

1. INTRODUCTION

The Consultant Team

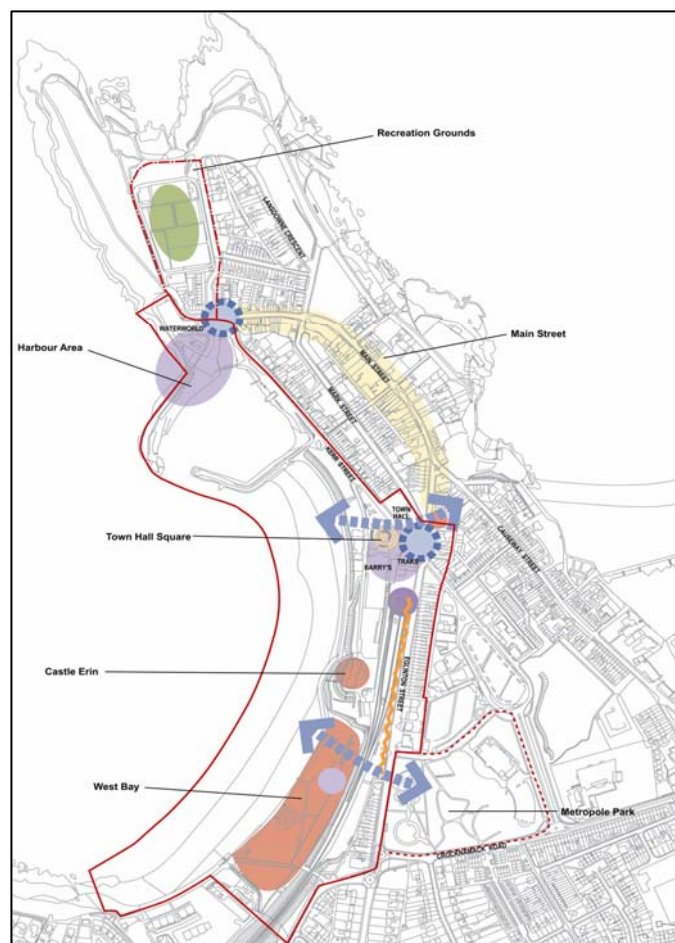
- 1.1 GVA Grimley, in association with CHL Consulting, Faber Maunsell and MDS Transmodal was appointed by the Portrush Regeneration Group in July 2006 to produce a masterplan for the “Western Peninsula” area of Portrush. This area was selected as a priority, as it offered the greatest opportunity “to change the face” of Portrush for both residents and potential visitors.
- 1.2 The Portrush Regeneration Group is made up of both public and private sector interests, including several local business leaders, Coleraine Chamber of Commerce, Coleraine Borough Council and the Department for Social Development. The Group was tasked to steer the development of the Portrush Regeneration Strategy.

The Study Area and Objectives

- 1.3 The boundary of the study area is shown by the solid red line on the adjacent plan and covers the Western Peninsula from the Harbour in the north to West Bay in the South. This area includes the train station, Town Hall Square, the Recreation Grounds and Metropole Park.

- 1.4 The core objectives of the Regeneration Strategy are to:

- Prepare an overall design concept to support the development of the Western Peninsula of Portrush;
- Prepare proposals for new public spaces and pedestrian linkages;
- Prepare proposals to encourage economic and physical integration with other significant areas within Portrush;



- Provide design guidance;
- Prepare development appraisals to establish whether market demand exists for the proposed uses and the extent to which development on the site is viable; and
- Prepare an implementation plan.

Policy Context

1.5 The future regeneration strategy for Portrush needs to be aligned with existing statutory policy to assist in the future delivery of key projects and encourage “buy in” from key decision-makers and potential investors.

1.6 The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) for Northern Ireland 2025 requires that 'uniqueness' and 'quality' in towns such as Portrush should be established.

1.7 Whilst Coleraine functions as the main hub providing retail, administrative and commercial services to its hinterland, the triangle formed by the towns of Portrush, Portstewart and Coleraine is widely recognised as a single urban entity. Within this urban triangle, each settlement offers the potential to develop a unique identity and role.



1.8 The RDS focuses on achieving maximum tourism benefit for the area (Portrush / Giant’s Causeway / North Coast Area – sports/leisure/family holiday, development of local ‘Tourism Gateways’ and to sustain and enhance seaside resorts). This opportunity is required to be reinforced further and is explicitly expressed in the Local Area Plan (Draft Northern Area Plan).

