



# A MASTERPLAN AND DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR FORT WILLIAM TOWN CENTRE

INITIAL PRESENTATION  
AUGUST 2023

# CONFIDENTIAL

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## OUR EXPERIENCE: PAISLEY TOWN CENTRE VISION

### The Challenge

This is a Scottish Government pilot project commissioned to demonstrate the potential for a traditional town centre of scale to be repurposed and reconfigured over the next decade or so. This has involved extensive community and stakeholder engagement.

### Our Response

Our Vision illustrates physical and spatial change to achieve regeneration through rebalancing away from retail dominance. The level of detail throughout breathes life into an inspiring vision of the future and sets a bar for the town's ambition that aligns the community and attracts investment (or government funding).

New uses (including cinema, food hall and workplace) have been strategically positioned and work together to achieve the critical mass to revitalise the High Street, reconnecting the wider community to their town centre.

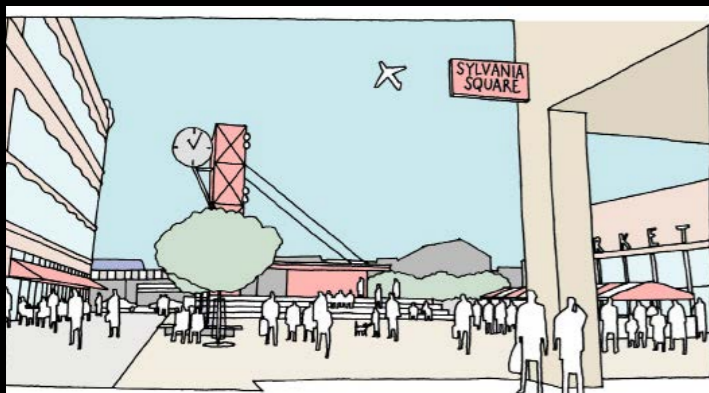
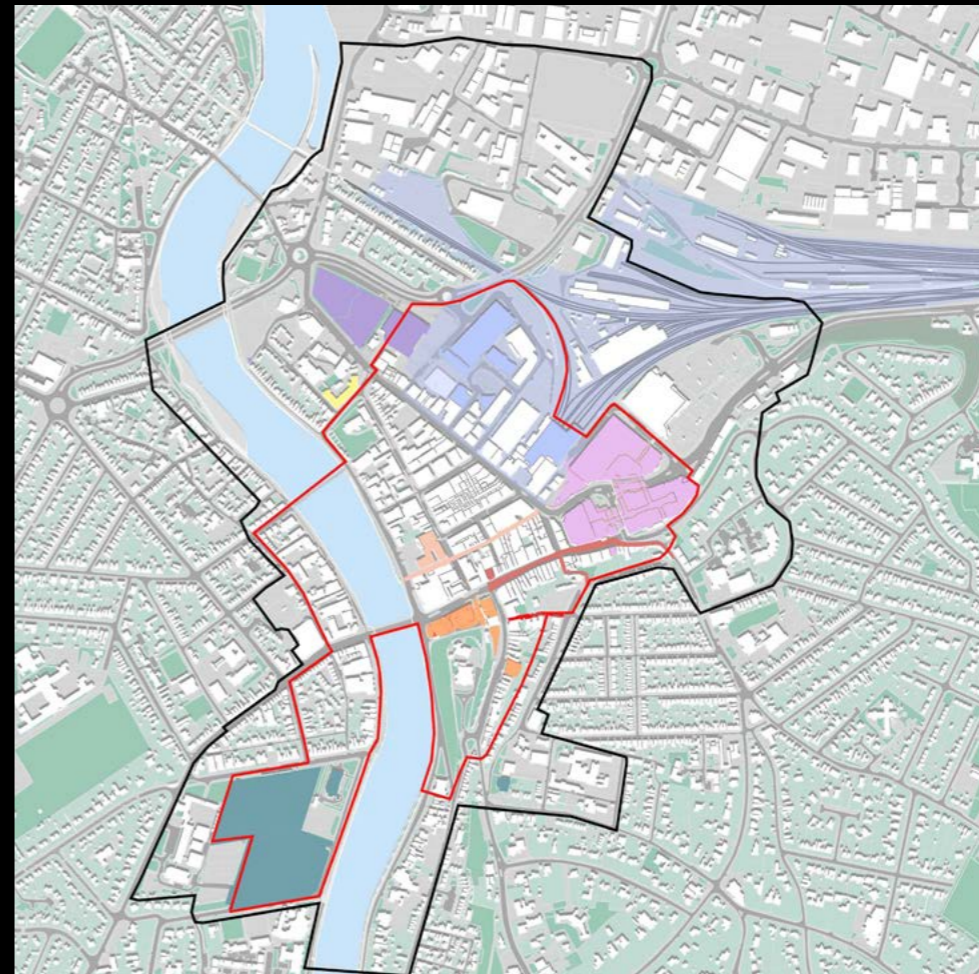
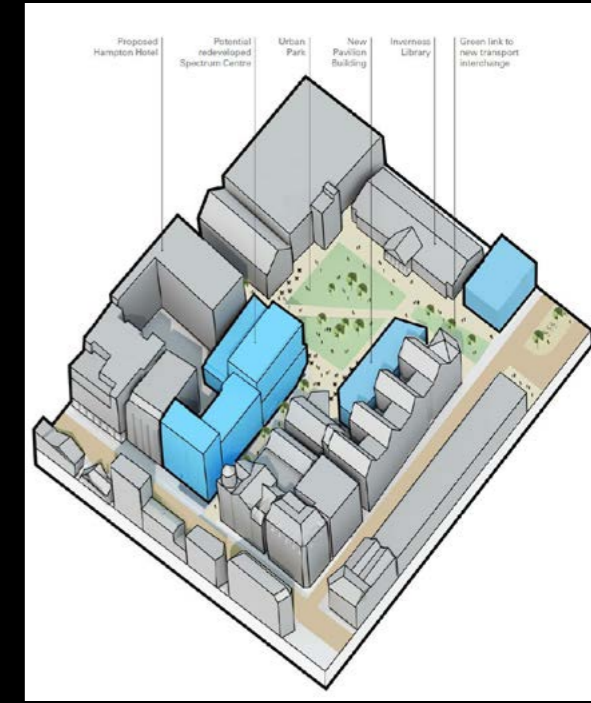
### Results

The study has already had positive impact with the sale of The Paisley Centre to deliver major redevelopment along the lines of the Vision. In addition to this, the Community Trust's proposals for a digital skills academy and multi-screen cinema in the heart of the town are now in receipt of preliminary funding. Elsewhere, the council are in advanced negotiations with the NHS to ensure that a major Health Hub is located in line with the principles of the Vision – accessible, visible and energising the town centre.





# OUR EXPERIENCE: CLYDEBANK TOWN CENTRE VISION



# OUR EXPERIENCE: INVERNESS CITY CENTRE VISION





**1.0**  
**BRIEF, CONTEXT & METHODOLOGY**



# CONTEXT: FW 2040 VISION



From the initial brief, we understand that the Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and the Lochaber Chamber of Commerce (LCC) are at a critical stage in the development and implementation of the Fort William 2040 (FW2040) Vision.

A number of key projects are either complete or nearing completion and there is now a need to position Fort William town centre at the core of the FW2040 Programme.

This Masterplan and Delivery Framework is absolutely critical as it will form a key component of the FW2040 programme moving forward.

The key themes of the FW2040 vision are as follows:

## A Great Place to Live:

with a unique landscape and distinctive local communities. Sufficient and affordable housing is a key issue for the area, as well as facilities and accommodation for visitors, with a need to attract and retain a diverse range of residents, visitors, and enterprises.

## A Connected Place:

highlights the need to maximise opportunities for a diverse range of transport and other connecting networks including new technologies.

## A Place Facing Water:

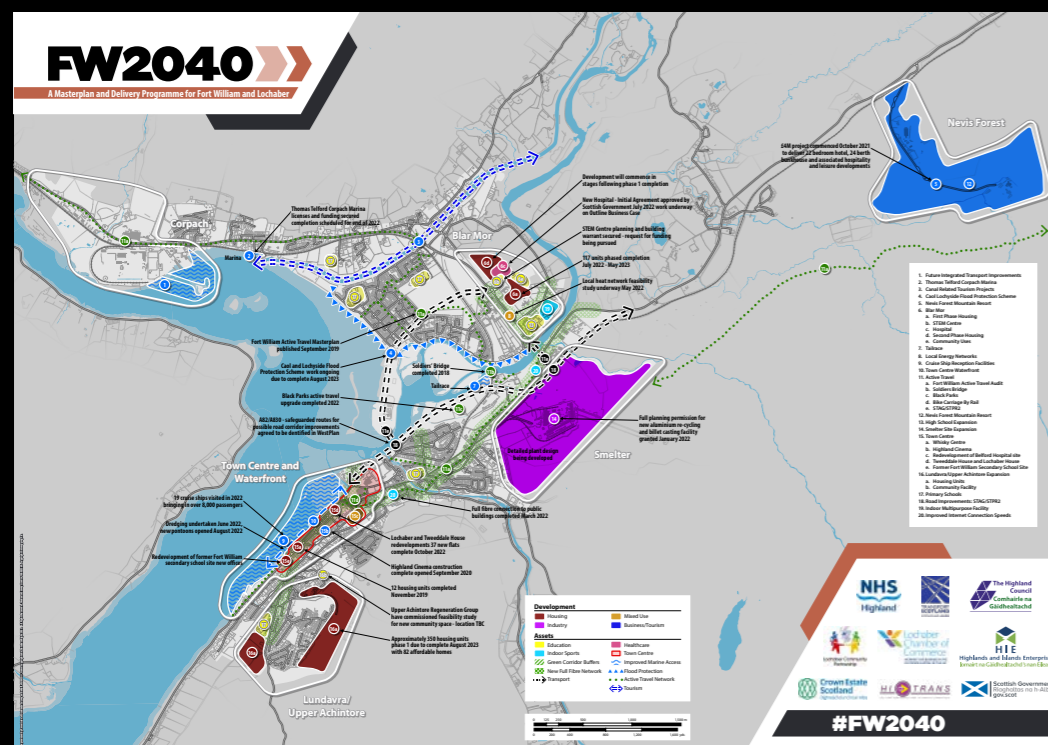
this theme focuses on the importance of water and the need to take full advantage of existing water assets to support industry, tourism, and communities.

## A Place with Collective Vision:

This underpins all work on FW2040 and is about new ways of working based on strong partnerships and good communication.

## Addressing the Climate Change and Ecological Emergency:

project delivery partners should work towards Fort William becoming a net-zero town. All of the larger FW2040 projects will be subject to further environmental assessment as they progress. All projects regardless of scale, will be encouraged to consider ways in which they can contribute to the net-zero target.





## CONTEXT: NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4 (NPF 4)

On the 23rd February 2023 the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) was adopted by Scottish Ministers. Consequently there is now an even greater need to take a fresh look at Fort William town centre.

### Key Considerations for Town Centres

Residential uses at ground floor in our centres should demonstrate they will create attractive frontages, would not affect the vitality and viability of a shopping area, and not result in an undesirable concentration of uses or dead frontages.

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Development proposals for non-mainstream retail uses will not be supported if the provision would undermine the character of the area or the health and wellbeing of communities.

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Given the need to conserve embodied carbon, NPF4 places a greater emphasis on the reuse of brownfield, vacant and derelict land and empty buildings.

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Proposals for the reuse of existing buildings, including listed buildings and other historic assets, will be supported- taking into account their suitability for conversion to other uses.

**NPF4 recognises the value of regeneration to transform our urban places, and improve wellbeing.**



The masterplan will be developed taking cognisance of the overarching spatial principles of NPF4:

### Just Transition:

Empower people to shape their places and ensure the transition to net zero is fair and inclusive.

### Conserving and Recycling Assets:

Making productive use of existing buildings, places, infrastructure and services, locking in carbon and minimising waste.

### Local Living:

Supporting local living, through the creation of a place that is well-connected and includes a mix of uses (including housing and associated green space/ play provision) where people can meet the majority of their daily needs within a reasonable distance of their home, preferably by walking, wheeling or cycling or using sustainable transport options.

### Compact Urban Growth:

Optimise the use of land through the re-use and/or redevelopment of buildings and/or brownfield sites to support services and resources within the town centre.

### Rebalanced Development:

Target development to create opportunities for communities and investment in areas of past decline.

### Rural Revitalisation:

Encourage sustainable development in rural areas, recognising the need to grow and support urban and rural communities. Fort William serves an important function to those living a distance from the settlement, therefore it is important that this is also recognised.



