



**Comments from Imtac about public realm proposals for  
Enniskillen Town Centre**

**(January 2019)**

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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).

## **About this report**

This report has been developed by Imtac in response to a request from Park for comments on proposals for a public realm scheme in Enniskillen town centre being prepared for Fermanagh & Omagh District Council by Park Hood Chartered Landscape Architects. To further inform its comments Imtac undertook a street audit of the area in December 2018. This report summarises the findings of this street audit, examining current issues and challenges on the streets concerned as well as setting out key recommendations from the Committee around the current proposals to ensure the planned improvements deliver maximum benefits for older people, disabled people and others.

## **Street audit findings**

The main streets included in the proposed public realm scheme include Darling Street, Church Street, High Street, Townhall Street, East Bridge Street and parts of Queen Elizabeth Road and Belmore Street. The scheme also includes a number of smaller streets abutting the main streets including Wesley Street, Paget Square, the Diamond, Water Street, Eden Street, Middleton Street and Regal Pass.

The street audit, undertaken in December 2018, identified a number of general issues with current public realm provision on all the streets in the town centre including:

- Footway widths
- Footway condition
- The use of dish drainage channels

- Clutter on footways
- The provision of controlled and uncontrolled crossings
- The provision of tactile paving
- Access at side streets and vehicle entrances
- Traffic levels and parking

The audit also identified a number of locations where there are specific and significant issues including:

- The Diamond area
- The junctions of Church Street, Darling Street and Halls Lane
- The junctions of East Bridge Street, Queen Elizabeth Road and Belmore Street

Photographs have been used below to illustrate each of the issues identified by the audit.

### *Footway widths*

Footways in the town centre are narrow but do for the most part allow a minimum of 2m width. This is a typical example from Belmore Street.



There are a number of locations in the town centre where the irregular building line means footway widths are reduced below acceptable and accessible standards including this example from Church Street.

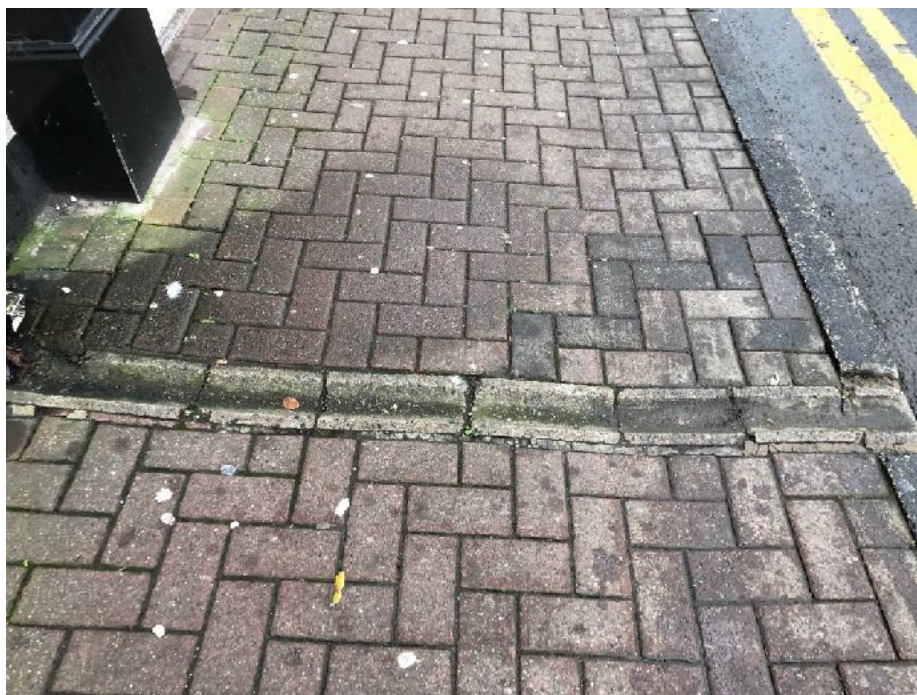


### *Footway conditions and drainage channels*

A range of different materials has been used on footways in the town centre. In the main the condition of paving is acceptable, however the surfaces are uneven in many locations including this example on East Bridge Street.



Dish drainage channels have used across footways throughout the town centre. Some are relatively shallow, others including this example from Belmore Street are deeper and present a potential hazard for some pedestrians.



