

**Leitir Ceanainn**



**Comhairle Contae  
Dhún na nGall**  
Donegal County Council

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**LETTERKENNY CULTURAL CORRIDOR (FORMING PART OF  
LK GREEN CONNECT)**

**AT**

**RAMELTON ROAD, HIGH ROAD AND JOHN MCLAUGHLIN  
WAY AND IN THE AREAS OF AN GRIANAN THEATRE, THE  
REGIONAL CULTURAL CENTRE, DONEGAL COUNTY  
MUSEUM, LETTERKENNY TENNIS CLUB AND  
LETTERKENNY BOXING CLUB, IN THE TOWNLAND OF  
LETTERKENNY, COUNTY DONEGAL.**

**DESCRIPTION OF THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF THE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED in  
relation to Letterkenny Cultural Corridor (forming part of LK Green Connect) at Ramelton  
Road, High Road and John McLaughlin Way and in the areas of an Grianan Theatre, the  
Regional Cultural Centre, Donegal County Museum, Letterkenny Tennis Club and  
Letterkenny Boxing Club, Letterkenny in the townland of Letterkenny, County Donegal  
and in the Letterkenny-Milford Municipal District;**

Pursuant to Part XI Planning & Development Act, 2000 (as amended) and Article 81, Part 8 of  
the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 (as amended)

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Regeneration and Development Team  
Directorate of Community Development &  
Planning Services  
September 2023

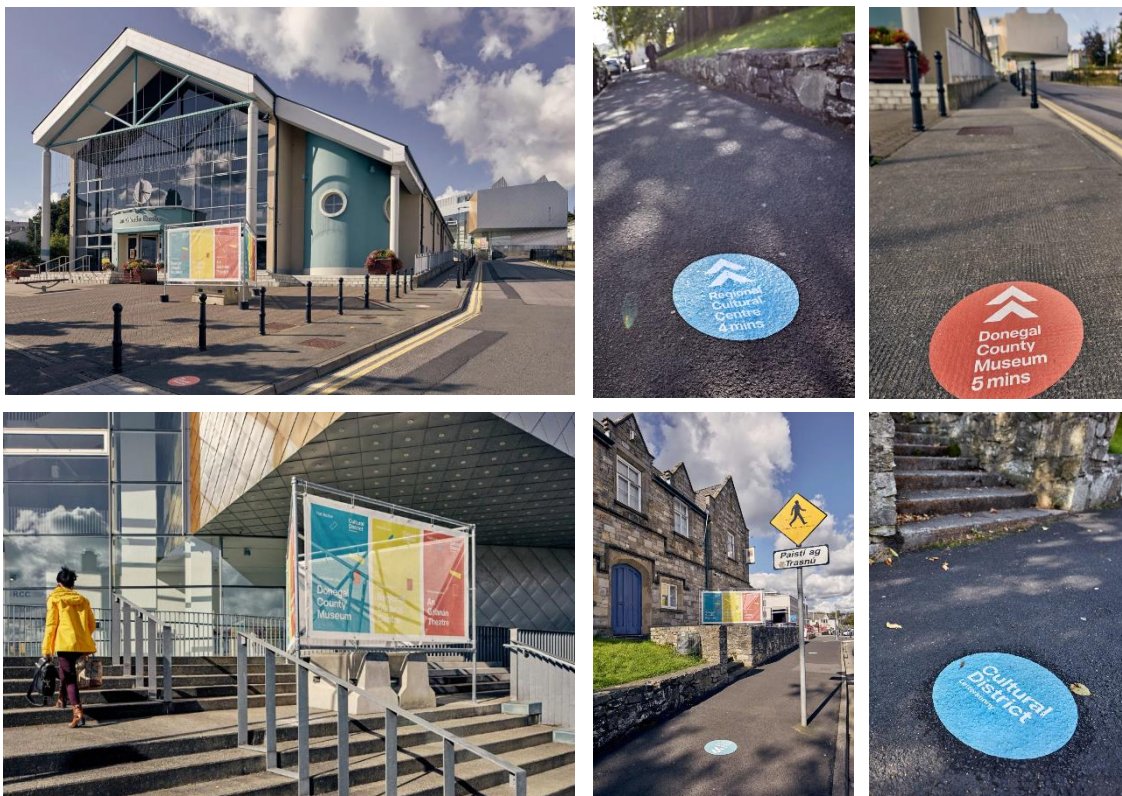
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## 1.0 Background to the proposed development

The Cultural Corridor project originated in 2019/2020 when the Cultural partners in Letterkenny (Donegal County Museum, the Regional Cultural Centre and An Grianan Theatre) secured funding support from the Irish Architectural Foundation (IAF) for a project entitled 'Reimagine Letterkenny,' to creatively explore how an existing walkway connecting Port Road and High Road could be transformed into a cultural asset. The aim was to consider how the existing path could become an attractive pedestrian route, reconnecting the three cultural buildings in the public imagination while also supporting the creation of a new cultural identity in this part of Letterkenny town centre.

IAF support enabled the appointment of Pasparakis Friel Architects in 2019/2020 to develop the concept for the Cultural Corridor including undertaking several consultation events. The emerging concept focused on (i) the design and installation of short term wayfinding markers to establish the seeds of a Cultural Quarter and (ii) a longer-term vision to create an innovative and alternative pedestrian link between the three cultural partners through the development of new and enhancement of existing pathway infrastructure. In addition, the concept for the longer-term project identified opportunities for public realm, moments for rest, moments for art and for the expression of culture in the physical environment. Images 1-7 refer.



Images 1-6: Wayfinding installations delivered in 2020 by the Cultural Partners/ Pasparakis Friel Architects under the IAF supported project entitled 'Reimagined Letterkenny.'



Image 7:  
Early concept image for enhancement of  
existing and new connections.

This Part 8 provides for the further evolution of the long-term vision of the IAF supported 'Reimagined Letterkenny' project to statutory approval stage having regard to the wider regeneration ambitions for the town centre that are set out in the Letterkenny 2040 Regeneration Strategy and thereby providing a cohesive accessibility and public realm approach to the development of a Cultural and Innovation Quarter in the town. This includes that the proposed development forms part of a wider key project of LKY 2040 known as LK Green Connect which aims to deliver a network of high quality walking, cycling and public realm infrastructure threading through the town centre from Donegal County Museum to the Letterkenny Public Service Centre and connecting to key destinations along the way including the RCC, Courthouse, Boxing Club, Tennis Club, Theatre, planned enterprise space, a future regional transport hub, the retail park, community centre and ATU. In that context, the proposed development is a critical phase in the delivery of the wider LK Green Connect, the first phase of which was officially opened in June 2023.

The proposed development is also central to realizing the potential of a vibrant and animated Cultural and Innovation Quarter located in the centre of the town. This is critically important for Letterkenny in responding to shifting patterns in retail and the increase in online sales that is having the effect of increasing vacancy levels and is also impacting on vibrancy and vitality of the town centre. Investment in physical measures that prioritize place-making and focus on enhancing the non-retail experience of Letterkenny town centre such as in the form of public spaces and squares, parks, built heritage and cultural institutions will have significant benefits in driving footfall to the town centre, improving liveability and quality of life and thus activating economic activity. In this context, the proposed development is a critical component in the Councils place-making response to reinventing Letterkenny town centre and in supporting the further evolution of the exceptional work of the 3 cultural institutions.

In addition, the evolution of the original IAF project to Part 8 enabled further engagement with the key stakeholders of Letterkenny Tennis Club and Letterkenny Boxing Club who also



occupy space in the area of the Cultural and Innovation Quarter and are adjoining neighbours to the Cultural partners. As a result, the Part 8 proposed development embraces the presence of both the Tennis and Boxing Clubs as highly active community and sporting stakeholders in the area that contribute to the sense of place and identity that is developing within the emerging Cultural and Innovation Quarter.

The project area is 0.87ha (2.1 acres) and is presently characterized as comprising of existing and long-established walkways, carriageways, paved areas and public realm. Part of the site where a new walking and cycling connection is proposed comprises an area of developed land/ buildings and curtilage. Located in the town centre, the proposed development will connect to multiple destinations offering choice to walkers/cyclists and enhanced permeability and accessibility. While the existing environment provides for a level of accessibility infrastructure and public realm, it is challenged and sub-optimal in character due to its lack of a cohesive design approach. As a result, it consists of a patchwork of different materials and colours which impacts legibility, poorly lit spaces, narrow overgrown corridors, blind spots, lack of natural rest points and overall it is a circuitous route between the three cultural institutions. Images 8-20 show the existing environment.

