

2040
- And Beyond



A VISION FOR PORTLAOISE
A STRATEGY FOR A BETTER TOWN CENTRE



DRAFT



2040 and Beyond: A VISION FOR PORTLAOISE

A STRATEGY FOR A BETTER TOWN CENTRE

For further information please contact:

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 rises 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.

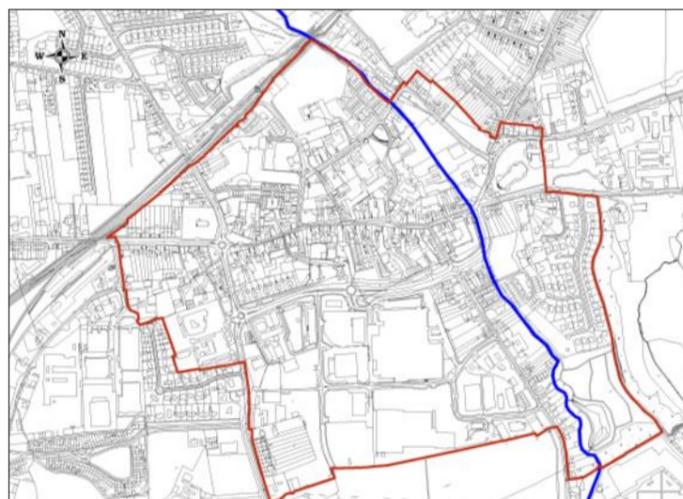
The Purpose of the Strategy

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 wellbeing 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

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.
- 40% increase in bicycle useage by 2040
- 300-500 trees planted in 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 though the Town Centre by way of the Triogue Blueway, James Fintan Lalor Avenue and Lyster Square will support the reduction in carbon emission 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.

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 cycle journeys, in support of national policy as well as the Draft County Laois 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 the 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 these schools, noting the campus cluster of Gaelscoil Phortlaoise, Maryborough National School and the Portlaoise Educate Together National School in 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.

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 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 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 provides 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 waters 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 potentially Town Centre. The Strategy will deliver improved amenity 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 habitat, 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 Peters Old Church and cemetery and other heritage assets in Portlaoise Town Centre.

The Town retains a series of buildings related to the Town's sixteenth-century foundation. These include Fort Protector, the 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 eighteenth and nineteenth 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 nineteenth 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, 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;
- To 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 streetscapes, punctuated by imposing buildings, create 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 streetscapes.

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 history 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 River Triogue from People's Park as a continuous pedestrian and cycle link through the Town Centre, and potentially through the Convent Lands.
- Reconnect to 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 for 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 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 waterways 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 predominantly 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. 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 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 more useful to more people, 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 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 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

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) concentrated in clusters within the Town Centre. 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 of 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 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. (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 Bank Place as an IT Hub / creative cluster.
- Accommodate small units of office accommodation at first floor level on Main Street.

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; 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 the 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 Hub within the Former Prison Officer's Club in the old bank building at Bank Place could build on national exemplars in this area. An example is the Fumbally Exchange in Dublin City Centre is 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, Cork or Limerick. Given the advantages of the imminent SIRO broadband rollout this opportunity and the related IT start-up or outsourcing potential is an opportunity 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 sixteenth-century, the establishment of Fort Protector and the evolution as the town of Marlborough through to the County town of Portlaoise today.

The Story of Portlaoise

Origins in the sixteenth century

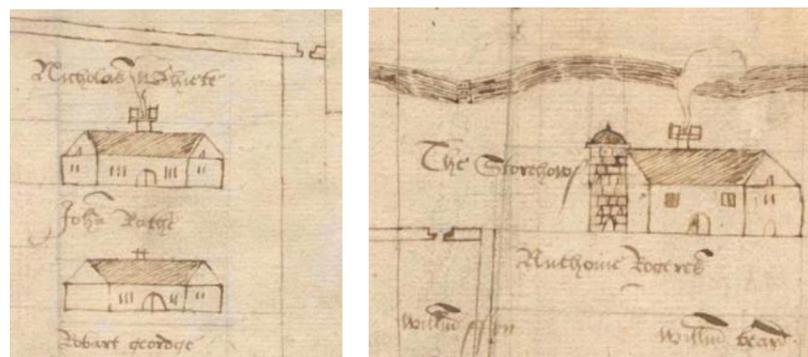
Known until 1920 as 'Maryborough' Portlaoise owes its current name to the sixteenth-century 'Fort Protector', one of two Crown forts built by English forces in 1548 as military outposts after the defeat of the O'More and O'Connor clans and occupation of their territories. Eight years later two new counties, 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 seventeenth-century form of the town 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 eighteenth 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 nineteenth century, which generated the central town plan as we know it 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.

