pedestrian and cyclist connections to busy areas of the Town.
- Increase path widths to allow for cyclists as well as pedestrians.
- Improve the level of design when above the objectives have been achieved. At present investment in design elements such as seats, bins, improved paths, bridges, etc. would potentially be wasted as the space is prone to anti-social behaviour and vandalism.
- Benefits to the river corridor as a habitat, with decreased pollution, removal of any invasive species and interventions to encourage wildlife, such as habitat enhancements (bird & bat boxes, artificial otter holts, gravel beds for spawning fish, etc.).



Example of surface treatment



Contribution to the Guiding Principles

The River Triogue Blueway proposal contributes to many of the Guiding Principles and in particular the following;

- The People's Town
- The Connected Place
- Provides positive Sustainability Indicators.

Sustainability Indicators

Environment:	Positive Impact
Social:	High Social Value
Economic:	Moderate Cost / Positive impact

06 / Portlaoise 3D Model

Introduction

A key requirement of the Strategy is the development of a digital 3D model of Portlaoise to facilitate the effective planning and communication of the proposed Vision for the Town.

The model created represents a valuable 3D map and digital record of the Town as it stands today.

Model Compilation

There were 4 stages to the development of Portlaoise 3D model;

- A drone survey to map the Town in 3D;
- Manual generating a 3D CAD model with reference to 3D mesh;
- A street-level photographic survey used to apply photorealistic facades to the CAD model;
- Importing textured CAD model onto *RealSim's* interactive environment simulator for visualisation and scenario analysis.

From Survey to Model

Survey

3D Digital Surface Model (DSM) produced from drone survey



Model Buildings

Create 3D building blockwork with reference to DSM



Photo-texturing

Carry out ground photographic survey and photo texture buildings



Model Use

The Portlaoise 3D Model is an Autodesk 3ds Studio Max model as requested by Laois County Council. This is a high-end 3D graphics Computer Aided Design (CAD) package traditionally used by graphic designers and architectural technicians to produce 'pre-rendered' computer generated images (CGI's) and video animations. These facilitate the production of image and movie outputs for 'passive' viewing from pre-determined perspectives. This is appropriate for the purposes of this project but does not allow for spatial or lighting analysis or viewing alternative perspectives.

RealSim has developed an environment simulation platform using high-end technology to render a modelled environment in real time, equipped with easy to use analysis tools. This allows for a *walk- or fly-anywhere* analysis of Portlaoise in 3D with the ability to easily toggle between present and proposed images of the Town.

The model has a life span far beyond this Strategy and is now a valuable digital asset for the Council which can be used by technical and non-technical people alike to assess any potential new building, landscape or infrastructure development in the Town in the future.

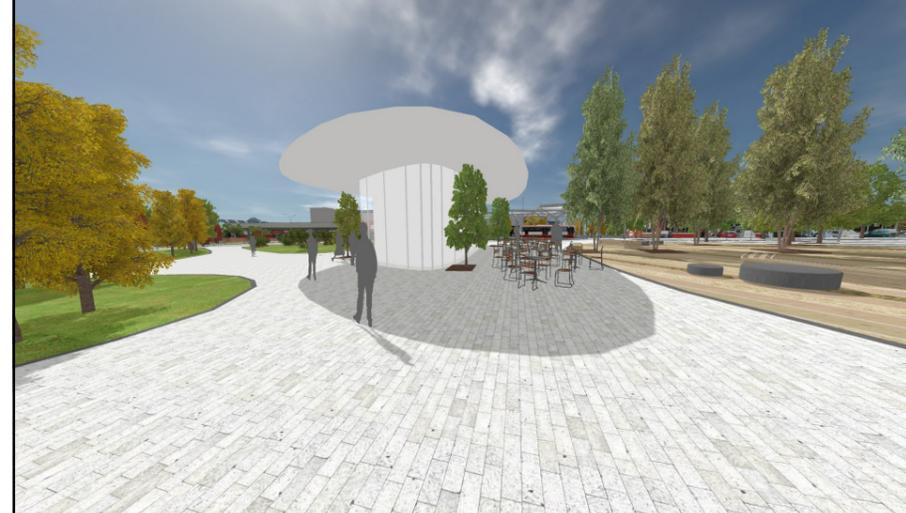
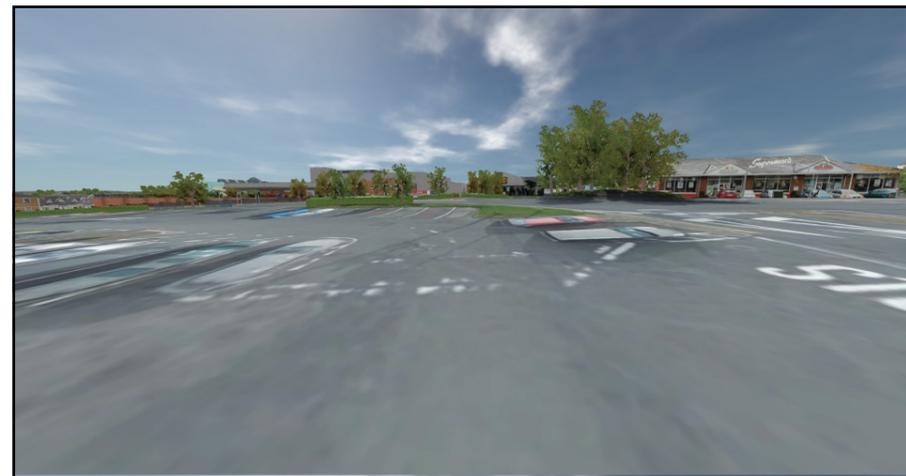
Project Outputs

The deliverables for this project are:

- An Autodesk Studio Max file of Portlaoise. In future the Council can request planning applicants of significant developments to submit their plans within this file for objective assessment.
- An executable file containing the interactive town model. This model can be used on any PC or laptop with a dedicated video graphics card.
- A promotional movie captured from the model showing the Town as it is today and how it could look like in the future. This can be posted online.
- Various stills from key intervention areas.

The images on the page over are a selection of screenshots from within the interactive model of various parts of the Town as it is today.

Views from the 3D Model—Existing and Proposed



07 / The Policies

Planning Context of the Strategy

Introduction

A thorough examination of the strategic and statutory planning and development context was undertaken to understand the role of Portlaoise in a broader national, regional and local development context. The following sections highlight the main points from the relevant plans concerning Portlaoise.

Laois County Development Plan 2011–2017

Under the Laois County Development Plan (CDP) 2011-2017, the development strategy for the Portlaoise Area prioritises economic development of Portlaoise as the Principal County Town.

As per the CDP, in order for Portlaoise to fulfil its role as the Principal Town in the Region, the town will be a focus for future population growth in Laois County. In terms of the Housing Strategy for the CDP, it is the policy of the Council to encourage a range of housing types in town centre and village centre locations. The importance of arts and cultural facilities is also noted in the CDP and increased public participation by the community with these facilities is encouraged.

Additionally, Portlaoise is of particular importance to the County's Economic Development objectives. The CDP includes objectives for improving town centres and developing them through powers from the Derelict Sites Act 1990 and other strategies. Improving the appearance of derelict buildings in town centre areas can directly affect the vibrancy of these town centres.

Portlaoise has an important role in the CDP's aim to develop an accessible, well-connected County with strategic transport infrastructure. The CDP recognises a commitment to the promotion of sustainable means of travel including public transport, walking and cycling and includes policies relating to encouraging new trends in town centres, away from reliance on car travel.

The CDP also notes the importance of the archaeological and architectural heritage of the County and that the conservation of monuments, buildings, streets and spaces throughout towns and villages in the County must be undertaken.

Laois Draft County Development Plan 2017–2023

In the Laois Draft County Council County Development Plan 2017-2023 (CDP), Portlaoise is identified as the Principal Town for the County, and under Zone 'A' of the Laois Core Strategy is envisaged to undergo strong growth during the Plan period, in addition to acting as a centre for sustainable growth of both population and enterprise. As a designated settlement in the County, Portlaoise is identified as a service-sector employment area. It is also evident that culture and tourism is of growing significance for the local economy, with the historic core of the Town recognised as having potential in this regard. The CDP also states that the LAP for Portlaoise will be reviewed within the lifetime of the Plan, in addition to preparing a Public Realm Strategy for Portlaoise. The CDP sets out the strategic context for the Laois Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2016-2021 and will support its implementation.

Within the Draft County Retail Strategy, Portlaoise's Core Retail Area will be the focus and preferred location for retail development during the lifetime of the CDP. The CDP also includes a policy for tourism which pertains to the revitalisation of the Town Centre public realm.

Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2012-2018

The Portlaoise Local Area Plan (LAP) provides the overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the urban area of Portlaoise. The vision of the LAP is to develop the Town towards more sustainable outcomes; limit sporadic development outside the Town boundary; consolidate development within zoned areas; and utilise existing infrastructure. The strategic approach of the LAP is to solve the imbalance of development in the Town Centre and to focus on employment generation, retailing, and residential development in order to enhance the service offer of the Town.

The LAP highlights the need for enhanced sustainable transport, with recommendations including cross-town bus services; a parking and traffic management strategy within the Town Centre; making the centre a more pedestrian friendly place; the provision of a network of cycle routes; and the standardisation of footpaths. Development will continue within the Town Centre with small pockets of infill development and individual replacement housing units being encouraged.

In terms of open space, Fitzmaurice Place to the North of Church Avenue provides a significant open space feature within the core of the Town Centre. The LAP notes that it is currently under-utilised but holds the potential to become an important pedestrian hub in the Town. Regard will be given to the Portlaoise ACA when considering development proposals, in order to maintain and enhance the character of the Town.

National Spatial Strategy (NSS) 2002-2020

The NSS aimed to achieve a better balance of social, economic and physical development throughout Ireland by adopting a hierarchy of development locations, based around major centres that had, or had the potential to achieve, critical mass (i.e. Gateways), with a second supporting tier of regional Hubs which would energise smaller towns and rural areas within their sphere of influence. Portlaoise was considered as a key town within the NSS to support the Gateway role that was given to Athlone, Mullingar and Tullamore, acting as a strategic linking corridor for the central spine of the Midlands Region.

The National Planning Framework (NPF, below) is being developed to succeed the NSS. The NPF will provide a long term strategy for the spatial development of Ireland and will form the top tier of Ireland's planning policy hierarchy. It will inform preparation of Regional Economic and Spatial Strategies and County Development Plans and will provide a clear vision to guide future development and investment decisions.

National Planning Framework—Issues & Choices

The National Planning Framework (NPF) Issues & Choices Paper was published in March 2017, to which Laois County Council made a response. Whilst the draft NPF has not been published the Issues & Choices paper highlights the key issues facing Ireland to which emerging national planning policy will respond. Key among these issues is housing for a growing population.

The Paper notes the emerging concentration of population and economic activity along the M7 Dublin—Portlaoise corridor, reflecting a concentration of larger town and their hinterlands, such as Portlaoise. It also notes that Laois had one of the highest rates of population increase nationally. The Paper highlights that enterprise has become more mobile and that the spatial pattern of employment is focused on the urban hierarchy of cities and larger towns, including indigenous enterprise. It also highlights that larger towns and cities are driving population increase and notes the importance of housing to health, well-being and social cohesion.

Midland Regional Planning Guidelines, 2010-2022

The Midland Regional Planning Guidelines (RPG) set out a long-term strategic planning framework to direct the future growth of the Midland Region over the medium to long term, in addition to supporting implementation of the national policies set out in the NSS. The RPG identified Portlaoise as the Principal Town for the Southern Development Area (SDA). In response to the NSS vision of Portlaoise as a transport hub and distribution centre, road and rail improvements have been made in Portlaoise with the aim of maximising the accessibility to the Town.

Laois Economic and Community Plan, 2016-2021

The Laois Economic and Community Plan (LECP) is a statutory plan to promote the economic and community development of County Laois. The Plan sets out a series of goals which provide a focus for the LECP Actions. The LECP recognises the importance of town and village centres as focal points for retail, commercial and community activity. The LECP highlights Portlaoise as a Rural Economic Development Zone and an important driver for the economic growth of its rural hinterland. The LECP provides a number of goals and objectives aimed at enhancing the vitality and appearance of town and village centres in the County in order to increase the development potential of these locations.



07 / The Policies

Implementation of the Strategy is dependent on guiding development and investment decisions successfully over the long term. Set out below are the Strategy Objectives and Policies with which to ensure that over the coming decades Portlaoise Town Centre develops in line with the overarching Vision.

It is the **Objective** of the Council to:

- **Implement '2040 and Beyond: A Vision for Portlaoise'** and enhance public spaces, buildings and walkways in a way that acknowledges the Town's unique characteristics and heritage assets, and that provides the foundation for the future development of a thriving and sustainable town centre.
- **Create Ireland's first 'Low Carbon Town Centre'** to improve the overall air and environmental quality, and promote health and well-being.
- **Deliver a walkable and accessible Town Centre** by promoting a shift from a car-centred to a pedestrian- and cyclist-centred town centre, and creating a truly pedestrian-friendly and connected place.
- **Improve the natural and built environment of the Town Centre**, and promote the health and well-being of residents and visitors by 'Greening' the Town Centre.
- **Promote the exposure of the Town Centre's cultural heritage**, by realising the potential of key heritage assets and showcasing the Town's history to provide the foundation for an expanded tourism offer.
- **Enhance the exposure and sustainable utilisation the River Triogue** as a key environmental, ecological and public amenity asset.
- **Support the reconnection of the old and new town centre**, and consolidation of the Town Centre generally to cater for its growing population.
- **Accommodate Living within the Town Centre**, and make the Town Centre a more attractive place in which to live by enhancing the quality of life in the Town Centre, and making it more liveable and visually attractive.
- **Maximise employment and opportunities for employment** within the Town Centre.

Policies

Within Portlaoise Town Centre it is the Policy of the Council to:

Low Carbon Town Centre

- Support a significant reduction in carbon emissions and air pollution through increased cycling and walking and reduced car use via improvements to James Fintan Lalor / Lyster Square, as well as by promoting introduction of electric bus services.
- Promote renewable-powered public lighting and the adoption of renewable energy sources in the County Hall, County Library and other public buildings.
- Re-balance existing car parking spaces, including replacing significant areas of tarmac with green, planted areas and trees.
- Remove large volumes of traffic from the Town Centre by delivery of the Portlaoise Southern Circular Road and reconfiguration of traffic flows through the Town Centre.
- Encourage sustainable means of travel by giving priority to pedestrians and cyclists, and where feasible separating pedestrian and cycle traffic from vehicular traffic.
- Support pedestrian prioritisation by directing traffic flows towards parking areas adjacent to the Town Centre and away from the pedestrian priority areas of James Fintan Lalor Avenue, Lyster Square, Market Square, Main Street and other key public areas.

Walkable Town Centre

- Support and protect fast, efficient rail and bus services, and improve ease of access from rail and bus termini within the Town Centre.
- Accommodate more sustainable means of travel, in particular walking and cycling, including by improving walking and cycling infrastructure to provide a safer, more user-friendly built environment.
- Improve signage between the train station and the rest of the Town, and reduce barriers to pedestrian flows, particularly through the Laneways and Lyster Square.
- Encourage more active travel generally, including a 10% of all trips by bicycle by 2020.
- Support the development of James Fintan Lalor Avenue, Lyster Square, Market Square, Main Street and other key public areas as pedestrian priority areas, and the eventual pedestrianisation of Lyster Square to connect with the retail areas south of James Fintan Lalor Avenue.
- Support the creation of a direct link from People's Park to the Southern Circular Road, and facilitate its use by schools in the south of the Town.
- Create a pedestrian friendly green route running east-west along the line of James Fintan Lalor Avenue through the Town Centre, linking Civic Plaza with the River Triogue Blueway. Also to provide a pedestrian and cycle route from the new school campus near People's Park, through the Town Centre, along the Triogue Linear Park, to connect with the residential areas to the north of the Town Centre.
- Support the introduction of legible, direct pedestrian routes between the old and new town areas, and provide pedestrian access across James Fintan Lalor Avenue and Lyster Square.
- Encourage provision of a public transport hub along James Fintan Lalor Avenue to increase the use of public transport.
- Encourage provision of charging points for electric vehicles at public car parking areas.

'Greening' the Town Centre

- Support the planting of between 300 and 500 broadleaf, native species trees within the Town Centre.
- Create 'Green' spaces threaded through the Town Centre by way of the Triogue Blueway, James Fintan Lalor Avenue and Lyster Square to complement existing open spaces.
- Deliver improved amenity space provision, including supporting linkages between open spaces, including the People's Park and Triogue Linear Park, and help foster greater use of existing and future amenity space.
- Increase the provision of open space, including the Triogue Linear Park, to cater for continued population increase within Portlaoise Town.
- Deliver environmental and habitat improvements, including provision of ecological corridors for birds and pollinators, linking the Town Centre to the open areas on the outskirts of the Town.
- Facilitate the creation and enhancement of linked 'Green' spaces through the Town Centre, including along the Triogue Blueway.
- Facilitate improvement of visual and physical access for the public to the River Triogue, to incorporate riparian buffer zones 10m either side of the river and flood risk improvement measures including through the Convent Lands.
- Improve pedestrian and cycle access through the Town Centre, including via the Triogue Linear Park from the new schools campus at Summerhill and People's Park, as a continuous pedestrian and cycle link and potentially through the Convent lands, as well as to the residential area to the north of the Town Centre. Cross connections from the Triogue Linear Park to the Town Centre and other routes.

