

DRAFT

## SECTION V: CONTEXT AND SETTING



*Plate 83 Masterplan area c. 1950's*

## SECTION V: THE CONTEXT AND SETTING

### 5.1 URBAN CONTEXT

Watters<sup>1</sup> the Town Clerk of Kilkenny, describes the river side setting from Green's Bridge and the eastern bank of the River Nore in 1872 as:

*'one of the most beautiful public walks perhaps to be found in any town in the Empire'.*

The eastern bank of the River Nore was then known as the 'Mayor's Walk' and it is from there that St Francis' Abbey as well as St Canice's and the mills and weirs could be viewed. Watters paid particular note to the orchards which he claimed were formed in the 'last fifteen years' by the Corporation (probably in and around 1850's).

The urban context of St Francis' Abbey and the Masterplan area which is intimately connected with the development and urban grain of the existing street scape of Kilkenny juxtaposed with the western bank of the River Nore in a relatively open area makes for an interesting dynamic.

So while the site is part of the development of the city it is still strangely set apart. The site has changed over time, while being in the ownership of one private company has helped preserve it as one coherent unit and ceased the piecemeal development of the land. The result is an opportunity to develop a sizable portion of land within an urban context that still contains well preserved upstanding, impressive, medieval masonry monuments of a national significance. These monuments are part and parcel of the cultural heritage significance of the medieval city of Kilkenny.

With a development of this nature and scale at the heart of a city there is the potential for conflicting values to be placed on different aspects of the site and for competing visions. It is the purpose of this document to provide an understanding of the cultural heritage value so it may be considered along with other values and be part of a collaborative decision making and design process.

The objective is to retain and celebrate the historic quality of the site and to promote its significance through interpretation and appropriate presentation while developing the site that is fit for purpose and meets the needs of modern Kilkenny. The job at hand is to manage the change appropriately and intelligently and to place the Abbey precinct at the centre of the development. The ultimate visitor and end user experience has to be interconnected between all disciplines.

Urban settlements will and must continue to change and develop. However, this necessary continuum must recognise and preserve the character, setting and amenity of all upstanding medieval monuments and urban defences and the archaeological evidence that survives, or may survive, below ground.

While investigation and monitoring has taken place within the Masterplan area it has never been subject to a comprehensive archaeological survey and until this has taken

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Watters 1872 The Approaches to Kilkenny in Olden Times, as compared with the present, *The Journal of the Royal Historical and Archaeological Association of Ireland*, Fourth Series, Vol. 2, No1 pgs 50-59

place the proposed chronology of the upstanding buildings and how the site developed and was used is open to interpretation and subject to change when further information becomes available.

Given the amount of development on site the sequencing of below ground remains is a problematic task and made more difficult when investigating small areas such as has occurred on site to date. It is difficult to reach a firm conclusion about the nature and date of buildings and ranges without further archaeological excavation and consideration of St Francis' Abbey in the context of abbey sites elsewhere.

English Heritage have developed the Buildings in Context Toolkit which is supported and promotes:

- Quality and heritage
- Innovation and history
- Sustainability
- Balance decisions
- Local Communities

The Heritage Council and Dublin Civic Trust have used this process to assess developments proposal for Aungier Street Dublin<sup>2</sup> which followed the following guiding principles:

- The historic environment is a shared resource;
- Participation of all stakeholders is necessary to sustain the historic environment;
- Understanding the significance of the place is key;
- Significant places should be managed to sustain their values;
- Decisions need to be reasonable, transparent and consistent.

The toolkit programme aims<sup>3</sup> to:

- Enable a wider understanding of the principles of developing appropriate contemporary design in historic areas to a range of professional and community groups;
- Enable those involved in making decisions affecting historic areas in their attainment of a more effective, balanced and efficient service resulting in an improvement of those decisions affecting the quality of the historic environment for future generations;
- Promote sustainable new and re-used development that doesn't sacrifice what future generations will value for the sake of short-term and often illusory gains so that we use already developed areas in the most efficient way, while making them more attractive places in which to live and work and conserving our cultural heritage.

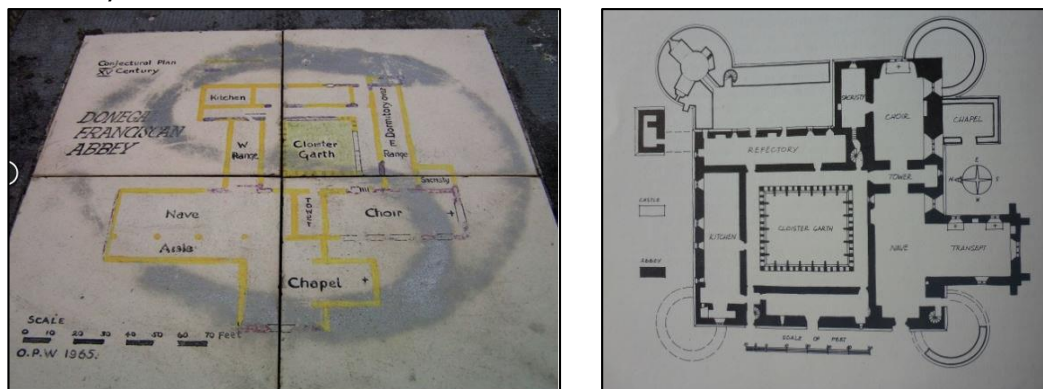
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<sup>2</sup> The project was implemented as part of a Public Realm Strategy in relation to Aungier Street area of Dublin by Dublin City Council and Dublin Civic Trust in 2012.

