



SOUTH EAST COAST MASTERPLAN

Prepared for Department for Social Development

Executive Summary

January 2013



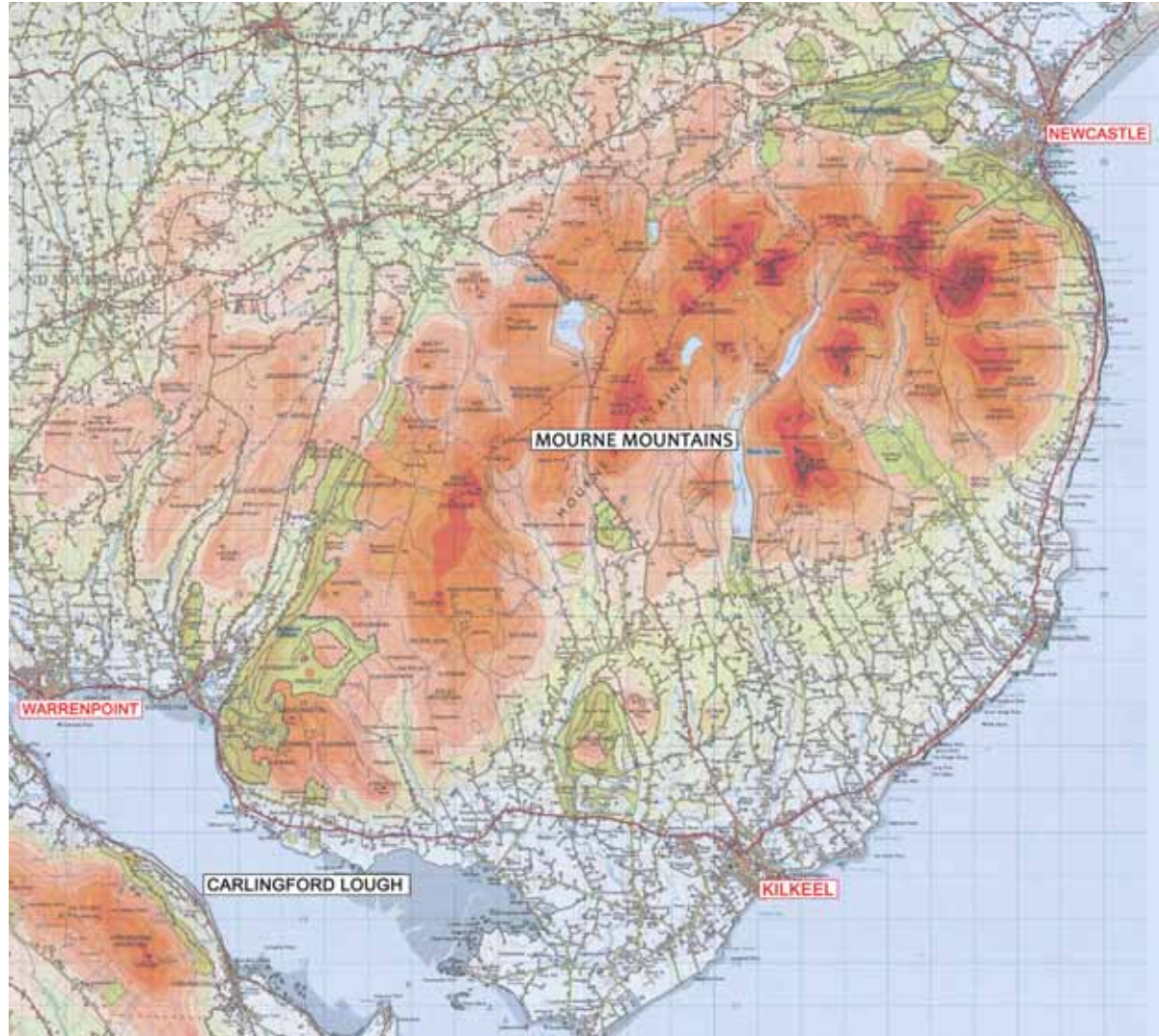
1 Introduction

The Department for Social Development, working with Down District Council and Newry & Mourne District Council, commissioned a team of specialists, led by URS, to produce a Regeneration Masterplan for the South East Coast.

1.1 The Brief

The Masterplan will provide guidance on the future strategic development of the South East Coast as well as specific guidance on the location and form of development in the Town Centres of Newcastle, Kilkeel and Warrenpoint over the next 20 years. In particular, it will help to direct public and private investment to those areas that will most benefit local people, support local business and commerce and contribute to the long term viability and vitality of the Town Centre.

Having reviewed the available evidence, and analysed the issues affecting the wider area and key town centres, URS have worked with local organisations to formulate a set of proposals showing how and where development opportunities might be realised.





2 South East Coast Masterplan – Overall Vision and Key Priorities

In order to present a framework for future development of the South East Coast, we believe that it is first necessary to set the parameters for success through a clear and coherent vision. This vision needs to respond to the challenges identified through the investigation and consultation process, and should seek to provide an understanding of where the area will be in twenty years time.

2.1 Vision

In establishing a vision for the South East Coast, it is imperative to recognise the intrinsic character that makes the area special for residents, for workers and for visitors; namely that the South East Coast affords a coastal setting comprising some of the best beaches in Northern Ireland and with a stunning backdrop of the Mourne Mountains. This landscape setting in turn has the potential to be coupled with a unique sense of cultural vibrancy, heritage learning, a range of outdoor activities, and some unique and high end products. These assets and resources in turn need to be positioned and developed in a manner that can drive year-round visitor interest in order to underpin a sustainable economy consisting of other sectors such retail, leisure, agriculture, fishing and manufacturing.

Given this context, the following vision statement should be adopted:

By 2025, the South East Coast is to become an area with a strong national and international reputation for being a high quality coastal landscape of great scenic, natural, historic and leisure value; and an area that provides an enjoyable place to live, to work, to explore, and to play in.

This is to be achieved by enabling the key towns of Newcastle, Kilkeel and Warrenpoint to collectively and individually embrace and prosper from their association with both their coastal setting and the wider character of the Mourne Mountains as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The delivery of this overall vision will require the co-operation and co-ordination of key stakeholders across the area, particularly those within the three towns of Newcastle, Kilkeel and Warrenpoint. It is evident that each town has a unique character and potential offering to appeal to both day and overnight tourism visits individually. However, as is evidenced through the Mourne Coastal Route, when the towns are viewed collectively they present a much stronger proposition, with the strengths of each town able to be presented and packaged to attract a range of visitors throughout the year.

To underpin the vision, each town needs to develop an individual identity but within a co-ordinated and complementary framework for the South East Coast. The following describes how this can be achieved.

