

ASKEATON PUBLIC REALM PLAN



Comhairle Cathrach
& Contae **Luimnigh**

Limerick City
& County Council

CONTENTS

1.0 Introduction	8
Summary	8
Vision and objectives	10
Methodology and process	12
Co creation and engagement	14
2.0 Context	16
Location and landscape	16
Historical development	17
Spatial qualities	18
Trends	18
3.0 Public realm	22
The Deel River Park	24
Squares and Main Street	42
A sustainable green infrastructure	62
4.0 Delivery plan	72
5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations	74



Figure no. 1: Site visit with stakeholders

Limerick City and County Council

Gordon Daly
Thomas Joyce
Gerard O Connor
Sarah McCutcheon
Grainne McMahon

Director of Service
Project Leader
Area Engineer
County Archaeologist
Senior Executive Architect (focus on derelict and vacant buildings)

REDScape Landscape & Urbanism team

Patrick Mc Cabe
Fatemeh Hosseinimoghaddam
Manuel Smalis
Bas Poppe

Landscape architect
Architect
Landscape architect
Traffic design

PART I

What makes Askeaton so unique in terms of its history, landscape and built heritage?

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Askeaton is a small town with an active community, located along the River Deel at the Shannon Estuary, approximately 25km west of Limerick city and just south of the N69 Limerick to Tralee Road. Its spatial heritage is rooted at the strategic intersection of the Deel River and an east west crossing. Earliest occupation is at its centre where an island castle stands prominently, with nearby a Franciscan Friary and to the east a Church with a Templar tower.

The town extended eastwards and westwards along the Main Road, where it formed a 19th century Main Street, with two distinctive spaces, locally known as East and West Squares, which still forms the historical core of the town to this day. Askeaton has many attributes not least the beauty of its surrounding landscape, the Deel River estuary, and proximity to Curraghchase, the site of an extensive forest park. The town boasts many local clubs and organisations including Askeaton Civic Trust, Askeaton Historical Society, Askeaton Tidy Towns as well as GAA, Rugby and soccer clubs and a leisure centre with a swimming pool.

Askeaton faces many changes which will impact its future development including a carbon neutral and increasingly online economy. These changes provide challenges but offer significant opportunities to future-proof the town and its public realm. Public realm is essentially the glue that holds a town together; the streets, the parks the rivers, but also that aspect of a town's landscape that shape its appearance and impacts the day to day lives of its residents; the views, mobility, the appearance of properties, places to sit, rest or come together for celebrations. The question at hand is how the public realm can be shaped to accommodate the changing needs of the town and make it more sustainable, green and inclusive?

The public realm plan examines this question by looking in detail at what makes the town so unique in terms of its

history, landscape and built heritage. It then focuses on three main areas: The Main Street, the Deel River Park and the overall structure of the town. Each of these areas is analysed to establish its challenges, and then elaborated to provide design principles and proposals for adaptation and transformation of these spaces. The process is carried out as a co creation with residents, stakeholders and Limerick City and County Council (LCCC). Finally, a delivery and phasing plan is developed to demonstrate how the projects can be incrementally rolled out with the active support of residents, stakeholders and LCCC.



Figure no. 2: Location of Bruff in the region



Figure no. 3: Historical development of Askeaton

Vision and objectives

The vision for Askeaton celebrates the unique and intrinsic qualities of the place, its past, and its people. It recognises the changing needs of Askeaton and proposes a sustainable, green, and inclusive public realm. By reflecting these needs, it aspires to improve the quality of life for its residents and contribute to the overall prosperity of the town and locality. To complete this vision a series of aims and objectives were formulated as a basis for exploring and developing the public realm, together with its residents and representatives. These are listed below.

- Assess existing town circulation (both pedestrian & vehicular) and consider how these may be improved.
- Assess existing walking routes / trails around the town and consider opportunities for improvements / new additions / connections / extensions /
- Assess the existing streetscape and associated infrastructure (street furniture, overhead wires, signage, lighting) and provide proposals on improvements to include traffic calming, car parking areas, road width reductions, etc.
- Assess and review information/interpretation/signage as viewed by a tourist/visitor.
- Assess the impression of the approach roads into the town and provide advice on how these can be enhanced.
- Assess planting within the overall study area and make recommendations on same.
- Assessment and proposals to improve the viability of the east and west square and improved connectivity between the two. The plan should define the character of each square and their role in relation to the town, including economic and social roles.
- Assessment of the relationship between the town and the River Deel. Provide opportunities for improved interaction between the town and the river for the residents and visitors to the town.
- Review of resident / visitor parking within town centre and provide opportunities for increased visitor parking with regard to the opening of Askeaton Castle in 2021.
- Opportunities for backland development local to the town centre.



Figure no. 4: Site visit with stakeholders to Askeaton Castle

Methodology and process

The Public Realm plan for Askeaton was commenced in October 2020 and was commissioned by Limerick City and County Council. The plan was carried out by REDscape Landscape and Urbanism, a landscape architect led company comprising multidisciplinary teams (of urbanists, planners, architects’ ecologists, engineers) with experience in delivering public realm and urban projects in Ireland and internationally.

The process in the adjacent diagram was undertaken in close collaboration with the LCCC , Askeaton’s residents and a local steering group comprised of key representatives over a 6-month period.

A number of important studies have been prepared for the development of the town and its surroundings which are statutory and are listed below. The Askeaton Public Realm Masterplan is not a repetition of these documents, but a development of their aims and objectives and although not statutory is cognizant of their requirements. These include The Askeaton Local Area Plan (2015 – 2021), A Community Plan (2020-24) and other non- statutory studies and inputs such as Tidy Towns Grading Report (2019) and a study for the riverside walk as part of the Outdoor Recreation Scheme (2020).

In combination with these statutory documents a wider research included looking at local heritage websites, tourist sites, cartographic material including soils, geology, flooding, topographic maps, planning maps and domestic news issues affecting the public realm.



Figure no. 5: Plan process for project

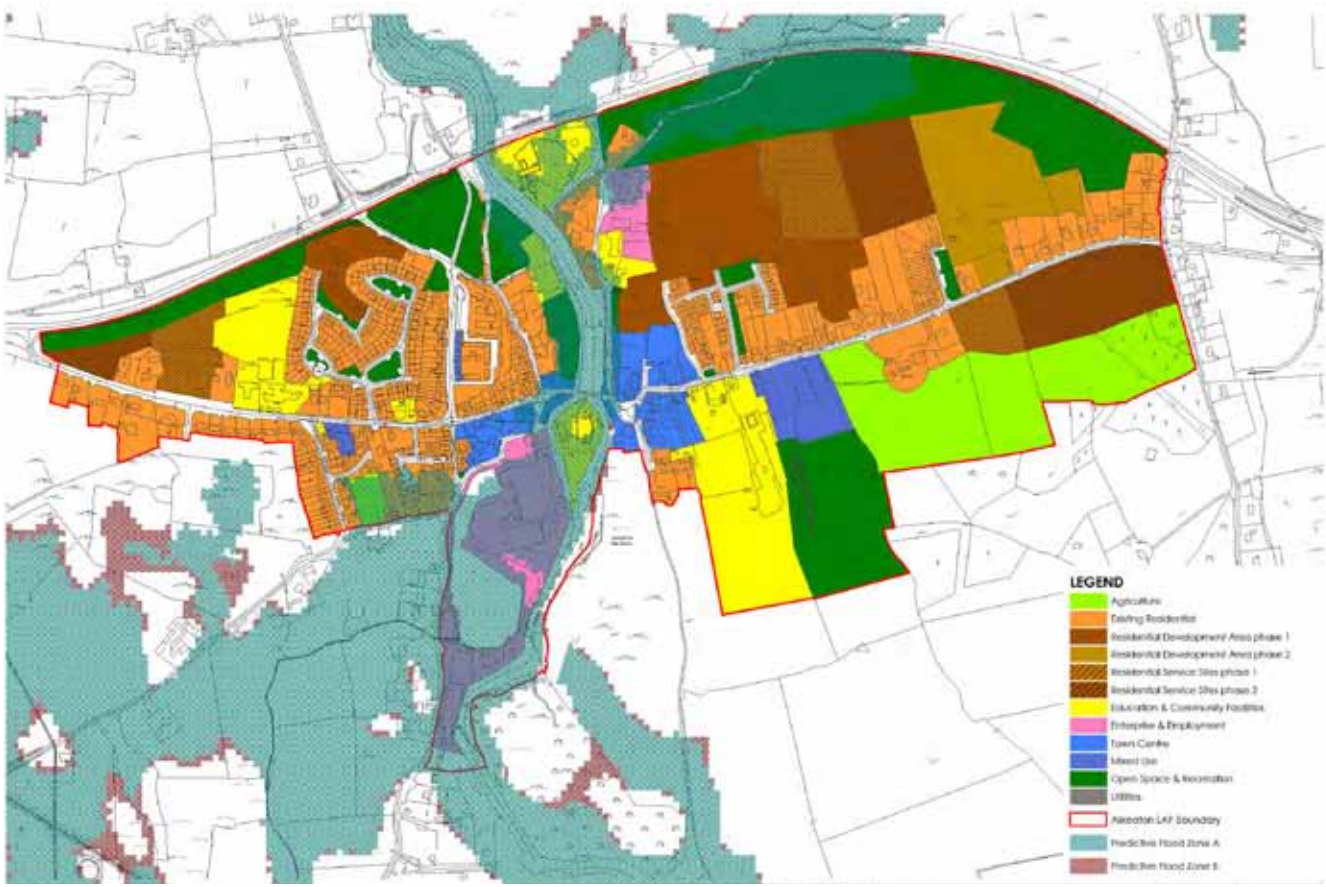


Figure no. 6: Askeaton Local Area Plan, 2015-2021

Co creation and engagement

The brief was formulated by Limerick City and County Council following ongoing engagement with the local community. REDscape Landscape and Urbanism was appointed in October 2020. The company applies a research through design approach, in which ideas are co-created through analysis, sketching and discourse with stakeholders.

An inception meeting was held in October 2020, which set out the main objectives of the project. An initial analysis of themes and a map for a site visit was prepared which defined the task in more detail.

The first public consultation was organized in December 2020 around a site visit with resident representatives, the council and different experts who walked the town and surrounding areas. The site visit was undertaken with strict adherence to the Covid 19 health guidance at the time. Key stakeholders discussed their Ideas, ambitions, and intentions, which were documented.

Subsequent bilateral workshops with LCCC were carried out to discuss technical issues of traffic, dereliction, and other requirements for the public realm in general.

In February 2021, a midway workshop was held with LCCC and its representatives to present the analysis, first concepts and design principles. Several ideas emerged in relation to parking which required further research internally to estimate feasibility.

In March 2021, a meeting was held with LCCC to present the draft public plans to disseminate the design principles and concepts to them and key stakeholders based on the comments received in the first workshop. In the interim two additional meetings were held to examine the issues of underwiring, traffic and parking.

In April, a second public workshop was held. Members of the public and key stakeholders were invited to give their

feedback on a draft of the public realm plan, the proposed projects, and alterations. This event was well attended (virtual event) and provided a valuable opportunity for residents to share their comments and views. The focus group of residents continued to engage with the consultants till the end of the project. This was followed by a 6-week consultation period to ensure all comments were captured and integrated into the proposals.

In June 2021, the report was finalized and presented to all the residents as a co creation. The ownership of the project rests with the residents of Askeaton with the support of LCCC.



Figure no. 7: Images of site visit



Figure no. 8 Site visit map

2.0 CONTEXT

Location and landscape

Askeaton is a small town (population 1137, Census 2016) located approximately 25km west of Limerick city, just south of the N69 Limerick to Tralee Road. It is located approximately 10km north of the town of Rathkeale. The strategic Regional Road (R518) connects Askeaton to Rathkeale. Askeaton has a relatively young population with a significant settled community of Travellers.

The bedrock geology of Askeaton is limestone over which layers of glacial drifts have been laid down to form its current landscape. The geomorphology and soils of Askeaton reflect this history. The melting of glacial drifts formed glacial rivers which deposited sands and gravels as found along the Deel. The river also exposed outcrops of bedrock, which were suitable locations to build on, such as Askeaton Castle and the Friary. Fine loamy

soils (excellent for farming) and clayey drifts were laid down post glacial. Field patterns show a clear distinction between the dynamic river landscape and the higher elevated landscapes of loam and clayey drifts. These differentiations in landscape offer diversity and are to be enhanced where possible in the public realm plan.

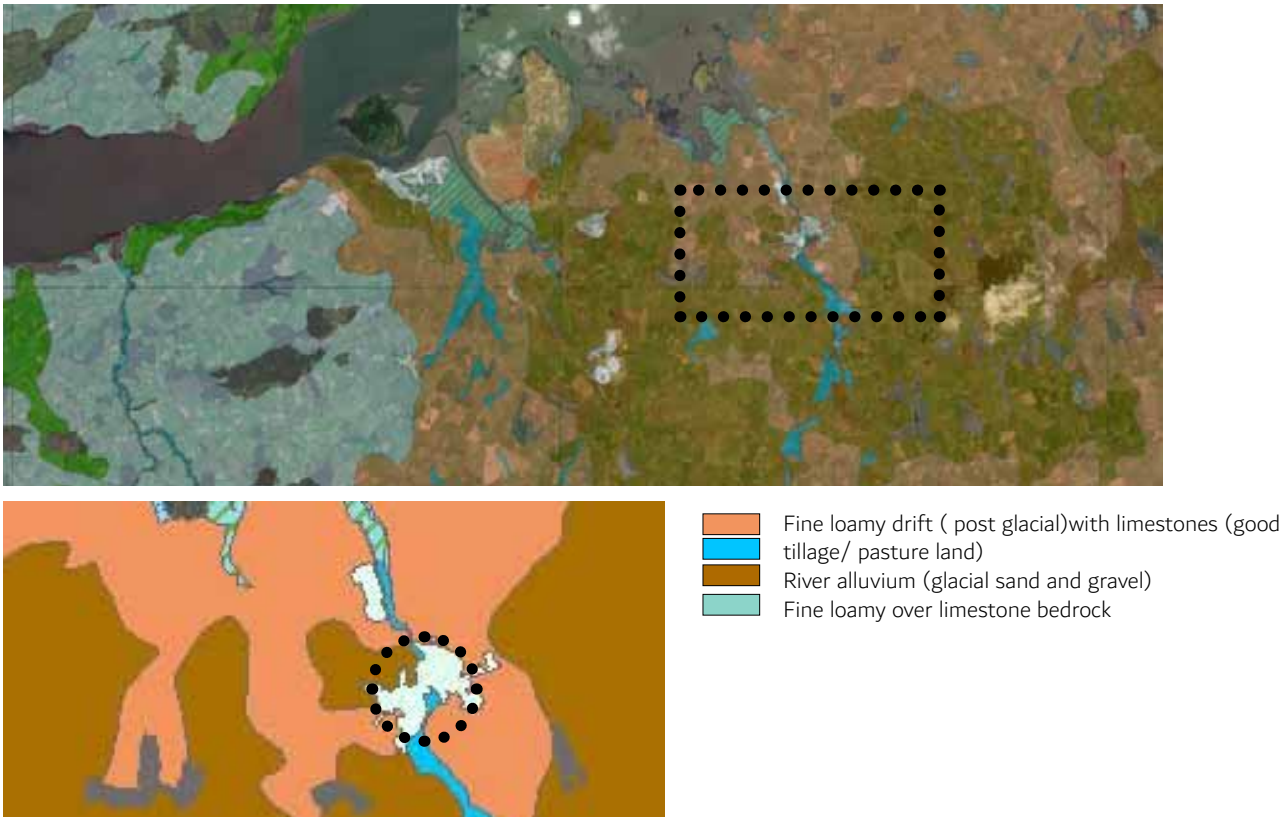


Figure no. 9: Landscape Character of Askeaton shown in soil maps.

