



**Recommendations from Imtac on public
realm proposals for Newry (Lower Hill
Street)**

September 2018

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About this report

This report has been developed by Imtac in response to a meeting hosted by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council in Newry on the 5th September 2018 to discuss proposals for public realm improvements for a number of streets in the city. The paper looks at current issues and challenges on the streets concerned as well as setting out the 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, John Mitchell Place, St Colman's Park, sections of Hill Street, Mill Street and O'Hagan Street. The scheme links to recently completed public realm works undertaken on Hill Street and Buttercrane and Merchant Quays.

John Mitchell Place

There is a controlled crossing on the slip road on the western side of John Mitchell Place at its junction with William Street. The tactile paving and control box on the William Street side of the crossing has been incorrectly installed.



There is an further controlled crossing across John Mitchell Place at the junction with William Street. A profusion of traffic columns on the northern side create potential hazards on a narrow traffic island.



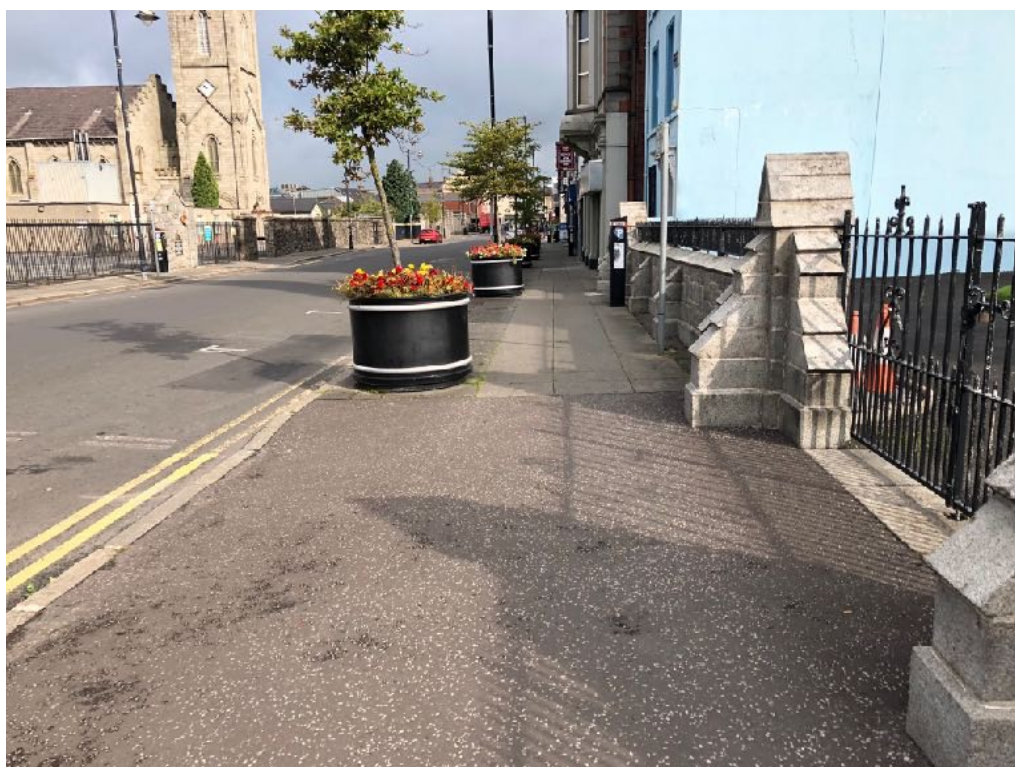
An uncontrolled crossing is provided to cross the side street close to the junction with William Street on the eastern side of John Mitchell Place. Appropriate tactile paving has been provided.



There is a further uncontrolled crossing with appropriate tactile paving across John Mitchell Place beside the First Presbyterian church. The footway is broad at this section on the eastern side, however street furniture including bins could be positioned better.



The footway on the eastern side of John Mitchell Place narrows considerably after the church. Large planters with trees significantly reduce the provision of obstacle free footway.



