

Saintfield Town Landscape Masterplan

John Reid

2015



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Saintfield Town Landscape Masterplan

Background to the report

1.1 History

This landscape plan came about due to a recommendation contained within the Heritage Development Plan. It is funded by The Northern Ireland Environment Link through their Challenge Fund. Following submissions Crawford Campbell Associates was appointed in early January 2015 to undertake this project.

1.2 Methodology

A desk study was undertaken using survey plans and Local Area Plans to identify areas of special designations and to establish the location of potential areas for individual projects.

As this project follows on from the two already commissioned reports, URS Saintfield Development Plan and Mentor Economic Developments Ltd Heritage Development Action Plan, reference and direction were obtained from these reports.

The Ulster in Bloom judges' reports have also been studied and recommendations noted.

Research was also undertaken in Land Registry to try to ascertain land ownership. However like many Ulster Towns much of the urban land is not registered. Together with local knowledge, many meetings and discussions, most of the areas targeted have now had positive feedback.

Meeting have taken place with:

- Saintfield Development Association
- Saintfield Development Association --- Greens Committee
- Newry, Mourne & Down (**NM&D**) District Council Parks Development Officer
- NM&D District Council Access officer
- NM&D District Council Biodiversity Officer
- DRD Roads Service
- Private Owners
Rowallane Gardens - Mike Snowden

2.0 Landscape and Amenity

2.1 Designations

The area falls within The Newry, Mourne & Down Area Plan: all Planning Designations in this plan have been plotted including the Conservation Area and all Listed Buildings.

2.2 The Town

Saintfield was an early 17th Century settlement. The surrounding areas would have been covered in native stands of Oak trees, however, the present town layout was established in the 18th century, primarily by the Price family. Today the town is an harmonious collection of buildings with just under 4000 residents. The town itself nestles between the typical Co Down drumlins bordered on the north by Saintfield Demesne and on the south by the National Trust's Rowallane Garden. To the east, the remnants of the County Down Railway form the town boundary.

The central core has been designated a Conservation Area by the DOE thus preserving its integrity in architectural terms. Most of the Listed Buildings lie within the Conservation Area.

Saintfield has expanded over the last 20 years with the new housing having been built mostly on the town periphery. Modern housing estates now form the gateways to the town. These gateways in recent years have been improved with the provision of distinctive Village signs.

Recently a major Road and Environmental Scheme has been completed in lower Main Street. This has been very well received and the quality of the work has been to a high standard. Upper Main Street will have a similar scheme undertaken when budgets allow, however, we have been advised that Todd's Hill is in greater need and will be executed earlier. The Square has also had a recently completed environmental improvement scheme. This too has been executed to very high standard, however, one aspect of visual amenity which must be addressed is the very unsightly overhead cables. These should be undergrounded as soon as possible. It is noted that ducting of cables is already in place due to the lower Main Street road works. As soon as the upper street is completed, pressure should be put on the relevant authorities to underground these cables.

A site has been purchased for the provision of sporting and community facilities and the approved scheme has approval for funding. Associated with this facility is potentially an open space provision which could provide a small town park associated with the historic remains of the Windmill Stump. This project is outside the remit of the landscape plan but cognisance has been applied and relevant linkages made.

The river itself has in the past been a totally undervalued resource. Together with very attractive stone bridges, the river is visually very striking with mill ponds completing the picture. The river corridor is rich in ecology with various habitats establishing themselves along its route as it cuts its way through the town. Although there is not the potential for a complete riverside walk, small incursions for pedestrians to view the river should be explored. A meeting has been arranged with Rivers Agency to see if they can facilitate access points.



Figure 1: Saintfield River ~ An undervalued resource

3.0 Ecology and Biodiversity

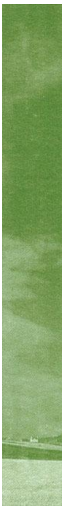
3.1 Habitats

Saintfield, for its size, has a very wide range of wildlife habitats and further detailed assessment of these should be undertaken.

On a first glance assessment of these habitats they include the following:

- Native Woodland
- River and Riverbanks
- Open Water - Ponds
- Old Pasture
- Dry Stone Walls
- Demense Landscape
- Historic Gardens
- Wetlands
- Wildlife Corridors - River and disused Railway
- Derelict Gardens and Buildings - Backlands

These habitats combine to give Saintfield a rich natural setting which all of its 4000 inhabitants should both understand, enjoy and benefit from. This is a great untapped asset which should be studied and protected for future generations.



Proposals contained with this report

As the research and discussions progressed with all relevant parties it became clear that the detailed projects could be defined under five major areas of interest:

- Saintfield ----- WALKS
- Saintfield ----- SEATS
- Saintfield ----- PLANTING
- Saintfield ----- SIGNS
- Saintfield ----- PROJECTS

There are many small pockets of land which could benefit from upgrading but would not have the scope to be projects in their own right. These have been grouped together and dealt with under the Saintfield Planting heading.

A major derelict site in the town is along the Belfast Road side of the crossroads. Planning permission has been given for town houses with garden frontages on this site and it is hoped that this development will commence soon. The neighbouring site [Hocks and Hooves] owned by Translink is in need of refurbishment. SDA is putting pressure on the owner to improve this building.

The focus for the following projects is on high impact and ease of implementation

4.0 Saintfield Walks

Drawing No. M02 shows potentially a series of walkways around Saintfield. None of these are designated rights of way at present and all of the routes shown require various consents but are potentially an immense resource for the Town.

Discussions have taken place with Newry, Mourne & Down District Council's Access Officer and there was a positive response for the Council to continue to explore the development of access along these routes.

It will take time to obtain all the agreements necessary for success. To take on this arduous task will require a long term strategy and the programme will necessitate that all parties need to work in tandem to achieve the objectives.

Anticipated programme:

- Research into ownerships ----- SDA and NM&D D Council
- Establish owners' agreements ---- SDA and NM&D D Council
- Establish legal agreements ----- NM&D District Council
- Carry out site work ----- Depends on Funding
- Maintain footpaths ----- NM&D District Council

This should be carried out as a team effort between the Council officers and SDA using local knowledge to target individuals who may be potential owners. For instance, the lane to the rear of Second Presbyterian Church is already established as a route but has now been closed by use of a gate. Attention should be drawn to the potential of these pedestrian routes which if established will benefit all. Rumour has it that this lane was closed due to vandalism and teenagers loitering in the darker corners. It is hoped that as quite a time has elapsed since closure, this unsocial behaviour will have reduced or stopped. Various local organisations and individuals will be consulted before progress is made.

The use of the redundant railway as a pedestrian route is an exciting concept. The Council Access Officer has stated that the ownership of the Railway line has reverted to the previous owners after the closure of the railway.

5.0 Saintfield Seats

It is important to note that these are unique

It is proposed that a special timber bench seat be designed for Saintfield. It is also proposed that the timber required for these seats be home grown in either Rowallane Gardens or Saintfield Demesne. This is a unique opportunity for Saintfield. The position of these seats is shown on Drawing No. M02.

It is proposed that a design brief be prepared by SDA for an open competition for the design of the bench seats. The use of the local timber is an essential facet of the design as is the final location of the seats.

The seats could be manufactured by the woodwork students at SERC [South Eastern Regional College] again developing the local provenance and the unique low carbon footprint as well as design for place rather than catalogue selection.

It is also suggested that each seat have a plaque with a QR code [Quick Response Code] which would bring up site specific information when activated by a mobile phone.

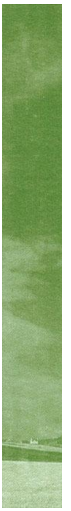


Figure 2: Illustrative example of the Saintfield Seat and the QR Code

5.1 Saintfield Seats

An anticipated programme of works for the Saintfield seat project would be:

- Prepare design brief ----- SDA
- Award design project ----- SDA
- Commission seats ----- Awaiting funding
- Discussions with SERC ----- SDA
- SERC to build seats ----- SERC
- Install seats as per dwgs ----- SDA / NM&D District Council

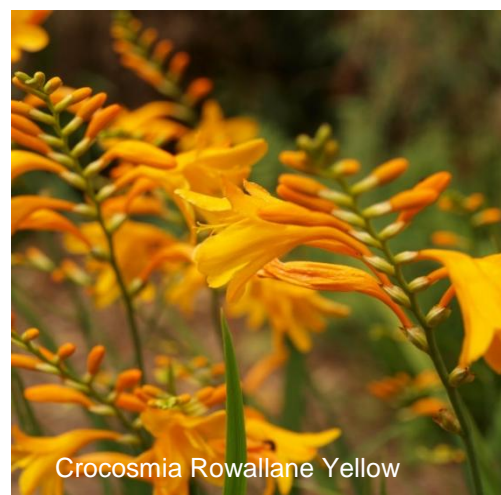
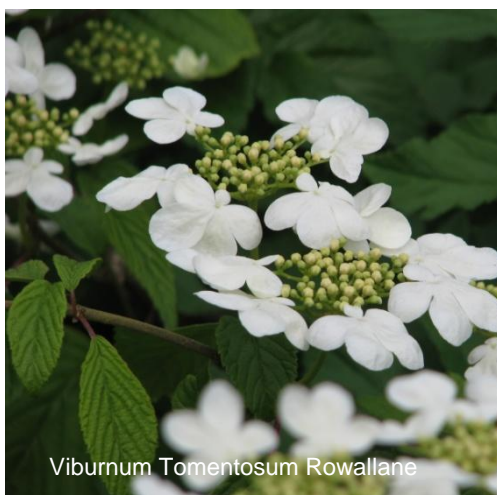
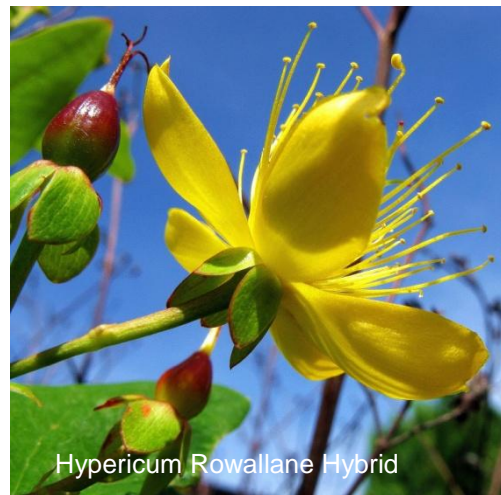
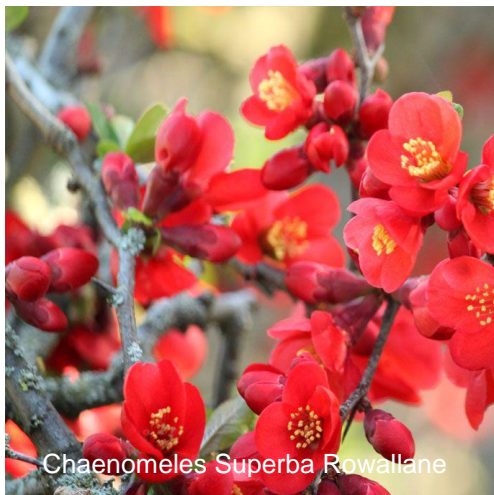


6.0 Saintfield Planting

Rowallane Gardens are world famous. The Estate is now the regional head office of its owners, the National Trust. The 19th century garden surrounding an Irish country farm is famous for its plant collections from all over the world, however it's the plants that originated from Saintfield that are of special interest to the Town Landscape Masterplan.

The most notable plants bearing the Rowallane name are:

- Chaenomeles Superba Rowallane
- Hypericum Rowallane Hybrid
- Viburnum Tomentosum Rowallane
- Crocosmia Rowallane Yellow



It is anticipated that these four plants form the basis of all new planting within the town. This will help to reinforce the link between the Town and Rowallane Gardens. In order to extend the flowering season and therefore the period of interest, it is suggested that these plants be underplanted with spring bulbs such as snowdrop and daffodils. The areas at the base of the Village signs require replanting and these could be planted with a collection of these plants. There are many small pockets of derelict ground which could accommodate this new planting as well as the important new Rowallane Bank dealt within the Projects.

The main stand of mature trees within the town are the six Limes in front of the Parish Church. It is proposed that this stand of trees be extended and the march of trees in the Fair Green be Limes. All other trees are to be Native Oak to respect the original setting of the Town and its once native surroundings.

The other aspect of planting in Saintfield is wildflowers. There are three types of seed mixtures which are to be used --- Meadow Mix --- Bare Earth Mix --- and Hedgerow Bank Mix. These mixes should be sourced locally – it is necessary to use native wildflowers.

A small stock pile of these seed mixes can be made and used when necessary as areas become available.

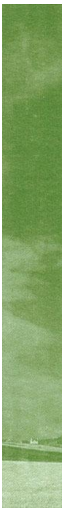


Figure 3: A Typical wildflower mix

6.1 Saintfield Planting

Anticipated programme of works:

- Source plants with the Rowallane name ----- SDA
- Propagate these plants in numbers -----SDA
- Source wildflower mixes ----- SDA/Newry
Mourne and Down District Council Biodiversity Officer
- We suggest that SDA Greens Committee could work in conjunction with Rowallane and local plant suppliers to propagate these targeted species



7.0 Saintfield Signs

There are four types of signage to be explored for Saintfield:

- Road Signs i.e. car parking
- Route signs i.e. footpaths
- Information signs i.e. historical sites / tourist information
- Upgrading the existing Saintfield Village signs

7.1 ROAD SIGNS

At present the town car park is very poorly signed with the result that many people do not know that this car park exists. This situation could be addressed with the implementation of the Upper Main Street Environmental Improvement Scheme.

There should be a cohesive plan for road signage throughout Saintfield.

7.2 ROUTE SIGNS

This commenced with the signs at the square, however this is only a start and both destination and further route signs must be implemented. This will be essential when the footpath system is established. It would be an added benefit if those visiting Rowallane would also use the footpaths around the town. Every opportunity should be explored to attract the Rowallane visitor to stop and use the town and its facilities.

7.3 INFORMATION SIGNS

These could help to establish a branding for Saintfield and an identification for each project/historical site. A number of other outcomes could also be achieved: referring to strong traditional aspects of Saintfield's past; creating renewed awareness; facilitating education and promoting community awareness.

These signs contain the QR CODE [Quick Response Code] matrix which would bring up site-specific information once activated by a mobile phone. This sign/plaque has to be made from a quality material as it reflects firstly Saintfield itself and secondly it will have to be displayed outside for many years. Stainless steel is an obvious choice of material to be used. Symbols can either be laser cut or acid etched into the metal. The final location of each sign will be determined by the position of the viewer and the object to be explained.

The QR code will have to be protected within the sign as it is a barcode machine readable optical label that contains specific information about the location. This code can additionally be programmed to take visitors right to Saintfield's web page. This can drive web traffic and smart advertising. In addition it allows tour information to be heard straight from a smart phone or tablet and it can prompt the user with further suggestions while providing directions to the next attraction.

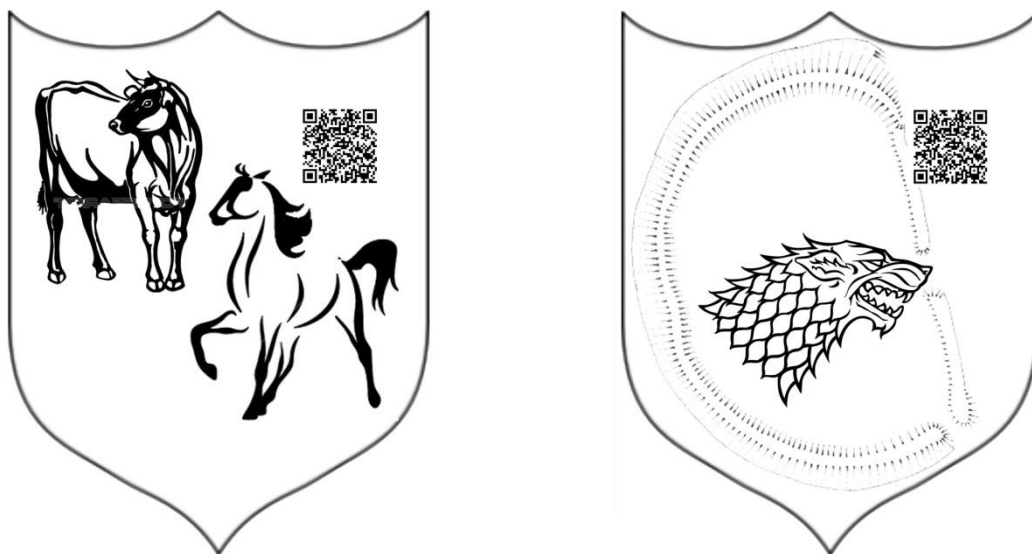


Figure 4: Proposed examples:

On the left is the proposed concept for the sign identifying the Fair Green project - In days of old this area used to stage the biggest cattle and horse fairs in Ireland where buyers would come from France and Germany to buy horses for their armies.

To the right would be the proposed concept identifying the Forthill Rath, or ringfort, an ancient site/monument which is located within the grounds of the National Trust's Rowallane Estate. Images depict the archaeological survey and the Crest of Arms of Winterfell, a region in the television series Game of Thrones which was filmed in this location.

7.4 SAINTFIELD TOWN SIGNS

The existing town signs themselves are most successful, however the area to the base of each sign requires updating. At present there is a gravel oval planted with grasses and bounded by a brick edge. Unfortunately this area appears untidy and somewhat out of place.

It is proposed to remove both the gravel and grass plants and replace them with a full shrub bed of SAINTFIELD PLANTS. These species coupled with contrasting spring bulbs will give a greater sense of identity to the town.



Figure 4: Picture of current conditions

8.0 Saintfield Projects

The projects have been packaged as individual pieces of work which can be implemented as a single element as and when funding becomes available. Some still require formal agreements; some are ready to be executed.

8.1 ROWALLANE BANK AND BALLYGOWAN ROAD JUNCTION

This area at present is a rough grass bank with a footpath and handrail crossing diagonally. There are a few Ash and Holly trees with bramble and scrub undergrowth.

There is also the remnants of a Saintfield in Bloom Project, namely a low dry stone wall.

On the opposite side of the road the footpath at the road junction is bounded by a rather thin and visually poor farm hedge.

It is proposed that the bank be planted up with Saintfield Plants and the old thorn hedge be gapped up with native species.

To enable the bank to be planted, the rough grass will need to be killed off with total weed killer preferably done during the growing period. The dead grass will then be cultivated into the existing soil.

The existing trees will need tree surgery to remove the ivy and any dead or damaged wood together with the removal of the brambles and scrub.

The entire area to be planted will then have a layer of 300mm deep, good quality, topsoil spread over it. The area will then be planted with Saintfield Plants as per the drawing and it is important that all the plants be sourced and their provenance guaranteed. On completion of planting, the entire area should be mulched with a high quality bark mulch.

It is also suggested that an interpretative sign be erected to explain the origin of the plants and promote Rowallane Gardens.

The new hedge could be planted from packs provided from The Woodland Trust. The plants could be planted in the existing bank to gap up the existing thorn hedge. On completion the bank could be sown with the wildflower seed for hedgerow bank mix.

8.1.1 PROGRAMME AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Agree work with Roads Service ----- SDA
- Source funding ----- SDA
- Prepare contract ----- SDA / Landscape Architect
- Source plants ----- SDA Rowallane / Woodland Trust
- Carry out work plus two year maintenance --- Contractor



8.2 WETLAND AREA AT PLAYING FIELDS

This project consists of a wetland habitat. This area is a low lying parcel of land with two streams/small rivers. The ecology of the area suggests that the area floods and is rich in the associated wildlife.

It is suggested that initially the proposals are minimal and that protection is the way forward. An ecological survey of the area should be undertaken. Its recommendations taken onboard together with any drainage/excavations for a small pond. Allowance for perimeter fencing undertaken.

Erect information signs and seats where appropriate.

Encourage schools to study this area as part of their course work.



8.2.1 PROGRAMME

- Agree proposals with land owner ----- SDA
- Commission Ecological Survey ----- SDA with help from NIEL
- Carry out any necessary recommendations ---- SDA / Conservation Volunteers
- Information Signs etc. ----- Perhaps NIEL



This project consists of a roadside open grassed area and an associated farm fence/hedgerow.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council have commissioned a contractor to sow this area with wild flowers. It is suggested that as a second phase a new hedge be planted to the rear of this area to prevent the advertising signs at present being attached to the fence together with a large specimen Oak tree to form a feature at this gateway area.

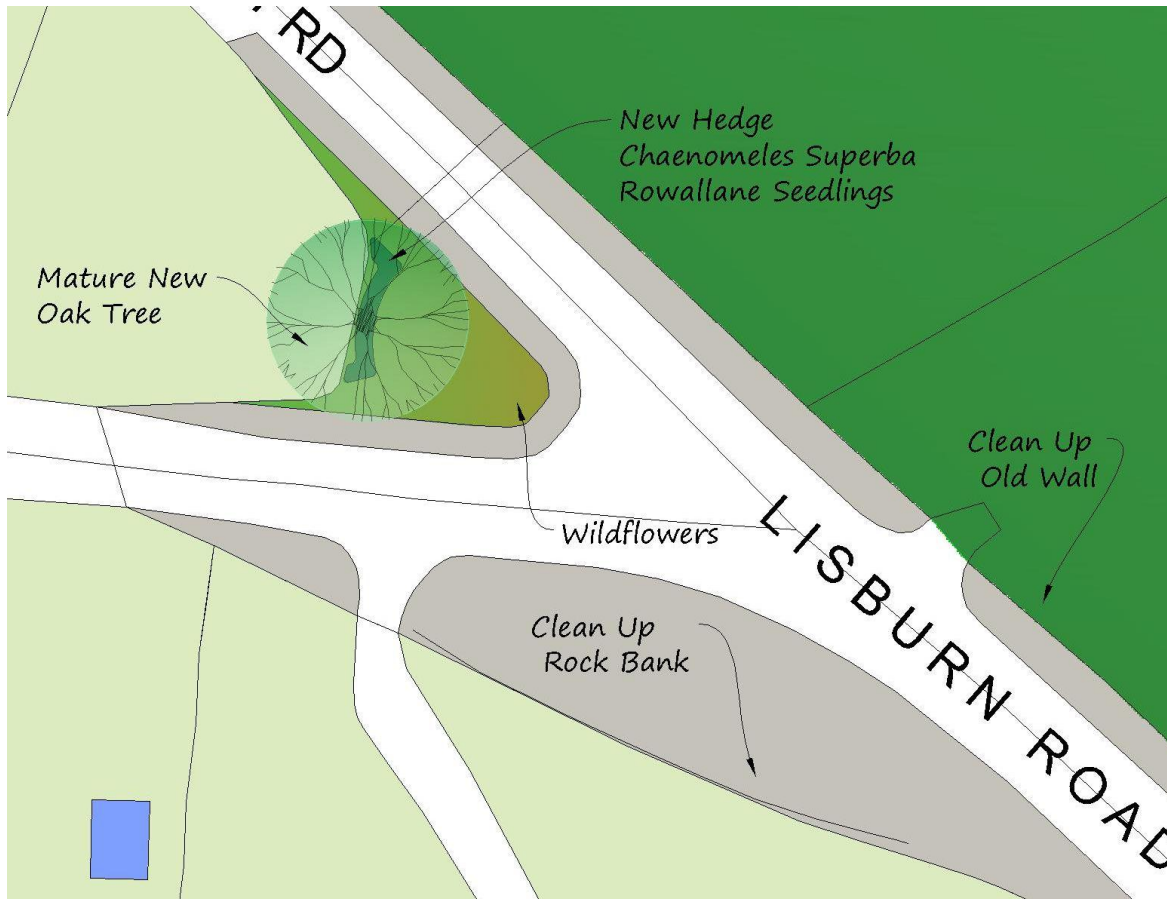
On the opposite side of the road is a rock bank over grown with Brambles and scrub. It is suggested that the rock face be cleaned up to form a feature and planted with native rock plants.

Opposite to the rock face is the wall of the old manse. This building lies vacant and abandoned however; this wall is an important feature as you drive into the town. It would benefit from a major clean up with care being taken due to the proximity of the wall to the adjacent road.



8.3.1 PROGRAMME

- Subsequent to the Wild Flower Area being sown.....
- Plant hedge and Oak tree ----- SDA / NM&D District Council
- Clean up rock face and wall ----- SDA



8.4 FAIR GREEN

This is a project consisting of four distinct areas, ~ the fair green itself, ~ the small car park in front of the shops, ~ the green area in front of the Health Centre, ~ the green area with the well.

Sourcing the ownerships of these areas has been very difficult however; it would now appear that the following is correct:

- Fair Green -----Under long term lease to NM&D District Council
- Health Centre Area -- Public ownership maintained NM&D District Council
- Well Green Area ----- Private ownership maintained NM&D District Council
- Car Park ----- Owned and maintained by DRD Road Service

Discussions have taken place with DJ Morgan of the new Council's Parks Department and proposals tabled and a programme agreed. As the report is being written, work has already commenced on the planting scheme. The main thrust of this is the march of the nine new Limes. This species was suggested to complement the Limes in front of the Parish Church and provide cohesion of planting. The planting beds in front of the Health Centre car park will in time be complemented with a hedge from the Saintfield Planting Scheme.

The other part of the scheme is the hard landscape feature at the roundabout. This consists of a low stone seating wall, a large focal point tree, feature lighting and cobble paving. The Saintfield Seats and Signs are also to be included as there is an historical aspect to this area which would benefit from interpretation.

There is an agreement to be achieved from the owners of the well green area to plant the three suggested Limes. NM and D Council has undertaken to plant, maintain and insure these.

Discussions have also taken place with Road Service and they have agreed to assess this area together with all the associated pedestrian crossings.

8.4.1 PROGRAMME AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Agree scheme with private owners ----- SDA / Owner
- Form long term leases for areas ----- NM&D District Council
- Improve car park and crossings ----- Road Service
- Carry out hard landscape works ----- Road Service / NM&D District Council
- Plant hedge at car park ----- SDA / NM&D District Council



This car park is very well used by local shoppers. Although very busy, the car park is visually unattractive. The layout of the car parking does not allow any trees or shrubs to be planted within the car parking. There are however areas along the boundary which can be used for screening and an improvement is required to visually upgrade the entrance.

The western edge of the car park is very unsightly due to views into neighbouring derelict properties and, more important, the run-down nature of the boundary fence itself. It is proposed to plant a screening hedge along the 1m grass strip in front of the fence to help both hide the fence and the neighbouring gardens.

The area to the top of the car park is also very unsightly due to walls and a concrete base remaining from the removal of the town's recycling unit. It is proposed that these remains be removed and the area regraded and planted out.

The entrance area is also very unsightly due to ownerships and access to rears of properties and there is very limited scope for major impact. However, removal of the Council's old and damaged Tourist Sign would help. It is suggested that a new sign be erected in the Square as per the proposed drawing. New Car Park Signs, Town Signs, new planting and an extension to the screen wall would help improve this area.



8.5.1 & 6.1 PROGRAMME AND REponsIBILITES

Responsibility for car parking reverted to the New Councils after April 2015. It is therefore assumed the NM and D will be responsible for this area.

- Agree scheme with all owners ----- SDA / Owners / NM&D District Council
- Form long term leases for areas ----- NM&D District Council
- Improve car park planting and signs ----- NM&D District Council
- Plant hedge in car park ----- SDA / NM&D District Council
- Erect new tourist sign at the Square ----- NM&D District Council

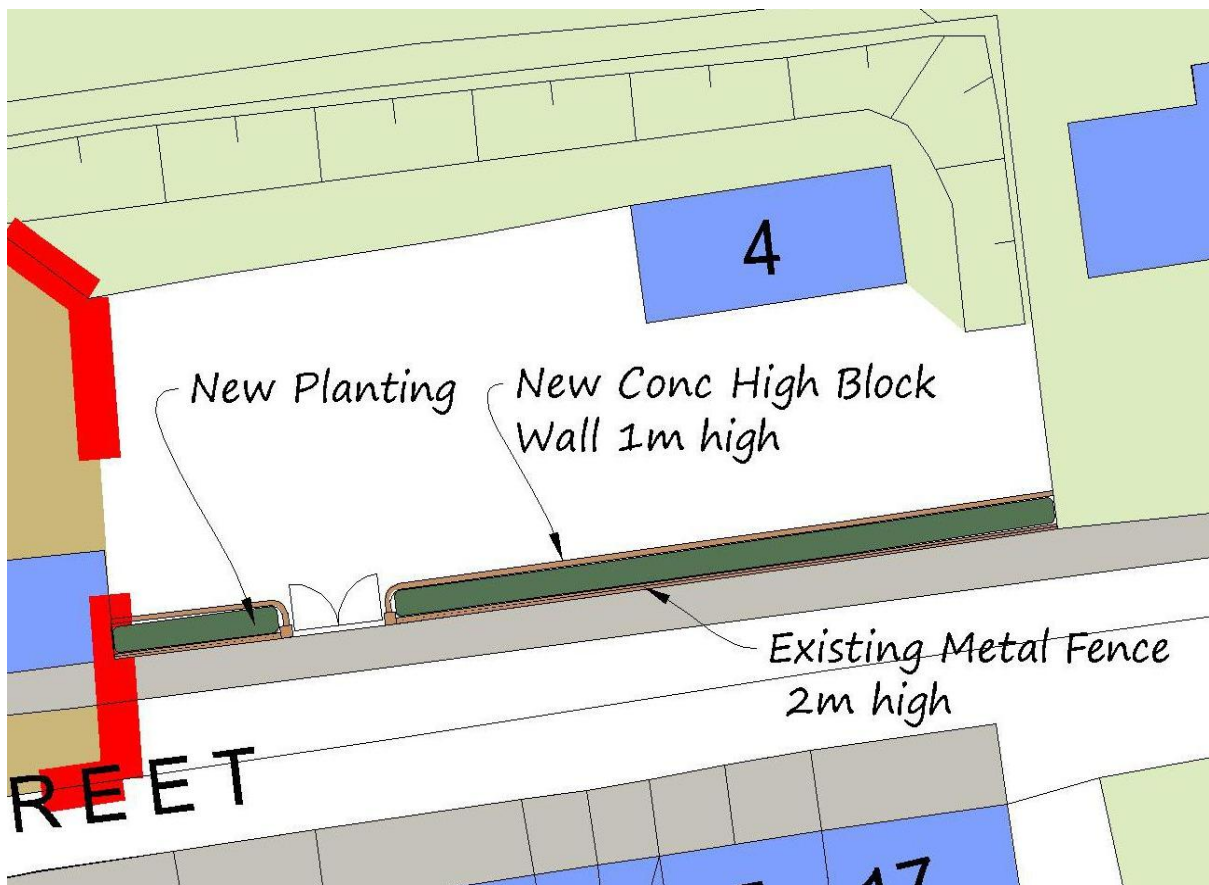


8.7 MAIN STREET - FRONTAGE IMPROVEMENT

The main responsibility for this scheme lies with the pub owner - however if SDA could source funding it would help with its implementation.

8.7.1 PROGRAMME AND REponsibilites

- Agree scheme with owners ----- SDA / Owners
- Improve with new wall & metal fence ----- Owner
- Plant hedge behind wall / fence ----- Owner



8.8 STATION ROAD INDUSTRIAL ESTATE

This is an established Industrial Estate forming one the Town's gateways. There are three elements to this part of the project:

- Extend the public footpath network to continue along Station Road to forms links with the proposed Community Centre and future Public Park. This will be a major link in forming one of the Saintfield Walks. Discussions have taken place with Road Service and they are committed to carrying out this scheme.
- Plant up the bare soil bank at the Station end boundary. This area is most suitable for wild flower planting. Newry, Mourne and Down District's Biodiversity Officer has undertaken to source seeds for this.
- Coupled with the bank planting, a new hedge along the road side of the perimeter fence for the unit adjacent to the Station. It is suggested that this could be carried out through one of the Saintfield planting schemes.

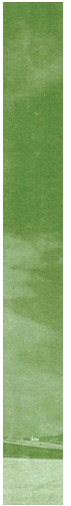
8.8.1 PROGRAMME AND REponsibilites

- Agree scheme with all owners ----- SDA / Owners / DRD Road Service
- Plant hedge along fence ----- SDA
- Sow wildflowers along bank ----- SDA
- Construct new footpath network ----- DRD Road Service



8.9 PARK LANE WILDFLOWER MEADOW

There is a small field adjoining the Silver Birch Nursing Home, located between Park Lane and the Crossgar Road as one heads out of Saintfield, which is very suitable for the creation of a wildflower meadow. This would form a very colourful display for both the motorist travelling along this busy road, the residents of the home and local residents. This could be relatively easy to establish as there is already vehicular access into this area. This area is large enough to sustain a meadow as seen in old time farming. It would form a valuable habitat for birds and insects and add to the rich range of biodiversity found in Saintfield. It could also be used for education purposes being close to the two primary schools. Ecological advice would be necessary as to the species of plants to be sown, so as to create the correct habitat. Monitoring the establishment of this meadow would help gain valuable insight with regard to other future projects.



8.9.1 PROGRAMME AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Agree scheme with owners ----- SDA
- Spray off existing grass ----- SDA
- Remove topsoil if required ----- SDA
- Sow wildflower meadow ----- SDA / NM&D District Council
- Maintain meadow ----- SDA / Conservation Volunteers



8.9 ROWALLANE GATE OPEN SPACE

There is a small finger of land to the front of the new development at Rowallane Gate. It is assumed that this area forms what is known as public space within new developments. This area not only forms open space for the development but is one of the few pieces of tiny parklands along the main through route in Saintfield. It is very important that this area be finished off to a very high standard. Although the developer has responsibility for this space it is proposed to help the developer raise the standard in this area.

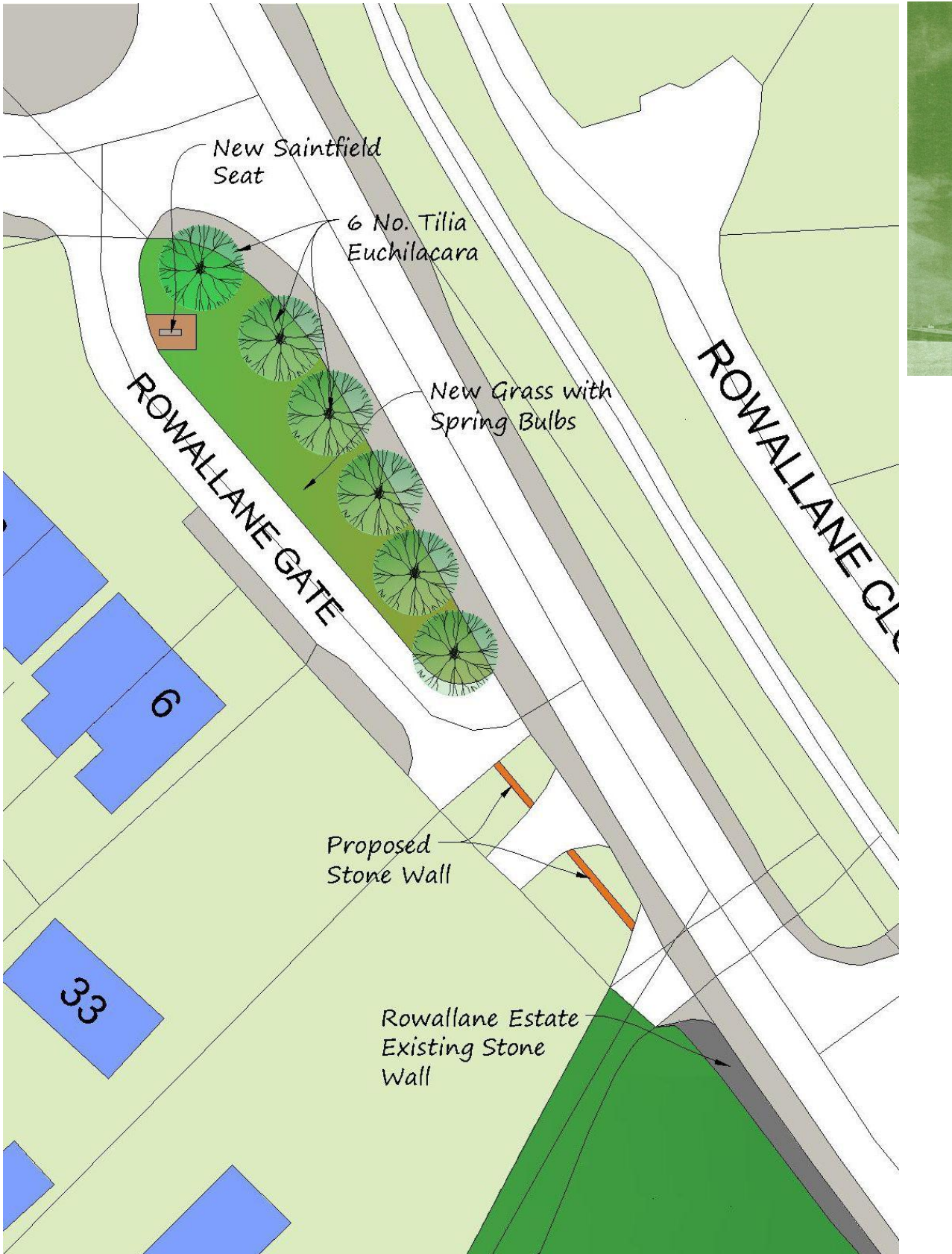
It is proposed to mound the area, sow grass and under plant this with spring bulbs. Six large Limes are proposed as is one of the Saintfield Seats.

Adjacent to the development site is a derelict nursery site. It is hoped that with future funding the existing Rowallane stone wall will be extended along the frontage of the derelict site to aesthetically and environmentally improve this gateway.



8.9.1 PROGRAMME AND REPONSIBILITES

- Agree scheme with developer ----- SDA / Developer
- Spray off existing area ----- Developer
- Create mound ----- Developer
- Sow grass and plant spring bulbs ----- Developer / SDA / NM&D District Council
- Plant Lime trees ----- Developer
- Place Seat ----- SDA
- Maintain area ----- Residents
- Source funding for wall ----- SDA
- Agreement from owners to erect wall ----- SDA / Owners



9.0 Conclusion

All the projects are easily implementable but await funding. This Landscape Report sets out a 10 year programme which, when implemented, will provide considerable impact for the Saintfield gateways and core areas.

In addition, these projects contain aspects relating to community education and improvement as well as combining to reinforce that Saintfield Town is a good place to live, visit and do business in.

The walks will also provide a safe network of footpaths away from the busy road linking schools to both sporting facilities, recreation and leisure activities. They will also provide a pleasing link to the rich heritage of Saintfield. The proposed Saintfield Seats are of an unique localised design and will not only be an identifying feature but allow digital interpretation from their plaques through the QR code activated by visitors' smart phones or tablets.

Crawford Campbell Associates would like to thank SDA and NIEL for commissioning this exciting project and wish them every success in its implementation

**THE
CHALLENGE
FUND**

Supporting People To Support Their Environment



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