#### Images 8-20: Existing physical environment



Image 8:  
John McLaughlin Way from  
Ramelton Road



Image 9:  
John McLaughlin Way  
towards Ramelton Road



Image 10:  
Public space to the front of An  
Grianan Theatre



Image 11:  
Public Road L-10042-0  
from Ramelton Road to  
RCC



Image 12:  
Embankment between RCC and  
Letterkenny Tennis Club



Image 13:  
Existing path along the front of RCC

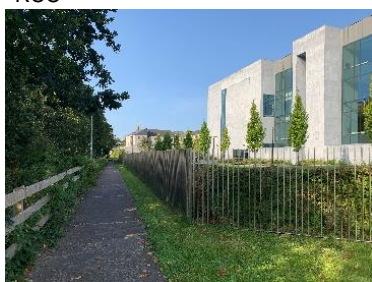


Image 14:  
Existing path adjoining Courthouse  
towards Boxing Club



Image 15:  
Existing path alongside Letterkenny  
Boxing Club

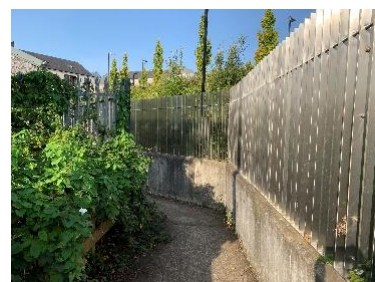


Image 16:  
Existing path alongside Letterkenny  
Boxing Club



Far left; Image 17:  
Lands between Letterkenny Tennis Club and High Road

Left; Image 18:  
Lands between Letterkenny Tennis Club and High Road



Far left; Image 19:  
High Road existing environment looking Northwards

Left; Image 20:  
High Road existing environment at exit point of proposed infrastructure between 'NCBI' building and vernacular house.

As referenced, the proposed development is an important component in the wider urban regeneration programme known as 'Letterkenny 2040' which has delivered the preparation of an ambitious, transformative and overarching Regeneration Strategy for Letterkenny town centre to achieve its goals as a Regional Growth Centre in line with its identified role in the National Planning Framework (NPF), The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) and in the cross border context of the North West City Region. The overarching vision of Letterkenny 2040 is to co-deliver a vibrant, liveable and fully functioning regional centre with a flourishing population that has a strong economy, employment and housing choice, healthy and restorative environments, community and social amenities, high quality of life and positive public and civic spaces. The proposed development of Letterkenny Cultural Corridor, forming part of the wider LK Green Connect walking, cycling and public realm infrastructure is a highly important project given its nature as creating a central spine of accessibility infrastructure to link existing and planned town centre destinations and thus making the town centre more walkable.

The proposed development is also linked to a parallel project, 'The Eat Out', that will see the development of outdoor dining infrastructure within the existing public space to the front of An Grianan Theatre. The 'Eat Out,' funded by Fáilte Ireland together with match funding by Donegal County Council, comprises the construction of a raised platform to enable outdoor dining with capacity for dual use as performance space together with canopy shelter. The proposed development of the Cultural Corridor builds upon the shorter term intervention of 'The Eat Out' by setting out the longer-term vision for the entirety of the public space at the front of An Grianan Theatre in such as manner as to integrate and align with layout, form and function of 'The Eat Out'. For information, 'The Eat Out' secured Part 8 approval in November 2022, has progressed through detailed design with tendering in respect of a construction contractor ongoing.

The proposed Part 8 development of Letterkenny Cultural Corridor will achieve multiple benefits including:

- Enabling the establishment of a Cultural and Innovation Quarter and the future animation of it through festivals, events and gatherings thus prioritizing a high-quality town centre experience.
- Enabling civic and community activity and cultural and artistic expression within the urban environment .
- Supporting the cultural programmes of the 3 cultural institutions.
- Enhancing pedestrian and cycling accessibility in the town centre
- Improving public safety
- Enhancement and upgrade to existing public realm.
- Supporting an attractive urban environment
- Offering choice in terms of modal shift
- Supporting the local hospitality and tourism sector.
- Increasing footfall and dwell time in the town centre and activating spin-offs for local businesses.
- Contributing to a more competitive and vibrant town centre.
- Integrating biodiversity into the urban landscape.

As outlined in section 4.0 of this report, the proposed Part 8 development offers strong alignment with the National, Regional and Local policy contexts particularly National Priorities for Compact Growth, a Strong Economy supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills and Enhanced Amenity and Heritage alongside driving a strong and competitive Cross Border Regional Growth Centre to the highest standards in accordance with the Town Centre Strategy of the County Donegal Development Plan, 2018-2024 (as varied). It is also aligned with the vision of the Letterkenny 2040 Regeneration Strategy.

Local Authority-led land assembly to facilitate the project is being enabled through Donegal County Councils successful application to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Call for applications under URDF together with match funding from Donegal County Council. The project presents as a strong candidate for submission to the 4<sup>th</sup> Call for applications to URDF as regards the capital funding required to deliver the project. It is anticipated that applications are expected to be invited for URDF Call 4 in Q4 2023/Q1 2024.

The proposed Part 8 development has been developed via the further appointment of Pasparakis Friel Architects in conjunction with the architectural resources of the Councils Regeneration and Development Team.

## **2.0 Location of the proposed development**

The location of the proposed development is the townland of LETTERKENNY specifically located at at Ramelton Road, High Road and John McLaughlin Way in the town centre of Letterkenny and in the areas of an Grianan Theatre, the Regional Cultural Centre, Donegal County Museum, Letterkenny Tennis Club and Letterkenny Boxing Club.

The proposed development largely relates to the enhancement and improvement of existing areas of public realm, carriageway and footpath- with the exception of circa 119m of new



walkway proposed between Letterkenny Tennis Club and High Road. The topography across the extent of the site varies with levels reducing North to South from existing ground level at High Road of circ 46m, to existing ground level at Ramelton Road/An Grianan public realm of circa 16m.

The site is located within the town centre and therefore is surrounded on all boundaries by built-up, long established urban infrastructure of mixed-use type including cultural, recreational, commercial, residential, retail, service, financial and entertainment, reflective of its town centre location. The cultural uses at An Grianan Theatre the Regional Cultural Centre and Donegal County Museum together with Letterkenny Tennis Club, Letterkenny Boxing Club and the Courthouse characterize the area as a distinctive part of the town centre in terms of cultural and community activity.

Please refer to drawing no's: Dwg No's: 0000 (Site Location and Site Extent) and 0001 (Site Location Map) and as shown the following pages as Images 21 & 22.

