

# Dunleer Town Centre First Plan

Executive Summary

October 2023



Comhairle Contae Lú  
Louth County Council



An Roinn Forbartha  
Tuaithe agus Pobail  
Department of Rural and  
Community Development



Lár Bailte ar dTús  
Town Centre First

**BDP.**

# THE TOWN CENTRE FIRST PLAN



## The TCF Plan for Dunleer

The development of a Town Centre First Plan for Dunleer is a unique opportunity to explore the perceptions the local community has of its town, and to set a shared ambition of shaping its future growth.

The TCF plan is a framework for revitalisation and adaptation. It has a multi-layered approach that brings together development strategies, town-wide proposals and actions, projects for buildings and open spaces, and community-led initiatives.

It will rely on a phased delivery in which each intervention will unlock the development of further projects. In this way it is not prescriptive, and will be able to adapt and change in response to future emerging issues. It will thus need to rely on a local long term stewardship (particularly by the Town Team) and the establishment of strong partnerships with both public agencies and bodies and private stakeholders.

This report sets out and explains the suite of strategies and proposals that conform the TCF Plan. As a headline summary, the plan will comprise:

**Strategies** - These will underpin the TCF Plan's proposals and set a framework for a holistic approach to revitalising the town centre.

**Strategic Opportunities and Interventions** - These identify town-wide interventions to, amongst others, improve accessibility and encourage active travel, enhance biodiversity, support new housing in the town centre, and establish frameworks for regeneration of different character areas.

**Projects and Initiatives** - Set out a suite of phased projects for buildings and open areas, scheduled across the TCF Plan's duration, and features progressive initiatives to enhance regeneration endeavours within the allocated time frame.

Fig.1 - Dunleer TCF Plan site

## STRATEGIES



**A TOWN CENTRE  
FOR ALL, BY ALL**



**RETHINK AND REFRESH  
THE MAIN STREET**



**DUNLEERIFY THE  
TOWN CENTRE**



**LINK, CONNECT,  
MOVE, TRAVEL**



**BEYOND THE TOWN CENTRE:  
A NEW DESTINATION  
IN MID-LOUTH**

## STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

**A**

**Dunleer Loops  
and Links**

### A1 Loops

- A1.1 Central Loop
- A1.2 Northern Loop
- A1.3 School and River Loop
- A1.4 Rural Loop

### A2 Biodiverse Links

### A3 Park Link

### A4 Station Links

**B**

**Dunleer Urban  
Blocks**

### B1 Blocks

- B1.1 Ardee Road Yards
- B1.2 River Backlands
- B1.3 Ardee Road Gardens
- B1.4 Main Street Backlands
- B1.5 Station Approach
- B1.6 Barn Road
- B1.7 Dunleer North
- B1.8 The Forge

### B2 Housing

- B2.1 Ardee Road Yards
- B2.2 River Backlands
- B2.3 Ardee Road Gardens
- B2.4 Main Street Backlands
- B2.5 Station Approach

**C**

**Main Street and  
White River**

### C1 Main Street Works

### C2 White River Park

**D**

**Revitalisation  
Projects**

### D1 Dunleer Library

- D1.1 Dunleer Library and Library Square
- D1.2 White River Pocket Park
- D1.3 Learning Hub

### D2 Dunleer Station

- D2.1 Train Station
- D2.2 Visitors' and Mobility Hub

### D3 Corner House Pub

**E**

**Enhancement  
Initiatives**

- E1 Town Loops, Wayfinding & Healthy Travel Signage
- E2 Green Gateway Project
- E3 Street Decluttering, Street Furniture Strategy & Lighting Street
- E4 Streetscape Enhancement Strategy
- E5 Green Area Biodiversity, Landscaping Improvements & Tree Planting strategy
- E6 Built Heritage Scheme
- E7 Building Façade Improvement Scheme
- E8 Digital High Street
- E9 Community Festival & Street Party
- E10 Upgrade to the Existing Playground
- E11 Deep Clean Initiative of the Town Centre
- E12 Local Transport Link Service

Fig.2 - Dunleer TCF Plan strategies, strategic opportunities and interventions

# A Dunleer Loops and Links

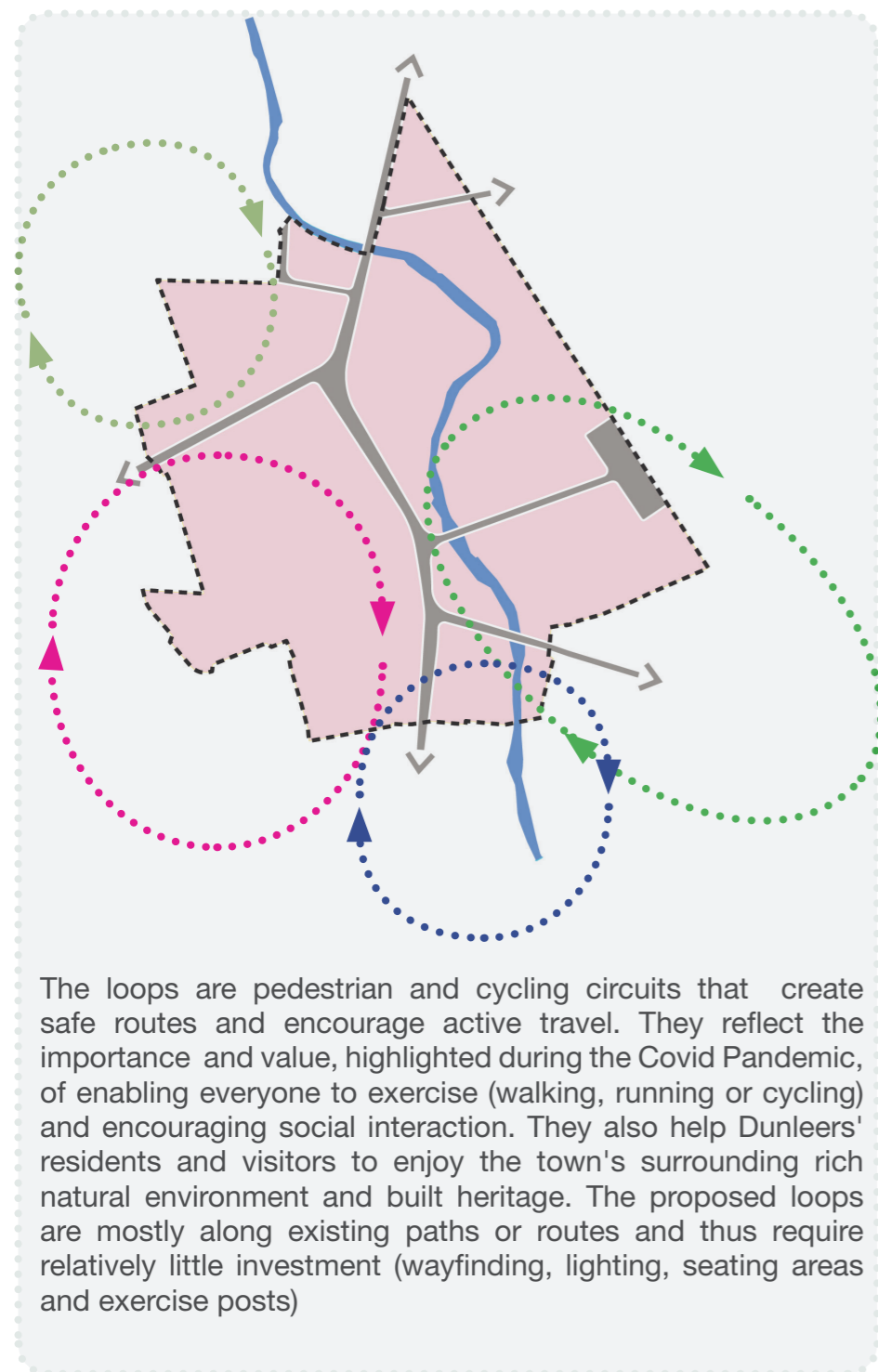
*A green and blue network of routes to promote active and healthy lifestyles for all, improve accessibility in the town centre, and contribute to the enhancement of Dunleer's biodiversity.*



