

## 05 / The Interventions

### Market Square and Lower Square

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

### The Purpose of the Intervention

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

### Key Features of the Intervention

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

### Market Square

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

By reconfiguring the road from a roundabout to a staggered signalised junction the additional space acquired will be given back to the people of Portlaoise.

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

### Main Street

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

### Lower Square

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

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

### Contribution to the Guiding Principles

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



Mallow reference



Market Square / Main Street / Lower Square



Landscape Material reference



**Sustainability Indicators**

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

## 05 / The Interventions

### Market Square and Lower Square (Continued)

#### Outcomes

- Improved Health and 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



Clonakilty reference



Historical image of Market Square

#### Key Physical Changes

The key components of the plan include the following;

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



Historical image of Market Square and Grattan Street



Market Square 3D View

## 05 / The Interventions

### The Laneways

#### (Pepper's Lane, Lyster's Lane and Bull Lane)

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

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

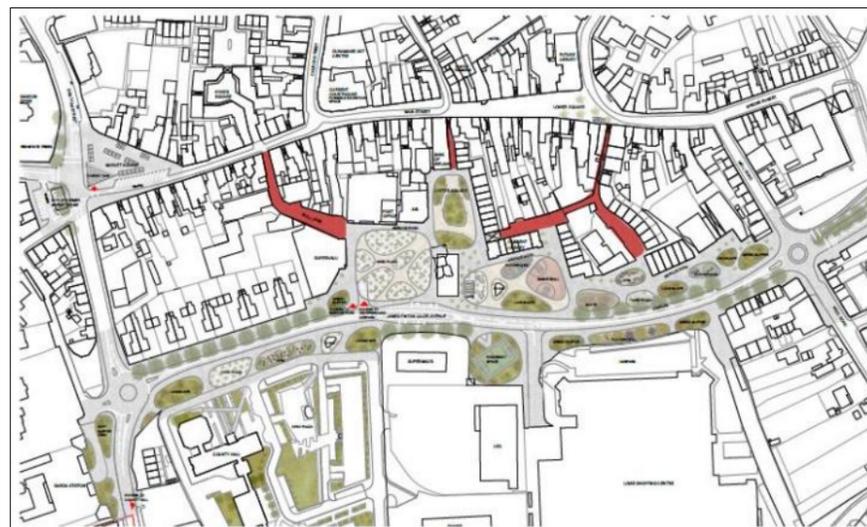
While Bull Lane functions as a street and is wider and relatively well lit the narrow and dark alley that is Lyster Lane will require to have a major upgrade to improve the pedestrian experience as well as increase the sense of a safe transition between the large public spaces at Market Square and Lyster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

### The Purpose of the Intervention

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

### Key Features of the Intervention

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



The Laneways



Hynds Square / Jessop Street Lane



Pepper's Lane

Lyster's Lane



ESB / County Hall Lane



Pepper's Lane

### Outcomes

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



Potential lighting option



Trespa Panelling



Corten Steel Panel



Sketch Proposal— Pepper’s Lane entrance at Lower Square

### Key Physical Changes

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

### Contribution to the Guiding Principles

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

### Notes

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

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

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

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



### Sustainability Indicators

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

## 05 / The Interventions

### General Street Improvements

The general presentation of many of the streets within Portlaoise Town Centre will require specific works to improve their general presentation within the public realm. The need to establish a higher overall standard of presentation for the individual buildings and streetscapes is identified as an essential part of a strategy to encourage local people and visitors to visit more often and for longer as well as a desire for linked trips for shoppers visiting the retail units to the south of James Fintan Lalor Avenue.

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

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

### The Purpose of the Intervention

The purpose of the proposed intervention at Portlaoise Town Centre is to enable the creation of an **Improved Public Realm**.

### Key Features of the Intervention

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



Lower Square

### Outcomes

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

### Key Physical Changes

The key components of the plan include the following;

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



Grattan Street



Church Street



Lower Square



Market Square

## Notes

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

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

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

## Contribution to the Guiding Principles

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



## Sustainability Indicators

Environment:	Positive Impact
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## 05 / The Interventions

### The Fort Protector — A Heritage Quarter

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

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

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

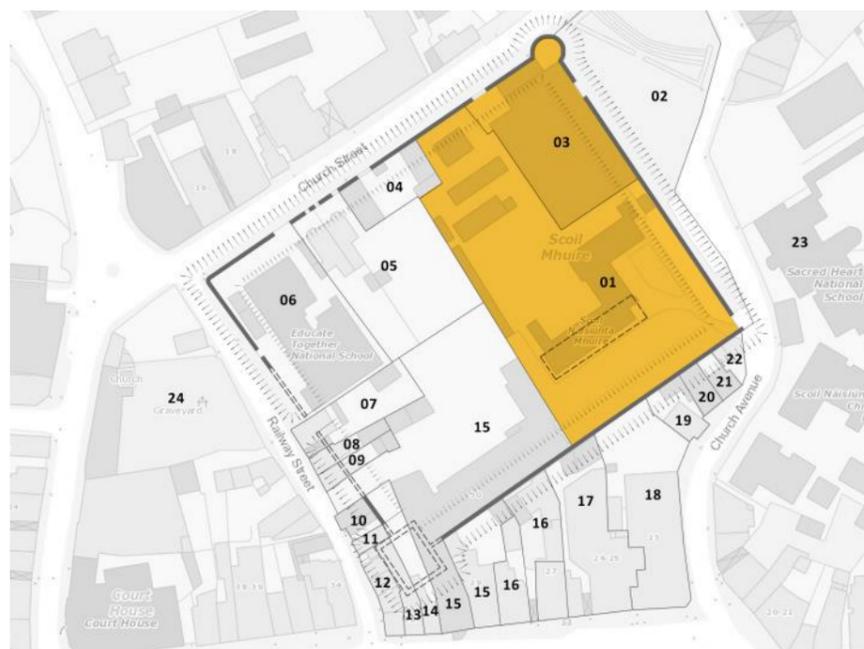
#### Potential of a Restored Fort

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

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

#### Potential for Assembly of a Heritage Site within the Fort

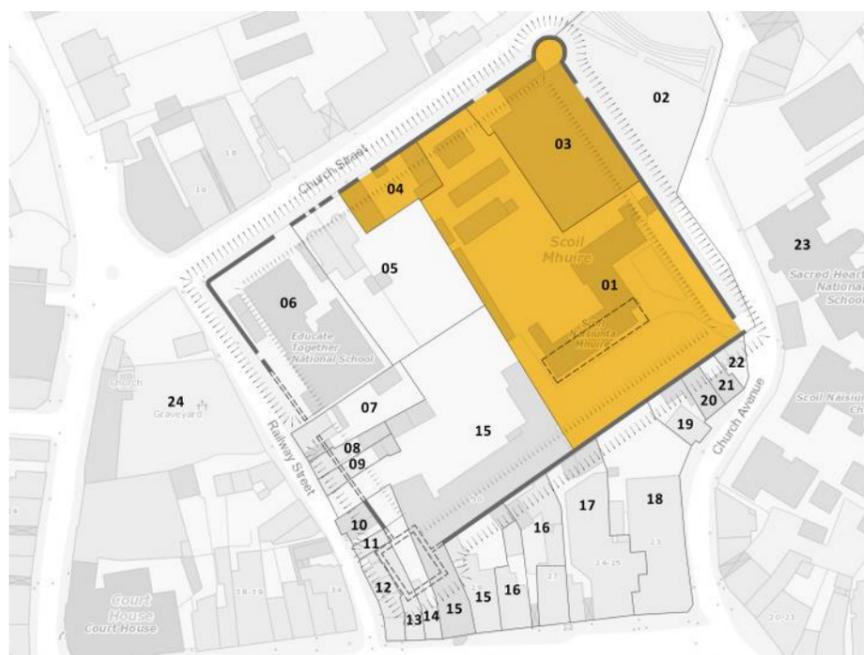
The development of the interior of the fort as a visitor attraction and part of the public realm would necessitate a degree of amalgamation of sites. The following five options might be explored:



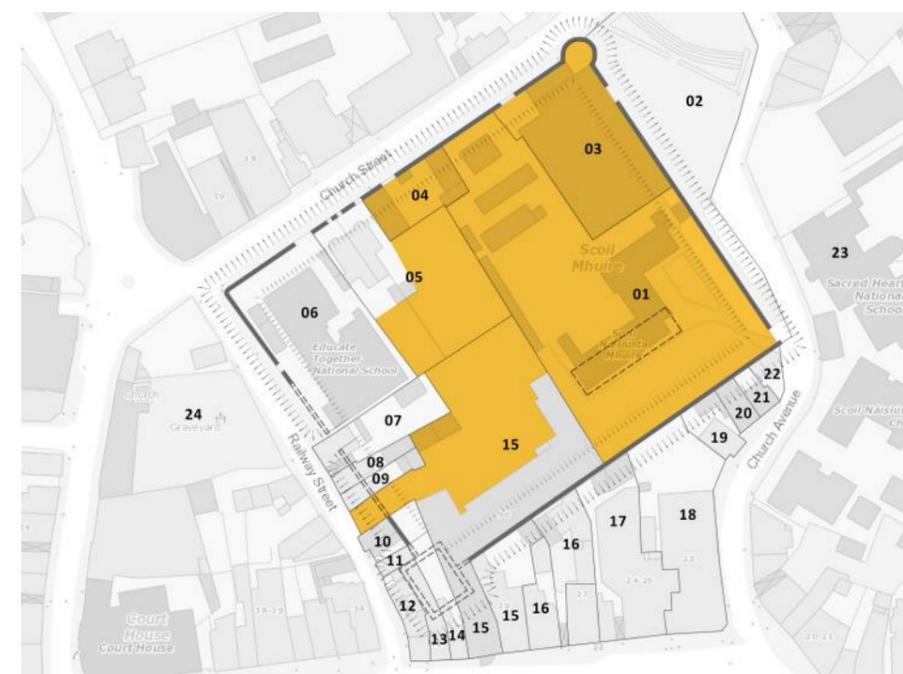
**Option 1: Amalgamation of the former Odlum's and Scoil Mhuire sites (Sites 01 and 03) would reinstate an open space of almost half the extent of the historic fort.**



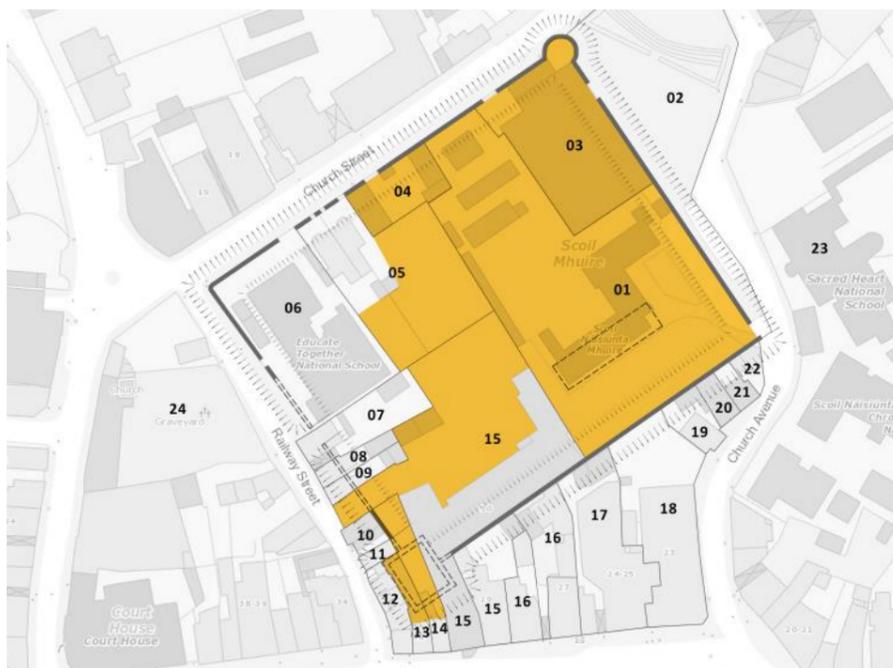
**Option 3: With the agreement of O'Loughlin's Hotel, the hotel car park might be reconfigured to give access to the fort interior from Railway Street. This entry point would enable a route connecting Old St Peter's churchyard into the experience, and would enhance the understanding of the scale and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



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



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



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



### Presence within the Town

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

### Use of the Fort Interior

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

### Exterior Walls and Fosse

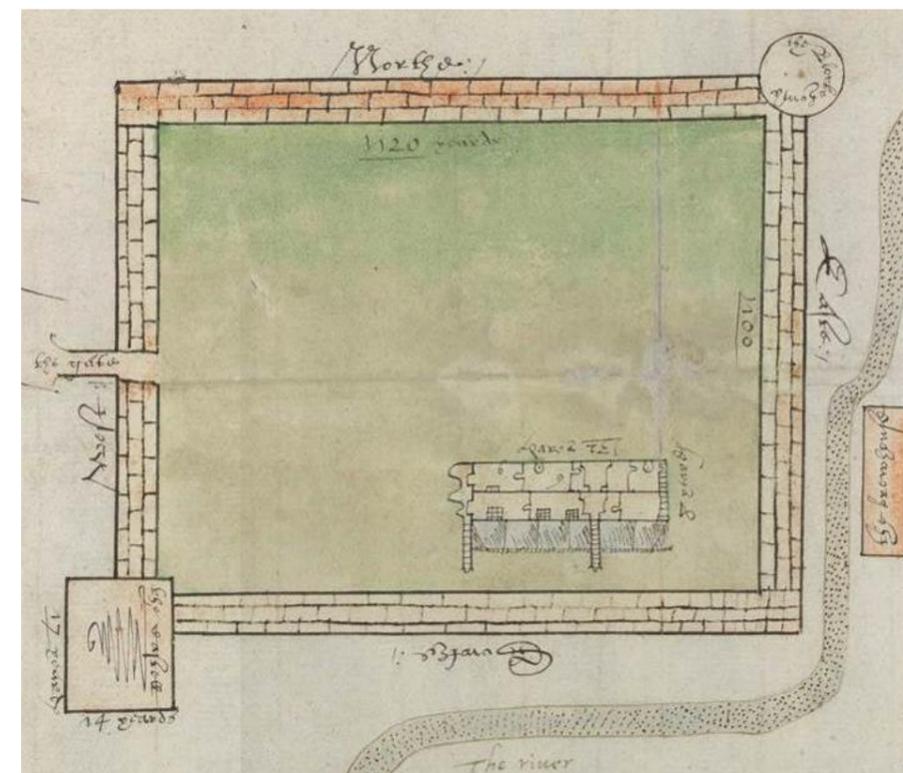
The long frontage at Fitzmaurice Place presents an opportunity to recreate the defensive ditch, which would enable the Fort wall to be presented in its original form as a military fortification. This would enhance the understanding of the fort and appreciation of its significance.