<sup>3</sup> [www.Building-in-context.org](http://www.Building-in-context.org). The Building in Context toolkit has been developed by English Heritage, CABI and the Kent Architecture Centre. It grew out of the publication 'Building in Context' published by EH and CABI in 2001. The purpose of the publication was to stimulate a high standard of design when development takes place in historically sensitive contexts. The founding principle is that all successful design solutions depend on allowing time for a thorough site analysis and character appraisal of context.

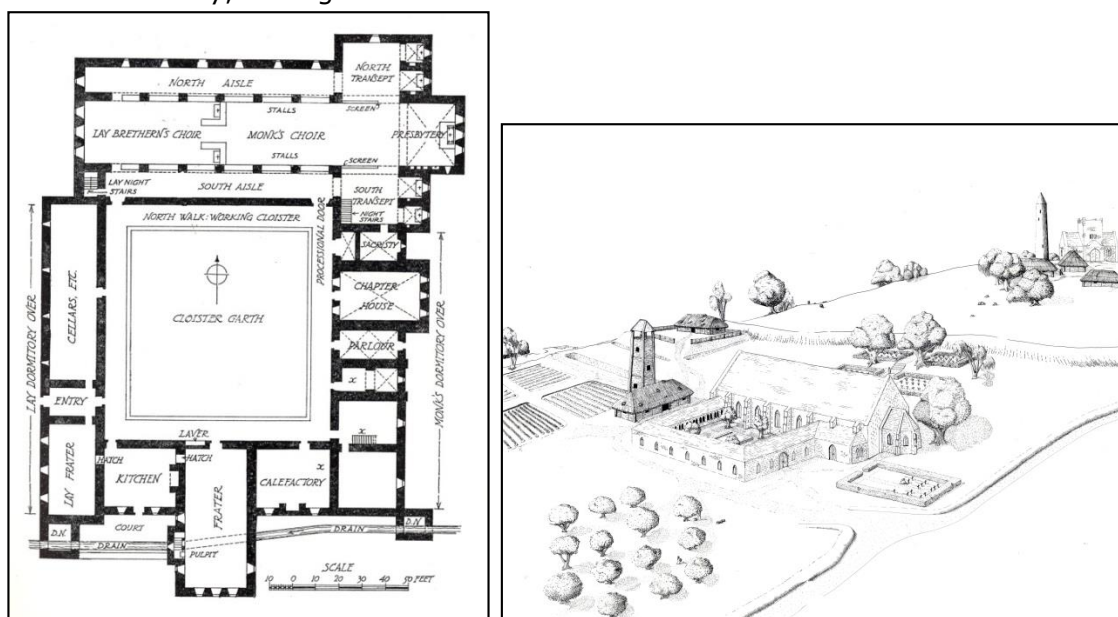
## 5.2 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

St Francis' Abbey represents an impressive testimony to 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century Irish Gothic architecture. Other Franciscan Abbeys which have a similar layout to St Francis' Abbey in Kilkenny include Donegal Franciscan Friary and Quin Franciscan Friary, Co. Clare, both of which have a choir to the east and nave to the west separated by a central tower, in common with Kilkenny. Both of these also have a cloister garth to the north and transept to the south, while at Kilkenny these elements are reversed, however they are c.200 years later than St Francis' Abbey in Kilkenny.



Plates 84-85 Franciscan Friary Donegal, founded 1474 Quin Franciscan Friary, Co Clare, founded 1433

The reconstruction illustration of Grey Abbey in Kildare is based on a typical Franciscan Abbey layout, the upstanding remains at the site and an interpretation of a geophysical survey and test excavation (Dennehy 2006<sup>4</sup>). The abbey is of a similar date to Kilkenny, having been founded in 1254.



Figures 35 and 36 Typical Franciscan Abbey layout (left) and Grey Abbey Co Kildare (founded 1254), artists reconstruction, based on this layout, upstanding remains and archaeological findings (Dennehy 2006)

<sup>4</sup> Dennehy, E. 2006 Directors Findings: Excavations at Grey Abbey Friary, Kildare. Presentation to the Grey Abbey Conservation Group.

While the basic elements of Franciscan church building of the medieval period comprise a nave to the west, where the congregation was accommodated, and the choir to the east with an altar positioned at the eastern end. In general the church layout is simple and rectangular in form, running East-West, with internal divisions by means of wooden screens. The church structure grew with the additions of aisles and transepts as the congregation grew and as funds allowed. At a later stage this long church may have been sub-divided by a tower. The base of the tower divided the church into a choir and nave. At St Francis' Abbey while the form of the building is simple there are many decorative stone carvings reflecting the wealthy patronage and a superior craftsmanship.

Domestic buildings were normally located to the north of the church in a rectilinear alignment around a cloister, the east, south and west ranges could contain rooms functioning as the monks dormitory, hall, necessaria, kitchen and refectory and the lay dormitory, cellars and drainage system. However there are many cases where these living quarters were located to the south as shown at Askeaton, Claregalway, Nenagh, Roscrea, Carrick-on-Suir, Castledermot and Kilkenny. Belfries were either free standing or attached to the church. Monastic gardens were located to the north, the monastic graveyard to the east and an infirmary to the southeast. All additional buildings such as barns, mills and brewhouses etc. were located in the outer court of the monastery. While these are the main elements of a Franciscan monastery, the layout of these elements varied from Friary to Friary and often was inverted.

