



Project Ireland 2040
Building Ireland's Future



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

LETTERKENNY 2040 REIMAGINED MARKET SQUARE

AT MARKET SQUARE, CASTLE STREET AND MAIN STREET, IN THE TOWNLAND OF LETTERKENNY, LETTERKENNY, COUNTY DONEGAL

DESCRIPTION OF THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF THE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED in relation to 'Letterkenny 2040-Reimagined Market Square' at Market Square, Castle Street and Main Street, Letterkenny within 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)

Regeneration and Development Team
Directorate of Community Development &
Planning Services
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1.0 Background to the proposed development

Market Square is an area of existing public realm located in the heart of Letterkenny town centre. It is recognized as the economic and social core of the town having always performed a function as a public space surrounded by mixed use town centre activity. Its shape, layout, manner of use and form have changed over time from a historically open space dating back to 1800's to its present-day state following its redevelopment in the early 1990's. Today, it is a space under extreme demand for competing and conflicting uses and as a result, it is significantly under-performing for all users and particularly in terms of its performance as a public space. It is therefore not reaching its potential to contribute to a vibrant town centre and is punching far below its weight as the most central and historical public space in the core of Letterkenny Regional Centre.

Image 1: Market Square 1890



Image 2: Market Square 2022



The proposed development aims to address the problems associated with the deficiency of the existing space by creating an enhanced public realm that is visually and physically open and accessible and which has the capacity to be used as a dynamic, multi-user space. The proposed development will upgrade and enhance the existing space so that it is capable of meeting the needs of the town as the largest urban area in the County and as the Regional Centre in the Northwest City Region.

The proposed development follows a successful architectural competition led by Letterkenny Chamber of Commerce in partnership with Donegal County Council during 2020/2021. The winning design forms the basis for the proposed development as outlined further in section 4.7 of this report.

The proposed development is an important lead project of a wider urban regeneration programme known as 'Letterkenny 2040' which also involves 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 redevelopment of Market Square an important project to contribute to the further establishment of the Cathedral Quarter as a key focal point and destination in the town centre and it will deliver this transformational change on the ground.

The proposed Part 8 development will achieve multiple benefits including:

- Creating high-quality public realm.
- Supporting an attractive urban environment
- Enhancing pedestrian and cyclist accessibility.
- Improve safety for pedestrians, cyclists and road users.
- 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.
- Enabling civic and community activity and cultural and artistic expression within the urban environment.
- Activating the private sector in the further regeneration potential of the surrounding land and buildings.
- Contributing to the tourism potential of the town by providing an attractive urban experience
- Providing a useable public space to respond to demand and changing mindset for outdoor spaces arising from the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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 including National Priorities for Compact Growth, a Strong Economy supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills, Sustainable Mobility 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 a key lead project in the delivery of the vision emerging from the Letterkenny 2040 Regeneration Strategy.

The delivery of the project is supported by the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) together with match funding from Donegal County Council subject to approval processes under the Public Spending Code.

2.0 Location of the proposed development

The location of the proposed development is the townland of LETTERKENNY specifically located at Market Square, Castle Street and Main Street, in Letterkenny town centre. The site consists of:

- (i) Two distinct areas of existing public realm:
 - a. The lower area adjoining Main Street including existing stepped access, walls, trees, planting, railings, seats and the location of the 'Rabble Children' sculpture and;
 - b. The upper area at the back of Market Square including stepped access, earth embankment to back wall, walls, railings and bandstand.
- (ii) Vehicular carriageway from Castle Street through Market Square to Main Street.

- (iii) Vehicular carriageway from Main Street along Ulster Bank frontage and dissecting across the centre of the site.
- (iv) Vehicular carriageway and adjoining footpaths along the Main Street frontage of Market Square and to the front of Market Centre.
- (v) Existing car parking, loading bay, taxi ranks and disables access car parking.

The site is surrounded on all sides by town centre streetscape of 2 storey scale and upwards providing mixed use development including retail, commercial, financial, office, residential and services. Images 5-18 show the site in its current form. Please refer to drawing no's. LKRMS-0005, LKRMS-0006 & LKRMS-0007 for a full photographic record of the site in its current form.

Please refer to drawing no's: Dwg No's: LKRMS-0000 (Site Location and Site Extent) and LKRMS 0001 (Site Location Map) and as shown the following pages as images 3 & 4.

Image 3: Drawing No. LKRMS-0000 (Site Location and Site Extent)

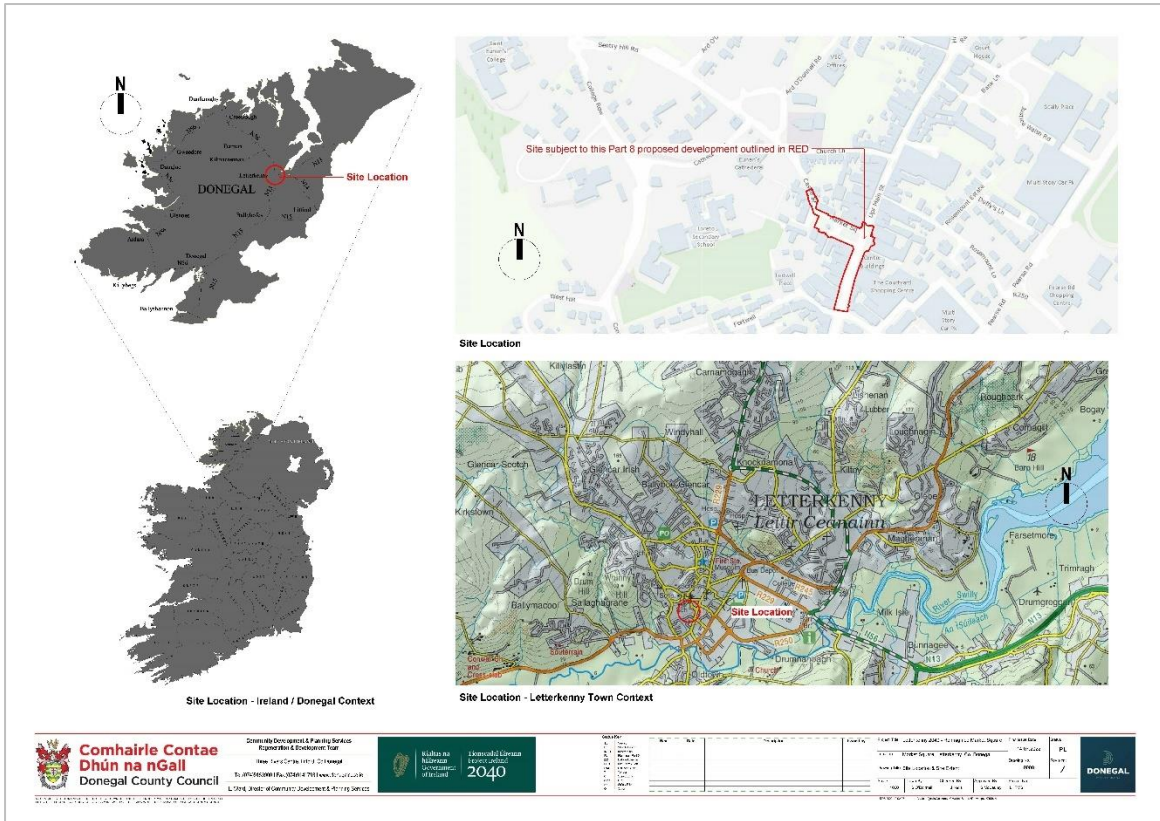


Image 4: Drawing No. LKRMS 0001 (Site Location Map)

