

DRUMSHANBO TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION SCHEME

Drumshanbo, Co. Leitrim

PLANNING STATEMENT

**incorporating Archaeological Assessment Summary,
Appropriate Assessment Screening Summary; and
Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Summary**

To accompany
**A Public Consultation exercise
made under Part 8 of the Planning and Development
Regulations 2001, as amended**

By
McCabe Architects

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Leitrim County Council.

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Table of Contents

1.	INTRODUCTION	3
2.	THE SITE, LOCATION AND DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT	5
2.1	History and Heritage.....	6
2.2	Town Core	8
2.3	Application Site.....	9
2.4	Record of Protected Structure	10
3.	RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY	12
4.	DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL	13
5.	STRATEGIC PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT	14
5.1	NATIONAL PLANNING GUIDANCE	14
5.1.1	National Planning Framework (NPF), 2019.....	14
5.1.2	National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2030	15
5.1.3	Our Rural Future 2021-2025.....	16
5.1.4	Town-Centre First Policy	17
5.1.5	Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2011)	18
5.2	REGIONAL SPATIAL AND ECONOMIC STRATEGY	18
5.3	LOCAL PLANNING POLICY	19
5.3.1	LEITRIM COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2023-2029	20
5.3.2	LOCAL GUIDANCE.....	36
6.	PLANNING ASSESSMENT	37
7.	ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT SUMMARY	41
8.	ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT SCREENING SUMMARY	42
9.	ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE IMPACT SUMMARY	43
10.	APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT SCREENING SUMMARY	44
11.	CONCLUSION.....	45

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report by McCabe Architects (MCA) is in support of a proposed Local Authority own development, on behalf of Leitrim County Council, with development consisting of the refurbishment to four structures to use as “smart working facility” with commercial use, creation of new public realm and off-street parking, and improvement works to the existing parklands and riverside walk with linkage to the Food Hub. The proposal is made in accordance with Part XI of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations – 2001, as amended.

The purpose of this document is to assess the compliance of the development proposal against relevant strategies and planning frameworks at national, regional and local levels. This report should be read in conjunction with the drawings and other reports that have been prepared for the proposed development and are submitted with this proposal. This statement also considers the proposed development against the requirements for the Archaeological Assessment, the Appropriate Assessment Screening and Environmental Impact Assessment Screening exercises.

Drumshanbo Town Centre Regeneration Scheme

The proposal comprises the Drumshanbo Town Centre Regeneration scheme which includes works to address vacancy including the development of a new smart working facility with commercial use on the Main Street, deliver an increase to civic space within the town core, the provision of new off street carparking in the town centre with enhanced public realm space and linkage to the Food Hub.

The Drumshanbo Town Centre Regeneration Scheme will aim to improve the streetscape and appearance of the town. It will create a focal point for increased activity and footfall, provide valuable space for new business in the town core. It will also provide increased safety for pedestrians and cyclists, and vehicle users.

This project aims to tackle several key challenges that are hindering Drumshanbo’s economic, cultural, environmental, and social progress.

The design brief and objectives of Drumshanbo Town Centre and Regeneration Scheme are as follows:

- Focal point for improved economic and social activities in the town centre.
- The redevelopment of vacant/underutilised buildings within the Core area of the town which have the potential to yield regional economic impact. Through the development of the proposed smart working facility, offering vibrant and flexible workspace options, the Local Authority can provide a future of workspace solutions for remote workers, entrepreneurs, and business teams co-working, landing spaces and satellite operations. This project will act as an economic stimulus both in its construction phase and thereafter via remote workers and entrepreneurs using the facility.
- The refurbishment and repurposing of these vacant buildings to allow for commercial spaces – acting as a catalyst for regeneration of other town centre buildings by their private sector owners.
- Encouraging the town’s commercial development by improving visitor appeal.

- A long-term ambition in Drumshanbo is to extend the success of the Food Hub to the wider town catchment area. This regeneration plan includes the opportunity to enhance accessibility from the Main Street to the Food Hub.
- Enhance the wellbeing experience in the town centre by opening the derelict back lands area to create a new riverside amenity that connects to key infrastructure. Thus, the project also promotes non-monetary benefits promoting a healthier lifestyle with improvements in both physical and mental health.
- Proposals for the redevelopment of existing parklands, extension of the existing riverside walk and walking link towards the Food Hub.
- Increasing footfall and facilitation of visitors from the Main Street through a new pedestrian walkway.
- Improvements for accessibility from Main Street through to the existing Parklands and the Food Hub.
- Provision of additional off-street car parking and increase public realm space.
- Proposals for the addressing of dereliction/vacancy within the town core.

Integrated Design Team

In 2022, Leitrim County Council appointed an Integrated Design Team led by McCabe Architects.

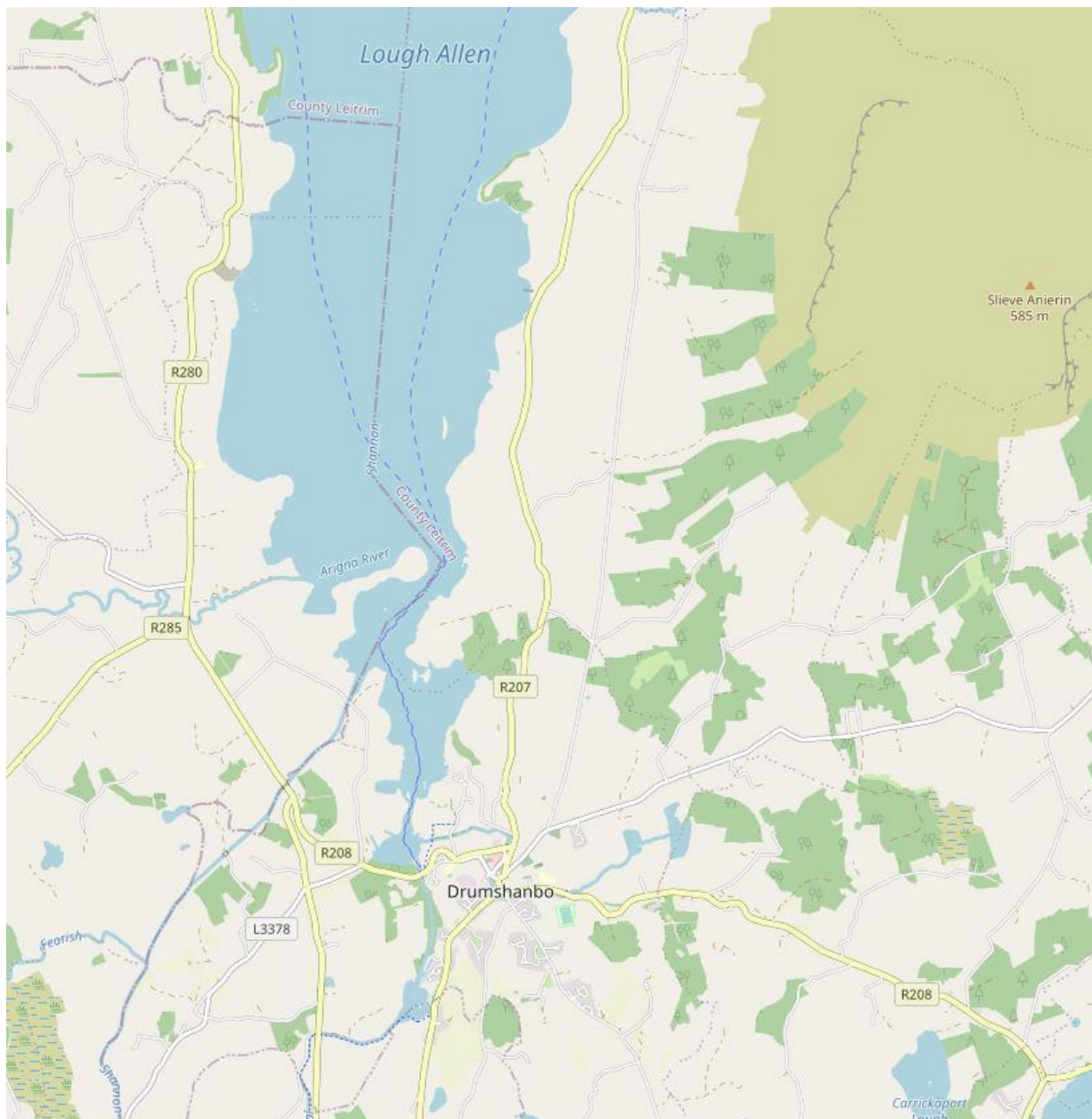
The design team includes:

- McCabe Architects (who will provide the architectural design for the team and Conservation input)
- TBS (Landscape Architects, Urban Designers, Public Realm Designer Lead);
- CST Group (Civil & Structural Lead);
- PUNCH Consulting (Flood Risk Assessors)
- Kingfisher Environmental Consultants (who will provide Environmental input)
- Fadó Archaeology (who will provide Archaeological and Environmental input) and,
- Philip Blackstock, Independent Arboricultural Consultant

2. THE SITE, LOCATION AND DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

Drumshanbo is the third most populous town in County Leitrim. It takes its name from the Irish, Druim-Sean-Bhoth or “Ridge of the old huts”. Drumshanbo is a small market town and industrial centre in the county. Drumshanbo is in the heart of County Leitrim and is approximately 13km away from Carrick-on-Shannon and 22km away from Mohill. The two main roads connecting Drumshanbo to other towns are the R207 & R208, which both run through the centre of the town. The town has a growing population, rising from 623 in 2002 to 902 in 2016, with 55% of the total population between the ages of 18-64 (Census, 2002 & 2016). Drumshanbo is a pleasant little town situated on the southern end of Lough Allen and nestling beneath the Sliaabh an Iarainn Mountain.

Figure 1: Drumshanbo in Co. Leitrim



2.1 History and Heritage

Drumshanbo town originated from growth in the iron industry in the 17th century as this was the location of the Finery Forgery. The town has a unique two-tier, stone fronted High Street feature which leads onto Ireland's shortest Main Street. Drumshanbo is surrounded by picturesque natural beauty that should be accentuated by the bustling activity of a busy, close-knit rural town centre.

Throughout at least the 19th and 20th centuries, regular Fairs were held at Drumshanbo. In 1925, the Town comprised 77 houses, 17 being licensed to sell alcohol. Some 500 victims of the Great Famine are buried at a famine-period burial ground at Drumshanbo.

Figure 2: Historic Picture of Main Street, Drumshanbo in 1910. (Source: Irish Historic Picture Company)



Figure 3: Photo towards Drumshanbo from Corriyard (Source: Irish Historic Picture Company)



Figure 4: Photo Railway Station, Drumshanbo (Source: Irish Historic Picture Company)



Railway: Drumshanbo railway station opened on 2 May 1888, but finally closed on 1 April 1959. It was part of the narrow gauge Cavan and Leitrim Railway. Today the nearest rail services may be accessed at Carrick-on-Shannon railway station around 14 km (8.5 miles) away.