1.9 The Causeway Coast & Glens Tourism Masterplan (2004 - 2013) was launched in April 2004 by DETI. The implementation of the plan is a signature project for the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. The Masterplan recommends a major programme of Traditional Resort Enhancement to improve the appearance and function of resorts in relation to the needs of international visitors.

Socio - economic profile

1.10 The population of Portrush was 6,372 in 2001 which represents a 10% increase in population since the 1991 census. This is due in part to the increase in second home ownership and the expansion of the University of Ulster’s campus. The draft Northern Area Plan estimated that in 2001, 25% of all housing in Portrush was a second home.

- 1.11 The population in Portrush can peak at almost 20,000 during the summer months which is a major factor to be taken into account in preparing a regeneration strategy for the area.
- 1.12 An analysis of the industry and employment profile of the area confirms the relevance of tourism as the primary economic driver for the town. 11.6% are employed within the hotel and catering industry, a figure which is significantly higher than the 4.5% experienced in Northern Ireland as a whole.

Property Market

- 1.13 The residential market in Portrush is currently booming with an emphasis on quality apartments, dwellings and a significant interest in the hotel / hospitality sector. Retail provision within the town is considered to be adequate.

Tourism

- 1.14 The success of the Causeway Coast and Glen region provides major opportunities for the Borough of Coleraine to build upon in the future. The analysis shows that Portrush must adapt to changing market conditions to become a competitive destination. Domestic tourism dominates the market and the presence of the World Heritage Site provides the opportunity to further tap into 'International' market.
- 1.15 Significantly, Portrush must diversify its current accommodation offer as there is a lack of 4 star / 5 star quality hotel accommodation and while events have made a positive impact on lengthening the season, the development of conference facilities could lengthen it further.

Marina Harbour Development

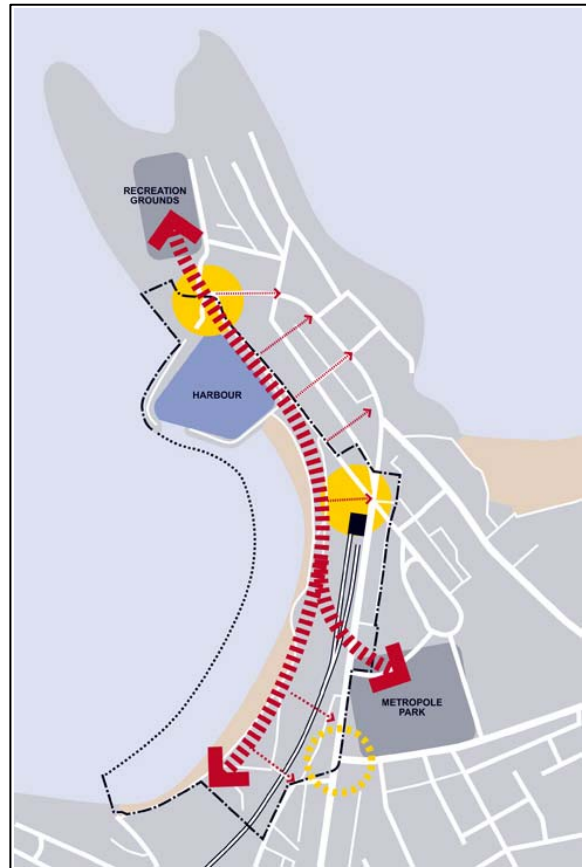
- 1.16 The analysis of the market and the demand for marinas concluded that there is an opportunity to grow this leisure sector in Portrush:
- 6-7% of the adult population in the UK participate in leisure boating - revenue source of almost £2.0 billion in 2005;
 - Growth of 8.5% between 2003 and 2004 – expected growth of 3.3% in 2005 in UK;
 - The BMF survey of 2003/2004 showed that demand for moorings in Northern Ireland will exceed supply by some 213 berths in 2008/2009;
 - A survey of local marinas (excluding Portrush) showed that demand (as measured by size of marina waiting lists) had grown from 131 to 185 between 2004 and 2006, an increase of some 40%;

- The waiting list for Portrush Harbour was estimated to be 67 in 2006. Therefore, the overall shortfall of berths amongst the marinas (Coleraine, Seaton's, Ballycastle, Glenarm and Portrush Harbour) was 252 boats. The surveys imply a substantial level of demand, which is growing and is as yet unsatisfied and demonstrates that further facilities are needed;
- If the existing shortfall could be accommodated in Portrush then the additional gain is likely to be in the region of £730,000 per year.

Urban Design Analysis

“Creating a circuit”

1.17 The adjacent diagram summarises how the area currently functions. Two development opportunities exist in the form of the **Recreation Grounds** to the north and **Metropole Park** to the south. The yellow circles represent hot spots of activity in the form of Barry’s and the harbour area, where additional regeneration potential exists. The dotted yellow circle identifies the key entrance to the Metropole Park area.