2.2 Newcastle

Newcastle will continue to develop and further its reputation as a seaside resort for the 21st Century.

Building upon the success of the new promenade, the town will continue to develop new means for animating the popular coastal zone to attract new audiences. This will include expanding the range of beachside activities available, showcasing local arts and crafts talents, introducing new play areas (both temporary and permanent), and establishing a programme of annual events; all of which will be designed to encourage overnight stays and to extend the tourism season, especially amongst family groups and general sightseers.

As the recognised eastern ‘Gateway to the Mournes’, attention will be given to supporting the range of activities available on the Mourne Mountains, particularly walking and cycling through a dedicated programme for welcoming these interest groups to be undertaken by accommodation providers, catering establishments, and retail units. Moreover, effort will also be made to draw attention to existing and potential coastal activities and attractions, from the mainstream and well-established activities such as golf and ‘easy to do’ watersports; through to the more niche heath





and wellness sector. The proposed Donard Gondola, as a premier visitor attraction for both the Mourne and the South East Coast, will allow all visitors to be able to experience and enjoy the Mourne Mountains from Newcastle.

Ultimately, the combination of the dual gateway role of Newcastle (to the coast and to the Mourne Mountains) will generate increased demand for new and existing services in the town. New and existing businesses will be supported, particularly in terms of retail, activity centres, catering enterprises and ideally accommodation. In this respect, hotel accommodation in particular has been identified as a development opportunity to both support and indeed to drive visitors to the town. This will mean that Newcastle can be extensively packaged promoted to a variety of different audience groups seeking to experience and enjoy both a coastal and/or mountainous experience in a vibrant and welcoming setting.

2.3 Kilkeel

As a working harbour with one of the largest fishing fleets in Ireland, Kilkeel is to develop a series of specialist and niche interests that celebrate and champion its fishing industry heritage. It is also

conceivable that, as an emerging industry for the area, Kilkeel will also be able to become a showcase for the sustainable integration of renewable energies within a setting of high environmental value.

The ambitious re-development of the Nautilus Centre comprising a new seafood cookery school, a maritime visitor attraction, and tourist offices has taken place in Kilkeel. This will be complemented by co-ordinated effort to raise the profile of Kilkeel's seafood cuisine to a standard of quality that will be recognised internationally. Organised trips to the local fish auction will be augmented with a dedicated harbour walk; interpretation material that traces the history of the fishing industry through the real life stories of industry workers through the ages, sea angling, sea diving and wildlife watching trips; and off-shore angling competitions and events.

A slower pace will epitomise the visitor experience at Kilkeel, partly reflecting its more peripheral location and partly its proximity to Silent Valley in the Mourne Mountains, an area that affords stunning views of the coast below that is renowned for the peace and solitude it provides. As a result, those spending time between the Mourne Mountains and Kilkeel will be offered ample opportunity to relax, unwind, and recuperate – as well as a little self pampering either through visiting one of its good quality restaurants; through purchasing antiques and local arts, crafts and produce; or through spa treatments. As a result, those seeking to escape from hustle and bustle will find Kilkeel to be a welcome hide-away.

There will be a wealth of amenities to satisfy those with children or those who still want a sense of adventure. The proposed new play-park will be state-of-the-art, whilst walks and cycle rides into the Mourne Mountains will follow in the footsteps of past Irish chieftains who would have surveyed their Kingdom of the Mournes.



Kilkeel will also represent a key destination for wildlife watching. The Kilkeel River is destined to become a key wildlife discovery trail after the efforts of the Mourne Heritage Trust and Northern Ireland Water to improve biodiversity in the valley, with a new nature trail highlighting many habitats found along its banks. Seals are also a key attraction of the harbour, with their playful nature often a real treat for all, whilst marine mammals are occasionally sighted.

Because of its location as the most peripheral of the coastal towns, Kilkeel is likely to benefit the most from the Mourne Coastal Trail. However, the initiatives as proposed through the masterplan and the town

Management Plan are designed to ensure there are a critical mass of assets, attractions and amenities to not just support users of the trail, but also to act as drivers of visitors in their own right. In that respect Kilkeel is the most important of the towns if a successful trail is to be created. It is vital that Kilkeel has a tourist draw capable of drawing tourists who visit Newcastle or Warrenpoint further down the coast. In the same way Warrenpoint must also provide a tourist draw to complete the South East Coast visitor trail.

2.4 Warrenpoint

The traditional Victorian character that defines Warrenpoint will be retained, and the independent retail brought to the fore. Pedestrian friendly spaces and an improved Town Square providing the focal point for people to gather, and for key events including the weekly market and music, arts and crafts events to take place. Cafés, bars and restaurants will help further animate this space both during the day and in the evening. The addition of a marina and extended promenade will link the Town Square and retail hub to the waters-edge, with the ease of people flow through the town to be aided by a new one-way traffic system.

The marina will also provide direct access to Carlingford Lough supporting boat trips and visiting cruisers. It will also provide a beacon for the growing reputation of Warrenpoint as a centre for watersports, with a multitude of activities from kayaking to power boat trips available. It will also support unique events such as Tall Ship visits; water sports challenge events, and possibly an alternative triathlon (e.g. kayak, mountain bike and hill running). The intention for additional cruise ships stopping at Warrenpoint should be welcomed and encouraged as this will benefit not only Warrenpoint but the South East Coast overall.

In this respect, Warrenpoint will also act as the western gateway to the Mourne Mountains and, as with

Newcastle, attention will be given to supporting the range of activities available on the Mourne Mountains, particularly walking and cycling. For Mountain Biking in particular, Warrenpoint acts as the gateway to Rostrevor Forest Park, with its growing reputation for downhill mountain bike challenges driving new and energetic visitors to the town. This in itself is breeding a new sense of vitality, with adventure enthusiasts also tending to bring their own unique culture and identity.



2.5 The South East Coast - Individually Distinctive; Collectively Strong

The focus of this masterplan has been to emphasise and promote the distinctiveness of each town, but in a manner that seeks to position each within a wider South East Coast context. This is to ensure that, through initiatives such as the Mourne Coastal Trail and through marketing and promotional initiatives, the collective strengths of the towns along with whole of the South East coastline can be presented as a destination.

It will be through the presentation of the South East Coast and the Mourne Mountains that the overall potential of the South East Coast as a destination will be realised. Within this context, each town will have a role to play. There will always be overlap in the types of services and amenities that each town will present, be it maritime heritage, beaches, and promenades. However, with the advent of the Mourne Coastal Trail, which is part of the NITB's and the DETINI's strategic approach to developing the Mournes as a signature destination, it is important that each centre is given a distinctive proposition to entice visitors; namely that the things to see and do which entertain, engage and enlighten are sufficiently different between the towns that visitors will want to travel to each as part of a multi-stop and multi-faceted experience. Through this approach, visitors will be given the opportunity to spend time to explore the area and to enjoy the special features of interest, learn about its heritage, or simply play along the coast or in the mountains.