Fig.3 - Potential links integrating biodiverse gardens at Rivervale Park.



Fig.4 - Proposed station pedestrian and green links



The loops are pedestrian and cycling circuits that create safe routes and encourage active travel. They reflect the importance and value, highlighted during the Covid Pandemic, of enabling everyone to exercise (walking, running or cycling) and encouraging social interaction. They also help Dunleer's residents and visitors to enjoy the town's surrounding rich natural environment and built heritage. The proposed loops are mostly along existing paths or routes and thus require relatively little investment (wayfinding, lighting, seating areas and exercise posts)

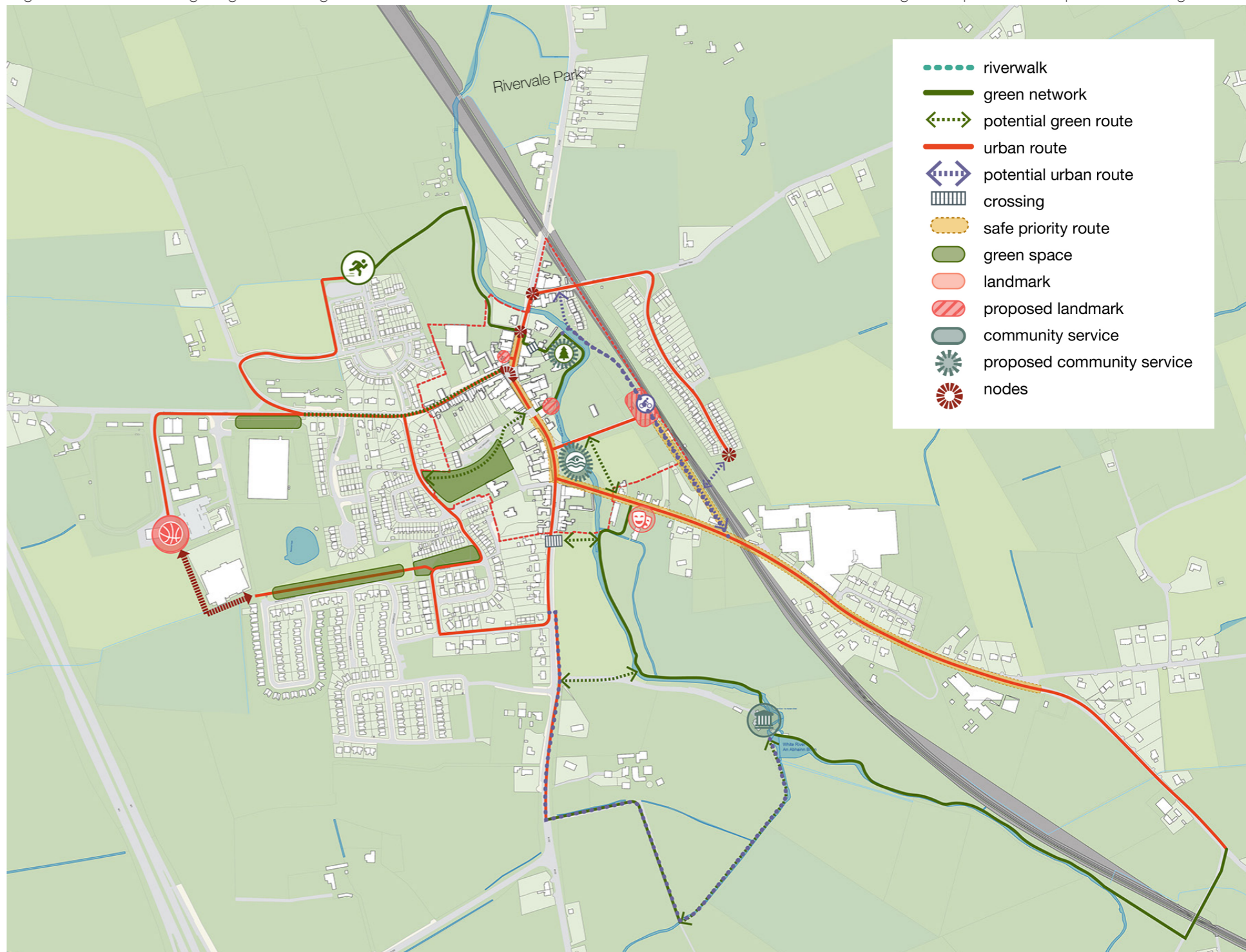


Fig.5 - Dunleer TCF Plan strategies, strategic opportunities and interventions

## Biodiverse Links

The network of pedestrian loops will link Dunleer's main public open spaces. Many of these are currently grass lawns with relatively low ecological value. There is an opportunity to enhance the biodiversity of these and establish a system of biodiverse links to be integrated with existing green and environmental corridors in the town centre. The new biodiverse parks can also incorporate sustainable surface water drainage systems as part of a town-wide strategy to mitigate current and future impacts of climate breakdown. In addition to their environmental role, the biodiverse links can also underpin a variety of social benefits. These spaces can include play and exercise areas for all ages, provide public seating to encourage local residents and visitors to spend more time outdoors, or establish outdoor environmental classrooms to illustrate the ecological value of rich and varied ecosystems. An important aspect of the proposal is the principle that the development and management of the biodiverse gardens should be carried out by local community groups such as Tidy Towns, supported by the Town Team and Louth County Council. The stewardship of green spaces, most of which are located within residential neighbourhoods, will promote place-based locally-led approaches in implementing the TCF Plan.



