



WHITEHEAD

Village Masterplan

WHITEHEAD VILLAGE MASTERPLAN

April 2011

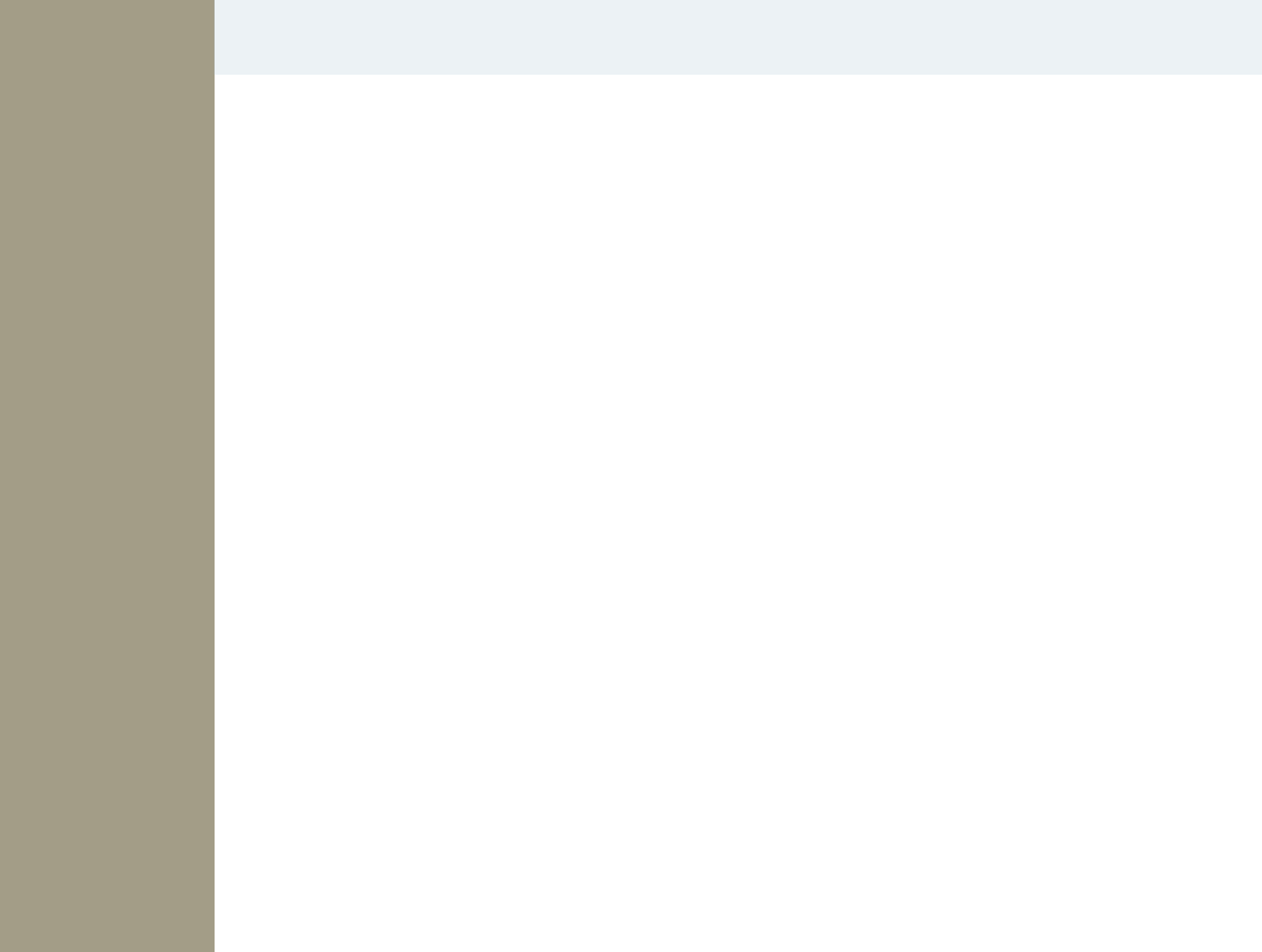






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1. INTRODUCTION

Nestled between cliffs on the northern shores of Belfast Lough is Whitehead. This village began life as a destination on the expanding railway map of 19th Century Northern Ireland. It has since grown into a thriving settlement of some 3700 inhabitants, located within easy reach of Belfast and the towns of South East Antrim. While very much a modern day village, Whitehead has managed to retain much of its Victorian charm, characterised by fine architecture and the occasional plumes of smoke that rise from its railway museum.

Recognising the importance of its heritage, this Masterplan is about the future of Whitehead. What is the vision for the future of the village? How can Whitehead's many strengths be protected and enhanced to contribute more to the social and economic sustainability of the village? How can Whitehead be improved upon to benefit the lives of all its residents?



2. CONTEXT

This masterplan has been commissioned by GROW South Antrim through Carrickfergus Borough Council. It has been part funded by the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), as a core part of the EU Rural Development Programme Village Renewal Measure. The masterplan is one of three plans that have been developed simultaneously for the villages of Doagh, Toome and Whitehead and seeks to identify a range of initiatives by which to improve the village over the next 5 to 10 years.

Whitehead is located to the North East of Belfast (17 miles) and Carrickfergus (6 miles) on the northern shores of Belfast Lough. To the north lies the peninsula of Islandmagee and Larne Lough, with the town of Larne beyond (9 miles).

The masterplan study area is loosely based on the settlement development limit as defined by the Department of the Environment within the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (Draft). This area stretches from the Beach Road Nature Reserve in the south to the Blackhead Path and Port Davy Road in the North and from the shoreline in the east to the Belfast Road in the West.

While the masterplan is largely confined to the area defined in the plan below, a holistic approach has been taken and as a result several of the strategies listed within Section 7 of this report look beyond these boundaries ensuring that initiatives respond to the wider hinterland.



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2.1 MASTERPLAN TEAM

The Village Masterplan process was overseen by a Steering Group comprising elected representatives, council officers and stakeholders from the private and community sectors (see Appendices). The plan was developed by a multidisciplinary consultant team The Paul Hogarth Company (Urban Designers and Landscape Architects) with specialised costing services provided by Nolan Ryan Tweeds.

The plan was compiled during the harshest economic downturn to affect Northern Ireland in many years and therefore takes cogniscence of the limited availability of funding in the short term. However, all of its proposals are designed to reap economic benefits for Whitehead, be it through improvement to retail areas, development of tourism opportunities or enhancement as a place to live. Phased delivery of the masterplan must therefore remain a priority for Whitehead, so as to ensure its social and economic sustainability in the long term.

2.2 PURPOSE OF THE MASTERPLAN

The Whitehead Masterplan serves to provide a vision of the future of the village and puts in place a strategic framework that identifies a range of improvement projects that can collectively fulfil that vision. A thorough process of research and analysis, including consultation with the people of Whitehead, has informed development of this plan. It therefore provides an invaluable point of reference for all who may wish to invest in the village, whether they are from the public sector (local council, government departments and agencies), the private sector (developers, individuals) or the community sector (sports clubs, community groups, churches etc). By working towards the fulfilment of a common objective, the input of many parties can be coordinated, so to maximise benefits to Whitehead.

Like all masterplans, this document should not be treated as a blueprint for development. Rather it sets in place a series of principles and concepts that if followed will greatly benefit the village. Each of its proposals will require to be developed to a greater level of detail once funding is allocated. This would include for example, detailed agreement with landowners, necessary technical studies and in most cases, a planning application.



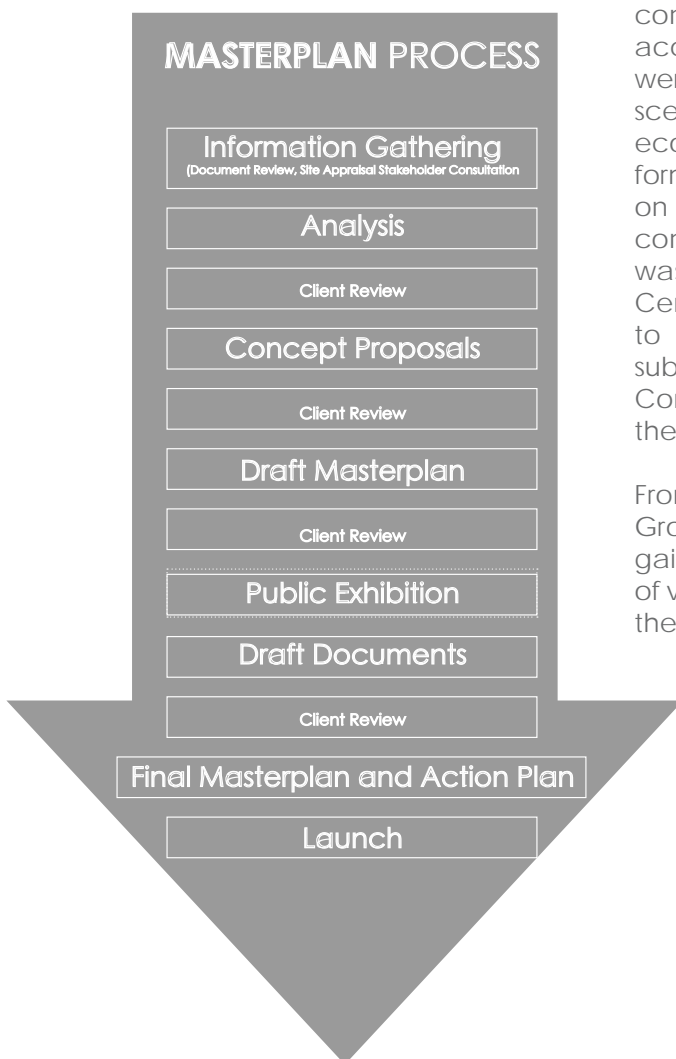
2.3 MASTERPLAN PROCESS

The steps taken throughout the course of the Masterplan process are outlined within the graphic below. During the initial 'Information Gathering' stage, numerous site visits and surveys were conducted each supported by detailed photographic records, while desktop research involving the review of existing plans and initiatives was also undertaken.