Cultural Heritage

- Support the improvement and enhancement of the Town Centre's cultural and heritage attractions as part of a cultural quarter within the old town.
- Support the enhancement, improvement and sensitive development of the historic centre of the Town as an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) and retain the distinctive architectural character and streetscape, including landmark buildings.
- Support measures to reveal and interpret the history of the Town, so as to improve the standing of Portlaoise as a place of cultural history and architectural heritage.
- Prioritise exposure of the Fort Protector, Ridge Cemetery, St Peters Old Church and Cemetery and other heritage assets in the Town Centre, and utilise the heritage, cultural and amenity value of St. Peters Church, including Ridge Cemetery as an urban garden.
- Support the creation of a cultural quarter to the north Main Street, centred on the new proposed County Library at Lower Square, the Fort Protector, St Peter's Old Church and Dunamais Theatre.

Reconnect the Old and New Town Centre

- Provide improved pedestrian linkages between the old and new town areas.
- Improve pedestrian links based on desire lines from Main Street through Laneways and between the Old and New Town Centre and through Lyster Square.
- Support an improved mix of attractions for residents and visitors, including a mix of local, distinctive, or eclectic retail and food providers, alongside larger 'multiple' operators.

Accommodate Living

- Support the sustainable population increase in the Town Centre, to a minimum of 2,500 residents by 2040.
- Seek to protect the residential areas in Grattan Street, Jessop Street, and Well Road from commercial change of use, and explore the necessity for 'Housing Protection Areas' to be established in these and other locations.
- Promote efficient densities and residential typologies throughout the Town Centre in all opportunity sites.
- Promote the efficient use of the Convent, CBS, and Parish Lands for residential and other appropriate uses.
- Promote the use of vacant residential stock, including living above the shop, and measures to upgrade and renovate residential stock, including those required to comply with fuel and energy, as well as fire safety requirements.
- Provide a comprehensive 'Toolkit for Reoccupation', including the offering of advice in relation to Planning, Building Control, Fire Safety, security, and other relevant statutory issues to owners, tenants, and potential investors, as well as providing information in relation to available funding.
- Support the provision of social spaces and facilities for exercise, play, and relaxation, so as to improve community health and well-being.
- Promote improvements to the Town Centre to create a more attractive place in which to live, work, and visit, including visual enhancements.
- Support appropriate measures to enliven the Town Centre, and improve the mix of uses within it, and to provide a better quality environment for leisure and social uses.

Provision for Working

- Support opportunities for an Information Technology ecosystem centred on Portlaoise's high speed broadband capacity. Support the creation of a high speed, internet-enabled IT creative cluster within the Town Centre, to include related service providers and IT start-up or outsourcing businesses.
- Support the development of a creative cluster / employment hub within the Town Centre.
- Support the provision of small units of office accommodation and studios above ground floor level on Main Street.
- Support the sustainable development, expansion and improvement of employment within the Town Centre, including facilitating small and medium sized enterprises.
- Encourage new retail development and the creation of a better experience and diversity of retail, as well as high quality food and drink and other complementary uses in line with the Draft County Retail Strategy 2017—2023.

Identity & Marketing

- Support the rebranding of Portlaoise Town Centre as a place for people, where residents, shoppers, and visitors alike can spend time enjoying its buildings and spaces.
- Support the development of a marketing strategy for Portlaoise Town Centre to attract local visitors and those from the wider region.
- Support a town management initiative to coordinate the uses and appearance of the Town Centre.



Shared Vision: Objectives & Policies

The Strategy Objectives have emerged directly from, and are fully supportive of, the Shared Vision and Guiding Principles. The Shared Vision states that:

'Portlaoise Town Centre will become a place for its people, where residents, workers, and visitors alike will come to enjoy a place that is inclusive, accessible, and truly sustainable from a social, economic, and environmental perspective. It will be an exemplar town centre where businesses thrive and the pride of the population is reflected in its public spaces.'

The Policies cascade from the Objectives and are cross-cutting but organised under the key actions of the Strategy:

- The Creation of a Low Carbon Town Centre,
- The Delivery of a Walkable Town Centre,
- The 'Greening' of Portlaoise Town Centre,
- Exposure of Cultural Heritage within Portlaoise Town Centre,
- The Reconnection of the Old and New Town,
- Accommodating Living in Portlaoise Town Centre,
- Provision for Working in Portlaoise Town Centre.

07 / The Policies

The Strategy supports Portlaoise’s role as Principal Town in the County, as set out in the Laois Draft County Development Plan 2017-2023 (‘the CDP’). It achieves this by seeking to strengthen the Town Centre and accommodate and encourage appropriate, sustainable development which enhances the Town’s attractiveness and retail offer within the County and wider Region. In this way the Strategy fully supports, and is underpinned by, the policies and objectives of the County Development Plan and the Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2012—2018.

The designation of Portlaoise as a primary growth centre and national transport hub in national and regional policy remains crucial from the point of view of attracting significant inward investment and job opportunities to the County. In this regard, the Strategy is consistent with the promotion of Portlaoise Town as a Prime Urban Centre for population growth as per Laois County Council’s submission to the National Planning Framework Issues & Choices Consultation.

Portlaoise Town Centre

The rebalancing of the Town Centre is a key aim of the Strategy and recognises the potential of the Town Centre as a focus for residential, employment, retailing and recreational development. The Strategy seeks to consolidate the Town Centre by utilising an appropriate type and form of development on zoned lands and opportunity sites.

Local Setting and Context

Local Setting and Context is important in the development of the Town Centre. It is important to identify the established pattern of development within the area in order to successfully address the character, scale, height, proportions, and detail of adjoining and adjacent buildings.

Future development, whether infill or on opportunity sites, should be successfully integrated within the historical town centre area. Each area in the Town Centre will have their own distinctive form and character. New development should respect this and reflect their setting and context, taking into account the built heritage of the area, but should not be unduly restricted by it.

Urban Form and Layout

New development should arrange buildings so that they provide continuity and enclosure to the public realm, creating a coherent urban fabric that encourages security and vitality. New development should be designed to create active frontages that contribute toward the creation of streets. This in turn should facilitate the creation of mixed-use areas which provide a range of different uses such as shops and homes, and present a vibrant urban environment. Design should also seek to minimise the risks of anti-social behaviour through appropriate layout, boundary features, means of enclosure, and passive surveillance.

Building Height and Scale

An appropriate balance must be struck between using Town Centre lands efficiently and retaining quality and amenity. The general height range for new buildings within the Town Centre is 2 to 4 storeys. In this regard, where infill development is proposed the height and scale should reflect that of the existing street and/or immediate area. In other locations, such as opportunity sites, larger buildings of 4 storeys or more may be supported where appropriate, and where the topographical context allows. A variety of heights are encouraged in appropriate locations, for example in order to establish landmark buildings and create a sense of place. Where proposals of significant height or scale are located close to existing development the Planning Authority may require daylight, sunlight, or shadow impact analyses to be submitted.

Density

The Strategy promotes efficient densities throughout the Town Centre. Densities of at least 35 units per hectare would be expected within Portlaoise Town Centre. Higher densities will be expected, where appropriate, within opportunity sites and other such locations, for example at the Convent, CBS, and Parish Lands, and in close proximity to the train station, where densities of up to 50 units per hectare could be acceptable, subject to good design. In any event, the densities should be appropriate having regard to the Draft County Development Plan, Portlaoise Local Area Plan, national guidance, and relevant factors such as transportation infrastructure and impact on amenity.

Re-utilisation of buildings

Vacant properties and those approaching dereliction within the Town Centre can provide for a range of uses, particularly residential and workspace uses. The reutilisation of buildings that are vacant, approaching dereliction, or otherwise in poor condition will require refurbishment and modification works, and in many cases extensive remodelling may be needed to achieve compliance with modern standards. There are a number of requirements that may need to be addressed where the building requires material alterations or change of use, as set out in the ‘**Toolkit for Re-Occupation**’. The Strategy supports the necessary works where these comply with statutory requirements and other practical considerations.

Mix of uses

This Strategy seeks to redress the imbalance of uses within the Town Centre, and focus on regenerating the historic core of the Town. This requires an appropriate and sustainable mix of uses within the core of the Town Centre which includes housing, employment, retail and other services and facilities.

Residential — In relation to housing, the provision of a range of housing forms and types will be required which meets the needs of persons that require housing in the area. The mix of housing proposed should be appropriate to the location, whilst supporting the need for housing outlined in the Draft County Development Plan and County Housing Strategy 2017—2023. Existing pockets of established housing will also be protected.

Enterprise and Employment — In the Draft County Development Plan 2017-2023 Portlaoise is identified as a service-sector employment area. Employment generating uses and a solid employment base are critical to balancing the significant population growth that has occurred around the Town Centre. The Town Centre offers significant potential to facilitate small and medium sized enterprises, particularly at street level and above ground floor uses. In this regard, the Strategy seeks to develop a creative cluster / employment hub within the Town Centre. Creating a high speed, internet-enabled IT creative cluster at this and other appropriate locations will also be considered. In this context, the Town Centre offers potential for IT start-up or outsourcing businesses and will be supported particularly within derelict or vacant properties within the Town Centre that provide both residential and workspace uses.

Tourism & Culture — It is also evident that culture and tourism are of growing significance for the local economy, with the historic core of the Town Centre having particular potential in this regard. The Draft County Development Plan includes a policy for tourism development which pertains to the revitalisation of the Town Centre public realm.

This Strategy puts forward Policies and Objectives alongside the identification of opportunity sites for business and employment uses to assist in the creation of appropriate, modern employment opportunities within Portlaoise Town Centre.

Retail — Within the Draft Laois County Retail Strategy the Core Retail Area is the focus and preferred location for retail development. Much of the retailing development that has occurred to date has occurred on the edge of the historic core of Portlaoise. The Strategy seeks to redress the imbalance and focus on regenerating the historic core of Portlaoise with complementary retail uses, which alongside hospitality, are also the predominant employment uses within the Town Centre. In this regard, the potential of craft-related retail uses will also be supported where appropriate. Lyster Square presents a significant development opportunity in this regard, with possible retail uses at ground floor and office or residential apartments above (as does Market

Square and Lower Square particularly for distinctive, independent retail and high quality food establishments) which will be supported. Where there is un-met retail capacity up to 2018, the historic Town Centre presents the opportunity to create diversity and distinctiveness in Portlaoise's retail offer, as well as to provide attractive, pedestrian-friendly connections between it and newer retail areas. Proposals to provide a better experience and diversity of retail, as well as high quality food and drink and other complementary uses, will be supported.

Development Opportunities

Lyster Square - Lyster Square presents a significant development opportunity for a mixed-use building in the heart of the Town Centre. Possible uses include retail at ground floor with office or residential apartments above. Retail units could accommodate either a flexible single or multi-let occupant. An underground car park could accommodate the entire existing surface level provision as well as the new building, and could link to other adjacent development opportunities including the existing buildings fronting onto Lyster Square. Kiosk units can be provided in Lyster Square as well as along James Fintan Lalor Avenue. A significant development opportunity for a multi-storey mixed-use building with a basement car park would see the car removed from the public plaza and open up opportunities for other buildings to be redeveloped as a cluster overlooking Lyster Square.

Lyster Square offers the opportunity to be the connector between old and new within the Town. The creation of a new pedestrian-friendly space in this area is of paramount importance to achieving a rebalance of how space is used in the Town Centre.

Main Street - The Library is a key opportunity, with a potentially re-purposed Courthouse and Fort Protector coming back into community or cultural use if the Court Service were to develop a purpose-built court facility elsewhere within the Town Centre. Together these improvements will deliver a central shopping district re-establishing itself for a truly sustainable future. The Dunamais Theatre as well as the cinema on Church Street and the proposed New Library would complete the setting for the Cultural Quarter north of Main Street.

The Convent, CBS and Parish Lands - These lands in the Town Centre represent a significant opportunity to deliver a number of key objectives, including addressing the reduction in vibrancy and vitality arising from the loss of the schools from the Town Centre. The importance of finding sustainable replacement uses and regenerating these key sites is essential to provide for the continued and sustainable growth of the Town. The sites represent a significant opportunity to reverse the decline of the residential population whilst addressing other infrastructural deficiencies such as the Railway Station car parking provision.

In this regard, a comprehensive master planning of the sites as either combined or separate projects is recommended. Masterplans should set out high quality urban design and development objectives as well as clear guidelines as regards mix of unit size and type, density and height, and overall guiding principles for the development and appropriate uses on the sites.

The purpose of the intervention at the Convent and Parish Lands is to enable the creation of a residential community of medium to high density. The Strategy promotes the efficient use of these sites to rebalance housing provision within the Town Centre and the creation of a residential neighbourhood adjacent to transportation infrastructure and services. Redevelopment of these sites can also provide extended amenity provision to both residents and the wider public. There is also potential to achieve other objectives including:

- Addressing any shortfall in car parking with additional park at Railway Station.
- Appropriate uses for Maryville House.
- The possible introduction of a new mixed-use building at FitzMaurice Place.
- The opportunity for new streets / connections with Main Street through identifying natural desire lines and promoting permeability through the Convent, CBS and Parish Lands.
- There is also the possibility of providing for the use of the Fort Protector as a cultural heritage site with potential for part restoration as a cultural and tourist attraction.

Potential uses for the Convent Building include hotel, third-level education and/or museum, and a possible elderly living residential cluster centred at the Old Convent building. Provisions for uses which will aid in the growth of the Town Centre residential population will have to be balanced with providing for other key town centre uses.

Regard must also be had to sensitive features on-site which present significant opportunities to enhance the design and layout of development, in particular the Protected Structures on the site, and the relationship to the River Triogue and the environmental and amenity value it offers. Appropriate, contemporary, and sustainable uses will help to sustain Protected Structures, and alongside sensitive maintenance and restoration, can be transformed into key heritage assets, including the Fort Protector as one of the most important cultural heritage assets in the Town.

Bank Place - Creating high speed internet-enabled employment with the Town Centre is a key element of the Strategy which supports development of a creative cluster / employment hub at this or other locations.

Market Square and Lower Square - There is opportunity to improve individual street properties on Market Square and Lower Square. Lower Square could provide for cafés and restaurants to spill out onto the street. Improving the public space at both Lower Square and Market Square offers the opportunity to bookend the Main Street and provide entrance and exit points which could be attractive and more inviting to the user. Taking back this space for more people-friendly events, markets, and spill-out of activity from surrounding buildings will enhance their purpose.

Flood Risk

The River Triogue runs through the Convent Lands to the east of the Town Centre. These lands are at risk of flooding and a Site Specific Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) will be required for future development proposals, in line with the Draft County Development Plan 2017-2023 and national guidance. In this regard, the CDP requires a 15m Riparian Buffer Zone from the water's edge which is to accommodate a continuous ecological corridor but can also provide for both pedestrian and cycle access through the Town Centre. In addition, related factors such as SuDS should also be considered integrally with the design of these spaces.

07 / The Policies

The Toolkit—Introduction

The Strategy for Portlaoise Town Centre provides a unique opportunity for taking a lead in providing a ‘Toolkit for re-occupation’ of many of the vacant residential buildings throughout the Town Centre. In many cases these properties have been vacant for an extended period and in some cases are either at risk of becoming derelict, or in certain cases are in danger of becoming dangerous structures and could potentially pose a hazard to public safety.

A Toolkit for re-occupation

The residential opportunity locations

Many of these buildings are on the Main Street spine and the ladder of streets to the north and south. The main areas at risk are:

- Market Square
- Main Street
- Grattan Street
- Kellyville Park
- Bridge Street
- Well Road
- Church Street
- Coote Street
- Abbeyleix Road

The Properties

The majority of these buildings are 2-storey eighteenth and nineteenth century townhouses and are included within the Portlaoise Town Centre Architectural Conservation Area. They would, in many cases, have been commercial business premises at ground floor with family accommodation at rear and first floor. Many of these properties have been vacated over the years mainly due to the heavy traffic on the old Dublin – Limerick Road (N7), Grattan Street, and the Dublin – Cork Road (N8) which ran through Market Square and along the Abbeyleix Road south. Through-traffic to Dublin entered Market Square, continued along Main Street, through Lower Square and Bridge Street, to the Dublin Road to the north. Traffic to Mountmellick (N80) and Tullamore continued north on Coote Street from Market Square. This through-traffic dominated the Town Centre until James Fintan Lawlor Avenue was constructed in the 1970’s. As a result of the congestion and noise, many families moved out of the Town Centre to the outer residential areas of the Town during this period.

In many cases these family businesses and homes were occupied up until the 1990’s after James Fintan Lalor Avenue had opened, by which time the tide was irreversible. There remains a small number of units occupied as residences on Market Square and Main Street; in comparison there are a total of 20 no. public houses and 3 no. night clubs currently trading between Market Square, Main Street, Lower Square and Bridge Street.

Many of the buildings on Main Street and the adjacent streets have seen the commercial areas at ground floor extended often to fill the majority of the ownership plot. In a number of cases the shopfronts were replaced and extended to the plot width. Many of the residential units were accessed either through front doors from the street or through shared arch entrances serving the rear access to the building on either side.

While in many cases these buildings are now in poor condition over ground, some may be suitable for refurbishment and re-occupation. In a number of instances the buildings are either derelict or approaching dereliction and in some particular instances may be Dangerous Structures which should be dealt with under Sections 2 and 3 of the Local Government (Sanitary Services) Act 1964. It is not possible to ascertain through visual assessment from the street whether individual houses are currently vacant and whether the property is suitable for reoccupation as residential accommodation. Closer study would be required to determine whether individual or combined properties could be brought back into residential use for individuals and families.

The Issues

The reutilisation of these buildings will require refurbishment and modification works to be undertaken prior to their re-occupation. In many cases the buildings may be in need of extensive remodelling to achieve compliance with modern standards. There are a number of requirements that may need to be addressed in particular where the building requires material alterations or change of use including the following:

- Planning Permission,
- Building Regulations Compliance,
- Fire Safety Certificate Application,
- Disability Access Certificate Application.

There are other practical considerations that will need to be taken into account in cases where Town Centre properties are reoccupied including:

- Adjacent uses,
- Protected Structures and Architectural Conservation Area,
- Pedestrian and car parking access,
- Means of escape,
- Private open space,
- Security.

