

WELCOME

Introduction

Welcome to the engagement process for the Comber Masterplan Review.

Ards and North Down Borough Council is embarking on a process to undertake a review of the Comber Town Centre Masterplan which was commissioned by the Department for Social Development (now DfC) in 2015. The Masterplan is a non-statutory document which provides the framework for the promotion, implementation and timing of urban regeneration, recreation, tourism, and leisure initiatives.

Taking on board your comments from the drop-in sessions and on-line survey at the end of last year we have developed a series of proposed priorities for the town centre. These seek to address Comber's present day challenges and opportunities, aligning them with mechanisms for funding and delivery.

We invite you to take a look and let us know what you think.

The engagement process is open from:
Monday 13th March to Friday 31st March 2023

Complete the short on-line survey at:
www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/masterplans



YOUR FEEDBACK

A series of conversations have taken place through the public consultation exercise the Council carried out in September 2022. There were over 130 comments received from the drop-in event and 51 on-line responses, summarised here.



Why live in Comber?

- Community
- Connectivity
- Events/Attractions/Facilities
- Green Spaces

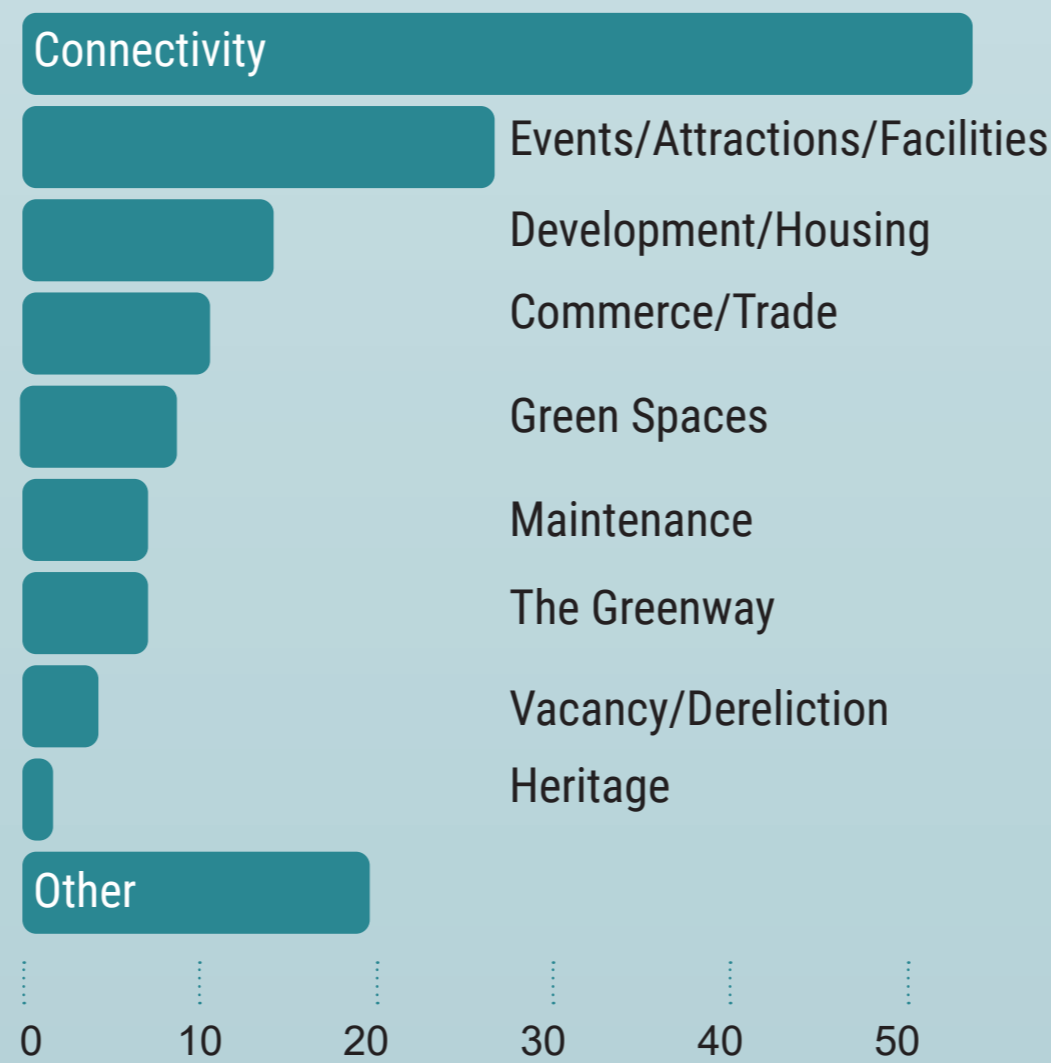
What are the undesirables about Comber?