### *Clutter on footways*

Shop displays, pavement cafes and A-Boards on the footway are a major issue in the town centre, further reducing already restricted footway width and creating hazards for some pedestrians. This is an example from Townhall Street.



In other areas the design and placement of street furniture narrows and restricts footway width including this example of a litter bin from High Street.



### *The provision of controlled and uncontrolled crossings*

There are only one single zebra crossing and one fully controlled crossing on Belmore Street (pictured below) for pedestrians in the entire area covered by the public realm. This is wholly inadequate given the levels of traffic using the streets and impacts on access for some disabled people and older people.



There are significantly greater numbers of uncontrolled crossings, with access across the side streets and main streets. Although generally these have been installed with dropped kerbs and appropriate tactile paving, traffic levels and parking either side of some crossings restrict the accessibility and usefulness of some crossings such as this example from East Bridge Street where parked cars reduce visibility.



### *Provision of tactile paving*

Although in the main tactile paving has been used and laid correctly in the town centre there are examples such below on Belmore Street where no tactile paving has been provided at the junction with a side street.





There are other examples, such as at the vehicle entrances to Courthouse (pictured below), where tactile paving depth is below design standards and does not cover the entire area where the entrance is flush with the footway.



There are a number of examples where tactile paving fails to contrast appropriately with the surrounding paving including at the Zebra crossing across Queen Elizabeth Road.



### *Access across side streets and vehicle entrances*

There are a number of examples of where access at side streets and vehicle entrances falls below acceptable design standards. The picture below from East Bridge Street highlights one such example where tactile paving provision is insufficient and the kerb has not been dropped to provide step free access



### *Traffic levels and parking*

During the audit traffic levels were heavy and parking at a premium. The overall impression taken from the audit was that vehicles had greater priority in the town centre than pedestrians as illustrated by the picture below of High Street approaching the Diamond.



A number of accessible parking bays have been provided across the town centre, generally located adjacent to a dropped kerb associated with an uncontrolled crossing such as the good example below. However a small number of accessible parking bays unsatisfactorily have no dropped kerb provision.



### *The Diamond*

The Diamond provides one of the few genuine areas of public space in the town centre with sufficient space for seating and other amenities. Due to differences in levels access to the Diamond via Eden Street and Water Street is via steps and ramps. Steps close to Eden Street have no corduroy tactile paving.



Currently there is no effective delineator between the carriageway and footway across the Diamond. Although bollards and dish drainage channels have been used to attempt to provide delineation this area is essentially a shared surface, a design concept opposed by Imtac as it use creates significant access issues for some disabled people and older people.



*The junctions of Church Street, Darling Street and Halls Lane*

The current design of uncontrolled crossing points at the junctions between Church Street, Darling Street and Halls Lane is problematic. In particular the location of the crossing, traffic movements and flow across the northern section of junction raise serious concerns about pedestrian safety.



*The junctions of East Bridge Street, Queen Elizabeth Road and Belmore Street*

Current provision for pedestrians at the junctions where East Bridge Street, Queen Elizabeth Road and Belmore Street meet is wholly inadequate. An element of controlled crossing is provided via a Zebra crossing across Queen Elizabeth Road.



An uncontrolled crossing across East Bridge Street does not provide the required priority and accessibility for pedestrians against constant vehicular traffic. Contrast between tactile paving and surrounding paving is poor.



There are similar issues with the uncontrolled crossing across Belmore Street. The staggered nature of the crossing and the traffic flow and movements make this an even more challenging environment for pedestrians.



There is a further uncontrolled crossing across Belmore Street to the rear of the Clinton Centre via a narrow traffic island. The absence of appropriate tactile paving, dropped kerbs and the width of the island indicate that pedestrians are not a priority. A bus stop is marked on the carriageway beside the island but there is no indication on the island itself.



## Comments on design proposals

Having reviewed the draft designs Imtac welcomes many of the proposals which it believes will address issues highlighted by the street audit including:

- Proposals to extend footway widths where possible.
- Proposals to upgrade all footway surfaces to provide a consistently even surface.
- Proposals to provide better, more inclusive, drainage solutions
- Proposals to declutter footways locating street furniture only where footway widths allow.
- Proposals to increase the number of pedestrian crossings on the main streets.
- Proposals to upgrade and enhance the existing uncontrolled crossing.
- Proposals to ensure that all appropriate tactile surfaces are provided and conform to design standards.
- Proposals to ensure that accessibility and pedestrian priority is enhanced at side streets and vehicle entrances.
- Proposals to enhance the provision of accessible parking bays including the provision of dropped kerbs at each bay.