The layout at the friary in Castledermot which was founded c.1247 is also very similar to that at Kilkenny, with a transept and aisle to the north of the nave and a cloister to the south (Halpin & Newman 2006<sup>5</sup>). The proportions of both churches are similar in that there are approximately 8m in width while St Francis' Abbey is some 6m longer standing at 47m. In both cases the northern aisle was partially destroyed to accommodate the construction of the transept chapel. Both have the same plan, three chapels with a row of arches creating a false aisle to the rear. This latter feature is found in other Franciscan transepts but the triple chapels are unique to these two sites. Kilkenny has the largest of the 25 known Franciscan transepts in the country<sup>6</sup>, and the transept at St Francis' Abbey is estimated at 18 x 20m. This is large in size when compared to Castledermot at 11 x 11.5m.

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<sup>5</sup> Halpin, A. & Newman, C. 2006 Ireland: An Oxford Archaeological Guide, 289-291. Oxford University Press

<sup>6</sup> Patrick Conlon (1975) 'Notes on St Francis' Abbey Kilkenny' in O.K.R The Old Kilkenny Review Vol.1, No.2, Kilkenny Archaeological Society, 80-84



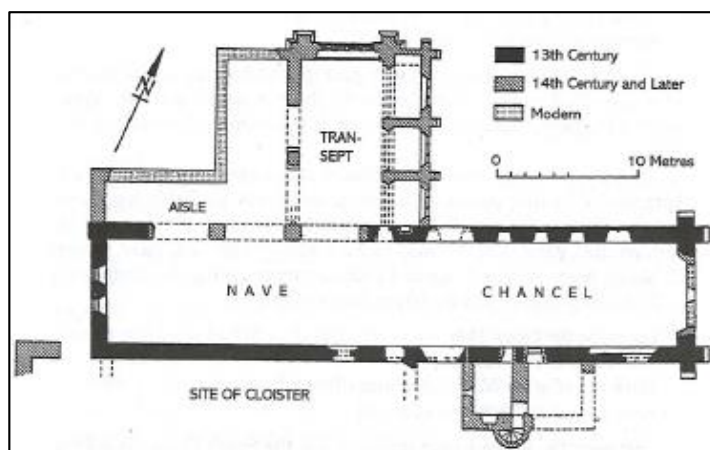


Figure 37 Franciscan Friary Castledermot, Co Kildare (founded. 1240)

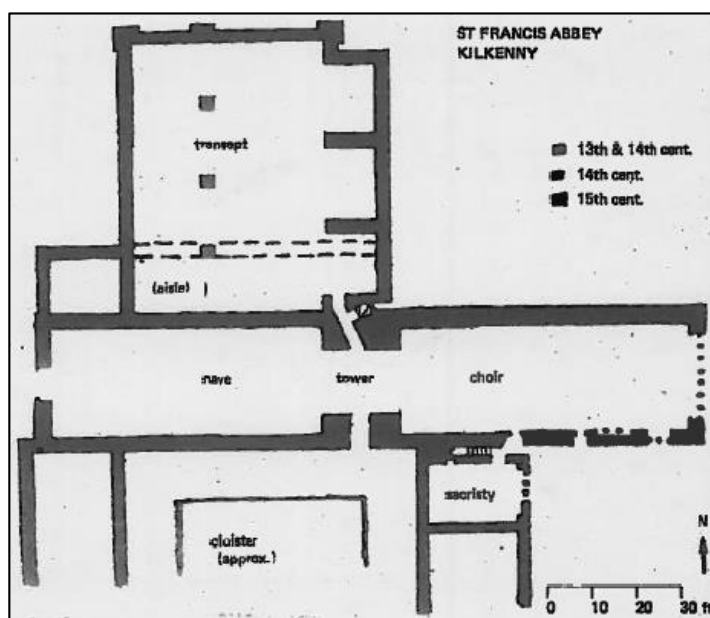


Figure 38 Taken from P. Conlon Notes on St Francis' Abbey



Plate 86 View of St Francis' Abbey taken from the north showing the chancel/choir to the east and tower to the west



*Plate 87 Franciscan Friary at Castledermot, showing transept, through excavation it is known that St Francis' Abbey Kilkenny has a similar layout and it is possible to visualise what the transept would have looked like from this photograph<sup>7</sup>.*



*Plate 88 Franciscan Friary at Castledermot founded c. 1247*

### 5.3 PRESENTATION OF THE MONUMENTS & SETTING

*'architecture, like all other cultural objects, is not made just once, but is made and remade over and over again each time it is represented through another medium, each time its surroundings change, each time different people experience it.'*<sup>8</sup>

The assessment of setting is concerned with the understanding and appreciation of the cultural heritage asset and its significance. In accordance with the accepted guidance, setting is not exclusively about the visual envelope, it embraces considerably more than just views; an impact on setting will only occur if the change affects the contribution made by setting to the significance of that asset.

<sup>7</sup> Monastic Ireland, The Discovery Programme, Castledermot Franciscan Friary

<sup>8</sup> From *Strangely Familiar* (1996):eds., Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Alica Pivaro, et al., Routledge, London.

The concept of setting is underdeveloped and undefined within the Irish Planning Legislation. The following are definitions of setting from English Heritage and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) X'ian Declaration<sup>9</sup>.

