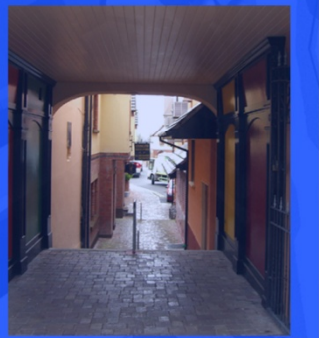
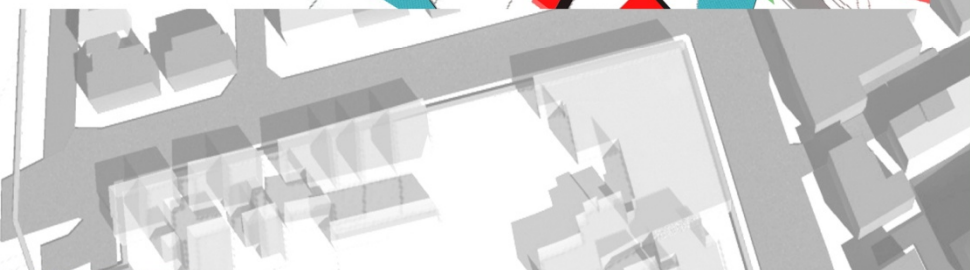


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# VIRGINIA MASTERPLAN AREA 1



## Pre-Amble.

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This study has been prepared at the request of Cavan County Council by David McCormack & Co., Architects, Ltd.

The purpose of the study is to examine the existing built and natural environment in Virginia in order to protect the existing and to set up a suitable framework for the possible future sustainable development of the town.



## Background.

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Virginia is a picturesque town located on the N3 on the shores of Lough Ramor, in the South-East of the County.

It is a fine example of a plantation town founded in the reign of King James I. The character of the village owes much to its early planned beginnings.

The wide main street, which is largely intact, forms a suitable vista to the C of I Church at the Western end of the town.

The streetscape is made up of many fine traditional 2 and 3 storey buildings. The Marquis of Headford built a hunting lodge on the lakeshore in the early nineteenth century. He also built several semi-detached cottages in the picturesque/rustic style located throughout the town centre. These now form an important and integral part of the streetscape of the village centre and a link to Virginia's historic and cultural heritage.



## Aim of Study

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Virginia has a special quality because of its planned form and the wealth of beauty it possesses in the landscape immediately surrounding the town centre.

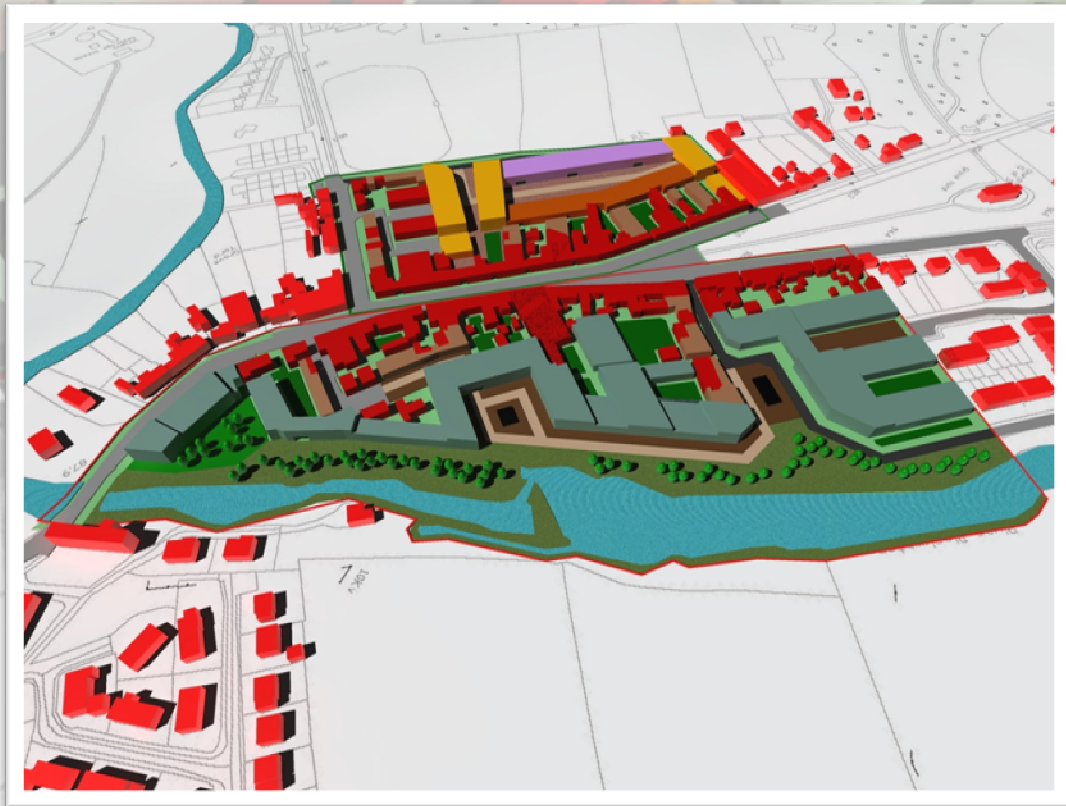
The aim of this report is both to record the existing built and natural environment of the town with photographs and drawings, and also to put in place a set of guidelines which would form the basis of future development of the town. It is hoped that both of these aims would act as a catalyst for proper development which respects and enhances the existing built and natural environment.