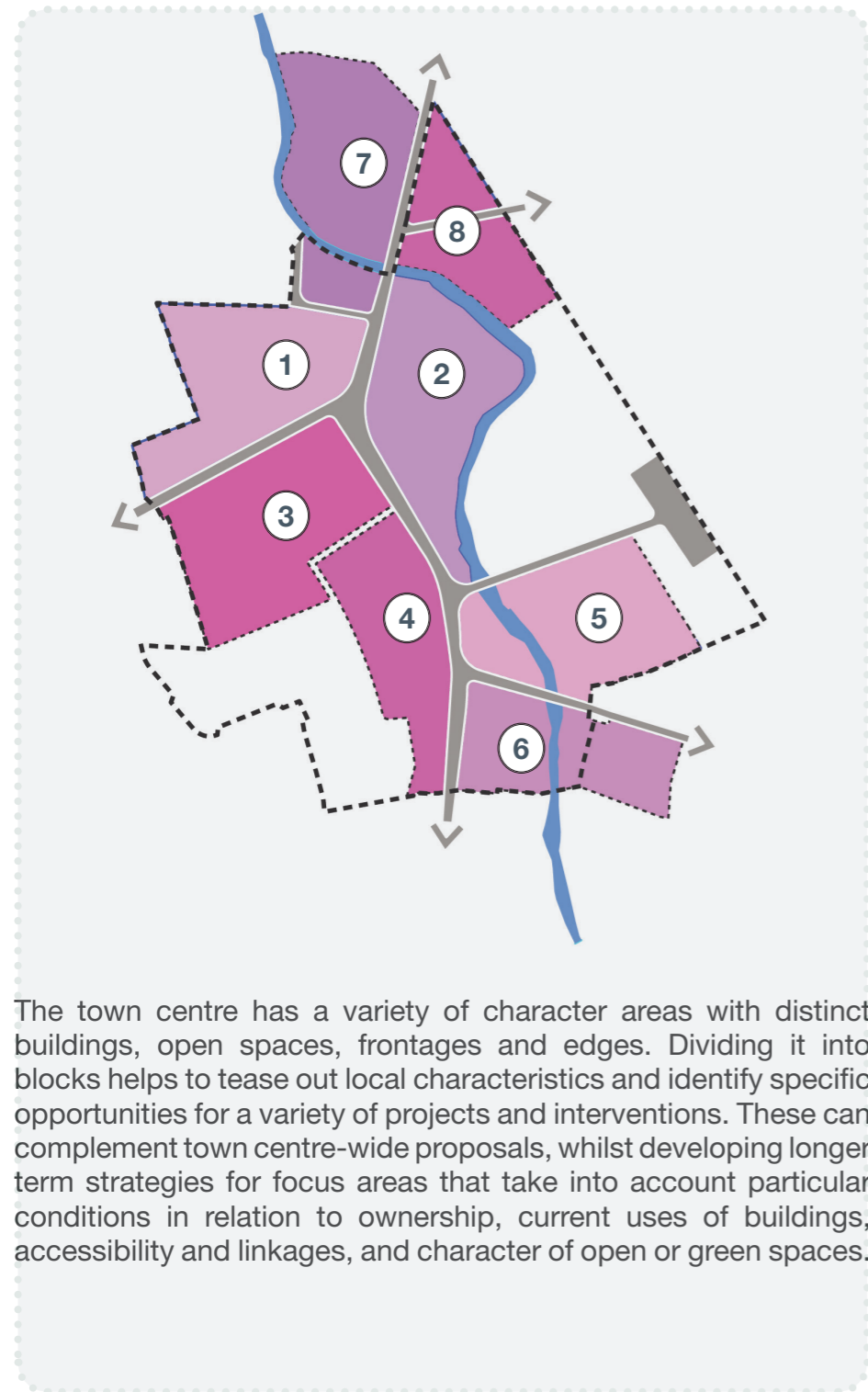
Fig.6 - Proposed green links between the Main Street and Dunleer Park



Fig.7 - Dunleer TCF Plan strategies, strategic opportunities and interventions

## B Dunleer Urban Blocks

*Understanding how the character and variety of the town centre's buildings, yards, gardens, backlands, open spaces and river corridor can underpin opportunities for new projects and interventions.*



The town centre has a variety of character areas with distinct buildings, open spaces, frontages and edges. Dividing it into blocks helps to tease out local characteristics and identify specific opportunities for a variety of projects and interventions. These can complement town centre-wide proposals, whilst developing longer term strategies for focus areas that take into account particular conditions in relation to ownership, current uses of buildings, accessibility and linkages, and character of open or green spaces.



