

Objective BALBRIGGAN 5

Promote and facilitate the operation of two local interconnecting bus services connecting the residential area to the town centre, commuter rail and bus services and the industrial areas at Stephenstown, and facilitate the provision of a park and ride facility at an appropriate location adjacent to the interconnecting bus routes.

Objective BALBRIGGAN 6

Promote and facilitate the establishment and development of a third level educational facility.

Objective BALBRIGGAN 7

Promote and facilitate local tourism opportunities in consultation with local community and business groups having regard to the Protected Structure status of the harbour.

Objective BALBRIGGAN 8

Prepare a regeneration plan for the harbour area in consultation with local fishermen, businesses and community groups. The harbour is a protected structure.

Objective BALBRIGGAN 9

Preserve and improve access to the harbour, beaches and seashore while protecting environmental resources including water, biodiversity and landscape sensitivities.

Objective BALBRIGGAN 10

Facilitate the implementation of the Urban Design Framework Plan for the town centre.

Objective BALBRIGGAN 11

Facilitate the implementation of an agreed Masterplan for the 'TC' zoned lands at Naul Road.

Objective BALBRIGGAN 12

Promote and facilitate the development of a swimming pool facility and a community sports complex within the town.

Objective BALBRIGGAN 13

Promote and facilitate the development of an ecological corridor along the Matt Stream.

A number of plans have been produced by Fingal County Council that have informed this plan including:

- Balbriggan Urban Renewal Scheme, 1999
- Integrated Framework for Balbriggan, 2000
- Balbriggan Urban Design Framework, 2004
- Connecting People, Places and Prosperity - An Economic Strategy for Fingal 2006- 2011 (Fingal Development Board)
- Balbriggan Local Area Plan, 2005 (Amendment to the Northwest Balbriggan Action Area Plan 2001)
- Stephenstown, Clogheder, Clonard Local Area Plan
- Stephenstown, Balbriggan, Urban Design and Landscape Masterplan, 2009

A number of supporting studies have also been produced that have informed the development of the Balbriggan Public Realm Plan. These include:

Balbriggan Town Centre Health Check (TCHC), 2010

This report was carried out in 2010 as a pre-cursor to the Heart of Balbriggan Plan. The TCHC provides indicators of vitality (a measure of how lively or busy the town centre is) and viability (A measure of its capacity to attract ongoing investment for maintenance and improvement and its ability to adapt to changing needs). A number of detailed surveys were carried out in the town centre, including pedestrian counts, vacancy rates, space in use/diversity assessment, retailer and consumer questionnaires, accessibility, arts &



Excerpt from Stephenstown Urban and Landscape Masterplan 2009, showing proposed urban extension to the west of town centre adjacent to Fingal Bay Business Park and Millfield Shopping Centre.

entertainment and demographics. The findings of the surveys have been used as a reference point to inform the strategies developed as part of this Plan.

Balbriggan Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC), 2009

A Historic Landscape Characterisation study has been undertaken for Balbriggan. The report notes that large scale, new housing to the west of Balbriggan and in Balrothery, as well as extensive retail and business parks and the development of roads have impacted greatly on the quality of the historic environment. The HLC identifies the coastal zone as a highly significant area from an archaeological and cultural heritage perspective which is highly sensitive to development. According to the HLC, there is potential for including the historic environment within proposed development areas to create a sense of place, for example by retaining vernacular buildings, hedgerows and townland boundaries, locating open space around archaeological monuments and using historic roadways as public walks.

Skerries and Balbriggan Harbours - Identification of Development Opportunities Report, 2009

The report concludes that Balbriggan harbour has the potential to deliver an interesting visitor experience which will complement the wider regeneration objectives for the town centre and support initiatives along the coast. The report does not see a "full marina" option as the appropriate direction for Balbriggan Harbour, due to its size and physical constraints at this location. The maintenance of the harbour structures together with dredging commitments is anticipated to exceed potential direct revenue from activities in the harbour itself. The report recommends the renovation of the lighthouse and/or the harbour buildings to offer a unique service, such as new 'celebrity' restaurants of striking architectural or cultural appeal. It is also recommended that the fishing industry should be consolidated onto the west pier while the east pier should be improved as a public amenity, and that improved links between the adjacent beach and the harbour should be considered jointly with the recommendations of the Urban Design Framework for the Town Centre, 2004.

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A1.5 Urban and landscape analysis

A1.5.1 Wider landscape context

Balbriggan is a large coastal town with a predominantly rural hinterland. The hinterland is defined to the north by the River Delvin, which forms the boundary of the county with Meath; to the west by the M1 motorway; to the east by the railway line and the coast; and more distally to the south by a series of roads weaving through open agricultural lands.

The County Landscape Character Assessment locates Balbriggan in the Coastal Character Type - a type that is classified as being of exceptional landscape value and of high sensitivity.

