

Chapter 3

The Masterplan





3.1 Alexandria Town Centre: The Challenge

Our research and consultations have shown that there is a broad consensus around the condition of Alexandria and the challenges facing the town. Alexandria has experienced **long-term economic decline** which have resulted in high levels of **poverty and deprivation**. The effects of these structural changes on the town centre have been compounded by fundamental changes in retail and leisure markets. The renaissance of Glasgow, the rise of regional shopping and leisure centres, and the growth in large supermarkets in out of town locations have all undermined the traditional roles and functions of town centres and resulted in high levels of **leakage of retail and leisure expenditure**. In this respect Alexandria's experience has been typical of many other post-industrial towns in the west of Scotland. Although Alexandria is a substantial settlement **the status of the town centre has been diminished** with many local residents preferring to travel to Dumbarton and other centres for their main convenience shopping trips, and further afield for comparison goods.

To these broad market trends we can add a number of local **factors** which are recognised to have accelerated the decline of the town centre by damaging the integrity of the urban form and diminishing Alexandria's distinctive sense of place:

- architecturally, **Mitchell Way** is a respectable development of its time, but it has been allowed to fall into near-terminal decline, and the east end of the shopping precinct opens up into a bleak desert of roads and surface parking; the quality of shopping has declined and residents, shoppers and businesses all express dissatisfaction with the quality of the environment
- the decline of **Bank Street** has effectively turned Alexandria into a one-street town; historic photographs show a handsome street of substantial commercial buildings, but Bank Street has become increasingly fragmented and traffic-dominated
- the area **west of the railway station** is fragmented and hostile: the road system encourages dangerously fast traffic; inappropriate hazard paving and a series of overhead pedestrian bridges all add to the sense of alienation and severance

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- Alexandria is a **riverside town**, but the town has turned its back on the Leven; the railway embankment is a barrier dating back to the mid 19th century, but more recent development – including social housing east of the town centre – has ignored the opportunity to create pedestrian links between the town and the river; the inevitable consequence is that the riverside is under-used and perceived by some to be a dangerous place
- Alexandria has a significant amount of recent housing development, but the design quality of these schemes has been uniformly disappointing and lowest common denominator: inexplicably, new homes by the Leven turn their backs to the river.

Despite a number of positive changes in Alexandria, including improved housing choice, the town centre has been locked into **a long-term cycle of decline** and its fortunes are at a low ebb. The town has effectively been reduced to the status of a **local centre**. There is still a substantial convenience shopping offer, together with some local services, but the evidence on ground confirms the Council's own analysis that the town centre is increasingly focused on meeting the needs of **low income households**, including people who do not have their own transport. Alexandria is continuing to meet demand from this captive market, but many customers who have a choice have **transferred their loyalty** to more attractive and better quality stores in Dumbarton and elsewhere. Indeed, a number of recent studies have confirmed residents' dissatisfaction with the quality and choice of the current food offer.

3.2 Key Choices

Several supermarket chains are reported to be interested in opening a large **foodstore** in the town. The Culverwell study confirms that there is sufficient demand to sustain a quality supermarket and that such an investment would help Alexandria to claw back retail leakage and create local jobs. However, the potential impact on existing traders also needs careful consideration. Culverwell argued that WDC should encourage operators to come to the town centre; the extra trips and additional footfall should act as a catalyst for regeneration, creating opportunities for existing and new town centre businesses. However, there is perception that operators favour locations on the edge of the town centre such as the site on Heather Avenue currently occupied by the swimming pool. An out of town site would not encourage linked trips and might be seen as a direct competitive threat to local shops and services.

The Community Health Partnership (CHP) intends to follow through with the previously approved proposal to relocate the health centre from Bank Street to a site at the front of the Vale of Leven Hospital. The current facility is reaching the end of its practical life and the CHP, taking into account a range of practical and health related factors, consider the hospital site to be the best option. A survey carried for consultations on the Town Centre Action Plan showed that visits to the doctor/dentist were the biggest single reason why people visited the town centre, and the Culverwell retail study states that "...closure of the health centre will undoubtedly have an adverse effect...It is widely acknowledged that the medical centre attracts people into the town centre". Anxieties about the impact

on local businesses and residents of relocating the health centre were also a strong theme of the masterplan community consultations and as a result WDC wrote to the CHP to encourage the consideration of the Kippen Dairy site near the Smollett Fountain, which had been a potential relocation site previously. However, the NHS Glasgow and Clyde announced in August 2008 of the intention to locate the new medical centre within the grounds of the hospital site as part of the overall vision for the Vale of Leven Hospital.

From a Scottish, regional and local policy perspective it is clear that the aspiration should be to restore and consolidate the role of Alexandria town centre as, to quote the Action Plan, the **Heart of Vale**. In this scenario, Alexandria would be clearly established as the principal urban settlement in the Vale of Leven. The town would offer an attractive, high quality shopping centre together with a wide range of commercial, civic, community and cultural amenities. A new **urban design framework** would restore the distinctive character of the town; strengthen pedestrian and cycling links between the town centre and the riverside; reduce the impact and speed of traffic; and repair the urban fabric between the town and the railway. In order to claw back retail expenditure Alexandria will need a large quality supermarket, and it would clearly be beneficial to locate it in the town centre on a site with easy pedestrian access to other local shops and services. Similarly, a new healthcare facility on the Kippen Dairy site would have been an important source of town centre visits; indeed, a modern medical centre would generate additional visits.

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This scenario is consistent with the goals and aspirations of the Town Centre Action Plan, and it has informed the recommendations contained in Sections 3.4 and 3.5 below. However, we recognise that re-establishing Alexandria as the Heart of the Vale will be a challenge that can only be achieved if there is a robust and realistic **strategy**, a strong **policy** framework, effective **leadership** by the public sector and strong **partnership** with the private sector. Unless these conditions are in place there is a significant risk that aspirations for the town centre will not be met.

Conclusions

The introduction of a 35,000ft² food store in the town centre will create opportunities for new and existing businesses and act as a catalyst for regeneration.