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

### Connectivity to the wider town centre

The development of the Fort Protector as a heritage attraction could form part of a 'chain' of heritage sites across the northern side of the town centre [cross reference to piece on Ridge graveyard]. This could consist of the following components.

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



## 05 / The Interventions

### The Exposure of Cultural Heritage

#### Character Areas

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

Character Area 1: Fort Protector

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

Character Area 3: Railway station and CBS lands

Character Area 4: Church Avenue and Fitzmaurice Place

Character Area 5: River Triogue and Ridge Graveyard

Character Area 6: Bridge Street and Well Road

Character Area 7: Main Street

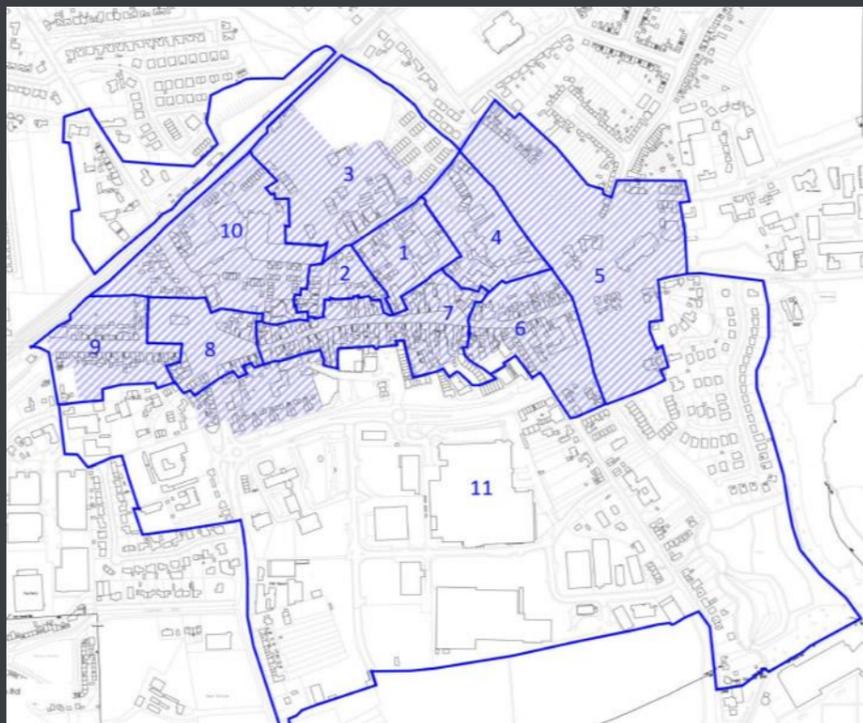
Character Area 8: Market Square

Character Area 9: Grattan Street

Character Area 10: Coote Street and Heritage Hotel

Character Area 11: Modern expansion to south

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



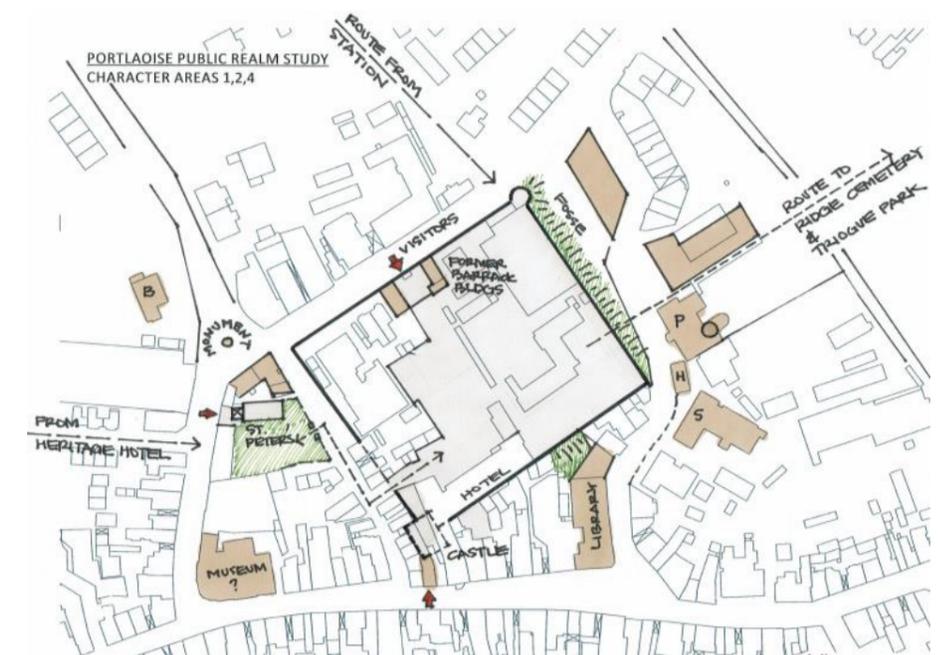
#### Interventions for Areas 1 and 2

Restoration of the Fort Protector

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

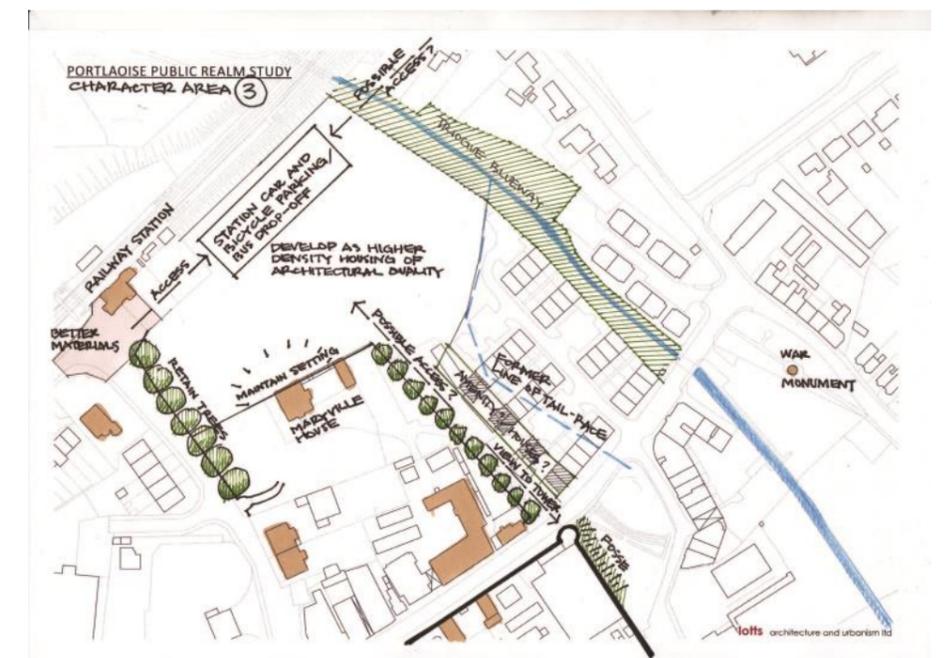
Link connecting the Old St Peter's Churchyard to Church Street and to Fort Protector