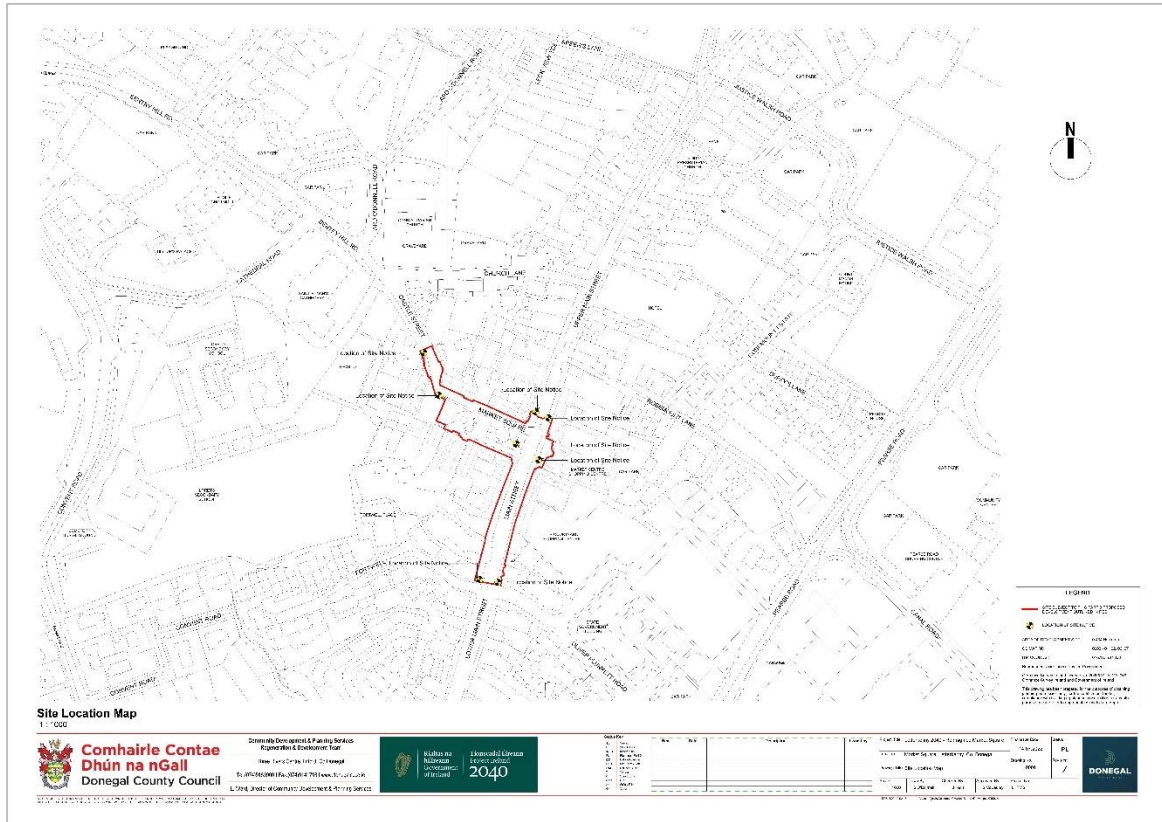


Image 5: Existing site as viewed from Main Street, 1st floor of Market Centre



Image 6: Market Square from Main Street



Image 7: Market Square from Main Street



Image 8: Walls, railings & steps to Main Street



Image 9: Lower public space adjoining Main Street



Image 10: The 'Rabble Children' sculpture



Image 11: Loading Bay at stepped access to public space



Image 12: Dominance of car



Image 13: Dominance of car



Image 14: Upper public space including the bandstand

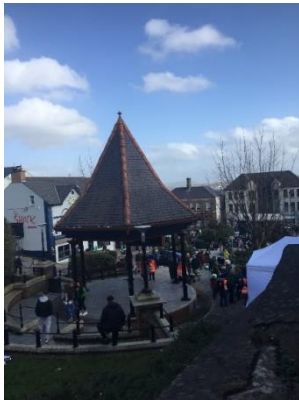


Image 15: Castle Street



Image 16: Upper public space including the bandstand



Above: Image 17: Carriageway from Main Street alongside the Ulster Bank

Left: Image 18: Carriageway from Castle Street to Main Street

3.0 Description of the proposed development

The specific nature of the proposed works is as follows:

- i. Demolition and removal of existing public realm environment at Market Square inclusive of removal of existing bandstand and adjoining embankment at rear, steps, walls, trees, shrubbery and planting.
- ii. Construction of a new public realm environment inclusive of a new shared surface, traffic calming, stepped access to Main Street, 2 no. public plaza's including water feature, connecting accessibility infrastructure and integrated low-level planting, modified carriageways/junctions/footpaths, new public seating, lighting, street furniture and cycle stands delivering an enhanced capacity for civic events and social purpose and to ensure all abilities access.

- iii. Installation of public art inclusive of Letterkenny 2040 brand logo and historical/heritage and place-related information.
- iv. Relocation of existing sculpture known as 'the Rabble Children' within the new public realm environment.
- v. Removal of existing car parking/loading bays/taxi ranks from within Market Square and replacement with enhanced pedestrian civic spaces throughout the scheme.
- vi. Removal of 2 no. existing disabled car parking spaces located in front of Market Square and construction of 3 no. replacement disabled car parking spaces located to the front of Market Centre.
- vii. Removal of existing taxi rank located in front of Market Centre and construction of new replacement taxi rank on Main Street in lieu of 6 no. existing on-street parking spaces.
- viii. Revised parking arrangements on Main Street
- ix. All associated ancillary works to include regrading of existing profiles, enhancements to public lighting, drainage and utilities, connection to services, landscaping, development related signage & public art within the overall development area.

3.1 Site layout design concept

The design concept for the proposed Reimagined Market Square provides for an open, readily accessible, multi-user space that will function as a space for people to meet, to sit and gather in, to host events and to animate, as well as a space for businesses to spill out onto. The concept for the proposed development is fundamentally based on creating a more accessible space for people, removing conflicting vehicular movements where possible and thereafter managing vehicular movements where the pedestrian takes priority. The aim of the proposed development is to upgrade the existing Market Square public realm by employing simple design interventions working towards an attractive and healthier town centre in which people will choose to spend more time in, to live in, to visit, to work in and to invest in. (Please see image 19 and Drawing no. LKMRS-0011 for proposed site layout).