# CONTEXT: FURTHER POLICY & STRATEGY DOCUMENTS

Fort William Locality Plan

FW 2040 Consultation Event Feedback (2022)

Fort William Town Centre Action Plan (2015)

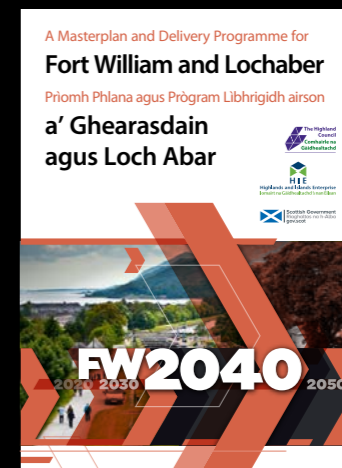
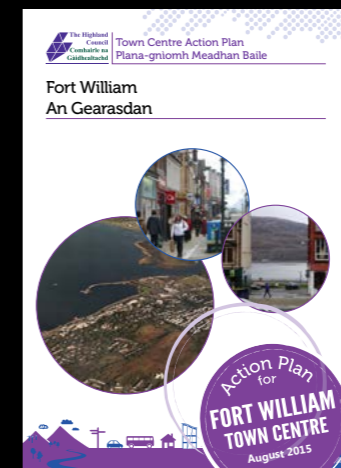
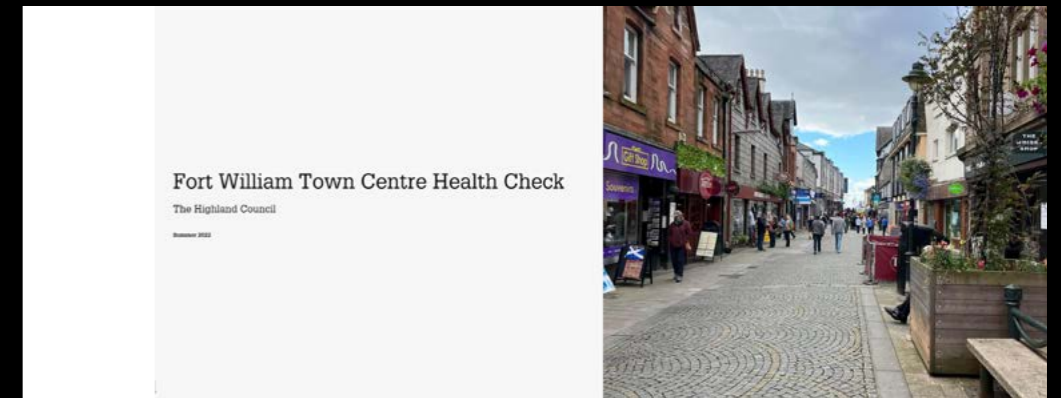
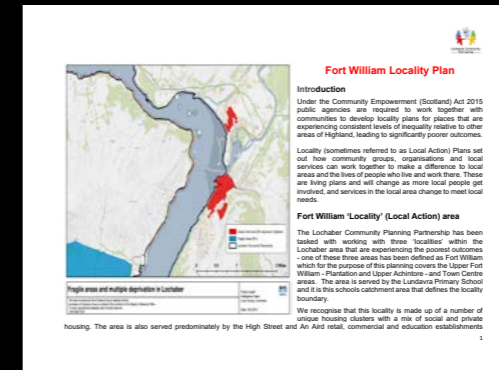
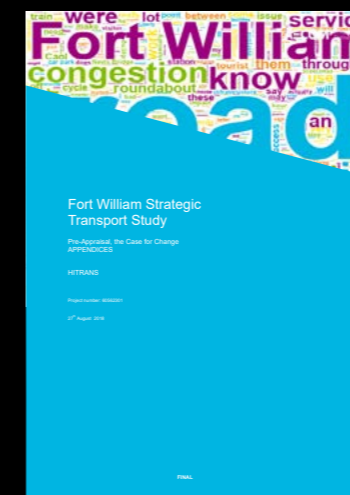
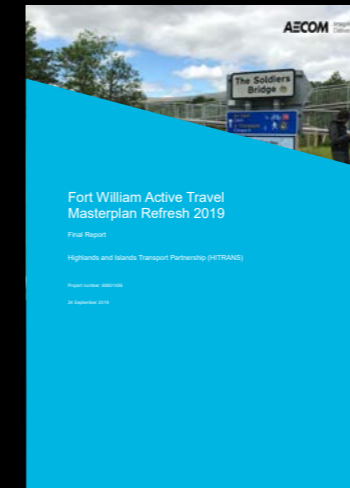
Fort William Town Centre Health Check (2022)

Tweeddale & Lochaber House Housing

Fort William Strategic Transport Study

Fort William Active travel Masterplan (2019)

Fort William Wayfinding Strategy



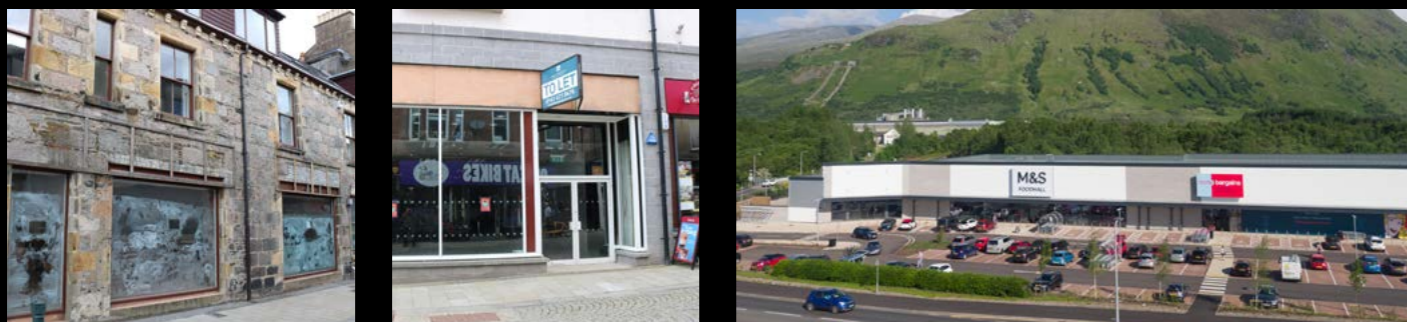


## CONTEXT: CHALLENGES & DRIVERS FOR CHANGE

### Changing Retail Habits

Marked decline in national retailers over the past decade (most recently evidenced in the closure of the large M&Co store) creating higher vacancy rates: the Town Centre Health Check notes that the vacancy rate has increased from 8.5% in 2018 to 12.3% in 2022.

- Proximity to the edge of town retail parks (Fort William and North Road) that contain among others M&S and Aldi which, by offering free surface parking, have led to a certain amount of diverted trade to the detriment of the established town centre.



At the FW2040 public consultation event of November 2022, in response to the question **how often and for what purpose do you visit the town centre?** a number of respondents stated that they either **only visit the town centre to eat out** or that **they seldom visit at all as their shopping needs were met by the retail parks**



### Lack of connection to Loch Linnhe and the Old Fort

The town centre feels disconnected from Loch Linnhe. It has traditionally turned its back on the loch with limited points of visibility and physical connection to the High Street.

The A82, combined with the Supermarket Car Park make it difficult to visit the Old Fort , a real missed opportunity.



### Poor Arrival Experience

The first impression any visitor arriving by public transport (train or bus) gets of Fort William town centre currently is a supermarket car park. The High Street is not visible and can realistically only be reached via a dark pedestrian underpass in a poor state of repair. This is due to the presence of the A82 trunk road that cuts this arrival point off from the town centre.



# CONTEXT: POSITIVE MOVES

Highland Cinema

New Council / HIE Offices

Garrison Hotel

Whisky Centre Housing

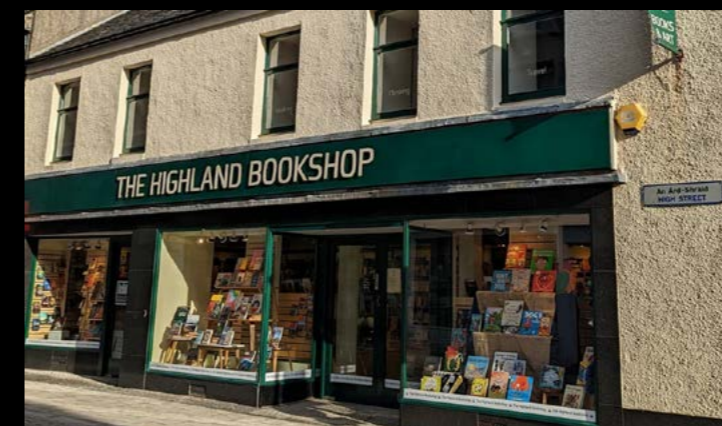
Tweeddale & Lochaber House Housing

E-Bike Scheme

Black Isle Bar

Diversification of the High Street

- Highland Soap Company
- Highland Bookshop
- Highland Liquor Co.
- The Wildcat
- Rain





## STRATEGIC AIMS

A place making framework for **physical and spatial change**

Be the “glue” that ties the complexities of all the current and emerging published policy and strategy and reflect an alignment of intent across all major stakeholders, governmental departments and politicians.

The guideline to assess and nurture future development, attract investment and ensure the town centre is the vibrant and attractive environment that the whole community needs.

The framework will be:

### **Regenerative**

A renewed regeneration direction for Fort William which builds on the Town Centre’s historic character and heritage to enhance its sense of place, legibility and liveability

### **Proactive**

Respond to current and future challenges

### **Responsible**

Support the Council’s net zero objectives through its approach to accessibility, and the use of resources and infrastructure

### **Collaborative**

Work with local stakeholders to reimagine the town centre and produce an ambitious and deliverable new masterplan & development framework to support its successful recovery, growth and evolution

### **Ambitious**

Provide an approach to regeneration opportunities which is both ambitious and deliverable

### **Considerate**

Consider changing retail and leisure trends, growing town centre living and repurposing of vacant sites

### **Encourage Investment**

Identify priorities for intervention and investment with focus on community wealth building

### **A Catalyst**

Encourage and accelerate mixed-use regeneration to reinstate and reinforce Fort William town centre as the vibrant commercial and community heart of the town

### **Influential**

Inform policy and design considerations and in relation to major planning applications which may come forward over the next 5-20 years

### **Contextual**

Develop a vision that considers how to best serve the wider Lochaber community and take cognisance of complementary projects contained within the FW2040 Vision



# PROJECT OBJECTIVES

## Desktop review of baseline information:

- FW 2040 Vision
- 2022 FW 2040 Public Consultation Report
- 2022 Town Centre Health Check
- Town Centre Action Plan
- Active travel Masterplan
- Locality Plan
- Nevis Centre Options Appraisal

## Appraisal of existing property / land uses and assessment of opportunities (highlighted on next slide)

## Creation of a Delivery Framework

- Prioritised list of potential developments
- Identified 'quick wins' for immediate delivery

## Identifcation of potential Public Realm infrastructure improvements

## Analysis of key Landscape and Built Heritage within the study area and how these can be safeguarded and enhanced

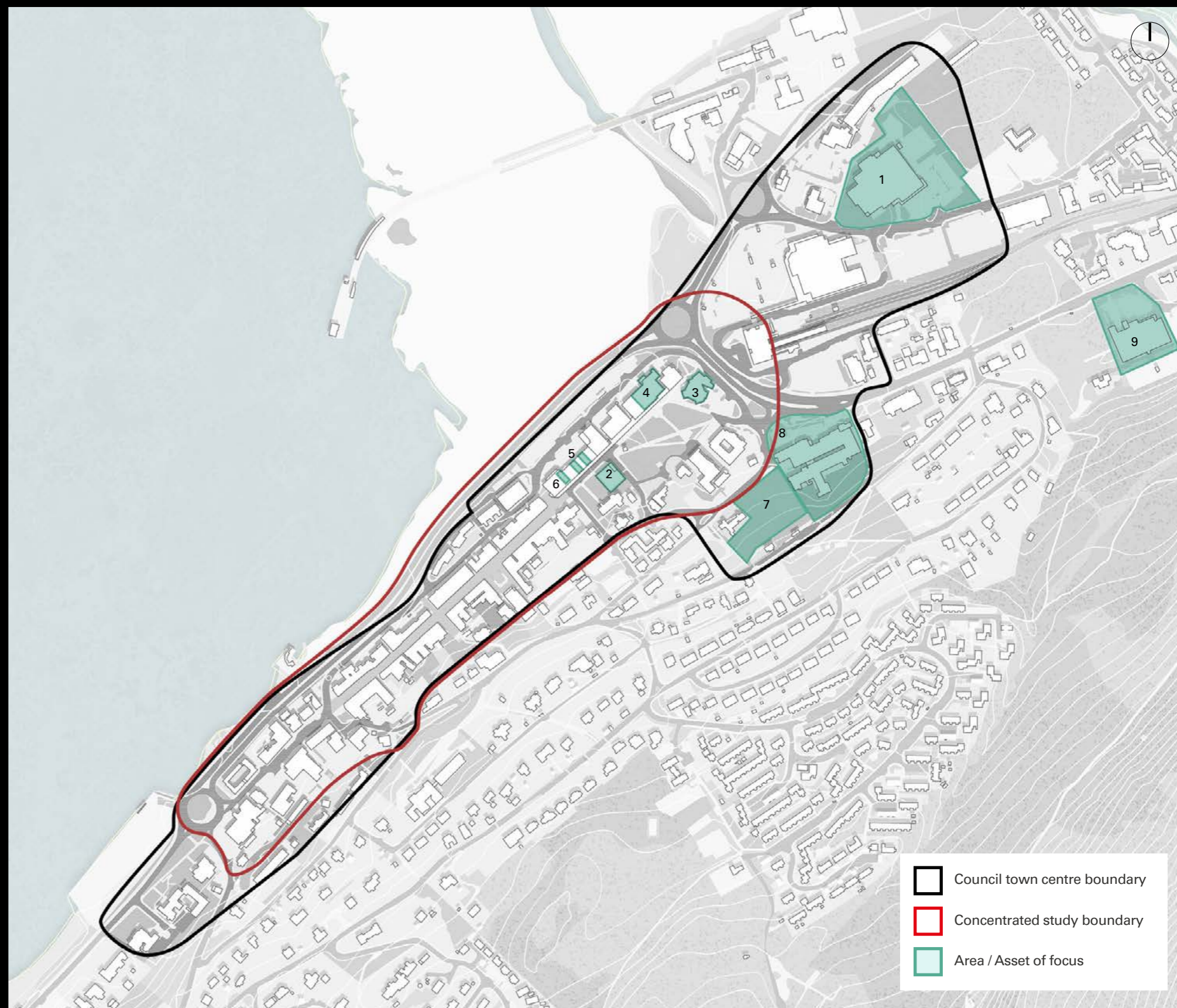




## STUDY AREA & OPPORTUNITIES

A number of key assets and sites of opportunity have been identified as part of the initial project scope:

1. The Nevis Centre
2. Former Tesco Store
3. Nevisport
4. Former M&Co store
5. Former TSB Branch
6. Former Council Service Point (Lochaber House)
7. Site of former Fort William RC Primary (St Mary's)
8. Current hospital site (subject to funding for new hospital being secured)
9. Current Lochaber Leisure Centre site



We will prepare finer grain design options for a number of these sites / assets and will also seek to identify further areas that require a similar focus within the agreed study area.





## METHODOLOGY: A VISION FOR HIGH STREET REGENERATION - SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE

Developed in partnership with Revo, the Scottish Government, Renfrewshire Council, and Scotland's Towns Partnership, we published this manifesto as part of our 'A Vision for High Street Regeneration' report – an agenda for a whole town centre vision to form national government guidance. Not all of it will relate to every project but it is a structured approach to a complex matter.

For any Vision to succeed and bring real transformative change, **it is imperative to establish and prioritise the key moves and core elements.**

'A Vision for High Street Regeneration' guidance document has been selected as a High Streets Task Force case study.





Our 18 point manifesto has been developed with the Scottish Government, Local Authorities, Revo and the private sector to deliver a strategic tried and tested approach to both whole urban centre solutions or the repurposing of specific significant assets (normally a struggling shopping centre) set in the context of the wider town centre vision.

## MANIFESTO FOR CHANGE 18 STEPS TO REBALANCE, REPOPULATE & REPOSITION THE TOWN CENTRE.

**To bring transformative change to your town centre, your vision needs to identify and meet the needs of the wider community while responding to the global climate emergency.**

From social cohesion and commercial regeneration to carbon reduction, energy conservation and flood resilience, our 18 point manifesto is a guide to creating sustainable urban centres. The manifesto highlights the right initiatives to regenerate the town centre, responding to the current and future needs and uses of the local and wider population.



### 1. CONCENTRATE

Take a deliberately focused approach centred around the High Street. This is the heart of the town, where we can repurpose and protect a valued legacy of buildings, support an improving local economy and create opportunity.



### 2. TELL YOUR STORY

Your town needs a clear, unique story and purpose that provide a clarion call and reason for your transformation. There are many parts to a town's story that can provide a basis for an authentic narrative. This is not about creating a simple strapline. One part of the story will not be enough. The richness of the narrative will come from the blend of a number of these strands, consisting of multiple messages and be chameleon-like, resonating differently with different groups.



### 3. GO BOLD

While the changing patterns of retail have created new challenges, this shift provides us with a once in a lifetime opportunity to rebalance our town centres. Repurposing a large single use asset such as a shopping centre can transform a High Street in one bold move, repopulating the heart of the town centre and increasing permeability by breaking down large blocks into new streets and lanes. Now is the time to reintroduce uses that serve the needs of our whole communities.



### 4. CONSOLIDATE

Reduce retail to the right level for a re-energised and diversified High Street with the right-sized (smaller) units supporting the increasing trend for independent, artisanal traders. Relocate retail to street edges and concentrate the offer; don't bury it deep in the urban block.



### 5. REPOPULATE

Introduce significant levels of urban living to the town centre. Create mixed-use blocks with a variety of tenures (private for sale, affordable, social housing, student, elderly / supported / sheltered). Bring life back to upper levels over retail space through residential conversion.



### 6. ATTRACT

Social and cultural attractors are a major catalyst for positive change and offer important opportunities to drive more visits into your town centre. From community and civic destinations, to cultural centres, cinemas and European-style food halls, these uses can bring new life to old, cherished buildings. Look to work with existing institutions and community groups to bring new galleries, museums and performance spaces to the heart of the High Street.

Positioning these attractors strategically and making them work together to energise key routes by stimulating footfall is critical. You probably only have one shot to get the location right. Visibility, radial influence and approach routes should determine their positioning, not just conveniently available sites.







## 7. CREATE WORKPLACE

Reintroducing residential on its own to town centres could lead to areas devoid of life and activity during working hours. The way we work is changing. Introduce workspaces that create vibrancy during the day while offering flexible working and healthy live / work balance. With a new imperative to work from home accelerated by Covid-19, there is a greater need for local shared workspace in well-connected towns to bridge between home and town centre.



## 8. SHIFT PERCEPTIONS

Open up lanes and views that dramatically change how people remember the town. This enriches the experience and how we emotionally connect to our environment by providing greater connectivity, permeability and new ways to navigate through our urban centres.



## 9. REPURPOSE & REPAIR

Take the opportunity provided by repurposing and rebalancing to upgrade or replace buildings that offer nothing to the urban environment. Many of our town centres benefit from a legacy of quality historic buildings and these new interventions should be of a contemporary architecture that matches them in quality and ambition.



## 10. REGENERATE

In response to the climate emergency, enshrine an ambition to achieve shared international goals within your Vision. This can be done by working towards a carbon zero objective and a more circular economy, generating localized renewable energy and recycling waste. Promote biodiversity and flood resilience in an inventive way that provides quality greened urban space for the community in the heart of our towns.



## 11. ILLUMINATE

Public art and dynamic lighting can transform the existing environment for a relatively small outlay. Lighting, in particular, can create a variety of effects to suit the season or event, celebrate rich historic facades and elevate the everyday.



## 12. GATHER

Re-energise the centre by providing urban places that enrich day-to-day life and accommodate events that will attract local residents and visitors from outside the town. These external 'rooms' should encourage vibrant, year-round use.

Provide 'place not just space' with active edges, human-scaled enclosure, and greening for play and wellbeing. Enhance these places with degrees of shelter to allow all-weather use, safe gathering and social distancing when required.



## 13. INCLUDE & INVITE

Make your High Street accessible for all, regardless of age or ability, accommodating those with issues of dementia or mobility and providing pause points throughout. Offering welfare facilities accessible for all can have a significant impact on the footfall and dwell time of our high streets.

Create success for your High Street by helping people discover and enjoy it easily. Develop a memorable, cohesive and legible wayfinding strategy that helps people navigate their way around their town centre.



## 14. CONNECT

Introduce safe walking and cycle routes and better connect the wider community to their centre better with environmentally friendly public transport. This will reduce car journeys, promote health and wellbeing as well as rebalancing inequality for low car ownership groups.

The future is likely to bring reduced car ownership alongside increased use of electric vehicles. In the meantime, we need to accommodate cars to encourage the wider suburban community to use their High Street and maintain equality of access. However, this should not be to the detriment of the quality of urban places. Routes into town and parking should be made legible and consideration should be given to the careful use of pedestrianisation, striking a balance with access and visibility of High Street traders.



## 15. REVIVE

Repopulate and re-energise your town centre to be safer and more welcoming. Increase activity and passive surveillance from new residents, workers and a vibrant and sustainable evening economy. These shifts will require changes to historical planning law use class and licensing restrictions to bring life to 'dead zones' in your urban centre.



## 16. EDUCATE

Encourage established education providers and community groups to take space on the High Street. Beyond conventional institutions, life-long learning encourages people from all walks of life to learn new skills and meet new people. This will create a sense of empowerment, increase wellbeing and combat digital poverty.



## 17. LOCATE SERVICES CENTRALLY

Key institutions such as education providers, health and civic establishments can be fantastic assets for a town centre. They offer essential accessible services right at the heart of the community, enhancing town centre vibrancy and greatly increasing footfall. For public funded developments, reinforce the responsibilities and all-round benefits in locating these assets and services centrally.



## 18. MEANWHILE...

Transformation takes time and not all proposals will be delivered in the short-term. Where a building or site is vacant, encourage 'meanwhile' uses that benefit the wider community, either through the creation of public space or temporary occupation for curated retail, commercial or cultural use.





# DEVELOPED BRIEF - PROJECT AMBITIONS

As outlined in our proposal, we have structured this project brief and ambitions using our 18 point Manifesto. This comprehensively covers all the myriad of factors to be considered in a logical and hierarchial sequence.



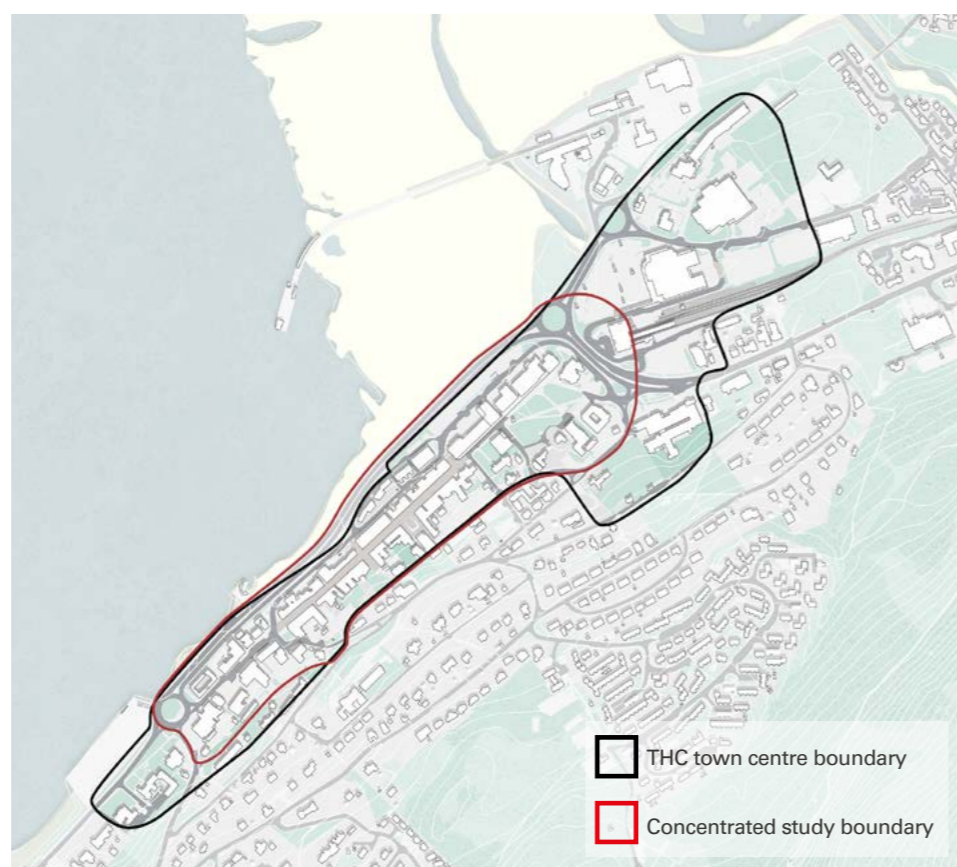
## 1. CONCENTRATE

Take a deliberately focused approach centred around the the heart of the town, where we can repurpose and protect a valued legacy of buildings, support an improving local economy and create opportunity.

A concentrated and focused approach is the first key principle in the prescribed methodology for Vision Led Regeneration in order to prevent "spreading the jam too thin" by attempting to regenerate equally and simultaneously across the wider town centre.

We have defined a more focused town centre boundary that extends from the train and bus station area to the north, bringing the edge closer to the High Street, down to the West End Roundabout at the southern end of the High Street (demonstrated in the map below).

In addition to this, a number of key areas of opportunity have been identified (as shown on pages 6-7) which lie beyond the concentrated town centre boundary (Nevis Centre, Lochaber Leisure Centre, Belford Hospital & former St. Mary's School site). These will still be taken into consideration as part of this study.