The interrelationship between the coast and the Mourne Mountains, which is itself a distinctive destination, also needs to be maximised for the benefit of all. The mountains themselves are sparsely populated and have limited amenities and resources. Those interested in exploring the Mountains will therefore rely on the towns to service their needs. This

is already evident in parts, however the aim of the masterplan is to further develop the role of the towns, but with each reflecting a slightly different position to attract slightly different audiences. For instance:

- Newcastle has greater potential to be the gateway for all, particularly capitalising on the gondola experience, allowing family groups and groups with mobility impairments to rise to the top of the mountains and to witness the stunning vistas that the Mourne provide.
- Kilkeel presents a slower pace where those visiting the Mourne can do so in away from hustle and bustle, and instead the can immerse themselves in the peace, the tranquillity and the solitude that the Mourne can provide.
- Warrenpoint is the adventure capital of the Mourne, providing the access to extreme mountain biking, challenging hiking, and other sporting challenges.



Key words which relate to the South East Coast as a whole.

2.6 Tailoring the Offer for Key Audiences

2.6.1 Family Groups

The South East Coast has always had a strong resonance as being popular with families and day visitors, particularly in times of good weather. Whilst this is still an important element of the offer, this tends to mean that the success of coastal destinations are often at the whims of the weather and certain times of year; a position that is not conducive to delivering an effective and sustainable visitor economy.

Coastal destinations across the UK are recognising that, in the 21st Century, traditional offerings need to be diversified into other forms of outdoor activity and entertainment to broaden their appeal to the family market. The public realm schemes completed to date have been highly successful in improving the look and feel of the three town centres and have increased footfall considerably, however this is only the first step and that success must be built upon. Through the masterplan, the towns of Newcastle, Kilkeel and Warrenpoint individually and collectively have the potential to redefine their offer to domestic and overseas holiday-makers travelling with children. The masterplan envisages that the South East Coast will provide a playground for young and old. New state-of-the-art play areas located in Newcastle and Kilkeel, and watersports and activities in Warrenpoint will be presented in a way for all the family to participate. Select beaches (especially those closely associated with Newcastle, Kilkeel and Warrenpoint) will be animated through new on-beach and off-shore activities; whilst others will be left relatively untouched to allow those seeking to spend time to relax, rest and be at one with nature have the chance to do so.

The Donard Gondola from Newcastle will represent a premier tourist attraction, and one that will allow family groups to explore and understand the Mourne

Mountains. The presence of this signature visitor attraction will help to raise the profile of the mountains as a useable resource for this market, something that has been highlighted as a barrier until now. Use of the associations between the Mourne Mountains and the land of Narnia, with the landscape inspiring these CS Lewis classic stories, will also be utilised to help create innovative ways to engage children to explore this intriguing landscape.

The active festivals programme across the towns already attracts people to the area, with the Festival of Flight, Festival of Fish and Maiden of the Mourne being important events for Newcastle, Kilkeel and Warrenpoint respectively. However, these and other events can be enhanced to offer a more family-friendly focus and better co-ordinated towards times that are likely to have the greatest appeal to family groups.

Altogether, the combination of stunning coastal and mountain views, beaches, activities, attractions and events coupled good stock of self-catering, serviced accommodation and caravan and camping parks, will ensure that the South East Coast will represent an enticing proposition for family groups on day visits and for those seeking overnight stays, be it for 1-night, 7-nights or more.

2.6.2 Overseas Groups

The Mourne Mountains, as an AONB, arguably has a much stronger resonance with overseas visitors than the South East Coast. Yet, as mentioned previously the towns have a strong role to play in supporting visitors to the Mourne, and as such this will include overseas visitors seeking to explore the mountains, particularly by foot and by bike.

Again, the Donard Gondola in Newcastle will have an important role as providing a premier tourist amenity, pulling overseas visitors into the area and supporting



their further exploration of the area - in a similar way to the Giant's Causeway Visitor Experience does for the Giant's Causeway. However, with the Mourne Mountains offering extensive walking and cycling opportunities, the emphasis here will be to ensure they stay for longer stays wherever possible. As a 'must do' attraction, it will also act as a signpost for further exploration of the Mournes and the South East Coast, either on this visit or a visit in the future.

Kilkeel, through its growing reputation for seafood cuisine of distinction, will resonate with gastronomic enthusiasts. In this respect, Kilkeel will follow in the footsteps of places such as Padstow in Cornwall, Bray in Berkshire, Emsworth in Hampshire, and Great Milton in Oxfordshire to name but a few, which have risen from relative tourism obscurity to attract significant volumes of visitors seeking high-end gastronomic experiences. For Kilkeel, this will include providing seafood cookery courses and sea fishing and fish market experiences, which can be easily packaged for overnight stays.

Warrenpoint will become renowned for watersports and adventure activities, both of which have a strong international appeal. Raising awareness of the availability of the activities will be essential within an increasingly competitive market, with festivals and events vital to this aim. Supporting sailing and cruisers travelling along the Irish and Northern Irish coastline will be an important role for Warrenpoint also.

2.6.3 Activity Interests

The Mournes area is the most significant outdoor activity hub in Northern Ireland and attracts visitors for this purpose all year round. The year round nature of this activity in the area is very important to the tourism economy and allows accommodation to retain levels of occupancy through the year based primarily on hill walking visits.

Newcastle has been a natural service point for many of these visits and is currently the focal point for activity centres and activity guides. However, each of the towns, along with smaller villages such as Rostrevor and Annalong, can support activity interests. In this respect, each town should seek to develop at least: guided walks and trails into the mountains, basic sea-kayaking and sailing sessions, boat trips, and beach activities, albeit those which are appropriate to their context.

As highlighted previously, Newcastle will present the primary gateway, with the Donard Gondola enabling visitors to access to trails deeper in to the Mournes more quickly than before.

There is also opportunity for Kilkeel and Warrenpoint to re-orientate themselves to provide a base and service for activity enthusiasts. Again, continuing with the theme highlighted above, Kilkeel will be able to utilise its proximity to the Silent Valley to offer serious hillwalkers the opportunity to escape from the crowds of elsewhere, which is likely to be an important differentiator. Similarly, Warrenpoint will have greater orientation toward adventure and watersports activities. As a result, each town will develop as an activity hub but within a coordinated approach to this in terms of provision and marketing.