The footway along this eastern section is in poor condition with old dish drainage channels. A-Boards create additional obstacles.



There is no tactile paving at the junction between John Mitchell Place and St Colman's Park. Cars parked on St Colman's Park overhang the footway creating a potential hazard.



The pavement along the remaining section of John Mitchell place is mainly clutter free except for lighting columns.



On the western side of John Mitchell Place large planters again reduces pavement width outside St Mary's Church.



The footway on the western side of John Mitchell Place continues towards the junction with William Street and is relatively obstacle free other than lighting columns.



St Colman's Park

The southern side of St Colman's Park is a mixture of retail and residential properties. Footway provision is in poor condition, incomplete and on one side only. Free parking is provided adjacent to the park.



There is no safe and accessible crossing provided across St Colman's Park at its junction with Abbey way.



The footway on the northern side of St Colman's park is narrow in parts. The use of large planters again reduces the narrow widths unnecessarily.



The area is dominated by parked cars with very poor access to the public park itself.



Hill Street

On the eastern side of Hill Street already narrow footways are made worse with shop displays and A-boards. The footway is in poor condition.



The footways here are in poor condition and include older concrete dish drainage channels.



No tactile paving has been provided at the junction with Mill Street on the eastern side of Hill Street. The location of street furniture creates potential hazards and could be improved.



The footway on the remainder of the eastern side of Hill Street is narrow but relatively uncluttered although the location of lighting columns are not ideal.



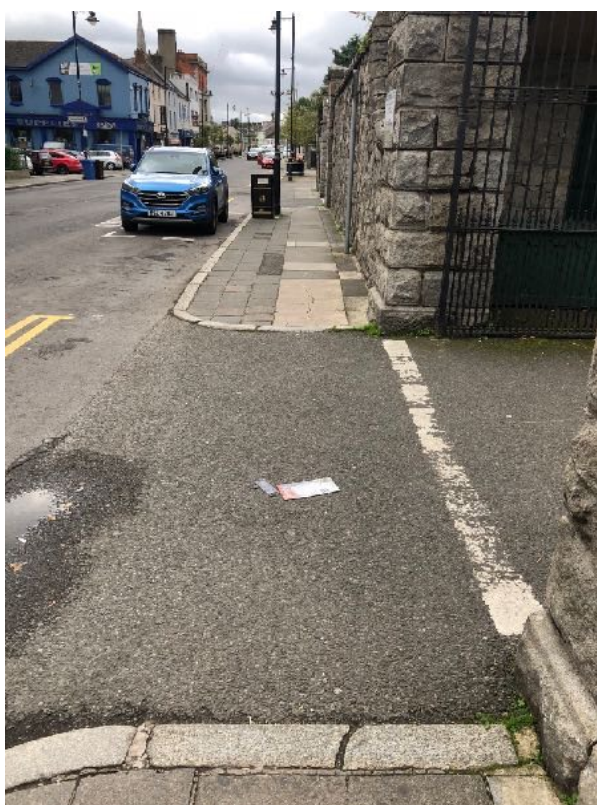
The footway on the western side of Hill Street is relatively narrow and in a poor condition. Concrete dish drainage channels have again been used.



Clutter from shop displays and A-Boards are also a problem on the western side of the street.



There are two entrances to the markets on the western side of Hill Street. Neither entrance include tactile paving to highlight the potential of moving vehicles to pedestrians with a visual impairment.



O'Hagan Street

There is an uncontrolled crossing with appropriate tactile paving across O'Hagan Street at its junction with Hill Street. There is a significant slope on the southern side of the crossing likely to create difficulties for wheelchair users and other disabled people.



The footway on the northern side of O'Hagan Street is exceptionally narrow, inaccessible to most pedestrians.



The footway on the southern side of O'Hagan Street is broader, clutter free but in poor condition.



There is no safe, accessible crossing across O'Hagan Street at its junction with The Mall.



Mill Street

There is no tactile paving provided across Mill Street at its junction with Hill Street.