1 - Ardee Road Yards



5 - Station Approach



2 - River Backlands



6 - Barn Road



3 - Ardee Road Gardens



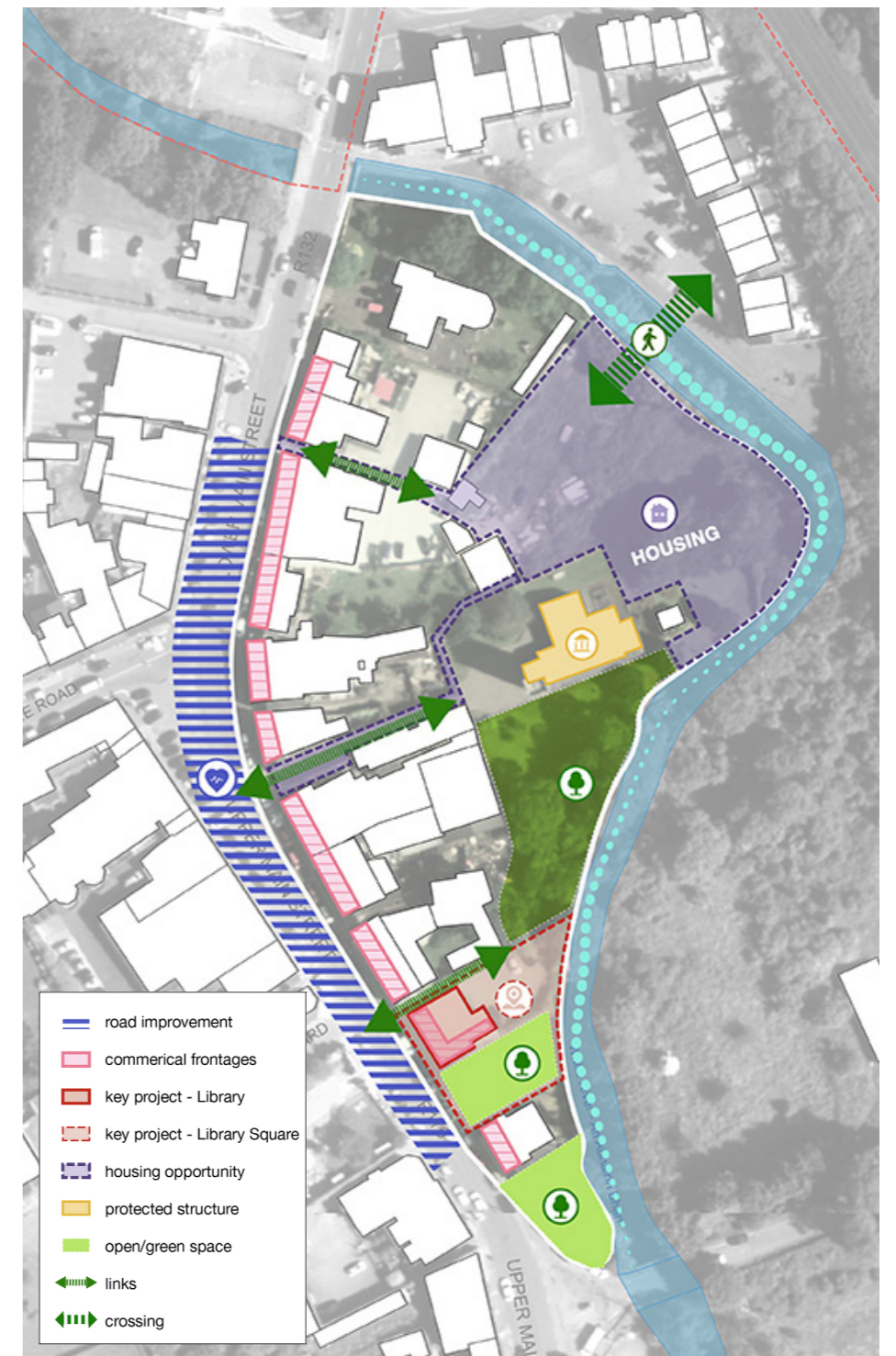
7 - Dunleer North



4 - Main Street Backlands



8 - The Forge



### River Backlands

The urban block has markedly contrasting characters. For example, the Main Street's mix of activity and traffic contrasts with the tranquil environment of the White River corridor. There relatively large backlands and existing vacant structures such as the former Bank of Ireland building create the opportunity to introduce new uses, link the Main Street with the river, and deliver a new public square and green spaces such as river pocket parks. The regeneration of the block can be linked to the transformation of the Main Street as a greener, more accessible space for pedestrians of all ages.

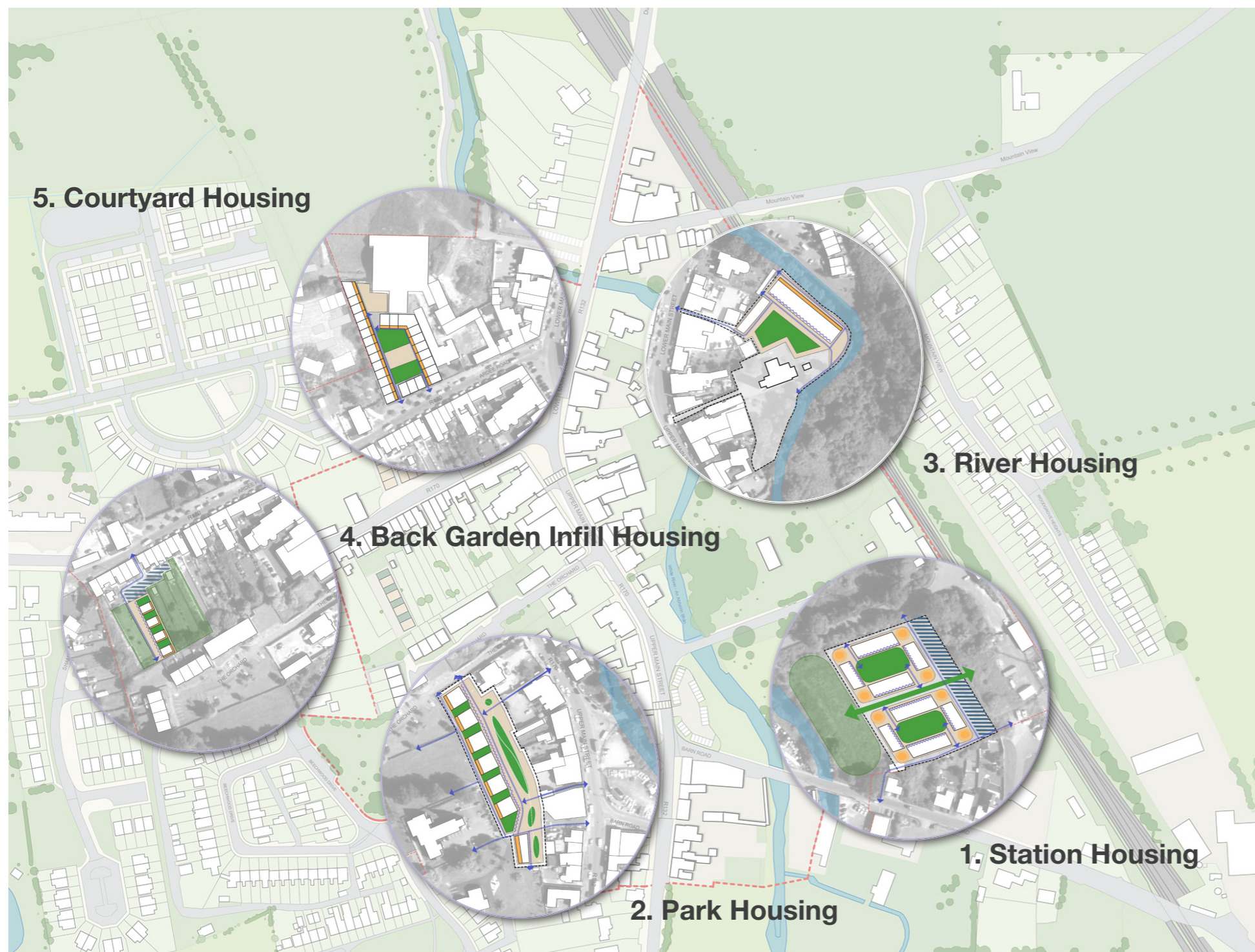


Fig.8 - Potential sites for new housing in the town centre



Fig.13 - Back garden infill housing example. Gap house, Bristol. UK. By BDP



Fig.12 - Park housing example. The Old Dairy, London. By Woodroffe Pappa Archs.

## Infill and Brownfield Housing - Overview

The TCF Policy identifies (and prioritises) the redevelopment of underutilised areas of town centres to provide a choice of housing types in response to Ireland's changing demography. The 'urban blocks approach' has allowed to identify potential plots for residential developments. The plan opposite shows the location of these plots, and the images below illustrate the typologies that would be best suited in relation to each site's characteristics.



Fig.9 - Courtyard housing example - Forest Mews, London. By Stolon Studio



Fig.10 - River housing example. Retirement Community, Tetbury. By Proctor Mathews



Fig.11 - Station housing example - Marmalade Lane, Cambridge. Mole Architects

## C Main Street and White River

A green and blue core at the heart of the town centre.