3.3 Developing The Masterplan

In the proposals that follow we have acknowledged some of the **uncertainties and contingencies** surrounding the master plan. However, in the case of **Mitchell Way** the position is now clearer. WDC has now confirmed its commitment to redevelop Mitchell Way and the Gillespies team has confirmed that the site has the capacity to accommodate a **35,000 sq ft supermarket**, together with new housing. However, we have sketched 2 alternative configurations depending on whether Mitchell Way is cleared entirely or some sections are retained and enhanced.

Similarly we have described proposals for locations including:

- the **Kippen Dairy** site, where the residential development of the site is recommended
- **Alexander Street** where it is recommended that there is major intervention of existing residential units for new and upgraded housing
- the **railway site** where the recommended design principles can accommodate residential development.

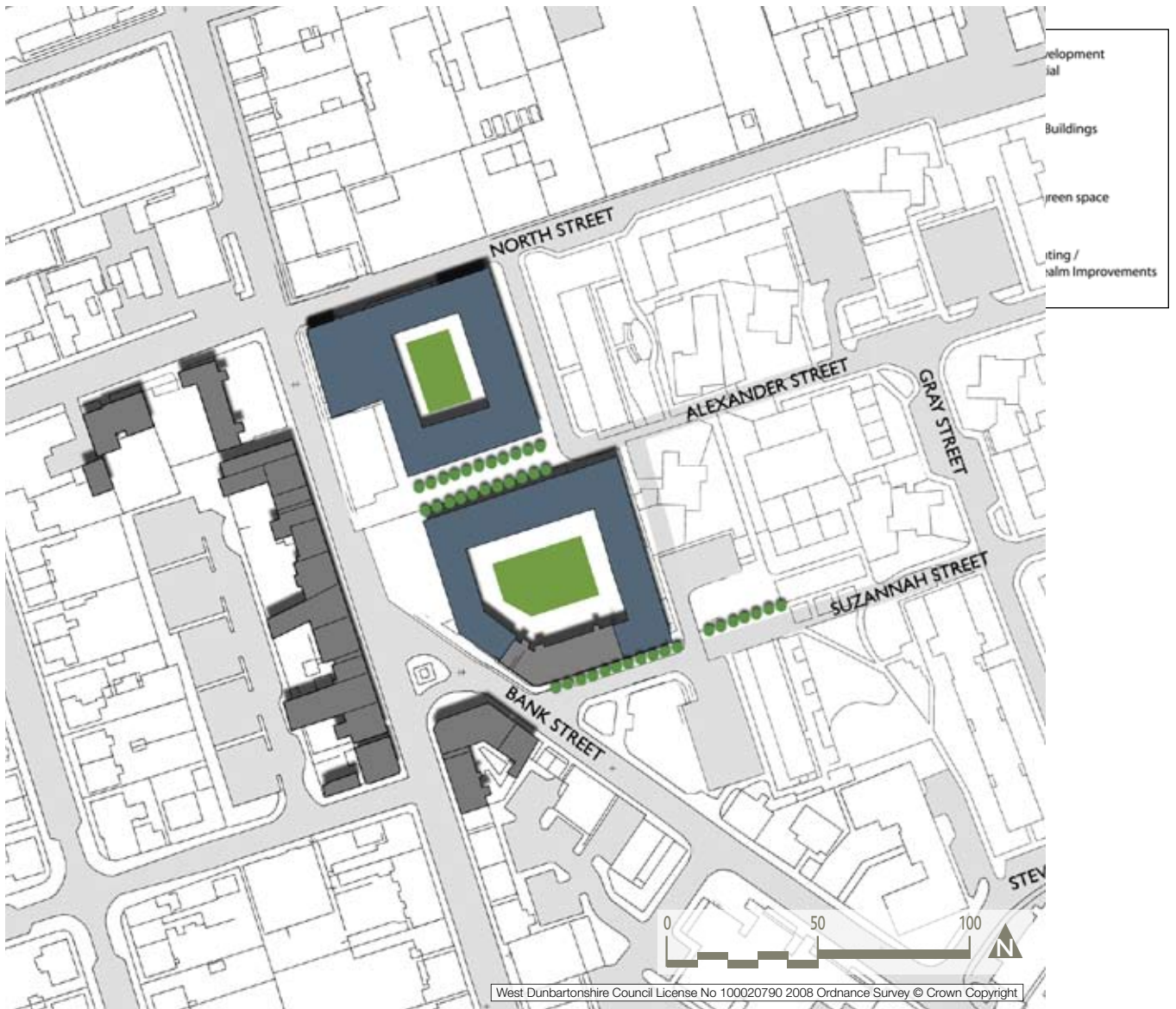


Key Intervention Sites

3.4 Key Interventions

The proposal involves the residential development of the site.