The coastal landscape consists of undulating lowlands that slope eastwards to the coast and north to the River Delvin. The Irish name for Balbriggan - Baile Brigin or Breacáin (the town of the small hills) reflects its landscape character. The prominent hills include Clonard (Cluain Aird) and Bremore (Brigh Mor). The highest hills are Strifeland (90m OD) to the southeast; Commons (70m OD); Clonard Hill (50m) northwest and Bowhill/Turkinstown (55m OD) west. The hills to the west, southwest and northwest provide visual containment to the town while the landscape to the north, east and west is more open agricultural countryside. The area is drained by the River Delvin and the River Bracken and their small tributaries.

At present, enclosed land (field systems) comprises the predominant land use in the hinterland of the town. This predominance confers a strongly rural character on the landscape. Arable farming is the primary activity. Settlement has increased dramatically in the last decade and notably southeast of Bascadden village, with ribbon development which makes it appear as continuous with Balbriggan. The town itself has extended widely into the surrounding landscape and appears now likewise to be contiguous with Balrothery. Other settlements in the region include dispersed single farmsteads and estate houses. Ardgillan, Hampton Hall, and Knocknagin House are the main extant manor houses dating from 1670 -1850. Lowther House in the townland of Knocknagin is a ruin. Ardgillan is now open to the



Balbriggan-Skerries cycling route (facilities currently being upgraded)

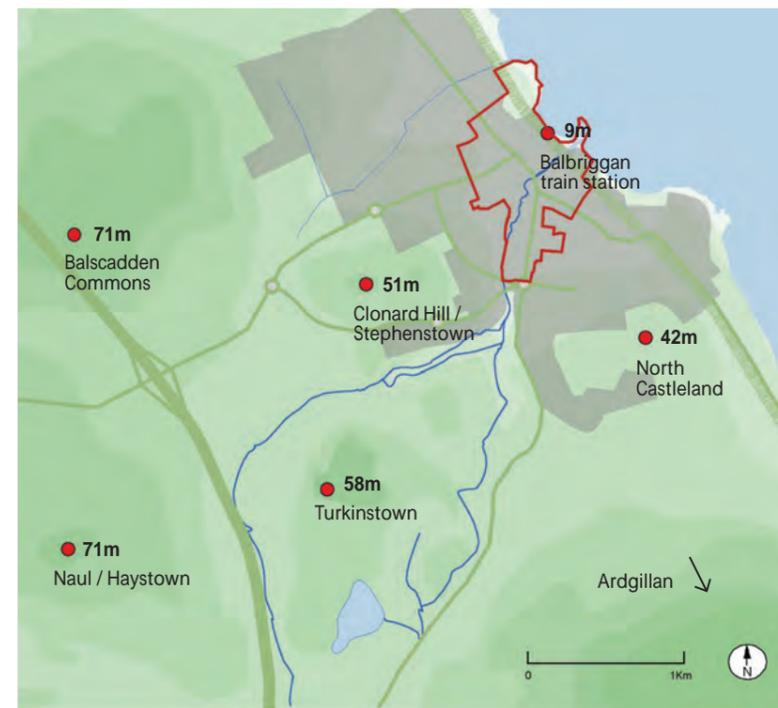
public and consists of 80 hectares of elevated rolling parkland with woods and gardens. The other estates are privately owned.

Water in the region includes the Rivers Delvin and Bracken, their tributaries and the coastal intertidal zone. The river system is of considerable archaeological significance because of its role in the passage of human settlement. Knock Reservoir (also known as Wavin or Bowhill Lake) is an artificial construction developed to supply water to mills. It is now a vibrant natural habitat and a proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA)

The public realm plan aims to improve linkages with the surrounding countryside. The Green Infrastructure objectives in the County Development Plan 2011-2016 include for the planning and development of the Fingal Coast Way from north of Balbriggan to Howth. Other linkages which will be explored in the current plan included the old coach road over Clonard Hill to Balrothery and the possible pedestrian /cycle way to Knock Reservoir.

It is a policy of FCC (Policy GI09, Development Plan) to:

“Plan and develop the Fingal Coastal Way from north of Balbriggan to Howth taking full account of the need to protect the natural and cultural heritage of the coast and the need to avoid significant adverse impacts on Natura 2000 sites and species protected by law.”



Balbriggan wider landscape context



Path of River Bracken through town centre backlands



Martello Tower and coast looking north



Balbriggan Town skyline looking east from Clonard Hill

A1.5.2 Urban evolution

Origins

Land at Balbriggan is recorded in the Civil Survey of 1656 as being in the possession of two branches of the Barnewall family: Nicholas Barnewall of Turvey (“the great farme of Balbriggan”) and Peter Barnewall of Tyrnure (“the little farme of Balbriggan”). The family occupied Bremore as a manorial seat from the 14th century. The present castle at Bremore is believed to date from this period¹.

At this time Balbriggan was a small fishing village of about 30 people whereas Balrothery, with a population of about 204 people (unsubstantiated), occupied what was then a more strategically important location on the main route north from Dublin (originally known as the Slí Cualainn) and also functioned as a focus for the area’s mainly agricultural economy.

By the early 18th century, however, the Barnewall family began to lose its political influence, to be eclipsed by the Hamilton family, which began to buy up land in the area beginning with 500 acres around Balrothery, and later the Barnewall farmsteads, (of which there are no known surviving buildings).