English Heritage in their guidance document on *The Setting of Heritage Assets* (2011)<sup>10</sup> define setting as:

*'The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced'.*

and also makes clear that:

*"Setting is not a heritage asset, nor a heritage designation. Its importance lies in what it contributes to the significance of the heritage asset. This depends on a wide range of physical elements within, as well as perceptual and associational attributes, pertaining to the heritage asset's surroundings. Each of these elements may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of the asset, or be neutral. In some instances the contribution made by setting to the asset's significance may be negligible: in others it may make the greatest contribution to significance."*

ICOMOS defines setting as:

*'as the immediate and extended environment that is part of, or contributes to, its significance and distinctive character. Beyond the physical and visual aspects, the setting includes interaction with the natural environment; past or present social or spiritual practices, customs, traditional knowledge, use or activities and other forms of intangible cultural heritage aspects that created and form the space as well as the current and dynamic cultural, social and economic context'.*

English Heritage provide a step by step assessment approach to setting this is as follows:

- identify which heritage assets and their settings are affected
- assess whether, how and to what degree these settings make a contribution to the significance of the heritage asset(s);
- assess the effects of the proposed development – direct, indirect, cumulative
- explore mitigation measures;
- make and document the decision and monitor outcomes.

### 5.3.1 Relationship of setting to curtilage, character and context

Setting is separate from the concepts of curtilage, character and context:

**Curtilage** is a legal term describing an area around a building and with protected structures, the extent of curtilage is defined by consideration of ownership, both past and present, functional association and layout. The setting of an historic asset will include, but generally be more extensive than, its curtilage (if it has one).

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<sup>9</sup> Xi'an (China) 21<sup>st</sup> October 2005 Xi'an Declaration on the conservation of the setting of heritage structures, sites and areas

<sup>10</sup> English heritage 2011 *The Setting of Heritage Assets*, now replaced by *Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3* published 25 March 2015



The **character** of an historic place is the sum of all its attributes, which may include: its relationships with people, now and through time, its visual aspects, and the features, material, and spaces associated with its history, including its original configuration and subsequent losses and changes. Heritage assets and their setting contribute to character but it is a broader concept, often used in relation to entire historic areas and landscapes.

The **context** of a heritage asset is a non-statutory term used to describe any relationship between it and other heritage assets, which are relevant to its significance, including cultural, intellectual, spatial or functional. They apply irrespective of distance, sometimes extending well beyond what might be considered an asset's setting, and can include that relationship of one heritage asset to another of the same period or function, or with the same designer or architect.

The National Monument of St Francis' Abbey as defined by the National Monuments Service is shown on Figure 42.

The Masterplan area is located within the City Centre and St Canice's Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs) (Figure 39).

The City Centre ACA forms part of the medieval core of Kilkenny. It is characterised by its tight urban grain, colourful streetscapes and network of lanes dating mainly from the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. This district includes the triangle of High Street/ Parliament Street, Kieran Street and Rose Inn Street, which comprises the principle retail area of the city.

The area is characterised by the almost continuous enclosure of the streets with mainly three storey 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings built on medieval plots and foundations. The area also includes sections of the medieval Kilkenny City Walls (Hightown Circuit). The stepped lanes running from High Street to Kieran Street and from St. Mary's Lane to Rose Inn Street are a notable feature of Kilkenny. There are numerous notable Protected Structures that surround the Masterplan area and belong in the conservation area, including St Francis Abbey, Irishtown Bridge, the City Hall and Courthouse and Rothe House on Parliament Street to name but a few.

The St Canice's ACA is dominated by the Cathedral district at the centre of which is the visually prominent 13<sup>th</sup> century St Canice's Cathedral. Vicar and Green Street have experienced some dereliction in the recent past, however there is potential for renovation in this area. The Masterplan area extends into the southern section of this conservation area along the banks of the River Nore.



*Plate 89 Views from the Masterplan area towards St Canice's*

According to Kilkenny City Development Plan<sup>11</sup> any new development within an ACA and in particular St Canice's and City Centre ACAs should:

- Encourage the introduction of buildings of high quality contemporary and vernacular design and materials, as appropriate to the character of the existing streetscape.
- Encourage the retention of the historic scale and plot size when new buildings are being introduced into an ACA.
- Minimise the impact of new development on existing amenities, including residential and land uses.
- Seek the retention of mature trees (those in good condition) which contribute to the character of the areas where appropriate.
- Seek the conservation of St Francis Abbey and its setting.
- Ensure that any development occurring along the River Nore will be sensitive in its design and mindful of its proximity to the river.
- Enhance the character of Vicar Street and Troy's Lane.
- Protect and retain the historic integrity of the City Walls, in accordance with the Kilkenny City Walls Conservation Plan<sup>12</sup>.
- Protect the historic and architectural character of St Canice's Cathedral and its unique setting.
- Encourage the renovation and re-use of any vacant or derelict buildings.
- Retain the existing scales of building heights of three and four storey buildings.
- Improve the visual appearance of the car parking area at the Market yard, and ensure a high standard of architectural design for any development at Bateman Quay.

