



Ards and  
North Down  
Borough Council

COMBER TOWN ADVISORY GROUP

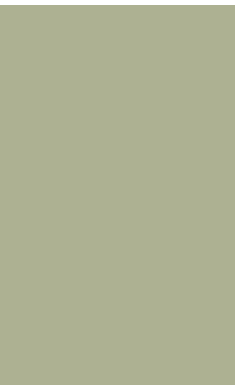
# Comber Wayfinding Strategy

the paul hogarth company

gleeds







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# 01. Introduction





## 01. Introduction

This document presents a Wayfinding Strategy for Comber, aiming to improve the experience for pedestrians in the town and to promote walking as a healthier and more sustainable mode of transport for the benefit of everyone. With a focus on accessibility, the strategy seeks to ensure that navigation within Comber is intuitive and inclusive, accommodating individuals of all abilities

Comber is an attractive heritage town, known as a thriving place in which to live and visit. It is also a relatively **easy place in which to explore by foot due to its size** and compact nature. Plans to extend the popular **Comber Greenway** through the town will also significantly enhance its accessibility for local people and its attraction to the visitor.

*“Wayfinding systems should **encourage walking and transit usage** by providing **multimodal information** and **adopting the pedestrian perspective**.”*

*Wayfinding works with other **visual cues** to help people **orient themselves** and **provide confidence** in navigating the geography of a city. Wayfinding can increase people's comfort in **choosing to walk** when they understand a **destination proximity**.”*

*Global Designing Cities Initiative (2016)*

This Wayfinding Strategy emanates from a review of the Comber Town Centre Masterplan. Shaped by the Comber Town Advisory Group and consulted upon with the public, the 2023 review identified the significant potential for a more **walkable Comber**. This would capitalise upon the aforementioned qualities and therefore reap the many benefits that increased pedestrian activity has to offer. The Wayfinding Strategy will also contribute to other priorities identified in the masterplan review, namely **activating the square** and **connecting with the lough**.

The **goal** is to address fulfil this potential and **provide clear, practical guidance for navigating Comber**. This strategy includes proposed improvements such as providing wayfinding elements and decluttering existing infrastructure. The strategy aims to **streamline navigation and enhance the overall pedestrian experience**.

### Comber Town Centre:

#### Masterplan Review

#### Proposed Priorities

- A. Walkable Comber
- B. Making the most of valuable space
- C. Activating the Square
- D. Connect to the Lough

# 01. Why Walk?

## Reasons why walking is beneficial:

- Physical Health
- Mental Well-being
- Environmental & Climate Benefits
- Social Interaction & Community
- Accessibility & Affordability
- Increased Economic Activity
- Traffic Reduction
- Public safety



**"A good walk is so much more than just stretching your legs. It's a chance to unwind, meet new people and discover nature on your doorstep."**

UK's Rambles Association

An effective wayfinding strategy can empower individuals to engage in walking and exercise. By providing clear signage, maps, and directional information, a wayfinding system can **motivate individuals to confidently navigate their surroundings, discover new routes and explore outdoor spaces**. A wayfinding system in a town can highlight paths, trails, and points of interest. By showcasing the accessibility and attractiveness of nearby walking routes, parks and green spaces, the strategy can **encourage people to incorporate walking into their daily routines as a convenient and enjoyable form of exercise**.

It is well documented that walking is not only good for us, but also good for the places in which we live. The promotion of walking in Comber therefore stands to bring multiple benefits to individuals, communities and the local economy.

A key benefit is environmental. By promoting walking and other forms of active travel, we facilitate a process of "modal shift" away from the private motor vehicle. This helps us all to **reduce harmful green house gases and air pollution**, while **reducing traffic** associated with short journeys.

Studies conducted in the UK and Ireland have consistently shown that regular walking is associated with numerous health benefits. According to data from the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK, **adults should aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise**, such as brisk walking, per week to maintain good health.

Research from the Irish Heart Foundation highlights





Walk to energise your body, mind and soul. No matter how old you are, how fit you are or how busy you are, walking works!

Get Out More N.I Campaign

that **walking for just 30 minutes a day can significantly reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke.** These statistics show the importance of integrating walking into our daily routines as a simple yet effective way to improve cardiovascular health and overall well-being.

Yet walking does not just benefit our physical health. It also can make a significant contribution to our **mental health and well-being**, stimulating endorphins in the brain, while bring us out into different environments. Walking also promotes **social interaction** with friends, family and even strangers, thereby contributing to an overall **sense of community**.

Walking also contributes to the **safety** of our streets and spaces, with more people 'out and about' increasing passive surveillance and dissuading antisocial behaviour.

Finally the promotion of walking and investing in infrastructure also makes good **economic** sense. Firstly it is of benefit to a large proportion of the population and **free to use**. Secondly, it increases the **dwell time** of people in the town and therefore their propensity to frequent local businesses and contribute to the local economy.

"Walking and cycling projects can increase retail sales by 30% or more."

Living High Streets

"Walking 30 minutes or cycling 20 minutes on most days reduces mortality risk by at least 10%

World Health Organisation

Walking is the heart of sustainability; it is humanity's first mode of transportation, a transportation mode that does not require external energy sources and that helps to keep people healthy, happy, and active."

Frontiers in Built Environment

"Walking and cycling are also highly affordable and are hence an equitable means of transport, providing access for the vast majority of the population."

World Health Organisation

## 02. Why Comber?

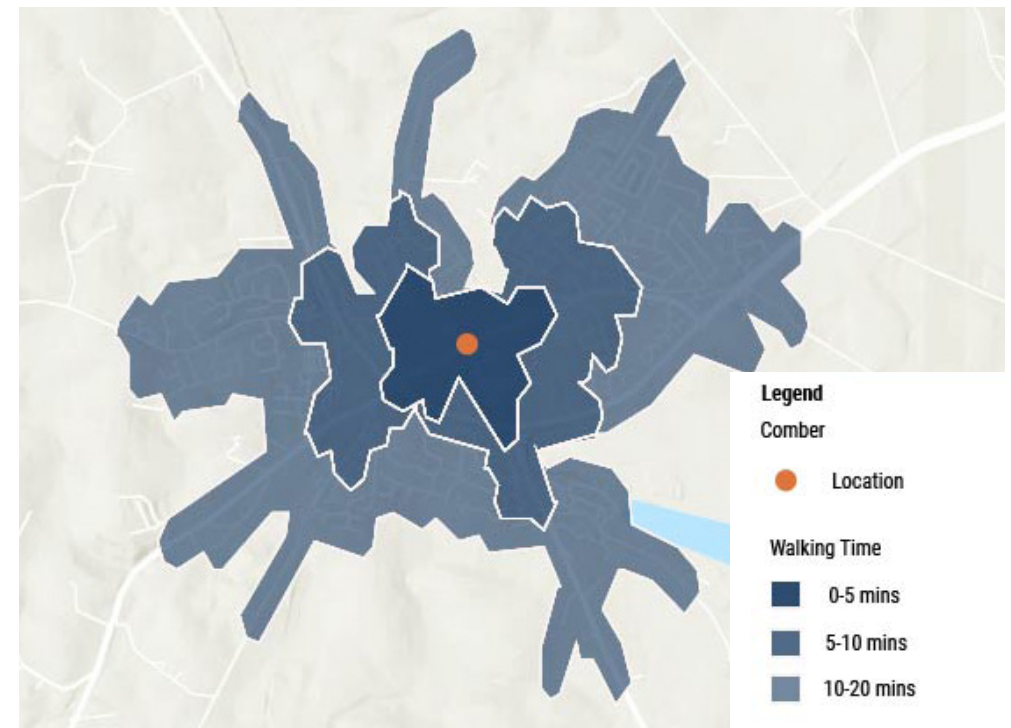
The town of Comber and its surrounding countryside are **home to many points of interest**. The heart of the town is the square with the landmark Rollo Gillespie monument and its attractive gardens. Comber is also a **bustling shopping and hospitality destination**, with many independent businesses thriving along the High Street and adjoining thoroughfares. Another significant feature of Comber is **the Comber Greenway** that connects the town with Belfast along the former railway line. This has proven a successful means by which to attract visitors and with a planned extension to the greenway, its significance is **likely to grow further**.





## Navigating Comber's Pedestrian Experience:

Comber is a compact town making it **well suited to the promotion of walking and active travel**. Yet it currently has very little in the way of wayfinding infrastructure, meaning that **pedestrian journeys are not promoted** around the town. Like many town centres, Comber also suffers from traffic congestion. Encouraging more people to walk will therefore contribute to the tackling of this problem, while bringing the many other individual and societal benefits outlined in the previous section.





# 03. The Strategy

Comber's Wayfinding Strategy streamlines navigation and enhances exploration, fostering seamless journeys and delightful discoveries throughout the town.





## Aims & Objectives

### To improve pedestrian wayfinding in Comber

- Increase levels of walking and wheeling to and from the town centre
- Provide greater confidence in support of pedestrian journeys within the town centre
- Spread footfall and increase dwell time in the town centre
- Provide infrastructure to support walking and public health initiatives

The aims are to transform Comber into a town of **easy navigation and cultural exploration**. The project aspires to redefine how individuals interact with the townscape.

The project seeks to create a **network of wayfinding elements** that seamlessly blend with the town's character, providing not just directions but also **a sense of place**. With each signpost, mural, and installation, the aim is to capture the spirit of Comber, celebrating its rich history, vibrant culture and promising future.

The Wayfinding Strategy is more than just aesthetics; it's a driver for **economic vitality and community pride**. By enhancing the visitor experience, the project aims to support local businesses, encourage exploration of hidden gems and foster a **deeper connection** between residents and their urban and natural surroundings.



# 04. The Users

Often wayfinding systems are aimed at one particular user group, such as tourists or shoppers. This strategy for Comber seeks to provide infrastructure useful to a range of different users, from the visitor to the local alike.

## → the shopper

- **Retail**
- **Town Centre**
- Parking, park & ride
- Hospitality / food / restaurants
- Public transport
- Public toilets



## → the visitor

- **Town Centre**
- **Key Points of Interest**  
(landmarks, parks, gardens, historic features, etc)
- **Hospitality / food / restaurants**
- Retail & Entertainment
- Sports & Leisure
- Walking trails
- Parking, park & ride
- Public transport
- Public toilets



## → the exerciser

- **Looped walks / running trails / greenways etc**
- **Parks / Country parks etc**
- **Sports & Leisure**  
(eg. Leisure complexes, playing fields)
- Parking, park & ride
- Public transport
- Public toilets
- Town Centre







### the mobility aid user

- **Safe and Accessible Routes**
- **Town Centre**
- Parking, park & ride
- Public transport
- Public toilets



### the commuter

- **Public transport**
- **Parking, park & ride**
- Town Centre
- Public toilets

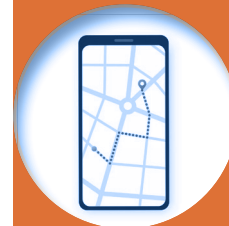


### the students

- **Schools**
- **Town Centre**
- **Parks, playparks, wetlands etc.**
- Sports & Leisure (Leisure complexes, sports pitches)
- Key Points of Interest (landmarks, parks, gardens, historic features, etc)
- Public toilets
- Public transport

# 05. The System

The Wayfinding System for Comber will comprise pedestrian level signage and markers, accompanied by mapping that aids orientation and the decision to walk. The system will be complemented by digital interactivity and used to support campaigns that promote walking, physical exercise and exploration of the town.





### identity

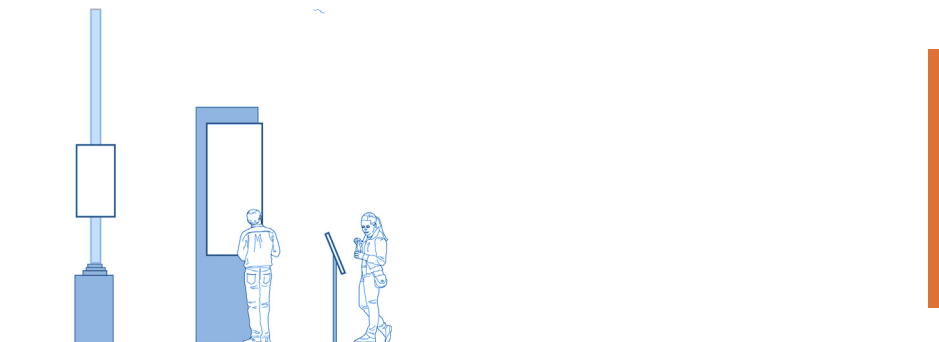
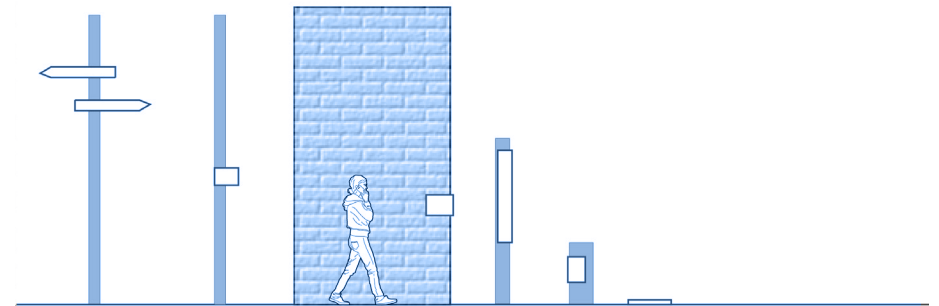
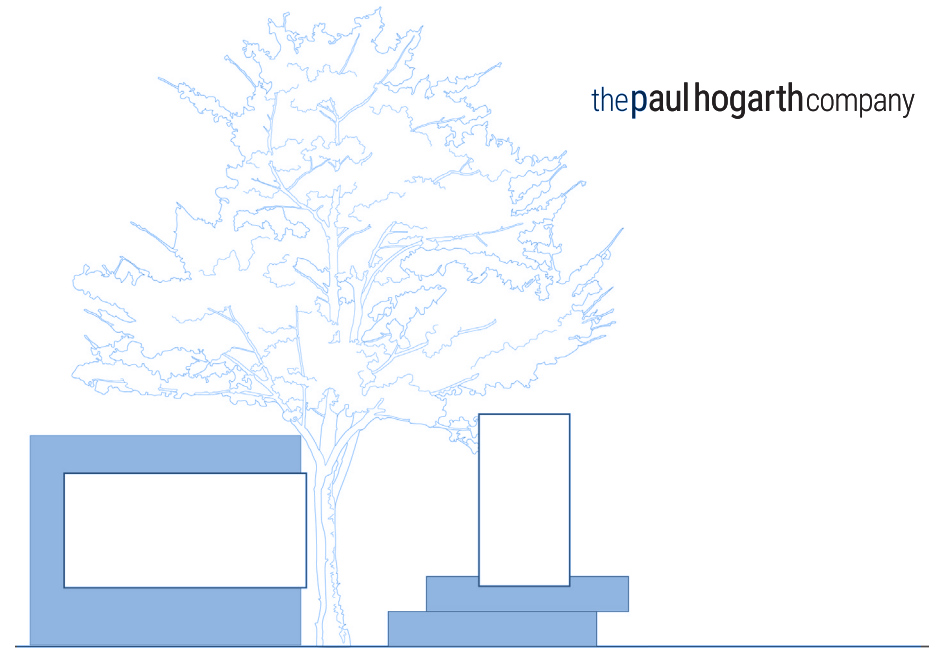
Identity wayfinding integrates elements of artwork, sculpture, murals, and branding into navigation systems to reflect a place's unique identity. By using curated colours, typography, and thematic motifs, this approach creates a cohesive and memorable experience for users, enhancing the environment's overall branding and sense of place.

### directional

Directional wayfinding signage includes location indicators, markers, destination information, directions, symbols/pictograms, consistent branding, clear typography, consistent design and strategic placement. It guides users efficiently through environments, ensuring they reach destinations with confidence.

### orientational

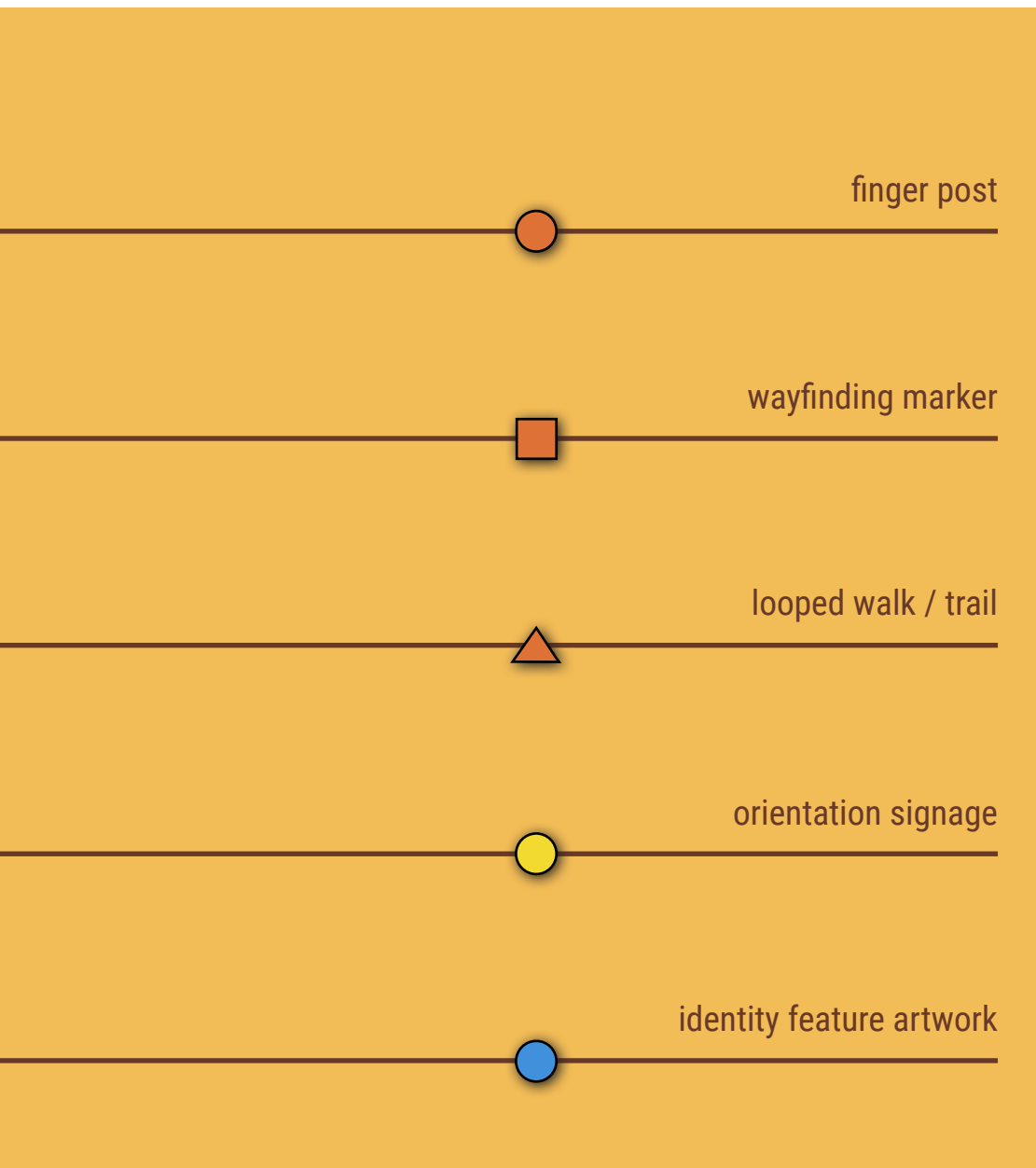
Orientational wayfinding helps users in understanding their overall spatial orientation within urban environments. Key elements include maps, landmark identification, path hierarchy, consistent design and visual clarity. It helps users develop a mental map of their surroundings and promoting confidence.



# 06. The Locations



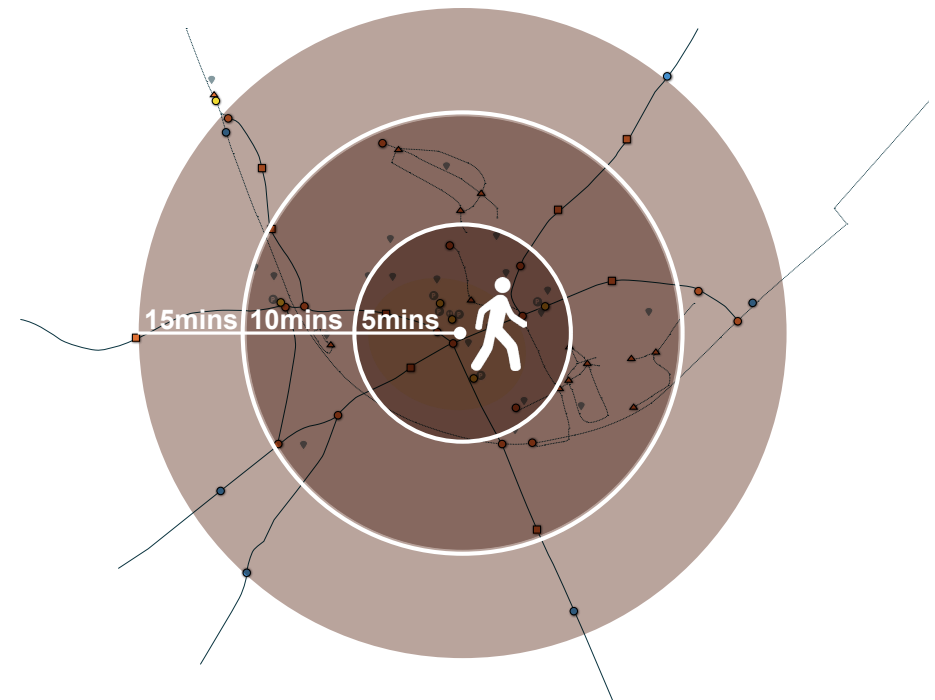




The Comber Wayfinding System will apply to the entirety of the town and promote its walkability with reference to walking times. The **majority of Comber is reachable within a 10-minute walk** from the square.

Identity **feature artworks** are proposed for the approaches into Comber while **orientation signage and mapping** will be provided at key arrival points. **Directional signage** will adopt the form of finger posts, augmented with smaller **wayfinding markers** as appropriate.

Loops trails and walks should also be sign posted with the use of wayfinding markers.



# 06. The Locations



All signage must be **very carefully located in the public realm** so to ensure visibility without detracting from its setting. This is particularly important in proximity to heritage buildings and views. **Street clutter must be minimised** so that circulation flows are not adversely affected. Superfluous existing signage should be removed, while new signs should be affixed to existing poles or structures whenever possible.





Due their size, orientational panels including maps must be positioned with great care. The location must be a safe place for pedestrians to congregate, while the panel must not block important sightlines, be they at traffic junctions or towards the most attractive views.

orientational



# 07. Design Guidance



The design guide for Comber prioritises the selection of colours to ensure a harmonious and visually appealing aesthetic. Incorporating contrasting hues such as vibrant blues, yellows, and oranges can uplift the rustic reds, tranquil neutrals and deep greens prevalent in Comber.

**Incorporating Comber's identity into signage offers benefits such as:**

1. Improved **navigation**
2. Enhanced **brand recognition**
3. Positive **visitor experience**
4. Boosts **tourism appeal**
5. Fosters **community engagement**
5. Boosts the **local economy**



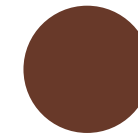


The design guide for Comber pays attention to the selection of colours to ensure a harmonious and visually appealing aesthetic. Contrasting colours such as burnt orange, yellow, and navy blue are suggested to uplift the rustic reds, greens, and greys prevalent in Comber.

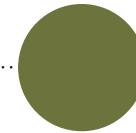
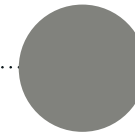
Drawing inspiration from the principles of colour theory and mindful consideration of the existing palette, burnt orange, yellow, and navy blue were identified as complementary hues. These vibrant tones were carefully chosen to infuse depth and vibrancy, enriching the overall visual experience of the wayfinding elements and enhancing the distinct charm of Comber.

# Comber, where Fresh Whites marry the Verdant Charm of Leafy Greens and Rustic reds.

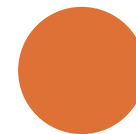
### PRINCIPAL COLOUR



RUSTIC  
Background



TRANQUIL  
Typical



VIBRANT  
Accent

### CONTRASTING COLOURS

# 07. Design Guidance

## Colours and Icons Recommendations

Colour plays a vital role in shaping our perceptions and contributes significantly to branding and graphic identity. It can serve as an identifier for specific areas, aiding in hierarchy and clarity within a wayfinding system. However, when employing different colours, it is crucial to avoid combinations that may confuse individuals with colour vision deficiencies. For instance, combinations below should be avoided to ensure clarity and accessibility for all users.

- red/yellow/green
- red/black
- blue/green/purple

## Fonts

Fonts are selected based on principles of readability, versatility, and brand consistency. Sans-serif fonts are preferred for their clean, modern appearance and legibility across different mediums. A primary font is chosen for headlines and prominent text, while a complementary font is used for body text and secondary information.

## Legibility

Signs are more legible for people with visual impairment when character contrast with their background by at least 70%. As the design of the system can be flexible in colour and brand application. Tests should be carried out to ensure the finished design has a high contrast finish.



Viewing Distance (M)	Text Height (MM)
2.5	15
5	20
7.5	25
10	40
12.5	50
15	60
17.5	70
20	80
22.5	85
25	90
27.5	95
30	100
32.5	110
35	120
37.5	130
40	150
42.5	160
45	180
47.5	190
50	200

"Rule of thumb" guideline, which suggests that every 25mm of letter height provides approximately 3m of legibility distance.



### Wayfinding Signage

Wayfinding signs, including finger posts, play a crucial role in guiding individuals throughout the town.

#### Design Recommendations:

**Sign Colours:** Consistency is key for all wayfinding signs. Therefore, it is recommended to use the same sign colours across all elements to create a cohesive and unified wayfinding system.

**Font and Symbol Colours:** To ensure legibility and clarity, the font and symbols on finger posts should be in a contrasting yet complementary colour. For example, crisp white can be used for the font and symbols against the slate grey background of a sign.

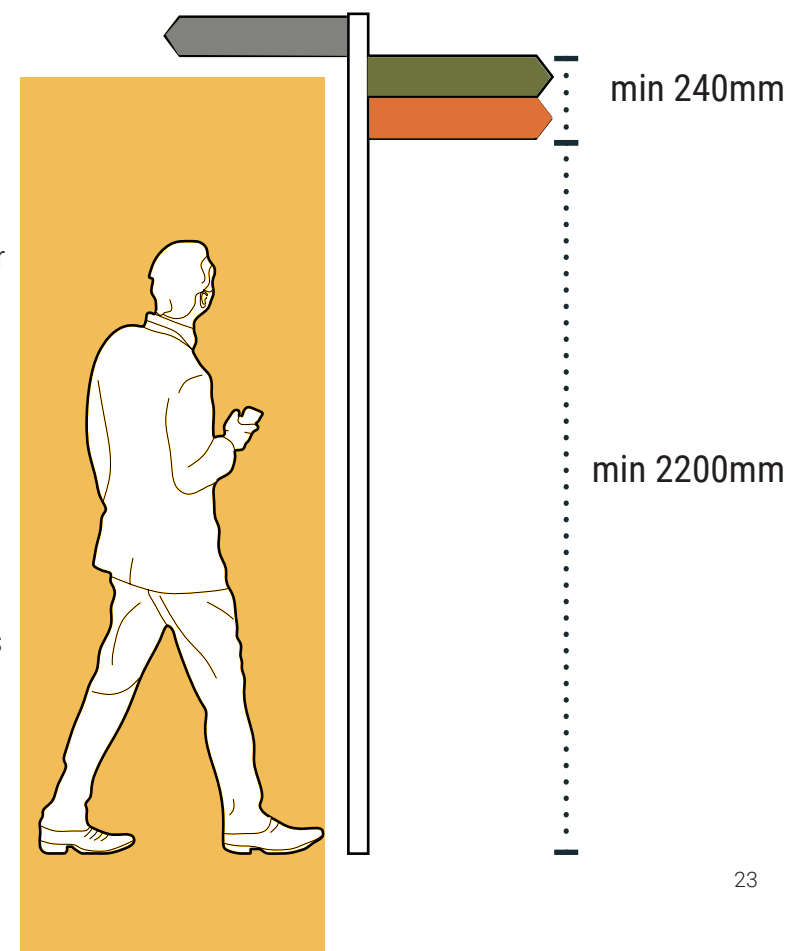
#### Rationale:

Consistency in sign colours across all wayfinding elements ensures a cohesive and easily recognisable wayfinding system. By using the same sign colour for all wayfinding signs, individuals can navigate the town with confidence, knowing what to look for regardless of their location.

#### Colour Coding for Specific Categories:

The use of colour can also be strategically employed and varied across signs. By colour-coding signs according to specific categories individuals can quickly identify relevant destinations and amenities within the town. This approach not only adds visual interest but also assists in efficiently conveying information to users, helping them navigate the environment with ease. Consistency reinforces familiarity and helps in establishing mental associations, ultimately contributing to a more user-friendly wayfinding system.

The strategic use of colour can be varied across signs while still adhering to or aligning with the original colour palette. By employing this approach, even highlighted categories feel integrated into the cohesive whole, mitigating the risk of using generic colour associations such as green for parks and blue for water. Colours such as 'orange' for parks and 'green' for galleries can be used within Comber's wayfinding system.



# 07. Design Guidance

An example of a consistent subtle colour coded sign:



An example of a colour coded sign:





### Orientation Signage

Orientational signs play a crucial role in guiding individuals throughout the city. Due to their limited presence compared to other signage types, such as finger posts, orientational signs have the opportunity to stand out prominently.

#### *Design Recommendations:*

**Sign Colours:** Vibrant colours should be employed for the orientational signs to ensure maximum visibility and prominence within the urban environment. This bold approach will help the signs effectively catch the attention of individuals seeking direction.

**Font and Symbol Colours:** In contrast to the vibrant sign colours, a tranquil colour scheme should be utilised for the font and symbols. Subdued hues, such as lighter tones or earthy shades, will ensure legibility and clarity while complementing the overall aesthetics of the environment.

**Braille:** Include Braille on all signs for visually impaired users.

**Tactile Maps:** Provide tactile maps at key locations.

**Audio Systems:** Integrate Sound Cloud technology or audio guides activated by buttons or sensors.

#### *Rationale:*

The rationale behind this design recommendation lies in the sparse distribution of orientational signs throughout the city. With fewer signs present, there is greater flexibility to make them visually striking without overwhelming the urban landscape. By opting for vibrant sign colours and tranquil font/symbol colours, these signs can effectively fulfil their navigational function while contributing to the overall visual identity of the area.

This design guide recommendation aims to enhance visibility, clarity, and overall user experience for individuals navigating the city, ensuring that orientational signage remains an integral part of the urban environment.

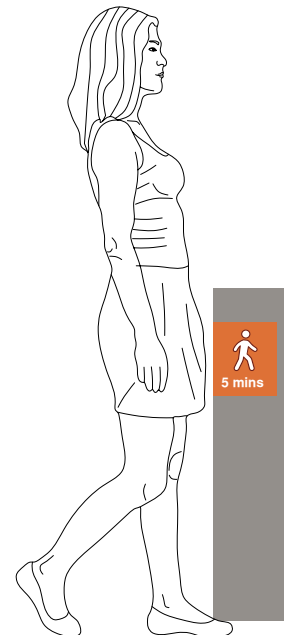
### Wayfinding Markers

Due to their smaller size and varied locations, require a design approach that ensures they stand out prominently while aiding navigation effectively.

#### *Design Recommendation:*

**Marker Colour Scheme:** Markers should feature a vibrant colour to enhance visibility and attract attention. A bold hue, such as vibrant colour is recommended for the marker itself. This eye-catching colour ensures that markers are easily noticeable amidst their surroundings.

**Font and Symbol Colour:** To ensure clear legibility, a contrasting colour should be used for the font and symbols on markers. A neutral colour, such as black or white, is recommended for the font and symbols against the vibrant background of the marker. This contrast enhances readability and ensures that important information stands out effectively.



#### **Symbol Usage:**

Depending on the size and visibility of markers, symbols may or may not be appropriate. If symbols are included, they should match the font colour to maintain consistency and visibility.

# 08. Creative Applications

## Identity Artworks

Public art, including murals, sculptures and temporary signage should make a significant contribution to Comber's wayfinding in addition to signage provision. Well placed artworks can become landmarks in their own right. They also help to enrich place identity and our cultural landscape. Consideration should be given to artworks that specifically contribute to the wayfinding system. These should relate to the colours of the signage design guide and skilfully incorporate useful directional information, such as arrows or maps. As with all interventions, the quality of artwork and craftsmanship should be a paramount consideration at all times.



