

# Urban Design Study for Urlingford

## Character of the Landscape Setting

The town of Urlingford is level, apparently having been built over a cut-over bog, an extension to the Templetuohy Bog. Today, the surrounding landscape is used primarily for arable purposes and grazing.

While the immediate surrounding landscape is essentially flat, it rises gradually to the southwest of the town (along the route of the N8) up Fennor Hill, for approximately two kilometres with an elevation gain of approximately 25 metres. This gives a fine approach to the town along a straight road. In the opposite direction, approximately six kilometres distant northeast, the rise in the landscape is more pronounced - in the vicinity of Spahill - with the summit rising to approximately 350 metres.

The River Goul, a minor tributary of the River Nore, has its source in the Slieveardagh Hills, approximately six kilometres south of Urlingford. It enters the town from the southeast, passing under Main Street and making its way to the bridge at Urlingford Castle (and Mill).

The interface between town and country is important, as it determines people's first impressions of a place. This is frequently described as the 'urban edge'. The national primary routes have tended to restrict development fronting onto these roads, therefore creating an appropriate urban-rural divide, though in Urlingford's case, the design of some of that development is not be in character with the traditional streetscape. Despite some ribbon development on the other approach roads the urban edge has tended to be treated in fairly positive terms.

## Pattern and Shape of the Settlement

The essentially flat landscape has facilitated the towns' development around one straight, primary axis - Main Street. The centre of the town is at the junction of Mill Street (on the north side of Main Street) and New Line (on the south side of Main Street). These streets run near perpendicular to Main Street and it is perhaps more than a coincidence that the northerly street connects the town to the earlier settlement nucleus of the area - focused around the Castle, Church and Graveyard. In addition to these secondary streets, there is some ribbon development and small housing developments along the approach of the R689 and some older single storey development on Lumper Lane (which runs parallel along much of its length with New Line Street).

At the east end of the town the street forks with roads leading to Johnstown (on the route of the N8) and Freshford (Kilkenny, along the R693).

Despite the development of a housing development at



**Photo 1:** Approaching the town from the south along the busy N8.



**Photo 2:** Important focal site at the Freshford Road junction.



**Photo 3:** View of Urlingford's broad and linear Main Street.

St.Mary's Avenue in the mid part of the last century, and some later housing developments from the 1970s' to the present day in the vicinity of St. Joseph's Terrace and Assumption Place, the town's essential character is that of a linear town, focused on its Main Street. Despite side streets such as New Line Road and Lumpur Lane, relatively little backland development has taken place and where it has taken place it is focused around cul-de-sacs.

### Buildings and Spaces in the Town

Main Street is a broad wide street. The traditional building pattern is typically that of two storey developments that run along the street edge, though there are a few examples of larger three storey developments. Traditional plot patterns tend to be consistently shorter on the south side of Main Street (except for institutional buildings such as the Catholic Church); medium plot lengths are to be found on the north side of Main Street - west of Mill Street; while much longer plots are to be found north on the north side of Main Street, north of Mill Street. The consistency and evenness of such plot dimensions indicate a conscious and organised planned growth to the town.

On the eastern end of Main Street the larger plots associated with public and institutional buildings, such as the Library, Church and Garda Station, predominate. Smaller, more modest buildings, in the form of single storey residential cottages are to be found on the side streets. In more recent times these same streets and the approach roads (with the notable exception of the National Primary routes) are associated with one-off houses and some ribbon development.

While the buildings of Main Street have retained their general compactness and unity of form, providing a strong streetscape, this has been significantly eroded on both the northern and southern ends of the town. These visually weak streetscapes are associated with modern developments such as service stations, bus garages, bus/truck parking, convenience restaurants, and more recently the construction of industrial units to the south of the town along the N8, in addition to the presence of car parking in front of buildings. Furthermore, the larger scale of buildings, varying building lines, flat topped roofs and canopies and varying boundary treatments (including high walls, low walls and railings all in a variety of materials) has acted to disrupt the continuity of form, typically found in the

**Photo 4:** Typical streetscape view.

**Photo 5:** Attractive terrace of cottages with brick trim surrounds to windows and doors—originally plastered, two of the end buildings have been stripped of their original plasterwork. Note other changes to their fabric such as widened window openings, replacement windows (pvc), etc.

**Photo 6, 7 & 8:** Various views of more recent development patterns on the edges of the town centre which have altered the traditional streetscape form.



Irish streetscape.