<sup>11</sup> Chapter 7, Heritage, Kilkenny City and Environs Development Plan 2014-2020

<sup>12</sup> Heritage Council 2005

In urban environments the numbers and proximity of heritage assets mean that the protection and enhancement of setting is intimately linked to townscape and urban design considerations (Figure 40), including the degree of conscious design or fortuitous beauty and the consequent visual harmony or congruity of development, and often relate to townscape attributes such as lighting, trees, verges or the treatment of boundaries, street surfaces and material used within buildings<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> English Heritage Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning, Note 3, The Setting of Heritage Assets, March 2015 p 1-2 and 6



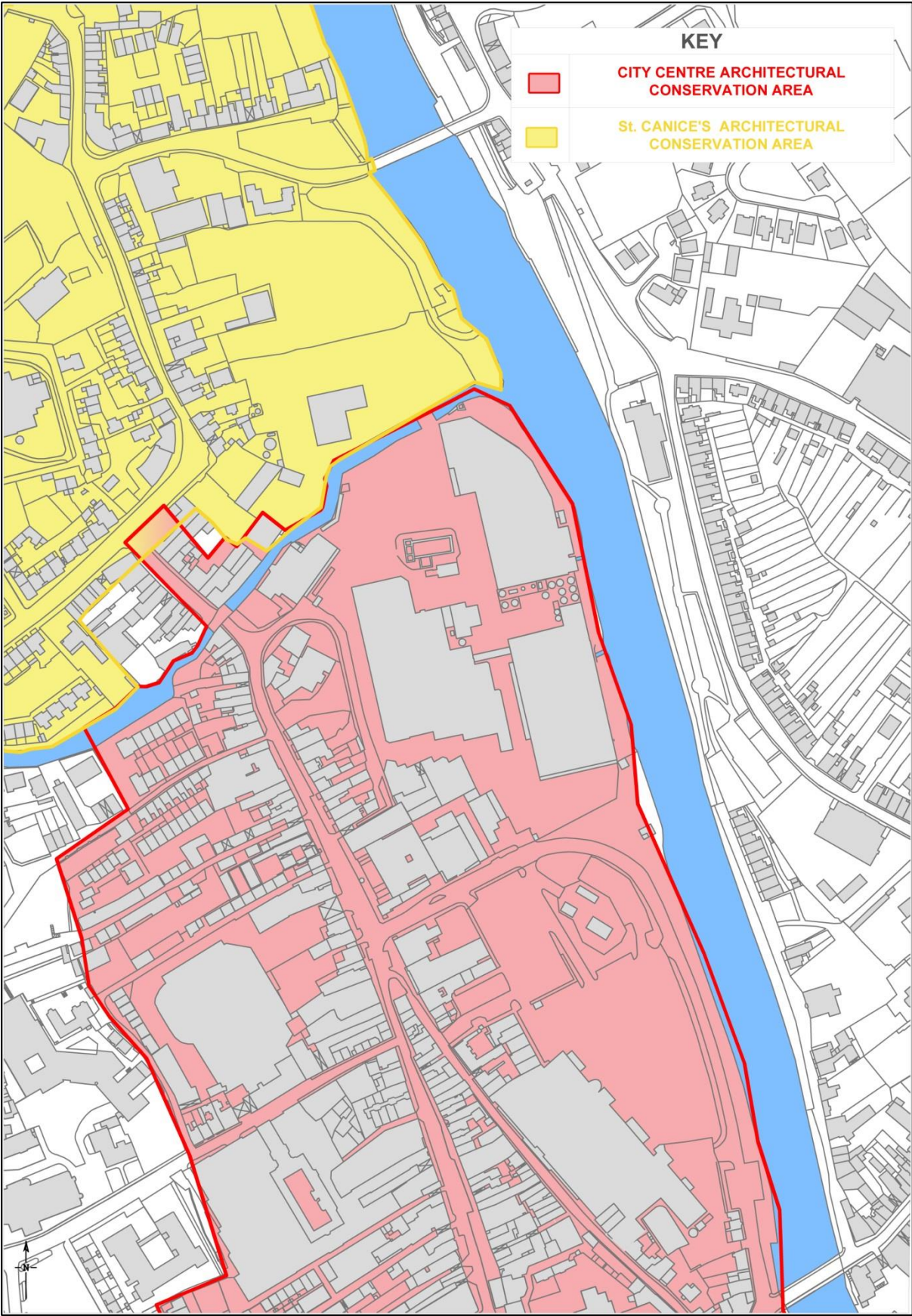


Figure 39 ACA Map







In terms of St Francis' Abbey the contribution of setting on the significance of the monument can be attributed to:

- The group value placed on the complex of upstanding well preserved medieval monuments including the City Wall, Evan's Turret and the Abbey itself and extending to the extensive below ground remains.
- The influence of the River Nore and River Breagagh in determining the location of the site.
- The location of the site within the historic town of Kilkenny

The Masterplan should provide for the potential of a newly enhanced urban environment that embraces the significance of the monuments and increases the appreciation and understanding of each individual heritage asset.

The approach of independently evaluating and reusing modern existing buildings within the brewery site will assist in retaining the urban, industrial character and will also contribute to retaining the significance of the brewing industry that was integral to the social, economic and technological growth of Kilkenny. For example, the retention of the Brewhouse, a side from its name, provides a strong physical and visual link with the former function of the site.

While the Masterplan area may appear to consist of competing heritage assets and values, a medieval abbey precinct and a brewery – both these sites have existed side by side for the last 300 years and together create an interesting and distinctive historic place that is inextricable linked to the development of Kilkenny. The following photographs show how the Masterplan area sits within the urban and street scape of Kilkenny and along the banks of the River Nore and Breagagh.



Plate 90 Kilkenny Streetscape



The following map was supplied by the National Monuments Service in relation to the extent of the National Monument of St Francis' Abbey which is defined by the dotted line<sup>14</sup>.

