
Report To:	Environment and Regeneration Committee	Date:	29 August 2019
Report By:	Corporate Director Environment, Regeneration and Resources	Report No:	E&R/19/05/0X/SJ/AW
Contact Officer:	Alan Williamson	Contact No:	01475 712491
Subject:	West Blackhall Street Public Realm Proposals		

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the West Blackhall Street public realm improvement project and to recommend which design is taken forward.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 Improving the environment of West Blackhall Street has been identified and agreed by the Greenock Town Centre Regeneration Forum and the Committee as a priority project for Greenock town centre. A design for the improvement of the public realm of West Blackhall Street was developed involving public consultation in 2018 (the 2018 proposal). A design review, funded by Sustrans, has provided an alternative design which meets Sustrans' funding principles (the 2019 proposal).
- 2.2 The main difference between the two designs relates to parking. The 2018 proposal retains parking on both sides of the street and reduces current parking levels from 65 spaces to 59 spaces. The 2019 proposal has parking on one side of the street and provides 36 spaces. A further 20 spaces will be provided at a site on Jamaica Street. The 2019 proposal is considered to offer a more transformational design for the street creating an improved sense of place which will make the street a more attractive place to visit and spend time, and also future-proof the street for when more sustainable transport choices are likely to change the streetscape. Significantly it greatly increases space for pedestrians and enhances opportunities for street cafés.
- 2.3 At a special meeting of the Greenock Regeneration Forum on 21 August 2019, there was broad support for the 2019 proposal.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Committee approves the '2019 proposal' as the preferred public realm improvement design for West Blackhall Street and that the project proceeds to detailed/technical design making use of Sustrans' funding.

Scott Allan
Corporate Director
Environment, Regeneration & Resources

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Improving the streetscape of West Blackhall Street was identified as a priority project in the masterplan that emerged from the Greenock town centre charrette held in 2016. The importance of this project was confirmed by the Greenock Town Centre Regeneration Forum at its meeting of 14 June 2017, and thereafter a design team led by landscape architects Ironside Farrar was appointed in February 2018 to prepare a design for public realm improvements to the street. The design process involved two public consultation events, plus reports back to the Town Centre Regeneration Forum and a project steering group. The developed design was reported to the Committee on 25 October 2018, where it was decided that the project be approved as a town centre priority project with implementation funding of £1.5m also approved.
- 4.2 Subsequent to the 25 October 2018 Environment and Regeneration Committee meeting, Council officers held discussions with walking and cycling charity Sustrans. Sustrans had reviewed the public realm improvement plans for West Blackhall Street and indicated that, if the design was more in keeping with its design principles, it would be a design to which it could contribute funding. These principles are:
- develop ideas collaboratively and in partnership with communities.
 - facilitate independent walking, cycling and wheeling for everyone, including an unaccompanied 12 year old.
 - design places that provide enjoyment, comfort and protection.
 - ensure access for all and equality of opportunity in public space.
 - ensure all proposals are developed in a way that is context-specific and evidence-led.
 - reallocate road space, and restrict motor traffic permeability to prioritise people walking, cycling and wheeling over private motor vehicles.
- 4.3 Sustrans advised that it could fund a design review of the existing proposals for West Blackhall Street to develop alternative proposals in keeping with these principles. The Council successfully applied for design review funding (£25k) and this process was undertaken by Ironside Farrar between March and June 2019. It involved two open consultation events and two focused events involving town centre users with physical impairments and the youth council.