**Image 21: Drawing No: 0000 (Site Location and Site Extent)**

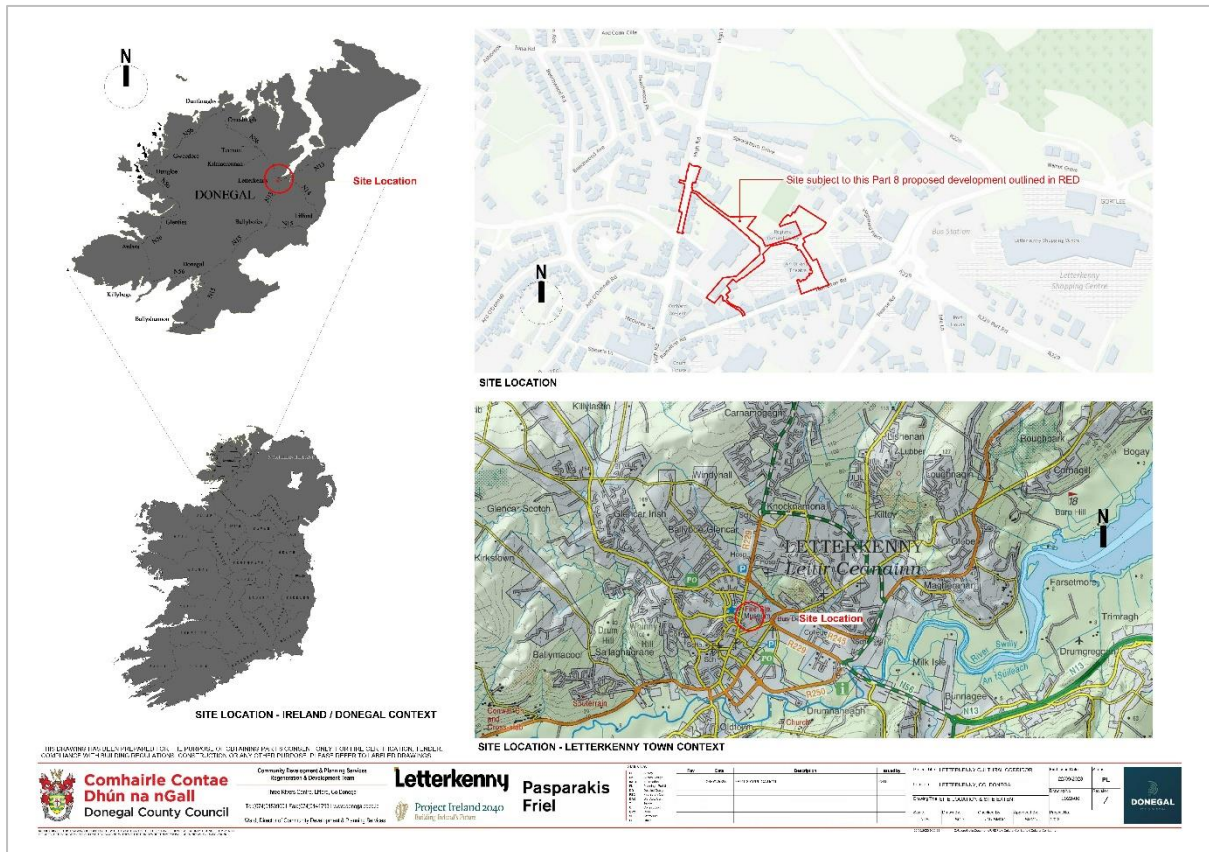
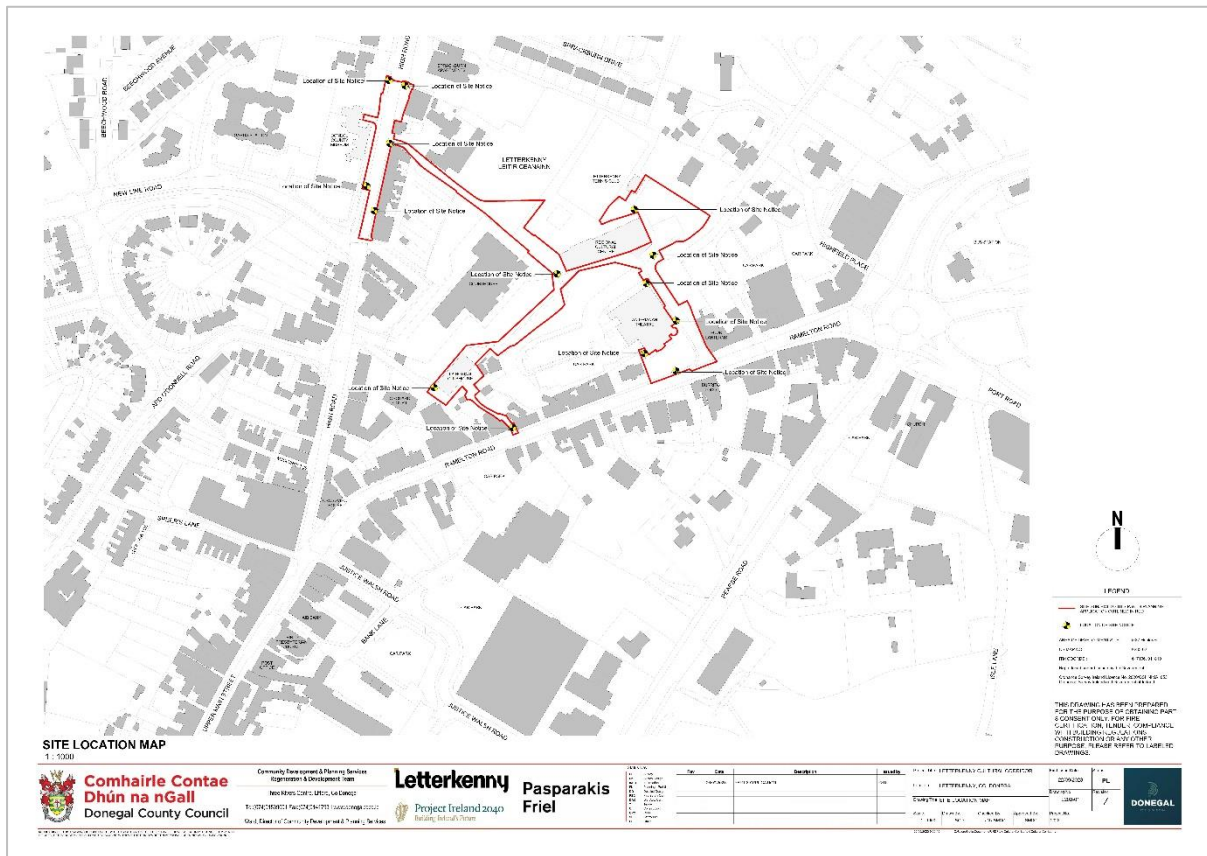




Image 22: Drawing No: 0001 (Site Location Map)



### 3.0 Description of the proposed development

The specific nature of the proposed works is as follows:

Enhancement of existing and construction of new walking, cycling and public realm infrastructure connecting an Grianan Theatre, the Regional Cultural Centre, Donegal County Museum, Letterkenny Tennis Club and Letterkenny Boxing Club inclusive of:

- Removal of existing public realm environment at the forecourt of An Grianan Theatre and construction of a new public realm environment integrated with the forthcoming 'Eat Out' Outdoor Dining Infrastructure Project.
- Modification to public road L-10042-0 from Ramelton Road to the Regional Cultural Centre to include construction of shared surface scheme and enhanced pedestrian infrastructure.
- Enhancement of existing steps and pathway at the Regional Cultural Centre inclusive of resurfacing/ colour change.
- Enhancements to existing pathway adjoining Letterkenny Boxing Club including resurfacing, reconfiguration of Boxing Club service area/ fenceline, management of trees together with elevational enhancements to Boxing Club building and installation of shared surface at south-west facing gable.

- Enhancements to John McLaughlin Way inclusive of resurfacing, repair of steps, surface water drainage, management of trees and vegetation, painting of gable elevations.
- Construction of new ramped access for emergency/court maintenance/pedestrian access to Letterkenny Tennis Club and installation of signage/public art on Tennis Club building.
- Construction of new combined walking/cycling infrastructure from Letterkenny Courthouse/Regional Cultural Centre to High Road inclusive of ramped and stepped access, and amphitheatre seating.
- Modification to carriageway and footpath infrastructure at High Road to enhance pedestrian accessibility and installation of controlled crossing point, raised table and resurfacing.
- Installation of public art inclusive of Letterkenny 2040 brand logo and historical/heritage and place-related information.
- All associated ancillary works throughout to include enhancements to public lighting, drainage and utilities, connection to services, landscaping, nature-based solutions to rainwater management, wayfinding and development related signage & public art.

### **3.1 Design concept**

The design concept for the proposed development of Letterkenny Cultural Corridor focusses on the important role of the three cultural institutions of Donegal County Museum, the Regional Cultural Centre and An Grianan Theatre as the anchors of an emerging and vibrant Cultural and Innovation Quarter, the diversity and quality of which is further strengthened by the activities of Letterkenny Tennis and Boxing Clubs.

The principle underpinning the proposed development therefore focuses on the creation of a door-to-door experience where the new landscape provided by the development extends the threshold of each of the three entrances (County Museum, RCC, Theatre) and addresses the 'forecourts'. The design concept aims to address the shortcomings of the existing forecourts and create a sense of commonality and linkage between the three institutions.

Therefore, the design concept aims to:

- Create a sense of arrival by using subtle theatrical and historical references in particular the concept of the laying of a 'red carpet.'
- Reference theatrical seating or stage sets in the design of the landscape and seating.
- Utilise lighting to define the cultural experience.
- Address climate change through the introduction of biodiversity rich soft landscaping into underutilised or unnecessary areas of hard landscaping.
- Provide opportunities for a culturally experiential place through platforms for painting and sculpture and space for musical, cinematic, or theatrical performances.

There are 7 components or areas to the proposed development as follows and the design concept of each is described in further detail on the following pages:

1. A new public realm scheme at the existing public space at the front of An Grianan Theatre

2. An improved pedestrian environment along the public road between Ramelton Road to the Regional Cultural Centre.
3. Resurfacing/ colour change along existing steps and pathway at the Regional Cultural Centre
4. Enhancements to existing pathway adjoining Letterkenny Boxing Club and linking back to Ramelton Road via John McLaughlin Way.
5. Construction of new ramped access for emergency/court maintenance/pedestrian access to Letterkenny Tennis Club.
6. Construction of new combined walking/cycling infrastructure from Letterkenny Courthouse/Regional Cultural Centre to High Road
7. An improved pedestrian environment at High Road

### **3.1.1 A new public realm scheme at the existing public space at the front of An Grianan Theatre**

The design concept for the existing public space at the front of An Grianan Theatre aims to bring the theatre closer to the street and takes reference from the existing desire lines where pedestrians naturally walk through the space rather than adhering to the lines of the surrounding public footpaths. As a result, the design concept provides for the removal of the sharp geometry of the existing steps to the building and in lieu creates an extended terraced area diagonally (north -south through the space) incorporating and integrating the forthcoming outdoor dining scheme (The Eat Out). This intervention extends the threshold at the front door of the theatre creating an improved sense of arrival.

The existing public realm currently consists of a patchwork of twelve different types of surface finishes which reflect various different small-scale interventions to try and improve the space over time. However, as a result, the scale, use and materiality of the space is confused. The proposed development seeks to rationalise the variation in materials by focussing on the use of high quality red paviers forming the cultural 'red carpet'. The scheme also provides for the definition of the space and creation of a meeting point through the installation of a sculptural steel bowl with planting, specimen tree, seating and potential for interpretation.

