

COCKERMOUTH VISION-25

Cockermouth & District Civic Trust



THE CIVIC TRUST BELIEVES THAT COCKERMOUTH NEEDS A COMMUNITY VISION TO ENSURE THE TOWN'S FUTURE BENEFIT. THIS DOCUMENT REPRESENTS THE CIVIC TRUST'S CONTRIBUTION TO THAT VISION.

Introduction

January 2025

Cockermouth and District Civic Trust is a voluntary organisation and charity with nearly 60 years of history. The Trust aims to preserve and stimulate public interest in Cockermouth and its surroundings, promote high standards of town planning and architecture, and secure the preservation and improvement of features of public or historic interest.

While maintaining the town's character and identity, the Trust supports evolution to meet 21st-century needs. It advocates for proactive community involvement in shaping the town's future, identifying positive development opportunities ready to be advanced when funding becomes available.

This document presents the Civic Trust's vision, which aims to evolve into a comprehensive community vision with contributions from local people and organisations.

Historical Background



Cockermouth has a long and important history and has been a pioneering town in many ways. At Papcastle, it was the site of the Roman frontier fort and town of Derwentio. It became the Norman settlement of 'Cokyrmoth' alongside the Norman castle in the 12th century and much of the structure of the town centre dates from this time.

Buildings remaining in the town date from the late medieval period onwards but there is a predominance of buildings and frontages in the town centre dating from the Georgian period. There are over two hundred Grade II listed buildings in the town along with the castle and Wordsworth House (both Grade I). The historic centre was declared a Conservation Area in the late 1960s and much of its character has been retained.

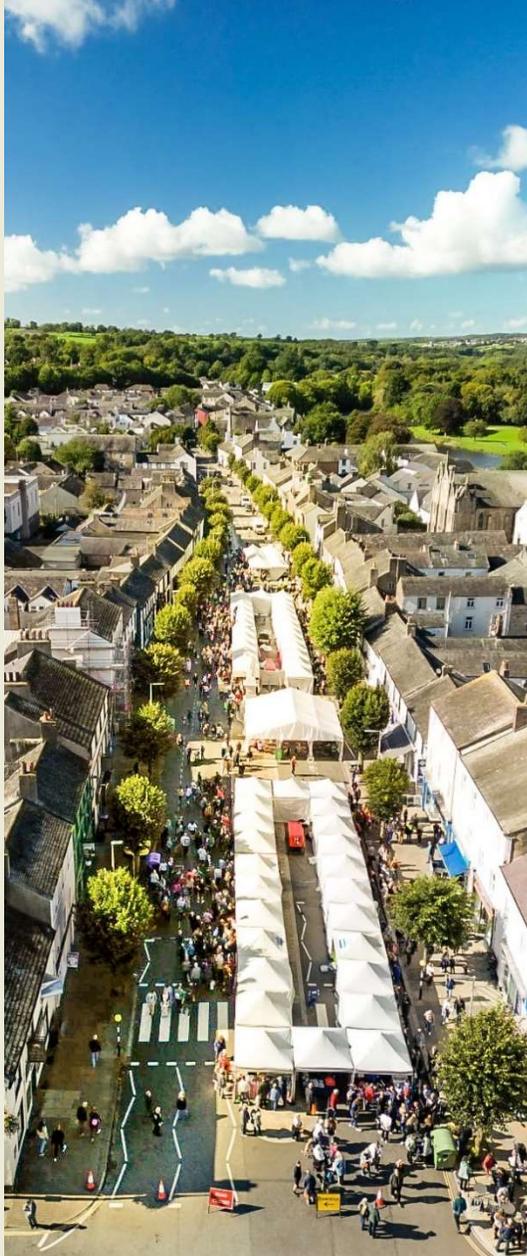
Cockermouth has long been a market town, receiving its first royal market charter in 1221, and, until recent years, had a weekly market in Market Place. It has also had a general and agricultural auction mart which continue to today with 'Mitchells', founded by Robinson Mitchell in 1849. The town also hosted hiring fairs twice a year when farm labourers were hired.

During the industrial revolution, Cockermouth itself became industrialised with many mills and factories. Many of these have been converted into accommodation.

There have been a number of Cockermouth born people who have risen to national and international acclaim, the most famous being William and Dorothy Wordsworth. Others include John Dalton, (born in Eaglesfield), Fearon Fallows, (royal astronomer who mapped the southern skies).

Cockermouth has been seen as pioneering, for example being the first town to introduce gas, and subsequently electric, street lighting.

Throughout its history, the town has had to adapt to changes and move forward. In recent times, the pace of change has increased with factors such as de-industrialisation, advances in technology, private car ownership, on-line shopping, etc. There has also been a very significant increase in the town's population with a number of new housing estates being built. Cockermouth needs to continue to adapt and move forward.