## 2. TELL YOUR STORY

Your town needs a clear, unique story and purpose that provide a clarion call and reason for your transformation. There are many parts to a town's story that can provide a basis for an authentic narrative. This is not about creating a simple strapline. One part of the story will not be enough. The richness of the narrative will come from the blend of a number of these strands, consisting of multiple messages and be chameleon-like, resonating differently with different groups.

Fort William is rich in narrative and has a distinctive story to tell, often through certain buildings and structures both outwith and within the town centre itself (The Old Fort, the Parade, Inverlochy Castle etc.).

It benefits from the ready availability of all manner of outdoor activities (hillwalking, mountain climbing, mountain biking, skiing, watersports), the dominating presence of Ben Nevis and the termination / starting points of both the West Highland Way and the Great Glen Way, indeed the town has earned the title 'The heart of The Outdoor Capital of the UK'.

Both the town's storied history and its present will no doubt play a significant part in the future story of Fort William and this study will seek to weave a rich narrative that not only celebrates these but draws on the ambitions and aspirations the town has outlined in the FW 2040 Vision.

The purpose of this brief is not to pre-empt the future story for the town but to recognise the importance of this exercise in establishing a clear authentic narrative to both position Fort William on the national stage and nurture a sense of pride in place and belonging.







### 3. GO BOLD

While the changing patterns of retail have created new challenges, this shift provides us with a once in a lifetime opportunity to rebalance our town centres. Repurposing a large single use asset can transform a town centre in one bold move, repopulating the heart of the town centre and increasing permeability by breaking down large blocks into new streets and lanes.

Now is the time to reintroduce uses that serve the needs of our whole communities.

The close grain nature of the High Street affords little opportunity for large scale intervention with the exception perhaps of the mostly vacant retail block and library adjacent to the Parade, a key gateway to the town centre at the head of the underpass.

Beyond this, a number of the sites identified in the initial project scope that lie outwith the focused town centre area could accommodate mixed use developments of a scale that would deliver significant transformation, such as the current Belford Hospital site, the former St. Mary's Primary School site and the site currently occupied by the Nevis Centre, should a replacement facility be created elsewhere.

One site, not specifically identified at the outset but with great potential is the West End Car Park. This space, directly on the shore of Loch Linnhe could play host to a number of uses including a new culture / leisure offering or a welcome centre for cruise passengers to the town. Any development here would help to transform the town's relationship with the water, a key theme of the FW 2040 vision and work in tandem with the Old Fort to create a 'dumbell effect' along the lochside.

We will explore the potential of all of these sites as part of this study, considering carefully scale, permeability, views and the right balance of uses in the wider town centre context.



### 4. CONSOLIDATE

Reduce retail to the right level for a re-energised and diversified town centre with the right-sized (smaller) units supporting the increasing trend for independent, artisanal traders. Relocate retail to street edges and concentrate the offer; don't bury it deep in the urban block.

The overall requirement for retail floorspace has dramatically reduced and this will continue as department stores and national retailers continue to contract. This has been evidenced most recently in Fort William with the closure of the large M&Co. store facing the Parade, and the contraction of Tesco from their larger unit into an 'Express' offer.

The proximity of both Fort William and North Road Retail Parks has displaced a large proportion of potential retail from the core town centre / High Street and, moving forward, the High Street and surrounding streets and vennels are likely to benefit from continuing to focus on more distinctive and independent offers rather than national chain retailers.

This vision framework will look to further strengthen the existing mix of active street level uses of varying sizes throughout the town centre, with a particular focus on the High Street.





## 5. REPOPULATE

Introduce significant levels of urban living to the town centre. Create mixed-use blocks with a variety of tenures (private for sale, affordable, social housing, student, elderly / supported / sheltered). Bring life back to upper levels over retail space through residential conversion.

From the feedback received as part of the Fort William Community Action Group consultation in 2019 (contained in the Fort William Locality Plan), there is a perception among the local population that there is a lack of housing and affordable options to rent or buy.

Fort William town centre has already benefitted from the introduction of new residential right on the High Street thanks to the repurposing of Tweeddale House and Lochaber House, and the new build development on the Whisky Centre site, completed in 2019.

There are a number of upper storeys along the High Street that contain residential accommodation and this study will seek to identify further opportunities to maximise this within the town centre, to increase footfall and provide greater passive surveillance.

Within the comments received as part of the FW2040 consultation there was a call for the introduction of additional residential accommodation for the aging population (including care home provision) in a central location to ensure care needs were being met.

We will develop a framework that focuses on the introduction of residential in a variety of types, tenures and affordability, influenced by market intelligence developed by Savills. This ensures that we appeal to as wide a market as possible. These proposals will largely be focused within the town centre area and on sites immediately surrounding the concentrated boundary including the current hospital and adjacent former St. Mary's Primary School.



## 6. ATTRACT

Social and cultural attractors are a major catalyst for positive change and offer important opportunities to drive more visits into your town centre. From community and civic destinations, to cultural centres, cinemas and European-style food halls, these uses can bring new life to old, cherished buildings. Look to work with existing institutions and community groups to bring new galleries, museums and performance spaces to the heart of the town centre.

Positioning these attractors strategically and making them work together to energise key routes by stimulating footfall is critical. You probably only have one shot to get the location right. Visibility, radial influence and approach routes should determine their positioning, not just conveniently available sites.

In terms of existing attractors within Fort William town centre, the Highland Cinema on Cameron Square has had a positive and transformative effect, not only due to its introduction of a popular leisure and food and drink offer but also due to its central location at the heart of the High Street. Adjacent to this, the West Highland Museum has ambitions to expand its offer through extension into an adjoining building that will increase its display capabilities and in turn, it is hoped, its visitor numbers.

Fort William benefits from a number of cultural and tourist attractions in the surrounding area (Lochaber Castle, Ben Nevis Distillery, Lochaber Geopark etc.) and as the 'Outdoor Capital of the UK' attracts a huge proportion of its visitors from the walking, climbing, skiing and mountain biking community.

The Fort that gives the town its name has great potential in its position on the edge of Loch Linnhe but at the moment is difficult to reach on foot due to the combination of the A82 and Morrison's car park. This study will seek to maximise the potential of the fort and the Loch as a significant 'attractor' for Fort William through forging stronger pedestrian connections from the town centre and creating an attractive environment with activity and potential to dwell for locals and tourists alike.

A recent study into the Nevis Centre has concluded that it should be replaced and concentrate more on cultural and community activity. This is also a central ambition of the FW2040 Vision that calls for a new multi purpose indoor venue and also suggests the creation of a Fort William Arts Centre. We will seek to locate any such facility strategically within the town centre to create a draw and an energy within the very heart of the town.

Beyond those already stated, working with Savills, we will identify potential additional uses that stimulate the day and evening economy with appeal to a wider demographic of residents and visitors whilst capitalising on the loyal local customer base.





## 8. SHIFT PERCEPTIONS

Open up lanes and views that dramatically change how people remember the centre.

This enriches the experience and how we emotionally connect to our environment by providing greater connectivity, permeability and new ways to navigate through our urban centres.

We often find that a review of historic town maps can suggest opportunities to reintroduce lost patterns that have a depth of cultural resonance.

The historic street pattern of Fort William town centre follows the traditional pattern of narrow plots, closes and wynds off of the central spine of the High Street. Limited in number, these historic lanes have been neglected and are now in a state of disrepair. They offer the only visible and physical connection to Loch Linnhe and as such their improvement is vitally important in establishing a new relationship with the loch.

Opportunities to introduce additional lanes and closes throughout the town centre will be explored to improve permeability that will both change how we experience the physical nature of the town and how we emotionally connect with it.

The FW 2040 Vision is organised around 5 key themes, one of which is **'A Place Facing Water'**. The town has historically turned its back on the loch and the FW2040 Vision recognises that this needs to change. The desire to foster a stronger relationship with the loch through the introduction of an accessible and attractive promenade, shoreline development and enhanced marine access are key priorities of the Vision. The need to better connect with the loch and transform the view of Fort William from the A82 is also expressed in the Town Centre Action Plan in one of its four key themes, namely: **'Maximise the Potential of the Waterfront'**.

This study will seek to positively impact the physical and spacial relationship Fort William town centre has to Loch Linnhe.



## 7. CREATE WORKPLACE

Reintroducing residential on its own to town centres could lead to areas devoid of life and activity during working hours. The way we work is changing. Introduce workspaces that create vibrancy during the day while offering flexible working and healthy live / work balance.

With a new imperative to work from home accelerated by Covid-19, there is a greater need for local shared workspace in well-connected towns to bridge between home and town centre.

Through our initial analysis we have found that there is a lack of available creative / co-work office space and workshop / maker spaces within Fort William town centre.

We will seek to incorporate new opportunities for workplace within the town centre, from co-work spaces that take advantage of a post COVID desire to be more flexible and local in our approach to working, to new craft & maker spaces.

These new spaces could take over vacant retail properties at street level, providing a place for craft with a showroom component that would enliven the town centre and further diversify the offer on the High Street. Creative office space could be an ideal use to revitalise vacant upper levels over retail in many of the historic buildings within the town centre.







## 9. REPURPOSE AND REPAIR

Take the opportunity provided by repurposing and rebalancing to upgrade or replace buildings that offer nothing to the urban environment.

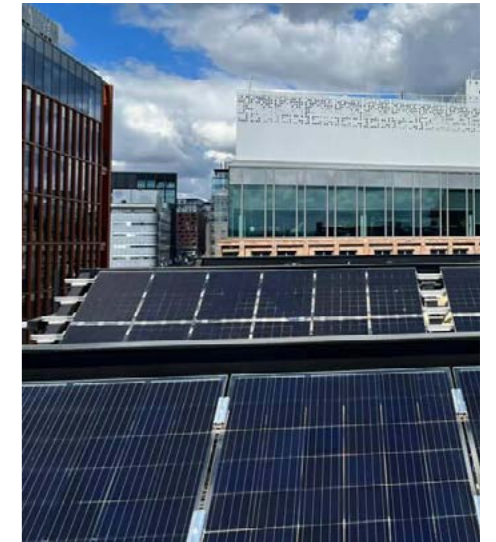
Many of our town centres benefit from a legacy of quality historic buildings and these new interventions should be of a contemporary architecture that matches them in quality and ambition.

The built heritage that enriches Fort William's town centre brings a strong distinctiveness and authenticity. Heritage assets are to be protected and cherished and the best way to ensure this is to bring them back into life through repurposing – particularly of upper floors (as noted in "Repopulate" and "Create Workplace" sections).

We will identify through our frontages study, opportunities where the introduction of new uses can be combined with the enhancement or replacement of buildings / facades that are detrimental to the quality of the urban environment.

The desired increase in residential provision and mix of uses will involve the need for new development. It's important therefore that any new interventions are of a high quality that make a positive contribution and at the same time enable the town to meet its net zero targets.

This study will indicate considered volumes, height and density of development and suggest through precedent, a level of quality that is commensurate with the surroundings.



## 10. REGENERATE

In response to the climate emergency, enshrine an ambition to achieve shared international goals within your Vision. This can be done by working towards a carbon zero objective and a more circular economy, generating localized renewable energy and recycling waste.

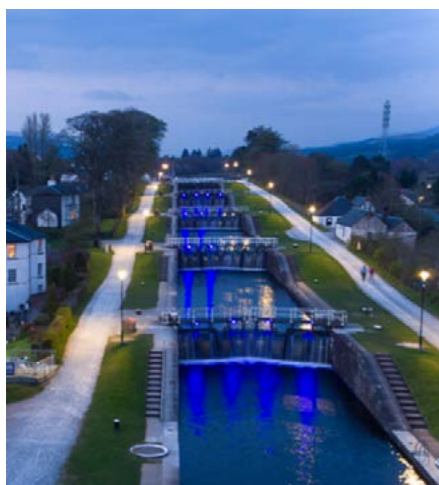
Promote biodiversity and flood resilience in an inventive way that provides quality greened urban space for the community in the heart of our towns.

The FW 2040 Vision is organised around 5 key themes, one of which is **'A Place that addresses the Climate Emergency'**. Being a town with a strong sustainable agenda could be a unique part of Fort William's identity, attracting a population and businesses that are increasingly aware and concerned about living and operating responsibly.

With the exception of the Parade, there is very little green space within the town centre. Working with our consultants Civic Engineers we will explore opportunities to introduce green-blue infrastructure initiatives in the form of new high quality urban green space and innovative surface water drainage solutions that will provide biodiversity, improve well-being and encourage healthy living practices.

Repurposing existing structures is the most environmentally responsible approach in terms of embodied carbon, but we need to be mindful that not all are readily adaptable or require extensive upgrades to achieve modern energy standards. We will seek out opportunities to take advantage of this where possible as we propose the introduction of new uses throughout the study area.





## 11. ILLUMINATE

Public art and dynamic lighting can transform the existing environment for a relatively small outlay.

Lighting, in particular, can create a variety of effects to suit the season or event, celebrate rich historic facades and elevate the everyday.