Comprehensive stakeholder consultation also formed a key component of the information gathering stage and included an open public consultation event in addition to meetings with numerous statutory agencies. The analysis stage involved the examination of land and building uses in the context of the historic growth of the village as well as gaining an understanding from the feedback gained from earlier consultation meetings.

Guided by the Steering Group, a strong concept and vision statement with accompanying aims and objectives were then formulated, which set the scene for the key physical, social and economic initiatives that ultimately formed the village Masterplan. Following on from the success of the earlier public consultation event, a public exhibition was held at the Whitehead Community Centre enabling residents of Whitehead to review the draft Masterplan and submit their comments. A copy of the Consultation Report is included within the Appendices.

From the outset of this project, the Steering Group emphasised the importance of gaining input from a large cross section of village residents in order to help shape the Masterplan.



3. HISTORY

Understanding Whitehead's fascinating history is an important first step of the masterplan process.

While only a short summary is possible for the purposes of this study, it is key to recognise the circumstances by which the settlement came about and how it has evolved over time. To that extent, acknowledgment is made to Mr P.J O'Donnell and his excellent publications on local history.

The ruins of Castle Chichester on Chester Avenue remind us of the history of Whitehead. It was built circa 1604 by the plantation settlers of Ulster for protection against local tribes, maintaining strong links to nearby Carrickfergus. Its limestone walls were constructed using stone from local cliffs to which the village owes its name. Here quarrying operations grew substantially, exporting its stone across the Lough and Irish Sea from the specially built White Harbour, a striking limestone construction still in limited use today.

Up until mid 19th Century, Whitehead comprised three hamlets (Whitehead, Chichester and Knocknagullagh) and consisted of quarry worker cottages, farm buildings and a mill. It was construction of the county road in 1854 and more significantly the Carrickfergus to Larne railway some eight years later that set the scene for development of the village.

The first holiday homes were constructed 1874, taking advantage of the railway company's Villa Ticket system to incentivise construction near its stations. Within 15 years the railway company itself implemented plans to turn the then Chichester-by-the-Sea into a holiday destination, constructing cliff top paths, the promenade and bandstand, as well as bathing pools.

In becoming known as Whitehead, this was accompanied by the construction of fine villas built to a gridiron plan along with a number of hotels, none of which remain in operation today.

By 1948 Whitehead had a population of 1800, overseen by its own Urban District Council. In response to the national housing shortage of the postwar years, an ambitious plan for a garden village was developed, comprising treelined boulevards and a large Conference Hall. Whilst it was never completed, the plans reflect the pioneering vision the people of Whitehead have always had for their village.

In the 1960s, the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland established their headquarters in Whitehead, where they continue to operate today. This commitment came at a time when the days of steam railway drew to a close and not long before Whitehead's demise as a holiday destination. Today the railway is lifeblood of a largely residential community, many of whom commute to work by rail.

Intriguingly, Whitehead developed a nickname of the "Town with No Streets" and indeed, its map comprises of roads and avenues. Somewhat ironically however, Whitehead has some excellent examples of street design, characteristic of the Victorian period.



4. ANALYSIS

Before developing proposals for the future of Whitehead, it is important to understand how the village both looks and functions today. The consultant team consequently carried out a thorough analysis comprising desktop studies, site visits and surveys, consultation workshops and photographic records. An overview of the analysis process is captured on the illustration opposite.

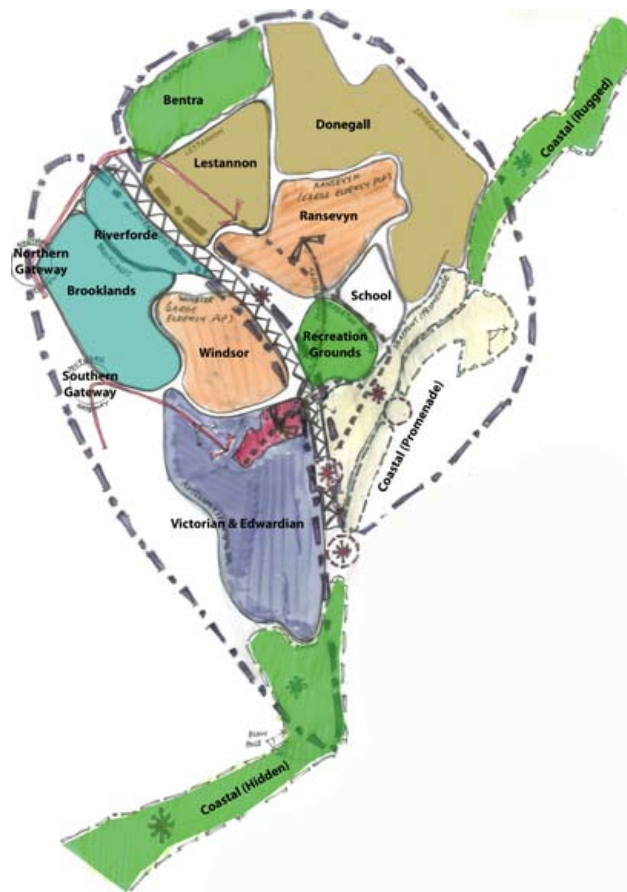
The key findings of this process are as follows:

Strategic Location

Whitehead's location between Carrickfergus and Larne is an important consideration and one that has informed the way in which the village has developed. Industrial or commercial development in Whitehead has traditionally been very limited, connected in part to its location some distance from the primary transport corridors of M2 and A8. The result is a population of whom many travel elsewhere to work and a village that has largely avoided the blight of industrial development and associated infrastructure.

The railway is and always has been, integral to Whitehead, serving primarily as a commuter line to Belfast. Planned upgrades to its rolling stock are likely to increase popularity of the service, helping residents to avoid congestion further along the A2.

One of the strongest aspects of Whitehead's location is its suitability for tourism, particularly being along the scenic Antrim Coast Road. The village has potential to capitalise more fully upon this, benefitting from its proximity to attractions such as the Blackhead and Gobbins coastal paths. To do so increased visibility from the main road will be important.



Natural Landscape

In this context, the natural landscape of the Whitehead area is central to its character. Its position on the bay between Blackhead and Whitehead cliffs is such, that the village is generally approached from above, presenting opportunities for good views both to and from the village. Any development on these slopes must therefore be limited, so not to detract from Whitehead's natural setting.

The Blackhead Path and Lighthouse has long been a popular attraction with visitors and its continued upkeep and protection from coastal erosion will be vital. Scope exists to further connect the path with surrounding areas, including southwards to Carrickfergus and once funding is secured, northwards to a reopened Gobbins path.

Importantly for Whitehead, potential exists for the village's shops and businesses to capitalise more fully on the visitor numbers coming to this attraction. The protection of natural habitat surrounding Whitehead must also remain a priority, with Beach Road Nature Reserve of particular importance. Access to the water is another trait of Whitehead, with a small beach and a very active yacht club of central importance.



Growth Rings

The incremental growth of Whitehead, as described in Chapter 3, is largely legible in the town today.

The origins of the town can be seen at the wonderful White Harbour, a largely hidden gem most visible from the railway. The Victorian and Edwardian centre of Whitehead is clearly apparent in the vicinity of the railway station, leading northwards along Cable and Kings Roads. As one moves northwards, the style of housing becomes progressively newer, with recently constructed houses at the outer most edge.

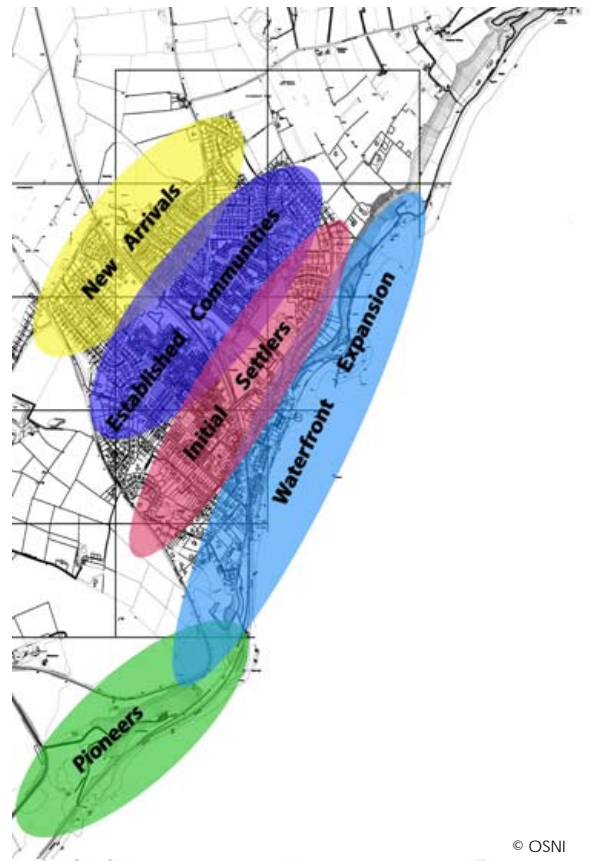
The Masterplan proposals must therefore have an awareness of this pattern and of the character of each of Whitehead's 'growth rings'

Approach Roads, Traffic and Parking

A downside of a village built primarily for rail travel, is that Whitehead has difficulties with vehicular circulation. Approach roads are relatively narrow and residential in nature, presenting two main problems to the village.