5.0 PROPOSALS FOR WEST BLACKHALL PUBLIC REALM

- 5.1 Two different designs have now been prepared for public realm improvements on West Blackhall Street. Hereafter these will be referred to as the 2018 proposal, previously supported at the October 2018 Environment and Regeneration Committee (see Appendix 1), and the 2019 proposal, prepared through the Sustrans' design review project (see Appendix 2).
- 5.2 The designs are compared in Appendix 5. Some aspects of the designs are similar. Both will open up West Blackhall Street to run one-way from east to west (Oak Mall to Grey Place). The direction of traffic on the side streets running onto and off of West Blackhall Street is also the same in both designs (see Appendix 3). Also in both designs there will be mini plazas created at each end of the street (outside Oak Mall and at Grey Place). Both designs also allow for sections of the street to be closed for events (see Appendix 4). All of these aspects were supported through both design processes.
- 5.3 The 2019 proposal has the following key differences:
- wider pavements on both sides of the street.
 - 2m wide segregated cycle lane.
 - 36 parking spaces compared to 59 in the 2018 proposal (and 65 currently).
 - road and footways will be fully reconstructed with drainage issues addressed.
 - street trees on single side of road (the 2018 proposal has street trees on both sides).
- 5.4 A key difference between the proposals and the existing situation is the reduction in parking spaces on West Blackhall Street. The 2019 proposal, supported by Sustrans, reduces parking from the current 65 spaces to 36 spaces, some of which would be disabled bays and approximately 8 of which would be restricted for loading at certain times of the day (this would also be the case in the 2018 proposal). The reduction in car dominance provided by parking on

only one side of the street is central to Sustrans' support of the 2019 proposal. There are different views as to how important on-street parking is to the future success of West Blackhall Street. For some, the traders in particular, it is considered essential to the street's success and any reduction is strongly resisted. Whilst some members of the public are also in favour of retaining current levels of on-street parking, for others this is less of a concern, or their concern is about the availability of town centre parking in general.

5.5 Ironside Farrar produced a completion report in respect of the 2019 design review and engagement. This is available as a background paper. Key findings are:

- Town centre regeneration – wide support for regeneration aspects of the project, including the halting of town centre decline and loss of businesses, through West Blackhall Street changing its offer and becoming a pleasant place to spend time during the day and into the evening.
- Accessibility – pavement surface and drainage improvements, and pavement width increases are necessary to provide an inclusive, flexible and usable footway, with connections from side to side and to public transport nodes and car parks.
- Walking and cycling – cycle infrastructure on West Blackhall Street would require connections to the national cycle network.
- Parking – the report reflects the difference between traders, who are strongly supportive of retaining on-street parking, and other town centre users, who see an issue with wider town centre parking, although all are concerned to some extent about any loss of parking. The report recognises however that a move to parking on one side of the street is fundamental to Sustrans' support of a design. The report concludes that a way forward is to provide compensatory parking measures hand-in-hand with the West Blackhall Street project.
- Trees – the report identifies street trees as the most successful way to enhance air quality and the environment of the street. Concerns regarding problems with roots and fallen leaves are recognised and can be mitigated by the selection of appropriate species and maintenance.

5.6 Action is proposed to address these points. The Council is purchasing the site of the former Greenock Free Church on Jamaica Street, having had an unconditional offer accepted, and will take ownership of the site on 4 September. This will provide 20 additional car parking spaces within walking distance of West Blackhall Street. The cost of this will be met from the Scottish Government Town Centre Fund. Funding will also be sought from Sustrans for a feasibility study investigating how walking/cycling links can be improved and created between the waterfront/national cycle network and the town centre, and West Blackhall Street in particular.

5.7 The Greenock Town Centre Regeneration Forum has been involved in the development of the 2018 and 2019 proposals, and considered these most recently at a special meeting on 21 August 2019. There was broad support for the 2019 proposal following extensive discussion.

5.8 The 2019 proposal is supported by officers as the design that will be most transformational for West Blackhall Street, enhancing it as a place to visit and stay longer. Whilst the 2018 design will improve the quality of street materials and introduce street trees it will not fundamentally change the feel of the street, which would remain car dominated. There are many factors affecting the performance of town centres and high streets currently and, whilst the availability of on-street parking is one of them, the creation of a sense of place and an attractive place to visit is also important. The public realm improvements proposed for West Blackhall Street will cover a period when town centres will continue to evolve, with sense of place becoming an ever more important factor for visiting, and also a period when zero-carbon targets and the move to more sustainable travel methods will change the streetscape. In this regard the 2019 proposal is seen as future-proofing the street.