The ideal is to achieve a new quality of place through understanding and protection of the heritage, whilst welcoming the current process which is the creation of a renewed and vibrant town centre.

## Plan Area 1

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The plan area is an integral part of the centre of Virginia. It is largely located 'behind' the Main Street, which forms its Southern boundary. It is bounded to the North by the River Blackwater. It extends to a point at the bridge on the Eastern Side and is bounded to the West by the recently constructed 'River Crescent' housing development.



The plan area is mainly made up of 'back land' type areas comprising of back gardens, yards, etc. This area is delineated by a broken red line on drawing no. 07011/01, enclosed with this document.

## Existing Architecture



The Northern side of the Main Street is mainly made up of 2 storey Georgian structures of traditional form. They typically have slated pitched roofs, are finished in plaster, with stone or plaster quoins. Windows (where they haven't been replaced) are of timber sliding sash and all have a strong vertical emphasis. Shop fronts have a simple traditional form and are mostly in timber. The streetscape is well preserved and largely intact. It is punctuated by the taller 2 storey courthouse and the large 3 storey hotel premises, both of which are very fine additions to the streetscape.



## Existing Landscape



The majority of the study area comprises of 'back land' areas to the 'rear' of the Main Street.

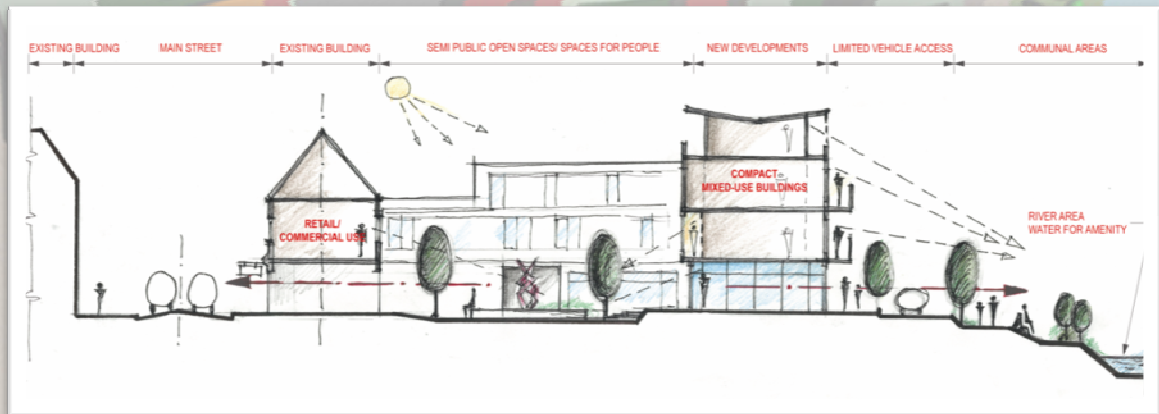
These typically rise gradually from street level before eventually falling again to the level of the River Blackwater to the North. This river is very picturesque and is both calm and tranquil where it has been weired and also flowing and audible where it flows freely. There are several mature trees along both banks of the river which form an important backdrop to the Main Street.