Firstly, potential visitors using the Coastal Road have little to entice them into the village, with relatively poor first impressions further compounded by difficulties in finding the centre. Secondly, parked cars line most of Whitehead's streets, causing localised areas of congestion and frustration for local people.

It will therefore be important that the masterplan seeks to address these issues.



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Architectural Quality

Unlike many comparable villages in Northern Ireland, Whitehead has been fortunate to retain the majority of its Victorian and Edwardian architecture, much of which of high quality design. The result is an attractive town centre with a consistency of building design and materials prevalent throughout.

The centre of Whitehead has for some time been designated a conservation area, affording it further protection from inappropriate development. However, reliance on this alone would be unwise and efforts must be ongoing to ensure that the character of Whitehead is enhanced and that new development makes a positive contribution. To that extent, improvements to a number of prominent buildings in the centre of Whitehead would have a beneficial impact on the character of the village as a whole.



Heritage Features

In addition to its architectural quality and character, Whitehead has a number of other important heritage features.

These include the remnants of Chichester Castle, that due to surrounding development, now sit rather discreetly along Chester Avenue. Significant potential exists to increase the prominence of this building, with scope for it to become a visitor attraction.

Another discreetly located heritage feature, yet arguably the town's most important, is Whitehead Excursion Station, home of the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland. This facility is of national significance, where visitors can see the important work in restoring Ireland's railway heritage, including a number of impressive steam locomotives. At the time of writing, plans are well advanced to upgrade and expand the station with the intention of increased visitor numbers.

Like the Blackhead Path, it will therefore be important for Whitehead to capitalise upon this opportunity. Efforts should be made to increase the visibility of the station and to ensure good linkages between it and the rest of the town. The visitor experience could also be further enhanced by longer and more frequent steam train rides from this location.



Pedestrian Circulation

In many areas, Whitehead is an enjoyable place to walk, particularly along its waterfront. However, considerable scope exists to improve pedestrian connectivity around Whitehead.

This includes overcoming the barrier presented by the railway that divides Whitehead in two, particularly north of the King's Road bridge and in the vicinity of the Recreational Grounds. It also includes helping visitors to navigate around Whitehead so that, for example, if they visit the Blackhead path, they are encouraged to venture into the central retail area.

Consequently, improved pedestrian circulation would bring economic benefits to Whitehead. It could also help to ease traffic congestion, by encouraging more people to shop by foot than car.



5. SHARED VISION, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

What kind of place would you like Whitehead to be in the future? Finding an answer to this deceptively simple question was a critical first step in developing a masterplan for the village.

The consultant team worked with members of the local Steering Group to compose the Shared Vision shown below, a draft of which was consulted upon with local residents.

It describes the kind of place the people of Whitehead aspire their village to be in the future and consequently, serves as a very important point of reference to all. To illustrate the vision, the graphic overleaf has been developed in the style of a railway poster, helping to define and promote the village to residents and visitors alike.

To achieve this vision, a series of Aims and Objectives were identified. These two statements spell out the priorities for Whitehead as a better place for its residents and for visitors to the town. By improving the town for local people, whilst sensitively enhancing its capacity to once again serve as a day trip or weekend destination, Whitehead has immense potential.

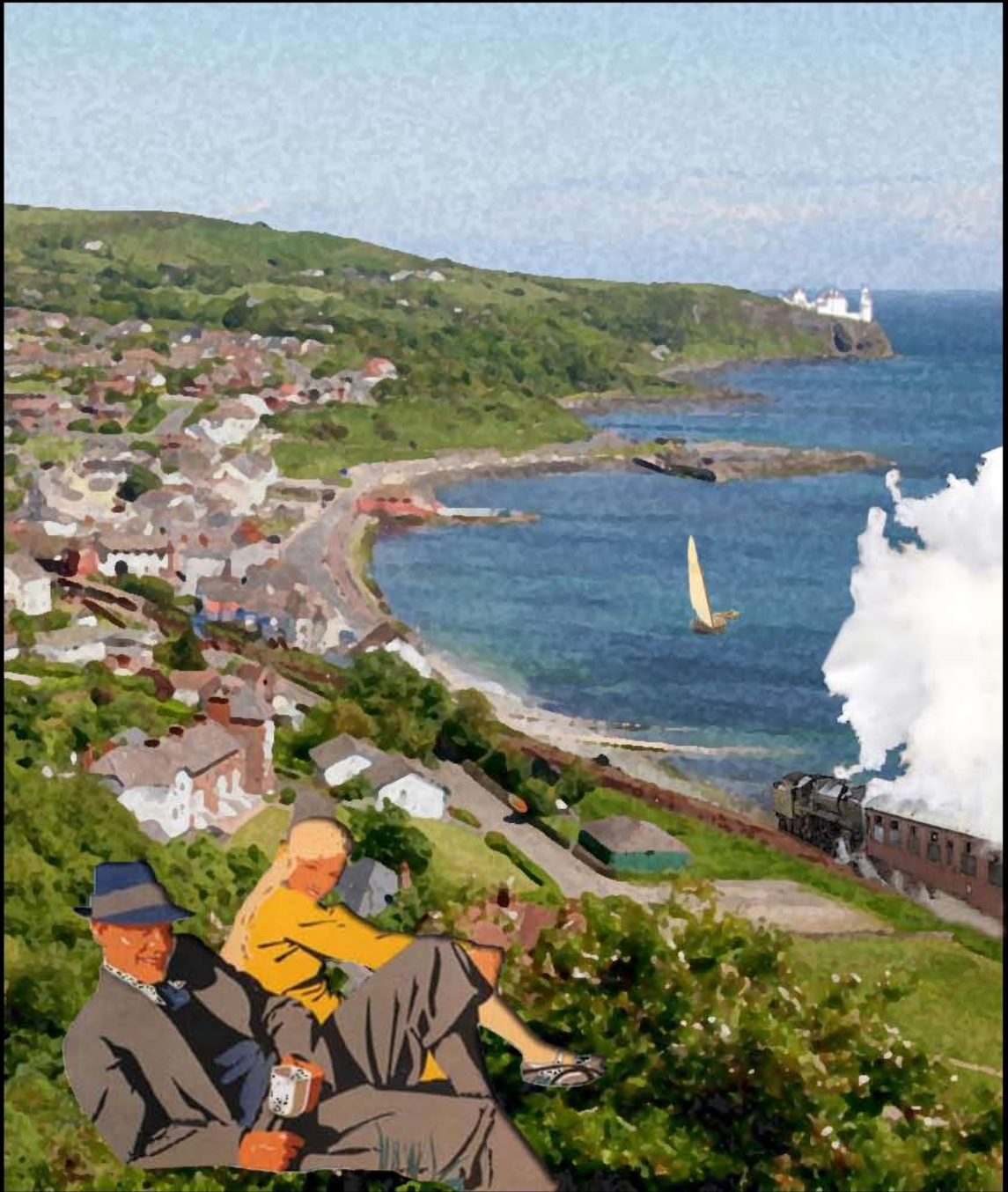


SHARED VISION STATEMENT

"The unique identity of Whitehead will be strengthened to provide a safe and attractive place in which to live and to develop business and leisure opportunities. The village will once again become a premier place to visit based on its rich heritage and wider natural environment.

Increased accessibility combined with an array of sustainable community projects will assist in transforming Whitehead into a welcoming and thriving Railway Town, shaped by its Victorian and Edwardian townscape and distinctive sense of place."