Economy: The Laird family were descendants of Scottish landowners. They employed hundreds of local people in their various factories and businesses. Caleb Laird was a Methodist with a reputation for progressiveness and good works. He had started an electricity generation plant in 1906 and supplied the town. He started a creamery in Drumshanbo and Ballinamore. Later he established a retail grocery business, a wholesale business, a garage, a corn mill and a jam factory.

Heritage: Drumshanbo is also the only remaining town in Ireland to still celebrate An Tóstal, a festival inaugurated all over Ireland in 1953, as a celebration for Irish life. The weeklong family fun festival is full of a variety of activities and entertainment. There is a mix of on-street entertainment, indoor and outdoor activities, water activities and the ever-popular Stylish Silage competition which attracts hundreds of people to Drumshanbo during the festival week to view the locals' creative displays.

High Street: An interesting point of interest in Drumshanbo is its unique High Street fronted by a stone wall and steps that lead down to Ireland's shortest Main Street.

Natural Heritage: Drumshanbo marks the start of the Shannon Blueway and Acres Lake is home to Ireland's first floating boardwalk. The 600m boardwalk extends over the lake and is part of a 6.5 km linear walking and cycling trail from Acres Lake in Drumshanbo to Battlebridge Lock, near Leitrim Village.

Sliabh an Iarainn

Sliabh an Iarainn is an imposing hill, towering over and dominating the rugged landscape that lies northeast of Drumshanbo. It is described as a natural heritage site that contains a rich archaeological, historical, and cultural heritage. Drumshanbo town originated from the extensive Iron industry around Slieve Anierin from the 17th century. Pig Iron produced at iron smelting works on the east of Sliabh an Iarainn, was brought south across Lough Allen to Drumshanbo Finery Forge where a malleable iron product was produced and transported to Dublin and Limerick by boat. The first ship built by the East India company in Limerick was supposedly finished with product from Drumshanbo Iron works. According to folklore, the "Iron ore was conveyed to the Drumshanbo furnaces by boat on Lough Allen, supplied from Sliabh an Iarainn, Ballinaglera, and the Arigna mountains, all situated around Lough Allen". It is a major tourist attraction and amenity for Drumshanbo despite its distance to the town (8km).

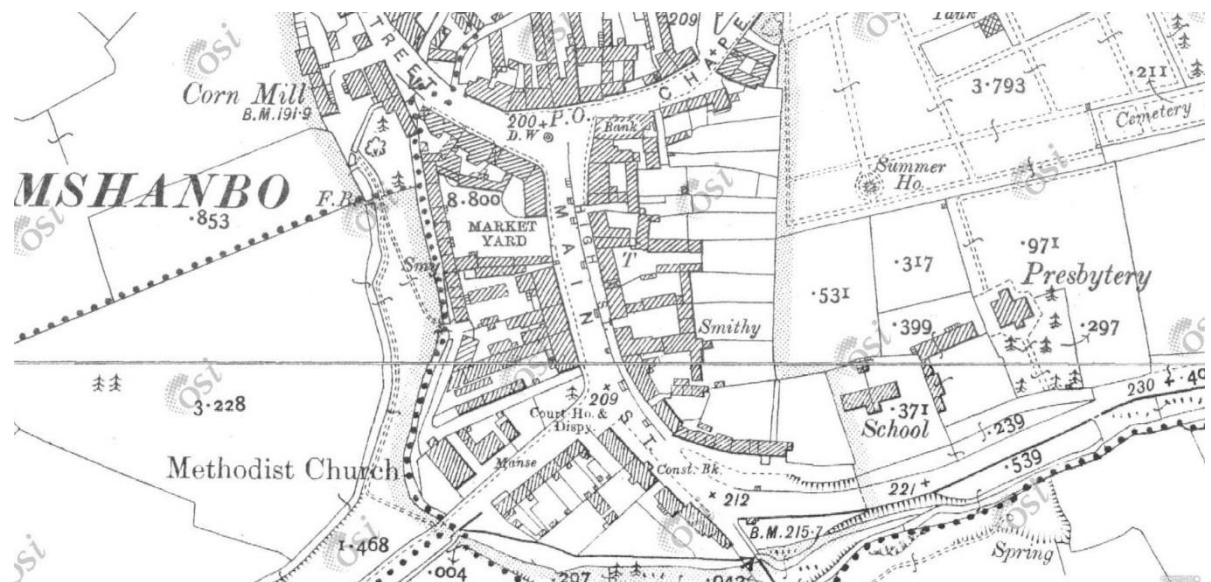
2.2 Town Core

Drumshanbo is characterised by a wide Main Street with some extensions to the east and west. It has a traditional, continuous building frontage with a mix of building heights and colours. The buildings on Main Street and Church Street are typical of 18th and 19th Century market towns and are mainly two-storey with a mix of uses including a number of residential properties many now vacant or converted to other uses.

Figure 5: Historical OS Map - 6 inch Colour 1829-41



Figure 6: Historical OS Map - 25 inch B&W 1897-191



2.3 Application Site

The application site area is 0.794 ha. It includes the former Bank of Ireland Building and lands; former Earley's building and lands; two derelict stone outbuildings stretching across to the existing parklands and riverside walkway known locally as 'People's Park' with the connection through the curtilage of Drumshanbo Methodist Church.

Figure 7: Application site



2.4 Record of Protected Structure

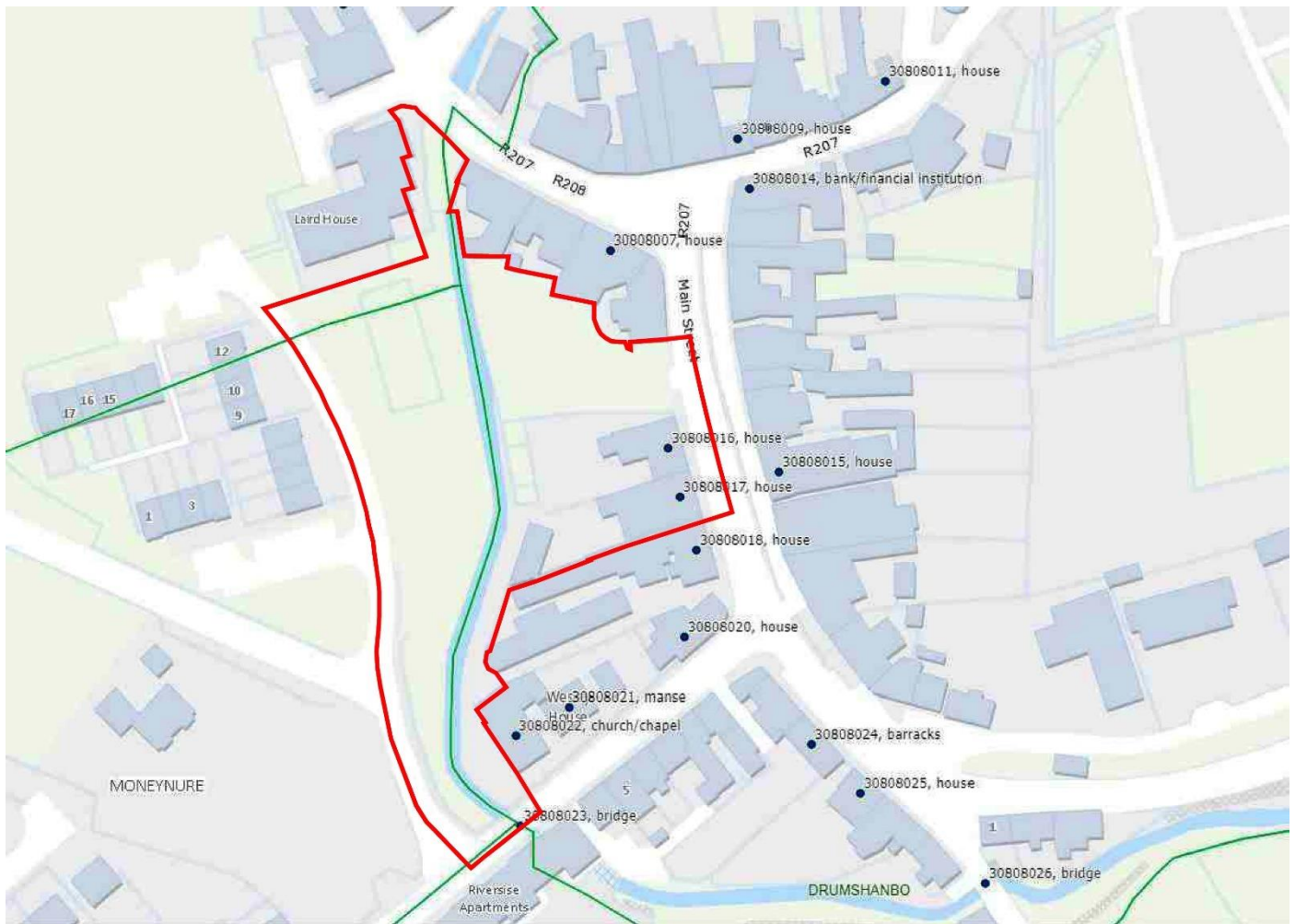
The proposed works are expected to impact on four structures identified within the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage and lands associated with them. These structures are the former Building of Ireland building (30808016), formerly Early's Vision Store, (30808017) on the Main Street, the bridge, Carrick Road (30808023) and the lands associated with Drumshanbo Methodist Church (30808022). It is only the Methodist Church which is a Protected Structure in the Leitrim County Development Plan 2023-229, ref. RPS No. 14.

There are a number of Structures identified within the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) within the wider town centre. These are identified in the below table. The proposed works are largely within the curtilage of these structures and impacting on them directly. The four most affected structures are the top four entries below in Table 1.

Table 1: Record of Protected Structures and Record of NIAH structures

Name of building	RPS Ref:	NIAH Ref:
Formerly Bank of Ireland, Main Street		30808016
Formerly Early's Vision Store, Main Street		30808017
Drumshanbo Methodist Church	RPS No:14	30808022
Bridge, Carrick Road		30808023
Centra, Main Street		30808018
House, Carrick Road, Main Street		30808020
Wesley House, Carrick Road		30808021
Conway, The Square		30808007
Former Northern Bank building, Chapel Street		30808014
Berry's Tavern House, High Street	RPS No:80	30808015
Drumshanbo Garda Síochána		30808024

Figure 7: Record of NIAH structures



Please refer to the Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment Statement for further information on impacts and effects prepared by D.M.McCabe, MRIAI Accredited in Conservation Grade III.

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

The works outlined in the report and associated drawings are subject to approval via a Part 8 public consultation process.