2.6.4 Nature and Wildlife Tourism

The nature tourism market is underdeveloped in Northern Ireland overall. One area that certainly has potential to grow this market, however, is the South East Coast. Here, visitors can already discover seal colonies and there is considerable winter bird interest close to all of the towns. There have also been marine mammal sightings on occasion.

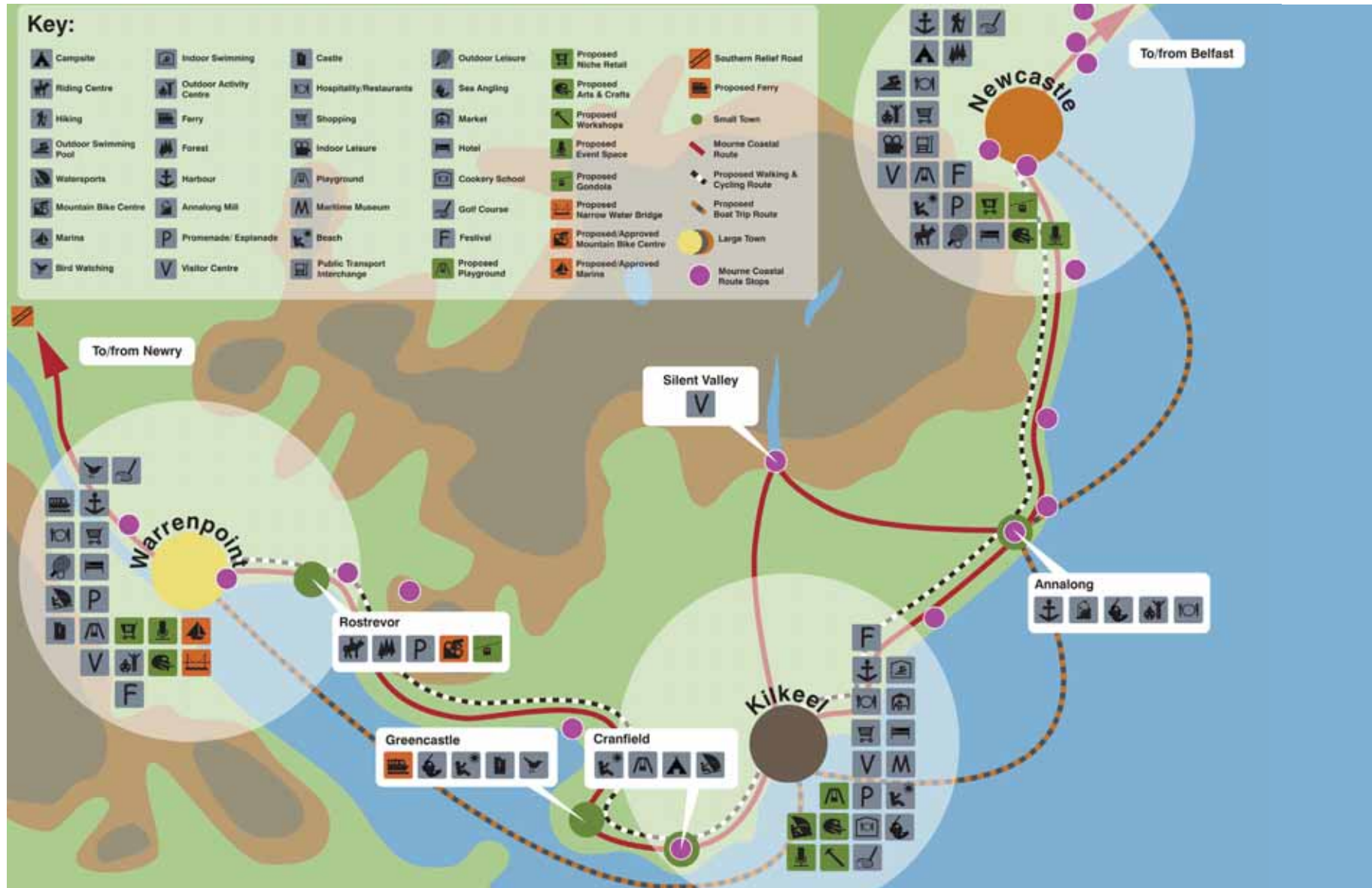
Wildlife watching has the advantage of being a year-round interest, and one that is most popular during

spring and autumn, particularly for wintering birds. Both nationally and internationally, wildlife watching is most successful where there are good prospects of sighting rare, endangered or iconic species. For the South East Coast, this would extend to the species highlighted above.

It is also an advantage if the visitor viewing is confined within a reserve environment that is also supported by ancillary services such as an interpretation/learning facility, café and retail facility. This is not currently available, however the character of the South East Coast would suggest that, should a suitable location be found, this would certainly assist in developing this market.

2.6.5 The Full Offering

The illustration highlights the existing offering within each town; the proposals identified within the Masterplan and also projects which are already in the pipeline but which the Masterplan endorses and promotes.



The Three Centres Are Distinct Yet Together Provide The Full Tourism Offering Together



3 Responding to Context – Masterplan Aims and Objectives

The South East Coast Masterplan seeks to maximise the opportunities provided by the Mourne Mountains AONB, Coastal zone and the assets within the Town centres.

The plan identifies the assets of the towns and seeks to develop them from a tourism perspective through development and regeneration and through improved marketing and promotion.

The key aims and objectives of the masterplan are set out below. These objectives inform each of the proposals within the masterplan.

- Promote and strengthen each of the town centres as a destination on the Coastal trail.
- Maximise the tourism potential of the South East Coast, making the most of its significant assets and promoting it in a holistic and joined up manner.
- Develop the leisure and cultural offering within each of the three town centres.
- Increase the number of domestic and international tourists visiting the Town Centres and SE Coast area.
- Improve connections between the centres by road, sea and pathway.
- Increase the tourist season, ensuring activities and events are on offer all year round.
- Ensure the Town centres are family friendly and pedestrian friendly places with high quality public spaces where people want to spend time.



4 Newcastle - The Masterplan

The Masterplan proposals for Newcastle are intended to build on its strengths as a tourist destination. The plan seeks to further the town's reputation as a high quality 21st century seaside resort which acts as the gateway to the Mourne and is known for the range of activities it has to offer. The plan also seeks to develop Newcastle's tourism potential with a view of complimenting the towns of Kilkeel and Warrenpoint.

A retail and commercial leisure capacity study and town centre health check were carried out as part of the Masterplanning exercise. The key findings from the reports feeds directly into the Masterplan proposal, ensuring the plan is realistic and deliverable within the twenty year timeframe.