Historical development

Early occupation is at its centre where an island Castle stands prominently, with nearby a Franciscan Friary and to the east a Church with a templar tower. Askeaton Castle is located on an island, a rocky outcrop in the river in the centre of the town, between the two town squares known locally as East and West Square. The castle is currently under restoration by the OPW and is due to be open to the public in 2021. The town extended eastwards and westwards along the Main Road, where it formed a 19th century Main Street (The Limerick Tralee road), with two distinctive spaces, locally known as East Square and West Square, which still form the historical core of the town to this day. The core of the town is currently concentrated on Main Street and is delineated from

West Square eastwards to St Mary's Church as part of Church Street. Previously the core of the town would also have included commercial activity along the River Deel, to include the Friary, docking, fishing and milling (along the Quay and the Mill Race). The Deel River rises near North County Cork and flows north for 60km to enter the Shannon Estuary. Askeaton is the last town along the river Deel before it enters the Shannon Estuary, marking its strategic importance as a defensive and commercial settlement. The tidal zone of the estuary is present up to the weir bridge at Main Street, which generally marks its inflection point to a freshwater river.

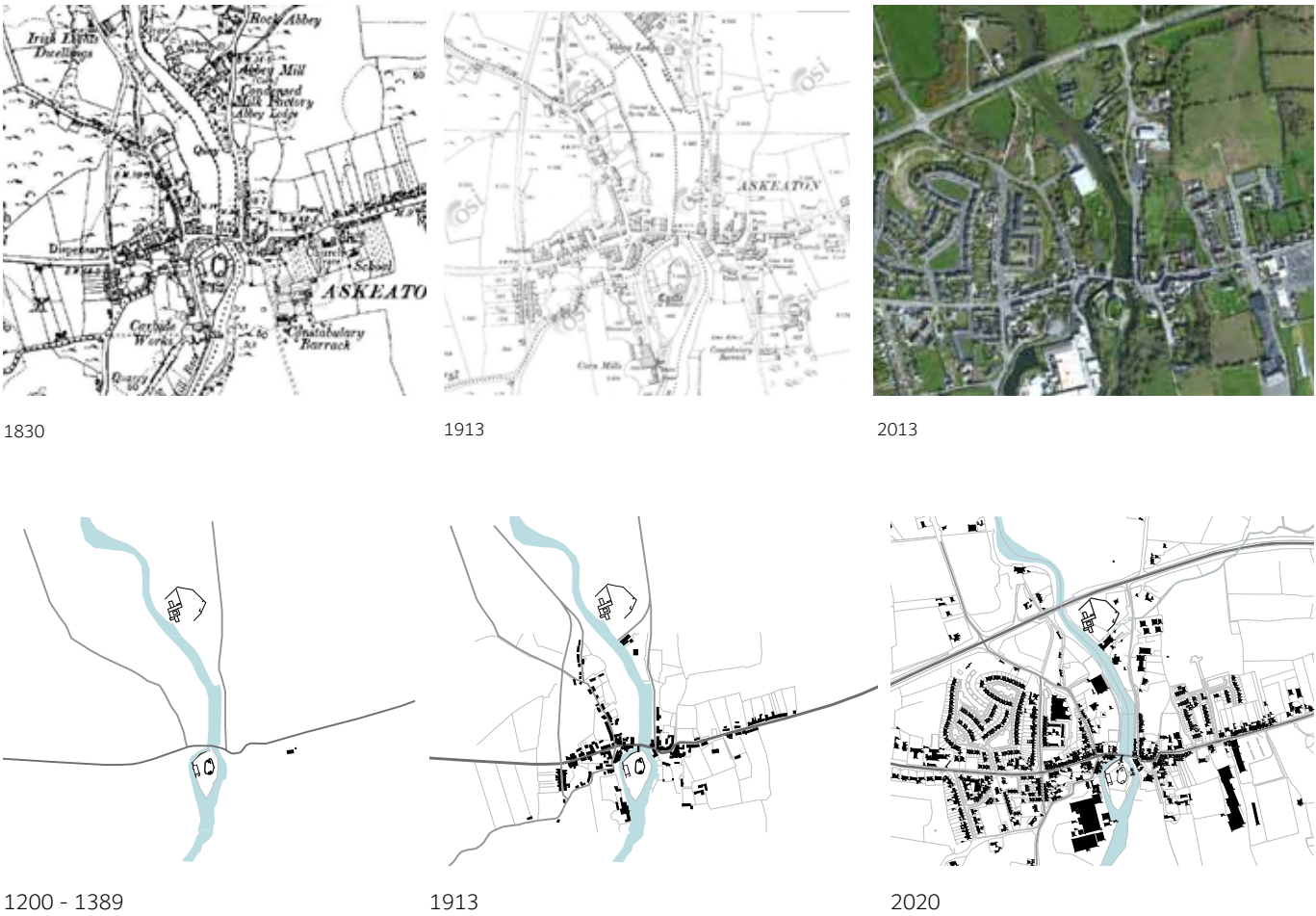


Figure no. 10: Images and diagrams showing the historical development of Askeaton

Spatial Qualities and key destinations

The town's public realm has several characteristic areas; the Medieval centre, the 19th Century core, the River Deel with its architectural heritage and finally the surrounding agricultural landscape of the town with hedgerows and intermittent woodland areas. The key tourist destinations local to Askeaton are the spectacular locations of Desmond Castle (1199) and the Franciscan Friary (1389).

There are several other built heritage tourist attractions within the town which are currently not developed including the Friary Mills with quays and steps, the Miller's House and the Mill, the Warehouse (Ryan's Mill) and the Mill Race on the East bank. Another location is at Mary's Church and Templar Tower to the east of the Castle. The Deel River is potentially another tourist attraction, which could link the Castle with the Friary. There are several walking trails in and around the town including the Sli na Slainte which runs north along the River Deel.

Trends

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated several global developments. These include the increase in remote working, the increase in online trade, a growing ambition to shift to a carbon neutral economy (sustainable mobility and energy production). Climate adaptation is an increasing requirement to address the symptoms of change in the environment including flood protection and air quality. These trends, pose challenges but more importantly offer great opportunities for Askeaton and its hinterland. Investing into a more sustainable public realm is a proven method to improve the town at many levels; its attractiveness, the quality of life socially and economically. This will contribute to the overall sense of the town as being a better place to live, work and visit.



The medieval core



The River Deel and its architectural heritage



The 19th century core

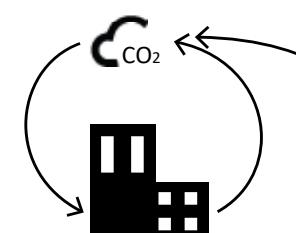


The surrounding agricultural landscape with hedgerows and intermittent forests.

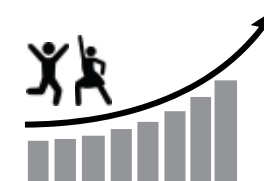
Figure no. 11: Images showing the qualities of Askeaton



Remote working



Carbon neutral



Attractiveness

Figure no. 12: Global trends

PART II

What key changes do we propose for Askeaton?

Having studied the unique qualities of Askeaton we have selected three key layers which form the focus of the public realm masterplan. These layers integrate the requirements of the public realm from micro to macro level to give an overarching vision for transformation.

They include.

- 1. The Deel River Park
- 2. The Squares and Main Street
- 3. A sustainable green infrastructure

The public realm plan does not attempt to solve all the issues but offers a framework to interpret spatial questions while remaining flexible enough to allow for unseen and as yet unknown future requirements.

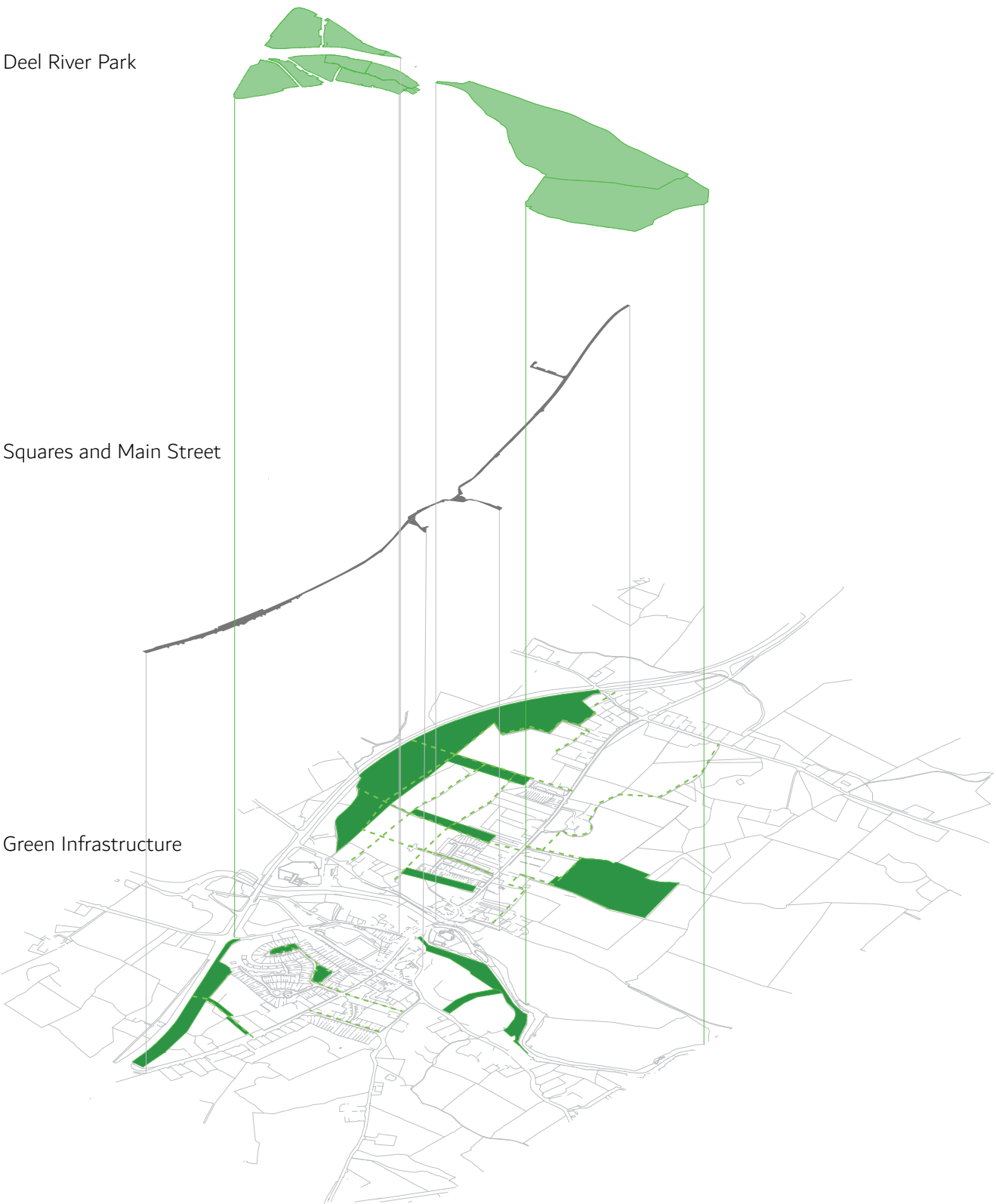


Figure no. 13: The public realm plan focuses on three layers for Askeaton

Deel River Park

General

The origins of Askeaton’s occupation and development are strongly related to the River Deel which runs north south through the town, with the Castle at its centre. Connecting the tidal river to the town and its environs is a key objective for the future development of Askeaton.

The Deel’s extensive floodplain is the cue to develop a long-term vision for the Deel River Park as a green zone designated for biodiversity, amenity, and recreation, which can strengthen the qualities of the river landscape. The project focuses on the park area north of Main Street Bridge but could be extended south of the bridge in the future. The Deel River Park is an extensive area which encompasses lands east and west of the river, including the Friary lands, the existing park, the Leisure Centre and parking, a rowing club, several fields, Traveller settlements and private dwellings. It contains an array of activities, buildings, and landscapes.



Deel banks with wooden fencing



Edge of the Park at the Leisure Centre



Slipway and view to the bridge (N69)



Playground



Abbey Cottages



Grazing horses

Figure no. 14: Images from site visit of Deel River Park.



- | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Boat storage facility | 8b. Leisure Centre | 15. Park with steps |
| 2. Desmond Rowing Club slipway | 9. Walking route | 16. Woodland (private) |
| 3a. Agricultural field | 10a. Lawn and flowers | 17. Miller’s House |
| 3b. Escarpment and field | 10b. Escarpment | 18. Abbey Mills |
| 4. Abbey Cottages | 11. Tennis court | 19. Abbey Mill quays and docking |
| 5. Row of trees | 12a. Entrance to park | 20. Franciscan Friary |
| 6. Playground | 12b. Bridge and entrance to Castle | 21. Bridge with pedestrian route at N69 |
| 7. Field with grazing horses | 13. Marina Quay slipway | |
| 8a. Parking area | 14. Marina with Warehouse | |

Figure no. 15: Aerial image of Deel River Park.

Qualities

The landscape of the park includes a floodplain with several rocky outcrops which extend above flood levels. The friary and the castle were strategically located on such outcrops. In the 19th century natural banks were replaced by quay walls and weirs were also constructed to retain the depth of the river in the town centre, during low tides.

The Park is host to an enviable assortment of built heritage spanning a 1000 years. A collection of images shows most of the highlights. An important phase of this heritage was built during the 19th century when the Deel’s energy was harnessed for extensive mill works. The quays played an important role in the town for the transport of goods. Traditionally there was a link between fishing boats in the Estuary and Askeaton town.

