

REIMAGINING LETTERKENNY MARKET SQUARE - creating a sense of place

brief

To provide a reimagined Market Square which will be a central public space that conveys and communicates the DNA of Letterkenny and its people, and fully meets the needs for a usable public and civic space at the heart of the town centre.

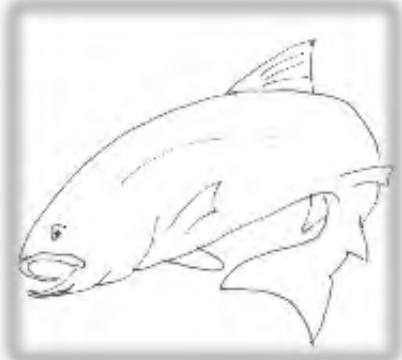
a sense of place

Location

When viewed in a wider context, Letterkenny is remote. It is located at extreme northwest edge of Ireland and Europe. However this leads to its uniqueness.

The nearest airports are City of Derry or Donegal International. However, the majority of people arrive by car or bus. The town’s railway stations closed in the 1940’s and 1960’s.

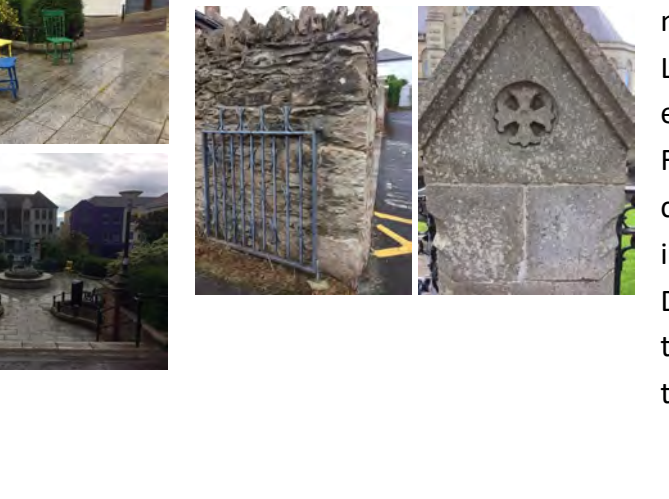
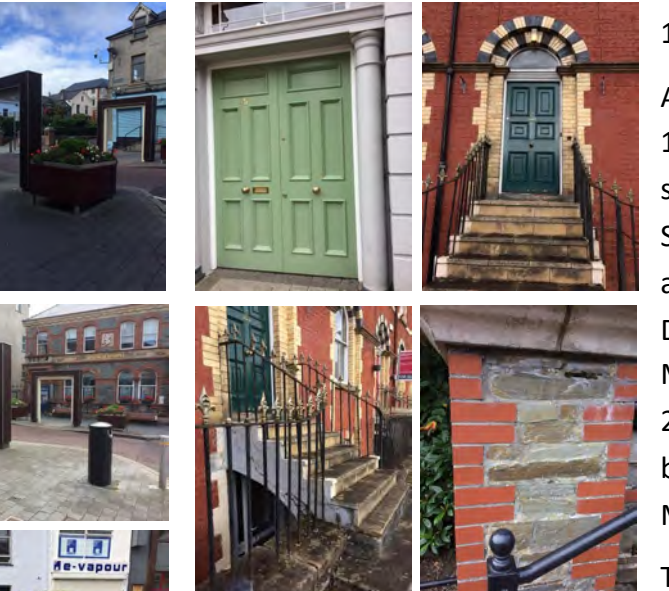
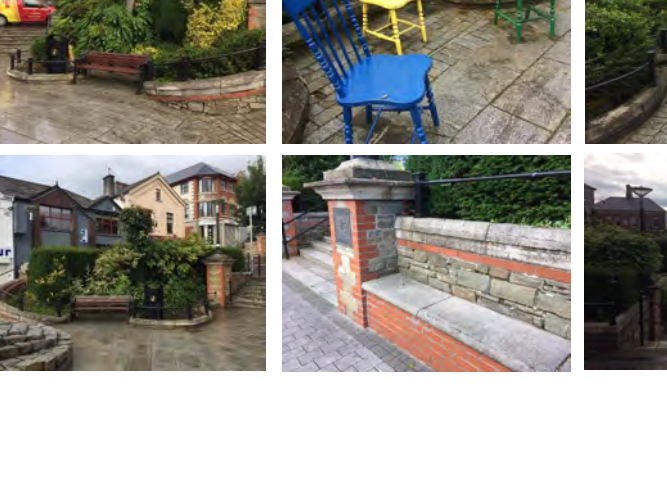
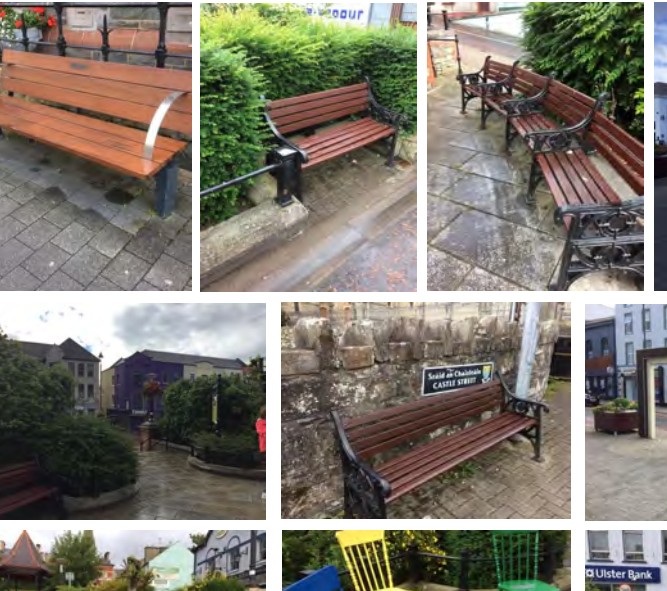
It sits at the northern end of The Wild Atlantic Way, a coastal route of some 1600km which is the longest defined coastal route in the world.



photos - existing



Cork 491km



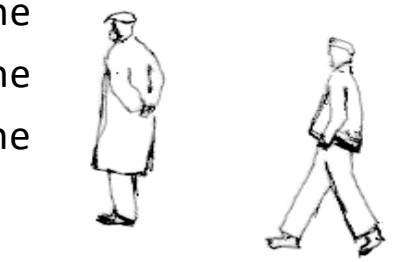
160,000.

As well as the arrival of the railways in the 1880’s, the late 19th century also saw the start of the construction of St Eunan’s and St Colmcille Catholic Cathedral. The architect was William Hague from Dublin. Dedicated in 1901, it is built from Mountcharles stone, and has a steeple of 212 feet. The steeple is the only part of the building which can be viewed from the Market Square.

The partition of Ireland in 1921, had massive implications for Donegal and Letterkenny. Co. Donegal was almost entirely cut off from the rest of the Irish Free state, and Letterkenny saw its fortunes change. When the Irish Punt was introduced in 1928, many of the banks in Derry opened new branches in Letterkenny to serve the Free State, as the town became the commercial hub for West Donegal.

tell me what you want?

