



Sion Mills

Regeneration Masterplan



March 2020



Derry City & Strabane
District Council

Comhairle Chathair
Dhoire & Cheantar
an tSratha Báin

Derry Citty & Strábane
Destríck Council

GAM Design
Associates

Angling at the Mourne River - A very popular pastime at an exceptional location. The potential of this particular activity and how the wider settlement can support it should be researched further.



Foreword

Sion Mills is a unique village located on the rural, wooded banks of the River Mourne in North Tyrone. It was this outstanding natural setting that led to the creation of a model mill village that became home to a thriving community with a proud history as a centre of the Irish Linen trade.

Much of the built industrial heritage survives to this day and offers a valuable insight into this period of industrialisation. However, like many settlements built as the result of a once prosperous industry that has since fallen into decline, Sion Mills has struggled to find a new role.

The village now has the opportunity to harness the unique tourism and recreation potential of its outstanding natural surroundings and rich industrial heritage to create a sustainable village community.

This document summarises the analysis of the existing village, proposes an outline design intention, documents the consultation process, discusses a range of potential projects and suggests the methodology of implementation of the Masterplan.

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by
GM Design Associates Ltd.
for
Derry City & Strabane District Council

Executive summary

Sion Mills adjoins a particularly attractive section of the Mourne River and is a unique village containing an impressive built heritage partly resultant of its location. The growth and development of the community was closely bound to the linen mill, which was powered by the mighty Mourne. It is from this mill that the village takes its name. The eventual demise of the linen industry at the end of the twentieth century has impacted Sion Mills economically, physically and socially. A clear, flexible framework is required to ensure the future development of the village is sensitively managed and that Sion Mills unlocks its potential as a special and distinct place, valued by residents and appreciated by visitors.

GM Design Associates welcome the opportunity to present this Masterplan, which was commissioned by Derry City and Strabane District Council. The Masterplan, which is evidence based, sets out the strategic vision for Sion Mills over the next 10 to 15 years. The purpose of the Masterplan is to identify the key priorities and actions for a deliverable and sustainable regeneration of the village. This document summarises the analysis of the existing village, proposes an outline design intention, documents the consultation process, discusses a range of potential projects and suggests the methodology for implementation of the Masterplan.

The Sion Mills Masterplan has been prepared in conjunction with the Council's Strategic Growth Plan (2017-2032) and the emerging Local Development Plan (LDP), which is currently being prepared for adoption. This document has been produced having regard to all relevant strategic policy documents to ensure the Masterplan forms part of a coherent framework for the future development of Sion Mills. A brief summary of each of the strategic policy documents can be found in section 2.3.

Analysis of the existing village has highlighted key areas for improvement relating to quality of life, economic productivity and the built environment.

The village is currently bisected by the heavily trafficked Melmount Road and the existing pedestrian links to the river corridor are indirect, illegible and around the river are in poor condition. The proposed A5 Western Transport Corridor, identified in the Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland, will by-pass Sion Mills and alleviate traffic flow within the village.

The Masterplan is based on a clear analysis and evaluation and include proposals which provides a sound basis to enhance the positives and mitigate the potential negatives of this transition to a greener, pedestrian-friendly village centre that is better connected to the picturesque Mourne River.

Also in terms of infrastructure, the village and wider area has in recent times experienced particular issues in relation to drainage and subsequent flooding. It is of the utmost importance that this is further investigated by the relevant bodies and re-mediated so as to avoid future damage to property and disruption to residents lives.

Sion Mills is fortunate to have a wealth of green spaces of varying types and sizes, for example the Mourne Riverside Park and the Brae Field, however the quality and public access to many of these spaces is currently poor. This is something that must be rectified in the near future. As provision of high quality public open spaces is of great benefit not only to the environmental credentials of a place but also to the health and social well being of the community and can also bolster a places economic prospects.

An ongoing concern is the preservation and enhancement of the existing built heritage. Sion Mills has one of the largest concentrations of listed buildings in the North West which gives the village its unique character, together with traditional street lamps, open spaces and mature roadside trees, all of which must be enhanced and maintained.

The aspiration is that 15 years from now, Sion Mills will have secured and promoted its unique heritage features and is regarded as a particularly desirable place to live, work and to visit for purposes of leisure and recreation. A place that embraces its past yet is progressive and connected.

Where economic, physical and social restoration has created a vibrant and distinct atmosphere within an attractive, contemporary environment that respects the village's industrial origins and where the local community is confident and forward looking.

In order to successfully achieve this vision, the Masterplan sets out a number of Themes encapsulating all areas identified for potential improvement within the village. These Themes were presented to elected members and the general public at a community engagement event that began a period of consultation, the findings of which are included in this document. The support fostered throughout the community engagement process must continue to produce the energy and commitment required to deliver the Masterplan effectively.

A sustainable future for Sion Mills will require the creation of a village infrastructure that allows the tourism and recreation potential of the area to be realised – as a result boosting the local economy, enhancing retail and commercial opportunities for residents and providing a thriving hub for the community.

The creation of an environment where there is sufficient confidence to generate investment on a substantial scale, particularly by the private sector, will be key for the successful implementation of the Masterplan. Derry City and Strabane District Council will have an important role in facilitating this investment by using all the skills and resources available to it. There are many direct actions which the relevant government departments and agencies listed in this report can take to aid the Council in implementing the Masterplan, though none will be more vital than promoting private investment.

Almost all the potential redevelopment land within the village is in private ownership. Hence the emphasis will be on progressing new development where possible in a co-ordinated and integrated manner; gradually improving the infrastructure of the village until development of private land appears more attractive and viable to landowners and potential investors.

While the challenges are significant, the opportunities for Sion Mills are great. This joint work and the completion of the Masterplan provides a sound basis for development in the village. It is expected that the Masterplan will become a catalyst for regeneration in the village over the next 15 years and help achieve the visions of the local community - shaping Sion Mills for future generations while respecting its unique historical contributions.

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The former Men's Institute - One of the many heritage assets that gives the village its traditional character

Part A Analysis, intention, consultation



1.0 Introduction

1.1 The purpose of the masterplan

1.1.1 GM Design Associates were appointed by Derry City and Strabane District Council in Spring 2018 to prepare a regeneration masterplan for the village of Sion Mills, Co.Tyrone.

1.1.2 Sion Mills is a large, former mill village, with an impressive built heritage, adjoining a particularly attractive section of the Mourne River. The growth and development of Sion Mills is closely bound up with the Herdman family who were particularly entrepreneurial and innovative throughout most of the nineteenth century and long into the twentieth century. Their extensive linen thread spinning factory complex, initially using the water power from the adjoining fast flowing section of the river Mourne, provided employment for generations of local families. Furthermore the philanthropic ideals of the Herdmans created a distinct and exceptionally integrated community from both traditions, treating both with equal respect, while endowing the village with an exceptionally wide range of sporting and cultural facilities.

1.1.3 The eventual demise of the linen industry at the end of the twentieth century left Sion Mills struggling to find a new role other than just another 'dormitory' village. The village retains the inherent attractiveness of its natural setting, many of its historic attributes and a strong community spirit including pride in its history, but needs to move forward confidently, building on these physical and community assets. There is an opportunity now to energise a new generation of residents, who while respecting and valuing the village's heritage are able and motivated to create new roles and functions appropriate for the challenges and potential of the future.

1.1.4 The purpose of this masterplan is to provide a clear but flexible framework for the sensitive management of future change and to facilitate the unlocking of the potential of Sion Mills as a special and distinct place, valued by residents and appreciated by visitors.



The process of preparation of the masterplan

1.2 The process of the masterplan

1.2.1 The masterplan is an evidence based document that sets out the strategic vision for Sion Mills over the next 10 to 15 years. It is a product of thorough analysis, starting with a detailed review of the state and functioning of Sion Mills. This included at the outset a review of previous studies including the recent Sion Mills, Glebe Clady Cluster Village Plan and extensive consultations with key stakeholders and public authorities.

1.2.2 These surveys were supplemented by a range of physical assessments including:

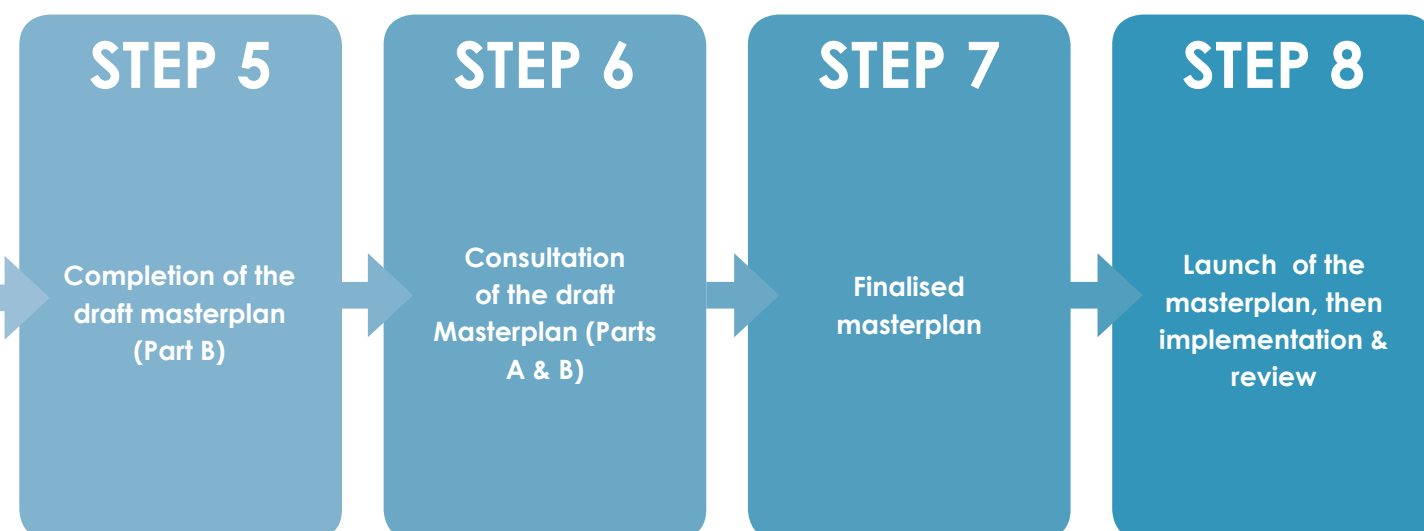
- Character areas
- Land use
- Dereliction and vacancy
- Building condition
- Existing vehicular traffic
- Future vehicular traffic
- Cycle and pedestrian movement
- Public transport
- Car parking

1.2.3 This was followed by detailed evaluations of the future potential of:

- Retail and commercial
- Tourism, hospitality and leisure
- Residential
- Business and office
- Public sector and community

1.2.4 Subsequently an 8 week period of public engagement for the draft masterplan was launched by Derry City and Strabane District Council in September 2018, with extensive publicity. This generated considerable local interest and it will now provide the basis for progressing the transformation of Sion Mills towards its potential as a place that is used, respected and valued by all the community.

1.2.5 A distinct vision, aspirational but also achievable was defined and agreed. This forms the basis for the draft proposals summarised in the main regeneration themes.



1.3 The strategic location of Sion Mills

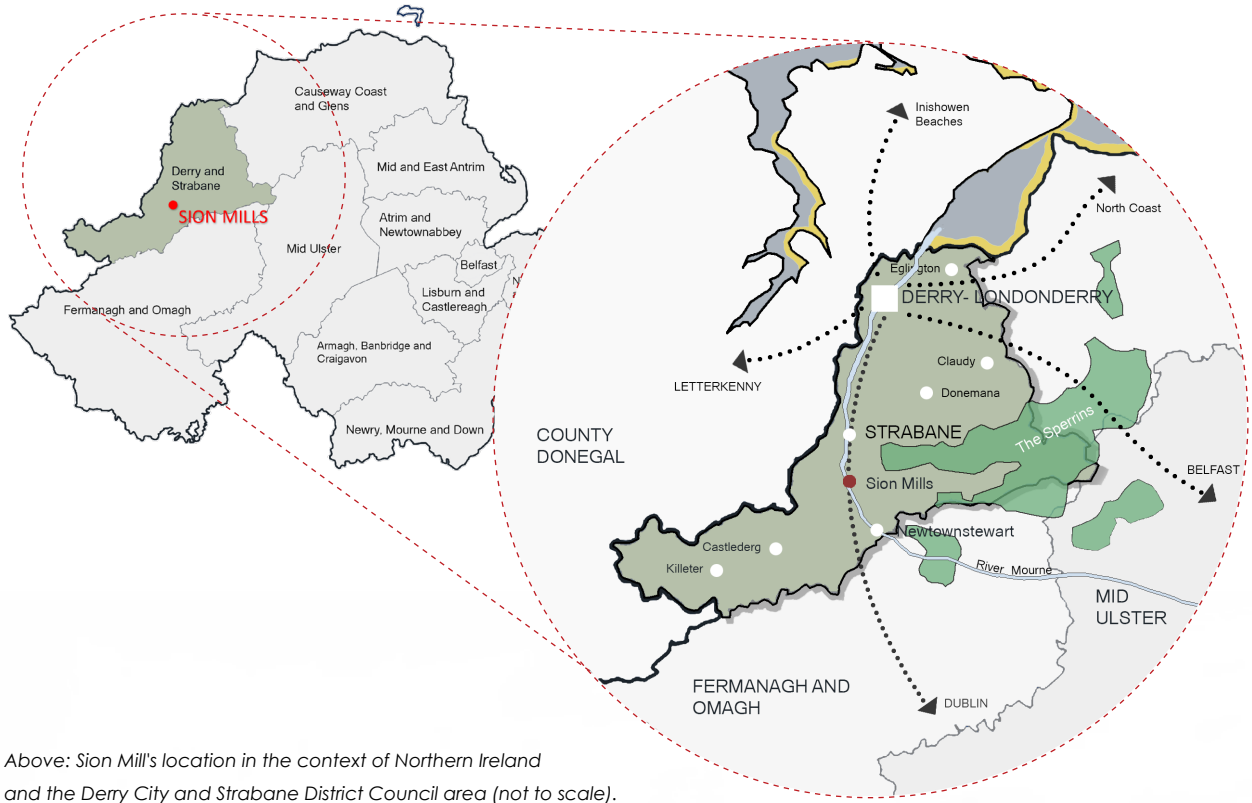
1.3.1 Sion Mills is located in the west of Northern Ireland within the Derry City and Strabane District Council area, approximately 5km south of the regional town of Strabane and 27km south of Derry-Londonderry. The other major urban areas of significance for Sion Mills are Omagh, located 27km to the south and Letterkenny, in County Donegal 29km to the north west.

1.3.2 Derry City and Strabane District, together with Donegal, forms the important North West City Region, the most closely integrated cross-border region on the island of Ireland.

1.3.3 This primarily residential village sits in a particularly attractive rural landscape, in the valley of the River Mourne with some forestry/woodland on the upper valley slopes. In this section the Mourne is fast flowing and provides fishing, including for Salmon. Settlement in the surrounding countryside is characterised by isolated farmsteads, individual dwellings and some small housing clusters. Sion Mills is located astride the A5 trunk road which links Derry-Londonderry and North Donegal with South Ulster and Dublin. Where it passes through the village it is tree lined with mature horse chestnut and beech trees. Sion Mills is strategically located along this primary route, providing easy and convenient access to larger urban settlements which provide commercial services and employment opportunities for Village residents.

Below: Aerial image of Sion Mills and the surrounding geographical context taken March 2018. ©Google Earth





Above: Sion Mill's location in the context of Northern Ireland and the Derry City and Strabane District Council area (not to scale).



2.0 Context, issues and analysis

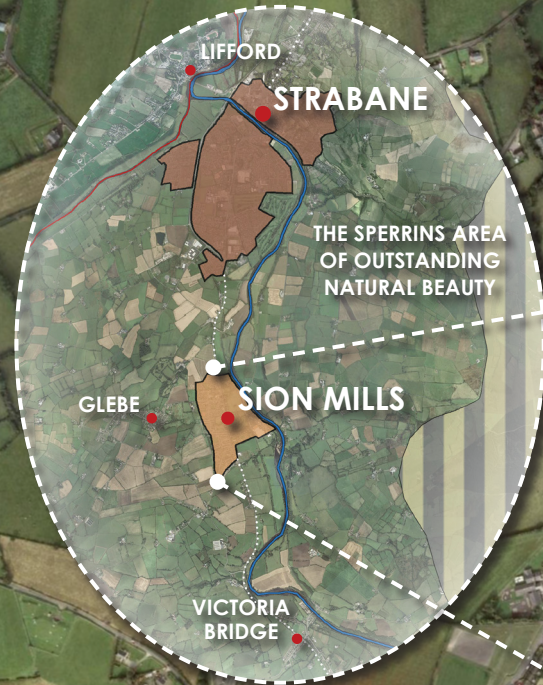
2.1 Local site context

2.1.1 The area of the masterplan (bounded by the red line boundary on the adjacent map), is immediately to the west of the River Mourne. East of the river the landform rises towards the foothills of the Sperrins. The village is on a more level area on the rising land west of the Mourne. The river forms a limit to development towards the east and with the A5 Melmount Road having further influence on the development pattern of the village, Sion Mills retains a compact form.

2.1.2 Nearby rural villages include Glebe, located approximately 0.5km to the west, Victoria Bridge, approximately 3.2km to the south and Clady, approximately 4km to the west.

2.1.3 Sion Mills owes its origin to the large textile mill (Herdman's Mill) sited adjacent to the River Mourne. The area around the mill is a designated Conservation Area with the mill itself separated from the main housing areas by the A5 Melmount Road. The mill is largely screened from view from the main road by the trees and woodlands on the east side of Melmount Road including those in the extensive grounds of Sion House and Sion Cottage. The social/religious buildings of the village are located on both sides of Melmount Road.

2.1.4 The former millworker's cottages are terraced parallel and perpendicular to Melmount Road. There is an open area within Church Square, north of the main group of mill houses. The other historical open area, known as The Park, has been partially built on by the new primary school and housing. There has been significant new housing built north and south of the historic village core through the second half of the 20th century.





2.2 Historical Context

(Sources: *Sion Mills Conservation Area* by Department of the Environment, March 1977, & *Herdmans Mill* brochure/pamphlet by Sion Mills Buildings Preservation Trust)

2.2.1 The village of Sion Mills was developed in the early part of the 19th century by the Herdman family. Up until 1835 there was a small cluster of three or four houses and a school around a flour mill alongside the Mourne River. In 1835 the brothers James and John Herdman acquired the lease of "the old mill at Sion" from Major Humphreys and the agent of the Marquis of Hamilton. They converted it to a linen mill with the first yarn spun later that year. A condition was put in place that the Herdman Company should not build another flour mill while the Marquis of Hamilton bound himself not to allow on his property the erection of another flax spinning mill.

2.2.2 In 1853 Herdmans built a new mill from stone quarried locally at Douglas. A fourth storey was added in 1879. The main four storey mill block is constructed of ashlar greystone, has a slated roof and is flanked by two and four storey yellow brick buildings. The mill chimney was built in 1877.

2.2.3 Sion House, the home of James Herdman was designed by the 19th Century Architect Charles Lanyon and was latterly much modified for Emerson Tennent Herdman by William F Unsworth, son-in-law of James Herdman. The dwelling was changed from a "square Irish Country House" to a long, part timbered, part plastered, Elizabethan style mansion with verandahs and balconies. The building with its tiled roof has tall patterned brickwork chimneys. Stables, a clock tower and a gate lodge similar in character to Sion House were all built at this time as was the bridge on the Avenue.

2.2.4 It is believed that William F Unsworth was also responsible for the design of the Church of the Good Shepherd, built in a Romanesque Basilica style with coursed greystone rubble and sandstone dressings.

2.2.5 Dwellings of both single and two storeys were built by the Herdman family to house a new generation of flax mill workers. By 1853 these were "upwards of 500 in number". The cottages are part of a planned layout similar to the work of Sir Titus Salt at Saltaire in West Yorkshire. In 1866 the Company owned 118 houses and provided employment for 940. By 1879 a new school house had been completed.

**Local children on Melmount Road
pictured in the early twentieth century**



2.2.6 In 1852 the railway from Derry-Londonderry to Strabane was extended south to Omagh providing Sion Mills its rail connection. By 1861 there was a direct connection south east from Omagh to Portadown and then to Belfast providing a railway service for the next 100 years (the Derry-Londonderry to Portadown railway line eventually closed in 1965). The railway route extended through the Herdman property cutting between Sion House and the factory.

2.2.7 The Herdmans' not only gave large scale employment but also provided for the wider needs of their employees beyond what was normal in the Victorian era. Not only did they provide decent houses for their workers but they complemented this by providing a wide range of facilities for sporting and cultural activities. These included the cricket club set up as early as 1864. Later, the Herdmans provided pitches for soccer and hockey and in the 1930s a tennis court and a bowling green. Along with these they were responsible for the erection of the Men's Institute along with accommodating the village's three churches. Complementing these was the introduction of a gas works as early as 1842 providing light in the mill cottages and later electric light in 1892.

2.2.8 After the rapid growth of the mid nineteenth century, the village and mill complex continued to expand and evolve on a more modest scale. In the post war era the village expanded especially to the north, south and west but with ubiquitous building forms diminishing the distinctive character of the village.

2.2.9 By the 1970s Sion Mills had grown to what was, by Irish standards, a very large village of over 2,000 residents. In the past forty years there has been little change in its overall population; the general decline in the average size of household being balanced by the development of modern suburban housing, particularly on the northern and southern approaches along the main road to the village. It retains a compact built form but now markedly elongated north-south and almost entirely to the west of the axis of Melmount Road. The village now has a gradually aging population and with limited local employment opportunities has higher than average unemployment and economic inactivity, generally poorer health and lower educational achievement, relative to the Region as a whole.

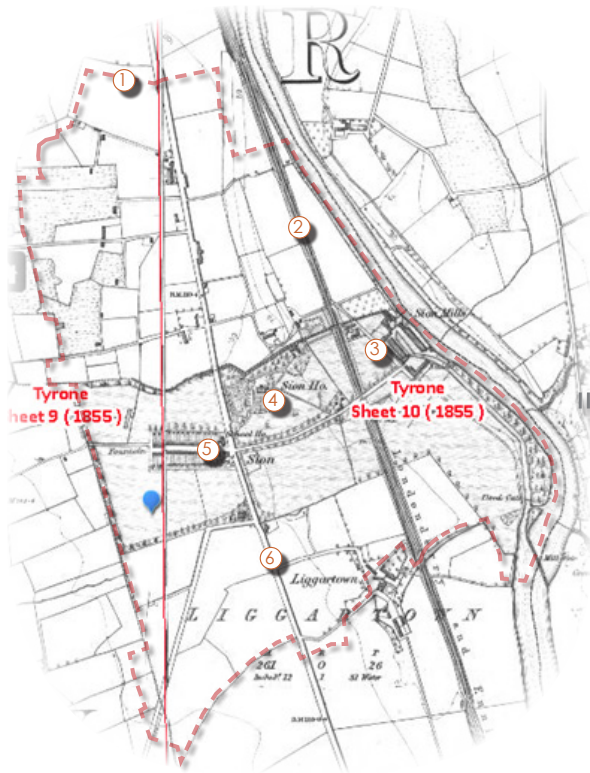


2.2.10 In 1989, a new purpose-built mill was constructed to the south of the old mill. New turbines were installed in 1995 which use the existing mill water system to generate electricity. Subsequently the mill complex closed completely and the premises were sold. The abandoned complex including the B+ Listed old mill has since deteriorated significantly from lack of maintenance and vandalism. This has had a major detrimental impact upon the village and not only includes the physical and visual blight but also the loss of recreational facilities and social infrastructure.

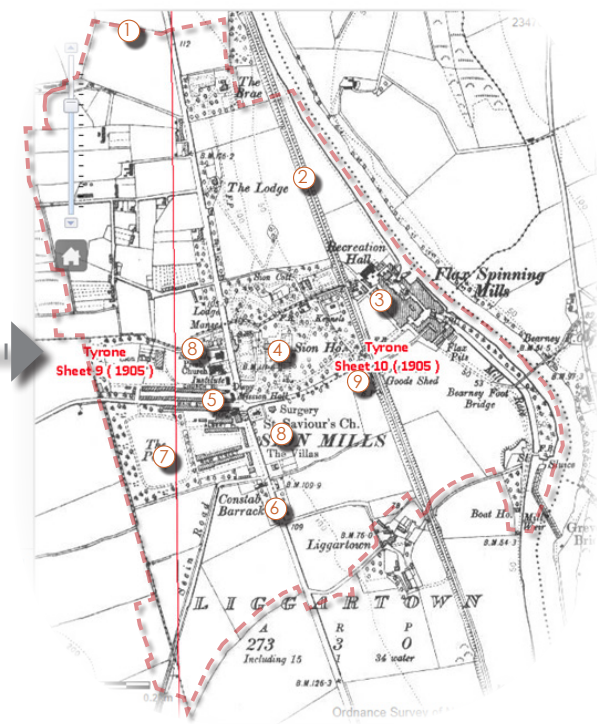
2.2.11 However the influence of the Herdman family remains long after the demise of the village as a major centre in the North of Ireland for the spinning of linen thread. This is not just the legacy of the many fine buildings within the village but also in its character, both its layout and arrangements and its landscape assets, particularly the parkland of Sion House and its neighbours, the woodlands alongside the river Mourne and the tree lined main street, Melmount Road.

2.2.12 As a mill village in close proximity to the large market town of Strabane, there never was a need for extensive retail, other commercial, health or educational services, other than those meeting the day to day needs of its residents. There remains a limited range of basic retail and food services along with several large car sale premises and the village primary school. Other than these there is no significant employment within the village. Hence almost all village residents in employment commute to Strabane, Derry-Londonderry and Omagh or other urban centres.

2.2.13 Today the village core of the terraced mill workers houses remains essentially intact and fully occupied. The set pieces of the churches and several other public buildings remain in good condition. The parklands, riverside woodlands and trees along the main street continue to adorn the village, but the extensive mill complex lies silent and empty, gradually deteriorating with the ravages of time, weather and on occasions malicious damage.



Circa 1855



Circa 1905

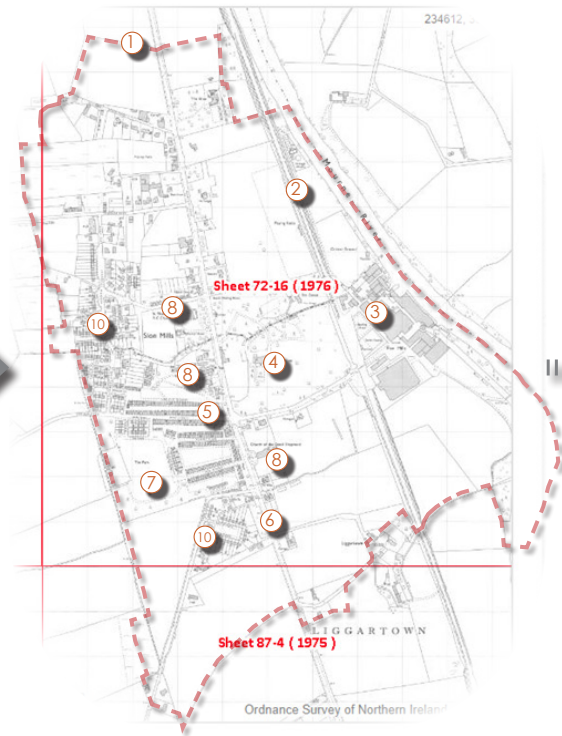
2.2.14 The general impression of Sion Mills is that of a village that has seen better times in the past but retaining a rich built and natural heritage, awaiting a new role in a post-industrial society; where the historic village core is gradually being overwhelmed by the spreading modern suburbs and where the many commuting residents contribute little to village life and whose interests and connections generally are outside the village where they happen to live.

2.2.15 There remains however, a vibrant core village community justly proud of their place and looking towards a re-invigorated future.

Historical Maps of Sion Mills (below & previous) - Demonstrating the physical expansion of the village (approximately every 50 years) over the past century and a half - Tyrone County Series 2nd / 4th Edition 6 inch Sheet 9 & 10, and Irish Grid 25 inch Sheets (NTS). ©OSNI

Key - the evolution of Sion Mills

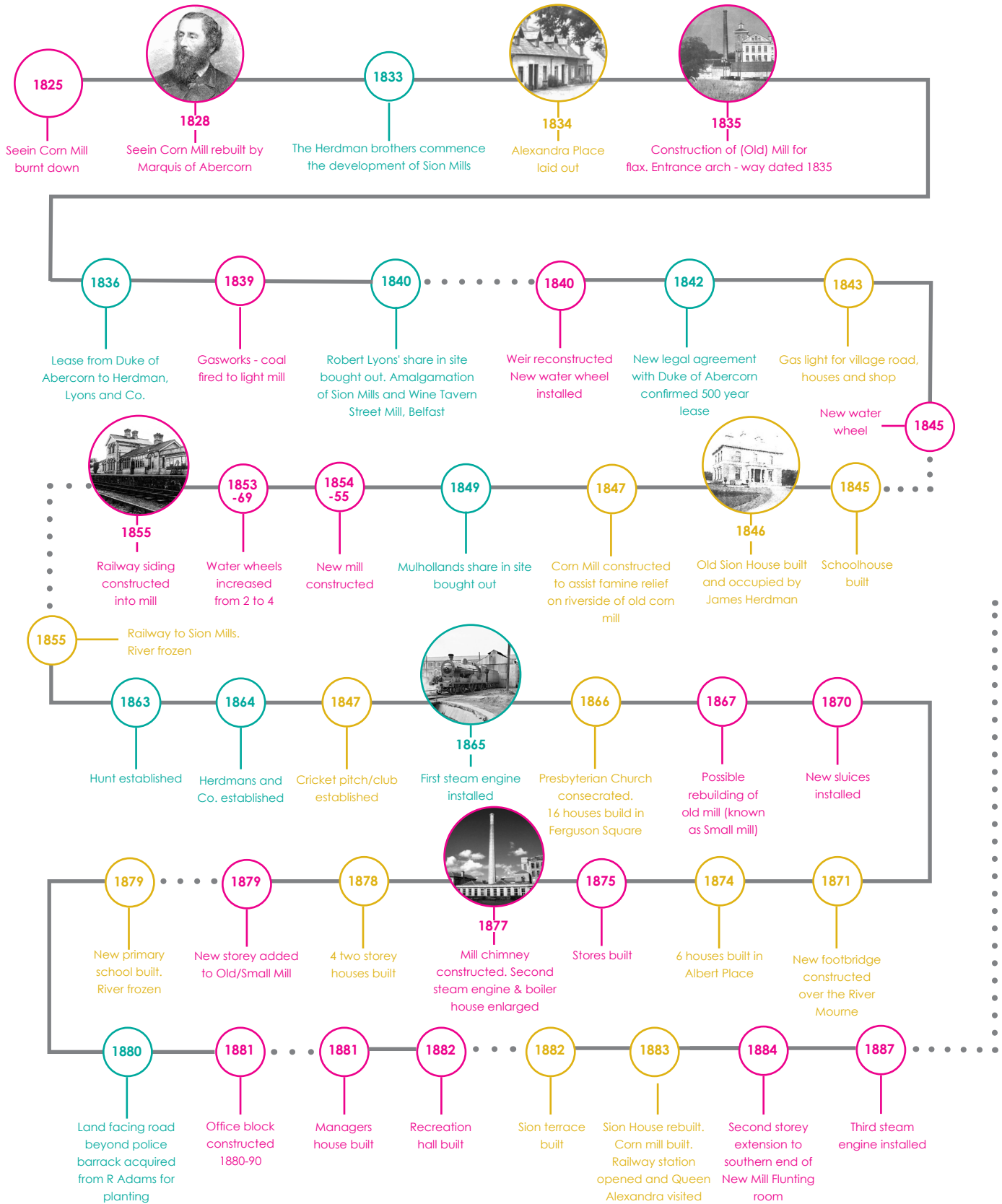
- ① Masterplan study area
- ② Railway line
- ③ "Old" and "New" Mill
- ④ "Old" and "New" Sion House & Cottage
- ⑤ Main Street and Alexandra Place
- ⑥ Melmount Road
- ⑦ The Village Green/Park - later Primary School
- ⑧ Churches and School house
- ⑨ Railway Station
- ⑩ Modern suburban extensions of Local Authority/private housing



Circa 1976

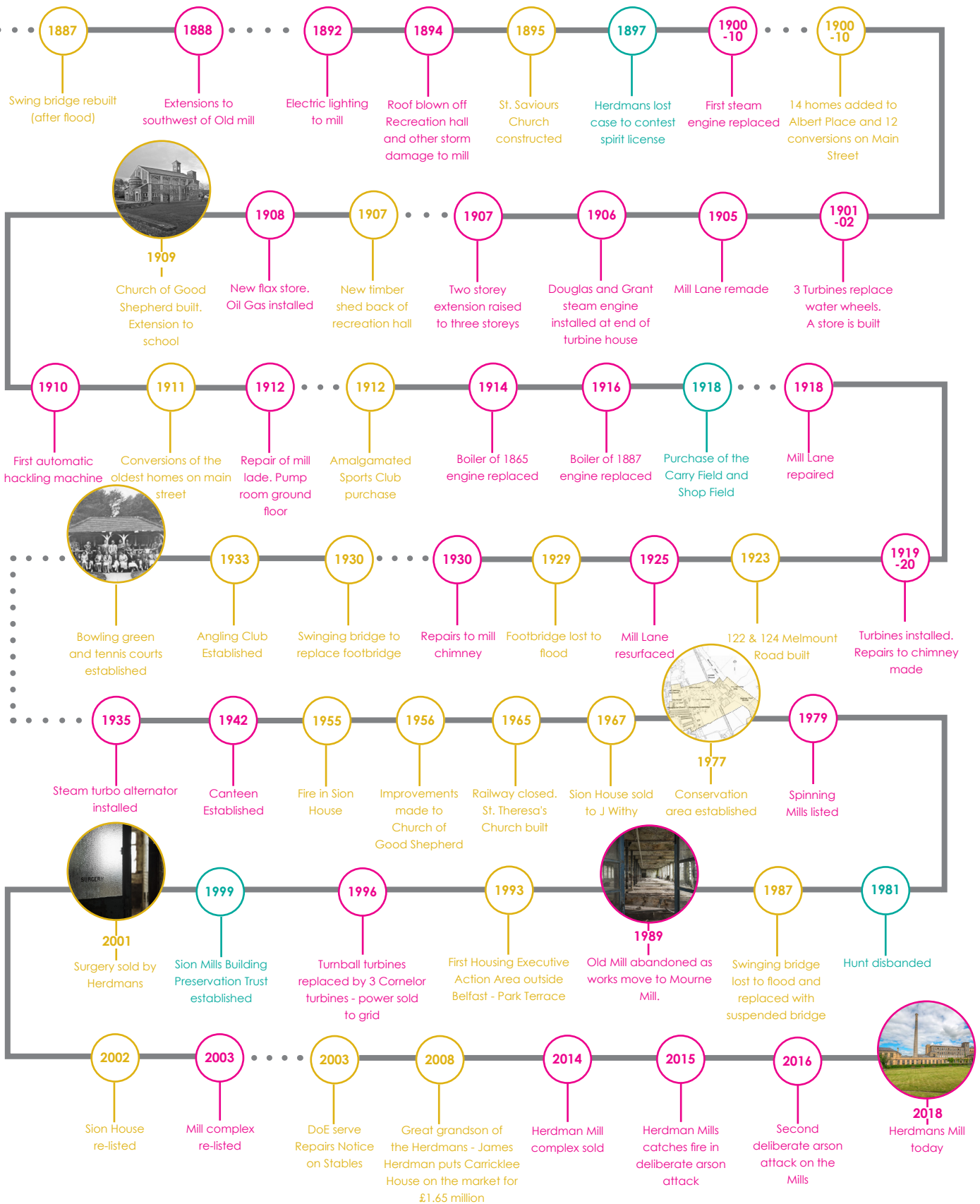


Present day



Timeline demonstrating the evolution of Sion Mills
(Source: The Sion Mills Conservation Plan by Donald Insall Associates, 2003)





The Stables, Melmound Road - An excellent example of the village's unique historic and architectural character which was a building at risk and has been successfully regenerated to the benefit of the tourist, leisure industry and the local community.