Ambition

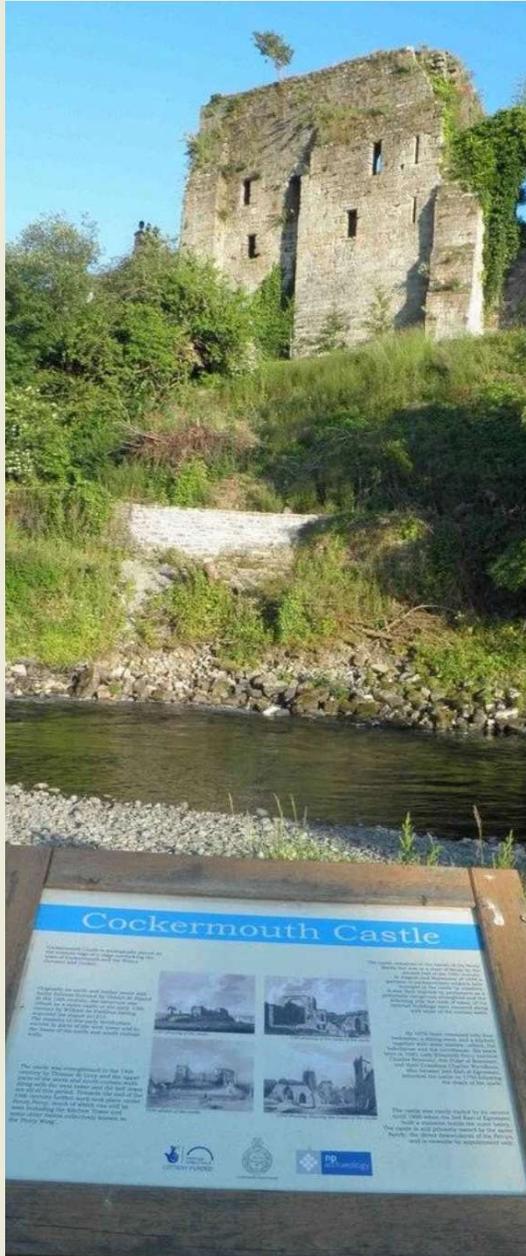
Cockermouth should be an attractive, enjoyable and distinctive town where residents are proud to live and shop. It needs to respect its heritage whilst adapting to the needs of the 21st century and becoming resilient to external factors such as climate change.

To achieve this, the town needs to provide local employment, attract customers from the wider local area and visitors from beyond.

New developments in the town centre should respect the existing architectural structure and heritage.

It is important that both Cumberland Council and the Town Council are unrestrained in their ambitions for the town. It is equally important that building owners, tenants and the community at large play their part in achieving the high standards necessary.

The town should actively pursue being considered a 'green town' with environmental sustainability being addressed for all new developments over and above minimum legal requirements.



Assets

- The conservation area – a legally designated area of the town that has been identified as being of 'special architectural and historic interest'.
- The character of Main Street, Station Street and Market Place, along with the traditional shop frontages, together are key to Cockermouth's identity.
- The tree-lined streets which have become a key identity for the town. Perhaps a phased replacement programme could be introduced as the trees age to avoid having to replace them all at the same time.
- The number of independent shops and their business viabilities.
- Harris Park and the Memorial Gardens.
- The town's location with good road communications with the Lake District National Park, the Solway Firth and West Cumbria. Public transport is good along the A66 corridor but poor in other directions, particularly Carlisle.
- Wordsworth House and the association of William and Dorothy Wordsworth with the town.
- As well as the well-known William Wordsworth, Cockermouth does have a rich history of other lesser known poets and artists. Also, the visiting J.M.W. Turner painted Cockermouth Castle. The artist Julian Heaton Cooper currently lives in Cockermouth. More could be made of this heritage.
- Cockermouth Castle, the oldest building in the town largely dating from the 14th century.
- Kirkgate Arts and Heritage Centre.
- Smaller buildings of public and tourist interest such as Banks Ironmongers, Percy House and Castlegate Gallery.
- Green spaces and parks. This includes the Memorial Gardens and Harris Park and smaller green areas such as the town cemetery. It also includes views out of Cockermouth, towards the Lake District Fells to the south and down Station Street to the north.
- There are excellent tourist facilities nearby and readily accessible from Cockermouth that are not adequately connected with Cockermouth. Examples include Setmurthy and Whinlatter Forest Park.
- The All Saints Church building is an important landmark for the town and an asset that should be more utilised for the general public benefit.



Issues

- Cockermouth town centre lies on the flood plain of the Cocker and Derwent Rivers.
- Cockermouth has become a dormitory town with relatively few employment opportunities in the town.
- The structure of the town centre was developed before the development of motorised transport and the expansion of the resident population. There are consequently congestion points at certain times of day. The challenge is to keep the town centre pedestrian friendly and to maintain its historic structure.
- Some developments in the town in 'recent' years have not respected the local built environment, for example Lowther Went shopping area.
- The unique character of the town is being eroded by inadequate enforcement of the shopfront design guide by Cumberland Council. Currently there is a minority of shop frontages that do not comply and/or are not well maintained.
- Buildings on the south side of Crown Street present a poor image of the town at a main entry point.
- Pavements on Station Street and the south side of Main Street are in poor condition.
- Cockermouth faces away from the rivers and therefore fails to take full advantage of them.
- The Courthouse has partially collapsed and represents an increasing weakness in the town's flood protection. It is also an eyesore and a loss to the town.
- With Jennings Brewery closing there is an area in need of development beside the northern end of the River Cocker.
- With the uncertain future of the Mitchells building on Lorton Street and the old fire station building across the road, there are potential development sites along Lorton Street.
- The Slatefell estate could be improved by better roadside landscaping.
- There is a perceived lack of opportunities for youth entertainment.
- The town has lost a number of tourist attractions that it once had, for example the printing museum, the toy museum.
- Although there are a number of public footpaths in and around the town, they are currently disconnected.



Opportunities

The future of the Old Courthouse building and site needs to be addressed. At the present time no funding appears to be available from either the owner or the Council or other statutory authority. The priority has to be restoring the gap in the flood protection for the town. Secondly, options need to be considered for the future of the site for the benefit of the town. Ideally a partnership should be established of interested parties including the owner and Cumberland Council to secure funding.