1.18 The activity flow between these areas needs to be strengthened further to encourage better connections to Main Street, Kerr Street and the promenade. An improved circuit from West Bay north along the promenade, to the harbour, the Recreation Grounds, Main Street and south to Metropole Park would achieve a full circuit. This circuit would offer a range of experiences on route.

1.19 Key design principles identified in the analysis are:

- Remove barriers and improve access;
- Improve perception and provide a higher quality public realm;
- The promenade, Harbour and Town Hall Square areas present a major opportunity to improve perceptions;
- Create a pedestrian gateway;
- Reduce the dominance of traffic at this area, to create a safer and more attractive environment for the users;
- The area forms a natural pedestrian gateway to the town that needs to be enhanced further.

Issues from the Initial Stakeholder/Public Consultation

1.20 From the outset of the study, a number of prominent issues emerged in discussions with stakeholders and the community. These included:

- Need to 'Think Big' – a small step change is not enough;
- The Harbour could be a 'Honey Pot' – with significant potential to promote Portrush as international tourist destination;
- Need to improve and update current tourist attractions and supporting infrastructure;
- Need to extend short tourist season;
- Need for 4* hotel with conferencing/spa facilities;
- Potential to relocate train station and open views to the sea;
- Opportunity to make better use of West Bay and attract more visitors;

Concepts, Options and the Selection of a Preferred Plan

1.21 A number of concept plans were prepared to illustrate alternative approaches to regenerate the area. These were subsequently refined and a preferred option was selected in consultation with the community and stakeholders. The preferred option incorporates proposals for the following key areas:

Northern Area, with key projects in the following areas:

- Recreation Grounds;
- Harbour;
- Town Hall Square;
- Kerr Street and Northern Promenade.

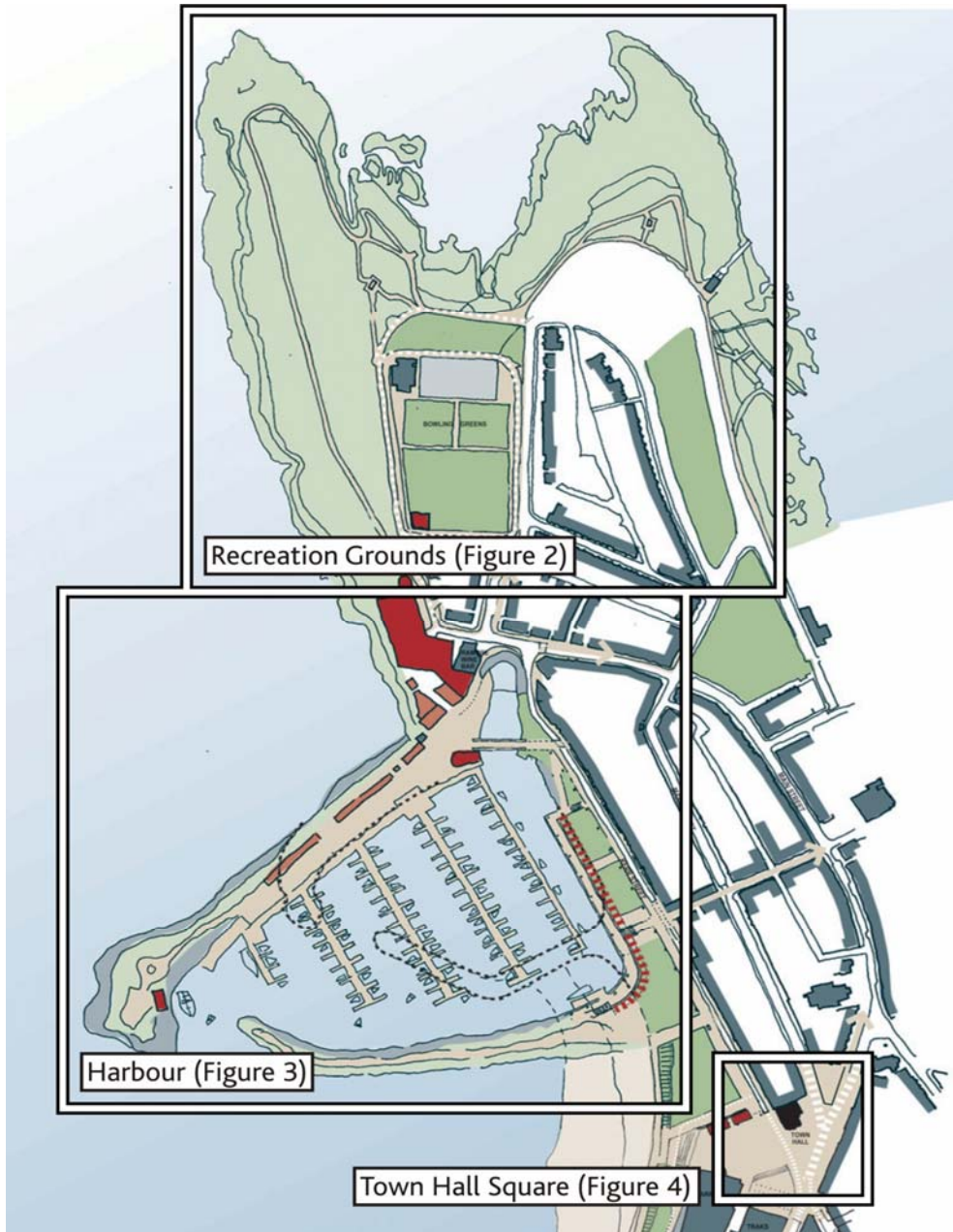
Southern Area with key projects in the following areas:

- Train Station;
- West Bay;
- Metropole Park.

1.22 The following paragraphs consider each project in turn.

1.23 Figure 1 illustrates the preferred option for the northern area.

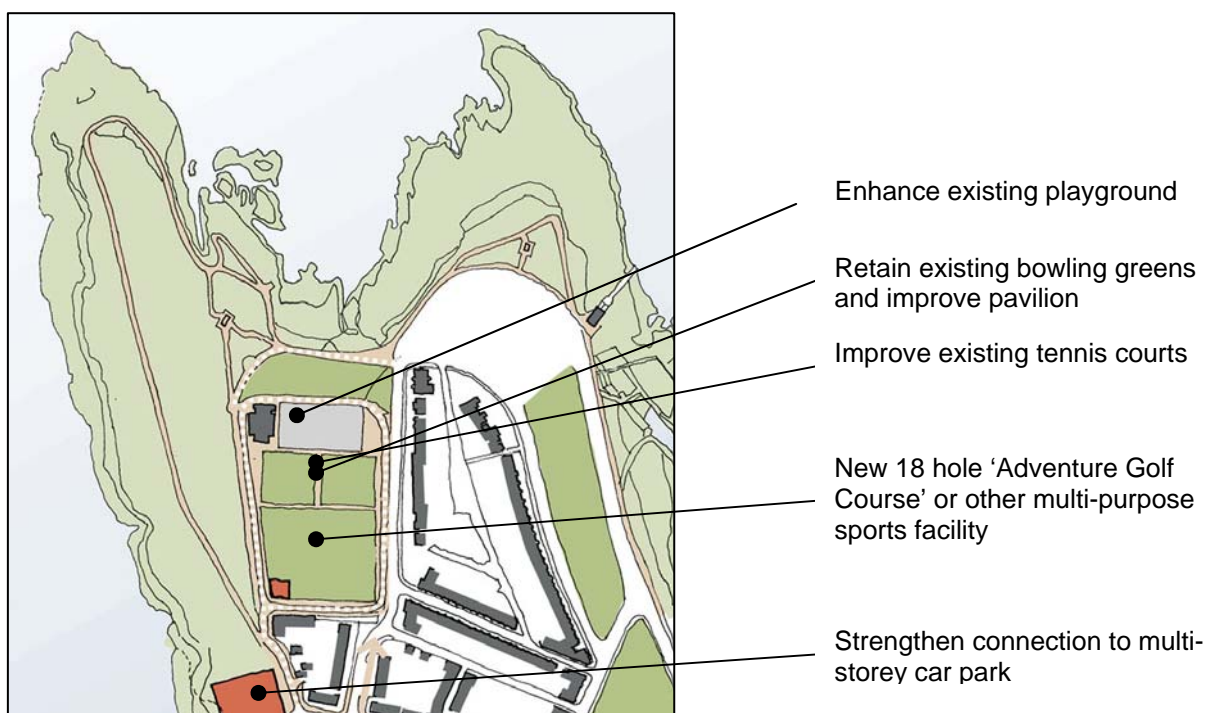
Figure 1 Preferred Option - Northern Area Context Plan



Recreation Grounds

- 1.24 The preferred option (Figure 2) proposes that the Recreation Grounds' existing provision is rationalised and upgraded, to allow for the introduction of a new recreation attraction to be located in the southern half of the grounds. The existing bowling green is retained, however the tennis courts are reduced by 50%, to release an area of land suitable for either an 18 hole themed crazy golf course with associated pavilion, or a multi-purpose sports facility.
- 1.25 To increase awareness and accessibility of this area, pedestrian links are provided between the multi-storey car park and the grounds.
- 1.26 The design of these improvements to the Recreation Grounds as a leisure amenity will require a sensitive approach to ensure that its natural surroundings and views out to the sea are safeguarded.