WHITEHEAD



Y°UR DESTINATI°N AWAITS

6. CONCEPT

6.1 COASTAL PARK

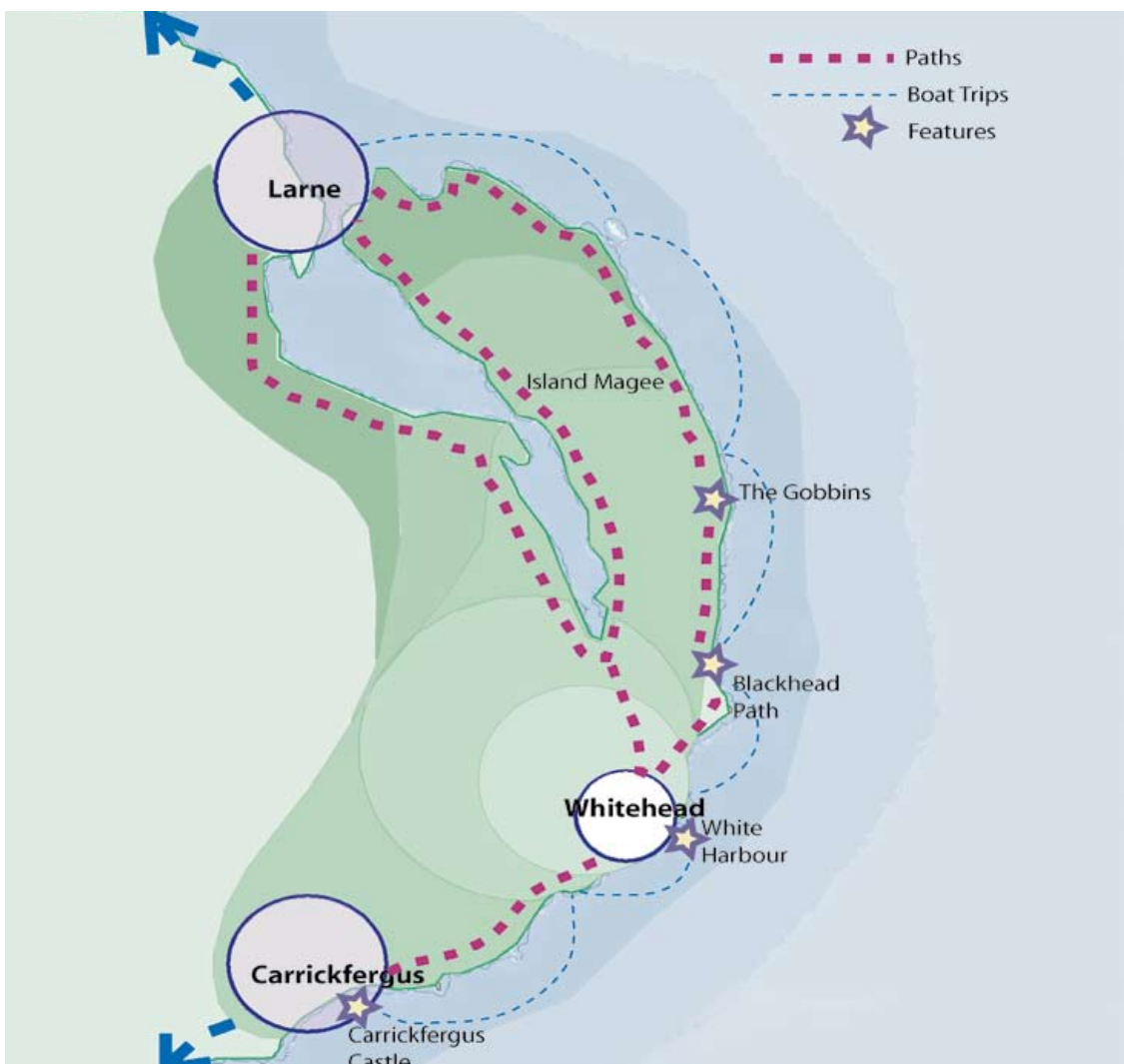
Through the development of the masterplan for Whitehead, the importance of regional connections quickly became apparent. It is therefore proposed that consideration be given to the establishment of a coastal park, stretching from Carrickfergus in the south to Larne in the North, incorporating Islandmagee with Whitehead a pivotal location at its centre.

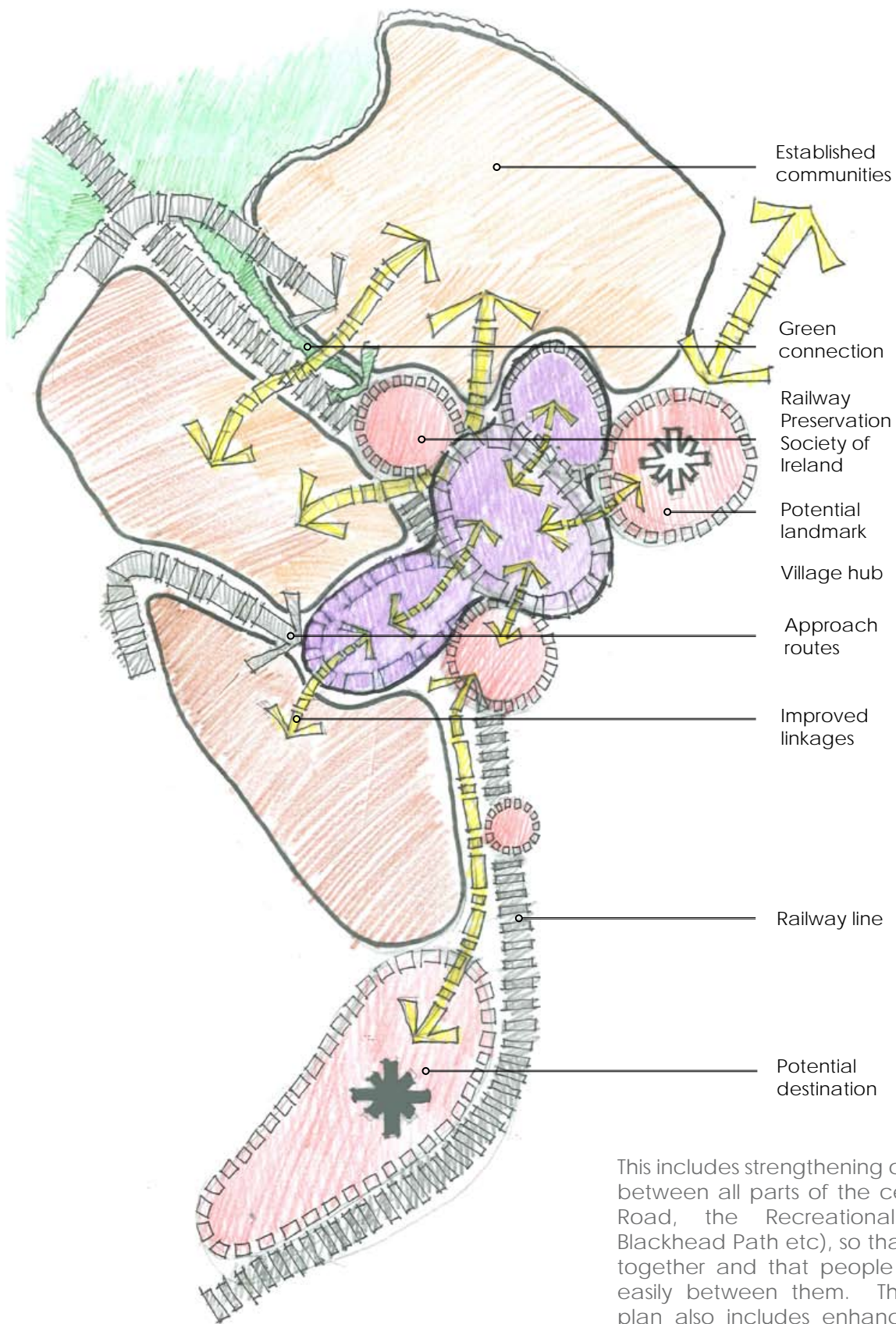
Establishing this concept would help to strategically develop the area as a destination for leisure and tourism, thus strengthening its role as part of the Causeway Coast and Glens Route, all within easy reach of Belfast.

A coastal path suitable for walkers, cyclists and potentially horse riders, could be implemented along its length, connecting key features such as Carrickfergus Castle, White Harbour, Whitehead, Blackhead Path, Ballystrudder, the Gobbins, the Magheramorne Quarry and Larne. It would form part of a regional network of use to locals and tourists alike.

Within this context, Whitehead would be ideally placed to serve as a hub from which to explore the park. Making use of its rail connection, information facilities and accommodation could be well located there.

Potential also exists to connect key locations within the park by boat based at Whitehead, with seasonal connections across to Bangor, Belfast and Stranraer and opportunities for wildlife watching and fishing.





6.2 VILLAGE CONCEPT

The Village Concept Plan shown is the first step in physically applying the aims and objectives to the village. It outlines the key strategic moves proposed for Whitehead.

This includes strengthening connections between all parts of the centre (Kings Road, the Recreational Grounds, Blackhead Path etc), so that they work together and that people can move easily between them. The concept plan also includes enhancing historic landmarks such as the castle, Victorian buildings and the White Harbour, so that they play a greater role in the life of the town and contribute to its social and economic vitality.

The term 'Public Realm', which appears throughout the masterplan initiatives, refers to all external spaces which are publically accessible. This includes streets, squares, parks and car parks.

7. MASTER PLAN INITIATIVES

INTRODUCTION

The Whitehead Masterplan comprises 31 overarching projects and 4 strategies, each of which is made up of separate individual components.

Together the projects and strategies seek to realise the Shared Vision for Whitehead through fulfilment of each of the identified aims and objectives.

7.1 VILLAGE CENTRE

The traditional centre of Whitehead around Cable, Edward's and King's Roads is the heart of Whitehead's economic activity, as well as its Victorian and Edwardian Heritage. The Masterplan proposes a number of projects to sensitively improve the way this area both looks and functions, underpinning its value to local businesses and residents alike.

A wonderful opportunity exists to develop the area as a unique Victorian shopping experience, complete with the necessary modcons of contemporary retail. The projects are Redevelopment Sites, Frontage Improvements, Public Realm and Car Parking.