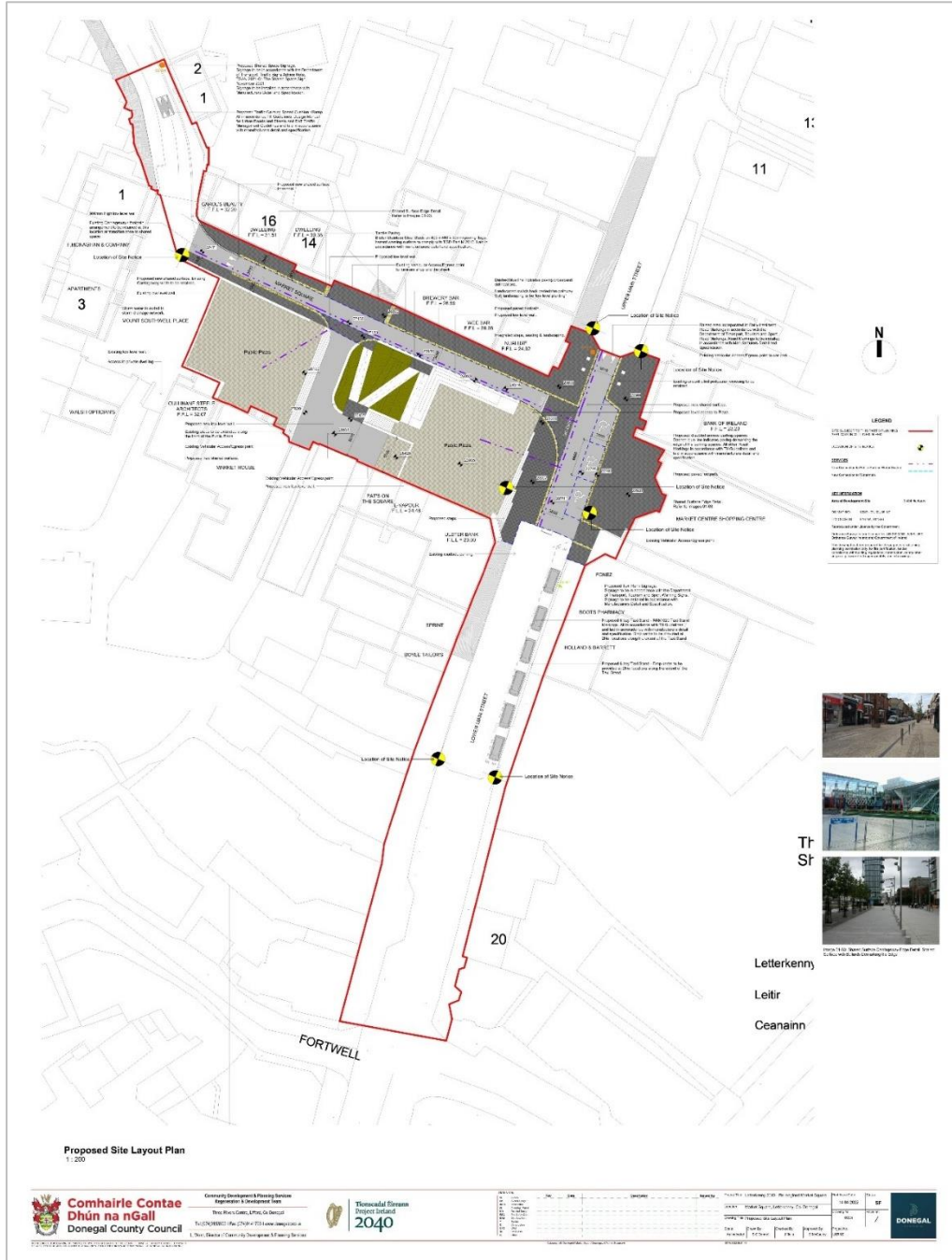
In general terms the proposed site layout will provide an open, flexible space where shared surfaces throughout prioritise and give more space to the pedestrian whilst discouraging car use and reducing speed. Having two key plaza areas that are strongly connected through visual openness and consistent materiality, the space will be capable of hosting smaller events/ activities such as an outdoor dining space on the plaza to the rear of the site alongside a market on the plaza adjoining Main Street. Likewise, the space can be readily adapted to accommodate a larger event in conjunction with temporary road closures facilitating a stage located on Main Street while Market Square providing a natural concert-like auditorium from front to back. The proposed development will thereby result in circa 2,000sqm of potential available public space to cater for a larger event in conjunction with road closures.

The proposed layout builds upon the winning design from the Architectural Competition held during 2020/2021 led by Letterkenny Chamber in partnership with Donegal County Council. The winning design, submitted by Joseph McCallion provided an open, accessible and flexible space, removal/ relocation of car parking and taxi ranks and closure of the vehicular access alongside the Ulster Bank. These elements are strongly reflected in the proposed

development. As outlined further in section 4.7 of this report, the proposed development does not provide for the construction of a tourist office with integrated public toilets to the rear of the site as had been indicated in the winning concept design but rather designs for the productive integration of this space as a key part of the useable public realm.

The following sections provide further detail in relation to the design concept relating to the components of the proposed scheme.

Image 19: Proposed site layout plan



3.2 Open plaza adjoining Main Street

This part of the proposed development strongly demarcates the frontage of Market Square along Main Street through the relocation of existing disabled car parking space and the removal of existing walls, railings and steps. It also reclaims additional public realm space through the removal of vehicular access from Main Street alongside the Ulster Bank thereby creating an open threshold to Main Street of circa 21 metres width. The footpath width between the Square and Main Street is widened together with integrated steps graded into the topography of the space. Level access is provided from Main Street to the Square on the Northwest side of the space to ensure universal access to all. The plaza space adjoining Main Street will provide circa 378sqm of protected pedestrian only space capable of hosting events, markets, musicians, outdoor dining as examples as well as passive meeting and rest space. The proposed site layout provides for L-shaped seating of stepped nature creating a natural amphitheatre and providing a strong, safe threshold to the vehicular carriageway along the northern boundary of Market Square (Images 20 & 21 refer). Proposed L-shaped seating is of concrete construction or other suitable alternative to ensure longevity in materiality. The proposed development provides for the installation of a jet water feature to allow for the intermittent animation of the space. The plaza surface forms part of the wider proposed shared surface and takes the form of high-quality paving and tactile paving. Adequate public lighting design will be provided and reflects a similar column lighting design as it currently being implemented in Phase 1 of LK Green Connect. This key element of the design concept is highly reflective of the Architectural Competition winning design concept. (Refer to Images 22-28 for precedent).