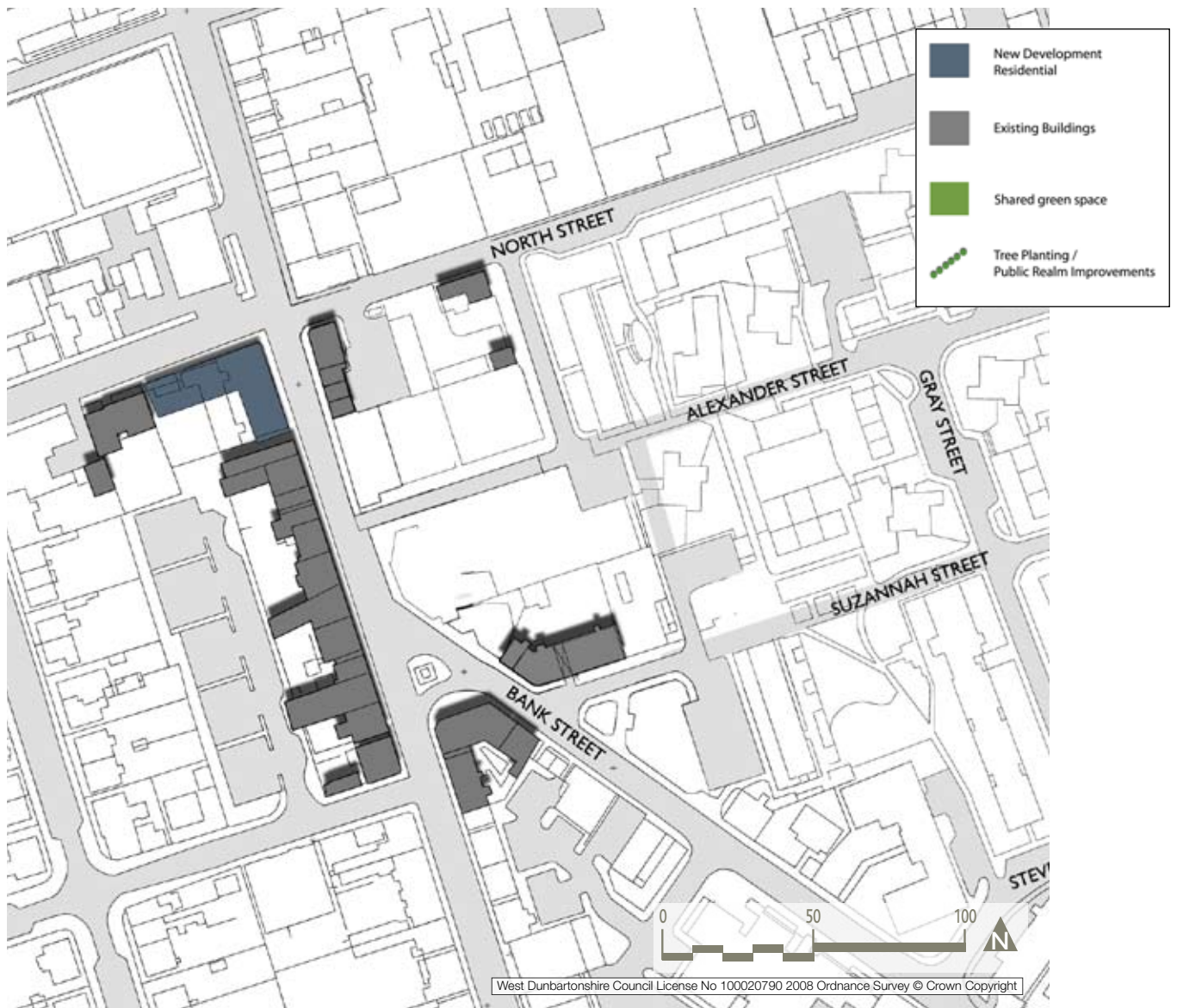
OPTION 1:	KIPPEN DAIRY SITE - OPTION 1
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This option assumes the relocation of the medical centre to the Vale of Leven Hospital and a viable alternative use will be required for the site
Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bring key town centre derelict sites into beneficial use to the local community Create a new civic space as a high quality setting for the Smollett Fountain (Grade A space – refer to public realm hierarchy outlined in section 3.5) Create defined building frontages to Main Street, (widened and set back to form a new 'place'), North Street, Alexander Street and Hill Street to redefine the street edges and create enclosure along this important corridor leading to the town centre Secure a high quality of design: Introduce 3 storey corner blocks to create a new northern gateway to the town centre and locate parking at the rear Complete the block bounded by Alexander Street/Main Street/Suzannah Street block with 3 storey residential apartments (NB: the block extends into Project 3 – The Alexander Street area). Retain Alexander Street as a pedestrian link to Main Street to maintain east-west links
Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The loss of the medical centre to an out of town centre location will result in a loss of retail and leisure expenditure and is likely to negatively affect the viability of the town centre



Kippen Dairy Site - Option 1

Project 2: Leven Cottage Site

PROPOSAL	LEVEN COTTAGE SITE: RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT
Description	Development of site to provide housing for rent
Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Create defined building frontage to Main Street▪ Create active frontage onto Main Street with entrances onto the street▪ Secure high quality design: introduce 3 storey corner block to create a new northern gateway to the town centre▪ Locate parking to the rear of properties
Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ WDC need to prepare a design brief for development at Leven Cottage



Project 3: Mitchell Way / Church Street Town Centre Core Options

The following items are included in both options:

Redevelopment components/demolitions:

- Removal of western side of gyratory system west of the railway line
- Removal of most pedestrian bridges - keeping the bridge to the east of Railway Street
- Extensive ground works required to reconnect land on either side of road

Retail:

- Development of a 35,000 sq ft supermarket
- New rear service yards accessed from Church Street

Residential:

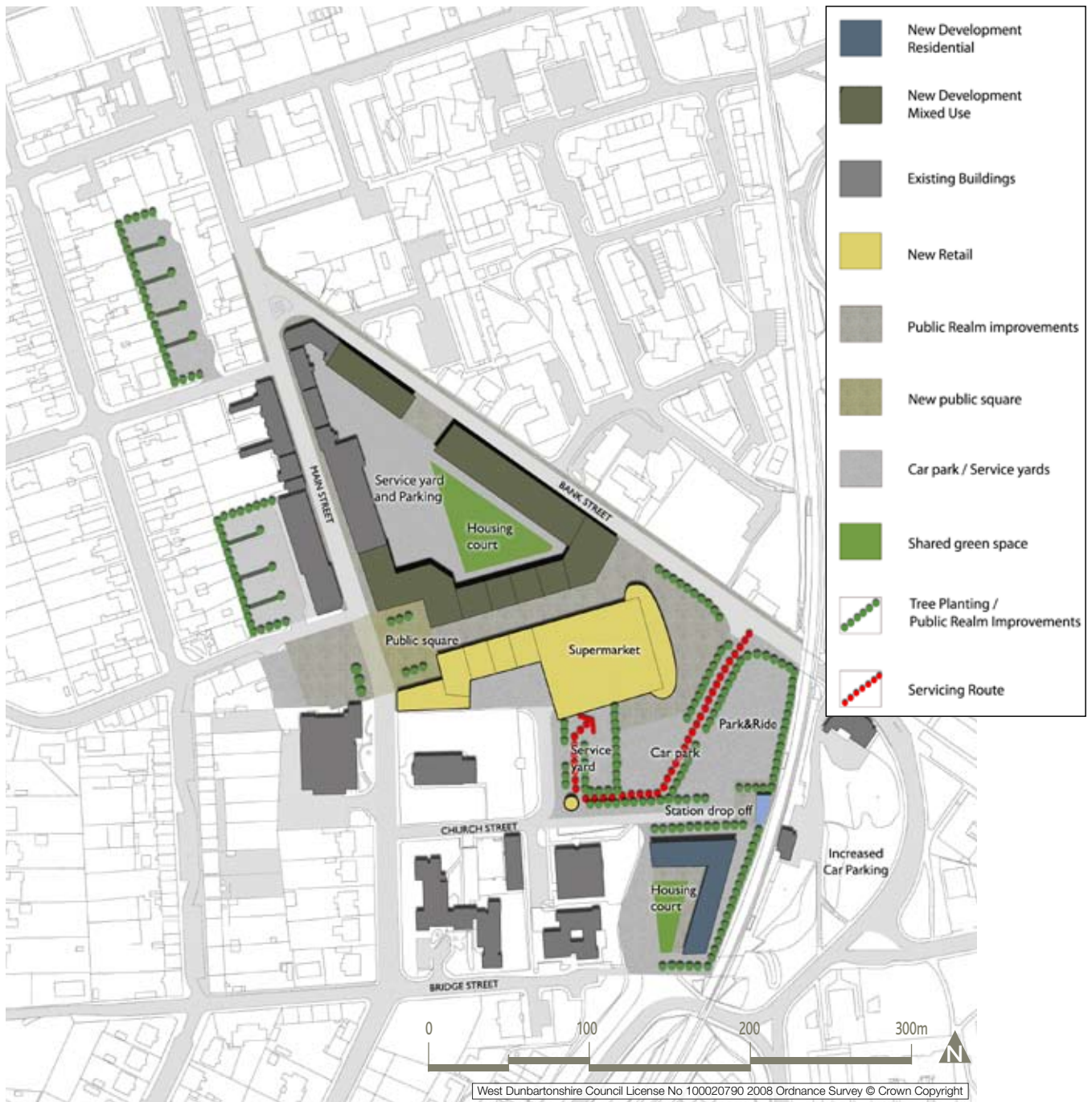
- New residential units between Church Street and Bridge Street and Railway station:
- Park and ride on western side of tracks to serve new station platform – approximately 70 spaces
- New boulevard link direct from station along Church Street to Main Street

The recent report by Research Resource established that the majority of residents of Mitchell Way were dissatisfied with both the external appearance and condition of their home. The first option presented recommends the removal of all Mitchell Way properties, while the 2nd option recommends removing the south side of Mitchell Way.

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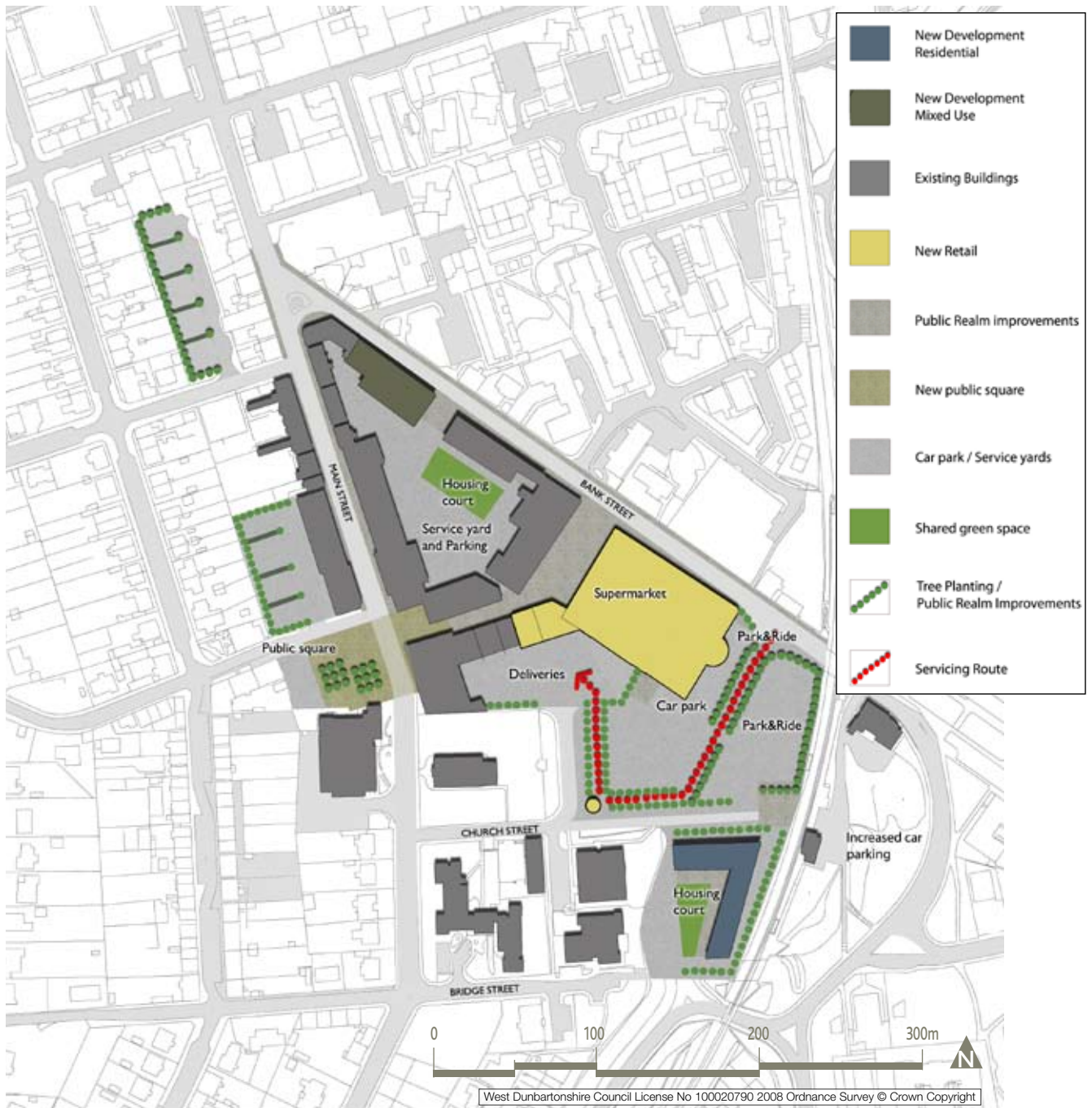


