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This report presents the outcome of a process which was sponsored by the Causeway Rural and Urban Network and supported by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland. It was initiated in response to the closure of Garvagh High School in August 2013.

The process set out to gather, through a series of conversations, the thoughts of others on the potential that the site offers, explore people’s ambitions for its future use and engage their understanding, experience and creativity in shaping realistic options for its future development.
Due to its uncertain future, planning for the future development of the Garvagh High School site needed to consider multiple possibilities for how the area might be transformed. We used a ‘scenario planning’ approach that allowed us to initiate conversations and foster discussions about how things might unfold, providing the opportunity for individuals, groups and agencies to look beyond their individual plans and concerns for the future and work collectively to fashion possible outcomes. The scenarios addressed two important considerations; the disposition of the people of Garvagh towards working together to improve their economic and social prospects and the potential of the High School site - set within the context of a significant natural and cultural heritage resource - to generate economic and social vitality.

Based on these considerations five scenarios were initially developed. Following further discussion and refinement these were reduced to the three scenarios which had the widest appeal and had the best chance of being realised. These scenarios include:

- ‘Welcome Visitors to Our World’ – getting Garvagh on the visitor’s map
- ‘Live, Learn and Prosper’ – the learning community campus
- ‘Start a Great Outdoors Revolution’ – getting active in the outdoors
How we worked

1. THE STORY SO FAR ...

The ‘Picturing the Future Workshop’ held on the 21st November 2013 provided us with an opportunity to visualise how the site might be developed. The picture is still taking shape.
1. **THE STORY SO FAR ...**

**What We Learnt**

The community conversations were designed to capture a meaningful set of community values while focusing the attention of the participants on the specific issue being explored. The objective was to arrive at some level of group consensus on the significance of the High School site and document the ambition for its future use. The process has taught us to;

**Include multiple perspectives ...**

involving the community and all relevant stakeholders by seeking their participation in the process and ensuring a voice for all sheds new light on the challenge. Hearing many voices allows us to question our own assumptions about the future as well as the assumptions of others and allows us to see the things we might have otherwise missed.

**Think from the outside in...**

is about building awareness of external changes that might, over time, profoundly affect our work. We recognise that our work is taking place against a background of change – the new regime for local governance is still being established and presents a situation which, while it poses the challenge of the unknown, undoubtedly presents opportunities, particularly in the area of community planning. Developing our ability to understand the consequences of external change within the context of an open discussion on locally specific solutions provides the best possible way of shaping realistic scenarios for the future.
Take the long view...

the pursuit of workable and lasting outcomes takes time, energy, commitment and persistence. We need to be prepared for the long haul and equip ourselves with the capacity to look beyond immediate demands and far enough into the future to be able to see new possibilities.
A significant asset for Garvagh is its location relative to other settlements as well as destinations of regional and national significance. While Garvagh has the potential to grow its function as a ‘gateway’ to the Sperrins and to the Causeway Coast that is not to say that it is not a destination in its own right and those passing through must be encouraged by the quality of the place and what it has to offer, to stop and spend time and money in the town.

Accessibility, along with quality of life, is one of Garvagh’s prime assets in terms of its capacity to attract visitors and needs to be fully exploited. A key anchor of the visitor offer is Garvagh Museum. Located within the High School site – it has the potential not only to provide a welcome for visitors but is also ideally placed to serve as a key point of orientation to the history of the town and the wider region as well as providing a source of information about the other aspects of Garvagh’s visitor offer.
The notion of a ‘community campus’ emerged as a result of an ambition not only to retain an educational use within the heart of the community but to expand its scope to include considerations such as training – particularly for the younger citizens of the town - as well as promoting life long learning.

For example, Garvagh has an unrivalled reputation in engineering excellence dating back to the 1800s. It was the birthplace of John Perry who was one of a network of scientists in Ireland during the period 1780 to 1880 who were among the world’s leading scientific figures. Perry was a great champion of technical education, giving classes for working men, and also of mathematics for engineers and scientists, and he published many textbooks in this area.

This scenario seeks to explore a unique opportunity for the creation of, within the context of fit for purpose and mutually reinforcing partnership arrangements with local businesses, an integrated, high quality, well resourced community campus, which could serve a wide range of learning and training needs for people living in and beyond Garvagh.
A key consideration to emerge during the course of conversation around this scenario was the potential the outdoor resource of the existing playing pitches and access to the forest provided for the development of outdoor activity and sports.

Garvagh Forest, for example, covers an area of over five hundred acres. The forest is dissected by a network of well maintained forest roads, which provide very attractive walks. A Mountain Bike Trails project is currently being developed by Outdoor Recreation NI, Coleraine Borough Council, Carn Wheelers, the Northern Ireland Mountain Biking Alliance and Forest Service. The aim of this project is to develop Garvagh Forest as a regional mountain bike centre with 10kms of mountain bike trails supported by visitor services such as a bike wash, trail cards and waymarking. Given the proximity of the forest to the school site there would appear to be huge scope for the latter to play a prominent and supporting role in enhancing and augmenting this offer of value not only for participants in the sport itself but also for beginners, for visitors and for those attracted to the major events that may be hosted as part of the mountain biking calendar.
We have chosen the scenario route for this project because we are:

- Working in a highly uncertain environment.
- There is leadership support for the scenario thinking process
- We are open to change and dialogue.
- We believe that we can attract the resources necessary for a successful initiative.

These scenarios give residents, agencies and others with an interest in Garvagh an opportunity to envision plausible futures. The next step is to use these scenarios to inform and inspire action. This phase of work is about creating coalitions of interest – willing participants around each scenario - and equipping them with the help they will need to consider the detailed implications of each scenario and shape, by September 2014, the final proposition – the prospectus for development- for the Garvagh High School site.