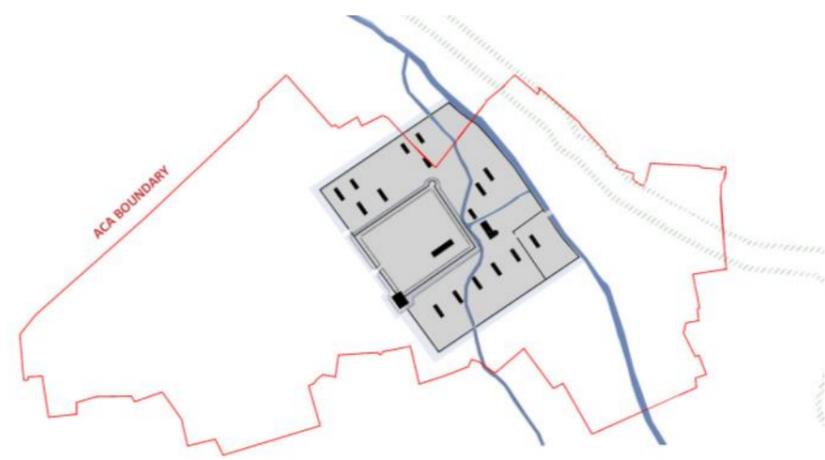
A number of significant buildings were built in the opening years of the century, notably a Market House, the County Infirmary, the Protestant church, the Courthouse, and the New Barracks, now the Garda station, the last three replacing earlier structures. An institutional quarter developed on the Dublin Road in the 1830s with the building of the prison and St. Fintan's Hospital, and 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. 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.

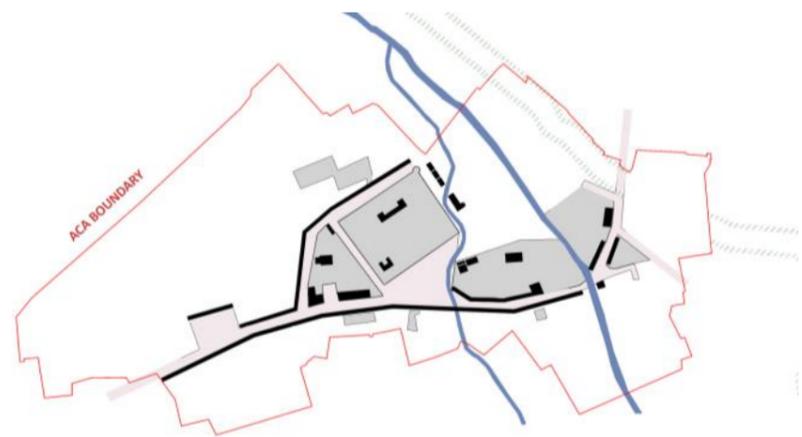
Twentieth century

The twentieth-century saw the addition of new housing schemes and some new public architecture. 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 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.

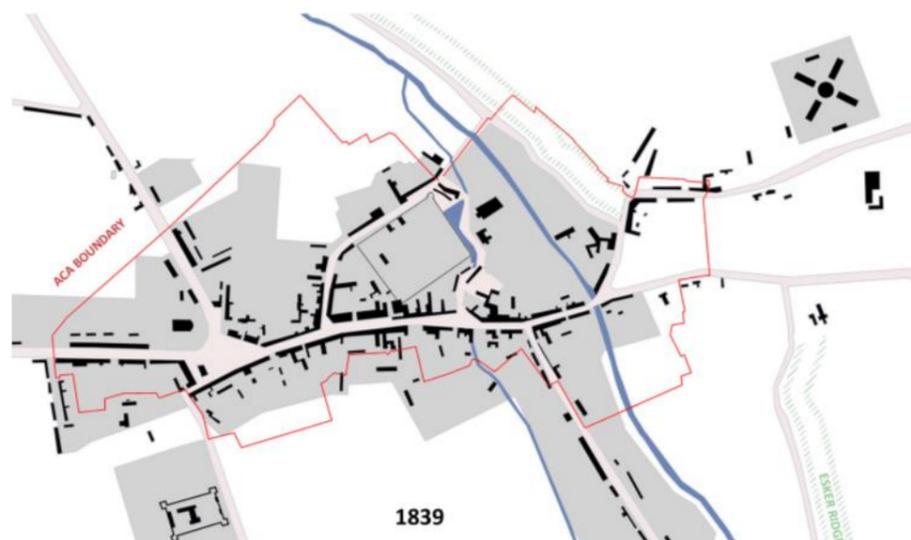
In 1935 the Modernist Midland Regional Hospital built by Michael Scott, one of Ireland's most illustrious architects. The main thrust of speculative and social housing came during the mid-twentieth century when some well-considered housing estates, such as O'Moore Place, were built on the periphery of the town. The laying out of James Fintan Lalor Avenue in the 1970s as an inner relief road 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.



1560



1721



1839

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 Odium'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 and 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 of 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 centered 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 the 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 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 the 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 Lawlor 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 of 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, and 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 in the Dunamais Arts Centre & Theatre a major cultural asset. 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 just over 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 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 Lawlor 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 minute walk) is notably closer than most other towns in the Region. Despite this however much of the movement is 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 pedestrianizing or covering Main Street.
- Links from Town Centre to Peoples Park and the Triogue Linear Park for cycling and pedestrians need improvement.
- Suggested improved accessibility and pedestrian wayfinding within the Town Centre, including linking Fitzmaurice Place to Triogue Linear Park.
- Contested space between traffic and pedestrians. Re-prioritise for pedestrians.
- Promote and accommodate cycling & walking. Improved walking & 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. Conflict 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 & wellbeing.
- A weakness in local transport links to the outer residential areas was also noted.