5.9 The significant difference in costs between the two designs as set out in paragraph 6.2 is owing to the 2019 proposal involving a full side to side rebuild of the street. Rebuild is necessary to achieve competent surface water drainage as part of the overall project in which both kerb lines will be moved and the pavements widened. The rebuild gives a fully reconstructed road surface and a robust long term solution. The 2018 proposal retains much of the existing road surface and kerb lines undisturbed (see Appendix 5) with full side to side rebuild being limited to junction plazas. Slow surface water drainage and longer term deterioration of the road surface were not addressed.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

Finance

- 6.1 The Committee has already agreed a Council contribution of £1.5m to the West Blackhall Street project through the Towns and Villages Environmental Improvements Projects fund. Approximately £60,000 of this has already been spent on design work and related studies. Partner funding will be sought for the remaining funding, which for the 2019 proposal will be in the region of £1.5M.
- 6.2 The 2018 proposal has been costed at £2.05m (£1.865m plus 10% fees) and the 2019 proposal has been costed at £3.09m (£2.809m plus 10% fees). However, it is only the 2019 proposal that will attract Sustrans' funding, with a bid for up to £1.5m being considered. The Council has committed £1.5m to the West Blackhall Street design so both proposals would need additional funding to be found with SPT a possible funder.
- 6.3 The Council has successfully bid for £85,000 Sustrans funding to undertake the detailed/technical design of the 2019 proposal, if this is the design that is to be taken forward.

Financial Implications:

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement from	Other Comments
Towns and Villages Environmental Improvement Fund - Greenock	West Blackhall Street	2019/20-2020/21	£1,400,000	n/a	Partner funding will be sought for implementation.

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement from (if Applicable)	Other Comments
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Legal

- 6.4 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

Human Resources

- 6.5 There are no personnel implications associated with this report.

Equalities

- 6.6 An Equality Impact Assessment of the proposed public realm improvement project has been undertaken. This indicates that the public realm improvements are likely to have a positive impact on the following protected characteristic groups: age, disability, and pregnancy and maternity. The reason for this is that through taking the requirements of these protected characteristic groups into account through the design process, the street should become easier to manoeuvre for young people and the elderly, people with sensory and physical impairments, and people with prams/young children.

Repopulation

- 6.7 Improving the environment of West Blackhall Street will make Greenock town centre a more attractive place to live, work, visit and invest.

7.0 CONSULTATIONS

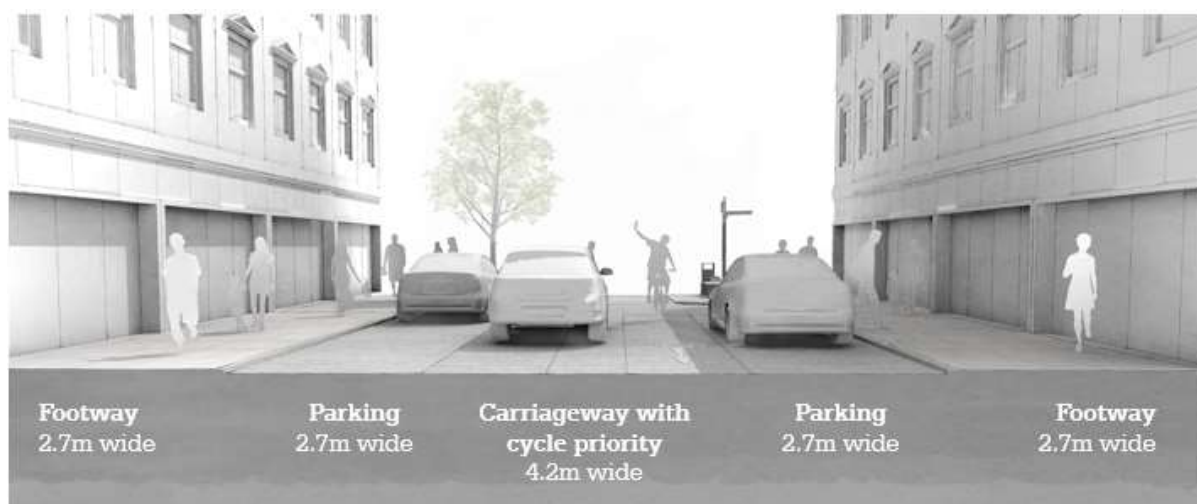
- 7.1 The Council's Head of Legal and Property Services and Chief Financial Officer were consulted during the preparation of this report.

8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1 West Blackhall Street Design Review & Engagement 2019 – completion report by Ironside Farrar.