The scheme also incorporates interventions to improve disabled access to the public space and to the terrace at the front of the Theatre alongside opportunity for installation of the Letterkenny 2040 brand by means of wall art and wayfinding signage.



**Image 23: Visualisation of the proposed development in relation to the public space to the front of An Grianan Theatre**



### **3.1.2 An improved pedestrian environment along the public road between Ramelton Road to the Regional Cultural Centre**

Public road L-10042-0 from Ramelton Road alongside the side of An Grianan Theatre serves the existing public car park, the Regional Cultural Centre, Letterkenny Tennis Club and number of residential properties to the north. Given the aim of the project to improve the walkability of the area, the proposed development provides for the reduction of carriageway width and consequent widening of the public footpath with the integration of a biodiversity corridor. The effect of a reduced width of carriageway and introduction of red asphalt surface (or alternative as specified at detailed design) together with raised table is to reduce the speed of cars, prioritise the pedestrian and imply pedestrian ownership of the area.

### **3.1.3 Resurfacing/ colour change along existing steps and pathway at the Regional Cultural Centre**

The proposed development provides for surface colour change along the existing grand steps to the Regional Cultural Centre and associated pathway to reflect the concept of the dramatic 'red carpet.' No changes are proposed in relation to layout, width or geometry.

### **3.1.4 Enhancements to existing pathway adjoining Letterkenny Boxing Club and to the link back to Ramelton Road via John McLaughlin Way.**

The proposed development seeks to address the deficiencies of the existing footpath infrastructure along the side of the Boxing Club building and from the Boxing Club to Ramelton Road via John McLaughlin Way by means of resurfacing, insertion of public lighting, seating, surface water drainage improvements where required, thinning of vegetation and trees to provide glimpses across the townscape, wayfinding signage and potential for branding/wayfinding art work at key gables.

The development also proposes adjustment at the existing path along the Boxing Club to reduce the impact of the existing elbow turn by means of adjustment of fenceline at the existing boxing club yard and resultant widening of footpath. This intervention will improve visibility and therefore improve public safety.

As an important stakeholder animating and activating the Cultural and Innovation Quarter, the proposed development provides for aesthetic interventions to the existing Boxing Club building by means of bold painting of the building and installation of supergraphics to boldly identify the presence of the Club and reflect its strong sense of character and identity as a key component of a vibrant Cultural Quarter. A shared surface is also proposed at the south-west facing gable of the boxing club to anchor the existing entrance to the building and to provide a safe threshold for access and egress of club members.

**Image 24: Visualization of painting and installation of supergraphics to Boxing Club building**



### **3.1.5 Construction of new ramped access for emergency/court maintenance/ pedestrian access to Letterkenny Tennis Club.**

Letterkenny Tennis Club occupies a key location along the proposed Cultural Corridor and a central point within the emerging Cultural Quarter. The visibility and presence of the tennis club adds significantly to the character and quality of the Cultural Corridor. It is however constrained in terms of access to the courts due to topography and the extent of surrounding development. To address this constraint, the proposed development provides for the construction of a 3m wide ramped access located at the embankment between the Regional Cultural centre and the Tennis Club clubhouse. This will provide for enhanced pedestrian accessibility as well as emergency and court maintenance access. In addition, the proposed development includes for artwork/signage along the south and east facing gables of the clubhouse to clearly identify the presence of the club as a key component of the Cultural Quarter.

The proposed development also demarcates the adjustment of existing fencelines and access gates on the southwest boundary of the tennis courts to facilitate the route of the Cultural Corridor

**Image 25: Visualization of ramped access to Tennis Club**

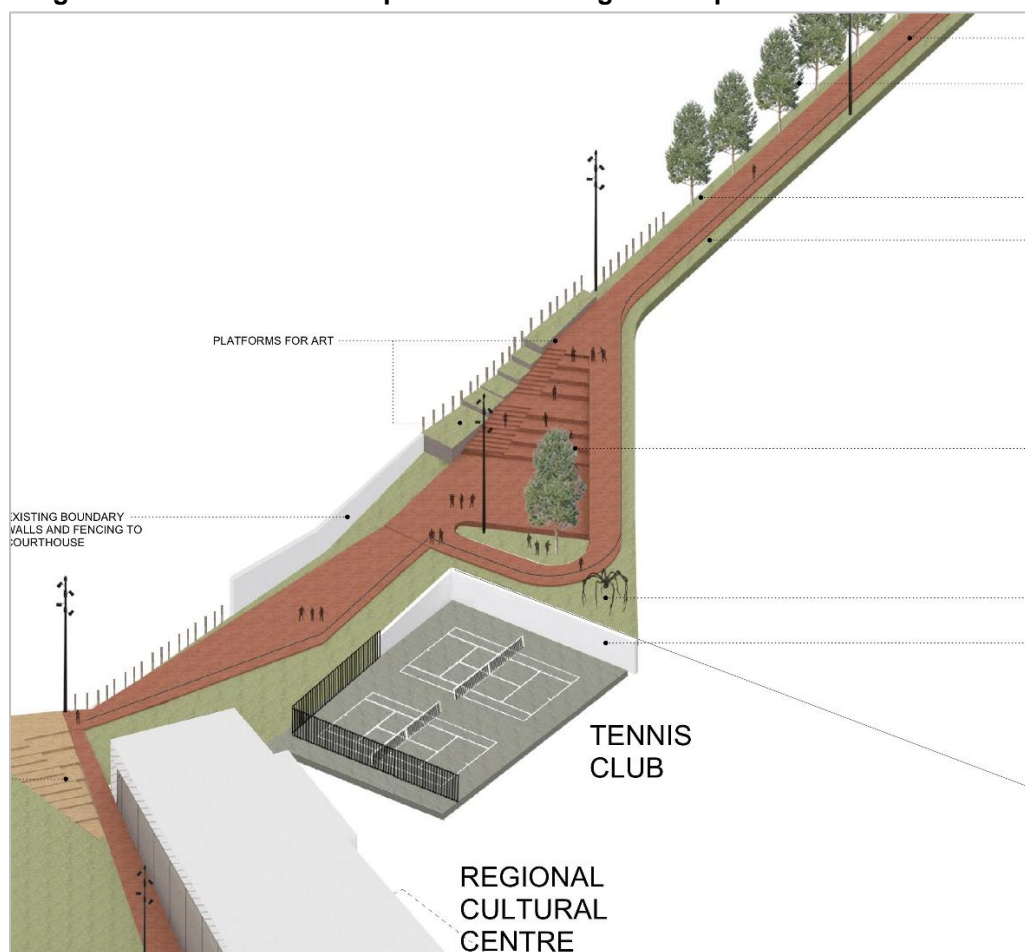


### **3.1.6 Construction of new combined walking/cycling infrastructure from Letterkenny Courthouse/Regional Cultural Centre to High Road**

A new combined walking and cycling path of circa 119m is proposed for construction from the Tennis Club/ Courthouse to High Road exiting directly opposite Donegal County Museum. The topography in this area is such that an opportunity presents for a stepped amphitheatre doubling up as performance and seating space offering views outwards to the townscape and also creating a viewing platform for activity in the Tennis Club. The stepped amphitheatre is complemented by a ramped access to cater for all abilities. This new route creates a short and direct connection from the Regional Cultural Centre/ Tennis Club to Donegal County Museum and to the exist Tadhg Culbert car park on High Road and is therefore considered to significantly improved accessibility options and will thus increase footfall in the area.



**Image 26: Visualization of Amphitheatre seating and steps**



### **3.1.7 An improved pedestrian environment at High Road**

At High Road, the proposed development provides for an improved pedestrian environment by means of reduced carriageway width, increased footpath width, raised table, controlled crossing point and integration of 'red carpet'. The combined effect of the proposed interventions will result in slowing speeds and prioritising the pedestrian.

## **4.0 Policy Context**

The statutory plans at a National, Regional and Local context relating to the area of the proposed development are:

- The National Planning Framework (Project Ireland 2040);
- Town Centre First Policy
- Our Rural Future
- The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Regional Assembly inclusive of the North West Metropolitan Area Spatial Planning Framework (MASP) and the Letterkenny Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plan;
- The County Donegal Development Plan 2018-2024 (CDP).
- The Draft Letterkenny Plan and associated Proposed Material Amendments.

In addition and as outlined in section 1.0 of this report, Donegal County Council is advancing a significant programme for the regeneration of Letterkenny town centre including funding support secured through the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> calls for applications to the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund. This activity provided for the preparation of Letterkenny 2040 Regeneration Strategy for Letterkenny town centre within which the vision for LK Green Connect is expressed inclusive of the section provided through the Cultural Corridor.

Each of the aforementioned policy contexts with a focus on relationship with the proposed development, are set out in greater detail on the following pages.