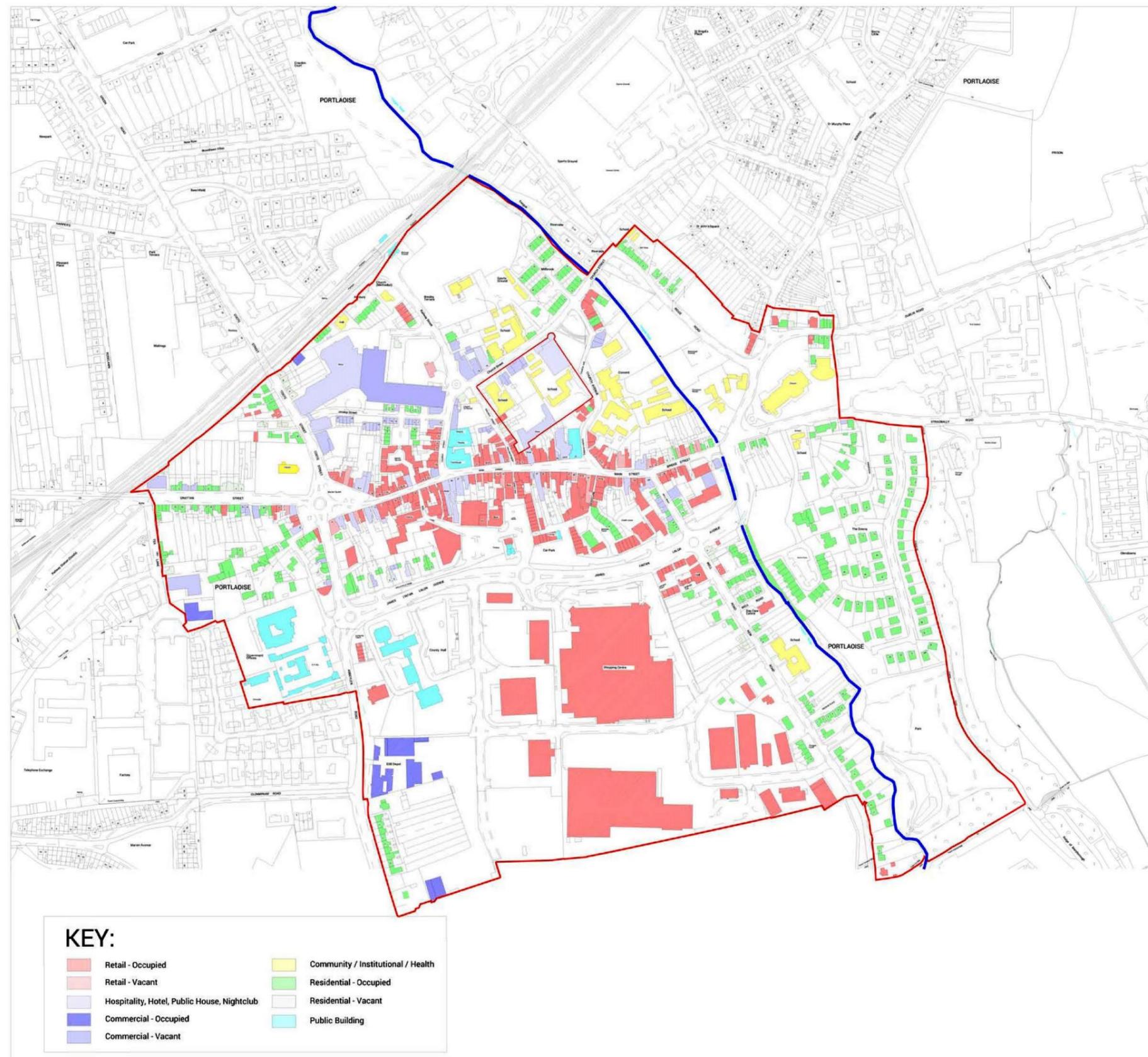
The Toolkit

A comprehensive 'Toolkit for Re-occupation' could be assembled and linked to the Laois County Council website as an information repository to aid and assist landowners, investors, potential owners and tenants in refurbishing Town Centre properties for residential reoccupation. The website could be backed by printed information packs and drop-in clinics as part of the pre-planning process to assist the public in accessing information in relation to funding and grants that would assist them in approaching lending institutions with the objective of bringing vacant Town Centre property back into residential use.

Grant Funding

Information on all available grants and funding through Government initiatives as well as available local incentives for the refurbishment of building interiors to habitable standards should be available. Similarly, information on the reinstatement and redecoration of external elements including rainwater goods, roofing, render, brickwork, features, shopfronts, and signage to approved conservation standards should also be available.

Advice could also be provided in relation to any development contribution reduction schemes. In turn, information should also be provided on any shopfront grant schemes which provide for a contribution toward the cost of replacing both damaged, unattractive, inappropriate, or unauthorised existing shopfronts.



Existing Uses at Ground Floor Level



Appendices

Appendices

A1/A2 Thematic Design and Activity Manual

B Heritage Strategy

C Landscape Strategy

D The 3D Model Technical Specification

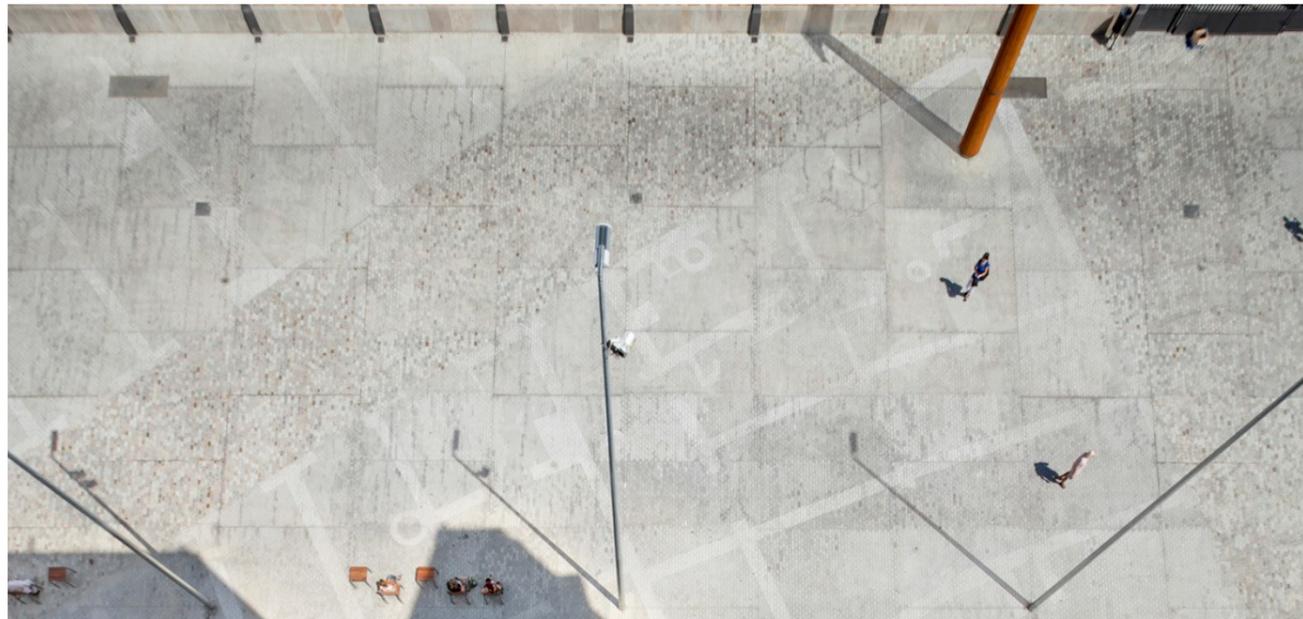
E Archaeological Study

A1 / Thematic Design

The choice of suitable, robust and appropriate materials are essential to the delivery of high quality public realm works. The need to follow similar material sets needs to be balanced with the design geometry to allow for variety while staying within a palette that is flexible to accommodate different context and applications. The importance of high quality materials and finishes is essential to areas such as Market Square in particular given the historical context and serve to showcase the unique architectural qualities of the surrounding buildings and St Peter's Church in particular with it's Gandon-designed spire.

Market Square, Material Paletter

Market square should be laid out in a series of textured stones illustrating the historic nature of the space. This could be a mixture of cobbles, granite paviours, limestone and local stone set into concrete.





Lyster Square & James Fintan Avenue, Material Palette

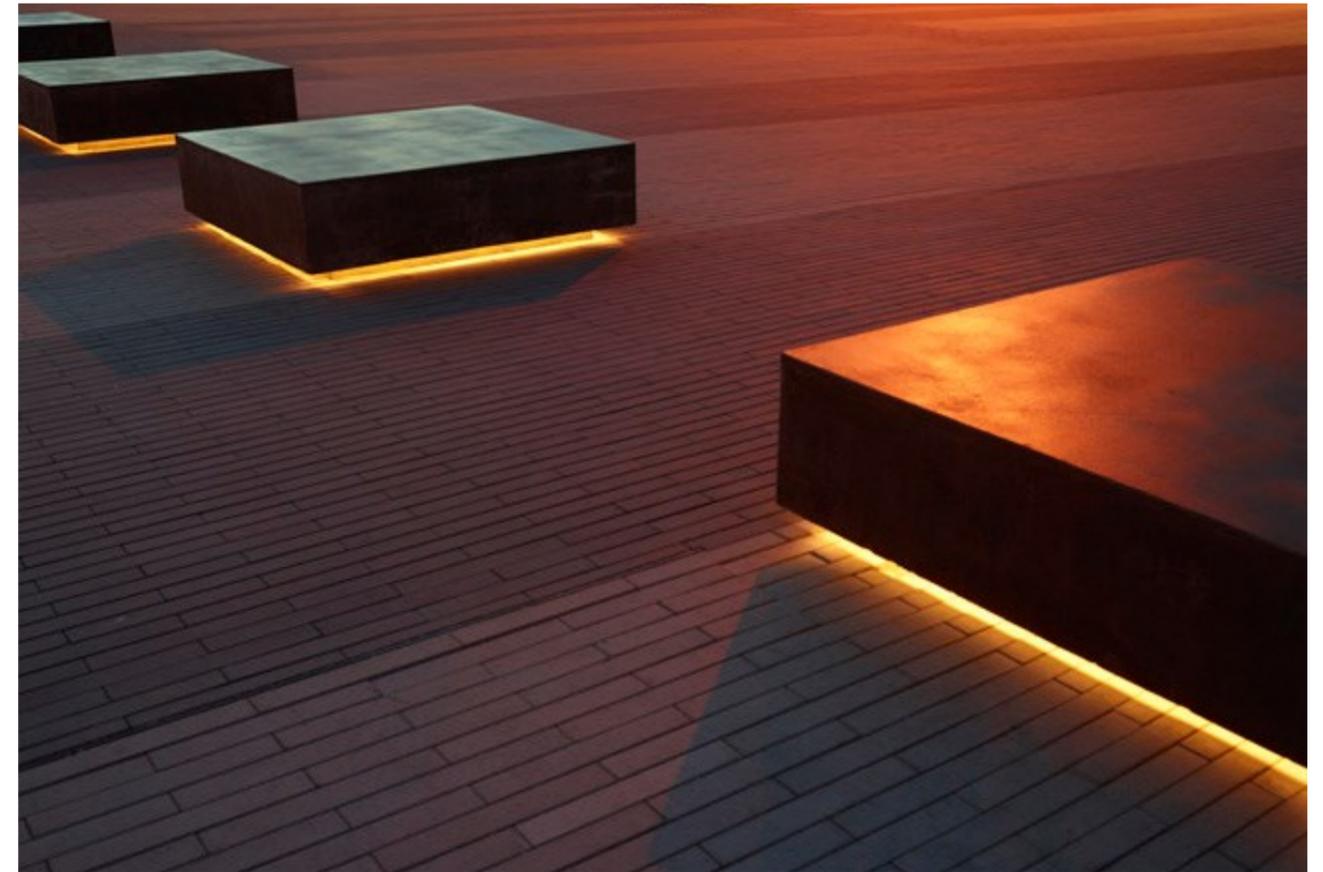
Lyster Square and James Fintan Lalor should have a more contemporary material palette with a pattern which is unique to Portlaoise. Materials can include granite and limestone paviors and cobbles, Sandstone or Portland stone, cast polished concrete and crushed compacted stone gravel. Bordering can be accomplished in corten steel.



A1 / Thematic Design

Lighting

Lighting should come in a number of forms. Strong directional down lighting via contemporary lampposts should be used in all larger public spaces e.g. Lyster Square and Market Square. These should be consistent and of one type. Indirect lighting should be incorporated into paviers, benches and street edges to create mood lighting and a feeling of bright safe space. Trees may be up-lit at night to create mood lighting and a feeling of bright safe space. Laneways should be incorporated with LED lighting inset into paviers as shown in the example to the right.



Street Lighting examples

Bollards and street furniture

Bollards should be of one variety and where possible low in height. Stone bollards should be used when possible and stainless steel bollards may be used elsewhere.

Street furniture should be modern and contemporary and where possible natural materials such as timber and stone should be used. Timber is preferred as it is more comfortable to sit on particularly in cold weather.



Street Furniture examples

A2 / Activity Manual

The public spaces created within Portlaoise Town Centre at Lyster Square, Market Square and Lower Square are intended to provide opportunities for festivals such as the Old Quarter Festival 2016 & 2017 and Street Performance Festivals, Songwriting Festivals, Comedy Festivals and Arts Festivals could be curated and run during the year. A programme of public events will serve to nurture local talent while providing tourist opportunities to attract visitors from Ireland and overseas.

Farmers markets, Christmas Fairs, crafts markets can also be provided for on a year round basis in Lyster Square and Market Square.

Festivals

There are a number of opportunities to develop a programme of events in Portlaoise Town Centre. These events can be a combination of public street events as well as other events which use the existing arts and entertainment venues including The Dunamais Theatre, public houses and hotels.

Portlaoise has long enjoyed a thriving live music scene. There have been and are currently many talented performers and bands who perform regularly in Portlaoise and the Laois area. The opportunity to build on this existing scene is palpable. A number of years ago there was a successful campaign fuelled by a host of local gigs to select a number of Laois Bands to play opening sets at the Electric Picnic, an annual successful music and arts festival held in early September for many years.

There are significant successes in recent years where Laois hosted the regional finals of the Rose of Tralee Festival and the many National Ploughing Championships held in Ratheniska, not far from Portlaoise in recent years. These successful and internationally recognised events show that Portlaoise is ideally situated at the centre of Ireland with excellent road and rail links.

Markets

A Farmer's Market has run for many years at Market Square. Considering the significant agricultural hinterland Laois provides a significant artisan food cluster. The opportunity to showcase the county of Laois as a centre of excellence for food. The public space at Market Square can be remodelled as shown in this strategy document.

The need for providing adequate power points for the stallholders should be built into the detail design for this space to include for small power and lighting as well as for a public address system for public events, Fleadh Ceol etc.

A retractable and demountable tensile roof would be worthwhile to consider to ensure that the markets can be run year round. The Meeting House Square in Temple Bar and the Milk Market in Limerick are successful examples in an Irish context.



Farmers Market Meeting House Square



Milk Market Limerick City



Farmers Market Belfast



Old Quarter Festival Launch 2017



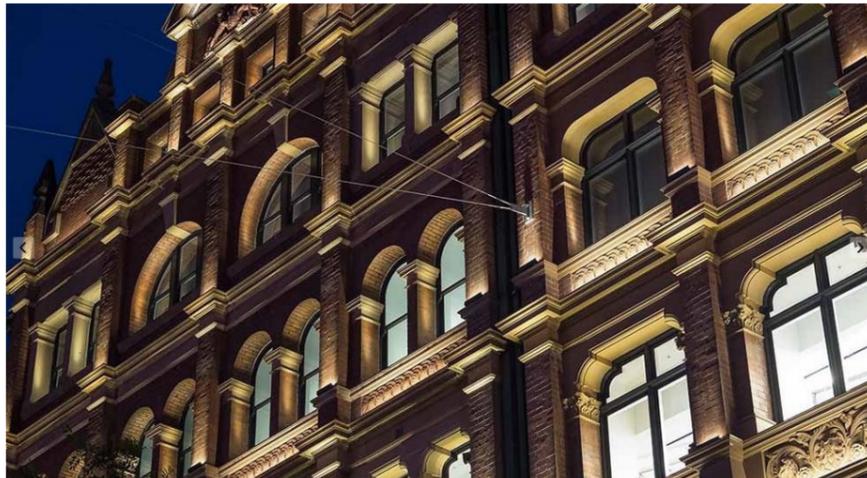
Old Quarter Festival 2016



Lyster Square reference



Wayfinding Signage



Uplighting key buildings reference

Other Considerations

Traffic Management Plans

If it were proposed to hold regular events for arts and entertainment in Portlaoise Town Centre it would probably have an agreed strategy that works for residents and business owners as well as An Garda Síochána and the emergency services for use at various times of year. Providing a simple agreed framework would smooth the planning of such events into the future.

A parking strategy would require that additional surface car parking capacity may need to be considered adjacent to town centre for festivals and special events .

Power Supplies and Public Address speakers

Given the unique urban structure of Portlaoise it will be worthwhile building in the small power and lighting at design stage for both Market Square and Lower Square as bookend outside venues for performance. A structured and fixed public address system would also benefit events being run year round.

Uplighting of existing buildings

Given the unique urban structure of Portlaoise it will be worthwhile providing low-voltage accent uplighting to highlight the upper parts of key buildings on Main Street, Market Square and Lower Square.

Directional Signage

Consideration should be given to a set of clear simple directional wayfinding signage for the Cultural Quarter which gives clear information about key public spaces, cultural assets, Churches, transport links, parks and car parking.