Heritage



The history of Portlaoise, with the establishment of Fort Protector and the town of Maryborough in the sixteenth 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 define 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 Fort Protector and Old St Peter's Church. Key points raised during the Consultation include:

- There is potential for the exposure of Fort Protector and Fitzmaurice place as heritage assets.
- St Peter's Church ruin and the attendant cemetery should be opened up.
- Many buildings in Main Street could be better presented.
- Potential to have a Portlaoise / Laois Museum in the Town Centre.
- Potential for the Old Convent Building as 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 the 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 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 town 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 nineteenth 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 a is welcomed. Using the existing ESB network, the SIRO service is delivered by fibre optic cables all the way to the building. This technology, known as Fibre-to-the-Building, has no copper connections at any point to slow down the network and 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 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; 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

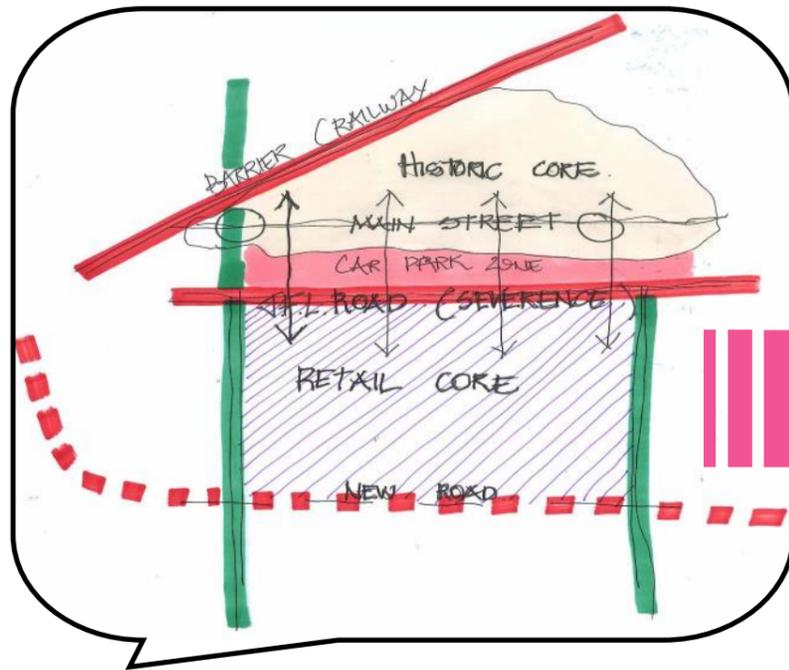
The former Shaws Department Store at Lower Square on the eastern end of Main Street was purchased by Laois County Council as a site for the new Portlaoise and County Library. The appointment of architects in late 2016 paves the way for the design, public consultation and ultimately the delivery of a 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:

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

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

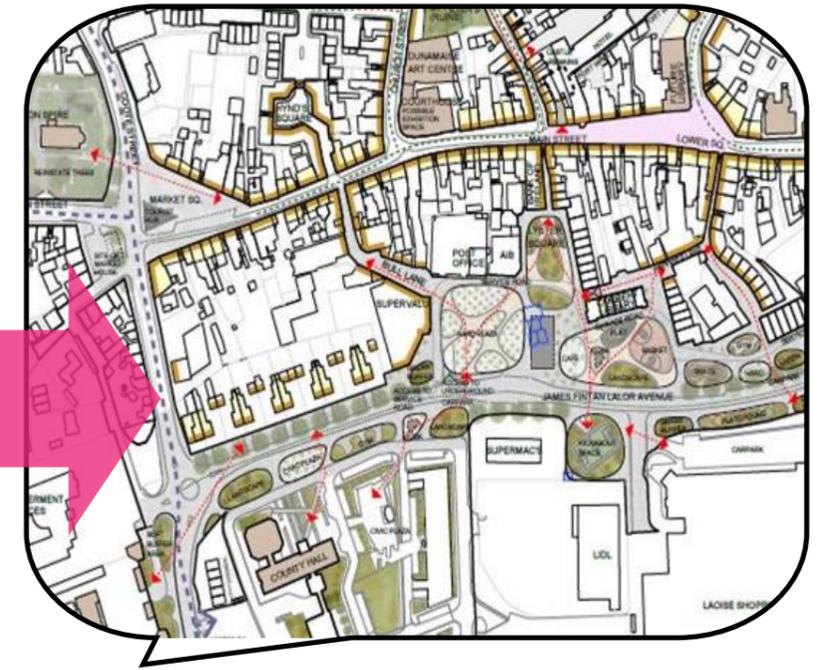
The workflow illustration is intended to convey the process of consultation, analysis and design development in arriving at a strategy that takes the intermediate steps from the initial familiarisation and immersion of the project team in the place through the various consultation workshops and meetings 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 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 interventions 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 & cycling infrastructure, as well as the enhanced presentation and interpretation of 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, offers 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.

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 the 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.