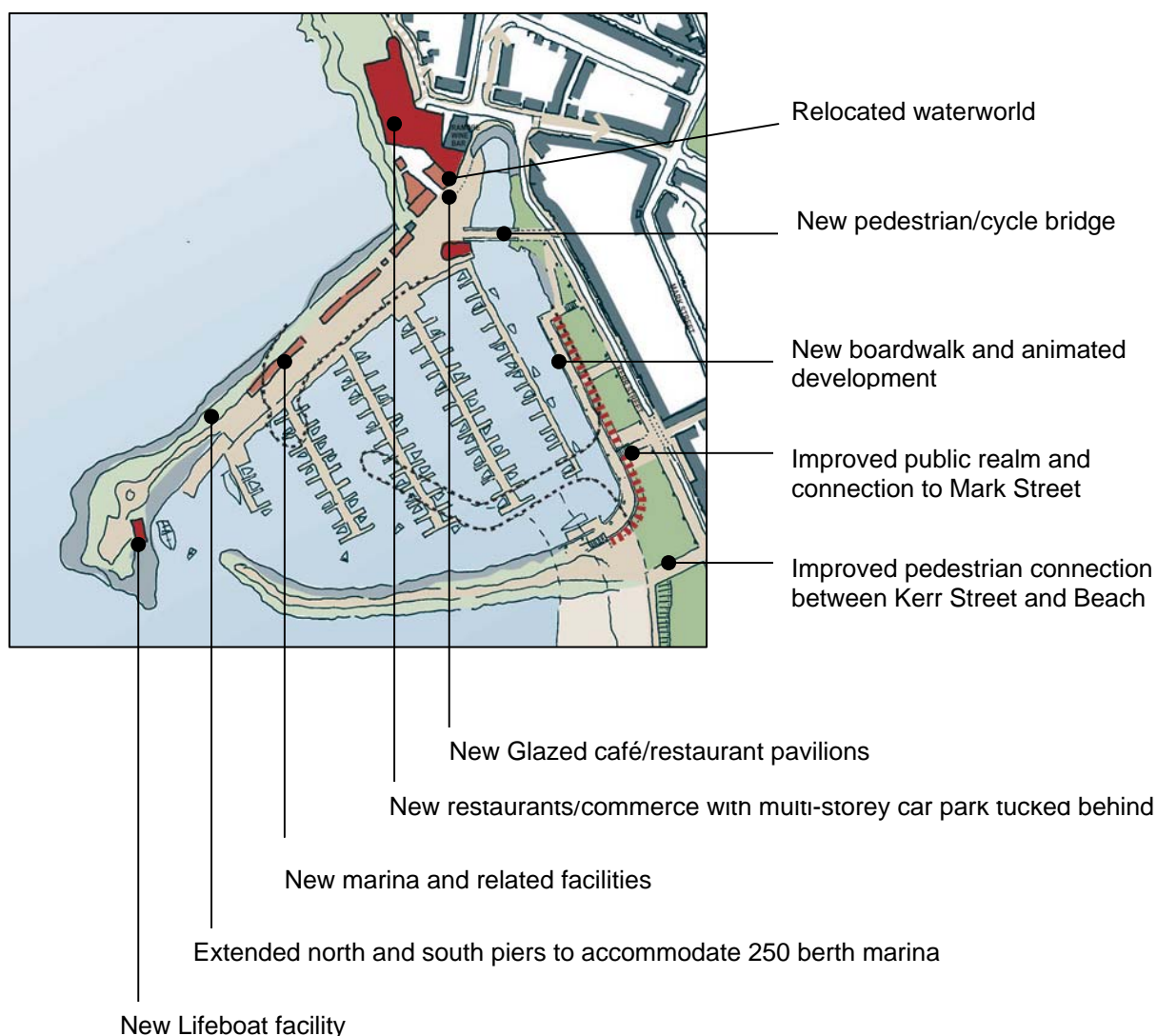
Figure 2 Recreation Grounds



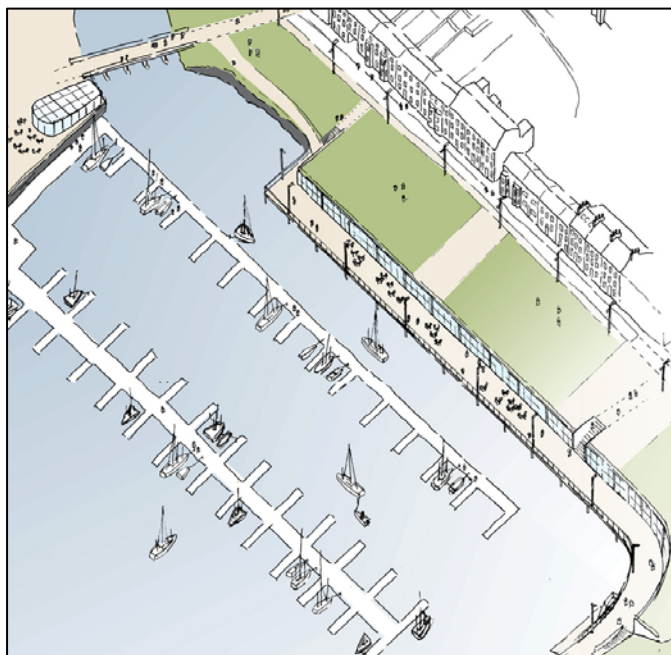
Harbour Area

1.27 The preferred option (Figure 3) extends the north and south piers of the existing harbour, which creates additional development land and facilitates a 250+ berth marina, with permanent pontoons. Restaurants and bars form part of a landmark mixed-use development, reinforcing existing uses and enlivening the area. This assumes that the existing Waterworld is relocated elsewhere in Portrush, releasing the rear part of the site for a multi-storey car park. The increased activity generated by the new development will be reinforced by a glazed pavilion building and outdoor eating areas which will encourage activity to spill onto a new high quality public open space.

Figure 3 Harbour



1.28 Other uses to be located along North Pier will include single-storey units for uses ancillary to the Marina, including a new lifeboat facility, changing and laundry facilities, storage and pumping, which are essential to attract boats yet limit possible damage if affected by flooding.



1.29 In addition, contemporary single-storey glazed buildings will be developed at water level with a boardwalk to further enrich vibrancy around the Harbour and along Kerr Street. This development is designed to utilise the topography of the land to ensure that buildings are set into the landscape and views and activity from Kerr Street are not restricted.

1.30 The quantity and type of development at the harbour is reflected in the proposal to provide an off street multi-storey car park (with car parking charges) utilising part of the existing Waterworld site. Introducing a multi-storey will allow removal of a significant amount of the current parking by the Harbour frontage to facilitate high quality open space with outdoor eating area etc. and the multi-storey car park will also help cater for the demand associated with the new development proposals.

1.31 The proposals also include the extension of the existing cycling network to the harbour area with a cycleway on the new bridge. Good quality cycle parking should also be provided at this location.