Christmas Tree base

Consideration should be given to putting a sleeve to receive a Christmas Tree in Market and / or Lyster Square with a concealed power supply for lighting.

WiFi Town Centre

Consideration should be given to the introduction of a full free Wi-Fi network throughout the town centre as part of the SIRO roll-out underway.

B / Heritage Strategy

Historical Development Portlaoise

Origins in the sixteenth-century

Known until 1920 as 'Maryborough' in honour of Queen Mary I, Portlaoise owes its current name to the sixteenth-century fort, the 'Fort Protector' depicted on mid sixteenth-century maps, and known as the 'Fort of Laois' in Gaelic Irish annals. Study of these and later maps, alongside documentary evidence and onsite investigation of surviving structures, enables an interpretation of the historical development Portlaoise, its archaeology and its architectural heritage.

With the establishment in 1541 of a 'Kingdom of Ireland' Henry VIII set out to impose English rule over the entire island, extending it beyond the Pale and the recently confiscated earldom of Kildare. Under the reigns of his children, the Tudor monarchs Edward VI (1547-1553), Mary I (1553-1558) and Elizabeth (1558-1603), successive lord deputies struggled first to assimilate and then to subdue the native Irish lords and Gaelicised lords of Anglo-Norman descent. The first attempts at subjugation came in Laois and Offaly with the military defeat of the O'More and O'Connor clans.

In 1548 two Crown forts were created as outposts to subdue these territories; the Fort Protector, now Portlaoise, and the Fort Governor, now Daingean. Both forts were named in honour of the Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, holder of the titles 'Lord Protector of England' and 'Governor of the King's Person' in the minority of his nephew Edward VI. The Fort Protector was built on rising ground to the southeast of the River Triogue, a tributary of the Barrow, with the esker ridge forming a natural defensive barrier to the east.

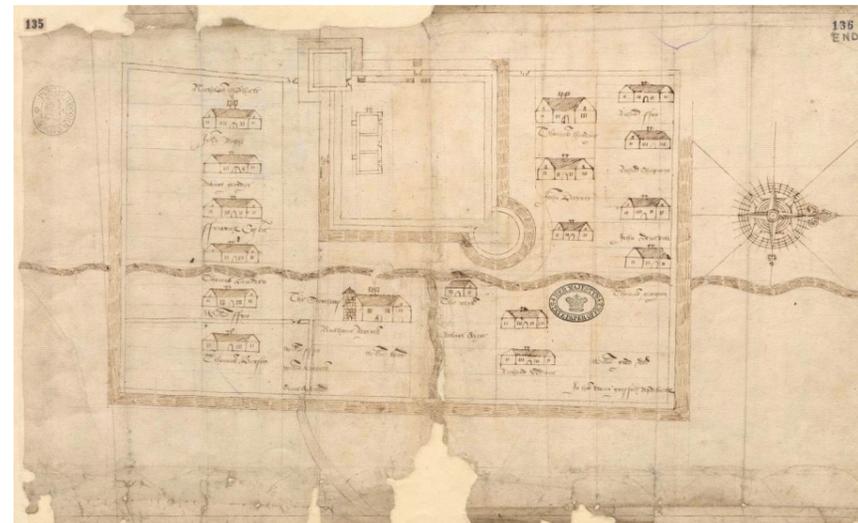
Eight years later, in 1556, the plantation was formalised with the creation of two new counties, Queen's County (now Laois) and King's County (now Offaly), named respectively after Mary I and her Spanish consort Philip II of Spain. The settlements were accordingly re-named Maryborough and Philipstown (Daingean).

Around this time the first parish church, Old St Peter's, was constructed to the west of the fort and within its own burial grounds. It was built as a Catholic church, as Queen Mary had re-established Catholicism as the state religion. When the reformed religion was reinstated after the accession of Elizabeth in 1558 it was used for Protestant services.

beneath Church Avenue. The Fort comprised a rectangular enclosure with a projecting circular bastion in the north-east corner and a rectangular tower, later called the Castle of Maryborough, in the opposing south west corner. A single entrance was provided in the western wall. These details are also shown on a second plan of the Fort from about the same time held in TCD Library, which also gives dimensions. Both plans show a barrack building parallel to the south wall, the latter plan indicating a timber-framed two-storey structure, possibly having a thatched roof. The northeast bastion was subsequently incorporated into the large industrial complex of Odlum's Mills which closed in 1991. The dwellings depicted on the 1560 map have all disappeared, other than a part of the 'Store House' with its circular stone tower to the east of the fort which was integrated into the Presentation Convent during the late nineteenth century. This building was labelled 'the brewhouse' on the plan held in TCD. It served as a constable's house, a gaol and an infirmary before the Presentation nuns took over the property in 1824. Excavations in the early twentieth century uncovered a tunnel connecting it to the fort, possibly related to its occupancy by the fort's constable.



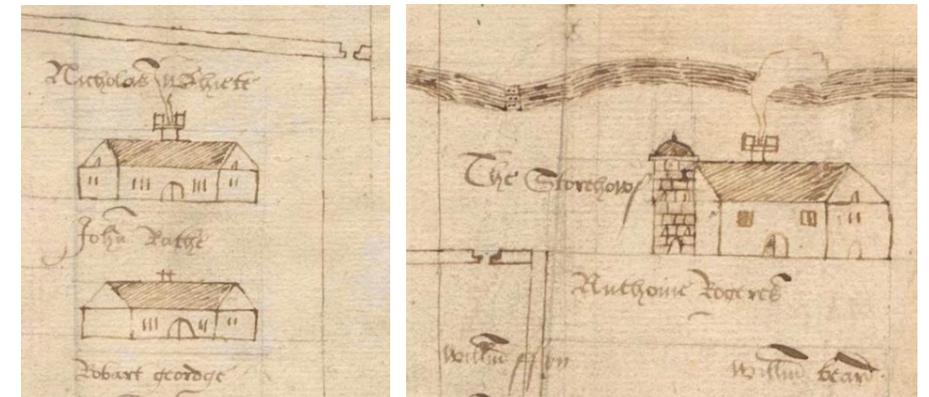
Extract from Cotton Map of Leix & Offaly, undated, c.1563 (British Library)



Plan of Fort and Town of Maryborough, undated, c. 1560 (English National Archives, Kew).

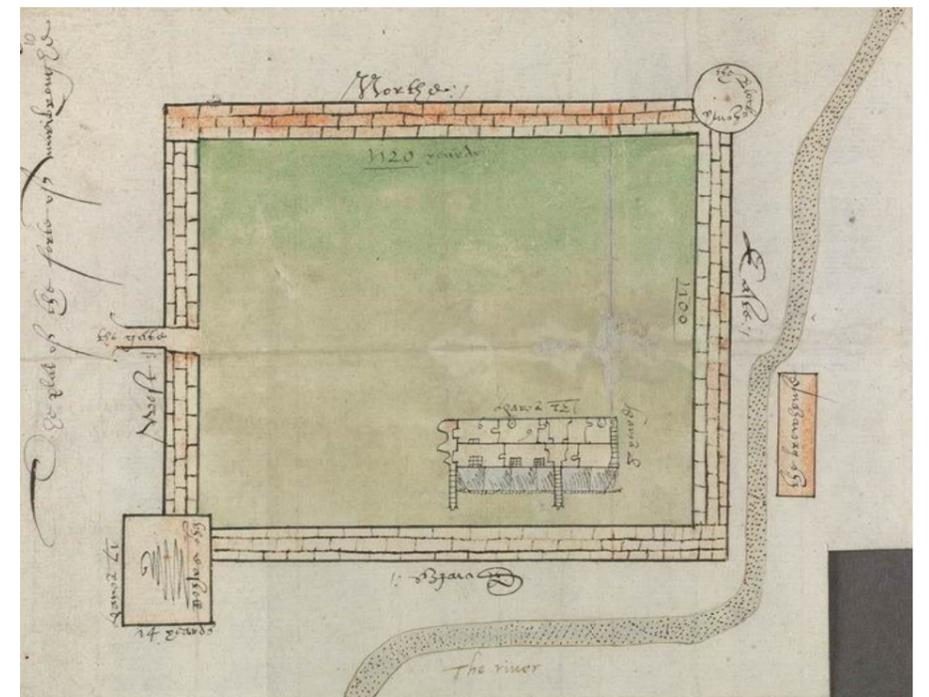
The parts of Laois and Offaly planted in the 1550s are depicted on a contemporary map held in the British Library known as the Cotton map, two other versions of which have also survived. This map, gives unique insight into the landscape, political divisions and buildings of early modern Laois and Offaly. Portlaoise, marked as 'Protectour', is depicted by a three-dimensional vignette, as was common in early cartography. This small image shows a rectangular enclosure with a round flanking bastion at the north-eastern angle, a gatehouse or archway on the western wall, and a castle on the southwest corner. The interior of the Fort appears to contain some smaller structures or enclosures, but the town is not shown to extend outside the walls, which may indicate that the map predates the foundation of the town. The site for the Fort was evidently chosen to command the open plain, using the natural defences offered by the Triogue River and the esker ridge. The Triogue is shown as a distinctly meandering watercourse, passing close to the walls. A ditch is shown around the walls coloured in black, which may suggest an earthwork, rather than a water-filled moat. The esker, known today as the Ridge of Portlaoise, is shown running alongside the Triogue.

A plan of the town and Fort from c. 1560 shows a small settlement within an enclosure surrounding the fort. The map indicates in schematic form the scale and style of the settlers' dwellings, the names of the tenants and the presence of the stream now culverted



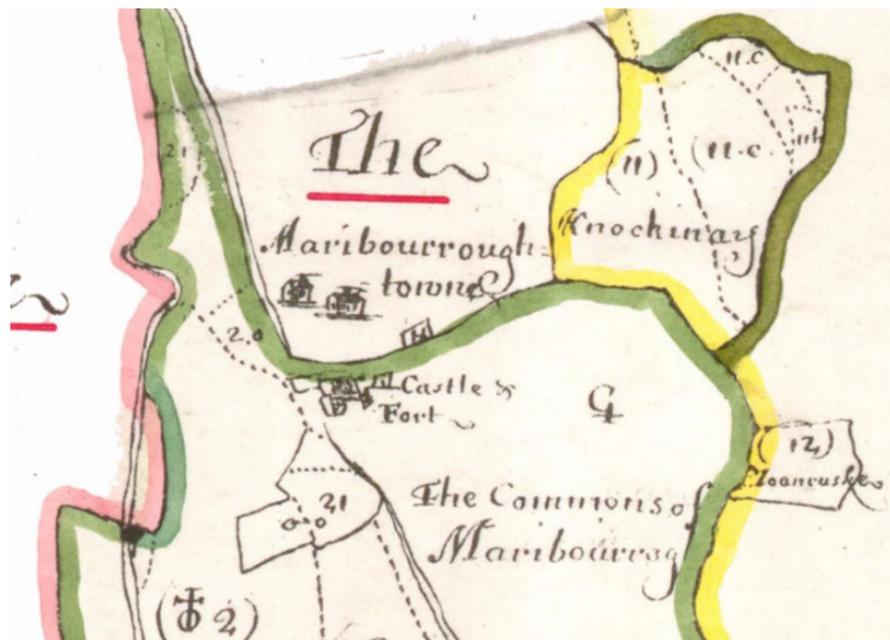
Typical house variations

The 'Store House'



Plan of Fort Protector, undated c. 1560 (TCD Manuscript Library).

Enjoying a short period of success, the town was granted a market in 1567 and was incorporated to the rank of borough by Elizabeth I in 1570. It flourished briefly before it was plundered in 1580 during the Desmond Rebellion and suffered several attacks and burnings before the territory was finally pacified in 1607.



Extract from William Petty's 'Down Survey' barony map of Maryborough (North at bottom of the map)

Seventeenth century

Due to the severity of the damage endured by Portlaoise in the late sixteenth century and during the Cromwellian Wars of 1652-3, in addition to the paucity of documentary evidence, an accurate seventeenth-century footprint is difficult to establish. Although extant remains of the fort and its bastions appear on the majority of contemporaneous and later maps, the extent of the old walls of the town at this period are unclear and were possibly partially dismantled by Cromwell's generals. An early flour mill with a horizontal waterwheel was built to the north east of the fort, later forming part of the Odlum complex, its mill stream ran towards the south until a later diversion to the Trigoue. Urban historians suggest that the only extant evidence of the form of the town defences today are the laneways to the south of Main Street, in particular Lyster Lane and Pepper Lane, which acted as entrances to the walled settlement and now penetrate the urban plan through archways leading onto the main thoroughfare, complementing the carriage arches that punctuate the historic streetscape.

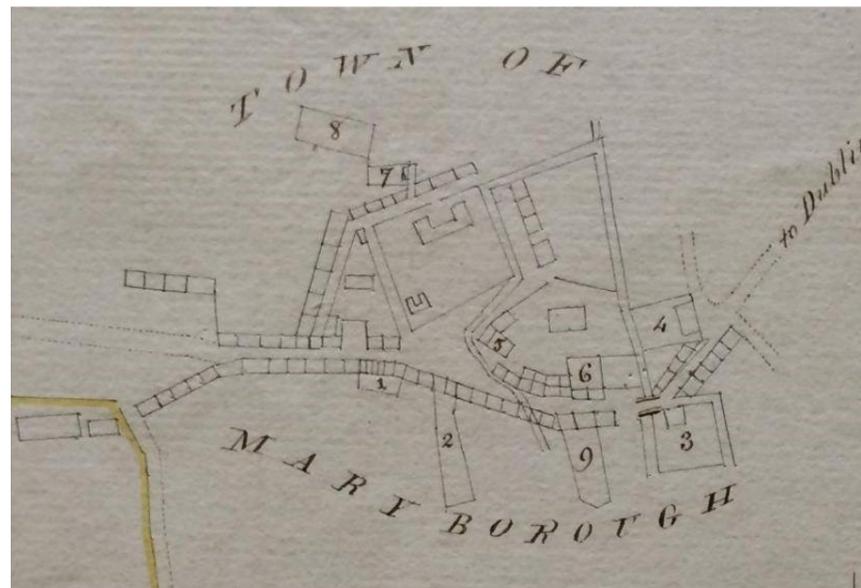
Eighteenth-century developments

The earliest origins of the urban core emerge in the early eighteenth century, with the nascent growth of the town form surrounding the fort and uniformly developing from there to the east and west. A manuscript map from 1721 indicates the extent of this urban growth, with the formation of the Main Street curving beyond the fort to the south and a former mill stream to the east, culverted and built on, creating a natural sweep in the streetscape, which today forms the junction of Lower Square with Church Avenue. This little square, which was lined to

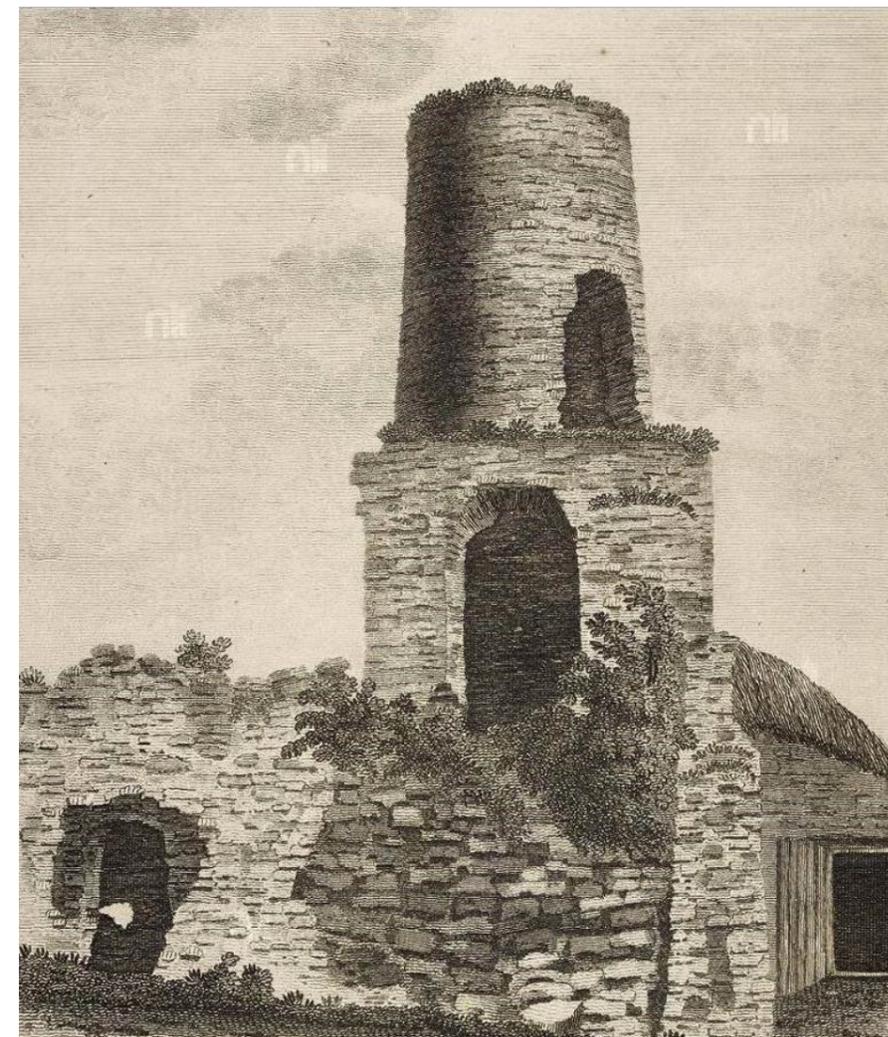
the north with the face of the fort walls and to the south with the widening of Main Street, served as the town's central market place until the establishment in the early nineteenth century of a more formal market square at the larger diamond to the west of Main Street and south of Maryborough Commons. Despite the foundation of the latter public space, the informal Lower Square still serves as the heart of Portlaoise and today provides fine vistas from either end of Main Street and through the laneways from the south.