Opportunities to build on the existing public art throughout the town centre will be explored, with particular focus around the High Street and any proposed public routes and spaces, such as along the shore of Loch Linnhe.

We will explore the introduction of colour and light to celebrate the historic town centre fabric, transform the arrival experience and improve safety on key routes into the town centre.

A lighting strategy will be a key component in creating a quality of environment, enhancing feelings of safety and supporting the continued extension of activity into night time economies.



## 12. GATHER

Re-energise the centre by providing urban places that enrich day-to-day life and accommodate events that will attract local residents and visitors from outside the town. These external 'rooms' should encourage vibrant, year-round use.

Provide 'place not just space' with active edges, human-scaled enclosure, and greening for play and wellbeing. Enhance these places with degrees of shelter to allow all-weather use, safe gathering and social distancing when required.

Fort William town centre is fortunate to contain a number of public spaces at its heart with distinct natures. The most significant of these are the Parade, a historic green space and Cameron Square, a hard landscaped civic square surrounded by cultural and leisure uses and with a canopy at its centre to encourage year round use. A third space, Gordon Square, not only marks the end of the West Highland Way but is the only one of these spaces with a direct visual connection to Loch Linnhe.

We will seek to enhance these existing spaces to maximise their potential through an analysis of the uses that surround them, the possibility of improving finishes and the incorporation of additional seating, planting and shelter.

A key focus of this study will be to propose the creation of new 'place' wherever the opportunity arises throughout the town centre, such as creating a more pedestrian friendly Monzie Square, another space directly connected to the High Street with a visual connection to the loch.

The lack of any meaningful public space at the edge of the loch has been identified in a number of the strategy documents and the creation of a new promenade is a central ambition of the FW 2040 Vision. As part of this study, we will explore the transformation of this edge, strengthen its relationship to the High Street and seek to create of new 'gateways' to the town centre.







## 13. INCLUDE & INVITE

Make your urban centre accessible for all, regardless of age or ability, accommodating those with issues of dementia or mobility and providing pause points throughout. Offering welfare facilities accessible for all can have a significant impact on the footfall and dwell time of our high streets.

Create success for your urban centre by helping people discover and enjoy it easily. Develop a memorable, cohesive and legible wayfinding strategy that helps people navigate their way around their town centre.

Key to the successful evolution of Fort William town centre will be ensuring that it is accessible and navigable by all.

The FW2040 consultation feedback of November 2022 called for the introduction of more seating, particularly on the Parade, and for more covered areas to shelter from inclement weather.

We will assess current provision of welfare facilities, bench seating and shelter, vital in our often challenging climate, throughout the study area alongside existing wayfinding and propose improvements to maximise the potential of the town centre to appeal to all members of society, regardless of age, mobility or income. Improvements to these key elements will encourage pedestrian movement which in turn promotes active, healthy living.

'Changing Places' facilities provide a lifeline for those families and individuals with challenging health and mobility issues. The decision to visit a place is often determined by their availability. The only facility of this type in Fort William is located within the campus of UHI West Highland. We will explore opportunities to introduce one in a more centrally located and accessible position within the core of the town centre.

Young people and teenagers should be included and invited to the town centre with active, engaging services and facilities that offer positive social interaction.



## 14. CONNECT

Introduce safe walking and cycle routes and better connect the wider community to their centre better with environmentally friendly public transport. This will reduce car journeys, promote health and wellbeing as well as rebalancing inequality for low car ownership groups.

The future is likely to bring reduced car ownership alongside increased use of electric vehicles. In the meantime, we need to accommodate cars to encourage the wider rural community to use their town centre and maintain equality of access. However, this should not be to the detriment of the quality of urban places. Routes into town and parking should be made legible and consideration should be given to the careful use of pedestrianisation, striking a balance with access and visibility of town centre traders.

Journeys by car are important within Fort William and its wider rural catchment. There are large areas of car parking around and within the town centre; Morrisons Supermarket, the West End car park, right on the edge of Loch Linnhe, the centrally located Viewforth Car Park and the Middle Street Short Stay Car Park. We will consider the balance of accommodating the car with the creation of human scaled urban place, especially in areas considered for repurposing or redevelopment.

Due to its predominantly rural nature, it is essential that Fort William is well served by a joined up and effective public transport network. Working with our transport consultants Sweco, we will carry out a high level assessment of the current conditions for transport, accessibility and proximity to services, making reference to both the Fort William Strategic Transport Study and the Fort William Active Travel Masterplan Refresh. We will also explore opportunities for greater connectivity as part of the town centre masterplan proposals.

At present, anyone arriving by Public Transport at either the bus or train station can only access the town centre via an unattractive series of ramps and stairs that lead to an underpass due to the domineering presence of the A82. This severs any direct pedestrian link at street level and transforming this arrival experience for the better, encouraging greater visibility and legibility will be a key focus of this study.

We will also explore the creation of new and enhancement of existing legible and permeable routes throughout the town centre, to the various attractors, such as the UHI campus and the Old Fort, to name but two.







## 16. EDUCATE

Encourage established education providers and community groups to take space in the town centre.

Beyond conventional institutions, life-long learning encourages people from all walks of life to learn new skills and meet new people. This will create a sense of empowerment, increase wellbeing and combat digital poverty.

UHI West Highland should be encouraged to make their presence felt more readily within the town centre through the introduction of more public facing activities and this study will explore opportunities for this.

The vibrancy of the town would further benefit if future expansion of educational activities could integrate with the centre by taking advantage of 'loose space' in existing buildings on the High Street particularly for incubator or life-long learning opportunities.

There already exists student specific residential accommodation on Camanachd Crescent in the town and this study will, following consultation with UHI, identify potential further opportunities to introduce this typology within the study area in appropriate location and scale. This, along with supporting new employment opportunities and optimising the positive benefits of links between established employers, UHI West Highland and new entrepreneurs will enable the development of further skillsets. This will create support and advice to prospective new businesses or social enterprises interested in locating in Fort William.



## 15. REVIVE

Repopulate and re-energise your town centre to be safer and more welcoming. Increase activity and passive surveillance from new residents, workers and a vibrant and sustainable evening economy.

These shifts will require changes to historical planning law use class and licensing restrictions to bring life to 'dead zones' in your town centre.

Feedback received as part of the FW2040 community engagement called for **'a revitalised town centre....a more vibrant night time economy including nightclubs.'** We will explore the expansion of the evening economy in the town centre, with a particular focus on ensuring this is introduced in locations that work with the existing offer and promote activity where desired, for example along the High Street.

In order to stimulate the town centre's economic recovery a proactive planning, conservation, regulatory and licensing system is essential. Getting the basics of stewardship right is vital to creating a positive visitor experience, so cleanliness and maintenance need to be high priority issues.

Feedback received from the 2022 FW2040 public event, in response to the question 'what would encourage you to come in to the town centre more?' stated **'More live events or live music and entertainment offerings in the evenings, particularly for families.'** We will explore the introduction of an expanded cultural offer and pop-up events to ensure the town centre is an attractive, safe and quality evening destination. Opportunities for a fuller calendar of events beyond the annual week long Highland Mountain Festival, the Scottish Six Day Motorcycle Trials and the UCI Mountain Bike World Cup can be drawn from other towns and cities across the UK such as Book, Film and Comedy Festivals.

New residential developments, including the repurposing of existing upper floors have to be considered carefully when located near evening activities but will provide passive surveillance to routes and spaces providing a safer, more welcoming environment for all.







## 17. LOCATE SERVICES CENTRALLY

Key institutions such as education providers, health and civic establishments can be fantastic assets for a town centre. They offer essential accessible services right at the heart of the community, enhancing town centre vibrancy and greatly increasing footfall.

For public funded developments, reinforce the responsibilities and all-round benefits in locating these assets and services centrally.

Highland Council opened its new offices and Customer Service Centre in 2018 within the repurposed and extended former High School building facing Loch Linnhe and so already has a significant presence within the town centre.

Following an options appraisal in 2020, it has been recommended that the Nevis Centre, a key community, leisure and arts facility for the town be replaced, perhaps with the 'sport' element removed from its program to create a more community and arts focused facility. We will explore the potential of locating such a facility within the heart of the town centre.

The existing library building, located close to the Parade and at a key arrival point within the town centre adjacent to the underpass that leads to the train station and beyond offers little in the way of street activation and a lack of urban scale. It has also been recommended that this function be absorbed into any new community and culture led facility.

Over and above arts and cultural attractions, town centres are the most accessible location for health facilities, driving footfall that is beneficial to other surrounding uses and preventing reliance on private car journeys.

The decisions on the location of these essential services must be based on ensuring the resilience of the town centre and not cost, in line with current government guidance such as the 'Town Centre First Principle', 'A New Future for Scotland's Town Centres' and NPF4. We will explore opportunities to encourage and accommodate more essential services in to the town centre as we develop the Masterplan.



## 18. MEANWHILE...

Transformation takes time and not all proposals will be delivered in the short-term.

Where a building or site is vacant encourage 'meanwhile' uses that benefit the wider community, either through the creation of public space or temporary occupation for curated retail, commercial or cultural use.

There is ample opportunity to enliven existing underused spaces and places within the town centre to create immediate vibrancy and impact in the short term. This could happen at different times of the year allowing 'pop-up' creative leisure or cultural ventures to make an impact and stimulate interest and activity.

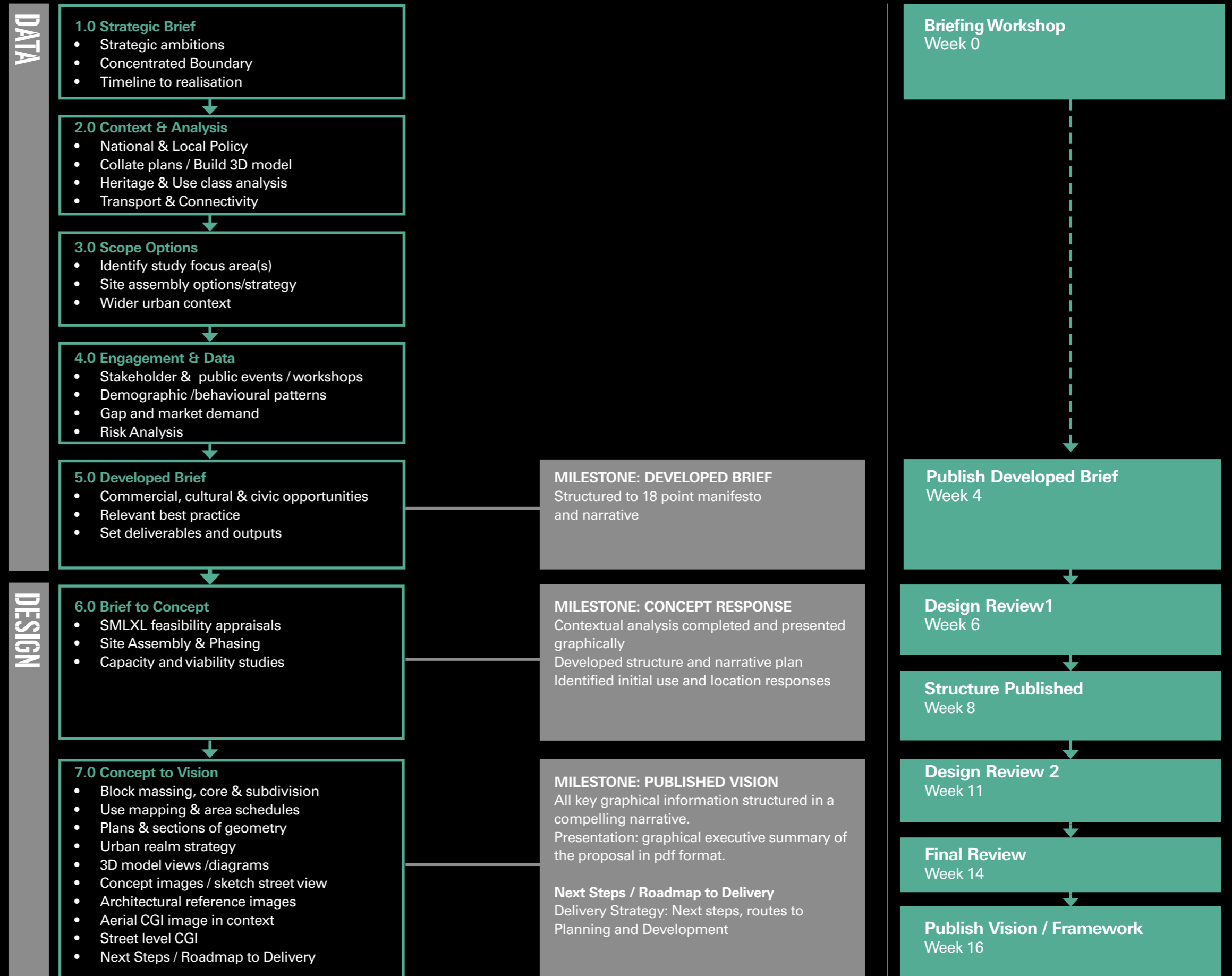
Interventions of a 'meanwhile' nature on even part of a site can permit a phased approach to the delivery of larger developments, preventing their lying dormant and inactive in their entirety for the duration of their often complicated and protracted design, procurement and construction.