WEST BLACKHALL STREET- PUBLIC REALM PROJECT – design review & engagement 2019

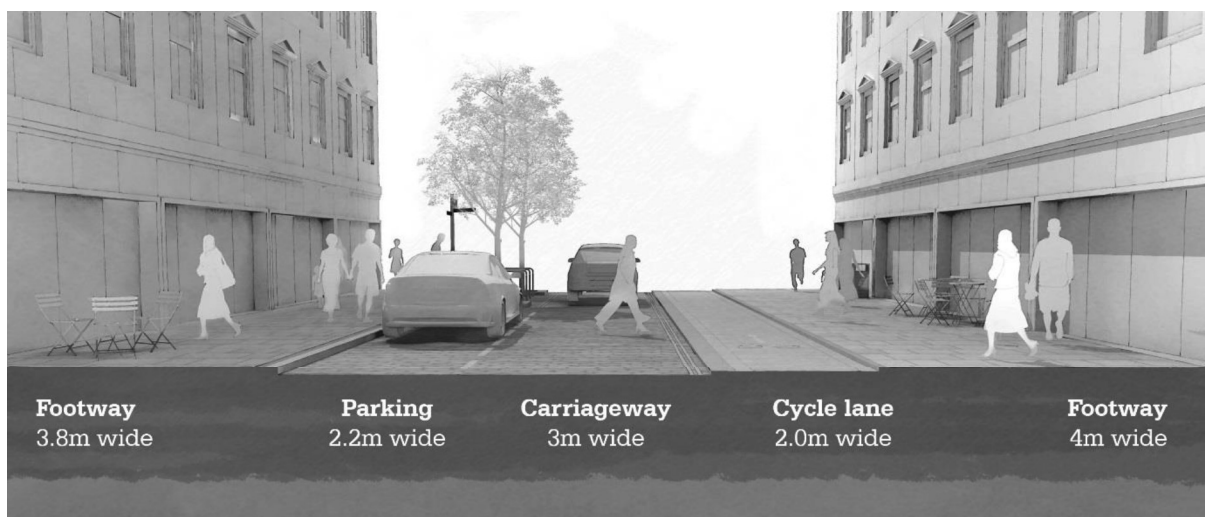
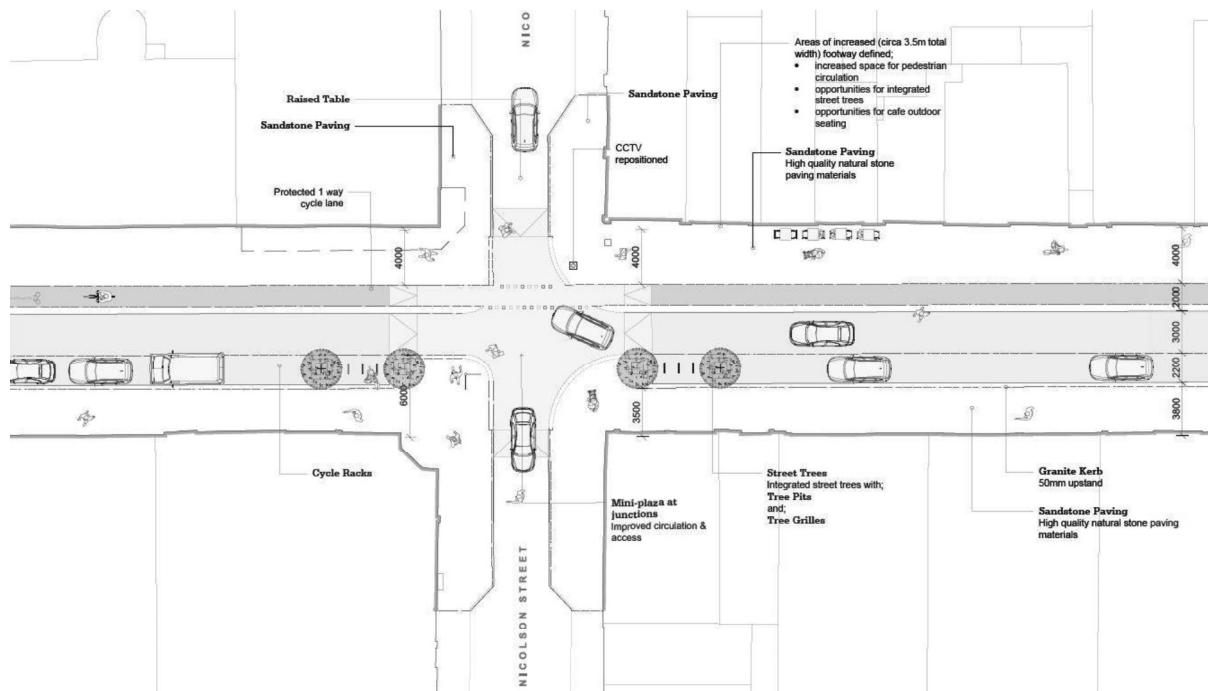
2018 PROPOSAL