OPTION 1:	REMOVAL OF ALL OF MITCHELL WAY PROPERTIES – FLATS/COMMERCIAL/OFFICE AND GROUND FLOOR – PREFERRED OPTION
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Replacement of all of Mitchell Way, to provide a new mixed use development comprising new shop units, a high quality anchor supermarket and new residential properties for sale and rent ▪ Redevelopment of units at the north of Mitchell Way to create new office uses with commercial development on the ground floors. ▪ Removal of some of the '1970's' shops and flats fronting onto the eastern side of Main Street ▪ New public square extending across Main Street from Mitchell Way to Overton Street ▪ Substantial new residential quarter along to the north of Mitchell Way
Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Renew the heart of the town centre to recreate a positive impression ▪ Create one large development site extending from the northern end of Bank Street to the railway line to maximise the potential developable area ▪ Create a vibrant mix of uses ▪ New supermarket relates positively to Bank Street and physically connects to new retail units ▪ Provide quality housing for existing and future residents ▪ Provide fewer retail units at a size attractive to potential occupiers
Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Extensive remodelling of land and infrastructure to be further investigated and costed ▪ Effective engagement with existing residential tenants and owners required ▪ Stakeholder consultation meeting with local businesses to establish aspirations



Mitchell Way - Option 1

OPTION 2:	PART REMOVAL OF SOUTH SIDE OF MITCHELL WAY
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Removal of south side of Mitchell Way (except retail unit), to provide a new mixed use development comprising new shop units, a high quality anchor superstore and new residential properties for sale and rent ▪ New public square extending across Main Street from Mitchell Way to Overton Street ▪ Infill residential development on Bank Street north of Mitchell Way
Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Renew the heart of the town centre to recreate a positive impression ▪ Create large development site extending from Mitchell Way to the railway line ▪ Create a vibrant mix of uses ▪ New supermarket relates positively to Bank Street and physically connects to new retail units ▪ Provide quality housing for existing and future residents ▪ Provide fewer retail units at a size attractive to potential occupiers
Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Extensive remodelling of land and infrastructure to be further investigated and costed ▪ Effective engagement with existing residential tenants and owners required to minimise potential anxiety ▪ Stakeholder meeting with local businesses to establish aspirations



Mitchell Way - Option 2

Project 4: Alexander Street Area

PROPOSAL:	SIGNIFICANT REPLACEMENT OF EXISTING RESIDENTIAL UNITS AND UPGRADE LINKS TO THE RIVER LEVEN
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Upgraded residential quarter: demolition of selected 1970s residential properties and new residential development ▪ Removal of all eight blocks of flats built at an angle to the street grid, and replaced with new 2 or 3 storey residential units parallel to the grid layout ▪ Develop Bank Street/Suzannah Street junction to create new street frontage along western end of Suzannah Street ▪ Bank Street frontage: residential with the possibility of commercial/offices on ground floor ▪ Upgrade vehicular/pedestrian/cycle links to the River Leven path along Alexander Street and Suzannah Street
Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recovery of grid street pattern through selected demolition, new-build and reconnecting streets ▪ Improve quality of place by removing Creveul Court to re-open historical route to river and reinstate original street pattern ▪ Reinstate corner frontage development at Bank Street/Suzannah Street and new residential blocks on the north side of Suzannah Street with 3 or 4 storey development ▪ Improve linkages to the river: reinstate direct vehicular and pedestrian/cycle links along Suzannah Street and Alexander Street by reconnecting the 'middle' sections of blocked-off streets ▪ Reconnect Alexandria with the river, and improving the safety of the national cycle route ▪ Simplify the existing convoluted path network of these east-west routes and soften as treed boulevards ▪ Simplify the path network of key north-south routes: linking Suzannah Street with Steven Street, and North Street with Alexander Street ▪ Improve pedestrian safety by reducing the number of pedestrian only pathways to shared vehicle/pedestrian and cycle routes ▪ Reducing the amount of semi private space which nobody looks after, replacing with clearly defined public or private spaces as a key 'secure by design' principle
Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potential land assembly challenge regarding existing blocks of flats to be demolished ▪ WDC to establish physical condition of all Council/HA properties ▪ Effective engagement with existing residents a priority ▪ Link to surplus housing stock and housing regeneration priorities ▪ Difficulties in integrating Gray Street sheltered housing



Alexandra Street and Kippen Dairy Site

Project 5: Railway Street

PROPOSAL	RAILWAY STREET: RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT
Description	Residential development of linear site adjacent of the railway line and smaller site at the east end of Wilson Street
Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create sense of identity through the use of a variety of building styles for groups of houses such as courtyards and avenues ▪ Develop specific views and focal points within the development ▪ Layout to positively address Heather Street, North Street and Lennox Street frontages ▪ Provide gateway features at entrances to give a sense of welcome and identity ▪ Provide vehicular access that links Heather Avenue and North Street ▪ Building layout to take priority over roads and parking so that the road layout does not dominate the public realm ▪ Provide a centrally located play area and open space as a 'village green' and focal point ▪ Retention of direct pedestrian link from North Street across the footbridge to the other side of the railway
Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There are current Health and Safety restrictions on the south western part of this site due to the proximity of a local bonded warehouse.