There are a number of old, iconic buildings in the town which we need to ensure are well maintained to avoid them deteriorating and further eroding the streetscape. These include the ex HSBC building, Barclays Bank building, the ex Conservative Club building and the Library building.

The town should take an active interest in 'slowing the flow' of the rivers upstream of Cockermouth, particularly the Cocker, and not just rely on flood defences in town.

The trees on Station Street are either dead or are in poor condition. They need to be replaced.

The courtyard adjacent to Sainsburys Station Street entrance could be enhanced and better maintained, perhaps with more greenery, making it a more attractive area for shoppers.

A new usage for the ex Wilco building needs to be actively progressed.

Investigate additional facilities for young people such as a bike and skate park plus indoor facilities.

Projects

We have put together a number of potential development schemes that will require significant investment. These are identified on the following pages as follows:

1. Development of the Lowther Went Site

If new usage for the ex Wilco building is not forthcoming, consideration could be given to redevelopment of the whole Lowther Went site, potentially a mixture of residential and commercial. Existing businesses could potentially relocate to other available locations in town or be rehoused in the new development.

2. Development of Brewery Site and Confluence Area

Jennings Brewery recently ceased operations leaving a large site available for redevelopment for other uses. With Cockermouth being adjacent to the 'Energy Coast', there is also potential for part of the ex brewery site to be converted into a smart energy generation demonstration facility with water power from the River Cocker, solar panels, a wind turbine (replacing the original windmill), heat pumps and energy storage facilities.

3. New Town Centre Housing – Lorton Street

In the event of Mitchells moving from their Lorton Street premises, consider a new cohesive use for housing across the whole area at the Lorton Street and Station Street junction, i.e. including Mitchells' current premises, the old fire station and the Grand Theatre building.

4. Enhancing the Slatefell Streetscape

The Slatefell streetscape could be enhanced to make it a more attractive place to live, potentially including the Highfields Sports Ground area which is currently a bit bleak.

5. Increasing the Capacity of Fairfield Car Park

Consolidating the existing carpark and increasing parking spaces can free up other less well connected carparks for more appropriate development.

6. Flood Management – Gote Bridge

Replacing the 3 flat arches of the bridge with a single arch would reduce the damming impact and increase the flow rate under the bridge.

7. Flood Mitigation Measures

Looking beyond the settlement boundaries and exploring projects upstream has the potential to greatly improve the towns flood resilience at much reduced cost.

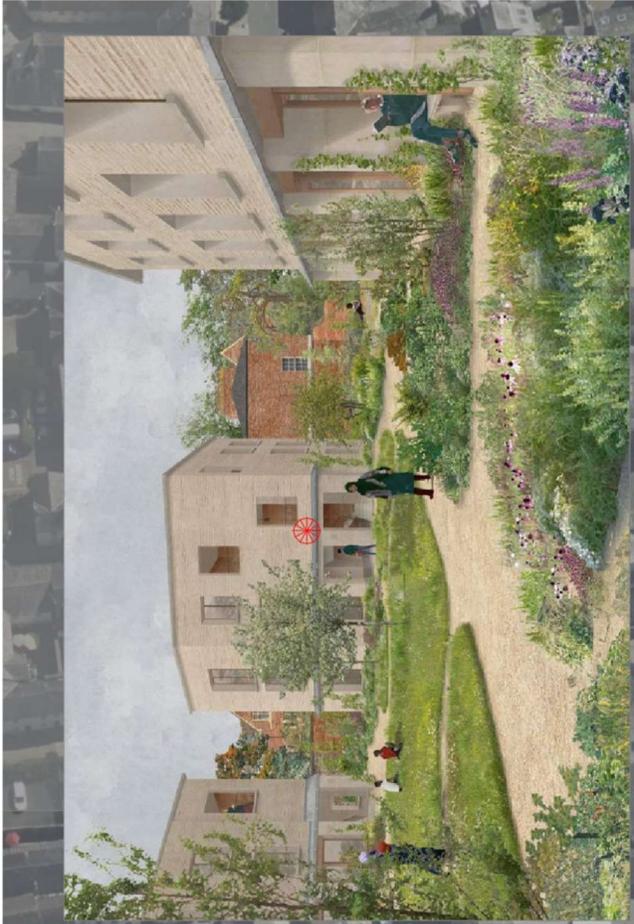
8. Public Footpath Connectivity

Connectivity of the public footpaths in and around town could be addressed, encouraging residents and visitors alike to enjoy and explore the town and local area on foot. A new footbridge between the confluence area by the brewery buildings and the Memorial Gardens would benefit circular walks, refer Scheme 2. This could include:

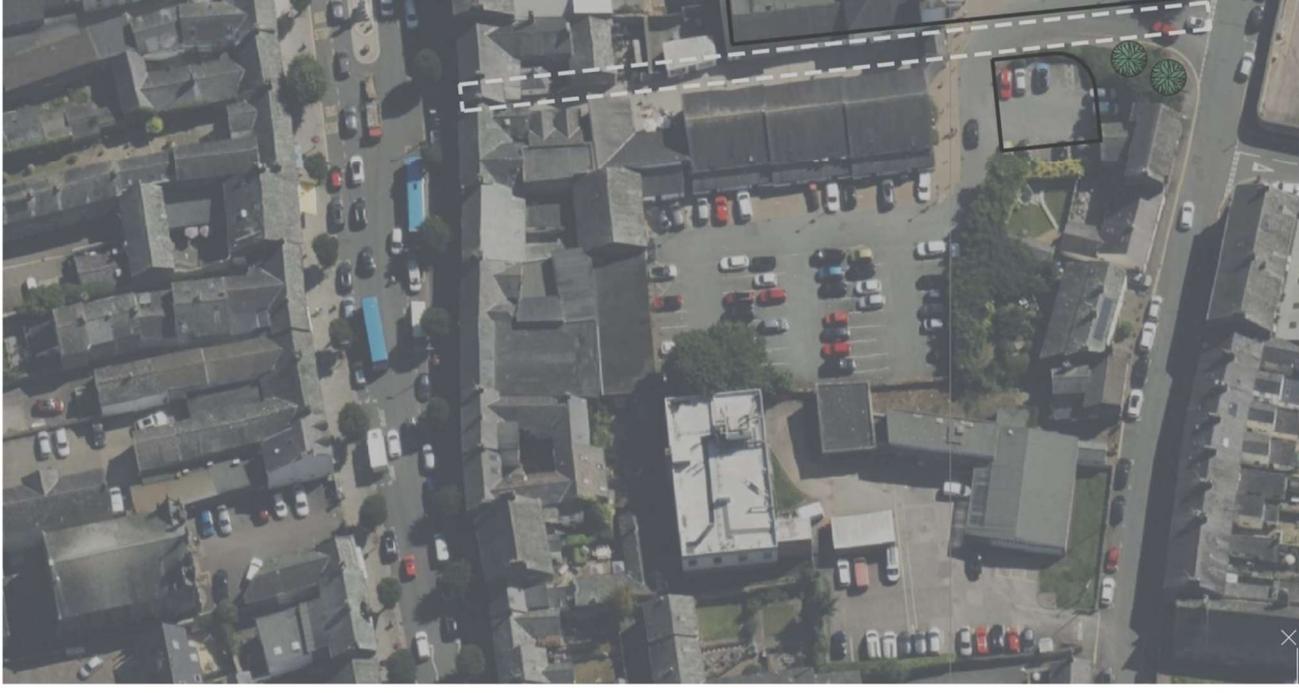
- i. Papcastle to Gote Bridge around Sandair and the cricket ground, extending the current footpath from Great Broughton to Papcastle;
- ii. From Low Road opposite Aldi, to the rear of the Lakes Home Centre following the river bank to the Fitz roundabout;
- iii. Investigate the possibilities on both sides of the Derwent upstream of the castle, on the north side potentially continuing through the woods and to Wood Hall.

9. Old Courthouse Building

A major project is required for the Old Courthouse building. A minimum requirement is the demolition of the collapsed rear section and reinstatement of the flood defences. A key decision is whether the front section of the Grade II listed building can be saved and, if so, for what purpose and whether it can be financially justified. If the whole building is demolished, a number of options can be considered, including a public park, new build for public purposes such as a museum or new build for upmarket commercial or residential purposes.



Lowther Went: With Wilko's closure, the large site on Lowther Went offers prime re-development opportunities. The went can be transformed into a welcoming, pedestrian-friendly street that connects Main Street and South Street with new mixed-use buildings (retail, office, and residential). The buildings will line the street, replacing the dominant car park. Undercroft and discreet parking can be integrated into rear landscaped courtyards or under raised gardens for the private use of new residents.