Town Hall Square

1.32 A new civic space is created to reinforce this area as a pedestrian gateway and enhance the setting of the Town Hall. It assumes that the existing Kiddieland and adjacent property are removed and possibly relocated to open up views and access to the sea. New pavilion buildings, in conjunction with steps, a grid of lighting columns and paving, assist in defining the space and reinforce views between the Town Hall and the sea (Figure 4) over page.

1.33 In addition, the Go-Kart area is to be removed and replaced by water fountains to create visual interest. The Tourist Information Centre is to be located in one of the pavilion buildings within the square.

1.34 High quality robust paving is used to articulate the space and reinforce its importance. By introducing a shared surface from this area across Kerr Street, to include the Town Hall and part of Main Street, pedestrian priority is achieved and the present intersection of roads is read as an extension to the Square.

1.35 There are a number of transportation issues associated with Town Hall Square. These are summarised as follows:

- There are strong pedestrian linkages although desire lines are not served directly;
- A certain amount of pedestrian non compliance occurs during the holiday period;
- Current layout exacerbates delays and impacts on junction operation.

1.36 In order to promote pedestrian continuity and priority, pavement widths and crossing opportunities should be improved while dropped kerbs and tactile paving should be provided at all side road locations.

1.37 This option would provide a more enhanced pedestrian environment and a more straightforward traffic layout without the need to ban the right turning movement into Kerr Street and allows for the introduction of additional pedestrian facilities at Dunluce Avenue and Eglinton Street South. Good quality cycle parking should also be provided at this location.

Kerr Street and Northern Promenade

1.38 In conjunction with the new activity created by the boardwalk and associated development, improved pedestrian connection between Main Street, Kerr Street and the beach is created.