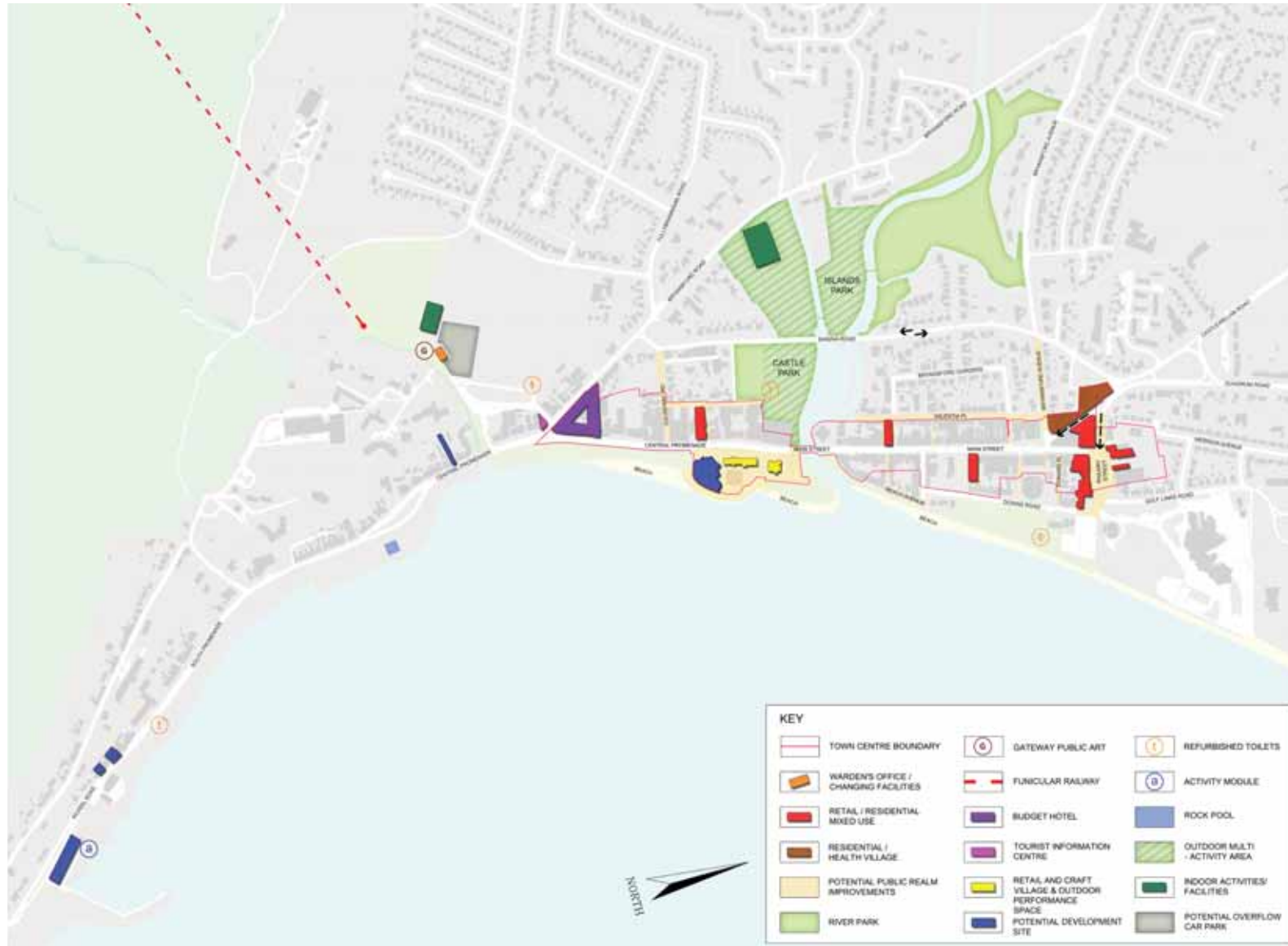
4.1 Masterplan Concept

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21st Century Seaside Resort... Gateway to the Mourne... Activities... Arts & Crafts



4.1.1 Newcastle Centre/ Tropicana

The Newcastle Centre and Tropicana provide an opportunity for a significant development within the town centre. Proposed is a high quality retail and craft village and new hotel based in the listed Annesley building surrounding land. This would showcase the best local crafts and produce aimed at the tourist market. The site is the ideal location for a new hotel in the heart of Newcastle. The proposals identified for Newcastle within this masterplan are designed to increase visitor increased bed space within the town will be necessary.

The rear of the development provides an opportunity for an outdoor performance space overlooking the sea.



Existing view of the Tropicana and Annesley Building



Artist Impression of a new contemporary hotel development on the Tropicana site. This would be complementary to the redevelopment of the Annesley Building.

4.1.2 Islands Park

The Pitch and Putt within Island's Park could be redeveloped into a new outdoor leisure development with the potential to attract more families and tourists into the heart of the town. There may also be potential for indoor leisure space within the Park area which would help to increase visitor numbers in the winter months or during poor weather. The proposals for the park include a number of different zones, catering for different age groups and interests. A Family Zone,



Potential activities within each Zone

Adventure Zone



Eco Zone



Family Zone



Adventure Zone, and an Eco Zone are possible ideas. An Adventure Play Dome could act as the centre piece of the new park situated in the heart of the town centre. A redeveloped Castle Islands Park coupled with the redevelopment of the Annesley building would transform this area of Newcastle attracting large numbers into the centre of the town.

4.1.3 Gondola

Running from Donard Park to Drinnahilly, Millstone Quarry or Thomas Mountain Quarry, this new attraction would be capable of bringing more tourists to the area. This would build on Newcastle's status as 'The Gateway to the Mournes' and create an attraction unique in Northern Ireland.



The proposed Gondola will provide an excellent attraction which would cement Newcastle's position as the 'Gateway to the Mournes'. Newcastle's setting at the foot of Slieve Donard is an exceptional asset which attracts thousands of outdoors enthusiasts each year. To fully enjoy the Mournes the visitor must be reasonably fit, be prepared and have sufficient time to complete a trek. The Gondola would provide a facility which would enable everyone, including families with young children and disabled users to access the Mourne Mountains and experience the views of

Newcastle and beyond towards Belfast.

At the destination point the visitor will be able to enjoy lunch or coffee at a mountain side café, and enjoy the views. Other activities will also be considered to enhance the experience. At the top, the visitor will have the choice of taking the scenic walk back through Donard Wood or return via the Gondola.



5 Kilkeel

The masterplan proposals for Kilkeel are intended to build on the town's assets of the Harbour and beach.