Several challenges have been identified in the Park. Primarily, the landscape of the park is a collection of individual places and activities but needs an overarching vision to make a cohesive design that works for everyone.

A review of the Park including feedback from residents and stakeholders was carried out. This was developed as part of a new vision statement for the Park to include the following objectives.

- Attract more users of different ages to the Park
- Connect the components of the River Park into a continuous experience
- Create trails and walks that form loops and offer different surroundings/ experiences
- Improve biodiversity in the park and develop seasonal variation in planting
- Promote educational activities around food production, ecology and the water
- Strengthen the built heritage of the Park.

- Offer space for local initiatives e.g., beekeeping, meditation, fitness
- Make the River Park more accessible from the town centre
- Create space for adventure and nature play areas.
- Create an event/ performance space for Askeaton
- Propose energy production in the Park
- Connect neighbourhoods more directly to the Park
- Assess the impact of future flooding in the Park

Design principles

As a first step in designing this part of Askeaton’s landscape, we would like to describe all these component areas as being part of a wider concept called the River Deel River Park. A series of design transformations are proposed for the Park to be developed incrementally over time. The steps are aimed at improving accessibility, biodiversity, experience and uses within the Park to deliver an overarching vision that delivers value for everyone in Askeaton. .



Desmond castle (1199)



The Fransican Abbey (1389)



Abbey Mills with quays and steps (1796)



Warehouse (1847)



Miller's House (1810)



Mill and mill race on the East bank.



The quay walls along the park

Figure no. 16: Built heritage along the River Deel

Tourist / Visitor Access

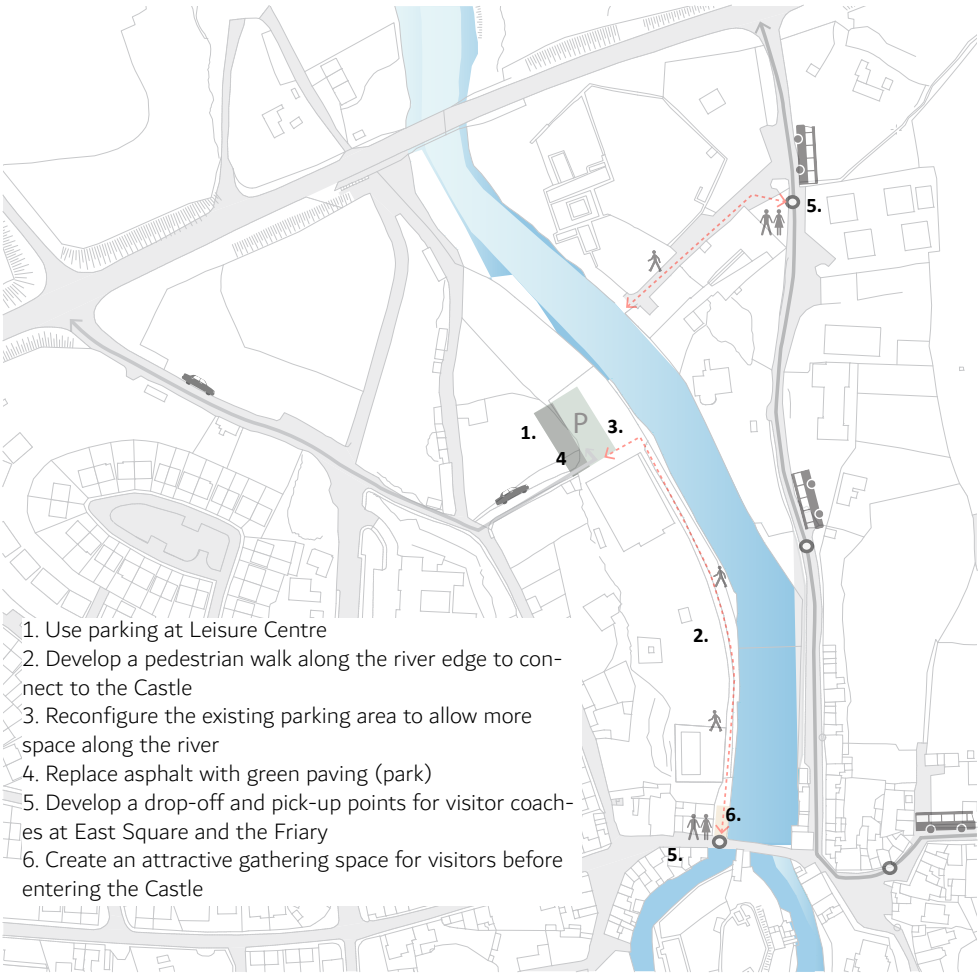


Figure no. 17: Tour / visitor access map for Deel River Park . A clear arrival and drop-off system for tourists to visit the Castle and the Friary seeks to minimise traffic and strengthen the existing local economy.

A clear departure and arrival system for tourists to visit the Castle and the Friary is required. A separate system of arrival and drop off for buses and cars is proposed to minimise the impact of crossing traffic on the Main Street Bridge. This is to be accompanied by an appropriate way finding system. Cars can use the west access point of the N69 to use the Leisure Centre parking area and can walk from there to the Castle, enjoying the attractive views to the river. Buses can approach the town from the east access point of the N69, with a drop-off point on East Square. Visitors can then walk from East Square to the Castle and on to the Friary. Buses can park outside the town centre, for example near the service station and pick up tourists at the Friary entrance before continuing onwards to the N69. A series of spatial design requirements are required

to make this happen and ensure the design quality of the Park is addressed. These requirements are listed in the adjacent map. A basic tour could include a drop off point at East Square for refreshments, a walk to the Castle followed by a walk through the Park to the Friary. Additional points of interest could include the story of the Main Bridge and other sites of interest. It is recommended that tourists be enticed to explore the town, in particular East and West Squares to contribute to the local economy. The addition of cafes and eateries outside of these areas could potentially weaken rather than strengthen the local economy. It is suggested to retain the focus on East and West Square. This could be a 4-hour circuit ending at the pickup point.

Pedestrian / Cycle bridge as catalyst for the mills

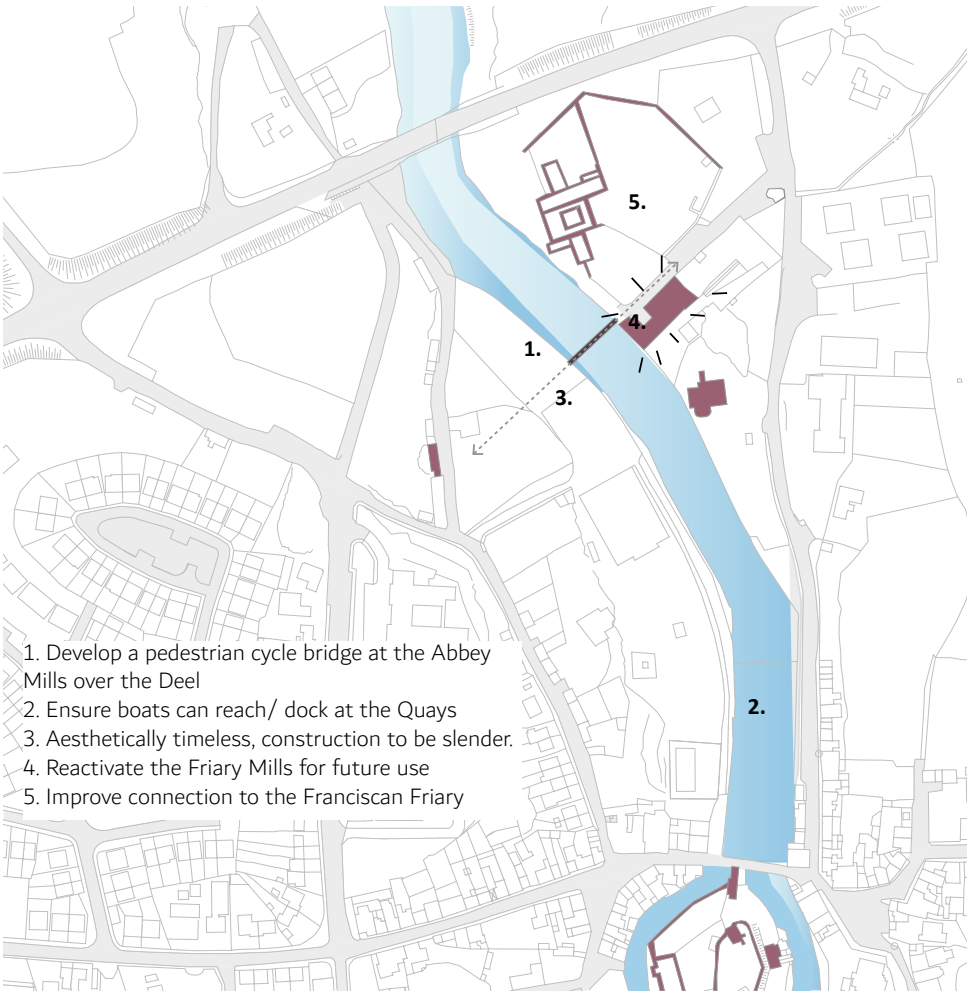


Figure no. 18: Pedestrian bridge map for Deel River Park . A new bridge would link the Castle with the Friary and offer opportunity to reactivate the Friary Mills.

A new pedestrian or cycle bridge is proposed to link the east side of the Deel with the Friary to the west side via the park to the Castle. The location of this bridge has been selected to complement the existing infrastructure and offer an opportunity to reactive the Mills building. A viewing line to the Abbey Cottages has also been proposed. The bridge design needs to be contemporary but timeless to tie in with the sensitive heritage surroundings. A set of requirements for the bridge is listed in the adjacent map.



Figure no. 19: Reference images for pedestrian bridge.

Pedestrian and cycling routes

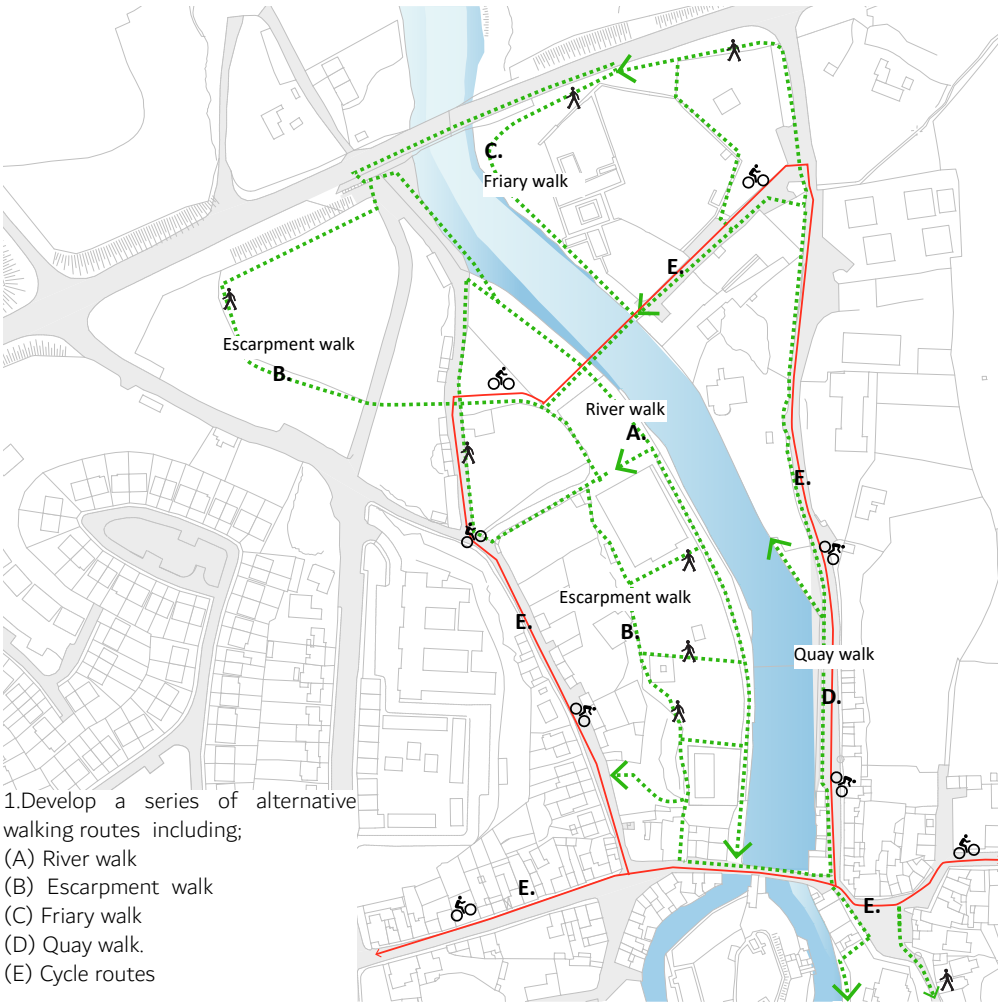


Figure no. 20: Pedestrian and cycling map for Deel River Park . New walking and cycle routes will strengthen the accessibility of the Park.

New walking and cycle routes will strengthen the diversity of the Park for its users. The assortment of walking loops and alternatives needs to be strengthened and extended. A series of new loops are proposed that will also strengthen the identity of the Park's landscape. Routes include;

The escarpment walk – a nature walk, to be added at the base of the escarpment or rocky outcrop

The River walk – a tree walk along the river's edge

The Friary walk- loop to the Friary,

The Quay walk- the route along the quays to East Square.

A set of requirements for the pedestrian and cycle routes is included in the adjacent map.



Figure no. 21: Reference image of pedestrian path (hoggins).