- children’s play area
- The Cathedral Quarter
- safety
- open up the square
- remove parking and bandstand
- go back to its original use
- pedestrianise it
- craft stalls
- better seating
- farmers market
- more lighting
- it should be the heartbeat of the town
- no overgrown trees & shrubs
- more coffee shops & food stalls
- public toilets
- keep the Hiring Fair monument
- use the bandstand for events
- no parking
- improve disability access
- address anti-social behaviour



‘I think of it as a place that I know is ordinary, and I can lay my hand on it and know it.’

Patrick Kavanagh

‘To know who you are, you have to have a place to come from.’

Carson McCullers

The Hiring Fair, and The Hiring Fair Statue, Maurice Harron, 1994

In Ireland, between the 17th and 19th centuries, Hiring Fairs were widespread through Ireland, with the practice continuing until the 1940’s in Letterkenny and Strabane.

People went to the hiring fairs because of poverty, and limited employment in agriculture. Small holding farmers with large families could not make enough money to support themselves, so looked for work in larger farms. Children as young as eight or nine were sent out to look for work as well as adults. If they were successful workers were hired for a ‘term’ of about 6 months. They would live at the big farm in barns, outhouses or if they were lucky perhaps they could get a place in the attic of the big house.

Various signs and symbols showed that people were looking for work. Men usually carried sheafs of sticks or straw, or had a bundle of tools under their arm. Women wore aprons and carried string bags.

The Hiring Fair statue is a monument to the rabble children who went to the Hiring Fair to look for work. It portrays the poverty the children experienced, and their defiance in the face of it. While the boy holding the frog reminds us that children will always look for joy.

Migration

Letterkenny has historically suffered from a history of emigration, which continued up until the 1990’s. However since then the town has experienced net immigration, with many immigrants coming from Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and South America. It is now home to one of Ireland’s few Hindu temples. Figures from 2006 reveal that most of Donegal’s non native population live in the town, and the make up 16% of the inhabitants.

Sligo 110km



‘We are dwellers, we are namers, we are lovers, we make homes and search for our histories. And when we look for the history of our sensibilities I am convinced... that it is to the stable element, the land itself, that we must look for continuity.’

Seamus Heaney

The weather

The weather usually presents itself as a series of extremes, and it is not unusual to experience four seasons in one day. A desolate and untamed coastline battered by brutal Atlantic storms, yet a few minutes later transforms into unspolited peaks and sweeping beaches with azure sea, bathed in glorious sunshine. We have taken photos on the beach in mid summer wearing full wet weather gear, hats and gloves, and on boxing day, in glorious sunshine; but also wearing two coats, hats, gloves and sunglasses!

Located on the edge of Europe, the Donegal coast experiences the full power of the Atlantic weather, raging storms and winds, but benefits from the warmth of the Gulf stream. This underwater ocean current transports the warm water from the tropics to the shores of Donegal, resulting in a temperate climate, even though Donegal is on the same latitude as Moscow.

The warm moisture laden air generated by the Gulf Stream also means that it rains in Donegal an impressive 279 days of the year, but the average temperature range is between a high of 18C in the summer and 2C in the winter.

Belfast 153km

The Landscape

Co Donegal is seen as one of the wildest areas of Ireland, and home to some of the most sublime scenery and beautiful beaches. Mount Errigal is the most striking peak in the area. With its quartzite peak, the cone shaped mountain, appears to glow pink in the setting sun. From the top you can see all of Donegal, most of Ulster, and looking south, the Arran Islands off the coast of Galway.



Dublin 248km

The Gaeltacht

Letterkenny is the gateway to The Gaeltacht. The Gaeltacht districts have historically suffered from mass emigration. They are at the extreme western edge of the island, have few railways and roads, and poorer land to farm. The Donegal Gaeltacht, or Gaeltacht Thir Chonaill has a population of nearly 25,000 and represents 25% of the total Gaeltacht population on the island. It is centered on three parishes, The Rosses, Gweedore and Cloughaneely, where there are over 17,000 Irish speakers. The dialect is known as the Ulster dialect, and has many similarities with Scottish Gaelic, which are not evident in other Irish dialects.

Trade

Letterkenny has a growing reputation as a good place to visit for a day out shopping. Due to the expansion of the town after 2000, the main retail centre has moved away from The Main Street to out of town retail parks. However, there are many smaller traditional businesses still present including giftshops, galleries, knitwear, clothes shops, shoes shops, game shops, bookshops, locksmiths, banks, delis, cafes, bars and restaurants.

The new Market Square Shopping Centre is located on the eastern boundary of Market Square.

‘One way leads to diamonds,
One way leads to gold,
Another leads to you only,
To everything you’re told.
In your heart you wonder
Which of these is true
The road that leads to no where,
The road that leads to you.

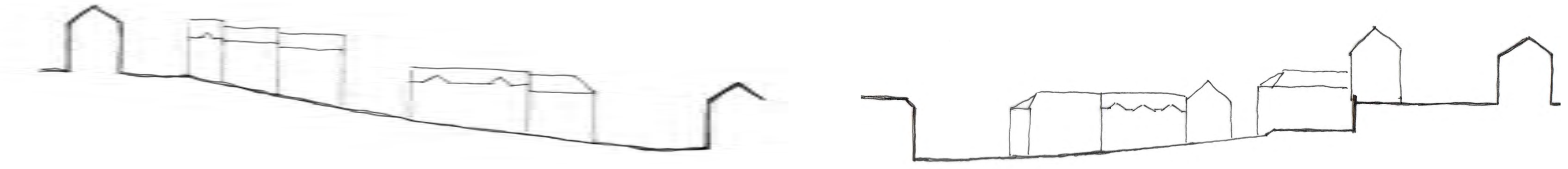
Enya, Pilgrim

‘...And often in the Darkness,
‘tis myself that sees it all,
For I can not help dreaming,
Of the folk of Donegal.’