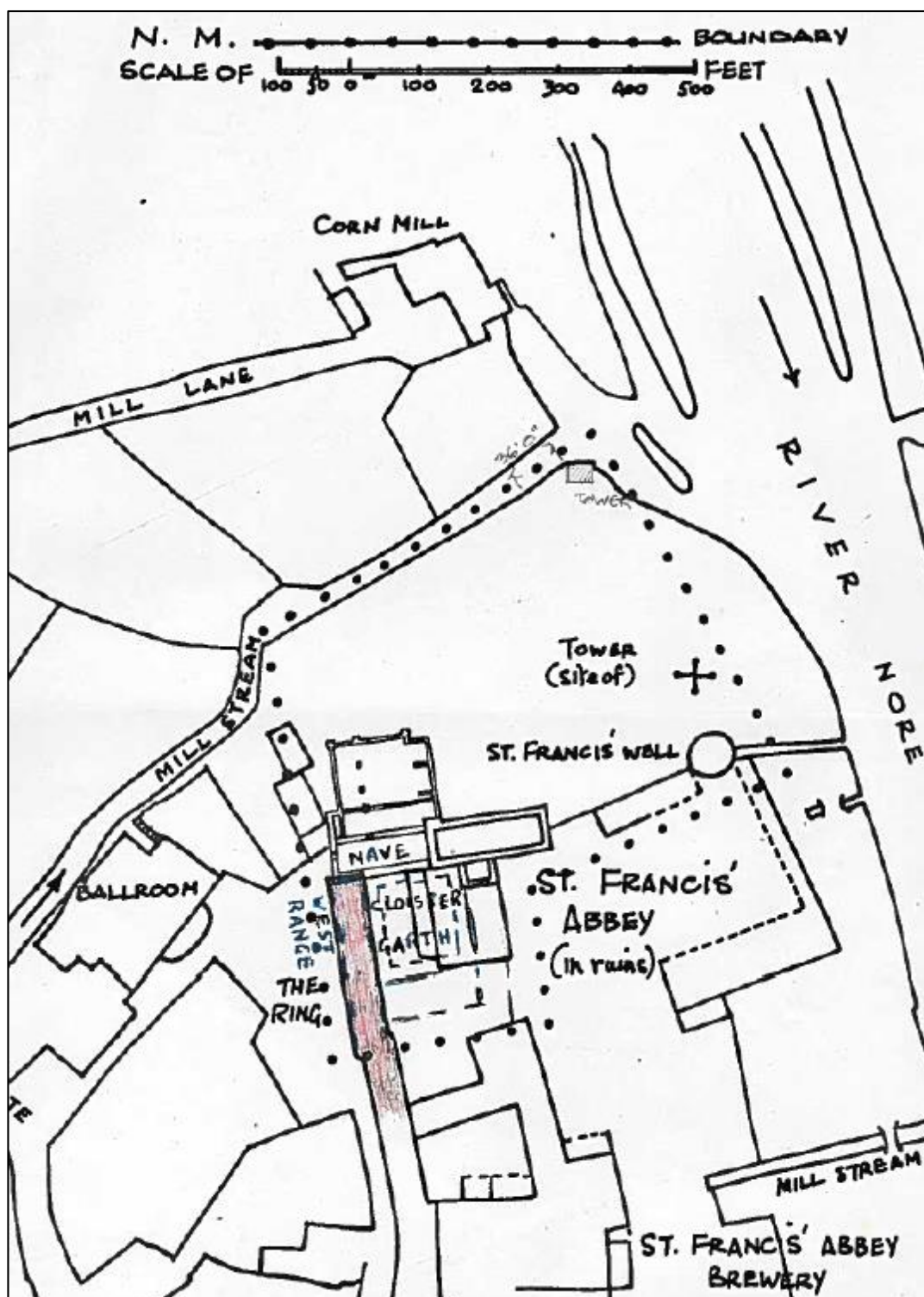


Figure 42 Extent of National Monument Saint Francis' Abbey

<sup>14</sup> The map of St Francis' Abbey was prepared in 1968 and shows the boundary of the National Monument as far as could be ascertained by surface indications, see dotted line on the map.



## 5.4 HISTORICAL ILLUSTRATIONS

Grose (1792) shows a depiction of the abbey when both the choir and nave were still standing and separated by the belfry tower. The illustration appears to be looking towards the east window which is blocked up and shows four small one storey thatch structures located within the nave above which the remains of three lancet windows project. The elegant arch of the belfry is clearly depicted.