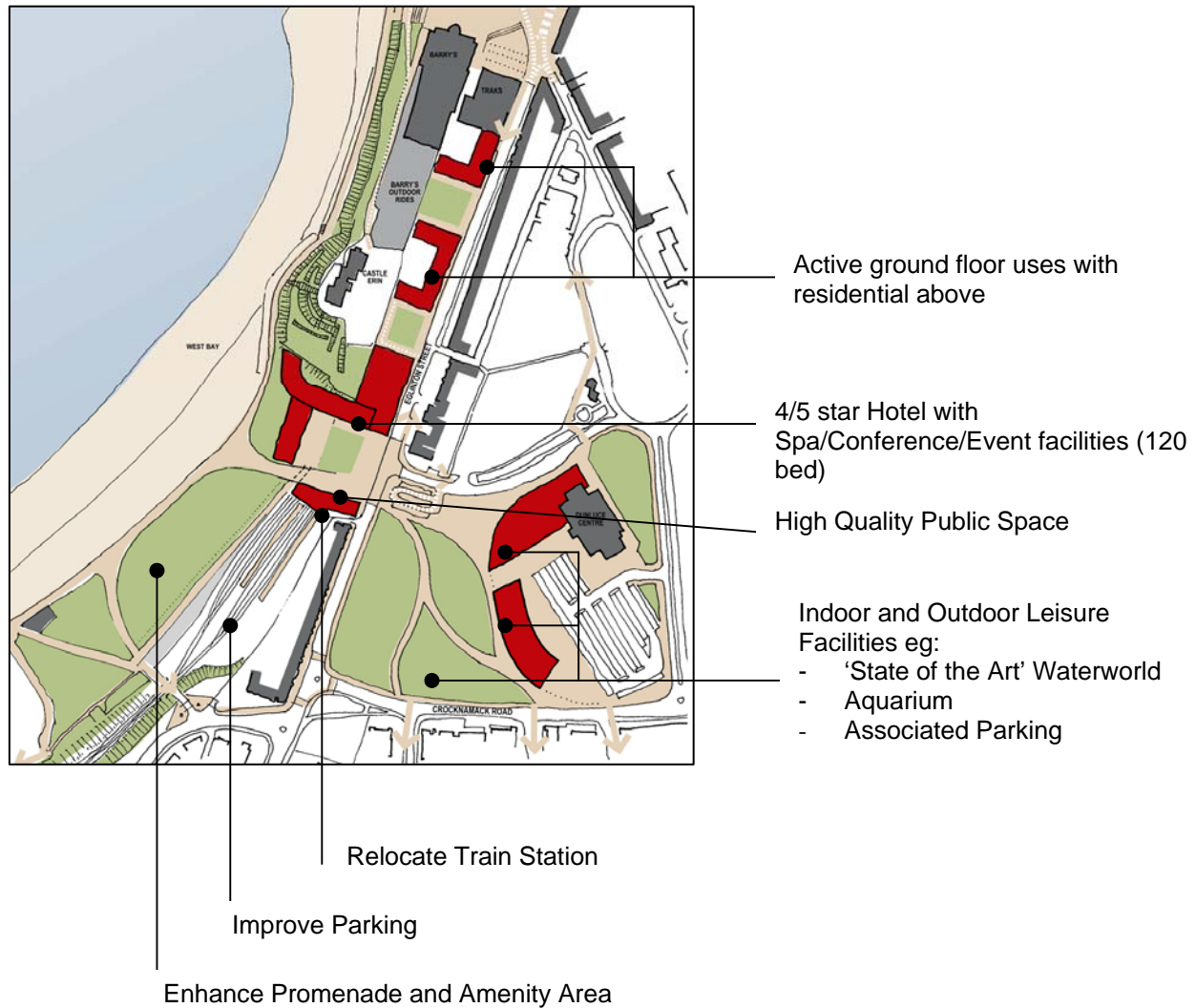
There is the potential to integrate an all-weather escalator parallel to the existing steps to increase accessibility, between Kerr Street and Mark Street.

- 1.39 Public realm improvements, including widening of footways and incorporation of crossing points to increase ease of pedestrian movement will strengthen the connection between the new Town Hall Square and the harbour.
- 1.40 It is envisaged that an element of on-street parking and service bays would be provided in an integrated manner. Similarly street lighting, seating, cycle parking and other street furniture must be carefully designed and located so as to avoid visual clutter.

Southern Area - Train Station/West Bay/Metropole Park

- 1.41 The Preferred Option (Figure 4) makes best use of the natural assets and ensures the greatest distribution of regeneration benefits throughout the resort. This provides a leisure focus to be established at the Metropole Park area.
- 1.42 The train station is relocated to the existing bus park area opposite Metropole Park. This creates a new integrated public transport facility and civic space, whilst releasing its previous site to accommodate public spaces and new commercial and residential development along Eglinton Street. The proposed development will create active street frontage and provide natural surveillance to avoid anti-social behaviour, whilst visually screening the rear of Barry's and Traks.