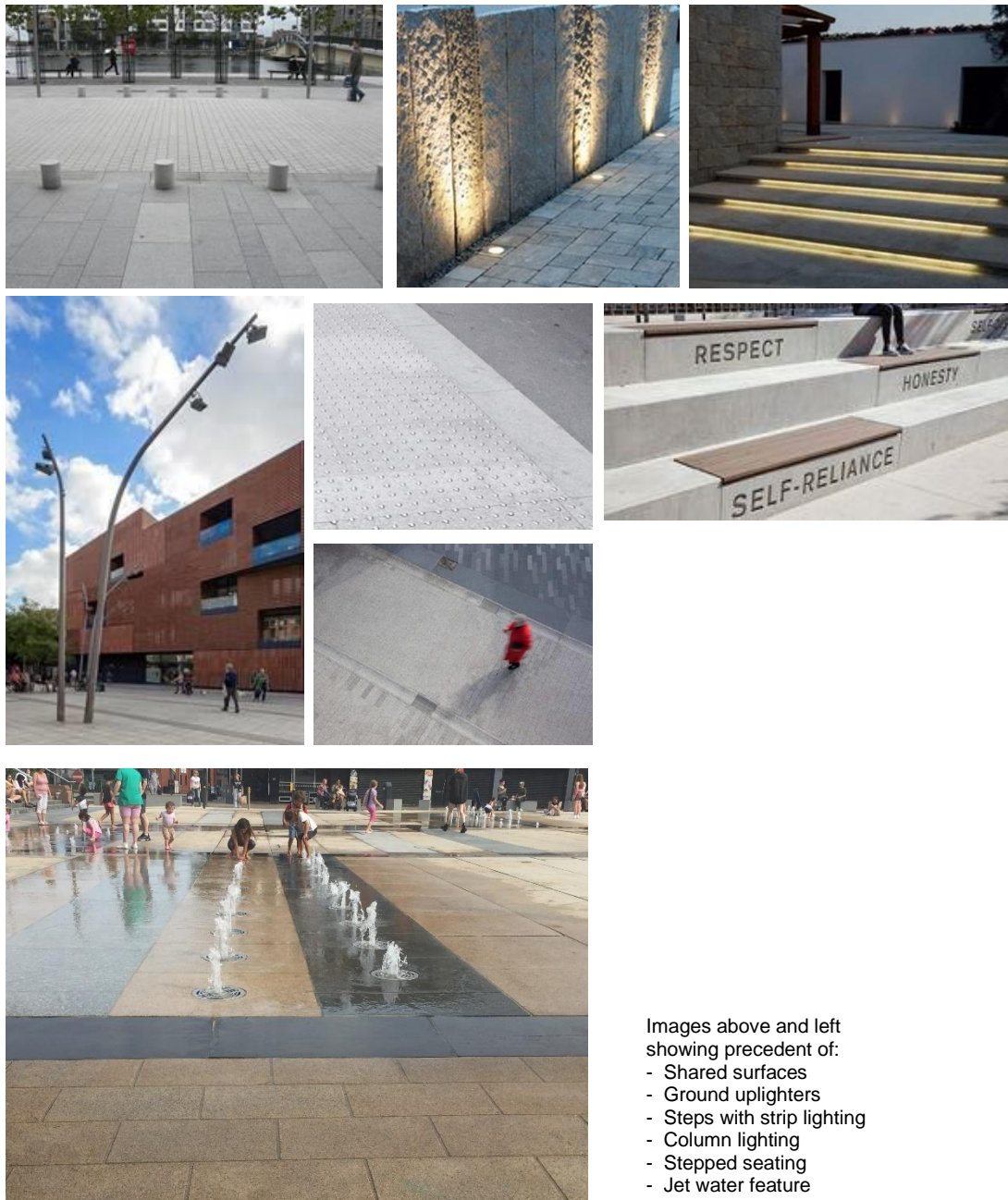
Image 20: Insert 3D visual looking up the Square



Image 21: Winning Design Concept in the Architectural Competition showing L-shaped seating and useable open space on the lower plaza.



Images 22-28: Precedent images



- Images above and left showing precedent of:
- Shared surfaces
 - Ground uplighters
 - Steps with strip lighting
 - Column lighting
 - Stepped seating
 - Jet water feature

3.3 Connecting infrastructure

The mid-part of the space accommodates the sloping topography of the site by means of accessible switch-back pathway with integrated low level grasses (Images 29-32 refer). Steps are also located at this point to also provide direct access. The 'Rabble Children' Sculpture is relocated to this area as shown in Image 36.

Images 29-32 showing precedent of low-level grasses and connecting infrastructure precedent



3.4 Open plaza to the upper section of the Square

The proposed development provides for the removal of existing bandstand and existing earth embankment located to the rear of the site to facilitate the reinstatement of historic levels so as to create a level open area, integration of seating and public lighting. The proposed development includes for use of the wall to the rear of the site for the mounting of 'LKY' branding (Images 33-35) as it emerges as the strong place-brand identity for Letterkenny together with associated artistic installation capturing the history of the space and the people of the town Image 36 refers). The proposed development includes for cycle stands at a number of key points including the objective to integrate the Donegal DNA Brand within this infrastructure (Image 38 refers).



Images 33 &34 above:
Emerging Letterkenny 2040
place-brand



Images 35 above:
3D visualization of the open plaza to
the upper area

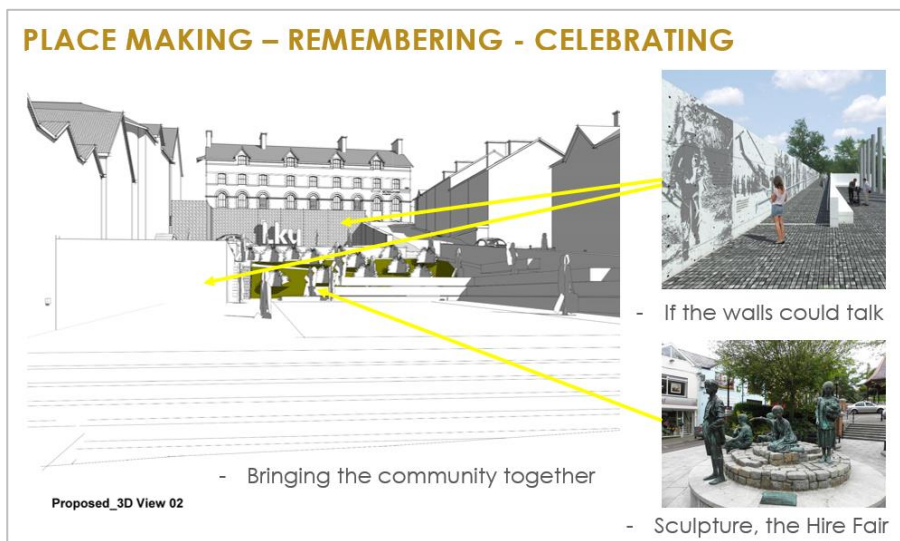


Image 36 left:
Proposed integration
of the existing
'Rabble Children'
sculpture and
installation of
artistic/heritage/
cultural expression
at rear wall and at
other locations