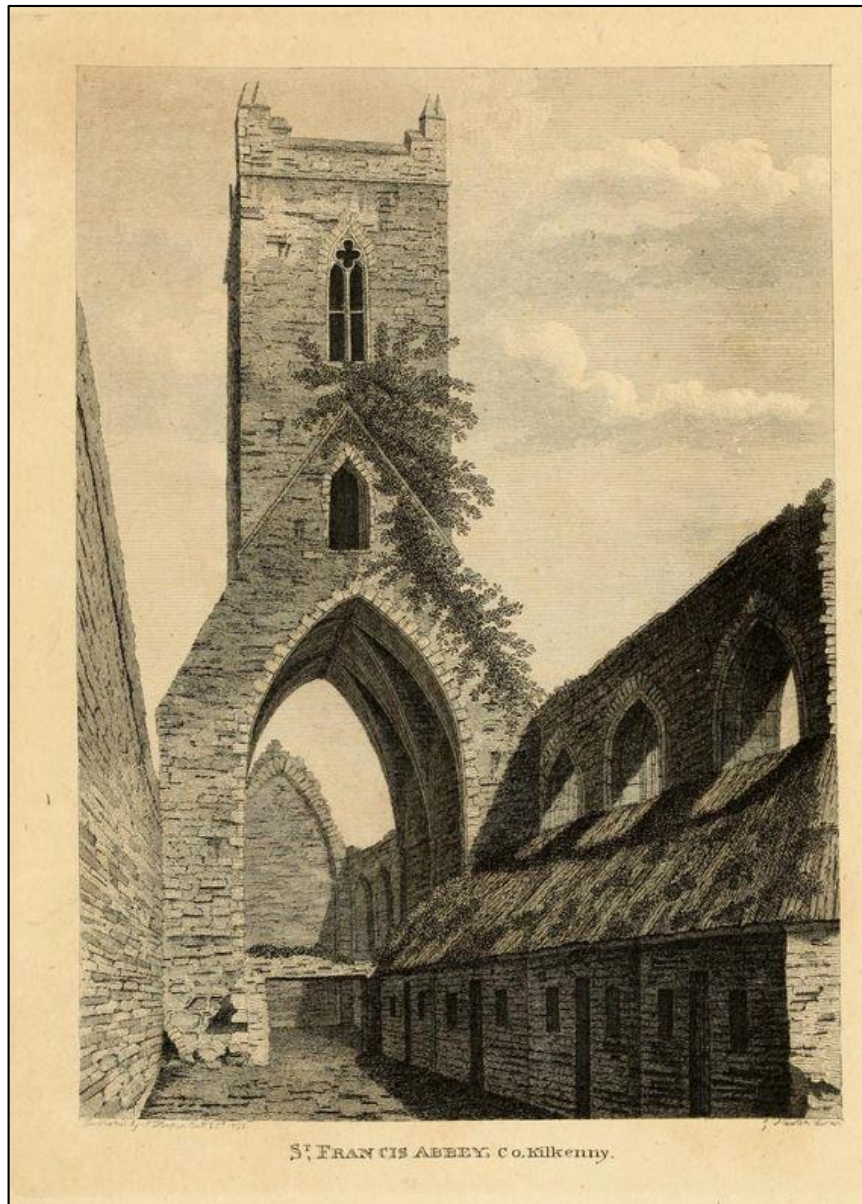
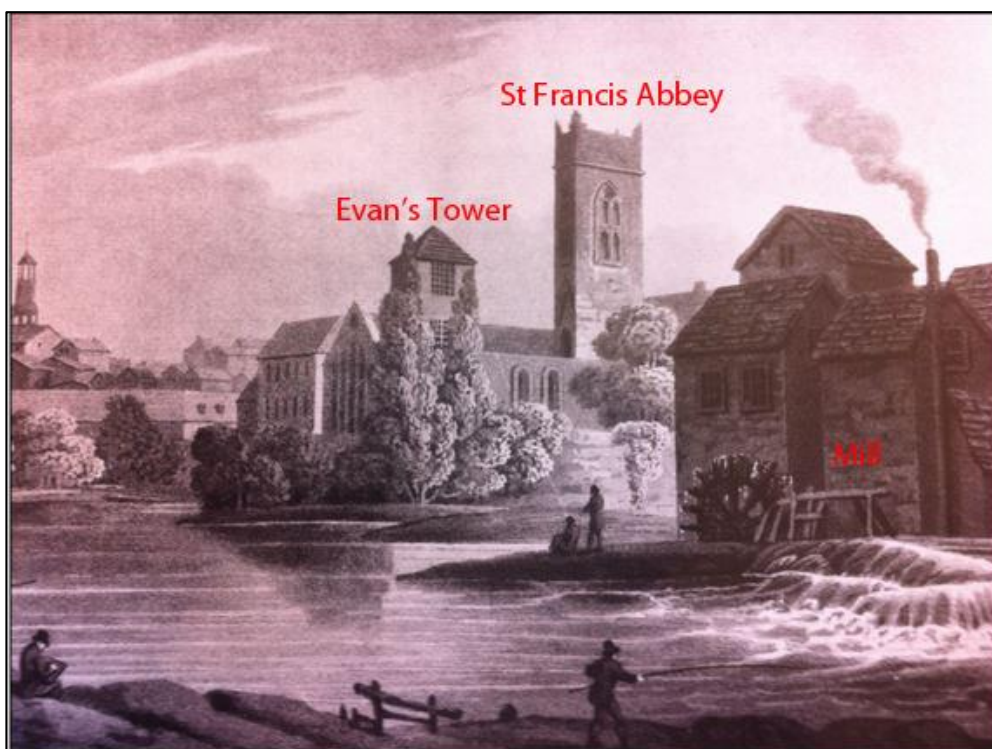


Figure 43 St Francis' Abbey, Kilkenny, Grose 1792

The following are all antiquarian drawings of the plan area and key features produced after 1800. The illustrations date from 1810 to 1882 and all depict a tranquil setting along the River Nore with the buildings set within lush vegetation rather than the increasingly industrialised backdrop with the expansion of the brewery and mill sites that were occurring at the time.