There are a number of other issues and concerns the Committee do not believe have been adequately addressed by the proposals including:

- Proposals to retain a shared surface street in the Diamond area of the town centre contrary to the published advice of Imtac<sup>1</sup>, guidance from Department for Infrastructure<sup>2</sup> and recent announcements from the Department for Transport<sup>3</sup>.
- Proposals to upgrade but retain the existing pedestrian crossing provision at the junction of East Bridge Street, Queen Elizabeth Street and Belmore Street.
- Proposals to upgrade but retain the existing pedestrian crossing provision at the junction of Church Street, Darling Street and Halls Lane.
- Proposals to retain existing and install new Zebra crossings rather than install Puffin crossings.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.imtac.org.uk/publications/revised-statement-shared-space>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/kerb-heights-public-realm-schemes-dem-15415>

<sup>3</sup> See paragraph 8.18 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/728547/inclusive-transport-strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/728547/inclusive-transport-strategy.pdf)

## Recommendations

The area covered by the current public realm proposals is the heart of the town centre with access to the main retail and other amenities. Currently there are a number of issues with the design of the public realm which limit the accessibility and inclusivity of the town centre. These issues are exacerbated by the traffic levels in the town and the obvious lack of priority given to pedestrians. As already indicated some of these issues will be addressed and improved by the draft public realm proposals. Others, however, will not. Resolving these outstanding issues will not be easy and will require input and collaboration between a number of agencies including the Department for Infrastructure and the Council.

The primary recommendation from Imtac is the removal of shared space from all areas of the scheme. The Committee recommends in the strongest possible terms that kerb delineation (with a minimum show of 100mm) be provided between the carriageway and pedestrian areas in The Diamond and any other areas of the public realm proposals where pedestrians share space with vehicles. Furthermore the Committee strongly recommends that the Council and its design consultants engage with Imtac and other organisations of disabled people and older people on the detail of any revised designs for the Diamond and other areas to ensure opportunities to improve accessibility are maximised.

Imtac further recommends that DfI Roads develop plans to improve pedestrian priority and safety at the two key junctions in the town centre identified by this report. This should include the provision of additional controlled crossings at the East Bridge Street, Queen Elizabeth Road and Belmore Street junction and a complete rethink and redesign of pedestrian provision at the Church Street, Darling Street and Halls Lane junction. In addition and linked to this recommendation any existing bus infrastructure should be upgraded to optimum accessible design standards including a optimum footway widths and the use of bus boarding kerbs<sup>4</sup>.

Linked to the previous recommendation the Committee has concerns about the current and proposed use of Zebra crossings in the town centre as an alternative to fully controlled Puffin crossings. The use of Zebra crossing disadvantages some pedestrians, particularly people with a visual impairment, by removing certainty of over when it is safe to cross. Imtac recommends when installing new or upgrading existing pedestrian crossing DfI Roads must install Puffin crossings.

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<sup>4</sup>See Section 6 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/3695/inclusive-mobility.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/3695/inclusive-mobility.pdf)



Illegal clutter on the pavements is a significant issue in Enniskillen town centre. Many of the streets audited are too narrow to accommodate pavement cafes whilst maintaining acceptable pedestrian access. The Council therefore needs to use its powers under the Licensing of Pavement Cafes Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 to remove cafes that currently obstruct the footway. Similarly the frequent use of A-Boards and shop displays are currently adding to obstacles on already narrow footways. Imtac firmly believes that this type of unlicensed activity is anti-social and should not be tolerated. It recommends that the agencies involved introduce a town centre wide ban on A Boards and other illegal clutter similar to the initiative recently undertaken by Edinburgh City Council.

A final relatively minor but important recommendation concerns the design of accessible parking bays. Imtac is aware that some Blue Badge holders travel in larger vehicles, sometimes with rear access. Access for such vehicles in standard accessible bays can be problematic. The Committee recommends that consideration should be given to providing a number of accessible bays in the town centre designed to accommodate larger vehicles, longer than the current minimum standard for an accessible bay.