- Connectivity
- Housing/Development
- Anti-social Behaviour

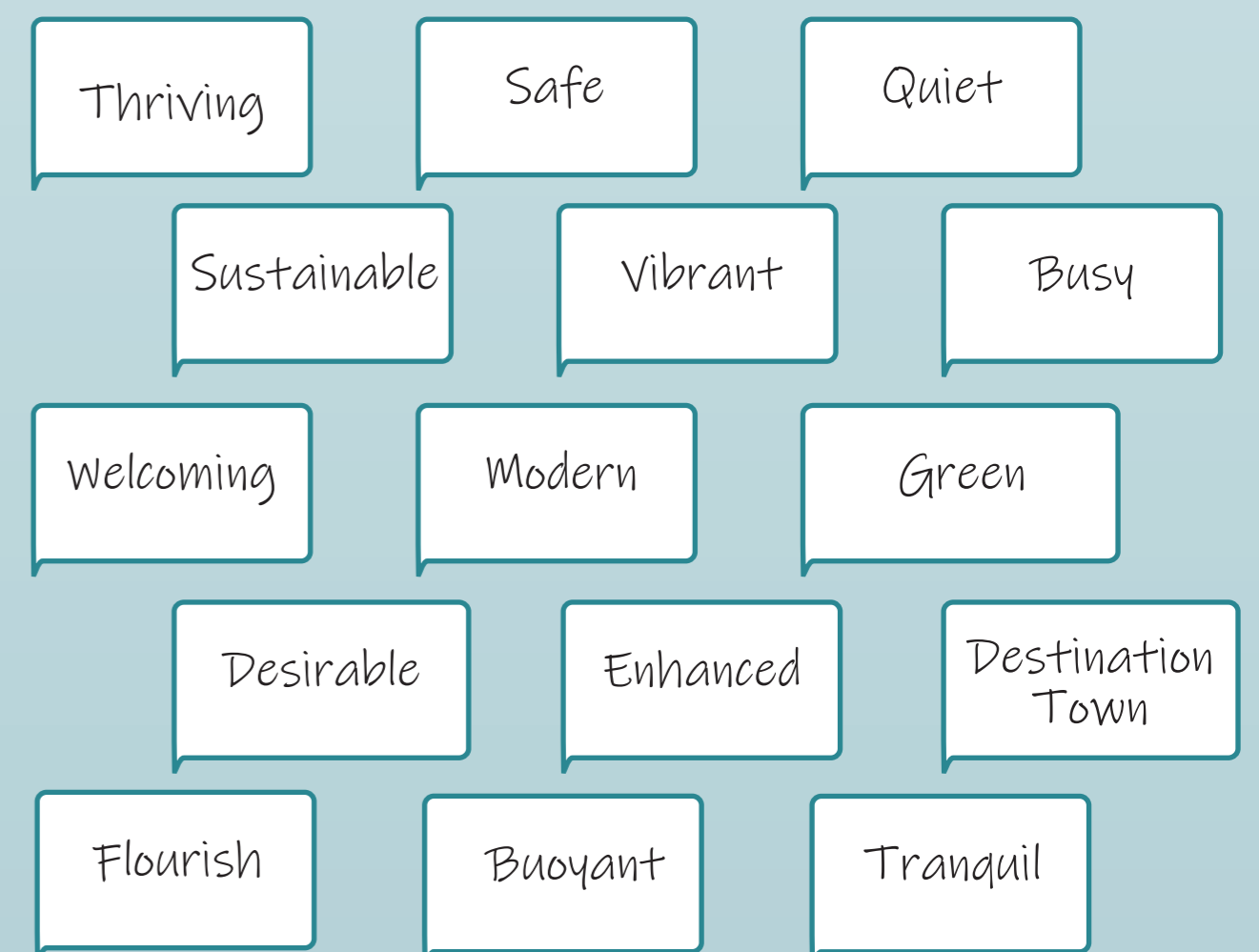
What is a disadvantage for businesses in Comber?