From this period onwards Balrothery began to lose its position as the dominant centre of population in the local settlement hierarchy² as the growing influence of the Hamilton family gradually manifested itself through its development of Balbriggan Harbour as a sea port and through its promotion of Balbriggan as a centre for the cotton and linen industries. As a result, many of the town’s place names derive from successive generations of George Hamilton, including George’s Square, George’s Hill etc.

By 1763 Baron George Hamilton had overseen the construction of a new pier of 600 feet in length (the east pier), and this was later supplemented by a 420 foot long mole on the west side, completed in 1829. The lighthouse was completed in 1761, but has since lost its dome shaped cupola. The harbour improvements facilitated a rapid growth in the fishing industry, in which the Hamilton’s shared a portion of the catch in return for supplying the boats. The pier also facilitated growth in the importing of coal, lime and salt. At its height the fishing industry employed about 900 people. Unfortunately the harbour was, and still is, prone to silting and quickly became a costly harbour to maintain.

By 1837 two large cotton factories employed 300 people. The factories were powered by a combination of steam engine and water wheel, driven by a mill-race, which in turn, was fed by a man made millpond known locally as ‘the Canal’. A large part of the production went to weavers operating looms in their own homes around the town. By this time Balbriggan was described as a sea port, market and post town, with a total population of about 3,016 (unsubstantiated).

¹ Coughlan, T. (1999). “Bremore Castle”. In: Dunne, T.P. Ed. 1999. *Balbriggan: a short history for the Millennium*. Balbriggan and District Historical Society. Dublin

² Baile Brigín: *A Short History of Balbriggan*, 2010. Available at: <http://www.balbriggan.net>

Work commenced on the Dublin to Drogheda Railway line in 1840, and a coastal route through Balbriggan was chosen. This had a very significant impact on the economic fortunes of the town as well as its urban form and structure. The railway opened in 1844 and included a large goods yard that remained open until 1974. By 1852, the Dublin to Drogheda railway was linked with the Ulster Railway to Belfast.

The railway and harbour improvements brought a mini boom to Balbriggan, associated with the installation of a gas works and street lighting, a salt works on the harbour, a brick works near the Martello tower (the tower was constructed in 1805) and on Clonard Hill, Coal Yards on the harbour, the Court House, Market House, St. George’s Church, St. Peter and Paul’s Church, various banks and educational institutions³.

The town commissioners were established in 1860 and began to make various civic improvements, such as bridging the Bracken Stream where it crossed the main street.

However Balbriggan remained a relatively small town, and it was adversely affected by events such as the famine, WWI and the Easter Rising, and subsequent decline in its traditional fishing and industrial base. The outbreak of WWII further slowed the pace of change and, following sporadic growth during the 1950s, it was not until after 1960 that the population of the town markedly increased to achieve its current status as a ‘Major Town Centre’ in the prevailing settlement hierarchy.

Built heritage

The town’s growth since the mid to late 18th century has left a rich legacy of historic buildings and structures in the town centre, including its most prominent landmarks, such as the harbour and lighthouse (1761), Martello tower (1805), viaduct (c1843) and railway station (1853), RNLI boat house (1889), chimney stacks, St. George’s Church (1813), St. Peter and Paul’s Church (1842) and other civic buildings such as the Market House (1811), Court House, Carnegie Library (1905) and others⁴.

While most of these are public buildings, and, as such, are extensions of the public realm, they are not part of the public realm proper, and several, such as the lighthouse and RNLI boat-house, are not accessible. Two exceptions to this include the walkway traversing the viaduct and the piers themselves. Other than these however, there are few remnant heritage features occupying the streets and open spaces themselves in the town centre.

The bulk of the town centre’s built fabric is comprised of ordinary or

³ Geraghty, C. (1999). “The Changing Face of Balbriggan”. In: Dunne, T.P. Ed. 1999. *Balbriggan: a short history for the Millennium*. Balbriggan and District Historical Society. Dublin

⁴ NIAH. An Introduction to the Architectural Heritage of Fingal. Department of the Environment and Local Government and Duchas. Dublin.



Balbriggan Town Centre circa 1842



Balbriggan Town Centre circa 1938



Dublin Street, early 20th century

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'vernacular' buildings, which, in combination with each other, civic buildings and infrastructure, industrial and commercial buildings of note and the town's unique morphology, combine to impart the town centre's unique heritage and townscape character. This character is recognised by the Council in designating two architectural conservation areas (ACAs) within the study area: part of the town centre and nos. 14-28 Hampton Street (even numbers only).

The condition of historic buildings in the town centre is generally very high, but it appears that the condition of buildings corresponds closely to the nature and extent of their usage and occupation. Although it is beyond the scope of a public realm plan to examine individual buildings in detail, all buildings in combination contribute to the townscape character of the town centre, which it is an objective of the plan to improve. Therefore, any initiatives that promote sustainable and appropriate uses for historic buildings, whether or not, they are protected structures, will ultimately benefit the public realm as well.