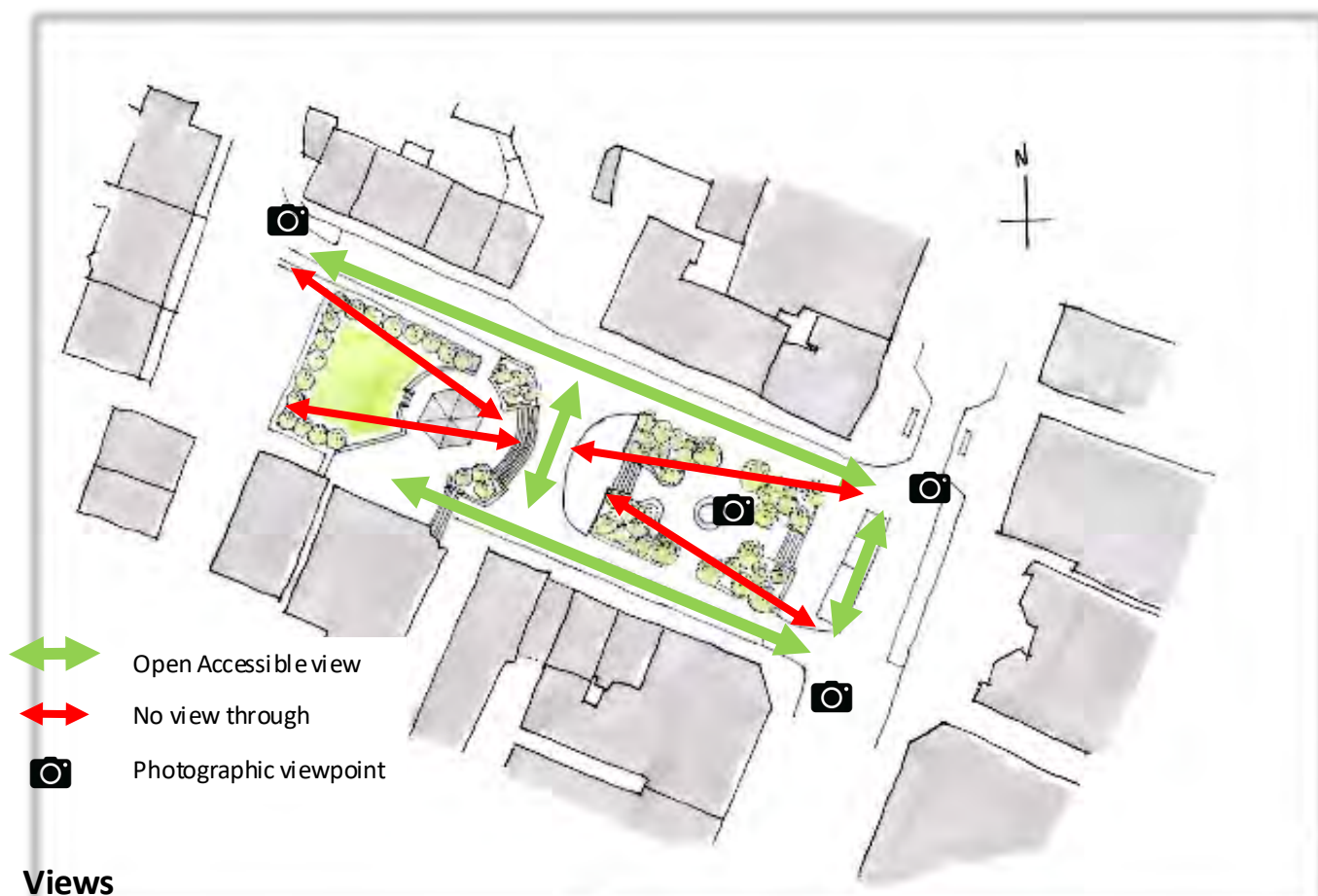
Patrick McGill, Will you not come back to Glenties

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constraints and opportunities



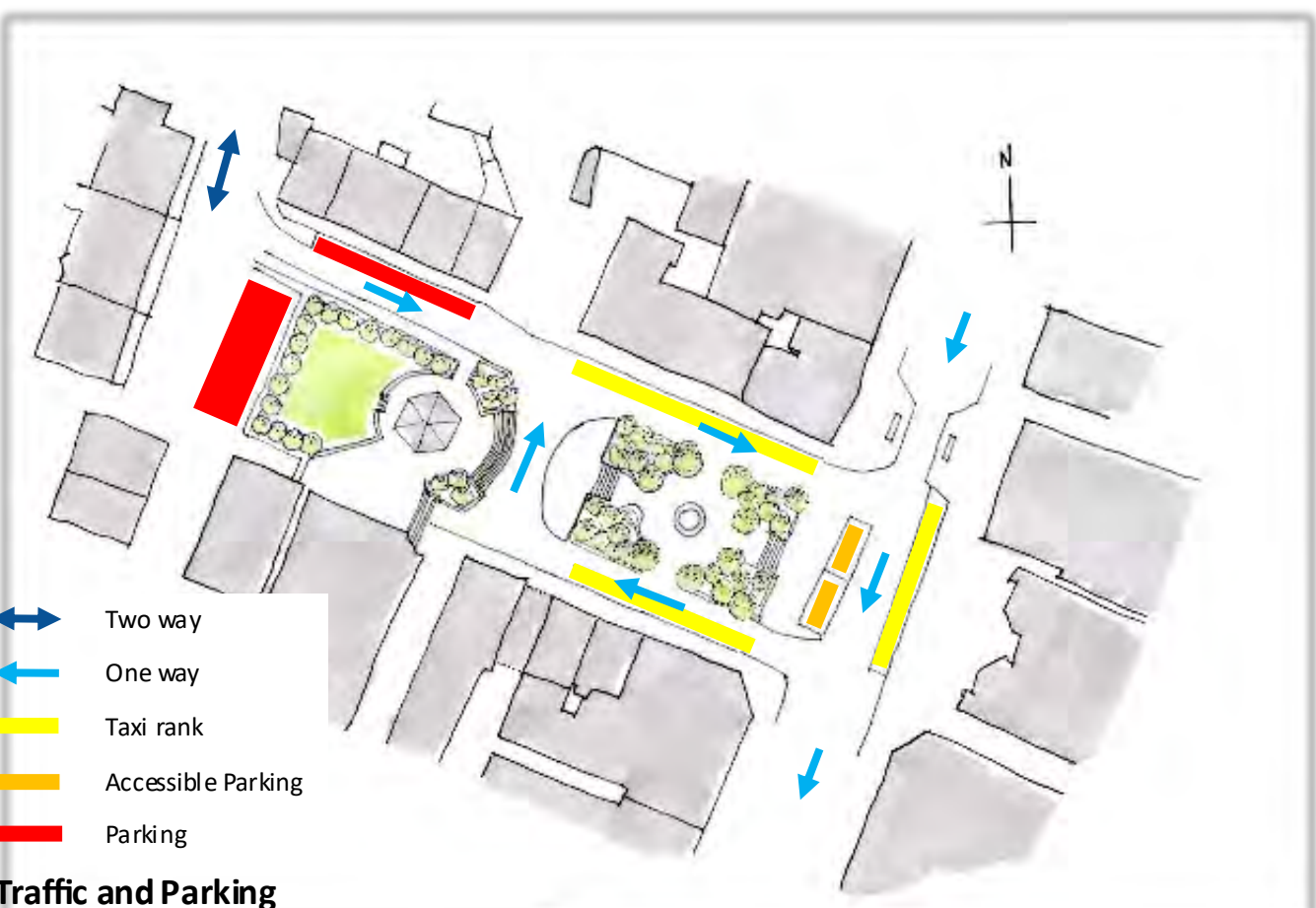
Topography
There is a 10 metre difference between the top of the hill at Castle Street and the base of the hill, Main Street.