2.3 Strategic and policy context

2.3.1 The following pages provide a brief summary of the key messages of the strategic and policy documents which have been relevant, in varying importance, to the production of this masterplan.

2.3.2 Strabane Area Plan 1986 - 2001

- Identification of sufficient land for housing and providing a range of dwelling types to meet different housing needs.
- Encouraging the upgrade of the existing housing stock and environmental improvements within existing housing areas, particularly those located within the Conservation Area.
- Allocation of adequate land to meet the expansion needs of existing industry within the village.
- Retention of existing public and private open space and allocation of sufficient land to meet the future needs of recreation and amenity.
- Improvement of general accessibility throughout the urban area.
- Facilitation of adequate shopping and service facilities to meet the daily needs of the local population.

2.3.3 Derry City & Strabane District Council Local Development Plan (LDP) 2032

- Settlement evaluation has concluded that Sion Mills should remain as a Village, separate from its urban neighbours.
- It is envisaged that the village's unique historic and architectural character along with its location can be exploited to stimulate the local economy through tourist projects and heritage regeneration initiatives.
- The planned construction of a dual carriageway A5 passing west of the village will present a significant opportunity to re-visit and re-vision the form and functioning of this settlement.
- There is a generous supply of zoned and committed land throughout the District to facilitate anticipated future housing need throughout the LDP period.



2.3.4 Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland

- The SPSS describes how the built heritage contributes to our understanding of both the present and the past and is an important economic resource. This enhances the quality of our lives and promotes a sense of local distinctiveness within our towns, villages etc.
- Built heritage can be a key marketing, tourism and recreational asset that, if managed in a sustainable way, can make a valuable contribution to the environment, economy and society.
- In managing development within a Conservation Area the guiding principle is to afford special regard to the desirability of preserving or enhancing its character or appearance where an opportunity to do so exists.
- In the interests of protecting the setting of designated Conservation Areas, neighbouring new development needs to be carefully managed so as to ensure it respects its overall character and appearance including the retention of important views in and out of the Conservation Area.

2.3.5 Heritage Asset Audit - Strabane Area 2018 commissioned by Historical Environment Division, Department for communities

- The Heritage Trail concept has been successful at combining heritage assets to encourage economic development. The audit recommends establishing a 'Linen Trail' that links the Museum at Sion Stables to a living heritage experience at the shirt factories of Strabane. The 'Linen Trail' could also extend to link with other existing centres in Dungannon, Lisburn and Belfast.
- The audit states that little remains of the once dominant railway heritage of Strabane and that existing assets such as Victoria Bridge Station and Ballamagorry Station should be provided with all possible support. A direct link between Sion Mills and Victoria Bridge Station would be beneficial to both heritage assets and could be achieved by utilising the former railway route.
- The restoration of Sion Stables is seen as an example of best practice and should be used to "indicate a way forward for the wider community and encourage entrepreneurship".



Social housing along Melmount Road, built on the site of the former police station

2.3.6 Sion Mills Conservation Area published by the Department of the Environment (NI) 1977

- The Conservation Area comprises of four main land uses. These are significant to the overall environmental quality of Sion Mills:
 1. The historic core of mill workers' dwellings:
 - Future emphasis should be on renovation and improvement rather than demolition and replacement.
 - Retention of the terraces unbroken in form should be the prime objective and any change in elevation should be in character with that existing.
 - The importance of the integration of new elevations within the existing street frontages (New Street, Main Street etc.).
 - The materials used in new buildings should relate in character to those used in the original construction.
 2. The community buildings, the Mill Complex and detached residential properties:
 - The future emphasis will be to retain the present character and form of the individual buildings of special architectural and historic interest.
 - Materials and colours should be sympathetic to the existing.
 3. The Housing Executive dwellings near Park Terrace:
 - Any development here must be sympathetic to the above due to the close proximity of the dwellings to the mill workers' cottages.
 4. Woodland Amenity / Open Space Area:
 - The riverside, street trees and private woodlands are significant to the overall environmental quality and will be protected by Tree Preservation Orders.

2.3.7 Sion Mills Conservation Plan published by Donald Insall Associates Ltd 2003

This included the following recommendations:

- Heritage Led Economic Regeneration – revive the historic Herdmans mill as an example of conservation led economic regeneration in a rural setting. This must provide economic uses for which there is market demand and which will have employment and social benefits.
- Historical understanding – ensure the history and all aspects of cultural significance are understood and preserved
- Interpretation and Visitor Provision – ensure the significance of the mill and the historic village is widely understood and interpreted for the benefit of the local community, visitors and tourists.
- Knowledge of the fabric – proposal for repair and reuse should be based on a sound knowledge of its fabric, condition and hydrology.
- Vacancy re-use and Sustainability – bring the significant mill buildings back into uses which will secure their future as heritage assets making a sustainable contribution to the local economy and the community.
- Conservation and change – conserve those aspects of the mill and its surrounding landscape which are crucial to the historic and cultural significance of the site, while enabling adaption to new uses that will secure its future.
- Care and Maintenance – ensure the historic fabric is appropriately cared for and maintained, addressing immediate problems and securing its future life.
- New Development – ensure any new developments or extensions to buildings enhance the site, will not detract from its significance and will support the principles of accessibility and sustainability
- Setting and Use of External Spaces – enhance the setting of the historic mill, make it attractive as a visitor destination and exploit the potential of its riverside location and natural features.

2.3.8 Derry City & Strabane District Council Strategic Growth Plan - 2017-2032

- The Strategic Growth Plan prioritises heritage awareness and the engagement of local communities in heritage conservation and development.
- The development of a heritage/conservation-led masterplan and renewal action plan for the village of Sion Mills is one of the Key Strategic Capital Projects to be substantially progressed by 2025.
- The proposed masterplan will be part of a projected £3.4bn capital expenditure throughout the Council area over the 15 year growth plan period, which includes significant private sector development driven by public sector stimulus and intervention.

2.3.9 Derg - Local Community Plan (Draft) 2017 – 2022

- In the Derg District Electoral Area (DDEA) there is high demand for investment in additional outdoor recreational facilities such as parks, multi use games areas, greenways etc. in response to health inequalities, especially in the most deprived areas.
- The 2011 census estimated that 49% of the DDEA population was in employment which equalled the DCSDC average.
- There is a strong need for investment in education to enhance the skills and employment potential of local young adults.
- Mobile phone coverage across the entire DDEA is needed to support rural communities, businesses and individuals and investment opportunities in the social, knowledge and digital economies.
- A key action includes the support of the development of Cultural hubs across the DDEA including Sion Mills as a key provider of art, culture, music, heritage and community events.
- A key action includes a regeneration masterplan required for Derg towns and villages including the implementation of the Sion Mills strategic heritage-led regeneration masterplan.
- In order to enhance historical sites and attract more visitors to them, the plan suggests a series of linked information points be developed, promoting the history and heritage of local villages and sites.

2.3.10 Rural Development Programme for Northern Ireland 2014 - 2020

- Although the gap is decreasing, the average gross weekly earnings for those living in rural communities is below those living in urban areas.
- Agriculture is the dominant industry in rural areas, businesses involved in construction is the second most prevalent, with those involved in retail the third most prevalent.
- For rural dwellers in general accessing public services can cost more and take longer travel time, compared to individuals living in urban areas.
- Rural areas support a higher concentration of tourism jobs although stakeholders are of the view that there is a lack of coordination across the rural tourism sector and there are opportunities to develop cultural and outdoor recreational tourism.
- The % of rural premises in NI with phone signal and network coverage is below the UK average.

2.3.11 Derry City & Strabane District Council Green Infrastructure Framework 2018

- GI will aim to physically connect areas of open space, to include the district's key parks, habitats, other open space features, greenways and blue spaces, in an interlinked network of GI corridors. Also, it will link the main urban areas with the urban fringes, countryside and with adjacent districts.
- The district's GI plan will encompass existing and new green spaces, both urban and rural, to provide a network of high quality, well located and multi-functional public parks and open spaces throughout the district.
- It will support active and passive recreation, enhance ecosystem services, further the conservation of biodiversity, and improve transport links for pedestrians and cyclists.
- The GI Framework's four main themes are:
 - Biodiversity
 - Climate change
 - Accessibility, recreation, health and wellbeing
 - Sustainable economic development and investment

2.3.12 Sustainable Rural Communities - Rural Strategy & Action Plan 2016 – 2020

- Active, inclusive and safe - All residents should have access to a decent, accessible and affordable home within a neighbourhood where there is a positive sense of community.
- Well run - There should be effective and inclusive participation, representation and leadership.
- Well connected - Accessible by transport links, have access to broadband and incorporate facilities which encourage safe walking and cycling.
- Well served - All residents should have access to a range of services which are accessible, reduce social exclusion and increase opportunities for all.
- Environmentally sensitive - Existing housing stock should benefit from energy efficiency measures.
- Thriving - Attractive and accessible rural areas which stimulates a diverse and innovative local economy, providing employment opportunities for local people.
- Well designed and built; and a quality built and natural environment which includes housing which is sensitively designed to reflect local character and setting.
- Fair for everyone - Facilities and services should be accessible for all residents as well as those from other areas and different community backgrounds, both now and in the future.

2.3.13 Derry City and Strabane Housing Investment Plan 2019 - 2023 (NIHE)

- The Housing Executive's Investment Plan identifies housing related desired outcomes throughout the Council area and an update on the progress in achieving these intended outcomes.
- The plan identifies that the social housing need (2018-2023) in Sion Mills is 26 units.
- 14 no. social housing units were on site within Sion Mills in March 2019, at Lismore Park.
- The social housing need throughout the 2019-2023 period has not yet been met within the village.

2.3.14 Derry City and Strabane District Council Arts and Culture Strategy 2019-2024

- Health and wellbeing - Research suggests that engagement in arts activities offer holistic benefits including physical, mental and social wellbeing.
- Community - There is strong evidence that participation in the arts can contribute to community cohesion, reduce social exclusion, and make communities feel safer and stronger.
- Education - Learning through arts and culture can improve accomplishment in Maths and English and develops skills and behaviour that lead children to do better in school.
- Economic - Arts and culture contribute to local economies by attracting visitors, creating jobs and developing skills, attracting and retaining businesses and revitalising places.
- Place making - Well-designed cultural venues and sports facilities add considerable value to the built environment by attracting visitors, generating increased activity, and helping to create places where people (not least young people) want to live.
- There is significant potential to further develop the historic environment sector in Northern Ireland. It accounted for 3.0 jobs per thousand of the population compared to 8.1 in the Republic of Ireland and 11.8 in Scotland. If the Northern Ireland sector could perform at an equivalent rate to Scotland, it could generate £1.5 billion annually and support 20,000 jobs i.e. three times its 2012 output and twice as many jobs.
- An objective within the plan is to animate towns and villages and stimulate growth in the creative industries by promoting the use of empty buildings as work and retail spaces for creative enterprises and as exhibition spaces for local arts and culture in village and masterplans.

2.3.15 Northern Ireland Economic Strategy 2012

- The need to improve the economic competitiveness of the N Ireland economy.
- The need to rebalance the local economy from over reliance on the public sector towards the private sector by focusing on innovation, R&D and creativity.
- The need to improve skills and employability, enhance competitiveness in the global economy, and develop economic infrastructure.
- Encourage business growth and increase the potential of our local companies, including within the social and rural economies.

2.3.16 Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland 2030

- The vision is to "Create a new N Ireland experience and get it on everyone's destination wish list"
- Identification of the key theme priorities of:
 - People – create an environment that encourages entrepreneurs.
 - Product and Places – create more opportunities for visitors to spend money, invest in infrastructure, exploit the potential of food, drink and local products to enhance the visitor's experience and encourage a suitable range of accommodation.
 - Partnership – establish a partnership with Planning to deliver a high quality development.
- Target marketing for city breaks, cultural/experience seekers and business visitors.

2.3.17 Derry City & Strabane District Tourism Strategy 2018-2025

- Figures show that the council area currently has a relatively low market share in terms of overnight visits and expenditure and there is potential to grow its market share significantly.
- Overall data indicates a strengthening hotel market, while the bed & breakfast and self-catering sector has been performing less well.

- Employment in this sector is growing faster than non-tourism jobs in Northern Ireland with an 11% increase from 2013 to 2015, equating to 458 new jobs.
- There are opportunities within the Council area to attract more visitors to stay overnight.
- In the rural areas working together to develop capabilities and products, including clustering and cross-selling of experiences is critical to the positive development of their offer.
- Investment in marketing with the purpose of influencing, informing, or persuading a potential buyer's purchasing decision is an essential part of the tourism supply chain.
- Need to develop the rural offering - The rural hinterland receives approximately one tenth of the visitor spend that occurs in Derry-Londonderry. Additionally, the accommodation, largely B&B's and self-catering, achieve lower levels of occupancy than the NI average.
- Development of activities and adventure holidays alongside the heritage experience has merit.
- Action plans include the implementation of active travel projects including cycling and walking trails and their promotion.
- Promotion of water based tourism products including angling, canoeing, kayaking, sailing, white water rafting etc.
- 3 core supporting propositions:
 1. History and heritage – Well established within Derry City and Strabane's current tourism profile. Key opportunities include investment in animation and collaboration to offer a more coherent experience.
 2. Creativity and culture - This is also well developed, but further co-ordination across public and private sectors will help to establish the city and region as one of the prime cultural destinations of choice on the island of Ireland.
 3. Activity and adventure - This is the least developed but has significant potential to attract a wider range of visitors in the medium to longer term.

Herdman's Mill Complex - An attractive scene for potential tourism, incorporating high quality industrial heritage set within beautiful natural surroundings



2.4 Demographic, social and economic context

2.4.1 The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) collects data regarding the demographic, social and economic make-up of the region every 10 years by way of a Census.

2.4.2 Output Areas (OA's) were introduced after the 2001 Census and comprise adjacent post codes of similar sizes. Since the most recent Census in 2011, Small Areas (SA's) have been used to collect data which are for the most part identical to OA's.

2.4.3 There are a total of 5,022 OA's and 4,537 SA's in Northern Ireland and the Sion Mills settlement comprises a total of 7 OA's or 6 SA's.

2.4.4 The following figures were gathered on Census Day 27th March 2011 and collated as statistics for the settlement of Sion Mills - providing the most appropriate single source of information relating to the location of the masterplan.

2.4.5 Population

The population of Sion Mills Settlement was 1,907, accounting for 0.11% of the NI total.

2.4.6 Households (national average in brackets)

The population was living in 770 households, giving an average household size of 2.48 (2.54). 57.27% (66.9%) of households were owner occupied and 37.53% (29.99%) were rented.



2.4.7 Demography (national average in brackets)

The average age of the population was 38 (37) and men outnumbered women 50.08% to 49.92% (49% to 51%). 20.5% (20.95%) were aged under 16 years while 15% (14.56%) were aged 65 and over.

2.4.8 Religion (national average in brackets)

63.29% (45.14%) identified as Catholic and 35.55% (48.36%) as Protestant or other Christian. There was a relatively equal split between British, Irish and Northern Irish identity.

2.4.9 Health (national average in brackets)

29.89% (20.69%) reported long term health problems while 68.96% (79.51%) reported good or very good health.

2.4.10 Labour (national average in brackets)

Of the population between 16 and 74, 56.63% (66.22%) were economically active and 43.37% (33.78%) were economically inactive.

2.4.11 The figures highlight a high proportion of the population suffer from long term health problems and are economically inactive with both figures being around 10 percentage points above the national average - despite the percentage of elderly residents being comparable to the average across Northern Ireland. The masterplan proposals must seek to reduce this disparity to ensure a vibrant and sustainable village community. Statistical sources must be constantly updated throughout the masterplan process.



2.5 Physical context

2.5.1 A comprehensive range of physical surveys were completed in mid 2018 for all of the study area. These surveys assembled detailed information on:

- Character areas
- Land use
- Dereliction and vacancy
- Building condition
- Contribution to built character

2.5.2 Individual streets were then contextualised and analysed based on the results of the above audit to determine the physical make up of the village.

A Character areas

2.5.3 The map opposite identifies nine distinct character areas within the village. West of Melmount Road includes both the historic village centre (characterised by the original mill worker's cottages and significant heritage buildings) as well as mainly late-twentieth century residential expansion.

2.5.4 The land to the east of Melmount road has a more open character with low density housing, parkland, recreation areas, undeveloped land and the Mourne riverside.

2.5.5 The new and historic mill complexes are also located a short distance east of Melmount Road. The historic mill contributes greatly to the village's distinct character in contrast to the low profile, functional, adjoining new mill.

KEY

-  **Historic Village Centre**
-  **Mixed Density Village Expansion**
-  **Low Density Roadside Development**
-  **Undeveloped Land**
-  **Mourne Riverside**
-  **Sports Recreation Area**
-  **Sion House and Gardens**
-  **New Mill Complex**
-  **Historic Mill Complex**



Sion Mills Character Map - scale 1:10,000



B Land use

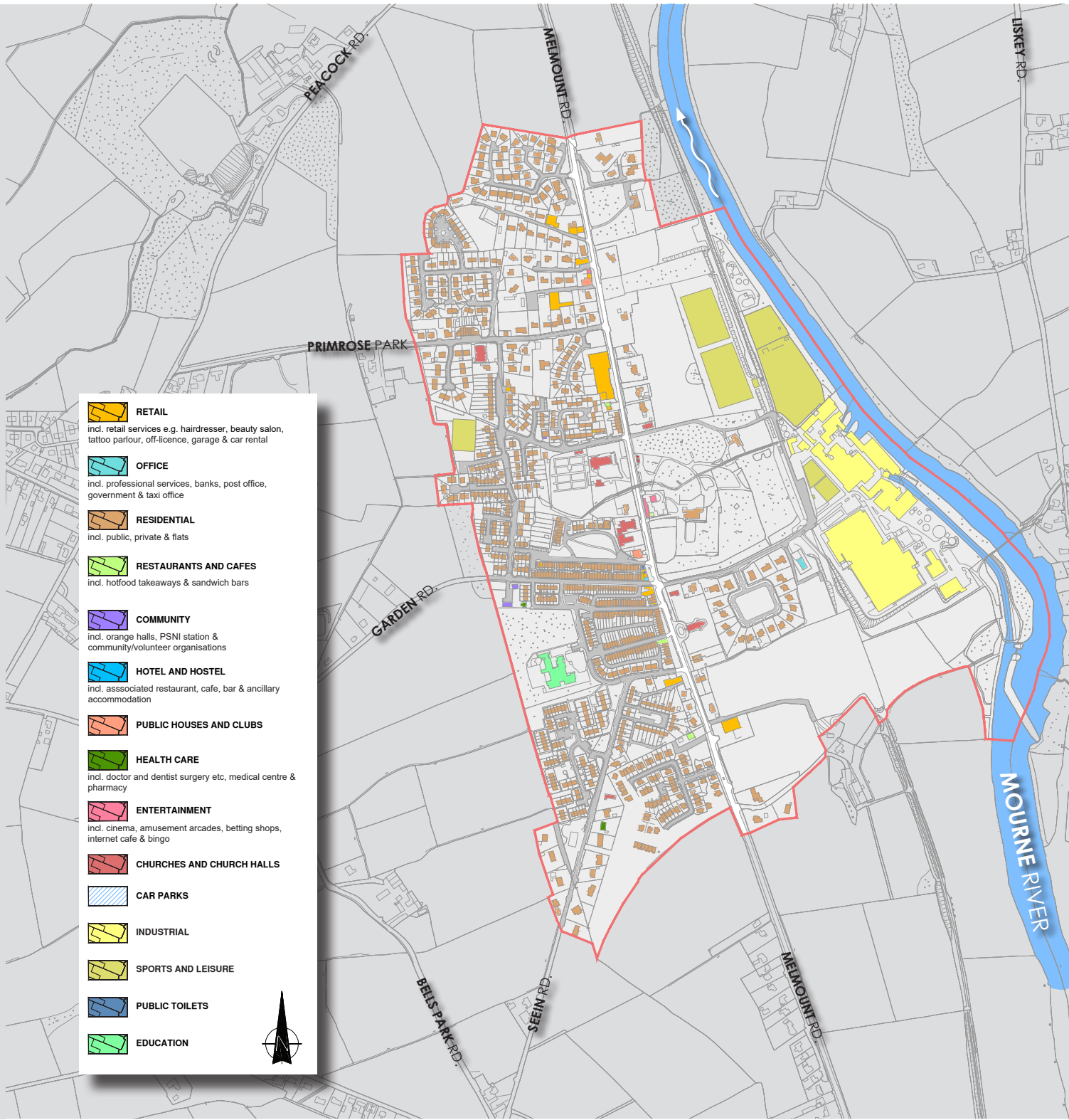
2.5.6 Residential use accounts for 55% of the villages total built floor space. In the past generation, housing has been the dominant development activity in Sion Mills as a result of the village's relationship with and close proximity to Strabane. The linear urban form of the settlement has resulted in commercial development being fragmented and sporadically located along the western side of Melmount Road and intermixed with other uses including community and residential.

2.5.7 There is very limited overnight accommodation available for visitors along with a few restaurants and cafés. However, the Sion Stables Restaurant has resulted in the successful re-use of the refurbished stables. There is little office accommodation available in Sion Mills.

Business Sector	Occupied gross floor-space (sq.m.)	Vacant gross floor-space (sq.m.)	Total gross floor-space (sq.m.)	% Occupied	% Vacant	% of total occupied floor-space
Retailing	3766	46	3812	98.8%	1.2%	77.6%
Offices	-	-	-	-	-	-
Catering	251	75	326	77%	23%	5.2%
Hospitality	788	0	788	100%	0%	16.3%
Finance	48	0	48	100%	0%	0.9%
Total	4853	121	4974	93.9%	6.1%	100%



One of only two public houses in Sion Mills - the village is currently lacking the hospitality infrastructure that is required to support a viable tourist destination. It also lacks overnight accommodation, restaurants and cafés.



-  **RETAIL**
incl. retail services e.g. hairdresser, beauty salon, tattoo parlour, off-licence, garage & car rental
-  **OFFICE**
incl. professional services, banks, post office, government & taxi office
-  **RESIDENTIAL**
incl. public, private & flats
-  **RESTAURANTS AND CAFES**
incl. hotfood takeaways & sandwich bars
-  **COMMUNITY**
incl. orange halls, PSNI station & community/volunteer organisations
-  **HOTEL AND HOSTEL**
incl. associated restaurant, cafe, bar & ancillary accommodation
-  **PUBLIC HOUSES AND CLUBS**
-  **HEALTH CARE**
incl. doctor and dentist surgery etc, medical centre & pharmacy
-  **ENTERTAINMENT**
incl. cinema, amusement arcades, betting shops, internet cafe & bingo
-  **CHURCHES AND CHURCH HALLS**
-  **CAR PARKS**
-  **INDUSTRIAL**
-  **SPORTS AND LEISURE**
-  **PUBLIC TOILETS**
-  **EDUCATION**

Generalised land use in 2018 - scale 1:10,000

C Dereliction and vacancy

2.5.8 Excluding the Mill complex, which accounts for almost 35% of the total floor space within the village, there is a low level of dereliction and a high occupancy of buildings in Sion Mills.

2.5.9 Only around 5% of floor space within the village is either vacant, derelict or cleared. However, this figure rises to almost 40% when the vast vacant and derelict mill site is included in the figures.

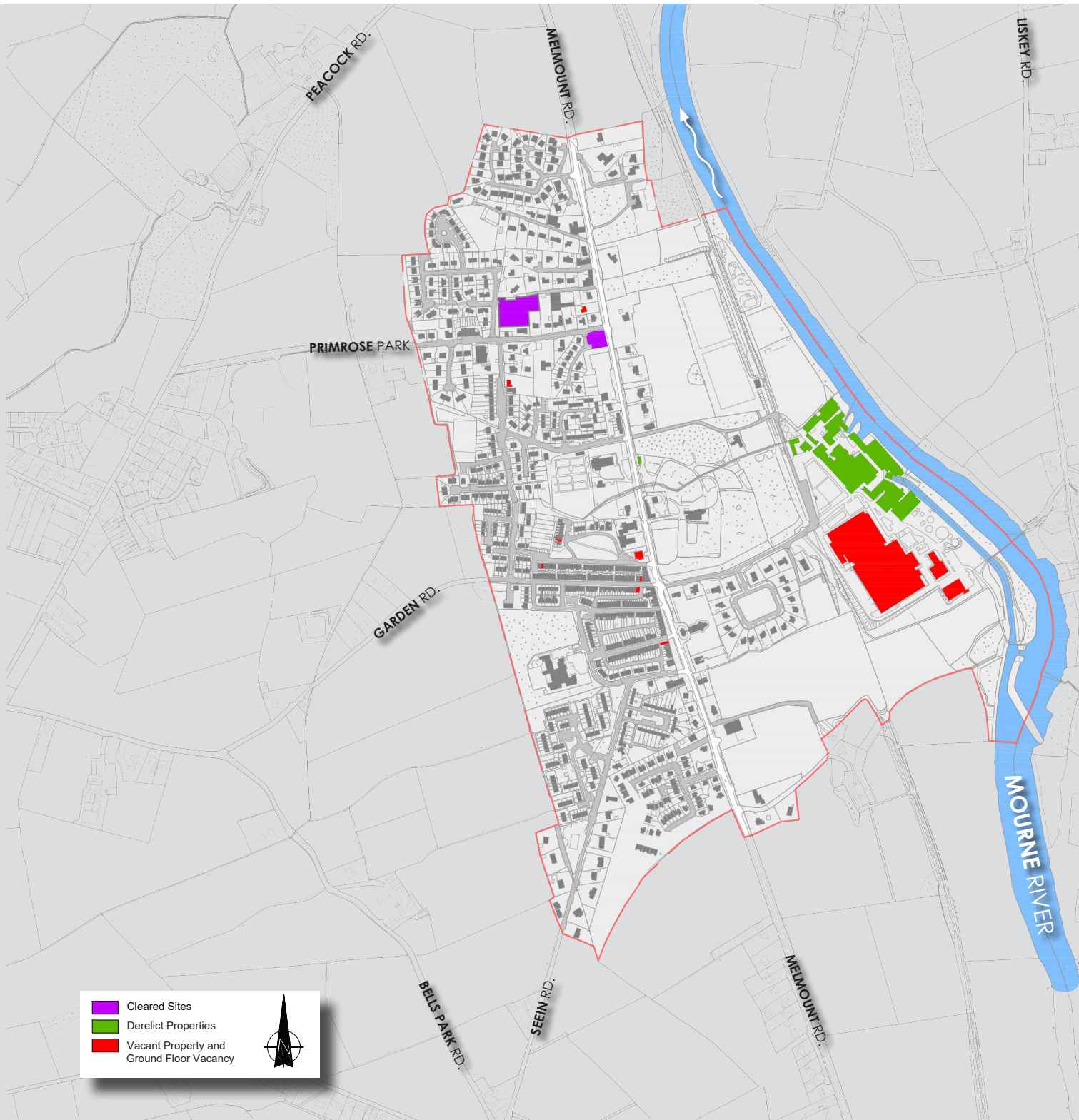
2.5.10 Sion House, the Gatehouse, as well as the Herdman's Mill complex are all key sites that contribute to the character of Sion Mills but have fallen in to disrepair.

2.5.11 There are a small number of cleared sites within the village that could potentially be developed. Derelict, vacant and cleared sites along Melmount Road should be prioritised for regeneration due to their prominence.

Use	Total site area (sq.m.)	% of total site areas (sq.m.)
Retailing in use	3,800	3.6%
Offices in use	-	-
Catering in use	250	0.2%
Hospitality in use	800	0.8%
Finance in use	50	0.05%
Community in use	2,500	2.4%
Residential in use	57,900	55.4%
Industrial in use	-	-
Total in use	65,300	62.4%
Retailing vacant	45	0.04%
Offices vacant	-	-
Catering vacant	75	0.07%
Hospitality vacant	-	-
Finance vacant	-	-
Community vacant	-	-
Residential vacant	350	0.3%
Industrial vacant	18,900	18.1%
Total vacant	19,370	18.5%
Total derelict sites	15,500	14.8%
Total cleared sites	4,400	4.2%
Total	104,570	100%



The Herdman's Mill complex ceased spinning linen in 2004. A subsequent change in ownership has failed to find viable, contemporary uses, leaving this major heritage asset vacant, physically deteriorating and vulnerable to arsonists.



Dereliction and vacancy in 2018 - scale 1:10,000

D Building condition

2.5.12 Based on an external visual assessment of the condition of buildings visible from the streets of Sion Mills, a generalised review of building condition was completed. This is not intended as a definitive statement of the condition of individual buildings and should be interpreted accordingly.

2.5.13 Within the village, most buildings remain in either good or very good condition. However, many of the Mill Worker's Cottages are in fair condition due to their age, a lack of maintenance and unsympathetic alterations to the original building fabric.

2.5.14 A number of buildings are in poor condition, including important heritage assets such as Herdman's Mill. These are historical buildings which the community has a particular pride in and their condition impacts on community morale and the tourism potential of the area.

2.5.15 Buildings in poor condition and in private ownership are a challenge which needs to be addressed within the masterplan proposals.

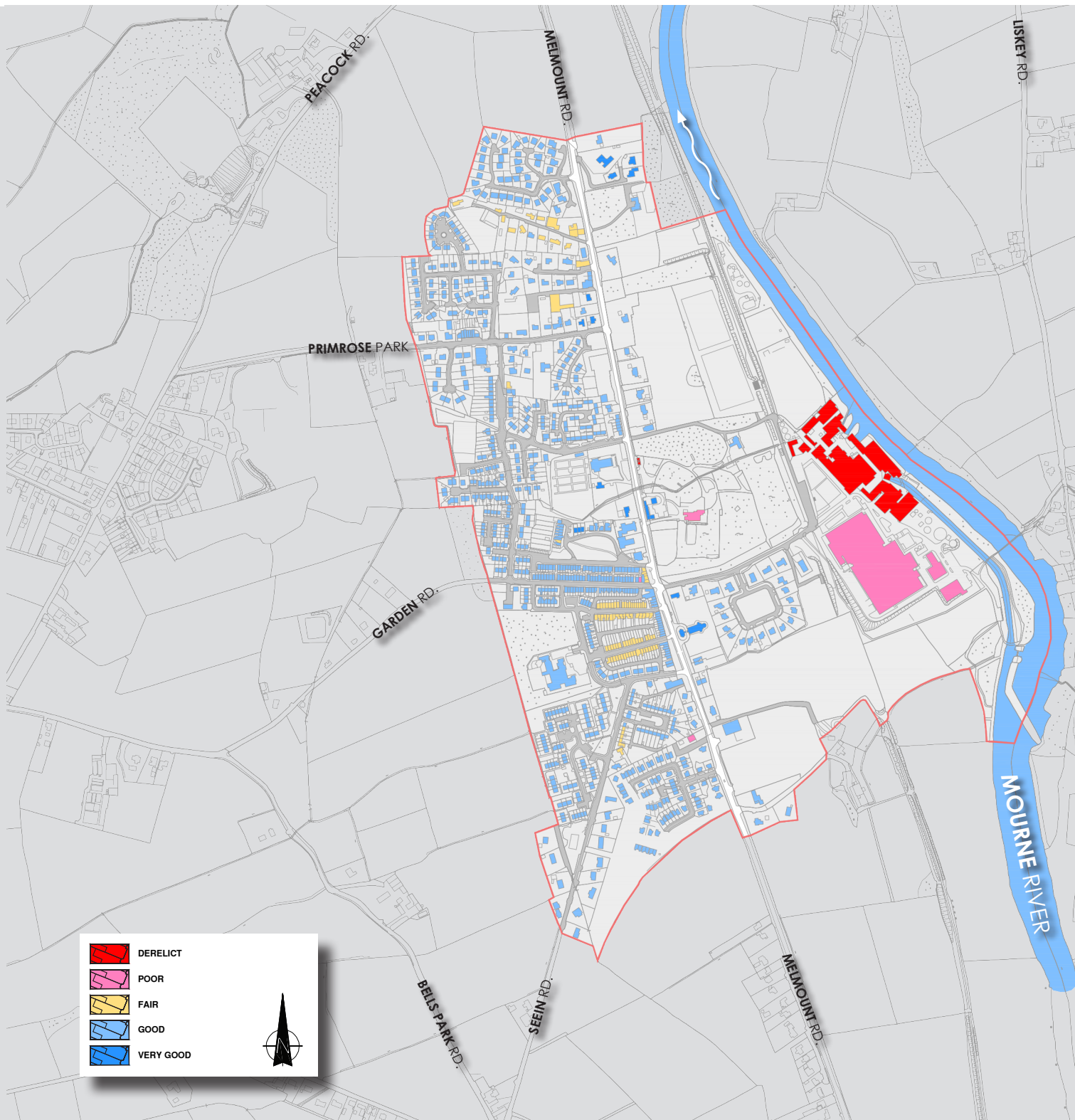
2.5.16 There have been a number of exceptionally high quality building restorations and extensions such as Sion Stables and Sion Mills Presbyterian Church.

2.5.17 Many of the village's public buildings such as the old school building and the church hall have been consistently well maintained over many years.

2.5.18 The condition of the public realm was also assessed during this process. Though adequate, the public realm in general is "tired" through out the village and public realm improvements are required, which would enhance the heritage assets and create a safer environment for pedestrians and cyclists.



Sion Gatehouse is one of a number of heritage assets with the village which requires fairly urgent intervention to improve it's condition.



Generalised building condition in 2018 - scale 1:10,000

E Contribution to built character

2.5.19 There are over 50 individual listed buildings in Sion Mills. The large number of listings in a relatively small area highlights the important historical value of the village. Many of the listed buildings can be found along Melmount Road, with a high profile for through traffic and visitors.

2.5.20 The urban form in and around the Conservation Area is generally positive. The Mill Worker's Cottages arranged along terraced streets with traditional street lighting and mature trees along Melmount Road contributes significantly to the character of the village.

2.5.21 However, the urban realm (i.e. surface finishes, street furniture etc.) is generally tired and in need of replacement/revitalisation.