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



#### Interventions for Area 3

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



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

#### Improve setting of Railway Station building

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

### Interventions for Areas 4 and 5

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

- Purpose: This route would be a part of a proposed 'chain' of heritage sites to north of the town centre, creating a walking route which would link Church Street and the Old Gaol - the Old St Peter's Churchyard - the Fort Protector - the Presentation Convent - Triogue linear park - War monument park - Ridge Burial Ground - Portleix House - SS Peter and Paul Church.
- Key Features: The route would pass through the existing archway in the Fitzmaurice Place housing, cross the carpark to the rear and the Triogue into the proposed linear park, ramp up to the level of the Ridge Road, opening onto it at the eastern end of the war monument park; A new pedestrian crossing in alignment with the pedestrian route into St John's Square housing along the north-western edge of the Ridge, allowing a direct connection from the war monument park across the Ridge Road; A new entrance into the Ridge Burial Ground at its western corner. This would involve a breach in the cemetery wall and a flight of steps inside the graveyard, which would require careful design and close archaeological monitoring.

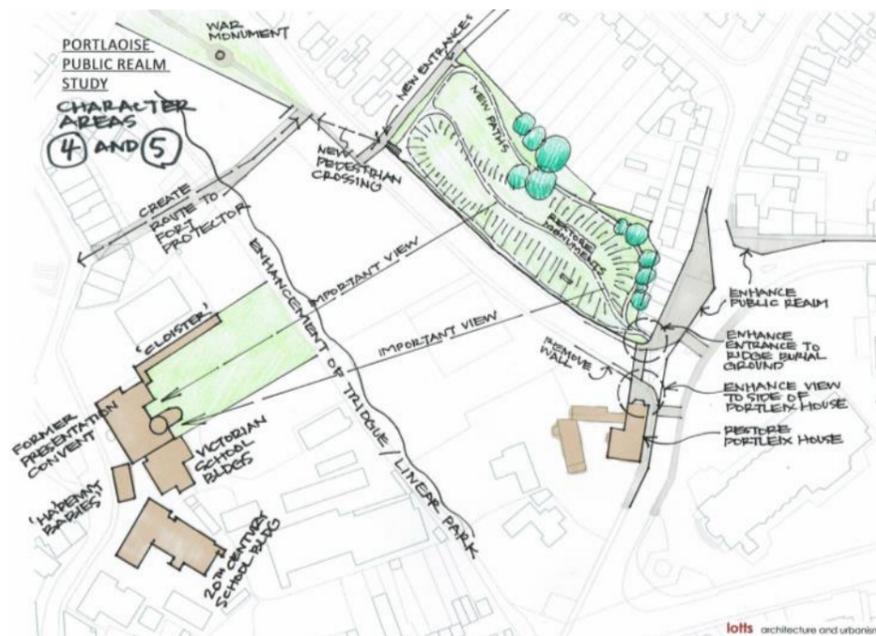
- Outcomes: Physical linkage of three sites which are linked historically as part of the foundation story of the town; Visual and physical connection between the war monument and htre Ridge; Amenity of high quality for the town, which would strengthen the proposals for a Triogue linear park and the improvement of the Ridge Burial Ground.

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

Purpose: To take advantage of an historic site of great inherent potential, currently misused for anti-social behaviour.

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

Note: Views to the former Presentation Convent building from the paths at the base



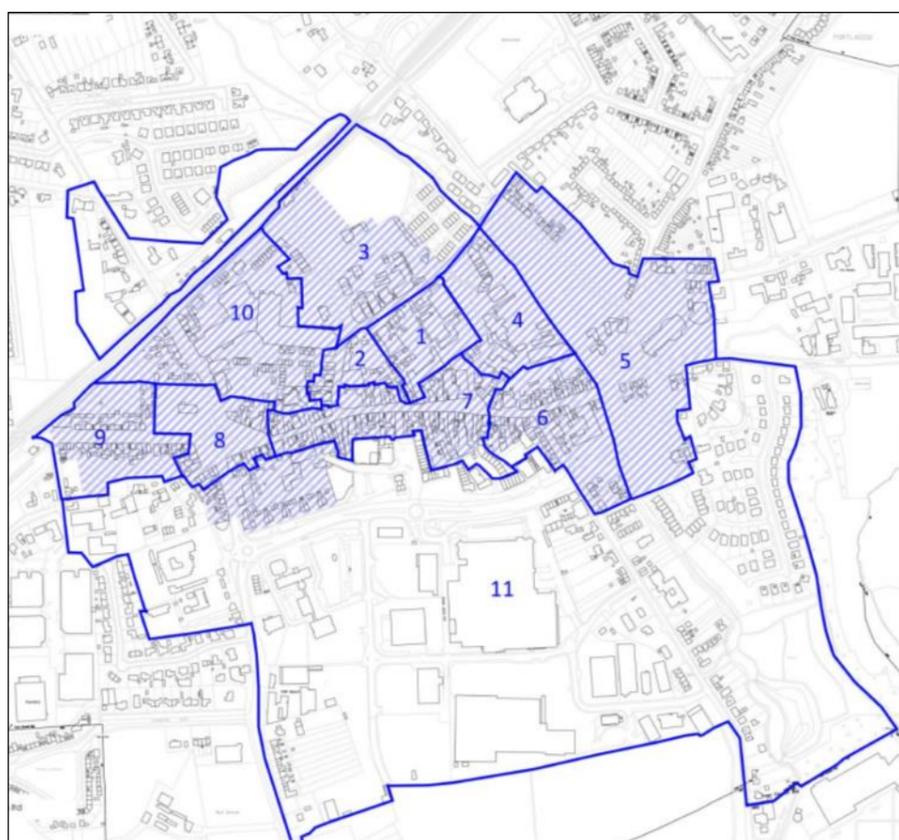
and crest of the Ridge should be preserved in future development of the parish and Presentation Order lands which lie between.