Figure 4 Southern Area - Train Station / West Bay / Metropole Park



- 1.43 A split-level 4 / 5 star quality hotel, with an integrated spa, conference / exhibition facility and car park, is proposed south of Castle Erin. It fronts onto a new public square and is orientated to maximise sea views. The square extends across Eglinton Street creating a positive link between the Metropole Park and the seafront, whilst also providing a quality arrival space from the relocated station.
- 1.44 Aside from the hotel, there is no new development on West Bay. However the existing green open spaces are upgraded with lighting, landscaping, seating and cycle facilities to increase use and create a higher quality interface with the seafront.
- 1.45 The existing parking at West Bay has been reconfigured to accommodate the proposal to pull back the train station to a more southerly location.
- 1.46 Within the Metropole proposals there is parking provision with improvement to and extension of the existing car park, and we have assumed that these are stand-alone and adequate for the purposes of their development. Good quality cycle parking should also be provided at this location.

Development Appraisal of Preferred Option

- 1.47 A development appraisal was conducted on the preferred option. This process included:
- Quantification of the proposed land uses;
 - Establishment of the development value of the proposed option, distinguishing public and private outputs; and
 - Establishment of construction costs, associated professional fees, assumptions for developer profit where applicable.
- 1.48 The analysis provided an indication of the scale of commitment required to deliver regeneration projects in these areas. The results show that there is a requirement for external funding to secure the delivery of the Harbour, Public Realm and leisure offer. The total cost of delivery of the preferred option is likely to be in the region of £80 million to be raised from a range of both public and private sources. From an initial search of existing funding sources both the Heritage Lottery Fund, and the European funding programmes of Peace III and the Interreg will need to be explored in more detail.

Programme for the delivery of Projects

- 1.49 It is proposed that the preferred option will be phased over a short - medium timescale with a number of quick wins. The following is an indication of how the regeneration strategy could be phased.
- First stage - public realm, recreation grounds (early win in council ownership and cost effective);
 - Second stage – harbour and
 - Third stage - 4/5 star hotel, spa and conference facility adjacent to Castle Erin. Leisure at Metropole could be delivered simultaneously.
- 1.50 The timing associated with the key projects should have a degree of flexibility to allow for full participation with the private sector. Private sector finance is needed to deliver the strategy for regeneration which will be directly related to maximising the economic and regeneration benefit to the Portrush area. This will require a long term commitment and considerable expertise on the part of CBC and the PRG to manage the delivery of key projects with private sector partners.

Delivery Strategy

- 1.51 The private sector is already demonstrating its confidence and willingness to invest. Recent expressions of interest in the Metropole Park, the sale of Castle Erin and significant investment and transactions in Lower Main Street, Causeway Street and Eglinton Street are evidence.
- 1.52 The delivery options open to the Council broadly fall into three categories:
- A staged or simultaneous marketing of the sites on an individual basis;
 - The packaging of sites, so that one or more project can be undertaken by the development partner;
 - The simultaneous marketing of the sites as a portfolio with a view to selecting a number of developer partners to co-ordinate and implement the development on a comprehensive basis.
- 1.53 The first two options are preferred as this will ensure that the momentum and interest that has been built up in Portrush in delivering these regeneration projects can be maintained.

- 1.54 The Northern Area Draft Local Plan imposes several policy restrictions on key development sites in the town. It is essential that this be reviewed in the context of the overall regeneration strategy for the West Bay Peninsula area.

Next Steps

- 1.55 To date the Portrush Regeneration Strategy Group has driven the strategy forward. It is critical that the group maintains the momentum and steers the next stages of the project forward. The regeneration strategy is the framework for maximising Portrush's regeneration potential. Given the commitment to prepare a regeneration strategy, which has subsequently achieved significant "buy-in" by the local community and key stakeholders, this is a solid foundation upon which to deliver.
- 1.56 The strategy is one that integrates all potential development sites in a way to achieve maximum impact. If each element is broken down and assessed individually, from a land-use point of view this would undermine the combined impact of the change required.
- 1.57 If we want to change the "face of Portrush", policy frameworks need to be flexible to accommodate market dynamics to capture the potential investment, otherwise it will go elsewhere. This should be done in a way that gives certainty to the investors in terms of a clear development framework "The Regeneration Strategy". We now have the blueprint for revitalising Portrush.