- Connectivity Issues
- Maintenance

Areas for Improvement



The Future of Comber



CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

- S**
- Historic urban form to town centre based around the square
 - Town square provides an important civic space and role

- W**
- Car based town centre with traffic issues at peak times
 - Disconnected from natural assets, such as Strangford Lough

- O**
- Compact and walkable town centre
 - Greenway plans will provide important pedestrian and cycle connections through the town centre

- T**
- Key vacant buildings/sites within the town centre
 - Lack of visitor and tourism facilities
 - Little draw or facilities for new businesses
 - Climate and Biodiversity Crisis

MASTERPLAN PROS & CONS

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>+</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear vision and coordinated spatial plan • Place-based tool to address multiple challenges • Means to attract funding and guide investment • Shared vision between organisations | <p>-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited delivery of actions • Lack of widespread plan use and buy in • Inflexibility of plan to adapt to a changing economic and political landscape |
|--|--|



SUCCESS SINCE THE MASTERPLAN

The Comber Greenway has been hugely successful providing a traffic free route from Belfast to Comber along the former railway line for walking and cycling.

There are now further plans to extend the greenway, providing a north to south route through the town centre along the river, connecting onwards to Newtownards.

The town has seen notable improved commercial offer, with independent retail and cafe culture. As a result there are relatively few vacant units.

The Square has continued to provide an important setting and heart for town centre life including the regular and very popular farmers market.