#### **4.1 National Planning Framework (Project Ireland 2040)**

The National Planning Framework (Project Ireland 2040) is underpinned by a set of National Strategic Outcomes (NSO's), which are the shared benefits the NPF will deliver if it is implemented.

**NSO 1 outlines the Governments objective for Compact Growth.** It seeks to carefully manage the sustainable growth of towns to create attractive places in which people can live and work. It outlines that all of our urban settlements contain many potential development areas, centrally located and frequently publicly owned, that are suitable and capable of re-use to provide housing, jobs, amenities and services but which need a streamlined and coordinated approach to their development enabling infrastructure and supporting amenities, to realise their potential. The NSO outlines that activating these strategic areas and achieving effective density and consolidation, rather than more sprawl of urban development needs a coordinated approach and is a top priority.

In particular, the NSO outlines a number of ways for the achievement of compact and sustainable growth including that it requires a focus on the 'liveability' or quality of life of urban places such as public realm, traffic and parking, access to amenities, a sense of personal safety and well being.

With specific reference to the proposed development, NSO 1 for Compact Growth is supported by National Policy Objectives which seek to:

- Ensure the creation of attractive, liveable, well designed, high quality urban places that are home to diverse and integrated communities that enjoy a high quality of life and well being. (NPO 4)
- Develop Cities and towns of sufficient scale and quality to compete internationally and to be drivers of national and regional growth, investment and prosperity. (NPO 5)
- Regenerate and rejuvenate cities, towns and villages of all types and scale as environmental assets, that can accommodate changing roles and functions, increased residential population and employment activity and enhanced levels of amenity and design quality, in order to sustainably influence and support their surrounding area. (NPO 6)
- In meeting urban development requirements, there will be a presumption in favour of development that can encourage more people and generate more jobs and activity within existing cities, towns and village... (NPO 11)

Reflecting the integral importance of place-making, the NPF also makes provision for projects that (i) contribute to sustainable mobility to move away from polluting and carbon intensive transport modes (NSO 4); (ii) strengthen the economy by coordination with place-making (NSO 6) and (iii) enhancement of the attractiveness of towns and quality of life through investment in well-designed public realm (NSO 7) as set out below:

- **NSO-4: Sustainable Mobility which states** 'In line with Ireland's Climate Change mitigation plan, we need to progressively electrify our mobility systems moving away from polluting and carbon intensive propulsion systems to new technologies such as electric vehicles and introduction of electric and hybrid traction systems for public transport fleets, such that by 2040 our cities and towns will enjoy a cleaner, quieter environment free of combustion engine driven transport systems'.
- **NSO-6: A Strong Economy Supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills** which states, 'This will depend on creating places that can foster enterprise and innovation and attract investment and talent. It can be achieved by building regional economic drivers and by supporting opportunities to diversify and strengthen the rural economy, to leverage the potential of places. Delivering this outcome will require the coordination of growth and place making with investment in world class infrastructure, including digital connectivity, and in skills and talent to support economic competitiveness and enterprise growth'
- **NSO-7: Enhanced Amenity and Heritage** which states, 'This will ensure that our cities, towns and villages are attractive and can offer a good quality of life. It will require investment in well-designed public realm, which includes public spaces, parks and streets, as well as recreational infrastructure. It also includes amenities in rural areas, such as national and forest parks, activity-based tourism and trails such as greenways, blueways and peatways. This is linked to and must integrate with our built, cultural and natural heritage, which has intrinsic value in defining the character of urban and rural areas and adding to their attractiveness and sense of place.

#### **4.2 Town Centre First, A Policy Approach for Irish Towns, 2022**

The Town Centre First (TCF) policy aims to create town centres that function as viable, vibrant and attractive locations for people to live, work and visit, while also functioning as the business, service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community. It recognises that Irish towns are diverse places and that supporting these towns requires a flexible, adaptive, and strategic approach. The TCF policy is as an enabling framework to support towns to identify, develop and progress their own unique town centre revitalisation plans which incorporate best-practice with regard to place-making alongside the establishment of national oversight mechanisms and the employment of Town Centre Regeneration Officers within each Local Authority.

The TCF Policy identifies 9 opportunities that can be implemented to drive future growth and development including (i) Experience-led retail (ii) the regeneration of public space (iii) Sustainable mobility and (iv) Realising the Existing Cultural and Heritage Assets of Places. In relation to each, it outlines:



**Experience-led retail :** It outlines that many traditional town centres have suffered from a decline in retail activity due to the loss of their immediate population base and shifting retail patterns, including an increase in on-line sales. The TCFP states that this leads to increased rates of vacancy and can have a major impact on the vibrancy and vitality of a town centre. In response to international trends, in-store retailing is shifting away from being solely reliant on the purchasing of goods toward more ‘experience-led’ retailing that includes a blend of retail services (including food and drink), leisure, entertainment and cultural uses. The policy states that town centres are in an optimal position to take advantage of the shift toward more blended retailing as many of the non-retail ‘experiences’ exist in such locations in the form of built heritage, parks and squares, and cultural institutions. It states that town centres can capitalize on this potential and generate additional footfall through enhanced place making and an appropriate balance between vehicle use and quality public realm.

**Regeneration of public space:** It outlines that in some cases, public spaces have lost their traditional function as civic/cultural spaces and many are now used as parking areas. It also outlines that the dominance of vehicles within the public realm has contributed to the decline of many town centres, making them unattractive places in which to live or visit for extended periods. It advocates that local communities be creative and ambitious in developing a public realm that is welcoming to all, is safe, is easy to access for all modes of travel (particularly walking), has low noise and air pollution levels and provides the community with things to do, places to sit and relax, and attractive views.

**Sustainable mobility:** It outlines that the historic legacy in many towns is an emphasis on private vehicle movement, poorly connected street networks and inadequate pedestrian/cyclist facilities which adds to traffic congestion with intrusive vehicle noise and emissions contributing to an environment which is not attractive to town centre living. It states that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many people have become much more aware of the benefits of having easy local access to most of their daily needs, especially within easy walking or cycling distance of their home – promoted as the ‘10-minute town’ concept. The TCFP states that this desire for the proximity of local services and amenities is a key sustainability indicator and has particular potential in many Irish towns.

**Realizing the Existing Cultural and Heritage Assets of Places:** It outlines that there is a recognition that heritage-led regeneration can support and make best use of already existing resources. It states that several towns have begun to reap the reward of heritage-led regeneration and investment in public realm improvements, and the conservation of built heritage, including the promotion of our natural assets and bio-diversity networks and that other cultural assets can also be a key focal point in towns and villages.

#### **4.3 Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025**

The Governments, ‘Our Rural Future’ relates to the country’s rural areas including the rural and towns and villages. Although Letterkenny is a Regional Centre, it is a critical urban settlement that supports the wider rural community in its hinterland. ‘Our Rural Future’ outlines 9 key deliverables of which the principles of the deliverable to ‘Revitalize Rural Towns and Villages’ is particularly relevant. Specifically, Our Rural Future outlines that this deliverable will be achieved through a number of measures including:

- Fund Local Authorities to adapt and improve outdoor public spaces for cultural events and activities all-year round.
- Invest significantly in the development of parks, green spaces and recreational amenities in town centres to make them vibrant hubs for community enjoyment, and to increase footfall for local businesses.

#### **4.4 The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) inclusive of the North West Metropolitan Area Spatial Planning Framework (MASP) and the Letterkenny Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plan**

The RSES published by NWRA is a 12-year strategy to deliver transformational change, effective regional development and achieve the objectives and vision of the NPF and of the NWRA. The simple vision of the RSES is “*to play a leading role in the transformation of the region into a vibrant, connected, natural, inclusive and smart place to work and live*”. The RSES proposes the introduction of a ‘Growth Framework’ to deliver this vision inclusive of ‘*Five Growth Ambitions*’, recognizing that regional growth cannot be achieved through linear steps and that isolated interventions will not achieve the ambitions of the region. The five growth ambitions of the RSES are:

1. To be a Vibrant Region (Economy & Employment)
2. To be a Natural Region (Environment)
3. To be a Connected Region (Connectivity)
4. To be an Inclusive Region (Quality of Life)
5. To be an Enabled Region (Infrastructure)

In particular, the RSES advocates implementation of a ‘place-based’ approach where the creation of ‘place’ is the key to realising regional potential (section 3.3 of the RSES). In terms of creating sustainable regional centres, the RSES recognises that access to talent is a chief site location criterion for businesses and ‘quality of life’ is a key factor both in retaining our current population and also attracting more people to the region in the future. The proposed development specifically implements a place-based approach to enhancing the physical environment of the Regional Centre in terms of improving accessibility, delivering a more attractive urban environment and facilitating a strengthened cultural environment and thus enhancing quality of life.