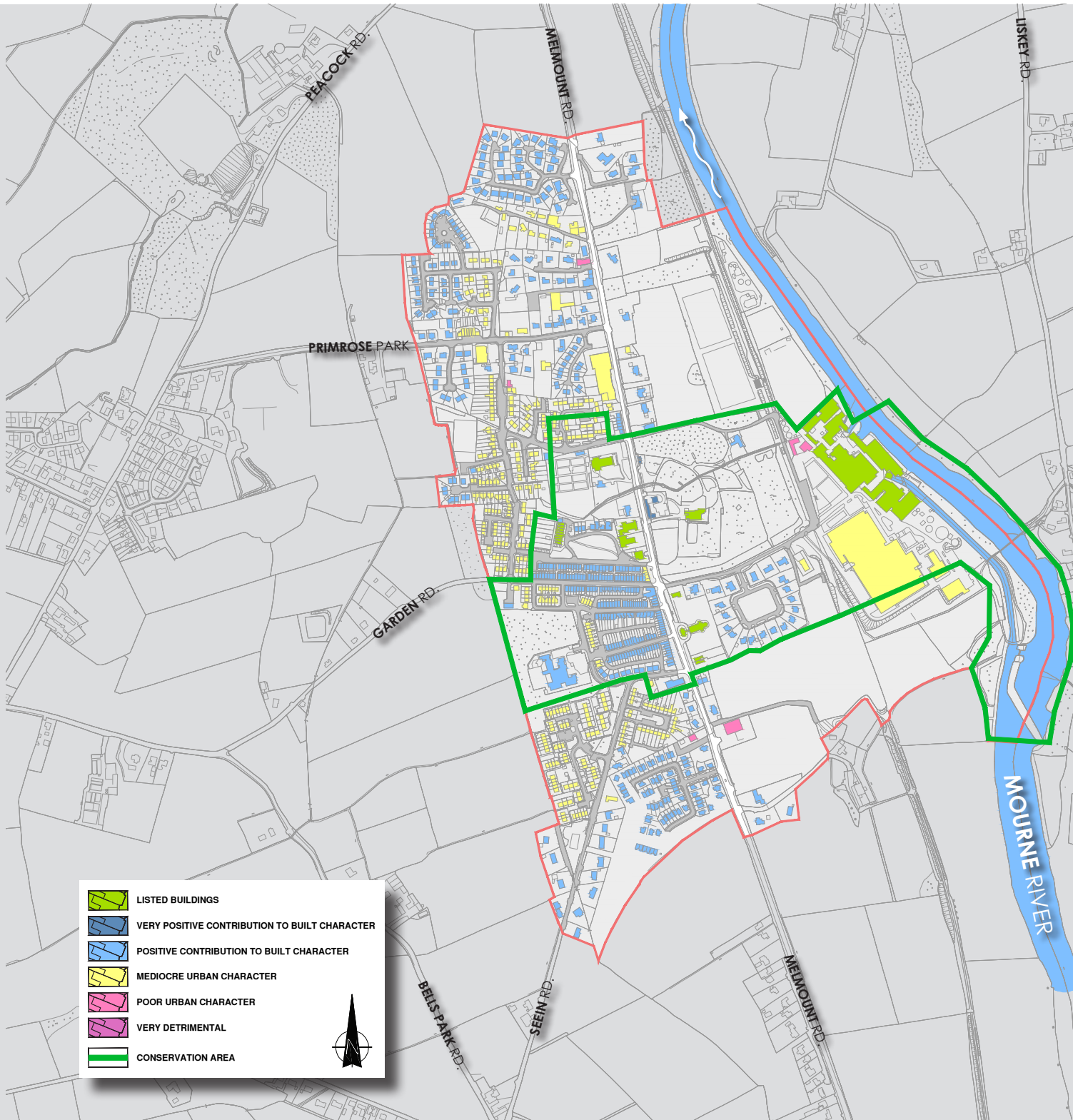
2.5.22 The buildings outside the conservation area are largely the result of the wide range of housing developments of the second half of the twentieth century. While they have little historic value, they are not unduly detrimental to the character of the village.

2.5.23 There are a number of commercial developments outside the conservation area, particularly along Melmount Road, that are not in keeping with the character of the village.

2.5.24 The original mill complex, while capable of providing the most positive contribution to the built character of the village, currently has a negative impact on Sion Mills due to the large amount of anti-social behaviour it attracts. Buildings such as Sion Stables show how the positive contribution made to the village can be restored through investment.



The old primary school building offers a very positive contribution to the character of the village and is located in a prominent position along Melmount Road



Contribution to built character in 2018 - scale 1:10,000

F Analysis of village centre streets

2.5.25 Melmound Road

- The section of the A5 trunk road that passes through the village is known as Melmound Road. The road runs north/south with a noticeable difference in development density on either side with the west being developed to a much higher density than the east.
- The buildings fronting the west side of Melmound Road at the centre of the village are predominantly residential in the form of traditional mill worker's cottages. Residential dwellings on the east side of the road are larger and set back from the road within large private grounds.
- There are also a small number of retail premises, a public house, two churches and the former primary school along this section of the road, marking it as the village centre.
- The building condition along the road is generally good, particularly having regard to the age of most of the buildings. However, there have been extensive 'improvements' carried out on the residential properties such as replacement windows and doors, which have detracted from their historic character.
- This is a wide street with significant lengths of parking bays avoiding impedances to the free flow of traffic.
- There are a considerable number of mature deciduous trees on both sides of Melmound Road, greatly enhancing its appearance, especially in summer.
- Melmound Road carries a large volume of through traffic and will therefore be most effected by the proposed western transport corridor. Due to the relatively small number of vehicles that currently stop on their way through the village, this must be seen as an opportunity for the village to become more pedestrian friendly and allow Melmound Road to revert to an attractive street.
- There is currently one pedestrian crossing in the centre of the village and this appears to inhibit the flow of pedestrian movement from east to west across the heavily trafficked trunk road.
- Melmound Road is the main route for public transport, with two bus stops located in the village centre.
- Melmound Road makes a positive contribution to the built character of the village, containing many heritage assets. However, the general upkeep of street trees, railings, signage etc. could be improved, particularly in the context of its prominence as a place.



Melmound Road - western elevation (not to scale)



Melmound Road - eastern elevation (not to scale)



Looking north along Melmount Road



2.5.26 Mill Lane

- Mill Lane (also known as the Willows) is orientated east to west and connects Melmount Road with the Herdman's Mill complex alongside the Mourne riverside.
- The landscaped private grounds of Sion House, with its mature trees, are on the north side of the lane, bounded by an attractive stone wall.
- A recent, low density detached housing development is south of the lane.
- Though Sion House itself is in poor condition, the building cannot be seen from the lane due to the mature vegetation. The properties along the south side of the lane are in good condition.
- Mill Lane has only a small volume of traffic as it only provides access to the housing development and the vacant mill sites. Anglers and walkers can access the riverside from a small car park at the lower end of the lane.

2.5.27 Main Street / Albert Place / New Street

- These streets run east/west and connect with Melmount Road to the east. They are lined on both sides by the traditional mill worker's cottages within the historic residential core of Sion Mills.
- The buildings in this area are in fair condition. Many would benefit from improved maintenance or the reinstatement of traditional features such as sash windows and timber doors.
- Traditional style street lamps along the pavements make a positive contribution to village character.
- A large amount of on street parking with vehicles occasionally parked on pavements detracts visually and functionally. This can make it difficult for wheelchair users or parents with buggies to pass along the pavement especially as these streets form the main link between the village centre (public transport, shops etc.) and the Primary School.



The Willows housing development, accessed via Mill Lane



Looking east along New Street

2.5.28 Church Square

- Church Square is a generous open amenity space bordered by buildings on four sides. Residential buildings line the square to the north, south and west with heritage assets such as the former village school, the Presbyterian Church and the Working Mens' Institute forming the eastern boundary of the square.
- Traditional, single storey mill worker's cottages line the south side of the square with a listed two storey terrace to the west of the square. The north of the square is bounded by more recently constructed houses, both single and two storey, terraced and detached, that do not adversely effect the character of the area.
- The condition and quality of the buildings surrounding the square is generally good, though the cottages and listed terrace would benefit from improved maintenance and the reinstatement of traditional features.
- The character of the square is slightly diminished by the amount of car parking, both on street and in visible parking courts. However, there is little traffic in the area and the open grass provides a safe place for children to play.
- Traditional style street lamps and mature trees line the square.
- The eastern boundary of the square, though lined with heritage assets, is largely inactive; the buildings front Melmount Road and turn their backs on the square.
- Overall, Church Square makes a positive contribution to the village character, though this could be further enhanced by minor improvements to both building fabric and the public realm, as more generally applies throughout the village.



Church Square - An open amenity space surrounded by traditional buildings that makes a positive contribution to the character of the village.



G Infrastructure

2.5.29 The management of the Northern Ireland Electricity Network for the area is included under the Southern Division based out of Craigavon. As part of this study, Network Record Maps for the Village area were provided by NIE.

2.5.30 SGN Natural Gas is available in Strabane however the network doesn't currently extend to Sion Mills.

2.5.31 There are 2 broadband exchanges in a 5 mile radius of Sion Mills and as of Autumn 2019 both of the exchanges, which are owned and maintained by Openreach, have been fibre broadband enabled. As a consequence of this broadband providers who are reliant on Openreach's broadband network infrastructure (BT, Plusnet, Sky, TalkTalk, etc.) will be able to provide fibre broadband to homes within a 5 mile radius of Sion Mills. Virgin Media fibre broadband is also available to homes within a 5 mile radius of Sion Mills. The maximum average speed that is available within a 5 mile radius of Sion Mills is 362Mbps (Source: *Broadbandexposed.co.uk*).

2.5.32 As of 2018 the Sion Mills Waste Water Treatment Works had capacity to receive foul from further development, however up-to-date site by site checks are necessary.

2.5.33 Sion Mills is affected by a number of watercourses which are designated under the terms of the Drainage (Northern Ireland) Order 1973. These are as follows:

- U1709 Ballyfatten Drain, Culverted watercourse
- U 1709 Diversion Ballyfatten Drain Diversion
- U1701 Sion Drain
- U1701Ext Sion Drain Extension
- U1701A Sion Drain Branch A
- U 1702/06 Seein Road Stream
- U170 Ext Seein Road Drain Extension
- 094 Mourne - Strule (Extension) Main River

A number of the watercourses listed above are partially or fully culverted. DfI Rivers has programmed maintenance works on some of the above watercourses for the 2018/19 fiscal year. These works include inspection and routine watercourse maintenance of open channels.

It should be noted that in Autumn 2019 there was significant flooding in and around the Main Street / Sycamore Avenue area of the village.



Images from flooding at Main Street / Sycamore Avenue on 21st September 2019. Flooding and the appropriateness of the existing drainage network is rightly a significant concern of residents in the village and as such requires immediate action to ensure that these events can be avoided / appropriately mitigated (source BBC News NI).

2.6 Access and movement

A Existing vehicular traffic

2.6.1 Sion Mills is located alongside the A5; a major transport route that runs from Derry-Londonderry in the North to Aghnacloy in the South where it crosses the Irish border and connects with the N2. From here, the N2 continues in a South Easterly direction before becoming the M2 to Dublin. Hence the A5 is part of the main transport route that connects Derry-Londonderry with Dublin.

2.6.2 The section of the A5 that passes through Sion Mills is known as Melmount Road. The majority of the village is concentrated to the West of Melmount Road. Any roads branching off to the east only provide local access due to the proximity of the Mourne River. The River may be crossed by vehicular traffic at Strabane to the north and Victoria Bridge to the south.

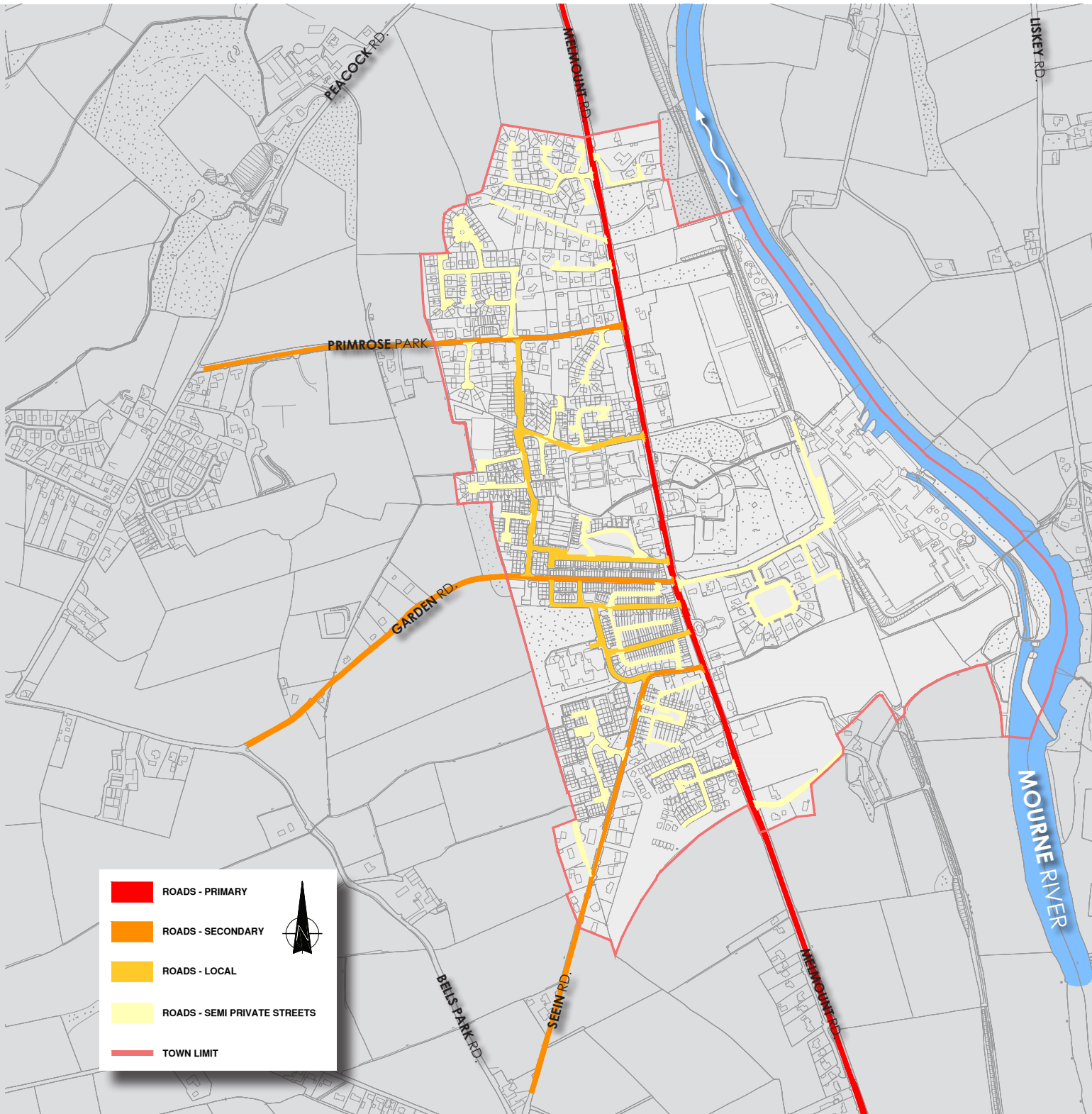
2.6.3 There are three roads to the West that provide connections to locations outside the village, Primrose Park and Main Street lead to Glebe village to the west and Seein Road continues to Seein village to the south. These roads then connect to the border village of Clady and Castledearg.

2.6.4 The other streets west of Melmount Road provide local access to residential areas.

2.6.5 There is a large volume of traffic passing through Sion Mills along Melmount Road, including HGV's. There is a 30mph speed limit through the village although, especially outside the working day, the straight, wide street encourages faster speeds. A single pelican crossing accommodates safe pedestrian movement across Melmount Road but because most of village life is now on the west side, with almost all the housing, the commercial and retail facilities and the school there, this crossing is used only on a modest scale.

2.6.6 Right hand turning lanes are provided for the majority of roads branching off to the West of Melmount Road and the road maintains a painted separation between lanes through the village allowing vehicles to turn right into residential driveways without disrupting the flow of traffic. However, due to the volume of traffic on Melmount Road, vehicles having to cross a lane to join the flow of traffic can experience delays and this can cause a build-up of traffic at junctions leading on to Melmount Road.

2.6.7 The existing vehicular traffic management relates to its complexity and the volume of traffic that it has to handle which works effectively but with some cost to the experience of pedestrians.



Map showing existing vehicular traffic - scale 1:10,000

B Future vehicular traffic

2.6.8 The A5 Western Transport Corridor (WTC) is a key transport corridor identified in the Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland. It plans to improve transport links between the urban centres of Derry-Londonderry, Strabane, Omagh and Aughnacloy by introducing a dual carriageway between Newbuildings to the North and Aughnacloy to the South. The proposed scheme route will bypass Sion Mills to the West and will reduce traffic flow through the village.

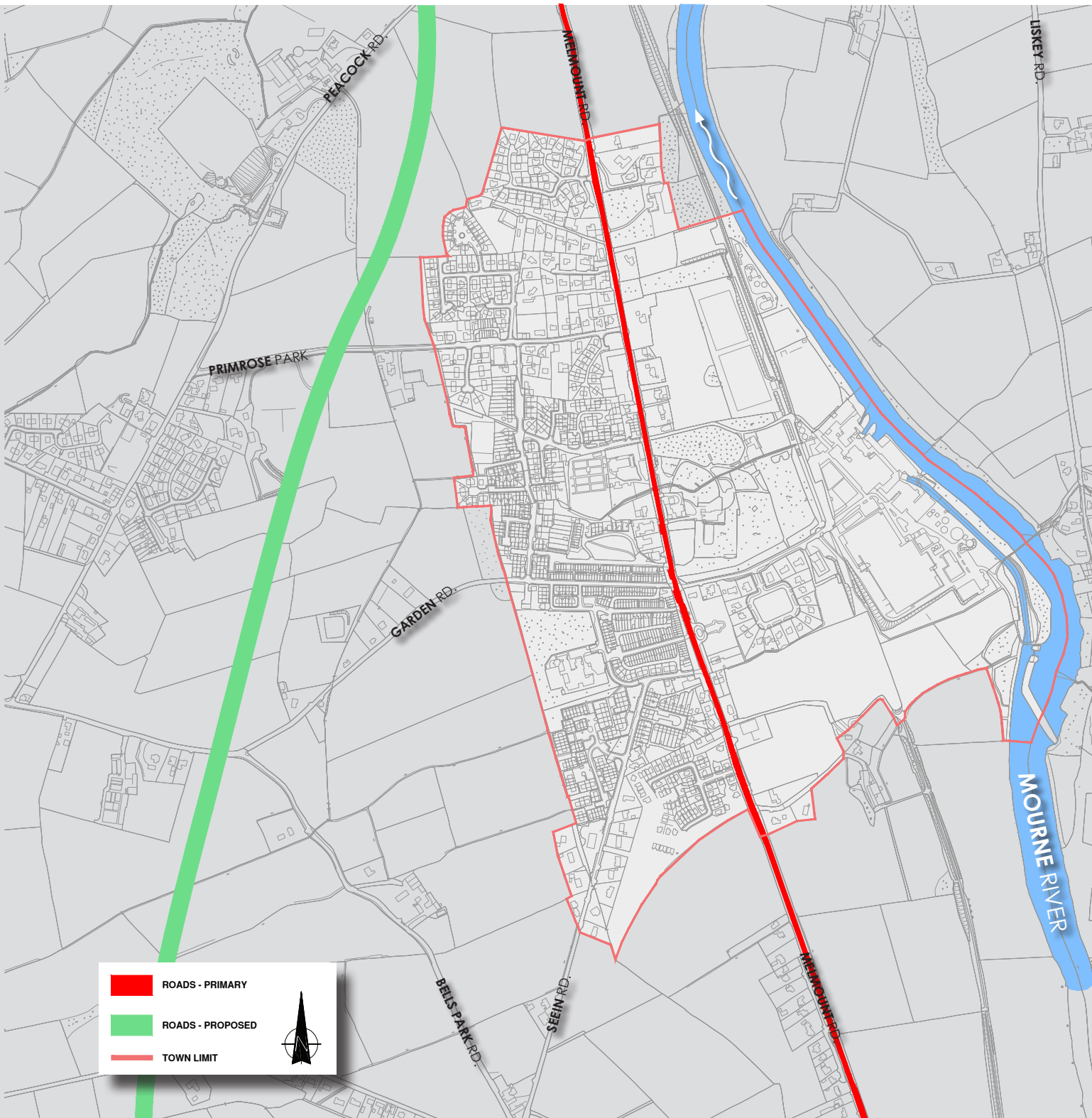
2.6.9 Access to Sion Mills from the WTC will be provided at Junction 8 located North of the village between Knockroe Road and Peacock Road, and Junction 9 located South of the village at Victoria Bridge.

2.6.10 The progression of the A5 development has experienced a number of delays as a result of public enquiries and legal challenges to DfI's decision to proceed with the scheme. It is now anticipated that this will delay the construction of Phase 1a, which was due to begin in early 2018, will now not commence until at least mid 2020. The construction of the WTC, which bypasses Sion Mills, will begin during Phase 2 upon confirmation of funding and, at the time of writing, no timescale for this has been provided by the DfI.

2.6.11 It is anticipated that the WTC will be completed in the short-medium term. Therefore this masterplan takes into account the impact a reduction in vehicular traffic along the existing A5 would have on the village, and the opportunities it will create for providing a safer and more pleasant living, pedestrian and cycling environment.



Vehicular traffic along the existing A5 - the volume of traffic passing through the village is expected to decrease significantly following completion of the A5 western transport corridor



Map showing future vehicular traffic - scale 1:10,000

C Pedestrian and cycle movement

2.6.12 The largest volume of pedestrians within Sion Mills is found to the West of Melmount Road, where almost all the residents of the village live, coupled with the majority of local conveniences such as the Post Office, a Supermarket and the Primary School. The highest concentration of pedestrians in this area can be found between Main Street (the Post Office) and Seein Road (the SPAR Supermarket). Main Street provides a route to these local amenities from residential areas to the North via Sycamore Avenue and Seein Road links the residential areas to the South.

2.6.13 Pedestrians living in more recently constructed residential areas where the village has expanded such as Millhaven to the North and The Linen Green to the South have no reasonable alternative but to access the village amenities via Melmount Road which contains a large amount of vehicular traffic.

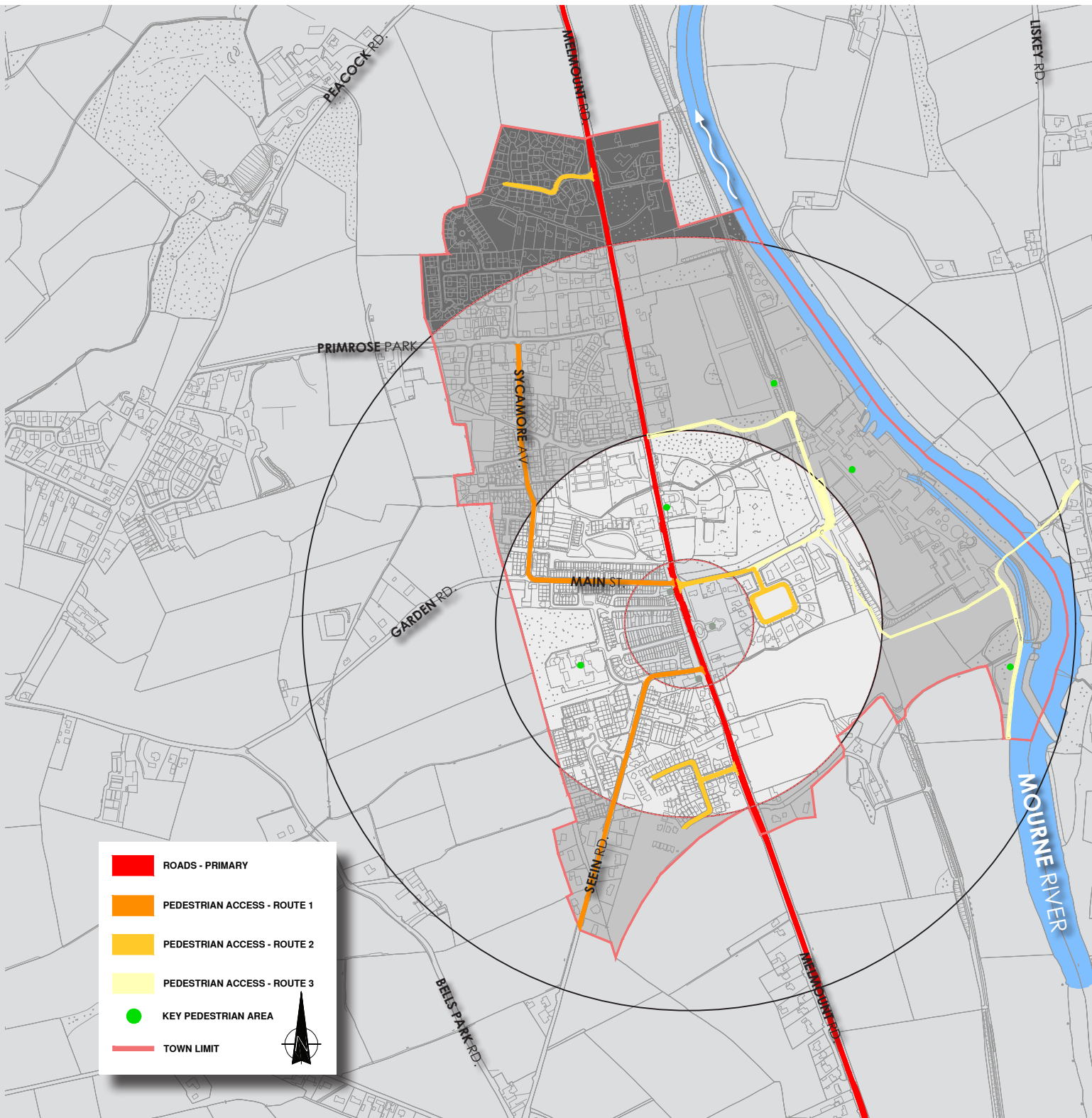
2.6.14 Pedestrians living to the East of Melmount Road in the Willows can access local amenities by using the Pelican Crossing near Main Street. The Willows also provides pedestrian and vehicular access to the Recreation Club, Herdman's Mill complex and the Mourne Riverside. There are no pedestrian footpaths from the Willows to these facilities and vehicles pass a national speed limit sign making this area potentially hazardous for pedestrians, despite the low volume of traffic.

2.6.15 The volume of traffic through Sion Mills along Melmount Road is a major barrier to linking pedestrians and facilities on either side of the east/west axis of the village. Though everyday facilities such as the Supermarket and the Post Office are conveniently located for most residents on the West side of the road, cultural and recreational facilities such as the Sion Stables (museum and restaurant), the Recreation Club, The Church of the Good Shepherd and the Mourne Riverside feel cut off.

2.6.16 Sion Mills is located within 1.5 miles of the National Cycle Network. Route 92 passes along Bearney Road to the East of the Mourne River as it travels from Ballinmallard in the South to Derry-Londonderry in the North. The route is a 103 mile designated cycle route that forms part of the larger Ballyshannon to Ballycastle cycle route that connects the West coast of Ireland to the North coast of Northern Ireland. The route is also advertised as part of the North West Trail, a 200 mile circular cycle route through Strabane, Omagh, Sligo and Donegal.

2.6.17 The National Cycle Network provides information on a route passing through Sion Mills that connects Route 92 with Route 95 – a route that travels from Lough Erne in the West to Lough Neagh in the East. The connecting route through Sion Mills passes along the Willows and Main Street and is marked as a traffic-free route and on-road route respectively.

2.6.18 There are no dedicated cycle paths in Sion Mills yet Strabane is within easy commuting distance around 3 miles away. Hence for this commute to be undertaken by bicycle would involve a journey north along Melmount Road on the carriageway of a trunk road with very heavy traffic. However, there may be the opportunity to improve conditions for cyclists once the new WTC is constructed.



Map showing pedestrian movement - scale 1:10,000

D Public transport



2.6.19 There are two Ulsterbus routes and three Goldline routes that pass through Sion Mills:

- Ulsterbus Route 97 - Strabane and Omagh
- Ulsterbus Route 100 - Strabane and Castlederg
- Goldline Routes 273 and X273 - Derry-Londonderry and Belfast
- Goldline Route X3 - Derry-Londonderry and Dublin

2.6.20 From Monday to Friday, there are a total of 61 services per day that stop on Melmount Road. These provide a service between approximately 5.30am and 10pm with the highest frequency between 7.30am and 7.30pm.

2.6.21 Goldline routes provide only a slightly reduced weekend service whereas Ulsterbus routes are significantly reduced on Saturdays and do not run on Sundays. The total number of weekend services stopping on Melmount Road amounts to 42 on Saturday and 26 on Sunday.

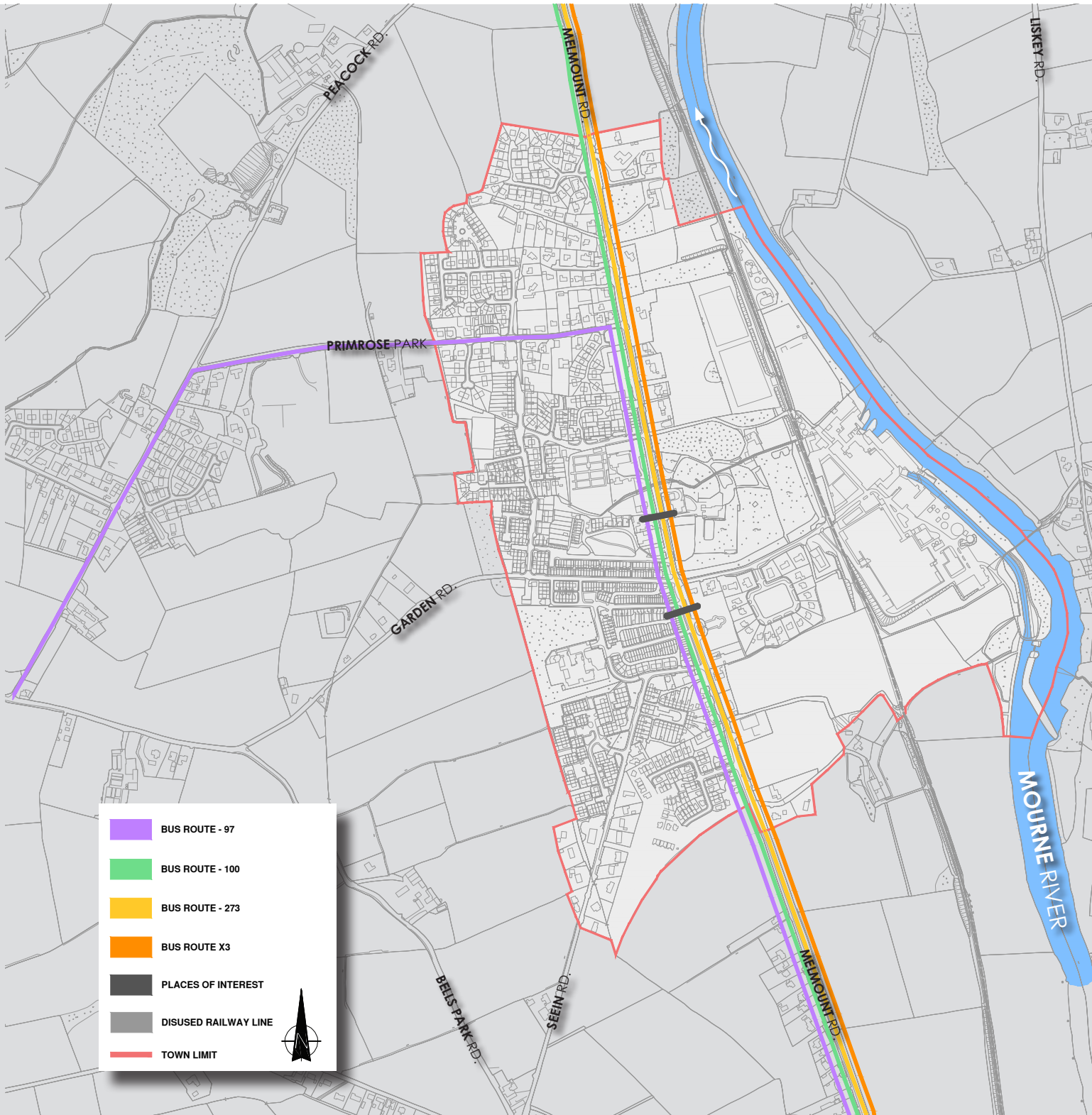
2.6.22 All these services have stops on Melmount Road with southbound services stopping outside The Church of the Good Shepherd and northbound services stopping opposite the Sion Stables. A designated lay-by bus stop is provided for southbound services whereas northbound routes must stop on the carriageway, disrupting the flow of traffic.

2.6.23 Almost all village residents live within a 10 minute walk of these stops with the maximum walk for any village resident using the bus services of 15 minutes.

2.6.24 The closest train station to Sion Mills is 20 miles away in Derry-Londonderry. The station has hourly services to Belfast via Coleraine, Ballymena and Antrim. The distance to the nearest station and the single onward route available make travel by bus a much more viable option for the residents of Sion Mills.

2.6.25 Sion Mills railway station was closed in 1965 and has since been demolished. Parts of the original railway route remains and is used as informal pathways that have yet to be regenerated in a coherent manner.

Image of existing bus shelter on Melmount Road - its traditional form is in keeping with the character of the village



Map showing public transport - scale 1:10,000

E Car parking

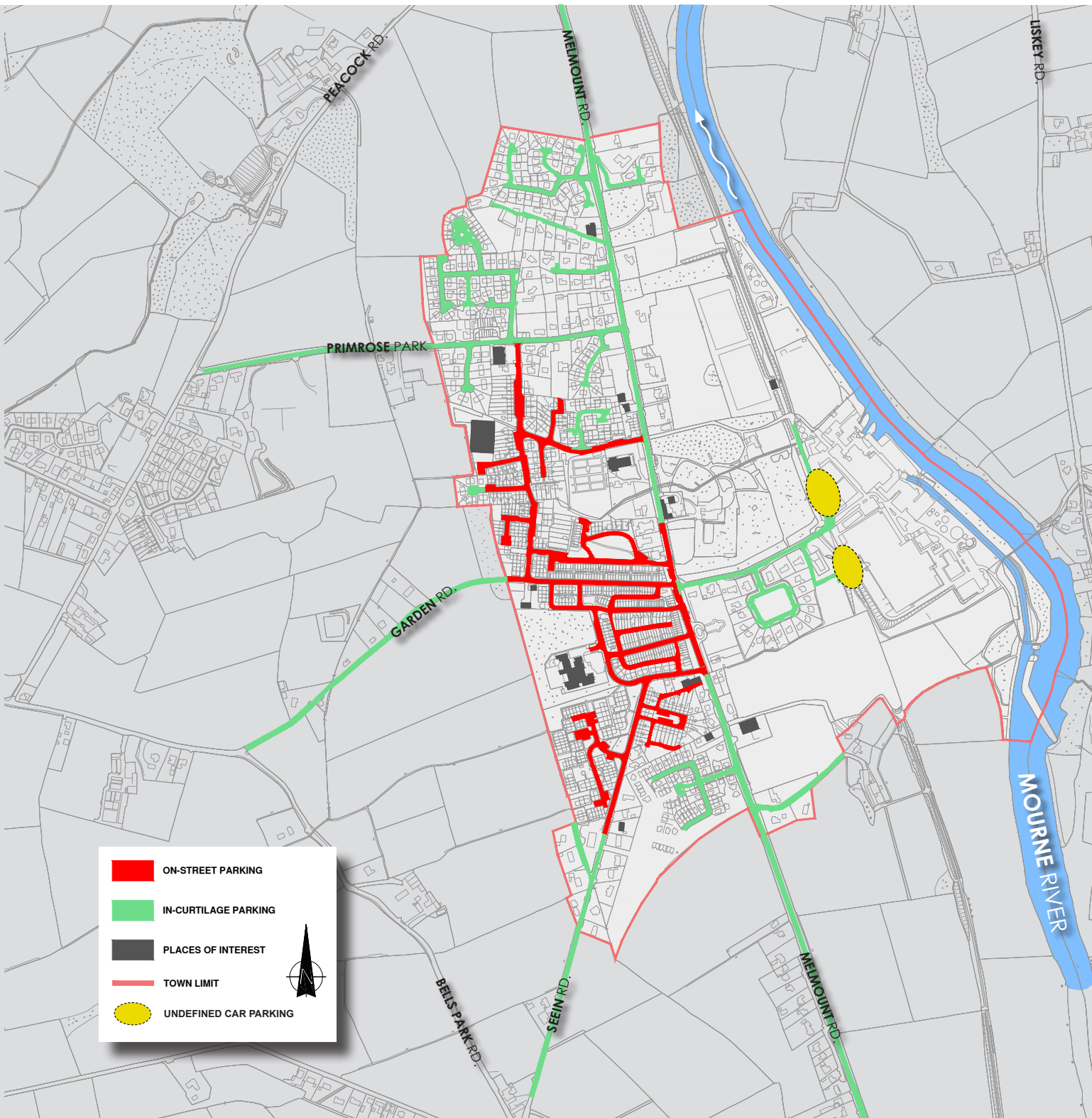
2.6.26 Most car parking in Sion Mills is for residents to park their vehicles near their homes. These spaces are provided in-curtilage, on street and in communal parking courts. A small number of lay-by spaces are available for visitors to the Post Office and the shops fronting Melmount Road. Other off-street parking spaces can be found attached to a number of village amenities including the Supermarket, the Primary School, Sion Stables and other small businesses and community buildings.