Comber

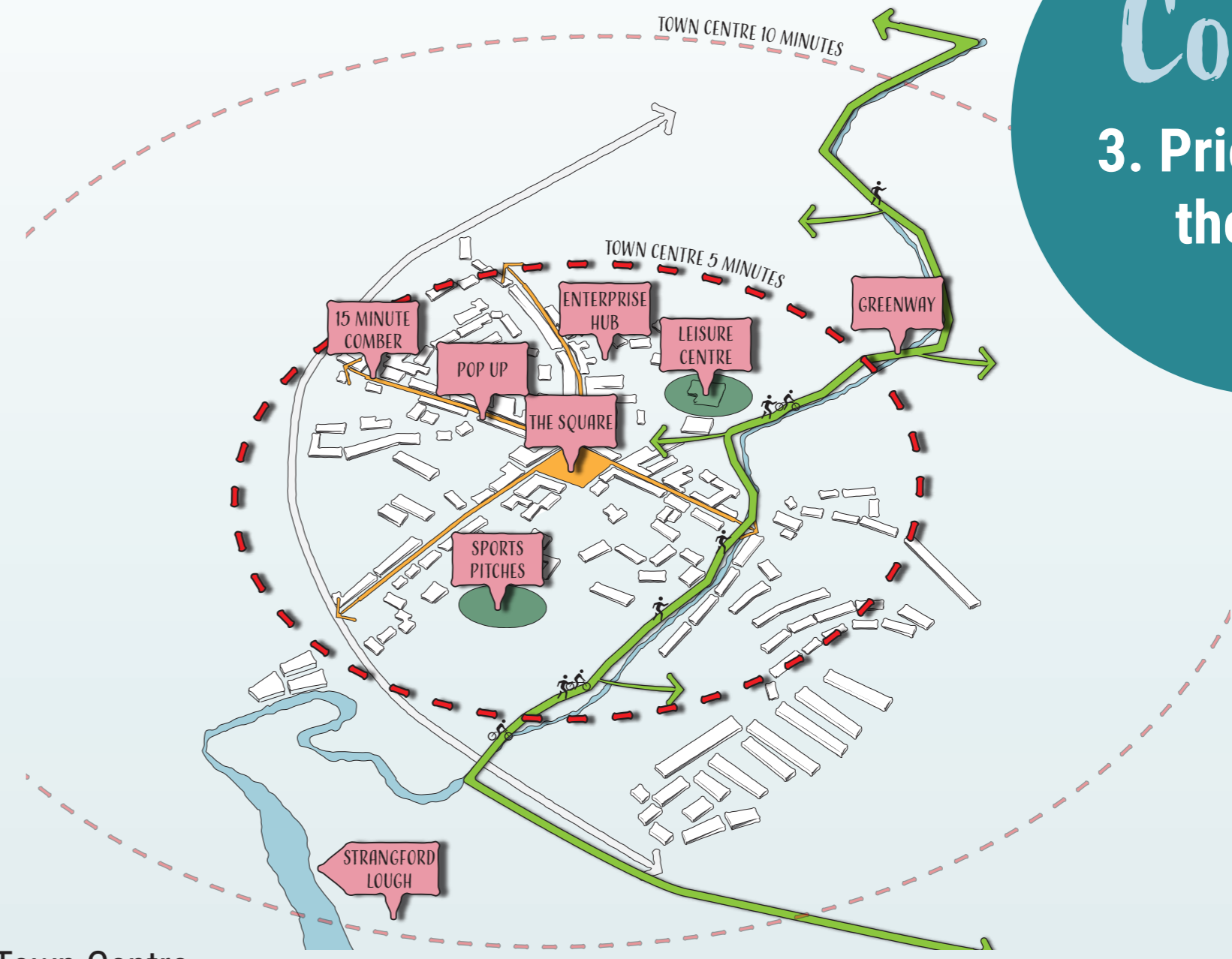
3. Priorities for the Town

MASTERPLAN VISION

“In 2030 – Comber is a thriving market town supported by its local community. The town centre is accessible and enticing, attracting people from far and wide for its superior quality and niche retail offer. The extended greenway through the town, linking to Newtownards and on to the coast has made Comber the focus for recreation and has established the town as the ‘Gateway to Strangford’.

Comber has also built upon its rich cultural heritage with The Square providing the focal point for activity.”

Comber Town Centre Masterplan, 2015



PROPOSED PRIORITIES

Based on analysis and engagement the following proposed priorities have been identified for Comber Town Centre.

A Greenway all the way

Capitalise on the success of the greenway by delivering the connection through the town centre, creating offshoots to create a series of links and routes into the town centre.



B 15-minute Comber

Develop and build on Comber’s walkability to support a 15-minute town centre where people can live, work, play, thrive all within convenient proximity, building a resilient and sustainable local economy that places people at the heart.