The form of the town in the mid-eighteenth century is clearly shown on a manuscript map dated 1766, of the estate of William Bridges. While the streetscapes are illustrated schematically as uniform terraces, the main contribution of this manuscript to the architectural history of Portlaoise is the elevational depiction of the first St Peter's Church, to the west of the fort, and the original Courthouse on Main Street, a two-storey over basement building with a central clock tower, typical of its genre and period. The map also indicates the early formation of the diamond to the west of the town at the junction of Main Street with the roads to Limerick and Mountmellick (Coote Street).

The eighteenth-century also saw the building of many fine residential late-Georgian terraces, still extant today on Church Street, and on the same street the construction of the sombre stone-clad gaol in 1789 by Richard Harman, James Gandon's clerk of works at the Custom House in Dublin.



Enlarged extract from Parnell Estate map of 1721 (National Library of Ireland)



Fort in the Town of Maryborough, drawn by Daniel Grose, 1792 (National Library of Ireland)

B / Heritage Strategy

Nineteenth-century expansion

The town's greatest thrust of development occurred during the early nineteenth century, which generated the central town plan as we know it today and produced most of prominent public buildings in Portlaoise, in addition to varied streetscapes created with a mix of archetypal pattern-book designs and vernacular terraced dwellings. The first edition six-inch Ordnance Survey map of 1839 reveals much about the town's urban fabric and public architecture, and illustrates clearly the form generated by the early historic core of development surrounding the fort and the town's expansion shaped by the nature of the many new roads projecting out from the core.

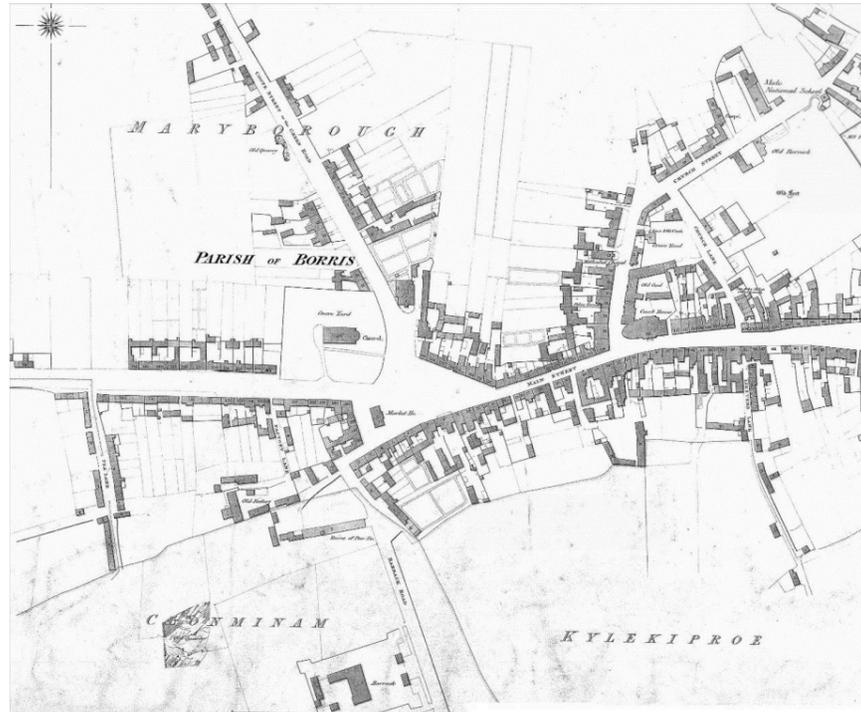


Grand Jury map by Daniel Cahill, 1806

One of the earliest developments was the building of a new Protestant church in 1803-4 to replace the first St. Peters. The church, which is embellished with an obelisk steeple and attributed to James Gandon, was the first building to be built on the Green of Maryborough to the west of the diamond - at the junction of Main Street with the newly laid out Grattan Street and Cote Street. This diamond was then the setting for a new public square for the town and the location for a free-standing Market House, subsequently rebuilt as the Town Hall in the second half of the century in the French Renaissance style.



Extract from the Ordnance Survey first edition 6" map, published 1839.



Extract from Griffith Valuation Town plan of 1850

A year later in 1805, like many of the public buildings in Portlaoise, the Courthouse was rebuilt on its own site to a design ascribed to Richard Morrison (a protégé of Gandon) and linked by a curved wall to the gaol on Church Street. The interior of the Courthouse was remodelled in 1875 by J. Rawson Carroll but the facades remained.

The old gaol followed suit and was replaced with a much more substantial County Gaol & House of Correction, built in 1830 outside the town on the Dublin Road by William Deane Butler in the Gothic Revival style. Complementing the institutional landscape on Dublin Road were the modestly designed County Infirmary built in 1808 to house 55 patients and the neo-classical St. Fintan's Asylum erected in 1832 on Cosby estate land.

On the opposite side of Portlaoise on the Cork Road (Abbeyleix Road) a large barracks with an ancillary drill ground was constructed to replace the smaller cavalry range located within the grounds of the old Fort. The barracks became the Garda County Headquarters at the foundation of the state. Following the narrative of the construction of institutional buildings, we find three schools built by 1839, one in the rural setting of Stradbally Road, the second on the north side of Church Street opposite the old fort and the third attached to the highly sophisticated Catholic Chapel of SS Peter & Paul. This fine church was built c. 1837-8 in an attractive late-Gothic style, and together with the adjoining Presentation Convent of 1824, extended 1872, formed a significant architectural set-piece within the town.

A further addition to the architectural landscape of Portlaoise were the more substantial private residences dotted along the periphery of the town, namely Newpark, Portran House, Annebrook House and the renovated Annefield House, the birthplace of Dr. Bartholomew Mosse, founder of the Rotunda Hospital in Dublin.



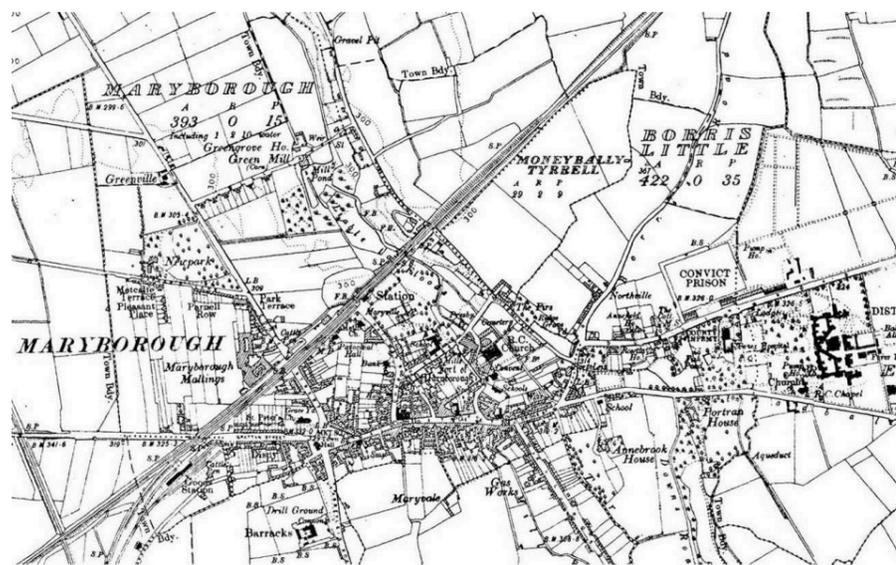
Extract from the Ordnance Survey 6" revision, published 1889 (Map Library Trinity College Dublin).

The arrival of the railway in Portlaoise between 1844 and 1846 generated the construction of the iconic railway station by the engineer Sancton Wood built with local limestone, and provided access for new local development including the laying out of Railway Street and subsequently the foundation of an attractive Methodist Church in 1883 in the Gothic Revival style. By the end of the nineteenth century Portlaoise could boast a rich industrial landscape; together with the impressive Odum's Mill complex and the Old Tannery to the south of Main Street, the town supported a textile factory (subsequently a granary) off Tea Lane, and the extensive Maltings to the north of the new railway line. Revealed in the second edition six-inch Ordnance Survey map of 1889 is the diversion of the Cork Road (Abbeyleix Road) directly into the market square to line up with Cote Street, resulting in the fragmentation of the southern terrace of the extension of Main Street onto the diamond and a major alteration to the architectural space.

Twentieth century

The twentieth-century saw both the demolition of important structures in the historic centre of the town and the positive addition of new housing schemes and some new public architecture. The most significant losses to the town core were the destruction by fire of the Town Hall in 1945, which has removed the focal point of the Market Square and detracted substantially from its spatial quality, and the demolition of the R.C. Chapel of SS Peter & Paul in the 1960s. This church was replaced with a larger red-brick structure at the junction of the Stradbally Road and Dublin Road, combining traditional church form with non-traditional details.

Some fine twentieth-century structures were added to Main Street, including banking institutions, two good hotels, and an elaborately decorated Medical Hall & Pharmacy, reflecting the town's prosperity and enhancing the already vibrant streetscape. Following the conversion of the former barracks to the Garda County Headquarters at the foundation of the state, a highly unusual red-brick gymnasium was constructed within the drill grounds for the use of young recruits.



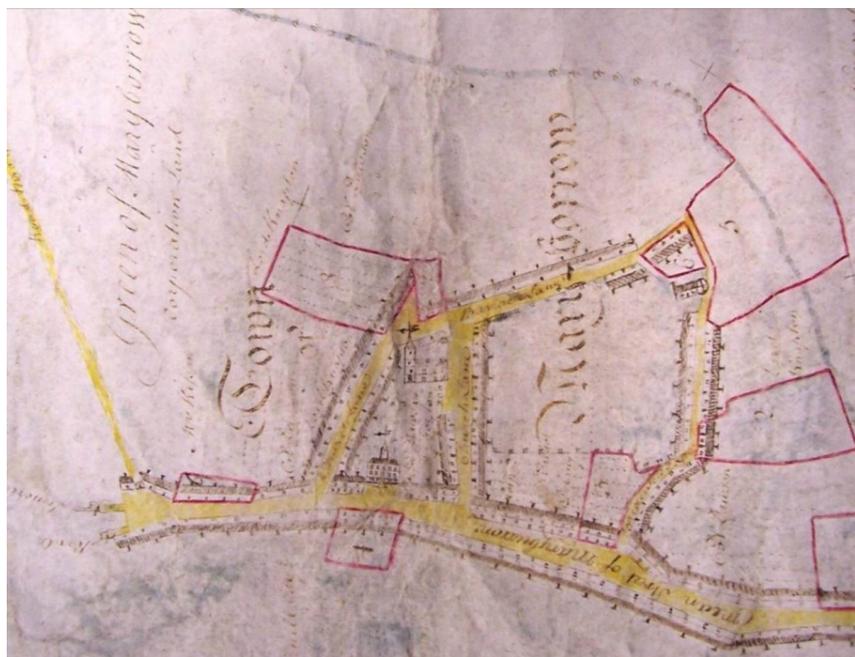
Extract from the Ordnance Survey 25" map, published 1907

Just over ten years later, the Modernist Midland Regional Hospital built by Michael Scott, one of Ireland's most illustrious architects, graced the Dublin Road, adding to the architectural ensemble of the modest County Infirmary and the impressive St. Fintan's Hospital.

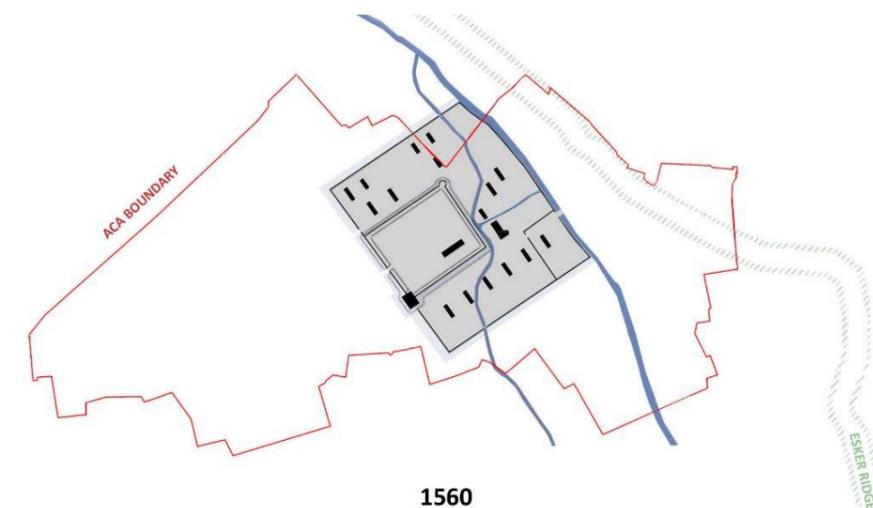
In the early years of the century a picturesque row of houses was built for prison officers of the County Gaol on the Dublin Road (demolished later in the century), but the main thrust of speculative and social housing came during the mid-twentieth century when some well-considered housing estates, such as O'Moore Place, were built on the periphery of the town. The laying out of James Fintan Lalor Avenue in the 1970s as an inner relief road to divert the Dublin-Cork traffic away from the town centre changed the face of Portlaoise, and facilitated new commercial and industrial development in its vicinity, as well as the building of the new County Hall in 1982.



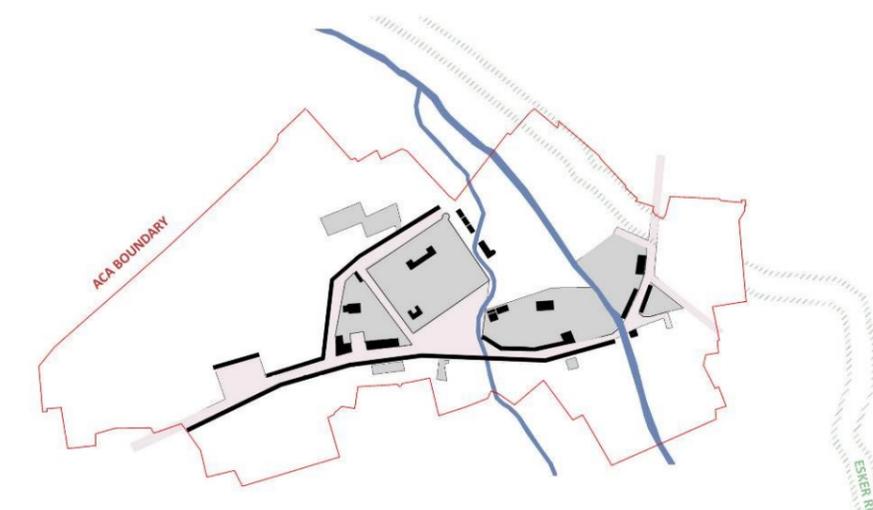
Michael Scott's Midland Regional Hospital, built in 1933-36. John O'Regan & Nicola Dearey (eds), *Michael Scott Architect: In casual conversation with Dorothy Walker*, Kinsale, 1995.



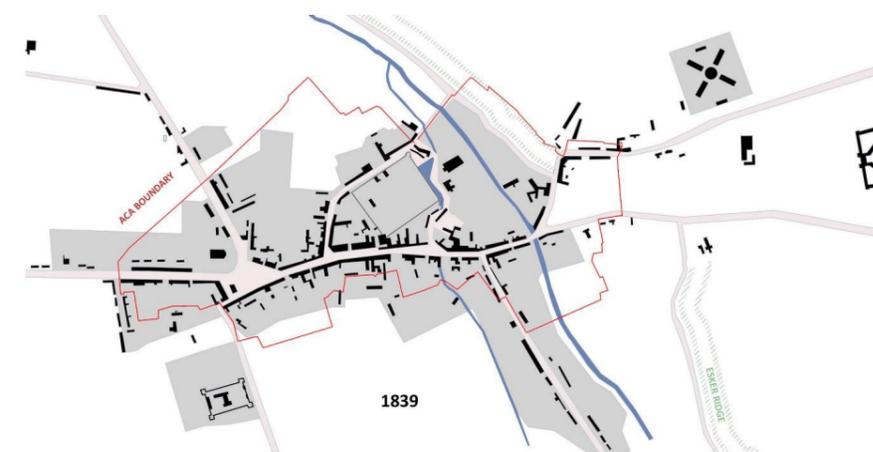
Extract from Bridges Estate map of 1766 (Local History Section, Laois County Library)



1560



1721



1839

Historic development of the town of Maryborough

B / Heritage Strategy

Historic Photographs



Market House/Town Market Square (Lawrence Collection, c. 1900)



Grattan Street (Lawrence Collection, c. 1900)



Upper Main Street at corner of Church Street (Lawrence Collection, c. 1900)



Market Square (Lawrence Collection, c. 1900)



Church of SS Peter and Paul with Presentation Convent and millpond (Lawrence Collection, c. 1900)



Stradbally Road and Bridge Street (Lawrence Collection, c. 1900)



Church Street, before erection of War Monument (Lawrence Collection, c.1900)



Early twentieth-century view down Main Street towards the Lower Square.



Traditional shopfront at Market Square



Traditional shopfront at 63-64 Main Street



Nineteenth-century Lawrence photograph of Main Street with Lower Square.



View from Ridge Graveyard showing the Presentation Convent buildings, Church of SS Peter and Paul, Triogue River and Odlums Mill.

C / Landscape Strategy

The Greening of Portlaoise Town Centre

The Purpose

Relating back to the original theme of bringing the countryside into the Town, one of the key purposes of the *Greening of the Town Centre* is to create an aesthetic that is unique to Portlaoise and that reflects its history as a rural market town, but that also fits with a progressive and dynamic urban core.

The importance of green space in towns is well documented. Such a policy has benefits for community health and well-being, visual amenity, and environmental benefits for habitat, pollination and healthy ecosystem services.