The following Regional Planning Objectives of the RSES are relevant in the context of the proposed development:

- **RPO 4.6:** To ensure provision is made for the expansion in accommodation and facilities within Destination Towns. Supporting infrastructural investment will also be provided, including improvements to the public realm, transport links, accommodation, night-time economy and the sustainable development of our natural and built heritage.
- **RPO 5.3:** Protect, enhance and harness the potential of the Region’s Cultural and Heritage assets.

- **RPO 7.9:** Promote the provision of high-quality, accessible and suitably proportioned areas of public open spaces and promote linkage with social, cultural and heritage sites and buildings. In this process, prioritize access for walking and cycling.

Chapter 9 of the RSES sets out the **North West Metropolitan Area Spatial Planning Framework (MASP)** relating to the area of the North West City Region encompassing Letterkenny, Derry and Strabane.

Reflecting the themes of the proposed development in relation to compact growth, urban design and placemaking and enabling economic opportunity, the North West MASP identifies four strategic outcomes as follows:

1. Building inclusive and compact places
2. Investing in connected and accessible places
3. Planning for a vibrant economy and nurturing communities
4. Creating resilient places and low carbon infrastructure.

Within and underpinning the framework for the NW MASP strategic outcomes and reflecting the overarching RSES vision in relation to a 'place-based' approach, the NW MASP also requires to the greatest extent possible, that new developments will:

'contribute towards the creation of high-quality places across the North West City Region, taking account of Place-Making Principles. Under the principles of place-making, development proposals should be based upon a design-led and participative process and should seek to deliver on the six qualities of place – namely, distinctive, safe and pleasant, welcoming, adaptable, resource-efficient and easy to move around and beyond'.

Section 3.7.2 of the RSES sets out a '**Letterkenny Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plan' (LK RGCSP)** providing for growth and investment to build the function of Letterkenny as the primary urban centre in Donegal and as part of the North West Metropolitan City Region (Letterkenny/ Derry/Strabane). The vision of the RGCSP for Letterkenny is:

'Between 2020 and 2040 Letterkenny will grow to a centre of at least 27,300 people, and will encompass all the key characteristics of a future city, with an expanded employment base, an additional 4,000 houses, together with an expanded offering in education, public services, civic spaces, and a Regeneration and reconfiguration of the Town Centre. Letterkenny will offer sustainable choices in housing, employment, and will be a centre that is pedestrian friendly, well served by public transport, with an emphasis on well-being, supported by a healthy environment, and quality spaces in the public realm.

The RGCSP outlines that it is important that Letterkenny continues to grow its offer as a Regional Centre of scale to host, and support visitors across all of north Donegal as an identified 'Destination Town.' To do this, the RGCSP specifies a number of objectives that need to be progressed in the short to medium term including:

- 'To further enhance public realm offer within Letterkenny to enhance visitor experience'.

#### **4.5 The County Donegal Development Plan 2018 – 2024 (as varied)**

The County Donegal Development Plan (CDP), 2018-2024 (as varied) provides the strategic planning framework and vision for County Donegal. Its vision is that:

*‘By 2028, County Donegal will be a connected place with a strong, competitive and innovative economy that is attracting and sustaining a population of upwards of 200,000 people, offering a quality of life ranked highest in the county and asserting a key role in the context of the North West City Region and within the area of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly.’*

The CDP identifies Letterkenny as a Layer 1 settlement in its own right within the County settlement structure. The CDP outlines that, as the largest town it provides a broad range of services across the sectors including employment, education, health, cultural services, community services, entertainment and many more, stating that its growth and strengthening as a major centre of population together with its wider metropolitan area is important in the regional context particularly in terms of its relationship with Derry City. The Plan outlines that a strong, vibrant, connected Letterkenny with a growing population will provide benefits across the County and within the Region in terms of attracting private sector investment in jobs and the economy and in securing investment in infrastructure that is critical to the County as a whole.

The CDP contains 10 Strategic Objectives, a number of which specifically underpin the important role of Letterkenny in the County and regional context and the importance of transitioning to sustainable and compact land use and transportation patterns. The relevant Strategic Objectives of the CDP in the context of the proposed development include:

- S-O-3:** To support the role of Letterkenny as a linked urban area in the North West City Region in order to drive investment and produce consequential benefits throughout the entire County and to support regional growth in the context of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly.
- S-O-5:** To prioritise regeneration and renewal of the County’s towns, villages and rural areas in order to support vibrant and strengthened communities and drivers of economic growth

The CDP includes a Core Strategy which sets out an overarching and ambitious vision for the future growth and development of the County over the 6 year life of the Plan (to 2024) and beyond to a 20 year timeframe (2038). Of its Core Strategy Objectives, the following are of particular relevance in the context of the proposed development:

- CS-O-4:** To support the growth of Letterkenny and its metropolitan area as a driver of population and economic growth in the County and to make appropriate provision for approximately 4,200 additional persons by 2024.
- CS-O-11:** To support economic growth throughout the county through.... (c) the establishment of Letterkenny as a centre for economic growth across the sectors, in particular through....consolidation of the town centre including prioritizing improvements to the public realm, the delivery of key road and access infrastructure, through a proactive approach to enable the delivery of key regeneration sites.



Other key relevant objectives in the context for the proposed development are contained in Chapter 3: Towns and Villages; Chapter 5: Infrastructure; Chapter 9: Tourism and; Chapter 11: Community, Culture and the Gaeltacht. The relevant objectives and policies include:

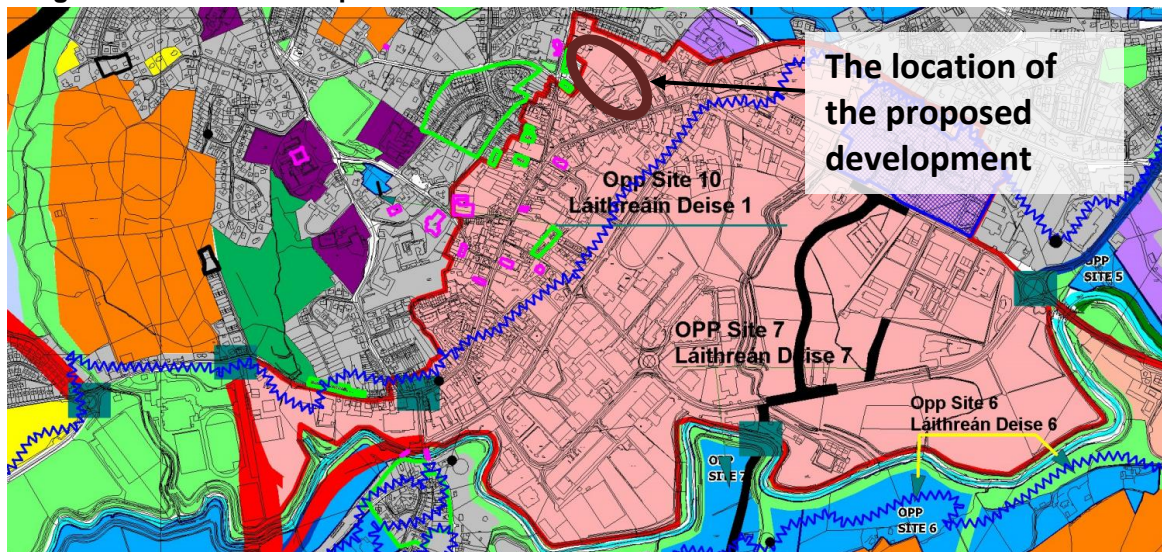
- TV-O-4:** To support initiatives to strengthen and improve the physical environment of towns and villages and encourage positive place-making.
- TV-P-3:** It is the policy of the Council to seek quality in proposals for new development within town centre in order to contribute to positive place-making.
- T-O-4:** To deliver optimum accessibility, ease of movement and to facilitate appropriate proposals for modal shift.
- T-O-13:** To support the development of new walkways, walking routes, trails greenways and cycleways that maximise the potential for local, regional and all-island walking and cycling networks
- T-P-12:** It is a policy of the Council to seek provision, improvement and extension of footpaths and lighting at appropriate locations subject to environmental, safety and amenity considerations.
- TOU-O-10:** To protect and enhance the vitality, vernacular character, streetscape and design quality of our towns and villages as vital tourism assets of our overall tourism product.
- CCG-P-17:** It is a policy of the Council to ensure that new public spaces; are of a high quality, imaginative design, utilise high quality materials and incorporate, where appropriate creative public art.

Part C of the CDP sets out the Objectives and Policies for Towns including Letterkenny within Chapter 12. It reiterates the importance of Letterkenny as the only Layer 1 settlement in the Settlement Hierarchy and it outlines 6 key areas for intervention in Letterkenny including 'Urban and public realm enhancements throughout the town centre.'

The subject site for the proposed development is located within the identified 'Town Centre' land use zone on Map 12.1B, 'Letterkenny Land Use Zoning Map 12.1B' (Image 12 refers). Table 12.2 of Chapter 12, Part C sets out the objective in relation to 'Town Centre' zoning as:

'To sustain and strengthen the core of Letterkenny as a centre for commercial, retail, cultural and community life.'