C Making the most of valuable space

Building and growing on the success of current initiatives there is an opportunity for further pop-up activities to test ideas and pilot initiatives within properties and open space that are not fulfilling their potential.



D Community Enterprise Hub

Nurture the success and grow the town’s economy through the development of a community enterprise hub providing opportunities for people to work within the town centre.



E Connect to the Lough

Strengthen connections between Comber and Strangford Lough. This may include visual and physical links where landownership permits and increased awareness through storytelling and interpretation. (eg the harbour, food, wildlife via Castle Espie.)



MAKING IT HAPPEN

Through this masterplan review a series of priorities will be identified for the next 8 years, guided by 4 year action plans.

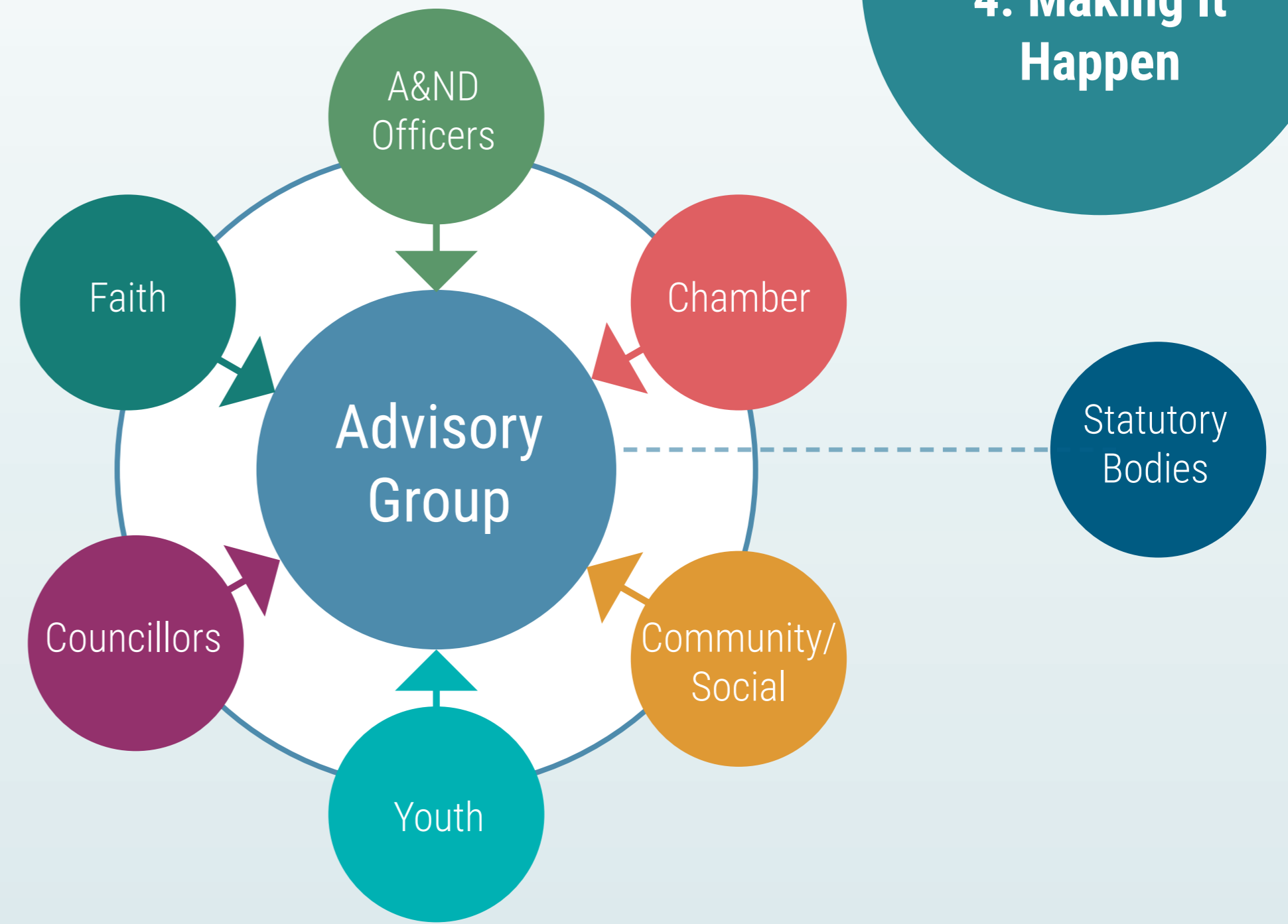
The Town and City Advisory Groups (TAG/CAG) were established in relation to Ards and North Down Borough Council developing a local approach to masterplanning, community planning, placemaking and other localised issues.