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 implementation of initiatives (for example the Library as 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 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 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 within the ACA, and should take its cues from the historic setting in terms of scale and design. 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, 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 the 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 Portlaoise's Town Centre streets 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 to and safety of 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 theirs. 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 3 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 and proven 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
- The Street Improvements

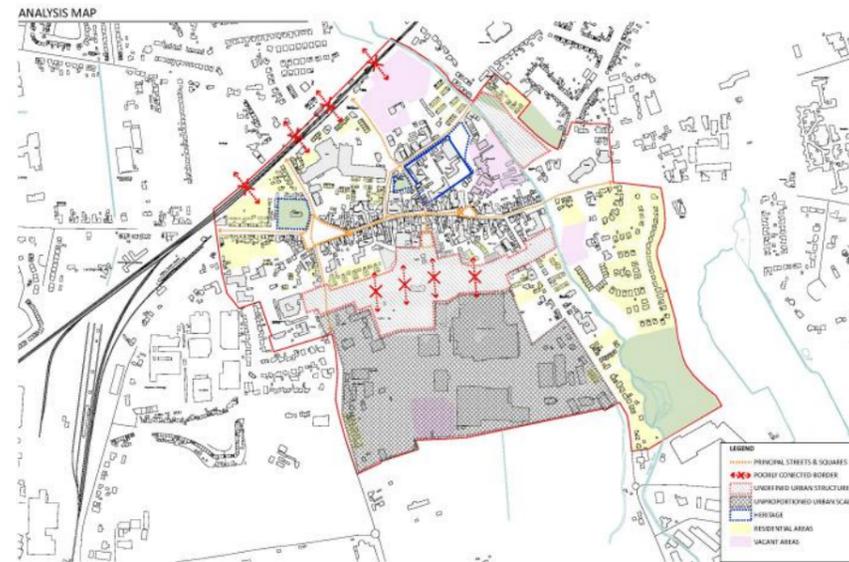
Heritage Interventions

- 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 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 will set out the individual interventions that have emerged from the public consultation and the design teams 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, 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 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 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.

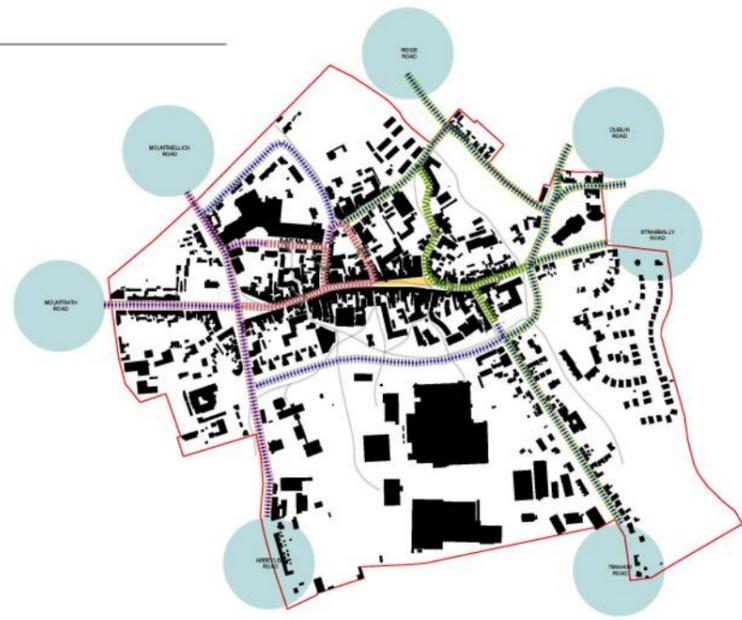
Detailed planting design should reflect the bringing of the countryside into the Town. To this end, we suggest the use of native trees and hedging in the appropriate context, with selected ornamental species where design requires. Appropriate planting typologies would include long grasses that reference 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