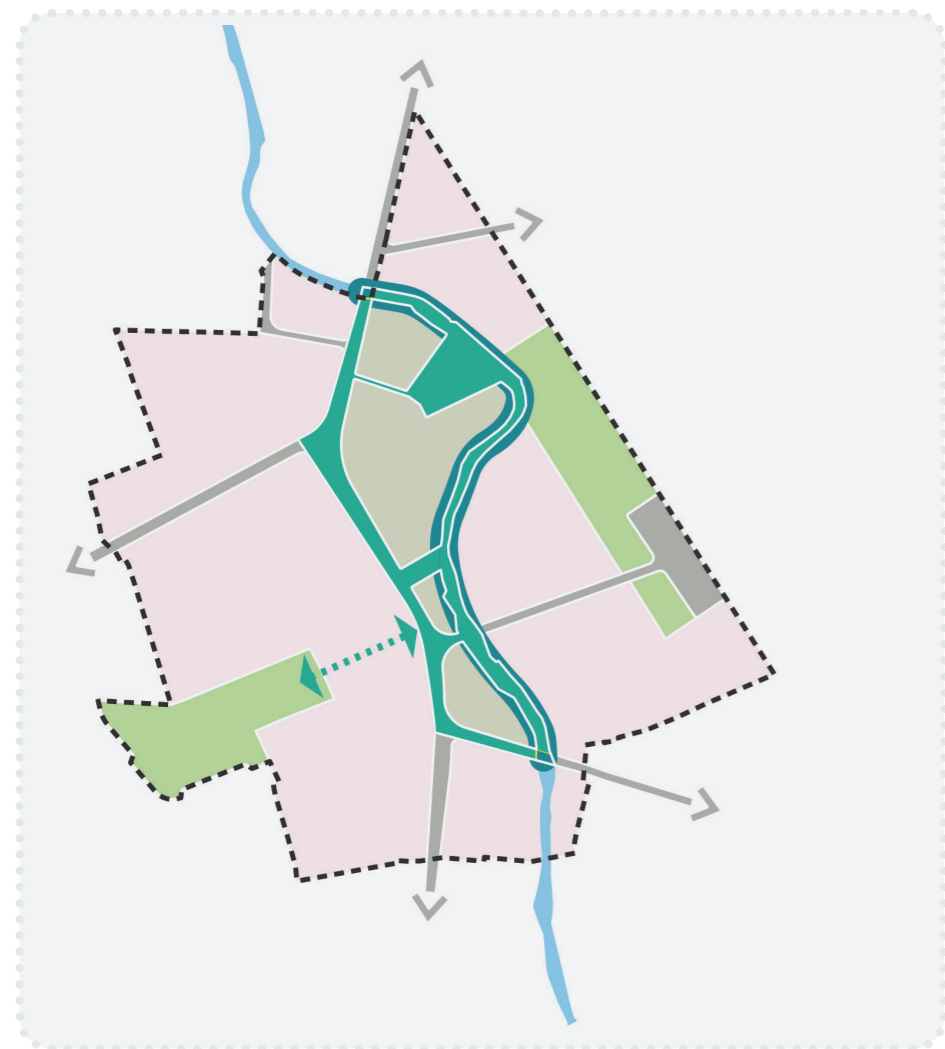


Fig.14 - Illustrative plan of proposed interventions in the Main St. and White River

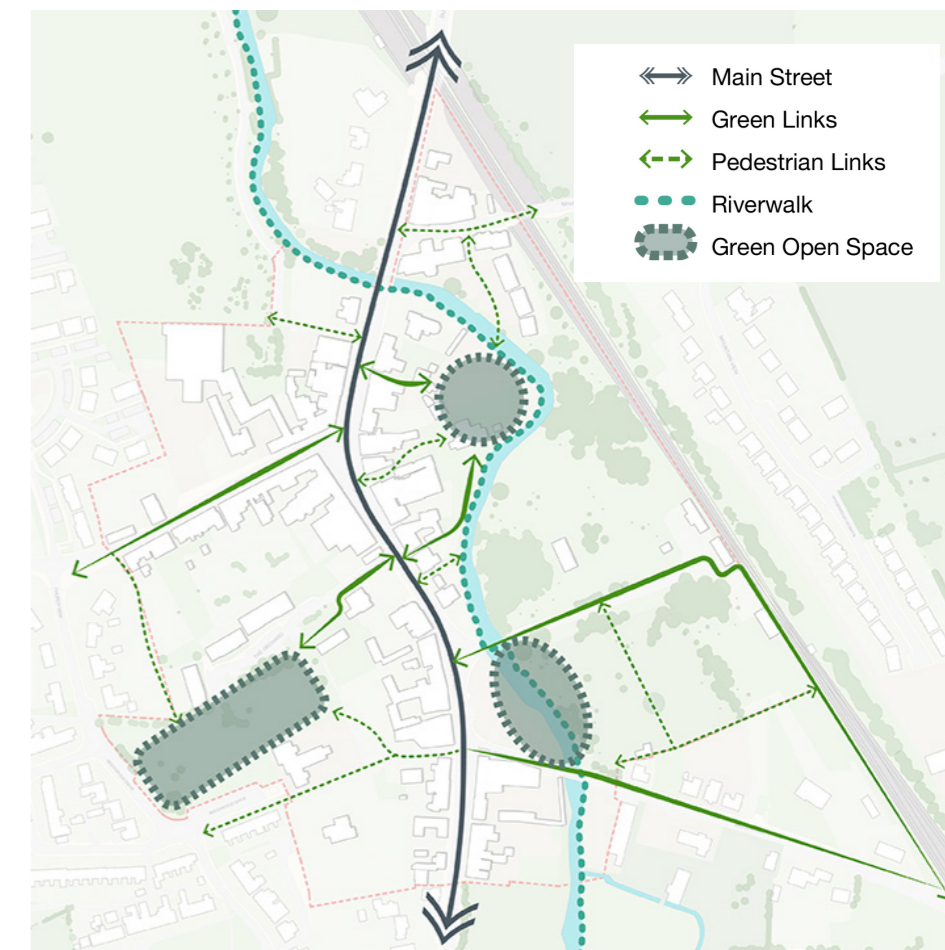


Fig.15 - Diagram of proposed green and blue network

The River Park is envisaged as an amenity for both Dunleer residents and visitors. It would incorporate small picnic and play areas. A series of terraced platforms could allow the public to sit along the banks and enjoy being close to the water. Sensitively designed stepping stones would bridge both banks, and make it possible to create a natural pool.

In this way the 'rediscovery' of the White River can establish a unique space for both Dunleer's community and visitors that promotes health and wellbeing in a natural environment which is very much part of the town's historic identity.

The Main Street and White River turn their back to each other, and are markedly different spaces despite their proximity. The hardness and vibrancy of the street contrasts with the calmness and lush greenery of the river corridor. The proposed strategic approach will consider street and river, and the spaces between them, as one project area or urban entity. A future 'soft core' for the town centre where the street opens up to the river, and the river becomes part of the public realm framework.



Fig.16 - Examples of natural swimming pools and river parks



## Reimagining the Main Street

The plans opposite illustrate the current layout of the Main Street, and the interventions proposed by the TFC Plan. The overall aim of the proposal is to make the Main Street a more accessible, pedestrian-oriented and greener place whilst retaining its function as a vehicular route. The enhancement of the public realm is key to support the revitalisation of the town centre by creating spaces that will more inviting, and by generating a value uplift that will help attract more investment and businesses. Importantly, better and safer public spaces for pedestrians will help to reinforce the role of the town centre as a place for the community - one where residents of all ages will want to spend more time in to socialise and engage with neighbours and visitors.

The interventions in the Main Street will be complemented with improved pedestrian links with the wider area of Dunleer, and the consolidation of a network of green and blue spaces that will incorporate Dunleer's historic street.