The Key Features

The key features of the *Greening* strategy are the linear parks proposed along the River Triogue and James Fintan Lalor Avenue. These projects will create a cross-axis of high quality urban green space which will be highly animated and create a variety of spatial types and opportunities for new facilities.

Other key features will include the integration and enhancement of existing open spaces, the civic plaza at County Hall, Ridge Cemetery, Church Street Memorial Park and the People's Park. Measures such as street tree planting, protection, retention and enhancement of existing mature trees and greening of incidental spaces should also add to the effectiveness of the strategy.

The Outcomes

Implementing the proposed greening strategy will result in the following benefits:

- Improved community health and well-being
- Increased social spaces and facilities for exercise, play and relaxation
- Visual enhancements within the Town Centre
- Environmental benefits for habitat, pollination and healthy ecosystem services

The Exposure of the River Triogue

The Purpose

Opening up the Triogue as a linear park through the Town would provide a host of practical benefits to the people of the Town by connecting the existing sections of the Peoples Park to JFL Avenue and Church Street to the railway. This provides a useful pedestrian and cyclist corridor through the Town, connecting the southern and northern areas of the Town in a very direct manner. Separation of pedestrians and cyclists from vehicles is an important principle of green infrastructural development.



Apart from the practical benefits, it will provide new amenity spaces that will enhance quality of life in the Town, making it more liveable and visually attractive. Planning open space along the river corridor will also afford an opportunity to manage flooding of the river going forward. And, by enhancing the spaces along the river, coupled with decreased pollution, there will be improvements to the ecosystem which will further benefit the local environment and bring a sense of the country into the Town.

The Key Features

The key feature is the river itself. By exposing and enhancing the Triogue, the unique ambience and nature of the river corridor becomes a character area of the Town, a place with its own identity and *genius loci*.

Whilst much of the linear park is already in place, there is an opportunity to join the whole through lands that are currently private and to create new spaces that can deliver green-blue infrastructure services to the town. Such spaces will have public access with pedestrian paths and cycleways, and give an opportunity to create incidental spaces for recreation, and for enhanced habitat for native flora and fauna.

Key to the success of the linear park will be cross-connections to the Town Centre and other routes along the way. This will have the effect of making it safer to use, more animated and more useful to more people, creating a virtuous circle leading to a more popular and more functional route.

Development adjacent to the stream should follow the guidance contained in Inland Fisheries Ireland publication *Planning for watercourses in the urban environment* and similar, to ensure that it is designed optimally for both environmental and amenity benefits. Spaces along the banks could be either hard or soft, as determined by the context and quality of design proposals. Civil engineering concerns, such as SuDS, should also be considered integrally with the design of these spaces.

The Outcomes

The principal outcomes will be as follows:

- Interventions will open up some of the areas and increase the potential for passive supervision from adjacent dwellings, including new buildings on plots that are released for development.
- Increased number of entrance points and connections to adjacent residential areas to allow for greater animation and more options for entry and exit.
- Introduce CCTV where no overlooking is possible to discourage anti-social behaviour.
- Create a central green space in the Town along the river, in parallel with increasing the level of accessibility to the river through the Town through development policies for sites along the river. Such spaces should be secure and overlooked with strong pedestrian and cyclist connections to busy areas of the Town.

- Increase path widths to allow for cyclists as well as pedestrians.
- Improve the level of design when above objectives have been achieved. At present, investment in design elements, such as seats, bins, improved paths, bridges, etc. would be wasted as the space is prone to anti-social behaviour and vandalism.
- Benefits to the river corridor as habitat, with decreased pollution, removal of invasive species and interventions to encourage wildlife, such as habitat enhancements (bird & bat boxes, artificial otter holts, gravel beds for spawning fish, etc.).

The Green Place—Landscape

Bringing the countryside into the Town is one of the key themes in the Public Realm Strategy. This is not a simple aesthetic question, but relates to the wider environment, the health of the townspeople, physically and mentally, and all of the benefits that can be delivered by green infrastructure.

The proposed provision of green space is very generous and would provide facilities and amenities to the Town which would be second to none for any town of its size in Ireland. Indeed, it would be setting a new precedent for open space provision.

The main elements of the landscape strategy are the linear parks and green-/blue-ways proposed along the River Triogue and James Fintan Lalor Avenue. These projects will create a cross axis of high quality urban green space which will connect into the heart of Portlaoise and provide space for a variety of facilities, which can enhance the quality of life in the Town. These will accommodate a wide variety of landscape spaces: parks and plazas, play and recreation facilities.

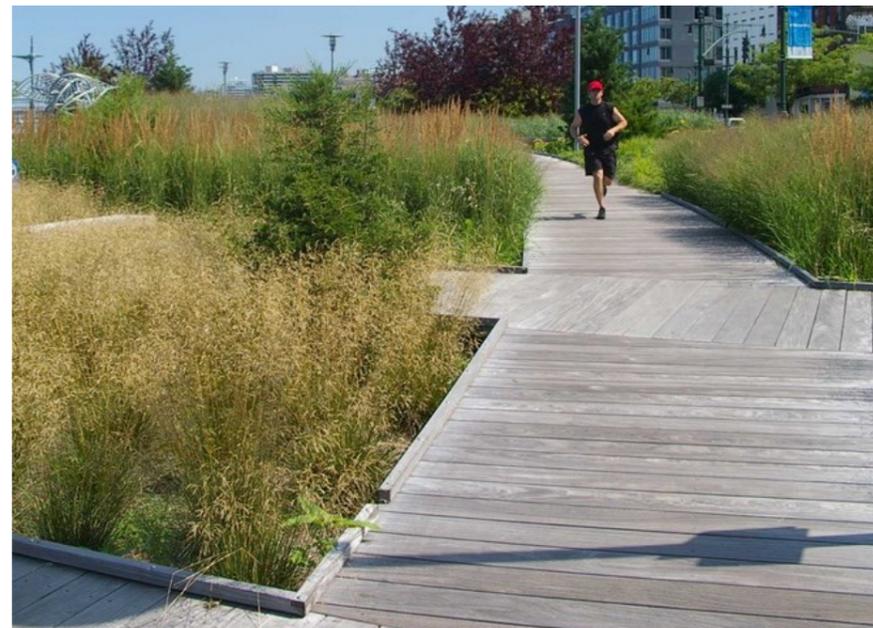
The open spaces and street tree planting will also enhance the ecology of the Town, creating a “green lung” which will have benefits for flora and fauna, which in turn benefits the human population.

Security and intervisibility are key concerns so planting and hard landscape measures should be designed to minimise “dead” spaces and areas that are not passively overlooked by buildings or roadways. Interventions and detailed design should ensure that there are sightlines, adequate lighting and animation in each of the spaces.

Detailed planting design should reflect the theme of bringing countryside into the town. To this end, we suggest the use of native trees and hedging in the appropriate context, with selected ornamental species where design requires it. Appropriate planting typologies would include long grasses that would reference crops in the field, (ornamental species such as *Calamagrostis*, *Pennisetum*, *Carex*), meadow flowers and perennials. Use of evergreen groundcover shrubs should be limited as much as possible, to ensure that the spaces do not have a suburban or institutional appearance.

Appropriate native trees would include Birch (*Betula* species), Alder (*Alnus*), Whitebeam and Rowan (*Sorbus* species) and Oak (*Quercus* species), among others, subject to detailed design.

Hard landscape materials should be varied to ensure that the spaces are defined and recognisable. Consideration should be given to contemporary materials and forms that will create a dynamic contrast with the “countryside” planting.



Landscape Strategy

Bringing the countryside into the Town is one of the key themes in the Public Realm Strategy. This is not a simple aesthetic question, but relates to the wider environment, the health of the townspeople, physically and mentally, and all of the benefits that can be delivered by green infrastructure.

In delivering the vision of the Public Realm Strategy, a Landscape Strategy is vital to understand the existing landscape assets of the town and plan for their enhancement and the addition of future spaces as envisioned.

Analysis

This section has been prepared to survey and analyse the existing green spaces within the Town of Portlaoise. It looks at the River Triogue & Triogue Linear Park, the Peoples Park, Millview Memorial Park and the Civic Plaza. It also looks at the main tree species present in the streetscapes.

River Triogue & Triogue Linear Park

The River Triogue is one of the main tributaries to the River Barrow. The Triogue begins just outside Portlaoise at Meelick and joins the Barrow north of Portlaoise, just outside Mountmellick in County Laois. Within Portlaoise, the River Triogue is a channel approximately 3-4m in width, following a north-west/south-east course, flowing from south to north. The river banks are steep and narrow, with adjacent ground level generally 2-4m higher than the river surface, although this can be greater in places, due to canalisation of the river and ground levels being built up for development adjacent to the river.

The Linear Park along the river runs from *The Peoples Park* in the south to JFL Avenue and from Church Street to the railway and under the railway bridge to connect to residential areas to the north along Ridge Road and Mountmellick Road. There are two other areas along the river where it is visible to the public (from JFL Avenue to Bridge St and to the west of Church Street public car park). In between, the river runs through private or institutional lands and is not accessible. The total length of the river from *The Peoples Park* to the railway bridge is approximately 1km.

Within the Town Centre, the park infrastructure consists mainly of a path along the river bank, 1.5-3m in width. In some areas, the path is surfaced with concrete and is railed (to the north of Church Street for c.100m), but it is generally paved in asphalt. The path is usually set in a narrow space between the river and the boundary with adjacent property. This boundary is formed of rear garden walls or fences, including some commercial or institutional land. Due to the height of elevation over the river and overhanging vegetation it is often difficult to see the river itself when walking on the path.

C / Landscape Strategy

The river can be divided into the sections listed in the following table, from south to north. Please also see the images opposite for further detail of locations.

Section of Triogue River	Length	Accessibility	Character
People's Park to JFL Avenue	c.300m	Accessible via riverside path	Triogue Linear Park; Path on east bank of stream and stream are heavily enclosed by trees and vegetation. Boundary formed by high garden walls / fences; some overlooking from houses on opposite bank.
Culvert under JFL Avenue	c.35m	NA	NA
JFL Avenue to Bridge Street	c.70m	Accessible via public path to east	Urban, strongly canalised section of river.
Culvert under Bridge Street	c.15m	NA	NA
Bridge Street to Millview Car Park	c.210m	Inaccessible	River passes through institutional and private lands, mainly parkland, soft landscape (flood zone)
Through Millview Car Park	c.70m	Accessible via public path to east	Urban, strongly canalised section of river
Culvert under Church Street	c.10m	NA	NA
From Church Street, parallel to Riverview residential development	c.90m	Accessible via public riverside walk to east with concrete surface and handrail.	Triogue Linear Park; Urban ambience, edges defined by walls of properties, but there is no overlooking. Overhanging trees and shrubs and height above the water level make it difficult to see the river.
North of Riverview to Railway Bridge	c.125m	Accessible via riverside path	Triogue Linear Park; Path and stream are heavily enclosed by trees and vegetation. Small bridge crosses the stream from eastern bank to western approx. 50m from Riverview. Edges are steel fences, semi-permeable with vegetation covering the majority.



Triogue Linear Park, south of JFL Avenue – Strongly enclosed with trees, difficult to see river, boundaries defined by fencing, walls of private properties.



Triogue River, parallel to JFL Avenue – canalised, urban section of river.



Triogue River, west of Millview Car Park - canalised



Triogue Linear Park, north of Church Street – as in the southern areas, difficult to see river, boundaries defined by fencing, walls of private properties.



The character of these spaces is generally naturalistic, dominated by riverbank trees and shrubs, which overhang both the river and the paths, forming a strongly enclosed space, particularly given the narrow, linear character of the spaces. This results in very few views or sightlines out of the linear park area, and leaving the space quite dark, with canopies overhead often blocking out a lot of light.

The main tree species along the river corridor were the native Birch (*Betula pendula*), Willow (*Salix spp.*), Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), with some non-native Willow species, Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) and Field Maple (*Acer campestre*). The shrub layer also contained several native species, including Dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*), Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and Blackberry / Bramble (*Rubus spp.*), but was often dominated by non-native, potentially invasive species including Cherry Laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*), Buddleia (*Buddleia spp.*), Cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster spp.*), Firethorn (*Pyracantha spp.*) and others.

A study carried out on the quality of the river in 2011, following the upgrade of a waste water treatment plant by Laois Co. Council in 2009, concluded that:

- The river appears to be healthy so this suggests the river is not at serious risk but maybe recovering from serious pollution since the treatment plant upgrade.
- There are high numbers of trout in the river.
- The physical aspects of the River Triogue stream indicate it has potential as a spawning area for salmonids with suitable substrate such as gravel and fine gravel, and is also a nursery area as many salmon parr were captured during the study.

The river was one of Ireland's most polluted rivers with many fish kills. Today the water quality has improved enormously thanks to the new waste water treatment plant. The river is at a recovery stage and the river should keep improving as time goes on having better water quality every year.



The study also noted the occurrence of Himalayan Balsam being present along the river. This is an Invasive Plant and displaces native flora. It wasn't observed within the Town Centre in the current study but there were plenty of garden escapees, including Cotoneaster, Laurel and Firethorn. All potentially invasive plants should be controlled according to best practice to prevent them spreading further.

The linear park from *The Peoples Park* to JFL Avenue and from Church Street to the railway provides a potentially useful pedestrian corridor through the Town, connecting the park and northern residents to the town in a very direct manner. Separation of pedestrians from vehicles is an important principle of green infrastructural development.

However, the overall perception of the spaces is quite negative, both in the experience of the author and in feedback from townspeople. Overall, the spaces do not feel safe, for the following main reasons:

- The majority of the paths are not overlooked by housing or by any other means, e.g. CCTV.
- The paths are not frequently used, so feel deserted and there is potential for anti-social behaviours occurring.
- There are very few entry and exit points, which means that there is no means of escape if an incident occurs and results in people making the decision not to use the park for personal security reasons.
- The naturalistic, wild appearance of the spaces, whilst good for wildlife, may add to a perception that the areas are "backland" and are not "properly" maintained.

There are a number of improvements that could be made to address these issues and improve the park, are as follows:

- Interventions to open up some of the areas, remove invasive species and increase the potential for passive supervision from adjacent dwellings.
- Increase the number of entrance points and create connections to adjacent residential areas to allow for greater animation and more options for entry and exit.
- Introduce CCTV where no overlooking is possible to discourage anti-social behaviour.
- Create a central green space in the town along the river, in parallel with increasing the level of accessibility to the river through the town through development policies for sites along the river. Such spaces should be secure and overlooked with strong pedestrian and cyclist connections to busy areas of the town.
- Increase path widths to allow for cyclists as well as pedestrians.
- Improve the level of design when above objectives have been achieved. At present, investment in design elements, such as seats, bins, improved paths, bridges, etc. would be wasted as the space is prone to anti-social behaviour and vandalism.



Triogue Linear Park, north of Church Street – pedestrian bridge over the river (left), trolley in stream (right).



Triogue Linear Park, north of Church St – view of approach to rail bridge pedestrian underpass (left), view from rail bridge area along the river (right).



Peoples Park – View of Parkland with play area to rear.

In summary, the River Triogue is a valuable asset to the Town in natural heritage and public amenity terms. However, at present, the form and atmosphere of the riverside spaces do not encourage widespread use by the public, so become a haven for anti-social behaviour. The objectives listed above would help to turn this around and to enable people to use the space without fear, turning a vicious circle into a virtuous circle, as the more it is used, the friendlier and more inviting it becomes. Many of these objectives would be achievable only through long term planning processes, such as development plan policies and planning conditions on future planning applications.



The People's Park

The People's Park is located off Timahoe Road, approximately 500m south-east of Main Street. Murray & Associates were commissioned in 1999 to develop a landscape masterplan for a site then known as Portlaoise Downs. At the time the site consisted of a boggy, poorly drained area. The site had good potential, with a backdrop of 'The Downs' which is an Esker feature to the eastern boundary of the site and the River Triogue, defining the western boundary.

The park was developed as an ecological park in 2000, with an emphasis on low maintenance and the creation of a diversity of wildlife. Site investigations uncovered extensive deposits of marl clay under the existing soil layer. The park design included a large lake area, which was formed using the marl clay as a liner. Thus, the soil conditions on the site were substantially improved and a natural clay liner was utilised to form the lake area. The river Triogue was diverted through the site to feed the lake and ensure a healthy water turnover and pedestrian footbridges were installed for access over the inlets. The majority of the planting used was native, ecological type planting.

C / Landscape Strategy

The park suffers from similar problems to the Linear Park in relation to lack of overlooking and consequent fears for personal safety and anti-social behaviour in the park. Nonetheless, it is well used and considered a significant asset in the Town.

A study was carried out by Dr. Christy Boylan, former Parks Superintendent of South Dublin Co. Council, in 2015, analysing the space and recommending future works to improve the park and the standards of maintenance and upkeep. There are a number of recommendations in the report, but its perceived remoteness from the town and proposals to introduce new entrances to increase its visibility are among the more relevant to the strategy.

Church Street Memorial Park

This is a small and simply laid out park space between Ridge Road and Church Street car park, approximately 75m in length and 20m wide at its widest point. The linear layout is focussed on a War Memorial dedicated to soldiers from the local area who died in World War I. It was originally located at Bank Place but was moved here in 2001. The park also contains a smaller memorial sculpture dedicated to those who died while serving with the United Nations.

There are several seats within the park which is enclosed on both sides by a perimeter planting of Maple trees (*Acer spp.*).

There is a car park between Millview Memorial Park and the Triogue River. There may be an opportunity to better locate the park along the river and re-use the park for parking, if there is a need.

Civic Plaza

The Civic Plaza at County Hall is primarily a hard space, but also contains some good quality trees and there is a wide variety of colourful ornamental and perennial shrubs in the entrance area, laid out in a contemporary manner. The main species of tree present are Hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*), Norway Maple (*Acer platanoides*) and Birch (*Betula spp.*).