The study will explore the introduction of temporary greenspace to accommodate family friendly outdoor amenities for active uses that support and enhance the visitor experience and connect the whole community to the town centre.

In terms of vacant retail forming part of a repurposing or redevelopment opportunity, landlords should be encouraged to consider their ESG agenda and provide meanwhile accommodation for community based and charity solutions that, although negating rates, is a great deal better than an empty unit on the street.



# METHODOLOGY: PROJECT PROGRAMME



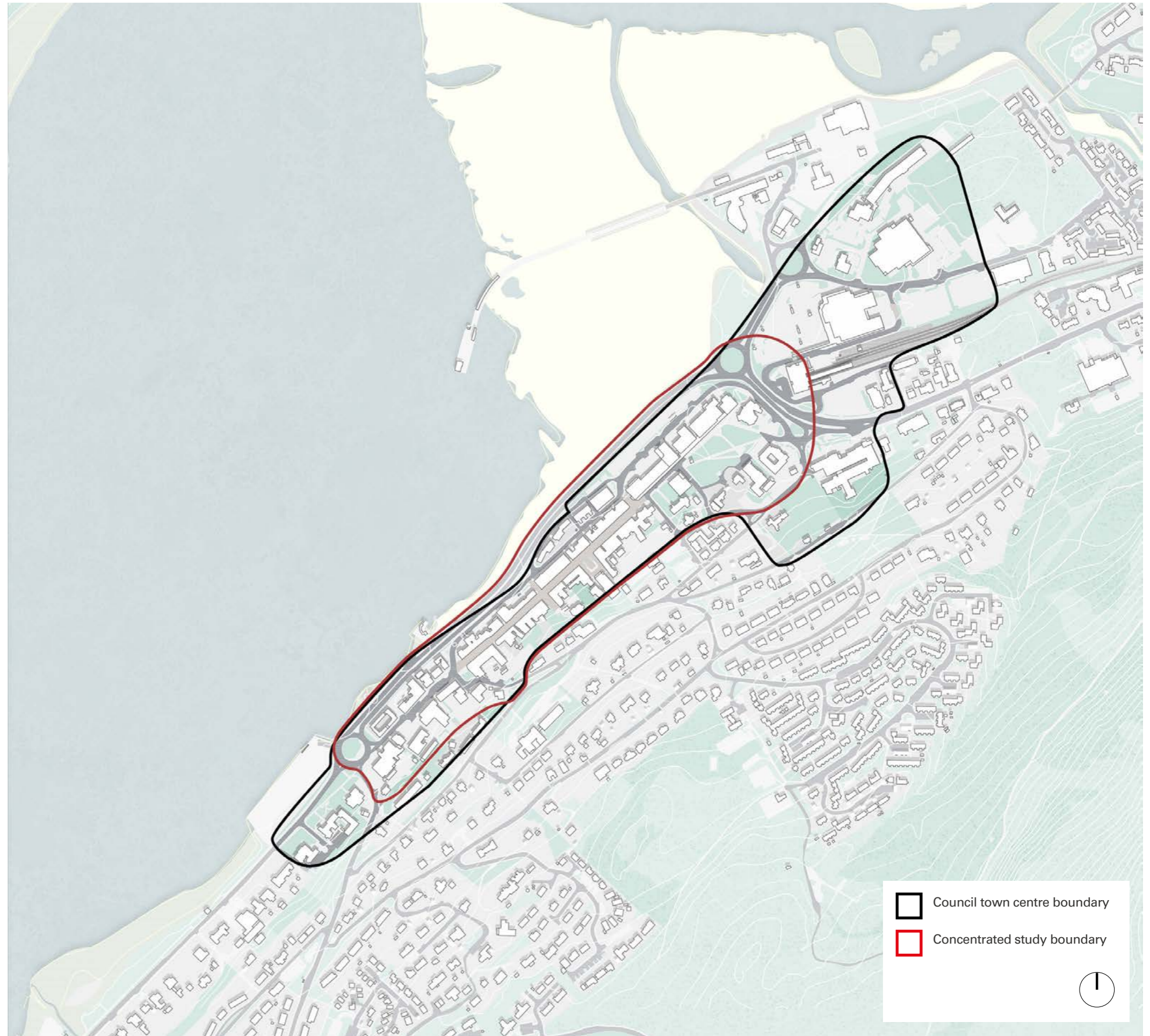




**2.0**  
**INITIAL ANALYSIS**













**ANALYSIS:**  
**BASE MAP**





# ANALYSIS: GROUND FLOOR USES

-  Cultural / Community
-  Transport
-  Government
-  Commercial
-  Residential
-  Hotel / B&B
-  Retail
-  F&B / Leisure
-  Healthcare
-  Vacant





# ANALYSIS: BUILT HERITAGE

- 'A' Listed building
- 'B' Listed building
- 'C' Listed building





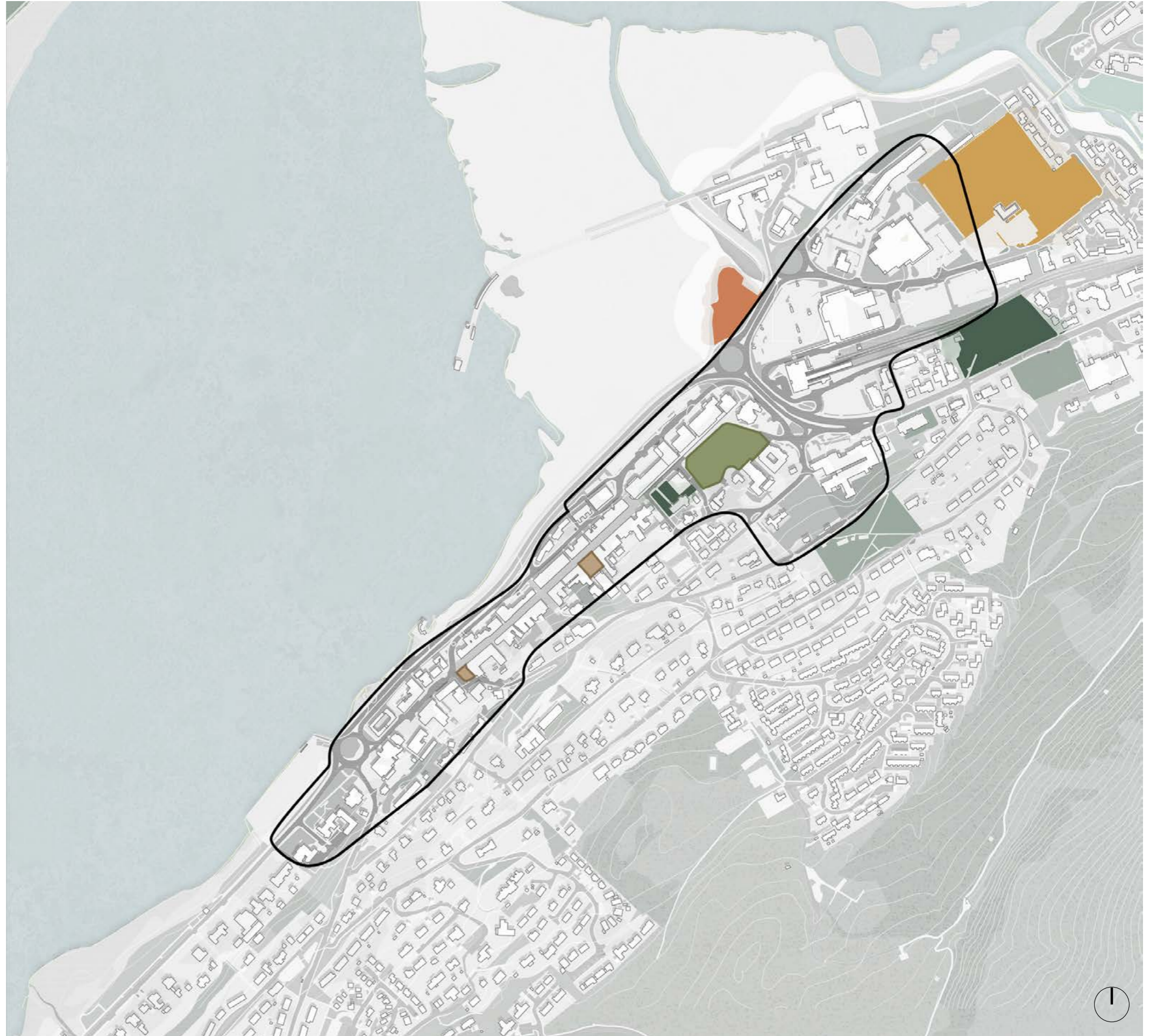
# ANALYSIS: DEVELOPMENT OF TOWN CENTRE





# ANALYSIS: CIVIC / GREEN SPACES

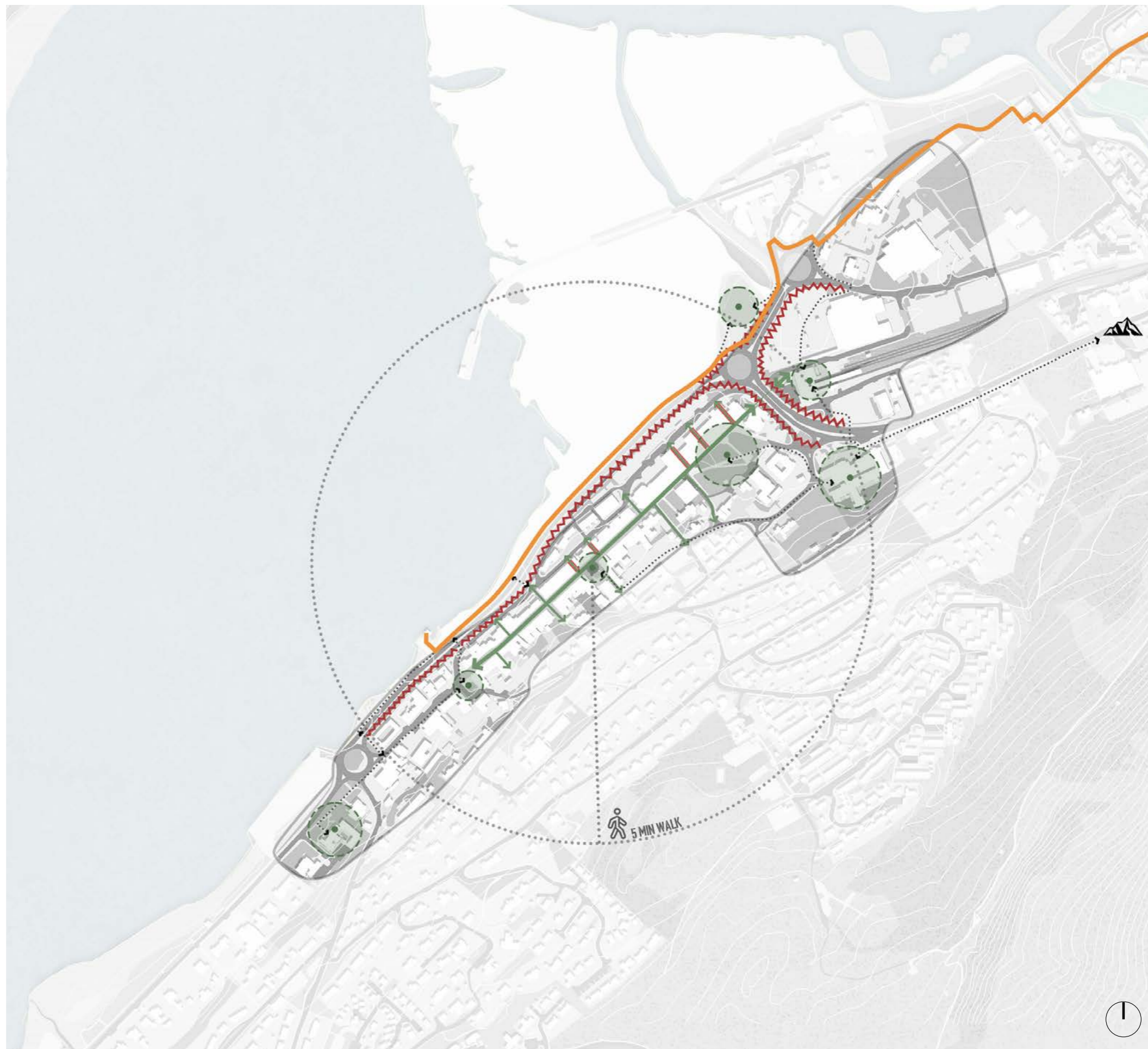
- Key Civic Space
- Key Civic Greenspace
- Cemetery
- The Old Fort
- Active Greenspace