Although the harbour itself is in continuous usage (the west pier for the unloading of catch, and the east pier for lying-to and repair of boats), the piers themselves, and particularly their surfaces are in a mixed state of repair. Sea damage to the eastern harbour walls has also been repaired in an unsympathetic manner and the overall heritage character of the harbour is somewhat marred by unsympathetic buildings. As a result access to the east pier in particular is constrained.

Many surviving heritage buildings have been altered using construction details and/or materials and signage that are unsympathetic to their original character in terms of their eaves and gutter details, window frames, placement of grilles and vents and signage etc.

"Damage to the vernacular building stock does not have to only relate to the loss of whole structures but can also be a result of the gradual attrition of architectural details such as the replacement of roof coverings and windows with modern materials, removal of external render, inappropriate re-pointing and the addition of unsuitable extensions. Alterations to individual buildings can have a significant and cumulative effect on streetscapes and landscapes." (Fingal Development Plan 2011-2017, pp 220).

Urban grain

Urban grain refers to the density and pattern of blocks and plots. 'Close' (or 'fine') grain streets tend to have smaller block sizes and a relatively dense pattern of plot subdivision, compared to medium or 'coarse' grain ones.

Small plots occupied by individual mixed-use street buildings, i.e. 'close' or 'fine' grain typologies, are flexible and adaptable to a range of uses. They support locally-based economies and social networks and foster a greater variety of building forms and architectural expression than single buildings occupying a single block. Smaller blocks generate a more flexible grid and permit more frequent linkages, visual and pedestrian connectivity, and a greater degree of activity on the street.

As stated in the Fingal Development Plan 2011-2017,

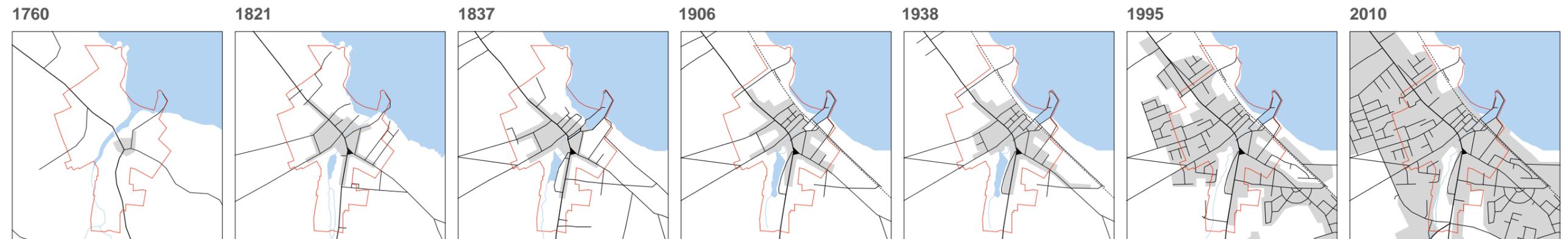
"Historic street patterns, plot sizes and street furniture also subtly contribute greatly to the character of a place and should be recognised and kept. As most of the historic cores of the towns and villages of Fingal have been identified as Architectural Conservation Areas it is hoped that this designation will assist in encouraging the

retention and re-use of vernacular structures in urban settings and historic elements in the public realm." (Fingal Development Plan 2011-2017 pp 219-220).

The built heritage and character of the town centre area is thus dependant on the underlying close grain pattern of subdivision being maintained, whether or not the buildings that occupy them are worthy of retention, so that new infill buildings will not disturb the overall character and continuity of the streetscape.

Although the built form and urban grain of the town centre area reflects its industrial past to a large extent – including a number of medium to large commercial, institutional and industrial buildings - these are concentrated on the secondary streets (e.g. Mill Street and Railway Street) whereas the main street (Drogheda Street and Bridge Street) is dominated by fine grain plot subdivisions. Historical analysis indicates, however, that this pattern has been eroded to a significant extent by consolidation of plots for the construction of larger floor plates. This has had a negative impact on the character of the town centre, with consequent implications for its ability and potential to market itself as a heritage town.