Fig.17 - Illustration of proposed intervention in the Main Street

## D Revitalisation Projects

*Targeted projects to unlock the wider regeneration and revitalisation of the town centre.*



These are key projects that will underpin the revitalisation of the town centre. They are all interventions in existing buildings and adjacent open spaces, together with a landscape project. They all have different ownerships and will require specific delivery, funding and management strategies. The Revitalisation Projects include the reuse of the railway station building and current Public Library, transformation of the old Bank of Ireland Building, adaptive reuse of the Corner House pub, and a new riverside park at the southern end of the town centre.

**Former Bank of Ireland** - The former Bank of Ireland building on Market Street has been recently acquired by LCC to relocate the public library from the station area. Located at the heart of the town centre, and directly opposite to the Market House, the future library will help to establish a community and public service core that will help to revitalise the Main Street. The TCF Plan proposes to consolidate and extend the library's role by creating a new square adjacent to the refurbished building. This will not only provide a much needed public space at the heart of the town centre, but also a link to the White River via a river pocket park. Bringing together the Main Street, Public Library, public square and pocket park will create a unique space for residents and visitors. A place to meet neighbours and welcome visitors, stage events, celebrate local culture, relax by the river, or simply enjoy spending more time in the town centre.

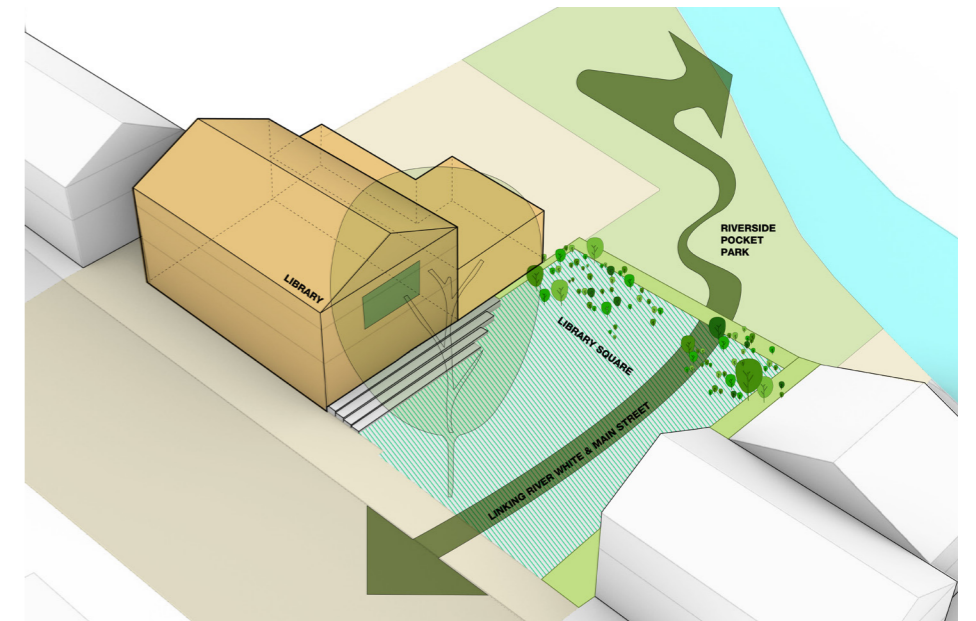


Fig.18 - Diagram of proposed Library Square and White River Pocket Park

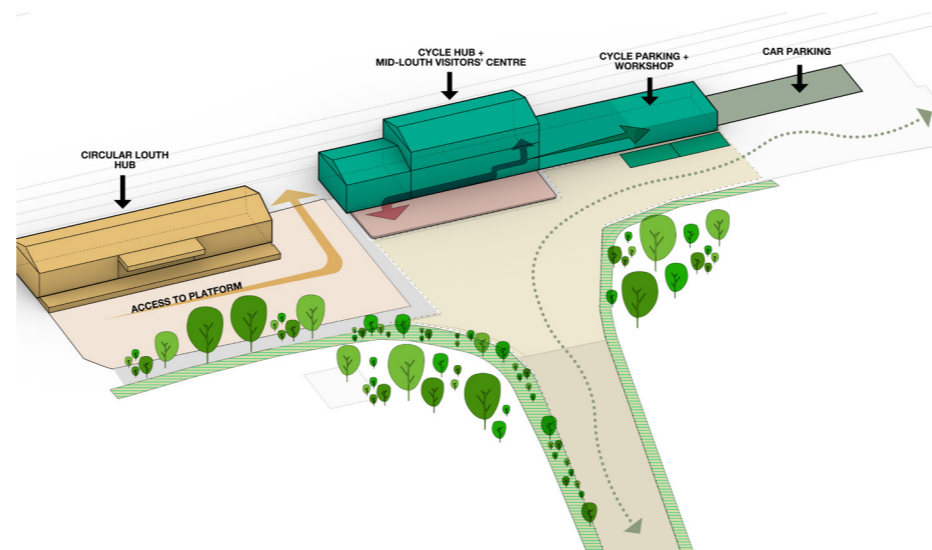


Fig.19 - Illustration of proposed intervention in the train station area

**Enterprise Yard** - The Corner House Pub can be reinvented as a hub to support new businesses and entrepreneurial initiatives. The TCF Plan proposes a strategy for an intervention in the pub that provides flexibility to accommodate a variety of uses. This is based on making the most of the building's diverse spaces, and of how these can be brought together or developed independently from each other. At ground floor, three large open spaces (the former pub, storage block and yard), with direct access from the Main Street can host an enterprise centre with a variety of uses such as a co-working hub, makers' workshops, youth cafe, retail outlets or market. The upper floor levels, divided into smaller rooms, can be used in a variety of ways, including shared office spaces, study rooms or even town centre apartments. The yard can be envisaged as an extension of the public realm - almost a square at the heart of a compact, mixed-use urban block at the heart of Dunleer's town centre.

**Train Station + Visitor's and Mobility Hub** - The TFC Plan addresses the challenge of designing for the adaptive reuse of the station building and former library, and their adjacent open space. The strategic proposal is to transform the vacant station building into a circular hub - one that will support local producers by hosting activities such as a farmer's market or community food hub, and support youth education and training programmes. These can be delivered without constraining the possibility of a future reopening of the station. The former library building can be used as a visitor's and mobility hub, with facilities such as a cycling cafe or repair shop, and a tourist information centre to help redefine Dunleer as a gateway to the wider Mid-Louth area.