7.1.1 REDEVELOPMENT SITES

In the town centre a number of opportunities for redevelopment exist, should respective landowners wish to pursue them. These include the former Health Centre, the former Police Station and nearby vacant shop units. Redevelopment of these sites should be encouraged, particularly as such vacant buildings have a detrimental affect on the town centre. Development of shops and business operations should be encouraged in all of these locations, helping to add to Whitehead's economic activity.

In addition to shops serving local needs, scope exists for gift shops, art galleries, cafes and restaurants that would also attract and retain visitors to Whitehead. To maintain activity levels, ground floor uses should be the preserve of activity generating uses, while upper floors are suited to offices and apartments.

Some of these buildings, like the former Health Centre are incongruous in style, therefore providing an opportunity to redevelop the site to be more in keeping with the area. As the new Library on King's Road has so elegantly demonstrated, this does not necessarily mean a traditional form of architecture. Contemporary designs are to be welcomed, as long as they respect the setting of adjacent buildings, adopt a height and use materials appropriate to the area. Other development opportunities, such as the former Police Station, are historic buildings and therefore require sensitive refurbishment to bring them back into use.

All proposals should be undertaken with reference to the Conservation Area Design Guide and in consultation with Planning Service and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.



7.1.2 SHOP FRONT IMPROVEMENTS

Wholesome buildings in Whitehead Village Centre require total redevelopment, others would benefit from improvements to their frontages. This would be assessed on a building by building basis, with priority given to prominent buildings that have the most impact on the area as a whole. Such buildings include the Community Centre and the building at the corner of Windsor Avenue and Kings Road, home to the popular bakery.

A detailed proposal of frontage improvements should be prepared by a suitably qualified architect, in close liaison with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. Components would likely include replacement of inappropriate materials, finishes and fixings, such as PVC windows and gutters. Where possible overhead wires should be replaced with underground alternatives.

Other measures could include painting works and the restoration of brickwork. Shop signage should also be coordinated across the village centre, so as to limit the use of large, backlit plastic signs, in favour of painted and metal signs of an appropriate size and style to the building on which they are located.



7.1.3 STREETScape: PUBLIC REALM & PARKING

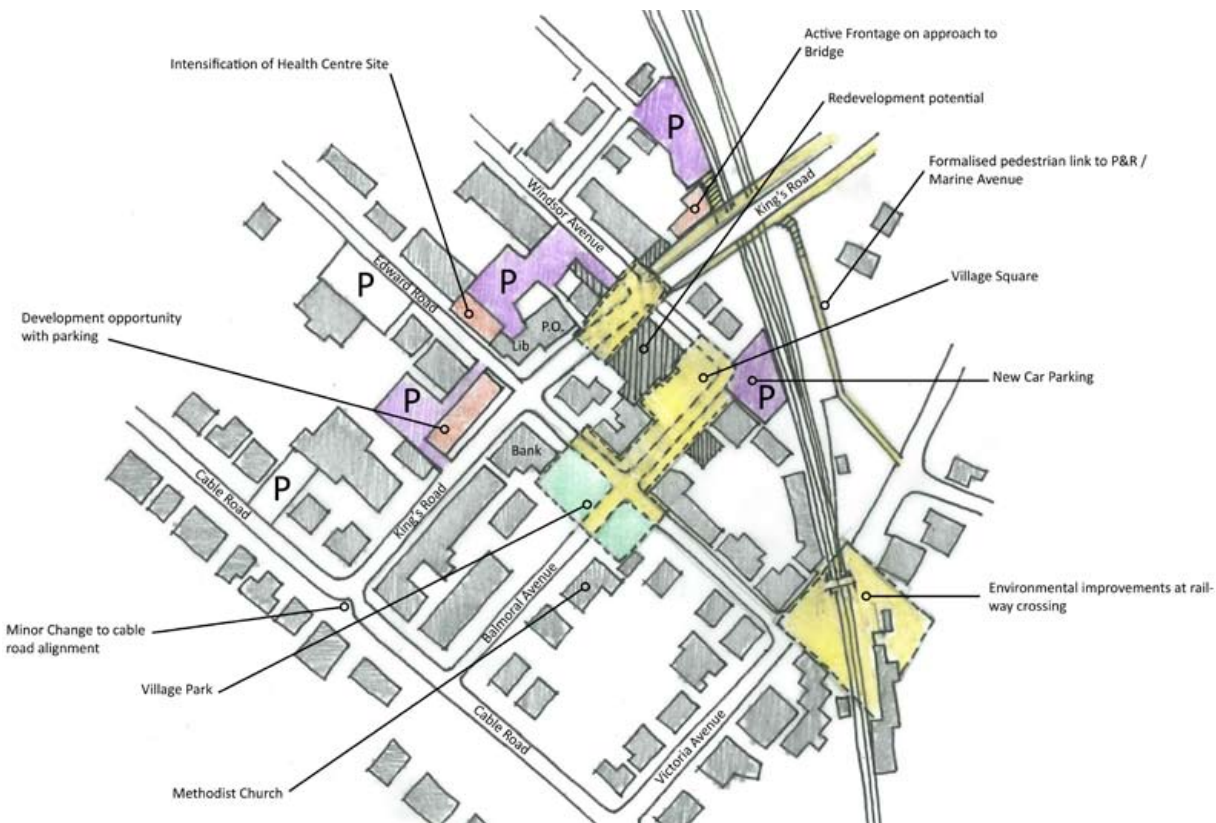
Much of the necessary improvements to Whitehead's traditional village centre relate to its roads and pavements. At present parked cars dominate many areas and footways are varied in their quality and safety. Public Realm and Car Parking should not, however, be treated in isolation of one another and comprehensively addressed through a streetscape project. This would enable pavements and parking bays to be redesigned, maximising footways for pedestrians and provide designated space for parked cars. Some form of ticketing may be required in prominent areas so as to maintain a turnover of the spaces in front of retail outlets.

The streetscape project would also provide the opportunity to improve the quality of lighting and street furniture, with consideration given to bespoke designs that contribute to local identity far more effectively than 'off the shelf' products. As part of the streetscape project, potential exists to create a new square along Balmoral Avenue, incorporating the community centre car park and green spaces associated with the Northern Bank and Methodist Church. This would provide a central focus to the area, with scope for seating areas and space for marketstalls and other events. In addition, a number of areas of land have been identified that may be suitable for increase parking provision.

7.1.4 TWENTY'S PLENTY

Finally, consideration should be given to introducing a 20mph speed limit throughout the central core of Whitehead as well as the lower section of the Islandmagee Road fronting Whitehead Primary School.

This would increase the safety of the area for pedestrians and cyclists, especially for children, parents with buggies and those with mobility impairments. As traffic speeds are generally low at present, this is unlikely to cause much disruption to motorists.



7.2 RECREATION GROUNDS

The Whitehead Recreation Grounds are an important part of the village, home to a number of very active sports clubs, play facilities, the war memorial and community centre. It is also, however, home to some underused facilities, such as the old squash courts and at times, prone to antisocial behaviour.

It is therefore proposed to comprehensively improve the Recreation Grounds to fulfil the following objectives:

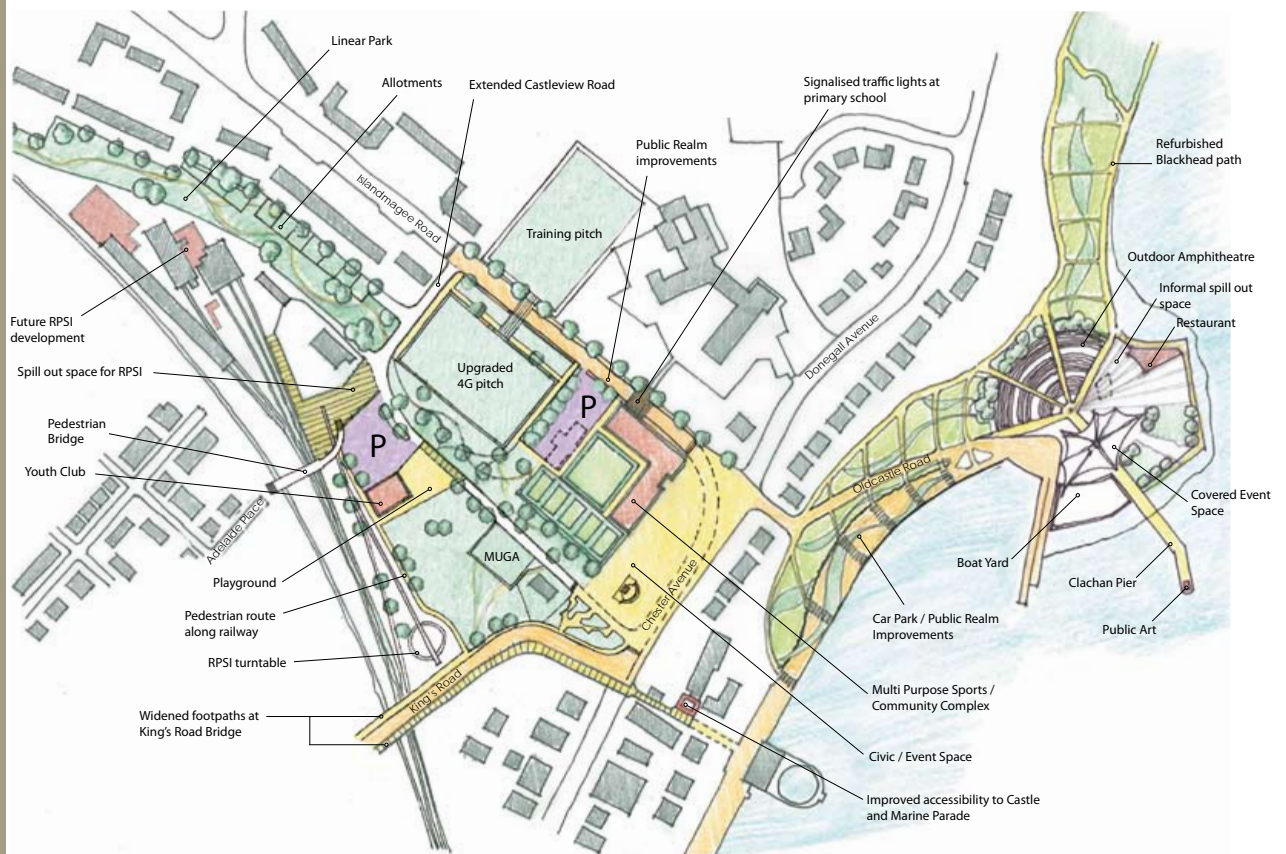
- to provide better facilities for its existing occupants;
- to provide useable space for other activities and events;
- to open up access and visually connectivity with the Excursion Station;
- to make the grounds safer through the reduction of antisocial behaviour;
- to improve the general appearance of the grounds.