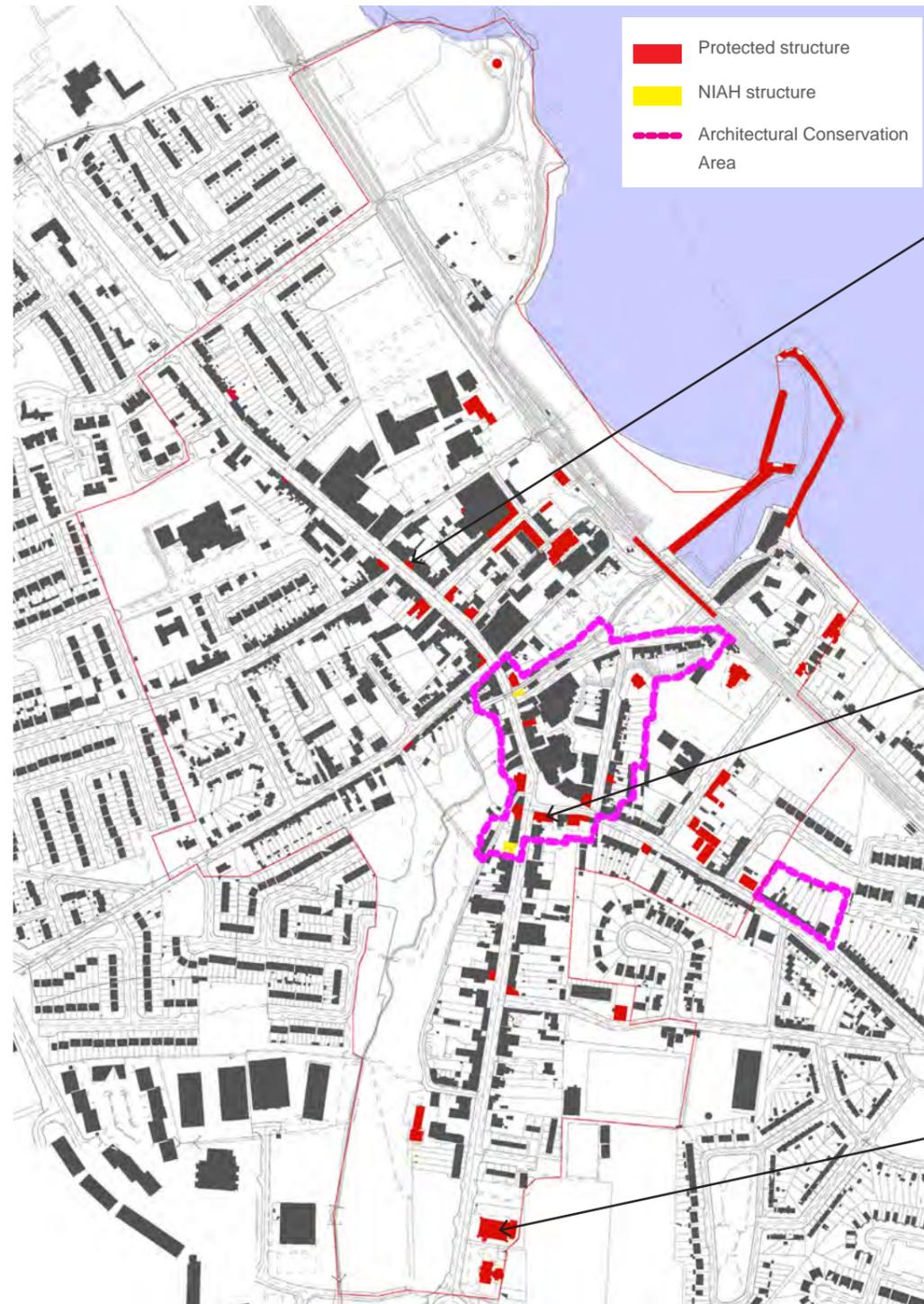
"The priority now is for consolidation so as to maintain vibrancy in the centres and support the existing businesses and activities". (Fingal Development Plan 2011-2017 pp 257).



Balbriggan Town growth (left to right: 1760, 1821, 1837, 1906, 1938, 1995, 2010)



Balbriggan Town Centre showing mixed 'grain' of plot subdivisions



Balbriggan Town Centre protected structures, Architectural Conservation Areas and buildings listed in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH)



Traditional shopfront on Drogheda Street



Balbriggan Courthouse on Georges Square (two storey stone building)



Ss. Peter & Paul's Church, Dublin Street (Mid-19th century Roman Catholic Church)

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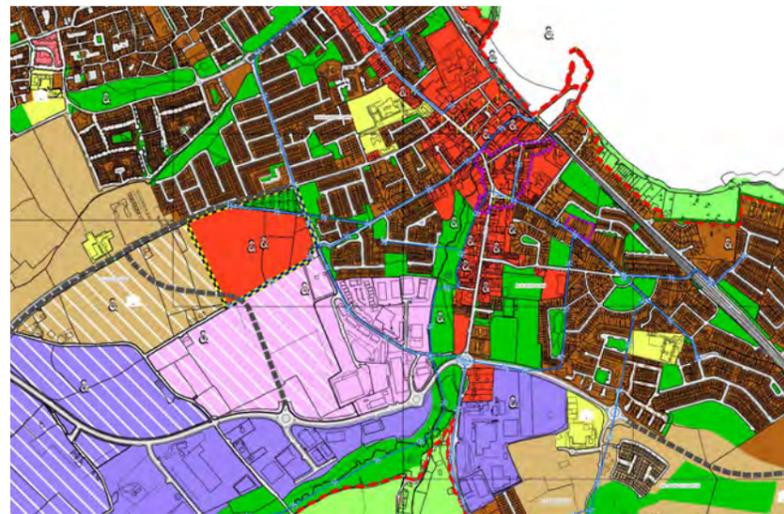
A1.5.3 Existing land uses

Land use activities in the plan area can be divided up into several broad but distinct character area types. These are:

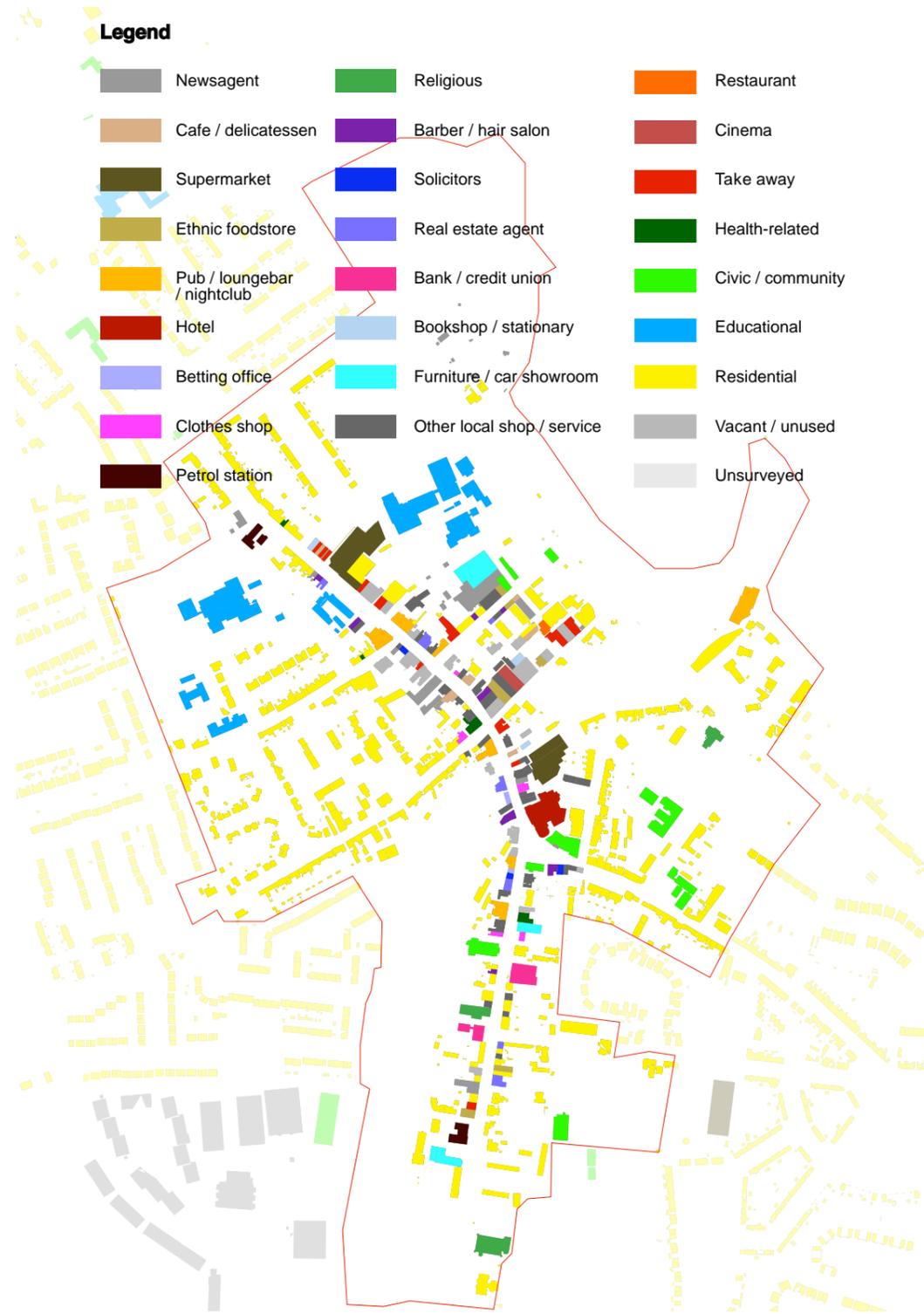
- Open spaces (including the river corridor, car parks, the beach and harbour);
- Institutional lands (schools and religious grounds);
- Mixed-use core area;
- Residential hinterland;
- Infrastructure including station area.

The land use survey highlights the extent to which mixed uses are concentrated on the historic spine of the main street. The mixed use core runs in a north-south direction along Dublin Street to the north, Bridge Street at the centre and Drogheda Street to the north. The Bracken River corridor runs parallel to the west of Dublin Street and bisects the mixed-use core area at Bridge Street as it bends to the east to meet the harbour area. Vacancy or unused buildings are in evidence at several points within the mixed-use core area with several prominent buildings notably vacant. The Town Centre Health Check survey of 2010 counted 21 vacant buildings. Clusters of fast food outlets feature heavily at certain points, while evening time activities such as restaurants and pubs are notably sparse by comparison.

Prominent land uses in the surrounding area include a large area of enterprise, employment and light industry to the southwest, the 'Mill Field' district shopping centre scheme to the west and recently developed suburban housing estates to the northwest.



Balbriggan Town Centre and surrounding statutory land use zoning and objectives (Fingal County Development Plan).