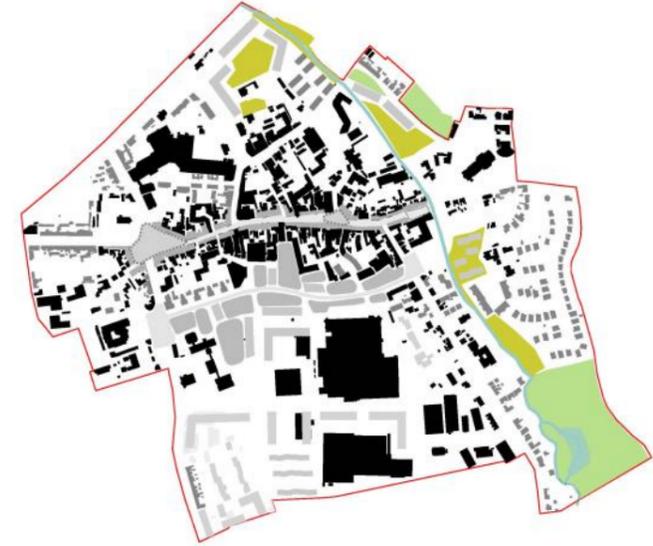
02_JAMES FINTAN LALOR ROAD



03_MAIN STREET



05_LINEAR PARK



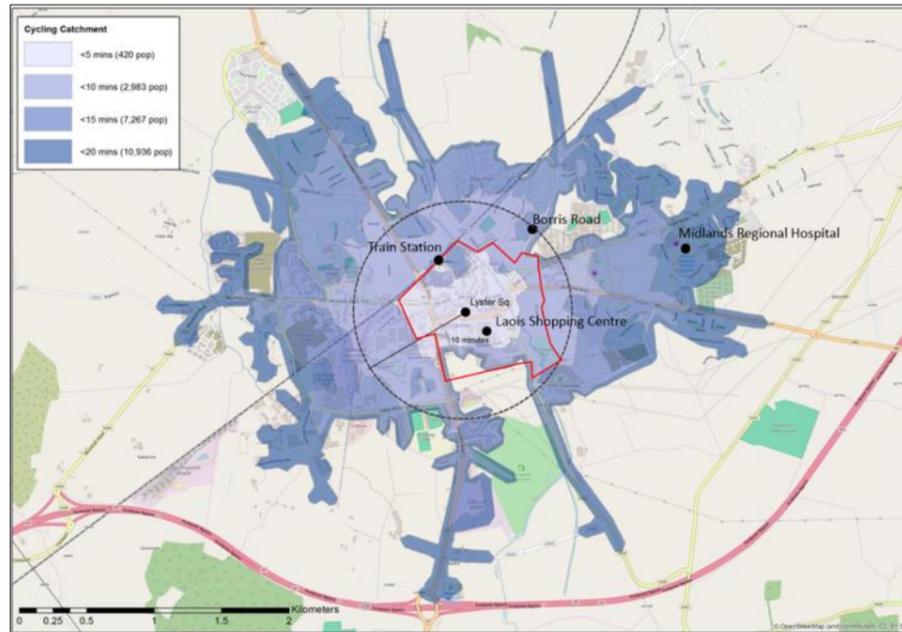
04_RESIDENTIAL INTENSIFICATION



06_KEY PROJECTS



05 / The Interventions



Cycling Issues

Proposed Network

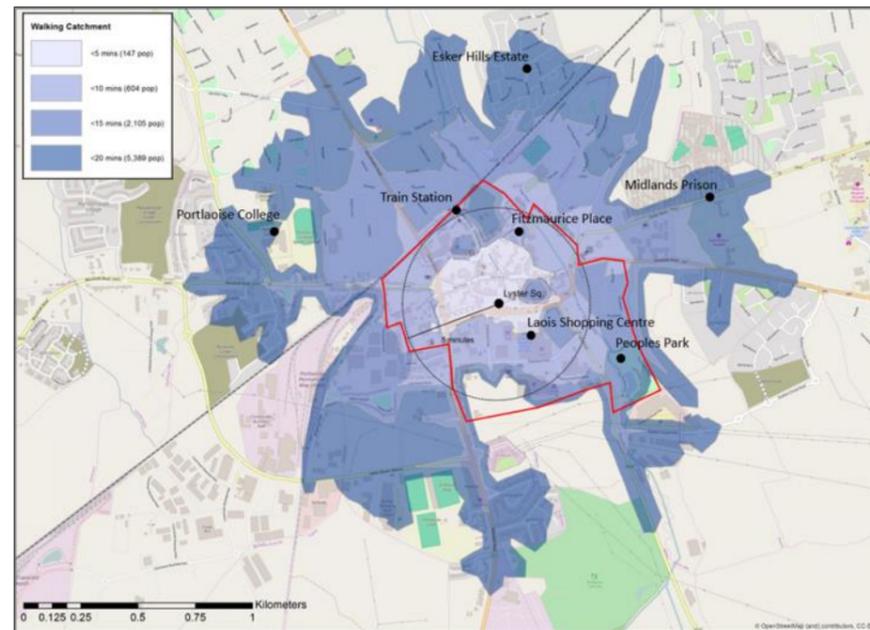
The National Cycle Network Scoping Study identifies Portlaoise as a key town on the Athlone to Carlow Corridor. This Strategy supports improvement of the pedestrian and cycling linkages between:

- Portlaoise Railway Station;
- Lyster Square / Main Street / Kylekiproe Road;
- Portlaoise Leisure Centre;
- Portlaoise College & running track; and
- 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 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.