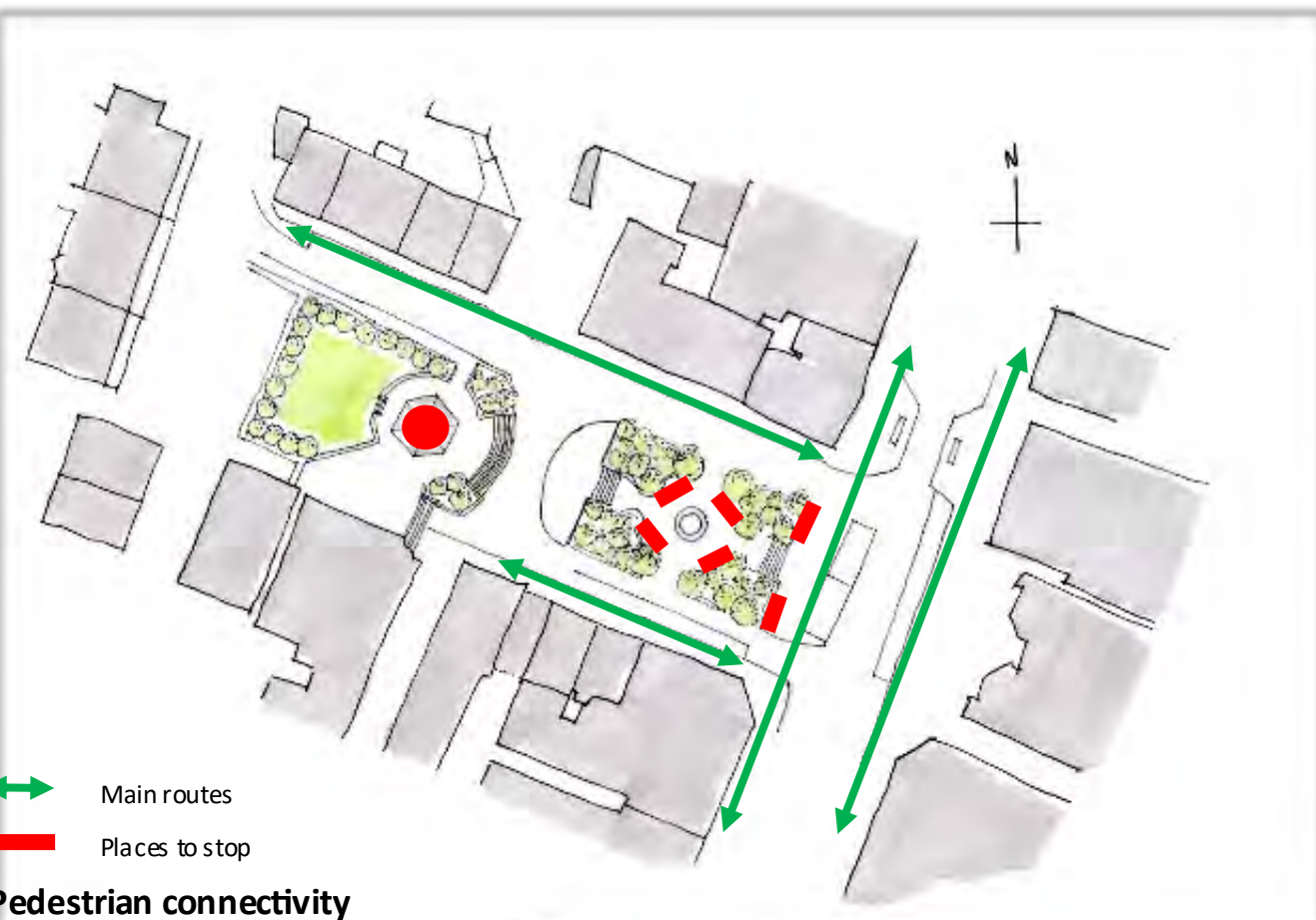
Views
Views into and out of the site are generally limited by the existing trees and shrubbery, which has become rather overgrown and dense over the past 30 years. In general the main lines of site are along the roads, and are limited in their angle of observation due to the vegetation and buildings. This limits the connectivity across the square and prevents a visual connection from one side and the other, and from the top to the base of the hillside. With the advent of smart phones and social media, everyone has the opportunity to be an amateur photographer. There are a number of photographic viewpoints in the area which could be exploited further through the enhancement of views and better signage.
Action: Remove barriers to enhance visual connectivity. This will make the Square a more attractive place to visit, it will appear more safe, and will lower the opportunity for anti-social behaviour.



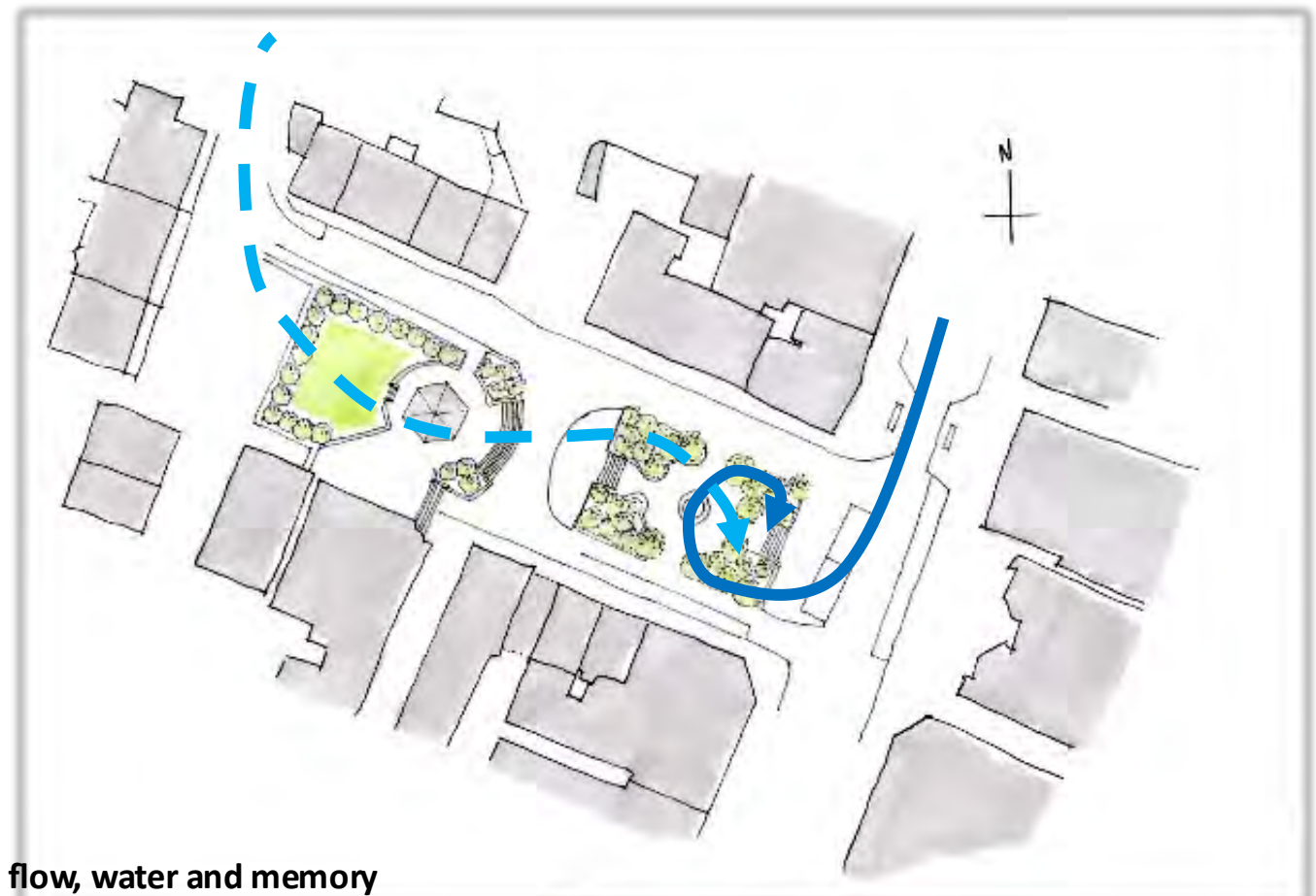
Boundary
The retaining walls around the Square are necessary due to the changes of levels, and to separate pedestrians from traffic. However, the way these boundaries are viewed and operate can be changed to make the Square more accessible.
Action: Create more permeable boundaries through the redesign of the retaining walls.