Though in general there is a strong building form in the town, there are a few opportunities to rebuild the streetscape through sensitive infill development. One notable example occurs at the Silke Pharmaceutical/Agrichealth Ltd. building, in addition to those areas highlighted on the Urban Design Map.

Traditional building lines in the town tend to be almost straight - reflecting again the more formal linear layout of the town, though the notable exception to this occurs on the south side of Main Street between the Goul River and the R689 junction. Here the building line deflects, creating a wider street space than typically found elsewhere in the historic core of the town. This offers scope for environmental improvements, such as street trees, extended pavement, the provision of street furniture/street sculpture and/or the delineation of car parking spaces.

Most buildings have replaced window types (i.e., pvc to replace traditional timber sash windows) and most of the retail premises have replaced shopfronts, with few reflecting traditional shopfront designs. A few display tiled shopfronts at ground floor level, which were in vogue in the late 1960's



**Photo 9:** Example of streetscape between The Goul tributary and R689 junction where the building line gently curves giving way to significant space that could be considered for environmental improvements in the form of broader pavement, landscaping, treeplanting and car parking bays delineated by new surface materials and kerbing.



**Photo 10:** Example of pavement improvements that have occurred in the vicinity of Mill Street/New Line junction.



**Photo 11:** Example of poor footpath conditions on the north side of Main Street. Note width of road margin - significant opportunities exist for widening the pavement, with designated parking bays and street trees.



**Photo 12:** Opportunities for infill development on the north side of Main Street in the vicinity of R689 junction.



**Photo 13:** Simple symmetrical proportions on local vernacular building.



**Photo 14 :** Example of appropriate backland development of apartments and townhouses with archway access to the rear of the plot.

and 1970's.

### The Nature of Open Spaces

The most significant area of open space in the town is the GAA sports ground. With the exception of some of the housing estates (notably St. Josephs Terrace and Mary's Avenue), there is a distinct lack of passive open space or a public park that serves the whole town.

A relatively small 'pocket park' is provided in the form of 'Goul Garden' beside Butler's Inn, on Main Street, though this appears to be in private ownership and essentially provides seating in a landscaped area adjacent to the stream.

Opportunities exist to provide a proper public park, in the form of a linear park that runs along part or all of the Goul River, particularly north of Main Street in an area in the vicinity of the Community Hall and the Castle. Extensions to this could occur in association with development - this could enable such a linear park to be extended from the Castle to the GAA sports grounds in time (see Urban Design Map for example).

### Roads and Traffic

The National Primary route N8 forms the principal circulation axis within the town. Though the road surface is good, this heavily trafficked road detracts from the amenity, ambience and character of the town - in terms of fumes, pedestrian-vehicular conflicts and visual intrusion.

Recently, the County Council have installed pedestrian traffic lights in the centre of the town near the Mill Street/New Line Road junction. This position also links the Post Office and Bank on the south side of the street and a local pharmacy on the opposite side - uses that tend to act as trip generators. The pavement has been extended slightly in its vicinity and emphasised through attractive brick pavoirs. Other corners of the junction with Mill Street and New Line have also been treated in a similar manner.

There is no public car park in the town and therefore car parking tends to occur on-street. Furthermore, few retail outlets or other trip generators, have customer or employee off-street car parks and therefore shoppers and visitors (short term users) compete for limited on-street spaces with employees and business owners (long-term users). A notable exception is the local Centra on the north side of Main Street.

On street car parking at the junction of Lumper Lane and Main Street restricts vehicular movement.

Most road surfaces in the town are in good condition and road markings are consistently good too. With the exception of recent pavement works, all footpaths are concrete and have concrete kerbing or no kerbing at all. This has tended to



**Photo 15:** The Goul River near the mill and castle - opportunities for a linear park.

**Photo 16:** Good road markings and road surface typify the approaches into the town, however commercial billboards and advertising compete with traffic calming signs.



**Photo 17:** Delineated path on Mill Street.

**Photo 18:** Car parking in vicinity of junction of Lumper Lane hinders access.



cause or facilitate the erosion of path edges. While footpath conditions generally tend to be good, notable exceptions include the north side of Main Street in the vicinity of the R689 junction; near the Library and near Lumper Lane. An occasional feature of the pavement is the presence of limestone flags at either vehicular side access points or at front door entrances (examples include the Bank of Ireland and some of the private residences).

The road margin of Mill Street (east side) contains a red coloured dressing, which has been laid to identify and retain the historical mass path in this location. The hedgerow adjoining it needs to be maintained so as to encourage its use.