Trees and views

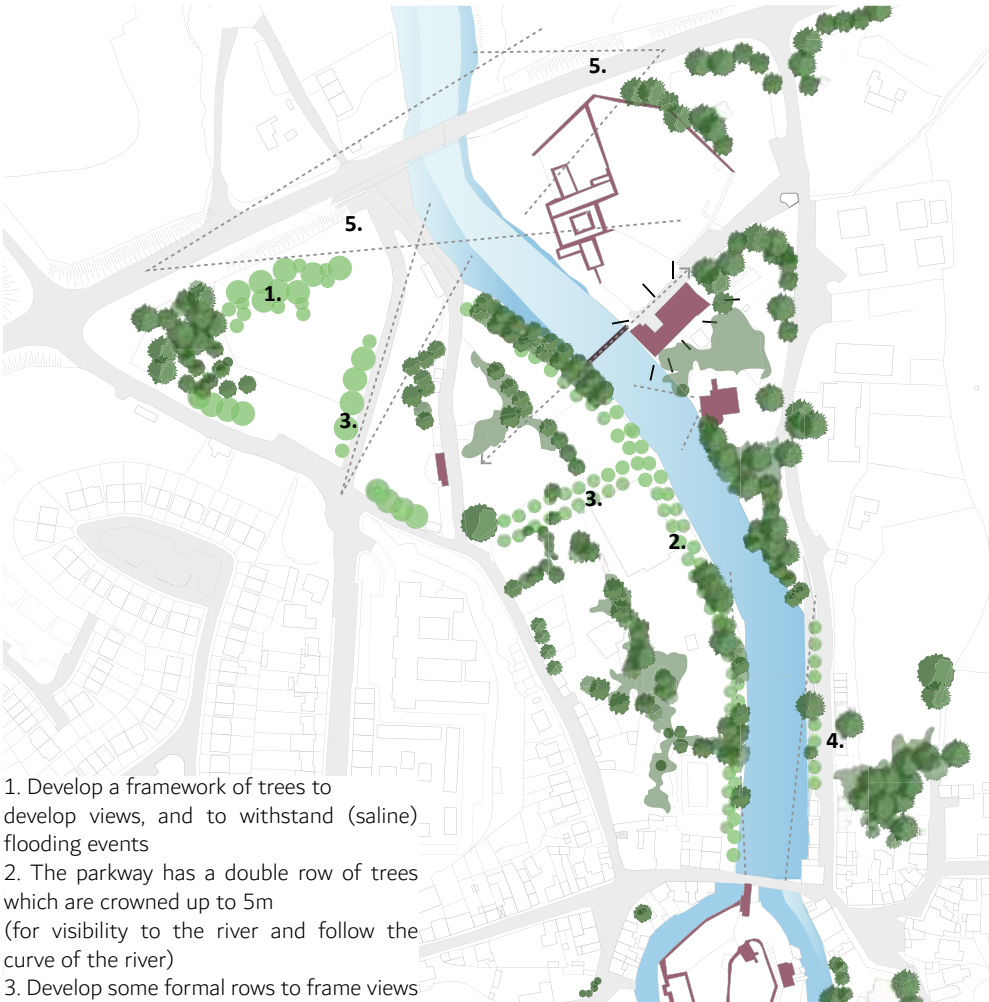


Figure no. 22: Trees and view map for Deel River Park . Trees can create a framework that shape the spatial experience of the Deel River Park

Trees create a framework that can shape the spatial experience of the Deel River Park. A framework of trees can be used to guide and protect views to and from the Park. Several views are distinctive and need to be protected. This includes views to the Friary from the N69, views along the river walk under the trees to the river, and views from adjacent roads to the Park. We acknowledge that trees planted along the riverbank have caused issues in the past such as erosion of banks or falling into the River and causing flooding downstream. Any tree planting close to the River will need to be designed and specified to avoid any future negative impact to the Riverbank. A set of requirements for the views is included in the adjacent map.



Figure no. 23: Reference image of trees

Planting and biodiversity



Figure no. 24: Planting and biodiversity map for Deel River Park. Local ecologies form the basis for the Deel River Park

The ecology of the river park is built around a set of complementary ecological subsystems that work in unison to create diversified biodiversity of a tidal riparian landscape. The development of quays has disconnected many natural gradients. However, planting of grasslands and trees could be enhanced to improve pollination and biodiversity. These are often systems that require less maintenance and are visually more varied and attractive. These include wildflower meadows near the Friary, perennial bulb planting along the river walks and wilder grasses along the escarpment. A set of requirements for planting and biodiversity is included in the adjacent map.



Figure no. 25: Images showing low maintenance bulb areas, source REDscape and mowed grass

Entrances, fences, signage

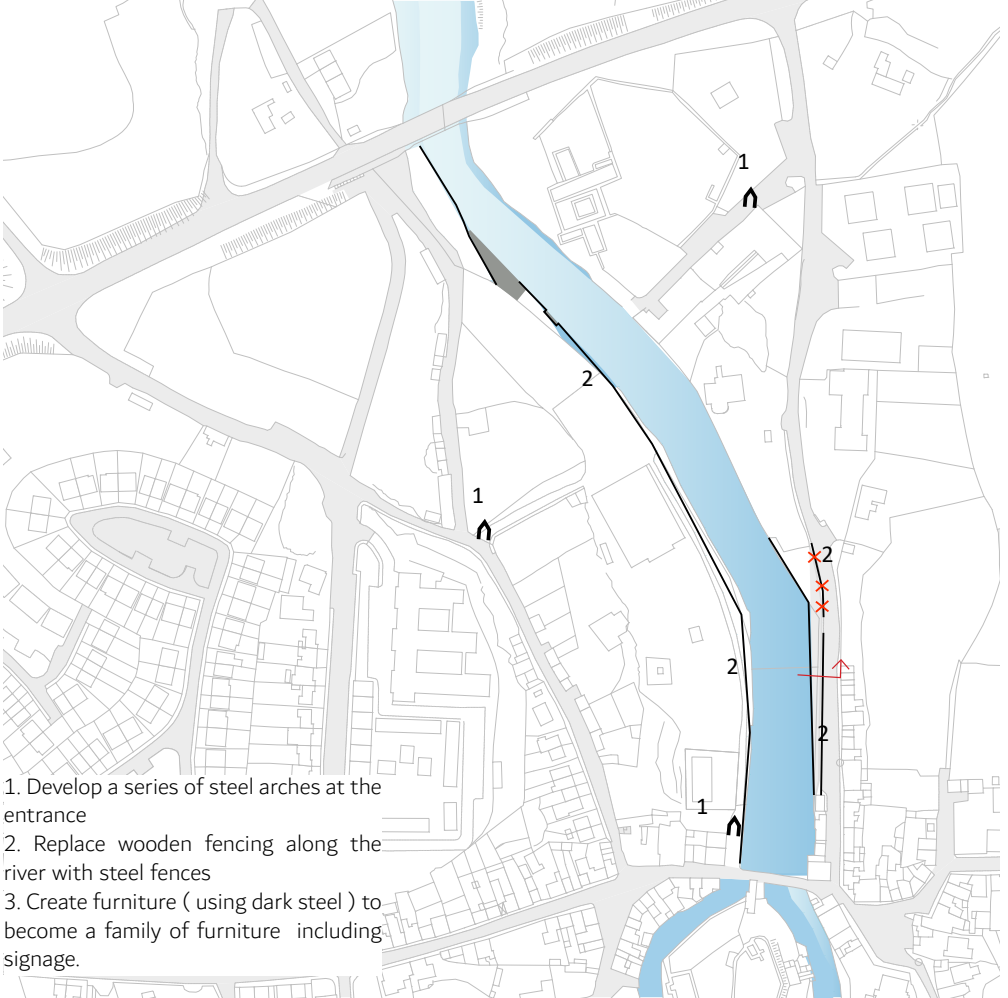


Figure no. 26: Entrances, fences, and signage map for Deel River Park The furniture is rural and timeless

A collection of furniture is required for the project including entrances, fencing and wayfinding. Our approach proposes a family of furniture using dark steel, functional design and preferably developed by local craftspeople. A set of requirements for furniture is included in the adjacent map



Figure no. 27: Images references for entrance arches and fencing as part of a cohesive furniture design

Invite initiatives and activities

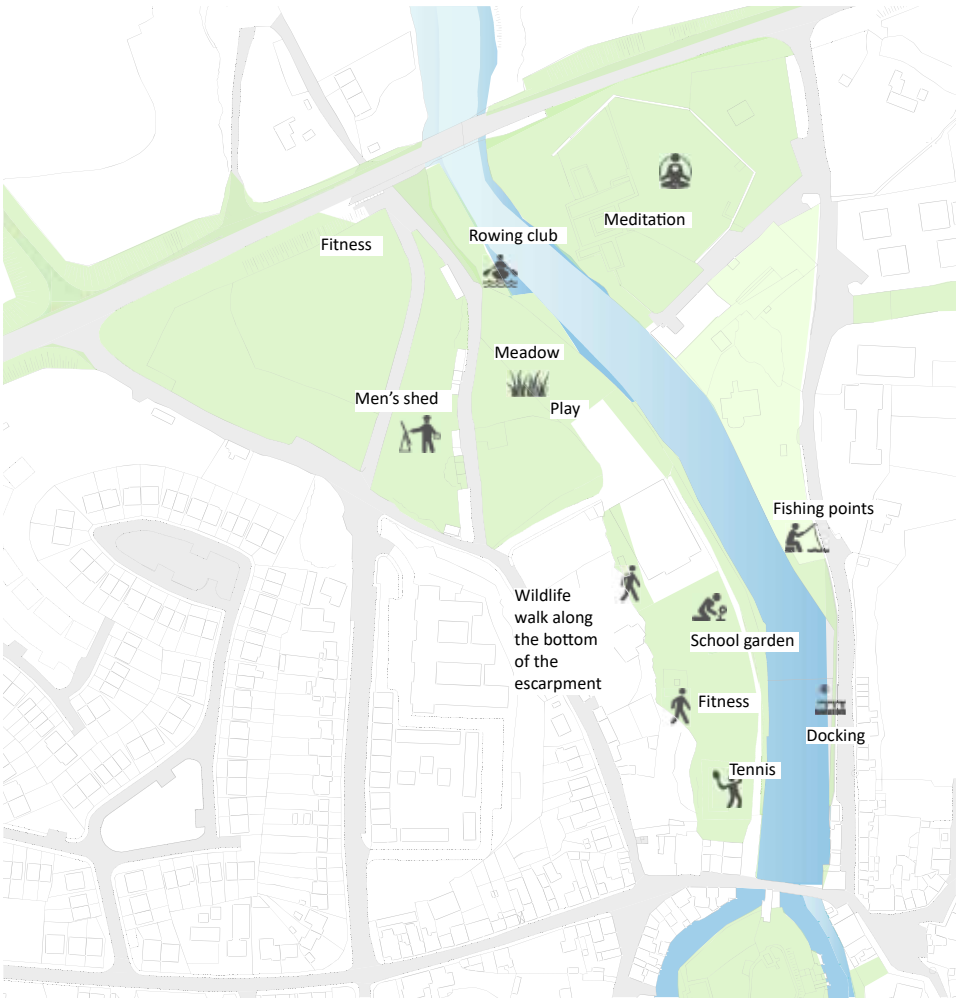


Figure no. 28: Initiative and activities map for Deel River Park Invite new activities into the park to stimulate engagement. Apply a spatial supervision to ensure initiatives to contribute and do not detract from the park setting

The Park has several important amenities, however many more could be integrated in time. The Park needs to attract new users of all ages, that can benefit from this blue green resource. Many ideas are listed and are to be discussed further in the context of a more detailed design. An openness to integrate local ideas and proposals, where suitable can be adopted. This needs to be qualified with a level of spatial supervision from a qualified designer to ensure that the capacity of the Park and its concept is always respected. Some examples include a traditional Traveller caravan to showcase and interpret Traveller culture as part of a tourism initiative. Other possibilities

include a school garden, a meditation garden in the Friary and fitness and sport facilities as part of a wider fitness network. The Park also needs to embrace a wider vision to activate the Deel, in particular for amenity, sports (boat clubs), and highly successful cultural events, like the Lantern Festival. The Abbey cottages could be reactivated as a Men's Shed.



Figure no. 29: School garden, orchard



Figure no. 30: Meditation and the Abbey



Figure no. 31: Fitness & sport



Figure no. 32: Traditional caravan for Traveller interpretive point



Figure no. 33 Feile Landeir (The Lantern festival)

Flood protection - Park

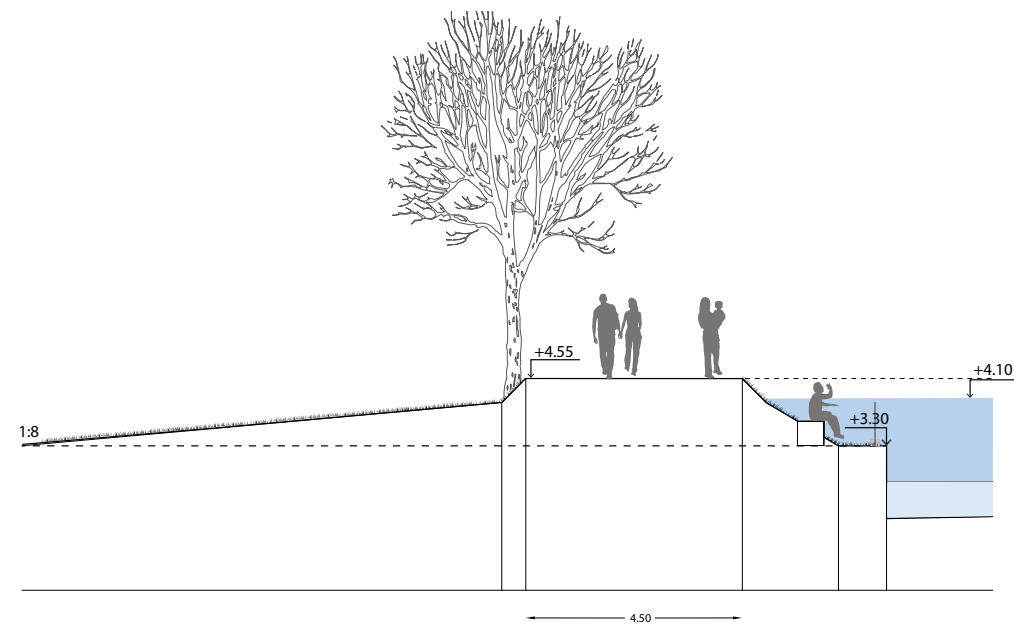


Figure no. 34.1 Proposed situation. A new dike or levee could be added as a walking route with grass steps to the river

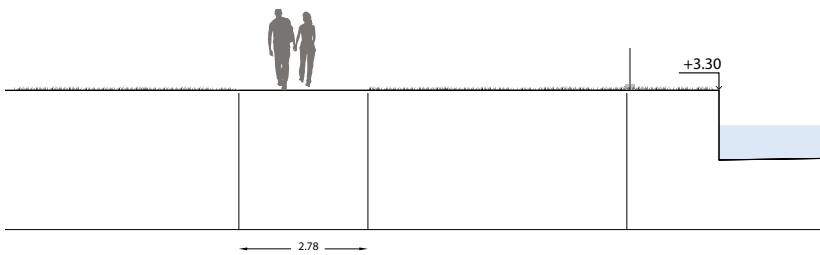
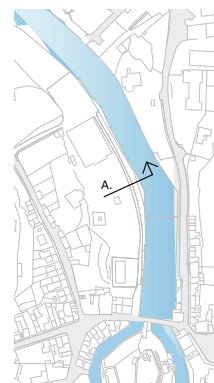


Figure no. 34.2: Existing situation



The impact of future flood protection can be considerable and could risk disconnecting the River Deel from parts of the town. If designs are solely engineering led or do not investigate a design led approach to the river, the risk is more likely. Flood defences are required to be fully integrated into the design of the Park and the public realm. Two locations demonstrate the potentials of an integrated approach based on a new flood level. The proposal for the Park explores a defensive structure in the form of a wide levee. It remains the question whether this solution is so impactful, that it might be better to allow the Park to flood and only protect critical infrastructure

such as the Leisure Centre. Flooding is a natural process that has a potential basis for increasing biodiversity and variation in the landscape of the Park. This variation needs to be more clearly expressed and designed to develop the ecology and offer more variation in experience.