5.1 Masterplan Concept

Both the Harbour and beach are currently underused assets from a tourism perspective. The plan proposes to promote the working harbour as an attraction for tourists to visit and experience the fish market for themselves. The beach also has further potential which could be realised with a new improved access point as well as an improved cleaning and management programme which could lead to a Seaside Award. Kilkeel should seek to promote and develop its reputation for seafood and gain a reputation as a town where people can come, to both learn how to cook and experience fine seafood for themselves. Some of the proposals may have the potential to happen in the short term whereas others are likely to be long term aspirations. When considering the masterplan proposals it may be helpful to imagine the town in 20 years and decide if the proposals are in line with what you would like to see.

A retail and commercial leisure capacity study and town centre health check were carried out as part of the Masterplanning exercise. The key findings from the reports feeds directly into the Masterplan proposal, ensuring the plan is realistic and deliverable within the twenty year timeframe.



Fishing Harbour Town... Seafood Experience... Industry... Beaches....

5.1.1 Sustainable Kilkeel 2020

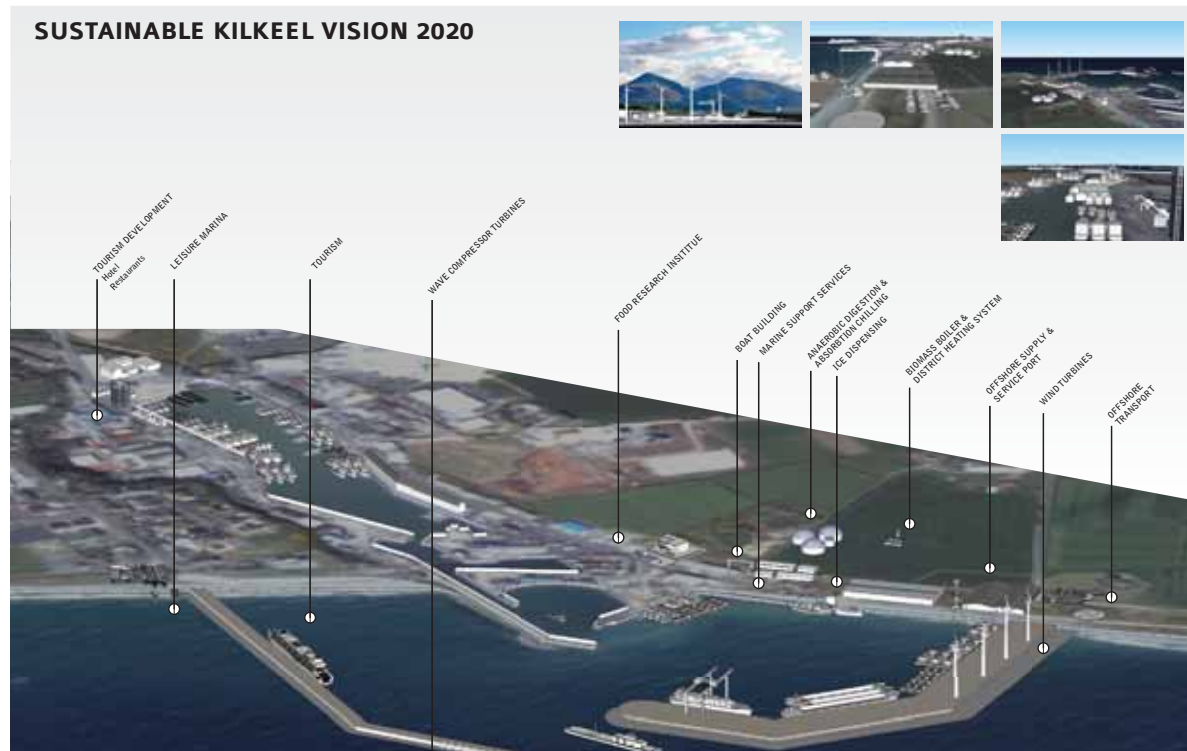
The kilkeel Sustainable 2020 plan looks at various development options around the harbour area. It has identified new opportunities for the fishing and engineering sectors in terms of transferring and developing skills for the newly emerging off-shore energy sector; potential new marketing opportunities for the fish processing sector; various renewable energy opportunities associated with fish and other organic waste streams; potential opportunities in the aquaculture and seaweed and opportunities for increasing tourism.

This development will need to consider not only the functional requirements of the harbour but also its impact on tourism and the environment. Developments in the fishing, renewable energy and aquaculture sectors should also take account of Kilkeel as a centre for tourism and help to develop the region as a centre for eco-tourism.

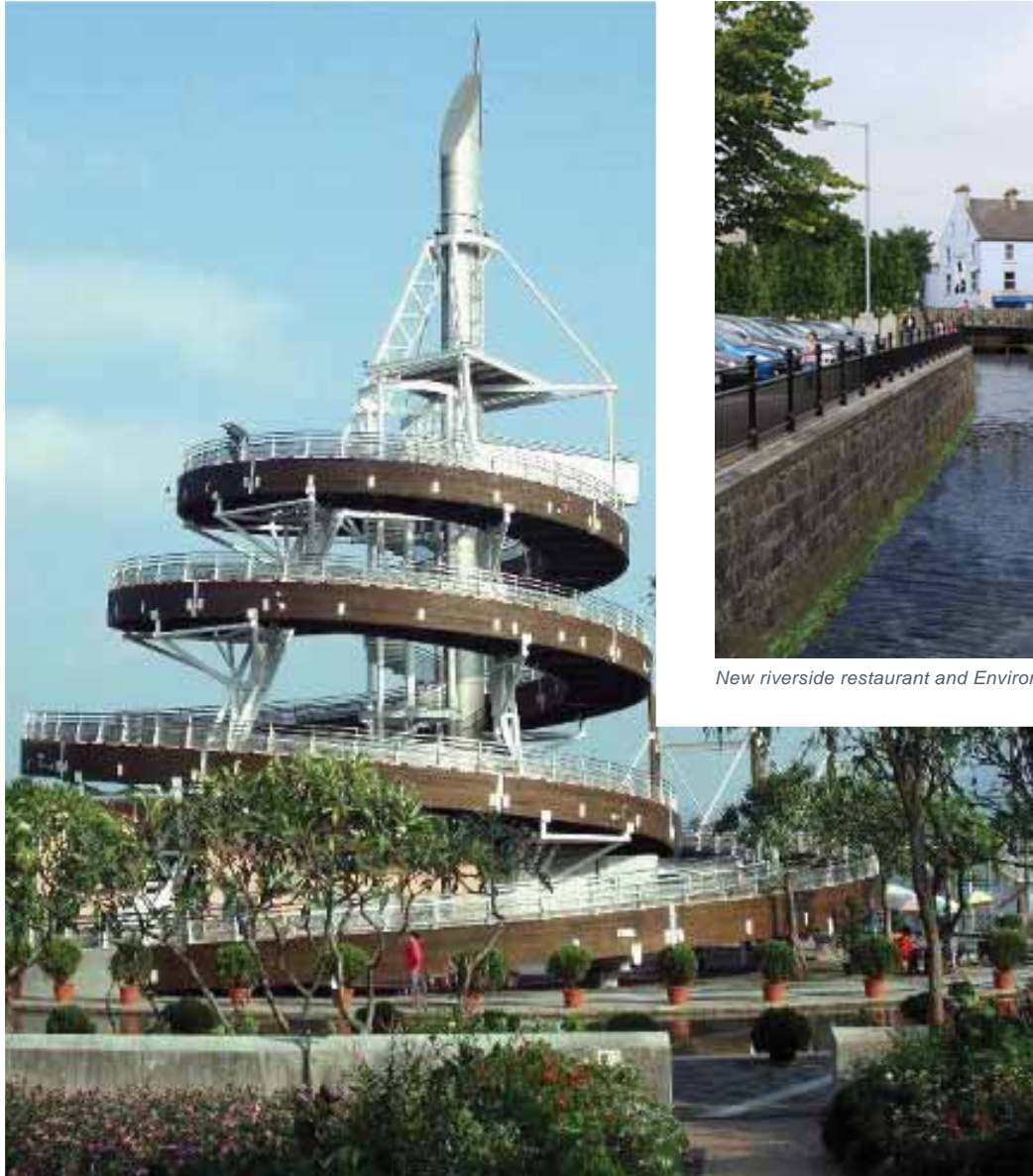
The Sustainable 2020 plan compliments the aspirations of the South East masterplan with regards to the importance of the harbour and tourism in the future. A key outcome of the scoping study is the recognition that Kilkeel's opportunities for economic development