2.6.27 There are a number of existing garage courts located within the village. These were a later addition and they have limited contribution to the visual amenity of the Conservation Area. A range of options should be explored including possible re-furbishment.

2.6.28 There is no evidence of a shortage of existing parking provision within Sion Mills, either for residents or visitors. However, with no formal public car parks in the village, there is little spare capacity in the village core. With regeneration of the village expected to increase visitor numbers, the need for additional car parking will need to be closely monitored as proposals are implemented.



Example of residents garage parking and on street parking at Church Square



Map showing car parking - scale 1:10,000

2.7 Analysis of existing sectors and future potential

A Retail and commercial

2.7.1 Previously retailing was often considered to be a key regeneration opportunity and economic driver in decayed or underperforming areas. While retailing continues to potentially make a contribution to creating vibrant and successful urban places, there are major contextual changes in the economy and society that need to be appreciated, including:

- Modest growth in retail sales in recent years
- The long term decline of town centre shopping and the continuous growth of out of town shopping
- The rapid growth and continuing increase of online shopping
- The loss of small and local independent retailers, particularly specialist food shops such as butchers, green grocers, fishmongers to the larger multinational retailers who are more often than not anchors, located within the large out of town retail parks
- Expansion of the large supermarkets into the sales of an extensive range of non-food goods and services

2.7.2 Irrespective of what happens in the wider economy, many of these trends are well established and unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Planning policies nationally aimed at directing retailing towards town centres would appear to have had little evident impact on resisting these trends, especially in N Ireland.

2.7.3 Having regard to the village's development limit as designated in the dated Strabane Area Plan, the settlement is largely built out except for a large undeveloped part of the housing zoning at its southern end adjacent to the Willows housing area. The Preferred Options Paper published in May 2017 as part of the Council preparation of the new Local Development Plan proposes a 4 tier settlement hierarchy and concludes that within the settlement hierarchy, Sion Mills should retain its status as a village stating that the settlements in this tier "are often quite 'sustainable' and can be fairly self-sufficient, characterised by having a cluster of services such as a primary school, good local shop(s), pub(s), varied community facilities, play areas, etc. The type of services listed are those that normally service the immediate local population (several miles radius) and tend to be clustered around a well-defined core which offers a range of retail services".

2.7.4 Unlike many settlements of comparable size Sion Mills has no well defined focus of commercial activity. The urban form of the settlement has resulted in existing retail and commercial development being fragmented and sporadically located mainly along the western side of Melmount Road and intermixed with other uses including community and residential.

2.7.5 Although the village's current retail offer including its service retail offer is somewhat limited, it does provide many of the local services expected in a village of comparable size, capable of providing the day to day needs not just of the village's residents but also those in neighbouring small settlements and those in the countryside up to 2 or 3 miles away. The current offer includes: three local convenience shops, a post office, a pharmacy, fast food and café/tea room/restaurant, butchers, local pub, and two hair dressing salons. The village also has a petrol filling station with a associated shop at its northern end. Sion Mills also provides a limited range of specialist retail services including a furniture shop, home décor shop and three car sales businesses with associated vehicle repairs. There is also a tackle shop linked to the local Sion Mills Angling Club. The village's comparison and specialist retail offer is otherwise very limited.

2.7.6 In the context of its Conservation Area status the quality of the shop fronts along Melmount Road are generally good and make a positive contribution to the streetscape. Continued upkeep of the streetscape and future refurbishment will support the retail offer. There are vacant buildings along Melmount Road that could potentially be refurbished to provide additional retail accommodation, particularly the characterful former Gate Lodge to the north of Sion Stables. The refurbished stable building now used as a tea room and museum is a particularly fine example of how a former derelict building can be brought back into beneficial use, building upon the emerging "coffee culture" and increasing tendency for eating out. Importantly this regeneration has contributed to and enhanced the Conservation Area while strengthening the attractiveness of the village to visitors.

Spar Supermarket - One of a number of local convenience shops in the village, Sion Mills is well catered for in this area but lacks in specialist retail offerings





One of three car sales businesses located within the village

2.7.7 In the context of the sporadic linear form of existing commercial and community facilities along Melmount Road and without a distinct focus, it is inevitable that there is limited opportunity for further expansion of the retail offer including provision of more specialist and comparison retailing or a large anchor supermarket. It is unlikely that implementation of the A5 Western Transport Corridor diverting traffic from passing through the settlement will dramatically impact either negatively or positively upon the scale or range of existing retailing. At present, very few passing motorists stop in the settlement. The fact that there is limited car parking may also be a disincentive for passers by stopping.

2.7.8 Having regard to the above it is therefore likely that Sion Mills has limited commercial potential with regard to retailing. It will be important however to seek to consolidate its existing commercial functions and further expand facilities for visitors and this can be achieved by a range of environmental and regeneration initiatives.



The existing public toilets - a potential refurbishment opportunity to provide more / higher quality retail units

B Tourism, hospitality and leisure

2.7.9 With relative political stability in Northern Ireland over recent years there has been considerable growth in tourism with an increase in the volume and quality of accommodation along with significant growth in the everyday hospitality businesses including restaurants and coffee shops. It is of course recognised that a locality's ability to generate investment from tourism is dependent on the natural, historical or other attributes it provides in order to promote itself. Sion Mills has not significantly benefited from the wider growth in tourism regionally despite its historical context and industrial heritage, its Conservation Area status and location adjoining an exceptionally attractive section of the Mourne River.

2.7.10 There is no overnight accommodation for tourists or visitors within Sion Mills. The nearest accommodation is a small number of bed and breakfast type facilities in the nearby countryside and some small hotels in Strabane, Newtownstewart and Castledearg. There are limited opportunities for eating out within the village, particularly in the evening.

2.7.11 The village's main attribute is its proximity to the River Mourne and the scenic Mourneside River Walk, the suspension bridge, the weir and a route alongside the remnants of the former Herdmans Mill. Unfortunately the Mill has fallen into a state of dereliction with its physical deterioration accelerating in the past two years.




2.7.12 The River is a popular fishing location with the Sion Mills Angling Club particularly active in the locality. It does not appear to be used for any other recreational activity. The local Cricket Club – initially founded to provide recreation for the Mill employees along with football, tennis and bowls, no longer appears to be active with the former Club House in a derelict state and only some basic maintenance of the cricket field. The nearby football pitch however is now neglected and overgrown.

2.7.13 The riverside route is publicly accessible from two locations along Melmound Road. Mill Lane on the southern side of the extensive Sion House grounds provides pedestrian and vehicular access along with car parking and, secondly, the pedestrian/cycle access to the north of Sion House, also referred to as Mill Lane. Neither access point is well sign posted from Melmound Road and there is nothing to indicate to passers by of the amenities of the river and its setting. The settlement therefore to an extent turns its back on this high quality natural recreational and amenity asset. There is however a "brown sign" directing pedestrians to the Mourneside River Walk from Liskey Road on the eastern bank of the river.

2.7.14 The demand for the development of overnight accommodation within the village is modest, however there are opportunities for Sion Mills to realise its wider leisure and recreational potential including:

- Re-establishing the historic leisure and recreational activities that were so central to the community, particularly the Cricket Club
- Investigating the potential to use the River for a wider range of activities
- Enhancing links to the River from Melmound Road and improving the settlement's connections with the River



The River Mourne - One of the village's main attributes is its close proximity to the river and the walking, fishing and wildlife activities it provides.

C Residential

2.7.15 Sion Mills is now almost entirely a "dormitory" settlement having lost its previous industrial "raison d'être". It provides a mix of private and social housing.

2.7.16 Sion Mills is now largely built out, relative to the dated and soon to be replaced Strabane Area Plan, which identified 7 housing zonings. There is approximately 2.5 acres remaining as part of the ongoing development of the zoning at the south western edge of the settlement at Seein Road. The large zoning on the south eastern edge of the settlement is only partially developed by the Willows housing area and a single dwelling fronting Melmount Road. There remains approximately 16 acres of undeveloped land within this zoning. Within the undeveloped zonings there is scope to provide approximately a further 200 dwellings. The Strabane Area Plan zoned 3.25 hectares of land specifically to meet the expansion needs of the Mill complex. This land is now surplus to requirements and could be considered for alternative development that is not associated with

2.7.17 Elsewhere within the settlement, options for providing further housing is limited to either infill or brown field development with either the redevelopment of vacant/derelict sites or the conversion or refurbishment of vacant/derelict properties. There are a small number of infill opportunities along Melmount Road most notably the vacant overgrown site at the junction with Primrose Park and the site opposite McGillion's Ford dealership where the construction of a single dwelling has commenced presumably in order to secure a previous planning permission. There is also the opportunity for some appropriate scale and density of housing within the large plots on the eastern side of Melmount Road provided their wooded character is fully retained. Planning permission was recently granted for brownfield redevelopment of a small cottage and former builder's yard at Lismore Park to provide 7 dwellings for the Rural Housing Association. A key refurbishment opportunity is the prominent Gate Lodge at 118 Melmount Road to the north of The Stables.



Modern residential development on "zoned land" at the south of the Village. Standardised designs and modern requirements often mean it is difficult for modern developments to capture the unique character of the historic village.

2.7.18 For Sion Mills to realise its residential potential it will need to:

- Ensure remaining undeveloped zoned land is developed appropriately
- Identify other development opportunities and sensitively restore the built fabric of the settlement by infilling gaps, redevelopment and refurbishing existing properties thereby improving the streetscape.
- Ensure there are safe and pleasant pedestrian links from new development
- Whenever feasible, ensure that any future development on the Mill site incorporates pedestrian and cycle linkages that connect with the River Side River Walk
- Ensure new development within the Conservation Area is of high quality and positively contributes to its character.

2.7.19 The Council's Preferred Options Paper for the emerging Local Development Plan would indicate that there is a generous supply of zoned and committed land throughout the District to facilitate anticipated future housing need throughout the period up to 2032. It is therefore envisaged that future housing development will be fully accommodated within the existing limit of development within existing zonings, as part of any development on the Herdman site, and through development of a range of mixed-use brownfield and infill opportunities.



A prominent road side dwelling along Melmount Road

D Business and office

2.7.20 Sion Mills has a very limited small office and non retail commercial sector with only a very small number of such uses operating within the settlement including the local Credit Union, a Financial Services office and a building energy consultant. The ability to attract new ventures and business use is probably quite limited, particularly given the settlement's close proximity to Strabane.

2.7.21 There is the opportunity to create a business park as part of the overall development at the Herdman's complex either as a new build or by conversion/ refurbishment of the existing Mill buildings. Land zoned to meet the expansion needs of the Mill complex could be considered for alternative economic development that is not associated with the Mill.



2.7.22 A key to the success of such a proposal would be ensuring that any new complex provides suitable and good quality accommodation of varying sizes to facilitate a range of uses and with affordable rents.

2.7.23 Similar developments have proved very successful in providing appropriate accommodation for a range of business and office uses and workshops at other heritage and high amenity locations for economic activities that do not require a town centre location. A comparable example is the recently completed Courtyard Business Park within the grounds of Galgorm Castle, Galgorm which is also a listed building within a parkland setting.

E Public sector and community

2.7.24 Sion Mills provides a range of public sector and community services to meet the day to day needs of the local population and its rural hinterland. This includes the following services:

- Ecclesiastical: The settlement has a number of places of Worship including The Church of the Good Shepherd, Sion Mills Presbyterian Church, St Theresa's and the Baptist Meeting House.
- Education: There is a Primary School within the settlement – Sion Mills Primary School. The school also provides a nursery facility.
- Community and leisure services – The settlement has a number of local community groups. Although it does not have a specific leisure building, the settlement has an all weather multi use games pitch and a play park associated with the Community Association.
- Health: There is a Pharmacy in the village. The nearest Health Centre is 3 miles away in Strabane. Sion Mills is convenient to Hospitals in Omagh and Letterkenny and particularly Altnagelvin 17 miles away in Derry-Londonderry.

The Church of the Good Shepherd - An excellent example of a well maintained community asset, the grounds and building contribute greatly to the character and community of Sion Mills

2.8 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

A Strengths

- 1 The village is located in close proximity to Strabane, a source of employment that provides retailing and commercial services.
- 2 Ease of access to the A5, a key route within the region.
- 3 Good access to frequent bus services.
- 4 Riverside location on a scenic section of the Mourne River.
- 5 A designated Conservation Area.
- 6 Pleasant industrial settlement rich in natural and built heritage. The majority of buildings are in relatively good condition.
- 7 Excluding the mill complex there is little dereliction and with a high occupancy of buildings.
- 8 Integrated, stable and committed mixed community.
- 9 Strong community spirit including pride in its history.
- 10 Good Fibre Broadband connections



Rich in built heritage - St. Theresa's church is just one example of many high quality buildings found within the village



Strengths

B Weaknesses

- 1 The A5, which is a major route within the region, runs through the village bringing high levels of through traffic including heavy goods vehicles.
- 2 Very few stops are made in the village by passing motorists.
- 3 Lack of defined gateway to the settlement.
- 4 The Mill complex - Large vacant site which is a focus for significant anti-social activity.
- 5 Lack of publicly usable open space and related facilities.
- 6 Lack of a distinct focal area at the heart of the village.
- 7 Erosion at River Embankments. No dedicated cycle paths and poorly articulated pedestrian routes.
- 8 Poor connections to the River. Historic crossings lost.
- 9 Urban realm generally tired looking.
- 10 Linear urban form has resulted in existing retail and commercial development being fragmented and sporadic.
- 11 Only a limited range of basic retail and food services. No overnight accommodation and very limited facilities for tourists to utilise.
- 12 A deprived community. In 2011, Sion Mills ward was the 76th most deprived of the 582 wards in Northern Ireland.
- 13 No significant employment within the village with residents commuting to nearby urban centres.
- 14 There is a low level of home ownership within the village.
- 15 Drainage infrastructure and the risk of future flooding.



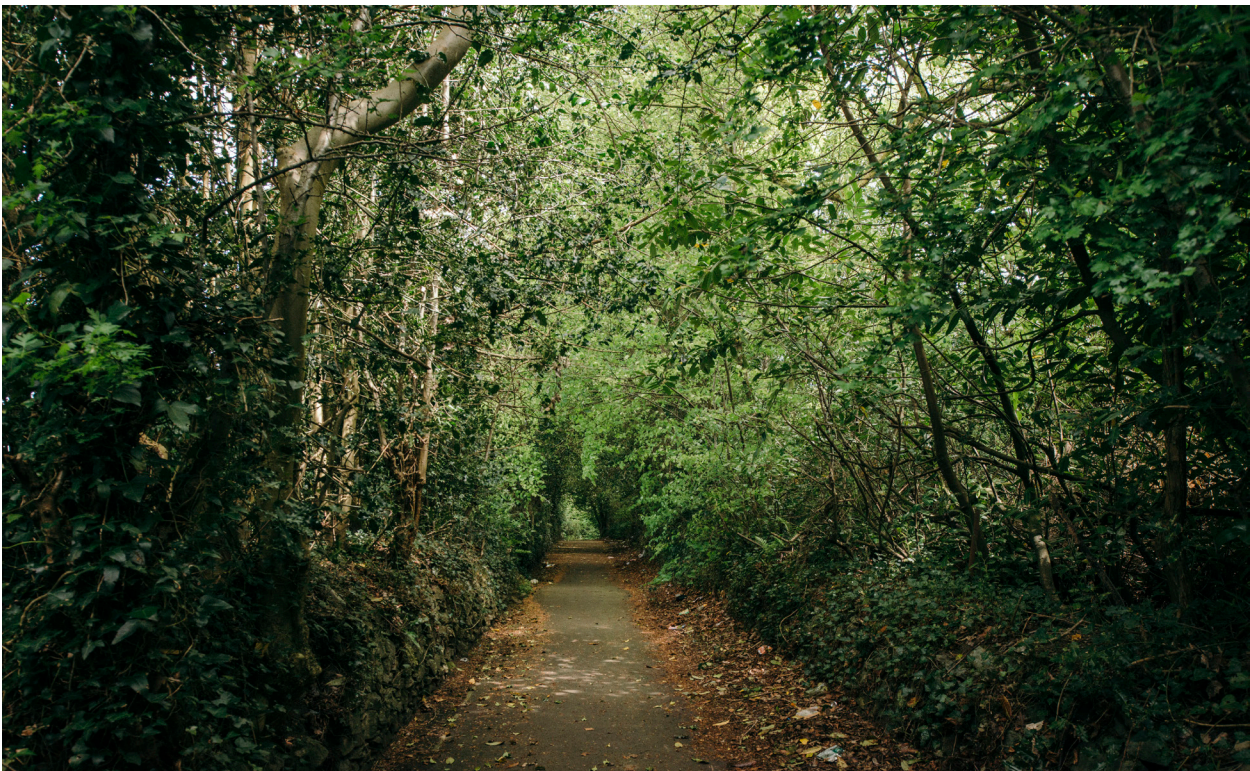
The mill complex - a large vacant site attracting significant anti-social behaviour



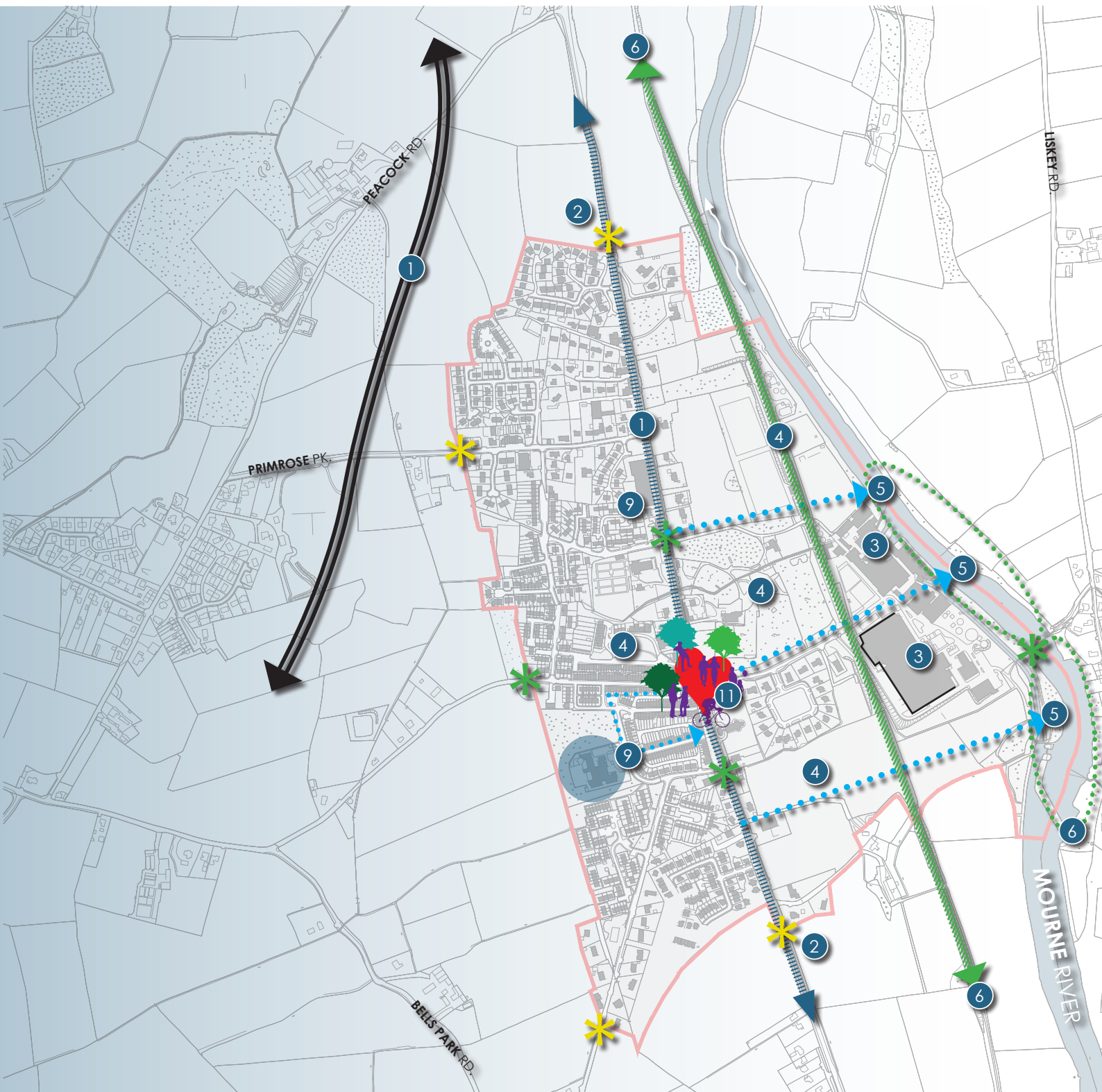
Weaknesses

C Opportunities

- 1 The A5 proposal, with the potential to ease the adverse impact of the existing high levels of through traffic (e.g. by improving crossings, creating a more pleasant pedestrian/cyclist experience).
- 2 Create gateway features to the village at both the settlement edges and the entrances to the Conservation area.
- 3 Potential utilisation and redevelopment of Herdman's Mill, an impressive structure in the local landscape.
- 4 Develop other opportunity sites with various uses in an appropriate manner (e.g. Employment; housing, parks etc.).
- 5 Improved connection between the village and the river.
- 6 Potential to create looped paths with interpretation signage. Possible additional crossings of the river and conversion of the former railway line to a Greenway.
- 7 The village's historic/architectural character, and riverside location close to the Sperrins could be a basis for tourism related projects.
- 8 Opportunity to build on the village's physical community assets.
- 9 Improve physical access to the Primary School.
- 10 Support the development of Sion Mills as a Cultural and sporting hub (cricket etc.).
- 11 Strengthen the village centre using existing and proposed services and incorporating a public space.



One of the few paths that currently connects the village to the river - there is a clear opportunity to improve access to one of the village's biggest assets



Opportunities

D Threats

- 1 Development of the A5 route could lead to potential visitors by-passing the village.
- 2 Closure of Herdman's Mill has taken its toll on community life including limiting access to open space facilities, and creates the impression of a place that has seen better days.
- 3 Inappropriate new development / re-development diluting the quality of the existing features of the conservation area.
- 4 Deprivation: Out of 890 NI Super Output Areas (SOA), Sion Mills is the 80th most deprived in relation to the proportion of working age adults (25-64) with no or low levels of qualification (52.3%). This has adverse economic and social effects.
- 5 Long term health problems/disability: With 29.2% of all residents restricted by long term health problems or disability compared to 20.7% in the region, this has an adverse impact on the vitality of the village's commercial and community life.
- 6 Conversely only 69.4% of residents have good or very good health - below the regional average of 79.5%.
- 7 Unemployment in Sion Mills (7.2%) is more than double the regional average (3.5%).
- 8 Sion Mills has an ageing population.
- 9 Car ownership levels are lower within the village in comparison to the remainder of the region, inhibiting mobility and involvement in employment (especially in the absence of local job opportunities).
- 10 Impact of climate change on the village and its assets, particularly the river and its surrounds.



The closure of the mill has not only contributed to a lack of employment within the village but has also adversely impacted on the availability of social and leisure facilities as well as contributing to an increase in anti-social behaviour



Threats

3.0 Outline intention

3.1 The vision

3.1.1 The draft vision below was presented during the engagement process and will be refined throughout.

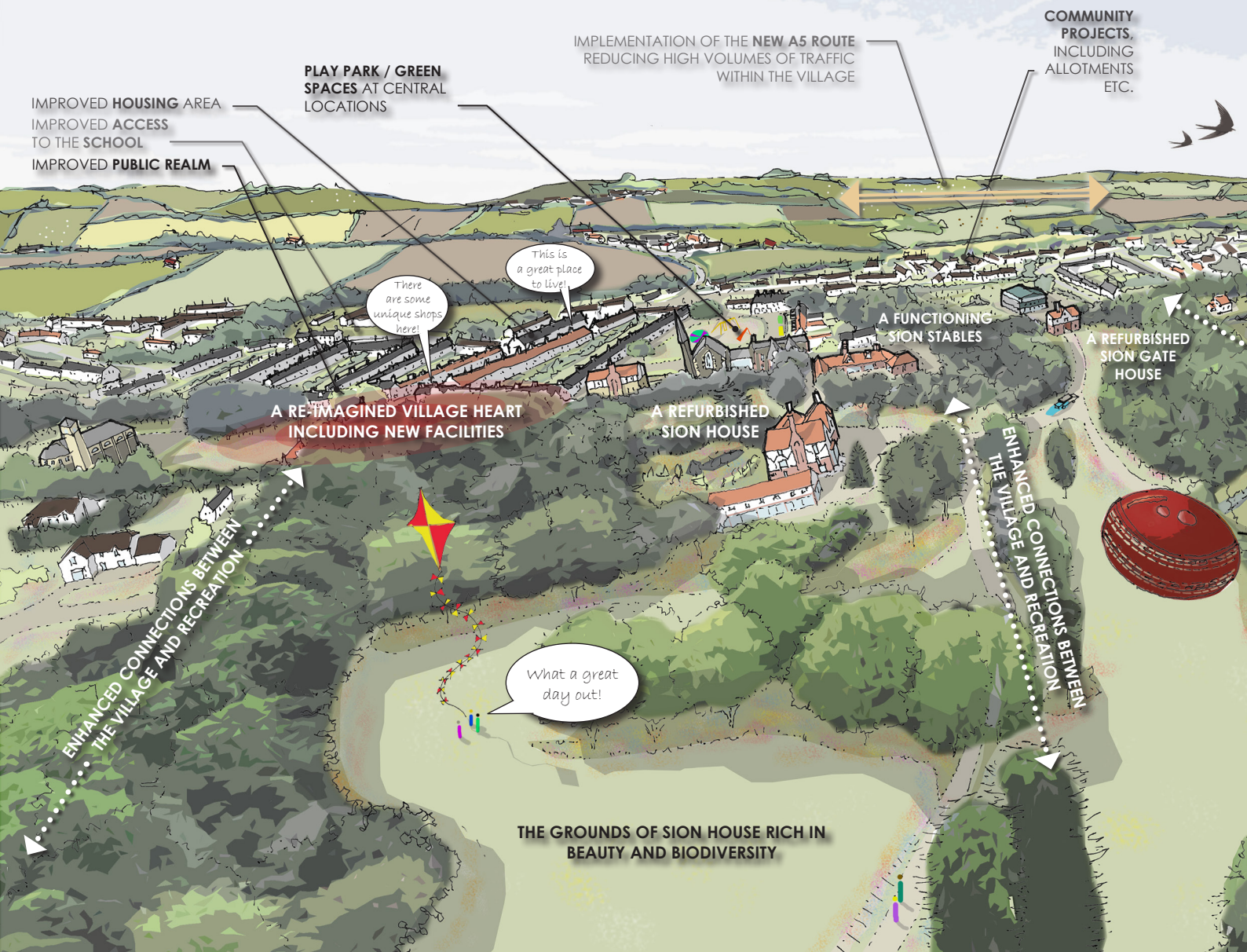
"15 years from now, in 2034, Sion Mills has secured and enhanced its unique heritage features and has surpassed its previous zenith of over a century ago. It is regarded as a particularly desirable place to live, work and to visit for purposes of leisure and recreation.

A place that embraces its past, is progressive, connected and complementary, where economic, physical and social restoration creates a vibrant and distinct character, with an attractive contemporary environment that respects the village's industrial origins and character, and is at the centre of community."

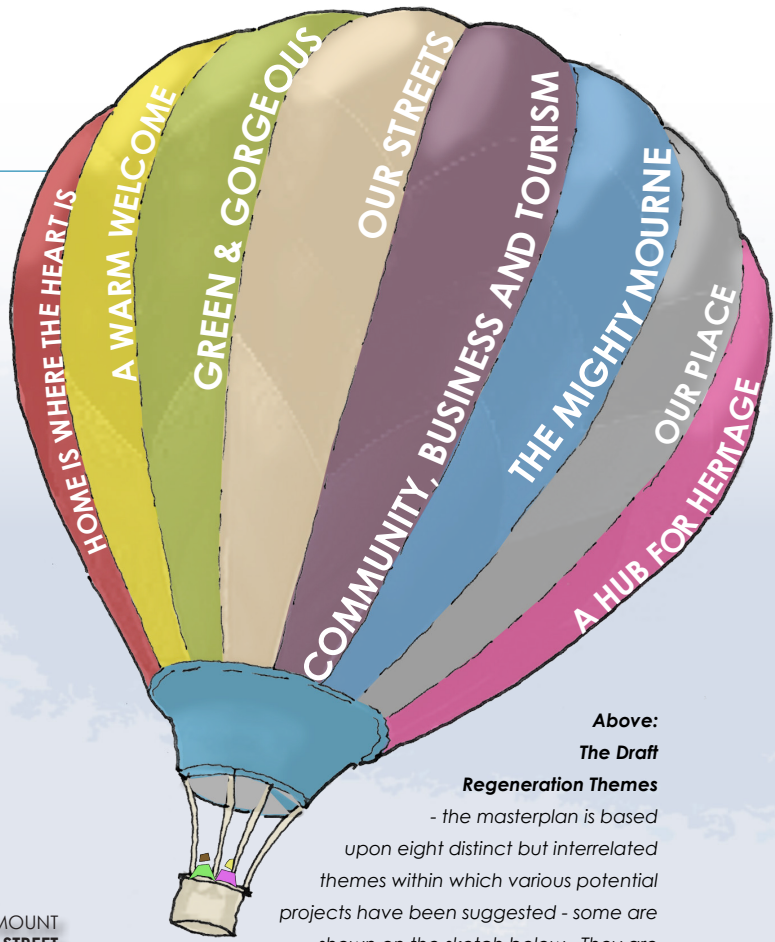
3.2 The objectives

3.2.1 The delivery of this vision will require significant progress on the following strategic regeneration objectives:

- Resolve any problems with vacant, derelict and physically obsolete buildings
- Deliver the redevelopment of existing cleared and underused sites
- Maintain and enhance the historic character and identity of Sion Mills
- Achieve a positive and dynamic mixed-use centre, appropriate to the size, character and location of Sion Mills, attracting investment and employment
- Improve community, leisure, cultural and recreation services and facilities



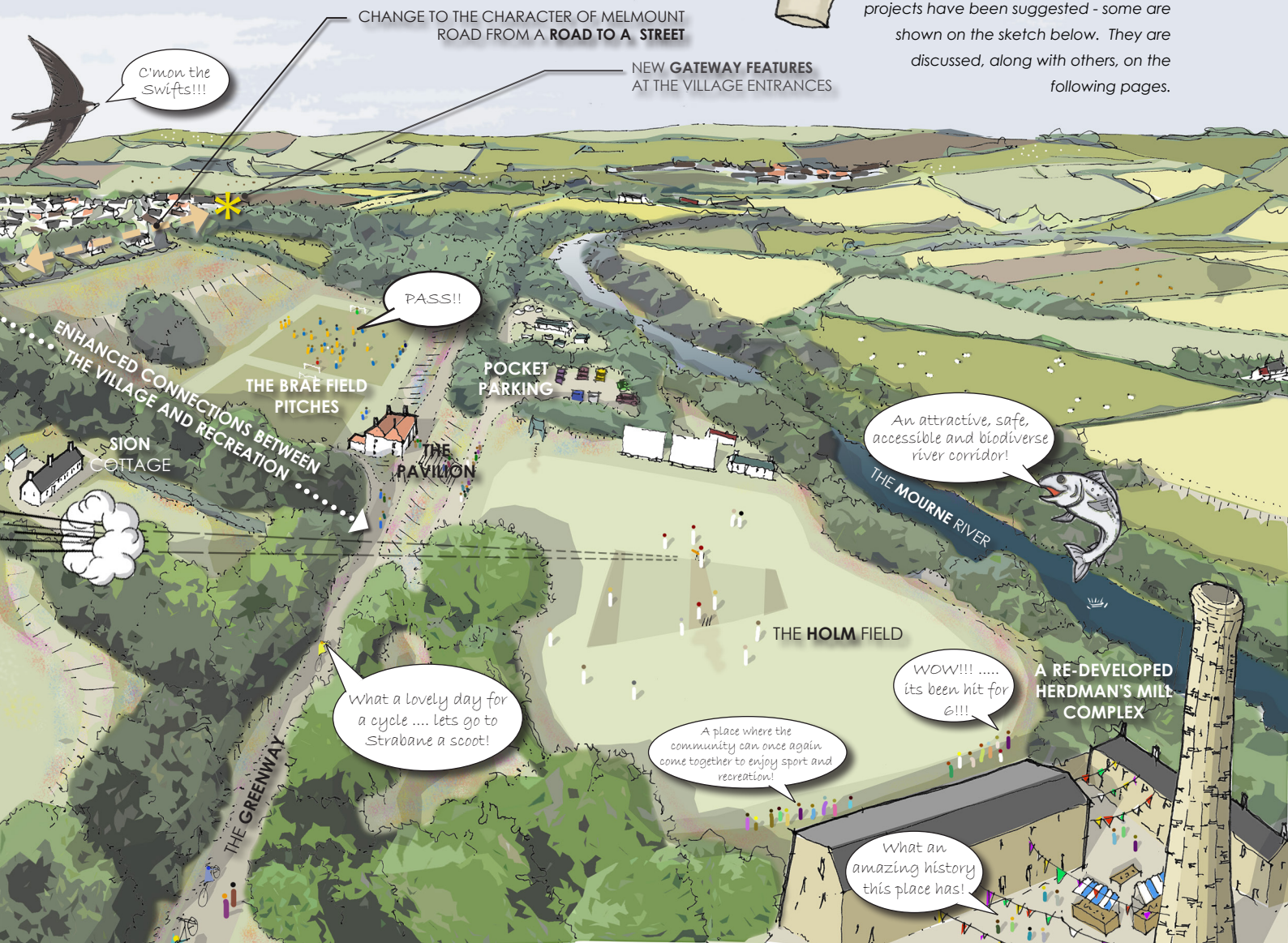
- Enhance the attractiveness of Sion Mills to visitors, marketing the village's distinctive historic character and features and providing overnight accommodation within the village
- Create a village with safe and pleasant walking and cycling routes, where a high proportion of residents choose, by preference, to walk and cycle into and from the village centre and towards the riverside
- Enhance facilities for the users of public transport within the village, thereby further increasing the use of existing bus services
- Ensure the essential needs of car drivers and passengers are adequately provided, including sufficient village centre car parking spaces



**Above:
The Draft**

Regeneration Themes

- the masterplan is based upon eight distinct but interrelated themes within which various potential projects have been suggested - some are shown on the sketch below. They are discussed, along with others, on the following pages.



3.3 The themes

3.3.1 Eight distinct but interrelated themes, which if implemented in a co-ordinated manner will fulfil the agreed vision. Developed through an analysis of the opportunities and challenges that exist in Sion Mills, these eight key themes emerged as particular areas of focus for achieving a desirable future for Sion Mills. The masterplan will explore these themes and provide detail on how they will guide the future growth and development of Sion Mills.



A warm welcome

Creating a sense of arrival to the village for locals and visitors alike.



Our streets

Managing traffic and creating a better environment for pedestrians and cyclists.



Home is where the heart is

Establishing a defined centre for the village.



A hub for heritage

Promoting the village's historic features.



Our place

Providing new homes, supporting uses and developing growth.



The mighty Mournes

Improving the Mournes River as a place for people and wildlife.