This would be achievable through the production of a detailed masterplan for the site, which could then be delivered in phases. The plan would require to be developed in close collaboration with its users and landowners.

Consideration should be given to the inclusion of Whitehead Primary School to the scheme, with scope to provide shared facilities for use of both the school and the community.

The Masterplan extract below illustrates a potential layout of this area. This includes a new sports building with changing rooms, gymnasium and function rooms, the use of which would be shared by the different sports clubs. This would then enable space to be freed up elsewhere on the site for improved sports facilities, play areas, planting and car parking.

The Masterplan also proposes the creation of a civic square in front of the building, with Chester Road passing through the space. This would establish an improved setting for the war memorial and a flexible venue for events and activities.



7.3.1 STATION UPGRADE

7.3 WHITEHEAD EXCURSION STATION (RPSI)

The Whitehead Excursion Station is the long established home of the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland (RPSI), Ireland's only remaining mainline steam engineering depot.

It is a nationally important centre where locomotives are restored and cared for, open to visitors at various times throughout the year. At the time of writing the RPSI have advanced plans to upgrade this site, incorporating improved facilities for engineering (including a turn table) and for visitors, including a viewing gallery and cafe.

The masterplan fully supports these proposals in recognition that a successfully functioning visitor attraction in this location is integral to the economic sustainability of Whitehead. For the longer term, the masterplan proposes a number of additional works that would help to further integrate the station with the village centre, therefore maximising the benefits of its success for Whitehead as a whole.

More recently, the RPSI has extended the original locomotive shed while adding considerable extra siding space with two new maintenance sheds built by the Society - the Carriage Shed (1992) with assistance from the International Fund for Ireland, and the Locomotive Workshop (1997). Following a successful appeal for funds, the Workshop was built at a cost of almost £100k and grant aid by the European Regional Development Fund.

The RPSI has been a major feature in Whitehead for many years and has further plans in place for major improvements to its site. At the time of writing, the first phase is underway with construction of a new, historically accurate Edwardian Station building to be erected on a refurbished platform area. The building will include a reception/ticket office, cafe, shop and toilets. The second and larger phase is for greatly increased visitor facilities with a high level viewing gallery over the workshop areas, extended workshops, carriage sheds and exhibition areas, and a locomotive turntable which will improve train operations as well as providing an impressive sight for visitors and residents.



7.3.2 STATION WELCOME

The entrance to the Excursion Station is currently rather discreet, more appropriate to its role as an engineering works than a visitor attraction. It is therefore proposed to greatly improve the entrance space to the area, in conjunction with a redesign of the Recreational Grounds. This would involve relocation of underused community buildings that obscure the facility, creation of a paved and lit entrance space and the introduction of signage and public art.

7.3.3 STATION LINKAGES INCLUDING FOOTBRIDGE

While the station requires good visitor parking facilities, it is very important for Whitehead that its visitors are encouraged to explore the rest of the village by foot. This includes other attractions such as the Blackhead Path, as well as its shops and cafes. Again in conjunction with the redesign of the Recreational Grounds, it is proposed to implement new footpaths that directly connect the Excursion Station with the village. The most important of these is to the bridge at Kings Road, providing a direct link to the facility.

It is also proposed to implement a new footbridge across the railway in the vicinity of the station. This would provide a valuable pedestrian link for Whitehead, overcoming the barrier affect caused by the railway in this location. Finally, the feasibility of pedestrian linkage northwards towards Bentra should also be explored. This could take place in conjunction with the development of allotments on open space to the rear of houses on Islandmagee Road.

7.3.4 EXCURSIONS

At present the station offers very short train rides to the Kings Road Bridge and back, as well as Belfast based day trips and Three Day Tours. To further enhance the popularity and success of this important visitor attraction, consideration should be given to the operation of elongated rides and excursions.

It is recognised that potential for this is restricted by requirements of the service line. However, through a multiagency approach, exploration to facilitate longer trips should be explored. This could involve reconstruction of the second line originally used for the quarry, with the White Harbour the potential location for a seasonal halt.



7.4 CASTLE CHICHESTER

Castle Chichester and the adjacent Manor House was built circa 1604 for Sir Moses Hill, Provost Marshall of Carrickfergus. Indicative of the period, it was heavily fortified to protect from marauding tribes.

The structure is an integral part of Whitehead's history and culture and its ongoing conservation will be important. The ruins are in private ownership and as such, there is no public access to the castle at present. However, given its prominence in the centre of Whitehead and its potential for tourism and education, consideration should be given to increasing its accessibility to the general public. This could involve a public footpath to or through the site, interpretative panels explaining its significance and a lighting project to increase the castles presence during the hours of darkness. Whether or not access inside the building would be practical, would depend on a survey of the structure. Should this be feasible, then potential exists for the building to be used as information point.

Such measures could be achieved through the formation of a partnership between the owner and other stakeholders, such as the Council, NIEA and local history groups.



7.5 ISLANDMAGEE ROAD

Islandmagee Road is a relatively wide thoroughfare that enables access to the east of the town. It is flanked by housing to either side, including the Ransevyn, Lestannon and Donegall areas, as well as Whitehead Primary School.

Environmental Improvements to this route would have a number of benefits. Firstly, road safety could be improved through traffic calming and improved crossing points. This is particularly important in the vicinity of the school. Secondly the quality of access of pedestrians and cyclists could be upgraded, making the route better for residents, as well as those making their way to the Health Centre or Bentra by foot. Thirdly, environmental improvements would greatly enhance the appearance of this important road, sending out a positive message about the neighbourhoods to either side, as well as the village as a whole.

Environmental Improvements would involve resurfacing of pavements, introduction of new crossing points, planting of street trees, new lighting, street furniture and public art. Involvement of local residents and school children is to be encouraged.



7.6 BLACKHEAD PATH

The Blackhead Path is a very popular Victorian seaside walking route to the north east of village, culminating in spectacular views from the Blackhead Lighthouse. Its upkeep and development is important for the future of Whitehead, with scope to attract more visitors to the village.

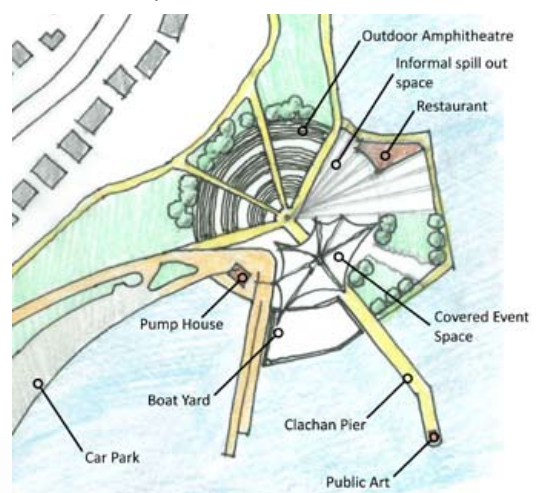
7.6.1 PATH RESTORATION PROGRAMME

Like most popular walking routes, the Blackhead Path requires regular maintenance and restoration to counter the effects of wear and tear and coastal erosion. A number of sections of the path are currently in need of repair so to ensure the safety of its users. It is therefore proposed that a coordinated restoration programme for the path is set in place. This would be informed by a detailed condition survey of the route and environs, followed by the identification specific measures. These are likely to include slope stabilisation, path reconstruction, localised drainage solutions and the enhancement of wildlife habitat. The likely costs of this process are such, that delivery of restoration measures would require to be phased over a number of years. Regular communication with the public will therefore be important, particularly should sections require temporary closure during the works.

7.6.2 BLACKHEAD EVENTS SPACE

To fulfil the shared vision for Whitehead, scope to capitalise more fully on the Blackhead cliffs should be explored. The masterplan therefore proposes the development of an events space, visitor orientation point and café/restaurant at the existing car park. This would establish a focus for visitors to Blackhead and attract more people to spend time in the area. Making use of the sloping topography, potential exists to construct an outdoor amphitheatre that could accommodate open-air concerts, plays and festivals. Car parking would be retained on the site, along with greater use of spaces to the south. Boat storage would also remain in the area, although designed to minimise its visual impact.