The footway on the northern side of Mill Street is narrow and narrows considerably more as it approaches the junction with The Mall and St Mary's Street.



The footway on the southern side on Mill Street is also narrow. No safe and accessible crossing has been provided at the junction with Georges Lane.



No tactile paving has been provided across The Mall at its junction with Mill Street with cobbles on the carriageway creating an unsuitable surface for many disabled people.



No tactile paving has been provide across St Mary's Street at its junction with Mill Street.



There is no safe or accessible crossing across Mill Street at its junction with the Mall and St Mary's Street.



The pavement on the southern side of Mill Street towards Buttercrane Quay is narrow but clutter free.



At the signalised junction with the car park on the southern footway, dropped kerbs have been provided with no tactile paving. A pedestrian phase has not been provided with the traffic lights.



The footway on the northern side of Mill Street towards Merchant Quay is narrow but uncluttered.



Drop kerbs have been provided without tactile paving at the entrance/exit to the car park and bus centre. These are not in line and there is no pedestrian phase provided at the traffic lights.



Key Recommendations

1 Broaden and improve footways

Many of the existing footways on the streets covered by the scheme are narrow, some exceptionally so. Public realm improvements must ensure every opportunity is taken to provide accessible footways. Where there is insufficient width to achieve appropriate standards then such widening as can be made should be sought. Consideration should be given to removing the provision of on-street parking bays in streets such as O'Hagan Street to enable the provision of broader footways.

Currently many of the footways in the streets covered by the scheme are in a poor condition and in need of maintenance or replacement. Given this Imtac welcomes the scheme which will result in better quality materials and a more pleasant and accessible environment for pedestrians.

2 Address current issues with crossings

At many locations current provision for crossing the streets is 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. Providing a safe and accessible way for all pedestrians to cross the car park entrances and exits on both sides of the footway on Mill Street as it approaches Buttercrane and Merchant Quays is a particular priority. Junctions which are signalised should be upgraded to include a pedestrian crossing phase where this is not already the case. In some cases the carriageway surface at the crossing may require upgrading or replacing.

3 Provide additional opportunities to cross streets

There are limited opportunities to cross John Mitchell Place and Hill Street along their lengths. Consideration should be given to providing additional opportunities to cross from one side of these streets to the other. Crossings should be safe and accessible with dropped kerbs or raised table crossings incorporating appropriate tactile paving.

4 Reduce pavement clutter

Currently there are issues in the city centre with clutter on pavement which reduces already narrow footway widths and creates unnecessary hazards for pedestrians. These include the design and location of street furniture, particularly planters, 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 including lighting columns. Traders in the town should be discouraged from placing items on the footway with enforcement considered as an ultimate sanction.

5 Maximise accessible parking opportunities

Imtac recommends that the public realm improvements seek to improve the current provision of accessible parking bays. Consideration should be given to the design and location of these bays. Bays should be designed to optimum dimensions, giving consideration to people who use larger, rear entry vehicles. A dropped kerb should be provided with all bays and be located to enable easy access to the footway.

6 Improve access to premises

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

7 Make St Colman's Park a more people friendly place

Currently St Colman's Park is one of the few green spaces in Newry city centre. Unfortunately the area around the park is largely inaccessible, with narrow, incomplete footways, poor surfaces and a lack of accessible crossings. The area is dominated currently by parked cars. Consequently the park itself is not accessible.

The scheme should prioritise improving the area around St Colman's Park to make it an area pedestrians might want to visit and use. Access to the park itself should be improved. Where possible footways should be broadened. Consideration could be given to improving the environs and access by reducing and controlling parking (a residents/business holder permit scheme?). Illegal parking should be strictly enforced.

Conclusion

Imtac thanks the Council and its design consultants for the early engagement with the Committee on developing proposals for public realm improvements Newry city centre. Despite obvious constraints the Committee believes there are opportunities to make significant improvements which will directly benefit older people and disabled people. Imtac would welcome further discussions with the Council and its consultants before decisions are taken about the final designs.