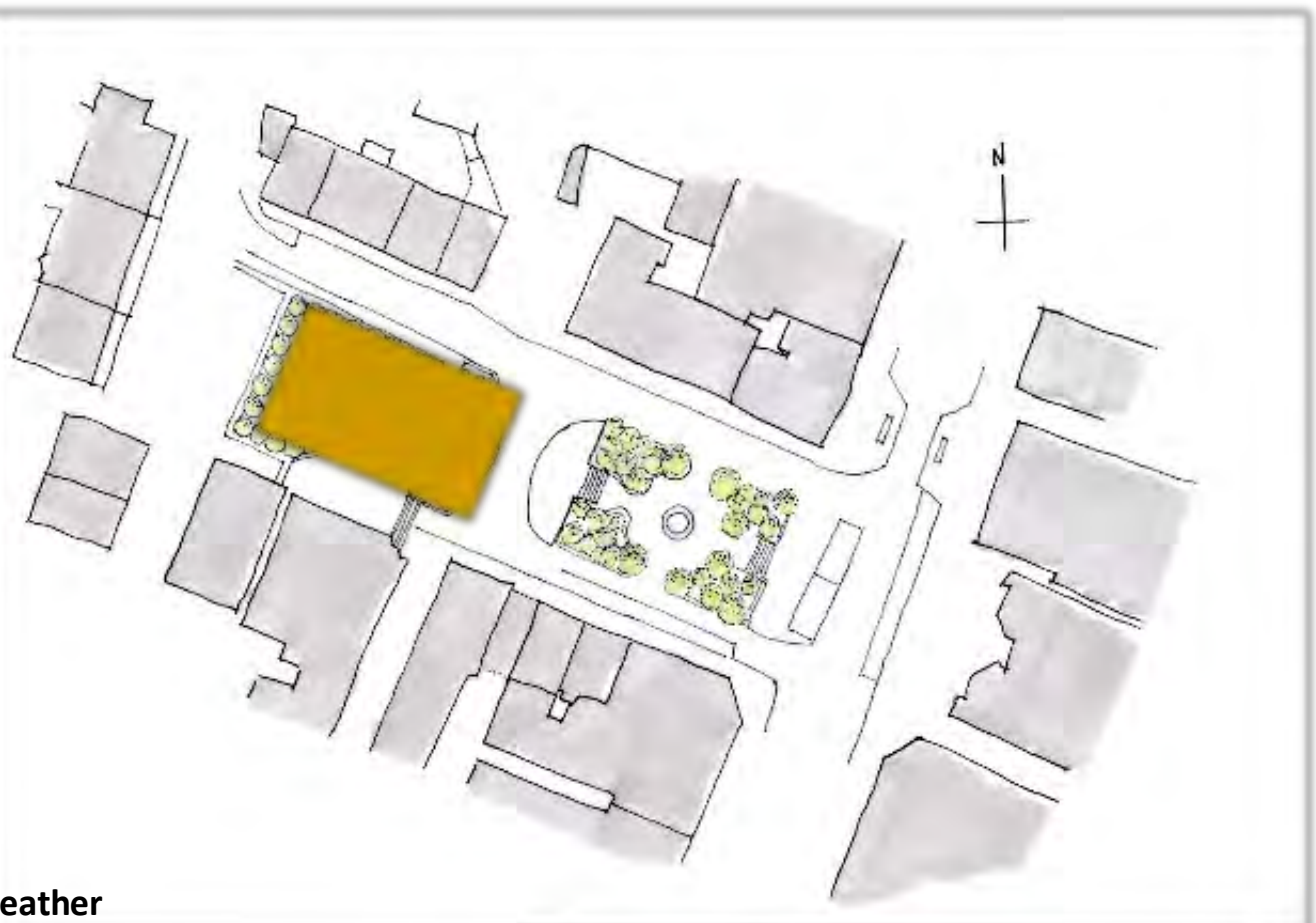
Traffic and Parking
The Square is bounded on three sides by one way streets, Main Street, Castle Street, and Market Square Street. There is also an access route across the centre of the square to allow for Taxi turning and drop off. There are three areas of taxi ranks, one area of private parking and one area of Accessible parking bays which directly impact the pedestrian's interactivity with the Square. The parking of cars in these locations sets up temporary barriers to the accessibility of the Square. However, there are also two access points to access the rear of the buildings which front the Square. At the moment we have allowed for these to be retained. It is important that vehicular access to the area is retained to maintain connectivity through the town, along Main Street and down Castle Street
Action: Relocate the taxi ranks and accessible parking to Main Street, to help to remove barriers to the engagement with the Square.



Pedestrian connectivity
Due to the orientation of the roads, and the lack of connectivity through the Square in its current format (whether that be visual or physical barriers), there is little pedestrian travel diagonally across the square.
Action: Provide an alternative more welcoming pedestrian route into and across the Square.



flow, water and memory
Taking inspiration from the River Swilly, and the flow of people along main street, there is the opportunity to create a stopping place at the base of the hill, where the waters may eddy around carving out a space in the landscape to stop and rest for a while. There is also the opportunity to create a flow between the upper and lower platforms, like a mountain stream working it's way downhill.
The memories of the Hiring Fair, and Emigration will also have left their mark, through tears for loved ones going away, some never to return. But that love and those tears and love create ripples that echo through time and join together, and run through each other, ever repeating.



weather
Ireland is a rainy country, there is no denying it! The climate is also temperate, we never experience the blazing hot days of Southern Europe, or the ice cold of Scandinavia. However, for a Market Square to work, there needs to be an element of public outdoor space, and for it to be usable, it needs to be protected for the rain. Through analysis, we believe the most appropriate location for some covered space is at the top of the hill, and believe that this should become a destination area for the square.

vision

These influences, together with the brief, have been developed to provide conceptual contemporary proposals for a modern Market Square, which will in turn spark the imagination, encourage discussion and offer creative solutions to develop this space. The physical ideas are those which promote a positive cultural transformation of the square, making it a world class space and popular destination.

These proposals will value and support civic and community engagement. The Square will realise and exceed the statement 'the social assembly point and economic centre of the town' and bring people to the area to stop and relax, promote interactions on a small scale and informal level, slowing down the pedestrian speed. It will also cater for the gathering of people at more formal events.