For the Quays, a proposal looks at retaining a walkway along the river and docking opportunities along the quays.

Energy

We also recommend that the former river race be redeveloped to potentially harness hydrokinetic energy

Flood protection - Quays

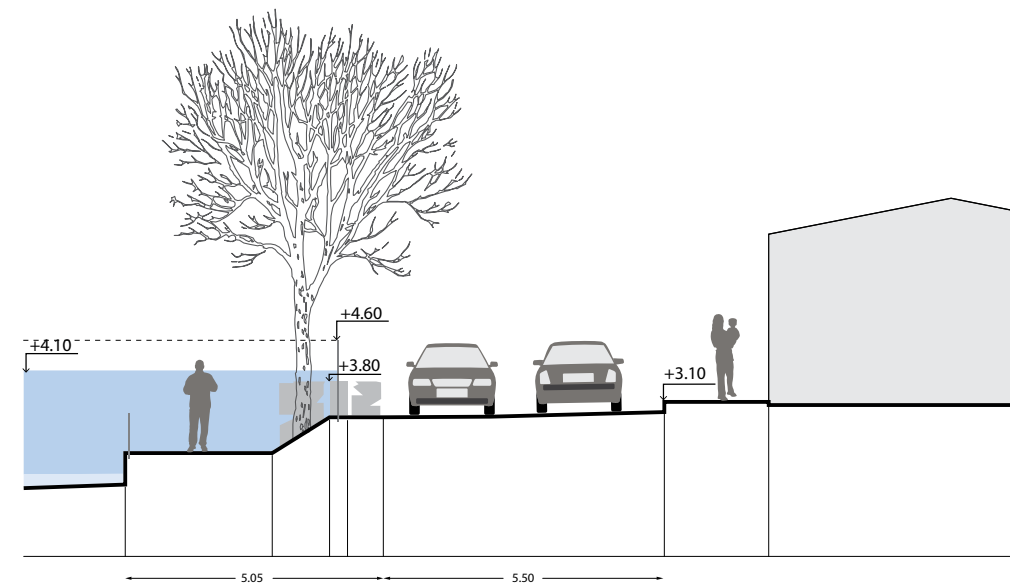


Figure no. 35.1 Proposed situation. A new dike or levee could be added as a walking route with steps to the river

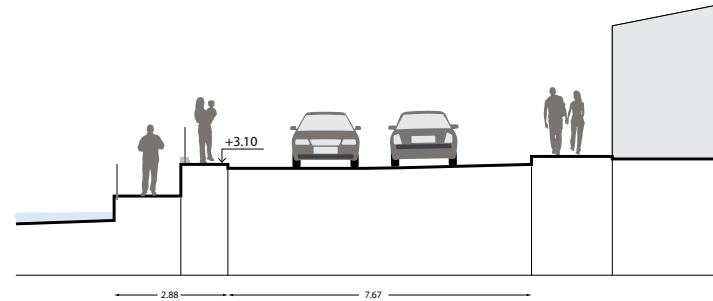
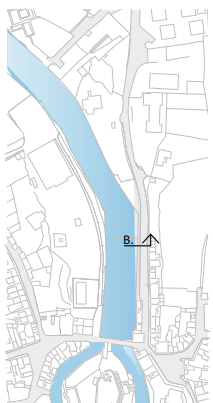


Figure no. 35.2: Existing situation



for the town's own use as part of a sustainable energy plan.

Water Levels and Maintenance

One of the issues that was raised during the public consultation was the extremely low water level of the River during the summer months. The inclusion of mini weirs to increase the water levels was suggested and this should be reviewed in parallel with the flood defence project. The maintenance / cleaning programme for the River Deel should be reviewed and prioritised.

Related issues

Several other issues surrounding problems with the River Deel were signalled during public consultation including the condition of the river / quay walls and the inclusion/ development of amenities for the boat clubs. The flow of water during extreme flooding events was also noted as a particular issue along the Quay and within the park. It was agreed that these issues could be best addressed in tandem with the flood defence project as an overall design. The boat activities could be included in a masterplan for the Deel River Park.



Concept framework for Deel River Park

To demonstrate the potentials of design principles, all layers have been collated to show a concept framework, which can be used as a basis for developing the design of the park in the next stages. The park is primarily a place for initiatives for all ages, a green resource for Askeaton that links the Castle to the Friary. Key to the park's success is establishing the right balance between the different needs and establishing key elements of the park's structure such as the river walk and other routes, the entrances as well as planting and trees.

- 1. Boat storage facility
- 2. Rowing Club slipway
- 3a. Agricultural field
- 3b. Men's Shed
- 4. Abbey Cottages
- 5. Meadow
- 6. Playground
- 7. Traveller's traditional caravan
- 8a. Reconfigured parking area
- 8b. Leisure Centre
- 8c. Carpark Expansion Area
- 9. School garden
- 10. Area for fitness
- 10b. Pathway along the escarpment
- 11. Tennis Court
- 12a. Entrance to Park
- 12b. Bridge and entrance to Castle
- 13a. Marina Quay slipway
- 13b. Library
- 14. Marina with Warehouse
- 15. Fishing area
- 16. Woodland (private)
- 17. Miller's House
- 18. Friary Mills (reactivated)
- 19. New Pedestrian Bridge
- 20. Franciscan Friary
- 21. Bridge with improved pedestrian route at N69

Figure no. 36: Vision plan for the Deel River Park

Legend of activities

Deel Riverpark



Figure no. 37: Impression of River Park. An example of how the Deel River Park could appear in the future to demonstrate its qualities



Existing Situation

Squares and Main Street

General

The town has a simple linear street layout characteristic of many Limerick towns which is uniquely punctuated by its East and West Squares on either side of the River Deel and the Castle. Main Street is dominated by late nineteenth century architecture of two and three storey buildings, some with retail uses on the ground floor. Main Street was originally designed with a dirt road for horses and the occasional car and bike. Designated footpaths were part of the original design.



East Square from Main Street (from east)



East Square from Barrack Road.



East Square from Main Street (from west)



West Square from Main Street (from west)



Main Street at the bridge (from west)



Main Street (west side)

Figure no. 38: Images of existing situation of Main Street and Squares.

Parking and pedestrian use



Figure no. 39: Parking map of Main Street and Squares.

West Square and East Square are dominated by cars and may be regarded as asphalted parking lots. In total there are 63 non – appointed parking spaces which limit the use, potential and attractiveness of the Squares as a centerpiece for an attractive public realm in the town.

East and West Squares and Main Street are in the heart of Askeaton and offer a mix of services, however in the intervening years, the 19th Century streets and squares, have been reconfigured for vehicles and not people.

Parts of the street have narrow footpaths, limiting ease of movement and causing access issues. On average 75% of the street space is given to overuse by the car only. Pedestrian comfort, and street life (terraces, seating) has been increasingly reduced by narrowing pavements and encroaching parked cars. The overall effect is that the streetscape in Askeaton is relatively hard and unwelcoming, even though there is physically enough space to cater for all requirements.

Vehicular Mobility



Figure no. 40: Mobility map of Main Street and Squares.

Main Street forms a two-way street with a speed limit of 50kmph. The meandering of Main Street where it traverses the Squares does offer a natural reduction in speed. However, the space for both cars and pedestrians at Main Street Bridge is limited and pedestrian access is uncomfortable and lacks security. Vehicle access over the bridge in both directions is also cramped and not safe for pedestrians.

Brewery Lane is a walled sinewing laneway which is currently used as a two-way street. However, it is not wide enough for two-way traffic and has many blind spots for oncoming traffic with a significant risk of collision.

Main Street has parking on both sides and has no trees or greenery in its profile. In general, there are few street trees in Askeaton.

Vision statement

Together with stakeholders a vision statement with more public realm objectives for this area was compiled for preparing ideas and proposals.

- Make the Main Street and Squares more alive and attractive for residents and visitors
- Develop the Squares as a destination and encourage outdoor use
- Reconfigure the Squares to be flexible and facilitate different uses
- Reconfigure Main Street and Squares as a pedestrian/ cycle led public realm
- Improve the visibility to the Castle from East Square as part of the identity of Askeaton
- Link East Square to the Deel
- Improve the landscape setting of the bank building and its surroundings for future use
- Make Main Street and Squares softer and greener.
- Improve pedestrian and cycle safety in combination with traffic circulation
- Reconfigure and assess parking
- Propose road width reductions with traffic calming measures
- Show opportunities for backland development
- Improve anti-social issues (dumping, crime)
- Reduce dereliction and incentivise re-occupancy of vacant houses and buildings
- Improve the entrance building to the Castle

Design principles

Transforming a Main street for future use is typically not a single step process. It requires a series of well-orchestrated decisions and actions which we call design principles. If supported by the community of Askeaton and applied in unison, these have the potential to solve many of the challenges facing the Squares and Main

Develop off-street parking and infrastructure

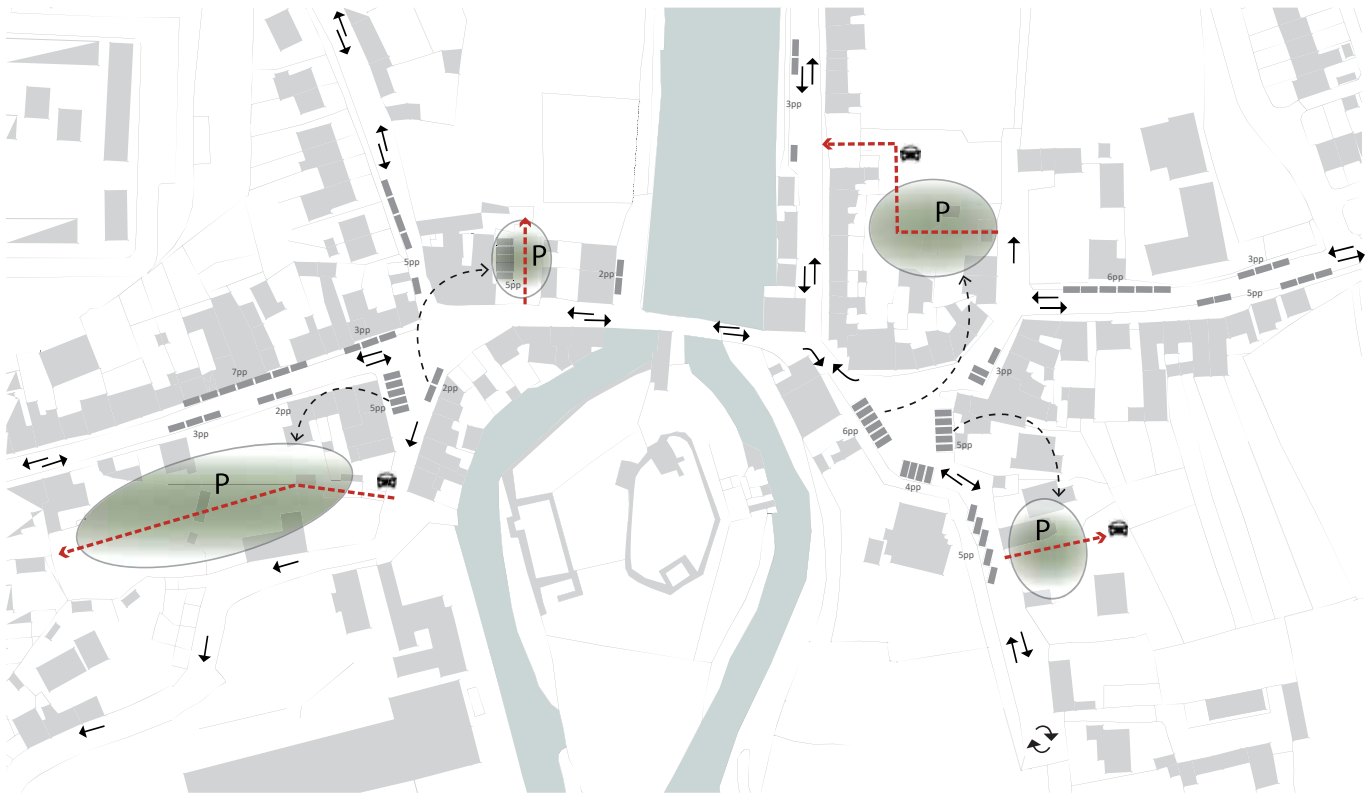


Figure no. 41: Off- street parking and infrastructure map of Main Street and Squares.

The car occupies 80% of the of the public realm in the Squares for its exclusive use. Parked cars block both visual and physical contact with the Squares and surroundings and block other potential uses which could attract and retain visitors. For example, places to sit and enjoy views to the Castle, which is the centrepiece of the town.

To address this issue a new parking concept is proposed which can allow cars to park off the Squares and Main Street, in parking plots, behind the 19th century façade. In spatial terms there is sufficient room to move much parking from both Squares. Further study is required to develop the best approach, but several parking plots at adjacent locations in the core would provide an optimum solution for Askeaton.

Develop off-street infrastructure.

Having developed off street parking, a new form of infrastructure is also required for Askeaton. This is called off-street infrastructure and has two components. Firstly, an infrastructure that connects cars to off-street parking and allows vehicles to permeate though these areas at slow speeds, improving accessibility and reducing traffic flows on otherwise congested streets. Secondly, a new infrastructure needs to be developed to allow pedestrians to permeate through the parking plots and connect them to key services and activities. This offers visitors flexibility to park and conveniently walk to and from the Squares and Main Street. Gaps between properties, private entrances and laneways could all provide ideal connections from the parking plots to the Squares and Main Street. As a rule of thumb, a two-minute walk will not negatively affect customer use of services. Disability parking spaces can be located at closer proximity.