would receive a major boost by improving the harbour infrastructure and capacity to accommodate larger fishing vessels, and vessels used from servicing the off-shore energy sector.

The proposed development of Kilkeel harbour will contribute to a significant increase in job opportunities in the coming years, resulting in a higher demand for qualified labour and will make Kilkeel more sustainable in terms of future energy needs and consumption by focusing on opportunities from the new renewable technologies as well. This has an indirect impact on the respective hinterlands of the coastal areas in and around Kilkeel.



Sustainable Kilkeel Vision 2020



Proposed South East Coast viewing platform and access to Kilkeel Beach



New riverside restaurant and Environmental Improvement scheme.



Current view of the River and vacant building

5.2 Major Development Sites

5.2.1 Riverside Development Site

The vacant unit on Bridge Street which abuts the river provides an opportunity for a new building with frontage onto the river and square. The current owner of the site has achieved planning approval for a mixed use scheme. This is a good opportunity to attract a new restaurant or café into the centre of town. A clean up of the river and relocation of the public toilets as part of an Environmental Improvement scheme would create a very attractive area for a café or restaurant to locate and where people would be happy to sit and spend time within the town.

5.2.2 Knockchree Avenue public art

Public realm improvements are proposed for Knockchree Avenue to create an attractive street which draws people from the Town centre down to the Esplanade. A new piece of interactive public art is proposed at the Esplanade end of the Avenue to act as a visual draw down to this newly developed leisure space. Play facilities and picnic seating areas would be located around the proposed platform, creating activity and life into the Esplanade area which currently offers little for tourists or families.

5.2.3 Mourne Esplanade, Beach & Riverside Park





5.2.4 Riverside Park

A Riverside Park and walkway stretching from the Town Square to the Harbour would provide a high quality park and pedestrian link from the Town centre to the Harbour.

This large area of green space presents an opportunity to create a new iconic play area which will attract families and tourists to Kilkeel. Go Karting, a Train, A Splash Pad and high quality play area are all possible

activities which could be introduced. This area also has the potential to facilitate a new indoor leisure development which would again act as a major draw to Kilkeel and are vital to increase the tourist season, offering activities during poor weather.

5.2.5 Esplanade

The Esplanade area is currently a significantly underutilised space. A new well lit coastal walkway is proposed which would make a significant visual

improvement to the area.

The Esplanade could be developed for both indoor and outdoor activities in conjunction with the existing indoor pool being developed with water based activities such as flumes. A new piece of interactive public art alongside seating areas and activities such as a granite themed Crazy Golf would transform this area into a hub of activity and a destination for families and day trippers.



Proposed Riverside Park



Proposed improvements to coastal path



6 Warrenpoint

The masterplan proposals for Warrenpoint are focussed on promoting this traditional town centre which has retained much of its Victorian character and strong independent retail offer. The plan also seeks to promote and develop the town's reputation as a hub for watersports and activities, utilising its location on Carlingford Lough. The plan also seeks to revitalise the public spaces within the town centre, creating event space and making it more attractive, people friendly and less car dominated.

6.1 Masterplan Concept

The proposals focus on the Town Square, Havelock Place and the Promenade as the key areas within the town where development and public realm improvements can take place which would have a positive impact on the town as a whole. The plan also proposes that the viability of a one way system in the town could be investigated. This may have positive impacts in reducing congestion around the Square area.

Some of the proposals may have the potential to happen in the short term whereas others are likely to be long term aspirations. When considering the masterplan

proposals it may be helpful to imagine the town in 20 years and decide if the proposals are in line with what you would like to see. A retail and commercial leisure capacity study and town centre health check were carried out as part of the Masterplanning exercise. The key findings from the reports feeds directly into the Masterplan proposal, ensuring the plan is realistic and deliverable within the twenty year timeframe.

Traditional Town Centre.... Water sports... Niche Retailing.... Heritage & Open Space



6.2 Town Square Improvements

The masterplan proposes to redesign the Town Square. A public realm scheme could take place with a view to creating a shared space. The space could still be used for car parking but could then be closed for events and a weekly market. A dual purpose Square would be the end goal.

The Square has the potential to be a high quality, pedestrian friendly space, acting as a hub of activity in the town. Pubs and Restaurants located in the Square could use the space for outdoor dining space, creating a space which would be a hive of activity at weekends and in the evening time. The Square is currently dominated by the car and what should be a stunning and vibrant space is currently a large car park. The improved use and design of this space could have a major impact on Warrenpoint, becoming space where people gather, encouraging more restaurants and cafes to open. Properly designed, this space could have major economic benefits to the town. Its location beside the main shopping street and harbour also make it an ideal location for a pedestrian friendly square which draws people in who are happy to spend time there.

The illustration shows how the square could look, however any changes to The Square are dependant on altering the traffic flow around it. The proposal for a one way system has the potential to reduce traffic around the Square, allowing a redesign of the space to the benefit of the pedestrian.