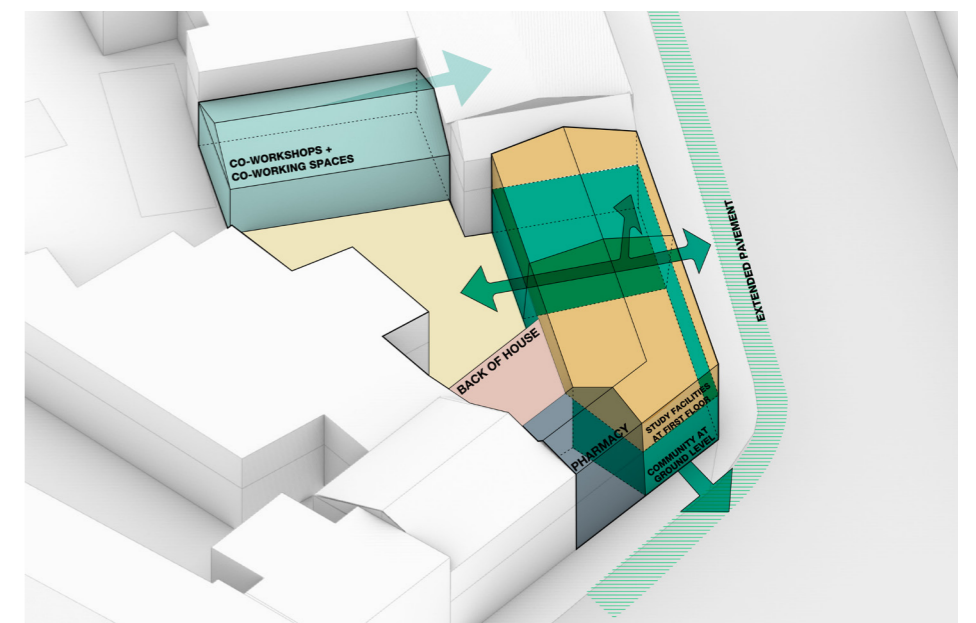


Fig.20 - Illustration of proposed reuse of the Corner House Pub

## Dunleer Library Square

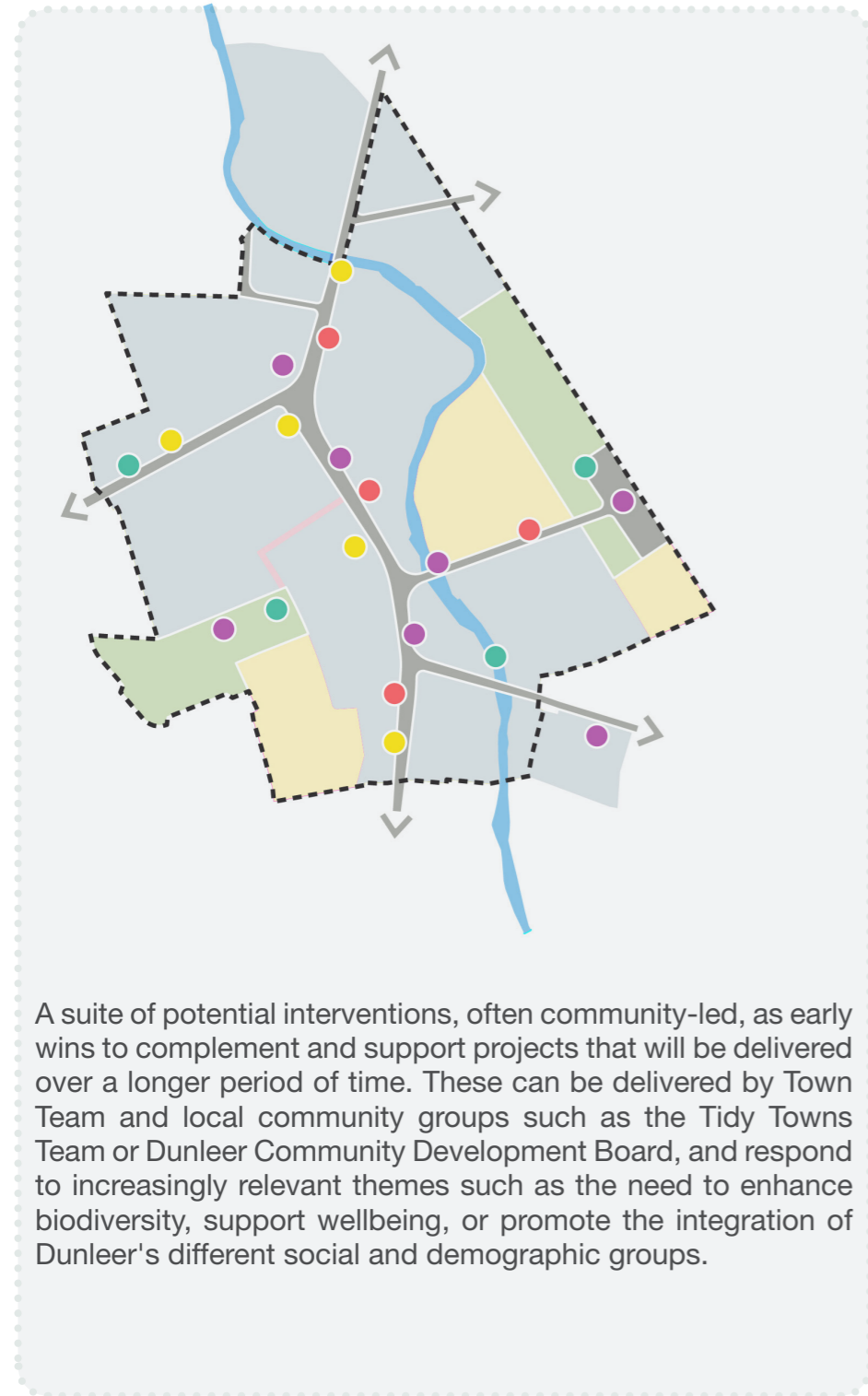
The Library Square will be a new cultural and community heart that will underpin the transformation of the Main Street and strengthen the town centre's role as the focus for the revitalisation of Dunleer. It will create a unique sequence of interlinked spaces and environments that will bring together a greener Main Street, a multi use public square, a river pocket square and a cultural and education hub. It will be a space to celebrate and showcase all that Dunleer has to offer as a forward-looking town that embraces the opportunity to define its particular version of positive growth and transformation.



Fig.21 - View of proposed Library Square from Main Street

## E Enhancement, Improvement & Collaborative Actions

*Early wins and community-driven projects to complement the TFC Plan's projects and strategies.*



A suite of potential interventions, often community-led, as early wins to complement and support projects that will be delivered over a longer period of time. These can be delivered by Town Team and local community groups such as the Tidy Towns Team or Dunleer Community Development Board, and respond to increasingly relevant themes such as the need to enhance biodiversity, support wellbeing, or promote the integration of Dunleer's different social and demographic groups.