Potential to densify backlands to strenghten town core

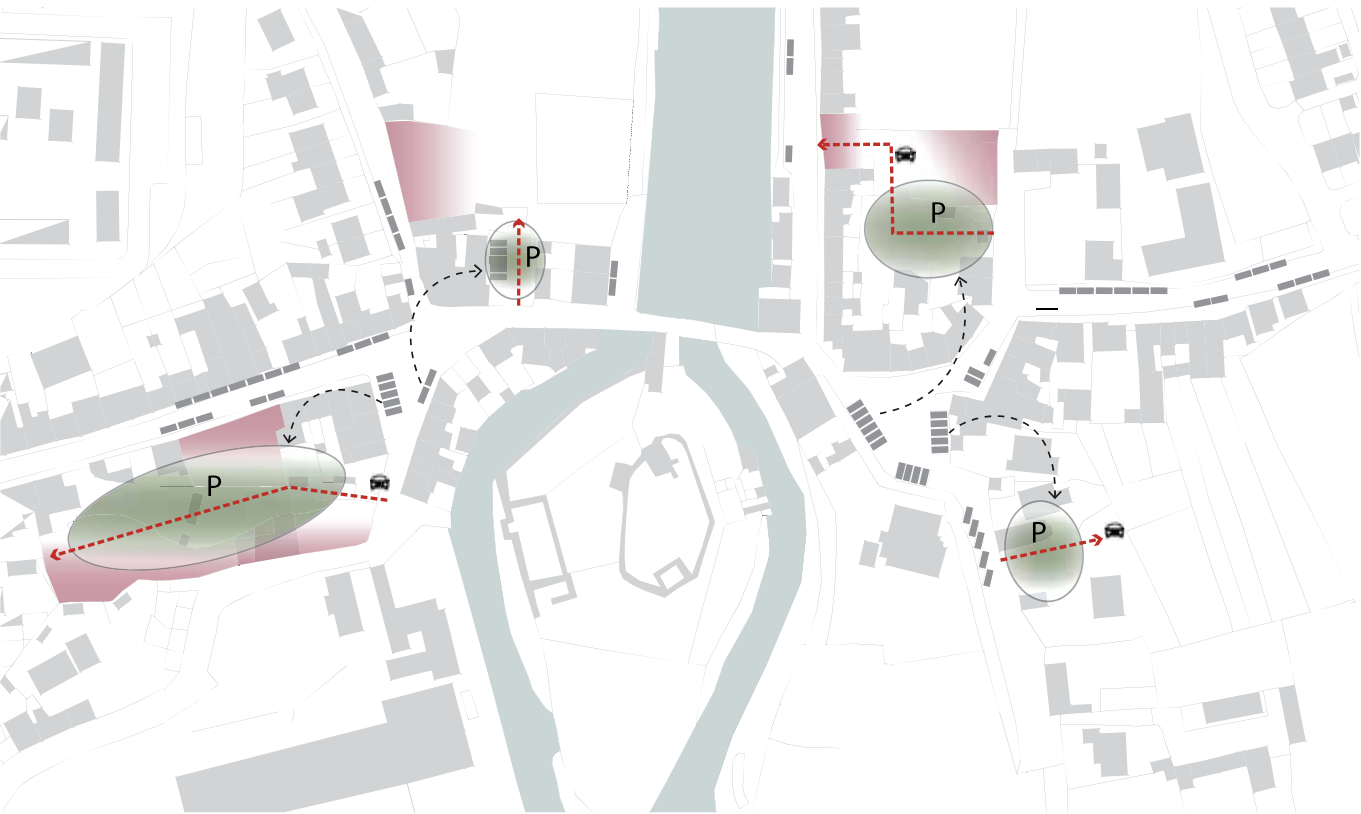


Figure no. 42: Densification map of Main Street and Squares.

Increasing the density of housing within the footprint of the town centre makes sense at many levels. It increases population and footfall in the areas where services are available, improves overall viability of the town, reduces carbon outputs, and increases sustainable movement. Potential to develop an urban framework to enable backland development is recommended as an approach to ensure that urban infill is well considered and ties in with the overall objectives of the public realm plan and policy objectives of the Development Plan. The diagrams demonstrate how densification could be developed in combination with parking, double ground use and development of higher density housing typologies that fit the historic core of the town. Of equal importance is to develop housing types that serve local needs. These would be expected to fully complement existing properties and potentially develop (traffic free) facades that tie into the overall green infrastructure of the town.

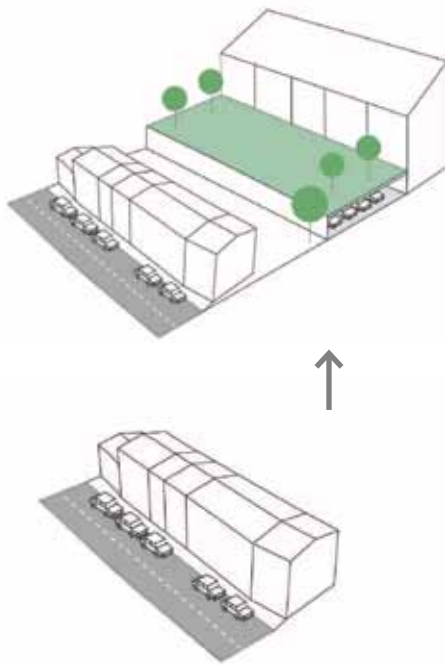


Figure 43: Design principle for densification of backlands

Soften the Main Street



Figure no. 44: Tree planting map of Main Street and Squares.

The short-term vision seeks to replace some of the parking spaces (6 - 10 parking spaces) in the core of Main Street with off-street parking. This would allow parking spaces to be reconfigured to enable the planting of trees along one (or both sides) of Main Street. Trees would require to be planted with appropriate reinforced tree pits of 20m3 of growth volume.

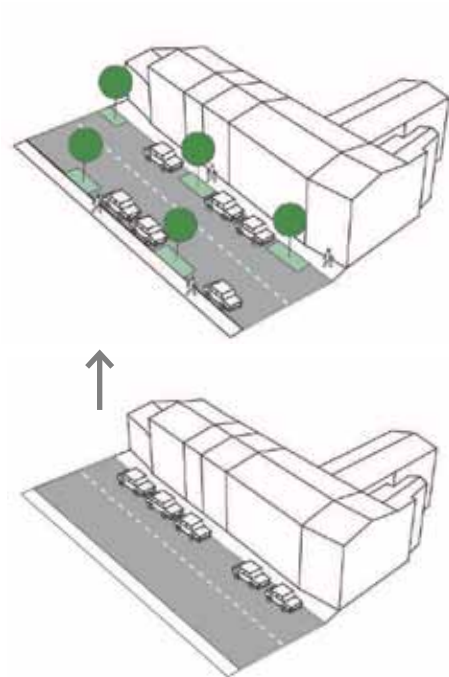


Figure 45: Design principle for softening Main Street

Reduce traffic speeds and reconfigure traffic flows if required



Figure no. 46: Traffic speed and reconfiguration map of Main Street and Squares

Moving cars at high speeds are loud and intimidating and limit pedestrian comfort for walking, sitting, and meeting. To encourage sustainable movement, it is recommended that traffic speeds in the core be reduced to 30 kmph. It is also recommended to reconfigure traffic flows on West Square, East Square, Brewery Lane and on the Main Street Bridge. Designs for the squares are included in the following sections. A single flow traffic is recommended for the northern part of Brewery Lane as far as the main Kingspan parking area to improve safety.



Figure 47: Amsterdam streets with combined parking and trees. Reduction in speeds to 30 kmph

A traffic lighted single flow traffic system for the Main Street Bridge is not currently required. However, should safety issues arise in the future, a proposal has been prepared. The primary objective is to improve pedestrian access and visitor safety to the Castle for large visitor numbers. It is proposed that a single flow traffic system if required, could be tested as a temporary installation initially before any full implementation.

Add bike lanes

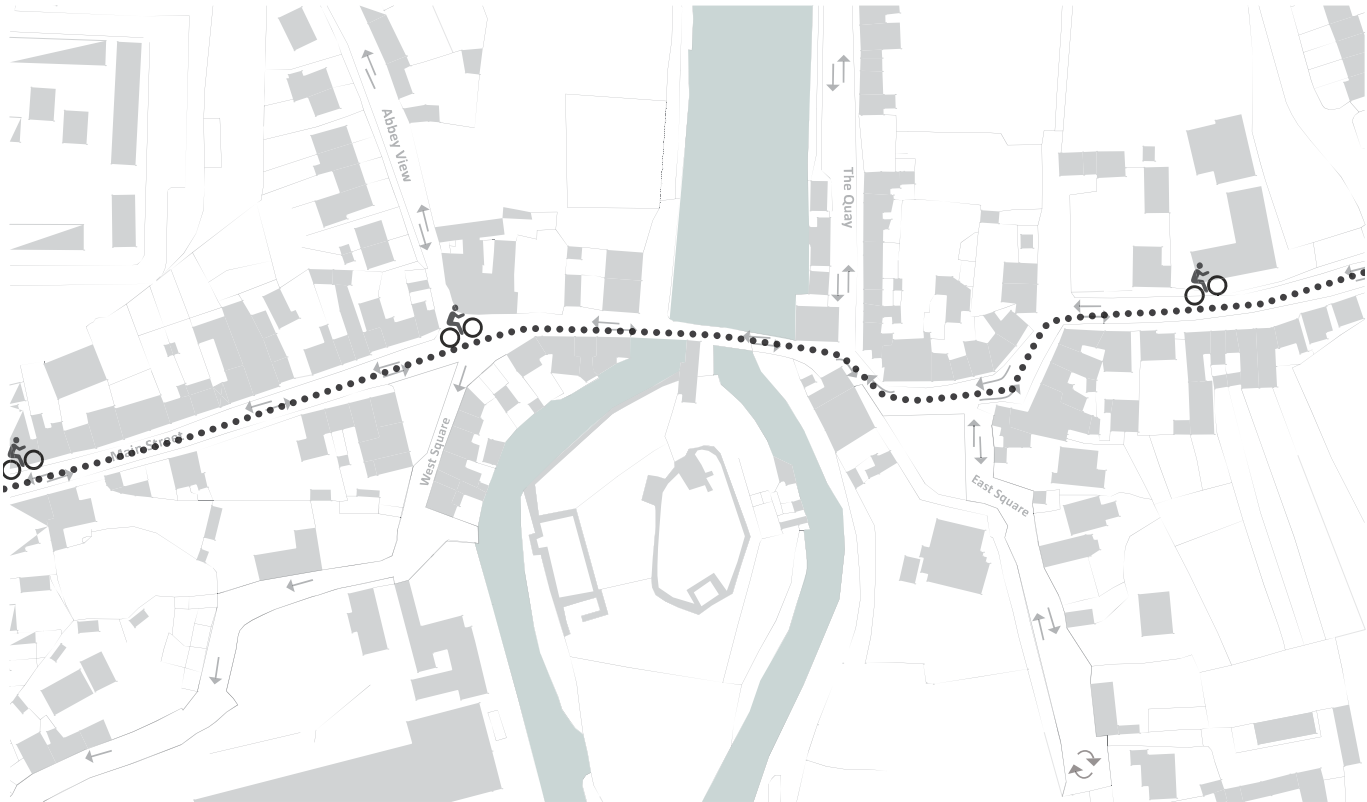


Figure 48: Bike lane map of Main Street and Squares



Figure 49: Bike lane principle for cycle safety



To encourage sustainable movement, it is recommended that speeds in the core be reduced to 30 kmph and that road markings on roadways for cycle routes be introduced to allow cyclists to travel safely.

West Square - Existing situation

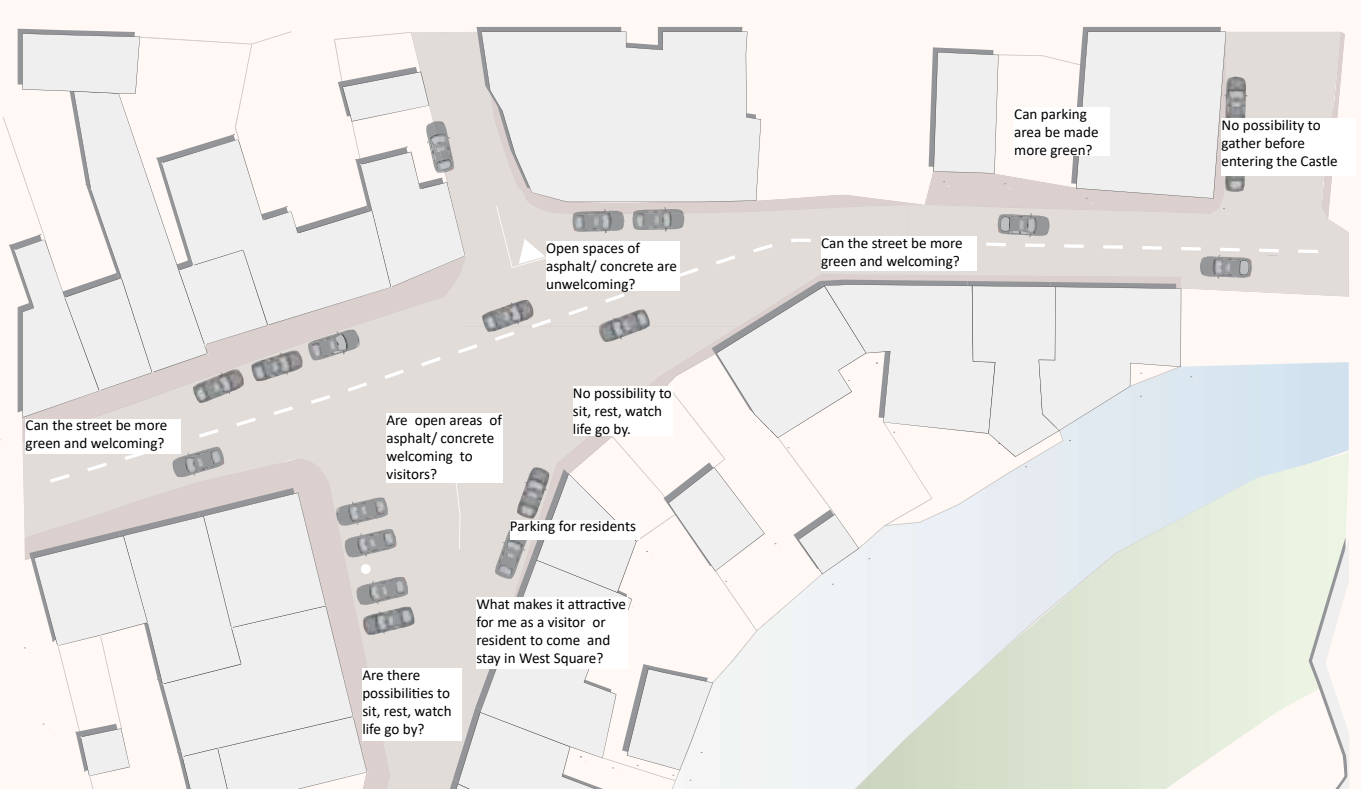


Figure 50: West Square, existing situation.

Askeaton has two central squares which can be developed into high-quality pedestrian areas at the core of the town. The long-term vision seeks to improve the experience of the Squares and Main Street to attract and retain visitors. This entails developing a pedestrian friendly zone by widening pedestrian footpaths across Main Street Bridge and developing the potential of the Squares.

West Square has a well-defined urban setting with potential to create an intimate, destination space. The existing situation raises several issues such as why the space currently has few commercial activities?