Image 37: Precedent image of public seating



Image 38 : Integration of cycle stands designed using Donegal DNA place-brand

3.5 Shared surface

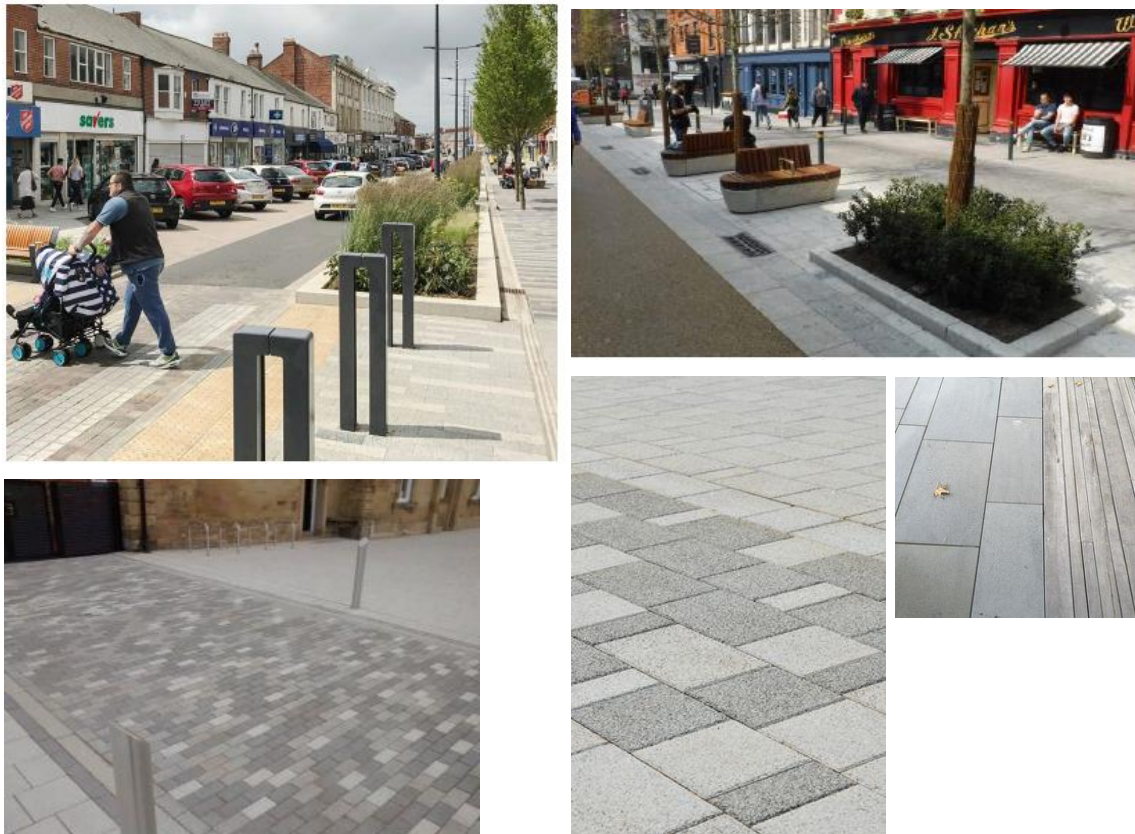
A shared surface is envisaged throughout the development therefore integrating the spaces where pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles share the main carriageway. This occurs at the following locations:

1. From the entrance of Castle Street into and along Market Square;
2. At a mid-point from the carriageway at Market Square to the existing car park to the rear of Market House and also to existing service access between Pats Pizza and Endgame.
3. Along the Main Street frontage.

The aim is to convey through design and materiality that the environment is a shared surface that drivers, upon entering the street, recognise that they are in a shared space and react by driving very slowly (i.e. 20km/h or less). This will be implemented through careful consideration of materials and finish, the embedding of kerb lines within the street surfaces in lieu of raised kerb lines, the implementation of a transition zone on entrance to Market Square via Castle Street (inclusive of a ramp) and the integration of raised area on Main Street at the carriageway entry to the space.

In addition, the proposed development incorporates the widening of footpath space through the relocation of car parking, taxi ranks, loading bay and disabled access car parking.

Images 39-43: Precedent of shared surface spaces



3.6 Car parking, disabled car parking and taxi ranks

In response to the current position of the dominance of the car in the existing environment at Market Square set against the potential for the space to perform better as a public space with associated economic and community benefits, the proposed development (i) reallocates car parking spaces to public space (ii) relocates disabled access car parking space and (iii) relocates taxi rank space as set out in more detail below.

Having regard to the community and economic benefits to be gained from the project, the reduction in on-street car parking and relocation of taxi rank space is a necessary and essential intervention to warrant the project viable. The proposed development makes provision for alternative arrangements that are considered to be adequate to cater for need and are measured in the context of the significant and sufficient extent of other on-street and off-street car parking and taxi rank provision across the town centre. Specifically, the proposed development includes:

- Removal of existing car parking/loading bays/taxi ranks from within Market Square and replacement with enhanced pedestrian civic spaces throughout the scheme.
- Removal of 2 no. existing disabled car parking spaces located in front of Market Square and construction of 3 no. replacement disabled car parking spaces located to the front of Market Centre (thus displacing an existing taxi rank)
- Removal of existing taxi rank located in front of Market Centre and construction of new replacement taxi rank on Main Street in lieu of 6 no. existing on-street parking spaces.
- Revised parking arrangements on Main Street

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) .

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 1st and 2nd calls for applications to the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund. This activity is providing:

- For the preparation of Letterkenny 2040 Regeneration Strategy for Letterkenny town centre and;
- For the Market Square Architectural Competition- this competition is now complete and a winning design was announced in June 2021. The competition was led by Letterkenny Chamber in partnership with Donegal County Council.

Each of the aforementioned policy contexts 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.

The NPF outlines that achievement of compact and sustainable growth requires a focus on four key areas:

- The 'liveability' or quality of life of urban places – public realm, traffic and parking, access to amenities, a sense of personal safety and well being
- Making the continuous regeneration and development of existing built up areas as attractive and viable as Greenfield development through active land management

- Tackling legacies such as concentrations of disadvantage in central areas through physical regeneration and encouraging integrated communities
- Linking regeneration and redevelopment initiatives to climate action

It is supported by National Policy Objectives which seek to:

- Deliver at least 30% of all new homes that are targeted in settlements other than the five cities, within their existing built-up footprints. (NPO 3c)
- 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)
- In urban areas, planning and related standards, including in particular building height and car parking will be based on performance criteria that seek to achieve well-designed high quality outcomes in order to achieve targeted growth. These standards will be subject to a range of tolerance that enables alternative solutions to be proposed to achieve stated outcomes, provided public safety is not compromised and the environment is suitably protected. (NPO 11)

The NPF also makes provision for projects that (i) enable increased walking, cycling and accessibility to enable modal shift as well as (ii) projects to strengthen the economy by coordination with place-making and (iii) enhancement of the attractiveness of towns and quality of life through investment in well-designed public realm. Relevant NSO's in this regard include:

- **NSO-5: 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 that will co-ordinate actions across Government, Local Authorities and key stakeholders to support towns to identify, develop and progress their own unique town centre revitalisation plans which incorporate best-practice with regard to place-making.