#### Upgrade Junction of Ridge Road and Dublin Road

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

## 05 / The Interventions

### The Exposure of Cultural Heritage (Continued)



The Character Areas

#### Interventions for Area 6

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

#### Interventions for Area 7

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

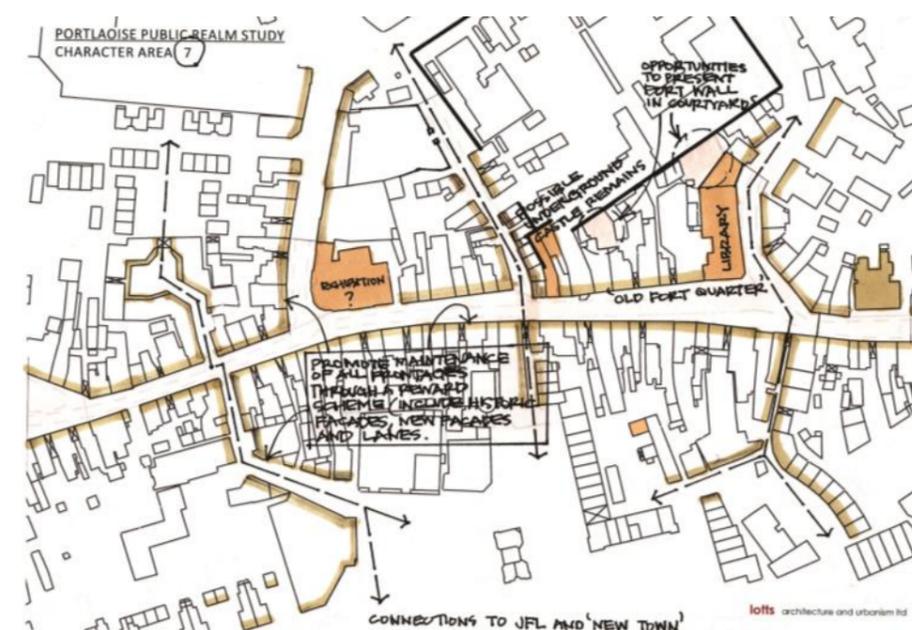
- Purpose: To create a vibrant urban space largely free of traffic in the historic core of the town.
- Key Features: Pedestrianise Main Street between Church Avenue and Railway Street with improved lighting, planting and signage; Upgrade facades, ground surfaces and lighting in Pepper Lane and Lyster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

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

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

Promote improved presentation of buildings in the public realm.

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





### Interventions for Areas 9 and 10

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

### Interventions for Area 11

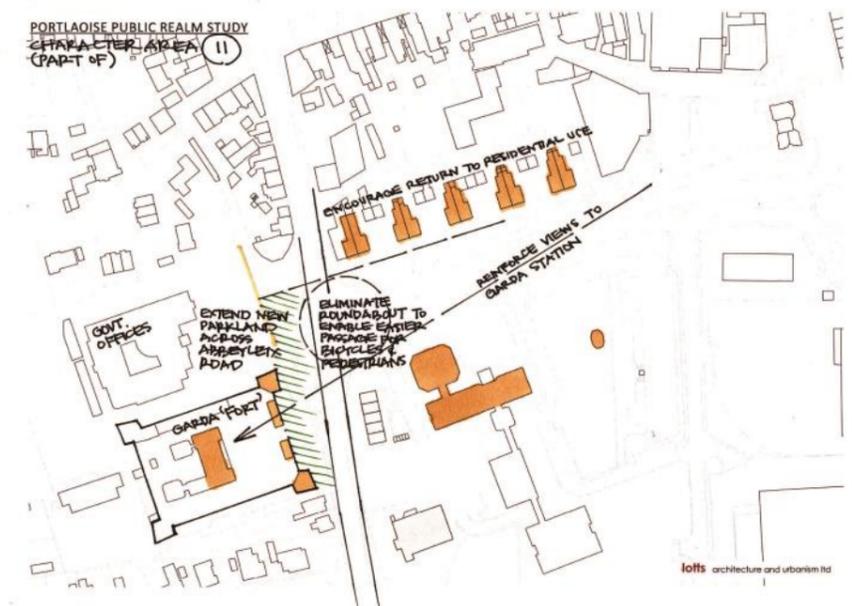
Enhancement of Setting of County Hall

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

### Interventions for Area 8

Redesign of the Market Square

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



## 05 / The Interventions

### Main Street / Lower Square Traffic Cells

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

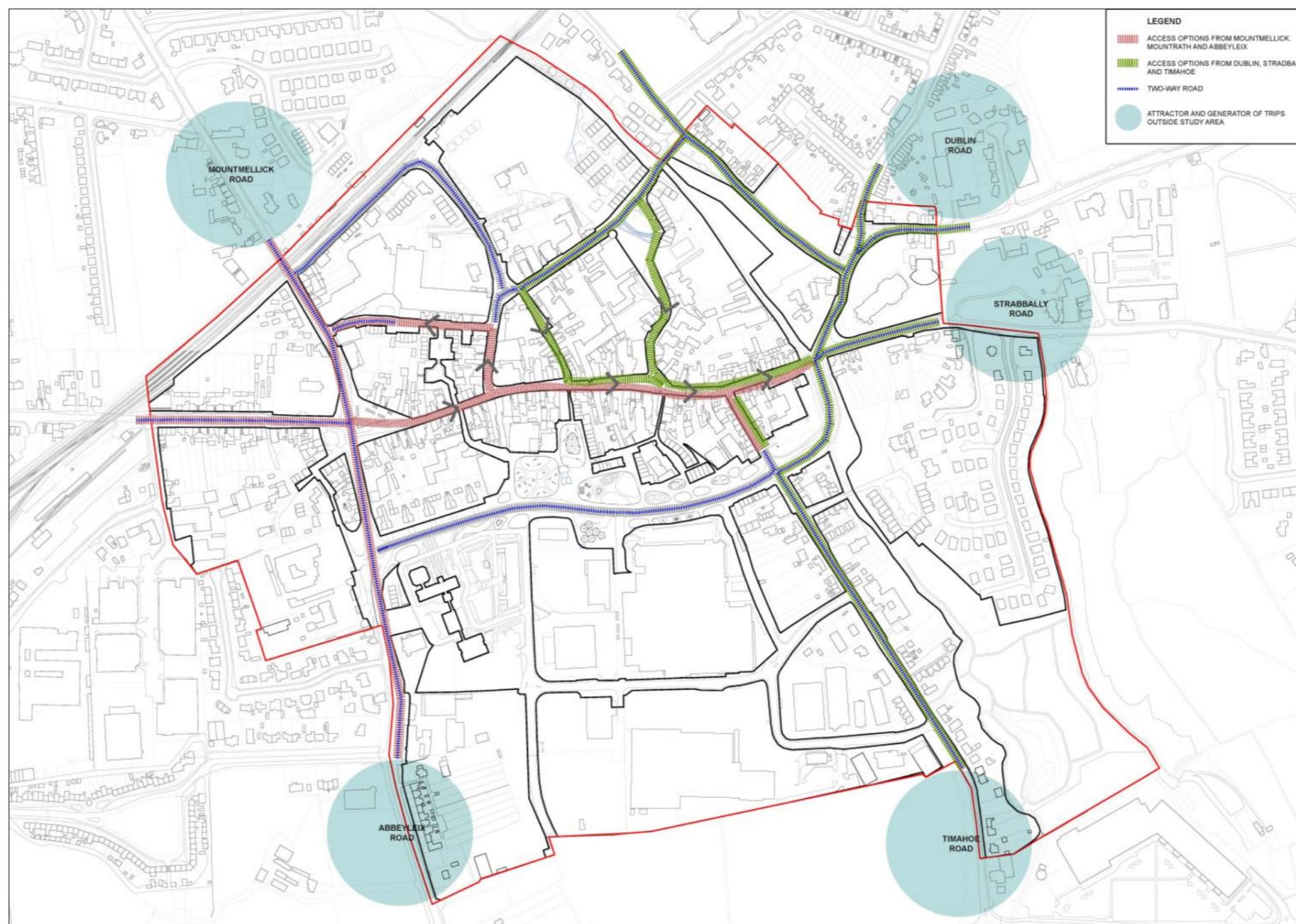
The strategy proposes to prevent vehicular traffic between the junctions with Railway Street and Church Avenue. Out-of-hours traffic movements are deemed positive (19:00-07:00), as they increase passive surveillance and safety, as well as allowing for Main Street's servicing requirements. Retractable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