## Proposals Plan Area 1

The main proposals for Plan Area 1 are as follows:

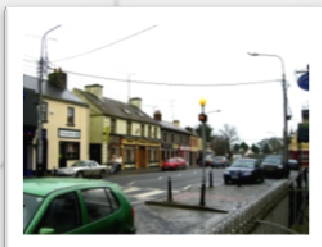
- To open up 'back land' areas for suitable Town Centre use and thus bring more activity and vitality to the Town Centre.



Virginia, because of the river to the North and due to its early beginnings as a 'planned' plantation town, is linear in nature. As a result, if development was ever to be permitted in an unplanned fashion, the result would invariably be that of urban sprawl. Therefore the further development of the town core is of the utmost importance. Having carried out this study of the town, it is evident that there are very large areas of land to the 'rear' of the main street which are either underused or not used at all. These areas provide the key to providing suitable development land which is ideally located for towncentre uses (mixed residential/commercial/retail). The development of these areas would serve to concentrate development in the core of the town where it is best suited.

The reinforcement and development of the town centre would not only bring additional activity to the core but would enhance and improve the trade and vitality of existing retail, commercial and social activities in the town. The proposals presented later in this report suggest ways in which this can be achieved.

- To protect the existing vernacular which make up the exceptional streetscape of Virginia.



Virginia has quite an unspoilt streetscape which is becoming rarer throughout rural Ireland. Every reasonable measure should be taken to ensure that the existing

architectural fabric is protected and that any future development should enhance and complement the existing urban fabric. Where possible existing building should be restored and renovated, in particular the facades. Where new development takes place, it should respect existing building lines, heights, proportions, plot widths, materials etc. While it is necessary to respect existing structures, new structures need not 'mimic' them. This can result in pastiche imitations which never quite replicate the older and original vernacular. New structures can be constructed as interpretations of the original and existing structures. New materials and forms can contrast and compliment their traditional neighbours.



- To set a standard for new developments

New buildings should be 'of their time' and should be constructed employing best practice and using the technology and materials which are contemporaneous with the time of their construction. Both can exist side by side and this harmony will result in a varied, vibrant and contemporary streetscape.

- To create a new streetscape which addresses the river.

One of the main assets or features that Virginia possesses is its natural landscape. This unfortunately is one of its best kept secrets as far as the passing commuter or short stay visitor is concerned.

The lake is only visible on the Eastern approach to the town or from the end of New Street. The river also is only visible to the majority of visitors to the town, from the bridge at the Eastern end of the Main Street.

One of the main proposals of this study is to open up the river to pedestrians, cyclists, walkers, shoppers and patrons of cafes, restaurants, etc. There is a unique opportunity here to create an exciting and vibrant addition to the town which has the natural beauty of the river as a backdrop. These guidelines should be established in order to have organised and planned development of the riverbank elevations/streetscape.

This streetscape should respect the plot widths of the Main Street. Buildings should be 3/4 storeys in heights in order to provide a strong architectural backdrop to the river. Buildings

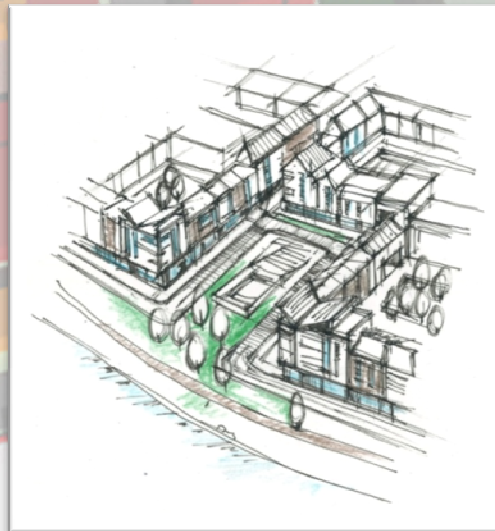


should generally be of a modern design and should employ materials which can both compliment and contrast those of the Main Street.