Planning History within Site

There are no significant planning applications on the application site in the past 10 years. *

Planning History outside the Site

There are no significant planning applications in the immediate surroundings of this application site currently on the public planning register.

4. DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

The proposed development consists of:

1. The redevelopment of two vacant buildings on Main Street, namely the former Bank of Ireland, a three-storey building, and the adjacent commercial building formerly known as 'Earley's', a three-storey building. Development works will include the demolition of the rear extensions to the respective buildings and the erection of a linear two- storey extension to the south side linking both buildings to provide commercial use to the entire ground floor and new smart working facility to the entire first and second floors. Works will include the creation of a new pedestrian walkway on the ground floor through 'Earley's' building to link a new public realm to the rear. All services will connect to existing public mains.
2. The creation of a public realm and additional parking to the rear of the renovated and extended commercial buildings on Main Street. The nature of the public realm works includes, inter alia, the opening of vehicular and pedestrian access routes through the existing stone boundary wall between the existing Market Street carpark and the former Bank of Ireland Building, lowering the height of the entire wall to 1m high, realignment works to the existing Market Street Carpark, the provision of new public lighting, a dedicated pedestrianized public realm that will incorporate seating, the provision of hard and soft landscaping, ramp access between Main Street and the redeveloped riverside walkway and a car park for seven car parking spaces
3. The redevelopment and partial reconstruction of two derelict outbuildings to the east of the Drumshanbo River. Both two-storey buildings will be redeveloped and repurposed to provide commercial use on both ground and first floors respectively, which will entail elevational changes and connections to existing foul and storm mains.
4. Riverside and town park improvement works to enhance the existing parklands and riverside walkway (known locally as 'People's Park'). The nature of the riverside and town park works includes inter-alia, the extension of the pedestrian walkway along the west of the river under the existing park footbridge to connect with a new footbridge 30m to the south which will in turn connect with the new public realm (to the rear of Main Street), an extension of the pedestrian walkway along the eastern side of the river to connect through the curtilage of Drumshanbo Methodist Church, a protected structure on the Leitrim County Council Record of Protected Structures (RPS No.14)) to connect via a new pedestrian bridge with the junction of the Carrick Road and the Food Hub/Carraig Breac Road. Works will also include the altering the existing hard landscaping area at the entrance to the Food Hub/Carrig Breac housing development, provision of new footpath along Carraig Breac housing development access road to include new entrance to the People's Park, new steps and ramp access within the park, the erection of new way finding signs, the provision of new public lighting, new hard and soft landscaping, new boundary treatments inclusive of railings, hedgerows and walls.

Please refer to the Design Concept Statement for further information on the proposed works prepared by Anita McDermott, MRIAI, McCabe Architects.

5. STRATEGIC PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

This section of the report highlights the Strategic Planning Context of the subject lands, namely the key National and Regional Planning frameworks, Strategies, - Guidelines and Funding Streams where they relate to the spatial organisation of land use at the subject location and the development and activities proposed.

5.1 NATIONAL PLANNING GUIDANCE

5.1.1 National Planning Framework (NPF), 2019

The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government published the National Planning Framework (NPF) in 2019 and National Development Plan (NDP) in 2021. It is the spatial expression of Government Policy up until 2040.

The aim of the NPF is to direct future development and investment in Ireland to sustainable locations and to promote sustainable development and proper planning across the entire State. The National Development Plan (NDP) (Ireland 2040) articulates shared national development goals, including improved living standards, quality of life, prosperity, competitiveness and environmental sustainability and provide greater clarity for private sector investment.

The NPF recognises the value of cultural heritage as a key component of, and contributor to, the attractiveness and sustainability of our cities, towns, villages and rural areas in terms of developing cultural creative spaces, private inward investment, and attracting and retaining talent and enterprise.

Planning for Ireland's Urban Growth – Rural Regeneration

The NPF emphasises the role of placemaking in economic prosperity as city regions are now the focal point for investment and seeks to develop cities and towns of sufficient scale and quality to compete internationally and to be drivers of national and regional growth, investment and prosperity.

The key national planning objectives in the context of Drumshanbo, and all towns in the country of similar size and stature, are NPO4 which seeks to ensure that such towns are attractive, liveable, well designed, high-quality urban places that are home to diverse and integrated communities that enjoy a high quality of life and well-being and NPO6 which seeks to achieve the regeneration and rejuvenation of small towns, and villages as environmental assets that can accommodate changing roles and functions and increased residential population and employment activity as well as enhanced levels of amenity and design quality.

NPF strategy states;

“Supporting both urban regeneration and rural rejuvenation through a €3 Billion Regeneration and Development Fund and the establishment of a National Regeneration and Development Agency.”

It is noted that building vacancy in rural towns and villages has become increasingly prevalent, resulting in the demise of the historic vibrancy and vitality of town and village centres. The re-use and regeneration of these buildings are essential catalysts to transforming the capacity and potential of smaller towns and villages in Ireland, as per national planning policy. The following NPOs articulate this as follows:

NPO 16 *Target the reversal of rural decline in the core of small towns and villages through sustainable targeted measures that address vacant premises and deliver sustainable reuse and regeneration outcomes.*

NPO 17 *Enhance, integrate and protect the special physical, social, economic and cultural value of built heritage assets through appropriate and sensitive use now and for future generations.*

NPO 18a *Support the proportionate growth of and appropriately designed development in rural towns that will contribute to their regeneration and renewal, including interventions in the public realm, the provision of amenities, the acquisition of sites and the provision of services.*

Well Designed Places

NPO 27 *Ensure the integration of safe and convenient alternatives to the car into the design of communities, by prioritising walking and cycling accessibility to both existing and proposed developments and integrating physical activity facilities for all ages.*

Sustainable Drainage Systems

NPO 57 *Enhance water quality and resource management by: Ensuring flood risk management informs place-making by avoiding inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding in accordance with The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities; Ensuring that River Basin Management Plan objectives are fully considered throughout the physical planning process; Integrating sustainable water management solutions, such as Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDS), nonporous surfacing and green roofs, to create safe places.*

The proposal is in accordance with each of the above.

5.1.2 National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2030

The investment priorities of the NPF are reflected in the National Development Plan 2021-2030. Investment in cultural and civic services and infrastructure is a feature of the NDP that recognises investment in high quality infrastructure as being critical for a vibrant heritage and culture sector and that investment in cultural heritage underpins social cohesion and supports strong, sustainable economic growth and development. In terms of regional objectives, specific priorities are to enhance arts and culture centres throughout the country, develop the sustainable tourism potential of the State's culture and heritage infrastructure, and improve Ireland's outdoor recreation infrastructure and natural heritage. The proposed development set out in Section 3.0 below is directly aligned with national policy in the form of the NPF and the NDP. The National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP) are the two pillars of Project Ireland 2040, setting out a shared vision for coordinated planning and investment, linking national spatial development priorities and enhancement of our Infrastructure.

5.1.3 Our Rural Future 2021-2025

Our Rural Future 2021-2025 outlines the vision for:

- Optimised digital connectivity
- Support of rural employment and careers
- Revitalising rural towns and villages
- Enhancing participation, leadership and resilience
- Transition to a climate neutral society.

Our Rural Future 2021-2025 is forward-looking and ambitious and addresses both the challenges facing rural areas and the opportunities which rural economies and communities can benefit from in the coming years. The proposed development is consistent with this vision and in particular the revitalisation of rural towns such as Drumshanbo.

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) is a commitment of €1 billion by government to be invested in rural Ireland over the period 2019 to 2027. The purpose of the fund is to support job creation in rural areas, address de-population of rural communities and support improvements in our towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000, and outlying areas.

This Fund provides an opportunity to support the revitalisation of rural Ireland, to make a significant and sustainable impact on rural communities, and to address de-population in small rural towns, villages and rural areas. It will be a key instrument to support the objectives of the NPF and to aid in the implementation of the RSES and the Leitrim County Development Plan 2023-2029.

Leitrim County Council has received funding approval for a Category 2 Application up to Part 8 Stage from the RRDF for the Drumshanbo Town Centre Regeneration project in 2022.

5.1.4 Town-Centre First Policy

The Town Centre First policy document aims to create town centres that function as viable, vibrant and attractive locations for people to live, work and visit, while also functioning as the service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community.

Irish towns are facing significant challenges and opportunities that require a coordinated and comprehensive response. This Town Centre First policy will facilitate that response by towns of all sizes across the country so that their centers can function as the sustainable and vibrant heart of the communities they serve, in ways that are adaptable and appropriate to 21st century needs. This proposal for Drumshanbo is very much town centre focused.

5.1.5 Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2011)

These guidelines offer best practice in regard to conservation and works and development in respect of protected structures and development in conservation areas and architectural conservation. The guidelines identify key principles in respect of conservation and the

The Drumshanbo proposals are considered in the context of these principles in the Heritage Statement produced by Declan McCabe, McCabe Architects and which supports this planning application.

5.2 REGIONAL SPATIAL AND ECONOMIC STRATEGY

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Northern and Western Region, within which County Leitrim, and Drumshanbo is located, provides the broad roadmap for effective regional development in terms of coordinating and combining responses on design and innovation; the provision of business opportunities, delivering homes, building communities and value land-use thereby creating healthy places and promoting sustainable communities.

This RSES provides a high-level development framework for the Northern and Western Region that supports the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the relevant economic policies and objectives of Government.

One of the key visions is *to manage future growth and ensure the creation of healthy and attractive places to live, work, study, visit and invest in*. A key objective of the Spatial Strategy is the regeneration and revitalisation of towns and villages, which is very much met by the proposed development.

Regeneration and Revitalisation

The RSES states: *“The future role and function of our large network of smaller towns and villages across the region need to be re-imagined, addressing economic, physical and social decline issues. The regeneration of our smaller towns and villages is now a major priority action for our region, which provides an opportunity to address legacy issues and to turn around their fortunes.”*

A number of regional objectives support the proposed development, and these are as follows;

RPO 3.4 *To support the regeneration and renewal of small towns and villages in rural areas.*

RPO 3.9 *Identify suitable development opportunities for regeneration and development that are supported by a quality site selection process that also addresses environmental constraints and opportunities.*

RPO 3.10 *Ensure flood risk management informs development by avoiding inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding and integrate sustainable water management solutions (such as SUDS, non-porous surfacing and green roofs) to create safe places. Development plans should assess flood risk by implementing the recommendations of the Planning System and Flood Risk Assessment Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009) and Circular PL02/2014 (August 2014).*

RPO 3.13 *To support the role of smaller and medium sized towns, which demonstrate an important role in terms of service provision and employment for their catchments within the economic function of the county. Such settlements will be identified through the Development Plan process as part of the Settlement Hierarchy and the Core Strategy.*

Natural Assets

The development works intended to the existing parklands and riverside walk known locally as 'People's Park' is to the west of the river and is in close proximity to the Main Street and is an amenity for the town that we aim to enhance. In this instance the following objective supports the proposed development:

***RPO 5.5** Ensure efficient and sustainable use of all our natural resources, including inland waterways, peatlands, and forests in a manner which ensures a healthy society a clean environment and there is no net contribution to biodiversity loss arising from development supported in this strategy. Conserve and protect designated areas and natural heritage areas. Conserve and protect European sites and their integrity.*

The proposed development involves greening the town centre and enhancing the town's biodiversity and is consistent with the above objectives.