Balbriggan Town Centre current land uses



Current disused / vacant buildings



Current night time uses

A1.5.4 Existing movement network

Pedestrian and cycle movement

Most of the Town Centre area is accessible within a 5 minute walk. The north-south routes of Dublin Street, Bridge Street and Drogheda Street serve as main pedestrian thoroughfares with the east-west branches of Mill Street, Quay Street, Railway Street, Georges Hill, Convent Lane, Chapel Street, Clonard Street and Hampton Street serving as important links to the wider area. The Town Centre Health Check of 2010 recorded the highest weekday pedestrian flows on Drogheda Street at the M.V. Estates count point with the lowest count point at the entrance to George's Square. The highest volume of flows at the weekend occurred on Bridge Street at the Aisling Dry Cleaners count point with the lowest again occurring again at the entrance to George's Square.

The Bracken River corridor, the harbour, viaduct and coastal area each have the potential to be incorporated into walking routes and cycling facilities that can complement established recreational walking, jogging and cycling circuits in the wider area. However, the absence of clearly signed amenity walking routes and lack of bicycle parking was also noted at the community consultation workshop event.



Strategic walking and cycling routes



Narrow footpaths on Quay Street



Pedestrian crossing at Balbriggan Community Centre on Dublin Street



Taxi rank on Railway Street



Pedestrian, cycle and public transport movement and access

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Public transport services

Balbriggan Town Centre has an hourly bus service running from Dublin City Centre (number 33 bus), stopping at Dublin Street and Drogheda Street. Two nightbuses (the 33a and 101) also run every Friday and Saturday from the city centre. The 101 bus also provides a late service from Balbriggan to the city centre. Bus Eireann runs a local service every 20 minutes within and around the town centre. A Dublin Airport to Drogheda service runs via Balbriggan, running every 20 minutes during weekdays, and half hourly and hourly at off-peak times.

Irish Rail provides a commuter service (Dundalk-Drogheda-Dublin-Bray) stopping at Balbriggan approx. every 10-20 minutes at peak times, every 15-30 minutes off-peak and every 1-2 hours on Sundays.

A taxi service operates on Railway Street.

Vehicular movement and access

The town is accessed from the regional road network via the M1 Dublin-Belfast corridor approx. 3km to the west. The M1 corridor, together with the outer relief road and proposed inner relief road, have removed much of the passing traffic from the town centre area. The outer relief road is accessed via a roundabout to the south of the plan area. The inner relief road is accessed from the town centre by Chapel Street. Within the town centre one-way systems operate along Quay Street, Mill Street, Georges Hill, Railway Street and Convent Lane. There is limited on-street pay parking within the town centre area. Public car parks are located at the railway station area, adjacent to the viaduct and at the southern entrance to the town centre at Dublin Street. Privately-owned car parks operate at Supervalu off Drogheda Street, Tesco/Hotel off High Street, and Lidl on Market Green.