The opportunity should also be taken to create public spaces which open up views of the river to be enjoyed by the general public. Suitable and convenient connections to the Main Street for both pedestrians and motorists are essential to the commercial and everyday success of this new area.

- To create new urban spaces which address the river and interact with the Main Street.

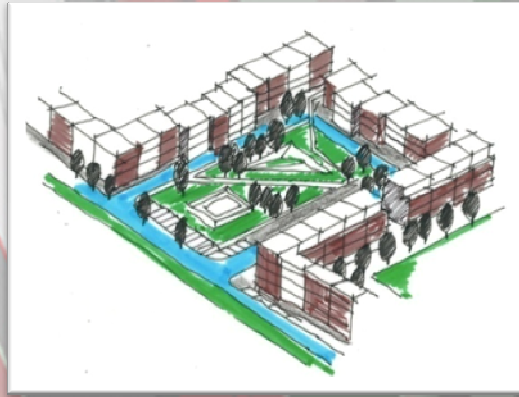
We have also indicated 2 number possible locations for public spaces which open up views of the river. These proposed spaces provide an opportunity for new commercial activity to take place with the river as a backdrop. These spaces would ideally be suited for retail, restaurant and commercial uses on the ground floors. First floors would be suitable for commercial/office use or for residential. Second and Third floors would have spectacular views over the river and surrounding landscape and would be ideally suited for residential use. It is suggested that these 2 urban squares be hard landscaped using high quality materials such as natural stone.



Different areas/uses (footpaths, roads, public squares, pedestrian streets, etc.) should be clearly defined with changes of materials or colours. It is also felt that natural landscaping and vegetation should be kept to a minimum in these areas. High quality street furniture (benches, bins, bollards, lighting etc.) only should be used

Grave  
Yard

87.5



- To create links, both vehicular and pedestrian, to the MainStreet.

As previously stated suitable and convenient pedestrian and vehicular links are essential for the success of any new developments. Adequate vehicular traffic is necessary for servicing of the shops offices, apartments, etc.



Pedestrian links are essential in order to provide easy and convenient access to the Main Street. These links are of paramount importance in order to integrate the retail, commercial, residential and social activities of the existing urban fabric with any new development. It is proposed to link this area with a new road at the side of the existing courthouse. This road is indicated on drawing no. 07-011/01 and also shows a link to the 'River Crescent' housing scheme, which would help integrate the residents of this scheme more with the town centre. This road also extends Eastwards to the second urban space and should provide limited vehicular access only to service developments along the river front. This roadway terminates at this square as the levels change dramatically East of this proposed square. Parking for new developments should be provided underground.



In addition to the major links to the Main Street, several possible pedestrian routes are indicated which make use of existing archways on the Main Street.



These pedestrian routes should be developed as regularly as possible and should be well lit with high quality light fittings and should be surfaced with high quality natural stone materials. Also indicated on this plan is a pedestrian footbridge which would link both the residents of existing and future housing developments on the Northern side of the riverbank to the town centre.

- To create a riverside walk which connects with the existing pedestrian routes in the town.



Another unique opportunity that has presented itself is that of creating a Riverside walkway/linear park along the banks of the Blackwater. This proposed walkway would extend from the bridge at the Eastern end of the town to the riverbank (which has already been largely developed) at the 'River Crescent' housing scheme on the Western side of the town.



This walkway would also connect to housing on the Northern side of the river via the proposed pedestrian bridge. The development of this linear park with its soft landscaping would serve to both contrast and compliment the proposed built streetscape with its hard landscaping, paths and roadways. While the actual pathway through this park should be paved and should be user friendly for trolleys, buggies, wheelchairs etc. The majority of the landscaping should be soft and should integrate seamlessly with the natural vegetation of the riverbank. The existing trees and vegetation should be preserved where possible. The natural change in level between the riverbank and the proposed roadways and streetscape would provide a suitable separation between the two types of activity which could exist quite harmoniously side by side. Regular links such as steps and ramps should also be provided in order to connect the park and walkway with new and existing streetscapes.