Key elements comprise:

- **Enhanced Environment** – fewer cars (6 fewer spaces), more footway space (at junctions but not along majority of street length) for movement and activity
- **Enhanced Accessibility for all users** – improved footway surface - full natural stone enhancement of paving & kerbs, wider pavements only at junctions and more street crossings at junctions, less traffic
- **Enhanced Environment and Air Quality** – mini plazas at junction locations with tree planting
- **Business Support** - Essential vehicle accessibility retained on both sides – for parking/loading. Increased opportunity for event organisation through street closures / use of pavement

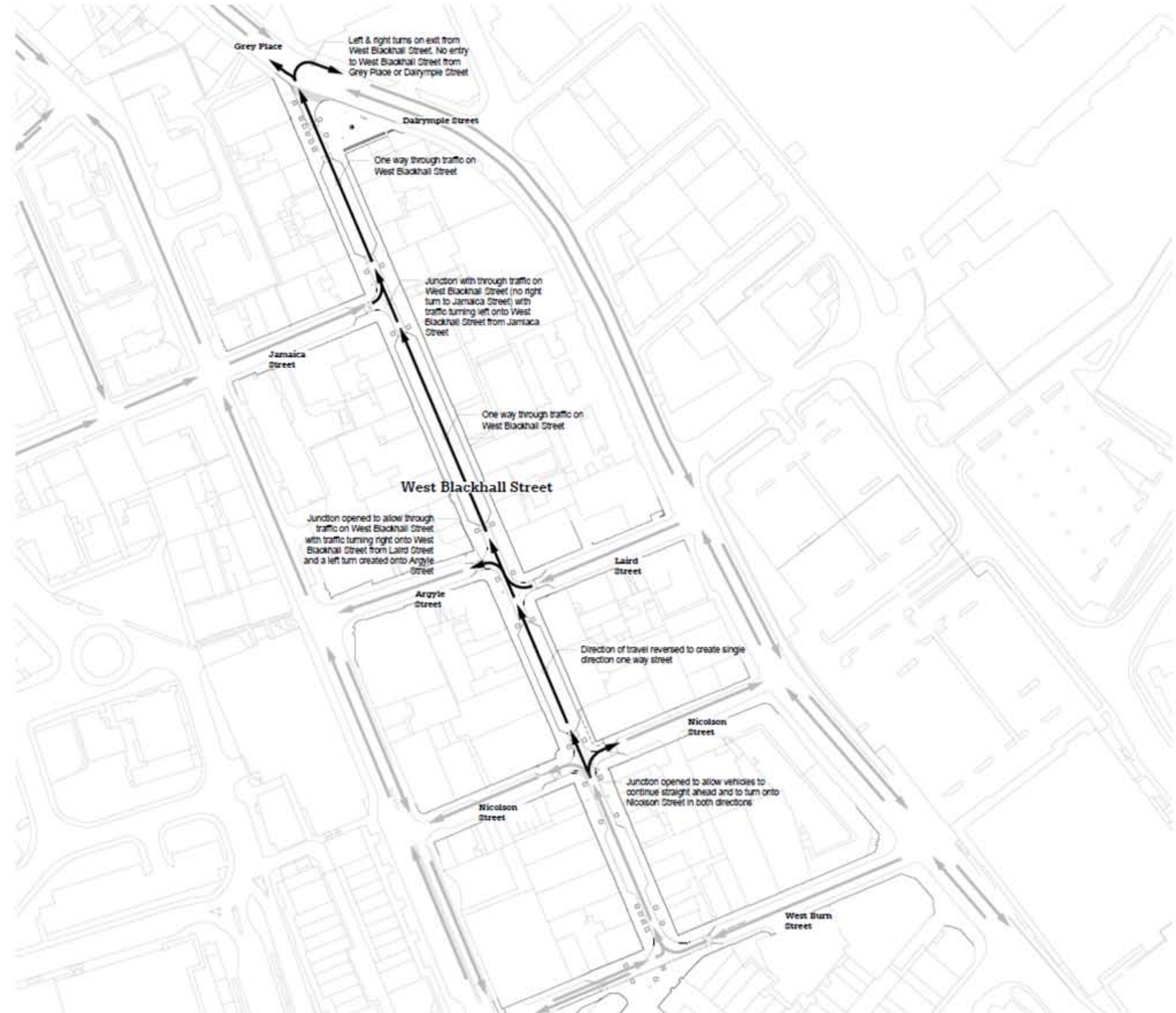
2019 PROPOSAL



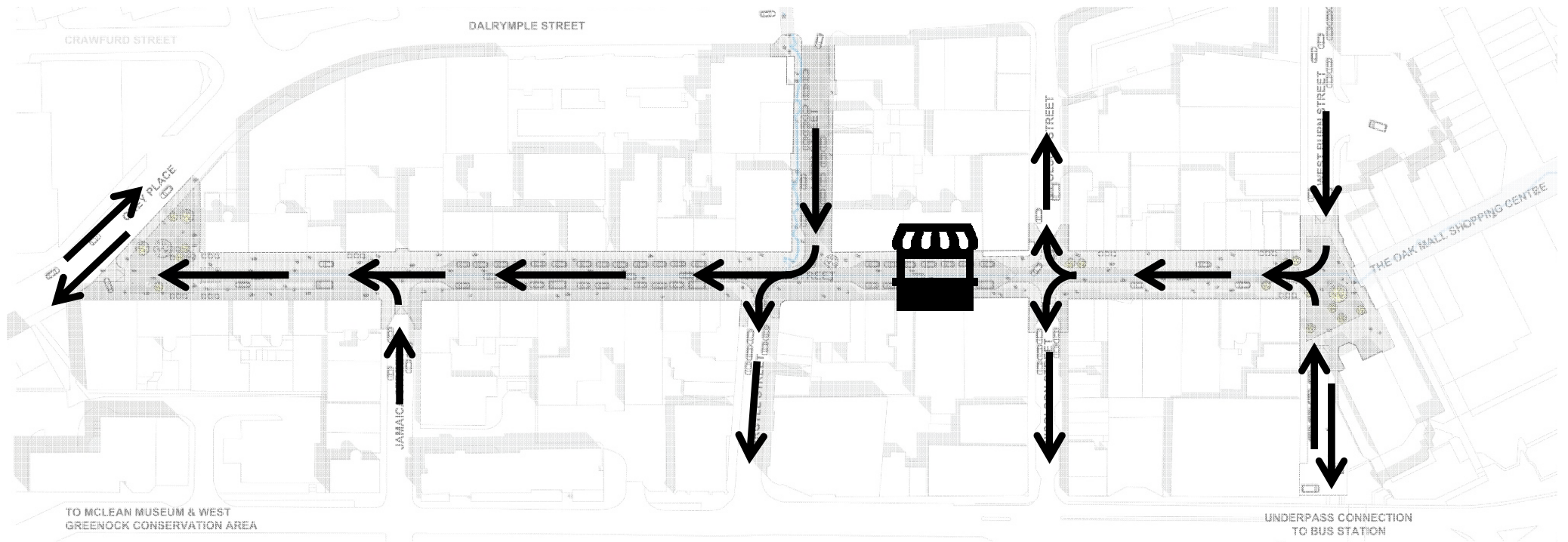
Key elements comprise:

- **Enhanced Environment** – fewer cars (29 fewer spaces), more footway space (both sides) for movement and activity
- **Enhanced Accessibility for all users** – wider pavements, more street crossings, less traffic, legible cycle routes.
- **Improved Cycle Access** - One-way, soft segregated, off-street cycle route (west bound). Future option to reverse cycle travel direction to create a contraflow (east bound) with on street west bound cycling. Parallel project ensures infrastructure is well connected to the wider town centre routes.
- **Enhanced Environment and Air Quality** – mini plazas at junction locations with tree planting along one side
- **Business Support** - Essential vehicle accessibility retained along one side – for parking/loading; free 3hr parking provided off-street nearby.