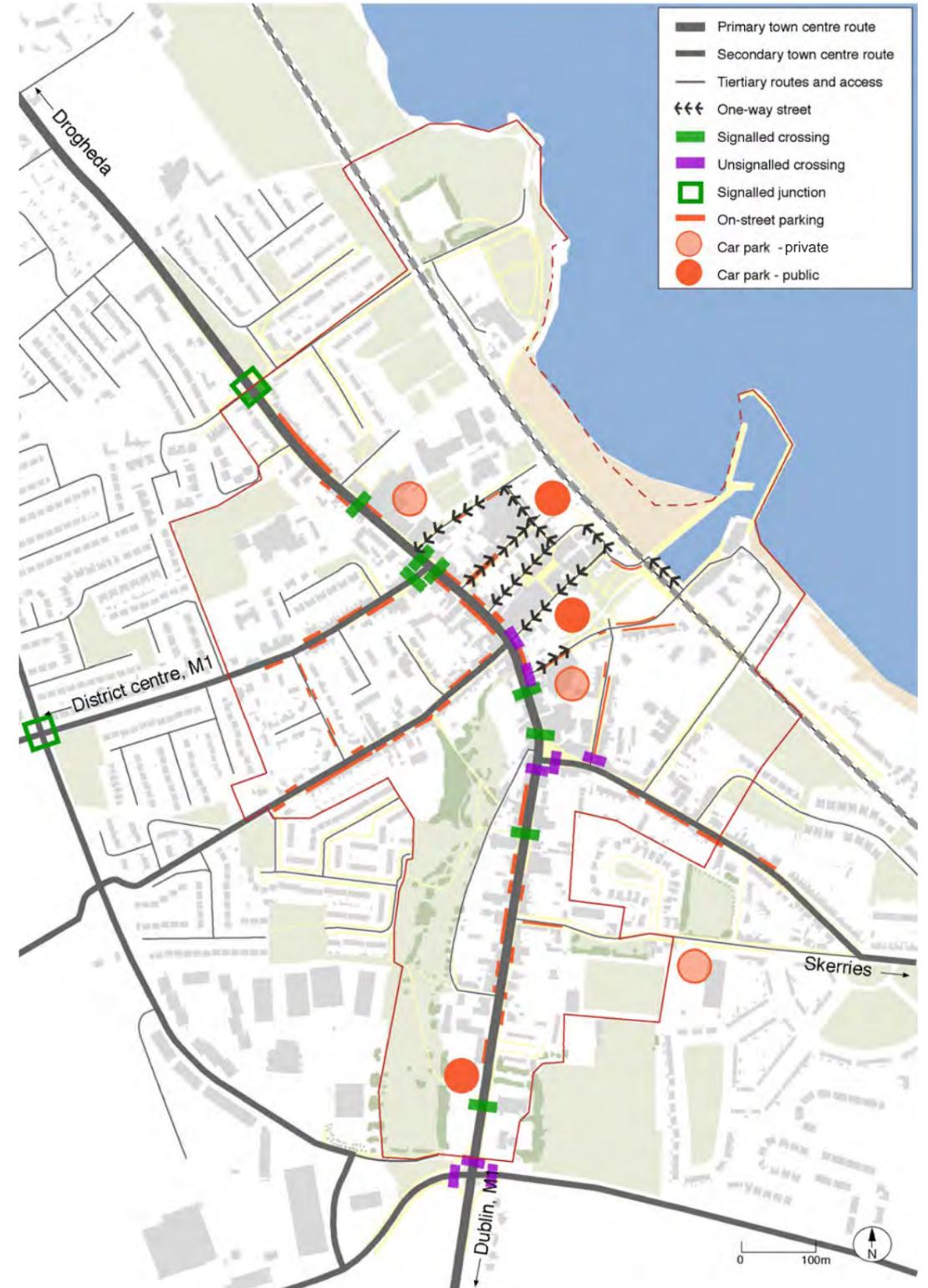
One-way system on Railway Street



Public car parking area off Quay Street



Balbriggan Railway Station car park area looking west



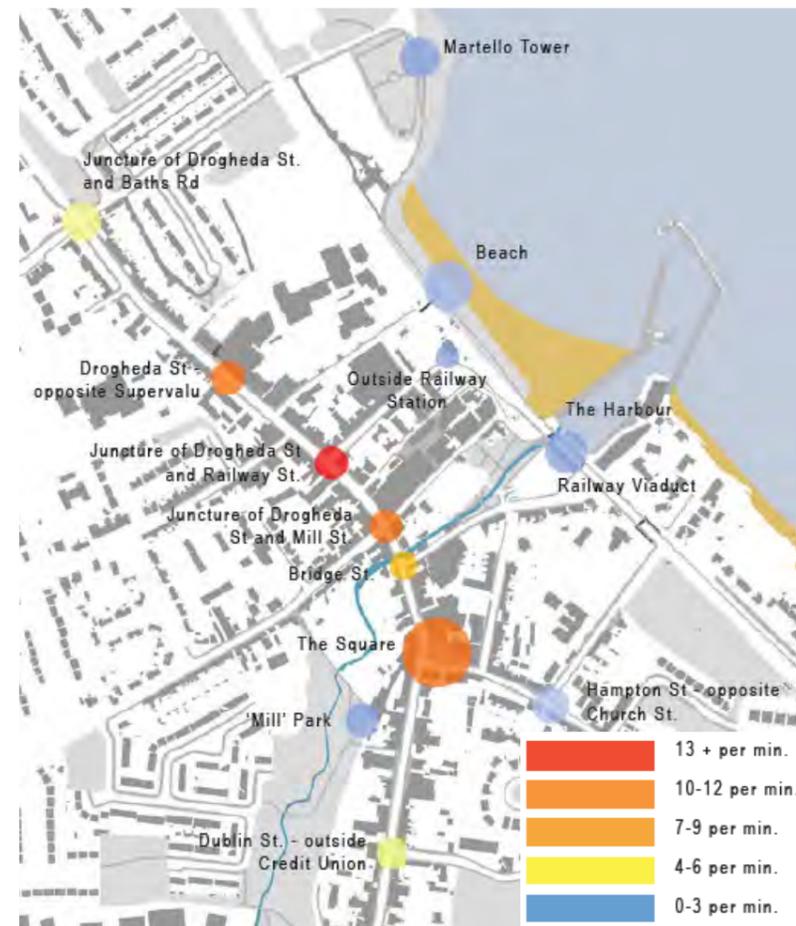
Vehicular movement and access as existing

A1.5.5 Quality of urban space and public realm network

A qualitative public space survey was carried out. The key findings of the survey are summarised here as follows:

Observations on typical weekday footfall

- High proportion of parents with pre-school children, often in buggies, in particular during morning time.
- Very low visible proportion of business persons.
- Surge of activity on Drogheda Street during lunch hour and from 3.00pm onwards as children finish school.
- Low proportion of cyclists; less than 0.5 per min at busiest along Drogheda Street.
- Limited provision of cyclestands.



Mini footfall survey carried out as part of qualitative public space analysis

Weekday versus weekend footfall

Footfall in the town centre was not observed to have changed from weekday to weekend. Weekend footfall measured on a Saturday (13:40-16:00) was 90% of the weekday average. This can be accounted for by the following factors:

- Contribution of schools, in particular secondary schools to midweek footfall.
- Balbriggan town centre is not performing as a destination for comparison retail or retail 'high st'.
- Commuter function of town and rail station subdued at weekends.



Looking north towards new developments at Linen Hall from High Street



View towards viaduct at green open space adjacent to public car park



Open space and public realm network as existing