Figure 51: West Square, existing situation.

West Square - Proposed situation

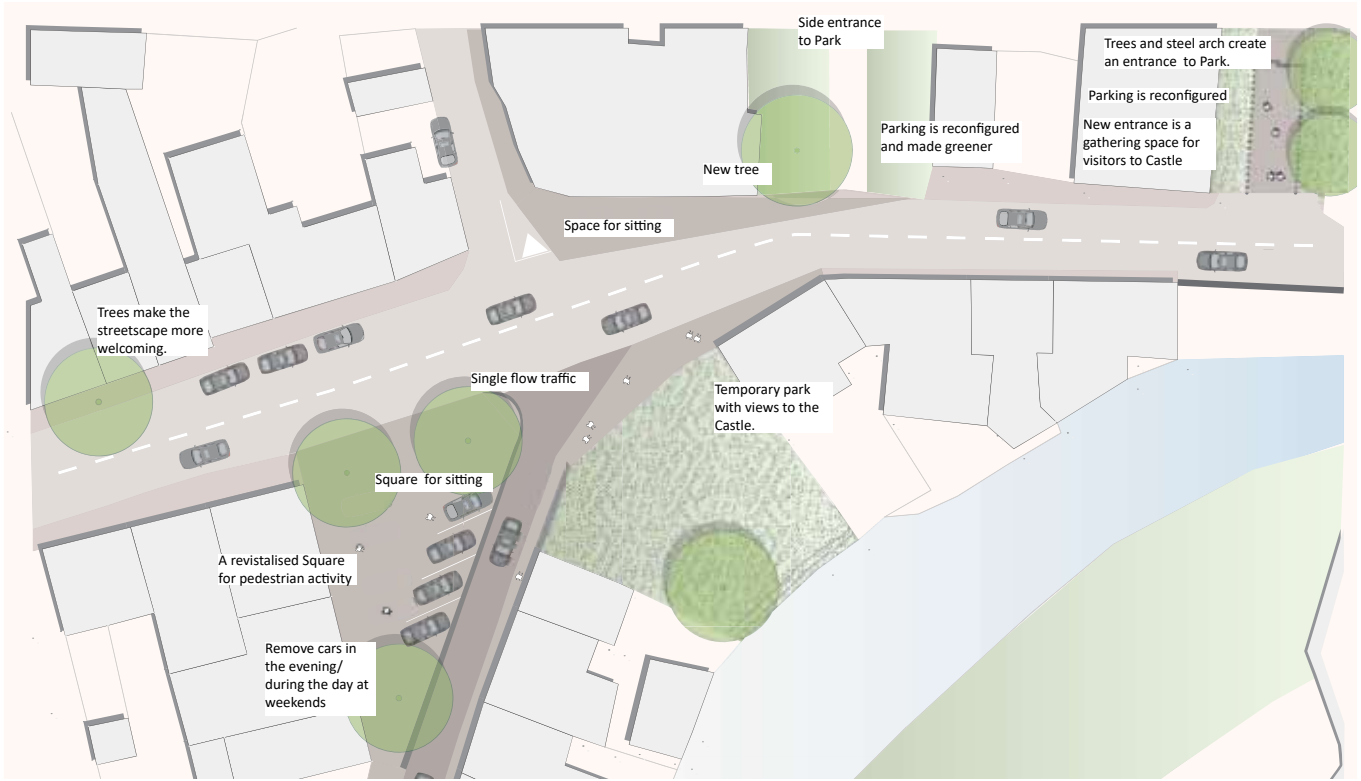


Figure 52: West Square, proposed situation.

A revitalisation of the Square as a flexible space is proposed where pedestrians are prioritised. An example of how West Square could appear in the future is generated to demonstrate how the Square could work and appear, a place where people will want to linger and stay as a resident or visitor.

A reconfiguration of the space means through-traffic is only permitted in one direction and much of the space will be given over to pedestrian use. Trees and green areas are added to compliment tree planting along Main Street. The Square still allows flexibility for all kinds of uses including outdoor terraces, sitting and small events. The Square could have a higher quality public realm in terms of materials and furniture which would facilitate an active street life, with seating areas, terraces, etc. which would suit the intimate quality of the Square. Other ideas include the removal of vacant or derelict buildings to develop views to the Castle. This idea could be trialled as a pop-up space to assess what works and the issues that may arise. If the space is not thought to work well, an infill of town houses could be proposed in time.

Park entrance and Main Street.

Some temporary parking on a limited part of the Square could be permitted. However, the preference would be to relocate all parking to off-street locations. One such location is also proposed near the chemist, which extends the parking and makes a pedestrian connection to the Park, while at the same time adding green to the area near Main Street. The entrance to the park at the bridge has also been reconfigured, by relocating the existing parking to the adjacent off-street parking. A new gateway is proposed with planting extended to the Main Street.

East square - Existing situation



Figure 53: East Square, existing situation.

East Square - proposed situation



Figure 54: East Square, proposed situation.

East Square has a poorly defined urban setting but has potential to create a destination space that links the town to the River Deel and the Castle. There is an outdoor Market held in the Square every Friday which is used by the local community and visitors to the town. The existing situation raises many questions, which are listed in the adjoining sketch. These questions are investigated as a basis to propose a new format for the Square and a programme of requirements as a basis for a new design of the public realm.



Figure 53.1: Images of Friday Market on East Square

An example of how East Square could appear in the future is generated to demonstrate how the The Castle becomes part of the Square and the town and East Square becomes a new destination for locals and visitors alike.

The design proposes relocating parking to off- street locations to free the space for other activities. Boundary walls are removed, reconfigured, or replaced with transparent fencing to strengthen visual connections to the Castle. Additional green areas and tree planting are added to soften the space. The Square could have a higher quality public realm in terms of materials and furniture which would facilitate an active street life, with seating areas, terraces etc. It is about 'experience' as well as convenience. The reconfiguration of the Square would provide increased area for the weekly market allowing

it to develop and continue to be an integral part of the Square and the town. There is also potential for colourful perennial street planting in the Square which could be well served with support from the Tidy Towns committee. A high-quality public core is important for the town of Askeaton to compete, attract and retain new residents and visitors, thereby improving the overall viability of the town as a place to live and to support the local hinterland.

The Square could continue to function as a focal space in the town, while at the same time showing new qualities for pedestrian comfort, sustainable movement, and a greener, healthier public realm where people will want to linger and stay as a resident or visitor.

Plan for Main Street and Squares

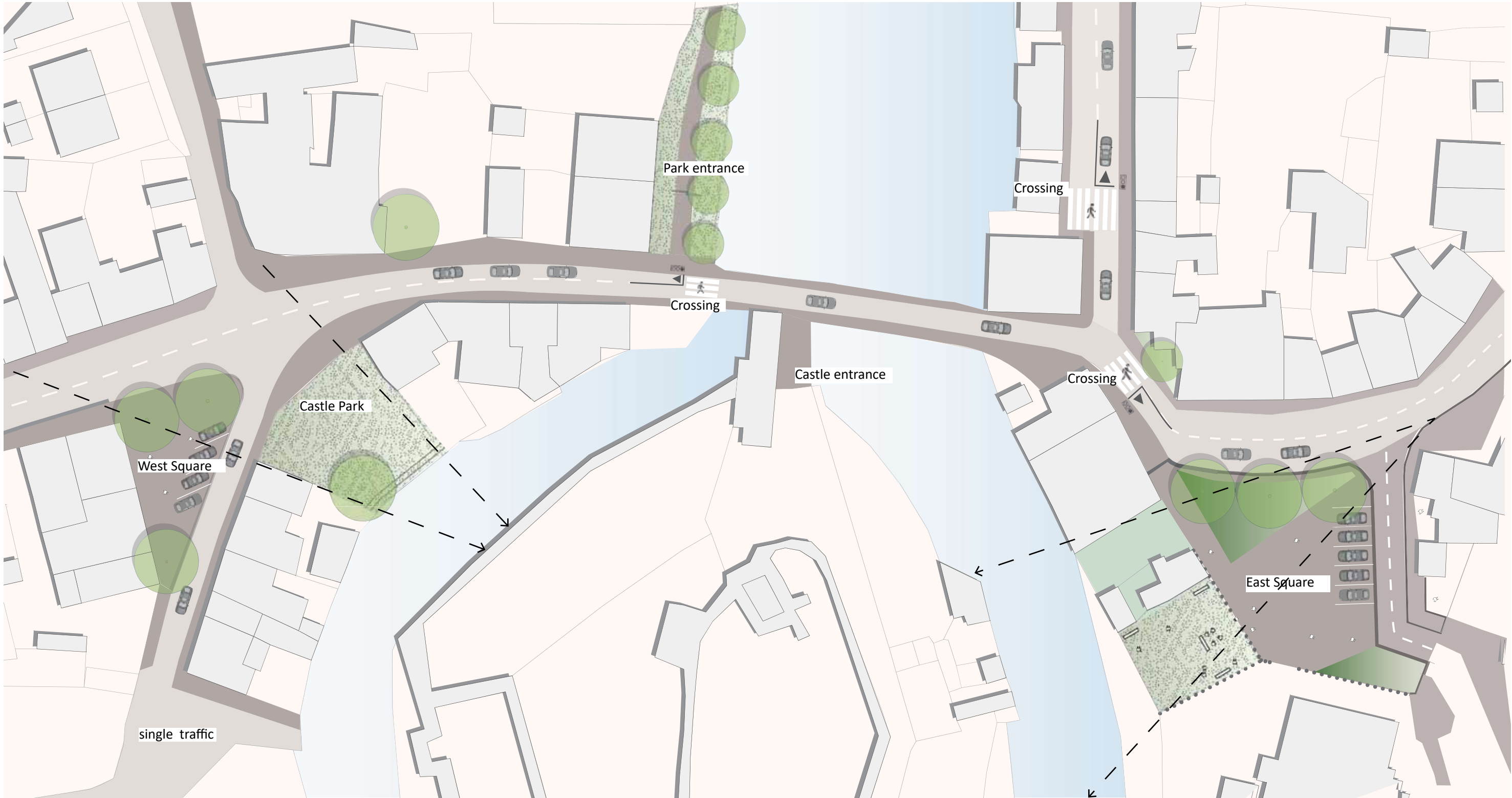


Figure 54: West Square and East Square, proposed situation.

East Square



Figure 55: Impression of East Square

By combining the design principles with the transformations to the Squares and Main Street a new type of public realm can emerge for Askeaton that better serves the community. The following attributes can emerge.

- Pedestrian led squares
- Improved visual connections to the Castle and the River Deel.
- Improved space and facilities for weekly market.
- Street tree planting and lighting for festivals
- Safer Main Street at 30 kmph
- Cycle lanes indicated
- Colourful perennial planting as SUDs
- Energy efficient catenary lighting
- Seating areas
- Event spaces



Figure 56: Existing situation of East Square

PART III

How can Askeaton benefit from a better public realm in the future ?

A sustainable green infrastructure

As a final step for the public realm, the overall structure of Askeaton’s wider public realm is considered.

Landscape as a basis for identity.

The geomorphology of Askeaton shows that there are two distinguishable landscapes present; a river and tidal river landscape and a half open agricultural landscape with distinctive parcellations and hedgerows. These offer a basis for differentiation to underpin and strengthen the identity and development of the town in a specific place related way. It is recommended that landscapes be used as a basis for identity to inform future landscape and possibly urban development.



Figure 57: Askeaton has two distinctive landscapes.

Green structure to strenghten permeability

This wider perspective reframes the public realm at a higher scale level. While sketching with stakeholders' new ideas emerged that potentially feed into projects to be developed in the short-term. To harvest these ideas a sketch was developed as a sustainable green structure at the scale of the town.

The maps can be applied as a template for future development and discussion and provide input for the development of urban plans. The components of this part of the plan are exploratory and have no formal status. Any developments proposed on private lands must occur with the agreement of landowners. Future plans can be translated spatially into more detailed proposals for future projects. The typology of green spaces is listed in the legend of the map to deliver a comprehensive structure of interconnected green areas and parks. These include;

These include;

- A connector park stroke - a green area where connection (for mobility and ecology) is a prime consideration
- Sport park: a park in which sports and public green amenities can be combined into a single park
- Riverpark: a park that develops the quality of the riparian landscape, caters for the dynamics of the river and ensures connection and access to the river
- Village walks: routes that can be used for pedestrians (and possibly cyclists) and as amenity routes.
- Tree lined walks. a grid structure of well dimensioned tree lined routes for cycle and pedestrian traffic in combination with localized vehicular traffic



Figure 58: Proposed green structure for Askeaton

Develop cycle, pedestrian and amenity connections

Walking and cycling has great potential to develop in Askeaton. A predictor of this potential could be the objective of having 60% sustainable mobility within a 6 km radius of the centre. This entails developing a network of routes over many years.

The map shows a grid structure for sustainable movement to connect Main Street with the River Park and other areas in the town. A ladder structure of walking and cycling routes could be developed in an east west direction to extend to the river. North south routes could ensure connections to Main Street, the N69 and environs. A cycle route could be extended through Main Street and potentially north south along the River Deel. Different routes could link the sports park (including the GAA pitches) with the river park along existing margins of tree lined fields, with primary and secondary schools.

Tourism destinations and amenities

There are several tourist attractions already mentioned within the town. Askeaton also has several local amenities which need to be linked to the town’s sustainable network. These include schools, public sport amenities, the GAA Club and the Deel River Park.

Wayfinding strategy

A wayfinding strategy is to be implemented to support a sustainable network and indicate the most important tourist destinations and local amenities. As part of this strategy the renaming of the East and West Square and the Bridge over the River Deel should be reviewed. The signage to the approach roads should be reviewed and new gateway signage proposed - see examples below of bespoke wayfinding. The strategy will tie in with all existing digital tourist information systems and apps. The physical implementation will review existing signage with a view to decluttering.

Horses as part of a new economy.

Askeaton has a long tradition with horses. It was agreed to prioritize a review of opportunities and economic benefits for Askeaton and surrounding areas for horses in the form of a horse plan, including equestrian routes etc. Issues surrounding grazing of horses in lands that are sensitive to damage such as the Friary lands could be integrated into an overall plan to achieve a better result for all horses and landowners.