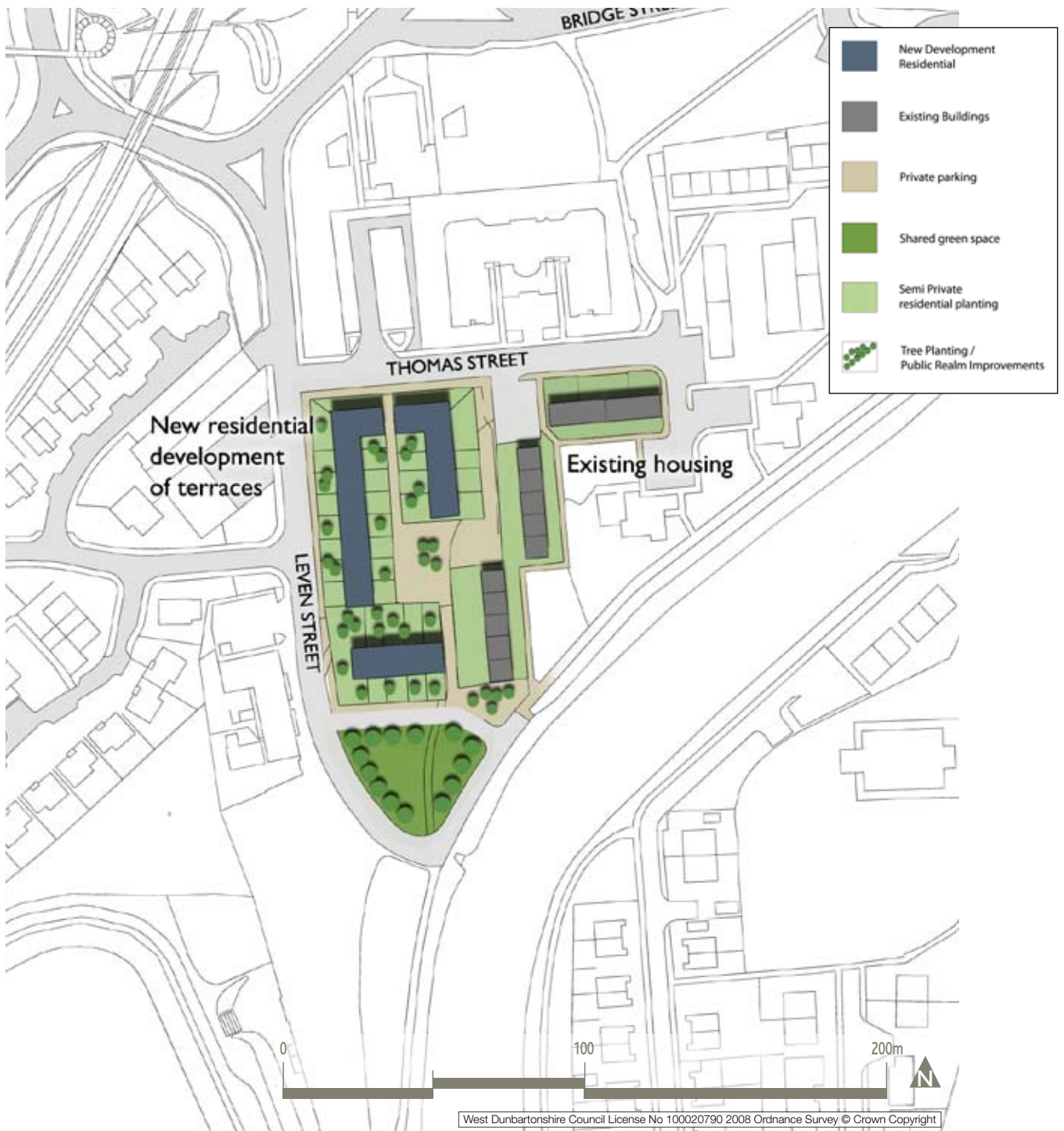
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Railway Street Option

Project 6: Leven Street site

PROPOSAL	LEVEN STREET SITE
Description	Development of site to provide housing for rent
Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create new residential block of terraced frontages to Leven Street, Thomas Street and the new open space on the riverfront ▪ Develop 2 storey terraces to fit with scale and layout of adjacent housing ▪ Incorporate open space to the rear and provide pedestrian access to rear of gardens of the properties
Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potential temporary or permanent provision of accommodation for future displaced residents of Mitchell Way ▪ Timescale – construction in advance of the demolition of Mitchell Way flats



Leven Street Option

3.5 Public Realm Projects

In response to the historic use of red sandstone in creating Alexandria's character, the colour red will form a unifying theme for paving materials (as outlined in the 2006 Land Use Consultants Streetscape Design Guide Study.⁷

A hierarchy of civic space and streetscape improvements relating to their importance to the image of the town comprises:

Grade A areas: Main Street, the Smollet Fountain area and new space at Overton Street/Main Street

Grade B areas: Bank Street and the Station site (west)