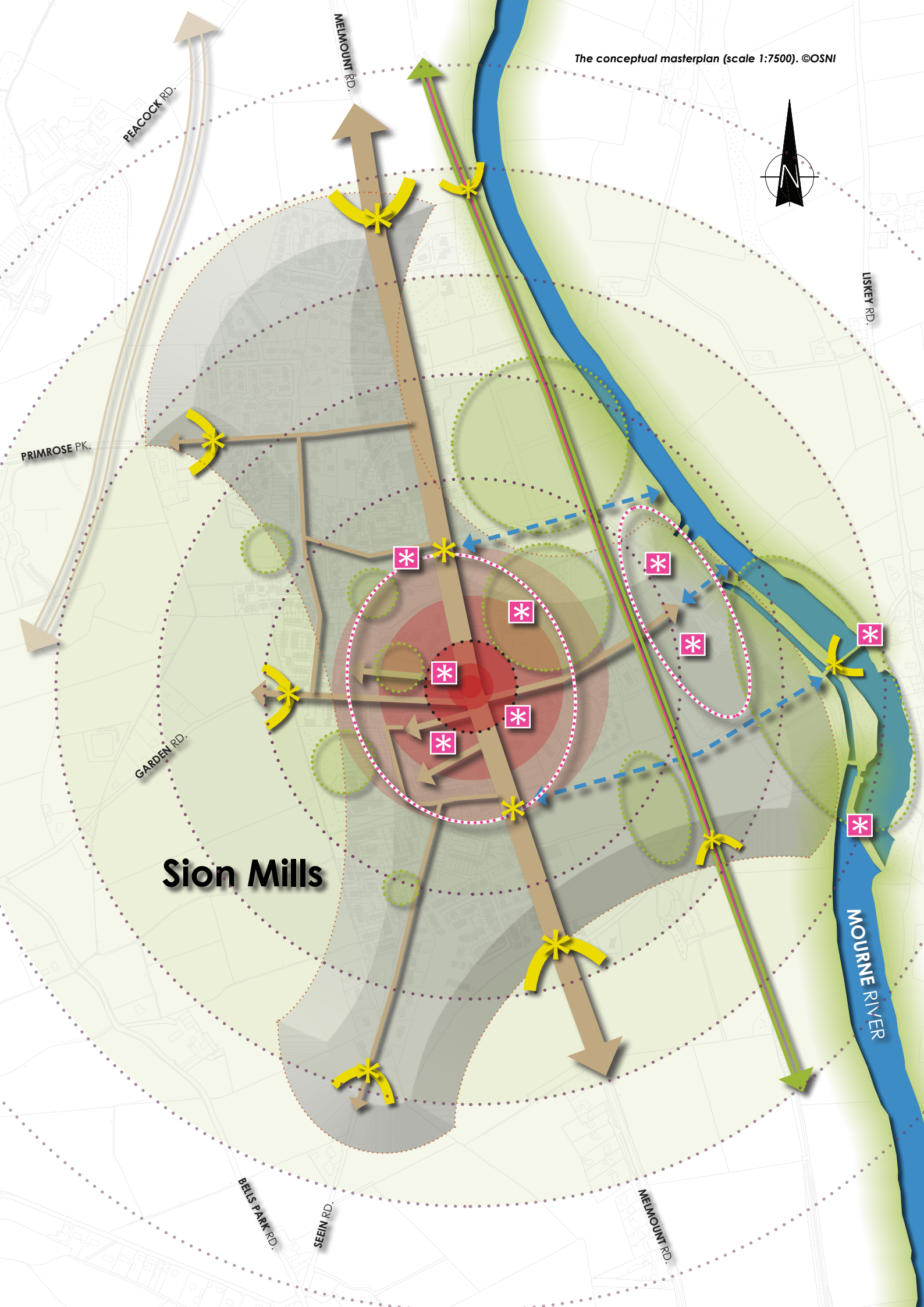
Green and gorgeous

Safeguarding the village's natural setting and enhancing the environment.



Community, business and tourism

Supporting the community and assisting in the development of business and tourism



Sion Mills

MOURNE RIVER



A warm welcome

Creating a sense of arrival to the village for locals and visitors alike.

3.3.2 First impressions and the quality of arrival experience in the village are key considerations. This is not just for aesthetic reasons, important as they are, but also for the messages they convey to residents, passers by, tourists or potential investors.



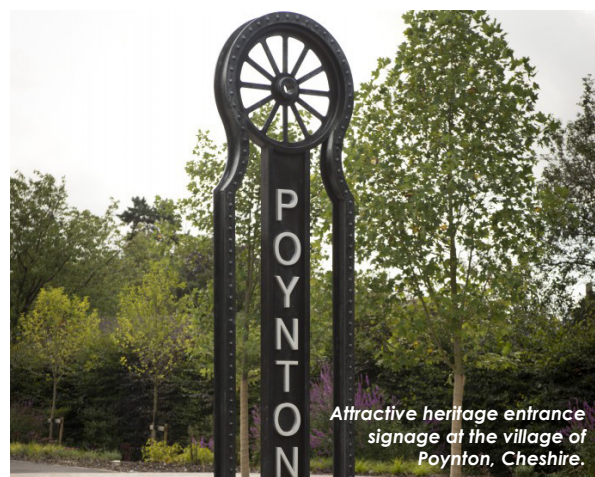
Existing featureless entrance to the village from the north.



Contemporary sculpture of industrial heritage by Michael Dunbar



Existing village entrance signage. Although distinct it is now dated. The logo itself is good and evocative.



Attractive heritage entrance signage at the village of Poynton, Cheshire.

Existing conditions

Best practice examples

Guiding Principles:

- Define and celebrate entrance points to the village.
- Communicate the identity of Sion Mills in a co-ordinated way.

Potential projects:

- Development of a brand for the village including a crest / logo;
- Signage co-ordination strategy to be established to identify appropriate location and designs for signage around the village.



Identification of village entrance/exit points which would benefit from new gateway features.

Potential projects (continued):

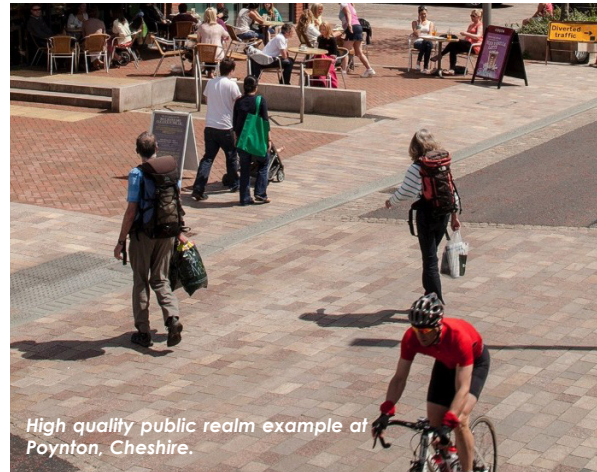
- New gateway features where the village starts and ends through the use of public art, signage lighting and street trees.



Our streets

Managing traffic and creating a better environment for pedestrians and cyclists.

3.3.3 A balance needs to be achieved between motorised vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians. The transformation of the character of Melmount Road from a road to a street will encourage drivers to pass through with more care. This together with streetscape enhancement on Melmount Road and connecting streets, particularly within the Conservation Area, will help create a better environment for pedestrians and cyclists and could be used to enhance heritage assets.



Existing conditions

Best practice examples

Guiding Principles:

- Reduce traffic speeds.
- Improve facilities for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Transform the character from a thoroughfare for vehicles to a multi purpose street by streetscape design.

Potential projects:

- Transformation of the character of Melmount Road from a road to a street – long term this will be assisted by the implementation of the proposed A5 by-pass, facilitating the implementation of a streetscape enhancement scheme.



Identification of potential streets which could be subject to public realm improvements, including re-surfacing, street trees, signage etc.). Also showing the proposed route of the A5 scheme and identifying that its link with the village is extremely important.

Potential projects (continued):

- Implementation of a Greenway along the route of the former railway, dedicated to safe and easy pedestrian and cyclist movement.
- Enhanced connections for pedestrians and cyclists from the school, to Melmount Road, to the proposed Greenway and the banks of the Mourne.



Home is where the heart is

Establishing a defined centre for the village.

3.3.4 Sion Mills lacks a defined centre. Melmount Road splits the village between east and west. Enhanced community facilities should be provided at the centre of the village, bringing life back into the streets. An improved connection between the centre and all other areas of the village is important in creating a sustainable Sion Mills.



A view towards what is a natural square, adjacent to the Church and close to the identified centre of the village.



An attractive village heart at Dromore, County Down.



The Flax Spinner - attractive public art which provides another focal point contributing to the sense of a unique place within the village core.



The village square at Strangford, County Down.

Existing conditions

Best practice examples



Guiding Principles:

- Define a centre for the village.
- Encourage the location of new facilities and services within this centre.
- Provide improved connections between the centre and all other areas of the village.

Potential projects:

- Create a central area for the village focused around existing commercial activity.
- Create a small central Square/event space within this area.
- Develop new toilet/convenience facilities within this area (bounding a new Square):
- Encourage the conversion of the existing public toilets to new commercial units.



Identification of the centre / heart of the village, where a new public space could be created.

Potential projects (continued):

- Construct a new playground space at a preferred site central to the village.
- Improve pedestrian and cycle connections to this central space.



A hub for heritage

Promoting the village's historic features.

3.3.5 Capitalising on the industrial heritage and distinctive architecture of Sion Mills must be a priority. Protecting this heritage is about more than conserving the fabric of historic buildings, it must also be about identifying new, sustainable uses for old buildings and how these buildings and the landscape can be looked after, utilised and sustained into the future.

3.3.6 Development of the existing river walks and the potential greenway will play a key role in creating heritage trails suggested by the Heritage Asset Audit. These trails and the use of clear interpretation signage will create a hub for heritage inclusive of all identified heritage assets including the villages Linen, Railway and Social heritage.

Sion House Gate Lodge - a heritage building at considerable risk.



New Lanark - the well known Mill Village in Scotland is a major tourist hub.

The Stables - an outstanding example of the regeneration of a building at risk. Though it requires further development, it remains something the village should be extremely proud of.



Cromford Mill in Derbyshire is an excellent example of a heritage tourist attraction.

Existing conditions

Best practice examples



Guiding Principles:

- Conserve the fabric of historic buildings.
- Identify new, sustainable uses for old buildings.
- Enhance the setting of historic buildings.
- Restore derelict and vacant buildings.
- Communicate the importance of Sion Mills' natural and built heritage.
- Link existing heritage assets to create a hub for heritage.

Potential projects:

- Define a housing improvement area with the aim of rectifying past inappropriate interventions to the Historic Mill Workers Cottages.
- Build upon previous work to champion a vision and create excitement for heritage features which are under threat, educating and encouraging owners to take positive action.
- Link identified heritage assets with the creation of a heritage trail with clear interpretation signage.



Identification of significant heritage features/landscapes. Some of these require urgent action, including securing sites/buildings, finding new uses, implementing repairs, etc.

Potential projects (continued):

- Implement appropriate public realm improvements which enhance the setting of the historic features.



Our place

Providing new homes, supporting uses and developing growth.

3.3.7 The extent of the future growth of Sion Mills is critically linked to its character and sustainability. Some housing growth in Sion Mills would benefit and support the provision of additional commercial and community facilities. The sensitive management of any growth is necessary to ensure the distinctive character of the village is retained and where possible enhanced.

Ongoing housing development - whilst modern and good quality it does not fully reflect the charm of the central area of the village.



Knockroon, Ayr - this new housing development fits seamlessly into that of the historic village, something which should be strived for in new schemes within Sion Mills.



It is important that any new housing development is sympathetic to the character of the village and its attractive rural setting.



A best practice example of new build housing in a traditional style.



Existing conditions

Best practice examples



Guiding Principles:

- Manage future growth of the village in a sustainable manner.
- Design new development to positively contribute to the built character and reinforce the distinctiveness of Sion Mills.
- Maintain a compact development pattern that results in a walkable village, reducing the need to use vehicles.

Potential projects:

- An increase in family housing, of mixed sizes, to support community facilities and honouring an existing residential zoning to the south of the village at an appropriate settlement edge density. Identify Key Action Sites within the existing village fabric.
- Encourage higher density housing within the Mill Complex as part of a more economically viable mixed use development including community, commercial and tourism uses.



The potential developed form of the village.

Potential projects (continued):

- Encourage tourism and recreational facilities to support the economic viability of the village by identifying Key Action Sites.
- Assist developers by providing a Village Urban Design Compendium for the Conservation Area including guidance on density and massing, legibility, materials and local traditions, public realm, style and diversity.



The mighty Mourne

Improving the Mourne River as a place for people and wildlife.

3.3.8 The Mourne River should be utilised and enjoyed as a place for people and wildlife. To do this it will be necessary to improve access and enhance the natural and built setting of the river. The Masterplan has been produced in conjunction with the Derry City & Strabane District Council Green Infrastructure Framework 2018 to ensure it provides a coherent basis for achieving the improved physical connection of blue and green spaces across the region.

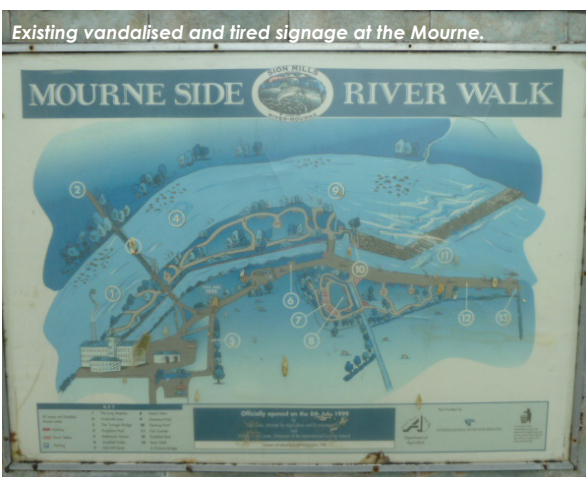
3.3.9 There is existing infrastructure close to the river that could be improved, expanded or developed to create a coherent network and better access. This could include improvements to the existing Mourneside Walk and the potential conversion of the former railway to a greenway that would allow this area of the river to be accessed by the wider region. Signage could be improved to promote wildlife and an understanding of the industrial heritage associated with the river.



An angler at The Swinging Bridge - an idyllic image.



Lough Shore Park in Antrim provides excellent access to the waterside for all.



Existing vandalised and tired signage at the Mourne.



Comber Greenway - a similar asset exists along the former railway through Sion Mills which, if appropriately developed, would enhance access to the river and encourage more pedestrians and cyclists.

Existing conditions

Best practice examples



Guiding Principles:

- Conserve and enhance the biodiversity of the river and its margins.
- Manage flood risk from the river.
- Enhance access to the river for leisure and education.
- Enhance the natural and built setting of the river.

Potential projects:

- Improve connections to the River from the Village, and create walking / cycle loops which incorporate the river frontage.
- Improve facilities at the River frontage including, signage, lighting, walkways, embankments, vehicle parking and a possible new park/events area.



Enhancement of the Mourne and potentially improved connections between it and the village.

Potential projects (continued):

- Investigate water based tourism opportunities, particularly fishing.
- Investigate the opportunity for a slipway or jetty for kayaks and small boats.



Green and gorgeous

Safeguarding the village's natural setting and enhancing the environment.

3.3.10 It is important that the landscape and the natural rural setting of the village is protected and enhanced where possible. New developments within the village must consider the incorporation of areas of landscaping. The masterplan will be produced in conjunction with the Derry City & Strabane District Council Green Infrastructure Framework 2018 to ensure it provides a coherent basis for achieving the improved physical connection of blue and green spaces across the region.



Church Square - an attractive urban green space.



*Island Park - Newcastle, County Down
An excellent example of improving biodiversity through managed wild flower schemes*



The Brae Field - the historic, privately owned, abandoned playing fields which the community continues to have considerable attachment to but where there is now only limited access.



Castlecaulfield - a recent village winner of the Ulster in Bloom competition

Existing conditions

Best practice examples

Guiding Principles:

- Protect and enhance the natural setting of the village.
- Retain and manage mature vegetation and landscapes (this will include a tree replacement programme for trees at Alexandra Place).
- Improve village cleanliness and tidiness.
- Add good quality landscaping into new developments.

Potential projects:

- Investigate the potential for a new publicly accessible "country park" incorporating the Sion House grounds, the recreation fields and the Riverside, all linked into the regeneration of the Mill Complex.
- "Best Kept" projects, including maintenance of community spaces, local amenity areas and flower displays (excellent examples include Broughshane, Co. Antrim and Donaghmore / Castlecaulfield, Co Tyrone).



Identification of existing and potential open spaces and a greenway.

Potential projects (continued):

- Develop a Landscape Management Plan.
- Public realm and streetscape improvements to include substantial street tree planting of native and appropriate species.



Community, business and tourism

Supporting the community and assisting in the development of business and tourism

3.3.11 Sion Mills retains a strong and inclusive community despite the many challenges that have occurred in the past. Nurturing and strengthening this sense of community will benefit the village moving forward. Attracting and supporting new businesses in the village and promoting tourism initiatives will restore a healthier community, with a distinct sense of purpose once again.



Existing community facilities within the village which could do with enhancement / relocation.



Strengthening the community will in turn help to revitalise the place.



The community have supported regular events.



The mill in Celbridge, County Kildare - part of which has been restored as a community centre

Existing conditions

Best practice examples



Guiding Principles:

- Support existing community / recreation groups.
- Identify opportunities for community networks.
- Build capacity of community associations.

Potential projects:

- Develop and promote Community / recreation groups.
- Plan and implement community training and capacity building.
- Establish and support masterplan projects.
- Develop regular social activities in village venues (e.g. community halls, church halls and the Stables).
- Establish an annual village event or festival.



The Community is not only those who live in the village but also those who live in the hinterland.

Potential projects (continued):

- Investigate the potential for a new shared community facility at the heart of the village.
- Investigate opportunities to cluster with adjacent villages.

3.4 Identification of key action sites

3.4.1 Identifying key action sites is the first step in creating a physical masterplan. Key action sites are locations throughout the village, both publicly and privately owned, that may be developed during the next 15 years. It is important that there is a coherent design intent for these sites as part of the regeneration of Sion Mills. It enables the identification of relevant potential projects consistent with the overall development themes.

3.4.2 Sports Pitches

The closure of the Mill has taken its toll on community life including limiting access to existing sports pitches and associated facilities. There is an opportunity to quickly improve the recreation facilities available in the village by reinstating the previous use of these sites and then improving and adding to the associated facilities in the medium/long term.



3.4.3 Sion House, Gate Lodge and Stables

The Sion House complex has considerable potential for re-development that would benefit the village, similar to that brought about by the recently refurbished Sion Stables. The appropriate development of the site's historic assets including Sion House, The Gate Lodge and Grounds could potentially attract visitors from outside the village, complementing the current uses at Sion Stables.



3.4.4 Mill Complex and Mourne Riverside

Much of the complex has historic value and if developed successfully this could transform the village and its wider reputation. The improvement of the riverside and the access to it would also greatly improve the wider village and attract more visitors. The River Walk scheme is in need of expansion and improvement and the former railway that passes through this area is a potential greenway that would link the river to the wider region.





Potential key action sites 1-11 - scale 1:10,000

3.4.5 Undeveloped Land

There remains a large area of undeveloped housing zoning alongside an undeveloped industrial zoning on the south side of the village. This industrial zoned land is now surplus to requirements and could be considered for alternative development that is not associated with the Mill, hence it may be more suitable for alternative mixed-uses.



3.4.6 Vacant and Underused Sites







Vacant/underused sites in the west of the village could host small scale, "quick win" schemes such as play parks, public realm improvements, community growing schemes etc. These uses would achieve immediate benefits for the residents of the village and provide a catalyst for longer term proposals.



3.4.7 Public Realm and Greenway

The current A5 route (Melmount Rd.) passes through the village bringing high levels of traffic and creating a separation for pedestrians leaving the heritage assets isolated. The urban realm designed to combat this is generally tired. Improvements are required which connect both sides of the village and the river beyond. A greenway along the former railway line would provide a car-free connection that would enhance access and enjoyment of the industrial heritage and natural setting.



-  Public Realm Improvements A
-  Public Realm Improvements B
-  Public Realm Improvements c
-  Pedestrian Links to the River
-  Proposed Greenway
-  Improvements to Heritage Assets



Potential key action sites 12-20 - scale 1:10,000

4.0 Consultation

4.1 Statutory authority consultation

4.1.1 As part of the consultation process a number of Statutory Authorities were identified for early consultation. GMDA engaged with them via e-mail in June and July 2018, at an early stage in the analysis of Sion Mills and before the development of the conceptual masterplan.

4.1.2 They were introduced to the task and what we aimed to achieve. They were generally asked to provide comment and any further information on:

- Any current issues in relation to their infrastructure/ facilities and/or services within the village.
- Any future draft or programmed improvement schemes and/or strategies which their organisation plan to undertake within the village.
- If there is anything else which they considered relevant.

The following is a summary of the responses received.

4.1.3 Department for Infrastructure – Roads

- Construction of the A5WTC will be carried out in phases over the next 8-10 years. Sion Mills is located in phase 2 with an indicative start date 2021 (dependent on available funding).
- One of the primary benefits to existing towns and villages that are by-passed by the proposed dual carriageway would be a significant reduction in traffic volumes (AADT & HGV) using the existing A5. During the Draft Order/Public Inquiry stage in 2016, DfI Roads committed to producing a masterplan for Active and Sustainable Transport Assessment (ASTA) to identify possible Non-Motorised User opportunities on and around the existing A5. There are anticipated benefits for Sion Mills by enabling proposed small scale amendments and enhancements to the existing Melmount Road once the A5 is implemented.



View facing east along Main Street

4.1.4 Department for Infrastructure – Rivers

- Sion Mills is affected by a number of watercourses which are designated under the terms of the Drainage (Northern Ireland) Order 1973. These are as follows:
 - U1709 Ballyfatten Drain, Culverted watercourse
 - U 1709 Diversion Ballyfatten Drain Diversion
 - U1701 Sion Drain
 - U1701Ext Sion Drain Extension
 - U1701A Sion Drain Branch A
 - U 1702/06 Seein Road Stream
 - U170Ext Seein Road Drain Extension
 - 094 Mourne - Strule (Extension) Main River
- A number of the watercourses listed above are partially or fully culverted. These are regularly inspected and maintained, including jetting, culvert replacement/repair and upgrading of the inlet/outlet structures as required.
- DfI Rivers has programmed maintenance works on some of the above watercourses for the 2018/19 fiscal year. These works include inspection and routine watercourse maintenance of open channels.
- DfI Rivers currently has no planned or programmed drainage or flood protection schemes in the Sion Mills area at this time.
- DfI Rivers is not aware of any ongoing flooding issues within the SMVMP boundary however there have been incidents of flooding in the past within this area.
- DfI Rivers do not own or maintain the public crossing on the River Mourne at the "Swing Bridge" or any of the public footpaths in or around the river and mill.

4.1.5 Health and Social Care Board

- There is currently no HSC provision in Sion Mills apart from a Community Pharmacist.
- Sion Mills receives HSC services from Strabane and Omagh.
- There are currently no plans for future HSC services to be located in the village.

4.1.6 Tourism NI

- Referred to the Council's recent Tourism Strategy which they were involved in.

4.1.7 Education Authority

- Village traffic management needs to be carefully considered in and around the school at peak times, especially if there is any increase in vehicle movements close to the school.
- Community events could be held in the school, utilising its facilities for numerous services, subject to consultation and agreement.
- Consideration of playing fields within the school grounds, this could be accessible to the wider community during out of school times.
- Consideration of play area on the site.
- Safe access to any play areas is required.
- An increase in population would affect the education authorities' plans/requirements.
- A significant increase in population may result in a requirement for additional facilities or additional land in order to provide for an increase in pupil numbers.
- Consult with Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and their vision for the wider area.

4.1.8 Department for Communities – HED

- Referred to a recently published document by the Heritage Council which emphasises the importance of community involvement in making a step change in the regeneration and revitalisation of historic areas 'Ballybrilliant: Heritage-led Regeneration in 5 Irish Towns'.

4.1.9 Other bodies also consulted included Northern Ireland Electric; Northern Ireland Water; Translink; DfC NW Development Office; DAERA Planning Response Team; and the Loughs Agency, These bodies didn't make any particular or significant comment.

4.2 Elected members consultation

4.2.1 As part of the consultation process a number of Elected Members from within Derry City & Strabane District Council attended a consultation on 19th September 2018. The purpose of this consultation was to:

- Provide an introduction to the masterplan including the background to the project and progress made
- Discuss the context and issues - including a SWOT Analysis and identification of issues that need to be addressed (e.g. lack of sports provision, poor streetscape etc.)
- Propose a draft vision, regeneration objectives and themes
- Propose a draft masterplan concept
- Propose potential Key Action Sites

4.2.2 This event also offered an opportunity for elected members to provide feedback to GMDA and the Council on the initial issues identified and on the draft vision, objectives and concepts etc. and to identify any other issues or ideas relevant to Sion Mills and the project going forward. This consultation was a very useful exercise early in the process with the following issues raised and considered:

- The need for achievable objectives avoiding the risk of raising unrealistic expectations.
- The need to establish clear priorities in the final masterplan.
- The need to explain the value of the masterplan and how it can facilitate drawing in funding for a range of projects to the community.

- The need to deliver "quick wins" early in the process to build confidence and respond to a widespread sense of discouragement at the apparent failures of previous initiatives.
- The need to manage the aspirations of different groups in the village with varying objectives.
- The need to make progress resolving the issues relating to the former recreation lands.
- The need to improve play facilities within the village.
- The opportunities that will be created from the reduction of through traffic when the proposed by-pass is completed, particularly of improving the environment of Melmount Road.
- The need to place the expectations of the community at the heart of all proposals and actions, enhancing Sion Mills as a desirable place to live.
- Carefully consider the concept, location and components of the central square and how it can enhance village life.
- The potential of the greenway as a local facility and as a safe pedestrian/cyclist connection to Strabane with the potential for wider links to Lifford and Castlefinn.
- Ensure the River Mourne is protected and its surroundings improved.
- The need to promote viable regeneration opportunities at the historic mill complex and maintain key heritage features throughout the village.



The Brae Field pitches as existing - Football can be an important regeneration tool within any village and could be too for Sion Mills

4.3 Public engagement

4.3.1 The first public engagement event of the Sion Mills regeneration masterplan was held in the education room of Sion Stables on the 26th September 2018. The event was publicised by Derry City & Strabane District Council and the presentation material was produced by GM Design Associates Ltd.

4.3.2 The event took place over two drop-in sessions, each of two hour duration. There were 30 visitors who registered their interest in the development of the masterplan as well as a number of unregistered visitors.

4.3.3 Visitors were briefed on the process and then invited to submit written feedback on the content of the presentation. The findings of this feedback is summarised on the following pages.

4.3.4 Discussion was encouraged by a series of large format presentation panels along with space and facilities allowing detailed discussion by members of the public facilitated by the GM Design team.



4.3.5 Feedback was received from visitors both through informal discussions and the completion of feedback forms. All of this information was collated and analysed.

4.3.6 Copies of the presentation were also made available for those who could not attend the public engagement event via the Council's website and at Strabane Library for a period following the consultation process.

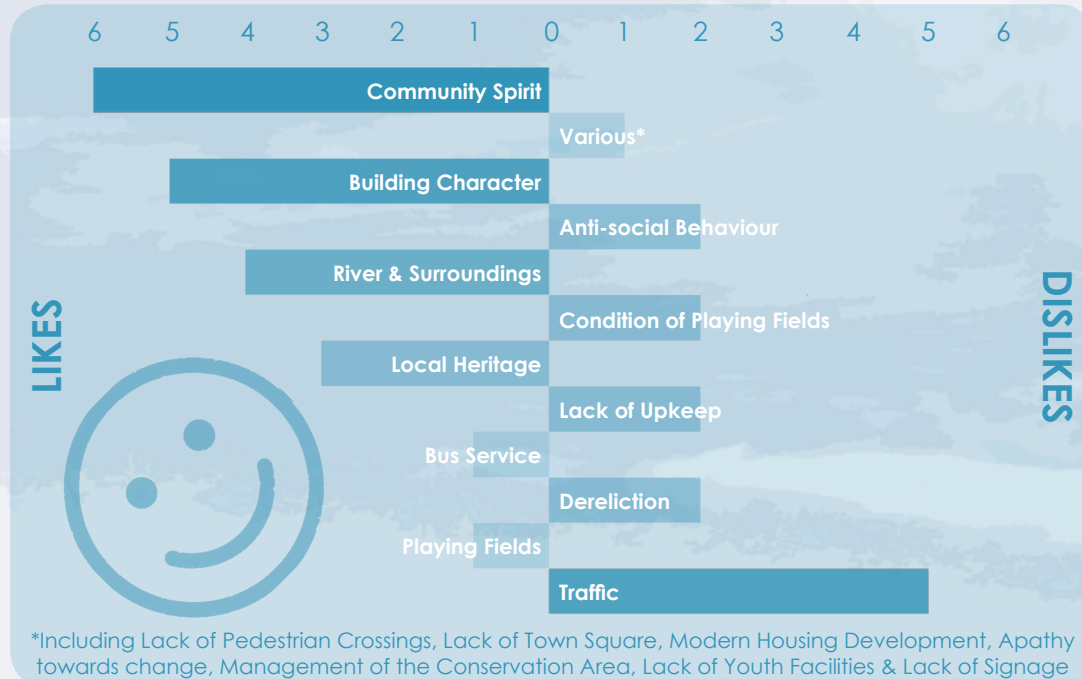
4.3.7 The public engagement event proved an effective way of allowing all the stakeholders in the process to have a voice including the community, the council and the consultants. The turnout was as expected for a village the size of Sion Mills. The community feedback will be most helpful in creating a masterplan that will provide a sound basis for moving forward positively.

***The Weir at Sion Mills** - The public engagement event highlighted how the local community views the River Mourne as a major asset, though access and tourist infrastructure needs improving to make the most of the village's natural surroundings*



SION MILLS

Public Engagement Event Feedback



Q1 What do you like and dislike about Sion Mills?

Q2 What kind of Mills to be

Q4 Of the potential projects mentioned within the themes, what would be your top priorities for Sion Mills?



Q5 Do you have any other ideas or suggestions that you feel could assist in regenerating Sion Mills?



- The Mill Complex**
- Redeveloped for use as a hotel/hostel
 - Redeveloped for use as retirement apartments
 - Redeveloped for use as office/conference facilities
 - Demolish the mill – too costly to renovate - and replace with new housing and apartments
 - Keep focus on the future – not on the mill



- The Built Environment**
- Conversion and restoration of a millworker's cottage into a museum
 - Expose the hidden ceiling in the Men's Institute
 - Maintain religious buildings
 - Maintain existing character of the village



Derry City & Strabane
District Council
Comhairle Chathair
Dhoire & Cheantar
an tSrátha Bálain
Derry Cille & Strábane
District Council

GM
DESIGN
ASSOCIATES

ON MILLS

2033

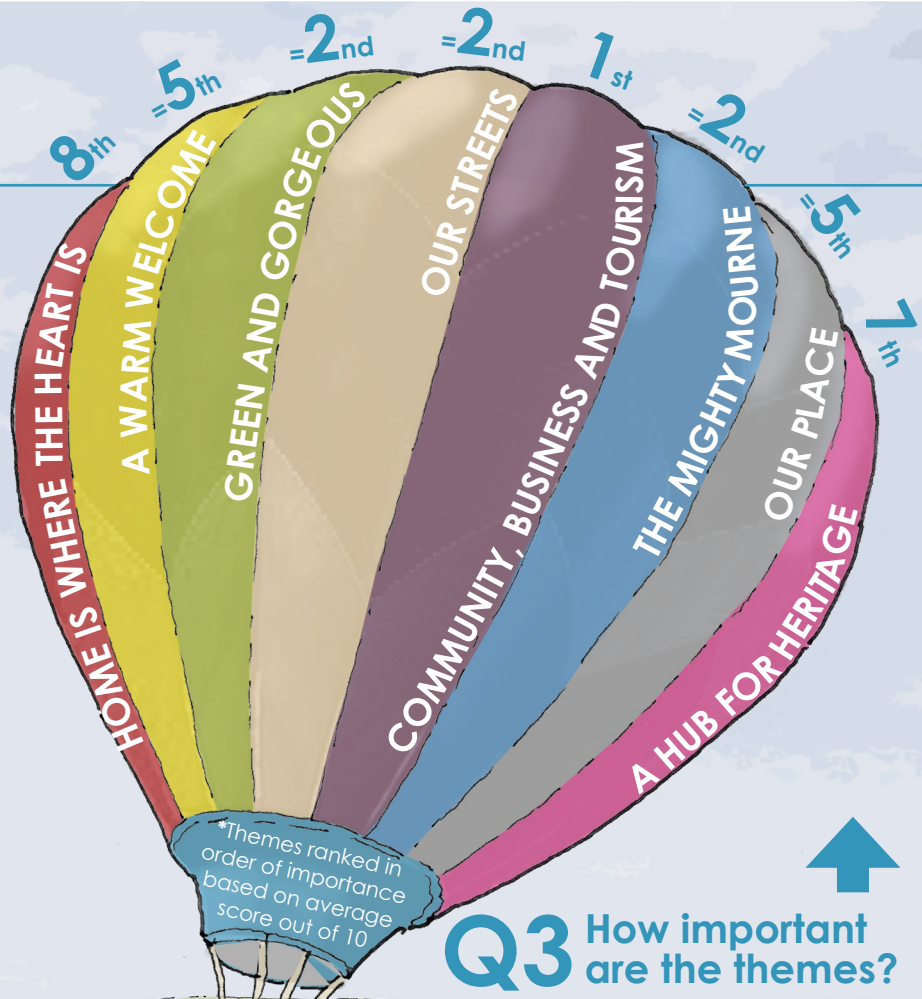


POST CARD

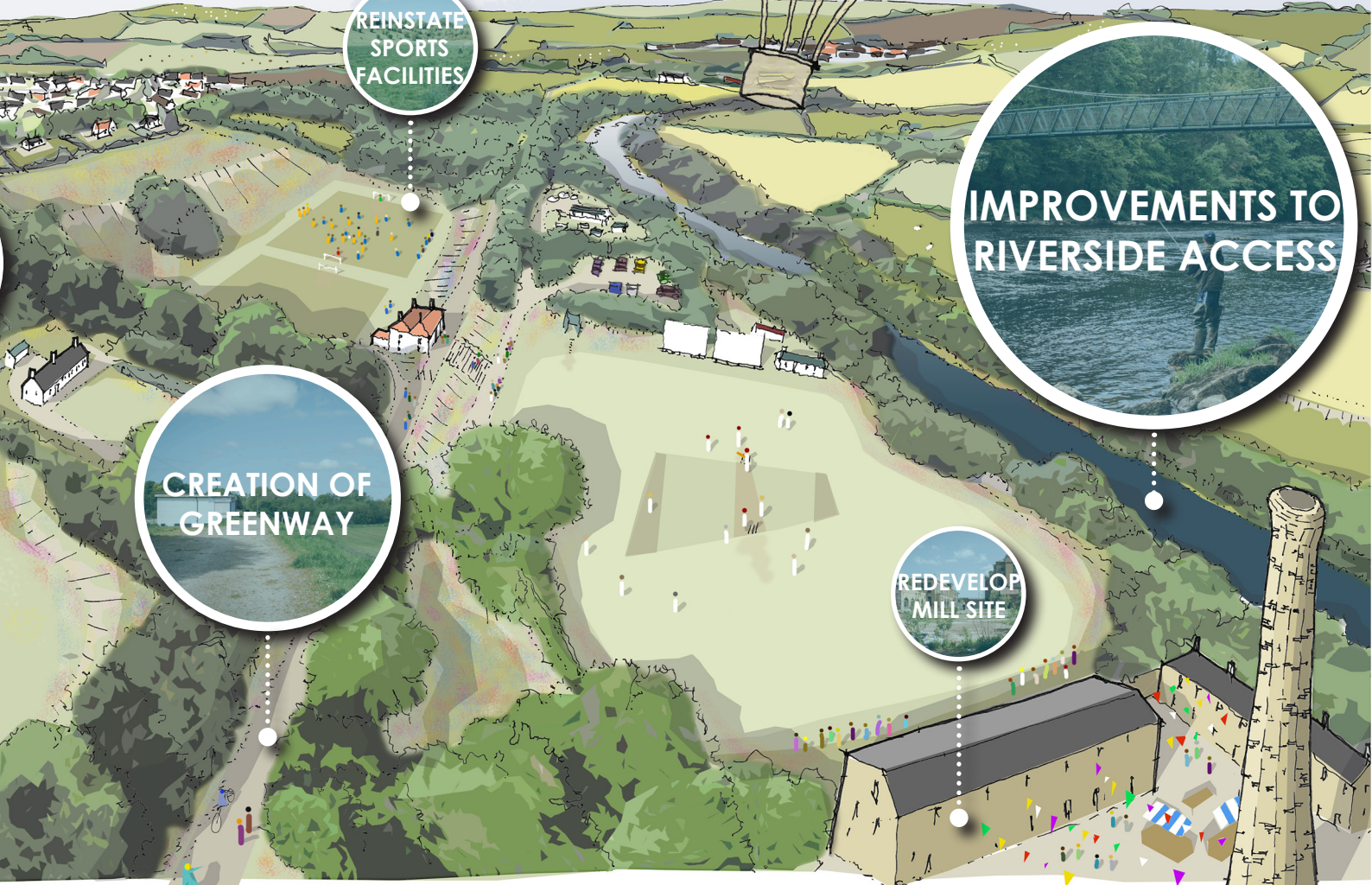
1. Attractive tourist village/
World Heritage Site
2. Existing assets maintained
and improved
3. Welcoming and safe community
to live/work in and be proud of

social cohesion; =4. Improved museum/heritage centre;
=6. More job opportunities; =6. Greater hospitality provision

of place would you like Sion
15 years from now?