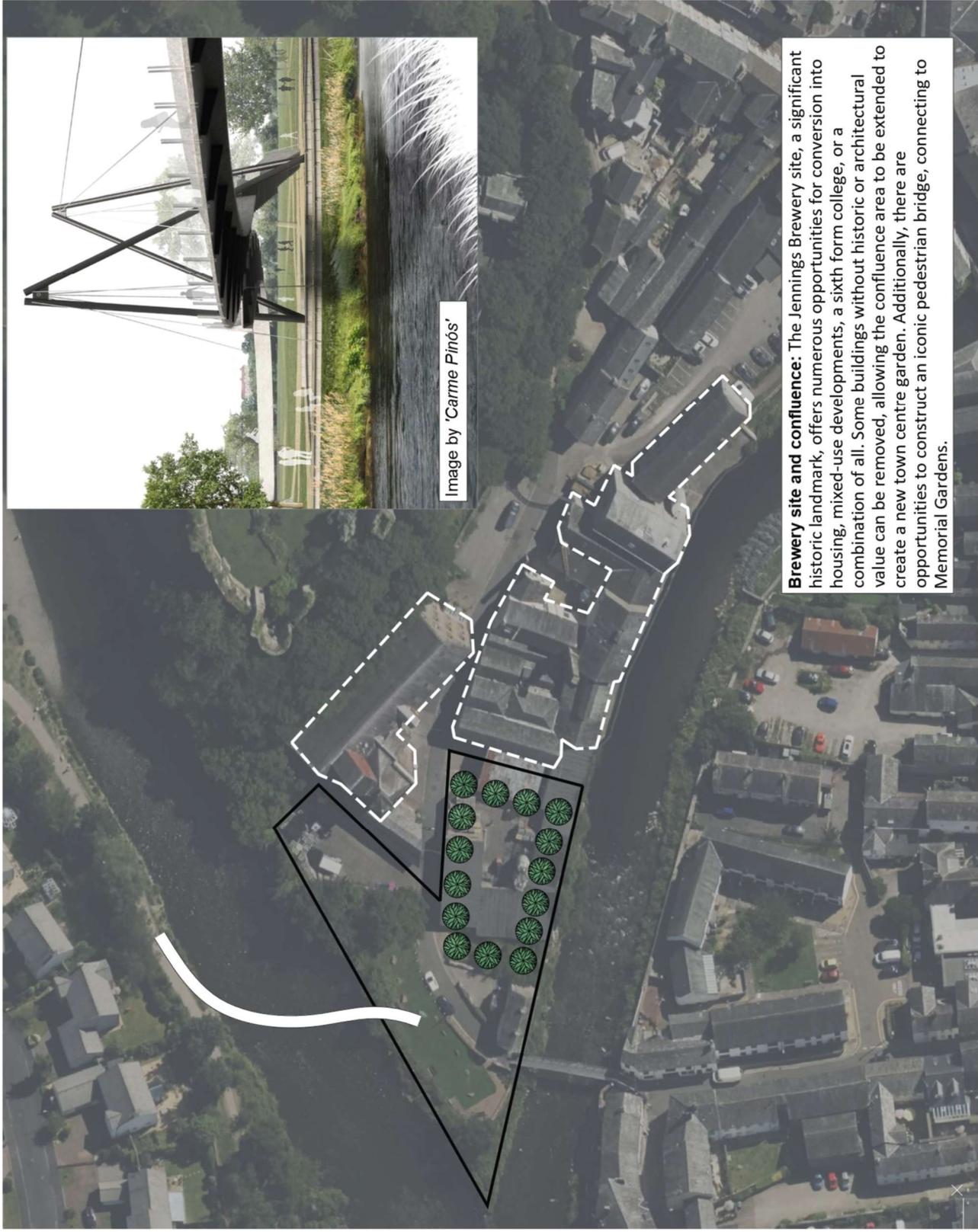
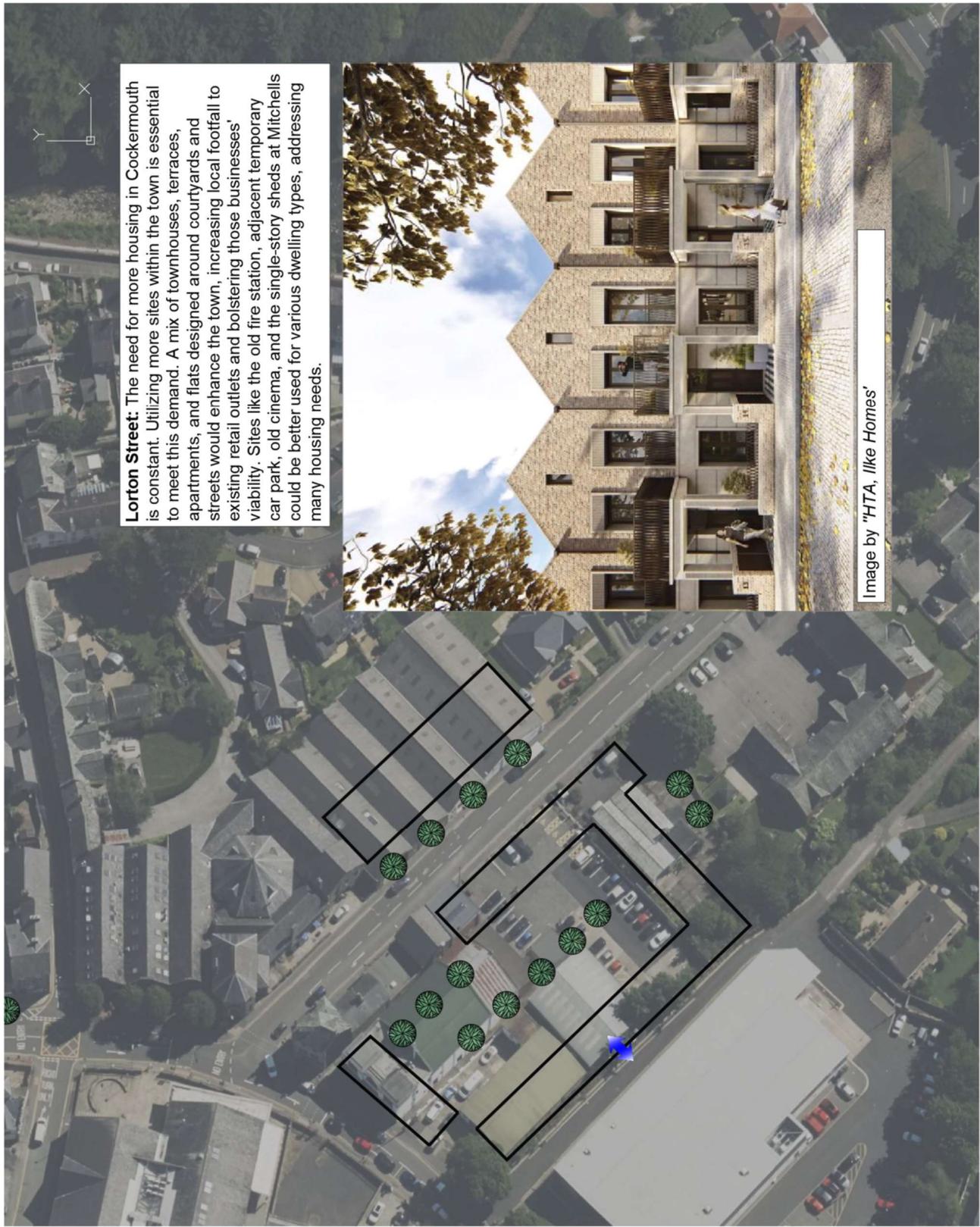


Image by 'Carme Pinós'

Brewery site and confluence: The Jennings Brewery site, a significant historic landmark, offers numerous opportunities for conversion into housing, mixed-use developments, a sixth form college, or a combination of all. Some buildings without historic or architectural value can be removed, allowing the confluence area to be extended to create a new town centre garden. Additionally, there are opportunities to construct an iconic pedestrian bridge, connecting to Memorial Gardens.