5.3 LOCAL PLANNING POLICY

5.3.1 LEITRIM COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2023-2029

The County Leitrim Development Plan 2023-2029 was adopted on 7th February 2023 and took effect from March 21st 2023 (hereafter referred to as the Plan) and sets out the intentions and ambitions for the County over the six years of the plan.

Core Strategy

The Core Strategy Map is presented below with Drumshanbo identified as a defined ‘Tier 2B Support Town’.

Relevant Policies include the following:

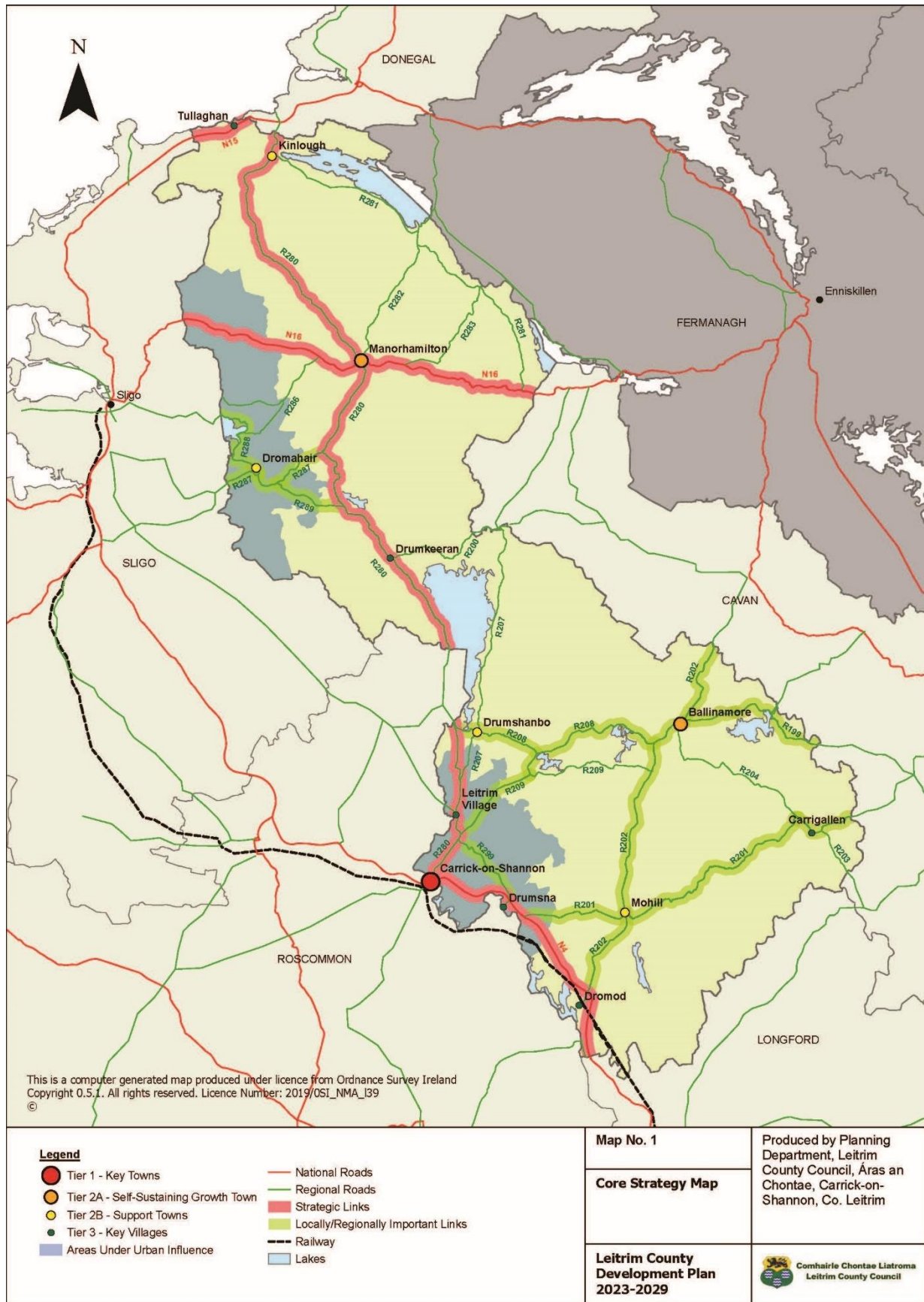
CS OBJ 12 *To ensure that the Support Towns of Dromahair, Drumshanbo, Kinlough and Mohill develop in a sustainable and consolidated manner with increased local employment opportunities available to sustain their communities, providing an appropriate range of local services and amenities and ensuring a high quality of life for residents in each centre.*

CS OBJ 06 *To support the regeneration of underused town and village centre and brownfield/infill lands along with the delivery of existing zoned and serviced lands to facilitate population growth and achieve sustainable compact growth targets of 20% of all new housing to be built within the existing footprint of the settlements contained in Tier 2B and 3 of the Settlement Hierarchy.*

CS OBJ 18 *To support the vitality and viability of existing town and village centres and facilitate a competitive and healthy environment for the retailing sector by ensuring that future growth in retail floorspace responds to the identified retail hierarchy, the sequential approach, and the needs of the projected population of the settlement areas.*

The proposed development meets the above objectives with a focus on regeneration and town centre development being a priority (CS OBJ 06); promote employment opportunities and sustaining communities (CS OBJ 12); provides for the vitality of existing town centre for the retailing sector (CS OBJ 18). The proposed development will in time make the town centre a more desirable place to live and work.

Figure 8: Core Strategy Map



Settlement Hierarchy

Drumshanbo is designated as a Category Tier 2B Support town under the Leitrim County Settlement Hierarchy within the County Development Plan. The Development Plan sets out the following guidance for Tier 2B centres:

“Tier 2 Centres are generally those with a population over 850 and have a range of commercial and community services and facilities. They include the 2A Key Towns of Manorhamilton and Ballinamore and the 2B Support Towns of Dromahair, Drumshanbo, Mohill, and Kinlough”.

According to the Leitrim County Development Plan, Drumshanbo is recognised as fulfilling “local service and some specialised employment and tourism functions which play an important role in supporting the social, economic and cultural life within their rural communities”. This designation, and associated function, reflects the long-standing role Drumshanbo fulfils within the county and wider region in providing for a good level of services, housing provision and employment generating uses to cater for immediate inhabitants and its wider hinterland with a strong emphasis on tourism development.

Leitrim County Council secured € 596,290 under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) for the Drumshanbo Town Centre Regeneration project in 2022.

The Development Plan fully supports the provision of fully functioning, healthy and vibrant town centres, that are enjoyable places for living, working in and visiting, in line with the Government’s “Town Centre First” policy approach which supports the proposed development.

The Plan seeks to support the regeneration of underused town centres throughout the county and encourages appropriate redevelopment therein to ensure better permeability with a strong focus on pedestrian movement and access. It is acknowledged that town centres are appropriate for a mix of developments alongside appropriately designed and sized pocket parks, public realm spaces, with an increased focus on walking and cycling. A strong emphasis is also placed on high quality urban design with Leitrim’s town centres.

The Drumshanbo proposals are consistent with the Drumshanbo Settlement Plan – Town Centre and Settlement Form Objectives DSO 3 & DSO 4 set out below:

DSO 1 *Promote and facilitate residential growth, the expansion of local employment options and of the range of services and facilities in tandem with the development of sustainable transport options to enable Drumshanbo to become more self-sustaining and fulfil its role as a Tier 2B Support Town in Co. Leitrim.*

DSO 3 *Facilitate the re-use and development of existing vacant and underutilised buildings and sites for town centre uses to create a compact, vibrant town centre.*

DSO 4 *Support the undertaking of environmental and public realm enhancement works and initiatives to visually enhance the streetscape and existing built form to include public realm measures that facilitate outdoor dining areas and the night time economy in the High Street/Main Street area of the town.*

These objectives very much support the proposed development. Considerable emphasis is placed in the County Plan on the regeneration of vacant buildings and under-utilised sites in order to rejuvenate towns and villages of County Leitrim. The transformative Drumshanbo proposals are consistent with the following objectives of the County Plan:

REG POL 1 *To enable infill and appropriate brownfield redevelopment in order to maximise the efficient use of existing infrastructure and services and promote a positive modal shift towards sustainable transport use.*

REG POL 2 *To actively implement policies presented in this Plan that support and encourage urban and rural regeneration, so as to secure climate resilience and reduce GHG emissions.*

The proposed development is further supported by the Town Centre First Approach.

Climate Change

Climate change is increasingly becoming a key planning consideration when determining planning applications. The Climate Action Plan 2021 (CAP21) sets out almost 500 actions to support Ireland's journey towards a 51% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 (from a 2018 baseline) and carbon neutrality by 2050.

The proposed development, which is regeneration based, is well aligned with the Climate Action Plan 2021.

Concerns regarding climate change have highlighted the importance of nature-based approaches such as 'Green Infrastructure' and Section 12.7.4 of the County Development Plan sets out the policy surrounding 'Green Infrastructure'. The proposal for Drumshanbo is consistent with NBGI POL 1.

NBGI POL 1 *To actively promote and encourage nature-based approaches and 'Green Infrastructure' solutions as viable mitigation and adaptation measures to reduce GHG emissions, increase the adaptive capacity of ecosystems and optimise the multifaceted benefits through:*

- *Conservation, promotion, and restoration of the natural environment;*
- *Integrating an ecosystem services approach and promote healthy living environments through enhanced connection with nature and recreation/amenity;*
- *Enhancing biodiversity in urban and rural settings;*
- *Assist with water and flood risk management; and*
- *Carbon storage or sequestration.*

Drumshanbo

Section 5.1 of Volume II – Settlement Plans of the County Plan sets out policies and objectives for Drumshanbo.

Strategy and Vision

Drumshanbo remains as a defined ‘Tier 2B – Support Town’ in the County Settlement Hierarchy of the Plan (2015-2023). Drumshanbo has a high economic development profile in comparison to other settlements within the county, with a longstanding presence of food production and tourism development within the town remaining key drivers of economic development in Drumshanbo and its wider area. Drumshanbo has developed a niche industry around the food industry over the years with the development of The Food Hub which is also home to The Shed Distillery where Drumshanbo Gunpowder Gin, Drumshanbo Sausage Tree Vodka and Drumshanbo Whiskey are produced. A new visitor centre opened in September 2020.