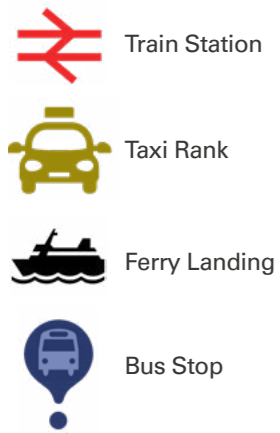
# ANALYSIS: PEDESTRIAN & CYCLE MOVEMENT

- ➔ Primary Pedestrian Route
- ▬▬▬ Poor Quality Route
- Important Town Element
- Walking Route
- NCR 78 Cycle Route
- ⚡ Barrier to Movement



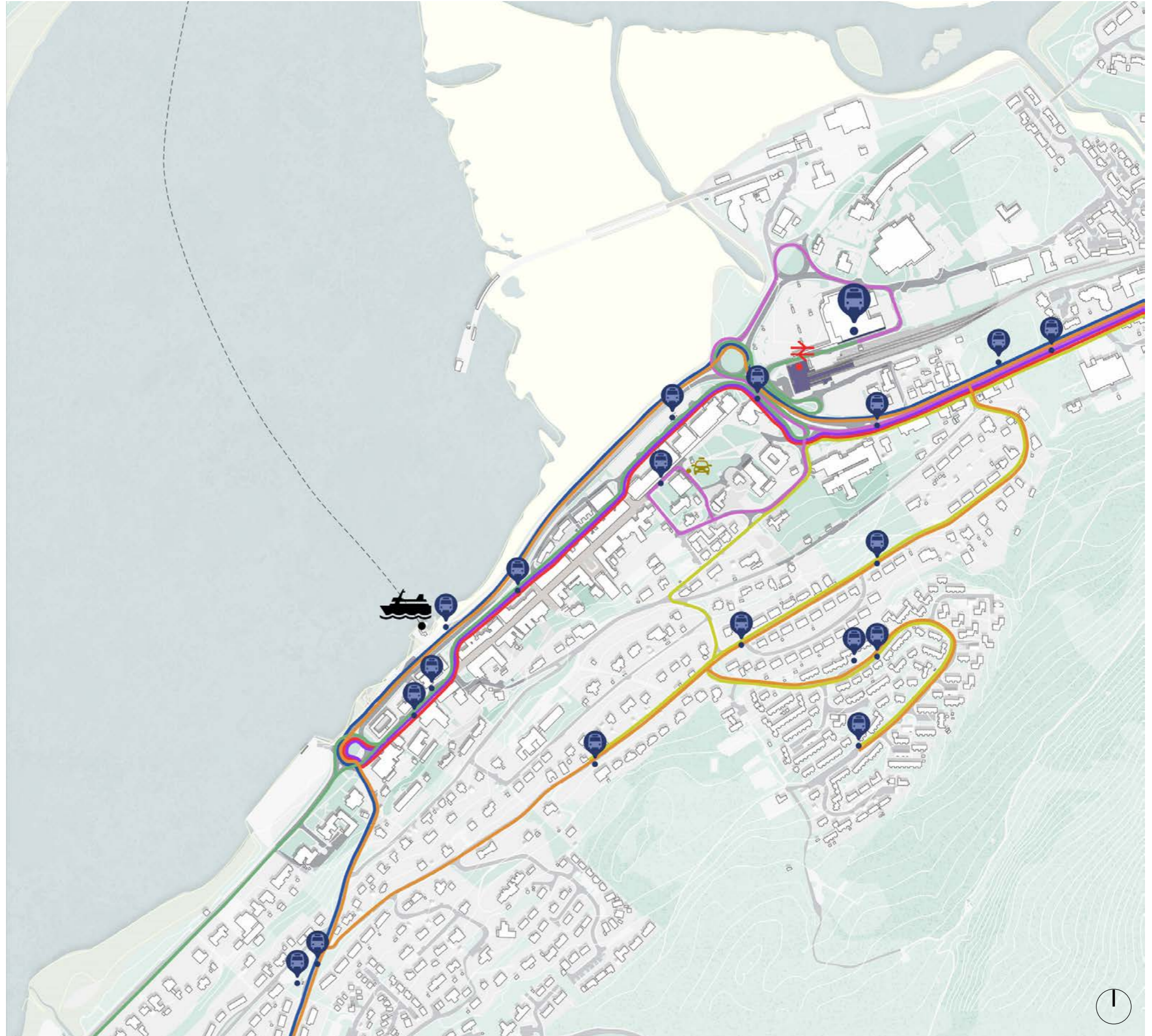


# ANALYSIS: PUBLIC TRANSPORT



## Bus Services

- 144 - Fort William to Kinlochleven
- 146 - Upper Achintore to Lochaber High School
- 147 - Fort William to Lochaber High School
- 148 - Plantation to Lochaber High School
- 149 - Plantation to Lochaber High School
- 522 - Fort William to Trislaig
- 592 - Fort William to Corpach





# ANALYSIS: ROADS & PARKING



- Primary Route- A82
- Secondary Route
- Tertiary Route
- Minor / Residential Route
- Car Parking