Q3 How important are the themes?



**REINSTATE
SPORTS
FACILITIES**

**CREATION OF
GREENWAY**

**REDEVELOP
MILL SITE**

**IMPROVEMENTS TO
RIVERSIDE ACCESS**



The Natural Environment

- More emphasis on the Mourne River
- Provide tourist infrastructure for anglers
- Potential for riverside restaurant
- Bridleway included along proposed greenway
- Consider condition of existing trees and replanting scheme



The Community

- Involve local members of the clergy – enthusiasm for cross community events
- Voluntary schemes to improve the appearance of the village
- Consider acquiring privately owned sites that would benefit the community

4.3.8 What do you like and dislike about Sion Mills?

- Respondents clearly believe that the community spirit is one of the village's best assets, closely followed by the character of its buildings and the beauty of the river and its surroundings. The community is also proud of its local heritage.
- There was a strong and consistent dislike for the volume and speed of traffic along Melmount Road. Many of the other dislikes relate to the appearance of the village including dereliction, the condition of the playing fields, the lack of management in the conservation area and a general lack of upkeep throughout the village.
- There was a noticeable correlation between the respondents pride in the appearance of the village and their frustrations that it is not currently looking its best or making the most of its assets.

4.3.9 What kind of place would you like Sion Mills to be 15 years from now?

- Respondents would clearly like to see the village become a tourist attraction with its existing assets maintained and improved. 5 of the 8 suggestions relate to tourism within the village including an increase in hospitality provision and an associated increase in job opportunities.
- There was also an emphasis on maintaining and improving the existing community spirit with a desire to increase the number of cross-community events.
- It was surprising that only one respondent mentioned reduced traffic volume and speed, particularly given the response to the previous question and the proposed bypass that will impact the village.
- There was a clear emphasis on maintaining and improving the existing village assets as opposed to introducing new developments. This, as in question one, points to a real sense of pride in the village and a desire for it to reach its full potential as a place to visit, live and work.

4.3.10 In regenerating the village, how important are the themes?

- 'Our place', 'A hub for heritage' and 'Home is where the heart is' rank consistently in the bottom three for importance. This is particularly surprising for 'A hub for heritage' given the positive feedback relating to local heritage and building character received from the previous responses.
- Community, business and tourism received the highest score of 10 from all five respondents who scored the themes in this way, reinforcing the importance of community, tourism and job creation that has been highlighted previously in the feedback.
- Again, the importance of the natural surroundings feature prominently with the themes 'The mighty Mourne' and 'Green and Gorgeous' ranked highly. Ranked equally highly were the themes offering improvements to the public realm as respondents see 'The welcome' and 'Our streets' as potential ways of dealing with the existing traffic issues in the village.

4.3.11 Of the potential projects mentioned within the themes, what would be your top 3 priorities for Sion Mills?

- The responses show there is a clear desire to see improvements to riverside access and facilities as a priority. The responses also highlighted an enthusiasm for a greenway project along the disused railway line.
- Four of the top five potential projects can be seen as improvements to the natural environment in an effort to promote tourism and job creation.
- Again, the general upkeep and cleanliness of the village featured prominently in respondents' answers.
- Redevelopment, reinstatement and improvement of existing buildings and facilities were popular answers, specifically relating to the mill, Sion Stables and sports facilities.
- There were also requests for a new play park and a central village square/meeting place, despite 'Home is where the Heart is' scoring low in the previous question.

4.3.12 Do you have any other ideas or suggestions that you feel could assist in regenerating Sion Mills?

- Responses to this question were varied but fall into four categories; The Mill Complex, The Built Environment, The Natural Environment and The Community.
- These categories directly reflect the issues highlighted throughout the feedback with popular responses consistently relating to the traditional built character of the village, its natural surroundings and the local community.
- There were varied suggestions and comments about the future of the mill complex.

4.3.13 The essence of a number of informal discussions which took place with various attendees were recorded. The issues raised were wide and varied. As could be expected, most people wanted to talk about issues that were of direct concern to them and would impact on their physical or social environment.

4.3.14 The masterplan will not be a success if only the loudest voices are heard. One of the keys to the success of the eventual masterplan will be ensuring all members of the community appreciate the benefits of proposals that may not appear to directly benefit their own cause or vision. It is important that the community as a whole gets behind the final masterplan in its entirety and is made aware of how each proposal will directly or indirectly benefit them.



The public engagement event held in the education room at Sion Stables

5.0 Part A conclusion

5.0.1 To fully inform the completion of a Masterplan, Part A includes a realistic assessment of:

- the causes of the current weaknesses
- its distinctive attributes as a place
- the potential opportunities of the future
- the barriers to delivery that may have to be overcome

5.0.2 This assessment identified a number of physical and social issues where varying levels of intervention are required. Part A then goes on to suggest a vision, objectives and a range of potential projects which could address these issues. Elected representatives, and the general public were then consulted in relation to these suggestions which will inform the next part of the Masterplan.

5.0.3 A sustainable future for Sion Mills will require the creation of a village infrastructure that allows the tourism, community and recreation potential of the area to be realised - as a result boosting the local economy, enhancing retail and commercial opportunities for residents and providing a thriving hub for the community.

5.0.4 The key will be in contributing to the creation of an environment where there is sufficient confidence to generate investment, particularly by the private sector, on a substantial scale. Derry City and Strabane District Council will have an important role in facilitating such investment by using all the skills and resources available to it. There are many direct actions which the relevant government departments and agencies listed in this report can take to aid the Council in implementing the masterplan, though none will be more vital than facilitating and promoting private investment.

5.0.5 The masterplan will assist the Council in the application of its planning responsibilities, specifically in their current preparation of the Local Development Plan.

***Holm Field** - The historic home of Sion Mills Cricket Club and scene of a famous victory for Ireland over the West Indies in 1969. Recently access to the pitch has been restricted, causing an important heritage and social asset to become neglected*

5.0.6 The success of the masterplan will be enhanced if all stakeholders in the wider area - public, private and community - work together to actively and enthusiastically pursue the implementation of the masterplan. It will greatly benefit from an influential group with a deep commitment to the area and with the contacts to make things happen, working alongside dedicated professionals on the ground, active on a daily basis in promoting progress. They in turn will require the necessary resources, financial and otherwise, at least until a positive momentum of change can be achieved.

5.0.7 The Sion Mills masterplan must value and harness the distinctive attributes of the village. It retains a unique character within the Northern Ireland context with many natural and historic assets that must be maintained and communicated as a selling point, whether to potential residents, owners of local businesses, visitors or those who use its services.

5.0.8 While the challenges are formidable, the opportunities for Sion Mills are great. The masterplan defines an achievable vision and the existing support fostered through the community engagement process must continue to produce the energy and commitment required to deliver the proposals effectively.



Stage two

Design, projects, implementation



6.0 The design

6.1 The concept

6.1.1 The conceptual masterplan presented at the public engagement event will form the basis of the final masterplan design. The concept is a simple colour-coded representation of what the eight themes relate to and where they can be implemented within the village. Though simplistic in its appearance, the concept begins to plot interventions geographically and form relationships between the themes. For example, the River Mourne and Melmound Road are identifiable and the concept begins to illustrate a link between the two. The concept also begins to suggest the location of the heart of the village and pinpoints important heritage assets – some close to the village centre, others close to the river. By providing a basic illustration of the themes, the conceptual masterplan begins to raise issues that will require resolution. For example, the heart of the village is disconnected from the River Mourne and there are large areas of green space that aren't currently accessible to the community. The conceptual masterplan is an important tool in the masterplanning process and moving forward the design should be an evolution of the initial concepts illustrated here.

6.2 The masterplan

The masterplan's vision:

"15 years from now, in 2034, Sion Mills has secured and enhanced its unique heritage features and has surpassed its previous zenith of over a century ago. It is regarded as a particularly desirable place to live, work and to visit for purposes of leisure and recreation.

A place that embraces its past, is progressive, connected and complementary, where economic, physical and social restoration creates a vibrant and distinct character, with an attractive contemporary environment that respects the village's industrial origins and character, and is at the centre of community."

6.2.1 The Sion Mills masterplan provides a framework to achieve the above vision. It does this by breaking down the vision into objectives and then themes as set out in stage one of this report (and overleaf).

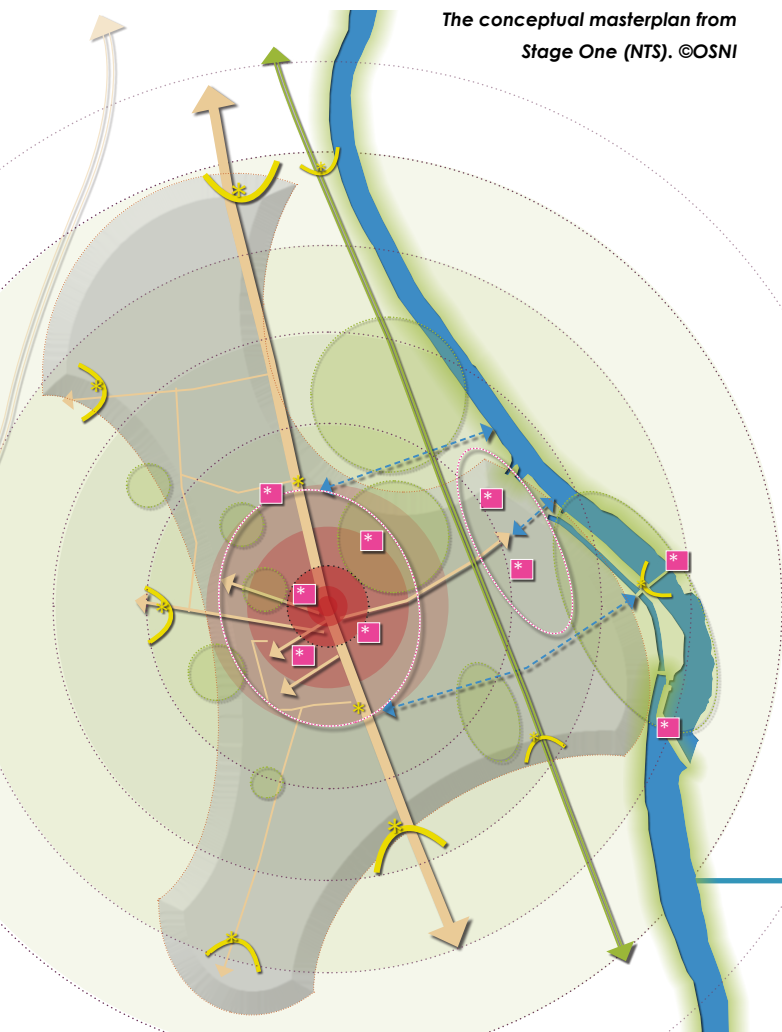
6.2.2 Developed through an analysis of the opportunities and challenges that exist in the village, eight key themes emerged as particular areas of focus for achieving a desirable future for Sion Mills.

6.2.3 Finally, a number of potential projects relating to each of the themes are put forward that can be seen as stepping stones towards achieving the vision over the next 15 years. **It should be noted that all potential projects will likely contribute to achieving the objectives set out in the **Community, Business and Tourism** theme.**

6.2.4 This stage two report describes the masterplan in detail through text, maps and illustrations before culminating in the action plan in the implementation section of this report. The Sion Mills masterplan is made up of three elements; the base plan, the key action sites and the potential projects.

THE BASE PLAN (see p119)

This is an evolution of the conceptual masterplan. The base plan is a colour-coded, scaled map of the village and illustrates existing and potential routes, buildings, open spaces, designated areas etc. Its relationship to the conceptual masterplan can clearly be seen when comparing the two but the information has been developed – green spaces now take their geographic form, roads and pathways follow realistic routes and trees are shown, illustrating the village's distinctive leafy character.



The conceptual masterplan from Stage One (NTS). ©OSNI

KEY ACTION SITES (see p118)

These are sites located throughout the village that may be developed over the next 15 years to help achieve the masterplan vision. The key action sites indicated are a progression and rationalisation of those identified in stage one, following community engagement and feedback. The boundaries of these sites are overlaid onto the base plan and interlinked by existing and potential routes to form the basis of a connected village community.

THE POTENTIAL PROJECTS (see p120-152)

Finally, each key action site plays host to a number of potential projects. These projects are suggested buildings, infrastructure, groups, activities, documents, databases etc. that may be implemented to help achieve the masterplan vision. Potential projects realise ownership issues, cost restrictions and programme constraints but suggest methods of delivery, potential budgets and estimated timescales to provide an aspirational and coherent action plan for Sion Mills over the next 15 years. Potential timescales and indicative costs have been identified for each project:

Potential Timescale:

Short - within 5 years
 Medium - 5 to 10 years
 Long - beyond 10 years

Potential Indicative Cost:

Low - < £1m
 Medium - between £1m & £5m
 High - > £5m

A

**A warm welcome**

Creating a sense of arrival to the village for locals and visitors alike.

B

**Our streets**

Managing traffic and creating a better environment for pedestrians and cyclists.

C

**Home is where the heart is**

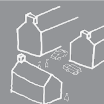
Establishing a defined centre for the village.

D

**A hub for heritage**

Promoting the village's historic features.

E

**Our place**

Providing new homes, supporting uses and developing growth.

F

**The mighty Mournie**

Improving the Mournie River as a place for people and wildlife.

G

**Green and gorgeous**

Safeguarding the village's natural setting and enhancing the environment.

H

**Community, business and tourism**

Supporting the community and assisting in the development of business and tourism

Key action sites

- 01** Establish public access to playing fields and cricket pitch, improve maintenance and provide associated facilities such as pavillion, changing rooms and car parking

D E G H
- 02** Improve the quality of the "Stables" experience for the enjoyment of local residents and visitors as a community facility and a heritage attraction to ensure long term sustainability

B D H
- 03** Realise the potential of the historic house, gate lodge and gardens

D H
- 04** Realise the potential of existing offices/community workshop spaces to ensure long term sustainability

D E H
- 05** Realise the potential of the mill complex as a unique heritage asset for tourism, commercial and/or residential uses

B D E G H
- 06** Potential development of riverside public realm as an extension of the Mourne Riverside Walks, possibly creating a market square, riverside park and associated pavilion

E F G H
- 07** Potential enhancements to existing Mourne Riverside Walks including improved access, signage and greater connectivity to the village, mill complex and greenway

F G H
- 08** Existing telephone exchange to be accommodated along with some potential development associated to former railway station/greenway/River Mourne such as a visitor centre, cafe, public WC's etc.

E G H
- 09** Potential residential development of existing committed site including access routes to river and greenway

B E F G H

- 10** Improvements to existing public amenity space to create neighbourhood play park

G H
- 11** Potential improvements to roads and public realm to create a safer, more efficient drop off/pick up area for Sion Mills Primary School

B H
- 12** Potential improvements to existing retail parade and the possible relocation of public WC's

B C E H
- 13** Potential village park with possible focal point to create village centre with associated public realm improvements to connect site with surrounding buildings and routes

B C D G H
- 14** Potential community growing space

G H
- 15** Potential residential/commercial development including improvements to road junction

B E H
- PR** Potential Public Realm Improvements

A B C D E F G H
- CA** Potential Conservation Area Improvements

B D E H
- GR** Potential Greenway

B D E F G H
- GA** Potential Settlement and Conservation Area Gateways

A D E H

The above illustrates how each Key Action Site could potentially be developed and the masterplan themes achieved as a consequence



Key

- ① Key Action Site Reference
- ⬜ Key Action Site Perimeter
- ⬜ Settlement Limit
(As defined in the Strabane Area Plan 1986-2001)
- ⬜ Conservation Area
(As defined in the Strabane Area Plan 1986-2001)
- Existing Buildings
- Potential Heritage Asset Improvements
- Settlement Limit
- Committed Site
(Commencement of previous approval Ref: J/2005/0320/F)
- Proposed A5 Western Transport Corridor
- Roads
- Primary Public Realm Improvements
- Secondary Public Realm Improvements
- Tertiary Public Realm Improvements
- Greenway
- Pedestrian Routes to River
- Gateway (Settlement Limit)
- Gateway (Conservation Area)
- Car Parking
- River
- Green Space
- All-Weather Sports Pitches
- Trees



7.0 Potential projects



A warm welcome

Creating a sense of arrival to the village for locals and visitors alike.

A

7.1.1 An initial analysis of Sion Mills identified and recognised that first impressions of the village were being let down by featureless entrances to the village, particularly to the north. The 'warm welcome' theme has been developed in response to this identified issue, with the intention of creating a sense of arrival to the village for locals and visitors alike.

7.1.2 The local community appreciate the importance of a welcoming arrival and so, first impressions and the quality of arrival experience in the village are viewed as key considerations for the Masterplan. This theme can assist in articulating and communicating the identity of Sion Mills in a coordinated manner through the identification of village entrance and exit points and the creation of new gateway features. Gateway features and welcome signage can help convey messages to residents, passers-by, tourists and potential investors. Appropriate signage and associated features can also assist in the identification and promotion of Sion Mills Conservation Area and the industrial heritage that exists throughout the village.

A

GA

Potential Settlement and Conservation Area Gateways

Install new gateway features at the settlement limits through the balanced use of public art, signage, lighting and street trees. This would include welcome features along the primary vehicle route (Melmount Road) and secondary vehicle routes (Seein Road, Main Street and Primrose Park). Pedestrian 'welcome' signage could also be installed along the Swinging Bridge and on the potential Greenway.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE:	Short
INDICATIVE COST:	Low
CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS:	DCSDC, DfI, DfC

Potential 'welcome' projects

A

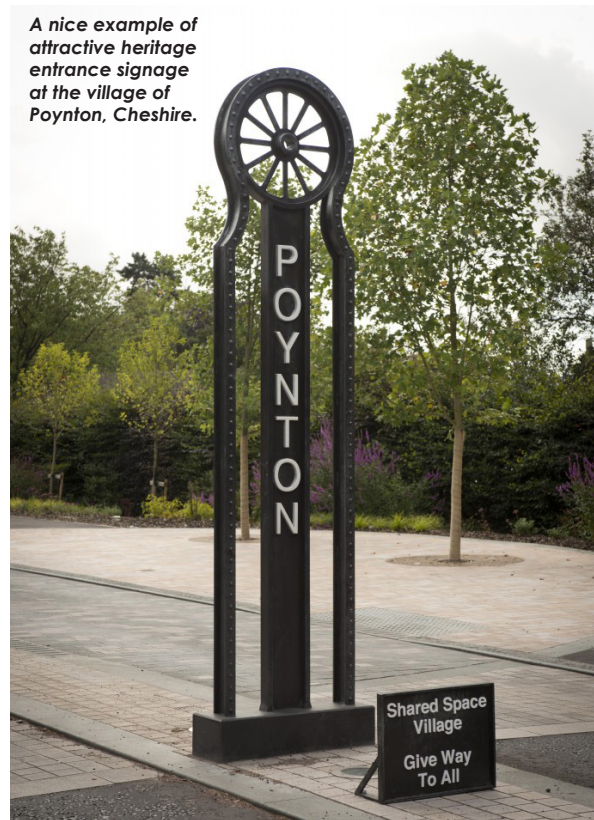
PR

Potential Public Realm Improvements

Use Public Realm features such as raised tables and changes in road surface to denote arrival into the village.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE:	Short
INDICATIVE COST:	Low
CENTRAL STAKEOLDERS:	DCSDC, DfI

A nice example of attractive heritage entrance signage at the village of Poynton, Cheshire.



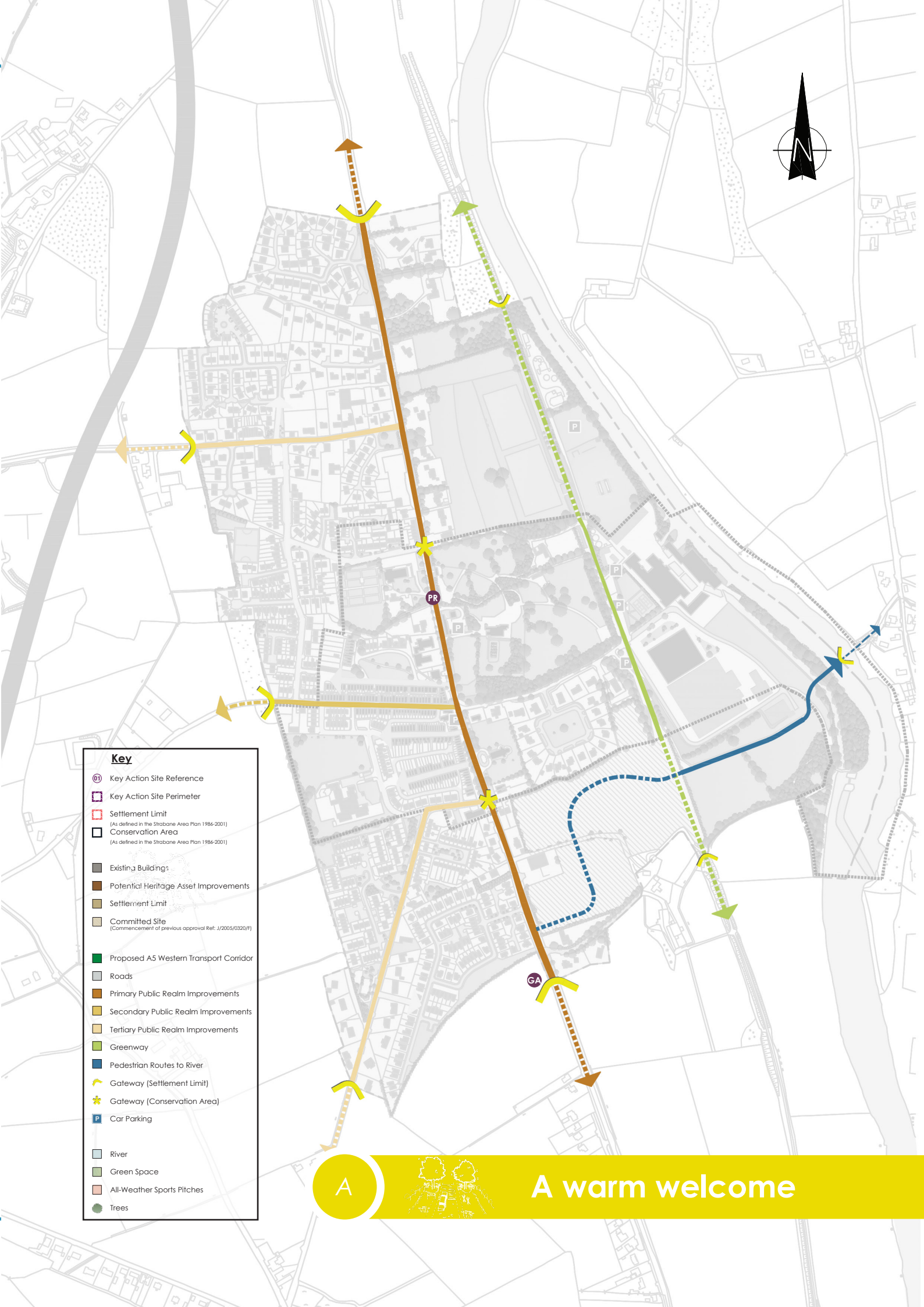


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- ▭ Pedestrian Routes to River
- ↪ Gateway (Settlement Limit)
- ✱ Gateway (Conservation Area)
- P Car Parking
- ▭ River
- ▭ Green Space
- ▭ All-Weather Sports Pitches
- Trees



A warm welcome





Our streets

Managing traffic and creating a better environment for pedestrians and cyclists.

B



Albert Place - Public realm improvements and a potential one-way system may help to alleviate parking congestion and improve pedestrian safety in an area close to Sion Mills Primary School. The potential public realm improvements as shown in the above sketch should be consistent throughout the village, including Albert Place, Main Street, Church Square, Mill Lane, Melmount Road etc..

7.2.1 From the outset of the Masterplan process, issues surrounding traffic levels and a lack of balance between motorized vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists have been apparent. 'Our streets' targets the transformation of the Melmount Road from a road to a street, encouraging drivers to pass through with care, creating a better environment for pedestrians and cyclists. The theme also targets improvements to the streetscape, particularly within the Conservation Area.

7.2.2 Residents within the village have demonstrated a strong and consistent dislike for the volume and speed

of the traffic along Melmount Road. The 'Our streets' theme ranked highly among respondents feedback during the consultation process with proposals for enhanced connections for pedestrians and cyclists and the implementation of greenways positively received by the local community. This theme is viewed as one of the potential methods of dealing with the existing traffic issues in the village, and so, will play a key role within the development of the Masterplan going forward. The themes key focus is to promote a more pedestrian and cycle friendly environment and the enhancement of existing heritage assets.



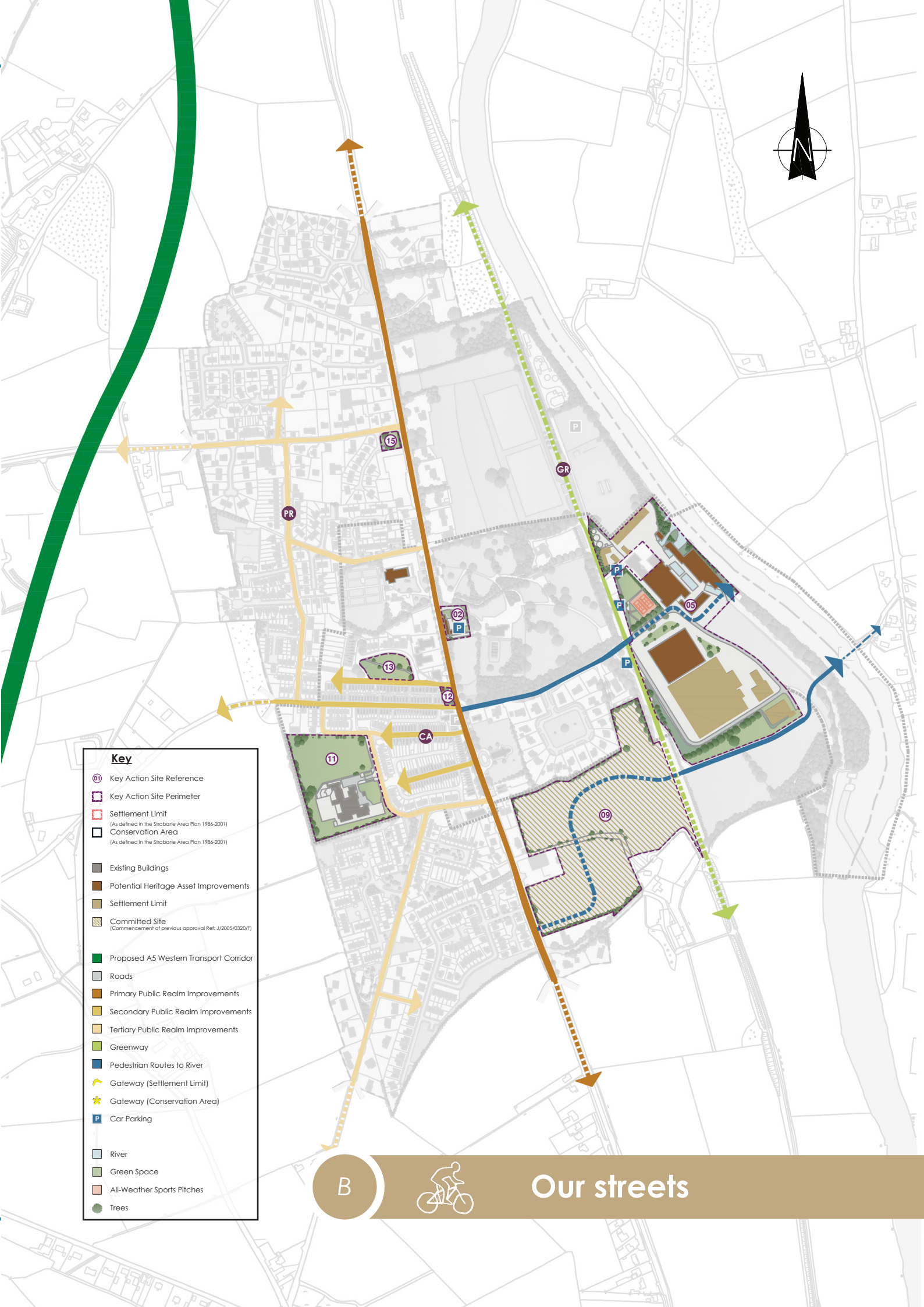
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- ▭ Green Space
- ▭ All-Weather Sports Pitches
- ▭ Trees

B



Our streets



Potential 'our streets' projects

B 02 *Sion Stables*

Install additional pedestrian crossings on Melmount Road particularly at the north to help with connecting Sion Stables Museum with the village. A pedestrian crossing would allow visitors to cross Melmount Road safely without having to walk to the existing crossing at Main Street. Furthermore, the crossing would make Sion Stables more accessible to residents who live in the North of the village.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Medium**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Low**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **Dfl, Community**

B 05 *The Mill complex*

Implement a Public Realm Improvement Scheme along Mill Lane with the aim of creating a more pedestrian/cycle friendly route to the Mill Complex and River Mourne (F-PR). The scheme may include speed reduction measures, signage, lighting, surface artwork etc. designed to promote the heritage of the Mill Complex.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Medium**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Medium**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, Dfl**

B 09 *Committed residential site*

Facilitate future road access from the site towards the river and adjacent sites to the east including the Mill complex (05) by renewed consideration of an existing approval. The future implementation of such a route would ease traffic pressure on Mill Lane (which would otherwise be the sole access to the Mill complex) and create a better environment for pedestrians and cyclists.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Long**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Medium**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, Dfl, Private**

B 11 *Sion Mills Primary School*

Improve public realm and drop off/pick up facilities at Sion Mills Primary School. Proposals such as the creation of a shared surface public realm and the implementation of a one-way system along West Way/West View Terrace, Albert Place and New Street (A-CA) could be investigated. A one-way system could allow for more formalised areas of on-street parking and the creation of a dedicated drop-off/pick-up zone.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Medium**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Medium**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, Dfl, EA**

B 12 *Existing retail parade and public WC's*

Improvements to road geometry directly outside the existing retail parade to create a more "intimate" environment for cyclists and pedestrians and where vehicles are less dominant. Also consider improvements as part of a larger public realm scheme (B-PR) which could provide shared surface treatments and level access parking bays.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Short**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Medium**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, DAERA, Dfl**

B 13 *Church Square*

Improve the public realm environment in and around this village green. for example by creating a shared surface at the adjacent roads, and upgrading of pedestrian route to and through the green would better connect the Church Square green space to the wider village community and provide better access for pedestrians.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Short**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Low**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, DAERA**

B **15** *Site at Primrose Pk./Melmount Rd. junction*

Consider improvements to the road junction in order to improve the flow of traffic and pedestrian safety. The proposed A5 western transport corridor is likely to increase traffic emerging from Primrose Park on to Melmount Road. The proximity of this site to the junction means that it could be used to facilitate widening of the junction or an increase of the vision splays if required.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Medium**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Medium**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **Dfl, Private**

B **PR** *Potential Public Realm Improvements*

Implement improvements to public realm throughout the village streets. This should involve the maintenance/replacement of footpath surfaces and street furniture including bins, benches, bollards and railings at increasing intervention towards the heart of the village (i.e. Melmount Road/Main Street etc.) . The improvements would provide a better environment for pedestrians and cyclists.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Medium**
 INDICATIVE COST: **High**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, DAERA, Dfl**

B **GR** *Potential Greenway*

Implementation of a Greenway along the disused railway line. This would contribute to The North West Greenway Network which is a Council-led project to identify and implement potential greenway and cycle routes linking communities. It would provide a safe, vehicle-free route between the village, Strabane and Victoria Bridge.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Medium**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Medium**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, DAERA, Private**

B **CA** *Potential Conservation Area Improvements*

Investigate, in conjunction with local residents/businesses, the potential for vehicular route improvements (to improve the flow of traffic - i.e. a one way system? - and on-street parking provision in the conservation area). The Millworker's cottages are a defining element of the conservation area and they line a number of streets in the village centre. However, the character of these streets is being compromised by the volume of parked cars. Where the issue is particularly severe along Albert Place, cars parked on the footpath can limit access for prams, wheelchairs and mobility scooters. The issue is exacerbated by the proximity of the Primary School and the lack of formalised pedestrian crossing spaces between parked cars increases the risk to pupils making their way to and from the school. A one-way traffic system along West Way/West View Terrace, Albert Place and New Street may allow for more formalised areas of on-street parking with specific pedestrian crossing points between parking bays. Limiting on-street parking along Main Street to one side of the road would allow for two-way traffic to flow without obstruction. Amendments to on-street parking should only be made as the result of a thorough community engagement process and detailed traffic and parking assessments. However, these improvements could provide a safer environment for vehicles and pedestrians, as well as improving the appearance of an area that is a defining characteristic of Sion Mills.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Medium**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Medium**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **Dfl, EA**



Home is where the heart is

Establishing a defined centre for the village.

C

7.3.1 The lack of a distinct focal area at the heart of the village was identified within the initial analysis of weaknesses associated with Sion Mills. This can contribute to a lack of vibrancy within the centre of the village at present. The centre of the village could be better connected to other key areas within the village, with pedestrian and cycle connections improved. 'Home is where the heart is' intends to initiate and establish this defined centre for the village. New and improved community facilities and services within this defined centre will bring the life back into the streets and create a sense of place within the central area of the village.

7.3.2 Although not ranked highly in terms of its importance relative to other key themes, the local community understand and support the need for an established, attractive and vibrant central area within Sion Mills. A potential project which has gathered particular attention within this theme was the construction of a new playground space at a preferred site central to the village. Support for this project was demonstrated with the implementation of this playground space providing the potential catalyst for further development and regeneration of the village.

Potential 'heart' projects

C 12 Existing retail parade and public WC's

(A-12) and update signage in order to define the site as part of the village centre. This would include improved tourist information map, multi-directional signage and communication facilities – telephone, internet, interactive map etc. Existing phone boxes could be replaced and offer contemporary services, though their appearance must be carefully considered. The site would be further defined as the heart of the village by the implementation of a shared surface public realm scheme (C-PR).

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Medium**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Low**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: DCSDC, Dfl, TNI, BT

C 13 Church Square

Install 'village green' artwork signage and a clear multi-directional sign posting to indicate the central location of the site. The provision of street furniture (in accordance with B-13), particularly the use of seating to provide a clear gathering space.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Short**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Low**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: DCSDC

C PR Potential Public Realm Improvements

Expand on general public realm improvements throughout the village (B-PR) to create a shared surface at the heart of the village. A shared surface would provide a clear illustration of the village heart to visitors by using a change in surface colour/material (i.e. cobbles or similar) to denote the village centre.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Long**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Medium**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: DCSDC, DAERA, Dfl



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- Trees



Home is where the heart is



A hub for heritage

Promoting the village's historic features.