It is important to consider the market square and public highway as one entity. The design will consider the extent of the square as the boundary of the site stretches out to the surrounding facades. The square will celebrate the existing architecture of the surrounding buildings. It will create a coherent public realm, supporting and enhancing the identity of Letterkenny.

'You can paint the picture, if you have a frame'

REIMAGINING LETTERKENNY MARKET SQUARE - creating a sense of place

Creating a sense of place

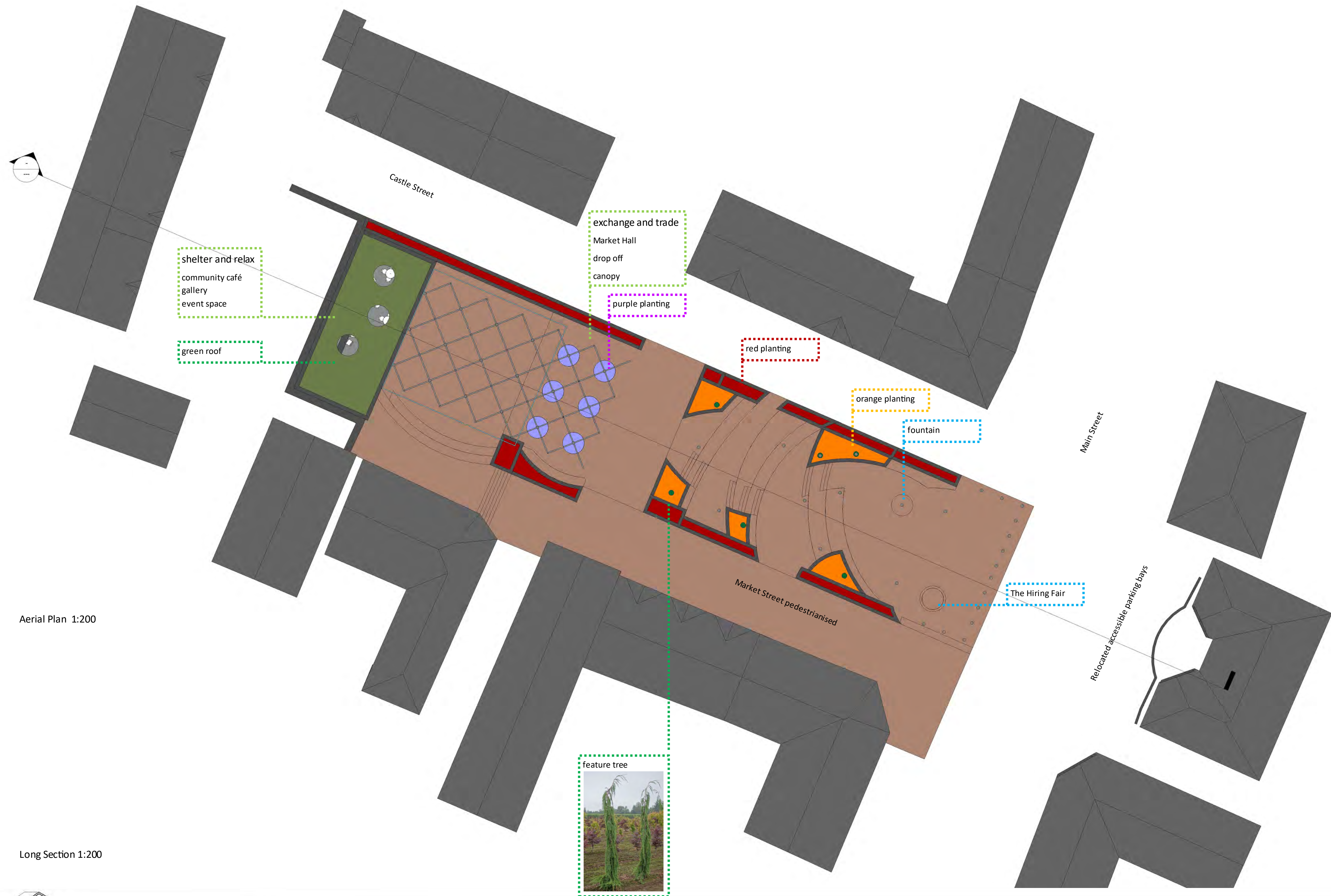
The proposed master-plan for the reimagined Market Square has been generated following a study of a set of influences, set within the framework of the constraints and opportunities analysis. The Market Square is reimagined as an attractive urban plaza that serves the wants and needs of Letterkenny's inhabitants, so that they take pride in the area in which they live. Nature, culture activity and amenity all play a part in engaging the community, and forming an active space filled with people from all walks of life.

The scheme has been planned on the human scale, zoning the space available into three distinct areas :-

- Rest and chat,
- Exchange and trade,
- Shelter and refresh.

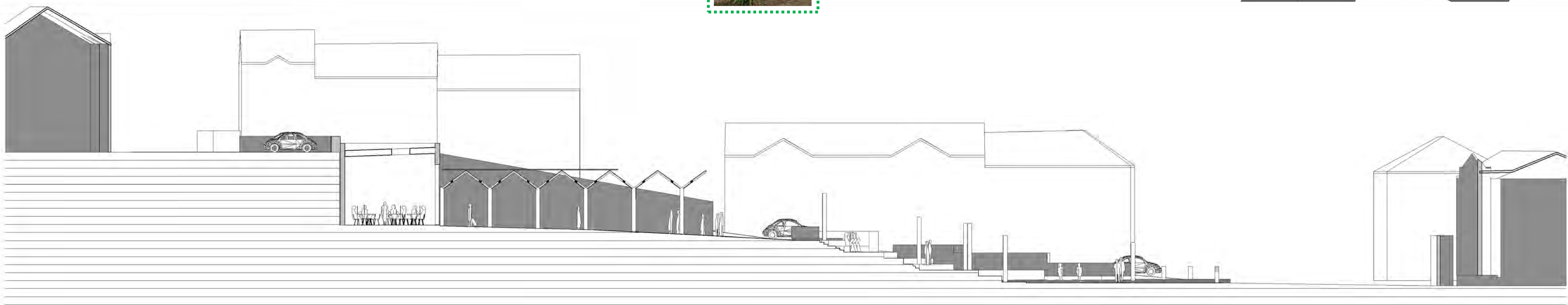
In addition, the reimagined Market Square will also support the following:-

