



**Recommendations from Imtac on public realm proposals for Dromore town centre**

**June 2018**

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## **About Imtac**

The Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (Imtac) is a committee of disabled people and older people as well as others including key transport professionals. Its role is to advise Government and others in Northern Ireland on issues that affect the mobility of older people and disabled people.

The aim of the Committee is to ensure that older people and disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else to travel when and where they want.

Imtac receives support from the Department for Infrastructure (hereafter referred to as the Department). Recommendations from Imtac on public realm proposals for Dromore town centre - (1st Draft May 2018)

## **About this report**

This report has been developed by Imtac in response to a meeting hosted by Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon District Council in Dromore on the 17th May 2018 to discuss proposals for public realm improvements for a number of streets in the town. The paper is an audit of current issues and challenges on the streets concerned as well as key recommendations of the Committee designed to ensure improvements benefit older people and disabled people in particular.

## **Key issues and challenges**

The main streets included in the proposed public realm scheme include Market Square and Bridge Street as well as short sections of Gallows Street and Princes Street. It is not proposed to change the central part of Market Square, incorporating the Town Hall and library as this was subject to relevantly recent public realm improvements.

### *Gallows Street*

It is proposed to include a short section of Gallows Street in the scheme including an uncontrolled crossing. Footways on Gallows Street are narrow. Two different colours of tactile paving have been used at either side of the uncontrolled crossings and the paving slabs damaged.



*Market Square (northern side)*

The footway on the northern side of Market Square is also narrow although wider than Gallows Street. On street parking is provided including an accessible parking bay.



There is an uncontrolled crossing to the centre of Market Square close to the junction with Gallows Street. The tactile paving is in a poor state of repair and the two sides of the crossing do not line up.



Overly large bins narrow the footway width along parts of this section of Market Square. The quality of the footway is poor and includes a number of concrete dish drainage channels.



There is a further uncontrolled crossings across to the central part of Market Square close to the junction with Princes Street. The alignment of the tactile paving is again an issue.



*Princes Street*

It is proposed to include a short section of Princes Street in the scheme. The already narrow footway is narrowed further by a utility box.



There is an uncontrolled crossing at this point providing access to eastern side of Market Square. Tactile paving has only been included on one side of the crossing.



*Market Square (eastern side)*

The footway along this section of Market Square is narrow. Tactile paving has been provided at one side only of an entrance and the gradient of the footway is a significant hazard at this point. A Boards further narrow the footway along this section. On street parking bays are provided.



On street parking on the opposite side means there is no safe or accessible crossing across Market Square at its junction with Lower Mount Street



*Market Square (southern side)*

The footway is narrow along this section of Market Square with vehicle access to a public house presenting an additional potential hazard.





After this point the footway broadens. However A Boards and cars overhanging the pavement narrow the width. A bus stop is provided for Newry bound services but car parking does not allow access to a kerb, essential for easy access for bus users.



A controlled crossing has been provided to the central part of Market Square at this point. However the location of seating presents a potential hazard for people with sight loss approaching or using the crossing.



A shop display on the footway approaching the junction with Bridge Street narrows the footway and creates multiple hazards for people with sight loss.



*Market Square (western side)*

There is an uncontrolled crossing connecting the western side of Market Square with the central section. The tactile paving does not line up and is extremely dangerous as it directs people with sight into the carriageway. The footway along the western side of Market Square is narrow.



## *Bridge Street*

The footways at the junction between Market Square, Church Street and Bridge Street are very narrow. Tactile paving has only been provided at the Church Street side of the junction.



There is no footway along this section of Bridge Street. Moving vehicles makes this a potentially hazardous place for pedestrians. Significant drainage has been provided along the building line of both sides of the street.



A narrow footway has been provided on both sides starting at the Bridge. The footway on the eastern side broadens after the bridge. The footway on the western side remains too narrow for easy use by wheelchair users and people with buggies or prams.



At the junction of Bridge Street and Meeting Street there is an uncontrolled crossing. Although dropped kerbs are included there is no tactile paving. Gradients and crossfalls on the footway present additional difficulties at this crossing. An A Board creates a further obstruction to the footway.



