

MILNGAVIE TOWN CENTRE

An outline urban design framework &
A Vision for the Community

December 2011

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milngavie town centre

A Vision for the Community



Background

'We Like Milngavie' - a Community Action Group formed in response to the development plans of Tesco for their site at Milngavie town centre - commissioned Page \ Park in October 2011 to assist in their consideration and analysis of the existing town centre qualities and structure, in order to develop a coherent development framework (focusing on what was needed to make a quality sustainable town centre) that could be used by the Council to inform the response to any development proposals within the centre - including those of Tesco.

In developing the appraisal and framework, this booklet considers the following:

1. An appraisal of the broad planning context (both local and national) that affects the town centre area and proposed development within it
2. An appraisal of key urban design issues and opportunities within the area
3. Articulation of some basic urban design principles for the civic and landscape settings of the town centre that could be developed to form a comprehensive urban design framework containing organising principles to inform future development within the town centre - including the Tesco proposals

planning context

Local, Regional & National Policies

In 2009, East Dunbartonshire Council published the 'Local Plan 2 - Finalised Draft' for public consultation. This plan has now been formally adopted. The Plan updates the previous Local Plan and is primarily concerned with the use and development of land in East Dunbartonshire. It provides clear guidance on what will or will not be permitted and where, and also contributes towards policies on sustainable development.

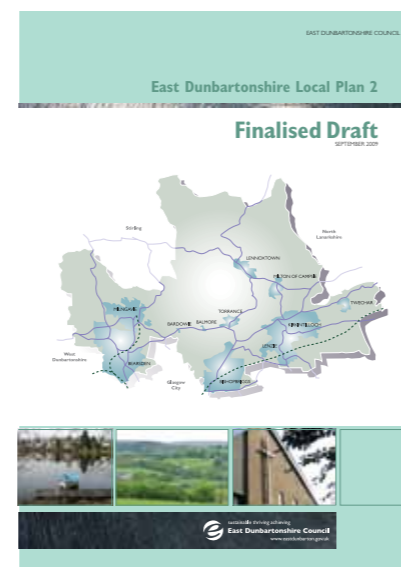
The following designations affect Milngavie Town Centre:

- Town Centre Area
- Conservation Area
- Prime Shopping Area
- Core Paths
- Parks & Open Spaces
- Important Wildlife Corridors
- Flood Risk Area

Generally, the Town Centre policies outlined in the Local Plan 2 seek to:

- Improve vitality and viability.
- Create good access and connectivity.
- Improve amenity and environmental quality.
- Retain and enhance local character and individuality.
- Support new business and foster inward investment.
- Resist 'dead' frontages and uses that detract from the character and amenity of the area.
- Encourage increased day time and evening visitors.
- Encourage retail development and uses that complement the prime retail area.
- Reduce the number of vacant units.

In addition to the above, and more specifically, the Council's Town Centre Policy TCR 6C for Milngavie states *"The start/finish of the West Highland Way in Milngavie Precinct provides an excellent foundation to promote and enhance the town centre for visitors"*.



There is a wealth of planning policies and guidance published over the years relevant to Town Centre development. The Scottish Government has consolidated the National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) into a concise Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) together with Planning Advice Notes (PANs). Such policies are as relevant to the strategic planning of town centres as they are to new-build developments within such centres. However, particular focus and attention is now given to creating distinctive, people-centred places that will serve generations to come.

When considering the Town Centre and its immediate context, the following policies and guidance are particularly relevant in both the development of proposals and their consideration through the Planning process:

Scottish Planning Policy - Scottish Government available online at www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/02/03132605/0

Scottish Historic Environment Policy - Historic Scotland available online at www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/publicationsresultsdetail.htm?id=4e41d8ccf

Designing Places - Scottish Government available online at www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/National-Planning-Policy/Designing

Designing Streets - Scottish Government available online at www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/03/22120652/0

PAN 52 - Planning in Small Towns - available online at www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/1997/04/pan52

PAN 59 - Improving Town Centres - available online at www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/1999/10/pan59-root/pan59

PAN 71 - Conservation Area Management - available online at www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/12/20450/49052

PAN 83 - Masterplanning - available online at www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/11/10114526/0

Managing Change in the Historic Environment; Setting - available online at www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/setting-2.pdf



This statement sits alongside the policy on architecture... and it is a material consideration in decisions in planning applications and appeals

Lewis Macdonald MSP; Designing Places : A Policy Statement for Scotland

Designing Places

'Designing Places' is the first policy statement on place design published by the Scottish Government, and is to be read in conjunction with 'Designing Streets'. The policy identifies six qualities which, it is argued, combine to make successful places that flourish socially and economically:

- they have a **distinct identity**
- their places are **safe and pleasant**
- they are **easy to move** around
- feeling a sense of **welcome**
- they are easily **adaptable**
- they are **sustainable**

A seventh quality is also identified - that of **beauty** - which, it is argued will result from a response to and realisation of the six qualities seen embodied in successful places.

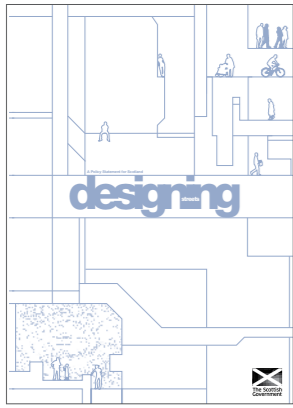
The conclusion statement within the Policy document states:

Much development results in places of which no one can be proud.

We need to see a different world emerging, one in which: a sense of quality design is part of children's education; professionals are trained to appreciate the complexity of places; the planning system is used creatively to set frameworks for development; developers know that the effort they put into coming up with a good design will be appreciated; and where bad design is no longer acceptable.

This policy statement has outlined a shift in attitudes, expectations and practices that is already under way. Everyone involved in development can play a part in designing places.





Street design guidance, as set out in this document, can be a material consideration in determining planning applications and appeals

Designing Streets : A Policy Statement for Scotland; p 9

Designing Streets

'Designing Streets', the first policy statement in Scotland for street design, was published by the Scottish Government in 2010. The document is a **national planning policy** and is supported by a range of design-based Planning Advice Notes (PANs). The document also supercedes all previous roads guidance and standards documents based on Design Bulletin 32 (DB32) principles as well as PAN 76 New Residential Streets, making a clear shift and raising the importance of street design issues from the subject of advice to that of policy.

The policies set out are :

- Street design must consider place before movement
- Street design guidance, as set out in this document, can be a material consideration in determining planning applications and appeals
- Street design should meet the six qualities of successful places, as set out in Designing Places
- Street design should be based on balanced decision-making and must adopt a multidisciplinary collaborative approach
- Street design should run planning permission and Road Construction Consent (RCC) processes in parallel

The primary concern of Designing Streets is to reverse the trend of designing streets for vehicular movement first, back to creating streets as successful places for people through good design.



our approach

Change needs to be planned and managed within an agreed planning and urban design framework aimed at securing the physical, economic and social well-being of the town

PAN 52 - Planning in Small Towns, 1997

The clear requirements and guidance now embodied in National Planning Policy and advice notes is that creating distinct, memorable, people centred places is of paramount importance when considering design solutions for specific buildings set within urban areas - and arguably no example is more important in this regard than our town centres. They lie at the heart of our everyday existence, and their sustainability and quality is of paramount importance in ensuring that we continue to make places that future generations will continue to enjoy and benefit from.

The following pages outline our analysis and response to the issues and opportunities observed at Milngavie Town Centre, and the resulting ideas seek to generate an outline framework that can be used to inform development proposals within the town centre area to enhance the wider town centre setting and quality of place.

In our view, an analysis such as this and resulting framework is in line with National Planning Policy and guidance, as a tool to control and enhance town centre development.

Town centres clearly have an important economic, social and cultural role to perform. Investors, property owners, retailers and shoppers see them as places of investment, profit or consumption. They are also the hub of the public realm of meeting places and social spaces. They provide cultural identity as well as a physical focus and it is important that they continue to provide quality choice in an attractive and safe setting.

PAN 59 - Improving Town Centres, 1999

Detailed thinking about urban design begins with areas where there is a particular need to control, guide and promote change. Documents called urban design frameworks show how planning and design policies should be implemented, and what principles should be followed by developers and their designers.

Designing Places : A Policy Statement for Scotland

A townscape audit can assist... by:-

....any action should not be undertaken in isolation. It must be part of a strategic approach which considers the centre as a whole, which involves a realistic vision for the centre..... The aim should be to adopt an overall framework containing a targeted approach that secures the necessary involvement of key partners.

- describing the physical and environmental characteristics of a town
- identifying elements which help define the town's character, including important cultural, historic or natural heritage considerations
- pinpointing those developments that diminish or erode the quality of the place
- setting out guiding principles for developers
- suggesting priority areas for improvement and regeneration

PAN 59 - Improving Town Centres, 1999

PAN 52 - Planning in Small Towns, 1997

the old town & river setting

Milngavie may be considered as the coming together of two distinct yet connected historic features;

- A the historic old town centre, and
- B the Allander Water and its setting

Milngavie as a town is thought to have evolved over a number of distinct phases.

The first records show a medieval 'Mill Toun' with scattered development around the site of the current Gavin's Mill. The Allander Water had a small diversion at a weir to serve the mill development whilst the main river meandered in a general south-easterly direction following the topography around the foot of what would become Lennox Park.

The eighteenth century saw the beginnings of industrialisation, with a number of industries scattered along the river: a linen mill, bleachworks, distillery and cotton mill. At this time, housing for the workers developed on the eastern side of the Allander, beginning at Strathblane Road. By the end of the century a calico printworks had opened on the south side of Station Road.

The historic heart of Milngavie (as we now recognise it) emerged from 1800 onwards focused on Main Street and Douglas Street to the west, where the urban form and civic setting was set against a backdrop of public buildings; notably the current Post Office and Black Bull Hotel. The railway arrived at Milngavie in 1863 linking the town to Glasgow and beyond.

The town centre by-pass (later named Woodburn Way) was constructed around 1970 in order to remove vehicular traffic away from the congested old town centre, which was then completely pedestrianised.

The **Conservation Area** for Milngavie recognises and protects the historical significance of the area, and includes the underpass pedestrian connection to an area around Gavin's Mill (a), as well as a similar link to the Railway Station to the north (b).



Within the town centre there are four listed buildings:

- 1 Corbie-ha
- 2 The old frontage of Black Bull Hotel - now Marks and Spencer
- 3 Gavin's Mill
- 4 Railway Station

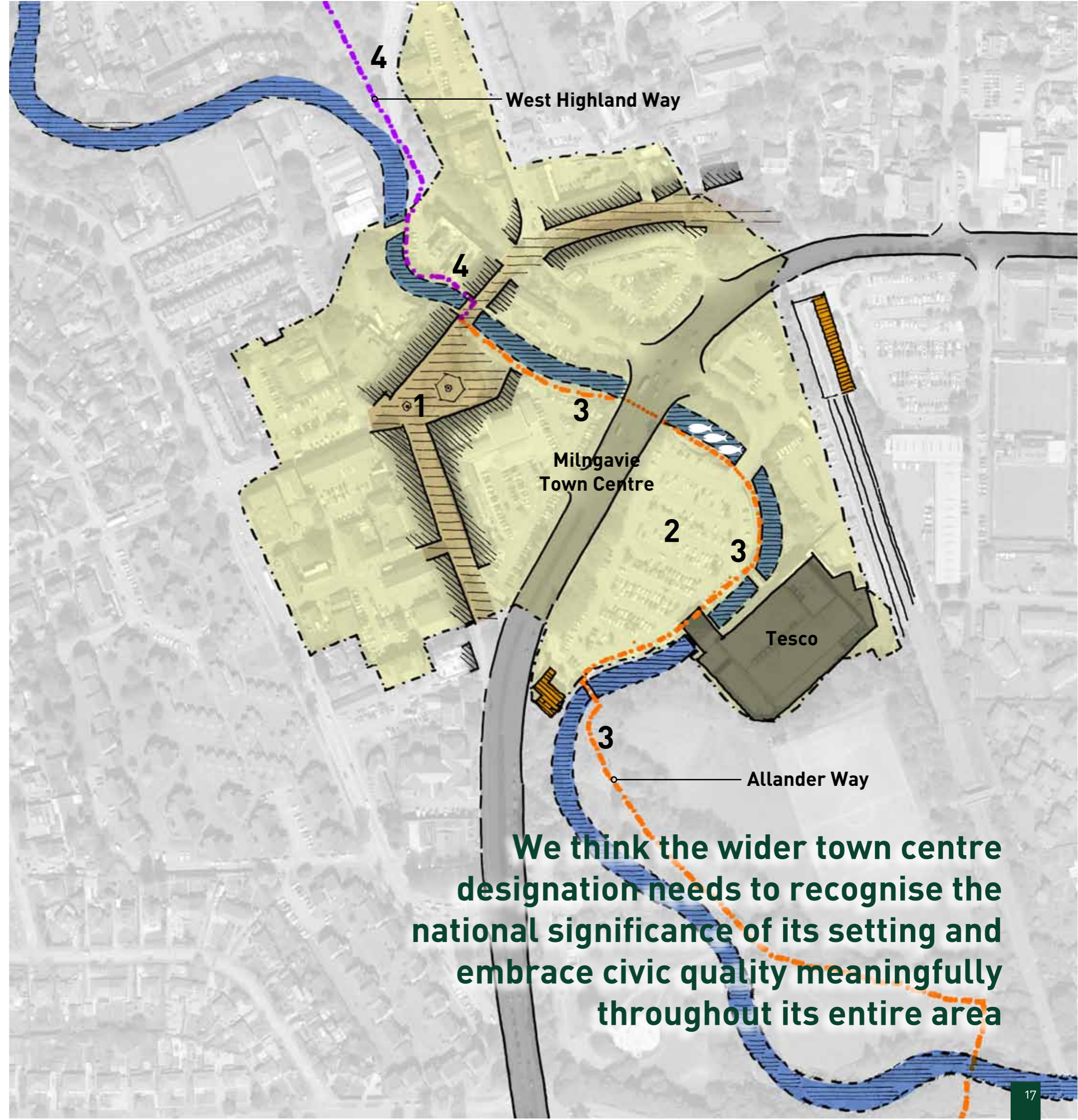
We think that the conservation area is a great asset and its immediate and wider river setting should be recognised and have a clear civic quality

the redefined town centre

The town centre was formally re-designated to include the area to the south-east of Woodburn Way - including the current Tesco store and associated car parking - in 2005 when Local Plan 1 was formally adopted. This designation remains in Local Plan 2 which has just been formally adopted. However, it is observed and easily argued that Woodburn Way currently feels as though it bounds the town centre to the north and west (1), and that the area to the south and east (including the Tesco retail) is at the fringe (2).

Within the old town centre there is a degree of clarity to the built form that holds the civic spaces, however this is in stark contrast to the area along Allander Water to the south and east. The dual-carriageway of Woodburn Way marks a clear dividing line between urban legibility and a change in character from north-east to south-west. The Tesco store and Gavin's Mill front on to the existing open-air car parking and road infrastructure but are not coherently linked to each other or the old centre. **If the new town centre designation is to be meaningful, this split needs to be addressed.**

The current core path running through the town centre includes the Allander Way (along Allander Water to the south) (3) and West Highland Way (from Douglas Street northwards) (4). The Allander Way is a route of local significance, linking south to the regionally significant Kelvin Way, and north to the nationally significant West Highland Way. Despite this significance, the path lacks clarity and definition (especially along Allander Water), and this needs to be addressed positively as a part of any town centre development strategy.



We think the wider town centre designation needs to recognise the national significance of its setting and embrace civic quality meaningfully throughout its entire area

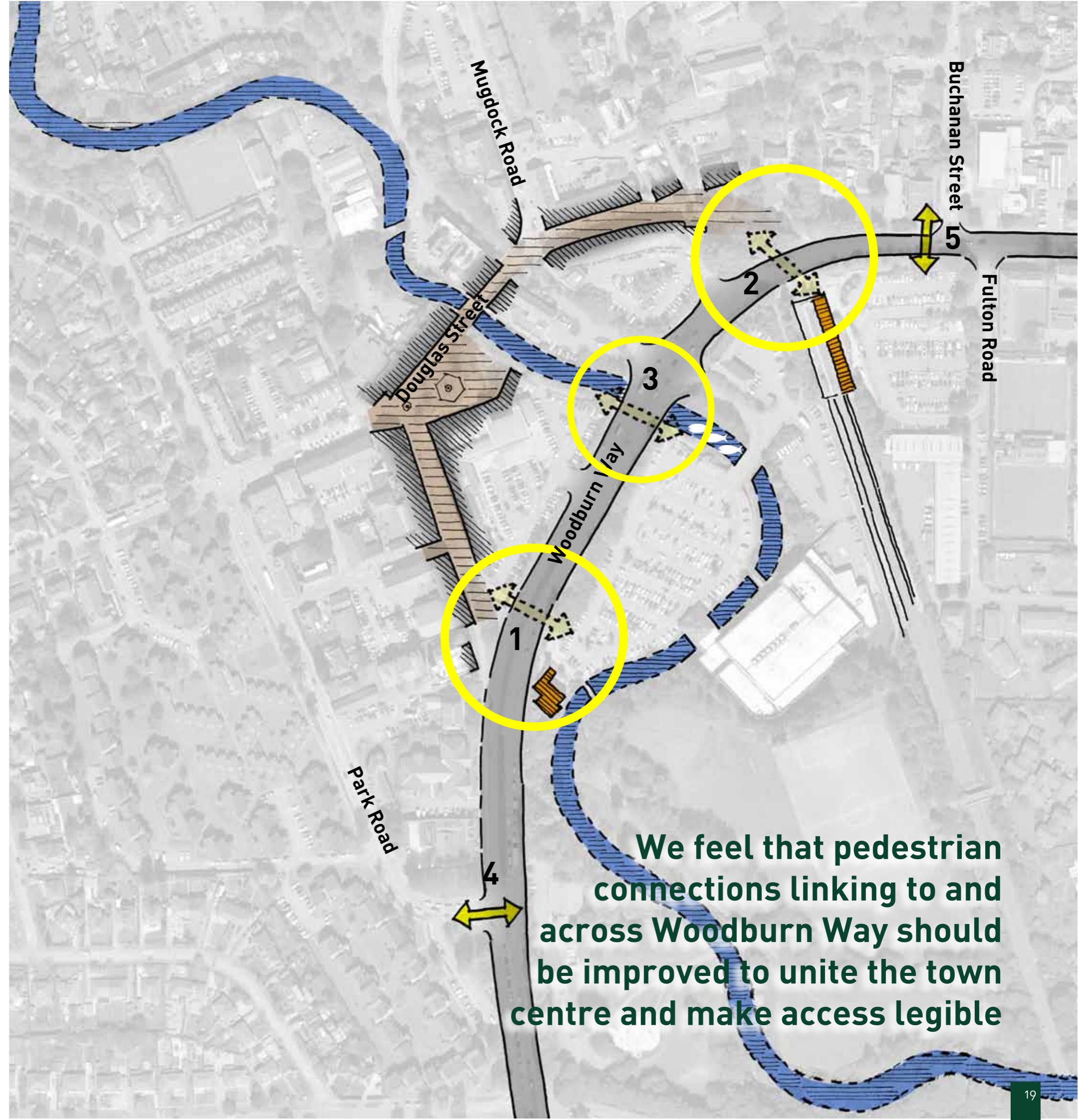
improving connections to the old centre

The construction of Woodburn Way, which consequently removed vehicular traffic away from the original old town centre, has allowed the civic heart to develop. However, due to the nature of the bypass and steep drop in level to the south-east, the new road forms a barrier and is perceived as the mental south-eastern boundary of the town centre. This is at odds with the aspirations of the Local Plan.

Currently, the old centre is connected to the south-east by a series of underpasses beneath Woodburn Way leading to Gavin's Mill (1), the railway station (2) as well as along Allander Water (3). As a pedestrian, you can walk under Woodburn Way to get to the old centre but...

- Are the underpasses safe?
- Do they complement the settings of Gavin's Mill, the railway station and Allander Water?
- As a visitor, do you know where to go?
- How do you connect from the level of Woodburn Way down?

Formal street level crossings are available at the Woodburn Way / Park Road junction to the south (4) and at the Woodburn Way / Buchanan Street / Fulton Road junction further north (5). It is curious that the road is crossable at street level just a few metres from the town centre but not within the town centre itself.



improving the town centre public realm

We feel there is clear opportunity to improve and better link the pedestrian routes between:

- 1 the retail elements throughout the town centre,
- 2 the historic buildings, and
- 3 the river walk

We understand that the retail destinations either side of Woodburn Way are important to the economic growth of the town. We have identified however how, in our view, the two sides of Woodburn Way are quite disconnected and have differing qualities of public realm and pedestrian experience. Envisioning an extension of high quality public realm towards and around historic building destinations, as well as core path routes through the town centre would help create a more meaningful and unified understanding of Milngavie Town Centre.

The concept that has evolved, links and strengthens the key civic and landscape elements of the wider town centre setting into a more unified pedestrian oriented environment. This takes the form of a high quality public realm 'loop' (3). We believe a unique opportunity exists to create a route of high quality public realm that incorporates wonderful civic space, historic buildings and a unique river and landscape. How many town centres do you know that have a fish ladder at their heart?!

We consider that a 10-15m strip along the westerly banks of Allander Water should be reserved to create a quality riverside edge setting worthy of the regional significance of the core path route along this bank. This improved riverside edge should then link into a quality and generous area of public realm fronting Gavin's Mill, leading in turn through and under Woodburn Way into the old town centre retail heart via an improved ramped access. Adjacent the fish ladder, the riverside setting and route of Allander Way should be improved and opened up, linking directly with Woodburn Way itself, and combining with a quality area of public realm overlooking the fish ladder. A new at grade pedestrian crossing should be provided on Woodburn Way at this location to enable the continuation of this strategic path above ground rather than having to rely on the current underpass that frequently floods.

The improvement of this river edge setting should then be continued westwards on the other side of Woodburn Way, opening up the currently overgrown and inaccessible river edge, to link positively with the old town centre square, completing the town centre 'loop'.



We think the town centre has the potential to create a unique sense of place, as a destination, in an enhanced loop of public realm incorporating quality landscape and civic features

approach to the town centre

The approach to the town centre along Woodburn Way may be considered in two ways, that is ;

- by foot and public transport
- by private car

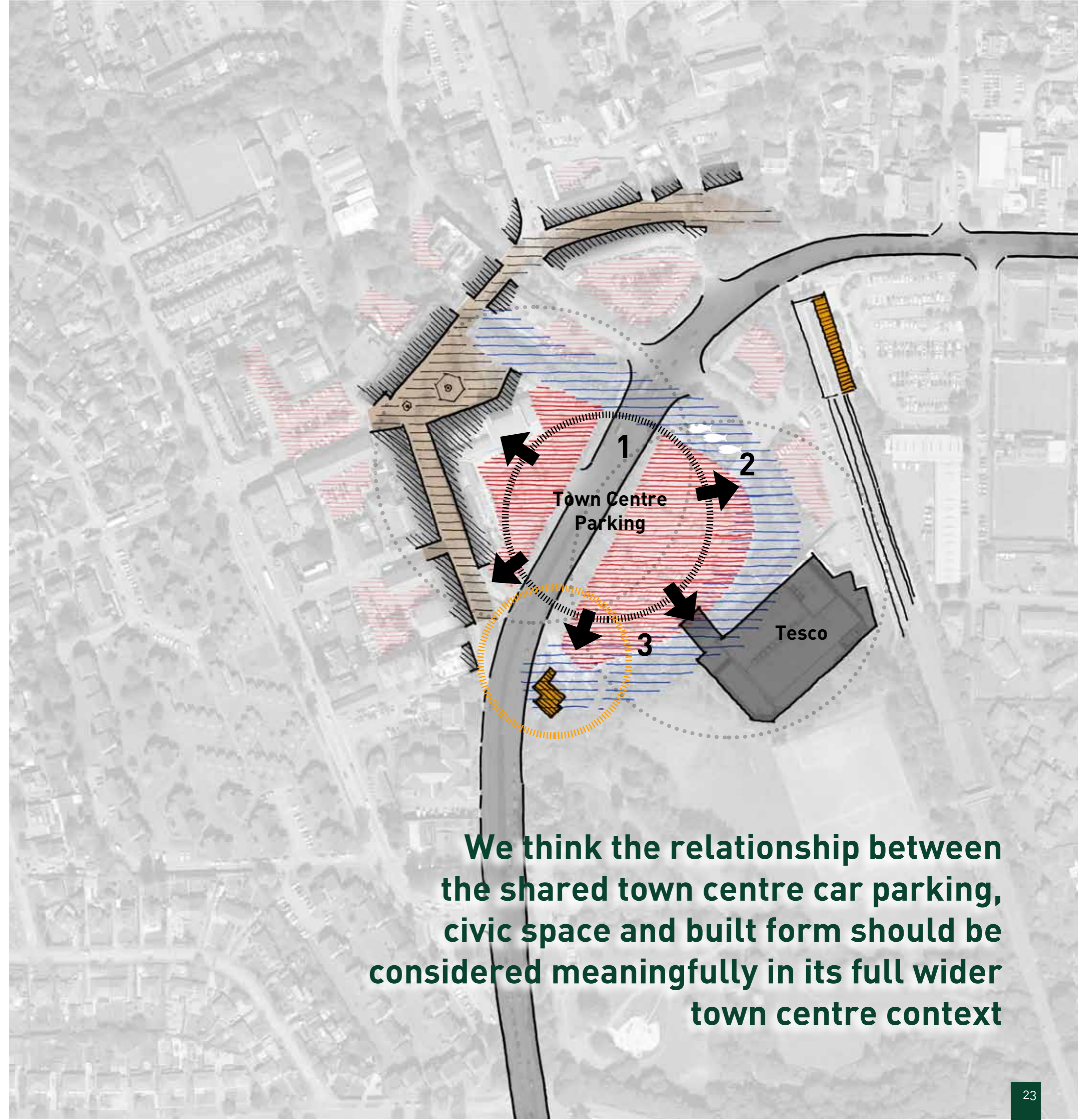
In relation to arrival by car, the pedestrianisation of Main Street and Douglas Street has freed up the old town centre for improved civic spaces. In many ways, the bypass has made it easier to arrive at the town centre by private transport, leading to a greater demand for car parking. That car parking is clear and central, serving both the old town centre to the north (with the railway station at the periphery), and south to Gavin's Mill and Tesco retail.

Arriving by car currently however poses a number of questions and issues in relation to the experience of approach to the Town Centre :

- 1 Can we make more of the town centre 'arrival experience'?
- 2 Can we better accommodate both roads infrastructure and quality pedestrian access?
- 3 Can we make a unified civic / river setting?

Currently, the parking location and distance on either side of Woodburn Way is roughly equidistant between the old centre and Tesco store. This arrangement makes both destinations relatively accessible from this centralised parking area, making it a highly effective 'shared' provision. In our view relocating parking away from this central location, and/or hiding it by placing buildings over the top, would erode the clarity of this town centre 'core' and result in the disruption of pedestrian movement between east and west. This would undoubtedly affect the mutual benefit that the centralised parking offers to both the old town centre and Tesco retail in its current location, with, in our view, potentially serious implications for businesses in the old town centre.

We think that the centralised parking should remain as a highly visible shared central resource serving the wider town centre area.



We think the relationship between the shared town centre car parking, civic space and built form should be considered meaningfully in its full wider town centre context

creating a sense of arrival

In addition to the arrival by car, the arrival experience for the pedestrian walking along the path to the south-eastern edge of Woodburn Way is, in our view, an essential element to consider for any development proposals within the town centre. The centralised town centre car parking straddling Woodburn Way is a clear functional need serving the immediate and wider area, however this provision results in a lack of street definition along its length, and a distinct loss of any sense of 'arrival' at the town centre. We consider that this sense of arrival should be addressed in two ways; the strengthening of structured landscaping/trees along Woodburn Way; and the development of key gap sites fronting Woodburn Way to create an 'urban gateway' for the Town Centre.

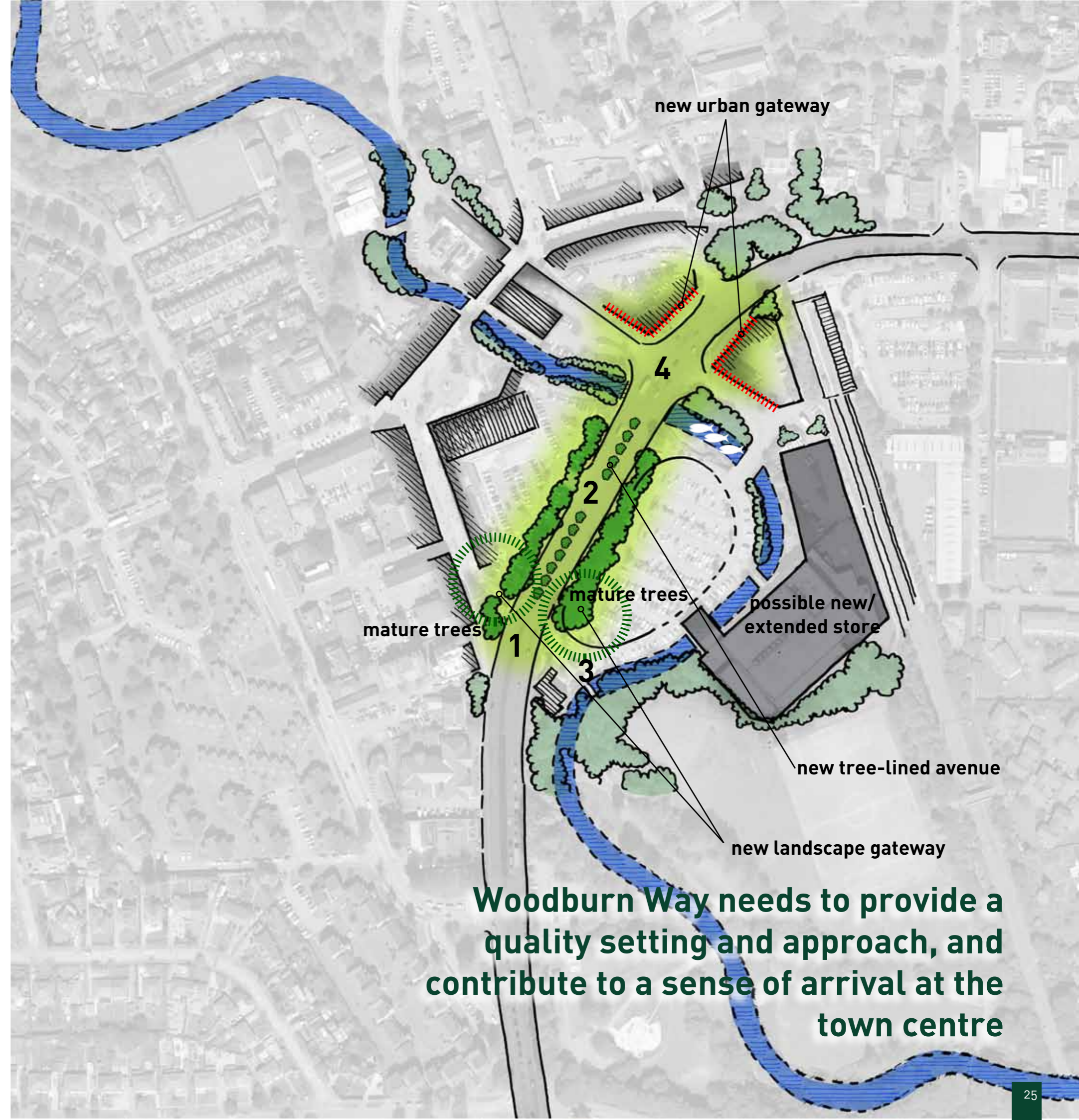
The current mature trees along the south-eastern edge of Woodburn Way we consider to be an essential asset to the town centre setting.

This is for a number of reasons;

- 1 they are a defining feature to the approach view from the south and 'introduce' the area's landscape setting.
- 2 they provide shelter and a natural edge for the pedestrian walking along Woodburn Way.
- 3 they provide a defining part of the current setting of the listed Gavin's Mill – a setting already challenged by the presence of Woodburn Way itself. Removal of these trees would lose any natural landscape elements from the Mill's northerly aspect.

We consider that the current trees along Woodburn Way should be strengthened – particularly to its north western edge – to create a strong tree lined avenue.

In addition to this landscape enhancement, infill and new development should be promoted at either side of the existing junction of Woodburn Way / Gavin's Mill Road / Ellangowan Road (4), to front Woodburn Way, creating a strong 'urban gateway' at this defining location.



Woodburn Way needs to provide a quality setting and approach, and contribute to a sense of arrival at the town centre

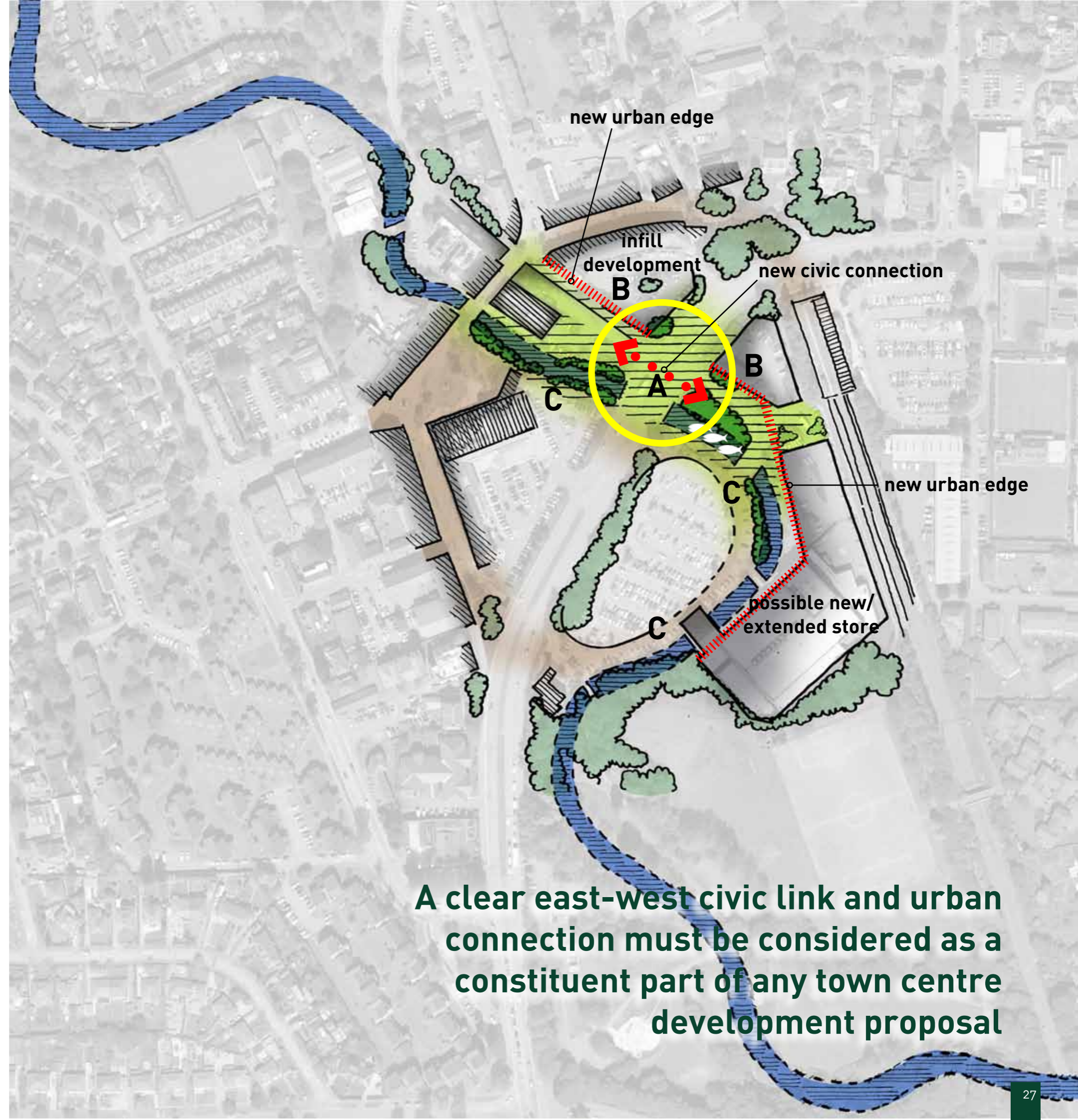
making a clear civic & urban connection

In addition to establishing a clear sense of arrival within the town centre through the transformation of Woodburn Way, establishing a clear urban east-west connection crossing Woodburn Way is, in our view, the other essential element to consider in any development proposals within the town centre. This is needed to visually and functionally link the two sides of the town centre that are currently somewhat dislocated.

We consider this to have a number of components;

- A** a street level pedestrian connection integrated into a new civic space at the existing road junction on Woodburn Way, (to be possibly known as Allander Cross) providing clear east-west pedestrian routes linking the two sides of the town centre core
- B** urban infill and new development on opportunity sites, to provide an urban frontage activated with ground level uses, linking east and west along a clear urban edge. Extension of these development sites to meet Woodburn Way (as described on the previous pages) will provide an urban 'gateway' marking the centre of Milngavie and creating a clear sense of arrival
- C** centralised town centre car parking serving the wider town centre area, and enhanced river edge landscape and public realm

The current Tesco retail site, we consider can be extended north to provide additional retail space as well as servicing provision and structured parking integrated into a new format store. The extension of this store does need however to consider the potential future reopening of Platform 3 at the station, and a suitable land reservation needs to be made for this eventuality.



A clear east-west civic link and urban connection must be considered as a constituent part of any town centre development proposal

a unified vision for an enhanced town centre

We have outlined in the preceding pages the thinking and strategy behind an outline development framework to guide development proposals for Milngavie Town Centre.

The core components of the strategy may be summarised as follows;

- **unify and connect** the two sides of the town centre
- protect, consolidate and improve the **centralised car parking** areas serving the overall town centre
- extend the **civic qualities** of the old town south-east in a 'loop' of quality public realm
- extend the **parkland setting** of Lennox Park northwards into and through the town centre through enhancement of the river edge setting of Allander Water, extending this northwards to re-connect with the old town centre
- clarify and improve the route of **Allander Way** along a quality river edge setting, crossing Woodburn Way via a new at grade pedestrian crossing
- create an improved **sense of arrival** at the town centre through a combination of landscape enhancement on Woodburn Way and infill development, marking a new focal civic space - 'Allander Cross'
- create a clear east-west pedestrian orientated **urban connection** crossing Woodburn Way at Allander Cross, positively linking the old town centre with a developed retail offering to the south-east

We would argue that any development proposals within the town centre should consider and respond to this outline strategy, placing the needs, sustainability and improvement of the wider town centre area ahead of isolated development thinking.



and looking further ahead?

....but we wonder whether there is a further level of change that can be explored to enhance and strengthen the principles outlined in this framework?

Woodburn Way was designed and constructed at a time when an engineering rather than a placemaking agenda dominated town planning. It would seem to us that the four lane dual carriageway (that joins at either end into a 'standard' two lane road) is an over engineered and nonsensical solution. This may be arguable, but what is without question, is that the scale and design of the road dramatically impacts the setting and urban design of the town centre.

In an age when individual car transport is becoming more and more expensive, should we not be planning for the down sizing of this road, and claiming the space back for the benefit of the town centre urban setting?

What if we were to close the north western carriageway of Woodburn Way (making the other carriageway two way), and construct a new urban edge building with shops along its ground floor along the north western side of this road? This would;

- improve the sense of arrival at a better defined town centre location focused at Allander Cross
- clearly define and contrast the urban town centre setting on the north-western side of Woodburn Way with the landscape garden setting to the south-eastern side

Parking could be provided along the length of the closed section of the dual carriageway. We then wonder whether this could lead to the reduction or eradication of the surface car park at the foot of Woodburn Way.....which would mean that the space could become the most wonderful town centre park, edged with the revitalised Allander Water with its town centre fish ladder. A truly memorable destination.

There's a thought.....



PAGE \ PARK

Page \ Park Architects, 20 James Morrison Street, Glasgow G1 5PE, UK

T 0141 553 5440 F 0141 553 5441 mail@pagepark.co.uk www.pagepark.co.uk