D

7.4.2 The Masterplan recognises that for Sion Mills to thrive, the industrial heritage and distinctive architecture must be protected and supported. This theme has been established and developed to help support this unique heritage.

7.4.2 The consultation process has demonstrated that the community is proud of the local heritage and built character within the village. There is a noticeable correlation between the communities pride in the appearance of the village and their frustrations that

it is not currently looking its best or making the most of its assets. Many participants of the public consultation envisaged Sion Mills as a future World Heritage Site and for this to become a reality, the unique heritage of Sion Mills must be carefully considered and utilised.

7.4.3 'A hub for heritage' targets the conservation of historic building fabric alongside the identification of new, sustainable uses for old buildings and how these buildings and the landscape can be looked after, utilised and sustained into the future.

Potential 'heritage' projects

D 01 Brae / Holm Field

Installation / refreshing of interpretive signage at the Holm Field cricket pitch to provide information on the history of the site including the famous Ireland victory against the West Indies in 1969. Connected to the Sion Mills Heritage Trail (D-PR) via the Greenway (B-GR).

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Short**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Low**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, Private**

D 02 Sion Stables

Add to the existing exhibits and events on offer at Sion Stables Museum and improve advertising of the offering to the local community and tourists to ensure the village maintains a sustainable heritage attraction. Connect to the Sion Mills Heritage Trail (D-PR).

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Short**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Low**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, TNI, Community**

D 03 Sion House, gate lodge and gardens

Optimise heritage, tourism and recreational potential of the Listed Building and historic gardens, in partnership with the owner, as an attraction for locals and visitors alike (e.g. accommodation, wedding venue, guided walks/tours, activities, inclusion on a heritage trail (D-PR)).

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Long**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Medium**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, Private, TNI, DfC**

D 04 The Maintenance Block at the Mill complex

Maintain the heritage asset and ensure it is habitable for business and community use. The priority is for these units to be occupied, therefore providing use, surveillance, maintenance and security to a heritage asset. Installation of interpretive signage and connection to the Sion Mills Heritage Trail (D-PR) via the Greenway (B-GR) will help promote the heritage of the Mill.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Medium**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Low**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, Community**



Key

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- Trees

D



A hub for heritage

D **05** *The Mill complex*

Optimise heritage, tourism, commercial, residential and recreational potential of the Listed Buildings, in partnership with the owner, as a important publically accessible place in the village and an attraction/experience for locals and vistors alike (e.g. accommodation, residences, work spaces, retail units, community facilities, visitor attractions using the existing listed buildings - inc. museum, guided walks/tours, activities, inclusion on a heritage trail (D-PR).

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Long**
 INDICATIVE COST: **High**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, Private, Community, TNI, DfC**

D **13** *Church Square*

Promote the heritage of Church Square by installing / refreshing interpretive signage relating to the surrounding buildings – possibly old photographs showing the Men’s Institute, Presbyterian Church, the Old School, The Bungalows and the Millworker’s Cottages. Consider creating a focal point to the green space relating to the heritage of the village such as a statue, water feature or performance space.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Short**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Low**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, Community**

D **PR** *Potential Public Realm Improvements*

Surface artwork designed into the public realm could be used to denote a Heritage Trail throughout the village. The Heritage Trail should be well publicised and accompanied by literature, online database and mobile application, as well as physical street maps and signage throughout the village. The public realm can be used to identify the heritage assets of the village and make them more accessible to pedestrians. For example, a shared surface could provide crossing points along Melmount Road, linking various heritage assets. These crossing points would provide level access and be identified by the use of different materials linking to the heritage of the village.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Medium**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Low**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, DfI, Community, DfC**

D **CA** Potential Conservation Area Improvements

Define a Housing Improvement Area and investigate Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) funding with the aim of restoring the Millworker's cottages to their original appearance. Over time, minor inappropriate alterations (windows, doors, satellite dishes etc.) have had an adverse impact on the original character of the buildings. It is important to take steps to rectify these alterations as the Millworker's cottages contribute significantly to the unique character of the village. A financial incentive for private owners to make these alterations has proved a successful method of regeneration across Scotland. Various Housing Associations have also had success in Northern Ireland by purchasing and restoring heritage properties (Rosetta Cottages, Belfast by Hearth/Clanmil) which in turn can influence private owners of neighbouring properties to restore their own in a similar manner. The implementation of a similar CARS scheme and the restoration of a prominent Millworker's cottage (perhaps to form a living museum) would enhance one of the most significant heritage assets of the village. Furthermore investigate potential of a regional / national status for the Conservation Area, similar but probably on a smaller scale to New Lanark and its UNESCO World Heritage Site status.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Medium**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Medium**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **NIHE, DfC, Housing Associations, Private, Community, TNI**

D **GR** Potential Greenway

The Greenway would follow the route of the disused Derry-Londonderry to Omagh railway line, an important remnant of the areas once important railway heritage. Signage and artwork should be used to identify this heritage and locate the site of the former railway station and railway footbridge etc. Historic images and first-hand accounts could be positioned to allow visitors to interpret what the area would have looked and felt like prior to the closure of the railway line.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Medium**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Low**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, Community**

D **GA** Potential Settlement and Conservation Area Gateways

Install 'heritage' signage of a cohesive and appropriate design along Melmount Road where it crosses the Conservation Area boundary. Signage should incorporate sculptural artwork relating to the heritage of the village. This signage will help define the village centre and promote the heritage of the village to users passing through along Melmount Road.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Short**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Low**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, DfI, Community, DfC**

Herdman's Mill - A diagrammatic plan of how the mill complex developed over the past centuries.

KEY

MID 19TH CENTURY DEVELOPMENT

- The Entrance Gateway - 1835 (01)
- The Main Mill - 1853-55 (02)

LATE 19TH CENTURY DEVELOPMENT

- The Cricket Pitch - 1864 (03)
- The 'Old' Mill - 1867 (04)
- The Chimney Stack - 1877 (05)
- The Manager's House - 1881 (06)
- The Stables Outbuilding - 1881-1900 (07)
- The Recreation Hall - 1882 (08)
- The Workshops - 1884 (09)
- The Workshops - 1888 (10)

EARLY 20TH CENTURY DEVELOPMENT

- The Turbine Section - 1900 (11)
- The Workshops - 1907 (12)
- The Workshops - 1907 (13)
- The Old Power House - 1919 (14)
- The Bowling Green and Tennis Courts - 1935 (15)

MID 20TH CENTURY DEVELOPMENT

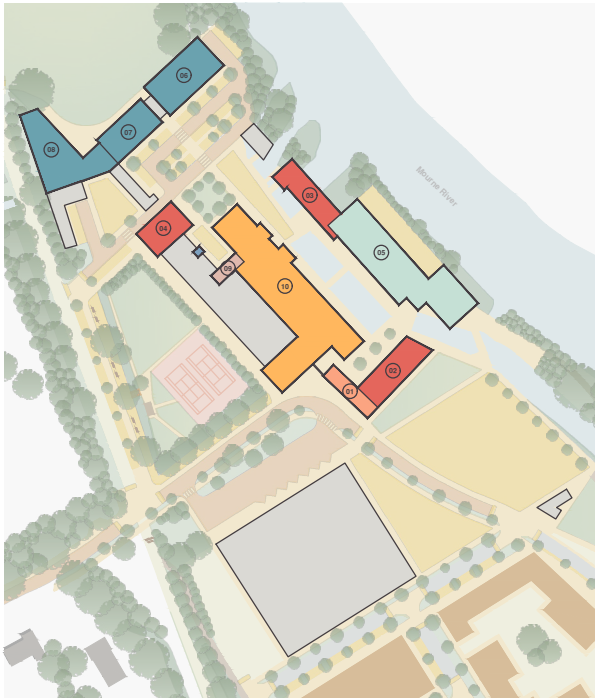
- The New Mill - 1987-88 (16)





GROUND FLOOR

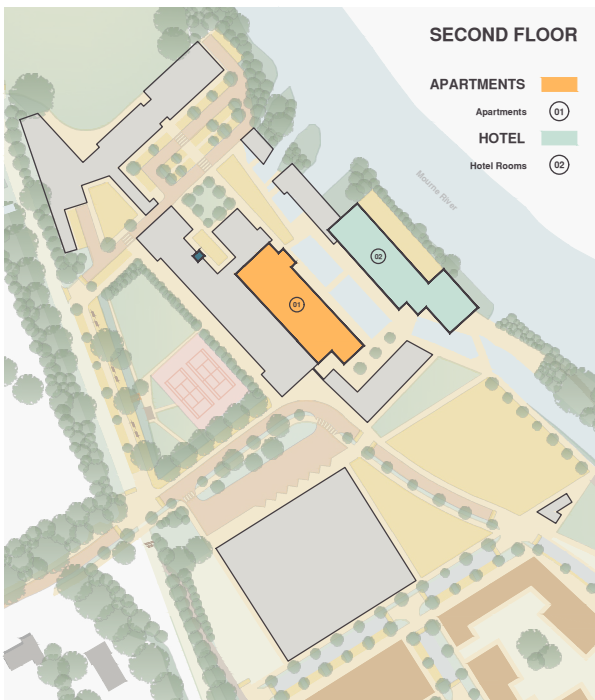
Visitor Parking	(A)	SPORTS FACILITIES	
Coach Parking	(B)	Multi-Use Sports Hall	(15)
Riverside Market Square	(C)	Offices/Changing Facilities	(16)
		Main Entrance	(17)
The Entrance Gateway	(01)	Exhibition Space/Function Room	(18)
RECREATIONAL		Kitchen/Stores	(19)
Tourist Information and Museum	(02)	Classrooms	(20)
New Pavilion	(03)	Bowling Green	(21)
Spa, Gym and Fitness Suite	(04)	Tennis Courts	(22)
FOOD & DRINK		Boathouse/Water Sports Centre	(23)
Museum Cafe	(05)	COMMUNITY	
Hotel Restaurant	(06)	Multi-Functional Room	(24)
Bistro	(07)	Citizens Advice	(25)
OFFICE		Multi-Use Community Space	(26)
Office Units	(08)	RETAIL	
HOTEL		Craft Units	(27)
Function Room	(09)	Indoor Craft Market	(28)
Hotel Lobby	(10)	Farm Shop	(29)
Terrace	(11)	Retail Units	(30)
LIGHT INDUSTRIAL		CAR PARKING	
Turbine House	(12)	Residents Car Park	(31)
The Old Power House	(13)	APARTMENTS	
Light Industrial Units	(14)	Apartments Lobby	(32)



FIRST FLOOR

RECREATIONAL	
Museum	(01)
OFFICE	
Office Units	(02)
Office Units	(03)
Office Units	(04)
HOTEL	
Hotel Rooms	(05)
SPORTS FACILITIES	
Multi-Use Sports Hall	(06)
Cricket Pavilion	(07)
Function Room	(08)
FOOD & DRINK	
Bistro	(09)
APARTMENTS	
Apartments	(10)

The potential of Herdman's Mill
 - A diagrammatic concept plan of one possible option for the comprehensive redevelopment of the historical Mill complex. (Please note that this is for indicative purposes only and has been produced by GM Design to merely identify a range of potential uses and the synergy between them and is entirely subject to the owners, planning and other statutory approvals).



SECOND FLOOR

APARTMENTS	
Apartments	(01)
HOTEL	
Hotel Rooms	(02)



THIRD AND FOURTH FLOORS

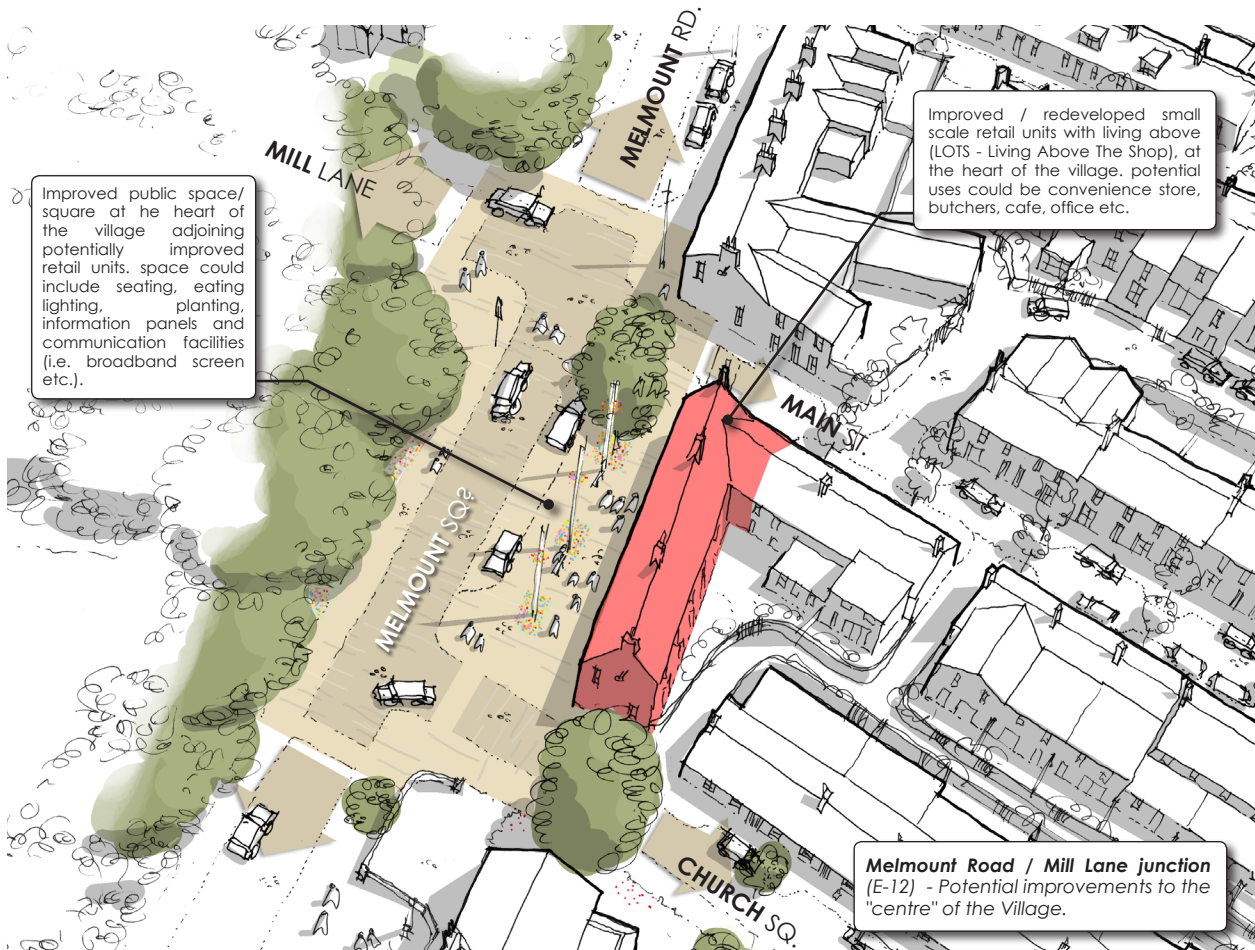
APARTMENTS	
Apartments Rooftop Amenity Space	(01)



Our place

Providing new homes, supporting uses and developing growth.

E



7.5.1 'Our place' identifies opportunities for future growth within Sion Mills. The extent of this future growth is critically linked to village character and sustainability. Sion Mills has historically been synonymous with Herdsman's Mill and the associated industrial character. This unique connection should not be forgotten, it should be developed and sustained alongside the provision of new homes and the support of appropriate uses.

7.5.2 Within the community, there is a clear emphasis on maintaining and improving the existing village assets as opposed to introducing new developments which suggests a real sense of pride in the village and a desire to reach its full potential as a place to visit, live and work.

The general maintenance and cleanliness of the village, together with the redevelopment and improvement of existing buildings, has been considered a priority by the community and this theme will focus on these priorities.

7.5.3 To ensure that the village's distinctive character is retained and, where possible, enhanced, sensitive management of any growth is necessary. Potential projects and developments should be sympathetic to the village, including its distinctive character and rural setting. Appropriate growth can support existing residents, businesses and services, attract investment, business opportunities and visitors and sustain the village for future generations.



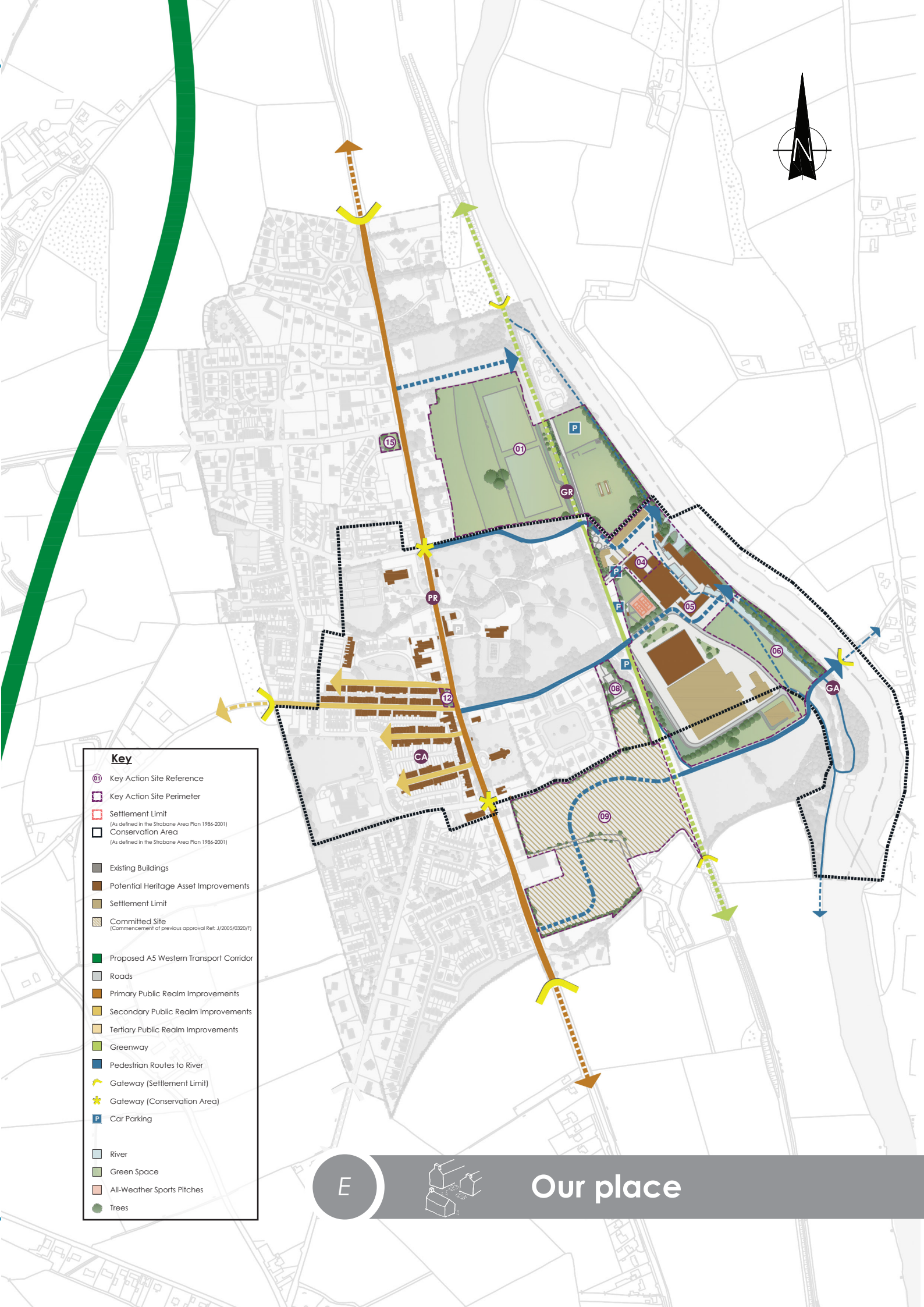
Key

- 01 Key Action Site Reference
- Key Action Site Perimeter
- Settlement Limit
(As defined in the Strabane Area Plan 1986-2001)
- Conservation Area
(As defined in the Strabane Area Plan 1986-2001)
- Existing Buildings
- Potential Heritage Asset Improvements
- Settlement Limit
- Committed Site
(Commencement of previous approval Ref: J/2005/0320/F)
- Proposed A5 Western Transport Corridor
- Roads
- Primary Public Realm Improvements
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- Tertiary Public Realm Improvements
- Greenway
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- Gateway (Conservation Area)
- Car Parking
- River
- Green Space
- All-Weather Sports Pitches
- Trees

E



Our place



Potential 'place' projects

E **01** Brae / Holm Field

Develop the existing facilities to provide a multi-use building that facilitates and promotes use of the playing fields and cricket pitch. This building could include changing rooms, showers and toilets as well as refreshment and viewing facilities. The building may be proposed to incorporate other potential projects such as a Cycle Station (E-GR). Vehicle access and car parking facilities must be carefully considered as part of the proposal as they are required for successful use of the site but must not become dominant in what is an extensively vehicle-free zone. A successful proposal will encourage recreational use of the site.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Medium**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Medium**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, Private**

E **04** The Maintenance Block at the Mill complex

Promote business and community growth by ensuring available office and workshop space within the Mill complex is inhabited. Local business start-up's and community groups should be approached and the sustainability of their proposals considered. The priority is for these units to be occupied (in accordance with providing use, surveillance, maintenance and security to a heritage asset – D-04) and consideration should be given to grant/incentive schemes to encourage occupation based on demand.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Medium**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Low**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, Private, Community**

E **05** The Mill complex

Realise the potential of the Mill site through appropriate refurbishment/re-development of non-listed buildings as appropriate (i.e. at the footprint of the non-listed factory to the south) to facilitate a range of uses. This will require collaborative engagement and progression from both public and private delivery agents.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Long**
 INDICATIVE COST: **High**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, Private**

E **08** Existing telephone exchange and site of former Railway Station

Carefully consider potential development / re-configuring of the site. It is likely that the existing exchange infrastructure will have to be accommodated. However, the site is located on a key axis of the Masterplan, adjacent to the Greenway and the primary access to the Mill complex, and includes the site of the former railway station/platform, which should be retained and appropriately incorporated into any potential scheme.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Medium**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Medium**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, BT**

E **09** Committed residential site

Residential development of the site as per Planning Approval Ref: J/2005/0320/F. (It may be prudent for the developer to re-visit the design of this scheme as alternative design approaches could be more appropriate to the setting).

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Long**
 INDICATIVE COST: **High**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **Private**

E

12

Existing retail parade and public WC's

Invest in the maintenance and development of the existing retail units in conjunction with improvements to street furniture (B-12) and signage (C-12). Consider potential development of the site with the aim of improving the existing retail offering and adding to it with the relocation of the public WC's. The sensitive development of this site would enhance the heart of the village and increase retail activity in the area, through growth in local custom and passers-by.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE:

Medium

INDICATIVE COST:

Low

CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS:

DCSDC,
Private,
Community

E

15

Site at Primrose Pk. / Melmount Rd. junction

Consider proposals for the residential/commercial development of the site and potential improvements to the road junction (B-15).

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE:

Long

INDICATIVE COST:

Medium

CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS:

Private, DfI

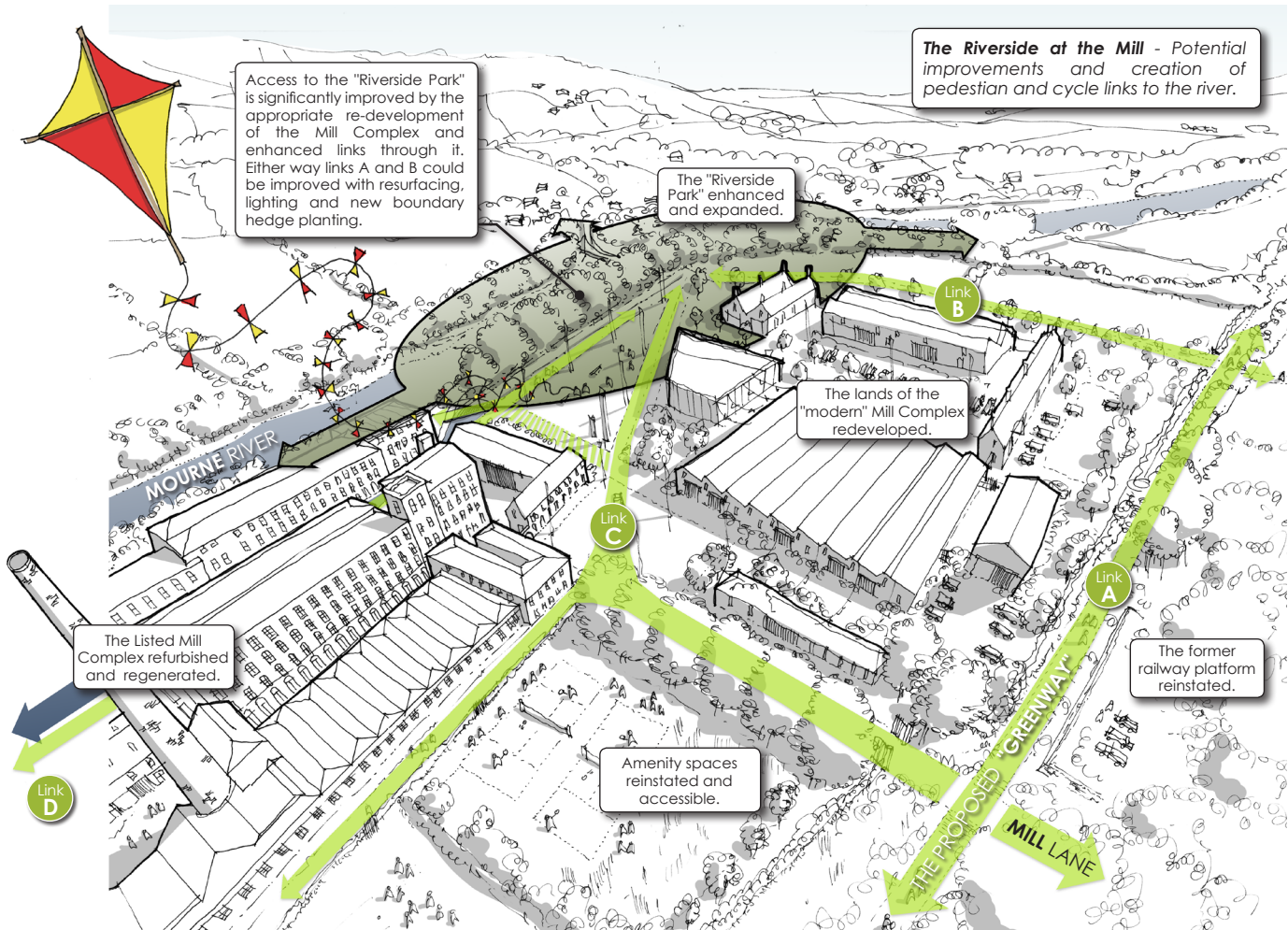
Existing Recreation and Facilities - Gaining access to the pitches, maintaining them and improving the existing facilities would greatly enhance the social well-being of Sion Mills



The mighty Mourn

Improving the Mourn River as a place for people and wildlife.

F



7.6.1 Alongside Herdman's Mill, the 'mighty' River Mourn is one of the most distinctive features associated with Sion Mills. The village's location on a scenic section of the river provides great opportunities for future growth and 'the mighty mourn' theme focuses on ways of seizing upon these. Improving the river mourn as a place for people and wildlife and improving the connection between the village and the river are paramount.

7.6.2 The local community agrees that the river and its surroundings are great assets that should be maintained and utilised where possible. Indeed the community has

ranked 'the mighty mourn' amongst the Masterplan's most important themes. This theme puts an increased emphasis on the natural environment and River Mourn whilst recognising opportunities for utilization, such as potential improvements for anglers, provision of tourist infrastructure and a potential riverside restaurant.

7.6.3 This theme is important in improving infrastructure close to the river, creating a coherent network and better access. Improvements to signage could help promote wildlife as well as an understanding of the industrial heritage associated with the river.

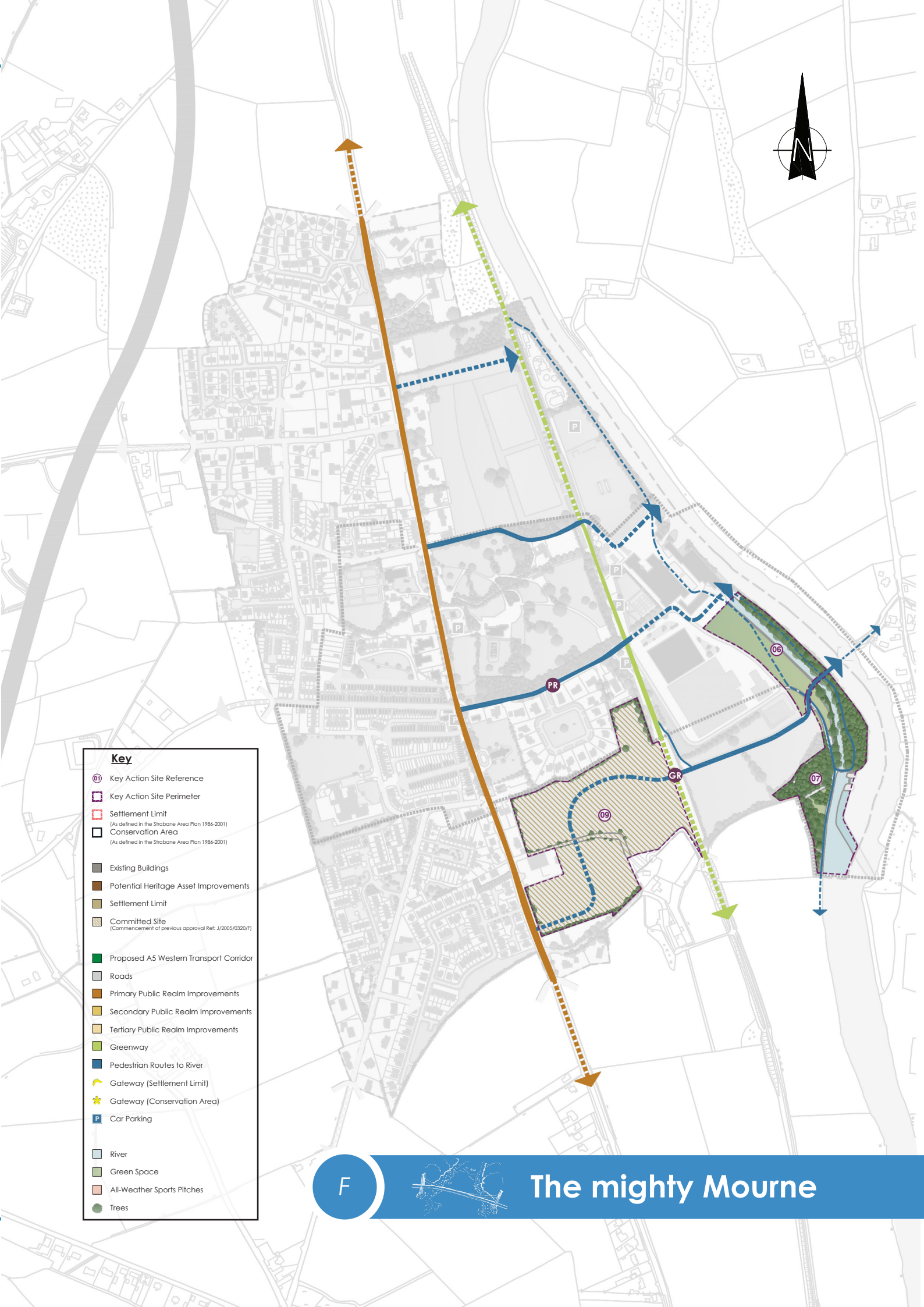


Key

- ① Key Action Site Reference
- ▭ Key Action Site Perimeter
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(As defined in the Strabane Area Plan 1986-2001)
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- ▭ All-Weather Sports Pitches
- Trees



The mighty Mourne



Potential 'mighty Mourne' projects

F 06 *The Riverside - north*

Negotiate public access to the site in order to extend the existing Mourne Riverside Walks to form a larger walking loop that would provide greater viewing access to the Mill, Mill Race and River Mourne. Aside from improving the River Mourne as a place for people and wildlife, this would enhance the Mill complex as a heritage destination (in accordance with D-05) and improve surveillance of the site.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Long**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Medium**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, DAERA, DfI Rivers, Loughs Agency, Private, Community**

F 07 *The Riverside - south*

Promote the existence of the Mourne Riverside Walks through literature, online database, heritage trail (D-PR) etc. to ensure residents and tourists are aware of the current infrastructure. Update directional and interpretive signage and improve access in association with public realm improvements to Mill Lane (B-05) and the implementation of the Greenway. Consider resurfacing and provision of new street furniture such as bins/picnic tables, seating etc. to ensure convenient, inclusive access and establish regular maintenance. Investigate and mitigate issues relating to instability of embankments and maintenance of existing locks.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Short**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Medium**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, DAERA, DfI Rivers, Loughs Agency, Private, Community**

F 09 *Committed residential site*

In accordance with potential project E-09, consider future pedestrian access from the site towards the river. The proposed routes through the development should become part of a pedestrian link between the village and the river. Currently, access to the Mourne Riverside Walks from the village is only via Mill Lane. A pedestrian link through this committed site as part of the proposed development (together with other potential connections) would greatly improve the physical connection between the village community and the River Mourne. Ensure adequate signage and possible surface artwork along the route and publicise as part of a village walking route/loop.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Long**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Low**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, Private**

F PR *Potential Public Realm Improvements*

Enhance existing pedestrian links to the River Mourne and implement new links where possible (i.e. via the Mill Complex). Mill Lane and the lane adjacent to the Baptist Meeting House currently serve as the only pedestrian links from Melmount Road towards the river. It is essential that these routes are well signposted, well lit and evenly surfaced to provide equal access to all. The extension of these routes and the creation of new links to the river should be explored as and when the relevant land becomes available. The close proximity of vehicle parking to existing and proposed routes should be carefully considered, particularly the need for disabled spaces that provide easy access to and views of the river.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Medium**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Medium**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, DAERA, Private**

The River Mourne at Sion Mills - Enhancing the pedestrian links to the river would make this unique village asset more accessible to the local community and visitors alike.