- Locally sourced natural materials and plants help to inform the Squares sense of place within West Donegal. See planting guide and materials palate for further information
- Celebrating the Main Street – the square will only be a success if the Main Street continues to offer a high number of High Street and independent shops and café's to attract the shopper to the town centre. Currently there is very little in the way of al fresco dining available on the Main Street. The new sitting spaces, and covered Market Hall will address this, for ad hoc use.
- In this time of Coronavirus, an outdoor tap for hand washing will be provided at the base of the hill, and by the café.
- Day time activities / night time activities can take place in the café, in the Market Space or on the podium steps.
- Market stalls will be able to se up under the covered Market Hall, on the turning zone, or on the larger terrace steps or at the base of the hill. This distribution of trade over the site will engage pedestrians and encourage them to move through the site, visiting all areas from bottom to top.
- Spaces to grow. The new planting beds will provide spaces for new plants. These could be tended by a local community group or a local school.
- New clear signposting to be installed through the site, and on Main Street, for the purposes of continuity of design.
- Clear sense of history – tangible. The original retaining walls, and adjacent buildings are part of the area's inheritance they should be celebrated. The proposals include for them to be cleaned and repainted as necessary to enhance the 'frame'. A varied palate of pastel colours in proposed to complement the natural stone and Victorian Red brick present in the Square.
- Clear sense of history – intangible. The design of the scheme has been influenced by the ripples of the tears shed following loss, eviction, famine, and emigration. These ripples interact and spread their influence throughout the Square, the country and the world.
- Public art. The presence of public art shows trust, investment and inspiration. The Hiring Fair Monument will be relocated to the base of the hill; the war memorial will be placed dose to one of the planted areas; while the Everest Monument needs to be at the top!
- Public Noticeboard could be provided at the base of the hill as a means of communication and engagement.
- We need comfortable places in which we can speak to other people, this has become all the more apparent through the restrictions faced during lockdown.
- Space for animals/ bird boxes/ bat boxes/ bee hives
 - Water and treats for dogs to be available for the café.
- Donegal Bat Boxes has undertaken research and has discovered that Letterkenny has the highest bat population in Donegal, comprising mainly Brown Long Eared bats, and Whiskered bats. Bat boxes could be installed on the new Green Wall.
- Charlie Ramsey beekeeper from Newtoncunningham was called to the town to rescue a swarm of honey bees which had gathered on a wall in July 2019, perhaps some hives could be located close to the Square, in the grounds of the Cathedral or the School, as the new planting in the Square will provide a good source of nectar.



Aerial Plan 1:200

Long Section 1:200



green roof	purple planting	red planting	orange planting
Acaena microphylla	Wisteria sinensis	Fuchsia	Rhodendron
Cotula Hispida	Lavebdula spp.	magellanica	'Orange Beauty'
Sedum reflexum	Hebe Caladonia	Embothrium	Geum rivale
Sedum acre	Campanula carparica	coccineum	'Leonard's Variety'
Sempervivums	Aster novae-angliae	Geum 'Mrs Bradshaw'	Crocsmia 'Lucifer', 'Severn Sunrise'
Thyme serpyllum		Rosa 'Geranium'	Hemerocallis
		Rhododendron	'Burning Daylight'
		'Dopey'	Narcissus 'Rip Van
feature tree		Ilex aquifolium	Winkle'
Chamaecyparis nootakatensis 'Vanden Akker'		'Hascombensis'	Buddleja Globosa
			Achillea
			Rosa 'Marigold'

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Exchange and Trade

In this proposal, access along Market Square Street is to be limited to drop off and collection for the premises on that street and for the new Market Hall. Therefore the Vehicular cross-over area half way up the hill has been retained as a drop off and service area to allow vehicles which access the shops on Market Square Street to turn, and to allow vehicular access to the Market Hall. However, it would not be a waiting or parking area like it is currently. The Taxi rank would also be removed from Market Street to reduce the numbers of vehicles in the area. The paving would indicate that this area is a shared surface, with pedestrians given priority over vehicles. At the end of Market Square Street, the original retaining wall is upgraded into a green wall. This will help to bring more greenery to the site, and hides the drab nature of the existing wall.

Like the terraces, there are a number of large stone steps around the Market Space to provide seating for formal and informal events.

On the approach to the open air Market Hall, the first structures which appear are the steel, tree-like columns covered with wisteria. These provide scent and shade during the summer months, and the columns also contain lights for night time events. Moving further into the Market Hall, the columns evolve to support a structural glass roof. Due to the rainy nature of the Letterkenny climate (where on average it rains on 279 days of the year) the glazed roof (made of self cleaning glass) will provide shelter yet still create the feeling of an outdoor space, and will effectively ‘disappear’ above the columns, and create a ‘Winter Garden’.

With advances in modern technology, today’s glass is an incredibly strong and durable material. Designed to have as thin a profile as possible, the roof is slightly faceted to ensure that the rainwater is directed to hidden downpipes within the columns, which is collected and stored for grey-water recycling the community café. Each panel is orientated to a minimum of a 1 degree pitch, to ensure the slope will assist in the self cleaning of the glass, and remove the need for unsightly gutters to the roof edge.

Rest and Chat

At the base of the hill, and adjacent to Main Street is the social space. The barriers created by the parked cars in the accessible parking bays, and the low level wall, steps and planting of the original scheme have been removed. This allows the social space to flow out into Main Street, and recess into the hillside. The social space will facilitate those ad hoc interactions of passers by – from a quick ‘how’s about you’, to a full indepth discussion about Mary’s upcoming wedding. While their parents are chatting, children might dodge the jets bubbling fountain or just take a little paddle.

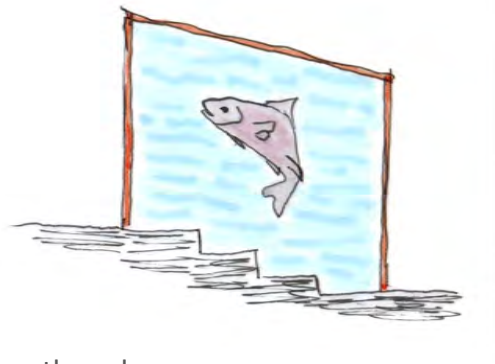
Set at pavement level, the fountain is the focal point at the north end of the social space, and is set at the conclusion of the route from the steps. It is only a small fountain, but a series of three jets will erupt to different heights, before subsiding to a small bubbling form.

The fountain will provide joy for the children through their ability to interact with it. It will also stimulate the senses through sound, touch and sight.

As a balance to the fountain at the southern end of the social space, the bronze sculptures known as ‘The Hiring Fair’ by Maurice Harron, has been relocated. Here the history of the Market Square is remembered, with the children waiting at the hiring fair, looking for employment, and preparing to leave the families for six long months. Relocating the this beautifully poignant work of art will enable it to be integrated into, and enjoyed by the community as people will pass by daily.

To work with the sloping site, the western boundary of the social space has been transformed into a series of curving terraces, with a curving staircase winding up the hillside. The new terraces provide different opportunities to stop, rest, chat and relax. Depending on the location the space might afford panoramic views down to Main Street, or across the site towards Church Street. Bordered by the ‘Flower Walls’ the main form of the steps has been inspired by pools of water in to which raindrops or perhaps tears are falling, and echo the ever-expanding ripples as they move across the surface.