Leitrim County Council has secured funding from RRDF for this Regeneration project and this planning application is consistent with the Plan objectives EC DEVL POL 1, DSO 06 & DSO 8, SEDO 5 and INT LAND USE POL set out below:

EC DEVL POL 1 *To support and promote economic development and employment opportunities identified in the Leitrim Local Economic and Community Plan or any amended or replacement plan, subject to the appropriate environmental assessments.*

DSO 6 *Design and implement a Regeneration/Public Realm Improvement Scheme for Drumshanbo to include inter alia the following elements:*

- 1. The acquisition and repurposing of two prominent buildings on Main Street to create ‘The Exchange Smart Working Hub’, a future work facility for remote workers. It is also proposed to repurpose existing stone outbuildings to the rear of the above buildings into two independent creative studio units, creating ‘The Creative Exchange’.*
- 2. To complete the Riverside People’s Park and to provide enhanced pedestrian access to the town from The Food Hub and The Shed Distillery Visitor Centre.*
- 3. To further expand the Market Yard car park.*
- 4. To transform the High Street into a thriving food experience and income opportunity for artisan producers creating ‘The Food Exchange’ whilst maintaining the special built heritage form of this unique street.*

DSO 8 *Engage with employers, employment agencies and local stakeholders in identifying and facilitating a suitable location for a remote working hub facility within Drumshanbo. In this regard, the Council have submitted a funding application under the RRDF Scheme to develop suitable properties for this purpose.*

SEDO 5 *Enhance the potential for economic development in individual sectors based on Leitrim’s physical, social, environmental and cultural character and quality.*

INT LAND USE POL 2 *To promote and facilitate shared working hubs which act as a counterbalance for commuting out of the county for employment by residents.*

ENT EMPL POL 5 *To ensure that entrepreneurialism and enterprise is promoted, that smaller, local businesses are fully supported and that the development of co-working spaces/hubs is facilitated.*

Social & Community Infrastructure

Drumshanbo is well equipped in terms of social and community infrastructure serving the town and wider community. The proposed public realm works, and improvement works to the existing parklands, are consistent with objectives DSO 15 & DSO 16:

DSO 15 *Provide for the expansion and development of educational, social, community and recreational facilities in Drumshanbo available to provide for the needs of the resident community and that of the wider rural hinterland.*

DSO 16 *Facilitate the development of a riverside park as previously indicated in the Drumshanbo Urban Framework Plan 2005.*

Physical Infrastructure

Drumshanbo's movement and accessibility infrastructure is dominated by private vehicles and pedestrians. The proposed public realm improvements and works to the existing parklands are consistent with DSO 17:

DSO 17 *Maintain and enhance accessibility to and within the town centre in respect of pedestrian and cycle access, public transport and car parking, with particular regard to the needs and access for people with disabilities.*

Tourism

There is a strong tourism base developed in Drumshanbo centred on water (Lough Allen, Acres Lake and the Leitrim Canal) with marinas offering berthing for pleasure cruisers. There are also outdoor adventure centres, an outdoor heated swimming pool and the floating boardwalk as part of the Blueway connecting Drumshanbo to Leitrim Village.

The proposed public realm enhancements and development works to the existing Parklands and riverside works will improve the visitor experience and accessibility, encouraging increased dwell time and repeat visits. The enhancement of the town centre with associated works to the Parklands and linkage towards the existing Food Hub will make the town centre a more attractive location for tourists consistent with Policies TOUR POL 1 & TOUR POL 10 and Objectives TOUR OBJ 4.

TOUR POL 1 *To support the development of new strategic tourism attractions that can create 'experiences' as motivational 'must do' signature experiences to draw visitors to the county, in a manner consistent with Leitrim's own brand identity.*

TOUR POL 10 *To facilitate, where appropriate, proposals to improve access for all at existing tourism sites and facilities, and to require all new tourism related developments to ensure the development is accessible to everyone, regardless of their age, or ability.*

TOUR OBJ 4 *To utilise the county's natural and heritage resources to foster the development of tourism as a viable sustainable sector of the economy, in a sustainable manner, which complements the scale, quality and unique features of the county.*

TOUR INF OBJ 3 *To enhance the visitor offering in towns and villages and provide visitor interpretation, signage and public realm schemes unique to the town and village which provide tourists with a memorable 'sense of place'.*

DSO 34 *Provide for the enhancement of tourism and amenity facilities within Drumshanbo where appropriate and to facilitate leisure tourism/amenity proposals subject to the preservation of the natural amenity of the area. Ensure that development proposals do not give rise to adverse impacts on the receiving environment.*

Commercial and Retail Development

According to the County Plan, Tier 2B Support Towns such as Drumshanbo have notable levels of vacant retail and commercial units which have an adverse effect on the town's presentation and vitality. There is sufficient vacancy within all of the towns to facilitate convenience and tourism related comparison goods. No additional retail floor space (with the exception of extending existing units) is required in these areas and the development of underutilised land or buildings in these towns is a key priority for their regeneration and consolidation.

RET POL 1 *To support the regeneration, vitality and viability of existing town and village centres and facilitate a competitive and healthy environment.*

RET POL 5 *To ensure that retail and service units will generally be located within the central area of a town or village.*

RET POL 7 *To ensure that all new retail and commercial development proposals respect the character and scale of the existing streetscape within which they are proposed.*

RET POL 10 *To encourage reuse of vacant town centre commercial premises for alternative uses and adapt a flexible approach to reoccupation.*

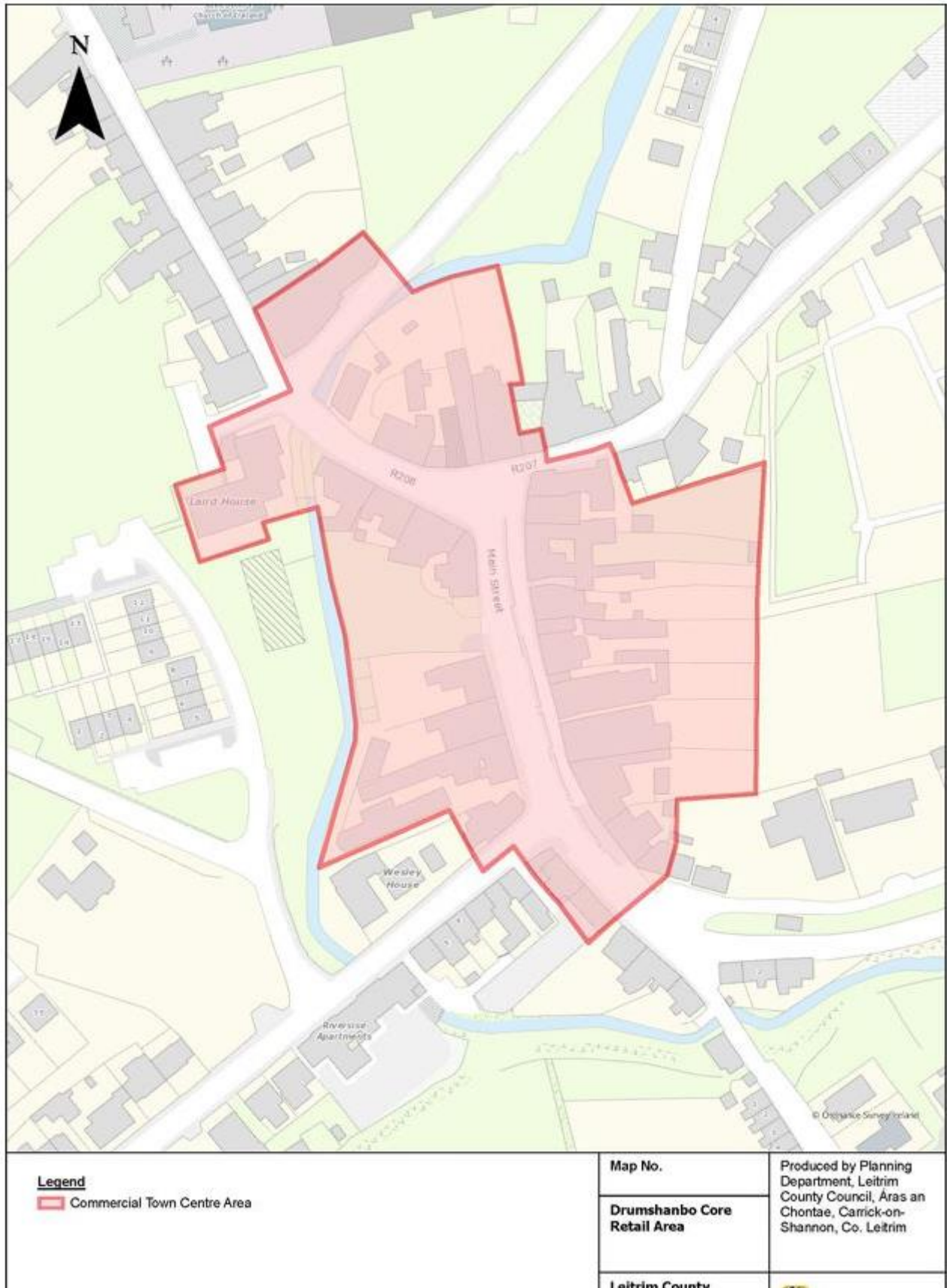
RET POL 13 *To encourage the adaptation of over-the-shop premises and other vacant town centre buildings for residential use.*

DSO 11 *Encourage and facilitate the re-use and regeneration of derelict land and buildings for retail and other town centre uses, with due cognisance to the Sequential Approach prescribed in the Retail Planning Guidelines 2012.*

DSO 12 *Seek the maintenance and improvement of shopfronts within the town centre. Proposals for new shopfronts should be sensitively designed with regard to their location within the streetscape and in accordance with the Leitrim County Council Guidelines on Shopfront Design, October 2003 or replacement guidelines over the life of this Plan.*

The proposed commercial activity is a flexible modern post-covid format as proposed and is consistent with RET POL 1 & REL POL 5 of the Plan. The environmental and streetscape enhancements proposed will encourage and stimulate development consistent with REL POL 7. The reuse of the currently redundant 4 no. buildings within the application site area is encouraged by RET POL 10 & DSO 11. The proposed creation of a new smart working facility to the first and second floors of the 2 No. vacant buildings on Main Street are supported by RET POL 13.

Figure 10: Drumshanbo Core Retail Area



Regeneration and Placemaking

The proposed development provides for the redevelopment and enhancement of the town centre which is part of a planned and coordinated approach to the development of backlands, existing parklands and riverside walk in Drumshanbo.