Fig.22 - Illustrative plan showing proposed TCF Plan interventions

- E1 - Town Loops, Wayfinding & Healthy Travel Signage:** A town centre wayfinding and signage initiative. This will provide a well designed way of navigating and learning more about the town centre.
- E2 - Green Gateway Project:** Building on the existing gateway designs on the edge of the town and providing a welcoming and unique entrance to Dunleer.
- E3 - Street Decluttering, Street Furniture Strategy & Lighting Street:** Making the town centre's public realm safer, more attractive and inviting, and accessible for all by reorganising the existing seating, bins and other street furniture.
- E4 - Streetscape Enhancement Strategy:** Revitalise the town centre by painting buildings and installing street art along the Main Street.
- E5 - Green Area Biodiversity, Landscaping Improvements & Tree Planting strategy:** Provide additional greening and planting at strategic locations in the town centre.
- E6 - Built Heritage Scheme:** Focus on existing Conservation funding streams to maintain and upgrade existing protected buildings.
- E7 - Shopfront Improvement Scheme:** A Louth County Council shopfront improvement scheme has been running since 2016 and is open annually to expressions of interest from businesses in the county.
- E8 - Digital High Street:** creation of a digital high street through an e-commerce platform to enable local shops and businesses to expand their reach and engage with customers online.
- E9 - Community Festival & Street Party:** A one off or annual event which brings business to the town and garners a sense of community
- E10 - Upgrade to the Existing Playground:** Upgrade and possible redesign to the existing playground.
- E11 - Deep Clean Initiative of the Town Centre:** A deep clean to the public areas and street furniture items within the town centre.
- E12 - Local Transport Link Service:** Establish a local transport network connecting residential areas and rural hinterland.



Fig.23 - Aerial view illustration of proposed interventions in the Main Street and Library Square

## WHAT'S NEXT

The TCF Plan establishes a framework to support Dunleer's transformation and positive growth. The strategic opportunities and interventions that have been identified and explored in the development of the plan set up a clear vision of how the town can prosper in a sustainable way over the next 15 years. The next steps for the plan will involve a further refinement of the proposals in liaison with relevant stakeholders. Enhancing the town centre's vibrancy will rely on collaborative processes at all levels, and involve, amongst others:

- Government departments and agencies
- Regional Assembly
- Louth County Council and other relevant local authorities
- Private landowners, investors and developers
- Local and regional community groups
- Non-governmental organisations
- Town Team

The strategic opportunities and interventions as set out within the Town Centre First Plan will require both public funding and private investment in order to deliver their objectives and to ultimately realise the Vision for Dunleer. The funding of project interventions will require a joined-up and coordinated approach due to the various stakeholders that will play a role in the funding and implementation process.

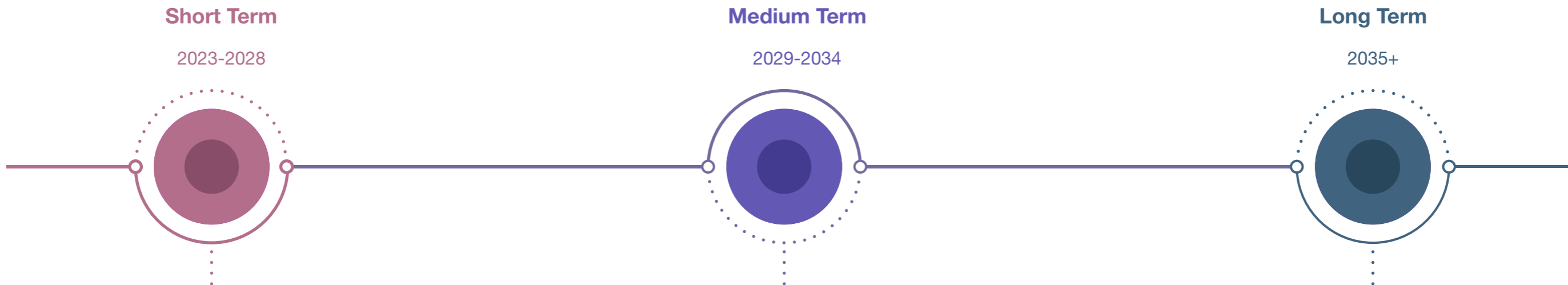
Current potential public funding schemes include the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF), Town & Village Renewal Scheme (TVRS), European Regional Development Fund, and the National Transport Authority's (NTA) Active Travel Grants Programme.

Monitoring the delivery of the TCF Plan will be in coordination with the National Oversight and Advisory Group (NOAG) as defined in the TCF Policy. NOAG will also support engagement across Government and national stakeholders, helping, amongst other aspects, to enhance the capabilities of the Town Team as a key actor in the implementation of the framework's proposals. The Town Team will have a key role in overseeing the Plan's delivery, stakeholder communication, and any required updates. This guarantees that the community remains engaged and retains stewardship of the regeneration process for Dunleer' Town Centre.

A periodic assessment of the regeneration process will allow to not only measure the degree of success in implementing its supporting interventions, but also to identify the need to make changes or adjustments in response to varying circumstances, new opportunities, availability of funding streams or any other relevant factor.



Fig.24 - Aerial view of Dunleer town centre from the south along the Main Street



Short Term 2023-2028		Medium Term 2029-2034		Long Term 2035+	
INTERVENTIONS AND PROJECTS	OUTCOMES	INTERVENTIONS AND PROJECTS	OUTCOMES	INTERVENTIONS AND PROJECTS	OUTCOMES
<b>A1_1</b> Rewilding public open spaces - no mow approach	Establishment of Biodiverse Gardens along Central Loop	<b>A1_1</b> Open link between Lannleire Pavilion and Rivervale Park	Completion of central Dunleer Loop	<b>A1</b> Open access to rural routes around Dunleer	Completion of network of pedestrian and cycle loops
<b>A1_3</b> Active travel scheme for Scoil Ui Mhuiri	Safer walking and cycling routes to school	<b>A1</b> Open link between Main Street and Dunleer Park via the Orchard	Accessible route between housing areas and the Main Street	<b>B2</b> Infill housing in backlands and allocated sites	Densification and compact growth in the town centre. Housing focused on elderly population and first time buyers/renters
<b>C1</b> Traffic calming	Slow traffic down throughout the core of the Main Street and enhance benefits for cyclists	<b>B2</b> Step-down housing	Accessible and supervised town centre housing	<b>B2</b> Step-down housing	Accessible and supervised town centre housing
<b>C2</b> Phase 1 of River Park and River Walk	New open space and public path	<b>C1</b> Main Street Parking and Greening - Phase 1	Accessible to all pedestrians and urban greening	<b>C1</b> Main Street Parking and Greening - Phase 2	Accessible to all pedestrians and urban greening
<b>D1_D2</b> Refurbishment of Library	New community hub at the heart of the town centre	<b>D2</b> Riverside pocket park	Public realm connection between Main Street and White River	<b>C2</b> Riverside park	Delivery of riverside park with facilities for local residents and visitors
<b>D4</b> Cycling Hub	Re-use of current library	<b>D3</b> Adaptive reuse of train station	New flexible space to promote and market local products	<b>D2</b> Extension of library and new community spaces	New flexible space to promote and market local products
<b>E1 to E11</b> Initiatives in collaboration with local community groups	Enhancement of town centre's streetscape and townscape. Improvement of facilities in open spaces and support of wellbeing for all ages. Safer and more accessible streets.	<b>D4</b> Mobility hub and Dunleer visitors' centre	Implement sustainable mobility strategy for Dunleer and promote local tourism		
		<b>D5</b> - Corner House Pub public realm enhancement	Value uplift of pub environment to attract investment		
		<b>E1 to E12</b> Initiatives in collaboration with local community groups	Enhancement of town centre's streetscape and townscape. Improvement of facilities in open spaces and support of wellbeing for all ages. Safer and more accessible streets.		