Along with the Council and Executive Departments, the advisory groups will help drive forward regeneration for Comber Town Centre, collaborating, sharing responsibilities and playing to strengths. A key function of the masterplan's new priorities will be attract funding from various sources, including:

Examples of Funding Opportunities

- Community Ownership Fund
- Levelling Up (future rounds)
- Shared Prosperity
- Peace Plus
- Shared Island Funding
- National Lottery (Heritage Fund)
- Ulster Garden Villages
- Groundworks
- Social Finance (e.g. Community Finance Ireland, NESTA)

Comber 4. Making It Happen



Case Study: Real Ideas, Plymouth

What they did

Real Ideas is a social enterprise based in Plymouth which aims to create opportunity for individuals, organisations and communities. It does this through a variety of programmes centred on helping young people into careers and employment, supporting the growth and development of social enterprises and acting as a hub for community, business, and cultural activity.

What impact did it have

Real Ideas has supported over 15 community businesses to start-up and thrive through a mixture of hands-on business support, training, tailored expert support and seed funding. The programme has developed a focus on renewing high streets as well as in protecting parks and green spaces. It has also supported thousands of young people take the next steps towards their future career.



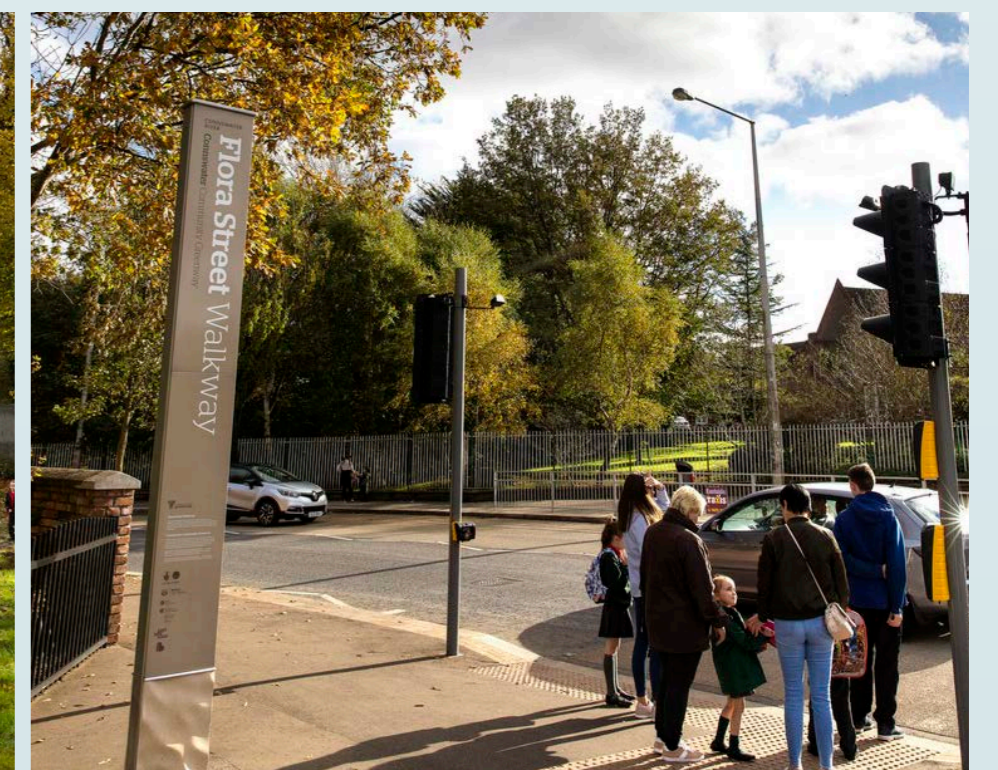
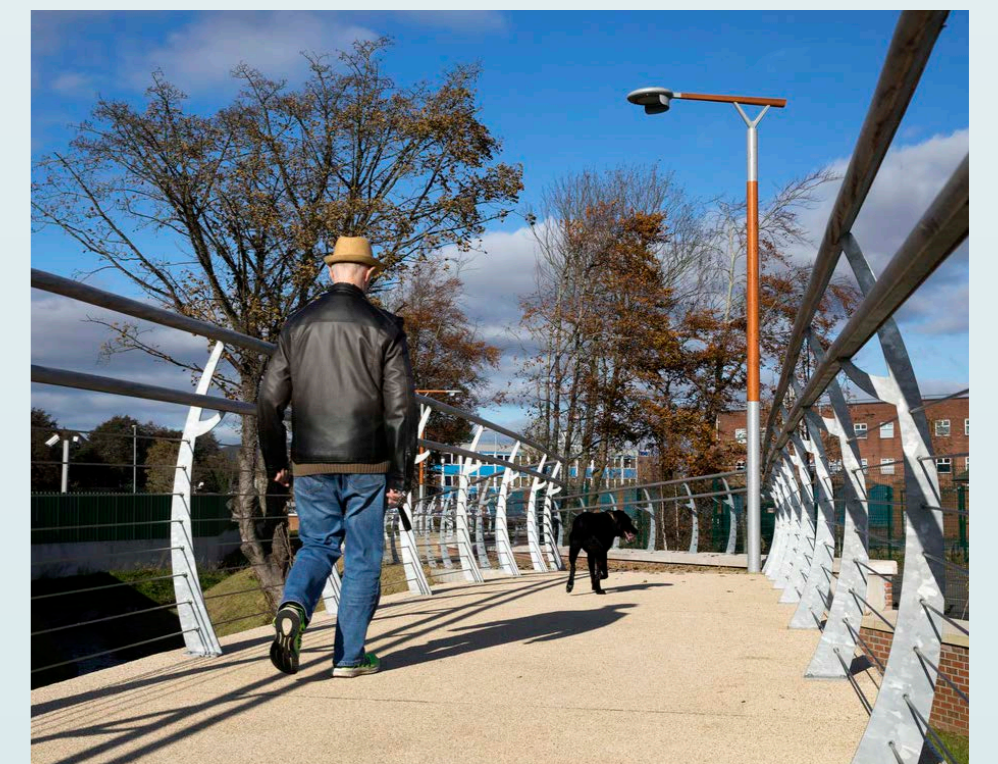
Case Study: Connswater Community Greenway

What they did

A once under-appreciated landscape has been transformed into a valuable community asset for the people of east Belfast creating a better connected environment which links local residents to nature, parks, play and leisure facilities, tourist destinations, retail, schools and colleges.

What impact did it have

- A 9km linear park for walking and cycling
- 16km of foot and cycle paths
- 26 new or improved bridges and crossings
- Serves 23 schools and colleges
- Up to 5km rivers cleaned
- Hubs for education, interpretation points and heritage trails
- Wildlife corridor from Belfast Lough to Castlereagh Hills
- C.S.Lewis Square - a space for events and activities



How to give your feedback

Complete the short on-line survey at:
www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/masterplans