Leitrim County Council pursues an objective to make settlements attractive and healthy places to live with recreational amenities, services and facilities, providing quality of life, and a sense of both place and community. Placemaking relates to the interrelationship and connection between people and the spaces they use.

The Drumshanbo proposals are consistent with the following policies and objectives.

PLACE POL 1 *To strengthen the role and functions of towns and villages and facilitating development that will rejuvenate these settlements and make them attractive locations in which to live and work.*

PLACE POL 3 *To support the regeneration and repopulation of town centres, through the sustainable reuse of existing buildings including the conversion of the upper floors of buildings into residential use, focusing on dereliction, the appropriate development of infill consolidation site(s), underpinned by good urban design and placemaking principles. A relaxation in development standards will be considered for such projects, where it is sufficiently demonstrated that the development proposal will deliver high quality accommodation.*

PLACE POL 5 *To enhance urban streetscapes by addressing vacancy and dereliction.*

PLACE POL 6 *To enhance the visual amenity of settlements and support improvements in the appearance of streetscapes and revitalising spaces.*

PLACE POL 7 *To encourage and facilitate improvements to the public realm of town and village centres.*

PLACE POL 9 *To ensure a high standard of shop front design and retention of traditional shop fronts in accordance with the Leitrim County Council Guidelines on Shopfront Design, October 2003 or any replacement Design Guide.*

PLACE OBJ 1 *To facilitate the development of a high quality and distinctive built environment creating a sense of place, with attractive, accessible and safe streets, spaces and neighbourhoods.*

PLACE OBJ 2 *To avail of all funding opportunities as they become available to facilitate the enhancement, revitalisation, renewal and regeneration of town and village centres.*

The proposed development meets the objectives with a focus on regeneration and town centre development being a priority.

Heritage

The historic core of Drumshanbo is designated as Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) in recognition of its historical architectural character and layout. The extent of the ACA is shown in Figure 11 below. The centre also contains a number of individually significant buildings including the 5 No. protected structures listed below. The Shannon Blueway is also a natural heritage site, offering water and land trails. Many of the key heritage sites in Drumshanbo are considered underutilised.

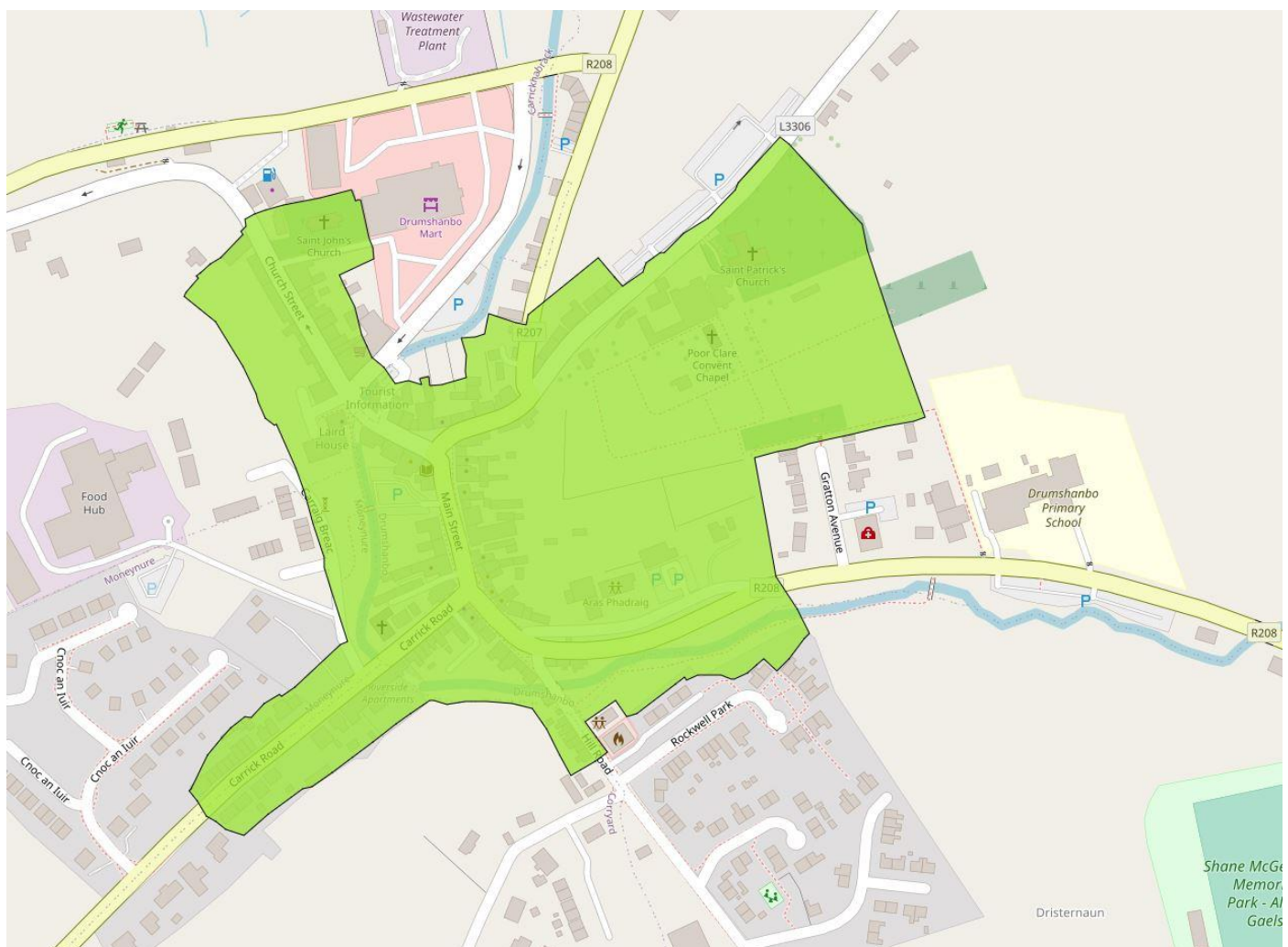
Drumshanbo has a distinctive wide streetscape running on a north-south axis. Some notable buildings include Saint Patrick's Catholic Church, Northern Bank Building, Drumshanbo Methodist Church, Berry's Tavern and Saint John's Church.

The following objectives for Drumshanbo contained in the County Development Plan are relevant:

DSO 27 Promote and enhance existing archaeological, built and natural heritage elements associated with Drumshanbo and to ensure their protection.

DSO 28 Protect and maintain the Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) in Drumshanbo and the buildings contained therein.

Figure 11: Drumshanbo ACA



The proposed landscaping scheme includes native trees and vegetation with the development. See Landscape Masterplan and Design Strategy Statement for details.

NH OBJ 9 *To support the implementation of the relevant recommendations contained in the National Biodiversity Action Plan and the All Ireland Pollinator Plan.*

Protected Structures

A number of protected Structures are located within the town core and within the site. These are identified in Table 1 of this statement. In addition to protecting individual buildings and structures, Leitrim County Council is aware that many other buildings, while not of sufficient merit to warrant individual listing, are nevertheless important in the context of their contribution to the streetscape and the character of Drumshanbo. There are policies in support of re-use and refurbishment of Protected Structures, and those relevant policies include:

BH POL 1 *To protect all structures in the Record of Protected Structures (Volume IV of this Plan).*

BH POL 2 *To promote best conservation principles and practice with regard to protecting Leitrim's considerable architectural heritage.*

BH POL 4 *To ensure that proposed development within the curtilage or attendant grounds of a Protected Structure respects the Protected Structure and its setting.*

BH POL 5 *To have regard to the Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities (October 2011) or replacement Section 28 Guidelines as may be issued by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage when assessing proposals for development affecting a Protected Structure and buildings listed in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage.*

BH POL 6 *To require the preparation of an Architectural Impact Assessment undertaken by an architect or other suitably qualified professional with conservation expertise, where appropriate, for developments which include or relate to a Protected Structure or their curtilage and attendant grounds.*

BH POL 7 *To promote the principles of best practice in conservation in terms of use of appropriate materials, repair techniques, and thermal upgrades by adhering to the guidelines as set out in Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht's Advice Series publications or their replacement*

BH POL 8 *To promote awareness and the appropriate adaptation of the county's architectural and archaeological heritage to deal with the effects of climate change.*

BH OBJ 1 *To seek the protection of all structures within the county that are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest as contained in the Record of Protected Structures (Volume IV of this Plan).*

The proposed development is in its entirety including the refurbishment and reuse of the former Bank building and Earley's Building on the Main Street is consistent with these objectives and a justification for the proposed interventions into the historic built environment in this location is set out in the accompanying Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment supporting this application.

Architectural Conservation Areas

Drumshanbo Town Centre is identified as an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) in the recently adopted County Plan. The ACA covers the Main Street buildings and associated lands. A majority of the site falls within the ACA. Relevant Policies include:

ACA POL 1 *To ensure the preservation of the special character of each Architectural Conservation Area listed in this Plan (See Table 11.9) by exercising specific design control with particular regard to building scale, proportions, historical plot sizes, building lines, height, general land use, fenestration, signage, and other appendages such as electrical wiring, building materials, historic street furniture, paving and shop fronts.*

ACA POL 2 *To have regard to the Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities (October 2011) or replacement Section 28 Guidelines as may be issued by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage during the life of this Plan when assessing proposals for development affecting the character of an Architectural Conservation Area.*

ACA POL 3 *To ensure the retention, repair and the regular maintenance, rather than replacement, of original/early features in buildings which contribute to the character of an Architectural Conservation Area such as chimney stacks, roof coverings, roof profiles, external wall treatments, doors and windows, shop fronts and pub fronts, while ensuring appropriate materials and repair techniques are used when repairs are being carried out.*

ACA POL 4 *To ensure that inappropriate materials for windows, doors and rainwater goods constructed in aluminium or uPVC are not introduced to buildings within Architectural Conservation Areas.*

ACA POL 5 *To encourage high quality, contemporary design and materials where appropriate when new buildings are being introduced into an Architectural Conservation Area and the retention of the historic scale and plot size. Such buildings should contribute to the visual enhancement of the area and respect the character of the Architectural Conservation Area as set out in the statement of character (when prepared).*

ACA POL 7 *To retain historic items of street furniture where they contribute to the character of the Architectural Conservation Area, such as, post boxes, benchmarks, gates, plaques, milestones, railings, etc.*

ACA POL 9 *To ensure the embodied energy of the current building stock within Architectural Conservation Area are acknowledged when considering proposed developments, and to encourage the reuse of these building over demolition.*

The entire proposal addresses where possible the policy requirements of the ACA.