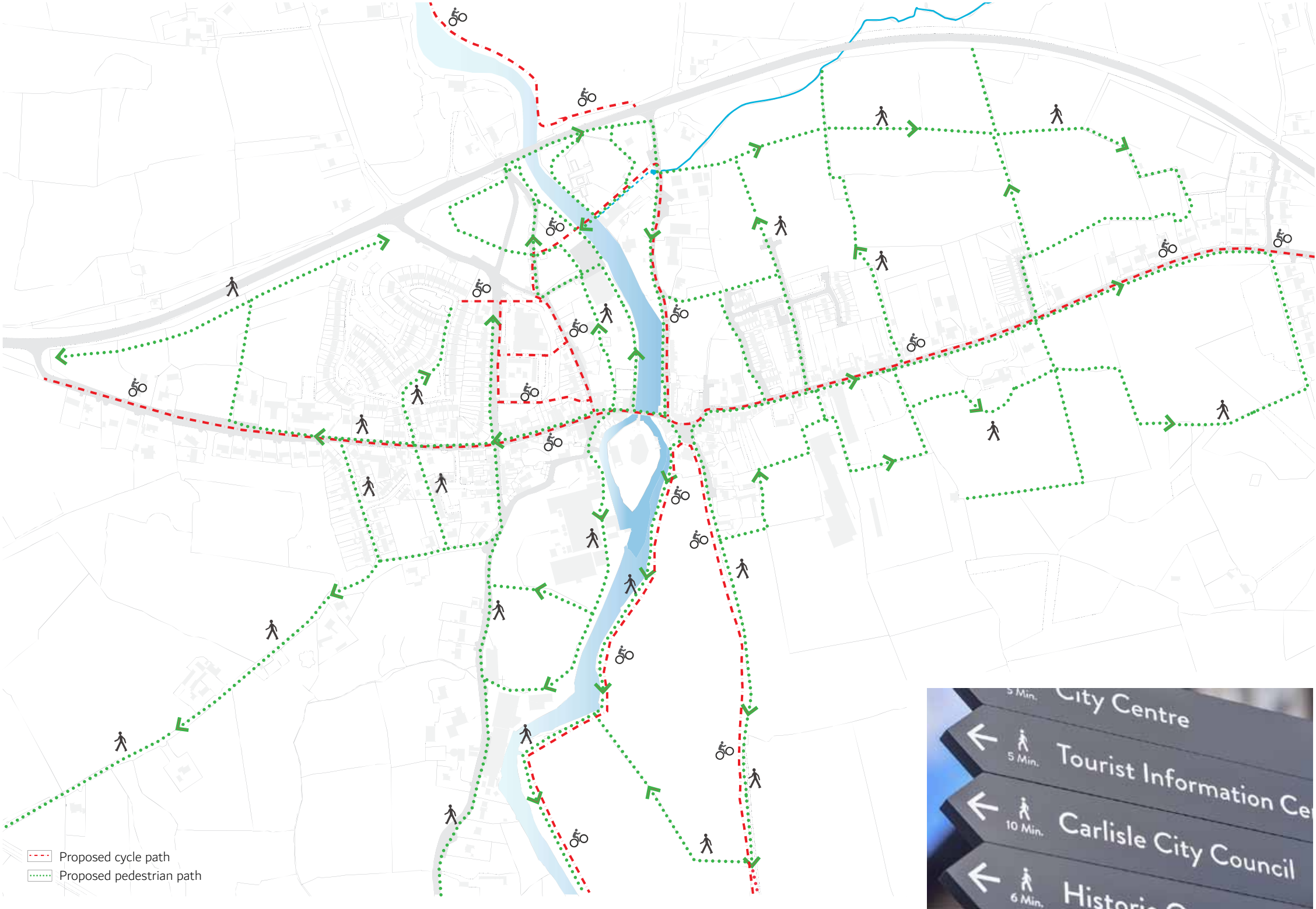


Figure 59: Proposed cycle, pedestrian and amenity connections for Askeaton



Figure 59.1: Example of proposed signage. A flexible system, using sustainable materials with clearly legible text and a timeless (dark grey and white) colour selection.

Amenity Routes to surrounding areas

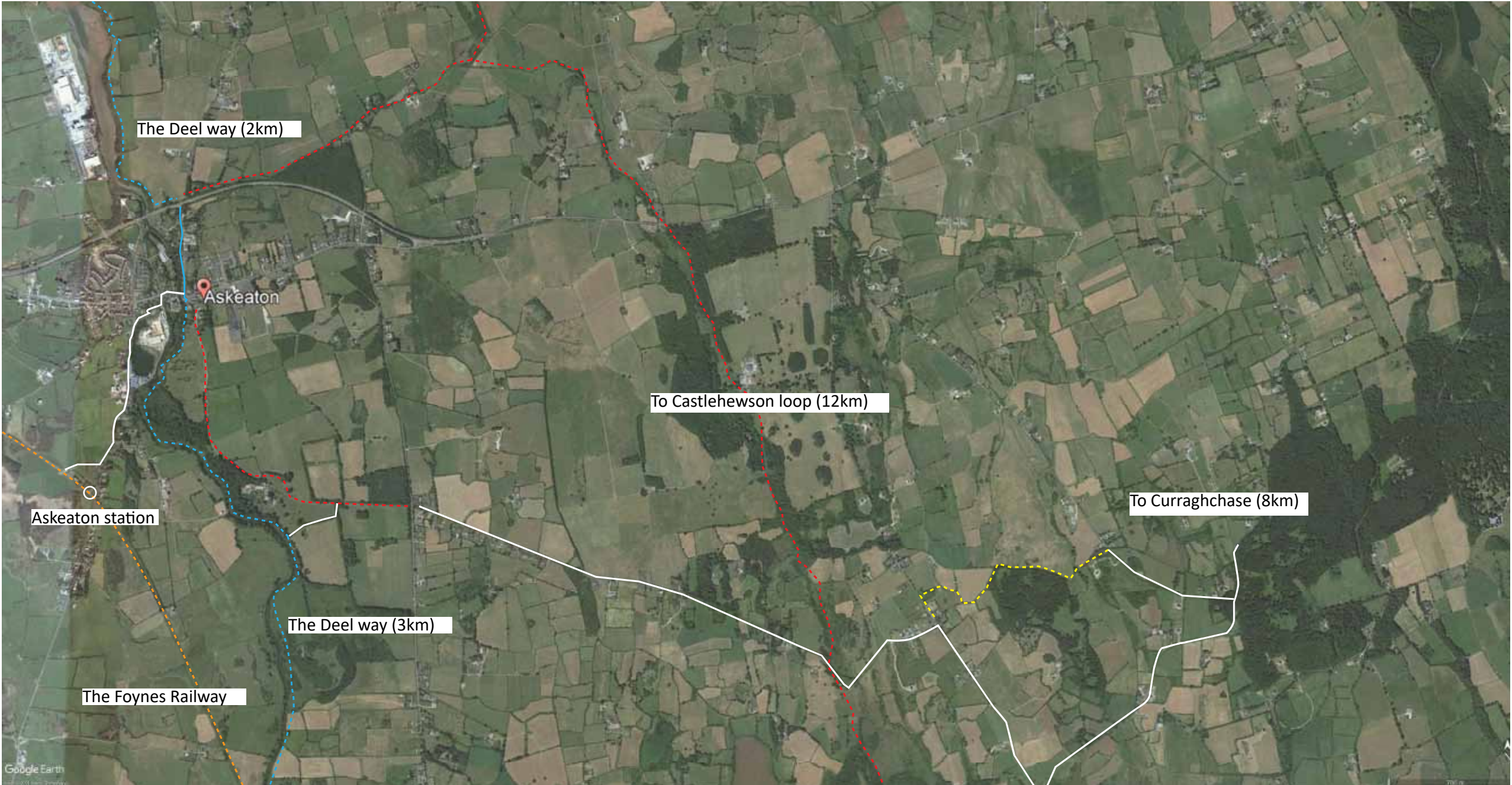


Figure 60: Amenity routes to surrounding areas.

Local walks and routes

Several options for improved pedestrian and cycle connections along the River Deel (the Deel way), to Castlehewson and Curraghchase have been explored. The routes make use of existing infrastructure and propose possible new connections. A long-term alternative would be to look for an off-road route (dotted lines). This could

potentially be developed in collaboration with landowners. This would offer a pedestrian and cycle routes and (albeit being relatively short) that could contribute significantly to the safety, experience, and overall amenity quality of the routes between Askeaton, the River Deel and Curraghchase.

Askeaton Station

Askeaton Station is located approximately 1km to the south of the town on the old Limerick Foynes Railway Line. Whilst the station is vacant at present it offers an opportunity for future uses in light of the planned re-opening of the Railway Line. The extension of the

footpath from the town to the station should be explored in tandem with a feasibility study for the station building.

PART III

How can we deliver the vision with the active support of residents and stakeholders ?

4.0 Delivery plan

The Askeaton Public Realm Plan (PRP) sets out a series of projects based on three areas; The Squares and Main Street, The Deel River Park and a sustainable green infrastructure. They vary in scale and complexity with some actions suited to short term delivery, while others will take longer to realise. The delivery of the projects will lead to the transformation of Askeaton’s public realm, making it future proof and climate adapted for the future.

Many projects will depend on the availability of funding and will be subject to further design development, local engagement, and where necessary, planning approvals. Other projects, however, can be driven forward by collaboration, volunteer work, local support, and committee agreement. The residents will play a key role in driving many of the projects forward.

Co-ordination and oversight of the plan and its delivery will require a continued process of partnership between Limerick City and County Council and local groups and

businesses within the town. Responsibility for the delivery of the actions shall be shared between different organisations and groups, including Limerick City and County Council as well as other public bodies, community groups and the private sector.

The following Action Plan should be reviewed and updated at regular intervals (every three years) during the next 10 to 15 years, as projects are delivered, and circumstances are reviewed.

The Park	
General	Develop a detailed masterplan for the park. Ensure universal access throughout.
Flood protection	Develop a flood protection scheme for west bank (if required) ensuring contact with the river is retained in a sensitive development that ties into the rural location of a small town i.e., no glass walls. Address related issues of quay walls, low water.
Sustainable infrastructure	Development of path and tree planted walkway along the Deel. Develop child friendly fencing and lighting (if required). Develop paths for looped walks including escarpment, Friary walks. Develop pedestrian and cycle bridge feasibility study.
Park entrances	Development of Park entrance at Main Street Bridge, Friary, Leisure Centre with steel entrances and reconfigured landscape.
Planting	Development of tree planting to develop framework. Development of planting plan for different areas of the Park together with a maintenance approach.
Parking and vehicular access	Removal of parking area near the river. Compensate with green parking areas. Development of drop off points for buses and coaches.
Energy	Explore hydrokinetic energy potential as part of an overall sustainable energy plan.

Figure 61: Table for delivery plan.

Main Street, the Squares, and other streets	
General	Develop orientation and way finding signage that aligns with village experience. Renaming of East Square, West Square and Bridge over the River Deel to be reviewed as part of Wayfinding Strategy. Decluttering, removal of overhead wires.
Quays	Flood protection scheme for east bank along the Quay. Develop a flood protection scheme for east bank ensuring contact with the river and movement along it is retained in a sensitive development that ties into the rural location of a small town ie no glass walls in the form of a Part 8 scheme.
Parking	Reconfigure parking area near the chemist. Remove parking at the Main Bridge entrance to the Park on the west bank. Develop a feasibility study for alternative parking in the Squares and street and deliver these areas in a phased way.
Main Street	Planting of street trees with best practice tree pits (REDscape standard, 20-25m3) Realignment of paving for Main Street. Reduction of speeds to 30 kmph and traffic calming measures. Introduction of cycle paths. Pedestrian crossings. Introduction of single traffic system on Main Street Bridge if required for safety. Surface treatment to bridge to be reviewed as part of works.
East Square	Removal of walls and opening views to the Castle. Development of landscape around the old courthouse. Development of connections to and along the Deel. Develop a Part 8 design for the Square for refurbishment of East Square to reference design.
West Square	Refurbishment of West Square. Development of Castle Park and removal of derelict house.
Traffic	Reduce speeds to 30 kmph along Main Street. Develop traffic calming measures. Develop pedestrian crossings. Develop a supporting traffic management plan for a public realm design (leading).
Dereliction	Dereliction and building improvement strategy. Renovation of housing and infill developments for re-use. Catalyze the development of the Friary Mills. Develop the Abbey Cottages as Men's Shed. Removal of smaller buildings and out houses along the west side of the Quays to retain and enhance visual contact with the Deel. Advance skills and training opportunities for all members of the community for refurbishment of derelict properties. Explore potential sponsors in the local building community to share skills and resources in support of this initiative.

Sustainable green infrastructure	
Sustainable connections in the town	Integrate tree lined field margins with new cycle and walking routes for future developments. Predicate future development on the inclusion of connecting routes to be worked out in a preparatory feasibility plan and urban framework.
Wider cycle and pedestrian connections	Use schemes to develop a wider network of paths and cycle routes in collaboration with landowners.
Wayfinding	Develop a wayfinding strategy.
Horses as part of a new economy	A general study to screen opportunities and develop a coordinated plan for horses in Askeaton; eg to develop equestrian routes, activities and new approaches to grazing for all horse owners in the community.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

Public realm is ultimately the essence that binds a town together; the streets, the parks the rivers, but also that aspect of a town's landscape that shape its appearance and impacts the day to day lives of its residents; the views, mobility, the appearance of properties, places to sit, rest or come together for celebrations. The transformations in public realm if achieved will deliver long term benefits to significantly improve the quality of life in the town and strengthen its economic and social resilience.

Commitment and cooperation of stakeholders

Achieving the vision for the town requires a long-term commitment and focused effort by all parties. The nature of any public realm plan is that it is public. It requires a strong if not unanimous consensus from the people of Askeaton to achieve overarching gains for the local community. The residents and stakeholders will need to cooperate in terms of commitment, decision making and a shared vision to solve the wider problems in the town, especially with issues such as off-street parking and infrastructure.

Incremental development and celebrations

The integrated approach of the masterplan requires a prioritization of projects. While long term-term projects are being prepared or incrementally developed, other short-term projects can be delivered. It is important that these milestones of success are celebrated and shared publicly and used as a basis for the next step.

Quality and design

Public realm is also about giving space to design, which is another word for giving creative space to develop more attractive, functional and flexible spaces. For every project, a high level of professional design quality should be expected and not compromised on. Quality is not just

about funding or high-quality materials. It is also about creativity, problem solving and the use of time. The role of design can be fragile in long term processes. It is important that stakeholders recognize and support design as a key driver in achieving optimum results for the public realm.

A template for opportunity

The Askeaton public realm masterplan demonstrates how the town can respond to its future needs to make it more sustainable, green and inclusive. It is a shared template for opportunity which can greatly improve the town for the benefit of the people who work, live, and visit it. The public realm plan is the next step in consolidating the existing qualities of place, history and people to develop Askeaton to its full potential for the benefit of all and to secure its future prosperity.



Rialtas
na hÉireann
Government
of Ireland

Tionscadal Éireann
Project Ireland
2040

Ár dTodhchaí
Tuaithé
Our Rural
Future



Comhairle Cathrach
& Contae Luimnigh
**Limerick City
& County Council**



The production of this Public Realm Plan was funded by the Department of the Rural and Community Development and Limerick City and County Council under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme