

Towards A Spatial Plan for: **NAENAE TOWN CENTRE**

Urban Design Background Paper



DESIGN URBAN
April 2020

Google Earth
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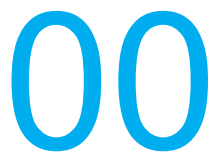
This Background Paper has been prepared for
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01

01 INTRODUCTION

Design Urban has been commissioned to assist in the process to develop a Spatial Plan for the Naenae town centre. In March 2020, as part of that process, an on-site and desktop urban design analysis of the town centre was conducted. This background report is a record of that analysis and findings.

01.01 What is Urban Design?

Urban design is concerned with the quality of public spaces and places in urban areas. These are the streets, parks, plazas and public facilities such as the public pool, railway station and bus stops. It is also focused on the way buildings relate to these public places, on the architecture and function of buildings.

Positive urban design is when buildings support the function and safety of public places and spaces. For example, buildings which have many windows and doors facing the street have a positive relationship to the street, while buildings with blank walls facing onto streets contribute little to street life.

Many of these aspects of urban design can be mapped and measured. This background paper sets out an analysis of Naenae and is intended to share the findings and information for future workshops with the community of Naenae. These will be held as part of a process to develop a spatial plan for the town centre.

01.02 Community Aspirations for Naenae

Many of the aspirations for Naenae are recorded and contained in the document “*Voice of the Community*”. This document was prepared by Empathy, a team of design researchers based in Wellington, and contains a record of workshops, open days and interviews with community members following the closure of the Naenae public swimming pool.

The document clearly outlines the local community desire for Naenae to be:

- A town centre where **people** can do *the basics*;
- A town centre where **people** can *stay active*;
- A town centre where **people** can *support local people*;
- A town centre where **people** can *connect regularly*;
- A town centre where **people** can *gather at meaningful times*;
- A town centre where **people** can *make memories*;
- A town centre where **people** can *come together as a community*, and
- A town centre where **people** can be *safe and satisfied*.

(Note: Authors emphasis)

What is clear from community aspirations is that people are at the centre of the aspirations. These aspirations are at the centre of this background paper and the urban design analysis. A key question will be, does the town centre in its current form and current performance support people and their aspirations?

The urban design background paper should be read in conjunction with the spatial performance analysis prepared by Space Syntax, and the economic analysis prepared by Urbacity Pty Ltd.

01.03 What is the Naenae Town Centre?

For the purposes of this urban design background paper, the area of the town centre is shown in Figure 2 on page 5. The area includes one section depth beyond Treadwell and Vogel Streets, the Naenae bowling club, and extends north-west to Oxford Terrace to incorporate the Naenae railway station.

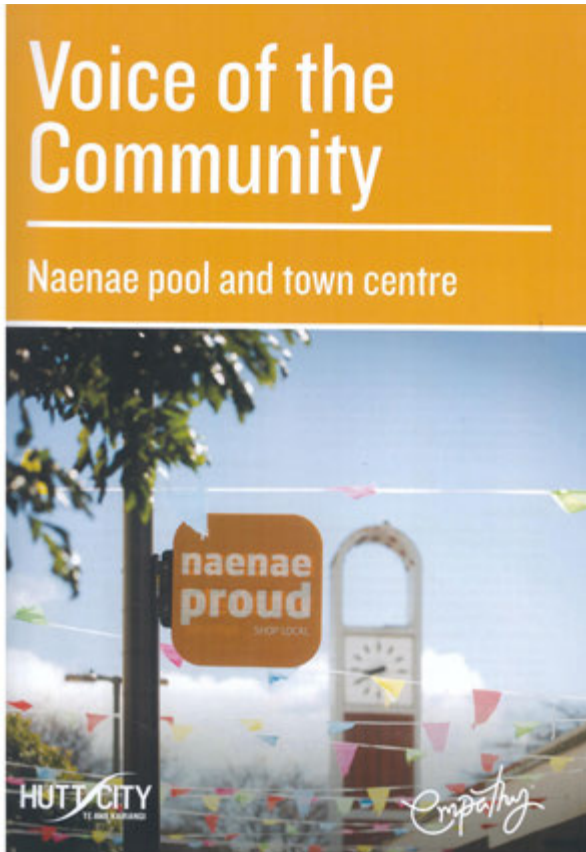


Figure 1. Cover of *Voice of the Community* document prepared by Empathy.

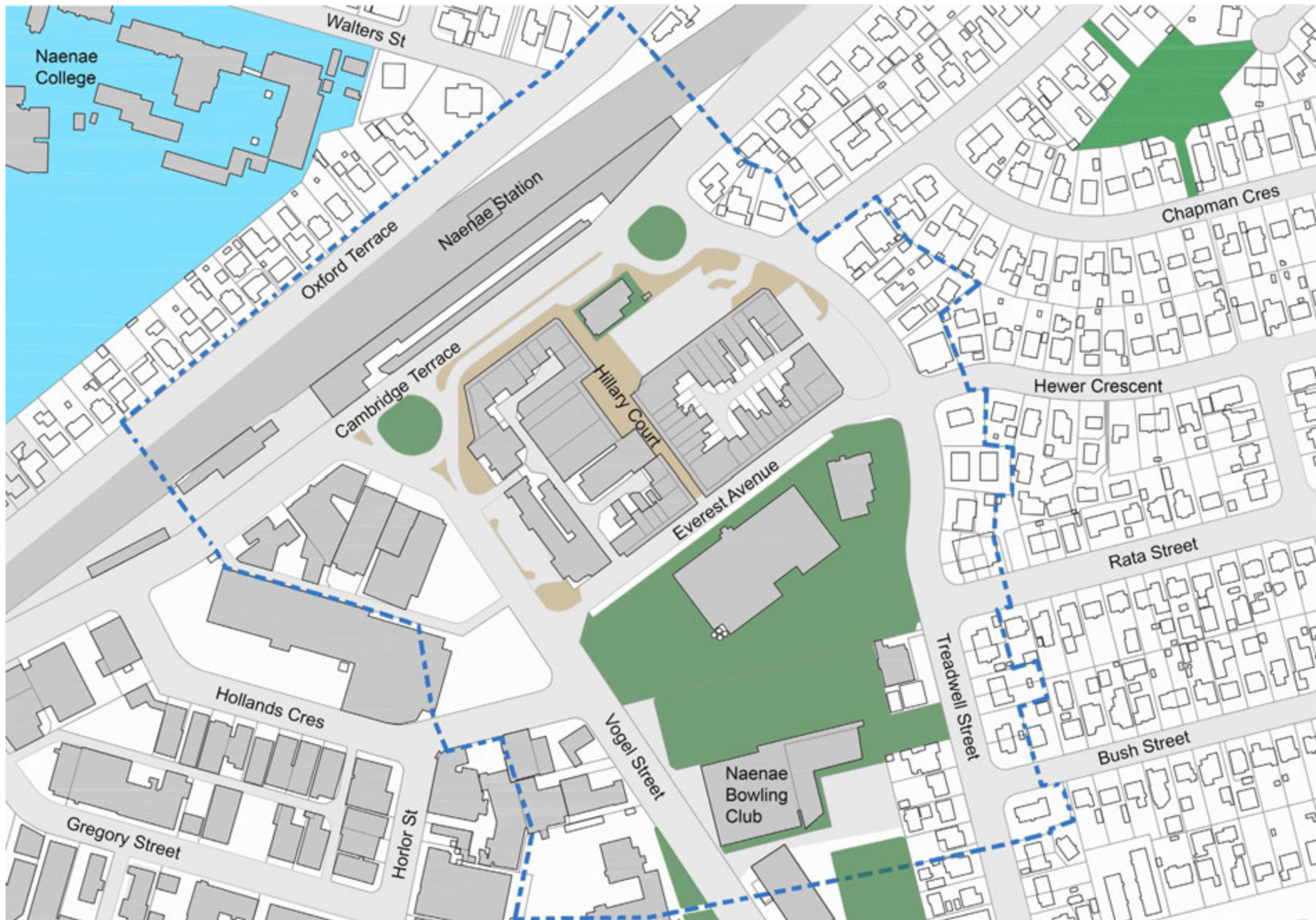


Figure 2.
Naenae
town
centre

02 URBAN DESIGN CRITERIA

The following urban design criteria have been measured to assess the Naenae town centre.

02.01 Pedestrian Access

Can I get to the town centre? How easy is it to access the shops and services for pedestrians, cyclists, public transport users and motorists? Is walking to the town centre an easy, safe and convenient option for those who do have access to a car? These questions can be answered by measuring the pedestrian catchments and the routes to the town centre. If the town centre is accessible for pedestrians it follows that other modes are likely to get to the town centre in a safe and convenient manner.

02.02 “Backs and Fronts”

Do buildings contribute to the quality of the public spaces by facing them or do they present their backs to streets, plazas, parks and public facilities?

02.03 Active Building Fronts

How buildings relate to public spaces has a direct effect on personal safety and the perception of safety. Blank walls or extensive rows of roller-shuttered facades reduces surveillance of public places and reduces safety in those places. Active building frontages are those where there are frequent doors and windows and where people can easily see from inside to the public spaces outside. How do the buildings in the Naenae town centre perform in terms of providing active frontages to public spaces?

02.04 Exposure to Streets and Parking

Shops perform better when there is good exposure to streets and passers-by, and where there is parking available nearby. How have buildings responded to exposure to passing pedestrian and vehicular traffic

and how easy is it to find parking nearby in the Naenae town centre?

02.05 Comfort and Amenity

When you get to the Naenae town centre, are there places for people to sit without having to spend money? Is there weather protection and are there trees to provide shade in summer?

02.06 External Messages

What are the messages being projected by the Naenae town centre to the rest of the city? Can these be evaluated and compared to other places so that Naenae expresses its unique characteristics?

02.07 Historical Perspectives

Can we learn anything from the past in relation to the Naenae town centre? Was there better urban structure? Can people still do the basics? Have we lost anything through incremental changes made over the past decades?

02.08 Meeting Places

Where are the places where the community can meet to celebrate special occasions, interact with each other and socialise? Are they performing at their optimum level or are improvements possible or obvious?

03

03.01 PEDESTRIAN ACCESS

Walkable catchments, sometimes referred to as “ped-sheds”, are maps showing the catchment or area within a five minute walking distance from a centre, or a ten minute walking distance from a station.

Figure 3 shows a map of Naenae with two circles drawn in red. These circles are centred on Hillary Court and represent a theoretical five and ten minute walking distance respectively. It is widely accepted that most people can walk approximately 400 metres in five minutes. It is also accepted that people will walk slightly further to get to public transport, and so a circle of 800m radius represents a theoretical ten minute walking distance to the station and bus stop at the library. These two measures give a sense of the *potential* catchment of people able to get to the town centre within five or ten minutes.

These circles are theoretical because the street network determines where we can *actually* walk.

Figures 4. and 5. show the area which is actually able to get access to the town centre or station in a convenient timeframe. In order to assess how well the catchment and street network performs, the actual walkable is expressed as a percentage of the theoretical walkable area. The higher the percentage the better the walkability. A good target for a walkable catchment is to have 60% of the area within a five minute walking distance of the centre, or ten minutes in the case of the railway station.

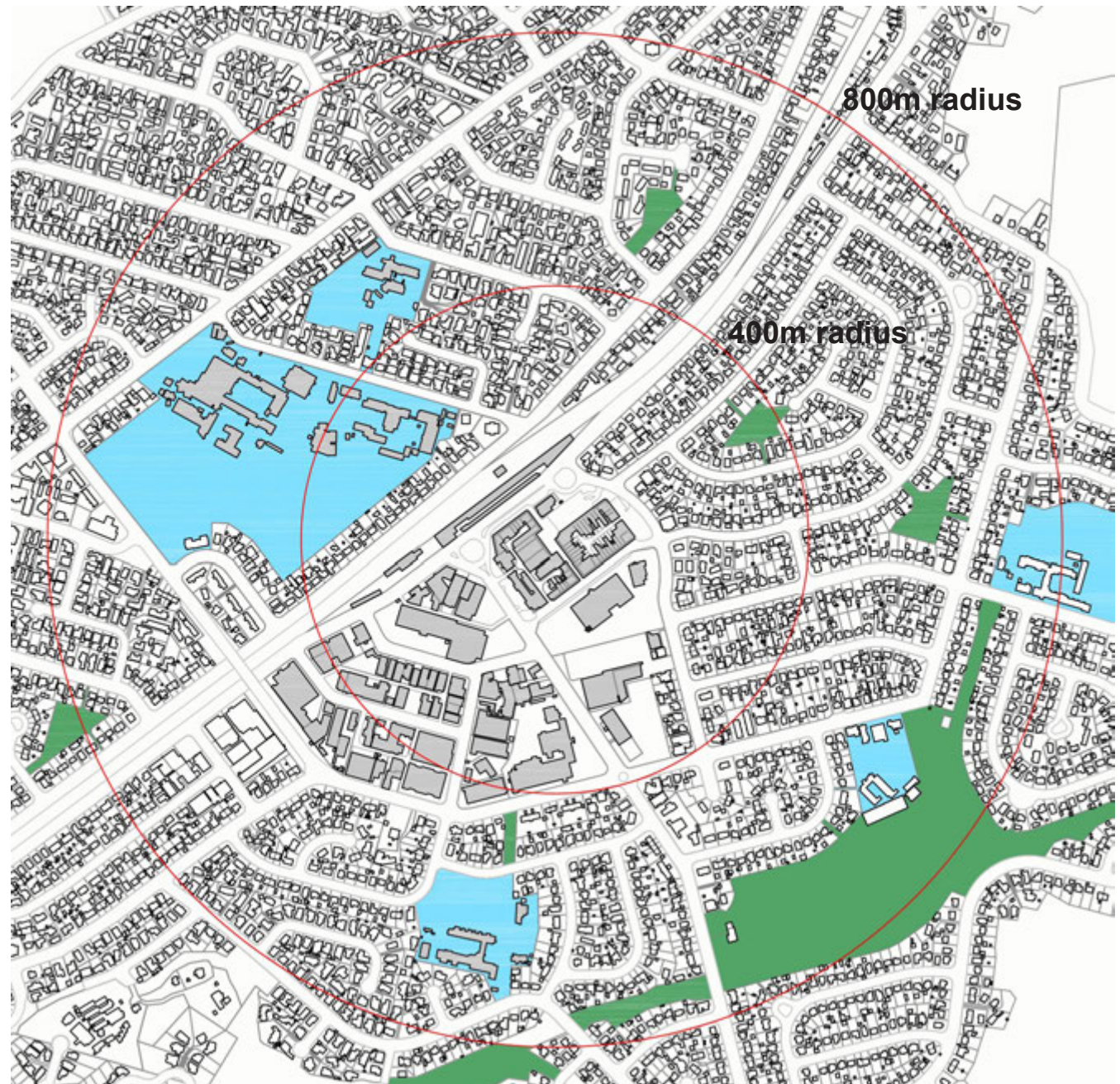


Figure 3. Measuring pedestrian access to the Naenae town centre.

Figure 4 shows the measurement of the area able to walk to the Naenae town centre within five minutes. This is expressed as a percentage of the theoretical walkable catchment represented by the 400 metre radius circle.

The result is that the street network is not operating at an optimal level as only 38% of the walkable catchment is able to get to the town centre within five minutes. The network is particularly poor to the north-west of the centre and to some extent to the south and south-east of the centre. These are areas where improvements to the street network, and other means of access such as the tunnel under the railway line, can be examined in future workshops.

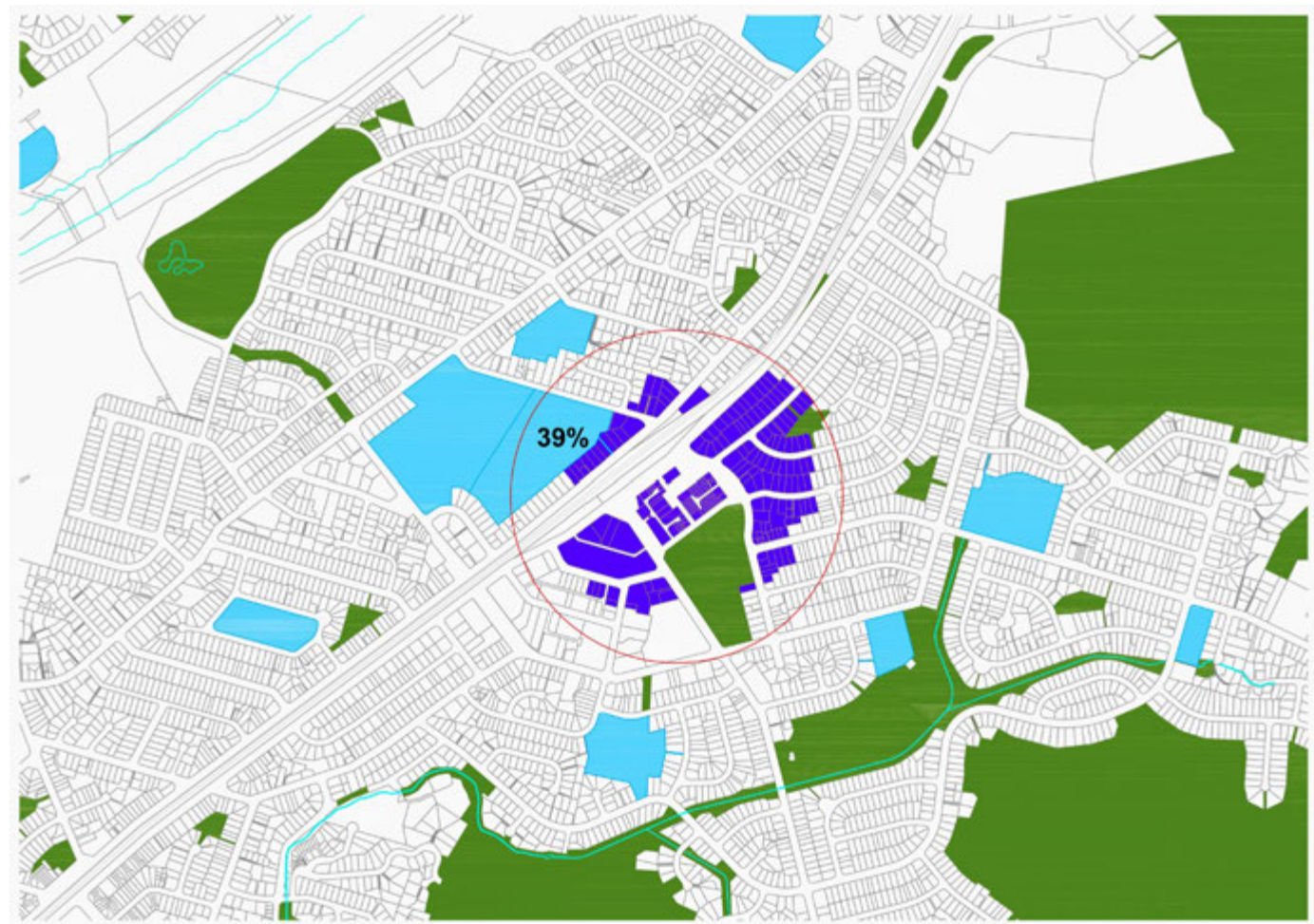


Figure 4 . Ped-shed showing the area able to walk to Naenae town centre in five minutes.



Figure 5 . Ped-shed showing the area able to walk to Naenae public transport in ten minutes.

Figure 5 shows the measurement of the area able to walk to the Naenae railway station and bus stops on Cambridge Terrace within ten minutes. (Note that the diagram includes the 400m catchment from Figure 4.)

The actual walkable catchment or “ped-shed” is only 41% of the potential catchment which indicates that the street network is underperforming. Once again the area to the north-west is particularly poorly connected to public transport, as are areas to the south and south-east. These are areas which need better connection to public transport and the town centre.

03.02 “BACKS AND FRONTS”

Buildings all have a clear “front” and a clear “back”. For the overall town centre to perform well and have safe and pleasant public spaces, it is essential that buildings face the public streets, parks, plazas and other public facilities such as the railway station and swimming pool.

Figure 6 shows the fronts of buildings in green and the backs in red. Generally the retail area of the centre performs well with shops mainly facing out to Everest Avenue, Cambridge Terrace, Vogel Street, Treadwell Street and Hillary Court.

Locations where buildings are performing poorly are at the railway station where blank walls face both the station and Cambridge Terrace. The other area of concern is between the swimming pool and the bowling club where there are poor relationships between buildings, public walkways, public places and parks.



Figure 6 . “Backs and Fronts” of buildings in Naenae town centre.

 Building Front
 Building Back



Figure 7 . Buildings with “backs”
fronting the Naenae railway
station



Figure 8 . Buildings with “fronts”
facing Cambridge Terrace.

Figures 7 and 8 show two different relationships of buildings to the public realm. Figure 7 shows the interface of buildings with the Naenae railway station. This is clearly the “back” of the building as there are no doors nor windows, just a blank facade.

Figure 8 shows the buildings across Cambridge Terrace, where buildings face the street and have many openings in the form of doors and windows.

Good Frontage
Activation



Average
Frontage
Activation



Poor Frontage
Activation



03.03 ACTIVE BUILDING FRONTS

A survey of the frontages of buildings in the Naenae town centre was undertaken. “Active frontages” are an important factor of the performance of urban centres such as Naenae. It is desirable to have a high proportion of frontages which are said to be “active” so that there is a high level of surveillance of streets, plazas, parks and other public places.

What does “active frontage” mean? Buildings which have an “active frontage” are buildings adjacent to public space that have activities that are easily seen or activity which plays a role in the public space at the ground floor level, for example a shop with large windows and a door facing onto the street, or a café with windows and doors facing the street and with tables and chairs outside.

The frontage survey assessed the frontages of buildings and assigned a value to each. These values are either “good”, “average” or “poor”. Examples are shown here. Each value is recorded with a colour and the overall mapping of the frontage conditions is shown in Figure 10.

Figure 9. Categories for measuring the activation of building frontages.
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Figure 10 shows the results of the survey of frontage conditions in Naenae town centre. As can be seen there are many areas where the buildings rate a “poor” active frontage result. When measured it is apparent that 61% of the frontages in the town centre are rated “poor”.

There is an opportunity to improve the social and economic performance of the town centre if the frontage of buildings and their relationship to streets and public places were improved.

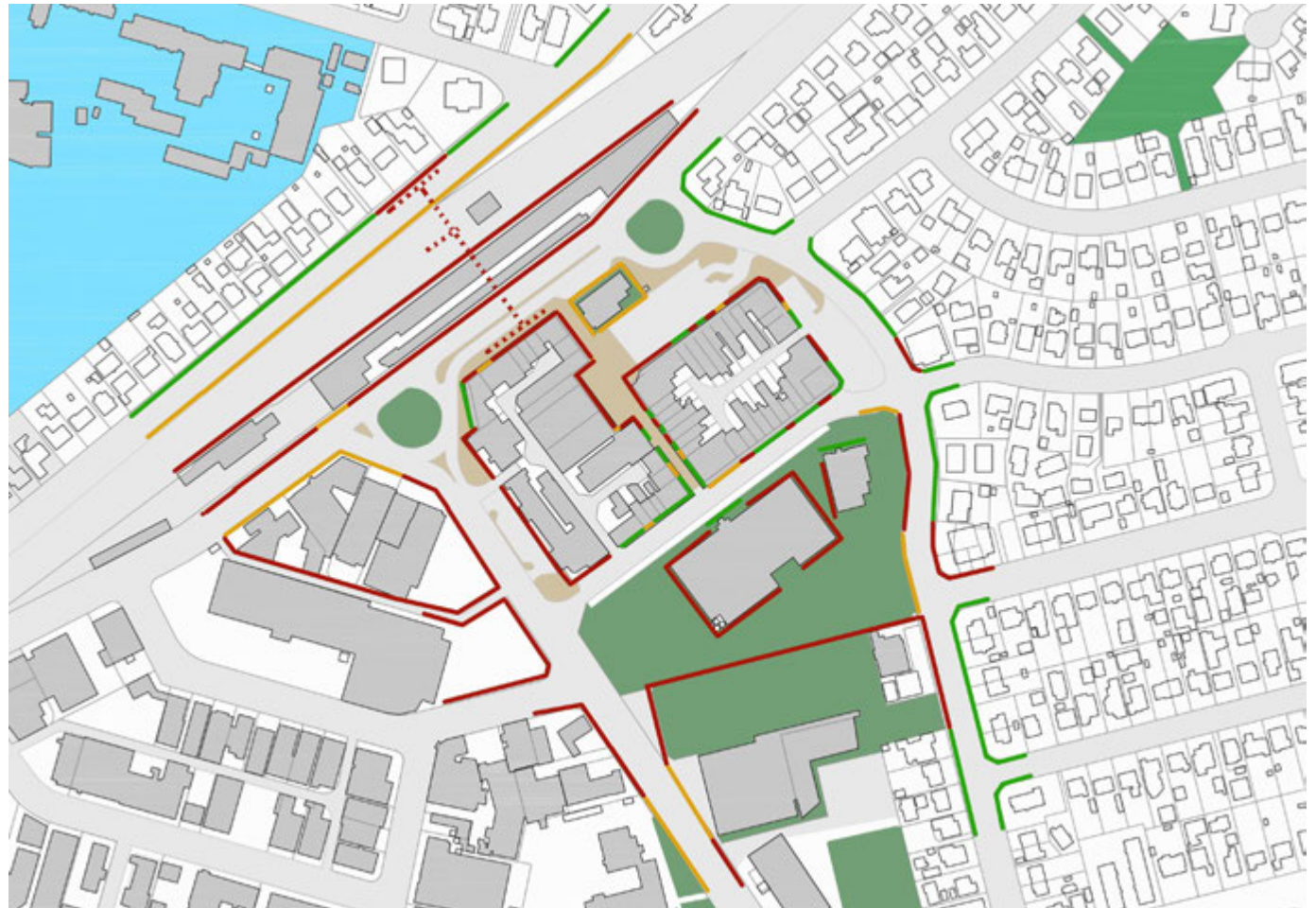


Figure 10 . Assessment of the quality of frontages in Naenae.

03.04 EXPOSURE TO STREETS AND PARKING

Streets, plazas and parks in Naenae town centre provide a variety of degrees of exposure to passers-by, or in retail terms, to “passing trade”. A high level of exposure is desirable for shops to attract potential customers.

Figure 11 shows streets assigned values in terms of the level of exposure they provide as “good” (green), “average” (orange), and “poor” (red).

Many of the streets are back service lanes and not expected to provide a high level of exposure, and typically service the “backs” of buildings. These are shown in red.

Streets or pathways shown as “average” are places where local conditions reduce their exposure to passers-by. For example the ramps to the railway station tunnel reduce access and exposure of shops and businesses which face Cambridge Terrace. Similarly, places in Hillary Court have limited exposure owing to the fact that these are pedestrian-only spaces with limited connection to other places. The same issues applies to the pedestrian pathway behind the swimming pool, but to a lesser extent as this links Rata Street to Hollands Crescent.

The evaluation includes exposure to parking lots and on-street parking, which provide ease of access for motorists driving to shops.

A further question was asked. Is there a relationship between the activation of frontages of buildings and potential exposure to the streets they face, and are these linked?

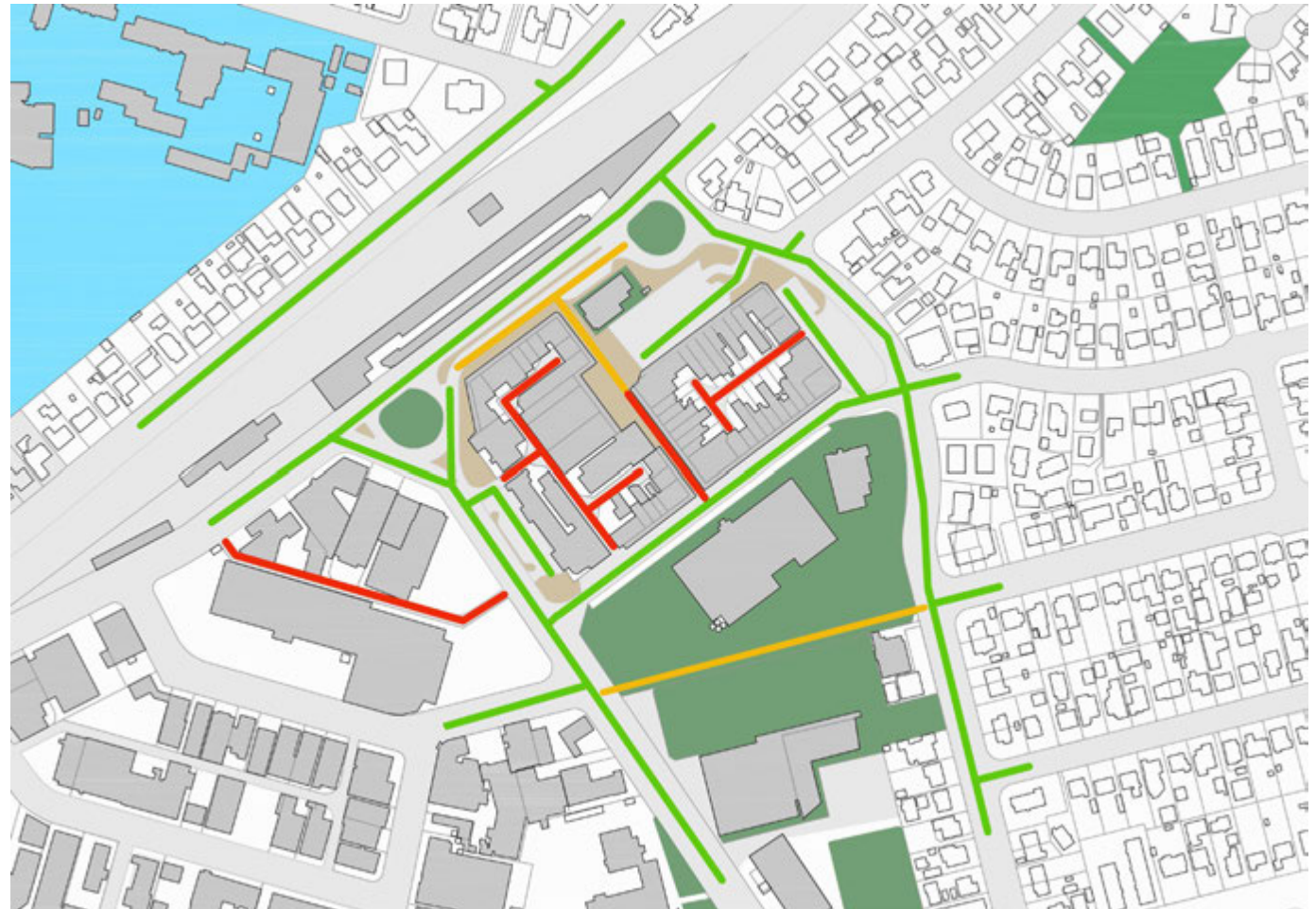


Figure 11 . The level of exposure to passers-by and access to parking offered by streets.

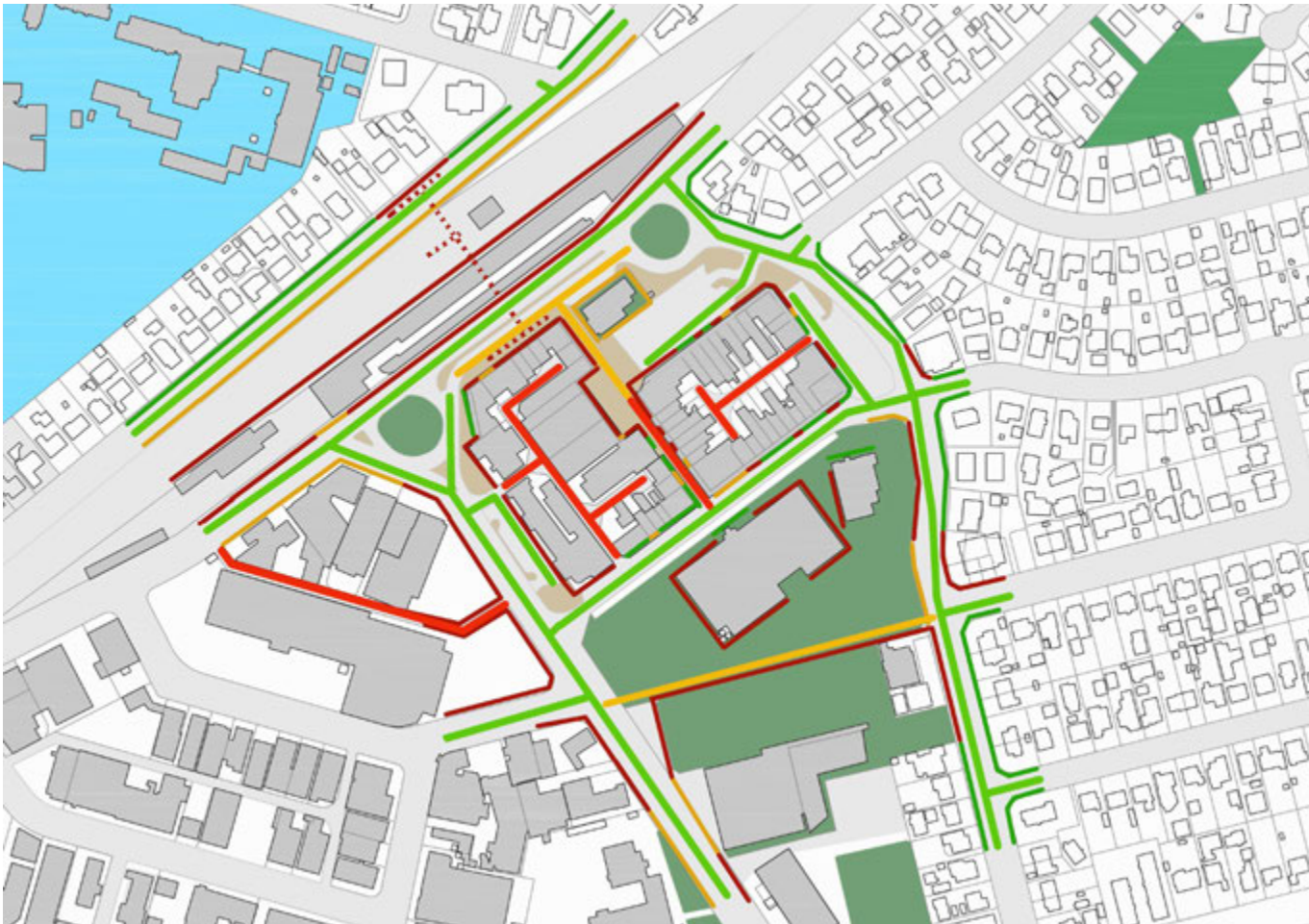


Figure 12. Combined mapping of Active Frontage and Street Exposure.

What does the combination of Street Exposure and Active Frontage mapping tell us?

From this mapping it is clear that many buildings are ignoring the potential to benefit from “passing trade” provided by highly exposed streets. For example, almost all properties on Vogel Street have either “poor” or “average” activation of their frontage despite the fact that this street offers a high degree of exposure. This is a significant opportunity lost.

Similarly, buildings which face onto Cambridge Terrace have “poor” or “average” activation of frontage.

On both Cambridge Terrace and Oxford Terrace, the effect of the tunnel ramps becomes obvious, where adjacent properties have turned away from this infrastructure despite the fact that both streets provide a high level of exposure

03.05 COMFORT AND AMENITY

If people are to linger in a town centre, then protection from the weather is important. Figure 13. shows the extent of weather protection shown in blue. Generally the shopping areas are well catered for, with the exception of buildings facing Vogel Street.

There is very limited public seating in the town centre. This is seating where people are able to sit without spending money.

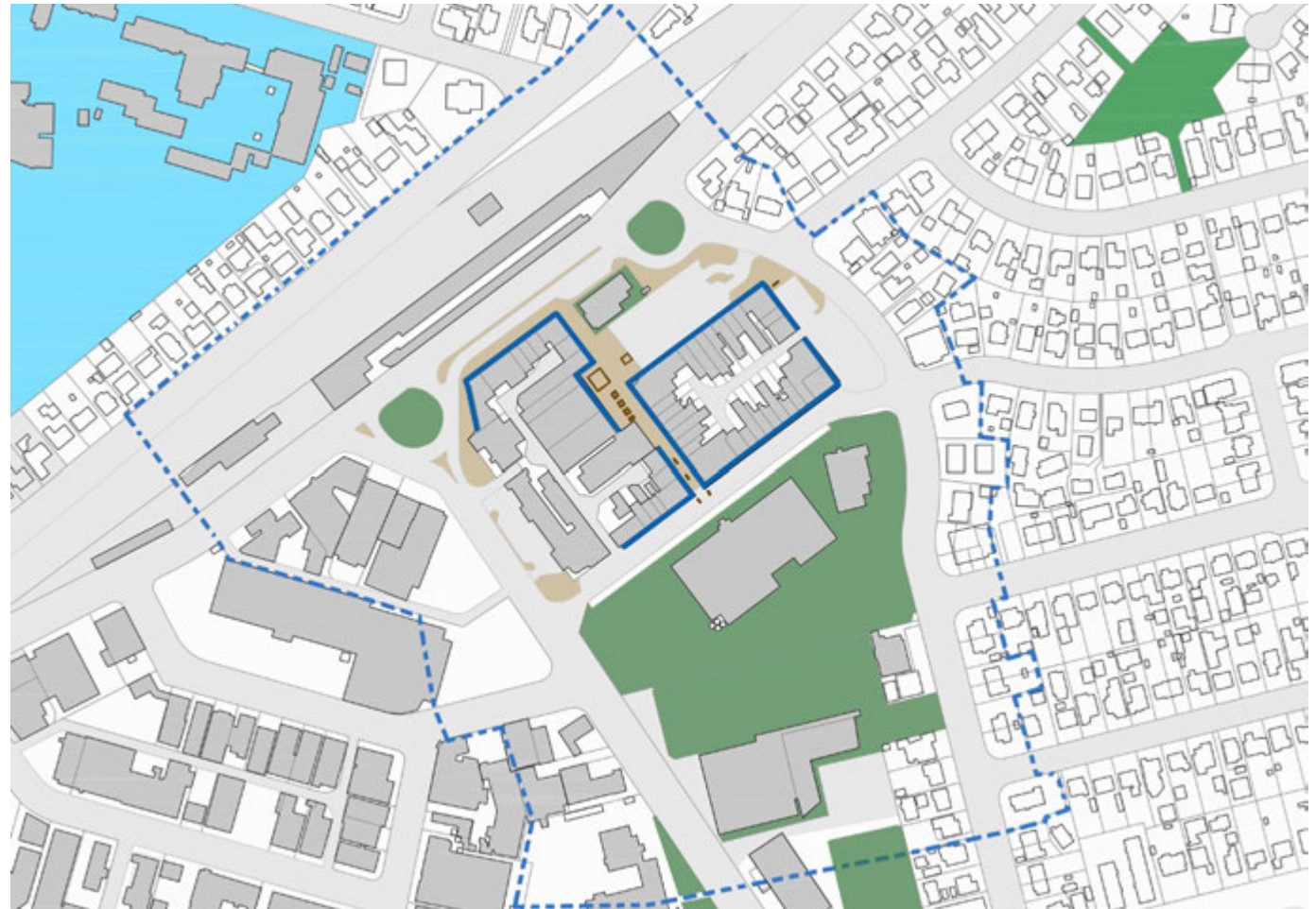


Figure 13 . The extent of weather protection and public seating.



03.06 EXTERNAL MESSAGING

The way the Naenae town centre is presented to the external world can have an impact on its social and economic performance.

In general terms the town centre presents the following:

- Poor and uncoordinated signs;
- Poor colour choice for buildings and signs;
- Pricing signs dominate buildings, and;
- Poor pedestrian environment owing to poor presentation and low activation of building frontages.

In general the centre presents an unappealing message which partly explains its poor performance.

Other places which offer an alternative have a coordinated approach to colour, signs and present an open and optimistic message to the external world. See Figure 15 on page 18.

Figure 14. Examples of poor presentation at Naenae town centre which is dominated by signs, parking lots and blank facades.

Images source: Google Earth



Figure 15. Examples of well coordinated centres in terms of consistency of colour, signs and external messaging.

Images source: Author

03.07 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

When the Naenae town centre was constructed several key links were severed. In particular, Hollands Crescent was once linked to Treadwell Street.

Figure 16 shows an aerial photo from the late 1940's currently on display at the Naenae library. In this photograph the connection of Hollands Crescent to Treadwell Street is clearly visible. Figure 17 is an aerial photograph from 1958 which shows that when the swimming pool was constructed, this street was removed. Figure 18. shows that the alignment of this street is still visible. The view is from Vogel Street looking east along the alignment of the former street. The street trees which are apparent in Figure 17 are still clearly visible in Figure 18, a photograph taken in March 2020.

Figure 16. Aerial photograph showing Hollands Crescent connected to Treadwell Street before the Naenae town centre was constructed.

Images source: Naenae Library



Figure 18. The alignment of the former Hollands Crescent taken from Vogel Street



Figure 17. Aerial photograph from 1958 showing the Naenae swimming pool under construction.



03.08 MEETING PLACES

The *Voice of the Community* publication records a strong community desire to have places where the public can gather for special occasions. Figure 19 indicates the places where the community could gather, while Figure 20 shows an image of Hillary Court, a prime meeting space.

This urban design study shows the area of the Naenae town centre indicated by the blue dotted line on Figure 19. This is an area of approximately 14.7 Hectares, or 147,000 square metres.

Of this, 8% or 1.2 Hectares is useable public space available for special gatherings. This is shown as paved areas in brown, and grassed areas in green. This is an appropriate area for public gathering, but what is the quality of the spaces?

The quality of public spaces is heavily dependent on the quality of their “edges”, in other words the relationship between buildings and the spaces.

Unfortunately 77% of the buildings which face onto the spaces have blank facades and inactive frontages.

In order to improve the quality of these gathering spaces, there is an urgent need to improve the relationship between the buildings which frame the spaces, and the gathering spaces themselves.

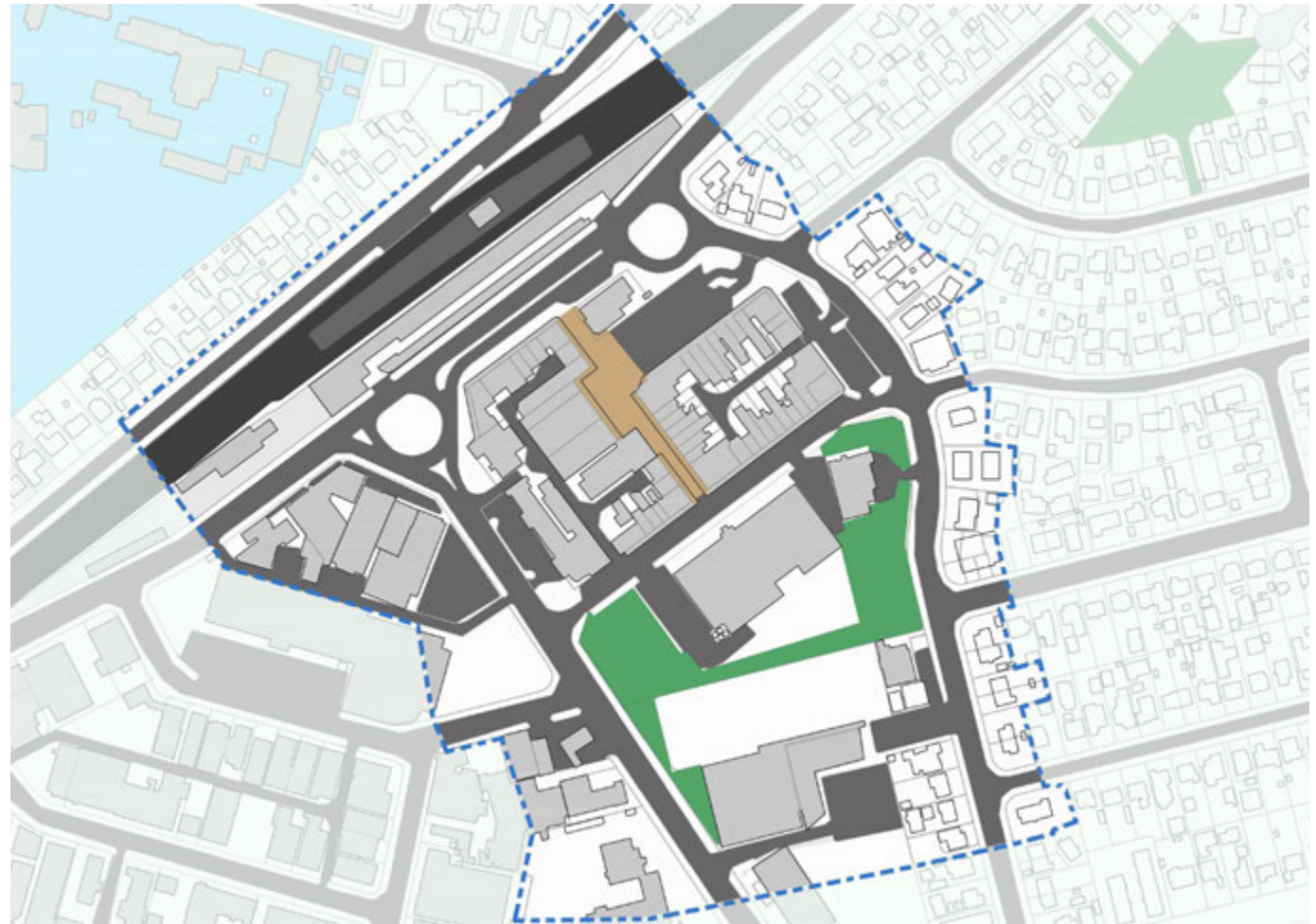


Figure 19 . The spaces for public gathering shown in brown (paved) and green (grass).



Figure 20. Hillary Court, the prime meeting and gathering space at Naenae.

Image source: Google Earth

04 CONCLUSION

This urban design analysis indicates that the Naenae town centre is underperforming and failing to meet the aspirations of the community.

From the analysis it seems there are a number of improvements which could be made to meet community expectations. These are set out in Figure 21 below.

Community Aspiration	What Needs to Change to Meet These?
• A town centre where people can do the basics;	Encourage a wider range of facilities and services.
• A town centre where people can stay active;	Rebuild the swimming pool.
• A town centre where people can support local people;	Improve the quality of public places and the buildings which facing these places.
• A town centre where people can connect regularly;	Improve connections to Naenae town centre.
• A town centre where people can gather at meaningful times;	Improve the quality and performance of Hillary Court and the buildings framing Hillary Court.
• A town centre where people can make memories;	Improve the presentation of the town centre and support community pride in the town centre.
• A town centre where people can come together as a community, and	Improve access and the quality of public spaces
• A town centre where people can be safe and satisfied,	Better presentation, surveillance and access so more people use the town centre and its public places.

Figure 21 . A table showing possible changes to improve the Naenae town centre from an urban design perspective



Figure 22. Shows a notional “before” and “after” set of images to demonstrate how linkages between key places such as the railway station and Hillary Court would begin to change access and perceptions of Naenae town centre. The railway station and Hillary Court are so close to each other, yet buildings have created a physical and visual disconnection.





Google Earth