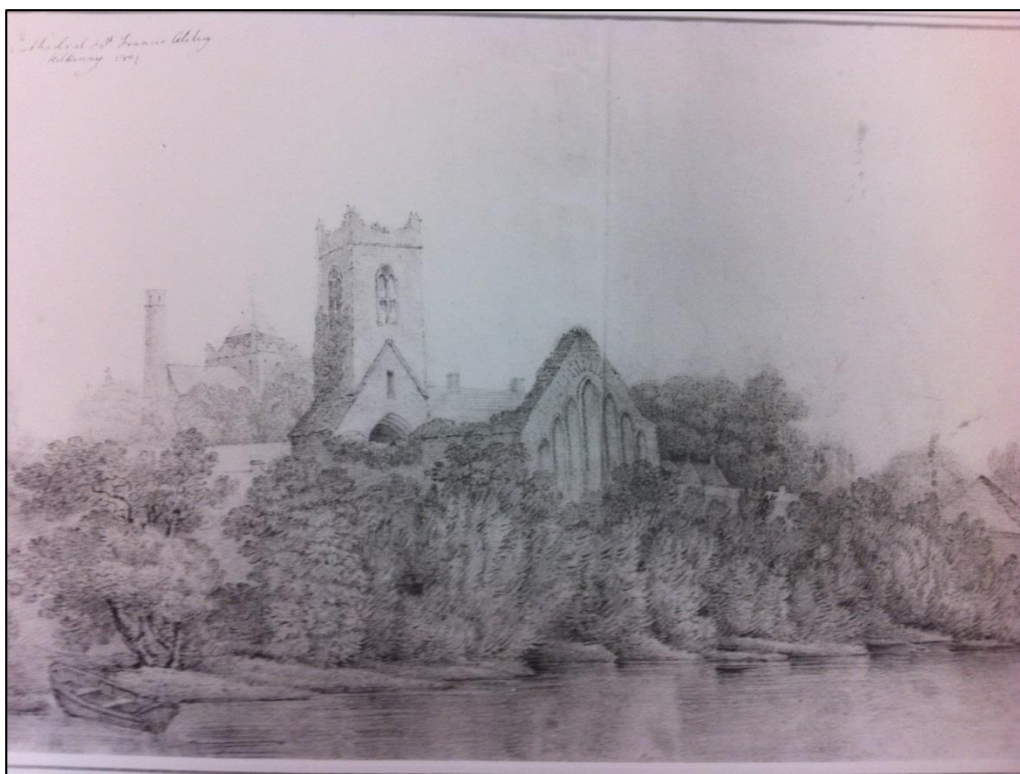


**Figure 44:** *St Francis' Abbey and Mills, with Evan's Tower in the centre. Print from *Antiquities and Scenery of the County Kilkenny*, ed. J.G. Robertson, 1851 reproduced with the permission of the Irish Architectural Archive, Dublin.*



**Figure 45:** *Watercolour view of City from east with St Francis' Abbey (left), Cathedral centre back, Evan's Tower centre front and mill to the right. Taken from Collection: Castletown House (Cat. No. 28). Reproduced with the permission of the Irish Architectural Archive, Dublin.*





**Figure 46a:** St Francis' Abbey viewed from the east bank of River Nore with St Canice's Cathedral and round tower in distance. Pencil drawing by R. Gibbs c. 1810 (see preface to *Antiquities and Scenery of County Kilkenny*, 1851). Reproduced with the permission of the Irish Architectural Archive, Dublin.



**Figure 46b:** St Francis' Abbey Brewery c. 1860 viewed from the east bank of River Nore, image supplied by Grace Fagan, Rothe House



**Figure 47:** 'The Nore' by E.J. Brenann 1882, oil on canvas, Butler Gallery. This painting focuses on the river and mills at Green's Bridge. The belfry tower at St Francis can just be made out in the background.

## 5.5 PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS

Public consultation and workshops took place on the weekends of 9/10<sup>th</sup> January and the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2015 with regard to re-visioning the Masterplan area. Comhairle na nÓg workshop took place on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February. Previous to this a draft plan was on display in December 2013. The purpose of these workshops was for the public to express their views and for suggestions for the future development of the site. In addition to this 71 submissions were received during the consultation period from the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 2014 to the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 2015. These submissions and issues raised at the workshops have been taken into consideration when preparing this document.

It was clear from the workshops that there was a genuine and pressing concern that archaeology and the built heritage should inform the design process. Everyone present agreed that central to the design of the scheme was the protection and enhancement of the archaeological and built heritage on the site, indeed this was a strong theme expressed throughout both weekends at each workshop.

As a result of the consultation process the following action was recommended by Kilkenny County Council:

*Complete the archaeological assessment and devise an Archaeological Strategy for the plan area in conjunction with all stakeholders, initiate further feedback once the strategy is published.*

The following vision statement reflects the aspiration from each of the themes discussed at the workshops:

*To plan the area as a seamless complement to the medieval city as an inclusive place for an inter-generational community to work, live, visit and play with St. Francis Abbey at its core. The regeneration of the area will focus on embracing the sites' natural, cultural and built heritage, whilst maximising the benefits of the rivers Nore and Breagagh, providing for a broad range of uses, sustaining growth in employment and advancing economic activity in a sustainable and energy efficient fashion where innovation can flourish. The area will be a permeable expansion of the city for pedestrians and cyclists where smarter travel principles are provided for<sup>15</sup>.*

As with all vision statements, they form part of an organic progress that evolve as further information is gathered, it is a live document which is constantly changing. The vision statement provides a starting off point into which a framework can then be built around and an agreed approach developed.

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<sup>15</sup> The Brewery: Re-Visioning Report on Public Consultation, March 2015 Kilkenny County Council