Lorton Street: The need for more housing in Cockermouth is constant. Utilizing more sites within the town is essential to meet this demand. A mix of townhouses, terraces, apartments, and flats designed around courtyards and streets would enhance the town, increasing local footfall to existing retail outlets and bolstering those businesses' viability. Sites like the old fire station, adjacent temporary car park, old cinema, and the single-story sheds at Mitchells could be better used for various dwelling types, addressing many housing needs.

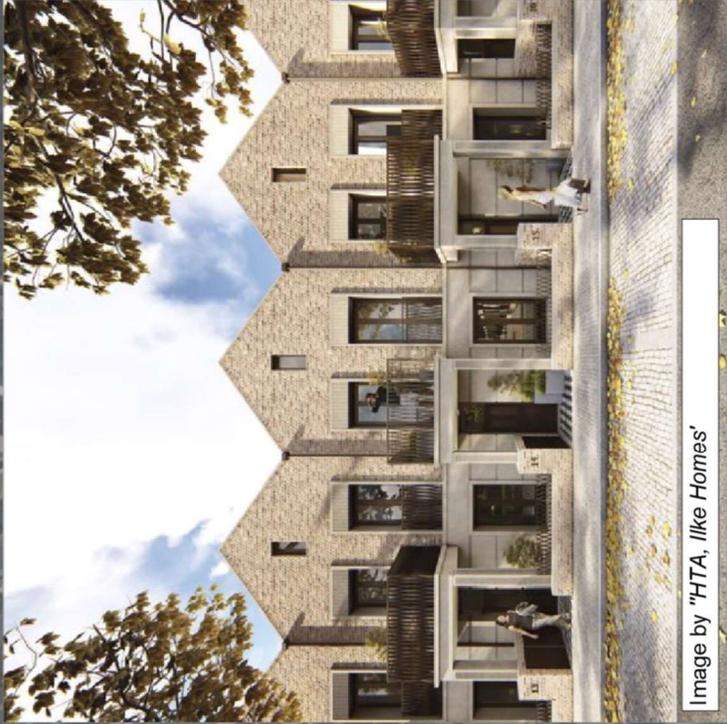


Image by "HTA, Ilke Homes"

Enhancing the Slatefell Streetscape:
Redesigning street junctions to be more modest allows for the introduction of planting and trees, creating a pedestrian-friendly environment without losing access or parking. These areas can also serve as surface water attenuators, easing the load on drainage systems and rivers. Planted build-outs and street trees form tree avenues, softening the urban landscape.

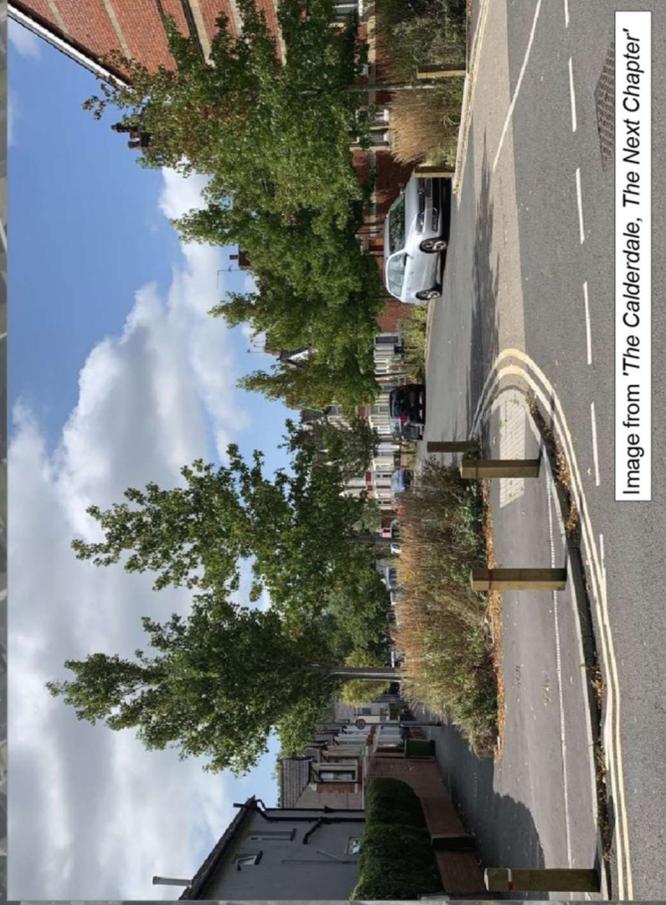


Image from 'The Calderdale, The Next Chapter'



Enhancing town centre parking: The Fairfield carpark, Cockermouth's most popular and best-located car park, can significantly increase its capacity by utilizing the site's level change. Incorporating a low profile modular car park, such as those by Sider Park, can boost capacity, improve landscaping, and control costs. Increasing capacity here would enable car parks like Sullart Street to be sold for development, subsidizing the construction of this improved facility.