## **Key Recommendations**

### *1 Broaden and upgrade footways*

Due to its historic nature many of the existing footways in Dromore town centre are narrow. Public realm improvements must ensure every opportunity is taken to provide additional footway width.

The opportunity should be taken to replace all poorly maintained or damaged footway surfaces and to improve gradients and crossfalls across accesses, reducing or eliminating all sharp changes in levels.

### *2 Address current issues with crossings*

At many locations current provision for crossing the streets are inadequate or in some cases dangerous. Issues include an absence of tactile paving or incorrectly laid tactile paving and a lack of any safe or accessible crossing opportunity. In addition to broader footways, all current controlled and uncontrolled crossings must be upgraded to meet current design standards. A safe and accessible crossing must be provided for pedestrians across Market Square at its junction with Lower Mount Street.

### *3 Reduce pavement clutter*

Currently there are issues in the town with clutter on pavement which reduces footway widths and create unnecessary hazards for all pedestrians. These include the design and location of street furniture and the activities of businesses. The public realm scheme must reduce the impact of clutter by giving careful thought to the design and location of street furniture. Traders in the town should be discouraged from placing items, including A boards on the footway with enforcement considered as an ultimate sanction.

### *4 Provide accessible bus stops*

Market Square provides the main access points for people using public transport in the town. A shelter and bus stop with an acceptable kerb is provided in the central part of the Square for services towards Belfast. However, because of on street parking, passengers using Newry bound services must get on and off the bus using the carriageway. The absence of access to the kerb for these buses severely limits their accessibility for disabled people, making access for wheelchair users virtually impossible. A priority for the public realm improvements must be to provide accessible bus stop facilities for all buses serving Market Square. This may involve a

relocation of the current bus stop, or an operational change where services in both directions utilise the stop on the centre of Market Square.

#### *5 Maximise accessible parking opportunities*

Currently there are two accessible on-street parking bays provided on Market Square. Imtac recommends that the public realm improvements seek to at least double this provision. Consideration should be given to the design and location of these bays. Bays should be designed to optimum dimensions, with consideration to people who use larger, rear entry vehicles. A dropped kerb should be provided with all bays located to enable easy access to the footway.

#### *6 Pedestrians should have priority at vehicle entrances*

There are a number of locations in the town where vehicle entrances interrupt footways and create potential difficulties for some disabled people and older people. The public realm improvement must address these issues by providing level access for pedestrians across these entrances. The scheme should ensure that the design of the footway at vehicle entrances indicates that pedestrians not vehicles have the priority.

#### *7 Improve access to premises*

The public realm improvements should maximise opportunities to improve access to businesses on the streets concerned. The aim should be to provide step-free flush access to premises where this is possible.

#### *8 Improve pedestrian access to Bridge Street*

Currently access for pedestrians to and along Bridge Street is challenging. The absence of a footway at the Market Square end of the street, coupled with significant levels of traffic makes this a hazardous and unwelcome environment for all pedestrians. Ideally Imtac would like to see a footway provided along at least one side of the street. The Committee recognises that the drainage required in this area and the listed bridge across the Lagan may make this solution extremely difficult to achieve.

In the absence of a footway the only other solution which Imtac would support would be to restrict vehicular access to the street, allowing only vehicles with a reason to be on the street access to it (ie businesses on the street and people requiring access to these premises). Any other solution creates a shared space, something that Imtac cannot support.

Care is also needed around the design and construction of the uncontrolled crossing at the junction of Bridge Street and Meeting Street. The gradient and crossfalls on the footway at this junction are likely to be exaggerated by the use of natural stone.

### Conclusion

Imtac thanks the Council and its design consultants for the early engagement on developing proposals for public realm improvements in Dromore town centre. Despite the constraints of working in an historic town the Committee believes there are opportunities to make significant improvements which will directly benefit older people and disabled people. Bridge Street does represent very specific challenges and Imtac would welcome further discussions with the Council before final decisions are taken about its future design.