### Other Urban Design Elements

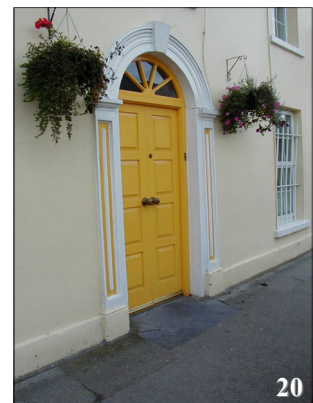
With the exception of bin types, street furniture generally tends to be lacking. Bins are of a uniform type and well maintained. The quality of the wirescape is not particularly bad (notably absence on the North side of Main Street for much of its length) and street lighting is functional and effective. An old traditional water pump exists on New Line Road, and though it may not be appropriate to reinstate it to its original use, it nonetheless is an attractive feature that should be restored.

On the N8, both on the north and south sides, a number of large advertising billboards are visible on both approaching and exiting the town. There are three locations to the north of the town and two to the south - some of which contain double advertisements, thereby increasing the scale and intensity of advertising - they detract from the environs of the town and act as visual clutter.

Urban design is concerned with the treatment of the buildings and spaces as they are viewed within or from the public realm (i.e., the road, street or square). In a traditional streetscape, individuality of buildings typically fall within a range of measurements (i.e., building heights, plot widths, roof pitch, materials, building setbacks, etc.). Some elements of continuity are therefore required to give a certain unity to the streetscape or road. On approach roads such as the R689, the variety in building lines, building forms and boundary treatments erode the character and urban design quality of the place. On this road, boundaries are treated in a variety of manners, including chain link fencing, stone walls, brick work (both yellow and brown), cement rendered and wrought iron. Some of these materials are painted in a variety of colours and tones. Continuity of boundary treatments can enhance the public realm, while allowing variety to be expressed in individual house designs and therefore should be encouraged. Consideration should therefore be given to establishing a standard material, height and setback for various approach roads to the town, using for example natural limestone walls or cement rendered walls of a particular colour. This would give great unity to



**Photo 19:** Significant access opportunities exist to open up backlands from redevelopment.



**Photos 20 & 21:** Attractive detailing around windows and door - note pseudo hood mouldings around bottom building. Both doorways have limestone flagstones on pavement entrance.

**Photo 22:** Disused water pump on New Line Street.





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**Photos 23:** The remains of the castle on Mill Street.

**Photo 24:** Unique stone stile on entering graveyard and old church grounds off Mill Street.

**Photo 25:** The streetscape of Urlingford is enlivened with simple architectural treatments, such as the curved window openings and tripartite windows from the early twentieth century as shown in this example.

**Photo 27:** Reduction in carriageway should be considered to facilitate on street car parking, subject to NRA Approval.

**Photo 26:** Road margins are generally wide enough to allow for adequate on-street car parking.



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these more recently developed 'streetscapes'.

### **Design Principles based on distinctive local character.**

The following principles will apply and should be read in conjunction with the Urban Design Map:

- Ensure that the scale of shopfront signs and nameplates is not out of scale with the ground floor façade area of a building nor out of character with the overall composition of the building. As a general rule of thumb, the sign should not exceed 15% of the ground floor level it is mounted on.
- Examine the financial feasibility of enhancing the streetscape on the south side of Main Street, between the Goul River and the R689, with the provision of an extended pavement, with delineated on-street car parking spaces, street trees and seating.
- Promote the development of a linear park alongside the River Goul and explore connections with the GAA playing fields.
- Examine the feasibility of providing a town park on lands between the Community Hall and the attractive Castle site.
- Consider tree preservation orders for those trees of townscape importance as identified on the Urban Design Map.
- Ensure consistent boundary treatments for all new developments on approach roads to the town.
- Ensure that any identified 'focal sites' on the Urban Design Map are designed to the highest standard, with specific attention being paid to principal facades as viewed on principal approaches.
- Ensure the retention of natural stone walls as identified on the Urban Design Map
- Ensure that any new infill development respects traditional building lines in the vicinity. New infill developments will be expected to have regard for the Design Guidelines on Future Development (Appendix A).
- Promote and encourage the development of backlands in the town.



**Photo 28:** Shopfront signage should not dominate the façade of a building and roof pitches should generally conform with the angle of established roof pitches on the street.

**Photo 29:** Traditionally set-backs in the building line were generally only reserved for important civic buildings, or as in this case a bank building.