The TCF policy aims to empower local communities and businesses, working with Local Authorities, to develop plans to maximise the particular strengths and assets of their town. These plans will also provide a link to the objectives in the statutory development plans and local area plans that are relevant to each town. This will be delivered through the establishment of (i) A National Oversight and Advisory Group (ii) A National Town Centre First Office (iii) Town Centre Regeneration Officers (iv) Town Teams.

The TCF Policy identifies a 9 opportunities that can be implemented to drive future growth and development including the 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. In addition, it states that towns can also present significant access challenges for people with disabilities. The TCF policy details that whilst many urban centres in Ireland are, at present, dependent on cars for day-to-day activities, their dominance within towns has had a major impact on their liveability, their attractiveness to visitors and on the quality of the public realm environment. It states that a balance needs to be struck by carefully managing vehicle movement so as to ensure that streets are accessible places that are not dominated by cars and car parking. 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.

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:

- Provide funding to support the upgrade and enhancement of shopfronts and street facades in towns and villages and for the adaptation of town centres for outdoor socialising.
- 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 and thus enhancing quality of life.

The following Regional Planning Objectives are relevant:

- 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 prioritise 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. The North West MASP recognises the need for 'All Island Cohesion' (also Chapter 9) and the potential of collaborative work at a sub-regional level and on a cross border basis for economic advantage and for the social, economic, cultural and environmental well-being of communities. It acknowledges the north-south cooperation that has already realised a pipeline of cross border initiatives and projects that are having a positive enabling impact on local communities and the strong level of cross border co-operation that exists via the joined-up leadership of Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council through the establishment of the North West Strategic Growth Partnership and the North West Regional Development Group.

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'.

Other relevant Regional Planning Objectives of the North West MASP include:

- RPO 9.1:** Build inclusive and compact places
- RPO 9.2:** Investing in Connected and accessible places

RPO 9.3: Planning for a vibrant economy and nurturing communities

RPO 9.4: Creating resilient places and low carbon infrastructure.

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 also identifies several regeneration opportunities which have the potential to transform the town's centre through an Urban Regeneration Strategy and this includes 'Church Lane/Market Square (Cathedral Quarter)' for the purposes of 'Continued Regeneration and Restoration'. The RGCSP identifies that each of these opportunities represents brownfield development within the town and that the re-use of these sites would represent a key element of achieving the Compact Growth objectives which is a central pillar of the NPF.

The RGCSP also outlines that Letterkenny has been identified as one of Failte Irelands 'Destination Towns.' It 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. To do this, the RGCSP states 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 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). It encompasses 18 Core Strategy Objectives including:

- CS-O-2:** To assert County Donegal as having a key role in the context of the North West City Region and within the area of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly.
- 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....
(b) Participation in a regional approach in order to assert a key strategic development role in the North West City Region and as part of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly area (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 (and).....through a proactive approach to enable the delivery of key regeneration sites.
- CS-O-12:** To require growth of towns in a sequential manner outwards from the core so as to make best use of existing and planned infrastructure to the benefit of local communities and effective urban growth.

Chapter 3 of the CDP outlines the importance of towns and villages to the County and the importance of renewal and regeneration and Chapter 9 outlines the Councils objectives and policies as regards tourism. Key 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.
- 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.

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 for the County stating that;

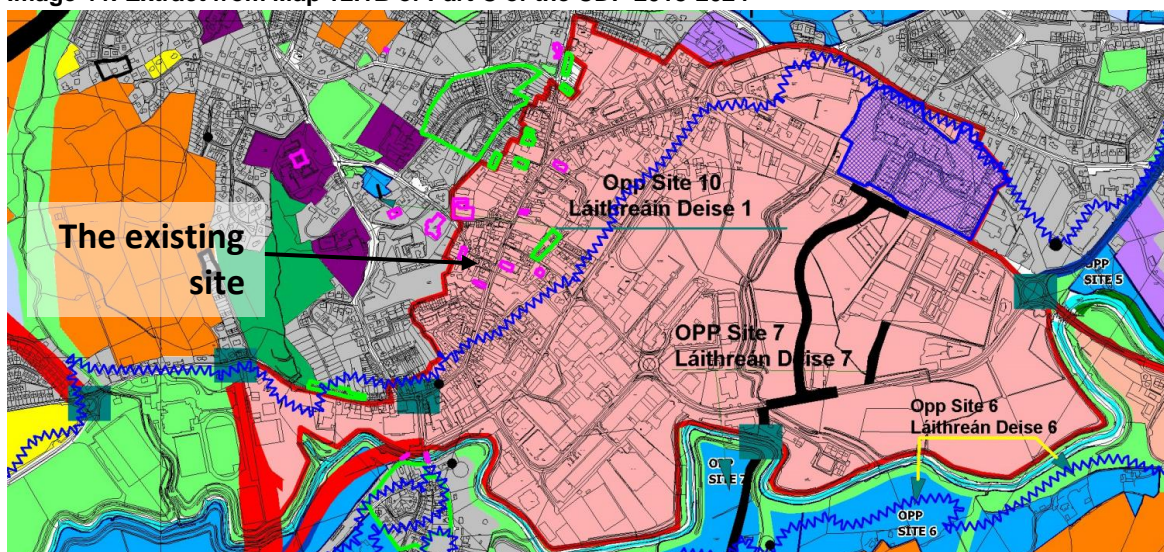
‘Its growth and strengthening as a major centre of critical mass together with its wider hinterland is critical in the regional context including its relationship with Derry City. A strong, vibrant, connected Letterkenny with growing critical mass will provide benefits across the County and within the region in terms attracting private sector investment in jobs and the economy and in securing investment in infrastructure that is critical to the county as a whole.’