Image 27: Extract from Map 12.1B of Part C of the CDP 2018-2024



The site is also located in the area defined as the 'Traditional Town Centre' on Map 12.2 of Chapter 12, Part C which is described as covering;

'an extensive area North and South of the Main St and the Upper Port Rd. It continues to act as the commercial core of the town and displays a vitality and diversity of functions not apparent in other areas of the town. The strong links between the arts, entertainment, traditional town services (e.g. banking, legal) and independent retailing remain the core strengths of this area. The quality of the built environment of the commercial core also contributes significantly to the shopping and visitor experience of the town. It is imperative that the vitality and vibrancy of the Commercial Core is maintained and expanded.'

The Plan identifies a number of adverse development trends which if left unmanaged could significantly hinder the achievement of a cohesive, multifunctional and high-quality town centre. These adverse trends are identified to include a lack of quality public spaces throughout and immediately accessible from the town centre. In view of this the Plan recommends a Town Centre Strategy which is supported by a suite of objectives and policies in the areas of mixed-use development, design criteria, streetscape, shop fronts, key linkages, active frontage and quality residential development. Particularly relevant objectives and policies include:

**LK-TC-O3:** Creation of an attractive retail environment in terms of overall design and the quality of public realm.

**LK-TC-O-5:** Development of an integrated retail environment accessible by a range of transportation modes

**LK-TC-P-10:** It is a policy of the Council to promote an attractive town centre atmosphere which would encourage additional trade and business to the traditional town centre encouraging increased footfall along the historic streetscape of the town.

It is also noted that the site of the proposed development partially traverses an identified 'Urban Block 2, Opportunity Site 12' in the CDP 2018-2024 (as varied) as regards the route of the existing pathway between the Regional Cultural Centre and the Boxing Club which the proposed development aims to enhance. The policy of the CDP (LK-TC-P-21) as regards Urban Block 2 recognizes that this site had previously been identified as an Opportunity Site in the Letterkenny and Environs Development Plan 2009-2015 (as varied), with a particular emphasis on the establishment of uses such as civic / public administration, the arts or tourism. It also states that (at the time of writing the CDP) the site was currently being developed for the purposes of a new Courthouse, thus enhancing the civic/administrative function of the town. It is noted that the new Courthouse is now complete and fully operational. The proposed development does not interfere with or impact on the new Courthouse and will improve accessibility to it.

Section 12.4.1, refers to objectives and policies in relation to Transportation with the following being of particular relevance to the proposed development:

**LK-T-O-4:** To promote, support and encourage modal shift to walking and cycling

**LK-T-P-1:** In order to influence the continued development of the town and to ensure a more accessible and attractive town in which to live and work, it is the policy of the Council to.....(d) Facilitate People Friendly Environments – measures, including Urban Junctions, to allow for the easy and safe movement of pedestrians and those with limited mobility or other needs in order to allow for comfortable, quality public and residential realms. (e) Facilitate cycling and walking - A linked network of safe routes throughout the urban area, including safe routes to schools in partnership with other stakeholders..... (g) Facilitate increased permeability – ensuring new development increases the incidences of linkages and flow of both public and private traffic, including pedestrian and cycle, throughout the town development envelope.

**LK-T-P-8:** The Council will promote the development of cycling and walking as a viable transport option. To do so, all development proposals shall be accompanied by appropriate levels of provision for cycle and pedestrian movement including:

- Covered secure cycle parking which is convenient and located to allow for informal surveillance
- Pedestrian and cycle friendly routes throughout new residential areas
- Footpaths and cycle provision in order to adequately and conveniently access public transport, services/amenities and connect with the wider locality.

Section 12.10 of Chapter 12 of Part C of the CDP refers to objectives and policies in relation to social, community and cultural issues in Letterkenny with the following objective of particular relevance to the proposed development:

**LK-SCC-O-3:** To provide parks, open spaces and outdoor recreation areas which provide a range of active and passive open spaces for all sectors of the community.

#### **4.6 Letterkenny 2040 Regeneration Programme and Letterkenny 2040 Regeneration Strategy**

'Letterkenny 2040' is Donegal County Councils wider regeneration programme. It involves the preparation and publication (in December 2022) of an ambitious, transformative and overarching Regeneration Strategy for Letterkenny town centre to achieve its goals as a Regional Growth Centre in line with its identified role in the National Planning Framework (NPF), The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) and in the cross border context of the North West City Region. The overarching vision of Letterkenny 2040 regeneration programme and Letterkenny 2040 Regeneration Strategy is to co-deliver a vibrant, liveable and fully functioning regional centre with a flourishing population that has a strong economy, employment and housing choice, healthy and restorative environments, community and social amenities, high quality of life and positive public and civic spaces.

Letterkenny 2040 Regeneration Strategy is a non-statutory framework, the preparation of which is supported by the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund under Project Ireland 2040.

The Regeneration Strategy identifies a series of projects to enhance the competitiveness and attractiveness of Letterkenny town centre. This includes the enhancement of the Cultural and Innovation Quarter (Image 28) encompassing Donegal County Museum on High Road, taking in the Regional Cultural centre, Theatre, Boxing Club and Tennis Club and extending to Pearse Road to include the Councils lead strategic regeneration site that is earmarked for enterprise space, housing and significant public realm provision. The proposed development is located within and weaves through the Cultural and Innovation Quarter between Ramelton Road and High Road. The proposed development forms part of LK Green Connect as the wider and parent project to deliver walking, cycling and public realm infrastructure from Donegal County Museum to the Letterkenny Public Service Centre connecting multiple destinations on the way. The LKY 2040 Regeneration Strategy consists of a Design Concept outlining the vision for LK Green Connect as a key project in improving accessibility throughout the town centre. Images 29 and 30 refer.



Image 28: Extract from the emerging Letterkenny 2040 Regeneration Strategy.