As part of this project, potential exists for additional land reclamation to take place at the southern corner of the site, creating additional space and removing an area that is currently prone to a build up of seaweed and litter. It is also proposed that the Clachan Pier is brought back into use. This would enable visitors to access the area by boat and provide a landing point for vessels touring the coastal park. As with all the masterplan proposals, it will be important to ensure excellent links between this location and the rest of the village, so to encourage people to visit other parts of Whitehead.



7.7 BENTRA

At the northern edge of Whitehead are the lands known as Bentra home to a bistro and 9-hole golf course. At the time of writing, outline planning permission has been granted for the development of a hotel in this area, with scope to enhance its golfing facilities. The masterplan supports this concept, noting the role a new hotel could play in attracting visitors to the village, as well as providing a place for hospitality and recreation for local people. Such a development could also act as a hub from which to explore the wider area. To maximise the potential of this location and its contribution to Whitehead, a detailed masterplan should be developed in conjunction with landowners to enable all opportunities to be explored, with potential to incorporate public footpaths, wildlife areas and additional golfing facilities.



7.8 WHITE HARBOUR

White Harbour is something of a hidden gem, tucked away along the narrow strip of coastline beneath the Whitehead cliffs. It was constructed in 1850 to export the limestone quarried from the adjacent cliffs and was successfully restored in the early 1990s. With its bright limestone walls and surrounding cliffs, the harbour is an attractive and fascinating place, not to mention an important part of the Borough's industrial heritage. Efforts to encourage public access and develop the White Harbour as a visitor attraction should therefore be pursued, in tandem with improved pathways along the coast towards Carrickfergus.

This harbour would be an excellent stopping off point along the route, with potential for seating and picnic tables, interpretation boards and even a seasonal café. The possibility of re-establishing a rail halt at this location should also be explored, with potential to provide an excellent destination for steam train journeys.

7.9 BEACH ROAD NATURE RESERVE

The former Whitehead Quarry is now an important nature reserve, accessed along Beach Road. It is home to a number of interesting species of flora and fauna, including the iconic Peregrine Falcon. The continued enhancement of this area should be pursued in a sensitive manner, including habitat improvement to further increase biodiversity, as well as the implementation of footpaths and panels that interpret its wildlife importance.



7.10 WATERFRONT

Whitehead's waterfront is a special part of the village, with fine views across Belfast Lough and the Irish Sea. It is proposed to sensitively enhance this area for the benefit of local residents, while strengthening an important link along the coastal path.

7.10.1 PUBLIC REALM & BANDSTAND

The public realm of Whitehead's waterfront should be comprehensively upgraded, to create a better more consistent surface for pedestrians and cyclists and points at which to stop and enjoy the views. The upgrade should include restoration of the Victorian bandstand, which fell into disrepair and has since been moved into storage. Opportunities for small-scale economic activities along Marine Parade should also be explored, with scope for a seasonal ice cream kiosk and other outdoor stalls.

7.10.2 THE LIDO

This prominent building on the waterfront was once an outdoor public swimming pool or lido and is now home to the Whitehead Glasgow Rangers Football Supporters Club. As part of Whitehead's Victorian heritage, efforts are required to bring this building back to its former glory as a highlight along the waterfront.

It is recommended that a partnership is formed with the owners to undertake a feasibility study for the building. This would include an assessment of the structure and consideration of options for its restoration. Scope exists for the establishment to provide hospitality to visitors and locals alike, with the Lido providing a unique focal point.



7.10.3 POTENTIAL HOTEL DEVELOPMENT

Over the years, Whitehead's waterfront has become predominantly residential in nature, losing the hotels that used to be located there.

Over the long term, it is recommended that opportunities to re-establish a waterfront hotel are pursued. This would add greatly to the visitor offer in Whitehead, capitalising of the unique waterfront setting along Marine Parade.

7.10.4 COUNTY ANTRIM YACHT CLUB

For many years, Whitehead has been home to very active yacht club which continues as a successful operation today. It is important for Whitehead that this facility is supported and encouraged to develop, increasing membership, hosting events, welcoming visitors and providing opportunities for young people to learn how to sail.

At the time of writing, plans are underway to restore the boat shed located alongside the railway line. This would help to bolster the club's facilities and address the limited space for boats the site currently affords.



7.10.5 WHITEHEAD SCOUT HALL & BOAT HOUSE

The Whitehead Scout Hall, a modest structure located along Beach Road, was constructed in 1957 largely from materials salvaged from a disused timber-built Scout Hall which once stood in the grounds of the Whiteabbey Congregational Church. Boasting Beaver, Cub and Scout sections and now with a dedicated website which keeps its members abreast of latest news and upcoming events, the Whitehead Scout Pack is now an established institution within the village and is well attended by residents young and old.

Originally constructed to house a lifeboat in conjunction with the coastguard cottages, the Boat House located to the east of Beach Road, was built around 1870. Despite the poor condition of the structure with its patched sections of basalt walls, bricked up windows and exposed roof timbers, in a report submitted to the Borough Council in December 2009, the NIEA stated that the boat house and nearby coastguard cottages constituted "a fine remnant of the maritime history of the area," with many original features still visible. As a result, the Boat House attained B2 listed status in March 2010 with NIEA records renumbered to include the structure as part of the larger listed coastguard cottages group.

The masterplan advocates that detailed feasibility studies are carried out with the view to refurbishing and modernising the existing Scout Hall to meet the growing needs of the organisation and the incorporation of appropriate conservation measures to ensure the preservation of the Boat House and its rich maritime connections.



7.11 COAST ROAD APPROACHES

First impressions are very important, particularly when seeking to attract passers by. Whitehead is fortunate to be located along the Antrim Coast Road, which is recognised at home and abroad to be one of the finest routes of its kind.

The Masterplan for Whitehead proposes two initiatives to increase its physical presence along the road, with the intention of attracting more visitors into the village.



7.11.1 THE BLAH HOLE

A highlight of this stretch of the Coast Road is the Blah Hole, where the route cuts through a large rock formation. To the north of the hole, where the road turns sharply northwards, are fine views across Whitehead to the Blackhead cliffs beyond. However, vegetation and road barriers currently obscure this view significantly.

It is therefore proposed to open up views of the village from the road, thereby inviting passers by to stop off in Whitehead. This would be achieved through the cutting back of vegetation and replacement of barriers with strong, yet lightweight alternatives, such as a tensile cable system. This small but important project would require to be undertaken in liaison with DRD Roads Service to ensure that road safety is maintained.

7.11.2 WHITEHEAD GATEWAY

Beyond the Blah Hole, the main arrival points to Whitehead are located, with entrances to Cable and Islandmagee Roads.

At present the environmental quality of this area is variable, with a number of different signs, boundary treatments and road markings that do little to convey a welcoming message to the village. It is therefore proposed that a project is undertaken along this stretch to implement environmental improvement measures. This could include resurfacing, planting, signage, public art and lighting.



7.12 INTERPRETATION, ORIENTATION & PUBLIC ART STRATEGY

The ease with which people move through Whitehead is important, particularly when places such as the Excursion Station and Blackhead Path experience high visitor numbers.

As the analysis process revealed, the layout of the village is such that it can make it difficult for a newcomer to navigate, especially with the railway line forming a barrier through the centre. It is therefore proposed to develop a strategy for the entire village to provide a suite of well located signs and art pieces that help people to find their way about and to learn about the history and culture of whitehead. Care must be taken to site these in appropriate locations and to design them in manner that is appropriate to their setting.



7.13 VISITOR STRATEGY

Coordinating the proposed increase of visitors to Whitehead requires a strategic overview, so that it can respond to opportunities as they arise and tie in with other tourism initiatives in the area. It is therefore proposed that a visitor strategy for Whitehead is developed and managed, in close liaison with Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

This strategy would be developed to accompany the masterplan proposals and to identify compatible tourism initiatives. These could include a branding and marketing programme to promote the village and the development of a visitor information package, with the involvement of local businesses, service providers and attractions.



8. DELIVERING THE VILLAGE MASTERPLAN

8.1 APPROACH

Having identified a range of proposals for Whitehead, it is now necessary to examine how they can be best delivered. This will require the input of a range of organisations and individuals from the public, private and community sectors. Only by working together will it be possible to realise the Shared Vision for Whitehead.

At the time of writing, Northern Ireland is on a slow road to recovery from a major economic recession, with impending spending cutbacks in both the public and private sectors. Consequently, funding for future capital projects will be limited in the short term. It is therefore more important than ever to ensure that limited funds are targeted accurately, so that the social, physical and economic benefits of each project can have the maximum impact on Whitehead. It will also be important to identify different sources of funding relevant to the types of projects proposed.



As the basis for managing this process, the Action Plan for Delivery sets out each Masterplan proposal. It indicates the priority of each project, based on its need and the likely impact it will have on the village. An indicative timeframe is also provided, along with an outline cost and a list of stakeholders whose involvement in the project would be necessary. This table should be used as a live document, so that progress can be monitored regularly and updated accordingly. Invariably, new initiatives and opportunities will arise, which should be assessed against the aims and objectives of the masterplan and added to the Action Plan.