Part C outlines 6 key areas for intervention in Letterkenny in total 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 44 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 44: 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 include a dispersed, low density retail environment which necessitates car dependency, a lack of quality public spaces throughout and immediately accessible from the town centre, and the fragmentation of the town centre into self-contained pockets of developments which hinder a coherent environment. In view of this the Plan recommends a Town Centre Strategy and states that the Planning Authority is of the firm opinion that in order to develop a consolidated, vibrant, accessible, multifunctional and high quality urban environment with a critical mass it will be necessary to: (inter alia)

- Achieve a critical mass of development in the town centre by increasing overall densities, developing derelict underutilised sites within the town centre, consolidating new retail development within a defined town centre (and expanding retail development thereafter in an incremental fashion) and focusing certain forms of development within the town centre.
- Promote a higher density and greater diversity of development through backland, infill and mixed use development;
- Creating a more coherent, and interlinked town centre through the achievement of critical mass, the establishment of quality linkages and promotion of diversity of uses throughout the town centre;
- Establishing new streets with active frontages by ensuring that new developments provide for a mixture of active uses, at a human scale, along architecturally pleasing and visually engaging facades;
- Further refining the template offered by the Urban Design Framework by identifying specific layouts and design criteria for the development of key urban blocks within the Framework;
- Establishing a pedestrian friendly town centre, through the consolidation and densification of development, prioritising pedestrians over private vehicles in the design and layout of development, the improvement of key pedestrian crossing points and the reservation of routes for pedestrian and cycling linkages;

This strategy is then 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-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.

Section 12.4 of Chapter 12 of Part C of the CDP refers to objectives and policies to enhance transportation including enhancement of walking and cycling networks and associated supporting infrastructure and Section 12.10 refers to objectives and policies in relation to social, community and cultural issues in Letterkenny. The following specific objectives and policies in relation to both sections refer:

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

LK-T-P-1: Ensure that all new development complies with the most relevant Traffic Management Guidelines through (inter alia).... (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.

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 that involves 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 regeneration programme and Letterkenny 2040 Regeneration Strategy is to co-deliver a vibrant, liveable and fully functioning regional centre

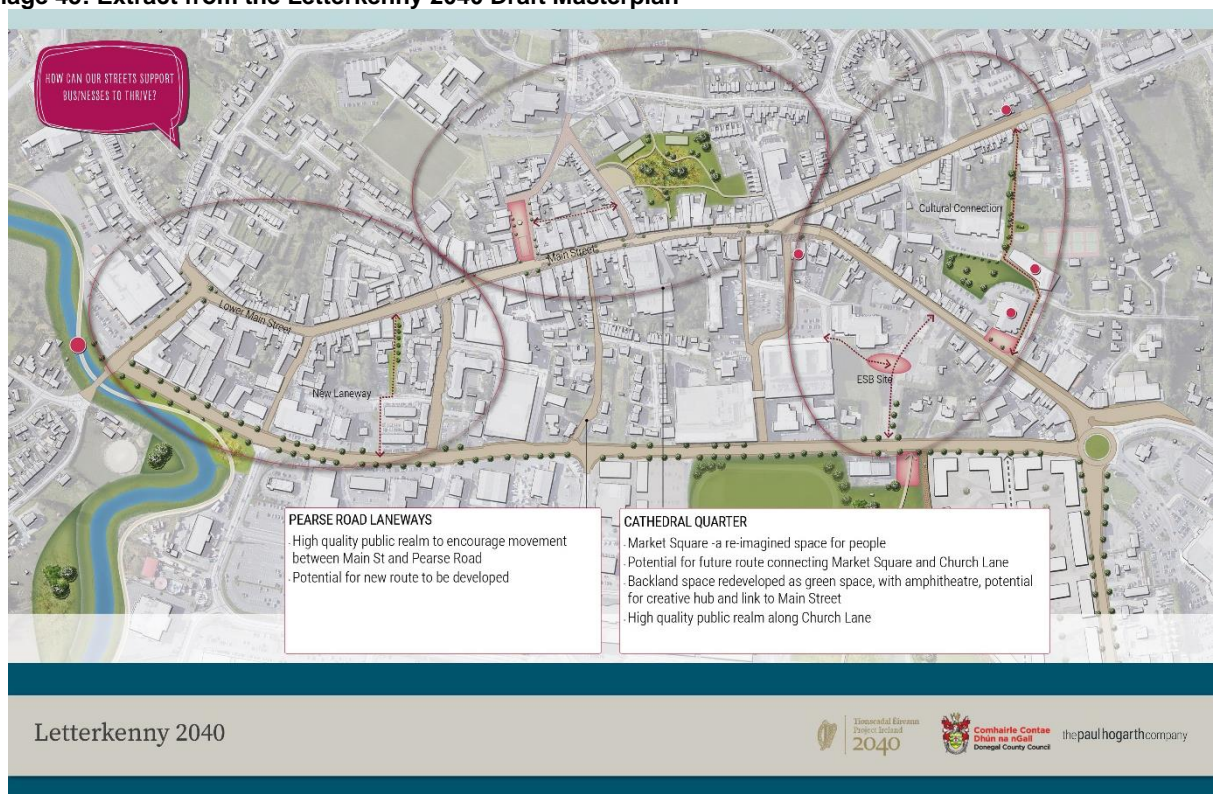
with a flourishing population that has a strong economy, employment and housing choice, healthy and restorative environments, community and social amenities, high quality of life and positive public and civic spaces.

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 project has completed three phases of consultation and will publish the final Regeneration Strategy in September/October 2022.

The Masterplan element of the Regeneration Strategy identifies a series of projects to enhance the competitiveness and attractiveness of Letterkenny town centre. This includes the enhancement of the Cathedral Quarter through:

- Market Square- A reimagined space for people
- Potential for future route connecting Market Square and Church Lane
- Backland space redeveloped as green space, with amphitheatre, potential for creative hub and link to Main Street
- High quality public realm along Church Lane

Image 45: Extract from the Letterkenny 2040 Draft Masterplan



4.7 Architectural Competition, Winning Design Concept

In July 2020, an Architectural Competition, led by Letterkenny Chamber of Commerce in partnership with Donegal County Council, was launched to invite Design Concepts to reimagine Market Square as a 'Place for People.' Following an evaluation process and public vote, the winning design concept was announced as that of Joseph McCallion. Image 46 shows the layout in relation to the Winning Design Concept and image 47 shows a 3D image of the concept. All communication in relation to the competition outlined that the winning design may or may not be taken forward, in full or adapted form to Part 8 planning consent.

The winning design provided an early-stage design concept and has ensured an exceptional foundation for the further design of the space for the purposes of Part 8. The winning design comprised four main components (Images 46 and 47 refer):

1. The creation of an open and accessible plaza to the front of the space incorporating L-shaping seating to provide a strong threshold to the vehicular carriageway and opening up a flexible space for seating, gathering, events, markets, outdoor cinema as examples.
2. The removal of car parking, loading bays, taxi ranks and disabled car parking spaces and relocation on Main Street.
3. The removal of vehicular access from Main Street alongside the Ulster Bank.
4. The construction of a tourist office with integrated public toilets to the rear of the site.

The proposed development that is now the subject of Part 8 process strongly reflects the key concepts of the winning design particularly as regards an open plaza to the front of the space (1 above), relocation car parking, loading, taxi ranks and disabled car parking (2 above) and closure of vehicular access alongside the Ulster Bank. As a result, a larger space is available as a high-quality public realm and conflicting movements between pedestrians and cars are significantly reduced and controlled.