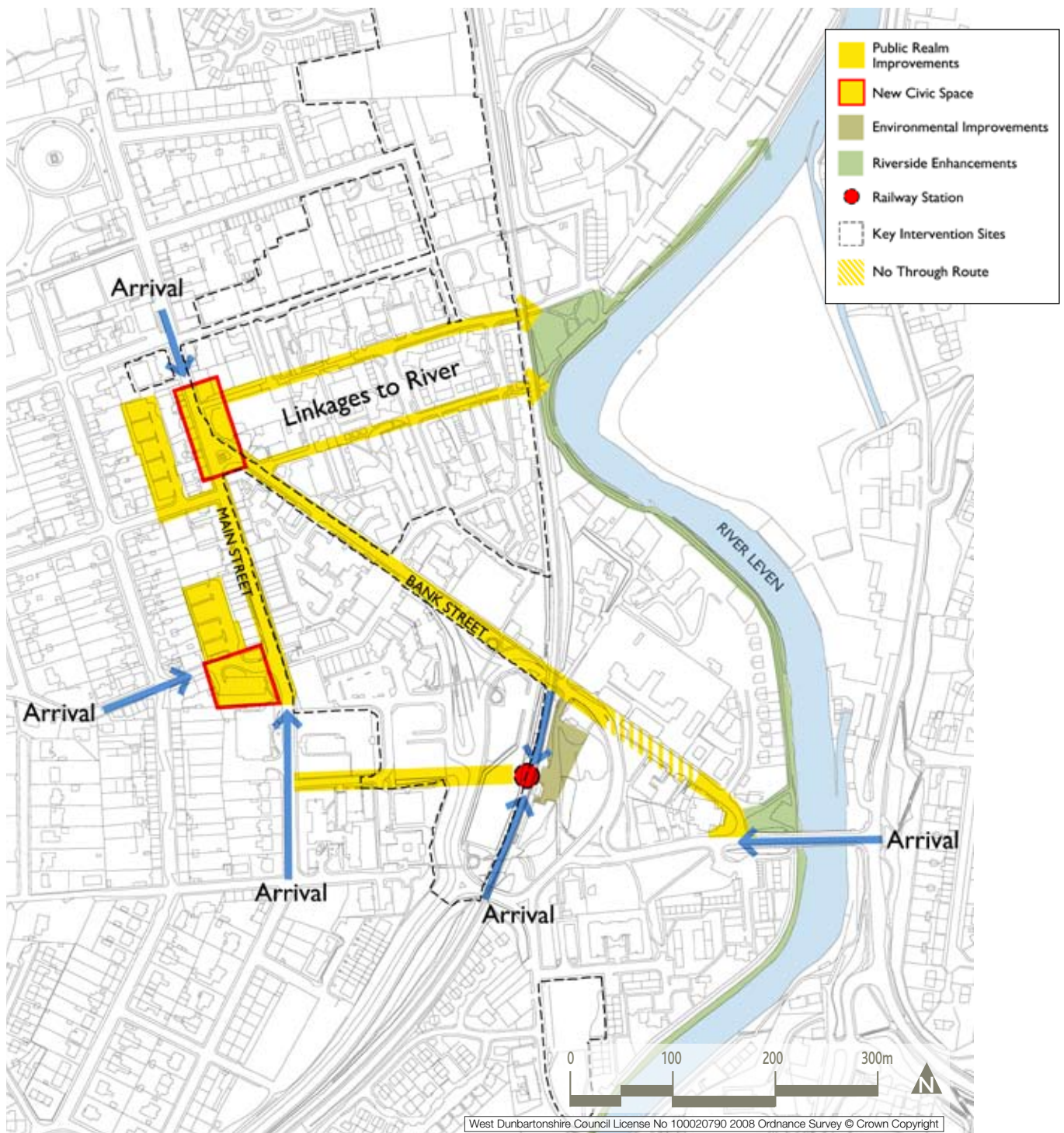
Grade C areas: Riverside

Grade D areas: Car Parks

Paving materials, lighting fittings, planting and furniture (seating, litter bins, bollards, cycle racks, tree grills and guards) will be selected in accordance with the streetscape hierarchy. The four step hierarchy relates to the materials hierarchy (Categories 1-4 respectively) in the 2006 Streetscape Design Guide.

Note that Mitchell Way is not included in the public realm improvements as it is now incorporated into the 3 'key interventions'.

⁷ Land Use Consultants, *Alexandria Heart of the Vale: Streetscape Design Guide (Report for West Dunbartonshire Council, December 2006)*.



Public Realm Improvements

Project 1: Main Street (including Overton Street space and rear car parks west of Main Street)

MAIN STREET (INCLUDING OVERTON STREET SPACE AND REAR CAR PARKS WEST OF MAIN STREET)	
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public realm improvements to emphasise the Main Street as Alexandria's principal shopping street and social hub Main Street: Grade A within streetscape hierarchy (LUC Category 1) Overton Street space: Grade A within streetscape hierarchy (LUC Category 2 entitled 'Mitchell Square') Car parks: Grade D within streetscape hierarchy (LUC Category 4)
Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Palette of materials and furniture to provide a strong unifying framework <p>Main Street</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traffic calm Main Street to discourage unnecessary through traffic, reduce vehicle speeds and provide a more comfortable experience for pedestrians. (See reference in Chapter 2 to emphasis Bank Street's future role as the key route for traffic round the south and east of the town centre, thereby shifting through traffic away from The Main Street) Improve the streetscape environment of the Street and Overton junction area as the key social hub of the town centre Narrow the carriageway to a uniform width, widen pavements and provide build-outs at key locations Create well designed public transport (bus) and taxi facilities Formalise on-street parking and introduce natural stone materials to soften the paving surface Removal of pedestrian guard rails where possible to ease pedestrian movement <p>Overton Street space</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Realign Overton Street at Main Street junction Create a new civic space Tree planting to provide enclosure <p>Car parks off Gilmore Street and Overton Street</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce impact of vehicles and hard surfaces by introducing hedges and light canopied trees and grass to redefine the spaces At north end of Overton Street car park enhance vennel link to Main Street
Guidelines and materials palette	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Main Street - materials palette as per LUC Report Car parks off Gilmore Street and Overton Street - materials palette as per LUC report Overton Street/Main Street environmental improvements – materials palette as per LUC Report

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Project 2: Bank Street and Smollett Fountain area