Land Use Zoning

The site is predominantly zoned as ‘Town/Village Centre Use’ to include the former bank building and ‘Earley’s Building’ on Main Street, the off-street car parking area, and public realm with the parklands and riverside is partly zoned as ‘Open Space’. The respective land use zoning objectives are as follows:

Town/Village Centre: *To maintain and enhance the vitality and viability of existing town and village centres through consolidation with an appropriate mix of retailing, commercial, cultural and residential activities.*

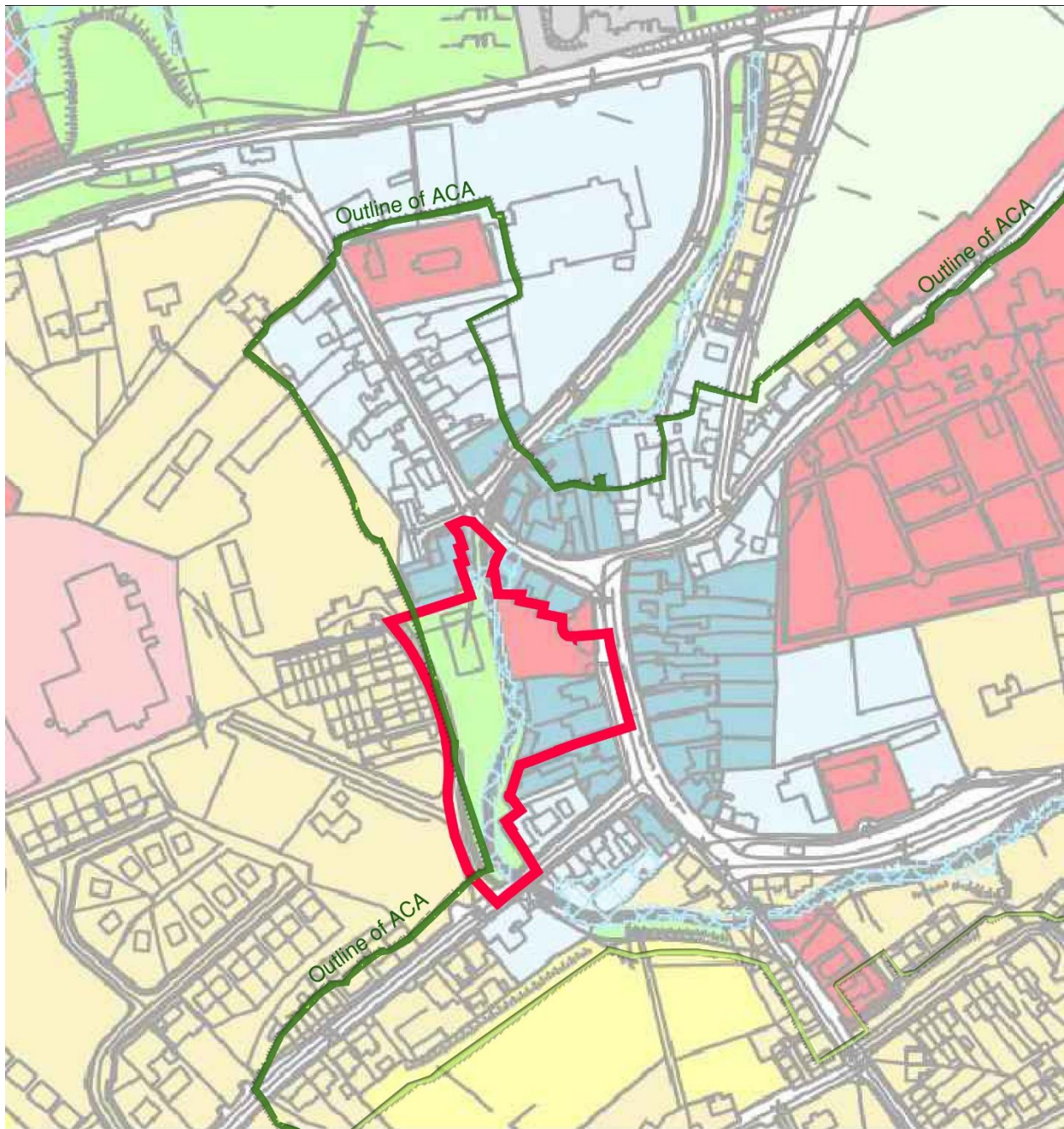
Open Space: *To preserve, provide for and improve active and passive recreational public and private open space.*

Figure 12 below is an excerpt of the Drumshanbo Land Use Zoning objectives Map(No.19) of the application site as contained in the County Development Plan 2023-2029. The proposed provision of an access off Main Street, back land car park, public realm and redevelopment works to the People’s Park and reuse of the former bank building, Earley’s Building and 2 No. derelict buildings are consistent with the Town/Village Centre land use zoning and its objective of improving town centre facilities and protecting and enhancing the physical and social characteristics of the town core.















Town/Village Centre: *The Council will encourage and facilitate the development of under-utilised land and brownfield sites creating a mix of uses to make the town and village centres attractive places to visit, shop and live in. The full use of upper floors in buildings, preferably for residential use, will be encouraged. The character of the town and village centres shall be protected and enhanced. Development proposals should provide a use, scale, form and design that accords with the role, function and size of the town or village centre. These areas require high levels of accessibility by all modes, including pedestrian, cyclist and public transport (where feasible).*

Open Space: *The use of land shall include the provision of land for parks, public woodland, pedestrian routes and greenways, riparian zones, development incidental to the enjoyment of open space (including playgrounds, outdoor recreation centres and sports centres, civic/market square, village greens, landscaped areas, shelters, sanitary conveniences, play equipment, dressing rooms and similar facilities). It also provides for the use of such land or such facilities for games, educational and recreational purposes. High standards of accessibility are essential. The Council will not normally permit development that would result in a loss of existing open space.*

Figure 12: Land use Zoning Map (extract from the County Plan)



Legend

- | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
|  | Existing Residential |  | Open Space |
|  | New Residential |  | Tourism |
|  | Town/Village Centre |  | Agriculture |
|  | Mixed Use |  | Utilities |
|  | Enterprise & Employment |  | Constrained Land Use |
|  | Social & Community |  | Development Envelope |
|  | Low Density Residential |  | Phase 2 Enterprise and Employment |

The proposed development is consistent with the above objectives of the Plan.

Car Parking

Section 8.10.5 of the County Development Plan identifies car parking requirements for proposed development. Relevant car parking based policies and objectives are listed below:

CP POL 3 *To ensure that planning applications for surface car parking/Local Authority own developments are accompanied by adequate landscaping proposals to soften the hard landscape and promote biodiversity.*

CP POL 5 *To require provision of parking standards in accordance with the standards set out in Chapter 13: Development Management Standards for all developments.*

CP OBJ 2 *To review the need for additional off-street car parks in Towns and Key Villages and, if required, to acquire land to develop further car parks availing of available national funding opportunities.*

Electric Vehicles

Section 8.10.4 of the County Development Plan identifies electrical vehicle requirements for proposed development. Relevant policy is listed below:

EV POL 1 *To facilitate the provision of electricity charging infrastructure for electric vehicles at appropriate locations.*

Bike Parking Facilities

Section 8.10.6 of the County Development Plan covers Bicycle Parking. Bike parking and proposed in line with Policy BP POL 1:

BP POL 1 *To ensure the provision of appropriate secure, safe, convenient and accessible bicycle parking facilities as part of any new developments in towns and villages to encourage modal shift away from private cars to more sustainable modes of transport.*

Urban Design – Hard & Soft Landscaping

Section 13.9.6 of the County Development Plan covers Soft Landscaping and Section 13.9.7 covers Hard Landscaping – the principles of the ‘Urban Design Manual Best Practice Guide’ (DEHLG, 2009), have been implemented on the proposals for Drumshanbo. Also, there is a significant amount of landscaping and environmental enhancement proposed consistent with CP POL 3.

5.3.2 LOCAL GUIDANCE

Part 8 in respect of the Regeneration of Riverside/Backlands Area

Part 8 Planning Approval was received for the “*People’s Park in Drumshanbo*” - Part 8 Planning 12/C/05 in 2012. Significant elements of the Scheme were constructed through LEADER Funds, however, some key elements remain outstanding and will be completed as part of this regeneration project including completion of the central space (level platform) adjoining the sculpture, lowering of the boundary wall between the carpark and the river, extension of the path along the river from under the pedestrian bridge to the Carrick Road, set back of the bridge parapet wall on the Carrick Road and completion of landscaping works to the park.

6. PLANNING ASSESSMENT

Planning Assessment

This Section is presented under the following headings:

- Compliance with national planning policy and guidance;
- Compliance with regional planning advice;
- Compliance with County Development Plan Policy;
- Other planning merits.

This planning assessment concludes the following:

Compliance with national planning policy and guidance

Section 5.1 above sets out key national planning policy and advice.

The proposal is consistent with the NPF which sets out development goals which encourage sustainable development of and proper planning in the State's towns. These goals seek to improve living standards, quality of life and environmental sustainability whilst seeking to reconcile national advice and international commitments on sustainability, energy efficiency and consumption, and climate change. It is essential that towns, and town centres in particular, are attractive places for people to live, work in and visit, all of which will be achieved in this instance. National Planning Outcome NPO4 seeks to ensure that towns like Drumshanbo are attractive, liveable, well designed, high quality urban places. This will be achieved with the proposed development proceeding. Regeneration, rejuvenation and revitalisation as proposed in this application is crucial to achieving these highly desirable aims. NPO16 & NPO17 are achieved in this instance where the proposed development seeks to strengthen the core of the town, seeks to address the long-term vacancy of two key buildings and two derelict buildings in this ACA location. The proposal is particularly supported by NPO18a which seeks to stimulate regeneration and renewal through improvements to the public realm, provision of amenities and the provision of services. This is in essence the proposed development. The proposal is supported by NPO27 which seeks to prioritise walking and cycling accessibility to the developments.

The proposed development is also supported by relatively recent Government advice encouraging investment in town and village centres in the form of 'Our Rural Future 2021-2025).

The proposed development is also supported by more recent national advice in the form of 'Town Centre First' which seeks to make town centres viable, vibrant and attractive locations for people to live in, work in, and visit and seeks to ensure that such locations function as service, social, cultural and recreational hubs for their communities. We believe that the proposal ticks the box in each instance. This is a town centre regeneration project also consistent with this national strategy.

Compliance with regional planning advice

The relevant regional planning advice and guidance for the Northern and Western Region is complied with in this instance. There are several regional planning objectives that support the proposed development including: RPO 3.4 which supports the renewal of small towns such as Drumshanbo; RPO 3.9 which encourages the identification of development opportunities for regeneration that is mindful of environmental impact; RPO 3.10 which seeks the provision of sustainable drainage solutions, and RPO 3.13 which supports service provision and employment in small towns. Regional guidance also supports the protection and sustainable use of all natural resources such as RPO 5.5 and in this case the proposed development involving the improvement works to the existing parklands and riverside walk could be linked to sensitive and sustainable use of 'People's Park' with environmentally sustainable cycling and walking link between the two of the town centre and the Food Hub.