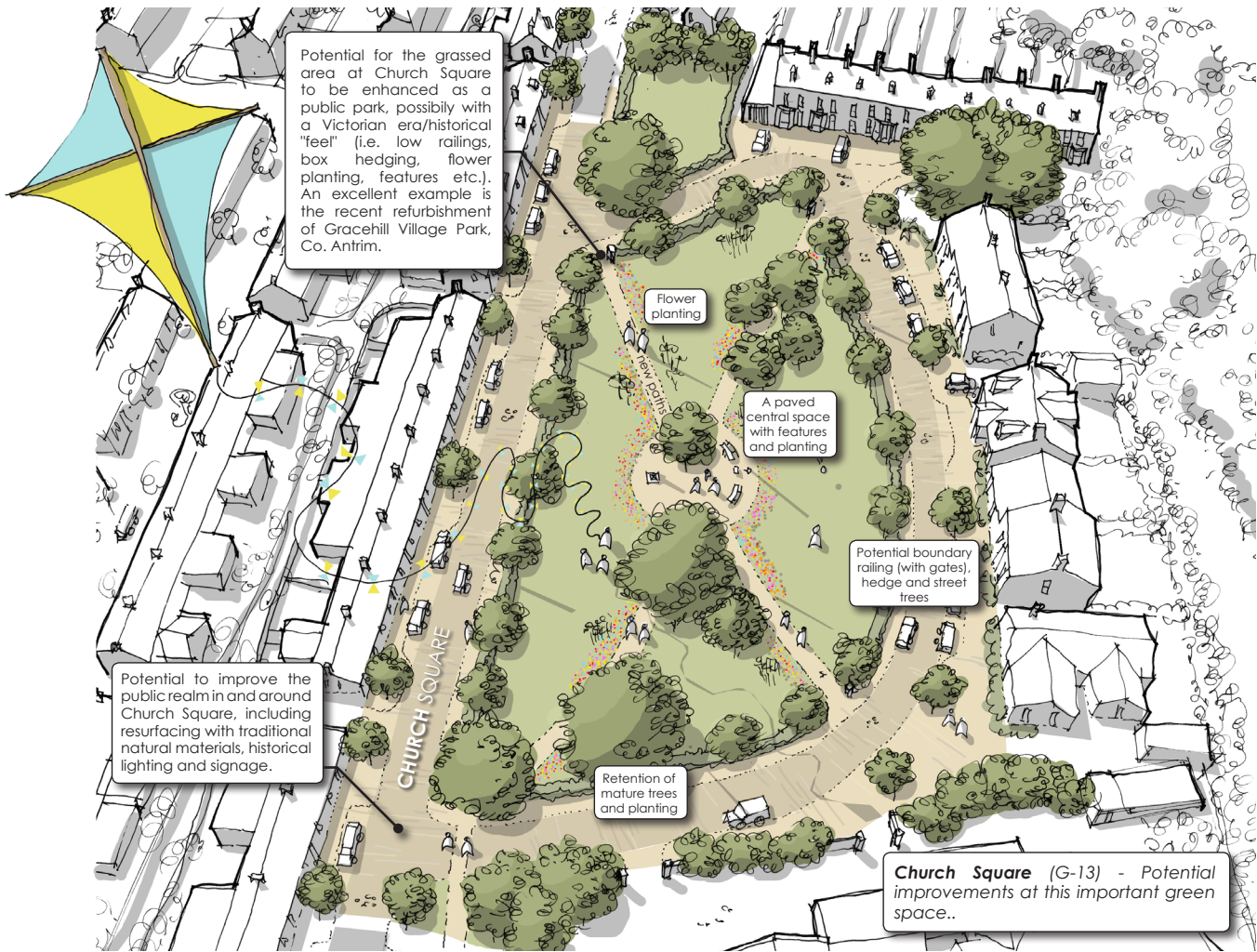




Green and gorgeous

Safeguarding the village's natural setting and enhancing the environment.

G



7.7.1 Sion Mills benefits from its natural rural setting on the cusp of the Sperrin Mountains. The 'green and gorgeous' theme has been developed in response to a lack of publicly usable open space and the need to protect and enhance the village's natural setting.

7.7.2 The importance of the natural surroundings featured prominently throughout the consultation process with the themes 'the mighty Mourne' and 'green and gorgeous' ranking highly in terms of its importance to the local community.

The community continues to have a considerable attachment to Brae Field. There is an obvious displeasure at the current condition of these playing fields and the limited accessibility.

7.7.3 This theme will contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of existing village assets. It will target the retention and management of mature vegetation and landscapes, improve village cleanliness and tidiness and aim to deliver good quality landscaping into new developments.



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- Trees



Green and gorgeous

Potential 'green' projects



01 Brae / Holm Field

Negotiate public access to the existing playing fields and cricket pitch – restoring an important recreational green space to village community use. Ensure the green space is regularly maintained to enable activities to recommence on the site.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Short**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Low**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, Private**



05 The Mill complex

Negotiate public access to the existing tennis courts and bowling green – restoring an important recreational green space to village community use. Ensure the green space is regularly maintained to enable activities to recommence on the site.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Medium**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Low**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, Private**



06 The Riverside - north

Negotiate public access to the site to create a unique riverside green space for recreational use. Procure and assess potential proposals (in tandem with the redevelopment of the Mill Complex E-05) for development such as a regional riverside park, pavilion, community events etc. This development would enhance the green environment of the village by reinstating public access to the Mill Race and riverbank.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Long**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Medium**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, Private**



07 The Riverside - south

Provide picnic/bbq spaces accessed by the Riverside Walks to increase recreational activity on the site. Ensure existing and potential car park provision is adequate, clearly signposted, well maintained and provides detailed information on the Walks, wildlife, heritage, activities etc. Consider provision of public toilets.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Medium**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Medium**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, DAERA**



10 Open space at Seein Rd.

Provide neighbourhood play park in accordance with public engagement feedback obtained in February 2019.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Short**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Low**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, DAERA**



13 Church Square

Consider adding landscaping and play and/or outdoor exercise equipment to promote community activity.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Medium**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Low**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, DAERA**



14 Open space at Sycamore Avenue

Develop the site to create a community growing space/men's shed through extensive engagement with residents, business owners, primary school pupils etc.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Short**
 INDICATIVE COST: **Low**
 CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC, DAERA, Community**

G PR *Potential Public Realm Improvements*

Complete a Landscape Management Plan, which identifies existing street trees in need of urgent attention and proposes the substantial planting of new street trees. Submit entry to Ulster in Bloom scheme as part of public realm improvements (B-PR). This would involve improvements to existing planters and the introduction of new schemes such as hanging baskets, planting beds, temporary sculptures and horticultural events.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Short**
INDICATIVE COST: **Low**
CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC**

G GR *Potential Greenway*

Use the Greenway as an 'Activity Corridor' to provide easy access to existing green space and consider opportunities to create additional green space for recreation along the Greenway. The playing fields, cricket pitch, bowling green and tennis courts can be accessed directly from the route of the potential Greenway. In addition, activities such as walking, cycling, horse riding and angling take place on or near the route. These activities could be supplemented by the creation of picnic/bbq sites, play areas and nature parks where wild flowers grow to create havens for wildlife. The physical creation of the Activity Corridor should be accompanied by literature, online database and mobile application to provide visitors and the community with all the information they need to enjoy and safeguard the natural setting of Sion Mills.

POTENTIAL TIMESCALE: **Long**
INDICATIVE COST: **Low**
CENTRAL STAKEHOLDERS: **DCSDC,
DAERA,
Private**

View of the Playing Fields - A landscape management plan would benefit the whole of the village and help to maintain and supplement the outstanding natural environment that surrounds Sion Mills

8.0 Implementation

8.1 Action plan

8.1.1 The effective implementation of this masterplan will require a sustained, co-ordinated and appropriately resourced effort. Defining the potential timeframes and resources required will be crucial in ensuring that the vision, aims, objectives and all proposals within the masterplan are delivered successfully within a realistic and achievable timeframe.

8.1.2 The following table summarises the identified potential actions, relating to the development themes. This table indicates challenging but realistic potential timescales for delivery, the indicative cost to completion and the central stakeholders that would need to be involved.

NOTES:

Potential Timescale:

Short	within 5 years
Medium	5 to 10 years
Long	beyond 10 years

Potential Indicative Cost:

Low	< £1m
Medium	between £1m and £5m
High	> £5m

Central Stakeholders:

DCSDC - Derry City & Strabane District Council

DfI - Department for Infrastructure

DfC - Department for Communities

DAERA - Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs

TNI - Tourism NI

Community based organisations - including Sion Mills Community Association / Sion Mills Community Forum / Sion Mills Buildings Preservation Trust

Private - including landowners / developers / and individuals



Promote the industrial heritage of the village - for instance, providing much needed maintenance to this sluice gate

Theme	Key Action Site	Potential Project Description	Potential Timescale	Indicative Cost	Central Stakeholders
A	PR	Implement changes in road surface and raised tables to denote arrival into the village.	Short	Low	DCSDC, DfI
	GA	Install 'welcome' gateway features at the settlement limit, such as public art, signage, lighting, trees etc.	Short	Low	DCSDC, DfI, DfC
B	02	Install a pedestrian crossing on Melmount Road to connect Sion Stables with St. Theresa's Church.	Medium	Low	DfI, Community
	05	Implement a Public Realm scheme along Mill Lane.	Medium	Medium	DCSDC, DAERA, DfI
	09	Implement new road access to the Mill complex to ease future vehicle traffic along Mill Lane.	Long	Medium	DCSDC, DfI, Private
	11	Improve public realm and drop off/pick up facilities at Sion Mills Primary School.	Medium	Medium	DCSDC, DfI, EA
	12	Update street furniture and public realm directly outside retail parade.	Short	Medium	DCSDC, DAERA, DfI
	13	Improve public realm environment in and around the Church Square green space.	Short	Low	DCSDC, DAERA
	15	Consider improvements to Primrose Pk/Melmount Rd junction.	Medium	Medium	DfI, Private
	PR	Implement a Public Realm Improvement Scheme throughout the village.	Medium	High	DCSDC, DAERA, DfI
	CA	Investigate potential for one-way traffic system along West Way/West View Tr, Albert Pl and New St.	Medium	Medium	DfI, EA
	GR	Implement a Greenway along the disused railway line.	Medium	Medium	DCSDC, DAERA, Private
C	12	Update signage, maps, phone boxes etc. outside the potential retail parade.	Medium	Low	DCSDC, DfI, TNI, BT
	13	Install directional signage, maps and street furniture in Church Square green space.	Short	Low	DCSDC
	PR	Create a shared surface at the heart of the village as part of a Shared Space Initiative.	Medium	Medium	DCSDC, DAERA, DfI
D	01	Install interpretive signage at the Holm Field cricket pitch.	Short	Low	DCSDC, Private
	02	Add to existing exhibits and events at Sion Stables and improve advertising to community and tourists.	Short	Low	DCSDC, Community, TNI
	03	Realise the potential of Sion House, Gate Lodge and gardens.	Long	Medium	DCSDC, Private, TNI, DfC
	04	Realise the potential of existing office/community workshop space to ensure long term sustainability	Medium	Low	DCSDC, Community
	05	Realise the potential of the Listed buildings at the Mill Complex	Long	High	DCSDC, Private, Community, TNI, DfC
	13	Install interpretive signage and create a focal point to the Church Square green space.	Short	Low	DCSDC, Community
	PR	Create a Heritage Trail throughout the village using public realm, literature, online database etc.	Medium	Low	DCSDC, DfI, Community, DfC
	CA	Define a Housing Improvement Area and investigate Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme/Heritage area status.	Medium	Medium	NIHE, DfC, HA's, Private, Community, TNI
	GR	Install interpretive signage along the disused railway line.	Medium	Low	DCSDC, Community
E	GA	Install 'heritage' gateway features where Melmount Road enters the Conservation Area.	Short	Low	DCSDC, DfI, Community, DfC
	01	Develop existing cricket pavilion and changing rooms to provide improved facilities.	Medium	Medium	DCSDC, Private
	04	Promote business and community growth by ensuring available office and workshop space within the Mill complex is inhabited.	Medium	Low	DCSDC, Community, Private
	05	Realise the potential of the non-listed buildings at the Mill Complex	Long	High	DCSDC, Private, Community
	08	Re-development of Mill Lane site.	Medium	Medium	DCSDC, Private
	09	Residential development of committed site.	Long	High	Private
	12	Develop existing retail units and re-purpose existing public toilets for retail use.	Medium	Low	DCSDC, Community
F	15	Residential/Commercial development and junction improvement at Primrose Park/Melmount Road.	Long	Medium	DCSDC, DfI
	06	Negotiate public access to the riverside and extend the Northern Mourne Riverside Walk.	Long	Medium	DCSDC, DAERA, DfI, Loughs Agency, Community, Private
	07	Promote, maintain and develop the existing Southern Mourne Riverside Walk.	Short	Medium	DCSDC, DAERA, DfI, Loughs Agency, Private, Community
	09	Create a pedestrian link through the committed site to improve village access to the river.	Long	Low	DCSDC, Private
G	PR	Enhance existing pedestrian/cycle links/implement new links from the village to the River Mourne.	Medium	Medium	DCSDC, DAERA, Private
	01	Negotiate public access to the existing playing fields and cricket pitch and ensure regular maintenance.	Short	Low	DCSDC, Private
	05	Negotiate public access to the existing tennis courts and bowling green and ensure regular maintenance.	Medium	Low	DCSDC, Private
	06	Negotiate public access to the northern riverside and create a unique green space for recreational use.	Long	Medium	DCSDC, Private
	07	Provide and maintain picnic/bbq spaces, toilets, car parks etc. accessed by the Southern Mourne Riverside Walks.	Medium	Medium	DCSDC, DAERA
	10	Provide neighbourhood play park at Seein Road site.	Short	Low	DCSDC, DAERA
	13	Provide neighbourhood play park/outdoor exercise equipment at Church Square green space.	Medium	Low	DCSDC, DAERA
	14	Implement Community Growing Space adjacent to existing multi-use games area.	Short	Low	DCSDC, DAERA
	GR	Develop and promote an 'Activity Corridor' along the Greenway through literature, apps, online etc.	Long	Low	DCSDC, DAERA, Private
PR	Implement a detailed Landscape Management Plan and submit entry to Ulster in Bloom competition.	Short	Low	DCSDC, Community, Private	

8.2 Funding and delivery

8.2.1 For all the masterplan proposals it will be important to ensure that all necessary mechanisms including funding, responsibilities, co-ordination and co-operation are in place to ensure timely and robust delivery.

8.2.2 The thorough and wide ranging stakeholder and community consultation that took place during preparation of the masterplan has established an appropriate foundation and provides a sound basis for bringing together the resources required for effective implementation of the various components of the masterplan, ensuring the vision and objectives are realised. The delivery of the masterplan will require a flexible, co-ordinated and committed approach by all stakeholders responsible for its implementation. This approach will be required throughout the masterplan time-frame.

8.2.3 The scale of individual development proposals will dictate the level of resources required for their delivery, either solely by the public sector, or solely by the private sector or as some form of joint venture. It will be important to bring together the resources for the delivery of certain proposals at an early stage, to "kick start" the masterplan, bringing visible short term benefits and creating confidence. The delivery of a **proposed playground space, public realm improvements** and the **improvement of facilities and access along the River** would all be catalysts for the future regeneration of the village.



The improvement of the existing facilities and access along the river is just one example of a proposal that could kick start the masterplan at an early stage - bringing visible short term benefits and creating confidence

8.2.4 Public sector Intervention, particularly leadership by Derry City and Strabane District Council will be essential in ensuring the delivery of many components of this masterplan, assisted by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Tourism NI, and the Department for Infrastructure, to name a few. Public Sector interventions include:

- Direct development
- Public realm improvements
- Infrastructure improvements including transport
- Heritage advice and support
- Service delivery
- Enabling measures including funding, marketing, facilitating & utilising powers and assets

8.2.5 The masterplan seeks to respond to the economic, social and environmental challenges facing Sion Mills. It also seeks to respond to many of the settlement's physical, environmental and natural attributes including its industrial heritage and historical connection with the former Mill, its Conservation Area status with many Listed Buildings, leisure and recreation and proximity to the Mourne River. The sources / tools of potential funding and delivery include:

A The Public Sector and the Local Authority

8.2.6 Whilst the masterplan has been commissioned by DCSDC, a partnership approach to delivery and implementation will be required with Council playing a key civic leadership role. It is an ambition that Public Sector funding for particular proposals could be facilitated by the Council, however in the current economic climate there can be no certainties. Other Public Sector funding sources may include for example DAERA Rural Development funding.

B Development Briefs

8.2.7 In the circumstances where there are sites which require particular regeneration, Development Briefs could be used as a mechanism to achieve regeneration goals by informing potential developers and other interested parties of the opportunities of each site.

8.2.8 In accordance with the masterplan's proposals for each Key Action Site any Development Brief would:

- Set out clearly the masterplan's vision for the development and future use of the land included within the Development Brief site.
- Have regard to the Conservation Area status of the village and the many historic buildings and provide clarity to landowners, prospective developers and all other interested parties regarding appropriate form and scale of development.
- Provide direction on the relevant planning policy context within which any future planning application will be assessed, identifying key constraints and designations to comply with.

C The Private Sector

8.2.10 As a number of the identified key action sites are with private ownership it is expected that the private sector will play a major part in fulfilling the regeneration objectives.

8.2.11 It will be important for the Council to work closely with the Private and Community Sectors to resolve any barriers to delivery, identify the mechanisms to overcome these, facilitate co-ordinated delivery and therefore creating the conditions where the private sector can confidently contribute to the regeneration of the sites.

8.2.12 The Private and Community Sectors have an important role in the delivery of the masterplan's proposals by:

- Working with the vision and objectives including the development and design principles for the Key Action Sites.
- Working together and co-operating with other private landowners to deliver proposals in a robust, timely and co-ordinated manner.
- Being proactive and demonstrating confidence by making significant investments, proceeding with catalyst development and subsequently providing confidence for others.
- Potentially contributing to masterplan proposals including enhancement of the Conservation Area, public realm improvements, investment in the recreational and leisure proposals including the Cricket Club and proposals for the greenway and improved access to the riverside. Contributions could either be financial or by making available the necessary land where this is appropriate.
- Working with the Council to endorse and implement the masterplan and to promote Sion Mills.

However, at the end of the day, private investment rarely happens unless there is reward or incentive. Therefore leadership, ambition, commitment and flexibility of the regulatory process will have to be demonstrated to attract the private sector.

D Local Asset Backed Vehicle

8.2.13 This potential delivery mechanism involves a joint venture between the Public and Private Sectors. It could be a successful approach to delivering mixed use regeneration, particularly at some of the masterplan's more complex proposals.

8.2.14 This delivery approach can be an attractive mechanism for the private sector as it provides an opportunity to invest in a way that is backed up by commitments and agreements from the public sector. It can also be an attractive approach for the public sector in that it regenerates areas while using the land as equity.

8.2.15 A Local Asset Backed Vehicle could be used to deliver the masterplan's proposals for the delivery of the greenway and proposals for enhanced connectivity to the Mourne River and Riverside walk, both of which require public and privately owned land, thereby requiring a collaborative approach by both sectors.

E Heritage Funding

8.2.16 The National Lottery's Heritage Fund should be considered as a means for funding. This programme supports a wide range of heritage and community projects including funding to safeguard local industrial heritage and historic buildings. It should be noted that funding has become limited in recent years in relation to historic buildings, repair and refurbishment. However, with an agreed masterplan in place and a commitment to improving the public realm, natural environment and the built environment through the sensitive restoration and refurbishment of historic buildings this source of funding is an option worth exploring.

8.2.18 Similarly the Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF) can provide Project Viability and Project Development Funding in Northern Ireland. Another recent initiative, which could be particularly relevant to Sion Mills, is the 3 year pilot programme known as "Village Catalyst" developed by DAERA/DFC with AHF involvement.

Sion Stables - An excellent example in the village of how
Heritage Funding can be used to enable the regeneration of an
historic building



8.3 Responsibility for delivery

8.3.1 The following key stakeholders will have respective responsibilities for implementation, with a continuing commitment to providing the resources required for the delivery of the proposals contained within the masterplan.

Derry City and Strabane District Council (DCSDC)

DCSDC will play a key role in the implementation and delivery of the Sion Mills masterplan. This masterplan, together with the emerging Local Development Plan and the Strategic Growth Plan, will be key in driving the Masterplans proposals forward.

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)

DAERA is the Government Department with responsibility for the development of the rural sector throughout the region and will therefore play a key role in the implementation and delivery of this masterplan.

Department for Infrastructure (DfI)

As the Agency responsible for roads and rivers infrastructure, DfI will oversee the implementation of any proposed improvements or works to either. Post implementation they will be responsible for their maintenance.

Tourism NI (TNI)

TNI working along with DCSDC can ensure the masterplan adds value to the local economy by assisting in the promoting of the village and its natural surroundings as a tourist destination.

Department for Communities (DfC)

As the Agency responsible for matters such as housing, urban regeneration, sports, arts and culture, museums, the natural and historic environment they can support the delivery of a place which is socially inclusive and desirable to live in.

Education Authority (EA)

The Education Authority have ensured that Sion Mills Primary School has been appropriately considered throughout the Masterplan process and will assist in the implementation of proposals impacting the school and its pupils.

Sion Mills Buildings Preservation Trust (SMBPT)

SMBPT has been actively involved throughout the preparation of the masterplan. The trust have had a particular focus on preserving the historical heritage of Sion Mills in recent years.

Community Groups

Sion Mills Community Association and Sion Mills Community Forum have been actively involved throughout the preparation of the masterplan, ensuring the thoughts and aspirations of the local communities within the village have been fully considered and incorporated as appropriate. The community groups will be an important contributor to its implementation and delivery.

Private Developers, Business Owners and Landowners

Private developers, business owners and landowners will play an important role in the delivery of proposals for the identified Key Action Sites, particularly since a number of these sites are owned by a small number of private owners. The key Stakeholders will aim to work closely and co-ordinate with all interested private developers and landowners to ensure effective implementation and delivery of proposals.

8.4 The risk register

8.4.1 A thorough engagement and consultation process was undertaken in conjunction with the preparation of the masterplan in order to reduce and mitigate potential barriers to delivery. This process also helped establish aspirations and gain the support and approval of all stakeholders from the outset. This process included consultation and liaison with all key public and private sector stakeholders, local businesses and local communities. All views received were carefully considered, prior to the final proposal being published.

8.4.2 The table below highlights potential obstacles that could impede implementation and delivery of the masterplan. In order to resolve any barriers to delivery of proposals, it is crucial that the level of communication and co-operation that has occurred between all stakeholders throughout the preparation of the masterplan is maintained. This will help ensure potential proposals are could be delivered on time, to budget, and without impacting on the delivery of other components of the masterplan.

No.	Risk	Description	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation	Residual Risk
1	Financial	Lack of funding resources from either the private sector or public sector	High	High	Ensure the masterplan is not reliant on funding from a single source. Implement "quick win" proposals to make larger scale, more expensive proposals more viable and attractive to investors	Medium
2	Political	Lack of co-operation across the political spectrum and limited cross party support	Low	Medium	Consistent communication with elected members and ensure the masterplan meets the needs and approval of the population	Low
3	Community	Lack of confidence and support from the residents and business owners of Sion Mills	Low	Medium	Public engagement throughout the process and reach out to local business owners, making sure that all community stakeholders are afforded their say on the future of the village	Low
4	Other Development and Interface Projects	Other development proposals adversely impacting on the delivery and subsequent success of the Masterplan i.e. uncertainty surrounding the development of the A5 transport network	Medium	Low	Work closely with the council to monitor potential development schemes prior to the publication and adoption of the masterplan	Low
5	Constraints	Physical, environmental and social constraints that could impact on the implementation and delivery of proposals	Medium	High	The masterplan must be flexible, offering multiple viable solutions to sites where possible to minimise any financial implications from unknown constraints	Medium
6	Co-operation	Reduced co-operation between all stakeholders who have an input into the implementation of proposals	Low	Medium	Ensure regular communication between stakeholders during both design and delivery of all projects	Low
7	Market Conditions	Fluctuating market conditions, affecting the commercial viability of individual development proposals	High	High	The masterplan must be flexible, offering multiple viable solutions to sites where possible to minimise any financial implications from market fluctuations	Medium

Initial risk register

8.5 Potential project programme

8.5.1 The Action Plan set out within this document identifies the actions for delivery of the masterplan's proposals and a timetable for their delivery that will extend over at least the next 15 years. Regular monitoring and evaluation is recommended. Successful delivery will require a collaborative approach between all stakeholders, the public sector, private developers, landowners and community based organisations. Some opportunity sites identified will be ideal contenders for "Quick Wins", bringing short term visible benefits to the village. Development on other sites and delivery of other masterplan proposals will be longer term.

8.5.2 The following have been identified as deliverable short term actions that will improve confidence and tackle the villages identified weaknesses in the near future. These "Quick Wins" are generally identified in the Action Plan (p 153) as actions which fall into the brackets of having a **short potential timescale** (<5years) and will be of **low indicative cost** (<£1m). They are generally projects which occur at sites where ownerships are relatively clear (normally public) and they can act as catalysts for longer term actions throughout the village, and include:

- **A-PR, A-GA & D-GA** - Creating welcoming gateways to the village.
- **B-13, C-13, D-13** - Improving the public realm and landscaping in and around Church Square.
- **D-01 & G-01** - Achieving public access to and improving recreational playing field space.
- **D-02** - Addressing issues with the existing facilities at Sion Stables
- **G-10** - Provision of neighbourhood play park at Seein Road.
- **G-14** - Implementation of community growing space at Sycamore Av.
- **G-PR** - Completion of a Landscape Management Plan and "In Bloom" competition measures.

8.6 Monitoring and evaluation

8.6.1 A series of measurable indicators to quantify progress will be established on implementation of projects to enable the monitoring and evaluation of the masterplan on a regular basis. The measured change over time will give an indication of the progress towards full achievement of the vision, the delivery of specific objectives and the overall vitality and viability of this village.

8.6.2 Typical measures could include an annual review of the village audit information contained within this report - such as comparing the number of vacant buildings year on year to ensure the masterplan proposal is increasing occupancy in the village.

8.6.3 To give a balanced and comprehensive picture the statistical measures need to be complemented by qualitative assessments, which could include regular forums with the community. For example, interviews may be carried out where residents are asked their perception of vacant buildings as an issue in the village. Though statistics may show a decrease in vacant property, qualitative assessment may highlight that a key asset has become vacant and so the issue is exacerbated.

8.6.4 Some of the data may be collected on an annual basis, some on a biannual basis, some every 5 years, and Census related data every 10 years. Some of the information collected will be for Sion Mills, some will include Glebe and Clady as part of the cluster village plan and some for the wider area covered by Derry City and Strabane District Council.

8.6.5 This review should be used to ensure the masterplan continues to be sufficiently flexible and capable of appropriate adaption to changes in the physical, social, economic and environmental context, rather than being a rigid and quickly outdated document of little benefit to the community.

The Mill Complex - One of the historical assets which could benefit from carefully planned regeneration



9.0 Part B conclusion

9.1 The analysis and consultation completed during Part A of the Masterplan, has informed this part of the process and has led to the identification of a range of potential projects of varying degrees of intervention and include re-development/refurbishment of suggested buildings, introduction of new infrastructure, potential activities, studies and documents etc, that may be implemented to help achieve the masterplan vision. These projects are subject to funding and, where relevant, statutory consent.

9.2 Realizing and delivering improvement within the village is not reliant on the implementation of all the projects identified in the masterplan. It may be the case that not all of the projects can be delivered within the plan period, however the village could still benefit from the selected implementation of a number of these potential projects.

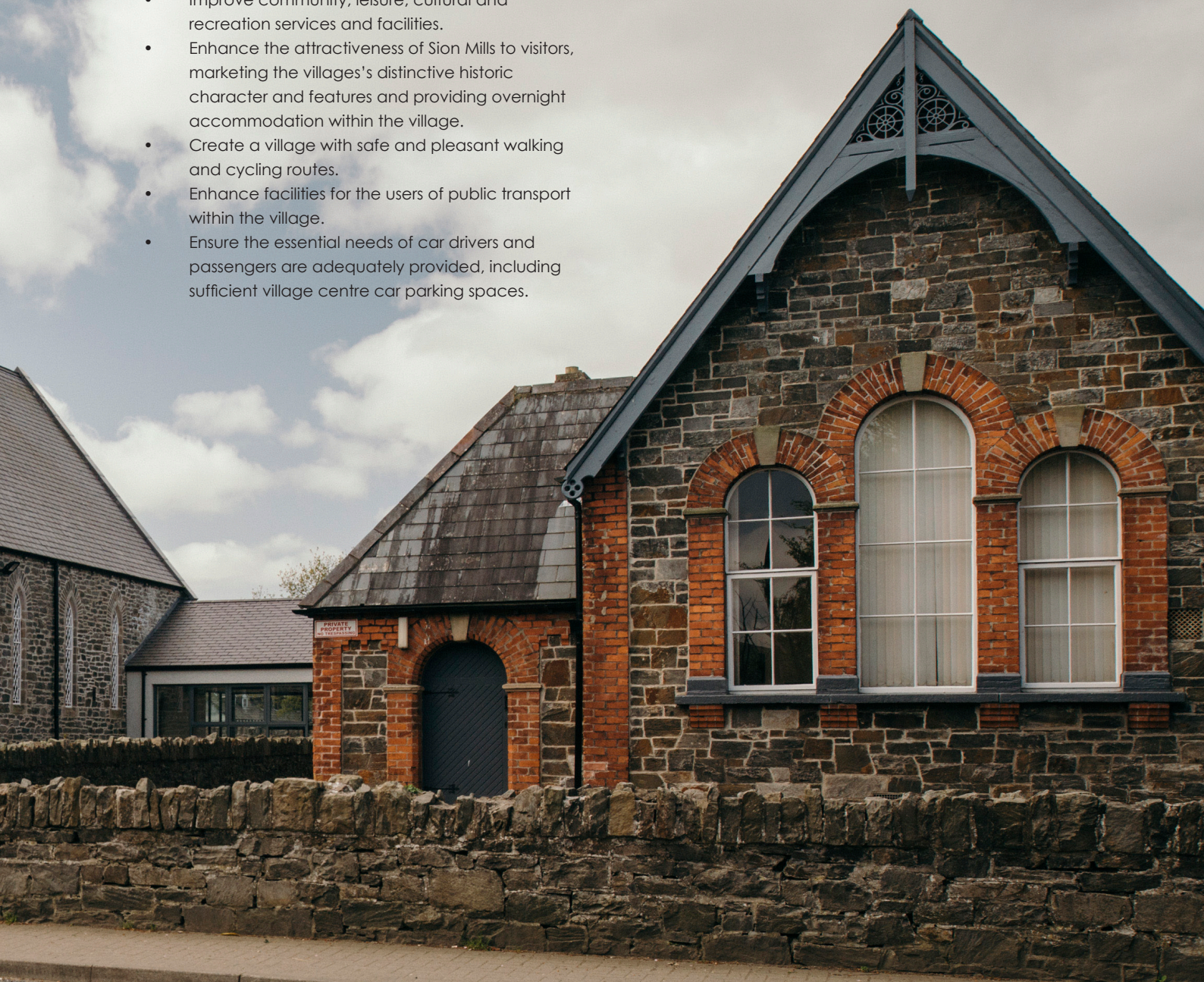


Sion Mills Presbyterian Church and former school house at Melmount Road

The task is to now bring about the delivery of the masterplan, realising the positive impacts it would have on Sion Mills and its people. These benefits will be brought about by delivering the following strategic regeneration objectives:

- Resolve any problem with vacant, derelict and physically obsolete buildings.
- Deliver the redevelopment of existing cleared and underused sites
- Maintain and enhance the historic character and identity of Sion Mills
- Achieve a positive and dynamic mixed-use centre, attracting investment and employment.
- Improve community, leisure, cultural and recreation services and facilities.
- Enhance the attractiveness of Sion Mills to visitors, marketing the village's distinctive historic character and features and providing overnight accommodation within the village.
- Create a village with safe and pleasant walking and cycling routes.
- Enhance facilities for the users of public transport within the village.
- Ensure the essential needs of car drivers and passengers are adequately provided, including sufficient village centre car parking spaces.

9.3 Although significant work and co-operation is required from various stakeholders on these objectives, this is what must ultimately be accomplished in order to achieve the vision of making Sion Mills a desirable place to live, work and visit for purposes of leisure and recreation.



10.0 Appendix

10.1 Equality impact assessment

10.2 Public engagement event feedback form





The Herdman Mill Complex - The abandoned buildings have become derelict and a magnet for anti-social behaviour

10.1 Equality impact assessment

A Introduction

10.1.1 The proposals and recommendations of this masterplan have been considered having regard for the requirements of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This has been reviewed for the range of groups for whom consideration is appropriate.

10.1.2 Sion Mills has made considerable progress in recent years with the different communities increasingly working together and co-operating in progressing mutually beneficial actions. There is also considerable scope for further progress.

B Religious belief/political opinion

10.1.3 Consistent with the Department's aim to create shared places that are available and welcoming to all communities, this masterplan, prepared in close collaboration with local partnerships, fully reflects these aspirations. Considerable sensitivity however, will be required in progressing these proposals including assuring any community that feels in any way threatened or disadvantaged, that all reasonable concerns will not just be considered but incorporated, as appropriate, at all stages of implementation. The Local Partnerships should continue to have a role in the development of this area. It is considered that this masterplan will promote equality between persons of different religious belief/political opinion.

C Racial groups

10.1.4 The vast majority of the population of Sion Mills identifies as being White though great sensitivity in this area should be exercised in any implementation of this masterplan to ensure that the needs of potential new communities are fully met and the sensitivities of the more established communities are given proper regard. In this context it is considered that the impact of these proposals will generally enhance and promote relations between racial groups not least by enhancing the village as a tourist attraction.

D Age / marital status / sexual orientation / men and women

10.1.5 Sion Mills has a relatively even spread of population across the age groups with a proportion of the village's inhabitants children below the age of 15 and an equally significant proportion over the age of 65. It is considered that this masterplan will have positive benefits including increased provision of facilities for children and better accessibility for older people. All age groups will benefit from the proposed physical improvements. None of the proposals are expected to have any negative effects relative to the range of these groups.

E Persons with disability

10.1.6 The proposals of this development framework are fully compatible with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination legislation. All improvements to public spaces and pedestrian spaces will be designed to enhance access and movement for all including those with disability. This development framework incorporates measures that will discourage all day on-street parking, encourage short term parking in designated areas and facilitate public transport and community transport arrangements, to the advantage of those with disabilities.

F Persons with dependants

10.1.7 This masterplan will generally encourage the provision of community and other facilities. Therefore it is considered all proposals included will help foster an environment within which people with dependants and people without dependants are more likely to have their needs met and therefore both will be afforded equality of opportunity.

G Summary

10.1.8 It is considered this masterplan and its proposed actions will have either a beneficial or a neutral effect on all Section 75 Groups. None will be disadvantaged by any of the proposals.




Humps for
500 yards
→

Listed buildings located at Melmooount Road.

10.2 Public engagement event feedback form

10.2.1 Below and opposite is an example of the feedback form used to gather information from visitors to the public engagement event. The form contains five questions relating to the presentation boards that were on display at the venue. The questions were designed to provide both qualitative and quantitative feedback.

10.2.2 During the event attended by 30 visitors, a total of nine feedback forms were received. These forms, together with numerous informal conversations, provided considerable local knowledge and opinion which was exceedingly helpful in the process of preparing the masterplan.



Sion Mills
Draft Regeneration Masterplan - Event feedback form




You are invited to complete this short survey about the Sion Mills Draft Regeneration Masterplan. All questions are optional and the content of your responses will remain confidential. Your feedback will be used to help us improve the plan before it is finalised.

Q1) What do you like and dislike about Sion Mills?

Like:

.....

.....

.....

.....

Dislike:

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q2) What kind of place would you like Sion Mills to be, 15 years from now?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q3) In regenerating the village, how important are the below themes? (score out of 10 0 - not important, 10 - very important).

The welcome

Our streets

Home is where the heart is

A hub for heritage


Our place

The mighty Mourne

Green and gorgeous

Community, business and tourism

..... please turn over





Sion Mills
Draft Regeneration Masterplan - Event feedback form



Q4) Of the potential projects mentioned within the themes what would be your top 3 priorities for Sion Mills?

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Q5) Do you have any other ideas or suggestions that you feel could assist in regenerating Sion Mills?



Write to us...
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Email us...
gmda@g-m-design.co.uk



Call us...
028 7035 6138

..... please return your completed form to the address / e-mail above or give us a call.





The Church Hall - One of the many historic buildings in Sion Mills that front Melmount Road and give the village its distinctive character. The masterplan proposals for the village respect and maintain this heritage with the aim of attracting new visitors and investment to ensure a sustainable future for its current and future inhabitants





Sion Mills is a former mill village located on the rural, wooded banks of the River Mourne in North Tyrone. It is this outstanding natural setting, coupled with its remarkable history as a centre of the Irish Linen industry, where a model village was created with a thriving community and a proud history. However, the success of the village relied heavily on the industry that created it and, since the demise of the linen mills at the end of the twentieth century, Sion Mills has struggled to find a new role and sustain its increasingly economically inactive population.

This masterplan reviews the characteristics of the area, identifies the scale of remedial action required, assesses what is possible and recommends potential measures that could facilitate its growth - physically, socially and economically - over the next 15 years.