Component 4 above (tourist office and public toilets) has not been taken forward within the proposed development due to:

- Implementing the first principle of regeneration to reuse existing vacant properties where possible in lieu of construction of new build space.
- The need for an integrated and partnership approach to enable a tourist office in the town centre to ensure an 'open door' 12 months of the year as opposed to a seasonal presence.
- The poor level of accessibility that would be delivered to public toilets/tourist office located at the back of the site due to the topography of the site and therefore the challenge in achieving universal accessibility to all, particularly to public conveniences.
- The availability of better alternatives as regard the future provision of a town centre located tourist office and public conveniences within other regeneration projects that are being progressed with particular reference to the reuse of the former Courthouse and the development of a Cathedral Quarter Park including a Creative Enterprise Hub.

Image 46: Layout of the Winning Design Concept by Joseph McCallion



Image 47 shows a 3D visualization in relation to the winning design of the architectural competition.



5.0 The Proposed Development and Flood Risk

OPW Flood maps (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 'Less Vulnerable 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 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 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 an EIA is not required. Please refer to the accompanying Preliminary Examination.

7.0 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.

8.0 The Proposed Development and Archaeology

Market Square is identified on the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). The record in respect of DG053-042 relates to the class of 'Historic Town' and states:

'Site of historic town can be located on the footprint of the modern town along with evidence of placenames such as Fort Well (DG053-042003-) and Castle Garden which refer to the seventeenth century plantation bawn (DG053-042001-) located in the historic town of Letterkenny. Castle Street running South from the Church of Ireland church down towards the Market Square originally ran down to the castle which appears to have been located near the South angle of Mount Southwell. On the latest ed. OS 6-inch maps there is an area marked as Castle Gardens and Fort Well. These two placenames appear to mark the location of the seventeenth century house and bawn. There is a large two storey house

beside Castle Gardens which may have been built on the site of the castle. There is a large stone wall enclosing this house which may have been part of the 17th century plantation castle’.

Having regard to (i) the extent of disturbance that has already occurred when the existing public realm was constructed during the 1990’s; (ii) the limited deviation between existing and proposed ground level; (iii) the nature of the existing embankment to the rear of the site as also having formed part of the 1990’s construction and; (iv) the nature of the development as a move towards the reinstatement of ground levels to those relating to the historical environment, there is no material impact in relation to archaeological matters and the SMR designation.

Notwithstanding, archaeological monitoring during site development works/ground works will be carried out by an archaeologist approved by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and appropriate steps taken in the event that monitoring reveals deposit(s) of archaeological potential.

9.0 Stage 1 Road Safety Audit

A Stage 1 Road Safety Audit (RSA) in relation to the proposed development has been carried out. Section 4 of the RSA confirms that the Audit Team certify that the drawings listed in Appendix A of the RSA have been examined and that the site has been examined by means of a site visit. The RSA states that this examination has been carried out with the sole purpose of identifying any features of the design that could be removed or modified to improve the safety of the scheme. It states that the issues identified by the Audit Team have been noted in the report, together with suggestions for improvement and, it recommends, should be studied for implementation.

The proposed development takes account of the features identified by the Audit Team that could be removed or modified to improve the safety of the scheme and implements same in accordance with the ‘Designer Response Form’ contained in Appendix B of the RSA.

10.0 The proposed development in the context of Casual Trading

Donegal County Council has commenced a review of Casual Trading Bye-Laws in County Donegal to identify suitable locations for casual trading across the County inclusive of Letterkenny. A 1st phase of consultation closed in September 2021. This will lead to the publication of Draft Casual Trading Bye-Laws in due course. An alignment exists between the proposed development and the designation of Casual Trading locations and will therefore be considered as part of the Bye-Laws review process.

11.0 The proposed development in the context of Appointed Stands (Taxi) Bye-Laws

Donegal County Council intends to review the Appointed Stands (Taxi) Bye Laws in order to put in place new 'Letterkenny Urban Area Appointed Stands (Taxi) Bye-Laws' in order to make provision for taxi ranks within the functional area. The proposed Part 8 development provides for the removal of existing taxi ranks at Market Square and at Main Street (the latter located outside Market Centre) that currently have capacity for circa 14 taxis. Existing taxi rank provision is noted at some locations as sub-optimum in terms of carriageway width to accommodate parallel traffic movements. As an alternative, the proposed Part 8 development provides circa 6 no. taxi rank spaces at an alternative location on Main Street through the reallocation of 6 no. on-street car parking spaces to taxi rank. Further information is set out at section 3.6 of this report. As a result, an alignment exists between the proposed development and the review of Taxi Bye-Laws. The outcome of this Part 8 will be considered as part of the Bye-Laws review process in order to ensure continuity and alignment of Councils objectives.

12.0 Public Consultation

Public consultation in respect of the proposed upgrade of the Market Square public realm has been an evolving process beginning in December 2019 with a 'day on the street' to gauge the public's views on the Square. Following this, a significant public consultation process took place as part of the Market Square Architectural Competition with over 3,000 people casting their vote on the 6 shortlisted Design Concepts.

To inform the proposed Part 8 development, further one- to-one consultation took place during 2022, with the residents and businesses located on the Square alongside engagement with the Elected Members of Letterkenny-Milford Municipal District, Letterkenny Chamber and the Cathedral Quarter Group.

13.0 Proper planning, sustainable and orderly development of the area

It is considered that the proposed Part VIII development providing for 'Reimagined Market Square', 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 and in particular will give full effect to the regeneration and development objectives and policies therein. It is considered that the proposed development is therefore in accordance with the proper planning, sustainable and orderly development of the area.

14.0 Schedule of Plans

Drawing No.	Document Title
LKRMS-0000	SITE LOCATION & SITE EXTENT
LKRMS-0001	SITE LOCATION MAP
LKRMS-0002	EXISTING SITE LAYOUT - TOPOGRAPHICAL SURVEY
LKRMS-0003	EXISTING SECTIONAL ELEVATIONS
LKRMS-0004	EXISTING SECTIONAL ELEVATIONS
LKRMS-0005	EXISTING SITE PHOTOGRAPHIC SURVEY-IMAGE REF SHEET
LKRMS-0006	EXISTING SITE PHOTOGRAPHIC SURVEY-SHEET 01
LKRMS-0007	EXISTING SITE PHOTOGRAPHIC SURVEY-SHEET 02
LKRMS-0008	DEMOLITION- SITE LAYOUT PLAN
LKRMS-0009	PROPOSED SITE LAYOUT PLAN
LKRMS-0010	PROPOSED SECTIONAL ELEVATIONS
LKRMS-0011	PROPOSED SECTIONAL ELEVATIONS
LKRMS-0012	3D VIEWS
LKRMS-0013	3D VIEWS