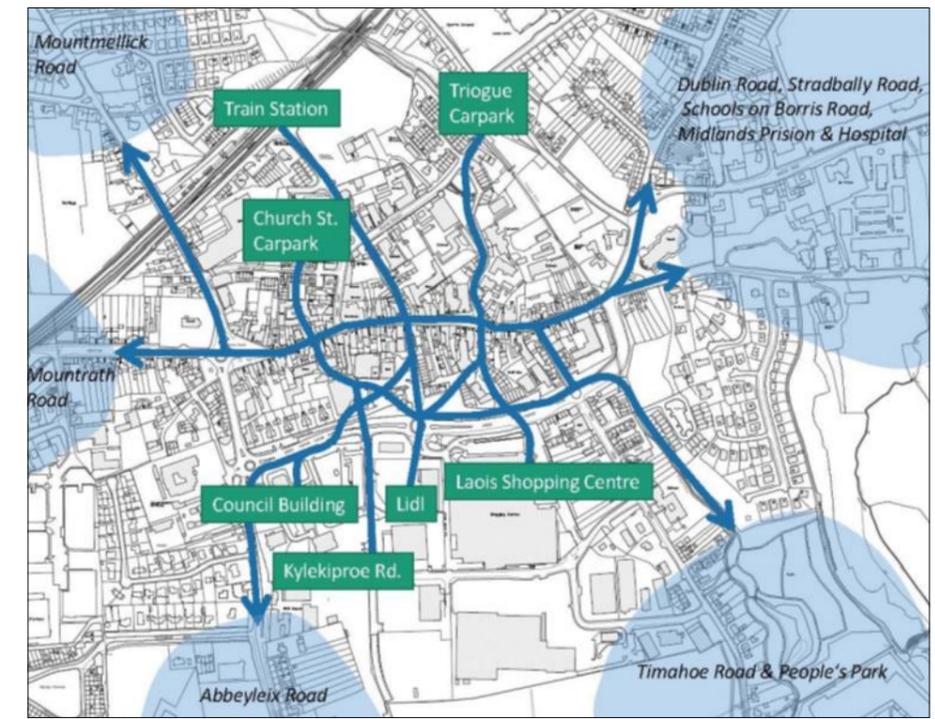
The Integrated Strategy



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, James Fintan Lalor Avenue / Lyster Square all have poor pedestrian provision. The laneways in particular are considered 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 as 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



LEGEND

- - - DISTRIBUTION TRAFFIC ROUTES
- - - TOWN CENTRE TRAFFIC ROUTES
- . . . PEDESTRIAN CONECTIONS
- REMOVE TRAFFIC CLUTTER
- POSSIBLE NEW BUILDING
- ENCOURAGE RESIDENTIAL USE
- FUTURE RESIDENTIAL INTENSIFICATION
- PROMOTE MAINTENANCE OF FRONTAGES
- EXISTING BUILDING OF RELEVANCE

05 / The Interventions

Permeability Analysis

The original street pattern within the historic town centre is acknowledged as being largely intact and 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 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; and
- 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 on 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.



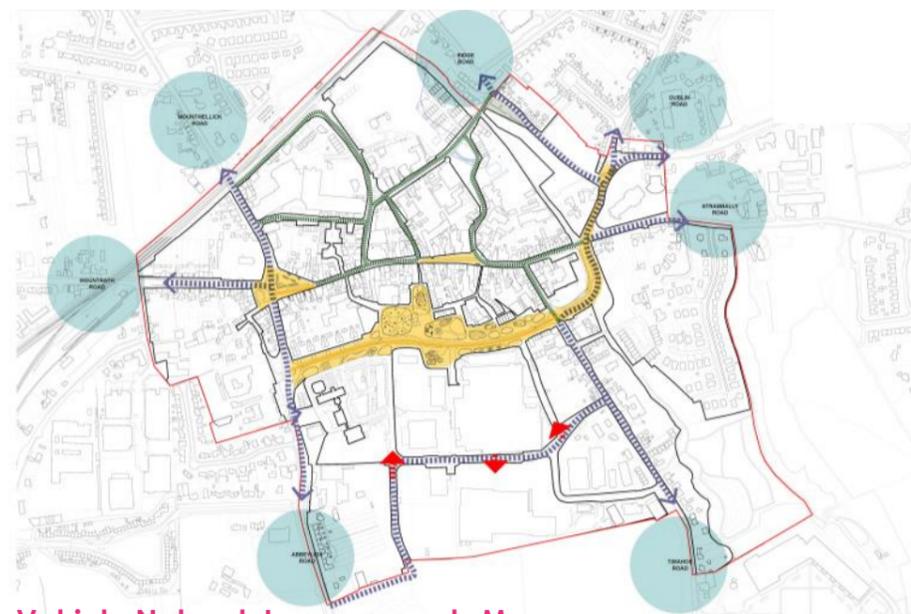
Transport and Mobility Proposals

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 wellbeing 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.

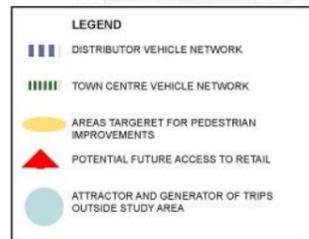
Improved links - Pedestrian wayfinding throughout the Town Centre will be improved including linking Fitzmaurice Place to Triogue Linear Park.

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 Town Centre. A dedicated bus information point will also be provided.

Bicycle Parking – Clusters of high-quality bicycle parking are proposed to be provided in close proximity to key destinations, such as Market Square, Lower Square, the Train Station, the Council Offices and Lyster Square.



Vehicle Network Improvements Map



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 JFL 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 the 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 configuration of the taxi rank.