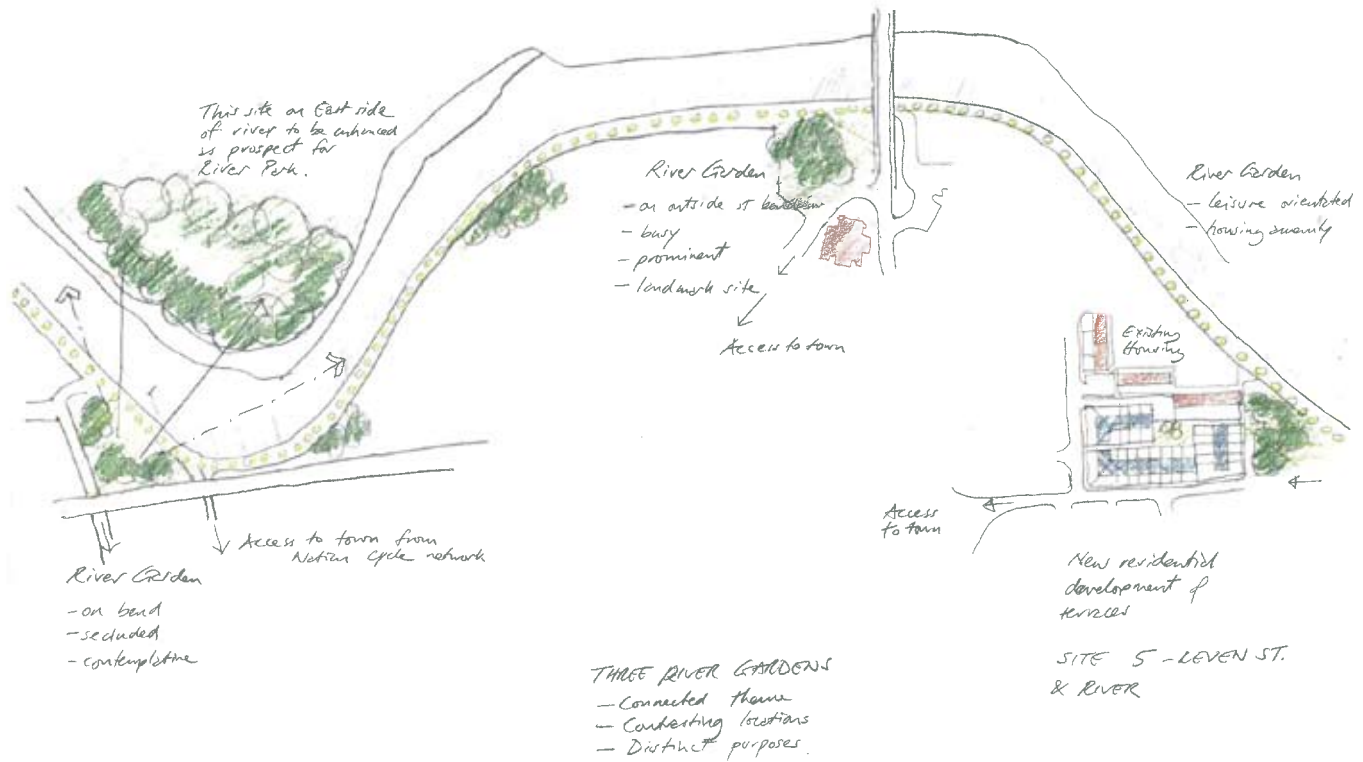
BANK STREET AND SMOLLETT FOUNTAIN AREA	
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-establish historical linear 'High Street' route from the north of the town centre to Bonhill Bridge Bank Street: Grade B within streetscape hierarchy (LUC Category 2) Smollett Fountain: Grade A within streetscape hierarchy (LUC Category 1)
Principles	<p>Bank Street</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconnect pedestrian links between the River Leven, the town centre core and to the Kippen Dairy site Provide a safe and convenient route through the town centre Improve accessibility for pedestrians Straighten out the curved section of the road to the north of the railway line to reinstate the historic alignment Soften the character of the street by introducing a landscape tree framework Establish a better setting to St Mary's primary school through boulevard street trees, upgraded paving and rationalising parking Encourage cyclists from the national cycle route to use Bank Street to access the town centre Emphasise the railway bridge as a gateway entry feature from the south <p>Smollett fountain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upgrade setting of the Smollett fountain by incorporating the fountain into a new civic space
Guidelines and materials palette	<p>Bank Street</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As per LUC Report (Bank Street North, Bank Street South and Schoolzone) <p>Smollett fountain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As per LUC Report
Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing services in vicinity of section of road to be straightened to be further investigated; this realignment would increase the potential developable area of the Mitchell Street/Church Street site Large HGVs would be restricted from turning left from Bank Street into Main Street

Project 3: Riverside

RIVERSIDE	
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upgrade existing open space and car park adjacent to India Street, land at southern end of Bank Street ('Riverside' in LUC Report) and the River Leven path that connects the two open spaces Grade B within streetscape hierarchy (LUC Category 4)
Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve access to the River Leven and provide an upgraded riverfront to encourage more frequent use of the River Leven path Enhancement of India Street space as the northern gateway into Alexandria town centre from the River Leven path Enhancement of the Bank Street/Bridge Street space as the southern gateway into Alexandria town centre from the River Leven path Advertise the existence of the path and links to it Provide signage and interpretation facilities at the India Street and Bridge Street spaces to encourage cyclists into the town centre
Guidelines and materials palette	<p>India Street space (as per 'Riverside' in LUC Report), plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Car park planting and surface improvements to vehicular link from Alexander Street Parking bays to be resurfaced with porphyry cubes Interpretation sign and signs highlighting route to town centre <p>Bridge Street space (as per 'Riverside' in LUC Report)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surface improvements to front of shop unit Removal of informal parking Interpretation sign and signs highlighting route to town centre <p>River Leven path</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Red/brown asphalt (or resin bound surfacing – Gillespies to advise) to reinforce the 'red' theme along the path Introduce amenity lighting, benches and litter bins (Category 2 street furniture as per LUC Report)

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Riverside Concept



Project 4: Station Site (east of tracks)

STATION SITE (EAST OF TRACKS)	
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Improve arrival space at entrance to station building▪ Incorporate additional park and ride spaces▪ Junction upgrading at Bank Street (signalised junction required?)▪ Bridge Street/B857 junction – redesign to accommodate 2 way traffic as per Colin Buchanan Report
Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Improve arrival experience at Station
Guidelines and materials palette	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Materials palette similar to Bank Street (LUC Category 2)

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