### The Purpose of the Intervention

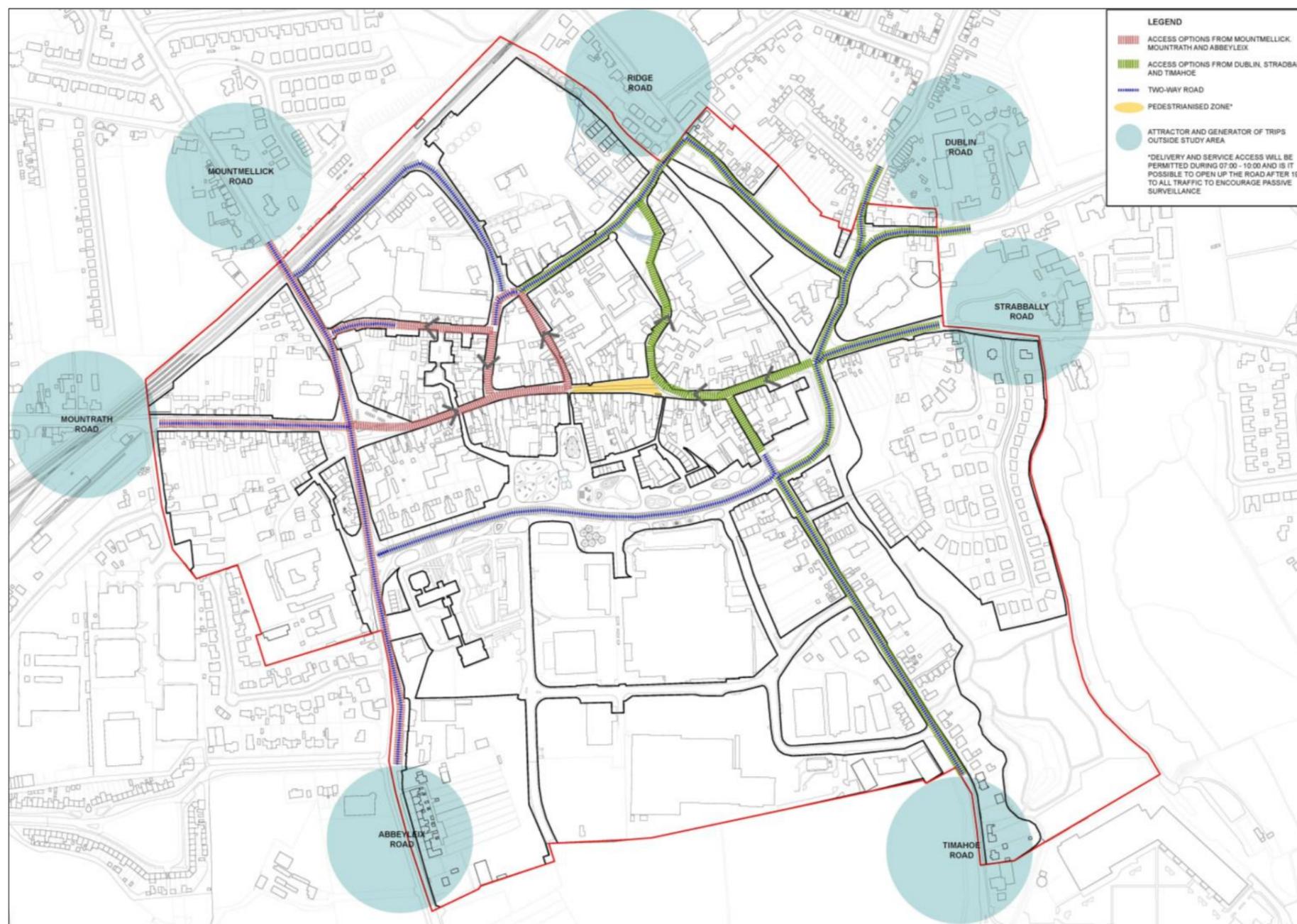
The purpose of the proposed intervention at Main Street and Lower Square is to enable a reduction in through traffic and seek to make Main Street a more pedestrian friendly place. This intervention provides a real opportunity to make Lower Square a people rather than a contested space.

### Key Features of the Intervention

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



The Existing Traffic Cells



The Proposed Traffic Cells

### Contribution to the Guiding Principles

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

### Outcomes

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

### Key Physical Changes

The key components of the plan include the following;

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

### Sustainability Indicators

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



## 05 / The Interventions

### The Convent, CBS and Parish Lands

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

### The Purpose of the Intervention

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

### Key Features of the Intervention

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

### The Convent, CBS and Parish Lands

#### The Opportunity

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

#### The Strategy

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

#### Site Constraints

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

#### Exemplar

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

### Outcomes

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



The Old Presentation Convent, Church Avenue, Portlaoise



McCauley Place, Naas, Co Kildare



Maryville, Railway Street, Portlaoise



### The Convent, CBS and Parish Lands at Portlaoise Town Centre

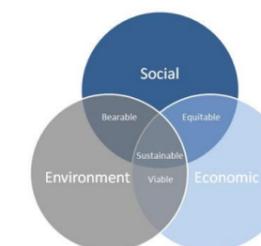
Note; This layout is intended to illustrate where new development might occur within the sites and is not intended to identify a capacity as there are a number of protected structures and natural assets along with a flood risk issue on the River Triogue which will impact on site density and capacity.