Green Streets

Several of Portlaoise's streets are planted with street trees and other vegetation. The table opposite sets out the main species of tree on each street in the Town Centre and a brief comment on the overall amenity value of the trees in the public realm. Where relevant, trees that are not planted in the public realm, but lend character to the public realm are included.

It should also be noted that there are several sites within the town where vegetation is uncontrolled and visible from the public realm. Such vegetation adds to a sense of disorder and lack of maintenance in public areas.



Millview Memorial Park with WWI monument in centre



Civic Plaza at County Hall, south of JFL Avenue



JFL Avenue – Lime Trees maturing, but not yet in scale with the width of the road

Street trees bring visual amenity, shelter, biodiversity and animation into towns. It is recommended that street tree and public realm planting should be encouraged, in parallel with a coordinated public realm strategy. The untended vegetation should also be challenged, perhaps through Tidy Towns or other public initiatives.

Landscape Strategy

All of these spaces contribute to the landscape of Portlaoise and result in the impression of a Green town—but where to next?

Bringing the countryside into the Town is one of the key themes in the Public Realm Strategy. This is not a simple aesthetic question, but relates to the wider environment, the health of the townspeople, physically and mentally, and all of the benefits that can be delivered by green infrastructure.

Chapter 5 of the Strategy describes the many and varied spaces that are proposed, many of which utilise and build on the existing spaces in the Town. These include the Triogue Linear Park, James Fintan Lalor Avenue Parkway, Market Square, Lower Square and the network of streets and spaces that make up Portlaoise.

The proposed provision of green space is very generous and would provide facilities and amenities to the Town which would be second to none for any town of its size in Ireland. Indeed, it would be setting a new precedent for open space provision.

The main elements of the landscape strategy are the linear parks and green-/blue-ways proposed along the River Triogue and James Fintan Lalor Avenue. These projects will create a cross-axis of high quality urban green space which will connect into the heart of Portlaoise and provide space for a variety of facilities, which can enhance the quality of life in the Town. These will accommodate a wide variety of landscape spaces: parks and plazas, play and recreation facilities.

The open spaces and street tree planting will also enhance the ecology of the town, creating a “green lung” which will have benefits for flora and fauna, which in turn benefits the human population.

Security and intervisibility are key concerns so planting and hard landscape measures should be designed to minimise “dead” spaces and areas that are not passively overlooked by buildings or roadways. Interventions and detailed design should ensure that there are sightlines, adequate lighting and animation in each of the spaces.

Detailed planting design should reflect the theme of bringing countryside into the town. To this end, we suggest the use of native trees and hedging in the appropriate context, with selected ornamental species where design requires it, such as those set out in the table over. Appropriate planting typologies would include long grasses that would reference crops in the field, (ornamental species such as *Calamagrostis*, *Pennisetum*, *Carex*), meadow flowers and perennials. Such planting is reminiscent of crops in the field, and a wilder, less ordered landscape. Such planting will recall the Heath and the agricultural landscapes of the wider county.

Use of evergreen groundcover shrubs, carpet bedding, etc. should be limited as much as possible, to ensure that the spaces do not have a suburban or institutional appearance.

Appropriate native trees would include Birch (*Betula* species), Alder (*Alnus*), Whitebeam and Rowan (*Sorbus* species) and Oak (*Quercus* species), among others, subject to detailed design.

Hard landscape materials should be varied to ensure that the spaces are defined and recognisable. Consideration should be given to contemporary materials and forms that will create a dynamic contrast with the “countryside” planting.



Lime trees at Lower Square, Main Street; have not established and grown much since planting (c.15y)



Mature Trees in grounds of Methodist Church and along Railway Street

Location	Main Tree Species	Comment
James Fintan Lalor Avenue	Lime <i>Tilia cordata</i> Norway Maple <i>Acer platanoides</i> Rowan <i>Sorbus aucuparia</i> CV	The majority of Lime trees along the avenue and the Hawthorn hedge were planted in 2003 and have established well for the most part, now coming into maturity.
Lyster Square	Birch <i>Betula pendula</i> Rowan <i>Sorbus aucuparia</i> CV Norway Maple <i>Acer platanoides</i>	Trees in Lyster Square, with the exception of the relatively recently planted Birch in the central island, are all quite poor and could be removed and replaced to improve the overall quality of the space. The trees have almost no visibility as they are too small to create visual impact.
Market Square	Norway Maple <i>Acer platanoides</i> Hornbeam <i>Carpinus betulus</i>	The Maple trees on the southern side of the square are in poor health and have not grown much in the last 10-15 years. Consideration should be given to removing and replacing the trees as they are not uniform and are in varying states of health, which overall reduces the quality of the space. Consideration should also be given to increasing the level of planting around the whole square. Note: There are some particularly good trees in the grounds of St. Peter's Church of Ireland, including an unusual, mature <i>Robinia</i> and several Yew and Cypress. These trees are very visible from the square and contribute positively to the sense of place.
Main Street / Lower Square	Lime <i>Tilia</i> spp. Hanging baskets	The Lime trees on Main Street appear to be in reasonable health and make a very positive contribution to the streetscape. They have not grown as much as might be expected in the c.15 years since planting, so there may be an issue with rooting space below ground. Where space is not available for trees, hanging baskets have been deployed, in the public realm and on shopfronts, creating a colourful contribution to animating the streetscape.
Jessop Street	Lime <i>Tilia</i> spp.	Whilst Jessop Street is a relatively new street in the town, the provision of street trees greatly enhances it and the Heritage Hotel entrance area.
Railway Street	Lime <i>Tilia</i> spp. Sycamore <i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i> Beech <i>Fagus sylvatica</i> Horse Chestnut <i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i> Yew <i>Taxus baccata</i> Fir <i>Abies</i> spp.	All of the significant trees along the street are planted in adjacent grounds, including the Methodist Church on the west side and the institutional grounds to the east. These are among the most mature trees in Portlaoise town and are worthy of protection and retention into the future, as they line the street to the train station, creating a positive first impression on visitors.
Fitzmaurice Place	Evergreen shrubs, hedging and upright conifer.	The planting here is purely ornamental and there are no substantial trees. Consideration could be given to planting trees that would have a greater visual presence.

D / 3D Model Technical Specifications

Technical Specifications: Portlaoise 3D Digital Model

This technical note describes the components of the Portlaoise 3D digital model from source mapping data to generated model as graphically presented in Figure 1 below.

A list of all the files supplied with the final model and source mapping data is included in the table at the end of this Appendix.

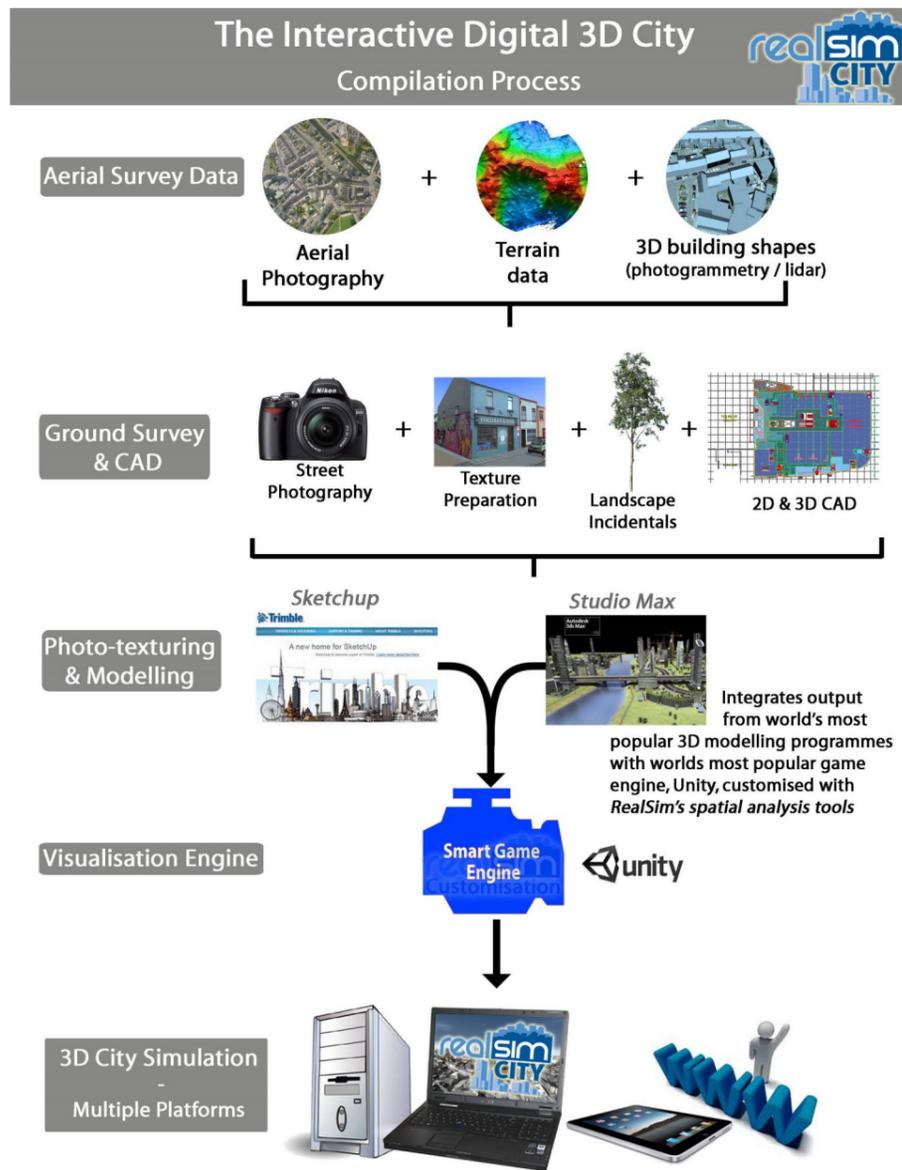


Figure 1: Graphical workflow of the process of compiling a digital town or city model.

Aerial Survey Data

Ordnance Survey Ireland LiDAR based Digital Terrain Model

LiDAR digital terrain data from the Ordnance Survey was purchased to form the baseline digital terrain model for the Town Centre area. It was supplied as an .XYZ file of points with a spatial resolution of 2m in ITM coordinates. A colour-shaded relief grid of this data was generated in GIS software (Figure 2) and a height map file exported as the base terrain layer for the simulated town model.

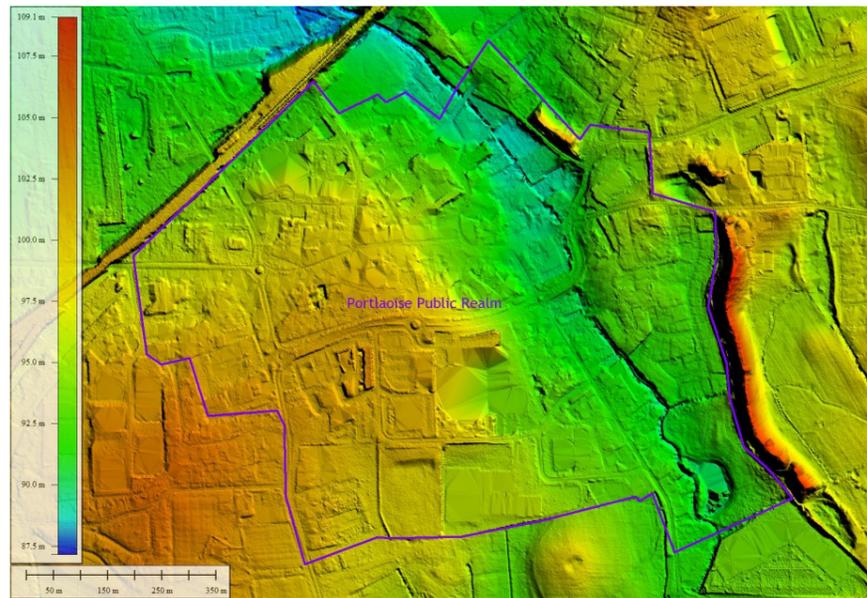


Figure 2: A colour-shaded relief grid of OSI's Digital Terrain LiDAR data over the study area.

Drone Survey based Ortho Photography and Digital Surface Model

A Digital Surface Model (DSM) differs from a Digital Terrain Model (DTM) in that it includes the elevations of everything which sits on the terrain, i.e. buildings, roads, vegetation etc. Subtracting the DTM from the DSM will give us a solid mesh model of all buildings and trees from which we can construct a 3D CAD model of same. Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSi) also have a LiDAR based Digital Surface Model, DSM, for Portlaoise, however at a 2m spatial resolution it is too coarse to accurately model the shape and form of buildings.

It was decided to take advantage of the latest developments in drone technology and the Irish Aviation Authorities new common sense approach allowing commercially licensed operators fly over urban areas. This required permissions from local Gardai and the prison service, both of whom kindly accommodated the survey.



Figure 3: Comparison between traditional airborne photography (left) and drone acquired aerial photography on the right. The latter is 5 times more detailed.

The main advantages to drone imagery over traditional airborne survey photography are:

- As drone imagery is flown much closer to the ground (300 ft compared to 6000 ft), a much higher ground pixel resolution can be achieved. Portlaoise was flown to achieve a ground pixel resolution of 5cm/pixel, 5 times higher than standard 25cm/pixel airborne photography.
- Higher resolution photography means higher resolution 3D photogrammetry outputs. A 3D digital surface mesh with a 20cm/pixel resolution was extracted to form the reference mesh for the 3D CAD model (Figure 4 and 5, over).
- For small areas less than 1sqkm, drone survey costs are far less than traditional airborne surveys.

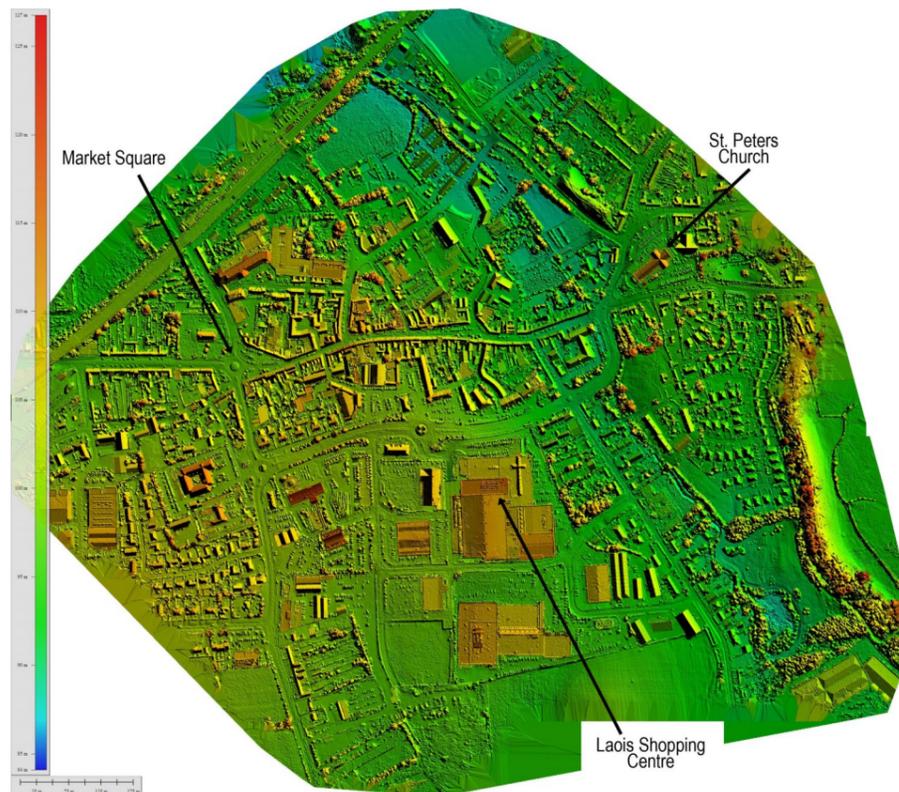


Figure 4: A Digital Surface Mesh Grid extracted by photogrammetric processing of the images taken by the drone survey over the centre of Portlaoise.

From Survey to Model

Survey

3D Digital Surface Model (DSM) produced from drone survey



Model Buildings

Create 3D building blockwork with reference to DSM



Photo-texturing

Carry out ground photographic survey and photo texture buildings



Figure 5: Process of going from digital surface mesh to photo-textured CAD model Ground Survey Data

Ground Survey Data

RTK GPS Control Points

To better constrain the position of the imagery and its associated outputs from the drone survey, ground control points were acquired with a RTK GPS throughout the Town Centre.

Photographic Architectural Street Survey

A detailed street level survey has been carried out of the Town Centre which facilitated the photo-texturing of the digital town model. This photography however is now a valuable asset in its own right as it represents a photographic record of every building in the Town Centre.

The following table details all the data streams that will be delivered to Laois County Council as part of this project:

Data Type	Format
LiDAR Digital Terrain data	.xyz
LiDAR Digital Surface data	.xyz
5cm drone ortho photos	.jpg (geo-referenced)
25cm ortho photos	.tif (geo-referenced)
20cm surface model height map	.tif (extracted from drone survey)
Autodesk Studio 3ds Max model	.max
Interactive 3D town simulation	Unity executable player file

E / Archaeological Study

Introduction

Archaeology and Built Heritage was appointed to provide archaeological services to the design team preparing a public realm strategy for the Town of Portlaoise. Where the Strategy is still on preparation, any archaeological implications will be given further consideration for discussion prior to the preparation of a final draft.

The town's origins as an urban centre are relatively recent and prior to the late twentieth-century interventions made around its historic core, elements of its primary sixteenth-century plan form were still legible. The primary plan was anchored by Fort Protector and the adjacent St. Peter's church; both structures still have a presence on the urban landscape within the town's public realm.