Taking inspiration from the salmon run up the Swilly, the structurally glazed handrails will be created from stained glass, with its own inherent texture and colour and images of salmon, as they jump up the steps. These glazed handrails will be framed with copper – a material known for it’s antimicrobial properties as well as being a visually pleasing material which responds to the environment and is influenced by human touch.



the salmon run



Castle Street



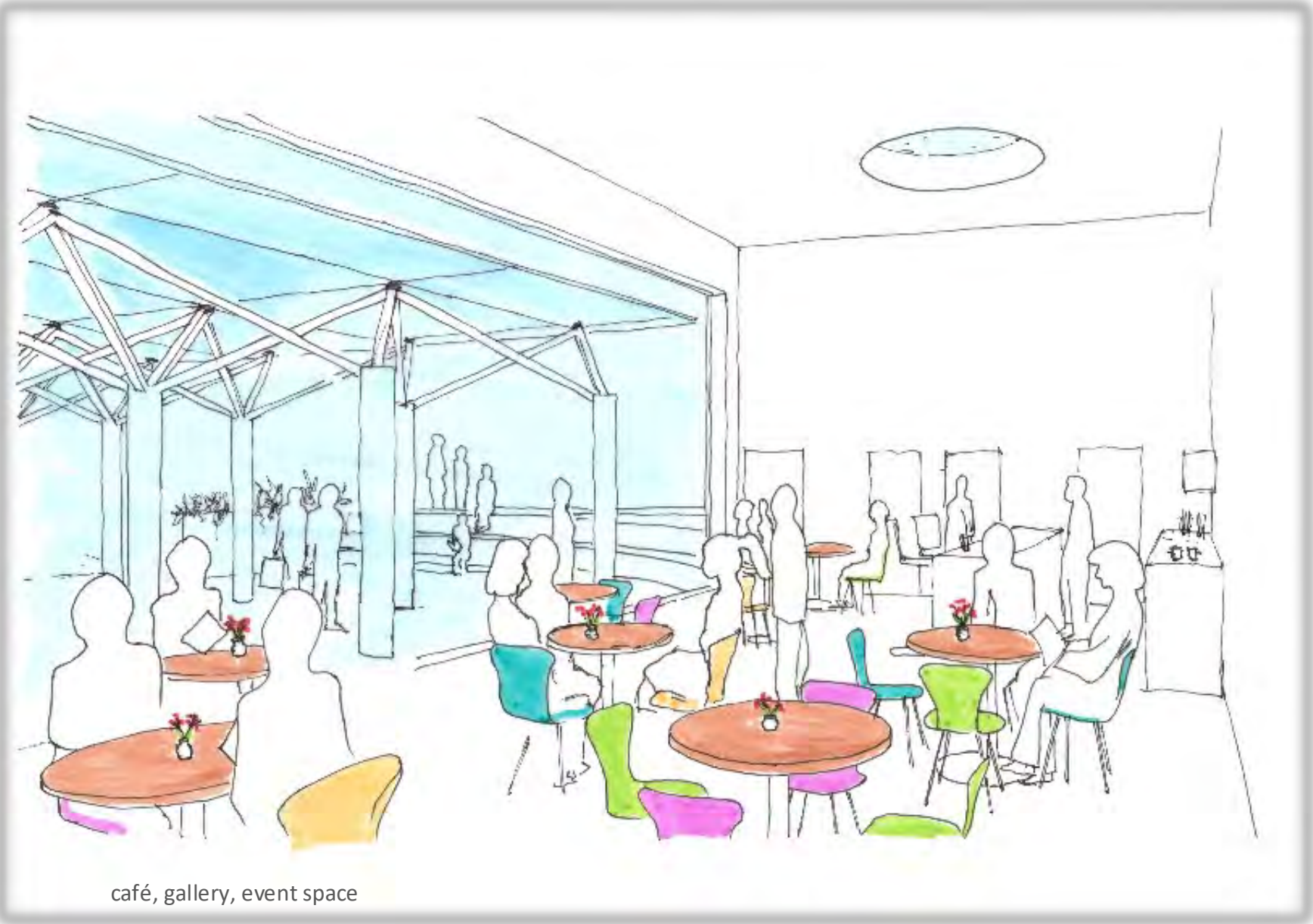
rest and chat - on the terraces



rest and chat - on Main Street



pedestrianised Market Square Street



café, gallery, event space



new covered Market Hall

the heartbeat of the town



bird’s eye view

FIGURA ARCHITECTURE LTD

Shelter and refresh

At the end of the Journey through the site is the new café. Set within the original retaining walls, the café will be a simple rectangular structure, with a flat, green roof, and glazed eastern wall. The glazing looks out over the Market Hall, and in warm weather can be opened up to promote an integrated indoor/ outdoor environment. The café will be open during the day and into the evening. It can be used as a flexible space, for musicians, poets, book groups and as a gallery. It will also provide public toilets for the square.

Market Hall – Vision

Market Halls are starting to be viewed as the key to a town’s renewal in the UK. Successful venues include Borough Market in London; Market House, Altrincham; and Chester Market which has also recently Market Al Fresco as a response to the easing of restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic. Not a market in the strictest sense of the word, but the pop-up nature of the food businesses at Baron’s Quay Social, Northwich and Marine Street Social, have also influenced these design proposals. Food and drink can be enjoyed from a variety of different food booths, serving food from across the world, with live music events on various nights, and eaten at communal tables.

Therefore, the vision for the Market Hall in Letterkenny would be to create an indoor/ and covered outdoor venue. It will primarily be a place for the locals, as well as passing trade. There is a sense of a close knit community in Letterkenny and the Gaeltacht, with strong family business links many stretching back generations.

The food market would be at the heart of the development, giving time tested, or newly opened food businesses the opportunity to test themselves and enrich the community. Indoors there would be up to four food booths, a selection of tables, a performance space, and walls on which to display local art work. Folding/ sliding glass doors open out onto the covered outdoor space, blurring the boundaries of indoor and out. Outside the space under the covered roof is flexible in its usage. The high, glazed roof will protect the traders and shoppers from the elements, but the open sides which will allow a breeze to blow through. It can have movable tables and chairs, market stalls, food stalls and a performance space depending on the requirements of the day. The stalls can be arranged along the rows of columns, to form aisles with plenty of space to pass, peruse and queue comfortably. Lighting and power will be routed through the columns supporting the roof.

The food would be a mixture of traditional and world wide cuisines, presented as fresh ingredients and finished dishes. Careful selection of the traders would ensure that the aspirational standards are maintained. Honest and interesting products would be prioritized over fancy franchises and fast-food pedlars. Indoors the food booths might be occupied by a wood-fired pizza chef, specialty deserts, Halloumi Fries, Caribbean or burgers and milkshakes. From the market stalls a variety of food would be on offer, from a bakery and a fruit and veg stall which have lasted for generations, to home-based jam makers, and entrepreneurs selling home cured ham, locally made blackberry liquor or hand made chocolates.

There would be a monthly craft market, showcasing the talent in the local area, with stalls selling clothing, knitting and crochet, hand crafted and upcycled furniture, greetings cards, candles, wood carvings, and creative arts.

The Market would be unified through the signage, branding and a monthy magazine with interviews and ideas from the producers. To enhance the community, and for the benefit of the planet, a scheme to reduce food waste would be implemented where surplus food would be donated to the hungry.

As well as continuing the role of trading, the Market Hall would be a place for the exchange of ideas, news and performance. Cultural events, such as book groups, poetry readings, and musicians will all have a place, as well as classes for children to learn about growing food at home and the importance of eating well. Animals would not be forgotten either, water and treats for dogs would be provided.