### Contribution to the Guiding Principles

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

### Sustainability Indicators

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



## 05 / The Interventions

### The River Triogue Blueway

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

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

### The Purpose of the Intervention

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

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

### Key Features of the Intervention

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

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

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

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

### Key Physical Changes

The key components of the Strategy include the following:

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



The Triogue Blueway Route



Example of surface treatment



Example of riverside walks

## Outcomes

The principal outcomes will be as follows:

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

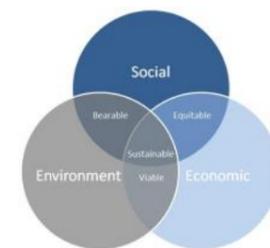


Example of surface treatment

## Contribution to the Guiding Principles

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

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



## Sustainability Indicators

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

## 06 / Portlaoise 3D Model

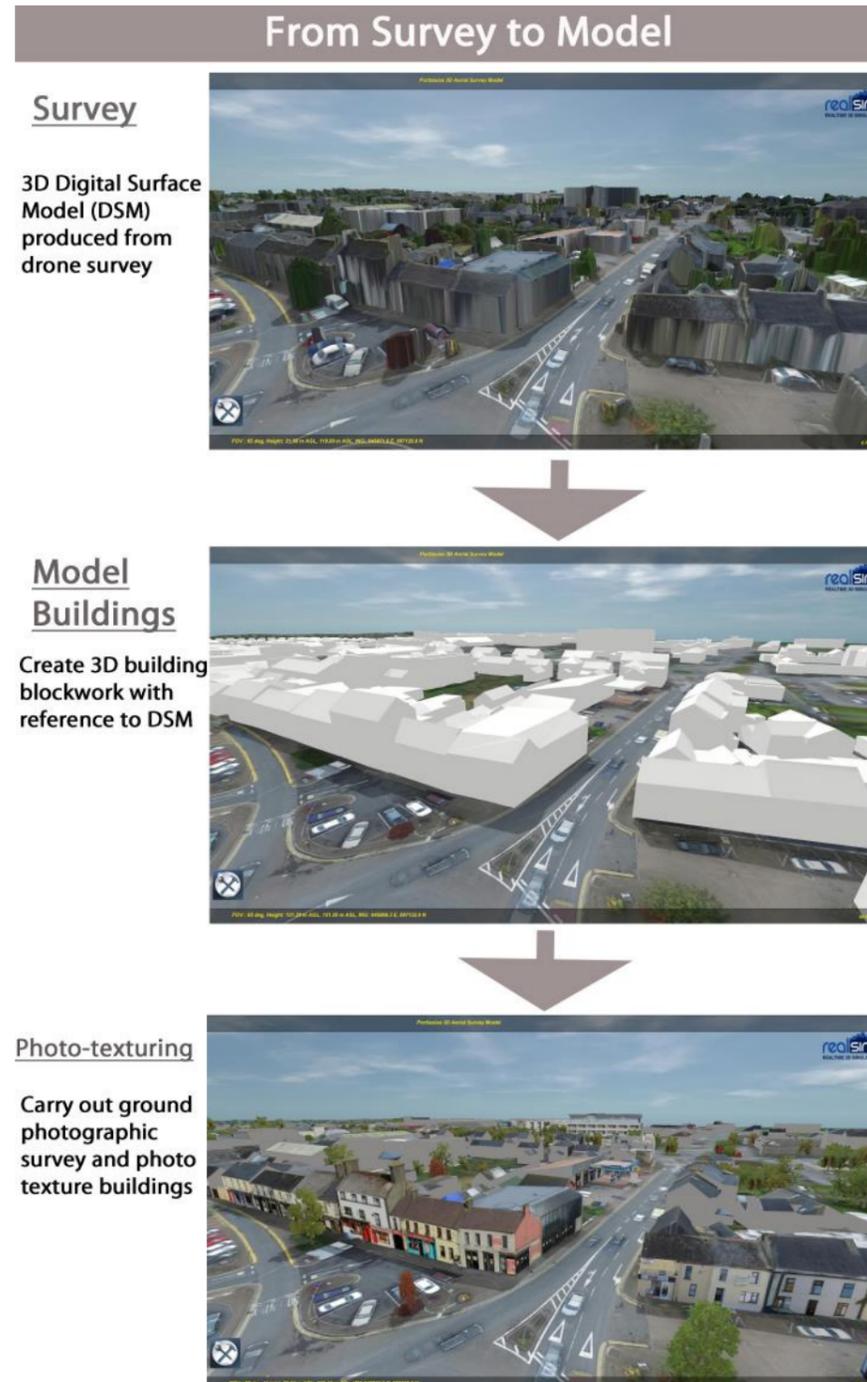
### Introduction

A key requirement of the Strategy is the development of a digital 3D model of Portlaoise to facilitate the effective planning and communication of a proposed vision for the Town. The model created also represents a valuable 3D map and digital record of the Town as it stands today.

### Model Compilation

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

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



### Model Use

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

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

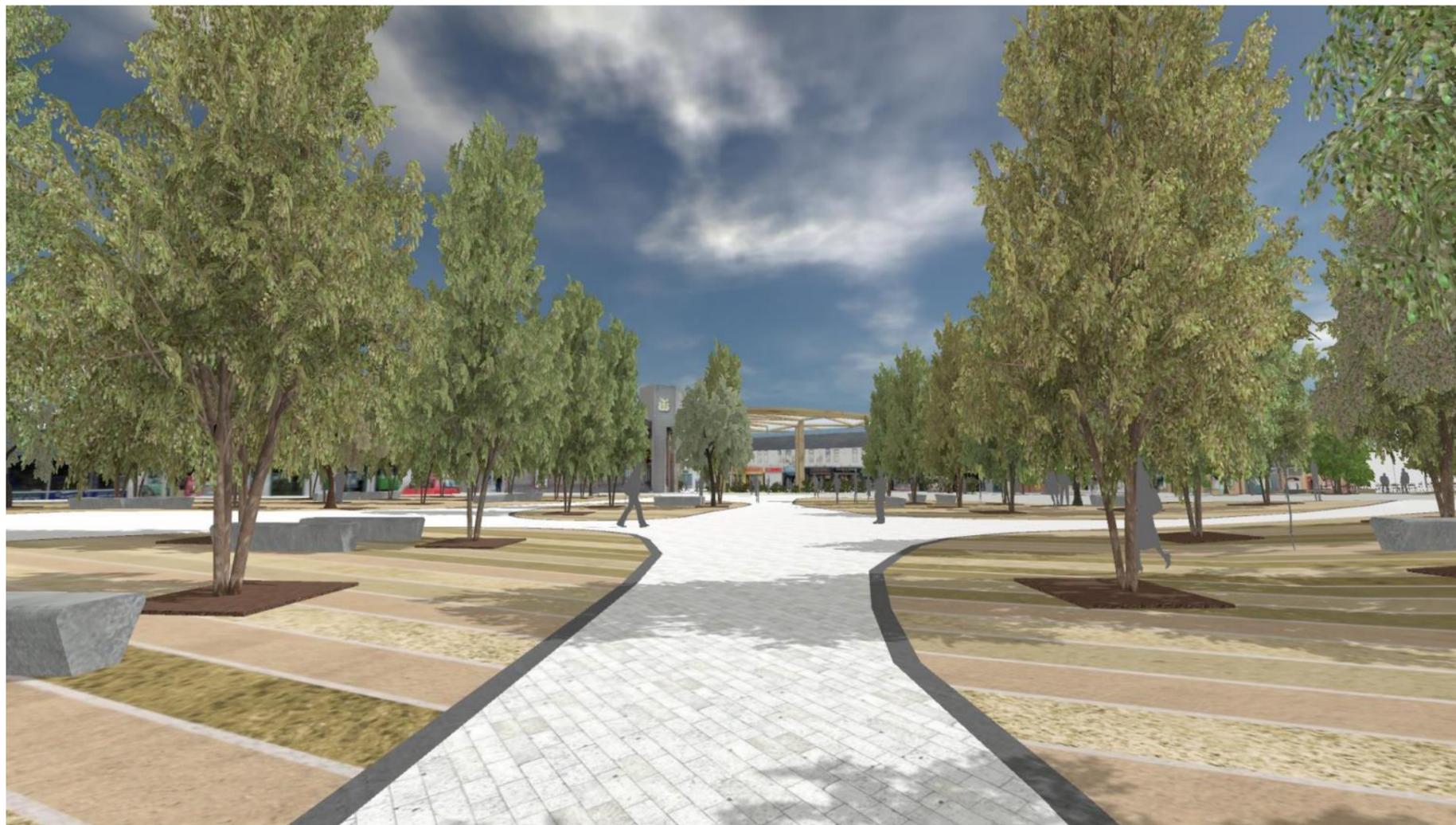
The model has a life span far beyond this Strategy and is now a valuable digital asset for the Council which can be used by technical and non-technical people alike to assess any potential new building, landscape or infrastructure development in the Town in the future.