Although historical cartography suggests that the primary settlement was walled, a natural defence is suggested by the original course of the Triogue river and the esker on its eastern bank which, as a graveyard, has become an archaeological monument in its own right. A lesser known monument comprising a circular masonry tower survives in the fabric of a former convent, a reminder that it is quite likely earlier built fabric exists behind the solidly Victorian façades that line the town's principal streets.

This document has been prepared to highlight some of the possible impacts of the public realm plan on the archaeological heritage of the town. By their very nature, such plans rarely have a significant physical impact on archaeological substrates, and indeed, archaeological investigations undertaken through the study area have not resulted in the recovery of much new information on the morphology of the settlement.

Where the two most significant monuments in the town lie comfortably within the public realm, an archaeological methodology is proposed for these discrete areas which, to a certain extent, pre-empts the type of intervention which may be undertaken as the plan is being implemented. In any event, it is not considered likely that such interventions will require further archaeological work beyond initial impact assessments and licensed monitoring.

Historical and archaeological contexts

The urban origins of Portlaoise more than likely lie in the construction of Fort Protector in 1548 by Lord Deputy Bellingham, following the suppression of the O'Moore's of Leix and their allies the O'Connors of Uí Failghe (Deigan 1999). The fort was initially named Fort of Leix or Fort Protector in honour of the Earl of Somerset, then Lord Protector of England.

The settlement was named Maryborough after 1557, however it weathered a precarious existence over its initial century. The town was granted a market in 1567 and was raised to borough status by Elizabeth I in 1570, maintaining its corporation until 1830. Many settlers moved into the town and the Elizabethan fiants record a particularly high number of property grants between 1569 and 1571. In 1641 the fort was captured by Confederate forces and in 1650 it was retaken by Cromwell's army. By the 1650s it had been outgrown by both Mountrath and Ballinakill, and by 1659 the population was largely Irish with only 48 English settlers. Following the political stability brought on by the restoration, the town saw a steady expansion as a market centre for the surrounding area and grew into the principal town of the county.

This particular location with no known settlement antecedent is possibly a function of the presence of the great esker that runs through the low-lying landscape between Slieve Bloom mountains and the Castlecomer plateau. Indeed, the eastern flank of the town is dominated by the Ridge Graveyard on the esker, which itself would have formed a useful defensive boundary for the initial settlement.

A map of c. 1560-69 (Figure 1) depicts a town wall which encloses an area of c. 14–17.5 hectares (incorporating perhaps a slightly earlier version of Fort Protector) and would have had a perimeter length of c. 1375–1625m. The wall was depicted as rectangular in plan with the long axis running north–south, and the fort located mid-way on the western side. The map would suggest that there were three gates: one on the east, with a possible gate house at the bridge on the road from Dublin, where two simple openings are shown on the west, on either side of the fort. No towers or bastions were depicted. The fort appears as an integral part of the circuit, mid-way on the western side. There are possible ramparts, but these are not clearly shown. However it is unclear what was actually constructed as this map was sent to London for approval by Queen Mary and may have indicated an intention to construct a town wall rather than represent a physical reality.

There is no firm evidence that the walled town of the c. 1560–9 map was ever completed, although the fort survives sufficiently to attest to the map's veracity in one respect. The walled town, certainly as depicted here, was extremely regular and simple in plan. No corner or mural towers are indicated and no solid gatehouses are depicted, apart from what appear to be narrow openings. The map appears to show that there was no access from the town directly to the fort, its only entrance being on the outer western side. The area of the planned walled town, as depicted on the map, would seem to have been substantial, comparable for example with medieval Carlow. Its outline appears to be partially traceable in the present town's streetscape, particularly along Main Street to the south.

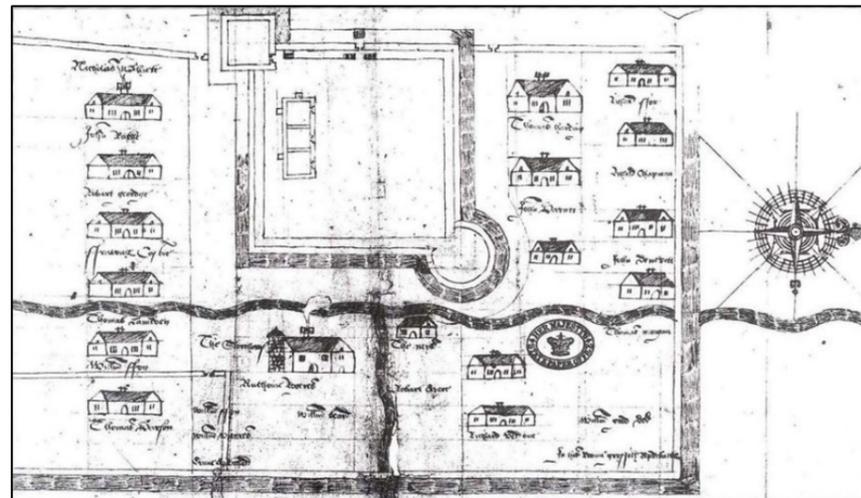


Figure 1 MS copy of Plan of Maryborough, c.1560-69

Bradley (1985) and Thomas (1992) both suggest on the evidence of the map that the eastern boundary of the town was located along the present day Ridge Road. Bradley also alludes to the possibility that the Triogue may have formed the eastern boundary of the town's defences. It would however appear that the present course of the river is artificial and that its original course ran closer to the esker to the east, where the map has the river running closer to the flanker. It could also be argued that the map is essentially correct and that original course of the river ran against the walls of Fort Protector and was incorporated into a mill stream and pond by the early nineteenth century. The town wall may well have followed the present townland boundary along its southern extent, however, there are no clear lines to the north in the contemporary landscape to indicate where the boundary may have extended.

In 1592 the right to collect murage was granted to the town and the burgomaster was granted permission to 'erect, build and fortify the borough with ditches and stone walls' (Thomas 1992). This would possibly cast doubt on the existence of the town walls depicted on the c. 1560-69 map. The first edition of the Ordnance Survey shows no indication of the existence of a town wall. Nevertheless although the documentary evidence for a walled town at Portlaoise is limited, the layout of the town is nonetheless highly suggestive of

there once being an enclosure, with property boundaries and minor street lines indicating a walled or enclosed area that does not necessarily contradict the c. 1560-69 map.

Good stretches of the perimeter walls of Fort Protector (LA013-041001) are evident within the public realm along Church Street and Church Avenue, including an impressive northeastern flanker. The remainder of the perimeter largely survives out of public view enclosing an area of approximately 1 hectare (Thomas 1992). Much of the interior is in open yards, where two school buildings also occupy a significant area of the enclosed area. It is quite likely that the foundations of the southwestern square flanker survive under Railway Street or within the fabric of the houses on the eastern side of the street, where it is suggested by a wall alignment on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey. There do not however appear to have been any licenced archaeological investigations within the fort itself.

Just to the west of Fort Protector is St. Peter's church (LA013-041002). The surviving tower and graveyard (LA013-041004) are accessible to the public, however they have not been particularly well maintained over the years. The earliest historical reference to the existence of a church at Maryborough lists David Good as vicar in 1598 (Bradley 1986, 53). Situated within its own churchyard the remains consist of the west tower and north wall of the nave of the church. The four storey rectangular tower is entered through a rectangular opening in the east wall. There is a high round arched opening in the west wall, now blocked up and forming the back wall of a house in Church Street. There is a blocked splayed opening or possible window in the north wall above the entrance. The first floor is marked externally by a string course above which the tower is stepped back slightly. The weathering for the sloping roof-line of the nave is visible in the east wall and indicates that the tower stood slightly northwest of the church. The third floor accommodated the belfry and has a round arched window in each wall.

The Presentation Convent is a three storey over basement Protected Structure (RPS 475) which incorporates elements of an earlier structure and circular tower which perhaps dates to the sixteenth century (RPS 476). This earlier structure is depicted on the c. 1560-69 map with the circular tower against the southern gable. The building was known as 'The Stone House' or 'Anthony Roger's House', the latter a constable in the Fort. A tunnel reportedly leads eastwards from the house to the fort and westwards towards the river. Renovation work undertaken at the convent in 1951 uncovered the remains of a tunnel which may correlate with this purported tunnel (Diegan 1999). Test excavation to the rear of the convent in 2003 also identified a tunnel/drain which the excavator tenuously linked to the tunnel identified in the 1950s (Flanagan 2003). The 'Stone House' was occupied by the Presentation Sisters in 1824, having previously served as a constable's house, a gaol and infirmary. An extension in 1872 subsumed the tower into the new structure. The Presentation Sisters left the building in the 1990s and it is currently vacant. It is set behind a high boundary wall fronting onto Church Avenue and there is a formal garden to the rear of the convent which extends to the Triogue.

The upgrading of Portlaoise Courthouse and the redevelopment of the old gaol into a new arts centre shifted the archaeological focus from the sixteenth century and into the eighteenth. The courthouse was built in 1789 and replaced an earlier structure which had been destroyed by fire. The gaol was built at around the same time and remained in use until 1830, after which it functioned as an RIC barrack until the 1860s. It was converted into a public library in the 1950s. Archaeological investigations recovered several inhumations in the courtyard of the old gaol, a cobbled surface that pre-dated part of the gaol and the remains of a structure outside its eastern wall.

The industrial archaeological heritage of the town is well represented by the railway. An examination of the first edition Ordnance Survey mapping suggests that the Triogue was an important source of water power, feeding at least three mills in the vicinity of the town. This would have had an immediate visual aspect to the east of Fort Protector where a large mill pond is depicted against the walls of the monument.

Previous archaeological investigations within the study area

Where the urban core of Portlaoise has been recognised as a zone of archaeological potential (LA013-041), a number of licensed archaeological investigations have taken place within the

study area, all of them conditioned by the planning authority to mitigate the impact of a development on possible archaeological substrates. All of the summary accounts below have been extrapolated from the Excavations website (www.excavations.ie) which has replaced the annual *Excavations* bulletin.

Presentation Convent (Licence ref: 03E0596)

The gardens of the Presentation Convent were test excavated in 1993 where the remains of a stone drain/tunnel close to the convent were identified. The excavator suggested, rather tenuously, that it may be associated with the tunnel identified in the 1950s (N. O’Flanagan 2003).

Peppers Lane (Licence ref: 96E225)

This site was located approximately 150m to the southeast of Fort Protector. A millrace which powered a large flour mill was recorded in this location on the first edition Ordnance Survey mapping. It was identified during archaeological test excavation at this site, although in a damaged condition (D. Delany 1996).

Fintan Lawlor Avenue (Licence ref: 00E0104)

Archaeological monitoring within the zone of archaeological potential was undertaken as new gas mains were being laid. There were no features of archaeological significance identified over the course of the monitoring (P. Stevens 2000).

Portlaoise Gaol and Courthouse (Licence ref: 96E365)

Archaeological test excavation at the Old Gaol and Courthouse identified evidence of cellars and a cobbled area (which predated the Courthouse). Six skeletons were also excavated which probably date to the operation of the gaol (F. Reilly 1998).

Portlaoise Broadband Monitoring (Licence ref: 03E975)

Monitoring of the broadband project around Portlaoise town identified a ditch along Church Street (which runs adjacent to the north wall of the fort). The excavator suggested that this ditch might have been the remains of a moat outside the fort, although there was no artefactual evidence recovered to support the dating (D. Delany 2003).

Scoil Croist Rí, Presentation Convent, Church Avenue (Licence ref: 11E442)

The results of archaeological monitoring, which included trenching for new boundary walls, clearly indicate the presence of a marshy area comprising presumably deposited organic soils over natural silts, which survive to a depth of approximately 2.4m at their greatest depth over the area investigated. The suitability of such material as a structural foundation is obviously questionable and the evidence suggests that the area was in use as a dumping ground certainly into the late seventeenth century.

This obviously raises issues around the veracity of the early map of the settlement, which places the Stone House on the western bank of the Triogue, thus suggesting that the present course of the river is artificial. Although the existing course is depicted on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey, a large millpond against the western wall the fort had been replaced by Church Avenue by 1912, suggesting that the present course of the river is an overflow from the eighteenth-century mills located outside the north-western bastion, where the original course functioned as a millrace and tailrace.

The absence of quantities of later dumped ceramics, usual in such contexts, would suggest that dumping activity had ceased by the eighteenth century and had certainly ceased by the arrival of the Presentation Sisters in 1824. The organic nature of the material would suggest that it contains human cess, redeposited from the latrine pits which would have served the town’s inhabitants prior to the introduction of a municipal sewage scheme.

It would therefore appear that the area functioned as the town dump, located as it was in a marginal area of the town between the tailrace (the original course of the Triogue) and the esker to the east, which was seemingly used as a burial ground since at least the 17th century (F. Myles 2011).

Discussion

It is difficult to gauge from the summary reports the depth of the archaeological deposits encountered in Portlaoise. In a very general sense, one would expect post medieval deposits to survive to a higher level, but their survival at all is a function of the level and density of subsequent urban development.

On the basis of the published excavation summaries there has been very little archaeological information recovered for Portlaoise and certainly nothing of its primary form. This may be a function of there being extensive modern services truncation on the infrastructural investigations along the streets, or indeed the depth of modern disturbance on the other developments listed. In the case of the courthouse and gaol investigations, there is a tendency to recover more archaeological remains over ground in public ownership, where there has been perhaps less development over the years.

It is unlikely that the recommendations of the public realm plan will involve substantial disturbance of the underlying deposits, however the following section outlines the statutory constraints involved with undertaking archaeological work within the curtilage of St. Peter’s church and Fort Protector.

Archaeological constraints within Portlaoise

The archaeological focus of the public realm plan is likely to concentrate on the two most obvious monuments within the study area, where the town itself is a zone of archaeological potential with its own archaeological designation.

Where work is being undertaken on a private development within a zone of archaeological potential, a planning condition usually requests an assessment of the site prior to the commencement of the development. This normally comprises a desk-top assessment of the site and the projected impact of the development. More often than not the assessment will involve test trenching undertaken under archaeological licence, issued by the National Monuments Service on receipt of a method statement and other documentation. An archaeological licence is generally issued within four weeks of the application being made.

Where significant archaeological deposits or structures are encountered over the initial testing phase, the resolution of the site in most case will involve a controlled archaeological excavation of the area being impacted upon. In exceptional circumstances, where medieval masonry or human remains are encountered, a redesign can be subsequently conditioned by the planning authority in consultation with the National Monuments Service.

Should the site be in the ownership of the local authority or involve development close to or impacting directly on the town’s defences, a different procedure is followed where the applicant must acquire Ministerial Consent for the development. This is a slightly longer process, where the sites are afforded National Monument status under the existing legislation. There is generally a more robust, research-led method statement required, however the archaeological procedure is the same.

Any work undertaken within the town which involves disturbing archaeological substrates should theoretically attract an archaeological condition, however some of the more recent developments in Portlaoise do not appear to have done so. It is possible that unlicensed archaeological monitoring may have been undertaken in these cases, where the work would not necessarily be reported in the *Excavations* bulletin.

Where there may be specific interventions planned for St. Peter’s church and graveyard and Fort Protector, both of which have their own discrete archaeological designations, the Development Applications Unit of the National Monuments Service will be a statutory consultee. In the case of the graveyard where there are human remains present, it is unlikely that any interventions which would require disturbing the graves would receive sanction.

Fort Protector, from which the town developed, is an obvious candidate for attention. A public area was developed outside the northeastern flanker in recent years, however the interior of the monument (with the possible exception of the school premises) is somewhat unknown to the general public and would appear to be mostly in private ownership. Controlled access to the interior would doubtless form a significant heritage destination and were there a possibility of developing visitor access there would be likely be a necessity to locate or renovate an existing structure within the complex.

As there has been no archaeological investigation undertaken within Fort Protector, the nature of the archaeological substrates is unknown. Both the Plan of Maryborough, c.1560-69 and an undated TCD MS plan of the fort depict a single structure in the southern interior, which may possibly have been removed by modern development. Where the location of this structure on either map is somewhat contradictory, there is a possibility that some structural remains may survive under grass within the school premises occupying the southeastern corner of the monument. This area would be an obvious candidate for a community excavation, however it is somewhat peripheral to the main open areas available.

Where a planning application within the remaining area would doubtless attract an archaeological condition, it is unlikely that there would be extensive survival of archaeological substrates due to the nature of the historic occupation of the fort. The survival or otherwise of archaeological material could in any case be quickly established by means of licensed test trenching.

St. Peter’s churchyard conveys something of the town’s past, where the standing remains are more likely to be seventeenth or even eighteenth century in date. Development opportunities are limited within the space, where there is policy (albeit unevenly applied) to preserve human remains *in situ*. There is potential though to further integrate the graveyard into the public realm which would include a comprehensive conservation scheme undertaken on the masonry remains and boundaries, where best practice would avoid disturbing the grave markers themselves.

Conclusion

Public realm interventions do not usually attract an archaeological condition where the impact on archaeological substrates is invariably negligible. In the case of Fort Protector and St. Peter’s churchyard, it is likely that any planning application, irrespective of its impact, will at the minimum attract a condition to undertake an assessment.

Where there is less scope to develop a built intervention in St. Peter’s, Fort Protector offers more opportunities in terms of the space potentially available. Should such a development proceed it is likely to have a light footprint if an existing structure cannot be utilised. In any event, the provision of services will possibly involve trenching which will at the very least require licensed monitoring, if not Ministerial Consent. The monitoring requirement may be omitted if test trenching undertaken as part of the initial assessment proves unsuccessful.

The nature of the statutory authorities’ response is obviously a function of the nature of the development itself. It is likely however that the nature of the intervention will be guided by the recommendations contained in the *Survey of Architectural Heritage of Portlaoise* (2008), where ‘a high standard of architectural design would be demanded of such a proposal and an architectural design competition is recommended as the best way to achieve this’. The recent Heritage Council award of €6000 to the Laois Heritage Society to fund a conservation plan for the site is the first step towards the reintegration of Fort Protector into the town’s life.