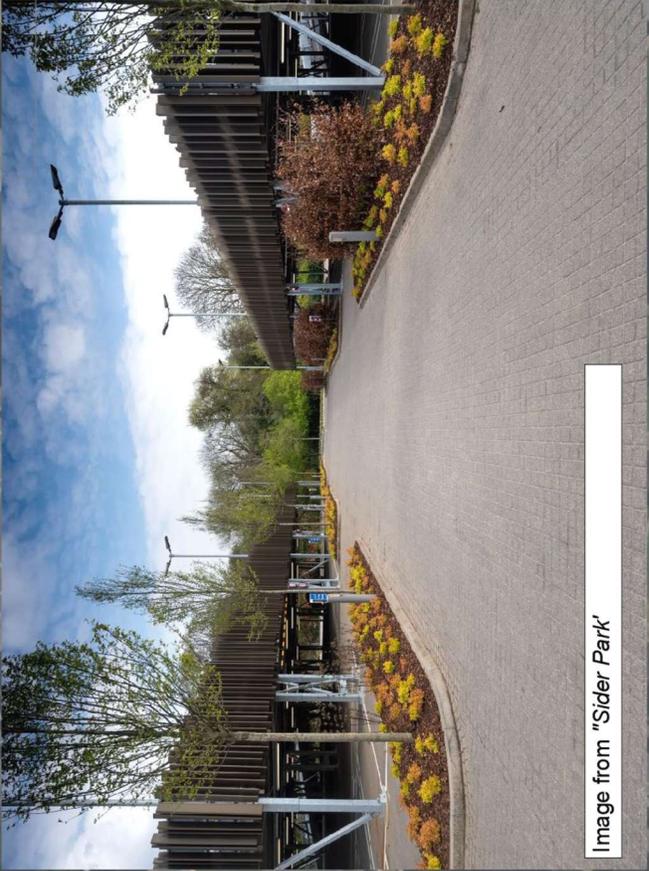
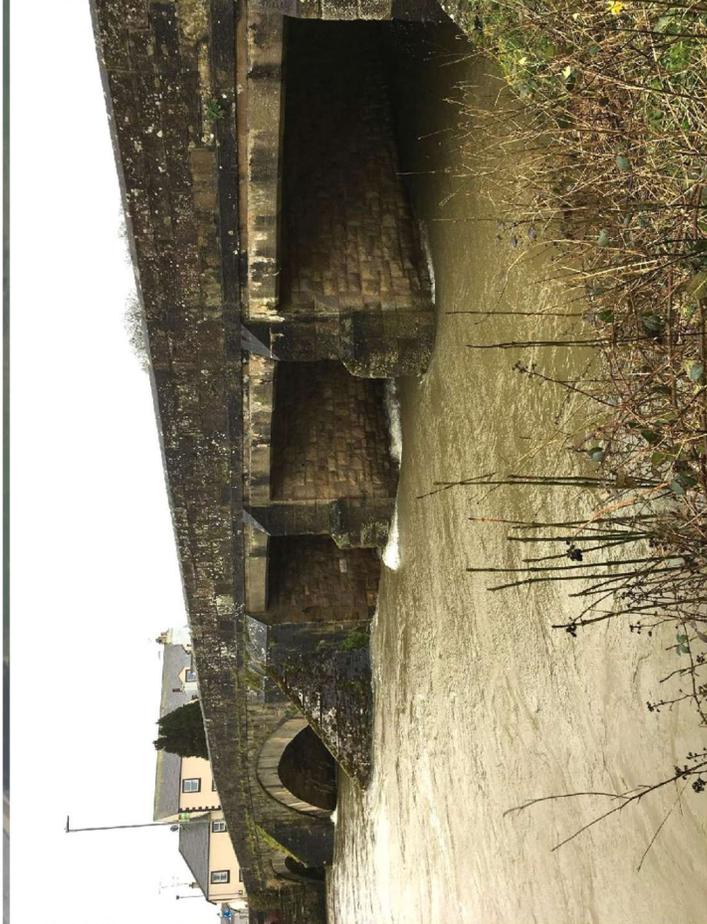
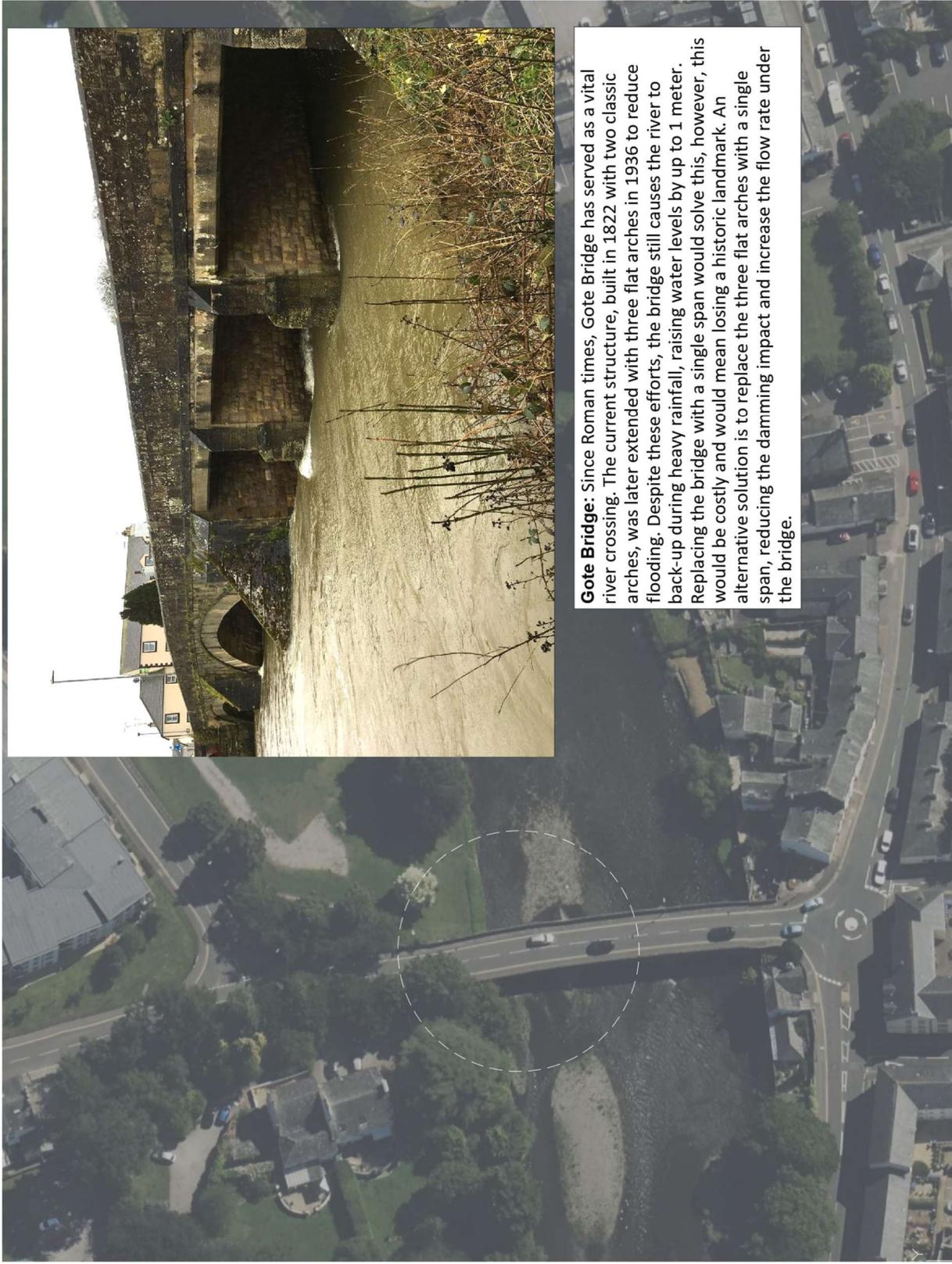