### Project Outputs

The deliverables for this project are;

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

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



Views from the 3D Model (Existing)

## 07 / The Policies

### Planning Context of Strategy

#### Introduction

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

#### Laois County Development Plan 2011–2017

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

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

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

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

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

#### Draft Laois County Development Plan 2017–2023

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

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

#### Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2012-2018

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

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

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

#### National Spatial Strategy (NSS) 2002-2020

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

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

#### Midland Regional Planning Guidelines, 2010-2022

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

#### Laois Economic and Community Plan, 2016-2021

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



## 07 / The Policies

### Introduction

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

## A Toolkit for re-occupation

### The residential opportunity locations

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

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

### The Properties

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

In many cases these family businesses and homes were occupied up until the 1990’s after James Fintan Lalor Avenue had opened, by which time the tide was irreversible. There are still a small number of units which are occupied as residences on Market Square and Main Street. However, there are a total of 20 public houses and 3 night clubs currently trading between Market Square, Main Street, Lower Square and Bridge Street.

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

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

### The Issues

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

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

There are other practical considerations that will need to be considered in the case of the reoccupation of Town Centre properties including:

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

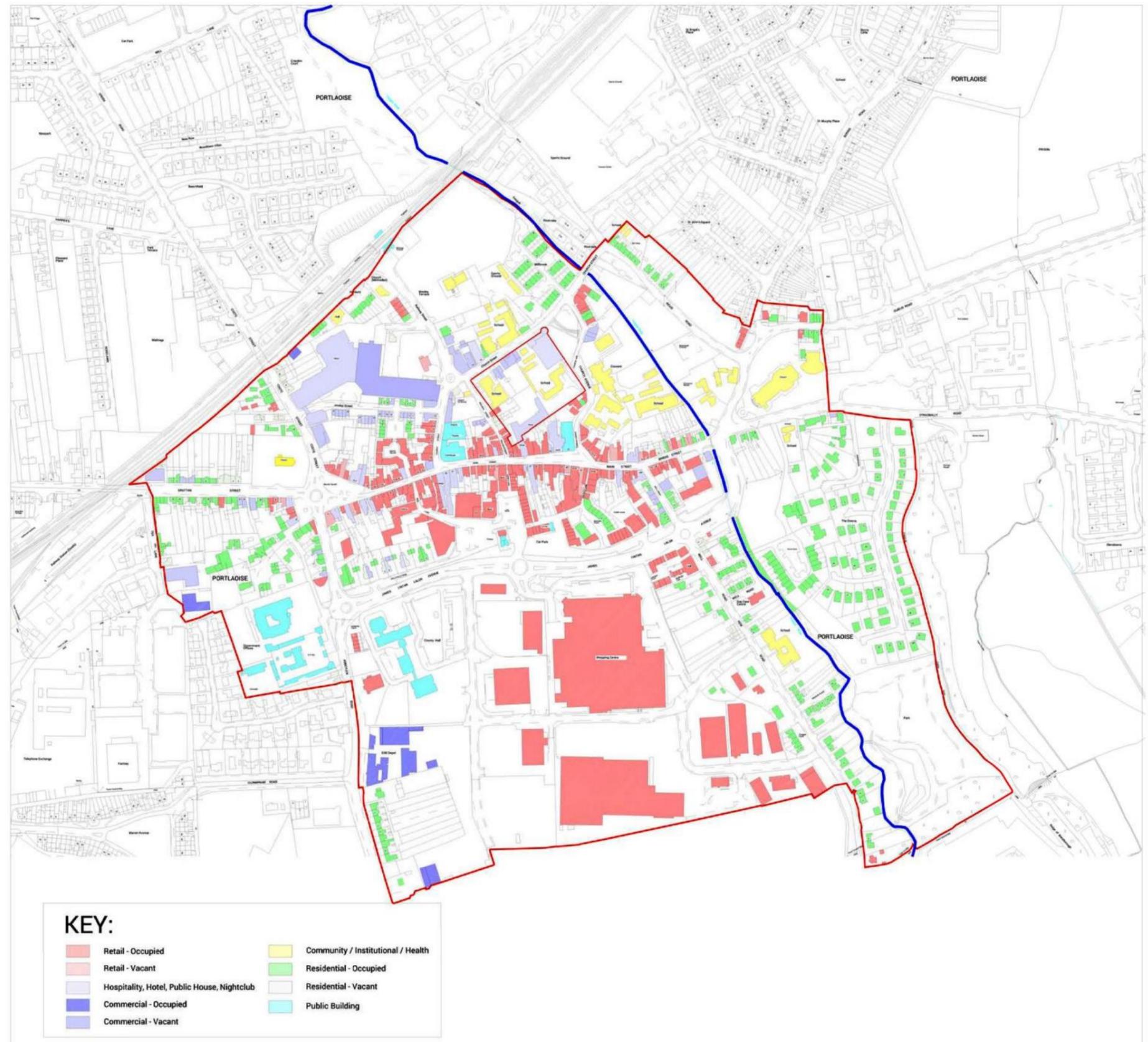
## The Toolkit

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

## Grant Funding

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

Advice could also be provided in relation to development contribution reduction schemes. There are also shopfront grants schemes which provide for a contribution to the cost of replacing both damaged and unattractive as well as inappropriate and in some cases unauthorised existing shopfronts.



**Existing Uses at Ground Floor Level**