Compliance with adopted County Development Plan Policy

The 2015 to 2021 County Plan and the adopted 2023-2029 County Development have both informed this planning scheme with the key policies and objectives relating to Drumshanbo very closely aligned. The proposed scheme was at a formative stage before the current County Development Plan took effect in the Spring of 2023.

The 2023-2029 County Development Plan identifies the importance of strong, vital and vibrant town centres within its Core Strategy and the proposed development in Drumshanbo is consistent with that key objective or principle. Central to that Core Strategy is that of development should be concentrated or focused initially in the town centre as a preference and thereafter outwards. The focus is, and will remain, on the development and well-being of the town centre consistent with the town centre first approach before that guidance became formally recognised.

The proposed development in its entirety is consistent with the Core Strategy of the 2023-2029 County Development Plan. The focus of the proposed development is very much on regeneration consistent with CS OBJ 06; the increase in local employment opportunities and ensuring a high quality of life for town centre residents is proposed as per CS OBJ 12 and reuse and refurbishment within the town centre is consistent with CS OBJ 18.

The proposal is also consistent with the Drumshanbo General Development Objectives of the recently adopted County Development Plan. Overall this ambitious project is consistent with objective DSO 6; DSO 8 (facilitating remote working hub and driving economic growth); DSO 15 & DSO 16 (development works to Riverside Park); DSO 17 (enhance accessibility); DSO 34 (enhance amenity facilities); DSO (encouraging enterprise and employment development); commercial objectives such as DSO 11 & DSO 12 (encourage regeneration and streetscape enhancement works); DSO 1 (encourage expansion of local employment options); DSO 3 (addressing vacancies and identifying new development opportunities) & DSO 4 (public realm enhancement works).

The proposal also assists the achievement of tourism objectives including facilitating tourism development (DSO 34 in particular).

The proposed reuse and refurbishment of former bank building and 'Early's building' as a new smart working facility is consistent with DSO 6 (regeneration of derelict and underused premises); and DSO 8 (which promotes and seeks planning permission for the RRDF funded Drumshanbo Town Centre Regeneration Scheme) which are key to this Part 8 proposal.

The overall proposal is consistent with policies and objectives in relation to heritage. The proposed demolition works to the rear extensions of the Former Bank of Ireland Building and Earley's Building and the extension of the pedestrian walkway along the eastern side of the river to connect through the curtilage of Drumshanbo Methodist Church to connect with the Carrick Road, are considered to be consistent with objectives DSO 27 & DSO 28 (protect, conserve, enhance and manage the built heritage).

BH POL 1 (protect all structures in the RPS); BH POL 2, BH POL 5 & BH POL 7 (use best heritage practice); BH POL 4 (new development be sympathetic to the Protected Structure); BH POL 6 (preparation of architectural heritage impact assessment); and BH POL 8 (appropriate adaptation). Mitigation measures are proposed and contained within the Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment accompanying this application to ensure policy compliance with the above.

The proposal, taken in its entirety, is also consistent with the policies/objectives in relation to the ACA designation and ACA POL 1 to ACA POL 5 inclusive, ACA POL 7 & ACA POL 9.

The proposal is also consistent with the parking requirements set out in Section 8.10.5 (Car Parking) of the Plan. The proposal is consistent with EV POL 1 which requires the necessary wiring and ducting to be capable of accommodating future Electrical Vehicle charging points at a rate of 10% of total space numbers. It is considered that the ducting and wiring can be provided without providing the actual spaces at this moment but that the need for further EV spaces to the 10% threshold will be considered at a later date.

The proposal clearly visually enhances the town centre – reusing vacant buildings and land and enhances public realm including improvements to the parklands and riverside walkways.

The proposal is consistent with the objectives set out in Section 7.14 (Roads and Infrastructure Climate Context and Development Objectives).

The proposal is therefore considered to be consistent with the provisions of the adopted County Development Plan 2023-2029.

Other Planning Matters

A pre-demolition or re-construction inspection for bats, carried out by a qualified and experienced bat specialist, will be undertaken on site. If bats are found to be present on site during this inspection a Bats Derogation Licence will be required. This requirement would be covered by a condition attached to any Part 8 planning approval.

Asbestos containing materials are present onsite and necessary steps shall be taken to ensure that this does not present a hazard or danger to human health and the environment.

Any asbestos containing material will be removed by an asbestos removal contractor and disposed of as asbestos waste before the refurbishment/demolition works commence. The following planning condition should be considered in the Part 8 approval:

“A construction and demolition waste management plan shall be submitted for the written agreement of the Planning Authority prior to the commencement of development on site. The Plan shall contain details of the various waste streams to be generated during site clearance and construction phases and volumes of export/importation of soil and stone material for the site.”

Other Planning Merits

The proposal also represents significant confidence and investment in the town for which funding is available.

7. ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

Following an Archaeological Assessment being carried out, it has been determined that the Drumshanbo Town Centre Regeneration Project development will have no direct or negative impact on any known recorded archaeological sites or monuments in the vicinity of the proposed development area in the greenfield areas, along the river and within the built areas or within the yards and associated buildings. There will be no visual impact on the recorded archaeological sites or monuments in the vicinity of the proposed development. Due to the scale of the development which is 0.794 hectares (c. 1.962 acres), it is recommended that archaeological monitoring should be undertaken of subsurface works associated with the development. The recommended programme of archaeological monitoring should be conducted by a suitably qualified archaeologist, under license to the Planning and Heritage Section of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, with provision being made for full recording, preservation in situ or excavation of any archaeological features or deposits which may be exposed.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT SCREENING SUMMARY

The proposed development is assessed to fall outside of the requirement for mandatory EIA by virtue of the below threshold size of the site, its developed context and proposed activity typology. Having regard to the **characteristics of the proposed development**, sub threshold EIA is not considered to be required, due to scale and type of development.

The findings and conclusions of the EIA Screening Report have been documented, with the necessary supporting evidence and objective criteria. The conclusions are that the Drumshanbo Town Centre Regeneration Project will:

- 1). Not exceed the EIA Mandatory Threshold for EIA Class 10(b)(iv) Urban development which would involve an area greater than 2 hectares in the case of a business district and therefore neither a mandatory EIAR nor an EIA is required.
- 2). It is considered that the project provides adequate and standard safeguards as inherent components of the overall project so as to ensure that significant risks to the environment are not likely to occur.
- 3). There is an absence of any environmental sensitivities in the area of the proposed development.
- 4). Overall it is considered that there is no potential for significant effects on the environment to arise as a result of this proposed development.
- 5). Having regard to the above, and in particular to the nature, scale and location of the proposed project, by itself and in combination with other plans and projects, it is considered that an EIA is **not** required for the proposed development of the Drumshanbo Town Centre Regeneration Project.

Leitrim County Council have determined that the proposed development does not require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Assessment Report.

9. ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

An Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment of the scheme has been prepared by D.M McCabe MRIAI Grade III Conservation. The existing site and streetscape was reviewed, including a brief exploration of significant historic buildings and their setting that are affected by the proposals, and the possible impacts that may result in undertaking the proposed work. Overall, the proposed development is expected to have a positive impact in enhancing the historic town centre, assisting in supporting a sustainable future for the historic buildings in maintaining their setting, giving renewed purpose, and providing vitality to the streetscape. The impact on the fabric and thus also the visual character of the buildings, subject to adoption of recommendations of the architectural conservation report and execution in line with best practice, is considered to be minimal, and therefore acceptable in terms of architectural conservation.

10. APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT SCREENING SUMMARY

The findings and conclusions of the Appropriate Assessment Screening Report have been documented, with the necessary supporting evidence and objective criteria. The AA Screening conclusions are that the planning application for “*Drumshanbo Town Centre Regeneration Project*”, will:

1. Have no significant impact upon surface water quality either during the construction phase or the post construction phase. The proposed development will not cause deterioration of water quality and cannot have a negative impact upon the Cuilcagh - Anierin Uplands SAC Natura 2000 site which is located over 5.1 km upstream in an elevated upland area.
2. There will no loss of any Natura 2000 site area. There will be no loss or fragmentation of Annex I habitats; or Annex II species upon which any Natura 2000 site qualifies for its conservation status as a consequence of permitting the proposed development to proceed. This is due to the nature and limited scale of the proposed development and the separation distance of the actual site works from Natura 2000 site of over 5.1km.
3. There will be no cumulative impact upon any Natura 2000 sites in combination with other plans or projects.
4. The proposed development will not compromise the maintenance of Annex I habitats for which any Natura 2000 site has been selected at favourable conservation status.
5. It is concluded that the conservation objectives of the Cuilcagh - Anierin Uplands SAC site will be met as the habitats and species will be maintained at a favourable conservation status.

The AA Screening findings and conclusions remove all reasonable scientific doubt as to the effects that the works proposed may have on the Cuilcagh - Anierin Uplands SAC Natura 2000 site. There the site can be screened out of Appropriate Assessment and there is no requirement to carry out a Stage 2: Natura Impact Statement.

Therefore, on the basis of objective scientific and factual information pertaining to the site and the proposed works, the proposed development either individually or in combination with other plans/projects will not have any significant effects on a European site – namely Cuilcagh - Anierin Uplands SAC.

There is no scientific reason why the proposed development should be precluded from proceeding.

Leitrim County Council have determined that the proposed development does not require the preparation of a Stage II Appropriate Assessment.

11. CONCLUSION

The proposed development complies with the Leitrim County Development Plan 2023-2029.

The proposal also represents significant confidence in and investment in the town for which funding is available.

The proposed development will be transformative to the town core of Drumshanbo. The new 'Smart Working Facility/Digital Hub' with commercial spaces, as proposed, would provide additional town core uses and generate substantial footfall in the core area. The public realm, extended car park and improvement works to the existing parklands known locally as 'People's Park' and works to the riverside walks will also be of significant benefit to the town. Creating a more permeable and accessible scheme represents a genuine opportunity to create a meaningful intervention for the town.

The proposals outlined in this regeneration project addresses ongoing vacancy issues, improves accessibility and enhances amenities for the people of Drumshanbo in reclaiming the town's identity.

There are a number of planning merits and advantages associated with the proposed development. The proposal is consistent with the 'town centre first' approach to settlement planning. The Drumshanbo Town Centre Regeneration Project will bring 4 No. prominent and vacant buildings back to use with an attractive new public realm space located between designed to invite people to meet, mingle and dwell. The regeneration works to the existing parklands known locally as the 'People's Park' and the works to the riverside walks and improving accessibility to the Food Hub from the Main Street will have an important role and function within the social and economic life of the Drumshanbo community and the attractiveness of the Town Centre.

The proposed development is in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.