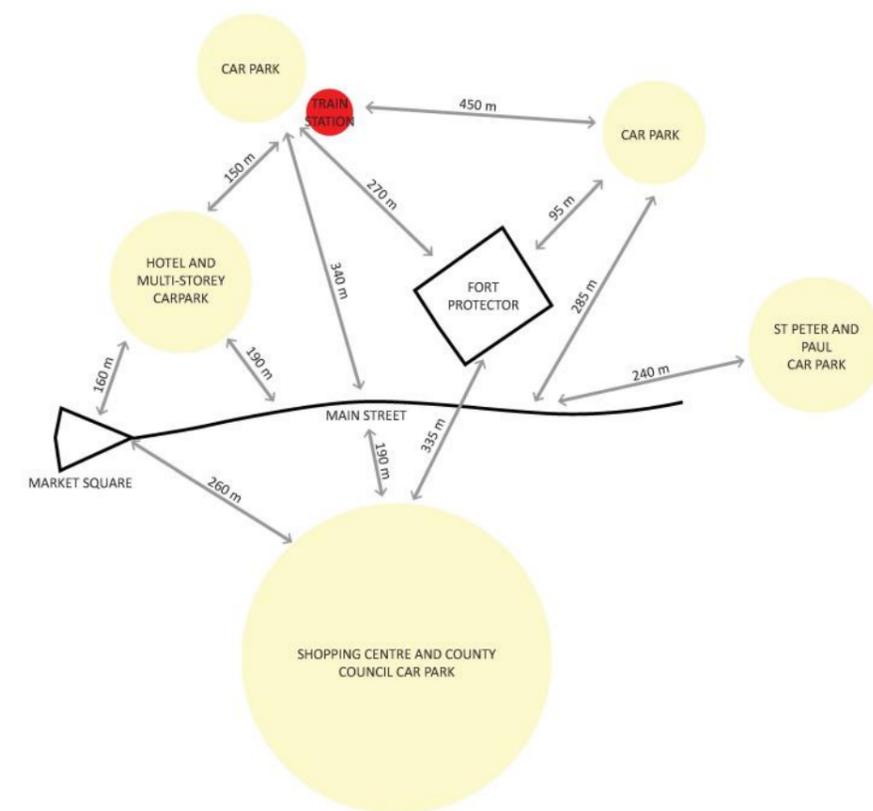
Traffic Cells – A system of traffic cells is proposed in order to address the issue of through-traffic on Main Street, which is also intended to improve pedestrian comfort along the Main Street. The Strategy proposes to prevent vehicular traffic between the junctions with Railway Street and Church Avenue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

Train Station Car parking – it is proposed that the Christian Brothers School 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 Abbyleix 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.



Car Parking Changes



Pedestrian Walking Distances within Portlaoise Town Centre

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-way carriageway. 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 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 Aras an Chontae is proposed from the Abbyleix Road; 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 Aras 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



Landscaping reference

05 / The Interventions

James Fintan Lalor Avenue (continued)

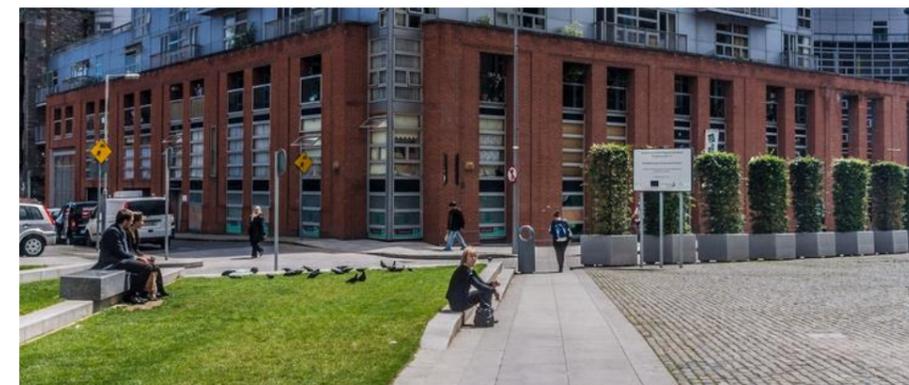
James Fintan Lalor Avenue presents the opportunity to introduce a green landscaped and programmed activity space through the central spine of Portlaoise Town Centre. The opportunity to divert the N80 via the Southern Circular Road facilitates the reduction of the 4-lane dual carriageway to a two-way road. The plan 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.

Outcomes

- Improved Health and Wellbeing
- 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

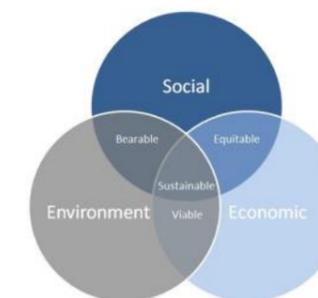
- James Fintan Lalor provides the largest Town Centre public space in Ireland
- Provides for a high quality urban designed environment
- Delivers a strong pedestrian connected place to link the new town centre with the traditional town core
- Extensive landscape provides for greening the Town Centre
- 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 user. The proposal seeks to create a linked landscaped place 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 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 park
- Possible development cluster adjacent to new building
- Kiosk opportunity within square
- Covered area at centre could facilitate a cafe



Market Square Dundalk



Landscaping reference

Key Physical Changes

The key components of the plan include the following;