Masterplan delivery should be coordinated and monitored by a group consisting of stakeholders from across the village. This should include representatives from Carrickfergus Borough Council, government departments and agencies, local businesses, clubs and societies, as well as local resident associations. Sub teams should then take individual projects forward, providing the opportunity to introduce specialist skills and interests as required.

Regular involvement of local residents in the Masterplan delivery process is to be strongly recommended, so that they are aware of progress and can contribute to shaping its direction. This could include design workshops, newsletters, websites and direct involvement in the delivery of certain projects.



8.2 ACTION PLAN

WHITEHEAD VILLAGE MASTERPLAN - ACTION PLAN

Regeneration Initiative		Description	Priority	Timeframe	Cost* (£m)	Potential Stakeholders
Village Centre	A1	Village Centre Redevelopment	M	M	2.55	Priv, CBC, EHB, NIEA, PS
	A2	Whitehead Community Centre	H	S	0.95	Priv, CBC, NIEA, PS
	A3	Kings Road (Cable Rd to Chester Ave)	H	S		
	A4	Cable Road (Presb Church CP to Beach Rd)	H	S		
	A5	Balmoral Avenue (Cable Rd to Kings Rd)	H	S		
	A6	Edward Road (Health Centre to Victoria Ave)	H	M	1.86	CBC, RS, PS, NIEA, DSD, Priv
	A7	Victoria Avenue (Cable Rd to Edward Rd)	H	M		
	A8	Chester Avenue (Train St to Islandmagee Rd)	H	M		
	A9	Kings Road to Park & Ride	M	S		
	A10	Balmoral Avenue Civic Spaces	M	M	1.46	CBC, NIEA, PS, Priv
RPSI	A11	Village Centre Car Parking Opportunities	H	M	0.38	Priv, CBC, RS
	A12	Environmental Improvement Schemes	H	S	0.55	CBC, Priv, RS, DSD, NIEA, PS
	B1	RPSI Headquarters	H	S	TBC	RPSI, CBC, PS, NIR, HLF
Recreation Grounds	B2	Adelaide Place	M	M	0.50	RPSI, NIR, CBC, RS, NIEA
	B3	RPSI/Kings Road	H	S	0.51	RPSI, CBC, NIR, RS
	C1	Multi purpose sports complex	M	L	2.43	Priv, CBC, SNI, PS
Castle Chichester	C2	Chester Avenue	M	L	1.80	CBC, NIEA, RS, PS
	C3	Community and Outdoor sports facilities	M	M	1.48	CBC, SNI, DENI, NIEA, RS, PS
	C4	Linear Park to Bentra	M	M	0.83	CBC, NIEA, NIR, PS
	D1	Castle Chichester Refurbishment	M	S	0.19**	Priv, NIEA, CBC, PS
Islandmagee Road	D2	Castle Chichester Laneway	H	S		Priv, CBC, NIEA
	E1	Whitehead Primary School	H	S	0.02	RS, DENI, NEELB, CBC
Blackhead Path	E2	Islandmagee Road	H	M	1.32	CBC, RS, NIHE, PS, Priv
	F1	Blackhead Path Refurbishment	H	M	6.00**	CBC, NIEA, NITB
	F2	Blackhead Car Park Redevelopment	M	L	4.72	CBC, NIEA, NITB
Waterfront	F3	Clachan Head	M	L	1.25**	CBC, CAYC, PS
	G1	Marine Parade	H	S	0.84	CBC, RS, PS, Priv
	G2	Old Castle Road Refurbishment	M	S	0.85	CBC, RS, PS, Priv
Additional Strategies	G3	Coastal Path	H	S	1.75**	CBC, PS, Priv
	G4	Beach Head Local Nature Reserve	H	S	0.03**	CBC, RSPB, NIR, Priv
	G5	Whitehead Rangers Supporters Club	H	S	0.02	Priv, CBC, PS
Additional Strategies	S1	Bentra Golf Club	H	S	-	CBC, Priv, RS, PS
	S2	Visitor Strategy	H	S	-	CBC, Priv, NITB, PS
	S3	Interpretation, Orientation and Public Art	H	S	-	CBC, NITB, NIEA
	S4	Whitehead Country Park	M	M	-	CBC, Priv, NIEA, NITB

Key: Priority H = High, M = Medium, L = Low, Timeframe S = Short (1 - 5 yrs), M = Medium (5 - 10 yrs), L = Long (10 - 15 yrs).

*All costs approximate and rounded to the nearest £1000. **Subject to condition report.

Delivery Agents & Stakeholders:

CAYC = County Antrim Yacht Club, CBC = Carrickfergus Borough Council, DENI = Department of Education Northern Ireland, DSD = Department for Social Development, EHB = Eastern Health Board, HLF = Heritage Lottery Fund,

NEELB = North Eastern Education & Library Board, NIEA = Northern Ireland Environment Agency, NIHE = Northern Ireland Housing Executive, NIR = Northern Ireland Railways, NITB = Northern Ireland Tourist Board,

Priv = Private Sector, PS = Planning Service, RA = Rivers Agency, RPSI = Railway Preservation Society of Ireland, RS = Roads Service, RSPB = The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, SNI = Sport Northern Ireland



8.3 SHORT TERM DELIVERABLES

The Whitehead Masterplan is ambitious and as a result, a number of its more extensive proposals are likely to be delivered over the medium to longer term. With such projects it will be important, however, to ensure that preliminary work is advanced early, so that they are ready for progression once funding and other opportunities arise.

In addition, many of the masterplan proposals are achievable in the short term and importantly for Whitehead, their delivery is likely to have a catalytic effect on further regeneration.

The Action Plan has highlighted 5 high priority projects for 'immediate' progression. These are continued refurbishment of the Community Centre, a walking route to the Railway museum, traffic calming at the primary school, a coastal path to White Harbour and frontage improvements to the former swimming pool (Whitehead Glasgow Rangers Supporter's Club).

Together, these projects would have a pronounced impact on Whitehead as a whole. The project action plans below provide a breakdown of how each project could be advanced.

A2 Whitehead Community Centre - Continued refurbishment and redevelopment		
Potential Tasks		Indicative Capital Cost (£)
A	Convene working group and agree project parameters	
B	Prepare architects drawings for refurbished centre, with detailed costs	
C	Submit planning application	
D	Frontage Improvements: re-render, repaint, glazing, rainwater goods, signage, powerwashing, decoration	15,000
E	Prepare architects drawings for retail unit extensions onto Kings Road	
F	Submit planning application	
G	Construction of retail units	600,000
H	Partial demolition and upgrade of hall facilities	335,000

B3 RPSI / King's Road - Dedicated walking route		
Potential Tasks		Indicative Capital Cost (£)
A	Convene working group and agree project parameters	
B	Consult landowners and other key stakeholders	
C	Prepare landscape architects drawings for footpath and associated construction with detailed costs	
D	Construction of footpath, including ground works	508,000

E1 Whitehead Primary School - Traffic Calming Measures		
Potential Tasks		Indicative Capital Cost (£)
A	Convene working group and agree project parameters	
B	Consult landowners and other key stakeholders	
C	Prepare road's engineer drawings, with detailed costs	
D	Implementation of pelican crossing and associated markings	15,000

G3 Coastal Path - Walking route from Beach Head Nature Reserve to White Harbour		
Potential Tasks		Indicative Capital Cost (£)
A	Convene working group and agree project parameters	
B	Prepare outline proposal for entirety of route	
C	Consult landowners and other key stakeholders	
D	Undertake detailed survey of proposed route	
E	Select preferred route and prepare landscape architect's drawings for footpath and associated construction	
F	Itemise components, prepare detailed costs and determine phasing if appropriate	
G	Phased construction of footpath, including ground works	1750000 (total)

G5 Whitehead Rangers Supporters Club - Frontage Improvements		
Potential Tasks		Indicative Capital Cost (£)
A	Convene working group and agree project parameters	
B	Research history of the building to inform proposals	
C	Prepare architect's drawings and detailed costs	
D	Frontage Improvements: re-render, repaint, glazing, rainwater goods, signage, powerwashing, decoration	20,000

9. CONCLUSION

The Whitehead Masterplan has set in place a clear vision for the future of this wonderful village. A clear opportunity exists to further enhance Whitehead as a place to live, while reshaping its role as a visitor destination for the 21st century.

Momentum must be maintained to realise the initiatives contained within the masterplan, with particular emphasis on those projects that can be quickly achieved through forward thinking, co-operation and little funding.

Through the concerted efforts of all in Whitehead, an exciting future lies ahead for the village.





10. APPENDICES

As part of the information gathering process, a number of separate consultation meetings were held with key stakeholders during the development of the village masterplan.

These stakeholders, together with those community organisations who were represented within the Steering Group and took part in the Community Consultation Events, are listed below;

- Carrickfergus Borough Council;
- County Antrim Yacht Club;
- DRD Roads Service;
- Libraries NI;
- NI Water;
- Northern Ireland Environment Agency;
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive;
- Planning Service;
- The Railway Preservation Society of Ireland;
- Translink;
- Whitehead Community Association;
- Whitehead Glasgow Rangers Supporters Club;
- Windsor Association & Ransevyn Residents.

A copy of the consultation feedback report is also included as an Appendix. This report summarises the process and findings of the public consultation process conducted in relation to the Draft Whitehead Village Masterplan between 11 October 2010 and 5 November 2010.