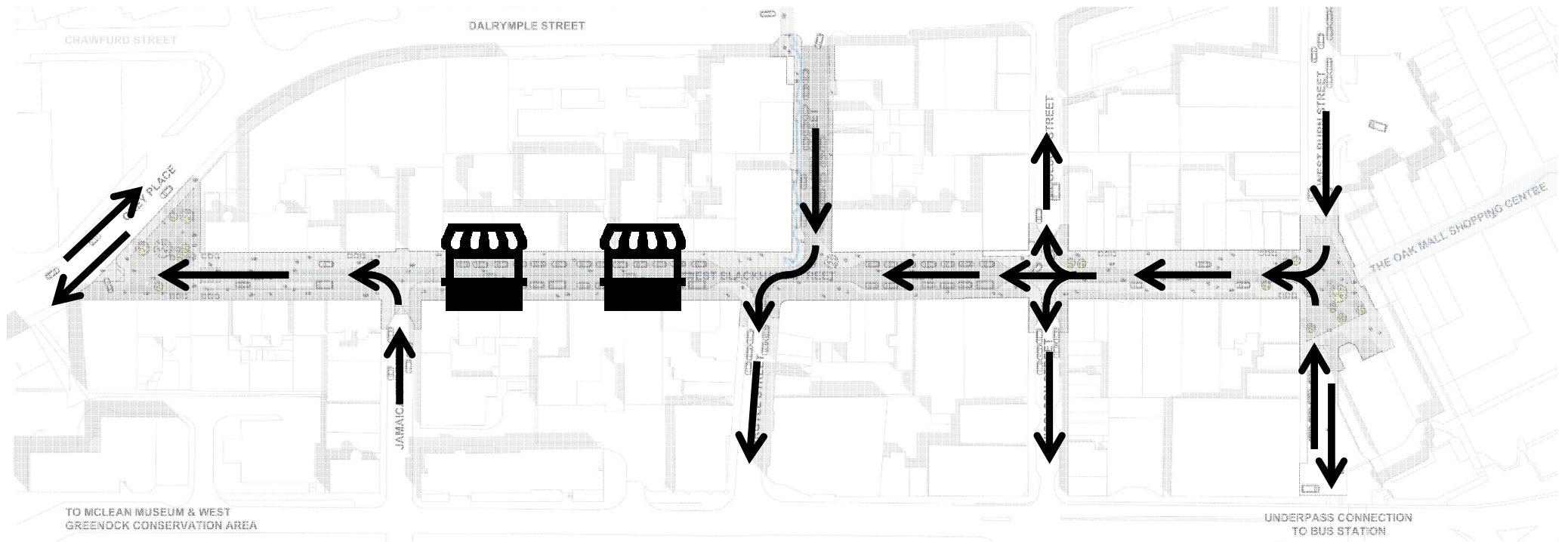
One way



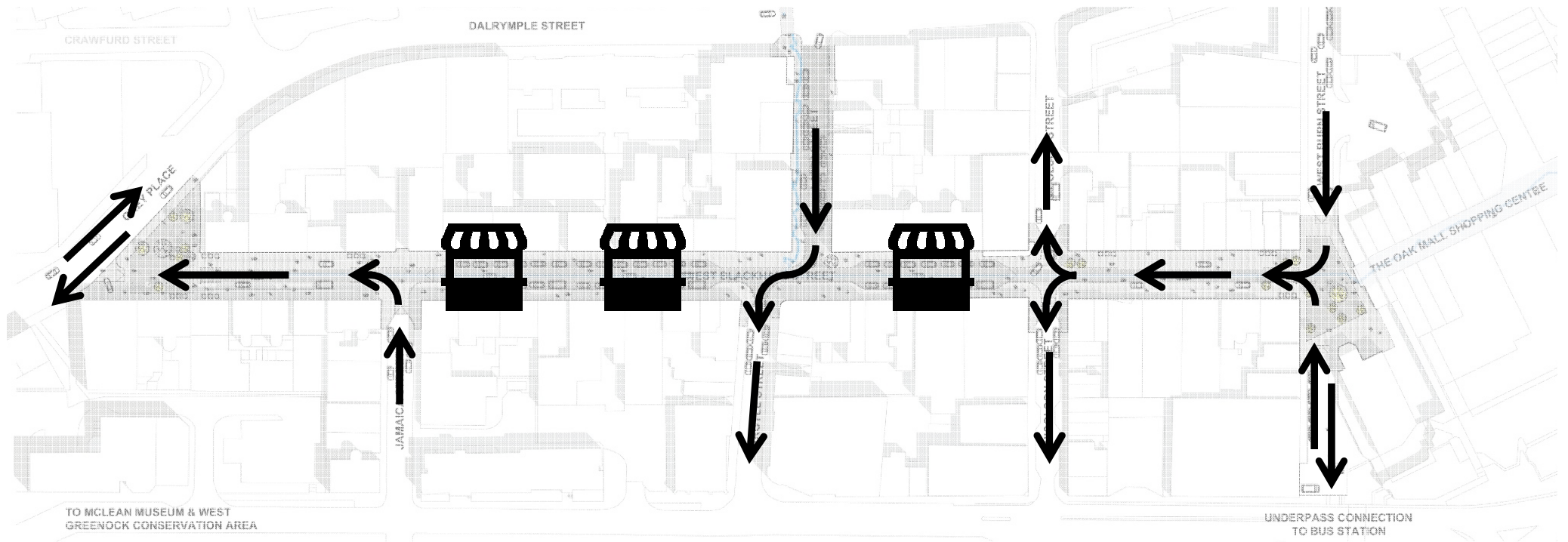
Event: Nicolson to Laird Street



Event: Laird Street to Jamaica Street



Event: Nicolson Street to Laird Street to Jamaica Street

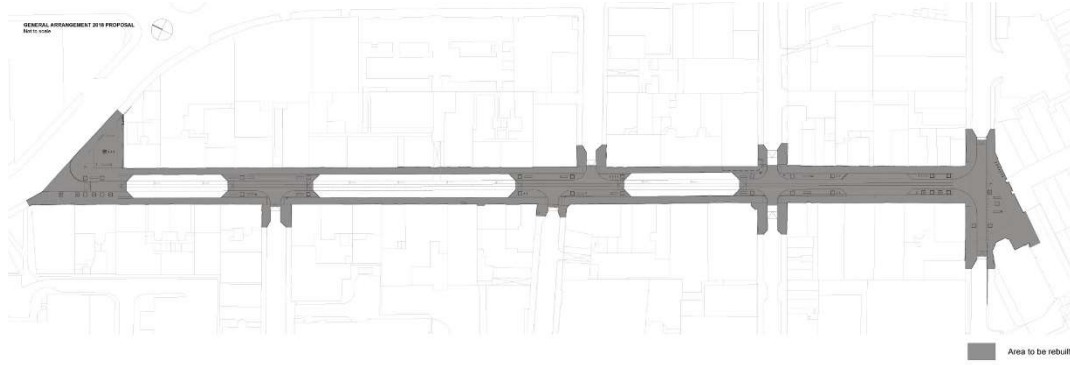


APPENDIX 5

COMPARISON 2018 & 2019 PROPOSALS

	2018 Proposal	2019 Proposal
Accessibility	Safe access and movement for all users and requirements of Equality Act	Safe access and movement for all users and requirements of Equality Act
Walking	Unchanged pavement widths (2.7m wide)	Increased pavement widths (3.8m & 4.0m wide)
Cycling	No dedicated cycle infrastructure	Flexible 2m soft segregated cycle lane (potential to provide one way or two way cycling infrastructure)
Reduction to Impact of Vehicles	59 parking spaces	36 parking spaces
Drainage & Long term quality	Issues to do with slow surface water drainage, and longer term deterioration of road surface not addressed	Fully reconstructed road surface & competent surface water drainage
Environment, Ecology & Air Quality	Street trees to both sides of street	Street trees to one side of street
Traffic movement	One way system reinstated	One way system reinstated
Mini plazas	Created at junctions and each end of street	Created at junctions and each end of street
Flexibility	Layout allows sectional closures for events	Layout allows sectional closures for events
Engagement	Open events, steering group consultation, trader meetings	Open events, steering group consultation, trader meetings, access advisory group, youth panel
Area of rebuilt street	6030m²	7530m²
Order of cost (*tbc)	£2.05m (incl fees)	£3.09m (incl fees)

Area of rebuilt street 2018 proposal



Area of rebuilt street 2019 proposal