# ANALYSIS: FRONTAGES



-  Postive frontage
-  Negative frontage



# ANALYSIS: SIMD ANALYSIS





# ANALYSIS: SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES





**ANALYSIS:**  
**3D CONTEXT MODEL: AERIAL VIEW OF TOWN CENTRE**



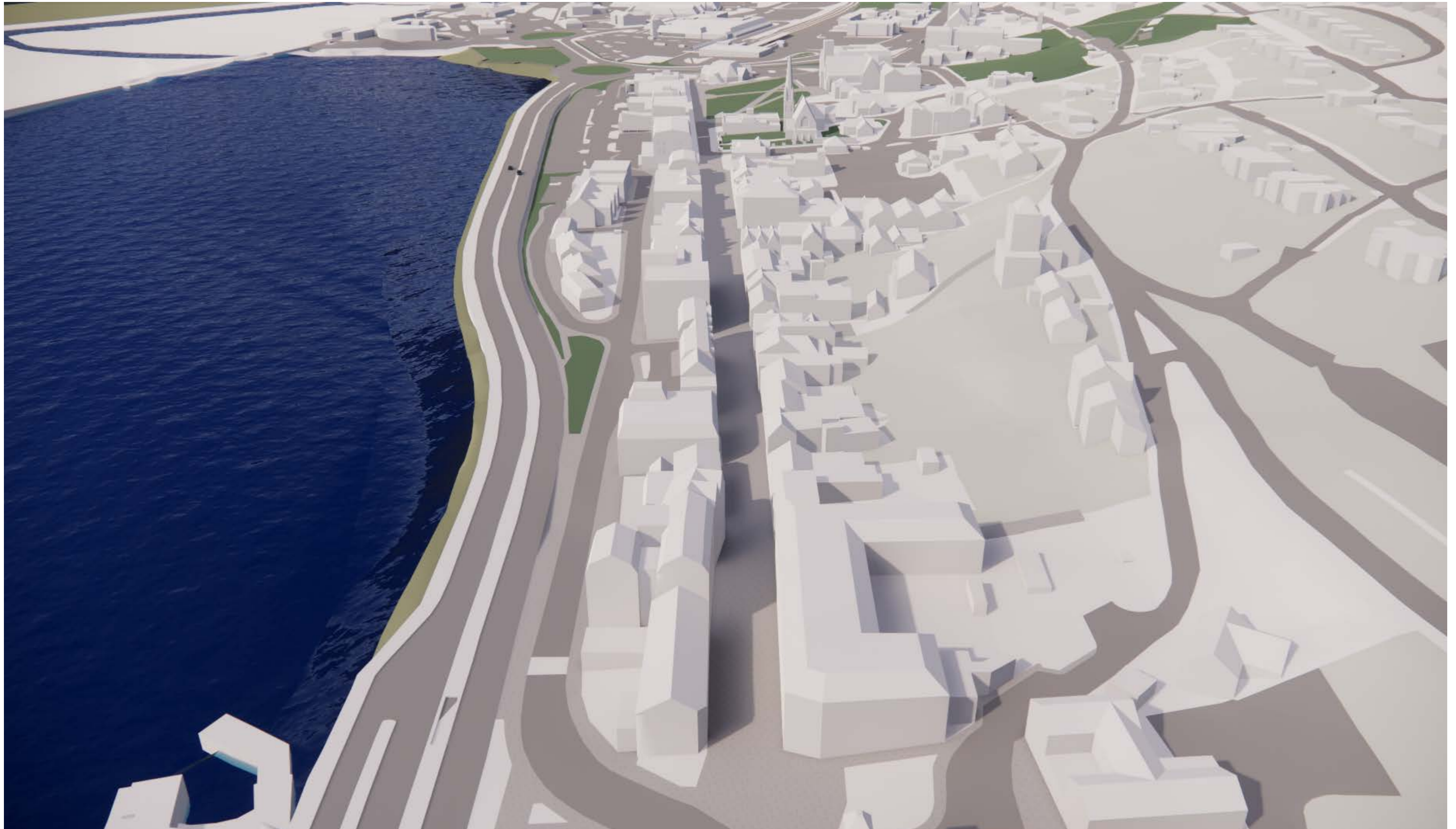


**ANALYSIS:**  
**3D CONTEXT MODEL: AERIAL VIEW OF TOWN CENTRE**



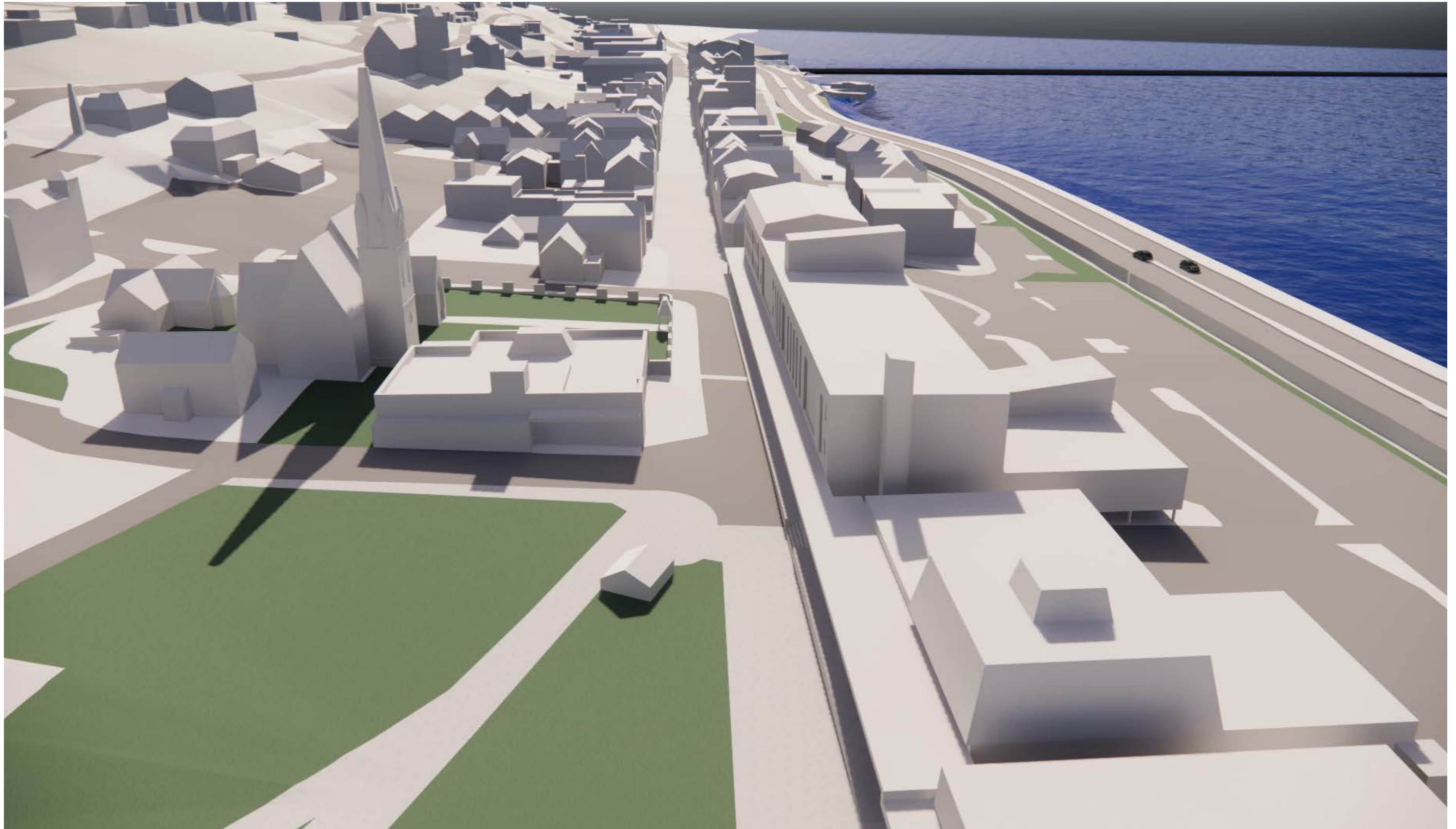


**ANALYSIS:**  
**3D CONTEXT MODEL: AERIAL VIEW OF HIGH STREET**



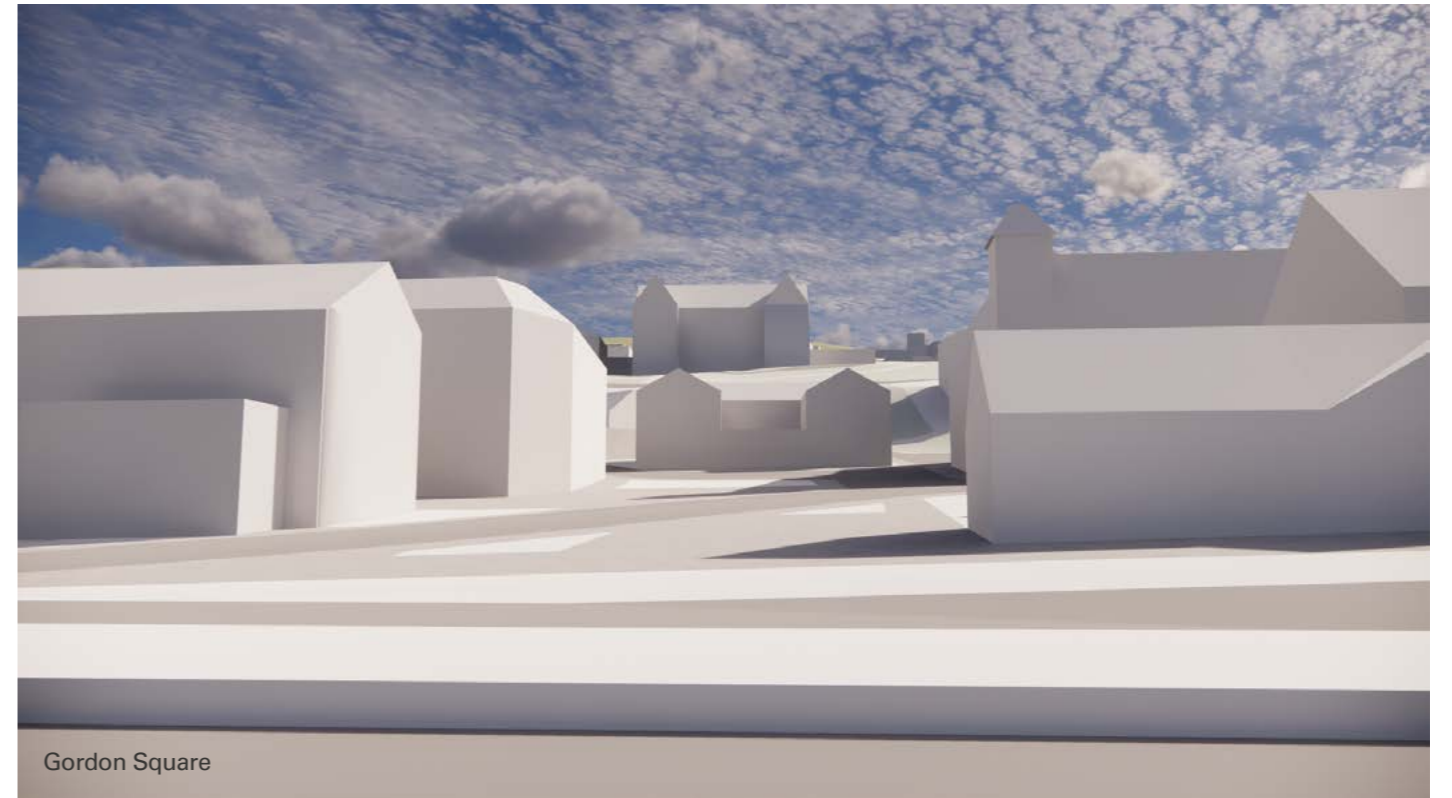


**ANALYSIS:**  
**3D CONTEXT MODEL: AERIAL VIEW OF HIGH STREET**



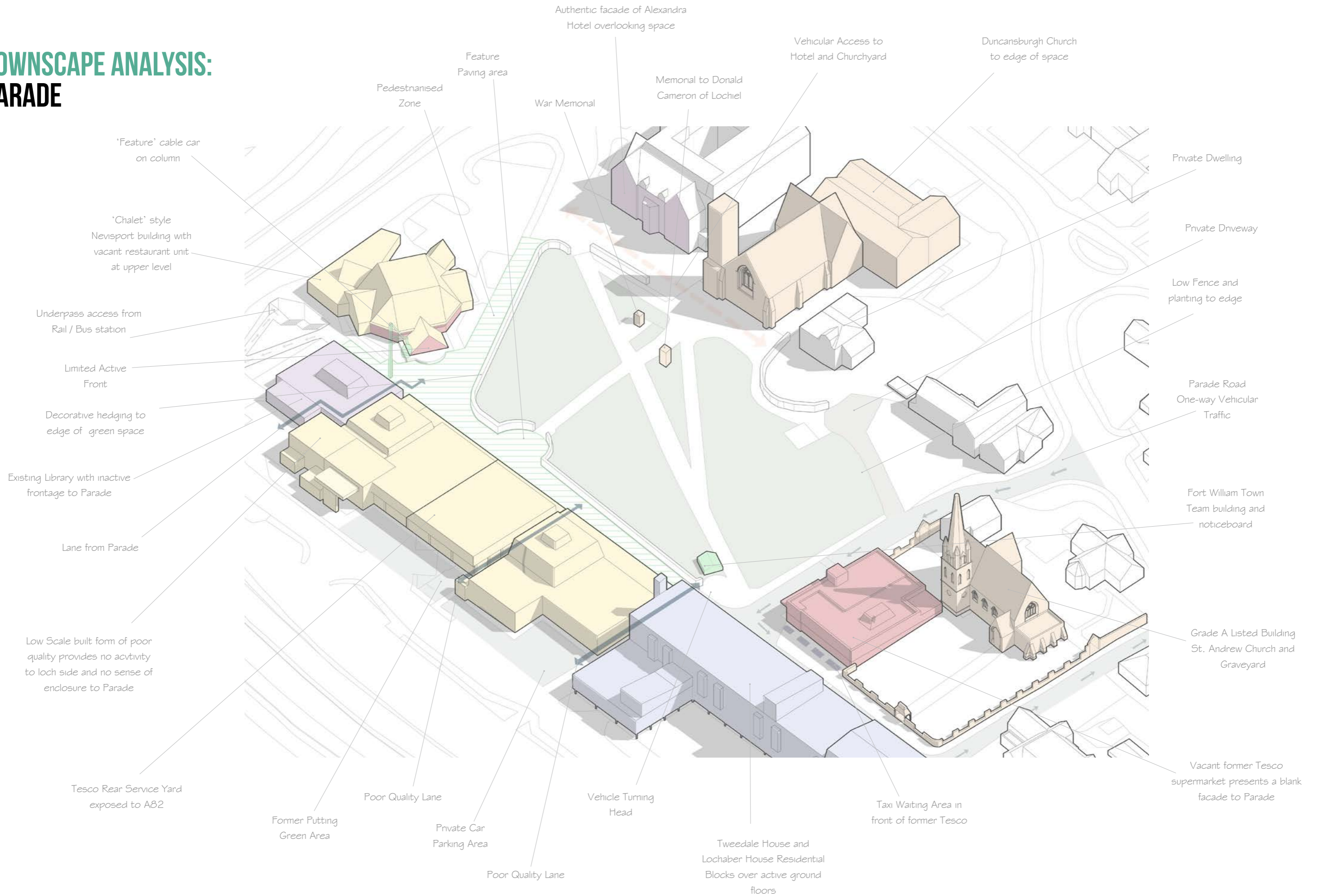


**ANALYSIS:**  
**3D CONTEXT MODEL: STREET LEVEL VIEWS**



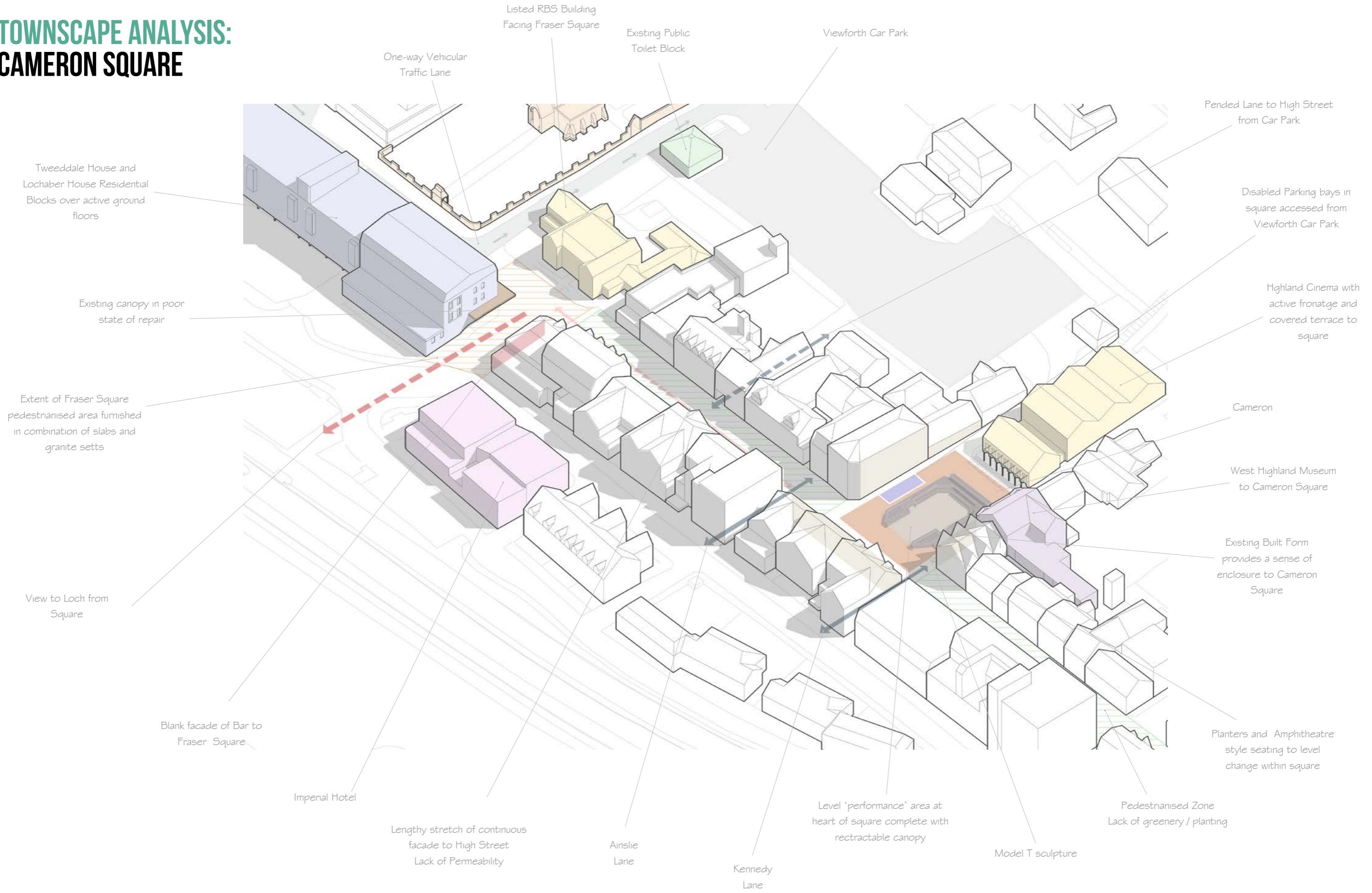


# TOWNSCAPE ANALYSIS: PARADE





# TOWNSCAPE ANALYSIS: CAMERON SQUARE



Listed RBS Building  
Facing Fraser Square

Existing Public  
Toilet Block

Viewforth Car Park

One-way Vehicular  
Traffic Lane

Pended Lane to High Street  
from Car Park

Tweeddale House and  
Lochaber House Residential  
Blocks over active ground  
floors

Disabled Parking bays in  
square accessed from  
Viewforth Car Park

Existing canopy in poor  
state of repair

Highland Cinema with  
active frontage and  
covered terrace to  
square

Extent of Fraser Square  
pedestrianised area furnished  
in combination of slabs and  
granite setts

Cameron

West Highland Museum  
to Cameron Square

View to Loch from  
Square

Existing Built Form  
provides a sense of  
enclosure to Cameron  
Square

Blank facade of Bar to  
Fraser Square

Planters and Amphitheatre  
style seating to level  
change within square

Imperial Hotel

Lengthy stretch of continuous  
facade to High Street  
Lack of Permeability

Ainslie  
Lane

Level 'performance' area at  
heart of square complete with  
retractable canopy

Pedestrianised Zone  
Lack of greenery / planting

Kennedy  
Lane

Model T sculpture



**INITIAL CONCEPT DIAGRAM:  
A CONNECTED PLACE THAT FACES WATER**