Image from "Sider Park"





Gote Bridge: Since Roman times, Gote Bridge has served as a vital river crossing. The current structure, built in 1822 with two classic arches, was later extended with three flat arches in 1936 to reduce flooding. Despite these efforts, the bridge still causes the river to back-up during heavy rainfall, raising water levels by up to 1 meter. Replacing the bridge with a single span would solve this, however, this would be costly and would mean losing a historic landmark. An alternative solution is to replace the three flat arches with a single span, reducing the damming impact and increase the flow rate under the bridge.



Adapting to Increased Flooding: Cockermouth must face the reality of flooding, now more destructive due to climate change. Building more town defences offers diminishing returns. Instead, upstream flood mitigation can reduce downstream flooding by storing excess water in natural flood plains. Allowing areas upstream to flood, using banded landscaped features to slow river flows, and incorporating methods like tree planting and creating leaky dams should be part of the town's management plan to ensure Cockermouth thrives in a wetter, flood-prone future.

Exploring a Flood Levy: Introducing a 'flood levy' on all new developments in town should be considered. This levy would fund existing and new flood mitigation projects, ensuring the town's resilience against future flooding.

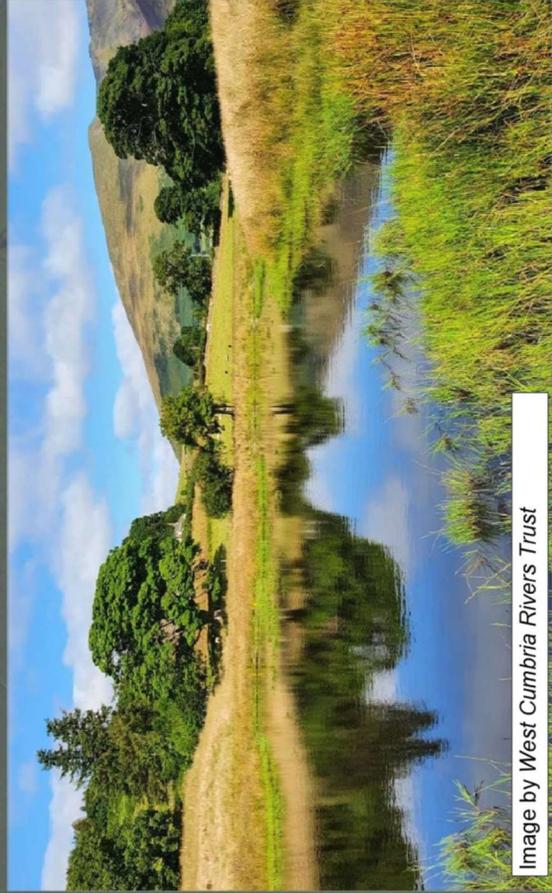


Image by West Cumbria Rivers Trust

Suggested New Rights of Way





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