## Possible Artwork Themes for Comber:

- Agricultural Heritage
- Comber Greenway
- Comber's Flax Industry

## Creative and Collaborative Process:

- Engaging stakeholders, including local residents, businesses, and authorities, in the design process.
- Encouraging input from diverse perspectives to ensure the wayfinding reflects the community's needs and desires.
- Fostering a collaborative environment where designers, artists, and local stakeholders can contribute ideas and insights.

## Bespoke and Contextual Design:

- Tailoring wayfinding elements to the specific character and context of each town.
- Designing signage and artwork that seamlessly integrates with the surrounding environment, enhancing rather than detracting from its aesthetics.

## Strong Local Resonance and Story:

- Infusing wayfinding elements with local narratives, symbols, and imagery that resonate with residents and visitors alike.
- Celebrating the town's heritage, landmarks, and stories through artistic representations and storytelling.
- Creating a cohesive narrative that connects wayfinding elements to the town's identity, fostering a sense of pride and belonging.

## Commitment to Quality Design, Materials, and Workmanship:

- Upholding high standards of design excellence, using quality materials and craftsmanship to ensure durability and longevity.
- Prioritising sustainability and resilience in the selection of materials.
- Investing in skilled artisans and craftsmen to execute the design vision.

## Thinking Outside the Box - Embracing Creativity:

- Embracing creativity and experimentation in the use of materials, forms and technologies to push the boundaries of traditional wayfinding solutions.
- Inspiring curiosity and engagement through thought-provoking design elements that capture the imagination and spark conversation.





**Wayfinding information extends beyond signage. Digital tools offer a multitude of communication layers for wayfinding.**

### Digital Interactivity

Great potential exists to introduce digital connectivity to the Comber wayfinding system. The utilisation of QR codes and other digital devices presents an exciting opportunity for enhanced interactivity. By linking physical signage to web-based content, it can provide users with instant access to a wealth of information, directions and resources. This approach not only streamlines the user experience but also opens up endless possibilities for dynamic content delivery, including real-time updates, and interactive maps.

While the system set out in this document pertains to wayfinding, such digital interactivity could also be used to provide further information. For example, links could inform the visitor of upcoming events or special offers from local businesses. They also have much potential for interpretation, sharing stories and information about places of interest within the town.

# 08. Creative Applications

## Campaigns and Activities

To bring the wayfinding system 'alive' and to get more people walking in Comber, creative campaigns and activities are to be greatly encouraged. A proactive approach is required to inform everyone about the wayfinding system and the value of walking to individuals and the town as a whole. The wayfinding system can be used to support existing initiatives, such as walking groups, fitness clubs or walking to school campaigns. Creativity with how the system is used can also unlock new ideas, such as treasure hunts, history tours and competitions.





## 09. Next Steps



Through the provision of signage, mapping and artworks the Comber Wayfinding Strategy aims to

- Increase levels of walking and wheeling to and from the town centre.
- Provide greater confidence in support of pedestrian journeys within the town centre
- Spread footfall and increase dwell time in the town centre
- Provide infrastructure to support walking and public health initiatives

This document should now be used to attract funding and inform the first phases of delivery, which will include detailed design, planning consent, fabrication and construction. Importantly, the people of Comber should be further engaged to help ensure the accuracy and appropriateness of the system, while being encouraged to support its overall objectives.

Comber is perfectly positioned to become a town known for its walkability. Through the delivery of the Wayfinding Strategy and complementary initiatives, a great opportunity now exists to further enhance the town and positively contribute to the lives of those of live and visit.

### Action Plan:

- 1. Secure Funding:** Obtain the necessary financial resources to support the wayfinding project.
- 2. Appoint Design Team:** Select and appoint a design team to develop and implement the wayfinding system.
- 3. Prepare Detailed Sign Designs:** Create detailed designs for each wayfinding sign.
- 4. Scope Each Sign Location:** Identify and assess suitable locations for each sign to ensure optimal visibility and effectiveness.
- 5. Consult with Council, DFI Stakeholders and others:** Meet with the the local council, Department for Infrastructure, and other relevant stakeholders to review and approve proposed sign locations.
- 6. Public Consultation:** Engage with the public to gather feedback and ensure community support for the wayfinding project.
- 7. Refine Designs:** Adjust and refine sign designs based on feedback
- 8. Submit Planning Application:** Submit a planning application for advertising and consent if necessary
- 9. Prepare Tender Documents:** Develop and issue tender documents to solicit bids from contractors/fabricators for the manufacture and installation of the wayfinding system.
- 10. Deliver Wayfinding System:** Oversee the production and installation of the wayfinding signs according to the approved plans and designs.