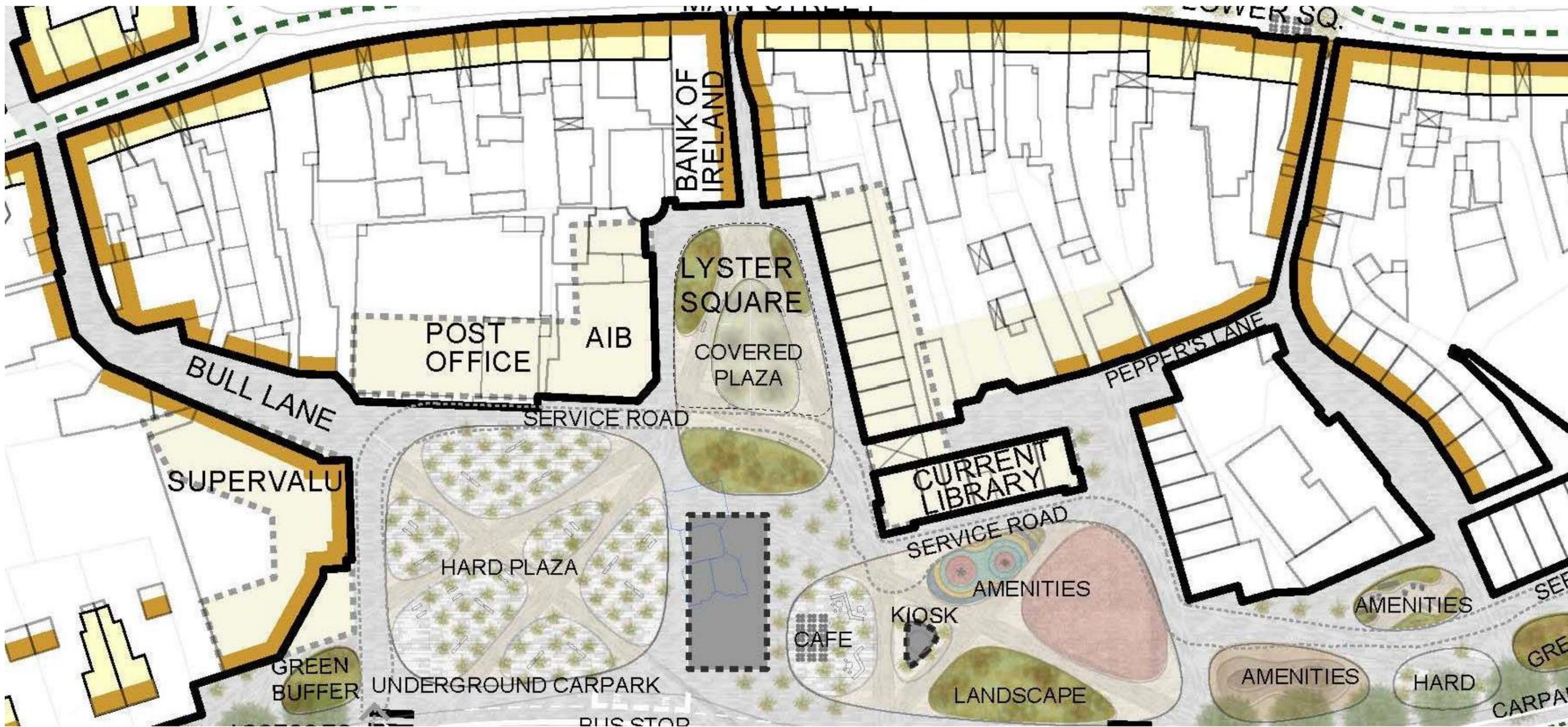
- Significant reduction in roadspace allocation
- The removal of the roundabout opposite Lyster Square
- Introduce Kiosk to Lyster Square
- Integrated hard and soft landscaping proposals



Landscaping reference



Landscaping reference



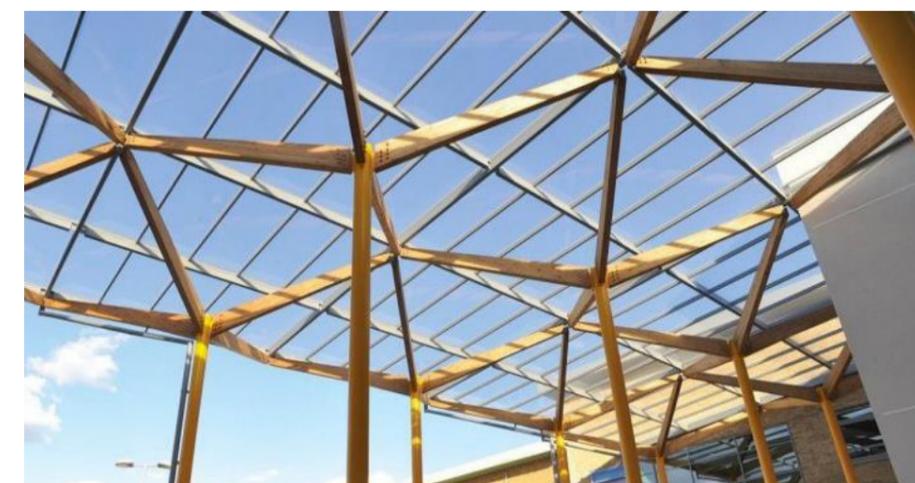
Lyster Square



Newbridge reference



Newmarket Square reference



Canopy reference

05 / The Interventions

Lyster Square (Continued)

Outcomes

- Improved Health & Wellbeing
- 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 park 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