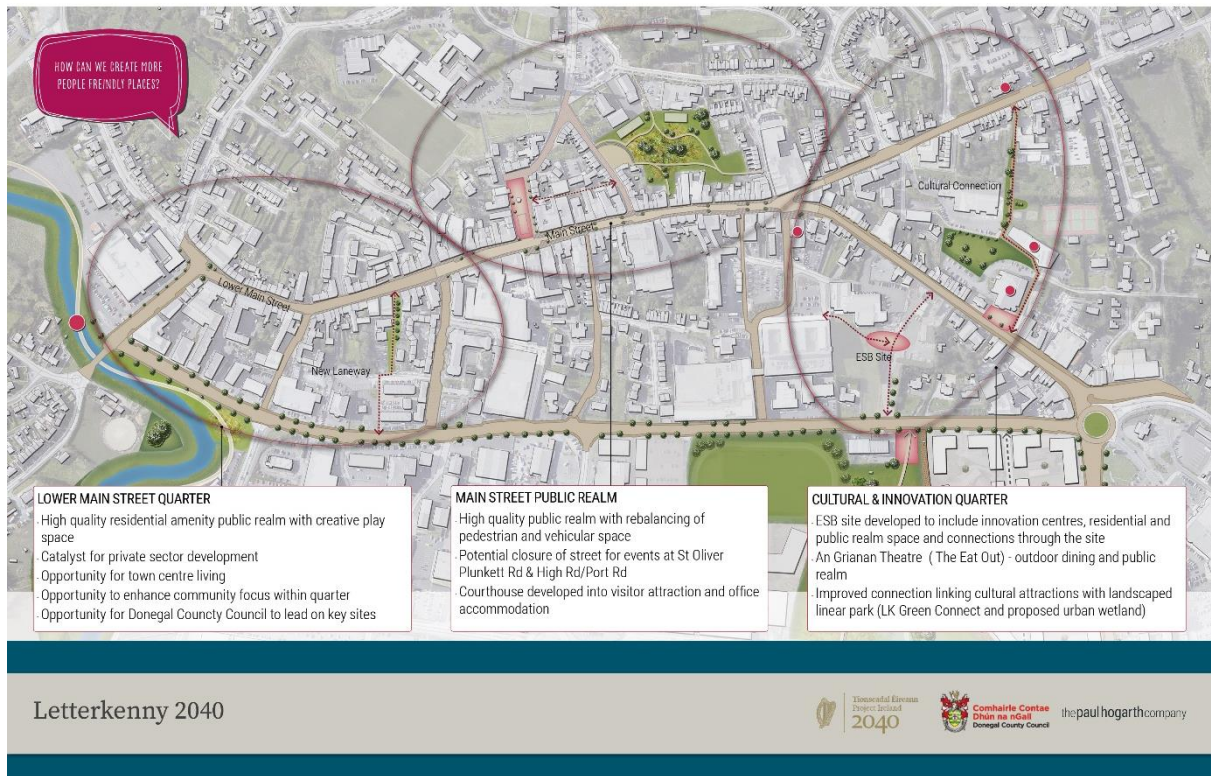
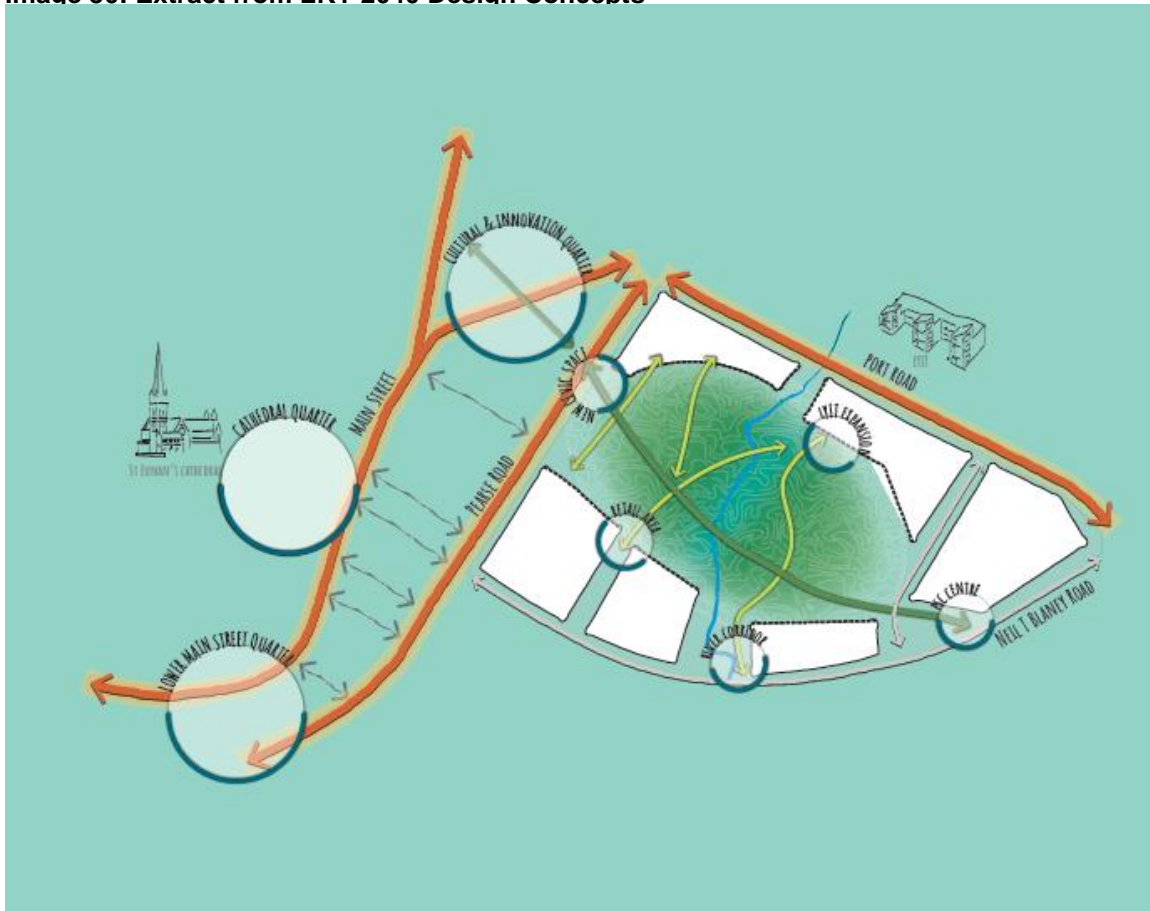


Image 29: Extract from LKY 2040 Design Concepts



Image 30: Extract from LKY 2040 Design Concepts



## 5.0 The Proposed Development and Flood Risk

OPW Flood maps ([www.floodinfo.ie](http://www.floodinfo.ie)) provide information on flood risk for a range of flood event scenarios including climate change. The OPW flood maps show that the proposed site is located within Flood Zone C where there is a low probability of flooding. In accordance with F-P-1, F-P-2 and 'The Planning System and Flood Risk Management - Guidelines for Planning Authorities', November 2009, DoEHLG and the objectives and policy in relation to flooding set out in Part B of the CDP, chapter 5, the proposed development is classified as 'Water Compatible Development' and as such, within an area identified as Flood Zone C is considered as 'Development Appropriate'. As a result, a Flood Risk Assessment is not required.

## 6.0 Road Safety Audit

Having regard to the limited scale, nature and complexity of the scheme particularly in the context of the predominant nature of it in terms of upgrade of existing infrastructure and due to the absence of the generation of vehicular traffic as a result of the scheme, that the discretion permitted by TII Publications GE-STY-01024 and GE-STY-01027 is appropriate and that a combined Stage 1 and Stage 2 Road Safety Audit can be completed at Detailed Design Stage with a Stage 3 Road Safety Audit carried out on completion of construction and a Stage 4 Audit, if required, carried out during early operation of the development. In addition, as the development does not otherwise propose access to a Strategic Road and

having regard to the provisions of Policy T-P-8 of the County Development Plan, 2018-2024 (as varied) a mandatory RSA is not required.

## **7.0 Built Heritage**

The proposed development includes enhancements to the existing environment at High Road in the area of Protected Structure Ref: 40502222 (Donegal County Museum and; Ref 40502215 recorded on the National Inventory of Architectural heritage (vernacular house). The proposed works at High Road are associated with existing layout in terms of footpaths, carriageway and crossing infrastructure and no works are proposed to either RPS or NIAH property. As such, there will be no material impact of either buildings Ref 40502222 or 40502215.

## **8.0 Preliminary Examination in relation to Environmental Impact Assessment**

The proposed development is sub-threshold for the purposes of Environmental Impact Assessment (“EIA”) per Article 92 of the Regulations and the Council has concluded on the basis of a Preliminary Examination of the nature, location and size of the proposed development in accordance with Article 120 (1)(b)(i) thereof that there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment arising from the proposed development and that Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is not required. Please refer to the Preliminary Examination and Conclusion for further details.

## **9.0 Screening in relation to Appropriate Assessment**

In order to ascertain whether the proposed development required Appropriate Assessment (“AA”) Donegal County Council carried out a screening of same in accordance with Article 250(1) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) and made a determination in view of best scientific knowledge that the development individually or in combination with other plans or projects would not be likely to have a significant effect on a European site in view of the site’s conservation objectives and that AA was not required. Please refer to accompanying Screening Report and Determination which includes the main reasons and considerations on which the determination was based.

## **10.0 Public Consultation**

Consultation on the project initially took place in 2020 during the process to develop the initial concept under the Irish Architectural Foundation supported project.

Further informal consultation has continued on an ongoing basis throughout further project development with the three cultural partners (Donegal County Museum, the Regional Cultural Centre and An Grianan Theatre) alongside engagement with Letterkenny Tennis Club and Letterkenny Boxing Club during 2023.

In addition, the concept for ‘LK Green Connect and Urban Wetlands’ formed one of 11 Design Concepts published in May/June 2022 for a period of consultation under the Letterkenny 2040 Regeneration Strategy project. 71% of online respondents indicated they were either supportive or very supportive of the proposed concept.



## 11.0 Proper planning, sustainable and orderly development of the area

It is considered that the proposed Part VIII development providing for 'Letterkenny Cultural Corridor (forming part of LK Green Connect', is in accordance with the provisions of the NPF, Town Centre First Policy, Our Rural Future, RSES, and the County Donegal Development Plan, 2018-2024 in particular will give full effect to the regeneration and development objectives and policies therein. The project is also fully aligned with the vision set out in the Letterkenny 2040 Regeneration Strategy. It is considered that the proposed development is therefore in accordance with the proper planning, sustainable and orderly development of the area.

## 12.0 Schedule of Plans

Drawing No.	Document Title
LKCC-2202-00	SITE LOCATION & SITE EXTENT
LKCC-2202-01	SITE LOCATION MAP
LKCC-2202-02	EXISTING SITE LAYOUT - TOPOGRAPHICAL SURVEY
LKCC-2202-03	EXISTING SITE PHOTOGRAPHIC SURVEY-IMAGE REF SHEET
LKCC-2202-04	EXISTING SITE PHOTOGRAPHIC SURVEY
LKCC-2202-05	PROPOSED SITE LAYOUT PLAN
LKCC-2202-06	PROPOSED SITE LAYOUT - PLAN AREA 01
LKCC-2202-07	PROPOSED SITE LAYOUT - PLAN AREA 02
LKCC-2202-08	PROPOSED SITE LAYOUT - PLAN AREA 03
LKCC-2202-09	PROPOSED SITE LAYOUT - PLAN AREA 04
LKCC-2202-10	PROPOSED SITE LAYOUT - PLAN AREA 05
LKCC-2202-11	SECTIONS AA_FF
LKCC-2202-12	SECTIONS HH
LKCC-2202-13	SECTIONS GG_II_JJ
LKCC-2202-14	SECTIONS KK_LL
LKCC-2202-15	SECTIONS MM
LKCC-2202-16	AXONOMETRIC