Proposed redesign of Warrenpoint Square

6.2.1 Osborne Hotel

The new Marina planned for Warrenpoint will revitalise this area of the town. The former hotel site is an obvious opportunity site and a current blight on

Warrenpoint's character. The increased activity and investment which will come from the Marina should ensure the site becomes an attractive proposition for developers. A new hotel or apartment development in this location would be a welcome addition to the

town, not only removing blight but also creating more life and vibrancy in Warrenpoint. The development of this site should follow on relatively quickly from the development of the new Marina.



Osborne Hotel

6.2.2 Exploiting the benefits of the Marina

Warrenpoint Marina was granted planning permission in September 2012. This is a key step in developing this exciting new development for Warrenpoint. Once developed this will be a major attractor to the town and indeed the South East Coast. The aim now is to fully consider the benefits it will bring and ensure that the ancillary services and facilities are progressed.

First Impressions: Havelock Place and Osborne Promenade will form the first impression for visitors arriving by boat. This area has huge potential now that the Marina has been granted and investor

confidence is high. There are several key buildings including the Osborne Hotel which have the potential to be redeveloped and brought back to their former glory. The Promenade area should become a mixed use hub where people live, visit and enjoy the local entertainment.

Services and Facilities: A hub for top class food and entertainment, exploiting local produce, talent and the tradition of the Mournes.

6.2.3 Outdoor Pool development site

Newry and Mourne District Council has attempted

to bring in investment from the private sector in the recent past. Unfortunately these attempts have been unsuccessful due to the constraints of the site and economic conditions. These efforts will continue.

Outdoor activities are currently run from the pool and the masterplan advocates the future promotion of this use for the site. The listed structure at the entrance to the pool is also important as it forms part of the charm and history of Warrenpoint. The site should continue to be promoted as a leisure destination. Some relaxation of conservation policies may be necessary in the future to ensure this structure is not lost altogether.



Existing outdoor pool



Proposed Marina, Warrenpoint



7 Action Plan and Implementation

7.1 Delivering the Masterplan

Given the many public sector powers and resources that lie outside the control of Council (even after RPA), the creation of a new regeneration body is recommended. A public partnership structure is likely to be the most effective way to achieve a collaborative, co-ordinated and strategic approach to achieving the regeneration objectives within the masterplan. The two councils coming together, alongside public sector agencies working together will be vital to delivering projects within the three town centres and the South East Coast as a whole.

As well as bringing the two councils closer together, with the continued regeneration remit of DSD, there will be an important role for other public sector agencies such as Roads Service, Planning service and Translink. Without the full buy in support of all the agencies, the partnership will be much less effective in achieving regeneration. Each agency must sign up to the aims of the masterplan and work together to see it delivered.

It is key that the partnership includes high level representation from each of the agencies who have the ability and remit to make robust decisions. It is also vital that both councils are structured internally to benefit and advise the partnership of any council led investment project which will benefit or impact on the South East Coast.

7.2 Marketing and Promotion

Through the masterplan, coupled with initiatives such as the Mourne Coastal Trail, the South East Coast will

be developed as a tourist destination in its own right within the context of and complementary to existing brands and initiatives such as the Mournes Signature Project and Mournes cooley Gullion Geotourism. In order to attract these visitors, marketing must be used to engage, inform and excite. A key issue for the coastal zone, and indeed the individual settlements, is how best to undertake a marketing campaign that will resonate with visitors, particularly national and international tourists in order to encourage them to visit and ideally spend a series of nights in local accommodation and spend money on local services and goods.

Developing the South East Coast Brand

The first step in the process of developing greater awareness is to establish destination brand to which visitors can readily identify as being representative of the area. Destination branding is a process used to establish greater cognisance of the destination through identity, image, positioning, and differentiation techniques. Ultimately, the purpose of destination branding is to establish a positive image that, through consistent use and supported by positive visitor experiences, will ultimately come to symbolise the destination as a place and promote future visits. A successful, consistent approach across the identified area will require better communication and closer working between Down District Council, Newry and Mourne District Council and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. Both councils in particular must sign up to the use of consistent marketing and promotional material.

A key challenge for the branding of tourism

destinations is one of overcoming spatial and geographical distinctions and/or synergies. Destination boundaries, particularly those within a rural and/or coastal setting, are often relatively fluid and loose from a visitor's perspective. However, these destinations often cross political and administrative boundaries that, if used in promotional material, would have little resonance with visitors. The key challenge here is always how to define the geographical extent of the destination and whether there is a need to go beyond official boundaries in order to present a destination that has greater meaning and resonance from a visitor perspective.

Although it is beyond the scope of this report to provide a detailed branding strategy, we recommend that the South East Coast take a similar approach to the Lake District and the Peak District whereby the designated boundary of an existing and known destination, in this respect the Mourne Mountains AONB, is expanded to cover the coastal zone also. In other words, the destination branding would become something akin to 'Mourne Mountains and Coast'.

This type of branding strategy would benefit both landscape areas by reflecting the fact that the visitor can benefit from two distinctive environments within close proximity, and they would be able to utilise the resources equally in order to maximise their stay – for example, play in mountains on one day and play along the coast another. This will help in terms of packaging and promoting overnight stays in particular.

Moreover, there is a high level of cross-over between the types of activity that can be undertaken – coastal walks, mountain walks; coastal cycling, mountain



biking; lake/reservoir watersports, sea-based watersports; and so on. The predominant imagery also combines the two landscapes, with one of the benefits of hiking up the Mourne Mountains likely to be the stunning and extensive vistas of the coast below; whilst conversely part of the enjoyment of bathing and watersports along the coastal zone is the stunning backdrop of the Mourne Mountains beyond.

By no means least, this branding would also reflect the position of the principal towns of the South East Coast, especially Newcastle and Warrenpoint, which currently contain the vast majority of the facilities and amenities that any visitor to the Mourne Mountains would seek. As a result, these settlements already represent important gateways to the Mountains, a position that the masterplan is seeking to enhance further through initiatives as The Gondola, and the Warrenpoint Marina. Likewise, with Kilkeel to be positioned as a place of exceptional seafood cuisine, the ability to reward ones-self after a day of coastal or mountain-based activity could be a significant motivator behind this type of culinary indulgence experience that would attract, almost by necessity, overnight visits. Annalong, Rostrevor and Cranfield also have important roles to play with the assets and attractions they possess which are also capable of attracting tourists to the South East Coast area.

It should be noted that this overall branding strategy for the 'destination' would not preclude the individual towns and village themselves in devising their own sub-brands to reflect their individual character. Indeed, each settlement, especially the towns, will need their own sub-brand to help differentiate between their attractions, their interests and their supporting amenities. However, this should ideally be co-ordinated through the Mourne Mountains and Coast branding to ensure that they are complementary, co-ordinated and share key headline messages.

